

## 2019 Most Endangered Historic Places in Illinois

### Millstadt Milling & Feed Company

#### QUICK STATS

- **Location:** 302 South Jefferson Street, Millstadt, St. Clair County
- **Built:** 1857, Grain Elevator Built in 1880
- **Architect:** Unknown
- **Current owner:** Private
- **Historic significance:** This property is one of the oldest continually operating grain elevators in the state. It represents a critical piece of Illinois' industrial and agricultural past.
- **Why it is endangered:** Millstadt Village officials declared the site a "public nuisance" in November 2018, giving the owners six months to present a plan for restoration or risk forced demolition.
- **Take Action:** Contact the Village of Millstadt Trustees to voice support for the preservation and continued use of the mill.



*Credit: Liz Chilsen*

#### BACKGROUND

Millstadt Milling & Feed Company has been in continuous operation for over 160 years and houses one of the oldest still-operable grain elevators in the state. James and Melissa Helfrich purchased the business and historic mill in late 2017 and are committed to saving this important example of Illinois' agricultural and industrial heritage. To their surprise, however, Millstadt Village officials have recently declared the site a "public nuisance," threatening to demolish the historic site if they did not provide a structural assessment and plan for repairs within six months.

Millstadt Milling & Feed Company was originally founded in 1857 at its current location at the southeast corner of Jefferson and Laurel Streets. In 1880, Fred Backer and Christian Stern added a wheat elevator to the site as business was flourishing. The crib-form grain elevator is typical of the late 1800s and was constructed of wood two-by-fours horizontally stacked 70 feet high. The Millstadt elevator was built to double the capacity of most mills constructed at that time,

## 2019 Most Endangered Historic Places in Illinois

### Millstadt Milling & Feed Company

holding 50,000 bushels vs 25,000. The Mobile & Ohio railroad came to town in 1883 to serve the mill, and in 1900, the mill was converted to a feed mill. While rail service has ceased at the site and the mill and elevator have passed through several owners, the site has remained in continuous use, making the grain elevator one of the oldest in Illinois still in operation.

Grain elevators and flour mills played a large role in the growth of Illinois throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The state prospered as corn, wheat and other grains grown around the Midwest were processed and shipped to large East Coast cities. Populations expanded in response to this economic growth, and towns like Millstadt attracted immigrants seeking rich farmland and agro-industrial opportunities. Structures like the Millstadt Milling & Feed Company represent a major piece of this history, but, as agricultural production and processing became more centralized throughout the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, many of these smaller, local facilities were left vacant. One of the other major examples in Millstadt—an 1857-built flour mill on the 100 block of West Oak Street—was razed in 1968. Today, there are few still-operable grain elevators left standing in the region.

The Millstadt Milling & Feed Company, however, remains in sound condition. One of the largest and tallest structures in the area, it continues to be a very visible part of the central village landscape. In 1985, the St. Clair County Historical Society recognized the importance of this long-operating building through its Landmark Award program.



*Credit: Liz Chilsen*

#### CURRENT THREAT

Although the exterior has suffered from deterioration, new owners James and Melissa Helfrich have been working to rehabilitate and save the historic mill. They are committed to the preservation of this critical piece of our industrial heritage and have worked with a number of community members, as well as the Millstadt Historical Society to raise awareness of the historic structure. As part of their efforts, the Helfrichs have discussed options for adaptive reuses of portions of the property, including uses that allow public access to the interior of the historic structure.



## 2019 Most Endangered Historic Places in Illinois

### Millstadt Milling & Feed Company

Unfortunately, to the surprise of the mill owners, Millstadt Village officials declared the site a “public nuisance” in November 2018, with the possibility of condemnation and demolition of the property. The Village had previously purchased a large parcel of the mill’s property from the former owner adjacent to the historic mill, demolishing the structures on that lot with intentions to plan and construct a new village hall.

Although the owners were given until June 2019 to present an assessment and plan for repairs, the overall rehabilitation project is a complex one, especially given the long history and functional nature of the site. To secure the future of this piece of industrial and agricultural history, the owners are working with Landmarks Illinois to develop plans for an immediate assessment and repairs. Instead of focusing on condemnation and potential demolition, we are calling on Millstadt Village officials to support this reinvestment and preservation opportunity in their community.

#### WHAT YOU CAN DO

- [Contact the Village of Millstadt Trustees](#) to state your support for saving the Millstadt Milling & Feed Co.
- If you have information on industrial heritage preservation, mill reuse or economic development possibilities for the Metro East region, contact [Landmarks Illinois’ Springfield Office](#).

#### FURTHER READING

- Millstadt History: <https://www.millstadthistoricalsociety.org/history.html>
- Visit the [St. Clair County Historical Society](#) website