

# Norbert Haberli

An Interview of an  
Egg Harbor  
Dairy Farmer, Orchardist, and Horseman



By Giz Herbst  
Egg Harbor Historical Society  
March 10, 2015

# Interview of Norbert Haberli Dairy Farmer, Orchardist, and Horseman

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Age 90 at time of interview

Dairy Farmer on 3935 Cty Rd EE

Fish Creek, WI

Parents: Joseph and Ida (Stern) Haberli

Wife: Genevieve (Gen) Zettel

Siblings: (oldest to youngest)

Children: (oldest to youngest)

Milton

Margie

Verna Herbst

Robert (Bob)

Laura Naumann

Sharon and Steve - twins

Gertrude Naumann

Norbert (Buddy)

Louella Haberli

Viola Haberli

**Norbert**

Adeline Zak



Norbert John Haberli, 94, of Egg Harbor, passed away on May 6, 2019. He was born February 6, 1925, in Egg Harbor to Joseph and Ida (Stern) Haberli. On October 27, 1951, he married Genevieve T. Zettel, she preceded him in death on May 26, 1998.

Norbert was born and raised on the family farm, which was established in 1909. He eventually purchased it in 1957. Norbert was well known for “logging” with horses. His reputation and passion for conservancy lead him to be active in logging with horses for many years. One of his many logging projects included clearing the land at Crossroads at Big Creek.

**Int** – Interviewer, Giz Herbst, nephew of Norbert and Egg Harbor Historical Society Board Member

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**Int** – You spent 90 years on the farm, dairy, orchards, logging, and sawmill?

**Norb** - Well, I bought, trained, and sold a lot of horses during that time. A lot of people said Norb is crazy, he's going to lose the farm. I got to know Eugene

Kinney, President of Zenith Corp. he bought a farm down in Juddville. They had a couple of riding horses. His wife was a nurse and she stopped in one day and started talking and was very interesting. When school was out in Chicago she came up with the family and lived at the farm in Juddville and he would fly up on some weekends and drive others. At Juddville, drive on toward the water, the farm is on the south side of the road.

They had a local guy who worked the farm for them. They wanted to see crops growing on the farm so they could go back to Chicago and tell the city folks about the farm. Some issues came up with taking care of the farm. They were concerned about how much seed and fertilizer was being used and they asked me how much I thought should be used. I told them they should have a soil test to check on fertilizer needs.

**Int** – When did you take over the farm?

**Norb** – I had work horses while dad was alive, but I couldn't get rid of the work horses fast enough, but then I went to riding horses.

I took over the fall in 1956. Dad died in 1954. He bought the farm in 1910.

My Grandma Schwartz was originally a Stern from Milwaukee. When Mom was 5 or 6 her dad got struck by lightning while she was sitting in her Dad's lap. He was killed.

**Int** – In the Institute Cemetery (on Hwy 57) at the Catholic Church there is a stone marked Alois Haberli, I believe this is your grandfather. Where did your Grandpa come from, was he born in this country?

**Norb** – He was born here. His mother was a Schleis from Forestville...Mark, Loren, and Howard Schleis family. Grandma Schleis married a Haberli. Haberli Road was Dad's home farm. When dad and mom got married, to tell the truth he got kicked out of the home farm because of the difference in religion. Dad was Catholic and turned Lutheran for mom and there were hard feelings, much more years back then today. Mark, Loren and Howard were in the implement business in Forestville.

**Int** – How big was the farm when your dad started in 1910?

**Norb** – 120 acres. Less than 12 cows, 12 was a big farm. He increased to 16. The old barn that burned had a steady herd of 16 cows milked by hand. Dad started with tractors shortly after getting married. He bought a Titan Tractor, and had two teams of horses. The neighbors tended to have two horses, one that was half dead and the other could hardly walk, so Dad many times borrowed out a team. Nobody had money in those days, what they did was to pay back with manual labor.

**Int** – When were the orchards started?

**Norb** – Dad planted 20 acres to start and later added 15 acres (on 40 acres purchased south of the farm on Cty E). Farms grew when more modern tractors came along. The Titan tractor was a big old thing without a radiator, it had a big water tank that surrounded the engine and kept it cool. Only 2 gears, 2 forward, 1 backwards. What happened was that it took so long to get anywhere with it that Dad would leave it out in the field overnight. He could walk home faster than drive that big old thing. One cold night in May the water in the cooling tank froze up and tractor was shot. I remember that tractor standing in the back yard as a little squirt and I would climb up on it, way up high and make believe I was out working in the field. Adolf Dietrich bought it later because he had a tractor like it, so he used it for parts.

**Int** – You had 5 sisters, how did it work with all those girls in the family?

**Norb** – Well I didn't have to wear dresses I know that, but they did a lot of hand-me-downs.

**Int** – Where did you go to school?

**Norb** – I went to Pleasant Grove for 8 years. Teachers were (1930-32) Clara Kreft, (1932-34) Percy Neuman, (1934-35) Jim McArdle, and (1935-38) Leslie Kihl. Walked up to the corner of Memorial and (Harbor) School Road. Went to Gibraltar for high school. All kids that went to high school in the area went to Gibraltar. When Lou (sister) went to high school she started at Sturgeon Bay because there was no school bus for Gibraltar kids. The bus started when she was a senior. I had a bus that went right past the our house. (Teachers were verified and dates added using the EHH's Family Memories Vol. 2)

**Int** – Where did Lou stay in Sturgeon Bay?

**Norb** – At a Mrs. Devine next to school. When she first started she stayed at Grandma Schwartz. That was on the Sawyer side (West side) and the kids had to cross the bridge to and from school. The bridge (steel auto) was opened in 1931. I remember crossing the old railroad bridge. You had to stop and pay a 10 cents fee to cross the bridge. I remember when new bridge was built in 1931 and the big celebration they had.

**Int** – Did your other sisters and your brother Milton go to high school?

**Norb** – Lou was the first. Milton, Verna, Gertrude, and Laura just went through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Milton actually didn't finish grade school. It was common in those days to farm as soon as possible, schooling wasn't important.

**Int** – Did you play sports in HS? We have a photo of you on an Egg Harbor basketball team.

**Norb** – I was at a big disadvantage, kids who were from Fish Creek, Sister Bay, Baileys Harbor they played basketball in their town hall as kids. They had a head start, for us farmers, what did we know about basketball?

Later on we had an Egg Harbor had a team: Decker Woldt, Jim Demmin, Bob Sawyer, Don Lautenbach, Shorty Haen, (also Bill Sawyer, Les Lautenbach, John Christianson, Larry Lafontaine). We played Jacksonport, Baileys Harbor, Sister Bay, Ephraim, and Ellison Bay, we played each other every Monday night at the high school. It was after the Washington Island team went through the ice and all drowned, the Island no longer had a team when I played. I never went to Washington Island until son Bob was playing baseball for Egg Harbor in the Door County League.

**Int** – Your farm is still milking cows isn't it?

**Norb** – The original barn burned in 1980. I had to decide if I was going to continue. Eugene Kinney and the Mrs. (President of Zenith Corp) came over one Sunday morning and said, “Norb you're going to build a barn, we're going to finance you”, insurance didn't cover everything.

**Int** – I remember staying and helping one summer in the 1950s when the John Cassidy barn down the road from your farm burned.

**Norb** – It was during cherry time. A storm came up so quick and heavy all the pickers brought their cherries in at once. We loaded the pails on the truck and took them back home under the big apple tree and rained so hard that the pails filled and the cherries ran over and down the slope under the tree and covered the yard with cherries. John Cassidy was working at the cherry receiving station on Hwy 42 when his barn burned. The station is where we brought our cherries and then they were hauled from there to Sturgeon Bay Fruit Growers Canning Factory

**Int** – Besides all your nephews and nieces coming to pick, you had migrant workers.

**Norb** – They stayed across the road south of Cty E . Dad had bought that 80 acres that he gave to Milton. Milton farmed down toward Egg Harbor, next to Stone Hedge Golf Course. Later Milton sold that farm and bought Doc Schmidt's farm on Memorial Drive across from your Grandpa Herbst's farm. Dad took the 80 acres back from Milton. We had some wonderful people from Texas, well educated people, nice and helpful. We also had that gray house on Cty E in the orchard. Milton and your dad Bill built it out of all homemade lumber.

**Int** – I remember hearing that John Toppe lived in that house for a while, I knew John from Sturgeon Bay High School.

**Norb** - His dad, Elmer Toppe, taught at Sunny Point and his wife at Carlsville, or was it the other way around? John was their son. They stayed there for a long time. Money was scarce and with Mrs. Toppe teaching school all day they'd often show up for supper down at the farm. Mom would know they may show up, it was OK with her. (A check of the school history in the EHH's Family Memories, Vol. 2 has Mrs. Florence (Elmer) Toppe teaching at Carlsville from 1945-1948 and Elmer Toppe taught at Sunny Point from 1944-1949, they stayed in the Haberli house in the orchard on Cty E at that time. Elmer would later teach in Sturgeon Bay's Sawyer school)

**Int** – Things were different then. Holidays and birthdays, all of us cousins would show up with our parents at grandma and grandpa's farm and have a good time playing in the woods and down at the swamp, and riding horses.

**Norb** - Horses, after marriage Gen liked horses, I didn't care much about work horses, but riding horses. I made lots of money buying training, selling horses. I made sales all over, the other side of Green Bay, Luxemburg. Got to meet so many people, Rio Creek, an Oliver implement dealer, Don Walters. I got to meet him because his brother had a quarter horse stallion that he used in competition. Don also farmed and was filling silo and working on it. His wife was to turn the switch on when he yelled, she thought she heard him so she turned it on and he got caught in the silo unloader. Had his legs off at the knees. I tried to do a lot of business with him.

**Int** – You said you like the riding horses, but not the working horses, but you got involved in logging with horses.

**Norb** – (showing a photo) – This team was a breed developed in Germany, powerful but small. At the Maifest in Jacksonport in the horse pull, out of 15 teams they place 3<sup>rd</sup>. Guys were kidding him about what he was doing with that team in Jacksonport? Just wait...1<sup>st</sup> pull, 2<sup>nd</sup> pull, 3<sup>rd</sup> pull, 4<sup>th</sup> pull, other teams were dropping out...we ended up 3<sup>rd</sup>.

I remember the vacations to Shipshewana, Indiana, with the Amish. 20 miles south there is a big Amish settlement. Friend of his, Ron Jilot, got to know the Amish and they went out for their big fall celebration. Went for 12 years straight, Harvey and Don Naumann, Ron and some others. He got to know a lot of Amish, hard to get to know them, but once you do they are great friends. They may start farming with 140 acres and as their boys get married they then give them 40 acres.

**Int** – You used horses for logging.

**Norb** – I had a team of blacks raised from babies, trained them. They were rideable and comfortable and good work horses.

**Int** – The woodlot that you own across the road from your house on Cty EE, that's in Fish Creek isn't it?

**Norb** – We log our own woods across the road. We've also logged Clarks Lake, Crossroads at Big Creek. Logged 40 acres near Sturgeon Bay. It was one of those government programs and they had to thin it out. They asked Bud (son), would you be interested in thinning it out. Bud said he'd talk to Dad and look it over. Every other tree had to be cut down and every other row. Forester showed what had to be done. We hauled the timber home. Came time to settle up with owner, owner said I thought I had to pay you for cutting . We made a killing on it.

I've have had 5 sawmills. First one was from Sevastopol area, it didn't work but we fixed it and had for it for two years, but it was only for small stuff and didn't do a straight cut. In Dykesville we found a bigger and better mill saw which I later sold in the newspaper and got my money out of it. Then we went to the western part of the state and bought one for \$600 and it was a beast that you ride the carriage back and forth with a 48” saw blade. And finally we went to Antigo bought a mill and still have it today, it's a good mill. We have our sheds stacked with lumber. We have a 4-sided planer with blower, planes all sides at same time. The blower blows the shavings into a chopper wagon and we use it for bedding in the barn. Barnowski out of Baileys Harbor got it at Marquette, Michigan but couldn't get it to work. He said, you can take it and set it up and I'll come over and plane my lumber, but he only brought over one truck load.

**Int** – So you've dairy farmed and had an orchard. You're logging and have a sawmill, that's a lot for one lifetime.

**Norb** – Ya, and my brother-in-law said, Norbert your'e crazy doing so much. Son Bud is farming 7 years now and his son is 25 years old and helping him. Anderson, Tishler, Abrahamson, Haen, Cassidy, Buechner, all neighbor family dairy farms gone, the land is rented out. The only farm with milk cows around us is Kaczmark's.

When dad was farming in the winter and the roads were blocked area farmers brought over their milk cans and he would haul the milk by sleigh to Carlsville, that's a long haul. He would take a sleigh load of milk cans and leave it there and return with a different sleigh with empty cans. Spring time the horses would often have trouble getting through Plum Bottom the water was so deep. Twice a week

he'd haul milk. Ed Krueger would take the milk from Carlsville to Sturgeon Bay. I remember the water was drained from Plum Bottom, but it still could be a problem with 6 inches, or so, over the road.

**Int** – How many acres is your farm now?

**Norb** - Around 280 acres. He bought more woodland across the road from Walter Tanck. We had very good neighbors except for one who had problems knowing property lines and who's woods the trees belonged to. Many in the neighborhood worked for Eames Orchards.

**Int** – Do you remember Dr. Eames, he had a lot of acres in the Egg Harbor?

**Norb** – I had teeth pulled by him. He had a lot of orchard, a lot of people worked for him. He was a neighborhood doctor for miles around, but you had to go there and pick him up, and take home. He'd come out to house. Poor people at that time couldn't afford to pay him. He'd take land in trade for medical payments. We were all born at home and my Dad would pick him up. At that time Dad had a Buick.

**Int** – What do you remember about the Village of Egg Harbor?

**Norb** – I picked up cherry pickers in Egg Harbor with the truck, also Jacksonport and West Jacksonport. Before the Door County Coop. all the business was done at Bertschinger's. Stiffy Bertschinger took care of the feed mill and his brother Art, the lumber. John and Paul Bertschinger were pretty sharp. John's kids were kept home to work where Paul made sure his kids got an education. At Peninsula Center, Washichek's store had everything that you needed, but eventually Mom bought the Wilson store in Egg Harbor built by Jim Wilson. Harry Wilson, Jim's nephew, farmed and his dad was a cheese maker in Juddville, we were pretty good friends with Harry. Wulfs bought the store from Wilsons and then Mom from the Wulfs.

**Int** – There are lot of stories about Casey's and Murphy Moore's. The place across from Murphy Moore's, now Mojo Rosas, had a dance hall along side of it that burned down. Bill Bertschinger was the only one that could provide a name for us, The Palm Garden.

**Norb** – No it was not the Palm Garden. I can remember going there with Mom and Dad and as a little kid sliding across the dance floor during breaks. We'd run and slide. The guy who had the race horse, Paddy Grey had the place. During summer he'd close the tavern and race horse all around and in winter time he'd

exercise his horse by going up School Road north down Memorial Drive past our place to Cty EE and turn around and go back home again. There are a lot of buildings that are gone and you'll never have pictures of. There was a house where the grocery store is, LeMere lived there, I think he was a town mail carrier related to Clayton Meckenberg, his mother was a LeMere, that's where all the Egg Harbor's baseball talent came from.

**Int** - How did you parents decide to buy the farm in 1910?

**Norb** – Dad and mother were looking for a farm and Mom's brother died and she inherited his insurance money, that went for a down payment on the farm. Looking around they found the farm for sale. Anderson owned it and they bought it. The house is the original log house, I've done some remodeling at times and the logs are like they were just laid a year ago. Your dad Bill helped put wood siding over the logs, now aluminum siding covers the logs. There were always a lot of south and west side windows. There was the original barn, a machine shed, and a garage with a chicken coop attached to the back of it.

The first well was there when dad bought the farm, you used a hand pump. Then a pump jack with gasoline engine was installed with an overhead pipe running to the barn. There was a pump house over the well.

Our first electricity had a 32 volt wind tower. I remember climbing the 65 ft. tower to grease it twice a year. We had 32 volt motors to do work like milk cows. The neighbors wanted us to pay for the power poles to come in from highway 42 so they could hook on to it before public service finally took over and put in the poles. That was about when I started high school. (1938-39)

I later drilled a 200 foot well. We had a wood burning cook stove Dad warmed his feet in the oven. We heated with a wood burning furnace in the basement. Saturday nights we listened to boxing on the radio. Now I have a newer wood burning furnace with blowers.

**Int** – We heard Buddy was thinking of putting in a milking robot?

**Norb** – With the setup I built it would be better not to, he would have to make a lot of changes. I just love the barn, it houses 60 cows and I made a darn good living with 60. I finished with a good living, plus no debt. When Mom bought the Wilson store the milk check was divided 1/3 went to Mom for the farm, 1/3 to me and 1/3 to pay the financier of the store, the financier said his third of my monthly milk check was bigger than his whole monthly milk check from his farm.

**Norb** - I'll be glad to get back to the farm a month from today.

Interview – 1 hour 15 minutes



Advocate photo by Christina Nesham

**NORBERT HABERLI HOLDS THE REINS** of a sturdy Halflinger horse while his son Bud hooks up a log to be carried out of the woods.

### Across Four Generations

"My dad got his first tractor in 1925 or '26, but that was just a knocked old beast. He didn't have it very long. He had to go back to horses because it wasn't very durable."

--Norbert Haberli at age 80  
*still logged with horses*

Deb Fitzgerald - Advocate staff  
reporter - 3-12-2005



Advocate p

**IN A SIGHT** that hasn't changed much in a century, Norbert Haberli guides a logging horse through a Door County woods.

Across Four Generations  
March 12, 2005 Door County Advocate

