



Corncribs at the farm where Helen grew up. North side of Section 13, Roosevelt Township, 2001.

From the yet to be published book *The Road I Grew Up On: Requiem for a Vanishing Era*  
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# The Farm I Grew Up On

The farm where I grew up is not the Gunderson homeplace. Instead our homeplace, where Great Grandpa and Great Grandma settled in 1881 and Grandpa and Grandma lived until the 1950s, is three miles south. Mother and Dad, my older sister, my brother, and I moved here in 1945. I was five months old.

The farm had been the home of David and Rosa Dady who bought it in the 1880s. My grandfather bought it in 1939. The oldest building on the place is a small wooden one that was the Dady carriage shed. Dad used it as a shop until he built a Quonset building for his welding and other mechanical work. The next oldest building is the round, brick corncrib that was built in 1922. I have gotten used to it standing unused and obsolete — a monument — but it has been harder to adjust to the status of the barn and wooden corncrib I “helped build” when I was a youngster.

A wind of tornado intensity tore into the roof of the barn in the 1980s. Dad dismantled the top section, then had the whole building torn down, making way to put a large, green government Quonset building from town on the concrete foundation for equipment storage. The tall, red, wooden crib built when I was five still stands but is not used except to store old cars in the alleyway. There have been no cows, pigs, or sheep on the farm for 25 years, and now there are no cats and dogs except for stray cats.

We used to have several tractors, new and old, mainly John Deere, but also Grandpa’s Model M Farmall. Dad eventually sold all his farm implements. For awhile, he regretted selling his red GMC truck, but it had reached a point where he couldn’t justify the costs of keeping it repaired. He did purchase a tractor, a Model C Farmall for mowing the yard, but it became cantankerous, and in 2002, he deeded it over to his tenants.



Helen’s Dad’s GMC truck and a flatbed trailer loaded with tile for a field drainage project. Circa 1979.

I remember that Dad was almost always working on a project in his shop, running errands in his truck, or working in the fields on a tractor or combine. Those activities were a big part of Dad's identity, but the man and the farm have changed. He has slowed down but still does projects and runs errands, such as surveying a field to find a broken tile line.

Dad has been an ardent fan of Iowa State University athletics and in the 1970s built a statue of the university mascot — a cardinal bird named Cy — that he designed and welded in his shop using scrap metals. He had the statue painted in brilliant red and gold colors and delivered it to Iowa State where it stood in the stadium for several years. Eventually, the university no longer had a use for the statue, and Dad's rendition of Cy is now stored in one of his machine sheds. It is rusted with dull red and gold colors and a bit of pigeon dung.



My parents' farmyard is quiet and empty except when Mother and Dad's renters, Dan and Roger Allen, are operating machinery. I've known Dan and Roger since childhood. Even though they grew up a few miles away on another road, their farm was in the same section as ours, and we were part of the same rural neighborhood and school bus route. In fact, the place they grew up has been cleared and is now part of the fields of corn and beans that the Allen boys (as my parents call Dan and Roger) farm for Mother and Dad.

After all is said and done, and inspite of the fine, efficient, and responsible farm work that Dan and Roger provide, not to mention the mutual respect they and my parents have for each other, I still find it disconcerting to see the end of an era of farming for our family.



Photo at left: Deane Gunderson near his shop with his rendition of the bird named Cy that is the Iowa State University mascot, circa 1975. Photo above: The barn that was built when Helen was a young child is on the left side of the photo. It had been heavily damaged by wind in the 1980s. Deane thought he could preserve the bottom half of the barn and make it useful. However, it was eventually razed and replaced by a large, green Quonset building that he purchased from coop, who had purchased it from the federal government. The United States Department of Agriculture had used it a few decades ago for storing surplus corn. The Quonset building was moved from town to the farm where Deane had retrofitted the concrete foundation of the barn to accommodate the new addition. Photo 1989.



Helen says, "This is my favorite portrait of my family. Perhaps it is because of Dad's argyle socks or that I had a simple haircut and a genuine smile." Back row left to right: Clara, Mother, Helen, Charles. Front row left to right: Peggy, Dad, Martha. Circa 1952. The youngest Gunderson sibling, Louise, was born in 1955. The Deane and Marion Gunderson collection.



The Gunderson family gathered at the Rolfe Public Library in 1998 for an open house honoring Marion Gunderson for more than 30 years of service to the library. Left to right: Marti Carlson (Largo, Florida), Louise Shimon (Perry, Iowa), Helen (Gilbert, Iowa), Marion, Deane, Clara Hoover (Millard, Nebraska), Charles Gunderson (Rolfe), and Peggy Moore (Canton, Michigan).



The yardlight is a sentinel between the garage of the Gunderson home and the buildings on the right that have served as Deane's machine shops. Circa 1994.



Gunderson farm buildings. Left to right: round brick corncrib, gasoline tank on posts, small building where Deane raised hogs, tall wooden corncrib, and metal grain bins, 2003.



Snowflakes and ears of corn on an antique corn dryer that Marion used for decoration near the main entrance to her home, 1989.





Bushel basket and clay pots, date unknown.



Bunny rabbit, date unknown.



Gunderson farm, 1948.



Gunderson farm, 1975.



Marion Abbott Gunderson, 1941.



Raggedy Ann doll, 1961.

## Mother's Art<sup>1</sup>

My mother, Marion Abbott Gunderson, has lived on the farm where I grew up ever since she and Dad moved there in 1945. Mother was raised in Ogden, Utah; however, her family's history in Iowa predates the Gunderson lineage in the state. Her mother, Helen Loomis, was the daughter of a Sioux City railroad dispatcher. Helen was valedictorian of her class and went to Iowa State College, where she met Jim Abbott from Utah. The two married and lived in Utah, where he was a chemist for a mining company then worked in the family wholesale hardware business.

As a teenager, Mother dreamed of going to an art school such as the Chicago Institute of Art; however, her parents talked her into enrolling someplace more "practical." That was Iowa State where Helen and Jim had met and Mother would major in applied art and meet Dad. Mother spoke of her early interest in art.

I became interested in art when I was a young child. It was during the Depression years, and I was thrilled to get a new box of crayons. One day the babysitter and I searched the house for enough money to buy a new box. Another vivid memory is of the time when my mother and I rode the train from Ogden to Sioux City, probably a two- or three-day trip. I had a new box of crayons and a new coloring book. Nothing could have pleased me more.

During junior and senior high, Mother was always able to schedule art classes. She said that she learned most of the basics from her high school teacher, LeConte Stewart, a renowned artist from Utah. When she enrolled at Iowa State, Mother was already in tune with much of

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1. Marion Gunderson entered the Rolfe Care Center shortly after this biography was written in August 2003. She died in November 2004.



The Reigelsberger farm, 1957.

what was being taught in the art classes. In those days, the art program was part of the College of Home Economics, and the art majors took all the courses — chemistry, nutrition, home management, etc. — that were required of other home economics students. While at Iowa State, Mother had the fortune to study under the university's beloved sculptor, Christian Petersen. She remembers, "I was not very successful but got an A in the class because he expected all of us to do our best work, and we did the best we could do." Regarding her vision for life after graduation, Mother said,

I don't know what I thought I would or could do with an applied art degree when I was out of college. Fortunately I didn't have to make that decision. For the most part, my painting and art pursuits have been purely for my own entertainment.

Mother also had the opportunity to study art during her early years in the Rolfe area. She acknowledged that the person who influenced her the most as a watercolorist was Cathrine Barr, a professional artist and watercolorist from Connecticut who spent summers visiting relatives and giving watercolor lessons in Rolfe. Mother claimed,

I learned almost everything I know about watercolors from Cathrine. Her classes were about six-weeks long and often on location. At one time, she had 50 or more students from Rolfe and surrounding areas. During those years, I was a mother of six children but found time to paint and did most of my solo painting at night. I especially loved to paint floral scenes but found still life items as well as buildings and landscapes that interested me. Cathrine's classes evolved into the Barr Art Association. The students I remember most from those days are Darlene Brinkman and Lena Vaughn from Rolfe and Percy VanAlstine from Gilmore City.

Mother exhibited her paintings with the Fort Dodge Art Guild, at the Iowa State University Memorial Union and other galleries, and with Darlene Brinkman at the Mason City Public Library. Mother has also enjoyed other media such as batik, acrylic painting, and crewel stitchery. She continues to paint occasionally with my sister, Martha, during her visits at the farm.

When the popular movie *The Music Man* was released in 1962, Mother saw it and was impressed with the spunky love song that the smooth-talking traveling salesman, Professor Harold Hill, sang to the River City librarian, Marian Paroo. She thought to herself, "Mmm, Marion the Librarian – why not." A vacancy opened at the Rolfe Public Library in 1963, and she began working as an assistant to the head librarian, Flossie DeVaul. Mother earned \$10 a month during her first year at the library and within a couple of years was making \$25 a month. Her motivation was the work itself and serving the community. She continued at the library and was the director until she retired in 1998. She claims that she loved every minute that she devoted to the library. She also has personalized license plates on her car that say "LIBRARY."

In 1947, Mother and Dad were charter members of a group that played bridge in the various members' homes on a monthly basis. It was simply known as Couples' Club. After 42 years, many members had either died or moved away from the Rolfe area, and the club disbanded in 1989. Mother was also a member of various women's groups, including the P.E.O. Sisterhood and Sorosis. In 1970, she co-chaired a flea market sponsored by Rolfe women's groups to raise money for the town's swimming pool. Three decades later, Mother provided the impetus, through a financial gift and vision for a new library, to the fund-raising efforts for

a new community center. Construction began in January 2003. The building is designed to house a library, city offices, and a large meeting room. Mother has also been an ardent genealogist and developed a substantial archive of local history materials at the library.

When her children were growing up, Mother taught the junior high arts and crafts class for the Presbyterian vacation bible school and served as a Cub Scout and girls' 4-H leader. There are also numerous other ways she has served the community and the state, including membership on some Iowa State University alumni boards.

Certainly Mother's home is no stereotypical farm home. Its aesthetic appearance and fine interior design and furnishings are testaments to her background as an artist and librarian.

She had learned to use a computer through her work as a librarian, and in about 1985 bought an Apple IIe long before many of her children had computers. As an octogenarian, she uses it both for genealogical projects and correspondence with family and friends.



The Gunderson farm, 1952.

Her travels away from her home are becoming less frequent. She and Dad play duplicate bridge on Wednesday afternoons in Fort Dodge, occasionally go out for dinner to Garland's broasted chicken restaurant in Rolfe, and are often on the road to medical appointments in Ames and other Iowa towns. She seldom goes to her Lake Okoboji cottage, some 70 miles northwest of Rolfe, but coordinates a schedule for her children, grandchildren, and friends to enjoy to the place during the summer.

As Mother has grown older, there have been times when she expressed a desire to move from the farm, perhaps to Ames. In fact, she and Dad lived there for two winters during the 1970s, house sitting for a couple who had gone to Arizona. However, Mother continues to live on the farm, partially because she is accustomed to the place and has superb support from the small-town community that she might not have in Ames. Also, she has apparently reconciled herself to the fact that Dad is reluctant to live any place other than on the farm.

## 8-Row Planter Used on Roosevelt Township Farm<sup>1</sup>

One of the things which has made America what it is, and what has made this country's standard of living continue to climb year after year is the continuous search for and discovery of better and more economical methods and equipment. That is particularly true in the field of agriculture.

Rising costs of production and smaller gross incomes have made it even more essential that agriculture look for cheaper means of production.

One such method was developed on the Deane Gunderson farm in Roosevelt township. Deane developed an eight-row cornplanter which he used in planting some 525 acres of corn this spring.

The planter represents some 200 hours of work by the 35-year-old "Farmer of the Week." He started working on the project shortly after the first of the year and, incidentally, did all of the work on his own place with the exception of \$1.25 worth of machine work done elsewhere.

Two four-row planters were attached. The check-rod between them was connected with a universal mechanism from another type machine. The check-wire for a regular four-row is strong enough, incidentally, to trip the eight-row.

One of the problems Deane had to overcome was the hitch for the planter. It was necessary to make it light, strong and yet portable. The hitch also is equipped with two wheels and serves as a trailer for the hitch rods and markers when the machine is being transported.

Another problem was getting the markers long enough and strong enough without making them bear too heavily on the planter's lifting mechanism.

The eight-row is assembled and disassembled in a hurry – about fifteen minutes' time, and the two four-row machines are disengaged, attached one behind the other with the hitch assembly on the rear of the second four-row and it's ready for the road.

The eight-row planter, by the way, isn't the only time-saver Gunderson has developed since he started farming in 1946. He has a tractor-mounted oats seeder which he made himself with which it's a relatively simple matter to seed 85 acres of oats in an afternoon. The seeder consists of a regular endgate seeder, fed by two large hoppers which hold about 60 bushels of seed.



Another time-saver is a large wire-frame built on top of a manure spreader which eliminates double handling of corn cobs when shelling. The cobs are loaded directly into the spreader from the sheller and hauled out at once.

1. This article is from the *Pocahontas Record Democrat* on May 27, 1954, and is used with verbal permission from editor Brooks Taylor. Dad's portrait was taken circa 1956 when he was the campaign chairman for Republican Leo Hoegh, who was running for a second term as governor of Iowa.

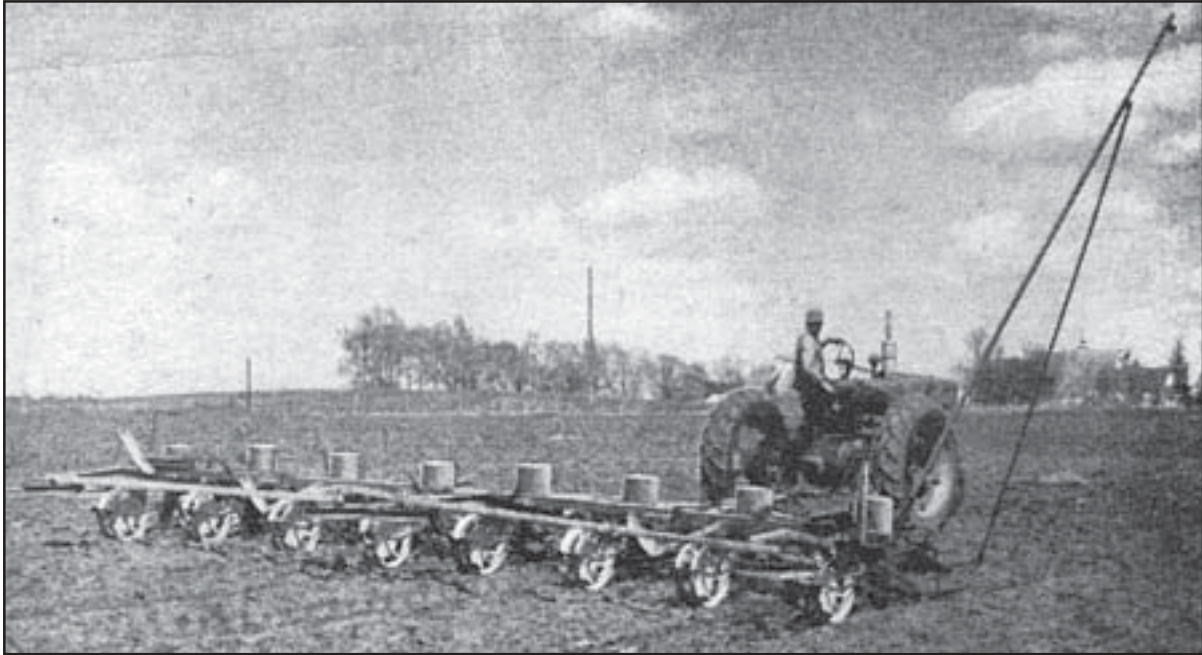


Photo of Deane Gunderson on his Model M Farmall with his 8-row cornplanter is from *The Iowa Farm and Home Register*, 1956.

Deane's next project will be a practical corn dryer which will make it possible to pick some of the corn earlier before it has a chance to drop from the stalk. Perhaps after that a picker-sheller, possibly a four-row outfit.

Gunderson operates about 800 acres of land. He actually owns 200 acres and rents the remainder from his father, John C. Gunderson. He has one full-time hired man and occasionally hires some part time help. Of course, he has the equipment necessary for that size farming operation — two MD Farmall tractors, a cornpicker, combine, four-row cultivators, etc.

On the land he operates, he will have 425 acres of corn, 225 acres of oats and the remainder in hay and pasture this year. All the oats are seeded with Mammoth Red Clover as green manure crops and the ground to be fall-plowed is covered with bulk-spread commercial fertilizer. All second-year corn ground is side-dressed with nitrogen at the second or third cultivation.

Deane has 61 head of feeder cattle at the present time. He likes to buy calves every other fall, have them on grass through the summer, in the cornfields in the fall, then on full feed and sold in the spring. His present

cattle were bought in Oct., 1952, at about 350 pounds and now weigh about 1150 and are ready for market. The last 100 days they are fed shelled corn, protein and prairie hay in dry lot. Pasture is kept down two years, being plowed down the second year.

Gunderson is a strong advocate of fall pigs farrowed on pasture with a minimum of investment in equipment. He expects to have about 65 sows farrowing the last of this September. He does have a few spring litters — and has Farmers Hybrid stock.

Deane was born on a farm two miles south of the one where he now lives. He's lived in the same community all his life with the exception of the time spent at Iowa State College earning a pair of engineering degrees and the five years spent with the engineering staff of John Deere at Waterloo.

He's township chairman of the Roosevelt Community Chest, Republican precinct chairman and a trustee of the Rolfe Presbyterian church. He's also president of the alumni corporation of Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity chapter at Ames, which consists of some 400 members.

Deane and Mrs. Gunderson have five children: Clara, 11; Charles, 10; Helen, 9; Martha, 5; and Margaret, 2.

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