

On this drizzly morning in October, I decided to go back once again to my Uncle Erik Albert Erickson's journal for inspiration before sitting down to write an essay for this week. Once again, I was not disappointed in what I found.

The entries in this journal are short and often cryptic. They are written in a "five year diary" that gives a small part of each page to an entry for a day of the month. On October first, my uncle's entries varied. In 1968 he just noted the weather—"60 degrees this morning, fair and windy, SW (wind)." 1970—"Thursday, fair and cold in a.m. 28 degrees. Had a bad night with my leg." 1971—"Friday, Fair and warm to 80 degrees. South wind. We went to town this A.M. for ground feed. " 1972—"Sunday, clear and cold with light rain, a cold fall rainy day. Mabelle was in this a.m."

The entry for 1969, though, had more substance. "Wednesday. Fair and warm. East wind. I put the culvert in today, finish tomorrow. [The trouble with the middle of the road is that nothing grows there.]. By James B. Weaver. Populist candidate for President in 1892."

If I had ever known what James B. Weaver thought, did, or was involved in, I had forgotten, so I asked Wikipedia for some basic information. An advocate for farmers and laborers, Weaver joined and quit several political parties during his life as he pursued progressive policies. After serving in the Union Army during the Civil War, he returned to his home in Iowa and worked for the election of Republican candidates. Remarkably, to anyone who is cognizant of Republican politics today, the party in its inception and early years was progressive. As the conservative wing of the party grew, Weaver switched to the Greenback Party, advocating increasing money supply in the country and regulating big business. As that party eventually fell apart, he joined the People's Party, and it was under that banner that he ran for President in 1892. He won 8.5 percent of the vote that time and won five states. The Populists merged with the Democratic Party by 1900 and Weaver went with them. He died in 1912.

In 1968 Albert noted the first frost of the season—October 21st. It must have been an unusually warm fall.

And, on the last day of the month, he made a few Halloween notes. In 1969, he wrote: "About a dozen kids were around for a Halloween treat. Mild tonight." And the next year: "Mabel had 15 trick or treat Halloweeners besides Julie, Shelly, and Melissa." And

in 1972, he wrote: “We had 10 Halloween tricksters for Trick or Treat, Sharon’s 4, Nancy’s 2, and 4 Unknown. Fun for the kids.”

Reading Uncle Albert’s diary is like sitting down with him in their kitchen, his binoculars in the window where he could keep track of the immediate fields and meadows. Mine are in our east window for the same purpose.