DEUEL COUNTY

“All the Way from Norway”

Scandinavian immigrants preferred to settle in land with a climate similar to that of their homeland – with cold winters and lots of snow – the upper Midwest, stretching from Wisconsin to North Dakota. Norwegians, in particular, settled in the Dakota Territory, especially after the treaty with the Yankton Sioux, signed in July, 1859. More followed ten years later, once their relatives in Norway felt it was safe and that such a move would lead to a better life. One immigrant, Jacob S. Deuel, settled here and had the distinction of having the county named after him.

 In 1862 it was land of the buffalo and the Indian. And, like the settlers of the plains of Nebraska and Kansas, these Norwegians were a hardy lot, often living in sod houses or small 10x10-foot dug outs, which were cut into a hillside. On the Gary Historical Association’s site, Marietta Thomas wrote, “My father came in the spring of 1879 to take up his claim where my brother and sister still live. He built a little claim shanty 16x24-feet sitting on large rocks for a foundation, put up a sod barn, dug a well by hand, broke up some land and went back to Minnesota for the winter. The next spring he brought his wife and two small daughters back to the wilderness ... This claim shanty with two small additions added later, was our home until 1908 when we built the new house. … At the time my father came there were still a few buffalo and antelope and Indians. The Sioux Indians were at peace then but still use their trails across the prairie, and the rings of stone still lay where they had weighted down the flaps of their teepees. The buffalo rings still plainly showed where the bulls had stood stomping flies, with their heads to the outside, to protect the cows and calves, which were in the inside of the ring, from the wolves and coyotes, which were many in those days. I still can remember the chilling howl of them in the dusk of the evening.”

 The Dakota territory was one of the last regions of America to be settled and was finally split into two in 1889, resulting in statehood for North Dakota and South Dakota. Anton Brevik, the builder of this round barn, emigrated from Romsdalen, Norway, about 1892 and married Cloie Herrick, a native of the area, in 1898. A year later they established a homestead near Lake Cochrane, close to the Minnesota border, where they raised seven children, all born in the farmhouse. In 1901 he began planting evergreens around the house, trying to re-create his homeland of Norway.

 Soon Anton began hog farming, specializing in purebred Poland China hogs. He’d travel far and wide to find a quality hog to strengthen his stock. In 1909 the *Canby News* reported that Brevik’s Poland China hogs had a successful exhibit at the Yellow Medicine County Fair. “Mr. Brevik believes that a pure bred hog ought to have as much care and attention as a good horse … he may often be seen out in his yard on a sultry day fanning his hogs with his straw hat and feeding them chocolate creams.” Anton also liked to name each one and included all vital statistics in sales brochures.

 In 1910 he built an octagonal hog barn, one with a sectional conical roof, a central roof ventilator on the cupola, plenty of windows and a pen arrangement along the outer walls. A stove, piped through a central chimney, and the barn’s concentric form also afforded warmth, especially important for piglets.

 His hog business thrived in the early 1900s – so much so that he could afford to build a large sale barn in 1923, taking his enterprise to a higher level. The 12-sided barn, with an attached rectangular hog house, was distinctive: an octagonal cupola with 16 windows, a central sales area and seating, and a matching dormer, all tinted a regal burgundy. In sale events twice a year, the entire family pitched in, preparing sales literature, detailing the name, age, and weight of each hog. Newspaper advertising showed photos and stats of the animals, enticing buyers from as far away as Minneapolis. Additionally, the family arranged for free transportation to the farm from the local depot and provided shipping crates for the winning bidders. For months ahead of the auction, Cloie canned mincemeat for the 40-plus pies she’d make, fresh for the day of the sale. Lunch, including ham sandwiches, pies, and coffee, was served without charge. All seven children helped. By this time the farm had been named, Plain View Farm. In the first sale in the new barn in 1923, 250 attended and paid good prices for the stock.

 However, as the 1920s progressed, bad crops and weak prices made farming difficult, forcing Anton to sell to a Mr. Gottsch in 1927. During the Great Depression, in years 1936-1937, the Breviks traveled west to Oregon, hoping for a rebound, picking berries, doing road repair work, and various farm labor jobs but, after six months they returned home. Even though Anton lost his farm, he continued raising his prize Poland China hogs until he died in 1941.

 Sadly, in an article written by Anton’s grandchildren, the farmhouse had deteriorated badly by 2003 but family descendants were reminded of how it looked in its heyday by a painting by Jerry Barlow, the wife of Anton’s oldest grandson. Likewise, even though the barns are now gone, thanks to a reference photo from Dale Travis, at least the sale barn will live on in this painting and essay, a reminder of a hardworking South Dakota family and their patriarch, who took a chance in coming here, all the way from Norway.