

Albert Roszek Began Irma Dairy Farm on \$500 Bond

By Abigail Wix

Foto News Reporter

Farming has been a well-known Wisconsin trademark, a way of life for many of our ancestors and basis of life today. One such story of a local farmer is that of the late Albert Roszek, father of local Merrill resident, Louise Wix.

After WWI in 1936, Roszek came home to start his Wisconsin life with wife Cora as a dairy farmer on a \$500 war bond. He made a down payment on 120 acres of land near Irma on Chase Hill. This section of land contained rocky fields, a rickety house built upon stones and weary farm buildings.

Roszek was unable to afford a tractor or other farm machinery, and in today's modern age, it is difficult to imagine the backbreaking work he would have to endure to create a respectable farm and secure home for his family without it. But make it he did, with purpose, will power and his own two hands. Armed with shovel and wheelbarrow, Roszek built a cellar beneath the house, using the abundant rocks for foundation before fixing it tight with cement. The project took seven years, but the results were fantastic—a cellar for canned goods and a place for heating to be installed.

His renovations did not stop there. In 1949, he rebuilt the furnace complete with duct system to registers in each room. The slumped roof was replaced with his own weather tight roof in 1951. In 1953, he even built a pressure system, providing the family with running water and a modern bathroom.

Roszek was as creative as he was handy, and utilized a shabby Jeep left in scrap for fieldwork and power. It also pulled out stumps and stones—both of

which were abundant upon the hill they resided upon—and served as a plow or just a run to town.

An old newspaper article quotes Roszek, "I just could not afford new machinery or hiring the construction, so I did the next best thing, do it yourself with what you have. I had to take things others discarded and make them work."

He cultivated 18 acres of wood when a cord of balsam was \$6 and spruce was \$8. He also had a dairy herd in his barn to provide the family income. Times were rough, and with a family of four, Roszek briefly returned to work in a shoe factory while his two daughters, Louise and Arlene, went to high school.

When the girls were graduated, Roszek went back to full-time farm work, his creative wheels turning again to secure his home. He scouted out two rundown corn binders and a threshing machine that he repaired to meet the harvesting needs. Conveyor parts of an old spreader were connected with a wood saw to carry fuel wood directly into a pile. Railroad ties and scrap windshield glass was used for the new dairy barn. He even built his own concrete mixer using native stone and timber from the wood lot, a handy tool to build a new milkhouse with ice cold water and pour a concrete floor in his barn.

The house was not neglected, either. After Roszek installed electricity and tile and trim, the home was cozy and comfortable.

The house and barn still stand today; reminiscent of the story of the Roszeks' tough start on a \$500 war bond and the effort and determination in the life of a farmer.



Above, Albert Roszek worked the hard way in 1959 to make his Irma dairy farm a success. Roszek created his farm and home for his family on a \$500 war bond and honest determination.