HOW MILLSTONES WORK

The “dress” of a millstone, that is the system of grooves and furrows cut into its surface is critical to its ability to make good flour. Millers used several different systems of dress according to the grain they were grinding and their own preferences. The millstones did wear as they ground and thus the stones had to be redressed or sharpened on a regular basis. Pine Mill’s were dressed every Saturday morning. To dress the stones, the top “runner” stone had to be lifted off and turned upside down. The miller used a hammer like tool called a millpick to dress the stones.

Millstone Dress

Millstone dress is the term for the system of cutting the furrows and crackling lines into the surface of the stone. Millers used many different dresses depending on the grain they ground and their preferences.

A: The Two-Furrow or Two-Quarter system.
B: The three-quarter
C: Straight or Union
D: Dress where the Furrow and Lands are equal.

This drawing shows four systems of dress for illustration only. An actual stone would have only one system of dress. The furrows would cover the entire face of the stone.

Millstone Construction

Pine Creek Grist Mill has French burt stones. The stone is a very hard type of gray colored quartz mined at just one quarry outside of Paris France. Since there are no stones large enough to make an entire mill stone, a complete millstone is made from several small segments. The segments are held together by a plaster of Paris matrix. Steel bands around the outside of the stones then further reinforce them. The runner stone may have pockets cast in it for lead weights used to balance it.