



Reed and Hyde Families Papers.

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INTERVIEW - ARTHUR DWIGHT HYDE - IN RE WILDER FARMS - 9/9/82

Chief Engineer

My Mother's Father was Samuel B. Reed, who was in charge of construction of the Union Pacific Railroad. He was in charge of the original survey for the Right-of-Way and subsequently of the construction through to Promontory Point, where it met the Western Pacific and was joined by the driving of the golden spike, and was the first Transcontinental Railroad that joined the Pacific Coast to the rest of the country. Subsequently, he served the Canadian Pacific during their construction, and at the last of his career he was receiver for the Illinois Central Railroad.

He was a frugal man and saved his money, a good measure of which was invested in farm real estate. One of these investments was the original 440.51 acres of Wilder Farms.

The original Abstract of Title shows that these 440.51 acres were conveyed to Fred Bennitt by Knute C. and Minnie Buckeye on August 14, 1905. The name of Bennitt was on there because Fred Bennitt married my Aunt Anna, who was my Mother's older Sister. There were three girls--Anna, Mary and Jane. Fred Bennitt was a kind of a jack-legged lawyer and he acted as sole Trustee of Grandfather Reed's estate, much to its disadvantage, ~~as things turned out.~~

In 1913, as part of a partial distribution, the farm went to Jane Reed who had married Arthur S. Dwight. He was a prominent Metallurgical Engineer and had his own metallurgical machinery business, with headquarters in New York City. They were living in Great Neck, Long Island in those days.

Jane Reed Dwight continued the ownership of this farm until her early death in 1929 due to pneumonia. She and her husband were childless and they had been very generous in helping provide for the education of the five children in our family, of whom I, of course, was one - the youngest.

At the time of her death, the farm passed to her husband, Arthur S. Dwight, and in 1930 the farm was passed on to me.

At that time I was working and living in Minneapolis. I was a young professional employed by General Mills and at that particular time I was in charge of all engineering and manufacturing of the Flour, Feed, and Cereal business of General Mills, which was the entire scope of their activities at that time.

The picture that I showed you is a picture of the farm shortly after ~~I gained possession of it.~~ *it was given to me.*

At that time it was being farmed by George Krahn and living with him were his Mother and Father, and his Sister, Alma.

I was busy with my work in General Mills which also necessitated a considerable amount of traveling to the various plants of the company. My Secretary was Miss Eleanor Romhild.

The farm was being managed by the Corwin Company, which was a Farm Management adjunct of the First National Bank, *of Minneapolis.* ~~and for~~ the privilege of managing it, or, in fact, mismanaging it, they took 20% of the gross as their fee, whether the farm made any money or not. Our 1931 records show that grain prices were extremely low - corn was 29 1/2¢ a bushel; oats 16¢ a bushel; barley 38¢ a bushel; and rye 29¢ a bushel.

Miss Romhild said that she would do the things that the Corwin people had *for a reasonable fee* been doing ~~to which I agreed, and so~~ She came down and looked the farm over.

~~Needless to say,~~ George Krahn was very pleased to be able to work directly with us.

I had never seen the farm up to this time, but after Miss Romhild gave me a report on her visit, I began to get interested in it.

As time went on, we decided to go into animal agriculture, starting off with a few cattle. George Krahn was a crop farmer and not interested in feeding livestock, so he rented a farm just on the west of the Heron Lake Outlet, where they moved,

and lived there until George and his Sister, Alma, died. His Mother and Father had also passed away before them.

At that time I went to the Heron Lake lumberyard and asked Don Sontag if he knew of someone who would be interested in running a farm. I had also engaged a professional farm manager named McNary, who wore high boots and talked fast and was managing a number of farms for one of the Life Insurance Companies. He lasted just six months with us.

Don Sontag recommended that we try a family named McCoy, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. McCoy and their five children. So we made an arrangement and they came and lived on the farm and we began the operation on our own. The McCoys were a fine family, but they were not farmers and they had no farm experience. They did the best they knew how, but the result was not very successful. Hap McCoy, one of the sons, was a fine young man and a fine physical specimen with an outstanding record as an eight-man football player in the Heron Lake High School and was headed for a career at the University of Minnesota, when the war came on and he enlisted, and subsequently became a member of the Rangers, who were virtually exterminated in a drop over Sicily. Hap, unfortunately, was one of those who lost his life.

After the McCoy family moved away, Paul and Harlow Hanson took over the operation, operating it from 1947 through 1951, at which time our agreement with them terminated and they left to do other things.

Gradually, over the years, the operation grew.

In 1940 we purchased from John Swenson an additional 80 acres of land immediately south of the buildings.

Inasmuch as a substantial part of our acreage was too wet to farm, we

had this tiled. This job was done by Walter Madsen, a tiling engineer.

Also in 1940 Section 15 came on the market and we bid for it and bought it. The Father had been a peddler with a pack on his back in this part of the country and had invested in land. The children--one of them was in London, one in New York, and one in a Concentration Camp in Germany. One of the New York banks gave them a report that Midwestern farmland would never be of any value, so they put it on the market for whatever it would bring. We paid \$40.50 an acre for it. Subsequently we sold two-thirds of it - half to Wilbur Hartberg where he lives, and the other part to Fred Diemer, which was East of the River.

1950 marked our first experience feeding cattle and in October of that year we purchased 72 steer calves and 27 yearling steers.

In 1952 we made an arrangement with Archie Forsberg and his wife, Muriel, to come and run the operation on a 50-50 grain and livestock arrangement. Archie had but recently come out of the Army, he was very energetic and able, and Muriel was a fine helper to him. During the following years, our operation grew quite rapidly.

It was also in 1952 that we formed a Corporation, Feeders, Inc., which would include the assets of Wilder Farms.

My own experience in business had moved along and at this time, in addition to my activity with General Mills, I was on the Board of Directors of A. O. Smith Corporation ^{of} Milwaukee, who had developed and owned the Harvestore business. In October of 1956 I purchased three 20 x 40' Harvestores and that was the beginning of our mechanized feedlot-cattle feeding operation. We added more feedlot capacity, a total of 13 Harvestores with a capacity for storing 250,000 bushels of corn, two concrete pit silos for holding 15,600 tons of silage.

The purchase of additional farm land brought the total of the Wilder Farms acreage to 1,535 acres.

We've had tours. A group of farmers from Italy came at one time. Farmers from France another time. And farmers from Germany another time. Subsequently in my work with Harvestore, I visited some of these people in each one of these countries. They are fine people. During this period we in Harvestore were very instrumental in investigating the confinement feeding of cattle and hogs in Western Europe. Confinement feeding began in Iceland approximately 100 years ago with sheep and spread to Norway, Sweden, Denmark, North Germany and then France, England, and Ireland. Then we brought it over to the United States and everybody knows what's happened to it here. It has grown and is still growing.

I retired from the Harvestore business in 1970 and moved to Wilder Farms, built a home and expanded our cattle-confinement facilities, the Harvestore facilities and the bulk storage facilities.

We at the same time purchased ^{farming and} a cattle feeding setup in DeSmet, South Dakota, where we ^{fed} brought calves to ^{weight} yearlings, ^{them} moved ~~the yearlings~~ to Wilder Farms, finished them and sold them to the packers. We were running at the rate of approximately 10,000 head per year and consuming approximately 500,000 bushels a year of the local corn ^{crop.} ~~grain.~~

In 1973-74 we had an unhedged position on our cattle, I was out of the country, and we were caught in a market collapse which cost us a lot of money. Subsequently, we sold the South Dakota operation. In 1977 we sold part of the Wilder land and in 1980 sold the Wilder Farms operation to Leonard Hintze of Sioux Valley, Minnesota.

FEEDERS, INCORPORATED

HERON LAKE, MINNESOTA 56137 - PHONE (507) 831-1095

ARTHUR D. HYDE
PRESIDENT

ELEANOR C. ROMHILD
EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT

October 1, 1982

Mrs. Delphine Sullivan
RRI
Heron Lake, Minn.

Dear Delphine:

Enclosed is a copy of your interview with Mr. Hyde, which includes some additional information and certain dates which you requested. If there is any further information you would like, I shall be happy to furnish it if I can.

So far as my own role in the 45 years that I have been associated with Mr. Hyde and the Wilder Farms operation goes, my primary responsibility was to handle the business end of our operation for him as he developed and expanded the Wilder Farms operation.

This has been a matter of starting out in the early years, knowing very little about farming and agriculture with all of its ramifications and learning, step by step under the guidance of Mr. Hyde, the development of the original farm of 440.51 acres (only 233 acres or 53% of which were tillable) with relatively a few poor buildings, into a highly mechanized cattle feeding operation with 1535 acres of well tiled farm land.

In those early years, there were few, if any women engaged in farm management, especially in the Midwest. As I was told on a number of occasions, they were considered useful as bookkeepers and for keeping records - period.

The first few years when I would come down to Wilder Farms from our offices in Minneapolis, there was naturally considerable curiosity on the part of some of the local farmers as to what I, a City girl, would know about farming and livestock. However, as the years went on, I made some good friends in the community. Fred Diemer, one of our neighbors, was an especially good friend, and there were many times when I would go to him and seek his counsel and advice. He has since passed away, but I shall always remember his kindness and patience with me.

One incident will always remain in my memory. Mr. Hyde had not seen the farm and in 1937 sent me down to see what it was all about. At that time George Krahn was the tenant. He was a very large man and weighed about 250 pounds. He didn't resent me at all. In fact, he was very happy to know that he could deal direct with Mr. Hyde instead of with the farm management people, who had been managing the farm prior to that time.

The first thing I wanted to do was to make a map of the farm, including on it the crops planted and the acreage of each crop. George got for me a measuring wheel, and for the better part of a week George and I walked over

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every single acre of the farm - I measuring everything with my wheel,, and recording the acreages and the crops on my little map. I am sure we made quite a sight for the neighbors and I was reminded only a few years ago by one of our farmer friends, that they were convulsed at watching the two of us as we trudged across all the acres.

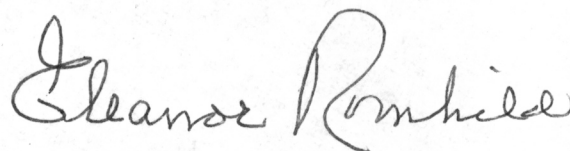
I do not want you to use this little incident in your material - I am only mentioning it as I thought it would amuse you.

Anyway, as the years went on, I devoted myself to trying to learn everything I could to better my education and knowledge, and I believe that eventually I gained the respect and friendship of many of the farms with whom I had contacts.

In recent years, women have taken a more direct interest in agriculture, but back in 1937 I am sure I was rather a curiosity.

I am not sure that any of this answers the questions in your letter and I am only passing it along to you for what it is worth.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Eleanor Roosevelt". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the word "Sincerely,".

ECR

Dear Mr. Hyde,

Thanks to you and to Miss Romhild for your interesting contributions to the Centennial History. We found both very interesting. I hope you have received one of the books. They sold 1000 copies in the first two weeks and the reception has been enthusiastic. They will be ordering additional copies from the publishers soon.

Delphine Sullivan