

# Robert "Mountain Man" Perry Keeps Traditions Alive at the Hagood Mill

*Visitors are sure to take a 'shine' to this Pickens County Icon*

At Hagood Mill's moonshine still, Robert "Mountain Man" Perry, age 71, is a one man show of times gone by. Robert started demonstrating "moonshining" at Hagood Mill in 1998. It was the first year that the Pickens County Museum's annual Heritage Day festival was held at the mill site and before any of the mill site's various structures had been added. He set up his still in an old log corncrib on the property. Robert is only allowed by law to boil water. While that water boils in the background, Robert tells lots of stories about the making and running of white lightening!



Robert Perry and "Black Jack" pose with his old Dodge Bros truck at the Hagood Mill.

*Photo courtesy of Bill Jordan*

After that first festival, Robert asked Ed Bolt, Hagood Mill's site manager, "Since you run the mill every month on the third Saturday, why don't I come out here every month and demonstrate the still?" This started the folklife and traditional arts demonstrations at the mill. Robert's wife, Marlene, soon joined him, demonstrating her sewing and knitting. His daughters would sometimes do "black kettle clothes washing in the creek". One by one, other demonstrators joined in as volunteers and the monthly event grew into what it

is today. Hagood Mill's volunteer recruitment poster, "Hagood Mill Needs You", features Robert pointing his finger in that classic Uncle Sam pose!

In addition to moonshining, Robert brings his 1937 Dodge Bros. flat bed truck to the mill each month, loaded with chickens, pigs, rabbits, and other assorted farm animals for the kids to see. Having grown up in the country without an indoor bathroom until he was grown, Robert feels the younger generations need to get a glimpse of what life was like before all our modern conveniences. He still lives on a large farm in a 150 year old farmhouse. Bolt says, "Folks really like Robert and many visitors want to have their picture made with this 'old timer' in his overalls and felt hat."

Robert has also been a part of several professional folklife programs which are held at the mill, the museum, and local libraries. Jerry Alexander's book, *Where Have All the Moonshiners Gone*, features Robert and the Hagood Mill still. He is also in the original Hagood Mill coloring book which illustrates many of the mill's attractions. Additionally, Robert has appeared in several regional magazines and TV ads.

In 2005, the Pickens County Cultural Commission honored Robert and Marlene, along with his brother Ralph, and his nephew Cooter and wife Misty for their work in building the mill site's log cabins. The Commission proclaimed that the site's name be officially changed to "Perryville" for one of the Third Saturday events. Robert liked the name, kept the sign, and named the "old west town" that he has on his farm, Perryville. Robert's wife Marlene passed away in 2009, but for years each June, they had hosted at their home, "Old Timer Days", a weekend of music and fun. Robert still keeps this annual event alive and he has collected a lot of old "stuff" ranging from vehicles to farm tools and other equipment, adding to the charm and aura of the day. He says "Folks give me old things sometimes because they know I'll never get rid of anything."

Robert also rents the music building at the weekly Pickens County Flea Market. Every Wednesday Robert is the host, playing washboard, wash-tub bass, and spoons. A great group of musicians join him for a 'pickin'. He loves to tell his listeners to make their own herbal medicines, avoid all fast food, drink good spring water, and walk every day. He is very proud that he weighs the same today as he did when he was fourteen!

Whether making music or making "shine", Robert "Mountain Man" Perry is a well known, well loved Pickens County icon. Join him and "step back in time" at the Hagood Mill Historic Site & Folklife Center every Third Saturday. Stop and visit with each demonstrator, enjoy some music, take home a bag of stone-grounded grits, and savor a bit of the sweet Appalachia culture.

The Hagood Mill operates, rain or shine, the third Saturday of every month and is located just 3 miles north of Pickens or 5 ½ miles south of Cherokee Foothills Scenic Hwy 11 off SC Hwy 178 at 138 Hagood Mill Road. Hagood Mill is open Wednesday through Saturday from 10:00 until 4:00, to tour the buildings and grounds and to visit the Mill Site Gift Shop.

For additional information please contact the Hagood Mill at (864) 898-2936 or the Pickens County Museum at (864) 898-5963.