

# Milling About

News from the Friends of Peirce Mill

Autumn 2011



## Celebration

After more than a decade of hard work, the rehabilitation of Peirce Mill is at hand. Work funded through the federal government's stimulus program is nearly complete and further activity by our craftsmen on the external waterwheel should be finished soon.



"This is the culmination of our efforts to get the mill operating again so that school groups and other visitors can experience the sights and sounds of a 19th century water-powered flour mill", said Richard Abbott, our president emeritus. We have raised more than \$1 million from foundations, families, and individuals since the group was formed in 1997.

The National Park Service (NPS) has reworked the grounds to more accurately depict the landscape that existed around the Mill during the 1800s. The NPS project also introduced some modern elements, including a bus turnaround by Peirce Barn and traffic calming measures on Tilden Street. The NPS has installed a new recirculating water pumping system to power the wheel, and inside, provided for additional support beams, a heating system, lighting, fire suppression, and complete upgrades to the utility infrastructure.

FOPM has funded the construction of the flume for delivering water to a new wheel, along with all of the shafts, gears and support systems required to run the newly resurfaced millstones. It has been a huge and complicated undertaking, but the primary mission of our group has been accomplished. Peirce Mill will once more be operational and open to visitors.

FOPM is now undertaking an important, new set of responsibilities. We have committed ourselves to an ongoing partnership with the NPS to be responsible for coordinating school programs and docent training, and handling maintenance activities. Involvement of our volunteers in these aspects of running the Mill is crucial. Given the ups and downs of federal funding, we hope that FOPM-managed repairs should help avoid another breakdown like the one experienced in 1993.

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Visit us on the Internet at [www.peircemill-friends.org](http://www.peircemill-friends.org)

The Friends of Peirce Mill, Inc., is a non-profit organization incorporated in the District of Columbia. It has been recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization.

## Private Reception and Public Festival

To celebrate the reopening of Peirce Mill there are two delightful events set for mid-October. On Thursday, October 13, 2011 an invitation-only reception will be held at the home of Cathy Carlson and Tom Galloway in the historic Peirce Still House at 2400 Tilden Street NW. This special occasion for key supporters and partners will include tours of the Mill. On Saturday, October 15, Rock Creek Park will host a Heritage Festival at Peirce Mill. The official “ribbon cutting” will take place at 10am and the day-long public festival will include 1800s period craft demonstrations, musicians and ranger-led tours of the Mill and its machinery.

## The Leadership Wheel Turns

The Friends of Peirce Mill are pleased to welcome a new arrival and we regret to announce a departure from our ranks in Washington, DC.

### Richard Abbott retires

Our founder and long-time leader, Richard Abbott, has retired from his position as the president of FOPM. Although he and his spouse, Marijke, have moved to Bellingham, WA, to be close to their daughter, Richard continues to serve on the board of FOPM and contributes frequently to our planning and programs. His long association with Peirce Mill began in 1988 when he served there as a helper to miller Ted Hazen. The mill was then open to the public on weekends and for school groups during the week. Richard’s job was to put the freshly ground wheat flour and corn meal into bags that were sold to the many visitors who loved visiting the mill and buying natural stone-ground grain products.

He was working there in April 1993 when a loud noise signaled problems with the machinery and he immediately shut off water flow to the wheel. It turned out that rot in the main shaft had caused the attached pit gear to move out of position and not engage the gears above. Unfortunately, mill operations ceased and the National Park Service was unable to find the necessary funds to make needed repairs.

This inspired Richard to write to the Washington Post asking the public to support a restoration effort. The letter, published in September 1996 resulted in calls from about 60 local residents, the formation of the Friends of Peirce Mill, and our incorporation as a non-profit organization in April 1997.

### Tara Morrison takes charge of Rock Creek Park.



*Tara Morrison and Richard Abbott at Peirce Mill*

In March 2011, Tara Morrison was appointed to be the superintendent of Rock Creek Park in the District of Columbia. NPS Regional Director Peggy O’Dell observes that “Tara’s distinguished service for the NPS in a variety of different urban settings makes her an excellent choice to lead this park. She has a proven ability to work with partner organizations and community groups in previous assignments and I believe Tara will do the same for Rock Creek Park.”

Morrison comes to Rock Creek Park from the position of superintendent of the African Burial Ground National Monument in lower Manhattan, a seven-acre site where free and enslaved Africans and African Americans were buried. Prior to this position in New York, Morrison served for two-and-a-half years as a management assistant in Northeast Regional Office, where she supported the development of the memorial and interpretive center at the monument.

Tara’s NPS career has also included positions at Gateway National Recreation Area in Sandy Hook, NJ, and at the Boston African American National Historic Site where

she developed expertise in the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program. Morrison served as special assistant to the deputy director in 2005, where she tracked and coordinated information requests from Congress, the Interior Department, the NPS Office of Management and Budget examiner, and other NPS Washington staff.

### **Volunteer (Docent) Training Oct. 1**

Our volunteer training program set for May 7 and 14 was postponed by unexpected delays in completing the renovations at the Mill. The re-scheduled volunteer training session is now set for one day: Saturday, October 1, 10am-3pm, at Peirce Mill.

So far we have 10 people signed up, but can accommodate a few more. This is your chance to get involved in a hands-on activity at Peirce Mill. Rock Creek Park rangers and Steve Dryden (author of a history of the Mill) will run the class. It should be interesting and fun, and comes just in time—two weeks before the October 15 re-opening festival, when we will need docents for the expected throng of visitors. Email our program manager, Steve Dryden at [jsdryden@comcast.net](mailto:jsdryden@comcast.net) to sign up.

### **Miller Training Class**

Speaking of hands-on training-- Adam Sieminski, our new president, attended a two-day miller training workshop held at Colvin Run Mill taught by Mason Maddox, Colvin Run's long-time chief miller. The session held May 13 and 14 was a practical event focusing mainly on the daily operations of an historic water-powered gristmill and the safe production of food products.

After a brief introduction to the mill, Mason started the class by teaching the dozen apprentice millers how to prepare the stones for "cleaning and dressing" by first heading to the basement level to disengage power to the driving gears- one of the many "safety first" steps constantly reinforced during the class. Even with water to the wheel shut off, a miller would not want to risk the stones moving unexpectedly. Then it was up the steep stairs to the 1st floor level to remove the grain hopper and the "horse" that

holds it on top of the circular wooden cover ("tun") that encases the stones. With the tun removed, the huge and sturdy wooden crane could be swung toward the stones and the iron tongs ("bale") could be attached to the stones with iron pins.

With pins passed through the two lugs in the bale and



*Mason Maddox (standing, right) instructs students*

then into the holes in the runner stone, the apprentices began to turn the crank handle on the lifting screw. With the runner stone up and moved aside, Mason instructed the students on proper cleaning of the stones- a key job for the miller at the end of the day to prevent insect and animal pests from feasting on the ground flour and corn-meal lodged between the stones and the tun. The class spent a great deal of time on discussions regarding the proper cleaning, storage, and handling of grain and food products.

According to Sieminski, the class included instructions in many other aspects of milling: how to keep all of the various gears, shafts, spindles and bearings lubricated for smooth operation; stone dressing; setting the stones to get the best possible production of product; tuning up the sifters and bolters; and what seemed like dozens of other things that the miller had to watch and listen for in the mill to keep it running properly and safely.

SPOOM's members are mill enthusiasts dedicated to promoting interest in old mills and other industrial Americana now quickly passing from the scene. FOPM encourages all of our members and readers to support this organization.

## Funding Update

Since our inception in 1997, the Friends of Peirce Mill raised, and have now nearly spent, over \$1 million—nearly every cent of it paid for the craftsmanship to be seen at the Mill.

We are extremely grateful for the support of our major donors:

- The 1772 Foundation
- The Kiplinger Foundation & Kiplinger Family Fund
- The Marpat Foundation
- The DC City Council

and the many other foundations, businesses, families and individuals who have made the restoration of Peirce Mill go from a dream to a reality. We hope to see all of you at the Mill.

A special and very warm thank-you goes out to the National Park Service and Rock Creek Park. The stimulus funds and organizational skills of the NPS have resulted in work that has gone beyond the Mill building to include the rehabilitation of the entire Peirce Mill Complex—a project that includes a return of the grounds (along with the Peirce Barn) to what historians believe the facilities looked like in the 1800s. The partnership between the FOPM and the NPS was fortuitous: our planning meant that a “shovel-ready” design was set to go, and the NPS had the vision to extend that plan to the entire historic and cultural landscape of the Mill. Our next challenge will be to support the NPS and Rock Creek Park in operating and sustaining the Mill.

## Upcoming SPOOM Visit to Peirce Mill

The Society for the Preservation of Old Mills will hold its annual conference in the Greater Washington DC region with headquarters at the Tysons Westpark Hotel, in Mclean, VA, September 21-24, 2011.

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Thursday, September 22, will feature a pre-conference tour of George Washington’s Gristmill, Mount Vernon, VA. Friday, September 23, will include lectures with speakers from the Association for State and Local History, the Association for Historic Tools and Trades, and the Mount Vernon Estate.

Also on the agenda for Sep. 22: Mapping Historic Water-Powered Mills, a talk by specialists from the Geography and Geospatial Technology Department at Northern Virginia Community College. Dr. Michael Krimmer will describe a project already underway to map the old mills of Fairfax County, VA, with software designed to let users enter, update, visualize and understand the scope of early American milling. GIS (geographic information systems) mapping software was used to fit Civil War era maps to modern maps, with mill data embedded in the database.

A keynote luncheon address by Dr. Robert K. Sutton, Chief Historian, National Park Service, has been organized by Friends of Peirce Mill program manager Steve Dryden. Afternoon sessions will include talks on visitor-centric historic site interpretation (Essentials for Mill Volunteers) and a case study on capital fundraising (Fairfax County and Colvin Run).

Saturday, September 24 will feature tours of Colvin Run Mill, in Great Falls, VA, and Peirce Mill in DC’s Rock Creek Park. These tours will be followed by a visit to Chesapeake & Ohio Canal and National Historical Park in Washington, and an evening tour of Frying Pan Farm Park, Herndon, VA.

For more details and registration information, please see <http://www.spoom.org/sp2011conf.htm>, or get in touch with Terry Tomasulo, Phone: 703-759-2771 / [terry.tomasulo@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:terry.tomasulo@fairfaxcounty.gov)

## Milling Experts at Work

John O'Rourke and Gus Kiorpes are the owners of O'Rourke & Kiorpes Inc., an historical restoration company that is performing repair and reconstruction work on much of the milling apparatus at Peirce Mill. The Friends of Peirce Mill found Gus and John while they were working on the rebuilding of George Washington's Gristmill at Mount Vernon.



Gus Kiorpes (left) of Port Republic, MD, and John O'Rourke of Solomons Island, MD, at Peirce Mill

Our nation's first President erected a large stone gristmill in 1771 at Mount Vernon to increase production of flour and cornmeal for use on the estate and for export abroad. The original GW mill structure was destroyed about 1850 and rebuilt in 1933, about the same time that Peirce Mill was first restored. The GW gristmill includes an operating Oliver Evans "Automated Milling System" that won US Patent No. 3 in 1790 and helped to make the gristmill at Mount Vernon a commercial success. Gus and John were critical to the success of the GW restoration and are hard at work now at Peirce Mill.

Among the important tasks that John and Gus are completing is the building of a new flume and sluice gate

system that will convey water from the new headrace to the waterwheel. Earlier they fabricated and installed the new oak main shaft that will be the hub for the wheel outside and the source of power for the gear systems inside the mill that turn the stones and drive other mechanisms. They completely restored the Hurst frame that supports the millstones and devices used to adjust their operation.

They have been working in their shop in Port Republic, MD and at the Peirce Mill complex. The photo (left) shows them at the Mill making final adjustment to the heavy timbers that form the backbone for the flume.

Once Gus and John get the millstones running again, FOPM intends to investigate the potential for restoring the Oliver Evans chutes, elevators, hoppers, and bolters at Peirce Mill-- with the help of Derek Ogden, an English millwright, now based in Madison, VA.

## FORCE is Now Rock Creek Conservancy

Our friends in the Friends of Rock Creek's Environment (FORCE) have changed their name to the Rock Creek Conservancy to better reflect an expanded mission: restoration of Rock Creek, its waters, parks, and lands. To learn more, attend the Conservancy's open house at Bethesda Green, 4835 Cordell Ave, 5 - 7 pm, on September 27.

### Cook's Corner

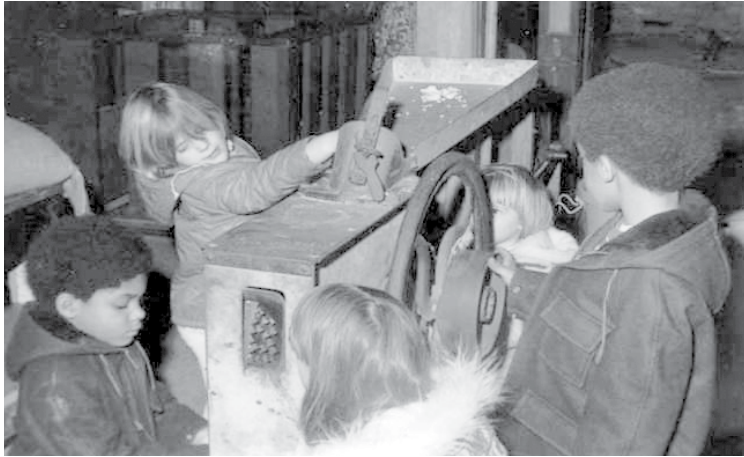
#### CORN MEAL GRIDDLECAKES

2 cups boiling water	1 tablespoon sugar
1 ½ cups milk	3 teaspoons baking powder
1 cup corn meal	1 teaspoon salt
2 cups sifted flour	2 eggs beaten

Pour boiling water over stone-ground corn meal, sugar and salt and mix well. Let stand until meal swells. Add milk and let stand until cool. Sift flour and baking powder together and add. Fold in beaten eggs. Bake on hot griddle, turning the cakes to brown both sides. The cakes should be small and well cooked. They require longer cooking than wheat cakes. Serves 4

*The American Woman's Cook Book*  
Consolidated Book Publishers, Chicago, 1945

# Looking Back at Peirce Mill



Young visitors try out a corn sheller at Peirce Mill

This photo, circa 1970s, courtesy of the National Park Service, shows children inspecting an antique machine that was used to separate dry corn kernels from the cob. This type of sheller probably dates from the late 1800's or early 1900s.

According to Steve Dryden's recent book: *Peirce Mill: Two Hundred Years in the Nation's Capital*, an estimated 93,500 people came to watch the gears turn inside the mill in 1973. This was the highest turnout in a decade that saw more than half a million visitors tour the site. The mill's popularity stemmed in part from "living history" programs featuring volunteers in period costumes demonstrating skills and customs from the era before electricity.



2930 Brandywine Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20008-2138

