A LITTLE BIT ABOUT OUR MILL...

Between November 1975 and March 1977 the proud community of Elk Horn, Iowa turned a dream into a reality – raising more than $100,000 and using over 300 volunteers to locate, purchase, move, and rebuild an authentic Danish windmill.

Recognized today as the largest rural Danish settlement in the United States, the town of Elk Horn began in 1864 with the first European settlers. In 1868, the first Danish settler, Christian Jensen urged his family and friends in Denmark to join him in the Clay Township community named for the elk antlers found scattered on the prairie.

In 1975, Harvey Sornson, a rural Elk Horn farmer, visited his ancestral homeland of Denmark. Upon his return, his fondness for the old and rapidly disappearing windmills led Sornson to propose a “crazy idea.” He suggested to some of the Elk Horn townspeople that they should bring an authentic Danish windmill from Denmark to this Iowa town of 750 people.

Through benevolent circumstances, Harry Pedersen, a visiting relative of Elk Horn native Milo Andersen, agreed to locate a mill for Elk Horn when he returned home to Denmark. Pedersen found the Nørre Snede windmill, owned by Julius and Kirsten Hansen who used it to generate electricity.

Within five months the people of Elk Horn raised the funds necessary to purchase and dismantle the windmill and transport it to Iowa. The Windmill Corporation of Elk Horn paid $11,000 United States Dollars for the mill, and $14,000 USD for Danish carpenters to dismantle the windmill. Shipping the mill across the Atlantic cost $8,000 USD.

The Danish carpenters who dismantled the windmill carefully numbered each piece, section by section. They also constructed a 10:1 scale model of the windmill with each piece numbered to correspond with the actual mill pieces. One of the early problems faced by the Elk Horn carpenters was the use of metric measurements. Many times the carpenters checked the placement of mill pieces with the model on display on Main Street.

Over 300 volunteers worked for over a year to refurbish and reassemble the windmill restoring it to working condition. Organized into work crew by banker Lamont Christensen, the people of Elk Horn, Kimballton, Audubon, Harlan, Atlantic, Hamlin, Brayton and Jacksonville mobilized to build their windmill. Farmers and townspeople alike supplied labor for this project.

“We want you to know, that we are very happy that you bought the mill and restored it. It was a tremendous and unbelievable task. It was a pain for many of us, when we passed through Nørre Snede, to see the mill falling more and more to pieces.”
Knut Vestergaard, May 1, 1992
Danish citizen and descendant of Knut & Nicoline Vestergaard, mill owners 1912 – 1947

GLOSSARY
BRENNERHÜSEL: wheel attached to the front of the windmill to drive the miller. The drive belt operates by the brake lever contracts arm to run to stop the sweeps running.
BRIDGE BEAM: beam supporting the spindle on which the millstones ride.
CAP: the rotating top of a smock or tower mill supporting the sails, windshaft and fanwheel.
CAP FRAME: the framework at the base of and supporting the cap, mounted on the shaft.
CURL: circular ring beam at the top of a smock, supporting the metal track-plates on which the cap rides.
FAKE STAGE: the framework at the rear of the cap, which supports the fanwheel.
FAKE TAIL: a vertical set of six to eight vanes, which automatically operates the mechanism to turn the cap and keep the sails facing into the wind.
GREAT SPOREWHEEL: the large driving wheel, which transmits power via the stone nuts to the stone bed with the kernel feet (pawls) or below (jumping fit).
HOPPER: a wooden funnel, which supplies grain from a hopper overhead via a chute to the horse or container resting on the millstones.
SACK HOIST: a mechanism comprising a horizontal jack bored around which a rope is wound to haul sacks of grain from the ground through a series of ropes/machines to the mill floor. It is controlled by the sack control lever which engages a friction wheel on the wallower.
SHUTTERS: Hinged timber vans on the swag, connected by the shutter bars.
STAGE: a wooden platform around the lower part of the smock mill from which the sails can be adjusted.
STONES: Runner upper and rotating stone of a pair. Bed, lower stone, fixed to the floor.
TENTING GEAR: the mechanism for setting the initial gap between the millstones.
WALLOWER: a bowed gear wheel meshed with the brake wheel and driving the great spur wheel. Most commonly, in post mills, it drives a runner stone.
WINDSHAFT: a shaft, usually of cast iron after the mid-eighteenth century, to which are fixed the stones, brake and tail wheels. It is inclined to balance the weight it carries and is supported in a pair bearings on the breast beam at the front and a tail bearing on the tail beam at the rear.

RELATED TERMS
MILLWRIGHT: one who designs and builds windmills.
SPILL THE WIND: to open the shutters while the sails are rotating.
STONE DRESSING: the cutting of a small radial from the center of the grinding surface of a millstone to grind and direct the grain.
TAIL WINDING: damage caused to the sails when a gust of wind catches them from behind, owing to failure of the fanwheel, the cap not rotating, or a sudden change of wind direction.

The mill in Denmark. Date unknown.

The mill in Denmark, 1997.