

History of the first farmers coming to the area

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In the 1880's, the area began to be settled by remaining timber workers and incoming homesteaders. Some of the new settlers came to this area by oxen and wagon from other areas, but many more came by train to Wadena or New York Mills, and from there dispersed into the vast, untamed wilderness that laid before them. Among the first settlers were John Kuukas settling in Paddock Township and John Tolppi settling in Blowers. Both arrived in the early 1880's and were followed thereafter by a steady influx of people, making up a community consisting of 45% Finns, 30% Scandinavians, 10% Germans, and the remaining 15% Yankee, Danish, Scotch and Irish. Many of the pioneer settlers in Red Eye Township first homesteaded in Blowers or Paddock townships and then moved farther east as the wilderness began to open up.

Sophia Niemi recalled that when her family moved to Red Eye Township from Paddock Township in the early 1880's, they had to cut the roads as they traveled. When they crossed Cat Creek, there was so much water that it came up to the wagon box.

The Indians, of whom there were many, actually proved to be good and friendly neighbors to the earliest settlers. They lived in their nearby wigwams through the winters, and early each spring would move to a lakeshore, where fishing was good and the forest rich in fruits and berries. As the white population increased, the Indians began to go farther and farther north. Finally the time came when they did not return even for the winters.

Henry Bimberg was ten years old in 1886 when his family settled in Red Eye Township. Henry recalled that Indians roamed in the woods, but they were friendly. Wolves were howling all over and ready to devour whatever they could get.

E.H. Pelton wrote, "I can look back now and see the poor farmers coming into the country. About all they had was a little bundle tied up in a red handkerchief..." The government had given them a 160 acres of choice land to homestead but nothing else. For the earliest settlers, it was a battle to survive with the barest of necessities.

The axe rang in the remaining woodlands to clear stumps for farming, followed by hoe scraping against stone in tilling the land for sowing. The early tilling of the soil was performed by stout but lazy oxen, which drew the moldboard plows slowly, yet straight, lumbering left at the command of "Hee" and right at "Haw." They were strong creatures, and everyone

used them for hauling all kinds of material, but particularly for snaking the big logs to the riverside. But progress marched forward, and the horse replaced the ox. One by one the oxen were slaughtered, eaten, and their hides made into much needed leather goods.

One of the challenges facing them was to make a living. They did not have much to sell, but they needed a market to sell or trade their goods for needed supplies. Their goods included butter, eggs, and timber, especially railroad ties. The closest markets were Wadena and New York Mills. Since transportation was by foot or oxen, a trip to the market was no small feat. Even by oxen, it was a three-day journey to go to Wadena and back again. Or for those going to New York Mills, it was a distance of 27 miles, usually by foot, to carry their goods to town. There they would trade their butter for flour, coffee or other supplies, and make the 27 mile journey again to carry their supplies home.

Money was hard to come by. When a farmer took his goods to town, he received a piece of paper called a "script" or a "due bill." He was given credit on the back of this for any amount due him after making his purchases. Any balance due to the farmer could be redeemed only from that merchant and from his stock. It was hard for the settlers to even get enough money to buy a stamp to mail a letter, let alone any bigger item.

In 1881, after a hard winter, the wheat crop froze in July and was an entire failure. Times grew even harder from 1892-1896. Butter was selling at eight cents a pound, and eggs were six cents a dozen. Many people lost their farms – some left and others started over again. There were men by the hundreds looking for room and board. Some farmers would pay 25 cents a day for a good man. Railroad ties sold for 25 cents.

In 1886 we were able to buy our first team of oxen. We used them to haul ties to Wadena, a distance of about 25 miles. Our first stop was in Red Eye Township. It was customary for all of us making the trip, which usually consisted of 12 to 14 teams of oxen, to meet at this particular spot by 10:00 a.m. Often one party would have too heavy a load so whoever could would share one another's burdens. ...We would reach Wadena the following morning. Before starting on the return trip the oxen were again allowed to rest and were fed, and we would reach home the following night.

-John Bankord

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Times have changed

During the past two weeks it was discovered that a great economic, social and business change has taken place without the public being aware that it was even contemplated. It seems that the women folks on the farm do not choose to ride in open bobsleds anymore. With a storm each week preventing automobile travel, the outstanding effect of those storms was that the women from the country did not come to town to shop. They were waiting for the roads to open so the autos could run. And when the women did not come to town to do the family buying, business slowed up to an alarming degree. Business is exceedingly dependent upon the woman shopper. In the old days the snow-covered roads would have made no difference, except to accelerate business and bring more folks to town; every road crowded with bobs with the feminine members of the family along, muffled in furs and robes. Thus the economic well being of the country town in the snow-covered regions is involved in a new problem.

The Sebeka Review,
January 13, 1928

America's diverse family farms . . .

(Continued From Front Page)

Instead, these small farms receive substantial income from off-farm sources. Income from off-farm sources are not reflected in OPM.

- Between 9 and 23 percent of small farms operate in the low-risk green zone, while a larger share, between 28 and 39 percent of midsize, large, and very large farms operate in the low-risk green zone.

Farm Operator Household Income and Wealth

Generally, farm households are not low income or low wealth when compared with all U.S. households.

- In 2019, 57 percent of farm households received an income at or above \$68,703, the median for all U.S. households. Median household income in five out of seven farm types exceeded both the median U.S. household in-

come and the median income for U.S. households with self-employment income.

- The median income for all family farm households is lower than the median among all U.S. households with self-employment income.

- Overall, only 3 percent of farm households had lower wealth than the median U.S. household. Farming is capital intensive and is generally dependent on large acreages of farmland that contributes to high wealth.

- Farm households often use off-farm income to cover farm expenses. While self-employment and wage/salary jobs are the primary sources of off-farm income for farm households, public and private pensions, interest and dividend payments, asset sales, Social Security payments, and other sources of income provide a

significant share of off-farm income, particularly for retirement farms.

- Operators of small farms – especially retirement, off-farm occupation, and low-sales farms – often report losses from farming.

Women in Agriculture

Female principal operators and operations with female operators make up a significant share of livestock and high-value crop operations.

- Women are operators in more than half (51 percent) of all farming operations.

Women are the principal operators on 14 percent of operations, and another 37 percent of operations have female operators who were not identified by the respondent as the principal operator.

(Continued on Page 3A)

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