

Poppel Retires As Head Of Farm Service Agency

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operations. That includes keeping up with the latest regulations and instructions from the national office in Washington, DC as well as the Minnesota State FSA Office in St. Paul.

We then are tasked with implementing the programs that were first approved by Congress. The CED supervises the program technicians in the office, works with the county committee, and is responsible for communicating with the general public and making them aware of our programs and application dates and deadlines.

QUESTION: What was your journey like to this point and what other positions did you hold in the agency?

POPPEL: I grew up in Wilkin County on a grain and livestock farm east of Breckenridge. Fortunately I have spent most of my career here in Wilkin County.

I was hired as a Program Assistant in July, 1977 and continued in that position until May, 2002 when I entered the County Operations Training Program. After six months shadowing other CED's in Minnesota, I completed that program and was eligible to apply for CED positions in the State.

My first office was in Roseau County. I worked there for about four months and then the Wilkin County Office had an opening for a CED. I have been the CED in Wilkin County since April, 2003.

QUESTION: What were some of the challenges of the position?

POPPEL: The challenges have been to meet deadlines without much notice. I always worried about lost benefits to our producers, that something I failed to tell them or failed to do would have affected their payments and the profitability on their farm.

The last few years with budget cuts, the CED's were tasked with doing the work that field reporters used to do. I walked a lot of miles staking CRP fields in sometimes not the best conditions.

After working all those years in an office setting that was really not my comfort zone, but I adjusted and learned to do it.

QUESTION: What will you miss most about the job when you retire?

POPPEL: I will miss the people I have worked with. And that is a long list. It includes the farmers, my staff, Natural Resource and Conservation Service and Water



This picture was a picture taken in the early 1980's. Carol Poppel Executive Director of Wilkin County Farm Service Agency was receiving a training certificate from the State Executive Director, Don Friederich.

and Soil Conservation District staff, and literally hundreds of other FSA employees in Minnesota and North Dakota that I have gotten to know over the course of that many years.

Then there are numerous Ag. Partners that we work with in our communities.

In the job itself, I have always enjoyed the amount of change we deal with. There is always a new challenge to tackle, a new program to figure out or another deadline to plan for.

QUESTION: How has agriculture and serving it changed over the years since you started?

POPPEL: It has changed dramatically. In the late 1970's yields were probably half of what they can be today. We had many more farmers and the farms were much smaller in size. We also had more livestock farms.

Sugar beets were new in 1974. With larger equipment, improved seed varieties and chemicals, and technology our farmers are producing much more on the land than they could 40 years ago.

When I started working for the agency we had hundreds of grain loans and the Grain Reserve Program was very popular. The Wilkin County Grain Reserve wheat

loan rate was \$4.09/bu. and corn was \$3.64/bu., plus another 26.5 cents/bu. annually for storage.

Farmers usually made a three-year commitment to store the grain on the farm. That program was intended to stabilize prices and there was a concern that our reserves were running low in the country at that time.

In the 1980's there was a glut of grain on reserve and the government or Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) ended up owning more grain than they wanted to maintain.

To manage that, we began to issue Payment in Kind (PIK) benefits. Instead of cash from FSA they received CCC owned grain from our warehouses through PIK Certificates that we issued.

This is just one example of the ebbs and flows that we experienced and always as quickly as legislation could respond to the current economic conditions on the farm.

The 1985 Farm Bill brought a lot of changes to our office. That was when the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) was first introduced. It also was when the Sodbuster/Swampbuster regulations were first implemented. Both remain with us and are going strong to this day.

We had a new Farm Bill

approximately every five years that usually changed things up a bit.

In the office in 1977, we were just starting to use electric typewriters. We weren't allowed to make corrections on most of the scannable documents we prepared that were sent to Kansas City to be read by a large mainframe computer.

There would be a two-week delay sometimes before we knew that a contract was in the "system". Program regulations were sent to us

by mail.

We first went to "green screen" computers in the 80's and now we are updating things at real time speed on the internet, with communications being immediate when regulations change.

In 1987 when we moved into our current building. There were eight full time employees and two temporary employees in the office. Now we will be down to three full time and one part-time employees.

QUESTION: Any advice for the new director?

POPPEL: Our office will be left in the capable hands of Leon Johnson, CED in West Ottertail County. He will be overseeing both offices in a Permanent Shared Management arrangement.

This is becoming very common in our agency as staffing levels are reduced. I don't think the farmers will notice much of a change.

The Program Technicians are the people that they do business with the majority of the time and we have a great staff.

QUESTION: Tell me about your family?

POPPEL: My husband, Mike and I have three grown children, Melissa (Adam) Palczewski, West Fargo, ND, Kevin (Rachel) Poppel, Albert Lea, MN and Luke (Alyssa) Poppel, Watford City, ND.

Also we have been blessed with five grandchildren, Cole, Ellee, Charlotte, Ben and Brynley.

QUESTION: What activities outside the office involve your time? What are some of your hobbies?

POPPEL: I have been active in Relay for Life of Richland and Wilkin Counties for many years.

I have been a team captain for the Wilkin County FSA team, a

Committee member, and event lead.

My favorite activity is walking and being active doing things outdoors. I am looking forward to spending time on the bike trails near the lake next summer. I am not a crafter, so anything outdoors is my favorite place to be.

QUESTION: What are some of your plans for retirement?

POPPEL: I am looking forward to a little slower pace and time to try doing some new things that I have never had time to do. I will enjoy the freedom to spend time with my kids, grandkids, and friends whenever I want. I will be working part-time and spending time at the lake as well.

QUESTION: Any comments you would like to share?

POPPEL: I have been blessed with some great people over the years that had a positive impact on me and on the ability of our office to function well.

I had great role models in the CED's that preceded me in June Hanson and Helen Sussenguth. As a CED you can only lead well if you are leading good people who believe in our mission.

Thanks to all of my staff and past employees for the best work ethic and attitudes a CED could have ever had to work with. And this includes my County Committee members who were all so good to work with as well. I will always be grateful for their support.

Carol Poppel is wished well as she begins a new phase of life, retirement.

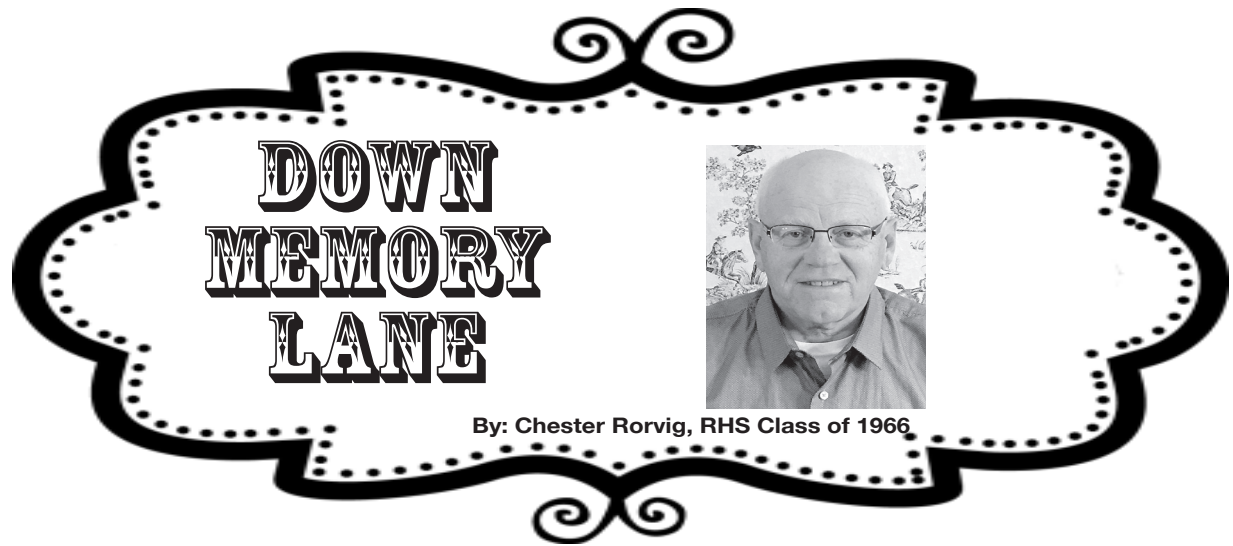
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Many of us have likely thought of someone who preceded us in life who we wished we could have met, someone whose life intrigues us, and whose life contained things we would like to know more about. One of those "someones" for me is my paternal grandfather, Carl Rorvig.

This is what I do know about him. He was born in 1871 in Horum, Norway and immigrated to America in 1881 with his parents and six siblings. They arrived by train at the Rothsay Depot and soon learned of a small farm for sale. They then purchased this farm, located a mile and a half east of Rothsay. Five of his siblings died in 1883, during their childhood years, and the other went to work in lumber camps in northern Minnesota and was never heard from again. Two older siblings had immigrated some years earlier and lived in Montana.

In 1900 Carl married Emma Huseby, whose family lived six miles west of Pelican Rapids. The Huseby's were acquaintances of Carl's family in Norway and had come to Minnesota in 1871. Emma was born in America in 1875, about about years later. Carl went on to take over the farm and had 10 children. They lived in the farm house consisting of a kitchen, a living room, one small bedroom and an attic, while having and raising those children.

Emma died at the Fergus Falls hospital in 1929, just shy of 54 years. The August 29, 1929 edition of the Fergus Falls Journal stated that she had been in ill health for several months, "having high blood pressure and a complication of diseases". My dad once told me he thought her early death could be attributed to over work and a hard life. Carl died in 1930, at age 59, suffering fatal injuries when his Model T Ford sedan was in a car crash six miles south of Rothsay on what is now old Highway 52. The newspaper account of the accident states that "his skull was fractured" and that he "died during the night without regaining consciousness." His three daughters were among the passengers in the car. They were injured, some severely, but all survived. They became my aunts, Stella Rorvig, Gladys Haugstad and Lillian Heggen. The Fergus Falls Journal reported that Carl's "funeral was attended by several hundred lifelong friends and acquaintances." His six oldest sons were the pallbearers. He was buried at Hamar Cemetery, near his parents, his wife Emma, and five siblings. Since then numerous decedents of his have also been buried there.

Carl operated the farm, with eventual help from his seven sons. That help was needed, as my dad used to tell me that Carl was not an especially strong man to handle the physical labor needed for farming then. After Carl died, there was an estate sale that highlights the machinery and livestock that were common for farms in the early 1900's. Imagine the struggles and hardships to support a family of 10 kids with the tools, commodities, and stock shown in the attached photos. It is hard to imagine this was the means for supporting such a large family.

This is the outline of Carl's life that I have gleaned from various written and oral accounts. I wish I had more detail, but the passing of time and the death of descendants renders that task unattainable. I wish too I knew more of what it was like for Carl's parents, my great-grandparents, to sail to America for an uncertain future, with seven children, and then to see five of them die in childhood and another disappear. I wonder how harsh life was for Emma, bearing, raising, and feeding those children in that cramped little house, with no indoor plumbing. I wonder what it was like for a 10 year old boy to come from Norway, to a new land, with a different language, and then to see his sibling die so soon. Then to go on to become a farmer, raise 10 children in cramped quarters, and become a valued and respected member of the community, well, that is the story of the "someone" that intrigues me!

The article in the Fergus Falls Journal reporting the auto accident and resulting death of Carl states that "the funeral was attended by several hundred life long friends and acquaintances" and that this was "a fatal auto accident that will not be forgotten right away in Rothsay and vicinity". Now, with the passing of nearly 90 years, no doubt this accident and the life of my grandfather has mainly been forgotten in Rothsay and vicinity. But I am not ready to let his memory pass too quickly and his life be forgotten too easily. Reading these accounts has captured my attention and peaked my admiration for the life and the person of this guy who became my paternal grandfather.

So to my grandpa Carl, I say; I never met you but I think about you; I wish I knew more about you, but I do know some things; you saw things you never wanted to see, and you experienced things you never wanted to have happen, but you didn't give up. From that comes a strong interest, immense respect and ongoing gratitude, from me to you, for what you endured, the life you lived and the life you passed on to your descendants.



After retirement Carol Poppel will have more time to spend with her children and grandchildren. The Poppel family are, left to right, on the couch Charlotte Poppel, Mike and Carol Poppel, Ellee McIntosh; back row, left to right, Luke, Alyssa and Brynley Poppel, Rachel and Kevin Poppel, Cole Christensen, Melissa and Adam Palczewski, and Ben is standing next to the couch.

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