

Fellows Road History

Written by Eleanor Wagner

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William Rapp was born in 1821 in Pennsylvania. He came to Wisconsin in 1843 with a friend. They stopped at Springfield Corners (Dane Station), built a shack and proceeded to look over the land. William went to northern WI to work in lumber cutting each winter, came back down the rivers to Prairie du Chien and sometimes St. Louis with logs, making \$50 and buying another 40 acres from the government—acquiring Wood Valley Farms. In a few years he sent for his family to come to WI to live. His parents were put on the first 40 acres he acquired. Elections were held in the original log house there between 1850 and 1860. The original logs are on the north side. The other room was built on when my grandparents Isabel and William Fellows moved there. (Note- the original house stood until recently just north of the intersection of Fellows and Hwy V).

In June 1850 William Rapp and Eliza Steele were married. She was a neighbor girl and living at the intersection of Lodi-Springfield Rd. and Lee Rd. Their children were Howard (Melisa Crow), Isabel (William Fellows), Jane (Peter Doane), Byron-unmarried, and Eva (Charles Chrislaw). During the early years when they first lived here the Indians would travel through here from Portage to Blue Mounds and Prairie du Chien. They would stop for tobacco so they always kept some out for them. One time they walked off with several loaves of freshly baked bread.

William lived into his 90s. Howard came back from Dakota and got the 80 acres south of us. Byron with what he already had got the rest. He became very well to do—into politics, etc. “a gentleman farmer.” Times were good. Byron left his estate to his two nieces and nephew—Nellie, Abbie and Harry—children of Isabel and William. Then came the roaring 20’s. Women got the right to vote. They all became “flappers” and danced the Charleston, Charles Lindberg, and Amelia Earhart. Everyone thought it would last forever—then the crash of ’29—the Depression.

Nellie married Charles Brereton and moved away from Wood Valley. Abbie moved home from teaching to care for her mother, and Harry bought Nellie’s share of the farm.

In 1913 my folks married. My mom- Nora Dohm- was from Dane, the youngest of 13 children. They built the house up the road from me where Guy and I were born. It cost \$1300.

Harry borrowed money to pay off Nellie for the farm from two separate people. At that time the banks went broke. No more money. I had a bank account with \$13 and when settled years later got \$3. Hogs were \$3 per hundred and less. No money for anything. Groceries were bought by selling eggs and old chickens. At least on the farm we had food—canned everything we could. 100’s of quarts of food were canned. Then we started raising crops that paid a little cash. Like cucumbers—everyone should have the experience of picking cucumbers! And tobacco, another cash crop and lots of work.

One never got bored. In the spring putting in the crops and garden, then haying, grain harvest, threshing, second crop hay, silo filling, corn harvest. In winter wood-cutting and often lumber sawing for lumber to build something.

Before tractors we had 10-12 horses to work the fields, about 30-40 pure bred short horn cattle, 50-60 sheep, and 100 hogs per year plus chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys. As children I don't think we ever knew how poor we were. To make matters worse the "dust bowl" years came. The western prairies had been plowed for so long that when a dry spell came with winds the prairie blew away—lots of it came here with westerly winds. We'd wake up in the morning with things covered with dust. It was dry here too. Not enough hay or feed for the animals.

Times got worse, conditions were going to result in foreclosures. FDR was elected President. He immediately started numerous things to help—WPA, CCC, NRR etc. Also the Federal Land Bank to help farmers. My dad's creditors were going to foreclose, as a last resort my Aunt Abbie sent a telegram to the Land Bank in Washington, telling them our plight. She received one back saying, tell creditors to stop, as loan will be given at once. My dad had asked Guy and I if we wanted to stay and help pay off the loan otherwise he would let it go. What could one say? So I became a farmer until 1948 when I married Herb Wagner manager of the bank at Dane. We built our house on these 4 acres Abbie gave us. I was a customer at the bank, in a conversation he found out I knew about guns and fishing. He must have been amazed! The postmistress across the street told him I was the girl for him and I doubt if his life was ever the same, a city boy moving to the country.

I didn't mean to make it sound like we never had fun—we did. The Steele cousins down the road and us would go down in the marsh and creek across from their place fishing with a picnic-fried chicken, potato salad, etc. Further toward Lodi there was a spring close to the road—clear water, watercress and some more fishing. We'd go to Crystal Lake and Pat's Pond. Last day of school picnics—all families would come—have games, etc. Lots of dances at the school and at home, oyster suppers-1 gallon. My grandpa Wm (Bill) Fellows was a square dance caller and fiddler. He played in the Lodi Quadrille Band for many years. Birthdays were a big deal. Aunt Nellie always made angel food cakes. We went to the Century of Progress in Chicago World's Fair in 1934. A friend drove us down in one day—first time I'd been out of the state. Mike our hired hand stayed and watched out for things.

Perhaps now is the time to turn the land back to some nature program, to be kept as it is for future generations to enjoy. Guy and I were the last generation to farm the land.

Written by Eleanor Fellows Wagner around 2004