

County's 284th Barn Quilt is a Nebraska Windmill

Shawano County's 284th barn quilt is the official "Nebraska Windmill" block. It is displayed on the dairy farm of Richard (Rick) and JoAnne Fink and their daughter, Danielle, at N3130 State Highway 47, Bonduel.

JoAnne was raised on a dairy farm in Nebraska, so she integrated her Nebraska heritage into the quilt pattern with their love of country, thus the red, white, and blue colors. The windmill vanes on the barn quilt are shaped like the state of Nebraska. The Finks have an actual Dempster windmill on their farm that Rick brought back from Nebraska and erected on their farm as a gift for JoAnne.

In Nebraska, windmills are part of the landscape, an integral part of farming on the flat Nebraska prairie. In Wisconsin, seeing a windmill now is a novelty or yard art. Over a hundred years ago, a windmill was a necessity for a farm. But what a big investment for the farm family.

For hundreds of acres, the windmill was often the only source of water for families and cattle. One of JoAnne's favorite childhood memories is going out to get the milk cows for the evening milking, going to the farthest corner of the 160-acre pasture to get the cows. The windmill and water tank were in the middle of the pasture, so the cows would stop and drink before going to the barn for milking. Once all the cows had their fill of water, JoAnne and her siblings were allowed to swim in the water tank.

To this day, there are still working windmills on the landscape of Nebraska. Even the windmill that supplied water for cows and swimming for JoAnne's family is still working and providing water to thirsty cows.

The Fink farm was originally homesteaded in 1868 by Henry Luecke. It was sold to the Frederick Runge Family in 1890 and the barn was built in 1898 by John and Johanna Runge. They sold the farm in 1925 to Walter Runge who sold the 120-acre farm to Rick's grandparents, John C. and Anna (Popelka) Fink.

Rick's grandparents met at a dance at Pleshek's Pavillion in 1928. To get people to come early to the dance, they had wrestling exhibitions. John C. was there to wrestle while Anna was there to dance. They met and fell in love. After getting married, they rented a 160-acre farm on Old Dump Road where Schmidt's Ponderosa's barns now stand.

In 1937, Walter Runge wanted to sell his 120-acre farm. Rick gives credit to his grandmother, Anna Fink, for buying the farm. She was done renting and wanted their own farm. Their first year of farming, they purchased a tractor. Rudolph (Rudie) Horn hired John C. to plow, which turned into a shared agreement that lasted until 1984 when Rudie died. In 1960, John C. and Anna sold the farm to their son, John M. and his wife, Beverly. John M. and Beverly added Rudie's 80 acres, increasing the farm size to 200 acres. Rick and his dad, John M., have always farmed together, with Danielle joining them as soon as she could walk.

In 1993, Rick and JoAnne purchased the farm. They have added an additional 80 acres, bringing the total to 280 acres. They currently milk 40 cows with their daughter Danielle, who plans to farm with her dad and be the 4th generation of Finks to operate the farm.

Anyone who would like to participate in Shawano County's barn quilt project can contact project coordinator Jim Leuenberger at jamesmleuenberger@yahoo.com or at 715-524-5685. You can also contact Patti Peterson, tourism manager at the Shawano Country Chamber of Commerce at 715-524-2139 or tourism@shawano.com. A link on the Shawano Chamber website includes photos and information on every barn quilt on display in Shawano County. Just go to www.shawanocountry.com and click on the barn quilt icon.