

Motor Mill...Today & Beyond

The Motor Mill Town site was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1977. In 1983, the Motor Mill Historic Site was purchased by the Clayton County Conservation Board with assistance from the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation from the Klink family who had owned the farm for nearly 80 years. In 1992, an additional 55 acres was purchased from Mildred Beck Kennedy. The site covers a total of 155 acres: 95 acres on the north side of the river and 60 acres on the south side.

In 2004, the Motor Mill Foundation of Clayton County was chartered. The membership assists the Conservation Board in planning and funding a variety of projects and activities surrounding the Motor Mill. Beginning in 2005, Clayton County Conservation opened the site two weekends a month for tours, May through September.

With a gift from the Robert Grau family, the Robert Grau Memorial Savanna was started in 2005. Restoration continues on this project.

John Thompson and his partners were people of vision. Though he succeeded in founding Elkader, his vision of a thriving community at Motor faded and vanished. Floods, chinch bugs and economic difficulties shattered his dreams. Today, the Clayton County Conservation Board and the Motor Mill Foundation are working to make the Motor Mill site a regional historical, educational and tourist attraction, while protecting its serenity and charm.

In 2010, the Motor Mill Site became part of the Turkey River Recreational Corridor. Projects that have been completed include the reconstruction of the Motor Mill Bridge and the Turkey River Water Trail. Additional projects to be completed include a land trail connecting Motor, Elkader, Elgin and Clermont, building restoration projects and flood control structures.

Your financial support would be appreciated and all contributions are tax-deductible. Volunteers are welcome to help lead tours, help with restoration and spread the word about Motor. Join us! 4/13



How to find us



There are two ways to get to the Mill. South of Elkader from Highway 13, take X3C (Grandview Road) east about 3.5 miles; turn left on Hazel Road and immediately take a hard left on Galaxy Road, go about 1.5 miles of gravel to Motor Mill. Or, take gravel road C1X (Grape Road) east from Hwy 13 at Elkader; follow Grape road 4 miles, then turn south on Galaxy Road, go another 3 miles to Motor Mill.

For more information contact:
Clayton County Conservation Board
29862 Osborne Rd
Elkader, IA 52043
(563) 245-1516
www.claytoncountyconservation.org
www.motormill.org



MOTOR MILL



Historic Site

Owned and managed by the
Clayton County Conservation Board

The History of Motor

The dream of Motor Mill began in 1867 when John Thompson, J.P. Dickinson and James O. Crosby formed a partnership to build a grist mill, sawmill, farm and town site at Hastings Bottom, the site of an earlier sawmill. The men changed the name of the settlement to Motor, for reasons unknown.

Thompson and his associates spent \$50,000 to build Motor Mill, and \$40,000 on equipment and outbuildings. The mill and cooperage were completed in 1869, the other buildings in the early 1870's. The scenic iron bridge was constructed in 1898.

Stone masons from nearby villages were hired to build the Mill. Stone quarried on the top of the bluff was lowered in cable cars on wood rails to the building site. *Legend* tells of four "lead" masons, each responsible for one wall of the building, who tried to outdo the others with his own style of stonework.

A better explanation of why the stones on three sides of the mill have rounded faces and the fourth side has flat faces, surfaced during research. Motor founders had planned in 1869 to build a woolen mill *onto* the *flouring mill's flume wall* (smooth side). But an investor could not be found so the woolen mill was never built.

According to county lore, during construction of an area railroad project, Thompson failed to pay laborers their wages and was nearly hanged.

Another early yarn indicates Motor construction men were so angered they threatened to blow up the dam if the payroll was not met.

Water for mill operation was provided by a dam upstream, 200 feet long and 12 feet high. A flume directed water into the basement of the Mill, providing power to the turbines.

The large dam ensured a minimum of 250 horsepower even at low water. One of the owners boasted that the Mill could handle 1500 bushels of wheat per week, for which he paid 50 cents per bushel. It was said that Motor flour was the best flour for baking. The flour was sold nearby and shipped to Dubuque for bread-making.

The town of Motor did well for a time and a railroad was begun which would link Motor with the town of Elkader. But a flood in 1875 washed out the ties and hopes of completing the spur.

The Mill was dealt another blow when large numbers of chinch bugs and other small insects inflicted great damage to wheat, corn, other grains and grasses. Invasions of the insects in 1867, '71 and '87 destroyed virtually every acre of wheat in northeast Iowa. Motor Mill ceased operation in the 1880's and was later sold for only \$12,000.

Many changes occurred after the mill was closed. Most of the milling equipment was discarded or sold, and much of the mill's interior was gutted. Horses were stabled on the mill's ground floor and hay stored upstairs. The livery stable was converted into a dairy barn in the 1930's and the roof raised to make more room for hay storage. The stable was used in dairy operations until 1982.



Structures at Motor

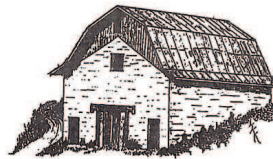
The majestic old *Mill* is nearly 90 feet tall, and is believed to be the tallest structure of its kind in the Midwest. The stately old structure boasts six full stories and measures 60 feet by 45 feet.

The Mill's foundation walls are five feet thick and step in 6" per floor as the structure ascends to the roof. The ground floor walls are about three feet thick; fourth floor, two and one-half feet; and the sixth floor, two feet thick. The bays on the inside are 12 feet wide. Beams measure 11 x 14 inches. Pillars are one-foot square. The first floor ceiling is nine and one-half feet high; all others are eight and one-half.



Barrels made in the *Cooperage* were later used to ship the corn meal and

flour. The Cooperage building is a two and one-half story stone structure measuring 24 feet wide by 44 feet in length. The walls are two feet thick. The native walnut floor joists measure 3" x 14", set on 16" centers.



The native stone was also used to construct a *Stable* to

house the animals of the patrons of the Inn. The Stable measures 40 feet wide by 44 feet long. Walls are two and one-half feet thick and measure 15 feet to the sill. The original straight roofline can be seen below the newer hip-type roof.



The attractive limestone *Inn* offered rooms and meals to farmers waiting overnight for their grain to be ground. The building is a charming two and one-half story structure measuring 33 feet wide by 45 feet long. Walls are two feet thick. The building measures 20 feet to the sill. The Inn boasts 10 rooms.



A rock *Ice House* made the complex complete. Ice cut from the Turkey River was stored in the Ice House and used for refrigeration at the Inn. The Ice House is two stories high with two-foot thick walls, and measures 19 feet, 9 inches long by 18 feet wide.



Destroyed by the floods of 1991 and 2008, a replica of the original 1895 pin and truss *Bridge* was completed in 2012, completing the scenic history of the Motor Mill Site. The 2 span bridge measures 194 feet long and is 4 feet higher on the original piers.