

# Shawano County's 243<sup>rd</sup> Barn Quilt Honors Shirley Kraeger

Mark, Kathy and Courtney Kraeger have sponsored Shawano County's 243rd barn quilt, called Shirley's Crest, now on display on their barn at W12625 Gerbig Road, Marion. The barn quilt was commissioned in honor of Shirley Felts Kraeger, matriarch of the Kraeger family, who, along with her grandson, Adam Kraeger, and her son Mark and his family, designed the quilt.

"This barn quilt will be an everlasting tribute for the entire family," Kathy Kraeger said. The "K" represents the Kraeger family, enhanced by the colors of the Green Bay Packers, which Courtney requested. The pine tree signifies Shirley's love of the beautiful tree farm owned by her brother, Lavern Felts, with the road symbolizing the family's love for travel and the many trips Shirley took with her family. The 4-H symbol is in memory of the many years Shirley was a 4-H leader, keeping her children involved in the many activities of that program. And, finally, the 14-point buck signifies a family of hunters, including Shirley and Medard. "Mark's largest trophy is 13 points, so we had to make this one 14," Kathy said.

## Farm History

On September 10, 1869, the 160-acre property was registered with the U.S. General Land office and ownership was granted to Joseph W. Perry and his heirs. Sometime between then and January 10, 1933, ownership was transferred to Harvey Luschow, who operated the feed mill in Marion. On that date, the property was transferred to Chas L. Bowers, including all personal property. Records are not complete, but the barn, house and out-buildings were probably erected sometime during that time, possibly in 1927, a date noted in the concrete of the house basement.

On April 1, 1936, Chas and Martha Bowers transferred ownership to Martin and Evelyn Radtke. On February 18, 1949, Martin filed an affidavit for registration of the property under the name of "Maple Lane Dairy Farm," for the use of owning and breeding registered Holstein cattle. Martin was Town Chairman for the Town of Grant and helped to build the existing Grant town hall on Highway M in Caroline. Evelyn was a McKinley 4-H leader for more than 25 years, serving with Shirley and her sister, Gladys Felts Kraeger Maahs.

The Radtkes operated the dairy farm with 40 cows and also housed the small calves there until the calves were about four months old. The calves were then moved to the second farm located on the west side of Gerbig Road and consisting of approximately 40 acres, currently owned by the Nohr family. In addition to the cattle kept in the lower north end of the barn, there were four horses kept in the lower south end in the stalls that still exist. In addition, a steer pen was located there to raise the family beef. The upper south barn housed about 100 laying chickens. The upper north end was used to store straw for bedding, with the balance used for hay. Milk was carried from the lower barn, up the stairs to the small room located on the south-west side of the barn, (currently where the Kraeger family dog resides). In that room, the milk was transferred into milk cans and carried outside to the water tank where it was kept cold. This was used until the milk house was built sometime in the early '50's, at which time an indoor cooler was used. A bulk tank was added to the milk house in 1968.

In addition to the barn, the farm contained a well house, tool shed, and grainery, which were taken down when the Kraegers purchased the property. The pig barn still stands, which housed about ten sows and 50-70 piglets. Another building on the main farm was the site of St. John's Church picnics for many years until the property was purchased by the Mielke family. Bill Radtke remembers his father having a harness-sewing machine in the basement of the home. What a great memory! There were two silos by the barn, but the west silo was removed later. The Radtkes continued to farm until 1970 when they moved to Shawano, and the property was purchased by Earl and Gertrude Mielke.

On June 9, 1975, Earl and Gertrude transferred ownership to E. H. Mielke and Sons, Inc. when the corporation was formed. They continued to operate as a dairy farm for a couple of months before moving the cows to the main Mielke farm. The Radtke farm was then used for heifers and hogs, as well as cropping the land for the animals on all the Mielke farms. The farmhouse was rented to Jake Krueger, followed by Dan Norton, and finally to Bill and Marian Tischauser, before Terry and Janet Mielke moved into the house upon their marriage in 1974.

In 1976, the Mielke family renovated the house, including converting the front porch into a dining room. The dirt floor in one room in the basement, where the Radtkes stored potatoes over the winter, was left intact. There is also a room on the west side of the basement with 8" walls that was used as a storm shelter and referred to by the Radtkes, and, ironically, by the Kraeger family, as the "bomb shelter." Terry and Jan lived there until 1985, after which the house was rented by Mark and Rae Lynn Mielke, who eventually moved north to the former Lawrence Verch farm. The property was then put up for sale and was purchased by Mark and Kathy Kraeger on January 3, 1992, with ownership being taken on February 22<sup>nd</sup> of that year. Included in that purchase were the house, small metal pole building/garage, and five acres of land. Over the past 21 years, the Kraegers have purchased the barn and additional acreage connected to the homestead, as well as acreage southeast and east of that property. In all, they currently have about 85 acres of the original Perry property.

"We especially want to thank Bill Radtke and Terry Mielke for sharing their memories of our home," Kathy said.

The barn quilt was painted by the Shawano County barn quilt committee and put on display by LeRoy and Keith Raddant of Raddant Electric in Shawano.

#