

# Country Neighbor

Agriculture and Rural Living Quarterly



## 'Killer' goats, Page 6

Dallas County sisters MaKayla Bentz, pictured, and Nicole Simpson enjoy raising goats, some of which they have lovingly christened with the names of famous murderers.



## History lives on, Page 3

The Broken-Arrow Arena in rural Polk County is home to numerous relics from the past, all maintained by owner Ronnie Wilson.



## Ag experience, Page 8

Cheyenne Bouldin brings years of agriculture education and knowledge to her new role as soil conservationist in Dallas County.



## Restoring memories, Page 9

Brighton residents Lou and Christa Lairmore are remodeling their farmhouse, which has been a family gathering place for many years.



## Mutton Hollow revival, Page 12

A longtime Webster County club keeps chugging along, thanks to seasoned members and newcomers.

Also featured in this issue: Columns by Jim Hamilton and Slim Randles.

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# JIM HAMILTON • OZARKS RFD

# SLIM RANGLES • HOME COUNTRY

## The old farm in winter

## Must have been the weather

It's been nigh 65 years since my first winter on our family farm near Elkland, and the deeper my memories of that first and subsequent winters slip into the past, the more they seem someone else's stories.



But, they were truly mine, those winters on the farm of yore, hard but precious times shared with my dad and brothers. I can yet picture our string of Jersey milk cows in their stanchions, we boys crouched on stools under their taut udders, milk pails squeezed between our knees.

niences finding themselves hiking after supper to an "airish" outhouse halfway between the house and the barn. But, I was young and eager for adventure. The old farm in winter was certainly that — adventure.

The music of streams of milk being squirted into our buckets still resonates in my mind, while the mingled odors of cows, manure, grain and aespedeza hay fill my senses.

They tell us those were the good old days, the late 1950s and early '60s. I guess they were, but they were especially hard old days for Mom and Dad as they struggled to pay for the farm and raise us boys (just three in number until December 1958).

At first it was just a flickering lantern that lit the milking parlor, but later dusty incandescent bulbs, while darkness settled on the barn lot outside the open door. Just inside the yard gate — on the path to the house — sat a 10-gallon milk can with a strainer in its neck, where we poured every bucket of the Jerseys' frothy, yellow milk.

Most tangible vestiges of those winters and the old farm are gone today. Mom and Dad have long passed; the brothers four — now just two — and the farm, itself, now belong to someone else.

A light from the kitchen window told us Mom was home from her job as a medical technologist in Springfield, already preparing the supper from the fixin's she had picked up on the way home. Probably pork steak and creamed corn again, we reckoned. It would be ready by the time we were done milking and tossing loose hay down from the loft.

And the experiences of my youth, well, maybe they belong to the farm as much as to me. Maybe that's why I look back on those winters as if they are stories of someone else — or maybe "someone else" is just an earlier version of me.

It's all my story, as I look back on it, now. But it might just as easily be an episode of "The Waltons" television show or a story I once read in The Saturday Evening Post. So it seems these 60 years hence, a story of someone else.

Reckon I'll just have to go back to the old farm in winter in my mind one more time to know.

Were it not for the bucksaw scar on my left hand, I might not believe it myself. I remember everything about those first, hard winters on the farm — hunting cows and milking in the dark, cutting wood at night and hauling it to the house on a sled fitted with an orange crate.

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It was especially hard that first winter — the winter I turned 10 — for boys accustomed to modern conve-

It began the way most miracles do: by accident or the hand of God, take your pick.



It might have been the weather, at least partly. For winter, the day had been almost balmy and warm. You know, sweaters instead of heavy coats. No mittens in sight.

he wasn't bad at it. Dud got out his accordion and joined in the fun.

Then there were still some Christmas lights on the stores, and that little bunch of Girl Scouts out raising money in front of the Read Me Now bookstore. Jasper Blankenship was inside going through the books to fortify his cabin's library for winter and sat, listening with a smile to the girls as they laughed and waited for customers that weren't really coming along too briskly.

By this time, it was getting dark in the street, and several people turned headlights on the area in front of the bookstore. Older people had joined the Girl Scouts dancing in the streets, and Delbert Chin from the Chinese restaurant across the street sent one of his girls out with a huge pot of coffee and paper cups.

"It's a shame there aren't more people out today for those girls," said Sarah McKinley, behind the counter. Jasper nodded and paid for his books, then walked out to the truck. He stopped and thought for a while, then brought out his violin, rosined the bow, and walked over to the sidewalk next to the girls. "You girls like fiddle music?" he asked.

The party was on. It lasted until the cars' headlights began to wear down the batteries, but during its brief lifetime, the street dance and midwinter party cast a blessing on us all.

"Sure do." And Jasper began playing fiddle tunes. Carla Martinez was driving down the street, headed for the Soup 'R Market when she saw the Girl Scouts dancing with one another in front of their table to Jasper's music. Before he'd had time to finish that tune, she'd returned with her guitar and joined the fun. Jim Albertson, the local school principal, showed up with a harmonica, and

It must have been the weather. Brought to you by the genuine cowboy music and musings of Steve Cormier up in New Mexico's Sandia Mountains. Check him out at [stevecormier.net](http://stevecormier.net).



**Country Neighbor**

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# History lives on

The past comes to life in modern times at Broken-Arrow Arena

Story and photos by Linda Simmons  
Bolivar Herald-Free Press

**W**hen you drive through the gates at Broken-Arrow Arena in rural Polk County, you feel like you're pulling into a movie set where the early 1900s meet up with the 21st century. The combination makes for a very interesting tour.

The cabin, arena, barn and adjoining buildings are all hand-built and filled with relics from the past, alongside some modern conveniences. And owner Ronnie Wilson is proud to show all the old mixed in with the new.

Most things at the arena he has made by hand from things that would otherwise be discarded. Everything from buildings to old-fashioned gas station pumps, metal signs from old buildings to old album covers still holding the long-ago vinyl records.

You can easily spend time in modern comfort but feel the past still living on. All in all, you don't have to be a cowboy to enjoy a tour of Broken-Arrow Arena, but you will get roped into all the history and interesting artifacts that Wilson has accumulated over the years.

The Bolivar Herald-Free Press recently visited with Wilson about his ranch and his collection of relics.

## About the barn, the first building at Broken-Arrow Arena.

"With the help of my friend, Larry Mitchell, I first built this barn in the early 1990s," Wilson said.

They built the barn together, and now 30 years later the barn is filled with items from years gone by. There is a Lonesome Dove area with a table to sit and have a cold drink and visit, along with a TV to watch.

"One of my favorite things in the barn is the sign from Lonesome Dove," Wilson said.

The sign has the carvings that were on The Hat Creek Cattle Company, and Wilson went on to explain that the Latin that is engraved at the bottom held a special meaning to Gus, from the Lonesome Dove series.

"Uva Uvam Vivendo Varia Fit broke down means, 'When a grape sees another grape it becomes one.' Which



Ronnie Wilson stands in front of one of the Polk County courthouse doors that opens into the cabin. The door still sports the original paint, or what is left of it, on the one side.



Ronnie Wilson working on nailing the logs in place. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



Ronnie Wilson gets a helping hand from his brother, Jimmy Wilson, putting the metal roof on the cabin. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



Ronnie Wilson sits in the Lonesome Dove area of the barn.



The Broken-Arrow Arena and the judges building.



The hand-built cabin sits high on a hill overlooking the arena and the long-horned cattle.



Ronnie Wilson in the tack room of the barn, a room that holds many memories for him.

of, the cabin is now home to two of the original Polk County courthouse doors. The Polk County courthouse was built in 1906, and at some point these doors were stored away in a barn and found by John Shuler.

“John donated those doors, there were four of them, to the Morrisville Lions Club,” Wilson said. “When they tore the Lions Club building down, Wendell Painter gave me two of the doors. They are being put to good use today.”

Wilson went on to say he doesn’t know what happened to the other two doors but hopes they are being used like his two are.

“Funny thing about those doors, I had only gotten them about a week before the anniversary of the courthouse was celebrated, and the doors were mentioned in the article in the paper,” Wilson said.

**About the other buildings.**

“I built them all,” Wilson said, “and decorated them all with relics, as well as making them all fully functional.”

The judging station that overlooks the Broken-Arrow Arena was used to watch and judge ropers. The arena is not used at this time for competitions but is frequently used for practice and friends just having a good time doing what they love to do.

The Dry Bean might appear to be an old-fashioned outhouse, but it has modern facilities.

The Candy Mountain Stable got its name from the movie “O Brother, Where Art Thou?” and the song “Hard Rock Candy Mountain.”

“When I was building the cabin, it was up on a really big hill and I always called it Candy Mountain,” Wilson said, “so that’s why I ended up naming the stable Candy Mountain Stable.”

according to some translators means, ‘A grape changes color when it sees another grape,’” Wilson said.

It’s thought by some that the writer of Lonesome Dove, Larry McMurtry, felt that applied to the journey the cowboys took on the Lonesome Dove trail and also can still apply to people today.

The tack room houses the saddles and all the gear for horseback riding and roping. On the porch, you can sit back and watch the cattle and tie your horse up just like the cowboys did. It’s a barn now used for fish fries and friends sitting around watching races and passing the day. With modern facilities it is a comfortable and fun place to spend some time.

**History behind the cabin that sits on the hill.**

“I built that little cabin on my property about 2 1/2 miles from where it is now, all with a chain saw because there wasn’t any power out there,” Wilson said.

The little cabin sits high on a hill and overlooks the arena and the long-horned cattle on the ranch. It now has power, making it possible to keep it warm, have a TV to watch and a nice little porch to relax on.

Something that Wilson is very proud

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Old-fashioned gas pumps. Only people of a certain age would remember using this type of pump. Ronnie Wilson has built three of them using items from various salvaged materials.



Ronnie Wilson stands by the back porch of the barn.



All the buildings were built by Wilson, with a little help from family and friends along the way.



The entrance and the back porch of the barn, both entrances full of history.

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# Ted Bundy is dead, again

Dallas County sisters enjoy raising goats, some with serial killer names

By Joy Beamer  
joyb@buffaloreflex.com

**T**heodore Robert Bundy was an American serial killer. He kidnapped, raped and murdered numerous young women and girls during the 1970s, confessing to 30 homicides committed in seven states between 1974 and 1978. He died Jan. 24, 1989. However, Ted Bundy, the goat from the Dallas County Bentz Farm, had a short, happy life with sisters MaKayla Bentz and Nicole Simpson. Ted Bundy, the goat, was not convicted of any crime.

Bentz has a strange interest in serial killers from the 1900s. She names all her new goats after famous serial murderers. Jack and Jane, full-blooded Nigerian dwarf goats, are the latest arrivals at the farm. The male goat is named after Jack the Ripper. Bentz watched a docudrama that suggested Jack the Ripper might have been a woman; thus, Jane became the name for the female.

Bentz names her bunnies after candy bars, such as Milky Way. Her dogs receive names after favorite songs: Jolene and Stormy. The small farm is filling up with all types of farm animals, fulfilling a young woman's dream of owning her very own farm.

### City sisters to country goat farmers

The sisters grew up in Springfield but loved visiting with family in the Buffalo area. They got the bug to live the country life in Dallas County and finally persuaded their parents to move to the rural area while they were attending high school. They claim they will never leave the country life or each other in close sisterhood. Nicole is married now, but the women share ownership and care of the goats.

The newest members of the herd are registered Nigerian dwarf goats. Bentz explained she never imagined how much paperwork is involved in registering an animal. Nevertheless, the sisters have learned a lot. As a result, she intends on registering full-blooded animals to keep a reasonable price per head if she decides to sell or breed.

### Why own Nigerian dwarf goats?

A Nigerian dwarf goat is smaller than most breeds, making care easier because they can live in smaller areas and be lifted by one person. In addition, a Nigerian dwarf goat can fit in a large dog kennel for transport.

Some people own goats for the milk. The goats can produce 1 to 2 quarts of milk a day. Research shows that standard-size goats have butterfat around 3 percent to 3.5 percent and Nigerians average 6.5 percent. The butterfat is almost twice the rate.

Sometimes, the milk makes soap instead of drinking/cooking milk. Goats are sustainable by selling kids, milk, cheeses and soaps. Many other folks raise goats for the meat. One advantage is they can breed year-round. In addition, they eat less than other dairy animals, making them affordable for a pet or livestock.

Goats produce fertilizer for gardens and can be staked to clear leaves and tall grass. The sisters have



MaKayla Bentz and Nicole Simpson are city sisters who turned into country farmers who love farm life. REFLEX PHOTO BY JOY BEAMER



Momma goat Camille and Grover keep dry in a shelter. They are registered fainting goats. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

collars for some goats for placing on a leash to eat off leaves on the edge of the yard. The forest that surrounds Bentz's home is heavily wooded with leaves aplenty and the goats' favorite food.

Lastly, Nigerian dwarf goats are adorable and make caretaking enjoyable.

### Are fainting goats nervous?

The sisters also own fainting goats. They are not ner-



Billy is a bully who reigns over the males' pen. He likes being dirty. Billy doesn't care if he is nasty and will roll in the dirt, making a muddy mess. REFLEX PHOTO BY JOY BEAMER

vous but fall over sometimes when startled. A fainting goat is an American breed of meat goat with myotonia congenita that affects the muscles used for movement when presented with a sudden stimulus. Sometimes the condition is called fainting goat syndrome.

Fainting goats don't faint, despite their name. The goats freeze up and tumble over when they get scared. When humans get scared, they tense up for a split second and then relax. A fainting goat stays tense, causing



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the goat to stiffen and sometimes fall over. The fainting goat will not lose consciousness or feel pain from the condition.

Bentz said that historically the fainting goats were used among a larger herd. When startled, the goat would stiffen up and fall over, sacrificing itself for the safety of the rest of the herd.

**What is the day-to-day care for the goats?**

The goats are spread out into three separate pens to deter any unwanted breeding. The full-blooded Nigerian dwarf goats, Jack and Jane, are penned together. The ladies, Pearl and Camille, live together in the second pen, while the men, Billy and Grover, slug it out over grain in the last penned area. Because Billy is a bully, he is bugging Grover all day long. Grover is not fully grown. His horns are starting to grow now as a 1-year-old.

The panels for the pens move to keep one area from getting too muddy. Goats keep the grass trimmed. The goats eat some grain once a day, along with the leaves, with hay fed about every three days. Simpson described the goats as calm and low maintenance.

Eventually, the sisters might sell a goat or two for profit down the road. For example, a Nigerian dwarf goat can bring around \$300 apiece. But, for now, their goats are pets and keep the sisters busy as a hobby.

Camille is a registered fainting goat and plans to serve as the “momma” to future baby goats or kids. A baby female is called a doeling, and a baby male is called a buckling. A goat’s gestational period is around five and a half months.

**Working together to raise the animals**

The sisters have worked together for several years on and off the farm to help Bentz manage daily chores. No one would guess by looking at her, but Bentz has severe rheumatoid arthritis with the diagnosis in high school. Simpson has been at her side, along with their mom, to take Bentz to the doctor and help manage the limitations that rheumatoid arthritis brings.

Simpson does all the heavy lifting for the mini-farm to keep Bentz from experiencing an inflammation flare. The 15-acre farm is home to several animals. Bentz has plans of increasing livestock with more and more animals. Bentz hopes to add another 20 acres in the future, but putting up fences is the No. 1 priority for now.



MaKayla Bentz is scolding the male goat, Billy, the bully. REFLEX PHOTO BY JOY BEAMER



Pearl is a fat and sassy mixed goat. She is family-friendly. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



Nigerian dwarf goats Jack and Jane love eating leaves.



Mr. Blue Eyes is one of the serial killer goats. Jack is a full-blooded registered Nigerian dwarf goat.

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# New USDA NRCS soil conservationist

## Brings ag experience, education to role

By Jim Hamilton  
jhamilton000@centurytel.net

**C**heyenne Bouldin, the newest face in the Dallas County U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service office in Buffalo, is no stranger to Ozarks agriculture or Dallas County.

Local junior livestock show exhibitors and supporters may recall twin red-haired girls who garnered multiple championship awards in the meat goat division of the Dallas County Junior Livestock Show from 2008 through 2011. At times they dominated the photo pages of the newspaper's "Gallery of Champions," exhibiting both goats and swine.

That comely championship duo was Cheyenne and Dakota Arthur, and a decade later they're still championing agricultural interests as representatives of the U.S. Department of Agriculture — Cheyenne as an NRCS soil conservationist and Dakota as a Farm Service Agency program technician in Polk County.

During those peak years as a junior exhibitor, Cheyenne was a 4-H and FFA member at Dadeville, where their mother, Sandra, moved the family before the girls started sixth grade.

Cheyenne was active in Dadeville FFA, competing on FFA knowledge, soils, meats and livestock judging teams, and advancing to state in knowledge and meats. She also held a succession of chapter offices, advancing to president for the 2009-10 school year.

Following graduation she attended Missouri State University's Darr College of Agriculture, where she



Cheyenne Bouldin PHOTO BY JIM HAMILTON

was awarded her Bachelor of Science degree in animal science and ag business in 2013. Two years later she earned her Master of Science degree in plant science.

With university degrees in hand, Cheyenne worked for more than two years with the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service out of Jefferson City, while continuing to maintain horses and cattle on her mother's farm at Flemington. She next worked for a short while at the Marshfield MFA, and from April

into September 2021 was a USDA inspector at Missouri Prime Beef Packers at Pleasant Hope.

In her new role with USDA in Buffalo, Cheyenne is still learning the ropes under the mentorship of NRCS veterans Mark Green and Adam Coulter from Greene County and Paula Welter in Polk County. She also shares office space with Dallas County Soil and Water Conservation District veterans Matt Hale and Debbie Henderson, who administer state conservation plans and practices similar to the federal programs on resource management.

In addition to working for NRCS, Cheyenne still has horses and livestock with her husband, Lucas Bouldin, on a farm at Phillipsburg.

Modern-day cowboy Lucas also rides pens for Springfield Livestock Marketing Center on west Interstate 44, as well as for Mid Missouri Stockyards in Lebanon. When he's not doing that, he is owner Shawn Gordon's "No. 1 man" at Shires for Hire Carriage Co. at Brighton. Cheyenne, with a similar affinity for horses, also helps handling the massive Shire draft animals.

Why, with her extensive experience and education, would Cheyenne choose a USDA slot in Buffalo?

"The job incorporates my whole background," she said. And though the job has its share of paperwork, "What I like most is I can get outside, and not be stuck in an office."

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# Restoring a hundred years of memories

Brighton farmers decide to remodel instead of tear down



The over-a-century-old farmhouse rests to the right of the property, while cattle and a century-old barn sit to the left. Around 95 acres of land expand in the background. PHOTO BY BRITTANY GILBERT



Lou and Christa Lairmore decide to remodel their families' century-old farm. PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRISTA LAIRMORE

By **Brittany Gilbert**  
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**I**n an economy that's forcing families to consider tearing down their old farmhouses, Brighton farmers Lou and Christa Lairmore have decided to remodel their farmhouse that's been around for over a hundred years.

### The century farm

Established in 1902, this Missouri century farm is approximately 95 acres, Christa Lairmore said. Her grandfather's uncle Frank Francka acquired the farm immediately, she said, and then her grandfather John Francka purchased the farm from him in the early 1940s.

He and his wife, Irene Francka, owned the farm, raising beef cattle with their four children — Frank Francka living in the house for a while.

Remembered as a "strong, independent woman," Irene Francka had hair with so many curls that she earned the nickname "Curley," Christa Lairmore said.

John Francka died before Christa Lairmore was born, so she never had the chance to meet him, she said.

"The house has always been Curley's house," she said.

Irene Francka lived by herself on the farm and worked for several years on the square in Springfield at Savage Juliette. Christa Lairmore said her grandmother could also "corral eight grandkids overnight on her own, made crafts (and) had a large garden."

On top of those skills, Irene Francka could even cook a feast for over 30 people, Christa Lairmore said, something she had to do after her grandkids began their own families.

Christa Lairmore said she remembers going to her grandmother's house "nearly every holiday and various Sunday lunches."

"She was an amazing cook," she added. "My favorites were her fried chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, her homemade rolls and any dessert she made."

She said she is certain the grandchildren all had their own favorites.

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John and Irene Francka PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRISTA LAIRMORE



Irene "Curley" Francka PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRISTA LAIRMORE

Some of the best memories she has, she said, center around Christmas. The family would gather around on Christmas Eve for one of her grandmother's huge suppers, and later the grandchildren would sleep over and awake to Christmas Day curiosities over what Santa had brought them.

After everyone opened their presents, Irene — or Curley — Francka would cook a feast for breakfast, which Christa Lairmore said she's convinced is the reason breakfast is her favorite meal.

Lou and Christa Lairmore began dating around 40 years ago, she added.

"The first time I took him to Curley's, he was speechless," she said. "He had never seen so much food and so many people in a small house. He couldn't believe Curley always greeted you at the door and never seemed stressed cooking in that little kitchen."

She said she remembers him talking with his friends and family about the feast-sized meal and how good it was. She said he "never complained about going to Curley's."

"I think I really started to appreciate how amazing she was when I looked at her from Lou's perspective," she said. "It was normal everyday life with Curley to me. I thought everyone surely had a 'Curley.' I'm pretty sure Lou was sorely disappointed after we were married and he discovered I didn't inherit Curley's cooking gene."

In 2007, Irene Francka died at 95 years old.

After her passing, Christa Lairmore's parents, Dale and Linda Francka, purchased the farm while still living on their own farm. They began using the house as a rental while raising cattle on the land, she said.

Her parents' farm adjoined her grandmother's, and today her sister and brother-in-law Terri and Ryan Schaffitzel now own it.

After her father died, she and her husband took ownership of her grandmother's farm in 2021.

**The remodel**

Lou and Christa Lairmore were already using Irene Francka's farm to raise beef cattle when they decided to relocate there.

"We then had to decide what to do about the house: tear it down or remodel it," Christa Lairmore said.

Upon inspecting the property, they realized the best location for a house happened to be right where the original one was located.


"However," she said, "it seemed strange to put a new one where Curley's had been."

After hearing about T Seiferd Designs and their work on flipping farmhouses, they decided to call the company to come to the property and give them an opinion.

She said her and her husband's question was, "Was the structure sound

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The signs reads, "Missouri Century Farm, Dale and Linda Francka, Family Farm Established in 1902, a program of University of Missouri Extension College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, Missouri Farm Bureau."

PHOTO BY BRITTANY GILBERT

**NEWSPAPERS HAVE YOUR BACK**



Bolivar Herald-Free Press • Buffalo Reflex  
Cedar County Republican • Christian County Headliner News  
The Marshfield Mail



Pictured here is the kitchen Irene "Curley" Francka would cook her family feasts in. PHOTO BY BRITTANY GILBERT

enough, and could it be done within our budget?"

The company confirmed it was possible and even sprouted "some awesome ideas," she said, including repurposing some of the original material.

"Lou and I are very excited with the prospect of keeping the house and living on the farm because we both had so many great memories there," she said. "It's not often you get the opportunity to live where your grandparents and father lived."

Christa Lairmore said she and her husband are looking forward to spending the time teaching their grandchildren about the farm, and she said they happen to already love the cows.

"Curley was a special grandma who made everyone feel welcome and loved having her grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchild around," she said. "We hope to create similar memories for our grandchildren on what will always be known as Curley's Farm."

**A message to farmers facing a similar decision**

Christa Lairmore said when families are looking at whether to remodel or tear down their farmhouses, make a list of pros and cons.

Think through the options, she said. "Get professionals to inspect the property and make sure the bones are good," she added. "Set a budget and see if the work can be done within the budget."

If a family is considering tearing down the farmhouse, consider the additional costs of "taking it down, disposing of the materials and preparing the site for a new build," she said.

For her and her husband, the right decision was to preserve the memories of the house with some additions that come with a remodel.

"It will be neat to tell my grandchildren that their great-great-grandma and -grandpa and their great-grandpa lived here," she said.



Pictured here is the room over 30 family members would gather in during holiday meals. PHOTO BY BRITTANY GILBERT



Lou and Christa Lairmore raise beef cattle on Curley's Farm, next to a barn that is over a hundred years old and set to be torn down. PHOTO BY BRITTANY GILBERT



The back of the century farmhouse faces more acres of land. PHOTO BY BRITTANY GILBERT



The front of the farmhouse faces the area where the beef cattle are kept. PHOTO BY BRITTANY GILBERT

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# Mutton Hollow revival

Longtime Webster County club keeps going

By Alyssa Andrews  
alyssaa@marshfieldmail.com

In 1936, a group of women in rural Webster County began gathering monthly to quilt, craft and bake. The women would walk through the countryside and cross babbling creeks to get to one another's homes. The event easily became the highlight for rural women of Mutton Hollow Road and the encompassing area. In time, the ladies would be best known for using their talents in a neighborly way.

The group would eventually be dubbed the Neighborly Workers Club of Mutton Hollow. The ladies not only shared their homemaker talents with one another, but also with neighbors and those in need in their community. The club donated numerous quilts and baked goods to both the Good Samaritan Boys Ranch and Cox Health's children wards.

The club eventually grew so popular that land was donated to build their very own "club house." In 1967, the building sprung from the ground, and those small gatherings grew into large ones. The women would host music parties and potlucks for the community to raise funds for local charities. The space was also rented for events such as weddings, showers and parties. Eventually, the club became co-ed and known as the social hot spot for rural north-west Webster County.

However, like many things, time takes its toll. The club continued to meet monthly, but attendance dwindled as members left, moved or passed. Not to mention the building was burglarized and in need of multiple repairs. There was discussion of ending the club for good in 2019, however the current club president, Billie Cunningham, did not aim for that to happen.

"That was not going to happen," Cunningham explained. "If we had to keep it going with just my family, we would. Luckily, that didn't happen. Evelyn (his wife) invited neighbors and everyone she knew."



President and lifetime member Billie Cunningham (84) rocks the newest Neighborly Workers Club member, Emma Bass (2 months old). PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED BY MORGAN MARLER

In fact, Evelyn invited neighbors and residents all along Mutton Hollow Road and the surrounding area. Many invitations were met with excitement or curiosity about the little white building nestled about the hollow.

In the past year, membership has doubled and a number of repairs have been made to continue the longtime tradition of "club." Most recently, the members threw a large Christmas party Dec. 9. The event had 77 people in attendance, including old Saint Nick himself. The night was full of home-cooked meals and camaraderie, which the building had not seen in years.

"It wouldn't have been that way if we didn't start spreading the word," Cunningham said.

The Neighborly Workers of Mutton Hollow are hopeful that their efforts will revive an old tradition and encourage younger generations to stay community-oriented.

If interested in joining or learning more about the Neighborly Workers Club of Mutton Hollow, join their Facebook group "Mutton Hollow Memories."



LEFT: The Mutton Hollow ladies get the food ready for the club's Christmas party Dec. 9.

BELOW: A photo of the original members of the Mutton Hollow Neighborly Workers Club before a Sunday hayride.

Hazel (Pritchard) Tracy penned this heart-felt poem in 1936.

### "Our Little Club"

We've organized a little club  
In these grand old Ozark hills,  
Twice a month we meet with each other  
Doing things of right and good will.

Our motto it is "Be good neighbors,"  
And we're trying so hard that to be,  
Watch us at work on club meeting day,  
And that's the very first thing you will see.

Oh, how happy the days of our meetings!  
Oh, how glad we are to be here!  
And we try every time to do something  
That will help us for many a year.

Sometimes we are quilting or patching,  
Doing things that must be done,  
We joke, and tell pleasant stories,  
We have bushels and bushels of fun.

We always welcome visitors  
And wish they would join us too,  
It's just a "Grand get-together"  
Like real good neighbors do.

That little club is "The Neighborly Workers"  
And we love it with all of our heart,  
And we'll love it forever and ever  
Tho in years, from each other we must part.

A poem written by one of the original founders, Hazel (Pritchard) Tracy.



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