

## The Old Mill: A Memory

And now a word in retrospect. The milling industry had its beginning in Iowa in the decade of the thirties. In some instances the sawmills came first. By the decade of the seventies much of the native timber had been cut and the lumber industry was concentrating in the big pine sawmills along the Mississippi. Flour mills developed and expanded in the forties, the fifties, the sixties, and seventies. Then the grasshoppers and chinch bugs came. Wheat moved out and corn moved in. Where there were once substantial and picturesque mills there are now cribs, and silos, and barns and government storage bins — visible evidences of accumulated wealth. The transition has been a dramatic incident in the story of Iowa.

As historians and as students of art and culture and wealth, we look backward across the years and see Iowa again a great wheat country, a lumber and flour producing area, a land of a thousand mills — horse-power mills, steam mills, and water mills; mills along the banks of many rivers; sawmills and gristmills; woolen mills and flour mills; mills, mills — everywhere mills.

In the accumulation of wealth, break not the charm of early days that live like a song in

memory. Rather preserve the artistic and the beautiful. Cherish a memory of the old water mill, and build around it shrines that will endure through the years. Where are the mills that once lent picturesque charm to the valleys of Iowa? A few of them have become modern milling centers, but for the most part they are gone. In more than half the counties there is not now even a trace of an old water mill.

But look again. A few dilapidated old mills, some of them abandoned, are still to be seen. Weathered and worn though they are, these old mills have a historical value. Service has given them dignity; age has conferred prestige; and years of idleness have changed their character from workshops to resorts. Vine-covered and mossy though they are, some of these firm old structures may still be preserved. Pine Creek Mill in Muscatine County is within the boundaries of a State Park. Moreover, it has been remodeled and rebuilt to preserve its essential features.

About 1880 a "new process" of milling was developed, and roller mills were substituted for the ancient millstones. With the advent of this method and the abandonment of the rotating stones, the old millstones came to be only a relic — a souvenir of the days that are gone. Many of the old stones have been lost in the mud of river beds, but some have been recovered and used as historical markers. At the town of Lowell in Henry County

a French millstone has been mounted upon a substantial base to mark the site of an old mill. In Shakespeare Garden of Crapo Park, Burlington, is one of the old millstones that was formerly used in Moffatt's mill on the Skunk River in Des Moines County. And at Iowa City an old millstone on each side of the doorway adorns the entrance of the Hydraulics Laboratory, one of the University buildings. At Cherokee, Iowa Falls, and Hampton markers have been erected for old water mills.

When a good man serves his fellows, we honor him; when he retires, we give him praise. So may it be with the old water mill — honor for service, praise for the wheels that are still, and monuments of stone and bronze for the mills that are gone. In the printed page, in picture, in story, and in song the old water mill still lives.

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#### IOWA MILLS

This list of mills, arranged alphabetically by counties, includes those known to be operating or still standing in 1939 and 1940. For a complete list, so far as available, see J. A. Swisher's *Iowa — Land of Many Mills* (1940), pp. 245-272.

| County    | Name of Mill                         | Operating in |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| Adair     | Fontanelle Roller Mills (Fontanelle) | 1939         |
| Carroll   | Doud Milling Company (Manning)       | "            |
| Cass      | Atlantic Mill & Elevator (Atlantic)  | "            |
| "         | Griswold Milling Company (Griswold)  | "            |
| "         | Massena Mill Company (Massena)       | "            |
| Cedar     | Durant Roller Mills (Durant)         | "            |
| Chickasaw | New Hampton Mill (New Hampton)       | "            |
| Clinton   | Model Roller Mills (Clinton)         | "            |
| Crawford  | Doud Milling Company (Denison)       | "            |
| "         | Westside Roller Mills (Westside)     | "            |