

Teweles & Brandeis Elevator in Sawyer now known as The Granary on Sturgeon Bay's West Waterfront

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Submitter: Nancy Aten and Dan Collins, with assistance from several other community members.

We wish to nominate this property because:

- National Register and State Register listing is an honor
- We wish to protect this property
- This property is threatened with demolition or destruction

Where is the property located?

92 East Maple Street
Sturgeon Bay
Door County

Do you know any of the following information?

The architect's name was: not known

The builder's name was: Russell & Lindsey, in part

The date of construction was: 1901

What alterations or additions were made since the building was built?

- removal of porches
- interior remodeling or updating

Briefly describe any changes checked above:

The footprint and structure of the grain elevator remains intact. The metal cladding appears to be original. The roof over the adjacent loading / unloading area which was added in about 1906 has since been removed. The structures that were added over time to connect the grain elevator with other warehouse and processing buildings on site have also been removed as have those appurtenant buildings. The interior has been repaired and adapted over time, but the central elements of man lift, bucket elevator, head house diverter, nineteen 10'x10'x30' wooden grain cribs, gravity flow chutes, and fanning mill remain and were repaired for operation through about the 1960s. Since then, the elevator has been unused.

Significance of the property

Why do you think that this property should be listed in the National Register and the State Register?

The Teweles and Brandeis Granary, the last extant granary in Sturgeon Bay, is one of the few remaining symbols of the community's collective agricultural past and is an iconic fixture on Sturgeon Bay's working waterfront. There were once several other granaries on Sturgeon Bay's bustling commercial waterfront, along with warehouses, refrigerators, and mills, beginning in the 1880s. This timing coincided with two regionally important events: the completion of the Sturgeon Bay Shipping Canal directly linked Sturgeon Bay to Lake Michigan, and the Ahnapee & Western Railway linked Sturgeon Bay to the midwest. Ships and trains met at this Granary. The Teweles and Brandeis Granary may have survived the longest in part because of its commitment to innovation; it was continually improving and was "high tech" for its time. The Granary was a source of pride in the community for its capabilities, and a boon to farmers and shippers with its ability to support the efficient cleaning, storage and dispersal of nineteen marketable agricultural products at one time. This was particularly important in Door County; to build a livelihood in this place impacted by the interplay of ice, water and rocks, farmers had to be innovative and adaptable. A grain elevator that could take wagon loads of peas, oats, beans and rye and offer it to world markets by ship or rail was a natural hub for the community. If you had lived anywhere near Sturgeon Bay and your occupation was teamster, ship captain, rail-man, banker, farmer or cannery worker, you knew the Teweles & Brandeis elevator. And, you knew of the family. Founder Moses Teweles was a brother of Ludwig, founder of the famed Teweles Seed Co. of Milwaukee. Moses' son-in-law, Isidor Brandeis, was a leader in Sturgeon Bay civic affairs.

This last Sturgeon Bay granary, solidly built in 1901 of fat boards laid flat and spiked, reminds us of how Sturgeon Bay once worked, and remains a beloved symbol for today's working community. It is a reminder of how creativity and a little mechanization solved problems that gave an economic boost to all. Called the Granary Exchange, it was also a pre-internet information exchange, a place where the farming community met to share and exchange the ideas of the day. One can only imagine the conversations that took place while wagons were unloaded. The Granary structure retains the characteristic crib period storage elevator construction. (See <http://robhutcharch.com/timber-grain-elevators/> for great background on timber grain elevators). It also retains much of the operational elements needed to transport, divert and clean the varieties of grain and seed. Its waterfront mass (75' high) was historically prominent and remains prominent to the present day. It is impossible to miss! Over the decades, each time its steel cladding was painted using scaffolding, the newspaper noted the event. Wooden elevators of this type are now scarce as many were lost due to exploding grain dust, neglect or rising waterfront real estate values. This Granary survived the first two threats with only one small fire and a passing grade in a recent structural analysis. It now is mustering all of its 125,000 board feet to stave off the threat of demolition as Sturgeon Bay re-envisioning its westside waterfront. Despite loss of the rail line that once adjoined it and the warehouses that once served it, its setting along a still-working downtown commercial dock and shipping channel gives it enough context to tell its compelling story, and to inspire new community visions for the westside's working waterfront.

What do you know about the history of the property?

The Teweles & Brandeis Elevator is part of a family business spanning sixty years and three generations. The grandfather, Moses Teweles, arrived from Prague and eventually established a seed warehouse and farm produce business in Sturgeon Bay in the 1880s. This timing coincided with an important event for Door County and for the expansion of the Midwest as a whole—the completion of the Sturgeon Bay Shipping Canal in 1879 that linked Sturgeon Bay to Lake Michigan. The canal shaved 150 miles off the trip from Sturgeon Bay to ports south and eliminated the need for ships to traverse the treacherous passage (the infamous “Death’s Door”) between the tip of the Door County peninsula and the Grand Traverse Islands. Ships brought virgin timber to Milwaukee and Chicago’s burgeoning populations. They also brought the much-needed grain that was grown on the newly-cleared land. By 1894, the Ahnapee & Western Railway also linked Sturgeon Bay to the entire midwest by rail, at the Teweles & Brandeis Elevator.

Moses’ son Arthur and son-in-law Isidor Brandeis joined him in the business in 1892, and their operations were expanded to Sawyer (Sturgeon Bay’s west waterfront) in 1893. The Door County Advocate, in a 1953 historical piece states: “In those years the company handled wheat, rye, oats, barley, peas, wool, hides, etc. In later years it added other items such as potatoes, flour and seed to its stock. During the winter months, when ice prevented ships from navigating Sturgeon bay, the shipments had to be hauled by teams to the canal and there they were loaded on the Ludington, to be transported to Milwaukee. In December, 1895, the company shipped nine carloads of peas, the biggest single shipment that had ever been made from this area.”

Following Moses’ death in 1896, Arthur Teweles and Isidor Brandeis moved their Sawyer seed and produce warehouse business to the waterfront, on the Washburn dock. Quoting from the same article: “It was in 1897 that Isidor received credit for making Bay View [Sawyer] such a fine market for farm produce. Prior to his arrival in this community, it was the custom to ‘shut up shop’ in the latter part of October, when everything had been marketed. Mr. Brandeis saw greater possibilities and obtained the consent of his business associates to keep the warehouse open year round. The idea of a year round market induced farmers to come to Bay View [Sawyer] and in a few years it *changed from a small unimportant market place to the most important one on the peninsula*” [emphasis added].

The Teweles and Brandeis Granary was built on this dock in 1901, directly on the waterfront to allow the loading of these ships. (Fill later changed the shape of the waterfront and the granary now sits recessed from the shore). Preparations for the elevator included the construction of a rail spur to serve it. Preparations also included extension and reconstruction of the dock and the conversion of the old Washburn refrigerator into a planing mill.

The first piles for the Granary were delivered in February, 1901. Russell & Lindsey began work on the foundation in June. From the June 15, 1901 Advocate: “The bents of the new elevator are all up and the carpenters are now engaged in enclosing same. A millwright is expected here soon to superintend the construction of the interior, as the building is to be supplied with all the modern convenience and accessories.” July: “The walls of the new elevator are creeping upward apace, and when completed the structure will be a prominent landmark on this bay.”

This is a large timber grain elevator, with 10x10-foot bins, each thirty feet high, laid out on a 4x5 grid (a footprint of 40x50 feet), with a ground floor below and head-house above. The bins provide prolonged grain storage for nineteen different grains or other agricultural product. Each bin has a “cribbed” construction with 2x4 or 2x6 lumber stacked throughout the height of the bin, laid flat and spiked, plus diagonal bracing to handle the very heavy lateral loads. One of the twenty bins was allocated to the ‘man-lift’ and bucket hoist, to move a single occupant (who hoisted himself by counter-weighted rope and foot-brake) up to the top. The architecturally distinctive head-house on top is where the grain arrived before being sorted into its bin, through a ground-level mechanical selector. Layout of diverters with spout selectors gave operators flexible in-and-out control of the nineteen bins.

It was a rush to complete the new elevator in time for harvest. In September 1901, while all the state-of-the-art fixtures were being added to the bins (an expensive fanning mill among them) and the exterior was being sheathed with corrugated iron, grain and peas were already being stored in the elevator. The elevator was completed over the winter.

The wharf, however, had a setback that winter. In January, a fire destroyed the former refrigerator and its warehouses, which were adjacent to the new Granary. Fortunately, the steel-clad Granary was saved intact. Just days after the fire, the first contingent of pilings arrived with which to rebuild the wharf for the Granary. The rebuilt wharf was completed in time for the first ship landing at the beginning of April.

One year later, Teweles & Brandeis announced that the expensive fanning mill in the Granary had paid for itself twice over in the first year of its installation by the savings it provided in grain and labor. The August 30, 1902 Advocate states: “These [fanning] mills are recognized as the best of their class on the market, and every elevator of any pretension is introducing them.” In 1904, the newspaper noted that five men were generally kept employed about the elevator, along with an experienced man handling grain.

In the early days, the elevator was used primarily for exporting grain. Later, when dairy farming became popular, farmers relied on the Granary for the purchase of feed, particularly before the introduction of hybrid brands allowed corn to be grown in Door County. For decades, the Teweles & Brandeis Market Report provided the “buy and sell” prices for the agricultural products produced and used by this community, and the Granary was the storage bank for the exchange of these commodities. Farmers would rush their harvest to the Granary; being early meant getting a better price for one’s goods. The Granary mostly bought in the fall and sold in the spring and its steel-clad skin was designed to keep stored products dry.

The devastating 1906 San Francisco earthquake provided an illustration of the central role of the Granary and wharf in connecting community. The April 28th, 1906 Door County Democrat states: “The hearts of Sturgeon Bay and Door County people have been touched by the terrible suffering of the people of San Francisco[...]. A car now stands on the Teweles & Brandeis sidetrack [in Sawyer] which is being loaded with provisions for the needy people of San Francisco, contributed by the people of Sturgeon Bay, and the farmers of Door County. As soon as the project was made known the response was most liberal. The first contributor was the Jennings Packing Co., which responded

with 34 cases of canned peas. Other contributions followed rapidly, and the big [rail] car will be well filled when it starts on its western trip Monday morning. Those who wish to contribute to the good cause, are requested to take their produce to the car on Teweles & Brandeis sidetrack...”

Over the next decades, Teweles & Brandeis seemed to take pride in keeping the Granary a prize of efficiency and modernity. The structure was repainted every few years. A series of newer, higher horsepower gasoline engines were installed. Automatic scales were added. New warehouses were built. The railroad spur was continually improved, made more robust. A newer and faster fanning mill replaced the first. A feed grinding machine was added. The dock was extended, and a longer channel dredged for the ships that docked at the Granary.

The Granary’s foundation was also strengthened. The July 31, 1909 Door County Democrat states: “Work is progressing on the concrete foundation being placed under the Teweles & Brandeis elevator. The piles were cut off sixteen inches below the water mark and timbers 8x16 placed on top of the piles, and from this the concrete work was started. When completed the foundation is one that should last for an indefinite length of time, and it is not probable any further trouble will be experienced from the elevator settling.”

In summer 1913, Old Glory was raised in the peak of the Granary - “this being the highest point from which a flag flew.”

Improvements continued into the 1930s. Months after Isidor Brandeis’ death in 1935, his son Stanley installed a new feed grinding outfit so that feed could be custom ground on short notice every week day.

The Granary survived one more fire, in 1944. Nearby warehouses were lost and then promptly rebuilt of cement block. Operation continued apace.

The Granary left family ownership and operation in 1953 when Stanley Brandeis sold it to the Door County Co-Op. A newspaper article reported the historic event: “Thus ends the long life of a business which originated in this community and through the course of years firmly established itself in the minds of people throughout Door County”.

The Door County Co-Op continued to operate the Granary into the 1960s. Since then, it has been unused.

A December 2013 analysis by Meyer Borgan Johnson of Minneapolis for the City of Sturgeon Bay included evaluation of the elevator’s structure and foundation, in the context of possible future use. This includes two key findings. Re: Gravity Loading: “There is excess capacity within the original designs to respond to minor deterioration and adverse modifications. Several original columns were previously replaced with weaker built-up columns”, and recommends analyzing those replacement columns; repairing or replacing the weakened columns as required. Re: Lateral Loading: “The original lateral resisting system in the 1st level was not sufficiently stiff to resist wind loads without excessive deflection. New systems are required to resist future wind loads and to address the rotational forces caused by the rotated grade-beams”, suggesting two possible cost-effective solutions.

In March 2015, the City of Sturgeon Bay issued an RFP due in June 2015 for development proposals for the Granary property, which may propose either new use or demolition of the Granary. Community members are working together to assemble a proposal to keep and protect the Granary as a public amenity and iconic fixture on Sturgeon Bay's working waterfront.

Sources:

ResCartaWeb: newspaper articles (transcription of sources included as attachment). Sanborn maps (WHS). Surveys (Door County Land Information). Historic photos (WHS and newspaper). <http://robhutcharch.com/timber-grain-elevators/> for background and context.

Attachments:

Photos, surveys and maps
Transcriptions of newspaper articles