

## CARL & GERI (FEDEWA) JASTRAM

**Wayne:** This is April 16th, 2024. I'm Wayne Summers, along with Glenn Ernst and today we are interviewing Carl and Geri Jastram at their centennial farm in Riley Township.

**Geri:** Sesquicentennial.

**Wayne :** Oh, sesquicentennial now!

**Geri:** Over 150.

**Carl:** We've gotten old.

**Wayne:** Why don't you start out, Carl, by telling us a little bit about how your family first came to Clinton County?

**Carl:** It was my grandpa Pingel. He immigrated over from Germany and, I think, a brother too. He settled in Wisconsin first and he was over there a while and then he came to Michigan. He settled, I think, for a few years, north of St. Johns is what I understand. Then he came down this way and picked up this land. It was pretty full of woods and snakes and everything else. He wasn't a very big man. He was kind of short and he cleared a lot of this land.

There was a cabin out there just a little ways, what he lived in. As he cleared the land, he loaded the logs to build this house and took 'em all the way to Portland to have 'em sawed and then brought all the lumber back. My grandpa across the road said that we didn't have hardly any stones here for the foundation for the house so he went over by Wacousta and hauled stones over here to build the foundation for the house.

**Wayne:** How many acres did he originally purchase here?

**Carl:** From what I know, all we've ever had here was about 160 acres, so I'm sure that's about what he had.

**Wayne:** When was the time period? When was this farm founded, I guess, is the question?

**Geri:** 1861.

**Glenn:** You mentioned Pingel and not Jastram.

**Carl:** It was a Pingel and then he married a Jastram.

**Geri:** No, he didn't marry a Jastram. Their daughter married a Jastram, their only daughter that survived. He had other children. Children didn't survive much back then, but their daughter married a Jastram. It only changed from Pingel to Jastram in one generation.

**Wayne:** You said he built the house. When was this house built then?

**Carl:** Between 1861 and over a 20-year lifespan of logging out of the woods, having it horse and wagoned over to Portland to be sawed up and dried and then brought back over, horse and wagon, so years to do all that.

**Wayne:** Where was he living while--

**Geri:** In the cabin out there, a little log cabin for

**Wayne:** --15, 20 years maybe.

**Geri:** The house was this size when he built it. It's not any add-ons. It's always been this size. He was a farmer and a medicine man, what we would call a doctor today.

**Wayne:** Let's talk a little bit about that then. What kind of treatments did he do or did he have any training?

**Geri:** Natural--

**Glenn:** Snake bites.

**Geri:** I don't know, 'cause education wasn't available like it is today.

**Wayne:** Sometimes people learn by-- They had another doctor that they kind of assisted.

**Geri:** \*Dr. Pingel, Grandpa Pingel. I don't know if I've ever heard or read about how he became--.

**Carl:** They just said he became the local witch doctor or whatever you want to call him.

**Glenn:** Were they married in Germany and she came over?

**Geri:** Married in New York, it says. He was born in Mecklenberg, Germany. See, he was brought over here, I thought, by his parents in Wisconsin. His parents were there, who is Johann **Carl** Christopher and Hannah Elizabeth Dorothea Pingel.

**Wayne:** If they were in Wisconsin, do you know why they decided to move to Michigan from Wisconsin?

**Geri:** I don't know. There's a lot of sesquicentennial farms in the area. It was a government thing, where there were land grants then. I believe that was--

**Wayne:** They could get inexpensive land here.

**Carl:** I don't know if it's a luck of the draw or how that worked, back then. Do you know?

**Glenn:** Just apply.

**Geri:** Apply and you're granted?

**Glenn:** They had to improve it over so many years.

**Wayne:** What kind of crops or animals did he originally have here on the farm?

**Carl:** I don't know what he had here. He probably had a few head of cattle and stuff. From what I remember, we've always had beef cattle here. We started out in beef cattle and hogs and then chickens. When I was about 12 years old or so, I decided I wanted to go in the dairy business. My dad thought I was nuts, and anyway, I went in the dairy business and after so many years, I bought him out because it was the best thing to do. Crops: corn, oats, soybeans. They raised beets here for a while, but the ground wasn't really that good for beets; and

then beans and corn, hay, and that's basically about what we always have raised on here. That's what they grow on here now is corn and soybeans.

**Wayne:** I think you said you're leasing out much of the land now, is that correct?

**Carl:** We had to sell some of it 'cause, when my dad retired, he'd farmed all his life and he didn't really have nothing, so I had to sell off some of the land to the Loniers and pay for his care and everything. We only own about 50 acres. We own the woods back there and there's a four-acre field off the side of it, we own that. We only own about 50 acres.

**Wayne:** So the woods on the south side?

**Geri:** It's on Craun and Forest Hill, just a half mile, 'cause the field across the road was 60 acres that we sold off for care, but the woods is then after that, on Craun and Forest Hill, and that's where we still make maple syrup.

**Wayne:** That was one of my questions. Why don't we get to that now then? When did you get into the maple syrup business or has your family always kind--

**Carl:** It's not always been a business, just a personal family.

**Carl:** When I came into the family, they were making it. Grandma always did the canning it up and she made sugar candy. No one else in the family did that, but I enjoy doing that. I had no one to tap into when I started making the maple sugar.

**Glenn:** No pun intended.

**Geri:** We did make it the first time and Grandma was alive, but she was not able to help us with any tips or anything so we were up till two in the morning making our first-time maple sugar candy.

**Glenn:** How do you process it now, boil it still, or reverse osmosis?

**Geri:** This is our first year of doing reverse osmosis and then you boil it. Still, you have to boil it. That just takes out half the water and then you boil it down to concentrate into syrup.

**Glenn:** Do you wood fire?

**Carl:** When we made it, when, I was little, we just had an open pan and the arch is still back in the woods where my grandpa and dad and uncle made it. That's all rotted out though. We made it, when I was in the dairy business just once, and I just didn't have the time to do it anymore.

**Geri:** You did a couple years, I thought.

**Carl:** Then we quit and then got back into it after I got out of the dairy business. This is basically after I retired. As we got back into it eight, 10 years ago, we did it with our neighbor back there, and he just had an open pan. Then a few years ago we bought a woodfired evaporator. It's like night and day, been doing that on an open pan. You continuously keep feeding it and boiling and drawing off, whereas a pan you can only boil it down so far and then you gotta draw it off, start all over again. When I was younger, I had horses, and for a couple years there, we'd go through the woods with them and gather the sap with the horses.

**Glenn:** Buckets and now tubing?

**Carl:** We had buckets.

**Glenn:** Tubing now

**Carl:** You gotta kind of have hills for an outfit like that, so you got fall, and I don't have that. I got a hill that goes through the middle of the woods, but the trees, most of 'em are down below the hill.

**Geri:** But back when you were younger, those galvanized pails is what we always used.

**Glenn:** Spigots, spouts.

**Geri:** Right, but then for the last eight, 10 years, it was buckets with hoses, until this year we changed everything.

**Carl:** We went to those bags. So you tap the tree; you hang this outfit on that holds a bag holder and you hang it on that. Then all you gotta do is dump that and when you're done, you just take the bag and throw it away. Otherwise, the pails, you gotta wash 'em and clean them, stack them all.

**Geri:** It sounds like we've changed things for easier production for us.

**Carl:** Pain, washing a couple hundred buckets.

**Glenn:** About how much do you get?

**Geri:** It is weather dependent. This year was short. Everything warmed up and dried up the first week of March.

**Glenn:** We didn't have a winter Yeah.

**Geri:** We had about four weeks. It was strong the second and third week, and then that was it.

**Wayne:** About how many gallons in a year do you do?

**Carl:** This year was only about six or seven. Last year was, I think, 10 or 11. We've had a year a few years ago, 30 gallon. I mean, it's different.

**Glenn:** How many trees?

**Carl:** This year we tapped 70 trees, but in the past we've always tapped over a hundred because we had help. We don't have help anymore. So we've gone to what we can do.

**Carl:** Plus it's a smaller evaporator than we got. It's something that her and I can do, whereas before we had to cut all the wood.

**Geri:** You didn't tell him what our evaporator runs on.

**Carl:** Oh, propane, so no more wood. We have done wood up until this year, all these years, but it's a lot of work making wood for that.

**Glenn:** What do you think the largest tree is in the woods?

**Geri:** It has to be that one that we put a couple taps on, but it just didn't run that well. It's over a hundred years. It used to produce.

**Carl:** We've had tree back there, we put four buckets on it, but that's all hollow and it doesn't produce anymore, but about to fall over. We used to put four pails on that one.

**Geri:** We had the woods logged this year just two weeks before we tapped. The woods is a mess right now, but there's so much more sunlight and we can see. His parents had it logged about 30 years ago and so some of those trees that got a chance to grow 30 years ago, we tapped some new ones this year that were probably, 10 or 12 inches. They're 30 years old.

**Wayne:** How old does a tree have to be before you can tap it?

**Geri:** At least that 30.

**Carl:** At least 8 to 10 inches and about 30 years old.

**Wayne:** And then up to about--

**Glenn:** Whenever.

**Carl:** That one that's over a hundred gave us some sap, but it wasn't as strong as some that are like 50 or 70 years old.

**Geri:** We are still learning. We went to the Michigan Maple Syrup Association meeting this year, which we hadn't done, and we learned even so much more about the anatomy of a maple tree. You never wanna stop learning.

**Glenn:** They're all maple, hard maple?

**Carl:** Oh, absolutely. We just tap sugar maples.

**Glenn:** So you can tap elm.

**Geri:** There are people who tap black walnut. People tap silver maples, but you've got like 70% water there.

**Wayne:** I guess I never heard of people tapping things other than maple.

**Carl:** Birch. They don't sound good to me.

**Geri:** We don't wanna experiment with that.

**Wayne:** You knew, obviously, your father and your grandfather. Did your great-grandfather too?

**Carl:** No, all I knew is my grandpa that lived across the road there. His brothers, I remember them. My grandpa lived on a farm just up the hill there. His brother lived across the road, and then you go down the corner of Pratt and Forest Hill and there's another brother that had a farm there. My grandpa finally moved down here. He inherited this. The other brothers, they stayed on the rest of the farm.

I think it was back in the Depression, they had a sawmill. They had a threshing machine. They had a tiling machine and they kind of did all that on the side. A lot of the old clay tile around here was put in by their tiling machine. They did custom work with the thresher machine and the sawmill. My dad used to have a sawmill back by that woods, back in the sixties, and my grandpa did custom sawing for the fun of it, I guess, I don't know.

**Glenn:** With the log cabin, was there a barn with that, a shed?

**Carl:** No, my grandpa, the first thing I think he built was this shed right here, right next to the building. I think that was the first shed he put up, and then the barn, and then there's another barn that used to set over there but that kind of fell over, so I'm trying to keep that barn up. That's where I used to milk cows in, was that barn there.

**Glenn:** How many head of cows?

**Carl:** I milked about 44 cows in stanchions. That's why I don't walk very good. My knees are kinda wore out.

**Wayne:** How large was this cabin that he originally lived in?

**Carl:** It wasn't too big, about the size of that garage, I think.

**Wayne:** Did it have a loft that you could sleep in?

**Carl:** From the pictures I've seen, no. Like I said, it was about the size of that garage. It wasn't very big.

**Wayne:** Do you know when that cabin was torn down?

**Carl:** No, I don't even think it says in the book when it was torn down or nothing.

**Wayne:** What schools did your ancestors go to then?

**Carl:** There used to be an old school on Pratt Road. You go down Forest Hill Road and you'll hit Pratt Road. It's black top now, and you go that way, maybe a half a mile, and there used to be an old schoolhouse [Pratt School] there. That's where my dad and uncle and them went. As far as my grandpa Jastram, across the road there, I don't know where him and his brothers ever did go to school, to be honest with you, if they even did go to school.

**Glenn:** They probably spoke German too.

**Carl:** I never heard my grandpa or any of them speak German. I know Geri, she's from Westphalia, and everybody speaks German up there, but no, I've never heard any of my family speak German. My grandma from Owosso, she spoke German, but as far as my family around here, I never heard them speak German. Now maybe they knew some, but as long as I was around, they never--

**Geri:** This is the cabin.

**Carl:** Oh yeah, it did have a little loft, not much.

**Wayne:** Oh, tintype.

**Geri:** This is Grandpa Pingel. He built those barns too. Look at all that. There was nothing here.

**Glenn:** The Stoys, my ancestors were barn builders over here in Riley.

**Geri:** That's what they lived in until they completed--

**Glenn:** You mentioned brothers and uncles. They must have worked together on the barns for each farm.

**Carl:** I just saw a picture of a barn raising right there. That was after, I think, the cyclone went through and tore it down.

**Geri:** That was here. Oh, that's Forest Hill. I'm sorry. You're right.

**Carl:** No, the barn his one brother had--that would be the next farm north on that side--a cyclone went through here and took it down. So all neighbors got together and put up another one. We had a tree out here in the front yard that got twisted in that cyclone. You could see it and it finally died. My grandpa, he always said, after going through that cyclone--

**Geri:** It went through in 1920, that cyclone.

**Wayne:** The big 1920 one that also took out part of St. Johns.

**Carl:** He'd say, "I hate to say it, but I'd just soon have a fire as I would have a cyclone." They were picking up debris way out in the field for months.

**Glenn:** You mentioned the farm across the road. Is there still a house there or not?

**Carl:** Yeah, that brick house.

**Geri:** Well, his grandparents built the brick house.

**Carl:** Yeah, they built the brick house just a year before I was born.

**Geri:** 1952.

**Carl:** Yeah, 'cause they lived in this house, then they built that house. My parents moved into this house. There was that red building behind it that used to be a chicken coop. There was another chicken coop there. My grandpa did a lot of woodworking. We got rid of all the chickens so he turned it into a woodworking shop, was what he did. He'd go out there and work with wood.

**Glenn:** What school district is this in, DeWitt or St. Johns?

**Geri:** St. Johns with a DeWitt address.

**Wayne:** Barely.

**Geri:** Right, but it is a DeWitt address.

**Carl:** We used to have a Grand Ledge phone.

**Geri:** When we had a landline, it was Grand Ledge.

**Wayne:** When you get over near Wacousta, you're in Grand Ledge district here.

**Geri:** It's just a mile south and just over there is Westphalia and just over there is Dewitt and then we are St. Johns 'cause that's a big school district.

**Glenn:** Are you from the area?

**Geri:** I'm from Westphalia.

**Wayne:** She's a "P-W-er" {Pewamo-Wesphalia}.

**Geri:** A "Kraut."

**Wayne:** She's one of those Westphalia Fedewas.

**Geri:** Exactly. Did I say I was Fedewa? It does say it right here.

**Wayne:** Geri, when did you get into the thread embroidery business?

**Geri:** Well, it started when our children were small and it was decided I didn't go to work anymore after our second one was born. I started doing some custom sewing, alterations, got into making brides' dresses and bridesmaids'. I did that for about 15 years. Then the kids were older and I went back to work in kind of the industry. It was when I started working at Country Stitches [in East Lansing] that I got interested in embroidery. I worked for them for 18 years, but I started my embroidery business about halfway through that 'cause it wasn't a conflict. It just grew to now all that equipment. I've been doing this full time for the last 10 years, custom embroidery.

**Glenn:** Quilting too or not?

**Geri:** No, that's different. That's another big machine, but not here.

**Wayne:** What kind of embroidery work?

**Carl:** Most of our work is for businesses: hats, jackets, shirts. Seasons change in Michigan, so short sleeves in the summer, long sleeves in the winter.

**Wayne:** Some of them are logos or--

**Geri:** Lots of logos. Yep, most businesses have a logo these days. It's recognition of their business and so that's what we do most of, anywhere from one item to hundreds of items. We have a client that it's always 4 or 500 pieces, mostly hats. I used to hire people to help and when he retired, it took him a year or so to find his place. Then he just started hanging out in the shop and cleaning threads and now it's just us.

**Wayne:** He's your helper.

**Carl:** He is and he's better.

**Glenn:** You pointed, said "There's your spot!"



**Geri:** You're sitting in his chair. It works out great. The two of us, we know what's going on every day with each other and the business, or if we're taking off to see our son in Virginia or something. It's easier to just work with the family. I grew up in family business and so did Carl, so we know the realm of that.

**Wayne:** You used to drive back and forth to East Lansing?

**Carl:** Well, East Lansing, and then I also managed a couple stores for them in Flint. Then from there, they needed a manager down in Jackson and I did that for five years.

**Wayne:** It wasn't just local then.

**Geri:** When they offered store management to me, after about just under two years of machine sales in East Lansing, then I started getting my feet wet in managing stores, which is the sales, the staff, the customers, the store, all of it. After five years in Jackson, I needed to downsize what I was doing because his mom started showing more ill, and I needed to be closer to home, so I went from managing in Jackson to teaching in East Lansing, which was a more flexible schedule. Then I was just in the teaching part of embroidery and embroidery software and all that. I taught people how to do all that.

**Glenn:** Computer stuff.

**Geri:** Yes, also I started my business in 2006. I grew up working. So did Carl, but when you're working for yourself, it's a world of difference. My goal was to then go full time in this and I got there.

**Glenn:** How many children do you have?

**Geri:** We have a daughter and a son. Our daughter lives in the St. Johns area with 4 of our grandchildren, she and her husband. Our son is in Virginia with 3 grandsons, so we have 3 and 3--3 girls, 3 boys. His wife was in the Army when they got married, so that's what took them to Virginia, and they've stayed. They love it. They're coming home in June. We count the days when we see them. We FaceTime. Bless our son's heart. Since he's been married, he always called us and it turned into every Sunday night, six o'clock, a standing appointment. After they had children and after the first one was about 2, we started FaceTiming every Sunday night at 7:00, almost 18 years. We see our son on the phone. We try. We got there three times last year. They're coming this summer and hopefully, we'll get down there one more time before the year is out.

**Wayn:** Do you have frequent flyer miles?

**Geri:** No, we actually drive. It's about a 12-hour drive, 12 to 13. We used to do it in a day. For the last three, 4 years, we've been staying over. What's the hurry? The hurry is to get there, but why do that to ourselves? We stay over.

**Carl:** I don't like to fly.

**Geri:** We did fly once and it was great. He goes, "So when are we ---?" I said, "We're leaving after breakfast and getting there before lunch," something like that, I told him. They're flying home in June, with the 4 of 'em so I'm sure my son has frequent flyer miles.

**Wayne:** Carl, do you have any stories that were told you by any of your ancestors of interesting things that maybe happened to them?

**Carl:** Cyclone going through.

**Glenn:** Native American encounters?

**Carl:** My grandpa always said there was a tribe of Indians that used to stay back in our woods every once in a while for some reason or another. I never knew why. Now, whether it's true or not, I don't know, something about they took some little boy when they left and he grew up with 'em for years and he come back. Now, whether that's true, I have no idea, but they used to camp back there every once in a while.

Dexter Trail used to run up through here and over on the corner of Wacousta and Pratt Road over there, where the creek kind of goes through there, they say a family was going up through there and their little girl died and she's buried back in there somewhere. If there's a marker there or not any more, I don't know.\*\* I've never been back in there. Other than that, nothing really outrageous happened around here other than they worked a lot.

**Geri:** It was their way of life.

**Wayne:** I think you mentioned they went to Wacousta occasionally. Did they go to the old Forest Hill?

**Carl:** Oh yeah, they went to Forest Hill store a lot. Grand Ledge, they used to do a lot of business in Grand Ledge, the feed company there, and then there was a International dealer there. They did a lot of business there.

**Geri:** Did they ever do business in Westphalia, with that feed company?

**Carl:** They could've. I never heard them speak much of Westphalia. Grand Ledge and Wacousta and then the Forest Hill store. I remember going down there and getting nuts and bolts and nails and everything. When I was real little, if we were building something, they needed something, tell me to jump in the pickup.

**Geri:** That store was owned by Marten? The Martens, and his aunt married--

**Carl:** The store was owned first by Howard Marten and then he sold it to Elmer Marten. I don't know if they're related or not, but anyway, Howard sold it to Elmer and then Elmer ran it until they passed. Their daughters turned it into the apartment building it is now. He got out of the store business and then turned it into apartments.

**Geri:** Elmer's daughter, Virginia, married his Uncle Leonard [Jastram].

**Carl:** I do remember the tiling machine that my grandpa and his brothers owned. They bought it and it was shipped by railroad over to Grand Ledge. Well, you didn't have trucks and trailers that you could load your tiling machine on and bring it out here. They drove it from Grand Ledge to here and it took 'em, I think Grandpa said, about a day and a half. It was on wood cleats. The track had wood cleats on it and so they drove it all the way here. I remember Dad saying, after a few years those wood cleats, they wear out. So one winter they sawed a bunch of oak, I guess, and that winter they were in their shop making them wood cleats and putting them back on the track. They had to drill the holes and then they had to counter sink them so the head of the bolt would go in there. That's what they did, he said, one winter.

**Geri:** They had to work a lot.

**Carl:** Nowadays, they load the tiling machine on the back of a semi away you go.

**Glenn:** Would the tile have come from Grand Ledge then, the kiln there?

**Carl:** They tiled here. They tiled land up by Westphalia, so they knew people up by Westphalia. Yeah, they tiled a lot of acres with that thing and they finally sold it and it ended up over towards DeWitt. I knew the two guys that owned it. It ended up trees were growing around it and up through it, and somebody come along and bought it and took it somewhere and they wanted to restore it. I don't know if they ever did or not. To me, driving it partway and then letting it set, and then driving it home the rest of the way--boy, that's a lot, especially wood cleats!

**Glenn:** That was all clay tile.

**Carl:** Yeah, clay tile. I remember they were saying one time up on one of the farms up north of here a little bit, a dog climbed or got up in one of them tile and crawled up there quite a ways, but they found it. They dug up the tile and everything. They found the dog. He was alive.

**Wayne:** How far down did they bury these tiles?

**Carl:** Probably about 4' is usual. Nowadays, they have to put 'em 4' because the tools they got now go down so darn deep and they're so big.

**Geri:** Do they go even deeper?

**Carl:** No, they won't go any deeper. You could tell, here a few years ago, that a lot of them clay tile on here were getting broke and plugged and everything 'cause you could see the wet spots starting to come back. So the guys that farm here, they got a outfit on the back of one of their big track tractors that lays plastic tile so then they put in new tile around here. Ground is pretty hard. They went through once with their outfit and they had to back up. It was so dry and hard that year. Then they went through it again and then laid the tile 'cause they couldn't lay the tile all at once 'cause it was so hard, the ground was.

**Geri:** It is hard ground.

**Wayne:** How big around was the tile that they used?

**Carl:** About 4" is what they usually-- Some places they probably use 6, but this is mostly 4" tile. Nowadays, I think they use 6".

**Wayne:** They're all plastic now too.

**Carl:** Yeah, everything's plastic, one big roll and they roll it out. Field like this out here, they could probably get going and in a day they probably have it tiled, but like my grandpa and them, they had to bring wagons in with tile, handle all that tile into the machine. That was a lot of work, but nowadays they just put it on a machine, lay it in. That's it.

**Glenn:** The original heat for the house was probably coal?

**Carl:** Coal, wood. Yep. I remember that. When my dad had the sawmill back there--we had slab wood back then, 'cause we didn't use a band saw or nothing. We used to cut that up, bring it out, and throw it in the basement, and then burn that. Then we'd get coal from Grand Ledge, and they'd bring that out and shove it down a window, and so it was coal and wood. Then my grandpa and dad made a outfit underneath the sawmill, where it took the sawdust out and it dumped in a wagon, and then I'd bring it up and back in the barn--that's when we had beef cattle--shove it all off. That's what we used for bedding in there.

**Glenn:** There was a windmill in the picture.

**Geri:** Yes, it's not here anymore.

**Carl:** I don't remember the windmill.

**Geri:** That's been gone a long time then.

**Carl:** Yeah. I don't remember.

**Wayne:** When did indoor plumbing arrive at your house?

**Geri:** Probably with your grandpa?

**Carl:**--because the house, we understand, sat empty for about 20 years.

**Wayne:** Goodness! From what time to what time?

**Geri:** Well, from Grandpa Pingel to Grandpa Jastram. Then Grandpa Jastram, the carpenter is the one that brought it back to life. He redid the kitchen. What was a butler's pantry, is a bedroom and a full bathroom. That would've been well before your time.

**Wayne:** Maybe the forties or thirties? Before that there really wasn't much indoor plumbing.

**Glenn:** --or electricity.

**Carl:** I'm trying to think when that was.

**Geri:** They did say, at one time there was like a seat between the bedrooms in that closet. A lot of houses were like that, where you had two bedrooms and a closet between them. They made just a stool, not an official bathroom,. It was under the staircase between the bedrooms. I know someone who still has that, the Houghton's in their house.

**Carl:** Oh, I didn't realize that.

**Geri:** They have a stool and the sink, so probably for nostalgia.

**Glenn:** I hope so.

**Geri:** I mean, they're running. They probably replaced everything since.

**Wayne:** I'm assuming the house would've had to be rewired for electricity. There would've been a number of renovations over the years.

**Glenn:** Wallpapering .

**Carl:** Before we moved in, we redid the kitchen.

**Geri:** When we moved in, 10 years ago, but otherwise before that, it was when your grandpa did it. His mom and dad never really had to do anything. They could have, but they didn't.

**Carl:** My dad always told me—there was that ugly linoleum in that kitchen—He always said there was hardwood floor under that.

**Geri:** Linoleum was popular in the sixties.

**Carl:** So before we moved in--my dad, we put him in assisted living--and so I went over to the corner of the kitchen. I thought, "Okay, what's, really underneath there? He probably don't know what he is talking about." I ripped up one corner of it. "Oh, there is a nice hardwood floor underneath it.!" Whoever put that linoleum down--I don't think they make glue like that anymore! It come up in pieces and I used everything there is known to man that's supposed to take glue off. Never loosened it. I dumped a whole thing of Goo-Be-Gone or something like that, and left it overnight. -- Sanding that floor and it took us days to do it.

**Geri:** We rented the sander and we used every grit . We have the hardwood floors today. Did you tell 'em about the bedroom floor.

**Carl:** Yeah, what we use for a bedroom used to be a pantry. There's a stairway that went from there upstairs. They tore that out. I don't know when. We we're gonna make that into bedroom. It was my parents' bedroom, but we ripped up the carpet and wanted to repaint it, and so I pulled up the carpet a little bit. "Oh, it's all refinished around the edges." There's about that much from the carpet to the wall. Thought, "Oh, this'll be great." So we tore it up. The rest of it wasn't done. It was all hardwood floor but that hardwood floor had strips of Black walnut. It had maple. It had oak, pieces of everything. It was, like a puzzle.

**Geri:** It's gorgeous.

**Carl:** It's, yeah, it's beautiful.

**Wayne:** And so it was designed to be attractive. It wasn't just using scraps.

**Carl:** Then we sanded that all down and put a finish on it. We didn't stain it or anything. We just put a finish on it so it shows the wood and it's pretty, except it's our bedroom.

**Glenn:** They finish the perimeter and then just have a rug in the center.

**Carl:** I think that's how they did it.

**Geri:** Grandma was notorious, I'm told, for every spring cleaning, putting a coat of orange varnish on everything. My mother-in-law always said, "The wood is sticky."

**Carl:** In the summertime when you got hot, he did have air conditioners that you--because Grandma put another coat on every year, on the woodwork. So that's probably why we still have the original woodwork.

**Glenn:** So it's not painted.

**Geri:** No, that was the family rule. I was told when I just came into the family, "Never paint the woodwork."

**Wayne:** --or you'll be kicked out of the family.

**Geri:** Exactly. So our house is dark for today's standards. That's why I went white and gray in here, I guess, but I love it. We redid the bathroom two years ago this summer.

**Carl:** She had to paint it.

**Geri:** We painted the woodwork.

**Carl:** She's still here to tell about it.

**Geri:** A bathroom, going from dark teak wood to white, so much fresher. It's lighter.

**Glenn:** Probably latex paint so it's easily removed at a later date.

**Carl:** We're not going back. Our daughter-in-law says it'll probably be my favorite room in the house. Their house is all white and gray.

**Glenn:** Is that originally cedar shake shingle or metal?

**Wayne:** It looks like cedar shake to me, doesn't it?

**Geri:** I mean, it's been been resingled during his parents' time.

**Carl:** I know this barn's got cedar shingles on it and then we went over it with tin 'cause they were starting to look a little bad. When my dad and I farmed—well, my dad farmed all his life--my mother was a fanatic, keeping receipts and everything and doing her taxes. When she passed, I cleaned a lot of the upstairs out. She had a stack of paperwork--

**Geri:** --to the ceiling.

**Carl:** She said, "Well you never know, we might get audited." And I said, "Mother, they don't go from the first day that you walked on this farm until now."

**Geri:** She had a tall upright, like from a vacuum cleaner box, that she started filling, and then it went beyond that. Fifty-three years they were married and 53 years of income tax records.

**Wayne:** If they ever did get audited, it'd be interesting to take the big box to the auditor and say, "Here you go." Sometimes you find some of the little paperwork and it's really interesting though.

**Geri:** We do have some interesting things, a little notebook. Was it your grandpa's?

**Carl:** Probably, with measurements and he kept track of who he did threshing for, who he sawed logs for, and he had all that.

**Geri:** It's a responsibility really, as the holder of the heritage.

**Wayne:** Do you see the farm staying in the family so it'd be a bicentennial farm someday?

**Geri:** Well, I wouldn't wanna be the one to say. Our two children are not interested in it but we have six grandchildren and they're all 16 on down to 2, so it's hard to say. They all love coming here, but they're not in a place that that's a thought, but you think about 1861, how old it is. They'll be around when it's 200.

**Carl:** That's why I got outta the dairy business, 'cause I knew my son. He liked taking cattle in 4-H and that, but as far as getting into the dairy business-- Back then, you either liked it or you don't do it.

**Geri:** 37 years, it'll be 200.

**Carl:** I didn't see him wanting to get into it deeper, 'cause what you gotta get into nowadays being a dairy farm.

**Wayne:** You have to go big.

**Carl:** Yeah, that's what I was looking at.

**Geri:** Millions.

**Carl:** I thought, I could sell what I got and pay off what little I owed. Nowadays, what are you gonna do with the dairy farm with 2,000 head a cattle. Who are you gonna sell it to? I mean, somebody ain't gonna walk in off the street, "Oh, I want to go in the dairy business. I'm want to buy your farm." You either gotta have a thousand and better cows to be in the dairy business nowadays. You're just hanging on if you got about 3 or 400 head of cattle. Land's getting so outrageous and that to buy and to rent, 'cause all these big dairy farms, they got all the land 'cause they can pay more money for rent on it. What scares me now is their manure waste and everything. You can only put so much of that stuff on the land and then you gotta kind of back off. Now they pump it underground to fields miles away. I don't miss it, but I always grew up with cattle.

**Geri:** We kept beef cattle. Our kids were in 4-H and we did that for our freezer, but it wasn't the same.

**Glenn:** Gardening?

**Geri:** Oh yes, we always garden.

**Carl:** I see some raised beds.

**Geri:** That's only two out of about 20 because we have hard clay. Since he is retired, we have so many raised beds and they're out on the cement. Isn't that smart?

**Carl:** That way, you gotta mow around them, but then I don't have to mow .

**Geri:** We grow a lot in those raised beds and he's perfected what the mix should be in the raised bed.

**Glenn:** Potatoes?

**Geri:** No, we don't have potatoes.

**Carl:** You go up north to a guy and buy them.

**Geri:** Yeah, for \$15, a 50 pound bag. That's how we get potatoes.

**Carl:** Yeah. Take a day off; go out for lunch.

**Geri:** And sweet corn we don't grow. 'cause Felzkes does a good job, and strawberries, they do a good job, but we do grow peppers, tomatoes.

**Carl:** Onions, carrots, squash, pickles. Last few years, now instead of making beds like that, I use the tracks off the big track tractors. Loniers, every once in a while, they'll throw a track or it'll wear out. Years ago they were desperate for help one spring and they asked me if I'd come over and help 'em. I said, " Okay, you're pretty

desperate." So I went over there and we were way back by a woods. Well, the track come off the tractor. They are a bear to get off and put a new one on. So I was over there and I see they had a couple of 'em behind the shed. I said, "What do you guys do with them?" "We don't know what we're gonna do with 'em. Why, you want 'em?" And I says, "I don't know, let me think about it for a while." So I got one and I brought it home. They're pretty heavy. I set it up and I filled it half full of sand and I put some good dirt on top of it. I raised some peppers in it, my hot peppers. Them tracks in the summertime they get hot, the heat 'cause they're about yeah thick or whatever. I tried cutting one in two. No, you don't do that. Them peppers, they got pretty hot. When it was real hot you couldn't lean on that track and work 'cause they were so hot. That worked out pretty good so I got a couple more. I got about four. We called them up just last week, "Got some more?" I says, "I hope you don't," because they ain't cheap. I said, "I'm gonna ask but I hope you don't have any tracks." And they said, "Well we're gonna put new tracks on our skidster." And I go, "Okay." Those are a little bit shorter, and I said, "Yeah, I'll take a couple of them and use them," 'cause I was gonna build a couple more." They work real good. They don't rot out or nothing.

**Geri:** Since he started building beds back there about 10 years ago, probably three years ago, you redesigned it, didn't you? Took it all apart 'cause some of 'em were wonky on the corners, so took it all apart, put all the dirt in a pile, redesigned it, more into a U.

**Carl:** Screws I used were pulling out. That was green wood when I built them and it just pulled apart.

**Geri:** So if anybody wants to know about raised beds, I think he is the man. You can grow so much in them. You don't have to get down the rows with the rototiller.

**Glenn:** Now the groundhogs don't get in them or the ground moles.

**Carl:** Once in a while we have trouble. We have put fence around, like chicken wire around certain things; deer, rabbits.

**Geri:** Do we get rabbits?

**Carl:** I don't think so. It's been there for a few years now. I don't have the problems. At first, we had deer going along there and nipping everything off and all that.

**Geri:** It's right at their eating height.

**Carl:** I have woodchucks, I hate woodchucks.

**Geri:** Last year we put a light on that end of the barn shining up, tool shed. We didn't have a single anything eating our garden because there's a light on all night.

**Carl:** I got a set of wind chimes I made and hung out there for the fun of it. That makes enough noise, but I think they're so used to that that don't they --

**Glenn:** I put wood or logs in the bottom of my bins. I raise potatoes in bins, just a filler.

**Carl:** A friend of mine uses tires. He tried that. He started 'em out and then he just keep putting tires and sand on 'em. They worked for him. Now I just let someone else raise them.,



**Geri:** My grandpa and his grandpa knew each other. I'm talking about my dad grew up on Forest Hill just down from the Forest Hill store. That was the Fedewa homestead and it's changed hands now, but my uncle had it until he died. Here we are in Riley Township.

**Carl:** My grandpa knew her grandpa.

**Geri:** Yes they did. I'm sure they sat out in front of Forest Hill store having a pop or something, a soda.

**Wayne:** They wouldn't have had anything stronger than that.

**Geri:** They probably never could have even dreamt that they would someday have grandchildren that ended up together.

**Carl:** That store had everything down there.

**Geri:** The little house across the road from it-- Have you been on that corner where the Forest Hill store is?

**Glenn:** Was that Riley?

**Geri:** They called Riley, yes.

**Wayne:** I think there was a Riley post office there at one time.

**Geri:** There's a little house right on the corner across from that. That was our first house. We bought that and it was empty, and we raised it up, poured a basement. Of course, we were in the cement business, and that was our first house. We fixed that up to live in. I think my grandma told me there was also a dance hall next to that, right on the corner. My dad and his family all lived just down the road. The girls could not go to the dance hall, but the boys could. Who are the boys dancing with?

**Glenn:** Not with the girls in your family?

**Geri:** Not my aunts! My dad was from [a family of] 11. There were 5 boys and 6 girls. All that's left now is Father Matt. An aunt just recently passed away in February, and he's 91, I think, Father Matt.

**Wayne:** Wasn't there a sawmill or something or a creamery, a cheese house or something?

**Carl:** Just east of the corner a couple houses, that was a blacksmith shop.

**Geri:** Where Bill and Cindy lived, wasn't that the blacksmith?

**Carl:** That was where the blacksmith shop was.

Your grandpa had a still just north of the store. 'cause they grew mint and they used to still the mint there. Her uncle told me one time--I think they raised beets too or whatever, sugar beets. That was during the war. Anyway, they'd bring prisoners out to hoe in the beets or the mint, one of the two. These guards—and they were German—they'd bring these guys out and they were working out in the fields. This one guard was there and he was walking up and down the road, kind of where they're working at. He looked like he was looking for something. So he went down there and he is talking to the guy and he says "You looking for somebody or for something?" The guy kind of laughed. He goes, "Yeah, I dropped my clip of bullets and I can't find them." He's supposed to be guarding these prisoners. Their German was a different German. They could kind of understand

each other. Her uncle asked him, "There's just that one guard. Why don't you guys just take off and run?" "Where'd we go? What would we do?" They finally confessed, "We got it better over here right now than back in our country."

**Wayne:** Did they come from the Lake Odessa area? There was a prisoner of war camp in Lake Odessa.

**Carl:** He could have. I don't know. He never really said, but when he said, "Oh, I'm looking for my bullets." Like they said, "It's better over here than what is going on in our country."

**Glenn:** Do you ever find arrowheads or anything on the farm?

**Carl:** No, I've never found arrowheads here. My grandpa's brother that owned the farm right on the corner of Pratt and Forest Hill--I remember going up there, and I was real small--he had a jar or a vase like that that was full of arrowheads he found up that way on that farm.

**Glenn:** You're fairly close to Looking Glass here, really.

**Geri:** It's a wonder we haven't found arrowheads in our woods.

**Carl:** Oh, you'd have to dig and everything. You'll never find them.

**Geri:** 'Cause you get a new layer of leaves every year.

**Carl:** --and branches now. I did find a arrowhead once on a farm I worked. It'd be east of the South Riley Church over there on Chadwick. I farmed a farm over there for quite a few years and I did find an arrow head there, but I'm not that lucky.

It's one thing I can say, around here, even when I was in the dairy business, we never had a lot of-- You'd see a mouse once in a while, As far as rats and everything, never had nothing like that around here.

**Geri:** Some people do have a rat problem, but we never did.

**Glenn:** So you put baled hay up in the barn?

**Carl:** Oh yeah, did some round bales.

That one year, we had a drought here. I don't know what year that was--'86--there wasn't anything around here as far as hay and everything. The government had some sort of a big thing in St. Johns. "Oh, you come, we'll help you get some hay," and all that. Went there and found out how much it was gonna cost me. I was lucky enough, I found a place up in Canada and asked them about their hay and, "Yeah, we got some." And I says, "Okay, bring me a load down." So I bought a semi load of round bales and golly, it was real nice hay in that. And I says, "You got any more?" "Oh yeah, we got about 3, 4 more semi loads." "Bring it down. I'll take all of it." And it was rather reasonable. So I bought it all. They had another meeting over there and I knew some dairy farmers that we were talking. Everybody's saying, "Oh God, I was paying \$135, \$140 a ton" and all that, and I'm just standing there keeping my mouth shut.

**Glenn:** They were about \$10 a bale?"

**Carl:** I bought it for \$95 a ton and they said, "Have you found any hay?" And I go, "Yeah, I found some up in Canada." "Well, how much you paying?" And I says, "You want me to tell you?" I said, "\$95 a ton." "They got any more?" And I go, "No, I bought it all."

**Geri:** I think your cousins bought some from you though, didn't they?

**Carl:** No, that was after that. Corn only got about so tall. Had a neighbor across the road there. He was a crop farmer and he says, "You want that corn, go ahead and chop it off." So I chopped that and the corn I had, put a bunch of water with it. Then I bought a couple semi loads of apple pulp. The guy brought it with a semi and he had a push thing on his semi. He pushed it all off. I mixed that apple pulp in with that corn silage and them cows just went crazy. It was really good and I didn't pay much for that. I thought, "If I make it through this drought, I should be able to make it."

\*Dr. Pingel, overseer of District No. 31, is making great improvements in roads by drawing gravel, and if other districts would follow his example, we would soon have fine roads in Riley. *The Clinton Independent*; June 5, 1895; p1

\*\*Probably Riley Dexter, 2-year old son of Judge Samuel Dexter, died May 1833 of smallpox; buried on Fred Mohnke farm.

