

History of the Prairie Mills Windmill Golden, Illinois

Construction of the Prairie Mills Windmill began in August 1872 under the direction of Henrich R. Emminga, a German immigrant who settled in the region in February 1852. Henrich Emminga was born in Ostfriesland in the Holtrop-Wiesens area in 1829. He was trained in Germany to be a millwright by occupation. During his lifetime, Emminga built three windmills; the first in Golden, Illinois in 1854; the second in Felde Germany in 1866; and his third, the Prairie Mills Windmill, in 1872.

The Prairie Mills Windmill was used in the manufacture of buckwheat flour, rye and graham flour, cornmeal, and ordinary mill feeds. The first story was completed in September 1872. The following winter and spring Mr. Emminga made most of the wooden machinery. The large iron components of the mill were cast at the city foundry in Quincy. The smaller iron parts were made in Camp Point. The plans and patterns for the castings were created by Mr. Emminga.

The upper stories and tower section of the mill were completed in April 1873. Two sets of lava burr stones were ready for use in September 1873. The grinding of mill foods began shortly after. In August 1874, the third set of burr stones were added for the grinding of buckwheat. This burr is five feet in diameter.

In the fall of 1878, H.H. Emminga bought his father's interest in the windmill and remained the sole owner until his death on December 9, 1915. The mill was then operated as the Golden Elevator and Mill Company. In March 1922 it was taken over by the Consolidated Cereal Company, with J.J. Emminga and F.B. Franzen consolidating the Prairie Mills Windmill and another windmill east of Golden. In March 1923 Mr. Franzen became the sole owner.

A strong wind tore off two of the four sails on February 9, 1924. A 30 horsepower gasoline engine was installed to power the mill and milling continued in this manner for some time. Operations were later discontinued altogether.

The mill stood vacant for many years until March 1956 when it was opened as a tavern in the lower story of the tower. The mill was eventually turned into a supper club. The Golden Historical Society acquired the mill in 1986 after the supper club closed and the threat from another community to purchase the windmill and remove it there to be erected.

Since that time, the Golden Historical Society has been diligently working to restore the structure into an actual working windmill. Over the past several years, work has focused on the structural integrity of the windmill. With the windmill structurally sound, restoration of the windmill began. Now 15 years later and more than \$500,000 in state grants and local donations, the windmill has been transformed into a working mill.

On Sunday, October 28, 2001, the Golden Historical Society dedicated the restoration of the Prairie Mills Windmill. With the release of the brake wheel, the winds of this western Illinois prairie community gently began turning the sails to life again after more than 70 years.

Respectfully submitted by Randy Kurfman, Golden, Illinois December 8, 2001

