

Farmer's diary reveals details of life in 1800s

Among some papers slated for delivery to a Bloomington recycling center several years ago was a bundle of hand-written sheets that, on close examination, proved to be a farmer's diary that is a valuable contribution to the history of the county.

NORRIS WENTWORTH, who transcribed the diary for publication by the Monroe County Historical Society, explains that it was written by Andrew Jackson Knight, a farmer who lived in Salt Creek Township. Born in 1850, he was nicknamed "Jack" and was 42 years old when he began his extraordinary diary, which extends from Jan 1, 1893, to Dec. 31, 1898. Between those dates in terse notations — sometimes spelled phonetically — he recorded not only the details of farm life, but the names of his friends and neighbors and many of the events of their lives.

Looking back

By Rose H. McIlveen

Reading the diary, one gets a sense of the rhythm of the seasons as Knight jotted down the daily temperature, wind direction and weather conditions. Interwoven with the details of climate were his recording of farm chores — some seasonal, some routine, regardless of the season.

A JANUARY 1893, entry says, simply, "Aimed to kill hogs, but too cold — 5 degrees." A frequent chore mentioned by Knight was the cutting down of trees on his farm and the splitting of wood for the farmhouse stoves. His occasional references to pulling out stumps would indicate that he was also clearing some additional land on the farm.

Apparent in Knight's diary, too, is a sense of the neighborliness of the man and those who lived around him. On March 27-31, 1893, for example, Knight pitched in to help Jefferson Hensely with the construction of a barn on the latter's farm. In May, when Knight was clearing land, a neighbor by the name of Swartz was on hand to help.

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