OUR HERITAGE—FAMILY FARMS

By Connie Jo Henderson Zwettler
Written for the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society 1976

In 1776, 90 percent of the 2.5 million Americans lived on farms, and most families owned their land. In England where jobs were scarce each person had a certain task to do and if another independent soul tried to get ahead by doing his own plus other tasks he could be prosecuted. The scarcity of people in the frontier didn’t allow for specialization. A farmer had to be a jack-of-all-trades.

The man coming to America as a servant for wealthier planter, worked off his debt and labored to find his own land on which to build his own house and scratch out a living for his family. Parents depended on their children to take on some of the chores early in their lives.

The other side to colonial farming was the wealthy plantation which abundant land and forced (slaves) made possible. But for every big plantation there were numerous small family farms.

These colonial farmers saved their money, acquired more land, and helped their sons find farms. Most of these farmers took the Patriot side and were instrumental in achieving independence from England.

In the January, 1976, issue of Dairy World we can read about a dairy farm in Sutton, Massachusetts that has remained in the King family for nine consecutive generations — longer than the 200 years of our country’s existence.

Many of the farms in the Mount Horeb area were settled in the middle of the nineteenth century. We can see farm signs showing pride of family ownership: the Thompson Farm since 1885, the Donald Farm since 1855.

Family farming has been idolized as the backbone of America since colonial times. It has been a tradition sacred to the American way of life. Now we see a combination of technology, economics and politics squeezing out the farm family who can do little to resist if there is a lack of capital to expand.

William H. Alexander writing in the August 25, 1975 issue of Hoard’s Dairyman calls the exodus from America’s dairy farms a “Quiet Revolution.” The professor of agricultural economics at Louisiana State University says, “This quiet revolution is in part, a rebellion by farmers against government and consumers for the lack of appreciation for their efforts in providing an adequate supply of high quality food at low prices.”

We can see the revolution as we drive throughout the countryside and find abandoned homesteads and once productive farms turned into pleasure farms.

Some say the disappearance of the family farm just makes way for a more efficient food producing system and it’s all in the name of progress.

Others look back and ahead and say the tradition of family farming must be continued to insure an adequate food supply for our country.

Governor Lucey’s acknowledgement of March 22 as Agricultural Day included a tribute to farm families who contributed so much to the economy of the state in a very economically depressed period.

Will family farms be only a part of history at our country’s next birthday?

FARMING

Submitted by Walter Brink

Since oats and barley were raised by every farmer, it means that the grain had to be threshed. The Holm farmers purchased a “Red River Special” to use cooperatively, and the Kelly Hill Farmers purchased a McCormick Deering. Each farmer had to furnish his own belt power when at home. It was a cooperative service — you help me, I help you.

The highlight of the work was when the hostess farm wife prepared a meal to behold on her finest linen. After the meal, all the men went out under a shade tree to relax until the “separator-tender” uttered these words, “Start the machines, we’re back to work.”

Perhaps the most unwanted job while threshing was to build the straw pile — one that would hold its shape and shed the rain. It was in a half-moon shape with a
compact center. When the straw was all in the stack and the grain was in the bin, the thresher was put under cover until another season arrived.

With the loss of the family farm, the closing of the local schools and cheese factories, the cooperative labor force having ceased, the party line telephone system no more, and the local functions coming to an end, we ask, “What will the next 50 years bring to the McPherson District that our offspring can relate to their children?”

CURRENT FARM STATISTICS
Submitted by Richard Schwenn

There were around 125 farms milking cows in the Town of Springdale in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In 1998, there are about 12 farms milking cows. There is a lot of land being worked by crop farmers and some also feed out steers or pigs.

AG STATISTICS
• 8/21/1880 Assessment valued at $385,723.00
• 8/12/1913 Assessment valued at $1,954,751.00
• 650 Horses, Mules & Asses
• 666 Horses, Mules & Asses
• 2,071 Neat Cattle
• 3,237 Neat Cattle
• 2,096 Sheep
• 200 Sheep
• 2,169 Swine
• 889 Swine
• 306 Wagons, Carriages & Sleighs
• 354 Wagons, Carriages & Sleighs
• 32 Gold and Silver Watches
• 15 Automobiles
• 1 Other Motor Vehicle

Crops Growing in Springdale in 1879
• 2,380 Acres of Wheat
• 2,424 Acres of Corn
• 2,149 Acres of Oats
• 432 Acres of Barley
• 178 Acres of Rye
• 52 Acres of Potatoes
• 10 Acres of Flax
• There were 45 acres of apple orchards, with 707 bearing trees, 1,194 acres of cultivated grasses and 5,522 acres of growing timber.

HARVEST TIME A HAIBUN
By Steve Edwards
(About Stanley Weise and threshing)

Stanley had fallen while pruning an apple tree.
Both legs broken. The versions of the story floated in
and out of the feed mill all day, each with its own vari-
ation on the them. Lay there two hours. Crawled to the
house. Demanded that he drive himself to the hospital.
But in each story, there was always the fall from the
apple tree. Always the breaking of both legs. And always the thirty acres of standing, ripe oats.

morning milking finished
empty barn hot
cicadas earlier today

After some discussion, it was decided to haul the
old community threshing machine from its shed. Do
it the old way one last time. And on that day, there
were forty men and teen-aged boys hauling bundles of
oats off the thirty acres to the roaring metal mon-
ster. Wives bringing food on the seats of pickup
trucks. The growing pile of straw. Adolescent girls
constantly rounding up their assigned broods of tod-
ddlers and young children.

on each cheek
a river delta
doof dust and sweat

Stopping on the shoulder of the road by the field
many years later is to lose one’s perspective on time.
Seemingly, one day, golden oat stubble in the after-
noon light. The next, not even the brightest of suns can
push its light to the ground beneath the evenly-plant-
ed rows of thirty foot pines where the straw pile had
been. In the subdivision across the road, houses on
two-acre lots, high fences between the yards.

for a moment
a light breeze
the rustle of swaying oats
“GOOD NEIGHBORS”
Submitted by Donald and Gertie Henderson

“Good fences make good neighbors,” wrote poet Robert Frost. But, in the Township of Springdale, 100 years ago, good neighbors didn’t need fences.

The Hendersons and McDonalds came from Scotland and settled in Springdale. The path between the two farms was well worn as they visited back and forth, sharing good times, bad times and hard work.

Joseph M. Henderson was born in 1884, and remembered his father, Joseph R. Henderson, and grandfather, Andrew Henderson, in many a discussion with John McDonald and his father, Dan McDonald. These Scottish immigrants met at their woodlots many times to trade stories, plan community events and discuss political issues of the time. Joseph R. Henderson (known throughout the area as “Uncle Joe”) recorded many of these stories and discussions as verses and published two books of his poems under the title, “Thoughts at Random,” one in 1896 and the second in 1911.

Joseph M. Henderson recorded on tape an often-told story about the relationship between the neighboring families.

He recalled that the McDonalds were the first farmers in the area to have pigs, and there were no fences at that time. When Dan McDonald’s pigs got into Andrew Henderson’s corn, McDonald went and got his gun, shot his own pigs, butchered them, and brought half of the meat over to fill the Henderson’s pork barrel. McDonald said, “They won’t bother you anymore.”

This sense of responsibility and respect for one another was the rule, and not the exception of the time.

TOWNSHIP OF SPRINGDALE
1848-1998 • 150 YEARS
Submitted by Pat Simms

The last history of the township of Springdale was written at the centennial in 1948. A lot has happened since then, both in the township and the world.

Springdale was built around the family farm, small cheese factories, rural schools and churches.

Today, the cheese factories are gone, victim to better machinery and increased demands. The tiny schools have closed, beaten by the efficiencies of consolidated school districts.

Family farms are dwindling dramatically, the cost of acreage soaring. Developers have carved subdivisions from the land, and new people have arrived to share our way of life. They bring with them new views and opinions. Local politics is, as always, feisty.

The churches remain — in the cemeteries are familiar family names: Henderson, Berges, Skindruds and Bangs.

But now, even the families are different. Early Springdale families tended to have eight, 10, 12 children. Many died from diseases like diphtheria or tuberculosis. Many stayed within a stone’s throw of the family homestead, marrying or not. Some died at birth.

Today, the norm is two or three children. Rural Free Delivery and World War II exposed younger generations to the wideress of the world. These youngsters are more likely to live in places like Seattle or St. Paul.

The histories in this book, told by people who live in the township now, reflect the change, the pain and the difficulties. They also reflect the strength of our rural heritage, our love of the rich earth and our faith in ourselves.

“I remember the summertime,” Lucille Stugard McKee writes, “with Dad working late in the field and Mom milking. You could hear her yodeling and singing to the cattle... I would sit on the porch steps and listen to her. She had a way about her that she just enjoyed life.”

SPRINGDALE SNIPPETS

In 1900, the telephone line from Riley to Clantorf on the Madison Road was connected to the line running from Madison to Mt. Horeb.
MEMORIES OF MALONE AND SPRINGDALE CENTER SCHOOLS


Malone School

“I remember that Delma Donald had such a beautiful doll at our Christmas program. I was most impressed by the beautiful things that she had. Tommy Martinson, about 12, was my companion. He would wait for me each morning at a fence between our farms and then we would walk over the pastures and through the woods until we came into the clearing above the Lust farm barn and could then see the school. It was wonderful that Tommy, youngest brother of Martin, Sever, etc. would assume this responsibility of guiding me through this shortcut across the pasture and through the woods. Jesse Smith (Mrs. Skinner Swenson) was a most motherly teacher for this timid country girl who knew no one. I remember that Hilda and Anna Anderson were helpful, and when I felt confident with them, I followed the road due south until I came to our road that led straight to home (later the Lowell Hanson farm).”

Springdale Center School

“I had my first days at Malone in September, and we moved to the Berg farm (now Stenseth farm) in March. Then I was to go to Springdale Center School, with Arthur Sorensen, the teacher. Mabel Anderson, Helen Magnuson (Lunde), Mabel Offerdahl (Lukken) and Rosena Thorson (Field) were the big girls and Harvey Field, Edwin Offerdahl, Otto Brager, Lawrence Iverson and Elmer Lunde the big boys. These boys all came to school on skis and during noon hour, we younger ones would stand behind on their skis and go down the hill on the Bohle property. The noon hour was always too short. I remember that Harvey Field would always do such a good job sharpening my pencil, before pencil sharpeners. He had a good whittling knife and so he did a very smooth job. The next teacher was Thea Thorson. Alice Bang (Brager), George Spaanem, Della Thorson and I were the four graduates. After school, on a Friday in late May, Alice, George and I walked to Mt. Horeb.”

OUR HERITAGE – POSTMARKS

By Connie Jo Henderson Zwettler
Written for the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society
March 18, 1976

Farmers in their fields this Bicentennial year can judge the time of day by watching for the mail carrier. The mail car stops at the same boxes at nearly the same time every day. It wasn’t always this way.

The government’s monopoly on carrying the mail is a carry-over from the British control of mail during the colonial period. The leaders of our young nation realized the importance of the postal system to a democratic government. How could people govern themselves if they were not informed?

The demands of the people were great. Each year hundreds of people moved farther and farther west. Congress was obliged to map out new post roads to answer the petitions for mail. The problem of getting mail at the post office in Philadelphia, a city of 150,000 people in 1825, was so great that mail delivery to homes was started. At first mail carriers did not receive a salary but were paid by those to whom they delivered letters.

By 1863, congress accepted the Postmaster General’s recommendation that the mail should be delivered to private homes free of charge and the carriers should be paid by the government. A town of 10,000 was eligible for the service by the year 1887.

But in 1890 the majority of people in America still lived in the rural areas. Of the 76 million people in the country, only 19 million had their mail delivered.

Rural post offices were by today’s standards numerous and therefore close together. At the crossroads, corners of general stores, creameries and the like were set aside for postal business. Farmers would come to the crossroads when they could to wait for mail that should already have been there.

SPRINGDALE SNIPPETS

The first official post office was the Springdale Post Office, where the mail came in by stage. The Springdale Post Office was on Highway G.
The Township of Springdale had at least six rural post offices at various times before 1900. The Springdale post office was established in 1850, Thomas B. Miles first postmaster. Mt. Vernon was established in 1854 and Hall C. Chandler was the first postmaster. Clantorf opened in May of 1867 with Patrick Carr as postmaster. This building can still be seen at the junction of County Highway PD and County Trunk J which runs north to Riley. The former post office is now the home of Richard and Judy Schwenn and family.

Riley was granted its post office in 1882 and continued business until 1940. George Clayton was the first postmaster. Bluff post office established also in 1882 had its name changed to Klevenville in 1891 and served the area until 1952. Albert K. Lorenson was first postmaster. Joseph R. Henderson was the first postmaster at Henderson established in May of 1893. The site of the Henderson office was a creamery owned by H. B. Dahle near the junction of U.S. Highway 18-151 and Springdale Center Road.

Farmers were eager for mail delivery to their homes when they learned of the service to their city cousins. A woman speaking in favor of Rural Free Delivery, RFD, at a National Grange meeting in 1891, said, “I am a woman nearly 70 years old, running a farm of 75 acres...To my mind...free delivery and collection of mail matter in rural districts would be an inestimable boon to everyone...Our men and boys would not so often be tempted to spend time and money in the billiard rooms and other similar places while waiting for the mail.”

Despite much opposition from merchants who made money while farmers waited for the mail and from those who thought RFD would put the country into bankruptcy, RFD began in October of 1896 with five routes in West Virginia.

RFD caused a social revolution on the farm. The farmer learned from his newspapers, journals, and catalogues about the rest of the country and indeed the rest of the world from which he had been so isolated.

The farmer learned of new methods in agriculture which allowed him to continue to feed a nation despite the cultivation of fewer acres by fewer men.

Farm boys and girls learning of city life found it very attractive and the country lost many future family farmers. The RFD greatly contributed to the decline of rural America’s small neighborhoods and with them the loss of a unique part of our heritage.