The Weigum Homestead

BY WILLIAM D. O'DELL

There are Weigums all over the state of North Dakota and throughout Mercer County. But if a certain branch of the family tree is only one of "The Farm." That branch started when Adam Weigum homesteaded "The Farm" in 1903 north of Zap. Adam's grandson, Dale, lives and works there with his family, wife Brenda, 55, and daughter Tiffany, 32. His son, Shannon, 35, owns it for 14 years. Dale took over the farm in 1974 and he still actively farms to this day.

"I was born and raised here and I never moved from here in my life...There aren't too many that homesteaded and still have the farm," he added about families that homesteaded in the area and then left.

"The Farm" has served as home for four generations, though a fifth generation is learning the trade with their father. The first generation of Adam and Mary (Becker) had four boys and four girls including Dale's father Jacob. He married Hella (Waiz) and they eventually had four boys and three girls.

Dale explained that the church, family and community were important to his grandfather, who was one of the founders of the St. John's Lutheran Church, Wittenberg, LCMS. Though the church is gone the cemetery is still on County Rd. 26. Of the five generations that have lived and farmed on the homestead, those that passed on are buried at that cemetery.

And for many branches of the Weigum family, the family knows of only one "The Farm." Tiffany said that the thing that makes this so special to her is that all of her family was raised on the farm and every one of her family is talking about Dale's place.

"It has real strong ties in all of our family," Tiffany added. "The immediate family, everyone still helps everyone out...it's my uncle, it's our cousins that come out and help. I just think that this helps show the strong family ties that this farm has."

And Tiffany is happy it's staying in this branch of the Weigum family.

"It's being passed on to another generation of Weigum boys that are coming out to the farm to help," Tiffany said about her brother's sons.

While "The Farm" may be home to this Weigum family, it is not the actual homesteaded buildings. The original farm buildings were once located straight south of the current farm, south of County Rd. 26. Brenda explained that they couldn't find water down there so they moved further north. She said that the only thing marking that area now is the stone foundation.

The houses that they built for the original homestead were built from prairie stone. The farm was moved about 11 years after the original land was homesteaded. And all the original buildings from 1914 have been replaced since then.

One of the oldest buildings on the current farm is actually not even a Weigum original. The train depot that was once in Golden Valley in the early 1910s was moved from the town up to serve as the Weigum's dairy barn. Dale explained that the depot was once used as a

This picture of the farm was taken in 1913 after they moved the farm north of County Rd. 26.

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deposit for meal, freight and cream as well as for a waiting station for train passengers.

While the train depot once served as a dairy barn, it has long since been used a dairy barn. Dale explained that his father really made the farm into a ranch about 50 years ago when he started with about 20 milk cows.

In the heyday of their dairy production, they used to milk 55 cows a year. Dale explained that the cream checks were the bread and butter.

However, one of the reasons that the ranch moved from dairy to beef production was that the dairy industry is one that requires constant supervision.

"You can't leave a dairy cow for a day, because they still need to be milked," Tiffany said.

Brenda added that part of the reason that many dairy farmers got out of the industry was because the milk market was high and then dropped while the costs remained high.

Dale estimated that he has about 130 head of cattle now though when his grandfather started it was much less.

"He had a team of horses, a wagon, a milk cow and a couple of chicken ... and that's about it. And the kids," Dale said about how his grandfather's family came by train to New Salem from Fremont, S.D.

Since then the farm has grown and stayed prosperous with all of the family pitching in. Dale said that his mother worked on the farm just as hard as his father did.

It was that sense of strong familial ties that kept everyone together. Dale explained that his brother, Marvin, also owns land close to the farm.

Tiffany recalled growing up on the farm that it was always interesting being around her father and uncles. She explained that she and her brother had to learn German because her father and his brother would always speak German on the farm.

"It was either learn German or you don't know what they were saying," Tiffany commented.

Brenda added, "They would only repeat it to them once."

No matter whether it's German or English spoken in the family, "The Farm" will continue to serve as a home to these Weigums for many, many years to come.

From left, the Weigums are Tiffany and her brother Shannah holding his second youngest son, Seth, next to his grandfather Dale, holding Seth's youngest brother, Dylan, who is standing next to his wife Brenda.