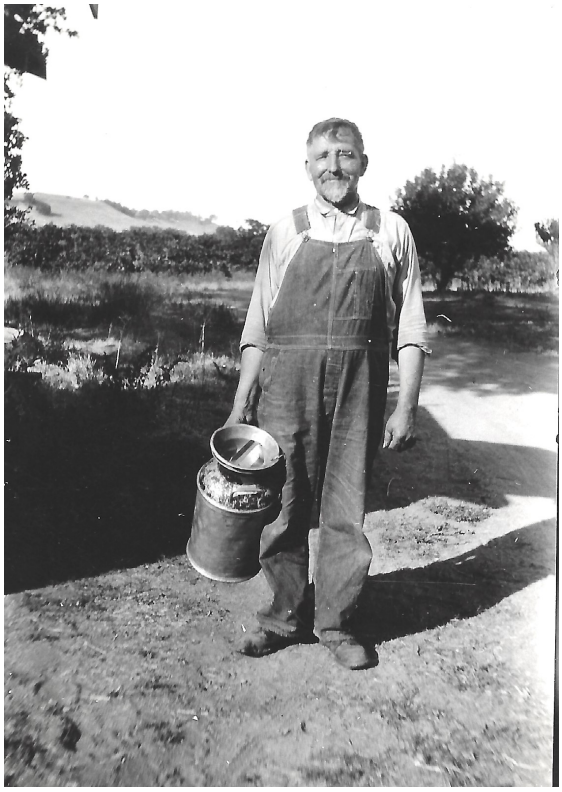
Life On the Farm

By Gene Johnson

The style and final condition of the original barn

Part One

Introduction: Quarry Quarterly Editor, Linda Wampler, suggested that readers would be interested in learning of growing up on Rocklin's Spring View Dairy. Some recollections follow, however, first, I have a confession: I never milked a cow! Grandfather and my parents ran the working dairy from 1919 through 1947 when I was 10 years old. Thereafter, Dad delivered milk and dairy products that he purchased from Roseville's Purdy Creamery, Golden State Dairy and Taylor's Dairy of Sacramento. Our dairy was, for some time, used by others including Tom Aitken and, later, Tom Allen. When Tom Allen left, he drove his cows from Rocklin to his new farm near Lincoln on what is now Sierra College Blvd.



Granddad, Anders Oscar (A.O.) Wick-

There was a large wooden barn with room for horses on the left side, hay storage in the middle and a milking area on the right side. A short distance away was the milk house for preparing and bottling milk and cream.

In 1940, at 3 years of age, I literally had a hand in building the new milking barn. The barn burned in the 1980's, however, my handprint can still be seen imbedded in the edge of the concrete "slop" gutter.

The original milk house, an 8 by 10 ft building, was abandoned when the new milking barn was completed. But took on a new life as my place to stay while Dad did the chores. It was a nice cozy place to be in the winter: a wood burning stove salvaged from the big house, a small wooden rocking chair and lots of décor including a stuffed deer head (a gift from game warden Alfred Willard).

In the heat of the summer the cool root cellar beneath the big house was the place to be – also with the rocking chair - and a radio to listen to the serials: Lone Ranger, Tom Mix, The Shadow, ….

Dad fed hay to the cows in the field behind the barn. He had an old flatbed Dodge truck and in those days the throttle could be set from the steering column. Dad would set the throttle for a slow pace and stand in the truck bed throwing hay to the cows. There were many large holes dug by ground squirrels – a left front wheel would fall into a hole

and the truck would turn left – then one on the right side resulting in a turn to the right – the truck weaving through the field 'til the herd was fed.

It was World War II and the end of the depression. My parents were purchasing the farm from my grandfather. We cut names from Christmas cards and resent them, we straightened nails for reuse, Mother worked at McClellan Field and my parents sold building lots $50 each to make payments for the farm.

The 22 cows each had a name and knew exactly which stall to enter at milking time. My favorite was a smaller Jersey named Popeye. The new milking barn had a refrigeration system to quickly cool milk. The milk ran over an array of cold tubes. The refrigeration tube that fed the array was coated with ice – an enticing item to lick on a warm day. Sadly, I found, like many other dairy kids did, that when your tongue sticks to the supercool tube escape is painful.

In addition to the cows there were chickens, tenant turkeys, sheep, a pig, a horse for a day, and a visiting bull that was tethered to a post with a chain and a ring through his nose.

The farm was on 5th Street at the edge of Rocklin — town in front of the house and farm in back. There were neighbors, Mrs. Moore and Mrs. Scribner, to beg cookies from, and there were friends to play with: the Kelseys, Renny Palo, Dan Tyler, Jerry Keenan, Val Koberlein. Barnyard wars were staged with cow droppings (an early version of the Frisbee) as ammunition. We learned quickly to avoid overly fresh ammunition. Inside the barn Dan Tyler and I set up a zip line from the top of the haystack. There was a hill beside the house. We rode our carts lickity-split down the hill 'til we hit the fence.

Dad, the new Milk Barn, and the '38 Chevy Milk Truck.

In the evenings by the partial light of the streetlamp we played Olly-Olly-Oxen-Free – hiding in the bushes and behind the palm trees.

My 4H project was raising chickens - Rhode Island Reds. One chicken was a favorite and rode on the handlebars of my bicycle. They took ribbons at the County and State Fairs. Part of the 4H project was to track income and expenses. When the project showed a significant net loss, I decided chicken ranching would not be for me. I sold the last of the chickens at Denio's auction in Roseville and purchased my first tool.

Life on the Farm Part 2: Antelope Creek circa 1940's

At the West end of Rocklin Road, next to our farmhouse there was a dirt road that led down the hill and through the field to a mineral spring and Native American village site - and to Antelope Creek. There was a wide, white, wooden gate at the bottom of the hill through which all were welcome to pass. Dad had only one request of visitors: "Please Close the Gate".

Lazy days of summer spent at Johnson's Creek (now known as Antelope Creek, bordering Johnson Springview Park)

The road angled through a field that had been a grape vineyard but by this time the field was cultivated for hay crops of oats and vetch. At the spring, about 300 yards beyond our house, one could dipper a drink of cool water and visit the nearby Maidu/Nisenan village site with its 88 bedrock mortars.

The road passed through another hay field and three hundred yards west of the mineral spring the road ended at a parking area overlooking Antelope Creek and a natural swimming pool (or swimming hole, as we called it).

On the north end of the pool there was a deep dark pool and a small tree with a diving platform about 6 feet above the water. The south end of the pool opened to a sandy delta area with water only a few inches deep. There was a very, very small beach on the east side and behind that the higher ground was good for picnicking. A cement pad, that had been used for a pump to irrigate the grape vineyard, served as a fire hearth. On the west side, beyond a steep bank, lie grazing land and "the Whitney Hill."

Exploring Antelope Creek was fun all year round, even in the winter. Here I am with my mom Florence, and my cousins Boyd and Bob Wickman, c 1940.

For many, "Johnson's Creek" (as it came to be known) was the community water park. Small children played in the shallow delta; as time passed we ventured toward the deeper end; braver kids dove from the small tree on the west bank and, the bravest, from the large tree on the east bank – until one of the Moon kids broke his neck (luckily he fully recovered).

Evenings we gathered around a fire and roasted weenies and marshmallows on sticks we cut from nearby willows. In addition to picnics and play, the pool served a more serious purpose when baptisms were performed in its waters.

In the creek south of the swimming area small children played with the lobster-like crayfish, while older lads fished for perch and catfish; night was the

time for frogging with a gig pole and a flashlight to catch the shining eyes of our prey. A few years older than me, Bucky Brashear was my "child sitter" and a right-hand man for Dad for delivering milk and for odd jobs on the farm. Bucky frog hunted with a gig but was also old enough to own a 22-caliber rifle. With no nearby neighbors the creek became a relatively safe shooting range. Valley Oak gall balls made splendid moving targets as they bobbled in the creek's swirling current. Cans tossed in the air also made challenging targets.

Summertime by the creek

Epilogue: The road still exists but as a walking trail. Changes in land use and climate have also changed the character of the Mineral Spring and the Creek. The spring still bubbles but not with the vigor and clarity of 80 years ago. Asphalted streets have resulted in faster rainwater run-off that has cut the creek bed down to the underlying layer of shale and leaving steep creek banks. Gone are the wide areas, gentle banks and sunlit shallows for child play. On the other hand, without grazing cattle, vegetation and trees have returned to support wildlife. Park trails serve a greater community by providing access to the creek and man has created sunlit splash pads elsewhere in the park to replace the creek's sunlit shallows.

What are galls?

Galls are abnormal growths in plants, usually caused by insects. Valley oak galls are formed when a tiny gall wasp lays its eggs in the tissue of the oak's flower buds in the spring. The tiny wasp also deposits fluids that cause the plant's cell multiplication process to change, resulting in a gall. The wasp's larvae develop inside the gall until they are fully-formed adults, at which time they depart the gall through an exit hole. Gulls normally do not harm the trees they grow on.