



COUNTRY FAIR

AN ALL VOLUNTEER
NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

Prater's Mill Celebrates Its Milestone 45th Anniversary

When the air is tinged with the unmistakable approach of autumn and the leaves begin their colorful transformation, a small army of volunteers is diligently preparing for one of the Southeast's most popular Fall festivals--Prater's Mill Country Fair--scheduled for Columbus Day Weekend, Oct. 8 and 9, 2016. A family-friendly jaunt through history, the Fair is centered around the old water-powered, still-operational gristmill. The mill was established in 1855 by Benjamin Franklin Prater and T.H. Pitner to grind wheat into flour and corn into meal.

This year's Fair marks the 45th anniversary of the festival begun by volunteers in 1971 to raise funds to restore the mill and surrounding buildings. The Fair has grown into a full celebration of Appalachian traditions featuring live music, Southern food, living history exhibits, and handmade crafts and original art created by nearly 200 talented artists and artisans. Demonstrations include blacksmithing, quilting, weaving, woodcarving, rug-hooking, and hand-tufting, the precursor to the famous machine-tufted carpet industry of Dalton, Ga.

Additionally, educational exhibits of interest include a living Civil War encampment, antique tractors, antique cars, and Peacock Alley, a clothesline display of hand-tufted bedspreads.

In addition to self-guided tours of the mill, visitors may also enjoy shopping in the country store, investigating the Shugart Cotton Gin, or acquainting themselves with farm animals at the Westbrook Barn with a Petting Zoo adored by children and adults alike. The whole family can experience canoe rides on Coahulla Creek or take a short hike down the nature trail; and pony rides are always at the top of kids' to-do list.

A continuous entertainment schedule on stage offers traditional fare such as clogging and square dancing exhibitions, country bands, and gospel singers. A contingent of Appalachian-style wandering musicians--including dulcimer players--roam the grounds entertaining the throngs while storytellers keep folklore alive with their captivating tales.

In many minds, the highlight of the Fair is the food. The Dalton Pike Church of God serves authentic Southern dishes--chicken and dumplings, collard greens, and cornbread cooked on a wood stove--near the 1898 Prater's store located just across the road from the mill. Other regional favorites are served at various points on the festival grounds. These include delicacies such as John's Family pit-cooked barbecue, Cochran Family fried apple pies, North Georgia apple cider, and even Miss Ruby's fresh-churned ice cream.

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Fair hours are 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday. Admission is \$7; children 12 and under enter free. There is no charge for parking. Visitors are urged to dress casually and wear comfortable shoes.

Prater's Mill is located on Georgia Hwy. 2, 10 miles northeast of Dalton and about 30 miles south of Chattanooga, Tenn. Interstate travelers should take I-75 to the Tunnel Hill-Varnell Exit No. 341; drive north 4.5 miles to the intersection with Georgia Hwy. 2 at Varnell; turn right and continue 2.6 miles to the Mill, a total distance of 7 miles from I-75.

The Prater's Mill Country Fair is sponsored by the Prater's Mill Foundation, a non-profit organization of volunteers dedicated to historic preservation and education. Nearly 40 civic clubs, churches and schools also participate in the community event. The Fair was a featured destination in the National Geographic Map Guide to Appalachia.

Prater's Mill is also a member of the Society for the Preservation of Old Mills (SPOOM), an international organization chartered in Maine in 1972 dedicated to promote interest in old mills and other Americana now quickly passing from the present scene. The Society reports to its members through a quarterly magazine, keeps files and maintains a library on mills, and acts as a clearinghouse on milling information. A wealth of information and links to mills internationally can be found at the Society web site, SPOOM.org.

For more information or to inquire about sponsorship and volunteer opportunities call 706-694-MILL (6455) or visit the web site PratersMill.org.

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