

56-2444

Wisconsin Word Processing Format (Approved 1/92)

United States Department of Interior
National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900A). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Rising Star Flouring Mill
other names/site number

2. Location

street & number	3190 County Road Q	N/A	not for publication
city or town	Nelsonville	N/A	vicinity
state Wisconsin	code WI	county Portage	code 097
			zip code 54458

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Diana J. Edwards
Signature of certifying official/Title

3/29/2018
Date

State Historic Preservation Office - Wisconsin
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

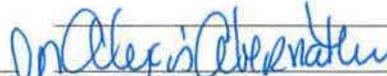
Rising Star Flouring Mill
Name of Property

Portage
County and State

Wisconsin

4. National Park Service Certification

- I hereby certify that the property is:
- entered in the National Register.
 ___ See continuation sheet.
 - ___ determined eligible for the National Register.
 ___ See continuation sheet.
 - ___ determined not eligible for the National Register.
 ___ See continuation sheet.
 - ___ removed from the National Register.
 - ___ other, (explain:)


Signature of the Keeper

5/11/18
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (check as many boxes as apply)	Category of Property (Check only one box)	Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count)	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	contributing	noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	district	1	buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	structure		sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	site		structures
	object	1	objects
			Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
(Enter "N/A" if property not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)
INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION
Manufacturing facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)
RECREATION AND CULTURE/Museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and Early 20th Century American Movements

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone
walls wood/metal

roof metal

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for the National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY

Period of Significance

1868 - 1968

Significant Dates

1868

1881

1883

1886

1893

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Name of Property

County and State

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional Items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name/title	Portage County Historical Society - Jim Walker	date	2-15-2017
organization		telephone	715-824-2337
street & number	P. O. Box 672	zip code	54481
city or town	Stevens Point	state	WI

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects, (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 1

Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County Wisconsin

Introduction

The Rising Star Flouring Mill was constructed on the banks of the Waupaca River by Jerome Nelson in 1867 in the village of Nelsonville, Wisconsin. This was not Nelson's first industrial venture in Nelsonville; in fact, Nelson constructed a dam across the Waupaca River in 1855. After the dam was completed a sawmill and residence were erected. Nelson left briefly to serve in the Civil War and upon his return, built the Rising Star Flouring Mill on the west bank of the Waupaca River opposite the bank where his sawmill was located. The Rising Star Flouring Mill began as a stone operated Buhr mill in 1867.

The mill is located on the northwest side of County Road Q within the small village of Nelsonville (population 191) in Township 23 North, Range 10 East, Section 5 of Portage County Wisconsin. The main facade of the mill faces east toward First Street which is Nelsonville's main street. The historic commercial area of Nelsonville consists of one-block along First Street, which consists of two story nineteenth century brick commercial buildings. The neighborhoods which surround the commercial district are comprised of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century homes. A few light commercial businesses are located on the west edge of the village along Highway SS.

The rolling terrain surrounding Nelsonville supports large dairy farms, crop fields and wooded parcels. Many of these farms came into existence during the operation of the Rising Star Flouring Mill. Jerome Nelson demonstrated his entrepreneurial and progressive nature by accepting and adopting new technologies which assured that the very best quality of flour was produced in his mill. The changes and upgrades to the mill that were undertaken by Jerome Nelson improved the industrial process of milling flour and in no way impede the integrity of the building. Industrial properties such as the Rising Star Flouring Mill were often modified over time to conform to new technological advancements.

Timber-frame Construction

Most buildings constructed during the period of time in which the Rising Star Flouring Mill was built employed fieldstone foundations. Fieldstone was available in massive quantities on the surface of the soil in Portage County. First masons would lay a concrete footing at a depth of eighteen inches below the frost line. Then both large and small stones were mortared together to produce a securely bonded wall. When completed, the fieldstone walls generally measured from two to three feet thick and extended several feet above ground. The fieldstone foundation walls of the Rising Star Mill vary from two to three feet in thickness and are comprised of large stones. Additional fieldstone walls bisect the basement of the mill providing for additional support.

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Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County Wisconsin

The Rising Star Mill utilizes heavy timber construction. The heavy timber framing was hand hewn by the local Norwegian builders, most likely from materials found at or near the building site. After the timber sill plate was placed on the fieldstone foundation, the timber frame (or bent) was assembled using two vertical large hewn square timbers and a single horizontal (girt) tie beam. The timbers were attached with mortise and tenon joints that were secured with a tapered hardwood peg. Using an axe, the builder fashioned tenons or tongue like extensions into the end of timbers. The tenons were then carefully fitted into mortises or slots hewn into the adjoining timber. A hole was drilled into the joined mortise and tenon and a wood peg was driven into the joint. In the case of a large load bearing areas, multiple pegs secured the joint. Additional diagonal braces were installed between the joint and the girt. This system of bents, girts, joints and braces became the skeletal structure of the mill.¹

In the case of the Rising Star Flouring Mill two rows of massive heavy timber columns with wood bolsters at the top, were installed in the basement, on the first floor and on the second floor to provide unshakable support for the mill's operation.

Evolution of the Rising Star Flouring Mill Building

The configuration of the mill evolved over time to accommodate new machinery. The building was constructed in 1867 and was altered a number of times until it reached its current appearance in 1947. All of the alterations were made during the period of significance. The original mill was likely proportionally smaller. When the mill was reconfigured in 1881 and 1883 to support the roller mill process, it was most likely modified to a height of two-and-one-half stories. The increase in size and height was needed to enclose the machinery necessary for the new milling process.² The one-and-one-half story north and south additions which project from the north wall, and the south wall of the central portion of the mill building, were added in 1893. At the time of their construction, these additions were built to mirror the main block of the mill with wide undecorated bargeboards resting beneath overhanging eaves. A 1947 one story shed roof addition, which rests on an exposed concrete block foundation, projects from the south wall of the mill. The 1947 addition extends 20'-6" to the east of the east-facing wall of the mill.

Exterior

The two-and-one-half story main block of the mill, and the one-and-one-half story north and south wings are clad with wood clapboard painted a bright barn red. The one story 1947 addition is clad with corrugated metal siding also painted a bright barn red. Most of the windows are original; those that were replaced were constructed of wood to resemble the original window. The doors are original.

¹ Allen G. Noble and Hubert G. H. Wilhelm, *Barns of the Midwest*, (Ohio University Press, 1995), pages 46-51

² *Stevens Point Journal*, December 15, 1883, Advertisement stating a new roller system had been installed.

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Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County Wisconsin

The door at the northeast corner of the building is original, constructed of wood and having two lower panels and two arched windows in the upper panels. The doors of the 1947 (south-facing) addition are of corrugated metal, the same material as the walls. The remaining doors are of simple plank wood construction. The bargeboards, cornice, corner boards and simple window and door surrounds are painted bright white. All of the roof sections of the entire mill are covered with metal which are painted silver.

Primary (East) Facade

The main façade of the two-and-one-half story mill faces east. The mill consists of a two-and-one-half story front gabled main block and two adjoining one-and-one-half story shed roof wings which project from the north and south walls of the main block. The east facing walls of the main block, and the one-and-one-half story wings are continuous and have no projecting surfaces. The gabled end of the two-and-one-half story main block and one-and-one-half story wings have wide undecorated bargeboards resting beneath the overhanging eaves.

A concrete foundation supports an 8' wide concrete porch that travels the entire width of the east-facing facade, and the north-facing wall of the 1947 addition. Concrete steps access the porch at the north-facing end, including the north-facing end of the 1947 addition. A metal shed roof, which covers the entire porch, is mitered in the southwest corner of the porch. The metal shed roof rests on seven porch posts which are supported with side braces. The 1947 addition is joined visibly on the east-facing elevation by the continuous porch and shed roof. A smaller metal shed roof shields the angled-corner office entry door and transom located at the northeast edge of the mill building. Two long benches are located along the wall to the north of the main entry to the mill.

Three doorways enter the building from the entry porch. One door is centered on the main mill block, one door enters the receiving area of the south one-and-one-half story wing, and one door enters the 1947 addition on the north-facing wall. Four, six-over six, double-hung sash windows are located on the first floor of the main block of the mill. Five double-hung sash windows are located on the second floor of the main block. Four of the double-hung sash windows on the second floor have two-over-two lights and the fifth double-hung sash window located at the southern end of the second floor has a six-over-six light. A single two-over-two, double-hung sash window rests within the gable end.

A hopper, located on the porch between the door which enters the main body of the mill and the door which enters the one-and-one-half story south wing, is secured with a large boxed cover. The hopper allowed the farmer to dump his grain onto the rollers (and later the hammer mill) located in the basement from either his wagon or truck.

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Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County Wisconsin

A 1947 single story wing projects 20' 6" from the south wall of the main body of the mill. The addition rests on an exposed concrete block foundation and projects 20'-6" to the east of the east-facing wall of the mill. The east-facing façade of the single story wing exhibits an entry door which is flanked on either side by a single six-light stationary window. A narrow loading dock is centered on the east-facing elevation. A basement light appears at each side of the loading dock. A retaining wall topped with a board fence projects from the southeast corner of the 1947 addition.

North-facing Facade

The north-facing façade is adjacent to First Street. At the first floor, a double-hung sash window is located at the northeast corner. A door is located to the west of the single window. Another double-hung sash window is located to the west of the door. A pair of double-hung sash windows is located to the west of this window. All of the windows located on the north-facing elevation support two-over-two lights.

West-facing Facade

The west-facing facade of the mill faces the Waupaca River. The walls of the two-and-one-half story main body of the mill and the one-and-one-half story north wing are continuous and at the time of the mill's operation were adjacent to the river. Centered on the first story of the two-and-one-half story main block of the mill is a one story projecting bay with a shed roof. This housed the water turbine and massive belt operated gear. The turbine bay rests on an open-sided concrete foundation that allowed the race to propel water through the turbine bay. A smaller entry bay projects from the north wall of the turbine bay. A single door on the west-facing wall of the one-and-one-half story north wing accesses a small deck where the miller could view the water wheel and the turbine. Stairs to the right of this deck descend to a lower deck and the door accessing the turbine bay.

Two double-hung sash windows are found on the first and second floors of the two-and-one-half story main block of the mill. A single, double-hung sash window is located in the upper southwest corner of the one-and-one-half story north wing and in the gable end of the two-and-one-half story main block of the mill. A double-hung sash window is located on the west wall of the turbine bay. Each is a two-over-two light window. The gable end of the two-and-one-half story main block and the one-and-one-half story north wing have wide undecorated bargeboards resting beneath overhanging eaves.

The south-facing projecting wall of the two-and-one-half story main block of the mill has a single, double-hung sash window on both the first and second floors. Each is a six-over-six light window. The west-facing walls of the one-and-one-half story south wing and the 1947 one-story addition are continuous and have no projecting surfaces. This portion of the mill was set back 16' from the west wall of the mill and the river.

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Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County Wisconsin

A single, two-over-two, double-hung sash window is located in the upper northwest corner of the one-and-one-half story south wing. A single, six-over-six, double-hung sash window is centered on the first floor of the one-and-one-half story south wing. A wide undecorated bargeboard rests beneath the overhanging eave of the one-and-one-half story south wing.

The west-facing fenestration of the 1947 addition is composed of two double-hung sash windows on the first floor and two double-hung sash windows on the exposed concrete block foundation. Each is a two-over-two light window.

South-facing Facade

The one-story 1947 addition rests on an exposed concrete block basement. Four, narrow, evenly spaced six-light stationary windows are located at the first floor. The south-facing wall of the exposed basement contains a sliding track door and two, narrow, six-light stationary windows.

Interior

The interior of the mill retains its original plan. Throughout the basement and continuing levels of the mill, original belts, pulleys, gears, chutes, wood hoppers, floor-to-floor wood funnels, and wood elevators remain from the flour milling process. When the Jackson Milling Company purchased the mill in 1916, the company converted the mill from flour production to grinding corn for animal feed. The conversion included the installation of equipment which completed the cracking and grinding of corn into feed for dairy cows, chickens, pigs, and sheep.

Basement

The rollers from the flouring mill were replaced with a hammermill, which remains in the basement. The water operated turbine that was used by the flouring mill, provided power to the hammermill and other mechanized apparatus throughout the mill. A machine which shells the corn cob, separating the two (corn and cob) into different assigned areas also remains in the basement. Short, heavy timber columns with wood bolsters support the first floor of the main block.

The Jackson Mill continued to take advantage of automation available within the mill. The cracked corn entered the elevator system in the basement and was moved to the third floor where it entered the various wood hoppers, funnels and floor-to-floor chutes. Gravity ultimately sent the cracked corn to the bagger on the first floor.

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Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County Wisconsin

First Floor

The 30' x 43' first floor of the main block is entirely unobstructed by walls. The original built-in balance scale remains in the floor of the northeast quadrant of the first floor. The grain elevator system passes through the first floor appearing as three square pillars. Upon opening a small door on the side of each pillar one observes a conveyer belt containing small cups, or bins, which move the grain from the basement to the attic of the main block. A machine used by the Jackson Milling Company to further grind the corn into smaller particles for chicken feed is located in the northwest quadrant of the first floor. To the north of this machine the large wood gear from the turbine house rests up against the north wall of the main room. The Portage County Historical Society has placed the large wood gear along the north wall of the main body of the mill for viewing by the public.

Centered on the north wall of the first floor of the main block and tapering downward from the second floor is an original large wood funnel, or hopper. Grain was funneled into chutes under which bags were placed to capture the final product whether it was flour or cracked corn.

The most dramatic architectural features are located on the first floor of the main block. Two rows of 12' tall heavy timber columns with wood bolsters, rise up and support the second floor. These massive support posts were hand carved by the Norwegian builders. The post portion was carved to include a base, a capital, and chamfered sides. The post supports the bolsters which reach outward to each side to add support to the underlying second floor.

Three doors exit the first floor of the main block along the north wall. Each enters into the one-and-one-half story north addition. The office of Jerome Nelson is located on the first floor in the east portion of the addition. The walls and ceiling of the office are clad with embossed decorative metal. A room used for storage and mill personnel is centrally located on the first floor of the one-and-one-half story north addition. A power room is located on the first floor, in the west portion of the one-and-one-half story north addition. A trapezoid shaped opening in the south wall of the power room allowed belts to travel through the wall connecting to another powering source within the room which no longer remains. A doorway on the west wall of the power house allows access to the outside and to the door of the waterwheel/turbine house.

A single door located in the southeast corner of the first floor of the main block enters the one-and-one-half story south addition. This area appears to have been a receiving area. An exterior door on the east wall accesses the east-facing porch. A door located on the south wall of the receiving area enters the 1947 addition. A door located on the rear, or west, wall of the receiving area enters a room of which its usage is unknown.

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Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County Wisconsin

A single door, centered on the west wall of the main body of the mill, enters the power house. After traveling down a small stairway a large gear assembly, which fills the power house, comes into view. The gear assembly was connected to the turbine in the water below by a shaft. As the flow of the water turned the turbine the shaft turned the large gear, transferring power to the mill. (Part of the gear assembly is on display on the first floor of the main mill). A large leather belt connected to the shaft of the gear radiates out from the power house into the mill.

The original Rising Star Flouring Mill turbine was operational at the time of the mill's closing. Another mill, whose turbine had ceased to be operational, traded their turbine for the Rising Star Mill's working turbine in the late 1990s. The exchanged turbine is on display in front of the mill.

All of the interior walls of the first floor mill are clad with unpainted boards of varying widths. The floors are clad with oak hardwood boards of varying widths.

The first floor of the 50'x 23'-3" addition from 1947 is unobstructed by walls. A large door on the east wall accesses the small loading dock. The interior of this addition was used for corn storage.

Second Floor

The second floor of the main mill is accessed by a stairway located in the northeast corner of the first floor of the main block. The second floor has the same overall dimensions as the first floor. A, 10'-6" x 21'-4' room has been partitioned off in the rear south east corner of the second floor. Bins, hoppers and chutes are partitioned off along the north wall of the second floor.

The grain elevator posts pierce from floor to ceiling through the second floor rising through the floor of the third level of the mill. Two rows of 14' heavy timber columns with wood bolsters, identical to the first floor, support the third floor. The areas of the ½ stories of both the north and south one-and-one-half story additions appear to be storage bins. They are reinforced with mortise and tenon joints, beams and cross bracing. The depth of the ½ story bins descend to the ceilings of the first floor rooms. The first floor ceilings of the one-and-one-half story north and south wing additions are not 12' as in the main block of the mill but are only 8' in height. This greatly increased the capacity of the grain storage bins.

Third Floor

A stairway, located in the northeast corner of the second floor, provides access to the third floor. The grain elevators which begin in the basement, rise and terminate in the peak of the gable roof of the mill. The grain elevators dump their contents into a wood hopper which is supported on legs. Radiating from the bottom of the hopper are several square wood chutes which send the grain through

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Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County Wisconsin

the floor and walls to various hoppers and funnels. An apparatus located on the first floor of the main body of the mill, rotates and channels grain to the various chutes. At each side of the hopper platform are systems of belt driven gears that provided the power for the movement for the elevators. At the time that the mill was operated as a flouring mill the chutes would have also directed material to flour refining machinery located on the second floor.

The visible roof rafters have had the addition of cross beams for added support. The mortise and tenon assemblies connecting the large timbers can be easily seen throughout the third floor.

Alterations

Little, if any, alteration has been made to the building since the completion of the mill expansion in 1881 and the addition of the north and south one-and-one-half story wings in 1893. The interior of the mill remains entirely intact and is a time capsule of the automated operation of a flouring and grist mill.

Integrity

The building retains a high degree of integrity as can be seen in comparing the historic photos to the current photos of the building. Alterations to the building to expand the milling processes, all occurred within the period of significance.

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Section 8 Page 1

Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County, Wisconsin

Introduction

The Rising Star Flouring Mill is locally significant and eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the area of Industry. The mill contributed to the advancement of the local economy in and around Nelsonville and improved the lives of those who lived in the area serviced by the mill. Saw and flour mills were among the first industries to make an appearance in rural Wisconsin. It is an excellent intact example of an early manufacturing facility that produced flour from Wisconsin wheat. Flour was a vital staple for the logging industry and early settlers. As farmers began tilling the soils of the cut-over lumbering lands, they focused almost exclusively to growing soft winter wheat. Flour milling became the economic leader in Wisconsin's industrial economy from 1845 to 1875. It accounted for 40 percent of the total dollar amount generated by all of Wisconsin's manufacturing facilities.

In *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin: Volume 3*, it states that in the historic narrative of the development of the rich agricultural lands located in the Midwest, the flouring milling industry holds a place of considerable prominence. Every village that had a stream with a sufficient flow of water used that power to mill flour. The flour mill became the catalyst for the development of a settlement.³

Summary of Significance

The Rising Star Flouring Mill contributed to the early local agriculture and industrial economy of the Nelsonville area. The establishment of a flouring mill in an undeveloped area often triggered the establishment of a settlement. The Rising Star Flouring Mill was the catalyst for the development of the village of Nelsonville. The mill became the nucleus of the community, serving both as a commercial entity and as a local social gathering place.

The Rising Star Flouring Mill became an outlet for locally grown wheat grinding it into flour. Jerome Nelson purchased the local farmer's wheat crop by the bushel. Some flour was milled for consumption by the farmer who grew it. The rest was ground into flour and sold to lumber camps, local residents or shipped to larger cities. The Rising Star Flouring Mill not only helped to encourage settlement in the area but encouraged the farmer to continue to clear land and expand their wheat crop production.

³ Barbara Wyatt, Ed. *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin Vol. 3*, Historic Preservation Division State Historical Society of Wisconsin, June 1986

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Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County, Wisconsin

The Rising Star Mill also represents the evolution of the industrialization of the flour milling industry. The small rural flouring mills were the harbingers of the industrial revolution constantly replacing and adapting to new technology. Eventually, the small flour mills who could not adapt to the technological advancements in refining flour lost their business to centralized large mills located in cities.

Period of Significance

The period of significance extends from 1868 to 1968. This period of time begins with the year of construction and ends with the year 1968, which was the year in which the Rising Star Mill ceased operation. During its entire duration of operation, the Rising Star Mill received its power from the Waupaca River.

Portage County History

Portage County was formed in 1836 with lands that were removed from Brown County. In 1836, Portage County encompassed acreage that eventually would be removed to form Columbia County, Adams County, Marathon County, and Wood County. The new county was named Portage to promote the famous portage between the Wisconsin River and the Fox River. Plover was selected as the County Seat. A Portage County census that was taken in June of 1842 indicated that the population of the county was 646 people. Columbia County was removed in 1846, Adams County was removed in 1848, Marathon County was removed in 1850 and Wood County was removed in 1856 leaving Portage County with its present borders.⁴ The County Seat was moved to Stevens Point in 1869, in order to provide a centralized location for county business. A court house and jail were immediately erected in Stevens Point at a cost of \$32,000.⁵

The topography of Portage County is remarkably level with slight undulations exhibiting broken bluffs and uneven ridges. What were known as *openings* (small prairies) within the closely timbered white pine forests were appealing to farmers, and farms were established within these treeless areas. The Wisconsin, Big and Little Plover, Mill Creek, and Eau Pleine rivers, and Buena Vista Creek provided water for crops and would become highways for the lumbering boom to come.

The early recorded history of Portage County is written around the lumbering industry and more specifically the white pine. The average age of these behemoths was three-hundred years. A full grown Portage County white pine could range in height from 90 to 160 feet. The average diameter of these giants was thirty inches, with some having a diameter of six feet. The white pine logs were cut into lengths of twelve, fourteen or sixteen feet. The logs were floated to the local mills where booms

⁴ A. T. Andreas, *History of Northern Wisconsin*, (Western Historical Company, Chicago, 1881), pages 725-735

⁵ *A Standard History of Portage County Wisconsin*, (Lewis Publishing Company, Chicago, 1919), pages 51,56, 85-93

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Rising Star Flouring Mill
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pulled them out of the water and the mill sawed the logs into boards. A raft or *crib* was built with the boards. The cribs were sixteen feet long by twelve feet wide having twelve to twenty tiers of boards. A team of two to eight men rode the rafts, wrangling them down the Wisconsin River. Once the white pine was harvested, the cut-over land would not again produce a crop of white pines; however, the land remained fertile for hardwoods and crops.⁶

In the 1840s, lumbermen began pouring into the woods of Portage County. Water power sites were selected and lumber mills quickly established themselves along the various rivers. The huge white pines were reduced to boards and shingles which were rafted down the Wisconsin River to Galena, Dubuque, and St. Louis. By 1850, Stevens Point had established itself as the northern gateway to the Wisconsin pineries. It was estimated, in 1857, that lumbering in Portage County produced 20,000,000 board feet which had a value of \$236,000.

In the 1850s, the intensity of logging increased. It became necessary to obtain substantial supplies to sustain the loggers in the woods. The Wisconsin River was not conducive to barge traffic due to the shifting sands of the river. Bringing supplies cross country by wagon from southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois was costly. Some of Portage County's logging camps began to grow produce. Men who had originally come to Portage County to log, along with incoming settlers, put a plow to the prairie openings in the forests and began growing crops to sell to the logging camps.⁷

Charles Stoltenberg and a young man named Fairesticke immigrated to the United States from Germany in 1851. In 1852, they both homesteaded land in the area of what would become Nelsonville. Stoltenberg stated that at the time of their arrival there were no settlers living between their location (Nelsonville) and Stevens Point. Shortly thereafter Jerome Nelson came to the area to seek his fortune.⁸

Jerome Nelson and the Rising Star Flouring Mill

Jerome Nelson (b. 1-9-1829, d. 1-17-1897) was born in Attica, Genesee, New York the eldest son of Adin and Sally Nelson. Adin was the overseer for the construction of the New York Central Railroad in 1835. In 1836, the Nelson family moved to Hadley Township Michigan and Adin engaged in farming. After selling the farm the Nelson family moved to Fond du Lac County Wisconsin in 1850. There Adin opened a general store. After selling the general store in 1853, the Nelson family moved

⁶ A. T. Andreas, *History of Northern Wisconsin*, (Western Historical Company, Chicago, 1881), pages 725-735

⁷ *A Standard History of Portage County Wisconsin*, (Lewis Publishing Company, Chicago, 1919), pages 51,56, 85-93

⁸ Portage County Historical Society, "History of Nelsonville",
<http://www.pchswi.org/archives/communities/nelsonville.html>, pages 1-8

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to Amherst Township in Portage County Wisconsin where Adin engaged in farming and operated a small mercantile.

As a young boy, Jerome attended school in both New York and Michigan. He also assisted on the family's farms and in the mercantile. Jerome struck out on his own at the age of nineteen. He spent one summer in Chicago, and then traveled down the Mississippi to Vicksburg, Mississippi where he logged in the cypress swamps earning \$20 a month. Two years later, with the money that he had saved, he partnered with Frank Johnson in a cypress tree harvesting operation. This endeavor ended up to be a profitable venture. Jerome came to Wisconsin and for a short period of time and helped his father on the family farm. Jerome then left for Washington County where he opened a general merchandise store in Barton, Wisconsin. Here in May of 1853, Jerome married Marilla A. Yerkes (b. 1835, d. 5-14-1899).⁹ Jerome and Marilla had no children of their own, but adopted a daughter whom they named Flora S. (b. 1866, d. 1942). After two years he sold his store in Barton and set his sights on Amherst Township, Portage County, Wisconsin where Jerome's family was already living.

On November 28, 1854 Jerome Nelson purchased forty acres from the United States Government under the provisions of the Land Ordinance of 1785. On September 10, 1855 of the following year he made arrangements with Charles and Anna Stoltenberg to construct and maintain a dam across the Waupaca River at any point where the river crossed the N1/2 SE 1/2 of SENW in Sec, T & R. The dam, when completed, was agreed to be not be more than six feet in height. It was understood by both parties that the act of damming the Waupaca River would create a mill pond on a portion of the Stoltenberg land.¹⁰ At the location of his dam, Jerome built a cabin and then erected a sawmill on the west bank of the river. The 1860 United States Census listed Jerome's occupation as lumberman owning real estate which was valued at \$13,000.¹¹ Eventually, Nelsonville would grow around this mill and a flour mill erected later. In his honor, the village came to bear his name.¹²

When the Civil War broke out, Jerome Nelson enlisted in Company H Third Wisconsin Cavalry on October 15, 1861. The main mission of the Third Wisconsin Cavalry was to eliminate Quantrill's Raiders who were a pro-Confederate militia that included the likes of Jesse and Frank James. The conflict with Quantrill's Raiders mainly occurred in Missouri and Kansas. Jerome was promoted to the rank of 1st Lieutenant on March 9, 1865 and was mustered out on August 26, 1865.¹³

⁹ *Commemorative Biographical Record of the Upper Wisconsin Counties of Waupaca, Portage, Wood, Marathon, Lincoln, Oneida, Vilas, Langlade and Shawano*, (J. H. Beers Company, Chicago, 1895), pages 46-47

¹⁰ Malcolm Rosholt, *Our County Our Story Portage County Wisconsin*, (Worzalla Publishing Company, Stevens Point, Wisconsin, 1959) (Deeds Vol. 1, page 225), pages 335-340

¹¹ 1860 United States Federal Census

¹² Portage County Historical Society, "Rising Star Mill", http://www.pchswi.org/museums/mill/rising_star_mill.htm, pages 1-2

¹³ United States Civil War Soldier Records and Profiles, 1861-1865

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Jerome returned to his saw milling operation in Nelsonville after the war. In 1868 he built a buhr flouring mill on the east bank of the Waupaca River.¹⁴ The millstones were turned by the power of the river against the water wheel and ground wheat and rye into flour.¹⁵ In preparation for building the flouring mill, Jerome straightened the Waupaca River and created a new riverbed below the dam. A large area of the mill pond between the new flouring mill and Jerome's home was filled in.

The construction of a flouring mill was the first step toward establishing the village of Nelsonville. Over time, homes were built and businesses began to locate in the vicinity of the mill.¹⁶ An advertisement in the *Wisconsin Pinery Newspaper*, published in Stevens Point Wisconsin in 1870, stated that the Rising Star Flouring Mill's proprietor Jerome Nelson offered custom wheat grinding.¹⁷ In 1870, the United States Census listed Jerome's occupation as *miller* owning real estate with a value of \$21,500.¹⁸

In 1873, Jerome erected a steam powered sawmill on the site of his old sawmill which was located on the opposite bank from the Rising Star Flouring Mill. A newspaper article stated that Jerome also intended to use steam to power the flouring mill at times of low water.¹⁹ By 1874, Jerome was sawing logs into boards at rate of 500,000 feet to 1,000,000 feet a year at his Nelsonville sawmill.²⁰ Jerome purchased a large flouring mill in Amherst, Wisconsin in November of 1877 (now demolished). The mill was known as the Red Mill.²¹ Jerome changed the name of the mill to the Excelsior Mill. The Excelsior Mill was completely refitted in January of 1880 and Jerome's son-in-law, John Loberg, was placed in charge of operations.²²

Jerome made several improvements to the Rising Star Flouring Mill in November of 1881. These improvements included a new water wheel (turbine), a new flume and a new tail race.²³ The newspaper reported that these improvements cost \$2,500. A flour purifier was also purchased.²⁴ In

¹⁴ *Commemorative Biographical Record of the Upper Wisconsin Counties of Waupaca, Portage, Wood, Marathon, Lincoln, Oneida, Vilas Langlade and Shawano*, (J. H. Beers Company, Chicago, 1895), pages 46-47

¹⁵ Jane Nolan and Linda Weintraut, National Register Nomination "Grain Mills in Indiana", June 1, 1990, pages 1-39

¹⁶ *History of Nelsonville*, by Donna Nelson and her class at Jerome Nelson Graded School, c1930

¹⁷ Malcolm Rosholt, *Our County Our Story Portage County Wisconsin*, (Worzalla Publishing Company, Stevens Point, Wisconsin, 1959), pages 335-340

¹⁸ 1870 United States Federal Census

¹⁹ *Stevens Point Journal*, October 11, 1873, "Amherst Items"

²⁰ *Stevens Point Journal*, March 8, 1879

²¹ *Stevens Point Journal*, November 17, 1877

²² *Stevens Point Journal*, January 10, 1880

²³ *Stevens Point Journal*, November 5, 1881

²⁴ *Stevens Point Journal*, December 10, 1881

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1883, Jerome traveled to Milwaukee to purchase iron rollers to replace the original millstones.²⁵ Jerome was paying \$1.06 a bushel for wheat and was taking in 300 to 400 bushels every day.²⁶ In May of 1886, the Stevens Point Journal reported that Jerome was overhauling the mill at Nelsonville once again. New centrifugal reels, dust collectors and aspirators were placed in the mill.²⁷

In October of 1887, Jerome and partners built a sawmill at the head of North Pelican Lake alongside the Soo Railroad.²⁸ Known as the Nelson Lumber & Boom Company it was managed by Jerome's longtime friend J. O. Moen.²⁹ Once opened, the mill harvested ten million feet of lumber each year along the Pelican River in Oneida County.³⁰ Jerome Nelson served one term in the Wisconsin State Legislature during 1887 as a member of the committee on incorporations.³¹

When more power was needed to increase operations at the Rising Star Flouring Mill, Nelson obtained permission to raise the dam another three feet to a height of nine feet in 1893. It was during this same period that the north and south mill wing additions were added.³²

One detriment to the growth of Nelsonville and the Rising Star Flouring Mill was that the railroad never built a spur to the mill. The closest access to the railroad was in Amherst Junction, which was located two miles away. During the height of production, all surplus flour was hauled by wagon to the rail line access.³³

Jerome Nelson passed away on January 17, 1897 from Bright's disease.³⁴ Jerome Nelson left a vast estate. Minus the mills at Nelsonville and the lower mill which had previously been conveyed to John S. and Flora Loberg, his estate was valued at between \$810,000 and \$830,000. Jerome expressed in his will that he wanted his executors, John O. Moen and John S. Loberg, to take time to settle his land and lumber interests so to not greatly sacrifice its value. Jerome Nelson was buried in the Greenville Cemetery in Amherst, Wisconsin.³⁵

²⁵ Portage County Historical Society, "Rising Star Mill", http://www.pchswilorg/museums/mill/rising_star_mill.htm, pages 1-2

²⁶ *Stevens Point Journal*, March 1883

²⁷ *Stevens Point Journal*, May 29, 1886

²⁸ *Stevens Point Journal*, October 29, 1887.

²⁹ *The Gazette*, January 20, 1897, Obituary for Jerome Nelson

³⁰ *Commemorative Biographical Record of the upper Wisconsin Counties of Waupaca, Portage, Wood, Marathon, Lincoln, Oneida, Vilas, Langlade and Shawano*, (J. H. Beer. Company, Chicago, 1895), pages 46-47

³¹ *Stevens Point Journal*, January 22, 1887

³² Portage County Historical Society, "Rising Star Mill", http://www.pchswi.org/museums/mill/rising_star_mill.htm, pages 1-2

³³ Interview January 14, 2017 with Jim Walker

³⁴ *Stevens Point Journal*, February 23, 1897

³⁵ Find a Grave Index, 1600s -Current, Ancestry.com

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John Loberg leased the Rising Star Flouring Mill to Matthias Wick from Stevens Point, Wisconsin. A year later, the lease was given to B. E. Dwinell from Amherst, Wisconsin. In March of 1890, the Portage County Gazette reported Dwinell purchased Loberg's Eclipse Mill, forty-one acres of land and two houses for \$8,000. Loberg returned to Nelsonville where he operated the Rising Star Flouring Mill until the spring of 1916 when he sold the mill to the Jackson Milling Company from Stevens Point, Wisconsin for \$6,000.³⁶

The Village of Nelsonville was incorporated on February 13, 1913. At the time of incorporation, there were 177 people living within the village. During this period of time the community supported a blacksmith shop, barbershop, four service stations, creamery, elementary school, doctor and the Rising Star Flouring Mill.³⁷

The Jackson Milling Company made improvements to the mill and converted the mill to grinding animal feed. The rollers were replaced with a hammer mill and the flour milling equipment was replaced with an automated corn sheller and machine which ground the corn in finer proportions for chicken feed. In 1924, the Amherst Electric Company purchased the mill and installed a generator providing electricity to the area in and around Nelsonville. The Amherst Electric Company ceased electrical generation 1936, because they could not profitably generate enough electricity. It is presumed that milling operations continued.

The mill was sold to Ben Cycosh and then to John Koziczkowski in 1946 who continued to grind animal feed. In 1968, after operating for more than 100 years, the mill ceased operation. It was the last gristmill in the area grinding feed for dairy farmers that still utilized water power.

The Department of Natural Resources purchased the land and the mill in 1984. In January of 1985 the mill was sold to the Portage County Historical Society. The Department of Natural Resources removed the dam and spillway in 1988 restoring the Tomorrow River (as it is now known) to its original and natural flow. The Tomorrow River is currently managed as Class A trout waters.³⁸

The Portage County Historical Society operates four museums in Portage County, publishes local history books and supports a large archive at the Archive Center, University of Stevens Point, Stevens

³⁶ Portage County Historical Society, "Rising Star Mill", http://www.pchswi.org/museums/mill/rising_star_mill.htm, pages 1-2

³⁷ Portage County Historical Society, "History of Nelsonville", <http://www.pchswi.org/archives/communities/nelsonville.html>, pages 1-8

³⁸ Portage County Historical Society, "Rising Star Mill", http://www.pchswi.org/museums/mill/rising_star_mill.htm, pages 1-2

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Point, Wisconsin. The mill is maintained through fund raising events such as an annual art show and sale, concerts, movie night and a yearly open house. The building is also available for meetings and other community events.

The Grain Mill

Wheat evolved from three strains of wild grasses that were crossed together between 10,000 B.C. and 15,000 B.C. in the hilly upper reaches of the Tigris-Euphrates drainage basins. It was necessary for early man to find a way to store nutrients during the period of time when no fresh food was available. Wheat grains lent well to that storage. Until about 3,000 B.C., these wheat grains were pounded with stone mortars to make a coarse meal which was then mixed with water to form porridge.

In 3,000 B.C. the Egyptians developed a grinding process whereby the grain was crushed between two rolling stones. This produced flour that was refined enough for baking. The Egyptians also mastered the use of yeast to make breads rise and began baking bread in ovens. To illustrate the importance of wheat, grains of wheat were even placed in tombs to sustain the Egyptian kings in the afterlife.

In 500 B.C. the Greeks improved the grinding process through the use of rotary grindstones mobilized by animal power. However, the Romans are credited with giving the world white bread. They refined the flour to a point that it became a creamy white and was only sold to the upper class. This refining process would be re-visited once again during the 1800s. The lumbermen and settlers in the United States needed long-lasting flour. The miller and baker had discovered that the germ of the wheat contained oils and these oils tended to go rancid over time. The germ and the aleurone (outer layer) were removed from the wheat grain leaving flour that was virtually nutrient free. The white flour was flavorless to rats and insects and thereby solved the problem of spoilage or contamination.³⁹ In 1941, the National Nutrition Conference for Defense began to study the American diet. Their findings were that the white flour which was being produced was virtually nutrient free. These findings led the United States Government to require that flour be enriched with thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, and iron.

Wheat Production in Wisconsin

After the loggers removed the white pine, the cutover land was settled by farmers who planted wheat. Wisconsin's 1839 wheat production was approximately 200,000 bushels, however within ten years that harvest grew to four and a quarter million bushels. Wheat became the most important crop in Wisconsin and accounted for forty percent of Wisconsin's industrial output followed only by the lumber industry at twenty-five percent. The golden year for wheat in Wisconsin was 1860 when twenty-nine million bushels were harvested. By 1870, farmers began to realize that growing wheat on

³⁹ Wheat a Plant That Changed the World, "The History of Wheat", www.allaboutwheat.info/history.html, pages 1-14

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the same field year after year was depleting the nutrients in the soil. The United States Government suggested that farmers abstain from growing wheat and in its place grow oats, buckwheat, clover, flax, or hemp. The flour milling industry reached its peak in 1880 with 705 flouring mills scattered throughout Wisconsin employing 2,418 workers. Total flour production for 1880 was valued at \$27,640,000. As the farmers in Wisconsin transitioned from wheat growing to dairying, corn, and oats became the primary crops.

In the early to mid-1800s, as the development of the United States marched west to the forests and prairies of the central United States, grain milling became a highly decentralized phenomenon. Hundreds of small mills located on moving streams and utilized water power to operate their mills. The millwright would search for a good location along a stream with a sufficient flow of water. In most instances a dam would be constructed across the moving water in a very unsophisticated manner not much more complicated than that of a beaver dam. Brush was piled into the stream and boulders were piled on the brush to crush it. Smaller rocks and then gravel was placed on the top of the dam to seal out the water.⁴⁰ In 1840, Wisconsin's Territorial legislature passed the Mill Dam Act. The laws governing this act applied to non-navigable streams (those streams that would not float a sawed log). Because the mills were so important to the economy of Wisconsin, the sawed log test was largely ignored and dams were built wherever someone was inclined to do so.

During the time period from 1730 to 1940 two types of flouring mills were constructed; the buhr mills (1730 – 1880) which utilized two horizontal grooved stones. The upper discoidal millstone revolved upon a lower stationary bed stone. The discoidal stone was mounted onto a shaft with a rynd. The force and weight of the moving water turned the waterwheel which provided power to a system of gears that turned the shaft and finally the grinding stones. The grain was fed through a funnel and was then rubbed between the two stones. The crushed grain spilled outward and was collected and strained through silk screens (bolted) before it was placed in sacks.⁴¹

Roller mills (1870 – 1940) replaced the stone operated buhr mill with iron rollers which were developed in Hungary. The rollers crushed and pressed the grain.⁴² Milling techniques had remained unchanged from the fifteenth century until a young American inventor, Oliver Evans, wrote the book *The Young Mill-Wright and Miller's Guide* in 1785. His concepts, equations and drawings illustrated an alternate method of grinding wheat and precipitated flouring mills to remove buhr mill stones and install rollers.⁴³ However, these advancements did not reach the central United States until mid-1800s when Joseph Dort revised Evan's concept and created a grain raising process within the flouring mill.

⁴⁰ Jerry Apps and Allen Strang, *Mills of Wisconsin*, (Tamarack Press, Madison, Wisconsin, 1980), page viii - 85

⁴¹ Leslie C. Swanson, *Old Mills in the Mid-West*, (Self-published, 1963) pages 3-42

⁴² Jane Nolan and Linda Weintraut, National Register Nomination for *Grain Mills in Indiana*, June 1, 1990, pages 1-21

⁴³ Oliver Evans, *The Young Mill-Wright and Miller's Guide*, (Self Published by the author, Philadelphia, 1795), figure #10

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Instead of hoisting a sack of wheat to the top of the mill where the wheat undertook a three-process system of cleaning, grinding and bolting (screening through silk cloth) through the means of gravity, the Dort process utilized several mechanical principals. A mechanically operated elevator sat on legs in the center of the building. The elevator operated an endless belt that contained small buckets which lifted the grain from the ground floor to the attic. Gravity fed the grain from floor to floor. Conveyor belts moved the wheat from one machine to another where individual functions were performed. Finally, a hopper spread the flour for cooling before the flour was bagged. This process increased the ability to further refine the flour.⁴⁴

Advancement in Milling Technology

The purification of flour advanced greatly when flouring mills switched from the mill stone to iron rollers. The iron rollers supported numerous spiral grooves and ridges. The rollers opened the grain without crushing it. Through a gradual reduction process, the grain was cleaned, dampened, blended, broken, sifted several times, purified, reduced by machinery that moved the grain from one device to another. The mechanization of the flour mill was promoted to the farmer as a process that went “from wagon to wagon again.” This mechanization was the first time, on a major scale, that an entire industry operated automatically. Evans had envisioned that the miller’s job should be to monitor the system. The mill should operate automatically entirely on its own.

The E. P. Allis Company Reliance Works, Milwaukee, Wisconsin pioneered the production of American made iron rollers. They had been suppliers of millstones and mill supplies for years. In 1876 the E. P. Allis Company Reliance Works displayed their cast-iron rollers at the 1876 World’s Fair in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The popularity of the roller mill soon made the E. P. Allis Company Reliance Works the leading producer of American made rollers.

Water Power for Mills

Flouring mills generally utilized three types of wood waterwheels: the overshot where the water entered the wheel at the top, the breastshot where the water entered the wheel at the midway point on the wheel and the undershot where the water entered the wheel at the bottom. The wood water wheel required frequent maintenance and because of that some mills replaced their wood wheel with a metal wheel. American James Leffel patented an iron turbine in 1862 which operated horizontally, required less water to operate and did not freeze up in the winter. This advancement revolutionized how the flour mill manufactured power and the turbine retained popularity until replaced by electric motors.⁴⁵

A race was constructed in the stream in order to direct the water power toward the upright wheel along the side of the mill. The water flowed into the water wheel through the race under the mill and then

⁴⁴ Jane Nolan and Linda Weintraut, National Register Nomination for *Grain Mills in Indiana*, June 1, 1990, pages 1-21

⁴⁵ Jerry Apps and Allen Strang, *Mills of Wisconsin*, (Tamarack Press, Madison, Wisconsin, 1980), pages vii - 85

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returned to the stream. The moving waterwheel transferred power to a shaft that ran into the mill and turned the millstones.⁴⁶

Community Impact

A saw mill or flouring mill often triggered the growth of a settlement. The flouring mill became the nucleus of the community, producing a product that sustained the settler year round. The mill served the community both commercially and socially. The farmer had an outlet for his crops and in return received flour for baking. Locals would also gather at the mill to share the news of the day, debate political views or post notices of upcoming farm auctions, church socials and other local events on the walls of the mill.

The millpond was also an attractive and important feature in the community. It became popular with both adults and children as a popular year-round fishing spot. The smooth frozen surface in the winter became a gathering place for ice skaters. Millponds were also the source of the village's ice supply before electrification. In case of a fire in the village, the millpond was a reservoir of available water.

In the beginning, the flouring mill was a simple structure utilizing the milling stones process. As methods of milling flour progressed, the mill structure had to adapt to changes. When rollers were installed and the automation practices of Oliver Evans were adopted, the space needed for the installation of new equipment caused the mills to take on a different look with a more factory-like appearance. Flouring mills became two to two-and-one-half stories in height to accommodate the milling equipment and the gravity process. The flouring mill had to be built on a massive stone foundation in order to withstand flooding and constant vibration. The roof form was predominately gable with wide service doors. Large windows were needed to provide adequate lighting. Because of the flammability of grain dust, millers preferred natural light and did not use light that originated from a flame.

The milling industry did not experience major technological advancements after 1890, only refinements. Steam and turbine operation merely changed the power source not the principals of milling. The largest impact came when the excess power created by the turbines provided the first electricity for local farms, homes and businesses.

In a matter of a few decades, a transition occurred from the decentralized small mills on nearly every stream in Wisconsin to a concentration of larger mills in populous industrial centers.⁴⁷ Many small flouring millers could not afford to expand or keep up with the latest technology and gradually went

⁴⁶ Jane Nolan and Linda Weintraut, National Register Nomination for *Grain Mills in Indiana*, June 1, 1990, pages 1-21

⁴⁷ Barbara Wyatt, *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin: Volume 3*, (Historic Preservation Division State Historical Society of Wisconsin, June 1986)

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out of business. The expansion of the railroad and roadway systems decreased the costs for raw grain transportation and flouring milling became centralized in large centers such as Milwaukee or Neenah. These larger centers tended to be the hubs for the national railway system, facilitating the shipment of the processed bagged flour. Several small local flouring mills, such as the Rising Star Flouring Mill, began to convert from flour to grinding livestock feed and survived for an extended period of time. What is remarkable is that the Rising Star Flouring Mill used the waterpower from the Waupaca River to grind feed until it's closing in 1968.

Conclusion: Criterion A - History

The Rising Star Flouring Mill draws much of its significance from the bond that the mill formed between agriculture and industry. The establishment of a flouring mill on a stream in a rural area inevitably attracted settlement. The flouring mill was essential for the economic development of a locality and it became a focal point for daily life. The flouring mill was not only a place of commercial transactions but it was also an important social gathering place for area residents to share the news of the day.

The flouring mill was the instrument for turning locally grown wheat into the commodity of flour. The wheat that the farmer produced provided an income for his family. In essence, Jerome Nelson became the middleman for the farmer by purchasing his wheat crop, milling it into flour and marketing it locally and in larger cities such as Stevens Point and Wausau. Having a flouring mill inspired the development of farms in the surrounding area. The farmer was encouraged to clear more land and to increase his wheat yield. In retrospect, the collective effect of the hundreds of small flouring mills that dotted the Midwest established the area as the bread basket of the nation.

The flouring mill was the second industrial factory to appear along the streams and rivers of the emerging frontier. It followed closely behind sawmills that were built by the logging industry. The flouring mill utilized the same source of power as the saw mill, moving water, which provided a never-ending supply of power. The rural flouring mill, although isolated, did not escape the impact of the Industrial Revolution. The flouring mills were the harbingers of the industrial revolution constantly replacing and adapting to new technology.⁴⁸

Jerome Nelson was a leader in both the flour milling industry and the lumbering industry and was often recognized as such in the Steven Point newspapers. He participated in both industries until his death, but his pride rested with his flouring mills. Early United States censuses listed his occupation as lumberman, but once he established his flouring mills he called himself a miller. That pride in

⁴⁸ Jerry Apps and Allen Strang, *Mills of Wisconsin*, (Tamarack Press, Madison, Wisconsin, 1980) page vii - 85

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producing the best possible flour led Jerome to recognize and embrace new technologies. In 1881, Jerome added a water wheel (turbine) and increased the water power with a new flume and race. In 1883, Jerome replaced the outdated mill stones with iron rollers. Concurrent with the addition of milling rollers was the introduction of a variety of flour processing machinery which moved the wheat through a series of specific steps and processes to create purified white flour. Often, changes to the configuration of the flouring mill needed to be executed to accommodate the new machinery. The conversion from stone to iron rollers marked a turning point in the flour milling industry. When more power was needed due to increases in operation, Jerome raised the height of the dam by an additional three feet.

The changes in flour milling technology eventually contributed to the industry's demise in rural America. It led to a gradual centralization of the industry in larger cities that were located on major rivers and were hubs for rail transportation. Many small mills just could not afford to purchase the machinery needed to produce a high grade of white flour in large quantities.

Comparative Analysis

As previously stated, mills were common in the early era of the development of many communities. The nearest flouring mill was in Amhurst, only a few miles away, and also owned by Jerome Nelson. This mill has been demolished. The next nearest mill is in Iola, Waupaca County, and is called the J. & C. Wipf Mill, which was a grist mill. The Wipf Mill is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NR # 87002108). While the Wipf Mill has excellent integrity, the Rising Star mill has a more intact collection of historic milling equipment. The Rising Star Mill compares favorably to the Wipf Mill, having high exterior and interior integrity and is an excellent example of a flouring mill.

Conclusion

The Rising Star Flouring Mill is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, distinguished for contributing to the early local agricultural and industrial economy of the Nelsonville area. From its start as a flouring mill, through the industrialization of its operation and until its closing in 1968, it served the needs of area farmers and Nelsonville residents. The mill operated over a one hundred year span and its production of flour, and later feed, was critical to the region. The Rising Star Flouring Mill retains a strong degree of integrity on both the interior and exterior and exhibits the distinctive appearance found only in early rural flouring mills. The Rising Star Flouring Mill's utilitarian design expresses dignity and character. The mill continues to exhibit integrity of location, design, setting, workmanship, feeling and association and is a highly distinguishable area landmark and symbol of the nineteenth century industrialization of flour milling. Importantly, it remains as an excellent example of how the flouring mill exemplified the sustaining relationship between agriculture and industry.

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Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County, Wisconsin

Stevens Point Journal, January 10, 1880

Stevens Point Journal, November 5, 1881

Stevens Point Journal, December 10, 1881

Stevens Point Journal, March 1883

Stevens Point Journal, December 15, 1883

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1860 United States Federal Census

1870 United States Federal Census

History of Nelsonville, by Donna Nelson and her class at Jerome Nelson Graded School, c1930

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United States Department of the Interior
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Section 9 Page 3

Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County, Wisconsin

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Section 10 Page 1

Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County, Wisconsin

Verbal Boundary Description:

Township 23 North, Range 10 East

Section 5: A part of the NW1/4 of the SE1/4 described as follows: Commencing at a point on the North line of First St. 99 feet Sw'ly from the SE corner of Outlot 1 of the Original Plat of Nelsonville; thence running SE'ly at right angles with First St. 145 feet from the North line of said st.; thence SW'ly to a point on the forty line, 1,017 1/2 feet East of the SW corner of the NW1/4 of the SE1/4 of Section 5, thence West on said forty line 134 feet, thence NW'ly to a point on the line of Mill Dam 270 feet West from the starting point; thence NE'ly on the line of the Mill Dam 270 feet to the place of beginning; including all flowage rights owned by Barney Koziczowski in the N1/2 of the SE1/4; ALSO all flowage rights on the E1/2 of the SW1/4, and the S1/2 of the SE1/4 of the NW 1/4 of Section 5, including the Dam across the Waupaca/Tomorrow/River, EXCEPT that part thereof conveyed to Portage County, WI., as described in Book 193 of Deeds, page 350.

Boundary Justification:

The nominated property coincides with the legal parcel. The pentagonal shaped property has a clearly defined north property line (First Street) and a clearly defined east property line (Highway Q). The property is bounded on the west by, but does not include, the Waupaca River. The remaining three boundary lines were drawn by the State of Wisconsin when purchasing the property from Barney Koziczowski in 1984. The State of Wisconsin is the owner of the land on which the Rising Star Mill, owned by the Portage County Historical Society, rests. Due to the number of acres of land owned by Jerome Nelson in and around the mill and the Village of Nelsonville, an accurate depiction of what land was the officially attached to the mill site cannot be produced with any certainty. This boundary excludes extraneous acreage, but enough to maintain the mill's setting.

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National Park Service

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Continuation Sheet

Section photos Page 1

Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County, Wisconsin

Name of Property:	Rising Star Flouring Mill
City or Vicinity:	Nelsonville
State:	Wisconsin
Name of Photographer:	Patricia Lacey
Date of Photograph:	January 2017
Location of Original Digital Files:	Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI
Number of Photographs:	23

Photo 1
Main East-facing facade
Camera facing northwest

Photo 2
Main East-facing facade
Camera facing southwest

Photo 3
Main entry, porch grain hopper
Camera facing southwest

Photo 4
North-facing facade
Camera facing southeast

Photo 5
1947 Addition
Camera facing northwest

Photo 6
View of mill looking north
Camera facing north

Photo 7
West-facing facade
Camera facing southeast

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Continuation Sheet

Section photos Page 2

Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County, Wisconsin

Photo 8

Jerome Nelson's milling office
Camera facing northeast

Photo 9

Hammermill located in basement
Camera facing southeast

Photo 10

Heavy timber post and bolster located on first floor
Camera facing northwest

Photo 11

Machine to process corn into fine chick feed
Camera facing west

Photo 12

Grain elevator with door open showing cups
Camera facing north

Photo 13

Large gear in power house
Camera facing north

Photo 14

Gear wheel from power house
Camera facing northwest

Photo 15

Grain funnel and two bagging chutes
Camera facing north

Photo 16

Grain elevators passing through second floor
Camera facing west

Photo 17

Grain storage bin in one-half story of the 1893 1 and a half story addition

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section photos Page 3

Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County, Wisconsin

Camera facing northeast

Photo 18

Third floor hopper where grain is dumped from elevators

Camera facing east

Photo 19

Pipe from hopper conveying grain to various chutes

Camera facing west

Photo 20

Chutes passing through third floor channeling grain toward destination

Camera facing northeast

Photo 21

Belt and pulley system mounted in third floor

Camera facing northeast

Photo 22

Additional belt and pulley system mounted in third floor

Camera facing northeast

Photo 23

Mortise and Tenon joint

Camera facing north

United States Department of the Interior
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Section figures Page 1

Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County, Wisconsin

___ Insert Figures

List of Figures

- Figure 1: First floor plan
- Figure 2: Second floor plan
- Figure 3: Third floor plan
- Figure 4: Site plan
- Figure 5: Illustration of mechanized milling machinery
- Figure 6: 1915 Plat map
- Figure 7: Historic photograph, c1890
- Figure 8: Historic photograph, c1920
- Figure 9: Historic photograph, c1950
- Figure 10: Historic photograph, c1950

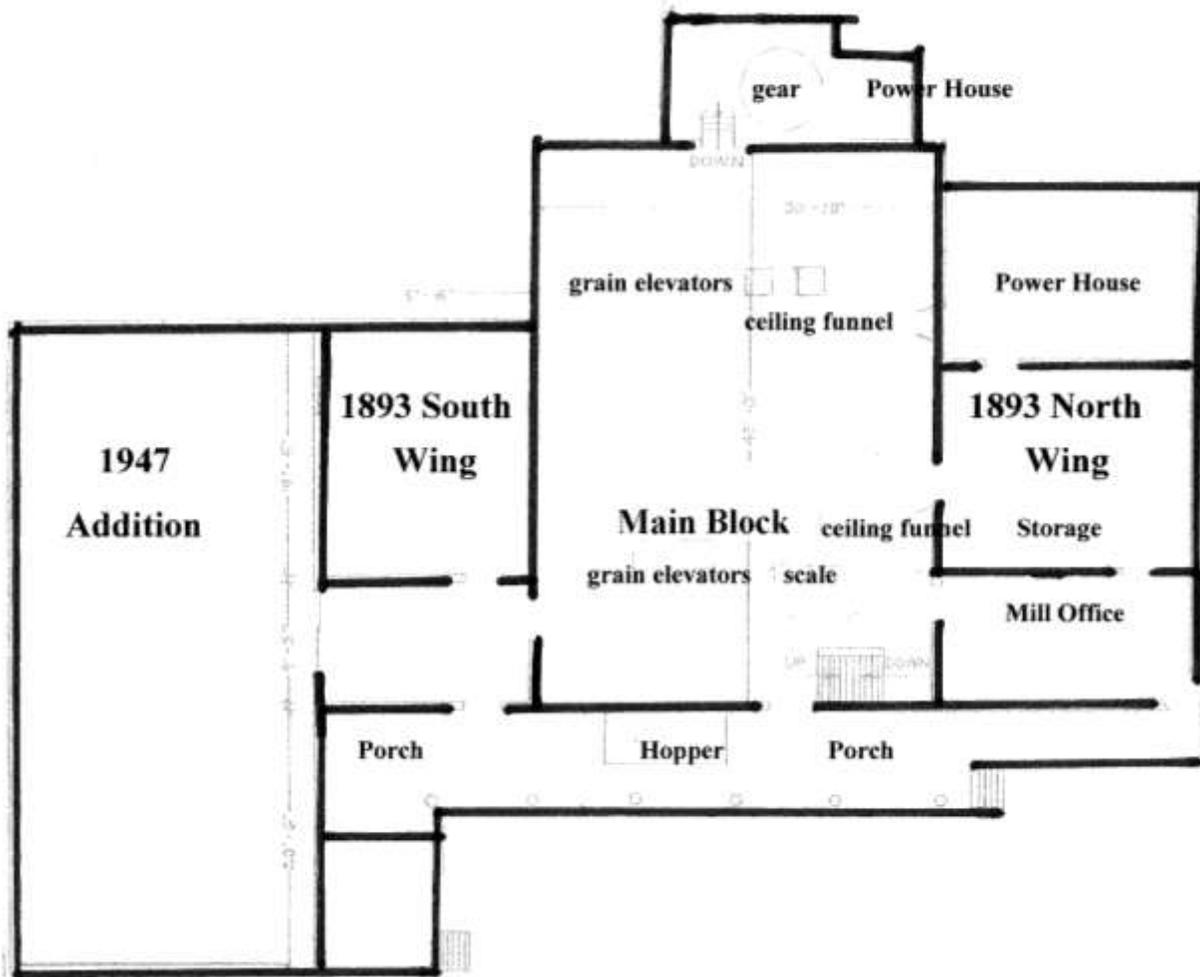
**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

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Continuation Sheet**

Section figures Page 2

Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County, Wisconsin

Figure 1: First floor plan
Not to Scale



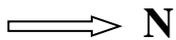
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Section figures Page 3

Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County, Wisconsin

Figure 2: Second floor plan
Not to Scale



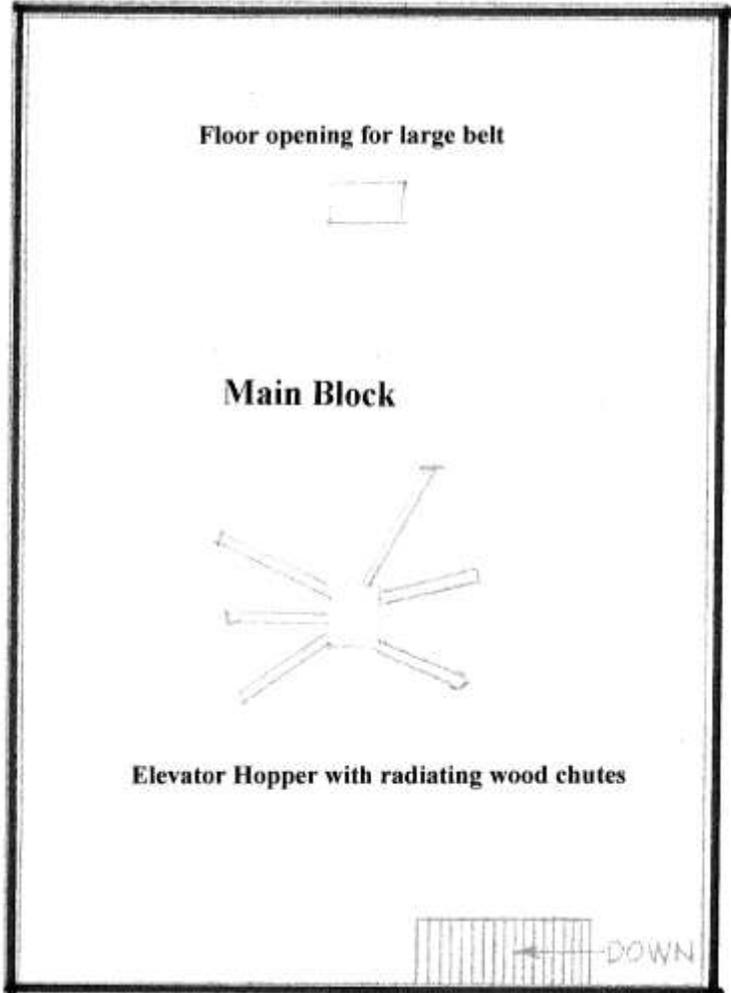
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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section figures Page 4

Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County, Wisconsin

Figure 3: Third floor plan
Not to Scale



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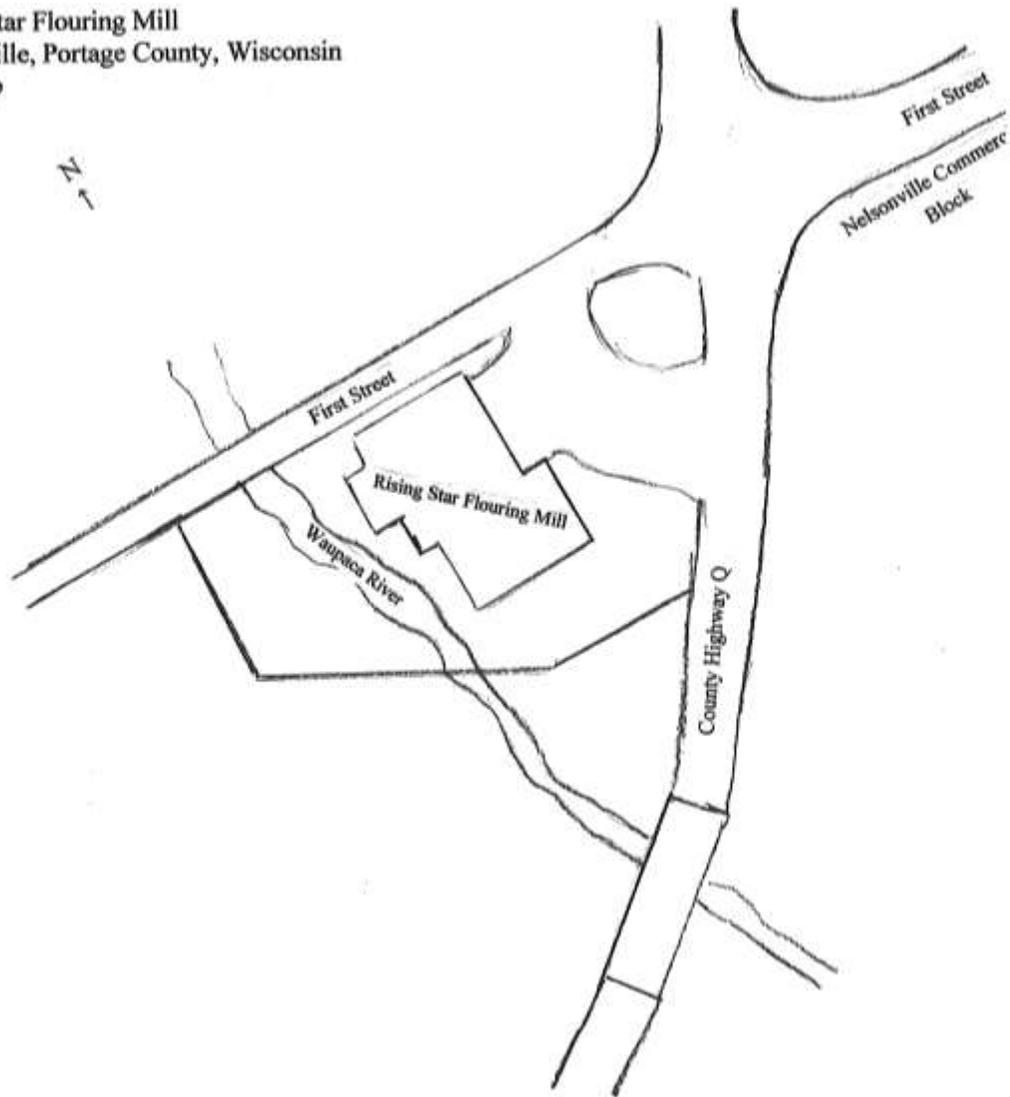
National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section figures Page 5

Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County, Wisconsin

Figure 4: Site plan
Not to Scale

Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County, Wisconsin
Site Map



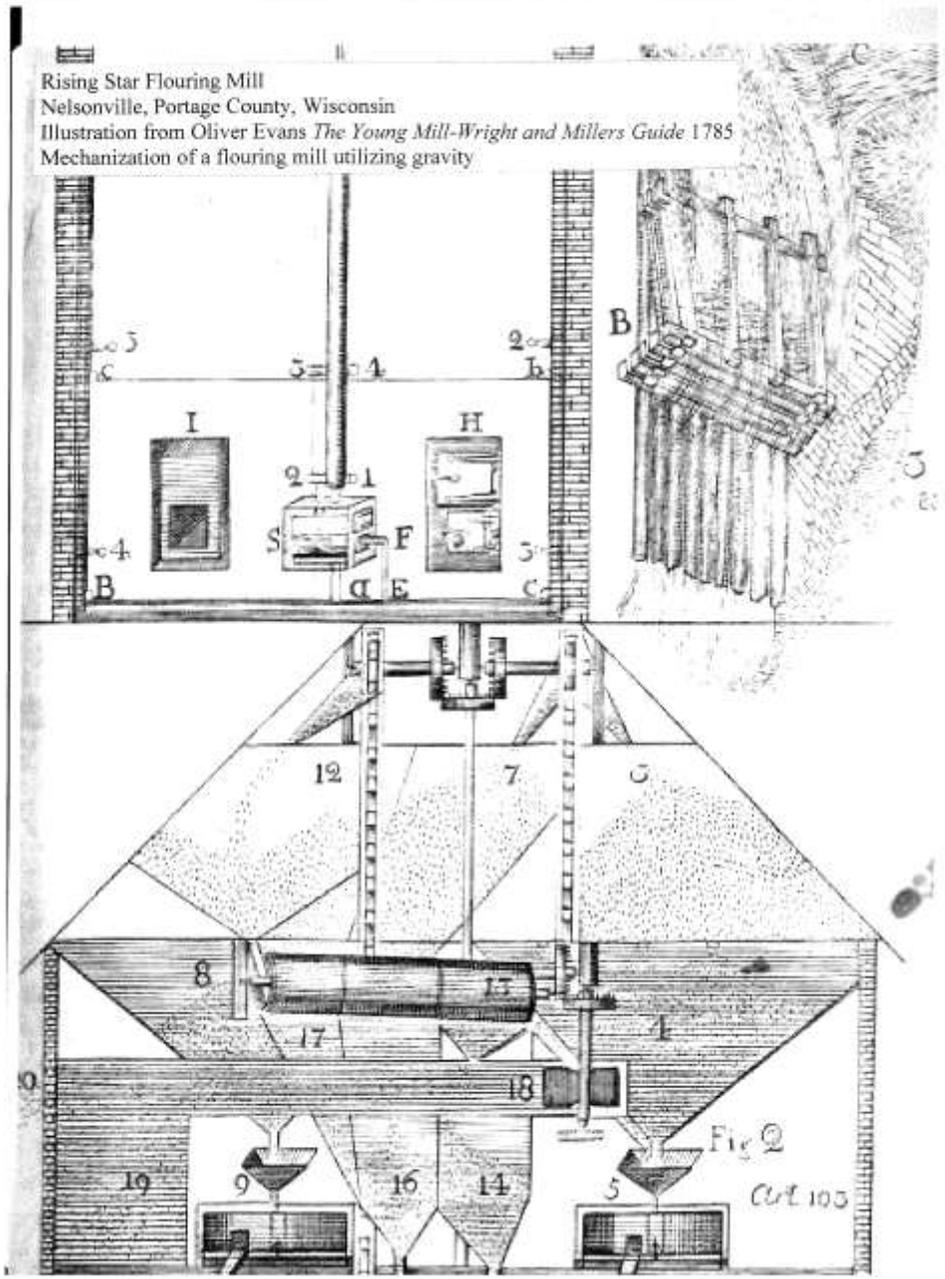
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Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County, Wisconsin

Section figures Page 6

Figure 5: Illustration of mechanized milling machinery



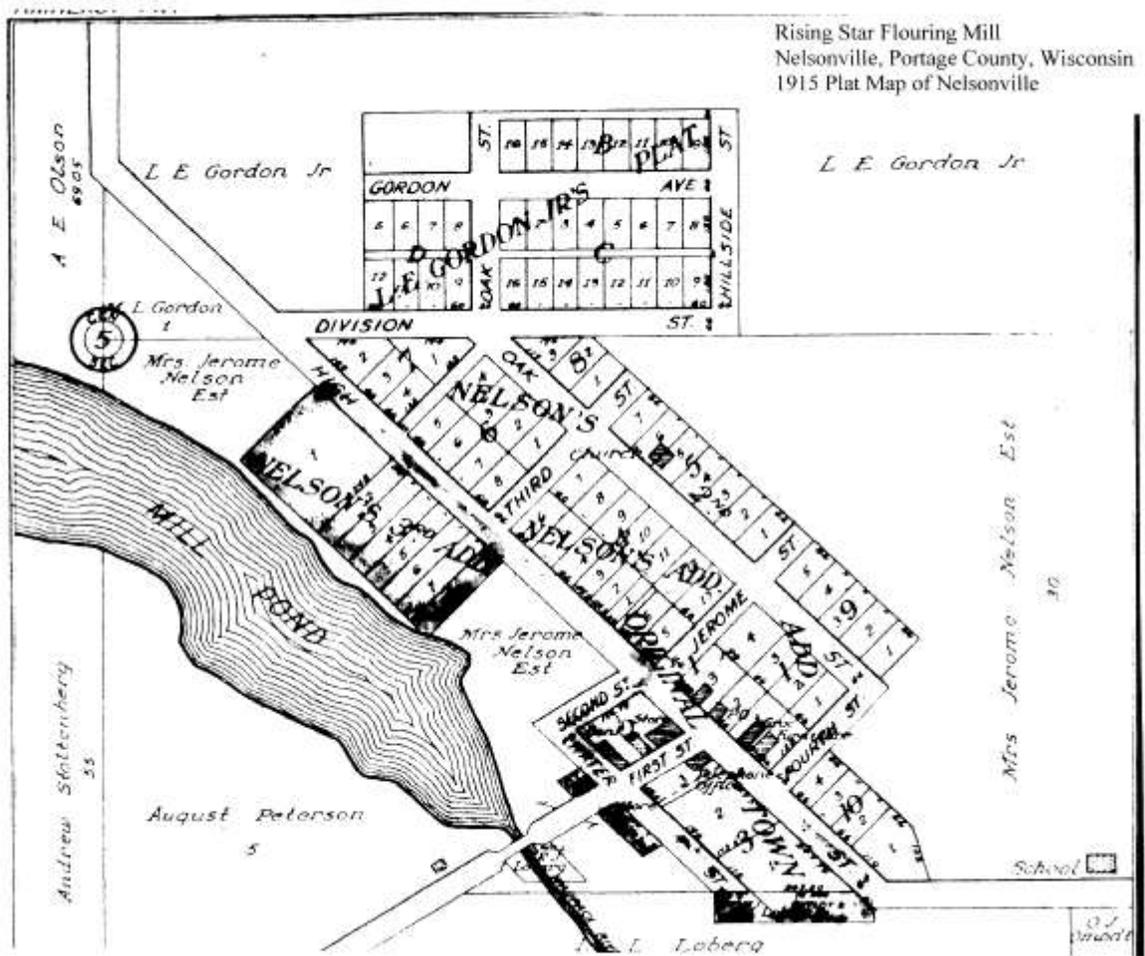
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Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County, Wisconsin

Section figures Page 7

Figure 6: 1915 Plat map



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Continuation Sheet

Section figures Page 8

Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County, Wisconsin

Figure 7: Historic photograph, c1890

J.S. LOBERG FLOUR MILL NELSONVILLE WIS



Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County, Wisconsin
Photo C1890

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Section figures Page 9

Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County, Wisconsin

Figure 8: Historic photograph, c1920



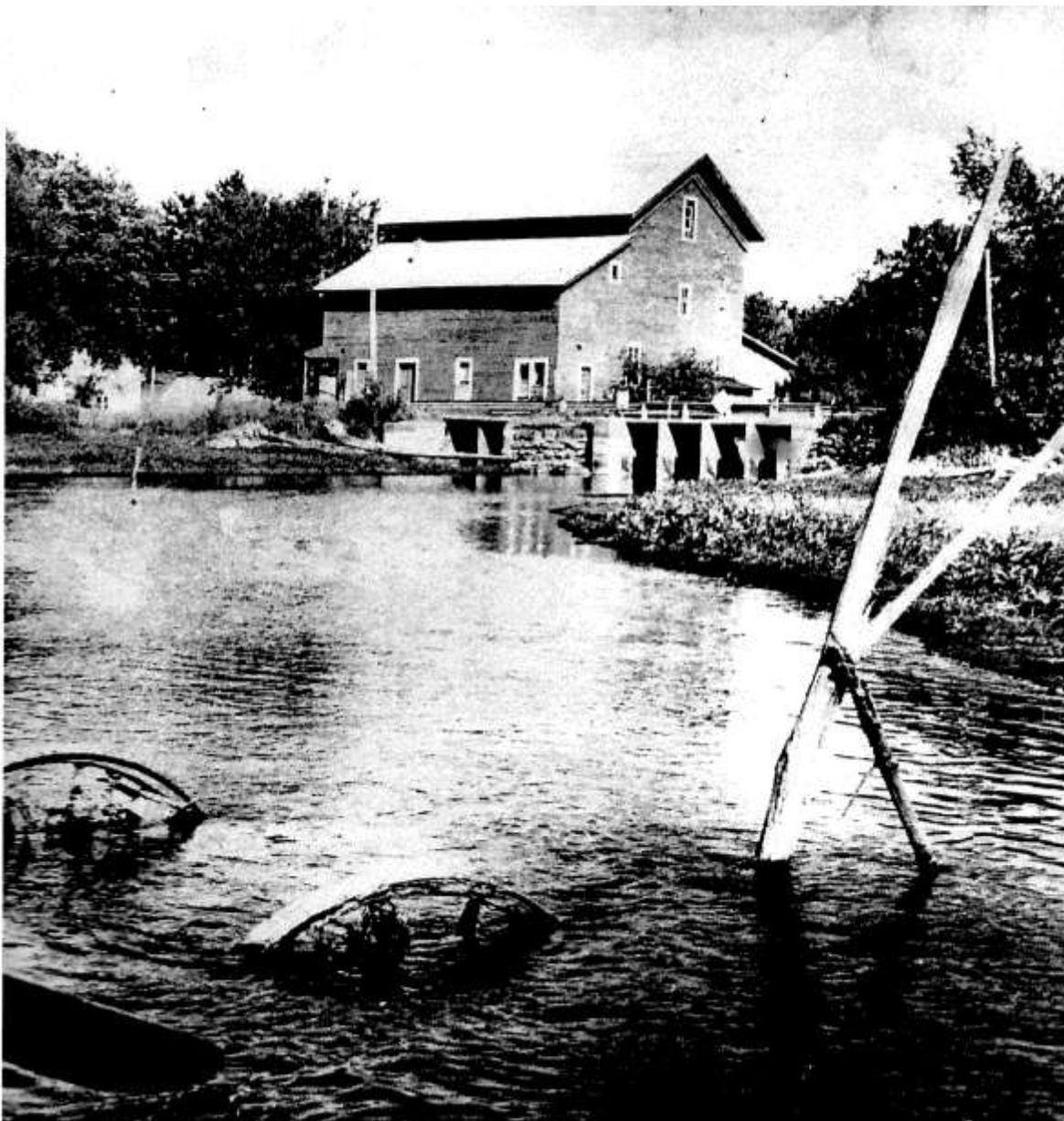
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Section figures Page 10

Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County, Wisconsin

Figure 9: Historic photograph, c1950



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Continuation Sheet

Section figures Page 11

Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County, Wisconsin

Figure 10: Historic photograph, c1950

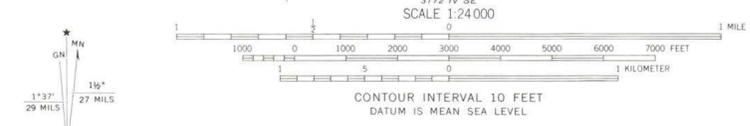


Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville, Portage County, Wisconsin
Photo C1950

Rising Star Flouring Mill
Nelsonville Portage Co
Wisconsin
16T 316267 65
4929345.53



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey in cooperation with the Wisconsin Highway Commission and Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey. Control by USGS and USC&GS.
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1969. Field checked 1969.
Depth Curves compiled from charts furnished by Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum. 10,000-foot grid based on Wisconsin coordinate system, central zone 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 16, shown in blue.
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked.



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway, all weather, hard surface	Light duty road, all weather, improved surface
Secondary highway, all weather, hard surface	Unimproved road, fair or dry weather

U. S. Route State Route

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, WASHINGTON, D. C. 20242 AND BY THE WISCONSIN GEOLOGICAL AND NATURAL HISTORY SURVEY, MADISON, WISCONSIN 53706 A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



AMHERST, WIS.
NE 1/4 AMHERST 15' QUADRANGLE
N 4422.5-W 8915/7.5
1969
AMS 3172 IV NE—SERIES V861











RISING STAR
MILL
1868











POSITIVELY
NO SMOKING

THE S...
REFRESH...

W O W E



SPRINGFIELD
MILL





THE FEED SACK
REFRESHMENTS





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THE RISING STAR MILL
MISSION STATEMENT
THE PURPOSE OF THE
RISING STAR MILL IS TO
PRESERVE, PROTECT AND PROMOTE
THE HISTORICAL, CULTURAL AND
ARCHITECTURAL VALUES OF THE MILL
AND ITS SURROUNDINGS. TO MAINTAIN
THE MILL AS A HISTORIC LANDMARK
AND TO PROVIDE EDUCATIONAL AND
RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR
THE COMMUNITY AND VISITORS.

















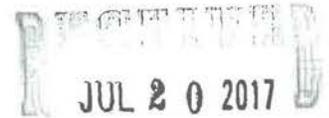




PATRICK TESTIN

STATE SENATOR

July 18th, 2017



BY:

Wisconsin Historic Preservation Review Board
c/o Ms. Peggy Veregin
Wisconsin Historical Society
816 State St.
Madison, WI 53706

Dear Ms. Veregin and members of the Historic Preservation Review Board,

I am writing to encourage your support for including the Rising Star Flouring Mill in Nelsonville, WI in the Wisconsin State Register of Historic Places and the National Register of Historic Places.

Established in 1868, the history of the mill is wrapped up in the history of both Nelsonville and Portage County. Jerome Nelson, for whom Nelsonville is named, purchased the land for the mill and the water rights in 1855. Initially, he constructed a dam and sawmill, but did not complete the flouring mill until after he returned from serving in the Civil War.

In 1924, Amherst Electric Company purchased the mill and changed it from a flouring mill to an electrical generating plant, helping to provide some residents of Portage County with electricity for the first time.

Today, the mill is owned by the Portage County Historical Society, and is the host site for an annual art show, as well as open houses, and concerts. Members of the community also rent the site for events, keeping the mill an integral part of the community of which it has been a part for nearly 150 years. The building has earned the right to be listed in the Wisconsin State Register of Historic Places and the National Register of Historic Places.

Sincerely,

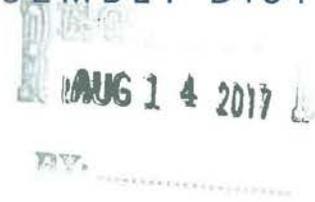
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Patrick Testin". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Patrick Testin
State Senator
24th Senate District



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
Katrina Shankland

71ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT



Wisconsin Historic Preservation Review Board
c/o Peggy Veregin, Wisconsin Historical Society
816 State Street
Madison, WI 53706

Dear Members of the Historic Preservation Review Board:

Thank you for considering the Rising Star Flouring Mill for nomination to the Wisconsin State and National Register of Historic Places. Not only is the mill one of the oldest in the state and the last of its kind in Portage County, but it also plays an important role in promoting our cultural heritage and tourism by hosting a variety of community events.

The Rising Star Mill is a fixture of Portage County, located in downtown Nelsonville next to the Tomorrow River, a beautiful trout stream. An award-winning coffee roaster is just across the street, as well as an antiques store. Nelsonville is a charming village of 155 people and is named for Jerome Nelson, who constructed a dam and sawmill in 1855. In 1868, Jerome Nelson built the Rising Star Mill after returning from serving in the Civil War. The mill operated as a business until 1984. Currently, the Portage County Historical Society owns the mill, and they do an outstanding job using the venue to support local events that bring people together and instill pride and a strong sense of community.

I recently attended the Rising Star Mill's 30th annual art show and sale. I look forward to this event every year, and the historic building is the perfect venue. The art show featured 28 artists, and I was impressed by the variety in artwork. In fact, I finally purchased a large piece I have been eyeing by my favorite local photographer. I am proud that the Rising Star Mill supports our artisans and small business owners by featuring their work, and am pleased that the mill contributes to our local economy.

The Rising Star Mill also hosts monthly concerts throughout the summer that feature Midwestern musicians, a free movie night in September, and an open house in October that will feature "The Barns of Portage County." As a frequent attendee of these events, I enjoy the acoustics, camaraderie, homemade popcorn, desserts, and coffee, and the opportunity to enjoy jazz or bluegrass while meeting friends and hearing about the current and upcoming events in the village.

The Rising Star Mill isn't just an important part of Nelsonville's history; it's a place to celebrate our past and look toward the future together. I fully support the Rising Star Flouring Mill's nomination to the Wisconsin State and National Register of Historic Places. It's vital that we preserve and protect the mill's history, and a designation will support our efforts to share this treasure with future generations.

Thank you again for your consideration of the Rising Star Flouring Mill's nomination to the Wisconsin State and National Register of Historic Places. I appreciate your work on this important board to further Wisconsin's cultural heritage, architecture, history, and anthropology. Please feel free to contact me at (608) 267-9649 or Rep.Shankland@legis.wisconsin.gov if you have any questions, or would like to attend an event with me at the Rising Star Mill.

Yours sincerely,

Rep. Katrina Shankland
71st Assembly District



WISCONSIN
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

TO: Keeper
National Register of Historic Places

FROM: Peggy Veregin
National Register Coordinator

SUBJECT: National Register Nomination



The following materials are submitted on this Twenty-ninth day of March 2018, for the nomination of the Rising Star Flouring Mill to the National Register of Historic Places:

<u>1</u>	Original National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form
<u>1</u>	CD with NRHP Nomination form PDF
<u> </u>	Multiple Property Nomination form
<u>23</u>	Photograph(s)
<u>1</u>	CD with image files
<u>1</u>	Map(s)
<u>10</u>	Sketch map(s)/figures(s)/exhibit(s)
<u>2</u>	Piece(s) of correspondence
<u> </u>	Other:

COMMENTS:

<u> </u>	Please ensure that this nomination is reviewed
<u> </u>	This property has been certified under 36 CFR 67
<u> </u>	The enclosed owner objection(s) do or do not constitute a majority of property owners
<u> </u>	Other: