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## Oral History of Illinois Agriculture

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**Catalog Number:** ISM\_50\_McClowKei  
**Interviewee:** Keith R. McClow  
**Interviewer:** Robert Warren  
**Interview Date:** August 31, 2008  
**Interview Location:** Kline Creek Farm, DuPage County, Illinois  
**Recording Format:** Digital Video (.avi; original HD .M2T requiring proprietary software available)  
**Recording Length:** 13 minutes  
**Recording Engineer:** Robert Warren  
**Repositories:** Oral History Archive, Illinois State Museum, Springfield, Illinois; Oral History Archive, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Illinois  
**Transcript Length:** 6 pages  
**Transcriber:** Tape Transcription Center, The Skill Bureau, Boston, Massachusetts  
**Editor:** Michael Maniscalco and Jack Warren  
**Indexer:** James S. Oliver

**Abstract:** Keith McClow was born on May 20, 1966 in Chicago, Illinois. He graduated from Purdue University in 1988 with a B.S. degree in Management. Keith is the Site Manager of Kline Creek Farm, an 1890s living-history farm in DuPage County, Illinois. In this interview, Keith discusses the history of the farm, its livestock, its crops, and staff demonstrations of period farm activities that occur on the farm today. The Kline family arrived in DuPage County in 1835. Three buildings at the site are original: the house (built in the late 1880s), the barn, and the smokehouse. Added buildings include a wagon shed, livestock sheds, a chicken coop, an ice house, and an outhouse. The main crops raised on the farm are oats, corn, and soybeans. Oats are planted in the spring and harvested in the summer using horse-drawn planters and binders. Oat seeds are separated from chaff (straw) using a threshing machine powered by a steam tractor. Livestock raised on the farm includes Percheron draft horses, Shorthorn and Angus cattle, Southdown sheep, and several varieties of chickens. Apples, pears, and cherries are produced in the orchard, and bees in the apiary pollinate plants and produce honey. An important winter activity is harvesting ice from nearby frozen lakes. Ice stored in the ice house is used to cool and preserve fresh milk during the warmer months of the year. A kitchen garden, planted and harvested by local school kids, produces a variety of vegetables that can be eaten fresh or canned for later use.

**Keywords:** Kline Creek Farm; Kasper Kline, Frank Klein; Klein Creek; log cabin; farm buildings: farmhouse, summer kitchen, barn, smokehouse, wagon shed, livestock shed, chicken coop, ice house, outhouse; kitchen garden; dooryard garden; ice; crops: oats, corn, soybeans, hay, straw; plow; disc; harrow; binders; orchard: apples, pears, cherries; apiary: bees, honey, pollination; livestock: Percheron draft horses, Shorthorn cattle, Angus cattle, Southdown sheep, chickens; meat; wool



**Citation:** Oral History Archives, Illinois State Museum and Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Springfield, Illinois

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## Interview With Keith McClow

#ISM\_50\_McClowKei

August 31, 2008

Interviewer: Robert Warren

Warren: We're ready to roll, could you give us your name and a little bit about the history of the house please?

McClow: Sure my name's Keith McClow I'm the site manager here at Kline Creek Farm, uh we're standing in front of the Kline Farm House. This is the second or third structure that they built here on the property. They came here in 1835, uh built a log cabin in the woods along the Dupage River and the story goes they moved it uh within a few years here to Klein Creek uh and that log cabin stayed and uh improved until the late 1880s when they built this farmhouse here. That was also the time when Frank Kline took over from his father Casper Kline.

Warren: So this house was constructed when?

McClow: Uh we don't have an exact date uh we know it was the late 1880s. Uh there is a um fancy woodwork in the peek saying 1889 but we know that date wasn't the date that they actually finished the house as we know the uh birth and death dates of the family and there's pictures of this house uh while Casper was still living so uh they must have added that date uh later in the 1920s when they added the bay window and they just didn't have the date or, or how they picked the date we don't know.

Warren: Can you kind of describe the layout of the farm as it exists today, reconstructed for today?

McClow: Sure we have the uh hundred n' ninety nine point six acres at the Kline's farm. Uh we raise crops and livestock, uh we have of course the family area here in the dooryard of the house with the dooryard garden uh and orchard so anything that the family would have done uh we try to do throughout the year. I should say that we don't interpret the Kline family directly um because there were many farms just like this all over Dupage county we've uh tried to uh recreate a typical Dupage county farm.

Warren: And the farm is pre constructed in relation to the house or some of the other buildings that you see there?

McClow: The original buildings are this house of course. Uh we also have a smokehouse which is part of the old log cabin complex, and then the barn. Those are the original structures. Uh the other buildings have been built to fill in the site, uh including the timber frame wagon shed, uh many of the livestock sheds, we have a chicken coop, icehouse, sawdust bin, um and outhouse.

Warren: And what's the structure right behind you that's separated from the main house

McClow: Oh uh that's part of the house we have the summer kitchen. Uh very typical to have a summer kitchen if you could afford to build one to keep the heat from the cook's stove outside. Since there was no air conditioning they wanted to keep their house as cool as possible.

Warren: And is there a garden attached to part of the kitchen?

McClow: Yep uh the, the kitchen garden where we grow our vegetables uh is just beyond the summer kitchen. The idea being you bring your, your uh vegetables into the summer kitchen, process them, clean them up and then they go into the house for storage. So you do all your messy jobs

in the summer kitchen. The other garden of course is the dooryard garden and this is for the family to enjoy uh and we have a team of master gardeners that keep it up for us and probably one of the most unique flowers is the, the little spotted stem with the tiny leaves kind of looks like an umbrella, that's a common name the Stanley's Washtub. It is the largest flower, uh flowering plant in the world. We're seeing the foliage here but in April early April it'll shoot up a single stalk and uh one bell flower and the stalk can be uh four five feet tall and the flower can be a foot or two wide. Uh people in the 1890s were fascinated with uh the natural history and they loved to bring in exotic uh things because they could. Transportation had increased uh you know with railroads and and uh shipping so bananas oranges uh you know luxuries like that were were becoming more and more common.

Warren: You mentioned the ice house that's out behind the main house is that correct?

McClow: Yep the ice house is built uh just on the edge of the woods so it stays in the shade. We fill the ice house uh in January we still cut ice and uh stack it in there the idea being this is a dairy farm and they needed that ice to cool the milk. When you milk a cow that milk comes out at over one hundred degrees and will spoil quickly and of course you have to wait until the train comes to pick up your milk so you put it in a large tank which the windmill continuously pumps in cold well water when it gets too hot around this time of the year you would throw in a couple of blocks of ice to uh keep it even cooler till it was ready to go to the train.

Warren: And just I guess that's north of the ice house is the chicken coop. Uh how many kinds of chickens are back there?

McClow: We usually keep two varieties of chickens uh ya know one that's a good layer and one that's uh good to eat. Um and there were of course lots of theories on raising chickens, uh whether you should have one or two or keep them separate uh but its its just uh safer to have a variety of breeds just in case uh one stops laying some part of the year you won't run out of eggs.

Warren: And there are two large barn structures. Uh whats the one on the, ones a little bit south of the other one. Could you distinguish those two structures for us?

McClow: Sure. Um the reproduction barn is our wagon shed where we use a loft to store equipment uh harness things like that and then down below we have maintain all the equipment. So it stores all the equipment where the other barn is for the animals and the animals are down in the basement level and it's uh you know two levels plus the loft and in the upper levels we store all the food. The oats that we're threshing today, uh the corn that we'll pick later in October and so all summer long you fill that barn up with hay and grain and then all winter long you drop pit down to the animals that are down below.

Warren: A little ways north of the garden as I recall from the map is the uh the orchard and the apiary, could you tell us about those?

McClow: Sure. Uh it was common for a family to have an orchard of eighty to one hundred trees. Uh our orchard is half apple trees and the majority of those apple trees would be used or the apples would be used to make cider which you could turn into vinegar. Uh and that's what you use for a lot of your canning in putting up your vegetables. Uh the apiary in the middle is of course our bee keeping area where we have bees to produce honey and also help pollinate the garden and the orchard.

- Warren: And then there are [agrades (inaudible)] off to the north and then also east of where we are. Could you kind of summarize uh how much, what kind of crops are are planted today and about how many acres of each one maybe?
- McClow: Sure we have about thirty three acres here in cultivation. Uh we we rotate uh now between corn, soybeans, and oats. Uh we use all of the oats here at the farm to feed the livestock and we use a good portion of the corn and of course the beans we sell um to help support the activities. Uh soy beans were grown in the 1890's but not as much as today. We didn't uh really know what to do with them back then they were mostly a forage. Um they probably would have added other crops into their rotation but uh as we try to do as much as we can with the horses and we only have two large draft horses, uh we can only manage to cultivate about seven acres. Uh the rest we have a modern combine come in and help uh plant and the combine harvests and uh markets the crops for us.
- Warren: So do the horses participate in planting and cultivating as well as harvest and (inaudible).
- McClow: Yep yep the uh horses earn their dinner, they're out we start plowing in March uh we'll even start plowing this fall and uh we'll plow disk and harrow with the horses. Uh we do all of the oat ground and some of the corn. We plant all the oats with our horses and uh we plant oh a couple at least half and acre with the horses of corn. And uh then we also have uh an old binder, we can bind grain with one binder and corn with the other and the horses will pull those also.
- Warren: The horses are pretty large, what what, what breed of horse are they?
- McClow: They're Percheron Draft Horses. So they're a good size to pull the equipment but believe it or not they're for our grain binder we probably should have three horses. Uh so um even as large as they are they can't pull everything.
- Warren: Well on the farm you have uh chickens, Draft Horses, what other kinds of animals do you have on the farm?
- McClow: We also raise uh cattle and sheep. We have shorthorn which was a good dual purpose breed in the 1890s, you could use them for milk or meat, and then we have Angus. Uh and we look at records so you know this was a big dairy area but there were also a lot of beef cattle running around Dupage County.
- Warren: And you mentioned sheep as well.
- McClow: Yep we have southbound sheep, again it's a meat breed uh with uh the price of wool these days uh we picked uh a meat breed, one that we could actually make some income off of to help support the farm both uh wool and meat breeds would have been appropriate for the area.
- Warren: I noticed that you had some wool in in the uh gift shop, is that from your sheep on the farm?
- McClow: Yep. Even though they are a meat breed uh we still can spin the wool. It's a little short but uh we we have cleaned and uh spun some. We uh we sent some away to have it cleaned and spun so that people can uh knit with the wool from sheep that they can actually meet and uh discuss the quality.
- Warren: Great. Is there some other aspect of the farm that I forgot to ask you about. I know there's a creek that runs right through the middle of it.

McClow: This is called Kline Creek Farm and uh the creek is Klein Creek but they're spelled differently. Uh the family uh being here since 1835 had quite a bit of influence here and there and the son of Casper Kline, John Klein, became sheriff. And he changed the spelling of his name so that it would sound more German since this was a heavily German populated area he was elected to two terms as County Sheriff and so the creek is named after John Klein which is spelled different than his father Casper Kline. The other important part of Kline creek farm is that we're open to the public uh and people can come and not only see what was going on or what might have been going on but they're encouraged to help. Uh our kitchen garden is planted by school kids in the spring and then harvested in the fall. Uh right now our threshing uh we've been binding and shocking and re-shocking oats and the public has helped us a great deal with that. When we start picking corn, uh the public will pick the majority of our corn and this year we should have um almost three acres to pick.

Warren: And could you tell us about your, your uh gift shop and visitors center as well?

McClow: Sure as you come to the you'll see the uh the Timber Ridge Visitors Center. It's an award winning building, uh it's part of the Forest Preserves uh accommodations for people who come out to see us. Uh we have a gift shop where we sell uh things for you to further your experience. So we have books on um the history, the activities that we were doing, we have books on crafts like knitting or tatting. Um as well as the sarsaparilla, uh an old drink, so it's a way for people to continue learning as they, as they go home.

Warren: Wonderful. Thank you Keith I appreciate it.

McClow: Thank You.