

Miller's Report

April 2020

Since we last met in May 2019 life has certainly changed at Yates Mill and around the globe, regrettably causing us to halt our 2020 Mill Tour season, shortly after it started. However, we closed 2019 on good notes. In addition to Corn Grinding, Mill Heritage (general public) History Detective (elementary, middle and high school) and Little Red Hen (pre- school) tours I also gave three Technology tours to the public and to Wake County Parks staff, with these visitors having the opportunity to see all three floors of Yates Mill.

I continue to perform "routine" maintenance and to prepare for, respond to, and clean up after high-water events at the Mill, while socially distancing myself from any park visitors. I am also working on an off-season repair to the Mill in anticipation of once again showing Yates Mill in action to visitors.

Here are a few highlights of the past year:

In June the fire alarm went off on the 3rd floor at 1:30am when a smoke detector malfunctioned. The Fire Department responded, cutting the locks to enter the mill and verified that all was well. The offending smoke detector and all the smoke detectors were replaced as they were 13 years old.

Our cornmeal storage freezer malfunctioned and partially defrosted so I purchased a new freezer to quickly replace the broken unit. I was able to repair the old freezer and now we have twice the storage capacity for cornmeal storage.

The July corn grinding weekend was extremely hot with the Raleigh National Weather Service issuing an "Excessive Heat Warning" for the area. Possibly due to the heat and metal fatigue a coupling broke on the primary drive shaft during the Saturday morning tours. As a result of this mechanical issue and the excessive heat the Saturday afternoon and Sunday corn grinding tours in July were cancelled. Fortunately I had a spare part on hand and with help from a local machine shop I was able to upgrade and replace the broken coupling the following week.

In anticipation of potential consequences from Hurricane Dorian in early September the Mill was prepared for any impacts but fortunately there were no issues resulting from the event.

In October we hosted visitors from the De Immigrant Windmill of Fulton, Illinois, who were interested in learning more about Yates Mill's operations and fundraising methods.

Typically in the fall and during times of low water, there is trash buildup in the flume/forebay, which requires removal. Beavers bring vegetation and other debris into the flume/forebay and regrettably visitors throw rocks and other items into the flume/forebay as well. Removing this debris requires draining of the flume/forebay and physical entry into the flume/forebay to

remove these items and sweep or shovel out the debris while preventing it from moving through the flume/forebay and becoming lodged under the control gate preventing it from closing and potentially damaging the waterwheel. I completed this task several times in the last year.

The annual Holiday Sale was once again held during November corn grinding event on Saturday, November 16. Totals for the November event were: Holiday Craft Sale \$704.00, Merchandise Sale \$468.00, Mill Tour Ticket Sale \$357.00 for a total of \$1529.00

Yates Mill was featured in an article in the November/December issue of "Cary Magazine" as one of the "10 Things to Do" in the area. Yates Mill is also one of many historical images depicted on a quilt that was on display as part of the "Quilt Speak" exhibit at the NC Museum of History.

During the November corn grinding event photographer Tyler Northrup visited the mill and spent the day taking photos for "Our State" magazine. These photos should be included in an article on corn that is scheduled to be in a fall 2020 issue.

A flood event on February 6, 2020 caused high water and debris resulting in damage to two of the buckets on the waterwheel. I was able to repair the damage by fabricating and replacing the missing bucket boards. Got to keep that big wheel turning.

The March mill tour calendar was quite full with the season starting briskly. As a result it has made the need to recruit more new volunteers who would be willing and able to help with mill tours, particularly weekday tours, a high priority. Regrettably mill tours were cancelled in mid-March due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As we look forward to returning to normal or a new version of normal please note that routine maintenance at Yates Mill for food production has always involved sanitizing the mill stones with a Chlorox solution before every corn grinding event.

I am currently working to replace loose bolts on the waterwheel's ring gear and installing oak timbers to provide additional support for the beams that support the pinion gear and primary drive shaft. Fabrication of new parts and partial disassembly of the drive train is necessary to complete this repair.

I look forward to resuming our tour season at Yates Mill and appreciate your continued support as I serve as your Miller!

William Robbins