

## *Fromm Furs*

"I don't believe in raising weeds for the heathen."

This was their father's response when the Fromm brothers suggested that he drop wheat raising in favor of ginseng.

The boys argued in German, the language in which they always talked with their father. "But this root will make us rich."

"I don't believe in it. But—," he told them to end the discussion, "you can have the land under that rock pile if you want to raise it yourself."

The Fromm boys were all workers. They moved the rock pile and started raising the ginseng. It has paid them as much as a hundred thousand dollars in a single year. However, before they succeeded with ginseng, they had a new idea.

"We want three thousand dollars," they told their surprised father.

"And for what this time?"

"We want to buy a silver fox."

"You have a silver fox—the three-legged one you trapped."

"We want a mate for that one. We can get it for three thousand dollars."

Mr. Fromm was interested enough to go to see the fox being offered. It was thin and scrawny. In fact, it looked sick.

"I wouldn't give thirty dollars, let alone three thousand, for that animal," he told his disappointed boys.

But their father went away on a visit. While he was gone, the boys persuaded their mother to mortgage the farm for six thousand, seven hundred dollars, and with this money they bought two silver vixen and a silver fox.

When Mr. Fromm came home he offered no objections. The farm, after all, belonged to his wife and if she wanted to encourage the boys in their wild schemes. . . . As he said later, when checks for a million and more came to his sons: "They succeeded in spite of my strongest opposition to everything they started. I claim none of the credit for their success."

By 1921, Fromm brothers' foxes had multiplied to five hundred. Today they have about forty thousand. In 1929 they received a check for one million three hundred and thirty thousand dollars

for one shipment of silver fox pelts. Today they have a ten million dollar business and are the biggest breeders in the world of silver foxes. They are also the world's largest ginseng raisers. Their farms cover twelve thousand acres.

Fromm brothers keep careful records of their foxes and are constantly improving their strain. They have given as much as one hundred and fifty thousand dollars for research in the control of fox disease. In early fall the foxes chosen to be pelted are turned loose in forty and eighty acre wood pastures. In this wild state their fur gets the luster and richness of that of wild animals.

The silver fox pelt is the aristocrat of the fur trade. Not only is the bright silvery pelt distinctively beautiful—it defies successful imitations. Many pelts can be dyed, trimmed, plucked or treated in imitation of others, but no pelt can be skillfully made in imitation of the silver fox. Its silver hairs taper into a black tip that casts a veil over the silver. This feature cannot be faked.

At the Fromm farm near Hamburg, which is thirty miles from a railroad, the brothers hold their fur auctions.

To these auctions come buyers from all over the country. They are met by the brothers Fromm—Walter, Edward, John and Henry—who entertain them with true German hospitality.

Modern bowling alleys and recreation rooms are provided for the buyers. Venison is furnished from the Fromm's private herd numbering hundreds of deer.

Every year two auctions are held, with sales at each amounting to more than a million dollars. The reputation of the Fromm brothers for quality of pelts and their honesty in dealing have created a world-wide demand for their furs.

Fromm brothers, more than any one else, are to be credited with reviving, modernizing and streamlining the oldest business in Wisconsin.

NOTE: The first great fortunes of the midwest came from the fur trade. For example, the Hudson Bay Company had grown so rich just before the Revolutionary War that it was more powerful than the government. Its great success caused bitter competition. Voyageurs and agents went into every section to buy furs from the Indians. Animals were trapped wholesale. Pelts were shipped to the east and to Europe. The slaughter of beaver, mink, fisher, fox, otter, wolf, bear, raccoon, moose, elk and deer are beyond computation.

In 1815, after our last war with Britain, Congress prohibited foreigners from dealing in furs in the United States or in its territories. This was the start of the colossal fortune of John Jacob Astor which today makes his grandson the largest single owner of New York real estate. As sole owner of the American Fur Company, John Jacob Astor conducted an extensive trade in Wisconsin. The Indians were urged to kill as never before. For the first time they hunted, not for food nor for sport, but for profit. They were largely paid in trinkets, junk and firewater. Prairie du Chien and Green Bay were the leading fur trading posts of Wisconsin.