

Group makes history live again

State grant will help restore Beverly Mill

By TAMMY MINNIGH
MANASSAS JOURNAL MESSENGER

■ THOROUGHFARE GAP

Crumbling stone walls surrounded by overgrown vegetation is all the remains of Beverly Mill, once the site of many historical events. The mill was severely damaged by fire in 1998, but a new grant will help the project on its way. Turn the Mill Around Campaign, a non-profit organization which owns the mill, has been awarded a \$300,000 grant from the Virginia Department of Transportation to be used to stabilize and rebuild the damaged walls.

This grant is the campaign's first step in a long, expensive process to transform the mill into a living history exhibit. Local history buffs hope some of its former glory can be restored.

"It was a real experience to be able to climb up these stairs and look out these windows," said Ellen PercyMiller, director of the campaign. "But all is not lost. I think we're all going to benefit."

While PercyMiller has bright hopes for the future, she still grieves for the community's loss due to the damage of the fire, thought to be an arson.

"I sometimes wonder if the mill would ever had

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Almost a year after fire gutted the Beverly Mill, located on the Fauquier County line in Thoroughfare, the surrounding area has been overtaken by half-dead trees and overgrowth.

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HISTORIC SITE FILE: BEVERLEY MILL
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been burned if the people who did it knew its history," PercyMiller said. "A lot of its history has just been kind of forgotten as the decades went by."

The mill was built in 1742 by Jonathan and Nathaniel Chapman in Thoroughfare Gap on the line between Prince William and Fauquier counties and was instrumental in the development of the Shenandoah Valley as a corn and wheat farming region.

During the Civil War, it was used by the Confederates as a meat curing center and distribution warehouse. The Battle of Thoroughfare Gap took place in and around the mill on Aug. 28, 1862.

American troops camped around the mill for six months while awaiting transport to fight in the Spanish-American War.

Milling continued on site until 1951, and when Interstate 66 was planned, it was rerouted to leave the mill untouched.

The site has been declared an historical district, and the campaign hopes to someday restore the old mill store and develop a public park to interpret the history of the mill in a living history setting, though this will be a years-long project due to the extensive damage.

Toward that end, the campaign is now looking for volunteers to begin helping with this tremendous task.

A variety of help is needed, PercyMiller said.

"I think there's something for everybody," she said.

Some areas for volunteer help that have already been identified include transcription of local oral histories, chopping down brush and vegetation around the mill and sifting through debris to identify arti-

Want to help?

- Anyone wishing to volunteer can call PercyMiller at (703) 753-3272.
 - Donations can be sent to Turn the Mill Around Campaign, P.O. Box 207, Broad Run, VA 20137.
- Tammy Minnigh

facts.

There are opportunities for volunteers with all levels of expertise, including a need for an tree expert with knowledge of how to save cherry trees damaged by beavers and a photographer with equipment to make copies of old photographs.

Some of the off-site projects can be started now. Before volunteers can enter the site, a professional contractor will be hired to stabilize and repair the walls, as it is both dangerous and highly-skilled labor.

"That has to be our primary consideration right now," PercyMiller said. "Any kind of uncertain weather and they could go."

In order to receive the grant money, the campaign must raise 20 percent in matching funds. Those funds can take the form of cash or in-kind services.

PercyMiller is confident that the money will be raised.

"People just love that mill. People are attached to it," she said. "We need financial donations and grants and we need volunteers' help, but I think it's going to happen."

In the past, the campaign has raised about \$35,000, she said.

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