

A Dairy Farm Glossary

*It ought to be the object and purpose
of an intelligent citizenship to guard well
this great dairy industry.*

W. D. HOARDMAN
EDITOR, HOARD'S DAIRYMAN, 1885

BIFFY, OUTHOUSE, BACK HOUSE, PRIVY or PATH. A wood outdoor toilet with a hole in the ground for a resevoir. When I went to country school, my little white behind got quite cold in the girls' outhouse in the winter.

Dad said a local farmer became disgusted with Halloween revelers knocking down his outhouse every year. One year he moved his outhouse over a few feet so the hole was exposed. He never had a problem with revelers again.

BOBSLED. A low, long wood sled pulled by horses for daily winter work on a farm. It is collapsible for easy storage and easily constructed from standard lumber. Dad often gave rides on his bobsled and used hay bales for seats. Dad's bobsled rides in the cold, crisp air after Christmas or Thanksgiving dinner were the best of memories.

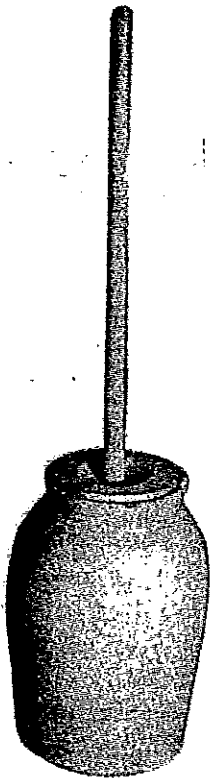
BREAD BOX. A tin box used to store homemade bread before the days of plastic bags.

BUTTER CHURN. A machine for making butter from cream by pounding the cream. Churning butter was a young child's job on my grandparents' farm because the children couldn't dirty the butter with their hands. However, the children had to be strong enough to pound the stomper, dasher or plunger. The Mainquist churn was made from stoneware with a wood dasher.

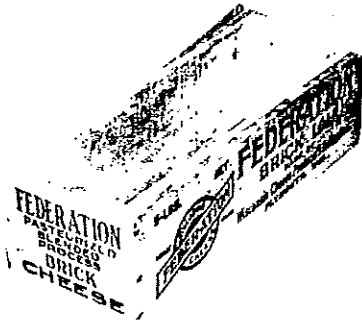
BUTTER CROCK. A small round pot made from earthenware coated with glaze. The crock helped preserve fresh farm butter.

BUTTON BOX. My mother clipped buttons off worn out clothing before she turned them into rags. The buttons went in the button box for future mending or doll clothes.

CAT TOY. A long string around a short piece of corncob. It is suspended from the manure carrier rail in the barn. My father watched the cats playing with the corn cob as it swung back and forth and my father milked cows. He also gave me a corncob toy for my kitty when I moved in a new apartment.



CHEESE BOX. Those containing process cheese ranged in size from two to five pounds. Dad stored nails, bolts, nuts, and screws in three such wood boxes in his shop.



CISTERN. A large tank above or below ground, for storing water. A former owner made my father's cistern by digging a hole under the dining room floor and lining it with cement. The cistern water was soft, making it ideal for washing clothes, but it couldn't be used for drinking water. The drinking water was pumped directly from the well. A dipper was kept nearby for quick refreshment.

My grandmother wrote in 1947, "Stanley helped Evert clean the cistern. Was it ever needed. And it needed mending, too. Evert had cement at home so he fixed it."

COOK STOVE. A kitchen stove heated with wood or other local fuel. In Nebraska, a young Mainquist child gathered corncobs from the hog pen for the cookstove. One time my grandfather warned my father, "If you miss any, you'll have to wear your mother's glasses."

A reservoir stored hot water heated from cooking and baking. A compartment above the stove kept food warm if case chores ran late..

CORN PLANTER (HAND). While each seed was planted separately with a hand corn planter, the farmer didn't need to stoop. My sister Laurie and my Dad planted sweet corn with his hand corn planter. She still has the corn planter.

CREAM SEPARATOR. The cream separator separated the cream from the milk via centrifugal force, similar to the wring cycle in a modern washing machine. The farmer turned the crank, creating centrifugal motion inside the separator. The crank had to be turned a particular speed for the cream to separate.

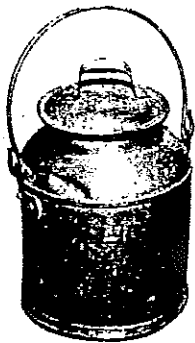
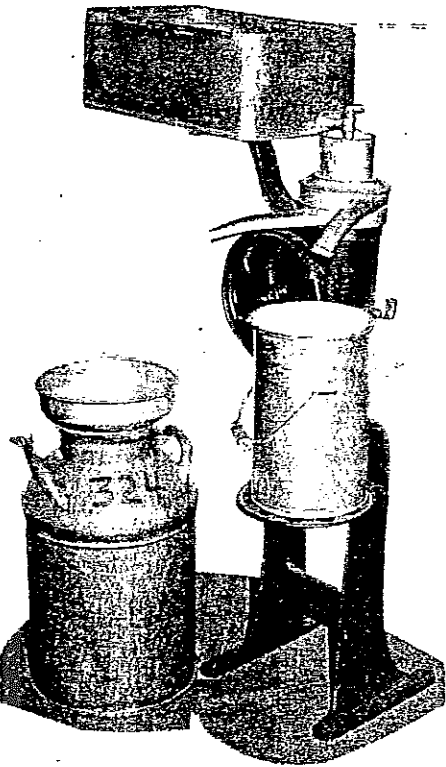
The Mainquist men usually complained more about washing the cream separator than cleaning the manure out the barn although in other families farm wives washed the cream separator.

Cream Can. The cream from the separator was poured into cream cans--usually eight or ten gallons in size. To help the creamery keep the cans sorted, each farmer had his own number on his cream cans.

Milk Can. The milk for family use was poured into a special milk can with a tight lid. When my dad was a boy, the milk can was lowered in the well pit with a rope. It was his job to fetch it before meals and return it afterwards. The other skim milk was fed to the hogs or calves.

CUTTER. Another term for a sleigh similar to ones illustrated on Christmas cards. My dad got his first cutter from a neighbor, George Buskey, for about ten dollars.

DARNING. My mother darned (or mended) my father's green cotton work socks by interweaving darning cotton across the hole. Sometimes



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she put a light bulb in the sock to facilitate darning. My thrifty mother quit darning socks only when darning cotton was no longer sold in Buffalo.

DIPPER. A metal drinking utensil shaped like a small saucepan with a long handle. A thirsty person lowered the dipper in a pail of water, took a drink and then re-hung it on a nail nearby for the next thirsty person.

DISHPAN. My grandmother's dishpan was a large steel basin with a diameter of 15 inches. The hole in the rim was used to hang the pan on the wall.

EGG MONEY. The chickens and the eggs were often the farm homemaker's responsibility. She sold the eggs at the general store in town to pay for staples, such as flour, sugar, and bluing.

FLY NET. Before fly spray for animals, farmers used fly nets to scare away insects the horses couldn't reach with their tails. Its construction allowed the horses to stay cool. My father's fly net from loose leather strips was laced together at intervals.

GRAIN WAGON. A wagon with a long, narrow box and high sides. At the end is a sliding door for dispensing the grain. A buckboard (seat with a spring) balanced on the edges of front facing the horses.

Dad favored this wagon to keep children from falling out during a ride.

HAYING WITH HORSES. After the hay was cut and dried, a crew on the ground would pitch the hay with a big fork onto the hayrack pulled by horses. A person on the hay wagon would spread the hay to keep the load even and tromp it down to keep it in place. Dad said, "If you were throwing up, you wanted to throw it with the wind."

Then the hay would be hauled to the barn. The hayfork team (two horses) was hitched to a long rope and pulley which was connected to a big fork. The fork came down and grabbed a load of hay, and the horses moved away from the barn and pulled the hay up. Then the hayers in the barn pulled the hay rop down a track on the ceiling and dropped the hay in the right place. Next the hay was spread evenly in the barn.

Dad's cousin, Edna Williams, said, "My sister Josie and I worked in the hay mow. We had to spread the hay. That was hot work, but mother was real good. She always had lemonade and something for us to eat when we would come down with a load."

HOUSE PARTY. House parties were held in living rooms of farm homes because it was difficult to travel and easy to dance on the wood floors.

Dad recalled, "When I came here, people were going out a little bit more because they had cars. Before that, they had house parties. They couldn't go so far with the horses."

"Herman Westphal [a nearby neighbor] played the violin at house parties. Art Marshall would play the banjo, they'd have fun, and the people would

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dance. Ottens [other close neighbors] were the only ones who had house parties. Germans had a lot of house parties. They'd dance and have beer. Ottens were German."

ICE CREAM MAKER. The Axel Mainquists shared ice cream with Hulda's sister's (Anna's) family every time Axel butchered. The saltpeter (a curing agent containing salt) left over from the butchering was packed in the outer perimeter of the ice cream maker to keep the cream-sugar mixture cold. The ice would come from town or perhaps a neighbor's ice house in the summer.

LAVA SOAP. Mom kept this pumice-based soap on the sink in the utility room--the entry room. Farm wives often organized their homes with a sink in the entry room so the men could wash up before they got the rest of the house dirty. Dad even took off his coveralls and hung them on the cellar door and removed his workshoes before entering the kitchen. When I scrubbed the utility room floor on Saturday mornings, I always swept up a pile of dirt.

LICENSE PLATES. Farmers saved their car and truck license plates because they bent easily without breaking. This was handy for repairing corners. My dad thought they were so useful he saved twenty license plates dating back to 1954. (I had thought my mother was the saver of the family.)

MILK SCALE. My father hung his milk scale from the manure carrier rail and hung a single cow's milk from a hook on the bottom of the scale. The pounds of milk measured her production. If a cow's production was the lowest of the herd and we needed meat, Dad had her butchered.

Dad let me hang a calf pail on the bottom hook on the milk scale so I could weigh the cats. One big Tom weighed over 20 pounds.

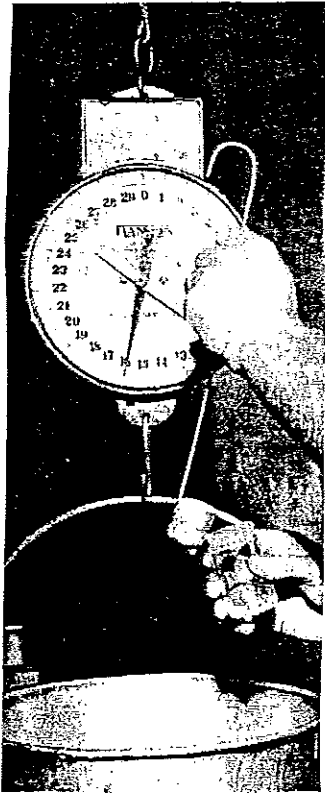
MILK STOOL. Farmers sit on stools when they milk their cows. My father built his from scrap lumber. He preferred a three-legged stool because it enabled him to lean into the cow, thus making it more difficult for her to kick him. Being kicked at 6:00 on a cold winter morning was sometimes enough to make a Swede swear out loud.

OVERALL POCKETS. My dad's overall pockets contained a stainless steel pocket watch, a pocket knife, a red or blue handkerchief, and Wrigley's Doublemint gum along with mostly rusty nails, bolts or screws he happened to pick up. A good deal of dirt and hay accumulated, too. Mom and I always checked Dad's pockets before we washed his jeans.

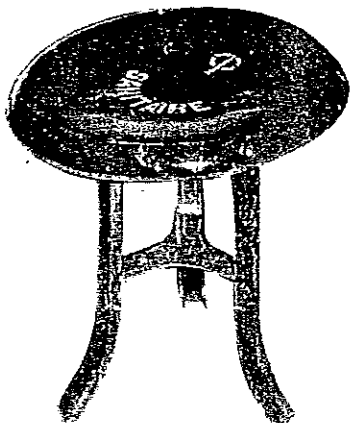
PANTRY. A closet off the kitchen with shelves and a storage cupboard. No food preparation took place in a pantry; it was strictly for storage.

PARTY LINES. In rural areas, people shared phone lines. Phone ring codes identified who the call was for. I believe my family's was two shorts, although the rings could be as much as four longs.

Lena Westphal, a neighbor of German lineage, sometimes spoke German so a rubber necker (a telephone eavesdropper) wouldn't understand her.



A scale used in conjunction with a sample for fat test is still in use on farms today.



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Another irritation was the length of conversation between teenage girls. Like rubber neckers, the teenage girls could not be stopped..

ROOT CELLAR. A room below ground level outside the house. Home-canned food, carrots, potatoes and other root vegetables were stored there because it was cool. A root cellar served as shelter during a tornado.

RUG BEATER. This graceful-looking tool was used to beat dirt out of rugs. During spring cleaning, the rug was draped on a clothesline, and a child was assigned to beat it.

SHIVAREE. Neighbors serenaded newlyweds after chores. They kept singing until the groom gave them ice cream or beer money. My mother and father were shivareed after their honeymoon in 1952.

SHOCKS. A group of sheaves (corn, cane, oats, or wheat) stacked vertically with their heads together in a field.

Dad sometimes raised cane and shocked it. It was hard work, even by my father's standards. He sometimes asked Allen Buskey, a strong high school boy, to help him. (I went to country school with Allen and his brother Russell. My parents thought highly of both of them.)

In *Threshing Days: The Farm Paintings of Lavern Kammerude*. Chester Garthwaite writes, "A good worker could shock from eight to ten acres [of oats] per day. The shocks were often designed in a different manner depending on when threshing would begin--that is on whether the farm was scheduled first or last in the threshing run rotation. If the threshing was to begin soon, a six- or seven-bundle shock was used to speed drying."

"However, if it would be several weeks before the threshers reached a farm, the "nine-bundle shock" was used. This involved placing three pairs of bundles in a row, then one on each side as a brace, then a ninth bundle as a "cap." This last bundle rested on top of the other eight and was spread out to cover the heads of the upstanding bundles. These shocks would stand lots of bad weather with only the cap bundle deteriorating."

(Note: *Threshing Days* has beautiful paintings of non-mechanized rural life as well as detailed description. The book, as well as some of the pictures are available from Zeke Garthwaite, P.O. Box 11, Blanchardville, WI 53516 (608/523-4849). Many of the prints hang in rural nursing homes. Either the prints or the book would be wonderful presents for farm elders.

STORM WINDOWS. In the fall, the screens were replaced with glass storm windows to stop the cold from entering the house.

STRAW HATS. Farmers and their sons wore straw hats to do hot outdoor farm work. I bought one as a gift for my father at the local department store, Burkland's.

My father's nephew, Vance Mainquist, told me his family and neighbors

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threw their hats in the threshing machine at the end of threshing to celebrate the end of a summer of hard work.

SULKY PLOW. A farmer walked behind a walking plow with his hands on the handles and the lines tied behind his back. In contrast, a sulky plow provided a seat and there could be more than one bottom.

Dad's young mule team, Pat and Pearl, would not stop, contrary to the stereotype of stubborn mules who don't start. Dad borrowed a sulky plow for a low, muddy field. After Pat and Pearl pulled the plow one row in that field, they stopped.

TOILET PAPER. Montgomery Wards or Sears catalogs.

TUGS. The chains connecting farm equipment to the harness. If they came loose, the driver and his passengers were in danger. Consequently, my father took an extra step in securing his tugs for added safety.

TWITCH. Dad used a twitch to control a horse to avoid being kicked or bitten when doing something painful to the animal. The twitch was a short loop of rope attached to a short piece of wood.

The rope was slipped around the horse's upper lip and twisted. If the horse misbehaved, the rope tightened, causing great pain. Dad had me hold the twitch once. She didn't move, and she wasn't angry with Dad after the twitch was removed. I was proud that Dad asked me to help.

WASHBOARD. Sometimes refers to the ridges in gravel roads during drought. It was common during the Depression.

WINDMILL. The windmill pumped water mostly for animal use. On the highest point on the farm, the wheel with the blades towered above the trees and caught every breeze. The wind turned the wheel. The wheel turned a crank, lifting the pump rod up and down. The pump, in turn, pulled the water from the well and into the watering trough. No engineer, Dad simply liked the clacking sound of the windmill as he walked to the barn for chores in the morning.

One Christmas Eve, George Buskey, a neighbor, asked my dad to fix his windmill. Since the top part was frozen, it wasn't pumping any water for his cows. Climbing the top of a windmill was a young man's job, and Dad was a young man. He said he'd do it the next day.

Dad had to chip ice away on every step up the ladder of the windmill as well as the platform at the top before he could fix the bolts. He climbed down, grateful he hadn't slipped or fallen. George came out of the house to thank him.

"I watched the cows last night at midnight for a sign," George casually mentioned.

"What did the cows do?" Dad was puzzled.

"Oh, they turned their heads a little to the left."

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That conversation made every slippery step a story.

These photographs are from a glossy booklet called "Dairy Collectibles" published by W. D. Hoards of Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin. The outside cover has a drawing of a dipper.