



CHoW Field Trip to Peirce Mill

Photos and Report
By CiCi Williamson



Formerly the hub of one of the largest estates in Washington that sprawled from Tilden Street north to the Maryland-D.C. border, Peirce Mill is now a National Park Service property in Rock Creek Park. Resulting from 17 years of fundraising and reconstruction by Friends of Peirce Mill, formed in 1997, the mill has been restored to operating condition, and visitors can now see Park Service Ranger and miller Jeanne Minor grind corn into meal.



CHoW and "Friends" member **Quentin Looney** arranged a lecture and tour for CHoW on Thursday, May 22. "Friends" volunteer Sheila Proser directed us into what was the carriage barn (1810), used as an art gallery in the 20th century and now as a small museum, gift shop, and lecture room.



Quentin greeted us with beverages and corn muffins he made from meal ground in the adjacent mill. First we viewed a video, "Bread and Butter on an 18th Century Farm," that was produced by the Friends with a \$10,000 grant.

Steve Dryden, author of *Peirce Mill: Two Hundred Years in the Nation's Capital* (Bergamot, 2009), lectured about the property's history. He presented a fascinating family account of the Peirces and their Shoemaker cousins, Quakers who moved to the site from Philadelphia in 1794. From humble 18th-century beginnings as farmers and millwrights, family members were civic and business leaders at the turn of the 20th century. Steve told us that the mill, the only survivor of eight that operated along Rock Creek, is one of the few



Kneeling: "Friend" Sheila Proser; (standing) Willis, Carly, and Carter VanDeventer; Julia Peirce Marston, miller Jeanne Minor, Christopher Marston, Barry Newton, John Kelly (CiCi's husband), Judy Newton, Quentin Looney, Katherine Livingston, Shirley Cherkasky, Steve Dryden.

remaining symbols of Washington's agrarian past. It is an early example of renewable energy and American technological achievement. Built in the 1820s by Isaac Peirce, a first cousin to the Peirces who created what became the famous Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, Penn., the mill was constructed with stones quarried from nearby Broad Branch. The complex also included a carriage barn, distillery, saw mill, spring house, nursery, and residence.

Next we walked down the hill to see the waterwheel and mill in action. The Oliver Evans-designed mill has a unique bucket elevator to raise grain from the delivery floor up to the gristmill on the floor above. Evans is called "the Watt of America" for building the first high-pressure steam engine and first automobile in America. He held U.S. Patent #3 for his mill design, and by 1792, over 100 mills were operating Evans' machinery.

Park Ranger for 4 1/2 years, Jeanne Minor trained at Colvin Mill in Virginia to be the miller here. She opened the mill race that channels water from Rock Creek to power the waterwheel. Then she poured dried corn kernels into the hopper and we saw them processed into corn meal, sifting into a bin on the ground floor.

Adjacent to the working millstones, a bedstone lay uncovered to view. It is a French buhrstone used for the finer grinding of wheat. Jeanne said it is not cut from one piece but built up from sections of quartz, cemented together with plaster, and bound with iron bands. French Buhr (or Burr) comes from the Marne Valley in northern France.

After the tour, the group had lunch at Hillwood.



For more information: www.nps.gov/pimi/index.htm