

Chapter 6

THE FARM IN CALAIS OHIO

In the spring of 1900 the house was nearly ready. The family of five moved into their new two-story house. They now had a real kitchen with a sink, a cookstove and a large pantry for items like a barrel of cider or a hundred pound bag of oats. Louisa was elated to cook without the constant kneeling before the fireplace in the cabin. There was a dining room and a sitting room with a desk, a bookcase and a side table for the oil lamp. Rodney and Roger soon adjusted to sleeping upstairs away from the rest of the family.

The old spring house was soon replaced with a larger glazed tile structure closer to the back kitchen door. Even at five Mildred was able to fetch, helping to retrieve what mother needed from the spring house. Even the twins were soon able to bring in the buckets of water for drinking, cooking and bathing. There was always a bucket with a dipper for drinking by the kitchen sink.



MH Warner Home 1900-1915

Getting a bucket of water meant opening the big wooden door, carefully stepping down on the always damp concrete floor. At the far end was an inverted bell tile where the boys dipped the porcelain bucket to fill it with what they could carry. Water had been piped from a spring quite a ways up the hill behind the house, and in addition to supplying the house with water, it provided a constant temperature in what came to be called the “milk house”. Crock of milk and other produce were kept cool in the flowing water, which meant many trips for each meal.

Louisa’s day was usually filled with preparing food, taking care of kids, feeding turkeys and chickens. Breakfast could be a combination of eggs, bacon, fried potatoes, mush, oatmeal, buckwheat or corn pancakes, and the bread and butter she had made. At any meal there was apple butter, sorghum molasses or honey, a custom that still continues for some of us today.

For winter storage a trench was dug and filled with straw. Here were placed bushels of apples, potatoes, cabbage and other garden produce. The area was then covered with straw, old feed sacks and a six-inch layer of dirt. The produce stored this way usually lasted until spring.

For cooking, Louisa depended on her cast iron skillets. One day a man came to the front door and showed her his sample of three small cast iron skillets. She gave the man some money for a set of three. Her husband and relatives said that she would never see those skillets but they finally came in the mail. She prepared the skillets by coating them with lard and baking them in a hot oven for more than an hour. After using them she would wipe them out and put them in their place to dry. Her helpers had been taught not to put them in the dish water.

Louisa's stove had a firebox for burning wood or coal. On one side there was a reservoir which was used to heat water for washing dishes, general cleaning and Saturday baths. The other side of the firebox was the oven where she baked bread twice a week and quite often corn bread and pies. MH had to cut, chop, split and carry a supply of wood for the cookstove and the heaters in the winter.

Two more boys were soon added to this Warner family. Thurman was born in the spring of 1902 and Hubert in the fall of 1904. Louisa chose her own maiden name of Gilmore for Thurman's middle name. Hubert's first name was James after his grandfather, James Wells Warner. Hubert had black hair in a family of redheads. He wrote, "For a long time I was referred to as Mother's little blackhead."

Mildred was now old enough to take care of the younger "boys." Mordecai Harvey and the twins had put a white picket fence from one side of the milk house around one end of the house to a gate in the front and on around the other end of the house and back to the other side of the milk house. This enclosed area was to keep the younger boys in and the wandering free-range chickens and turkeys out.



Mildred Elvira Warner 1895-1907
8th grade Graduation?
grave at

Mildred and most devastating loss hit the family when Mildred was twelve. While she was adding firewood to the kitchen stove her dress caught fire.

She ran from the house toward the creek. Different stories of what happened next have been told. The twins ran after her, one went for a rug to roll around her. Another version tells that RJ was nearby with a bucket of water. And yet another says they rolled her on the ground. She was badly burned. Louisa was stricken with grief and guilt when she saw the burns on her daughter. Mildred lived for three weeks before infection ended her life.

It was a time for drawing strength from family. They came together in grief--the Warners, the Gilmores, the Howilers, the Carpenters, the Stephens, the Roes and other relatives and neighbors. They came to give support. The family unit had been damaged, crushed. They prayed together. They offered consolation, sharing their love like healing salve on those who were hurting. Family was important, perhaps the most important of all human endeavors.

Mordecai stood by Louisa as they closed the

the hilltop cemetery. His anger with God lessened as he looked around at all the family that had gathered. He felt a new surge of what it means to have life and family. He looked upward with an unspoken prayer to overcome his anger and for the ability to lead his family into an understanding of what it really means to be alive. They would need all their help to reverse the devastation of this tragedy and recover the joy of living. (Louisa's mother would later say that Louisa never got over it.)

A year later, 1908, Louisa gave birth to a boy, and as a namesake of her loss, she gave him the name of Hildred. For a middle name she took the middle name of the husband she loved, Harvey.

Back at the house the routine of this young family continued. Rodney and Roger gradually become more involved in the more difficult chores of farming. They fed the hogs, sheep and were soon taking care of the horses. This meant cleaning the stable and

knowing what to feed depending on the temperature and whether or not the horses were going to be worked that day. They progressed to hitching up to the wagon, the surrey or the plow. If two horses were to pull as a team they were hitched differently.

Thurman soon became the horse man. His younger brother later told that they would go to the barn, hitch Ole Bill to the sled just to haul a bucket of corn to the chickens or get a bucket of potatoes from the garden. Ole Bill was known as a special horse. He was gentle, responded to voice commands and knew enough not to step on crops and garden plants. It would be their attempt to hitch a cow and horse together as a team that would get some boys into real trouble.

The younger boys were learning that succession of helping tasks: picking berries, gathering eggs, nuts and produce from the garden. Turkey eggs were carefully collected each day during the laying season. Later the eggs were placed back in the nest for hatching when a turkey hen became broody. There could be 75 to a 100 turkeys by fall. The older boys herded some of the flock together and drove them down the road to market.

Hubert recorded they attended church fairly often. He wrote, “Three things stand out about

my church experience. There were two front doors to the church, one on either side of the front. All males entered by one door and all the females entered the other door. No music instrument, not even a piano, was allowed in the church and the only minister I knew had a lot of real white hair and a real black mustache.



“We had old man, Alfred Martin, for the teacher of our Sunday School class. We took turns reading a verse from the Bible and explaining what we had just read. The teacher helped with both if

necessary. He gave us a verse to memorize for the next Sunday *Church of Christ, Calais* and we began each Sunday by reciting the verse. I later learned that the land on which the church was built was given by my Grandfather Wesley Gilmore. My parents’ farm completely surrounded the land he gave.”

The farm produced well. MH did a lot of buying and selling, especially livestock. He was also successful in breeding Percheron draft horses. He won recognition at the Ohio State Fair with a white horse named “Judge.” The next year, with the help of neighbors and the twins, MH built a new barn. They added a tall, round wood silo to store ensilage the following year. Ensilage, also called fodder, is made by chopping the entire plant including leaves, stalks, and grain of crops like corn or sorghum.

In 1912 MH announced a plan to build a new barn. He needed more space to store feed and hay for the Percheron horses he had been breeding. It was to be the biggest barn in the area. One afternoon eight wagons loaded with lumber arrived and were unloaded with

the help of relatives and neighbors. The barn was up and ready for use by early winter. The twins provided a lot of help.

My dad, Rodney, took my brother and me to see this barn some forty years after they moved. The large lean-to on the left side of barn had been added since our visit. I did not remember the church on the hill. Dad pointed out the little stream where they had shoveled gravel into a one-cubic box to mix the concrete for the foundation. He also showed us the spike nails that were still on the front of the barn where they had hung the horse harnesses for the big sale



MH Warner barn built 1912

stream, still

before they moved.

There was a concrete block in the foundation of the corn crib with the initials HMW. It was gone when I took these pictures in 2008.

I still remember the shock that my Dad expressed with the erosion on the hillsides where they had raised corn and tobacco. In 2008 the shock was mine. The small

stream, still small, had washed away enough soil to deepen its bed nearly three feet and required a bridge to cross over.



Here is another view of the barn that was built by MH, the twins, and the help of relatives who lived in the Calais area. The small white area in the foreground is the bridge needed to cross over the stream that Dad and I had been able to step across.

The cover over the wood silo was part of the construction when the silo was added before 1915, and the silo appeared to be in good condition when I took this picture in 2008.

As we drove away from the farm we passed a house with a large tree behind it. With a tone of anger in his voice, Dad told about a man that lived there who tied his wife to that tree when he went to town, usually to get drunk. He and his brother, Roger, had wanted to give the man a good thrashing but Granddad had told them to stay out of it, it was not their affair.

A short distance later we came to two identical houses, one built just a few feet behind the other. Dad remembered that the man and wife that lived there could not get along with each other so he built a second house for himself.