

THE
HISTORY
OF
GRIMM
ALFALFA



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BY

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Chaska, Minnesota

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Foreword

The purpose in writing this brief history of Grimm alfalfa is threefold. First, because the year 1957 marks the hundredth anniversary of the introduction of this superior product in the County of Carver, from which it has spread throughout North America. Second, to give the interested reader a true account of how this hardy forage plant was brought to the United States from Germany. The third purpose is to honor the Wendelin Grimm family, for the foresight displayed by Wendelin in bringing this alfalfa with him.

Although the account may seem simple and short, it entailed much time and research in obtaining the facts. The indefatigable zeal of the author, Frank Kelzer, is to be commended, as well as his persevering efforts in overcoming the many obstacles which present themselves in an undertaking of this kind.

S. M. A.

CARVER COUNTY, THE HOME OF GRIMM ALFALFA

In 1837, when Wendelin Grimm came to the United States,
In Laketown Township he bought himself some real estate.
He bought it to be his own, to make it his family's
future home.

A year after, on this farm, he found a spot
On a hillside, to sow some of his favorite crop.
This alfalfa crop he called his own
That made Carver County its future home.
On this hillside for a century had stood
His alfalfa, grown from its everlasting root.
And today, on his alfalfa hillside
Stands a great historical site.
Here his alfalfa stands at its very best.
No one can compare a strain of any of the rest
With his alfalfa seed.

From the beginning, his alfalfa had it rough
But Mr. Grimm, really knew his "stuff".
With careful handling that made it sprout,
Year in, year out, it stood the drought.
Though severe winters came about,
His alfalfa always came out.
He called his pet, "Lucern or Ewiger Klee"
We call it Grimm's Alfalfa Hay.
His alfalfa became so very famous,
That its spread was just "outrageous",
Over land from sea to sea.
He sowed his seed by hand
To make a successful stand.
When all his hard work was done,
A golden crown he won.
This all happened in the year of 1858
When Minnesota became a great state.



Mr. and Mrs. Wendelin Grimm, sturdy pioneers in Carver County, whose foresight in bringing a few pounds of seed of a hardy forage plant to this country from their homeland in Kùlsheim, Germany, and whose courage and perseverance in raising it, conferred an inestimable boon on the farmers in this county, state, and all North America.

WENDELIN GRIMM, THE ORIGINAL PRODUCER OF "GRIMM ALFALFA"

Mr. Wendelin Grimm was born on October 18, 1818, in a little village called Kùlsheim in the Grand Duchy of Baden, Germany. This village was known for its advances in agriculture and farming. In this place he spent his youth, and here he met his future wife, Juliana Segner, who was born on June 15, 1821. While the Grimm's lived in Kùlsheim, three children, Frank, Joseph, and Ottilia were born to them.

Mr. and Mrs. Grimm were an ambitious and a hard-working couple. At this time, their farm was situated out of town and consisted of small tracks of land which was difficult to farm.

When Frank was eleven, and Joseph nine, Mr. Wendelin Grimm began to look ahead to the family's future, and like so many other German families, he determined to migrate to America. They sold their farm, home, and belongings, packed their three trunks with the possessions they wished to take along, and set out for their adventurous trip to the land of promise, America.

Their travels took them westward from Kùlsheim until they reached the Rhine River. From there they took a boat up the Rhine to Rotterdam, where they boarded a powerful steamship to cross the great Atlantic Ocean. They encountered violent storms and rough sailing on a number of days.

Finally they arrived in New York. There they heard that most immigrants were going westward to Minnesota, which was said to be a place of great opportunity for new settlers. Just how they reached St. Paul is unknown. However, they rode up the Minnesota River to Chaska on a steamship and reached Chaska, in Carver County, about September 1, 1857.

Mr. Grimm and his family were lodged at the Bar Hotel in Chaska. The family remained in the lobby while Wendelin went in search for a place for the family to live. At this time he met a man, John Neunsinger, who told him that he had his farm in Laketown Township for sale. Mr. Grimm bought the farm, with a log cabin, barn, and clearing.

The following day, the Grimm family moved to their new home, which was about three miles northwest of Victoria. All in all, it was a long journey from Kùlsheim, Germany, to their new home in Minnesota. Before long, the new settlers became acquainted with their neighbors between Chaska and Victoria. The Grimm family attended St. Victoria Catholic Church, and later, the children became pupils at the parish school which necessitated a three-mile drive by means of oxen and wagon.

In 1858, when Mr. Grimm and his boys were actively engaged in their farm-work, Mr. Grimm took from one of his trunks, a secret treasure which he had hidden among the quilts and blankets. It was a small bag containing about fifteen pounds of "Lucern", or "Ewiger Klee", everlasting clover, as the plant was called in Germany, because of its perennial nature.

He proceeded to plant this alfalfa, his prize possession from Germany, on a small patch of ground near the log barn. During the winter, all of his treasure, except a few plants, froze. With a careful hand, he tended these plants, and selected only the seed of the sturdy plants. When the patch was well developed, it produced the hardiest alfalfa even grown. To this day there is no alfalfa more hardy than the genuine Grimm Alfalfa.

About two years after coming to America, a fourth child, Caroline, made her appearance in the Grimm family.

Wendelin Grimm was not only interested in farming, but was also devoted to the cause of helping his neighbor and of protecting his newly adopted country. When the news reached him that the Indian War of 1862 had begun, he took his team and wagon, gathered his neighbors and supplies, and set out westward to join the American men in their battle with the Indians. When the group reached Glencoe, they were informed that the National Army had taken over, and that the war was ended. This was before railroads were invented, so the volunteer soldiers made their laborious way back to their waiting families.

In the year 1872, Mr. Grimm purchased a second farm, midway between Victoria and Chaska. Several years later, his eldest son, Frank, married Rosalia Pograbo, and they established themselves on the Grimm homestead farm, while his father and the other members of the family moved to the new farm.

The second son, Joseph, married Mary Agnes Browers on June 1, 1875. A few years later, they moved to Texas. After some time, they came back to Chaska, but remained only a time and then moved to Tampa, Florida.

Ottilia, the eldest daughter, married Hubert Kelzer in 1889, and the newly weds made their home with Mr. and Mrs. Wendelin Grimm. Death claimed the latter on December 8, 1890, while his wife survived him until October 28, 1897. Both are buried in St. Victoria Cemetery, at Victoria, Minnesota. May their souls rest in peace.'

The youngest child of the Grimm family, Caroline, married William Glatzel. They settled on a farm located one mile north of Chaska.

Many interesting stories were told the grandchildren of Wendelin Grimm about the life of their grandfather. Ottilia, the wife of Hubert Kelzer, gives this interesting account. When Wendelin Grimm came to Carver County, he not only brought alfalfa seed with him, but a six-knife cabbage cutter, in order that his family might

be assured of their favorite German dish, sauerkraut. Not only did Mr. Grimm supply his own family with sauerkraut, but he would walk from town to town with his cutter strapped on his back, and cut cabbage for his customers along the way, among whom were hotel owners in Minneapolis and St. Paul. While on these tours, which often took several weeks, his sons took over the farm work. On his return, it was not unusual for him to carry a fifty-pound bag of flour from Minneapolis to Victoria.

At the turn of the century, between 1890 and 1900, dairy herds increased, and Carver County turned from grain farming to the dairy industry. As a result, the alfalfa fields became larger and larger because of the increasing demands for this product. The Grimm alfalfa seed was often difficult to get because of unfavorable weather conditions, and so many farmers had to buy a common alfalfa seed instead. However, a remarkable difference could be detected in these varieties.

Mr. Hubert Kelzer, who lived on Wendelin Grimm's second farm, also experienced a shortage of Grimm alfalfa seed, and bought a half bushel of common alfalfa seed from a local dealer. This he planted in a field next to the plot where his Grimm alfalfa stood. The latter field happened to be along the Chaska-Victoria road, and attracted the attention of many people passing by. The foliage of the common alfalfa was dark green, and the blossoms were blue, while the Grimm alfalfa had a lighter green foliage, and the blossoms were of various colors, such as light and dark blue, greenish purple, reddish yellow, and white. Often inquiries were made of Frank Kelzer, while working in the field, for an explanation of the different kinds of alfalfa.

About this time, Charles Brand, an agricultural inspector of Washington, D.C., was sent to investigate the different kinds of clover and alfalfa. While on his tour of inspection, he took pictures and samples of various fields for the purpose of observation and testing. A year later, he returned to the same fields and brought with him other experts from the University of Minnesota. They were very much astonished to find that the common alfalfa could not withstand the cold winter, and that not a blade was to be seen in the fields. Whereas the Grimm alfalfa, in the adjoining field, was sturdy and flourishing. Mr. Brand took pictures of these fields and filed his reports with the U.S. Agricultural Department.

After Charles Brand had taken pictures and made his report about the Grimm alfalfa and the common alfalfa, he and Frank Kelzer went to the field where the Grimm alfalfa stood, and dug out alfalfa plants, digging as deeply as they could with a long spade. Before putting these specimens in his water-proof bags, he identified and marked the plants carefully, as well as the bags. Before packing them into his

suitcase, he watered them again, and then took them to the experiment station in Washington, D.C. A few years later, Mr. Frank Grimm, son of Wendelin Grimm, received a sample of the seed grown from these plants. He planted these sample seeds in a field east of his farm buildings. It was a pleasure to see the variety in color in this alfalfa field. Mr. Leo Grimm, youngest son of Frank Grimm, can testify to this.

When the Grimm's first came to Carver County, the only means of traveling long distances, was by steam boat up and down the Minnesota River. During the first part of the 1860's, a severe depression occurred. This put the farmers here at a great disadvantage, because they had to sell their grain and wood before the river froze and while the boats could still run. Buyers took advantage of this situation, and bought the farmers' products at low prices. The farmers, on the other hand, had to pay high prices for everything they needed.

Transportation was improved somewhat by the introduction of horses and mules to replace the slow-moving oxen. This took place after the Civil War when the horses and mules were brought from the south.

The first railroads were built through Chaska in 1869. The Minneapolis and St. Louis went south to St. Louis, while the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul went as far as Glencoe. In 1873, they built a main road from Minneapolis to Cologne. This road went through the Wendelin Grimm farm to meet what they called the Hastings and Dakota Line. This line was a by-pass to the Twin Cities. The following year this was extended from Glencoe to Montevideo.

After the railroads were built, this county really began to boom with industries of various kinds, such as, brick yards, flour mills, breweries, and saw mills, together with live stock grain raising and dairy farming. There was a market for everything.

At this time, too, improvements in farm implements were being introduced. For cutting grain, the old hand cradle was replaced by the reaper, and later by the self-binder. The old hand-flail threshing was replaced by the horse-powered threshing machine, later powered by steam engines, and still later by the gasoline tractor, and today we have the combine. The oxen-drawn breaking plows were replaced by horse-drawn walking plows, then came the sulky and gang plows, and now we have the tractor-mounted cultivators.

During the first part of 1900, the silo became a great aid to the dairy farmers. At that time it was used only for corn silage,

but as more and more silos were built, experiments proved that alfalfa silage is equally as good as corn silage. Since the yield of alfalfa is about equal to corn silage per acre, more alfalfa was put into silos. Feeding cattle green alfalfa silage in winter, was comparable to green pasture in summer; dairy farmers used green alfalfa silage when pastures became short in summer. Farmers have found that one acre of alfalfa will produce as much feed in the form of green-chop alfalfa, as several acres of pasture. Thus a good brand of alfalfa, such as Grimm alfalfa, is another help to the dairy farmer.

By the year 1910, the raising of alfalfa became a booming occupation in Carver County. Dairy farming kept pace with the growth of alfalfa. Signs were placed all along the roads in this county with the following inscriptions:

"This is Carver County".

"Carver County, the Home of Grimm Alfalfa".

"Carver County, the Golden Buckle of the Dairy Belt".

Today there is only one of the original signs to be seen. This reads, "Carver County, the Home of Grimm Alfalfa", and is attached to the dairy barn on the Clarence Kelzer farm, which was the original second farm owned by Wendelin Grimm, the great-grandfather of the present owner. This farm is located midway between Chaska and Victoria, just off County Road No. 14, on a Laketownship gravel road.

At first, Mr. Wendelin Grimm sold seed to his neighbors. They were eager to get it because they knew the superior quality of his product. Gradually, the reputation of the quality of this seed spread throughout the county. The work of Charles Brand and the University of Minnesota experts brought this alfalfa to the attention of seed companies, and immediately they began to sell Grimm alfalfa seed. In this way it became known all over the United States from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from the Gulf of Mexico to the north of Canada and Alaska.

In 1910 two of Frank Grimm's sons, John and Paul immigrated west to Reeder, Bowman County, North Dakota, where they took up farming. They farmed here for many years. One year Paul raised over 4000 pounds of Grimm alfalfa seed. They had unfavorable weather conditions, too. In the drought years of the 1930's, after several years of crop failures, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Grimm and their seven sons were forced to leave their farm; from there they went westward and finally settled in Billings, Montana.

Today there are many different trade names for alfalfa, but most of them can be traced to the original Grimm alfalfa seed. For to this day there is no other variety of alfalfa that can excel

the genuine Grimm alfalfa in durability, hardiness, and quality. May the name of Grimm alfalfa continue to denote the best alfalfa ever produced, and may its story continue to be told.

In conclusion, it can be seen that the foresight of an ambitious, German immigrant, Mr. Wendelin Grimm, brought prosperity to Carver County in the State of Minnesota. A fifteen-pound bag of alfalfa seed placed in a trunk between quilts and blankets, making a long journey from Kilsheim, Germany, to New York, and then from there to Carver County, Minnesota, after being sowed and cared for amid difficulties known only to a pioneer, has become the "open sesame", or magic key to prosperity for a great county.

The place Wendelin Grimm holds in the estimation of men of thought is revealed in an article which appeared in the Minnesota Quarterly, in the March, 1938 issue on pages 21 to 33.

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