



## NEWS FROM FRIENDS OF THE MILL

Tom Hanifan, President

Winter 2024

“complicated gadgets performing simple tasks”

It was a big year at Wildcat Den State Park. 11,558 visitors came to the Mill. Add to that 884 children (with accompanying adults) who came on spring field trips. We have now joined the national tourism community. More on that later. We were visited by the Model A Car Club from Cedar Rapids. More on that later. All of this takes many hours of volunteer and staff time. A big thank you to all who helped.

**It is critical that we receive more donations to allow us to continue interpreting the Mill.** The Mill is open more hours to host more visitors.

Friends of the Mill received the prestigious Governor’s Award. Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds recognized the Friends of the Mill with a 2024 Governor’s Volunteer Award (Group Award). Also Friends volunteer Chuck Pappas received the Governor’s Volunteer Award (individual). The ceremony was held in Ankeny, Ia.

We have a modernized Web site. Same address as before: [www.pinecreekgristmill.com](http://www.pinecreekgristmill.com). The old site served us well. But it got long in the tooth. The new site is less cluttered, simplified, and with new content. Several of our members helped create the improved site. We are now working with the Augustana College’s Web Guild. The Guild is a joint student/faculty project. They specialize in community non-profit groups like Friends of the Mill. They have over 200 clients around the country.

The Iowan Magazine had a nice March/April article about Wildcat Den and Pine Creek Grist Mill.

The project to replace the old window shutters was finished in 2024. This was a project of former Friends member Chuck Pappas.

Pine Creek Mill has been featured on Iowa Public Television. Their new series “Road Trip: Iowa’s Great River Road National Scenic Highway-South” focuses on the southeastern Iowa portion of the Road. The program includes Wildcat Den Park and the Mill. We know that visitors came because of it. You can view it on YouTube.

Friends of the Mill has recently joined a new community effort in Muscatine called the Cultural Alliance. It’s purpose is to support area efforts in the arts, conservation, history, and music. The goal is to better inform the community of our efforts, to raise donations and to promote volunteerism. Because of the Alliance, Friends of the Mill and our neighbors, Friends of Fairport Fish Hatchery, have agreed to begin working together.

The Cultural Alliance held a joint meeting with lunch at the Merrill Hotel. It was attended by about 180 community leaders. Speakers were Mayor Brad Bark’s wife (reading the mayor’s remarks), the former director of the Hancher Auditorium in Iowa City, and the President of the Stanley Center for Peace and Security.

*This article was recently published in the Quad City Times newspaper. It is published here with permission from the Times.*

## **WILDCAT DEN STATE PARK—A WONDERFUL PLACE TO DECOMPRESS**

By Dan Lee

The stress level is quite high these days – uncertainty about what is going to happen in the wake of the recent election, a lot of work to do in the various jobs that we have, and much more. From time to time, we all need to decompress a bit. I know the perfect place to do that – Wildcat Den State Park, located in Iowa near Muscatine.

Though we have lived in the Quad Cities for more than 50 years, I wasn't aware of Wildcat Den State Park until last summer, when my daughter, who had been there, brought it to my attention. In late August, my daughter and her husband, my two grandsons and my wife and I had a wonderful family outing there.

I returned there on a Saturday morning three weeks ago to photograph the fall colors, which were spectacular.

There are picnic tables in several different areas. There is a campground for those who enjoy camping. There are miles of trails to hike for those who enjoy hiking. And there are some historic buildings that are worth exploring.

One of the most interesting historic buildings is the Pine Creek Grist Mill, which was built by Benjamin Nye for \$10,000 in 1848 using lumber cut in his nearby sawmill. Unfortunately, it has a tragic history. In 1852, Nye was murdered by one of his sons-in-law, at which time ownership of the mill passed on to his other son-in-law.

Today the mill is a museum that is open to the public during the summer months. Much of the equipment that was used in the mill is still in place. There is a special display for children which includes a hand powered grinder for grinding corn. My oldest grandson loved it!

The grist mill is located by Pine Creek, where a dam, which still exists, pooled the water to power a water wheel, which is no longer there. A small steam engine, which is still there, was used to power the mill in the winter when Pine Creek was frozen or in late summer when the flow of water in Pine Creek was insufficient to power the water wheel.

Another building of interest is the Melpine Country School. One of the few one-room country schools that still exist, it was in use from 1930-1945. It is occasionally open during the summer months.

Though not in the park, the Old Stone Church is located just outside the park. German American immigrants built the Pine Mills German Methodist Episcopal Church, using limestone quarried nearby. Services in German were held in this church from 1867 to 1920.

But then the building fell into disrepair as the German speaking families moved elsewhere or joined a nearby church where services were held in English. The sturdy stone walls, however, survived.

In 2006, the building was deeded to Friends of the Old Stone Church, a not-for-profit organization, and the process of restoring the building began. In 2010, with the restoration process nearly completed, a special Christmas service, which has become an annual event, was held in the restored sanctuary, which seats about 50 people.

This year the Christmas service will be held at 4:00 p.m. on Saturday, December 7. The building is not heated, so wear a warm coat and mittens. There is no indoor plumbing, so plan your life accordingly. You should also check the Old Stone Church website to make certain that the service is being held before heading down there. If the weather is bad, the service will be canceled.

When there is snow on the ground, I plan to return to Wildcat Den State Park to shoot some winter pictures on a day when the sun is shining and the roads are passable. Ditto for spring when the spring flowers are blooming.

Wildcat Den State Park has become an important part of my life.

*DAN LEE, a regular columnist, is the Marian Taft Cannon Professor in the Humanities at Augustana College; [danlee@augustana.edu](mailto:danlee@augustana.edu).*

## THEY CAME BY BOAT

Why is this big boat in the Mill newsletter? The Mill is now part of the riverboat cruise industry. That was not in the vision when we started restoring the dead building. American Cruise Lines has discovered Muscatine and the Mill. Around 350 cruisers “came aboard” the mill. They came from all over the country. I talked with visitors from New Orleans, Los Angeles, Virginia, Tennessee, Florida, New York, St Louis, and Texas. Eight boats visited. **In 2025 they plan to bring 13 boats. Thanks to our donors, volunteers, staff and Park staff for making it possible.**



## .... AND THEY CAME BY ANTIQUE CARS AND BY BUS



Pine Creek Mill is all about history. Friends’ members Barb and Don Fick are members of the Hawk A Model A Club of Cedar Rapids. Club members like to explore the world in their restored cars. On June 15<sup>th</sup> many cars visited Muscatine and Pine Creek Mill. 150 members of the community came to see them.



Another special group visited the Mill on June 12. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources Commission came to learn about this important historic site for which they are responsible. They spent about an hour and a half visiting and learning about the Mill and seeing it run. The Commission is 7 citizens who provide policy oversight over Iowa’s state-owned natural resources. Members are appointed by the Governor.

On Sept. 20<sup>th</sup> - 22 members of the Leadership Muscatine class came to learn about the Mill. Leadership is a group of citizens who are interested in learning about the community and possibly volunteering in the community.

On Aug 22<sup>nd</sup> a busload of conservation visitors from the Des Moines area came. They visited the Mill, the Park, and Muscatine.

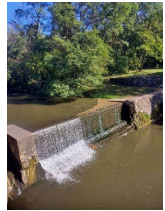


## YOU CAN HELP -- VOLUNTEER

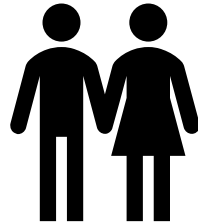
In the May newsletter of the Old Stone Church there is a quote of interest from Paul Edmondson. He was an executive with the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

“National Trust Historic sites put into practice the concept of preservation in perpetuity, including fiscal sustainability, long-view stewardship, robust audience engagement, and the constant pursuit of relevancy and truth in history.”

Mr. Edmondson asks how groups like Friends can assure the mill will be preserved in perpetuity. How can we assure the Mill becomes relevant to the next generation and those coming behind us? We need to see a generation of volunteers step up to assist with the tasks of maintenance, interpretation and administration of the Mill.



**You can help.** Looking for a new interest? Want to volunteer at an important historic site? Friends of Pine Creek Grist Mill is a volunteer group that works with Wildcat Den State Park to create a tool that brings our history alive. It is a recreation site for families. It is a tool for elementary school field trips. It is a tourist attraction that literally hosts visitors from most states in America and from countries around the world. **We are looking for volunteers with mechanical skills, an interest in historical restoration, in history, in interpretation, and in teaching children about pioneer history.**



Pine Creek Mill is a restored working Mill where visitors can experience their pioneer heritage. It is on the National Register of Historic Places. It is thought to be the oldest WORKING grist mill between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains. It played an important role in the early development of the Muscatine area. Early residents would not have been able to feed their livestock or themselves without a mill. At one time Iowa had about 500 grist mills.

“The mission of Friends of the Mill is to restore, operate, and maintain the mill and to share the historical significance of the site through educational programs public tours and events”. The inside of the Mill was almost unknown to the public after it closed in 1927. Friends formed in 1996 to restore it and open it to the public. We rescued it from a slow death by decay.



The generosity of donors makes it possible for us to host visitors and provide our school program.

When you see the folks giving tours of the Mill and working on the Mill, know that they are part of the Friends of the Pine Creek Grist Mill and not state employees. Friends is an IRS registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. So, when you graciously give a cash donation in the donation box or on your credit/debit card please know all of your donation stays with the Mill and gets turned right back in to keeping the Mill open for your enjoyment and education. None of the money goes to the State or DNR.

WHEAT LEVEL \$1000 +

CORN LEVEL \$500-\$999  
Howe Foundation

BUCKWHEAT LEVEL \$300-\$499

RYE LEVEL \$100-\$299  
Martin & Whitacre Surveyors  
Mark & Marie Latta

OAT LEVEL \$50-\$99

The Friends of Pine Creek Grist Mill officers are:

Tom Hanifan, President  
[tomhanifan@yahoo.com](mailto:tomhanifan@yahoo.com)  
563-554-4228

Heather Shoppa, Vice President  
[hshoppa@yahoo.com](mailto:hshoppa@yahoo.com)  
563-571-5213

Heidi Heirigs, Treasurer  
[my2boysatplay@aol.com](mailto:my2boysatplay@aol.com)  
563-299-0906

### DONATION FORM: Your donation keeps the mill open to the public

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Dates you wish to sponsor \_\_\_\_\_

Person you wish to honor \_\_\_\_\_

Amount donated \_\_\_\_\_

**Make your check payable to** Friends of Pine Creek Grist Mill at

Friends of Pine Creek Grist Mill  
Box 1205  
Muscatine, IA 52761

**Friends of the Mill**

C/O Tom Hanifan  
1721 Timberline Dr.  
Muscatine, IA 52761  
Return service requested

**2025 Membership**

Membership is only \$25 per year. Your membership includes

One year membership in Friends

Pine Creek Grist Mill Newsletter

An opportunity to learn about and participate in a local historic treasure

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_

2. Address \_\_\_\_\_

3. City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail address \_\_\_\_\_

Send this form and check to Friends of the Mill  
Box 1205 Muscatine, Iowa 52761

Check out the mill  
on the Web and  
Facebook

