

# VERMONT TOWNSHIP THEN & NOW

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AN EXHIBITION IN THE TOWN HALL

JULY 2023 THROUGH DECEMBER 2024

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The Vermont Township's *Then & Now* Project partially funded by Wisconsin Humanities through the Black Earth Historical Society has developed pairs of photos of selected farmsteads and landscapes in Vermont Township – a *Then* photo usually from 50-80 years ago, and the second one – a *Now* photo – from the same viewpoint taken in this past year.

The pairing of *Then & Now* photos in this exhibition presents the viewers with a moment to reflect on the dramatic changes in Vermont Township's land use, farming systems, family structures, economic conditions and governmental policies over significant periods of time.

The comments of present and past owners of lands shown in the paired photographs are summarized in each exhibit.

The Project's intention is to use these landowner reflections and reflections by the viewers of the exhibition to provide suggestions to the Town's Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors for updating the Township's Comprehensive Plan.

As a viewer of the exhibition, please note your reflections on changes in the Township in the Exhibition's Comments Book, or provide them personally to Planning Commission members and Board of Supervisors, or send them via email to David Stanfield at: [jdstanfi@wisc.edu](mailto:jdstanfi@wisc.edu).



"Then" photograph of the Jorgen Skalet farm, taken in the 1930s probably by Gil or Sever Skalet, provided by Ingerid (Skalet) Kvam



Now photograph of Herrlings' property taken in October, 2022 by Mitchell Travis and Abbey Miskimen

**The Skalet /Herrling Farm  
HWY 78, SECTIONS 1,11 VERMONT TOWNSHIP**

In the 1930s the Jorgen Skalet farm was a dairy operation with the land used for supporting the dairy plus some products for family consumption and sale. Now Scott and Liz Herrling who reside a few miles to the east have reoriented the land toward recreational and educational uses within a philosophy of preserving the land, water and forests for future users.



"Then" photograph of the Haugen farm taken in 1950, provided by the Haugen family



"Now" photograph of the Haugen farm taken in October 30, 2022 by Mitchell Travis

### The David and Joan Haugen Farm

STATE HIGHWAY 78 IN SECTION 14 HWY 78, SECTIONS 1,11 VERMONT TOWNSHIP

The Haugen family has moved from managing a dairy based family farm to managing a land preservation and restoration farm. The family remains "motivated and dedicated to our part in the preservation and this wonderful land—even though it is not deemed as great agriculture land it is in our hearts to maintain good land conservation so that generations beyond may enjoy."



**"Then" photograph of Aunt Mary and the Urness farm field, corner of JJ and Vermont Church Road taken in 1948, Provided by Jon Urness**



**"Now" photograph of the same field and corner taken July 11, 2022, by Abbey Miskimen**

**The Urness farm  
COUNTY JJ, SECTIONS 10 AND 11 OF VERMONT TOWNSHIP**

Soil integrity of farmland has been improved since the 1960 through farmers' conservation programs. County and Township roads have been much improved, financed largely through local property taxes. At the same time many landowners no longer cultivate their land, and have to generate income to pay those taxes and other expenses. The Urness family intends to extend succession of ownership to future generation of Johannes and Martha Urness descendants.



Vermont American Cheese Factory. Photograph was provided by Wayne Barsness, taken about 1900.



Aerial View of the Corner of Blue Mounds Trail and County JJ in Vermont Township. Photograph by Mitchell Travis, taken September 3, 2023.

### Vermont American Cheese Factory

#### HOME SITE FOR MATT BAKER AND MARK KOWALD SECTION 2, VERMONT TOWNSHIP

For 80 years the Vermont American Cheese factory shown in the Then photograph occupied the corner of Blue Mounds Trail and County JJ. The factory closed in 1967 and the building burned down in 1978. The 15 acre parcel remained vacant until 2021 when Matt Baker and Mark Kowald purchased it from the Cowens. Their plans for the land include eventually building their home on it. But for now they are transforming the parcel into an ecologically diverse landscape home to small scale gardening and a wide variety of wildlife, plants and trees.



“Then” photograph of Herman and Otelia Barsness farm, provided by Wayne Barsness, taken around 1920.



“Now” photograph of the same farm now owned by Steve and Jan Cowen, taken December, 2021 by Abbey Miskimen

**The Barsness/Cowan Farm**  
**COUNTY JJ, IN SECTION 2 OF VERMONT TOWNSHIP**

The Then photograph shows Herman Barsness’s dairy barn, where he milked about 25 Holstein cows. The Depression and gradual expansion of wetlands along the Vermont Creek made row crop/dairy farming model obsolete which had sustained the farm for so many decades.

The Cowans took over the property in 1975. They found a better use of the land in limited pasturing and tree farming. But the majority of their acres were better suited to wetland and wildlife habitat that mother nature seemed to intend.



“Then” photo from 1937 of land parcel, part of which acquired in 2022 by the Vermont Lutheran Church  
 U.S. Dept of Agriculture, Wisconsin Historic Aerial Photographs, 1937, showing of remnants of oak savanna



“Now” photo of land acquired in 2022 by the Vermont Lutheran Church, from Google Maps, photography done after April 2022

**Vermont Lutheran Church Land Purchase**  
**VERMONT CHURCH ROAD, SECTION II OF VERMONT TOWNSHIP**

For years the cultivated areas of the hilly 115 acres to the east of the Vermont Lutheran Church were dedicated to cash cropping.

An opportunity arose in 2021 for the Church to purchase that land parcel with the goal to develop and maintain a Legacy Prairie & Woodland whose purposes are:

- 1) to preserve the Church’s view-scape for the enjoyment of members and other organizations and to inspire innovative uses of the land in the community; and
- 2) to use the land in accordance with the Church’s outreach priorities, as expressed by the Church’s “Caring for Creation” ministry.



"Then" photo of the Brunner farm photograph, taken in 1957 by John Drury



"Now" photo of the Brunner now Perkins farm photograph taken by Jesse Perkins in summer of 2022

**The Brunner/Perkins Farm  
COUNTY FF, SECTIONS 5 AND 6, VERMONT TOWNSHIP**

Three generations of Brunners worked the land and milked cows while raising and educating their children. Changing scales and profitability of dairy farms, especially the smaller sized ones, led the family to sell the farm in 1994 to David and Barbara Perkins.

The Perkins raised vegetables using organic farming techniques and sold them directly to hundreds of families in the Madison area. Their son Jesse is continuing organic cultivation, but now for the production of organically certified seed potatoes.

The Perkins are concerned for the future of changes in land uses which might allow intrusive buildings with negative visual impacts on the neighboring residents.



"Then" photo of the O'Connell Farm, from *This is Dane County*, Inland Photo Company, Chicago, Illinois, 1957; Photographer: John Drury



"Now" photo of the O'Connell farm taken June 22, 2022, by Abbey Miskimen

### The O'Connell Farm COUNTY F, SECTION 7, VERMONT TOWNSHIP

The squeeze on dairy farmers comes from the need to make large capital investments in Grade A milking equipment and cattle handling facilities; the price of milk often falls to below cost levels; finding milk processors and milk hauling is more difficult with the decline of dairy farms; competition for land from the Conservation Reserve Program makes it difficult to get secure access to land for needed feed and forage as well as for manure spreading.

A sudden health crisis led the brothers to sell the cows and close the dairy operations. They now operate a cash crop operation on owned and rented-in land.



"Then" photo of the Helmenstine farm taken in 1961, Provided by Jerome Helmenstine

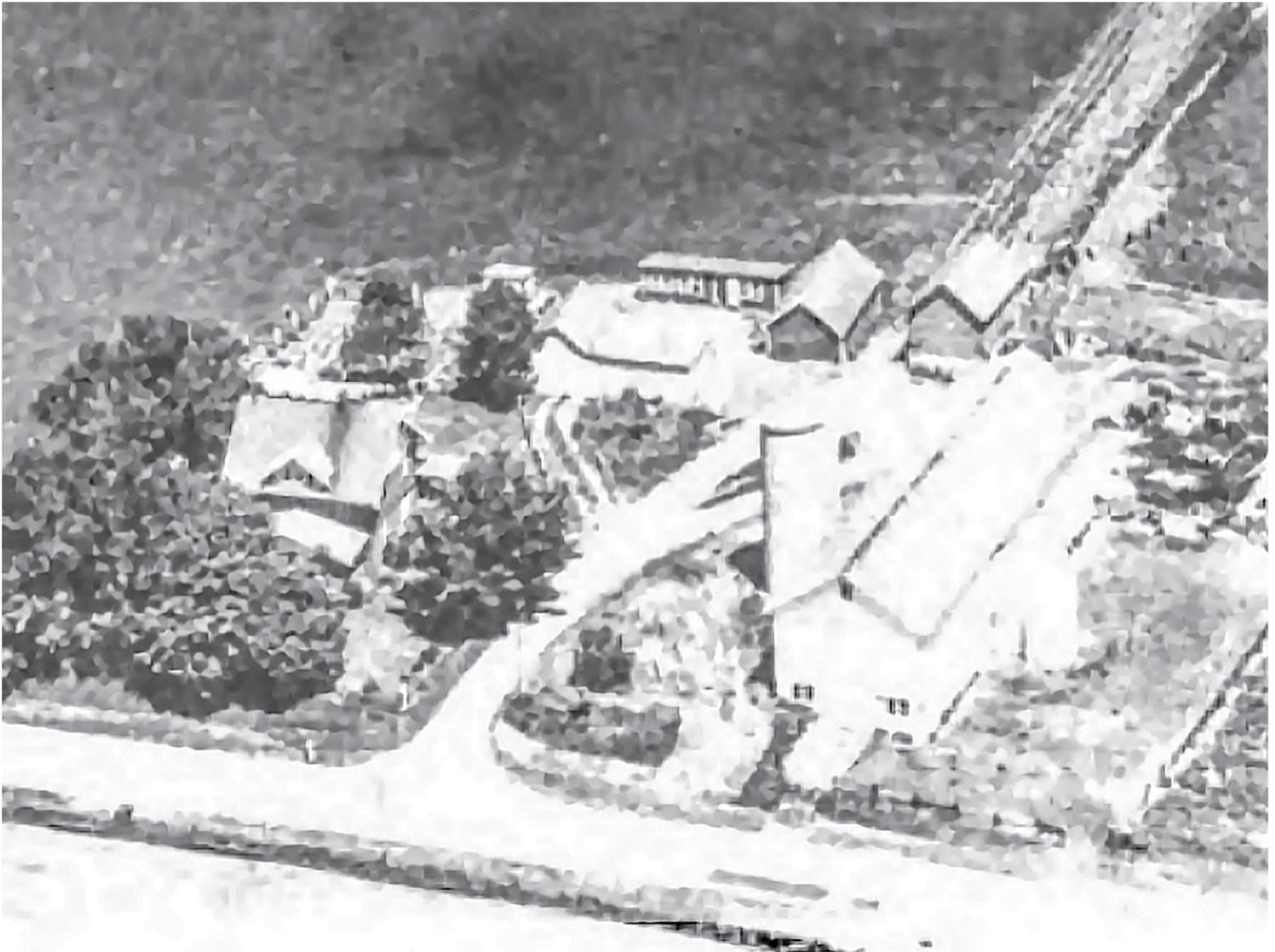


"Now" photo of the Helmenstine farm taken August, 16, 2022, Photographer Abbey Miskimen

**The Helmenstine Farm**  
**COUNTY HWY FF, SECTION 6 OF VERMONT TOWNSHIP**

The Helmenstines like many township residents are investing in restoration of their woodlands to encourage predominant hardwoods with flourishing wildlife and plant life.

Many township households are using the internet and product delivery systems to homes to shift to home employment while others are developing small businesses on their properties.



"Then" photo of the Sherven farm taken in 1957, From John Drury, *This is Dane County*, Inland Photo Company, Chicago, Illinois



"Now" photo of the Sherven farm November 2022 photograph taken by Abbey Miskimen

### The Sherven Farm COUNTY J, SECTION 36 VERMONT TOWNSHIP

Mark took over the farm in the mid 1980s but by the early 2000s he sold the cows and hogs and dedicated himself full time to the tree farming business.

His and his brother's children maintain ties with the farm which is a bond among the family members.

Several residents feel that new house building should have low visual impact on the rural landscapes in order to preserve the rural look and feel of the Township which attracted those new residents in the first place. People should be encouraged to build in ways which "fit into" the landscapes.



"Then" photo of the Frame farm taken in 1957, From John Drury, *This is Dane County*, Inland Photo Company, Chicago, Illinois.



"Now" photo of the Frame farm taken July 2023 by Mitchell Travis

**The Steve Frame Farm  
RYAN TOWN ROAD, SECTION 30 VERMONT TOWNSHIP**

Steve Frame suggests:

1. The Town should exercise great care in requiring Engineer's Plans as part of the Town's review of applications for the re-zoning of land for residences and other buildings. They are expensive for the potential builders.
2. The Town should consider publishing maps of rights of way for extensions of the Town's existing road network and for future turn-arounds on the dead end Town roads.
3. As the number of farmers able and wanting to rent land decreases in the Township, what options are there for landowners without equipment or expertise to earn income from their land?



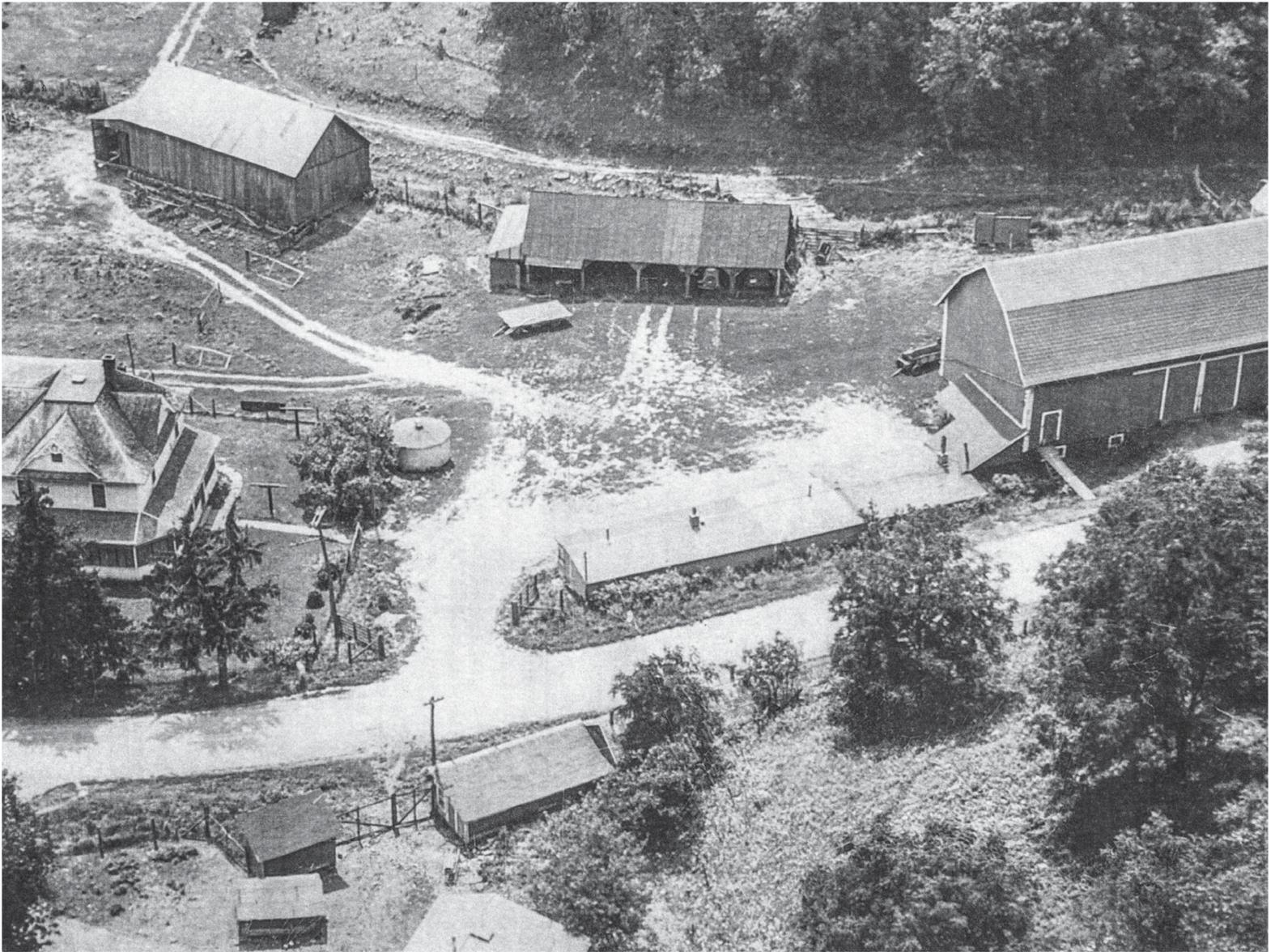
"Then" photo of Joe Deneen's farm from early 1960s, provided by Jim Danz



"Now" photo of farm now owned by Jim Danz, taken June 27, 2022, by Abbey Miskimen

**The Deneen/Danz Farm**  
**COUNTY F, SECTION 29 VERMONT TOWNSHIP**

This farm was established through three U.S. Land Office patents in 1855 by P.K. Deneen. It has been in the hands of his descendants until today. Jim Danz has concluded that the small farmer today cannot survive.



"Then" photo of the J.C. Miller family farm, taken in 1957, provided by Harold Miller,



"Now" photo of Casey and Lauren Fredrick residential parcel, taken June 2023, by Abbey Miskimen

**The Miller Farm  
BLUE MOUNDS TRAIL, SECTION 3, VERMONT TOWNSHIP**

Similar to other farmsteads in Vermont Township, the Miller family operated the 156 acre dairy (25-30 cows) and chicken (1000 layers) farm for about 30 years. The 1984 tornado damaged the farm buildings, Only the house's lower floor was saved. A three acre house parcel was sold to Casey and Lauren Fredrick. Four other parcels totaling 48 acres were created, residences and facilities for businesses constructed. The remaining 105 acres have been incorporated into the neighboring Parrell and Hallick properties.



"Then" photo from 1930s of Amble farm, provided by present owner Connie Janousek, restored by Abbey Miskimen



"Now" photo of the Janousek farm, taken June 2023, by Abbey Miskimen

**The Kreuger/Janousek Farm  
AMBLE ROAD OFF COUNTY JJ, SECTION 15, VERMONT TOWNSHIP**

Connie and Jeff Janousek purchased the farm in 1980 from Earl Kreuger. Connie is trying to hang on to the old ways of simple living along side friendly neighbors in a beautiful Vermont Township. She suggests that each new building in the Township should make the landscape more beautiful than it was before the building was built (adapted from Frank Lloyd Wright).



"Then" photo of the Charlie Booth farm, taken by John Drury from the book , *This is Dane County*, Inland Photo Company, Chicago, Illinois; 1957



"Now" photo of the Carlock property taken June, 2023 by Abbey Miskimen

### The Booth/Ludolph/Carlock Farm

#### CEDAR HILL LANE OFF OF COUNTY F, SECTION 5, VERMONT TOWNSHIP

Aaron Carlock's parents are living in a residence built by Jim Ludolph, next to the site of the original Booth house. With the impact of the pandemic in 2020, a decision was made to split a portion of the land for other family members to be able to build a home and enjoy the beauty of the land and community. Aaron and Karen then decided that it was also the right time to build their new home on the land as well.

As Chair of the Town Board and long time Town resident, Karen has become aware of the tension that lives within the Comprehensive Land Use Plan as it strives to balance protection of the environment, preservation of rural character, preservation of agriculture, property owner rights and community member rights. One such tension is whether to encourage people to build more than one residence on a shared driveway to minimize environmental disturbances or to encourage separate driveways for separate residences which might better maintain the rural character of the Town.