

Fred Williams

Fred Williams was born Oct. 1861 in Blackman Twp., outside of Jackson City, Mich. When he was 5 years old, his family moved to Jackson City and lived there for two years. They then moved to Leona, Mich. for four years, south of Grass Lake, Mich. for two years., and then in the city of Grass Lake for two years. They then moved in the country on a small farm four miles north of Grass Lake for one year, and into Ingham County, Auvers, Mich. Here Mr. Williams lived with his parents till he was 20 years old. During this time he had got so he could work for the farmers a little and had intended to go and work on farms by the month. When he told his mother about this she said, "No, Fred, you know the two older boys are 21, and can leave any time. I'd like to have you stay at home. If you should leave I wouldn't have anybody to help with the chores. If you stay home and take care of the cows, provide the hay, you and I will own the cows together and we'll raise calves." Anything his mother requested was the way it went with Williams. After the first year here one cow was getting a little along in years. A fellow came with a Brud mare and asked if he had something to trade for it. Fred said he would trade for a cow. They went to look at the cow and the men traded. They raised a colt from her that year. The next year Fred was helping one of the neighbors plant corn (by hand). When they came up to dinner, this neighbor says, "Fred, I have a colt I want to sell you. It's half-brother to the colt you have already. You can raise two together and have a nice team some day." This sounded all right but he told him it was the money part that bothered him. The neighbor told him he could take the colt home that night and said he could pay for it by work through the summer at odd times. Fred took the colt and raised it till it was about three years old. At that time they had bought a new wagon and a new harness. They had raised many calves beside

buying a few and had cut all the hay with scythe that was needed for the stock. When they got the idea of coming to N. Dak., they had an auction sale and sold all they had accumulated which brought around \$1000. That was what brought the Williamses to N. Dak. in the spring of 1882.

Fred Williams, his brother, Johnny, and his brother-in-law came by train to Sanborn, March 16, 1882. Starting March 17, it snowed and blowed for four days. When it finally cleared up there were drifts of snow around Sanborn from 6 ft. to 10 ft. high. There came a large drift on the maintrack just in front of the depot. Their snow plows were rather crude in those days but some kind of instrument had to be used to clean off these large drifts. So the first train that came after the storm had sort of an old-fashioned snow plow on it. They had been notified of this drift before they got there and struck this drift at quite a high rate of speed. The results--there were no windows left on that side of the depot towards the track. The flying snow even swept the chimney off the roof.

Two months later, Fred's parents and the rest of the family came to Dakota. After buying clothes, transportation, and other articles their \$1000 was pretty well cleaned up. The country looked good. All were delighted with the prospect that was before them. All the boys got work on Cooper's ranch south of Cooperstown. Most anybody was able to get work at those times for \$25 a month and board. Where Fred came from the average price was from \$10 to \$12 on the farm. So \$25 naturally looked pretty large to them. Fred Williams hauled Cooper's first wheat crop to Sanborn. There were about 24 horse teams that were kept going all winter. About the middle of February the railroad was laid up as far as Dazey. They then hauled only to this side of the rail. Fred helped haul the first lumber to Cooperstown

for the first schoolhouse.

The town was surveyed out and plotted in the summer of 1882 so the schoolhouse was already located. He helped haul the first lumber for the Palace Hotel and other buildings besides building up a lumber yard.

From March 17 on came lots of snow. About the 5th of April it warmed up so that the snow was beginning to thaw. A big rain came and turned the snow into water almost over night. About that time some people came on their way to Cooper's ranch from Colorado. When they got to Bald Hill creek, the water started to raise so they didn't dare to cross. They unloaded their goods which was mostly boxed and went back to Sanborn after more goods. A heavy rain came; the water rose so fast it flooded the bottoms along Bald Hill creek and swept away all the goods with the exception of one box of clothing which happened to be in quite a large box. Mr. Cooper asked Fred one day to put a certain team on a little light wagon he had for running around. They put boats in the wagon and with sets of oars went to Bald Hill creek. They picked up enough lumber along the shore that had been flooded away and made a raft. They got the large box of clothing on the raft. This Cooper did by himself and he had hip rubber boots on. The two men took the clothing out, spread it on the grass and dried it, and then went home. The next day Cooper sent Fred to the creek with the same outfit and there were about 20 people waiting to get across. He brought them across safely, one person of whom was John Mills. He congratulated Fred on being such a good hand with the oars.

The Williams family all took homesteads separately in the spring of 1883. Mr. and Mrs. Williams took a homestead west of Cooperstown in Pleasantview twp. Fred built a claim shanty in the fall of '82. The next spring he bought a yoke of oxen and moved onto this claim, Sec. 2, Bald Hill Twp. The homestead consisted of 160 acres. The

shanty was 14 ft. by 16 ft. with three windows and one door. In 1884 he built an addition 10 ft. by 14 ft.

In the spring of 1885, Fred Williams was married to Elizabeth Fenner b the Justice of the Peace, Johnson of Cooperstown. In the fall of 1883 Fred's parents came to live with him. His mother died the next summer. Fred continued to farm with oxen for two years. He then changed from oxen to horses. Then began to get more land under cultivation, year by year doing a little bigger farming. A few years later he bought out Victor Gale's homestead that joined his and made $\frac{1}{2}$ section altogether.

Their first seeding was done by hand; it wasn't so nice to sow wheat by hand when the wind blew; so he had to get up early in the morning and sow the grain by hand for two hours, then get breakfast and take the oxen and harrow it in.

Fred's brother, Charlie, and he built a schoolhouse in Bald Hill Twp., the west part of Sec. 12. The school was held for a period of six months a year.

In 1885 or '86 Bald Hill Twp. was organized. Fred was elected as Chairman of Twp. Board and held the office for about 35 years, perhaps longer than any one man held that office close up to the present time. The supervisors were Duncan Sinclair and John Mills; Archie Sinclair was the clerk.

Their first child Edward was born Jan. 1, 1886. The second child, Mabel, was born about a year and a half later. She died when 11 mo. and 10 days old. The sickness was whooping cough which turned into pneumonia.

Speaking of turkey raising; Mr. Brophy, (a man that ran the first elevator in Cooperstown) was sent a box of chickens from his father in Minn. In the box of chickens was one turkey hen. Fred was there with Mr. Brophy at the time it came. Mr. Brophy said he couldn't make any

use of it and asked Fred if he wanted it. Fred took the turkey home and purchased a gobbler from the neighbor and raised a nice bunch of turkeys that year. He has always been a turkey raiser from that time on. In the early years there wasn't much of a price on turkeys so they raised them mostly for home consumption. The first bunch of turkeys raised to amount to anything was in the year 1918. 1919 he raised around 170 turkeys. This was quite interesting for him. The Fargo Produce Co. heard that he had this bunch of turkeys so they called Fred up by long distance phone, and wanted to know about his turkeys. Fred told them how many he had. It was an extra nice bunch of turkeys. They told him they were paying 18¢ a lb. for dressed turkeys at that time. Fred had kept a little tab on prices of turkeys in the east and had an idea of what they should bring so he told them their 18¢ didn't interest him at all. The Produce Co. said they couldn't pay any more so Fred told them they better hang up, because they were losing money by holding the phone. A few days later they called up and wanted to know how he felt about the turkeys. Fred told them he felt the same as before when they talked to him. They said they had offered a pretty nice price for them. Fred told them they might as well hang up if that's all they had to offer. A few days later this Produce Co. called up for the third time. They explained they just about had to have those turkeys for thanksgiving. Fred told them if they felt that way about it, they knew what the answer would be. They asked him if he could get the turkeys into Fargo at a certain date. He told them if he agreed, he would. They whined a little and finally told him to send the turkeys along. Fred told him, "Just a minute now. There's a little more to this deal. I said 35¢ F.O.B. Cooperstown." They told him to ship them. Fred's check for that bunch of turkeys was \$952. He took that check to the photographers and had a reproduction made of it. It looked so real that a person could

just about had it cashed.

Mr. Williams' mind had run along inventions more or less since he has grown up. Up until 1891 grain drills hadn't been used. Around 1891 they began operating grain drills, they being, Fred considered, rather cumbersome. He very readily designed a shoe for a grain drill to be constructed out of two disk wheels. This shoe is known as the double disk grain shoe for drills. He constructed one of them and at that time didn't own a drill of his own so R.C. Cooper asked him to put it on one of his drills and they would experiment with it for him. It worked so well that they left it on the drill through the balance of the seeding season. That was the first double disk shoe that was ever placed on a grain drill.

At that time there was a law that made it legal so you could file a "caviot". The object of the caviot is to give you protection on your invention until completed. This caviot was supposed to run one year when you are to apply for a patent. During the life of this caviot there was a patent granted to other parties. That should have been considered contrary to law. The object of this caviot was to protect the inventor by infringers to give you the same protection that you would expect to have from a letters patent while you're completing the invention. As a matter of fact, Mr. Williams decided to drop the case even tho he had a prior right, rather than become involved in a law suit.

Mr. Williams invented a potato planter and received a patent on it. He also made one in his blacksmith shop on the farm and used it there for about fifteen years, during which time he often loaned it to the neighbors and gave very good satisfaction. This potato planter differed with ordinary potato planters in that it cut its own seed. All you needed was to sack up your potatoes, fill the hopper with whole potatoes

and then you were ready for planting. This machine planted one row at a time, but could easily have been made a two-row planter. As Fred was too busy engaged in farming this patent had to die by the wayside as thousands of people die a natural death.

Mr. Williams was one of the first ones around here to raise strawberries (around 1900). He first started with a few potato plants that his brother-in-law sent from Mich. They did so well that two years later he sent for a few Senator Dunlap strawberry plants. His small patch of strawberries became a little larger year by year until he finally had about a fourth of an acre. Mr. Williams and his wife picked 2200 qts. one year off that piece of ground. They sold readily for 17¢ a quart. They were such a novelty at that time, people would have been willing to pay most anything that he might have asked. They were such large berries and such fine flavor, that in the first pickings you could find strawberries that was 3½ in. in diameter. They continued to grow strawberries for their own use for a good many years with great success. Around 400 qts. were usually put up for their own use.

Eleven more children were born to this family. Mr. Williams cannot recall the date they were born: Mrs. Otto Hoffman, Marynet, Wis. Manley, Wilmet, Oregon, Mrs. R.E. Barr, Cascade, Mont., Freddie, Shelby, Mont., Dazey, died 1920, Mrs. R.W. Chronich, Seward, Alaska, Mrs. Yost, Mrs. Robert Scott, Plains, Mont, Kenneth, Cascade, Mont., Darry, Cascade, Mont., and Roland, Cascade, Mont.

Mr. Williams ran a threshing machine for 35 years. It was a large size steam rig. The main object of keeping this was: there was so much grain to thresh from the south besides his own. He always threshed his own first, and then his neighbors. The threshing machine made quite a considerable income for him as well as getting his own grain threshed in proper time.

Mr. Williams grandmother was a beekeeper for many years. Fred first started to keep bees when he was about 14 years old, when he found a swarm in the timber, cut the tree and put the bees into a hive. He had about 20 swarms when he came to Dakota. They were sold on sale. The next bees he got in Fargo around 1898. He brought these to Cooperstown and have kept bees practically ever since. Mr. Williams lived on the homestead till the spring of 1924. For a few years he had about 40 swarms of bees which began to produce quite a considerable quantity of honey. He found a ready sale for it, so in the spring of 1924 he moved to Cooperstown and started to build up his bees from 80 to 90 swarms. Up to 1932 the bee business was very good and produced good crops of honey. From that time on for a few years it dwindled off as there was so much dry weather.

In the summer of 1935 Fred decided to dispose of his bees due to ill health. About the middle of August, 1935 he had a stroke which put him in a coma for over 35 days. During that time, one of his neighbors took it on himself to dispose of his bees and were sold at a much lower price than Fred had expected to get out of them.