



PLYMOUTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2015

Fall

The Farm is a good place to be from:

(Memories of life on our farm in Plymouth by Margaret Carol Creelman, daughter of Alvin William and Bernice Creelman written March 1986)



James W. Creelman built ca 1875



Aerial view ca 1927, Vicksburg top, Cty Rd 6 at bottom left

Farm house still used as a family residence – after 140 years families are still calling it home.

Recollections of life on any farm in the Thirties could be covered in a few words:

Gardens and fields, ponds and woods, cows and horses, chickens and ducks, fences, roads and railroad tracks, tornados and blizzards, good crops and bad, family, friends and traveling salesmen, dogs and cats, cooking and canning, washing and cleaning, sewing and ironing, school and church, singing and playing, remembering and reminiscing, recession and depression.

Borders of our farm were those fences, woods and the Creelman Crossroad (now Vicksburg); the south border was the Luce Line railroad tracks. Those held a special place in our farm experience, because our grandfather, James William Creelman, had given the railroad a narrow strip of land in the woods for the track. This intersection became the “Creelman Crossing” where there was a tiny “depot” shelter where we could wait for the 9:00 AM train from Wayzata and points west.

We flagged the train to stop, and 10 cents took us to Minneapolis in a half hour; another 10 cents brought us home at 6:00 PM. Sometimes for diversion we would watch our penny flattened by the wheels of the engine as it rumbled by. Riding on the Luce Line was an experience – the passenger car smelled heavily of formaldehyde and swayed one way while the engine swayed the other.

We took special delight in the tiny log cabin on the hill beyond the Creelman Crossroad (now Vicksburg Lane) which had been built for the Gilfillan boys for hunting. We imagined cowboys and Indians had used those bunk beds and learned that Grandfather Creelman had helped build the stone chimney. (Hopefully, this cabin will be historically preserved)

The woods everywhere offered us beautiful wild flowers. Mothers Day brought May Flowers and one year when they bloomed a week early, I presented my mother with huge bouquet. No one knew how disappointed I was in “Mother Nature” that year. To us mushrooms growing on the roots of trees were “Indian Moccasins” and we found wild strawberries and wild gooseberries, as well as a few Hazelnuts.

We always had cats and a dog. When I questioned the absence of our dog, I accepted the fact that he had gone to his “Happy Hunting Ground”. A white Spitz dog, Trixie, came to us after being abandoned on the highway (Cty Rd 6). She played ante-ante-over with us, catching the ball and bringing it around the house to be tossed again. Sadly, she was hit by a car on that same corner where we found her. And she too went to her “Happy Hunting Ground”.

Our pond across the road offered us diversion; there was an apple orchard beyond and even thorn apples along the fence. When our neighbors farm buildings caught fire in the night, fire trucks from Wayzata pumped water from our pond to put it out. It was frightening to see Keller’s buildings burning.

The house was heated in the winter by huge chunks of wood. We cut away panels of large corrugated cartons, laying them over the furnace grating to send the heat into the far corners. One morning we discovered a fire in the dust and lint which had accumulated around the base of the furnace. While I ran out in terror into the front yard, toothbrush in hand, screaming about the fire, Eleanor in her usual manner, went for water to put it out. She loved to go out into the yard in a heavy rain storm and let the rain splash on her face. During one tornado, though, we all watched from the cellar and later found the storm had uprooted 14 elm trees in the yard.

Eleanor and I slept in the upstairs north bedroom. There was one little grate in the floor above the central furnace for heat so water froze in the glass on the dresser while we slept under heavy crazy quilts. She had vivid dreams and would scream in her sleep – even the neighbors on the hill said they sometime heard her. I chose to walk in my sleep wandering downstairs, scaring Mom half to death.

We all wore bib overalls. Eleanor loved to climb trees and my brothers climbed the barn roof. More than once Mom would see three or four heads appear over the ridgepole – luckily no one was hurt in those escapades.

We sometimes went to Wolsfeld’s maple sugar farm west of the farm for picnics – fee: 25 cents. We never understood the sign, “Gentiles Only”.

A large pit developed when gravel was sold for roads for tax money. When the pit reached water level we found tadpoles, frog and turtles. (This is now called “Cimarron Ponds) Gordon collected big bullfrogs and put them in the toolbox of the mower when he cut hay; he skinned them and served up a pan of fried frog legs, Mmmm!

Harvesting was hard work for all, neighbors helping each other on the threshing rig as it circulated to all the farms, arriving early in the morning for a hearty breakfast and stopping only for a generous lunch. Our farm machinery was far from sophisticated – a plow, disc, harrow, mower, manure spreader, hay rack – all horse drawn. We eventually had a gasoline motor on the water pump to send water to the huge tank for the horses and up to an overhead that provided water for washing, piped into the house. Of course we had no indoor plumbing – not even electricity. Our drinking water was pumped and carried into the kitchen in large pails.

We were often visited by relatives from Minneapolis, northern Minnesota and Iowa. One Iowa cousin, Donald Davenport, while attending the University of Minnesota, often appeared on the road from Parkers Lake, singing all the way. We enjoyed the visits from family from Minneapolis whose three children were just our same ages. They joined us in exploring the gravel in search of “carnelians” (brownish-red mineral which is commonly used as a semi-precious gemstone) and other surprises. As an assignment in school I wrote a letter to Marian, signing it, “Sincerely, You’re Cousin”, because I was sure we must be related.

Children’s Day at the Parkers Lake Methodist Church was special. One spring Sunday I was all prepared with my “recitation” wearing a new hat. As my mother carefully adjusted it, I visualized a lovely pale blue straw but the mirror reflected an average straw colored hat – I almost cried. Another Children’s Day I was sick at home alone while everyone else went to the service. Over the years we were quarantined for various ailments – scarlet fever, mumps, measles, chicken pox – if one had it, we all stayed home.

Every fall our “Little White Church on the Hill” (sung to the tune of the “Little Brown Church in the Vale”) put on a huge chicken dinner. Everyone donated food; we usually did potatoes and the Epworth League served “all you can eat” to people who came clear from Minneapolis to enjoy the repast. I still remember spilling coffee on one patron in my novice waitress style.

One Christmas I found my old baby doll completely restored with a new china head, tucked into a full sized baby crib – an unexpected and tearful reunion. Once, a little black baby doll arrived at Christmas in a red cradle. We sewed for our dolls ourselves on the old Singer treadle machine. Eleanor had received a beautiful, one-year size, doll from our Aunt Ethel in Florida. It had real hair and clothes we made from real patterns. It had a tiny phonograph in its tummy with cup-shaped records and after turning the little crank we heard a clear child-like voice reciting songs and poems. Grandma Davenport once gave me a little flat covered wicker basket and under a collection of little fabric pieces there was a tiny pair of scissors.

Cooking for a family of nine was never ending task. Breakfast was always oatmeal with a handful of All-Bran to fortify us for the day. Milk and cream was plentiful; we bought back from the Twin City Milk Producers Association butter, cheese and “whey” which we made into cottage cheese. Often this depleted our credit for the milk sold and I remember Mom crying with relief when a milk check for \$6.00 finally arrive after a zero balance for several weeks. The milk truck picked up our cans every morning, delivered them to the milk company, then dropped them off every afternoon.

Lunches for school were put together on an assembly line in our pantry; homemade bread for peanut butter and/or jelly sandwiches, cookies or cake and if we were lucky and orange or apple. Mom baked eight loaves of bread every other day in black metal pans which were placed in the warming oven across the top of the wood range for the second rising. She always said she couldn’t go to the Ladies Aid Society at church because she had bread baking. Eleanor liked to cook and often augmented the bread baking with good caramel rolls or pies. I often chose to do the cleaning and dusting while Eleanor bakes. After Gordon’s “Crystal Set Radio” became sophisticated with a speaker, I listened to music while I dusted.

Washing clothes was a real challenge – first with a “hand pump” machine, then with a gas engine added. A big oval boiler covered one end of the wood burning range for heavier washing in boiling soapy water – we grated Fels Naphtha Soap for our washing. This same boiler served to hold many quarts of “Ball” canning jars for cold-pack canning. We strung clothes lines between trees and hung out the washing until it was bitter cold. The frozen “Long Johns” were then draped over a folding rack and placed over the big furnace grating to finish drying. With several flat irons heating on the range we managed to keep our clothes neatly pressed – no drip-dry clothes then!

Canning for the winter months was an important part of summer. My Home Economics teacher, Miss Becker, read my report in disbelief and one Saturday drove to our farmhouse to see for herself my summer project. I watched her drive along the Creelman Crossroad in her little “Fliver” (Model T Ford) all prepared to prove our 400 quarts of canning: pickles, relish, sweet corn, green beans, tomatoes, Swiss chard, beets, rhubarb – augments by crates of peaches, pears and plums, a barrel of sauerkraut (from which we snitched cold samples occasionally) and even canned pork chops and head cheese. We kept rutabagas and great quantities of potatoes in the cellar. We would all gather around a tub sized container on the porch to “snap” beans for canning the next morning. When I started taking piano lessons, Mom managed to have mounds of green peppers, green tomatoes and onion all chopped and ready for canning chili sauce as soon as I emerged from the lessons.

Our Home Economics teacher saw Eleanor’s project too; café curtains for the kitchen made from flour sacks with perky little appliquéed flowers across the hems cut from scraps which were left from our dresses. We used flour sacks for dish towels and even night gowns; when our panties should have matched our dresses we used flour sacks trimmed with scraps of the matching print along the bottom hem.

From the back of a horse drawn wagon we picked pails of chokecherries near the woods. Cooked with apples and drained through flour sacks we preserved many jars of jelly. Turkeys and ducks strayed into our yard from the City Workhouse Farm east of the crossroad. We collected their eggs and hatched them under our chickens adding to our somewhat meager flocks. Occasionally we had roast pheasant for a treat – sometimes out of season!

We often had traveling salesmen at our door. When mom bought a big aluminum roaster, she received a premium of a tiny 5” Wearever frying pan, just right for one egg and still in use today.

I was told that a peddler sold a turquoise stone, which was set in a gold chain, to Aunt Alma Eleanor Creelman and I still wear her gold chain. She died at the age of 24 of tuberculosis, so I never knew her. The tragedy was repeated when my sister, Eleanor, named after her, also died at the age of 24 at the birth of her son. Of course when my father died in 1923 I was too young to know him.

Aunt Alma’s diary of 1893 offers up some precious accounts of life on the farm at age 14:
To Alma from Sister Alice – “Write something in it every day”

Jan 1 – 20 degrees above – I am going to try to go to Sunday School every Sunday I can.
I did not have a lesson leaf this week so I did not know my lesson by Sunday.

Jan 2 – 0 degrees I faced a pair of mittens for my Uncle Graham, helped wash this morning and ironed this evening. I am going to make donuts soon.

Jan 4 – Very cold! Alvin caught a rabbit this morning. We are going to have it for dinner tomorrow. I have been sewing ever since ten o'clock this morning till nine tonight.

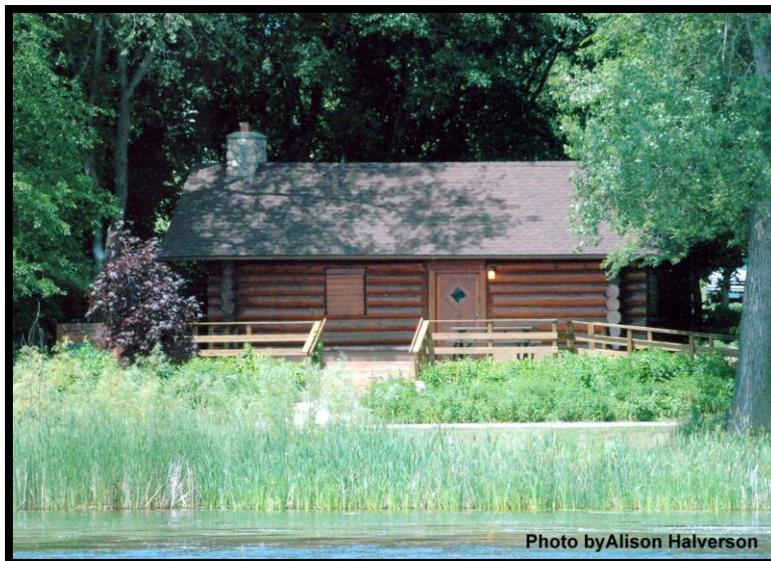
Jan 8 – Wind! Our teacher was not at Sunday School today so we had Genie Hatcher for our teacher. (Reference to our teacher didn't surprise me – Jennie Hatcher Kreatz was still teaching Sunday School at the church in 1940!)

Our years on the farm were difficult – there were no subsidies, no support programs, no money for improvements, no price or production controls and of course we weren't required to have insulated barns and there was no electricity for sophisticated dairy operations. It was subsistence farming – we existed, survived and endured. The records repeatedly show: “foreclosure/redemption” – it was the DEPRESSION !!

Note: Carol's mother N, Bernice Creelman remarried after Alvin passed away Feb. 19, 1923. She married John Day in 1924 and they had four more sons Larry, Mardell, Ralph and Norman in addition to Eleanor, Gordon and Carol.

In a future newsletter an additional article will be included highlighting Carol's aspiration to learn to play the piano inspired by a traveling salesman.

Carol worked tenaciously to try and save the old log cabin built for J. B. Gilfillan on his Ben Avon Farm at Parkers Lake. The cabin was too far gone to be taken apart and moved but Carol and her cousin paid for the recreated log cabin that is now located by the shores of Parkers Lake. Carol Creelman born November 4, 1921 died November 28, 1998 at age 77 but her legacy to the people of Plymouth lives on.



Another successful History on Parade Tour of Plymouth

October 4th was a beautiful day for the tour. The 50 people on the tour enjoyed the sites and the recounting of some of early Plymouth's history. One of the stops was the tour of the Mt. Olivet Chapel, a historic treasure in Plymouth. See pictures below.





Old Fashioned Christmas

On Saturday, December 5th from 2-5 pm, the Plymouth Historical Society and the Plymouth Park & Recreation Department are co-sponsoring the 28th Annual “OLD FASHIONED CHRISTMAS IN PLYMOUTH”. The purpose of the event is to provide some old fashioned holiday spirit and activities for families in Plymouth. Children can visit with Santa and Mrs. Claus will be right there to help the Elves hand out candy canes. The children can also see Santa’s reindeer and go for a hay ride pulled by Belgian horses with bells jingling. The rides are free, hot cider and cookies will be provided; carolers and making Christmas decorations are other activities for the children.

This year we again have our great story teller back. Bob Gasch will be telling holiday stories in the Carriage House, something you don’t want to miss! Also the Armstrong Chamber Singers will be singing holiday songs and delighting the children young and old.

Bring your friends, relatives, neighbors and kids ages 1 month to 100 years young. The annual event has attracted large crowds with some families having a perfect attendance record with their children since it started in 1987. We had a great time last year as we do every year.

Activities include:

Visit with Santa

Live Reindeer

*Old Fashioned Hay
Ride*

Hot Cider and Cookies

*Old Fashioned Xmas
Decorations*



Old Toy Train Display

Crafts

*Story Telling by
Bob Gasch*

*Music Groups
Armstrong Chamber
Singers
Messiah Recorder
Ensemble*

Website

The Plymouth Historical Society website is:

www.plymouthmnhistoricalsociety.com

Check us out!

Note: All past newsletters dating back to 1986 are available on-line in PDF format for viewing or printing.

Donations

Donated by Quester Antique Club:

- \$50 from the MI-NI-TANKA Chapter 856



Meetings

The Museum is also open the 1st and 3rd Sunday of the month in the afternoon from 1:00 to 3:00 PM during Spring, Summer and Fall.

The monthly business meetings are held on the 4th Monday of the month at 7 p.m. in the Plymouth Historical Society Building, located at 3605 Fernbrook Lane North, Plymouth, MN.

Open by special appointment in January, February & March

Current Officers

The following are the present officers:

President	Dennis Jacobson	763-972-0988
Vice President	Kay Bertrand	763-249-0138
Secretary	Betty Jacobson	763-972-0988
Treasurer	Gary Schiebe	763-473-4889



Mailing and Membership List

If you are not a member and want to sign up or if you have any questions, please call: Kay Bertrand, 763-249-0138.

The 2015 annual dues are:

Individual	\$10.00
Family	\$15.00
Individual Lifetime	\$100.00
Family Lifetime	\$150.00

If you would like the newsletter delivered via E-mail please notify Kay Bertrand or send an e-mail to: info@plymouthmnhistoricalsociety.com

If you do, it is a plus for both of us. When you receive via e-mail it will be in color. When sent by mail it is in black and white and costs PHS about \$2.00 per copy to print and mail.