

In another conversation, George Kjome told that his father delivered medicines for the community because there was usually no way for most of the families to get to town. Many people died during the epidemic, leaving homeless children, so families such as Martina's took them in and raised them as their own, even though they already had nine children.

I found the spirit of a pioneer community very much alive in Highlandville today. The friends I have made have shown me that genuine bonds of love and generosity between neighbors are not as rare as I had imagined. They live daily as true neighbors, individuals, yet part of a group of people who feel deeply each other's losses and joys and live in harmony by sensing another's needs and doing their best to fill them.

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A Miller's Tale of True Grist

by Geraldine Schwarz

ON THE BANKS OF THE UPPER IOWA, fifty-five miles upstream from Decorah, stands the Lime Springs Mill. A sign on the front of the brick veneered building proclaims it was established in 1857. For over a hundred years, this mill was a busy center of activity, but by 1960 portable mills and the steel structure in town had cut so deeply into its business that it was closed.

During the last forty-two years of its operation, Herman Lidtko owned and ran the mill, spending his days grinding buckwheat flour or stock feed and his evenings running the electric power plant connected to the mill, which served Lime Springs and Chester. Now nearly ninety, he speaks with enthusiasm and pride about those arduous days.

Explaining how he became a miller, he says, "I was just sort of a one-horse farmer when I got into this. I married the daughter of the man who owned it, and she was the only kid in the family and the mill went with the deal." He chuckles and adds, "That was the sad part of it."

With obvious respect and admiration, Mr. Lidtko talks about

his father-in-law, D. W. Davis. "Even if he was my dad-in-law, I'd have to say he was more of a go-getter than the average fellow. He was always looking over the heads of the crowd, down the road, trying to see a better way of doing things. And he always had to have the best." As with all other things that his life touched, Davis wanted the Lime Springs Mill to be the very best.

Aside from being a miller, Davis was also a stock buyer, and the farmers he dealt with told him that stone grinding was the best for hogs because it made more meal. So when he heard that the French buhr millstones that had been in Governor Larrabee's mill at Clermont were available, he decided he must have them for his mill.

He knew that French buhr was the best material for millstones since it is a stone that when quarried still has "quarry sap" in it. This makes it easily sawed and cut. After exposure to the air, a chemical change in the stone makes it extremely hard. He also knew that these stones had been brought over from France by ship especially for Governor Larrabee's mill and that Larrabee was the most respected miller in this area at that time—his reputation as a miller had, in fact, contributed to his success in politics.

So it was that in 1917 when Davis heard that these millstones were being offered for sale by a man in Colesburg, where they had been taken after being in the mill at Clermont, he sent his son-in-law, Herman Lidtke, to get them. The following is Mr. Lidtke's story of that week-long trip from Lime Springs to Colesburg and back.

"I went from Lime Spings to Postville the first day and then from there to Colesburg. It was 105 miles down there. I slept in the hotel at Postville and put the team in the livery barn. I got down to Colesburg towards evening and then I stayed there the second night.

"The fellow that had the stones was running the mill there and of course it was easy enough to find him as long as he was living right there; I could inquire where he lived. My dad-in-law had taken care of paying for the stones. I didn't have anything to do with that. Just a rough guess, I'd say maybe he paid a hundred dollars—things were cheaper then. I think Larrabee got them shipped from France in 1855. See they did have stone here but it was a different stone and it was all one piece. They'd quarry a

great big stone out of the quarry and then they'd round it up. But this was all in sections like bricks. The millstones are joined together by "keying in" the stones, similar to archstones over a doorway, and held by iron bands.

"So then the next day we loaded the stone; it took us until three o'clock or later. We just had to pry it and use bars and keep sliding it along. I got started then from Colesburg about three in the afternoon and then I stopped at Littleport, I think it was, or Elkport, for the night. I got started early in the morning and I only had to go a short ways and go up a hill and I was stuck right away. The team couldn't pull it. And, gee, it made me sick, you know—wouldn't it you? And I blocked the wheels and unhooked the team and I see some fellas down the hill going to milk so I just walked down there to see if they wouldn't help me up the hill. "Nope," they said. "The boss is gone and we wouldn't hitch up his horses." So then I had to walk clear up the hill to the next farmer and he was just getting up and his horses was in the pasture. 'Yah,' he'd help me. So he helped me up the hill.

"And then when I got up the hill I was on the ridge quite a while on the level, and really that's awful pretty country, you know. You're up on the ridge and you can look down, I believe, as far as from here to Lime Springs (one mile) . . . farm houses all along there. My granddaughter lived down there in Elkader not very long ago—she's a nurse. We went down to see her and then we took a ride and went down to different parts of the country from there. I enjoyed that more because I was just sitting in the back seat and watching the sights. And really, it's pretty country.

"The people down there was real nice. You know after you get down there to Colesburg and Elkader—that's old settled country down there and lots of great big brick houses. But one night I thought I was cornered; I started to stop for the night and pret-near every place I stopped, the people was gone. So I didn't know what I was going to do for a while, but I did finally find somebody just come home. Oh, they was all real nice.

"Anyway then I got down to Elkader again toward evening or middle of the afternoon and I had some stuff that I could unload and ship through—there was the piece of shaft and the bearings where the shaft would go through, they were big heavy iron bearings—it was about 600 pounds that I could ship through. So I put

my team in the livery barn there to feed 'em and there was a fellow there just hitching up his team and I asked him where the depot was and he told me, 'Why?' he says. And I says, 'I got some stuff I'd like to ship out. I've got too much of a load.' 'Well,' he says, 'throw it on the wagon and I'll take it up for you.' Anyway I started out then and I says, 'I ain't gonna get out of Elkader at all without help.' There was some fellers plowing corn down to the bottom of the hill there, and I asked them if they'd help me. 'Yah,' they'd help. One feller had a big team of mules and we hooked them on ahead of my team, and those two teams, we had to rest them several times just to get up the hill.

"And going down the hill I had a chain on the reach that was long enough that I could chain one wheel and then I'd slide it going down the hill; that was the brake because they could never hold that load. From Elkader I stopped at a farmhouse and quite a storm come up and right there was quite a hill, too. So I was there for dinner and horse feed and then it kinda quit raining, and all he charged me was fifty cents and he helped me up the hill. I don't know, it wasn't much of a hill but it was a new graded road and it was kind of a clay soil and it just seemed like the wheels would pret-near slide sideways like they do in snow.

"Well, then when I got on top of the hill there again I got into Postville and I rested my team there, and I thought, 'Well, I'll get to Calmar and stay there tonight.' And oh boy, that was a long road from Postville, and the team was getting slower and it was getting dark and it started to thunder and lightning. And I asked some fellers I met how far it was to Calmar. 'Well about four or five miles yet.'

"I made it to Calmar all right . . . getting late . . . and then I was looking for a livery barn and the fellow said, 'There's no livery barn here but there's a feller that's a horse buyer, he can sometimes let someone put his horses there.' So I found out where his place was and he let me put the team in and I says, 'Where's the hotel?' And so he told me where it was. 'It's a poor one,' he says, 'you can sleep in the barn here if you want to.' Because in those days the livery barn would hire out teams and they'd be gone half the night and they'd have to have someone in the barn all night, so they'd have a cot and everything to sleep on. So I stayed in there. And that storm finally come up and, boy, it thun-

dered and lightninged and rained, and that darned office there where the cot was leaked and I'd get up and move the cot here—drip, drip—move it there. And then finally the electric lights lit up, and I thought, 'Holy Cats, is the barn on fire?' But it was funny, the water must have come down on the wire and kind of shorted it enough so the bulbs lit up.

"From Calmar I went to Ridgeway, and then east of Cresco I stopped and rested the horses and fed them, and then when I pulled through Cresco it was maybe six or a little more and the sun was way up, you know it was the last of June, and I thought 'Oh gol, I'll get home.' But I got this side of Bon Air and the team was just out. There was a farmer living there and I drove in and said, 'I wonder if maybe I could put up with you for the night?' And he said, 'Yah, I got plenty of room for the horses but I ain't got no room for you.' And here he had a bigger house than we did. So I said, 'I don't give a damn about myself, it's the horses that are out.' So I slept in the barn that night. Of course if I'd a thought, you know, I could have called home and had somebody come and get me—just for the night, then I could a come back in the morning. But I never thought about that at all.

"Then the next morning I pulled up there to where my wife's folks lived and boy, they looked to see the way that team was a pulling. So I says Monday morning I was going to weigh that before I unload it. And by goll, it weighted 5600 pounds with the wagon and me and all. That was the weight of what the team was pulling. They was Clydes, great big Clydes. I had them all shod all around before I left. They lost a lot of weight on the trip. The fellow that worked for my dad-in-law in the stock yard there, when he seen the team Monday morning—he was a good Welshman, you know, he had kind of a brogue—he throwed up his hands and said, 'Well, indeed I never thought a team could fall away that much in a week.' "

For the next ten years the Larrabee stones served the Lime Springs Mill. But they were man-killers and slow, according to Mr. Lidtke. Each day he got farther and farther behind, sacks of grain to be ground piling up around him. Each night he ran the power plant and at the same time lifted one of the huge stones and sharpened it, first with a many-pronged pick that roughened the stone, later with an air hammer equipped with chisels that cut

grooves into it. "There must be an easier way to grind feed," he told his dad-in-law. So the stones were replaced with a Bowers Brothers grist mill.

One stone is now a front step to Mr. Lidtke's house, the other embedded in the side of his house with a brass plate in its center stating. "This stone installed in Gov. Larrabee Mill, 1855, Clermont, Iowa." The stones remain a monument to an earlier era in milling, and to the millers who used them.

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Fond Memories of a Fiddler

by Luis Torres

I FIRST MET JOHANNES SOLLIEN through my research on the Bekken School in Winneshiek County's Highland Township. He attended this one-room school in the first decade of the century, and I wanted to hear what he had to say about that experience. During the course of our conversation, I discovered that he is a fiddler who knows hundreds of old time dance tunes, and since then we have gotten together several times with a group of his friends from Mabel and Spring Grove, Minnesota—most of whom are over 70—for some fantastic old time music "jam sessions," making music so danceable that I am hard put to choose whether I would rather play with them or dance to their music.

Johannes Sollien can trace his ancestors in Norway back to 1766, even though he has never been to the old homeland himself and has only family tradition to go by. His grandfather was part of the large wave of Norwegian immigrants who settled the area in northeast Iowa and southeastern Minnesota which centers around the towns of Decorah, Iowa and Spring Grove, Minnesota. Norway has a rich and varied tradition of folk music and dance, and the Norwegian immigrants brought significant portions of that cultural tradition along with their rose-maled chests, ale bowls, chip-carved boxes and Hardanger embroidery.

The kind of music Johannes and his friends play falls in the category called "gamaldans," or old time dance, by the Norwegians nowadays. It is the kind of dancing that was done "free-

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