

Tanna Timbes and Francis Mill Preservation Society
Nominees for the PNC's Gertrude S. Carraway Award

Tanna Timbes is the fifth generation descendent connected to the historic Francis Grist Mill. In 1887, her great-great grandfather William Francis (November 14, 1810 - August 22, 1894) built the mill that serviced Francis Cove and surrounding communities. William married Polly Almon, daughter to one of the wealthiest men in the area, Gideon Almon, and constructed the mill on one square mile of land granted Polly as her dowry. The original twenty-four foot mill wheel was made of yellow poplar harvested in the vicinity. The white granite rock used in grinding corn and a similar one for processing wheat came from Richmond, Indiana. Second generation, Monteville Pinkney Francis (December 18, 1849 – November 1, 1923), inherited the operation. In 1914, he replaced the original wheel with one made by Fitz Waterwheel in Hanover, Pennsylvania. Monteville's son Dewey V. Francis (December 23, 1894 – December 26, 1976), like his father and grandfather, assumed operation of the mill and ran it from 1923 – 1976. Hester, Dewey's daughter, inherited the mill, but her health did not permit her to become involved with the operation or repairing of the mill. Her daughter Tanna Timbes inherited the historic structure in 1988. By that time the mill needed much attention and restoration. Tanna Timbes yearned to reinstate the mill to its former grandeur.

In order for Tanna Timbes to be successful in her efforts of restoring the mill she needed assistance from preservation-oriented individuals. In 2003, Tanna and similarly-minded people formed the 501C3 non-profit, Francis Mill Preservation Society. At this juncture, Tanna and the group contacted Heritage Conservation Network. The Francis Mill organization conducted the first preservation workshop in July 2004 with help from Heritage Conservation Network, under the leadership of Jeff Finch. Fourteen volunteers from nine states replaced the east side concrete foundation, mounted five new oak posts, and installed a twenty-five foot beam, of which most of the mortises were cut by hand.

In 2005, another volunteer group participated in a workshop similar in scope to the 2004 workshop to focus on the following goals: rebuild floor in machinery room at basement level, repair floor on main level, replace rotten beams and posts on east side of the mill, and install siding. Again, in 2006, another work session concentrated on positioning boards and building the mill race. During the 2007-2008 work clinic volunteers installed a new twenty-four foot wheel. The flume was completed, thanks to a generous donation from the Steel Reese Foundation. The organization hired millwright, John Lovett, to refurbish machinery inside the mill. Once Mr. Lovett brought the equipment back from dormancy to a working state, the mill was ready to perform. The mill processed the first grain ground in thirty-two years.

Tanna Timbes keeps the first grinding of corn to symbolize the mill's meshing of past, present, and future. Francis Mill, through the ardent efforts of its owner, Tanna Timbes, and the Francis Mill Preservation Society, was refurbished for the purpose of serving as an educational location. Since the mill's restoration the organization has hosted fourth grade students at Bethel Elementary School as they learn about local and North Carolina history. Youth Environmental Stewardship Summer Camp participants and Salvation Army Camp have visited the mill for a

hands-on training session of mill workings. Music at the Mill each year features mill operations as a background to old time music. Haywood County Genealogical Society met there to learn about mill history. In addition, Francis Mill has been a favorite site for three years with the Cold Mountain Heritage Tour, dedicated to preserving history and allowing the public access to historical structures and information.