



The Cornwell home is loaded on a rig of steel beams and wheels for its move from the farm to the town of Rolfe. 1989.

THE MIDDLE FARMS

The Cornwell Farm

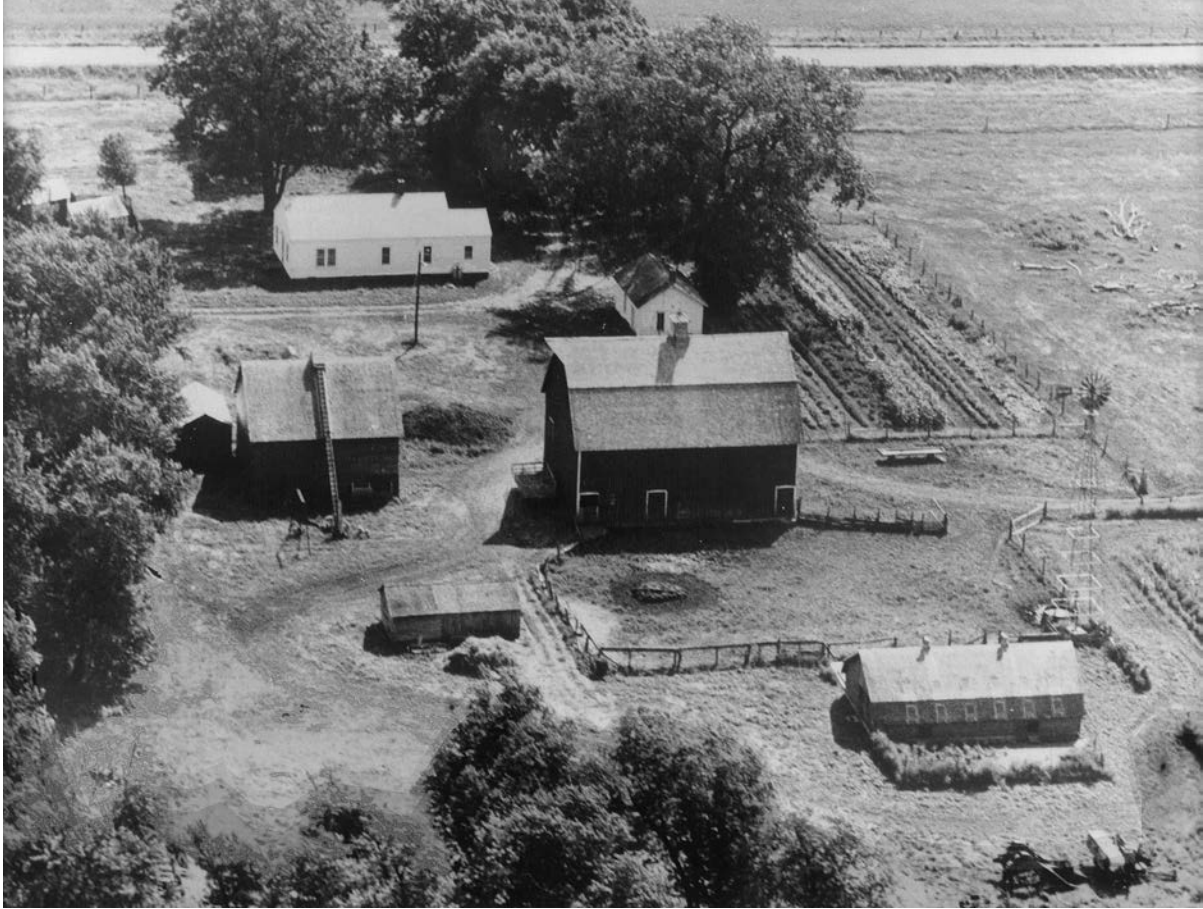
Irving and Velma Cornwell lived with their daughter, Joy, on the farm that Irving's grandfather, Melvin Cornwell, bought in 1895. It is the third Century Farm along the road, and there won't be another until 2020. Irving and Velma now are deceased. Their house was moved to town in 1989, and their farm fields are alternatively planted to corn and beans.

Joy was the valedictorian of the Rolfe High School class of 1964. She did her undergraduate work at Upper Iowa University in Fayette and completed a master's degree at the University of Missouri in Columbia. She married Doug Palmer. The couple lives on a farm near Forest City and raised two daughters. For several years, Joy drove 200 miles round trip each week to Rochester, Minnesota, where she lived and worked for two and a half days, cataloging medical journals at the Mayo Medical Library. She continues to own the farm where she grew up and rents the land to a neighborhood farmer.

Irving's father's mother was Dorothy Wiegman. In 1888, Dorothy's parents, Herman and Elizabeth, moved to the farm at the far west end of our road. They sold it in 1913. Herman had a sister, Anna Marie Margaret Wiegman, who married Diederick Brinkman, a pioneer patriarch in the area. That means Joy is connected to the large clan of Brinkman cousins, including Kathy Dahl and Robert Brinkman who live on the highway not far from the east end of the road.



Left to right: Irving, Joy, and Velma Cornwell at a farm auction. Irving and Velma are deceased, and Joy Cornwell Palmer lives in the Forest City area with her husband and two daughters. Circa 1977.



Top photo: The Cornwell Farm, northeast corner, Section 14, Roosevelt Township. The camera faces east, southeast. Circa 1955. *The Joy Cornwell Palmer collection*. Bottom photo: This photo was taken from about the same place and angle as the photo above. The Cornwell land is in the lower right quadrant from the intersection but all the buildings and other signs of the Cornwell farmstead have been cleared. The Reigelsberger farm is on the left in the distant part of the photo, and the farm where Helen grew up is on the right. Circa 1996.



Hayrake seat and tines at Cornwell farm auction. Circa 1977.

The Harrold Farm

Marjorie and Paul Harrold, mother and son, have had the most diversified farm operation along the road. Paul was six years behind me in school and has one sister, Paulelda, who is married and is a food and nutrition specialist with the Iowa State University Extension Service in Fort Dodge.

Marjorie Davis and two of her three brothers, Milton and Melvin, moved to the place with her parents in 1942, shortly after buying the farm. It was the first land they owned. That summer, Milton cultivated the crops with horses while Melvin cultivated with a tractor. In October, Milton went into the military, and in November, Melvin married and moved to a farm two miles away but farmed in partnership with his dad. With her brothers gone, Marjorie learned to be a chore person. Later she met Faber Harrold at a dance. The two married and moved into a small house her father had moved onto the farm, across the lane from the big house. Faber and Mr. Davis farmed in partnership until the older couple moved to Fort Dodge in 1952. Then Faber and Marjorie moved into the big house, rented the farm, and supported their family on their 50 percent share of her parents' 240 acres.

After Paul graduated from Rolfe, he took an 11-month farm power course at Iowa Central Community College in Fort Dodge then worked for Robinson's John Deere dealership in Rolfe. He set up new planters and combines and helped farmers who bought them adjust and start using the machinery. In 1976, he began farming with his dad on land they owned and rented. Faber died in November 1989, leaving Paul and Marjorie the challenge of keeping up the farm work. Paul does the bulk of the farming while Marjorie gardens, mows the large lawn, and manages the household. Occasionally, she works for Paul, for instance, driving their Model M Farmall tractor and pulling a rack of hay bales home from the field.



Davis family. Front, left to right: Gladys, Marjorie, Elmer. Back: Milton, Melvin, and Marion Edgar. 1937. *The Marjorie Harrold collection.*



Above: The Harrold home, south side, Section 11, Roosevelt Township. 1989. Below: The Harrold family. Faber in back, then left to right: Paul, Marjorie, and Paulelda. 1958. *The Harrold collection*.

Paul farms approximately 800 acres, including Velma and Verle Howard's farm across the road and land at the west end of the road that he bought from the Mildred and Arlo Ives family. At times, Paul teams with area farmers, hires a retired farmer, or arranges for young men to work with him.

Paul used to have 250–300 hogs and 80–100 head of cattle. He would buy young feeder pigs from local farmers and yearling heifers at sale barns, then finish the pigs and cattle out, and sell them when grown. When corn prices got high, and it became too costly to feed pigs and cattle, he decreased the number of livestock he had on the farm. Often he has no pigs because hog factories have emerged in the county and forced independent farmers out of the business of breeding and selling young feeder pigs. He could buy young pigs from the hog factories, but their price is too high. Occasionally, though, he will custom-grow 350 feeder pigs for Chamness Swine of north central Iowa.

Paul no longer has any cattle; however, he practically lived with his livestock during





Paul Harrold standing by his Model 4020 Diesel John Deere tractor. 2003.

the 100-year heat wave in 1995. He watered the hogs and let them wallow in mud for protection from the heat. But the cattle got stressed, and their tongues hung out from the heat. Paul had two buildings on the farm that he seldom used except when he lined up cattle to implant them. So during the heat wave, he opened the buildings to give the cattle shade. Then his neighbor, Verle Howard, brought two fans from his farm. One was from the alleyway of his crib that he used during corn shelling to create a breeze for the workers. Paul put the fans in his sheds and set up a sprinkler system so the cattle could get shade, breeze, and a spray of water. Paul was also cultivating crops and would ride his three-wheeler back to check on the cattle every two hours. Fortunately, none died.

It wasn't the first year that severe weather hit their farm. One instance was in 1980 when a wind blew their barn away, scattering debris south across the Howard farm. Another crisis came on Labor Day of 1983 when a hailstorm wiped out their corn and soy beans. Before the storm, it had looked like there would be a bumper crop. After the storm, there was nothing in the fields but stubble.

When Paul and Paulelda were young, the supper hour was a time for the family to discuss what was happening at school. They have continued to make a point of talking things over. The day after the hailstorm, the family sat around the round oak table in their kitchen and talked things out. They are quiet, unassuming, private people with a subtle sense of humor, basic wisdom, commitment to hard work, and close ties built on a tradition of solving problems together.

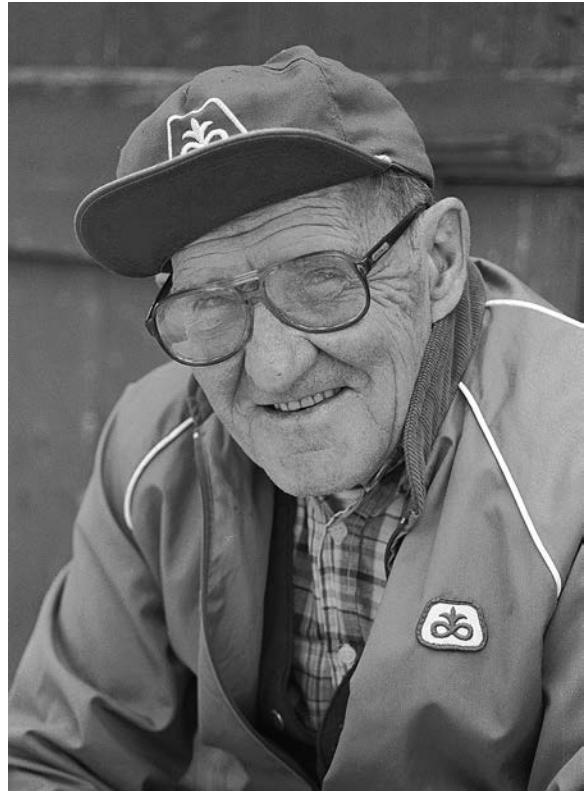
With no livestock and no livestock chores to do, Paul has more leisure time. In 2001, he used it to paint the Model M Farmall he bought in the 1970s from his neighbor Irving Cornwell and to restore a 1952 Chevrolet pickup truck. Marjorie has always been a seamstress, sewing most of Paul and Paulelda's clothes when they were young. However, now with her hands becoming arthritic, her sewing projects are mainly machine-pieced quilts. Marjorie does a significant amount of gardening. Paul says she has always had potatoes and that in recent years, she has begun growing cauliflower and broccoli. Marjorie added, "I grew all the vegetables, peas, and beans. Most of the time we had a strawberry bed and strawberries to can." When I asked if she had any favorite poetry, scripture, or activity to turn to when she wanted solace she said, "I go to the garden and hoe. Lots of times you can think over things and by the time you get through, you have it figured out."



Top photo: Marjorie and tomatoes from her garden. 1994. Bottom: Cattle at the Harrold farm. 1989.

The Howard Farm

Before moving to town in 1998, Velma and Verle Howard lived across the road from the Harrolds on a 160-acre farm. It was one that Verle and his two sisters inherited from his folks who had moved to the farm in 1940 after purchasing it in 1939. At one time, Verle rented an additional 160 acres west of his place but never got into big-time farming. He says that he was able to survive in farming because he “never bought a lot of expensive machinery but kept wiring the old equipment together with baling wire.” Finally, in 1992, he retired from farming and rented the land to Paul Harrold.



Left: Velma Howard. 1990. Right: Verle Howard. 1993.

Velma and Verle were married in 1947. He worked for rural power companies while she did bookkeeping and stenography work. In 1953, they moved to the Philippines where Verle took a job as a power plant supervisor with the Voice of America. In 1962, they moved back to the States, making their home on the farm and raising six children who have all left the area.

Even though they no longer own the building site, Velma and Verle’s farm is the homeplace to their children. When their family held reunions at the farm, Velma says, “it was sheer bedlam.” They set up two campers and a tent. The adults sat around and ate and talked. The grandchildren played with toys, got out the badminton and horseshoe sets, and built forts in the haymow.

I began to get to know Velma and Verle in the fall of 1989 when I asked if I could photograph their farm. Since then, I have photographed their last season of picking corn and shelling it the following summer. I have had several cups of coffee at their round oak kitchen table and picked apples from their two apple trees. Velma has given me advice on things such as planting asparagus, and Verle has helped me do things such as measure their barn and make

a platform for my camera so I could photograph the haymow. Theirs is the last barn along the road. Almost every time I leave their place, Velma says, "Hurry back."

Velma has a garden and used to raise chickens. She tells about how in 1990, while she was still a cook at the nursing home in Pocahontas, she decided not to dress chickens anymore:

That winter, I made the decision, after we had talked about it, and Verle agreed and went along with me. So that spring, he said, "How many chickens should we order?" I said, "Don't order any. I'm not dressing chickens this year." Not too long after that at work one day, a co-worker, Marian Kuchenreuther said, "You tell Verle to order some extra chickens, because Al wants some."

I said, "What are you talking about, we're not having chickens." "Oh yes," she said. "Verle told Al he ordered the chickens." Needless to say, there was a little blue smoke around when I got home from work. But I refused to dress chickens, so Verle had to find someone to dress chickens that fall. [In the years before that] I picked the chickens out of the shed, hung them on the line, and cut their heads off. Did the whole thing until he took over. Then we got the people from West Bend.

Verle has often played tricks on some of the neighboring farmers like Mick Reigelsberger and Dan and Roger Allen, and they have played jokes on him. One day Verle came home from town and was looking for his riding mower. He looked everywhere but couldn't find it. Later, he discovered Mick and Roger had hung it from the ceiling of his shop.



The Howard family homeplace farm, north side, Section 14, Roosevelt Township. 1996.

When I asked about the spirit of cooperation in the neighborhood, Velma said, "In this community, you never have to ask." Verle added, "If somebody is in trouble and needs help, you don't have to ask. They're here." Then Velma told about their third child, Monte, president of the high school student council, who fell from an elevator silo at Bradgate where he was part of a construction crew in 1970. "When Monte was killed, we didn't have all of our beans walked. His friends went and walked our beans and didn't even tell us that they did it. Others told us then that the kids had been out and walked our beans. Now that's called help without asking."

Velma and Verle's other son, Randy, died of cancer at his home in Chicago in 2001. Their oldest daughter Joy died following a short illness at her home in 'Aiea, Hawaii, in 2003.

The Howards sold their acreage, which includes 3.5 acres of land and the buildings, to Brenda and Brian Slama in 1998. Brenda and Brian have remodeled the house. She is a mechanical engineer and works for a company in Laurens, Iowa. He is a construction worker. On November 24, 2002, they had a baby girl named Josee.

Brian occasionally helps Paul Harrold with harvest and other projects. Sometimes Paul comes with his tractor and shovels the snow for Brenda and Brian. Paul also uses the barn and a machine shed on the place.



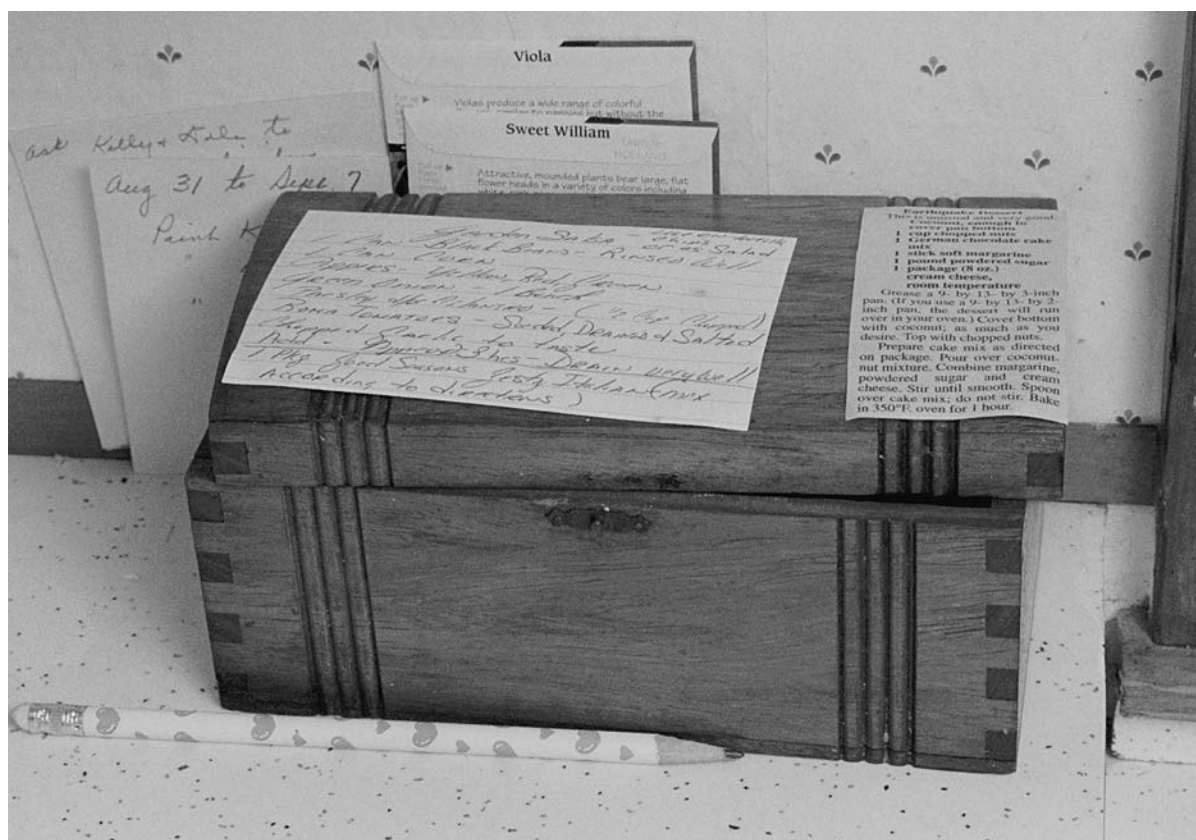
Above photo: The Howard home. 1989. Photos on opposite page are of the Howard kitchen. In this road project, it has been interesting to discover so many residents and former residents who have round oak tables in their homes. 1998.





Details from the Howard kitchen a few weeks before Velma and Verle moved to town. 1998.







POCAHONTAS COUNTY

Farmer of the Week

Some of Best Corn in County on Howard Farm¹

Year after year, some of the best corn produced in Pocahontas County is raised on the Harry Howard farm in Roosevelt township. The Howard farm, located four miles east and four miles north of Pocahontas, is 160 acres in size and has been owned by the Howards since 1940.

Credit for the above-normal corn yields on the place is due to several things. First off, Harry follows a practical field-rotation plan which gives his ground an opportunity to recover the elements and tilth it necessarily loses when planted to corn. Second, Howard makes good use of livestock manure and commercial fertilizers. Third, he plants heavier than normal plantings.

This year, Harry had 55 acres of corn, 55 acres of oats, 25 acres of beans and the remainder in pasture and hayland. He uses a red clover alfalfa mixture for his pasture that has proved particularly good for ranging hogs. He rotates his fields each year.

Harry raises about 250 hogs each year and feeds about 40 head of cattle annually. As a result, he's sold corn off the farm only twice since operating it. In 1939, he sold the crop off and last year he sold about 1,100 bushels. Because of his livestock feeding program, he's probably purchased a good many times that amount of corn in addition to his homegrown grain for feed.

Commercial fertilizers play an important role in Howard's high-yielding corn crops. Harry generally uses about 100 pounds to the acre of starter fertilizer when he plants the crop. Then he applies ammonium nitrate when he lays the corn by at the rate of 70 pounds to the acre.

Although he check-plants his corn, Harry takes advantage of closer plantings to boost the number of hills per acre on his ground. When planting, he plants two 40-inch rows alternated with two 36-inch rows. Cross-rows of course, are 38-inches (the spacing on his planter-wire). Mathematically, it figures about 10 percent more hills per acre, Harry says. In other words, in a 50-acre field of corn, he would have a crop equivalent to 55 acres of 40-inch rows and 40-inch cross-rows.

About half of Howard's corn is Farmer's Hybrid this year. Because his corn had such a good stand and showed every indication that it was going to be a high yield, Harry wanted to enter their yield contest. He couldn't, however, because of his heavier plantings.

Harry is a Spotted Poland China hog enthusiast. He raises mostly Spots and believes they grow faster than other breeds. Particularly, he's found, they aren't as active as others and as a result don't "run-off" their weight. He usually raises about 140 spring pigs and between 100 and 125 fall pigs. His farm, incidentally, is completely hog-tight.

Usually, he feeds about 40 head of cattle each year. He now has that number of 400-pound calves which he will feed out on grass next summer. With younger cattle, Harry says, you can just let them grow. The cheaper feeds they require and the resulting cheaper gains make it a less risky and more profitable program than feeding heavier stock. The Howards keep a few chickens on their place, although it's not one of their major projects.

Speaking of major projects, they've undertaken one in the form of a home-remodeling job. In addition to modernizing their home, Mr. and Mrs. Howard are now in the process of almost a complete renovation of their place. They have three children: Mrs. George Wilson of Kelly and twins, Mrs. Curt Hepperly of Burbank, Calif., and Duane of Humboldt.

Harry was born near Jolley. He has lived in the Havelock and Pocahontas vicinities for the past 20 years.



Marian and Harry Howard, who lived on the Howard farm from 1940-1941, with their granddaughter, Joy, who lived in Hawaii until her death following a short illness in 2003, and her younger brother, Monte, who was killed in a construction accident the summer after he graduated from high school. Circa 1940s. *The Velma and Verle Howard collection.*

1. The “Farmer of the Week” article on the left was published in 1952 in the *Pocahontas Record Democrat* newspaper with verbal permission from the editor Brooks Taylor to use it in this project. Note: Harry and Marian Howard’ son, Verle Duane Howard, was known both as Verle and Duane, depending on who was speaking about him.