Newry Festival to commemorate textile mill in Oconee

Nicole Smith Independent Mail
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Set in the Little River Valley, the village borders ridges, a forest and a dam on Lake Keowee.

The 118 properties include the mill complex, mill office, company store, post office and village church along with residences.

The Courtenay Mill was built in 1893 by the Courtenay Manufacturing Company, founded by Captain William Ashmead Courtenay, who fought under Robert E. Lee during the Civil War. Most of the buildings were constructed between 1983 and 1910.

The mill was in operation until 1975.

The village was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1982.

OCONEE COUNTY — On June 14, 1894, water ran for the first time to power the Newry Mill in Oconee County.

According to the Oconee Heritage Center's Web site, the mill was in full operation by the end of that year. By 1903, the mill was operating 635 looms.

Now the mill stands unused in Newry Village.

The sixth annual Newry Festival on Saturday will commemorate mill's history.

The free festival will begin at 10 a.m. around the post office and Newry Mill Store and last until 4 p.m.

Visitors will have the chance to tour the historic Newry Village from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and learn about the area and the mill. Tickets cost $2 each and can be purchased at the Festival Information Booth throughout the day.

"It gives people chance to see an undisturbed mill village and see what it looked like," said Nicholas Gambrell. He is director and curator of the Oconee Heritage Center.

The center joined with the Newry Village Community last year to put on the festival.

"We sort of adopted them last year and took on the festival as part of working together," Gambrell said. "It extends our reach. We do a lot in Westminster, a lot in Walhalla, so wanted to do something in Seneca."

He said the festival attracted at least 1,000 people last year and more are expected this year.

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Besides the walking tours, bands will play 25-minute sets.

One of the bands, the Greenville Textile Heritage Band, dresses in costumes and plays instruments of the period to teach people about textile industry's cultural and historical significance.

There will be a banjo, fiddle and guitar competition beginning at 2 p.m. People must register before 1 p.m. Winners in each of the three categories will receive a $75 prize.

A small-engines show will feature different one-cylinder engines used during the period, including an old ice cream maker.

Funnel cake, hot dogs and other food will be available. People can also create some original arts and crafts.

Gambrell encouraged people to come out for the festival.

"It was the way of life not just for the people in Newry, but all over the South for a long time," Gambrell said. "It's just a part of history. If people forget that, the next generation won't know what happened if they don't come. There is a point to it."

Historic Newry Village

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