

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED **MAY 2 1977**
DATE ENTERED **DEC 27 1978**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

AND/OR COMMON

DeWitt Flour Mills and King Iron Bridge

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

E of DeWitt on Big Blue River

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

DeWitt

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

First

STATE

Nebraska

CODE

31

COUNTY

Gage

CODE

067

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERICAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER: storage

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

John Zwonechek

STREET & NUMBER

Damsite

CITY, TOWN

DeWitt

VICINITY OF

STATE

Nebraska

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Register of Deeds, Gage County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Beatrice

STATE

Nebraska

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT
 GOOD
 FAIR

DETERIORATED
 RUINS
 UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The DeWitt Flour Mills and King Iron Bridge are located on the Big Blue River in Gage County just above its confluence with Clatonia Creek and one half mile southeast of DeWitt, Nebraska. Both structures are more precisely located along the old county road (Gage County Road District #7) where it crosses the Big Blue River. The road, which basically follows the section line dividing Sections 18 and 19 in Township 5 north and Range 5 East, turns south as it approaches the river to a point which allowed a good, normal crossing of the river. This old road then continued northeast to the section line which it then followed eastward. The King Iron Bridge spans the Big Blue River along this old road and is immediately adjacent (north) to the DeWitt Mill structure (see photos #1-3). This old road has not been used since the new road and bridge was constructed several years ago. The old road is presently used as a farm lane.

The present mill structure is a large, three-story frame building (photos #1-3) constructed partially on the foundations of an earlier (Suiter Bros.) mill building. A mansard roof encloses the top floor. Dating from ca. 1887-88, the main building measures eighty by eighty feet and is structured of 12 X 14 inch timbers. The small, attached and gambrel-roofed powerhouse on the north side has been removed but the small, mansard-roofed office is still extant on the west side of the building. Other additions to the building--dating to about the early twentieth century--are still extant and include a shed to the east and a long shed-roofed warehouse along the south side. The warehouse has large openings for both trucks and railroad cars. A spur railroad line formerly connected the mill to the main line of the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad.

None of the original power or milling equipment is intact in the building. Originally, the operation was powered by an overshot water wheel which is now in the river. Rope line shafts transferred the power to the milling machinery.

An underground bin stored the grain after delivery until it was lifted to the third floor for washing and hulling. The grain was lifted to the top floor with small buckets attached to a belt line where it was dumped into hoppers. The rollers were on the second floor, sifters on third and packers on the first floor. After packing, the flour was transferred to the attached warehouse where it awaited shipping.

Only parts of the milling operation are extant including a gindstone from the earlier mill, rope lines, a hopper, flour sacks and other miscellaneous equipment. The structure is presently used by the owner for storage.

Just north of the mill is a small concrete and concrete block structure built in 1919-20. This small hydroelectric power plant was used to supply power to the mill as well as to the town of DeWitt, one half mile away. This plant is equipped with a low head turbine engine which took an eleven foot head of water to drive it and was used until the early 1950's for power supply. The turbine is still intact and purportedly is in operating condition.

The King Iron Bridge (photo #4) which spans the river adjacent to

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the mill was built by the King Iron Bridge and Manufacturing Company of Cleveland, Ohio, in 1887. It was probably erected on this site in 1887 or 1888 and was probably part of a general improvement of the road associated with the rebuilding of the old mill after the 1878 fire.

The bridge is a Pratt Through Truss of a single span and constructed of iron. The span measures 45.57 m. The construction depth of the structure is 7.35m., the road width is 4.74 m. and the structure spans the river at a height of 6.9 m. (January, 1977; approximate distance above high water mark is 3.6 m.). Both the substructure and the deck above it is of wood construction while the piers supporting the span on the north side of the river are steel encased concrete (see photo #5). Abutment materials supporting the span at the south end are unknown but are presumably limestone.

Another, smaller bridge spans to the higher ground north of the King Iron Bridge and is presumably of later date (photo #5). It is a steel Pratt Pony Truss with wood deck and substructure. Statistics on this bridge are as follows: span is 31 m., construction depth is 3.66m., width of deck is 4.94m. and its height above water (grade in this case) is 3m. at the deepest (south) end.

Both the bridge and the mill have retained much of their original integrity and offer visual evidence of the nature of the activities which once made this place important. Two other buildings are in the vicinity of the two structures nominated but they do not detract from the character of the important structures. These structures include a ca. 1880's dwelling which once housed the miller and his family, but which has since been moved to a new site (with no important historical associations attached to the new site) and the 1911 Zwoneček house which has housed the Zwoneček family since its construction, but which has also been somewhat altered in exterior appearance.

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The Zwonechek house and the old miller's house are situated just southwest of the mill building. The old miller's house is a delightfully detailed two-story frame dwelling enclosing two rooms above two rooms. Built with a symmetrical front facade, the house assumes the modestly scaled central chimney I-type house form complete with the one story, two room, gabled extension to the rear (south). Notable design features include the Eastlake-inspired double porch on the front, the shingled window spandrels and the shingled gable with sunburst pattern. While the date of the house is unknown, it probably was constructed in the late 1870's or early 1880's and moved to its present site before 1900.

The Zwonechek house was built in 1911 and represents an example of a modest vernacular house. The frame dwelling is nearly square in plan with a small hipped roof extension on the south (rear) facade. The house is one-and-one-half stories in height and has a hipped roof with large gabled dormers on all four sides. The house has seen substantial alteration on the exterior with the decorative iron porch supports and wide wood siding.

Another small frame structure on the property is believed to have been a workmen's cottage. The small one story, gabled structure (photo #12) is in a substantial state of disrepair. The original site is unknown.

Many other features are extant or in ruins on the site. Most notable are the ruins of the dam which created the required head for the operation of the mill and the electric generator. Since the construction of the generator in 1919-20, much of the earlier structure was removed or altered. The inlet and outlet structures for the generator are extant and in reasonable repair (see photo #13). The dam itself (possibly dating from the 1919-20 period) is in bad repair. Constructed of heavy timbers with a long slope on the upstream side, the dam originally was sheathed with three layers of 2 x 12" planks. A later coating of concrete protected the wood until the structure began to give away. Approximately half of the dam structure is in ruins on the site today (see photos #15-17).

Other historic features on site include the concrete spillway used for the overflow or the diversion route, and the rock-faced concrete block addition to the east side of the mill building. This structure, now in ruins, originally housed both the steam engine which replaced the water turbine as the prime mover and the auxiliary electric generator which was used when the main generator was shut down.

Two modern corrugated metal grain bins are also extant as shown on the sketch map.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The establishment of hundreds of flouring mills throughout the state played a very significant role in the settlement and agricultural and commercial development of Nebraska in the late nineteenth century. The DeWitt mills played this important role for the agricultural community between Wilber in Saline County and Beatrice in Gage County.

In July of 1874 two brothers, Joseph and Frank Suiter, began the erection of a grist mill on the Big Blue River, 3/4 mile east of DeWitt. The mill, completed in March, 1875, was then one of the largest flouring mills in the state.

The Iowa-born Suiter brothers, both Civil War veterans, arrived in Nebraska separately. Joseph came in 1867 and homesteaded along both sides of the boundary dividing Saline and Gage counties. The town of DeWitt was platted on the Saline County portion of this homestead. He followed only agricultural pursuits until the arrival of his brother Frank M. in 1874, when they joined forces in the milling business. Frank was also involved in real estate and loans. The Suiters built and managed the DeWitt flour mill until 1877, when it was sold to Hiram P. Webb & Co., who operated the business until the fall of 1878, when it was destroyed by fire.

After 1878 the mill property went through a variety of owners in rapid succession but finally stabilized in 1887 when L. A. Washburn and O. L. Kent purchased the property. Deed evidence indicates that the re-building of the mill may have begun in 1886 under the ownership of Frederick Thiele, but he soon ran into financial difficulties and sold the property to Kent & Washburn who are most probably responsible for the present building and for the subsequent operation of the mill.

On February 12, 1902, John Zwoneček and Joseph Aksamit purchased the mill from Job B. Rathbun for \$8,000. Zwoneček and Aksamit had purchased the Wilber Mills about 8 miles north of DeWitt in 1894. Aksamit managed the Wilber Mills and Zwoneček was overseer of the DeWitt establishment. The two mills were very successful. Examples of their products include Golden Bell Rye Flour, Little Hatchet White Flour, Fine Wheat Farina, Golden Thistle Flour, corn meal, and graham.

In 1919, The DeWitt Mills which had been run by an overshot water wheel, converted to a hydroelectric system and a power plant was built to supply electricity to the town of DeWitt. Thus, the mill site played an increasingly significant role in the community by supplying this important new source of energy.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Continuation Sheet

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY about 1/2 acre ²⁰

see continuation sheet 12/6/78

UTM REFERENCES

A	1, 4	6, 7, 7	9, 0, 0	4, 4, 7, 3	0, 8, 0	B					
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING				ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		
C						D					

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

see continuation sheet 12/6/78

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Janet Jeffries, Historian; D. Murphy, Architect

ORGANIZATION

Nebraska State Historical Society

DATE

April, 1977

STREET & NUMBER

1500 R Street

TELEPHONE

402-432-2793

CITY OR TOWN

Lincoln

STATE

Nebraska

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Marvin D. Knott 4/18/77

TITLE

Director, Nebraska State Historical Society

DATE

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I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Charles E. Brown

DATE

12-27-78

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

William H. Brasman

DATE

12-27-78

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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In the early 1930's the mill was closed due to the expense of meeting new government regulations which included new metering equipment as well as vitamin additives. The mill's significance to the community was over but the mill dam and power house continued to supply electricity until the early 1950's when that, too, was shut down because of the expense of operation.

Architectually the building stands as a representative example of the type of structure which housed this important early Nebraska industry. Built at a time when the milling industry was changing because of improved technology, the building somewhat symbolizes this in its form. The mid to late 1880's saw the shift from the use of buhr to roller mills for grinding the grain and the shift from reel to plan sifters. In older mill buildings, this change required additional space above the old building, often resulting in the addition of another floor which was often housed behind a mansard roof. We know that this was the situation with the Neigh Mill in Antelope County (see National Register nomination). The size and late date of construction of the DeWitt Mills building would indicate that the mansard roof was original in this case (although sufficient information is lacking to absolutely verify this).

Few mill buildings are extant around the state at this time and only three are known to exist which were built in this distinct architectural form.

The King Iron Bridge on this site is a relatively rare example of the distinct, early, prefabricated bridge which once saw widespread use around the country. Fabricated by the nationally known King Iron Bridge and Manufacturing Company of Cleveland, Ohio, in 1887, this bridge is one of the few extant structures of its date and type known in Nebraska. The 1884 King Iron Bridge and Manufacturing Catalog listed 14 prefabricated bridges by this firm in the state at that time. Much of the bridge's significance lies in the manufacturers use of prefab technology which allowed economical construction of much needed bridges in both the rural and urban sections of the United States in the last half of the nineteenth century.

From an engineering point of view the bridge design is based upon the Pratt Truss which was first developed by Thomas Pratt about 1842. Considered by modern engineers to be the first scientifically designed truss, this design has seen widespread use for small spans since the 1850's. The simplicity and efficiency of its design did much to recommend it. The lightness of the King Iron Company's prefab construction produced details which often seem picturesque to us today (see photos #5-8).

Bridges of this type did much to improve rural communication in Nebraska and helped the development of the agricultural industry as

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Form 10-300a

DeWitt Flour Mills and King Iron Bridge

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well. In this age of increased agricultural industrialization many old bridges are being replaced to make way for wider agricultural equipment. This bridge offers a good opportunity for preservation being situated along a road which is no longer open to the public.

This group of buildings, bridges and structures (see sketch map and item #7) represents the total environment of an important industrial complex of the mid-nineteenth through the early twentieth century.

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DeWitt Mills and King Iron Bridge

CONTINUATION SHEET Geographical ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 1

Acreeage of nominated property about 20 acres

UTM References

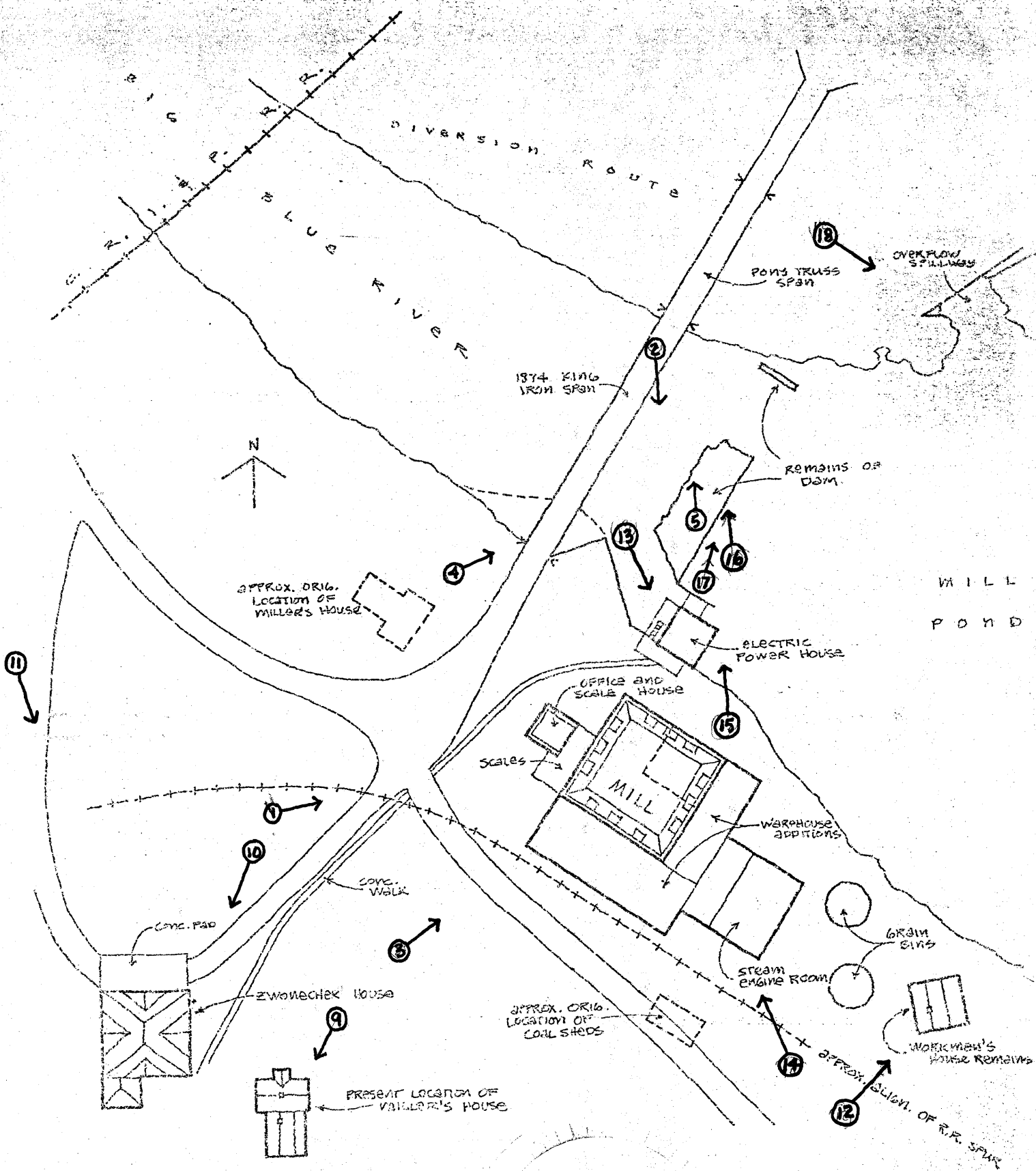
A. 14 677650 4473280 B. 14 678110 4473300

C. 14 678120 4473020 D. 14 677700 4473000

Verbal boundary description:

All property east of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad right-of-way and north of a line running 900 feet south of the north boundary of section 19 lying in the northeast quarter of the northwest quarter of section 19, T5N, R5E together with that property east of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad right-of-way lying within the northwest quarter of the northeast quarter of section 19, T5N, R5E described particularly as follows: Commencing at a point 27 chains, 40 links east of the northwest corner of said section 19; thence south 47°49' east 10 chains, 39 links; then south 54°41' east 6 chains, 30 links; then north 38°45' east 13 chains, 50 links to a point on the north line of section 19 thence west 27 chains, 25 links to the place of starting.

The boundaries include all of the known features associated with the site as well as small segments of the old county road both west and northeast of the bridge.



DE WITT MILLS & KING IRON BRIDGE
 GAGE COUNTY, NEBRASKA
 SITE SKETCH MAP NO SCALE

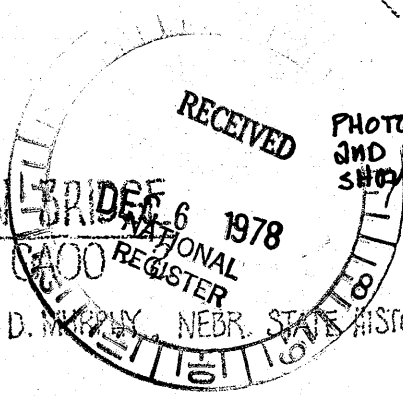


PHOTO NOTE NUMBERS
 AND DIRECTION OF VIEW
 SHOWN IN RED

D. W. MURPHY, NEBR. STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY JULY, 1978

