

Memories of the Pape Farm

Visiting the grandparents' home can be exciting for a youngster. The following are my recollections of the Pape family farm.

Grandfather Jacob Pape arrived in the U.S. on May 4, 1884 as a 15-year old orphan and indentured servant. After working in the rice fields of Arkansas and wheat fields of Washington, he came to Concordia, MO, where his sister Adelheid and Stuenkel friends were living. Jacob settled on a farm just north and east of St. Paul's Lutheran Cemetery. He had worked for and eventually purchased those 80 acres from his future father-in-law Louis Stuenkel.

That farm brings back many memories from my childhood. While I have very few pictures of the farm itself, images of it are still burned in my memory cells. Recollections of it require the verbal description that follows, a sort of walking tour. A sketch of the layout of the farm on the next page will help one to follow this narrative.

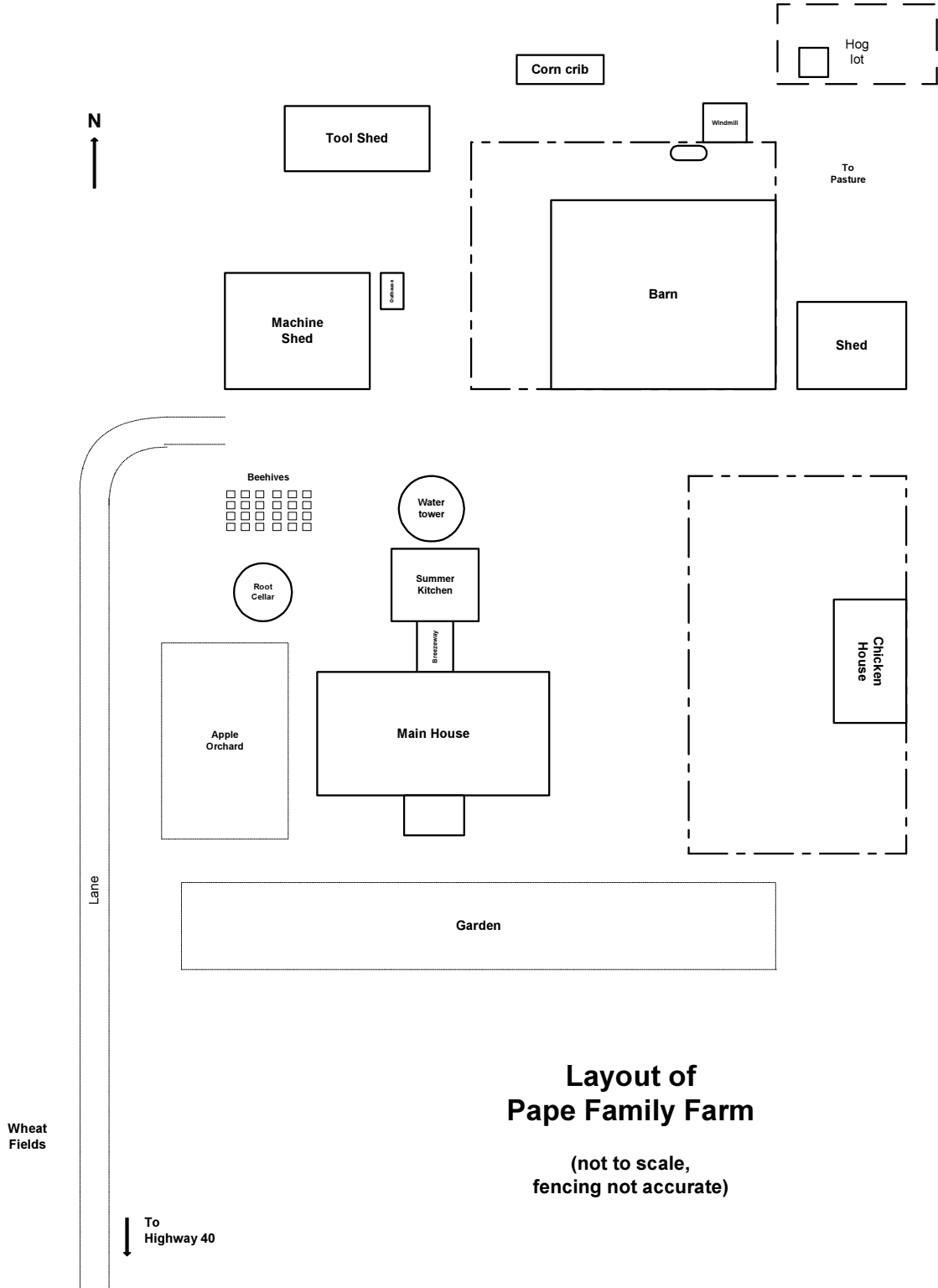
Leaving Concordia, one would approach the farm by turning left off of old U.S. Highway 40 just past the cemetery and head north. It was a relatively long dirt lane to the house, about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile. I often wondered how Grandpa kept it open during the winter snows and spring rains. During some winters, the drifts of snow were so high that it took days to clear the lane so that the family could go to Concordia and church. But it would be good weather when my family came to visit.

One would travel through the wheat fields when approaching the home. Jacob Pape always grew wheat. Like others in the area, he also grew corn for the livestock and chickens, but wheat was his favorite crop. My earliest memories of the farm were of a threshing party during the summer when I was a young child. Threshing in those days was a community event. Neighboring farmers would join together and travel from farm to farm harvesting the wheat or other grain during the late summer.



Early in the morning a huge steam engine would come lumbering up the lane towing a large threshing machine. It would pull off the lane on the edge of a field and set up for the threshing operation. The wheat had been cut earlier, bundled with twine into shocks that were piled in small stacks around in the fields. A crew of farmers would pitch the shocks with their forks onto a wagon which a team of horses would then pull alongside the threshing machine. There another crew would pitch the shocks of wheat into the thresher and one of the men (or a boy) would stand at the top of the machine, directing a long chute that blew the straw into stacks.

I was too young to work on one of these teams, but I did have a job as waterboy. I would carry a jug of water, wrapped in a damp gunny sack to keep it cool, and offer it to the farmers as they worked in the field. They would thank me and joke with me, in Low German of course.



Layout of Pape Family Farm

(not to scale, fencing not accurate)

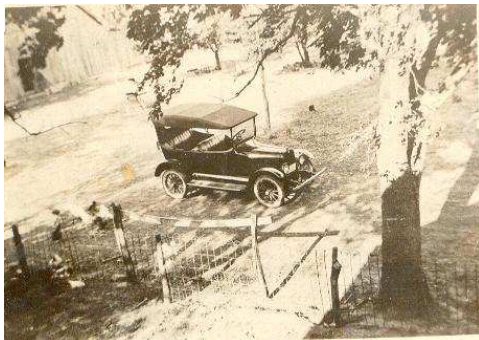
As we traveled up the lane, one could see the farmhouse from quite a distance. It was not a heavily wooded area. The following are several very early picture of the farm house before many buildings were added.



Approaching more closely, the porch on the front of the house became more obvious.



The road would then make a right turn toward the rear of the home at the machine shed. That shed is where Grandpa kept his car and a few farm implements. He never owned a tractor. Instead, he preferred to plow the fields and tend to the crops riding behind his trusty team of mules. While Jacob was old-fashioned in his farming practices, he was relatively progressive in other ways. He was one of the first in the area to have electric power and a phone in the home. He bought a car when they were still a new fad. The family kept a picture of his first car parked by the backyard.



It was a Dort automobile, somewhere between a 1915 and 1920 model. He once drove that vehicle to Oklahoma in 1923 with Grandma to visit oldest son Arthur and the first grandchild. It was during the tornado season and Aunt Anna told stories about that very interesting trip. Later he bought a 1936 Chevrolet Master 2-door sedan. (I inherited that car.)

On the other side of the drive were a large number of beehives. Beekeeping was a tradition in the Pape family dating back to earlier days in Germany. I remember the bees well because, as we children played in back of the house around the root cellar and in the orchard, we would often be stung by them. Being allergic to bee stings, my arms would swell up to twice their normal size. On the other hand, the bees did not seem to bother my dad. When he harvested the honey, the bees would swarm all over his body. Of course, he did smoke them out and wore a screened hat.

The next thing one would notice when entering the farm lot was a water tower next to the summer kitchen. Yes, the farm had running water when I was young. It had a relatively large tank but the tower only rose up to the second floor level. Still, it was quite an accomplishment to have that water tower. I am told that Uncle Elmer built the tower when he was relatively young, before he went off to war in WWII. I'm not sure where they drew the water from, probably a dug well close by. (One doesn't worry about such details as a young child.) But, I also recall Dad talking about getting water from a stream on the east side of the farm.



As we approached the house, we would often be greeted by Grandpa. He would usually be puffing on one of his favorite White Owl cigars. He trimmed the end of the cigar off with his pocket knife and inserted it in a rubber holder that he clenched in his mouth.

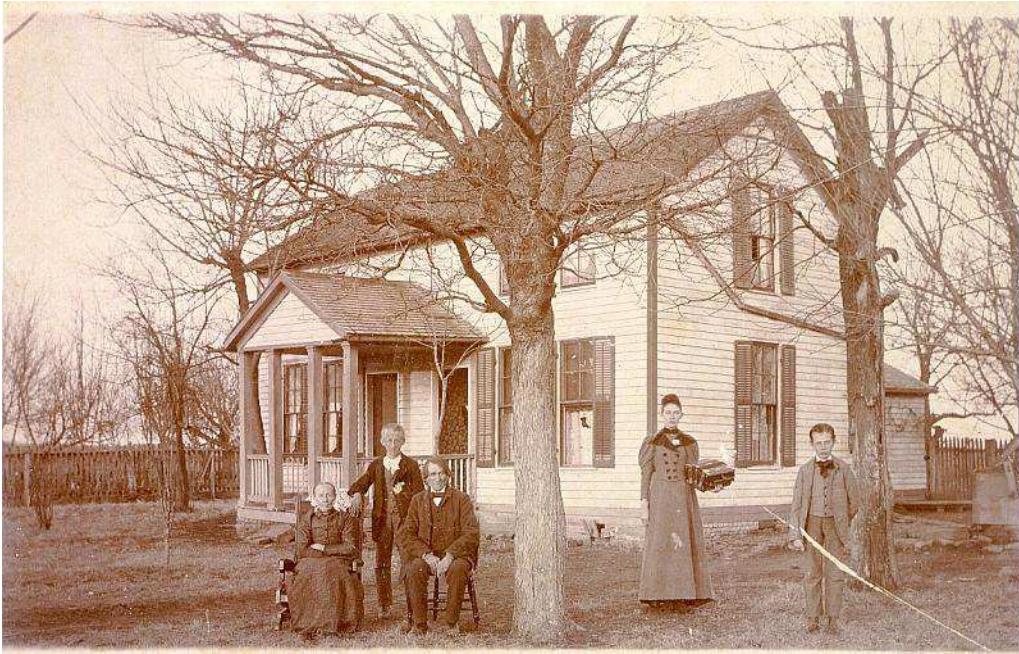
Grandma would often be feeding the chickens or gathering eggs in her apron. She was quite camera shy, but one day Dad got a picture of her coming out of the outhouse. She was very embarrassed to say the least.



We would park by the backyard next to a gated wire fence. It was a large, well shaded yard. My memories of it again go back to the threshing parties and the noontime lunches. As one entered the gate, there was a bowl of water where the farmers would wash their hands with homemade lye soap. They would then sit around a table in the cool shade as the wives brought them a large lunch with lemonade or coffee.

One always entered the house through the back door from a breezeway that connected the house with the summer kitchen. The family history indicates that the summer kitchen stood on the spot where the original farm house was built by gr-gr-grandfather John Henry Bruns. J. H. Bruns was killed during the Civil War in the bushwhacker raid of Concordia on Oct. 10, 1864.

There was a legend that John Henry had buried his money and other treasures when he went off to the battle. This was thought to be near the backyard where Grandma had her garden. In the spring, she would tell the children to dig up the ground and look for the treasure. That way she got the garden dug up.



This is the original J. H. Bruns house. Pictured in this photo is the extended family of Gerhard Ficken. Gerhard was the second husband of Anna Dettmar Bruns (seated on the left). Anna, in turn, was the second wife of John Henry Bruns, marrying him after my gr-gr-grandmother Christine Frerking Bruns had died. (As noted earlier, John Henry was killed in a bushwhacker raid.) The tall girl holding the accordion is Sophia Bruns who married gr-grandfather Louis Stuenkel. At this time, occupancy of the home was drifting away from the family but eventually returned to Sophia and Louis. (The 1897 plat of the area, i.e. about the time Grandpa had purchased farm, lists the owner as a mysterious "Melchior Behg". I wonder if that name shows up anywhere in the county records.)

Getting back to our tour of the Pape home, as you went through the summer kitchen into the brick milk parlor, you would see the DeLaval separator where Grandpa separated the cream after milking the cows. The cans of cream were set in a tank of water or well at the back wall to keep the cream cool until he could deliver it to the creamery. Next to the cream cans was a crock of Grandpa's favorite drink, clabbered milk. That is probably what kept him healthy so that he lived into his late 80s.

Back through the breezeway, one would step up into a large kitchen in the main farm house. In the kitchen was a large table that we children would sit around playing card games in the evening when the Louis Pape or Dieckhoff relatives also came to visit. One of my favorite games was Touring, involving cards with various old autos pictured on them. Another was a game that simulated trading of grain on a commodities exchange. We would frantically trade cards to get matching sets. "One-for-one, two-for-two, ..."

Grandma had a large wood stove where she would cook all of the meals and other goodies. There was a small hand pump next to the sink. A counter nearby had an apple peeler on it where she would peel apples from the orchard or root cellar for pie.

From the kitchen, one passed through a door into the sitting room where everyone would gather after dinner (equivalent to today's family room). Over that doorway was a pair of antlers from a deer that Grandpa had shot while working in Washington. He brought the antlers back to Concordia with him. The antlers were used as a hat rack. About the only thing I remember about the sitting room was the Black Forest cuckoo clock between the windows on the front wall which Grandpa would keep running by regularly pulling up the weights. The room also had a low wood stove to keep it warm in the winter.

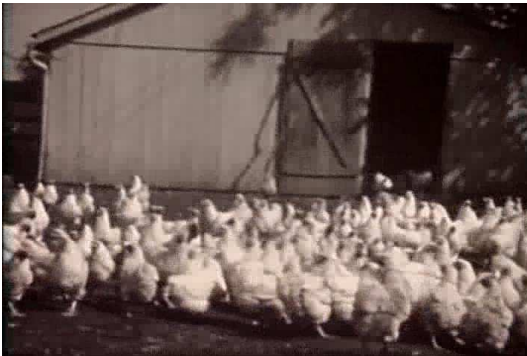
The older folks would sit around the room and have generally somber discussions, although Dad would add a joke or two to liven things up. Grandpa was a quiet and reserved man. (That probably reflects the fact that he became an orphan quite early in life.) The relatives would speak in Low German, most likely the common Hanovarian Plattdeutsch spoken around Concordia, not the dialect from farther north in Germany where Grandpa came from. However, Uncle Henry Hensiek spoke in a slightly different dialect, probably Westphalian Plattdeutsch. They would, however, speak to us children in English. It was not like my mother's side of the family. They always spoke in English with an occasional Low German phrase to spice up a story. There was a lot of joking and story telling. (Of course, we had Uncle Bill Klingenberg who would keep the conversations lively. He had a story for every occasion.)

The door on the other side of this room led to the front hall and doorway to the front porch. I don't think they ever used the front porch, not even for taking family photos. But in the hallway was a pump organ with ornate woodwork. Grandpa had purchased the organ for Uncle Arthur when he was studying for the ministry. He felt that every pastor needed to know music. The organ was never played when I was there. I was told that the last time it was used was for Aunt Flora and Uncle Henry Hensiek's wedding, which was held in the house. Aunt Anna and Uncle Edwin Dieckhoff were also married in the parlor there.

One entered the parlor through a doorway on the other side of the hallway. As children, we never went into the parlor. I don't remember the furniture in the parlor, but apparently the organ had also stood in this room earlier. Peeking into the parlor, the only thing I remember was the Gold Star flag that Grandma hung in the front window after Uncle Elmer was killed in WWII.

I never went upstairs in the home. Other cousins did sleep there and can add their own stories about that part of it. My brother Don remembers sleeping there when Uncle Elmer still lived at home. There may have been problems with the roof or walls. In winter, the boys would wake up with snow on their feather beds.

Cousin Myrna has posted some very interesting stories in the Pape forum of the message board about staying at the house, particularly about some of the meals that were served. They certainly were not very appealing to a young child.



Back outside, a chicken house was across from the back yard. Grandma always kept a lot of chickens, Leghorns if I remember correctly. I've extracted a clip of it from one of Dad's home movies. The chickens had plenty room to roam around the farm.

Then there was the barn for the livestock. Grandpa kept a number of cows, several horses for the wagons, and his trusty pair of mules. The hogs that he raised for sausage were kept in a shed and pen behind the barn.



I was not able to find a good picture of the barn; only a clip of one corner. It had a tall wood plank fence on the west side that wrapped around the back to where the windmill and watering trough were. There was always a block of salt in the front corner. The horses and mules could usually be found by the water trough. (I don't know about that old saying about "leading a horse to water ...")

My best memories of the barn were from the fall when the hay was brought in. The barn had the typical fork for lifting the hay into the loft. The big hook hung from a pulley suspended from the ridge beam that stuck out the front of the loft through the big door that swung down. The fork would drop down on the hay in the wagon. After it was adjusted, someone would call to the other side of the barn where a person led a team of horses pulling on the rope to lift the hay up and into the loft. It was an impressive operation for a young child to watch.

Other than that, there were a few other sheds for storage around the barn, some of which were built after I visited the farm. The shed behind the outhouse was referred to as the tool shed. The corn crib stood behind the barn. I do remember bringing buckets of corn to the old corn sheller by the summer kitchen and shelling corn for the chickens. But I don't remember what we did with the corn cobs. (I think they were burned in the stove.) I also believe that there was a foot-pumped grindstone close by.

Cousin Phil Dieckhoff visited Concordia during Street Fair last fall (2013). Wilbert Schlesselman, the current owner of the farm, invited him to come out and look at the property. Phil reported that very little was left of the old buildings, but the machine shed and the windmill were still standing. The windmill, with blades still attached and pump still there, has a tree growing up in the middle of it. That may be what has kept it from toppling over. So there it stands as a last reminder of the Pape family farm and our family tree. But the memories linger on.

