

Ancestral Roots Research Paper: The Farm

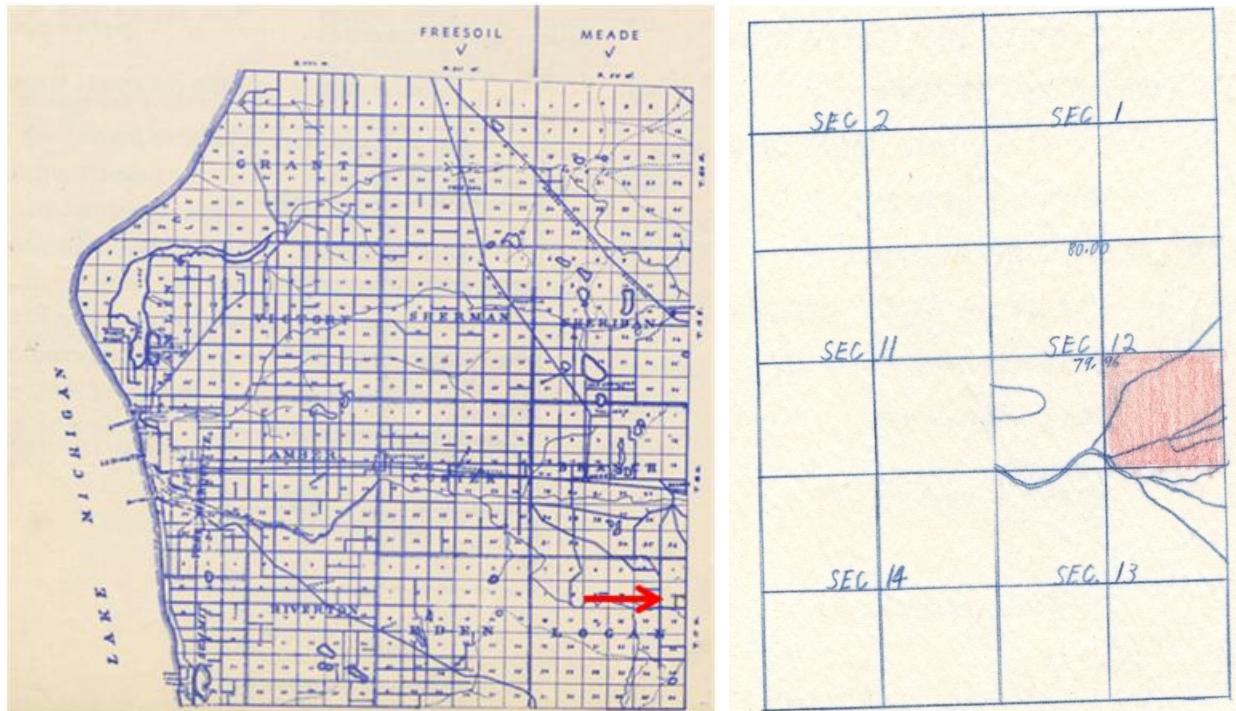
INTRODUCTION

The piece of property, known by my relatives as “The Farm”, has been in my family for three generations. Six generations of my extended family have visited the Farm. I believe most, if not all, of my grandparents’ six children and their spouses and 35 grandchildren (and many of the great-grandchildren) have visited (vacationed) there. Some of my best memories as a child and as a young adult were visiting “The Farm” with my Dad going fishing and walking through the fields and woods and just generally having a good time. Though visiting the place may have been special partially due to being accompanied by at least some alone time with my Dad, I remember being absolutely giddy at the prospect of going there. And as an adult, I still am. For me, it is a special place with many amazing memories. The Farm represents hallowed ground in my psyche. This paper provides a brief history of the land and people of the Farm, touches upon an analysis of the landscape and why it is important today, and offers a few extracted thoughts on how the landscape of the Farm has affected me.

CONTEXT AND ANALYSIS

Location of the Farm

The Farm is located on Hawley Road in the rural western central Lower Peninsula of Michigan in Mason County, approximately 25 miles east of Ludington and 10 miles west of Baldwin (Site Visit 2008). The original property is identified as “The entire Southeast Quarter (SE $\frac{1}{4}$) of Section Twelve (12), Township Seventeen (17) North, Range Fifteen (15) West, according to the Government Survey thereof, Mason County, Michigan.” (Olmstead 1951) Following is a map of Mason County and a diagram of the immediate vicinity.



On left, a Mason County Map (circa 1951) with the property of the Farm indicated. On right, a close-up diagram of the property. (Images borrowed from Olmstead 1951)

These graphics display the grid created by the United States Geological Survey (USGS). The Lower Peninsula was probably surveyed after being “purchased” from Native Americans and before the Civil War for the purpose of searching for minerals and other natural resources (Rabbitt 2000). The land was first surveyed to gain an idea of its value. Seeing the grid pattern will aid understanding an aspect of the regional landscape of rural Michigan. Following is an aerial photograph of the property.



Aerial Photograph of the Farm (maps.live.com 2008)

Pre-European Settlement History of the Land

Prior to the European settlement, Native Americans lived on the land of the Farm. The only identified evidence of their inhabitation on the Farm are arrowheads and other stone tools that Levi Ivan Reed (my Grandpa) found on the property while working the land over the course of his lifetime. Alta Catherine Reed (my Grandma) indicated that the arrowheads were normally quite noticeable in top of the sand ground after hard rains. Patrick Gary Reed (my Uncle) retains the collection of these arrowheads and was kind enough to provide the following photograph of the collection.



Collection of Native American arrowheads and other stone tools that were found on the property of the Farm by Levi Ivan Reed. The slug, shown in the center of the collection, is significant because it was used to kill Levi Ivan Reed's first deer. (Picture taken by Patrick G. Reed (author's uncle with similar name) on April 17, 2008)

Though there is nearby evidence of “Indian” mounds and campsites in Sections 7 and 34 of Mason County (Catherine Reed 2006), no landscape features are readily identifiable due to Native American habitation directly on the Farm (Site Visit 2008). As such, I will only briefly address the pre-European history of the area. There were five main groups of Native Americans living in Michigan, often referred to as the Chippewa, the Ottawa, the People of the Fire or Asistagueronon, the Miami, and the Huron and many smaller groups. It seems interesting and important to note that these groups of people may have simply fished in the same region or spoke the same language. These “tribes” are more a distinction of a way of life than a contiguous

group. The terms, tribes or Indian Nation, are apparently European constructs of structure and are misrepresentative of reality (Fitting 1970).

I speculate that Native Americans were attracted to the land of the Farm due to its proximity to the Pere Marquette River (one of Michigan's major rivers (Fitting 1970) less than two miles away), due to the richness of the natural wildlife and other resources of the area (still existent today), and the section of a tributary of Carr Creek, which crosses the property. Carr Creek is a tributary of the Pere Marquette River and has annual spawning runs of sucker and native freshwater salmon, which would likely have been a source of food for the Native Americans (Vogel 1986). Other big game fish species (trout and salmon) currently have spawning runs up Carr Creek, but this would have only occurred since their introduction to the Great Lakes System in the 20th Century.

One remaining aspect of Native American inhabitation of Michigan (derived from an Ojibwa word, incidentally) is the naming of places. In Mason County where the Farm is located, the Muckwa Creek is named after the word for bear in the language of the Ojibwa. Watassa Lake in Mason County probably is named for the Ojibwa word, wawatessi, for glow worm or firefly or lightning bug (Vogel 1986). These cultural place names are a reminder of the past Native American civilizations.

History of the Land before it was the Farm

Land, including the Farm, was ceded to the State of Michigan upon its formation in 1837 by the Federal Government (Olmstead 1951).

On a document dated May 25, 1855 (there are other dates in the document which seem to indicate the transaction possibly occurred in the couple previous years), the Congress of the State

of Michigan granted the St. Mary's Ship Canal Company of St. Johnsbury, Vermont, 750,000 acres to build the ship canal around the falls of the St. Mary River at Sault Ste. Marie. The Farm property in Mason County was inexplicably included in this acreage (Olmstead 1951). A reason why is unknown.

After construction and completed acceptance of the Canal, the St. Mary's Ship Canal Company sold the property to Eber B. Ward of the City of Detroit. Mr. Ward bought 6,682.75 acres (including the Farm property) for a sum of \$27,730.41 in a transaction dated September 14, 1868 (Olmstead 1951).

Mr. Ward was survived by his wife Catherine L. Ward (also spelled Catharine and also known as Catherine L. Morrow and Catherine L. Cameron). On May 7, 1878, she sold land in several counties which included the Farm for a sum of \$200,000 to Thomas R. Lyon, a wealthy entrepreneur from the City of Ludington. Mr. Lyon purchased the land due to his interest in lumber (Olmstead 1951).

During all these transactions and time, little is known about any alteration of the landscape of the property known as the Farm. Based on my observations, the forests, which currently exist on the Farm are not virgin stands. Therefore, I speculate that lumbering (probably clearcutting, since this was the practice during those times) may have occurred prior to 1902.

History of the Farm

Thomas R. Lyon mortgaged the 159 acres, the piece of property known as the original Farm, to James Enoch Lyon (my Step-Great-Great-Grandfather and also no relation to Thomas R. Lyon) for \$855.00 (Olmstead 1951). Enoch was a "people person" and a well known fiddler, whom often played for weddings and other occasions (Catherine Reed 2008), and lived from 1853 to

March 12, 1929 (These and the next set of dates are from their grave stone in the nearby McCumber cemetery). His wife, Carolyne J. Lyon (my Step-Great-Great-Grandmother), lived from 1854 to 1927. Enoch probably worked the woods for a living. He apparently had a thing for wild horses because he typically owned about five of them. The horses free-ranged over the Farm and had no use or purpose other than aesthetics, presumably. The horses were held in by a wire fence (Catherine Reed 2008). Based on recollections of a childhood walk to the northern property border, portions of a wire fence (not sure if it is one in the same) are in existence today and are part of the landscape.

One acre in the very southeast corner of the Section Twelve was retained during the transaction and was eventually developed into the Country Store for the Carr City Settlement (Olmstead 1951). This building, although in disrepair, is still in existence today. Following is a picture of the dilapidated building. According to Alta Catherine Reed, the owner plans to tear down the structure and construct a new residence within the next five years (Catherine Reed 2008).



The Country Store for the Carr City Settlement (Catherine Reed 2006)

Thomas R. Lyon built the original log cabin on the Farm in 1905 (Catherine Reed 2008). I speculate that he may have located the log cabin on the property due to the following reasons. One, it is just off Hawley Road. Two, Carr Creek is located just across Hawley Road. Three, the well that was dug right next to the log cabin turned out to be naturally artesian although this was probably just luck as discussed below. There are likely additional unknown reasons why the particular site was chosen.

Following is a picture of the original cabin. Ever since my Grandma has known about the Farm (circa 1936), the yard surrounding the cabin and the Farmhouse have been tidy and well-kept as trimmed grass (Catherine Reed). This surprised me because I would have thought that keeping a trim yard would not have been a high priority during the early 20th century. The picture provides evidence that the yard surrounding the cabin was kept up.



The Log Cabin and Cecilia Reed (circa 1923, photographer unknown)

Regarding Carr Creek being just across Hawley Road, my Grandma tells a story about how my Grandpa and his brother used to catch salmon. They were able to hear the large salmon swimming up the small Creek for spawning purposes in the middle of the night and, upon hearing them, would go catch them for food. This was certainly an advantage of the house being closely situated to Carr Creek (Catherine Reed 2008).

Regarding the artesian well, it is still the source of water for the site today. An artesian well is under a pressure head partially due to an impermeable layer of soil. In other words, water flows freely to the water use points without a pump. I conjecture that locating the log cabin right next to an artesian well was probably amazing dumb luck because digging multiple wells to locate such a spot would have been costly. Given that still today there were no other buildings (wells) around for probably a half-mile, it does not seem reasonable that the existence of the artesian well was known when selecting the site. Following is a picture of the artesian well located on the eastside of the property.



Artesian Well (picture taken by author on April 12, 2008)

There was a garden originally planted around 1905 and maintained for a number of years to the side of the log cabin. Interestingly, my Grandma can identify a few plants that come up year after year from the original garden. These include hops, horse radish, and a flower plant called golden glow. Though it is well known that hops is used in the beer-making process, it is lesser known (at least by the author) that hops was used to make yeast for baking bread. Horse radish makes a really strong condiment to put on potatoes. My Grandma indicated that the condiment was prepared during the spring and it caused you to cry. Golden Glow is a perennial that comes back every year from the original garden (Catherine Reed 2008 and Site Visit 2008).

Thomas and Carolyne Lyon begot and apparently sold the Farm to their son, John Earl Lyon (my Step-Great-Grandfather) on April 29, 1916 for a sum of \$200.00 (Olmstead 1951). John Earl Lyon is responsible for the current clearing, as shown on the aerial photograph on page 2 of this report. He liked to cut down wood for heating and selling purposes and, reputedly, if he would

have had a chainsaw, there would not have been a tree left standing on the property (Catherine Reed 2008).

The story goes that John Earl Lyon met and dated Hazel C. Lyon (my Great-Grandma) and then left for World War I. Apparently, for some reason, he was presumed dead during the war. So, Hazel Lyon met and married Levi Reed (my Great-Grandfather) and they had two children, Levi Ivan Reed (my Grandpa) and Cecilia Reed (my Great-Aunt). Levi Reed died in a factory accident in 1917. John Earl Lyon returned after the end of World War I and then married with Hazel Lyon, having one more child, Billy Lyon (my Step-Great-Uncle) (Catherine Reed 2008).

Following is a picture taken in front of the log cabin of this family.



James Enoch Lyon (top left), Hazel C. Lyon (top middle), and John Earl Lyon (top right). Levi Ivan Reed (front left), Billy Reed (front middle) and Cecilia Reed in front of log cabin (front right) (circa 1925, photographer unknown)

Either James Enoch Lyon and/or John Earl Lyon were responsible for two relatively large barns for housing hay built on the Farm. Both barns burned down at different times for different reasons and I have never noticed any evidence of their remains (Catherine Reed 2008 and Site Visit 2008).

John Earl Lyon built the Farmhouse that still exists today in 1923 just to the west of the log cabin. He needed to finish building it prior to the birth of Billy Lyon (Catherine Reed 2008).

The log cabin has disintegrated over time. I can remember seeing some of the rock foundation of the cabin when I was a child. My Grandma built a new building, which houses Levi Ivan Reed's Mini-Museum. The new building was constructed on the original site of the log cabin (more on this later in the report) (Site Visit 2008).

My Grandma did point out a foundation that was likely constructed during the time period of the log cabin. She was not sure for what the small building was used, however, a chest of Levi Reed's tools was found in this building. This chest and tools are currently held in the Mini-Museum (Site Visit 2008). Following is a picture of the remaining foundation on the east side of the existing yard.



Unknown building foundation (picture taken by author on April 12, 2008)

Directly out the log cabin's rear was the location of a "junk pile". My Grandma plans that this will be excavated in the coming month in search of antiques (Catherine Reed 2008).

Carr Creek is located both on the Farm property and directly across the road. At some point, a portion of the creek was channelized alongside Hawley Road. Following is a picture of the channelized creek taken during the Spring (Site Visit 2008).



Carr Creek alongside Hawley Road after Spring rains (picture taken by author on April 12, 2008)

John Earl Lyon built a number of other structures on the property. These include a buggy shed, a chicken coop, a granary, a pig sty, and, of course, a privy (Catherine Reed 2008). Almost none of these structures remain on the property today (Site Visit 2008). Following is a picture of one that does remain.



Shed in poor condition (picture taken by author on April 12, 2008)

The Farm was actually a farm during the time that James Enoch Lyon and John Earl Lyon owned it. Crops to feed the animals were grown in the fields and strawberries were grown outback. Chickens and ducks were allowed to somewhat roam all over. Pigs and five to eight milking cows were also kept. My Grandma remembered separating the cream and milk and selling the cream for making butter. She said keeping the cream separator clean was a highly work intensive continual process and the truck from the creamery would come every week to pick up cream (Catherine Reed 2008).

Over the years, the oil and gas rights for the property have been sold and resold to various entities including the Carter Oil Company of Tulsa Oklahoma, the Superior Oil Company, and the Pere Marquette Oil Company. Numerous fossil fuel pumping stations are visible on the landscape along the highways in the northern and central Lower Peninsula of Michigan. Much of the chronological transaction data in this report is available because the Carter Oil Company

put together a Complete Abstract of all real estate transactions for the Farm property in 1951. Two different geological survey tests were performed along Hawley Road (east to west) and along Tyndall Road (north to south). For better or for worse, the test results were negative; no oil or gas was ever located on the property (Olmstead 2008 and Catherine Reed 2008). Positive results would likely have instigated significant alteration of the landscape.

Unfortunately, due to a missing clarification in John Earl Lyon's Will, there was a protracted legal battle between Levi Ivan Reed and Cecilia Reed (her descendants) over whether the land should be split into two areas of equal size or two areas of equal value. The Will said simply divide the land and certain road front property is worth more due to development potential. It ended resulting about five years ago in my Grandpa receiving legal ownership of 106 acres, on which the main Farmhouse is located, and Cecilia Reed's descendants receiving 53 acres (Catherine Reed 2008).

Another interesting historical aspect of the area was the community of the Carr City Settlement. My Grandpa knew every household within a couple square miles of the Farm. My Grandma can basically walk from grave to every other grave in the nearby McCumber cemetery and talk about the people and families buried there. This is obviously different from today's society in the United States of America. During the 1920's to 1950's in the northwestern Lower peninsula of Michigan, people socialized and traded with their neighbors and knowing your neighbors was simply a matter of survival. This strong community tie that existed is important to understanding the area's cultural landscape during my Grandparents' lifetime (Catherine Reed 2008).

Following is a picture of the Farmhouse on July 6, 2003, my Grandpa and Grandma, and the Michigan Centennial Farm sign. The State of Michigan issues these signs to farms that have remained in the same family for over 100 years.



My Grandpa and Grandma and the Farmhouse in July 7, 2003 (photographer unknown)

The Farm Today

My Grandpa passed away in January 4, 2005 and was laid to rest in McCumber cemetery. My wonderful Grandma is still alive and well.

Nowadays, most of the remaining 106 acres is woods and meadow. Much of the meadow is in some early stage of forest succession. The following picture shows the meadow and the tree line looking east from the yard. The tree line is significant because it indicates the line to which John Earl Lyon had cut down trees (Catherine Reed 2008 and Site Visit 2008).



Looking east from the yard. Shows forest tree line. (picture taken by author on April 12, 2008)

The Farm property is used mainly as a place of vacation and deer hunting activities. There are several deer blinds located across the property. Following is a picture of an old tree blind that has been in existence since before I first visited the farm.



Tree Blind on the Farm located just north of the Farmhouse (picture taken by author on April 12, 2008)

My Grandma built a new garage/building structure on the location of the old cabin and developed a Mini-Museum. The picture below shows the farmhouse and museum, and fence along the property front. As the Farmhouse goes long periods with no one in attendance, danger exists that it will be burglarized, which has occurred previously. Several households in the area have been burglarized recently with the intent of stealing antiques. The fence was placed there to at least keep people from driving up to the house. Neighbors keep tabs on the place most of the year for my Grandma and the Mini-Museum is protected by a state-of-the-art installed security system (Catherine Reed 2008 and Site Visit 2008).



Picture of Farmhouse (left) and Mini Museum (right) taken from Hawley Road facing north (picture taken by author on April 12, 2008)

Here's a picture of the Museum sign.



Mini Museum sign (picture taken by author on April 12, 2008)

Following are some pictures inside the Mini Museum, including Levi Reed's tool chest (as previously mentioned), a gramophone, and other shots.



Levi Reed's tool chest and tools (picture taken by author on April 12, 2008)



Gramophone and records inside Mini Museum (picture taken by author on April 12, 2008)



World War I memorabilia in Mini Museum (picture taken by author on April 12, 2008)



Various farm implements and tools in Mini Museum (picture taken by author on April 12, 2008)

Catherine Alta Reed told about a row of maple trees and a row of pine trees that were planted perpendicular to the road past each side of the yard. Only one maple tree remains from the original row. However, several pine trees still exist as shown in the following photograph (Site Visit 2008). Based on their size (age) and John Earl Lyon's overbearing interest in lumber, I speculate that both rows of trees were planted due to his actions. The motivations could have been for aesthetic purposes, an investment in future lumber, or possibly the following ecological driver. The pine trees are situated along the west and slightly north side of the Farmhouse. This would likely be the appropriate location to shield the Farmhouse from the predominant wind.



Line of Pine Trees along western side of the farmhouse (picture taken by author on April 12, 2008)

A couple last landscape features I will mention is the apple tree in the front yard. I do not know about the apple tree's history, but I have eaten apples and apple pies (picked and made by my Grandma) using its fare. Following is a picture of the apple tree in front of the Farmhouse.



Apple tree in front of farmhouse (picture taken by author on April 12, 2008)

FURTHER ANALYSIS

Now that a fair amount of historical information has been covered, here is, first, an analysis of the aesthetic, environmental, and ecological aspects of the Farm's landscape and, second, how these aspects apply to contemporary design. The landscape of the Farm was not designed for aesthetic purposes, to be friendly to the environment, or for ecological reasons; it is/was a

landscape of necessity and of use. So, upon initial thinking, any applicability of the Farm to contemporary aesthetic, environmental, or ecological issues should not be applicable. However, the landscape of the Farm continues to be an incredibly natural place. The views of the deer, the woods and stream all have extreme intrinsic aesthetic value. The rural low-density way of life has had little, if any, detrimental environmental impacts on the land. And, of course, this mostly natural land in Michigan provides a great deal of ecological services to its plant and animal inhabitants, which include the Reed family.

There is a great deal to learn from these aspects of the natural, mostly un-designed (by humans anyway) land of the Farm because in many ways, it is better than many designed places. One, natural features are usually considered aesthetic. So putting natural features into a design would usually aid the aesthetic value of contemporary landscapes. Two, the environmental aspects of the Farm would likely include household and equipment chemicals. Prior to increased regulation and knowledge, many exceptionally dangerous chemicals were commonly used in the household (including my Grandparents) with little regard to safety and proper disposal. The products seeped into the environment surrounding their use points. Humans have learned that some chemicals are just not biodegradable and some have a tendency to bioaccumulate in fatty tissue of many biotic species. The long term detrimental effects of having spread all these chemicals into our environment has yet to be fully understood. Fortunately for the farm, because of the rural low-density area, these chemicals that have been dispersed to the environment will likely never be as high at the Farm as an urban environment. Third, (similar to aesthetic above) natural land in Michigan has amazing ecological value. So, putting natural space/features into a contemporary design will likely increase the natural ecological services being provided by said design.

A caveat, though, is that one difference between the Farm's landscape and other contemporary landscaped places is that the Farm consists of rural land and natural features. It would probably be impossible to achieve the aesthetic or ecology of the Farm in a small lot or in an urban landscape. No contemporary designed landscaped place would ever evoke the same feelings in me that the Farm does. So, trying to achieve the whole of what the Farm achieves would not make much sense in an urban area.

One more thought that I wanted to include in the analysis is in regards to subsistence living. Largely, subsistence living in today's United States of America has been lost. The majority of humans in America obtain their food from, basically, manufactured sources. This is likely necessary because I do not believe enough space exists for every American to practice subsistence living. However, an advantage of subsistence living is that its intensity of land use is a whole lot less than modern agricultural techniques and so the practice of subsistence living should certainly not be forgotten. The way of life on the Farm could on some level be considered subsistence living and this approach to living off the land can and should be incorporated into contemporary landscape design in the form of, for example, community garden plots or green-roofs that grow edible plants.

CONCLUSION

Walking the landscape of the Farm and enjoying its space during my youth instilled an admiration and respect for natural land. This admiration and respect is definitely still a part of who I am and part of what I would consider my "landscape history". These qualities, first, led me to pursue a degree and career in the field of environmental engineering, and have subsequently led me to pursue a Masters in Landscape Architecture at the University of Michigan School of Natural Resources and the Environment. In my landscape architecture

design thinking, I definitely have a strong tendency and affinity towards natural areas, restoring areas to be natural, and increasing the size of natural areas. Due to these preferences, I know that I correspondingly undervalue space built specifically for human interaction. I do not consider it to be wrong or incorrect thinking though. I believe, in regards to valuing natural space, that human humbleness and respect towards natural spaces is growing as our understanding of the natural world increases and as education/knowledge is spread.

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