

shielded them from the exposed high-speed saw blade and belt-driven machinery. "All it would take is just one stumble and that's it for you," Rodgers said.

Visitors to the Mississippi Ag Museum get that message. "Once you see that blade spinning and the carriage moving across it, most people realize that it was an incredibly dangerous job. I think it makes people appreciate how far we've come in making sure that families aren't torn apart because of work accidents," Rodgers said.

"And then I think a lot of people react to the sheer power of it. All you have to do is thump a log to realize how much material is there. This old equipment could just power right through it—hundreds of logs a day, if they wanted to."

Recent upgrades to the museum's sawmill, funded in part by the Mississippi Forestry Association, include the construction of a viewing deck for visitors, safety enhancements, repairs, a donated carbide saw blade and additional informational signage.

Termites, rust and weathering are constant threats to the old mill's survival, but Rodgers believes this piece of Mississippi history is worth every effort to preserve and interpret for future generations. The exhibit represents a piece of family history for museum visitors whose relatives once worked in a sawmill.

"I think it's important for us to teach how complicated life was then, and how hard it was, so you can appreciate how easy it is now," Rodgers said.

"We like to think of ourselves as having these big, complicated lives now, but in these rural communities they may not have been formally educated but they had to know so much about how to live on their own. This sawmill is a perfect example of that. And there was so much hard work involved in it."

Museum visitors can see the sawmill in action during the annual Harvest Festival, Nov. 7-11 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. daily. The museum's Small Town Mississippi will come to life with demonstrations in the sawmill, cotton gin, cane mill, print shop and blacksmith shop. Each is equipped with authentic equipment, machinery and tools.

"The experience you're going to get is the really unique noise of a 20-year-old tree being cut into lumber, or the thump of the giant diesel engine running the cotton gin, or the clang of the blacksmith's hammer. It's an experience you can't get from a video. And when it's all running, it's magical out here," Rodgers said.

For visitor information, contact the Mississippi Agriculture and Forestry Museum at 601-432-4500 or visit msagmuseum.org.

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