

THE PALIMPSEST

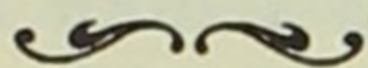
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The Orchards

Time was when people thought that apple trees bore fruit, or not, according to the grace of God and regardless of worms, pests, extreme heat and cold, and other hazards of nature. There were some, however, like the pioneer in Harrison County who conceived the idea of applying science to apple raising. This man, David Wesley Lotspeich, had purchased virgin land in Monona County, originally part of a railroad grant, and had turned that wilderness into a well-cultivated farm with a small home orchard. His original interest in an orchard had arisen out of the belief that apples and other fresh fruit were necessary to the health of his family. He had traveled as far as Magnolia to buy apples before his own orchard in Monona County was old enough to supply the needed fruit.

The three daughters of the family, Rose, Ruth, and Kathryn, attended the neighborhood school. Rose and Ruth wanted to be school teachers,

which meant that they must have more training than the rural school could provide. Their father did not consider for a moment the possibility of sending them away from home for their education. Instead, he decided to move the family closer to a good normal training school.

For this reason, backed by the conviction that his farm was much too hilly to be used for a commercial orchard, Mr. Lotspeich began to explore the surrounding territory for a more suitable acreage for a permanent home. North of the town of Woodbine he found an eighty-acre tract perfectly suited to his needs. There was a long gentle southern slope which seemed to creep gradually down into the Boyer Valley. Not more than a mile to the south was Woodbine, where one of the best normal schools in the State was located. There were no other orchards for miles in any direction, so he felt that there would be an adequate market for the fruit he intended to raise. Mr. Lotspeich bought this farm in 1893 and moved there with his family in the spring of 1894. The land he vacated was rented to Rasmus and Soren Rounsberg, who had formerly worked for him, and who purchased the place from him a few years later.

The condition of the land on the new farm could well be described as "corned out", and there was

much to be done to the soil before trees could be planted with any surety that they would survive. During the severe drought of 1894 and 1895, unbelievable numbers of loads of manure from the town's livery stables as well as from various nearby farms were added to the soil to enrich it.

During the period while the land was being reconditioned and before the apple trees became productive the family had a very meager living. For the first two years only the income from the Monona County farm saved them from real want. Then Mr. Lotspeich began to sell nursery stock for a company in southwestern Iowa, and carried on the regular farming activities of raising corn, hogs, and alfalfa. Strawberries were started on a commercial basis in 1898, followed by plantings of black raspberries and blackberries. Berries and grapes grew between the rows of fruit trees in the small home orchard north of the house.

This small orchard included a tree of everything from sweets to sour, and reds to yellows — peaches, cherries, mulberries, pears, apples, plums, grapes — and from early summer varieties to those ripening the next spring if properly stored. The family at "The Orchards", as they named their new home, had fruit twelve months of every year. The nursery stock was kept in an adjoining plot, but all of that was cleared out after the apple

orchard began to bear fruit in profitable quantities.

For apple stocks Virginia Crab and Sheriff were planted, and were used two years later for top-working to Grimes Golden and Jonathan. Some of the trees so grafted were producing from thirty to forty bushels per tree forty years later, which is adequate proof of the soundness of the top-working methods used.

In the big orchard there were equal numbers of Jonathan, Grimes Golden and Ben Davis, and half as many Sheriff. Then, in smaller numbers, Winesap, Gano, Geniton, York Imperial, and Northwestern Greening trees were set out. Mr. Lotspeich tried a unique plan in that part of the State when he planted his trees close together, with every other tree an early-to-bear and shorter-lived variety. These were thinned out as the better trees — Jonathan and Grimes Golden — grew in size. The experiment proved to be very profitable.

Of course there were losses due to accidents beyond human control, as well as the constant struggle against fruit parasites. The extreme severity of the winter of 1898-99 caused the loss of some trees. Again, in 1910, there was a very early spring followed by a severe freeze late in March, which caught the trees just ready to bloom and ruined the whole crop. Various pests and dis-

eases were carefully studied and treated. Codling moths, red cedar rust, and Illinois canker needed much attention. Jonathan spot, caused by delay in picking and storing, and hard to avoid in a large orchard, spoiled the appearance of some fruit, but did not affect its edibility.

The owner of "The Orchards" was faced with a rather difficult problem in working out a system for spraying his apple trees. For the first two seasons after spraying became necessary, he used a huge wooden barrel fastened lengthwise in a horse-drawn conveyance, and equipped with a hand pump. Later this pump was replaced by one operated by an air-cooled gasoline motor. Fortunately Mr. Lotspeich was an expert mechanic, and so was able to keep in operation this temperamental engine which was always displaying new eccentricities that had to be eliminated. Both the sound of the motor and the sting of the spray were violently resented by the horses, Ben, Dick, and Dewey, hitched to the apparatus. Half-way up the long hill the "filling station" was established, where barrels of copper sulfate, lime, and lime sulphur were added to water to make the various sprays. By locating the supplies of spray materials as he did, Mr. Lotspeich saved half of the long haul to the hilltop and centralized the source of supplies for the whole orchard.

A great deal of help was needed at harvest time to pick, sort, and pack the apples, and to help with the alfalfa crop which grew between the rows of trees in the big orchard. The workmen all lived within the immediate vicinity, although some brought their tents and equipment and camped at "The Orchards" during the harvest seasons. Cultivation of the soil and the pruning of the trees were done without hiring any extra workers. Mr. Lotspeich built a huge, odd looking, wooden rake, pushed by the horses, which he called a "go-devil" and which he used to collect the prunings which he cut from the trees during the dormant season.

At first the market for the fruit from "The Orchards" was entirely local. The Lotspeich family used to marvel at the amounts of fruit the people in such a limited territory could use. Then, as automobiles became more numerous, the market widened and people came from adjoining counties to buy fruit. On one particular Sunday afternoon, Mr. Lotspeich's son-in-law counted cars from twenty-three different Iowa counties parked outside the sorting shed and in front of the house. There were also many small shipping orders and these apples were carefully and individually wrapped and packed in barrels.

In no two years were marketing conditions exactly duplicated. A commission firm in Council

Bluffs handled several car loads of apples one year. Several times the entire crop was sold to one man — once to be delivered at the packing table, another time for a flat price on the trees. In any case, Mr. Lotspeich always insisted that the buyer must supply the local trade, rather than ship all of the fruit out of the territory. Once a grower in Logan bought a car load of apples, and took over the workmen and apparatus and bossed the job until his packing was done.

When Mr. Lotspeich began his work as a horticulturist, his knowledge of fruits and grafting was based on his mother's teaching. After he definitely decided to start a commercial orchard, he visited the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, where he absorbed all the advice people were willing to give him. Some of this advice was most peculiar and was wisely ignored as being impractical of application to an Iowa orchard.

Iowa State College at Ames used "The Orchards" for various spraying and other experiments. Starting in 1908, Professor S. A. Beach did some work on types of sprays. In 1911, Professor T. J. Maney continued that work and also made records of the hardy apple stock grafting which Mr. Lotspeich had started in 1894. The information obtained in this orchard through records and observation, forms the basis of the only

recorded long-time experience in top grafting of apple trees on the hardy stocks like Virginia Crab and Sheriff. This record now covers a period of over forty years.

Both the Southwestern Iowa Horticultural Society and the State Horticultural Society found an active and interested member in Mr. Lotspeich. Both societies issued annual reports of their meetings. In this way members got permanent and detailed records of the proceedings plus reports on the various experiments and experiences of other members, much of which was valuable in their work.

In 1893 Mr. Lotspeich sent an exhibit of DeSoto plums from his Monona County farm to the Columbian Exposition at Chicago. The plums were the subject of much comment because of their unusually deep coloring. This was the result of a very hot ripening season, however, rather than because the plums were any new development.

One of the first exhibits sent out from "The Orchards" was to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904 at St. Louis. Mr. Lotspeich received a "certificate of merit" and a three-inch square medal in recognition of the excellence of the box of Bessarabia cherries and the barrel of summer apples which he contributed.

A bushel of Grimes Golden, numbering 104 apples, received the award for the best box of apples in the State of Iowa in 1912. The gold disc which was presented to Mr. Lotspeich by Henry Wallace, editor of *Wallaces' Farmer* and grandfather of the present Vice President of the United States, was among his most cherished possessions. He wore this disc on his watch fob for many years.

At all the county fairs within reasonable distance — Harrison, Monona, Woodbury, Shelby — he regularly displayed fruit from "The Orchards". No exhibits were ever sent unless they were really above average.

Mr. Lotspeich had a wide reputation for his pioneering spirit, not only in his work with apples, but along other lines as well. He purchased his first automobile, a Great Western, on the last Wednesday in January of 1907 — just as the panic of 1907 broke. The banks would not pay out more than \$5.00 in cash to anyone, but were willing to transfer money on draft or check, so the car was paid for in spite of difficulties. Since it was one of very few automobiles in the community, the owner needed to be well informed concerning machinery. Things *would* go wrong with those early automobiles, and there were no garage mechanics available to right the wrongs.

Mrs. Lotspeich had acetylene lights — of which she was a little afraid — when most housewives were spending hours cleaning kerosene lamps. The first concrete that Woodbine saw was made and poured at "The Orchards" amid a shower of jibes and derogatory comments from a large group of bystanders. In spite of its purely experimental nature, that concrete was a success and a long-lived one.

At the time Mr. Lotspeich started raising alfalfa in quantities, very little was known about curing it. Most farmers had discarded it as an undependable crop and therefore not satisfactory. However, as a result of the orchardist's experiments with curing the alfalfa, the crop became widely grown in that area.

Another hobby was that of trying to produce successful crops of peaches in spite of the rigorous winters in that section of Iowa. Due to a succession of mild winters, Mr. Lotspeich was able to pick excellent peaches from his trees for two consecutive seasons. Then the usual cold winters returned and, in spite of repeated trials, this experiment was a dismal failure.

In connection with the necessity for storing large quantities of fruit, the owner of "The Orchards" devised a ventilating system for fruit storage cellars which kept fruit and vegetables in

good condition for seven or eight months without any refrigeration. His system became widely used before refrigeration became common.

"The Orchards" was sold to Mr. W. P. Campbell in 1917, but in many minds there lingers the early memory of the air of bustle and excitement during harvest time. All over the orchard the pickers would be singing, whistling, and calling back and forth to each other, as their picking bags hung heavier and heavier with the scarlet and golden fruit. At the sorting tables a colored avalanche rolled down the gentle inclines to be separated into lots of uniform size. There a visitor might find Kathryn, youngest daughter of the family, deftly separating exceptional fruit from the average of the crop, to be used as exhibits for various county and State fairs. There was a spicy tang in the air, and people came to sniff, watch, and munch, with the apples cracking pleasantly as teeth sank through the crisp skins.

It was harvest time — and all was well with the world.

LOIS MARIE OLLIVIER