

REMEMBERING THINGS PAST: UP ON THE FARM

By Sister Margaret Clarke

When the Sisters purchased the 80-acre Weller-Hulett farm in 1900, it had been uncultivated for several years due to a dispute over title between Messrs. Weller and Hulett. At that time there was no great need for the Community to start building a new motherhouse, so the Sisters decided to revive the farm, hoping that it could supply milk and vegetables to their Duluth missions. The property included a farmhouse, hay barn (used by Mr. Weller as a school) and a few outbuildings.



*Cutting hay with the four-horse team.
Kenwood is in the background.*



Digging potatoes

Initially, Sister Amata Mackett was designated the farm manager, and four or five farm laborers were employed. By 1902 it became necessary to build an additional dairy barn, a house for the farm laborers who chose to live on site, and some additional structures. The creek was dammed to produce a pond for watering livestock (and later on for winter skating). Of all of these structures, only a couple of stone ruins remain: a spring house near the creek, a storehouse near the current community gardens, and bits and pieces of the dam near the north property line. The actual locations of the main buildings remain rather fuzzy in the minds of those who recall them, but the consensus is that they were relatively close to Kenwood Avenue. The farm laborers' house was moved uphill in 1941 to become the College post office and store. The original 1870s farmhouse was purchased at some time, probably in the late 1930s, and moved to a location at the corner of Kenwood Avenue and Toledo St. where it is currently undergoing major renovation. The wooden barns were eventually demolished.

The remaining 80 acres on the Kenwood site were purchased in 1907-08, making it possible to enlarge the vegetable garden. Adam Cismowski, brother of Sister Jerome, was hired as farm manager, and Frank Beyenka, father of Sister Eustacia as head gardener. By 1908 separate records of the farm began to be kept. Early inventories provide lists of impressive numbers of livestock: in 1910, 22 cows, 1 steer, 1 calf, 9 big pigs, 15 smaller pigs, 8 small pigs, and 2 very small pigs, 4 teams of two horses, 250 chickens, 6 turkeys, 6 geese, 4 rabbits and. . . 1 dog that was valued at \$25.00! That must have been one pretty good dog! There were 19 vehicles of various kinds including 5 carriages.

Continued →

REMEMBERING THINGS PAST: UP ON THE FARM, *Continued*



The chicken yard with the dairy barn and farm laborers' house in background.



The dam on Chester Creek

The pigsties were located just below where Somers Hall is today. When the Somers Suites were added in 1993, excavation laid open the former pig yard, which still reeked of its previous inhabitants. In 1912-13 there had been an outbreak of hog cholera in the herd. The Sisters bought hog cholera vaccine from the University of Minnesota, and the pigs were vaccinated by a vet with moderate success, followed later by a further outbreak and more veterinary services. The results seemed to show that well pigs remained well after the vaccination, so it would be reasonable to vaccinate all newly-purchased pigs. However, to save on vet bills, one Sister writes “there were plenty of persons on hand who had done hospital work and for whom inoculation with vaccine was an ordinary thing.” Obviously, the medically-trained Sisters were assigned to pig vaccination duty.



The cows had free run of the farm property.

During the early years of its operation, the farm was a money-making concern, even though the money was coming from the Sisters' Duluth houses—going from one pocket into another, so to speak. Major expenses each year were for animal feed and hay (some hay was grown on the property, but most had to be purchased and brought in by train). The other major expense was salaries for the farm laborers. Milk, potatoes, vegetables, and poultry were sold to St. Mary's Hospital, Cathedral school and convent, and other school missions in Duluth. For the first ten years, the profit averaged \$2,500 per year.

REMEMBERING THINGS PAST: UP ON THE FARM, *Continued*



A hand-colored print of the vegetable garden near the creek showing dill, lettuce, and cabbage.

At the onset of the Depression, expenses began to outpace the returns. After March 1931 there is no longer any record of milk sales, so the dairy herd must have been sold off about then. Produce was still supplied to Duluth missions through 1932, but it was in that year that the decision was made to discontinue the farm enterprise.

The farm was an important but little-remembered part of the early history of the Community. There are no records of the years in which the various houses, barns, and outbuildings were removed or demolished. One of the construction workers on the 2012 Science addition recalled a fire in “a barn” when his father was working on the construction of Stanbrook Hall in 1937. If anyone with a long memory can provide any information on the disposal of any of the farm buildings, we would be happy to hear it! Please contact Sister Margaret at mclarke@css.edu.

Photos from Monastery Archives