

Silwood Dairy (The Moe Farm)



Owner: Luther and Alice Moe

Above: Luther Moe & 2nd home built by Ole, July 2003

Right: Ole Moe & his family in front of 1st home.

The Silwood Dairy Farm, NE of Silvana on the Norman Road, was established in 1903 by Luther Moe's grandfather, Ole. He chose to homestead in the Silvana area partly because its terrain and climate were reminiscent of his native Norway. Throughout its 100 years, the farm has produced dairy products and still has a thriving operation with the latest computerized milking equipment in its milk parlor. The two-story home that grandfather Ole built remains as home to Luther and Alice Moe.



Notes by Louise Lindgren from verbal and written material offered by Moe family July-august 2003

Transcribed from the Oksness Family History:

Ole Olsen was born at Eidskog, Hedmark, Norway in January 1859. His parents were Ole Pedersen Grasmo and his wife, Karen Arenesdatter. They lived on the Grasmo farm. He had five siblings at birth and two more were born after he was. His parents and most of the children came to America in 1870.

Family tradition tells that Ole Olsen went to Oslo to learn the blacksmith trade when he was age 18. About 1879, Ole emigrated to America, joining his parents and family at Genesee, Waukesha county, Wisconsin. The next year he moved to Chicago where he worked as a blacksmith. Ole Olsen took the name Moe, probably in honor of his home farm "Grasmo," and to avoid confusion, because he had a partner also named "Ole Olsen."

Marie Teodorsdatter Torsen, born in 1860 at Eidskog, Norway, became Ole's wife in about 1881. She had emigrated to America in that year. Their son Olgar was born in Chicago in 1883. In August 1885 another son, Karl, was born. Marie died when Karl was about one month old and the baby, Karl, died a few days later. Ole took his one remaining son, Olgar, and moved to Otter Tail County, Minnesota. In Minnesota, the widower met Tina (also "Thine") Oksness who was also a Norwegian immigrant. They were married in 1887 and had four children, Anna Marie (b.1888), Syvert (b.1889, died at birth), Clara (b.1891, died at age 14), and Arthur (b.1897). Ole became an American citizen on Dec. 6, 1899.

In 1900, Ole Moe and his brother-in-law, Jorgen Oksness were living near Doran, Minnesota. They both “got the fever” for homesteading, according to the Oksness family history, and decided to homestead in Colville Township, North Dakota. Jorgen wrote in his diary in 1901: “Ole Moe went up there and built our homestead shacks, the size 12 x 12-8 feet, built from drop siding. This was done just before the Christmas snow and cold weather. I do not know why we went there to experience again some of the frontier pioneer life. It must be in the Vikings to be in the front line as pioneers and take the brunt of pioneer life as trail blazers of civilization.” Ole and Tina and family lived on their claim in North Dakota for one summer and one winter. They moved to Washington in the early 1900s. The Moe’s daughter Clara died after a fall in February 1906 at the age of 14. The family settled near Silvana and had to deal with another tragedy soon after their arrival in 1906. Tina was gathering eggs which the chickens laid in the log jams in the Stillaguamish River. She slipped and fell into the river and drowned. Daughter Marie was 18 yrs. old and son Arthur was only 9 when they lost their mother.

Olgar, Ole’s son from his first marriage was 26 yrs. old in 1906. He was married to Gustava Borgen, and they lived on the Moe home place at Silvana. Olgar’s son Luther Moe remembers Ole walking with a vigorous step to the Lutheran Church in town to teach Sunday School in Norwegian as many people still used that language. Ole’s daughter Marie married Alfred Dahl in 1918, and they lived at Crary, North Dakota. Ole lived with them at Crary for several years and worked at his blacksmith trade. Later in the 1920s, Ole returned to Washington and lived with his sons Olgar at Silvana and Arthur at Sumas.

Syvart and Louise Oksness moved to Washington in 1922. Shortly after their arrival, they visited the Moe home place at Silvana, Washington and Syvert described it in a letter: “Moes have a beautiful place with a big dwelling house, large clean barn, milk house, summer kitchen, and other out-buildings, fine water piped into all the buildings. Their land is flat with fence and cross fence, and neighbors so close you can talk with them from the porch. Borgen’s place is about 60 rods from Moe. This is a valley with hills on the south and north side with some timber on them, and the Stillaguamish River cuts through the valley down to the sound. The sound is just a few miles from here. The small farms lie on both sides of the river. Some have 10 acres, others 20-25, and a few as much as 160 acres. It’s all dairying, and they have as much as 10 cows on a 10 acre tract. They sell the milk. Moes ship the milk to Seattle. Others sell it to the milk condensery. The take in so much milk – up to 80 tons a day,”

Ole Moe lived at Sumas with his son Arthur for several years. Arthur lived on 25 acres of land on what he called “Moe Hill.” Arthur’s son Stanley remembers Ole as a fine Christian and hard-working gentleman. He worked as a farmer, carpenter, and blacksmith. Ole often said, “I feel the best when I am in motion.” On the farm at Sumas, Ole had six cows and supported himself by doing the majority of farm work. He built a barn and chicken house on the farm. Ole dug a road by hand out of the side hill to make a better approach to the farm. Ole was a member of the Sumas Monte Hiking Club with his son Arther and wife. Ole was rather wiry and short at 5’5”. He kept active until just before his death in March 1938. When he had finished grubbing out a stump on the farm, he came in the house and told his son Arthur, I got it out.” That night he had a stroke and died at home about a week later at the age of 79.

Ole’s obituary states: “Being endowed with good health, he led an active and useful life until seven days before his death. Having accepted Christ as his personal savior at an early age, and being an active worker in his Master’s service, Ole could have said as did the Apostle Paul: “I have fought the good fight; I have finished my

course; I have kept the faith.” Funeral services were held for Ole from the Lutheran Free Church in Silvana and he was buried at Valley View Cemetery.

Memories of Alice Moe, August 14, 2003

Luther was a farm boy, raised with six brothers, graduated from Stanwood High a big star football player. After working for Standard Stations, he joined the Air Force, in World War II. He spent three years overseas in the Pacific theater of operations, flying, picking up the wounded.

I did not marry Luther until he came home from the war, although we wrote to each other. We were married in 1945. I was a registered nurse and he went back to working at Standard Stations. All I heard was, he wanted to farm.

So, we moved from Seattle to Arlington and bought twelve cows and 80 acres on the Kackman on Transom Road. We had two babies by then, and were really hunting for money. Someone had to go to work. I worked for many years in the hospital and then in a doctor’s office while Luther worked very hard on the farm so we could get ahead.

In 1951 we moved to the Moe farm in Stanwood. Luther’s father, Olgar was still living, although he had had an accident. He was up on a ladder in the barn and several bales of hay fell down, hitting him and knocking him down several feet. This caused a blood clot on the brain, surgery was done, and eventually his health was returned. During this time we took over the farming.

I continued to work as R.N. and another baby came into our lives. Luther’s dad passed away in 1955. So, we purchased the farm (his six brothers were still living) and were very much in debt. We were so determined, we knew if we worked hard and long enough we would succeed.

We are proud to be in farming. Our family is and was basically healthy, and we are proud of our three children. They really learned how to work – each one having many duties on the farm. We are proud to say they each have a profession.

Our biggest regret is seeing what has happened to the small farmers. They have had to give up the struggle. The youth has to leave the farm. Wouldn’t we have a different society if all the children had chores, raised their own animals, and could live on a farm with loving parents, working together for a goal? We have much to be thankful for!

[Editor’s note: When Luther Moe was asked what he found most satisfying about farming he answered, “The good earth and good neighbors, always willing to lend a hand.”]

A Farm Girl’s Childhood: Reminiscence of Chris Moe, daughter of Luther & Alice Moe

Growing up on the farm was filled with many unique experiences. To start with, many of our prepared foods were from right there on the farm. We always planted a BIG garden and with that came hours of work dedicated to that patch of treasured produce -- beans, cucumbers, corn, carrots, beets, zucchini, and more. We were all asked to work planting, weeding, hoeing, and harvesting all. Of course with that came the job of canning all the different items. Again we were all asked to participate and take turn at snipping beans to cutting carrots. Whatever could be canned and put away for the winter, it was.

We also had an orchard that had a variety of fruit trees. Cherries, apples, pears, prunes were all picked and again canned. Some apples were directed for use in our old wooden cider press. This old press worked just fine and from it we got some pretty tasty apple cider. From loading the apples, to cranking down the press, and turning the press wheel, we all needed to take part in the event. It was always fun to see the juice trickle out of the press and we sure enjoyed the taste! Another beverage we made on the farm was root beer. We mixed, bottled it and capped it off in bottles we saved from year to year. It didn’t have the carbonation that today’s pop has, but at that time we thought it was great!

As I mentioned earlier, much our food came right from the farm. Of course we always enjoyed our farm's fresh own fresh milk. We enjoyed meats from the farm and for some years we raised a few pigs so we could have pork also through the year. Years ago, I'm aware there were also chickens, but in my years dairy herds weren't allowed to have chickens raised on a dairy farm. No doubt about it, much time and thought went into food preparation. Of course we enjoyed baked specialties also. Our favorites often stemmed from our Norwegian heritage. Lefse, sandbakkels, and even the traditional lutefisk dinner would be on our table. We were very used to home cooked meals. Our farm house was quite large. The main floor was heated mostly with wood, but the upstairs was not heated. In my childhood, I can still remember going to bed with a warm brick wrapped in newspaper to place at my feet in my bed to stay warm. The heat felt so good on those freezing winter nights. Outside our house, we had a wood shed and it was always filled with a range of wood that would last us through the winter. We kids usually had the job of making sure the wood box was full daily.

The farm was located along the Stillaguamish River and with that came floods. If a flood came during the a school day, we would be delivered near our home on the bus, but would often need to make the last small stretch home walking on top of the river dike and then finally reaching our driveway. The flood path would flow through fields near our house, but in my years, it never threatened our home. It did at times fill the floors of our loafing sheds, so we would need to work to drain and pitch water out, so the cows could return to their spots!

Milking happened two times a day. During my childhood years, we milked in the original old wooden barn that my grandfather built. Early on, I can remember milking and helping my father with feeding the grain and hay. The milk was carried in metal buckets to a milk house where it was drained through the sieve into the tank. Of course storage of milk way back was in the milk cans, but in my times a milk truck came and picked it up.

From milking one "batch" of cows to two and more, the herd size grew and the old barn gave way to a new milking parlor that speeded up milking time. Along with the cows, there were heifers and calves to feed. From teaching the newborn calves to drink from the bottle then bucket, to getting bails of hay/grain to the heifers, there was always some group of animals needing tending. Sometimes excitement came unexpectedly when the cows got out. That threw every one into action. Whether it was one or one hundred, it took teamwork and quick feet to redirect them back to their field or pen. It was even tougher when the cows got out at night. Kneeling down and peering across the skyline in the black of night and looking for a cow silhouette, was always a great challenge. No one ever wanted to hear "The cow's are out!" Such a relief when they were all back in. It was quite a workout out too!

With growing up on the farm, came chores and other responsibilities. Fieldwork started early in the spring and I remember taking my turn on the tractor at an early age. Much "Driver's Ed" for me, began on the tractor working the fields, or in the truck or pickup delivering hay or silage to the animals. We all needed to contribute, so whether you had an official driver's license or not it didn't matter, as long as you could reach the gas or brake pedal and turn the wheel. From daily chores to the summer hay crews, it took much our time and kept us quite busy.