

Innovation Sparks a Growing Economy

Technical advancements in the mill produced improvements and appreciation in the bustling Mazomanie community

By the turn of the century, the mill and the coming of the railroad became a leading driver of commerce in a thriving Mazomanie. During the 1880s substantial improvements were made in the operation of the mill. Under the banner "Mazomanie Mills," William Thompson purchased wheat from as far away as Iowa and Minnesota for specialty flours which he not only sold locally, but shipped to markets in Boston and New York. Between November 1874 and April 1875, the mill was running with six run-of-stone, employed 20 men and was the largest in the state.

Under Edward Sanderson's ownership in 1876, he economized on space leaving more room for packing and shipping, increased the grinding capacity to eight run-of-stone and installed a double turbine rated at 116 horsepower. The "Arcade Mill" was said to have run 24 hours a day and was producing 125 barrels of flour a day.

A flour exchange system was also adopted in September 1882. For the value of every bushel of wheat brought in, a comparable value could be taken out in flour and feed. By this system, a farmer saved time and received far superior quality of flour than in the old plan.

On August 2, 1883, new owners William Hover, John Hicks and the Bronson family, had bought into a mill which had reached maturity. The building was in good repair, it had been equipped with thousands of dollars worth of the latest machinery and its products held their own in a variety of markets.

In late 1885, the "Mazomanie Milling Co." and the community combined to produce an astonishing innovation. An alert Seymour Bronson, part owner of the mill, conceived the idea of using the mill's turbines to run an Edison dynamo which would generate electricity for lighting the downtown business area. The electric lights were put into operation for the first time on December 29, 1885. Water from Black Earth Creek, via the mill pond, spilled over two sunken generators, to provide power for the mill and reportedly for the first electric lights in Dane County. Tunnels below the village carried the water back to the creek.

In 1886, as the result of a communication by cable, the mill sold and delivered a carload of flour to Antwerp, Belgium. Also, in 1888, water mains were run from the mill pond to the business district primarily for fire protection. At no cost to the village, "Mazomanie Milling Co." agreed to furnish water from the pond and to supply and operate a hydraulic pump located inside the mill. The village was noted for the rapid advancement that had been made in the nature of public improvements the past two years, but the crowning success was the waterworks.