

Vol. 40 • Fall 2025

# Milling Around

Motor Mill Foundation



Motor Mill Historic Site Newsletter

## OUR MISSION

To protect and preserve the architectural integrity, history, natural beauty, and serenity of the Motor Mill Historic Site and its surroundings and to develop appropriate uses and interpretation as a regional treasure for the benefit of future generations.



Keith S. Elster



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Follow us!



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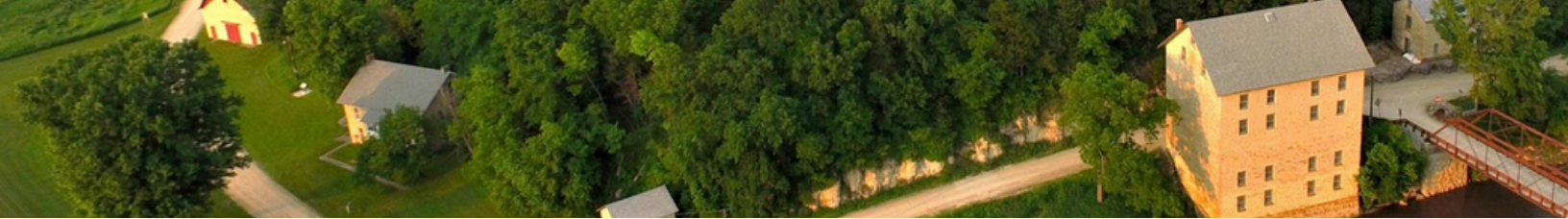
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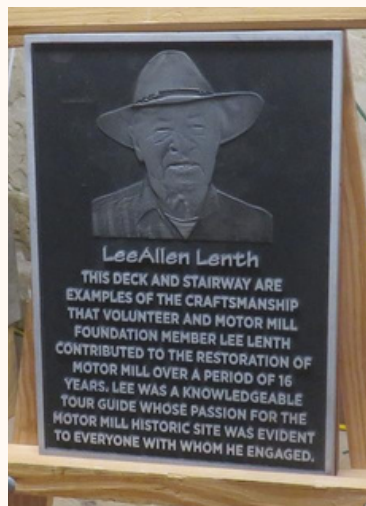
## FOUNDATION NEWS

The Stable recently underwent a makeover, with a fresh coat of red paint applied to the doors and the roofline by Miller's Woodworking of Elgin, Iowa. During the years when the Mill was open, the roofline was actually flush with the limestone walls. The gambrel roof was added in the 1930s to make room for hay storage. Restoration of the Stable included leveling the floors, securing the support beams and interior structure, replacing the roof, and installing electrical wiring for lights and power.

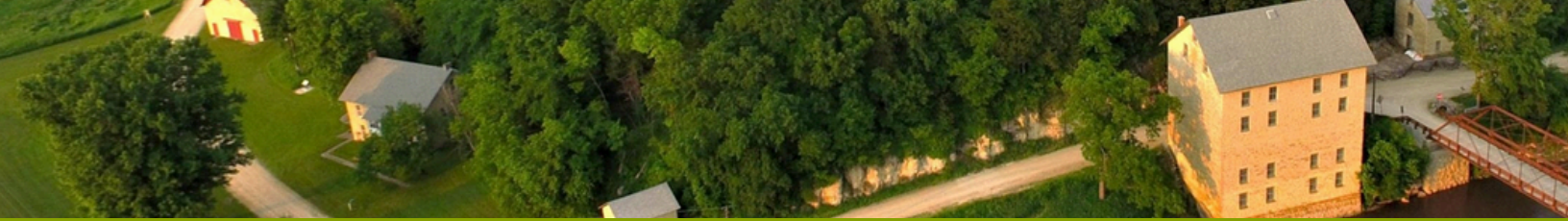
The Stable can be reserved for a variety of events, like family reunions, graduation parties, and live music. Reservations for the Stable, the Inn, or a campsite can be made at: [www.mycountyparks.com/County/Clayton](http://www.mycountyparks.com/County/Clayton)



## LEE LENTH DEDICATION - JULY 26







## HISTORY CORNER: THE COOPER'S TRADE

The word “cooper” most likely comes from the Latin word for vat, “cupa.” In New England, coopers arrived with the first English settlers in the 1620’s, and their work was important for commerce and daily life (<https://www.nharts.dncr.nh.gov>).

A cooper was a highly skilled craftsman who used planes, jointers, saws, and knives to shape the wooden staves that made up a barrel. He also made other wooden containers like casks, vats, buckets, tubs, and troughs.

The process of making a barrel started with the wooden staves, or oak slats, which were cut from local timber. After the staves were soaked, they were attached by one end to an iron hoop, creating a cone-shaped ring of staves. They were heated or steamed to make the wood flexible, so additional hoops could be added. Iron hoops were forged in the cooperage.

Wooden barrels were replaced by plastic, cardboard, and stainless steel varieties during the mid-1900’s. (<https://extension.unh.edu/>).

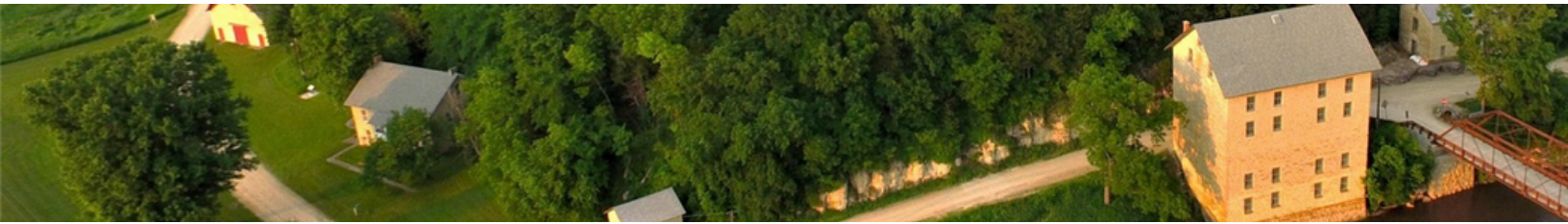


This photo of the Mill, bridge, and cooperage was taken in early 1900.

No.	Name	Age	Sex	Color	Height	Weight	Build	Complexion	Mar.	Prof.	Rel.	Place of Birth	Parents	Children	Notes
1	John D. Miller	31	M	W	5' 10"	160	Medium	Fair	M	Cooper	Presb.	Mass.	John D. Miller	2	
2	William Jones Cooper	28	M	W	5' 8"	150	Medium	Fair	M	Cooper	Presb.	Mass.	William Jones Cooper	1	
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Two coopers worked hard at their trade at Motor: Daniel D. Miller, 31 years old with a family of 2, and William Jones Cooper, 28 years old with his wife, according to the 1870 census of Motor.





# HEAVY LIFTING



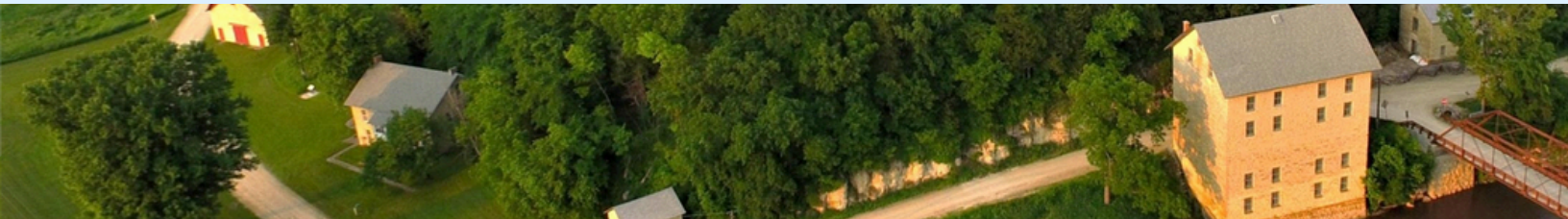
The millstone crane was an essential tool in a grist mill, designed to lift and maneuver the heavy upper millstones safely during cleaning or sharpening. These stones could weigh over a thousand pounds, making manual lifting impossible. The crane used a threaded screw mechanism—a simple machine that transformed rotational force into vertical motion. By turning the screw, millers could slowly and steadily raise or lower the stone, keeping it secure and balanced while moving it off or back onto the power shaft. This ingenious use of the screw allowed millers to handle the massive stones with both precision and safety.

In 2020, as part of the basement excavation at Motor Mill, two millstone bales—the iron fittings that gripped the stones for lifting—were uncovered in the silt. Thanks to the skill of Cletus Keppler at Royal Products in Elkader, and guided by historic millwright drawings, the recovered bales were restored to their rightful place on the reproduction of a Motor Mill crane. This restoration brought back to life an important piece of mill technology, allowing visitors to once again see how the screw-powered crane made the work of the miller possible.

-Written and edited by MMF members  
Dan Slagel and Chris Schoen







## S.T.E.A.M. CAMP 2 JULY SUMMARY

17 kids had a fun day at our July 16<sup>th</sup> STEAM Camp. The theme was water, and the kids made water wheels, paper boats, water compasses, went fishing and hiking, and got to study Monarch caterpillars. They also played several games, including the Water Cycle game.



## FALL EVENTS

### MUSIC UNDER THE MOON

3:30 - 7:00 PM OCT. 5<sup>TH</sup>

### OSBORNE HERITAGE DAYS

10 AM - 4 PM OCT. 11<sup>TH</sup> - 12<sup>TH</sup>

### HOLIDAY BRIDGE LIGHTING

4:00 PM NOV. 22<sup>ND</sup>

\*With a special appearance by Santa\*

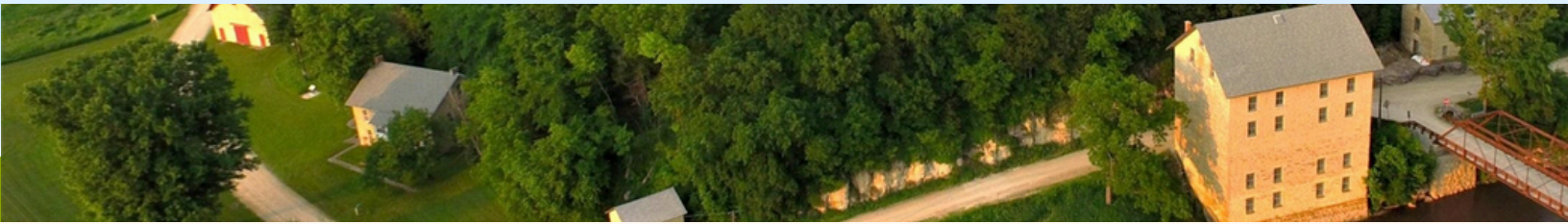
### MILL OPEN FIRST 2 WEEKENDS IN OCTOBER

Special weekend tours by our  
dedicated volunteers.

"Stories in Stone"

Weekend Tours: Noon - 5:00 pm





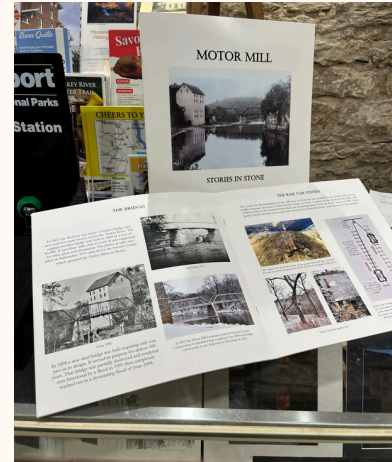
## GIFT SHOP CORNER

### NEW Motor Mill Merch!

Motor Mill vinyl decals, or stickers, are now available at the gift shop. *Motor Mill: Stories in Stone* books are still available at \$10 apiece.



Follow this QR Code to find other select merchandise and apparel that can be purchased online.



Items include:  
Hoodies, T-Shirts,  
Blankets, Cinch Bags,  
Hats, Coffee Mugs,  
Keychains, & Stickers

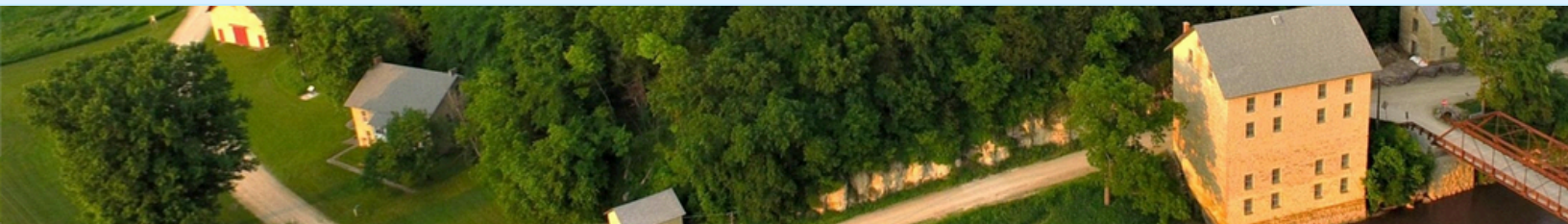
**MILL OPEN FIRST  
2 WEEKENDS  
IN OCTOBER**

Special weekend tours by our  
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"Stories in Stone"

Weekend Tours: Noon - 5:00 pm





## VOLUNTEER!

Volunteers are nothing less than the heart and soul of the Motor Mill Historic Site. One way to volunteer is to become a weekend tour guide. Before you become a guide yourself, you will shadow another guide in order for you to get comfortable with the site and giving tours. It is a rewarding experience to share this special place with its visitors!



Another way to support the Mill is to help with renovations as a member of the volunteer work crew. It is impossible to maintain the Mill without the crew's contributions. Bring your hands and heart and enjoy the camaraderie with like-minded people in common effort.



'here he would build a mill finer and bigger than any that had yet been conceived by pioneers.'

James O. Crosby

## DONATE

Help Us Keep the Lights ON! Utilities alone cost \$950 a year. Donations are necessary to stay up and running. Please consider a donation to help offset these costs, then bring your family to visit this community treasure that you cherish. Ask for a personally guided tour for your group.

Also, consider contributing to the Motor Mill Foundation Endowment.

This sustainable source of funding supports the long-term operation of the Motor Mill Historic Site, payable to Community Foundation of Dubuque and Clayton County.

Donations to the Motor Mill Foundation or Clayton County Conservation Board are tax deductible. Any amount helps. Become a Friend of the Motor Mill at any of these levels!

### Friends of Motor Mill

Apprentice (under 14)	\$100.00
Stone Cutter	\$250.00
Carpenter	\$500.00
Stone Mason	\$1000.00
Cooper	\$2500.00
Miller	\$5000.00

## TO SEND DONATIONS OR FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Donate online at:  
[www.motormill.org/donations](http://www.motormill.org/donations)

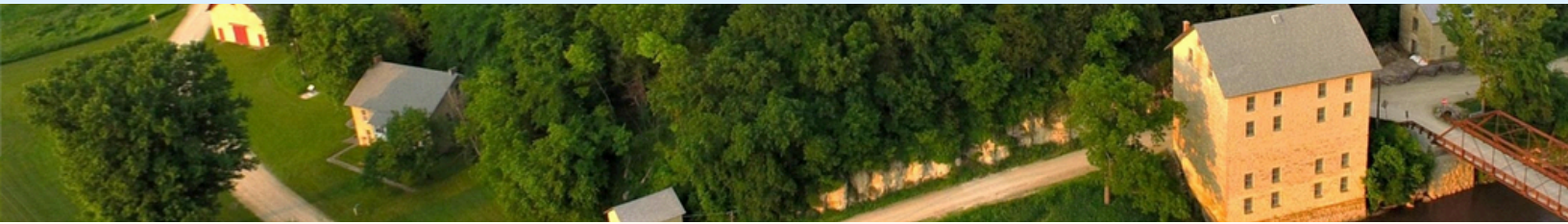
Mail to:  
Motor Mill Foundation

-or-

Clayton County Conservation Board  
29862 Osborne Rd  
Elkader, IA 52043

Phone: 563-245-1516  
Email: [cccb@claytoncountyia.gov](mailto:cccb@claytoncountyia.gov)





## OUR PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

The [River Bluffs Scenic Byway](#) stretches throughout both Clayton and Fayette counties. This scenic route extends for 109 miles and passes through "Bluff Country", an area in Northeast Iowa known for its rolling hills and valleys, towering bluffs, and beautiful green landscape.

[www.traveliowa.com/trails/river-bluffs-scenic-byway/11/](http://www.traveliowa.com/trails/river-bluffs-scenic-byway/11/)



[Silos and Smokestacks National Heritage Area](#) preserves and tells the story of American agriculture and its global significance through partnerships and activities that celebrate the land, people, and communities of the area. [www.silosandsmokestacks.org](http://www.silosandsmokestacks.org)



The mission of the [Clayton County Conservation Board](#) is to promote the health and general welfare of the people; and to model and encourage preservation, conservation, education, and recreation through responsible use and appreciation of our natural resources and cultural heritage. [www.claytoncountyconservation.org](http://www.claytoncountyconservation.org)



The mission of the [Motor Mill Foundation](#) is to protect and preserve the architectural integrity, history, natural beauty and serenity of the Motor Mill site and its surroundings and to develop appropriate uses and interpretation as a regional treasure for the benefit of future generations. [www.motormill.org](http://www.motormill.org)



The [Turkey River Recreational Corridor](#) provides several outdoor activities, like land and water trails, that people can enjoy along the Turkey River. The scenic river connects the towns of Elgin, Clermont, and Elkader offering various businesses and historic attractions as well. <https://turkeyrivercorridor.com/>



The [Great River Road National Scenic Byway](#) follows the course of the Mississippi River for 3,000 miles from northern Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico. The scenic route passes through 10 states and hundreds of river towns. Motor Mill Historic Site is a designated Interpretive Center (IC) of the Great River Road - An All American Road! [www.experiencemississippiriver.com](http://www.experiencemississippiriver.com)