

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

FINAL

### National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

#### 1. Name of Property

historic name Star Milling and Electric Company Historic District

other names/site number Star Mill Falls, Star Gristmill

#### 2. Location

street & number County Roads 0505 W and 700 N N/A not for publication

city or town Howe XX vicinity

state Indiana code IN county LaGrange code 087 zip code 46761

#### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

*Patrick R. Roberts*

8/1/95

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Indiana Department of Natural Resources

State of Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.
  - See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
  - See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Star Milling & Electric CO. H.D.  
Name of Property

LaGrange Co., IN  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
1	0	sites
2	0	structures
0	0	objects
4	0	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION:**

**INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION:**

Energy Facility

Energy Facility

Manufacturing Facility

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

No Style

foundation CONCRETE

walls BRICK

roof ASPHALT

other

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Star Milling & Electric Co., H.D.

LaGrange Co., IN

Name of Property

County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- XX A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Social History

Industry

Period of Significance

1911-1945

Significant Dates

1911

1929

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

McKee, Ray

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- XX State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

Star Milling & Electric Co. H.D.  
Name of Property

LaGrange Co., IN  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property 4.0 AC ±

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	16	630010	4622850
Zone	Easting	Northing	
2	16	630060	4622850

3	16	630060	4622660
Zone	Easting	Northing	
4	16	629670	4622940

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Richard K. Muntz/Attorney at Law Suzanne Fischer/DHPA Intern

organization Richard K. Muntz, P.C. date 1-30-95

street & number 109 S. Detroit St. telephone 219/463-2151

city or town LaGrange state IN zip code 46761

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Star Mill, Inc.

street & number P.O. Box 1021 telephone 219/463-2151 463-4922

city or town Shipshewana state IN zip code 46565

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Star Milling & Electric Company H.D.  
LaGrange, Indiana

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Architectural Description

The Star Milling and Electric Company Historic District consists of four contributing resources: a small hydroelectric powerhouse built in 1929, two dams also dating from 1929, and the site of the original 1870 gristmill/hydroelectric generating plant.

The 1929 powerhouse is a one-story front-gable building that rests on a concrete foundation spanning the Fawn River. The low-pitched gable roof is covered in asphalt shingles. The building is rectangular in shape and has dimensions of approximately 22'x 36'. The main facade faces east. The poured concrete foundation is approximately 15' high and has an opening at the bottom to allow water to flow through the building and turn the turbines. All of the electrical generating equipment is original to the building and is still in operation (NIPSCO rewired the facility in 1964).

The main facade of the building contains two small windows centered under the gable. The left window has four panes and the right window is partially covered by a ventilating fan with metal louvers. The entrance is on the right side of the facade and on the left is a large, multi-paned sash window. All windows are metal framed and have flat limestone lintels and sills. The door is of white-painted wood with a limestone lintel and sill, and above it, a limestone plaque reads "Star Mill 1930." The roof has a narrow molded cornice, a moderate eave overhang, and exposed purlins. The power transmission lines exit the building at the top left of the facade, level with the lower half of the upper window.

Both side elevations are alike, with three large multi-paned windows spaced evenly along the walls. Windows are identical to the large front window. The windows on the south side have been blocked off by an interior partition.

The rear elevation is similar to the main facade, with a second large window replacing the door on the right side.

The site of the 1870 mill is reported to comprise the ruins of the building, which was demolished in 1964; all of the grist milling machinery; and the 1911 generating equipment. The building and its contents were collapsed into the

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Star Milling & Electric Company H.D.  
LaGrange, Indiana

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basement and covered over with earth. When the mill was built in 1870, it was a two-and-a-half story, front-gable, frame building with weatherboard siding and a stone foundation. A suspended shed roof sheltered an entrance portico.

The two dams were built of concrete in 1929. The upper dam is the containment for the reservoir that provides water for the generator. The lower dam is a buffer for excess water escaping from the upper dam and spillway. The upper dam was originally built of timber in 1870 to provide water for the gristmill, and was three feet high. It was rebuilt in 1911-12 with concrete to the same size, and raised to a height of seven feet in 1929. The drop in elevation (head) necessary to power the generating machinery comes from a dredged channel and not from either of the dams.



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Star Milling & Electric Company H.D.  
LaGrange, Indiana

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**Statement of Significance**

The Star Milling and Electric Company Historic District is significant under Criterion A in the areas of social history and industry. The old mill generated electric power from 1911 to 1929 and the new powerhouse began generating electricity in 1930 and is still in operation today. Star Mill is significant in the area of industry as the oldest and largest privately-owned hydroelectric facility continuously operating in Indiana. It is significant in the area of social history as one of the first attempts to provide electricity to rural residents from a central power plant, and as an example of how electricity improved the quality of life on farms and in rural communities.

When Star Mill was built in 1870, the machinery was turned by water power, harnessed by a timber dam. The owner of the mill, O.P. McKee, began generating power for use in his feed-grinding operation and his home around 1910. In 1911, he ran a transmission line at his own expense to the town of Howe (about 2 1/2 miles) and some neighboring farms and began selling electricity. He and his family did all their own repair and maintenance on the equipment and wires. In 1912, McKee replaced the old timber dam with a sturdier one of concrete.

In 1929, Ray McKee (who took over operation of the plant after the death of his father in 1928) was approached by the electric utility NIPSCO, who offered him a loan to build a new, larger generating plant. NIPSCO would then purchase the electricity from Star. The construction of this facility provided work for local residents during the first months of the Depression at a wage of \$1 per day. The generating equipment installed in the plant included a control panel, two generators, and two turbines of different sizes. The flow of the river controlled which turbine would be operated. This equipment is still in use today.

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LaGrange, Indiana

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The new Star plant went into operation in the summer of 1930. This powerplant could produce twice the electricity of the old one. At this time, Star Mill was at the outer limits of NIPSCO's transmission network. The new plant would provide electricity to outlying areas that were previously too far away to receive power from one of NIPSCO's own generating plants. Under the terms of its new contract, Star would continue to produce electricity for its own needs, and sell the excess to NIPSCO. Although the power generated by Star was fed into NIPSCO's power grid and sent out to a large area, the utility continued to supply electricity to Star's farm customers.

Before World War II, only 10% of all U.S. farms had access to electric power generated by central stations. About 4% more had their own generators. The first rural electrification project (1906) was a two-mile line that served five communities. Such projects were rare, however. According to the 1930 census, Indiana had only 15,163 electrified farms. Most of the farms with electricity were located in New England (where hydroelectric power was cheap and plentiful) and the far West (where vast acres under irrigation made it economically feasible to run transmission lines). Farmers in the South and Midwest were not as likely to use electricity because it was expensive and they were not yet aware of its benefits.

The cost of running a transmission line from a utility company to a farm could range from \$1200 to over \$2000 per mile. Since there were fewer customers per mile of line in rural areas than in cities, it was not profitable enough for utilities to provide service. When they did run electric lines to farms, they often charged farmers a \$500-\$1000 deposit to defray the cost of the wires and poles, then charged a rate double that of the cost to urban customers. For this reason, most farmers did not have electricity supplied by a central station, but some generated a small supply for their own lighting needs.

In 1935, Roosevelt created the Rural Electrification Authority (REA) in an attempt to help rural areas get electricity through



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government loans. Loans were made to non-profit cooperatives called Rural Electrification Membership Corporations (REMC). Indiana had the first REMC in the U.S.; LaGrange County did not energize its REMC until 1939. Star Mill had been providing electricity to its customers for 28 years before most of the rest of the county had power. Pending renewal of its license, Star will continue to provide electricity to NIPSCO, as it has since 1930.

By providing electricity to farms and the small town of Howe, Star Mill improved the quality of life for its customers. Before electrification, rural residents were likely to suffer from diseases caused by unrefrigerated food and poor sanitation. Indoor plumbing and running water, which helped limit sewage-borne diseases and parasites, were made possible by electricity. Electricity increased the number of machines available to farmers and made their work more efficient. Perishable fruits and vegetables could be shipped longer distances to market or stored for longer periods of time. The dairy industry experienced a large increase in production and consumption after World War I due to improved processing methods as a result of electricity. Dairy farmers benefitted not only because of refrigeration, but because the speed and efficiency of electrical machinery cut down on the amount of human handling that milk products received. The more the milk was handled, the more bacteria were found in the finished product. Many city people were afraid to drink milk or eat milk products before this time because of the health risk.

In 1923, the Committee on Relation of Electricity to Agriculture (CREA) was founded as a cooperative effort by the Farm Bureau, state agricultural colleges, and the electrical industry. CREA's main contribution to rural electrification was to make farmers aware of the different uses of electricity in their work. By 1930, it had identified over 200 applications of electricity to farm labor. Some of the important uses were: milk churns, cream separators, milking machines, bottle fillers, milk stirrers, feed grinders, sheep shearers, and corn shellers. Electric washing

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machines also saved the farm wife approximately 20 days of laundry work per year.

Star Mill helped its rural customers improve their lives with electricity. Star customers could keep up with some of the modern conveniences enjoyed by residents of urban areas without having to operate their own generators or pay exorbitant prices to have power lines run to their homes. Rural residents who had electricity were less likely to leave the farm for the city. Part of the reason for rural population loss after World War I was that rural residents wanted access to the same modern conveniences, labor-saving devices, and consumer goods as city-dwellers. Electrification and the automobile helped farmers gain access to these goods and services while keeping them on the farm. Star Mill is significant for its role in rural electrification as one of the first and longest-operating private powerplants in the state of Indiana.

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LaGrange, Indiana

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Bibliography

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Brown, D. Clayton. Electricity for Rural America: The Fight for the REA. Contributions in Economics and Economic History No. 29. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980.

Crawford, Chet. "Fourth Generation of McKee Family Living on Star Mill Farm." Sturgis Daily Journal, 18 August 1956: 7.

McKee, O.P. II. Telephone interview, 16 March 1995.

Middle West Utilities Company. Harvests and Highlines. Chicago: Middle West Utilities Company, 1930.

"New Power Plant North of Howe Nears Completion." The Standard (LaGrange, IN), 26 June 1930: 1.

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Star Milling & Electric Company H.D.  
LaGrange, Indiana

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Property consists of a triangular area delineated by UTM references as noted in Section 10 of the nomination form, being a portion of the property described below:

Twenty-two acres of land off of the West side of the Southwest quarter of the Southeast quarter of Section Thirteen (13), Township Thirty-eight (38) North, Range Nine (9) East, the same being 24 rods wide on the North end and 64 rods wide on the South end, with the privilege of erecting a dam 3 feet high; also the right to use an overflow of water on the following described land as a tail race, to wit: Commencing on the East line of and about 20 rods South of the Northeast corner of the Southeast quarter of the Southwest quarter of Section 13, Twonship 38 North, Range 9 East in said County of LaGrange and directly West from a mill now running on the Southwest quarter of the Southeast quarter of said section, running thence West and bearing North of West 55 rods until it intersects Fawn River on said first described land as now extended. Said race and land thus used and flowed to be 50 feet wide of the sole purpose of a tail race. The above and foregoing described property being known as Star Mill property.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

Boundary includes all of the contributing resources and excludes the modern and non-contributing structures belonging to the campground business.

STATE OF INDIANA  
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES  
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

