

Not Your Every Day Run of the Mill

*From my old Kentucky home
to down by the old mill stream*

Written by: **Shane Riggs**
Photography by: **Lance C. Bell**

*I*t was just barely more than a year ago when John Childers (right) of Kentucky fell in love.

For him, it was an obsession at first sight — the form of a neglected beauty standing by the side of the road he could not get from his mind.

He saw her briefly just for a fleeting moment on a pleasure trip and then upon his return, inquired about her availability. She was pale, tired, stripped of her dignity and shivering in the cold.

Childers knew he had to have her and he was determined to make her his own.

This southern boy's love affair was not with a person, however, but with a building—what he calls the “remnants” of the historic Stanton's Mill outside Grantsville and at the threshold of Penn Alps and the Artisan's Village.

Childers was on his way to Washington, DC, from his hometown of Hazard in the blue grass state when he spotted the mill from Interstate 68. When he got to the nation's capital he was haunted by images of the building, its water wheel missing, its paint in need of a new coat, the shrubbery that surrounded it deserving a trim, the stream that fed it choking with debris.

When he made his way back through the area on his way home he decided to stop in and find out for himself whom the building belonged to and why the structure was not being used.

What he found was that the Penn Alps organization held the deed and had a plan that had been on the back-burner since the mill had closed.

The group had been preserving the building, vacant for 10 years and had long hoped for a savvy entrepreneur with a milling background to revitalize and even perhaps bring the mill back to operating condition.

In other words, the mill had been waiting for a man just like Childers.



John Childers and the Old Mill he has been working to restore.

“I got off the interstate and walked into the soap shop and the owner there happened to have a key,” he said. My intent was to find out who owned it and if I could own or lease it.”

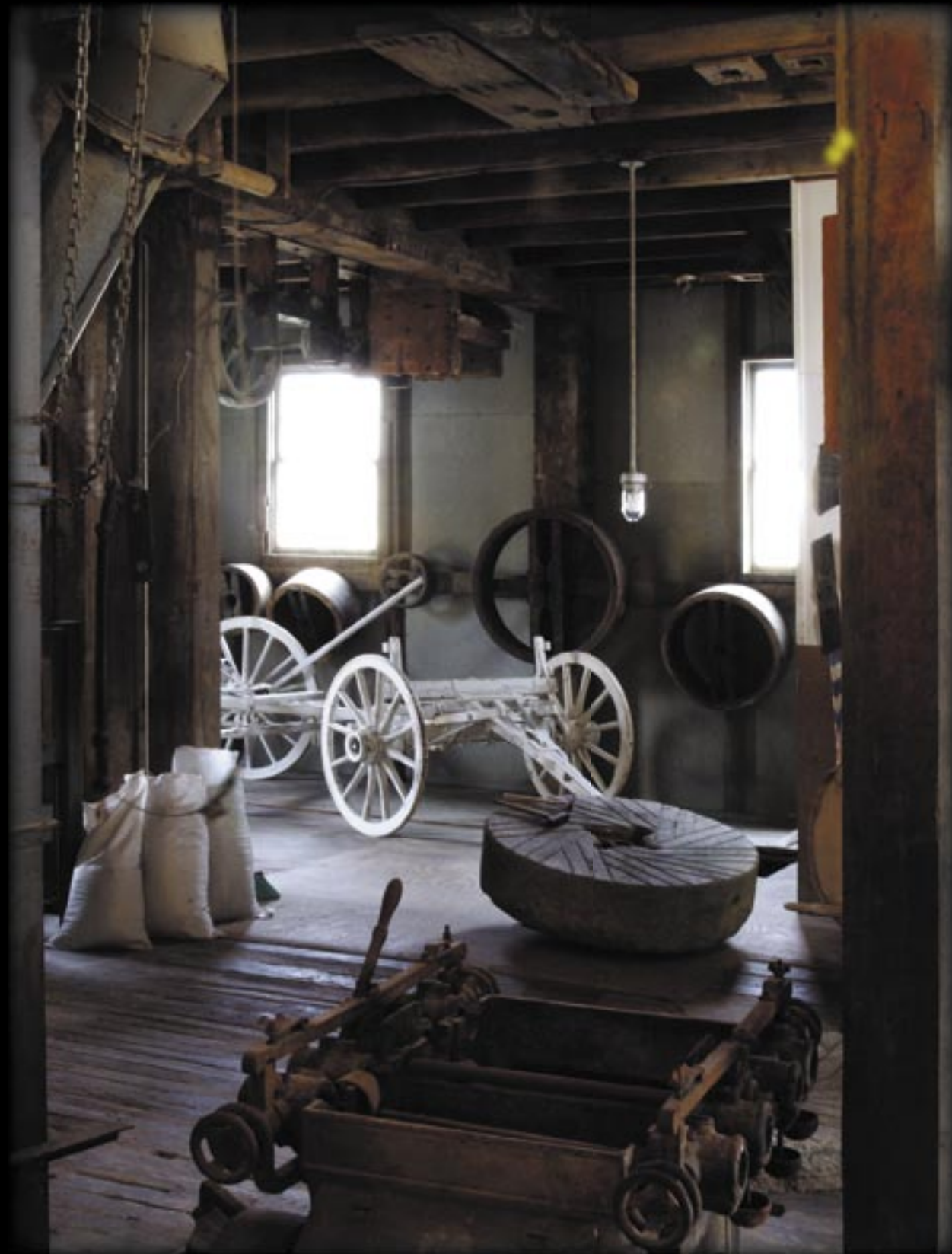
Capable of holding a staggering one million tons of grain, Stanton's Mill is the third oldest mill structure in the state of Maryland.

The mill was once an integral part of Grantsville's development and produced flours for the neighboring restaurants and retail stores from 1797 until 1994.

The building had been frequented for nearly 200 years by businessmen, weary travelers, professional bakers and accomplished homemakers. It had been passed by every sojourner heading west. Rumor is it also may have even fermented the grains for the alcohol once served at a nearby hotel.

Many of the windows in the mill are the original panes of glass. The stones in the floor turn on gears laid more than a century before. In fact, its namesake, Eli Stanton, carved his name in one of the first laid floorboards in 1862.

That etching was one of many discoveries Childers would make as he set about restoring the mill.



Stanton's Mill, Grantsville, Maryland

photo by: Lance C. Bell



The building was a lady with a past and John Childers was determined to be her final and most spoiling suitor.

Over the years the mill sat empty and still, pieces of equipment necessary for production “came up missing,” Childers said, and he spent the first 12 months sifting through the Internet and other defunct mills looking for replacement parts.

“Finding all the equipment has been the hardest part,” he said.

“It’s a solid building but it was in some disrepair when I came in,” he said. “It had been neglected for 10 years and it needed some help.”

Childers had grown up around mills his entire life. His grandfather was a miller in Kentucky and so while other boys were busy with Pee Wee ball and bubblegum, Childers learned how to mill. He learned how to work a water wheel, how to sift flour from large industrial castings, and what a millstone is used for. Most days today, Childers can be found at the mill, restoring and revitalizing the building. His goal is to generate in the same fashion—albeit on a smaller scale—the product that put the mill on the map.

Childers’ goal is to have the mill “up and fully operating just like it used to” in five years. By the end of summer, a newly restored water wheel will return to the side of the building and will be in operation. The mill will be backed up with an electric generator.

“We’re going to use it to grind corn meal, flour, buckwheat flour and then we’ll sell that,” he said.

Childers said it has been his lifelong dream to restore and then operate an original mill. He is grateful for that fateful day a little over a year ago.

“I had the house of my dreams in Hazard where I grew up,” he said. “Some people said I was a little crazy to do this and sometimes even I think I’m crazy for doing this but I couldn’t pass it by and do nothing.”

Music at Penn Alps

Saturdays 7:30 pm – Penn Alps Great Hall

May 29 James Gorton and Gretchen Van Hoesen
Oboe and Harp

June 5 Laurel Trio
Horn, Violin and Piano

June 12 Gila Goldstein
Solo Piano

June 19 Michael Forest and Máire O’Brien
Tenor and Soprano
with Piano

No concert June 26

July 3 Newberry’s Victorian Cornet Band
Brass Band

July 10 Ilya Finkelshteyn
Cello with Piano
Accompaniment

July 17 Eaken Piano Trio
Piano Ensemble

July 24 Merling Trio
Strings & Piano with
Guest Bassist

No concert July 31

Aug. 7 Tina, Dan & Webb
Music of the 16th &
17th Centuries

Aug. 14 Ricardo Cyncynates and Anna Balakerskaia
Violin and Piano

Aug. 21 Tony Ellis & The Musicians of Braeburn
Celtic, Folk and Original Songs

Aug. 28 Lyra
Religious and Secular Chorus from Russia

Sept. 11 Schrock Memorial Concert Franko Richmond
Piano

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