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Farming's past

(Continued from Page C28)

stumbling upon the farm during side photographic trips in the area bordering the Susquehanna.

I've wandered through ghost towns in the West and worked helping to raze vacant city slums. I trudged through the Catacombs, old Rhineland castles and slipped into long-empty German bunkers. But nothing compares to the feeling of sheer aloneness that pervades when exploring a dormant farm site.

I suspect that it's because life ... and death ... are so real on a farm. Each spring a farm comes back to life vegetatively after dying in late fall. There's evidence of new life emerging continually — kittens in the barn, calf or new litter of pigs.

Likewise, death is a common occurrence. The unfortunate bunny that gets caught during the first cutting of alfalfa, the calf turned the wrong way or the big, black cow that just couldn't take that final difficult birthing.

But nothing makes life more vital and real than death.

Farms are the fountainspring of all life through the foods there produced. That too, is why an abandoned site is all the more contrasting to the bustling activity that normally takes place through long days and well into the night seven days a week.

Walking through this abandoned site also brought back memories of a small family farm of a bygone era. Barely visible through the

debris of what must have been the kitchen were faded colorings of a floor covering commonly called oilcloth. It brought back memories of similar multi-colored geometric blocks on a floor of that other farm kitchen.

I can remember sitting in the kitchen of that other farmhouse on a hot July afternoon waiting for the milk to be strained in order to quench a youthful thirst, or getting awakened later that muggy July night to sit around the large wood table until the noise and fireworks of an electrical storm passed and everyone could go back to sleep knowing the barn was again safe.

Outside, this abandoned farmhouse rose a couple of wild cherry trees — the smooth bark and fragile leaves nestling up the rough stone walls.

I can recall my first introduction to homemade wine as a very small tot several decades ago. My farm from the past was located near the Northampton and Bucks county line in the hills between two small hamlets called Wassergass and Springtown. It was the farm of an aged German couple who transported a bit of the homeland to these hills.

My first taste of homemade wine came on VE day. As we listened to the news on the big old parlor Philco radio, the huge man in the bib overalls told his wife in his best "Hoch Deutsch" to get the bottle of wein.

Silently, a small glass was poured for each person present as the couple prayed for peace to come to the land they left and the land they now worked.

On the abandoned farmstead, the pointed tip of my boots kick a small lead object. It's the top of a Ball-canning jar. Oh, how I remember the massive, delicious meals that poured forth from these jars.

The only other "beings" with me at the vacated farm site are the tiny flies that buzz annoyingly round my head. They used to be real pests when a sweaty little boy was stuck up on the second floor of a barn to fork the hay back into the corners of the mow.

The sun filters through the trees that have almost overgrown the abandoned farm location. I remember the sun as it filtered through the cracks in the wood walls of the barn, sending the hay dust shimmering and dancing like a million little lights.

The silvery-grey aged wood of the wagon shed-cornercrib is torn loose in spots and falling in others. But there's such character in that wood.

In the deep lines of the wood I can still see the lines that creased the faces of that couple from the farm of long ago.

Yes' there's nothing so sad or lonely as an abandoned farm.

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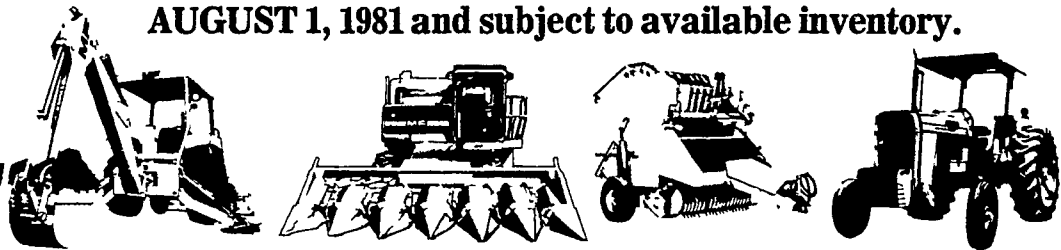
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