

MEMORIES OF EARLY DAYS AT FLINTSTONE FARM

by Mary Johnson Hibbard

Flintstone Farm began its existence during the 1890's, Frederick G. Crane, who was born in 1865, loved animals, the land and farming from the time when he was a little boy and for the rest of his life. He was my- Uncle Fred., known to me as Pop Crane,--my special friend and always my hero.

Fred Crane felt that many of the small farm -owners of Berkshire County were having a very hard time and that there should be a farm where new crops, new breeds of poultry, sheep, pigs, cattle and horses could be raised, experimentally. If such a farm were successful, other farmers would feel encouraged to - try new crops and pure bred animals. Flintstone Farm was to answer this need. Fred Crane's venture created much interest throughout the County among farmers, and also became a tremendous source of interest and pleasure to his young family, their friends and relatives, especially to his daughter Rosemary and to myself, his niece, Mary Johnson.

During the 1890's Fred Crane started buying up hay fields pasture land and some farm buildings, as well as constructing others as they became necessary. Finally, by the early 1900's, Flintstone Farm was composed of about 3,000 acres of beautiful land, several barns, farm houses, a blacksmith shop, granary, dairy and a farm office, and in the summer required a staff of thirty to forty farmhands.

During the late 1890's Fred Crane's sister, Mary Crane Johnson, who later became my mother, acquired several acres of her brother's land and a large farm house which she called "Holiday Cottage." During each summer for several years she entertained groups of Fresh Air Children and a matron from New York City. These city bred children, were nearly away homesick and dis-oriented for a few days but would soon love the farm and if possible would return year after year to enjoy fishing, swimming and country life, so different from hot summers in the slums of a big city.

Flintstone in the early 1900's had a poultry farm of Rhode Island Reds. The hens lived in small groups in tepee shaped houses with a run for each flock. I remember looking through windows of several incubators where 'baby chicks were tapping their way out of shells. There was a strong smell of kerosene in the dark incubator room where heat was supplied by kerosene stoves. There was a brook running down the hillside forming a pool at the bottom of the hill. A flock of white ducks waddled around and some swam happily in the pool. I also remember seeing sheep being shorn outside a large barn that I think later became the horse barn. Sheep raising must have been abandoned soon after that as I never saw sheep on the farm again

My special memories of Flintstone Farm began in the summer of 1914. That was the year the three huge Belgian draft horses, two mares and a stallion, "Gaillard de Lens", were shipped from Europe to New York harbor on the last cattle ship to arrive in the United States before the start of the First World War. I suppose these horses came to Dalton's freight yard by train and were driven or led to Flintstone Farm. What a horrible experience for three horses! They were very handsome and created quite a sensation at the farm. Many visitors came to see the new arrivals. I remember seeing the two chestnut colored mares pulling wagon loads of hay piled high and square, driven by Deacon Herman Mitchell. The stallion came to be known as "Old Fred". He was exercised by Eddie Drake nearly every day Pulling a two-wheeled yellow cart. "Old Fred." pranced along throwing his front feet jauntily sideways. His tail had been docked short in the Belgian fashion showing off his splendid hind quarters. His arched neck and

shiny bay coat made him the handsomest horse in Dalton. At least I thought so, and I'm sure Eddie thought so too!

Starting a few years later during the war, Rosemary Crane and I worked every summer at various Jobs on the farm. Our first job was in the dairy packing cottage or cream cheese into 1/2 pound cartons. Every Saturday morning, very early, Mr. Lee Boyce would pack up a quantity of crates of cheese and butter in his small truck and leave for Pittsfield. On his way to the Outdoor Farmers' Market he would pick up, Rosemary and me. I think we always went home with an empty truck as our products sold very fast. It was great fun taking part in the busy market selling Flintstone's cheese and butter along with other farmers and gardeners were selling vegetables, fruit and flowers to early risers in Pittsfield.

When we worked at Flintstone, Rosemary Crane and I rode horseback from Craneville to the farm and back, about four miles through Dalton each way. One summer we did the daily roundup of fifty or more Shorthorn cows, on horseback like real cow girls, and brought them home to the cow barn for their afternoon milking. One day the cows were herded together and walking leisurely from the pasture toward their barn when I suddenly realized that one was missing. At that time I knew each cow by name, Lady Jane Cruikshank was missing. I got the herd safely back to the barn and then went back to look for the stray. After a half-hour or so of searching through pasture, woods and bushes, I heard a low "moo". I looked into some thick bushes and there stood Lady Jane with her newly born little calf standing beside her, still wet and wobbly! I hurried back to the barn to report. One of the men went back to the pasture with me. He picked up the baby calf and draped like a lady's fur piece around his shoulders, the calf's little legs dangling over his chest. Lady Jane followed anxiously, mooing all, the way home.

Rosemary and I usually each milked seven cows after the daily roundup, and often in the morning, too, That meant getting up at about four o'clock, eating a hasty breakfast, feeding and saddling our horses, riding to the farm, ready for milking before six o'clock. When I reached home by about eleven A.M. I remember one day my mother saying, "Mary, you're so tired and cross no one can speak to you!" I answered. "of course I'm not tired and I'm not cross!" I loved every moment at the farm and working there at any and every job as a teenager, or flapper as were known then, was my greatest interest.

Our careers as milkmaids ended abruptly as milking machines were somewhat experimentally introduced at Flintstone. At about this time toward the end of World War I, Rosemary was put in charge of the calf barn with me as her helper. There were about thirty small stalls in this barn, fifteen on each side of a central walkway with a work area and feed bins in the center. Almost always each of the stalls was occupied by one frisky little calf. We kept the barn neat and clean, changing the straw bedding, feeding and watering the calves, letting them out into the yard for exercise and brushing their coats, a few at a time every day. This was a great responsibility for us and we took it seriously, enjoying our young charges and their antics. We had a fancy name for each calf. Pop Crane would look forward to hearing the latest names when he dropped by to see how things were progressing. A particularly troublesome big fellow, we called the "Beast of Berlin". When the calves got, too big and strong for us to handle, they were transferred to a barn where older stock were kept or maybe turned out to pasture.

Rosemary and I did not always work together as we did in the calf barn. I remember working in the hay field joining a group of haymakers. I drove a very tall horse (17 hands) known as "High Henry". I drove him on a tedder. This machine kicked up the newly cut grass to make it dry quickly into hay. I also drove "High Henry" on a hay rake which required some skill as a pedal had to be tripped at an exact moment in order to make the correct section of a long straight row. I'm afraid my rows were apt to be somewhat zigzag!

One day I rode "Gaillard. de Lens--Old Fred" putting forks full of hay from a wagon into a hay loft over the lower barn where young heifers were kept. The fork was attached to a long rope that went through a pulley, dragging the hay up as "Old Fred" pranced away from the barn. I think this was my most exciting job as that horse pranced and danced somewhat recklessly. These are my memories of early days at, Flintstone Farm. Soon after the war was over, my Johnson family moved away from Dalton. Although I visited quit often I lost the, close contact with Flintstone Farm that I had enjoyed so much in those early days.

Fred Crane, Sr. came to Flintstone nearly every afternoon at about four o'clock after his day at the office. Although he himself never worked at the farm, he understood how every job should be done and was aware of all that was happening. It was a habit of his to whistle a little tune of his own as he visited barn or field. You could hear him coming and know that he would be interested to see whatever activities were taking place. Flintstone Farm was his very own project. He often brought visitors with him and he delighted in showing off his cattle, his horses or perhaps a special crop that was doing well. Everyone who worked at Flintstone appreciated Fred Crane's sincere interest in his farm and all that was being accomplished.