

Entry 05

Subject: Bale Grist Mill, St. Helena

Approximately 11 years ago, when I was 7 years old, my dad decided to take my family to Bale Grist Mill State Historic Park in St. Helena during Old Mill Days. Immediately stepping inside the park, I was thrown into a different era. There was a band playing historic songs, people dressed as pioneers, children playing with corn husk dolls, people working the apple press. All with the sound of the gigantic, rotating mill echoing throughout the site. When my mom took me to the costume closet, the employee helped me get into pioneer clothing typical of that era. I personally got to experience the day-to-day activities of a pioneer in the Napa Valley during the mid 19th century, and learned about the history of the water-powered grist mill. I was enlightened. The over 160 year old mill inspired me to deepen my knowledge on the past, and reflect on its significance to the community.

The land of the Napa Valley was the land of the Native Americans. Native Americans have had a connection to the land—stewarding the land and gathering its resources for sustenance and tools. Settlers also turned to the land—growing fruits, barley, and so much wheat that our county was famous for it—during their arrival to Napa Valley. The mill became part of daily life. People went to it to get their grain ground into flour and meal, which was powered by the creek waters. Essentially, Napa has always been an agricultural community ever since the first inhabitants of the Valley. The mill has direct ties into that agricultural and rural heritage. Overall, our history shows how we have maintained that identity throughout the thousands of years of history of this land, from the Native Americans, to the early settlers in Napa, and present day.

What makes the Mill irreplaceable is the fact that it's one of few mills in California, and even the nation, that is actively still working. It is a testament to time through preservation efforts. It gives us a glimpse into our historical heritage, while giving the local community an accessible place to learn about our history through events, tours, and visits. Ultimately, it can inspire individuals, like me, to pursue knowledge on a deeper and personal level through volunteering, higher education, and careers.

To ensure the legacy of the Bale Grist Mill, I want to continue volunteering at the Mill and other historic sites/organizations. I recently volunteered for the Old Mill Days event in October of last year as a reenactor and activity leader—acting as a pioneer, helping the children get into character with clothes from the costume closet, and making corn husk dolls with them. To collectively contribute to preservation and community efforts all around the world, I want to pursue a career in historic preservation by being a collections manager. Handling, storing, and helping preserve artifacts and sites would contribute to conservation efforts not only at the Mill, but at other historic places.