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Town of Eagle and Bovee family name strongly linked



Joan Holman

TOWN OF EAGLE — Before Wisconsin was a state or Waukesha one of its counties, a Bovee was farming the eastern half of section 25. There, a gravestone, engraved with "Jane Dodds Bovee — 1770-1844" attests to that fact.

A visit to the homestead on Highway 99 and a talk with James Bovee and his wife, Fern, roused memories linked with the town of Eagle and the Bovee family.

The town is an integral part of James Bovee's life — he served on the Town Board from 1933-73, with a one-year lapse, first as a supervisor and then as Town Chairman.

Bovee's memory sticks to facts as he says, "Those dates were interrupted. In 1934, I lost on a recount so I didn't serve for a year."

James Bovee was born on the homestead in 1895, a much quieter time when the normal noise along the road in front of his house came from horse drawn carriages. Today, it's far more common to hear motorcycles rounding the bend.

Bovee says it was his great-grandfather Mathias who came to the area and bought the original farm in 1843. The family consisted of nine children, five girls and four boys, and Mathias, mother, Jane. Her grave is located on the

see a lot of them at the dances held in the Masonic hall, Main Street (now an apartment complex). Then in 1912 there were more people and more changes brought on with the arrival of cars."

Harry Smart was the first to introduce the automobile to the village. His business was located where the present Chapman service station stands. In 1912 Bovee got his first car — a model T Ford — when his parents bought a Dodge touring car.

Instead of attending the local dances in the horse and buggy, Bovee drove. He says these gatherings were high points. It was there he met Fern Marty, his future wife.

She says, "I would kind of peek at Jamie. He was nice. But he didn't realize the difference between horse and car was gas. Often you'd see a man on the road carrying a can. It had to be Jamie."

The couple was married in 1922.

Eagleville school in 1929 was a much smaller version of today's institution. That's where Bovee's son and daughter attended with other children who would be part of the fall threshing "fun."

These threshing times were busy and friendly ones. The women

would be busy with the food their men and children would eat when the work was completed.

Fern remembers the fear of finding a red ear of corn.

"It meant the person couldn't kiss anyone. Now, of course, the hybrids have done away with that worry," she says.

In 1933, Bovee began his long term on the Town Board. He says only one other town resident ever served longer. That was Charlie Cruver, who was town clerk for 50 years.

Bovee says 1936 was the worst for snowfall in Waukesha County. Plowing was under county jurisdiction.

He says, "Eagle had its farmers and methods of snow removal when the county couldn't come. But in 1968-69, the town got its own plow. The county was turning roads back to the towns. We were ready."

Bovee says, "Towns do have responsibilities for residents. It used to be welfare in the 40s. I knew most of the people and any financial problems. So did Sherman Sprague, store owner. Those on relief would get a special package of candy among groceries. The regular customers didn't."

"The Town Board did solve

most problems," continued Bovee. "Its present location for this is the Village-Town Hall built in 1957. It also houses the fire equipment."

"As Eagle grew in population, so did other areas. I guess political power had to be more centralized. I certainly don't know many of Eagles expanded population and couldn't decide the relief problems as we did in the 40s."

One of the last things with which Bovee was involved as town chairman was Old World Wisconsin. Together with board members Tom Burton and Walter Sherer, the board approved the plan for the outdoor museum. Bovee said he feels this living museum is an asset to Eagle town and village. Tourists can view the homes of transplanted settlers who homesteaded in Wisconsin.

Bovee retired from farming not too long after he left the Town Board. His grandson, Scott, has taken over the homestead. Bovee and his wife have moved to Kiwanis Manor in East Troy.

Their leaving marks the end of an era in Eagle but only the start to understanding its history.

(Joan Holman is a correspondent for the Freeman who covers the southwest portion of Waukesha County.)

northeastern part of the property which is presently owned by a relative, David Steinke.

The original 300-acre farm had shrunk to 160 by the time Bovee started farming with his father.

"The explanation was," says Bovee, "Great Uncle Marvin H. Bovee. He had campaigned against capital punishment in Wisconsin. Grandfather Benedict Bovee had signed notes against property to help Marvin."

"In the mid 1800s, as Wisconsin claimed anti-capital punishment, a portion of the farm had to be sold to pay Marvin's debts. We have about 70 acres invested in this act."

Bovee recalls the Eagle of his early days, when the town's population was about 200.

"You knew everyone. You would