

My Day at the Kelley Farm

One day last summer, my family and I went to a farm up near Elk River. It's called the Oliver H. Kelley farm. It is owned by Minnesota's Historical Society and is an Interpretive History Center. That means it's a farm that has been restored to look like a farm in history. The crops are planted and harvested the way they were in 1860, the people working there are dressed in clothes that were the fashion in the 1860's and the people talk like they are in a time warp. They don't "know" anything about computers, the Minnesota Twins or the Metrodome!

When we first got there we walked into the Administration Building. A movie shows what goes on at this farm during the year. The part I liked is where they show Oliver Kelley and another man plowing the field with an ox and one blade. That must have been really hard work and it probably took forever to plow one acre! After we watched the film and looked at the display in the Center we walked outside into the sunshine.

I walked on through the field (they called it a prairie) and I guess this is what it looked like around here before settlers came to the area. There was a lot of real tall grass they called blue stem grass and there were lots of insects. I like watching grasshoppers and listening to crickets.

When we got to the farmyard, Farmer Casey and his wife were busy trying to catch some little chicks they wanted to move to a different chicken house. I found the last one under some straw in the big chicken house. It seemed really scared when I picked it up. I could feel its little heart beating against my hand.

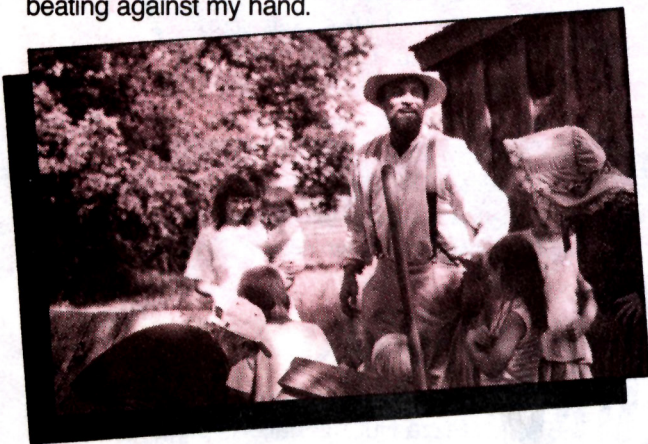


Photo Courtesy Barb Neils

Next we walked with the farmer down to the barn. He had work to do and he asked me to help by getting up in the hay mow and stomping down the hay up there. He wanted this done because he needed room to put more hay. We walked into the barn and the smell of the red clover hay about knocked me over. It is a wonderful smell. It is sooooo sweet. The barn cat was by the door taking a nap in the sun. It looked real lazy, but it has an important job to do and that is catch the mice that want to eat the grain.

After I helped stomp down the hay, Farmer Casey said he could use help feeding the livestock. That meant the cows, oxen and the horses. There was a big wagon

sitting by the barn door and it was loaded with hay. I took the pitch fork and pushed it into the hay. I slowly pulled back and a big forkful of hay came with it...too much in fact. I dropped half of it before I took one step. Farmer Casey showed me how to take smaller amounts at a time. I walked over to the wooden feed trough and slipped the hay into the trough. The animals all came running to eat. It was interesting to see how they decide who eats first. There's lots of pushing, shoving and nipping but eventually each of the animals gets its share.



Photo Courtesy Barb Neils

After feeding the big animals it was time to "slop" the hogs. That sounds so gross doesn't it? Well, it was sloppy stuff that I gave them. There were watermelon rinds, cantaloupe rinds, egg shells, string bean stems and milk mixed together in this slop. It was the left-overs from the farmhouse kitchen. In a way it could be called re-cycling. All I know is that the pigs loved it.

I went to the pump to wash off my hands and get a drink of water. This was an outdoor pump with a long handle that you push up and down to get the water to come up. I pumped the handle about 8 times and the icy cold water came gushing out. It was so cold and on such a hot day. I cupped my hands to make a container and put it to my lips. It was the coldest, freshest tasting water I have ever tasted!

We went into the farmhouse. The farmer's wife was cleaning up her kitchen after a busy afternoon of churning butter. She let us taste the sweet cream butter. It was delicious.

The house is big. It has many rooms but there is not much furniture in it. Oliver Kelley never had quite enough money to finish furnishing his farmhouse.

Outside the house is a huge garden. The farm family ate foods fresh from the garden in the summer and fall. They canned many fruits and vegetables for the winter. Any extra food was traded with neighbors for things they needed.

As I wandered back to the Administration Building I thought about how quiet it seemed to be. There is no traffic noise and the pollution smells are not the same. I could smell manure, but that smell mixed with the sweet hay and the leather harnesses was not bad. I wasn't in a hurry to leave. I'll think about this day and remember the hard work people did, but I'll also remember how peaceful it seemed to be out on the Minnesota prairie.

By Tom M., Grade 6, Bloomington, MN