

VERMONT TOWNSHIP Then & Now

Edited by David Stanfield

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December 26, 2023

Notes to this December 26, 2023 version:

The original purpose of this paper was to provide input to updating of the Town of Vermont Comprehensive Plan. The richness of the commentaries stimulated by the Then and Now photographs and included in this paper, however, led us to expand the focus. The paper now should be read more as a compliment to the 1977 'History of Township of Vermont', providing insights into how the management of the land has changed in recent decades and what factors have influenced those changes.

Suggestions for updating the Town's Comprehensive Plan which emerged from this paper and which resulted from discussions during 2023 with the Town's Planning Commission are contained in a separate report "Suggestions for Updating the Town of Vermont's Comprehensive Plan", November 27, 2023.

The project from which this paper emerged, Land Administration in Vermont Township, was carried out with financial support from Wisconsin Humanities through the Black Earth Historical Society and with institutional support from the Town of Vermont, Dane County, Wisconsin.

The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the Town of Vermont, the Black Earth Historical Society, or Wisconsin Humanities.

David Stanfield, December 26, 2023

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Introduction

Vermont Township is located in western Dane County, Wisconsin. It is a rural township with approximately 22,400 acres. There is no urban settlement in the Township. Homes, farms and businesses are scattered across the landscape (<https://townofvermontwi.gov/>).

Over the years the Township's population which is presently around 900 people in 350+ housing units has been gradually increasing. Approximately 10 new residences are built yearly.

In 1985 the Vermont Town Board opted into the State of Wisconsin's Farmland Preservation Program which commits the Town to limiting its building density to approximately a total of 640 residences within the Township. That density limit as well as having an effective Comprehensive Plan helps landowners in the Township to qualify for farmland preservation tax credits.

As expressed in the Town's Comprehensive Plan, its long-time land use goals are:

1. *Maintain and preserve the rural character of the town;*
2. *Preserve agricultural opportunities;*
3. *Protect the environment; and,*
4. *Protect and preserve the natural beauty of the town.*

As input into the updating of that Comprehensive Plan, the Black Earth Historical Society with financial support from Wisconsin Humanities and with the institutional support of the Town of Vermont offered to consult with Vermont Township residents about their perceptions of how land use has been changing since WW II.

The "re-photography" technique was used to stimulate these Vermont community reflections. A project team developed pairs of photos of selected farmsteads and landscapes in Vermont Township. A *Then* photo usually from 50-80 years ago was paired with a *Now* photo from the same viewpoint taken in this past year.

"Re-photography" was used to great effect in the celebration of Wisconsin's Sesquicentennial in 1998, with the publication of Nicolette Bromberg's *Wisconsin Then and Now*, University of Wisconsin Press, 2001. We modeled our project on her work and followed her definition of re-photography as "the activity of producing a new photograph to repeat or match an older existing image—thus presenting the viewer with an insight on the life of a person or place by connecting moments selected out of the stream of time" (p. 1)

In Vermont township's "Then and Now project", the pairing of *Then* and *Now* photos was used to provide 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.

We began the project by selecting 15 farmsteads and landscapes from various parts of the Township:

- 1) the “Norwegian valley” along State Highway 78 and County Highway JJ
- 2) Peculiar Corners, at the junction of County F and County FF
- 3) the central part of the Township between Elvers Corners and Old Indian Trail,
- 4) The Southeast (near Mt. Horeb) and Southwest (near Blue Mounds) corners of the Township.

The next step was to contact families in those regions who had old photographs of farms and landscapes, preferably before the mid-1950s. We found such old photographs for most cases. To get *Then* photographs for those cases which lacked old photographs we scanned photographs from the book of farmstead photographs taken in 1957 by John Drury covering nearly all of Dane County¹. In some cases we used old photographs of people, which revealed landscapes or farmscapes in the background.

Abbey Miskimen, Mitchell Travis and Jesse Perkins did the *Now* photographs. To the extent possible they took the *Now* photographs at the same time of the year and day as the *Then* photographs. Where the views for the *Now* photographs were blocked by the growth of trees, the photographers used drones to get above the trees to reproduce the viewpoints of the aerial *Then* photographs.

We talked with people who knew the places photographed. In some cases these informants wrote out their reflections on the histories of the places and what influenced decisions about land use, and what they expect for the future. In other cases, Jon Urness and David Stanfield converted their notes on conversations with knowledgeable people into summaries of their informants’ insights.

Chapters 1 through 15 present the 15 cases studied, including the *Then* and *Now* photographs from each case as well as comments on changes in land use, family strategies for managing the land, and the changing social and economic environments.

¹ John Drury, [This is Dane County, Wisconsin](#): an up-to-date historical narrative with county and township maps and many unique aerial photographs of cities, towns, villages and farmsteads, published by Inland Photo, Chicago in 1958, photographs from 1957

1. The Skalet/Herrling Farm

Located in Sections 1 and 11, Vermont Township

Prepared by David Stanfield based on conversations with Scott and Liz Herrling and on material drawn from Ingerid Kvam's "The Skalet Family"²

In 1955 Philip and Ethel Skalet owned a farm of approximately 170 acres along Highway 78 and bordered by Moen Valley Road which had been in the Skalet family ownership since 1866. In 1958, Jorgen and Mildred (Milly) Skalet purchased the farm from Philip (Jorgen's brother). They raised three children on the farm—Paul, Joanne and Julie. Jorgen lived there after he retired until he died in 2015.



A piece of the 1955 Vermont Township Plat

² Ingerid Kvam, *The Skalet Family: Ancestors and Descendants of Sever and Malla Skalet*, self published, 1996, accessed at: <https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/KTSTIWPMYNAXY&F>

The changes in the farm have been dramatic, from the time it was a functioning dairy producing sufficient income to raise three generations of families to new uses today.

The following black and white *Then* photo was probably taken by Sever Skalet, Jorgen's father, in the 1930s. The land was intensively used as a dairy farm, operated by the Sever Skalet family.



"Then" Photo: Taken in the 1930s probably by Sever Skalet, provided by Ingerid (Skalet) Kvam

Here is the *Now* photograph taken in 2022 from the same hilltop:



Now Photo: Taken October 30, 2022 by Mitchell Travis and Abbey Miskimen

Another *Then* photograph shows the Gulbrand Skalet family (Jorgen's grandfather) before the turn of the last century and also the hill behind them, mostly without trees. It was from the top of that hill that Sever Skalet, Gulbrand's son, took the above "Then" photograph the farm 40 years later. Gulbrand was born in Valdres, Norway, retired from the family farm in 1908, and died in Black Earth at age 74 in 1916.



Photograph from 1893 of Gulbrand and Tonetta Skalet and family (Sever, their son, is on the fence with the gun). Provided by Ingerid Kvam.

The corresponding *Now* photograph taken in 2022 from roughly the same place shows present day tree coverage on the hill. The trees are so tall, that the *Now* photograph of the farm field and buildings had to be taken by a drone from above the treetops.



Now photograph taken by David Stanfield in 2022

In the 1930s at the time of the *Then* photograph from the hilltop, the farm was a Skalet family dairy operation with the land used for supporting the dairy operation and for sale, plus some products for family consumption and sale.

The Herrlings who now own the farm, reside a few miles to the east.

Scott Herrling grew up on a nearby farm, and with his family attended the Vermont Lutheran Church, where Jorgen and Milly also attended all of their lives. Scott hunted on the Skalet farm and admired the Jorgen Skalet family.

Scott and Liz were married in 2001 and built a home on a piece of the Herrling farm in Cross Plains Township. Scott is the owner of a prosperous road paving company.

After Jorgen's passing when his farm became for sale, Scott and Liz purchased it in 2020. A photograph of the Jorgen Skalet farmstead shows what the place was like in 2020.



From Access Dane, Bing maps @2021 Microsoft Corporation 8/7/2012

Many of the buildings were in bad shape in 2020. The house in particular was not livable—symbolized by a small stream running through the basement much of the year. The Black Earth Fire Department burned the house down.

But Scott and Liz have big dreams for the Skalet farm. They formed a corporation called Anniversary Dreams Estate to be the legal owner of the farm. They continue living at their place in the Township of Cross Plains. But they are investing in the Skalet farm to improve the land and water resources (they built a pond for the wildlife and to control runoff, for example) as a place of reflection and recreation for their family and friends.

How they are investing in the farm, however, has been to commemorate the Skalets. They have removed most of the outbuildings, since the cost of repairs would have been excessive, and for what purpose, since the farm would no longer be a principal economic activity for the Herrlings. But as the buildings were torn down, Scott and Liz preserved much of the siding and beams, as well as some old farm tools and implements that remained from the Skalet farm.

They then purchased a Cleary building, and had it modified to include a machine shed and a substantial part for a gathering and living place, year around, for the family. They made the furnishings of that space--the ceilings, tables and cabinets, the towel rack in the bathroom--from materials from the Skalet buildings.

They have built the new building on land where the old buildings were, preserving farmland for agriculture. They have planted trees, and have preserved the historic shooting club building. Across the road bordering the wetlands, they have done landscaping to protect the land from erosion.

Their three children are in the educational stage of life, but there is land available on the property bordering Robert's Road should they be interested in building homes there as they establish their own families.

Scott and Liz continue to be active in the Vermont Lutheran Church and are supportive of investments by the Church in acquiring land for a prairie recreation and educational area bordering the Church. Liz is the Secretary of the Church.

They rent the tillable land and have reoriented the entire farm land toward recreational and educational uses while preserving the land, water and forests for future users.

In the 1930s the Skalet farm was a dairy operation with the land used for supporting the dairy and for sale, while also producing food for family consumption. The new owners, Scott and Liz Herrling who reside a few miles to the east, have reoriented the land toward recreational and educational uses with a philosophy of preserving the land, water and forests for future users.

2. David & Joan Haugen Family & Farm

Located in Section 14 of Vermont Township

By Joan Haugen

David Haugen was born on this approximately 180 acre farm on July 16, 1942 and lived his entire life here. His father, Hjalmar Sigurd Haugen and mother, Garnet Evelyn Mickelson (known as Evelyn) managed the dairy farm on land that was not the best in Dane County. They milked cows, raised hogs and chickens and were pretty much self-sufficient.

David and his brother John, who was five years older, grew up doing the designated chores and enjoying country life. Their lives were filled with adventure with all the animals and countryside at their fingertips. There were several incidents that meant fun for them but perhaps not for their mother. Since Dave and John shared a bow and arrow set they got for Christmas, it seemed to them that they had moving targets in the chickens that roamed. They took turns aiming at the chickens and were quite confident that the arrows would never hit any of them. But one arrow did hit its mark! A delicious chicken dinner was served that evening.

The farm was originally purchased by Martin Mikkelson Haugen and his wife Hannah Tonetta Norslien that included the land that joined them to the north. The two farms were worked together and included 390 acres. Martin Haugen was born September 9, 1875 in Valdres, Norway and emigrated to the United States at the age of 16. Martin and Hannah were married September 16, 1908 at Vermont Lutheran Church. Upon their retirement their son Hjalmar and his wife Evelyn got a part of this land and in the near future purchased more acres from the Helmuth Schroeder farm. The other part of the Martin/Hannah farm went to Norman Haugen, a brother to Hjalmar. Norman Haugen's land is now where his son Eric and family live, located on Vermont Church Road.



Then Photograph of Haugen Farmstead in 1939, provided by Joan Haugen



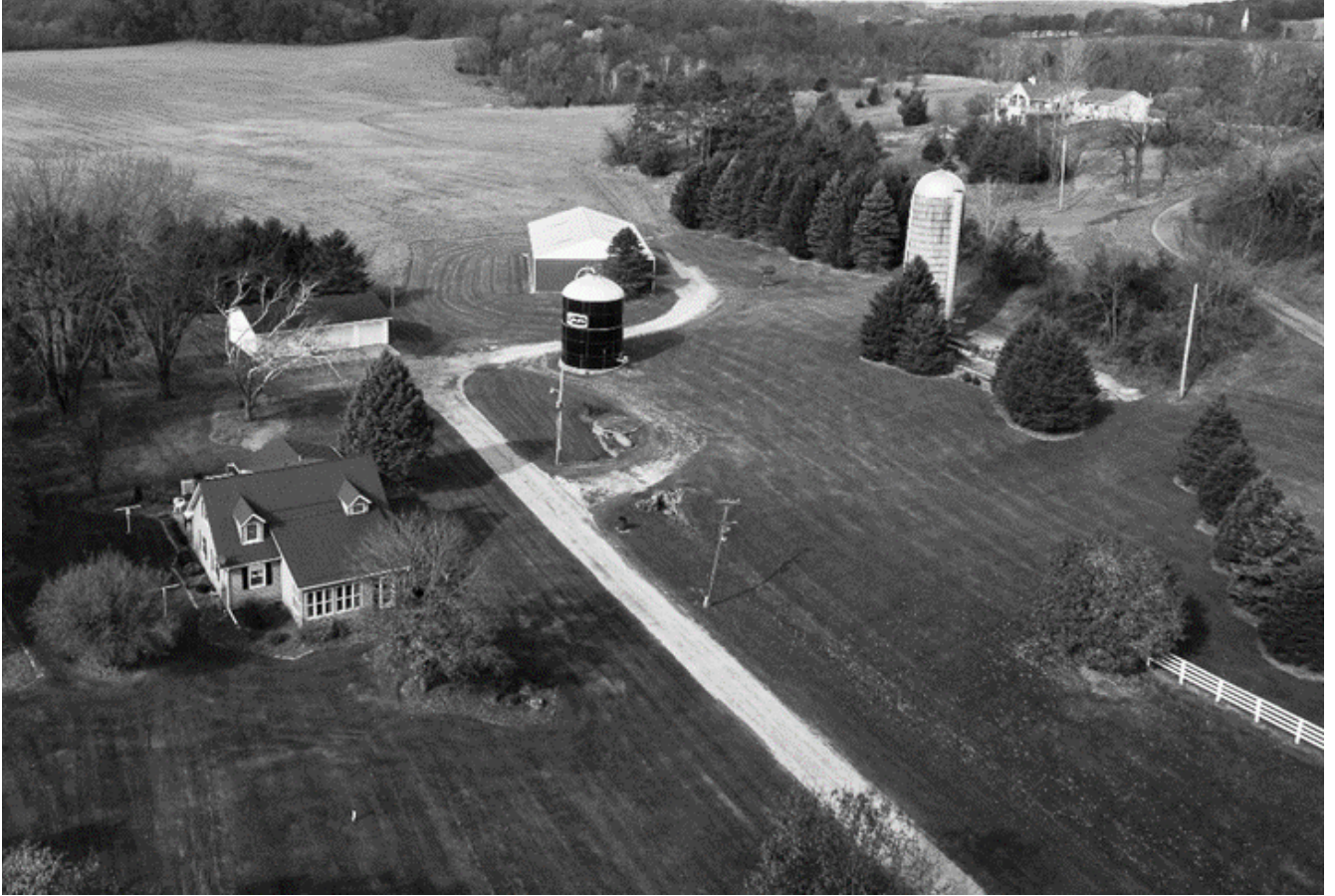
Now photograph of Haugen Farmstead, taken by Mitchell Travis, 2022.

The above Then photo shows the farmhouse in 1939 before it was razed and mostly burned as well as the large barn and chicken house. A new house was built as shown in following photograph. Several items from the old house were used in building the new one. All the wooden floors in the attic were from the old house as well as the stairway to the basement. Those are still in perfect shape in the house today.



Then: Haugen Farm, 1950, Aerial photograph provided by Joan Haugen

Above is another Then photo from 1950 showing buildings and also how some of the farmland was being used.



Now: Haugen Farm, Drone aerial photograph by Mitchell Travis, October, 2022

The barn deteriorated after Dave sold his cows. Since it was designed primarily as a dairy barn, the cost for converting it to another yet undefined use was prohibitive.

In 1962 David married Joan (Thompson) of Black Earth. They farmed the land they received from David's father Hjalmar and together ran a successful dairy farm, cattle and crops, for 25 years. Many improvements were made during this time period.

After 25 + years of dairy farming they decided to sell the cows in the federal "dairy buyout program". Dave said "It was the right time".

The Haugen's have deep roots in the Vermont farm land and long experience in finding ways to use the land to make investments and with hard work raise and educate three generations.

With farming instilled in him from a young age he went to work at the UW Farms in Madison/Arlington for two years prior to taking the job as patrolman of the Town of Vermont for the next 20+years.

After the sale of the cows the 128 ft. barn started to deteriorate—with crumbling foundation and leaking roof. The cost to repair the barn that was not being used was not a good investment so it was torn down in 2013.

In 1973 the Haugen's sold 57 acres to Richard Grum. This land was primarily hilly wooded area.

Dave presently has approximately 70 acres in the CRP/pollinator prairie which he mows yearly and receives enough income from that to pay real estate taxes on the farm. Previously, those 70 acres were in the Prairie Restoration Program through the CRP. The acres that were in the Woodland Preservation Program were pulled out from that program and the work preserving and working that land is being done with family labor.

Karsten Haugen, Dave and Joan's oldest son, graduated from UWEC with a degree in mathematics. He retired in 2021 and with his wife Kim purchased land from Dave and Joan in 1998 and built a home on approximately 40 acres. Since then Karsten and Kim have purchased a few more acres including some in the CRP/Pollinator Project with the rest planted in trees.

Their younger son, Kurt Haugen, has planted many pine and nut trees in the remaining pasture lands that have been of great value in land restoration and feeding wildlife. Many of the nut trees were started by Kurt from nuts that he picked up and nurtured in growth. We can now see the fruits of his work in planting and preserving the land.

Yes, we truly remain 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.

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 the land is not deemed as great for agriculture it is in our hearts to maintain good land conservation so that generations beyond may enjoy it.”

3. Vermont Lutheran Church Land

Section 11, Vermont Township

David Stanfield from conversation with Peter Antonie

Church members have had discussions for several years with the joint owners of land bordering the Church about buying a few acres of land for expansion of Vermont Lutheran Church's cemetery. An opportunity arose for the purchase of 115 acres bordering the Church (along with three Potential Development Rights). Such a purchase was possible thanks to significant donations to the Church's Legacy Fund from various Church member families and friends.

The overall purposes of the purchase are to develop and maintain a Legacy Prairie & Woodland:

- 1) to preserve the Church's view-scape for the enjoyment of members and other organizations and
- 2) to use the land in accordance with the Church's outreach priorities, as expressed by the "Caring for Creation" committee of the Church.

Three former farm fields (about 35 acres in total) have been seeded to prairie plants with grass trails planted surrounding the prairies. A "ditch" was remediated to minimize future erosion, woodland trails were cleared and the wetland through which Vermont Creek flows will be preserved.



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 photograph of land acquired in 2022 by the Vermont Lutheran Church. Photograph provided by the Vermont Lutheran Church.

The variety of land cover and topography gives the Church opportunities to experiment with various ideas for the management of the prairie and woodlands.

Some years ago a developer presented a proposal to the Town Board for the building of a golf course on this property, along with several high end homes bordering the golf course. That did not happen, but demonstrates alternative land uses which may be considered from time to time but may not be consistent with the goals of the Town's Comprehensive Plan.

This conversion of the land from cash cropping to developments like a golf course and mansions is now precluded by Church management of the land for preservation of the soil and diversification of land cover as well as re-establishing prairie.

For years the cultivated areas of the hilly 115 acres to the east of the Vermont Lutheran Church were dedicated to cash cropping. The present management of the land is guided by the goal to develop and maintain a Legacy Prairie & Woodland as part of the Church's "Caring for Creation" ministry.

4. Urness Farm: Then and Now

Sections 10 and 11, Vermont Township

Jon Urness

The Urness Farm on the corner of Vermont Church Road and County Road JJ, was pieced together by Johannes and Martha Urness in the years following their immigration to America from Norway in 1857. Martha and Johannes came as tenant farmers to the Lars Monson homestead and spent the first few years living in sod and timber dugouts on the hillside west of the current Urness house. Depressions from those dugouts are still easily found in the woods. By 1863 the young couple, now with four children, had managed to scrape together \$550 to buy two small parcels of farmland totaling 60 acres from Lars Monson.

The next year Johannes was conscripted into the Union Army and fought with the 16th Wisconsin Regiment as part of William Tecumseh Sherman's army in Georgia and the Carolinas until the end of the War in April 1865. For the Urness family, the upside of that terrible war was that Johannes survived, and used his soldier's back pay to buy another 120 acres for \$1600, bringing the total of what the family now calls the original Urness Farm to 180 acres. Much later in 1950, Nels Urness, grandson of Johannes and Martha, added another 120 acres by purchasing additional land from neighbor Robert Tollefson. So that's how the farm came to be one of 300 acres. The vast majority of those 300 acres (276 acres) are still owned by members of the Urness family.

That brings us to a narrative of the "Then and Now" photographs depicted. The word CHANGE will often be used in all of these narratives but there are still many things UNCHANGED from the "Then to the "Now". Both will be covered. As the author of this narrative and the current owner of the largest section of the original Urness Farm, these photos give me clues as to what has remained the same, what has changed and what will change moving forward.



Then photo taken in 1948, provided by
Jon Urness

Now photo taken by Abbey Miskimen, J
July, 2022

With few exceptions, the footprint of tillable land in the photos and the farm as a whole, is identical today as it was when the 1948 photo was taken. The exceptions include places where brushy fence lines have been removed to make planting and harvest more efficient with the larger equipment used today. In the center of the 1948 photo above, my Dad (Norton) is plowing the very small field along side Vermont Church Road. I'm sure it was no accident that he is shown with his nearly new Minneapolis-Moline R Model tractor and 2-bottom plow in the center of the photo. In those days it was fairly easy to plow and plant this one-acre field and then harvest with a 1-row corn picker. Today, it's perhaps not worth the effort. There are a couple other tiny three-corner fields on the farm that are also not tilled any longer. But what does remain the same, is the need to generate income from the tillable land to cover cost of ownership and make a living on the land.

In 1948 the crops were largely converted to feed for livestock housed right on the farm. Today, the grain or forage produced is marketed off the farm and shipped or fed elsewhere. With fewer livestock in the Town and reduced concentration of livestock and the associated challenges of waste handling, it might be tempting to judge that as a good thing. However, without the application of livestock manure as organic fertilizer and replenishment of soil organic matter, new challenges will be created. The optimist in me hopes and expects that new, yet to be developed technologies, in the field of genetics and agronomy, will address those challenges.

As we consider a landscape with few livestock, it's easy to see the effect of continuous grazing on the pasture land in the distant hillside. It's almost park-like. In 1948, the dozens of small dairies in Vermont relied on pasture in the summer months for forage feed for milk cows, their replacements and even for draft horses. Hogs were also pastured back in 1948. It all sounds kind of "pastoral" but in reality, grazing practices had yet to be developed in 1948 to maximize production and renewal of the resource. The result was over-grazing and erosion. Coupled with agronomic practices such as moldboard plow tillage and the lack of contour farming on the steep slopes in the area, nearly annual and multiple flooding occurred along ditches and creeks. Even in this 1948 photo there are remnants of spring flooding across Vermont Church Road.

During the 1960's new USDA programs were introduced to area farmers that helped begin the reversal of annual flooding and erosion events. Administrated at the county level, farmers were elected to local ASCS (Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service) committees. The goal was to administer soil conservation programs but paid staffing for field administration of these programs was slim at best. So, individual farmers who were elected to the local committees often became that field staff. I recall Dad (Norton), being gone from the farm endless hours in the 1960's as he helped lay out contour strips on dozens of farms in the Town. Grant Skalet was another member of the local ASCS committee and I'm sure there were others on the west end of the Town who were paid minimally but were instrumental in starting these early conservation programs and convincing others that the programs were important for future soil integrity.

Turning away from agricultural considerations, these contrasting photos suggest that we demand a lot more in terms of services from the Town today than we did back then. Notice that Vermont Church Road was merely a graveled pathway in 1948. It was first blacktopped in about 1959. I was too young to remember the discussion that occurred in the old Town Hall on Elvers Corner

on this issue, but I'll bet there were those who thought our roads were good enough and preferred not to spend the money on blacktop. At the same time there were probably those who wanted to improve the farm to market roads and believed the expenditure was a good investment. And did you notice the "casual" stop sign in the 1948 photo that leans over and merely suggests traffic should come to a stop at the intersection? How about the patch of grass behind the bicyclist? Surely our citizens would not be satisfied with roads and road maintenance like this today.

And what about that bicyclist? That's my Aunt Mary trying out her new bike on a practically deserted County Highway JJ. While bicycling is now a great source of recreation and exercise, back then it was also a vehicle for transportation to the half-dozen one-room schools in the Town. Traffic was light to almost non-existent in 1948 as most folks worked on the farm and very few commuted to work.

So now that an Urness has lived at the intersection of Vermont Church Road and County Highway JJ for some 165 years, how do we hope to continue that for another 150 or more? It gets challenging when you're not actually operating the farm, but hopefully income for maintaining the farm and paying taxes can continue to be generated through the tillable land, timber resources or other creative sources yet to be explored. In the meantime, there are legal instruments in place to extend succession of ownership to future generations of Johannes and Martha Urness descendants.

5. Barsness-Cowan Farm

Section 2 in Vermont Township

Jon Urness

With Wayne Barsness and Jan and Steve Cowan

Few farms in the Town of Vermont have such a detailed history in terms of land use as the Cowan farm, located at the corner of Blue Mounds Trail and County Rd JJ. Steve and Jan Cowan, current owners, fill us in on their nearly fifty years of ownership. But first, Wayne Barsness details the early history of the farm which was owned by his great-great grandparents.

Wayne's father, grandparents, great-grandparents and even his great-great grandparents were important players in the development of what is still occasionally called the "Barsness Place" even though Steve and Jan Cowan have owned it for nearly a half-century....that's just the way it goes in Vermont Township!

According to Wayne, the farm goes back to at least 1866 when Norwegian immigrants John and wife Siri Barsness (Americanized to Sarah), are listed in Township records as owning property in Section 11. By 1873 they had acquired additional land in Section 11 and Section 2 for a total of about 110 acres. Their first house was a two-story log dwelling, later replaced, by a white frame house and the old house became a granary.

John and Sarah had 12 children. Seven boys and five girls. Two of their sons, Melvin and Peter, became dentists, perhaps a bit unusual for two nineteenth century farm boys from rural Wisconsin. John's son Herman and his wife Otelia took over the farm when John and Sarah built a home in Black Earth and moved there in 1902. In 1923 Herman built a new brick home on the farm which was remodeled and built onto in the 1980's by Jan and Steve Cowan.

Herman was a very gifted and talented man. Although he had very little formal education, he possessed an extraordinary mechanical ability. Together with his brother Edwin, they perfected a dairy cow stanchion system and obtained two U. S. Patents dated May 11, 1915, and June 8, 1915. They began manufacturing this equipment in a small plant in the Village of Black Earth under the name Barsness Brothers Company. Their business grew and was a success and soon outgrew this facility. They changed their name to Barsness Manufacturing Company and constructed a new 10,000 sq ft brick factory building in 1919 on Center Street at the railroad tracks in Black Earth. They not only manufactured, sold and installed their stanchion system but offered a full line of dairy and horse barn equipment including steel stalls, pens, water systems, feed trucks and ventilators. The business flourished well into the 1920's but like so many others during that time they became a victim of the great depression and by 1930 the business was dissolved.



Then Photograph: from around 1900, provided by Wayne Barsness

The barn seen in the photo not only served as Herman's dairy barn, where he milked about 25 Holstein cows, but was equipped with the latest Barsness Brothers Company stanchions and farm equipment. Herman's brother Edwin, who was in charge of sales for the company, had a photo album which he showed prospective buyers. One of the photos is the interior of this barn and is labeled "Barsness Exp. Barn". Presumably the "Exp." meant experimental. Herman or Edwin would invite any farmer interested in Barsness equipment to tour this facility for a "hands on" look at what was offered. Unfortunately, this barn was destroyed by fire about 1930. A new barn was rebuilt on the same location.

Dairy farming was predominant in Vermont's "Norwegian Valley", but many farmers also grew the cash crop of tobacco. However, by about 1915 most had given up on tobacco, but Herman continued growing it well into the 1930's. His allotment was normally three acres and grew it in the field along Hwy JJ north of the farm buildings.

Herman and Otelia had nine children. With the help of their children, Herman farmed through the 1940's. When he died in 1950 none of the children were interested in taking over the farm and it was sold to Ethan Brindley in 1958. It was later sold to Donald Mandt in 1965. Mandt sold all the property south of Blue Mounds Trail and West of Hwy JJ to William Bolt in 1975. In 1976 Mandt sold the remaining original Barsness farm to the current owners Jan and Steve Cowan.

Steve and Jan still own most of the remaining farm and Jan picks up the story from there.

In 1975, the Cowens bought the original Barsness farm from Donald Mandt. At that time Jan had just gotten a teaching job in Middleton. Steve was attending college in Platteville. He had grown up on a dairy farm in Oshkosh and wanted to live in a rural area but we needed to find a place within reasonable driving distance from Middleton.

Our realtor showed us this place in Vermont Township and we were attracted to the land with the Vermont Creek flowing through it. We liked the old Brick House on 60 acres which included a new 30x80 shed and an old windmill. No other outbuildings were on the property. The setting was beautiful against the hill and we decided to buy.

A problem came up as we applied for our loan. In those days bankers didn't see a woman as a wage earner and since Steve was still in school, they gave us a loan to buy our home with the stipulation that we had to rent the farm to someone else for two years before we could move in.

Steve had a degree in wildlife ecology, so he planted hundreds of trees on the property. The land between the house and creek was too wet to plant a crop so Steve put in the pond. He smoothed out the soil from the pond and put in seed for a lawn between the driveway and the pond. Years later the DNR put in four scrape ponds for wildlife in the marsh area.

One of the first projects Steve took on was to put a concrete floor in part of the shed for a shop. Heat was added later. Steve was a self-taught carpenter and saw potential in remodeling the house. It was a very sturdy house using oak lumber sawn from the trees on the land. When we bought this house there was an addition put on by the former owners but in the tornado of 1984, the addition was separated from the original brick house. In the years following, the addition was removed and Steve built the new addition that is there now.

With dreams of getting into farming, Steve planted corn on the 8 acres in the field north of the house, and the 15 acres he purchased across the road on JJ. (He bought the land the cheese factory had been on. The factory itself burned down sometime in the two years while we waited to move in to our home). Steve became too busy with his own Company, Cowan Construction and rented the farm land for a few years until it became too wet and small to bother with.

In 2022, Abbey Miskimen took this *Now* photograph from the same place as the 1900 photograph:



Now photograph taken by Abbey Miskimen in 2022

The dairy operation is gone. The land in the foreground has reverted to grasses and wetland, no longer pastured. The hill in the background is covered in trees.

In 2021 the Cowans sold the cheese factory land and 15 acres across JJ to Matt Baker and Mark Kowald. At this writing they have dug two wetland ponds and planted many trees. They are planning to build their house once the current inflated building materials situation settles down.

The Cowans are planning to stay in their home as long as they can. After that their hope is that their three children can sort out the next chapter of the Barsness/Cowan Farm.

The land use story of the Barsness/Cowan farm really is one dictated by farm commodity economics, entrepreneurship, changing farm practices, efficiency of scale, living space preferences and even weather. John and Siri Barsness immigrated from a little spit of land on the fjord near Sogndal, Norway. Just across the fjord lived John's friend, Johannes Urness. Both John and Johannes are also Jon Urness' great-great grandfathers. Shortly after arriving in America, they were both drafted into the Civil War and fought together in the 16th Wisconsin Infantry Regiment. Both bought farms just a mile apart along a rutted dirt road in Vermont later to be known as County Rd JJ. Funds to purchase their farms came at least partially from their muster out pay from the Army. And some years later, John Barsness's daughter Christina, married Johannes's son Hans Urness.

Farming was a tough life for John and Siri Barsness and in the early years their income depended on a bountiful wheat crop to which much of their farm was planted. Wheat was suited to the old farm as the soil in the valley was rich and fairly well drained. In the latter half of the 19th century the country's rail system was developed which opened up huge and better suited areas than Wisconsin for growing wheat.

As wheat declined, the dairy industry blossomed. Son Herman and daughter-in-law Otelia, adapted to dairying and along with the supplemental income derived from the Barsness Manufacturing Company, made a pretty good go of it. Theirs was a fairly large dairy with 25 milk cows and a ready market for their production was right across the road at the Vermont American Cheese Factory.

As years passed it became more and more difficult to grow row crops on the bottom land that primarily made up the Barsness farm. Subsequent owners tried raising corn but it was a hit and miss proposition as the land became more poorly drained. Fortunately, Steve and Jan Cowan recognized a better use in limited pasturing and perhaps corn on the highest ground. But the majority of their acres were better suited to wetland habitat. The first step was planting the 100's of pine and cedar trees that flourished. Then the five ponds were dredged and pretty soon the property resembled the wetland and wildlife habitat that mother nature seemed to intend.

6. Vermont American Cheese Factory—Baker and Kowald Home Site

Section 2, Vermont Township
Jon Urness with Mark Kowald and Matt Baker

In 2021 Mark Kowald and Matt Baker bought their fifteen-acre piece of heaven in the Town of Vermont on the corner of County Road JJ and Blue Mounds Trail for their future home.

The parcel had no buildings but did have remnants of previous constructions.

Mark and Matt had no idea that the property was once home to the Vermont American Cheese Factory, a functioning cheese factory from 1886 until it closed in 1967. Over those 80 years, nearby dairy farmers brought their milk daily to the factory, an important source of their families' income and source of whey for feeding hogs back on their farms.

Perhaps just as important, the factory was a place for farmers to exchange news and views of local and even world wide happenings.

Here is a photograph of the factory taken about 1900, with Blue Mounds Trail coming down on the right of the photograph, and County JJ running along the front of the photograph.



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

Front row, left to right; Joe Barsness, Gille Barsness, Mrs. Carrie Broughton, Miss Carrie Broughton, Mrs. Henry Norslien, Mrs. Otto Sale (Hazel Norslien), Henry Norslien, Carl Anderson, Ream Turk, John H. Barsness

Back Row: Harald Norslien, Nels Espeseth, Sylvester Amble, Eric Espeseth, Anton Anderson, John Wilkins, Herman Barsness, Osten Espelene, Frank Turk, Andrew Anderson, Halsten Peterson, Albert Dybdahl

Many mornings as a grade-school age kid in the late 1950s and early 1960s I accompanied my dad Norton Urness after the morning milking was complete, to the cheese factory to deliver close to two dozen cans of milk, some of it still warm from the cow. Sometimes there was a line-up of other farmers doing exactly the same thing, but in a little while, we'd make our way to the milk receiving window and Dad would hoist the heavy cans on a conveyor leading into the factory. Just inside, cheesemaker Oscar Roshardt, would offer a friendly but business-like "good morning" which to my ears sounded more like the Swiss-German, "Guten Morgen."

Oscar and Helen Roshardt, along with their family of four daughters, had immigrated from Switzerland a few years before to run the little cheese factory in Vermont. Oscar, was a small, balding man but with powerful biceps and forearms, reminding me of "Popeye". It was at that little opening to the factory that I first heard words like Sputnik spoken. And later, opinions on the Russian missile crisis and Kennedy assassination were cussed and discussed reminding me that the world was a lot bigger than our little township. Closer to home, news of the latest births, deaths and marriages were also exchanged. After the last milk can was unloaded and returned, Dad would pull around to the back of the factory to an old and smelly wooden tank of whey. Filling a steel 55-gallon barrel perched in the back of Dad's pickup truck, he would take the protein rich liquid home to make slop for the 14-16 sows kept on the farm. This happened 365 days a year no matter the weather or day of the week, including holidays. So it was, that Vermont American Cheese Factory provided a market for milk produced on the farm, a source of supplemental feed for the hogs and a dispensary of important news and opinion.

And that daily routine was repeated all throughout Vermont Township with up to fourteen cheese plants in the Town of Vermont! It's hard to imagine today, but in the early to middle part of the 20th century there were that many cheese factories in Vermont putting out Swiss, American, Brick and even Limburger cheese. Every single dairy farmer in the Town had access to a cheese factory within about a mile of home.

What really caused the demise? Certainly fewer dairy farms contributed to the factory closings. But even before that, these small cheese factories with not more than a dozen or so patrons, were closing their doors. From just after World War II to the last closing in the mid-1960's, every small cheese factory in Vermont shut down. New environmental regulations regarding effluent and disposal of by-products made it tough for small factories to stay in business. There was a time when the whey was gladly picked up by patrons and fed to hogs. But then there became fewer hogs to feed. The final blow to small, rural cheese factories came with the invention of the bulk milk cooler.

Prior to that invention, milk from the evening milking was strained into 80-pound galvanized milk cans and cooled overnight in springs or cement water tanks. The morning milk went directly into cans as warm as it came from the cows, and accompanied the cans filled the evening before to the cheese factory. It was a daily chore to hoist the cans into pickup trucks or small trailers and travel to the nearest cheese factory.

But the daily trip was a social outlet for all the farmers. The day's news was dispensed while waiting to place the heavy cans on a roller track that led into the cheese vat.

The on-farm bulk milk cooler changed all that. Large coolers could store up to two day's milk and cool it to 38-degrees without any drudgery. And a huge milk truck would come right to the farm and pump it out. It was also at this time that many small dairy farmers gave up milking rather than making the investment in a bulk milk cooler.

Back in 1976, Nels Goderstad, a long-time cheese maker himself, did exhaustive research on Vermont's cheese factories and his article was published in the Vermont Township Bi-Centennial Book. Nels is gone now, but his article explains in detail all that was known about the factories at that time. Here is what he had to say about Vermont American Cheese Factory located on Matt and Mark's property:

*The **Vermont American** cheese factory was incorporated on November 24, 1888 and was located at the corner of Old Indian Trail and Hwy JJ. Besides making cheese, the idea for Patrons Mercantile Co-op originated at the factory. Amos Thorsrud, a patron at Vermont, was also the first manager of Patron's and started the store in Black Earth. In June, 1966, the boiler broke down and operations ceased. It had already been decided to close down the following year. The factory continued as a residence but burned in December 1976.*

Now fast forward several decades to Matt and Mark's search for a place to build a home in their beloved Driftless area where they had spent many outings as avid outdoorsmen exploring trout streams, looking for morels and hunting deer and turkeys. They have lived in Cross Plains for the last eight years and have a short commute to Madison where Matt is a sergeant with the Madison Police Department and Mark is an ER Trauma Nurse at UW Hospital. According to Matt, "With both of us tied to Madison work....we found the Town of Vermont to be the sweet spot, so feel very fortunate to have landed where we will soon call home."

The pair worked with Dane County and the Township to enlarge the extremely small building envelop defined by where the old cheese factory stood. Once that was achieved they bought the property from the Cowans and began cleaning up rubble and scrap left over from the 1976 fire that destroyed the building. In doing so they hauled away seven flatbed trailer loads of metal scrap and reclaimed parts of a still standing shed that will eventually help form a fireplace mantle in their new home. Material shortage issues delayed any attempt to bid out the building of a home but finally, at the end of 2021, they sensed a small window of opportunity and let bids. However, they were shocked to learn that costs had gone through the roof because of inflation, demand and labor shortages. And even a meaningful scale-down of house plans didn't land them in an affordable comfort zone for even a modest sized house.



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

Developing and cleaning up the property has been a process of discovery for Matt and Mark, including evidence of the place as a cheese factory and even more ancient history. Behind the old shed they found a couple piles of lump coal that without a doubt are remnants of the coal used to fire the cheese factory boilers. And as a reminder that they are not the first hunters and gatherers to occupy the site, they found a nearly perfect arrowhead while planting trees in the south field. Perhaps history does repeat itself in some sort of way.

7. The Kreuger-Janousek Farm

Section 15 in Vermont Township

David Stanfield's conversations with Connie Janousek

Connie and her husband Jeff moved to Vermont Township when in 1973 they bought Ted Moll's farm on F below Brigham Park. Connie travelled from that farm to her teaching job in Barneveld until they moved to Saudi Arabia in 1976. They rented the farmhouse until it burned down in 1977.

While they were in Saudi Arabia, in 1980 they decided to buy a farm from Earl Kreuger on what is now Amble Road. He had installed a house trailer and then built a ranch house just east of the old farmhouse. The Norwegian Kjorlie brothers (twins-Ed and Henry and their older brother Sigurd) continued to live in the old farmhouse. They cultivated the crops in lieu of rent to Earl Kreuger and continued to use the land and care for the Janousek's riding horses after Connie and Jeff purchased the farm from Mr. Kreuger.

One of the buildings shown on the *Then* photo below from the 1930s, just northwest of the farmhouse, is the former Sandridge School House. In 1917 after the new schoolhouse was built and a new well dug, the old school house was sold to Sever Amble who moved it to be nearer his farm buildings. He used it as a grainery and horse barn. At the time of the *Then* photo in the 1930s JJ is shown as passing around and north of the barn and farmhouse. Just past the house along the old JJ is the "sweetest spring in Vermont Township". Mirella and Otto Wilkins once mentioned to the Janouseks that people on their way to and from Church would stop their buggies at the spring and fill containers to take the water to their homes.



The old Sever Amble farm, photo from the 1930s, provided by Connie Janousek

In 1957 the Town purchased the land from George Lukken on which a new schoolhouse had been built in 1917. The Town began using the schoolhouse as the Vermont Town Hall.

George Lukken sold the farm (142 acres) to Earl Kreuger who sold a couple of parcels on JJ before selling about 109 acres to the Janouseks.

After purchasing the farm in 1980, not being farmers, the Janouseks decided to invest in a Ford 8N tractor but continued the arrangement with the Kjolrie brothers for them to go on living in the farm house and working the farm. In recent years Erik Forshaug has rented the cropland.

From the time the Janouseks returned from Saudi Arabia and took up residence on the farm they had the attitude that they did not want to be the type of newcomers who kept to themselves. They reached out to their neighbors--the Wilkins, the Forshaugs--and have forged close neighbor ties.

The property now has most of the same buildings as when it was a functioning dairy operation, with the addition of the new house. But the land is no longer used for supporting a dairy which ended in 1960. Like many other farms in the Township, trees are more prominent in the land cover today than when people tried to extract a living from the land, even more marginal soils.

Over the recent years, trees have also grown and filled in the built-up area.



Photo of the Janousek place, by Abbey Miskimen, in spring of 2023.

In contrast to much of the outside world, Connie says that she continues to hang on to the old ways. She believes that she should keep the landscape in the same form as what attracted her and her husband to Vermont Township in the first place. She thinks that buildings should have low visual impact, which includes being painted to fit largely unnoticed into the landscape. Instead of tearing down the old buildings, she has invested in repairing them to shelter and feed her horses—hanging on to much of the old landscape.

Some quotations from Frank Lloyd Wright which continue to inspire Connie are:

I believe in God, only I spell it Nature.

The good building is not one that hurts the landscape, but one which makes the landscape more beautiful than it was before the building was built.

Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature. It will never fail you.

No house should ever be on a hill or on anything. It should be of the hill. Belonging to it. Hill and house should live together each the happiest for the other.

Nature is the inspiration for all ornamentation.

A building should appear to grow easily from its site and be shaped to harmonize with its surroundings if Nature is manifest there.

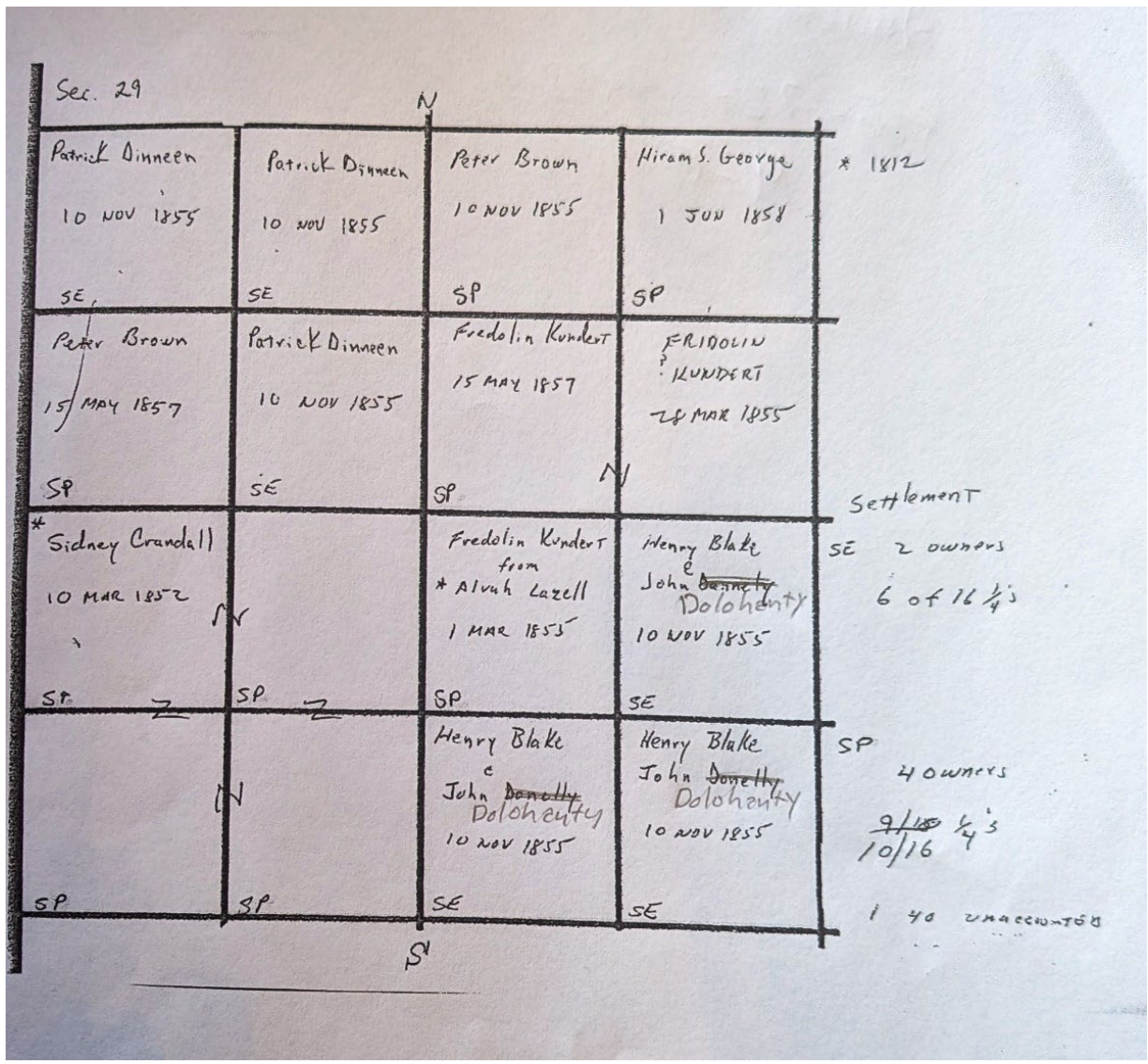
8. Deneen-Danz Farm

Section 29 of Vermont Township, County F
David Stanfield with contributions by Mary Calstrom and Jim Danz

Jim Danz owns a farm of about 160 acres, about 80 acres tillable, which he purchased from his uncles, Jack and Donald Deneen in 1981. Jim's mother was a Deneen, with ancestors stretching back to the original settler on Jim's land, Patrick K. Deneen in 1855.

This case is the only one out of the 15 cases selected for the Then and Now Project where the present owner can trace the ownership of the land back through family ancestors to the original settler of the land. Moreover, the family's collection of photographs of the farmstead extend back in time to before 1900.

Some of the history of the Deneen-Danz farm is captured in the following Then and Now photos and extracts from Vermont Township Plat maps. Ownership of the farm since first patent in November, 1855 of three quarter-quarter sections in Section 29 of Vermont Township, totaling 120 acres to P.K. Dinneen



Dan Brunner's sketch map of Section 29, Vermont Township, showing original patents from U.S. General Land Office in Mineral Point.

P.K. received three patents for 40 acres each in 1855 totaling 120 acres in the Northwest Quarter Section of Section 29 in Vermont Township

We have is a very old photograph from Mary and Jim's wall, date unknown, showing a log cabin, perhaps the one built by the original settler, P.K. Dineen



Dineen (now Deneen) Log Cabin, date unknown, provided by Jim Danz

By 1873 some transactions had occurred as shown by the 1873 plat of Vermont Township, with P.K. Deneen (note spelling change) holding 220 acres by 1873.

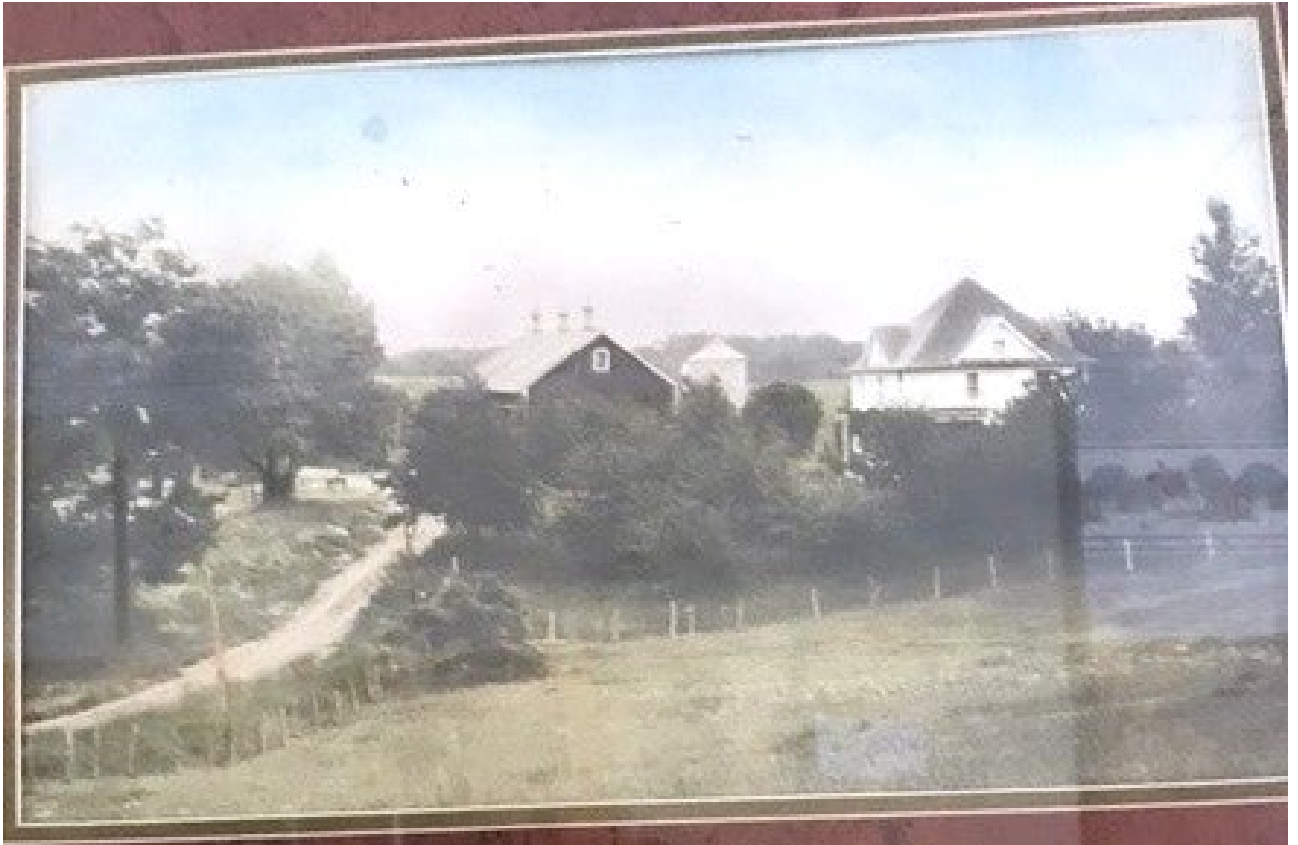


1873 Plat, P.K. Deneen, 220 acres in Section 29

P.K. died in 1874 at which time he also owned several parcels in Madison in addition to 260 acres in Vermont Township.

P.K. was quite active in the local real estate markets before he died. Paul Hessman's research in the Dane County Register of Deeds uncovered 72 land transactions involving P.K. as buyer or seller of rights to land (including mortgages) between the years 1854 and 1873.

What follows is another "Then" photograph which hangs on Mary's and Jim's wall and provides a view of the farmstead from County F, taken in approximately 1908, including an orchard in center-right of photo.



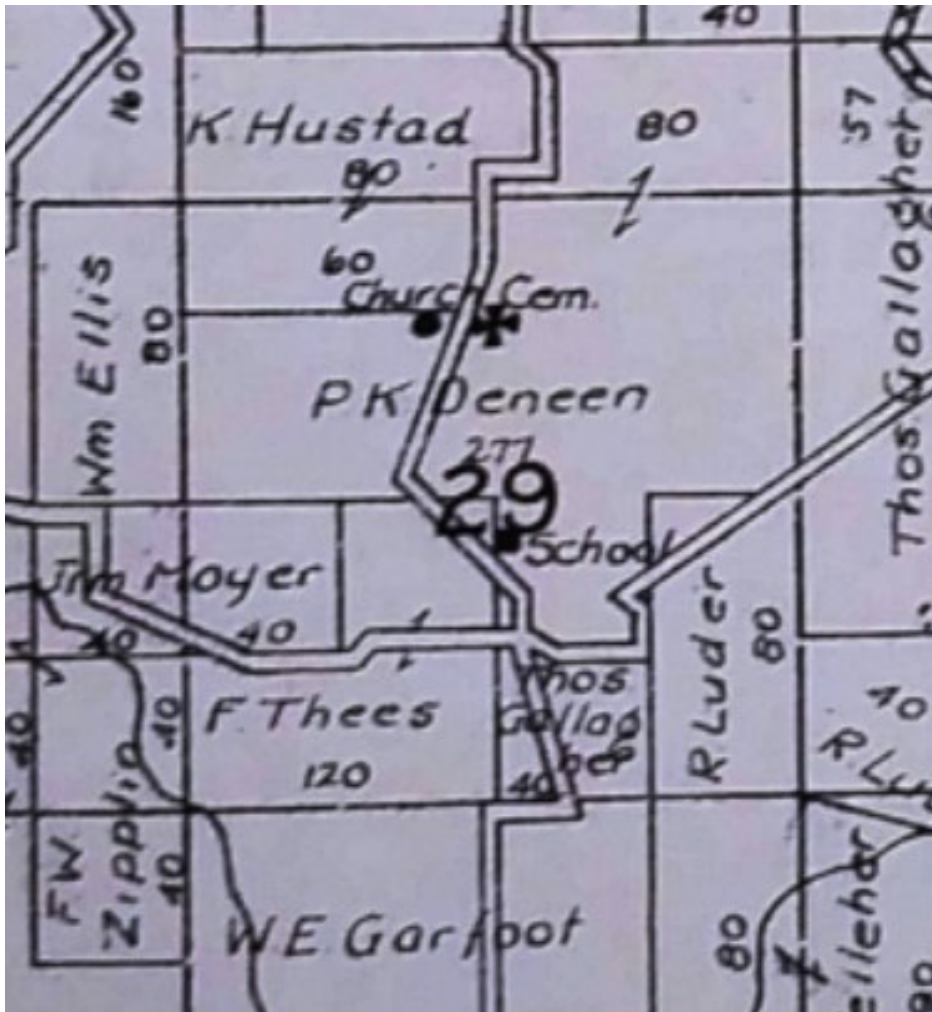
Photograph from 1908 provided by Jim Danz and Mary Cunningham

A photograph from the same place taken in 2022, the Now photograph, shows that the orchard is gone but a silo has been added and electricity now flows to the house and barn.



Photograph taken by Abbey Miskimen, October, 2022

The cultivated field in the foreground has roughly the same shape on the same hillside in the two photograph, which makes cultivation with modern machinery a bit challenging..



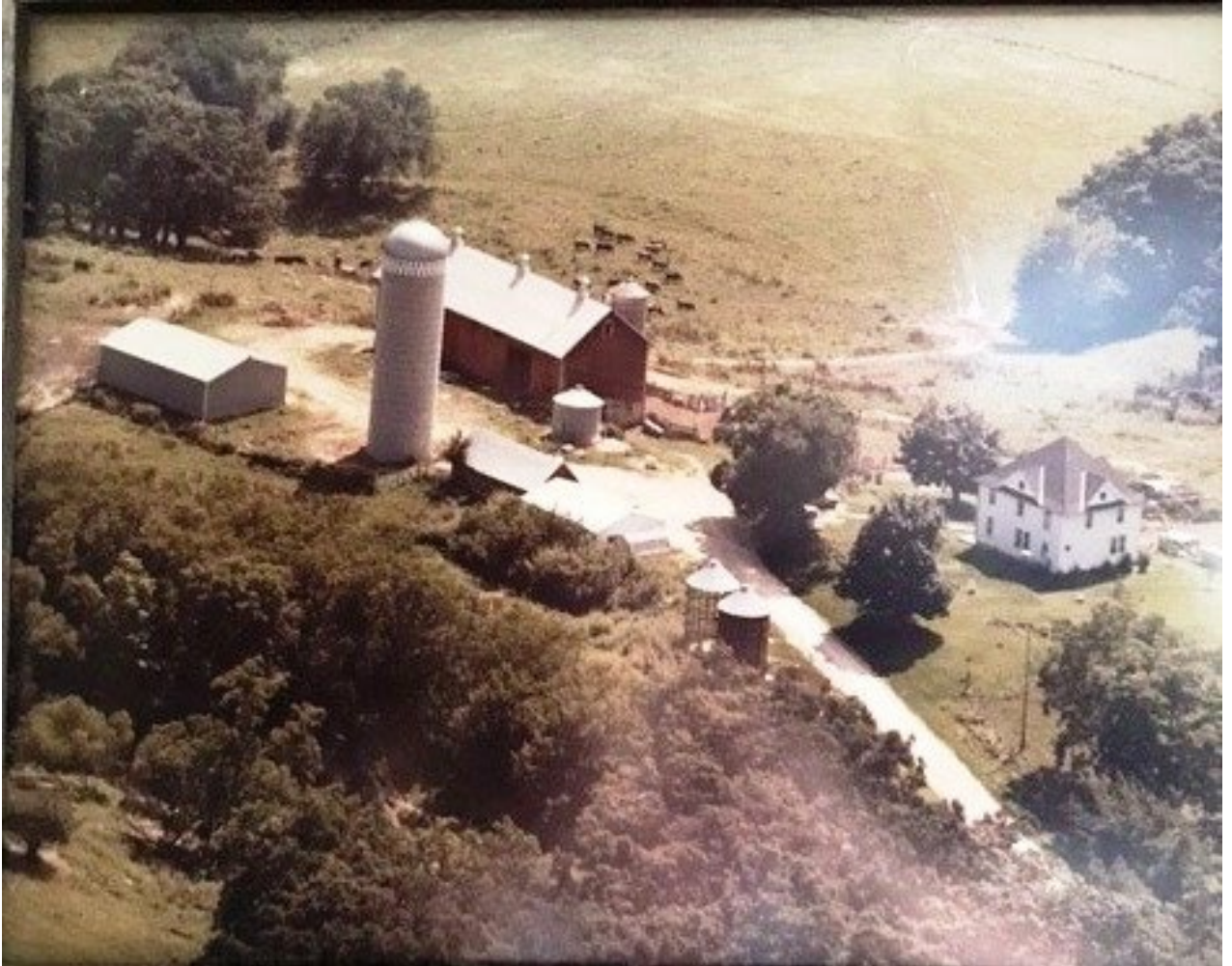
1924 Plat, P.K. Deneen (settler P.K. Deneen's nephew) 277 acres in section 29 plus 80 acres in Section 20



By the 1947 Plat, Joseph Deneen has accumulated ownership to about 7.5 quarter-quarter sections (300 acres) in Section 29 and 60 acres in Section 20

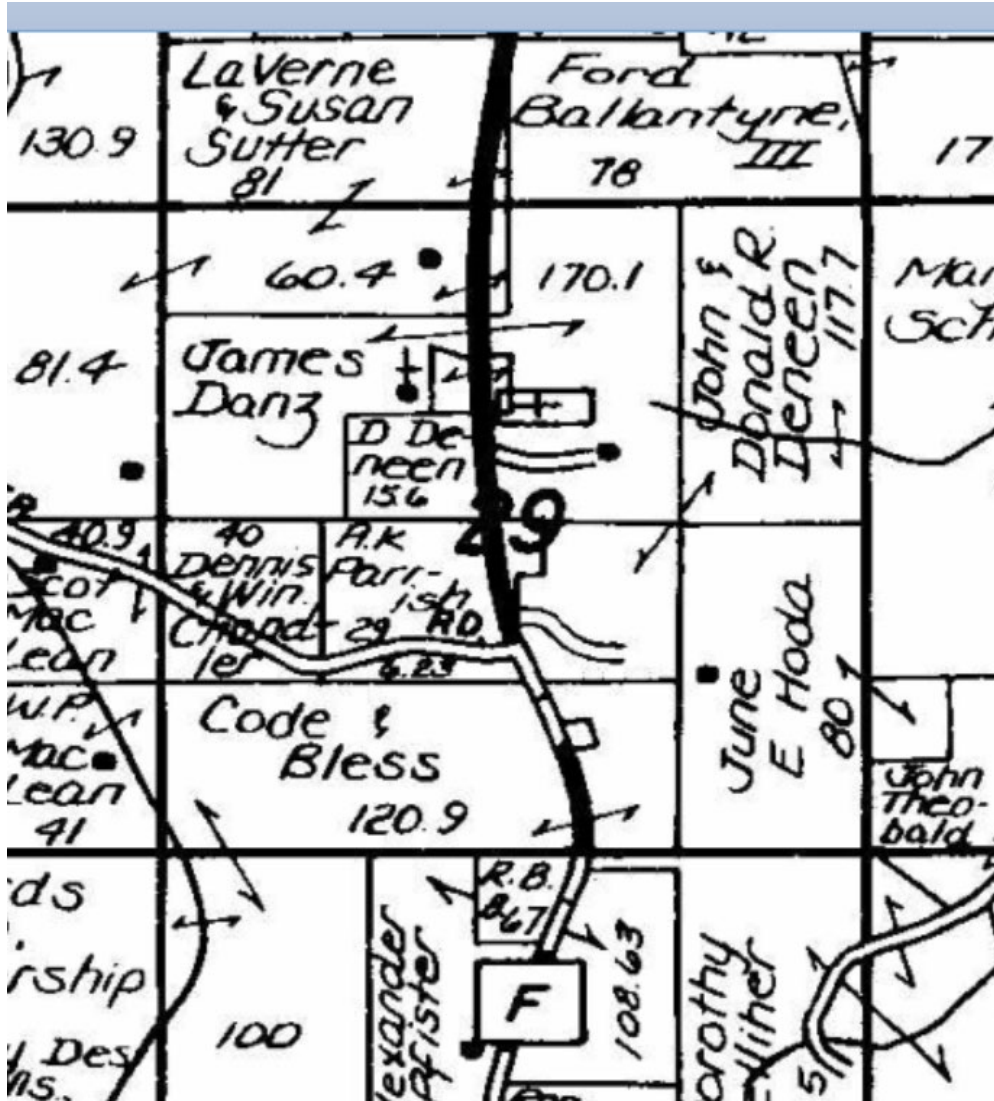


Aerial photograph by John Drury, 1957 from book of farm photos in Dane County



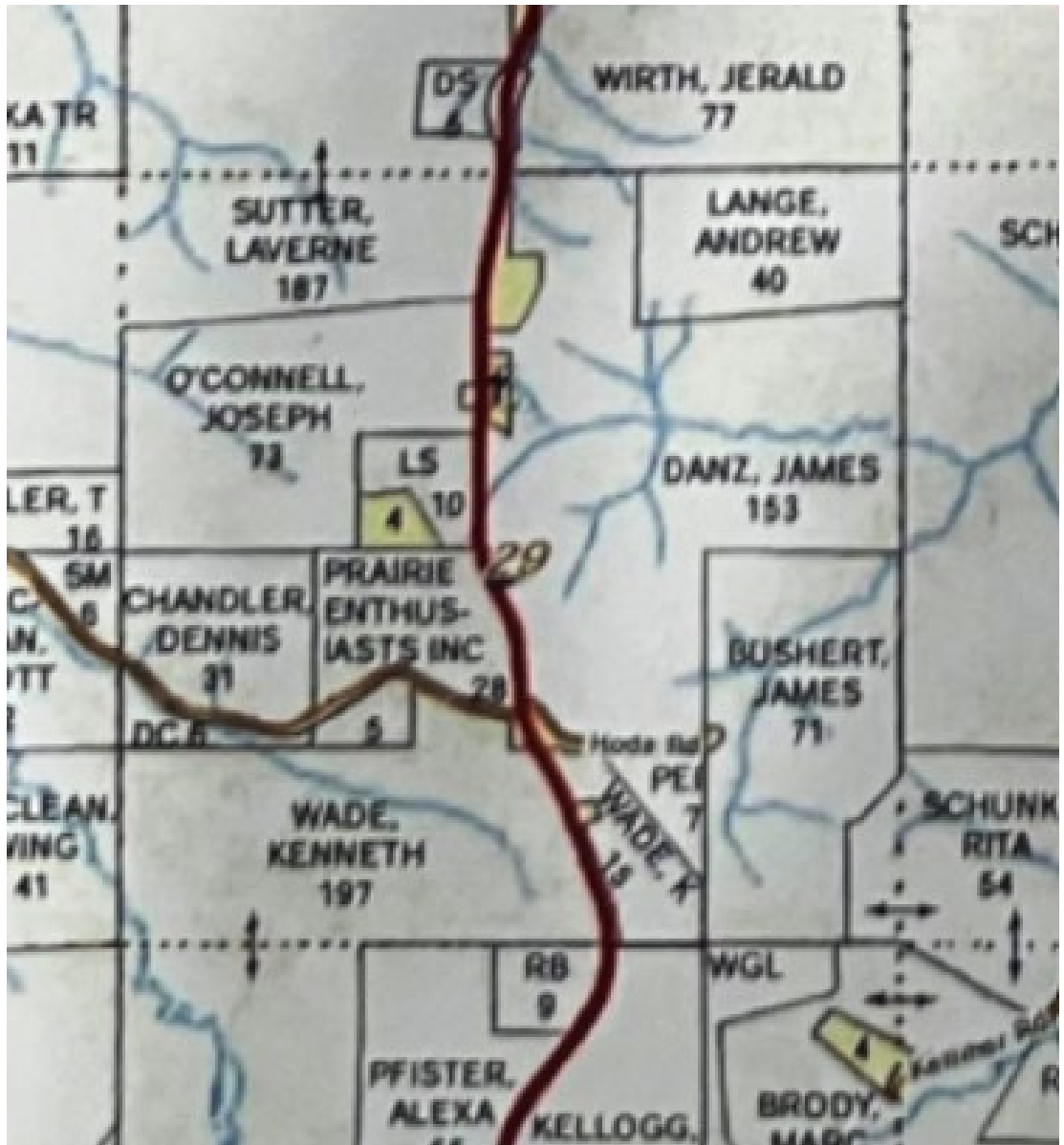
Aerial photograph from the early 1960s, provided by Jim Danz

By 1985 the 1985 Vermont Plat shows the farm as subdivided with James Danz having 170.1 acres in Section 29, D. Deneen having 15.6 acres in Section 29, John and Donald Deneen having 117.7 acres in Section 29.



From 1985 Vermont Township plat

By 2018, as shown in the 2018 Vermont Plat, Jim Danz is shown as owing 153 acres in Section 29.



2018 Plat, James Danz, 153 acres in Section 29

What follows is another “Now” photograph from Abbey Miskimen’s drone in October 2022.



Photograph from 2022 by Abbey Miskimen

There are many more trees than in previous years. Jim no longer milks cows. He rents out approximately 80 tillable acres.

Jim commented that after 168 years of the land being in the ownership of members of the same family using it in a family dairy operation, it is very difficult for small scale farmers to survive these days.

Summary:

The Deneen family descendants of P.K. Deneen maintained ownership of the land that P.K. received from the U.S. Land office in 1854 until today.

However, it is difficult for small scale farmers of hilly land typical of Vermont Township to survive, including the present owner of the land, a descendant of P.K. Deneen.

9. The Miller Farm

Section 3 of Vermont Township
Harold Miller and David Stanfield

Harold Miller recalls life and work on the farm.

My father, Jack Miller bought the farm of about 160 acres in 1936 with barn, outbuildings, and house from long time farmer E. Punswick who fell prey to the Great Depression. The farmland lies on both sides of Blue Mounds Trail. There were about 90 acres tillable. Three crops were usually raised each year, corn, oats and hay (clover, alfalfa mixed with timothy). The crops were planted in rotation so that about one third of the cropland was devoted to each crop each year. That was done to insure that if growing conditions were not sufficient to produce enough corn, oats or hay for the livestock, we would purchase what was needed from the cooperative or from another farmer who had for sale what we needed.

The livestock operation usually consisted of 25 -30 dairy cows. About 500 to 600 pounds of milk was hauled to the Vermont Cheese Factory every day.

The operation also included about 1,000 laying chickens. producing daily dozens of eggs which we packed into cases that held 30 dozen each. We would load the cases on to the pickup every Saturday and deliver them to the Mazomanie Egg Company.

Land preparation for the planting season was done differently from today's minimum tillage of the soil. During the 1950's and 1960's, the ground was plowed followed by disking (sometimes twice because of the clay type soil). We then pulled a drag to level the ground for planting corn. After the corn was 3-4 inches high, we had to cultivate the fields to get rid of the weeds. We usually cultivated 3 times until corn reached about two feet in height. Needless to say, this process caused severe soil erosion if heavy rain storms occurred.

We had some machinery, but much of the work was labor intensive, hand shocking of the corn, gathering and packing 30 dozen eggs every Saturday to Mazomanie, hauling 85 lb cans of milk to the Vermont Cheese Factory every morning 7 days a week. I am glad that I lived that life when growing up, but I would not wish it on anybody today.

We operated the dairy and chicken farm for about 30 years until 1966 when my parents sold the farm to Bill Parrell. My father was 86 years old at the time of the sale, having managed the farm in his later years gradually without the help of his children who had left the farm to study or through the draft. He and my mother lived another 10 years at their home in Black Earth.

Bill Parrell lived on the farm and converted property to a hog operation until 1984 when a tornado destroyed the barn and outbuildings. Only the house's lower floor was saved.

Without livestock, buildings or insurance Bill sold the farm around 1987.

The land previously in the J.C. Miller farm but north of road was divided into four parcels, 13 acres owned by Richard Parrell Trust, 9 acres owned by Don Parrell, 9 acres owned by Ward and Linda Winchip, 14 acres owned by Antonie Trust; All but three acres of the old J.C. Miller farm south of road in Section 10 has been incorporated into 237 acre property owned by neighbor John Hallick. A three acre parcel south of Blue Mounds Trail where half of the Miller house left by the tornado is located is now owned by Casey and Lauren Friedrick.

How the Antonie family acquired a parcel

Peter and Kris met at West High School in Madison, married and embarked on careers. Peter taught Science in secondary school in Waukesha, with an early interest in environmental concepts and related emerging crises. His work change led them to move back to SW Wisconsin. They decided to build a house in Black Earth, with innovative solar and efficient energy design features. That home was damaged in the 1984 tornado.

At a luncheon at the Vermont Church held to encourage families damaged by the tornado, they spoke with Dave Dybdahl. Dave knew that Peter liked to sing and he invited Peter to join the Vermont Church choir. Peter thought that if the Church had people who would invite non-members to be in its choir, he wanted to be part of a community of such people.

In the early 1990s at the Church, they met Don and Marguerite Parrell and became friends. As Peter and Kris approached retirement when living in their Black Earth home, they decided that they wanted to live in a more rural context, with sufficient land for a garden and to experiment with establishing prairie and encouraging wildlife.

They learned that the Parrells were open to selling some land for a home. So, he and Kris bought a 14 acre parcel from Don Parrell in 2006 and worked with Dane County to re-zone that land as residential to allow them to build a home there. The land is steep going up the hill from Blue Mounds Trail. Locating a building site and land for a driveway required many consultations.

Peter, Kris and the builders, after consulting with the Town's Planning Commission, finally agreed on a building site and the driveway. They contracted with an engineer for preparing a driveway plan acceptable to the Town of Vermont Board.

Their interest in solar and energy efficiency led to a careful study with an architect with experience incorporating solar panels and various energy efficiency features into home building. They oriented the house and built roofs and overhangs in a way to maximize capture of solar radiation during the cooler months while protecting the house from that radiation during the hotter months.

This parceling of former farmland is occurring in most parts of Vermont Township. We have seen major changes in the management of land in Vermont Township, from farmers-owners of the land to non-farmers or part time farmers. These new land owners rent substantial proportions of the cultivable land out to large scale land cultivators or enter the fields into the federal Conservation Reserve Program. The new landowners make a substantial portion of their family income from off farm work or from small businesses located on their land.

The comparison of the *Then* photo from 1957 and *Now* photo from 2023 of the Miller farmstead illustrates this transformation.



Then photo of the J.C. Miller family farm, taken in 1954, provided by Harold Miller

After the 1984 tornado, only the lower half of the house was salvaged shown in the *Now* photo below.



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

These changing patterns of land ownership have implications for Town Government, particularly the management of Township roads. Large farming implements travelling from place to rented place cause more wear and tear of Township roads than the previous family farmer owned, largely self contained model of land management. At the same time the new non-farmer owners of land rely on Township roads to get to and from their jobs, or to engage in “amazon” commerce. They pay a growing proportion of property taxes for the increasing costs of the upkeep of those Township roads. The small and irregular fields of relatively lower productivity land produce lower rents to the owners which often barely pay the property taxes.

10. The Helmenstine Farm

Section 6, Vermont Township
By Jerome and Jackie Helmenstine

The 300-acre Helmenstine Farm, located on the western edge of the Town of Vermont on County Road FF, has been in the Helmenstine family for over 100 years, and is now managed by Jerome and Jackie Helmenstine.

Jerome grew up on the farm when cattle pastured in the approximately 130 acres of woods. Fences had to be repaired each spring to contain them. The woods were like manicured parks, with stately burr oaks, hickory, white and red oak and a few walnuts. These trees framed the cultivated fields stretching from the ridges on the south and west to the marsh land bordering East Branch of the Blue Mounds Creek across FF. Some wooded ridges had been cleared for work land, as Jerome says, "to help pay the mortgage and taxes on the land".

The farm was homesteaded in 1897 by Jerome's great grandparents, Charles and Henrietta Helmenstine. Jerome's grandparents, Emma and Gus Helmenstine operated the dairy farm, supplemented with hogs, chickens and crops until 1961, when it was taken on by his parents Donald and Mary Ann, and Donald's brother Duane, who operated the farm from 1962-1979. Jerome in 1979 assumed the management of the farm operation. The family remodeled the barn built in 1908 in order to expand the dairy operation. They added some stanchions, an upgraded milking pipeline and other improvements, including landscaping in 1984 to allow the building of a confinement area for the cattle.

Jerome increased his dairy operation from about 25 cows to 40 cows and stopped the hog operation. He shifted from pasturing the woods and creek bottom to a confinement system, and green chopping of forage and corn for feeding the cattle. He shifted from silo silage storage to bags. This revised cattle management system meant that that the cattle no longer roamed the woods. In a few years honeysuckle, buckthorn, and prickly ash invaded the understory of the majestic trees.

Jerome and Jackie married in 1987 and assumed ownership of the family farm. Jerome continued milking cows and growing crops. Jackie worked off the farm but handled much of the financial aspects of the farming operation. Big events were the birth of their two sons, Dustin in 1992 and Daren in 1993. Jerome and Jacki devoted their energies to making the farm succeed.

When the boys were about 4 and 3 years old, one day in 1996 Jerome came in from the chores and looked at the boys and realized that he had spent very little time with them. He also realized that he was turning 40 and asked himself if he really wanted to devote the rest of his life to the very time consuming work of a dairy farmer. He saw neighbors in the area expanding their dairy operations and land cultivation. Jerome realized that he also had to dramatically increase the number of milking cows and acres in cultivation to stay in business as a dairy farmer. Managing this without the family labor needed every day of the year for such expanded operations even if his young sons opted for staying on the farm more than a decade in the future would be difficult.

In 1997, Jerome decided to sell his cattle and rent the cropland to neighbors. He continued raising heifers for his neighbors using his buildings and yard and helped neighbors with the milking for two years. In 1999, Jerome used his skills developed as a multi-tasking farmer to work full time off the farm to not be tied to morning and evening milking. Jerome and Jackie decided subsequently to take

advantage of a well-constructed barn by remodeling it into a multi-purpose barn used for storage and even family events.

In 2002, the Helmenstines enrolled 80 acres of their woods in the Managed Forest Law program administered through Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources. This program reduces property taxes on the enrolled woodlands in exchange for management of the woods that encourages re-growth of hardwood trees and a flourishing wildlife. This work is also supported by the Natural Resources conservation Service of the US Department of Agriculture.

Jerome and Jackie embarked on a program of renewing the 80 acres of woods, a few acres at a time. They receive partial reimbursement for the cost of brush removal that allows for re-growth of hardwoods and the awakening of long dormant native grasses and plants. They envision the restoration of the woods to what it once was 40 years ago, but with more hardwoods, along with the addition of a couple of small ponds and their wood ducks and fish and the return of once rare birds, such as red headed woodpeckers, whippoorwills, killdeers, and even turtles nesting on the hills.



A *Then* photograph of the Helmenstine farm in 1961, provided by Jerome Helmenstine



Now Photo: Taken August, 16, 2022, 6:00 p.m., by Abbey Miskimen and drone

Over the years, some buildings have been removed and others added. The barn is still in good repair. But while the place retains an appearance of a dairy farm, the Helmenstines have completely changed their relationships to the land and the functions of the infrastructure.

The moon can once again be seen from the kitchen window shining through the burr oaks without the blockages of prickly ash and other invasives.

Jerome and Jackie's off-farm employment has provided a schedule and income that allows a life style providing time and resources for working with their property. They continue with work on improving their forests and marginal lands, involving their boys as well as other relatives in that farm work experience. The township's improved internet service has allowed Jackie to move her work home during the pandemic and now on a permanent basis.

Jerome and Jackie have observed some big changes in the community. The phone company moved from wires on poles to improved underground cables carrying the internet. More shopping is occurring over the mail and internet and through residential delivery systems. People in the community are developing small businesses in their homes. Traffic is higher on local roads, but the Town has well maintained the Township roads in support of small businesses and farms as well as supporting internet purchases and sales and home deliveries.

11. Brunner-Perkins Farm at Peculiar Corners

Section 5, Vermont Township

By Barbara Cadwell Perkins with comments by Dan Brunner

The Perkins family (David and Barb; children Jesse, Eric, Becky) purchased the Eddie Brunner farm in 1994. We invested in growing organic vegetables and selling to Madison area families in a Community Supported Agriculture model, at a scale to support our family. The property appealed to us because of the farm's deep rich fertile soils and its proximity to Madison, which would be our primary customer base.

The *Then* photo from 1957 shows multiple farm buildings.



BRUNNER, FRANK
Blue Mounds

Sec. 5

Rt. 1
195 20722

Brunner farmstead photograph taken in 1957 by John Drury

Robert Brunner purchased the farm from Tom Denney in 1904. The Brunners moved from a hill farm located in Sections 15 and 16 of Vermont Township, where they had arrived in 1875. The barn that still stands on the Perkins' place was built in 1910. The Brunners moved at least one of the out-buildings

from where Tom Denney had built them, on the east side of Cedar Hill and the North side of F to where they are shown in the 1957 photograph.

In the early 1960's you could readily see the foundation of the old Aaron Denney house that was located Just north of F and East of Cedar Hill Lane. Frank and Josephine Brunner briefly lived in that house after they were married in 1914. The house that Dave and Barb Perkins live in presently was built in 1924. Over 75 years of dairy farming and three generations of Brunners lived and thrived on this farm.

Now photograph;



Brunner now Perkins farmstead photograph taken by Jesse Perkins in summer of 2022

The only original building from the Brunner years is the barn, which the Perkins structurally improved. They added a packing shed (north side of barn) and an addition (east side). The interior of the barn was modified to accommodate vegetable equipment and walk-in coolers. A shed was built to house equipment. Two greenhouses were constructed to grow vegetables.

The Perkins farm, known as the Vermont Valley Community Farm, has been certified organic since 1999. The Perkins have cared for the land and water through labor intensive organic farming practices. An active outreach program led to the incorporation of hundreds of families as customers into a

Community Supported Agriculture business model. Between 1994 and the retirement of Dave and Barb in 2001, thousands of people have been connected to the farm and benefited from eating healthy, local, organic vegetables while observing how they are grown.

When re-siding the house, the Perkins chose the same width (vinal) boards and similar color as the original house and added a garage.

Then and *Now* photos of Brunner and Perkins children also show land uses in the background:



Then photo taken in 1942, provided by Brunner family *Now* photo taken by Jesse Perkins in 2022

Then: The 1942 picture is of Mary Brunner (Parrell) born in 1930, the youngest daughter of Frank Brunner. In the *Then* photo you can clearly see the piles of excavated dirt on the east side of the creek from straightening of the East Blue Mounds Creek, which occurred right around the time of the photo. You can see the old creek bed in the background. Beyond the old creek bed there was no road leading to the Booth property. Cedar Hill Lane, or as we called it Charlie's Road, did not exist until late 1946 or early 1947.

Now Photo from 2022. The *Now* photo shows Mischa Perkins born in 2013, daughter of Jesse and Johanna Perkins (Jesse is older son of David and Barb) in the same position with dog and doll in her arms like the photograph of Mary Brunner. Comparing the backgrounds of the two photos shows that much more of the land was under cultivation 80 years ago. The wetlands along the creek are now hardly visible. The hillsides had some tree cover then, but less than now. Both the wetlands and hillsides were pastured.

The *Now* photo shows much more tree cover in the wetlands and on the hillsides.

The land would have been farmed organically in 1942 (although the word “organic” was not used then). Chemicals were introduced in the 1950s and 60s as part of the modern farming model promoted in those years, and were presumably used on the land during 1960 up to the time that the Perkins purchased the farm in 1994. The organic practices used by the Perkins focused on feeding and improving the soil without chemical pesticides to provide healthy crops and using cover crops for erosion control to produce vegetables and earn a decent living from that type of farming.

During the Brunner family’s dairy years what is now wetland had been grazed. With the recent spread of the wetlands the Perkins farming practices focused on vegetable production on the tillable land while eliminating pasturing on the expanding wetland and let it restore itself.

As we gaze north across the valley with its wetlands, fields and hills, we are continually impressed with the beauty of the Town of Vermont and the healthy variety of plant life and diversity of the wildlife. Our landscapes are beyond compare. Once a house is built on a ridge top or on a hillside or on the edges of wetlands it is there to stay and the view-scape has been permanently altered. Houses respectfully nestled into the landscape, blending into the topography, help keep the integrity of the town’s beauty in place. As building takes place it is the responsibility of the Town’s Board, Plan Commission, and citizens to prioritize the natural beauty of this town before it is irrevocably changed.

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.

12. The O'Connell Farm

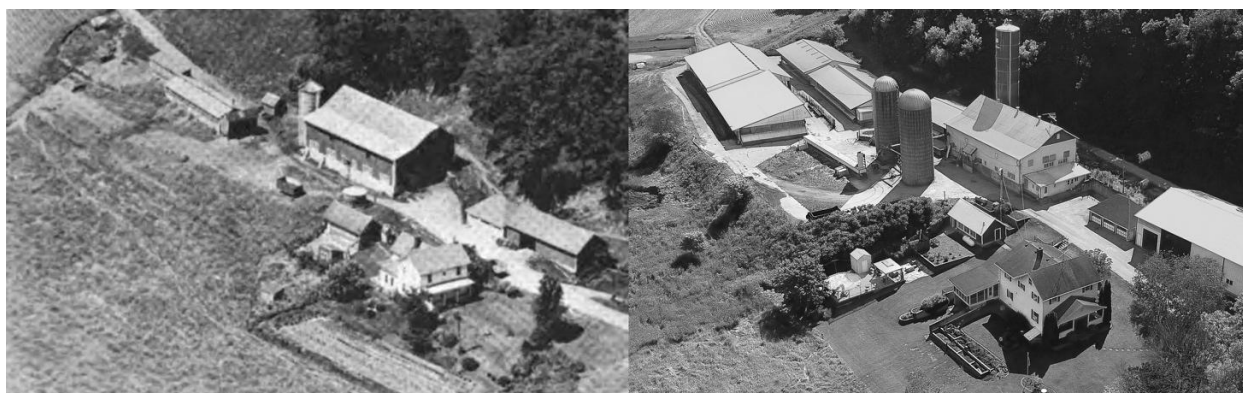
Section 5, Vermont Township
David Stanfield with Keith O'Connell

Keith and his brother Joe O'Connell grew up on the farm operated as a dairy by their father Ray O'Connell. In 1957 when the "then" aerial photo was taken the approximately 60 holstein cows were managed by the brothers' grandfather, David O'Connell. Along with approximately another 20 dry cows the milking cows grazed on pastures during the warmer months and were fed hay and silage during the winter months.

Ray O'Connell took over the farm from his father David, until he and his wife Lois passed the farm to their sons Keith and Joe.

After taking over the farm from their father, the two brothers expanded the farm enterprise into a confined feeding installations to shelter and milk a herd of approximately 200 milking cows and to store silage and shelter a substantial fleet of tractors and associated machinery. For several years they operated about 600 acres of land mostly planted to corn and alfalfa, using modern machinery and land management techniques to raise corn and alfalfa to feed the cows but also with soybeans in the rotation, for sale.

The investments the brothers made are easily visible in a comparison of the *Then* and *Now* photographs:



Then Photo: Taken in 1957. (From John Drury, [This is Dane County](#), Inland Photo Company, Chicago, Illinois; Photographer: John Drury}

Now Photo: Taken June 22, 2022, 4:13 p.m. by Abbey Miskimen

As the O'Connell brothers' operation grew they had to deal with the serious challenges of financing needed machinery and buildings. Then and Now photos show the substantial building capital investments which the family made over the almost 70 years covered by the two photographs.

The demands on the brothers' time have also been substantial. They hired some help over the years primarily for the milking operations (young men from Uruguay who lived in Barneveld) but the O'Connell brothers did most of the field work themselves and much of the milking work also.

A constant concern of the brothers was with meeting the standards for a grade A dairy operation to provide milk to the general population. They made investments in milking equipment and secured contracts with milk hauling companies to get their grade A milk to a buyer.

Over the years finding a buyer for their milk became more difficult as the number of dairy farmers in the region declined and the milk processors also consolidated. Manure handling and land management regulations from the State and County grew over the years and became more difficult to meet.

The brothers have rented many acres mostly from landowners in the neighborhood. In recent years, the Federal Conservation Reserve Program has raised the per acre rates for acres enrolled in the program. The new CRP rates for the mostly erodible rolling fields in Vermont and neighboring townships are often substantially more than farmers like the O'Connells can pay to rent those same lands.

In September 2020, while pumping out the manure pond, Keith suffered a serious accident which sent him to the hospital and laid him up for several weeks. He recovered his health to a significant degree, but with reduced physical abilities. This event precipitated the brothers' decision to sell the cows, end the dairy operation and shift their machinery and time to cash cropping of corn and soybeans on a mixture of owned and rented-in acres.

The substantial past investments in cattle handling and milking installations are standing empty. But the brothers have more time for their families and simpler though demanding work schedules using their equipment fleet to raise and sell corn and soybeans.

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.

13. Booth/Ludolph/Carlock farm

Section 5, Vermont Township

David Stanfield with Marlene Ludolph and Karen Carlock

The location of the 206 acre farm now owned by the Aaron and Karen Carlock family is at the end of Cedar Hill Lane off of County F.

Charlie and Rose Booth bought that farm in March, 1911, from Matthew T. and Susie Coldwell. The price is not known, but they were charged 4% interest.

The original road leading to the farm entered from Highway FF through the Brunner property. But because of low marshy land the road would be under water in the spring making travel difficult. Charlie told of the time they tried to drive a car up the road. It became mired in the mud. The next day the car had sunk so much that it almost disappeared from view.

The township bought an acre of land and built the present road, the entrance on Highway F. [From TOV History, 1977, p.149]

The James Ludolph family bought the 206 acres from Charlie Booth in 1968. The Booth farmhouse was in need of repair.



Photograph from 1969 provided by Bruce Ludolph

Jim had worked in construction for several years and had built the house in Madison in 1957 where they lived after they got married. After moving to the Booth farm, Jim soon started building a new house adjacent to the old Booth house, but the family lived in the old house for over a year. The three boys slept in one bedroom. The old house was heated by an oil stove in the living room, in a house which did not have much insulation.

Marlene worked the 3-11 shift as a nurse. One mid-winter night she got home in a snowstorm and had to walk from the mailbox to the old house. She wore only her uniform and a jacket and was very cold when she got to the house. To warm up, she took a bath. The faucet leaked a bit. In the morning she woke to find a stalactite hanging from the faucet met by a stalagmite building up

from below. A drafty place!! Marlene's attitude to somewhat primitive living was "You do what you have to do".

Their three sons were 11 and younger when they moved to the Booth place. Besides working on their new home, Jim got off work at 5 and Marlene had to be at the hospital at 3 p.m. A neighbor, Mary Frame, stayed with the boys from when Marlene left for work until Jim got home. Such is the culture in Vermont Township.



Then photo: photo from John Drury, [This is Dane County](#), Inland Photo Company, Chicago, Illinois; Photographer, published in 1958

The layout of the buildings and lanes was what the Ludolphs acquired in 1970.

Jim ran a line painting business for several years, and Marlene worked as a nurse. Along with their boys Brian, Bruce and Jeffrey, they raised beef calves from brood cows and farmed the land part time. Their boys still remember the parties they had at a nearby old Booth house, much to their mother's chagrin, until the Black Earth Fire Department burned it down in the 1980s. Jim found a woman's hatpin with the name of Susie Caldwell in the ruins of the old Booth house, which he donated to the Black Earth Historical Society.

Over the years the Ludolphs invested in a new house (which Jim built), and some new outbuildings. The Carlocks also invested in some remodeling of the house and in a new outbuilding, as shown in the *Now* photograph:



Now Photo: Carlock Farmstead, photo taken June, 2023 by Mitchell Travis and Abbey Miskimen

Aaron and Karen Carlock bought the Ludolph place in 2018 and arranged for Aaron's parents to live in it.

Aaron and Karen worked as professionals in the healthcare technology sector. They initially moved to the Town of Vermont on a 80 acre site on Union Valley road, for the beauty of the landscape and the proximity to Madison. After becoming more involved in the community, they decided to buy the Ludolph farm because the farm would be a place to provide for their families and eventually would be a place for them to build a future home. The goal has been to care for a few cows, horses, goats and eventually some produce farming and to foster an appreciation throughout their family for the importance of land and agriculture. 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 home on the land as well.

As Chair of the Town of Vermont's Board of Supervisors, Karen has become aware of the tensions 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. Going through the process herself of building a new home has provided a first-hand experience of how challenging it can be to balance each of those important community goals when attempting to site a new home. An example of the type of tension the Town confronts 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.

14. Steve Frame Farm

Sections 30 and 31, Vermont Township

David Stanfield and Steve Frame

Steve Frame lives with his wife Jean on a farm on Ryan Road which he inherited from his father and mother, Glen and Fern Frame. Glen served as Town of Vermont Assessor for several years, and Fern was an election worker at the Town Hall for 65 years.

Glen and Fern Frame did not inherit land, even though their grandfather, David Frame, had homesteaded land nearby in the Town of Blue Mounds. In 1939 they decided to go into farming. They got a loan from an uncle and purchased a farm of around 108 acres from the Mickelson estate on Ryan Road where Steve now lives. Then in 1959 they bought a neighboring farm of about 100 acres from Herbert Rindy where Steve's son Jon Frame now lives.

Sales of timber (for railroad ties) logged after the purchase of the Rindy place largely paid for that purchase.

Glen and his family milked about 30 cows in those years. Steve worked with his father for 11 years after graduating from the Mt. Horeb high school in 1971 in a class of 129 students. He had attended the local Deneen School for his first five years of schooling. When the Brunners moved away, there were not enough students to keep that school open, so Steve attended the Mt Horeb School for his remaining seven years.

Glen died in 1996 and Steve took over the dairy and land cultivation. Lacking help, and without farmer neighbors to share machinery and labor, Steve sold his cows in 1997.

This closing of dairy farms in Vermont has been a long trend. There are four dairy farms left in Vermont Township: Larry Losenegger; Eric Forshaug; Luke Sutter; and Sarah (Mickelson) Amble.

After selling his cows, Steve tried cash cropping for a year, but decided against continuing, and made arrangements with the O'Connells to rent his land.

He then worked for several companies, finally with a firm involved in laying oil pipelines where he worked as a heavy equipment operator in South Dakota, Louisiana and other distant places, with only short periods of time at home.

At one point he needed money, and he sold some land parcels to neighbors, and one parcel to Jesse and Johanna Perkins where they built a house and are raising a family.

These changes in the farming operation are reflected in the Then and Now photographs:



Then photograph from John Drury 1957 book of photographs.



Now photograph by Abbey Miskimen, 2022

The old barn is gone, as are several outbuildings.

Steve retired from the oil fields a few years ago and subsequently served as Chair of the Board of Supervisors of the Town of Vermont.

Steve has some comments on issues facing the Town:

- a) There are instances of over-regulation of residents by the Town exemplified by the requirement in some instances for an Engineer's Plan as part of the Town's review of applications for the re-zoning of land for residences and other buildings. Steve feels that some reviews have resulted in Engineers' plans which were really not needed. The Planning Commission should have at least one member who has the expertise to decide whether an Engineer's Plan is needed and to monitor the execution of that plan.
- b) There is a lack of preparation for the future by not laying out rights of way for extensions of the Town's road network. The Board and Planning Commission should be able to advise potential builders on avoiding these rights of way and setback requirements in their requests for rezoning.
- c) Are the Town residents still in opposition to allowing owners of 4 wheelers to use Town roads? Does the Town get any compensation for such users of Town roads? What about

compensation to the Town for the bike races—is it adequate for covering some of the costs of road maintenance?

d) As the number of farmers able and wanting to rent land decreases, what options are there for landowners without equipment or expertise to earn income from their land?

15. Sherven Farm

Section 36, Vermont Township
David Stanfield with Mark and Lee Sherven



Then photo of the Sherven Farm, Drury book, 1957

Now photo by Abbey Miskimen, 2022

Mark Sherven and Barb Iverson live on the farm in the brick home built by the Ike Halverson family back in 1923.

Mark's parents, Leon and Christine Sherven bought the 120-acre farm in 1952 which included a 101 foot dairy barn, a hog house, chicken and brooder house and other outbuildings. They raised their two sons, Lee and Mark, and worked hard as a team. The family milked about 35 cows and cared for another 40 head of dry and maturing heifers, in a pasture, hay and grain-based operation. Most feed was grown on the land they owned but at times other land was rented to supplement supplies. They also raised chickens, hogs and steers.

The prosperous farm was located on the southern edge of Vermont Township, about 2 miles from Mt. Horeb. In those days the family farmed with what was considered as modern technologies such as a 40 horse power tractor, 2 row corn planter, 2 bottom plow, 8 foot disc, and a 1 row pull behind corn picker. Later, a hay baler was purchased where bales were stacked by hand onto the wagons, then unloaded onto an elevator and stacked into the mows of the barn. They also had a very large vegetable garden, so canning and preserving food was always done. The farm operation required a lot of labor-intensive work, but the whole family enjoyed it and there was a love for the land that was lived on and worked.

In the early 1980s Mark assumed farming operations, and no longer raised chickens, hogs or steers, but increased the herd to 50 milking cows plus young stock, after his parents moved to Mt Horeb. Holstein cows were the number one breed, and with artificial breeding, genetics were much improved. All the machinery sizes also increased, an additional silo was constructed, and other improvements were made.

As the year 2000 approached, Mark decided to get out of the dairy business and began working for the Daisy Hill tree farm in Vermont Township. He became interested in the landscaping industry as a new career field and decided to start his own business and planted trees on 15 acres of his farm. He purchased specialized equipment for digging and moving large landscape trees to commercial and residential customer sites. The business focus became growing, selling, moving and planting large

landscape trees. He rented out the remaining tillable acres and the home was remodeled and added on to in 2002. Mark did keep the dairy barn, rebuilding the barn's foundations and made other repairs, and now uses it for equipment storage and a repair shop.

He focused on multi-media advertising for his tree business, establishing a reputation for healthy large trees for landscaping in housing developments in the rapidly growing Madison, Mt. Horeb and Verona areas. He considers his operation a "niche" business, which has provided a good living over the years, requiring demanding, but satisfying work that he is still doing.

Mark served for 15 years with the Town of Vermont in a variety of duties starting with the Planning Commission, then on the Board of Supervisors, with 6 years as Town Chairman. He counted as one of his accomplishments the scheduling of town road maintenance so that every road is improved on a set schedule.

Mark's brother Lee became a herdsman at the University in Madison, benefiting from his early years of caring for dairy cattle, hogs and chickens on his family's farm and has lived with his wife, Deb, in rural Green County for many years.

Mark enjoys his tree farm business. He also enjoys the role the farm plays in maintaining family cohesion.

Mark and his partner Barbara Iverson have 5 grandchildren, who with their parents, as well as Lee and Deb's two children and 5 grandchildren enjoy visiting the farm. Finding new things in the woods, making lefse or cutting a Christmas tree are some of the fun activities that help keep everyone connected to the farm and land which has been in the family since 1952. There is always something new to discover and explore. Deer hunting on the land is still enjoyed by family members and friends, too.

Regarding land use in the Town of Vermont, many residents feel that new home building should have low visual impact on the landscape, in order to preserve the rural look and feel of the township. The rural look and feel is why many live here, and continues to draw new residents. People should be encouraged to build in ways which "fit into" the landscape.

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. In this view, people should be encouraged to build in ways which "fit into" landscapes.

Concluding Remarks

The original purpose of project, Land Administration in Vermont Township, was to use pairs of “then” and “now” photographs, to provide input into updating of the Town of Vermont Comprehensive Plan. However, the richness of the commentaries stimulated by the photographs, both included in this paper, led us to realize that we had done much more than originally planned. The paper now should be read more as a compliment to the 1977 ‘History of Township of Vermont’, providing insights into how the management of the land has changed in recent decades and what factors have influenced those changes.

The project has more long-term value than originally envisioned. As Jon Urness observed, there is a high degree of entertainment and historical value of stories about how the management of the land has changed. After all, there has not been a comprehensive recording of Vermont Township family histories since the Bi-Centennial year of 1976. At that time the history of most properties in the town was dominated by “old” families, many dating to the years of homesteading and immigration of the 1840’s to 1860’s, along with a few properties owned by relatively new occupants. Today, it seems the opposite is true or at least the trend is moving in the direction of only a few original settler family-owned properties and many more newly arrived residents. And this means a more diverse base of perspectives.

Another notable change has been the decline of the once dominant family dairy enterprise model in recent decades. How the land is used and what enterprises have emerged have also become much more diverse.

When forming an opinion, implementing a town plan or codifying regulations within the Township, the easiest thing in the world is to draw only from our own individual perspectives and agendas to make those important decisions. It’s only natural. Our own experiences and opinions are the easiest to call on. Therein lies the true value of this project. With a brief document and at a specific point in time, we can learn what is important to a wide variety of fifteen land holders in the Town of Vermont whose experiences will certainly differ from our own. While reading these fifteen stories we would implore the decision makers of the Town, which includes elected and appointed officials as well as the general populace, to search for hints of new perspectives that maybe had not been thought of or considered before.

Absorbing the 1977 Vermont Township history and this complimentary study can give residents a common appreciation of the varied Township features and people and thereby can help strengthen the cohesion of the Vermont Township community.