



Unidentified Gunderson ancestors, circa the 19th century. The Deane and Marion Gunderson collection.

From the yet to be published book *The Road I Grew Up On: Requiem for a Vanishing Era*
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EARLY LANDOWNERS

Farming Yesterday and Today¹

Yesterday

Yesterday the farm was dreary enough looking for the most pessimistic crank the twentieth century has produced. That the farm was the real basis of wealth production then is beyond all question of doubt, and it is a marvel today that the grand structure began in so crude a manner. Let us picture a scene of say forty years ago, and I know there are many who read this can remember just how it was across the almost level prairie, stretching farther than the naked eye can reach, the rays of the setting sun make enormous shadows of trivial things, and not one sheltered spot is visible for many miles. The winter snows have been driven from the land, and nature's carpet is assuming the brilliant emerald hues so pleasing to the eyes. From some distant spot there are a couple of conveyances creeping towards the sunsets glow, one is hauled by two heavy draft horses and the other probably has a yoke of oxen hitched to it. As the rays of the sun assume a more horizontal position to the line of travel, the travelers decide to stop for the night. The animals are turned out to crop the fresh young grass that is so luxurious and abundant, and the whole family comes down from the wagons to do their several parts in fixing for the night. The camp fire is a small one in consequence of the scarcity of fuel, but the blood of these pioneers is of the thick and heart retaining kind and they are too busy to think anything about a possible coolness in the air.

The morning dawns clear, and the air is laden with a thousand odors that are peculiar to the springtime. The animals have thoroughly enjoyed their new pasture, and the family are out to witness perhaps the most glorious sunrise they ever beheld. The whole world seems aglow with the refulgent blaze, and the hearts of the beholders are touched with the mysterious something that is only felt in vast solitudes. Like an inspiration the thought comes to them that here would make an ideal spot for the home they are traveling to locate, and the impression becomes conviction when the richness of the soil is discovered. It is only a matter of exactness of location to them now, and the spot for the future dwelling is readily selected. Down an almost imperceptible slope there is a small stream, and on either side stretches unnumbered acres of virgin soil, ready for the preparation for crops of golden grain. The old tent and wagon covers are taken to the chosen spot, and are then put into semi-permanent condition and the fanning implements are gotten ready for work. In a few days the black soil is turned up to the action of air and sun, and soon the seed has been scattered from the hands of the sowers. At another point the ground has been put in proper shape to receive the seed corn that was carried so far for this purpose. While all this is being pushed forward laboriously, the

1. This editorial is from the Christmas edition of *The Reveille*, published at Rolfe, Iowa, in 1908. It was probably written by Joseph Lighter. In 1890, Joseph and Emma Wilhelm Lighter, came to Rolfe where he became sole owner of the *Reveille*. The couple had seven children. All the sons went into newspaper careers. One of the daughters, Cora, had a dry goods store in Rolfe. Another, DeElda, married John Gunderson and had a son, Deane Gunderson, who is my father. Joseph died in 1916 at 62. Emma died in 1941 at 85. It would be interesting to see what Joseph would write if he came back today and saw the changes in agriculture. I am afraid he would be overwhelmed by both the progress and loss that has occurred in the last century.

female portion of the family have planted the garden stuff, till the whole looks as if quite a colony had suddenly settled there. The tools are heavy and cumbersome and the laborers work from early dawn to deepened twilight in order to accomplish the desired task. After the crops are planted and the preliminary cultivation given, it is decided to build a house where the canvas shelter stands, and the male members start for the nearest timber. After several days of hard work they have cut a large number of trees, and gotten them trimmed so it is convenient to load them. The hauling is begun in earnest, and the distance being too great for hauling two loads a day, the one load is brought as early in the morning as possible, the balance of the afternoon being devoted to placing the day's haul on the structure they are looking forward to as their home. The charm that word "home" contains for those first settlers is unknown anywhere, and the tasks these pioneers accomplished puzzle countless thousands. The rude building gets completed before the really cold weather sets in and the crops are gathered as only first crops are ever harvested, with hearts overflowing with gratitude to the giver of all good gifts. The small grain is cut with the scythe, possibly a cradle is used, but just as likely not. The entire family goes to the harvest just as they did when the corn had to be hoed and weeded, and then the threshing is often done by the old-fashioned flail, some being fortunate enough to be near a horse power thresher. Next in order comes the marketing of a part of the grain, and the real work of this undertaking is not half told when one says that it often took three days to haul a load, and then get little more than half what the grain was really worth, much of the pay being compulsorily in trade. The social side of life in those days had its sweetest flavors in the fact that every neighbor was really a neighbor, and every one knew that the hearty handshake was an expression of gratitude for each others presence in the solitude. The strenuous life was never better exemplified than during the pioneer struggles of pioneer Iowa, and it is largely due to the underworking principles of the first settlers that the stalwart character of our state become hereditary.

Someone has said that those early settlers were contented with what they had, but it seems to me that the statement is not exactly true, else why is there so much evidence of their having striven for something better. They were fortunate who had a fairly comfortable home for themselves, and the rudest kind of straw sheds for their cattle and horses.

Today

The farmer in our crowded sections has made enough money to warrant him in looking for more land, most of them trying to gather enough to give each of the boys a farm of his own, while a few get tired of struggling along on high priced farms, and make up their minds that a few hundred miles farther west he may get a farm of his own. There is no guess work about the selection of the state to which the land seeker will direct his attention. The topography and climatic conditions are all published long ago, varieties of crops and average yields are known facts to everyone, and the railroad and market facilities are merely matters that a glance will readily put at his command. No very elaborate preparations are needed for a trip that may lie from a couple of hundred to a couple of thousand miles in extent, because he knows he can find hotels and other accommodations on every hand. He goes to the railroad station and buys a ticket for the nearest railroad point to the district selected, and the train takes him with ease and comfort to his destination. He finds luxury or comfort according to his desire or means while en route, and lands at the end of his journey in less time than it took the pioneer to get his camp outfit together. He goes to a hotel and engages a room and makes himself presentable quite leisurely, then call up the land agent whose advertisement has been the means of

bringing this particular district to notice. The agent dashes up in a fine auto, and they are off to look at some particular desirable farm. No need to dig into the soil for evidence of productiveness, green fields are all around being living witnesses as to quality. Should it happen to be a quarter or eighty that has no improvements, it is only a matter of hauling the necessary material a very few miles, and then engage the services of the right mechanic to build. When the house is already for occupancy the family arrives by rail, and later comes the stock and implements by the same route.

The work of getting the seed into the soil is neither long nor laborious, because we have the grain drill and the corn planter, both of which can do ten times more work in their line than a man of the past could. The cultivation of the different crops is simplified and intensified by highly improved machinery. Instead of walking all day behind a plow or cultivator, a man can sit in partial comfort, and a boy can do the work that took a strong male to accomplish in those days of toil, while the horses are not compelled to put forth anywhere near as much effort. The harvesting of all crops is more easily executed, each variety having a machine peculiarly adopted to it. The cutting of and caring for hay is actual pleasure compared with forty years ago, and the threshing of small grain has become a matter of hours instead of days.

The creamery and cheese factory have come in to lighten the burden of the farmer's wife, and it would be a curiosity to see the rows of milk pans of the past, while the hand separator had increased the cream production more than would be readily believed.

The stock on the farm is not a matter of haphazard these days, it has become a science that can be figured down to certainty. Highbred horses, cattle, hogs, sheep and poultry are all everyday occurrence today, and special breeds are really only matters of taste or difference of treatment. Accommodations for all kinds of stock are becoming more and more important every day, and a large farm presents the appearance of a fair sized village of about forty years ago. The lumber wagon has ceased to be the general family conveyance, and easy riding buggies and carriages, and very often a comodious automobile, are the accepted styles of travel. It is not the rule to see a man in the field until the stars are visible, the day's work being more easily done in less time.

The daily mail delivery has eliminated distances as far as the farm is concerned, and it is now a case of a daily newspaper as an everyday necessity, when the weekly paper was considered a much desired or prized luxury in the days of yesterday. The telephone has removed the space between town and farm, and all kinds of business has began to assume the rapidity of the city.

Instead of a few months each year at school for the boy or girl on the farm, we have all grades of colleges with all kinds of special courses, until every prominent faculty of a boy or girl can easily obtain the needed development.

The contrast between yesterday and today, as far as the farm is concerned, reads like an improbable piece of fiction, while the actual fact suggests some spasmodic revolution in its rapidity of consummation, as the farm was the real foundation of wealth production yesterday, we find it has retained that status today in every country, and now shows evidence of being the main support of monetary health of the world.

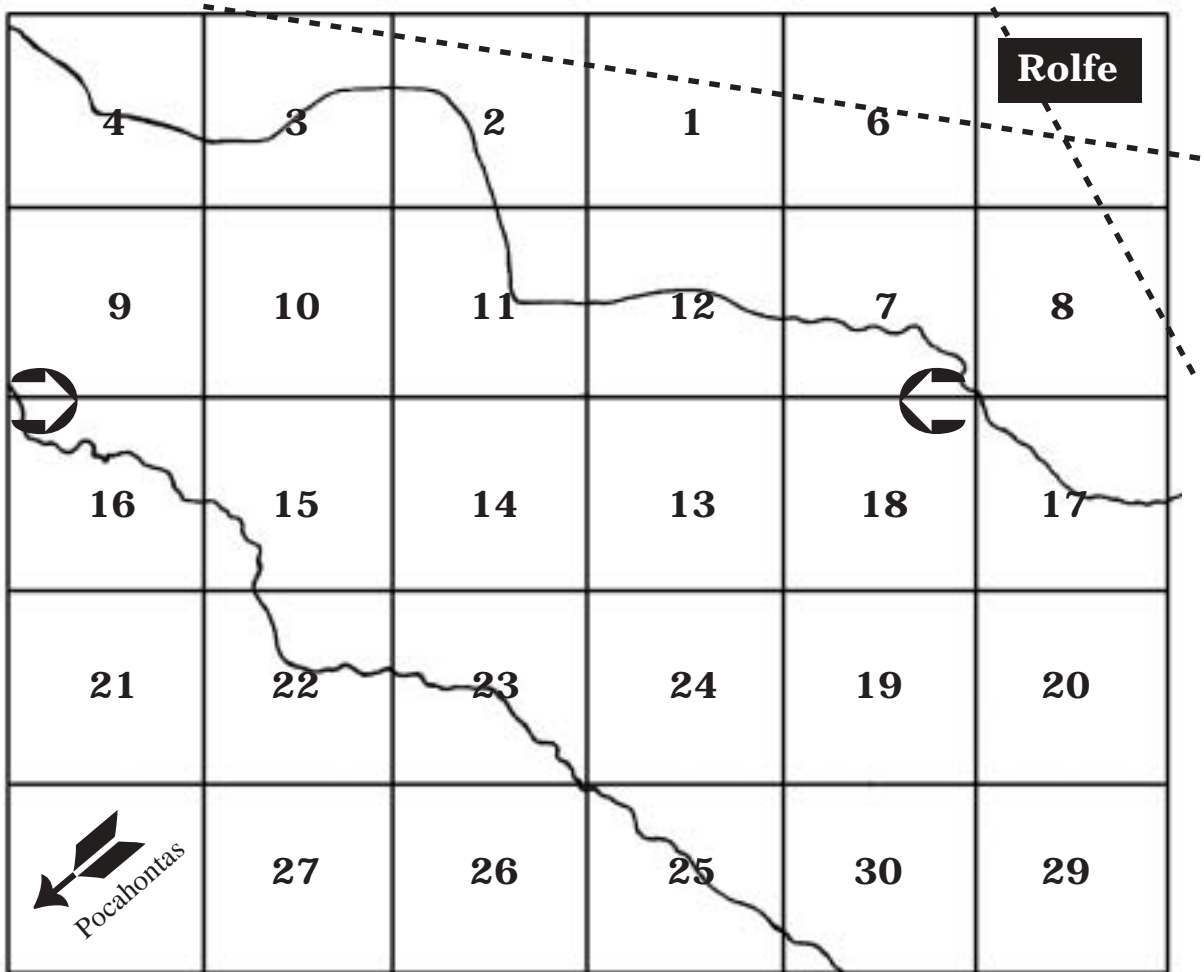
In these days of trusts and combinations, it seems to me that the day is not far distant when the farmer will be his own commission man, and the world's markets will be governed by the men who produce the material for those markets. When that day dawns a new era will be begun for all the world, and the man that brings the bread, butter and meat to the millions will be recognized at his true value. How this is to be accomplished is not in my province to declare, but I think it will be inaugurated through the medium of cooperation.

Pocahontas County Population and Farm Data

Year	County Population	Number of Farms	Average Farm Size	Land Value A	Land Value B
1860	103			\$3	
1870	1,446			\$9	
1880	3,713			\$10	
1890	9,553		173	\$21	
1900	15,339		182	\$43	
1910	14,808		182	\$89	
1920	15,602		175	\$282	
1925			171	\$193	
1930	15,687		174	\$153	
1935			173	\$99	
1940	16,266	2,039	177	\$111	
1945		1,990	182	\$148	
1950	15,496	2,032	179	\$233	\$311
1954		1,907	188	\$273	\$340
1959		1,767	203	\$332	\$395
1960	14,234				
1964		1,511	242	\$352	\$413
1969		1,369	265	\$513	\$563
1970	12,793				
1972					\$647
1973					\$909
1974		1,239	289	\$992	\$1,224
1975					\$1,723
1976					\$2,086
1977					\$2,131
1978		1,177	308	\$2,264	\$2,394
1979					\$2,810
1980	11,369				\$2,891
1981					\$2,905
1982		1,105	323	\$2,164	\$2,364
1983					\$2,272
1984					\$1,738
1985					\$1,173
1986					\$995
1987		987	354		\$1,159
1990	9,525				\$1,644
1992		919	391		\$1,641
1995					\$1,893
1996					\$2,224
1997		778	459		\$2,437
2000	8,662				\$2,329
2001					\$2,381
2002					\$2,546
2003					\$2,762

Census data from the Iowa State University Department of Sociology Census Service, Willis Goudy, coordinator, at <http://www.soc.iastate.edu/census>. Source A for land values is the federal government's agricultural census data. Source B for land value is the ISU Extension Program's Ag Land Value Survey supervised by Michael Duffy at <http://ia.profiles.iastate.edu/data/landvalues>.

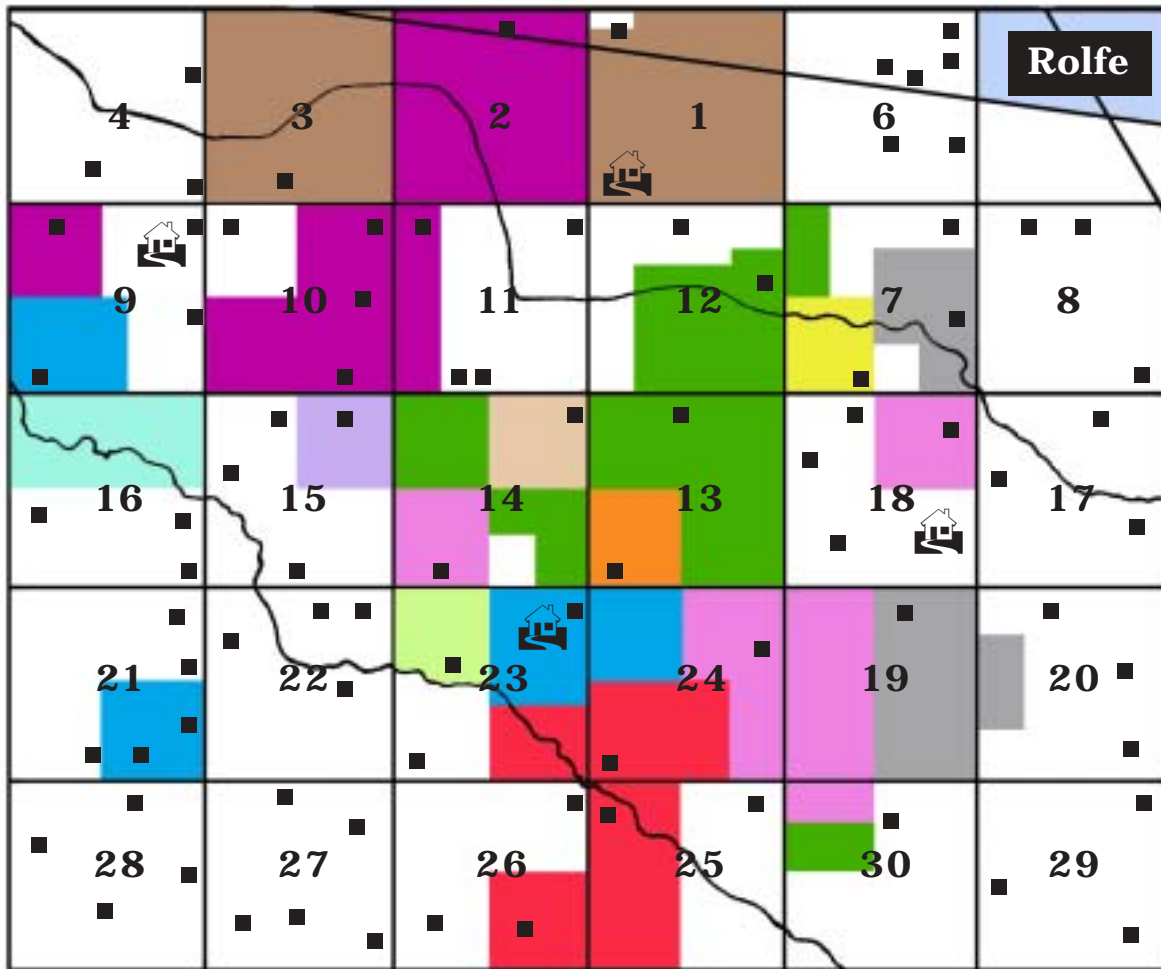
The Area Where I Grew Up



	The symbols mark east and west ends of my road. The dotted lines represent rail lines.
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1. One inch equals one mile. A square mile is a section of land and contains 640 acres.
2. The left four columns are now in Roosevelt Township, which originally was named Center Township. The right two columns are in Garfield Township, which originally was Clinton Township.
3. There were two railroads. The east-west one was called the Chicago Northwestern. The one that went southeast to northwest was first called the Des Moines-Fort Dodge, then the Chicago Rock Island, then the Minneapolis-St. Louis. Both lines were bought by the Union Pacific Railroad in the 1990s, and the track east of Rolfe was removed. Crooked Creek is the top drainage ditch and Lizard Creek is the bottom drainage ditch. Pocahontas County is one of 99 counties in Iowa. It has 16 townships, each with 36 square miles called sections, which are numbered consistently with the system by which the state was surveyed in the 1800s.

Modified 1901 Map



One inch equals one mile.

■ 1901 farmsteads

🏠 country schools

🏠 First century farm along the road. Only grain bins are left. It is owned by Marge Shimon of Pocahontas whose late husband's, Bernie's, great-grandfather, Albert Shimon, bought it in 1892.

🏠 The second century farm was bought by Conrad Laufusweiler of Ft. Dodge in 1894. The family name has changed to Laufersweiler. Both a marsh and Lizard Creek were on the half section. The family never moved to the farm, and it had no building site. It is owned by the heirs of Mary Laufersweiler Fielding who died in 1988.

🏠 The third century farm was purchased by Melvin E. Cornwell in 1895. His great-granddaughter, Joy Cornwell Palmer of Forest City, grew up on the farm and owns it. There are no buildings.

🏠 Hunter homeplace, 1896–1910. It is now owned by the Dahl family. One building is left.

🏠 Zeman homeplace, purchased in 1891. Barbara and Terry Zeman live on this well-kept farm.

🏠 Richard C. and Fannie Grant farm, purchased in 1892. Their son, Casper "Cap" Grant, and Addie Cook Grant bought 80 acres on the north side of Section 15 in 1920 and then lived and farmed there. Their son Don, who was a participant in this project, died in 2001. No buildings remain.

Early Families with Large Land Holdings in the Area

Osburn J. Shannon, a cattle buyer in Chicago, purchased three entire sections of land plus a few hundred other acres in Center Township from the railroad in the 1880s. He never moved to the Rolfe area, but the Shannon Farms became one of the largest enterprises in the county with 3,302 total acres. Shannon's last descendant died in 1999, and the farms were bequeathed to Berea College, which sold them to an investor.

In 1882, James Henry Charlton, age 26, moved from Dallas County to the Rolfe area where he had bought 80 acres in Section 11, Center Township. James was manager of the Shannon Ranch from 1887 to 1897 and eventually owned 10 stock ranches, totaling 3000 acres. He had investments in several Rolfe businesses, including the First National Bank, an egg and poultry station, a mill, the grain elevator, and a car dealership. James died in 1912. He had previously sold the bank to Diedrick Brinkman; then his estate sold the elevator to Diedrick, Charles L. Gunderson, and another investor. James's heirs have sold most of their Charlton land; however, some is still owned by the family, although James and his wife, Franc, have no descendants in the Rolfe area.

Diedrick Brinkman of Michigan bought 160 acres in Section 24, Center Township, from a Civil War veteran. In 1873, Diedrick and his wife, Anna Wiegman Brinkman, moved to the site, built a home, and raised 12 children. The family bought more land, a bank, and a share of the grain elevator. Much of Diedrick's and Anna's land is owned by their descendants. A large clan of Brinkman offspring continues to live in the Rolfe area. The farm where Diedrick and Anna's great-grandson, Robert, and family live in Section 18, Garfield Township, is on the east end of the road where I grew up.

In 1881, Anna Wiegman Brinkman's brothers, Herman and John, moved to the section where Anna and Diedrick lived. Herman was married to Betsy Clark and later bought 200 acres in Section 9 that he sold in 1913. John expanded his holdings to have enough land to bequeath 160 acres to each of his four children. Neither Herman nor John has any descendants in the Rolfe area; however, John's heirs continue to own land inherited from him.

In the 1880s, three brothers from Oxford, Iowa, bought land in the area. Morris Ives settled in Section 19 of what was then called Clinton Township. It was later renamed and currently is known as Garfield Township. Morris married Hattie, the oldest daughter of Diedrick and Anna Brinkman. Their son, Arlo, took over the farm in 1931. His children now own the land but live out of state. In 1886, Leon and Louisa Ives came to Section 7, Clinton. Their great-granddaughter, Kathy Dahl, and family live on the farm. Milo Ives bought 160 acres in Section 19, Clinton, but never moved to the county. Instead his son, Robert, came in 1913 with his wife Maude. The place became known as the Maude Ives farm but was sold to Bette Brinkman in 1988.

David Dady and Rosa Beck moved to Section 13, Center Township, in 1882. They raised cattle, accumulated land, made loans to other families, but had no children. He died in 1916 and she in 1931. Their property has been sold, and their only relatives in the area are a few great-great nieces and nephews of David's sister, Mary Dady Sinek, and husband Frank Sinek.

Charles and Gunder Gunderson moved to Section 25, Center Township, in 1881. Gunder later moved on to Washington, but Charles married Dena Christensen, also from Wisconsin, and the couple built the Gunderson homeplace farm and had six children. John was the only one to stay in the county. He married DeElda Lighter. They had one son, Deane Gunderson, who married Marion Abbott. Marion and Deane have six children, but only Charles lives in Rolfe; however, family members continue to own 2,935 of the 3,683 acres that the family had accumulated at the height of its land ownership in 1981.

Frontier Families

Introduction

In the late 1800s, many people settled the land and created the rural neighborhood where I grew up. Unless their stories were passed along to their descendants, memories of the people who moved away, including information about their aspirations and challenges, have largely been forgotten. There are few, if any, clues as to who some of those descendants might be and where they might live. Other families are more easily remembered because they are named as landowners on old maps, they wielded great influence, or they had several descendants who populated the area for subsequent generations. However, for most families, the time came when there was no longer anyone living in the area who carried their surname.

It has been interesting to ferret out the stories of some of the families whose names were bantered about when I was a child as I listened to my parents and their friends reminisce about local history. Despite a good deal of research, it is difficult to know much about the lives of even the more prominent families. Much of the information about them simply has not been passed along. Some of the people who I presumed could relay information about the early history of the area had only vague memories; other persons had vivid memories but not ones that matched the factual record or the stories of other descendants. In the end, I pieced together information from paper documents with snippets of people's versions of history to prepare biographical sketches of some of the more-renowned early families.

The Shannon Farms

The 1904 book, *A Pioneer History of Pocahontas County*, reports, "Osburn J. Shannon, a commission stockdealer of Chicago, at an early day foreseeing the future development of Northwestern Iowa, purchased all of sections 1, 3 and 5 and 240 acres on section 7, Center Township, making altogether 2,160 acres."

James (Jim) Craig, who lives near Pocahontas and was manager of the Shannon Farms from 1967 to the end of the twentieth century, supplemented this history of the ranch. He began by saying that the Shannon Farms had amassed a total of 3,302 acres.

Jim said that O.B. (the name people called Osburn Shannon) lived in Chicago and was acquainted with a neighbor who was a railroad company president. The neighbor told O.B. that there was good land in Iowa that his company owned but had not yet been plotted. He suggested O.B. should invest in it.

Records at the county auditor's office show that Shannon acquired the land from the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad Company with a purchase of a portion of Section 1 in 1881. Included in Section 1 was a site known as Ruben's Landing where trains loaded and unloaded before a stopping place and depot were located in the current town of Rolfe. The history book goes on to say:

These sections are enclosed with good fences and with the exception of 300 acres under cultivation, are used for pasturing and feeding the large herds of cattle and hogs that are annually prepared here for the Chicago market. This ranch is one of the largest business enterprises in Pocahontas county, about 500 head of hogs and 1200 head of fat cattle being annually shipped from it. The value of the annual sales ranges from \$60,000 to \$70,000. About 500 tons of hay are made each year, and during last year 100,000 bushels of ear corn were purchased from the neighbors.

According to Jim, Shannon had one daughter, Mary S. Shannon, who married Alford C. Tyler. Mary took over the farms and visited them often in the 1940s. She and her husband had one child, Robert Dixon Tyler, who became an architect in Chicago and began overseeing the farms. He had two children. His daughter Elizabeth died of leukemia at age 12. His son Bobbie became an attorney and was gradually assuming responsibility for the farms. Robert planned to retire; however, Bobbie died of brain cancer in the mid-1980s at age 45. The misfortune meant that Robert, a septuagenarian and the last of the Tyler line, had to continue overseeing the farms. Robert's wife, Helen, died in the late 1980s.

Mary Shannon Tyler had specified in her will that if there were no remaining blood relatives of the Tyler family, the Shannon farms should go to Berea College in Kentucky. Jim says that Robert visited Berea to tell officials the school would receive nearly 3,000 acres upon his death, but the administrators were indifferent. They probably didn't know the value of the land would be five to six million dollars. Robert died in 1999.

Berea sold the farms to James Satori of Florida. He kept the tenants who were renting from the Tyler family, but he gave them cash rent contracts rather than sharing the inputs and proceeds on a 50-50 basis. The properties still have the incorporated name of Shannon Farms. Berea kept the money, stock, and other assets of the farms that Mary Shannon Tyler stipulated be given to the college.

Jim says the Tyler family visited the Rolfe area four times a year to meet with him and the various tenants. However, in the last decade of Robert's life, Jim made all the decisions. He apprised Robert of his actions, but Bob (as Jim refers to the octogenarian) trusted Jim with all matters including grain sales and banking. Jim and his wife Mildred think a lot of Bob and Helen Tyler. He said they were "well-to-do people but as common as could be and supportive of the arts and education."

The Charlton Farms

The 1904 *History of Pocahontas County* tells about the Charlton Ranch, saying, "In 1882, James Henry Charlton, a young man, resident of Dallas county, bought the W1/2 NW1/4 Sec. 11, Center township — 80 acres — and erected some improvements and prepared a home for his father and family who arrived the next spring."

The Charlton family had resided in Ohio before moving to Iowa. James's father, Jesse, was 64 years old and a widower when he and six of his nine surviving children moved to the Rolfe area. James was 26. The book continues:

James embarked in the business of raising corn, hogs and cattle — the corn for feed and the stock for the city market. The profits, from time to time, have been invested in more land, and he is now the owner of 3,000 acres, to the successful management of which he gives his entire time and attention.

This land is in Pocahontas County and Palo Alto County and is divided into ten farms on each of which a house and other outbuildings have been erected. These farm houses are occupied by persons or families who have been employed at an annual salary, with the understanding that they shall board from one to three other persons as occasion may require.

The aim, in their management, has been to mature for the city market each year all the hogs and cattle possible. During recent years about 2,500 head of cattle have been carried and to supply their needs in the summer season it has been necessary to purchase from 60,000 to 80,000 bushels of corn, in addition to the large quantity raised on the farms.

One cannot read the story of the rapid growth of this ranch, whereby in eighteen years it was increased from 80 to 3,060 acres, yielding a gross annual income of more than \$100,000, without being impressed with the thought that its proprietor and manager has found the golden secret of “how to make the farm pay.” As a farmer he has certainly found the philosopher’s stone — the secret of success — and his wisdom appears in strictly adhering to it. That which has been achieved is a practical illustration of the possibilities of the Iowa farm and the kind of management needed to secure the best results.

It is difficult to read this success story without thinking of James’s connection with Osburn Shannon, owner of the Shannon Ranch that James managed from 1887 to 1897, and wondering what opportunities he was able to take advantage of in that position. Nor can one ignore that the 1887 plat map shows that 320 acres of his land was originally listed under the name of W.H. Brenton. W.H. was kin to James’s mother, Sara Ann Brenton Charlton, who died in Dallas County in 1868. William H. Brenton and his sons of Dallas County founded the Brenton Bank that continued to be a major bank in the Midwest until the 1990s when it was bought by the Wells Fargo Bank.

In September 1891, James married Franc Otterbein of Linn County. It appears the couple did not reside on the farm for very long but, for the most part, lived in the town of Rolfe. In addition to owning ten stock farms, he became vice-president of the First National Bank of Rolfe and had other investments in the town such as an egg and poultry business, a grain elevator, and an automobile dealership.

James died in 1912 at the age of 56. His share of the grain elevator was sold to three men — among them were my great-grandfather, C.L. Gunderson, and another patriarch of the area, Diedrick Brinkman.

Clyde E. Brenton of Dallas County was the executor of the Charlton estate. In a court document from James’s estate files, Mr. Brenton said, “In resume, this executor respectfully represents to the Court that at the time of his appointment, the various farm properties of said decedent were rather heavily encumbered and that in addition to said indebtedness, there were other unsecured obligations of said decedent outstanding and unpaid, including notes given to Brenton Bros. of which this executor was a co-partner, of more than Two Hundred Thousand (\$200,000.00) dollars.”

Mr. Brenton believed that had he proceeded immediately to sell sufficient Charlton properties to pay all of the estate’s indebtedness, the sale would have exhausted the greater portion of the estate. However, he felt it was in the best interest of the estate to defer payment of the estate’s debt until it could be paid out of the rentals, earnings, and profits of the estate.

Mr. Brenton was required to sell only four of the Charlton farms — a total of 814 acres — in order “to pay off all debts and claims against said estate and in addition thereto, all mortgage indebtedness on the remaining lands and properties belonging to said decedent.”

Mr. Brenton ended his petition, saying, “It is therefore with considerable, and he believes pardonable, pride that this executor is able to relinquish and terminate his said trust, leaving intact in the hands of the said widow and surviving children of said decedent, some twenty

four hundred acres of farm lands, as well as other real property, and more than Fifty Thousand (\$50,000.00) Dollars in personal property consisting of grains, life stock, machinery, etc. on said lands all free from indebtedness or encumbrance of any kind or nature whatsoever.”

James and Franc Charlton had four children: Lucile B., Shannon B., Frank B., and Clyde B. None of their descendants live in Rolfe. However, Dennis Callon, who graduated from high school with me in 1963, is a great-grandson of James’s sister, Martha Charlton Callon.

The heirs of James and Lenore have sold a substantial amount of the family’s once large holdings, including their land along the road where I grew up in sections 10 and 11 of what had been Center Township and is now called Roosevelt Township. Clyde B. Charlton sold 560 of that farm in 1951 to Maynard Grossnickle, a cattle farmer from Curlew, some 20 miles northwest of Rolfe. Maynard rented the farm to tenants, including Russel Jordan. In 1966, the Gunderson Trusts (created for my siblings and me in the 1950s after the death of my grandfather) bought the land from Maynard’s estate. Then in the 1970s, some of my siblings and I bought nearby parcels, totalling 240 acres, from the heirs of Lucile B. Charlton Hall. I recall buying 20 of those acres for \$3,000 per acre in 1980 when land values reached their height prior to the farm crisis of the 1980s. None of us Gundersons have lived on or farmed the land but have rented it to tenants. In 2003, my next younger sister, Martha, was forced to sell 240 acres of her land. It sold for \$2,725 per acre.

Other heirs of the Charlton family sold 160 acres in Des Moines Township north of Rolfe in about 2001. They have only a 345-acre farm left. It is custom-farmed by Larry Pedersen.



Ana Mary Margaret Wiegman Brinkman
and David (Diedrick) Brinkman, circa late 1800s.
The Kyle Brinkman collection.

The Brinkman Clan

The 1904 county history book reports on one of the better-known early patriarchs of the Rolfe area.

Brinkman, David, (Diedrick) resident of section 24, Center Township, was born near Hamburg, Germany, in 1843. At the age of twenty-three, having learned the carpenter trade, he crossed the ocean in a sail boat that was seventy-two days on the voyage. He located first in Michigan, where he worked at carpentry. On Feb. 28, 1871, he married there Anna Wiegman, and on April 18, 1873, located in Pocahontas County, first in Clinton Township, and the next year on his present farm.

According to a family history book written by Diedrick and Anna's heirs, Diedrick bought his first 160 acres from a Civil War veteran, named Reverend Brown, who had gotten title to the land from the federal government for his service to the country. Diedrick paid four dollars per acre for the land, and the deed he received indicated the farm was marked by a rock and some deer horns. The county history tells more about David's story of settling in the county.

He is one of those hardy pioneers who were not frightened from the frontier by early hardships, and his splendid success on the farm places him in the front rank as a farmer. When he came to locate on the frontier his brother-in-law accompanied him, leaving their wives at Fort Dodge. They set out on foot at Manson to walk the distance to their new homes — twenty miles — and had to carry their clothing in their hands when they waded the Lizard. A few days after they returned to Manson, they sent for their wives

and families and took them out with an ox team. A few days before harvest that year the grasshoppers came and destroyed thirty acres of wheat and ten of oats, a loss that left David in the fall of the year with ten dollars and thirty bushels of potatoes for the support of himself and family during the winter. When the corn was ripe he went east of the grasshopper district, husked corn on the shares and survived that winter by making his home in a cellar and living on potatoes, cornbread and water. In 1874, the grasshoppers devoured the small grain again, but not the corn, and he fared better; but that fall and again in 1881 his crops and improvements were saved from prairie fires only after the most heroic efforts. In the fall of 1874 he got lost and had to remain all night alone on the prairie. In the winter of 1881, while returning from Humboldt in a sleigh, he was caught in a blinding snowstorm, passed within three rods of his home, but did not know it or discover the fact until he had gone two miles further, and ran against the walls of a deserted sod shanty. When he reached his home he was nearly frozen to death. His brother-in-law, after one year's experience on the frontier, returned to Michigan.

As the years have passed, David Brinkman has added acre to acre so that his home farm, which he has improved with fine buildings, contains 540 acres, and he is the owner of two other farms in the vicinity that contain 300 acres more. He keeps from 25 to 30 cows for dairy purposes and in August 1894, began to use the Delaval cream separator, the first one in Center township. The result of its use has been so satisfactory that he would not think of dispensing with it while keeping cows. He aims to keep a sufficient amount of stock to eat all the grain raised on the farm, and has met with good success in feeding both cattle and hogs. He is a highly respected citizen, was a trustee of Center township in '77-78, president of the school board in '76-77 and assessor in 1884. When Diedrick and Anna were married in 1871, he was 27 and she was 21. They had 12 children: Hattie, Caroline, Henry, Dora, Jessie, John, William, August, Anna, May, Glyde, and Idella. Hattie was born in Michigan in 1872, and the others were born on the Brinkman homeplace farm.

Kathy Dahl, mother of the Dahl girls whose skill in farming I admire, is the granddaughter of Dora Brinkman Ives. Phil Brinkman, a farmer in his 70s, is one of Diedrick and Anna's

grandsons and lives on land Diedrick acquired across the road from the original Brinkman homeplace. Phil claims that Diedrick gave each of his five sons their own 160-acre farm but that the boys were to share part of their profit from working the land with their sisters. Phil added that some of the brothers shared fairly with their sisters and others did not.

The farm Diedrick gave to his son Henry is in the northeast corner of Section 18, Clinton Township (now Garfield Township). That farm is along the main north-south road that goes into Rolfe. It is now a paved highway, and is at the east end of the gravel road where I grew up.

H.D., as Henry is commonly called, and his wife Nellie lived on the farm and bought another 160 acres in the same section, including a home where their hired hands could live directly to the west. Wanda Peers Hodgell and Lavonne Howland Page are two people I interviewed who were members of hired hand families and spent part of their formative years on the Brinkman farm.

Phil Brinkman also tells about Diedrick buying the First National Bank of Rolfe. Diedrick purchased a half interest then the sole ownership from James H. Charlton. The bank was incorporated in 1894 but had its origins in the Bank of Rolfe that was established in 1882 after its building was erected in 1881. According to the county history book, it was the oldest building in Rolfe.

Phil claims that his dad Gus, who was one of Diedrick's sons, advised Diedrick that it was wise for a man to stick with investments in his own area of expertise — in this case, farming — and not risk investing in other enterprises. Gus further encouraged Diederick to buy an entire section of land that was available near Rolfe for \$50 per acre. Instead Diedrick invested in the bank and eventually turned the bank over to his sons. John managed it and was assisted by the other brothers who were on the board of directors. However, their bank failed on April 4, 1928. The sons paid 80 cents on the dollar compared to the 50 cents per dollar that most bank-



David (Diedrick) Brinkman and his 12 adult children, arranged from the youngest on the left to the oldest on the right: Dolly Brinkman Freeman, Glyde Brinkman, May Brinkman Caffrey, Anna Brinkman Vaughn, August Brinkman, William Brinkman, John Brinkman, Jessie Brinkman Welstead, Dora Brinkman Ives, Henry Brinkman, Caroline Brinkman Olerich, Hattie Brinkman Ives, and Diedrick Brinkman. Circa early to mid-1930s. The Joanne and Robert Brinkman collection.

rupt banks paid their creditors. The reason for this high payment was in part a sense of family ethics but perhaps even more the fact that the Brinkman boys owned land and the expectation in the community that they pay their share. Subsequently the Brinkman boys mortgaged their land to get through the hard financial times. All the sons were able to retain ownership to their property except John who lost his farm.

When I was growing up, I was aware of the extensive Brinkman clan in the Rolfe area. In fact, there were so many Brinkman cousins — including Kathy Ives Dahl whose family farms the first farm along the road — in the Rolfe High School class of 1965 that it was difficult for them to find prom dates who weren't their cousins. The Brinkmans were also known for holding large picnics on the Fourth of July. The Gunderson family tree is much more sparse than the Brinkman tree, and my grandparents were our only relatives living in the area. We had no aunts and uncles or cousins to celebrate with, and it seemed unfair that the Brinkmans were privileged to hold large gatherings of their clan and have so much fun. Apparently the last Brinkman Fourth of July picnic was in 1999, and the event has been discontinued; however, several descendants of Diedrick and Anna Brinkman continue to live in the Rolfe area.

Currently, Robert Brinkman, grandson of H.D. and Nellie, and Robert's wife Joanne live in the large house on the highway at the east end of my road where H.D. and Nellie once lived. The west farmstead where the hired hands and their families lived has been cleared. Robert and Joanne have three young boys: Jacob, Thomas, and Sam.

The Wiegman Family

The account of Diedrick Brinkman in the county history book speaks of him coming to Pocahontas County in 1873 with a brother-in-law. The name of the brother-in-law is not specified; however, Diedrick's wife, Anna Wiegman Brinkman, had two brothers who eventually settled in the county, Herman F. and John F. Wiegman. I talked with Joy Cornwell Palmer, who is Herman's great-granddaughter and has a collection of material about the Wiegman family compiled by her late aunt, Frances Cornwell. When I asked about Herman's migration to the United States, Joy told a story similar to what the book said about Diedrick — one of a young man crossing the ocean in a sail boat in some 72 days. She also said several Brinkman and Wiegman families had lived in the same area in northern Germany. Because Diedrick was born in 1844 and Herman in 1845, it is conceivable that they were good friends as well as brothers-in-law and sailed to America together in 1866 when Diedrick was 22, and Herman was 21. John Wiegman, on the other hand, was born in 1853 and would have been only 13 when Diedrick and Herman sailed to the United State.

I talked with one of John's grandsons whose name is also John Wiegman. I will refer to the grandfather as John F. and the grandson as John. There are incongruities not only between what John and Joy reported about the family history but between their versions and what is represented in official courthouse records. I'll do my best to synthesize the material as fairly and accurately as is possible.

John F. Wiegman was the youngest of 10 children and lived in Germany with his parents, Heinrich Wiegman and Dorothy Schierholz Wiegman. At the age of nine, he began herding sheep and helping his father in the shoemaking trade. John F. then came to this country in 1871 as a stowaway on a steamship at the age of 18 to escape the kaiser's draft. He then worked for several years as a farmhand in Illinois for a dollar a day, according to one source, or \$145 a year, according to another source. German was the only language spoken in the community

where he worked, but the young immigrant wanted to live where English was spoken. The only English word he knew was hamburger. He had a German-English Bible he read every day that he used to teach himself English. In 1880, at the age of 27, he moved to Pocahontas County where he worked for his brother-in-law, Diedrick Brinkman.

Herman Wiegman was living in Michigan with his wife, Elizabeth (Betsy) Clark. Before Herman emigrated to the United States, he had helped his father in the shoemaking trade, and when Herman came to the United States, he worked several years in New York before moving to Michigan. Betsy Clark was born in 1851 in England and, at the age of 19, came with her parents to a farm in Michigan. Herman and Betsy were married in September 1872 and had their first child Ed in April 1873. That meant that if Herman was indeed the brother-in-law who came with Diedrick in 1873, he was already married and had one child when he arrived in the Rolfe area. The county history reports that Diedrick and his brother-in-law, that is Herman, after leaving their wives in Ft. Dodge and walking from Manson to their property, went back to Fort Dodge and brought their wives to the county with oxen. The question remains whether Herman and Betsy brought their son with them. Diedrick and Anna's oldest child Hattie was born in Michigan and was one at the time of the move.

Assuming that Herman and Betsy were indeed the couple that came to Pocahontas County with Diedrick and Anna, they then returned to Michigan where they farmed and Anna gave birth to three more children. However, in 1881, Herman obtained the title to the the northwest quarter of Section 24, Center Township, just west of the farm where Anna and Diedrick had started their homeplace farm. Herman and Betsy came back to the township with their four children, began their own farm, and had another child in August of 1881. Perhaps when they first arrived, the couple and their children stayed with Diedrick and Anna.

In 1884, another newcomer to the area, Cyrus Manley, purchased the east half of Section 23 just west of the Wiegman and Brinkman farms. He and Mary Ellen Altizer were married in 1869 in New York before heading to the Midwest. When they arrived in Pocahontas County, their oldest child, Almira known as Miney, was 14 and had three younger sisters. A fifth sister was born in 1886, a brother in 1888, and a sixth sister in 1891.

In 1888, John F. married Almira, and they made their home on the 160 acres in Section 24 that Herman had originally purchased for \$680. Herman had sold the west 80 acres to John F. in 1882 for \$340 and the east 80 acres to John F. in 1887 for \$1,360. Then in 1888, Herman gained title to 160 acres in the southwest quarter of Section 9, Center Township — a few miles northwest of the farm where John F. and Almira would build the homeplace for their branch of the family. In 1890, Herman bought another 40 acres in Section 9.

There was also another Wiegman relative who came to Pocahontas County. Herman, John F., and Anna had an older sister by the name of Sophia in Germany who married Henry Draeger. Their son, Fred Draeger, who was born in 1860, came from Germany to Center Township in about 1882 and worked for Anna and Diedrick. In 1893, Fred bought 80 acres in Section 21, Center Township, in the vicinity of his aunt and uncles. He eventually acquired a total of 160 acres in the section, but in 1927 he moved to Hollywood, California. However, he continued to hold title to the land.

According to Joy (Herman's descendant) the farm Herman bought, and where he and his wife Betsy lived in Section 9 — at the very west end of the road — was the Willow Farm. Herman and Betsy had five more children in Iowa for a total of 10 offspring; however, one girl died at birth in 1883, her twin sister lived a long life, and a boy died at the age of one in 1887.

Herman and Betsy moved to Pocahontas in 1910, when Herman was 65 and Betsy was 59.

They sold the farm in 1913. The couple's fourth child, Dorothy Frances, born in Michigan in 1879, married Wesley Cornwell in 1901. In 1915, Dorothy and Wesley bought a farm near Morton, Minnesota, where they established their home. Their son, Irving, after graduating from the University of Minnesota, came back to Center Township to the Cornwell homeplace on the northeast corner of Section 14 to help his uncle Will Cornwell farm. Irving started buying parcels of the land from his relatives and finally in 1946 obtained title to the entire 160-acre homeplace that his grandparents, Melvin Cornwell and Helen Bebe Cornwell, originally purchased in 1895. Both Irving and his wife Velma are deceased. Joy is their only child. She owns the Cornwell land but lives in Forest City in north central Iowa.

When John F. and Almina married, he was 35 and she was 18. They had four children: Henry, Lena, Roger, and Floyd. Unfortunately, Almina died due to complications from a tubular pregnancy at 37. John F. continued to live on the farm, but at 75, he moved to town and lived with his son Henry when young John was 10 years old. Henry died two years later, but John F. lived long enough to enjoy a celebration of his 90th birthday with the Wiegman-Brinkman clan and friends of the family.

John F. accumulated enough land to leave 160 acres to each of his children. One of his early acquisitions occurred in 1898 when he paid his father-in-law Cyrus Manley \$7,000 for the remaining 200 acres that Mr. Manley owned in the northeast corner of Section 23. That property and the Wiegman homeplace in Section 24 were bequeathed to his sons Roger in California and Floyd in Chicago; however, the property was given only in life estates with the offspring of the two sons eventually getting ownership of the land. John F. also had 320 acres north of Rolfe that went to his son Henry and daughter Lena. They both resided in the Rolfe area.

In researching the Wiegman history, I heard some colorful stories about Roger, who was John F. and Almina's youngest son. According to Roger's nephew, John, Roger was a real daredevil. John said his uncle imported liquor from Canada during the Prohibition years and that Roger once drove a car used for bootlegging into a haystack to hide it from federal authorities. Phil Brinkman, a man in his 70s and the grandson of Diedrick and Anna Brinkman, said Roger was a character and ran around with another character, Roy Zeman. The two had gone to country school together and got into bootlegging. The car they used was a green Pontiac with overload springs that provided a gentle ride and were perfect for hauling their five-gallon containers of moonshine. One time when the Feds were after him, Roger stopped at the farm of his cousin, Caroline (Brinkman) Olerich, who was the second oldest of Diedrick and Anna's 12 children. Roger told Caroline that things were getting hot, so she hid his car in a machine shed and housed him in an upstairs bedroom and fed him for two weeks. People who know Caroline's propriety would be surprised to know she provided sanctuary for a bootlegger, but when family members challenged her actions, she said, "It's OK, he is blood and kin, and we've got to do something [to help]." Later, Roger went to his partner Roy and said, "This car is hot, and we've got to do something with it." Roy assured him, "Don't worry, I'll take care of it." Roy's barn, like many in those days, had a sling and set of ropes and pulleys for lifting bundles of hay off a wagon into the haymow or upper level of the barn. Roy ingeniously used the same set of equipment to hoist the Pontiac into the haymow where he covered it with hay. According to my father, the car would have weighed much more than a ton while a load of hay would have weighed much less than a ton. The vehicle remained hidden in the haymow for two years before Roy brought it out and drove it again. After various close encounters with the law, John F. Wiegman, took his son, Roger, to the train station and sent him to Chicago to live with Roger's brother Floyd, who was nine years older than Roger and an attorney.

Roger eventually moved to San Bernadino, California, where he became a respected businessman with an upholstery, drapery, and cleaning business. Roger died in 1972, and in 2000, his widow established a trust account at the Rolfe Public Library that provided for a \$1,000 scholarship to be given each year to a graduating senior of Pocahontas Area High School who resided in the Rolfe area.

Henry, the son who remained in Rolfe, married Marie Hauck. Her father, George O. Hauck, was one of the founding co-owners of the Weible-Hauck General Store in Rolfe. He later left the partnership and began Hauck's Grocery Store which was active through the 1950s.

Henry managed some 2,000 to 3,000 acres of land: his own farm, property belonging to his father (John F.), land belonging to the Hauck family, and the Charlton farms. The families who lived on those farms and farmed them were not tenants in the usual sense of the word where a farmer rents the land, makes the decisions, and does the farm work. Instead, the farmers were salaried employees, working for Henry and paid monthly. Each morning, Henry called the tenants with their instructions for the day, and then he drove around the countryside to check up on their progress. Henry also owned the stockyards in Rolfe along the Minneapolis and St. Louis rail line. There was another set of stockyards for the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad. Henry also co-founded the Rolfe State Bank in 1934. The bank continues to operate in Rolfe.

There are no Wiegman descendants living in the Rolfe area; however, the heirs of John F. continue to own land inherited from him.



John F. Wiegman's 90th birthday party in July 1943. The guests included members of the Wiegman clan as well as several friends of the family. A photo was taken of him with the women guests, and this one was taken of him with the men guests. Front row, left to right: Johannes (Hannes) Olerich, Otto Alberts, George Wiegman, Floyd Wiegman, John F. Wiegman, Roger Wiegman, Charles L. Gunderson, Bert Young, John Carlson. Middle row: Earl Ives, Harry Spencer, Casper (Cap) Grant, John Wiegman, Jean Wiegman, Henry D. Brinkman, Don Henderson, Arlo Ives, Orvan Olerich. Back row: William Brinkman, David Brinkman, Ellwood Olerich, Gerald Firkings, Russel Ives, Carl Hertz, unidentified man, Russel Sawin, Bob Shelgren. From the Marjorie Hertz collection.

The Ives Family

In the mid-1800s, Warren and Maria Ives lived in New Haven, Connecticut, where he was a fish merchant but doing poorly in the trade. At one point, Warren joined the '49er movement and traveled west to seek gold in California. Having little luck, he returned to New Haven. In 1863, Warren and Maria and their young children — four sons and a daughter — left the East Coast, traversed the country, and settled near Oxford, Iowa, where they established a farm. In the 1880s, the two oldest, Morris and Leon, moved to Pocahontas County.

Morris, born in 1857 and the second son, was the first to come to northwest Iowa. In 1881, he came to Calhoun County — just south of Pocahontas County — where it is said he bought a threshing machine that he operated for two seasons. In 1883, he moved to the Rolfe area where he traded the rig for the northeast quarter of Section 19, Garfield Township. However, official records at the courthouse show it was not until 1886 that he gained official title to the 160 acres of prairie land.



Leon Ives and Louisa Ditto Ives, circa 1890.
The Velma Ives collection.

Leon, born in 1856 and therefore the oldest son, married Louisa Ditto of Clayton County in eastern Iowa in 1882. He was 26 and she was 19. In 1886, they and their two oldest children moved to Pocahontas County, where it is quite possible they stayed with Morris. In fact, Leon and Louisa bought the east half of Morris's quarter section in April 1887; however, they sold the 80 acres back to Morris in October 1889. Then in 1890, Leon and Louisa purchased a quarter section on the east side of Section 7, Garfield Township, one and a half miles directly north of Morris's farm. Interestingly in 1893, Louisa's mother, Minnie Ditto, purchased 40 acres in the southeast corner of the same section where Leon and Louisa settled. Both parcels of land, totaling 200 acres, are still owned by the family today.

Milo, born in 1859 and the youngest of the three surviving sons, followed an Ives' tradition whereby the youngest surviving son remained on his family's homeplace to farm and take care of his aging parents. Thus, Milo lived the rest of his 94 years in Oxford on the his parents' farm. However, frontier life had its appeal, and in 1888, Milo purchased the quarter section in Pocahontas County just south of the quarter section where Morris lived. Then in 1898, he purchased 40 acres just east of his farm, giving him a total of 200 acres in the county. Apparently Milo had Morris farm the land until 1913 when Milo's son, Robert, and his wife Maude moved to the area. Robert gained legal title to the farm in 1927 but died of a brain tumor in 1929. The title then went to Maude. Although she moved off the farm within a couple years following Robert's death, she continued to manage the farm and had some eight different

tenants before she died. Neither of Maude's two children, Russel and Mary, remained in the Rolfe area, and in 1988, her estate sold the farm to Bette Brinkman. Bette and her husband Phil live on the farm that Phil's grandparents, Diedrick and Anna Brinkman, owned. It is in the same section as the farm that had become known as the Maude Ives farm.

The farm where Morris settled was just east of Diedrick and Anna's farm. The first-born Brinkman child, Hedwig Anna Maria, known as Hattie, was 11 when Morris moved to the area in 1883 at the age of 26. Eight years later, in 1891, Morris and Hattie married. He was 34, and she was 19. The story is that Diedrick and Anna had required Hattie, as oldest of the 12 Brinkman children, to perform many duties: doing farm chores, serving as housemaid, and caring for her siblings. Instead, Hattie, a spirited young woman with the intent to get away from what she considered to be slave labor, eloped with Morris.

Family historian Peggy Ives has collected several stories about the family and published a two-volume book about the Ives clan in the United States. She says that Hattie told the account of her marriage to several family members, especially Hattie's grandchildren, who in later decades would recount nearly identical versions of how she and Morris eloped. Peggy thought the story about their eloping was such a good one that she had to include it in the book. Hattie's grandson, Dallas, who was born in 1945 when Hattie was 73, also remembers the story. He says:

Hattie told me hundreds of stories as a kid. She was so hard of hearing that I couldn't really hold much of a conversation with her, but I would go to visit and she would just talk, always telling stories of the old days. Of course I remember absolutely none of them, except for the story of her marriage, which I remember as if it were yesterday.

Another of Hattie's grandchildren, Jim Ives, had the presence of mind to write down verbatim what Hattie said one time when he was visiting his grandmother and she was regaling the family with stories of the olden days. Dallas has heard Peggy's and Jim's versions of the story about Hattie's marriage and says that some of their information is, "exactly the same version that Hattie told me, right down to the quote." However, Dallas also said, "Strange thing is that there are also a lot of details I remember differently. I guess that's part of what makes family history fun."

According to Peggy, "As a girl, Hattie spent a lot of time herding cattle on the open prairie in the area. It is not hard to imagine her meeting her neighbor, Morris, in the course of her duties." Dallas says Hattie became aware that Morris was interested in her because he often stopped to chat with her when she worked in the fields. She decided that if Morris ever asked her to go on a buggy ride or perhaps, even more daringly, might ask her to marry him, she would accept the offer.

Both the Brinkman and Ives families were members of the Presbyterian church where friends and neighbors often stopped to talk in the churchyard after services. According to Hattie:

One Sunday morning when we were leaving church I got in Morris's buggy, and Father came over and tried to take me out of the buggy. Morris gave me the reins while he untied the team. Father came to my side of the buggy and grabbed my arm. I couldn't believe he would try that, because I was so strong from working on the farm. Anyway, I pulled away, and he slipped and fell down in the mud. I looked over the side and said, "He's clear of the wheels Morris, let's go."

Hattie and Morris then dashed away in the buggy. Hattie says, “It wasn’t long (meaning minutes, not days) until we were engaged.” At that point, they started talking about what they would do since she could not go home.

The couple could not marry that day because it was Sunday, so Morris took Hattie to the home of his brother Leon and sister-in-law Louisa where Hattie spent the night. Morris then went to Walt Hersom’s farm, which was halfway between Leon’s and Morris’s farms and left his horses in Walt’s barn. Early the next morning, Morris drove Walt’s team to Pocahontas to get their marriage license. Meanwhile, Diedrick went looking for Hattie and stopped at the Hersom farm where he expressed his chagrin. However, Walt simply said, “Mr. Brinkman, I think Hattie needs a husband, and Morris needs a wife.” Diedrick, in his exasperation, replied, “Well, I don’t know what I’ll do without my helper.” The couple was married later that day. The marriage certificate is signed by a local pastor. However, no one knows the details of the event — whether it was a small affair at Leon’s and Louisa’s home with only the



Morris Ives and Hattie Brinkman Ives, 1891. The Sally Ives Quigley collection.

two couples and the pastor present, if it was held in town, or if other family members and friends were invited.

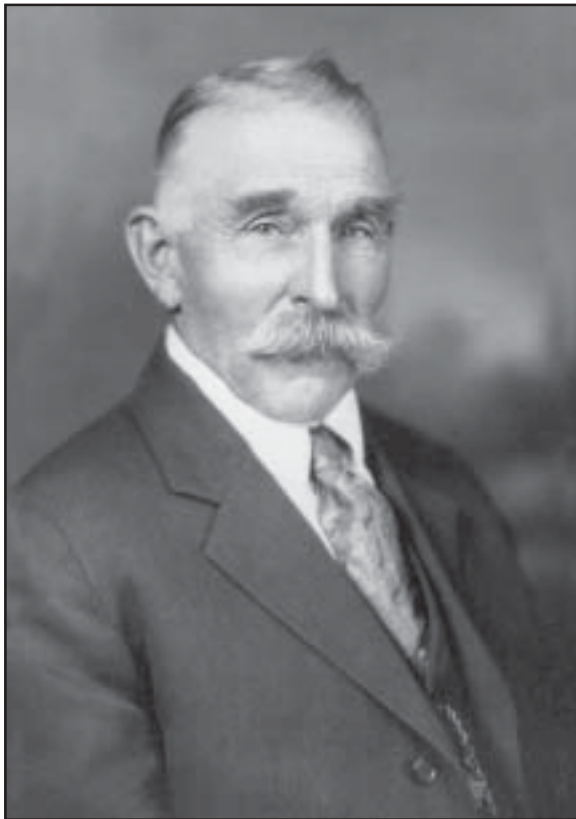
Following the wedding, Morris brought Hattie to his home. It was 12 by 15 feet with a stairway to a simple loft. He showed her the utensils and dishes for cooking and told her to make him a pie. She baked the pie, set it on the table to cool, and then went outside. When she came back, Morris had eaten all the pie except for one piece that he said he had left for her. She started eating it, but he grabbed and kissed her, using that as subterfuge to get another bite of the pie. As Hattie told Dallas, “Well, that was the first time he kissed me.”

The Brinkman and Ives families lived as good neighbors for many years, and Hattie often related, with a smile, that her parents accepted her marriage graciously. They were the young couple’s first visitors.

Hattie and Morris raised their first six children in their rudimentary, small house before building a new home on the same farmstead. The couple ended up having a total of 11 children between 1882 and 1915. One daughter died when she was only a month old, and another died at the age of 15. The other nine grew into adulthood.

Morris had a history of borrowing money to expand his holdings. In fact, even in 1886, he borrowed \$846 from the Farmers Loan and Trust Company in order to pay the purchase price of \$1,120 for his first quarter section of land. The loan was to be repaid by 1896 at 6 percent interest. Morris paid off the loan and the company released his mortgage in 1896. He maintained a similar pattern of borrowing from institutions such as the State Savings Bank of Rolfe, New York Life Insurance, and Collins Mortgage Company.

According to his granddaughter, Sally Ives Quigley, Morris was on an ambitious cam-



Morris Ives and Hattie Brinkman Ives, circa 1926. The Dallas Ives collection.

paign to buy enough land to give each of his four sons a farm, and in the 1910s and 20s, he was well on his way toward the goal. Sally says, however, that Morris mortgaged his homeplace in order to purchase other land. That was a critical mistake.

Although the national economy was generally booming during the 1920s, the farm sector was depressed. The First National Bank of Rolfe had already been closed in 1928. However, on March 2, 1929, Morris and Hattie took out a mortgage of \$13,500 from the State Savings Bank of Rolfe. Then on October 30, 1929, the Wall Street stock market crashed, and the entire nation was plummeted into dire straits.

On March 20, 1931, Morris and Hattie sold their homeplace farm to their daughter, Blanche Ives Sorenson. The deed included the phrase “except for the encumbrance of record which encumbrance the grantee does not assume or agree to pay.” Blanche was their fourth child, who lived in Estherville some 60 miles away. She was 34 and married to a photographer.

At this point, the historical record gets extremely complex. On June 7, 1932, the State Savings Bank was also foreclosed, and the state superintendent of banking became the receiver for the bank. Then a year later in June of 1933, the Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States sued Morris and Hattie, the State Savings Bank of Rolfe, the state superintendent of banking, and Blanche for the sum of \$14,853 at 8 percent interest.



Arlo and Mildred Taylor Ives, circa 1936.
The Sally Ives Quigley collection.

Sally says that her father Arlo Ives, who was Morris and Hattie’s youngest son and a 1928 graduate of Rolfe High School, was a pre-medicine student at the University of Iowa when his parents were faced with foreclosure. Arlo left school and returned to the farm where he worked to pay off the debt on the homeplace. Apparently, he and the other siblings who remained in the Rolfe area worked together to save the place. On September 5, 1933, Arlo’s brother, Glen Ives, petitioned the court, saying he was the legal tenant of the farm and that the crops were his and should not be part of the suit. It is probable that Glen, age 25, and Arlo, age 22, were farming with their father. Their older brother Earl, who was 40 and farmed nearby, probably assisted not only with the farm work but by borrowing money to help the cause. Then on September 4, 1934, Blanche and her husband sold the quarter section to Arlo. Eventually, the family petitioned the court — based on acts of the

1933 and 1934 General Assemblies of Iowa — and had foreclosure of their farm delayed until March of 1937.

Meanwhile in August of 1935, the court ordered the state superintendent of banking, as receiver for the State Savings Bank of Rolfe, to accept a compromise settlement of \$1,000 for the \$3,800 that Morris, Earl, and Earl's wife Ethel still owed the bank. The court claimed the settlement offer was "highly advantageous to the receivership." Finally, on November 22, 1935, the receiver for the State Savings Bank accepted the compromise settlement, and the Equitable Life Assurance Society dismissed its suit against the family.

The family's slate of credit must have been cleared because on November 35, 1935, Arlo obtained a mortgage of \$13,000 from the Equitable Life Assurance Company and in 1942 was released from the mortgage.

It is interesting that the Ives' tradition of the youngest son taking over the family farm and caring for his parents played itself out again with Arlo. In 1936, he married Mildred Taylor, an elementary school teacher. Mildred was born in Idaho but then moved to Wall Lake, Iowa, where she graduated from high school, then got her teaching certificate.

The young couple lived on the farm with Morris and Hattie. Morris died in 1939 at the age of 82 while living on the homeplace farm. Hattie eventually moved to Rolfe where she had her own home. She died in 1964 at the age of 92.

Sally senses from things she heard from Mildred about the years from 1936 to 1939 that Morris displayed symptoms of what today would be classified as Alzheimer's disease. Mildred told Sally that Morris had become a "grouchy old man" and that the financial crash also crushed him emotionally. This view is supported by an entry in Peggy's family history book that says, "The Depression after World War I struck savagely at Morris's ambition, and his financial loss contributed to his failing health."

Arlo died in 1974 at the age of 63. Mildred moved to the West Coast, and after several years in Arizona and southern California, ended up in Eugene, Oregon, where Sally lived. Mildred died in 1998 at the age of 88; however, her funeral service was in Rolfe and her gravesite is next to Arlo's.

Arlo and Mildred had three children — Carolyn, Sally, and Dallas. Dallas and I are the same age and were in preschool Sunday school together, then elementary, junior high, and high school. We graduated from Rolfe in 1963 and went to Iowa State, graduating from there in 1967. Although we saw little of each other during college, we were paired together at the university's first computer date dance. The pairings were based on 20 simple questions answered by each participant several days before the event. Most likely, our match had more to do with the fact that both of our families were Presbyterians, Republicans, and farmers from a similar heritage than it was an indication of our being a good match for dating. Carolyn died of cancer in 2000. Sally, who lives in Eugene, and Dallas, who lives in Houston, continue to own some of the land they inherited from Arlo and Mildred accumulated. However, they have sold other parcels, including 80 acres of the property once known as the Willow Farm at the west end of the road to their tenant, Paul Harrold.

Although most branches of the family tree begun by Morris and Hattie have planted themselves elsewhere, the pioneer couple does have one great-grandson living in the area. Jeff Ives, who graduated from Rolfe in 1975, farms north of Rolfe and has three children. He is Arlo's great-nephew.

Leon and Louisa had four children. Their son, Andrew, married Dora Brinkman — one of Hattie's sisters. Figuring out the Ives and Brinkman family lineages has always been difficult, but here it is: Andrew married his father's brother's wife's sister.



Andrew and Dora Brinkman Ives, 1907 and 1957. The Velma Ives collection.

Andrew and Dora built a home a quarter mile south of Leon and Louisa's homeplace on the 40-acre parcel that Louisa's mother Minnie Ditto had purchased along Crooked Creek. Andrew and Dora then had three children who survived to adulthood. Their son, Norton, went to Iowa State where he met his wife, Velma Gygi, who was from northern Wisconsin and majoring in dietetics. They returned to live on the south farmstead while Andrew and Dora moved to the north building site.



Norton and Velma Ives, 1980.
The Velma Ives collection.

Norton and Velma had eight children. Their fourth child, Kathy, graduated from Rolfe in 1965, then went to Iowa State where she met Gary Dahl from southwest Iowa. The two married and eventually returned to live on the family's north farmstead.

Norton went back to Iowa State and earned a doctoral degree in agricultural engineering in 1959 when he was 41. He continued farming until his death in 1992 at age 74, but he also specialized in crop-drying technologies and traveled to many countries as a consultant.

Gary and Kathy have eight children. Dawn, Heidi, and Anna are the oldest and have moved away. Mercy, Betsy, Caroline, Luke, and John are still at home. Along with their mom, they are the only descendants of Leon and Louisa in the area.



The Dahl family, 2001. Back row, left to right: Betsy, Anna, Gary, Kathy, and Luke. Front row, left to right: Mercy, John, Dawn, and Carolyn. Heidi was not present. The Gary and Kathy Dahl collection.

David and Rosa Dady

David Dady and Rosa Beck, were married in January 1882 by a police magistrate in Rock Island County, Illinois, just across the Mississippi from the state of Iowa. Their marriage license says David was 24 and Rosa was 19. He was the son of Irish-born Catholic farmers, and she was the daughter of German-born Lutheran farmers. David and Rosa moved for a short while to the cattle country of Audubon County in southwest Iowa. Then in September 1882 David bought land in Section 13, Center Township, in Pocahontas County from a man who had bought the property from the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad. David and Rosa built their home in that location and established a farm.

In 1883, David's mother, Bridget Dady, bought land a few miles away in Section 20, and it appears that Bridget and David's siblings moved to Pocahontas County. Although the ages entered in the 1880 census for the Dady family members, then living in Rock Island County, are inconsistent with ages reported elsewhere, the census information does provide insight into the family. It says Bridget was 52 and single, and her occupation was that of keeping house. Margaret was listed as Maggie and was 24 with no specified occupation. David was 22 and listed as a farmer. Mary was 13 and a school student, and James was 15 and listed as a farm laborer. It is probable that David had become the male head of the household, and his mother and siblings initially lived with David and Rosa when they arrived in Pocahontas County in 1883.

In David's obituary in 1916, The *Rolfe Arrow* said, "Mr. Dady was typical of this prairie country. He saw its possibilities, and as fast as financial conditions permitted, accumulated land. The feeding of stock attracted his attention in an early day, and realizing the profits to be derived therefrom, he thrived financially and died possessed of a half million dollar's worth of property."

Rosa and David raised Hereford cattle, amassed 1,230 acres of land, but had no children. Interestingly, the 1887 plat map shows a dashed line between Pocahontas and Rolfe, which went through the center of the property that the Dady's accumulated. The line could have represented a potential rail line. David and Rosa may have anticipated they would be able to



David and Rosa Dady's tombstones in the Clinton-Garfield Cemetery near Rolfe, Iowa, circa 2000.

load cattle directly from their farm onto train cars headed for market; however, a railroad line never materialized between the two towns.

Probate records show that when David died, his estate — in addition to the land he owned — included 37 Hereford cows, two red cows, 28 spring calves, one bull, one yearling heifer, 35 shoats (young hogs less than one year old), one mule, five horses, 1,000 bushels of ear corn, 250 bushels of oats, 90 tons of wild hay (about nine big stacks), 36 shares of stock in the First National Bank, deposits in banks at Rolfe and Pocahontas, and two lots in Rolfe. Rosa died in 1931, and the records for both David's and Rosa's estates show that the couple made generous loans to other farmers in the area, almost as if Rosa and David had their own independent bank.

David's obituary in the *Rolfe Arrow* describes his willingness to loan money to his friends.

David B. Dady was as square as men are made financially. His word was as good as his bond. He was four-square in all his business transactions. Few men have possessed to a greater extent the confidence of their neighbors. His friendship and confidence were worth accumulating. A friend did not appeal to him in vain, even though it meant financial backing, for one whom Dave Dady trusted need never want for financial support. He was of the sort it was a pleasure to call a friend. When the committee was soliciting funds to erect a hospital in Rolfe, Mr. Dady was one of the most liberal contributors. He was public spirited on all occasions. He will be greatly missed in the community.

My father says that Roy Zeman, an old-time farmer in the area, described David as being a short Irish man who loved whiskey and would leave his flask hanging on a nail by the screen door on the porch to the house. Phil Brinkman, a septuagenarian farmer in the area, added that even though there were many other Catholics in the township, most were Bohemians and didn't like David because he was Irish Catholic.

David's obituary goes on to say, "In death, as in life, Mr. Dady was a pioneer, being the first one laid to rest in the new Catholic cemetery south of Rolfe." His obituary is incongruent with the one for Rosa that says her funeral was held at the Methodist church and that she was buried in the Clinton-Garfield Cemetery used by the Protestants. I visited the Protestant cemetery and found the Dady tombstone. It is a large one inscribed solely with the name Dady but has a small, ankle-high stone on the left for Rosa and a similar stone on the right for David.

I asked Dad about the newspaper report claiming David was buried in the Catholic cemetery and my finding the Dady tombstone in the Clinton-Garfield Cemetery. Dad remembered a story about a widow who had her deceased husband dug up, moved, and buried again, but Dad wasn't sure of the details. I then called Phil about the puzzle of David's burial. Phil recounted a story about Rosa disagreeing with St. Margaret's priest over financial issues and that she exhumed David's casket and moved it to the Protestant cemetery where she was buried in 1931.

Finally, I called Lucile Taylor of St. Margaret's Parish for clarity. When I asked if she was indeed the person in charge of Catholic burial records, she energetically answered, "Yes, and I am having a Dicken's of a time finding one person." I asked if the missing person was David Dady, and she said, "Yes, I have walked all over that cemetery trying to find that man, and he isn't there." Lucile wanted to solve the mystery of David's burial because the parish was preparing for its centennial, and she planned to publish a small history book.

David died at age 60 from rheumatism and chronic nephritis but left no will; however, Rosa emerged as administratrix of his estate. She was supported by a handful of area farmers and businessmen, including Diedrick Brinkman and my great-grandfather, Charles L. Gunderson, who stepped forward with funds to secure a court-required probate bond of over one hundred thousand dollars.

It appears Rosa was a capable farm woman, and that by today's standards, the land David owned would be listed equally in his and Rosa's names. Evidence of her partnership in the farm appears in Rosa's obituary in 1931 in the *Rolfe Arrow*.

Mr. and Mrs. Dady lived on the farm southwest of town and gradually added to their acres until at the time of Mr. Dady's death they were among the heaviest land owners of the county. In all the years of accumulating this estate, Mrs. Dady did her part, both in the management and labor, often carrying the work of a farm hand in addition to her household duties.

Although there were tracts of land in the early part of the century that listed women as the titleholders, that was not the case with the Dady properties. When David's estate was settled, his half of the land went to Rosa, who continued to live on the homeplace farm they built. The rest of David's half of the property was divided among his siblings. In David's probate records, Margaret is listed as being age 63, Mary 51, and James 49.

Margaret (Dady) Russell inherited the north half of Section 14, but she and her daughter met foreclosure in 1922. The farm was sold at a sherriff's sale. The buyer lost the place in 1933 to the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company who owned the farm until 1939 when it was bought by Marian and Harry Howard. Their descendants continue to own the land but sold the acreage in 1998. Margaret has no descendants living in the Rolfe area.

Mary (Dady) Sinek inherited a large portion of Section 12 and 80 acres directly east of it in Section 7, Garfield Township. When Mary's husband Frank died in 1924, she continued farming with her single son Roy and her widowed daughter, Veronica Harrison. However, they went bankrupt, and the land was sold in June of 1928 via a sherriff's deed to J.G. Hildebrand, a dentist from Cedar Falls. Dr. Hildebrand rented the land to Mary's son, Leon, and his wife Margaret. The couple farmed there until moving to town in the early 1950s. Then their son, Paul, and his wife Esther rented the farm and moved there where they raised a family. Dr. Hildebrand died, leaving the land to his only heir, a son living in the eastern part of the United States. The son offered to sell the farm back to the Sinek family. Subsequently, in 1956, Paul and Esther, with help from Leon, bought the place. A few descendants of Mary and Frank Sinek currently live in the Rolfe area.

James Dady inherited the land in Section 12 just north of the Dady homeplace. He and his son ran into financial difficulties and were unable to pay \$18,438 of a \$20,000 mortgage to First Joint Stock Land Bank of Chicago. So the family sold the farm in March of 1929 to Lee Reigelsberger. Lee agreed to assume the mortgage and pay \$24,150 for the farm, which consisted of some 247 acres. The average price per acre appears to have been \$98. The Reigelsberger family continues to own and operate the farm with Lee's grandson, Mick Reigelsberger and family living on the place. James Dady has no descendants living in the Rolfe area.

Rosa's single brother, Gottlieb, came to the Rolfe area after David's death and lived with her on the farm. The two moved to Rolfe a few years before Rosa died in 1931 when she was 72. Gottlieb executed his sister's estate, a task that was exceptionally difficult during the heart

of the Depression. Some of the attorneys that Gottlieb hired to work on the estate died in the years between 1931 and 1934. Then there were families who had borrowed money from Rosa who could not repay the full amount of the loans that they owed her estate. And finally, land values were so low that Gottlieb had to petition the court to wait to sell Rosa's land until "such time as the fair and reasonable value of said real estate can be obtained." It was not until 1940 that Gottlieb completed the sale of all his sister's property and settled the estate.

Although this may have been a frustrating decade for Gottlieb, the annual records he prepared as administrator for the court provide an interesting source of information about farming. For instance, in October of 1932, he got only 12 cents per bushel when he sold 1,165 bushels of the 1931 corn crop to the Rolfe elevator. This shows how low the farm economy had sunk. In 1933, he got a loan of 45 cents per bushel on 2,600 bushels of corn from the newly created Commodity Credit Corporation, reflecting the 1932 election of President Franklin Roosevelt and implementation of the New Deal and agricultural subsidy programs. In 1937, as further evidence of the federal government's involvement in agriculture, Gottlieb received the farm's first soil conservation check. The records also show that wheat — a crop no longer common in Iowa — was grown on the farm throughout the 1930s and that soybeans were introduced in 1938.

Gottlieb rented the Dady homeplace farm on a cash rent basis to Fred Baade, who lived there and farmed it. There were also neighboring farmers who rented smaller portions of Rosa's land. Leon Sinek, her nephew on David's side of the family, farmed 64 acres of Rosa's land in the southeast corner of Section 14. In 1939, Leon bought the land from the estate.

Another of the renters was Phil Brinkman's father, August (Gus) Brinkman, who was one of Diedrick and Anna Brinkman's sons. Gus and his wife Grace were one of the couples who had borrowed money from Rosa. It was in the form of a 1926 promissory note for the sum of \$2,400 with interest set at the rate of 6 percent per year. The note was one of several to various families, and Rosa's estate held a total in \$12,000 in outstanding loans. In December 1931, Gottlieb petitioned the court, objecting to the inheritance tax appraiser's valuation of the various notes, claiming the appraisals were excessive for several reasons. Then Gottlieb listed the circumstances of the families who owed money, including the following: "That the appraisal of the A.A. Brinkman note in the sum of \$2,400 for the full amount of \$2,400 is excessive for the reason the said note is long past due and the deceased in her lifetime was unable to collect the same, that the property of A.A. Brinkman is encumbered and that his debts and obligations are not confined to the secured debts." In September 1934, Gottlieb began a suit against Gus and Grace to collect the \$2,400 but returned to the court, saying Gus and Grace had offered "the sum of \$1,000 as a full and complete settlement of said note and interest." The court ordered that Gottlieb be authorized to accept the compromise settlement. Similar arrangements were made with other families who held notes.

Interestingly, Gus rented 80 acres of land in the northwest part of Section 30, Garfield Township, from the estate throughout the 1930s. In July 1936, Gus bought the 80 acres from the estate for \$5,800. He paid \$1,000 at the time of signing the contract and \$4,800 when the final settlement was made. Possession was given on March 31, 1937.

I couldn't understand how, in 1934, Gus and Grace were able to pay back only \$1,000 of their \$2,400 loan to the Dady estate but, in 1937, they were able to complete the purchase of 80 acres for the sum of \$5,800. I called their son, Phil, in 1995 and asked about his parents' turn of fortune. He said that although the times had been tough for farmers, the reason his folks were able to buy the land was that Gus had been a veteran of World War I. Phil explained that in

1936, “Roosevelt gave all the guys who served in WWI a \$1,000 dollar bonus. And since Dad had been overseas, he got an extra \$200. He stuck his neck out and made a down payment with the \$1,200 bonus. Years later, I admired his foresight and guts.” Phil went on to speak about the history of land prices. “My analysis is that in my lifetime, I saw the 80 bought from the Dady’s for about \$60 per acre — with some of it virgin land — when I was 10 years old. When Dad passed away in 1951–52, it was worth around \$350, a conservative figure. It had gone from \$60 to \$350 then peaked over \$3,000 and now back to \$1,750 in only 50 plus years.”

My father once told me about a time when he was a boy and went along with Grandpa to visit Rosa at her home. It was a cordial business conversation with Grandpa expressing interest in purchasing some of the land that she owned just east of his farm and south of the Brinkman farms. However, Rosa told Grandpa that she intended to sell the piece of land that he wanted to Gus Brinkman. Rosa added, though, that some day she would sell Grandpa her north farm — the Dady homeplace farm in Section 13. In the decade after her death, her wishes were carried out. Gus Brinkman got his 80 acres in Section 30, and Grandpa bought the land in Section 13, which eventually became the farm where I grew up.

Grandpa had rented some 74 acres of wild-hay land in the southeast quarter of Section 13 throughout the 1930s — first from Rosa then from Gottlieb. In October 1938, Grandpa bought the land from Rosa’s estate, signing a contract with Gottlieb and making a down payment of \$500 on the east half of Section 13 (320 acres) for \$22,700. The balance of \$16,200 was paid on March 1, 1939, when Grandpa took possession of the property. He also executed a mortgage of \$6000 at 4 ½ percent interest that was to be paid to Gottlieb on or before March 1, 1945. Then in February 1939, Grandpa signed a second contract, this one to buy the northwest quarter of Section 13 (160 acres) from Gottlieb for a total of \$16,400. Again, there was a down payment of \$500 at the time of the sale. Another \$6,000 would be paid on March 1, 1940, when possession of the land changed hands. There was also another mortgage — this one for \$9,900 at 4 ½ percent interest per year and due within eight years. If my calculations are right, Grandpa paid an average of \$81 per acre for the 480 acres he purchased in Section 13 in 1938 and 1939.

Grandpa arranged for Fred Baade to continue renting the Dady homeplace in Section 13; however, the Baade family was asked to move when my parents, my two older siblings, and I moved to Pocahontas County in 1945. At that time, I was five months old, and we began our residency on that farm. Dad still lives there. Mother moved from the farm to the Rolfe Care Center in 2003.

I have heard stories and seen photos that indicate the building site was run-down. In fact, in Gottlieb’s petition to the court in December of 1931, he challenged the inheritance tax appraiser’s \$20,000 valuation for the northwest quarter of Section 13, saying, “The above described piece of land is untilled, the fences are in bad condition, the buildings are old, run-down and not in a state of repair. The land has been farmed for a long period of time without any fertilization and without crop restoration.”

Regarding the northeast quarter of the section, Gottlieb claimed that “Said land is unimproved, that it is only partially fenced, the land is untilled and only about 50 acres of the entire quarter is under cultivation, and it is partially underlaid with peat.” Gottlieb used a similar argument when he described the southeast quarter but added, “The entire quarter is unbroke and in the present condition is of no value except for pasture or hay, and the land is wild-hay ground.”

Today, the land Gottlieb referred to as wild-hay ground is called prairie. It was probably perfect for a large Hereford cattle operation but not conducive to the emerging row-crop

mentality. In the 1940s, my family tilled all but two acres of its more than 160 acres of prairie. As a youth, I occasionally walked across the section to explore that small bit of prairie, but I was not conscious of the significance of prairie in the history of the plains states with its great diversity of plant and other native wildlife. In the 1980s, my parents' tenants, Dan and Roger Allen, cleared that vestige of Iowa's natural heritage.

Rosa's estate was divided between Gottlieb, age 66; another brother, John Beck, age 76; and 11 nieces and nephews. All but Gottlieb lived in Illinois. When Gottlieb closed the estate, he returned to Rock Island County where he died in 1966 at the age of 101.

In 1995, I traveled to Rock Island to see what I could find out about David and Rosa Dady. After going through the excitement and drudgery of a genealogical search at the courthouse and historical society, I knew little more about the couple than before I started the trip. However, hoping that some distant kin might remember a morsel of information about their great uncle or aunt, and perhaps — if I were really in luck — have a photo of them, I called a few of the people whose names showed up in my research. No, they did not have any photos of Rosa or David. I should not have been surprised since the couple left the Rock Island area in 1882 before photography was common, and the two apparently had little contact over the years with their relatives in Illinois. Yes, the relatives I talked to knew of David and Rosa but not much more than the fact that the couple had gone to northwest Iowa. Interestingly, the kin were more familiar with Gottlieb because he lived with nieces and nephews when he returned to the Rock Island area before taking up residence at Oak Glen, the county home.

When I asked two of his grand-nieces what kind of person Gottlieb was and whether he was rich or poor, I got various responses. One woman said he was a cranky old bachelor. The other said he was shy. One thought he was a shyster, but the second said that people, including some of his nephews, "took Gottlieb for everything he had" and he died penniless. According to her, Gottlieb bought property and rented it out; then people didn't pay, and he died without money except the small amount set aside for his funeral. In the end, the county provided him with room and board and a pauper's grave. Apparently, family members wanted to be able to give money to help him, but they were told that then they would have to claim him and take care of him.

I am intrigued by the fact that someone such as Rosa once lived on the farm where I grew up. Both her and David's obituaries say she was good out and about the farm. I wonder — did she love farming? How much was she involved in management decisions? Was she an early feminist who not only was capable of being a farmer but was proud to be one? Or did she prefer a more domestic life but instead was required to work hard on the farm because she and David had no children, and her labor was necessary for the 1,230-acre cattle business they operated? Was she tough and wizened from the outdoor work? How does the part of her personality reflected by hard work on the farm jive with a further account in her obituary that described her devotion to homemaking. It said,

She belonged to the type which we now call old-fashioned, loving her home above other things and always being found attending to her duties. She was retiring in disposition, but had a wide circle of friends. Faithful, loyal, honest, she was a devoted wife and home-maker. She would have made an excellent mother, but children were denied Mr. And Mrs. Dady.

What can be made out of the small clues in a claim against her estate from a merchant named Isaac Mikel for payment of an unpaid bill? The itemized list of goods she procured in May of 1931 included three silk bed spreads, two silk scarves, four yards of silk fabric, 24 English goods at 25 cents apiece, and six pounds of tea? Unfortunately, she probably had little opportunity to savor those supplies since beginning on June 20, 1931, she had a least one doctor's visit a day, including trips to the Lutheran Hospital in Hampton, until her death due to cancer on August 10, 1931.

I wonder if Rosa was someone I would like to have known. Would she have been a good role model or mentor? Would she have cared about me or have had little time for me? I'll never know. Much of her life is a mystery, and there are no records nor people who can give further clues about her personality. However, it was peculiar this afternoon, when I left my house to run an errand — after several hours of writing about Rosa and David — that when I stopped at an intersection, the small white car ahead of me had personalized license plates that read, “Rosa B.” Perhaps Rosa Beck Dady and others of the early settlers are present in more ways than we can comprehend.



The house where Rosa and David Dady lived. Rosa added the left section after David's death in 1916. Fred Baade and family lived in the house and farmed the Dady farm from the late 1920s until Helen and her family moved there in 1945 when this photo of renovating and blowing insulation into the walls of the place was taken. North side, Section 13, Roosevelt Township. The house was moved when a new one was built in 1956. The Deane and Marion Gunderson collection.

The Gunderson Family

George and Helena Gunderson, Norwegian-born Lutherans who were farming near Boscobel in Grant County, Wisconsin, in the mid-1800s, had six children. The youngest boy, George, stayed on the homeplace with his parents and eventually had his own family on that farm. However, in 1881, the two oldest boys, Gunder, age 24, and Charles, age 22, set out for new ground in Pocahontas County where George, their father, had bought the west half of Section 25, Center Township, in 1878. Gunder and Charles took the train across northern Iowa to the town of Ruthven. According to family legend, they then walked some 35 miles to their land where they began breaking the prairie sod and building a farm. The 320 acres they settled on were in the section just south of the Brinkman and Wiegman families.

In a letter to his father on April 11, 1882, Gunder writes about some of the challenges he and Charles faced on the prairie.

Pocahontas, Iowa
April 11, 1882

Dear Father:

Your postal received yesterday, and we see that you have not received our last letter dated March 29. I am astonished to find out that you are not going to send out a team as we need one very bad, and to hire a team out here and pay \$3.50 per day is impossible and here is no teams to get after all, that is the worst. We never dreamt but what you was going to buy another team because you can not spare those you have got; you need two teams where you be. We thought you would have bought another team long ago. We can send you \$175.00 if you should buy another team. We can send it in one week if you need it. We should at least break 50 acres for ourselves and sow 25 acres of the same to flax which will be impossible if the team don't come until after springs work. Our farming with one team on so much land is of little value not make much.

They are now breaking, they can break as soon as the frost goes out. Plowing comes about the 1st of April but so much rain that sowing and plowing has been little of. Don't you think you can hire a team down there and send it out here about the 25 of April. We want just little of the Bohemian oats for seed because these oats out here are so poor. Oats out here are .55 per bu. If we don't get a team until after springs work is over then a team will be of no use then there is no work for more than one of us and we can not rent the land. We will lose lots of money by not having another team. I can get the school next summer and I suppose I will have to take it. I can also hire out for \$20 per month. Now write right away and tell what to do as I must soon know about taking the school. Last winter is when you should have bought the team and not waited until too late.

Yours respectfully,

G.B. Gunderson

In July of 1884, Charles returned to his hometown and married Dena Christensen, age 18 and the oldest of nine children in her family, in the Lutheran church. She was a high school graduate with two years of teaching experience. The couple came back to the frontier farm Gunder and Charles had been cultivating and made their home on the place. Gunder had already begun teaching school in the northeast corner of Section 23 — a bit more than a mile north of the Gunderson home. The spring after Dena arrived in the area, Gunder hired her to teach at the same school.



Gunder Gunderson, circa 1900.

As reported in the history of the Wiegman family, Cyrus and Mary Manley were newcomers to the township in 1884. He had purchased the entire east side of Section 23 except for the bit of ground belonging to the school. Although they were married in New York, it is interesting to note that they, too, had lived in the Boscobel area before coming to Iowa. Their oldest child, Almina, who was known as Miney, was born in 1870, and by the time her family left Wisconsin for Pocahontas County in a covered wagon, she had three younger sisters.

The Manley home was on a direct route between the Gunderson farm and the school. It would have been natural for Gunder, Charles, and Dena to be good friends of the Manleys as former residents of Boscobel, as neighboring farm families, and through school activities.

Stories in the Gunderson family suggest that Gunder had a courtship with one of the Manley girls, most likely Almina. She was 14 when she arrived in the area and her next two sisters, Elise and Minnie, were 11 and 9. However, Gunder was not the only single man in the area. The Manley farm and the school were just west of the land where Herman and Betsy Wiegman settled and not far from the Brinkman farm where John Wiegman was working as a farmhand for his sister, Anna Wiegman, and her husband Diedrick Brinkman. John was 28 and only four years older than Gunder. One could speculate that there was competition between the two for the affection of Almina and/or her sisters. The Gunderson story says that Cyrus at one time planned to sell half of his land — 160 acres — to Gunder, but when the alleged courtship was broken off, Cyrus, out of spite, decided to sell only 120 acres to Gunder. To add insult to injury, the land he sold Gunder was the worst part of the Manley property with Lizard

Creek winding its way diagonally through the center of the land. Gunder moved to the state of Washington sometime between 1884 and 1889, but he completed payment on the land he bought from Cyrus and gained official title to it in 1891. Meanwhile in 1888, John Wiegman, then 35 years old, and Almina Manley, age 18, were married. Ten years later in 1898, John bought the remaining 200 acres that Cyrus owned in Section 23 just north of the land which Cyrus had sold to Gunder. Almina died at the age of 35, and John lived into his nineties.

Gunder continued to teach when he moved to Washington, and then became a principal and superintendent. He also served as a representative to the state legislature and worked for a newspaper. Gunder was married in 1903 in Washington. Unfortunately, in 1904 at the age of 47, he died from a disease that began as lip cancer. The story is that while setting type at the newspaper, he often held pieces of type with his mouth, much like some people would hold a pencil or paper clip with their lips. The lead contained in the type was the carcinogen that started Gunder's cancer.

Charles — known simply as C.L. to many people — and Dena stayed on the farm in Section 25 and made it the Gunderson homeplace. They had six children. Charles bought more land, including 360 acres that belonged to Gunder, and accumulated a total of 840 acres before selling his property in stages to his third child and youngest son, John.



The Charles L. and Dena C. Gunderson family. Front row, left to right: Charles, Martha, Ruth, Naomi, and Dena. Back row: George, Art, and John. Circa 1907. Photos on both pages are from the Deane and Marion Gunderson collection.

John was born in 1889. He was the only one of Charles and Dena's children to stay in Pocahontas County, and the only one of the siblings who did not graduate from college. Three of his siblings ended up in southern California, another in Everett, Washington, and another in Orange City, Iowa.



John Gunderson circa 1908, and
DeElda Lighter Gunderson, circa 1916.

John quit high school after his sophomore year to begin farming. He wanted to be by himself rather than live with his parents and siblings, so he took up residence in a little house in nearby Section 26. On Christmas Day of 1917, at the age of 28, he married DeElda Lighter, who was 24. She was the daughter of the newspaper editor, Joseph Lighter, who had died the previous year, and Emma Lighter. DeElda had worked in her sister Cora's variety store in Gilmore City and, in 1915, had become the cashier and bookkeeper for Hauck's General Store in Rolfe. John and DeElda moved to the southwest corner of Section 24. Their one child, Deane Gunderson, was born in 1918 in the house on that farm. He is my father. Then in 1919, the family moved to the homeplace farm after Charles and Dena moved to Rolfe.

The 1904 *History of Pocahontas County* says of Charles:

He is now one of the most highly respected and substantial farmers of Center Township — he served six years as a trustee of Center Township, 1890-92, '95-97; six years as a justice of the peace and was secretary of the school board in 1898. He is recognized as a man of sterling integrity, a staunch Republican and a firm believer in the cause of prohibition.

Charles was also a founding director of the Pocahontas Mutual Insurance Company in 1890, became its president in 1909, and was one of the founders of the Grinnell Mutual Reinsurance Company that was incorporated in 1909. According to the company's web site, "The Grinnell Mutual's roots can be traced back to the mid-1800s. As settlers moved to the Midwest, they sought protection from the ravages of prairie fires. Working together, these pioneers banded together to protect each other. They discovered that working together was necessary for survival. When fire struck, neighbors pitched in to help with labor, materials, or money. There was no thought of profit. It was a way of people helping people." The story is

that C.L., as president of the county insurance company, got 10 cents for each signature on a policy. Also, when farmers needed to have changes made to their policies, they simply stopped at his farm home, and he made the changes for them. In 1923, he was elected president of the State Mutual Insurance Association. He also served four years as a state representative from 1919 to 1922. Additionally, he was a trustee of Buena Vista College, vice-president of the Rolfe State Bank, which was founded in the 1930s, and a member of the Masonic Lodge. He also enjoyed playing the violin.

Little has been published about Dena; however, some stories have been handed down by word of mouth. Although she and Charles were baptized and married in a Lutheran church in Wisconsin, she wanted her children to be part of a church where English was spoken. That precluded the family from belonging to the two Lutheran churches in Rolfe where one spoke Norwegian and the other was a Danish-speaking congregation. Instead, she and C.L. joined the Presbyterian church where Dena regularly taught Sunday school. It is also said that when she was on committees to plan church dinners and when asked to recruit a dozen people to make pies, Dena would make all the pies herself. In addition, she and C.L. were staunch believers in the temperance movement. Dena was also a charter member of the Rolfe library.

Even through the depths of the Depression, the couple was financially stable. A man named Sam Zikifus, who taught school in Rolfe in the 1920s and 30s, told me the economy then had gotten so bad that the school board could not pay its teachers. Instead, the staff was paid in paper script distributed by the county. The idea was that if the economy got better, the teach-



Helen's father feeds corn to chickens at the Gunderson homeplace farm, circa 1924. Photos on both pages are from the Deane and Marion Gunderson collection.

ers could redeem their script for the amount of their salary plus interest. Of course, that meant the potential for hardship in the meantime. Fortunately, according to Sam, the teachers were able to go to C.L. who paid them cash in return for their script.

I asked Deane — who is my father — how his grandparents, Charles and Dena, had become so affluent and able to buy the script from the school teachers. Deane said C.L. was frugal and self-sufficient on the farm and had some good years right before the Depression. Also, C.L. had rented his land to John, who was a very good farmer. As a result, C.L. had his landlord's share of rental income from the land plus the money John was paying him to buy land.

Deane also told an example of his grandparents' frugal lifestyle that he once heard from the late Slim Davidson, a Chevrolet dealer in Rolfe decades ago. Apparently, when C.L. and Dena came to town one day to run errands, they observed people sitting in a restaurant. C.L. commented to Slim, "Look at these farmers, they're drinking coffee. No wonder they're going broke. Ma and I — we bring our own lunch to town."

Deane went to Iowa State College where he met Marion Abbott, an applied art major from Utah. Deane's degrees were in mechanical and agricultural engineering, and after he and Marion were married in 1941, he went to work for the John Deere Tractor Company in Waterloo. However, in September of 1945, the couple and their three children moved to the Rolfe area and made their home on the farm, the one that John owned on the north side of Section 13 where Rosa and David Dady had once lived. I was five months old, my brother Charles had turned two in May, and my sister Clara had turned three in July.

I have been told that I was the "apple of C.L.'s eye." Perhaps that was because I was the first infant in the Gunderson family to live in the Rolfe area since my father was born in 1918. Although I recall little about C.L., I feel a fondness for him and wish I had known him better. He died in 1947.

I knew Dena a little more than I knew Great Grandpa. I recall that she crocheted dish clothes for Mother. I also recall visiting Dena's home when I was four years old. Mother was taking Charles to his first day of kindergarten and left me with Dena for several hours. I recall sitting at the kitchen table with Dena, who had been a math teacher. She taught me to use a pencil and a juice glass as a guide for drawing circles and creating geometric, floral patterns. Dena died the following winter in March of 1950. I wish I had known her better, too.



Helen's grandfather's draft horses, circa 1920.
The Deane and Marion Gunderson collection.

I had more opportunity to know my grandparents, John and DeElda, because our family celebrated Thanksgiving and Christmas with them, and I often visited Grandpa and Grandma at the homeplace, three miles from our farm. Grandpa and I had a particularly close bond. Some of the reasons for that connection are clear, but there is also much mystery about our friendship.

He and I were each the third child in our respective families, and we both loved horses. I knew him as a gentle person with a fine sense of humor who used to snuggle with me on

the couch. However, through my research I have discovered that although he was deemed to be an honest and fair person, he was a very determined farmer who got all the work he could out of his horses and men. Dad says that one of the reasons Grandpa worked so hard was because he wanted to be able to buy all of Great Grandpa's 840 acres of land. Perhaps the advantage I had as a child was that Grandpa had grown older and gentler and could show a side of himself to me that he did not show to other people.

Eventually, Grandpa obtained a total of 2,073 acres. He had a stroke at the age of 67 on the homeplace farm in the afternoon of October 17, 1956. I did not know he was ill nor that he died until I was called to the principal's office the next day at school where the rest of my siblings were gathered. Mother told us the news of his death.

I wish I had been closer to Grandma, but although I had a deep respect for her, we did not share the chemistry that I had with Grandpa. As the years go by, I think of Grandma in her twenties, moving from town to a farm that was six miles from Rolfe and six miles from Pocahontas, having one child, then after he left for college, living in the big Victorian house with just her husband John. I think of her watching over me when I visited them and her being extremely apologetic when I got a bad sunburn while playing in a plastic wading pool at their home. I recall her large vegetable garden and apple trees. One still stands today. Although it is not very healthy and has sections that no longer bear fruit, it continues to produce wonderfully tart Wealthy apples that are especially good for baking pie. My father says the tree was planted when he was seven years old in 1925.

I recall the hollyhocks and snowball flowers next to the white trellises of Grandma and Grandpa's home. I recall her preparing meals — not only for herself, Grandpa, and me when I stayed with them, but the Thanksgiving and Christmas meals. I recall her kitchen with the cherry-colored cabinets and the pass-through counter between the kitchen and dining room. It was where the pecan, minced meat, and pumpkin pies sat waiting while we ate the main course of the holiday meal. I remember sleeping with her in her springy bed when I tried to cling to my side of the bed but gravity caused me to roll to her side of the mattress, and I would wake up and find myself lying snugly next to her. I wish I could have savored the closeness to Grandma; but instead, I felt awkward. I recall her moving into a fine little house in Rolfe designed by John F. Wiegman's grandson, John Wiegman, a talented architect. He had built the place for his mother, Marie Wiegman, but she died, and our family bought the place for Grandma.

I recall Grandma having cancer when I was in high school and college, and visiting her at her small home. I would sit at the foot of her bed, not knowing what to say or do. There was a particular time when I went with Dad to visit Grandma. Her home nurse, Bertha Cordes, took Dad aside and told him that DeElda had prayed out loud the previous night for God to please take her away because her pain had become intolerable. I recall that Grandma died at the age of 72 in January of 1965 when I was a sophomore at Iowa State. I often regret that I never thought to take her hand and simply hold it — even if I had not been able to think of anything to say.

When John died in 1956, there were six children in my family. His land went to my grandmother and my father, who began a trust for us. When I was 31 in 1976, the land in the trust was distributed, and the trust was dissolved. Five of us, along with our parents, continue to own the family land; however, my brother is the only one of us six siblings who lives in Rolfe. He is an attorney and farm manager but does not farm. Actually, today none of the descendants of Charles and Dena are farmers. Dad retired from active farming in 1975, and although as an octogenarian he continues to do projects around the farm, he is far less active

as a farmer than in the first 25 years of his retirement. And he certainly is not the active farmer that he was during the many years when he oversaw 3,200 acres for the family — land belonging to him and Marion as well as his mother’s property and his children’s trust.

I live just north of Ames in the small town of Gilbert, less than two hours from Rolfe. As a single person, I am happy to have inherited a portion of the land that my great, great uncle Gunder — a single man — owned in Section 23. As a person concerned about the environment and who is learning more about the significance of prairie and the need for restoring prairie remnants, I am glad that a piece of land I own northeast of Rolfe contains a hilly pasture that has not been tilled nor been grazed for at least 25 years and where there are numerous native prairie grasses and forbs. I call the place “DeElda Farm” in honor of Grandma.

When a Neighbor Dies

by James Hearst

Safe from loneliness, safe from storm,
Here he lies in his earthly form.
Here he lies in his last array
The neighbor who calls us in today.
He is our neighbor, he goes without
The grieving flags and the public’s shout;
He is our neighbor and so he goes
Served by us in our solemn clothes.
This is his house, it was his home,
This is his land and its sandy loam
Has known him better than you or I
But he was our neighbor who came to die.
These fields of corn that line the road
Follow the fields his father sowed.
The gate is wide for his team and plow
But he must follow his father now.
What can you say to folks he knew
Of what he had done or tried to do?
What can you say that is the truth
Of a man you have known to age from youth?
We stand by the side of our neighbor dead
And only half hear what words are said.
We try to remember what he had been
And nod to a neighbor coming in.
He was our neighbor, we only know
That his hands were large and his temper slow.
We simply say as we stand and wait
That his fields were clean and his fences straight.

“When a Neighbor Dies” by James Hearst was published in a book of his poetry, *Landmark and Other Poems*, in 1979. Used by permission from the University of Northern Iowa Foundation.

On Being at Home in the Garden

by Helen D. Gunderson

I enter the garden, searching and yearning,
homing in on that visceral something that lures me.

The garden is home, sanctuary, embrace and acceptance.
It connects me to a voice not heard in religions whose steeples
pierce upward, away from earth, away from home.

The garden is home with no division between sacred and secular.
It nurtures and sustains, uniting people and nature,
the past with present and future.

The garden calls me to that renewing center where I am loved
and where the spirits of those I love are with me.

The garden reminds me that eternal life has as much to do with
the quality of life in each grace-given moment
as it does with unending chronological time.



Demolition of the homeplace house where Helen's great-grandparents and grandparents lived and where her father grew up. The place is owned by her brother Charles. In 1990, he was having a difficult time getting responsible renters and was faced with the choice of either investing in repair of the home or demolishing it. He hired two men who dismantled and recycled most of the building material before lighting a match to the remaining rubble and burying the concrete foundation.

From the yet to be published book *The Road I Grew Up On: Requiem for a Vanishing Era*
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