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WATER POWER PUTS MILL BACK IN OLD GRIND WILLIAMSVILLE ATTEMPTS TO MEET '46 COURT ORDER

By DICK DAWSON AND SUSAN SCHULMAN

Feb 16, 1993

The gates are back in the Ellicott Creek dam at Island Park, and the historic Williamsville Water Mills will again have water power to grind corn this weekend.

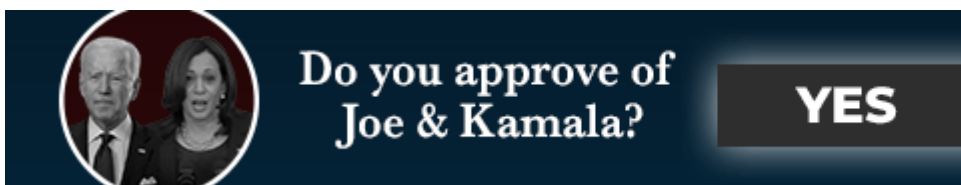
Now it's a matter of keeping an eye on what Old Man Winter may bring as the village attempts to resume compliance with a 1946 court order not to divert the mill's water supply, Williamsville Mayor Ronald W. Daniels said Monday.

Mill owner Warren D. Miller said the water power will be used to grind corn into cracked corn and cornmeal Friday afternoon and all day Saturday. He said visitors are welcome to watch the operations at the mill, which was built in 1811 by Williamsville founder Jonas Williams.

A 1946 State Supreme Court order bars the village from removing the dam gates, except during floods, and to replace them as soon as flooding subsides.

When the gates are removed, creek water is prevented from entering a secondary channel which flows into a sluice and penstock to the mill.

Williamsville in recent years has been removing the gates in late fall and not putting



The job of removing and reinstalling the wooden gate sections in freezing weather is made more difficult by ice in the gate channels, frozen chains and ice-encrusted gate sections that fuse together, according to Daniels.

But Miller argues that his mill shouldn't be deprived of its legal water supply because the village in recent years has gotten away from what used to be a flood-control responsibility.

The wooden gates "are leaking pretty badly," Miller said Monday. "If they were maintained properly and were reasonably water-tight -- the way the court order requires them to be -- they wouldn't have this fusing problem the mayor talks about," he said.

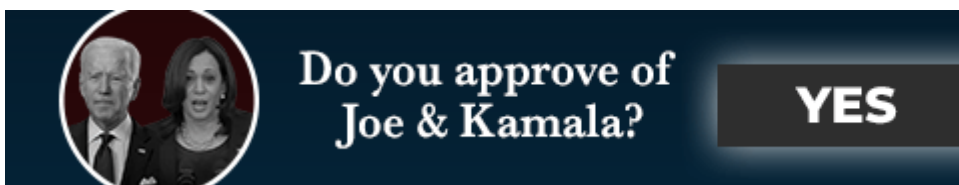
Miller maintains that preventing upstream flooding and supplying his mill isn't a one-or-the-other proposition, which he noted the village itself proved each winter until about the late 1970s. "The dam is a flood-control facility that they have neglected to even attempt to operate properly," he said.

"I appreciate their living up to their legal obligation," Miller added, "but I don't look upon short-term adherence to a court order as any great achievement by any means."

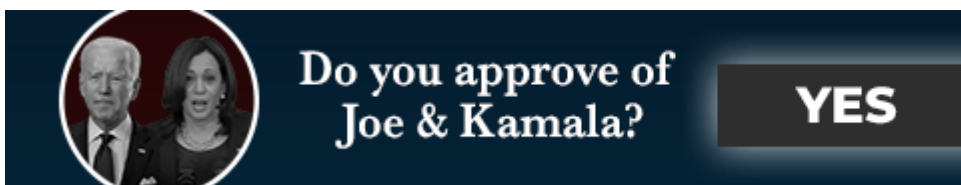
Daniels said current village officials weren't aware of the 1946 court order until Miller sent them a copy in December. "It's not even in our files here that I'm aware of," the mayor said.

Daniels ordered the gates put back in the dam on Jan. 22. The job -- which Miller said "took all of 1 1/2 hours" -- was delayed until Thursday "because the weather conditions until recently weren't good enough," Daniels said.

Daniels said the village is awaiting recommendations from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers "regarding long-term operation of the dam."



The mayor said the Corps of Engineers has agreed to report back on the upstream impact when all dam gates are in place during floods, the effect of possible upstream channel improvements, and whether it's possible and financially feasible to move the mill sluice gate and penstock downstream, below the dam.



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