

*Views of the Ridge*

**Oral Perspectives from the  
Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area  
in Southwest Wisconsin**

*Susan Cantrell Gilchrist*

B L U E M O U N D

CHICAGO

BM 1260

NORTH WEST

*Cover photo of Blue Mounds, Susan Gilchrist.*  
*Purple coneflower, Gary Eldred.*  
*Background map, USGS Historical Topographic Map Collection.*

# Views of the Ridge



## **Oral Perspectives from the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area in Southwest Wisconsin**

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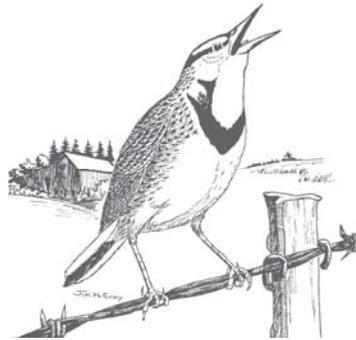
2013



To those who have  
labored with love  
to preserve and restore prairies  
in southwest Wisconsin.



S GILCHRIST

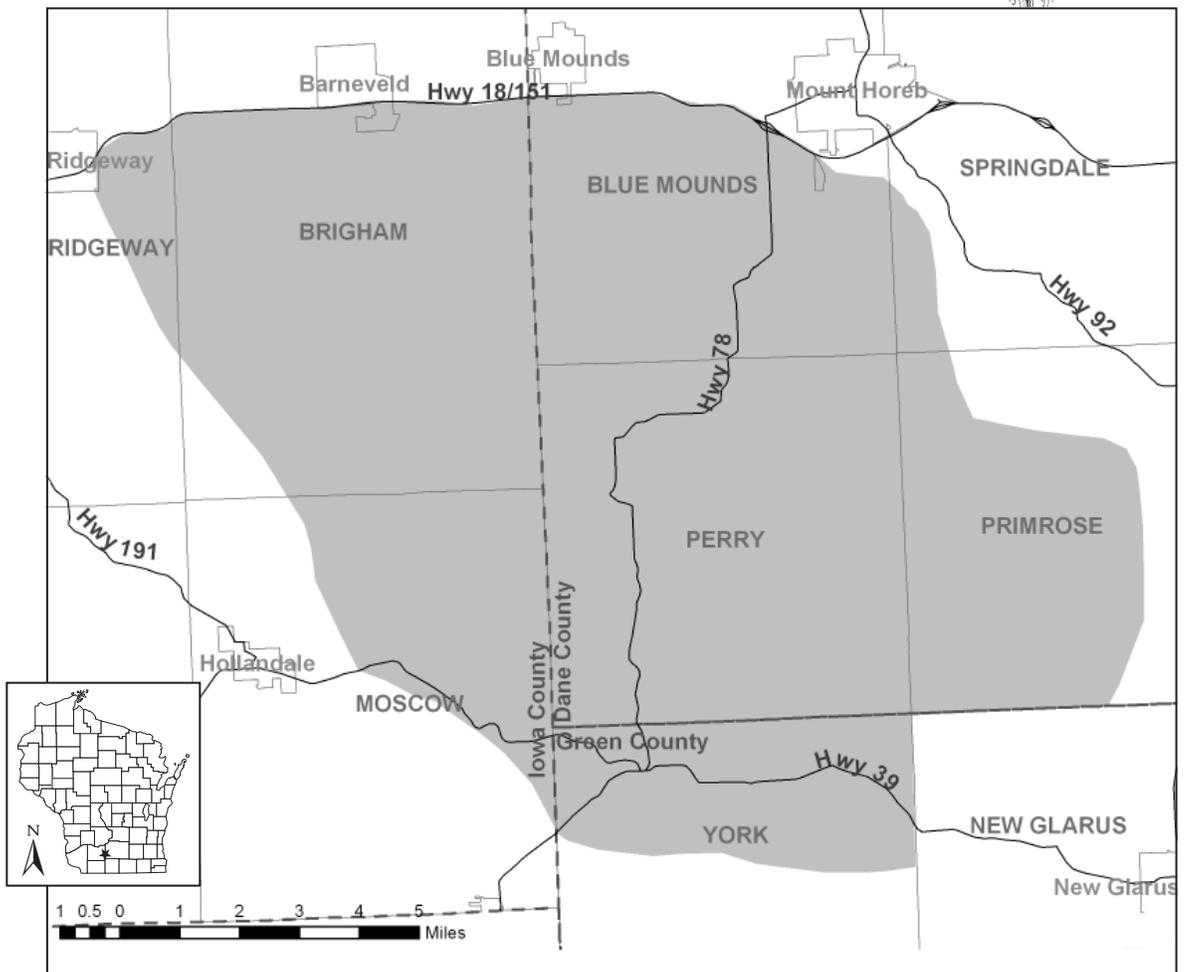


*"What about birds?"  
I asked.*

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# Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area



*A partnership of nine nonprofit organizations and government agencies have agreed to work together in the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area, an area of special conservation interest known for its rolling hills, prairies, and unique cultural heritage.*

# Introduction



*Blue Mounds.*

## The Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area

When I first moved to Wisconsin, in 1977, I was not a person in search of open vistas. I grew up in eastern Pennsylvania, Penn's Woods, and I was used to small hills and curvy, tree-lined roads. As a girl, I played in a beech-hickory forest. Still, I remember driving across southwestern Wisconsin and being struck with the beauty of the area. I didn't know anything about the edge of the glaciers and the way they shaped the terrain, but I did appreciate the beauty of the "Driftless Area." My eyes could carry me a long way to the distant horizon, taking in all the subtle color changes before and around me. I felt myself opening up, like the landscape, as though I could reach as far as I could see. I felt aware that I am a tiny part of something much, much bigger than myself. Even then, before I knew about the drastic loss of prairies in the Midwest, when I thought prairies had only grown west of the Mississippi, I used to imagine taller grass covering the broad slopes of the hills and American bison grazing in a great herd. It was exciting to me, years later, to learn that, indeed, southwest Wisconsin once was prairie and it was home to bison!

In 2004, when I collected oral history in the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area, that first experience of the landscape, a sense of its history and character, resurfaced for me. As I talked with people who had a dedicated connection to the land there, I began to see the place through their eyes. Some told me the area was at

least as beautiful as any other place, maybe the most beautiful place in the world, so they had no desire to even consider going elsewhere. What a blessing, to love and appreciate the place where you are as the best place to be! I started inhaling the open spaces with pleasure and gratitude myself. Person after person proclaimed the area beautiful, and the truth of their perception is evident in the soft violet shade of the Blue Mound rising above the delightfully nodding coneflowers and other prairie plants in bloom and the various green and brown cultivation strips that reflect interest in conservation in their own way.

The flip side of the beauty of this open, rural area is that it draws more and more people wanting a home in a beautiful place. As new houses dot the hillsides, the beautiful vistas are interrupted and the historic farms are broken up, which costs the landscape its rural character and appeal. Many of the people I talked with don't like to see more houses being constructed, like scabs lumping on the horizon. But they understand that selling some of the land is frequently the only retirement option a farmer has to support himself when he can no longer manage the whole farm. For this, one cannot begrudge the farmers.

Then add the conservation element to the equation. Though they once dominated much of the Midwest, prairies and oak savannas are now among the most threatened habitats in the whole world. In Wisconsin, less than 0.01% of the former prairies and oak savannas

# Views of the Ridge

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Pockets of native prairies still exist here and so do some of the grassland plant and animal species that are no longer common elsewhere.



S. GILCHRIST

*There are still broad grassy areas in the countryside.*

remain. As the prairies disappear, so do the animals that depend on those grasslands for their homes. Declines in populations of grasslands birds, like meadowlarks and bobolinks, have been noted, and that's not all.

The Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area is special in that pockets of native prairies still exist here and so do some of the grassland plant and animal species that are no longer common elsewhere. Two endangered species of insects that depend on specific prairie plants for their survival can be found in the area: the red-tailed leafhopper and the regal fritillary butterfly. A rare reptile found in the area is the Blanding's turtle; a rare amphibian is the pickerel frog. Among the farmlands, there are still broad grassy and primarily treeless areas in the countryside, and there are still spring-fed streams.

The Military Ridge represents the watershed divide between the Wisconsin River tributaries flowing north and the Mississippi and Rock river tributaries flowing south. The ridge was named for the Military Road that was constructed in 1835 from Green Bay to Prairie du Chien. The ridge was used as a highway because it was

mostly without trees. The road served as an immigration route bringing settlers to the area. The Chicago Northwestern Railroad was built along the road in 1881 and later converted to a bicycle path in 1985.

In 1964, three acres in the area were donated to The Nature Conservancy (TNC). This was the first land donation ever given to the Wisconsin chapter of TNC and it gave conservation interests a foothold in the area. In 1990, biologists from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) conducted an analysis of landscape conservation opportunities across the state. This area was selected as an important area for preserving prairies and grassland birds, due to the high concentration of prairie remnants, pasture, and uncultivated Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)<sup>1</sup> fields that support many rare species.

The prairie that formerly covered the area was called the Military Ridge Prairie. When the area was selected for special conservation focus, it was called the Blue Mounds Prairie Heritage Area, until in 2000, when the name was changed to link the prairies and cultural

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<sup>1</sup> The federal Farm Service Agency administers the Conservation Reserve Program to help improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and reduce loss of wildlife habitat. In exchange for yearly rental payments, landowners enrolled in CRP agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. Participation is voluntary, with contracts for land enrolled being 10 to 15 years in length. CRP is the nation's largest private-land conservation program.

heritage of the place: the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area. TNC initiated the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area conservation project, and, in 2004, nine government agencies and non-profit organizations signed a memorandum of understanding, agreeing to work together in the area. The partnership adopted goals of maintaining prairie, savanna, grassland, and aquatic habitat, maintaining an economically viable rural and agricultural landscape, providing traditional recreational opportunities, and applying continued monitoring and adaptive management methods. Since then, the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area partnership has managed over 1,000 acres of grassland each year, working across both protected nature preserves and private lands.

## The Oral History Project

In managing this area, the partnership recognized the importance of including input from landowners, concerned citizens, and others who have had a stake in the land there. For this reason, through my position with the DNR, I was asked to interview people with a strong connection to the area. I had worked on a similar project in the Northwest Sands or Pine Barrens in another part of the state, so I was eager to talk with people about the Military Ridge. People involved in the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area partnership helped develop the questions that I asked in my interviews and helped me identify, select, and contact narrators. Once I got started, I found more narrators through additional networking.

I began the oral history project in 2004. It wasn't always easy to connect with potential narrators. Even retired people living in the Military Ridge area seemed to keep busy schedules. They were very business-like about allotting their time, and the interviews, with a few exceptions, were limited appointments rather than extensive visits. I generally spent one and a half to two hours with each interview. Some people preferred to be interviewed together with someone else, a spouse or sibling. In these cases, one speaker tended to dominate the interview, but I did not feel that there was any pressure applied to any speaker by a cohort as to the content of what was said. Frequently, one speaker reminded the other of details that reinforced initial statements.

I conducted 29 personal interviews, including 40 people. Twenty five of the narrators were men; 16 were women. Birthdates ranged between 1904 and 1977,

with 29 of the narrators being between 60 and 90 at the time they were interviewed. The addresses of the people I interviewed were in Mount Horeb, Blue Mounds, Barneveld, Ridgeway, Daleyville, Hollandale, Dodgeville, and Monroe, but many had moved off their farms or wherever they had lived most of their lives. I interviewed some people who lived in the area all their lives, some who moved to the area many years ago, one who was inheriting land there, one who wants to buy land in the area, and one who owns land there but doesn't live in the area. Many of the narrators seemed doubtful that they had much to offer when I first called, but were willing to help. And, help they did. Only one didn't discuss the memories of place I asked about, because he was intent on delivering a message to the DNR regarding the overpopulation of deer. Overall, the reception I received was very positive, and



*I interviewed 40 people, with a range of birthdates, who had connections to the Military Ridge area.*

# Views of the Ridge

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*Some people lived in the area all their lives, some moved to the area many years ago, one was inheriting land there, one wants to buy land in the area, and one owns land there but doesn't live in the area.*

I remain grateful to these 40 narrators who gave me their time, their memories, and their perspectives.

At the start of each interview, I introduced myself and the purpose of the oral history project. I explained potential uses of the interviews and asked permission to use the memories in education, exhibits, public programs, written documents, and storytelling. I used a small portable tape recorder, with the external microphone placed in plain sight before the narrators. I showed them a map of the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area, so it was clear what “area” I was inquiring about. The questions I asked had to do with what the area was like when the narrator was growing up there or first came there, recreational and occupational activities, memories of wildlife, land management, changes in the landscape, what the narrator valued about the area, and how s/he would like to see it in the future. After asking the questions from the pre-determined interview outline, some follow-ups, some inquiries regarding topics specific to the narrators, and some details of personal background, I shared some photos related to the area and some pertinent issues. I invited narrators to tell me anything they liked or disliked about the photos or to share any memories the photos brought up for them. The interview outline, the photos I used, and the map can all be viewed in the Appendices. I also took photos of the narrators to illustrate documents such as this book.

Through the interviews I learned that people really appreciate and value the beauty of the landscape in the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area, the view. It was also clear that landowner rights are important to them. Narrators had seen fewer birds over the years, though with some grassland conservation, meadowlarks seemed to be coming back. Some noted fewer snakes as well. None were certain they'd ever seen prairie chickens in the area. On the other hand, they were seeing white-tailed deer in much greater abundance than ever before. The interviews occurred at a time

when wildlife managers in Wisconsin were battling a fatal disease in the deer herd, chronic wasting disease (CWD). The disease centered in the southwest part of the state, which included the Military Ridge area, so the deer there were targeted for eradication, in hopes of preventing spread of the disease. Deer overpopulation coupled with the policy of killing them made the topic of deer an intense issue. Narrators also reported seeing more wild turkeys, the result of successful reintroduction, and more coyotes, the result of that species' own range expansion. Many narrators talked about the days when the map was punctuated with small cheese factories and one-room country schools at every major crossroads, and the land was laid out in dairy farms. The conversations often led to memories of storms, snow, rain, or the terrifying tornado that hit Barneveld in 1984. I am proud to say that I met some people who were heroes in the face of that destruction.

Following collection of the interviews, a multitude of changes put the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area oral history project on hold. The DNR went through some changes. My job was redefined, my time redirected into different assignments; and with budget reductions, my position was eventually eliminated. My life changed too. I fell in love, married, and moved to Ohio. The Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area partnership also changed. The group expanded to become the Southwest Wisconsin Grassland and Stream Conservation Area and some changes in personnel occurred. But people concerned with prairie restoration and conservation of open grasslands seem to have maintained their enthusiasm over the years and through the changes.

## **This Book**

I never lost interest in the oral history project. I feel I owe a debt to those who gave their time and shared their thoughts and memories with me. The writing of this book is my effort to return something to those individuals and their families. In 2012, the Wisconsin

# Introduction

Humanities Council provided funding to the DNR to disseminate perspectives from the oral history through publication of this book and presentations in appropriate communities. Eight years after conducting the interviews, I have put the recorded interviews onto the page. In doing so, I have tried to adhere to the expressions of the speakers as closely as possible, while not transcribing exactly all of the words that were spoken. I have written their perspectives in the third person so as to differentiate between speakers if needed, especially when more than one narrator participated in the same interview. Using the third person also allows me to include an occasional observation of my own to support the narration. References to “now” or prior times of so many years ago pertain to the year 2004, when the interviews were conducted.

This is not a traditional oral history in that the questions were not intended to divulge information about a specific time period or historic event. These interviews were intended to create a collective sense of place. Statements made have not been purposely altered for historical or scientific accuracy, or to be more “politically correct.” I did not necessarily check names, dates, or events against other records (nor did my editor). My role was to record things as I was told them to the best of my ability. The opinions expressed here are those of the interviewees, not necessarily those of the author, nor do they represent policies or stances held by the DNR. The statements reflect the personal perceptions, memories, opinions, and perspectives of the people who were interviewed, at the time when they were interviewed.

## Revisiting the Area

Having moved out of state and having been absent for so long, I wanted to steep myself in the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area again, so I could feel the images float past and buoy the words I typed. I also wanted to introduce my husband to this significantly special place. We had lunch at the Grumpy Troll, a pub in Mount Horeb, and, as I read the history about the facility having once been a cheese factory, I began to feel I was in the right place.

It was Labor Day 2012, when I revisited the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area (hereafter, referred to simply as the Military Ridge area) to rekindle my sense of place. Though it was a holiday, Steve Richter from TNC took me around in the morning and Rich Henderson from the Prairie Enthusiasts led my tour in the afternoon. It is a tribute to the dedication of these conservation experts that they gave their time so willingly, on short notice, on a holiday, to reintroduce me to this beautiful landscape.

It was a glorious sunny day, with summer’s heat still heavy. The cornfields demonstrated the devastation of the summer drought. The stalks were brown and hadn’t grown near “as high as an elephant’s eye.” Corn prices would be up this year for sure. Apparently the stalks couldn’t even be mowed for livestock fodder, as their failure to grow left them too rich in concentrated nitrogen, and they would have made the cattle sick. The soybean plants were turning yellow in their strips. I couldn’t help but chuckle when I remembered that



*We had lunch at the Grumpy Troll, a pub that was once a cheese factory.*



*Steve Richter, a TNC staffer, showed me around the area.*

PHOTOS: S. GILCHRIST

## Views of the Ridge

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a tourist had once called the contour strips “designer” farming. I guess the name fits as the different colored and textured strips make for an aesthetically pleasing design and the layout represents farming by design, by conscious, purposeful plan.

As I remembered from before, the view across the fields and sloping hillsides drew my focus in the distance, and I looked and looked, and looked some more, trying to absorb every line of the horizon, every nuance of color. The colors and the gentle shadows changed with the hours, and a single scene did not stay the same from morning till midday. The open meadows and restored prairies were truly golden with different kinds of goldenrod, yellow coneflowers, and prairie (“showy”) sunflowers, punctuated by purple thistles, purple verbane, and tiny white flowering spurge. Walking through the variety of grasses, the short bluestem and taller Indian grass, and turkey foot grass, I saw badger dens in the hillside: piles of dry brown soil at

the base of a large, rather rectangular hole. I have never seen a badger in the wild, and I would love to see one in the “Badger State.” It gave me a thrill just to see a relatively fresh badger den.

In that one day’s visit, I got a glimpse, just by chance, of several wildlife denizens, significant species in the area. A thirteen lined ground squirrel ran across the road in front of the van and disappeared into the grass. A killdeer flew along the road and across the field. A meadowlark perched on a post on a patch of prairie. A phoebe flew past. We saw a couple of deer by the road. Several kinds of butterflies fluttered from flower to flower, a swallowtail, a monarch, and a regal fritillary.

TNC, Steve explained, is looking at a global picture, so they are looking beyond the individual kinds of grass seeded in prairie restoration sites. They are concerned with water quality in the area, as the water in southwest Wisconsin flows into the Mississippi River which flows through the heart of America and empties

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drew my focus in the distance, and I looked  
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line of the horizon, every nuance of color.*



T. DEITINGER

# Introduction

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into the Gulf of Mexico. If there is soil erosion and polluted water here, those problems will be carried along to eventually affect the Gulf. But the cold water streams in the Military Ridge area are really special and they do contribute to water quality in the larger waterways. Much of the conservation work being done in the Military Ridge area is taking the form of stream protection and stream bank restoration.

We visited a site managed by the Prairie Enthusiasts, where conservation work had been done to improve water quality. There was a pile of soil there with a sign saying to call if you wanted any. Prairie restoration workers remove the trees and the top layer of soil before scattering prairie seed. There was a greener strip through the site where the stream ran. Alongside of the stream, there were four large birds, two of them grey-brown and two of them white. I have seen many sandhill cranes, thousands staging for migration in Indiana and Nebraska, and smaller numbers feeding in wet, open areas in parts of Wisconsin. But I had never seen whooping cranes in the wild. What a wonderful and unexpected treat this was! Whooping cranes are an endangered species and, unless you live under the migration route they are taught to follow with an ultralight aircraft, it is a rare event to see them, there are so few. We watched them for a while as they moved along beside the stream, and I wished them well with all my heart.

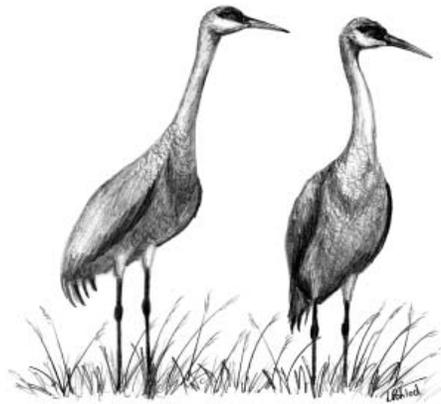
*Alongside of  
the stream, there were  
four large birds,  
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and two of them white.*



PHOTOS: S. GILCHRIST

# Views of the Ridge

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Still,  
I remember driving  
across southwestern  
Wisconsin and being  
struck with the  
beauty of the area.



### David Harold Thomas

*Born: August 16, 1922*

### Margarette Ruth (Thomas) Osborn

*Born: January 19, 1916*

When you drive along Highway 18/151 from Mount Horeb toward Ridgeway, you might notice a beautiful stone barn just south of the highway near Barneveld. That barn is a landmark in the Military Ridge area. Thus, I began my interviews by talking with Harold Thomas, the barn's owner.

We sat in the kitchen of the house where Harold grew up and still lives. He said the house had been built of materials from a church that was torn down when the railroad came through the site where that old church once stood. It took three years to build the landmark barn, all from rock that came from right there on the farm. The barn was finished in 1881.

When Harold was growing up in the 1920s and '30s, his parents had no car to take him to school in the cold and snowy winters. The hired men hooked up the horses and he snuggled down into the sleigh. He remembers the snow being so deep that the sleigh rode right over the fences to get to the one-room school that he attended. In the school, which went up to the eighth grade, he used the wood burning stove to warm his feet. There were both crops and livestock on the farm. The hired hands did the field work: haying, stacking the hay, threshing, shredding and shocking corn, and

shocking grain. There were also regular chores of feeding the hogs and cattle, and milking.

Harold's family milked the cows, then took the milk to the Geniton Cheese Factory, where it was made into Swiss cheese that Harold's family sometimes bought. Harold noted that a family lived above where they made the cheese, in the same building, so the smell of the cheese could not have been too overwhelming.

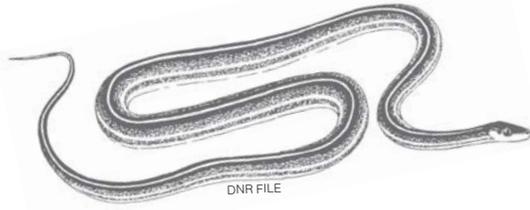
Harold remembered his boyhood as not much fun because he always had to work. His jobs included raking hay and dragging the fields with the horses. His little legs got so tired behind the drag that he took the front wheels off a little red wagon, tied the wagon to the drag, and rode in it. He also shocked and husked corn and cut weeds.

The corn binder made the corn into little bundles, which is what he meant by "shocking" corn. You stack up the bundles and wait until fall comes to bring them in. Then you husk them with a corn shredder so that you get fodder in a stack and ear corn piled in the wagon. The fodder is used for winter bedding for the livestock, while the corn is fed to the hogs.

"Don't mention butchering hogs," Harold said, as even the memory seemed gruesome. He explained that



*The Thomas stone barn is a landmark in the Military Ridge area.*



*Prairies provide habitat for a wide variety of plants and animals, including various snakes.*

they'd catch the selected hog and then he would shoot it with a rifle so it went down. The hired man would stick it in its chest and let the blood run out. They would put it in a tank of boiling water and then scrape the hair off with a scraper. They would gut it, or take the insides out, then hang it for a couple of days in the kettle house where the scalding took place, then cut it up and salt it down. His mother put the meat in jars of lard in the cellar. Mmmm. That was good.

During the summer, Harold said he was always busy with farm work, cutting weeds, cutting back thistles with a hoe so they wouldn't spread, putting in the crops. The crops included oats, barley, corn, and hay. Harold claims no other jobs besides working on the farm, but he was proud to be 81 years old and still going!

Harold had a brother and a sister: Walter and Margarette. He told me that Walter had an enlarged hole in his heart so he couldn't do much of the farm work. So, Harold felt that it was up to him to keep the farm up, in the long run.

There are not many farms left like the one that Harold grew up on. His farm had both dairy and meat. They never expanded to 200 cows, the way so many farms did to survive. You don't see many hogs now. Harold claimed his family never made any money on hogs.

When I asked Harold about memories of wildlife and differences today, he replied immediately that "you don't see any snakes anymore." He used to see bull snakes, garter snakes, and blue racers. He was always watchful for snakes when he was a kid; he didn't go close to them. When he saw a snake, he tried to kill it with a pitchfork or a stick, whatever was available. If there was nothing available for killing the snake, he would just leave it. He didn't like snakes. Now, however, he says he wouldn't kill a snake for anything. He explained that they eat mice and other prey and they don't hurt you if you don't bother them. He thinks that, after the farmers took to using pesticides, the snakes disappeared. He hasn't seen a snake in years.

Other wildlife, such as chicken hawks, robins, bluebirds, orioles, blackbirds, butterflies, bumble bees, wasps, these he says are about the same. Maybe there were more birds when he was a kid than there are now. Apparently he doesn't see many blackbirds around there anymore. Robins and wrens come back every year, and there always seem to be sparrows.

When I asked about the way the land was managed or used, Harold remembered that the land was cultivated up and down the hill. Farmers chose the easiest way to work the land, since they only had horses. "Whichever way the field was lying, that's the way we went." Now you can't do that anymore. Now farmers have to contour, which Harold says is a great thing.

Margarette, who is Harold's older sister, joined us at the table. As Harold's big sister, she remembered having to take care of him a lot. Everyone was busy. They all had to help on the farm. She worked both inside and outside. She claimed there was still plenty of time to play ball, ride horses, or have her own activities. She said she used to train the workhorses for riding. She had many accidents but she was never hurt too seriously. When she was 8 years old, she started milking the cows with her mother. She worked with her mother some, but she also worked alongside her dad. She could harness the horse, except that she couldn't put the collar on the horse herself because it was too heavy. The whipple tree, Margarette and Harold remembered, was the part of the harness where you hitched the horse to the wagon, the part that went to the neck yoke from the tongue of the wagon.

Margarette helped with the haying. She said the hay was loose. They had a hay-loader on the back of the wagon. The hay went into the wagon. Someone stacked it there in the wagon. The hay was then unloaded in the barn with a hay fork. The hay fork was tied to a long rope that was attached to a horse with a singletree. Someone led the horse and that pulled the hay along a track and dumped it into a stack in the barn.

*"We've still got the hills,  
but they're not as high as they used to be."*

Harold remembered once when the horse was on the hay mound hitched up to the hay fork. They had a wooden fence. They had guinea hens, and you know what noise guinea hens make. One hen jumped up onto the wooden fence and scared the horse. It pulled the hay fork right out the window and broke the rope. Harold was pleased with that turn of events as it takes quite a while to splice a rope back together, and he got to rest while he fixed the rope. Margarette said their mother was good at leading the horse on the hay fork.

I asked Margarette about her memories of wildlife, and she said there was a lot of wildlife on the farm. She used to spend a lot of time in the woods on the property. She had her own riding horse and she went into the woods on her horse, the dog following along. The woods was attached to Birch Lake. She spent lots of time there, enjoying the birds, chasing the squirrels, sometimes seeing a fox or two on the bluff in the woods. "Of course we ran across plenty of snakes."

What's different about wildlife today? "You have hyenas or coyotes now." She never heard them when she was a kid. Harold added, "you hear them now like a bunch of children playing on the playground." Harold said he doesn't know what coyotes are good for; they attack calves sometimes. Margarette said they catch small animals on the farm, and Harold agreed that they do catch other wild animals.

"We had plenty of pigs," Margarette went on about domestic animals. "Dad was a great one for raising pigs!" They had lots of cats and always a dog as well. Harold says he didn't have as many cats then as he does now. He has about 27 cats now, all outdoor cats. Margarette remembers their mother, who couldn't see very well, going out on the porch. She would get mad and kick the cats off the steps so she wouldn't fall over them.

"What about birds?" I asked. Margarette said she hardly ever sees bobolinks now, but she sees meadowlarks occasionally. She used to see a lot of red-winged

blackbirds, but she doesn't see very many now.

"They're really hurting the environment now," Harold joined in, and he didn't mean the birds. People are spraying for weeds and the spraying has cut down the bird populations, Harold believes. "Either that, or there's a heck of a lot of foxes around," he said. "Something's happening to them." Then, reluctantly, he added that cats could eat them too.

Margarette said that, when she was young, all the land was managed in that it was all used for something, even the woods. Every fall and winter, they chopped wood for the heating stoves. Of course the way they used to use the land, they didn't know anything about contour farming. They used to plow the land up and down, up and down. Contour stripping stops a lot of erosion. Margarette sees rotating the crops as a good thing too. Though farmers rotated their crops when Harold and Margarette were growing up, most farmers do contour farming as well as crop rotation now.

Neither Harold nor Margarette remembered seeing burning done on purpose as a land management tool when they were kids. But Harold told about one fire he did remember. Above, on the track, there was an old train that burned wood or coal. Sparks from the smokestack ignited the pasture. It would have burned many acres if no one had noticed the fire. But someone did see it and neighbors ran up there to put the fire out with their shovels. That was all they had. Water was far away; there was no place to get it nearby. They probably had to slap the fire and throw dirt on it to put it out. Harold repeated that it was a good thing someone saw that fire in time.

When I asked how the landscape has changed, both Harold and Margarette said "we've still got the hills," but Margarette added, "they're not as high as they used to be." She did not mean just because she's grown up now either. She said she used to only see the top of the neighbor's house, but now she can see more of the house and silos in the distance too. The hills

# Views of the Ridge



*Wild grapes made really good jelly, but you had to pick a lot of them.*

are smaller, she says, because of the wearing down of nature. Harold says the landscape has changed in that these big farms have thousands of acres now, and they have big machines to work those enormous farms.

Harold sold some land a few years back. It was a piece of rocky land where Native Americans had their wigwam when Harold and Margarete were kids. They had never used that piece of land for anything but pasture. They sold it to a cement mixer man in Mount Horeb. He apparently took the fence down and one of the neighbors plowed up that piece of land. It was rocky prairie ground connected to the woods. Margarete said she liked to go to that wide-open area. She liked to play there because it was wide open and away from everything, with no buildings or anything. Harold agreed it was a beautiful place with all native grasses. He liked to go there just for relaxation. Margarete used to pick flowers there in the early spring; there were all kinds of wildflowers there. She liked to run through the thick grass. When she was a girl, she could hide in some of it. They said no one ever should have dug up that prairie. Harold said he was "horrified when they dug it up."

In the fall they used to pick wild grapes up in that area too. They ate a lot and brought some home. Their Mother made grape juice and grape jelly. Those wild grapes made really good grape jelly, but you had to pick a lot of them, they were so small. There were chokecherries too. We ate them, said Harold. They puckered your mouth up and they were nothing but seeds, but they tasted good. There were hazelnuts up there in the trees. The squirrels loved them. There were lots of squirrels, rabbits, and chipmunks then. "But you don't see anything when you go up there now." It's a deserted area. You don't hear a bird singing; it's quiet. Maybe you'll see a squirrel in the woods, but it's not like it used to be. Harold mentioned seeing pheasants and deer. Margarete said they used to see "prairie chickens" south of the barn when they were kids. Harold says he still sees prairie chickens. Later, however, when I shared a photo

of a prairie chicken with them, they asked me what it was, so perhaps they were referring to some other bird, calling it a "prairie chicken." They have noticed wild turkeys south on the farm too, though Harold thought they were always there, and Margarete said there were not many around when she was growing up. She acknowledged the turkeys were restocked. "There are probably lots in the woods we don't know about," she surmised. Harold said there are lots of quail now, and Margarete nodded that they had always had quail. Harold said he had never hunted anything, not deer, pheasants, quail, etc. He only killed snakes.

That reminded Margarete of a story. She used to run barefoot through the hayfields after the hay was cut. As soon as the weather got warm, "our shoes came off," she said. She was a runner. Her dad taught her how to run and she was always racing him. She loved to run! She was in sports and, to their chagrin, she could beat the boys. One time she was running through the hayfield, lickety-split, coming down the hill. She saw a huge snake crawling in front of her. She jumped over it. She never looked back. "Oh, I don't like snakes, not at all, not to this day," she said.

*"We had a lot of experiences with snakes, but we were never bitten by a snake."*

One time she was in the hayfield across the highway with some other kids. They were getting ready to go home for lunch. Somebody picked up a big snake. It was summer and it was hot, so she just had on a little vest and jeans. Someone threw the snake over her neck and down her back. "That was terrible!" She was really

mad. “We had a lot of experiences with snakes, but we were never bitten by a snake.” Sometimes, though, they found snakes chopped up in the hay, after the mowing.

And then there was the time their mom went to bring the cows home for milking. Seeing something shiny in the grass, she took it for a chain to put through the ring in the bull’s nose. She bent over and picked it up. It was a snake! She dropped it in a hurry. “She didn’t like snakes, not at all.”

Their mom wasn’t the only one who went to get the cows. Harold said “we used to be cowboys and cow-girls” going to get the cows in the pasture. Margarette remembered getting up at 4:00 in the morning. Her dad called her to get up and go get the cows. She didn’t like getting up that early; it was still dark. Their mom had to get up early too. Dark or not, she had bad eyesight from a bout with scarlet fever when she was growing up in Switzerland.

Margarette liked to play in the hay mound, jumping off hay bales, when she was young. When her grand-kids visit the farm, the first thing they do is head for the barn. They like to swing on the rope and land on the hay. They’re city kids; they love that barn swing.

At one point Margarette and Harold discussed their memories of the Native Americans that used to live nearby. They didn’t know what tribe the people were part of, but they remembered hearing that their father, David Darius Thomas, went with his father, their grandfather, Walter Thomas (called Watt), to the prairie north of Military Ridge, where there were wigwams. Walter and David lived in a log cabin. The Indians were friendly. Margarette said they would sit around the wigwam and smoke the peace pipe. If you didn’t take a puff from the peace pipe, they didn’t like that because they wanted to be friends. When the pipe came to their dad, he smoked it, though he was just 6 or 7 years old. “At least that’s the way Dad told it,” Margarette said. Harold remembered a different, but similar

story. Walter and David went to visit the Indians in the wigwam and Walter smoked the pipe, but he didn’t have any matches, so he sent an Indian boy inside the wigwam to light the pipe from the fire. The boy never came back, so Walter lifted the wigwam flap and saw the boy enjoying the pipe inside the wigwam. Harold also remembered that, when the hired men went out to do the field work on the farm, the Indians would come and ask for food. They would take what they wanted, but they wouldn’t take butter for some reason or other. “Must have been the other,” he quipped.

When their father, David, grew up, he went to the University of Wisconsin and became a lawyer. People came to the house and he gave them advice, but he never charged anything. When David’s father died, his brothers didn’t want to take over the farm, so David did. He chose to keep the farm in the family. He was a beautiful writer. In 1894, he gave a Fourth of July oration that tells about the neighborhood, the Native Americans, and so on.

As a father, Harold and Margarette agreed that their dad was strict. “He’d have been a good one in the Army.” But Margarette remembered getting only one spanking, and “it was for a very minor thing.” She had something in her mouth and she was chewing away. Her dad wanted to know what she had in her mouth.



## Views of the Ridge

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*"I think it's ridiculous ...  
Right in the middle of a cornfield  
you see a huge house going up."*

She was stubborn and she wouldn't say, so he spanked her because she wouldn't say. Afterwards, he found a wad of gum underneath the chair. She had spit it out. That was the only spanking she ever got. Harold said he got a lot of spankings. Perhaps he was a little devil, but his brother, Walter, pointed the finger of blame at Harold whenever he got in trouble, and Harold got the spanking. One time Walter told Harold to break an outside thermometer. Because Walter was older, Harold did what he said. He got a big spanking for that. He tried to run away over the woodpile, but his dad caught him before he could get over the top of the wood.

As the big sister, Margarette was asked to watch Walter. Once when he was only two, she was told to protect him from big birds that might take him away. She shut him in the granary to protect him from a big bird. It might have been a crow.

Once Margarette got kicked in the head by a horse. She jumped off a load of lumber to open the gate for her dad and the horse lashed out. They had broncos from Nebraska, and Margarette's riding horse was the one that kicked her. Men that were cutting weeds along the road carried her home. She was bleeding through the nose, mouth, and ears. The doctor came to the house. They had to shave the hair off half of her head. Her dad gave that horse a heck of a licking.

Margarette remembered the threshing crews coming through too. When they came through, you had to feed them in shifts. Her aunts came to help her mother. Margarette was the waitress. There was a lot of good food – pies and all. They served dinner to 14 or 15 people sitting at the large table in the living room. Those were the good old days.

The discussion altered course when I asked about the changes in the land in the area and how they felt about those changes. Margarette began by saying that contouring is better than plowing up and down the hills, and Harold commented that it's probably better

to keep it all in sod and not farm at all. Margarette's next point was that a lot of farmland is being sold and residential houses are going up. "I think it's ridiculous," she said. People shouldn't be allowed to tear up a nice woods to build a house; it interrupts the environment and wildlife habitat. Open fields are being sold. "Right in the middle of a cornfield you see a huge house going up. It's awful!" Many farmers are glad to sell a piece of land. They need the money. "But I don't think it's right. I don't." Still, Harold explained, when you die, someone else takes over and puts up houses, regardless of how you wanted it. They'll probably put a golf course here after we're gone. "That's the way it goes." Margarette added that there are plans to build condos off the golf course already. Harold said a realtor wanted to buy the barn, to make a nightclub out of it. But nobody will do that now, "the way we got it planned." When Harold is gone, his son will inherit the farm, then his daughter in Connecticut. She's real proud of the farm. Harold wants the place to remain the same as it is now. "Leave it naturally," Margarette interjected. Harold tipped his head: "I don't know what's wrong with the human race."

The brother and sister looked at some photos I provided of the area, with reiterations that they don't like houses built in the middle of good farmland; that the hills in the horizon are going down, maybe from wind erosion; that there were once beautiful wildflowers in the prairie area; and that Margarette hasn't seen a meadowlark in a few years, but she doesn't do the walking she used to do, and Harold still sees them when he gets out. Harold said he'd seen badgers too and Margarette commented that they dig big holes in the ground. "They're the same as groundhogs, right? Well, they look a lot alike."

While Harold was stretching his knees from sitting too long, I asked Margarette if she had worked outside of farming. After her husband died, she went into "domestic engineering." She took care of eight houses



In 2005, the Thomas family signed a conservation easement to preserve their farm's legacy.



S. GILCHRIST

in Madison. All the people in those houses were just like her family. After her husband died, she was able to keep her four kids together at home just by doing housework, and she never went on welfare. It must have been pretty hard. Her husband had a massive heart attack while he was piloting a plane out of Mineral Point. His half-brother was with him and was killed when the plane crashed.

When Harold returned to the table, he said that he sold some prairie to TNC: Thomas Prairie. I asked what led him to sell the land to TNC. He replied that it was a long way to go to get the cows. There were brush and thorns down there and it was hard to get to the calves there when the cows gave birth. I guess it wasn't very useful land for the farm. Margarette remembered that there used to be a windmill there and Harold validated her memory; it's still there.

When she was a teenager, Margarette used to climb the windmill. One time she was chasing a squirrel and it jumped off the windmill, way up on top. She came to find out it was a flying squirrel. That was the first time she'd ever seen one and she hasn't seen one since.

I asked what the two siblings valued most about the area. Margarette said she was really proud that she grew up here. It's a beautiful area. It's wide open. And she really values all the experience she learned on the farm. No one can ever take that away. She could do anything that her dad taught her to do on the farm,

*Harold and Margarette are really proud that they grew up in this beautiful, wide open area.*

and she also helped her mother in the house. "We did a lot of things together. There was a lot of togetherness. It's a good life." Harold's answer complemented hers. "You can do what you want to do. You're free, just like a bird. What else would you want?"

When I tried to formulate a question about what kinds of support would help them commit to maintaining open, rural land, Harold laughed. Harold said he would never sell the land to someone who would build all over it. "It'll stay right the way it is, period." Margarette talked about a neighboring farm that was sold to realtors. It was farmland, but now it's all built up with huge houses. Harold figures too many people want to live out in the country. People want to put houses there because it's beautiful. You used to be able to see a long ways, but now you can't because houses have been built. Harold sold his land to TNC because he knew they would keep it as it is. Margarette added "To save the land... They want to keep it as a prairie."



**William Wayne Schuelke**

*Born: February 12, 1924*

Wayne truly is a long-term resident in the Military Ridge area. He was born just the other side of Barneveld. His family moved three miles north of Ridgeway, on County Trunk H, when he was 6 years old. They lived there for 12 years, then moved into Ridgeway. In February 2004, just after his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, I interviewed Wayne at his Barneveld address.

Wayne's father had a cheese factory that was at one time called the Ridgeway Cheese Factory. He made cheese there for 28 years, until Wayne took over farming. Wayne said it didn't take too long to learn to make cheese, but you did have to have a license to do it. He got his license when he was 17, but he helped his dad make cheese even when he was a kid. He carried the cheese on the press to the storage room. He wasn't tall enough to lean over the vat without falling in, so his dad had to do that. He got a permit to drive when he was 12 so he could pick up milk from his dad's patrons.

He also used that driving permit to help out with another job when he was young. There was a quarry between the cheese factory and the grade school. He hauled cold water in an old Ford truck for the men working in the quarry to drink. Once he was taking a can of water up there and saw a wheel rolling right past him in the truck. The wheel had come off his truck! He stopped, got out, and put the wheel back on the truck again. There was a contractor who crushed the rock and got the gravel out of the quarry. The scars from that operation are still visible in the hill. The contractor never filled in the quarry or smoothed it out, as you would be required to today.

Wayne knows the surrounding area because he trucked milk from the farms into Ridgeway to the cheese factory. He only had one accident doing all that driving. Highway 18/151 was being detoured south of Ridgeway. A fellow was half asleep when he struck Wayne's rear wheel. Wayne tried to get the truck out of the way, but it flipped over a couple of times. He lost the milk but he was not hurt. Aside from that bit of unwelcome

excitement, Wayne said it was "just every-day work." Then, as he got older, he had four or five men working for him and he was able to stay in the milk plant. There were close to 80 farmers in their business, with the farthest 12 miles away from the plant. "We don't have those farmers any more today," Wayne commented. He only knows of one farm where they still milk cows until you get down to the next highway, approximately four miles away. "Only one farm milking – that's a big change!"

When he was a boy, Wayne attended a one-room schoolhouse that went from first through eighth grade, and was about a half-mile from their cheese factory. He usually walked to and from school, but once in a while the neighbors came with a team of horses and a sleigh and he'd jump in. The snow got terribly deep every winter. Of course he was only half as tall then as he is now, but he remembers the snow as awfully deep.

With times being so hard, he doesn't know how they did it, but Wayne and his brother and sister went to the 1932 Chicago World's Fair. They got to watch the Chicago Cubs play ball. Wayne was about 10 years old then. He stayed with his uncle. He became a Cubs fan at that time and he is still a Cubs fan to this day.

When Wayne was about 6 years old, his father bought him a saxophone. He took lessons in Madison. Since he was about 12, he played big band music in a dance band. He played by ear, without written music. He whistles a lot even now.

Wayne said he liked wildlife. He hunted a lot as a kid, always alone. His dad bought him a .22, gave him five shells, and told him he was expected to bring five squirrels home. He did. He cleaned, dressed, and ate them too. Sometimes his dad went coon hunting with his uncle and Wayne tagged along. There were not many raccoons around in those days. "If you hit one trail at night, you were doing good." Now you see raccoons all over. They used to get \$35-\$50 for a raccoon hide. Coon hides were worth something then.

*There were not many raccoons around in the 1930s,  
but now you see them all over.*

Those were tough times, in the early 1930s. The price of butter and cheese was very, very low then, so dairy farmers didn't make much, and any additional income was a good thing. Now Wayne hunts deer sometimes, but only mature bucks. He won't shoot a deer unless he intends to mount it.

The Mill Creek that was below their place had three varieties of fish: trout, suckers, and bullheads. He used to eat them, but he hasn't fished in many years now. The banks were clean when he was young, but now the willows have grown up and it's tough to get to the bank to fish. He just never tries to fish any more. There used to be great trout streams, but there isn't half the flow of water in the streams that there used to be. He doesn't know why.

Wayne saw all kinds of birds when he was a kid, but he didn't pay much attention to them. Now people from the University of Wisconsin have catalogued the birds on his land. They used a satellite to locate the nests. They came looking for native grasses and flowers on the land, and they made a list of birds in the area, including meadowlarks and bobolinks. They found a very scarce butterfly too. The identification of a rare butterfly on his land had no real impact on him; he thought it was nice that they found it. He wasn't interested in these things previously.

Wayne said there are a lot of ring-necked pheasants here now, but when he moved to this place, about 56 years ago, there were hardly any. He could count them; maybe seven or eight roosters. After four or five years, even those seven or eight disappeared. He thinks the pheasants vanished because of herbicides and insecticides that were used on corn, as well as the lack of cover. There used to be trees in the fence rows, but people plowed the land and dozed out the fence rows, removing cover the pheasants needed. When there were no pheasants for many years, Wayne started "growing them." He says the DNR didn't want people to raise pheasants then, but he did anyway. He bought

the pheasants in Pennsylvania, raised them, and released them. He started about 17 or 18 years before the interview and raised about 100 to 300 a year. Now he has pheasants all over. He paid for their food and all himself, but he never has shot one. He likes to hear them crow, and "they've got a lot of beauty on them." Even the hens he described as "the prettiest brown."

Wayne met Phyllis, his wife, when he was up north hunting. He shot a buck and went to a bar to have some fun. He had one drink. He noticed a group of girls in a closed off area with the jukebox, and he danced with all of them. He met Phyllis and her twin sister there, and he took Phyllis home that night. Phyllis worked in California for a while and Wayne went into the Service, but three years later, they got married. They had four kids. None of them farms. Wayne didn't want them to grow up to be farmers; it's too hard work he said.

Wayne started with his parents on a 200-acre farm. Then he and his wife purchased another farm of 148.6 acres. In 1971, he bought another neighbor's 200-acre farm, making his farm total 548.6 acres. He ran it as a dairy farm with 60 to 70 cows. Although he never milked by hand, he said he never could have managed the farm without his wife and children, as all of them were good workers. He grew alfalfa, corn, grains, and



*Wayne raised about 100 to 300 pheasants each year.*

# Views of the Ridge



*Chopping hay and bringing it to the cows in wagons increased milk production.*

eventually some soybeans to supplement the corn for the cows to eat. He believes he was the first farmer in the area to grind up soybeans for cows. They didn't shell the corn, but ground it up with the cob and all. He started growing soybeans in the early 1970s, as a savings in cattle feed costs. He only grew what he knew they could use, along with grazing down at the bottom, bound by an electric fence. He did green feeding too. "Green feeding" is the process of chopping alfalfa and whatever you want the cows to eat, and loading it in wagons and bringing it to them so they don't go out and graze.

When Wayne first came here, there was no contour plowing. "We contoured the farm" to prevent erosion in the 1940s or '50s. When you put in one strip of corn and another of grasses, the "water can't get flowing so much, when it runs off." Wayne says he likes "rotavating the land rather than plowing; rotavated land doesn't wash like plowed land." Rotavating digs and fluffs up the land, holding the moisture, without compacting it the way a tractor does when it runs over and over it. Soil that's been dug up like that so rain penetrates easily will stand up under drought conditions better than

plowed, Wayne explained. He had one small tractor and a team of horses. His dad said, "you can't get along without horses," so Wayne let him do the dragging for a couple of years, until his dad got tired and said, "Better get another tractor."

The land has changed in that it has gotten more fertile over the years, as Wayne sees it, because of contour strips, rotating crops (not raising corn on top of corn every year), and better conservation practices. The landscape on his farm has changed specifically because he has planted about 125,000 trees there. He cut down box elders and planted the hillsides with pine. He said he never planted trees on productive land until about five years before the interview. In that instance, he thought it was rocky land that never should have been taken out of timber anyway. He used to plant white pine, but when there were too many deer, he took to planting white spruce and red pine. He tried to plant some oak trees, but the deer ate them too. Now he has some trees that he can't even put his arms around, they are so big. When Wayne's son, Bruce, was 9 years old, the boy had his first 4-H project and it was planting trees. (Bruce was 56 at the time of the interview.) Wayne says he has



*Wayne says conservation practices have made the land more fertile over the years.*

The tornado of 1984 took Wayne out of the dairy business, knocking down both of his barns.

no plan to ever cut the pine trees down. He planted trees to purify the air and feed wildlife.

There are 10 acres of switchgrass that Wayne has put in. Mike Foy, a DNR wildlife manager, showed him native grasses up on the hill. Native grasses such as big and little bluestem, Indian grass, switchgrass, and “some grass that grows in a bunch” are on the hill-sides where neither plowing nor much pasturing is done. Those grasses come up every year. Wayne never pastured his land heavily, and he hasn’t had any cattle since the 1984 tornado.

Wayne was a farmer most of his life, but that wasn’t all. He worked in retail for 31 years and farmed at the same time. He sold Polaris snowmobiles, ATVs, and motorcycles. Polaris surpassed Honda as the biggest manufacturer of ATVs in the world, he told me. He had a restaurant license and sold meals. He had snowmobile races as an annual event to benefit the Red Cross. You can’t see the remains of the race track now; it’s all grown over with grass and trees. But in the heyday of those races, people came from Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, even overseas. There would be 350 competitive people there. He invited the race participants to camp there, on his property, for nothing. Five to six thousand people came to watch from the hill. It took 35 people to work the race and make it happen. People worked the gate, sold brats and drinks. It took eight to ten people to score the race. He paid these people. He got local kids as flag people on the dangerous curves. Fortunately, nobody got hurt. He made money at the gate, but he paid for the trophies and big prizes (like \$500) for the finals. Those prizes drew in some good riders. Racers didn’t usually make money; they had to win just to break even most of the time. He rides motorcycles and snowmobiles himself too. “Don’t let my age fool you!” he ribbed me good-naturedly. He raced snowmobiles professionally when he was about 47 years old and was seventh in the USSA for two years. But the races were always on

weekends and that was hard on his wife, Phyllis, and the kids, as they had to do all the milking while he was gone. “It was a great experience, a great experience.”

It was the tornado of 1984 that took Wayne out of the dairy business: the storm took both his barns. He raised corn as a cash crop for a couple of years. Then CRP came along. Although he was already in the old Soil Bank Program, the tornado convinced him to join CRP, combined with a lack of income and high interests. (A farmer got \$0.12 a pound for hogs. He paid \$0.20 on the dollar interest on his own money.) Wayne considers CRP a great program. It was CRP that got him into raising pheasants.

“If you went through one tornado, you didn’t want to go through another.” Wayne and his wife were in bed when they heard an explosion right outside the window, like a loud clap of thunder. But it wasn’t thunder. There was only one loud clap, then it was still. You could have dropped a pin and heard it. Wayne’s grandson was with them, so they got him up and headed for the basement. Wayne was just buckling his belt when things broke loose. He started running. Glass was flying out of the bedroom as windows exploded. It was black all around them because the power was off and there were no lights. Wayne went flying downstairs. The vacuum was so strong there, in the lower part of the house, that he could hardly open the door to the basement. The windows had not blown out downstairs yet. He grabbed a portable scanner. He heard calls from Barneveld. They needed help there badly.

Wayne lived in an older house, built around 1940, but it was a strong house. It was built by a great carpenter who nailed things to stay. The tornado lifted the south end of the house and cracked it right down to the chimney. The storm went through fast. It didn’t take the house, but the storm left a gap between the house and the basement so you could look right down into the basement. When it was all over, Wayne asked his wife, “Where did you learn so many church songs?!”

People said the tornado hit the water tower in Barneveld, but it wasn't so, according to Phyllis. It was the power lines that carry a lot of voltage that were hit, and that sent feedback to the substation on Highway 18/151. That was the blast that they heard and it was the back flash that hit the water tower.

The tornado came from the southwest. It had an effect on the tractor with the green feeder box for the cattle, as well as the electric box for the fence. The tornado flipped the chopper and the 18-foot feeder box upside down, it was so strong. It didn't flip the tractor over, but it twisted the 2½-inch thick steel bar that was the hitch to the tractor, and that hitch still is not straight. Wayne commented appreciatively that he would have liked to have seen the storm hit in slow motion.



Wayne believes the Military Ridge area is the most beautiful area in the state.

Phyllis commented that, in their store, they had one wall with U.S. flags on it. After the tornado, the flags were sitting there folded up, one flag on top of another, outside the door, and the walls were completely gone. The store had been built new in 1968. The original intention had been a four-car garage, but they used the building as a store to sell snowmobiles and ATVs in their later years. The tornado took everything off the building except one wall with one plate on it.

Since the tornado, there are new buildings everywhere, so everything looks better, more modern. Wayne had to build a new house as well as a new shed for machinery. He rebuilt the business first. They spent their first night after the tornado in a trailer home. The winds were 85 miles an hour during the tornado, and Wayne thought that trailer would go, but it didn't.

When I asked Wayne how he felt about changes to the landscape, he said he was in the Soil Bank program years ago. In the Soil Bank program the government rented your land. The federal CRP is similar today. CRP has been very productive for wildlife. A number of people now drive through the area to see deer and wild turkeys. You didn't see turkeys here for quite some time, until about 25 or 30 years ago. Wayne remembered that his cousin told him he saw five turkeys on his land once back then, but Wayne had never seen one. Turkey populations have mushroomed since then, so Wayne can see 100 turkeys at a time now. He says they like pines for roosting, as it is about 10 degrees warmer inside a pine plantation than it is outside it.

One time Wayne returned home to find a message on the phone saying there was a fire on top of the ridge. A bolt of lightning started the fire. It burned about four acres of CRP land. It started about 5:00 p.m. that day. Fortunately, it was put out before it got to the plantation. Conifers explode when fire hits the dry needles, he explained. "Did you ever put a dried Christmas tree on top of a fire?" The same thing would happen if a wildfire got to the dry timber.

*Wayne would like to see the landscape  
"with beautiful, big patches of timber."*

In the future, Wayne would like to see the landscape just as it is, "with beautiful, big patches of timber." He likes to sit among the pines and see wildlife just a few feet away. In the spring he sees gobblers and hen turkeys. He does hunt turkeys, though not extensively. He doesn't want to chase them off the farm. In the last few years, he's thought about planting more timber because trees purify the air.

In response to some photographs of the area that I showed him, Wayne made the following comments. He likes the look of the land that is very conducive to wildlife, with some agriculture. He likes native grasses and flowers. He knows that badgers are hard to see but he thinks there are some out there, because he sees holes dug in the ground. There have always been meadowlarks around, but especially since the land has been in CRP. He has not seen prairie chickens here, but he has seen them up north. He has done prescribed burns on his land. Someone from TNC came out to his grasslands and collected seeds. The man got 12 different varieties of seeds and sent Wayne some reimbursement for them.

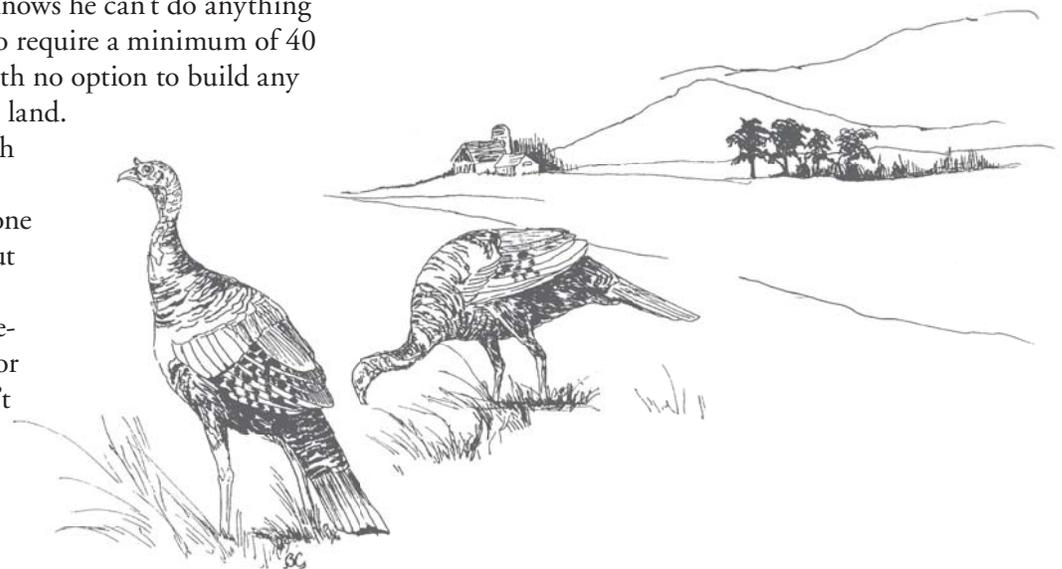
Wayne does not like splitting all the farms and putting houses on them, but he knows he can't do anything about it. He would like to require a minimum of 40 acres to build a house, with no option to build any other houses on the same land.

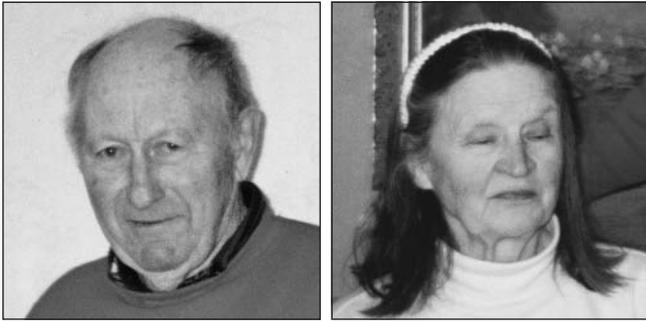
People are using too much productive land to build houses. He could have done that himself years ago, but he hasn't sold his land. Monetarily he could benefit from selling his land for houses, but he just doesn't want any houses built on it. "Money is not everything; happiness is the greatest thing." He likes

to see the land as it is now – that makes him happy. He figures that, after he's gone, he won't have any say over what is done with the land, but for now he wants to keep the beautiful views. He takes friends around the farm and they are awed by what they see.

When I asked him what he values most about the area, Wayne said that he believes it to be the most beautiful area of the state, with gradual, sloping hills, the way farmers crop their land and still maintain habitat for wildlife, and the amount of timberland there.

Wayne's adventures didn't always stay on the ground. He was 18 when he learned to fly and got his pilot's license. When I asked how the landscape has changed from an aerial view, he said he didn't pay much attention to what the landscape looked like when he was flying, and he quit flying 15 to 20 years ago. But he showed me an aerial photo of his place. All the pines he planted have grown up. He invited me to drive around his property, and I did. I could see all the pines he was talking about. A huge flock of turkeys was right by the road too. Wayne made it clear that he loves it here; he wouldn't live anywhere else.





## **William Frank Holmes**

*Born: May 12, 1928*

## **Betty Holmes**

*Born: December 19, 1930*

I interviewed Bill and Betty at their home south of Mount Horeb in February 2004. They said they did not grow up in the area, but they came there together in 1960. There were three farms on Blue Rock Road then, and all three had dairy cattle. There are no dairy farms there now and the land has been divided up. They bought the land they now live on in 1983. They bought most of the farm it used to be and other neighbors bought the balance of it. This is their second farm in the area, but their purchase and the subsequent division of the remainder eliminated the original farm.

The first farm they had in the area was about a half mile down the road. They dairy farmed there until 1990, when their son, Jim, took over. They took out horse stalls and completely remodeled the barn for milking. They started with 25 Holstein cows in 1960. Nowadays, 25 cows is “nothing.” They milked with machines that put the milk in buckets that they then carried to the cooler. They put a pipeline in later and milk trucks picked up bulk tanks of milk and shipped it to the plants. There were two plants in the area: Pabs Farm over by Verona and the AMPI<sup>5</sup> plant in Mount Horeb. The plants sold milk for cheese and different products. They sold to Chicago and Florida and other places. Farm products seem to go even further from the farm today.

While some dairy farmers buy most of their crops, Bill and Betty planted and harvested their own. Hay was their main crop, plus corn and oats. Most of the haying they did themselves. They adopted a son, Jim, in 1961, but he didn’t start helping until he was 11 years old. Then he drove the tractor with the baler. Betty and Bill hauled the bales. The boy was a husky guy and he could handle them pretty well, but Betty said she had a hard time handling the square bales. Betty put them on the elevator or, occasionally, she ran the baler.

“It was hard work,” Bill summarized. “That’s why they don’t do it much anymore.” “It was a sweaty job,” Betty added. “It was torture some days when it was 95 degrees, real torture!”

There were no vacations for the farm families in those days either. The cows had to be milked twice a day, seven days a week. There were debts to be paid too. Necessary building and remodeling created debts, so they had to keep going all the time. They only took time off to go to funerals and weddings. For entertainment or recreation, they did simple things. They played card games with a social group who got together once a month. Betty would bake a cake and they’d all get together. They also bought a boat and went into Madison. It was a good-sized motor boat that could fit six people in it, a “round about.” Nowadays, young people plan their vacations ahead, and they get one or two every year. Their son, Jim, takes his four children



*Bill and Betty came to the Mt. Horeb area in 1960.*

<sup>5</sup>The Association of Milk Producers, Inc., a dairy marketing cooperative. The cooperative collected milk from all the dairy farms in the area.

*There were no vacations for the farm families;  
cows had to be milked twice a day, seven days a week.*

on vacations to Florida or Niagara Falls. They rent a camper and go for a week. The kids have a good time. They will remember those family vacations for as long as they live.

Big changes came for Bill and Betty when they built this house in 1990. In 1983, their son got married. He wanted to live on the farm with the cows, and Bill and Betty considered themselves too young to have to move into town. Ironically, there are no cows on the farm now; as soon as Jim paid off the cows, he sold them. But Betty likes it in their newer home: "Up here in the wind, we get plenty of air." She knew instantly where she wanted the house built. She picked this spot because you can see all the way up to Cave of the Mounds from the site. She considers the scenery superb! From their house, they can see towns along the ridge and can just barely make out the lights of Mineral Point to the southwest. On the Fourth of July, she explained, she can walk around the house and see fireworks all around. They can't see the fireworks on the eastside of Madison, the big ones, but plenty of others. On July Fourth, they like to have company and sit in the yard and watch the fireworks. "That's the trouble when you get old; we'd rather just sit out on the grass and watch airplanes go over" (than have to go somewhere/do something).

Their son has a grain farm now and he rents extra land. He grows corn and soybeans. But he works a job in Madison too. People used to be able to make a living farming, but now it's different. "Now farmers work out" (off the farm). People buy more things so they need more money. The women have jobs in town now and most of them have been working for years. Farm wives used to just work on the farm. But when women just worked on the farms, they got "cheated out of social security and insurance." One reason many women work off the farm now is to get health insurance for their families. With a wife and four kids, Jim needs health insurance through an outside job.

When I asked about wildlife, Bill joked that he never worried about the fish: "We don't have any fish," he explained. He countered himself, saying that there is more of every kind of wildlife than there used to be when he and Betty moved there. There are way more deer and wild turkeys. Betty said she doesn't like the "turkey planting" because the population of turkeys isn't controlled. "We've never had one to eat," Bill chimed. The turkeys eat their crops, but the farmers can't just take a turkey to eat. It would cost "a couple thousand dollars" if you got caught taking a turkey like that. Bill likens it to paying more taxes because the turkeys are eating crops, and that costs the farmers money. Betty sees the young turkeys jumping around in the corn plants, where they are bound to break the stalks.

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to the southwest.*

Bill said he doesn't see many foxes, but, Betty pointed out, there are coyotes around now. Neither of them saw coyotes in the area years ago. Bill doesn't mind them now, but Betty figured coyotes would be a problem if they had chickens. Bill had heard coyotes howl at night when he lived in Michigan, when he was young – "Oh, my God!" They don't hear the howling from inside their house here. One has to be outside to hear them, they explained. But they have seen coyotes running in the field. Bill thought they seemed different, bigger, and he wonders if some of them may have crossed with dogs.



*Bill and Betty noted that there are more coyotes in the area now.*

Bill used to think it was great to see a deer. He'd see a big buck in the fall once in a while. Years ago there were not so many deer or so many hunters as there are now. His son Jim likes to hunt with a group of friends. Somebody had to stay and do the chores while Jim went hunting, so Bill doesn't hunt. Jim hunts deer every fall, also pheasants and rabbits. Now there are a lot of pheasants in the area, which is fine by Bill since they are beautiful birds, but he never used to see any. Betty is "all for controlling everything." Hunting is more challenging if there are not so many wild turkeys or pheasants. Jim buys turkey tags every year, but if each hunter can only shoot one bird, that doesn't decrease the population very much. They have seen flocks of a hundred wild turkeys in wintertime, when they flock together. Betty called the DNR one time when she looked out the front door and saw a whole field black with turkeys – "It was unreal!" But the DNR did nothing about all the turkeys, she said.

Bill said there used to be a lot of red-winged blackbirds. They disappeared after the farmers started using insecticides for corn. He didn't see any red-wingeds for years then. But now they are starting to come back, and he likes to see them. He also said they used to see meadowlarks. They're "a nice bird." But they don't see many of them: "all those chemicals they use on corn are hard on birds."

Betty likes to hear mourning doves. She was against passing the law to shoot them. Bill jumped into the discussion: "Who would want to go shoot a little bird not any bigger than your fist? There's no meat on

them!" Although Betty says she rarely hears mourning doves now, she likes to stand outside and listen to them. They are nicer to listen to than blackbirds and crows. Bill indicated that there are crows around all the time; they are a nuisance. Pigeons too. Bill thinks it would make more sense to issue a license for hunting pigeons, as they're bigger and "all they do is make a mess of everything."

Looking at a picture of a prairie chicken, neither Bill nor Betty identified it, but Bill thought he used to see those by the hundreds in Michigan. He said a flock of them would "sit on a tree and make a nice noise, a nice song."

When I showed them a picture of a badger and told them what it was, Betty said she doesn't like badgers because they dug a hole by the driveway and made a mess. Bill explained that that instance was actually a woodchuck, but they had had badger holes around. Although he's never had an encounter with a badger, he warned that "You have to watch out for them; they'll take after you."

Bill and Betty have been strip cropping the land since the 1960s. The strips are 80 to 100 feet wide. They follow the contour of the land. Instead of going up and down over the hills, the crop rows go along the hills. The farm was already stripped when they bought it, but when they bought extra land, they had to strip that. An expert laid out the strips, but then they had to maintain them. The ASC (Agriculture Stabilization Commission) sends a letter every year asking if they are keeping the contour strips and waterways up.

Bill figures two-thirds of Wisconsin is wasteland, marsh, or sandy soil. The northern part is at best half woods. The people in the northern part of the state harvest different crops than they do in the southern part. The wastelands Bill claims for his southern part of the state are steep hills you can't farm. Betty hates to see people building houses on the land in the country and sticking up light poles over good workland. The

Bill and Betty wonder where all the people come from  
and what the countryside will look  
like in another 70 years.

weeds grow up between the light poles and the tractor wheels can't get close to the poles to mow and control the weeds. These weed and thistle patches between light poles might be considered another kind of wasteland. When people build new houses, they are told how many acres they need to have to build, but there is no rule saying where within their plot they have to build. People build in the center of their land, far away from the existent roads. Then they build a long driveway, cementing over good workland and, in a sense, creating another kind of wasteland.

In their 70s, Bill and Betty are wondering what the countryside will look like in another 70 years. If the human population keeps growing, there will be more little 40-acre farmettes. When they started out, they bought 200 acres. They added onto their parcel twice so that now it's 410 acres. A lot of the farmers have to sell land for extra money. One neighbor wants to sell 20 of 79 acres now. They have horses at that farm now; they're in the business of horses. You can see the way people use the land in the tax records. People have little 1-acre, 5-acre, or 10-acre places. Bill has seen it in the Town of Blue Mounds annual report. Betty noticed that there were two more pages of names listed in the book in 2003 than there were in 1999. That's how many more people have moved into the township. There are a lot more landowners in the township now than there used to be. A township is only six square miles. But that's how it is in all the townships now, Bill assures me. Sometimes he wonders where all the people come from.

While they claimed no experience with fires, except perhaps seeing a grass fire from a distance, they did say they had experienced some major storms. Bill recalled the big ice storm of 1976. A lot of tree limbs were broken off in that storm. The whole area, even north of Madison, was out of electricity. Bill and Betty were out of electricity for nine days. Betty said that was an experience she would never want to repeat! They did

have a generator so they were not completely without power, but they shared the generator with others who had none, thus they didn't have power all the time. "We went out to help others. But for nine days! And we were milking cows!" They used the generator so they could milk the cows by machine. "I don't think anybody mentioned global warming then," Betty quipped.

They both remembered a bad wind and hail storm that took the crops out in 1974 or 1975. They were remodeling the house at that time. That storm flattened the hay. The hail pellets were small, but there was a lot of wind. It pounded everything down. Water came down through two floors from the attic, inside the house, and damaged new drywall they were just putting up. They had to do the new drywall over.

Although you can see Barneveld from their place, it's seven or eight miles away. There was no impact from the Barneveld tornado at their place. "It must have been terrible." The tornado hit in the middle of the night, so everything was really dark until cars with their headlights started coming in to help. Everyone has cell phones today, but nobody did then. But everyone pitched in to help. For a month to six weeks after the tornado, they set up a kitchen in one of the buildings left standing, to feed people in Barneveld. Bill and Betty gave donations. Many people went up there to help.

Betty spelled out changes to the landscape: it's been chopped up into little plots of land. Although the roads may be pretty much the same as they were when Bill and Betty first moved here, there are a lot more driveways. Betty expects there will be a lot of little 40-acre farmettes raising gardens. Bill said there will be big farms too. It's the middle-sized farms that will be missing from the landscape; the family farms that used to be everywhere will be replaced with little lots or giant consolidated farms. There have been two big dairy set ups near here in the past year or two, Bill explained. One on Highway 78 went in in the year preceding the interview. They take care of 600 to 700 milk cows.

It's very hard on the small farmers; there's not enough profit in dairy farming to keep them going. They do what they can with grain farming.

When Betty was a young child, her dad had an 80-acre farm, and he had tough going. That farm was close to Madison. It was a dairy farm, with corn, grain, and hay. It is still a farm now; her brother runs it. He's added land so the farm is about 240 acres now, and he rents some additional land as well. It's all workland: there are no woods up there, and that makes a difference too.

Bill and Betty didn't see eye to eye on tree planting. Bill initially said planting trees is a good thing. Betty's declaration was adamant: "I don't want more trees!" She wants the view, and, if she wants to sit in the shade, she has a mini-woods of bur oaks and ash. She let Bill plant those trees in the mini-woods 10 or 12 years ago. One of the trees is pretty big now. She says trees are messy and she claims to be "too old" to rake their leaves. There is one tree in front of the house she doesn't mind. It's a locust and it's easy to maintain. "The little bitty leaves kind of disappear." They also planted a flowering crab, an ornamental tree. "It gets these gypsy moths in it every year."

Betty looked at a photo of grassland in the area and declared that she doesn't like "the look of all those weeds." Bill pointed out that prairie grass is what you want, if you want the land preserved. "That's not weeds; that's what you want, prairie grass."

When I asked what they value most about the area, Bill said "wide open spaces, fresh air, and good water." Betty re-iterated appreciation for good water. When I asked what could be done to help maintain open spaces, Bill said he'd like to keep people from building there, or at least cut down on people building homes close together. He immediately acknowledged that "we can't do that." He doesn't think it's too crowded yet, but it could get that way. "We have painters that sit and draw here." This statement serves as tribute to the beauty of the landscape. Artists appreciate the view.

They moved to the area when land in the area was relatively cheap and it was all they could afford. Bill lived by Mount Vernon for 14 years first, and when they got married they farmed there for six years. They rented that farm. But they looked to buy one, and this 200-acre farm was affordable. Bill liked it because the place only had four buildings on it, unlike some farms that had a lot of buildings, "all junkers" that were hard to fix up. He was pleased that "if we wanted to build a new building, we could." And they "wanted to get on more rolling land." It was mud where they had lived on bottom land, which presented problems with getting stuck, so they moved up to higher ground. "It was good alfalfa land" too.

When they moved here, there was a "country school," a one-room schoolhouse, serving maybe 15 or 20 kids. The kids walked over a mile to school. Once a month, a mothers' group from the school organized a neighborhood get-together for the whole community. Everybody would bring a cake, donuts, or sandwiches, and "we'd all fill up." That school, German Valley School, closed in the mid-1960s, four or five years after Bill and Betty moved there. Now the school building is a house and people live there. There used to be a school every couple of miles so the kids didn't have to walk very far. When they consolidated the schools, they stopped organizing the get-togethers for the neighborhood.

The neighbors came to visit them right away when Bill and Betty moved there. The farmers exchanged help with one another for the heavy jobs like haying and filling the silos. They hired out to get the corn-picking done. Betty remembers picking some corn by hand one year, to have some to feed the cows before the corn-pickers came. A neighbor had a corn-picker and everybody hired him. That was not a combine, just a row corn-picker. Then more people got their own small combines. Now everything is done by combines. Neighbors will still help each other, but most everybody has their own equipment now, so farmers do their

## The Interviews

*People would say that, to succeed at farming, "you got to get big," and that didn't sound so good, because theirs was not a big farm.*

own. Then if the equipment breaks down, neighbors will help, but otherwise farmers don't work together much anymore. Although Betty was quick to point out that they do know all their neighbors, Bill said that living out there in the country is getting like living in the cities in that you hardly know your neighbors.

One time, Betty recalled, a dog chased the heifers out and they were out all night trying to find them and get them back to the barn. Neighbors came to help. "We could never have done it alone." But they herded the heifers back along the woods and up the road to the barn.

For socializing, people used to go dancing. Betty wonders what young people do for fun, besides house parties these days. "Young people should have dance parties to go to." In fact, it was at a wedding dance that Bill and Betty met. If the reception was in a big enough place, there would always be a dance at a wedding. Mount Horeb, Cross Plains, Black Earth – all those places used to have dances. Betty went to a couple of big bands in Waunakee. She worked in Madison, and she remembered going dancing at Turner Hall too.

When their son, Jim, was growing up, he was alone, an only child. For toys, they bought him miniature machinery, a tractor, manure spreader, and so on. Using a little toy grain drill, he used to plant real oats in her flower beds. He rode mini-bikes all over the farm. Bill and Betty discouraged Jim from farming when he completed high school. They thought he would be too tied down and they didn't think he would like it. In addition, they considered it too expensive. People would say that, to succeed at farming, "you got to get big," and that didn't sound so good, because theirs was not a big farm. But Jim wanted to farm. Now, he doesn't encourage his two sons to farm either.

Bill drives a school bus now. He likes it. Yet he still has old tractors, four of them: Minneapolis Molines, all red and all from the 1950s. Such tractors are scarce now, so he bought them for his collection. They were yellow with red wheels, but he painted them red-orange. They work well, he claims, but Bill didn't get these tractors to work.



*Bill showed me photos of his collection of Minneapolis Molines from the 1950s.*



*Bill drives bus for the local school district now.*

PHOTOS: S GILCHRIST



## **Bernard Hendrick Bjorge**

*Born: August 26, 1921*

## **Lucille Marion (Harris) Bjorge**

*Born: November 14, 1920*

I interviewed the Bjorges in their home in Ridgeway. Neither of them grew up in the area, but about 40 years before the interview, in the 1960s, they moved here from Elkhorn. Bernard had gone to school in Lake Geneva, Lucille attended school in Whitewater. Bernard was in the Service when they got married, and after World War II, he wanted to farm. They farmed for 20 years in Elkhorn before they moved here, but they didn't own the farm there and they wanted a farm of their own. They moved to this area because land closer to Milwaukee and Chicago was too expensive; here, it was affordable. They have never been sorry that they came here. Lucille likes the nice people, schools, and hospital, plus the proximity to town for shopping. The kids liked it here too.

When they first moved here, there were not so many houses around. You could see the scenery out the window. There were woods around the property. It was nothing to see 10 to 12 deer or wild turkeys crossing their field of vision. They just see rabbits and squirrels now. The deer and turkeys used to come from the woods to a cornfield that was always harvested later than the rest. People come hunting sometimes now, though Bernard never hunted. He didn't do much fishing either, though his son and daughter-in-law do quite a bit.

The farm here had a nice, fairly new house and barn. They fixed it all up. Their son, Bob, wanted to farm with them. He worked for wages for a while, then for a third of the farm's income, then half, until they sold it all to him. Bob has done a lot of fixing up on the farm in his own right. At first, in the 1960s, Bernard and Lucille raised beef and dairy cattle and hogs. But Bob didn't like hogs so, after a few years, they dropped the hogs and raised more beef. They had Holsteins and they raised the bull calves for beef. They raised their own feed for the livestock too. Bernard helped Bob farm some at first. They had 100 head of cattle, then sometimes just 30. They bought enough beef

cattle to consume the feed they grew. They never sold any feed they grew on the farm, except when they rented extra ground.

Bernard and Lucille moved to the house they live in now 16 years before the interview. This house was closer to the farm than Dodgeville, and the house was being built right when they were looking to move off the farm. They could see what the house was like, so they bought it. Prices have gone up since then.

Lucille and Bernard are glad their son is a farmer. They consider themselves lucky to get one out of their three boys (five kids) to take over the farm, after they fixed it all up and invested so much. Bob's wife worked on computers, so she keeps all the cow records. They have an office in the barn. Having a computer in the barn is definitely different from the early days of farming. The kids email each other now. Bernard and Lucille have a daughter who runs the computer office at the Vo-Tech College at Fennimore. Having worked there 20 or 30 years, she is talking about retiring. They are proud of their granddaughter, Jenny, for her interest in farming. She is in FFA (Future Farmers of America) and takes care of calves. She loves farming. Her brother, on the other hand, wants nothing to do with farming; he just stays in the house.

Lucille is pleased that Bob is doing a wonderful job with the farm. A few years ago, he put in a new milking operation and quit the beef business. Bob's wife does the milking. She milks about 170 cows. Bob rents land now; he runs about 400 to 500 acres. There are about five harvesters there: fancy feeders with fancy buttons. Now a new tractor would cost Bob about \$100,000. When Bernard and Lucille started farming, it cost about \$18,000 to \$20,000 for a little tractor.

Before he went in the Service, Bernard worked driving a gravel truck, but Lucille has never worked off the farm. She worked taking care of five children and doing everything herself. But she never did milk a cow. "Everyone thinks I'm weird," she said. Her folks had

a farm, so she grew up around cows, but she had two older brothers to tend to the milking, so she didn't have to do it.

The farm was already modernized when they bought it. They bought everything in one package, the land, cows, milking machinery, and a self-propelled combine. They moved there in one day and had to milk the cows there that night. There were 200 acres then, and they added 65 acres more adjoining land from Folklore Village (a cultural center hosting dancing and other folk traditions). Then they rented the rest of Folklore Village's land. Then the DNR bought some land across the highway to put in a bike path.

*Lucille and Bernard  
consider themselves lucky  
that one of their sons took  
over the farm after they  
invested so much.*

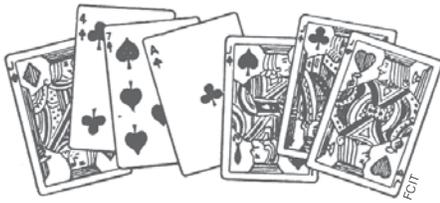
Bernard and Lucille have been very active socially in their community. Even now they built a gazebo in the yard, and a retired neighbor comes over to sit and visit. In the year 2000, they hosted a Dairy Breakfast and fed over 2,600 to 3,000 people. It had rained and rained that week and they really had to work to clear the yard. They rotate the breakfast among the farms, but no one else ever had a breakfast as big as that one. At Christmas time, they really like to light up the neighborhood. They put up over 6,000 lights around the house, gazebo, and trees. All those lights make a big difference to the electric bill. The Association for Advancement for Ridgeway gives them a check for \$25 in appreciation, to help cover the costs for the lights.

About 25 years before the interview, in the mid-1970s, the electric company (Wisconsin Power and Light) put up a tower with a wind generator on the ridge on their farm. It was close by the highway and people came from all over the world just to see it. Foreigners and tourists came by busloads. School children came to see it and then wrote them thank you letters. Although the electricity generated was not enough to run the farm, Bernard and Lucille got the use of what was generated. The generated electricity was deleted from their bill. After three or four years, the company raised it up higher, but without enough guy cables, so a storm blew it over. Lucille heard a noise and said, "The windmill's down." Bernard thought she meant it wasn't working, but it was literally down on the ground. Now there is talk about building more wind towers in the area.

Lucille and Bernard used to have "a bunch of bird feeders." But it got too messy with their droppings. The rabbits came underneath the feeders and they left messes too. They stopped using the messy bird feeders, but Lucille does still take care of the hummingbirds. There are lots of robins in the yard too, while the rabbits still cause trouble in the garden.

For recreation, the Bjorges have enjoyed snowmobiling. They don't do it anymore, but their kids still do. Their son and his father-in-law flew up from Florida just the week before the interview. They've been coming up to go snowmobiling every year, for the past few years. They like to snowmobile along the bike trail. Having the Military Ridge Bicycle Trail there is handy! They used to hike that trail too, but now Bernard claims to be "getting too old for it now." They had a grandson in Verona who rode his bike here and home again, but he got married in 2003 and bought a home in Watertown, so he's not biking here so much.

Bernard and Lucille have been married for 60 years. They met at a barn dance in Lake Geneva and started going together in 1941, during the war. Some people's barn burned down and they built a new one. Needing



*For over 40 years, Bernard and Lucille have participated in a local card club.*

money, they held barn dances in the summer. Lucille said, “We girls went down there one night, and Bernard was there.” Bernard was drafted into the Service in 1942, so the timing was right.

In Elkhorn, Bernard and Lucille were both 4-H leaders. They had done a lot in 4-H when they were kids, so they got their own kids involved. Bernard taught kids to drive tractors. Lucille was a gardening leader: she taught kids to garden. Their kids raised steers for 4-H. One daughter, Bonnie, took child care training through 4-H. She was not interested in cattle, but preferred flower arranging and things like that to cattle. As they got older, the kids got less interested in 4-H.

Now Bernard and Lucille participate in a card club. Club members play euchre at each other’s houses one Saturday afternoon a month. The host serves supper. The card club has been going for 40 years. They originally had six tables of players, but now there are only three. People have died or gotten sick. Besides the Bjorges, there is only one other couple from the original group still participating. “A lot are six feet under now.”

Bernard said that, “before we got here” the land was used for lead mining. There are piles of stones and three- to six-foot holes caved in. He had to pick up stones and fill in holes, level the land off. Just the year before Bob was looking out from the silo and saw a black spot in the field. It was a 12-foot hole that was eight feet deep. You could put a whole tractor down in there and cover it up; that’s how big it was. He’d worked the land there for years, but suddenly it just caved in. Other people are getting these holes too, but that was the biggest one. Bob had to fill it in. He picked a lot of rocks to fill it and had a gravel truck fill it with black dirt. These holes were left over from mining. Donkeys pulled lead ore on carts and the cart rails were down in that hole, so he knew it was from mining. Frost must bring up the stones. To avoid damaging machinery the farmers had to pick up the rocks by hand every year. Sometimes Bernard spent a week or two just picking up



B.BJORGE

rocks, all by hand. Bob takes the time to pick up the rocks to protect his machinery now. Bernard explained that when you pay \$104,000 for one tractor, you take care of it. Bob now has six tractors on the farm plus a couple of skid loaders for cleaning feed lots.

When I asked Lucille and Bernard about changes they have observed in the landscape, Bernard explained that there used to be fences all over the landscape so people could pasture their cattle. But people took out the fences so they could work the land straight across. The hillsides were starting to erode. They pulled the fences out so now they can work the land from borderline to borderline with contours that keep the water from running down the hillside. What used to be a patchwork of little pieces of land divided by fences is now a larger open area cropped in long strips. Also, people don’t pasture their cattle the way they used to. All the livestock are confined and fed right there in the buildings now. Bob feeds over 402 head every day and night. He’s got five big harvesters for harvesting the feed. He feeds the cattle baled hay and shell corn. One big shed is filled with big square bales of hay and corn silage. In addition, there are different crops than when Bernard and Lucille moved here. They never grew soybeans, but now they see soybeans all over. Bernard grew wheat, barley, and oats, whereas now farmers just grow barley, as oats are not as valuable for cattle feed, and alfalfa and corn are the main crops. Bernard used to grow wheat to take to the mill to be ground into flour

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and to feed the chickens. There used to be chickens on every farm, and people fed the chickens wheat. Now, farmers hardly know what a chicken is any more.

For the most part, Bernard and Lucille think these changes in the land are for the better. They say farmers are doing more fertilizing and cropping and generally taking better care of the land. Before, you'd just go out there and cut the crop off with the expectation that there would be another crop next year. Now farmers are looking to conserve the soil through contouring. Asked about the way they would like to see the land in the future, Bernard said he figured this is about as good as it gets: we can't make many more changes to improve production, as farmers are cropping every inch of workable land.

There is a lot of building going on in the area, which takes land out of production. But farmers are getting better production from the land than what they used to. When Bernard was first farming in the area, 30 to 35 bushels of corn was a bumper crop. Now Bob can get over 200 bushels of corn some years! Slurry tanks make a big difference. Manure is pumped into tanks, mixed with water, and broadcast over the ground by a tank spreader. The liquid manure is worked into the ground. He puts it onto the ground in the spring and fall, when he can work it into the ground, to get the value out of the manure. It used to take a lot more acres to sustain the cattle than it does now, thanks to better fertilizer and hybrid seeds. Hybrid corn increases productivity; the size of the ear is bigger. With such

increases in productivity, Bernard doesn't see how any more changes in the land can be made. Except for the addition of more roads, he expects this land to remain farmland. "You've got to have farmland/cropland here!"

With CRP, the government pays farmers to leave the ground empty. Meanwhile all the new houses take land out of production. The influx of people moving to the country means more people to feed here. Sooner or later there won't be enough crops to feed the people and we will have to put land back in production to feed everybody.

People are building more roads, which takes land out of production. There used to be just a two-lane road through the countryside and a train that went where the Military Ridge Bicycle Trail goes now. A passenger train came by twice a week and a freight train every day. The passenger train went from Madison to Illinois, with stations in Belmont, Platteville, and a branch to Mineral Point. Although Bernard and Lucille never got to ride that train, they did wave to the caboose man on the back end as the train went by. The train didn't move very fast, as the tracks were in bad shape. People are all going to semis, trucks now. In the late 1960s or 1970, the track was taken out.

Lucille and Bernard value "everything" about the area. They say the people are friendlier there. Although they see negative behavior such as drugs and liquor among the youth working its way out from the city, there is not as much "rowdy" behavior in the country. They

say their farm will always be farmland. Although they have no woods, they don't expect the farm to go to prairie grass because there is so much livestock there. They want to keep the area in cropland because you get more productivity out of it that way and aerating it by working it improves the land.

The 1984 tornado missed them, going south of their place and then hitting Barneveld. But their son was at the implement dealer in town at that time. When the police were keeping everyone else out of Barneveld to prevent vandalism after the tornado, the implement truck was allowed to go through to haul stuff back and forth. The police knew Bob and the truck, so he took Bernard and Lucille through the devastated town. "It was hard to believe what you saw." The town was flat. Lumber was scattered and the trees were full of rubbish and clothes, all torn to pieces. Amish people came and set up a big warehouse at the end of town. That's where meals were served. The women's club made food. One time Lucille was elected to take all the desserts down there for the workers cleaning up the town. She saw cars smashed and trees down. It was "just a mess!" Nine people were killed and a lot more injured. Everybody went to work in a hurry to rebuild the town, but it took a couple of years to do so. Most of the free help donated was for the initial cleanup; the rebuilding was done with contractors.

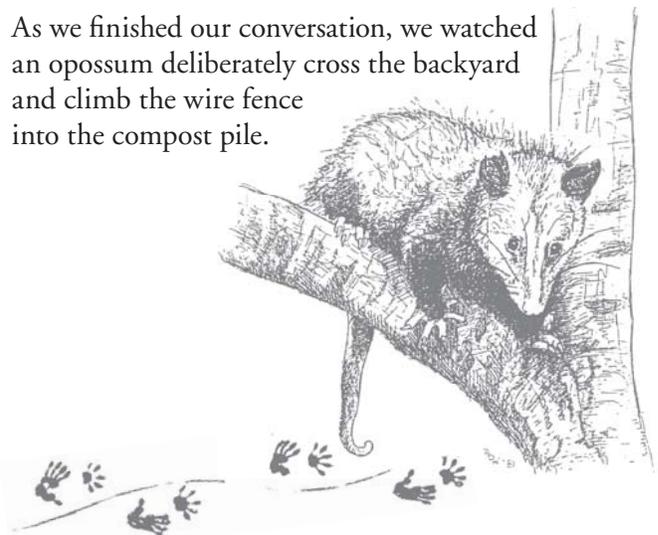
The Amish people who came to help after the tornado came from Fennimore, about 25 miles north. They even came from other states too. A lot of them have moved into the region: now they are in Belmont, Platteville, and they do some shopping in Dodgeville, though Bernard was quick to admit that he has never seen a horse and buggy in Dodgeville. Lucille has seen them in Fennimore. Preston is probably the closest Amish settlement. Lucille and her daughter took a trip to visit a big Amish settlement in or near Cleveland, Ohio once. They ate meals there, went to some shops, and visited a farm. Lucille explained that the Amish farm used

nothing electrical. Their refrigerator ran on gas. "They can bake and cook!" They don't use cake mixes either.

Bernard and Lucille recollected an ice storm in the 1970s. The trees were coated thick and the ice was hanging on everything. The electricity was out. "We were one of the lucky ones: we had a generator." Still, they had to keep appliances shut off in the house so they could use the generator for milking the cows. The generator was on a trailer so they could take it to the neighbors so they, too, could milk their cows. People stayed in the houses that had wood stoves to keep them warm. The electric poles and wires were down, so people in the area were without electricity for eight to 10 days. Crews were brought from other parts of Wisconsin to help with the ice storm. They brought in trucks, equipment, poles, and wires to get the electricity going again in the area.

Lucille also remembered that snow used to be piled higher than the telephone poles. She used to just go in a bobsled or a horse and sleigh. Now the snow is nothing like that. Bernard reminded us that now they have equipment they didn't have previously to clear the snow. Now we get a quarter inch of snow and the big snow plows are grinding up that hill.

As we finished our conversation, we watched an opossum deliberately cross the backyard and climb the wire fence into the compost pile.





### **Sharon Kay (Tessmann) Mahoney**

*Born: March 20, 1943*

It was late February 2004, when I met Sharon at her home outside Blue Mounds. A large dog greeted me too. Sharon moved some papers from the kitchen table and invited me to sit. Her enthusiasm for sharing memories and anecdotes led us through an enjoyable evening's conversation.

Sharon grew up on the far west side of Madison, on the edge of an open space between Madison and Middleton. For entertainment, she liked to go for rides, especially in the Blue Mounds area, so she was familiar with the countryside before she moved there. It was after she married King Wayne Mahoney in 1961 that she moved out to the Military Ridge area. She came to a 100-acre farm with a new baby. The farm was on Kingsland Road, near where she lives now. They milked dairy cows and raised a family on that farm. They chose the Blue Mounds area because the area was affordable and that's where her in-laws moved when they sold their Middleton farm. Sharon and King lived three or four miles from King's parents and they all worked together. Sharon said her mother-in-law helped take care of the kids, though child care was rarely needed since they were dairy farmers and didn't go anywhere. King's dad helped with the field work. King was an only child and the two families stayed close together. When the in-laws' farm was purchased for a state park, they moved to the house where Sharon and King live now. After King's parents died and King quit milking cows, Sharon and he moved to this farm, about five years before the interview.

When they first moved from Middleton to the area, Sharon said other farmers were milking cows there. All the land was being worked. The landscape didn't look much different than it does now. They had corn and crop rotation. But in a few years, Sharon expects it will look different, as all the pines that have been planted in previously open fields mature.

Sharon claimed, "All we did was work!" But she managed to enjoy some of the work. When the kids got to

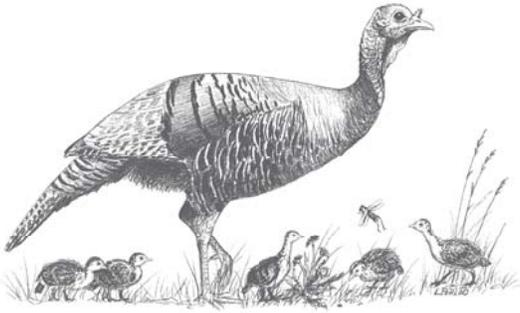
be about 8 years old, she was free to go out and help with the field work. As her father-in-law got older, she learned to run the tractor. Her favorite tractor task was cutting hay. She could watch butterflies and birds as she did it. King said it took her longer to cut a field than it took anyone else. It must have been all those distracting butterflies and birds.

The bad part of this task, however, was that in late May or early June, there were fawns out there, and it was nearly impossible to see them. They lie very still to hide, undetected, in the tall hay. The first time her son, Shawn, cut hay, he got a fawn caught in the cutting mechanism. That shot the mowing for that day. The trouble was that the mower didn't kill the fawn and it had to be extracted from the mower and put out of its misery. A neighbor told the boy he would "fix" up the fawn, and he took it away and killed it. Shawn never knew.

In the fields, the red-winged blackbirds would wrap their nests around the tall weeds. Sharon would see the eggs or the young birds in the nest when she was mowing, and she would cut around them. But then the nests stood out from the mowed surroundings like a sore thumb from a tight fist. Predators came in the night and got the eggs or baby birds. Whenever she checked the nest the next day, they were always gone. Regardless, she never could bring herself to cut down those nests.

She saw other birds too. Sometimes she watched red-tailed hawks. She watched them teaching their young. If something died or got killed, turkey vultures came and she watched them. They flew in pairs and overlapped each other's circles continuously. "You can see a lot of things, if you take the time to look."

There were blue herons on the creek on the back part of the farm. King had heard her talk about them, but he didn't know what blue herons looked like. When he saw one, he thought it was a stork. He didn't want to tell anyone he'd seen a stork on his place, because



*There were no wild turkeys in the area when Sharon and King first moved there, but there are plenty of them now.*

he and Sharon had a baby every year or two, and he figured he'd be in for some ribbing. Of course, the big bird wasn't a stork at all; it was a heron.

For several years there were coveys of upland plovers – little batches of the birds hatched out and she would see them. The neighbor saw them on Sharon's property and asked "How can we get them over here?" He didn't understand why they didn't reproduce on his property. But the road between the properties seemed to make a difference. The birds hatched between hay crops. When the hay was cut, the plovers were big enough to get out of the mower's way.

Although there were no wild turkeys in the area when Sharon and King first moved there, there are plenty of them now. Once, King mowed right over a turkey nest. The hen flew out from under the back of the mower so he went back and looked. A whole clutch of eggs were hatching. King put the fluff back on the nest and covered the eggs up and the hen came back. He marked the place so he wouldn't bale that mother turkey and her brood. But in a couple of days, when the hay was dry enough to bale, the hen and chicks were all gone.

Last year her son was walking in about six inches of snow when he startled some turkeys eating in a field. The startled birds ran into the woods. Where the big birds had passed, the ground was all trampled into mud. It looked like the trail of a herd of cattle that had gone through. There was a tremendous number of turkeys in that flock. Sharon has counted 15 to 20 turkeys in a group and that is not unusual. But her son has seen 50 grouped together in winter, huddling up for warmth.

When Sharon and King moved to the area, they had about 15 peafowl. They let other people have them, and one got away. You could hear its distinctive and

unsettling screams above the routine sounds. It kept company with a turkey flock for several years. Hunters reported seeing a peacock with the turkeys, and the local farmer did too. Sharon thought a cross between a turkey and a peacock would be goofy – a turkey with a tail dragging behind it, a "turpea" or a "peakey" fowl! While she sees and hears turkeys more than she used to, Sharon said she used to hear bobwhites a lot more than she does now. She still sees meadowlarks in the spring.

Sharon has noticed mammals in the wild too, some of which can be annoying. She hears coyotes now, more than she used to. Coyotes don't cause her any trouble, but a neighbor has lost newborn calves to coyotes. By the time the coyotes were making their presence felt, Sharon and King weren't farming any more. Badgers can be annoying by their diggings. In one night, she mused, they can dig a hole in sandstone. They can dig a hole big enough to get into right in the rock. They leave piles of sand and rocks that, if the hay is high enough to hide them, wreak havoc with the mower. Sharon never has seen a badger up close, but her dog killed a woodchuck a few days before the interview. She had hoped it was a raccoon, since there is an overabundance of them and they eat the cat food. If you feed the cats outside, you automatically feed the coons, she explained. But that helps keep them out of the chicken coop, so feeding them incidentally isn't all bad.

King has raised a variety of animals, including chickens, geese, goats, an emu, and a rabbit, but it was not an easy transition from dairy farming to raising these animals. King hailed from generations of dairy farmers, and "they don't quit until they die." When King was no longer making money at dairy farming, Sharon was trying to convince him to quit. Their oldest

*Sharon appreciates the beauty of the prairie wild flowers.*



son wanted to farm cows, and King didn't agree as to exactly how things should be done, so King got a night job and helped with the field work on the farm during the day. When the house they live in now became available, they moved into it and left their older son, Louis, on the other farm. Their son worked the farm for a couple of years, but he had no one to help him in the barn with 50 cows or in the house. It was isolating and there was no rest to be had, so Louis quit farming. To get out of the debt load, King and Sharon sold the farm to a neighbor who had been renting the land already. There's already a second house on the land now. The neighbor had to sell a building site so he could make the payments on the rest of the farm.

Sharon and King kept 28 acres from the original farm: the creek bottom, with a steep hill with a small strip of workland at the top. This land is going into the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)<sup>2</sup>, so it will all go back to flowers and grasses. That program lasts for 15 years. They want programs like this that allow them to keep the land and provide some payment. All the seeds going into the workland part will be native to this area; it won't be your standard wildflower mix. The man who bought the other farm will work the land up for them, and they'll rent a seeder to put the prairie seeds in. Kristin Westad, from the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area Project, will take care of the burning regime to maintain the prairie for them. Kristin will help them enhance some other wildflower patches on the hill as well.

Sharon has seen prairie smoke flowers, so pretty, and puccoons, orange ones and yellow ones, and birds-foot violets –just beautiful! But the puccoons and birds-foot violets are not there anymore. A neighbor cuts

the grass there; maybe he cuts it at the wrong time or something. He planted pines in that shallow soil, and now the land is in CRP. Once Sharon burned a little area between the road and a worked field, a tiny piece no bigger than most people's lawns. She wanted to see if the desirable flowers and grasses would come back. There was a lot of buildup of dead grass there and the fire got hot. She learned that you need to have people there who know what they are doing with a burn. A grassfire can go very fast. At the time of the interview, not all the flowers had come back. There was a patch of Joe-pye-weed that was getting smaller and smaller every year. After she burned it the year before the interview, she didn't see any there at all. But the creek was dry that year too so it was not marshy the way it had been other years, and she was not sure whether that plant is biennial or not, so she recognized that there may have been other factors besides the fire at work in this instance.

When they first came here, all the land was worked by plow. They would plow, disc, drag, and then plant seeds. Now farmers use more chemicals to kill the grasses, and then they plant the seeds. They call this "no till" planting. They don't turn up the soil. But not much of the Mahoney's land is worked anymore; most of it is in CRP. From the first, there were some areas that were so shallow that they didn't work them at all. King set these little pieces aside and burned them. There were no rare butterflies found there or anything, but the bluestem came back. They were prairie remnants. When they sold that farm, the buyer worked straight through those pieces. The remnant prairie patches are no longer in existence. A 4-H group planted a little patch of prairie by County Roads F and

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<sup>2</sup> An offshoot of the Conservation Reserve Program, CREP helps those actively working the land to meet their conservation goals, especially those who till or graze along waterways. Landowner participation is voluntary, with enrollment through either a 15-year agreement or a perpetual easement. Landowners receive payments to install filter strips along waterways, return continually flooded fields to wetlands, or implement various land cover and management options, depending on landowner desires and site-specific factors.

*To get landowners to keep land open, one would have to pay at least as much to keep it open as the government pays to put the land in trees.*

Z, in the triangle space there. They planted mostly grasses and it took 10 years before the grass was seeding itself back again. They kept taking the kids back to the site to see the results of their work over a 10-year period. They burned it every other year.

Mostly the land has changed from worked land to set-aside land. Trees are being planted too, mostly pine, because “that’s what the DNR tells people to plant.” In the spring, Sharon and King planned to plant savannah oaks, red oaks, and pines in their bottom land. They have about 20 acres of grasslands to plant with prairie grasses and flowers. That leaves a 16-acre piece not covered by CREP. This parcel they will keep renting back to the farmer to work until he no longer wants it. Then they will plant it to native grasses. Sharon didn’t know how she feels about these changes. “You can’t tell landowners what they should or should not do.” But she does like to go to areas with prairie grasses and wildflowers better than places with weeds and box elders. On CRP land, people have to cut box elders or they would get fined. Sharon said CREP offers an advantage over CRP in that the former helps landowners put the land back into prairie and wildflowers. She would like to see bigger areas of grassland all connected to provide a long area for bird habitat. For the future, she hopes more people in the area will be talked into planting grasses rather than trees.

It’s the beauty of the area that Sharon values most. She would like to be able to identify wildflowers. She has field guides on birds, bushes and shrubs, flowers, and trees. King jokes about it when she goes for a walk: “Are you going to take your library with you?” But Sharon considers herself fortunate to have the land there, plus an area in the woods where they camp. Grandchildren can come play in the creek. Sharon still camps up there in a pop-up trailer that’s parked there permanently. Her mother is 90 years old, and she still comes out to the camper to stay in “Grandma’s Sugar Shack.” Sharon especially likes to go there in the evenings, just to listen

to the quiet. She and King like to sleep there, just for the quiet, and then come back down from the campsite to the rest of the day’s tasks. Their two daughters live in Blue Mounds, yet they come down a lot too.

The summer previous to the interview was not much fun. The creek dried up completely. King’s father had to run water down to the heifers because the creek was dry.

Sharon doesn’t care for pesticides, thus she is ready for a program to avoid putting these chemicals on the soil. To get other landowners to keep land open, one would have to pay them at least as much to keep it open as the government is paying them to put the land in trees. A long-term program is needed. In the program Sharon and King are in, they have to plant the open creek bottom into trees. The government’s incentive to do this gives Sharon the money to pay her taxes and provides some security for 15 years. Most farmers didn’t put money aside for retirement; their money was all tied up in the land. Sharon and King were fortunate that they could sell some land and still have something left, because King had no siblings to share in the family farm. A lot of farmers have to sell everything and are still left with debt at the end, “back at square one.”

Sharon raised her kids in a house without central heating. The house was mostly a log cabin homestead built in the mid-1800s with another house added on. Though she loved that old house, it was drafty and cold. In the winter it was so cold that, when she washed the baby’s diapers and hung them in the bedroom to dry, they would freeze. One time the alarm clock didn’t go off because it froze. There was no heat upstairs. It wasn’t so bad for the kids because they didn’t know any other way. They had to cut firewood. Even at night they would have to go out and get wood if they ran out. None of her kids wants to heat with wood, not even a fireplace now.

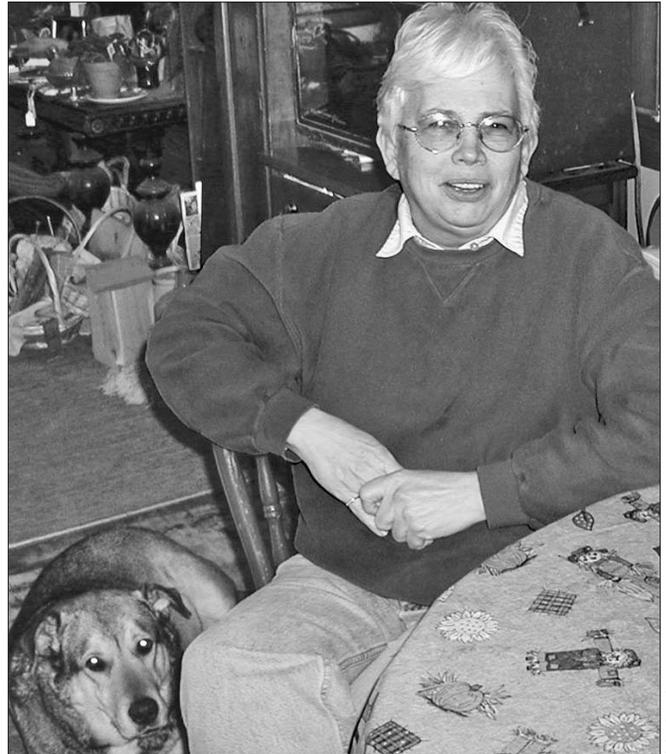
The kids were never big outdoor/nature lovers, except the older son, who liked to fish. When he was just 4 or

5 years old, he went to the creek and caught chubs. He brought them home in a pail and put them in the cow tank. Sharon thinks the cows must have sucked one up now and then, but the cows never complained.

The first time King sent Sharon out to bring the cows home, she couldn't find them. She went the wrong way to find the pasture. The pastures on one side were really beautiful. One hillside was covered with walnut trees and nothing would grow under them but grass. One time a whole hillside was covered with hundreds of goldfinches. It was incredible to see all those birds. At first she thought they were butterflies because they were fluttering so. That was in the early 1970s.

In 1976, there was a horrid ice storm. They were without regular electricity for 13 days. Their power line was a spur that came off the main line, so the people repairing the line forgot about them. Fortunately they had purchased a generator just before the storm. They had to shut everything else off and run the generator to milk the cows, cool the milk, and run feed out to the cattle. Then they pulled the generator, which is just a motor on wheels, behind a tractor to lend it to the neighbors.

Sharon remembers that there used to be a lot more snow. The snow used to come in November and stay until March. For several years there were 20 to 25 days when the temperature never rose above freezing. The weather wouldn't get above zero for two or three weeks at a time. She lived on top of a hill then, and it was colder there with the wind blowing. She didn't notice the difference until she moved down here into the valley. Up there, the pipes would freeze in the barn. They would break and there would be a mess. It would be hard to get feed to the cows. The animals would get frozen ears. Normally you would milk the cows and feed them, then turn them out to clean the barn. But sometimes it was too cold to turn them out. The cows got frozen teats, and they would let you know it. "They kicked you good and hard, and constantly." Then they could get mastitis. The problems would



snowball as a result of the initial cold. Then, she would notice there was no wood left!

The Barneveld tornado on 1984 had no impact on Sharon and King's place. Sharon woke up that night with a headache, and now she knows it was from the pressure of the storm. She heard the news that Barneveld had been hit. She listened to it all while the people there tried to get help. Traffic was already being diverted, so you couldn't go over there. She felt so helpless; it was hard not knowing who was hurt or killed and what damage had been done. In the middle of the night it was really black there. There was no power in Barneveld after the storm took it out, so there were no lights and you couldn't see where anybody was.

Another frightening thing happened when the slurry store got too full. The slurry, where the manure was stored, got too full one night and it overflowed. The manure ran down the hill to the creek. Sharon said there was really nothing they could do about it. A couple of days later she saw some people walking up through the field and two DNR agents came right into the shed with drawn guns. The agents announced that the slurry spill had killed all the fish from there to Hollendale. She could see that some of the slurry

*Now that they don't farm,  
Sharon is trying to take vacations,  
which is a learned thing, she says.*

did go into the creek, but she doesn't think that much did. All the agents had to do was say the accusation. She said they never had to produce any dead fish, and she doesn't believe they checked for any other possible source of pollution that might have killed some of the fish. She and King had to pay a \$4,500 fine "for all the fish killed." They really had no recourse, she said. Sharon remembers the DNR agents saying "You're just lucky we're not charging you for all the ones the coons ate!" Someone fishing on a bridge at 2:00 a.m. in Hollendale said the water level was raised six feet. But Sharon questions the accuracy of someone fishing at 2:00 a.m. and said the complaint was not even on the same day as their spill occurred. The incident is over and done, but "it leaves a thorn in your side," Sharon explained, when men come into your shed with drawn guns over an accidental manure spill. They cleaned out the slurry and didn't use it again, though they have continued to interact with the DNR.

Now that they don't farm, Sharon is trying to take vacations, which is a learned thing, she says. They go to rendezvous re-enactments, where they wear period clothing from the fur trade era and mingle with other "buckskinners" or "voyageurs," for relaxation and camping. They use a roll tent, and her mom usually goes with them. They usually go to rendezvous in Argyle, Baraboo, Westfield, Mauston, and a private one in Reedsburg. The fall one is nice, because it's not so hot. "It's surprising how cool buckskin can be." When it's too hot, she switches to a calico "prairie dress." She wants to learn more about Ojibwa lifestyles. When they burn the hillside, she wants to build a longhouse or wigwam. Her husband just rolls his eyes.

Although one of her sons farmed for a while, he quit and none of her kids farms now. She didn't want her kids to farm because it's too much hard work with too small return. Sharon likes cutting the hay and milking the cows, but it's back-breaking work for nothing. Their oldest son rented land to farm, but the land was sold and their son was left with a debt of \$85,000 for his investment and no way to pay it back, all at age 21. He preferred milking cows to field work.

Sharon held another job off the farm. She spent 20 years at the Lakeland Food Distributor in Madison, then worked part time in the Dairy Supply Company in Mount Horeb. Now she works as an art specialist at Lands End. She discusses the proper design and application of company logos on clothing, etc. She had worked there 15 years at the time of the interview. Initially, she went to work to supplement the farming; outside employment was important for health insurance coverage and for the cash. But now they've sold the farm, but there she is, still working at Lands End. She doesn't want to work until she's 80. For two years, King has worked at the Wolf Appliance store in Madison. Their older two son-in-laws work there as well. Their older son lives in Ridgeway; he does stucco houses. They don't see him very much. Another son was recently married and had a new baby. He lives in Mount Horeb; the two girls are right in Blue Mounds, all close.

Sharon was very happy to hear that TNC acquired some land from Botham's, a nearby vineyard. She has belonged to TNC for years because she supports their goals. This is the message she would like to convey to the land managers interested in the area: she would sure like to see open grasslands.



## **Eddie Duane Goplin**

*Born: February 4, 1938*

## **Cheryl Louise (Mathews) Goplin**

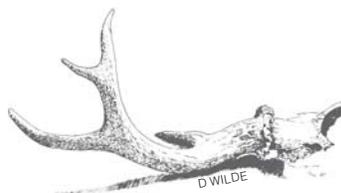
*Born: July 31, 1947*

**I**nterviewed Eddie and Cheryl in their home, just west of Mount Horeb. We sat at the dining room table and enjoyed a snack as we talked about their lives in the Military Ridge area.

Eddie and Cheryl both grew up in Richland County, and they “trickled” to the Madison/Military Ridge area. They are not city people and they prefer hills to flatland. Eddie came here with his previous wife, and they bought the farm in 1964. They had five kids when his wife died in 1968. He had known Cheryl because his mother went to school with Cheryl’s father, and Cheryl’s father was a teacher right across the road from where Eddie grew up. Eddie didn’t pay much attention to Cheryl when they were growing up because of their age difference, but when it was appropriate, he wrote to her. She had been married too, but her first husband, Joe Studnicka, was killed in a farm accident in 1969. Joe was milking when a cow kicked him right in the temple. He leaned against a stanchion and died a few minutes after the kick. Cheryl and Joe had a son. After they wrote to each other, Eddie and Cheryl went on their first date in September and married each other in December of 1970. They had a daughter together in 1972.

Eddie and Cheryl raised their kids as “outdoor people.” The kids were active in 4-H; they liked trees and nature and living in the country. They had all kinds of animals: insects, calves, rabbits, horses, guineas, geese, and peafowl. Their daughter is married to a farmer. Another daughter’s husband both farms and works off of the farm. Two sons “hobby farm” – they farm on the side. Two sons, Eric and Tim, are involved in prairie restoration. They also like to hunt and fish. Tim hunts for “sheds” - deer antlers that are shed. He enjoys the challenge of trying to find the second antler of a pair once he’s found the first, and collecting them is a hobby. He has a cabin wall covered with sheds.

When Eddie first moved here in 1964, there were family farms all around. Every neighbor milked cows. Most



*Eddie and Cheryl’s son Tim hunts for “sheds.”*

had pigs, and many had chickens too. The landscape was more open then too, because everyone pastured their animals. Everything changed when people learned that pastured cattle walk off a lot of their gains. Then people quit pasturing their stock and brought the food to the animals. Bringing food to the animals may be more efficient for pounds of beef, but the abandoned pastures have been overgrown with weed trees like prickly ash.

Though they hardly ever saw a deer in the area in the 1940s and 50s, they saw jackrabbits here back then. With the advent of chronic wasting disease (CWD), Eddie says he doesn’t see as many deer as he did just a couple of years ago, but then deer were evident in large numbers.

Since people have quit pasturing their animals, bird life has changed too. Certain birds that like short grass, like the killdeer, are not as prevalent as they used to be. With the brush growth, however, there has been an increase in pheasants. Eddie saw six hens in one bunch recently. As the wild turkeys came back into the area, he saw more and more of them, but fewer grouse. He used to see roughed grouse, quail, and some Hungarian partridges. But now, Eddie says, you don’t even hear the grouse drumming. With the current blend of agriculture and efforts to restore and maintain open grasslands in the area, there are lots of meadowlarks, upland plovers, bluebirds, and swallows to observe. Although Eddie said he had never seen a prairie chicken, he recognized the picture for what it was immediately. Eddie has heard talk of reintroducing prairie chickens west of his place. Cheryl loves seeing the birds in the morning and at night. Eddie had seen

## Views of the Ridge

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*There are a few prairies that have never been turned by a plow or anything and Eddie likes the wildflowers that come up there.*

more bobolinks in that past year than he had in many previous years. Although the interview was at the end of February, he had seen doves and grackles already.

Eddie has seen badgers in the area. Although it had been about four years since he had seen a live badger, he found one dead about two years before the interview. He cut the foot off and the grandkids took that “good luck” foot to show and tell at school. Several years ago, Cheryl saw three baby badgers crossing the road. Eddie says badgers seem to go in cycles. They used to see a lot of foxes, but they don’t see many now. Now coyotes howl when sirens go by. It’s hard for foxes to survive with coyotes in the neighborhood. A few years ago, they were overrun with raccoons, but now they don’t see so many. About three years previously, Eddie shot 16 raccoons in the barn. He had to keep going back to the house to get more shells. He filled a whole wheelbarrow with their bodies. There are lots of “varmint” - skunks, woodchucks, possums – Eddie shoots them all, when he gets a chance.

Both Eddie and Cheryl work in Madison. Eddie works in small crops research at the Barley and Malt Laboratory. He has worked there for 40 years. Since 1990, Cheryl has worked on the University of Wisconsin campus, in the Board of Regents office. When Eddie first lived here on the farm, he worried he was living too far out, but now he is glad he lives this far out. Driving into the city every day was hard. There was no by-pass for Verona then.

Eddie and Cheryl describe their lives as different from some of the other families in the area. Because they were not tied down to livestock most of the time, they have been able to travel more. They’ve been to Europe three times, including two visits to Norway, where Eddie has family, and a visit to his great-grandfather’s house there. Eddie was stationed in Germany during his Army years, and he traveled through Europe then. He and Cheryl were planning a trip to Spain and Portugal a few weeks after the interview. Because Eddie was not a full-time

farmer, he and his family were able to take trips even when the kids were young. Nine people in a station wagon all the way to Yellowstone, Toronto, Montreal, Vermont, New Hampshire, or Cape Cod must have been quite an adventure in itself! Around home, the kids played sports and participated in Little League, so they went to the baseball and football halls of fame. They took more local trips to Galena and House on the Rock.

Eddie was working in Madison when he bought the farm, so the corn, oats, and hay he grew and harvested all represented weekend work. For a while, he bought young dairy heifers, raised them, and sold them as breeding heifers. Eddie said it was hard going back to work on Monday morning when he was thinking he should be baling hay.

Cheryl claimed it wasn’t any fun lifting those hay bales, period. One time she was driving the tractor for haying and she went right through the fence. She didn’t know how to drive the tractor very well, she said, but she got yelled at that time. Eddie said the equipment was old and they kept “doctoring it up.” So it sounded like it was a little hard to drive. Another time, Cheryl was baling hay, when something surprised her. She was wearing loose pants that bagged at the back. She felt something go down her back and down her leg. Using her pants like a pot-holder, she grabbed whatever it was and squeezed it. She took her pants off right on the spot. It was a mouse she was squeezing inside her pants. There are kangaroo mice that will really jump high in the fields, Eddie explained.

There are a few prairie places that have never been turned by a plow or anything. Eddie is interested in the wildflowers that come up there. But he also likes to plant trees in the spring. He plants white pine and spruce. December 2003 was the first time he’d cut one of his own trees for a Christmas tree. He has started some prairie patches now too. Working with TNC and the Prairie Enthusiasts, he burns them in the spring to increase the prairies. He collected seeds from another

## The Interviews



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patch in the fall, worked the area, and planted the seeds. He loves the flowers – leadplant and blazing-star. His son, Eric, got him interested and taught him about plants. Eric runs a small nursery. I don't know whether it was Eric's interest that rubbed off on Eddie or the other way round in this case, but Eddie kept bees and extracted his own honey around 1978-80.

Eric is just naturally a naturalist. He knew the names of all the insects and the rest of the family learned about them from him. Eric would stop the car to pick up roadkill to take the lice off and make fly ties for fishing, etc. Eric is the oldest of the kids. He had an insect collection that was really excellent when he was young. He got a great grade on it as a science project in school. There was a really rare butterfly in the collection. In the years that followed, Eric's younger siblings, Tim, Ellen, and Julie each used the same insect collection for science class. Each replaced one or two insects to freshen it up. All the kids got good grades for that insect collection, and the teacher always commented on that rare butterfly! That butterfly wasn't the only unusual insect sighting. Pat Sutter, who works for the DNR, found some insects that live on soil that's never been turned. He found them on the Goplin property.

Rich Henderson, another DNR employee, who is very active in the Prairie Enthusiasts, helped to get Eddie and Cheryl interested in prairie restoration. They mowed a fire strip. Rich saw a butterfly of one kind mating with one of another kind and got excited. Eddie couldn't figure out what he was looking at! When Rich has spare time, he comes out to the Military Ridge area and cuts brush and chemically treats stumps to help maintain the openness of the landscape. Eddie cuts brush with him sometimes. Eddie burns with the Prairie Enthusiasts too, and has been employing their help conducting burns for six or seven years. He really appreciates their careful expertise because he had a bad experience with a brush fire following an ice storm years ago.

In 1976 there was a terrible ice storm. Ice froze in layers all over everything. You could hear branches dropping off the trees all night. The ice actually snapped the electric poles, the telephone poles, and Eddie and Cheryl were without electricity for about 12 days. The National Guard came in with water for the cattle. They filled the freezers up with dry ice to keep things in the right range of cold. It was about 42 degrees out. They burned a lot of candles and played a lot of cards. The neighbors had to get a generator to milk their cows. The neighbors had an electric stove, which was off, so they had no way to warm their house. They came over to the Goplins', where there was a gas stove. Eddie and Cheryl left the oven door open, and the neighbors slept there over night to keep warm. The gas stove kept two rooms in the house warm. In all those days without electricity, the worst thing was being without water. With the gas stove they could eat and they could use a candle for light, but there was no water for washing dishes or for bathroom facilities. Eddie brought fresh water from work, to flush everything down.

One result of the ice storm was a lot of downed tree branches. That spring, in late March, Eddie and Tim, one of his sons, tried to burn the brush. It was a Sunday morning. The fire got away from them and started going towards the barn. When he saw the fire start to go in different directions, he started to panic, and, Eddie figures, with so much open land, a fire that got away could go a long distance. Eddie had to call the fire department. It was church time and the firemen came directly in their church clothes: ties, jackets, dress shoes. After this experience, Eddie really appreciates the help of the Prairie Enthusiasts and TNC when he burns. He would be reluctant to burn on his own, but it's nice to have eight or nine people to help. He says the Prairie Enthusiasts really know what they are doing: they check the wind, notify the fire department, and make sure there are fire strips.

*Eddie relies on the expertise and assistance of the Prairie Enthusiasts to conduct prescribed burns.*

Because they live at the edge of the lead mining area in Southwest Wisconsin, the Goplins have old mining holes left in their land. Their farm had been part of Ebenezer Brigham's land. Brigham is recognized as the first white settler in the area and Brigham Park is named after him. He mined his land. The Goplin boys used to climb down the mine holes and come back with old lamps, bottles, milk cans, and other discarded tools. Farmers used the mines as dump holes, and these old dumps are still there. Eddie always warned the kids: "Be sure someone stays on top!" Some holes were about the size of a silo going straight down and Eddie was concerned about safety.

Pokerville was a mining town that sat at the edge of Blue Mounds. People did a lot of drinking and gambling there. In the 1850s the railroad came through Blue Mounds but not through Pokerville. People moved their houses to Blue Mounds and Pokerville died. But initially this area was a thriving community, and Blue Mounds actually had a post office before Chicago did.

As city people came out and bought land in the area, things changed. It used to be that you could walk on anyone's land here. But when people moved from the city and bought land on trout streams, they wouldn't give anyone else access to the streams, and some of the trout streams are not maintained by the DNR now. Not all the streams are stocked now because city people won't let others on their land. Legally you can walk down the center of a stream and catch fish, but it ruins the experience if someone yells at you.

It's the same with hunting. People used to give and take, but now if your cows get out and get on someone else's land, a lawyer may come knocking on your door, and it won't be for "neighboring."

"Neighboring" refers to the act of neighbors getting together to chat and enjoy one another's company. Eddie likes the way country neighbors got together and visited. They used to have a neighborhood picnic. Now

people are trying to revive that summer picnic tradition. Cheryl says the ladies have a cookie exchange too. It's been going for close to 10 years. It's gotten so big that they just bring a single gift for the exchange now, rather than dozens and dozens of cookies. But there are several new houses every year, with new people moving into those new houses. They made an effort to include the new people in the cookie exchange; that must be part of why it got so big. People still get together with neighbors for graduations, weddings, confirmations, and the like. Eddie says they like all their neighbors, and that's important. There is a card club that meets once a month. Eddie belongs to the Knights of Columbus and the Sons of Norway. There are a lot of things going on in the country.

When Eddie first moved to the area, there was a Club 18 for teenagers and a limestone quarry. After the Club 18 closed, teenagers used to go parking and have beer parties at the quarry. They'd get 17 or 18 people up there with beer. One time Eddie called the police because he was afraid somebody might get hurt. He sat in a chair with a beer in his hand and watched the show. When the police cars rolled up, all the other cars peeled out of there in a hurry, going in every direction. For a while police used the quarry as a firing range, but about 20 years ago was the last time it was actually quarried. The Goplins own the quarry and they have had a number of offers or requests, but they won't let anyone use it. Quarrying is noisy because they blast. It leaves a bigger hole in the ground and it takes away your privacy. They said Wingra Stone wants to work the quarry, but Eddie and Cheryl discourage such interest. There are a lot of really nice fossils in the limestone there.

When Eddie first came here, all the land was cultivated or pastured, but it was all used for something. Fences were hard to maintain, but, in those days, if your cattle got out, they could go all the way to Dodgeville. Not many people pasture cattle any more. Eddie likes to see

*Eddie likes to see cows grazing because they help keep invasive species from spreading.*



cattle out grazing because they will keep exotic plants like multi-flora rose from spreading. They will keep an area clear, and the open space is good for many birds. When weeds, brush, and multi-flora rose grow in, Eddie says, he can hardly walk through areas that were open 10 years previously. Eddie's barnyard is getting overgrown and he misses the cows.

The snow plow pushes the fence out along the road, and the land is rocky so it's hard to fence. Years ago they piled stone in the fencerows or wherever it was convenient. Limestone is a soft stone and it breaks down and helps create the neutral pH<sup>3</sup> of the soil. Some hills are "shallow," without much topsoil on top of the limestone. But this ground is good for prairie plants. The farmers pick the stones out of the fields every spring. Now they even have a machine that picks up the stones, but not many farmers have it.

There is still a lot of dairy farming going on in the area, but instead of 12 farms with a few cows, you have one farm milking 350 cows. Huge dairy farms are like factory farms now. You no longer have people milking 16 to 20 cows. It doesn't pay. Farmers' sons can work construction jobs in Madison where they can have nights and weekends free and still make more money. "Dairying, you are tied down. You have to love the land and love cows to sacrifice that part of your life." The big farms hire immigrant workers to do the milking year round; there are a lot of Spanish-speaking people in the area now. They are good workers, but they are probably not paid much.

"We're down to cats," Eddie said. Instead of cows, they have about a dozen barn cats. Cheryl likes the cats. Eddie likes birds. The cats sit under the birdfeeder and watch. When Eddie finds colored feathers in the barn, evidence a songbird was killed, he sets them around

the birdfeeder to let Cheryl know what her cats are doing. It's generally impossible to catch the cats to neuter or spay them, and a lot of the cats are white, which makes them indiscernible from one another. One time a kitten crawled in a pipe. Eddie lifted one end of the pipe to let the kitten slide down and out so Cheryl could catch it. Eddie yelled to Cheryl to "Grab the cat!" Cheryl was afraid she wasn't going to catch it and the kitten was probably more afraid. What Eddie didn't realize was that the freaked out kitten had embedded its teeth in Cheryl's finger. The doctor told Cheryl to come in for a tetanus booster. She needed strong antibiotics too, as a cat bite is one of the worst you can get for risk of infection. She had to get a prescription right away. But she couldn't quarantine the cat to see if it had rabies. Just that morning she had counted 13 white cats, and, even if she could have caught the wild kittens, she didn't know which one it was. The bite had to be reported to the Humane Society and to the police, and Cheryl had to undergo a series of about 11 shots. The worst part was the two shots directly into the bite wound. Cheryl also received shots in the arms, hips, and right above the knee. Every Saturday for about five weeks, she had to go get shots. What started out as a simple exercise to catch a kitten ended up as a long, miserable story.

One thing that residents in and visitors to the Military Ridge area really seem to value is the view. As Eddie pointed out earlier, more people are moving out to the area from the city. The influx of people impacts on the landscape in several ways, one of which is altering or interrupting the long-distance view that people love. This creates fertile ground for conflicts over the way the land is used and what structures are erected on the landscape. Eddie told me the modern-day saga of the nearby Hauge Church.

<sup>3</sup> In chemistry, pH is a measure of acidity or alkalinity. A pH less than 7 is said to be acidic and a pH greater than 7 is called basic or alkaline. Pure water has a pH very close to 7 and is considered neutral.

## Views of the Ridge



*The historic Hauge Church, as seen in 1960, and neighboring lands became the center of a local controversy.*

Although it's an unassuming building, set back from the road, with a couple of weathered grave markers alongside, the Hauge Church is very historic; it's been there over 100 years. Eddie explained that a couple of attorneys from Madison bought land adjoining the church. Apparently they wanted to put in a hog operation, right beside the church. Other people in the area didn't want what they expected would be an odiferous eye sore right there. The county executive became involved in the issue, and there was a local movement to make the area surrounding the church into a park. The Town of Perry denied the landowners permission to put in the hog operation, and the landowners allegedly put in a driveway without township approval. One of the landowners then erected what some people are calling a "spite" fence. The fence is solid wood and it's tall, so you can't see the horizon through it or over it. It doesn't really go anywhere or fence anything in or out, it merely blocks the beautiful view of the mounds from the church across the adjoining land. Now the town chairman, who lives nearby, can't see the landmark view that defines the area for many, nor can visitors to Hauge Church. Other people in the area are donating land to help protect the church. Yet, territorial skirmishes continue to define the borders. What started as a seemingly simple idea from city folk has ended up a bitter feud.

Eddie and Cheryl talked about the differing perspectives of city people from the rural residents. City people want to see cows in the fields out here, but the farmers have devoted their lives to their farms, and they don't have the same benefits that city people have from their jobs. If they want to sell off a little piece of their land for their survival, that is understandable. City people come out here and build, but they don't want anyone else to move out here after they do. They don't want the farmers to sell off any more of their land to anyone else.

Also, Eddie believes that animals belong outside, not in the house. With the cats, if two kittens out of a litter of five survive the winter, those will be strong cats. On a farm, only the strong survive. Whereas people in the city keep everything alive, especially favoring the smallest, sickest, or weakest animals. With the influx of more people from the city, the way things are done on the land will change over time, as will the landscape itself.

One depressing thing for Eddie and Cheryl is seeing barns and other farm buildings in disrepair. It hurts the appearance of the landscape to see ghost farm buildings tumbling down. Eddie is trying to restore his barn, though he says it is not practical. He cannot afford to put \$30,000 into a barn roof when he has no cattle to keep in the barn. In Norway, Eddie found that you have to maintain or tear down buildings. There is more government control there than here. They have small farms there too, not great big ones. Here it's hard to keep up all the farm buildings, and when they are going downhill, it starts to look really poor. Cheryl pointed out that it's harder to farm, or at least to support a family through farming now. Eddie agreed. You could raise a family on 60 acres in 1947, but you can't any more. We have cheap food to buy, but the farmers' incomes have not kept pace with inflation.

In the future, Eddie would like to see fewer houses on hilltops. He is against urban sprawl, and he wants to keep the Military Ridge area rural. He is concerned that land is being purchased as an investment by urban professionals who plan to hold onto it and then develop it later. It is permissible to sell off one house or building site for every 40 acres now. But people can get around this limit with family members building on the land, then dividing it and selling it off in parcels.

Eddie is interested in working with TNC to conserve the land and the rural nature of the area because he has



*Eddie says that in the country, kids can enjoy the outdoors.*

*The sunsets and the sky offer a spectacular view in and of themselves, and Eddie loves seeing the stars without interference from city lights.*

always enjoyed wildflowers and wild grasses. Prairie plants are deep-rooted, he explained. Those roots can go eight feet deep, so the plant can survive a dry year. Bluestem was eight feet tall in this part of the state. It was prairie here before his time. As noted previously, he has participated in prescribed burns and prairie seed gathering efforts. He has some areas where blazing-star blooms and he loves those flowers.

He also loves seeing the stars at night. In the country, you can see the stars without interference from city lights. The sunsets and the sky offer a spectacular view in and of themselves. More and more buildings with more and more lights will impede the view of the stars.

Eddie believes there is no greater place to raise a family than in the country. His kids would get bored when they went into town to visit family in Verona, but out here, they could always find something to do: build a treehouse, play in a hay mound, go hunting or fishing. As teenagers, the kids worked at Cave of the Mounds, car-hopped, or worked at the grocery store. In winter, they went sledding, tobogganing, and ice skating. They had a horse for riding. And now that his kids are pretty much raised, what he values most is the quietness of it. He and Cheryl have protected themselves

with plantings to provide privacy. They like the notion of maintaining a small community there and, while they say Mount Horeb still has its own community, they are worried about losing it because of the population growth in the area. But people do still know each other and have something in common. Cheryl considers them fortunate to have the best of both worlds – Madison has the university, sports, theater, etc. But, Eddie chimed in, “We can get away from it all!”

For the conclusion of my visit with them, Eddie and Cheryl took me to their son Tim’s place, near the Town of Vermont. Tim lives by Little Norway, a place that draws many visitors. He lives by a stream where brook trout are reproducing, but Eddie noted that great blue herons are killing the brook trout. We saw a pheasant in the field even in the short time I was there. Inside Tim’s hunting shed the walls are decked with many sets of deer antlers. An old jukebox, TV, and old popcorn and cigar boxes identify the place as a timeless refuge from a fast-paced world outside. The surroundings are beautiful, wooded and hilly. The deer like to spend their winters here, under cover from severe weather, in the Tyrol Basin. I could see wanting to spend time in this place too.



*The walls of Tim’s hunting shed proudly display the antlers he’s accumulated.*



## Elizabeth Ann (Foshe) Thronson

*Born: November 24, 1936*

It was March 2004, when I sat in Betsy's kitchen. She was just recovering from heart surgery, yet she still gave off remarkable positive energy. As I heard her story and learned some of the things she has done, I realized how appropriate it was that we were sitting in her kitchen.

Though she grew up around Des Moines, Iowa, Betsy had lived on the farm outside Blue Mounds for 35 years. When she first came there, the area was "populated" by dairy farms. There were four dairy farms on the one mile-long, dead-end road where she lived then, but only one remained at the time of the interview. The area had changed radically. Betsy noted that more people are coming to the area and building more individual homes. There was visible construction on the hill even as we spoke.

Because farming is so marginal, farm children grow up and move off the farm to find employment or other professions. Betsy always hoped theirs could remain a family farm, with one or both of her sons taking it over. (She had five children.) But farms have to be big now,

and it's not feasible for one to farm without the help of others or without a big financial investment. She expressed regret that none of her grown kids is actively farming because she considers farming a close-knit family way of working together. She didn't advise her kids against farming, and one son tried it, but it just wouldn't work. She feels that they are missing a great opportunity with their own families. Her grandkids have not been around a working farm; they haven't seen cows being milked or hay being baled. Her kids all live close, in the same area, with a similar landscape: two in Barneveld, one in Blue Mounds, one in Mount Horeb, and one in Hollendale. They all love this farm, so they don't want their parents to sell it, but it's too labor-intensive to farm it themselves. Betsy explained that "a farmer's retirement is selling his farm." She and her husband, Glenn, will have to sell the farm if they want to buy a home in a village or town.

When Betsy moved to the farm, she milked, hayed, and worked in the barn. She and Glenn worked together. The children helped as they grew up too. The cows were milked by machine, but they didn't have a pipeline or a dumping station, so she carried the milk to the cooler for quite a few years before they got a pipeline. They milked about 55 cows until 1987. They raised the heifer calves and sold the bull calves as veal. With artificial breeding, they raised their own replacement cattle. For haying, they had a baler with a wagon hooked behind. Glenn loaded the bales as they came off the baler. They had to load the bales onto the elevator by hand. Today, farmers have large round or square bales that have to be loaded by machine. They use kick balers that throw the bales into a wagon on behind, and you don't have to touch them. They fly in there and you unload them. Betsy said they always had silage, but some people put up haylage. "Haylage" is basically a salad for the cows. It's all chopped up and dry, and blown into the silo. People put in additives, and with a little moisture, it ferments a bit. "It's what



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cows like,” Betsy says. There is corn silage too, which is different than hay. Different parts of the country, or the world, do things differently. In Australia, farmers even use chicken droppings as cow feed.

Besides working on the farm, Betsy said she and her family picnicked and participated in church and 4-H activities. For 4-H projects, the boys were involved in showing calves. The girls never got particularly interested in cattle; they did sewing, baking, and craft items.

They took family vacations to her parents’ home in Iowa, about 250 miles away, about four times a year, but it was hard to get help for the farm so they could go. Betsy’s parents visited them about once a month, so they maintained their family relationship. Her dad was a steam fitter; she came from a union family. She became active as a spokesperson for agriculture because she had seen what a group of people could do when they worked together. “Farmers are independent,” she said, and that independence has cost the agricultural industry a lot.

Betsy did other things besides farm work. She worked for a publishing company seasonally for seven years. Then they built a restaurant. The restaurant originated as an offshoot from the Barneveld tornado.

When the tornado hit in 1984, all the highway equipment was taken to the town site to clear debris. Glenn worked at the Iowa County Highway Department. Betsy went to Barneveld with Glenn to see the devastation. It was unbelievable! She was struck by the feeling that there was nothing she could do, so she asked the Red Cross how she could help. They told her that volunteers had been there since the middle of the night and needed something to eat. Betsy went to the milk factory to get cheese, procured sandwiches from the churches, along with drinks and coffee. She set up lunch on some planks on some equipment that had been blown over. That night, several volunteers moved everything to the only large building still standing:

Brigham town hall. It had just been built and was to be dedicated that night. Workers brought tables and chairs and other things that were salvageable. Betsy and others set up a temporary kitchen. Organizing the food started out a small operation, but people brought kitchen equipment from the school and people’s houses: ovens, sinks, lots of refrigerators and freezers. It was really something to see how people worked together. They served three meals a day in that building until the fall. Then they moved the operation to Mason Hall. There they served coffee and donuts, plus hot soup and sandwiches at lunch time until the end of April, almost a year from when they started. The food was all free for the people who needed it, and there was a can for donations for those who could afford to help support the effort.

She would not have thought greed and selfishness would play a part in the aftermath of the tornado, but people are still just people. Many of the businesses donated things. There were some big bottles of soda free for people to take as needed. One elderly woman took at least two bottles home every day, though she had no children. Another woman loaded her car with clothes that were donated through the tornado kitchen. She took the clothes to her daughter and they sold them at garage sales. That woman had not lost a thing; her house was intact.

Then there was the girl who returned the nickel. Several teenaged Mennonite girls from Canada helped rake debris out of the yard. One sent a letter back with a nickel. She’d found the coin in the yard and kept it, then felt guilty so she’d sent it back. Betsy said it was things like this that could revive your faith in human beings.

Meanwhile, Betsy was feeling waves of survivor guilt, because she hadn’t lost anything while other people around her had lost so much. One woman had lost her antiques, things that meant a lot to her because they were from her family. That woman didn’t appreciate her new home. “If I’d wanted a new house, I’d have built

## Views of the Ridge

The biggest impact of the tornado was not the twisted trees or destroyed homes, but the realization that so much can be done when many people come together.



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one!" she said. Betsy would have wanted her old house back too, with all the memories it held, not a new home.

Though their family car was in Barneveld at the time, the tornado didn't hit Betsy and Glenn's farm. But in the surrounding landscape, you can still see the signs of devastation. On the mounds and down into Black Earth, the storm twisted the trees in the direction the tornado went. Some of the farmers' barns were damaged and some were destroyed. The farmers had a lot of problems with the land because the tornado dropped nails and other things in the fields. There were a lot of flat tires following that storm. Staff from the Grange, a farm organization, came and walked the fields for some of the farmers and tried to get the debris out of the fields. They went through the fields with large magnets to pick up nails and other metal things. The scars are still there in the land if you know what to look for.

For Betsy, the biggest impact of the tornado was not the twisted trees or destroyed homes, but the realization that so much can be done when many people come together to help. The victims of the tornado were very lucky to have hundreds and hundreds of volunteers come. Most of the help was devoted to the village

rather than the farmers, but all the volunteers really helped people in need to rebuild their lives. It was the love that was shown to those in need that was most significant to Betsy.

People came from all over. Homemaker groups came. People came from church groups from as far away as New Glarus. They set up schedules and volunteer groups came on their scheduled days. The Salvation Army was a wonderful organization! They quietly went about *doing*, and didn't rush out in front of the camera for the publicity. A lot of people gave of themselves to help. A lot of Amish and Mennonite people came all the way from Canada. The men helped rebuild houses and barns; they did the manual labor. One man, a Mennonite from Manitoba, was a carpenter. He was there a long time helping. The government brought in trailers. As houses were built or repaired, people moved out of the trailers and into their homes. Some of the Mennonite men who volunteered lived in the trailers, and people from the tornado kitchen took food to them. The Mennonite women came and helped in the kitchen. Betsy learned that there is a difference between Amish and Mennonite practices. A woman came to help in the kitchen. Betsy had her slice the ham. When Betsy came to check how the slicing was going, the woman said she could do better if she had her electric knife. Betsy said that woman was Mennonite, not Amish. It was really heartwarming to see how many people responded to the need for help. The kitchen never could have served three meals a day all the way through September, without all the volunteers.

The tornado kitchen was the only place people had to come for social interactions and group communications too. One young couple got married and had their reception at the tornado kitchen. They had music playing. Some of the men would come and have coffee every morning. One gentleman liked to start controversial discussions and then, after he'd gotten everybody arguing, he would leave. People could come

*The restaurant served family-type meals and homemade pies.*



to the kitchen and get food and clothing that was donated for the relief effort. Several companies sent outfits for children, but those were allocated per family as appropriate, rather than letting everyone take as many as they wanted. The volunteers also distributed new sheets and pillowcases. People helped one another with problems with insurance companies. There was a lot of red tape and bureaucracy for receiving government aid. People would fill out forms and the forms would be lost so the people would have to fill them out again. There was a need for concrete help and a place where community members could come together to find it. That kitchen was much more than a kitchen where food was prepared; it was an organizational mastery and the hearth of the community.

*The tornado kitchen became the one place for social interactions and group communications.*

When the emergency tornado kitchen was about to close, the Small Business Development Center at the University of Wisconsin suggested Betsy should build a restaurant because Barneveld needed one. After a lot of thinking and looking at other restaurants to determine what people wanted, Betsy decided to do it. On February 27, 1987, she opened up a restaurant called "Betsy's Kitchen." Although there was a bar attached, to keep pace with the competition, the restaurant was not a bar per se. It was a family restaurant serving family-type meals. The menu included pancakes made from the recipe she made for her own kids and homemade pies. Everything was made from scratch; no mixes. She tried to cook the way she did at home.

Betsy enjoyed the restaurant. She enjoyed meeting people and working with different people there. She worked with a lot of teenagers. But working in the restaurant was different for Betsy than working with volunteers in the tornado kitchen. With paid help, she had to be a good business manager and she had to be there all the time.

Sometimes people do strange things, and some people who came to the restaurant acted in memorable ways. One time a boy came about 8:00 at night. He wanted to sleep at the restaurant overnight. The staff called Betsy. She said "no" but went over to the restaurant. He was about 18. It was one of the first cold nights in September. The boy had had an argument with his parents and he had run away. He seemed pretty mixed up. Betsy gave him something to eat and took him to Mount Horeb to a priest (He was Catholic.). They found him a place to sleep that night and Betsy found out who his stepfather was and called him. The parents were going to come get him that next morning, but the boy had already left by then. Betsy guessed he went home again. A couple of months later she found out that he killed his mother. He shot her with a bow and arrow. It was horrible, a very sad thing. As Betsy reflected on the experience it occurred to her that the boy could have done something to hurt her when she took him to Mount Horeb.

Another time a lady came in with a man. They got in a terrible fight, right there in the restaurant, and he left her standing there, crying in the parking lot. The distressed woman "had an accident" and Betsy had to find her fresh clothes to wear. The sheriff's department took her back to Dubuque where she had come from. Later, the woman came back looking for the man. Apparently, he had been on medication for manic-depression and he had stopped taking his medication.

In these kinds of situations, Betsy tries to help, in the hope that, if ever her own kids need help, someone like her will help them. One time her son needed to

purchase a copy of his birth certificate. He planned to pay with a check but found out he would have to pay cash. He didn't have enough cash to pay for the certificate and then take the bus out of town to catch his ride home. Not knowing what else to do, he asked a man for a quarter. The man said "Hell no!" Betsy pointed out the irony of this set of circumstances. She understands the wisdom of not giving money to everyone who asks, but she hopes that good deeds and kindnesses will be passed along.

Changing the subject at one point, I asked Betsy about wildlife in the area. She said she still sees deer, but there were a lot more until the last year, when so many were killed to prevent the spread of chronic wasting disease. There are wild turkeys, but no foxes. Several years ago there was a beautiful fox – you could watch him leaping about out back of the house. "Coyotes must have gotten him," she mused. "We have coyotes." The coyotes were not here when Betsy moved there, but they appeared in the last seven years before the interview. She has not missed a pet, but one man she knows has lost a lot of lambs to coyotes. There are lots of squirrels; Betsy watches them play on the fence every morning. There are lots of rabbits around, raccoons too, but not as many skunks as she remembers in the valley. Betsy said she once saw a badger running across the road, on top of a hill. She really likes seeing wildlife. She said the reason we don't see them much is because they have disappeared as people have taken away their habitat. She seldom sees Monarch butterflies any more. They feed on milkweed and she doesn't see milkweed pods the way she used to either.

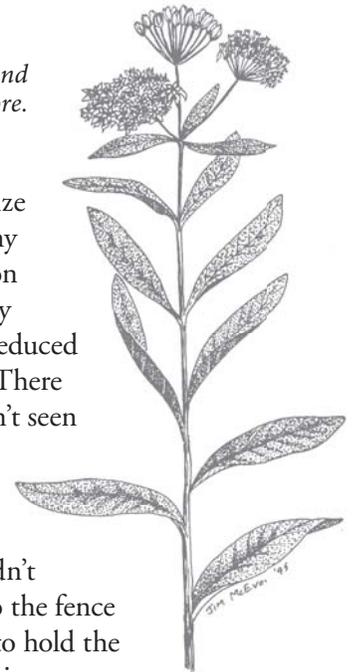
She hopes we haven't taken away all of the habitat from the birds; it's sad to see them disappear. There are some grouse in the area, but she has never seen a prairie chicken. She sees more ring-necked pheasants now than when she first came there. People from the University of Wisconsin are doing bird census surveys. These experts have told her that there are some sandpipers there, but

*Betsy doesn't see as much milkweed and hardly sees Monarch butterflies anymore.*

she claims she wouldn't recognize one if she saw it. There are many doves, but the pigeon population is way down from the way Betsy remembers it. Betsy considers reduced pigeon numbers a good thing. There used to be killdeer, but she hasn't seen them recently.

Betsy thinks soil conservation was practiced more widely years ago, when they didn't plow all the fields completely to the fence and contour strips were put in to hold the soil. "We practice soil conservation; we had the soil tested to make sure we had the right amount of chemicals in it" (lime and so on). Betsy doesn't think the new, big landowners practice conservation methods the way she thinks they should. They plow up and down the hill without "stripping," so the water can wash the soil down and away. In addition, people have been raising a lot of soybeans, and soybeans are hard on the land. Soybeans loosen the land so it washes away more easily, especially when you have marginal land anyway, with such hills. People don't seem to alternate their crops from year to year either, but they put in the same crops every year. Every year it seems they are putting more acreage in soybeans instead of buying the beans from outside the state. It's a gradual transition to raising our own.

The land here is marginal and is good for grazing cattle, but Californians can compete better because they don't have to winter their cattle. But they do have to import water from Colorado to irrigate two to three crops of vegetables and fruits each year, and to raise cattle. She doesn't think they should be raising the amount of dairy cattle that they do because they have to use so much water. People in Colorado are upset about the Colorado River and issues related to dams, and water is likely to be a serious issue as human populations



*The main change in the landscape is that lots of new homes are being built.*

continue to grow. Then people start coming up with crazy ideas like moving an iceberg closer to melt for water or piping water from the Great Lakes.

The main change in the landscape Betsy has noticed since she first moved here is that lots of new homes are being built. One of the ways people have come up with to save their farms is to sell off a piece of the land for housing. Just to keep the bulk of the land and keep farming, some have to sell a section of the land. “We sold eight acres where one house is being built,” she said, but now she feels bad about it. She wanted theirs to stay a family farm. All the homes being built in rural areas are a visible change themselves, but they represent an even larger change in the area. People who decide to move out to the country are usually very unafraid to stand up and make their feelings known, whereas farmers have been very quiet and traditionally reticent to express themselves. They have generally expected their elected officials to represent them. People transplanting from the city want to enjoy rural life, but they also want the urban services they are used to, such as police protection and garbage collection. Rural residents used to dispose of garbage in the pig pen, bury cans, and burn paper trash, but now they have garbage pickup service. Betsy approves of recycling; it’s “a good thing.” She thinks the government should support the businesses that try to make a living out of recycling. Now you can see recycle containers waiting for the garbage truck to come. “We’ve gotten more strict,” she says. She doesn’t care for the new silage containers: long, plastic bags that blow around, looking like litter.

Betsy had recently returned from a trip to Georgia when we spoke. She saw no rhyme or reason in the way they have built. Land use planning is a major issue in the rural areas there, where they are trying to keep urban sprawl from expanding into prime agricultural land, using a system to regulate what is allowed and what isn’t. A lot of landowners seem to hate the regulatory system, as they follow the maxim that “It’s MY



S. GILCHRIST

*All of the new homes built in the rural area represent a visible change to the landscape.*

land.” But without regulations, you cannot say anything, and Betsy believes regulations are becoming a necessity. Telephone towers can be built anywhere, for example, and any time there is a new thing, people go overboard. The beauty of the land is thus marred by things that have been allowed.

It is the beauty of the area that Betsy values most here, in the Military Ridge area. It’s beautiful with hills, rock formations, and animal life. What can be done to inspire people to maintain the area as open grassland? Something would have to be done through the government, through the political arena, yet rural areas are not as important politically as they were 30 to 60 years ago. The cities require a lot of maintenance and assistance. Betsy hopes something will be done before it’s too late, that people will realize they do need to plan for the future and future generations if they want the area to be anything like what it used to be. Strong land use regulations are needed to define where and what people can build. “Bigger is not necessarily better.” If you build a big dairy operation on a big farm, you may have difficulty finding a place to deposit all the manure. Betsy thinks a lot of problems need addressing, and she doesn’t know how to do this without

legislation. Everyone wants to be independent; no one wants to be told what to do, but you have to have regulations, she says.

Some of Betsy's land is enrolled in CRP, since they weren't going to use the land for a while, it is good for the land to lie fallow, and they needed the money to rebuild the land and buildings. CRP is useful to help keep the land open, but land in the area has gotten so pricey that only non-farmers like developers, doctors, lawyers, and other professionals can afford to buy the land. Land across the highway at Brigham Road was all sold to a developer. "I hate it," Betsy summarized.

In the future, Betsy would like to see the landscape the way it is, with no more development, but rural, with fields and hills "left as nature intended." She thinks the houses and businesses should be kept in the villages and cities. Instead of letting the middle of the cities deteriorate and expanding into the countryside, she advocates keeping the middle of the cities viable with more planning.

Some photos of the area prompted some comments. Betsy explained that she and her husband never burned their land to manage it, but she knew some farmers burned their fields. Maybe they did that to make it easier to till in the spring, she thought. It was probably 25

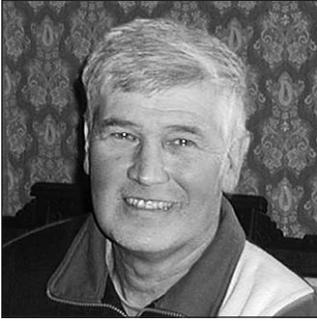
to 30 years ago that she knew a farmer who did this. But she does really appreciate those who gather native wildflower seeds, as it's really nice to see the native wildflowers in bloom.

I asked what led her and her husband to buy land here. They were looking for a farm in Iowa to be closer to her family, but the farms here were better taken care of, and the cost was much higher in Iowa. They liked the location and the setting of this particular house.

Their kids played hide and seek, baseball, and horse (shooting baskets with a basketball). Generally they played close to the house, sometimes in the barn or hay mound. When friends came over, sometimes they did things they hadn't done any other time, things like swinging on a rope in the barn or climbing up on the roof of the pigpen. They played in the creek some too. She thinks the kids enjoyed growing up in the country, though, at the time, "they thought they were materialistically short-changed." They couldn't have all the fancy things or go on all the fancy vacations that their city cousins did. When the kids do the same things you did and have a lifestyle like yours, you guess you did okay. Now her grandkids like to be in the country. They go on adventures, walk in the woods, and play in the creek. They come in all muddy. This is a lived-in house.



S GILCHRIST



### Stephen Russell Thompson

*Born: January 6, 1946*

Steve and I talked in the dining room of the house built by Steve's great grandfather in 1901, just west of Daleyville. Although Steve has lived far away from southwestern Wisconsin and the family farm, his roots go way back. It was 1853 when Steve's ancestors got off the boat in New York, having come from Norway. Just three years later, in 1856, they bought land from the government here in the Military Ridge area. They probably settled and got the crops in before they actually bought the land. The family lived in a log cabin on the farm before the house was built. Although Steve has never returned to Norway, both Steve's mother and daughter have. Some Norwegian influence is still strong in the family.

The landscape was more open when Steve was growing up than it is now. Part of that change is that timber use has subsided. Thirty years ago, his grandfather cut trees for fence posts, fire wood, and lumber to repair the outbuildings. Wooden fence posts have now been replaced by steel posts. A lot of timber may have disappeared through pasturing as there was no limit to where the cattle could go. When Steve and his wife, Mary McCarthy Thompson, "came home" in 1975, his parents lived in the big house, so Steve and Mary built a new house on the farm. They started keeping cattle out of some places, and that was the last time lumber

was cut on the property. I noticed that Steve's land did seem particularly hilly and wooded, compared to most of the area. He said the farm is officially considered "oak savannah," but there was remarkable variety in the landscape. The whole area the family owned came to 243 acres. Of that, 100 acres were cropland. Sixty or 70 acres were timber or woodland. The rest was open pasture or oak savannah. (The combination of oak savannah, fen meadows, some wetlands, and a relic pine stand remaining from the glacial period makes the place unique.) Steve claimed to be just beginning to understand the importance of those parcels. Although the ancestral immigrants would have grown wheat, and the farm was not originally a dairy operation, this farm has always been a dairy farm during Steve's life. Dairy farming came in with alfalfa in the 1920s and '30s.

When he was a child, the house was really a multi-family home. He and his parents and sister lived upstairs. His mother was a music teacher in school. His grandparents and unmarried aunt lived downstairs in the house. Everybody helped with something. His grandmother babysat while his mother taught. His aunt was in charge of 500 chickens. (The roosters were mean and picked on Steve. Sometimes he forgot to watch out for them and they would surround him. He would scream until someone came to his rescue.



PHOTOS: S. GILCHRIST

## Views of the Ridge

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The milk was cooled overnight in the milk house  
and then hauled to the cheese factory  
about a half mile from the farm.

Regardless of the threat the chickens posed to him, the income from the eggs was an important part of their grocery money.) His grandfather and father did the hog and dairy farming. Through his grandfather, Steve saw the tail-end of the horse and buggy era, though he never got to ride in one. His grandfather had work horses for a short period, then they were gone. As a kid, he did get to ride in a sleigh. His grandmother did gardening. She grew flowers and tended a huge strawberry patch. She also was a wonderful cook and he was well fed with good Norwegian pastries. Steve's grandfather's younger brother had started the farm, but he had died. Steve's grandfather had four brothers, and Steve had 16 first cousins. There were always lots of kids around.

When he played outside, the place he played the most was on the bluff, where the relic stand of pine defines the horizon. Going up there to play was the primary entertainment. When relatives from Iowa came on weekends, they'd take their picnic baskets and roast marshmallows up on the bluff. There were pictures of ladies in long, white dresses waving from there. It was a social gathering place. When his aunt worked at *The Daleyville*, a little newspaper published around the turn of the century, there were references to "Thompson Bluff." Years later, the pine stand on the bluff was still being noticed. In 1997, the University of Wisconsin's geography department published a book that included research on the white pine stand on Steve's property, illustrated with photos of Thompson Bluff in 1900 and 1994. The pine stand is denser today; it's healthy and is regenerating itself well.

The bluff was always there when you needed some place to get away from a crowded house and reflect. You could go to the bluff to meditate. Steve's grandmother went there to mourn. It is a magic place. Once you get up there, you would swear you were in northern Wisconsin. It was as if a chunk of geography had been moved north. When there was a family reunion

three or four years prior to the interview, and all the cousins were back, Steve said the first thing they wanted to do was to go up on the bluff. "Of course it was a lot steeper than when we were 6 or 7 years old!"

The children played things like cowboys and Indians, red rover, tag, hide-and-go-seek, and crack the whip. A tragic family story comes in here, however. Steve's grandfather had a sister who was on the end of the line when she was playing crack the whip at school. She let go of the other person's hand when the line of children was "cracked" like a whip, and she hit her head on a rock. She died later from this injury. She was only about 12 or 13 years old. "This was a sad thing; but the games were always so much fun."

Sometimes the children played in the barn. They made basketball hoops out of wire with boards to bounce the ball back for a rebound. They slept overnight in the barn in the summer. Their dad bought a hay baler in the late 1950s or early '60s. Once the hay was baled, they could make forts out of the small, square bales.

As long as Steve remembers there were milking machines on the farm. But in his great grandmother's time, there was no such milking system; the milking was all done by hand. The milk was cooled overnight in the milk house, in a water tank, then the next morning it was put on a milk truck and hauled to the cheese factory, about a half mile from the farm. They made Swiss cheese, then cheddar, before the factory closed. The factory building is still standing now, but it's a private home. In those days the cows depended on summer pasture. The calving was in March and April, then you milked the cows through the summer and into fall. But the farmers stopped milking for the winter so the cheese factories closed over the cold winter months. When there was a huge snowstorm, all the farmers helped clear the way to get the last of the milk to the cheese factory. That was an all-day event, working together to clear the roads. Twelve or 13 farmers sold their milk to this cheese factory.

*The relic pine stand on Thompson Bluff was a social gathering place.*



*Family letters written around 1909 let Steve know that fishing was good in the area.*



In the winter months, they used the cream for baking and making their own cheese. The unmarried aunt who lived with Steve's family when he was a child, eventually married the neighbor and moved across the hill. She made pultost, a strong, Norwegian soft cheese that sat on the radiator. They used up the rest of the milk making that. Like Limburger, it was a soft and smelly cheese that was always wrapped in a cloth. His uncles loved it. Along with the lefse his daughter makes, this cheese represents a Norwegian influence that is still strong in the family.

When Steve was a kid, they had a tractor. They grew three crops: alfalfa, corn, and oats. The early farm machines they had in the 1930s were called steam tractors and were used to run the threshing machines. Steve's father probably got the first modern tractor when he returned from World War II. Veterans got priority for those tractors. It took time to get tractors from the factory, and this preference for veterans caused some hard feelings.

Steve's family had the expectation that he should go out and try other things before making a commitment to the farm. His grandfather ran a feed mill in Hollendale and invested and worked in a brick factory there for a while too. Steve's dad recognized that lead was a valuable commodity and invested in a lead mine. But then he joined the Army, and, after World War II, lead wasn't very valuable any more. After spending years in New Guinea and other places, he was ready to milk dairy cows. As for Steve, he wanted to travel. He worked with migrant workers in Ohio as a VISTA<sup>4</sup> volunteer, then with young boys in crop and animal production in Paraguay as a Peace Corps volunteer. When he returned, he spent two or three years working in adult education through the vocational system. He taught basic education and high school equivalency

courses at Fox Valley Technical Institute in Appleton. Then the time was right to return to the farm. He had really made the decision to come back and work on the farm when he was in South America. The Peace Corps had the biggest impact of everything he's done in his life: his experiences there helped him sort out the values in his life. He realized that he had to do something he liked, that lifestyle was more important than plain money. The rat-race he saw in other places and other kinds of work didn't appeal to him. He has never regretted this decision – not once! He probably would not have chosen to start a new dairy farm from scratch, but coming back to continue the tradition was ideal. It was not just the act of farming that he chose, but it was the family tradition. And, why here? "I'm biased," he said, "but it's a real pretty place."

Although the 240-acre property is supposed to be an excellent hunting area and there is a trout stream where people who knew how to fish caught good-sized trout, the Thompsons have never been avid hunters or anglers. But, thanks to some family letters written around 1909, Steve knows that his grandmother, who would have been 18 or 20 then, went fishing and had a really good time. The grandmother's letters are all in English, but the great-grandmother's are in Norwegian. His daughter, Tia, is learning Norwegian to help translate those letters.

Now Steve is learning about the landscape and what projects need to be done. For example, multi-flora rose is taking over the land. The farm has been parceled into "improvement areas," though Steve says it will take the rest of his life to get all the things he wants in effect. Working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Steve is learning how to manage his farm without doing harm, that is, without further destruction. Steve has been working with the Fish and Wildlife Service

<sup>4</sup> Created by the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) is a national service program designed specifically to fight poverty and help serve the needs of the poorest Americans.

# Views of the Ridge

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*In the early 1950s, it was a big deal to see a deer here.*

for five or six years. This cooperative effort has been an extremely positive experience for him. He has been learning about native grasses and prairie flowers and what needs to be done to grow and maintain a prairie. He tries to gain some additional information each season. His goal is to put back as much land as he possibly can into a state as close to what it was when the Thompsons first came there. It took 150 years to get the landscape we have now; it may take 300 years to restore it to its former glory. He has been burning some parcels. He is pleased with how many native prairie plants are there without replanting. It's nice to have someone explain the native plants to him – that's his recreation now. Steve has two children who are exploring other things now: Arnie, who is in biochemistry, and Tia, who is in anthropology and art history. There is still time left for them, but with each generation it gets harder to make a living from a small family farm. It's more important to Steve that he and his family work out something so the land will not be developed than whether it's a dairy farm or not. His sister agrees. She has strong family memories too. The pace of development is frightening. Soon there won't be any open spaces left, if this pace continues. He understands that land values are so high now that it is tempting to take the money and run, and he understands why some people get in this position, but he hopes it won't happen to his family. He hopes to improve the native aspects of the land: "That's what we really want."

Steve says the biggest change since he was a boy is evident in the wildlife he sees, most significantly the birds. He has two vivid wildlife memories from childhood, one about birds, the other a deer. His grandmother loved "canaries," as she called them. They were goldfinches really. She got very excited when she saw them. Then "it was a major event in the summer when we saw a 'canary,'" though now Steve sees large numbers of goldfinch flocks. There was also an oriole that nested in a tree there for many summers, and

his grandmother always remembered that too. Steve especially remembers the time his aunt came upstairs to get him and brought him to a porch. From there, she pointed to a white-tailed deer standing on a ledge. That was in the early 1950s and it was a major event to see that deer. Friends who hunted had to go up north to find deer. Now Steve sees deer all the time. It's not uncommon to see 30 to 40 deer in the late afternoon, as they come across the valley. (I passed two on the way to the interview.) But in the early 1950s it was a big deal to see a deer here.

When he was a boy, Steve saw robins and crows. What he didn't see then, but has seen more recently, are bluebirds. The first bluebird he saw was in 1976 or '77. Six or eight years prior to the interview, a friend set up 30 to 40 bluebird houses and the bluebirds came in swarms. The friend who set up the houses, or boxes, has learned about raccoon destruction and sparrow invasion as he has gone along. He checked the boxes regularly. He has not been able to maintain the boxes recently, but the bluebirds have found some other places, natural cavities, besides the remaining nest boxes. Bluebirds are a regular sight in the area now. They have established their pattern to return to that place. There are other birds he sees now, but never saw as a child: tufted titmouse, indigo bunting, and pileated woodpeckers. The woodpeckers fly over every day now. They nest in the pines on the bluffs. Screech owl and great horned owl are the two owls he sees. He thinks they may have been around for a while. The whippoorwills have always been around; they never left. He remembers seeing a king fisher once in a while – and it was a big deal – when he was a child. Now they are more common. Likewise the great blue heron seems more common now. He sees sandhill cranes now occasionally, but he never saw them years ago. He never saw meadowlarks or bobolinks when he was a child. Now there are lots of bobolinks – Steve considers it a big treat when they come back in the spring.

## The Interviews

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*When he was a boy, Steve didn't see bluebirds, but once a friend set up 30 to 40 bluebird houses, they came in swarms.*

The meadowlark is one bird he hopes to attract with grassland restoration. He sees them elsewhere in the area, but not yet on his farm. He's seen a scarlet tanager once. Although he has not had time to go into the woods to find them, he believes they are nesting there. Rosebreasted grosbeaks are regular residents in the summer here now, and in relatively large numbers. The increase in varieties and numbers of birds in the area is marked since his childhood. He thinks the discontinuation of DDT and toxic chemicals in the environment is one factor that has helped.

Two new arrivals to the area in the last 15 years are the reintroduced wild turkey and the coyote. Steve never saw these was he was a kid, but they are in the area now. Once in a great while he would see a red fox. A pair of foxes stayed there some years, and one summer he watched the family of kits. Everyone had chickens in those days, so foxes may not have been very popular. But they called red tail hawks "chicken hawks" and people would shoot them and string them up along the road, their now useless wings splayed out as if to catch the right current. He remembers seeing three to five hawks shot and strung up at once, because the farmers believed they ate their chickens and thus wanted them dead, but he doesn't remember hearing about any hawk ever actually getting a chicken. Another new arrival as a regular visitor since 1975 is the turkey vulture. And most winters Steve sees bald eagles from the Wisconsin River. A few years ago, there was no value in calves, so farmers put dead ones out in the fields, where the eagles ate them. But then payments for calf hides started, so now the farmers ship the dead calves away and there are not so many eagles here. It was probably about six years prior to the interview that Steve saw his first bald eagle here. What a magnificent bird! It was a most dramatic experience! One day Steve was cleaning the barn when an eagle flying at tree-level flew right over the tractor. Steve could almost count the scales on its feet!

Steve had gotten interested in birds because he grew up in the country and built his house in the woods where he began to see birds and pick up interest. He had heard expert birder Sam Robbins over public radio over the years too. Maybe four years before the interview, Steve's mother, in her last years, liked to watch the birds at feeding stations he had set up by the windows. One day, sitting at the window with her, he saw a varied thrush. It was the first time one of these had been identified in Iowa County. Sam Robbins came out to verify the sighting. Meeting Sam was very worthwhile! Sam put the sighting on the Internet and 60 or 70 birders came to see it. People came from Milwaukee, Appleton, all over the state. They parked their cars in the yard and watched that bird. Yes, birdlife has definitely improved dramatically since Steve's childhood!

Steve's uncle hated badgers, he recalls. He got rid of them in his hay fields. Steve hasn't seen a badger on the farm since he returned to live there. He has seen woodchucks, which he dubbed "delightful", but no badgers.

Steve's aunt, Sylvia Hoskins, was an environmentalist long before that was an accepted thing to be. When Steve's father and grandfather tried to drain the swamps to grow more crops, Sylvia knew this wasn't right. There was no scientific basis then, but now it is known and the government is trying to get the swamps un-drained. Aunt Sylvia knew her birds. But it was the wildflowers she took him out to the woods and fields to see. She taught him and her students to identify wildflowers like ladyslippers. He can't find ladyslippers now – he doesn't know where to look. But he has found shooting stars and Jack-in-the-pulpits. Aunt Sylvia is Steve's hero: a remarkable person and a great lady.

Steve was initially interested in restoring wetlands when he got interested in restoring oak savannah. The issue is to do restoration and still be a dairy farmer. Steve said that cattle have to be separate from the ecosystem. The Fish and Wildlife Service looked at restoration in a different way. Steve thought he had to fence

# Views of the Ridge



S. GILCHRIST

*Steve noted that cattle-grazing can help in controlling reed canary grass and other species that compete with native plants.*

the oak savannah to protect it, but then he realized that buffalo and elk used to walk on the savannah. Without money changing hands, this partnership is a handshake agreement. The Fish and Wildlife Service supervises burns, cuts brush, and provides expertise. Steve tried going to the County Land Conservation Office, describing what he wanted to do, but his objectives didn't fit the categories for their programs. Then in Dodgeville, Steve got a referral to the wetland person in the Fish and Wildlife Service, and that person referred him to Kurt Waterstradt. Together Kurt and Steve walked the prairies. Kurt's program fit Steve's needs and Steve's land fit Kurt's interest. Steve is learning the native species: Kurt has identified over 42 species of grasses and forbs for him.

The ways that people use the land have changed over time. When Steve was a kid, his father was concerned about conservation with strip cropping, but the goal was always to produce as much as possible. There was no conservation goal for wildlife, no interest in achieving ecological balance with wildlife. Steve's father and grandfather both focused on producing as much of their crops for livestock as possible. That, Steve believes, is the biggest difference in the way land is managed now, compared to the days of Steve's childhood. Steve's project is starting to return the land, parcel by parcel, to a healthier state.

He has come to truly appreciate what fire can do to bring back a prairie. He saw what happened after he burned – plants grew back so quickly! His parents burned the meadow before they plowed if the grass was so long it would tangle in the plow, but there was no restoration purpose.

When Steve was a child, there was only fencing around the fields and the farm. The pigs were fenced in, but the cattle were free to wander. There was no concern about the pine stand, though the cliffs were potentially dangerous for the cattle. Now he knows that cattle do provide help for native grasses. They eat reed canary grass that destroys sedges and native plants in those meadows. Cattle-grazing gives native plants a chance to get up and growing. Though the crops produced on the farm are the same as when he was a kid (alfalfa, corn, and oats), Steve is experimenting with cattle grazing as a management tool for the landscape.

Overall, the landscape has changed visibly. When Steve was a kid, the Military Ridge area was parceled into homesteads with red farm barns and herds of grazing cattle. Now it is open grasslands: a different vista. Many barns have disappeared altogether. TNC has purchased a large area from Bothams Vineyards. Now you can see big stands of grasses that used to be chewed to the ground by cattle and other livestock. Along with the grasses, there are invasive species like prickly ash that alter the vista.

Steve remembers, back in the 1950s, that his grandmother read about a rose bush you could plant around the house and it would grow like a fence. She ordered it from a seed catalog. It took over everything. It was a multiflora rose. "Now we'll deal with that for generations." The flowers are so pretty that people planted them, but the amount of money it will cost to get rid of them on his farm is phenomenal.

In the future, Steve hopes the land, if not used for agriculture, will at least have some large open areas. He remains very concerned about the development that is



Steve would like to see a balance between open grasslands and cultivation.

*In the 1950s, Steve's grandmother read about a rose bush you could plant around the house and it would grow like a fence.*

taking place, though town boards are trying to keep it under control. Those 12 little farms that were once associated with the cheese factory have mostly been cut and parceled into 40-acre or smaller sections. Now they may be parceled even smaller for more development. Steve considers it very positive that TNC can buy big chunks of land. "Our contribution can be a small chunk" of a larger whole.

I asked Steve what he values most about the area, and he replied that it is the beautiful landscapes with a variety of ecosystems: trout streams, wetlands, hills, grasslands – "it is a beautiful area!" He also values the rural traditions he was brought up with. People respected and helped their neighbors. At corn-planting time, the labor was shared among families. Now there are no other farmers around to help him. Steve has to hire people to do the harvesting. They do it with machines now, in a matter of hours, where before it took days and a lot of labor. The people who did that sharing were a part of the school community when he was young too. He valued the education he received there.

While Steve did not fish, there were always fishermen in the trout stream. Steve's grandfather was the

kind of man who reached out to people. He used to bring fishermen home for coffee. There was a sense of community. Steve still has some feeling of community, but it is changing. He struggles with this question: Is the community still healthy, only different, or is it dying? The people who set his values, his parents' and grandparents' generations, are gone now. Former farm families have gone to the cities to work. He feels that the new people moving into the area don't focus on the local community. They work in Madison. They are not making a commitment to the local community. Steve also raises the question: Are those of us already here welcoming the newcomers to join the community? "Are we welcoming their ideas?"

What Steve would like to see is a compromise between landscape and agriculture, a balance between open grasslands and cultivation. I asked him what he thought would inspire or motivate other landowners to maintain open spaces and the rural aspect of the landscape. He gave the quick answer, "money," then added "but that's not enough." We need state and federal programs to compensate landowners for keeping open areas. Now we are paying incentives for most of them to leave pasture in pasture. "But there has to be something more. People have to understand that, if it all disappears, we aren't going to get it back." We can't undo huge housing developments that are built. The temptation to sell the land for big money is very, very significant. He has an advantage in that his Peace Corps experience was in a rural setting that looked like 1860 or '70, with no cars, only horses to help realize the medicine and other technologies we have come to depend on in our culture. He learned there, in the Peace Corps, that a sense of community is more valuable than money.



**Harold Charles Zander**

*Born: July 15, 1935*

On that March day in 2004, when I sat in Harold's dining room, in the house just outside of Barneveld, the house had already been sold. Harold said he needed more room for his wife's quilting and, besides, he wanted to be nearer his son, so he was moving. He had moved to this area in 1968, from the Sauk Prairie area, because he wanted to be a dairy farmer and the price of the farmhouse he initially bought near Barneveld was the right price. Even now, in his current move, he was staying in the vicinity of Barneveld.

When Harold first moved to the area, there were more dairy farms than there are now, and strip cropping was already being done. Harold doesn't perceive much change in conservation practices since that time, but generally he says that farms have gotten bigger and the population has decreased. He said small dairy farms didn't survive because of the low price of milk. Farmers didn't get paid enough to survive. There were comparatively lucrative wages available for jobs in Madison, so people sought work in the city. Those people didn't want to work the long hours required for dairy farming, but Harold was raised on a dairy farm and he never considered doing anything else.

The first farm Harold had totaled 200 acres, 140 of which were tillable. He had facilities for about 50 milk cows. The farm was modernly equipped. Harold would get up at 5:00 or 5:30 a.m. to milk the cows and take care of the animals. He milked again at 5:00 or 6:00 p.m. In the summer, the milking schedule was the same as in the winter, but there was more field work during the day in the summer. Corn and alfalfa were the two crops he always grew. He was tired by 9:00 p.m. The first year he farmed, Harold had some pigs, but he got out of the pig business and decided to concentrate on milking because he didn't have good facilities for pigs.

Harold went into partnership with his son, Jerry. The equity in the farm gradually went to Jerry, so now he works the farm and Harold just helps. Down deep,

Harold is thrilled that his son has chosen to go into the business of farming, but he tried to make sure this is really what Jerry wanted to do. All of Harold's nine children have college educations, so if Jerry gets hurt and can't farm, he has something else he could do. Harold's oldest son went into partnership with a friend on a big farm. Of the nine children, one son is



*Harold has lived in the vicinity of Barneveld since 1968, initially as a dairy farmer and now to remain near family.*

PHOTOS: S. GILCHRIST

an Extension agent, who is involved in farming. Three of Harold's offspring are involved in farming; two sons are engineers. Most live within an hour's drive of their parents. Harold thinks that a farm is the best way to raise kids. Yes, he worked hard, but he had a lot of contact with his kids. The kids learned how to work and how to get along with each other.

Since he moved to this area, Harold has not had a job off the farm. His wife, Rita, is a retired teacher. She made it easier for him to concentrate on full-time farming.

Harold talked about wildlife, starting with a comment about deer and turkey. It's hard to get permits to hunt turkeys, but he can sit right there and watch them. When he moved to the area, there were no wild turkeys. As for deer, there were not as many deer at first as there were five years prior to the interview. (The effort to halt the spread of chronic wasting disease in the deer herd in the area may have been affecting the deer population at the time of the interview.)

Harold didn't notice as many birds when he lived on the farm as he sees at the house he was just about to move out of. The farmhouse had spruce trees around it. But he remembers interactions with wildlife when he was working on the farm. Killdeers nested in the spring when he was putting in crops. Turkeys became a problem when they wouldn't get off their nests and he was trying to cut hay. Fawns are particularly a problem because they don't move and it's hard not to slice them with the mowing equipment. If you are lucky, you don't have to dig their remains out of the equipment.

Coyotes act more like dogs. They get as close as 50 feet from the farm equipment. But they can generally outrun a dog. He plays tag with them. Occasionally, he chases them with the tractor, though he usually doesn't pay any attention to them at all. If he had a gun, he wouldn't be able to get the gun out of the case before the coyote would be out of range. He figures coyotes eat a lot of other wildlife. He can't remember

any coyotes when he first moved to the area; there were foxes then. He guesses coyotes are more numerous now. He thinks there might be some connection between the reintroduction of wild turkeys and the increase in coyotes. Anyway, he hears the coyotes howling.

*Harold can't remember  
any coyotes when he first  
moved to the area,  
so he guesses they are more  
numerous now.*

Raccoons are pests people would like to get rid of. A raccoon tore at the dining room window screen at Harold's house. In the barn, coons tear sacks open and get in the equipment. If you have a dog, they will stay away a bit better.

Snakes? Harold does not particularly watch them. However, he has seen them in front of his door.

Harold does not like groundhogs. One had a burrow under the deck. Harold didn't want him there and it took a long time to get him out of there. He was undermining the concrete. It took water and AZZ to get out; Harold had to flood the hole with water.

When Harold first moved to the area, there was more grazing of cattle than there is now. Strip cropping and crop rotations were practiced a lot. Most farmers hauled their own manure onto the fields. Now there is more equipment than there was then, and tractors and other farm equipment have increased in size. In 1968 there were few tractors over 60 horse power with a small plow and seeder, and maybe a small corn picker instead of a large combine. They used to fill one silo with hay and bale the rest in small, 50-pound bales.

Today we chop all of it and hire somebody with a big baler to bale what we can't store in a silo or bunkers. A bunker has cement sides and bottom. You fill it with hay or silage and pack it with a tractor. There is no roof, so to get the hay or silage out, you use a skid loader. Harold says they still spread their own manure every day on his farm. They put fertilizer on every year. That part hasn't changed much. "We put up hay quicker and earlier with bigger yields than we used to have." It goes back to the equipment and the effort to get a better product for feeding the cows.

There were some cheese factories that were close by in 1968, including one in Barneveld, but Harold's milk went to a cheese factory in Madison. The cheese plants certainly helped the rural economy. When Harold first farmed in Sauk Prairie, he used milk cans to store and haul the milk, but here, on the Barneveld farm, he had a pipeline and a bulk tank.

Harold has never used burning as a management technique. Burns won't work on his farm, Harold explained, because there is no residue. It gets worked back into the soil. If you want to raise plain grass, burns are fine, says Harold, but there is no purpose for them on his farm.

There is more land that isn't being worked now than when Harold first came to the area. There were set-asides in 1968, the CRP started. TNC moved next door to the west, and Harold expects his taxes will go up because of it. TNC doesn't have to pay taxes on land it owns. CRP doesn't do anything for the local economy either. The farm products go to the bigger cities and people from Madison see the land out here and want to build a house on it. These recently urban people demand more services than he would demand: snow removal, good roads and schools, garbage pick-up. When Harold first moved here, there was school bus service, but no garbage pick-up or recycling. On the farm, paper products were used again for bedding. Plastics were burned for heat and broken appliances

just went in the ditch. Yet Harold is not opposed to people building homes near the house he has just sold, as that land is not suitable for agriculture. "Why not have some houses?"

*When Harold first  
moved to the area,  
there was school bus service,  
but no garbage pick-up  
or recycling.*

Harold still appreciates agriculture, but he doesn't know how to make it more productive for farmers. He doesn't think government policies help. Maybe it would help the dairy industry if the amount of cheap imports such as MCP (a dried milk protein that big cheese companies mix to make cheese) were limited. The only way Harold sees for the farmer to survive is to make the farm bigger and bigger. But then the financial margins get less and you don't have time to spend with your family, so what have you gained? Harold has never lived in a city.

Harold believes that some of our tax laws do not promote farming the way they should. "We're penalized too much." Fields used to be taxed higher than woodlands, but now woodlands are assessed at more than farmland. The burden of taxes is changing, and he doesn't know whether this is good or bad. Harold's farm has been considered a little bigger than average. The Farmland Preservation Tax was set up such that the state government gave farmers a refund on income taxes. For example, if your farm was taxed \$6,000 and you and your wife both worked on the farm without any job off the farm, or you didn't sell too many cars

*Harold values the sense of community in the Military Ridge area. "We were welcomed here and quickly became part of the community."*

so your capital gains weren't too high, you could get \$2,000 to \$3,000 refunded. But his farm is 500 acres and had capital gains because they sold cows every year, plus his wife worked at a school, so his family's income was over the \$40,000 off-farm limit, and he could only take the minimum off his real estate taxes. This does not promote dairy. "It's not property tax relief, though that's what they call it. It's giving someone a job in Madison."

I asked Harold what he values most about the Military Ridge area, and he said "A sense of community; we were welcomed here and quickly became part of the community." As an example of that sense of community, Harold told me what happened in 1977. In July that year, he and his sons bought the materials and followed blueprints to build a 65-foot long addition to the barn. They had just gotten the roof closed in on the barn. At 9:00 or 10:00 that night, a storm came through: a small tornado. The tornado hit a different barn first and threw pieces of that barn into the one he had just built. The old barn stayed there, but the new one was gone. It could have been hurled right through the house but it didn't come that way. Harold and his family had gone down into the basement for safety. When they came out and looked around, there was barn debris all around. It was raining, thundering, and streaks of lightning split the sky. They tried to fix things for the cattle first, so the cattle wouldn't go all over the place. The next day, people showed up. He doesn't know how they found out that he needed help, but they just showed up and helped to clean up the mess. The same thing happened 20 years ago – people came to help when the Barneveld tornado struck. If Harold saw a neighbor down the road having trouble, he would help. The neighbor would do the same for him. Of course, some neighbors will be more helpful than others. He doubts he would get a helpful neighbor response from his TNC neighbor because the people are not actually here.

Harold's experience of the big Barneveld tornado was very depressing because the town was gone. At 2:00 a.m. he knew something was wrong because the power had gone out. A neighbor came in the yard and said Barneveld was gone. He didn't understand at first, but she was right. Harold's youngest son had driven up the road to town to visit a girlfriend, so Harold was concerned. He waited until 5:30 a.m., when it was light enough, then drove around up there. He could not begin to describe the mess. He found a fireman and found out that his son had been shipped to Dodgeville with everyone else. The Ford LTD his son had driven was a wreck, not a piece of glass in it. He was so relieved, so thankful his son was all right! He said he just shut out all he had felt before. His son helped a lot of people there, but he doesn't talk about it. It was very depressing. Harold knew a lot of people in Barneveld and he wanted to help. For example, he moved a freezer out of a house to a son-in-law's. The National Guard let the press in, but anyone wanting to help had to get the right pass to be allowed in. He had trouble with that barrier to friends and neighbors helping. To get a pass he had to go to an office to apply for it and every day they changed the pass, so it was an inconvenience at best. The authorities were worried about looting, "but how are you going to loot junk?"

Harold's son-in-law, Jerry, had some fields just northeast of Barneveld. His fields were covered with insulation, aluminum, steel, wood, and lots and lots of nails. Sometimes you would find a picture of someone or something that mattered to someone, but mostly it was all junk. Jerry tried to pick up stuff that would be hard on the tires of wagons and equipment. He had to pick each piece of debris up by hand. He went through six tires on his wagon.

Harold knew people that were hurt during the tornado. The saddest story was what happened to a baby named Joey. His head was damaged, and now Joey will probably not progress past the maturity level of a 5- or 6-year-old.

# Views of the Ridge

*When landowners build houses in the middle of fields, their land is lost from production because farmers find it difficult to work around the new dwellings.*

Harold said he had seen a lot of dangerous things besides the tornado, but he couldn't remember any dangerous experiences farming. One incident he did remember, however, happened when one boy pushed another, who fell down the stairs and broke his arm. Another incident occurred the first year Harold was on the farm. The water system wasn't as good as it should have been. Harold broke the chain on the old barn cleaner and needed help getting it fixed. His wife and kids helped. Then one of the kids went into the house and upstairs to get a drink or something. He turned on the faucet, but no water came out because the water was turned off. Somebody had plugged the drain to the sink, so when the water came back on, it overflowed the sink upstairs. When Harold returned to the house, there was water all over the place. Water came down the light fixture from upstairs. He could have gotten a shock. "We were lucky about safety issues," Harold concluded. His older son had car wrecks. The kids learned to use equipment earlier on the farm, which may have added to the risks. But generally they were lucky.

In the future, Harold hopes the area will stay about the way it is now. He said he would like to see both farming and grassland – a balance between the two. Then he went on to explain his perspective on Botham and the Conservancy.

Botham Vineyard, a local winery, is a neighbor of Harold's. Harold said Dr. Botham sold some land to TNC, giving the impression it was to keep down development of the land. Yet Dr. Botham kept three parcels and the vineyards for development and his own use. Harold doesn't think he was being honest about selling for conservation, because the parcels he kept are not located together up by his house. At one time, Botham approached Harold saying he had somebody who wanted to buy Harold's land, next door to his own house, for development. Harold didn't want to sell it, but he never really said so. The offer never came



PHOTOS: S GILCHRIST

*Harold showed me some of the quilts that his wife Rita makes.*

anyway. After Harold is gone, he would like to see his son continue farming there. If his son doesn't want to farm it, then he can sell it to TNC or someone else or build houses on it if that's what he wants to do. Harold doesn't care. But at this time, he wouldn't sell. His wife, Rita, more or less told him she wouldn't sign off, and he thinks that is the right decision.

Rita makes quilts. She has a long arm sewing machine so she can do the quilting. She enjoys making quilts

and I could see some beautiful ones right there. We interrupted the interview briefly so I could admire them. It occurred to me that the landscape is like a large patchwork quilt tossed over the geologic foundation, with fields, forests, wetlands, prairies, rivers, roads, and buildings the repeating patterns fit together in an irregular but visually pleasing design. But this was my thought, not necessarily Harold's. Then we returned to talking about the land.

In Harold's township, you cannot build a house unless you have five acres of land. That regulation would discourage a lot of development. Harold says the 40-acre rule doesn't really work. Someone from Madison can buy 40 acres cheaper there, in the country, than in town. The new landowner can build a house anywhere on the property. If the house is built on cropland or farmland, that land is lost to farming. Farmers don't want to work around something in the middle of a 40-acre plot. The field size gets too small and negotiations with the homeowner can be difficult. Most 40-acre parcels that were in farming are sold and the land is no longer farmed. This house and 12 acres that Harold just sold was part of a farm previously. He wouldn't care if there were two houses here instead of just one, because the land around the house is not tillable land or grassland.

Harold told me that he has had an issue or two with the DNR. Since I was conducting the interview as a DNR employee, he shared these accounts with me from his perspective. One instance had to do with a culvert, the other with turkey hunters.

On the farm he owned in 1993, there was a trout stream. There was a lot of rain that year in Barneveld, and water came down into the valley. Flooding on the road was unsafe to drive through. But Harold had to get through a flooded driveway because he had cattle in there and his son had built a house in there. So he bought a steel culvert and hired a man to dig out the driveway and set the tube in there. It cost him \$7,000

to make the driveway safe for his big equipment. A couple years later, an official from Dodgeville asked where his permit was. He said he didn't know he needed one. He sent in \$200 for a permit, retroactively, when it had only cost \$65. The official said he had to reset the tube – dig it out and put it back in a foot lower so that aquatic wildlife could get through it. Harold fought about this out of court for about two years. It was the principle that mattered most to him. Finally, one day in March, he met with the DNR "fish guy" and they reached a compromise. He put a dam across the creek to raise the water level through the culvert.

In the other case, Harold shared that there are two brothers who have come out to Harold's farm for turkey hunting for seven or eight years. They don't really bother him. One spring they left a note asking his permission and he left a note saying yes. They parked where they always did. Two wardens soon appeared. The hunters were at the edge of a cornfield where there happened to be corn lying around from the year before. The wardens gave the hunters citations for hunting over bait and one got a citation for hunting without a license because his period to hunt was later in the season that spring. The wardens confiscated his gun, though they allowed him to hunt during his licensed period if he bought a new gun, which he did. Again the spring before the interview, the same hunters were out there on Harold's land, when two game wardens "frisked them" and checked their cars. They were legal, the right person having the right gun and all. Harold considered this harassment on the part of the wardens. He said the DNR claims they are operating on tips, but Harold thinks the wardens mistreated the hunters and himself as the landowner. He said he would be concerned if deer and wild turkeys were endangered, but they are not. In fact, he had already indicated earlier in the interview that one observable change in the land since he first came to the area is the increase in deer and turkey populations.



## Myrtle Viola (Espaseth) Anderson

*Born: April 23, 1904*

It was at Ingleside Manor, the nursing home in Mount Horeb, that I interviewed Myrtle, when she was just shy of 100 years old. I saw her again on her birthday, a month later. She talked of the farm she had lived on in Blue Mounds as her home, of course, not the nursing home, which she seemed to consider only temporary housing. She told me that she had lived all her life in the Military Ridge area, except for a brief spell when she lived in the Chicago area. She had worked as a coil-winder, winding coils for fluorescent lights, at Jefferson Electric in Elmhearst, a Chicago suburb. It was piece-work: she got paid per coil. She mentioned that she wore dresses to work and that it was hard to stand and wind coils all day long, except for a 15-minute break for lunch. As our conversation progressed, I learned that her brief stint in Chicago had actually been from 1927 to 1975, about half of her unusually long life. She made it clear, however, that the farm in Blue Mounds was her home, regardless of how long she had lived elsewhere.

Myrtle was born and grew up on a farm just five miles south of Blue Mounds in Dane County. "It's my farm," she said. She had been living there until she got sick in October of 2003, five months before the interview. She told me that she rents the land to a neighbor now, and that her son lives across the meadow and watches over the farm for her.



*Although Myrtle lived in Chicago for almost 50 years, she considered her farm near Blue Mounds to be home.*

"More than anything else," she said, she enjoyed being on the farm. The neighbors were different when she was growing up there. They were "all so friendly!" All the neighbors had big families then. Myrtle had only two brothers and two sisters, but most families she knew had eight kids.

During the holidays, Myrtle recalled how five or six neighbor families gathered between Christmas and New Year's. The whole group came to one place one night for supper – there was always a big spread. The next night the group would go to the another neighbor's house for supper. In this way they hosted one another every night between Christmas and New Year's. Myrtle always looked forward in particular to the night when they had "ragamuffins." On that night everyone dressed up, both grownups and children, and walked through the snow in the dark, from house to house. The neighbors they visited had to guess who they were and gave them treats at the door. They made their own root beer or bakery treats. Back then, Halloween was a little different in that the kids went out and put wagons on top of sheds, put gates where they didn't belong, or did other somewhat destructive things, anything mischievous. Myrtle was not along for any of that stuff, of course. She claimed to be mischievous ("I was no angel!"), but said she didn't do the things like switching other people's gates.

When they made root beer on the farm, they bought a bottle of extract. It took one bottle of extract to 2 or 3 gallons of water and some yeast. They put it in a big container under the steps until it was ready to be capped in bottles.

Another aspect of her social life on the farm was going to dances in people's homes, usually about 10 miles away. Unless she was being punished and not allowed to go, her parents would say sure she could go. But she had to walk all the way. She wanted to go so badly that she didn't care. The dances were usually in someone's kitchen. They would haul out the cookstove and chairs

## The Interviews

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Myrtle recalled going to dances in people's homes, usually in the kitchen, when she was growing up. "They don't have fun like that today!"

so there was room to dance. The music was usually provided by violin, guitar, and sometimes drums. They danced squares, Scottish, waltz, and two-step. They would have a big "lunch" at midnight. On the farm they butchered and did a lot of baking. "Oh, we'd be full!" They needed the food for energy, Myrtle claimed. "Talk about fun. They don't have fun like that today!"

From the time she was 7 years old, Myrtle had jobs or responsibilities on the farm. She got up early to go get the cows and bring them to the barn. She always had to get the cows before 6:00 a.m. and again at 5:00 p.m. "We had our cows [and] we had to milk morning and night." If her brother wasn't there for some reason, she would take the milk in a big can, on the wagon with the horse, to the Barber Cheese Factory, in Barber. That was near the farm. "They made good cheese too! You don't find that today." They made Swiss and brick at that factory; Swiss was her favorite.

One time she and her brother had to do the milking, but he was late coming back from Madison. She had to get all the cows in the barn and start milking because a neighbor was coming to help that day, and a storm was brewing. She knew the cows would be very hard to get in the barn if the storm came up. She told the dog: "Go get the cows!" but the dog's chasing them to herd them led the cows to hold their milk. Then she had to milk each one a little at a time, going back and forth between the cows and returning again and again to the same cow. She had milked all but two of the 24 cows when the neighbor came. "By that time the storm was coming up. It was so black!" While the neighbor was finishing the milking, she took the rest of the cows to the night pasture. As she opened the gate, a flash of lightning hit the wire gate. She could feel it all over her hands. The lightning threw the gate out of her hands and the horse reared up when the lightning hit so close. But she did get the milk to the factory – the neighbor took it for her. She washed the cans and pails afterwards and took the milk for the family into the house. When the

neighbor returned from taking the milk to the factory, she went home with him. She was afraid to be alone with the storm raging, so she stayed at the neighbor's overnight. At 4:00 a.m., she got up to go home to help her brother milk the cows. But when she looked out the door, all she could see was water. "That valley was like a river overflowing!" She couldn't get home until 2:00 p.m. that afternoon. She walked where it was hilly and jumped a lot of puddles, but she got there. "When you are young, you can do anything!" Her brother had gotten home and he had had to milk the cows alone that morning. Myrtle was about 12 when that happened, but she has always been frightened of storms.

Years later, she was in the area when the tornado hit Barneveld. The next morning, her son called her and told her, "There's no more Barneveld. The storm took it last night." She only lived four or five miles southeast of Barneveld, yet she knew nothing about the tornado. She figures the mounds protected her farm from the tornado by sending it off in another direction.

When she was a girl, she would hear a rumble that sounded as if it were inside the mounds when a storm was coming. When she was little she was more frightened. Sometimes the lightening seemed to be so sharp – it really split the sky. She acknowledged that it might sound crazy, but when a storm was coming, she was afraid to go upstairs to shut the windows when they were open because she was afraid the storm would come before she got back down.

Myrtle attended a one-room school, where students of all ages learned together. She liked having the company, being with the other kids in school. She had to walk about a mile to school, no matter what the weather. But when the weather was nice, she played baseball outside at school.

When she was in high school, she belonged to a hiking club. Once time the club walked to Madison. It took from 6:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. to walk to Nakoma in



*A tractor made life a bit easier on the farm.*

Madison. Once the hikers reached Madison, they took the train to the depot and stayed there until the Cannonball (a train) came and took her home. She had been wearing new shoes, and the next day she could hardly walk at all.

Myrtle had to walk to Daleyville to learn her catechism for confirmation. It was three miles from the farm to the church there. She was given a nickel to spend if she got hungry. A nickel bought a box of sardines. Somebody else had a nickel and bought crackers, and they shared.

As mentioned, Myrtle's folks ran a dairy farm. Her father, Oliver Espaseth, raised crops: oats, corn, and barley, but no wheat. They harvested hay mostly, and that was for the cows. When her brother helped the neighbors, she was Pa's "hired hand." She drove the horses to help harvest the hay. They had a hay-loader: the hay came up onto the wagon via the hay-loader. Myrtle didn't like that it would pick up snakes along with the hay and snakes would end up on the wagon. She noted that bull snakes could be big – three feet or longer and two or more inches wide. She helped unload the hay with a hay fork. She would put the fork into a bunch of hay and hook it and the other end would be tied to a horse. Her brother would pull the load of hay up into the loft and then dump it. Once she pulled the hay fork down and two snakes were on the wagon. She hollered for Pa to come and kill them. Sometimes a snake got away; there were so many of them around the woods. Once the fork came down empty and she put it down so hard into the hay that when she told them she was ready to go ahead and pull it, the rack and all came up and she had to jump off onto the ground. She had pushed the fork so hard that it had gone into the wooden rack. But the rack was heavy, so it fell off the fork quickly.

In 1923, Myrtle's father got a Fordson tractor. It wasn't very smooth riding. In fact it was rough riding because it didn't have tires. It just had big clogs. Today tractors

have tires. Previously they used to draw the farm machinery with horses, but now they used the Fordson for plowing and haying. The tractor made farm work a little easier because they no longer had to feed and take care of the team of horses afterwards.

Myrtle did have another job besides working on the farm while she lived in Wisconsin. She worked at Olson's Restaurant in Mount Horeb from 1920 to 1927. She worked in back of the counter and waited tables – "whatever they needed." She helped at the fountain and packed bakery goods to be shipped off to different places. Everything was shipped by train in those days. The train came from Madison and went to Fennimore. She rode the Cannonball. At 2:00 p.m. she boarded it for Madison, and it brought her back at 9:00 p.m.

It was while she worked at Olson's that she met her husband, J. Earl Anderson. One night when it was just time to close up the restaurant, a car with three pulled up. The men wanted something to eat, so she said "sure." They all wanted steaks, so she got the steaks ready for them. When they went to pay, they gave her a check. She asked her boss if she could accept the check from three men she didn't know. Her boss said, "They're our bread customers." Earl's dad apparently had a restaurant in Ridgeway. She felt kind of foolish that she didn't know. The next day, her boss told her that one of the fellows she had waited on wanted a date with her. She said, "No, I don't know him." Then her boss asked if she would go if he told her to. Otto, her boss, was always good to her, and she didn't want to hurt his feelings, so she went on the date. They went to a show in Madison. The next morning her boss asked her how her date went, and she said "okay."

I asked Myrtle what has changed since the days when she was a girl on the farm. She said people are not as friendly as they used to be. "When we were kids we got together and had fun. Today kids don't know one another. We used to go fishing or hunting – kids don't do that anymore." She used to set traps in brush

*"When we were kids we got together and had fun...  
We used to go fishing or hunting -  
kids don't do that anymore."*

piles to catch rabbits to eat. She loved to fish – she could fish all day! She used to catch trout, suckers, and panfish in the creek that runs through her land. She cleaned the fish and ate them. The expectation when she was a kid was that “if they wanted it, they had to do it themselves.” People can still catch some fish in that creek, but there are seasons for fishing now. Today you can go to the store and buy things, but in her girlhood, the kids had to make their own weapons. With her brother’s help, she made bows and arrows to hunt rabbits. She could hit a rabbit and kill it with arrows too. “There was nothing else to do, so we kept at it until we got ‘em!” Since Indians had been in the area before her grandpa settled on the land, she used to go up in the field and look for arrowheads. She found a lot of Indian arrowheads. She remembered social events like the Old Settlers’ Reunion, where the old timers got together for a picnic and the kids came and played. They don’t seem to have that sort of gathering any more either.

She remembered one dangerous thing that happened on the farm. A hunter was showing someone else how to use a gun and pulled the trigger. The bullet went through the man’s foot. They brought the man up to the house and Myrtle’s brother got the milk rig. They filled it with straw and put all the pillows from the house there, and the injured man had to ride in the wagon nine miles to the hospital in Mount Horeb to get the bullet removed.

She thinks the birds and animals are the same kind she used to see in the area in her youth, but the numbers of white-tailed deer and Canada geese have definitely increased. Looking at a photo, she recognized a prairie chicken. She said she had seen them in the wild up by Blue Mounds a long time ago, when she was a girl, but they had gotten scarce. She mistook a photo of a badger for a skunk, then said she had seen a badger run away from the house once, when she had just bought the farm in the 1960s. “Boy can they run fast!”

When Myrtle was growing up, “folks used every scrap of land they could find. Now it’s all contour. It’s got to be just so. Back then anything went. They grew stuff.” Now she says people have been taking too much out of the ground and not putting enough back in. The crops are not as organic as they used to be; farmers use chemicals and seeds that have been tested and altered to be bigger and more productive. Back then, they didn’t have all the scientifically improved and mechanically facilitated options to work with; they had to scratch out a living. But they got by.

Myrtle remembers contour farming started after she bought the farm, the same one she grew up on, in 1962. When her father died, her brother ran the farm, but when her mother died it went up for sale. She couldn’t stand to see the farm going to a stranger, since it had been in the family since 1850, so she bought it. Before her family owned the farm, the first log that went into the Hauge Church was cut from that land.

Myrtle’s great grandparents came to America from Norway on a boat they built themselves. It took six weeks to come across the ocean to the St. Lawrence River. They came down the river to Lake Erie and Lake Michigan, all the way to Milwaukee. They went from Milwaukee to Madison in a wagon with wheels but no spokes. From Madison, they were assigned to come to Blue Mounds where they could homestead a claim. They had to walk from Madison to the land that is now her farm. They walked all the way wearing shoes made from animal hides. After walking from Madison, they had to dig a hole in the ground big enough to crawl into and lie in. That was their home. Myrtle’s grandma used to say they used to find a bull snake “in bed” with them in the morning. Apparently the snake lived there before they got there, and it just wanted to be warm. The family stayed there until they could build the log house. “How would you like to walk all that way and have nothing to eat when you got there and no place to sleep? They didn’t have

*When she pictures  
"home" in her mind, Myrtle  
can't see any place but here.*

anything but what they carried on their backs." It was 1852 when they built the log house. They built it right into the hillside. When Myrtle bought the farm, the log house was so old that it was falling down, but people still came to see it. It is part of the historical register now, and the Historical Society, of which she is a member, protects it.

Myrtle was planning to leave the farm to her family. "They're gonna take good care of it, just like I have." Renters were working the land at the time of the interview. She expected her grandsons to get the farm after she was gone. "They want to keep the farm," she said assuredly. Although her own children grew up in the Chicago area, she says they value the farm now.

Myrtle said the landscape used to be wild, covered with a lot of trees. Now the trees have been cut down and the ground cleared for crops. In the future, she would like the land to be just as it is today, with no changes. She hopes people will keep the area in farms and grasslands. "Keep it; don't sell it," she repeated. She wants to avoid a "big outfit" coming in and taking over, making a lot of money by building on the land or taking away the farm. Years ago each farmer made his own living. Today there are no cows, chickens, or pigs – there's nothing to work from, nothing to make a living. Myrtle believes the farm should be left for people to make a living on. "Maybe I'm old fashioned, but I can't see this progress. A little is all right, but where's progress going to end? Nobody's going to have anything."

I asked Myrtle whether she remembered any prescribed burns from when she was young. She said not when she was a girl, but now she has seen spring burns "to get wildlife started again," on rocky land that wasn't used for anything else, to let the "wild stuff" grow on it.

She remembered picking violets, buttercups, shooting stars, and a "flower with a purple top" whose name she couldn't recall. That was what came to mind in reference to prairies.



S. GILCHRIST

She also remembered winters from her youth. "Years ago in the wintertime we had snow! The drifts were so high we could hardly see the barn from the house." It used to be so bad that Pa had to walk on top of the drifts to get to the barn. Today she says "we only have one or two inches;" there's barely enough snow to cover the ground. "Now the southern states have the snow and we don't have any. It used to be that we had the snow."

I wondered what aspect of the Military Ridge area Myrtle valued most. She re-iterated: "It's home to me and always will be." When she pictures "home" in her mind, she can't see any place but here. It's where her grandpa and great grandpa and all her folks grew up. "They all grew up on this farm. The neighborhood has been so loving; I can't see any place else." All the time she was in Chicago, she couldn't wait to get back here. She missed the friendliness of the people, and, of course, home.

Even in the nursing home, Myrtle told me that her Himalayan cat from the farm and her son's dog have visited her. She always had cats, though this one is an indoor cat. The cat plays with the dog, a German shepherd. The dog puts the cat's head in his mouth and shakes it, and Myrtle said the cat likes it. The dog knows which door is hers when he comes to visit, but the cat doesn't like to visit there.

Myrtle has kept up with some fashions. It was just 10 to 15 years ago that she got her ears pierced. Her mother had pierced ears. She remembered watching her pull a string through the holes.

Myrtle said she still likes to garden. She considers herself to have lived a good life. She hopes everyone else can do the same, though she recognizes that not everyone likes farming or living on the land. Her advice is to be active; don't sit all the time.



**Henry Frederick Eckel**

*Born: July 3, 1930*

When I interviewed Henry in March 2004, he had just sold his farm in January and moved into the new house in Mount Horeb in February. He showed me some heavy lead rocks he had kept from the farm. As a boy, he had played in the piles left from the old lead mines. He also showed me a picture of the farm where his parents had lived before him. His mother and dad had built that farmhouse in 1924. Henry had been born in that house. Until now, it was the only place he had lived his entire life, except for the two years he spent in the Army, stationed on the west coast, during the Korean War. But when he was drafted, his parents were still farming. It was when he came back from the military that he bought the farm himself.

Henry farmed exclusively for a few years, then he worked at a bank while living on the farm. He raised a few crops, steers, calves. His two sons were going through college at the time and they helped with the farm, doing a lot of evening and weekend work. None of his children are farmers now. His daughter is a teacher. One son, Scott, is the band director at Madison East High School. The other son manages a store in Atlanta. His kids never got the thrill of milking cows by hand, but they helped with the farm work when they were young. Scott would have liked to have had the farm, but it was too impractical, since he and his wife were both teaching in Madison, and buying a farm just to own it really doesn't work. But it doesn't bother Henry that his children didn't take over the farm; he has no regrets.

When Henry was growing up in the Military Ridge area, he liked to play outside, especially in the piles of debris from the lead mines. He played cowboys and Indians among the rocks and lead tailings. He liked to look for lead there. His dad and uncle told stories about the tunnels dug underground, where mules carted the tailings out. There was history in the land, which Henry seemed to appreciate.

The site of the old Blue Mounds Fort, dedicated to Ebenezer Brigham, the first settler in Dane County,

*The site of  
the old Blue Mounds  
fort, dedicated to  
Dane County's first settler,  
was on Henry's farm.*



*Henry showed me a picture of the farm where his parents lived.*

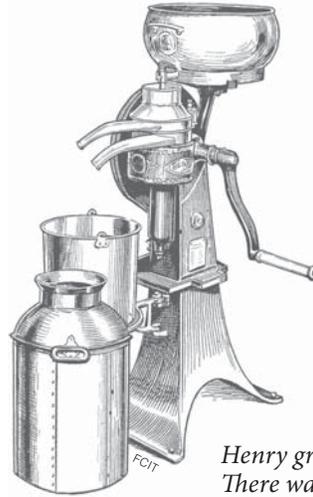
was on his farm. That was the highest spot in the area, and Henry and his friends liked to play on the site. They could hide in the long, sweet clover, and hunt for each other. The fort was built to fight the Black Hawk Indians between 1832 and 1848. It was built high on a mound so the settlers could see Indians in any direction before they got there. Stories talk about two of the settlers or soldiers getting scalped riding away from the fort. It was the Sauk Indians that were there. There is no structure remaining from the fort there now, just a monument to Ebenezer Brigham. Ebenezer was the first clerk of the Town of Blue Mounds, which was organized in 1948. Some of his record books still remain. Instead of "relief," they listed "provisions" for the town paupers: potatoes, and other food. Henry was very interested in these things, so he did a little research about the fort.

Henry's dad farmed. He was a dairy man, but he also always had hogs, chickens, and ducks. Henry did chores. He milked by hand when he was 8 or 9 years old. They got the milking machine in the 1940s. They farmed differently in those days. They let the cows dry up so they weren't milking more than a couple of cows during the winter and there were not as many chores to do then. They had a separator and there was always butter and thick cream to eat on breakfast food. They bred the cows to calve in the spring, then they milked all summer and fall.

They had no tractor until the mid-1940s. Everything was all done with horses when Henry was a boy. He remembers riding the horses with his friends. He said they were "just regular horses," but he liked to call them "old grey mares." When the horses weren't working, it was okay to ride them, although there were no saddles so the rides were not very fast or far.

Henry worked in the fields with his uncle and cousins. They did haying together. They did threshing as a group, silo filling and shredding the same way, helping each other. "We young fellows always looked for games to play, trouble to get into, but we always did our share of the work too." The crops were hay (timothy, clover, and alfalfa), oats, and corn. They always rotated the hay and oats. Henry's dad raised some sugarcane too. They planted the cane in rows with a corn planter. When it was ready, they stripped it, took the leaves off, and bundled it. The neighbors south of the farm had a mill. Henry's family would bring the cane in bundles and the neighbor would crush it. They would cook the crushed cane to make molasses and pancake syrup. Everything was done by hand labor. They didn't have a big enough operation to burn the cane the way they do on some plantations. They made sugar for their own use.

When Henry bought the farm from his parents in 1956, he paid \$17,000. As a banker, he knows the price of real estate is much higher than it used to be. Henry's grandfather had actually owned 280 acres



*Henry grew up on a dairy farm.  
There was always cream and butter.*

and had built buildings on the other half of the farm. When Henry's dad got married in 1924, the farm was split into two 140-acre farms. His dad got one of the farms and built the set of buildings on it. Henry's uncle got the other. Later, Henry bought the other 140 acres from his uncle and the farm was re-united as 280 acres. A few years after Henry bought his uncle's farm, values went way up and his uncle was beside himself thinking Henry had underpaid him. Henry explained that it was like an investment in a certificate of deposit: if the value goes up, you can't benefit, but if the value goes down, you don't lose it either. Henry farmed pretty much the same as his dad had farmed, growing the same main crops. He had about 30 cows, but he couldn't fit any more in the barn. To expand would have meant building another building and he didn't really like milking much, so he quit farming and sold the 140 acres that had been his uncle's in 1985. He had given up a scholarship to the university because his parents wanted him to farm, and he never really liked farming. He always thought he could have gotten a degree and done something else. He "holds that inside."

In 1965, Henry was appointed town clerk for the Town of Blue Mounds. He had been clerk for 38 years at the time of the interview. He went to work for the bank as well. But at that time, he kept farming.

He tried raising meat instead of milk. He raised 100 prime veal calves with his brother-in-law for five or six years, but he had to feed them morning and night and the work was worse than milking. Then he raised 150 steers. While his dad had butchered his own animals, Henry took them to a butcher in town and stored the meat in a freezer.

The house was quite cold.  
The curtains across the leaky living room windows  
blew back and forth from the outside wind.

Before they had a freezer, his mother used to cook the meat and put it in a crock with lard that solidified and kept the meat in winter that way. She also canned meat. They made sausage and cooked it, then put it in sealed jars.

During the Great Depression era, they ate a lot of potatoes. He got to pick out the big ones and put them in a separate place to make potato pancakes. They stored the potatoes in the basement.

With his two sisters, Henry made sauerkraut in a 30-gallon crock. It was a whole afternoon and evening project. They cut the cabbage from the garden and put it in a wagon. They brought it to their mother, who cut the hearts out. Their dad pushed the cabbage heads back and forth across a blade to cut it. Then Henry got to stomp it down with a clean baseball bat. They let the cabbage cure. It looked terrible – it bubbled – and it smelled. Finally they threw the froth away and canned the remaining sauerkraut in quart containers.

When indoor plumbing was installed, it must have made life a little easier than it had been on the farm. In the 1930s the family had an outhouse. When they first got an indoor toilet, they had to flush it by carrying buckets of water from a hand pump and pouring them down it. The house was quite cold. The curtains across the leaky living room windows blew back and forth from the outside wind. The water in the entryway, called the “wash room,” would get a coat of ice on top of the water. Henry’s mother kept a basin attached to the stove so she always had about 5 gallons of hot water for washing.

Growing up on the farm was more than the work. Henry liked to play outside with a cousin and a neighbor boy. They were all about the same age. These “Three Musketeers,” as they were called, played ball and hide-and-go-seek, and they had water fights. In the winter, they went skiing, tobogganing, and sleigh riding. Henry claims there was a lot more snow then than there is now. He used to go out sleighing and

skiing at night, by full moonlight. It was like daylight out. There was no creek on the farm, but they had water fights from the watering tank for the cattle.

One time Henry and a cousin got in trouble for playing with matches. It was one of the driest days of the summer. His mother had some matches hanging high on the wall. But the kids stood on a chair and climbed onto the stove to reach them. They lit some papers by the barn, but there was no real fire. There was dirt all around and the fire just went out; the grass did not catch on fire. Henry’s parents found tennis shoe tracks on the stove, and the kids had to own up to their misdeed. Henry said the scolding his grandfather gave him hurt worse than the licking his dad gave him. Henry said his son did the same thing when he was around the same age. Henry was working outside when he smelled smoke, and his son had started a fire. Henry said he gave his son a licking worse than the one he had gotten himself.

Henry used to be pretty scared of chimney fires. His dad always burned wood and some coal. Sometimes he burned green wood. Soot or tar would accumulate in the chimney, resulting in a chimney fire. Once when he was farming by himself, when he hadn’t changed the furnace yet, he was out in a field on a windy day, when he looked up at the house and saw black smoke and sparks flying out. The wind was blowing towards the barn. He called the fire department and they put out the fire. Luckily nothing serious happened.

Henry has used fire as a tool, however. When he first started using a tractor, the corn got pretty big, and, if he picked the ears by hand, he couldn’t plow the remaining stalks under. So he back-fired the field and then burned it. Sometimes he burned a field with a lot of grass rather than corn too. Of course you want the wind to be blowing in the right direction when you burn. An embarrassing situation occurred once, when Henry was farming with his brother-in-law. They decided to burn a dense field of cornstalks. They back-fired all around the

# Views of the Ridge



Sometimes, “a big ol’ bull snake came slithering through the hay.”

*Husking by hand, Henry’s dad would pick out the big ears, hang them to dry, and shell them out in the winter time to use the corn as seed the next year.*



field. It was already dusk when the wind was minimal and they lit the fire. The fire took off! In Blue Mounds, a couple of miles up the road, people in a tavern saw the fire and called the Mount Horeb Fire Department. They came with sirens. Henry and his brother-in-law were just sitting there, watching the fire. He realized they should have called the fire department ahead of time and told them about the prescribed burn. “Live and learn.”

When I asked Henry about wildlife he’d seen, he said he still sees ring-necked pheasants. When he was a boy, one time he and his cousin were cutting grain with an old binder and a team of horses. They had to go backwards the first time around and throw the bundles along the fence. When they came back around, they saw that the binder had gone through the nest and smashed all the eggs. He remembers the image of those crushed eggs. Now in the mornings, when it is still, just before daylight, he likes to hear pheasant hens cackling back and forth. He likes to see them too. He said he has seen ruffed grouse over the years as well. For years he kept a birdfeeder to feed birds over the winter. He never used to see woodpeckers, but he sees a lot of them now. He sees cardinals, blue jays, mourning doves, black-capped chickadees, robins. His wife loves to see the first robin in the spring and to note the return of the red-winged blackbirds. When his kids were about 4, 6, and 8 years old, he would get them to pull wild mustard. The fields would be just yellow with the yellow rockets. It was about the same time that the red-wingeds would nest that he would send the kids out to pull mustard. The red-wingeds often put their nests in the yellow rocket. When the kids came, the parent birds would come swooping down, screaming at the kids. Henry still sees meadowlarks, which he loves, but not nearly as many as he used to see. Perhaps he sees fewer because he is not out in the field as frequently as he used to be. Haying on a farm always created opportunity to see wildlife. Henry encountered bull snakes in his youth,

though he rarely sees them now. When he was young, Henry helped his dad hay with a team of horses, a wagon, and a hay-loader. Henry would be on the wagon. Once when the wagon was almost full of loose hay and they were right by the house, “a big ol’ bull snake came slithering through the hay.” Three or four feet long, it was right there on the wagon. It had come up the hay-loader. Henry took one leap from the wagon onto the ground. For weeks after that, he walked. Years later, when he was baling hay, the kids got scared when they saw a snake partially cut off, with its tail dangling down from the hay. It was in the 1950s that they started baling hay.

Henry has seen only one rattlesnake on the farm. For threshing, he and three or four other people were tipping shocks of six bundles with a fork to let them dry out. They heard a noise and discovered a rattler all curled up inside the shock of grain. He knew rattlesnakes were in the “mountains” but they didn’t usually cross the railroad tracks, so this one was a surprise.

Now Henry sees wild turkeys, which he never saw when he was young. He hardly ever saw a white-tailed deer then either, though he sees them now. And pigeons, he said, “we used to have a lot more pigeons than we do now.”

Land management practices have changed some too. Henry’s dad never did any contour farming. But when Henry started farming, he laid out the strips to keep water from running off and thus to conserve the soil. All the farmers followed a crop rotation, so they didn’t continually have corn in one place, and so on. As time went along, farmers have fertilized the land better. Henry’s dad used his own seed corn too. Husking by hand, he would pick out the big ears, hang them to dry, and shell them out in the winter time to use the corn as seed the next year. When Henry farmed himself, he bought the seeds from a seed dealer. Things changed dramatically in some respects, the crops grown remain about the same.

The dairy farm sold milk to the factory. In the early years, Henry's dad took the team of horses and hauled the milk to the factory in the morning. They cooled it in a tank overnight. Henry had to stir the milk in the can to get it cool. You could tell when it was cool by touching the outside of the can. Later, when Henry farmed, he went grade A and installed a tank. When he was farming, Henry also hauled milk cans for a couple of years. He picked up the cans from about 10 farmers and delivered them all to the factory.

There used to be cheese factories all over this area. The Lead Mine Cheese Factory was one. South Blue Mounds, Meadow Grove, and Blue Mounds Overhead were all cheese factories in the area. They made mostly Swiss cheese; a few made brick or Limburger. His dad liked a lot of Limburger, but Henry did not. There was no refrigeration in those days, so his mother made him put the Limburger in the entry way cabinet so it didn't smell up the house. But it never lasted very long; his dad ate it in a hurry.

One major change in the landscape is the number of houses being built. Henry has been involved in zoning, so he has ideas about where new houses should be located (in shallow land or next to the woods) and considers the length of the driveway to get to them a significant factor. It bothers him to see "big, big houses in the middle of a cornfield," but there is not much Henry feels he can do. He says he has less and less control over the placement of houses now, and more farmers want to sell. Selling a piece of their land is "their retirement." It's easier to sell a piece of land for a house; harder to sell the whole farm. The farm he sold is still being maintained as a farm, with some fields enrolled in CRP. He had put the farm in CRP previously, when he had no help and couldn't take care of all the crops. Farming was not very profitable, and CRP was the most practical thing to do. He expects that, in the future, the field next to his new condo will all be houses soon. He doesn't know where it will end.

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But he expects that the ability to raise a lot of crops will continue, "So, hopefully, we won't starve."

Henry particularly values the fact that the landscape in the area is picturesque. Most of the homes are neat, with well-kept farm buildings. He loves the climate; he likes to see the four seasons. He has traveled a lot, including one trip to Europe, but it is always great to get back home!

Henry acknowledged that we are all looking for ways to make ends meet. People will do what they need to do, as long as municipal rules will let them.

During the Great Depression era, when Henry was 7, 8, or 9, his mother and dad didn't have much money. They struggled to get by. They would take crates of eggs to Mount Horeb on Saturday night to trade for groceries. Neighbors would come by and they would talk. On rare occasions, his dad would give him a nickel. He would walk around and look in the stores and decide what to spend his nickel on – usually candy. After Sunday morning church, his mother would cut up a pint of ice cream into five pieces. The kids all watched to make sure the pieces were equal. A piece of the pint of ice cream would be their treat for the entire week.

In the early 1940s the family had a little more money. Prices were going up, but the country was worried



*Henry remembered picking black caps, black-colored berries, quart after quart.*

about going to war. Henry was listening to a Green Bay Packers football game on the radio when he heard the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. Young men he knew, at least as names and faces, were being drafted, injured, even killed. When the war was over, Henry went up-town to a big celebration. People came out of the theaters and everyone was shouting and hollering.

Henry was working in a bank in Barneveld at the time of the tornado in 1984. He didn't know anything about it until 4:30 or 5:00 in the morning, when a friend called and asked if they were okay. Henry turned the radio on and then drove into town. Henry was worried about the bank and the people in Barneveld, but he couldn't get in. They couldn't see in the dark either; just people with flashlights. If the mounds in the area had angled differently, the storm would have hit Henry and his family. He could see scars on the mounds, showing where the storm had gone off to the north. "We don't get as many severe storms as we used to back then," Henry observed. His dad was always frightened of storms. "We would pace the floor and then look out the other side." Then they went to the basement to wait out the storm.

Henry remembers more snow than now: real blizzards. They had to shovel as soon as they were done milking so the milk truck could get through. The next day they would have to shovel again. People who couldn't get home through the snow stayed overnight. In a severe blizzard of 1936, the road was blocked by Barneveld and a bus that came past his place stalled. Fifteen people from the bus stayed overnight. He remembered a little girl that he had a good time playing with.

For recreational activities, Henry is not a hunter, and he has fished only a few times. He used to be quite interested in playing ball. He played softball and baseball into his 40s. He played in a hometown league for many years. Now he likes to golf. He does a lot of reading, hiking, and walking. Henry suffered a heart

attack in 1995, so he tried to keep active. For 10 years he maintained about two miles of walking trails on the farm. It was a pleasure to walk there, and see turkeys, snakes, once in a while, a deer. There are only two big poplar trees on the farm; the rest is all open with rocky knolls freckled with native wildflowers, but no woodland. As a kid, Henry played in the back field and brought bouquets of buttercups, shooting star, violets, and crocuses home to his mother. He says he didn't really know what they were. Over the years, he farmed more and more of the land as the equipment got bigger and he could drive across it. The flowers kind of disappeared. When he and his wife, Bev, walked back there, they noticed the flowers had petered out.

Henry did remember picking black caps, black-colored berries, quart after quart. His mother canned them. He still puts some by, but he freezes them now. He loves those berries on ice cream. He kept a big raspberry patch producing over a number of years too, and the people living there now have told Henry he can return to the farm to pick berries anytime.

At the time of the interview, Henry served on the board of directors for Ingleside Manor (a nursing home), and he had been the treasurer for the Community Foundation for Mount Horeb since 1988. Since 1972, he has been preparing income taxes for other people. He takes a University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension course every year to keep on top of the field. Seven or eight years ago, he did taxes all by hand; now he does them all on the computer.

At the time of the interview, Henry's wife, Bev, had been working half-time as a legal secretary for 30 years. I asked how they met, and Henry explained that it was when she was living in Madison. Henry and some guys would go to the city for fun and an ice cream cone. Henry met her when she worked as a "soda jerk" at Borden Dairy. She still hates cottage cheese because she had to package it and she used to come home smelling like it. At the time of the interview, Henry said they

had been married 51 years. On their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, they invited friends for coffee, only to look out the window and see that a whole herd of steers were out. They all had to run after the cattle in their dress suits to get the cattle back in. Henry counts the 28<sup>th</sup> as his lucky day. Not only did he get engaged to Bev on that date, but it was on the 28<sup>th</sup> that he got married, got drafted, and got discharged. His daughter was born on the 28<sup>th</sup> as well.

Henry's kids played games growing up on the farm. They played "Moonlight, Starlight." In this game, one person is "it." Everybody else runs around in the dark and hides. The repeated phrase was "Moonlight. Starlight. I hope I don't see a ghost tonight!" The first person caught was "it" for the next round, so everybody tried to run back to base before they got caught. One



Henry was active in the Mount Horeb community.

The 28<sup>th</sup> was  
Henry's lucky day.  
He got engaged, married,  
drafted, and discharged  
on that date.  
It was also his  
daughter's birthdate.

time a neighbor girl was being mean to the younger children, so one of the guys came running down the road with a sheet on him and scared the girls who went up the road to hide. They played "duck, duck, goose" in a huge circle. Adults and kids played ball together, and they played hide-and-go-seek.

Henry played music. His parents gave him lessons on a Hawaiian tremola (a stringed instrument) and a guitar. In grade school he played a Tonette recorder. In band, he played saxophone, guitar too. But Henry was quick to acknowledge that his son, Scott, is really good in music. As high school band director, he has the ability to get the best out of everyone.

Pets? Henry said there were always a lot of cats around. They would multiply and then get sick and dwindle down to one or two again. They had a lot of different dogs too. One of his favorite pets was the first purebred calf he bought from a neighbor for a 4-H project. "She was always Queen of the Herd!" For 4-H, Henry raised crops, showed heifers, even competed in a speech contest. Once the leaders of the Blue Mounds 4-H Club had a contest to name their club. The name he suggested was selected: the Blue Mounds Busy Mites. Henry's own children were not in 4-H. The club had disbanded by the time they were old enough.



## Eldon Frederick Schraepfer

*Born: July 4, 1933*

I interviewed Eldon in March 2004. We sat in his living room in a house with a Hollendale address. He said he has lived in the area his whole life. He grew up on a farm right below the hill by the house that he lives in now.

He described growing up on a farm as a “normal life.” Farming as an occupation required crop work and livestock work, besides going to school. He performed the customary chores and seasonal work. When I asked him what it was like growing up on the farm, he replied that his “childhood has nothing to do with this.” But he did tell me that “farmland was managed very well.”

When he was young, farmers grew corn, hay, and oats in rotation. The Agriculture Stabilization and Conservation Service laid out contour strips in the late 1930s or early 1940s. The government-sponsored programs were good for the farmers then; they conserved the soil. For years people tried hard to conserve the soil, only to have farmers now plant corn and soybeans on the hill-sides and let all the soil wash away. Eldon doesn't like the government programs now. Because of the economy, he says the government has let the farmers turn to cash cropping. They now plant loose crops, like corn and grain, heavily, and these are hard on the soils.

Eldon went on to state that he thought the DNR has become too powerful. He considered the agency to be too hard on the farmers in some cases. “DNR has not been a blessing to the farmers,” he claimed. Eldon felt the agency had too much control and that you had to ask permission for too many things.

When I asked about wildlife, Eldon said he considers the bird population about equal what it used to be. Fish populations are good now. The DNR built fish cribs and did some good things. They have helped the waterways with rip-rapping. Eldon never used to see white-tailed deer, but he does now. But now he says the deer population is “overgrown.” Similarly we are “overflooded” with wild turkeys. They destroy the crops.



*Eldon noted that large deer populations result in a greater number of car-deer collisions.*

“We need a heavy season. Nature will take care of it.” But meanwhile, he says the deer and turkeys are out of control. Deer cost a lot of money in car accidents.

Eldon told me he has had several collisions with deer. One time he was driving slowly because the weather was foggy. It was around 4:30 p.m. on Christmas Eve. A deer shattered right through his car windshield. It lay with its “horns” right on his chest. His chest was sore, but he could have been injured more seriously. The deer must have weighed about 250 pounds, Eldon said. He was still able to drive the car with the shattered windshield, but another time he had a deer accident where the car was totaled. “You never see a deer until they do damage to your car,” he warned.

In the Military Ridge area, farmers have had to sell their land for an income to survive. People have moved there who are not accustomed to living in the area. Though they were welcomed to the area and they are all good people, some of these former city-dwellers don't get along with the farmers. For example, people don't want yard lights on at night. They try to control the neighbors. According to Eldon, most of them are government employees who don't farm the land. They don't want anyone else to build a house that they will have to look at, so they use conservation as an excuse. People moved out to the area and they weren't “screened,” yet now they want to “screen” others. Eldon believes in zoning, but not some of “the idiotic things” that are going on now. “It's the people who move out [here from the city] that cause the problems,” Eldon summarizes. “It isn't fair.”

*farmers have had to sell their land  
for an income to survive.*

I asked him what happened at the Hauge Church. Eldon explained that he is all for historic preservation of the Hauge Church, but he thinks the public relations people did a poor job of public relations in that instance. The neighbor wanted to have a driveway. "Pushed to the limit" when he was not permitted to put in the driveway he wanted, he built a fence that blocks the view from the church. Eldon doesn't think it's right to have other people controlling what you can and can't do on your property.

Since Eldon is in real estate and the auction business, he has met a lot of people who have "moved out" (meaning moved out of the city into the countryside) that he likes. Once he received a phone call from a man who lived on a piece of property that was given to a man's foster son. The foster son became an ordained minister and sold the property when his parents died. The new owner built a shed on the property. The caller told Eldon he didn't want the land sold. He was a university professor; he didn't make his money off the farm. Eldon explained that he himself does not make more than a minor amount of his income from the land, the majority of his income coming from real estate and the auction business. Therefore, if Eldon's neighbor wanted to put up 10 houses on the ridge by his house, Eldon wouldn't fight it. Eldon says the issue is that people don't want neighbors. They fight driveways and such just because they don't want to look at another house. But he thinks "city-dwellers" have to learn to get along and not try to control something they don't own. "If you want to control something, you better buy it!" The caller telephoned back later and said, "You're right."

Eldon reiterated that this is not the fault of the DNR, but the land would not have been for sale in the first place if the farmers had been given a good price for their products. And now wild turkeys dig out the corn when you plant a field of it. Deer eat a lot of corn too. Every time you have an accident with a deer, your insurance goes up, Eldon reminded me. People want

to hunt on their neighbor's land, but they don't want anybody hunting on their land.

The Military Ridge area has become very popular now. Years ago, in an area just north of Barneveld, you couldn't sell a farm. You were lucky to find a buyer. But through CRP, property is now very valuable. But now the farmer can't sell his valuable property because he is only entitled to "so many splits" or divisions. Land division is "controlled by city-dwellers who don't want neighbors."

As an auctioneer and realtor, Eldon has seen the sale of everything from old farm tools to whole farms. He said tractor power came in the 1940s and got more modern in the 1950s, with the introduction of the hay baler, etc. Equipment of the 1960s and 1970s is now pretty well outdated. They went from two- to four-row planting to six-row planting to sometimes twelve. Machinery is much larger now. It is also higher priced. Labor costs more now too. Where there used to be two men operating a farm, there is one now. Hay balers sell for \$40,000, so the common square-baler is not too popular now because it takes too much labor. The old plows are replaced with tillage tools as people try to conserve the soil. Minimum tillage is good, but you cannot grow corn and beans continuously. It's not good for the land. Farmers need to grow some hay; give the soil a rest. Soybeans are hard on the soil. They loosen the soil until it's "easily washable." Eldon does not blame the DNR for not wanting the soil to wash into the creeks.

There used to be a "sodbuster" program, so farmers couldn't plow up so much. "Now that's a joke." They have a "swampbuster" program. Eldon insists that, when the farmer loses control and can't drain his own land without permission, that's wrong. "Some farmland has to be drained, but the farmer has to turn a somersault to get permission to do it."

Because of his work in real estate, Eldon does a lot of appraisals. He sees farmers in serious trouble. Farmland

## Views of the Ridge

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Eldon considers the landscape to be fine as it is.  
He says local people should decide on the government  
rules, and the landscape will be okay.

would never be for sale except for certain things that happened and the way the economy changed.

There used to be 40 cows on a farm, then 60, then 80. There is a shortage of labor. Some farmers have borrowed two or three million dollars to put in a mega-sized dairy setup to attract labor. People spill huge amounts of milk on the road in protest. This is not good. It's too hard on the small farmers. They can't make the income they need. They can't continue the operation with the prices they get from the products they produce.

Eldon considers the landscape to be fine as it is; he is not looking to see it particularly different in the future. He thinks the wrong people are promoting "smart growth." Let the local people decide on the government rules, and the landscape will be okay. Farmers should be able to sell or do as they like with their land. The DNR controls animal units. But the city people come out here and build a shed, bring out junk cars, let the place grow up with weeds, have horses or goats they don't take care of, or try to be organic farmers. This is where there needs to be some control. These people should be required to keep their places clean. They are good people; they just don't understand that you have to manage nature; you can't just love it.

If someone uses atrazine, that is none of the neighbors' concern. He sprays his pasture to control the weeds. Some people don't want the roadway weeds cut, but failing to cut them could cause an accident, where someone might be hurt or killed. They want to see nature, but they also want their roadways plowed so they can get to work in winter. They are missing the whole concept. The Military Ridge area is a beautiful area, but we have to do some things differently.

Once in a while, Eldon thinks we go too far. For example, he told me the bridge project on Highway 39 could not be completed because some barn swallows were under the bridge. The project was delayed for

six weeks, which cost the people of Wisconsin, which includes him.

When I asked Eldon what strikes him as beautiful about the area, he responded that he had lived here all his life. He likes the hills and valleys; he doesn't care how many houses go up. Houses have nothing to do with it. We have to have building permits – that's fine. Farmers just sell what needs to be sold. A small percentage of people move here and want to be "nature boys and girls." They don't know the problems. Eldon is in favor of zoning, but considers the decision –makers "mixed up" on zoning. "The view" is important to the city-dwellers who moved here. And then, after their jobs go, they move out of the area: they are not permanent residents, yet the rest of us have to live by the rules they helped create. "There has to be a balance."

In the Town of Perry, two old men sat on the planning commission and wanted to tell people where they could or could not build a house. Some people came out from the city. They paid good money for their land, then had the planning commission telling them they could not build a house on this location. Let this be a lesson to pay attention to who you put on these commissions.

When I asked about controlled burning as a management tool, Eldon thought maybe some farmers burned places that were overgrown with grass when he was a boy. But there has never been excessive burning; Eldon does not consider it a problem. He is not against burning. Farmers generally know how to control burns, but city people have to have the fire department come out to control the burn. One neighbor's wife burned leaves. Twice the fire got away so the fire department had to come. The fire chief said "I'm going to have to take those matches away from you!" Eldon got turned in once himself, for burning at night. He said he knows better than to burn without permission. Controlled burning has never been a big issue, but Eldon recognizes that burning is dangerous and could be a problem

with all the houses in the area. He believes in requiring permits for burning. Sometimes you have to burn for weed control, the weeds get so high.

Of course people have to get rid of their garbage somehow. The towns have gone to garbage pickup every two weeks or so, and that has eliminated some of the need for burning trash. The garbage pickup plan is excellent. Farmers could also have a burn hole dug in the ground to burn their extra twine, etc.

When I asked Eldon what he values most about the area, he spoke of the Irish and Norwegian ethnic groups and genealogy in the area. But, he acknowledged, "That's changed as old timers leave the land or pass on and the land passes on to new owners." Eldon reassured me that it's all good, but the new owners have to learn to live with the people out here. Building houses won't hurt the rural area at all.

When I asked why he has chosen this area, he explained that he never left the area. It's other people coming to the area that has brought the value of the area up. New comers are astonished by the tax bill after they build the house; paying the real estate taxes and insurance can be a problem. It can cost you \$700 a month in taxes just to live in your house. Farmers are not getting by paying all these taxes either.

Eldon has been an auctioneer since 1956. He has sold everything from livestock, machinery, and antiques, to fine arts and real estate. Because farms have become larger and there are not as many farms operating now, he doesn't have as many farm sales as he used to have. He used to be at a farm sale every day in February. Some sell to settle an estate, retire, or move to a retirement center, or for health reasons. Tractors used to sell for \$10,000 to \$12,000; now, they are \$40,000, maybe \$50,000. Cattle prices have changed too. Top price for cattle used to be \$200; now the average herd is worth \$1,000 to \$1,200 for each cow, and you can pay as high as \$2,000 for a good-producing cow. Some sales attract



more people than others. The number of people who come to an auction depends on the number of things you have to sell, the territory you are in, and who you are selling things for. Typically 85 to 350 people register for an auction. Some people come for farm machinery, some for cattle, and some for antiques. Years ago there was no system for identification – people just used their names. People come from a wider area now, from farther away, but auctions have always been popular.

Eldon moved to his farm in 1966. His daughter has grown up and is a school teacher, yet Eldon is still actively farming. One difference from 1966 is that now he has land enrolled in CRP. He said he went into CRP because he wanted to be a sharetaker, since he pays a lot of income tax, and he considers CRP a big give-away, a guaranteed income.

I asked Eldon what might be done to inspire landowners to maintain the rural character and open landscape of the area, and he said we need to educate the people who make decisions. If newcomers move here and take control of the area, the area will be destroyed. They want to be on the school board and zoning commission,

*All these small towns had "characters,"  
and each village had its own unique celebration.*

and they don't know what they are talking about. The land is here for everyone to enjoy, but the new people moving here have done nothing to enhance it. There is nothing wrong with their coming out here, but they have to live and let live and let the zoning take care of itself. People who want to control a piece of land should buy it rather than tell other landowners what to do. He saw people on a planning commission try to tell people who had just bought land that they couldn't build their house where they wanted to. People either want to build on top of a hill for the view or they want seclusion. Eldon considers it wrong to have "local yokels" tell you that you can't do that. We have to conserve through farming practices, not control who owns the land or how many people live there or how big the property is. It's not the size of the property that matters; it's how it is farmed that counts. Control the animal units per acre and mow the weeds. Noxious weeds have to be cut.

*Eldon says  
that people  
who want to control  
a piece of land  
should buy it  
rather than tell other  
landowners what to do.*

The social aspect of the area has changed. There used to be church picnics and community gatherings, but all this has changed. There was always a Fourth of July picnic. The cheese plants had picnics for all their patrons. The village of Moscow was thriving before

Blanchardville or Hollendale were created. A lot of characters lived there. During the Great Depression, people worked in the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) or other work programs. Each village had its own unique celebration. All these small towns had characters. In the prairie area there was a village called Jonesdale, which harbored a lot of stories. Little towns used to have chicken barbecues and baseball games. Now the rescue squad in Hollendale has a big breakfast. Church dinners are still popular with some games, some gambling, some bingo. There are some township picnics now too, but we need more of these gatherings.

But much has changed. Some people want to do organic farming. Fine. Someone else wants to grow tobacco. Fine. Somebody wants to milk goats instead of cows. It's all fine. "I intend to do what I want with my farm" and it's nobody else's business. In an adjoining area, one neighbor wanted to raise mink. No one raised any concerns about that. Later, this same mink-farmer got concerned when another neighbor wanted to have buffalo. People are all mixed up with concern about their neighbors and what these neighbors want to do.

Eldon commented that the snow storms are not like they used to be. But now there are storm retention areas so they don't have the same runoff problems they used to have either. The DNR tries to control runoff, and that is good. There used to be floods. North of Barneveld and Ridgeway people are trying to control the watershed. This is a good example of how people can work together.

Although he has never seen a prairie chicken, Eldon is glad that DNR is buying some land for prairie chicken restoration. But he thinks the DNR is not paying market value when they purchase land. He thinks DNR needs to revamp their thinking and their rules.

In summary, Eldon says we can't control the people. He wants to preserve what's here, but mostly, he just wants people to get along.



### **Melva Elaine (Polkinghorn) Phillips**

*Born: January 19, 1927*

**M**elva and I talked in the living room of her house outside Ridgeway. She has lived on farms all her life. She grew up on a farm between Ridgeway and Dodgeville. Her mother came from Blue Mounds. In 1949, she and her husband, Charles, bought a farm across the road from where she lives now. They procured the farm where she lives now in 1954. In the 1970s they bought another farm. They had 525 acres and two of her sons farmed with them.

The first farm had a lot of bottom land, and some of it had never been plowed. Melva's husband came from Mineral Point; he had lived on a farm that was all bottom land. They had a little tractor and two big work horses. That was his way of getting the ground plowed. The tractor would get stuck so he would get the horses to pull the tractor out.

They were one of the first to get contour farming. When they first bought the farm, the ditches were so deep in the fields that they couldn't cross them with the machinery. They had to do something or the soil would all wash away. It was 1949 when they first started doing contour farming along the sides of the hills.

They hayed with a hay-loader and loose hay. Later on they had two teenagers when they got the wire baler. One youth sat on each side and tied the wire. Melva said they still talk and laugh about their experience today. One day they were busy haying and Melva was driving the tractor. They came upon a nest of bees that was in the ground. When the bees flew up at her, she panicked and pulled the tractor to a stop. This left the baler stopped right on top of the bees' nest. Everybody was scurrying to get away from those bees!

I asked Melva about seeing wildlife during haying. She said she didn't see many white-tailed deer. The first deer she remembered seeing was the one her husband got when he went hunting across the river with a shotgun one year. After that it changed. She didn't see deer at all until the 1960s or '70s. When her husband would come home from the woods and say "I saw a deer today," it

was quite something. Then it got so she could see deer all the time. She could look up most any time of day and see deer. Now she doesn't see them much, except once in a big while, she'll see five deer at night. While Melva doesn't see as many deer as she used to see, she sees a lot of wild turkeys: about a hundred every day. They eat here by the creek, by the soybean field.

Melva used to go hunting with her brother. He had a .22 rifle. He'd get her to jump on top of piles of wood and he would shoot the scared rabbits that came flying out. Neither of them ever thought he might shoot her, but she thinks about that now: "How stupid we were!"

When she was young, Melva saw a lot of rabbits, squirrels, and ring-necked pheasants, but she didn't see deer until later. Now she doesn't let people hunt in her woods much, and the squirrels are thick. A squirrel even perched on the porch the morning of the interview. There used to be a maple tree by the house. Melva told me that a mamma squirrel had her babies in that tree and they were cute to watch. But they took the tree out when they added to the house, "and that ended my watching squirrels."

She has never seen a prairie chicken, but she believes there are badgers around, up on the ridge. They make awful big holes that are hazardous to go over with machinery. She's heard the men talk about going around badger holes when they are working. She has seen groundhogs and skunks; she saw a groundhog the day before the interview.

She sees wildlife typical to the area. Now there are lots of wild turkeys. Ten deer may be the most she saw the winter of the interview, but she saw quite a few pheasants at that time. She saw one pheasant the morning of the interview. Her son saw six coyotes in a pack right behind the house. She is sure those coyotes were up to no good, as they can take a baby calf sometimes. Melva has seen and heard coyotes just in the last decade, but there seem to be more and more in the area all the time. At night she hears them howling.

One might see one coyote occasionally, but to see six in a pack is unusual. Melva supposes they were pups with their mother.

When she used to feed the birds, there were all kinds at the feeders including six pairs of cardinals. But the birds made a mess over the rocks, so she quit feeding them. Now she has to decide where to put the bird-feeder so she can get to in the snow. Melva explained that it is not good to stop feeding the birds in the winter, once you start. She does like to watch them, and, before her husband died in 2001, he watched the birds at the feeder too. When the snow was deep, six turkeys came every day to clean up the birdseed. She saw a couple of cardinals the morning of the interview. She used to see a lot of meadowlarks, but she hasn't seen them in a long time now. She thinks the sprays people use are hard on them.

Everybody fertilizes with chemicals now. Melva thinks that yard fertilizers are worse than the farm fertilizers. The chemicals all come down the creek so there isn't anything living in the creek any more. The stream used to be one of the best trout streams around, but the sewer ponds put in at the head of the stream killed all the fish according to Melva. There are not even muskrats down there anymore. The cattle won't drink the water from the creek now. If they are out in the pasture, they'll go back in the swamp and break the ice on the puddles rather than drink the creek water. "I suppose it smells like chemicals to them; I don't know." There used to be so many cars along the road by the bridge that her husband couldn't get through on the farm machinery. The people who parked there were all fishing. Now there are no fish.

Melva was graced with four kids, including a pair of twins: a son in Hollendale, a daughter in Oregon, Wisconsin, and two sons who farmed with them. At the time of the interview, Melva had 10 grandchildren and 10 great grandchildren, with more expected soon to keep the family tree going. Her great grandchildren are

the eighth generation of the Davies family that came to this area in 1848, from Wales, via Pennsylvania. Melva's ancestors settled in the Dodgeville-Ridgeway area. They were miners and farmers, as were her husband's family.

Melva's kids entertained themselves on the farm.

There was a big rock the kids spent a lot of time on. One time they dragged up poles and built a tipi. They surrounded it with wire so the cows couldn't knock it down, but the cows managed to knock it down in a few days anyway.

Melva said her kids went to a country school until it finally closed. Those were what they called "the good old days," she mused. "But I don't know whether we really want to go back to them or not." We had to pack the water in to wash the clothes, heat it, and pack the water back out, because most houses didn't have drains in them then. Melva did other work too. She helped milk cows, got the cows from pasture, washed the milk cans, cleaned the barns, fed the cows, and helped in the fields besides. She never plowed or planted, but she did disking. She drove the tractor to pull the hay up in the barn, and later she drove the hay baler.

For Melva, "farming is togetherness," though this quality seems to be fading fast because things are changing. She and Charles would go out together to bale hay,



S GILCHRIST



*One of Melva's afterschool chores was churning butter.*

work in the field, or milk the cows. They were pretty much always working together. Or, if she wasn't working with them, Melva would take dinners to the men in the field. She might be babysitting at the same time. Two daughters-in-law were beauticians, and she took care of the older kids while their mothers worked.

How is farming different than it was when Melva was growing up on a farm near Dodgeville? They used horses, not a tractor. They milked the cows by hand. Her job after school was to churn the butter. When the first snow fell, the road would get plugged, and it would never be plowed clear until the sun melted the snow in the spring. It was hard to get to the cheese factory, so they would dry the cows out in winter. The kids walked on top of the snow to go to school. She's seen the transition from milking cows by hand to milking by machine and from the 10-gallon can to the bulk tank.

Charles and Melva bought a tractor when they got married in 1946. They paid \$1,500 for an R Minneapolis Moline, a small tractor compared to the big four-wheel drive tractors that farmers use today.

In 1949 they had a few cows, about 30. In the 1980s and '90s they were milking 85 to 90 cows. When everything went up in price, they needed to make more money, so they expanded their herd. For a while the young couple, Charles and Melva, lived with his mother. The milk check for two weeks amounted to \$35. Out of that they had to pay the mortgage. One day a salesman came to the door trying to sell mortgage insurance. Charles said it was all he could do to pay the mortgage; he certainly couldn't pay for insurance on the mortgage.

In 1949 the crops were corn, oats, and hay. Now they've gone to soybeans because soybeans provide pretty good money. With not so many cattle to feed now, they grow crops to sell.

In her youth, they always pastured their cattle. The cows had a lot of room to roam and graze. They pastured along the creek and into the woods. The

big thing was that you had to go get them. Charles' mother would talk to the dog, Queenie, an English shepherd with a lot of hair. That dog would go get the cows and bring them back. When they started penning up the cows, they had to haul feed to them and they started using the land to grow crops. That was sometime in the 1980s. Melva's son pastures some beef cattle now, only about 20 head. They keep the berry bushes down but are not so hard on the land.

The bottomlands weren't plowed back then; they used to be pasture. As they are using less land for pasture, they are plowing more now. Melva's husband used to drop a match or two back in the swamp. He thought that burning the grass off would dry up the swamp so he could get in there and plow.

Her son has let some bottomland go back into wetlands. He could only get a good crop out of it once every 10 years or so, only when there was a dry year. So he got in a program where he could get some money out of it. She had tiled the swamp, but that only worked for a few years. There are four feet of peat back in that swamp. One time a man went coon hunting back there. He didn't know where to go because he was afraid of falling through the peat. It would shake when you walked back there.

Melva has seen a lot of changes in daily living. When she was a kid, there was no electricity in her house. Not until she was in high school did they get electricity. However, her grandpa had electricity. He charged up his own batteries so they had an electric iron, lights, and an electric refrigerator. Before they had refrigeration, they had to put the milk in a cold water tank to keep it cool until it was time to transport it to the cheese factory. One neighbor preferred to take the milk to the factory at night so he didn't have to keep it cool all night. When she was a kid, they took visitors to the factory to see it. That was a big event of the day!

She remembers carrying water into the house. There was no bathroom and no running water in her house

## Views of the Ridge

Melva thought indoor plumbing was the greatest thing, but when people had to carry their water to the house, they didn't use as much as they do now.



until her children were in high school. "Talk about poor farmers!" The bathroom was put into the house in the 1960s. She thought indoor plumbing was the greatest thing that ever was! She no longer had to pack the water down the hill from the well to take baths, wash dishes, or launder clothes. When people had to carry their water to the house, they didn't use as much water as people do now days. We use more water flushing the toilet once now than they used all day then.

In the other house they had, they heated with a pot-bellied stove. The stove pipes went up into the closet, which was not very safe. So, when they moved to this house, they installed a furnace before they moved in. They still had to cut wood and clean out the ashes, as it was a wood-burning furnace. An oil burner was really considered a luxury.

When she was a girl, Melva had a play house. It had been an old ticket office in Dodgeville. Her dad bought it and moved it to the farm. It was about 15 by nine feet. One end was hers; her brother had the other. (There were only two children in the family.) Melva had her dolls down there and a table and chair. She spent a lot of time in that playhouse.

Saturday nights she sometimes got a chance to go to town when her mother did her shopping. Saturday morning they had to kill the old hens and get them ready to go to market. When Mother went to town, she could trade eggs and hens for other groceries.

Melva's grandparents lived on the next farm, so she used to go there a lot. They always had a lot of kittens and her grandpa bought a pony for her. On Sundays she went to Canyon Park with her pony. Those were exciting days for her. Years later, her own children had a pony too. On her farm now, she has only a couple of stray cats.

When she was a girl, Melva went down to the rocks to play. She remembers the Dutchman's breeches growing there. There was a stick man and a sun carved into

the rock. That was in the 1930s and '40s. She doesn't know whether Indians put the drawings in the rock or not. Her dad got tired of fencing that area; he had to pack the fence posts in and that was hard work, so he sold about 20 acres to some people from Chicago.

As a girl, Melva went to Hollyhead School. In the winter, she had to walk on top of the snow to get there, as the roads were not cleared off. She and her brother had no toboggan. They took a sheet of tin, turned the front up on it, and "sleighed" down the hill. Melva would worry herself sick if she thought her grandchildren were doing that! You could get all cut up! "But we did it, and nobody ever got hurt!" The old school has been turned into a house now.

While Melva has lived on farms all these years, she has also gotten some jobs off the farm. She worked at the egg plant in Mazomanie. They made powdered eggs for the boys in World War II in the 1940s. Around 1945, she worked for the Burgess Battery Plant in Mineral Point. When she got married, Melva stayed home for a while. Then when the twins were three, she went to work at Grabers Curtain Rod in Middleton. She did everything there, so if someone were absent, she took their place on the line. The foreman offered her a special job, but she didn't take it because she had field workers coming to the farm and she had to cook. She also worked making sandwiches and salads and washing dishes at Olson's Restaurant in Mount Horeb for a while. She has done a lot of work for the historical society in Dodgeville since 1976. Usually she volunteers one day a week during the summer. She does research at home too. At the time of the interview, she was engaged in putting together scrapbooks.

At one time there was a cheese factory and a school-house on every corner. They were traveling by horse then, and every few miles there was a cheese factory. Brigham had a lot of them. They used to take their milk to the cheese factory in a 10-gallon can, but then new regulations said they had to go to bulk tanks. Just

like the schools, the cheese factories, the milk companies, and the farms – “everybody had to get bigger.” They couldn’t afford to buy a bulk tank without financing, and the bank wouldn’t give them a loan, but Arnold at the cheese factory in Dodgeville gave them the loan to buy the bulk tank, and they paid him off. They ate ice cream, whipped cream, and butter. They separated the milk and fed the skim milk to the calves and pigs, maybe even the chickens. When she was a girl, her dad took the cream in a 10-gallon can to the butter factory in Dodgeville. Sometimes he’d sell cream there in the winter time, though they dried up most of the cows in the winter because it was too hard to get to the factory. Today, they can give the cows a shot to dry them up, but in those days you dried up as many as you could naturally in the winter and still milked a few. She milked year round because when a cow got pregnant, she had milk.

In the future Melva would like not to see all these houses cluttering the landscape! She thinks the houses should be clustered in one spot “instead of letting them go all around your farm.” People come out from the city and they don’t want to know their neighbors. “You don’t know who’s living in the next house anymore. They don’t want your smell, your dust.... They don’t want to know you. The neighborhood is not a neighborhood any more, like it used to be. You used to know everybody.”

Melva referred to something that had happened a few days before the interview, around Necedah. Apparently a little girl was found locked up in basement. Melva insisted that, years ago, neighbors would have known about that and someone would have stepped in sooner. Nobody knows what’s going on in the next house now. Not that it’s always your business, of course, but when someone is being abused, it is your business.

In scattering new houses across the landscape, they are taking up good farmland. Melva does not agree with what is going on in this respect. Sometimes she wonders

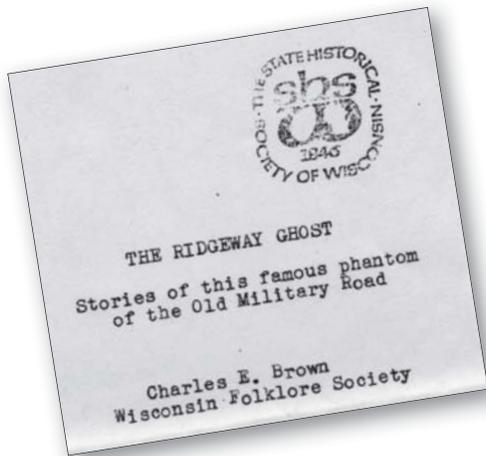
*Melva says some neighbors  
may still help each other,  
but you don't do much  
with neighbors now."*

where all the people that are building these houses are coming from. She clarified that there are some really nice people that have come from the city; it’s not that she dislikes them all personally by any means.

Threshing was an example of the kind of community gathering they used to have. The men went from farm to farm and helped with the threshing and the shredding too. When Melva and Charles first came to their farm, there was an older woman in her 70s. She’d be walking along the wagon driving the horses while her son was bucking the hay-loader. Melva’s husband talked to him and, after that, they helped each other with haying and silo filling; whatever they needed help with, they did together. Some neighbors may still help each other, “but you don’t do much with neighbors now.” Most of the farms have gotten so big that they have bought their own machinery, instead of waiting for their turn with shared machinery. When the grain is ready for harvesting it can’t wait, so sharing machinery doesn’t work for the bigger farms.

When I asked Melva what she valued most about the area, she said matter-of-factly, “It’s a beautiful valley.” When she was building onto the house, she observed the carpenters looking out the window and commenting on the beauty of the view. It’s a nice place to live. In the fall the colors are wonderful and in the summer it’s quiet. “Home is home.”

Once Melva went to Mexico and saw the conditions some people lived in there. She thought she would go home and never want to move away! It can be nice to



*Melva has volunteered for the local historical society. She shared stories about the legendary Ridgeway Ghost.*

go away sometimes, but it's nicer to get home. Melva likes the area where she lives because it's hilly. She figures it's all in what you grow up with, but for her, "flatland would be more tiresome" because it all seems the same.

One of the things people talk about related to the Military Ridge area is the Ridgeway Ghost. Melva had helped prepare a small booklet about the ghost, so I asked her about the stories. When miners came to the area around 1832 to 1845, they were "a hard lot," she began. They had to be tough in those days, just to survive. They set up living quarters in caves or fixed something over the bank to live in. About 1840, people in Ridgeway began to have experiences they couldn't understand or explain.

There were saloons (or "groceries" as they sometimes called them) along the way. Miners would go there and drink and have drunken brawls. One night two little boys walked in from the cold to one of the taverns. The men there were drunk. They grabbed one of the boys and threw him into the fire. The other ran out the door. The next morning the mother found him frozen along the fence. People used to see a little old woman with a white shawl over her head, and they thought it was the ghost of the mother looking for her boys.

There are many, many stories about "the ghost," but the ghost takes many different forms. Another story features Doc Cutler, who came from Dodgeville through "the Grove," as they called the woods, and "Frogtown," which is what they called the place where the miners lived. Doc whipped his horses to a fast gallop to get through there, but sometimes the ghost would get on the wagon with him. This was not the same old woman ghost looking for her boys. Doc thought this ghost liked the smell of blood. Melva expects that, as Irish, Welsh, and Norwegian people

came into the area, they brought their beliefs and superstitions with them. Some thought the ghost was a horse, a dog, a pig, an old lady: they saw the inexplicable in many forms. People probably exchanged stories when they stopped at Messersmith's for a bite to eat between Dodgeville and Blue Mounds. Some really believed the stories or believed in what they saw. Others liked to boast.

Some played pranks on others. One time somebody released a pig from a crate and replaced it with a big, black dog, while the owner was drinking. When he got home and opened up the crate to find a dog instead of a pig, he must have been pretty startled. One time a man looked up the railroad tracks and saw a light that was bobbing up and down on the railroad. Instead of a ghost, that turned out to be a kid with a lantern jumping up on the rail and down again. Another time, people heard sounds in a vacant house. It turned out that someone was stealing the boards out of the house.

Some say the ghost left on a cow catcher on the front of a train in 1881. Others say it disappeared with the fire of 1910. Probably some people think it's still there. The Ridgeway Ghost got the blame for a lot of things. Melva read me a poem she wrote about the ghost.

Melva was home the night the Barneveld Tornado struck. She said the storm came on both sides of the buildings of a neighbor's farm and through her back woods in two paths, but by the time it got to the bridge on the road, it went into one path. From there, it took every barn from here to Black Earth. Her house leaked in four places. When the wind was blowing so hard, she said she was going to go downstairs. But her husband wouldn't get up. He always knew that, if a storm came up, he was going to go with the mattress. It did rain, but the wind quit all of a sudden, just as she was about to go downstairs. Then it got still. She went outside to see if the barn was still there. "What would we do with 85 cows in the morning with no barn?" Melva realized she would not have been alone.



On up the valley, everybody's barn was gone. But her barn was still there.

She said that, when the storm hit, it was just like a bomb over the house. "Bang!" And the lights went out. It was around 1:00 a.m. When she got up in the morning, she went to check on the barn. She saw other houses up the road had lost roofs. Lights she thought she had seen by the barn were neighbors coming to check and see if their house was all right and turning around again. "We were right on the edge of it. The wind was terrific!" The first sound she remembers was a loud crash. She wasn't sure whether the sound was thunder or the power lines going down like dominoes.

Melva said she "only did six scrapbooks on the Barneveld Tornado." Once people found out she was doing this, everybody started funneling stuff to her. She made four books for the historical society and two for the Barneveld library. Within a few days of the tornado, Mrs. Thronson started feeding people in the town garage. A plea went out to churches to send food. Melva went up and helped a little, but that was later on. She had already put together her first scrapbook on the tornado, and set it on the table for people to see. One man came for lunch and looked at her scrapbook. He said he hadn't known all these things had happened. He had been too busy to look at the papers.

A relative of Melva's, Bob Arneson, was killed during the tornado. A wall fell on him when he got up to close a window. He lived on the first farm going into Barneveld. Mrs. Arneson lost everything: the house, the barn, the silos, her husband. She got sick later herself, probably from the insulation that was in everything she had to go through afterwards.

*Melva thought Barneveld rebuilt because people got together.*

Another neighbor had marks on her shoulder where a truck tire had gone over her shoulder. Fortunately she wasn't really hurt. Another couple got thrown out the window. The tornado exploded the window and threw them right out. Someone else Melva knew of, Al Wright, was driving the ambulance back from Madison to Barneveld and didn't know if his family was safe or not. The trauma caused by the tornado took a lot of years off all their lives in Barneveld. Now people panic when a storm comes up.

After you go through something like that, it kind of haunts you. When Melva was a kid, there was a lightning storm that hit the house and, specifically, the chimney. It blew the radio out. She ran to another place about three quarters of a mile away. Her dad came home and she was okay, but after that she was desperately afraid of lightening. When her kids were little, she would walk from one window to another, pacing like a lion in a cage, when there was a storm. Luckily nothing rubbed off on her kids and they are not particularly scared of storms. Now she can lie down in bed and it has to be a really bad storm before she'll get up, but she understands how the people who lived in Barneveld when the tornado came through must feel.

Melva remembers that she had been in Barneveld that very afternoon before the tornado struck. Women were busy planting flowers in the tulip gardens along the road. The new owner of the feed mill was planning an open house the following week, and people were getting ready for that too. It was a really humid, hot day. Melva found herself thinking what a nice little town Barneveld was. The next morning it was a real mess. But the people stuck together. That's why they built the town back the way they did; they were a town that faced disaster together. The people didn't have much left. A lot of people threw away appliances. Melva doesn't know what was covered by insurance or not. It was probably fortunate that the electrical power went off, as it would have been really dangerous with all

those live wires lying around. There was only one business left in town: International Harvester. Everything else was gone or damaged. Most of them, the bank and the tavern, moved into trailer houses. The post office went into someone's garage. Melva took a lot of photos to document the rebuilding of the town.

Amish Mennonites came to help. They built a barn for one man. When he asked them how much he owed them, they said, "Nothing. You just go back and help someone else who needs help." You might have seen a mother, a father, and maybe three kids helping together. Everybody would grab a pail and walked through the fields picking up litter. There were boards, nails, insulation, pictures, anything that could have blown out of the houses. She saw a heavy baler on the other side of the road and thinks the tornado put it there. The wind drove bits of insulation into the tractors. That insulation was bad stuff; people shouldn't have been breathing it. As for cars, the storm just tossed them around and smashed them up. The tornado took out a lot of old trees too. But people planted new ones and Barneveld now has a new growth of trees. People came "out of the woodwork" to help. They built back the town and the barns, and they have been building ever since. The town is still growing.

When I asked about people who have impacted the land, Melva said, "The farmers have tried to take care of the land. They know that they aren't going to make any more land. The soil is not too deep here anyway. If too much washes away, we'll be sitting here on rock." She went on to say that some have planted trees and she thinks that's great too; "we probably need that." She thinks it's horrible when, out West, they go up on the mountain and cut all the trees. They should leave some of the trees. She would hate to see that happen here. She thinks it's a nice thing about this part of the country that "here we've got a lot of trees."

Her brother-in-law has some prairie, so he gathered prairie seeds and gave her quite a bit. At the time of the

interview she had not planted them. She planned to make the yard bigger and put some of it in prairie. She wants to get the seeds out there. But everybody's busy and she has had some health issues (a bad knee and some blood clots in her leg last fall) that make gardening hard for her. Besides, he said to plant the prairie in the fall.

*"The farmers have tried to take care of the land. They know that they aren't going to make any more land."*

Of the farmers that are left, she said, "A lot of us are older." But the prices are so bad there's no profit in farming. Her sons who farm the land have full-time work other places now. Her husband worked just on the farm. She stayed on the land after her husband died, though she knows she doesn't need nine rooms in a house. Her husband had cancer, strokes, diabetes, and a heart attack, but he kept a driver's license to drive within a radius of 15 miles. He'd go over to his son's and drive the tractor – he loved that! He thrived on work. He didn't have to go to a nursing home.

The land hasn't changed much. But now you don't see the big herds of cows you used to see and there will be fewer barns because people can't take care of them. The small cheese factories and schoolhouses are gone. Probably there are more fields. When they worked with horses, farmers probably didn't plow as much. Now, machinery plows up the bottomland that used to be used for pasture.

To convince others to maintain the rural aspect of the Military Ridge area, Melva suggests "smart growth" and zoning commissions.



## William Joseph Lehner

*Born: July 18, 1928*

One Saturday at the Dane County Farmers' Market, I asked Will Lehner of Bleu Mont Cheese if I could interview him about cheese making in the Military Ridge area. Will suggested I talk to his father instead. Thus, I came to visit Billi Lehner, or "Wild Bill" as he says he has been called, in his home in Monroe.

Billi came from Switzerland to North America in 1951. He had to shovel coal for two weeks to pay for his passage. The ship got stuck in a storm and Billi was sick for days, and thus unable to shovel coal. The captain told Billi he'd "make good whale bait" if he threw him overboard. That was his way of making the point that Billi wasn't being very useful while he was so sick. Billi left Europe from Le Havre, France, and came to Quebec, Canada. He could speak French then, though he said he had forgotten most of it by the time of the interview. He could also speak Swiss and German, and now he has added English to his repertory. He spent two and a half years working in Canada because he had no money to come to the United States. He had to work on the land, so they put him on a farm with Amish people in Ontario. Billi considers the Amish and Mennonite people the most trustworthy people on earth. They are honest and they lead simple and good lives. They don't pollute the environment either according to Billi. Some of the Amish farmers in the United States are some of the richest farmers around, but they don't have a hundred-thousand dollar tractor. They have but three horses to pull the plow.

Billi was a cheese-maker who had learned cheese-making through four years of working as an apprentice in the mountains in Switzerland. His first year, he milked cows and goats. It's important that apprentice cheese-makers learn where milk comes from. He worked in three different cheese factories. In the summertime, he went into the mountains and made cheese on an open fire, as is still done today. The cows grazed in the pasture with green grass and alpine flowers.

"There's no way you can match that. It has to be in the Alps – close to heaven. That cheese is out of this world!"

In 1953, Billi came to the United States. From Canada, he went to New York City first. He was a country boy and he didn't like the big city, so he soon left New York. Back in school he had learned that Wisconsin is America's Dairyland. So, he headed here.

He had a panel truck that he slept in. That truck was his whole house and livelihood. No sooner had he come to Monroe than he turned on a radio and heard there was a "cheese opening" in the Mount Horeb/Barneveld area. The next day he was hired up there. In that cheese factory, he and his boss made eight wheels of cheese a day. This was an unusual amount of work; in Switzerland, he had only made two or three wheels a day. Not only that, but in Switzerland the cheese factory had already been automated, whereas in Wisconsin they made all the cheese by hand. They had to wash the cheese once a week and lift it by hand, and that's just one man's job. "You have to be a little sick in the head to do that much work because it's mostly back work." It takes 3,000 pounds of milk to make one wheel of cheese. A wheel weighs 200 pounds and is about two and a half feet in diameter.



*Billi was proud of his Swiss heritage, having come to the area from Switzerland in 1951.*

S. GILCHRIST

## Views of the Ridge



DNRF/FILE

Since it takes so much milk to make a wheel of cheese, the quality is in the milk, not the cheese-maker. You need milk that has come from cows that went out and ate grass, got exercise, and stayed healthy. “This is the only way you can make Swiss cheese!”

There used to be a cheese factory within about three miles of each farm throughout the area. Every factory depended on about 15 farmers to provide milk to make the cheese. Every farm made cheese. They made cheese together, as families. Now we’re leading way too fast a life, and Billi doesn’t know where this fast living has come from. “Maybe from the university,” he suggested. Now it’s “a rat race;” now there’s competition. Now there is just one cheese factory left in Wisconsin that makes good Swiss cheese, and that’s in Platteville. You need the special milk to make that cheese. Most people call the new ways “progress,” but Billi calls them “backward.” He says the problem is that we are “over-schooled and under-nourished.”

To make a wheel of cheese, you start by putting the milk in a copper kettle. Copper lifts the heat slower; stainless steel gets too hot and burns the milk. You add starter, whey from the day before. You have to smell it and taste it to know how much – it takes time to get the feel of it. A 200-pound wheel needs about two quarts of starter in 3,000 pounds of milk. You put the starter in the milk for about a half hour. The bacteria take off. You heat it to about 90 or 95 degrees; then add rennet to coagulate the milk. In a half hour, it’s thick enough to cut in little bitty cubes. Now you’ve got little cubes of curd that swim freely in the whey. Heat it to about 125 degrees and then “stir the cheese out.” When it is ready, you can squeeze the curd in your hand and it will break. That’s all “feeling.” It takes time to learn this. “You don’t learn this at school, but from a cheese-maker, as an apprentice.” You use a big cheese cloth with a metal “Berkely,” a cheese rim, around it. You have to be particular and pick it up exactly the way the milk settles in the cheese cloth, or

you could get bad cheese on one side. Then it goes in the big cheese hoop where you press it for ten minutes, then turn it. Part of the whey releases itself; the rest is curd. That’s the start of the wheel.

But four to six months more must pass before you can happily eat that cheese. There is a lot of work involved in making cheese, and good luck too. It can take four to seven weeks before you know what you have in your cellar, whether you have good quality cheese or not. The difference between the value of good or bad cheese could be 60 to 90 cents a pound or 60 to 90 dollars a wheel. You take that risk. You might have a cellar with 200 to 300 wheels in it, and they turn bad, full of pinholes: “grinders” (poor cheese). If you don’t make good cheese, you can’t pay the farmers well. They quit bringing milk to you or quit farming; they go somewhere else.

Cheese-making is a risky business and it can be very stressful. Billi had two friends who succumbed to this situation. They took their own lives because they couldn’t take the stress. In one case, there was a family up in the house with little kids, and the old man dead in the cheese cellar because he couldn’t take it. He came from Switzerland and made Swiss cheese down in the Mineral Point area. He had four or five kids, aged 6 to 12 or 13. When the farmers fed the cows silage, he couldn’t switch over to make different kinds of cheese because he couldn’t buy the different equipment. So he kept making Swiss cheese – grinders. When he went under, he couldn’t pay the farmers for the milk, so they left him and went elsewhere. Before they closed the factory – BOOM – he shot himself. He couldn’t take the pressure. This stress is one reason why some Swiss cheese makers drink too according to Billi. Some drink themselves under the table and die from that.

In the 1950s it wasn’t so bad, but in the 60s they fed the cows silage all the time. The silage was like a poison for the milk. The bacteria for making Swiss cheese don’t do well in that environment; they die off in the

To make good Swiss cheese, you need milk from cows that went out and ate grass, got exercise, and stayed healthy.

milk, and they don't make the cheese. The cheese-maker gets grinders. A lot of the cheese-makers didn't know what was wrong. They kept on going, making more cheese that didn't turn out well. They went broke and the factories closed. It used to be that they could still make fairly good cheese in the summer, because the cows were only fed silage in the winter. Then dairy farmers started feeding the cows silage in the summer too. The silage was a lower quality than it is today; you could smell that silage from miles away. It was just no good, at least for making Swiss cheese from the milk. Dairy farms started making more money because they got more milk output, but the increase in silage feeding signaled the end of the cheese factories. When they could no longer make Swiss cheese, the cheese-makers could either switch to making a soft type cheese or close the factory. Now farmers get 50 to 90 pounds of milk out of a cow, but the cows get burned up in five years. It takes two years before the cow lactates and "comes in" as a heifer, so that means three years of lactation and the cow is done. "They call that progress!" But in Switzerland it's still eight to 10 years – the cow has a longer life span there than in this country.

Billi made cheese as the manager for Ryser in Mount Horeb. They made wheels and soft cheeses like cheddar, Muenster, caraway, Edam, and brick. They made about 20 kinds of cheeses there, until they finally went broke too. It was a big factory; about 20 people worked there and around 100 farmers delivered milk there. The milk was delivered in big cans. There would be a whole line of farmers waiting to drop off their milk. They made the cheese right there the same day, every day. You had to make the cheese when the milk was warm, not cooled down.

If he had his life to do over, Billi said he would not make cheese. "There's no freedom. You work every day." Sometimes he started an extra hour earlier to have an hour with the family. Billi had six kids and he felt as though he was never home. He worked long

hours, 13-14 hours a day, seven days a week. He made about \$225 a month in the 1950s; the rent was \$25. It was all hand work; he was still lifting the cheese by hand. There were no vacations.

Life was entirely different than it is today. The work ethic was enormous. Today, a normal person couldn't physically do the work in a cheese factory the way Billi did. You had to be in good condition. It was "the little guys from Switzerland" who were "tough like rocks." "It was pounded into our heads to do it and we did it. We didn't know any different." He washed 200 cheeses a day. He lifted each cheese and put it back on the shelf twice a day. Billi said this added up to lifting 75 to 85 tons of cheese a day. He could earn an extra \$100 a month if he did it all himself. But you have to know how to do that. He never had any serious accidents – if a cheese fell down, he got out of the way. Now he says life is too short to spend doing nothing but working; but he didn't know any better then.

Billi never had any other kind of work in Wisconsin; it was all cheese-making. But if he had it to do over, he would farm rather than work in a cheese factory. He would have goats – he likes them. He would produce the goat milk, make cheese, and sell it. He would not have a separate middle man, so he would make the money himself. He would sell the cheese at the farmer's market. He would make a good living that way with 20 cows.

Five years prior to the interview, Billi drove to Florida. Along the way, in Alabama, he saw a sign on the highway advertising "cheese for sale", so he drove in. The man and his wife made cheese there, with 25 cows, 18 of which they milked. They sold the cheese for \$7.00 a pound. Billi helped the man make cheese one day there. The farmers there got \$70 for a hundred pounds of milk, whereas our farmers in Wisconsin got \$10. That farmer grossed \$160,000 from 25 cows; he cleared \$100,000 a year on that. He made special cheese; it was aged. Here the farmers don't get as much money for the milk or the cheese-maker for his cheese.

## Views of the Ridge

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Making cheese was hard work.  
You had to be in good condition and  
"tough like rocks."

But if you sell the cheese directly to the public yourself, you can make more money. Most cheese averages at \$4.00 to \$8.00 a pound in the store.

In the 1960s the factory began making rindless cheese, and then the cheese didn't have to be washed any more. It was square cheese then. People didn't know the difference; they had forgotten what cheese was supposed to taste like. Billi likes flavor in his cheese. His favorite is two-year old aged Swiss. "Most people don't like it. It's too sharp for them." But he doesn't like cheese that is made and sold right away. Swiss cheese is the hardest cheese to make. You can't put enzymes into it; they've got to be in the milk.

Billi explained that cheese started with camels. When someone cut the stomach of a camel calf, the milk was coagulated in that pouch. There was an enzyme in the camel's stomach. They let the liquid run out and kept the curd. There is only one factory in the United States that Billi knows of that still uses rennet to coagulate the milk, the Limburger factory, and that one is near Monroe. It's costly to make cheese that way, for real good quality, but Billi buys cheese there.

Billi worked at Ryser for 21 years. Then he fell in love with a young woman. He also tired of managing people. It was hard to hire good help when the pay wasn't very much and it was such a long day. He got tired of working every single day. So he went to Valley View, a little cheese factory in South Wayne, about a half hour west of Monroe. Billi's son works there now. That factory still makes cheese today, though the style of cheese is different: brick, Muenster, farmer, Edam, Gouda – low fat cheeses, about 10 different kinds.

For a while, Billi worked in the Barneveld Cheese Factory, on Highway 18/151. That factory doesn't exist anymore. But it wasn't silage that wiped that factory off the map, it was the Barneveld Tornado. Billi lived in Mount Horeb at that time, in a little three-bedroom home on the prairie. As he got a little money, he built

a chalet in back, with 10 acres of land. That's where he raised most of his kids. Billi was in Mount Horeb when the tornado hit Barneveld. He heard about it on the radio that morning. He tried to go down there, but they wouldn't let him in. They were trying to keep looters out. He sneaked in anyway. The house he had lived in was flat. "Strange how that happens, how Mother Nature works." The storm created an unusual vacuum that sucked people right out of their bedrooms. People went to bed in the bedroom and woke up out in the yard, just a few hours later, only to discover that the house wasn't there anymore. In Ontario once Billi said the wind picked up a man with horses and a plow. It sucked them right up and set them down two miles further on, and the man was still walking. After the tornado in Barneveld, the water tower was still standing. Billi noticed a little piece of flexible straw that was stuck into a fence post, like a needle. There was an unusual force of wind that could do that. It had been about 10 years since Billi had worked there, but the Barneveld Cheese Factory was gone. It was leveled.

Billi thinks it's pretty low to steal from people who were hurt by the storm. He can't understand the looters. People are not as close to one another as they used to be. People needed each other and helped each other more in the past than they do now. Now people are isolated; they don't know their neighbors. People have the attitude that "we don't need each other; I can make it on my own." Billi doesn't call this a good life. Humans should depend on each other more. It used to be that 15 or 20 farmers worked with one cheese maker, and he made cheese for them. In the winter they dried the cows out, but he helped cut wood for winter. Farmers helped each other harvesting hay. Several farmers owned one harvester machine and they helped each other.

Billi said he always preferred to have his children in the cheese factory than running around chasing some ball all day. He paid them a little money, but they had to

*Both Bill's sons, Will (shown here) and Jimmy, are cheesemakers.*

work for it. By the time they left high school, each of them had saved \$8,000 to \$9,000. He took that money and bought a 40-unit apartment complex for them, and the kids made the payments. Everything was a lot cheaper 30 years ago.

Also, Billi sent all the kids to Switzerland to see how people live happily with less. One son, Hans, spent two years there; Will spent five. They learned the language so they could all speak Swiss, and they worked on the farm and in factories. Billi says that's the best education you can get.

Will and Jimmy, Billi's son and son-in-law, both learned to make cheese in Mount Horeb. When the previous owner went broke, Billi bought another cheese factory: Chula Vista. His son-in-law, Jimmy Meives, worked there, and Billi's daughter, Maryanne is associated with that factory. Will's cheese is called "Bleu Mont" cheese. I have purchased both Chula Vista and Bleu Mont cheese at the Dane County Farmer's Market, and, even before I met Billi, their cheeses were my favorites. Billi feels good about the fact that some of his kids (Hans, Will, Jimmy, and Maryanne) make cheese.

Most of the cheeses produced now are Mexican cheeses, melting cheeses for tortillas, etc. A factory with about 30 employees produces about 40 pounds of cheese a day. Billi figures there are more Mexican people in Wisconsin and the United States than there used to be, and that they eat a lot of cheese. He says the \$7.00 to \$8.00 an hour they can earn here is generally better than the wages they would earn in Mexico. Mount Horeb still maintains its Norwegian character, but in places where there is more industry, Billi expects there will be larger immigrant populations. You can market a lot of cheese (30,000 to 40,000 pounds of cheese) in the Chicago area. "If you can establish a market for your cheese, you've got it made."

Although Billi could take no vacations when he was young, since he was working all the time, he has since



traveled "all the lands in the world." He's been to Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Switzerland, and he visited cheese factories in each of these places. He saw cheese that has never been touched by human hands. The little factories in Switzerland are still working and they are fully automated. The little factories there are subsidized by the government. Billi says the banks in Switzerland are the richest in the world. The little factories there are gorgeous, with stainless steel everything, and the cheese turns itself.

When I asked about Billi's memories of wildlife, he promptly replied that he is neither a hunter nor a fisherman. Besides rats and cats, he sees quite a lot of pheasants, but he doesn't shoot them. Same with white-tailed deer. "They are beautiful animals." He says he's too softhearted, though he does eat the meat if someone gives it to him. He asked about chronic wasting disease and whether it was all taken care of yet, with a reference to the large deer herd and the presence of the disease around Barneveld. "We're still working on it," I said.

When I showed Billi a picture of a prairie chicken, he didn't claim to be a birder, but asked me what it is. He said it looked "cute," like it "must be in love." I explained that the bird in the picture was a male with his orange air sacs puffed out, probably dancing in an effort to attract a seemingly indifferent mate. He said he thought he had seen prairie chickens between Barneveld and Mineral Point in the 1950s. "They have some good environments for them up there, where they can hide."

In response to the picture of a badger, Billi noted the stripe and told me about a skunk encounter. When he came to this country, he didn't know what a skunk looked like. He was working up in Ontario, on a farm

There were 1,500 cheese factories in Green and Dane counties in the 1950s, but now there are only 25 or 30.

with the Amish. He saw a little animal in the field, and it ran away. But he got closer and closer. He tried to pick it up. Pretty soon, "Boom!" It got him! They don't miss. When he went home to the farm, they washed him with ketchup. That was his first experience with a skunk.

Billi asked if the fire or "burn" in another photograph was purposeful. He said he had probably seen purposeful burns in the 1960s. He thought the Indians used to do burns too, longer ago than that, and I agreed with him that they probably did.

Wildflowers appeal to Billi. He likes seeing them along the roadsides. As he is particularly fond of goats, he would like to see some of them amidst the wildflowers. He says we spend too much money on mowing grass, when wildflowers would just come up every year. At the same time, he understands that sometimes the strips along the road have to be mowed so drivers can see.

Now use of fertilizers should be controlled, he proposed. Nitrates go into the streams and lakes and affect the water system. We're paying very dearly for our green lawns. Billi thinks we should be developing a more organic fertilizer. "Farmers can't even drink their own water! That should be stopped before that happens!" Still, overall, Billi considers the management of the land to be better than it used to be, now that there is crop rotation and contour stripping on the hills. "It is a beautiful area... A gorgeous area!"

Since the 1950s, when he first came to the area, the population has increased, and the political balance has changed as well. The little towns have demonstrated a lot of growth. The water and sewer systems seem to be under control, and the run-off could be considered under control if the farms don't get too big. We've got to be stricter in regard to those big operations. There are some that have 300 to 400 cows. Billi said one farmer has 3,000 cows. Billi doesn't like the big operations much. In another 10 to 15 years, there will probably be

no farmers left. Every day we lose three farmers. That's over a thousand farmers a year. The farmer goes broke, can't keep up the buildings, sells the land to a person with money, and quits farming. Billi would like to see it more like the way he understands things to be in Norway: the guy who buys the land works the land. He doesn't buy the land and get paid by the government to let it lie there. Ultimately, in many cases, the farmer is put into a situation he doesn't even like himself.

The government has helped in the last few years, with incentives for keeping the land rural. But the farmer needs to get profit for whatever he plants so he can stay on the land, and this has not been so for a couple of years. Most of the money goes to the big farms. Most of the land gets paid off by the rich men and then they can get put on the programs so the government pays them not to work the land. Or the land is turned into a huge farm operation. The big money-makers buy the farm for a tax write-off; they don't even want to make money. The basis of competition should be the "little guy" who makes a living from farming. Those laws are generally made in Washington, far from the rolling hills of the Military Ridge area.

Farmers need a decent price for whatever they produce. We have problems with over-production which leads to a depressed market. We shouldn't force the land and the cow. If the cow produced less milk, the farmer would get a little more money for the milk. When farmers force the cow and the land to be more productive, they get less for their goods when they sell them. Smaller farms are disappearing.

When I asked what could be done to help, he replied, "Shut off most universities!" We don't need to use all those resources! We need organic fertilizers, windmills, water wheels – we don't need all that gas and oil from the Middle East!

Billi says, though we have more today, we lived a simpler, healthier life when he was young. "People don't

*Top: Billi played a lively tune on his “special” accordion, punctuating the tune with whoops and yodels.*

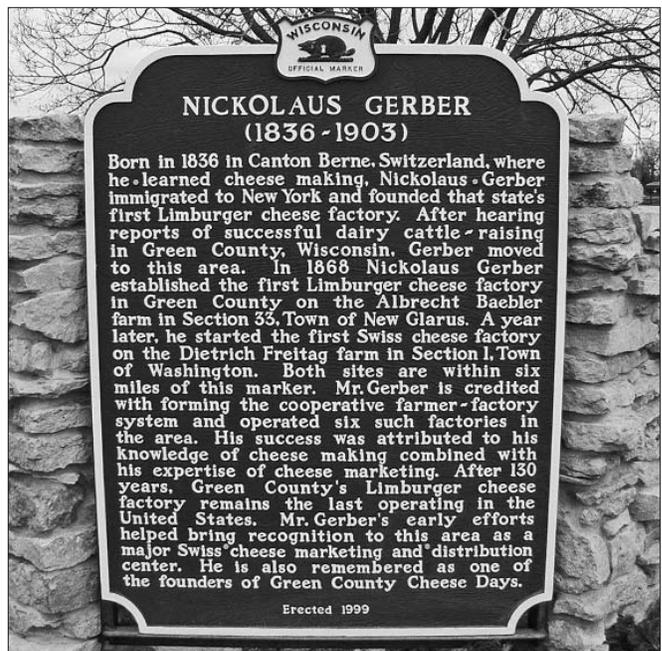
*Bottom: Billi settled in the “best cheese-making region in the world” so he could “make himself worthwhile.”*

even know how to feed themselves” and 40 percent of the people are overweight. He says his brother is a university professor who talks about ecology. He showers twice a day. He takes these showers because he runs. He runs instead of working to get exercise. Billi thinks this is not really ecological. And, “he calls himself educated!” Billi says he got the least education of his siblings, but he’s financially better off than they are. He likes to rub that in, of course. He lives the simple life. “If you have the spirit to work in America, you can make it.”

In the future, Billi would like to see the landscape similar to what it is now. He doesn’t want to see too much selling of the land for the building of big homes. He thinks we could be tougher on building permits. He would like to see us leave the land alone, leave most of it for Mother Nature. Yet he understands that often the only way a farmer can make some money is to sell the land and that people have to live some place. He understands that there are more and more of us, but he reiterates that we don’t have to put up such huge houses.

When I asked Billi what he values most about the area, he explained that Swiss people settled around New Glarus in approximately 1845, because the rolling hills reminded them of their fatherland. He came to the area because of the cheese-making. He figured he could settle here and make himself worthwhile. It was the best cheese-making region in the world! Then all that changed. There are no cheese factories active in Mount Horeb now, though there are a few in Monroe. Where there were once 1,500 cheese factories in Green and Dane counties in the 1950s, there are now only 25 or 30. But the land is still gorgeous for its rolling hills.

When I completed the interview, I asked Billi if I could take his picture. He agreed, but excused himself for a minute. He reappeared wearing a short, Swiss-style jacket and velvety black cap. He sat down and played me a lively tune on a bright red accordion. He punctuated the tune with whoops and yodels. He says



PHOTOS: S. GILCHRIST

he goes dancing every Sunday afternoon – he does the waltz, polka, and other dances. He sent me home with a sample of some excellent cheeses just to be sure I knew the taste of good, aged cheese.

It was only much later that Mary, Billi’s daughter, who was selling cheese at the Dane County Farmers’ Market, told me that Billi doesn’t actually play the accordion. His accordion is special—it hides a tape that plays for him. This means that he can’t take requests, play the tunes in any other order, and he can’t play any other instrument. She said someone played a trick on him one time and switched the tape for something that would never come out of an accordion and Billi was caught red-handed. Everyone laughed. And, as I completed my tour of the farmers’ market, I too was sporting a big, cheesy grin.



## **LeRoy Francis Underwood**

*Born: March 24, 1921*

## **Mary Louise (Fosshage) Underwood**

*Born: July 13, 1926*

I interviewed LeRoy and Mary Lou at Ingleside Manor, the nursing home in Mount Horeb. But the farm they spoke of was in the Blue Mounds area. LeRoy spoke quietly, in a rough, breathy voice that conveyed that he wanted to be heard. The interview was interrupted several times by health care staff, but everyone was jovial and pleasant.

LeRoy said he grew up just north of the Military Ridge area, in the Town of Vermont. Mary Lou grew up in Mount Horeb. The farm they referred to had belonged to Mary Lou's great grandparents. LeRoy took over the farm around 1963. The farm had been rental property and it looked kind of rough then. The tenants had just scratched up what land they could to grow something. LeRoy tried to get all of the land in production as best he could. He tore up a lot of the alfalfa so he could raise corn one year and then grain and alfalfa again. After two, three, or four years, he put the corn back in, introducing a system of rotating crops. There were about 310 acres on the farm. The farm is no longer in operation, but remains in the family. Farming changed in the area. The norm changed from family farms to big farm operations. LeRoy sold off 100 acres from another farm he purchased, but the original farm is still there.

The farm had some natural prairie. Mary Lou said there were about 10 acres of natural prairie that were never plowed. LeRoy said there was so much land to work, and the back part, farther away to begin with, was stony, steep, and hard, with plum trees growing there, so it was just never plowed. The Prairie Enthusiasts are managing that prairie now. Some endangered species, insects and flowers, were found there. "There are beautiful flowers back there!"

The Prairie Enthusiasts also manage the prairie burns for him; he never burned on purpose. But the grass caught on fire a couple of times from sparks behind the tractor and the fire department came to put the fire

out twice. When this happened, he was usually doing spring work of some kind, and the tractor was running at a "fever pitch." "It was wide open, bellowing pretty good." In those days, the tractor didn't have an upright exhaust. Twenty feet behind the tractor, he'd see a little smoke and realize he had to stop and go stomp the fire out. It didn't take too long until he changed the exhaust pipe.

LeRoy considered himself lucky to have started out farming in strips, "right off the bat." This contour farming that reflects the lay of the land holds the soil better. "A lot of farmers are doing that now; there was a lot of erosion before."

LeRoy said he planted a lot of walnut and red oak trees on the original farm when he put it into CRP around 1984. A lot of the trees grew. Some of them are 20 to 30 feet high now. There are smaller trees he's planted since then too. It was being broke that helped him decide to go into CRP. He may have found out about the program first through the paper, but then he talked to his neighbors and realized what everybody was doing. Quite a few neighbors were doing CRP too, and he couldn't keep going the way he was, so he joined the program. He wishes CRP had come along a lot sooner. He was always pretty strong, but he has health problems now. He wishes he could have retired from farming sooner because you "abuse yourself" too much farming.

Mary Lou and LeRoy have four children. The kids lived in Mount Horeb when they were growing up, so they could go to school there. But they used the farm a lot and helped LeRoy when they could. All four still live in the area, but none is a farmer. "They looked at me and listened to me," LeRoy explained, "and they decided that's something they don't want. I had a lot of help from some of them. But I didn't want them to be caught up in that vicious cycle just to break even." For a farmer there is just no let-up – you can't go anywhere. He advised the kids against farming, and they

*Farming used to be done on a smaller basis. Now, LeRoy wonders if all the big tractors are going to tear up the whole countryside.*

took his advice. A farm is a good place for kids to grow up, but there's no money in it.

The only thing LeRoy knew was to work, and there were always so many things to be done that he was always behind. Some of the old-timers came and helped him scramble to get the crops in. "They'd work their tails off." One fellow, Olaf Olson, worked until he was so tired he would shake. The hardest work was probably taking care of the fences. Sometimes they'd break and the phone might ring at midnight from a neighbor looking for his livestock or finding some of yours. More than once, LeRoy chased some cattle that had escaped the fence only to find out, when he shone a flashlight on them up closer, that they weren't his. He'd just put those loose cows in someone's field rather than call to wake the people up. It was better, at least, to get the cows off the highway.

*LeRoy advised his children against farming because he "didn't want them to be caught up in that vicious cycle just to break even."*

Farming used to be done on a smaller basis. Now, with all the big tractors and other equipment, you wonder if they're going to tear up the whole countryside. Those who are milking have a lot of cows now, as many as about 20 farmers used to have totaled among them. LeRoy had about 130 head of cattle, but only about 46 were milk cows. He was always trading a poor cow and trying to replace her with a good one. That's what you call gambling! But he always checked the cows carefully before he bought one.



*LeRoy planted a lot of walnut and red oak trees when he put his land in CRP.*

LeRoy used milking machines when he was milking cows. Pretty much everyone in that area did by 1960. "Cows weren't used to someone yanking their teats." One night a storm knocked out the electricity and LeRoy tried to finish the milking by hand. After about three cows, the electricity came back on, and he was glad of it. The cows had kicked and mauled him; they didn't like the hand milking any more than he did. Accustomed to the machines, they seemed to consider hand milking "rough treatment."

LeRoy deposited the milk in a bulk tank and someone from the Pure Milk Company delivered it to a dairy. He never followed the process beyond that, but Mary Lou said the dairy in Mount Horeb didn't make cheese or butter, just powdered milk. Eventually the milk from LeRoy's cows was probably delivered to Madison.

In the summertime, he put the cows out on the 100-acre farm to graze. He fed them a little bit, just to be sure to keep some fat on their ribs, but mostly they had to graze for themselves. Today, with all the big farmers, there are too many cattle for pasture. The grass is worn down to the ground where the cattle are. Some places even have the entire barnyard paved. LeRoy figures the farmers may do a better job of feeding the cows now, as they are so conscious of what they get from each cow, how much milk each cow produces.



*Mary Lou urged LeRoy to tell about badgers and “all the broken axels!”*

“You don’t see cows grazing the way you used to,” LeRoy observed, but that’s not all. Fifty years before the interview you might have seen old horses out grazing too. If you see them now, you know “it’s just an old keepsake” from when farmers used them for work. Now you don’t see any horse stalls in the barns either. Farmers put the hay in huge bales now. Square bales could be put in the barn, but you had to handle them. He’d stack up big bales and leave them in an area where the cows could eat them all winter.

One way, LeRoy pointed out, in which times have changed in the Military Ridge area is that there are fewer farmers and more white-tailed deer than there were 20-some years before the interview. There have been other wildlife viewing changes too.

Mary Lou urged: “Tell about those badgers and all the broken axels!” LeRoy commenced explaining. About 20 years previous to the interview, LeRoy used to see badgers on the farm. They ripped up the fields looking for grubs. They dug up huge areas! LeRoy didn’t fill in the holes; he tried to avoid them. But when a tractor wheel went in one of the holes, the axel sometimes broke. When a tractor axel broke, LeRoy’s response was immediate and vehement: he let loose with a lot of “cussing.” According to LeRoy, a broken tractor axel gave you the “right to cuss!”

One time LeRoy stopped along the road. He was trying to harass a badger, using choice words and lunging at him. The badger would “kind of spit and make a noise to warn you off.” Most people left badgers alone. “They had horrible claws on them – it’d be like tackling a bear!”

Not having been down to that part of the farm in recent years, LeRoy doesn’t know for sure whether there are any badgers to be seen. It might be, he figures, that the grubs and stuff they like to eat are less available. He used to use natural fertilizers: manure. Then, more recently, he added chemicals. He didn’t

completely switch fertilizers, but he did add chemical fertilizers that he thought might affect the grubs.

LeRoy farmed with horses in the Town of Vermont, “over the hill a piece and down by Black Earth.” When he was first out of the Service in World War II and got back to work, he began farming with a tractor. His (then future) wife and her mother had a farm they were going to sell for only about \$25,000, and he thought that was crazy, so, he said, “I stuck my nose in there.” He told them, “Don’t sell it. I’ll go down and run it.” He was young then, just back from three years in the Marines; he thought he could whip the world! He returned to Vermont because that was his home area; his mother was still there. Then he met Mary Lou and fell in love.

When LeRoy first returned from the Service, he was building bridges and anything anywhere east of the Mississippi. He made good money, but he came home to see his mother. At that time, Mary Lou was married to a fellow who got killed coming home from work. Then LeRoy met her. Mary Lou’s sister and LeRoy’s brother were already married to each other and he wound up over there for supper one night and was invited to join them at a football game. That’s how he met Mary Lou. LeRoy called it “fatal attraction,” but maybe what he meant was “love at first sight.” He said, “No, I don’t regret it.” He was just sorry he “couldn’t a done better.” Economically, he said, “That sure was a scramble.” He really had to struggle. Everything was associated with money and he was always behind. He always had to do the work first, so he never had a sense of having a great time.

In 1986, LeRoy stopped the dairy business. He had an auction, and on the day of the auction, he just quit. He came up to Mary Lou and told her he was quitting. He didn’t ask for her input; he just told her he was done. Mary Lou said she was glad for his sake. The dairy business “hadn’t been a money-making proposition for many years.”

Still, there is definitely something LeRoy valued about his chosen lifestyle and the place he chose to be. "I can see it now, with the world in turmoil, that this is a very secure place, because for anyone to get in here and upset the applecart will take some doing, so it feels safer." He compared the area to New York City, where you have more of a mix of people and you are "kind of walking on pins and needles." (This interview was conducted in the spring of 2004, with the terrorism of September 11, 2001, still an open wound.)

Like most of the people in the Military Ridge area, LeRoy and Mary Lou endured some severe storms. A tornado came up the valley just off the fence line and "raised heck with the silos" on another farm there. The storm came with a big bunch of rain, wind, and darkness, so "you knew it was trouble." That storm didn't hurt LeRoy's place at all, but another one did some storm damage. When he got up in the morning, he saw the roof was gone from the addition on the back of the barn, which was intended as a place for the cows to get out of the rain. It had been blown off with the heavy wind. LeRoy didn't know if it was actually a tornado, but it definitely was a strong wind.

When the Barneveld Tornado hit, LeRoy was "uptown." But a man who was helping him was there getting ready to milk in the morning. "He could hear that thing!" He reported to LeRoy that there was wind and it hit Barneveld. "That was as close as we got." But LeRoy listened to blow-by-blow reports of the tornado on the radio. He believed there were eight people killed. He went over later in the day to see what had happened, but was discouraged by a lot of authority figures who were there because, "as usual, idiots were trying to see what they could get away with." He only got to the outskirts of Barneveld. He went home, as there was nothing he could do and the people there already had lots of help.

LeRoy would like to see the land kept in farming; not big farms, but something the kids could enjoy, a place

LeRoy felt the  
Military Ridge area  
"is a very secure place,  
because for anyone  
to get in here and  
upset the applecart  
will take some doing..."

for families to raise their kids. Now, LeRoy observed, "kids get in a van and tear off to town." It's not such a good life, day after day. He thinks it's good to "stop and see where you're at."

What do landowners need to enable or inspire them to keep the land open, in farm fields or prairies? LeRoy was clear that there has to be enough compensation for a man, but "how they're going to do this, I don't know." At age 83, LeRoy had already sold the farm to his son. "The price of everything goes up around a man, and then he slowly sinks into the ground; he plummets." LeRoy would like to see the farm kept going so the grandkids could enjoy it. Some of the younger generation do not have any idea now, but in another 20 years, they will wish they'd kept on. "There are a lot of greedy people that have to have everything. They'll buy up 50,000 acres around here and just turn it into dough because people are looking for land. The price keeps going up and they will sell it off piece-meal." LeRoy didn't think this was right because "soon you'll have a bunch of people just barely eeking out a living – poor people allowed to make just enough to eat, but that's all." LeRoy had no ready answer as to how to prevent this from happening, because individuals are different and, as the saying goes, "one size does not fit all." A program that might help one farmer

## Views of the Ridge

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keep his land wouldn't necessarily work for another. He hoped that whatever he's done has made it a better place to live.

LeRoy believed he did some good in his three years in the Marines. "That was no exercise in futility because we stopped the Japanese." LeRoy was stationed in the South Pacific. He fought in Okinawa and was even in China for 10 months. The poor Chinese people were busy fighting. There were farms there, but they were farming on a very small scale. They didn't have any big machinery; they were lucky to have a water buffalo. It was a big difference to come back here, to Wisconsin, in 1946. You could see the trend towards bigger farms already. "Farms were starting to go big time."

In the Service, it was pretty rough. He was an automatic rifleman "so it was all about killing." He took a heavy breath when he said that. He said he wondered why he was alive. "You think 'How come?' and you don't have an answer."

Following World War II, a lot of returning soldiers landed on home farms, but often, if they had been involved in active fighting, they took to drinking whiskey. "That was the pill you could take. There was so much going on, you just couldn't shake it off." Some of

them – their dads needed them. So they tried farming, but they were confused, and after a few months, they met a girl and got married. That had a lot to do with it. But he didn't get married until later. He didn't know what he wanted. He worked construction between the war and the farm. He should have stayed there because he made good money, but he'd grown up on the farm.

Farming was different from when he grew up when he started in 1961. When he left for the war, it was all hand milking, but when he started farming, there were milking machines and pipelines. The farms started getting bigger in the 1950s. One guy would buy a neighbor's farm, and then he'd get more cows. A lot of the cheese factories disappeared in the 1950s, along with the small farms. The smaller factories couldn't compete. One cheese-maker, working by himself, was overworked and couldn't get away. It happened in cheese factories just the way it did in farms and in industry: small ones got taken over by big corporations. LeRoy wondered if this expanding and expanding could keep up.

LeRoy ended the interview saying he didn't regret farming. He only wished he hadn't been away from the kids all the time doing all that farm work.



S. GILCHRIST



### **Robert David Thomas**

*Born: May 16, 1928*

### **Twila Fern (Helgeson) Thomas**

*Born: August 5, 1937*

Many times I had passed the big sign on the highway advertising Tom's Campground. On an April day in 2004, I found myself there interviewing Bob and Twila Thomas.

Bob grew up in the area. His great grandparents came to the farm around 1870. They got married in Cornwall, England, in 1852, and moved to the U.S. right after their wedding. Bob grew up on the same farm his great grandparents bought when they came to Wisconsin. Twila was from Black Earth. She married Bob in 1955 and has lived in the area ever since.

I asked Bob about growing up there. "It's been a wonderful experience!" he exclaimed, as if he might still be in the process. He shared some memories from way back, such as the first time he rode in a car. He was going home in a Model T when the car ran out of gas. Not a very auspicious introduction to the world of automobiles.

Bob's dad worked the farm with horses, but he had one steel-wheeled tractor too. Before that, he had steam engines. He had a thresher and they did a lot of "custom work;" that is they helped other farmers. Bob went with the threshing crew. At first he went to play with other kids, later to work. It was the kids' job to get in the granary and empty the grain bag. "It was dusty and hard but we loved doing it." There was great camaraderie with the threshing crew, and there were wonderful meals. "Every lady tried to outdo the cook of the day before." There would be a milkcan in the yard. Sitting on the bench would be four basins and everybody washed their hands in the same water. They all drank from the same dipper too. When the threshing crew came round, it was a real community affair.

Country schools and churches were the community gathering points. There was no TV to sit around in those days, and a lot of people didn't even have radios. At the school there were debates and singing programs; they'd have lunch. People would even walk to come.

The country cheese factories also served as places for building community. Wakefield and Garrison Grove Cheese Factories were nearby. Every two or three miles there was a cheese factory in those days. Farmers hauled the milk with horses and wagons, and with a team, you couldn't pull too far. Changes came with the arrival of the automobile and pick-ups. The volume changed. A cheese-maker couldn't make much money with a few thousand pounds of milk, and that dictated changes. Farmers could drive further distances and then a truck picked up the milk, so the farmer wasn't limited to the closest cheese factory. The small, local cheese factories dwindled; there are not many left today.

Bob had more than one job on the farm when he was a boy. When he came home from school in the winter, he'd throw down corn fodder as bedding for the animals. In the summer, he'd milk 10 cows every night. They didn't usually get him up for the morning milking. But he was not yet 10 years old.

He did, however, have fun too. Bob had a pony and cart, while a lot of kids didn't even have a pony. He'd ride around in the pony cart with one neighbor boy, Billy Lewis. They rode up along Highway 14, where you wouldn't want to ride now. They liked to ride over to the Farwell family's place, where Folklore Village is, and rest the pony cart in the shade. The Farwells came here around the same time as Bob's great grandparents. They were the first to have refrigeration. Bob and Billy loved being invited inside for ice cream. In those days it was really something to have ice cream in the summer! Bob and Billy went fishing too, on a nearby stream. They broke off a willow branch for a pole. They always had a hook and sinker. In the winter, they went sleigh riding. They even sleighed home from school. There was a big hill from Wakefield School and you could get a lot of speed sleigh-riding down that hill!

Billy's brother still farms up the road, still in the area. But Billy died from a ruptured appendix when he was just 9 years old.



*During the Great Depression,  
it seemed everyone cut firewood.*

Bob remembers the Great Depression. There was dust everywhere. Bob went barefoot in the dust. One year his dad had hardly any hay. Bob's great uncle and some others were out of work. "Mother and Dad took them in; they came and lived with us." There were a lot of people sleeping at Bob's house in those hard times, but his mother always had a lot of food; there was always something to eat. There must have been a sense of community in the sharing.

The Great Depression left a scar on this area; it left the soil scarred. Bob told me about a gentleman who was having a rough time with his beef cattle. He tried to sell the cattle in Chicago and couldn't get enough money for them, so he fed them another year and then had to sell them for even less than he could've gotten the year before. Advised to get out of the cattle business, he plowed up the ridges and planted corn. It was so dry the ground was like powder. Then the rains came. That farmer showed Bob the ditches brought about by his plowing. They were five or six feet deep. "See what I done?" he said. Bob repeated it: "See what I done?"

Some farmers lost their farms in Ridgeway. Some could buy back their farms, but some couldn't. It cost \$10 to \$15 an acre to buy the land back; the bankers didn't want the land either. It was later that it became worth way more. After he went broke, one farmer bought his land back and struggled and struggled until it was worth a lot of money. Not everyone was able to succeed like that. Bob remembered a suicide; he believed it was over the fact the man was about to lose his farm.

There wasn't much you could do during the Great Depression. There were no crops to raise. But everybody cut wood to burn. Some used wood in cook stoves. Some had summer kitchens to keep the heat out of the house. The wives did a lot of work cooking. Bob's dad hunted rabbits to eat. He would walk around brush piles and see two rabbits in there. "Can't you see its eye?" he'd ask, but Bob could never see those rabbits. His dad would shoo them out.

Even when they were raising crops, when he was a boy, his family made time to be together. They didn't need much in those days, and though they didn't have the conveniences we enjoyed later, they found the time. After the oats and corn were in, the whole family took a day and went fishing. Bob never had as much time with his own children, even after he had chemicals and machinery to help with the farming.

When Bob was small, farmers in the area didn't do contour farming. Most farmers didn't plow many acres. Most didn't have a tractor; just a team. Bob's dad started "strip" farming around 1940, just before World War II. Bob's dad and Roy Farwell were among the first to start contour farming. They tried putting fertilizer on corn too; they put a fertilizer attachment on the corn planter. But it was the contour farming that changed the face of the landscape. Now people who know nothing of farming come to the campgrounds. A couple from Canada wanted to know about the "designer crops." They were talking about the different colors in the contour strips.

Bob's great grandfather, who came from England, had a big bunch of rocks across a ravine, not too close together. When there was any flooding that picked up the top soil, the sediment stayed on the rocks like a little dam. He'd pay passage for Norwegian immigrants who then worked for him until they paid off their passage. When there was nothing else that immediately needed doing, the hired men shoveled the sediment that had settled on the rocks onto a wagon and hauled black dirt back up the hill. This was conservation work. Bob's dad built two flood control dams in the same area. His dad was one to try new things.

Bob still keeps the sod waterways in. His son is diligent about that too. A sod waterway is a low spot in a field where you don't work the soil, spray it, or plow it. If you do, you'll end up with a ditch. The water doesn't stay there; it flows away, but you want to prevent erosion. There are not as many floods as there used to

*Like country schools and churches,  
cheese factories were community gathering places.*

be in the valley because there is more soil conservation. Bob has a photo of the whole valley being flooded. That was before 1900, he said, because it was before the house they live in was built.

Twila pointed out that there have been changes since she first came here in 1955. The strip cropping is in wider strips now, because the machinery is bigger. And some farmers are plowing up the sod waterways. They're getting ditches from the spring rains. They'd keep the top soil if only they didn't plow the sod waterways. Bob said he gets upset every spring when he sees people plow the sod waterways and take out the contour strips. You can see the erosion as you drive by. "That's our topsoil going down and polluting our streams." Then the soil needs fertilizers. More people are doing fall tillage so they are ready to go first thing in the spring. If there is a heavy rain, the erosion can be very bad. Both Bob and Twila expressed a wish for more stringent rules for soil conservation, or at least better enforcement of conservation rules.

Bob remembered his agriculture class in high school. He wonders if agriculture teachers teach anything about soil conservation any more. They focus on marketing, he observed. Mr. Fox was his agriculture teacher, and they had a field day of education out on a farm. They took their lunches and helped a farmer lay out contour strips. Twila added that they used to do soil judging on farms too. Though "Dodgeville soil is richer than this clay and rock," you could study different soils even on the same farm.

Twila remembered the first spinner plow she saw. You turned the dirt uphill to catch water in the furrow as the water came down. You could still plow up hill. Bob said he just planted corn where he plowed, right in the furrows. He didn't disc it at all. "We tried to conserve the soil."

Bob said a lot of farmers have stopped milking cows and gone to cash crops like soybeans. Without as many cows, you don't need as much hay. More farmers are

going to no-till or minimum-till farming, and they are doing a great job at that. Twila reiterated that farmers used to plant oats, corn, and hay, but now it's soybeans. Soybeans are a legume and put nitrogen into the soil for a good corn crop the following year, but, without rotation, continuous cropping of soybeans depletes the soil. Soybeans are good money, for cash cropping, now that most of the dairy cows are gone, Bob said later. You can't blame people for going the easy route; they don't have to do the milking any more. But many regret growing all the soybeans out on the hillsides, as they loosen the ground and create erosion problems. Bob is sad about losing the dairy farms. "It's a dirty shame," he said. You can't use your other crops to feed the cows and you can't get their manure to haul back onto the fields for fertilizer. Further, we've lost the dairy farms as a draw for tourism. Most of the milk cows now are confined all the time, so the tourists don't see them at all. Bob said he never did plant soybeans. Their son, Joe, or Joseph, runs the farm now. He plants only enough soybeans to feed his dairy cows. He still pastures his milk cows and the city people stop to see them in disbelief. It's a great experience for the little kids. The cows come right up and lick their little fingers. Joseph bought the farm a year or so before the interview. He represents the sixth generation of Thomases on the farm! Bob had kind of hoped to keep the farm in the family name.

Bob and Twila have six kids, all of them married. Both sons are farmers. (Bob figured that he probably didn't do them any favors in this.) Joe runs the home farm and serves as fire chief and is on the county board and the highway committee for Iowa County. Joe had been working in town, and he wanted to know how his parents would feel if he quit his job and came to work on the farm. He married a woman who had been raised on a farm too, so Bob and Twila built a house on the farm for them. The older son traveled with cattle shows and auction sales. He came home for Joe's wedding and decided he'd had enough of living out of a suitcase. He

## Views of the Ridge

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*A lot of farmers have stopped milking cows and switched to growing cash crops like soybeans.*

bought a beef herd and began farming on his own. He is on the Dodgeville Town Board. He raises beef cattle and does cash cropping. One of the Thomas' daughters married a neighbor and thus is a farmer only a couple of miles away. She was a home economist, but gave up work to raise a family. Another daughter works at Marshall Fields (formerly Gimbles), a department store in Madison. Another daughter, in Minnesota, wanted to be a nurse even back in grade school, so she went to get her master's degree in psychiatric nursing. The remaining daughter lives in Dodgeville. She has three children and works at the middle school there. Bob and Twila are proud of their 17 grandchildren! The children also help at the campground.

Now farmers can't afford to buy land. Usually someone from outside the area buys 40 acres or smaller for a retirement place for a house. "It's a trend; there's not much more we can do about it," Bob surrendered. Young people won't be able to start farming unless the prices of commodities stay way up. "It's out-of-the-area money that's coming in to buy land," he repeated.

I asked about wildlife in the area. When Bob was young there were a lot of pheasants, though these seem to be coming back. And there are plenty of wild turkeys now. You can see them within a few hundred feet. He said there were tremendous numbers of rabbits. They had brush piles to live in. There were always foxes around too. In fact, there had been a red fox den nearby for the past four years. Bob and Twila like to watch the vixen bring food to her young. Sometimes the pups have gotten killed on the highway. There have been coyotes around for the past 15 years, lots of them, but Bob and Twila weren't aware of them before then. Bob said he'd seen a badger hole recently. He fills them in at the campground all the time. Badgers dig as fast as you can walk and they throw out big chunks of rock when they dig.

They do see a lot of birds. Twila doesn't think bird populations in the area have changed much over time, except that maybe there are more starlings than there

used to be. They still see goldfinches and Baltimore orioles. Killdeer lay their eggs on the ground and then act crippled to draw predators away. Tom can hear meadowlarks in the morning, and a wren nests in their bird house. They also have hummingbirds here. Twila says once while resting her feet against a planter, a hummingbird came to a flower in the planter. At one point someone from the Audubon Society kept track of all the birds here, but someone borrowed the list and never returned it. When they first started the camp, there were a lot of woodpeckers around. Apparently someone used to feed them here, but they quit that. Bob and Twila still see some. Bob knows what a prairie chicken is, but he said he's never seen one in the area.

Around 1950, before Bob was drafted into the Army, Bob and his two brothers were coming home from Ridgeway on Highway BB when they saw something cross the road. They didn't tell each other or anyone else for years, but when they finally talked about it, they all swore they saw a black bear crossing the road that night. Now there are bear sightings half a mile from where we sat doing the interview. Just the year before, a woman reported seeing a black bear right near there. A black bear was struck by a car west of Dodgeville on Highway 18. The driver thought it was a dog at first, couldn't stop in time, and killed it. Twila once saw something bigger than a coon waddling along, and she thought it was a small bear, but she didn't tell her family. Now she is glad to hear that she isn't "nuts," but there is a bear near there. Bob added that, at the quarry up the road, people do see bear tracks in the lime around the quarry.

Twila told the story of a woman who worked with her. Coming from Hollandale, the Woman was taking her mother-in-law to Dodgeville for a Friday night fish fry. She thought she saw a buffalo in the pasture and everybody laughed at her saying, "It was just cows!" But it turned out it was not her imagination; a neighbor does have buffalo!

*Bob and Twila enjoy the opportunity to meet people coming from all over.*

When Bob was turning 62 and starting to experience little health problems, his son wanted to take over the farm. Bob changed 55 acres over to campground. He got the license in 1989. Bob understood it could take seven years before realizing any profit when you start a new business. Now he can see why small businesses on Main Street fail. You need financial reserves to get through the first few years. And “you have to put in long hours,” Twila added. “Twenty-six hours a day, eight days a week. Farming was only 18 hours a day!” Bob explained that you can’t go away or take a vacation when you’re running a campground, though he did go to Minneapolis to work the RV show. In the winter, Twila works at Lands’ End. Twila’s job further curtails vacation opportunities.

Bob said he didn’t go camping as a kid because his family couldn’t leave the farm. For the same reason, he didn’t take his kids camping. Twila clarified that if she were going to take a vacation, it would be one where she didn’t have to cook! But the kids did enjoy sleeping out in the pasture sometimes. One time the girls took a loaf of bread and some fruit out there, but the dog got it. That coonhound was afraid of the dark, so he kept running past the campfire with a slice of bread in his mouth. The girls just came back to the house for another loaf.

Bob and Twila have kept the campground kind of small, just “doing what we can do.” Twila figures they could have done more with better finances, but running the campground has been interesting and it helps tourism in the area. They agree it’s nice to meet so many people. Out-of-staters come to the House on the Rock, find out about other sites in the area (Mineral Point, New Glarus, Dodgeville, etc.) and stay several days. Bob and Twila were expecting several caravans from other states that year, with a caravan of 24 being the largest group. The state park is frequently full. Caravans of people can stay together at the campground when they can’t at the state park. Bob and Twila have



enjoyed the opportunity to meet people coming from all over, including the police commissioner from Cook County, Illinois. Foreigners have come from Australia, Norway, Germany, Japan, England, and more. Some of them trade motorhomes with Americans traveling in their home countries, like time shares. When you run a campground, Bob explained, you check everyone in and then you check around the campground before you turn in for the night. You see people that never knew each other before talking around a campfire, enjoying themselves. Some people come to Tom’s Campground because they were referred by others. Sometimes people discover they knew each other from someplace they camped together before: Texas maybe, or somewhere else.

It’s no wonder Bob enjoyed the camaraderie of the campground, as socializing was a significant aspect of his childhood. When he was young, in the 1930s, his mother belonged to the Good Cheer Women’s Club. They had house parties. They took the stove pipe out and pushed the stove out of the way so they could have a house dance. There’d be three people playing music and a lunch to eat. As a kid, Bob got to visit everybody’s home. In the summer the club organized afternoon meetings, box socials, debates, etc. In the winter they had evening meetings, including dances. Bob remembered that once his dad participated in a debate about whether it was better to be married or single. It must have been odd for a boy to hear his own father debate such a topic. But that was their entertainment; there was no TV. They enjoyed each other’s company.

Bob said that there are lots of "digging holes" in the area and showed me an old map of local lead mines.

One historic characteristic of the Military Ridge area is the lead and other mining that occurred there. On the Thomas' farm and from the campground to Dodgeville, you can find places where people scratched around and found lead. Bob even had a map of the lead mines in the area, except that the Ridgeway portion of the map was missing. During World War II, a mine was worked just four miles from the place where we sat during the interview. Singer Mine went day and night as people worked to get zinc for the war effort. Between the campground and Highway 18, Bob said there are lots of digging holes to be found. The Wakefield Mine was near Folklore Village. Bob said his mother talked of walking home from school, throwing rocks down a hole, and hearing water splash. There was nothing but a little barbed wire fence around the hole. There was lots of lead in the area, but water chased the miners out. There was no way to clear the water out of the mines then. Bob's great grandfather had been a tin miner in England and mined lead here before he bought the farm. But "the lead mines failed because of the water; they couldn't pump it out."

I asked about prescribed burning in the area. Twila acknowledged that there is a lot of controlled burning now. She sees the smoke in the sky. She figured they need to do it to take care of the weeds, and it all looks so much greener when it does green up. Bob said his dad had had 10 acres that had Canadian thistle. He burned that pasture every year to control the thistle. Otherwise there wasn't much prescribed burning going on years ago, except for the railroad right-of-way along Highway 18/151. That was burned every year, primarily because the steam locomotives went through, and, if the grass grew up and it was dry, sparks from the engine could start a fire.

Bob could hear the Illinois Central and the Northwestern going by: two train whistles at the same time. The Illinois Central rails were picked up for the World War II effort. That train had gone to Freeport and Chicago.

In the fall, he remembered, farmers selected cows they didn't want to keep and drove them to the stockyards in Jonesdale. They loaded them on a train and shipped them to Chicago. One could ride a caboose for free to watch the cattle being sold. Bob's older brother did that once – got a free ride to Chicago! The trains stopped at every little town to pick up cream to take to Chicago. Tom said his older son has a farm with beef cattle nearby. He had a cattle drive about four years before the interview. People on horseback, with the help of some dogs, drove the cattle right up Highway 191. People who were passing by stayed to watch the cattle drive. It was fun to watch. They drove about 150 head four miles right up the state road!

When I asked what could be done to encourage people to keep the area rural, open, in farms and prairies, Bob referenced a town board meeting. "I'm Town Chairman," he acknowledged. "We've had a land use plan for 10 to 15 years. Now we are working on transferring development rights to keep the better crop land in agriculture, so no one will build on it." People can get a payment to keep their land out of development by selling the development rights to someone who will keep it open or, in the case of the poorer soil and steeper slopes, at least sell the development rights to someone who will put all the subdivisions in a cluster, keeping them together rather than spread out across the landscape. "We've talked about expanding agriculture, but there are not many places left for farms with a lot of cattle. There is too much scattered development." Their son, who is a fire chief, says that clustering houses together is better for emergency services too.

Bob went on to say that one should have to be a farmer before being entitled to any government programs; to get government payments one should have to first file a Schedule F. People from out of state with money buy the land, go to the conservation office, and the government pays them for their property, Twila explained, when the farmers can't get those payments. Twila

*Bob and Twila opened Tom's Campground when Bob turned 62 and their son took over the farm.*

considers such programs “welfare for the rich.” With programs like CREP and tree-planting support, the young farmer can’t match the out-of-area buyers’ prices and the new owners get the government aid. “This doesn’t feel right to the old farmer who’s farmed all his life,” Tom continued. “Neither of my boys could buy land anymore because they can’t compete against outside people coming in.”

Bob appreciates his wonderful neighbors, but it’s the quietness he particularly values in the Military Ridge area. One can hear the semis on the highway, but there isn’t much other noise. In the morning, Bob hears pheasants crow and wild turkeys gobble. Of course you can see the turkeys too. Twila saw three across Highway BB just the day before the interview. One camper looked out the window from his camper’s bathroom and saw a doe and fawn, not 50 feet away. Other campers have watched deer all morning. There are frogs, crickets, birds chirping, even at 9:00 at night.

Twila likes being able to see the stars. People come from the city just to sit and watch the stars all night. Sometimes you can even see the Northern Lights out here, when you can’t see them in the brightly lit city. Bob looked at a photo and said, “Blue Mounds is pretty any place you look.”

What draws the campers here? When Bob was working an RV show in Minneapolis, many motorcyclists told him how beautiful southwestern Wisconsin is for riding motorcycles through. Most of the RV campers come to the area to go to the House on the Rock. They like to get out and drive, never knowing what kind of scenery they’ll see around the bend. It’s different here than being in a completely flat area. At an RV show in Iowa, Bob heard that people came to see apple blossoms in the Gays Mills area and then came back in the fall to get apples. Twila chimed in that people come to this area in the fall to see the trees in color.

Bob pointed out that some people come to research their genealogy too. They want to check out their



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ancestors at the courthouse in Mineral Point or at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. Historically, many people who were miners left the Mineral Point area when gold was discovered in California. One day, 30-some wagons left for California for the gold rush. When they departed, the miners left ancestors behind in the cemeteries. Now people are coming to find a little about their family history. One time, some people came from California. They were digging around an old cemetery, when, sure enough, they found the very last tombstone broken off, picked it up, and discovered it was from their family. And once people find out a little bit, they get addicted to the search and then they have to go overseas to trace their family.

Generally the heritage of people in the area is a mix. Cornish/Welsh miners settled in Mineral Point. Around the campground and eastward, there were a lot of Irish farmers. By the House on the Rock, there were mostly Norwegians. Germans settled west of Dodgeville. Just east of the campground and around Monroe and New Glarus, there were a lot of Swiss people.

In the conversation about family heritage, Bob referred me to Melva Phillips’ book, *Along Military Ridge*. (Melva Phillips is another narrator in this oral history project.) Bob pointed out a photo of his parents and grandparents in Melva’s book and told me Melva did a good job with the book. Bob added that he had a lot of resources, things like the “Soil Survey of Iowa County, Wisconsin,” maps of 1910, a University of Wisconsin-Extension newsletter with demographics about the area, etc., but he wasn’t sure what to do with them.

When I asked about occupations off the farm, Bob said he never really held a job off the farm, except for the two years he spent in the Army. He went to Germany during the Korean War, but he never had a full-time job off the farm. Twila was “a stay-at-home mom and chief gopher” until their children were all grown

## Views of the Ridge



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*"That was one thing  
about farming:  
you always had food."*

always had Yorkshire hogs. He started with them after World War II. He always sold some breeding stock. Twila reminded him that people used to laugh about his thin pigs, but Yorkshires are now the thing: "a leaner pig." Bob and Twila always had their own meat and milk, but they never had chickens or eggs, as one of their daughters was allergic to chicken feathers. "That was one thing about farming: you always had food." Even if company came, you always had something on the shelf you could make a meal out of. Now people are afraid they'll get sick if they eat home canned food. Twila used to do open-kettle canning, then used a pressure cooker. They drank raw milk too, though they had a pasteurizer when the kids were little. "We always drank our own milk."

It was right after World War II that the agricultural revolution exploded and changed things. During the war you couldn't buy anything because there wasn't anything to buy. Women went to work, so many of them had an income. But with reduced manpower, they needed the mechanization to help with farming. Right after the war, mechanization took hold and tractors became available. A lot of young men went into the Service and never came back to farm. Some got deferred from the Service to work on the farm, but then their brothers went away and never came back to farming. Bob missed World War II. He was trained for electronics in the Service. He could have gotten a job in Chicago, but he didn't want to do it. He came back here after being stationed in Germany: farming is what he wanted to do. Bob remembered his Agriculture teacher assuring the class there would always be a bright future in farming because people would always need food, so it should bring a good income. Now there are shortages in soy, corn, and milk. Prices are high. Though the yield per acre has increased, "there's not a lot of food on hand in the world," Bob concluded. "Maybe we'll wish we had some more ground" for farming.

and married. Only then, the last 16 years before the interview, did she work off the farm. She helped with the beef cattle, when they were being bred artificially. She'd get them up in the morning and turn them out at night. She always had a garden. "My daughter and I canned over 400 quarts of stuff before I worked at Lands' End." She wishes she had time to can now, but between Lands' End and her arthritis, it's hard. She misses having a big garden. In the past she planted three or four dozen tomato plants. It was nice to get a can of beans, corn, tomatoes, or peaches off the shelf and open it up. It's not like it used to be.

Bob had Holstein cows. Exotic beef breeds came in and he started artificially cross-breeding cattle. He



### **Theodore Edward Sawle**

*Born: May 25, 1905*

Just outside of Mount Horeb, a coyote ran across the road in front of my car, on a Highway 78 detour. It was early April in 2004 when I went to Ingleside Manor, a nursing home in Mount Horeb, to interview Ted. Just a month shy of his 99<sup>th</sup> birthday, he had plenty of memories to share. He was as alert and personable as anyone years his junior. I found his conversation delightful, well directed, and clear, as he patiently explained to me about his life and times. Apparently he had a sister who had lived to be 106, so his family stretched through a lot of years. Ted told me he was named after Teddy Roosevelt and King Edward of England. He spent some years of his life milling grain from north of the Military Ridge, at Hyde Mill.

Ted's grandfather was a sea captain who came to America from Cornwall, England, in 1875. He had many adventures in his travels, including a brief incarceration in France when he was thought to be a spy. That sea captain's oldest son was William, Ted's father. The captain came to Wisconsin because he thought it was the land of milk and honey, that you just had to "tickle the earth a little" and everything would just grow. Of course, he found out that wasn't exactly the case, but he came to this area specifically to farm. He bought a big farm out by Arena, because he had a relative there. The farm had once belonged to William Rowe, who had been a Wisconsin legislator and had run a hotel in Dodgeville. Ted grew up there, near Arena, and bought his own farm about 12 miles away.

When Ted was a boy, his father ran the mill. He ground feed for everybody north of Blue Mounds and Mount Horeb. When Ted was 4 years old and his brother was 6, the two boys were playing in the mill. Their mother was in bed. She had given birth to another baby boy just four days before, and, in those days, women were expected to stay in bed for a couple of weeks after childbirth. Ted's father was busy down in the mill, sharpening the mill picks to pick a furrow in the mill stones, to make sure they would grind.

Picking a furrow was a hard process because the mill stone was four feet in diameter and very hard stone that came all the way from France. With both their parents pre-occupied, Ted and his brother had free range. They fearlessly ran up the tall stairs to the second floor of the mill, where they "got into mischief." Ted's brother had a little box, about four feet long. He had attached pulleys to the sides of it and made a little toy like a threshing machine. Upstairs in the mill there was a line shaft with pulleys to run elevators, and Ted's brother climbed up on the timber, about four or five feet off the floor, to run a belt on it. His clothing caught on a set screw and the machinery beat him to death. Ted remembered carrying him to the house and pumping water on a leather sack with ice in it to put on the injured boy. "For 4 years old," said Ted, "I remember pretty much about it." The boy lived for 70 hours before he died. This tragedy had quite an effect on little Ted. "He was my playmate." His dad tried to get him to talk about what had happened but he became more of an introvert. Kids just don't see the dangers that surround them on farms and mills.

The milling area was defined by the location of a stream that produced good power. That's why the area where Ted was familiar was mostly north of the Military Ridge. Within a few years of his brother's death, Ted's dad had him back in the mill, watching it grind. His father did income taxes, clerical work, even drew up wills for people, though he'd only been to eighth grade. He had a sharp mind. In the winter, he'd invite men in for breakfast, if they'd come a long way to the mill and they were cold. When Ted was 8 to 10, it was his job to do the grinding after school. He had to be careful not to let the stones run empty. If the stones ground empty, you'd rub off all that work you'd done putting the grooves in. They called it "staying in the run." When you changed over from one farmer's grain to another's, one farmer's grist would accidentally run into another's. At night, his dad would ask who'd been

## Views of the Ridge

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Ted told how his father was town chairman  
and was responsible for paying bounties  
on wolves and rattlesnakes.

to the mill that day. Ted remembered one Irishman who asked how he stayed in the run. He looked right at Ted with piercing eyes. Ted was afraid of him. But when Ted talked to his father about it, his dad told Ted not to worry. That Irishman was “a funny old guy!” He had wonderful horses. Another man came from Mount Horeb with a wonderful team of Belgians. He always had a 22 sac of grist. He always paid with a \$20 bill. When he was all loaded, he had to make a jump to get on the seat as the horses took off. He said his team would pull that grist just by hanging on his lines. When Ted graduated from high school in 1923, he ran the mill.

Some brought oats with a little wheat in it; others brought corn, barley, or rye to the mill. Corn and oats were ground for the cows. Ted remembered grinding sacs of calico corn for cow feed. The mill ground oats, barley, rye, and some shelled corn for hogs. Ted’s father had run a big flour mill, but he quit grinding flour when Ted’s brother died. In 1860, the Hyde Mill ground 15,000 bushels of wheat in a year. Wheat was predominant then. But then wheat ran out in the area and people went to broader farming. Ted was too young to have experienced the change in 1870 or 1880 when area farmers started raising corn instead of wheat, but he knew the history of the mill. As Wisconsin became a dairy state, farmers didn’t raise so much wheat.

When Ted was a boy, farmers there didn’t know anything about conserving soil. They plowed right up and down the hill. There used to be a 100-acre mill pond, but the farming methods washed dirt down and filled in the mill pond. That mill pond was filled in with about 20 feet of black dirt that was washed down from the farms – their best land was washed away! But contour farming made a big difference in holding the soil. Now they don’t let the land just wash away.

Ted said he wasn’t in favor of fires. But he remembered that a neighbor burned the woods. If he did it every year, it didn’t hurt the trees, but if he let the

woods go for four or five years, the excessive heat was hard on the trees.

Ted claimed to be “kind of a walnut man.” When he was 18, he shot a squirrel in a hollow log. He felt so guilty that he quit hunting. When he bought the place at Hyde, there were two beautiful walnut trees by the house. Squirrels seeded walnut trees all around; they seeded the whole place with walnuts. Now there are walnut trees so big that Ted can’t even reach around them. He figured the squirrels paid him back for having a faint heart. “Sometimes some good comes from things you don’t think about” at the time.

When Ted was a boy, his father was the town chairman for a while. That meant that people came to him when they wanted to receive a bounty on something they’d killed. There was a \$20 bounty on wolves; \$0.50 on rattlesnakes. Ted saw both wolves and rattlesnakes in that area, but people pretty well cleaned them out. Ted didn’t care much for hunting, since his remorse for shooting that squirrel, but he did kill a couple of rattlesnakes. He said his brother hunted, though, and he thought one time a man from Madison came hunting and killed a prairie chicken at their place, maybe 80 years ago.

Although Ted grew up in the country, you could hardly call his family “backwards.” Ted was really ahead of his time. There was running water in the house in 1914. In the cellar, they pumped the 20-foot long tank full of water every day. (Ted remembers that year because the U.S. Army marched from Camp Douglas to Camp Grant in Chicago. Maybe they had some inkling of World War I already. The soldiers camped in a neighbor’s pasture. “They stopped in when we were running the separator.” They drank skim milk as fast as it came from the separator. The soldiers also went swimming in a place in Ted’s family’s pasture. The big Jersey bull in the pasture “put the run on the United States Army!” When a big bull pawed the earth, you ran! The Army fellows left their

clothes and shoes there.) Ted's house was lit by kerosene lights until Ted's mechanically-minded brother came home from the Navy. In 1919, he put together a crystal radio and he put in a generator so they could generate their own electricity. Most people in the community, according to Ted, didn't get electricity until the 1930s. Ted's family charged batteries for their electric car and truck with their water power. They bought the electric car for \$200 in Milwaukee. It had belonged to Governor Upham and it was really fine. It had red leather upholstery with a cut glass vase for flowers. The driver steered it with a bar rather than a steering wheel. The car had four speeds ahead, but you had to raise the bar to back up. The people in the car sat on seats facing each other. The car moved on hard rubber tires. People used those electric cars in Madison too, long before gas-fueled cars. One time Ted's brother was showing off with the electric car. He backed up too fast and tore the rear end out of it. They had to send the remains of the car to a junk yard. Ted said it made him feel sick to think about it; that little "car would be worth about \$50,000 today." The only place Ted had seen an electric car like that lately was in Iowa at a steam show. "There are not many left."

When Ted was a boy, though, it was rough country. It wasn't all developed farmland. Before 1900, farmers depended on cutting timber for cordwood, and farmers made money with that. In 1856, the Milwaukee Railroad went through, creating a good market for hand-hewn ties. You got paid \$0.45 for a hand-hewn tie made with an ax in those days, compared to the \$18 you'd get for one tie now (at the time of the interview). Ted's uncle was a wonderful man with an ax, but he worked himself to death by the time he was about 50. He could cut trees down and hew 30 railroad ties in a day! In those days, they just "slabbed" two sides of the tie, not all four. That uncle really loved to chop! Another uncle of Ted's was more of a precise chopper, slow and deliberate. He always carried a razor stone to

*Prior to 1900, area farmers depended on cutting timber for cordwood.*

sharpen his ax. Every motion had to count with him. Ted worked in logging for 30 years.

Ted had been working at home, farming, or milling before he got married in 1931, but the story really starts before then, when a man from Chicago was going to Rochester for a goiter operation and he got stuck in the mud road by the farm where Ted's family lived. He came up to the farm in hopes of finding a team to pull him out of the mud. They found out that Ted's mother and the Chicago man had actually come from the same place in New York. I guess they felt some connection. When the man returned to Chicago, he told his family about their beautiful farm in Wisconsin. In fact, he brought his family to see the farm. "Two of us brothers married two sisters from that family," Ted explained, though they "made up their minds pretty quick." So Ted got married to a girl from Chicago, all because her father got stuck in the mud. However, Ted's wife wouldn't move out to Wisconsin until he had running water and electricity. They were married on May 2, and, by October, he had all the work done. Ted said his wife, Roma Rockcastle, adjusted well to farming. She was a flapper, wearing spit curls and fancy hats, very independent. She smoked cigarettes, even used to blow smoke in his face. In Chicago she used to shop in fancy places, stores like Marshall Fields. She had lots of shoes, maybe 20 pairs. Once she gave the neighbors a pair of shoes, and they gave her half a hog in return. They came in and laid a half a hog in the table, with the head still on it. She took care of that hog. "She was amazing for a city girl!" She was a good cook too.

Ted actually met his second wife, Norma Partridge, before he met Roma. Their families were friends because they sided together in a law suit long ago. But Norma was so young that he didn't think about her for a long time. In 1929, he'd just built a new barn and her family came to see the barn. She came in when he was milking at night. She'd been married twice already when Roma died, and Ted went to see her real soon after that.

Ted never made much money. His brother, the one who married Roma's sister, went into business in Chicago and made lots of money. Ted bought the mill at Hyde and remodeled it for his bride in 1931. Those were hard times, with the Great Depression. He ran the mill for five years, then, in 1936, he put in a sawmill and started sawing railroad ties. In the 1940s, World War II came along. He turned his mill into a box factory. He started making ammunition boxes for the Navy and meat boxes for Oscar Mayer in Madison and some meat packing places in Iowa. He shipped boxes to Armour and Company in Chicago. He also made crates for another company there, Pioneer Paper. On a freight train, he shipped 100 three-by-three-by-five-foot crates for collecting waste paper. Sometimes he had 20 men working there, day and night. (Ted told me the funeral for the man who had been the foreman at the box factory was the day after the interview. Apparently the man lived to 102.) He thought he would have work when the war was over, but the government got boxes cheaper in Chicago and cancelled his order. Then Ted went into selling lumber and railroad ties at his place at Hyde until about 1960. Then he sawed lumber for a company in Muscoda, about 40 miles away. He drove back and forth every day. He had lots of accidents. One time a 52-inch saw cut along his neck and cut his thumb right off. It never hurt, though it looked like it would. The accident threw him about 10 feet against something. Maybe it knocked him out, but he said he was able to stand and look at his thumb.

He had it stitched back on and he can use it fine now. He worked in Muscoda for years, but when the mill there burned, he went to Spring Green and started another sawmill. He was getting close to retirement age but had good luck and made good money there. Then his wife got Parkinson's disease. She stayed in a nursing home for a month. Then she wanted to go home, so he quit his job to take care of her. He had just started to pile up a little money.

Since Ted spent a lot of his life sawing lumber, I asked him if the area was any more forested then. He said the landscape was forested about the same as it is now. He said a lot of people won't sell timber; they don't want to cut it. One walnut tree could be worth \$3,000 to \$4,000 if the wood is fresh and the log is 16 feet long. Now they just cut merchantable-sized trees, 15 inches across, so there will be another crop coming along.

*One walnut tree could be worth \$3,000 to \$4,000.*

There wasn't much dairy in the area until 1900 or a little before, when the cheese factories came into being and made a market for the farmers' milk, except for during the Great Depression, when prices for farmers were terrible. Twenty-five cents worth of beef was about three pounds of meat, enough to make a big meal. A quarter's worth of beef wouldn't be much meat now. One man shipped a car load of sheep to Chicago to market. They didn't bring in enough money to pay all the freight to ship them. Prices were really bad for farmers. At the time Ted bought his farm at Hyde, the government was paying farmers to kill their baby pigs because there was too much pork on the market. Farmers had a terrible time. Once, Ted hired a man who'd lost his farm. The man was really desperate to have a job. Ted hired him to make boxes at his factory.

*Ted bought his farm when he was in his 90s and thought "it's a beautiful place."*

But the man was extremely anxious about everything, and Ted had to let him go. The man's wife wrote Ted a letter, though and Ted hired the man back. Then Ted got to know him, but at first the man had been so desperate wanting a job. That man turned out to be one of the best men Ted ever hired: "I was very glad I gave him a second chance." Ted paid him \$0.67 an hour, yet that man managed to buy two houses in Dodgeville on that salary. A man sure wouldn't go far today on that salary! Ted never did advertise to hire people; help just came to him. Men came from Spring Green, Arena, Black Earth, Dodgeville, Monroe, and Mineral Point. They worked day and night. Some Swiss cheese-makers came to work for him. Ted's wife did the bookkeeping.

There aren't many cheese factories around anymore. The small factories got concentrated into bigger ones. Big trucks hauled the milk to big factories. Now they haul milk from California here. "It doesn't make sense."

When I asked how he feels about the changes in the land in the area and the way people use the land, Ted just said, "I've got to like it, I guess." Ted told me that, when he bought this farm, he was very much in love with it. He was going to fix it up. But he was already in his 90s when he bought the place, and then he got cancer in his jaw, then pneumonia, and he hasn't been able to take care of the place the way he'd intended. He said he's holding that farm for sale now for one million one hundred thousand dollars. It's worth quite a bit of money. It's close to Madison and "it's a beautiful place." A hundred acres sell for \$300,000, he explained, and that farm has 360 acres. "It's a big place." He reiterated that he bought the farm when he was in his 90s, "but you can't make plans!"

Ted did work as a farmer for about 30 years while he ran the mill. He milked cows and did chores in the barn. Then the barn caught on fire when he was running the mill. He went into the flaming barn to let the cows out. His brother yelled at him to get out, but he



PHOTOS: S. GILCHRIST

was concerned about the letting the milk cows out. He got all 30 of them out.

Ted had seen a few storms in his day. He said Roma got the kids all together during storms. One time the bed actually fell because too many people were sitting on it. The sound of the bed dropping scared them. They thought the house had been struck by lightning. Another time, Ted came home after a big rain. By the little church, the cement road was under water, so he didn't go through. The next day he saw that the water had carved a 20-foot hole in the road. If he'd tried to go through there, he'd never have gotten out! Then, during the Barneveld Tornado, he was worried because his daughter's house was struck there. She and her son were in the house, hiding in the closet. The storm took out the windows. It didn't demolish the house completely, but it did a lot of damage. Ted heard about the tornado on the radio and went up there. His daughter was still in the house. Ted said that storm took the heart right out of the town.

Ted mentioned some legal issues over water rights. When he was making boxes at his place in Hyde, he used water power. Then he hired so many men that he quit using water power and he didn't use it for about 20 years. When the war was over, he went to put his dam back up and make the water power operational again, but the DNR stepped in and said he couldn't do it, that he'd lost his rights. The DNR considered his rights "prescriptive." Prescriptive rights allow that, if you raise the water level for 20 years and nobody complains, you can keep doing it; you've got a right. But if you don't use the dam for 20 years, you can lose that right. However, Ted had a "deeded flowage" right. He bought the land with those rights with the mill. Deeded flowage rights are forever. He went to court over his water rights and eventually won, though the process took about 25 years, eight lawyers, and \$25,000 to \$30,000 in lawyers' fees. Though it was a long process, Ted felt he got satisfaction. He told me about

another case related to the place in Arena, before his time. That place had a 100-acre mill pond, but farmers plowed and dirt kept washing downstream and eventually filled in the mill pond. Farmers pastured their cows on that land then, and they thought they could claim it because they'd been using it. But that land had been the mill pond and the land belonged to the mill, so Ted's father fought for it. He won that case too.

The flour mill had some problems for his dad. He'd just put in the flour mill when the supply of wheat was unsteady. Sometimes the mill had to stand idle. Then bugs could get in the spouting. There were hundreds of feet of spouting. It went from basement to attic. But if bugs got into the flour, he couldn't sell it, except maybe for livestock feed. He put \$2,400 into the mill, and that was a lot of money in the 1890s!

Ted's father had a good herd of Jersey cows. They produced an excellent butter. In competitions with other buttermen, his butter won prizes. He shipped the butter to Milwaukee in 60-pound firkins. (A firkin is a big crock made out of wood staves.) He had a butter stamp with a cow beautifully carved on it. The stamp, now a valuable antique, was used to stamp the firkins.



Ted showed me a photo of his father's mill dam.

*Ted said he loved the tremendous oak trees at his place.  
Some were probably 200 years old!*

He had a water wheel with a shaft to drive the butter churn in the yard. Ted's dad had that all set up before Ted's time.

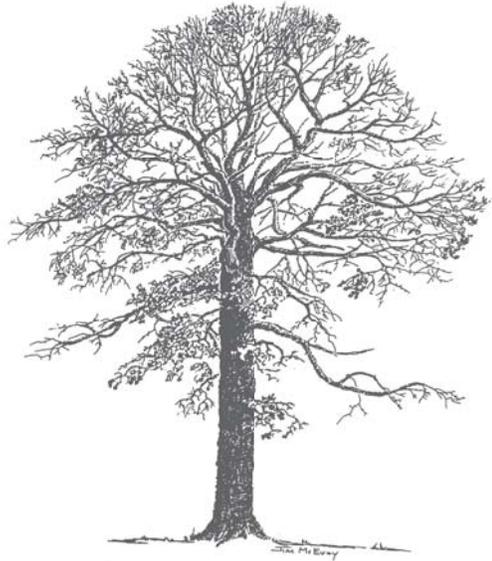
Ted has done some creative things too. He's made hand dashers and butter churns, which he's given to people. He carved birds for people too – cardinals, bluejays, etc. He made a wooden pitcher for someone. He said he "made a lot of wooden stuff," though not all of it was small. He made water wheels that are still in use today. These are big: 18 feet in diameter. He made nicely dove-tailed boxes of wood. He even showed me one. He's done some of this woodworking at the nursing home, though he said they wouldn't let him have any power tools there.

When I switched the conversation back to the landscape by asking Ted what he valued most about the land in the area, he said he loves the woods! He said trees are wonderful and it's amazing how they grow to such a size from just a seed! He said this with sincere awe. He talked about the trees in the yard at the farm. That yard was laid out like an old English garden with a fountain in the middle. The pine trees have been there 150 years. Tremendous, big oak trees on his place are probably 200 years old. "I do love trees."

His dad "was a man for that." In the 1920s a man from Bayfield brought white pines from the north and planted them in a sand bowl north of Arena, where there was nothing. They're big now. The man from Bayfield got Ted's dad started. Ted's dad gave land to Arena High School for a school forest.

Ted hasn't planted trees; he's cut a lot of them down though. He supposes the squirrels do a better job of planting trees than people do. He hates to cut beautiful trees they've planted, but he does trim and prune them. He reaches up and saws off the limbs.

Ted had nine children. One daughter died in infancy, only a couple of weeks old. Otherwise, he had four



*Ted supposes squirrels do a  
better job of planting trees  
than people do.*

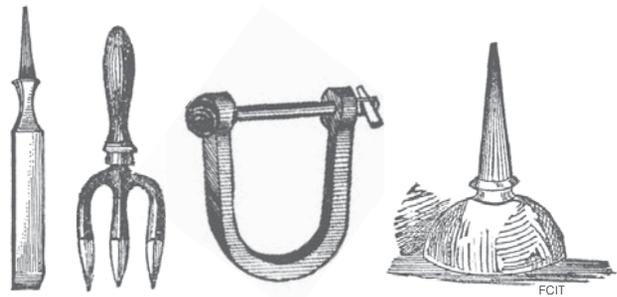
boys and four girls. One daughter just had her 72<sup>nd</sup> birthday. All the boys are "in the woods business." The oldest son cuts logs, another does trucking, hauling logs to the sawmill. One son has a sawmill in Richland Center and the remaining son used to manage one in Minnesota. Ted likes it that his kids work in the wood business.

Ted enjoyed telling me this funny incident about one of his sons. In the 1940s, you had to have "priority" to buy anything like a truck or tires, but he had a C ration stamp, so he managed to buy a Ford truck at Kayser Ford in Madison. The salesman explained how to shift the gears. But once Ted was driving in traffic, he couldn't remember how to do it. His 4-year-old son, however, had listened to the salesman carefully and told Ted how to shift in traffic. "Today," Ted said proudly, "that son drives truck." When Ted's wife got sick, he sold half the mill to that son, but he just wanted to get back in the trucking business. Of course men used to haul logs onto the trucks by hand: it was a tough job. Now it's a lot different as it's mechanized.

Ted still has the mill at Hyde. He could still grind buckwheat if he wanted to. He almost sold it once when the kids “got cantankerous” about the mill. A fellow happened along who wanted to buy it just then, for \$400,000. Then the kids realized they didn’t want to get rid of it after all, and they came together to keep the mill. He would have hated to sell it himself. There was a 60-foot long building full of antique tools on the property. Ted estimated the worth of the antique tools around \$100,000. The young man who wanted to buy the mill didn’t have enough money, so as soon as he bought the place, he was going to sell off all the antique tools to pay off his purchase of the property. Ted said there were navigation tools and surveying equipment, saws and chisels, everything you can think of, all old stuff.

Ted has lived in southwest Wisconsin pretty much all his life, except for about six months when he lived with a step-daughter in Alabama, and a few years in Minnesota. After his second wife passed away, Ted got sick. He wanted to live with his kids, but they put him in the nursing home. It wasn’t what he wanted, but he seemed to have resigned himself to it. I think he could see how his kids’ lives weren’t set up for him. “I can see it,” he said. “I’ve thought a little about it too. But there’s no sense to worrying about stuff. You can worry yourself sick about some little fool thing.”

Ted was offering some good advice here, so I asked him what other advice he would like to give. “Eat good food, don’t worry about stuff, and don’t drink or smoke too much.” He admitted he smoked a little in high school, but he quit. His dad used to say, “If the good Lord had intended you to smoke, he’d have put a chimney in your head.” Ted said he doesn’t believe in carrying drinking too far either. An assembly man once told him he was so drunk when he voted on a law that he had to go back the next day to see how he’d voted. “That doesn’t speak very well for making laws,” Ted concluded. He remarked that there’s a lot



*Ted accumulated a nice collection of antique tools that he kept at his farm.*

of drinking going on, and, in a crowd, he turns it down. There’s some history behind Ted’s attitude towards alcohol too. Around 1845, the British Temperance Society was formed around Liverpool and London. That British Society sent people over here to buy 40 to 80 acres, build a little house on it, and start a farm. “That’s where that place of mine was farmed. Those people came there.”

Ted said he thought whatever could be done to keep the Military Ridge area open and rural was being done. His farm didn’t have an easement on it yet, but he thought they would pay him not to cut trees because you can see the Wisconsin River from his land, and there is an effort to maintain trees along properties within view of the river. Arena is a strict community too. The town makes sure you own 40 acres before you can put a building up. Even so, the hills are full of houses around Mount Horeb and between here and Black Earth. Once they put a house in, they need to put a road in too. “There are getting to be a lot of people in this country.” With all the people moving out here, he doesn’t want to give up the price of his farm. It has two and a half miles of a big stream running through it and three Indian mounds on it, and it’s just 25 miles from Madison. He has 40 acres of marsh along the Wisconsin River too. He does have an offer on that. Ted thinks it would be nice and quiet to have a house there. As for his place at Hyde, he prefers to see it stay in the family, the farm and the mill both.



## Hilton Allen Arneson

*Born: May 19, 1931*

When someone lives on a street with the same name as their family, you figure there is a lot of family history in the area, so I was not surprised to find out about Hilton's connection to the Military Ridge area. It was April 2004, when I interviewed him. He told me first that his wife had died when she was in her 30s. He had been a long time without her, but he held onto many memories that went back even further than their shared times.

Originally, Hilton explained, the family name was not Arneson. Hilton's great, great grandfather was Arnie Rusty. Arnie's oldest son took the name "Rusty." His brothers took "Arnie" and added "son" to it. The name was transformed into "Arneson." Two of the three sons fought in the Civil War. One who was 17 was buried in Tennessee. Hilton's great grandfather fought in the Civil War, but he returned home. While he was away at war, he had eight children at home and his wife built a rock wall around the farm to keep the cows in. The cows would wander all the way to Blue Mounds and she had to go after them every morning. Every day she added a rock or two to the wall. The farm was originally made out of three other farms. First there was a dugout house on the bottom of the hill, then two more houses were built. In 1999, the main house burned. "We rebuilt this house," Hilton explained.

Hilton's great grandfather, Andrew Arneson, had a sister who was going to marry a German. The Arnesons were Norwegian. Andrew's mother was so deeply upset that her daughter wanted to marry a German that she actually prayed her daughter would die rather than marry him. That daughter died in her sleep that night. That would have been around 1860 or 1870.

Arnie Rusty helped build the Hauge log church, still a landmark in the area. Every man in the community was asked to haul a log, and he hauled the first log. The house he first built is still standing on Myrtle Anderson's farm. (Hilton and Myrtle, another one of narrators in this oral history project, are related.

Hilton's dad and she are cousins. I attended her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday party. Hilton and I agreed that Myrtle was a real nice person. Hilton chuckled when he told me that the senior citizen bus would pick her up and then she'd get off the bus and drive her car again. She had a little yellow bug for a car.)

Hilton has lived here, outside of Barneveld, all his life, and the farm was active when he was growing up. There were three schools on the farm: the Arneson Schools. The farm was always a fairly modern farm, but there was always work to be done. Initially they milked cows by hand, though there was an electric plant there that was battery operated in a stone building in 1895. They had milking machines in the late 1800s. Hilton didn't know when they stopped using those machines to milk the cows, but when he was a boy, they milked by hand. He milked two cows two times a day, evening and morning, when he was 5 or 6 years old. They hauled the milk to the cheese factory. In the winter, they used the separator to separate the milk and cream. For an hour or two, he had to crank the separator every morning and night. The kids had to cool the milk by stirring it too. They made cottage cheese by cooking the milk on the back of the stove. When it curdled to the top, you took the whey off and strained it. They made their own butter and ice cream too.



*Hilton has lived outside of Barneveld his entire life.*

S. GILCHRIST

*"A lot of work was done by hand.  
We picked our corn by hand."*

His great grandfather introduced the first registered Holsteins in the area. They did their own butchering and smoked their own meat in their smokehouse. "If kids knew nowadays how we used to clean the intestines..!" To make sausage they had to butcher the hog and then soak the intestines in water. Then they had to blow the waste out of the intestines. They had a machine that blew air into the intestines and blew the waste out. Then they made sausages with those pigs' intestines. They made their own dried beef, and they salted hams too. They put the hams in pillow cases and hung them up in the attic all winter. Attic flies got in the bag and on the ham. Hilton's mother would scrape the flies all off, cut the end off, and parboil the ham. When they butchered, when Hilton was a kid, he'd have to take a knife and scrape all the meat off the hog's head skeleton to make head cheese. Do that and then try to eat that tongue right after his mother would fix it!

Hilton also had to carry wood, depending on how much wood his mother used and how hot the fire got. She would keep it going for three to four hours to keep things boiling when she canned food. Hilton's family used to can 1,000 to 1,500 quarts a year. (He continued to can even after his wife died. The year before the interview, he said he'd canned a couple hundred quarts, including tomatoes, green beans, apples, beets, pears, and plums.) They also made their own sauerkraut.

Even taking a bath required some effort, so they used just one tub of water. The cleanest one used it first. The dirtiest went last.

Hilton's family used to raise 700 to 800 chickens a year. They always had their own eggs. His mother would wait until she had an "old cluck – one that got clucky." She'd put the old hen on a nest. Then there was something to look forward to! Hilton couldn't wait until the first chick stuck its head out around that old hen. They gave the chickens oatmeal. Hilton's family used to furnish restaurants in Mount Horeb with chicken, and

Hilton noted that they couldn't buy more than what money the eggs brought in when they went to town.

The work of food gathering didn't totally depend on domestic livestock. They had a trout stream on the farm. Hilton had to go down to that stream to catch fish for breakfast a couple of mornings a week. Every Sunday morning after church, the kids had to chase rabbits out of a brush pile. The men shot the rabbits. The bullets whizzed past him in the brush. It was scary! Although no one was ever shot, that experience is why he hates hunting. If they didn't shoot enough rabbits for supper, they had to shoot some pigeons. "Pigeon breasts were real good. "

When Hilton and his sister were 5 or 6 years old, their dad boosted them up into the cherry trees to chase blackbirds away. The trees were about 25 feet tall. They did this for about a week until the cherries all got ripe and could be picked.

There were always bees on the farm. Hilton's grandparents had bees. They used to gather 16 gallons of honey a year. Then the bees started getting more aggressive and Hilton's family started getting allergic to bee stings, so they stopped keeping bees.

Hilton's grandparents had sheep. Later on he had them too, in the 1960s. Someone gave them five or six orphaned lambs and they adopted them. He had to feed those lambs six times a day. He remembers giving the sheep Pepto Bismal because they got gas.

Hilton remembers 10 to 12 horses on the farm. In the 1930s, they did a lot of the farm work. One time he tried to get on a horse to ride it after the cows. Because the horse was big, he climbed to the top of a fence to get on the horse. But by the time he'd climbed up the fence post, the horse backed away from the fence. He remembers the first tractor they got too. It had big lugs on the wheels. Hilton and his sister, when they were 8 or 9 years old, took the tractor to get the cows. Hilton figures it was a miracle that they didn't

*There was always time on  
Saturday night to socialize  
with the neighbors.*

tip over, since they really didn't know what they were doing. In reprimand, they got a spanking and were not allowed to go to the movies that Saturday night. After all, it was a new tractor!

When his folks would go grocery shopping, the kids each got a dime. They got money to buy pastel-colored licorice and go to a movie. In spite of how much work there was to do on a farm, there was always time Saturday night to go talk to the neighbors, to socialize. We've lost that now. We don't have time any more. When Hilton was growing up, if a neighbor didn't show up at the cheese factory or something, you found out why.

Hilton remembers when electricity came through. The kids would put their fingers in the light socket to see who could hold it there the longest. They thought it was a new toy. It probably didn't hurt as much then as it would now, Hilton conceded. "It was 1936 when we first got electric lights. We were kind of off the beaten path." He remembers using kerosene lamps before them. They had to wash the lamps out every night.

He also remembered the first radio they got. It was a Philco radio. He listened to Jack Armstrong. He told me that you could send in 10 Wheaties box tops to the show and get a "walk-o-meter" that would tell you how far you walked. Hilton also remembered that they always had a door that squeaked and they pushed people into an "alligator pit" on that radio show. As he thought about things he remembered from his childhood, Hilton wondered when people started making Jello.

In 1941, Hilton remembers, all the children in the family got scarlet fever. "We were quarantined for six weeks in the house. We couldn't have sugar." One thing they learned, though, was to eat grapefruit without sugar. They had the house fumigated twice. But somehow, Hilton thinks the germ stayed in that house because all his own children got scarletina, which he described as a lighter case of the disease.

When I wondered what activities he used to engage in outside when he was a boy, Hilton told me they made their own toboggan. It was a plank with a piece of tin. They had "one sleigh for six kids." He never had a bicycle in his life. Sometimes they took a ball to somebody's meadow and had a ball game. They'd walk a mile and a half to go fishing at night. They simply tied a string to a willow stick, bent a safety pin for a hook, and used bread as bait. They caught suckers.

There was a trout stream on their property. He wished they had pushed more about the stream. "Our water system is getting bad." They used to have springs where they hung cups from the trees and you could get a drink from the spring. "It was good water!" On a hot day, they would walk down there just to have a drink of water. Once his sister got a pair of shoes she put on the tree down there. When she died 10 years ago, they found those shoes still there. The spring is still there, and it still tastes the same. But the cows go through the creek now. There are no fish in that stream today. Within seven or eight years, Hilton thinks there will be no creek left at all there. Already it's dwindled from six or seven feet deep and 20 feet across to just one and a half feet deep and only four across. He worries about his grandchildren. When he leaves this world, he wants to leave food and clean water for them. "I think we should do more to keep these streams clean," he said. Nitrite is high in the water now; you can taste it. It comes from manure and sprays. Hilton is worried because "we're not thinking about tomorrow" and we're cutting corners. "Our kids are going to pay for it."

There used to be three sets of buildings on the farm. The fireplaces are still there. When Hilton and his siblings were kids, they played house there. During the Civil War, there was an extra house down in the pasture. A couple came through, on their way to land out west. Their two daughters, aged 4 and 5, were sick. Hilton's great, great grandfather was away in the Civil War, but his great, great grandmother generously let

*Hilton's great grandfather kept a diary,  
now a source for some family stories.*

the family stay in that house until the family got well. The two little girls died and are buried there. When the family left, they asked the Arnesons to take care of their two little daughters' graves, but by now, Hilton had lost track of where they are.

Hilton knows some of these family stories because his great grandfather, Andrew Arneson, kept a diary. That diary is really interesting. Near the Cave of the Mounds, the young men went to Pokerville to enlist for the Civil War. Andrew had one friend who died the next day and he had to write a letter to the young man's family. A lot of those soldiers had dysentery. A lot of people died from food poisoning then too. Andrew's brother, Christian Martin Arneson, was killed in Sherman's March. He thought enlisting would be a way to see the world. He enlisted in February and died in May. He was only 17. He was captured on Sherman's March, when they went down the Mississippi River. The grave was moved from Tennessee. Last year (the year before the interview), Hilton went to see the grave. There were 44 acres of gravestones in Missouri from the Civil War. They were high as your knees and it was "just like you were looking at infinity." Hilton tried to explain how he felt there. "I had the weirdest sense that he knew I was there." It was an eerie feeling. "It truly, truly bothered me." Hilton mentioned something to the keeper of the grounds, who said others have said the same thing.

Christian and Andrew's mother was quite a woman. She was married to her first husband 25 years, but they had only been here six months when he died. She was a widow for six years, then was married to her second husband for 50 years. She smoked a clay pipe. But Hilton wasn't able to keep up with family history. After his wife died, he didn't have time with seven kids!

Although a lot of people have picked up arrowheads in the area, Hilton said he'd never found any. Black Hawk (a Sauk leader who was involved in a brief conflict with the United States in 1832, called the Black Hawk War)

had lived among the mounds there. An airplane actually found a cave on his property. Hilton said that, in the last battle of the Black Hawk War, the warriors put all their wives and children in a cave on the mounds. It was said that the warriors sealed up the cave so, if the white soldiers won, they could never get the Native American wives and children. Black Hawk lost the war so it was said that the people never came out of the cave. Over the years, people have looked for that cave but never found it. Hilton's great, great grandfather had some friends who were in the fort during the time of hostilities between settlers and Native Americans. (Fort Blue Mounds, near the home of Ebenezer Brigham and under his command, was constructed of logs to protect the settlers from potential attacks.) Hilton understood that the two men his ancestor knew went to the creek to get water and both were scalped.

Hilton's aunt owned a farm at the bottom of the mounds. She had to pay an "Indian tax" on that farm when she sold it (about 15 years prior to the interview). The tax had to go all the way back to the Native Americans.

I asked Hilton about his memories of wildlife. He said a neighbor planted 10,000 trees on agricultural land. They never had wild turkeys then, but they had ring-necked pheasants. They had jackrabbits, but not anymore. He'd like to get jackrabbits started. The coyotes would take care of them. Hilton hears coyotes howl and he said he hears a wolf sometimes from a southern direction. He said another guy saw a wolf in his machine shed. Hilton himself saw a black bear a year before the interview. It was a two or three foot tall cub that stood up. This was on his property, where he saw bear droppings too. He doesn't tell many people about the bear, and he hasn't seen any signs of one more recently. They used to have squirrels galore. They could shoot a couple a day and have enough to go all winter. They were big, red squirrels then. Now, Hilton says there are only about four scrawny squirrels around. He



When he walked to school, Hilton liked to pick out what birds he saw. His grandkids don't get to see as many birds on their school bus ride.

doesn't remember ever seeing a white-tailed deer when he was younger. It was about 1960 before he saw a deer in the area. His great grandfather rode a horse from Barneveld south to Daleyville on Sundays for confirmation, and he would see deer along the way. That was in the 1870s or before. He noted this in his diary.

There were always a lot of birds in the area. It was the most relaxing time in his life when he would get up around 3:30 or 4:00 in the morning and walk around. There was dew on the grass and, in summertime, the birds would be chirping! He'd go to get the cows and a killdeer would be there, ahead of him, so close "you'd swear you'd be able to catch it." But he never did catch one. Hilton thinks we've lost a lot of birds from the Military Ridge area due to the use of atrazine fertilizer. "When you stop and think of the amount of fertilizer some of these farmers put on their crops," especially corn, it's evident. Hilton liked to pick out what birds he saw when he was walking on his way to school. His grandkids don't know what some birds are. They just get on the school bus to ride to school. When he walked to school, he saw birds, and he misses that.

School memories included some specifics. "They'd give you a bar of soap and a chart to check if you'd brushed your teeth and combed your hair." The soap was Life-buoy. The students also had to take goiter pills once a week. Hilton liked to pass them out to others and get extra himself, because they tasted good. During World War II, they had hot lunches in school. The government gave the schools excess food, things like hamburger with macaroni and tomatoes.

The mailman always carried saving stamps in those days. You'd bring ten cents to buy a defense stamp and take it to the teacher. She'd put it in a stamp book and save it towards a war bond at the end of the year.

The mailboxes for the neighborhood were all down by the school. One day about 10 Gypsies were there by the school with their horses; they stopped by the

mailboxes. The teachers thought they were stealing and rang the bell to warn the neighbors and scare away the Gypsies. Hilton was scared by that.

Another thing that scared Hilton when he was a boy was a bobcat. "They used to scream terrible!" He and the neighbor kids went into a deserted, "haunted" house just to see how brave they were. A bobcat in the woods screamed and scared them so the kids ran out of there: "Oh, man!" Their parents told them bobcats could get really big. This was to keep the kids from going to that house.

Hilton was enthusiastic about some other childhood memories. He said he used to make a willow stick into a whistle when he went to school. He can't remember how to do that anymore. He remembers Fourth of July celebrations as a big day. Down at the school, there were sack races (where you and your partner each put one leg in a sack and race against other pairs). They made ice cream for that occasion and Hilton remembers the first ice cream cone he ever had. The ice cream was always vanilla. Then they got chocolate! One time he had a "double dip" cone, ice cream in a double cone. That was something to look forward to! On his birthday, when the Lone Ranger (a radio then television cowboy hero who wore a mask, used silver bullets, and rarely stuck around to hear "Thank you!" when he righted a wrong for someone) came out, there was a sweatshirt with a picture of Tonto (the Lone Ranger's Native American side-kick) and the horse on it. Hilton got that Lone Ranger sweatshirt for his birthday one year; that was one birthday present he remembers. He said he used to read a lot of books, but now people watch TV. He doesn't think there's much good on television, though he does like *National Geographic*.

Hilton thinks people didn't work the land as hard in the past as they do now. They didn't pack the ground down so much. His dad only had 30 to 40 cows. At one time, Hilton had 110 cows to milk on his farm. Yet they never bought straw, hay, or corn; they always

# Views of the Ridge



*Hilton misses seeing owls. They were fun to watch.*

raised enough to sustain their own livestock. The way of living is different now, as Hilton sees it. Conservation practices go back to the 1940s, when farmers in the area practiced contour stripping. And they didn't put dams up. They took care of the creeks better. Nowadays, people don't have time to worry about the future. "Take what I can get right now" seems to be the mode of operating. "People don't worry about anyone else." Hilton made sure to state his stance: "I don't agree with that at all. I was brought up that if you don't have something and you run out, you're done." He had to save. Sometimes when he was a boy, all his family could afford for breakfast was cheese from the cheese factory. They ate it melted, like a pancake, with ketchup on top. That was their breakfast. They had to take a laxative too. "And then you wonder why we have heart trouble," he commented.

Hilton acknowledges his part in the way the land is now. "I contributed a lot; I sprayed." He blames the sprays for several problems. When he canned 34 quarts of apples last year and they spoiled, after years of successful canning, he figured maybe the apples were sprayed late in the year and the spray was never washed off. He also thinks birds are dying because of the sprays. Now we've got to spray crops twice to kill the weeds, Hilton complained. The weeds have gotten immune to the spray. Now farmers put double chemicals on the ground so the corn won't get root worm. "What's going to come of it?"

Hilton thought about birds and acknowledged that he saw more of them last year than he had seen for many years. He asserted that there are still more wild turkeys in the area than he wants. He used to have huge walnut trees filled with orioles and their hanging nests. Except for last year, he doesn't see them anymore. Likewise with the tanagers: except for last year, he hadn't seen them in years. He saw more bluebirds last year than he had seen in recent years too. He hasn't seen meadowlarks or red-winged blackbirds this year (2004) yet, but

he figured that it was too early in the year. Hilton used to see owls build a nest in February and lay their eggs. "You'd think they'd freeze!" The owls would line up eight or nine dead rats all the way down the limb of the tree, ready to feed their young. He hadn't seen those "big horned owls" or the barn owls he used to see. He misses the owls. They were fun to watch.

The loss of the owls bothers John Zoner too. John is a friend who helped Hilton raise his kids and work the farm. He's bought part of the farm now. Hilton likes to call him "the lad" but John was 47 at the time of the interview. John recycles everything. It bothers him when people throw everything in the same bag and "out it goes." It bothers him that he doesn't see the owls and the birds seem to be gone. "The older I get, the more I see things like that. Even a thistle amazes me," Hilton said, "how beautiful it can be."

Hilton continued in the same vein recounting changes as losses. "The oaks are dying out. We had a beautiful set of oaks down here and they're dying out." Hilton doesn't know why. Where his mother was raised, the cows pastured under her oaks until the ground was nothing but mud. Someone said they packed the soil so bad that the oaks died. In 1973 you could take the truck with a load of fertilizer through the bottom land, but you can't now. It's all sunk into a marsh or bog. You'd have to drive four miles around through a neighbor's farm now.

When Hilton was young, he used to climb Lynch Hill. The Lynch family used to own it so that's why it was called Lynch Hill. The Lynches were fruit farmers. They still have the old apples that taste really good. Visitors who ate them couldn't get over the taste of those apples!

Of Hilton's seven children, one son is farming in Monroe. One is in Spring Green. They didn't take over Hilton's farm, at least in part because they didn't want to take it out from under John, who has lived and worked there for many years. It would be hard to give a break in buying the farm to one of his children because he's

got six others. In addition, it would be hard for one of his kids to buy enough cows and machinery to make the farm successful. His farm is 286 acres and he ships 7,000 pounds of milk a day from 50 cows. But Hilton is debt free. His son couldn't do this and wouldn't be debt free to start. Everything's getting bigger, and he'd have to milk 60 or 70 cows to make ends meet. Hilton would most like to see the farm productive in the future, but he doesn't really think it will be, "with everything getting so big."

Hilton hates to see the farm turn into brush. He doesn't know how it gets so brushy. He would rather see it all go into prairie than see the land "sitting there doing nothing." He could get good money selling the property, but once someone puts a house on the land, you can't plow it. You can't grow food on it. He would like to see someone be able to make a living off the land. "You could put in a garden and feed yourself," though Hilton doesn't know if young people can do this. They spend too much money now and pay for it later. Hilton doubts they could feed themselves from a garden. He remembers once when the septic system wasn't working and he told his kids to "go" outside. They had a fit. So he doubts the abilities of the younger generation to succeed with the hard, down-to-earth work of farming. He doesn't want the farm to be all brush, but he doesn't think it's likely to be a productive farm in the future either.

In the Military Ridge area, it's good to have some prairie and some trees. "They say there weren't many trees, but there are all the stories of grubbing land," clearing the land from trees to farm. Hilton wonders "how much the government is going to keep putting up here." Dr. Botham had 900 acres that went to TNC. A number of farms went into conservation. Then "people squawk about taxes!" When Hilton sold a farm to TNC, neighbors complained they had to pay more taxes. People didn't like it. There were badgers on that farm, Hilton added later in the conversation.

In response to my question about what he values most about the area, Hilton replied, "I like the privacy. I like the fresh air. There's nothing better than getting up in the morning and seeing everything fresh." He wouldn't want to look out the window and see somebody else's house there. He isn't against people building houses where you can't farm, but a house built in the middle of a field – that bothers him. Hilton grew up with neighbors, but it's different now. There are four houses underneath the hill by the turn into his driveway. He went to meet a neighbor once, but the man said "I don't have time to talk to you." "Neighbors used to help one another but we don't know each other anymore." Good fences used to be "your pride," but nobody keeps them up any more. The big issue is that farms have too many cows now. When they spread manure, you could smell it four miles below. Hilton had to shut the windows in the house. Nobody wants to buy a house with that odor. "That's not living in fresh air, out in the country!" People will want regulations, but those regulations will hurt the small farmer.

"We've got to quit fertilizers and insecticides, or I think we're gonna kill our own people after a while." Now farmers don't cultivate the corn. Since there's no grass or anything growing there because of the chemicals and sprays, there's no need for cultivation. But there are nitrates in the water now. "There are a lot of things we can't do much about."

"How can we enable landowners to keep the land open?" I asked. The problem is that it all comes down to how much money you've got. Housing is an issue. There's zoning, but there are now 12 houses on the farm where his mother was raised, a place that shouldn't have had more than three. Hilton didn't want to build houses on his land, so he waited until TNC came up with a nice offer and bought 180 to 190 acres. Hilton is concerned that TNC may be taking up more than they can handle. He thinks they are putting 10 pounds of seed where they should be putting 20 pounds. There

*"We've got to quit fertilizers and insecticides, or I think we're gonna kill our own people after a while."*

are too many thistles growing. They're trying to do a good job, but Hilton is concerned about housing and the need to cut down on insecticides and other pesticides. He wants more work done to keep the creeks and the water supply clean. He doesn't know why the creeks are getting so small; they're just a trickle now. He worries that sewage may leak into the water. And plastic bags are flying all over the country now. John is very particular to wrap up the used silo bags and they get picked up, but not everyone is so careful. Hilton worries more about this generation coming up. His grandparents never used pesticides, though his dad did use spray in the 1950s. Hilton's uncle convinced his dad. Hilton sprayed Round Up to kill the grass when it was about six inches tall. But there was no guarantee the spray would be effective unless you did a second spraying.

Hilton said his house burned down in 1999 and the barn in 1976. It was a heater that stuck that caused the barn fire. Hilton was up at the other farm making hay with John, when the kids called a neighbor who came to get him and tell him the barn was on fire. All the cows that were in the barn burned with it. The heifers had been outside, so he had a few cows left, but mostly he had to buy more. He lost the young stock and the milk cows. When he rebuilt the barn, people came from 40 miles away to help and the DNR let him have hay from the set-aside ground to feed the cows. He called the Board of Health to ask about the heaters, but they wouldn't even comment, the problem had happened to so many others.

The house fire was a different story. That fire was caused by a faulty cord. He had to live in a motel in Mount Horeb for seven months after that. Hilton said people didn't want to rent an apartment to them because they were farmers. Hilton was "stressed out," only eating pork and beans out of the can. Although for 30 years he had taught Bible school and sung in the choir, not one family from church offered a hot meal or came and talked to him. The people who helped out

were two atheists who brought hot meals two days a week. "They had Christ in their hearts."

Hilton had a few experiences using fire as a tool. He burned on purpose "the day before yesterday" to get cornstalks off the ground. The weather was calm when they started. They disked well so the fire would stop before the fence. Just as the fire got down there, there was a "dirt devil," a little whirlwind. Flames jumped over the fence and over the creek. "We had to dip our hats in the creek and beat the fire out with wool hats... I'll never do that again!" Another time, Hilton tried to burn some trash across a creek. The fire jumped the creek and got in some oat stubble. He went to the neighbors. Seven fire trucks came. That was sometime in the 1960s, but Hilton swore he'd never do that again. "A lot of people have burned this year (2004). It's a dry time right now. I'm surprised we haven't had more fires." Hilton remembered that 1976 was very dry too. Trucks with chains dragging made sparks that started fires.

Hilton faced some difficult years in the 1970s. In 1973, his wife died. In '74 there was a tornado that twisted the house and took part of the house and barn roof off. The barn burned in '76. In 1977 he ran over one of the children in an accident. In 1978, some kids killed his cows. He had already told me about the fire in the barn, so I asked about the accident and the 1978 incident.

Hilton was driving the utility tractor really slowly. He was unaware that his 5-year-old son came out of the shed and jumped onto the drawbar on the back of the tractor. The boy lost his balance and fell against the tread of the tire. He wrapped one leg around the axle and the tractor dragged him. He fell between the fender and the tire. He came around in front of that tire. The tractor was just starting to cross the boy's chest, when Hilton realized what was happening and stopped the tractor. The boy was in a body cast for six months, but he grew to be 6'4" in spite of the accident.

He even came in second in the state wrestling competition. The boy's leg had been broken between knee and hip. The damaged leg grew faster than the other leg, so the injured boy grew up with a limp. Hilton still remembers how he had put the clutch in and then tried to back up, but just dragged his son along. "I still dream of that. I still see that." Hilton had sat by his wife's side for two weeks while she died, "but this kid, it seemed like it was more my fault."

In 1978, some kids around Blue Mounds got on drugs. They went out with a deer rifle and, thinking cows were deer, shot nine or 10 cows. They blew off the jaw or the utter. Some were killed, but others had to be put down. The district attorney wanted to get these kids because they had done other things too. But Hilton felt the parents paid people off to keep the kids out of court. One kid's parents owned a gun shop. Another of the kids wanted to grow up to be a lawyer, so he didn't want a felony on his record. These kids said they were going to come kill Hilton and his family. They shot guns outside the house in the middle of the night, which was really scary. The parents had to pay for the cows the kids shot. Hilton said he never took them to court because then he probably wouldn't have gotten paid for the cows. He also told me about how those same kids dropped cement blocks off the viaduct onto the windows of semis. He said that they got by with that too because their parents paid off people.

It was 1984 when the tornado hit Barneveld. Hilton felt sorry for the people who suffered losses from that tornado. But the things they threw out bothered him. People threw out some things that were still good. They had insurance to cover those things. But Hilton thinks there were other things that government aid could have been used for. Hilton felt bad winds that night. He was asleep but woke up. The house just shook. He was trying to figure out when he should go downstairs. That house had 14 rooms, two stories, with a stairway to the basement. He could hear something brewing



*Hilton showed me his antique cream separator and talked about how farmers took pride in their work and their milk.*

that night. Jason, his youngest son was a senior in high school, but he wasn't home that night. Just Hilton and John were home, and they had to decide when to go to the basement. But they didn't go. Instead, they looked outside. Later, during breakfast, they heard the radio. Although the house was only four and a half miles from Barneveld, the storm had no impact on the house.

Hilton closed our conversation saying he'd like to see the area the way it was when there were cheese factories and schools and community, and people got together for potlucks and to play cards. With the cheese factories there was competition and the farmers had to take pride in their work and their milk. But when the cheese factories folded, the farmers didn't take as much pride. Soon there will be no choice as to where the farmer sells his milk. There will be only one big cheese factory with a monopoly. Already the farmers can't look to sell to the best cheese maker any more. Hilton still grazes some cows in pasture, carefully rotating the pasture. But he says it's hard to find people who take pride in their work now. As Hilton walked me out towards my car, he showed me a cream separator and an old sausage stuffing machine, relics of an earlier time on the farm, serving as lawn ornaments now.



**Paul Abner Helgason**

*Born: July 10, 1938*

Paul grew up on a dairy farm just west of Daleyville, near the Town of Moscow, just outside the original map lines of the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area. He lived in Mount Horeb for 45 years, however, since he married Karen. He worked in Madison, at Oscar Mayer, for many years too. It was in Mount Horeb that I interviewed him in April 2004.

When Paul was growing up, the area was covered with small dairy farms. There were local, rural, one-room schoolhouses and local cheese factories. Eleven area farmers hauled their milk to one small cheese factory. Now none of those 11 are still dairy farming. The last one sold his cows three years prior to the interview. Now you see some cash farming and some beef cattle. A lot of local fields have been planted to trees with the reforestation encouraged by CRP, and there is a lot more idle land now.

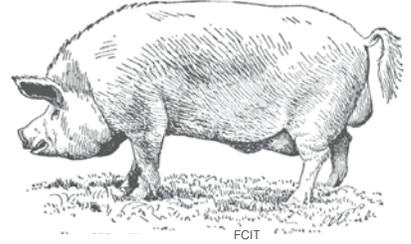
In 2004, Paul said he saw a lot of white-tailed deer and wild turkeys, but he saw none of these when he was growing up. He remembered seeing his first deer on the farm in 1956. He and his dad were working on fences when the dog started barking. That dog came running through the pasture chasing a deer. Deer were seldom seen then, so this was “a big thing!” He had hunted deer north of Barneveld, where there were more deer, but there had been no season south of Barneveld, at least at that time. When Paul’s grandpa was young, in the 1880s, there were a lot of deer. But uncontrolled, subsistence hunting probably eradicated them. Likewise, wild turkeys were all shot out in the early 1900s. He saw his first one in the area in 1995.

Because people used wood for fences, for burning, and for building, a lot of the trees had been logged off. There was a more brushy woods when he was growing up, and there was a lot of rabbit and squirrel hunting. Rabbit hunting has fallen off; now it’s “spotty.” In the 1950s and ‘60s, Paul used to go fox hunting. “You could put a dog out in any small woods and you’d have a run on a fox right away!” Paul told me that mange

took out most of the foxes in the 1970s, but he saw some last year (2003). Gray foxes disappeared too. Now it’s hard for foxes to compete with the coyotes. There didn’t used to be coyotes there. Now, at dusk at the farm, coyotes howl for 15 minutes. Their howling gets all the dogs in the neighborhood barking. Coyotes get more vocal when they mate in February, and you hear the pups yipping in the spring. Young coyotes don’t have very good voices yet. The first time Paul heard a coyote howl here, it was in the early 1980s. He wondered if it was really a coyote, as he knew dogs could howl too. Then he was making a deer drive and a coyote came loping along a cornfield, “just like in a Disney film.” Paul considers the coyote tougher and more intelligent than the fox. Paul doesn’t hunt coyotes, but he does shoot them when he sees them, and he said he’d shot two. Paul has a nephew who hunts coyotes with dogs. It’s the areas where they are hunted the hardest that they seem to repopulate. Paul guesses they like this country.

Now, thanks to CRP, there are more pheasants than Paul can ever remember. His dad and uncle belonged to a rod and gun club in Hollendale where they raised pheasants for a “put and take” operation. The pen-raised birds didn’t fare very well in the outdoors over the winter. The Helgason farm is now on the second 10-year contract with CRP. Paul didn’t see much increase in pheasant activity the first decade, but now he sees a lot of pheasants. There used to be a few Hungarian partridges, but they needed shorter grass than CRP usually provides, and open spots. “There are more hawks than ever,” Paul added. When farmers all had chickens, they used to shoot hawks to protect their chickens. They thought every hawk and owl was a bad one. “The guilty got shot along with the innocent.” Paul especially sees a lot of hawks in late fall/early winter, when they migrate.

A year prior to our interview, Paul sold his farm to his son, who works in advertising in Chicago. One of



*As a boy, Paul took care of the chickens and pigs.*

Paul's daughters lives in Chicago too. The other teaches French in New Mexico. None of his three children are farmers. They used to pick rocks from fields. They thought rock-picking was the worst work possible, that and cutting thistles and other weeds in the pastures. Paul thought it was pleasant work, but they didn't think so. "No matter how many rocks you pick, the next year there's another crop, and no matter how many weeds you cut, the next year, there's another crop."

*Thanks to CRP, there are more ring-necked pheasants than Paul can ever remember.*

Paul grew up on another farm in the same area. His great grandfather came from Norway when Paul's grandfather was 1 year old, in 1862. The family settled in the Town of Moscow, on very poor ground. Paul wondered how his great grandfather ever made a living on that poor ground, especially as a recent immigrant. But he wasn't on the farm all the time, because he joined the Civil War. He was in some tough fighting, but he made it through. Paul's great grandmother died, and his great grandfather remarried. He had a large family with his second wife. When Paul's grandfather grew up, he homesteaded in South Dakota for several years. He got burnt out by the hot, dry winds five out of seven years, and his wife got lonesome, so they came back here. It was Paul's grandfather who grubbed off most of the woods to get farmland. In 1904, they built the barn. They built the house in 1910 or 1911. There was a log house on the place Paul grew up, and that was where the family lived initially. They needed to build the barn before the big house. Paul's dad farmed that place before he was married. In 1930, his dad bought the farm Paul recently had and still farmed

Paul's grandpa's farm as well. Then he traded farms with Paul's grandpa. In 1938, Paul's grandpa sold the farm he then owned to Paul's aunt and uncle, who sold it to Paul and his brother in 1975. Paul bought his brother's half of the farm in 1992 or '94. This is the farm his son now owns.

I asked Paul what it was like growing up on the farm. With a sister three years younger and a brother seven years younger than he, Paul was the oldest. When he was old enough to carry a gun, he told me, he shot gophers in the cornfield. Gophers dug up the young corn before it sprouted, so they were considered pests. Paul always had a dog, quite a few cats, chickens, and hogs. He took care of the chickens and pigs. The pigs were for an FFA (Future Farmers of America) project in high school. There were four or five sows. That meant there were 20 to 40 piglets to fatten and sell. Piglets were born in March and ready for market at the end of September. The way Paul raised pigs was not nearly as intensive as pig farming these days, with the factory farms where the pigs never see darkness. Factory raised chickens probably don't ever see darkness now either. But when Paul was young, his mother was determined to have chickens because she liked fresh chicken and fresh eggs. In those days, the chicken eggs paid for groceries. On Saturday evenings, they would go to town and trade eggs for groceries. Sometimes there was even a little money left over from the eggs. But the worst job related to taking care of the chickens wasn't selling eggs; it was cleaning the chicken house a couple of times a year. Nobody wanted to participate. It smelled strongly of ammonia when you started cleaning it out.

For a while, Paul had pigeons in the chicken house and in every building where he could put them. They were just pigeons he had caught. They were messy. They would fly against windows and break them trying to get back into the chicken house once they were shut out. His dad finally talked him into getting rid of them.



*Paul gave one of his pet crows to a neighbor. After the crow knocked the neighbor's aunt's hat off, it soon disappeared.*

Paul had three different pet crows too. One got in a transformer and pecked the wrong wire. That one got burned. Someone shot another of Paul's crows. And he gave one to a neighbor who wanted it. Unfortunately that crow buzzed the neighbor's aunt, and knocked her hat off. She declared the crow had to go or she would, so the crow disappeared.

Paul even had a badger he kept in the corn crib for a while. Initially, the dog had it cornered in a shallow hole in the pasture. Paul was out there cutting weeds so he went over to see what the dog had. It was a half-grown badger! Paul isn't sure how he did it, but he used a hoe and got him into a gunny bag. He shot pigeons and other things for the badger to eat. "He was never afraid of me." Sooner or later, Paul figured that badger was going to assert his authority and bite, so he decided to release him. When Paul took him out in a box and let him go, the badger trotted off as if nothing had happened.

Some neighbor kids caught a badger when it was quite young and it was very tame. Paul said it exhibited no aggressiveness at all. One neighbor had raccoons, but as they got older, they got aggressive and bit some of the kids. Other people have had tame fawns, since deer have been plentiful. But Paul has never touched a fawn. Paul knows now that it's illegal to harbor wild animals. "Wild animals you try to tame usually suffer a sad ending." Deer can get hit by cars, beaten up by dogs, or shot, if they aren't wary enough.

Everybody in the neighborhood strip-cropped when Paul was growing up. The land had suffered before; Paul's dad said it was "wheated to death." There was subsistence farming when the land was first changed from wilderness to farmlands. People would work up a patch of ground and plant wheat until it couldn't grow anymore, and then they'd work up another patch of ground. The top soil was depleted and washed away. The land needed conservation. One of his dad's cousins lived to be 90. That cousin spent a lot of time on a

neighboring farm and he remembered how the women and children had to watch the fields when they planted wheat in the spring, because flocks of passenger pigeons would eat all the grain. They had to chase the pigeons away. They didn't have machinery; it was all hard hand work, and the plots were small. They didn't want to lose all their wheat. That was probably in the 1880s or '90s. Now there are no more passenger pigeons.

When Paul was growing up, most farms in the area milked up to 25 cows. They hauled milk to the Clay Hill Cheese Factory. That cheese factory burned down twice. There was no fire protection then, so if something caught on fire, it burned. Milk production wasn't the same all year round. The biggest flow of milk was in the early spring when the cows freshened, or had calves, and again when the cows were first let out to pasture in the spring. The cheese factory could make three wheels of cheese per day. Before they had refrigeration to cool the milk, they used to make cheese twice a day. In late November or early December, the cheese factories quit making cheese because everyone dried the cows up. The cows had a short rest over the winter. Everyone managed to get by that way, but now, with payments due 12 months a year, it's hard to have no income for the winter. The cows started calving in late January. Paul's father had a hand separator in the milk house, and they separated the milk and cream by hand before the cheese factory opened again. There was a spring with a knob that hit a bell on the separator when you were turning the handle up to speed. When the bell quit ringing, you weren't up to speed. Paul's dad sold cream to the creamery in Dodgeville, and they fed the skim milk to the young stock. Paul remembers when his dad got the first milking machine in the 1940s. On the bigger farms, it took more people to milk the cows before they had milking machines. Most patrons generally got to the cheese factory before 7:00 a.m. Paul's dad ate breakfast around 7:00, lunch at 10:00, what he

*They fed their livestock on what they raised: oats, corn, and hay, rotating the crops to get value on their hay ground for two or three years.*

called “dinner” at noon, afternoon coffee, then supper at 5:00. That meant they milked at 5:30 a.m. and again at 5:30 p.m. Paul’s dad was pretty punctual.

The land has gone through cycles of abuse. In his dad’s era, people from the county laid out strips. That made a big difference in erosion! There weren’t any more large open expanses of ground that had demonstrated erosion previously. In the old days, they didn’t sell any feed. If they fed chickens, pigs, and cattle, they raised oats, corn, and hay. They would put one quarter of their ground in oats, one quarter in corn, and the remaining half in hay. They fed their livestock on what they raised. And they rotated the crops. They’d try to get value on their hay ground for two or three years. Everybody limed and tested their ground. Everything was hand work then. You loaded lime on a wagon by hand and pulled a spreader behind. Someone drove the tractor and somebody shoveled the lime. Farmers did their own planting, but there was a lot of exchange work. A group of farmers threshed together. Some farmers who hauled milk to the same factory went from farm to farm. That was a fun time for the kids. Those guys liked to play jokes or tricks, and you knew at which farms you were going to get good food.

They used to shred too, though that probably stopped before threshing, when people started picking corn. Those were the days before choppers, so they cut the corn with a binder, picked it up on a wagon, and

hauled it to a silo-filler, sort of a chopper right at the silo that cut the corn and blew it up into the silo. But you had to load everything by hand. Silos were a lot smaller then. A 40-by-14 foot silo was huge then. Now they’re 90-by-20 feet, even bigger some places. Now the trend has gone away from building silos. Now you see trench silos and long, cigar-type plastic tubes filled with haylage and silage.

After some of the small farmers quit, the remainder got bigger and rented land out. Some of those guys didn’t use very good practices because they wanted to have bigger fields. Buffer strips and waterways were torn up. Paul told me how a fellow from Madison bought up land and tore it up with a huge Steiger tractor. A lot of ground washed down the creek and silted up Gordon Creek. That fellow went bankrupt and left big bills. There’s shallow ground here and he couldn’t plow very deep, but Gordon Creek still suffered. Years ago, Paul’s father didn’t use pesticides; he just cultivated. But now the farms are too big; there’s too much land to cultivate. With no-till, they save on erosion, but farmers have to use more pesticides to get started. A farmer can have corn one year and not have to work the ground at all, just plant between the rows: corn and beans, alternating each year. Of course the farms can suffer in a dry year. There aren’t as many cows now and not as much manure as there used to be. When farmers fed their own stock, they had their own fertilizer and there



*Large, round bales and cigar-shaped, plastic tubes filled with haylage and silage have largely replaced silos.*

People are more independent now.  
They don't depend on their neighbors the way they used to.

wasn't as much commercial fertilizer. Cows no longer get fed on site, farmers use more commercial fertilizer now, and cash crops are sold off and transported down the Mississippi, or wherever. Everybody tries to get a bigger yield; and the yields have gone up, compared to when Paul was growing up. Costs also go up with more fertilizer, bigger machinery, and higher fuel costs. Land has gone up in value and rent cost. But prices haven't kept up, or there wouldn't be all this land waiting to have houses built.

Paul said he doesn't like to see houses all over the country, but "it's a matter of when, not if." He would like to see woodland, pasture, and maybe a farmhouse. Paul acknowledged that the programs that are out there now are good incentives to maintain open land, but maybe it's too late. Realtors are already here and they are thinking "development." People will want to move out here, but all they're going to have to look at will be someone else's house. As more people move into the area, changes occur. Paul had his well water tested in March 2004. You have to go deeper with wells because water usage is greater today than it used to be. People need more roads now too. The increase in the white-tailed deer population changed a lot of things as well. Some people bought land just for deer hunting. Now with all the houses, it's hard to hunt with dogs, because the dogs go where the game goes, and people have different attitudes about hunting and hunters on their land. Some people want to have their resources and use them too. If people do it right, they should be able to use the land and still have a steady supply of resources. When Paul was growing up, life centered around the school and the cheese factory. There was always a Mothers' Club to help with school and other social events. There were 31 kids in eight grades in the whole school. There was no kindergarten. Paul's brother, seven years younger, was in the last class out of Clay Hill School, around 1957 or '58. The school closed and consolidated with Barneveld. The 4-H clubs were very

active. There was no TV, but Paul listened to westerns on the radio and used his imagination. Without the school and cheese factory, "the neighborhood is not like it used to be." People are more independent; everybody does his own work; they don't depend on their neighbors the way they used to. People used to have the same expectations out of life. Parents tried to educate their kids to have a better life. Paul's mom was a teacher. She taught before she married and started teaching again when Paul's brother was in high school. She taught in a one-room country school and she also taught third and fourth grades in Barneveld. Paul's daughter teaches now, as do several other people in his family.

Paul always wanted a horse of his own, but he never got one. He drove the work horses on the hay-loader when he was young, but it just wasn't the same as sitting up on a real riding horse. Paul's dad planted corn with those work horses for years. Then he just hauled manure with them and, after that, they didn't do much but sit around and eat, so Paul's dad sold them. "Everybody felt terrible when the truck came to pick up the horses because they were probably going for pet food." That was sometime in the early 1950s.

Paul remembers that his father got his first tractor in 1942 or '43. He got a 1938 WC Alice Chalmers. That was the tractor that Paul learned to drive. He could hardly reach the clutch, and that clutch was jerky. But it was a good tractor, fairly efficient. Paul owns two Alice Chalmers antiques now, a 1948 and a 1951. He hauls wood, cuts weeds, and takes care of fences with the old tractors. A friend who is a mechanic overhauled the old WD Alice Chalmers. It was expensive to get parts. "But if you think it's expensive to get parts, go price a new one!" But Paul confessed he'd still like to have a little bit better tractor, maybe one with a bucket on it.

The crops have changed over time too. Few grew soybeans when Paul was growing up, except in a dry year. Sometimes then the soy was cut and dried for hay. They planted sedan grass for pasture, but they had to

be careful, as it can be toxic to cows at certain times, and make them sick. Paul never had any cows get sick from sedan grass, but a few cows bloated on alfalfa. His dad put a tube down the bloated animal's throat and poured something down to try to make the cow gag to get rid of the gas. Later the vet would jab a knife with a sheath into the stomach and leave a plug in to let the gas come out. When they bloat, animals can asphyxiate themselves and die. Paul's brother's cattle ate acorns. One fall it was wet and the acorns stayed toxic longer than usual. The vet said there was nothing they could do. Some calves died. Paul's brother had one steer that bloated every day. He'd just run that tube down his throat and make him gag. Then they put another steer in with him. He never bloated again after he had a companion.

Paul told me that if the cheese factories hadn't stopped making cheese when they did, they probably would have been put out of business by the DNR because their sewage systems for the cheese waste were so inadequate. Most of them had a raw sewage line that ran out on farmland and into the rivers and creeks. It was a big thing to fish for suckers in the spring of the year where the cheese factory emptied into the river. You'd find them feeding on curd, cheese rind, and other cheese scraps. Paul thought there was probably never enough stuff running into the water to deplete the oxygen.

A few years back, liquid manure spilled from an upright tank, about four or five miles upstream from Daleyville. The tank was quite a ways from the stream, but the manure ran down the hillside and got into the stream. The spill depleted the oxygen in the water for a long way down and there was a big fish kill. That made a big difference in the quality of Gordon Creek. There are different weeds growing there now. A veterinarian told a farmer still farming below where the spill was that bacteria from the spill could cause problems for his milk cows, and that the bacteria could remain in the mud for quite a few years. Paul said the farmer

whose manure spilled had to pay a fine, but that didn't return the water quality to its former state. And that had been a good trout stream! Even the pit manure gets really potent because it sits there and ferments. You can only put it on hayground about twice a year or you'll burn it up. It doesn't smell very good either!

Another farmer had a beef feedlot and pushed the manure from the feedlot into a drainage ditch. There was a bad rain and the manure flowed down the drainage ditch. That farmer got into some trouble because of that.

A small amount of manure, left to nature, dissipates in the elements, but too much manure creates problems. Paul considers this related to the bigger size of farms now. More cattle are kept in a smaller area now, which leads to more manure in a smaller area as well. Previously, farmers didn't raise more cattle than their farm could feed. Now the number of farms has declined but not necessarily the number of cattle in the area; the cattle are concentrated. Sometimes there are 300 to 500 cows for one farm, and that means a lot of manure.

When I asked Paul how he felt about the changes in the area, he acknowledged that "you can't stay in the same timeframe forever." He figured that, when he grew up, it was as good a time to grow up on a farm as there will ever be. Everybody had the same interests. Kids hadn't been "corrupted by TV yet." Farm kids grew up with a good work ethic. There were always chores to do on a farm. But it's hard to make a living off the land unless you run a big operation, though maybe these garden farms that grow fresh produce might have a better chance on small acreage. "You're gonna see more houses" because more people will sell their land for houses. When Paul was growing up his dad had two sisters who farmed and all but two of his mom's nine siblings farmed. Most people didn't move more than 10 miles away from their family in those days. Paul remembers a lot more visiting with the neighbors in the evenings than there is today. On holidays you usually



went to a neighbor's for a meal, but often the neighbors were relatives. All that has changed. Now "local" seems to mean international, with all the communications, news media, travel, and general mobility.

In the future, Paul would like to see his farm stay the same. He just sold some logs from some trees he cut last year. But his woods is an old woods with some mature and some distressed trees. There's not much natural reforestation going on, between the deer and the wild turkeys. "Turkeys scratch up a woods to find acorns, so there are no acorns left for the trees."

When Paul was growing up, he was introduced to hunting and fishing when he spent a lot of time with his aunt and uncle. He just lived for trout season the first or second weekend in May! Paul got to go along when his uncle went pheasant hunting too. There was no deer hunting then, but he always looked forward to the first day of pheasant season. His wife's favorite game was squirrel meat, though, and Paul always liked it too; "I just grew up that way." He chuckled at a memory of his daughter, in reference to squirrel hunting. Apparently she told her students in New Mexico that, when she was growing up, her parents made her eat squirrel meat. They couldn't believe that! Then, when Paul was visiting her, they went to a restaurant. The waiter was one of her students and tried to tell them they were getting squirrel meat. Paul saw an article on squirrel hunting and how to prepare the meat, so he sent it to his daughter to pass on to the waiter.

But why is he so attached to this place? Paul said he likes the country. He grew up here and he has a deep feeling for the woods and the wildlife here. After all, he wanted to live here so much that he drove back and forth to work at Oscar Mayer in Madison for 38 years!

Paul knows a lot of people here. He knows the country here too; he spent time hunting and fishing in the area. And he values the farm. He's been living in the same house since 1965. Another fellow built this house for himself in 1934. Paul claimed to be "a creature of habit," then added that his wife still likes this house. "It's old, but it's a good house."

*Paul likes the country and he has a deep feeling for the woods and the wildlife here.*

In 1965, Paul bought the house for \$16,500. Today (2004) it would be worth \$225,000 to 250,000. Paul used to trade cars every few years. He told me how gasoline was 30-some cents a gallon, and remembered driving to Minnesota once and seeing the gas stations competing. The prices in these "gas wars" were \$0.18 to \$0.20 a gallon. Not only have gas prices gone up, but houses and land prices have gone up too. Houses used to stand for sale for years here, into the early 1960s. Then beef farmers from Illinois came and bought land here. In 1976, Paul saw a 240-acre farm that was for sale at \$400 an acre. He didn't buy that farm, but it sold just a few years ago for \$950 an acre. Now there are three houses on that land with two more to come. Paul doesn't like to see houses across the fence, but he says he can't do much about it.

Paul remembered the man who used to haul the most milk to the factory: Henry Gordon. The local stream was named after him. But his barn fell into disrepair. His son took a job off the farm and sold the farm, though he kept the house. Prices rose. In fact, Paul said prices had been accelerating very fast (in the two years previous to the interview)! In one year, an acre valued at \$2,000 to \$3,000 had jumped to \$6,000. Most

people were just looking for a building site, some just a place to hunt, resulting in more homeowners than farmers in the area. Paul felt you have to have people with a love for the land. He was glad Dr. Botham sold 900 acres to TNC when he could have sold the land for more to be “chunked up” for new houses.

I asked Paul about his job, so he told me some about Oscar Mayer and his work there. When he started working there, in Madison, in 1959, it was a family-owned operation. General Foods later bought the company, then Phillip Morris took it over and merged with Kraft, and now Kraft is in charge of the meat packing. Paul told me that when the Oscar Mayer family owned the company, it was a pretty good place to work. They expected you to work hard and they expected to pay for your work, and he said the quality of the meat and spices used was the best. Now, he told me, price determines what is used and whether a product is good or bad.

Starting in 1959, Paul worked in canning for eight years. He ran the government contracts. The Vietnam War was just getting started then. They pre-fried bacon and other meats for canning. Bacon had a really high salt content, enough to last for seven years. Ham steak and pork steak were pre-fried, canned, cooked in a steam pressure cooker, and sent to Vietnam. Some of those boxes were extra heavy and had to be banded, before they were banded to the pallet. If you didn't have the right equipment to get into them, you could starve to death. Paul said they made some pretty good meals in those days. He thought the ham and lima beans in a small can were excellent. They made some “minute meals” with rice, but these never caught on. They made ham sliced for luncheon meat. The stuffers were all loaded by hand then; everything is automated now.

When Paul worked there, the company slaughtered beef, hogs, and calves at first. They stopped slaughtering calves soon after he started. At the peak, they killed 1,200 hogs per hour, from the 1960s into the

'70s. In the 1970s, they stopped the hog kill and later closed down the beef kill too. They started buying meat from different packers, like Iowa Beef. The boning department was also shut down. The people who cut the meat from the bones made good money, about \$17 an hour back in the '70s and that was equivalent to lawyer fees. But the work was really hard and some of them paid a dear price, working where it was cold, handling a sharp knife, and cutting up such large animals. The “boners” got terrible arthritis from handling cold meat year after year.

Paul gave his perspective on the 1984 tornado that hit Barneveld. At that time, Paul had German short-haired dogs that he fed late at night. Shortly before midnight, he noticed it was “funny” outside. In the morning the power was off. He called in late to work. Driving into Madison, he heard that about 10 people had been killed. Paul had worked with the first man who got killed: Bob Arneson. Apparently Bob heard a noise and got up to look around. The tornado took part of the house where he was standing and blew it right into another house. The tornado had knocked the power lines down all over. Paul and his wife went over to the site with the Red Cross. Paul said Barneveld was not recognizable as the same place that it was. That tornado took most of the trees out of the town, and a lot of people never did rebuild there. The high school dropped down to 65 students. At the time of the interview, Paul estimated about 1,000 people in the town, with about 100 students in the high school. The population went down for a little while, but now there is new development and the town is twice the size it was. Arneson's dairy farm is just part of town now; strangers moved in. The town has gotten more modern. There is a clinic there now and a lot of Barneveld is much newer than it was when Paul was growing up. When Paul was growing up, everything was “laid back.” One time the bank door was broken and nobody was even around. A fellow backed his Studebaker into



*Paul collected a regal fritillary for a 4-H project in the 1950s. Now, TNC and the Prairie Enthusiasts have protected land where that rare butterfly occurred.*

the bank door and then just went home to bed. He called the bank in the morning. In those days, guys carried guns in the car so they could hunt on the way home from school and everybody carried a pocket knife. Now you get expelled from school if you have a pocket knife.

I showed Paul some photos and they stimulated some more discussion about wildlife. Paul said he'd seen badgers many times. Once in the summer, Paul saw a mother and baby badger lying in the road. They ran off as he approached, but the baby got stuck in some vines and the mother came back and snarled at him. Paul has never seen a prairie chicken, but his wife's grandfather hunted them near Verona in the early 1900s. Paul has always liked bobolinks. The males sing in flight. For a few years he hardly ever saw them, but they are back now. When farmers cut hay at night, some grassland birds probably get run through the hay binder. He's seen them fly up at first, but as the grass strips get smaller, no more birds fly up. Paul says the red-headed woodpeckers are coming back again and he's seen a few pileated woodpeckers too, though not since the woods was logged. There was a blue heron rookery there, with 10 active nests. It was really noisy. Then, all of a sudden, the birds were gone. They never came back. He wonders if maybe coons ate the eggs. Paul doesn't think the DNR likes blue heron rookeries by a trout stream because the birds eat the fish. Sometimes Paul tried to catch young quail. They were like little shadows. He never could catch them. He left a hay strip for quail, but the birds are gone now, maybe because of harsh winters and the intensive grain farming coupled with the removal of fence rows with the brush that offered some protection from hawks. Right in Mount Horeb, just a block away, a coyote grabbed a cat. Paul hollered when he heard the ruckus, and the coyote ran off. He took that yellow Tom cat to the vet and it was okay now. When he was a kid, Paul had an insect collection for 4-H. In 1950 or '51, he caught

a regal fritillary. TNC bought land because of a rare butterfly there, and it was the same kind of butterfly. But that was the only one Paul has seen. He said it was prettier than a monarch.

When Paul was a kid, there were more wildfires in the woods than there are now. Other than the local farmers, no one fought those fires. They kept the brush down and didn't damage the trees. Those fires made a difference in the brush, the blackberries, and the multi-flora rose. Paul has been fighting the multi-flora rose for years, though he has seen deer and wild turkey eat rose hips from those bushes. He figures the deer and turkeys compete with the squirrels for acorns too. In a poor acorn year, the squirrel population declines.

There were two dry years in 1988 and '89. The corn was barely hip high. But in those dry years, oak trees germinated on the brow of a hill on the farm. The brush protected the oaks. Now they are 10 to 12 feet high. Paul observed that if you knick a tree with a chain saw, the tree is stimulated to produce acorns. There are 30 acres of woods on his farm. Native grasses or oaks are to be planted along the creek. But he doesn't know how the oaks will survive the deer. He planted winter rye last year and deer love rye. He's planted 500 red oaks, 500 white oaks, and 500 red cedar, but rabbits cut the oaks off. Red and black oak filled the woods when he was young, but now it's all white oak. He figured the multi-flora rose protected the baby oaks.

Paul is enrolling some of his bottom land in the CREP incentive program. Paul said he did okay on the crops. He had no trouble selling corn or hay, but some buyers were slow in payment, he didn't have a lot of machinery, and there's less call for hay now. He figured CRP was the best thing now. He's learned more about the land and its conservation. He has goldenrods, for example. He always thought they were pretty and didn't mow them. Now he knows they're invasive.



**Twila Mae (Thomas) Norman**

*Born May 8, 1912*

Twila and I sat at her dining room table in a newer ranch house. Her son and his wife live next door in the older home where Twila used to live. She had four musical instruments (two organs, a piano, and a keyboard) there in her house, evidence of her musical abilities. She plays them all. She taught in Black Earth many years, but is retired from that work now.

I asked Twila how she came to be in the Military Ridge area. She was born in an old survey area southwest of Dodgeville. When she was just 2 years old, her folks moved to this side (northeast) of Dodgeville to a place that was owned by a man named Tommy Jones. When she was 5 or 6, they moved into an adjacent farm that was also owned by Mr. Jones, in the Wakefield School area. Twila lived there until she married in 1930. She attended what she now calls “the old folklore school” for eight grades. She graduated from Dodgeville High School and took a teacher training course. At that time you could teach after one year of training. But she didn’t teach for long at that time. In 1930, she moved to Ridgeway to the house next door to the one she lives in now, because that’s where the man she married, Clifford Strutt, lived. Clifford finished an agriculture course at the University of Wisconsin. Then his folks moved off the farm and she and Clifford moved into the farmhouse. It was certainly much different when she moved in than it is now. She could reach the top of a maple tree by the garage then, but she can’t begin to reach it now. It was about five feet tall then; now it must be 30 or 40 feet high.

The house was right beside the road. It was just a dirt road then, and, when it rained, you didn’t go far without putting chains on the car. It was easy to get stuck in the mud. When it didn’t rain, it was impossible to keep dust out of the house. Twila felt embarrassed when people came to visit because she couldn’t keep the house as clean as she would have liked. She remembered a “Dakota dust storm” that hit them in the mid-1930s. There was a quarter inch of dust on

everything. Twila guessed people referred to the storm that way because such dust storms were really bad in the Dakotas. Those storms actually picked up the dry soil and moved the hills in the Dakotas. Some of the same storms blew in Wisconsin. There were several storms here, but the one that was so bad happened on a Sunday afternoon. “We were visiting about a mile west of here. We came home and were surprised.” Although the doors and windows were closed, it was unbelievable how thick the dust was. Not having a vacuum cleaner then, they cleaned up with a dust cloth and a dust pan. Twila had lived there five or six years when they started grading and graveling the road. Tires were smaller and cars lighter than than at the time of the interview (2004), so the roads didn’t become as solid from car traffic as they do now. They didn’t have the machinery to work with that they do now either. In the winter there was no snow removal in the early 1930s. It was the mid-1930s before they started having snow plows. Twila remembered a series of snow storms that took the snow to the level of the telephone lines in the front of her house. The snow was so high that, even once they’d been plowed out, she couldn’t see cars going by on the roads. They must have gotten snow plows from Madison to try to clear those roads. Twila remembered some “centrifical plow” they got from Madison. It turned in circles to move the snow. “We were blocked in for a month or more.” Farmers had to come on snowshoes and skis to get groceries. The trains couldn’t get through. “But that’s history now. Now, you don’t even know it’s winter, as far as the roads are concerned here.” Twila lives on a county highway where the snow plows come out. She said she’s never had the inconvenience of living on a side road since she married. They began to plow the roads in the area in the early 1940s. Plowing the roads changed things in that people could socialize more and drive further away to jobs. When Twila went back to school at the University and she drove to Madison through the winter weather, it never hampered her much; the roads were well cared for.

Twila remembered a "Dakota dust storm"  
that hit in the mid-1930s.

People came to Madison from a great distance. Once in the summer she got a flat tire on the way to take an exam. A fellow came along from Highland and helped her. When the war came, women went to work and cars became easier to drive. Women could get out and provide for their families. "Having a car and the roads made a terrific difference to our pattern of living."

The Great Depression of the 1930s was a rough time when everybody was trying to grab a job to earn a penny. Her father-in-law had a garden. Twila remembers thinning carrots and trying to replant the ones that were pulled out. They raised chickens so "we had chickens and eggs to take to the store." Her husband farmed in cooperation with his father, who lived in town nearby. They had Jersey cows. They separated the milk and took the cream to Knellwolf Creamery in Dodgeville. There's a little mall there in Dodgeville now. At the farm, they had a pumphouse. There was a concrete tank, about 10 by 20 feet. At one end, it had two concrete barrels and the water ran through one into the other. The first one had a wooden barrel inside for drinking water. The drinking water was always fresh because the water ran through that one. Water was confined in the second barrel area. They put the cream cans in that part of the system to keep the cream cold. The overflow water went into the stock trough. They were on high grounds so they had a windmill and the wind kept the water very fresh. The frame is still there, but the wheel is gone. The pumpjack was a motor that ran on gasoline, with two arms about four feet long, extending from the flywheels. The arms raised the rod that was fastened to the piston, and that raised the piston and dropped it down again, and that raised water out of the cylinder down in the well.

Twila considered her father-in-law to be a self-educated man, very modern in his approach to things. He had the second silo in Iowa County. He built that silo around 1908, before Twila came there. The silo had a round rock foundation about three feet thick, with a

diameter of about 15 feet. From the foundation up, it was lathe and plaster with tin around the outside. He started to use silage to feed the stock. They used that silo until about 15 years prior to the interview. It was well built, hard to destroy and to dispose of. They put green, chopped corn in the silo. A farmer came with a corn binder and they cut the corn in bundles. Farmers came from all around to help. They cut the corn "in the hard milk," when it was moist but not too green, so it would go through the fermenting stage. "The silo had a real smell of its own." But the cattle really loved it.

Starting in about 1908,  
they put green, chopped corn  
in the silo and used the  
silage to feed the stock.

Twila said she stopped dairy farming around 1965. Her husband died suddenly of a heart attack in 1960, and she only did dairy farming a few years after that. She was teaching school when he died and she had two boys. One son was in the Service in Alaska; the other in the National Guard in Madison. Twila said the officers were so good, they gave her sons leniency to come and help her keep the farm going. The older son got out of the Service two or three years after his father died, and life became a lot easier for her. She said she could not have done the farm without people helping her. When her husband died, in his mid-50s, he had just bought the second farm and cattle to stock it and machinery to run it. The debt was enormous, confounded by the grief of losing her partner. Twila couldn't afford to stop teaching. Neighbors helped a lot. Her lawyer and other friends gave her good advice. She was able to borrow enough to stabilize her life on

*Twila showed me a picture of an old country school. She taught grades one to eight and all the different subjects.*

the farm. Still, Twila observed, it was amazing how quickly some people wanted their money when she was suddenly a widow left alone. Her husband had bought a tractor on time. It was big for tractors in those days. The week after her husband was buried, the man he owed for the tractor was on her doorstep asking for the money. Twila said there were several experiences like that, but she was able to get through them with the help of her banker and her two boys. The boys were university graduates and they had always been hard workers. Both her lawyer and banker were very complimentary to her when she was finally able to pay off all the debts after her husband had died. They didn't think she'd be able to do it. Twila would have liked to have gone on to school herself, but she didn't have the money and she couldn't afford to stop teaching.

Twila had two sons and one daughter, so I asked if any of her grown children were farmers. Both boys, she said. When she was financially able to change her life pattern, "teaching and that," her son Tom's two boys, her grandchildren, bought one farm. Another farm sold to another grandson, but she kept the third farm.

When we talked about her career, Twila confided that she had always wanted to be a nurse. She would have liked to have become a doctor, but, when she graduated in 1929, she couldn't afford medical school. Her parents were "as poor as church mice." But teaching was predominantly a woman's profession then, and a year of training certified you to teach in the rural, country schools. She taught in a school north of Barneveld, about 15 miles away, then transferred to the local school, about six miles down Highway H. She only taught for a year after training in 1930, but returned to teaching around 1938 or 1940. She showed me a picture of an old country school. She taught grades one to eight together and she taught all the different subjects. When it was time for fifth grade reading, the fifth graders came and sat up front. At the end of that class, they moved back again. Twila made use of the



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older students. She thought there was a lot the younger children got from the orientation of the older children. When we lost the rural, country schools, Twila thinks we lost a style of learning where the students had to be more independent and do more for themselves. She followed her eighth grade students when they went on to high school. Her principal always complimented her that her students were right up there with the others in high school. Twila prided herself in her creativity as a teacher. She made up games to teach the drills, to make the learning fun. She used an "Old Maids"



*Twila said she doesn't see many meadowlarks anymore.*

game for a reading drill and she made up games with numbers where the students had to pick out the correct combinations of numbers. In those days they didn't have all the workbooks they have in schools today, so she used a lot of games. She only had about eight to 10 students in the early years, 15 to 18 in the later years.

I solicited information about wildlife, including fish and birds, and Twila told me her fishing experience wasn't very specialized. She didn't go fishing during her married life at all, though they had trout streams and people would ask for permission to go down there to fish. The DNR planted fish in the waters. Twila said she'd like to learn to fish now. She likes nature. But fishing is a business now with specialized flies and other equipment. When she was growing up near Dodgeville, she used willow sticks trimmed down, with a fish hook, string, and a cork on the string. She'd go down in the valley and fish. If she got a little fish eight inches long, she thought she had a monster!

In the winter, when she was growing up, Twila and her sister had skis. They did a lot of skiing on a nice hill across from the house. They'd go scooting down the hill and ski right across a frozen stream.

There are more birds around the house in winter now, though not so much the summer birds. There are trees around the house now, some evergreens. She planted trees. She was going to plant blueberries, but people told her the birds would eat the berries and spot the roof. When I showed her a picture of a meadowlark, Twila said she doesn't see them anymore, though she used to see a lot of them. She identified the prairie chicken in a photo, but said she'd never seen one. She told me about a bird she had seen recently, but for the first time. She described it as a big bird, like a small crow, with dots all over its breast, a lot of red on it, and kind of yellow or orange.

Now Twila says she sees some wildlife she wishes she didn't see: raccoons. Last summer her 12-year-old

grandson tried to raise sweet corn to sell. Though he put up an electric fence and all, the coons took all the corn. The boy was upset because he wanted to do something to make money. "Coons are sharp little animals!"

Neither Twila nor her husband hunted. Her husband didn't like killing. But a lot of the men and boys in the area did. There were a lot of deer hunters that wanted to hunt on her land. She let them when it was right for them to be hunting. Most hunters were very respectful of her property. Twila was glad to have the deer hunted, as they were pretty destructive of the crops when they weren't hunted.

Like her mother, Twila is quite musical. When Twila went back to school, she went into physical education. She did a lot of dancing, musical games, and recreational work with kids. She plays the organ, piano, and keyboard now. She used to play the accordion quite a bit but she told me she hurt her back in an accident and can no longer stand the weight of the accordion on her back. She wondered if maybe there might be a lighter weight accordion she could play now. Twila is in the process of doing musical compositions. She composed some wedding music and wanted to copyright it, but she found out she could copyright 15 pieces for the same price as one composition. She's not sure she can compose 15. For a while, Twila "did quite a bit of volunteer music for the homes and that." As a volunteer, she worked with a group at Stonefield Retirement Home for a while. In the community hall, there were dining units with a table and four chairs. There were rollers on the chairs and people could get around pretty well. She got big playground balls and got the participants to kick the balls around to music. But a year ago, she had open heart surgery and the doctors told her she had to slow down; she couldn't keep doing everything. Now, she confessed, she gets much more tired than she used to.

In addition to her music, Twila worked creatively sewing quilts. She also made and decorated wedding cakes.

After Twila's first husband died in 1960, she continued teaching and still kept her properties in the country. She remarried Goldwin Norman in 1967; that's how she got the name "Norman." Goldwin was transferred to Minneapolis for his business, so they moved up there, but Twila still had her properties here in Wisconsin, so she went back and forth a lot. She was teaching for a while in Minnesota. In the early 1970s the retirement system for Wisconsin teachers was revamped, however, and it was to her advantage to teach in Wisconsin, so she came down here to teach and just went to Minnesota on weekends. While she was in Minnesota, she went back to school in Minneapolis. She did her graduate work there and became certified in special education. When she came back to Wisconsin, she worked for Dane County and trained student teachers. Goldwin was sick for three years before he died in 1981. Since she retired in 1977, she had already been living back here at the time. She did go back to school after Goldwin died and got her LPN (licensed practical nursing) degree at vocational school. She returned here because it was home to her. She'd been prominent in the church community and still had

the farm property here, but mostly she wanted to be near her family. She had lived in cities, first in Madison after her first husband died. She got the farm in order to leave Madison. Later, she lived in Minneapolis with her second husband. Yet, she likes the freedom of living in the country, being able to get out and kneel in the dirt and watch the plants grow. She likes machinery too. She told me she can run tractors. Though the farmers in the family didn't trust her to plant the corn, she could do anything else. She was never a "citified" person. Her folks were always country people.

Twila responded to my query about changes in the area by pointing out that the bike trail used to be railroad tracks. She said the roads have changed too, not so much the layout of them, but the surfaces and grooving of the roads. She identified the ease with which we do things now as a change. Men used to plow a garden with a walking plow and a team. Now she uses a tiller. "It's altogether different." Seeds are processed differently. We know germination dates and different characteristics of fruits and vegetables. She used to have an apple orchard with "apples of every kind running out our ears." Now you can buy apples cheaper than you



*Twila plays the organ, piano, and keyboard. She has composed wedding music and volunteers her talents at the local retirement home.*

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can cultivate an orchard. We know more about nutrition in the last couple of years, more about health and body conditions too.

Twila noted there are more people living into their 90s, to 100 or 101. She sees them listed in the obituaries. (She was turning 92 the month after the interview.) She was audited the previous year. She said the state audited her because few teachers continue receiving their pensions in their 90s, but she is still getting hers. People are living longer and many of them are still active. She still drives. She has concern, because of the birthrate and increased longevity, about what will be there in social security for the young people of today when they get older.

Likewise, she worries about all the houses that are being built all over the land. She wonders how there will be enough land for production of food and things they really need. "That scares me. It really does." She doesn't like to see the land being covered by houses and blacktop. Twila has had opportunities to sell her land for the construction of houses, but she won't do it. "Older people need to have some consideration for generations to come." Not only in regard to the land, but water too. "What do we do in this country without water, pure water? To me it's scary. It's a concern. But what do we do with people that need houses?" Twila did let her grandson build out here before she sold him the farm. There was a little strip on the brow of the hill, an idle spot that was big enough to build a house. That was the only option for building she gave him. He has crops all around. Of course he has to have a drive out. "He's doing a good job of it." Now he's bought the farm anyway, since she couldn't run it anymore. He has crops all around. She says he keeps the fertility of the land up.

Twila worried that it's a little late to start thinking about "preserving and protecting our natural resources." Yes, preserve what we have now, but the population is still increasing. When I asked what

she thought could be done to help keep rural areas rural, to keep the Military Ridge area open, to keep it country, she answered simply: "I don't know." She wondered if "man, with as good a brain as he's going to have," can find an answer. "The Bible says there are going to be famines and famines. Are we destined for that?" We could import from other lands, but that takes jobs from our people here. "You're damned if you do and damned if you don't."

*"What do we do in this country without water, pure water?"*

When I asked how Twila would like to see her farm in the future, she said she is pleased that her son and grandson are very conservation-minded. They work closely with the corn crop and the germination program. Though some of the old-fashioned farmers think you should plow the ground until it blows away, her son and grandson are going to no-till. She thinks no-till is a successful method. Her grandson went to school in Green Bay to get an education in order to get a position in this area. Then he can work with his father to help on the farm. Twila considers herself lucky that her "boys" want to farm, though they have other jobs too.

Twila does have 60 acres of her farm enrolled in CRP. After her husband died, her sons had their own professions and didn't have time to help her any more than they were already doing. While some of the other farms specialized, she didn't have the labor to do "big dairying." Years before there had been dairy cattle, hogs, and horses on her farm, but not now. She didn't have the labor to keep it all up, so she put the land in CRP. She rented the land to the government and grew

hay, and got paid for it. It's easier to rent to the government than looking for a renter every year, and Twila says some renters are not so good, but the government takes care of the land. She's glad to be in CRP.

Twila mentioned a hail storm that destroyed her roof in 1999. Different people advised her to put a metal roof on, so she did. She didn't think she would like it, but she does.

Since she brought up a hail storm, I asked about the Barneveld Tornado in the mid-1980s. Twila was in Minneapolis visiting her daughter the night the tornado hit. She was in nursing then, working in St. Joe's Hospital in Dodgeville, so she came back to work the next day to find they were still bringing people in from Barneveld. She remembered seeing one woman who looked "absolutely black" because the tornado had blown dust and dirt into the woman's skin. Another woman told her how she woke up in the storm and went to find her shoes. She was walking through crushed glass. Twila's son, Dick Strutt, was one who came to help the people in Barneveld after the tornado. She said he described it as "weird." There were no lights and you didn't know where you were walking. You didn't know whether people were dead or not, but you were looking for them. Going through houses to see if people were okay, Dick got to an elderly woman. The window had been blown out, though her house was not otherwise seriously damaged. The woman told the rescue men not to worry about it. She said she'd go uptown in the morning to get a window to replace the broken one. She didn't realize there was no store, no uptown there anymore. Several people were killed in the tornado. Twila remembered the story of a boy whose folks were both killed in the tornado, maybe a sibling too. The boy was hurt badly during the storm, but he had relatives in Evansville, so he went there. He was featured in the newspaper recently for making a good recovery. It was an awful thing to go through, even for those just coming to



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help. There was a 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the tornado, but Dick didn't want to speak about his experience there. Barneveld is like a new place now. Twila takes care of an elderly man up there. Sometimes senior citizens will mention the tornado.

"Edison sure lit up the world!" Twila pointed out that at night you can see nine tower lights from her house. There was no electric bill until 1941. They had kerosene lamps to begin with. When it's not dark, you can see the hills, the blue mounds, out the window. Twila says that scene is a barometer. If you don't see the blue mounds in the morning, you better be pretty careful when you're driving in to work.

But before I left to return to my own office, Twila played three renditions of "Jesus Loves Me," on three different instruments. It felt to me like a small but glorious celebration of her life, and I thanked her from my heart.



## **Delbert Leland Peterson**

*Born: June 12, 1924*

## **Marcia Colleen (Erickson) Peterson**

*Born: April 12, 1929*

**D**elbert and Marcia shared a lot of the same memories. They have been married since 1947, and they grew up in the same area, so it was appropriate to interview them together. Each was an enthusiastic narrator. I sat with them in their kitchen.

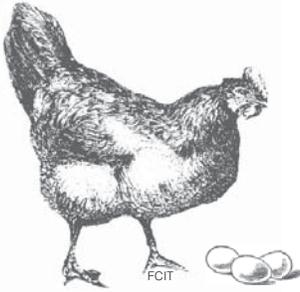
In 1855, Delbert's grandfather homesteaded the ground where we conversed. They lived in a dugout through the winter and built a two room log cabin the next year. They raised eight of nine children there; they lost one. Delbert's father was the youngest of the family. He bought the 80 acres from his father and added two additional 80-acre parcels. In 1951, a century after his grandfather homesteaded there, Delbert bought all 240 acres from his dad. Delbert's parents lived there with him until they passed away. His father died in 1954; his mother in 1971. They heard a lot from these parents about the way things used to be, and Marcia and Delbert wrote much of it down. They knew that Delbert's grandfather had been called to the Civil War, and they knew that his name was Peder Bratbrakken, a Norwegian name translating to "steep hill." They changed Peder to Peter, a more English way of spelling it. With Peter as his first name, then, the name was changed to Peterson and handed down as such to Delbert. Delbert doesn't remember the log house, but the house he lives in now was built in 1896. He sleeps in the same bedroom that he was born in. Delbert was one of 12 children, eight boys and four girls. He and his siblings walked cross country about two miles to school. There was a lot of bad weather in those days, lots of snow. His dad made skis so they used the skis to get to school. Delbert graduated from the eighth grade of the Adamsville School District.

Marcia came from just as big a family. In hers, there were six boys and six girls. She grew up about a mile down the valley from where they live now, near Blanchardville. Nine of her siblings were farmers. She said it was hard growing up on a farm in the '30s. She and Delbert agreed they pretty much lived on potatoes

during the Great Depression. Marcia's mom had a big cucumber patch and they made pickles in two-quart jars. "Not much was wasted." They always had chickens. Her family raised 500 baby chicks every year. "We didn't think about it, but at that time we were luckier than people who lived in town. Wherever we went, we always took an oatmeal box of boiled eggs and a two-quart bottle of milk, and others were grateful for it. We didn't know we were poor. Everyone was kind of in the same boat."

"We made our own fun!" Delbert exclaimed, so I asked what they did for fun when they were growing up. Marcia said she used cardboard to sled on the snow. Delbert played ball. They both played a game called "anti-over," where one person threw the ball over the house and the person who caught the ball had to run around and try to tag someone. Marcia remembered crawling through the hay. Delbert played in the hay too. Delbert said he used to walk on the beams in the barn, barefooted, playing. The beams were 14 feet above the floor, with nothing in between to catch him if he fell. But he never got hurt doing that. Marcia said there was usually a creek wherever they ended up. Someone would say, "There's green arms in there!" to scare her. She could just see those green arms reaching for her. She didn't like to go by the creek very often.

Delbert said they used to have a spring on their farm, but it dried up. There used to be running water in the spring when it seeped. But now they have to pump water for the cattle. They had to pump the old well a couple of times a day. It was getting dry. In 1968 or '70, they drilled a new well. The old one was too close to the barn and not deep enough. They built the new well on the hillside behind the house. There was solid sand rock, then the drillers hit soapstone. They cased it, drilled down more, then had to pull all the casing out and redo it when they hit more soapstone. While it usually takes a day to drill a well, it took a week to drill this one. It was 375 feet deep.



*As a boy, Delbert used to help the neighbor pick eggs.*

When Delbert was a kid, the farm was run with horses. His dad got their first tractor in 1939 or '40, when Delbert talked him into buying a tractor. The neighbor had just gotten a new little Ford Ferguson tractor and Delbert "just had to have one." Before the tractor, Delbert had to come home from school and hitch up the team to start plowing for the next year. On her parents' farm, Marcia had to go out and catch the horses, ride them back, and harness them to work in the fields. The little horseback ride part of it was fun. She knows she could have gotten dumped off the horse, but she never did.

Delbert said the farm was a dairy farm until 18 to 20 years ago, when his knees played out and he had to quit milking. He had both knees replaced; he has stainless steel knees now. He had to quit milking, but he got a few head of beef and hoped to pay the taxes with the proceeds. When he was young, Delbert milked by hand. He said he started milking on the opposite side of the cow from his sister when he was just 4 years old. Marcia concurred, "I did too. When I was 4 years old, I helped my mom milk cows."

When Delbert was a boy, the kids used to go to the neighbor's, the Swenson's. Once a week they helped Mrs. Swenson pick the eggs. They had to crawl in the hay mow to find the nests and the eggs. She'd "candle" them (hold up in front of a candle or flash light) to make sure they were safe to eat, since the hen might have been sitting on them a few days already. She would look for a spot that indicated a chick was growing inside the egg. One time Delbert threw an egg to Marcia. She caught it all over her face. It was "a dirty trick" (literally!). In order to catch an egg, you have to give with it.

Delbert said "we were one of the last ones to get electricity here." That was in 1946 or '47, just before Marcia came to live there. They got married in 1947. Marcia said electricity came to her family in 1946. It was nice to switch on a light instead of lighting the kerosene



*Delbert sleeps in the same bedroom that he was born in.*



*With family roots extending back several generations in the area, Delbert and Marcia really did know each other all their lives.*

lamp and doing chores by lamplight. It was nicer not to have to carry a lantern and it was safer not to have to mess with kerosene. Delbert said he still burns a little wood to heat the kitchen. There is oil heat in the rest of the house, but just the wood stove in the kitchen.



*Red-wings will practically hit you trying to protect their young.*

Once she got them, Marcia knew how to take advantage of electric appliances. She used to make butter in a very modern way. She emptied a 5-gallon can of cream into the washing machine. It was a GE with an electric motor with a tub inside and a ringer outside. She turned on the machine. Then all she had to do was pick the butter out of there, wash it, pack it, and have butter for the whole summer!

That reminded Delbert of the way his mother washed the laundry. They had a cistern that collected rain water from the roof, and a hand pump by the sink. His mother pumped water to wash the clothes. She “had a double ringer washing machine run by a belt with an agitator that looked like four cow tits.”

Delbert notices changes in the land in terms of the amount of woods. He said there were more woods when he was a kid than there are now, but “we cut a lot of woods.” One hot, dry summer, he and his dad took a cross-cut saw and cut whole trees down so the cows could eat leaves off the trees. In the morning, you couldn’t find a leaf still on any of the branches. Luckily that fall there was plenty of rain. “Farmers gamble on the weather,” Marcia emphasized. Delbert said he and his dad made some money selling white oak fence posts. There were no steel posts at that time, just wooden ones. He put up about 1,000 posts that fall. That was a lot of wood! Marcia said her family had to do that too. They had to get posts cut for the next year’s fences. Delbert explained that the posts rotted every five years or so and you had to replace them. “We didn’t hurt the earth with those kind of poles,” Marcia added. She commented that telephone poles are treated with something that probably does something unhealthy to the soil.

The conversation went to storms in the area. Delbert said there was a tornado in 1875 that went through and took a lot of the buildings from their farm and all the neighbors’ buildings. That tornado killed quite a few people. Delbert told me how his grandmother

found a neighbor half way to the farmhouse from the old Swenson farm. She was dead, but her baby was still alive. The rest of the family raised that baby.

When the tornado hit Barneveld in 1984, Marcia and Delbert heard about it from the automatic radio that came on to wake them up at 5:00 a.m. Before they did their chores, they heard that Barneveld was gone. Marcia said her stomach just hardened at the news. Nine people were killed in that tornado. Marcia and Delbert went to Barneveld, but they weren’t allowed into the decimated town. They “saw devastation all over the place.” They heard there were deer hanging in the trees in the woods. There was “quite a swath all the way to Black Earth. Now when storms come on TV, Marcia says, “It just makes me sick.”

Two or three times, Delbert and Marcia have lost cattle from lightning strikes. One time a cow and calf were walking by a fence when lightning struck the fence and threw the two animals down a ways from the fence. Both died. Marcia and Delbert had to make sure the calf was the cow’s own.

When there was a bad storm and the electricity was off, they had to milk using their tractor. Delbert explained that the vacuum from the spark plug would run the line to the milking machine. (When their youngest girl graduated from high school, Delbert had put in a pipeline.) He mentioned that during the ice storm in 1987 or ’88 he had an alternator so he helped seven of his neighbors do their milking. They were without electricity for 10 days. The tractor ran many hours, Marcia said. They used it to cool the milk down and to run the freezer so the meat wouldn’t spoil. Everybody was very grateful that Delbert came and helped them. “That’s what it’s all about!” Marcia underscored the importance of community. Delbert commented that “We don’t have the neighbors we used to. We used to exchange work all the time.” They used to fill silos and thresh oats together with neighbors. Marcia remembered one year when there was so much

Delbert commented,  
"We used to exchange work all the time."  
"That's what it's all about!" Marcia underscored.

snow that they weren't able to pick the corn. Delbert went to 13 different places that year to help pick corn. There was so much snow they couldn't get farm equipment into the fields, so the men hand-picked the corn in buckets. The women made hot dishes to feed everyone. Men from prison were brought to help pick corn. They really worked! Wisconsin Governor Earl even came out and helped pick. That was in 1985.

Things are generally easier than when Delbert was a boy. But the machinery is getting too big for the amount of land he and Marcia have now. The big machinery needs 1,000 acres to work in the fields now. Delbert hadn't bought a new piece of machinery in 22 years. He fixed everything he could himself. After his heart attack, he fixed a motor so it would run perfectly. When his nephew once said he couldn't do something like that, Delbert told him "you could if you'd just make up your mind to do it."

The land is different too. Delbert says there are not as many forests and trees as there were, but "brush has taken over." The DNR let wild parsnip grow by the roads, he said, and it spread to the fields. His youngest son drove through on a four-wheeler one time, and he was covered with blisters from wild parsnip. CRP rules won't allow cutting until the first of August, and by then it's all gone to seed. This baffles Delbert. He figured they, the Department of Agriculture, are afraid they might kill a bird or something. But if he sees a bird, he'll stop and let the bird get out of the way. When he was driving the tractor and saw a red-winged blackbird nest (Red-wingeds will practically hit you trying to protect their young. Delbert said this, but I can vouch for it. Red-wingeds have flown smack into my head on more than one occasion when I was in the vicinity of their nest.) Delbert would move the nest and babies, still too young to fly, out of the way. The parent birds would come back.

When I asked about wildlife, Marcia said she saw things she was scared of, like skunks that could have

had rabies. Maybe coyotes or wolves back then; she didn't remember. "We were petrified of any wild animals in the woods." Her grandmother had lived just down the road a little ways and walked to school when she was young. She chipped out pieces of trees along the way to be sure she could find her path home. The woods were thicker then and she was afraid she would get lost if something such as a wolf scared her off the path. They were poor and lived in a log house. Marcia figured they would think we are really wasteful.

When Delbert's grandfather went off to fight in the Civil War, they butchered and kept the meat in 30-gallon crocks to keep it cool. They kept the crocks north of the house. But apparently wolves got up there. The dog tried to keep the wolves away, but the wolves got the best of the dog. Grandmother found the dog all torn up. She dragged him on a sheet back to the house and nursed him back to health. Delbert's grandfather, though, was taken prisoner and sent to Andersonville, down South. When he got released, he found his way home, which couldn't have been easy since he spoke Norwegian rather than English. He came walking up the valley. He'd had dysentery and had lost a lot of weight in prison, and he had grown long whiskers. Grandmother didn't recognize him and wouldn't let him in the house until he mentioned something special about the clock that a stranger wouldn't have known. Then she let him in.

Delbert remembered seeing his first white-tailed deer in the area. That was in 1940. "Now there are too many around." Delbert used to go north to hunt deer every year, but now he thinks there are more deer here than there. While Delbert went hunting, Marcia did the chores. She had to milk the cows.

Along with rabbit and squirrel hunting when he was a boy, Delbert went fishing. He dug worms. He took a bucket and went half a mile to the river until he was old enough to go swimming. It was fun playing tag in and out of the water. He used to fish in the Adamsville

*Although Delbert has put his farm acres into CRP, he still wanted something to do. So he has some cattle and has crops on a neighbor's land.*

River. He caught suckers to eat. "Dad said you bring 'em home, you clean 'em and eat 'em." So he did. He hasn't had time to go fishing now. Marcia said there were lots of fish back then, but now you don't see them anymore.

Delbert saw a badger when he was a kid. His dog went after the badger and Delbert helped pull the stump out of the way so the dog could get at the badger. Badgers are good fighters, but that big police dog did kill that one. Years later, Todd saw one and tried to get it. It was digging a hole too close to the house. He went to get a gun, but the badger was gone when he returned.

Delbert remembers seeing prairie chickens on their land in the 1930s or '40s. For a while there weren't any ring-necked pheasants, but with CRP, they're coming back. "It's wonderful!" (In fact, a cock pheasant ran across the road in front of my car on the way to the interview.) He says there are a lot more wild turkeys now too. Marcia expanded on that thought, "There are too many turkeys now." Marcia has seen lots of meadowlarks this year, some bluebirds, red-wings, and snipes too.

Delbert has put the acres at his home in CRP, and then he rents a neighbor's land to put in 80 acres of crops. He put his acreage in CRP when his boys grew up and left and he was aging so he couldn't do everything alone. But he wanted something to do, so he still has cattle and he put in some crops on the neighbor's land. When his youngest son started farming, Delbert rented land to him for three years. He said he couldn't make it at farming, so he went to school in electronics in Madison. When he graduated with high honors, he started working immediately in Milwaukee. Now he lives in Madison. Delbert has sold him 58 acres from the homestead, including the woods, seven or eight years prior to the interview, and now he's building a house across the road. He isn't married and he helps Delbert and Marcia a lot. He helps Delbert check the cows and band the calves and earmark them. He drives back and forth to Madison for work. This son, Todd Delbert Peterson, was "a late arrival," since he was born



10 years after the last girl. Marcia remembered when he was born. The girls had to come to the hospital with Delbert and they had that baby named before Marcia had even seen him. Todd is the only one of their kids who tried farming, but he didn't feel he could make it, the way milk prices were. Marcia would have liked for the kids to farm. When the cows went, it took her two years to get over the fact that the cows were all gone. They were Holsteins, though not purebred. The cows were special to her, and they all had names. The cows were sold as a herd at a farm auction. As Marcia put it, "You turn them over to someone else and they're butchered and away they go." But Delbert just couldn't do it anymore; he'd had both his knees replaced. Todd is good with cattle, both Marcia and Delbert agreed. "They lost a good farmer when Todd decided to go into something else."

Marcia and Delbert still graze cattle in pastures, but they keep the herd small enough that they can manage it. They feed them in winter. They run them across the road for a week then bring them back on this side. When they had milk cows, they used a night pasture and a day pasture and they had to bring the cows back home for milking time. It was harder that way.

They have had bees on their land for many years, but Marcia and Delbert don't own them. Other people keep the bees there and give them free honey. Marcia said this honey is really good. Delbert said this honey is clear, but one year it was dark.

Delbert and Marcia said they don't believe in using all the chemicals that some people use now. Marcia

hears on TV about how people can't use the water in other places because something gets in it. Chemicals get into the water. "They're checking the water here in the rural areas." Marcia figures that's a good thing, but if the chemicals are already in the water, how do you get them out? She heard that the water in Baraboo wasn't safe to drink. Delbert only has about 15 acres of corn now. "That way I can cultivate it. I don't use any chemicals." He puts the corn in the silo for silage. Delbert remembered that when Atrazine first came out, they said it was so safe that you could drink it. "But it got down in the water so you can't use that anymore." Marcia said it killed off all the worms. She's hardly seen an angleworm since people in the area started using chemicals. She used to pick up a handful of straw from the straw pile and find "gobs of them." Delbert remembered cutting across the neighbor's cornfield on the way home from school. He'd check under the corn, pick up a handful of worms, and stop to fish on the way home. "We don't see those worms any more the way we did before."

Delbert said he doesn't see snakes and turtles much anymore either. Once in a while in the garden, Marcia

*"We don't see  
those worms any more  
the way we did before."*

used to see little garden snakes, but not anymore. Delbert called them "grass snakes." The closest they've seen a turtle was the time one came up by the house. They think it may have been crossing to the other river. The water is about a mile away in either direction.

Not only the land has changed, but the weather has changed too, Delbert said. "We don't have the hard

rains, the storms we used to have. We used to have floods that cleaned the rivers out and left holes that were six, eight, 10 feet deep." Marcia reminded us that they closed the beaches in Madison because of algae. Something was making that algae grow. Delbert figured it had something to do with all the fertilizer people put on their lawns.

Although Delbert graduated from eighth grade when he was 12 and never attended high school, he kept up with the times. He stayed on the farm. In the 1930s he was the first one around to lay out contour strips. He laid out half of the farm the first year and the other half the next year. The farm has been in contour strips from 1939 or so until recently when he put it into CRP. It used to be that everything was square and the rows went up and down the field. There used to be ditches so deep that you couldn't even see the plow when it went down in a ditch. Marcia put this in an historical perspective. In the 1930s, President Roosevelt had the Works Progress Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps. The WPA and CCC "put boys to work." They had something to do and a little bit of money to help their families. Delbert decided to do contour farming because the hard rains were "washing too many ditches in the land." Delbert remembered how his father used to put his head on his arms on the table and take a little nap every day after dinner for about 10 minutes. One time Delbert showed him the design for the strips and how he planned to seed them. His dad just looked up at those crooked strips and said, "You got to work it!" He threw his arms up. Delbert believes farmers should have used contour stripping 100 years earlier, but once started in the area, they took on quickly. Unfortunately though, too many people plant beans on one strip and corn on the next and there are ditches washed two or three feet deep.

As personal stories intertwined with memories and perspectives on the landscape, the conversation went to Delbert's grandfather again. In 1861, Peder was

*"They say, as the farm goes, the village goes."*

called to serve in the Civil War. He had been here only six years before he was drafted. In those days you could pay someone else to take your place in the army, so a neighbor asked Peder to go for him. Peder said he would go if he was called, but he wouldn't go for someone else. He got the call himself soon after. Peder served in the 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, Company E, in the Union Army. He fought at Gettysburg. Later, he was captured and put in the infamous Andersonville prison camp, southwest of Macon, Georgia. There were thousands of men confined in an open area, as many as 30,000 at the same time. It rained for 21 days straight while Peder was in Andersonville. There was no shelter there and no blankets or straw to sleep on. Marcia read that it was estimated that there was a half pint of lice on each man's body and their skin was covered with mosquito bites. Drainage was bad and the water supply inadequate. Prisoners received poor, uncooked, and very little food. For those with money, it has been reported that bread cost \$20 a loaf and it cost \$5 for 10 radishes. Thousands died in that prison camp. "Nobody wins a war," Marcia said quietly.

Delbert said he had never been in the Service, but his older brother was at Pearl Harbor when it was bombed. At home, Delbert and his family heard about the bombing on the radio. They got a letter from his brother saying that he had been off that day, in town, not at the camp. He jumped behind a pillar to avoid strafing, though. He returned to Hawaii for a gathering of Pearl Harbor survivors a year or two before the interview. He's 82 now.

When Delbert went to the Draft Board, though, his father said, "If you take him, I'll have to sell." Marcia said they needed every farmer to feed America and the soldiers overseas. Delbert was given a 4-F deferment to keep farming.

Marcia told about her aunt who had six kids when her husband shot himself in 1934. That was during the Great Depression. He just got so frustrated and

desperate because he couldn't feed his kids! His wife had to go to work. Four of her sons went to fight for America. They lived around Argyle, Wisconsin, not too far away, though it seemed far in those days.

That brought the conversation back to the place, so I asked the questions about what they valued in the Military Ridge area and how they would like the land to be in the future. "It's home," said Delbert, clearly and simply. Marcia said "God gave us this job to do.... We had children and they come back here and they enjoy it too. We respect the soil and what God gave us." Delbert expressed concern about the houses popping up all over. "Someday we're going to need the land for food." Marcia would like to see the land saved for another generation, "saved for food. How do we know how many people will be on earth after we're gone? It'll be hard to feed them." Delbert acknowledged that we don't know what the future will be, but he was sure "we lived at the best time!" Marcia commented, "Children today don't understand that there are hardships out there. I keep chickens and they think I'm cracked!" Just that morning, Marcia had been listening to a woman on the radio saying we need to go back to organic food; chemicals in foods hurt us, and they're even more harmful to children. "Basically, we're killing ourselves," Delbert chimed in. He "can't see" all the chemicals we're putting on the land and worries about the chemicals getting into the ground water.

The only spray Delbert uses is brush killer to kill the multi-flora rose and wild parsnip that have taken over a lot of the pasture. Once he gets rid of the brush, he can see grasses coming back where there weren't any before. He told me how multi-flora rose was introduced by the Department of Agriculture to serve as fencerows so you'd never have to fence again, but the birds spread it all over. Delbert has put a lot of spray on the multi-flora roses.

Years ago, Delbert and Marcia were part of a group of 13 farmers who worked together to take milk to

*Marcia keeps a small flock of chickens.*

a cheese factory. Not one of the 13 is still producing milk. Cheese factories organized into a bigger group and prices went. Little factories closed. Little schools closed too. Little towns struggled. “They say, as the farm goes, the village goes.” There used to be small grocery stores in little towns, but it’s hard to keep one going now. Landowners need to show a profit, and they just aren’t showing it. That’s why Todd left farming. Now farmers only get half the price they need for milk production, yet milk prices are as high as they’ve ever been. “Twenty years ago, we used to have 100 percent parity, but we don’t have that anymore.” But, Marcia explained, the laws changed. We had 100 percent parity and the Capper-Volstead Act. (The Capper-Volstead Act was adopted by the U.S. Congress in 1922. It gave associations of people producing agricultural products certain exemptions from antitrust laws so they could form cooperatives.) The Act allowed farmers to organize and set their own prices. That Act helped farmers through troubled times. But it disappeared. No one talks about it anymore. In order to maintain this area open and rural, there have to be “farm-minded people” here. “You have to work with the cows, know they poop and pee, and you’ve got to clean their bags and be there for them when they calve to understand farming.” Bring the farm-minded people back, those who grew up on farms. Of course universities are educating farmers, but they’re educating them to run big farms. We need to keep small farms intact, and small farms are struggling. It makes you wonder what will our next generation eat?

Marcia wants “something to protect what God’s given us.” She sees the soil wash away and disappear. Delbert acknowledged that people are trying to watch where they’re building, and they shouldn’t build right in the middle of a field. Marcia remembered grubbing stumps. They worked hard, backing up the horses to pull the stumps out, all to get a little more land to farm. It was dangerous too. “We could’ve been killed.” Now they’re planting trees in fields all over. Of course,



PHOTOS: S.GILCHRIST

with newer equipment, you can pull out a whole big tree more easily. Marcia advised that we replant trees every year to replace old ones. After all, trees do get old, just like people. The leaves fall and provide fertilizer for the next group. Delbert admitted he hasn’t planted as many trees as he thinks he should have planted. Marcia and Delbert planted trees on Arbor Day.

They have never looked for morel mushrooms, but Marcia and Delbert know they grow in the area. People stop along the road and look by dead elm trees.

I asked about controlled burns. Delbert said his dad burned the woods every year to keep the brush down. Not the fields, just the woods. Gooseberries and blackberries took over when he quit burning. Delbert never burned, but he observed that more are burning in an effort to get prairie grasses back. Marcia noted, “It sure looks nice after it’s burned.”

Marcia likes the idea of gathering seeds from prairies to replant what was here before. “A lot of wildlife can

# Views of the Ridge

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live in those places where you save the prairie. Little farmers need cropland, but for what they can't use, prairie is fine."

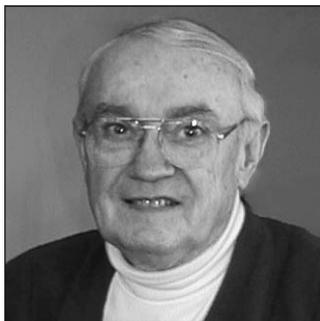
Marcia pointed out that, when they quit milking, they didn't have enough cows to tramp down all the brush. Delbert complained that he can't clip it until August because of CRP, but by then all the weeds have gone to seed. "It makes me mad! I really don't think I would have put it into CRP if I had known they wouldn't let me clip it when I wanted."

Curious, I asked Delbert and Marcia how they met each other. Delbert said Marcia was born down here in high water in a flood, so he liked to say she came floating down river. Marcia's dad had had to go out with the horses to get the doctor. When they got into high water, he gave the horses the line because they knew where to go. The doctor managed to throw the

lantern in the river. Marcia was already there when the doctor reached her mother's side. Although he is only five years older than Marcia, Delbert used to go help her dad. He liked to tease Marcia's older brother that he was going to stick that little girl in his pocket and take her home. He ended up marrying her and they had babies of their own. Their first child was born prematurely; his twin died of respiratory problems. Leland weighed three pounds and was kept in an incubator for six weeks. Fortunately, they could touch him and all, but he was so little that Marcia was afraid he might break. All of their babies were hospital births, most in Dodgeville, but one in Madison. In Madison, a bigger hospital, Marcia was afraid she was going to get the wrong baby. But it all seems to have worked out, and I think it is accurate to say that Marcia and Delbert really did know each other all their lives.



PHOTOS: S. GILCHRIST



## Carl Frederick Arneson

*Born: November 18, 1929*

Carl spent all his life in the Military Ridge area. He grew up in the Village of Barneveld, and it was in his brick house in Barneveld that I interviewed him in 2004.

Carl remembered 60 years back, walking over the hills south of town with his aunt Mathilda, looking for pasque flowers on the rocky knolls that were part of the family farm. They picked the flowers and she put them in a vase. Neither of them thought of the flowers as vanishing heirlooms of the prairie. But now that area is “all built up.” You won’t see pasque flowers any more.

The family farm was inside the Village of Barneveld. His grandfather, Teman Arneson, purchased the property in 1901. It was a dairy farm he ran with his sons. Then Carl’s dad and his dad’s brothers worked the farm. Now the farm is being subdivided; homes are being built on the farmland. Carl lives on a corner of the farm now. He and his wife bought land and the original house. But the tornado blew away the original building, so he built the house they live in now in 1985. Carl says it’s a comfort to feel that he’s on the same land that his dad and grandfather farmed.

Carl helped on the farm when he was growing up. The farm was a small dairy operation, with 25 to 40 head of Holstein cattle. Water cooled the milk cooler. The milk went through a strainer and ran over in rivulets to be cooled. The milk was taken to a factory where it was made into Swiss cheese. They kept some milk in the ice box for their own use. It was plain, raw, unpasteurized milk then. The ice box was “electric with a circular thing on top.” The farm was a small operation, growing hay, corn, and oats. They had pigs and grew corn to feed them. And they had chickens for eggs. But when farms converted to bulk handling of milk instead of cream cans and the cheese factory, a Grade A milk permit didn’t allow mixing of cows, pigs, and chickens. So in the early 1950s, they stopped having pigs.

He also helped with Blue Mound State Park because his aunt and uncle owned it. He tended the gate, collecting

fees from cars that came up to the Mounds to picnic and use the swimming pool. The pool was there more than 50 years ago. Carl’s uncle John developed the park, and when he died in an accident that happened in the process of building the road to the top of the mounds, his widow, Carl’s aunt Mathilda, carried on with the park until it became too much to manage. She sold the park to the State of Wisconsin in the early 1950s. Carl used to ski the trails in winter there, but he doesn’t go now. He has to buy a sticker to get in.

In general, farms are different today. When you drive along Highway 18/151, you can see the size of the fields has gotten much bigger. Farm equipment has gotten much bigger too; it requires more space to turn around. There is an increased amount of fallow, non-cropped



*Carl worked the gate at Blue Mound State Park, a property that his uncle John developed and that his aunt Mathilda later sold to the State of Wisconsin. He said the swimming pool was there more than 50 years ago.*

PHOTOS: DNR FILE



*Carl remembered the first wild turkey he saw.  
It was odd to see a solitary turkey crossing the road.*

land because of soil conservation programs. This is very good for the individual farmers who had marginal land since the government paid to help cover their taxes. That's good for the farming community.

Carl's father was one of the first to use contour strips laid out by the Soil Conservation Service. His dad read a lot of journals because he was interested in purebred Holstein cattle, so he probably read about contour stripping, but he also could see it was good for conserving soil. In the old days, farmers grew subsistence operations. Then they discovered they could grow extra and sell the produce for cash to buy goods they couldn't easily obtain by barter.

At the same time as he was farming, Carl's dad was also employed by a bank. He eventually came to own the bank. Carl started as a janitor in the bank, when he was in eighth grade. He worked his way up to be president. In 1941, his dad bought the controlling interest in the bank. Carl referred to "the economics of life" and the role the bank played. He got married and had a small child. From 1951 to 1954, he served in the Marine Corps in San Diego, Boston, and Japan. It was because he had a job at the bank and because his wife and families were all here that he returned to the area. In the 1940s, when farming changed from the small cream can to bulk milk tanks and the milk went to AMPI in Mount Horeb, the bank provided money to help farmers convert to bulk milk tanks. Carl's brother, Ted, set up the program. The farmer got an easier method of handling milk and the milk industry had a better method of transporting milk to Chicago. The bank had a good income from loans to the farmers.

The landscape is different now in that the fields are larger and there is more fallow land. It's not speckled with small family farms; but farms and milking herds have all gotten bigger. There are no hog factories around, but there are large dairy farms. The hog farms were disastrous. The smell from the manure lagoons was unbearable and they were too high in methane.

When the farmers converted from milk cans to bulk milk delivery and sale, the cheese factories couldn't convert in like manner, so they folded up, died, and faded away. There used to be a half dozen cheese factories in the immediate vicinity of Barneveld; now there are none. Some buildings were in disrepair and fell down. Some were converted into residences. The last cheese factory operating around Barneveld was the Barneveld Cheese Factory. It was converted into a residence and then the tornado blew it away. It was mainly the change in method in handling the transfer of milk from the farm to the consumer that led to the demise of the small, local cheese factories. Carl remembered how the bulk truck used to get rid of the whey after the cheese making practice. They sprayed it on hay fields as a fertilizer or tried to evaporate the whey in ditches, which did not create a very pleasant odor. The cheese manufacturing plant in Blue Mounds had disposed of waste by spreading it on fields. They have a huge tractor that carried the waste product out. Carl said they processed cheese from raw materials from Switzerland, and, as they converted the cheese from raw to processed, there is a whey by-product.

Growing up after World War II, Carl and his brother hunted squirrels, rabbits, and ring-necked pheasants. They used to try to kill their share! Now there are fewer squirrels, more rabbits, and the pheasants are making a come-back. Carl walks on the Military Ridge Trail and hears rooster pheasants crowing. He enjoys seeing them and appreciates their beauty.

There are wild turkeys now. "We didn't used to have turkeys." Carl remembers the first wild turkey he saw. It was about 30 years ago. He had a real estate brokers' license. He was driving out County Highway H to see a farm when a solitary turkey crossed the road. He almost went off the road himself! But just the other day, one almost flew into his windshield. He told me it's not unusual to see 25 to 50 turkeys, especially down Highway T towards Spring Green,

## The Interviews

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Carl said there were never too many white-tailed deer in the area until recently. He figures chronic wasting disease will take care of the over-population.

There were never too many white-tailed deer until lately. There was no problem with deer in croplands when he was farming. As recently as 10 to 15 years ago, people went driving towards Hollendale in the early evening just to see the herds of deer in the hay fields. He used to go north to Minocqua to see deer. Carl used to hunt deer, but the 1957 bow season was the last time he tried. The arrow hit the buck in the jaw. The impact bent the arrow head over double, but the deer ran away. He thought about that and realized he would have had to field dress it and drag it out of the woods, and that was not for him. He figured he didn't need venison; he needed beef. He's never killed a deer. Other people have hunted on his land, though, some with permission and some without. Carl's dad, as he became more successful, had bought a farm north of town that was used for hunting. Carl referred to this as the "North Farm."

Carl felt the over-population of deer is being taken care of because of the chronic wasting disease concern. He said he figures wildlife diseases come and go in normal cycles.

Carl never saw a badger when he was a boy (just lots of gophers), but he thinks there are fewer of them now. He did see a badger crossing County H in the days following the tornado.

As to songbirds, Carl doesn't recall what he saw in his youth, but he has been a birdwatcher for the past 10 years. One winter there was a flock of evening grosbeaks. He's seen cardinals, juncos, chickadees, finches, mourning doves, the usual. He can't understand hunting doves, as they are beautiful birds and they don't do any damage. Farmers can get money for deer and turkey damage. He thinks dove hunters should shoot at clay pigeons. He doesn't see many meadowlarks any more.

Carl has been very active in his community over the years. When he came back from the Service, he was the village clerk/treasurer. He worked for the fire department for a while. He worked for the advancement

(booster) organization. After he retired from the bank, he administered the Community Block Grant program for the village and served on the planning committee since the tornado hit. He's been active in the church and has been following his own interest in genealogy as well.

When the tornado of 1984 struck, Carl and his wife, Lois, were in bed. Lois was reading with the clock radio on. The power went out. She went to the kitchen to get a flashlight, saw lightning and heard thunder. She said "something" was coming! The noise outside the window sounded like a freight train. He pushed her downstairs. The suction was so powerful that they could hardly make it down the stairs. They fell on their hands and knees by the washer and dryer, as the storm lifted the roof right off over their heads. There was a crashing sound. They could hear wood rending. Somehow the first floor flooring stayed on the foundation. But it was raining so heavily that rain came in through the floor. Everything happened in the middle of the night, with the power off, so he didn't see everything as it happened, but he both heard and felt the house picked off overhead. The washer was against a concrete wall. If he had stayed in bed, Carl is sure he would've been killed.

The first thing Carl did after the storm passed was to look for his dog, a Norwegian elkhound he'd put into the basement because he'd expected stormy weather. He held the flashlight in his hand and shone it up the steps. A wall of the bathroom had fallen across the top of the stairwell. The dog cowered against that, trying to get up. Water was dripping into the workshop area of the basement, but he had some clothes there. Lois was in her nightgown, he in his pajamas, and they were afraid the roof would fall in on them so they felt they had to get out. He put a rain parka over Lois' nightgown and they found their way to an outside door.

"Everything looked utterly foreign." Everything they were accustomed to seeing was gone! They heard a

voice. “Over here, help!” The neighbors had ridden a bed down from the second floor to the ground. The wife was nine months pregnant. They were a couple and a little girl. They put coveralls on Tom, the man, a jacket on Katie, the wife, and a jacket on the little girl. Tom and Carl found another man in a car. That man had a broken arm and his house was gone, so he was just sitting in the car. Tom and Carl took him to another neighbor whose house wasn’t damaged. Everybody tried to help one another. Carl and Lois went two doors down to Carl’s brother’s house. The house was twisted, but it was not blown away. They spent the rest of the night there, though it was almost morning by that time. The next day, in the neighbor’s yard, they found a 40-foot section of steel auger used for moving feed from a silo to a feed bunker. It had been deposited there from another farm. Hurling in the wind, that auger must have made an awful sound.

Carl and Lois found a mobile home in Blue Mounds and stayed there for a week or so, then stayed with friends north of town for a few days until they got a mobile home to live in. Carl’s youngest daughter was in Hong Kong at that time, working for the Bank of America. She saw the news of the tornado on television all the way across the world. She tried to contact her parents but couldn’t get through. She finally got through to Carl’s brother, Sam, who lived in Madison. Sam reassured her that her parents were all right.

Barneveld has grown tremendously since the tornado. The population doubled in 20 years. The business district changed dramatically. “We have a lot of new things in town, a lot of new homes.” Carl stressed that “the community and the people have a good attitude.” The slogan that was adopted in the wake of the tornado, “We’re not giving up. We’re going on!” has basically held true. The people in the community are very warm. They

strive to help each other. “It’s a close-knit community.” Carl said “in spite of” and then added an amendment, “maybe because of” all the new people we have in town.

Outside of Barneveld, Carl considers the tornado to have had less impact on the area than other things such as the railroad going out and the “rails-to-trails” idea coming into play. Carl considers the Rails-to-Trails program<sup>6</sup> to be very beneficial to the area. He said more people travel through and see the community as they ride the trail.

Carl said his wife tells a story about one time when they were in the bank. A bond salesman was in the bank, waiting to see “one of us.” He was sitting there, looking out the window, and he asked, “Why does this town look so new?” He didn’t know about the tornado. But that’s one of the things about Barneveld: it’s so new. “There’s a look about it you won’t find in other small villages. The streets are all curb and guttered. The sidewalks are in every residential area. It’s neat. You won’t see a lot of trash around, trashy cars and what not. There are three vibrant and growing churches, a wonderful public library, an excellent fire department, and a super EMS team.” All these are positive things about the community, but Carl doesn’t think they come so much as a result of the tornado as from the community spirit of the village as a whole. People saw the effects of the outpouring of support, people coming to help after the tornado. The Mennonites from Muscoda helped farmers clean their fields of the debris because it was cropping season and they helped with building projects. In the spirit of cooperation, fire departments left equipment for our community to use, since all of our equipment had been destroyed, except the ambulance that had been on a run to transport someone to Madison when the tornado hit. Most people who were here when the tornado

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<sup>6</sup>The Railroad Revitalization and Regulatory Reform Act of 1976 included a section to provide funding, information exchange, and technical assistance in order to preserve abandoned rail corridors and create public trails. The program is widely known as “Rails-to-Trails.”

*"We're not giving up. We're going on!"  
Barneveld has grown tremendously since the tornado.*



*"Why does this town look so new?" Barneveld has a look that "you won't find in other small villages."*

hit stayed here. Reporters asked people, "Where are you going? What are you going to do?" But Carl didn't see why he should go elsewhere. He had a lot paid for and he figured he could build the house he wanted on it. Many others thought the same way. Carl explained that, though we are a mobile society, most people who were here during the tornado and left afterwards, left for other reasons, not because of the tornado.

Personally, Carl says he believes the traditions and values of individual families are the most important thing that made it worthwhile for him to be here, to come back here, to stay here. He said he couldn't think of any bad experience that could happen that would cause him to want to leave. This is home. With a smile, he added, "I don't know where else I would go." He looked at condos in other places, but he feels no urge to move. He doesn't know what he'd do if he didn't have the house and yard to be concerned with. "These are little things that I feel tie me to the community. I have a great sense of belonging."

Carl has been active on the village's planning commission since the tornado. Especially in the last two or three years, he sees more and more the need for intelligent, comprehensive land use planning, like the Smart Growth program the state has promoted. It would



PHOTOS: S GILCHRIST

be a great achievement if we as citizens can work together to be respectful of landowners and helpful in promoting a good land use plan for the area. Carl has read about land use plans of other towns in southwest Wisconsin, such as Vermont and Blue Mounds, and he sees different mindsets of public-spirited individuals who are on those committees. Carl mentioned the prairie land Dr. Botham sold to TNC: "I think it's wonderful!" About all that land is good for is vineyards, but it's nice that he's not planting vineyards all over like in California. We see pockets of trees around the countryside, and there could be a house nestled among them. But there's no septic system capable of handling the family that lives there, and such things need to be taken into consideration. "We need responsible, intelligent decisions on how best a person can use their land. The landowner has got to be given more consideration and recognition. The landowner has rights, but the broader community has rights too. There's got to be a balance there." Carl considers this a matter of the people who have the authority recognizing those landowner rights.

In the future, Carl would like to see the Military Ridge area no different than it is right now. He would love to see Barneveld continue to have a K-12 school.

*"We need responsible, intelligent decisions on how best a person can use their land. The landowner has got to be given more consideration and recognition... There's got to be a balance there."*

He wouldn't change a whole lot. When he's driving through the area, he'd like to look out the window and see a flock of wild turkeys and two or three deer – and NOT run into any of them!

I asked Carl about burning as a land management tool. His father never used burning as a tool but used dynamite to blow stumps out of a field. Carl has only seen prescribed burning come to play in the area in the past 10 years. His sister has a prairie restoration plot and she's burned every year for the last five years. She has the fire department come to do it, which Carl considers "The smart way to do it." Carl thinks regulated burns are a good thing. He mentioned an area over towards Dodgeville that they burned. It will come back. It'll be green in a week. Somebody does a burn in the Sugar River Valley every year. Carl said he used to burn a 2-acre plot. He never told anyone when he was going to do it. He just did it. He burned to get rid of the thorny bushes and to get the natural prairie to come back. The cattle couldn't get in there to get rid of all the weeds. He started burning that plot 25 to 30 years ago. He read about burning and heard about it, so he decided to try it on a nice, calm evening. He burned back in against the breeze, armed with a shovel and broom to beat out the embers if they got going in the wrong direction. He did that without any problem for four or five years, then he got too busy with other things. The land he used to burn is in the section of land that he's negotiating to sell to a developer. He thought it will probably end up with houses on it.

Carl would like to see more wildflower prairies. His grandfather used to walk to Mineral Point to work in the mines to make hard cash to pay for his farm. He would tell his family the stories of the prairie grasses and wildflowers and the prairie chickens that he saw. That was about 100 years ago; he came to the area in

1862. Carl has never seen a prairie chicken there. But his aunt wrote about these things in her memoirs.

At the end of the interview, Carl showed me some photos from his own collection. He said he's tried to take a picture with the Blue Mounds in the background from the same spot as a photo he has from the 1930s, but it's so grown up in trees that you can't see the mounds! There are houses and trees there now. "That's the change in the environment!" He showed a picture of his father's farm in the early 1920s. There used to be a wooden windmill there, but later he remembers a metal one. The original house was a log cabin, then with an addition. That house blew away in the tornado, and he hadn't realized the log cabin was still under that siding until after it was gone. Then he was too busy thinking about his own loss up here. Carl said he looks at those old pictures every day and wonders what the people of those times would say if they could come back and see what the world is like now. "Goodness, gracious, me!"



S GILCHRIST



### **Kenneth Nicoli Brattlie**

*Born: May 12, 1941*

### **Beverly Ann (Dodge) Brattlie**

*Born: May 9, 1943*

Though he comes from Norwegian heritage, Ken Brattlie is the fifth generation on the same land. His wife, Bev, grew up in the nearby Town of Barneveld. She came out to the countryside when she married Ken in 1962.

The farm where Ken grew up was an active dairy farm. There were always chores to do, and he was taught to do the chores first, before he could play. He fed and bedded the cows. His family got the first milking machine when he was in about eighth grade at Clay Hill Country School. In those days, every neighborhood had its own cheese factory and school. He always had the neighbor kids for playmates. There was a closeness with neighborhood kids and parents then, as people depended on their neighbors for fun, for help, and support. For example, some neighbors came through with a threshing machine and everybody worked together. It was fun for the kids because they got to drive tractors out in the field. Ken remembers the first time he drove the tractor. First thing, he drove right over a shock of oats. He was 10 or 12 years old, but there was no power steering and the tractor was hard to manipulate. That's why he drove over the oats. The older guys who were throwing the bundles up teased him for that.

Ken remembers seeing birds, including ring-necked pheasants when he was young. "Pheasants have been here for an eternity, as far as I know." White-tailed deer didn't start to show up until about 1959 or the early '60s. He used to go up North hunting. When he was a senior in high school, in 1959, he went north to Brule with a neighbor. He's not sure, but he thinks he shot a deer up there that year. He came home from hunting, and a neighbor said, "You gotta come! You gotta come!" He went with the neighbor past the green shed. There was a herd of deer right there on his neighbor's and his own land! A dog chased the deer, but they managed to get the dog off them. At that time, the deer wouldn't stay here over the winter. They'd migrate

back to the mounds, then west to Spring Green. But the deer that were born here eventually stayed here.

Ken said he sees more wildlife today than when he was young: more pheasants, wild turkeys, and deer. "I could do without the turkeys," Bev chimed in. She considers them "the ugliest bird ever." Ken said there's a lot of competition for food. The deer, squirrels, raccoons, and wild turkeys all compete for acorns. After 50 to 75 turkeys go through the woods in a big circle, there aren't many acorns left. Turkeys clean the woods so the acorns don't get a chance to sprout into new trees. Ten years ago, Ken was bow hunting and noted that deer were still scratching for acorns in December. Now? Forget it! Ken thinks there's been more crop damage from the deer because of the turkeys too.

There are lots of crows, blackbirds, and hawks, but Ken hasn't seen as many robins this year as usual. There were two geese at the other place: they're there for the summer. They chase the cattle if the cattle get too close to their nests. There are a lot of blue herons and Ken and Bev saw two bald eagles this spring. When Ken was turkey hunting last week, he watched a pair of cardinals flying around and out into the field next to the woods. He was concentrating on turkeys just then. He didn't get one that morning, but he did a couple of mornings later. Ken has never seen a prairie chicken, though he had definitely seen lots of meadowlarks.

Ken saw badgers on the farm when he was younger, but he hasn't seen one in a long time. There was once a den on the north side. Three badgers lived there. Then groundhogs took over. He doesn't see badgers now. Bev wouldn't want to get too close to them anyway.

Growing up in town, Bev said the kids were free to go from one end of town to the other. Everybody knew everybody in town. Kids helped older people by getting their mail or getting their groceries. Mail wasn't delivered to the house then. Kids got around on roller skates or they rode their bikes. For a while, Bev worked at the grocery store. There were three grocery stores in

## Views of the Ridge

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*The cost of production increased, but the price of milk did not. Producers used to get 80 percent parity, but now it's down to 30 or 40 percent.*

Barneveld then; now it's hard to keep one going. There used to be three feed mills then. There was a drug store, a restaurant, and three bars. Bev had her share of chores too. She washed dishes, dusted, vacuumed, and babysat. She had to work for her clothes. Ken helped bale hay at other farms as a hired hand, but he never had a job outside of farming. Bev did. She worked for an optometrist for a year. Of course, she also milked cows with Ken for 40 plus years. Bev bought a couple of books and learned how to use a computer. She worked half-time for Mount Horeb Mail before she and Ken sold the cows. She entered their ads in the computer and did bookwork. She worked full-time for an insurance company in Mount Horeb, after they sold the cows. When that company got sold, she went to work in Dodgeville. After everybody had done their refinancing, she got laid off and worked for Rural Insurance in Madison, as she continued to do at the time of the interview. After you turn 50, Bev explained, people don't want to hire you. It's hard to find a job.

Ken sold the cows just three years prior to the interview, in June 2001. It was hard getting the feed up for them and dependable help was getting in shorter supply. So he sold the cows to reduce his workload. He'd milked for more than 42 years. Of course, the first milking machine made his life easier, but the best things were the silo loader and pipeline. That was a nice setup! That pipeline milker was such a wonderful piece of equipment. It took away the labor and increased the quality of the product. The milk went directly into the bulk cooler. You weren't carrying it, so the milk was as clean as you could get it for the consumer. "We always drank milk out of the cooler ourselves." The milk was three and a half to four percent milk fat. Now they drink two percent milk, which they buy. There are so many things that you aren't supposed to eat these days!

But all the people who lived through the Great Depression knew how to put food on the table! They knew

how to handle a penny too. They never spent one unless they could bring in two or three. The quality of life was more appreciated then than now, though everybody has new stuff now. In the Great Depression, most people only went through eighth grade because we had to work for our folks to keep the farm. Those people were never wasteful. They understood the value of things.

Ken pointed out some of the changes in the area, agreeing with Bev that it was economics that put the small farmers out of business. Ken was the last guy to quit milking on Clay Hill Road, which goes from County F to Daleyville. At one time there were 14 dairy farms on that road; there are none now. He thinks the small dairy farms should have stayed around, but they just didn't get paid enough. There are other accomplishments that are worth more than the dollar anyway. A dollar went a long ways when he started farming. Back around 1978, farmers were getting \$12.50 per hundred weight for their milk. The last two years, they've been getting \$10.50 for their milk. It took \$12.50 to break even a year or two ago, and they were under that. It cost about \$8,000 to buy a truck around 1980. Now, it's \$24,000 for the same truck. Basically, the cost of production increased, but the price of milk did not. The producers used to get 80 percent parity, but now it's down to 30 or 40 percent. Some farmers carry a debt load. "You can't go all your life producing food at a debt level." Bev picked up the train of thought: "There's no guarantee for the farmer. The price can fluctuate. You can't plan anything." Ken gave an example, saying you wouldn't like it if your employer paid you one wage one week, but only half that the next. He despised the University of Wisconsin teaching assistants' intent to strike because he can't strike. He can't even intend to strike. He doesn't dump milk to bring the price up because "somebody needs that glass of milk somewhere." The farm always requires help too, extra hands. Ken says that's why

*Ken said the biggest change on the landscape over his life was all the new residents in the area, people buying parcels of land and building houses.*

Bev stayed with him all those years. Without her, he'd have had to figure out how to cook for himself. He could manage the cooking if he had to, but it takes more than one person to successfully manage a farm. Ken says farmers only make up a small percentage of the population any more, but he's proud to be American and a food producer. "One thing I want to say, if I don't say another word. The three most important classes of people in this country are the clergy, the veterans, and the farmers. You've got faith, freedom, and food, the three basic things we need."

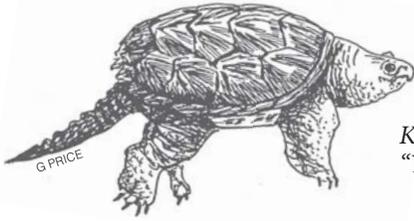
Bev and Ken both pointed out that the landscape has changed in that it isn't all cropped any more. A lot of the land is in government programs now. Bev says she sees a lot more weeds and brush. Ken said that his ancestors cleared the land to be farmed. He's not against the 10-year program (CRP), but he is against the folks running the program. "You're not supposed to let it grow up in timber, box elders, and thistles." He's had a hard time keeping his land clear of thistles. "They just come blowing in." Also, the landscape has changed with all the new residents, people buying parcels of land and building houses. "That's the biggest change over my life span, as far as being a farmer." But selling a parcel is a chance for a farmer to get something out of his long, hard work. "That's his retirement." Ken also pointed out the changes in property taxes. There's been no change in the tax structure, but there is "an increase in your valuation," according to the purchase price of the parcel next door. "Then you can't afford to buy land to farm anymore." Bev summed up by saying, "Land is taxed at the value of sold land." Ken issued a warning: "You'd better watch out 50 years down the road." Bev seconded that, "There will be trouble if we have to depend on other countries for food." A farmer takes pride in producing food: milk, meat, and the essentials.

It was farmers who kept the small towns going, and it was the small towns that kept the school districts



going. The Town of Brigham kept the School District of Barneveld going all through Ken's young years. Brigham paid two-thirds to the village's one-third. But then taxes were \$500, not \$5,000. "Forty years ago, you got more for your buck." Bev traveled to Norway in 1994. There the government pays the farmer to stay on the land. Milk was the equivalent of \$4.00 a gallon there. Norwegian farmers were getting \$30 per hundred weight for milk. They were heavily subsidized by the government. In Norway farmers only have 10 to 15 cows, while Ken and Bev had 40 and got \$12 per hundred weight. The Norwegians said, "No wonder you need so many cows!"

When I asked about their vision for the future, Bev said their four daughters said they would never farm, and she didn't want them to farm. Ken said it was his dream that one of his kids would take over the farm. "The land is given to us to take care of, and each generation is supposed to improve it, the land and the buildings. But that's kind of gone out the door." In the future, Ken hopes whoever owns the farm will rent the land and the pasture out. He doesn't want to put land into a government program. He sees that CRP is good for water resources and for holding soil, so he is not opposed to it. But his dad did stripping with the Iowa County conservation people for many years and thus Ken hasn't seen much erosion in his lifetime, since they rotated the corn and beans. He likes to see the beauty of an alfalfa field. "You don't make any money by looking at it. You



*Ken recalled catching a snapping turtle while out fishing.  
"You wonder how you're gonna get that off the hook!"*

already put the money into it, but that's the rewards of farming – the beauty of the crop." Still, farming has a business end to it, like everything. Now it's big milking parlor-type farms with 500 to 1,000 cows. "To me, that's not the answer." The food and fiber for this country should come from 50- to 100-cow herds, or we'll end up with problems down the road. For example, there have been more trout killed in the last five years than in the last 100 years of farming. Ken read that in the newspaper. Fertilizer runoff is part of the problem. He explained that when you clean a pit from more than 500 cows, the waste can eventually pollute the water because there's such a concentration of it.

Since Ken mentioned fish kills, I asked about fishing. Ken got started fishing because he went on a class trip from Clay Hill School. The teacher took the class down by Gordon Stream. They had a picnic and spent the rest of the afternoon fishing. Ken caught his first trout then. It was only about 12 inches long, but it was the biggest prize he could have imagined getting. Anyway, it was that class trip that got him started trout fishing. He had a small cane pole with a fishhook. He went on to say that you can get a snapping turtle one foot in diameter with a good cane pole, if they latch on. Snapping turtles will take trout. Along with great blue herons, they catch more fish than fishermen. He caught a snapper once when he was 10 or 12 years old. He thought he'd snagged his line. He kept lifting and lifting. Finally, he realized it was moving. "Then you wondered what you had down there. You knew it wasn't a fish. Once you get it off the bottom and get it up to the top, you wonder how you're gonna get that off the hook!" He probably snapped the line that time. "No thank you;" he didn't take that turtle home and eat it. He knows that some guys hunt turtles in the early spring when they're hibernating in the sand. They poke around in the sand with a steel rod until they hit the shell. There's a vibration you can feel in the rod. Then they dig them up, put them in a gunny

sack, and take them home. Ken claims no authority on catching turtles. He doesn't eat them, but he knows other people do and consider them a delicacy.

The land is all big fields, but now it's in contour strips. When it rained an inch or more, the creek used to come up. Now the contouring holds the rainwater back, so it takes a while for the creek to come up now. Ken says it's true that the creek water doesn't rise as high with striping. Contour striping came in when he was about 15. He remembers his dad telling him about a flood in 1920. That flood took all the fences out in the valley. Neighbors came from upstream looking for their fences. Ken's seen water rise when the cornfields were tassled out in August. Hurricane rains raised water as high as the third wire on the fence, but it never took the fences. The water was being held back better. That was a lot of water. That year in the 1990s, we didn't get some of the crops in because of the water. That was the same year the Mississippi went wild.

When Ken was a boy, the crops consisted of some corn and a lot of hay and oats. Now there's more corn, and soybeans have been added to the list. Soybeans are here because of cash cropping. It's a good rotation crop for corn because you don't need to use insecticide and it puts nitrogen back in the soil for the corn. Ken has a three year rotation: corn, soybeans, then oats and alfalfa. He uses minimal tillage for the oats. He hasn't had any problems with erosion. But you can't go back on the corn again and you have to keep a short rotation on the hills. No-till planting helps prevent erosion. Ken remembers the tornado that hit Barneveld in the middle of a night in June 1984. "We were not hit bad here, but we got an electrical storm and lots of rain that night." Ken and Bev didn't know anything had happened until about 5:30 a.m., when they were milking cows. Bev's brother in Dodgeville called knowing they'd be up then. The ambulances went right through Dodgeville, so people in Dodgeville had heard the sirens and found out what was going on before Ken

*Ken and Bev consider the countryside the safest place on earth, and they have good neighbors too.*

and Bev did. At the farm, they couldn't hear the sirens. Their son-in-law had been uptown playing ball that night, stopped to get something to eat, and had just left before the tornado arrived. Ken just couldn't believe it. "What in the world can we do for the people?" They gave money. They also went to Barneveld and helped pick up, which seemed a never-ending task. Bev worked regularly at Betsy's Kitchen, the emergency kitchen set up by Betsy Thronson. (Betsy Thronson is another narrator in this oral history project.) Everybody donated food. Bev made food at home and brought it to town to give to people. There was no charge for the food; they served whoever was working to help the community. Many folks around the country gave and helped. The Amish Mennonites came and did a lot of building. They were very gracious, very knowledgeable about building, and not afraid of work. Ken and Bev's place is nine miles from Barneveld and there was no debris there. Bev's family had moved to Blue Mounds at that time, so they weren't in Barneveld. But one of the teachers got killed in the tornado and a baby got sucked out of the house. The baby lived through it, but he has been disabled ever since. Barneveld is a small community, so Bev and Ken know everybody who was hurt or killed. Since that tornado, Bev and Ken have gone to their basement a few times in the face of a storm. Ken is always up when it's stormy; he can't sleep through it. In the country you hear storms. In Madison, you don't even know there's a storm out there. The buildings absorb the sounds of the storms, and there are noises from traffic, etc. Here, you get a cooker of a summer night, and you know it's a storm! Since the Barneveld tornado, Bev and Ken know they'd better pay attention when there's a storm. They always have the tornado on their minds.

What do Ken and Bev value about the area? "It's just plain peaceful." In spite of the memory of the tornado, they feel safe. They consider the countryside the safest place on earth. Ken says they have good neighbors too, though he misses the old farm neighbors. It used to be

that if you needed help, you would get it. Your neighbor would be working on the other side of the fence. Now everybody's gone to town to work. That's why Ken carries a cell phone now: so he can get help if he needs it. That's a big change.

Ken considers himself fortunate to have had only a few scrapes or mishaps and no accidents. For example, one day he went looking for a calf. Usually when something like that happened, one of the kids would jump in the truck and go with him, but on this particular day, none of the kids came along. His dad went with him. They found the calf and threw it in the truck box. The cow was to follow along. Then the heifer went into the woods and Ken's dad went after it. Ken had to jump out of the truck in a rush to go help. The truck stayed still for a while. Then the truck started to go. The truck rolled until it hit a tree. The calf flew up in the air and let out a holler, then landed back in the truck box. The calf lay still. It was terrified. The calf was okay, but "I wasn't okay. That was a bad day, a real bad day. But there were no kids or anything in the way."

When Ken and Bev were young, there were gravel roads in the countryside. It was hard to stay on a bike or motorcycle and you could get pretty scratched up. Now all the roads are hardtop/blacktop. Bev reminded us that it's easier to get plowed out in winter now than it used to be. Ken remembered that the snow used to be extremely high. They would take the horses with the sleigh to deliver the cans of milk to the cheese factory. They would actually drive right on top of the snow right over the fencerows, the snow was so deep and so hard. That was in the late 1940s, early 1950s. There was a lot of snow back then—"some wicked snow!"

The small cheese factories met their demise when farmers could get more money for their milk through the cooperatives like AMPI and Land of Lakes. They were called "farmer-owned dairies," but they weren't according to Ken because "the stock wasn't worth the

paper it was written on.” But dairy farmers took the milk to the co-ops because they got a better price for it there. The co-ops marketed the milk or made it into cheese. Now, the number of places for a farmer to take milk is down to three or four. Maybe that’s why dairies got bigger. The co-ops paid a bonus on volume. “They didn’t treat the little guy right.”

When Ken was young, farmers grazed their cows. “That was the best time of year, when spring came and you could turn the cows out!” Veterinary bills went down and milk production went up. There was all that work you didn’t need to do to take care of cows in the barn. The cows enjoy themselves outside. They have freedom and they are relaxed. The calves are out scampering around. Now Ken just has a beef herd instead of milk cows, and he custom raises a few heifers. He has about 35 head. Larger farms practice total confinement. They keep their cows in a building. “They’ve certainly got it comfortable in there,” and milk quality is about the same whether the cows are out grazing or confined, but Ken says confined animals don’t last as long, probably because they’re on cement. Bev explained that they get exercise outside and, like people, they feel better when they get exercise.

Noting a photo of a burn, Ken commented that there was a lot of controlled burning this spring. There wasn’t so much burning as a management tool when he was younger, because the land was grazed or harvested. He went on to say that he wouldn’t want a house where there’s too much dead grass around. If somebody flicked a cigarette out, you could be in trouble. He didn’t worry about that so much when he was young because every acre was farmed.

In those days you could catch a big trout in Gordon Stream, but they aren’t there now, the stream has changed so much. Farming right up to the creek bank has not been good and there are box elders growing there now. There used to be a pig pen right by the spring. You know where the pigs liked to lie in the hot

summer – right in the spring! There are no pigs there now. “No pigs. No pigs,” Ken chanted. When the pasture came up to the creek, you could see night crawlers.

Ken said the small farms polluted less than what’s going on now. Plowing goes right up to the creek bank instead of having pastured grass as a buffer. CRP should take the box elders out or all you’re getting is a mud bank that fills the creek in. But then, “cows are not as bad as mercury.” Ken was just reading about the mercury level in our streams and lakes, “because of our vehicles going up and down the road.” Fuel emissions cause that. “Or is it because of the paper mills?” Ken acknowledged that there are no paper mills in the Military Ridge area, but “you’ve got Lake Michigan” not so far from the paper mills.

Growing up in the same area, it is not surprising that Ken and Bev have known each other since high school. Ken remembered that they went to the Dodgeville Theater on Main Street and saw a movie on their first date. That theater is still going on the weekends! Both Bev and Ken have Norwegian and English heritage in common. As they made their way together, farm life had its advantages. Both parents were there when their kids were growing up. There was more togetherness. They shared values that weren’t monetary. All four of their girls had to drive the tractor before they could get a learner’s permit to drive a car. Learning to drive the tractor in these hills was quite a challenge! “Farming was a way of life then. Now it’s a business. You have investors that have never seen a field in their lives.”



S. GILCHRIST



**Kim Joseph Bigler**

*Born: August 19, 1968*

It was May 2004, when I sat on a couch in Kim's living room in Madison. We talked about the Military Ridge area, where Kim grew up, and his attachment to the land there. Kim was still under 40, with, hopefully, much of his life ahead of him. I hoped he might be a voice to speak for the future. Still, we started with his roots.

Born in Monroe, Kim lived on a farm near Daleyville for the first few years of his life. His parents, Donna and Jack Bigler, moved to a farm in Blue Mounds in 1972. The farm had belonged to his grandparents previously. Kim's grandpa had come over from Switzerland and settled in the area because it reminded him of Switzerland, with that big blue mound marking the scenery. Kim's dad bought out his sister, Kim's aunt. They farmed there from 1972 until Kim's dad got sick in 1978. It had been a working dairy farm from 1942 until Kim's grandfather died around 1956. After that, it was mostly just cropped. For a while, Jack and Donna ran three farms, one they lived on, one to help Kim's grandparents, and one to earn money.

Kim's grandparents followed the old ways in some respects. They didn't believe in paying their own kids to do work on their farm. They just expected it. That was the kids' job. When Kim's parents got married, they had to work on their own to make a living. But when Kim's grandpa got sick, Kim's parents had to come back to help take care of the farm. Since Grandpa still wouldn't pay his kids for working on the farm, Jack and Donna rented another farm across from Blue Mounds Cemetery. Eventually the toll came back down to two farms, and they sold the last 30 acres of the one farm in the 1980s. The farm the family still holds currently is right off Cave of the Mounds Road, south of Highway 18/151.

For a few years, Kim's parents really worked hard raising four kids under the age of seven, renting a farm, and helping Kim's grandparents with their farm. The

years from 1953 to 1956 were extremely hard years. Kim's father worked 36 hours in a row without sleep sometimes. Farm work was harder then, because farms weren't so machine operated as they are now. There was no silo-filler machine. Everything had to be done by hand then. Donna worked as a bookkeeper outside of the farm for a while too. Since he was 4 years old, Kim lived on the farm. He came from a big family, but most of his older siblings were off and married when he was still little. Kim grew up with his twin brother, Scott.

Like his parents, Kim was a hard worker. His first job was picking rocks for a farmer for \$2.00 an hour in sixth grade. In seventh grade, he detassled corn. He worked at a cheese factory through high school. The first year at the cheese factory, he just worked outside, pulling weeds and doing other yard work. He was too young to work with any machinery. Later he worked inside, in the grinding room. His brother Scott worked more in cheese processing. Scott worked there for five summers. He held the record for the most years as summer help there. The boys also worked at night at Club 18, a restaurant outside Mount Horeb. On top of that, Scott and Kim worked for their brother doing electrical work, from the time they were about 16. They usually had three jobs going. Their dad was not farming then because he'd had open heart surgery in 1978, when Kim was about 9 years old. They rented out cropland for some income, but that didn't work so well because the renters cut too much hay. The hay rotted and they couldn't get it off the field for the new crop to grow. They also cut the corners short on the contour strips so thistles and other weeds grew up. The renters weren't farming the land as well as they should have been, so, in the late 1980s, when the CRP kicked in, Kim's father saw that he could have the property the way he wanted it and still get some income from it.

The farm hasn't been actively farmed since 1987 or '88. Kim's dad also put some of the land in the Managed



*The Henslow's sparrow is one of five endangered species Kim has identified on the farm.*

Forest Law (MFL)<sup>7</sup> program in the late '80s. For Kim, he says the frustrating thing is that the DNR doesn't seem to communicate very well, so the prairie restoration plan doesn't mesh well with the MFL program. The two programs are not delivering the same messages. The forestry people want to plant trees and the prairie restoration people say to cut trees and open up the landscape the way it used to be. It's difficult to perform according to two different management plans at once. Kim would believe in both plans if they were managed properly. It's perfectly acceptable to plant white pine, etc. in places where they belong, but he says those trees aren't native to this area, and that makes it a little bit hard. Kim would like a universal plan that could be used in the Military Ridge area. If we are going to manage the prairie the way it used to be, let's manage the forest the way it used to be too. If honeysuckle isn't supposed to be there, let's get rid of the honeysuckle. If oaks are supposed to be there, let's plant oaks! We need to look at historical perspectives of how the area used to be from surveys. Kim says it's an integrated management practice to have more trees because then they can cut more trees.

Kim has another 40 acres besides the farm. "We're losing money by not cutting the trees." But Kim doesn't want to cut the oaks for income just because they are mature. A forester would say to cut the trees because they are past their peak, over-mature. But because there is a mature forest there, there are rare twin leaf plants on the property. Kim thinks he should be trying to maintain a system that doesn't exist much anymore. The open understory cuts back on honeysuckle and garlic mustard invasions too, though he doesn't get oak regeneration either.

Kim is the one who found out about prairie restoration and has encouraged his family in this direction. He understands that there is a lot of pressure for building and a lot of farms get subdivided. He repeated an oft quoted phrase in the area: "The farm is their retirement." Kim would like not to subdivide their farm. By putting land in prairie he hopes to stave off subdivision. "And we have five endangered species on the farm already!" The endangered species he identified are red vane prairie leafhopper, wooly milkweed, Henslow's sparrow, Bell's vireo, and Hill's thistle.

Since he never met his grandparents (his father's parents), Kim feels his stewardship of the land is a connection to them. They were good stewards. They kept prairie remnants that number in the dozens of acres. They didn't plow every corner of the property. Because of their hard work and because of his parents' hard work, he gets to do what he loves, and he considers good stewardship an obligation. Now he's going to be able to live there someday. Because they worked so hard, he'll get to live where he grew up. "We haven't had a farm payment in close to 40 years because they worked so hard."

Scott holds a degree in water resource management from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, so he was already interested in natural resource management when they got interested in prairie restoration. They were talking about the new CREP program to preserve riparian zones, places where there were streams, etc. Kim attended a meeting at Perry Lutheran Church. "We didn't have the qualifications for CREP because there were no streams on the farm." Derek Johnson from TNC was there talking about the Military Ridge area, and he said it was "a unique situation." TNC

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<sup>7</sup>Wisconsin's Managed Forest Law encourages sustainable forest management on private lands through tax incentives to landowners who follow written management plans that incorporate landowner objectives, timber and wildlife management, water quality, and the environment as a whole. Participation is voluntary. In exchange for following a management plan and program rules, participating landowners are subject to reduced forest tax law rates in lieu of regular property taxes.

has identified this as one of 40 sites in Wisconsin that they're working on and consider significant. In fact, Kim says it's one of the top six sites they value. They put a coordinator on this site, a job being paid to manage the area. "Our farm fell into that area." Derek put Kim in touch with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and an expert went on a survey with Kim. The Fish and Wildlife Service expert found native prairie remnants. They are looking for continuous seed banks to provide Wisconsin genetic strains for native grasses, to restore habitat and eventually bring back the prairie chicken. Kim appreciates this instead of importing seed from other states. Of course, some plants are so rare that you can't get them without going further, but so far, most of the seeds have come from within 50 miles.

Kim has memories of being on the land when he was a kid. He and his dad liked to go to a hill they called "The Turnaround." (After his dad had surgery, he just wasn't able to be very mobile, so this was the place he usually had to turn around.) They would sit, talk, and watch for deer. Scott and he spent time in the barn. They played on some old vines, went hiking, and picked small black cap berries. Kim said his fondest

*TNC considers the Military Ridge area to be significant. It is one of 40 sites in Wisconsin that they're working to preserve.*

memories are from the times he went hunting with his dad. He remembers certain places they went. Coon hunting was big when he was growing up, and he and his dad did that together. They also went hunting for rabbit and white-tailed deer. He mowed out a spot for a picnic table for sitting and watching birds, and now the whole family goes there when they are out for a hike. One time when Kim was in Boy Scouts, he and his dad went on a hike. It wasn't a very long hike, as Kim was only about 8. They hiked to a spring, and his dad showed him the bubbling of the sand and they drank out of the spring. They talked about the stone fence



*Kim's grandparents were good stewards of the land. They kept dozens of acres of prairie remnants.*



*That raccoon out-ran or out-smarted them, so Kim thought it was right to let it go. "I swear that was the biggest coon I've ever seen!"*

line. Kim remembers sitting under the big oaks. Once they were sitting there looking at a scout book when a tiny red spider mite fell on the book. Kim and his dad wondered at its tiny size and all. What was going on in its tiny brain? Kim remembered picking a lot of rocks off the farm too. He and Scott were too young to run the tractors, "but we could pick rocks!"

Kim has enjoyed other wildlife encounters besides the red spider mite. His interest in songbirds and identifying plants has come more recently, since he got interested in prairies, but he has some memories of wildlife from his dad's and his experience years ago. His dad once "treed" a raccoon on a fence post. It was a red raccoon with a rust colored mask and tail rings. Kim's dad had it made into a little rug. That was before his sister was trained in taxidermy, probably in the 1960s. Kim remembers shooting his first deer. It was a small buck, but an eight pointer, and it was his first. His dad pulled over in the truck to see the buck. The first thing he asked was, "How many shots?" Kim had only needed one shot, but he had shot again to be sure. He and his dad were both pretty proud that he'd been able to get that nice buck.

One time Kim was hunting at night, trying out a dog at his neighbor's place. They were in a cornfield when the dog swung around. He was bringing a huge raccoon back. Kim flicked a light on and saw the coon run by about four or five yards away from him. "I swear that was the biggest coon I've ever seen!" That raccoon must have weighed 50 to 60 pounds. "It was huge!" The coon ran into the barn and the dog wouldn't go in after it. Kim considers it unethical to continue after a coon once it's denned up. He wouldn't cut down a tree to get a coon. The raccoon out-ran or out-smarted them, so it was right to let it go, and that's what Kim did.

Kim remembers going fishing with his dad. "It was more like drowning worms. We'd throw them in and then just kind of sit there." As a kid, Kim had a Zepko, a cheap rod. He never fished for anything in

particular, but he caught bluegills, perch, and bullheads. He fished some in Crystal Lake and some in a place north of Blue Mounds, a fishing pier in a private pond. His dad got a boat for the last four or five years, after he was retired, so they could fish in Crystal Lake and other places.

Kim remembers seeing certain birds for the first time. The first time he saw a wild turkey was in the late 1980s. He was driving along the road and three or four of them went across the road. "That was pretty impressive!" The first time he saw a bluebird he was on a two-track field road, right before the turnaround where his dad always parked. A bluebird was just sitting there like a picture. There were no bluebirds around when he was growing up, so seeing that one was "really cool." Last year he saw four scarlet tanagers for the first time on their other property, the 40 acres north of Brigham. "That was pretty cool!"

One time Kim was turkey hunting in the spring. He was calling the birds in off the roost when two mallards, a male and female, came and circled only a few feet from him through the air. That was unusually close. They were coming in to land, but he was "camoed" up so they didn't know he was there. Another time when Kim was turkey hunting, he had a decoy. Two coyotes came to the decoy. One snuck right up behind the decoy and practically touched it with its nose. The coyote jumped back about 10 feet. Kim suspects the coyote could smell his scent on the decoy. Kim was about 10 yards from the whole show.

Kim shared some the experiences with wildlife that his dad had had. One time his dad was walking by a badger hole when a badger growled at him. Kim has never seen a badger but he knows there are badger holes around. Years ago, his dad heard a bobcat when he was out coon hunting at night. The sound of that bobcat raised the hair on the back of his neck. You don't see bobcats any more. That was when there were fewer people in the area.

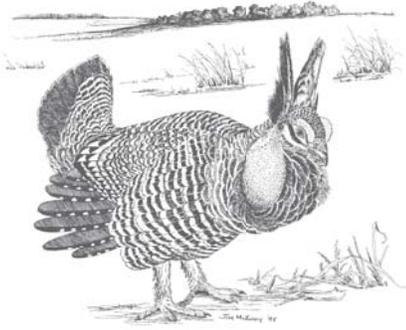
Another time Kim's dad was out in a pasture with his dog. That was his first dog, a redbone, and he'd raised him from a pup. The weather was cold. They had a raccoon up a tree. Suddenly a bull came out of the woods, charging at them. They threw the lights on the bull, but he kept coming, snorting and stomping. They were backing up, backing up against the river, and the bull kept coming. Kim's dad called Old Jim, the dog, off the tree and sicked him on the bull. The dog had not been trained to do that, but he went after the bull and got him turned away. He just knew that something was wrong. Remembering that story, Kim said he was once out in a pasture when an animal snorted. He didn't know what animal it was, so he was worried, but it turned out to be a horse.

There were no prescribed burns when Kim was a kid. He considers the lack of fire the reason we don't have the prairies the way we used to. "Prescribed burns are absolutely the best tool to manage prairies, provided they are done properly." Part of his job is to maintain firebreaks on the farm. His dad never burned anything on the prairie until three years prior to the interview. They've done four burns in the past three years. They've done prairie restoration too. The first year they burned about 12 acres in CRP and converted that to prairie. The second year it was about 14 acres of CRP and pastureland that had been reed canary grass. They reseeded it with native prairie seed. Some of the best prairie are some sections he hasn't even managed yet. Kim is working out from a core of native remnants trying to manage several blocks so as to connect them into one continuous grassland. Kim is aware that he needs to remove scrub brush and put in fire breaks. He wants to convert another section to prairie too. There's crown vetch growing along the highway. Kim will have to spray and burn to get rid of that. "That's how we've managed our conversion—through burning." Burning manages woody growth and gets rid of cool season grasses (grasses that grow when it's cool) to replace

them with warm season ones. Kim thinks the burning has promoted the shooting star too. The first year he started managing for prairies he saw a few single flowers, but last year he saw doubles with triple flowerheads. Kim takes pictures to document his prairie restoration efforts.

When Kim drives through the area, what changes does he see? He sees a lot more houses. He said he couldn't go coon hunting as he did in the 1980s. There are no places to go any more. There are a lot of 20- 40- or 80-acre properties now. Kim doesn't mean to "begrudge anyone for having the American dream, but says we have urban sprawl." Communities like Blue Mounds and Mount Horeb are expanding a lot. Kim's farm alone has a lot more woody patches than it used to and sumac patches in the area seem bigger. Kim wants to go back to the way it was, restore the landscape to what it was in the 1800s, when prairie chickens were here. Then you could see miles and miles of grass with periodic burr oaks. He says cooperation will be required to restore large, continuous grasslands. Kim would like to get bobwhite quail back too. Maybe that's a more realistic goal. Kim's older sister remembers bobwhite quail on the old farm in the mid-1960s and there are some on a nearby farm now. Maybe they can get the fox back too, though there are a lot of coyotes around now. Last year, Kim saw a covey of Hungarian partridges land on the outskirts of the farm. He didn't think they were staying, more likely passing through, but it was the first time he'd seen them there at all. One time last year, he could see a bluebird, rose-breasted grosbeak, goldfinches, and an oriole all at the same time. Goldfinches have been around all along, but Kim has never seen as many bluebirds before. There were no orioles before, yet now there is an oriole in Kim's mom's yard. Kim noticed two nesting pairs of upland sandpipers last year. He hasn't seen them back this year (2004) yet, but it might be a little early in the year. Although he doesn't remember having seen

# Views of the Ridge



*Restoring prairie chickens is Kim's ultimate goal. He would really like to see them dance.*

bobolinks as a kid, bobolinks and meadowlarks are common prairie species now. He says the meadowlark is a promising sign of things to come. Kim would really like to see prairie chickens dance. He's never seen that. Restoring prairie chickens is his ultimate goal.

What does Kim value most about the Military Ridge area? The opportunity of living in the country! Kim lives in Madison now because his job is there. But he likes the pace of the country, where a person doesn't need to chase money to be happy, and he considers the country home. He could be happy living in a small town and he likes Madison, but the Military Ridge countryside is really home.

Kim thought about incentives for keeping the Military Ridge area open in farmland, grassland, or prairie. He thought it might help if farmers were allowed to graze their livestock on the land. There used to be an appraisal done to determine how much grazing could be done without affecting the prairie. Maybe farmers could fence a portion of the prairie off and be paid for the fenced off area. Or maybe the land could still be used for farming but with promotion of burning as a management tool. In order to have dairy farms and prairie, farmers have to buy into the fact they can still get something from the land. Maybe farmers could get a tax break or the state could pay taxes on prairie land they can't till. Kim sees his farm as different because he's not farming it. "CRP is great! Most people just ask for enough to cover their taxes." To establish prairie, farmers need enough to pay their taxes for the prairie land. They have cropland to make money. Kim said CRP makes a big difference to his family, knowing they can have CRP and still have prairie. In the CRP application system, a farmer gets points for having restored some prairie. The points go towards getting renewed in CRP. "That helps a lot. They rate you higher the more prairie you've converted. You have a better chance of getting accepted back into the program."

Kim likes the fact that there are multiple organizations involved in the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area. He considers it a neat thing that so many are involved for the common good. But the thing he doesn't like is that the new Department of Agriculture CRP program doesn't allow you to plant clover in food plots. You can only plant grains. Pheasants Forever people lobbied for grain to help birds, but clover would help other animals like white-tailed deer. "It seems a little short-sighted." Kim backs integrated management completely. He says we should manage for water resources, water quality, as well as soil conservation. CRP helps cut down erosion and "that's great!"

*In order to have  
dairy farms and prairie,  
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Kim worked at a cheese factory when he was in high school. The factory was called Lacto Pro. It was on the corner of County F and Highway 18/151. The family that ran the cheese factory, the Stauffer family, came from Austria and Switzerland right before World War II. They barely got out of there with their lives. They came to Wisconsin with nothing but their family and a recipe to make cheese. They started in Mount Horeb with one cooker and their business grew into a big cheese factory in Blue Mounds. Running a cheese factory is hard work. They ended up selling to a company in Austria and then to Lacto Pro. Kim's mom, Donna Bigler, started working there in 1972. She was their bookkeeper for 20 years.

Kim told me that big conglomerates gobbled up all the business from the small cheese factories. The big factories could pay farmers more for their milk, and the little cheese factories couldn't compete. Back when farmers delivered milk with a horse and wagon, it was necessary to have a cheese factory every 10 miles or so. As better transportation developed, more milk could travel farther to a single factory. They used trucks and tanks to transport the milk. Tractors got bigger in those days too. Barns got bigger. But the price of milk stayed closer to what it was. Kim's grandpa got \$5 per hundred weight for milk in the 1940s, but farmers got \$10 per hundred weight just two years ago. Now the price of milk has come up a bit lately. But remember that in the 1950s one could buy a big tractor for \$1,500 to \$2,000, the best they had, with a hydraulic unit. Now, the cost of a big tractor is more like \$80,000 to \$100,000. It cost \$50,000 to buy a farm then; now it's \$1.2 million, and taxes too! In the 1940s, people bought the farm next to Kim's family. It was a large farm, over 200 acres. They had that farm paid off in four years! How could anyone start up a new farm now, without already owning it? This is because of the big guys coming in and because of the mechanization too. You could truck the milk, so the creamery could gather milk from farther and farther. One milk route became 30 miles!

It's hard for Kim to think in terms of a favorite place in the area. "I just like the area." But one of his favorite places is Blue Mound State Park. He and his dad used to go up there on the towers on the Fourth of July. They could see Dodgeville, Barneveld, and other communities. Kim also has a soft spot in his heart for Brigham Park because his dad used to coon hunt there before it was a park. It was one of the brushiest spots there was. In the 1940s and '50s, you didn't worry about trespassing. You could go through people's land to cut your wood or to hunt. Nobody had miles of continuous right-of-way so everybody knew you had

to cross someone else's land. You didn't have to ask permission. You just did it.

Another one of Kim's favorite spots is his own 40 acres by Brigham Park. He likes that because it's going back in time. He likes going to the family farm to look at the flowers, that kind of thing. Governor Dodge State Park is nice too.

The towns themselves have changed. Mount Horeb, Blue Mounds, and Dodgeville have gotten bigger. "It's hard to know people the way you used to. You walk down Main Street and you don't know half the people that are there."

Kim gave due credit to his mom, Donna. "She has been great!" Nothing would be done on the farm without her support. She gives the "green light" to everything. Half the land is in a trust now, with Donna, who is now retired, owning half the property on paper, with the expectation that all of it will eventually be put in the trust too. Retired though she is, Donna is very busy. Kim said she "needs an appointment book" now to keep track of everything she does. She also mows the place. "She works hard."



*In the 1940s and '50s, you didn't worry about trespassing. You could go through other people's land to cut wood or hunt.*



## **Calvin Daniel Williams**

*Born: April 5, 1961*

## **Victor Irving Williams**

*Born: February 8, 1959*

Appropriately, I sat in the milk house with Cal and Vic Williams. I interviewed the two brothers together on the dairy farm where they grew up. It was a day in early May 2004.

“It was a good place to grow up,” Cal said. “There was never a dull moment.” They didn’t get out and about as much as kids do now, because they always had chores to do. Chores included getting the cows, feeding them grain, putting the milk machines together, running water to the cattle, all the “run of the mill farm chores.” Vic explained that things were not as automated when they were growing up. There were no four-wheelers. You had to actually walk out and get the cows. Milking machines were old fashioned, with buckets. There weren’t automatic take-offs. You had to pour milk into a “step saver.” There was more “hand work.” When their dad, Daniel T. Williams (another narrator in this oral history project), was the farmer here, he put the machine on the cow, milked the cow, put the milk into a bucket, carried the bucket into the milk house, and took the milk a mile and a half up the road to a cheese factory, every day. That’s how they did it. The cheese factory is still there and the person who ran it then still lives there, but the factory no longer operates. That was Prairie Grove Cheese. There were vats and they made curd at the factory. Probably most of the milk was made into cheddar cheese there. Now the milk goes to Grande Cheese and is mostly made into mozzarella cheese.

Their dad had a couple of neighbors, so for fun and socializing, as well as helping each other, they “neighbored back and forth.” Neighbors helped each other make hay and the boys got to know the neighbor kids a lot. They all did things with each other’s families. “There wasn’t a lot of outside stuff.”

Cal and Vic didn’t hunt when they were growing up and they only did a little fishing. In the mid-1960s, they caught German brown trout in Williams Creek, which runs through their farm. No one could catch

trout in that stream now they told me. The stream has shrunk to three quarters of its size. There used to be spots where you could swim, but the water doesn’t go deep enough now. Though Cal says it’s still pretty clear, the creek just doesn’t have the volume it used to have.

Cal told me about a favorite spot the boys had, a place in the woods. They’d say they’d all “go over to the spring.” That’s just how they referred to that favorite spot. There had been a cheese factory there in the 1930s or ‘40s. It had been built in the late 1800s. Some history they’ve read about the area recognizes it as one of the first cheese factories in the Township of Brigham. Only the foundation remains now. You could walk right by it and not even know it was there. One time the boys bought a tent and camped there. They had picnics there too. “If we were going to do something outside, we usually ended up over there.” It’s woods there, with a little clearing where they planted some pine trees. Their spot is right where the spring comes out of the woods. The majority of the woods is oak, definitely oak, both brothers agreed.

Neither Vic nor Cal is a hunter now, so their interactions with wildlife involve more just looking. Sometimes they would get a bale of hay with a snake in it. You’d cut the hay and the snake would be lying in there. You wouldn’t see it, but you’d just bale it up. When the bale came off the elevator to get loaded in the barn, you’d see part of a snake hanging out of the bale. Mostly you’d just leave the snake in there and when you fed the bale to the cows, it would be lying dead in the manger. Snakes that got caught in the hay bales were mostly bull snakes, though not too big. There are plenty of white-tailed deer around now, but when their dad and his sisters were growing up, very, very seldom did they see a deer. If you saw a deer, you stopped and watched. “It was quite a thing!” Cal and Vic have seen lots of deer and, about 15 years ago, they started seeing wild turkeys too. Now they’re thick: “there’s tons of ‘em.” The changes

*“Everybody used to pasture more.” Cal and Vic said they use most of the land that their father used for pasture to grow crops now.*

in wildlife populations don't make a lot of difference to the brothers, since they don't hunt, but, as Cal said, “You hate to see them kill all the deer off with chronic wasting disease, but they'll come back.” Vic agreed with the notion that there were too many deer, but “to eliminate them totally would be difficult.” He figured turkeys will be a problem at some point. Deer sometimes do some damage, but the biggest animal problem they see is the raccoon. Raccoons come into the buildings. They're having their young and there's no corn in the fields to eat, so they come around the buildings. They get caught in the conveyors anywhere there's corn. “There are just way too many of them.” When they get caught in the machinery, “their life ends really soon.” Usually the machinery kills them, but if it doesn't when they get caught, there's no way to get them out without shooting them. Vic went on to say that they hit fawns sometimes when they are mowing. “It's not a pretty thing.” They get cut or mangled. There's nothing you can do. You can't see them because they try to get down as low as they can. Or you might run over them with a wheel and break their leg. You set them aside, but when they're that small and they're injured, they're not going to live. You try to avoid hitting them. If you see a place where deer have been lying, you go slower and try to avoid hitting a fawn. Still they usually hit one or two a year.

Cal and Vic are not “big bird watching people” either, but they remembered that orioles regularly made a nest in an oak tree. They haven't seen them in years now. There are more ring-necked pheasants now than there used to be. A lot of people raise pheasants and let them go. When birds raised in captivity are put in the wild, they don't have much chance of making it. They don't know how to protect themselves or they go too close to the roads. Cal and Vic think the pheasants are pretty.

When Cal and Vic were boys, “everybody used pasture more.” Now they very seldom keep cows on pasture, except maybe one lot where the cows can get some



PHOTOS: S. GILCHRIST

exercise. “Dad ran the cows out on pasture more often.” Everybody did then. You don't see cows everywhere the way you used to. Now you drive a long ways between farms. A lot more land is not being used now. A lot of new houses are being built too.

Cal and Vic have Holsteins, the same kind of cows their father had. They milk 75 or 80 cows, but they have a couple hundred head of cattle on the farm total, counting the young stock. Their dad only had 35 or 40 cows previously, so they have expanded their dairy operation with the times. Cal pointed out that they'd always had enough land to have more cows. The land their father used for pasture is used by Cal and Vic to grow crops and feed for the cattle. “It's a lot more work!” They grow corn, a little bit of oats, and a lot of alfalfa. No soybeans. Vic said the change from pasturing the cows was a “sign of the times.” When you get more milk, you get more money. They got more milk by feeding the cows alfalfa than by grazing them, so they made the switch from pasture to keep the cash flowing. Life was simpler in the previous generation's time. People just took what the cattle gave them off the land. Now some people are going back to that, coming full circle. “When Dad farmed here, there was just him and Mom. Now the farm is supporting two families,”

*Neither Cal nor Vic has ever had a job other than farming. They say it's next to impossible to decide to be a farmer today, unless you have a lot of money or can make a deal with a retiring farmer.*



S. GILCHRIST

Cal explained. Also, there used to be just one cutting of hay, but Vic says they do three or four cuttings each year now. Their dad didn't need that much hay, so he didn't take it. Neither way is right or wrong; that's just the way it was done.

Cal said they have not used prescribed burns as a management tool. But he remembered his dad saying his grandpa said the Native Americans burned woods and grasslands every year. Since the burning's been "let go," a lot of the land is overgrown. The prairie people are trying to clear the brush so the grass will grow now. Vic considers that another instance where people are coming full circle too.

When I asked how they would like to see their land and the whole area be in the future, say 20 years from now, Cal reminded me that their farm has been in the family since 1855. Cal would like to think their farm would always stay farmland. Vic added that he'd at least like to see the land used for growing crops, not all turned into brush. "To us it doesn't seem right to see it just sitting there." But both brothers recognize that "development is a huge issue right now." Land here is pretty valuable for development. "If you're willing to sell, they will buy it!"

Cal has three children but right now he can't foresee any of them farming, though that could change over time. His kids have grown up here, and "it's a good place to grow up." But he would like to see them grow up and work somewhere else, off the farm for a while, to see what that's like. Maybe they would appreciate the farm more once they've seen "how the other half lives." Or maybe they'd never want to come back. Neither Cal nor Vic has ever had a job other than farming. If Cal's kids wanted to farm, the opportunity would be there. But it's next to impossible to just decide to be a farmer and start from scratch, unless you have a lot of money or can work something out with a retiring farmer. "You have to have access to land to get a start."

Though they are growing up in the same place their father did, Cal's kids don't play the same way he and Vic did when they were boys. Of course Cal and Vic didn't play the same things their father did before them either. When Cal and Vic were young, all the kids they played with were farm kids. When they were in school, two-thirds of their class was made up of farm kids. Now, hardly any of his kids' classmates farm. Plus there's so much more for kids to do now. Cal played Little League baseball: that was it! Now they have many choices and they can be active all year round, with basketball, volleyball, golf, etc. Now, so many kids are raised in town. "They don't have a clue about living on a farm. It's a lot different than living in town." When Cal was in eighth grade, a friend helped him hay one summer. If they had a Little League baseball game to go to, they had to do the chores, get the hay baled, quick take a shower, and catch the bus to the baseball field. Cal's friend could not understand why Cal's hair was always wet on the bus (because he'd gotten dirty and he'd had to shower). Once that friend worked on the farm that summer, then he understood why Cal had wet hair on the bus to Little League.

"We grew up here. That's why we want to stay here. We like the country. We'd like to see it stay country."

There used to be just one cutting of hay.  
Now they do three or four cuttings each year.

Vic summed up what he values most about the area. "Privacy is the biggest thing." Neighbors are not right at our door. Neither Vic nor Cal fancies living in the city. Cal emphasized, "This has been home to us. No matter what happens down the road, this will always be home."

When they were kids, it was a big deal to go into Madison. Not anymore. It's just a 20 minute drive now. "The city's moving out." The number of houses in the area is "unbelievable, and no end in sight."

"They don't have a clue  
about living on a farm.  
It's a lot different than  
living in town."

Cal and Vic don't blame people who've owned land all their lives but don't have a lot of savings for selling land to developers. It's their property and they can do what they want with it. Selling a piece for development is their ticket to spending the last years of life in a financially secure position. You have to have money in order to be able to stop development. Maybe there could be some incentives for keeping the land rather than selling it. Cal pointed out that most of the people who want to buy land there have more money than those already trying to farm it. One could put \$4,000 to \$5,000 per acre into a small parcel, Vic explained, so if you can get land there for \$2,000 an acre, you had better buy it! It will be double in five years, "which is pretty scary." Cal concurred. "We've got 500 acres. There's no doubt if we wanted to take parcels of acres off, we could be sitting really well. But we don't want to look out across the field and see another house sitting there." Some people don't like the smell of a farm. But people can build on your neighbor's land, right

across the fence, and you don't have any control over that. Cal's biggest fear is that they could sell 15 acres to someone who would complain and could make their lives "a living hell." Vic worried about someone moving here from town and building right next to a cattle feed lot. If the wind blows the wrong way or trees fall on his lawn, etc., is he going to complain? Vic's biggest fear is people moving out here without understanding the way things are done and trying to change the way the people who have been living on the farms do things. "We don't want to be intimidated by people moving out here. We have to base our income off the land." There are a lot of rolling hills in the Military Ridge area, and that, according to Vic, defines it as prime development land. "It's secluded," Cal reminds us. Vic hopes that, when he and Cal want to retire, TNC will buy all their land. But it's important to retain the option to sell 10 to 20 acres, if that's what it takes to save the rest of the farm, but selling a parcel would be a last resort for Cal and Vic. Some townships have limits such as building only one house per 40 acres. With a limit like that, a farmer would have to sell 40 acres, though most people just want to buy five acres for a house. Such limits are a "double edged sword." Do these limits help the township or county, or do they hurt the people who own the property and have to sell that much? If there's a way to keep milk prices up, that would help the dairy farmers keep their farms.

Cal and Vic's parents were living in Barneveld when the tornado hit there. Their parents' house wasn't destroyed, but the house next door was completely gone. Their dad came down to the farm in the morning to make sure the cattle were okay. There was no damage to the farm. But "the town we knew was gone," Cal remembered. The place they used to get feed is now a tavern. The town is virtually new. It's close to the highway, and four lanes went through after the tornado. When the brothers were in high school, the population was about 536. Now the population is

## Views of the Ridge

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*“People must have thought it was a good place to live then too.” Today, people come to look for butterflies, birds, and sedges. “We’ve got ‘em all.”*

at least 1,000, closer to 1,500. This is an example of population growth in the area.

Cal and Vic have not really been anywhere else, but their parents visited relatives in the Dakotas and told them it was flat there, and you could see for miles. Here, in the Military Ridge area, there are hills and valleys, trees, and a stream. That’s what everybody wants, though Cal and Vic see it every day. Some days you just want to go for a walk, and there’s the woods! Cal mentioned a man who hunts on their land. He just comes on weekends. He doesn’t really care if he gets a turkey or a deer; he just likes to come out there and hunt. He uses the opportunity more to get away from it all than for hunting. He doesn’t hear his cell phone ringing, etc. Cal and Vic acknowledge they probably take that aspect of “getting away from it all” for-granted: “We’ve never had to punch a clock.” When they were kids they never went on vacation trips either. There was no such thing. They just went to neighbors’ houses for social interactions. Cal and Vic know their neighbors less and less all the time. The neighbor kids they grew up with were a little older. They moved away. None of them are farming. Some of their parents still live in the area, but none of them are milking cows any more. Cal and Vic’s younger brother, Doug, works at Land’s End in Dodgeville. Cal and Vic see him all the time, and he does have an attachment to the place. He just “never got off on milking cows seven days a week.”

The biggest reason people come out here to buy land is the view. You can see the mounds, and that is quite a draw! If people in the city see a picture of the scenic mounds here, and they have an opportunity to buy a view like that....! Seeing the Mounds – that’s what draws them here.

Both Cal and Vic mentioned that they had seen badgers, though more often when they were kids than now. The first time they saw one, they had no idea what it was. Their dad told them it must have been a badger. If

you see one, he’s going to be moving, heading for cover. You won’t see him for very long. The brothers used to see more fox dens too. Now they see coyotes, though they never did as kids. The first time Cal heard a coyote howl, he didn’t know what it was. “It kind of scares you.” The brothers see and identify meadowlarks, but not as often as they used to. When I showed them a photo of prairie chickens, they figured those birds would be “coyote bait.” Some people say the DNR brought the coyotes here. “That’s what everybody says.”

In the last five or 10 years, there have been a lot of people coming here: students from the University of Wisconsin doing research related to birds, TNC and the Prairie Enthusiasts, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service doing brush clearing and pasture renovation, and more. One woman looks for butterflies. Another looks for sedges. “We’ve got ‘em all.” The guy from the Fish and Wildlife Service wants to see native plants come back and Vic and Cal will be getting better pasture because there will be more grasses there, so they decided to work with him. They like the idea of leaving a little overgrowth for the birds and other wildlife too, not just clearing everything completely out. Although they don’t pasture the milk cows much, Vic and Cal do pasture the young stock. With the brush clearing and re-establishment of native grasses, they believe there will be a better place to graze their cattle, and they recognize that the brush will take over if they don’t do something. The Prairie Enthusiasts want to take the land back to the way it was years ago. Vic and Cal have learned that when people (of European stock) came here, there were very few trees, but lots of prairie grasses and oak savannas. They have found Native American artifacts on their land, which Cal interprets to mean “people must have thought it was a good place to live then too.” Still, the main message Vic wants to convey is that we should leave the land farmland instead of developing it.



## Daniel Thomas Williams

*Born: June 28, 1935*

Dan Williams is the father of Cal and Vic Williams, two other narrators for this oral history project. I was fortunate to be able to learn about memories related to the same farmland from a generation earlier. At 68, Dan was just out of the hospital, struggling with emphysema.

Dan explained that the farm Cal and Vic now operate has been in the family since 1855. The original land grant was signed by President Buchanan, and the original 40 acres was sold to Robert P. Jones. Dan is related to that ancestor through his father's family. His ancestors came from England and Wales. Additional "forties" have been added to the original farm.

Dan grew up on the same land, but he said it was a lot different then! For one thing, the driveway at the farm was mud. Cars were constantly getting stuck. Dan was the baby of the family, so all he can recall is the general farming atmosphere, something of how and why things were done. Farming practices have changed enormously. Dan's father and uncle farmed together with horses. They had an old Alice Chalmers tractor that took a couple of people to steer. Dan's dad bought a model H McCormick tractor. He paid \$600 for it, that and a plow, in the early 1940s. Dan remembers that corn was planted and cultivated with horses and they used horses on the hay-loader too. As a kid, he'd lead the horse on the fork when they were putting hay in the barn. When Dan's older brother came back from World War II, he was on the farm. He used a little horse power and some tractor power besides. When his brother left the farm, their dad and uncle rented the land. Dan always knew he wanted to farm THAT farm. He didn't want to farm anywhere else.

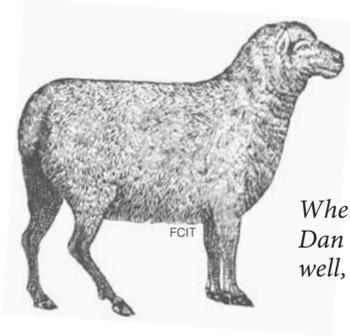
After he went in the Service, took a year of college, and got married, Dan and his wife started farming. They had just one little dinky Ford tractor; there were no horses working on the farm then. Other little things were different too: there weren't any drinking cups in the barn. The milk went to a cheese factory.

The first milk check he remembers was for \$2.14 a hundredweight.

Times moved ahead with a different way of doing things. Dan was one of the first to go to the rotavator for tilling. He stayed with it and "the boys have stayed with it too." It's soil-conserving. It's slow and it takes power. They used to figure if you had a hundred inch rotavator, you had to have a hundred horsepower tractor. Dan had a two-row planter. Then the boys bought a four-row. Changing with the times meant bigger tractors. Dan and his wife hired help, which was an experience all by itself. One guy worked for them for six and a half years. He was really part of the family. When he got married, he and his wife lived there on the farm, in a trailer. Then he went farming on his own. Other attempts to hire help just didn't work out. Dan and his wife couldn't trust the people they hired. Finally they decided, "This is it. What we can't do is not going to get done. We're not going to put up with this anymore." Then Cal and Vic bought the farm, maybe 10 years before the interview. "They made me look like I didn't know what the hell I was doing," Dan



*Dan, the father of Cal and Vic Williams, grew up on the same land and ran the same farm, but he said it was a lot different then.*



*When he was a boy, his family raised sheep and hogs. Dan wandered the hills, getting to know the farm pretty well, while he searched for the roaming sheep.*

said with pride. He is proud of them and believes they are doing a very good job. He acknowledges that they do things differently than he did. "I did it like my dad. They couldn't do it like I did. Financially they'd be out of business." They modernized the farm and made it work for them. Another son, Doug, built a house on the farm and works at Lands' End in Dodgeville.

When Dan was a boy, his folks had sheep and hogs. Sometimes he fed the hogs. Dan roamed the hills with the sheep to see where they were. Doing this, he got to know the farm pretty well. Out in the pastures, amusing himself, he noticed wildflowers like shooting stars. They had about 60 ewes. The sheep took care of the brush. Dan bottle-fed the lambs that the ewes wouldn't take. His dad hired someone to shear the sheep. One year the shearer nicked the sheep. That was that for that shearer. Dan's dad hired somebody else. They would throw the fleece up and drop it in a big sack, then stomp it down. They piled the fleece on a stringboard with twine and kind of baled it. They hauled the wool to Dodgeville. Dan never wanted them to butcher the sheep. He was always saying what good pork chops there were for dinner until he found out he'd been eating mutton. They docked the tails of the lambs with an axe they hit with a hammer. Dan always thought that was mean, but then he found a lamb dying once. Its tail had not been docked and there were maggots in the manure under the tail, and that changed his thinking. Dan remembered some incidents about the rams too. One evening his sister brought a guy home, and the buck sheep cornered that fellow, wouldn't let him get in the car. One ram, Louie, would do anything for a chew of tobacco, which Dan's dad chewed. That ram got the championship at the State Fair because he stood still for a wad of tobacco. At times there was trouble with dogs and the sheep. If a dog was bothering the sheep, it was fair game for the rifle. If your neighbor's dog got shot, you'd peel back the lips and find wool in his teeth.

That would be the end of the problem right there. One time dogs ran his uncle's whole flock of sheep off the face of a cliff at a quarry. Dan's mother didn't worry about his ramblings with the sheep on the farm much. She wouldn't accept boredom. "You've got 510 acres to play on!" But she was always scared to death he might drown in the creek.

The creek was Williams Creek. Dan says the creek has less than half the capacity it had when he was a boy, except, maybe, for the mud. There used to be much more water in it. In the last 15 to 20 years, the creek has really shriveled up. As a boy, he swam there! There were places that were 12-15 feet deep then. Now there's no water over three feet deep. "You could walk that creek and never get your bellybutton wet now!" The area doesn't get the old floods to clean out the creeks any more. "Nature's vacuum cleaners," Dan likes to call those floods. He thinks the change is due to some of the conservation measures, the strip farming, dams, etc., along with the lack of moisture (rain and snow) now. When his dad was farming, everybody plowed up and down the hill. You don't see that any more.

The bottom of the farmland, the land between the house and barn, used to be completely covered with water in the spring because of spring runoff. The fences ended up everywhere. "Don't put a good fence across the creek because it won't be there for long," his dad always told him. Any high water at all and the fence would be gone. Dan remembers the water being across the road and big chunks of ice. One time Cal and Vic had some cows stranded on one side of the road because of flooding. Luckily the water went down right away. Storm-wise, Dan has lost some cattle to lightning. Once 12 or 14 head were killed under one tree.

Dan recollected some memorable storms. When Vic was a baby, and Dan was taking him to be baptized, there was a heavy storm. That was 45 years ago. Going uphill to get home to the farm, "you hoped you could

Williams Creek had much more water in it when Dan was a boy. In the last 15 to 20 years, the creek has really shriveled up.

stay on the road” it was snowing so much. It seemed to Dan that the storms were bigger then. He said it was sometimes hard for pregnant women in labor to get to the hospital in the face of a snowstorm. His brothers and sisters went to school in Platteville and Dan remembers that they were once stuck at home because it snowed, and they were snowed in for two weeks! There was no getting out. Now the highway department has equipment to take care of the snow on the roads. They didn’t then. A little Alice Chalmers tractor and a trucker who put a big load of sand in the truck and a plow on the front were the only snow removal equipment they used to have.

Generally, a storm didn’t mean much to a farm family. “It rolled and banged, and really raised the dickens, but a storm is a storm. You can’t change it.” Things seem bigger when you’re small, especially things like hills and storms.

When the tornado of 1984 hit, Dan was living in the Town of Barneveld. He had just built his house in 1983. He thought it was just another big storm at the time, but he doesn’t like to talk about it much because he suffered so little loss compared to most people there. The house suffered some damage, but it wasn’t completely destroyed, as many were. It was just after midnight when the clocks stopped. There was a large sound and a flash of lightening that didn’t quit. It just stayed there. By the time he decided to go to

the basement, the tornado was gone. The ambulance went up and down the street by Dan’s house because it couldn’t get into town on other streets. Vic and Doug were living there then, and Doug went uptown and came back saying this person and that person were dead. Dan couldn’t comprehend that. In a little town like Barneveld, everybody knew everybody. People they knew started coming to their door and they heard that indeed people had died. Then Dan realized this was not just a big storm. When he first woke up, he looked out the window and saw a roof on the lawn. He started cussing because he’d just finished building the house and now he thought the roof was off of it. But it was the neighbor’s roof that was on the lawn. Knowing the neighbor had some health problems, Dan went next door to see if he was okay. A woman was standing in the driveway in a night gown and the house was reduced to only four feet high. In the lightening, Dan could see all the landmarks in town were gone. There was no bank to turn left by, no culverts and trees he’d known as a kid. There were no lights and if you tried to go somewhere, you had a hard time knowing where you were, with all the landmarks gone. “People were hurt physically and mentally. We lost people. The tornado – it was not a good experience. It went beyond a thunderstorm.” It happened in the middle of the night. If it had happened during the day, Dan thinks there would have been many more fatalities. There were cars from the west end of town that ended up on the east end. Those cars were “beat to the devil, smashed from rolling.” There were no windows left in the cars. Those who could drive didn’t dare because the streets were a mass of nails. Everybody had flat tires. Farmers east of town had junk everywhere in their fields: roofing, doors, windows, siding, sinks, bathtubs, parts of things, you name it. One man was killed, and they found his billfold outside town, but his driver’s license was found close to Green Bay. One house looked as though it had just been pushed off its foundation; it

## Views of the Ridge

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Where you were brought up shapes and colors  
your images of places. Referring to a bluff  
a half mile away, some of Dan's relatives said they  
"couldn't live with a mountain like that in my kitchen."

was gone. The basement looked as though it had been cleaned out with a giant vacuum cleaner. The woman who had lived there said "I don't even have a roll of toilet paper," and she didn't. "You've got to cry a little bit, feel sorry for yourself a little bit, and then realize that this isn't going to do you any good." One contractor brought in trucks and loaded up. Everything was junk. There was nothing to save. They hauled everything to the quarry. "That's where Barneveld ended up, in that quarry." With insurance companies, there were one or two holdups, but mostly the appraisers went down the street saying, "Totaled. Totaled. Totaled." They didn't really even have to look. Some people started out with an old house and ended up with a new one. But that's the way it goes.

A lot of what you see in the area depends upon your perspective. Dan remembers a visit from some relatives from the Dakotas. They looked out the kitchen window and said "I couldn't live with a mountain like that in my kitchen." They were referring to the bluff with pine trees on it. It's a half mile from the house, but to them it was right next to the kitchen. It's where you were brought up that shapes and colors your images of other places.

Dan has "a soft spot for trees." There weren't originally any trees on that bluff. Shortly after Dan took over operation of the farm, he got in touch with a forester. In one year he planted about 7,500 pine trees. Several years ago, Cal and Vic did a salvage harvest in the woods. It had to be done. "Trees are just like corn stalks. If you don't take them down, they'll rot and fall down." The trees are ready for another harvest now; not a salvage harvest, but a harvest for a better grade of trees. But they can't get anyone to take the pine trees now. Dan is afraid the trees are so close together that they are likely to get diseased. When he planted them, he followed the rule of thumb that was six feet apart, because many of the trees were expected to die. "But every tree lived. Now they're too close together." Pine

is softwood, but Dan doesn't know why nobody wants to harvest them.

When Dan was very small, his dad used to burn the woods. Dan figures he had his reasons, but Dan couldn't tell what they were. The Native Americans used to burn too. But when Dan planted pine trees, he didn't burn. "No, thank you!" Maybe he burned a little bit just to clean up the dead grass, to make it look better, but he never burned any large area. More recently, Vic and Cal have done controlled burns. With the cattle constrained, the farm is going to brush, so Vic and Cal are in programs to clear the brush.

When Dan was 5 or 6 years old, there was a CCC camp on the farm for two or three summers. The men planted trees, straightened creeks, built fences, put in diversion dams. They went to the woods and cut what they wanted. Some were humongous! Dan tore some of those fences out later and those old posts were hard to take out. Some of the old posts are still there. When he was a boy, rambling with the sheep, Dan liked to watch the men work. Sometimes they'd come to the farm and get the horses to use for the day. They were putting in earth berms with scrapers. They didn't have a bulldozer. They'd drag logs out of the woods with horses. It was all hard hand work. The farmers signed up to have their creeks straightened, trees planted, fences built, etc., but Dan didn't know whether any money changed hands as it was a government-sponsored program.

When he was growing up, Dan was used to seeing wildlife such as red fox, ring-necked pheasants, cottontail rabbits, skunks, possums, mink, and raccoons. But he saw his first white-tailed deer on the farm around 1959 or '60. There are certainly more deer in the area now than there were then, but there are fewer right now than there were 30 years ago. A group of guys from Madison used to come out to shoot pigeons. The rule was just that you couldn't shoot them on the roof of the barn. There always seemed to be enough,

regardless of how many pigeons they shot. The cottontail population seems to ebb and flow in cycles. Dan's dad used to shoot 25 to 30 rabbits at a time. An older Welshman used to pickle them in big barrels, but that was before Dan's time. There were no coyotes in the area when he was young, but there are now. One time a nephew came down from the fields and said he'd seen a coyote. Dan thought he was drunk until, a month later, he saw one too. He didn't want to tell anyone. Now he hears them at night all the time. He used to hear foxes yipping when they had their pups, but not so much now, though Cal and Vic have seen some fox pups on the farm. When he was young, Dan came face to face with a fox one time. Usually when you told Dan's dad you'd seen something, somebody got a gun and went hunting. Dan wanted to think he was Daniel Boone, but at 5 or 6 years old he couldn't have anything to do with a gun. Dan once saw a wildcat on the farm. "Their cry is like a baby or a woman screaming. You'd swear someone was choking your sister." When he was little he remembers sitting outside, around the house, with his family on a summer evening when he heard that screech. "It scared the pants off you!" It was a couple of years after that when he saw it. The wildcat was in the area a few years in the early '40s, then someone must have shot it.



*In the fall and winter, Dan has counted more than 100 wild turkeys in the nearby fields.*

*There were no coyotes in the area when Dan was young. Now he hears them at night all the time.*

Along with pheasants, wild turkeys have been added to the landscape. In the last two or three years, people have stopped at the farm and asked the kids getting on the school bus, "Is this a turkey farm?" Dan has counted over 100 wild turkeys himself. Not in May when the interview took place, but in the fall and winter, when the turkeys flock up is when he sees them. When Dan was growing up, there was not a wild turkey to be seen. About 10 years ago, he started to see them. When he was helping Vic and Cal with the hay mowing, he'd sometimes hit a turkey nest. He never hit an adult turkey with the mower, but on the next round in the field, he's see he'd hit the nest. The mower would break the eggs and kill the chicks.

Sometimes he'd hit a fawn. Sometimes the fawn would go all the way through the hay conditioner, but sometimes it would block the machinery and he would have to get under there with a knife and start cutting. Now this isn't as much of a problem because there is machinery without rollers. The old windrollers would block more easily.

Dan shared other wildlife observations too. He said he'd seen badgers on the farm 12 to 15 years ago. "They dig holes in the fields and you wish you'd never seen them," he said. There used to be bull snakes, though Dan hasn't seen one in a long time. "Of course," he acknowledged, "I'm not on the farm all the time any more now either." It used to be said there were no rattlesnakes south of the railroad tracks, which go right through town, and now people say there are. Dan's father-in-law used to hunt rattlesnakes three

Dan liked the "do it yourself" attitude that he found in the area.

miles north of Barneveld. One day he hauled a gunny sack out of the car. "Come on over here. I gotta show you something! Look in there!" There were three, four, maybe six rattlers in there. Dan didn't want to hang around that time. Overall, he doesn't think there are more or fewer snakes and frogs in the area now. But he doesn't see as many blackbirds as he used to see. He doesn't know if that's due to spraying the fields or what. Blackbirds rest in the hayfields. Nor does he see (or hear!) as many meadowlarks as he used to. He used to see jackrabbits, but they're gone now. He used to see grouse, but now he's more likely to hear them in the woods than see them. He thinks he saw prairie chickens when he was a boy, though he probably didn't know what they were then. He saw a sandhill crane about 20 years ago and didn't know what that was at the time either. It was making a weird sound. He does see bald eagles once in a while.

Dan has seen some of the world. He was stationed in Germany when he was in the Service. He stayed in Europe during his 30-day leave. He went to many places in Europe, yet he never saw any place any better than right here. Besides, there was a young lady, Norita, involved. He came back here to be with his wife. He never really questioned coming back here.

Dan met Norita when they were in high school. "A bunch of us skipped school. We went cruising around the country in somebody's car." Although it was a long time before they really went together, that was the day Dan decided Norita "was a pretty nice little gal." After Norita graduated from high school, she worked for the Wisconsin Department of Motor Vehicles until they got married in 1957. She came to the farm, where she was his "right arm." Although she never milked the cows there was very little she wouldn't or couldn't do. Sometimes she washed the cows for him to milk, but he didn't want her to do the milking. Now she works as a receptionist for MNI Bank in Dodgeville and she does the commuting.

Dan's older brother was in the Service before Dan was. He was a flight engineer during World War II. He was shot down and taken prisoner. He was held captive for a year and a half, so he didn't even know his daughter had been born. He and a fellow from London, England escaped together. "He came home when we were shearing sheep. I remember coming downstairs to see my big brother. I was scared. He looked at you like he'd just as soon cut your throat. He was just skin and bones." He had been on a forced march in Germany. All the prisoners were being marched out on the ice on the Baltic Sea. He had been between Allied and German lines for about six weeks. Finally coming back to the US on a ship, he didn't even have dog tags or anything. The Red Cross charged him \$0.25 for a sandwich. Dan resents the Red Cross for that to this day. When Dan saw his brother that first time home from the war, he wanted to give him a hug, but he was afraid to get that close to him. His brother, 85 now, is Arthur D. Williams, or Art. He's in a veterans' hospital in Biloxi, Mississippi now (2004), but he did belong to the Veterans Association in Madison. Art farmed for two years.

From a farming aspect, Dan values the "do it yourself" attitude and the "go ahead initiative" that he found in the area. Everybody farmed the same way. He valued the work ethic. But he can't say that any more, as there aren't any working farms now. Big cities have never appealed to him. If he left Wisconsin, he would probably go to the mountains in the western United States because he likes the mountains. It might be nice to go south for the winter, but, with his lung problems, he can't tolerate the humidity. Mostly, he likes this area. He likes the type of people he's found here, though there are getting to be fewer of them. Everybody's moving out of the city to get rid of their problems, but they are bringing their problems with them. He remembers when Barneveld encompassed only about 500 people. "Everybody knew everybody, and everybody took care of everybody. Everybody had a nose in everybody's

business, but nobody seemed to mind. That's just the way it was." Now he sees people taking their evening stroll and he doesn't know who they are. His grandkids talk about their friends with names unfamiliar to him.

Dan wonders whether the changes are really for the better. In farming, people seem to think "bigger is better." But if someone had told him he could give a cow a shot and get more milk back when he first started farming, he'd have dropped his teeth. "We've done the same with schools," he points out. They've closed the little schools and made schools bigger. Now, Dan has heard, they are breaking schools down smaller again at the national level. Dan doesn't know whether bigger is always better but bigger tractors and faster cars seem to be the way we've gone. "It's impossible to go back, whether you like it or not."

Years ago, Dan delivered his milk to the Prairie Grove Cheese Factory. The last cheese-maker from there is still alive and in his 90s. Dan quit hauling milk there in 1963, when he went to Grade A milk. Everybody wanted to go to Grade A then because the price for the milk was better. You had to "clean up your act," comply with higher standards, to have your milk graded A. At that time, the Grade A plant was centered in Mount Horeb, with AMPI. They produced drinking milk. Grade B milk was all used for cheese. The farmers hauled Grade B milk to the cheese factories. "You got more money by going Grade A." After he left the farm, Dan worked for AMPI for 11 years, in Madison, in the lab. "That was another experience!" He was on the road all the time and is glad not to be doing that now. He was driving about 300 miles a day. AMPI produced milk for drinking, under the Chicago Board of Health. A lot of the drinking milk went to Chicago. Some of it was shipped to Florida or other places. Milk was cooled to 31 to 33 degrees and shipped in a tanker. The tanker drivers couldn't pull over to rest because the milk could heat up and it is perishable. Dan told me that the State Board of Health, combined with the

DNR, put the little cheese factories out of business. Their regulations said your whey could no longer flow into the creek and the wooden rakes and other tools all had to be made of stainless steel. The small cheese factories could no longer afford to keep up. On every corner there used to be a cheese factory or a school or both. Now very few of the schoolhouses are left standing and there is only one cheese factory in the area. Now tankers pick up the milk right from the farmer. With Grade A milk, the farmers went bulk instead of handling everything in cans. Now the milk gets picked up by a guy who starts in Iowa and drives it maybe as far as Beaver Dam. Between the farm Vic and Cal now own and the highway, there are only one or two operating farms, where there used to be a farm with cows at every driveway. Dan couldn't begin to tell me how many farms there used to be.

Aside from the disappearance of many dairy farms and cheese factories, Dan identified misuse or no use of the land as changes in the landscape: set asides. The land is sitting idle. "Some farms will never come back to production." Trees are growing on fields someone worked hard to clear off so he could farm it. The creeks are notably small. "Everybody's throwing a house up. That's the big thing. Everybody's building a house. Everybody wants their piece of heaven. But once I get my piece of heaven, you're not coming close to it" seems to be the prevailing attitude. "The hills are still the same, but the roads change and trees grow and fall down." Dan guesses that contour stripping came into the area in the late 1940s or early '50s. "That's what saved this country, or we'd all be down the Pecatonic River!" Dan put in contour strips when he bought the farm from his dad. His dad couldn't understand why he wanted to "put those little garden patches in!" His dad didn't like snaking the cultivation around the hills. Dan considers contour stripping the biggest thing that was ever done for soil conservation in this part of the country. "This is hillside farming here!"

## Views of the Ridge

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*More land is sitting idle.  
"Some farms will never come back to production."*

Dan would really like to see the area hold its own over the next 20 years. But there are houses all over now. In high school, Dan was told that by the year 2000, this would all be open range. "It's open, but there's no range. The cattle are all confined now." Dan doesn't believe we can go back and he questions whether we should sit still, use the set-aside land, or what. Is bigger really better? He would like to see the land maintained so it remains similar to the way it is now. Improvements may be found through science, but "there won't be any more of it. We can go to the moon. We can do wonderful things, but we can't make any more land."

Dan doesn't know what could be done to prevent the breakup of farmland into small plots with houses, except regulations, and he hates regulations. "Can you blame a farmer with so many expenses who sells 10 acres here and 10 acres there for a house?" Yes, Dan values the land, but he would rather see his boys selling some of the land than losing the whole works. He thinks people should be able to buy a house, car, land, etc. without being regulated. It would make you mad if a third party came in and told you "you can't sell your car," wouldn't it? Yes, Dan would like to see the Military Ridge area stay rural, just the way it is, but he sees that it can't stay the same. "Our population is getting too big." You may buy a place and love it here, but that land will never go back to productivity.

Dan has a favorite place: the spring and the cabin on the farm. They took an old granary and made a cabin out of it. Dan has spent a lot of time over there. It's back about a half mile off the road. "I can sit there and I can't hear a man-made noise. That's what I like." He and his wife can't get used to all the man-made racket around town. He expects his sons will help him finish work on his special place by the spring.



PHOTOS: S. GILCHRIST



### **Shenandoah John Trulen**

*Born: May 25, 1976*

### **Christie Lynn (Brindise) Trulen**

*Born: December 22, 1977*

I was interested in the perspective of younger people who had an attachment to the Military Ridge area and those who hoped to buy property there in the future, so my friend Mary Rathbun referred me to Shenan and Christie. Mary lived on a farm with Highland Scottish cattle and she worked for a local newspaper, so she was aware of the community, both human and environmental. Shenan had worked on the Rathbun farm when he was a boy, though he didn't grow up on an active farm himself.

Shenan grew up about a mile outside of Daileyville, by the river. His grandfather sold the farm when his mom was young, so his parents never actually farmed. But they did log timber off their land and built their house from scratch. They had a friend in Blanchardville who had a sawmill and sawed the lumber for them, and there were construction workers in the family who contributed some expertise in building. Shenan was quite young at the time, but he remembers that they cut the lumber in winter, when there was less sap. It was white pine that they cut. Shenan was kept away from falling trees because he was so young, but he remembers his dad planing lumber until midnight every night. His dad would say that Shenan ran away with tools more than he helped, but Shenan doesn't remember running away with any tools. The property his parents own consists of six and a quarter acres. They bought it for \$150 an acre in 1971 or 1972. Land was cheaper here then, though that \$150 was worth more than it is now. The seller didn't want to sell more land than that. The landscape was different then too. There were a lot fewer houses in the area then.

When Shenan was seven, he got his first BB gun. In those days he knew everybody's land and there was nobody around. He could go fishing for half a day without seeing anyone else. He never worried about being abducted by strangers. Now there's so much traffic in the area that he would never let a child of that age wonder around like that.

A cousin lived in the old farmhouse, though, and the two boys went hunting and fishing together, so Shenan wasn't alone all the time. They fished in the Gordon branch of the trout stream. There are still trout there. Shenan was about 3 years old when he got his first fishing pole. By the time he was 7, he had four fishing poles. His grandparents had old bamboo poles in the garage, but Shenan preferred the newer fishing poles. Twenty years ago, he'd fish all day and never encounter another person. He'd ride his bike or his mom would drop him off to fish. He'd take a sandwich for lunch. He caught many fish, but he didn't have a creel, just a stringer. He'd let most of the fish go except for one towards the end of the day, and that one he'd keep for dinner. He entertained himself with fishing and such because his parents didn't have the money to drive him into town to play with other friends. Once he went to school he made more friends. When he was in fourth grade or so, he could ride home on the school bus with friends. He spent a lot of weekends with his friend Matt. They went hunting and fishing together.

The only bird Shenan had ever hunted is the wild turkey, although he noted that ring-necked pheasant populations have rebounded in the past few years. The first time he saw a wild turkey was shortly after the DNR started "planting" them. He was coming home from church. He was amazed at this big black bird walking around. It was "so weird looking!" He said he was scared to shoot one the first time he went turkey hunting with his dad. He was 14 or 15 at the time.

Shenan said there are a lot of coyotes in the area; the same with foxes. He's never shot either, though they can be pests. The only reason he would shoot one would be to mount it because they are beautiful animals. But he has no room for a mounted coyote. Generally he prefers to eat what he kills and he has no desire to eat a coyote. The first time he saw a coyote, he was driving down the road. He's seen them when he's been deer hunting too, sneaking through the woods.



DNR FILE

*Shenan saw a bobcat in a field south of Daileyville early one morning. "That was an enjoyable experience!"*

When he was just 5 or 6 years old, Shenan started going out "hunting" with his dad. Of course, his dad was the one doing the hunting. He's seen a lot of white-tailed deer, though not as many in recent years. He said a lot of people have been following DNR advice and shooting every deer they've seen because of chronic wasting disease (CWD). Some landowners disagree and don't want all the deer killed. Maybe shooting them is better than letting them waste away with the disease or watching them starve to death because of over-population. But Shenan understands that they don't kill all the animals because of CWD out west, where the disease has been recognized for many years. He says he has a hard time understanding the effort to kill all the deer. He has harvested his fair share of deer, but he only shoots what he can eat. He remembers every time he's shot a deer. The first deer he shot was a very large doe. He was 12. He thought he had killed a baby deer, and he was upset. But his father verified that it was a three and a half year-old doe and a very large animal. The first thing they did was to say a prayer to thank God for letting him harvest this deer. He always says a prayer of thanks for taking any life. He said it's a respect issue.

Until the year previous to the interview, Shenan had never seen a bobcat in the wild. But the winter before the interview, he saw a bobcat at the Rathbun's farm, south of Daileyville, towards Hollendale. It was early in the morning when he saw it out in a field. It was only there a brief minute or two, then it retreated to the cover of the woods. He guessed it was about a 40-pound animal. "That was an enjoyable experience!" He thought he heard a bobcat scream once, but he can't be sure. They sound like a high pitched yell or a baby crying.

Shenan used to see killdeer when he was young. They used to be plentiful in the fields when he was growing

up, but he doesn't see them anymore. He's never seen a prairie chicken at all, but he'd like to see one.

Badgers he's seen a few times. His dogs brought one back once. It wasn't very big, but he figured either the dogs ganged up on it or found it already injured or dead. The dogs had no marks on them and he didn't think they'd come home unscathed from fighting a badger. Badgers are feisty! He saw one that was running once. It looked like a raccoon that had been squashed flat to the ground. He also saw a badger once when he was hunting. He was up in a tree stand on a ridge top, hunting deer, when the badger came over the bluff and scampered along the ridge and back down the bluff towards the water. This was just a little further down the ridge from where he'd seen the bobcat.

At one point, Shenan aspired to be a DNR conservation warden. He went to the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point with becoming a warden his initial goal. He did some job shadowing, however, and found out that he would never be able to make more than \$28,000 a year. He changed his major to business administration so he could make money to enjoy the outdoors, instead of having to work outdoors. Even when he heard the agency was looking to hire wardens, he continued in the computer direction. He has been a computer programmer for several different companies. He had worked doing odds and ends at the Rathbun's farm when he was young, and he worked as a butcher for a while, but he was working as a computer programmer in Verona at the time of the interview.

Unlike Shenan, Christie did not grow up in southwestern Wisconsin. She grew up in McHenry, Illinois. She came to this area in 2002, when she married Shenan. Her first impression of the area was that there are fewer stoplights, less traffic, and fewer people here than in McHenry, but then McHenry is a bigger town than Mount Horeb. She immediately liked the trolls in Mount Horeb and she found all the hills in the area appealing. Christie got her degree in forestry from

*Christie's first impression of the area was that there are fewer stoplights, less traffic, and fewer people here.*

UW-Stevens Point, but she found she didn't really like the field. She works as a dental assistant now. She hopes to go back to school to be a dental hygienist.

Shenan does not feel the land has changed much; it's more the use of the land that has changed. With more CRP fields, a lot of crops have disappeared. Especially in the valley, a lot of people stopped planting crops and planted trees instead. The changes in the landscape seem to have helped the ring-necked pheasants and white-tailed deer. They hide so well in the tall grass that you almost have to step on them to get them to move. The big difference is that a lot of farms are breaking up. People move out from the cities and try to become active in the area and make it more like the city. Some people moved out to the valley where Shenan's parents live. They wanted people to drive 25 to 30 miles per hour the way they did in the city. But the people who had lived in the area longer, many of whose fathers or maybe their grandfathers had farmed the area, were accustomed to going 55 miles per hour. An ordinance to reduce the speed limit did not pass. The people who had been their longer embraced the attitude of "That's how it's always been." Yet Shenan suspects the farm break-ups have to happen. Shenan can't afford a large farm, so he may have to buy a portion of one, if he wants to live in that area. "I may not be able to afford a 250-acre farm because land prices have gone up." He's concerned that he may be contributing to the very change that he doesn't want to see.

The farmers have to have an incentive to hold onto their land. Maybe if the farm is sold as a whole, the income tax bracket on the sale of the farm should be lower than normal, but if the farm is sold piecemeal, the income tax bracket should be higher. That would provide some incentive to sell a farm as a whole, but it would also reduce the number of people capable of buying the land.

Shenan and Christie would like to settle in the Military Ridge area themselves. Shenan said he used to

know everyone in the valley, though, as people move in he no longer knows everyone. He wants to settle there in part because he is familiar with the land and the stream. He knows the whole valley from driving back and forth and from having lived there already. When he goes hunting, he feels more a part of the place because he knows how things work, where the animals move, and what they're using for food. He savors the memories of growing up there. But it's more than one thing that draws him to the area. There are people reasons too: family and friends. He has brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles in the area, plus it's not too far away from Christie's family. Another factor is that he just doesn't like the notion of living in town. There are different noises associated with living in town or in the country. It's what you're used to. Christie said she heard a whippoorwill for the first time when she went to visit Shenan at his mom's house. Shenan said there are loud crickets and it gets really pitch dark out there at night. He doesn't ever want to live in the city, with all the sounds of traffic, etc.

What Shenan values most about the area is the view, the rolling hills. If you drive two hours in any direction except towards Galena, the terrain flattens out. He likes the farm country with rolling hills and trout streams. He hasn't seen anything as beautiful in all his travels, except maybe the wine country in California, which is "extremely beautiful." But his family is here.

Ideally, Shenan would like to see the Military Ridge area stay the same as it is now in the future. Trying to be more "realistic" he said he hopes it will change as little as possible. He'd like to see the farmers' children coming back and farming so the farms wouldn't be broken up. At the same time, he doesn't want to deprive anyone from the opportunity of moving out there. Overall, he summed up, he would like to see the area "NOT changed."

Christie and Shenan both relayed the importance of keeping the programs that are already in place in the

*Shenan would like to see the farmers' children coming back and farming so the farms wouldn't be broken up.*

area. Christie expressed concern about potential budget cuts and resulting program cuts. She hopes people would keep their land with incentives. On the other side of the coin, Shenan stated that most people who own large farms rely on that land as their retirement. They have to be able to put the land into a program they can pull out of when they want to, without paying back taxes. Sometimes they can't wait 20 years before they can sell land. It's a difficult issue.

Still, we should keep funding the current programs, as they seem to be working for wildlife. Shenan doesn't know the reason for cutting down trees on river banks. He's seen a lot more vegetation in the water and more sun on the water warms it. He doesn't claim to be a fisheries expert, but he knows "trout don't like warm water." He wondered if maybe grass holds the bank soil better than tree roots during the flood season. He believes the removal of trees on stream banks was a DNR-funded program intended to increase water quality, but he understood the water quality to have been excellent there beforehand. "If what's there is working, why change it?" If people are moving out to the area, Shenan would prefer that they impact the land as little as possible. People move out to the area because they enjoy the way it looks, the wildlife, everything about it, so it doesn't make sense for them to change it. But every time you get a conglomeration of people, you get human-wildlife conflicts.

Shenan is not against prairie restoration. In fact, he said, "I think there does need to be more prairie in the area." He'd like to see the prairie back, as long as it doesn't alter the current place. In an area already filled with native trees, he doesn't want to see all the trees taken out. Of course, if a landowner wants to take out all the trees and restore his land to prairie, that's the landowner's choice. Most CRP fields are open areas without trees, so Shenan wondered if there could be a program to plant native plants there. Shenan admitted to a bias because he enjoys hunting and, without trees

and cover, it's harder for the deer, rabbits, and squirrels he hunts. (Since Shenan had said he eats everything he hunts, I asked him if he'd eaten squirrel stew. Not stew, he said, but squirrel meat is good doused with Shake and Bake and then baked. There's a recipe for squirrel hunters!)

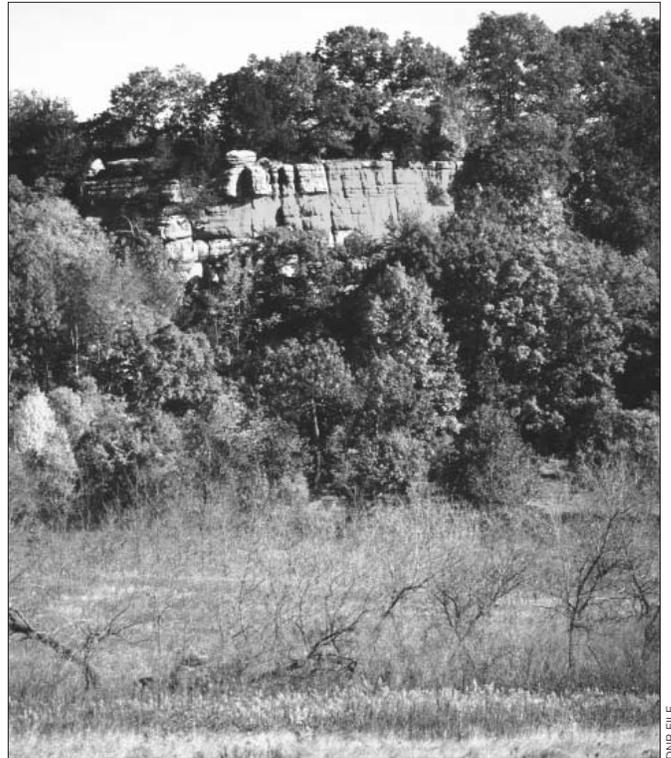
Shenan figures that prescribed burns benefit the land when they are not done too late in the spring. If burns are done too late, they can destroy pheasant and turkey nests, which eventually has an impact on hunting. He acknowledged burning as a useful management tool. When he was younger, the county came out and burned the ditches. His parents used to burn a grassy field every year. They burned it early in the spring, before the new grass came in. Burning got rid of the old, dead grass, which made the field look better and, when the new grass came in, taking advantage of the vacancy, the burn provided better food for animals. A huge flux of animals would come to eat that fresh grass! They haven't burned that land in years now, though, because they've had highland cattle grazing there, and part of the land is too swampy so Shenan didn't think it would benefit from burning. Most of the woods on their land consist of pines that are too young and too low to the ground to burn safely. Shenan reiterated that he is not an expert, but was telling me what he thought. Christie was a district forester in Illinois, so she had experience doing burns there and was familiar with burning as a tool.

When Shenan was a kid, his parents planted 15 to 20 trees along the tree lines, but they didn't need to plant much. Their property was wooded anyway, except along the bottom land that was wet and didn't support a lot of tree growth, except maybe willows. He'd like to see more trees back in some places. Yet, Shenan has seen where the fence lines were 50 or more years ago, and the trees have crept beyond the fence line, spreading out.

I asked the young couple about favorite places in the area. Shenan said he thought Governor Dodge State

Park provides a good idea of what the area offers. You can walk in it. There are rock bluffs, valleys, and streams – everything you'd get walking on a piece of private property. Blue Mound State Park is another place he'd recommend. You can see a view from the climbing towers. In addition to these public places, Shannon likes to pick a spot on Sandy Rock Road and just stay in that one spot because he's knows that place so well. "Part of the fact of liking it so much is that I've spent so much time there, just growing up there." On his parents' place, there's a wide sandstone bluff that's just a few feet deep. When it freezes, there's an ice fall that creates an ice cave. When he was little he would climb up inside that ice cave and slide out the opening. The falls were 20 to 25 feet high, so you wouldn't slide down from the top of the falls, but just out the opening of the cave. He did this when he was 7 to 12 years old. It was "a spot you'd never forget!" Not having grown up there, Christie has had less time to explore and bond with favorite places, she responded that she liked walking up the hill overlooking the valley and seeing the view at Shenan's parents' place. Shenan remembered another "favorite" about the area. For a while he used to work unloading semis in Middleton, the town just west of Madison. He would drive up Highway 78 from Hollendale just as the sun came up. The valley would still be covered with clouds. You can still see that if you get up at daybreak and drive up or down 78 along the ridge. "That's something to see!" But if you stop by someone's property to enjoy the view, people will ask you what you're doing. There's a fear of trespassers. "When you see something out of the ordinary, you think it's a bad thing happening." Then, looking at a photo of the mound, blue in the distance, he said that's the view he saw almost every day as he drove to Mount Horeb or Middleton. It's "a view I hope to see again every day if I live back in the valley!"

*Shenan and Christie would like to settle in the Military Ridge area.*



DNR FILE

*Shenan thought Governor Dodge State Park provides a good idea of what the area offers: rock bluffs, valleys, and streams. And, you can walk in it.*



S GILCHRIST



**Merel Robin Black**

*Born: September 24, 1941*

Merel moved to this area in the spring of 1968, after graduating from the University of Wisconsin in Madison in 1963. Madison and its “liberal leanings” drew her here, and she had always wanted to live in the country. She wanted a place with a pond because her husband, Joel, likes to fish. She had come from the foothills of the mountains in North Carolina. Joel came from New York City, but he wanted to live in the country too. The politics of Madison kept them here. I interviewed Merel in May 2004, at the house that she and Joel bought in 1968. And yes, there are bass in their pond.

Merel worked for the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and then the University of Wisconsin. She went back to North Carolina for a few months, but couldn’t stand it so returned to Wisconsin. She worked at her own business, retired, worked at the University, and retired again. Merel said she likes to work, and the more I visited with her, the more I saw the truth in that.

When Merel and Joel first came here, the place was a working farm with 37 cows. Looking from the house, which had been built 1883, the land was all open pasture with some large oaks. The fields were cultivated. She wanted some trees. Until after she retired the first time, she volunteered on the Military Ridge Bicycle Trail. Rich Henderson (of the DNR and also of the Prairie Enthusiasts) provided some training, and Merel realized she had some prairie remnant. Now the Prairie Enthusiasts cut out the brush to help maintain the prairie, but in the early days, the DNR told her to plant things that have become invasive. She went to the DNR when she first came, to find out about healing the land. She put the cropland into a program like CRP and the DNR gave her some shrubs to plant and a living fence of multi-flora rose. Now she’s cutting everything out.

When she first moved here, Merel said there were no white-tailed deer. “If we saw a deer, we were overjoyed!” She wouldn’t let people hunt on her land. Now she pleads with anyone to hunt there, as her property

is in the chronic wasting disease area. Besides, the deer are eating her prairie plants. She expects hunters to harvest does, not just bucks. Generally 12 to 20 deer were harvested off the place every year, but now the season has been extended, yet she can’t get anyone to hunt, and only a single deer was taken last year. Recently she counted 47 deer up on a hill overlooking her land. Driving is hard because of all the deer. Merel hit one, or maybe it hit her. It ran into the side of the car and dented the car. Another deer jumped in front of her car when she was returning from canoeing. Its hooves hit the hood of the car. When deer are hit on the road and injured, they go to the pond to die. There were two dead deer there at the time of the interview. She thought a dead buck she found by the pond seemed to have died of some new disease, which was potentially worrisome.

There have been other changes among wildlife populations in the area besides deer. Gordon Creek is right down the hill from Merel’s place. Her husband routinely used to pull out 20 native trout a day. But he doesn’t fish there now. Now people catch the “planted” trout. The DNR has a plan to improve that creek. Merel remembered once hearing a noise like a two-cycle tractor starting. It would go and stop. It was a grouse drumming. They used to have “a ton of grouse” and pheasants that were planted. But after the wild turkeys were planted in the area, the grouse disappeared. “It’s been years since we’ve had a drumming grouse.” There were bobcats and weasels in the area when Merel and Joel moved in. A bobcat cry sounds “like a child being beaten.” Joel went to see the bobcat once, but as he approached, it went farther away. One time an animal ran across the road in front of the car. She thought it was a bobcat, but she said the DNR seemed to think it was a Canada lynx. She looked for tracks but couldn’t find any on the hard driveway. In the last five or six years, there has been an explosion of groundhogs, which they didn’t have before. There used

## The Interviews

*It came from the woods, flying due east.  
At first she thought it was a heron, but it was too big,  
and its neck was sticking straight out, not bent like a  
heron's. Her fellow hunter identified it as a crane.*

to be badgers, though, and there was an otter once, for a season. It came over to the canoe, maybe 20 or 25 years ago. There are lots of frogs, though the bass eat them in the pond. There used to be hog-nosed snakes on the place, but Merel doesn't see them anymore, probably because of all the trees. They like open and dry country. But there are fox snakes that hibernate in the basement. One was eight feet long, the other six feet. Merel takes pictures and shoos them out. Once she saw a snake climb into a hole in a tree and into a bird's nest. Another time, she watched a garter snake eating a toad. Merel sees lots of raccoons and opossums. There's a raccoon's nest in an old white pine by the house, probably a relic pine. Merel is not thrilled with the raccoons. They get in the house and make a mess in the barn. They are cute, but mean. She has mink and snapping turtles in the pond. Once when a snapping turtle and a mink died, she thought something must be wrong with the pond.

Generally, there's a good diversity of birds at Merel's. A whooping crane, a very rare sight, spent the night there when it was migrating. Merel follows the whooping cranes. Once when she knew they were migrating, she got up at 5:00 a.m., before the sun came out. She was turkey hunting when she heard a noise. She didn't know what it was. She was listening for turkeys. It

was about 6:20 a.m. The crane came from the woods, flying due east. The sun was not bright yet. At first she thought it was a heron, but it was too big, and its neck was sticking straight out, not bent like a heron's. The bird was white with black wingtips. She watched it until it flew out of view. Her fellow hunter identified it as a crane, and Merel knew it must be a whooping crane, and that harsh, quick sound she had heard was the crane. The large bird must have circled around to get so high above the pond. Merel avoids the pond when the ducks and geese are going through, but she did have an egret there once, nesting great blue herons, and there is a green heron there now. Meadowlarks are present and there have been upland sandpipers. Merel didn't know what a bobolink was until one was pointed out to her at a prairie. She has orchard orioles and Baltimore or northern orioles. There's a nesting hummingbird in a walnut tree. Merel sees titmice and rose-breasted grosbeaks, lots of birds. There are sharp-tailed grouse up along Spring Creek Road, and she's seen woodcocks and all kinds of hawks, including rough-legged and Cooper's hawks. In the winter there was a northern shrike. Turkey vultures are plentiful, and occasionally there is an eagle. Some wrens were being vocal during the interview. Merel said she used to have no bluebirds on her land, but now they're all



PHOTOS: S GILCHRIST

*Merel and Joel came to the area in 1968. They wanted a place in the country with a pond.*

## Views of the Ridge



*When she learned about prairies,  
Merel put up bluebird nest boxes.*

over. As we talked, a bluebird kept attacking his own reflection in the large window. Merel put up bluebird nest boxes about 10 years ago, when she learned about prairies. She has put up wood duck nest boxes too, but there were wood ducks here previously.

Merel and Joel were the first non-farm family in their neighborhood. The smallest farm then was about 116 acres. Each farm was individually farmed and each cow was milked with an individual milking machine. Cows were pastured on the steep soil that was difficult to cultivate. All the pastures, including the woods, were open. When Merel went with a researcher to “botanize,” she found that the farther from the barn she got, the better quality prairie she saw. The area that is golf course now used to be covered with butterflies, including regal fritillaries, the rare ones. That habitat is gone for miles now. Merel noted that there are now probably 20 PhDs and only seven farmers remaining, out of the 368 people in the Township of Perry.

Because of changes in land use, vegetation has changed drastically. Six of the white oaks that were 150 to 200 years old have died because their lower limbs were all shaded out now. Merel is trying to open that area up again, girdling the guilty trees and using herbicides as necessary to get rid of the brush. In the last three years, garlic mustard has grown up. Plowing or grazing used to keep the landscape open on the farms. She tries to keep garlic mustard out of a relic woods that doesn't belong to her too, because there are lady's slippers and other precious plants there. The conservation groups in the area are generally less interested in the woods than the prairies, but it makes no sense to Merel to ignore one for the other.

No one thought about prairies 30 years ago, except Dr. Hugh Iltis, who was concerned about everything. She told me that although he may have caused some animosity towards the herbarium in Madison, where Merel worked for a while, he did recognize what we were losing. Merel was a computer specialist at the

herbarium in Madison and now she is doing the same for the herbarium in Stevens Point. She also manages a website about the plants of Wisconsin, which is a significant undertaking.

Merel has seen major changes in the landscape over the years. The vegetation has changed. “It’s wooded up.” There are houses everywhere. There used to be two farmhouses between her place and County Highway Z, but now she sees lights everywhere. The Town of Perry has a good land use plan, but zoning can always be changed. One day “this will be a suburb with a few protected spots.” Something has to be done about the sprawl! So many people are trashing the land. And traffic is unbelievable! They build highways and then people move out here. Merel raised two kids in her house; it is plenty big. But now people come out here and build huge houses, sometimes just for two people. Merel considers that wasting the land. “People can’t seem to get enough. They want everything.” When Merel first came to an auction here to meet the neighbors, people asked if she intended to build on the hill with the oak savanna. She loves going up there, but she doesn’t want any building there. She prefers to live in “this old house.” In the old days, farmers put houses where there was water and they could get to the cheese factories most readily. They sold off land they didn’t consider productive, land such as oak savannas, soil that was too poor or too steep to cultivate, and prairie remnants, so that is where the new houses are. Merel told me Blue Mounds has no land use plan; they let the farmer do whatever he wants with the land because it’s his land. She said they don’t realize it’s only his land for a short period of time. Merel would really like to see people have some respect for the land and think about something other than themselves and their egos. She would like to see people use things sparingly. “People build on top of hills so they have a beautiful view, but then everyone else has to look at their stupid house.” She wishes people would build on the brow of the hill,

*Merel wishes people would build on the brow of the hill, not on the top, to be more subtle, more mindful of the environment around them.*

not on the top, be more like Frank Lloyd Wright, more subtle, more mindful of the environment around them. Merel doesn't think the building all over the fields and prairies is going to stop, but how quickly it all happens depends on the economy. If gas prices continue to increase, maybe development and urban sprawl will slow down. She can't just "pop into Madison" with gas prices the way they are.

In the future, Merel would like to see oak savannas kept open, prairies healthy, and no more development. She'd like to see more cows, and noted that there are hardly any cows any more. Merel had just driven back from visiting her son in Virginia, and she remembered how she used to count cows when she was a kid, to keep busy on long drives. This trip she noticed that she saw very few cows.

Thirty-five years ago there were cheese factories all over the area. There was a cheese factory on a curve on Highway 78. It had wood-colored siding. It was called Mayflower Cheese Factory. Every factory made its own cheese with a different recipe. Cheese makers used a solid copper tub that was five feet across and three feet deep. Merel remembers going to the cheese factory to get cream, picking strawberries, and making ice cream. One time she caught crawfish and bought cream at the factory to make crawfish Newburg. The Mayflower went out of business about 25 years ago. The cheese maker was lifting a heavy wheel of cheese and hurt his shoulder, so he had to close up. Each farmer had a cheese factory he supported. Then Yahoo milk drinks opened a plant in Mount Horeb and farmers sold their milk there. All the neighborhood cheese factories are gone now. Yahoo went bust. AMPI had a processing plant in Mount Horeb, then they went bust. Merel doesn't know where the milk goes now. Her milk house has a cement tub that was filled with cold water to put the milk cans in to keep the milk cold. One time she helped with a controlled burn for a farmer who is still milking and wants to preserve the land.

He's still farming, so it must be doable. He rotates the cows and manages to make a living. You couldn't buy the land and equipment to make a living farming now.

There are some incentive programs to help retain the rural character of the land. Merel has her property in MFL, to keep the tax burden lower. The program is only for woodlands because people were looking at woods as a crop. They want you to log big oaks and plant pine trees. It's nice to look at the land not just as a commodity for earning money. This Driftless Area (the unglaciated southwestern part of Wisconsin) is unique in the world. Yet farmers need money from the land for their retirement. Another incentive to keep the land rural is the conservation easement, where the landowner can sell development rights for conservation, to protect the land from being developed. CRP and CREP are fabulous because their effects can be more permanent. Merel was among the first to sign up. She told me she now gets \$70 an acre where she was getting only \$40 from the farm, and the program paid for restoration. Merel's easement is for 15 years. A farmer can put cropland in a program like this and get an income, though the land still needs to be managed. Merel says her land shouldn't be cropland because of the sandy soil. She hopes funding for these programs will continue and that she can have a tax break for prairies similar to that for forests in MFL. She hopes the conservation easements will continue too, so farmers can sell their development rights to groups like Dane County Natural Heritage, etc. These groups pay you for a conservation easement on your land. If you donate the land you can take the tax write-off, but in retirement you can still live there and receive the payments. It's important to get information about these options to landowners. The Blue Mounds Area Project helps educate people about these options.

What does Merel value most about the Military Ridge area? "It's gorgeous! It's gorgeous!" Every time she goes walking, she sees something new. "It's like an Easter

egg hunt!” She takes the dog for a walk every evening. It sounds nice too—she loves to hear the frogs.

Merel noted that there used to be tons of foxes, even gray foxes. But since the coyotes came, the foxes are gone, except for rare sightings. Merel likes to hear the sounds of these wild canines.

Merel’s mother-in-law used to come from New York to visit. She couldn’t sleep here because it was too noisy. Merel’s husband has a running feud with a whippoorwill. That bird sits right outside and goes “click, click” and it’s LOUD!

Raising children out in the country was difficult because there was no neighborhood. Her two sons were the only children in the immediate area. They went to school in Madison, not Mount Horeb, so socialization was a problem for them. Both boys loved to fish in the pond. They are both extremely attached to the farm. One son doesn’t like any changes. He says, “Don’t cut down the trees!” The other child has asthma, and thus had some outdoor limitations.

Visiting Merel at her home, I had no doubt that Merel loves her farm. She loves her prairie remnant. It’s so open. She loves the savanna up there and there’s a nice rock out-cropping. Each part of the place has its value. She loves just sitting on her deck.

She has some attachment to Thomson Prairie too. She used to work there as a volunteer for TNC. She helped a researcher there burn different areas at different times of the year and did quadrat studies. She had to learn her plants!

Merel doesn’t volunteer now. She has her own work to do on the land and the website to manage as well. She went from burning to fighting garlic mustard and then wild parsnip. She does the land management by herself. For a while she was only seeing the work and not the beauty, so she is changing her behavior.

Farmers used to burn pasture to keep it open. Merel’s grandfather used to burn all the time. She has divided

the land into different burn units that get burned every other year. She cut brush and herbicided in winter when the prairie vegetation is under ground. Last winter she just cut without applying herbicides. If she continues to burn every other year, she expects the brush will eventually die. She has battled many invasive plants. There was autumn olive and the DNR once suggested she plant honeysuckle. Prickly ash is a native invasive. Wild parsnip is a biennial plant and won’t grow back after mowing, but bergamot is a perennial and, thankfully, will. Merel showed me a wood girdling tool she made out of a spring for removing unwanted trees and woody growth. She wipes mud in the tree wound so it doesn’t heal. She girdles 30 trees once a week for four weeks. She has cut brush all by hand, with clippers, on her knees. She uses a bow saw, not a chain saw to clear the land. Merel make compromises over the line between what is managed and what is not. She leaves some brush so her husband can have grouse.

An 11.5-acre field is in CRP. That plot has 60 species of native plants. She bought some from the Bluestem Nursery in Baraboo to obtain native genetics. She hand-collected 45 pounds of seed from around here and scattered that in the section that has so much diversity. Merel says that section looks even better than the remnant! She put 31 acres in CREP into prairie. She can’t manage it all, so she will concentrate on the remnant as her priority, maybe a 4-acre plot. The remnant could be blue with birdsfoot violets then solid white with shooting stars, though it’s now grown into trees. She realized this was a prairie remnant when she first moved here because she saw the prairie smoke. Her husband gave her Zimmerman’s book and she was able to identify the flowers. The hillside was just covered with them.

As we walked around her property, Merel shared her wealth of knowledge and experience with me in bits and pieces. She talked about a gazillion shooting stars.

*Merel took a berry specimen to the herbarium to be sure she identified it correctly. It turned out to be a rare hybrid.*



She indicated a hand-dug well that was square and lined with sandstone. The pond is spring-fed. The water is warm on top but chilly down about a foot. It used to be crystal clear. Merel says a neighbor rents and farms the hillside and silt runs into the farm. The blue flag iris and duck weed that decorate the pond are both native. Merel planted wild rice in the pond about three years ago, but the drought killed it and it's an annual so it needs reseeding. Grey dogwood is native, but Merel considers it a pest. Merel talked about golden Alexander with its yellow flowers, rattlesnake master, cone flower, stiff goldenrod, showy goldenrod, and mountain mint. The seeds came from within five miles of this plot. There are deer paths everywhere. Purple prairie clover is a new species here, and mullein is a non-native, so she pulls it. There are big bluestem and Indian grasses in the prairie remnant. There are lots of busy ants. Wood betony creates a poison that kills other grasses and helps keep an area open. St. John's wort normally is a wetland plant but it grows all over these hills. Merel appreciates the fact that some prairie bush clover, a federally endangered species she was given, and prairie dropseed grows here too. Robin fleabane was blooming.

Blackberries, raspberries, black caps, and strawberries all grow wild on the property. When one of Merel's sons was 2 years old, he wouldn't eat a strawberry she picked, so she stuck it in his mouth anyway, and then he couldn't get enough of them. That son lives in Virginia now, but he still loves strawberries. When she was working on the website in Madison, she wanted a picture of a blackberry, but she wanted to be sure she identified it correctly. She brought in a specimen from the farm, which turned out to be a rare hybrid. Someone ribbed her, "Why are you always bringing in such common things?" but she found out it wasn't common.

The land holds many memories for Merel. As we walked by some old black oaks, she reminisced with me. One time, when her kids were little, there was a



*Merel describes the Military Ridge area as gorgeous.*



*As we walked around her property, Merel shared her wealth of knowledge and experience with me in bits and pieces.*

storm and lightning hit nearby. She put the kids in the car because her physics book had said that was the safest place to be. The lightning hit a metal fence post and dug a trench. It dug a hole right under a big oak. That was 25 to 30 years ago. Later we passed a cherry tree that had been struck by lightning.

## Views of the Ridge

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*When she moved to the Military Ridge area, the neighbors accepted Merel and welcomed her. She realized neighbors had to depend on each other.*

There are always risks when you spend a lot of time outside in the woods and grasslands. Sure enough, Merel got Lyme's Disease last year. There are plenty of ticks here.

Some people have been a little afraid of Merel, because she has been known to call the police when people were hunting on her land without permission, and people got arrested. One kid shot a doe on a neighbor's property but the doe died with her back end in Merel's pond. The kid had asked her if he could hunt on her property and she had said no, so the kid wouldn't come get the doe and she had to haul it out herself.

After we walked Merel's property, the prairie and the savanna, we settled inside the house to continue the conversation. The home betrays the creativity of its owner. I noticed a lamp made from a samovar (a Russian, Eastern European, or Middle Eastern metal container used for heating and boiling water for tea) and a couch made from an old dough trough.

Merel told me a little about her background. Growing up Jewish, she never felt she belonged in North Carolina. She was a "tom-boy." One time she tried to bury a cicada shell but the crumbling noise made her think maybe the insect wasn't dead. She crushed it to be certain it was dead, and then buried it. When she moved to the Military Ridge area, the neighbors were Norwegian, and they didn't seem to have seen a brunette before. But they accepted her and welcomed her. She realized she had to depend on neighbors, as there was no fire department or ambulance nearby.

Merel tried to tell one lady it would be wise not to offend the neighbors, as she might need their good will someday. Merel briefly told me the story of what people in the area have come to call the "spite fence." I had seen the small fence next to Hauge Church. Apparently, the landowner built the fence to block the view. Some people say he built the fence out of spite because the township didn't want him putting a

building there and made zoning laws that prevented building anything as tall as the church within a certain distance of the church. The township wasn't suing for removal of the illegal fence because they expected to condemn the whole property "for the greater good of the community," for Perry Park. Merel was on the Perry Park Board.

Before I left Merel's place, I met her pets. Duke is a German shepherd Merel was keeping for a man from Utah who was serving in the military in Iraq. Merel fell in love with the dog and the man's wife said she should keep him. A cat lives there too. There are fish in the pool on the deck, and I met the Asian box turtle inside the house. I discussed the possibility of a return visit to see her beautiful prairie when it was in summer bloom. And I took a picture of the aggressive bluebird that kept flying against the window.



S. GILCHRIST



### **John Walter Thomson**

*Born: July 9, 1913*

### **Olive (Sherman) Thomson**

*Born: October 4, 1915*

It was a gray and rainy day in May 2004 when I visited with John and Olive Thomson in their living room outside of Mount Horeb. Neither of them grew up in the Military Ridge area, but they both came to the region together in March 1951.

Olive said they came there because they wanted to live in the country and bring up their children there. They were trying to find a place they could afford. The place they found was a little bit farther from Madison than they thought they should be, but it worked out all right. The house they bought was very run down. John explained that it had once been a fox farm, where they first developed silver foxes. It had been abandoned as a fox farm when silver foxes no longer sold for much. The 20 acres John and Olive acquired had been a sustainable living place for previous generations, when people could get by on less. The people they purchased it from farmed it. They had five cows, but they needed extra income in the form of outside employment. Olive and John didn't farm the land, but they did rent out the land to some neighbors. They got half the crops instead of cash. Olive said their children got the benefits of growing up in the country. They were in 4-H and they had their animal projects. They raised sheep and chickens. "We did gardening and tried to be self-sustaining because we could not afford to be otherwise."

Both Olive and John are botanists, and, as such, both were interested in the local flora. They had come from Superior to Madison so their hearts were still in the North and they tried to get up there as much as they could. John was a professor of botany at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. He felt "this was a marvelous place for us to come." He liked to find as many native plants as he could and used to collect material for use in teaching his classes. Of course, there had been changes in the plant life here over time. "This whole area has been intensively farmed," Olive offered. "The main changes are from road construction." Every road was upgraded, and as they got more sophisticated

machinery, the more they could destroy. In the whole Driftless Area (the unglaciated southwestern part of Wisconsin), there were many patches of native prairie that occurred along roadsides. With upgrading and regrading the roads and more intensive maintenance, these native remnants were now gone. The more intensive the road maintenance, the fewer native plants and the more "disturbance" plants you'll find they told me. Instead of native plants, John said, "we find lots of European weeds and other plants now." Some of the plants that used to be common here included compass plant, prairie grasses, prairie goldenrods, lead plant, bush clover, gay feathers, pasque flowers, and shooting stars. "Now you don't see them except where somebody has been fighting to maintain them, but they used to be all along the roadsides when we first moved here." Of course it was a mud road when they moved in. Most roads in the area were not even paved then.

Olive and John don't see wildlife with the same frequency as they used to. They used to see badgers occasionally. They seldom saw white-tailed deer years



*John and Olive are botanists who came to the area in 1951.*

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*Originally there were both eastern and western meadowlarks in the area. Now just the eastern remains.*

ago, but now they're a nuisance. There were more foxes, but now there are coyotes: they're new here. There used to be more snakes, before the paving of the roads. Olive used to see a hog-nosed snake at the corner west of there, where there was a sandy hillside. But now those snakes are gone. She was always fascinated to watch them. Hog-nosed snakes are the ones that pretend to be dead. They turn upside-down with their mouths open and their tongues hanging out to convince you they're dead. Those are beneficial snakes. Olive has moved them off the road to save them from being run over. They get in the road to get warm, and people intentionally run over them. People think all snakes are dangerous, though they are not. John has seen ring-necked snakes, Dekay's snakes, and garter snakes still here. He sees them when he's walking, or sometimes in the garden, but Olive said she never sees them anymore.

Olive said they didn't have as many birds when there was no protective cover. Only as she and John planted conifers and garden plants in their yard did they see more birds. Olive doesn't think the general populations of birds have changed much since she first came to the area, except for meadowlarks. Originally there were both eastern and western meadowlarks in the area. Now just the eastern remains, and very few of those. She and John see them in fields; they don't come near the house. "They need their territory." But they had at least one meadowlark nest at the time of the interview. Olive thinks they are coming back as a species in the area.

When I asked about fish and fishing in the area, John said, "You don't go fishing on top of a hill." But the children used to go fishing. There were trout and catfish in their local stream, Deer Creek.

Both Olive and John have noticed changes in the way land is used in the area since they first arrived here. It was intensively dairy farmed back then, with local cheese factories everywhere. There were cheese factories at each end of Malone Road. When they moved here, there were 14 cheese factories that were on the

Mount Horeb mail route. But it wasn't long before refrigerator trucks came into being. Farmers could get more cash selling their milk for bottling, so it was shipped out to Madison and eventually Chicago, and so on. The refrigerator trucks made a big difference. There are very few dairy farms left in southern Wisconsin. The availability of transportation and milk inspection together pulled the bottom out of the small cheese factories. Grade B milk was used for making cheese, but you could get more money for Grade A milk. The changes had to do with making the most money and efficient hauling. When there were lots of local cheese factories, the farmers used to haul their own milk to the factory. When sophisticated equipment for storing, cooling, and delivering milk came to the area, everything changed. Milk would be picked up right from the farmer's barn. Olive wondered how many dairy farmers drink their own raw milk now or whether they all buy milk at the store. John mentioned that the milk goes through a lot of machinery now and is not as readily available to the farmer as it used to be. Besides, it has to be inspected. Olive remembered that they had been told that milk should be pasteurized. So when they moved here, they bought a pasteurizer and pasteurized the milk they got from the neighbor.

Along with dairy farming, the whole landscape changed. "See all the empty barns?" There are not as many small farms as there used to be. And with the tremendous machinery available today, a few farmers use much larger areas. Another factor that is changing the landscape is urbanization, the movement of the city out to the country. Olive said, "We're old fashioned. We don't like the loss of the dairy farms." She also expressed sadness that farmers have not been able to make a good living farming, and farm wives have had to make a living outside of their homes. "It's been a bad cycle."

Olive expressed concern about the water supply. John agreed. When you use groundwater as your water supply and you no longer have a large area from which the

The area is not as intensively farmed as it used to be.  
"See all the empty barns?"

groundwater comes, you wonder how much longer that water supply will continue. They have their own well. The old windmill just tells what direction the wind blows now, though, while an electric pump pumps the water instead. Olive is very concerned about the use of chemicals on the land. "Knowing the chemicals get into the groundwater is especially worrisome," John added. They have tried to keep their own 20 acres free of chemicals. When other people used their land, John and Olive have told them, "We don't want any chemicals used."

John was a student when the University of Wisconsin Arboretum was created in Madison. He did some early experiments there to learn how to restore and maintain prairie. They did prescribed burn plots at the Arboretum way back then. When he and Olive moved out to the country, they didn't see any controlled burning, but now they do. "What we learned then is being carried out now."

Olive grew up in a rural area in southern Wisconsin, near Edgerton, but not on a farm. That area was filled with tobacco farms at that time. There was a shift in agriculture there in the late 1960s or early '70s. Tobacco farming took hard labor. "If you can't do it by machine, nobody wants to do it." Tobacco removes nutrients from the soil, so maintaining the soil is important, as is storage for the tobacco. If you look at a tobacco barn, you see slats, vertical boards that open up on hinges to help the tobacco drying process. They can be closed when it's wet. Every farm south of Madison had a tobacco barn years ago. Even dairy farms had some tobacco. It used to be that farms had everything: pigs, cows, crops, etc. Now everything is specialized. John noted that, on the day of the interview, there was an article in the newspaper stating that use of tobacco was no longer permitted in restaurants anywhere in the state.

In the future, Olive would like the area to look "like it looked 20 years ago." She doesn't like to see homes

built in the woods any more than she likes to see homes breaking up farm fields. Olive wants to see enough of the original vegetation preserved so that it will be in the area forever. She does not want to see the native, historic vegetation a thing of the past. She's very happy with anything that's preservation-oriented in the area. She hopes "people will realize that, whether it's prairie or woodland, the land has its own unique character that is wonderful to live with." John and Olive have been working with TNC to obtain parts of original vegetation in order to have it saved. Both of them worked with Norman Facett, a professor at the University of Wisconsin and the field botanist of his day, who took his classes out to sample native vegetation in the 1930s. They kind of absorbed the idea that it is nice to preserve some original vegetation of a region "so people can know it."

Olive doesn't like to see  
homes built in the woods  
any more than she likes  
to see homes breaking  
up farm fields.

Those prairie regions are where John used to take his classes to show the students what prairies were like. They were close to home, and they could discover things along the roadsides too. Olive and John had a desire to get acquainted with the local area. A close friend of Olive's owned a farm where they found *Liatris* or gay-feather. Olive told her friend and she fell in love with it. It was that friend's family, the Collins family, who donated a patch of land that was useless to them, in honor of her original family, the Thousands. That was the first land donated for the prairie. Olive

and John explored other areas and found little knolls that had never been plowed and still had prairie remnants. For a while people tried intensive corn planting. In the 1960s, people tried to plow acres that had never been plowed before. Olive tried to educate people in Mount Horeb through the garden club and by putting pressure on the Dane County Highway Department to set aside prairie remnants instead of growing European plants there, to save the Prairie Heritage Trail. That was the Dane County Bicentennial Trail, for which Dane County received four national honors. Thomson Prairie is another area John and Olive worked to conserve. It's a core area for TNC work to save the unglaciated region in the Military Ridge area. Thomson Prairie specifically was born after John and Olive tragically lost their son. They used all the memorial money, plus some they added, to purchase the land and have it kept. The land is under TNC management now.

John and Olive quietly told me the heartbreaking story of their son, Douglas. He was a medical doctor, 34 years old, He'd just returned from Vietnam, where he served as a doctor under fire. He came back here to live, finished his medical residency in Madison, and took a job as a radiologist in a clinic in Eau Claire. He and his wife bought a small, 20-acre place between Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls. One day some children were trespassing, shooting at railroad signs, and they shot him. The shooters were fined \$100 for shooting in a no-shooting zone. They were within city limits, and had been drinking and were under-age. It was very sad. It was pretty ironic too. Their son had gone through a war and then was shot by kids back home. Douglas had attended high school in the Military Ridge area. He was very compassionate about all life. "All our kids are that way. I guess we've infected them with the love of nature."

Another son, Dennis, and his wife Joan, own Nittany Knoll, the farm next to LeRoy and Mary Lou Underwood (two other narrators in this oral history project).



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They are preserving their prairies too, and their farm is now in the hands of TNC. Nittany Knoll Farm is named after a place in Pennsylvania. (The Penn State football team is the Nittany Lions, and there is a Nittany Mountain and a Nittany Valley too.)

TNC was looking for land. When the Thomsons donated 27 acres, they added to it. It took them a long time to obtain the neighboring land, as those landowners went through personal difficulties, including divorce and bankruptcy. Olive and John felt honored when they named the prairie after them. Sometimes Olive even feels a little guilty when she thinks about all the people who grew up in the area and still live here, and she thinks maybe the prairie should be dedicated to them. TNC chose the name for the prairie. Olive and John didn't ask for that. TNC has ambitious plans to cover a much wider area, and many people support their important work of saving prairies.

John and Olive used to go frequently to Thomson Prairie, but their ages make it difficult to go over there now. They always liked to see as much as they could, and they were always adding to the list of species found there. They watched for animals as well as plants. "We're not just botanists. We're naturalists!" At the time of the interview, they were looking forward to a trip with Rich Henderson (of the Prairie Enthusiasts and DNR) to go there in the next week or two. There are ways of getting out there by truck, but they didn't want to take their own car. They acknowledged and appreciated Rich's informative familiarity with the prairie.

Olive remembers the very first time she went to Thomson Prairie. She was with some Mount Horeb friends who were visiting the farm. She spotted a patch of pink on the horizon. "Please excuse me. I've got to go see



S. GILCHRIST

what that pink is!” She walked across the valley to what’s now Thomson Prairie and found a beautiful stand of prairie flox in full bloom. “From that day on, I had to go back and back and back. It just became a favorite place.” There was no need to worry about trespassing then. Later they had to be more careful. The first time John went to the prairie, he went with Olive. He took his classes there afterwards. He was influenced by all the prairie plants there, but that’s not all. There’s also an unusual garter snake on that patch of prairie. He’s seen it and “left it there, of course.” When Olive and John found the first *Psoralea* or Indian turnip plant there, they realized it was very unusual, so rare. At the same time, Olive remembers seeing upland sandpipers, which were quite common there. That impressed her too.

When I asked Olive how she got interested in birds, she said, “Everybody is!” John explained that all their friends were interested in birds. Birds are just part of the landscape, one of the valuable things about it. John got interested in birds in New York, when friends who were ornithologists went along on fieldtrips to look at the flowers, and helped to sort out the birds they were seeing. On a job in a park when he was young, John was expected to show kids the birds and frogs and everything else.

When John was a young man, he lived in New York City. He used to go with the botanical club to areas around the city to see vegetation. “You can see what influence that had on my life!” He worked in a museum in Bear Mountain, along the Hudson River, about 50 miles from New York. He taught and helped as a naturalist in the interstate park near Bear Mountain. In the summer, he took Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and others on nature walks. He put up exhibits and

*TNC named the prairie preserve in honor of the Thomsons to recognize their efforts over the years.*

taught about them. The young people set up camp. John also taught at Pennsylvania State College in the summers too, in the mountains of Pennsylvania. With those experiences, he can say he’s a naturalist. But things were not always easy. John lived through the Great Depression and the World War II years. During the war, he taught in Superior. He taught for the Army Air Corps, whatever they wanted him to teach, war-time aviation things, atmospheric stuff. Airplanes were still quite new then and they had different problems to face. He taught them what to look for, what to do if they had to land some place in Africa, for example, the kind of things that they kept quiet about. The kind of knowledge that they had in the Air Corps was very interesting. John considers himself to have led a good, long life. When I asked him for advice on how to live a good, long life, he simply recommended I be interested in plants and nature.

John and Olive had five kids of their own. Like Olive, their daughter is musical. She plays the violin. She was just finishing a raft trip in the Grand Canyon at the time of the interview. The oldest son is a professor, a meteorologist at Penn State University. Their next son is a professor at the University of Georgia, in science education. The third son is the one they lost. The fourth is an architect in southern Michigan. He specializes in making churches and hospitals, but he also does houses. Olive wanted her kids to know where their food came from and she wanted them to be busy. She didn’t know what to do with them in a city. So she and John moved here with four little boys. First, they had a house in Madison, but it felt like an “enclosed landscape” to them. So they sold that house and bought this one. The kids were exposed to many things because of John’s profession. He was very happy with his job in Madison. He built up the herbarium, a lichen herbarium. (In fact, Olive worked there for a while and that was where she and John got to know one another. They got married when John was a

*"It would be nice  
to sell the place to  
people who would  
perpetuate it with the  
same interest that we have."*

teaching assistant at the University.) Any other place he would have been helpless to do the research. That was one thing that kept them in the area. The kids were exposed to the routines of the parents, their walks to look at plants, birds, etc., just by being here. They took the kids to Hudson's Bay and California, to both sides of the continent, including the far North. "Everywhere we went, they looked at everything too." Olive and John gave their kids the opportunity to grow up in a place where they were surrounded by beauty, in a place they loved, but of course you don't hear about that from your kids. Not until they are grown up do they tell you it's a place they treasure.

The farm is John's favorite place in the area. They have their own arboretum and a prairie remnant right there. After he and Olive are gone, he hopes whoever buys the place will preserve it, and he does not mean as a place full of 52 houses. (One of their neighbors did that, but there's nothing John can do about it.) None of their children or grandchildren wants to live here, because they have jobs in the far off places where they want to be. "The interest in the place comes down," as if it were inherited, but they have jobs in other places. "It would be nice to sell the place to people who would perpetuate it with the same interest that we have," Olive summarized.

Olive is into gardening; she modestly says it's lots of fun. For 20 years she was active in roadside preservation in the area. She was very disturbed about the destruction of plants on the roadsides. In 1975, when she was chair of the Dane County Environmental

Council, she proposed that the council establish the Prairie Heritage Trail. She heard there were grants for original projects, so she wrote a grant proposal, and the county got a grant from the federal government, from the Bicentennial Committee. Olive was invited to Washington, DC to talk at a national transportation meeting. Transportation commissioners came from all over the country. She told them how she got the grant by going to the Dane County Board and the highway commissioners and writing the proposal for support.

John and Olive were adamant that, to preserve the open, rural character of the land here, we should get people to work through TNC. But they didn't say how to involve people with the conservancy. Olive said "We've been promoting a better land use plan. It's going on all around us." The people who have dotted the landscape with new homes are wonderful people, and they're much more attuned to preservation than some of the farmers who have lived here all along. The farmers have worked so hard! They wanted to have an easier life, like the one they perceived the city people as having. The cities had beautiful lawns, so the ideal in the country became to mow everything. But flowers could never come into bloom if you mowed the roadsides every two weeks. They told me that the Department of Transportation adopted the idea that the image of beauty was a mowed lawn. Most of the people are brought up in cities with concrete everywhere. They have to go to a park to see trees. But they are the ones who appreciate the rural countryside, except that they are still willing to clear a space in the woods and mow the lawn again. When Olive served on the Dane County Environmental Council, she pushed for working with the highway department. There were workshops for patrolmen to teach them the value of the landscape and the vegetation. Olive actively urged town boards to make sure the people who were maintaining the roads would know about the plants that were valuable enough to save.

One time Olive heard a mower coming right in front of their house. She and John didn't want that area mowed. They wanted to leave it alone and maintain it themselves, as needed. Olive went out there and asked the person, "Please don't mow here." But he was intent on doing his job. When she didn't get cooperation from the person mowing, she just stood there in front of the mower and said, "You can cut off my legs, but I'm not going to move!" He went around her, waited a bit, then went on mowing. Olive and John let the town board know that they would take care of mowing on their land, that the roadside mowers could bypass them. Another time, they got a petition to save a patch of prairie dock. They had 30 signatures and they had served the petition. The highway staff respected that. And just the week before the interview, when the authorities were putting up telephone and electric light poles, they came and consulted with John and Olive before putting in a new pole. They made great efforts to save a patch of flowers. "They're cooperating beyond our expectations!" Now many people support conservation and the things John and Olive were pioneering. Olive could feel that she was being respected. The newspapers were supporting these things too.

*Today many people support conservation and the kinds of things that John and Olive were pioneering.*

The Thomsons were active in getting the State Natural Areas program started in Wisconsin too. John worked through the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters to send a committee to the state legislature to articulate the need to save natural areas. Walter Scott,

who was then the DNR secretary, and A.W. Schorger, a prominent Madison business man who was active in the Academy, joined John in approaching the state legislature. They persuaded legislators to get started on the program. They had a staff person who continued with the acquisition of natural areas. Olive served on the committee for nine years. She and John are rightly proud of their work. "So many areas have been saved and are still being saved. They still have a staff that keeps them going!" The DNR came through with the endangered species program and the Natural Heritage Inventory program got off the ground. All these things are inter-related. Both John and Olive are delighted that TNC has grown and that the Prairie Enthusiasts have come into being. They wish they could still go to committee meetings, but they can't any more.



PHOTOS: S. GILCHRIST



**Merel Robin Black**

*Born: September 24, 1941*

Since I interviewed her in the spring, Merel generously invited me back to see her prairie in full bloom. It was a hot July day in 2004 when I drove south of Mount Horeb onto Spring Creek Road. I noticed the grassy sea decked with purple and yellow flowers along the hillside before I reached the shaded driveway. Merel was outside brushing her hands off from having just cut down a small walnut tree. She is going to make a rustically lovely stair rail for the porch out of that tree, to provide a steady handle against the slippery surface of the paint on the steps.

We drove to the patch of prairie that she has restored herself, the very piece I had admired as I passed by on the road a few minutes before. Patches of pale lavender bergamot colored the hillside and I breathed in the scent that reminds me so much of a warm kitchen on a winter morning, and my Earl Grey tea. The blossoms remind me of large, round, fuzzy, purple bees with multiple legs bending all around. Rubbing my fingers on the blossom, I put them up to my nose. Merel said that might not be the same plant that is used in Earl Grey tea, but it does smell the same. She showed me St. John's wort, which can be used for tea, and is said to aid against depression.

She pointed out a lead plant that still had bright purple blossoms with delicate orange stamens. Earlier, there would have been many punctuating the prairie, but now the lead plants were past their prime. The prairie was constantly changing. Most of the flowers here grew from native seeds Merel gathered herself, locally. She told me how gathering prairie seed is not a one-time effort. Because different plants bloom and go to seed at different times, she had to go regularly all summer long and collect whatever was timely each trip.

Merel pointed out that sometimes the same flower comes in different colors. In the midst of a cloud of purple bergamot, a couple of white ones nodded shyly. Flower color, Merel said, is not a sure way to identify plants. She showed me one indigo plant that will have

white flowers, and then a prairie wild indigo that will bloom yellow. I had thought indigo plants had deep blue flowers. Then Merel explained that common names can be confusing. Apparently the wild prairie indigo in Merel's "garden," as she refers to the prairie she has nurtured so carefully, is called "indigo" as the common name, but it is not a true indigo. Its real name is *Baptisia*.

Merel pointed out more plants than I can remember, sometimes bending over and parting the larger leaves to find tiny yellow, blue, or white flowers. Sometimes we stopped to smell things like the mountain mint. Sometimes I could spot things I recognized. Ferny yarrow leaves surround white yarrow flower heads. She showed me Culver's root, with a white flower shooting up like a steeple, in a pointed cone shape. We saw some rattlesnake master, protruding above the shorter vegetation with a straight, bald, smooth stalk ending in a knob-like, whitish flower. Maybe if you look at it through "soft eyes"—eyes three quarters closed so everything is blurry and your imagination is highly activated—you could see it as a snake with rattles on the end.

*The prairie is constantly changing. Different plants bloom and go to seed at different times.*

Soon the goldenrod that was almost ready to herald the last chapter of summer would take the field, but now the golden halo of the prairie was the yellow cone-flower, taller than most of the grasses and flower stalks, and waving slightly in the summer breeze. Merel showed me one pale purple coneflower still in bloom; most of them already past. And she told me the purple



PHOTOS: S GILCHRIST

*The remnant prairie looked very much like the restored area, a testament to Merel's efforts.*

coneflowers we all have in our gardens are not the same as the pale native variety in the prairie.

Merel pointed out some non-natives that pop up here and there, Queen Anne's lace and her roadside companion, chicory. Coming from the South, Merel has developed a taste for chicory coffee, made from ground chicory root. She pulled the top off a tall mullen plant, "nature's toilet paper" some call it, for the velvety leaves large and soft enough to be handy. Whenever she came to wild parsnip, she carefully wrapped her T-shirt around her hand and pulled up the plant. Wild parsnip can raise painful, burning blisters where your skin has touched it and then been exposed to the sun. Merel has found repeated mowing very successful at getting rid of parsnip and now hardly any was left.

Large bunches of grass with deep purple ends were big bluestem. The smaller clusters with the purple tinge were little bluestem. I commented that the color didn't look very blue to me, so Merel showed me one patch where the grass really looked blue-green. There were other grasses in the prairie. She showed me prairie dropseed and switchgrass. Once when we bent over to look into a clump of prairie dropseed, she showed me a small snake curled up between the slender blades of grass at the heart of it. When she picked the snake up, we saw its bright red belly. The northern red-bellied snake doesn't get much bigger than about 10 inches, so the small size of this one was typical. It was sure trying hard to get out of her hand in a hurry, and the speed with which it disappeared when it gained its freedom practically matched the speed of darkness resuming when you switch off the light in an underground cave. I could see it and then I couldn't.

As we walked through the prairie, we came to a couple of places where all the grass was matted down. Deer beds. I imagined how pleasant it would be to sit in one of those matted down places and read a book in the sunshine, hidden from human view by all the bergamot and coneflowers. Merel said the deer love the prairie and they do eat the plants there, sometimes to her chagrin. The wild turkeys love it too, she said. She told me about the time she was out turkey hunting this spring, and she saw a whooping crane fly past. It was one of the cranes that initially had been led south following an ultralight aircraft and was being tracked on its migration back to Wisconsin. Whooping cranes are endangered and that was an exciting moment!

The remnant prairie on the steep, north-facing slope, different from the restored prairie we visited up on the hill in that Merel didn't plant it, looked very much like the restored area. This similarity was a fine indicator of the success of Merel's efforts at restoration. Of course, she explained, the remnant prairie boasts a few plants that the restored prairie doesn't have, because they are too small or otherwise hard to gather seeds from, and she hadn't planted them on the hilltop. Merel had cut out unwanted plants all by hand. Unfortunately, the milkweed didn't withstand the mowing to eliminate the wild parsnip very well, as the milkweed was pretty much gone now too. In the coming year, Merel plans to concentrate on managing just the restored and remnant prairies, and she expects to use burning as the primary tool. She was mowing the perimeter of the prairie then, in preparation for later burns.

Even the remnant prairie hasn't always been the way it is today. When Merel first moved here, she said

## Views of the Ridge



*Merel identified more plants than I can remember, sometimes pointing out tiny flowers or other features of interest.*



this prairie was open. But she planted some trees and shrubs, then let the trees and brush take over, because that's what she was advised to do. It was because of some prairie smoke growing there that she took on the prairie restoration work. She had seen the fuzzy red flowers that seemed to float over the ground like smoke before they were crowded out by the encroaching woods. Because their name had the word "prairie" in it, she rightfully associated them with a prairie environment, and she began to find out about prairies, the great loss of prairie ecosystems, and the work that was entailed to restore and manage a prairie. All this beauty today just because there was once some prairie smoke here; all that work inspired by the memory of one red flower!

We walked down the steep slope, past an oak or two and an apple tree here and there, and some hazel shrubs, towards the pond. We paused to note a rather large white mushroom, reclining on the ground. But when Merel went to pick it up, she saw a tiny, fingernail-sized frog sitting in the hollow of it. I asked if there were a lot of frogs in the pond and she said there were in the spring, but the bass in the pond love to eat them. Between the pond and the path, we stopped to seek the yellow-green leaves of a Twayblade orchid and couldn't help but notice a low, brown mound of dirt. Countless ants busied themselves carrying bits of vegetation this way or that across an anthill that was more than a foot wide. Prairie ants are important, Merel explained. They mix and aerate the soil. A few yards further, a pair of Canada geese stood en guard at the edge of the pond. She said they'd nested by the pond this year and she'd seen the goslings learn to fly. The

wild rice Merel planted in the pond a few years ago served as a great draw to waterfowl. The ducks loved it. It grew there readily until a drought shrunk the pond and exposed the rice bed to the summer sun, killing it.

Between the flowers and the wildlife, the pond and the house, we occasionally picked and tasted red raspberries, black caps, and black berries. We both agreed the red raspberries are the best. Merel doesn't want the prairie to be overrun with prickly berry bushes, so she tries to remove them when they grow where she doesn't want them. But there, on the edge of the lot that will remain brushy woods for the grouse her husband hunts, it's a pleasure to find bright berries gleaming out of the tangle of green, like shiny buttons on an army uniform, only a lot tastier.

We passed a tamarack tree and walked over some soggy ground, just before we came up to the house. One of the interesting things about Merel's prairie is that there are some wetland plants growing side-by-side with dry prairie plants. Great St. John's wort is a wetland plant, but in the same vicinity, Merel found dwarf blazing star, which is considered a dry prairie plant. Merel says these unlikely neighbors have to do with the hydrology of the area. She showed me the old, original well, with water still seeping in, back behind the house.

Returning to the house, we sat on a couch that glides back and forth gently, savoring ice water in large, blue-rimmed Mexican-style glasses, talking about this and that. We got talking about snakes as we looked at pictures of them in a field guide. Merel told me her neighbor contacted her last month with a snake problem. There were a couple of large snakes up by the

*It takes many plants to grow a prairie,  
all reaching deep down  
with their roots in the soil.*



neighbor's house, and she called Merel to please come and get rid of them. The snakes were probably six to eight feet long. One of them was in a plant pot, coiled up among the pansies. It was easy to dump that one out of the pot into a bucket. But the other snake was harder to catch. It was fleeing along the foundation of the house. When she was unable to catch it with any tools, Merel finally just reached out and grabbed it. She said she knew you were supposed to grab a snake right behind the head so it couldn't bite you, but she grabbed this one further down its long body. She had to hang onto it too. The strength of that snake, the power in its muscles as it pulled away from her hand was incredible! She managed to get it into a bucket and plunk on a lid. The neighbor couldn't believe she then put the snakes (in the bucket) in the car. Back at her own place, Merel let the snakes go. They were fox snakes, she said. They look like bullsnakes, but with more yellow on the face. She showed me a whole five-foot long snakeskin that a bullsnake had shed right by the house, about a month previously. Turned inside-out by the shedding process, the skin was shinier on the inside and we could see the tiny round eye covers still intact. Merel knows that snakes can be good to have around. She has had little brown snakes in the house and enjoyed them. Besides the German Shepherd, she has a pet tortoise named Henry and an indoor fishpond with five or six bright orange fish swimming in it, so non-mammals in the house are nothing new.

Before I left, Merel showed me some of the furniture she has made from sticks. Especially lovely is a "floating table" made of peeled willow sticks. The willow sticks remind me of cathedral windows, light and airy, dividing the space between the tabletop and the floor into arcs. Nailed together at strategic places, these delicate twigs hold up a heavy board as the tabletop. When you stand back and look at it, you can hardly see the slender sticks and it appears as if the tabletop is floating. Merel took a class to learn how to make this kind

of stick furniture. It was hard to hammer the small nails into the twigs when she was hammering against air, so she figured out a way to do it with pliers.

Out in the prairie, we had rested for a little while on a Leopold-style bench she also made from sticks. The seat and back, long enough for two of us to sit on at once, were made from many sticks about the width of my little finger, all cut to about 10 inches long, and nailed to a couple of slightly thicker sticks going the other way. I thought those little sticks would break if I sat on them, but they didn't. The seat and back both gave a little as I eased into the bench. It was very comfortable. The fact that we could both sit there on that row of tiny sticks supports the theory that there is strength in many individuals holding together. It's like the prairie. It takes many plants to grow a prairie, all reaching deep down and holding on tightly with their roots in the soil. Merel said it takes at least five years for a prairie to be established. But once it is, it can survive a lot of hardship. I thought about that bench and that prairie and I hoped that many people like Merel will work to restore native prairies and maintain open grasslands, and through their collective strength preserve the unique rural qualities of the Military Ridge area.



SGILCHRIST

# Views of the Ridge

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PHOTOS: S GILCHRIST



Further Reading  
Appendices  
Acknowledgements

# Further Reading

## Further Reading

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C. KAHLER

## **Appendix A: Oral History Interview Guide**

Most of the interviews were conducted in the narrator's residence. Introductory information included identifying the interviewer as an employee of the DNR, the purpose of the interviews to provide information about what is important to the narrator regarding the area to the local community and conservation groups to help them in their planning, clarification of where the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area is on a map, and an explanation of potential uses of the information from the interviews. The recorded interviews lasted about an hour and a half. If time permitted, the interviews included showing photographs to prompt reactions/opinions or simply spur memories. The interviews were loosely structured, but they followed a general guide developed with input from conservation professionals involved in the area. In cases where narrators had a specific story to tell, the focus of the interview shifted readily, for the character of the land and the people who shape it or are shaped by it are intertwined.

### **Early Days**

- What was it like when you were growing up here/first came to this area?
- What brought you to this area?
- How long have you lived in the area?

### **Activities**

- What kinds of recreational and/or occupational activities have you done in the area?
- What kind of work have you done?
- Tell me about your recreational pursuits. Tell me about one time you went hunting, fishing, etc.

### **Wildlife**

- What are your memories of wildlife, including birds and fish, and how is this different today?
- Tell me about encounters you have had with wildlife, including birds and fish.
- What kinds of wildlife do you see in the area now?

### **Land Management**

- What do you remember about the way the land was managed or used when you were young/first came here?
- How is the land managed differently today?
- How do you feel about prescribed/controlled burning? Have you ever conducted such a burn?

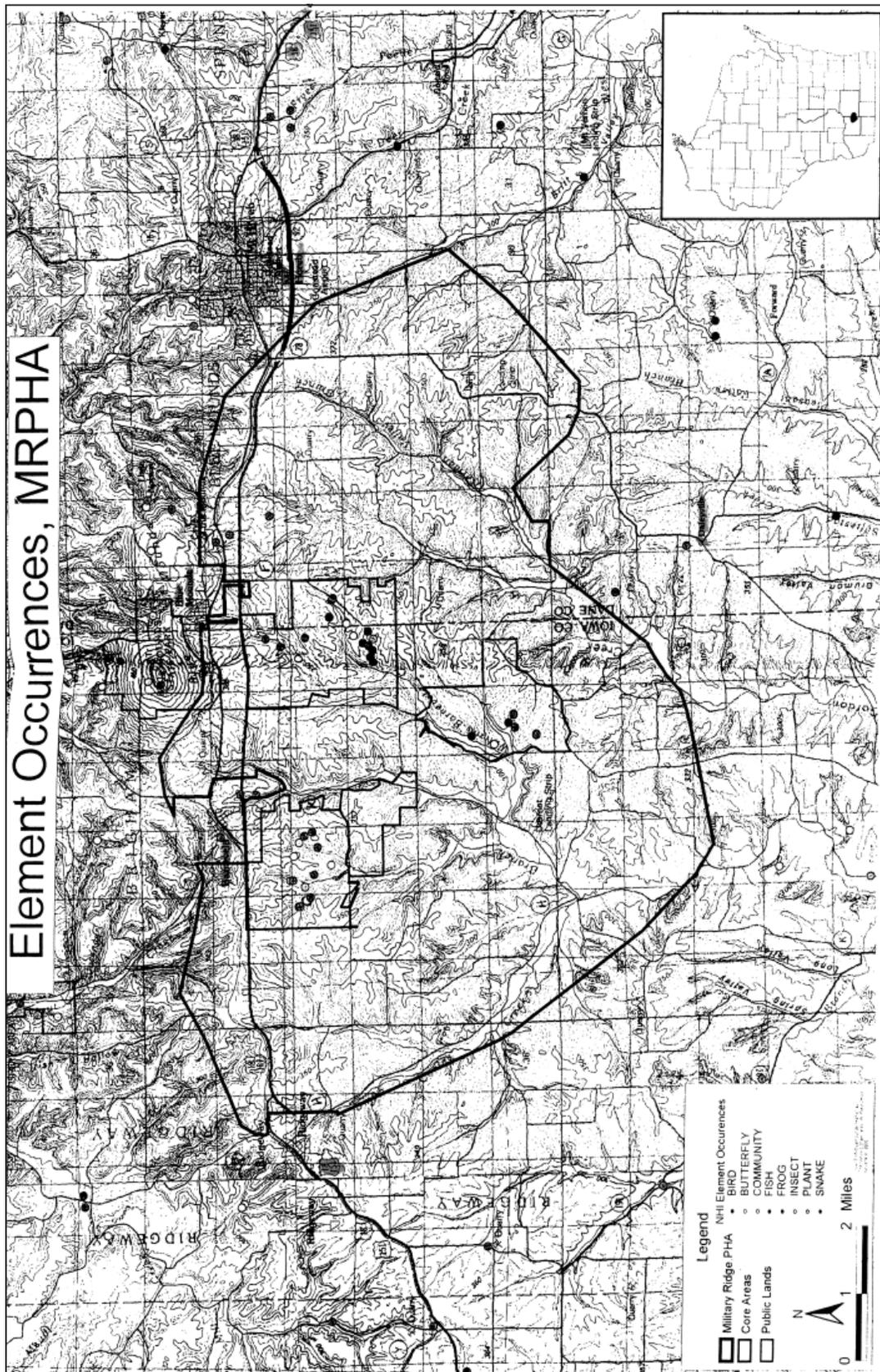
### **Changes**

- How has the landscape changed since you were young/first came here?
- How do you feel about those changes?
- How would you like to see the landscape in the future?

### **Values**

- Tell me what you like/don't like about things in these photos or share any memories they inspire.
- What do you value most about the area?
- What would you like the area to be like 20 years from now?
- What would you need in order to commit to maintaining open space and the area's rural aspect?
- What would convince/inspire/enable other landowners to support maintenance of open space for agriculture, prairie, or grasslands?
- Tell me about your favorite place in the area.
- How do you feel about your children farming/not farming? Did you want them to farm?

Appendix B: Map and Photographs Used in Interviews

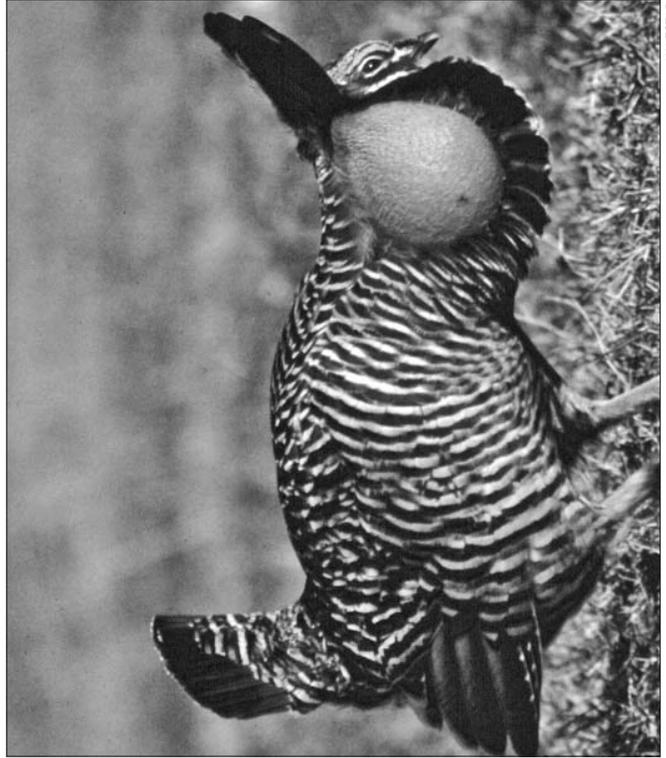


A map was used to clarify where the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area is located in southwest Wisconsin.

# Appendix B



ACADEMY OF NATURAL SCIENCES OF PHILADELPHIA



K WESTAD



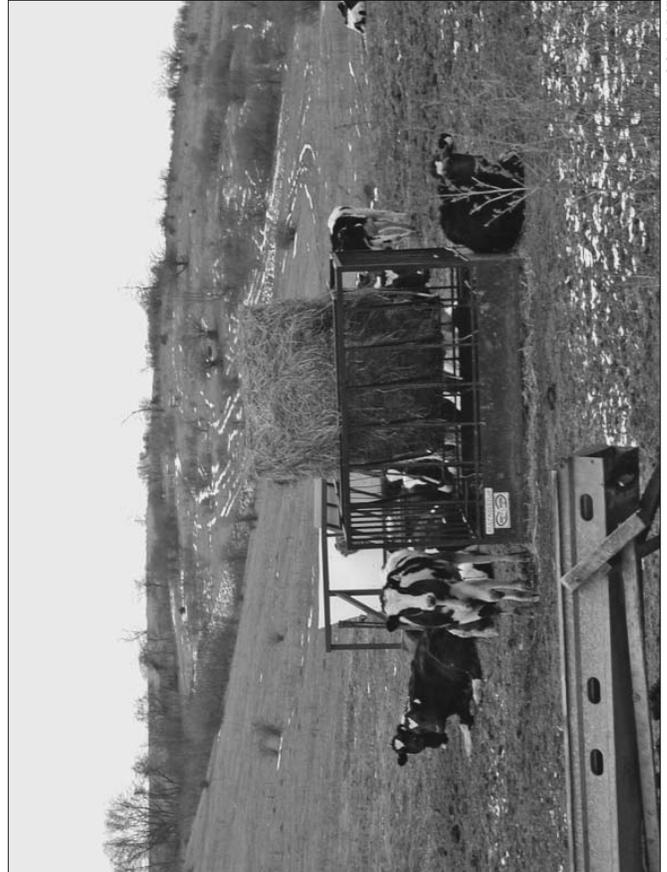
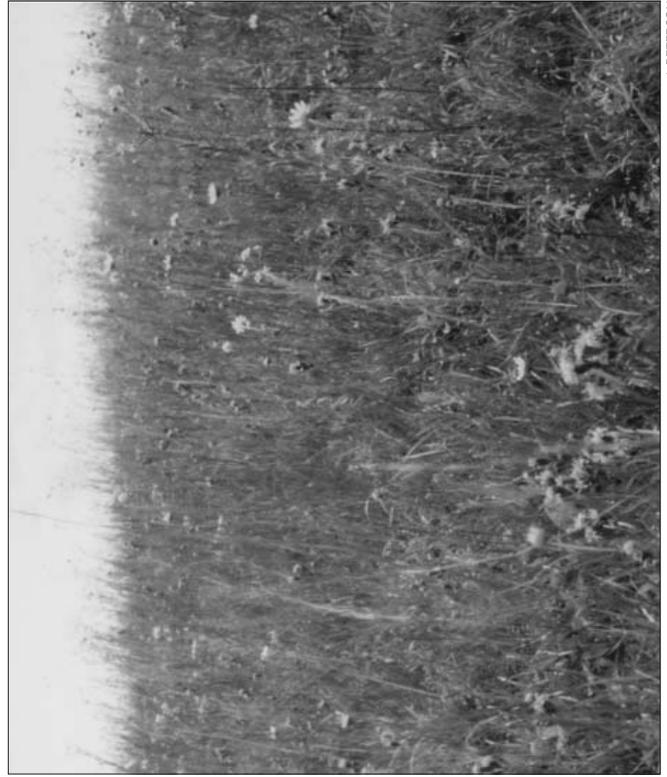
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# Appendix B

## Appendix B: Map and Photographs Used in Interviews *(continued)*



# Appendix B

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R. HENDERSON



K. WESTAD

## Appendix C: Conservation Programs and Partners

### Conservation Programs

**Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** – The Farm Service Agency (FSA) administers the Conservation Reserve Program to help improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and reduce loss of wildlife habitat. In exchange for yearly rental payments, landowners enrolled in the program agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. Participation is voluntary, with contracts for land enrolled being 10 to 15 years in length. CRP is the nation's largest private-land conservation program.

**Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)** – An offshoot of the Conservation Reserve Program, CREP targets priority conservation issues identified by local, state, or tribal governments or non-governmental organizations. CREP helps those actively working the land to meet their conservation goals, especially those who till or graze along waterways. Participation is voluntary, with enrollment through either a 15-year agreement or a perpetual easement. CREP pays landowners to install filter strips along waterways or to return continually flooded fields to wetlands while leaving adjacent land in agricultural production. Various land cover and management options are available, depending on landowner desires and site-specific factors.

**Managed Forest Law (MFL)** – Wisconsin's Managed Forest Law encourages sustainable forest management on private lands through tax incentives to landowners who follow written management plans that incorporate landowner objectives, timber and wildlife management, water quality, and the environment as a whole. Participation is voluntary. In exchange for following a management plan and program rules, participating landowners are subject to reduced forest tax law rates in lieu of regular property taxes.

### Conservation Partners

**Blue Mounds Area Project** – The Blue Mounds Area Project is a community-based, nonprofit organization that seeks to inspire, inform, and empower private landowners in southwestern Wisconsin to enjoy, protect, and restore native biodiversity and ecosystem health.

**Driftless Area Land Conservancy** – The Driftless Area Land Conservancy is a private, nonprofit land trust founded in 2000. Following the standards of the Land Trust Alliance, the Driftless Area Land Conservancy serves the communities of southwest Wisconsin by protecting and preserving lands in perpetuity.

**Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)** – Part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Natural Resources Conservation Service is the federal government agency that works with landowners on private lands to conserve natural resources. Formerly called the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), the agency provides technical assistance to help farmers develop conservation systems uniquely suited to their land and individual ways of doing business. The agency also provides assistance to other private landowners and rural and urban communities to reduce erosion, conserve and protect water, and solve other resource problems.

**Pheasants Forever** – Pheasants Forever is a national, nonprofit organization dedicated to the conservation of pheasants, quail, and other wildlife through habitat improvements, public awareness, education, and land management policies and programs. Pheasants Forever operates through a grassroots structure that empowers its county and local chapters with the responsibility to determine how locally raised conservation funds are spent.

**Southwest Badger Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Council, Inc.** – Southwest Badger RC&D is a regional, nonprofit community-development organization serving Crawford, Grant, Green, Iowa, La Crosse, Lafayette, Richland, Sauk, and Vernon counties. Its mission is to implement natural resource conservation, managed growth, and sustainable rural economic development in its area.

**The Nature Conservancy (TNC)** – The Nature Conservancy is an international, nonprofit conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters. Founded in 1951, TNC now has more than one million members and works worldwide to address the most pressing conservation threats at the largest scale.

**The Prairie Enthusiasts** – The Prairie Enthusiasts is a regional, nonprofit conservation organization committed to the protection and management of native prairie and savanna habitats in the Upper Midwest. A grassroots organization that began in the 1970s and run mainly by volunteers, The Prairie Enthusiasts now has 11 chapters in Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service** – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is a federal government agency dedicated to the conservation, protection, and enhancement of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats. It is the only agency in the federal government whose primary responsibility is management of these important natural resources for the American public. The Fish and Wildlife Service is responsible for implementing and enforcing federal laws, such as the Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and Marine Mammal Protection.

**Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR)** – The Department of Natural Resources is a state government agency responsible for the preservation, protection, effective management, and maintenance of Wisconsin's natural resources. The DNR is responsible for implementing state laws and, where applicable, federal laws that protect and enhance natural resources. It is the one Wisconsin state agency charged with full responsibility for coordinating the many disciplines and programs necessary to provide a clean environment and a full range of outdoor recreational opportunities for the state's citizens and visitors.



# Acknowledgements

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## Acknowledgements

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# About the Author

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## About the Author

Susan Cantrell Gilchrist served as the Environmental Education Researcher for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) from 1989 to 2007. She conducted interviews for the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area oral history project in 2004 and wrote the book from the narrations in 2012-13. This is her second oral history book with a sense of place, the first being *Sand Country Memories: Oral Perspectives of Wisconsin's Northwest Pine Barrens*. Susan's oral history work is the result of her training in writing and teaching English (B.A. in English from Wells College and M. A. in Teaching from Cornell University) combined with her long-term personal interest in interpreting history and nature through storytelling and her professional experience as a researcher using interviewing as a data collection tool. Previously, among other projects through the DNR, Susan evaluated *Project WILD*, a wildlife education program, and developed *One Bird—Two Habitats*, an education program on migratory bird conservation. Susan has also worked in human services, child care, childbirth education, adolescent health, and prison education. Currently she resides in Berea, Ohio, with her husband, where she continues to practice the art of storytelling and is taking up watercolor painting.

## Production Credits

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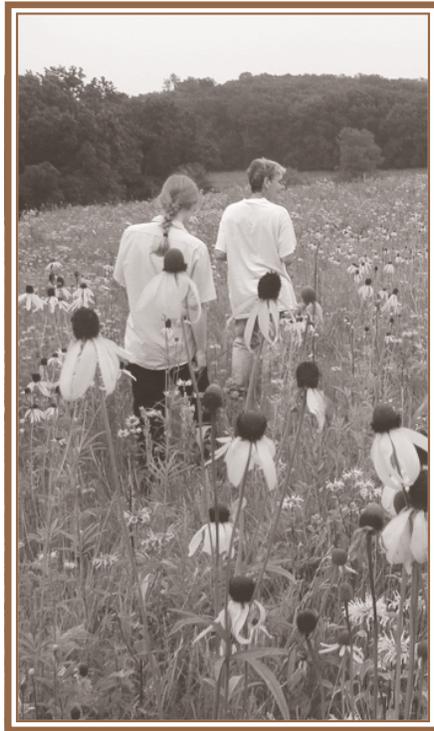
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