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*For the
Love of*
**THESE
HILLS**

MY CO-OP

Photos and text by Al Cornell

The hills and the people of Richland County draw many folks back who have moved from the area. The REC lines run up the valley to the second home of Bob and Beverly Schmitz. It's a home with family tradition. Bev's mother, Mildred Gillingham, purchased the 80 acres in 1954. She was a widow at that time and moved her cows from the adjoining ridge into the barn on her new property. Mildred paid for the property with a timber sale.

Bob grew up on a farm south of Bear Creek along Highway 130. Bev spent her early years at Ash Creek and Little Willow. She and Bob got married in 1952. Bev began her working career at Farmers and Merchants Bank before becoming a dispatcher for the sheriff's department. Bob was a cheese factory inspector. He and two others inspected the 31 cheese factories in Richland County plus one in Muscoda. That included Ed Vodak's factory in West Lima and Joe Schmitz's in Bear Valley.

In 1960 the wanderlust bug struck and they left the security of home for a new adventure. They purchased the A&W Root Beer stand in Stevens Point. In 1962, Bob accepted a job with the state health department, and they sold their business. Stevens Point, as dictated by family and careers, became home. But the ties to Richland County family, friends, and vista were never broken.

When Mildred passed away in 1990, Bev inherited the 80 acres that included the valley. The old house there was in rundown condition except that the original log portion of that house had stood up well. Bev was determined to keep that unique structure. She wanted to make it part of a functional log

house for Bob and herself, and hopefully to pass it on as a family heritage.

She began seeking ways to salvage that original log cabin. Those large red oak logs show the marks of having been hewed into square beams with a broad-ax. Dale Bangert was interested in the logs and contacted Bev. In turn, she contracted him to take down the log house, tagging each log and storing them.

Two years later, she contracted a guy from Waupaca to reconstruct that cabin

at its current site about 200 feet back up the draw from where it originally stood by the road. He added a pine log addition to the house. He was amazed at the quality of those old logs and the perfectly square room that they could be reconstructed into.

Through the summer, friends from Stevens Point came to help chink between the logs. Five couples moved in during the weekends, most of them bringing motor homes to stay in while

they helped out. Bob's brother Ken from Bear Valley brought a cement mixer, and medusa was applied to all the cracks. That job was completed in 1994.

This log home now gets used year-round by not only Bob and Bev but also family and friends. From among their four children and seven grandchildren, there is considerable interest in utilizing and maintaining the property. They arrive at various times to enjoy the beauty of the area and to clean up the yard and



1. Bob examines a walnut tree growing in their yard. 2. Bev points out the location of their property. 3. The well-preserved logs from the original house on the property add to the mystique. 4. Red-bellied woodpeckers are among the many species of wildlife that enjoy acorns near the Schmitzes' log house.



Bev and Bob frequently retreat from Stevens Point to their property in the valley.

do other work projects. The surroundings entice family members who wish to hunt deer, turkey, and mushrooms.

Close friends are invited to use the property. Well, in a way, some are not so close. When Bob and Bev arrived there recently, they wondered whose car was parked next to the house. When they saw the Florida license plate, Bev knew that a friend from their days attending Richland Center High School had been enticed back to these hills. Jack Johnson makes a few trips back from Florida and even shows up in the winter to enjoy the serene setting. Ann Weiner of Las Vegas also occasionally finds her way back and reminisces with Bob and Bev about a country homeland that never escapes its place in the heart. Other friends still live locally.

The log house is nestled between two hills that are managed for timber. Eight acres of old hillside fields were planted to about equal portions of red oak, black walnut, and white pine. The forested property has areas dominated by

northern hardwoods and red oak.

The local Department of Natural Resources foresters have helped with the woodland management. When a group of 91 landowners attended an Oak Management Workshop last September sponsored by the Driftless Area Land

“We just think it’s a really pretty spot.”

–Bev Schmitz

Conservancy, they were brought to the Schmitz property to view and discuss oak management. Oaks are difficult to regenerate, and that large workshop attendance demonstrates how many area landowners are interested in maintaining oak in their woodlands.

In addition to oak species being

valuable for timber, their acorns provide quality food for many species of wildlife including woodpeckers, wood ducks, turkeys, chipmunks, squirrels, and deer. Bev said they saw five deer and a turkey the evening they arrived at the log house. Those animals add to the enjoyment of the surroundings.

The Schmitzes delight in the beauty and peace that they experience at the log house in the woods. The view of the hills, the sound of the creek that runs by the house, and time spent with friends and family all contribute to what draws them back to the area where they grew up. Bev says, “We just think it is a really pretty spot.”

As Bob approaches 90, he wonders why these hills had to become so much steeper in recent years, but, with a glance toward the hills, he envisions memories from days gone by. He and Bev are among the hundreds of people who had to move away from this area before they realized that they had grown up in a special place. e e



SPRING HOUSE CLEANING

Come May, it was time for house cleaning at the farm home where I grew

up. It was no small task because we heated the drafty old farm house with two woodstoves throughout the long winter months. Wood stoves leave behind dust and dirt. First step was to remove the Round Oak wood-burning stove from the dining room and carry it into the woodshed where it would spend the summer.

With the stove removed, Ma could now work at cleaning the dining room. This meant washing the dining floor with soap and water and washing the accumulated grime from the windows. Ma also opened the double doors that led to the parlor, which had been closed for the winter as there was no stove there. We knew for sure that spring had arrived when the woodstove in the dining room was missing, and the parlor doors were open.

Meanwhile, Pa and I worked on the outside of the house to make it ready for the warmer seasons. First, he hitched the team to the manure spreader, and he and I pitched the tired straw that had been piled all around the house at its foundation into this machine that would spread the straw on the corn ground and be plowed down. Having been in place since November, some of the straw had rotted or begun to rot. Next we tore off the tarpaper that had covered the doors to the dining room and living room, doors that could not be opened from November to late March—and frustrated city salesmen who tried to enter the house through a door that wouldn't open.

With the dining room mostly presentable, Ma turned to the rugs, some of which had been made on my Aunt Edith Apps' loom out of discarded and worn-out clothing that we had given her for that purpose. Ma used a rug beater, which had a

wooden handle and a curved metal pounding surface made of heavy wire. Ma hung the rugs on the clothes line. It was one of those times, when if any of us wanted to relieve any frustration we had, we could beat on the rugs with the rug beater and watch the dust fly. After the rugs were properly assaulted, and replaced in the dining room, Ma turned to the handmade quilts, which had covered our beds during the winter. These went on the clothes line to be aired out before storing for the summer.

Ma also opened the windows in the kitchen and the dining room, and opened the outside doors of the dining room and the parlor. "To give the place a good airing out," she said. Much of this work was done on a Saturday, when my brothers and I were home from school and could help. And none of the spring cleaning was done until the mud in the road, in the barnyard, and in the path from the house to the barn had dried up. "No sense doing any cleaning until the mud goes away," Ma said.



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