

There have been sheep on our farm for generations. My great-grandparents had the first ewes, and since the late 1800s there has always been a flock on the place. Some of our present ewes probably still have bloodlines that go back to those first sheep.

In 1939, my father, Einar Erickson, took first place in the Wolverine Lamb Contest, sponsored by Michigan State College (now University), the land grant institution in our state. The following article appeared in the Osceola County Herald following the completion of that contest. Accompanying the writeup was a picture of Einar feeding the small flock of Shropshire ewes. I made two corrections in the factual information the article presented. Otherwise, this was the account, word for word in the 1930s style of small newspaper journalistic writing:

*Plenty of exercise, especially before lambing, was a big contributory factor in the 100 per cent crop of lambs this past year of the flock of Shropshire sheep raised by Einar Erickson on his farm five miles northwest of Tustin.*

*This flock received first prize in the Wolverine Lamb contest this year it was recently announced by officials at Michigan State college. This is the first time an Osceola county farmer has won first in this contest and is an achievement for any farmer doing so.*

*With 26 flocks contesting for honors it is a signal honor to own the flock which made the largest number of pounds per ewe.*

*Mr. Erickson states the 24 ewes of his flock had 42 lambs, none of which were lost by death, and each weighed an average of 79 pounds at the end of 135 days.*

*The Ericksons have raised sheep for many years and this is the first time the flock was lambed and the lambs raised without a loss.*

*Mr. Erickson states he makes the ewes walk quite a distance before and after feeding, especially before lambing and he attributes to this fact most of his success.*

*The ewes are fed second cutting alfalfa hay during lambing and he says this provides plenty of milk for the lambs.*

*A couple years ago Mr. Erickson and other farmers in that vicinity of Burdell township nearly went out of the sheep raising business because of the heavy losses by coyotes. Trapping has gotten rid of practically all the coyotes and sheep raisers now have less fear from this predator.*

*Once before Mr. Erickson placed high in the Wolverine Lamb contest when his flock was among the 10 best in the state.*

*Mr. Erickson operates the farm which was homesteaded by his grandfather, the late Lars Augustineson, in 1873.*

*He owns his own purebred Shropshire ram.*

*Mr. Erickson has been invited to display a pen of Shropshires at the annual Farmers' week program at the Michigan State college in East Lansing from January 29 to February 2. He is not certain whether he will be able to do so or not. Weather conditions will have much to do with the decision he will make.*

As it turned out, he did not show a pen of sheep at Farmers' Week. With winter barn chores--my father milked by hand a small herd of Shorthorn cows, as well as taking care of the sheep--and with all the other work that occurs during that time of year, and with no extra money for transporting animals to East Lansing or for staying there several days himself, he and the Shropshires stayed home. This was a much smaller flock than had been on the farm in earlier years, but the coyote problem and the end to "free range" pasturing in the area that was planted to red pine by the Civil Conservation Corps, made it prudent to keep less sheep. But, sheep were probably always my father's favorite livestock.

We have just about concluded the latest lambing season here on Coe Creek Farm. While we did not attain the perfect season Einar had with his 24 Shropshires in 1939, it was a remarkably trouble free experience this year. Our 248 lambs are, at this point, all healthy. We had three stillbirths, one ewe giving birth to a dead single and another having two dead lambs and one live one. We lost one lamb at several days old from unexplained causes, and we destroyed two, one with untreatable crooked feet and the other with such an undershot jaw that he could not nurse. We had many sets of triplets, and some were successfully grafted to ewes with single lambs, or in one case, to the ewe who had the stillborn single. We are still supplementing some of the triplets with lamb milk replacer, but they will soon be old enough to get along on pasture and what three can share from their dam.

April is over, and with it, our lambing season. Now, eight little red

calves are on the pasture, waiting for more playmates. May has come.