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# *The Farm*

The farm is an important category and one that has always been of great interest to me. The main part of the farm is 80 acres located six miles east of Princeton on Highway 95 and then one mile north on County Road 15, located in Isanti County and in Wyanett Township. Also part of the farm includes 40 acres one mile south and 1/4 mile west of the home place. That latter 40 is always referred to as “the meadow.” It consists of a large pond of about 15 acres and a farmable area that was split into three parts that makes up about 25 acres. That area produced all of the hay needed to feed the cattle in the winter. Occasionally potatoes or soybeans were planted in one of the fields. The hay was cut and stacked for winter use and was of the wild variety and didn’t really help much in the cow’s production of milk. But along with corn stalks and a little bit of ground oats and corn we did get enough milk to feed calves, pigs, use for the table plus some to sell to the creamery in Princeton, so there was some cash coming in monthly.

The main 80 acres of land was equally divided by a dirt road that was graveled in the late 1930s. In 1955 it was blacktopped. At that time it became Isanti County Road 15. The west 40 acres was divided into four parts. The buildings were on one portion and surrounded by three fields. All three fields were fenced, as that area was used for pasture for the cattle and horses. The remaining 40 acres across the road was always farmed. The crops were: corn, rye, oats, potatoes and sometimes soybeans. The soil was light and sandy.

In the old days, the only fertilizer was the manure produced by the livestock. If the season had a good amount of snow in the winter and

adequate rainfall in the growing season, good crops were produced. By today's standards it would be considered to be a get-by living. One must remember that life in those days (1930s and 1940s) could not be compared to later years.

Nearly everything that we ate was produced right on our farm. Our garden was large and contained potatoes, sweet corn, peas, carrots, string beans, cucumbers, strawberries, raspberries, apples, plums, blackberries picked from the roadside, chokecherries, radishes, beets, lettuce, onions, cabbage, melons and rhubarb. We ate most of these items, plus a couple hundred jars were "put-up" and stored in the basement for late fall, winter and spring consumption. Mom stockpiled eggs in the fall, as the chickens didn't lay any eggs in the winter when it was cold. Those eggs were put in a large crock jar into which a solution was added. The eggs were only used for baking.

Our meat was produced at home and included chicken and pork. We would butcher a pig about three times a year. The hams and bacon were taken to the smokehouse in Princeton. When we got them back a wire was run through the meat near the bone. Then the wire was attached to two nails that were pounded into the rafters in the granary or upstairs in the house. A large flange of tin was placed on the ends near the meat so a mouse couldn't crawl the wire and get to the meat.

Butchering a hog was hard work. First the animal was shot in the head at close range. The pig's throat was cut immediately and then the carcass had to be pulled out of the pen and over to a tree that already had a rope around a strong branch. A barrel of really hot water was ready and the rope was tied to the animal's back legs. We all pulled on the other end of the rope, raising the animal up in the air so we could lower the hog into the hot water, where it would be left for a couple minutes. That loosened the pig's bristles from the skin. The pig was then put onto a makeshift table and we all scraped off all the bristles with knives.

The next step was to cut the pig open to remove the entrails. Let's see someone try that today!

After the hams and bacon were cut from the hog, Mom and Dad cut up the rest of the meat. All of the meat was cooked and gravy was made. Mom canned the remainder of the meat with the gravy and down to the cellar it

would go. Dozens of quart jars of meat were then ready for the winter season. Very little meat was purchased in town, and that was only hamburger and wieners.

After a freezer locker plant opened in Princeton, we rented a locker. We would sometimes slaughter a pig at home and take the carcass to the freezer plant. They would cut up the meat, package it, label the packages and put it into our individual locker. In later years we brought in the live animal and they provided the entire process.

When we went to town we always stopped at the freezer plant the last thing before we left for home in order to pick up enough meat to last until our next trip to town. We also brought strawberries and put them into the freezer.

The food items that we purchased from the grocery store were: salt, pepper, vanilla, cake flour, soap, whatever pancakes are made from, and canning items. All the weekly groceries fit neatly into a small cardboard box.

I don't know how Mom did it, but she even made soap that was used to wash clothes. It had to do with rendering the fat from the newly slaughtered pigs. She trimmed off all of the fat and put it on the stove to cook slowly for a long time. Much of the rendered fat turned into lard and was put into quart jars and kept for whatever lard is used for.

Just how the fat was turned into soap is a mystery to me, but I assume that lye was used somewhere in the process. I do remember that the soap was brown and was put into loaf cake pans and left to harden.

The soap was then cut into three-inch squares. When the soap was used it was cut into smaller pieces and added right into the hot water in the washing machine.

It was a tough life for our parents but for us three young boys it was a good place to grow up and enjoy the simpler things in life.

To describe the farm buildings I will start with the house itself. The basement was the nicest around with a cement floor, brick walls, plastered ceiling and hooked up to the chimney so that we could have a fire down there when the weather really got cold. Also three potato chutes were installed in order to get the potatoes into the area. A wide stairway with an

extra wide door was provided to carry the potato sacks out of the area when a buyer arrived.



Our farm home in Wyanett Township

The rest of the house contained three very small bedrooms. When my grandparents passed away two of the bedrooms were joined as one. All five of us slept there until 1938, when one bedroom was finished upstairs. That is how it is today, with the exception that the third bedroom has been converted into a bathroom. The kitchen is good sized and has a pantry. The living room is small but we managed quite well. The summer kitchen is part of the house and is entered via a screened porch. That is the place that we cooked and ate all of our meals in the summertime. It is also the room where Mom washed clothes and did most of the canning.

Mom sewed a lot of our clothes and patched all of the holes that Dad and us three boys managed to get in our shirts, trousers and stockings. Many times the holes were patched a couple of times. She also sewed all of her own dresses, aprons, pillowcases and sheets for the beds. A lot of the material came from flour sacks that we got from the creamery. We used a lot of flour, as all of our bread was baked at home, so Mom had an endless supply of flour sacks for material. Many different print designs were

available, but Mom would seem to manage to have enough material of a certain design to finish whatever project she was working on.

We didn't have many dress clothes so Mom didn't have a lot of ironing to do but when she did, the only way to accomplish the task was to heat the flatirons on the kitchen stove. She then ironed until that iron cooled off a bit, then she put that iron back on the stove to be reheated, released the handle and then attached the handle to the next iron. By having about four irons, she could keep on ironing until the job was complete.

Dad had a metal shoe-shaped device attached to a big short log. He could put the metal attachment into a shoe and then make some repairs. New heels and leather half-soles could be put on worn-out shoes by using glue and nails. Dad was very good at that task.

Dad also gave us boys all of our haircuts. He would put two kitchen chairs together with the backs apart and then put a small bench on the chairs. The clipper was manually operated like a scissor, with the thumb on one lever and the rest of the hand on the other lever. My brothers and I didn't look forward to having our hair cut, as Dad seemed to manage to go faster up the side of our head than the fingers of his hand made the clipper go. The result was often getting our hair pulled but I suppose it wasn't any fun for him, either.

It was a great day when we could go to the barber in Princeton, but that wasn't until sometime in high school. I still have the old hand clipper but I don't know of anyone willing to let me give them a hair cut.

In the old days, our lights were a kerosene lantern for the barn and either a kerosene lamp or two white gas lamps for the house. The house lights were the variety that had two white mantles and the gas tank had to be pumped up by hand to force the fuel up to the burner under pressure. The second lamp was used only when we had company and that was often.

In 1940 Dad bought a 32-volt windcharger with a 65-foot tower. There were many glass batteries and they were old and never very good, but when the wind blew we had light as good as anyone. When the wind didn't blow it was back to the old standby—kerosene or white gas lamps. In 1943 Dad had the batteries rebuilt. That was wonderful until an electrical storm hit the area. Lightning hit the windcharger and followed the line to the basement,