



Rademacher Farms Newsletter

Newsletter 8 - Life in Agriculture: 100 Years Ago

August 24, 2019

Preface

I've mentioned some of the challenges from this year: deep freeze, endless rain, dicamba, drought, and unstable grain markets. At least it's all happening in one year I guess? Life changes incredibly fast and I find it's good to put these events in perspective. The following stories come from my Great Grandmother Ruth Piatt. In 1978, she wrote down any stories she could remember from her childhood. There's about 8 pages that cover the time from when her grandparents originally came from Sweden, all the way to the early 70's. Too much 2019 crop news can get a little dry, so I'll spend this newsletter highlighting some of the stories from agriculture and life back then. ***Bold and underlined statements are quoted directly from the journal***

Ruth begins with her grandparents coming to the U.S. on a boat in 1881. They were headed to Minnesota because she says that's where most of the Swedes went. Another couple on the boat convinced them to instead go with them to Attica, Indiana, because Minnesota was too cold. (And thank goodness, because if they hadn't, I may not be here writing this newsletter right now!) Charles, her grandpa, worked in a stone quarry, while her grandmother, Hattie, was a milkmaid, that **"carried a bucket in each hand and one on her head."**

Ruth writes that they moved around a few times, eventually moving to Georgetown, Illinois in the early 1900's (this is all still before she was born). She then writes that a local boy threw a rock at her uncle when he was a boy and his leg soon became infected. The "doctor" came and removed a bone in his leg from knee to ankle...on the kitchen table. Yikes.

After her grandpa passed away, two of her uncles farmed and raised livestock. At one point, their neighbor bought some cattle from Mexico, but they had hoof and mouth disease. Their livestock also caught the disease, and had to be killed and buried on the farm. It doesn't say how many cattle they had...but I'm betting they had to bury all of these cattle by hand.

Ruth's mother worked for a local couple for 11 years. **"She got \$2 a week for 6 days of hard work...she said she had \$65 when she got married."** At this point in the story, we're in the mid 1910's and Ruth (the narrator, 1915) and Audrey (1917), her younger sister are born. Their dad farmed 300 acres and raised cattle. **"Dad also butchered hogs and delivered them. Also sold hay in town. Everyone had a cow in town."**

She goes on to talk about buying their first car, a 1926 Chevy 4 door. They lived in a large house during the Depression. **“42 windows, 8 outside doors, cold, lived in the kitchen in the winter.”**

Occasionally the story is a bit disjointed here, so I’m not sure where we’re at chronologically:

“I stayed at Grandma’s and went to school my first 2 years. Then when Audrey went to school, we both walked 3 miles each way.”

“Also all the family got together and made soap. When we butchered it was a lot of work and a greasy mess, but everything always tasted good. When Mom made apple butter, Grandma came out a day before and peeled apples all day. Then the next day Dad fixed a fire under the copper kettle and cooked the apples all day. Seasoned the butter with brown sugar and spices. Sure was good!”

“I think Mom made pies almost every day and her own bread. Dad always wanted meat, gravy and pie. Dad didn't think he had anything to eat unless he had gravy and pie. Mom made butter, molded some of it, and took it to the store and traded it for groceries.”

Her father began growing soybeans a little before 1930 but there was no market for them and it didn’t make good livestock feed. **“In 1936 we had a drought. Dad planted corn, didn’t come up, then he planted beans, then it rained and it all came up.”** He used that mix for feed.

“Then we had chinch bugs. They got in the neighbor’s wheat. Then to our corn. About took the corn. Their weapon was to drag a log behind the horse, then dig post holes every so often, put tar in the bottom, then when you drug the post, that would drag the chinch bugs into the holes. Not a very good way, but the best they had.”

She goes on to mention that her sister Audrey went to Utterbacks Business College in Danville and worked at Modern Machine Shop in Danville for 17 years, while she went to beauty school. Ruth met Carl and after dating a year, in 1940 they got **“married in the evening because didn’t want to lose a days pay.”**

Unfortunately Ruth’s father died soon after. **“Dad and I planted corn in May 1941. He was sick and I was pregnant. He didn’t live to pick the corn.”**

My personal favorite section:

“Carolyn Jean (my grandma) was born August 24th, 1941. She was small 5 lbs 10 oz. Jeanie cried all the time and Aunt Alma couldn’t stand it. Had to buy a special milk for her.”

“Samuel Dean (grandma’s brother) was born July 19, 1942, didn’t have any trouble with him. He went along on cow’s milk.”

I’ll stop here because the narrative quickly moves from the 1940’s to the mid 70’s where she begins to talk about Carolyn and Dean’s marriages and kids. But what a story it is, and that’s just the parts I chose to highlight. Yes, this year has been a frustrating year from start to finish. Compared to some of the hard times they faced though, we certainly don’t have much to complain about! I for one, have

never had surgery on a kitchen table, buried cattle by hand, or farmed with literal horsepower. This season will be over soon enough!

This is quite a change from our typical newsletter and I hope you all enjoyed it! We're at a bit of a pause in the season as we wait to crops to mature and begin preparations for harvest. Next newsletter should be around harvest time, unless someone has something they want to hear about!

Frank