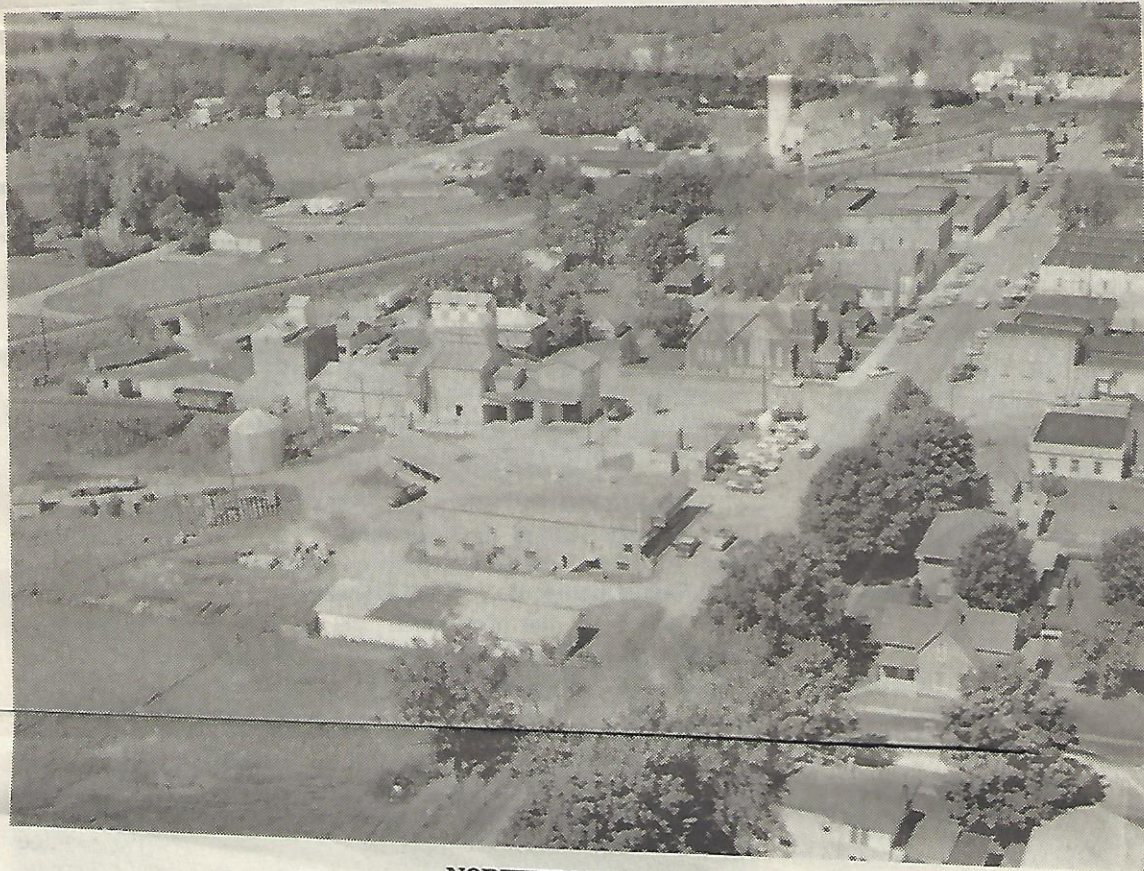




OLD MILL COMING DOWN IN MENTONE



NORTHERN INDIANA CO-OP — INTEGRAL PART OF MENTONE HISTORY

Mentone landmark coming down


By ROSA HATFIELD
Guest Feature Writer

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Gerald Romine and Bill Ettinger, owners of the building that once housed the Northern Indiana Co-op mill, are in the process of tearing a portion of the structure down. Romine said the building is in such poor repair that it has become a hazard. The northern end will be removed to the fire wall, leaving the portion that houses Ettinger Machinery and Romine's apartment.

Northern Indiana Co-op is an integral part of Mentone's history. Many Mentone residents played a part in the mill's function, either as employees or members of the board of directors.

In 1930, 130 of Mentone's leading farmers formed a charter incorporating the Mentone Cooperative Association to enable them to purchase feed at lower costs. The original board of directors consisted of M. Roy Rush, Homer Creighton, Dr. Anderson, Herschel Nellans and Clarence Leininger.

By the end of November, the building of the elevator and mill was well under way and turning out to be a great deal larger than had been anticipated. Oliver Teel and Bud Norris are names linked in the memory of many Mentone residents with the actual construction. The building was practically com-

pleted by mid-December, the machinery had been ordered and the side track to the Winona Railroad had been laid.

Many new stockholders had been added, coming from every community within a 25-mile radius of Mentone. The venture, now called Northern Indiana Cooperative Association, when combined with the Mentone egg producers, was expected to make Mentone one of the largest co-op centers in this part of the state.

A common belief behind the effort was that the existence of the town was due to the farmers and what benefitted the farmers would also benefit the town.

Not all Mentone residents held the same opinion and many of the business owners were against having a co-op form. At the first annual Northern Indiana Cooperative Association stockholders' meeting on Jan. 19, 1931, Rush advised members to do their shopping only from businesses that were friendly to the co-op.

Rush maintained that the farmers had a right to organize for their mutual benefit. He said the directors had traveled hundreds of miles at their own expense through Indiana, Illinois, Michigan and Ohio visiting other mills and attended 27 meetings before deciding on the type of building and machinery to pursue. He reminded members that "private interests have

made thousands each year on the feed we use."

Two locations were investigated as possible building sites for the mill, the present site and one by the Mollenour sawmill. The one not chosen was located on the stockyard tracks in low ground and would have required building and maintaining a long piece of road. In addition, it would have put the mill completely away from the business district.

The mill was opened in early February 1931 and by the beginning of April, it was equipped with a 50-horsepower hammer mill, a ton mixer and corn sheller. Banner and Purina Feeds were sold as well as fertilizer, hardwood, building materials, coal, gasoline and oil.

In September 1932, new coal bins were constructed with the railroad tracks running on top of the bins so the coal cars could run over top of the bins and dump the coal. With the driveway located beneath the level of the railroad tracks, customers could pull up to the bins to load before driving onto the scales.

A hardware store was added in 1937. Everett Besson remembers Clem Teel building rafters for the store in his front yard; and in 1942, a filling station was built where East Side Service now stands.

Northern Indiana Cooperative Association was active during

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Mentone landmark coming down

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the 1930s in helping Mentone become known as "The Egg Basket of the Midwest" because of the train car loads of eggs loaded on the old interurban and shipped to Eastern markets.

More interest was shown in the co-op during the 1950s than any other time. Waiting lists were long with names of people desiring to purchase stock.

During the latter part of the '60s, the financial stability of the co-op was in doubt. Business was falling off and loans were hard to obtain. In December 1967, the co-op was placed into the hands of a receiver, Max Nellans.

On Feb. 13, 1968, three months after Ed Fenker replaced Everett Rathfon as manager of the mill, Nellans sold at auction the hardware, lumber, building materials, service station, gas and oil plant, and Plot 23 and the building it contained.

Jim and Lois Miller, who had operated a hardware in Mentone since March 1964, purchased Northern Indiana Cooperative Association's hardware. Frank Sieman purchased the service station and bulk plant along with Lot 203. The bottle gas division was taken over by Petrolane Redi-gas of Warsaw.

Gerald Romine bought the mill, intending to turn it into a restaurant. However, after investigating the cost of remodeling the building, he decided to rent it out for offices and storage instead. Bill Ettinger went into partnership with Romine and moved his machine shop into the south end of the building.

Over the years, the building has housed a variety of items, from the Larry Bell memorabilia to counterfeiters.

Romine said he had rented an office to two men without ever meeting them in person. Several months later, when he still

hadn't received any rent for the building, he tried to find the men to evict them. Before he managed to meet with the men, a U.S. marshal showed up on the doorstep and informed Romine that counterfeit \$100 bills were being manufactured on the premises.

"Supposedly, these men had a contract to produce the \$100 bills but did such a poor job that they couldn't get rid of them," said Romine. "They ran a trucking company and started passing the money to their drivers. From there it circulated all over the United States. It was a long time before I would try to cash a \$100 bill anywhere in this county."

Demolition of the building marks the end of an era for Mentone, though the original business it housed has been gone for many years.

Guest feature writer Rosa Hatfield resides in the Mentone area.

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