

SPOOM

Mid-Atlantic Chapter

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Chapter Meeting at Colvin Run Mill **10017 Colvin Run Road, Great Falls, Virginia 22066**

The Mid-Atlantic Chapter of the Society for the Preservation of Old Mills (SPOOM) met at the Colvin Run Mill in Great Falls on March 3, 2007. The meeting was hosted by the Colvin Run Historic Site and the Friends of Colvin Run Mill (FOCRM). Over 60 persons interested in the history of early American mills attended.

The meeting was opened by the Chapter president, Charles Ives, at 9:00 AM. After coffee, Charles read a letter of welcome from the Chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and introduced Harold Rapp, the president of the SPOOM national

Meeting (cont'd)

Thanks were extended to the Colvin Run Mill staff and the FOCRM members who made the arrangements for a pleasant and rewarding meeting.

Robert Lundegard, representing the FOCRM, introduced the two speakers who made presentations on the history of early American milling and mill preservation.

The first talk was given by Prof. Brooke Hunter of Rider University on milling in the mid-Atlantic region during the Colonial and early American period. Her carefully researched report, based on her forthcoming book, was a fascinating account of the system of grain and flour production and export in early America. This period, through the technical ideas of Oliver Evans, the highly skilled and hard working farmers and craftsmen, and the energetic entrepreneurs laid the foundations of one of Americas leading and profitable industries. Prof Hunter covered all interacting factors from grain production to shipping to European and West Indies consumers. She also traced and explained the movement of the center of the industry from Philadelphia in 1776 to Baltimore by 1820.



Prof. Brooke Hunter

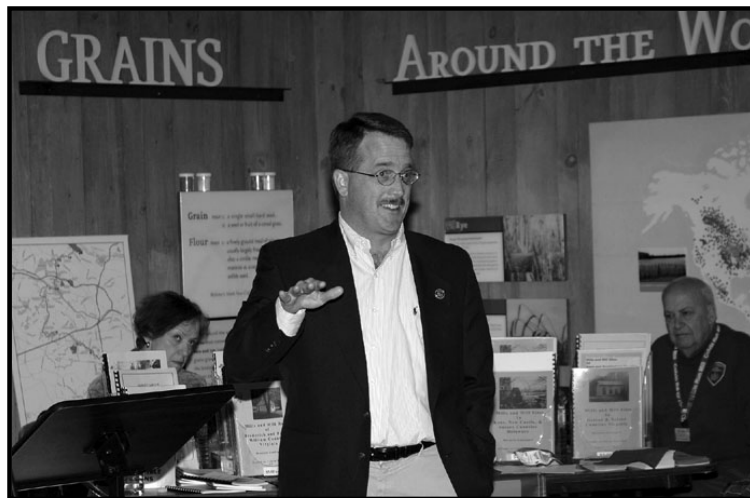
(Article provided by Bob Lundegard; b&w photos by Steve Springer; color by S. Langley)

Meeting (cont'd)

The history of the origins and reconstruction of the 1810 Colvin Run Mill (CRM) was the subject of the second talk by Michael Henry, the CRM Site Manager, of the Fairfax County Park Authority. He covered the most interesting features from the early vision and property ownership of George Washington, through 125 years of mill operations, to the purchase, reconstruction, and opening of the historic mill museum by the Fairfax County Park Authority in 1972.

After lunch, Mason Maddox, the miller on the CRM staff, gave tours of the historic mill to the SPOOM members and guests. The tour was a special experience based on Mason's deep knowledge of milling and of the specific operations at the Colvin Run Mill.

The Chapter business meeting followed the tour of the mill and was chaired by Charles Ives. The current officers were nominated and elected to serve for an additional two year term. The chapter is new and still evolving as a significant educational resource in the mid-Atlantic region. The members agreed to extend an invitation to St. Vincent College and Mill in Latrobe PA, to host the next chapter meeting scheduled for August 10-11, 2007.



Mr. Michael Henry



Mill lane



Mill interior



**Maddox Mason
leads tour**

Mill tour





Breneman-Turner Mill named to National Register of Historic Places in 2006

This superb early pioneer four-story stone and brick grist mill was built about 1800 by Abraham Breneman, a Mennonite pioneer who had migrated from Pennsylvania in 1770. Breneman settled in the Edom area of the Shenandoah Valley. He purchased 800 acres along Linville Creek and built a log house along the creek, a few miles north of Harrisonburg, VA. This Mill was built about 30 years later, two miles west of his home, along what is now known as Brenneman Church Road.

The mill survived the systematic burning of the Valley during General Sheridan's campaign of the Civil War in 1864. Oral history reports more than one story about saving the mill which may have been set on fire by Union soldiers more than once during that day. A barn nearby was also set on fire. It appears that Mrs Shaver was able to extinguish the fires set in the mill. The barn was not saved. According to one local story, sympathetic Union soldiers spared the mill after discovering that illness had struck the family of the owner, George Shaver. Another account holds that the soldiers set fire to the building, and left in a hurry so that the Shavers were able to extinguish the flames.

The most documentable story indicates that the one time when Mrs Shaver could not extinguish the fire, she "blew on her horn" and neighbor Jacob Wenger, from over the hill, along with his hired man, came and helped put out the fire. More than one of these stories are likely true, since in some locations more than one group of soldiers stopped at farms and mills as they moved north.

This mill is one of the few pre-Civil War mills in Rockingham County to survive General Sheridan's campaign, and the only remaining one which has operable grist mill equipment. It was operated continuously until the late 20th century.

The Breneman-Turner Mill was operated as a grist mill by J. Howard Turner from 1933 until 1988, the year of his death. In 2003 his heirs donated it to the Valley Brethren-Mennonite Heritage Center for preservation and restoration.

Breneman (cont'd)

It includes three floors and an attic. The machinery needs refurbishing. The mill is constructed of brick on a foundation of limestone. The Flemish-bond brickwork, the carved beams and the beaded floorboards are original 19th-century workmanship. The walls are five bricks thick, or 22 inches.

Mill Restoration: When the Turner family donated the mill, the Valley Brethren-Mennonite Heritage Center agreed to preserve the mill. The Heritage Center then had it evaluated, and Derek Ogden, a professional millwright, developed a plan for restoration. Due to foundation problems, the three-story south wall, which had begun to sag and bulge outward for several decades, was about to crumble.

In March 2005, Lantz Construction Company built supports on the outside to stabilize the wall at a cost of \$35,000. This 'buys time' to seek funding for rebuilding the wall and refurbishing the machinery. The goal is not just preservation but *restoration* to operational condition.

Stabilizing the wall was completed with borrowed money because of the critical nature. The estimate for rebuilding the stone-and-brick wall is \$85,000. The bricks and stone will be removed for re-use.

The Heritage Center plans to undertake the restoration on a phase-by-phase basis as funds become available. The professional millwright estimates that it will take about \$500,000 to complete restoration to a mill that is fully refurbished and operational.

Preservation Charter Membership has been established for persons contributing \$1,000. The goal is to recruit 100 members for this phase. To date there are 40 members.

Ken Weaver chairs the Mill Preservation committee. You may contact him at 540 833 1449 or e-mail at KJMWeaver@juno.com. Steve Shenk, the Executive Director of the Valley Brethren - Mennonite Heritage Center also may be contacted for information at 540 438 1275 or sshenk.valleybmhc@vbmhc.org,

-- Ken Weaver

ROCK MILL IN FAIRFIELD COUNTY, OHIO

Marjorie Lundegard

In the Lithopolis area of Fairfield County there is another very large mill that is under renovation. The mill is located on Rock Mill Road about 4-5 miles southeast of Lithopolis, Ohio. There is a restored covered bridge adjacent to the mill that is located on the Hocking River.



This is a four to five storied frame structure with a gabled roof. The mill was built around 1824. A new roof has been added to the mill. The frame siding and windows are in the process of being restored. A plastic sheet covered many of the open areas. This was once a prosperous flourmill. The mill is located on a gorge of the river where there is a good drop and flow of water. There is a pulley hoist at the apex of the roof line. The water wheel is gone. The mill might have used a turbine at one time. The mill equipment has been sold but plans are to obtain appropriate milling equipment from other mills ruins in the area. The plan is to make this a working mill again.

At one time this stream supported over eight mills and all have disappeared but the Rock Mill. Fortunately this mill is being restored. The surrounding area is beautiful. The mill will be very photogenic when the restoration is completed.



Rebirth for landmark Rohrer's Mill

■ Major restoration work begins on historic grist mill severely damaged in fire 12 days ago.

By JANE HOLAHAN
New Era Staff Writer

It looked like the end of an era when fire devastated one of the last water-powered grist mills in Lancaster County on Dec. 16.

Rohrer's Mill, built in Paradise Township in 1852 by Christian Rohrer, was declared a "total loss" by the Strasburg Fire Company.

Jim Landis and his sister, Nancy Landis, the great-great-grandchildren of Rohrer, sadly talked about tearing down the ruins.

"Jim's first inclination was to get rid of everything," says his wife, Mary.

But the people of Lancaster County are a resilient bunch.

As the ashes settled, the Landis family and their Amish neighbors decided they didn't want the landmark to disappear.

"Our neighbors encouraged us to keep it," says Jim Landis, who lives in the adjacent farmhouse at 271 Rohrer Mill Road, Ronks.

They did more than encourage.

Once it was determined the foot-thick brick walls and the water wheel were intact, the



Richard Hertzler/New Era

An Amish worker is shown in a doorway of the burned out Rohrer's Mill that is being restored.

work of restoring the devastated mill began.

"We'll probably do a partial restoration and incorporate

some newer, more modern equipment and get some advisers in to look at our options for a possible reopening," says

Landis.

That day may be a while off, but the restoration began in earnest today, when their contractor and neighbor, Steve Fisher, brought a group of volunteers to help tear down the grain mill and raise roof trusses.

Floors will have to be built and windows replaced, but Fisher is ready.

"It's an old landmark I've passed by all my life," says Fisher, who is Amish, as are the volunteers working today. "We're going to try to make it as much like the old mill as we can."

"A total recreation of the way it was in 1852 would just be too cost prohibitive," says Nancy Landis, who has conducted hundreds of tours of the mill and was able to save several 19th century financial ledgers from the fire.

The Landis family had worked in the mill on the day of the fire.

The cause of the blaze is unknown. Neighbors alerted the Landis family to the blaze around supper time and community residents quickly arrived to see if they could help. Eleven fire companies were called.

"The roof, the grain elevators, the pulleys are all gone," says Nancy Landis. "But the fire didn't reach the west side of the mill. The water wheel, the saw mill and the buhr stones were OK."

Please see MILL page A4

This is one of three articles provided by Nancy Landis about the fire at the mill owned by her brother. This article is reprinted with the generous permission of New Era through Staff Writer Jane Holahan, LNP News.

Anyone wishing more information or to offer thoughts and suggestions may contact Nancy at nlandis@paonline.com or at 283 Roher Mill Road, Ronks, PA 17572



Richard Hertzler/New Era

Exterior of Rohrer's Mill as Amish workers remove siding in grain storage area.

Mill

Continued from A1

Landis grows corn and wheat on his 165-acre farm, and he often ground grain for his neighbors.

Those neighbors gave back on the Monday following the fire by saving about 2,000 bushels of corn from the grain mill.

"Our English and Amish neighbors brought all the corn from the bins and roasted it to give to Jim's steers as feed," Nancy Landis explained. "It took all day, 10 hours at least. They were still going at 10 at night. That added to the healing."

She also noted that her brother's pastor, Steve Weaver, and members of the Stras-

burg Mennonite Church have been a big help too, volunteering to dismantle and remove some of the equipment that was damaged.

Fisher plans to use hemlock wood for the floors, which he estimated will take several weeks to complete. All of the beams will have to be replaced as well.

Right now, the barn is a nightmare for anyone with vertigo, but today the volunteers were expertly weaving their way on planks and swiftly moving up and down ladders in the three-story mill.

"I'll tell you, my heart was pounding when I watched them going up and down those ladders to get the grain out," Nancy Landis says with a smile.

The destroyed slate roof will be replaced with a plastic-type roof that looks very

much like slate but isn't as expensive.

A mill has stood on the site since 1760, according to newspaper records. It is powered by water from spring-fed Calmus Run.

The mill was a side business for the Landis family.

Jim Landis devotes most of his time to the farm. An employee operated the mill until January, when Landis and his wife began running it themselves.

"Right after the fire, you know you think the worst," says Landis.

"But after we thought about it and our neighbors encouraged us, we decided to rebuild. Our neighbors have been so helpful."

■ CONTACT US: jholahan@LNPnews.com or 481-6016

No upcoming activities were submitted for this issue. Please any such items to Susan Langley by May 15th for a quick pre- summer Notes& News.

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2023