

the  
**LITERARY HILL**



*A Compendium of Readers, Writers, Books, & Events*

BY KAREN LYON

### Not Run of the Mill

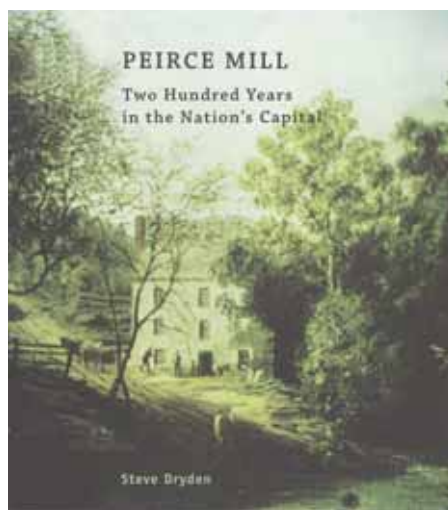
The story of the Peirce Mill in Rock Creek Park contains all the elements of a sweeping historical novel. Several families of Quakers from Chester County, shunned for taking up arms against the British, resettle in the future site of the nation's capital in the mid-1780s. Here they thrive as landowners, establish a mill and a horticultural business, and rise to prominence as civic leaders.

By the early 20th century, however, the lingering taint of family scandals and a series of legal squabbles have taken their toll, and the mill is reduced to a scenic backdrop for bicyclists and picnickers. But a New Deal plan to restore historic structures saves Peirce Mill, which today stands as the last example of an early industrial site in the District of Columbia.

A new book by preservation activist and writer Steve Dryden, "Peirce Mill: Two Hundred Years in the Nation's Capital," tells the story of the mill from its earliest working days through its fall into disuse and disrepair and its eventual rebirth as an important piece of Washington history.

Entwining the stories of the families who owned the mill over the centuries with the growth of the nation's capital and the events of the times, "Peirce Mill" serves as an intimate reflection of the history of Washington, DC, itself. Well-researched and gracefully written, the book contains beautifully reproduced photographs and artwork to complete the picture of this significant landmark.

Peirce Mill was a working gristmill from 1820 until 1897 and was returned to operating condition by



A new book about Peirce Mill tells the story of a significant landmark in DC's industrial history.

the National Park Service in 1937. It continued to grind and sell flour until 1993, when the wooden water-wheel shaft failed and forced the mill to shut down. A group of dedicated volunteers, the Friends of Peirce Mill (FOPM), organized to save it, and, through partnership with the NPS, the restoration is now nearing completion. According to Dryden, who also serves as vice president of FOPM, the mill could reopen as early as fall of 2010, if promised funding comes through.

"Peirce Mill: Two Hundred Years in the Nation's Capital" is available at Riverby Books as well as at Politics & Prose, the National Building Museum, and the DC Historical Society gift shop. If you would like to donate to the restoration effort, send checks payable to Friends of Peirce Mill to Sheila Ploger, 8404 Pittsfield Court, Potomac, Md., 20854.

### Timmy and the Boys

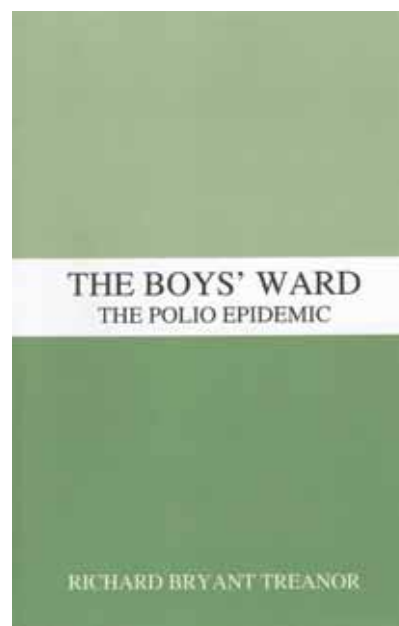
Timothy Kelly is having a great time at summer camp. Sprung from a Boston suburb, he's thrilled to have

washed up on a lake in Maine, where he's won first prize in every swim meet. But it's 1945, and dangers lurk within those seemingly pristine waters. A few months after his return to school, Timmy awakes with a fever, and, when he tries to walk, his leg buckles. The doctors at Children's Hospital tell his parents the bad news: he is paralyzed from the waist down with polio.

Richard Bryant Treanor – lawyer, writer and occasional artist – contracted polio in 1945 and spent seven months in Boston Children's Hospital, an experience he has fictionalized in a new novel, "The Boys' Ward: The Polio Epidemic." As one of the few "polio survivors [around] today to tell the story," he writes, he wanted to describe "how various people ... coped with the terrible polio epidemic."

Told from Timmy's point of view, Treanor's recollections contain a typical teenage mix of angst, raunchy

A local writer takes himself back to "The Boys' Ward" for a (mostly) fictional look at the polio epidemic of the 1940s.



humor and fears about the future. In Timmy's case, however, his trepidation takes on special poignancy. "So then my brain started thinking about what I would do when I got out of the hospital," he writes in his diary.

He fantasizes that he could "dress up like Napoleon and rent myself out to a Wax Museum ... which I could do easily since I couldn't move much." He indulges in a little self-pity: "How tragic is my fate and how cruel." Then, gazing at the Red Sox banner on the wall of the ward, he's all hormones: "It seemed to be saying 'Red Sex, Red Sex.'"

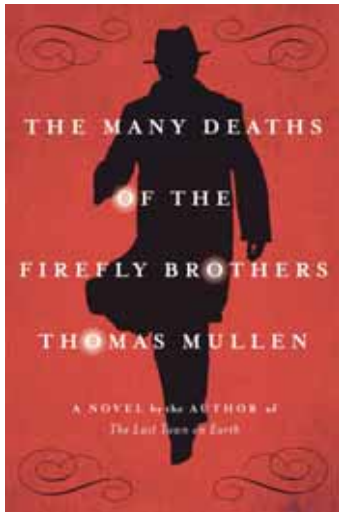
At the end of his long hospital stay, Timmy is almost reluctant to say goodbye to his new friends. But as he leaves the boys' ward for the last time, he thinks, "I know my life is changing, but just like Ol' Man River, I'll Just Keep Rolling Along."

Richard Treanor is also the author of "We Overcame: the Story of Civil Rights for Disabled People" (1993), "Report Card: The Americans with Disabilities Act Tenth Anniversary" (2000), and a previous novel, "The Cloning Dialogue" (2004).

### A Prodigious Return

Former Hill author Thomas Mullen returns to DC with a new book that is already being hailed as "a crackling good yarn ... from a writer who brings history vividly and bruisingly to life." "The Many Deaths of the Firefly Brothers" is the story of a fictional pair of bank-robbing brothers who inspire Depression-era Americans with their derring-do and flouting of authority.

"It combines the stark realism of a troubled time with the rollicking adventure of old-fashioned pulp fiction," explains Mullen. "Given the tough economy we're currently suf-



Former Hill author Thomas Mullen returns for a reading from his new book at Politics & Prose, March 1.

fering through, the book has a weird resonance that I honestly hadn't expected back when I wrote it many months ago."

Mullen's first novel, "The Last Town on Earth" (which was reviewed here in July 2008), was also eerily prescient. Set during World War I and the influenza epidemic of 1918, the book's themes evoked moral issues over America's involvement in the war, its treatment of immigrants, and its suppression of civil liberties in the name of national security. "The Last Town on Earth" was named Best Debut Novel of the Year by "USA Today" and Best Book of the Year by the "Chicago Tribune."

Thomas Mullen will discuss and read from "The Many Deaths of the Firefly Brothers" at Politics & Prose (5015 Connecticut Ave. NW) on March 1 at 7 p.m. ★

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*For more information email Monica F. Jacobs at [monicafjacobe@usa.net](mailto:monicafjacobe@usa.net)*



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