

GRIST FROM THE MILL

VOLUNTEER NEWSLETTER

COLVIN RUN MILL
HISTORIC SITE

December 2008

A Steady New Hand at the Till(er)



Reed Asay is docent Brian Kendell's roommate. In May, he began coming to the mill with Brian once a month, helping out as a volunteer gardener. Soon, however, he discovered the joys of making hand-cranked ice cream with summer visitors.

When ice cream season ended, Reed wondered what other job he could

turn his talents to. He likes interacting with visitors and can now be found one Saturday a month behind the cash register in the General Store — ringing in sales and dishing out change instead of ice cream.

Originally from Utah, Reed works at an undisclosed location as a chemical engineer. Besides volunteering, he enjoys reading, playing piano and video games. The last

two hobbies undoubtedly help account for his skill with the till.

As a testament to his bravery and steady hand, Reed has agreed to work the cash register during this month's Children's Holiday Shopping.



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All hands on deck for the upcoming holiday programs!

Santa needs all the elves we can muster to help kids find the perfect gifts, wrap up surprises, toast marshmallows, carol 'round the bonfire, sip hot chocolate & wait patiently for their turn with the jolly old elf himself. Sign up sheets are in the lunch room or contact Jennifer Blackwood.



HOLIDAY HOURS:

The site will be **closed**:

- ◆ Christmas Eve, Dec. 24
- ◆ Christmas Day, Dec. 25

Open, but closing early:

News Year's Eve day, Dec. 31,
11am — 4pm, last tour at 3pm

Closed again:

- ◆ News Year's Day, Jan. 1
- ◆ County furlough day, Jan. 2



TINA & NICK YANNARELL

Congratulations to these college sweethearts
who celebrated their

**50TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY
NOVEMBER 29, 2008**

WEEKENDS IN DECEMBER:

HOLIDAY PROGRAMS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY



Children's Holiday Shopping
Colvin Run General Store
Saturday, 12/6, 10am-2pm
Sunday 12/7, noon-4pm
Monday, 12/8, 1-4pm

**Country Christmas with
Santa in the Mill**
Saturday, 12/13, 3-6pm
\$6 per person, ages 3 to 93

Model Train Display
The Barn at Colvin Run Mill
Saturday, 12/20, 11-4pm
Sunday, 12/21, 11-4pm
FREE



Was It For Hallowe'en?

"I WAS AT MY WITS' END! WE HAD SPENT COUNTLESS MAN HOURS, AND THIS ONE YOUNG BEAVER SEEMED HERE TO STAY."

MASON MADDOX



**From the
Miller's Desk**

By Mason Maddox

You may have noticed a new addition to the staff at Colvin Run Mill who resides at the far end of our tail race. Who could it be? Is it a forgotten Hallowe'en prop? No, actually, it is my new helper, Mr. Scare Beaver.

Back in the summer, another resident moved in – a very industrious young beaver. He began causing a maintenance problem when he constructed a dam inside the drainage pipe under Colvin Run Road. His dam caused the water in the tail race to rise above the bottom of the waterwheel, a condition known as backwatering, which creates undue resistance on the waterwheel as it tries to turn. Also, when the backwatered wheel is left idle, water soaks one spot on the wheel and causes it to be un-balanced. Neither situation is a preferred operating condition.

To start dealing with the beaver's dam, I fabricated a large grappling hook in the blacksmith shop, attached it to a big rope and

then went to the pipe to remove the blockage.

My next problem was getting the rope across the dam so I could pull the hook through. With Drew Foulis' help, I tied a plastic bottle to a lighter rope and floated it across. Then we used the small rope to pull the big rope attached to the hook. After several tries, we managed to remove the entire blockage. Thinking this was it, we went away triumphant.

But our little guest would not surrender that easily! A few days later, he moved upstream into the tail race and built a new dam at the gate area of the drainage pipe. We tore it out in the morning, he built it back overnight. This continued for over a month. We escalated our efforts to get him to relocate by taking apart his hut, removing the underbrush around it and removing the dam. None of this seemed to discourage him.

I was at my wits' end! We had spent countless man hours, and this one young beaver seemed here to stay.

I had only seen him a few times, but when I did, the beaver seemed terrorized and disappeared instantly. That's what brought the thought to me – maybe I could scare him into staying away from the tail race. And that's when Mr. Scare Beaver was born.

I went up to the shop to grab some wood, a raincoat, an old sweatshirt, a coffee can and a hard hat. To make it lively, I hung some coke cans on fishing line, I found some leftover Easter egg crafts in the cupboard and hung them by yarn, and the grand finale – I tied a two-liter bottle to his leg that floated behind him in the water. This seemed like it would do the trick.

To my surprise, the beaver returned only once more – about three days after Mr. Scare Beaver was installed. After I tore out his work one more time, the tail race seems to be beaver-free. Knock on wood, I think he threw in the towel. It has now been weeks since he has been seen and I don't miss his company!



Mr. Scare Beaver at work, guarding against encroachment.



We send wishes for continuing recovery to volunteer and neighbor **Mike Pahner** recuperating from a spot of heart surgery. Luckily, according to his doctor, he's a big guy with extra capillaries that had been working overtime to keep him ticking along.





Indoor Plumbing

Arti—FACTS

by Dawn Kehrler

Bellamy Partridge's story (*in box at right*) introduces three artifacts this month: the pitcher, basin and lidded chamber pot displayed on top of the bookshelves in the General Store. While they do not seem to be from a matched toilet set, they are pieces that would have been included in sets purchased in the 19th and early 20th centuries in America. Other pieces usually included a mug, brush vase, soap dish, hot water pitcher and slop bowl.

All three of our artifacts are transferware pottery made in Staffordshire, England, in the 1800s, a location famous for its ceramics. The transfer process began with an engraver who traced a design on paper and reproduced it onto a copper plate. An inked tissue pattern was made from the copper plate and transferred onto the surface of the ceramic object which was then fired to fix the pattern. On our artifacts you can easily see where tissue pattern pieces were cut to fit the shape of the object.

The pitcher dates from about 1850. The pattern on the pitcher shows an exotic scene with buildings, trees and human figures. People are shown on horses and on the ground. Flowers decorate the spout and the handle is ornately shaped. There are indentations on the bottom of the pitcher, but I could not determine the manufacturer from the indentations.

The basin in which the pitcher sits also dates from the 1850s, although they do not appear to be a set. The inside bottom of the bowl shows large vases in a natural setting. On the inside edge of the bowl, there are two different female figures, each shown twice. One figure is playing a lyre and the other figure is sculpting. The outside edge shows a repeated pattern of a woman playing a lyre and flowers. There is a mark on the bottom of the bowl showing a tree and some buildings and the letters MYC and two E's, but the pattern was torn and the name is not clear.

The exterior pattern on the chamber pot shows a

fanciful place with trees and buildings, children and adults near water. Inside the pot there is a similar pattern. The matching lid has an elaborate knob at the top and the pattern is again a family near water with sailing boats. The marking on the bottom of the pot is quite clear. The pot was made by the T. J. & J. Mayer company at the Dale Hall Pottery in Staffordshire. The name of the pattern is Florentine. According to a Staffordshire index of pottery marks, this pot was made between 1843 and 1855.



Toilet articles were sold in ceramics as well as simple granite ironware and enameled ware. A basin might be kept primarily in the bedroom, but inventories show that chamber pots were kept equally in the bedroom and in the kitchen. Basins and chamber pots were used until they were replaced by modern plumbing.



In the book *At Home*, Bellamy Partridge recalled the 19th century Christmas that he and his sisters gave their mother an eight-piece toilet set including a pitcher, basin and chamber pot. When Bellamy brought his mother the slop jar, he slipped it over his head for fun. After everyone stopped laughing, Bellamy couldn't get his headpiece off. He struggled for a while and finally his father held a flatiron on one side of the jar and rapped the other side with a hammer, breaking the jar and freeing Bellamy.



Milling Around in Corsica



Abandoned chestnut mill near Corzanno, Corsica.

Last July, during a two week, long-distance backpacking trip in Corsica's high mountains, Mike Moran visited an abandoned chestnut mill near the village of Corzanno. He reports:

The historical and economical significance of chestnuts in Corsica is most noteworthy. The trees have been maintained since the 13th century and became known as "Bread Trees." In the late 18th century, chestnut trees covered 70% of all cultivable land. By the 1880s, Corsica harvested 150,000 tons of chestnuts, and there were many chestnut mills, most water-powered, which were also used for corn. By the 1990s, the harvest was down to 2000 tons.

Today, there are probably only two grinding water-mills left. The yearly harvest is about 1000 tons,

of which 85% is transformed into 300 tons of flour. Over the past 50 years, many chestnut trees were cut down due to the economic benefit from wood sale and/or died from numerous diseases. Today's chestnut trees are mainly in the Castagniccia area, but do not grow at sea level nor up in the mountains.

At the abandoned mill I visited, the old stone walls and roof are still intact, along with the remains of the old tubular race, which directs water to the horizontal tub wheel.

The pre-harvest work starts in early autumn by cleaning everything that has grown underneath the tree since the previous harvest. The actual harvest begins in October.

Traditionally, just the chestnuts that have fallen onto the ground and out of their shells are gath-



ered with the help of a short rake. Mules still transport them in sacks down the slopes.

Some chestnuts are sold fresh and others are loaded onto a drying-loft in a stone drying hut where they are put on a lathwork a certain height over a slatted floor. Underneath, a constant fire burns for about 25 days, slowly drying and curing the chestnuts, killing worms and fungus, and resulting in chestnuts as well preserved as any other grain.

After drying, the chestnuts are put in a threshing machine to be shelled. Then they are loaded into a blowing machine to remove the last bits of skin, which contains a lot of tannin. After that process, they are put in a riddle to be sorted out. Lastly, they are transported to the water-powered mill to be pulverized by the big millstones.

Chestnut flour is very fine and light, and is used for making bread, beer, liquors, cakes and polenta.



The wooden hoop and hopper are rapidly deteriorating.

CHESTNUT FLOUR is gluten free and adds a sweet nutty flavor to baked goods, pasta and sauces. Substitute chestnut flour for some wheat flour (usually less than 50%) in recipes, or as a complete substitute for cornmeal or oat flour. Its tender texture and sweet flavor make wonderful pancakes, muffins and pastries.

igourmet.com

Chestnut meats are soft and starchy, more like grain rather than crunchy like other nuts. It is the only nut primarily treated as a vegetable due to its starch content. As the nuts are cured, their starch turns into sugar, which sweetens the meat. homecooking.about.com





Archaeology at Colvin Run Mill

*Aimee Wells, Archaeologist
FCPA Cultural Resource
Management & Protection
Section (CRMPS)*

Over the summer, I conducted archaeological investigations at the mill with a field crew made up of interns from George Mason University and Cambridge University and some long-time CRMPS volunteers known as “The Friday Crew.” One of our goals was to find and better understand the purpose of outbuildings we can see in aerial photos of the mill taken in 1937, but which are now absent from the mill landscape.

Our work included:

- excavating test pits on the hill behind the miller’s house;
- probing an area believed to contain the

walls of the original ice house in front of the miller’s house; and

- opening up an excavation unit between the mill and Colvin Run Road that was a small building site in 1937.

As is often the case with archaeology, thus far there are more questions than answers.

The artifacts we excavated in the unit near the mill include cut nails whose peak of popularity was c.1820-1910, a brass buckle, leather fragments, wooden planks, glass and a lot of brick.

It is possible that the brick and some other waste material were graded out when the mill was restored in the 1970s. These construction and reconstruction-related

features can be difficult to discern given the small “windows” we use to understand the layers of soil and sediment.

The work at the mill progressed rather slowly due to poor weather conditions. More than once, the unit filled up with water and had to be bailed out. But archaeologists will return to the mill in the spring, hoping to answer some of the questions that this year’s work has left them with.

Before that, they will take advantage of the colder weather and lack of foliage this winter to examine the remains of the icehouse and conduct a survey on the far side of Rt. 7 to determine the possibility of archaeological sites on the parkland opposite the mill.

“AS IS OFTEN THE CASE WITH ARCHAEOLOGY, THUS FAR THERE ARE MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS.”

AIMEE WELLS

December Birthdays



3 — Even though **Frank Boucher** is “at the age where he’d just as soon forget about birthdays,” he is planning a celebratory lunch with his wife Carol.

15 — **Mason Maddox** is anticipating getting a few more aches and pains for his birthday as well as at least one surprise from his loving family.

16 — **Nick Yannarell** will “only be 79” so expects no big hurrah (at least not this year...hint, hint). But he will take his wife Tina out to dinner.

LATE BREAKING ELECTION DAY NEWS: IT’S A BOY!

Proud first-time grandma **Debra Gee** is delighted to announce that while she was busy working at the election polls, **Andrew Ricardo Olaverria** made his own mark in history by arriving three weeks early at 5:36 a.m., November 4, weighing in at 5lbs. 13 oz. He’s now at home in Ashburn with his parents Christine and Ricardo.





**COLVIN RUN MILL
HISTORIC SITE**

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Mike Toms, Colvin Run Mill volunteer



The mission of Colvin Run Mill Historic Site is to maintain and interpret its historic buildings and collections for the enrichment of Fairfax County residents and visitors as they relate to the themes of technology and community in 19th century rural northern Virginia.

Manager: Mike Henry

Assistant Manager/Newsletter Editor: Ann Korzeniewski

Miller: Mason Maddox

Historic Collections Coordinator: Dawn Kehrer

Programs, Volunteer Scheduling & Sales: Jennifer Blackwood

Jills of All Trades: Crystal Allison & Pam Gennari