

The Friends of the Pine Creek Grist Mill

Restoration Progress Report 101 November 10, 2018

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Towards the end of the 2018 season things began to slow down at the mill. Due to illness and travel it became difficult to get a crew together for our Tuesday work days.

We continued to work on reinforcing the wood beam above the country store counter. The steel plate that will be bolted to the beam has been delivered along with the wood cladding for it. One of our first jobs next spring will be to install the plate. The plate by the way is twenty foot long by 8" high and 3/8" thick. It weighs around 300 pounds.

The windows in the mill also continued to be worked on. Since we only work one day a week and sometimes not that this project has been going very slow. We were always waiting for putty to harden and paint to dry. The project just turtled along.

I've come to the conclusion that the only practical way to handle the problem is for us to request the DNR central shop builds us new windows. Every year we could have a few new ones fabricated as needed as not all the windows are in bad shape.

Another issue the DNR is concerned about is the appearance of the mill's shutters. The shutters were one of the Friends original projects. While the shutters were not originally on the mill, the Friends installed them to protect the mill from vandals, that is keeping the new windows the DNR had installed on the mill from being broken.

The shutters were built from native oak supplied by the DNR from their Yellow River saw mill. Over the years most of them have become warped out of shape or even had parts rot away. We have been repairing them on a piecemeal basis as needed. The bottom line is that they all need to be replaced. The restoration crew can handle the replacement easily, all we need is a supply of new lumber. I have not been able to find if lumber is available from the DNR saw mill or not. If it is now we can buy the lumber we need from the Muscatine saw mill if the DNR will pay for it.

Tom Baston the DNR district supervisor has been looking into having repairs done to the mill siding. The creek side of the mill needs to be renailed and there are other areas that could use new siding or have the existing siding stained again. Changes to the exterior of the mill involve other agencies since they would change the appearance of the mill.

I had the local Sherwin Williams store mix up an experimental stain and sealer for the mill's siding. Jordan the park manager has it and I hope that tests of the stain can be done in the spring to see how it works. If it does win approval by the DNR we could use it to touch up problem areas and stain new shutters if we build them.

And now for the most awful job we did at the mill. I got a email from Heather Shoppa that thee was a terrible odor on the first floor of the mill. She was not kidding! It smelled like some large critter had died and began to rot. The smell seemed to originate from the smutter.

The smutter for those that do not know all of the mill's machines is used to clean the grain that goes to the millstones for grinding. The smutter is unique among the machines in the mill in that half of it is on the first floor and the bottom half hangs from the basement ceiling making it difficult to work on.

We had volunteer Hank Man at the mill that day along with new volunteer Brian Bentley and my good neighbor Larry Driscoll who helps when we have a serious problem at the mill and this odor was just that serious problem!

The smutter has a wooden exhaust duct in the basement that conducts the dust from the machine to the outside of the building. Our first theory was that some animal had somehow crawled into the duct and died. We took the duct down and no dice, the dead critter was elsewhere. After reinstalling the duct, not an easy job since you have to sit on top of the steam engine flywheel to work on it.

The dead critter had to be on the inside of the machine so we went back up to the first floor to dismantle the large "U" shaped air duct on the top of the machine. After a great deal of effort we got the duct off and were able to dismantle the smutter's beater, a slotted chamber with rotating paddles in it that cleaned the grain.

There we found the source of the problem, one very dead very large snake of unknown species. Brian volunteered to remove it, this had to be the worst job even done in the mill. Once the remains were removed the machine was completely washed down and sanitized and the air in the mill smelled like it should, an old dusty mill again.



Each week we raised the sagging beam just a fraction of an inch to avoid damaging it. At left Dick Stoltenburg is checking the degree of improvement after another lift.

At right Clarence Klauer and Dick Stoltenburg are adjusting the thrust bearing for the smutter's drive pulley shaft.



That's Hank Mann with Larry Driscoll (sitting on the steam engine flywheel) removing the smutter exhaust duct in our search for the dead critter.

Larry Driscoll, Brian Bentley and Hank Mann are preparing to remove the smutter's top air duct so they can reach the beater chamber below. No, you don't want to see what we found inside.

