

The Story of Twin Oaks—in the words of Francis DuVoisin (1923-): Part 5

by Dr. James Paul

I was born in Kankakee on March 1, 1923 to Swiss immigrants, Armand (1894-1993) and Yvonne (1898-1982) DuVoisin. Dad immigrated to Kankakee in 1914 and after learning English, served as a translator under General John J. Pershing during World War I. Dad's brother, Maurice, had a blacksmith shop in Kankakee on East Avenue. He did horse-shoeing for the state hospital in Kankakee. Dad brought mother from Switzerland in 1920, and they were married on Sept. 30, 1920. They farmed one mile west of Koerner Airport, and that is where I was born. In 1924, Mrs. Ida Perry came to visit and made an agreement with my dad to start farming her land [formerly known as Twin Oaks].

When I was 1 year old, my family moved into the tenant rooms of the Perry farm house. My first memory of the Perry family, when I was about 5 years old, was visiting with Bertha and her husband Dr. Dan Scott. I remember riding the street car to Sunday school in Kankakee. Lomira, and her mother Ida, lived at the farm during June, July and August. I remember that Lomira and Ida did not like people cutting through their property to get to the Indian Caves. They would often yell at them.

At the age of 6, I started to help milk the cows. The milk house was built when I was 1 or 2 years old. Our main customer for the milk delivery was the state hospital in Kankakee. The milk was processed there. In the 1920s, my family owned a car-truck with a six-foot bed for hauling milk to the market. We had 30 Holstein dairy cows, several working horses of all colors and about 200 Rhode Island Reds and Plymouth Black chickens. We did not have hogs or sheep. There were cats in the barn. We also had a pet off-breed white dog. Of the 169 acres of the farm, about 110 acres were tillable for hay, alfalfa, oats, wheat, corn and soy beans. We rotated the crops every year. The rest of the acreage was pasture. I remember the chinch bugs crop destruction of the 1930s. My dad and I tried to keep the bugs off the crops by digging a trench around the fields, but it did not work.

In addition to the present day existing farm house, three-bay English barn, horse barn, milk house, pump house and garage, there were several farm buildings that no longer exist: a silo (demolished in the late 1960s) next to the three-bay English barn; a 2,000 bushel corn crib, built in the early 1900s; a 30' by 15' chicken house west of the garage (it had a door in front between glass windows and a foundation with a sand floor—every year I would bring in new sand from the river); a garage built in the 1930s situated between the current garage and chicken house; a 20' by 20' brooder house; a cobb and wood shed (the corn cobs were used to start wood fires or

to use in the stove); a 25' by 25' red tool shed with a slanted roof and rolling doors (demolished in 1970s); a creamery next to the horse barn near the defunct cistern; two outhouses (one for the Perry family and one for my family) and a rental house on the south end of the property. We used well water from the white pump house south of the farm house until about 1960 when the water became contaminated.

While my father and I did the farm chores and repaired the farm buildings, my mother Yvonne canned, cleaned house, salted meat, prepared our meals and mended our clothes (with the sewing machine that is now on display in the farm house parlor). My education was in the Bradley school system. I either walked or rode my bike to school. In high school, I went out for football, but after getting hit, decided against it. When I graduated from high school in 1941, I was given a deferment from the draft because I was an only child. In 1949, that deferment ended. The army delayed my enlistment for 90 days so that I could plant our corn crop. I then served for one year in the army during the Korean War in construction of an air field in Yuma, AZ. We worked at night during the summer as the daytime temperatures reached 120 degrees.

In 1941, my family purchased a John Deere tractor. Before that year, we used horses for plowing. During World War II, we purchased a 1945 Model A John Deere tractor with steel wheels—no rubber tires during the war. Later in 1965, I purchased a 1955 self-propelled John Deere combine and in 1970, another John Deere tractor. When I broke the crank shaft in the tractor, I drove to Wisconsin to buy a used one, and replaced it myself. I had an acetylene welder. Beginning in 1945, I also worked at Roper as a stove repairman and then as a "tear down man" on the 3:30 p.m.-12 a.m. shift.

On Feb. 23, 1952, I married Anne-Marie Charbon at the First Baptist Church in Kankakee where Bertha played the organ. Over the years we have been graced with three children, five grandchildren, six great-grandchildren, two step-grandchildren and three step-great-grandchildren.

My wife and I dug a basement under the farm house and that became our family and friend party area. Mom and dad lived with us in the farm house until 1952. In the 1960s, I also farmed for Dr. Blatt on 30-40 acres just south of the Perry Farm from what is now the Orthopedics Associates of Kankakee medical building area to the river. That land had much clay and rock—very hard to farm. In the 1970s, I supplemented my farm income by operating a wheel alignment and tire shop with Jim Walters on the corner of Schuyler and Brookmont Avenues.

Lomira died on Dec. 29, 1961



Francis DuVoisin's 1941 high school graduation photograph and in April of 2017 sitting next to his mother's sewing machine

in the farm house. His wife, Anne-Marie, painted this scene around 1965 when a tree grew out of the silo which he had half demolished in 1962.

at age 74. She bequeathed the farm in trust to the Illinois Department of Conservation. She also gave me a lifetime right to live on and maintain the farm. Lomira's will stipulated that if the state accepted the property, at least 40 acres were to be used for a park and have "Perry" in part of its name. Questions then arose as to how the property would be maintained and developed. There was concern that if the farm was used as a park and recreational facility, some of the land might be developed commercially to finance the facility. At one point, I believe that some realtors wanted to build a strip mall on the property. Bourbonnais Township leaders feared that the development of the land would over-commercialize the area and make residents unhappy.

The Illinois Department of Conservation decided in November 1985 that it was willing to give the Perry Farm to a new park district representing Bourbonnais Township. The declaration was favorable to the township, but the decision was opposed by the Kankakee River Valley Forest Preserve

(KRVFP)—both the KRVFP and the Bourbonnais Township Park District (BTPD) were formed in 1986. The BTPD was awarded the property by the State of Illinois in 1988. The BTPD expanded Lomira's wish for a park to include the whole 169 acres.

I agreed to end my lifetime estate interest in the property in 1989 when the BTPD took over title to the property. In 1990, after I had lived in the farm house for 66 years, my wife and I moved. Until recently, I cultivated hollyhocks in my "Francis's Garden" (between the horse and three bay English barns) to greet farmstead visitors. I am so proud of my connection to historical Twin Oaks, presently known as Perry Farm Park and its 25-acre Durham-Perry Farmstead—which is on the National Register of Historical Places (March 31, 2006) and a Kankakee County Historic Landmark (Feb. 13, 2013).

For the full story of Twin Oaks (Perry Farm Park and Durham-Perry Farmstead), go to a link on the Bourbonnais Township Park District web-

site http://www.btpd.org/park_history_4_2934382977.pdf. Dr. Paul is a member of the Perry Farm Living History Advisory Committee whose purpose is to teach the community about the history of the Durham-Perry Farmstead. Dr. Paul is also president of the Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society.

The Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and promoting local history.

Monthly meetings are held at 7 p.m. on the first Thursday of each month March to December.

Museum hours are 1 to 4 p.m. first and third Sundays of each month, March to December or by appointment.

Visit <http://bourbonnaishistory.org>, on Facebook at <http://facebook.com/bourbonnaisgrove> or call 1-815-933-6452.

Preservation Plan established

The Kankakee County Historic Preservation commission established a Preservation Plan for Kankakee County. After a year of work, the commission:

- Compiled the historic context of Kankakee County as a whole and the 17 townships individually;
- Held six public meetings throughout the county gathering input from interested members of each community to learn what buildings or sites were important to them and what goals they would like the commission to focus on;
- Conducted a preliminary countywide reconnaissance

survey to build a database of notable historic properties and photos.

The information was compiled by consultant Ken Itle of Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc. in Northbrook and then presented to the commission in a final 250-page publication that sets goals, policies and implementation strategies for the Preservation Commission.

The Preservation Plan was financed in part with federal funds from the Department of the Interior, administered by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency through a Certified Local Government

Grant. Additional funding to achieve the matching grant was provided through a grant received through the Community Foundation of Kankakee River Valley and through volunteer hours provided by the commission.

A limited number of copies of the Preservation Plan are available by contacting Michelle Sadler at the Kankakee County planning department at 1-815-937-2940, ext. 5555 or email msadler@k3county.net. For more information, contact Sadler or Mardene Hinton at 1-815-933-4236 or email mlhinton@comcast.net.

Construction underway



Construction has begun on the site of the new Meijer store to be located on Rt. 50 in Bradley. The developers are working on removing the existing concrete at the site before beginning construction on the store. Meijer, a full grocery store with pharmacy, electronics, clothing department and home and style essentials, is expected to be complete in the spring of 2018.

Herald photo by Laura McElroy