

# THE WAY IT WAS

The publication of

## THE CASS CITY AREA HISTORICAL & GENEALOGY SOCIETY

VOLUME 32

AUGUST 2022

NUMBER 3



The Cass City Historical Society met at the Library on June the 4th and enjoyed a program presented Mike Fornes from Mackinaw City entitled "101 Things That Happened On The Mackinac Bridge". Since the bridge opened in 1957 it has been hit by lightning, by an airplane and a ship and it still stands. About 50 people from the community attended.

## Home, Home on the Farm

This year marks the 100th birthday of the James and Cora Purdy home at the Thumb Octagon Barn site. The "Friends of the Octagon Barn" team have been busy this year making repairs and sprucing up the place to restore it near to its original condition in preparation for guided tours throughout the



The Purdy Home today

summer and for the annual "Fall Family Days" event.

This home was a harbinger of its time in many ways compared to other farm homes in 1922. It had steam heat upstairs and down, electric lights, and running water with indoor toilets. Mr. Purdy was a banker in the town of Gagetown few miles away and didn't farm the land himself. He did research on buildings and the latest materials available at that time. He purchased a 32 volt electric generator that had

been newly developed by Charles Kettering of the Dayton Electric Company. This preceded the coming rural electric power lines by several years.

The home is of the Arts and Crafts design of the day and it has stood the test of time for all these years. There is a booklet written by members of "The Friends" that describes in detail the various features of the home as well as the barn available for sale at the farm.

One hundred years is a long time and many things have happened that have changed living on a family farm as well as in all locations of American life.

Home on a farm had been a rather reclusive family life as automobiles and developed roadways were slower to come to the rural areas. Horses were the primary source of power for farm work and also transportation. The harvesting and sale of crops, milk and cream from cows, eggs from chickens and pork from pigs were the primary sources of income for

farm families. Trips were made to town once a week for groceries and other essential supplies. One room country schools within walking distance was the norm for the farm children. They carried their lunches that were prepared at home.

World War I had recently come to an end, our soldiers had returned from Europe. Providing for the war effort was over.

Life on a farm was not easy for the farmer, but more especially for the wife and mother. She bore and raised the children. She had the responsibility for preparing the meals, and for the clothing - washing, drying, ironing and mending, for the baths—pumping and heating the water with no indoor toilet facilities, for the gardening and canning, for tending the chickens and the eggs, the cream separating and the house cleaning. It was a 24-7 responsibility in sickness or in health. The children took on some of the responsibilities when they were old enough.

Work for the farmer was not a piece of cake either. Preparing the land clearing, fencing, stone picking, plowing, seeding, cultivating, fertilizing with manure, harvesting;

## SATURDAY SPECIALS

24½ lbs. Bread Flour	-	\$1.00
5 lbs. Sugar	-	39c
15 oz. package Raisins	-	16c
2 lbs. Soda Crackers	-	25c
1 lb. can Kar-a-van Coffee	-	40c
2 pkgs. 25c pie filling	-	35c
1 lb. Cocoa	-	17c

tending the animals - cleaning stables, feeding, milking cows and shearing sheep. He also had to keep his equipment and buildings in repair often working with other farmers and craftsmen in town such as black smiths, farriers, harness makers, wagon makers (wainwrights) and veterinarians.

Entertainment in the home was limited to reading, listening to hand cranked phonograph with 78 rpm records and table games.



Radio would not be developed until 1929, and then only on a limited basis as broadcasting studios and home radios were not yet developed. Warren Harding became the first president to be heard over the airways in 1929.

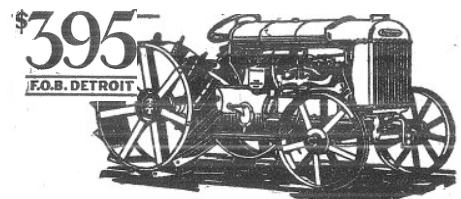
The main source of news was from the newspapers delivered in the mail, which meant it wasn't up to date.

There were movies but they were silent and only in black and white. Artist such as Charlie Chapman were popular.



The 1920s was a decade of development in many other ways. Automobiles were becoming available and more sophisticated with electric self starters. Flat tires and motors that burned oil were common and had to be contended with.

Tractors were also becoming available and gradually replacing horses. Cultivating and harvest-



**Fordson Often Does More In a Day Than Six Horses**

ing equipment were also being developed raising farming to a larger scale. Originally most family farms consisted only of 40, 60 or 80 acres. Electric power would become available replacing windmills for pumping water for the livestock.

It was very important for the farm home to have electricity for clothes washing machines, running water and indoor toilet facilities. It also meant lights in the barns, chicken coops and other out buildings. In 1922 the first electric milking machines were introduced.

Off of the farm manufacturing jobs were opening up with pay and prices were rising. Ford was paying \$5.00 a day in manufacturing jobs. Men were able to travel distances to work in those jobs in their own Model T cars. Gasoline rose from 17 cents to 25 cents a gallon.

Forms of entertainment were increasing with fairs and traveling shows in local opera houses and tents. Religious crusades were also having tent meetings. The cities were coming alive with stage shows and dancing to the music of big bands. The top song in 1922 was Swanee sung by Al Jolson.

The 18th amendment to the constitution had just been ratified giving women the right to vote. This along with the growing prosperity on farms and manufacturing plants freed up the economic outlook for that generation giving rise to what was known as "Roaring Twenties". The effect was largely felt in the large cities like New York and Chicago. Women were shortening their hair and their skirts and dancing the Charleston. The lyrics of a popular song were "Reuben, Reuben I've been thinkin', How are you going to keep them down on the farm after they've seen Paree?"

Prohibition had also just gone into effect making the sale, transport and manufacturing of alcoholic beverages illegal. Speakeasies (illegal taverns) were popular in cities along with organized crime groups.

All of this came to an end in 1929 with the stock market crash plunging the nation into "the great depression" of the 1930s.

Since that time the country has been through the Second World War, the Korean War, the Viet Nam War and the Gulf War, other skirmishes in the Middle East and 9/11. On a brighter note we have also been to the moon and made many advances in the medical sciences.

There are essentially no more small family farms. The fence rows are gone and most farms consist of hundreds of acres with farm machinery sized to match. Much critical information for farming comes today from satellites. School no longer ends at the eighth grade. Agriculture is a critical science including special methods for organic farming, cattle farming, pork farming, poultry farming, dairy farming and corn farming for alcohol production. Horses are used for parades.

Farm homes are equipped like other homes with all the appliances and comforts for modern living.

Since women received the right to vote they have steadily risen in influence to a point that they occupy 27% of the seats in the House of Representatives, 24% in the senate, 20% of the state governorships, and the only vice president. Women have also made their presence known in the business, education, television and most every field of endeavor.

In looking back we have to be thankful for what our predecessors worked through to get us to where we are today with the technology such as in our cell phones that most of us have, utilize and enjoy, but don't fully understand. This makes it harder to imagine what the world and life will be like in 2122 with the advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and space exploration to Mars, and maybe beyond.