

Autobiography of Albert Enzmann

Acquisition and Life on the Farm in Field Township

Albert arrived in the United States in 1902. He worked at various jobs from New York to Oklahoma and eventually ended up in Northern Minnesota. In 1922, he sold his homestead in Ray, Minnesota, to his brother, Oscar, and started a general store in Leander, Minnesota. The store was never more than a break even business with its primary business being tourist traffic between Virginia and Lake Vermilion. In the late 20's the original highway called "Old 11" was relocated to the current US 53 bypassing "The Farmer's Store". This is the point where we start – bankruptcy of The Farmer's Store and acquisition of the farm currently owned by Albert's grandson James Enzmann.

Sam Cusson was General Superintendent of the Virginia and Rainy Lake Lumber Company and Chet Rogers¹ was Mill Superintendent in Virginia. Mr. Rogers stopped in the store one day to say he was too polite when meeting another car, pulled over too far and drove in the ditch. I had a 1 ½ ton truck that my 2 teenaged sons used to pull out his car without any problem. While they were doing this Mr. Rogers said to me, "You're just the man I want to see. I got the far west of Cook back again. I want you to find me a German farmer with a big family. Even if he doesn't have much money I will give him a chance."

Some friends of mine returned from California reporting they had seen sheep raised for a good profit on low cost land. I could not sleep all night. I thought that this was the place for them. I drove to International Falls to talk to them and thought I had them convinced. Then I went to see Chet Rogers and beat his price down from \$18,000 to \$15,000. I gave Mr. Rogers a check for \$1,000 to bind the bargain.

I knew none of the 6 men from California was worth less than \$10,000. They had 2,000 sheep coming but when they could not show me at least \$1,000 I would not let them put the sheep in the barn. All I got from them was a hard luck story about how they lost their money on the stock exchange. When my creditors found out about me buying that farm they began to foreclose on me and drove my Leander store into bankruptcy.

Mr. Chet Rogers declared the contract null and void after he had waited 2 months for the \$14,000. He instructed me to stay on the place and also declared the \$1,000 payment I had given him forfeited. I told him that Francock and Kelsie bought the place for \$16,000 but their check bounced while they were cutting timber. Every one of the buyers was robbing the place after they knew they could not live up to their contract they gave up paying anything. I told Mr. Rogers, "Why not give me a chance to run the farm. Whenever I sell something I will give you money." He agreed.

¹ On October 9, 1929, C.H. Rogers, general superintendent of the company, set the levers that sent the last log of the Virginia mill into the flying bands of steel. The world's largest white pine mill had closed its doors in the last of the white pine states reaching from Maine to Minnesota because it had no more logs. Residents of Virginia still remember the dramatic ending; as the last log was cut, a long blast from the plant whistle sounded a requiem for an industry that had been to a great extent the life of the community (Larson, 1949, page 400).

Mr. Nelson had a registered Holstein cow on the farm which my creditors promptly claimed and as Mr. Nelson couldn't prove ownership, they got away with it. Luckily they sold it back to me for \$50.

A friend of mine, Bill Harrigan, County Commissioner for Koochiching County, offered me a \$1,000 loan as he felt sorry for me but I turned it down because I wasn't sure I would be able to pay him back. Then he asked me if I could pasture 41 horses. I told him I couldn't pasture 41 but I could pasture 20 of them if I could also work them. He agreed so we made a deal that I would get \$5 per head per month.



Flint Creek Dairy Farm – April 1930

The farm was fenced and cross fenced with 4 foot woven wire fencing having a strand of barbed wire top and bottom. It could hold back anything from small pigs and lambs to 3,000 pound bulls. All the machinery on the farm was still horse drawn back then in 1930 so there was nothing I needed more than horses.

Mr. August Neubauer wrote me the Production Credit Association as looking for a farmer with room in his barn to house and feed 10 cows, 1 breeding bull, and 3 heifers. They were owned by a veterinarian who had died after a long illness. His wife had been feeding them nothing but sunflower silage. I had a modern barn with stanchions, concrete floors, drinking cups, and hot and cold water. It had a pen for the bull, lots of calf pens and some horse stalls.

Some of the cows had been fresh for only 5 weeks yet they gave as little as 2 pounds per milking. I started feeding the red clover and alfalfa hay that was stored in my barn along with rutabagas and bran and in 10 days had worked them up to full feed and by the end of 1 month they were producing 20 pounds of 4% fat milk per milking.

PCA had proposed my paying \$200 down, \$200 in one year, and \$200 in 2 years. I countered with nothing down, \$200 in one year, \$200 in 2 years, and \$200 in 3 years which they accepted. If they had shipped them they would have gone as canners and cutters for almost nothing. They were happy, I was happy, and I even gave the veterinarian's widow \$50. She said that the cows had cost them from \$150 to \$190, and the bull had cost them \$500 when he was 10 months old.

Those sheep farmers tried getting me to take over 200 sheep but I absolutely refused to work with them.

I did buy 50 ewes from a Jew and agreed to give him 50 lambs in exchange. Later I discovered that a lamb was worth twice² as much as its mother.

The barn was 36' wide, 166 feet long and 52 feet high. The haymow alone was 42 feet high and at one time held 343 tons of hay. The farm was developed in 1913 at a cost of \$62,000 with the buildings alone costing \$35,000. The barn alone cost \$16,000.

Bill Harrington asked me if he could buy 30 tons of hay at \$16 per ton.

We bought 50 laying hens the first year along with 1,000 chicks. The farm had a combination hog house and chicken coop that was 90 feet x 20 feet.

The original owners raised hay, grain, horses, cows, milk, beef and hogs. They employed 1 manager at \$5,000 and a foreman at \$2,000 along with 17 workers who they paid \$13 monthly plus room and board. They lost \$33,000 in 6 years producing food for the Virginia Rainy Lake Lumber Company.

When I purchased the farm my oldest son was a freshman in high school and my second son was in the eighth grade. They each did 2 men's job without coaxing. We had a niece and my wife's sister staying with us, and they did a man's work every day.

Mr. Frazock, a former owner, inquired how we were getting along. I said that we were doing better than I had ever expected. He said, "Wait until the repair bills show up, and the veterinary bills." I responded, "I never have seen a repair bill and don't expect to in the future. I do the blacksmithing and carpentry, Harry is the electrician and Walter the veterinarian. Walter also does all the butchering, the dogging, castrating and beheading.

The barn had been built in 1913 and had never been cleaned out since the first hay was hoisted into the haymow. I baled 46 tons of hay from the haymow and sold it for \$16 per ton. It cost me \$3.50 per ton to get it baled. I bought 50 ewes with broken mouth³ for \$2.00 each delivered to the farm. I got more than that for the wool and they averaged more than 1 lamb per ewe in the spring. I wintered the sheep on the chaff from the hay and I sold the grass seed that was left for \$278.

In less than 2 months I brought Mr. Rogers a check for \$500. "Where did you find it?" he asked. "In the haymow," I responded.

² October 1930 prices Sheep, ewes (Chicago) \$2.84/cwt, lambs \$7.031/cwt – down from \$4.625 & \$12.094 a year earlier. Wool had dropped from \$0.43/lb to \$0.30/lb over the same period.

³ **Broken-mouth** or **broken-mouthed** – a sheep which has lost or broken some of its incisor teeth, usually after the age of about six years.

In June, 1933, before retiring for the night I always checked to see if everything was alright in the barn. Twice I caught tramps sleeping in the haymow and I chased them out. I would never allow anybody to sleep there but I would put anyone who needed a place to sleep in the bunkhouse even if they were broke. The farm had a bunkhouse that would house 20 men.

One night I checked the barn at 9 p.m. but did not retire until 11 p.m. when I let the dog out. I noticed a strange light at the top of the barn room. I ran to the barn and to the stairway at the far end. We had just started haying the first crop of red clover.

When I opened the door on the stairway the dog shot past me. I made it only halfway up the stairway when I was overcome with smoke. I hurried back down, opened the back doors on the barn, then I untied the 2 horses in the barn, the team I had been using. There were a dozen more horses in the pasture. I opened the bull pen. The bull lost no time getting out but the horses returned and I had to chase them out again with a pitchfork. Then I ran to the milk house where we had stored ½ box of dynamite. I hauled it out and put it where it would be protected from the flames, then woke up the hired man and told him to alert the family.

Then was a dance that evening at Linden Grove, about 2 ½ miles from my farm, and in 5 minutes there was a crowd watching the fire. The bunkhouse could have been saved by bucket brigade but many of the people just stood there watching. We were able, however, to save the garage. We lost the barn, milk house, bunk house, boiler house and blacksmith shop. There were lots of hand tools and a wagon standing near the barn that were also lost. I could not get anyone else to go on to our house to extinguish sparks so I had to do that. I should have been bossing the job instead.

A representative of the local insurance company insisted I notify the agent right away. He was madder than a hornet when I got him out of bed at 11 p.m.

The insurance claim was for \$10,000. They were willing to settle for \$9,000 but would only give me \$900 as I only had a 10% claim in the farm.

Rogers wanted to foreclose but he had to give me 30 days' notice before he could declare me in default. My lawyer, Frank Rosemeier, told me that by making good on my default I had 1/3 interest. Instead I waived my claim to any insurance money and agreed to a new contract with Mr. Rogers for \$500 per year for 10 years, no interest.

I made my first \$500 payment to Chet Rogers in 1934. He was so happy that he went out celebrating and it killed him. His brother became administrator of his will. His brother told me the heirs had agreed to liquidate the estate as quickly as possible. I pointed out that the notes I had signed with Mr. Rogers were not interest bearing and probably would not sell well at auction. I thought if the heirs would agree to let me get a Federal Land Bank loan and accept that as final settlement, they could get more money than any other way.

I pointed out to the brother that the previous manager was getting \$5,000 – I did not have that expense. He hired a foreman at \$2,000 – I did not have that expense. Mr. Rogers complained of carpenter and blacksmith bills – I had none. Then I introduced my sons. The oldest one, Harry, was an all-around mechanic. The younger, Walter, did the dehorning, castrating, docking, killing, and beheading. We only had 2 steady hired men and never employed more than 7 during the busiest part of the harvest season.

I had a big laugh when Walter and his mother had a contest. They each selected a flock of 100 hens and separated the non-layers. We then kept the culls separated for 3 days. Walter had 5 layers in his culls but Marie had only 1. I watched her sometimes sizing the hens up on the roost and all at once she would walk up to a hen and say, "You haven't laid an egg in ages." I would then lop off her head and always found Marie's selections to be correct.

I could only cut 2 acres of hay in a day using horses but Harry could cut 40 acres a day using a tractor. Horses can only work 8 hours per day in the hot sun but a tractor can work 24 hours per day if necessary.

When I bought that big farm from Mr. Rogers the manager of a large creamery by the name of Curtis came to me and said, "What were you thinking when you bought that farm without any money? Others have gone and bought a place like that and lost \$20,000." I said, "Well, at least I never had \$20,000 to lose." In 1935 I was going strong and he was glad to have a W.P.A. job.

One of the best programs ever was the C.C.C. I don't know if the person who authored the program realizes how much he did for those boys. One day I was heading home from Virginia after delivering farm products. I stopped at a sandwich shop for a sandwich and cup of coffee. Two C.C.C. boys were there and in trouble because they had missed their school bus after taking a couple girls home from a dance. One of the boys lived in Virginia and the other one was from Pennsylvania. I lived in Cook, only 25 miles from Virginia, but of course I took them right to their camp in Cusson, 46 miles from Virginia.

The boy from Pennsylvania told me his father had been working in coal mines since he was 14 years old. He was a member of a large family and his father was quite often off work due to illness due to work in the filthy coal mine. He was glad to help his parents while at the same time learning a trade and high school classes while living in healthy surroundings. Their \$25 monthly pay was sent directly to the parents.

Those boys got me interested and one day I drove to take pictures of the beautiful bridges, gates and fireplaces the boys had done. They also planted trees that today are being harvested for lumber. An officer told me to give him my film as the C.C.C. was being criticized for competing with union labor. He said the C.C.C. would also like to give the boys basic training but it was forbidden. He told me that one boy's mother convinced him to return home to Walla Walla, Washington, on his 18th birthday. She had saved \$180 for him from the money he had sent home. He used the money to pay \$150 down on a car, got drunk with his girlfriend, and then ran into another car demolishing them both. He had no car, no money, no girl, but lots of debt and a dishonorable discharge. It was not the C.C.C.'s fault.

I got a loan from the Federal Land Bank for \$4,000. Chet Roger's brother agreed with me and tried to get the other heirs to agree. Furthermore I got a Land Commissioner's loan for \$1,000 that we used to buy machinery. It was payable over 10 years. The Land Bank loan was payable in 36 years.

We paid off the Land Commissioner's loan in 5 years and the Federal Land Bank loan in 16 years.

We built a new barn in 1946, only ½ as large as the original but we only hired one carpenter. In 1948 our assets were \$47,000 and our liabilities were none.

In 1948 we sold our farm to our 2 sons for \$9,000 -- \$2,000 down and \$1,000 per year. We sold the farm to them so cheaply because we felt they already had an interest in it. I never paid them any wages but also I did not draw wages from the farm. I never refused my sons any money. They ran a farm implement business from the farm and did not pay rent so they could make better deals. In addition they went out threshing with my machinery and burned my gas and then kept all the money.

In the early 1950's the International Harvester Company whose products they were selling wanted them to move to town so they bought a lot there but finally ended up selling the lot and giving up their implement agency.

At the end of each year they paid ½ to me and ½ to my wife.

Whenever I wanted to buy timber land and my wife was against it, I borrowed the money in my own name at the bank. I hired all the work done and kept the profit, so I had 320 acres left. I only had to borrow money once and I kept that fund separate. I made \$350 on the first piece of land. This was 80 acres. It had a 12 foot waterfall. With the \$350 from the timber on the first place I was able to buy another 80 acres. From that I cut enough timber to pay for the land plus I pocketed \$1,500. It had a 75 foot waterfall. I gave another 120 acres to my sons.

After selling the farm to Harry and Walter, Albert and Marie moved to Northern California. Marie got a job as companion and housekeeper for an elderly blind lady. Her family would not let Albert stay in the house – Albert moved to Forbestown, California, where he operated his small gold mine using nuggets from the mine to make souvenirs sold at the local tourist shops.