



THE DUTCH WINDMILL NEAR MINNESOTA LAKE
[From a photograph presented to the Minnesota Historical
Society by Mrs. Leach]

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

A "HAUNTED WINDMILL"

Near the town of Minnesota Lake in Faribault County stands a windmill that is popularly reputed to be haunted. It is rapidly falling into ruin, for it has not been used since its owner and builder died. Although abandoned and decaying, it still serves as a monument to the ingenuity and industry of the Minnesota pioneers.

Gottlieb Shastag, a miller from Holland, built the mill in the early sixties with the help of his neighbors. He spent two years in the woods near Mankato fashioning the parts of his mill. Working with rude, handmade tools, he carved the various parts from hard wood. The great gear wheels, some of them ten feet in diameter, are spliced together with wooden pins. The tooled wooden teeth, which meshed to drive the machinery, are carefully inserted. The main drive shaft is a huge oak log sixteen inches in diameter. The four fan blades, thirty-five feet in length, were most skillfully constructed. Working without patterns, using only the memory of his father's mill in Holland to guide him, this dauntless pioneer carried his task to success.

Since there was no water power to turn the mill, wind power had to be utilized to the utmost. To accomplish this, the fan was built so that the blades could be set by hand to face the wind. The whole top of the mill could be turned and anchored to a post to hold the fan in the desired position as long as the wind blew from that direction. In order that the miller might enter the mill with safety from any side, a number of doors were provided. Each part of the mill was fashioned by hand. Floor, shingles, handrails, and bins are all the work of Gottlieb's hands. Even the large grinding stones, shaped by

chipping from Minnesota niggerheads, were ground and polished by hand.

No one at the present time seems to know just why the mill parts were constructed so far from the present site of the mill. Some say that the mill was first erected near Mankato and later torn down by Gottlieb and removed to Minnesota Lake. Others report that he could not find suitable wood near its present site and as a result was forced to go a distance to secure material. At all events, it is known that Gottlieb and his neighbors hauled all the parts by ox-team through the woods and over the prairies. Even the great center shaft was moved in this way. The distance was long and the roads were poor or altogether lacking, but these and other obstacles did not deter the pioneers. When all the pieces had been assembled, a "raising bee," under Gottlieb's direction, took place. How all this was managed without modern machinery is a mystery today. Putting the parts of the windmill in place must have been dangerous and exhausting work. It had to be done carefully, too, so that the cogs would mesh and the fan turn smoothly.

"The new mill," according to a newspaper account published a few years ago, "must have been a wonderful sight in the woods by the lake, and the insistent creaking of the giant blades must have sounded odd in the quiet of the primitive land. Doubtless the Indians felt at a loss to account for the strange round house with the big wings, that, blown around by the wind, turned the wheels that ground the white man's flour for him."¹ The settlers were glad, however, for they could now have their grain ground near home and need not make the long and dangerous trip to Waseca. For some ten years Gottlieb did most of the grinding for the settlers who lived in the vicinity of Minnesota Lake. The coming of the railroads, however,

¹ "The Old Haunted Windmill at Minnesota Lake," in the *Evening Tribune* (Albert Lea), December 15, 1927. The present note is largely based upon the material included in this article. *Ed.*

brought to the community the better-milled flour from the large mills; and as a consequence Gottlieb's millstones were used not to grind wheat, but to crush food for stock.

As the mill's machinery became worn with usage, it sometimes failed to function. The miller, who it appears was very superstitious, was convinced that there was a devil inside the mill. He even went so far as to attribute its presence to two of his enemies, whose purpose, he thought, was to bewitch the place. He endured five years of difficulty, but his troubles came to an end, so he said, when he managed to chase the devil out in the form of a black rabbit. In order to prevent further trouble, he refused to permit anyone, even members of his family, to enter the mill thereafter. All its doors save one he nailed up. At that one door he received grain for grinding. He did all his work alone. In 1913 he was struck on the head by one of the mill fans and the injuries that he sustained from the blow caused his death.

Never since his death has the old mill ground any grain. No one has dared to do any work there and this rare Dutch windmill is abandoned. The exterior is in need of repair and the fan is broken and dangerous; but the inside is in good condition. It is littered with leaves and dirt and the wooden gears and other equipment have been patched with nails, but the mill remains much as Gottlieb left it. The winding stairs to the hopper, where the grain was dumped, are still strong enough for the curious to climb. The haunted gear chamber, from which a black rabbit — the descendant of the original witch rabbit — may jump out is well worth a visit.

It seems a pity that this old mill is not restored to its early appearance and preserved for its historical interest in this great milling state of Minnesota, for it is a marvel of mechanical genius, a monument to pioneer industry.

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