

Alongside our desk—in the little cubbyhole next to the wall—there are several rolls of paper. One is a 1916 plat of the county, another is a topographical map of the area in Sweden where Runo grew up, and one more is a set of aerial photographs of our farm and surroundings. We look at these occasionally for one reason or another, but a few days ago, I took out another large sheet of paper, all rolled up. This is a drawing of how the farm buildings were situated prior to the construction of the farmhouse and barn I have always known. We have looked at this drawing now and then, too, but this time, I pulled it out and took it to our local librarian. She laminated the sheet so that it is easy to use and share with other family members.

Einar, my father, had sketched the layout years ago, and my mother had transferred his rough drawing to a neater, larger format—probably not a “scale drawing,” but nearer to how things were. Since she never saw these buildings, it was at his directions that she made this “map” of the farm yard.

Dad was eleven years old when the family moved into the farmhouse where I grew up, and he was twenty when the gambrel-roofed barn was built. So, these drawings are of the buildings and surrounding yard during the period when he was a boy.

Dad’s maternal grandparents had lived in another log cabin during their first years here on the homestead. This little building was closer to the trail that was along the section line and later became a road. But, when they chose a building spot for their permanent home, they picked a place farther from the eventual road and on a knoll.

This was a fortunate choice, and maybe, it was not just the nice high ground where they decided to build that influenced their decision. The ground on the knoll was sandy, and the well—still the one we use today—brought pure water to within a few feet of the surface, so it was easy to pump and abundant.

The log house the Augustinessons built was not a fancy place, but it was sufficient and served them until their deaths and their daughter and family for a decade after that. This house stood in the exact spot where our cabin is today. When we were digging our basement, we encountered the logs that had made the cellar walls for that previous house.

Dad’s sketch—and my mother’s subsequent drawing—is pretty detailed. There is only one photo of the house in existence, and it was taken from the south side long after the house was a dwelling. The family used the log building as a blacksmith shop for years, until it burned in some kind of smithing mishap.

The main floor of the house had a woodshed and summer kitchen on the north side. Half of the main room was the regular kitchen, and the other half was divided into a bedroom and a living room. There was a porch along the south side of the house. Dad did not sketch the second story, but I understand that the upstairs was divided into two rooms—one for the girls, one for the boys.

West of the house was the well, and then the granary, the binder shed, and the shop. Crab apple trees were situated here and there in this area, and the ash barrels—presumably for storing ashes until lye for soapmaking was

needed—were northwest of the house.

Directly south of the porch was a tiny maple tree—now the huge giant silver maple that—along with its four daughters—shades our cabin. There were apple trees, too, now long gone. A sweet apple, two Northern Spy trees, and a Greening were in this area. There were lilac bushes, too. A row of maples stood at the south end of the yard, and spruce trees lined the east side of what is now our yard. Generations of cattle—after the house and yard were no longer occupied—eventually destroyed the trees.

Heading southwest from the house, the family would have encountered a small, but important, building next to the barn. This little house was labeled “Mrs. Jones,” and it was the outside toilet. So, a trip to the outhouse was called “visiting Mrs. Jones.”

The log barn, used for a decade after the house was unoccupied, had several distinct parts and uses. On the north side was the horse barn. Next was the big hay mow, and next to that the double driveway where hay could be brought into the area next to the mow. I assume that after the big hay mow was filled, hay was piled in the double driveway.

South of the barn driveway was the cow barn, where the cows were milked. West of the cow barn was a room for the young cattle, and a similar area also stood to the east of the cow barn.

East of the double driveway was the “Big East Shed,” and north of that, the buggy shed. A west shed was similar. And two more small buildings finished the farmyard area. A chicken coop and a corn crib stood east of the barn.

I will never know, of course, exactly how this all looked in the early days of the twentieth century. But, I can imagine, and in my mind’s eye—and supplemented by the stories I heard from my father—I can see my grandmother pushing a sheet of thin bread dough into the oven to make the family’s favorite bread. I can envision my dad and his siblings up in those apple trees, eating more green apples than were good for them. I can see the horses coming from the horse barn—the team placid and willing to work, but Dot, the riding horse, prancing and eager to run. I can imagine my grandfather—and before him, my great-grandfather—taking care of the roan and red cows and doing the barn chores.

And, taking a cue from the only picture we have of her, I see my great-grandmother Benedicta, black, wavy hair falling below her shoulders, orchestrating the building of this farm. For, if the stories are true, she was the driving force when she, great-grandfather Lars, and their two daughters homesteaded this place where we live today.