

Windmill Factory Now A Great Museum

The Kregel windmill factory closed in 1991 and reopened as a museum with one of only 13 line shaft systems left in the U.S. Line shaft systems were common in factories and shops in the 19th and early 20th century. A central shaft driven by an engine, electrical motor or water wheel, powers various belt-driven tools.

"The line shaft and all the belt-driven equipment still operate," says David Flatt, Kregel Windmill Factory Museum. "The last windmill built by the company was the same design and produced the same way as when the factory was built in 1902."

Tools include a metal turning lathe built in 1865 and a power shear, punch and riveting machine built in 1875. Most of the tools, like saws, drop hammer, joiner and grinders, were manufactured in 1900 or 1910.

The Kregel Windmill Company produced approximately 1,000 Eli brand windmills over its 112-year history. However, it's the only surviving factory of the 1,500 windmill companies that once operated in the U.S. Its revival as a museum is unique.

"When the 93-year-old owner died, the factory was closed," explains Flatt. "The Kimball and Ward foundations and others approached heirs to the estate suggesting setting it up as a non-profit museum and offered to raise operating funds."

While everything inside the building worked perfectly, the structure needed work. The tin plate exterior was removed piece-by-

piece, numbered and stored. Once repairs were made, the tin was replaced.

The interior is a time capsule of factory life 100 years ago or more. Not only tools, but also ledger books on shelves, pencils and pens on the desk, even an overcoat on a hook remain where last used. More than a million and a half artifacts can be found in the building.

"It even smells like an old factory," says Flatt. "The only changes were to remove excess pieces of pipe and towers so people could walk around. It is handicapped accessible, and we installed computer kiosks with informational videos."

An Eli windmill with a 31-ft. tower and 10-ft. wheel is on display across the street from the museum. The windmills came in 25, 31, 36 and 53-ft. heights. Many can still be found in service.

"The Eli is a direct stroke windmill with no gears to go wrong," explains Flatt. "Most were sold within a 50-mile radius of the factory, and about 100 are left."

The museum is open year-round Tuesday through Sunday. It hosts special events and lectures, as well as tours for around 3,000 visitors each year.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Kregel Windmill Factory Museum, 1416 Central Ave., Nebraska City, Neb. 68410 (ph 402 873-1078; info@kregelmuseum.org; www.kregelmuseum.org).



The Kregel windmill factory closed in 1991 but reopened as a museum with the factory still intact.



Factory's original line shaft and all the belt-driven equipment it operates are still in working condition.



The Shattuck Windmill Museum in Oklahoma has more than 40 rare windmills outside and many more inside.

Oklahoma Town Honors Windmills

Without windmills, settlers in Shattuck, Okla., wouldn't have survived, so it is fitting that the town has a windmill museum and that it will host the 2020 International Windmillers Trade Fair, June 10-12, 2020.

"We are in a semi-arid area with very few streams and springs. So windmills were vital to the area," says Sue Schoenhals, one of the volunteer board members for the museum. Besides providing water to settlers, windmills pumped water for trains with steam engines.

Located on a couple of acres of city property on the corner of Highways 283 and 15, the outdoor part of the museum with 40 windmills is open to the public year round. The gift shop and museum with 14 rare windmills and other displays are open from April through November. Run completely by volunteers, they offer guided tours through the museum, a dugout home, and a pioneer farmhouse.

Windmill enthusiasts will find a variety of wood and metal windmill models from a 5-ft. Star Zephyr to an 18-ft. Samson. There are also a couple of homemade water drilling rigs and a water wheel.

A Halladay Standard, Kirkwood, Freeman and Imperial are among the mills protected

inside a building at the park.

The idea for the museum started when Phillis Ballew returned home to Shattuck and had a 10-ft. Eclipse windmill placed in her yard. She and her husband, Dan, teamed up with Marvin Stinson, a windmill collector and restorer who wanted to share his collection. With support from the Shattuck community, pop. 1,300, the Shattuck Windmill Museum was founded in 1994. Though most of the founders are now deceased, volunteers keep the museum going, Schoenhals says. Each September, they get help from windmill enthusiasts from other parts of the U.S. who come for a work week to paint, fix and do maintenance on the windmills and buildings.

"Our goal is to maintain the history," Schoenhals says. And, when visitors come they also discover Shattuck is a very friendly town on the edge of Oklahoma's panhandle.

Museum/gift shop hours are 10 a.m.-4 p.m. April-November. The museum is free, but donations are welcome for the non-profit.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Shattuck Windmill Museum, P.O. Box 227, Shattuck, Okla. 73858 (ph 580 938-5291 or 580 938-5146; Facebook: Shattuck Windmill Park and Museum).

Amazing Book Documents Corn Picker History

Illinois farmer and rural letter carrier Bob Johnson is a corn picker aficionado, having collected more than 25 "ageless iron" pickers since the early 1990's. Those efforts encouraged he and his wife Phyllis to research, compile and publish a book on corn picker history that's more than 800 pages long.

"I caught the fever when I bought a Deere 200 one-row picker that I think was my dad's," Johnson says. "It was the model he owned, and it had a sticker from Huntley farm store, the dealer he bought it from, so I think it's the same picker."

Johnson has also collected reams of corn picker literature and print ads. His passion for corn pickers eventually led Phyllis to suggest putting all the information together in book form. The result was their book "Corn Pickers, And The Inventors Who Dreamed Them Up," with more than 1,500 photos and illustrations.

"We believe the book features every corn picker ever made, and Phyllis and I were able to dig out lots of details on each machine, which is included in the descriptions and sidebar stories," Bob says. Phyllis says an excellent source of information turned out to be genealogy websites, where she uncovered backgrounds on inventors and names of descendants who could fill in more details.

The book has now sold more than 600 copies and the 4th edition is being printed in 2 volumes. That's due to reader feedback that said the original book, which weighed 6 1/2 lbs., was simply too big and cumbersome to read comfortably. The 4th edition is available for \$135, plus \$15 for USPS Priority Mail shipping.

The Johnsons point out that the boom years for corn picker manufacturing were 1930 to 1970, but some of the designs date as far back as the mid-1800s. "There were a lot of corn picker patents applied for between 1850 and 1890, but factories simply didn't have the raw



More than 800 pages long, Bob Johnson's amazing book on corn picker history is printed in 2 volumes.

materials to make strong enough machines to stand up to the rigors of harvesting corn," Phyllis says. "It took another 40 years before mechanical corn picking really kicked into high gear."

Bob says most of the 25 one-row pull-type pickers in his collection still run and he has several additional machines he uses for parts. His most unusual pickers are two Great American machines, which were designed to be safer for farmers since the inventor had lost some fingers in a corn picker accident. The Great American design features "stalkwalker fingers" that pulled the stalks into the machine.

"We are stunned that there has been so much interest in old corn pickers, and humbled by all the interest in our book," Bob says. Thanks to the enthusiastic response, the Johnsons are now researching their next book, "Corn Crib: Every Farm Had One."

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