

The Howard Farm

Before moving to town in 1998, Velma and Verle Howard lived across the road from the Harrolds on a 160-acre farm. It was one that Verle and his two sisters inherited from his folks who had moved to the farm in 1940 after purchasing it in 1939. At one time, Verle rented an additional 160 acres west of his place but never got into big-time farming. He says that he was able to survive in farming because he “never bought a lot of expensive machinery but kept wiring the old equipment together with baling wire.” Finally, in 1992, he retired from farming and rented the land to Paul Harrold.



Velma Howard, 1990.



Verle Howard, 1993.

Velma and Verle were married in 1947. He worked for rural power companies while she did bookkeeping and stenography work. In 1953, they moved to the Philippines where Verle took a job as a power plant supervisor with the Voice of America. In 1962, they moved back to the States, making their home on the farm and raising six children who have all left the area.

Even though they no longer own the building site, Velma and Verle's farm is the homeplace to their children. When their family held reunions at the farm, Velma says, “it was sheer bedlam.” They set up two campers and a tent. The adults sat around and ate and talked. The grandchildren played with toys, got out the badminton and horseshoe sets, and built forts in the haymow.

I began to get to know Velma and Verle in the fall of 1989, when I asked if I could photograph their farm. Since then, I have photographed their last season of picking corn and shelling it the following summer. I have had several cups of coffee at their round oak kitchen table and picked apples from their two apple trees. Velma has given me advice on things such as planting asparagus, and Verle has helped me do things such as measure their barn and make

a platform for my camera so I could photograph the haymow. Theirs is the last barn along the road. Almost every time I leave their place, Velma says, "Hurry back."

Velma has a garden and used to raise chickens. She tells about how in 1990, while she was still a cook at the nursing home in Pocahontas, she decided not to dress chickens anymore.

That winter, I made the decision, after we had talked about it, and Verle agreed and went along with me. So that spring, he said, "How many chickens should we order?" I said, "Don't order any. I'm not dressing chickens this year." Not too long after that at work one day, a co-worker, Marian Kuchenreuther said, "You tell Verle to order some extra chickens, because Al wants some."

I said, "What are you talking about, we're not having chickens." "Oh yes," she said. "Verle told Al he ordered the chickens." Needless to say, there was a little blue smoke around when I got home from work. But I refused to dress chickens, so Verle had to find someone to dress chickens that fall. [In the years before that] I picked the chickens out of the shed, hung them on the line, and cut their heads off. Did the whole thing until he took over. Then we got the people from West Bend.

Verle has often played tricks on some of the neighboring farmers like Mick Reigelsberger and Dan and Roger Allen; and they have played jokes on him. One day, Verle came home from town and was looking for his riding mower. He looked everywhere but couldn't find it. Later, he discovered Mick and Roger had hung it from the ceiling of his shop.



The Howard family homeplace farm, north side, Section 14, Roosevelt Township, 1996.

When I asked about the spirit of cooperation in the neighborhood, Velma said, “In this community, you never have to ask.” Verle added, “If somebody is in trouble and needs help, you don’t have to ask. They’re here.” Then Velma told about their third child, Monte, president of the high school student council, who fell from an elevator silo at Bradgate where he was part of a construction crew in 1970. “When Monte was killed, we didn’t have all of our beans walked. His friends went and walked our beans and didn’t even tell us that they did it. Others told us then that the kids had been out and walked our beans. Now that’s called help without asking.”

Velma and Verle’s other son, Randy, died of cancer at his home in Chicago in 2001. Their oldest daughter Joy died following a short illness at her home in Aeia, Hawaii, in 2003.

The Howards sold their acreage, which includes 3.5 acres of land and the buildings, to Brenda and Brian Slama in 1998. Brenda and Brian have remodeled the house. She is a mechanical engineer and works for a company in Laurens, Iowa. He is a construction worker. On November 24, 2002, they had a baby girl name Josee.

Brian occasionally helps Paul Harrold with harvest and other projects. Sometimes Paul comes with his tractor and shovels the snow for Brenda and Brian. Paul also uses the barn and a machine shed on the place.



Above photo: The Howard home, 1989. Photos on opposite page are of the Howard kitchen, 1998. In this road project, it has been interesting to discover so many residents and former residents who have round oak tables in their homes.