

Wind Energy

Old School Style

Wind energy is 2007's gear industry buzzword, but the concept has been around for centuries.

In one illustration, the Fabyan windmill in Geneva, IL, has been in operation since the nineteenth century. The mill itself was originally built by German craftsman Louis Blackhaus in collaboration with German, Dutch and Swedish mill workers between 1850–1860. Hand-cut cypress beams

with hickory and maple gearing characterized the mill and its most modernized feature was a set of grain mills.

It was during its \$914,000 restoration that was completed in 2005 that the local community and engineering scholars began appreciating its uniqueness.

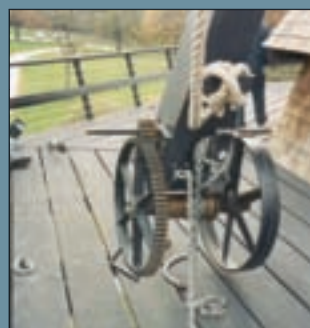
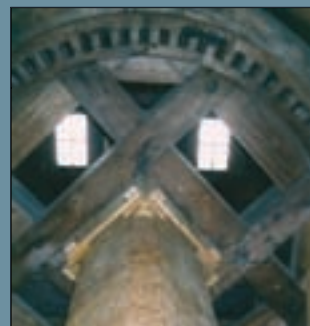
"The Fabyan windmill is the best example of an authentic Dutch windmill in the U.S.," says Dutch windmill maker Lucas Verbij, who was contracted to oversee the restoration. "It would be the most popular windmill in the Netherlands (there are currently about 1,000)."

Roman numeral markings carved into the beams used in the original construction are still visible. It took 33 workers mixing concrete by hand to build the 42"-deep x 26"-thick foundation. Inside, beams and shafts are of cypress wood and trimmed with black walnut. New wooden gears were made. At the top, or cap, of the mill is a huge cogged wheel turned by wind blowing against the vanes (blades). The vanes are covered with canvas sails to help catch the wind. The moving cog rotates a shaft running the height of the mill.

In its day, the Fabyan windmill housed a bakery in its basement. Its oven was rarely used, but its sharpening wheel, corn sheller and grain separator were indirectly responsible for feeding the colonel's livestock and two bears—Tom and Jerry—until the mill stopped grinding in 1919.

The Kane County Forest Preserve says the 65'-tall, five-story Fabyan windmill is one of the area's most photographed and popular attractions. It's open for weekend tours from May 15– Oct. 15. It's definitely the best way to glimpse authentic gear and timber work without buying a ticket to the Netherlands!

The Fabyan Windmill
1600 Chrissey Ave. (Rte. 25)
Geneva, IL 60134



Photos by Tom Haskell.

