

How The Fromm Ranches Came To Be In The Town Of Hamburg

Mrs. Fred Fromm, who died Tuesday evening at her home on the Fromm ranch in the town of Hamburg after seven years' illness, may be credited with a considerable part in the launching of the Fromm-Nieman ginseng and silver black fox industries the annual earnings of which approximate a million dollars a year.

Mrs. Fromm's father, Joachem Nieman, was born in Mecklenburg, Germany, and as a heritage from his father he received seven acres of land. Land was a precious commodity in Europe and none could practically be bought as land was held in high esteem and passed as an heirloom from generation to generation. Mr. Nieman decided that seven acres of land would be a limited acreage to pass on from generation to generation, and he emigrated to America and purchased a farm at Cedarburg, where Mr. and Mrs. Nieman lived until 1866, when they moved to the town of Hamburg, Marathon county. The daughter was six years of age, and the parents purchased an entire section of land in the town of Hamburg from the United States government. The section of land was divided among their children and the daughter received the southwest quarter section following her marriage to Fred Fromm in 1883. It was on this quarter section of land that the original ginseng and silver black fox industries were started by the sons of Mrs. Fromm. It is also on a small portion of this quarter section that the Fromm private cemetery is located near a school, and it is in this cemetery that Mrs. Fromm's body will be placed at rest, Saturday, Jan. 28, the day of the funeral services.

The section of land had been bought several years before the family located in Marathon county and was purchased from the government at its land office in Stevens Point. While the remainder of the section of land purchased by Mr. Nieman at that time, passed to other heirs, some of this has since been incorporated into the Fromm ranch since, a quarter section having been purchased from Mrs. Fromm's brother, Herman Nieman, when he moved to Lockwood, Mo., and 200 acres having been purchased during the past two years. Other parcels of land have been purchased in the neighborhood and the Fromm ranch in the town of Hamburg consists of three-quarters of a section of land, in addition to which 320 acres of timber land are owned in Lincoln county.

The original Nieman homestead at Cedarburg passed on to Charles Nieman and thence to his sons who are cousins of Edwin Nieman who since has become a son-in-law of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Fromm by marriage to their daughter, Miss Erna Fromm. He has been included in the partnerships formed by the Fromm-Nieman interests who have purchased five large farms for incorporation into the ranches at Cedarburg. Charles Nieman has also been made a partner in several of the Fromm-Nieman companies.

Mr. and Mrs. Fromm had six sons and three daughters, and the early life on the town of Hamburg quarter section of land was primitive and accompanied by many hardships. Mr. Fromm cut down the first tree to make a clearing, and a log home was built. A log barn was added. As the family grew, it became necessary to enlarge the log home. Some of the children grew to advanced school age when others were still in the cradle. The father was very fond of the outdoors and his sons likewise became fond of hunting and living in the outdoors. The mother was keenly interested in her home, in her children, and in the home garden which she kept in neat array and which furnished the family with fresh vegetables during the spring and summer months.

Mr. Fromm had experienced little schooling, while his wife after attending the primary grades at Cedarburg, was a pupil at the district school in the town of Hamburg during her girlhood years, and among her teachers were August Rusch, who in later years served as county clerk of Lincoln county, and Charles Nieman, who was a brother of Mrs. Fromm. The Fromms were keenly appreciative of the value of public schooling and when their sons reached advanced school age, these were sent to High and Normal schools, while the daughters were given an education in domestic science schools in order to perfect them in their life's vocations as manager of their homes. It was while the sons attended High school, that they through the study of botany, became acquainted with the ginseng root which at that time grew quite profusely in the northern woods and which they found was in considerable demand for export to China. They cruised the woods in search of it, and found among others who were likewise searching the woods in its quest, Reinhold Dietsch, also of the town of Hamburg, and who for many years

has been known by the interesting title, "Father of Ginseng."

When ginseng root became scarcer in the northern woods, the Fromms experimented with growing the root but at first met with considerable difficulties. They however discovered in one of their visits to the Reinhold Dietsch place, that he had experimented successfully with growing it under an arbor, and they met with similar success after a trial of this method. Today, the Fromm-Nieman ginseng crop is increased from year to year. Larger arbors are built with the growth of the crop, and throughout the breadth of ginseng culture, there is no individual enterprise which in any way approximates the proportions of the Fromm ginseng arbors. Still, within these arbors, the neatly planted and cultivated rows and the careful attendance to crop details are but a reflection of the early lessons taught the boys by their mother in the art of gardening. These same lessons are apparent in the many flower beds which adorn the surroundings of the Fromm home. Yet, Mrs. Fromm's ill health prevented her from enjoying in recent years the fruits of her nurture of crops at the primitive log home embodying lessons which later became valuable aids in the culture of the mysterious ginseng root for which the Chinaman has at times been willing to pay quite fabulous prices.

Just as Mrs. Fromm was responsible to a considerable extent for the successful ginseng venture which her sons developed to its present large proportions, so Mrs. Fromm was likewise largely responsible for the successful fox ranching venture which the sons have expanded to vast proportions. It was the spirit of the wildwood that actuated the father and sons in their hunting and other open-air expeditions that prompted the boys to experiment with the growing of the ordinary red fox. Approximately the same time, when the boys became interested in ginseng, as far back as 1904, they also experimented with growing the red fox. They built pens and stocked them with ten wild foxes from the woods. The foxes bred and soon the ranch increased to almost a hundred animals. But the culture of red fox was no money-making enterprise, they found. The red fox was still too plentiful in the woods and he required just as much attention and feeding as the silver blacks. Yet, the purchase of silver blacks was almost out of the question owing to the extremely high prices asked by the Prince Edward Island breeders for these animals which were still a great rarity in those days of pioneering in this since greatly developed industry.

However, in 1914, the boys made the somewhat risky venture by

borrowing a portion of the needed money and purchasing two pairs of silver blacks from the Peace River district of Alaska. At the start, the offspring was in great demand for foundation stock of other ranches, and just as the ginseng berries from the Fromm gardens furnished foundation stock for many other ginseng arbors, so through purchase and through organization of new ranches, the Fromms established many other persons in the expanding fox industry. In 1922, the Niemans at Cedarburg were included in the Fromm partnerships and the breeding of the young foxes is undertaken at the Cedarburg ranches owing to the more clement weather experienced there in spring. In the fall, the foxes are brought to the town of Hamburg where they are given free range and where better opportunity is given for the development of a fine coat of fur because of the colder weather conditions. Last fall, eight thousand foxes made the migration from the Cedarburg to the Hamburg ranches and next week at New York, the prized pelts of these eight thousand animals will be offered at auction at New York City. A year ago, the crop of pelts brought in the neighborhood of \$800,000. This year, the crop promises to bring a figure well over the million dollar mark.

The Fromm ranch is equipped with extensive buildings and paraphernalia for the handling of ginseng root and silver black fox pelts, also for the handling of feeds. Thousands of dollars are represented in the construction of ginseng arbors, and many additional thousands of dollars in the building of fox pens and the closely woven and guarded fence which surrounds the large ranches both at Hamburg and at Cedarburg. Much of the land is still in partly wooded condition and luxurious residences have been built in this unique headquarters of ginseng root and silver black fox pelt.

The old log house served its purpose in years past when the family was able to raise nearly all the provisions it required and when money was scarce. Today, money is plentiful in comparison, but it requires a great deal of money to live, — at least in present-day luxury in which the Fromms have found themselves today. Automobiles of luxurious types take them

over modern roads to Wausau and Merrill within a few minutes whereas years ago the trip over crude roads from Wausau required two days and a night or two nights and a day with the usual team of horses. The Fromm residence built in 1920, has every modern convenience and the walls are hung with expensive genuine oil paintings in which the silver black fox, the beaver and the out of doors are conspicuous. The members of the Fromm family are fond of art and music. Fred Fromm, the father, is a gifted violinist; and the sons are talented musicians on the piano, violin, grand accordeon, and other musical instruments. The home is a frequent meeting place of master musicians including the famous composer, Jacob Reuter, of Wausau.

And while the sons have invested in orange groves in Florida and finely located winter homes in Florida and California as well as in numerous successful industrial enterprises in southern Wisconsin and elsewhere, Fred Fromm, the father, who was born May 6, 1873, in Washington county, Wis., says that the town of Hamburg is good enough for him, and as proof of this statement, he mentions that while for fifty years he has owned a prairie farm in Iowa, he has preferred to live amid the forests and the wild life of this section of Wisconsin. Although in his 75th year, he is enjoying the best of health and greatly enjoys his role as host to thousands of prominent visitors year in and year, out at the famous Fromm ranch nestled among the wildwoods of the town of Hamburg.