

Mill offers year-round interest

Holly Hamlin

kid trips

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“Remember when I wore that pink hat and pushed that thing up and down?” my 3-year-old asked the other day as she pointed to a picture on the refrigerator.

“No, I wasn’t there. Grandma took you.”

“Well, I wore a pink hat and pushed that thing up and down,” she said. Then after a pause, she added, “Where was that thing anyway?”

The “thing,” which was a butter churn, was one of the historical, hands-on activities at Willamette Heritage Center at the Mill’s annual Sheep to Shawl Festival.

“Can we go to that place again?” she asked.

A few days later, we did. Of course, after two years of looking at that picture, my daughter expected a pink sun bonnet and “the up and down thing.” However, there was no Sheep to Shawl, no Magic at the Mill and no other special event like the ones that previously lured us to the familiar locale.

“We’ve never been here on a normal day,” an older kid observed.

We didn’t know what to expect ... especially not the key that came with the map to get into the buildings.

To start off, we watched a film that walked us through the history of the region explaining how the first settlers came as missionaries by ship. We also learned how the water-powered mill had come into being and impacted the history of the region.

Before exiting the building for the houses, we were reminded the roped-off displays were armed with motion detectors so people would respect the set boundaries. That, along with the fact that “it feels kind of strange to just walk into these locked buildings on our own,” launched my middle daughter into high alert.

“Be careful,” she warned as her older sister leaned forward to look at an antique piano, “you’ll set off the alarm.”



Kobbi R. Blair / Statesman Journal file

The Jason Lee House stands in the background at Mission Mill Museum, which is a five-acre park that features a tour through the 19th century woolen mill that was Pendleton Wollen Mills.

If you go

Where: 1313 Mill St. SE, Salem

When: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Mondays-Saturdays Tour prices: \$6, \$4
students with ID, \$3 ages 6 to 17 and free for
ages 5 and younger

Contact: (503) 585-7012 or
www.willametteheritage.org

Next event: Sheep to Shawl Festival, May
12th

Not taking any chances, I held my 3-year-old close.

“A family of six lived here,” I reminded as we walked through Salem’s oldest single-family home, the Boon house.

Walking between buildings was a feast for senses. The sight and smell of spring blooms that colored the beautifully landscaped grounds, the touch of the golden sun as it forced our jackets off and the sound of, big surprise, my kids.

After peeking in the Old Presbyterian church, “where we saw that concert that one time,” and crossing the bridge over the water “that went down there and made the mill work,” we came to the machine shop. My youngest found the button that made the machinery move while my 9-year-old, reading about the former machinist, yelled above the clatter, “Look! He served mice at a banquet table.”

Entering The Picker House, two things were clear. First, the name “Picker” was not going to pass without a reference to noses. And second? The cold, damp building would have been a miserable place to work.

At the main mill building, we entered the first-floor room and the displays for the latter part of the cloth-making process, then we took a break from the milling process to check out the exhibit on Grand Rhonde women.

Finally, we were to the last part of our tour: The place where the cloth making really happened.

After completing our slow, educational walk through, my youngest returned repeatedly to the roped-off path that took her up on a small platform and around the spinning area.

“Are you done?” I asked after the 10th time.

“No, I’m not.”

“Let’s let her do this another hundred times and get tired,” advised one of her older siblings.

And what were they doing that kept them so content to stay while their sister walked laps? It involved the elevator, a piece of equipment that stood next to the elevator and realistic cut-out figures that we’d observed “working” machinery around the mill.

“You put your arms out like you’re pulling,” one coached another.

“Lean over like this.”

“Be careful ... it says ‘don’t touch’.”

Essentially, they were freezing in place when the elevator passed as if they were part of the display.

If the elevator passengers weren’t entertained, my kids were.

Watching the smiles and teamwork, I forgot to look at my watch until it was almost closing time.

Thankfully, we still had time to return the key and pick out some “really old fashioned candy” at the store.

The plan was to buy it and leave, but Danner and Soli’s “has super cool stuff,” and every time

we turned to leave, there'd be something else to look at. Like Bacon bandaids.

I'm not sure what occasion will bring us back to Willamette Heritage Museum at the Mill. Perhaps Sheep to Shawl. Or a holiday. Or maybe it will just be a sunny afternoon and the need to relax.

Whatever the reason, as my middle daughter said, "It's pretty cool that it's right here in Salem and we can go to it anytime."

Holly Hamlin lives in Salem with her husband and four children ranging from ages 3 to 15. Kid Trips appears Tuesdays in this section. Write to Kid Trips, Statesman Journal, P.O. Box 13009, Salem, OR 97309-3009. Letters can be faxed to (503) 399-6706 or e-mailed to STEFHAM@Comcast.net.