

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

MAY 24 1988

NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Champion Mill
other names/site number Champion Roller Mills; Lakeside Roller Mills; NeHRS# CH01-1

2. Location

street & number Mill Street and 2nd Street
city, town Champion
state Nebraska code NE county Chase code 029 zip code 69023

3. Classification

Table with 3 columns: Ownership of Property, Category of Property, and Number of Resources within Property. Includes checkboxes for private, public-local, public-State, public-Federal, building(s), district, site, structure, object, and resource counts for contributing and noncontributing.

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet. Signature of certifying official: James A. Hanson, State Historic Preservation Officer, Nebraska State Historical Society. Date: May 16, 1988.

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of commenting or other official: Date: State or Federal agency and bureau:

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
determined eligible for the National Register.
determined not eligible for the National Register.
removed from the National Register.
other, (explain):

Signature of the Keeper: Adeline Byrum Date of Action: 6-23-88

Signature of the Keeper: Date of Action:

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

~~Industry/Processing/Manufacturing Facility (Mill)~~
~~Industry - energy facility (power plant)~~
~~Recreation - outdoor recreation (park)~~

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

~~Recreation & Culture - museum~~
~~Recreation & Culture - Outdoor recreation~~

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Other: Early factory type with full monitor
frame and joist construction

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Wood - weatherboard

roof Wood - Shingle

other Waterworks: concrete and earth

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

GENERAL

Champion water-powered mill is a small industrial complex that served the southwest Nebraska area as a flour and feed mill in the late 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries. It is located on the Frenchman River in central Chase County on the northwest edge of the small town of Champion, population 140. The complex consists of three contributing resources. Integrity is good for all three resources.

The mill building is situated on the south bank of the river approximately sixty-five feet downstream from the earthen dam, and the two structures are connected by a diversion and headrace. These three elements are integrally related in that the dam and diversion are necessary to power milling operations. The milling complex measures approximately 168 m. north to south by 91 m. east to west. The mill is situated in the south-central part of this area. The diversion is located west of the mill, and the earthen dam is located north of the diversion.

The mill ceased commercial operation in June, 1968, and in 1969 it was purchased by the State of Nebraska. It is presently being used for interpretive purposes by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission as a state historical park.

CONTRIBUTING BUILDINGS

1. MILL: The water-powered mill is a three-story wood frame structure of frame and joist construction with a T-shaped floor plan, four vertical functional areas, concrete basement and footings; and wood shingle, gabled, full-length monitor roof with a minimum slope roof extension over the main mill portion. The middle portion of the structure is the 1892 mill building, which has always been used as the milling area. This consisted of a basement and two upper levels. In 1913 a two-story storeroom and storage area were added, altering the roofline. In 1929 a third floor addition with a minimum slope roof was added on the north side of the monitor above the milling area only.

In 1915 a one and three-quarter story office, shop and dump drive were added on the south side of the 1892 mill building, with a set of Fairbanks scales outside the south side of the office. A penstock with water turbine covered by a one-story turbine house was added in 1929 on the north one-half of the west side of the 1892 mill building, and in 1945 a boiler room was added on the south one-half of the west side of the 1892 mill building. Thirty-one windows throughout the mill are two over two, double hung windows; four-lite windows are located in the basement (3), boiler room (3), shop (3), third floor (2), and two dump drive doors (2 each). Primary entrance is from the south into the office.

See continuation sheet

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Secondary access is through two hinged double doors, allowing east - west access to the dump pit in the drive, and a hinged double door without windows in the south side of the storeroom. Stairways to all four floors are located along the west portion of the north walls of the 1892 building. Historic, functional equipment in the building consists of: Three lineshafts, one water well pump, one molasses tank, and one retrieval auger in the basement; ten ton Fairbanks scales in the office; one floor scales in the storeroom; feed rollers, cornmeal rollers, hammer mill, tempering auger, and floor scales in the first floor milling room; hot water boiler in the boiler room; 78 h.p. Leffel water turbine in the concrete penstock under the turbine house; molasses mixer in the second floor shop above the drive; receiving separator, auger, dust collector and three lineshafts in the second floor milling room; three lineshafts and full length auger in the third floor monitor; three continuous belt bucket elevators running through all four floors of the 1892 building; one continuous belt bucket receiving elevator running from the dump pit to second floor.

Due to the deterioration of the exterior of the mill, mainly because of its proximity to water, insect damage and natural weathering, the mill was resingled and resided in 1982 using like materials of cedar shingles and cedar horizontal bevel siding. The corrugated metal siding, that had been placed over the old cedar siding on the west and north faces of the main part of the mill, was not replaced.

CONTRIBUTING STRUCTURES

2. HEADRACE: A twelve foot wide concrete headrace runs approximately 65 feet west from the penstock and connects the water turbine to the mill pond diversion. The mill pond diversion is concrete, runs north and south and consists of the twelve foot wide headrace, two, twelve foot wide gate bays with ten foot wide metal flood gates, an eight foot wide concrete dam retaining section, a twelve foot wide board overflow with wooden deck, and fifteen-foot long upstream and downstream retaining walls on the north side of the overflow.

3. DAM: The earthen dam runs approximately 15° east of due north for a distance of approximately 400 feet and is faced on the west (lake) side with local limestone. The dam is of sufficient height to develop an eight foot head of water to operate the water turbine. The north end of the dam is approximately 1.5 feet lower to act as an emergency overflow to prevent breaching the dam near the concrete diversion during high water.

The diversion originally was a wooden structure located where the present overflow sets. Built in 1887, it had a semi-circular overflow, wooden retaining walls on the north, and a 2.5 by 4 foot headrace and wooden retaining walls on the south. By the early 1900's this was replaced with concrete, and in 1943 the two flood-gates and twelve foot wide headrace were added.

INTEGRITY

Historical integrity is uniformly high for the building and two structures. Integrity of design, location, materials, setting, feeling and association are all retained for the period of historical significance. Modifications to the building and diversion have contributed to the material development of the mill complex through time as an agricultural

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support industry and to its ability to survive economic and social changes. The substitution of concrete for stone and wood in the basement and diversion should be seen as stabilization efforts due to natural catastrophic events associated with water-powered milling in general. The building additions have not altered the main mill building structure; rather their presence reflects the need for improvements over time in a competitive milling business in which smaller mills were forced to expand or close nationally.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Industry
Entertainment/recreation

Period of Significance

1888 - 1938

Significant Dates

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Scott, Thomas
Hamilton Townsite Company

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

GENERAL SUMMARY

Under Criteria A Champion Mill is significant to Nebraska's industrial and recreational history. As an agricultural support industry, its industrial significance lies in its representativeness of and conformity to the community mill type of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, its long term of operation, and its survival as the last functional water powered mill in Nebraska. The survival of the mill and pond as a single unit is unique in Nebraska. It is not only significant industrially, but it is also important from an historical engineering and technology point of view, since it is still operable. The water-powered mill is historically significant to recreation because the mill pond was the recreational hub of southwest Nebraska through the 1940's, and it is technically the last mill pond in Nebraska. The mill and pond are presently being preserved as a state historical park and a state recreation area. The period of significance is derived from the original construction date of the mill (1888) through 1938, the last year in which the property continues to meet the 50 year criteria.

HISTORY

In 1885 southwest Nebraska was still utilized mainly by cattlemen. Chase County was formed on April 12, 1886 by Governor Dawes and was named after Colonel Champion S. Chase, Nebraska's first Attorney General, a former mayor of Omaha, and a prominent attorney, politician, investor, and promoter in the state. An influx of settlers and the introduction of agriculture to the area meant a need for towns and support industries. The boom town of Champion, first called Hamilton was platted in May of 1886. The location was chosen because of a 3 foot natural rock falls on the Frenchman River which offered a prime water power site for a mill. The Hamilton Townsite Company was formed by investors and promoters and the millsite and mill pond site were aggressively used to promote settlement and land sales in the town and surrounding area. The townsite company built a dam across the Frenchman in 1887 and tried to lease the millsite, but in 1888 it gave the land and water rights to Thomas Scott in exchange for his building a 50 barrel roller flour mill on the site. Flour and feed milling commenced in 1889 but the mill burned in the winter of 1891. Thomas Scott rebuilt the mill in 1892 and sold it to Richard James in December of 1892. James installed machinery in the new mill and ran it until 1897, when he sold the mill to Thomas Jordan. In 1908 Milton Yaw and John Foerster purchased the mill.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

1. Chase County History, Vol 5 (Champion Mill History), Chase County Historical Society, 1974.
2. Chase County Champion Newspaper, Vol 4 #15, Sept 5, 1889, Champion, NE (2 page State Fair broadside).
3. "Champion Mill (Nebraska)", by T. J. Hajek, Old Mill News, pp 5, 6 and 7, Society for the Preservation of Old Mills, Vol 14 #1 (Winter, 1986).
4. Water Powered Flour Mills in Nebraska, by T. R. Buecker, Nebraska State Historical Society, 1983, pp 43 and 60.
5. "Nebraska Flour Mill Buildings, Structure and Style, 1854 - 1936", T. R. Buecker, Nebraska History, Vol 66 #2, Summer, 1985, pp 145-163.
6. Industrial Archeology of Nebraska, Rapp & Beranek, J - B Publishing, 1984.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

Champion Mill State Historical Park

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 3.8 acres

UTM References

A 14 266860 4483500
 Zone Easting Northing

C

B
 Zone Easting Northing

D

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description The property is described beginning from a point 50 feet East and 180 feet South of the center of Section 21, T6N, R29W; proceeding 555 feet South, then 300 feet East, then 555 feet North, and then 300 feet West back to said point.

(Above boundary description refers to the property also known as "all of Block 4 and Lots 1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 12, 13 and the north 100 feet Lot 4 in Block 5 of the unincorporated Town of Champion, platted Hamilton, Chase County, Nebraska.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire town lots that have historically been associated with the property in order to maintain the water powered mill, its mill dam, and its diversion on them.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Timothy J. Hajek, Superintendent

organization Champion Mill State Historical Park date 2-24-1988

street & number Box 117 telephone (308) 882-5860 or 882-5963

city or town Champion state NE zip code 69023

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Foerster died in 1912, Yaw died in 1914 and the Yaw family ran the mill until 1918. In 1915 the south addition to the mill was built to better facilitate receiving grain.

In 1918 Domina Robert purchased the mill and sold half ownership to John and George Banks. They expanded milling operations by building the east storeroom and grain storage addition and adding a full length monitor to the roof. The basement was concreted, the water turbine on the back side of the dam was replaced with a water turbine on the west side of the mill and a 3 foot diameter metal tube was run from the diversion to the turbine. Flour milling capabilities were doubled by the installation of a 100 barrel "midget" mill, and the mill served a 40 mile radius hinterland. The Banks Brothers acquired full ownership of the mill in 1925, but they sold the mill in 1929 to Glen Knotwell. Knotwell installed a 100 barrel long system, added a third floor addition to the main (1892) part of the mill, built a penstock and turbine house on the west side of the mill and installed a 78 h.p. water turbine to run the machinery. A 1940 flood caused extensive damage to the south end of the dam and destabilized basement foundations. A concrete headrace and diversion with 2 floodgates and a board overflow were fabricated and the basement was stabilized, but flour milling ceased in 1945 and the mill's feed milling and mixing capabilities were expanded. A tile block boiler room was also added to the west side of the building.

Knotwell died in 1953 and Carl Hill purchased the mill in 1956. The mill was operated by water power commercially until June of 1968, and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission purchased the mill in 1969. It is presently being preserved and operated as a state historical park.

INDUSTRIAL CONTEXT

Milling in Nebraska has been a changing industry. The spread of the flour and feed milling industry in Nebraska followed closely behind the spread of agriculture throughout the state. The need for milled food and feed products was met first by small community mills which were established wherever the local economy demanded. By 1889 some 279 mills, most of which were small, water-powered community roller mills, were operating throughout the state. With the introduction of roller process, stone process milling had become obsolete and unprofitable. Water power was utilized by a majority of mills, but other power sources were being developed. Also better road systems and cheaper transportation were developing. New processing machinery, new power sources and better transportation caused the industry to change. The early 1900's saw the rise of the large "merchant" mill and the domination of the milling industry by larger mills. The small community mills slowly went out of existence as their necessity to local areas decreased, or else they became local feed mills.

Small community mills of the 1890's and the early 1900's in Nebraska were generally characterized as being small, water turbine powered, wood frame, roller mills that did both feed and flour milling. By World War I they had to either improve and expand to become more competitive or else cease operation. Buecker (1983) more fully describes community mills of this period.

Typologically, Champion Mill exhibits the small community mill form commonly associated

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with this period. It also is representative of community mills which survived by making industrial changes and improvements to stay in business. Its history reflects adaptation in a changing industry while still retaining its historic character.

INDUSTRY

Industrial significance for this water powered mill complex as a unit is evident in its integrity as a functional combination of the mill building and water power source. Its survival as the last functional water powered mill in Nebraska reflects its importance as a unique interpretive historical artifact. It is significant not only for its strong associations with the small community mill type but also because it retains its dam and water power as it did during the high period of water powered mills in Nebraska (Buecker, 1983,p.60). Its long term of operation at this site (1892 to 1968 for this building; 1888 to 1968 for a mill at this site) is further reflective of its industrial significance, considering that, out of the more than 550 mills that have been built in Nebraska in the last 140 years, 6 large mills still produce flour, less than 50 buildings are still standing (most are gutted shells used for other purposes or vacant), and only 2 old mills are being preserved in the state (Neligh Mills and Champion Mill).

This mill building, like most community mills, is a wood frame building of rather plain design in which frame and joist light factory construction has been utilized. The simple, functional design is descriptive of small community mill designs of the late 19th century, and the functional, structural additions are typical for mill buildings of this size and age. Buecker (1985) discusses the variety yet common functional design of mill buildings of that period.

The mechanical system contained in the mill consists of the water turbine, lineshaft and belt drive system, and feed grain milling machinery. This system is significant because it is operable by water power, the most historically and traditionally used power source for mills of the 19th century. Like the vast majority of Nebraska's water powered mills, Champion Mill used a water turbine, not a vertical water wheel. The power transmission system of the mill consisting of iron lineshafting with babbit bearings, cast iron pulleys, and spliced belts running throughout the mill, is a significant example of historical engineering and technology used in mills to transfer power from one power source to equipment throughout the mill.

The diversion structure and headrace are functionally significant to the milling complex because they supply and regulate water to the water turbine. They have been substantially changed throughout the mill complex's existence, but changes in the structures reflect attempts to improve the survivability of the complex as a unit. The 1887 water right (a power right only) is the oldest active water right on the Frenchman River because the diversion has been maintained.

The earthen dam is important to the mill complex because it creates the water supply necessary to run the mill. It is functionally significant as part of the water powered milling complex and adds to the historical integrity of that complex by retaining its original form and function.

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RECREATION

The mill pond at Champion is significant to recreation because it was the recreational hub of southwest Nebraska through the 1940's. Mill ponds traditionally have been utilized as parks and gathering places, especially in less populated areas such as southwest Nebraska. Few bodies of water existed in southwest Nebraska, and as a result the ponds open to the public were well-utilized, especially the mill pond at Champion, which was actively promoted as a recreation area. In 1887 the dam was built by the townsite company and the pond was filled. The West Addition to Champion was platted around the mill pond and on the southwest side of the pond a "lakeside park" was platted to insure public access. This was done for promotional purposes, since most privately owned ponds either limited or denied public access or else charged use (trespass) fees. Recreational use of the mill pond, especially on Sundays and holidays included, fishing, picnicking, swimming, boating, ice skating and other activities. Camping was also allowed, especially by patrons of the mill. Although fish existed previously in the river, the first large fish stocking (trout) was done by the state fish commission in 1888, and the area quickly became the recreational hub of southwest Nebraska.

The townsite company actively promoted the site as the location for county celebrations. The first county fair (1886) was held just west of the mill pond site, and subsequent fairs were held west of the pond where the horse racing track was located, until other promoters moved the county fair and races in the 1890's to Imperial, the county seat. Most of the county-wide celebrations were held at the mill pond. In 1887 a big 4th of July celebration was held at the mill pond, which included a county picnic, tub races on the pond by local businessmen, patriotic speeches, music, and the main address by Colonel Champion S. Chase. The known recreational value of the pond was emphasized by townsite promoters regularly, such as in the 1889 two-page special edition of the Chase County Champion Newspaper, 3,000 of which were printed up to hand out at the Nebraska State Fair (Vol. 4 #15, Sept. 5, 1889).

Peak recreational useage of the mill pond occurred during the 1920's, when the mill owners actively promoted recreation at the pond. They offered facilities for bathing, swimming, boating, fishing, picnicking, camping and ice skating. A bathhouse and concession stand was built on the south corner of the pond, and black wool bathing suits could be rented. A boat dock was built on the south side of the pond and canoes and row boats could be rented also. A diving board and diving tower were installed on the dam near the overflow, and the deepwater was cabled off. Picnic tables were placed around the pond. The pond was known as one of the best angling spots in the state, and the area was heavily used on Sundays and holidays. Cabins were built on the north side of the lake, and by the 1930's motor boat rides were given around the lake.

In 1899 the West Addition and the lakeside park had been vacated, thus taking that park area out of public ownership, but a county road through the lakeside park area still allowed easy access to the public. In 1929 the Game Commission was charged with managing state parks and starting a state recreation area system by purchasing at least 50% of the shorelines of known recreation areas. Champion Lake State Recreation Area was one of the first areas in the state to be acquired (in 1930 and 1933). This area includes the original "lakeside park" but not the mill dam, which remained in the mill owner's possession until the mill ceased commercial operations. In 1969 the mill property and dam were acquired

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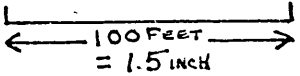
as a state historical park.

The long and continued use of the mill pond as a recreation area is significant, especially since the mill pond is technically the last mill pond in Nebraska, and it still retains the character of the older, smaller recreation areas acquired in the 1930's that still make up the backbone of the state's recreation area system.

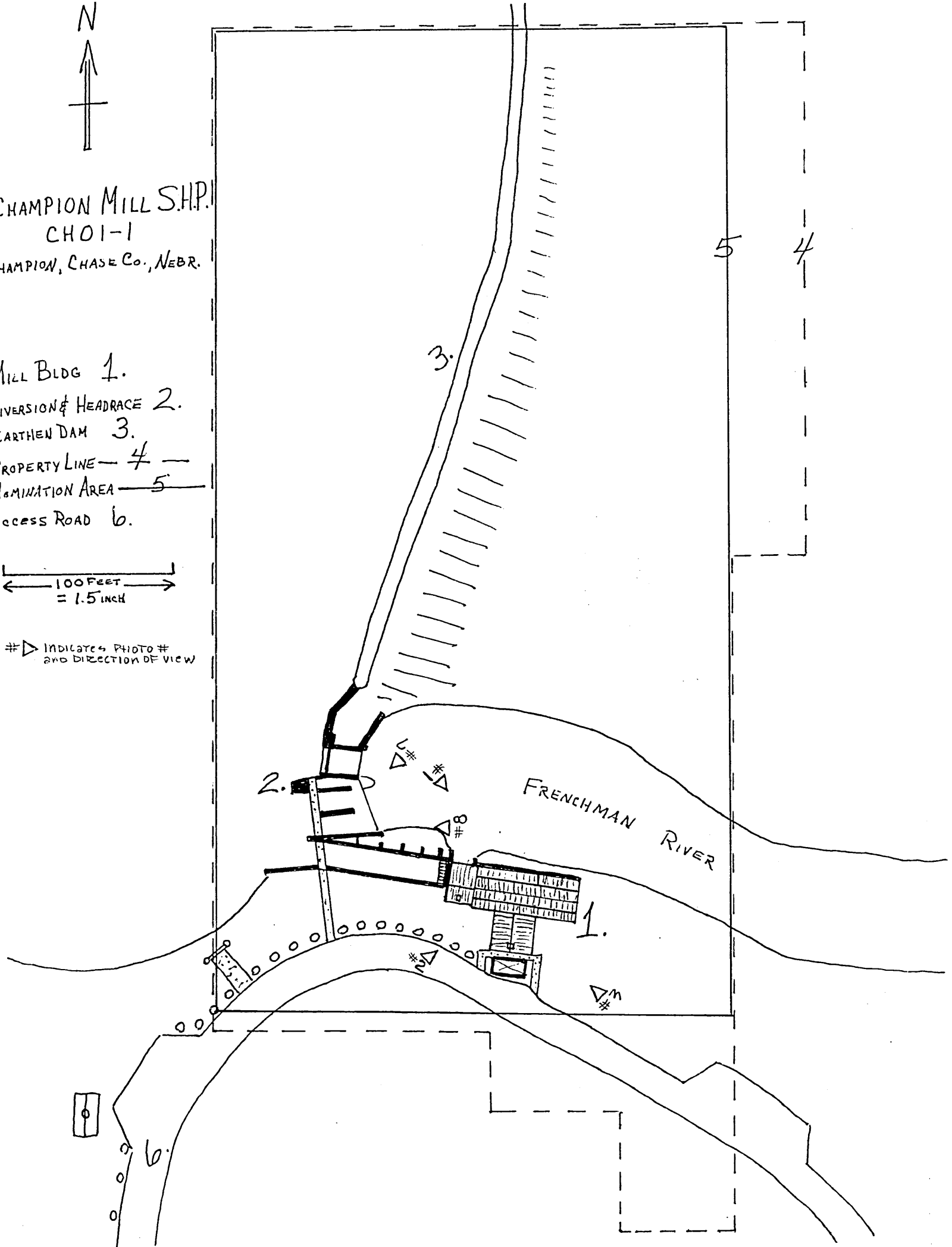


CHAMPION MILL S.H.P.
CHOI-1
CHAMPION, CHASE Co., NEBR.

- MILL BLDG 1.
- DIVERSION & HEADRACE 2.
- EARTHEN DAM 3.
- PROPERTY LINE — 4 —
- NOMINATION AREA — 5 —
- ACCESS ROAD 6.



#▷ INDICATES PHOTO #
AND DIRECTION OF VIEW



CHAMPION LAKE STATE RECREATION AREA

- NOTE:**
1. CITY BLOCK DIMENSIONS 300' x 300'
 2. ALLEYS 20' WIDE EXCEPT WHERE NOTED
 3. STREETS 80' WIDE EXCEPT MAIN AND MILL STREET
 4. CITY LOT DIMENSIONS 25' x 140'
 5. SURVEY IN THE TOWN OF CHAMPION, NEBR.

CENTER OF SECTION 21
T-6-N. R-39-W
CHASE COUNTY, NEBR.

NW CORNER of B1K 4
Is 50' E and 180' S of
Center of Sec. 21
CHAMPION LAKE

PROPERTY SURVEY

CHAMPION LAKE STATE RECREATION AREA

FOURTH ST.

FRENCHMAN RIVER

THIRD ST.

23

24

SECOND ST.

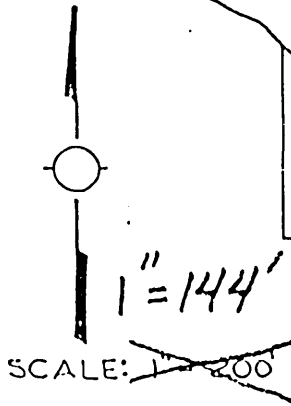
BROADWAY ST.

MILL ST.

KELLY ST.

CHASE ST.

MAIN ST.



- LEGEND**
- CORNERS FOUND
 - CORNERS ESTABLISHED
 - VACATED LOT LINES
 - PROPERTY LINE OF SURVEY
 - OLD MILL
 - - - NRHP PROPOSED BOUNDARY

SURVEYORS CERTIFICATE

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THE ABOVE PLOT IS FROM AN ACCURATE SURVEY OF THE DESCRIBED PROPERTY TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF AND THAT SAID SURVEY WAS MADE WITH REFERENCE TO KNOWN AND RECORDED MONUMENTS.

KENNETH K. KERSEY L.S. 271
LAND SURVEYOR LINCOLN, NEBRASKA