

Vol. 41 • Spring 2026

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.



Motor Mill Historic Site
28518 Galaxy Rd, Elkader, IA, USA

Clayton County Conservation Board
29862 Osborne Rd, Elkader, IA 52043

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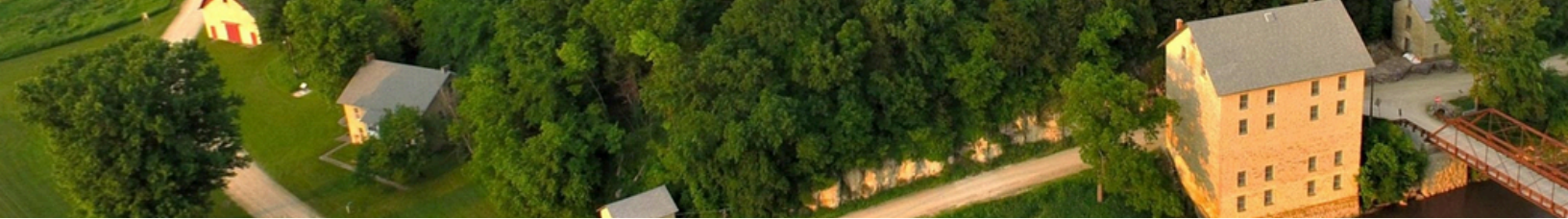
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<https://motormill.org/milling-around/>



FOUNDATION NEWS

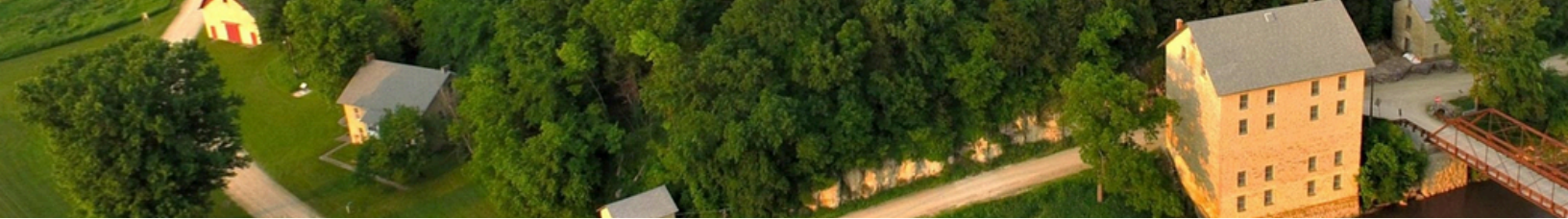


CHUCK MORINE HONORED APRIL 25

The Motor Mill Foundation honored longest standing volunteer, Chuck Morine, with a surprise party full of family and friends on Saturday April 25th by unveiling the Charles H. Morine Workshop. The foundation brought in his family from across the country; he said that he was grateful for the foundation's effort in making that happen. "This party really blew me away," he said.



Morine joined the Motor Mill Foundation shortly after its inception in 2002 and has been an active volunteer ever since as a tour guide, treasurer, and helping the volunteer work crew on projects, donating countless hours that will take years for someone to match. One of the founders of the Motor Mill Foundation, Larry Stone, said Morine has been an instrumental part of the foundation's journey. According to Stone, "None of the progress we've made on the mill would be possible without him and the work of other volunteers."



CHRIS SCHOEN RECEIVES STATE AWARD

By Laura Elsinger

A small group of Iowans gathered on May 28, 2026 at the State Historical Society in Des Moines. What brought them together was their mutual passion for and commitment to Iowa history. Motor Mill Foundation board member and Vice president Chris Schoen, along with his wife, Laura Elsinger, were among them. The exemplary achievements of nine people were recognized that day at the annual Excellence in History Awards. Chris was honored with the Excellence in Archaeology and Historic Preservation Award.

Chris built a career as a professional archaeologist, having made significant contributions to the academic knowledge of the historic and prehistoric past through much of the United States. Now in retirement, he continues to apply his craft at the local level. In 2020, he directed the excavation of flood water sediments from the basement of Motor Mill, recovering two of the wooden turbines that had translated the power of the river to the machinery of the grist mill operation from 1870 to 1883, when the milling operation ceased.

The report came together through the winter of 2024/2025 and was submitted to the Iowa State Historic Preservation Office, Community Programs Bureau of the State Historic Society of Iowa. A copy is also held by the Clayton County Conservation Board at Osborne Center. The report, entitled Removal of Alluvial Sediments from the Basement of the Motor Mill, Clayton County, Iowa, prepared by Christopher M. Schoen with contributions by Laura J. Elsinger, was more ambitious than simply documenting the excavation. It also aimed to compile the broader story of Motor Mill and the historic town of Motor as well. Chris' report was considered so exemplary by the review office that he was nominated for this year's award.

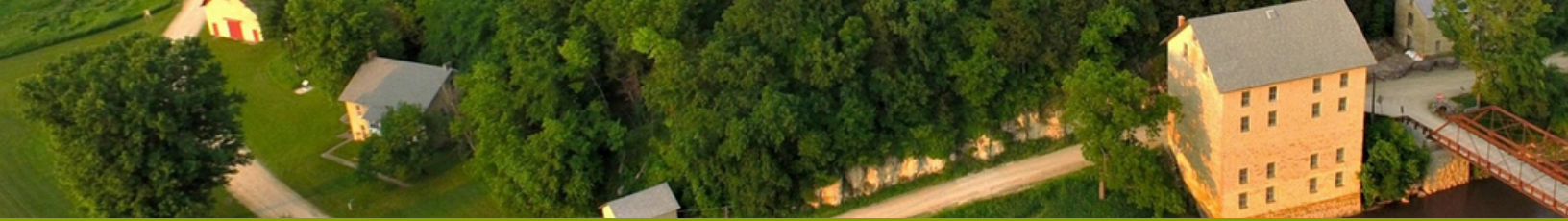
The story of Motor Mill is a rich tale of the past, but it also continues to be expanded as today's county employees, board members, and other volunteers make their contributions.



State Historical Society of Iowa Administrator
Valerie Van Kooten and Chris Schoen



Chris Schoen during 2020 excavation of
basement sediments



HISTORY CORNER: THE FOUNDERS

"Jack determined to round out his milling career by constructing a mill finer and bigger than any that had yet been conceived by pioneers."

James O. Crosby refering to John "Jack" Thompson



JOHN THOMPSON

1/20/1804 - 4/23/1891

We begin our Motor Mill Founder Series with John Thompson, whose dream it was to build a grand mill in this valley.

John Thompson was born in Scott Co., Kentucky in 1804. Thompson headed west at 17 with his family to Missouri where he tried

his luck at a variety of trades before he made his way to Dubuque, Iowa in 1836. His experience in the stock business and the mercantile business prepared him well for what he was to accomplish once he found his way to Clayton County.

The general store he owned in Dubuque may have sparked his passion for milling. A sucessfull businessman, he moved to Clayton County in 1844 and immediately set to work building up and improving the pioneer communities in this new county. He became a real influencer here,

partnering with other men of vision like Elisha Boardman, Chester Sage, and Timothy Davis. Together they founded Elkader and helped him build a mill there. As his success grew, he branched out. He joined the railroad company as president at McGregor and built his 2nd mill at Clermont which he later sold to Govenor Larabee.

His dream was to build a 3rd and final mill downriver from Elkader. A mill to rival all others. He entered into partnership with James O. Crosby and J.P Dickenson and set upon building another town in Clayton County he named Motor. They build a grist mill, cooperage, inn, stable and a smokehouse. All of which can still be seen today if you visit Motor Mill Historic Site.

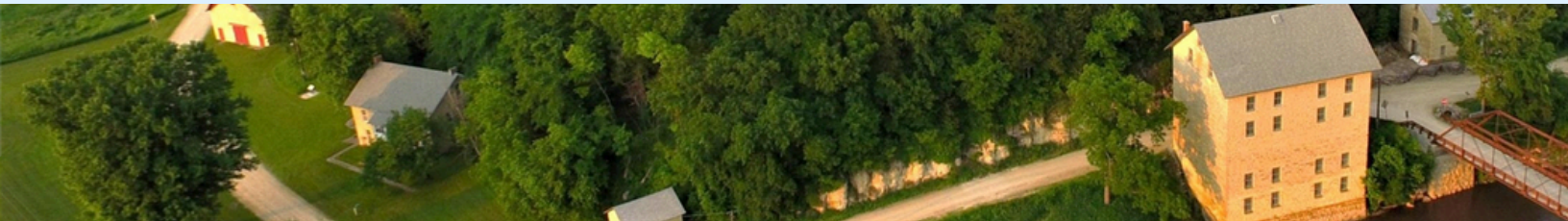
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SCHEDULE 1.—Inhabitants in Motor in the County of Clayton, State of Iowa, enumerated by me on the 19 day of July, 1870.

Post Office: Motor Asst. Marshal.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Name			Age	Sex	Color	Profession, Occupation, or Trade	Value of Real Estate	Value of Personal Estate	Place of Birth	Whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, pauper, or convict	Whether married	Whether single	Whether married	Whether single	Whether married	Whether single	Whether married	Whether single	Whether married
1		John Thompson	66	M	W	School teacher			Canada										
2		Elizabeth	32	F	W	At home			Canada										
3		John	1	M	W	At home			Canada										
4		Mary	25	F	W	Teacher			Canada										
5		John	21	M	W	Teacher			Canada										
6		John	17	M	W	Teacher			Canada										
7		John	12	M	W	Teacher			Canada										
8		John	8	M	W	Teacher			Canada										
9		John	5	M	W	Teacher			Canada										
10		John	3	M	W	Teacher			Canada										
11		John	2	M	W	Teacher			Canada										
12		John	1	M	W	Teacher			Canada										
13		John	0	M	W	Teacher			Canada										
14		John	0	M	W	Teacher			Canada										

According to the 1870 census of Motor, John Thompson lived in the Inn when first built with his Daughter Nettie, the Falconers who ran the Inn for him, the school teacher Mary Davis, and a maid named Elizabeth. Thompson's other daughter, Marry Jane Appleman, lived in Clermont.



NEW AT MOTOR

BOLTER MODEL

This new interactive bolter display demonstrates how the freshly ground flour was sifted through screens of different sizes to separate the particle sizes for the different grades of flour they were after. Examples of much larger real bolters from the era can be found on the 3rd floor of the mill.



TRAIL RE-NAMED

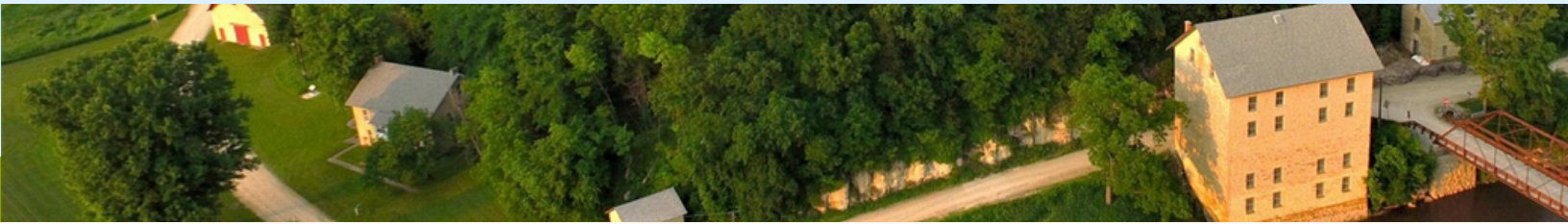
ROBERT AND RUTH GRAU MEMORIAL TRAIL

The Robert Grau Memorial Trail has been renamed to honor both Robert and Ruth for their years of dedication to Clayton County Conservation and Motor Mill.

Originally Ruth and her family began the Grau savannah reconstruction and trail project in memory of her late husband for all his years of service to the Clayton County Conservation Board as a charter boardmember. Now it is time to recognize all the support that Ruth gave the Conservation Board carrying on her husband's legacy. Ruth was a tireless supporter of Motor Mill and Clayton County Conservation. She will be missed.

Interpretive trail signs project was one of the many projects Ruth was involved with.





GIFT SHOP CORNER

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.



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

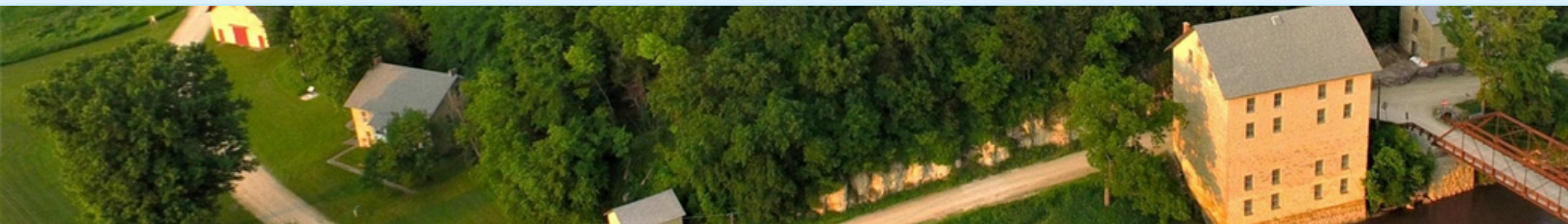


"STORIES & STONES"

TOURS EACH
WEEKEND
THROUGH
OCTOBER 11TH

Special weekend tours by our
dedicated volunteers.

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.

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



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

James O. Crosby

TO SEND DONATIONS OR FOR MORE INFORMATION:

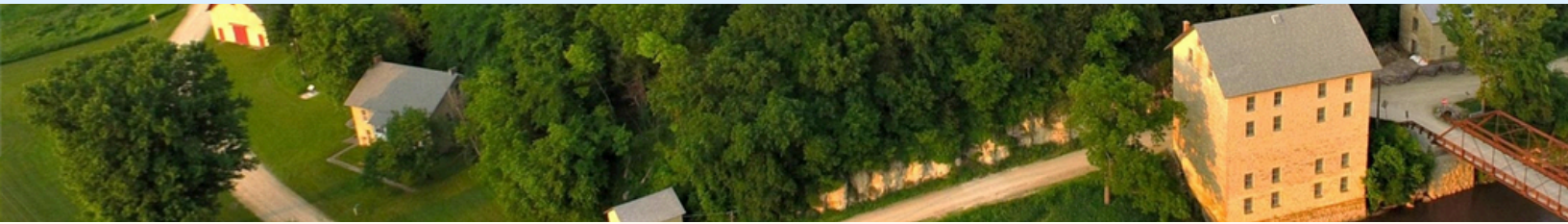
Donate online at:
www.motormill.org/donations

Mail to:
Motor Mill Foundation

-or-

Clayton County Conservation Board
29862 Osborne Rd
Elkader, IA 52043

Phone: 563-245-1516
Email: cccb@claytoncountya.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/



[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

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



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

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