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Gray's Mill: Email Correspondence regarding Mill Store

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Date: Mon, 11 Mar 2002 20:40:34 -0400
To: SAYRE2834@aol.com
From: "Anne W. Baker" <awb02@sprynet.com>
Subject: Re: trying to reply to RCG
Cc:
Bcc:
X-Attachments:

Below is excerpt from RCG's note if you can define what you (both) want, I can reply. I'm not presently interested in becoming a shopkeeper as you alluded to Tickled to help out if you really need me.

There is a rumor you may be available to go to Westport and help organize a lot of the stuff we have collected.

If true let me know so

Sorry to take so long to get back. I got involved in a report I had to write.

Now to try and define how I vision the future of the mill:

What I want is to see the mill up on its feet again, back to its old self-- open and running.

A miller/manger to run it, keep it clean, be able to explain its history and how it runs. I would like to see the miller/manger maintaining the site, the machinery, the fields, the tailrace etc.

Other than an engine (which should be ready soon) the mill is physically where it was before Tim left 4 years ago. Its most important aspect at this moment is its contribution to history. As an "interpretive center" it has great educational value. Not only for the general public, but for Historians of Engineering Technology; The Society of Old Mills; The Society for Industrial Archaeology; The International Molinological Society; Historic American Engineer Records (HAER), and students of all ages.

To add to the educational value it would be great to grow some flint corn in the back field. And how about a jonnycake festival at the time of harvesting.

In addition to the above I feel that it is a candidate for nomination to the National Reg. Of Historic Places - a possibility that I am pursuing. This would protect it to some degree but more importantly give it clout.

At this point, without a trained miller, there is no way the mill can grind enough flint corn for general sales but I do think jonnycake meal should be for sale, It can be ground by somebody else (for instance Harry Records in Exeter Rhode Island) and sold in Gray's bags in the store.

The store is important as it can be a source of income.. As you know when people go to historic sties they always look for the museum store. The store should have mill related items, Most important books and videos. Copies of old maps and photos of the area, postcards, mugs and t-shirts with mill logo, Iron frying pans, spatulas perhaps with the mill log on the handle and so on. plus small items such as "Corn on the cob" (popcorn that comes on a cob and made to pop in a microwave.) And from, and for the locals, fresh vegetables ,and home made cookies , etc. for sale to reflect the bakery that was once next door,. and perhaps on Saturdays jonnycake tasting, lessons on how to cook them, history of such(which there is a great deal of) and so on. This means that we need to find somebody who can buy for the store, somebody who has taste and is sensitive to the type of items that are sensitive to the history of the mill.

And as you suggested the mill could also be headquarters for the local historical Society – which now barely exists but the interest is definitely there.

With what Ralph as already collected it already has become an archives and Ralph's "office" is perfect as a records archive and research area. If the Historical Society was interested they could even expand into the Bakery next door. Once you get something started it's amazing what will follow.

The bottom line though is not to loose track of what the mill is all about –the fact that it is because there was a stream that could be dammed, which in turn serviced the needs of people who then created a village

I would hate to see the mill become so commercial (a Ted Hazen kind of thing)that it looses the story it tells about the 18th century, followed by the 19th century influence of the industrial revolution – a wooden wheel replaced by a turbine – and all the people involved.

Regardless of what transpired in the end with Tim , he felt and understood the real meaning of the heart of a 19th century grist mill within a community. The mill is more than walls, water and machinery. Ralph said it in one sentence:

"I want to make sure that the spirit of what this mill represents is eternalized for my grand children, their children, for Adamsville, and for the nation. "

Now for me and where I'm at physiologically. Having helped to reawaken the mill and (keep your fingers crossed) succeeded in getting the pond cleaned, I don't envision getting involved with the day to day realities of its running. I would hope that we could find somebody, who deeply understands the rarity of what the mill represents, to oversee its future and take it forward as its historic spokesman and teacher. Ralph's love of the mill has offered a great opportunity for someone to do just that.

Now that you got through that following is a copy of a letter I received in the mail today.

Dear Anne, Thank you for your email. I am sure that you have heard from many people since the story was written. My husband and I started our love affair with Westport over ten years ago in a rented house on the river. My landlady suggested I read the book, A Joyful Noise, and as I read I knew that I had landed in the right place. The story took place right across the river from the house we rented. The book inspired me to go graping and to hunt for beach plums. But most of all what appealed to me most was the history and cultural of the area. While not a certified historian, I have learned about Westport's history from the people who live here and books on the area. Sharing the history with others is something I would enjoy. We now own a home in the harbor area and as a neighbor used to say, "we are indeed in god's country". Since I retired from teaching I have spent the time landscaping our yard and gardening both flowers and vegetables. I put up the vegetables, make jams, tomato sauces, and so forth. I welcome the possiblity of selling local produce and preserves. Additionally, I envision the store could selling items from art to painted stools with country garden motifs from artists in the area. I would be interested to learn about how much mechanical know how is necessary for operating the mill. I believe that the hours for the mill/store to be open would vary as to the season, that is the tourist versus school seasons. Special times could be made available for school groups. A summer time of operation would be open for discussion. I will be away from March 21st to March 30th. I look forward to hearing from you.

Interesting for sure and maybe worth pursuing. But here is were we have to be careful painted stools with country garden motifs from artists in the area could be the beginning of something too cutsey .ie. could turn into "Colonial America" stuffed pillows, quilts and so on. What's most important is not to loose tract that the mill is a learning center of technology

Bla, Bla. Sorry to get so carried away.

Delighted to hear that you are on board.

Pete

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