

August 3-4, 1965

### Beginning of Farming in Northern Minnesota and Wisconsin

The first farming was done by the traders and missionaries. Their beginning of farming was no different than the first pioneer farming.

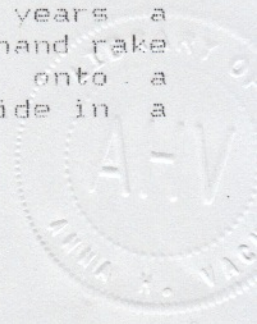
Land was first cleared of the trees, which were used for the buildings. The trees were cut into logs which were fitted into a framework and the crevices were filled with clay inside and out. Some had stone fireplaces and were partitioned into two or three rooms or a loft. Floors were made of unplanned wood or dirt. Logs were hued on four sides with a broad axe and were sawed by hand. In later years, work was done at the sawmill.

Log homes were a common sight until 1900, then frame homes were made of rough lumber. Most of them were not plastered. Larger barns replaced the log barn.

Clearing land for cultivation was hard work. Green stumps and stones had to be removed by first "grubbing" away the ground from the roots and chopping the roots. Brush, wood, and rotten logs were piled on the more stubborn stumps to burn in whatever way to make it easier for a team to pull out the remaining stump. Many times the stump would remain in the clearing field for one or two years to rot. Large stones would also be piled with the wood and brush, etc., to burn. After the pile burned down the remaining ashes would be raked away and a pail of cold water would be thrown on the stones, causing them to crack into small pieces. After cooling down, the pieces of stone would be removed and used for buildings or fences.

Plowing or breaking the new land was done by hand plows pulled by a team of horses or oxen. Potatoes, corn, oats, and millet were the main crops. Handmade markers, pulled by hand or horse, marked the rows for the potatoes which were dropped 12 or 15 inches apart. The potatoes were covered by hand or a hiller drawn by a horse between the rows, partly covering two rows at one time. A hoe was used to completely cover the potatoes by hand. Oats, wheat, or rye were broadcast by hand and a spike-tooth drag was dragged over the seeds.

Crops were cut by hand in the beginning but in later years a mower drawn by a team was used. Crops were gathered with a hand rake or a dump-rake into piles and when dry were pitched by hand onto a wagon. Some was hauled into a shed but most was piled outside in a haystack.



The first pioneer farmer, like the missionaries and traders, depended on the rushes or swamp grass. This wild grass grew in abundance in northern Minnesota and Wisconsin. Cut and harvested in the hottest and driest part of the summer, the grass was carried out of the swamp by hand to higher ground. Sometimes stacks were made on location and hauled out when the ground froze.

Loggers also depended on the rushes or swamp grass for winter feed for their horses or oxen. (Old maps indicate marsh areas for logging camps.) For almost a hundred years (1800-1925) men depended on the abundance of marsh grass, reeds, and bushes.

Open wells, dug by hand and drawn by hand, were a common sight on farms. Many times small gardens were destroyed by wild animals or the farmer's stock.

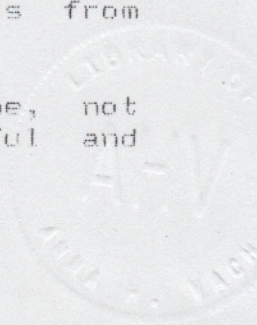
Food and meat were dyed. The pioneers depended on wild game and fish for much of their food. The few cattle were kept for family use. Cheese and butter, made at home in later years, were taken into town and sold or traded at the store for sugar, salt, and coffee, etc.

Cream was skimmed off by hand with a laddle and made into butter. Not everyone had a butter churn so cream was put into a large jar, covered tightly, and shaken until the butter separated from the milk. The butter was poured off slowly, placed in a wooden bowl of cold water, and paddled with a wooden paddle. The water was changed until it remained clear, was drained, and the butter was paddled until all the water had been removed. The butter was placed into molds and stored in a cool place. Over the summer months the butter and milk were lowered in a bucket into the well.

Potatoes, carrots, and turnips, etc., were kept in the root cellar or in pits under the fireplace. A method used for storing salted meat was to place the meat in a barrel, the outside of which was lined with straw or reeds, and place the barrel in a pit. A heavy cover was placed over the barrel which was then covered with brush or reeds. This dugout was built in the coolest area or in an area away from sunlight.

Settlements of the same nationality formed communities in which everyone helped each other with clearing and building. Together they built schools, churches, and roads. They worked long hours from morning to dusk for a very small plot of land.

Many pioneer farmers had a lonely grave for their loved one, not far from their homes. He chose this spot as the most beautiful and restful spot on his farm.



The greatest needs of a farmer were his axe, grub hoe, plow, and a horse or team. With these tools he cleared and toiled on his land, thanking God for all His blessings unto him and his family.

During the winter months the farmer and his sons would make furniture. His wife and daughters would make quilts, spin wool, and make mittens, stockings, and candles. In later years, during the winter months the farmer would work in the logging camps while his wife and children worked their small farm taking care of the stock which consisted of three or four cows, a team, a few chickens, and some hogs. In March, the farmer returned with his winter pay which would be about \$30 or \$40 a month. This helped to pay for their farm, clothing, and improvements. When the farmer returned from camp, he brought not only his pay but also lice. Before entering his home, he had to take a hot bath out in the shed and put all his clothing in hot kerosene water outdoors to boil.

The old practice was to farm the land until it was worn out or give it up to new land. Minnesota wheat was the chief crop without any strong rival but it drew from the soil without giving anything back to the soil. So, the farmer began to rotate his crops.

In the old days, the farmer tested his seed corn to find out which ears were the best for seed. Cloth was cut into 14-inch squares and within each square the farmer placed the grains of corn from one ear. Each square and ear was numbered. The cloth was rolled and tied at both ends, soaked for 15 minutes in lukewarm water, and placed in the sun. After five days, the cloth was unrolled and, checking the number of the squares and ears, the kernels with the best sprouts were chosen for the next planting.

Dairy farming as an industry scarcely began in Minnesota before the early 1890s. The DeLavel cream separator was invented in Sweden in 1877 and Mr. J. J. Hill had one on his farm in 1885. By 1898, it was used commonly on most farms.

After the Babcock test had been developed, milk was no longer judged by quantity but by butter fat content. The cream separator and the Babcock test put dairying on a scientific basis and farmers began to strive for better and larger farms.

Many trades and inventions were introduced by the foreigners. For example, the Swiss settlers introduced cheese made on their farms by hand. The Danes played a great part in the development of the dairy industry. We can be grateful to those hard-working foreigners for the gifts they brought with them from their native countries. Hardy men and women survived all the hardships and strived for improvements.

Due to cooperative creameries in Minnesota, it became the leading state in butter production. The first cooperative cheese and butter factory in the state was established in McLeod County. In 1891, the first dairy school in the world was opened at the University of Wisconsin. A few years later, the School of Agriculture was established at the University of Minnesota in which the newest method of butter making was taught. Professor Haecker surveyed Minnesota creameries and found them badly managed but, in Freeborn County, the Professor found Clark Grove, run by a number of Danish settlers who had learned the success of dairying, to be very successful (Askov in 1900; Partridge). In those days, butter was largely a home industry product which resulted in poor quality and freshness.

Later, private creameries were established. The first creameries were located in the southern part of the state, moving later to the central and western part of the state, and finally to the northern part. For many years, creameries depended on sawmills and the logging industry for their existence. After the sawmills closed down disaster was predicted and, in desperation, farming began in the northern and eastern parts of the state. Farmers no longer depended on their livelihoods from logging camps and turned completely to farming. Machinery replaced the old ways of farming.

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*Edited by Dr. Mm. Hall.*

