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FOCUS

Textile mill remembrances offer view of Clinton's past

By Judith Brown
Staff Writer

Pat Lanford was a little boy in Clinton when he and his dad were eating at Louis Thornton's restaurant and Silas Bailey came in, chatted a bit and asked if he could take the young boy to a Clinton Mill's Cavalier's baseball game.

Lanford's dad was a worker in the mill, and obviously told the Clinton Mill president it was fine with him.

"I had a great time," Lanford recounted. "And when the game was over, Mr. Bailey brought me back to the restaurant and my dad was there waiting on me." Lanford's story was one of many

memories he told recently when he accompanied former Clinton Mills Manager Ted Davenport and Rod Holmes, owner of the former Clinton Mill property, on a tour of the facility with a group of professors and students from Presbyterian College working on a Textile Mill Memory Project. Several PC staff and students are

working to save some of the history of the Clinton and Lydia Mill communities with summer research, study, interviews and documentation, making use of an almost \$100,000, three-year grant by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

"The mill is the focus because that's our history and our story, and our task is to gather information and make it accessible," Southern studies professor Dr. Kendra Hamilton said. "Accessibility is the key, and we'll be taking advantage of the new technology that's available today to make it relevant to these tech-savvy students."

Part of the grant will go toward recording equipment and stipends for four PC Fellows already working this summer on collecting and documenting data.

"Anita Gustafson has been doing oral histories forever," Hamilton said of history professor Dr. Anita Gustafson, who is collaborating on the Clinton and Lydia mills project. "But the students have always had to use their smart phones. Now we can get the equipment we need," and everything will be formatted for the best online use and storage.

Eventually the collection of data will be available for the community, but the target audience is academia.

"I have a background in digital humanities," Hamilton said, "and when academics are looking for data relating to the economic

impact that textile mills had on a community, for instance, they'll be able to pull from these resources in Clinton and use them because it's been a thorough process; everything will be documented for real academic research. Anyone will be able to search and see our stuff and see if it's useful and, if they need to, they can then make a research trip in person."

Four different professors are working with one of the four PC Summer Research Fellows on the early stages of the project, including Gustafson with Olivia Aldridge, whose interest in story compilation and journalism led her to the project. Also, theater professor Leslie Preston is working with theater major and photography student Kelly Cichon. Preston hopes to compile a play based on the Clinton Mill workers' stories. Others working on the project are Hamilton and her archivist, Jillian Collier, and Spanish professor Dr. Sharon Knight, who is working with Allison Cooke on mapping and geocaching.

"We're still very much on the front end of this three-year project," Gustafson said. "We're buying the equipment and learning to use the technology and learning about oral history in order to better prepare for interviewing the people who have stories to tell."

"The faculty is so excited because everyone can see the potential applications," Hamilton

said. It's not going to happen fast, "but we want to get it going, and offer it for the community through a portal where the general public can encounter this data and the history of our town."



Photo by Judith Brown

SKY VIEWS — The open sky view tells the story of decay in one building of the 1896-era Clinton Mill. Former mill worker and PC graduate Rod Holmes purchased the property in 2009 in an attempt to save some of it from destruction. The stories of life and work within the mill community will be told through the Textile Mill Memory Project. Overseen by the Southern studies department, the three-year, \$100,000 grant will result in a multi-departmental project that can set Presbyterian College apart from other small liberal arts colleges.



Photo by Judith Brown

SAVING HISTORY — The PC staff and students are already exploring the open space of the Clinton Mill maintenance room as former Clinton Mill employee Pat Lanford walks in. Lanford, Clinton Mill management staff Ted Davenport and property owner Rod Holmes all had different stories to tell from working there. Lanford's included a very happy childhood living across the street from the mill where his parents worked. Holmes admitted his was a very short stint in the exhausting work as a cotton blower with Lanford, and he was soon convinced to go to PC and earn a business degree.



From a fine field of opponents, (see page 8), Becky Gregory, right, was chosen Queen of Lydia Mills and Pat Burdette was named the Queen of Clinton Mills. The beauty contests climaxed "Fun Day" at the mills as several hundreds of employees turned out to join in the festivities.

Photo by Judith Brown

QUEENS — *The Clothmaker* newspaper was a source of news related to work and lifestyle of Clinton Mills and Lydia Mill, including the crowning of pool queens in 1958. The Textile Mill Memory project will not be complete for awhile, but PC professor of Southern studies Dr. Kendra Hamilton said the researchers eventually plan to share with the community some of Clinton's roots.



Photo by Kelly Cichon

NURSE — Nell Haggart and PC Summer Research Fellow Olivia Aldridge met for an interview and a video of Haggart's oral history about her experience as the Clinton Mill nurse. Not only did she care for ill or injured employees, but neighborhood children could count on a Band-Aid and a kind word from the long-time medical nurse.



Photo by Judith Brown

VALUABLE ARCHIVES — PC junior Jillian Collier explains some of the interesting data she's gathered to Kelly Cichon, Olivia Aldridge and Allison Cooke. The four PC Summer Research Fellows spent some time looking over copies of *The Clothmaker*, newspapers produced for the Lydia and Clinton textile mills. One of the tasks of the Clinton Mills textile project is to digitize archives for reference by those needing primary sources for academic work, but Southern studies professor Dr. Kendra Hamilton also sees it as a way to give back to the community.