

NORTHERN ILLINOIS REGIONAL HISTORY CENTER

HISTORY 497 PROJECT: FARMING AND FARM FAMILIES IN DEKALB COUNTY

Oral History Interview
with

MARY STARK

24 November 1986

North Malta Road
Malta, Illinois

By Kelly L. Keister

NORTHERN ILLINOIS REGIONAL HISTORY CENTER

FARMING AND FARM FAMILIES IN DEKALB COUNTY

General topic of interview: Growing up on farms and small towns in Illinois; childhood memories; marriage and life on a DeKalb County farm.

NARRATOR: MARY STARK
DATE: 24 November 1986

INTERVIEWER: Kelly L. Keister
PLACE: North Malta Road
Malta, Illinois

PERSONAL DATA

Mary Stark was born in Aurora, Illinois in 1915. Her father was a storekeeper who began farming when Mary was very young. The family moved to Virgil, Illinois, where Mary's father took up storekeeping again before returning to farming around 1927. Mary has vivid memories of growing up on the farm, especially of butchering time and holidays. She attended a boarding school in St. Charles for two years, but returned home in order that her younger brother might start school. Having said that she would never marry a farmer, she met the right man--a farmer named Harry Stark. They married in 1939. Harry continued farming during the war, then was asked to manage a dairy farm. The couple moved briefly to California. Upon their return to Illinois, they returned to the farm at Cloverdale where Mary had grown up. There Harry raised soybeans and corn, while Mary sold eggs. During the early seventies, feeling pressured by the development of DuPage County, they began looking for another farm and eventually bought 110 acres near Lee. They have worked there since 1975 and as of the interview have no plans to retire.

INTERVIEWER'S COMMENTS

Mrs. Stark was prepared with some notes on her early life, and occasionally the rustling of paper can be heard on the tape. At some points she requested that the tape be stopped so that she could collect her thoughts and call attention to some points that I missed with my questions.

Mary mentions living in Cloverdale. This town has been wiped off the map by Carol Stream and other suburbs.

Mary is a lively woman whose vivid memories of all aspects of farming--from grading eggs to cooking to butchering to celebrating holidays--are a valuable addition to our study of farming. She and her husband are very active, working on their farm and taking courses at Kishwaukee College. After the interview Mary showed me some of the wood carvings that she has made.

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NARRATOR: Mary Stark
DATE: 24 November 1986
LENGTH OF TAPE: 1½ hours

INTERVIEWER: Kelly L. Keister
PLACE: North Malta Road, Malta, IL

TAPE COUNTER NUMBER	SUBJECTS COVERED
SIDE A	
000	Introduction
005	Family and early years in Aurora. Differences between city and country life.
023	Father's decision to farm. Mother's feelings. Mary's feelings.
034	The farm at Cloverdale. Holidays and other memories.
065	Farm animals.
070	Family moves to Virgil (Kanr County). Father a storekeeper.
074	Back to the farm, south of Virgil, c. 1927.
080	Girl's and boys' work on the farm. Taking care of animals.
095	Mom's work and Dad's work. Mother works in the field with Mary's brother in a box beside her.
102	Shocking grain.
110	No recollection of who crops were sold to.
118	Butchering time: labor shared with neighbors. Smokehouse and preservation of meat.
158	Cooking and baking.
170	Heating the farmhouse.
188	Meals.
199	Gardening and canning. Buying peaches and other fruit from vendor.
212	Schools: Cloverdale, Virgil, Mount St, Mary's boarding school in St. Charles.
225	Memories of boarding school. Long walks and night crawlers!
264	Plans for the future.
280	Friends from school.
298	Other memories of the farm at Cloverdale. Almost killed by angry sow. Ice skating. Swimming in cow tank. Gathering nuts and wildflowers.
348	First telephone, c. 1933.
352	First refrigerator, 1937.
356	Typical day during threshing time.
382	Feeding the threshing crew.
409	Trips to town. Items purchased.
423	Life without refrigeration.
436	Effects of electrification.
466	Mary's life between quitting school and getting married.
477	Visiting aunts in Deerfield and Lake Forest.
482	Friends (most were relatives). Keeping in touch by letter, never by telephone.
490	Meets Harry Stark.
519	Marries H.S. in 1939 in Cloverdale.
530	First home.
540	Move to dairy farm during the war.
560	Mary raises chickens. Grading eggs. Selling eggs.
600	Move to California.
618	Move back to Illinois.
624	Decision to continue farming. Harry's work as a cement contractor.

SIDE A CONTINUED

635 Mary's father moves off the farm at Cloverdale. Mary and Harry move there and farm for 20 years. Fire in their home.

SIDE B

000 Fire insurance money used to buy farm equipment.
010 Reports that c. 1951 times were still rough for farmers.
019 Farming 170 acres. Crops raised.
021 Mary's egg business.
030 Comparison of food then and now.
039 Chicken business sold.
047 Buying, not butchering, meat. Butchering chickens.
054 Holiday celebrations. Family gatherings.
057 Vacations to California.
064 Drives in the country.
084 The move to DeKalb County, 1975.
121 Retirement?
128 Mary's work on current farm.
141 The house on North Malta Road.
144 A day at the farm. Mary cooks on a kerosene heater.
157 Evaluation of Harry's work.
164 Feelings about working on the farm. Backtracking: taking care of chickens and eggs, driving horses on hay fork.
190 Hobbies, church work, games.
210 Hired help.
220 Milking cows by hand and by machine.
250 Life now. College at Kishwaukee.
285 What happens to Mary and Harry's crop.
298 Comments on government policy.
301 Recollection of how father planned for retirement before Social Security.
310 What deceased relatives might think of farming now.
350 Retirement? Vacations.
355 Family now: nieces and nephews visit.
370 Mary's work off the farm: in grain elevator, conservation office, nursing home, factory, food service of two high schools--all mainly for company and the chance to meet other people.
528 Message for future farmers.