

Dillard Mill State Historic Site

History and Significance

Dillard Mill, originally known as Mischke's Mill, was built by Emil Mischke and his sister, Mary, between 1904 and 1908. It played a vital role in the community of Dillard, Missouri. The mill was powered by a turbine instead of a waterwheel and the grain was crushed between a series of steel rollers instead of being ground between stone burs as in earlier mills. At the time of its construction, the mill was 'state of the art' water milling. Now, it is one of Missouri's best-preserved, intact and operable examples of a turn-of-the-century, water-powered gristmill. As such, its preservation provides visitors with the opportunity to see a working gristmill and its interpretation allows an understanding of the importance of such enterprises to the economy of rural areas through the mid-20th century.

The Mischkes operated the mill together until 1917 when Mary sold her share to her brother. Emil continued the business until 1930 when he sold it to Lester Klemme. Klemme was not a miller but would hire millers to keep the mill going. The local flour-milling business declined in the 1930's because flour became cheaper and more conveniently purchased at stores. After that, Klemme concentrated more on cattle feed production and developed the area into a lodge for tourists and vacationers.

Klemme sold the mill and its surrounding 132 acres to the Leo A. Drey (LAD) Foundation on December 30, 1974 for \$53,000. On December 1, 1975, the LAD Foundation entered into a 25- year lease agreement with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, and on October 23, 1977, Dillard Mill State Historic Site was officially dedicated. The lease with the LAD Foundation was renewed for another 25 years in 2001.

The story of the historic site goes much deeper than just the interpretation of a mill. It is the story of the economics of a little Ozark hamlet named (Old) Dillard. The entrepreneurial attempts to eke out a living in this remote hill country meant that a miller probably could not subsist without finding sources of additional income. According to recently found court records, Emil Mischke had a stave (saw mill) operation on site and was

under contract to produce 500,000 staves between 1902 and 1907, and then to deliver them to the rail yard at Dillard.

Klemme was another of the mill's owners who also had some commercial sense. When he owned the land, he operated Klemme's Old Mill Lodge for tourists. This operation expanded into a small complex of cabins along with the lodge. One small cabin and the old lodge that now serves as park housing are all that remain standing. Another house is also preserved on site and that was the home of Klemme's mother, Mimi. It now serves as a park office. He also charged DC batteries using the mill's generated power. Both Mischke and Klemme proved to be enterprising individuals.

The enterprising spirit was not limited to the mill and a lodge. The hamlet also contained other buildings such as: a school house (long since destroyed), a cemetery; a store which also served as a post office. Built in the 1880's, the Adams-Wilhite store was reopened for public interpretation in 1996. The Adams-Wilhite store building is the only building still standing at the site of the town of (Old) Dillard. The store is the last of several general stores that served the people of the town.

Dillard Mill's natural setting is one of great beauty and is a drawing point for many of the facility's visitors. Care is taken to preserve that natural landscape through monitoring of the area's two streams, Huzzah and Indian creeks, for water quality, bank erosion and any other threats that may occur. Besides viewing historic buildings, a limited day use area is provided for visitor recreation that encompasses a small shelter, two ADA accessible restrooms, picnic tables and grills, and field exhibits explaining different buildings in the hamlet. Rugged hiking opportunities also are available on site.

The facility currently encompasses the original 132 acres purchased by the LAD Foundation with an additional 30-acre scenic easement adjoining the back of the property.

On January 14, 2015 Dillard Mill, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.