

Miller's Report

April 2021

Well, 2020 was quite a year and what happens in 2021 remains to be seen. Even though the mill building has been closed to visitors due to Covid – 19, it has been a busy year for me at Yates Mill. I took the opportunity to complete some needed repairs while the mill was closed to the public. I also continued to perform routine maintenance and respond to issues as they arose, including a fair number of high water events due to all the rain that occurred in the past year.

Here are a few highlights of the past year:

In May, I installed oak timbers to provide additional support to the primary drive shaft and pinion gear. I partially disassembled the primary drive shaft in order to realign it and lifted and repositioned the pinion gear that carries power from the mill's waterwheel. Since we brought Yates Mill back to life in 2001, the wear and tear on these gears and weathering of the wooden components resulted in this misalignment. Now with this additional support and realignment, we hope to extend the service life of these critical components.

An additional repair was also recently completed to the waterwheel. The bolts on the waterwheel's segmented ring gear had become loose and could no longer be tightened. In order to complete this repair, the old bolts needed to be cut off with a torch and new bolts fabricated. In addition new nuts and washers were used to complete the repair and secure several segments of the ring gear to extend the service life of the waterwheel.

I prepared for and responded to flooding including that associated with the passage of Hurricane Isaias in early August as well as other high water events including the flood event on November 12 of this past year. For these forecasted events, I make sure that all the moving parts of the mill are adequately greased should the water level get high enough to cause the waterwheel to freewheel, which was indeed the case after the November rain event. Fortunately no serious damage was caused by any of the events; however several stones on the top edge of the dam and one of the large stones on the waterwheel axle's stone support structure were lost. Local stone mason, Brooks Burleson, was hired to complete those needed repairs.

Thanks to Laura Ketcham and the staff at Historic Yates Mill County Park, we developed a series of videos entitled "Interview with the Miller" to continue to engage people about Yates Mill. You can view them on Historic Yates Mill County Park's Facebook Page under the videos tab. These videos focused on the tools needed to fabricate and dress the mill stones and we hope you will consider viewing them if you haven't already. Check them out at:

<https://www.facebook.com/pg/yatesmill/videos/>

I also hope you saw the photo essay on corn, grits, and gristmills in North Carolina in the November 2020 issue of Our State Magazine. Yates Mill was featured prominently in this article which included a photograph of Yates Mill on the cover of the magazine. The photos were taken during the corn grinding event in November 2019 in anticipation of the article that came out in 2020.

I am also pleased to report that Yates Mill Cornmeal is once again available for sale! Alex Ives and our friends at NCSU's Howling Cow Creamery, located across Lake Wheeler Road, just north of the park entrance have agreed to sell our cornmeal. So, please stop by to get some wonderful Yates Mill Cornmeal as well as some fabulous Howling Cow Ice Cream. More information about the creamery is available online at: <https://howlingcow.ncsu.edu/>

While the mill is not currently open for tours, Historic Yates Mill County Park is still open. As I am at the mill performing routine maintenance, rotating the waterwheel, and responding to any other issues that need addressing I continue to be amazed at what a popular destination Yates Mill and the Park have become for folks from near and far.

I look forward to the coming year at Yates Mill and appreciate your continued support as I serve as your Miller!

I hope to see you at the mill,

William Robbins