

Mill House Monthly

October, 2014

Water Basin Cogwheel

We need to send a big thank you to Stephen Johnson and GOEL Services for the newest addition to our museum collection. GOEL is conducting the demolition work on the Fairfax Water property at the west end of Occoquan. The old water containment basins and pumping station are no longer in use and are being removed to make way for a riverfront park.

On Thursday, October 23, we received from GOEL a cogwheel from one of the old basins. Since 1950 the basins provided water to much of Northern Virginia including Fairfax and Prince William Counties. The new display along the waterfront adjacent to our Mill House historical markers will remind us of an important piece of the river history.

The two dams built by the Alexandria Water Co. on the Occoquan River in the 1940's formed the Occoquan Reservoir. Though once capable of providing hydroelectric power their primary purpose is to provide water.

The construction of the dams and water containment basins that followed erased an era of industrial history. The mill race and ruins of the 1828 cotton factory and 1755 iron furnace have disappeared. All were victims of a new era of urbanization and an increasing need for water.

Beautiful falls of the Occoquan River, swimming in the old mullet hole, children scampering among ancient boulders, all relegated to history.

The cogwheel will help us remember as we move on to a new era of river memories!



Pictured above are Santos Funes, Terrance King, Vernon Artis, and Tim Short, four of the men who provided the hard work for our new water basin cogwheel display. Directly below is the cement pad being lifted into place for the cogwheel pictured on the lower right.



River Memories



Archdeacon Burnaby, June 1760;... brought me through as beautiful a scene as eye ever beheld. It was a delightful valley about two miles in length and a quarter in breadth, between high and craggy mountains covered with chamoedaphnes or wild ivy in full flower. Through the middle of the valley glided a rivulet about eight yards wide, extremely lucid, and breaking into innumerable cascades: and in different parts of it stood small clumps of evergreens, such as myrtles, cedars, pines and various other sorts....



Ask the Curator

Some of the best questions asked at the Mill House Museum come from our youngest visitors. I will always remember the young boy who, when I started to explain that the old grist mill stood where the parking lot next to the museum is, asked; "you wanted that instead of a mill?" Their questions and comments are honest and open!

Photography

A few weeks ago, Cub Scout Pack 1683 visited the museum. They had several interesting questions related to photography and the photos we have displayed.

The boys wanted to know when families had cameras. Photography that was affordable to the average person followed the production of photographic film. George Eastman made this possible with his Kodak box camera and film in 1888. The camera came preloaded with the film. Eastman's slogan, "you press the button-we do the rest", allowed us all to capture history in real time. Once the film was used the camera was returned to the Kodak Company for processing. The photographs were then returned with the camera reloaded for the next adventure. In 1900 a box camera loaded with film cost about \$1. In 2014 that camera would be priced close to \$30.

Kodachrome color film was introduced in 1935 by Kodak. Again the film came loaded on a camera and after being used it was sent back to the company for processing. Color film was quite expensive and, although more common by the 1960's, it wasn't until the 1970's that the price was more family affordable.

Our digital cameras today allow us to click away to our hearts content. Gotcha!

Merchant's Mill Model

Just like the boys of BSA Troop 1683, all our children want to know how Dr. James Walbert

created the water for the scale model of the Occoquan Merchant's Mill.

Dr. Walbert explained that the waterfalls are made with clear silicone bathroom caulk. The waterfall design is created on wax paper and allowed to dry. Once dry, the "waterfall" can be removed from the wax paper and adhered to the model, in our case the mill sluice, with more clear silicone caulk.

The river water is created with two part furniture epoxy that has been tinted with yellow and green acrylic paint.

After watching a few YouTube clips I quickly realized the gift of time and talent Dr. Walbert gave to all of us in the form of our mill model. YouTube has a variety of videos showing the construction of scale models. Some videos are created by manufacturers of realistic water products, and others are by inventive artists who have fabricated their own methods.

Wheat

In a large barrel planter outside the museum wheat grass was planted as a teaching tool so children could see the seeds develop, the grass grow, and understand where flour came from. Recently someone asked me what type of wheat we had growing outside the museum, where I purchased it, and was it the type of wheat that would have been planted in the early nineteenth century.

Where was it purchased? Our red durham wheat was bought from www.amazon.com.

Is it the same type of wheat planted in colonial times? Not likely, colonists would have brought seeds with them from their home countries. Today there are 6 classifications of wheat; hard red winter, hard red spring, soft red winter, durum, hard white and soft white. There are hundreds of varieties among the classifications. Some varieties might be better suited for certain flour products, climates or milling processes.