



John Cleland

John Cleland is the third generation on his family farm in Capron, IL. However, the history that has unfolded in merely three generations is very intriguing.



Cleland's great aunt's father, W.W. Wilson, bought the 320 acre farm in 1904. He also had a commission house at the Chicago Stockyard. W.W. Wilson's brother, James Wilson, was the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture from 1897 to 1913. Mr. James Wilson holds the record for the longest-serving United States Cabinet member. He served under William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and for only a day and a half under Woodrow Wilson.

In Cleland's living room, he has a map of the United States on display dated 1860. It is believed that this map was given to James Wilson when he retired in 1913.

"No one even knew the map existed until my wife and I moved into this house that was built in 1884 and found it in the attic," said Cleland. "We were told it was a government map and we are guessing that because he was in the US Department of Ag and every 10 years they got new maps, some people in Washington would get the outdated maps."

Around the edges of the map are all of the US presidents and the last president accounted for on this map is Abraham Lincoln. The map also contains an artist rendition of what the Washington Monument was supposed to look like. However, what we know of the monument to be today and this drawing are very different. The borders of the states, territories at this time, also look very different from what we know them to look like today.

Getting back to the history of the Cleland Farm, W.W. Wilson's daughter, Ruth Wilson, married Cleland's Great-uncle, K.W. Cleland, in 1913 and took over the farm where Cleland currently lives. They continued on the farm until 1951. Cleland's father, uncle, and grandparents came to the farm and farmed until 1973. Cleland joined his father in 1976 and he and his wife, Diane still farm there today.

In 1920, K.W. Cleland served on the first board of directors for the Boone County Farm Bureau. The Farm Bureau tradition was continued with Cleland's uncle, Alfred, and father, William. William served on the Board as well as president in 1985-1986. Cleland has served on the Boone County Farm Bureau/Winnebago-Boone Farm Bureau Board since 1995 and is currently the Vice President of the Winnebago-Boone Farm Bureau.

Cleland and his wife have two children, Scott (16) and Daria (14). Both children are very active on the family farm.

"My son is very interested in the farm," said Cleland "He is in 4-H and FFA and taking agriculture classes. My daughter has taken a special interest in Veterinary Sciences. So hopefully the next generation will have the opportunity to take over the family farm like I did."

The Cleland's farm has grown in size and has modernized over the years.

"When my grandpa was running the farm, they still used horses for work," said Cleland "Now we use tractors and it's almost amazing how far the technology has gotten us. I was one of six kids and the work was so labor intensive there was a need to have that many people in the family, just to keep the farm running. Now, because of the technology, it takes less people to do even more work."

Today the Cleland's raise crops, beef cattle, and show hogs for the kid's 4-H projects. However, in the past they had a farrow to wean hog operation.

"For years we raised pigs and we would sell the piglets right after we weaned them," said Cleland "We would take them from here to a nursery finisher."

An interesting fact about the Cleland's hogs is that they were hauled around in an old school bus. Cleland worked together with a friend of his who was also in the pig business and his friend's daughters painted pigs on the side of the school bus.

"We took out all of the seats and we put bedding down and hauled the pigs from farm to farm, said Cleland "It was nice because you could put a heater inside to keep them warm or put the windows down if it was warm out."

Stories like this are always fun to tell to the next generation. Cleland's mother knew this very well. She put together a book of farm stories and poems that she had published.

"My mother, Louise Cleland, wrote articles in the Belvidere Daily Republican," said Cleland "she put them together into a collection and now we have all of the stories from her point of view and can look back at all of the change over the years."

The history of the Cleland family has been preserved extremely well and it is very humbling to look back at how far the farm has come. However, John and Diane Cleland along with their two children are paving a path for the future as well. (Published October 2, 2015)