



Art and Donna Bert stand in front of the Clear Springs Mill that they restored recently. The three-story mill with a mansard roof was built in the Second Empire architectural style during the 1880s.



Collectible reproductions in iron, tin, woodenware, hand-thrown pottery, handwoven textiles, and other 19th century art is available at the mill. In addition, the Berts hold numerous events throughout the year featuring 19th century handicrafts and tasting parties featuring whole grain breads and summer grain salads.

## Clear Springs Mill Restored As Community Hub

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DILLSBURG (York Co.) —

In the 1800s, Clear Springs Mills was the hub of the local community. The three-story mill in the Second Empire architectural style buzzed with the buying and selling of grains. It was a meeting place for rural neighbors and a place to grind a wagonload of corn or pick up a bag of freshly ground flour.

Then the fabric of American life changed. Business dwindled and the mill was silent for 50 years.

About three years ago, Donna and Art Bert purchased the mill, which vandals, rodents, and weather had damaged. The Berts transformed the mill with the goal that it become again a center of activity.

Inside and out, the mill has been restored and was opened for business last year. While the mill does not exactly duplicate the milling practices of the past, it still grinds flour—15 different whole grains, to be exact.

A Meadows Mill with an 8-inch grinding stone is used to transform organic grains into fine powdery flour.

"It doesn't grind as fast as the old type, so we want people to call ahead whenever they want large amounts of flour," Donna said.

Part of the Berts' intentions for the mill is for it to be a place where visitors can learn about history. The Berts enjoy giving tours of the mill and take the time to show visitors the race below the first floor. Although the mill stream has been diverted since the mid 1950s, when the state constructed a highway about a quarter of a mile away, the lower part of the mill has been retained to show how the water ran over the water wheel to provide water power to grind

grains.

As much equipment as possible has been retained to give the mill an authentic ambiance, but much of the mill's iron and steel fixtures had been sold for scrap metal during World War II. The remaining equipment was sold during a 1980s auction before the Berts purchased the mill. Since then, they have replaced pulleys, hooks, and some other authentic fixtures.

Redoing the barn uncovered some surprises such as the cigar sign. When removed, it revealed a hole to the exterior. Inside a miller's desktop was the handwritten scrawl, "Chas quit chewing tobacco 1882."

In addition, the Berts have been fascinated by the trek of people who years ago either worked or shopped at the mill and stop by to tell memories.

These little tidbits of information add human intrigue and helped lighten the work of hand scrubbing the walls and floors of the three-storied mill. The interior wood was thoroughly scrubbed by Donna. It's hard to believe that the wood had once been covered with cobwebs and served as a home for raccoons and other wildlife.

While the Berts focus a lot on the historical significance of the mill, freshly-ground flour is only a small part of the mill's offerings.

For sale are red clay pottery, pewter, yellow ware typical of the 19th century, heirloom seeds, fleeces, hand spun and dyed wool, handpainted fraktur, whittled and carved folk pieces, wild flower plants. . . "anything associated with 19th century folk art," Donna said.

Donna's large barn loom stands in one corner.

"Ideally, I'd be weaving while the shop is open," Donna said.

"But her facetiously-spoken comment exposes the fact that work is so time consuming that she has little time to devote to weaving rugs and linens to be sold at the shop. Instead she relies upon other weavers to provide some of the handiworks for display and sale.

The exterior required 60 gallons of paint to restore the original colors of mustard-colored boards with red barn trim.

The couple share a love for the historical and did most of the restoration work themselves.

The ruins of the saw mill are situated next to the grist mill.

"I'd love to save the sawmill, but it's past the point of restoration, it would need to be entirely rebuilt," Donna said.

"It's frustrating to have more ideas and plans than we have time and money to implement them," she said.

Donna grew up in Ohio, and Art in California. They attended the nearby Messiah College, where Donna studied behavior science and earned a teaching degree while Art studied business administration. In the 1970s, the couple married and renovated an old vacant farmhouse a few miles from the mill.

"We both grew up in families who appreciated historical things and antiques. We often visited old farmsteads and were conscious of our ancestors," Donna said.

While the Berts enjoyed fixing up their farmhouse, the idea for purchasing a mill wasn't a long-thought-out plan.

"It sort of began when a friend and I attended the sale of a mill in a different area and I remembered this old mill."

Donna stopped by the business across the street to inquire about the status of the mill. The business



Freshly ground whole grain flours are available for home bakers. More than 14 different organic grains are stone-ground while customers watch.

owner was a descendant of the former owner. Although she was told the mill was not for sale, a few months later, Donna received a call with the offer to sell the mill.

"I panicked," Donna said. She turned down the offer. But the seeds of possibilities sprouted as

she and Art, who owns a restaurant, discussed the mill. They thought of turning it into a restaurant or a bed and breakfast. But eventually the best plan seem to be to use the mill as a showcase for the handiwork of that era.

"We feel good that we saved a bit of history that otherwise might have been lost," Donna said. "Through restoring this, we've learned so much about the milling business and that time period."

"It's been an enjoyable adventure finding out the history, hearing the stories of people who remember the mill when it was in operation, and the creative sense involved in finding items to sell in the shop."

Some of the upcoming events offered at Clear Spring Mill include a wildflower walk on the grounds with a botanist on April 12; hand spinning, weaving, and

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# OMESTEAD NOTES

