



Dennis Galloway photo

Spring 2011



### **President's Message - Glenn Harrison**

Once again, I stress the importance of keeping the millpond full year round as it is part of the historic setting for the mill. It is a significant part of the mill for visitors, artists, and historians. The Boston Mill Society understands that to reduce flooding and to improve fish runs on the Calapooia River, it is important to remove two dams that have been in place for over 50 years. However, an adequate water source from the Calapooia River must be found to maintain the water level in the mill pond. It is part of the fire suppression for the mill and is a source of water for use by the volunteers of the Halsey-Shedd Rural Fire Protection District. Adding a liner could help reduce seepage and repairing the gates will help reduce leaking. But an adequate flow from the river maintained by pumps will be required. Yes, it would be expensive for State Parks, but is far more expensive and potentially destructive to the historic site, tourists, and the iconic view. Remember that the mill and surrounding property including the millpond are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

State Parks is a year late and many thousands of dollars short. In an April 19 meeting with stake holders, we learned the disastrous news. The two dams will be removed later this year, but an alternate water supply to the millpond will not be available until next year. Of the three alternatives proposed by River Design Group, the cheapest and easiest option was favored. That means for much of the year an inadequate water supply will reach the millpond. This year for the months of August and September, when many visitors would want to tour the mill, it will be closed. Oh, the park grounds will be open and discussions can occur outside of the mill, but the water level will be so low that access to the water in the millpond will not support fire suppression. So the mill will be off limits for visitors and staff even though art exhibits have been scheduled for inside the mill.

Short term decommissioning of the mill does have some advantages. Any fish that might be in the

millpond could be returned to the river, a lining could be installed, leaking at the gates could be addressed, and a real expert in hydrology of mills, dams, gates, and turbines could examine the mill and surrounding area and make a recommendation. Long ago the Boston Mill Society offered to fund the expenses for such an expert. As yet State Parks has not accepted the offer.

The pond would eventually fill from rain, runoff from farmer's fields, and winter flooding from Walton Slough. Next year a well would be dug on Park's property and a downstream pump would recycle water back to the pond to increase the water level to about a foot lower than the usual level. But that won't even be enough to offset water loss through evaporation and leakage. It might help, but it is not adequate. Many people appreciate the view over the millpond. Imagine what it would look like with very little water and algae growing in the millpond from lack of flow.

The third option proposed by River Design Group would be acceptable because it would bring water from the Calapooia River through an eight inch pipe to the southern end of a contained, smaller millpond. The second option, opposed by all, was to have three wells on the mill site to pump water into the pond. That would lower the water table in the summer for farmers near the mill. The third option is projected to cost \$310,000 more than option 1, but Parks Trust and lottery funds could be used for the expense. It would maintain the Mill's Territorial water rights and allow enough water for demonstration milling. It is worth doing! The mill is on the Pioneer Country Trail. What happens at the mill impacts tourism.

## Annual Meeting

The Boston Mill Society Annual Meeting will be held from 1:00 to 2:00 pm on Saturday, May 21 at Thompson's Mills, 1 1/2 miles east of Shedd. Ranger Tom Parsons and BMS Board member Larry Thompson will speak. Tours of the mill and refreshments will be available. Members will vote on three board members and officers for the next year will be elected. If you are interested in the future of this historic site, plan to attend. This is your chance to see the rearranged displays and purchase a souvenir.

## Ranger Report - Tom Parsons

"Time is a dressmaker, specializing in alterations" - Faith Baldwin

Having worked at Thompson's Mills for over six months, I can tell that I am finally starting to understand the job because I have more questions than ever. The more I look around the more I am able to see through the tangle of gears, boards, wires, holes, knobs and scuff marks. But instead of being wide eyed and feeling overwhelmed like I was in September, I'm now squinty eyed and focused, wondering, "Wait, what is that? Why is it there?!"

Part of the issue is that while some gears, boards, wires, etc. have their obvious role in the feed-making process, so many others are less obviously explained because they are remnants from a previous era. When the power supply was upgraded or the technology was improved or even when the very goal of the mill was changed to reflect modern times, the structure absorbed new ideas in the form of different line shafts, altered pulley configurations and rerouted chutes. What is left behind is historical evidence of the old way of thinking, the old way of powering a mill, the old way Americans looked at flour...

These cryptic clues to the past are everywhere, combining to make Thompson's Mills a priceless and unequaled archive of the last 152 years. They also remind me not only that I am years away from thoroughly understanding this place, but also that change is inevitable and sometimes right around the corner.

As we approach the summer of 2011, change is indeed right around the corner. The Sodom and Shear Dam removal projects represent yet another example of change in the continuing story of Thompson's Mills with this chapter focusing on the relationship between the mill and its water power source, the Calapooia River. All mill owners have proven in the past that when the world around the mill changes, the mill can adapt and successfully carry on. As the Oregon State Parks Ranger who has the pleasure of seeing the mill through these changes, I am eager to help the mill once again stay in line with modern thinking and help the mill adapt as it has so many times before.

Many answers to questions about the projects to remove the Shear and Sodom Dams can be found at the Calapooia River Watershed Council's website at <http://www.calapooia.org/projects/sodom-dam-fish-passageimprovement-and-flow-management/>. If you have any specific questions about how the changes will affect the mill, write me an e-mail at [thomas.w.parsons@state.or.us](mailto:thomas.w.parsons@state.or.us), give me a call at 541-491-3611, or, better yet, drop by the mill in person to chat and visit this historical gem.

## Ag Expo



Daryl Patton and Martin Thompson with one group

From the afternoon of Wednesday, April 20 through Friday, April, 22 small groups of 3rd and 4th graders visited the Thompson's Mills station in 15 minute intervals at the Ag Expo held at the Benton County Fairgrounds in Corvallis. Assistant Ranger Daryl Patton was aided by Boston Mill Society representatives Martin Thompson, Marlene Culbertson, and Glenn Harrison. The students learned about the importance of flour and its relation to Thompson's Mills State Heritage Site.

## Ross Sprenger Honored



Ross between Daryl Patton and Kathy McMullen



Cake with Valley Rose; Ross's assorted daffodils  
{Ellen Hamill photos}

On March 12 Thompson's Mills was the site for a gathering to honor 92-year-old Ross Sprenger who has helped out many historical and other groups over his many years. Who else lets people visit a museum at his farm, take a ride on his stream-powered railroad, or have a spin on the merry-go-round that he built? He has restored several steam powered pieces of farm machinery, one - the oldest of its type with only three in existence - made the cover of a restoration magazine. The program included several individuals who spoke of Sprenger's knowledge and willingness to help in a variety of ways.

For the Boston Mill Society, Glenn Harrison told of Ross's assistance at the mill and service on the BMS Board. For the Linn County Historical Society, Glenn told of Ross's long service as a Director on that Board. For the Linn County Historical Museum Advisory Commission, Harrison pointed to Sprenger's long service on that Commission as well. Then Daryl Patton told of his skill in making the wooded teeth

for the gear wheels and a tool for repairing grinding stones at the mill plus his stories about the mill over time. Bob McCormick told of Ross's willingness to help with repairs and to show the Shedd Museum, Larry Thompson told about his assistance at Powerland. Leonard Forster told of his expertise with the Oregon Daffodil Society and for \$35 making a machine to crack a variety of nuts that worked better than a commercial one costing \$5,000. Gwenn Marchese told of his help with Albany's Brass Ring & Carousel Museum by making the wooden teeth for the 1909 carousel mechanism. George Pugh commented about Sprenger's work with the Shedd Methodist Church and the Shedd Cemetery Association.

Kathleen McMullen represented the Northwest Rose Historians and dedicated a cutting from the Sprenger heritage rose that Ross' grandmother and perhaps great-grandmother had planted on their Donation Land Claim. Refreshments were provided by the Boston Mill Society.

## Art Exhibits



Green Heron

"Birds of the Valley" photo art display by Allen J. Norby will be at Thompson's Mills during May. Stop by and take a look and perhaps buy one or more prints during your next mill visit. Donna Lee will have an exhibit in June. Other exhibits are planned in the future.

## One to Go

So far visitors to Thompson's Mills have come from 848 locations in 49 states and Washington, D.C. The only state without a pin representation on the visitor maps is Delaware. Oregon visitors have come from 204 locations. Five provinces of Canada plus twenty-four other foreign countries are represented.

## Membership

Using the mill's historic name, the Boston Mill Society is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that supports the Thompson's Mills State Heritage Site through a cooperative partnership with Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. We work to celebrate, interpret, and educate about the significant agricultural, commercial, industrial, and social history of Oregon's Willamette Valley pioneers and those who followed.

We encourage you to join us or renew your membership for 2011. Donations are also welcome. Members receive newsletters and a chance to vote at the Annual Meeting. If you are willing to volunteer, that would be appreciated. Dues are still by levels of support:

\$20 - \$49 Sacker	\$100 - \$199 Carpenter	\$500 - \$999 Head Miller
\$50 - \$99 Blacksmith	\$200 - \$499 Miller	\$1,000 or more Millwright

Please mail your check to Marlene Culbertson, Treasurer at 1008 Takena Street SW, Albany, OR 97321-2048. Let us know if you would like to receive your newsletter via e-mail and supply your e-mail address. Visit our website at [www.bostonmill.org](http://www.bostonmill.org) and click on news for past newsletters.



Boston Mill Society  
1132 30th Place SW  
Albany, OR 97321-3419