

SELHS News

Newsletter of the Sterling Eureka and Laketown History Society

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Memory Room – Cushing Community Center

April 2016

Email selhscushing@gmail.com

Website <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wiselhs/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SELHS/>

Address: SELHS Box 755, Cushing, WI 54006

Meeting: Third Thursday, 7 pm Cushing Community Center Museum Rooms 2nd Floor

Mink Farming as told by Myron and Verle Bergstrom



Myron and Verle (Brenizer) Bergstrom sat down with us in 2015 and talked about mink farming in Sterling and Laketown. Below Harold and Margaret (Carlson) Brenizer, Verle's parents with their prize winning breeding stock mink. The family fur farms began in the 30s and lasted until the end of the 1970s.



A mink coat made of mink from the farm. The Harold Brenizer Mink Farm sign and logo.

YARNS IN YESTERYEAR BY HAROLD BRENIZER

MINK RAISING

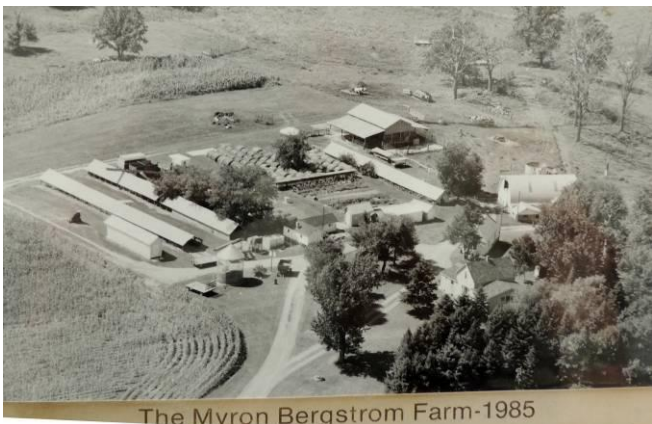
As a young man, I enjoyed trapping. My favorite animal to catch was the mink, as the pelts brought in good money. I used rabbit meat for bait. I finally thought it would be interesting and challenging to raise mink. I knew someone who raised mink on a small scale. After talking with him, I built six cages, 15 inches high and wide by five feet long. I bought six mink to start with. The cages had to be up off the ground. At first I had them out in the open, but soon learned they needed shelter so I built a pole barn and by then I was raising more mink. The mink diet consisted of horse meat mixed with 15% cereal from the feed mill. Mink need to have food and water in front of them at all times. I soon learned it was better to have smaller cages, they were 15 inches high and wide by 18 inches long. This kept them from running so much so therefore they would gain weight quicker. I would have to feed them at least three times a day. The meat needed to be kept fresh as food poisoning would set in easily. During the hot muggy nights, I would have to spray them down often with water to keep them cool. Usually this was the only time I had to get up at night. Birthing began in late April or early May. The usual litter was 4 or 5, however, it could be anywhere from 1 to 17. I only had one female that produced 17. They would nurse about six weeks and then be separated from the mother and eat a regular diet. They were big enough to sell at the market in November. Quality was the most important thing to look for. A good size quality pelt would bring in \$74.00 back in the 1950's. I would market 4,000 pelts per year. It was not good to use any off spring for breeding so I would always look for good quality females and male mink. It was important to have the quality at any price. The average life span of mink is 6 to 7 years. The females averaged 3½ pounds, the males a little over 4 pounds. Mink need to be handled when being sorted for quality. Because of the bite, I had to wear chopper mitts. Mink raising is risky, yet profitable.



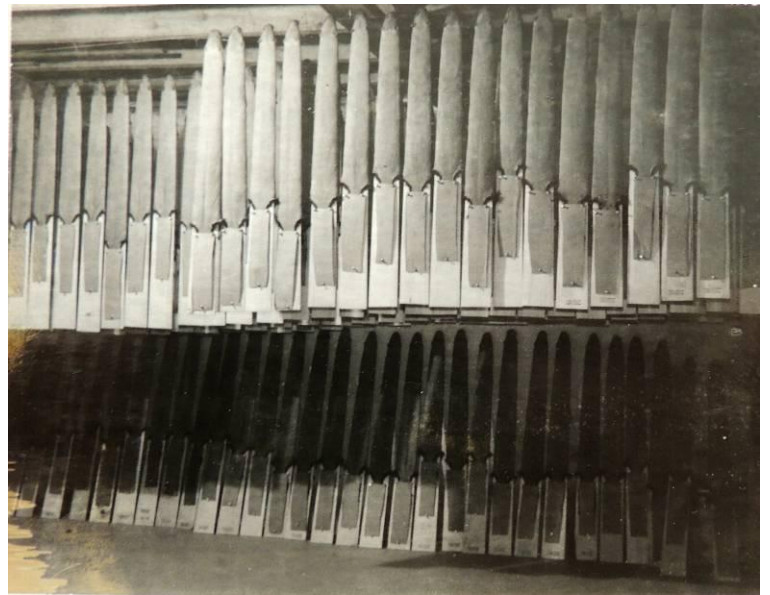
Photos from the Mink farms



FLESHING MINK
VERLE, MYRON, VERGIL & BERNIDINE



The Myron Bergstrom Farm-1985



DRYING MINK PELTS



Mink grew luxuriant fur coats during the winter and when the furs were prime, the mink were separated into breeding stock and those to be used for pelts. The mink were euthanized, skins removed and cleaned, stretched and dried before being sent to market where they were sold at auction to fur buyers.

Harold and Margaret Brenizer and their children, Verle and Vergil, grew up on the mink farm in West Sterling, and both began mink farms of their own after getting married and moving to farms in the local area. The mink business was reasonably profitable from the 1930s through about 1980 and the farms did well, although there was a great deal of work and very demanding care of the mink.

Harold and Margaret realized there was more money in selling breeding stock than just selling mink for their fur. A fad in the 60s led many breeders to move to light colored mink, away from the blacks and darker furs. Harold believed the blacks were coming back, and specialized in and maintained an excellent breeding stock, and did well when blacks were back in favor.

Harold and Margaret retired from mink ranching as they got older. The other two families kept at it until by 1980, there was an anti-fur sentiment that caused prices to plummet and they chose to close down their mink farms. Wisconsin is still one of the major producers of mink for the fur market. Photos of special mink colors and of Myron and Verle and Judy and Dale.



The Brenizer Family by Vergil Brenizer (2008)



The Brenizer family came from Germany in 1730 from south of Heidelberg to Pennsylvania. Some of the family moved west as the land opened up to Ohio, Illinois, Iowa and then Sterling. Four brothers came to Sterling.

Bert Brenizer was the first to come to Sterling from Dunkerton Iowa in 1902. He bought land and homesteaded land in Section 5 of Sterling township (along the Burnett County line in West Sterling). In 1920 he moved off of the barrens to the top of the hill on Evergreen Avenue just east of the River Road. Bert said that he bought his first land on the barrens in the winter having been shown the nice level snow covered fields that looked like the rich black farms he knew in Iowa.

The land dealer was Baker Sand and Thistle (the local nickname for Baker Land and Title). During World War I, the prices of crops rose a great deal and Bert told us that he raised a large field of Navy beans and made enough money to buy the 80 acres of land in east Sterling.



When Bert died he had over 1000 acres of land, having continued to purchase land in both east and west Sterling over his lifetime. He married Hattie Noyes in 1907, his neighbor Franklin Noyes' daughter. They had 3 children; Fern, Martha and Floyd. Martha married Chris Christenson. Granddaughter Ione lives on Bert's farm and the family still owns the original farm on the barrens.

Ellery K Brenizer came in 1903. He was my grandpa. He married Jessie Liebert. They had 10 children. They settled in section 11. Charles and Carrie Liebert, parents of Jessie, lived about ¼ mile west of the Worth School from 1903 to 1908. Ellery's children included: Mrs Albert Peterson, Mabel (Mrs A. F. McGilp), Ethel (Mrs



Martin Samuelson), Ella, Ruby and Lucille and Earl, Harold, Roy and Melvin.

Eli F. Brenizer's obituary says he was born in 1884 and in 1903 came to Wisconsin with a covered wagon and a team of horses, feed for the horses, some home canned food, and \$2.50 in cash, accompanied by his bulldog and after 12 days on the road he landed in Polk County. He purchased a confectionery store in Grantsburg and married Myrtle May Orr from Sterling in 1910. In 1918 he moved to a farm he purchased in Sterling and lived there until 1945 then working in St Paul. They had 5 children. Mrs. Brenizer died in 1925. "Many of the older settlers of Sterling will recall Eli and his faithful team of horses patrolling the town roads, summer and winter from 1924 on for several years"

George F. Brenizer came in 1906. He married Ida Melius and had 2 children. The parents of these four sons (there were other children who didn't come to Sterling) were Eli K. and Martha. Eli K. is buried in Lester Township Cemetery, Black Hawk County, Iowa. He died in Grantsburg while visiting his son Eli F. The website <http://www.mlkwweb.org/p/ltc.html> has a picture of the large gravestone. Information there says that Eli lived across the road from

the cemetery and owned the land that is now the cemetery. The Brenizers and Carnes are buried in this cemetery just north of Dunkerton. The cemetery web site says: "Verda Brenizer McDonald of Waterloo remembers her father, John Brenizer, telling that his father, Eli, who lived (like following generations) across the present road from the cemetery, had told the following story: In the 1850s a family came across the plains in a covered wagon, with several children who were ill with diphtheria. Several died and Eli gave them enough land to bury the children on land which later became Lester Township Cemetery."



My Dad, Harold

Brenizer was born in Sterling township in 1904 and lived his entire 90 years there. I was one of two children, Vergil (me) and Verle (Mrs Myron Bergstrom).

In 1930 I was ready to start school at the Worth School, named after early settler Henry "Hank" Worth. It was by the north bridge over Trade River. It closed that year and instead I went to Orr school. East of the Worth School about ½ mile was the Worth Post Office 1898 to 1905.

Just up the river about ¼ mile from the Worth bridge and school was St John's logging dam. It had not been used for many years when I was growing up, but had been used to hold the logs back to get a large head of water in the spring to run them down to the St Croix River to Nevers and then Stillwater. The dam had been originally built in the 1850s for the white pine logging era. Around 1900 it was rebuilt to drive the second cutting of jack pines down river by logger Ed St. John. It is all gone now but you still may be able to see parts of the log dam in the bottom of the river.

When I started school, there were just trails for roads with no snowplows. We got to school in the winter with horses and sleigh. It seemed like we had mostly work and not much play!

I remember there were lots of distills back then and at times you could see little curls of smoke coming from the pine forests where they were making moonshine. There were federal agents out to find them. When a big car went by where we lived my Dad said "There goes the feds." I remember the crash of the stock market in 1929 and the Great Depression in the 1930s. There was hardly any money and people worked for almost nothing to survive. People were happy with what they had. There was a deer hunting season only every other year for bucks with 1 inch forks only in the early 1930s as there were not a lot of deer then.

Harold Brenizer, my Dad, started fur farming in 1938. I and my sister Verle started in 1949 and continued for about 22 years. We raised mink. It was a lot of work! My dad raised Hereford cattle and I raised Angus and Myron and Verle milked cows in addition to the mink on our ranches.

I lived in Sterling township for 68 years and now have moved to Trade Lake township. Verle lives in Laketown. (Vergil passed away June 2014 at age 88. His wife and parents preceded him in death.)

**Elected Officers and Board Members
Sterling Eureka and Laketown Historical
Society from 2015**

Chair - (Open)

Vice Chair - Russ Hanson

#755 2558 Evergreen Av, Cushing, WI 54006
(715) 488-2416

russhanson@grantsburgtelcom.net

Secretary/Treasurer - Donna Blair

2677 240th Av

St Croix Falls WI 54024

Emeritus Chair – Marcie Marquardt

quietmeadows@lakeland.ws

Executive Board Members !

George Laier, Russ and Dottie Adams,
Marlys Hedberg, Joan Swanson,
Justin Swanson, Marcie Marquardt, Margo
Hanson.

Needed Volunteer to join us!

Order a book from SELHS

Postage included in price

\$13 A History of Making Maple Syrup
\$18 St Croix River Road Ramblings 2010
\$18 River Road Ramblings 2011
\$18 The St Croix River Road
\$18 History of Cushing Wisconsin I
\$18 Stories of the Trade River Valley I
\$18 Stories of the Trade River Valley II
Check to SELHS, Box 731, Cushing, WI
54006

All profits go to SELHS to preserve local
history. Or go to Amazon.com and order.

Meetings are the 3rd Thursday of each
month at 7:00 pm at the Cushing
Community Center Back Entrance
No Meetings December, January and
February, March

Wanted! You as a volunteer for the
Sterling Eureka and Laketown Historical
Society! A little time and a lot of fun!

The Polk County Genealogical Society is at
the Luck Museum Monday of each month
from noon until 3 pm. They will help you do
research on your family history. No charge
and no appointment needed. Email us at
polkgen@gmail.com and check our website at
www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wipolk/

*Do you have an email address? If so, send it
to SELHSCUSHING@GMAIL.COM and we
will keep you up-to-date on what is happening
with regular releases and send our
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the Sterling
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*Memberships are due each June. We
depend on your membership and
contributions and book sales for our
operating funds, so be generous!
Make a check to SELHS and send it to
SELHS Box 755 Cushing, WI 54006*

*Join us at every 3rd Thursday, 7 pm
at the museum April – Nov*

*Check out our Facebook web page at
<https://www.facebook.com/SELHS/>*

Sterling Eureka and Laketown Membership Form

Send completed form to

SELHS.
P.O. BOX 755
Cushing WI 54006

Museum in the top
Of the Cushing
Community Center

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Annual Membership Levels

Individual	Student	Life (ind or couple)
\$10.00	\$5.00	\$100.00

All memberships in excess of \$10 as well as any additional donations to the SEL Historical Society are fully deductible.

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selhscushing@gmail.com – in full color and save a

Reserve the Museum
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