

Since our website is new, I want to take you on a little tour, past and present, of Coe Creek Farm. If you follow our weekly newsletters, you will soon become well acquainted with the terrain, the flora and fauna, and the various human characters who have inhabited this farm since my great-grandparents homesteaded here in the 1870s.

We are located in the northwest part of Michigan's lower peninsula, close to the Manistee National Forest. Our long lane leads to the dirt road we take if we need to make our way to a more populated area. Mostly, though, we stay here at home where we try to coexist in harmony with the animals--both wild and domestic--that inhabit what we call Coe Creek Farm.

To Lars and Benedicta Augustineson, though, the gently rolling terrain of what became this farm must have appeared quite differently. There was just one small clearing that a single man had made in a short-lived attempt to homestead the acreage. To the north lived the closest neighbors, the Perketts, and good neighbors they proved to be.

Clearing land was the priority for homesteaders. It seems to us today that it would have been wiser to leave much of the area--in fact, much of northern Michigan--in woodland, but the emphasis in the 19th century was certainly on turning wilderness into farms.

The Augustinesons did just that. They had only one horse in the beginning, so they hitched the horse and the milk cow together and broke ground. They fell trees, planted around the stumps, grubbed out roots and rotting stumps, and began to change the look of this homestead.

I wish I could have seen this area before all this took place. But, there are not even pictures of the way it appeared in those days. I have to be satisfied with the feeling I get as I walk across the fields and meadows, knowing that my great-grandmother, barefoot and determined, trod the same acres so long ago. Family stories that have come down through the generations suggest that Benedicta was the compelling force in the family, the one who was always on the move, working, picking berries, looking after Lars and their two daughters. He was said to be more easy going--a good worker, but one who was not as

"driven" as his wife.

My grandmother, Cornelia, was the younger Augustineson daughter. She and her husband, Lars Erickson, raised ten children here on this farm. Einar, my father, was the seventh of those children, the one who remained on the home place. And now, I am here with my husband, Runo Lorentzon, who immigrated to the United States from Sweden about a hundred years after my great-grandparents left the "old country."

We have extended family all around us, making this a neighborhood consisting, in large part, of people related to one another in some way. This provides impetus for the repeating of family stories from long ago, and it gives a basis for knowing "who we are" even for the youngest members of the family. It also provides a continuity that draws the family "home" to the place our ancestors settled. All of us know where the family's first little house stood, how the giant silver maple came to be growing on the knoll where our cabin is today, and what is meant when someone mentions The South Road. Such are the building blocks of a family culture.

In future weeks, I will tell you more about Coe Creek Farm--what we do here, what happened before our time, and share with readers some of the stories of this area.