

Evolution Of A Farm And Its Barn Schleif Family

Rosanne Schleif, PVCW Board Member
Evolution Of Farm & Its Barn
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The Evolution of a Farm and Its Barn by Rosanne Schleif

As I look around my Town of Pine River, Lincoln County neighborhood I no longer see the barns that were present in my youth. My home place up the road had the barn removed a good 5 years ago. My own barn on the adjacent property was taken down 4 years ago. The evolution of these barns is sad to see for many of us who grew up on these properties. Generations of our immigrant ancestors and their families had worked so hard to establish them.

My ancestors had big dreams of becoming farmers and guiding their own destiny with their efforts. They had been farmers for generations on the Ferdinand von Lehman estate in Kreis Wirzitz, POSEN. This estate was reputed to be progressive and excel in raising grain crops, horses, and sheep. My grandfather, August Schleif was born (b. 1 Nov 1892) in a small dorf where the estate kept around 500 sheep. August emigrated with his parents Hermann and Eva SOMMERS SCHLEIF in April of 1893. He was just 6 months old when they arrived in the Port of Baltimore and made their way to Merrill, Wisconsin. Eva had at least one sister and some cousins already living there. The couple had \$35 in their pocket. Hermann listed his occupation as farmer but lived in the City of Merrill until 1901 working as a machine hand in a saw factory and working in logging camps on the side. He and Eva had 5 more children after they arrived. The last 2 were twins - one died at birth and a girl died 3 months later. Then mother Eva died a month later. With four young children under the age of eight to care for, Hermann wasted no time in marrying his second wife Henrietta FRIEDRICH (who was Eva's first cousin). In 1901 they bought the Town of Pine River farm from Robert GERHOLZ. The order of ownership on this parcel was patented in 1859 to Robert BRIGGS; 1885 Geo. PROSSER; 1895 Robert GERHOLZ; 1901 Hermann SCHLEIF; 1940 August SCHLEIF; 1948 Ted SCHLEIF. Land had been logged and some land had been cleared. In 1898 the Pine River fire burned much of what remained forested. Many in Pine River dreamed of farming, but they needed a cheese factory and a share of the market to sell their product before they could commit to farming on a large scale. Hermann got the ball rolling by rallying the neighbors to form the Pine River Dairy Co-op. That required lots of risk and sacrifice, but in time they made it happen. It was the catalyst that allowed dairying to become a viable way to make a living in Pine River. Hermann and Henrietta also expanded their workforce with 10 more children, 8 who lived to adulthood. He also ran his own logging camp in the Bunker Hill area east of the farm.

In 1914 Hermann built a new barn on the farm. The stone foundation was laid by John Nass and Bill Abel. According to the Merrill City Directory, both were masons and Bill was a contractor who had hailed from Pennsylvania. The structure was 36' wide, 88' long and 36' high built on an 8' stone foundation. It had a 14' open side shed on the east side. It also had an attached 14'x36' stone silo and hexel shed on the west side. The initial structure housed 40 guernsey cows and had mangers for 8 work horses. It was the first barn in our German neighborhood built with a hip roof. This allowed a greater capacity for storing crops. I remember the side shed adjacent to the hayloft had a pigeon coop. People would come out to our farm to harvest "squab" which was a delicacy. When the haymow was quite full you could climb onto the hewn beams and climb inside to explore.

Hermann's family milked 40 cows morning and night. In 1914 they were the first patrons at the Pine River Co-op to earn a \$1,000 milk check and owned 600 acres of land. He also had the reputation of running all his operations like an army [according to my dad, Ted Schleif]. Tragedy struck in 1913 when one son, Max, was killed in a logging accident. Then in July 1932 Hermann suffered a stroke at age 66. He died a few days later. Only his oldest son August was interested in farming at the time. Many of his sons were working in factories and did not want to return to farm life. They had no offers buy out the large farm and hiring of others to run it did not work out. August was already farming with his sons next door and doing double duty by keeping Hermann's place going. Eventually the estate was settled with August making an offer that the family accepted. As things evolved, my father Ted, the oldest of the sons, worked Hermann's place. When he married in 1948, the couple took over on a land contract. Our family of five children grew up working many hours on this farm.

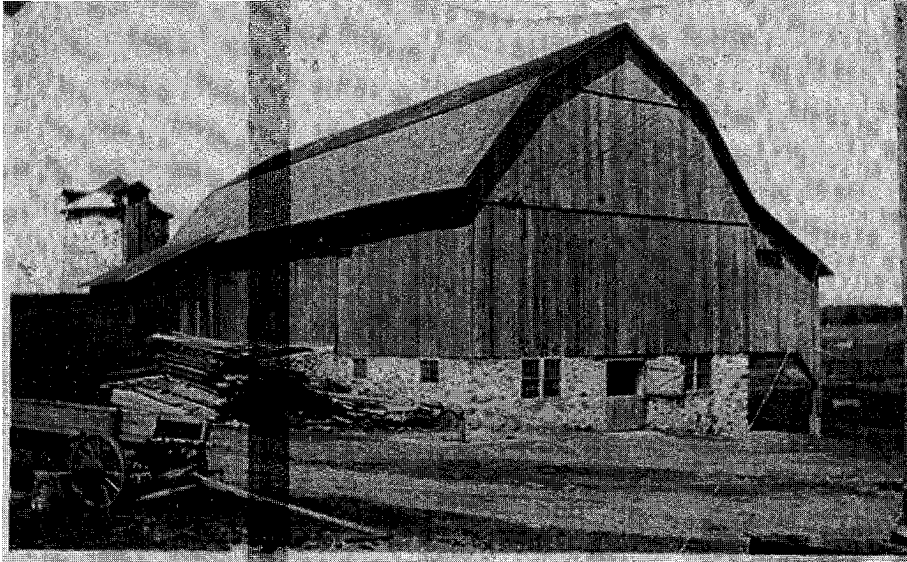
Herman had developed quite a reputation for his farming as noted in his obituary. *"As a farmer, Mr. Schleif took the matter seriously, and injected business principles tempered with hard work, into the occupation of farming, and met with deserved success. As a citizen and neighbor, Mr. Schleif was held in high esteem."*

Source Credits: Obituary - Star Advocate, 19 July 1932, p.3, c.8; Ted Schleif Short Stories; Joel Streich and Rosanne Schleif - Genealogy Research

(Schleif Family Pictures and Barn Raising In 1915 at August Vanselow Farm Continued on Page 12)

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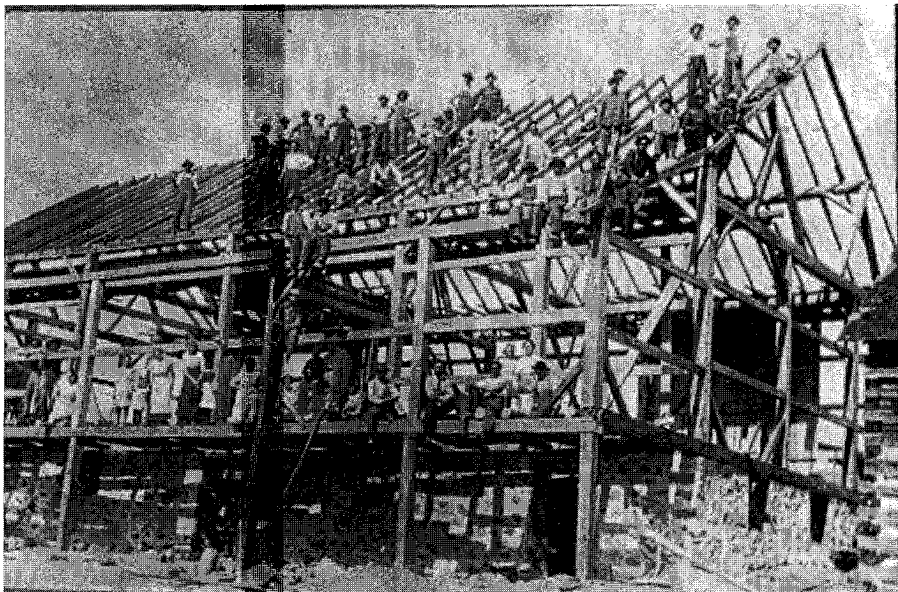
(Schleif Family Pictures and Barn Raising In 1915 at August Vanselow Farm Continued from Page 11)



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Great Grampa Schleif at his Bunker Hill Logging Camp. Land had been logged and some land cleared. In 1898 The Pine River fire burned much of what remained forested.



This is a Barn Raising that took place in 1915 at the August Vanselow Farm. It was torn down in 2016. Roseanne Schleif stated that as you look around the Town of Pine River, one no longer see the barns that were present in our youth. Her own barn on the adjacent property was taken down 4 years ago. The evolution of these barns is sad to see as many of us who grew up on these properties. Our generations of our immigrant ancestors and their families worked so hard to establish them.



This is picture of Rosanne Schleif's Grandparents. August and Margaret Schleif taken shortly after they had just retired.