

Lie me Down in Green Pastures:

An Analysis of Farm Wife Widowhood in Trempealeau County
From 1875-1967



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History 489

11/30/2009

Abstract

This paper will attempt to examine the role of farm wives who were widowed. This will be done by focusing on the lives of two generations of widows in the Everson family in Western Wisconsin from 1875- 1967. This paper will help to add to the knowledge of gender and marital status as well as Wisconsin history in general.

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Over the last few decades the history profession has expanded and gained a wider lens into what constitutes history. This is evident in the developed study of both minorities and women. In addition to the expanded knowledge of these groups, local history has gained importance. This is evident with the study of Wisconsin history. Many books have been written on the subject including The Making of an American Community written by Merle Curti, which focus on the development of Trempealeau County. Universities like UW-Eau Claire also have courses solely devoted to Wisconsin History.¹

Both the new gender angle of history as well as the narrow study of local history is combined into Jane Pederson's Between Memory and Reality. In this book Pederson explores the gender issues of rural Wisconsin, namely Lincoln and Pigeon townships of Trempealeau County. Pederson explains the role of women in rural society, specifically in work and in the social arena. However

¹ Merle Curti, *The Making of an American Community*. Stanford University Press: Stanford, CA, 1959.

although Pederson successfully examines the gender history of the area from the time period of 1870 to 1970 one element that she does not expand on is the role of widows on farm in Trempealeau County.²

Little is studied about the widow on the farm and her role in history. There exists very little documented evidence of this category within gender history. Therefore having identified this lack of scholarly research this thesis will attempt to shed some light to this little illuminated chapter of not only gender history but of the history of Western Wisconsin.

Two generations of Women of the Everson family who lived near the community of Whitehall, WI will be the basis of this study. Firstly, the case of Ellen Everson, who was widowed young not only once but twice, helps to illustrate the role of widows from the latter half of the 19th century through the early 20th century. Similarly to her mother-in-law Ellen Everson, Anna Everson would as well be widowed at a young age. With the study of these two women and the community which they called home will help to expand the

² Jane Pederson, *Between Memory and Reality: Family and Community in Rural Wisconsin, 1870-1970*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1992.

field of knowledge on the role of widows on Wisconsin farms.

Brief History of Trempealeau County

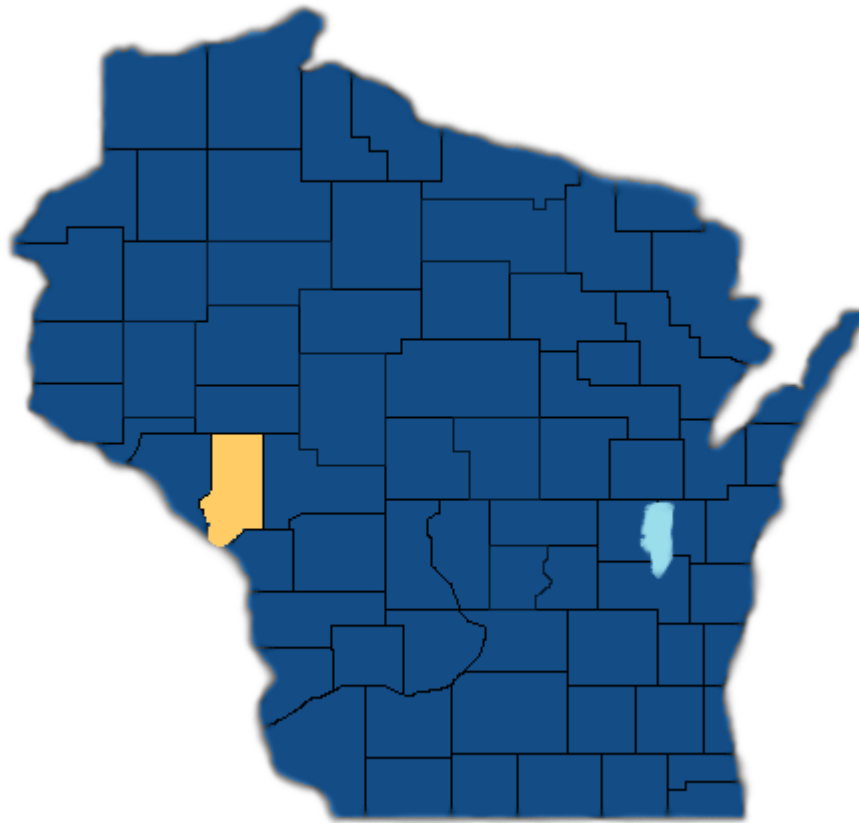
Trempealeau County is located in Western Wisconsin and is the home to rolling hills and valleys. The first Europeans to come to the area were French explorers during the 17th and 18th centuries. The permanent settlers came in the in search of furs. These trappers and traders would set up trading posts in the first permanent settlement of Reed's Landing in the 1830's. By the 1850's the first land speculators had come to the county. With this then came the first pioneers, who were for the most part Yankees. These settlers began to build farms and villages. These Yankee farms developed farms and established Trempealeau County as a grain producer. During this time more roads were built to allow for improved transportation. By the early 1860's European immigrants start to come to the

county. For the many Norwegian immigrants it was said that the hills and valleys reminded them of home.³

Among these Norwegian immigrants was the Everson family would settle in a valley known as Irvin Coulee. The large valley lay between Whitehall to the north and Square Bluff to the South. There along with many other Norwegian immigrants they would begin to develop and expand on the former Yankee farms. Included is a map of Wisconsin to better understand where Trempealeau County lies in the state as well as plat map of the Whitehall area in 1914, one can note the location of the Eversons' Farms as well as other important community locations.

³Merle Curti, *The Making of an American Community*. Stanford University Press: Stanford, CA, 1959.

Trempealeau County, Wisconsin

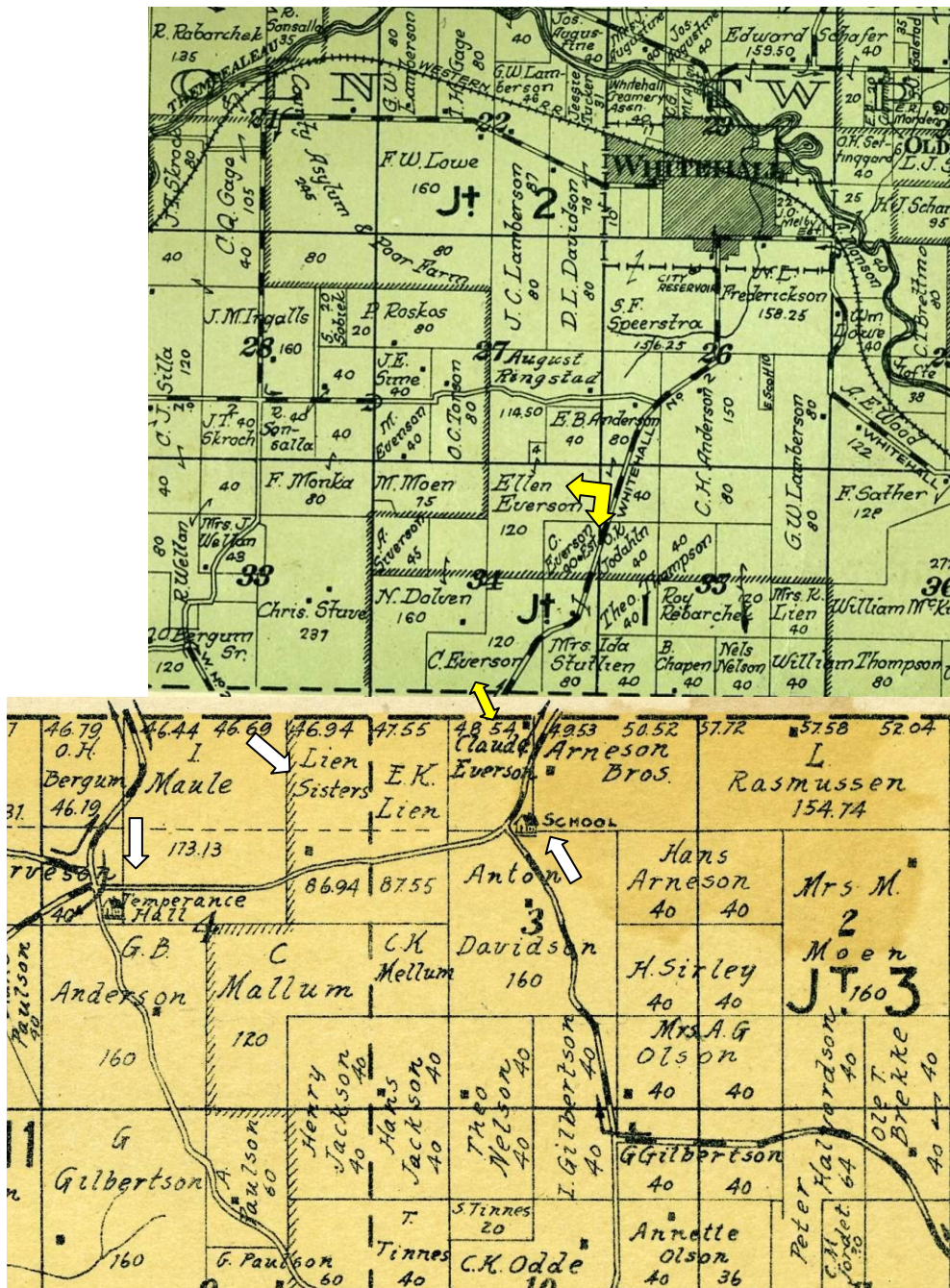


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⁴ "Trempealeau County Map,"

[http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://feingold.senate.gov/recovery/images/By County/recovery_map trempealeau.gif&imgrefurl=http://feingold.senate.gov/recovery/map/trempealeau.html&usq= uwgtrzIfQ-1me4Gir_3WAbxzjg8=&h=439&w=495&sz=20&hl=en&start=68&um=1&itbs=1&tbnid=pGpq24319o00xM:&tbnh=115&tbnw=130&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dtrempealeau%2Bcount%2Bmap%26ndsp%3D21%26hl%3Den%26rlz%3D1T4GGLG_enUS310US310%26sa%3DN%26start%3D63%26um%3D1](http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://feingold.senate.gov/recovery/images/By%20County/recovery_map_trempealeau.gif&imgrefurl=http://feingold.senate.gov/recovery/map/trempealeau.html&usq=uwgtrzIfQ-1me4Gir_3WAbxzjg8=&h=439&w=495&sz=20&hl=en&start=68&um=1&itbs=1&tbnid=pGpq24319o00xM:&tbnh=115&tbnw=130&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dtrempealeau%2Bcount%2Bmap%26ndsp%3D21%26hl%3Den%26rlz%3D1T4GGLG_enUS310US310%26sa%3DN%26start%3D63%26um%3D1) (assced December 10, 2009)

Plat Map of Irvin Coulee 1914



⁵ Atlas and Farmers' Directory of Trempealeau County Wisconsin, Webb Publishing Company: St. Paul, 1914.

Ellen Everson History

Ellen Everson's journey began thousands of miles from Trempealeau County back in the old country. Ellen was born to Gulbrand and Sesel Smedsrud (later to be known as Hanson), on January 24, 1851 in Nordre Land, Norway. Her given name in Norwegian was Anneta Gulbrandsdatter. In 1866 the Smedsruks set out for America on the ship Thor on May 4th. They reached Quebec, Canada on June 11. The first came to the Mt. Horeb area in Dane County, WI. After three or four years they came to Welch Coulee in the township of Preston in Trempealeau County, where they developed a farmstead. Ellen was joined in marriage to Tracy Rice, who had come to the Trempealeau area from New York State, on May 20, 1871. They were blessed with one son, Gilbert. Tragically, Tracy died perhaps of typhus about three years after their marriage. Without further support Ellen returned to the family's home in Welch Coulee. ⁶

Similarly to many young widows of the time Ellen would remarry. After about a year into her widowhood she met a

⁶ "Ellen Everson Obituary," *Whitehall Times*. June 15, 1927.

young man, Christian Everson, who had recently come to the area. They were married November 21, 1875.

Much like herself, Christian was also from Norway. He was born there May 11, 1849. At the age of four or so, in 1851, along with the rest of his family came to the United States. They settled in Vermont Township, Dane County, WI. His father was noted to be one of the pioneers of Dane County who had come to the county poor but in time had come to have a valuable farm. Christian had lost four of his brothers two of whom were lost during the War of the Rebellion and two others who had become ill and died after leaving home to secure work, one of whom died in Illinois during the first year the family had come to this country and the other died in Nevada some time later.⁷

Christian had left the homestead at the age of 25 to move to Trempealeau County where he purchased 164 acres in Lincoln Township in section 24. He purchased the land from Milo Campbell on April 1, 1875.⁸

⁷ "Obituary Christian Everson," The Whitehall Times August 17, 1893.

⁸ Biographical History Illustrated of La Crosse, Trempealeau and Buffalo Counties, Wisconsin.

After their marriage Christian and Ellen began to build a family and farm. One of the first improvements made on the farm was to move a small house that was on the north edge of the farm to the current more central location. They utilized a small sand stone quarry on the hill above the home to cut stone out for the use in building of the basement. Once the small home was moved, two major additions were made on either end of the original home as the family grew to form a cross shaped home which had two porches one on either side of the cross section of the home. Along with the farm, the Eversons also grew their family. With the son from Ellen's first marriage, Gilbert, they would also have six additional children born from 1876 to 1890. They would include Millie in 1876, Clara in 1878, Edward in 1881, Claude in 1883, Helen in 1887 and Florence in 1890.⁹

On Christian and Ellen's 164 acre farm about 90 acres was tillable. In similar fashion to their neighbors, they grew primarily oats, hay and some corn. The livestock they raised included a dairy herd and some chickens. They also

⁹Everson, Gary. Interview by Jennie Everson. Whitehall, WI, November 2009.

had several horses for both work and others for transportation.

There was again to be sorrow in the life of Ellen and her family. Christian died in their home on August 6, 1893 of consumption, also known as TB. After her husband's death Ellen would assume the management of the farm with the help from hired men, especially in the early years when the children were not yet old enough to help. In addition to the farm activities the Eversons at the time also owned partnership interest along with the Getts family in the Creamery in Whitehall which continued after the death of Christian. Getts and Everson had formed the creamery in the 1880's as wheat farming had been replaced with dairy in the area.^{10 11}

Again in 1898, Ellen would be challenged, as the barn that had stood to the west of the house was struck by lightning and was burned. Ellen chose to rebuild and continue the farming operation. She replaced the burned barn with a new dairy barn which was 36' by 72' and had

¹⁰ Everson, Gary. Interview by Jennie Everson. Whitehall, WI, November 2009.

¹¹ "Obituary Christian Everson," The Whitehall Times August 17, 1893.

room for about twenty-two cow stalls and about six horse stalls.¹²

The livestock as well as the house received its water from a spring. The unique system piped water from the spring house where water collected about 3/8 of a mile to the buildings. The water first entered the house and collected into a large cement tank in the kitchen and the overflow ran to a stock tank for the cattle.

In those days farmers did not sell milk, instead they would separate the whey and cream and sell the cream which was seen as the product with value. Ellen also sold the cream from the dairy herd. She utilized the natural cold spring water in a large tank in her kitchen to cool the cream before sale.¹³

Along with the responsibilities on the farm, Ellen also had an active social life. She often had guests in her home as in this time visiting was more common. Along with home visits Ellen and family also joined other

¹² Everson, Gary. Interview by Jennie Everson. Whitehall, WI, November 2009.

¹³ Jackson, Ethel. Whitehall, WI, November 2009. Jackson was raised on the farm where Ellen once lived.

neighbors and had community events at the Temperance Hall which once stood on the hill between Irvin Coulee and Plum Creek which helps to illustrate the ideals of the community.¹⁴

Along with actively socializing in the community Ellen was one of the founding members of the Lady's Aid which was part of the Lutheran Church in Whitehall where she was a member. Ellen along with Mrs. Ole Wald led the organization in the beginning years. Many of the early members were from Irvin Coulee.¹⁵

In addition to Ellen's interest in community and the farm business she also placed a high importance in education. This can be illustrated by the education which her children received. With the addition of attending school in Whitehall through the level available many of her children also sought higher education.

Her oldest son Gilbert attended La Crosse Business School and when he completed his training he entered into the machinery business in 1895 and by late 1910 began to

¹⁴ Millie Everson, Diary, 1897, Everson Family Collection.

¹⁵ History of Our Saviour's Lutheran Lady's Aid, Whitehall, WI, 1995, Everson Family Collection.

convert the business into the Auto Sales Company as the automobile industry grew. He continued his activity in this business until his retirement. In addition to his auto sales he also had business holdings in stock in the Farmers and Merchants Bank of Independence. Gilbert married in 1895 and later had six children with his wife Ida.

Millie, Ellen's oldest daughter was a teacher for many years and other than her primary education it is likely that she was self taught to the trade of education. Millie taught in several area rural schools in addition to teaching in Whitehall. For some time she also taught in North Dakota in the Knox area where some of Ellen's relatives had lived. Millie returned to the area and continued teaching as she never married.

The only one of Ellen's daughters that was not a teacher was the second oldest daughter Clara who was a seamstress in the Whitehall area. Clara likely learned the trade from her aunt Julia Hanson, Ellen's sister, who had worked in several large homes in Duluth, including the

Congdon family of who owned the Glensheen Mansion, which is now a museum.

Helen would be the only one of the four girls who would marry. Prior to this though she attended college in Oshkosh and after graduating began teaching. After starting teaching in the area she moved to North Dakota where she taught for several years and then later married Harry Petrie. With Harry, Helen helped to run their general store as well as a machinery dealership in the area. They also had interest in the local bank in Linton, ND. The Petries were never blessed with children. Helen's interest in learning and education was evident by the gift she made to the community of Linton of a new library.¹⁶

The youngest of Ellen and Christian's children, Florence also was a teacher. She attended college in La Crosse. Florence first taught in rural school districts including Irvin Coulee. Later she would teach in Montana and Washington State for a time. A majority of her career was in Virginia, Minnesota where she taught grade school. Florence owned a home in Whitehall where she spent her

¹⁶ Everson, Gary. Interview by Jennie Everson. Whitehall, WI, November 2009.

summer and once she retired she returned there. Florence also would never marry.

Both of the younger of Ellen sons, Claude and Edward, would pursue farming interests. In addition to farming Claude also operated a bridge and road contracting business which operated throughout the county. Both Claude and Edward would marry and have children, three and six respectively.

After Claude was out of school he would manage the farm for his mother. In 1909 Claude bought his own farm and a year later on November 16, 1910 married Anna Mortenson. Claude continued to manage his mother's farm until his brother Ed married a few years later and took over the role. After Ed's marriage, the family home was divided and an additional kitchen was added to the already large home to accommodate the two families. This allowed each family to have their own private quarters.¹⁷

Ellen would remain in her home in Irvin Coulee until her death on June 1, 1927. Although Ellen had to endure

¹⁷ Everson, Gary. Interview by Jennie Everson. Whitehall, WI, November 2009.

many challenges in her life she held the family and farm together. It is clear that Ellen instilled strong sense of community as well as education. Ellen Hanson Everson is an excellent example of the strength and perseverance of a widow on a Wisconsin farm.¹⁸

¹⁸ Obituary of Ellen Everson, *The Whitehall Times*, June 15, 1927.

Anna Everson History

Anna Everson's journey starts in the sleepy valley of Dagget Coulee, also known as Moe Coulee, in the town of Pigeon, Trempealeau County. She was born on January 29, 1883 to Hans and Mathea Mortenson. Her parents had come to the town of Pigeon in about 1867; prior to this they had lived near Halfway Creek near Holmen, WI. Both of Anna's parents had immigrated to the United States from Norway. Hans was from Tromso, Norway which is north the Arctic Circle. He had been a fisherman till he came to this country which initialed hard, cold work. During the fishing season the men lived in tents and often had to eat their food frozen. Hans and Mathea had eleven children, however the oldest five died in epidemics of the time. They were buried in the Upper Pigeon Creek Cemetery. It can be noted that several were lost in the same week. They would later have six girls who would reach adulthood. During the winters Mathea was left to manage the day-to-day chores of

the farm when Hans would leave for the pineries of northern Wisconsin.^{19 20}

Anna attended school at the Dagget Coulee School to complete her primary education. Then she would stay with her older sister, who was married at this time and lived in town where her husband owned and operated the local mill, so she could attend the high school in Whitehall which was indicated in the 1905 census. A few years following this time in 1909, her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Hans Mortenson retired and sold their farm. They then moved into Whitehall where they purchased a home on Dewey Street. After Anna was finished with school she would work for Torgerson and Steig which was a general store located on Main Street, the building still stands today and now house Whitehall Surplus Store. During the time Anna worked as a clerk in the general store she met Claude Everson, Ellen Everson youngest son. Anna and Claude then married in 1910. A year prior Claude purchased 167 acres adjacent to his mother's farm from the Davidson Family, three years

¹⁹ Everson, Gary. Interview by Jennie Everson. Whitehall, WI, November 2009.

²⁰ H. A. Hanson, A Pigeon Valley Pioneer- Hans Mortenson Obituary, 1924, Everson Family Collection.

following this they would purchase 120 additional acres from Ole Torson, which adjoined the existing farm. In addition to farming, as previously mentioned, Claude also operated a bridge and road construction business. In 1915 Claude began improvement on the farm by building a new barn which measured 50' by 80' and, as originally constructed, held 27 cow stalls and about a dozen horse stalls. The barn was aided in ventilation by four cupolas that were on four points along the roof line. From the basement where the animals were housed four structures which resembled a wood chimneys ran from the ceiling of the lower story to the cupola which aided in air circulation.^{21 22}

In addition to the new barn, the farm also had an equally large tobacco shed. During this time tobacco was a important crop. Along with dairy, the Eversons also had a sheep barn where they raised sheep, mainly for wool production. A minimal amount of hogs were also raised. Chicken for meat and for eggs were also a notable element on the farm.

²¹United States Census Bureau, Census of Population, Trempealeau County, Village of Whitehall, 1905.

²²Everson, Gary. Interview by Jennie Everson. Whitehall, WI, November 2009.

Claude and Anna, however, were not only growing a farm but a family as well. On January 30, 1912 their first son Chester was born. Three years later, on January 12, 1915 Roderick joined the family. The next year on February 14, 1916, their youngest son, Walter was born. By 1918 Claude began to develop heart problems and it was said that his heart sounded like a threshing machine. After about six months of being confined to bed, Claude died in March 24, 1919 and the farm was bequeathed to Anna. Claude's will helped to indicate that both Anna and he had the full intention that after his death she would maintain the farm. "Trusting that my said beloved wife as well as those who shall succeed to her estate, may find the same enjoyment in the use of my estate that I and my beloved companion found in its accumulation."²³

Anna became a young widow and was left with three young boys who were not yet of an age where they were much help; they were seven, four, and three respectively. Since Anna was certainly unable to manage on her own, Lyder Nelson, a Norwegian immigrant, who had worked for Claude

²³Claude Everson Will, February 17, 1919, Everson Family Collection.

previously, returned to help manage the work on the farm, where he stayed from 1919 till 1927.

Anna was well suited to management. Since her work as a clerk in her youth she developed notable organizational skills. This can be seen in many instances but especially when she was first married. She created a list which makes up several pages of the items and their costs in which she purchased to set up housekeeping. These skills can also be seen in her detailed farm record keeping where she notes all the financial affairs of the farm.^{24 25}

After Anna assumed management of the farm after her husband's death, she would go on to make several improvements to the farm; one of these improvements was the introduction of Holstein cattle to the farm. Anna traveled to Westby, Wisconsin and purchased the registered cattle in 1921. The cattle then arrived by train to Whitehall and were led up the valley to the farm. Prior to this time the dairy herd was made up of shorthorn cattle which are known to be more of a dual purpose breed. An additional

²⁴Anna Everson, Setting up housekeeping list, 1910, Everson Family Collection.

²⁵ Anna Everson and Sons, Farm record books, 1941-1946, Everson Family Collection.

improvement to the farm was the mechanization of field work. By 1925, at the time Anna purchased the first corn chopper, she had already owned a tractor which was used to pull the chopper.

Though there were many hills on the land that make up the Everson farm, there was as well lower land on the bed of the valley. The fields that were located in this area were often wet and difficult to work. In response to this Anna decided to tile four of these fields in 1928 which made up about fifty of her tillable acres.

Tiling is a tool which can help to convert wet land to more suitable farm land. In the process large clay piping was laid a few feet below the soil, deep enough so that they would not be disturbed when the field was plowed. The clay pipes are connected and help to collect excess water throughout the field and drain it into the creek. The process of laying these large clay pipes must have been a very labor intensive process in the 1920's with a majority of the soil having been moved by hand. Once the fields had been tiled they were much more productive and manageable. The tiling system still remains today and functions for the

most part must as it did in the 1920's, which stands as a testament to the management and progressiveness of Anna.²⁶

In the years following the death of Claude, Anna received support from her mother-in-law; who better to understand the challenges of the situation as a women who too had been a young widow not only once but twice? During the time Anna's boys were young their Grandma Ellen would watch them as she did through her son Claude's illness as well.²⁷

Over the years, Anna had also made various facility improvements to the farm. One of the building changes was made in 1936 when a large tobacco shed that stood near the dairy barn was torn down and the material was used in building a two story chicken coop which had capacity for about 800 chicken. Following this construction a new tobacco shed was built about a half a mile down the road which allowed for the drying and curing of five acres of tobacco. Another improvement made in the 1930's was the addition of electricity. When the people living in Irvin Coulee were unable to get electricity from Northern States

²⁶Map of Tiling layout, Anna Everson Farm, 1928, Everson Family Collection.

²⁷As recounted by Anna's son, Roderick to author in her childhood.

Power, but the people of the valley joined to get and were able to get the rural electric coop to bring power to the valley. Anna Everson in 1937 was among one of the original members of the Trempealeau County Rural Electric Coop. Prior to this the some power on the farm was delivered by wind power from the windmill that was on the farm at the time of purchase. Also by the 1920's the first tractors were purchased and the use of the work horse was eventually phased out over time.²⁸

Along with the field crops of tobacco and corn, grain was also raised. The hay production on the farm was split between timothy type hay and alfalfa which allowed for the dairy cow to produce more. For example in 1937 Anna raised forty acres of grain, fifty acres of hay and 21 acres of corn, this is indicated by the Annual Enumeration of Farm Statisitcs. In addition to the field crops, Anna raised a large vegetable garden which helped to feed her family, as well as the hired men that worked on the farm. As a resourceful woman Anna utilized the wild vegetation that grew on the farm as well. There were wild plums and blackberries that could be picked and converted to sauce or

²⁸ Everson Farm and Family Scrap book, last updated 1990, Everson Family Collection.

jam for consumption in the winter months. Also many wild apple trees grew on the farm which served as a source of fresh fruit as well as a product that could be preserved and used in the months it was not available.²⁹

As Anna's sons grew they began to assume more of the day to day management of the farm. Also during this time all of Anna's three sons would complete high school. In a similar vein as her mother-in-law Anna held a high importance to education. This is evident by the fact that after high school Anna's oldest son Chester attended Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. Due to the economic times during the early 1930's, Chester was only able to attend for two years. Later both Chester and Anna's youngest son Walter would attend Farm Short Course at UW Madison. In addition Walter would enlist in the US Navy where he served during WWII.

Once Roderick, Anna's middle son, married in 1943 the home the family lived in was divided into two apartments, one side of the house for Roderick and his family and the other for Anna and Chester. Once Walter married and returned home he began to farm in partnership with his

²⁹ *Annual Agriculture Enumeration of Farm Statistics*, Trempealeau County, Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Microfilms. 1939.

brothers. In 1948, Anna's three sons purchased a 339 acre farm from Archie Webb which was two miles north of Whitehall near Coral City. There Walter and his wife Arlie lived and managed the dairy herd until 1954 when he left the partnership. After this time Anna decided to move her son Chester to the farm near Coral City as Chester assumed the management of that farm. Anna remained the owner of the farm in Irvin Coulee which she had fully inherited from her husband in 1919 until she sold it to her sons Roderick and Chester in 1961 with whom she farmed in partnership with till this point. Anna would remain on the Coral City farm with Chester until her death. She remained an active part of the farm, helping out in barn chores until a few weeks before she passed away. Following a brief hospital stay in Whitehall, Anna returned to Irvin Coulee to stay with her son Roderick and family for the night. During the late hours of the evening she would complete her earthly journey, January 10, 1967 at the age of 83, in the same home that she had once shared with her husband.

Anna Everson stands as a testament to the perseverance and strength of the farm widow. Not only was she able to assume the responsibility of the management of the farm, she as well was innovative in making several improvements

to the farm early on. As well as her farm responsibilities Anna instilled in her boys a sense of education and a strong work ethic. Anna, as her mother-in-law did, withstood the challenges of the time in order to pass the fruits of her husband and her own labor to the next generation.

The Community of Irvin Coulee

Other Women in the Area

It is clear, however, that not all women of this time were as well equipped to deal with adversity. This can be clearly illustrated with the case of Christina Liebech who lived immediately south of the Anna Everson Farm. From her photo taken roughly in 1930, Liebech stares vacantly out from the dilapidated boards that barely are held together well enough to be considered an adequate shelter for livestock, let alone that of a woman.³⁰ (see appendix) It is hard to imagine how a building could have been able to get to this humble state at this time because it can be easily found buildings on a farmstead in which have been left to time for decades and still be in considerable better state than that of the heap of boards in which Liebech called home.

³⁰ photo of Liebech standing near her home in Irvin Coulee, Whitehall, WI.

However, though Liebech may have had considerably less support from her family than that of her neighbors to the north, Anna and Ellen Everson, she was not in the world alone. This can be noted by the day in which she left this world for the next. After the concern of her neighbors in not seeing activity around her home for some time they set out to check up on her but once they reached her yard they were met by her trusty canine companions which met the callers with snarls and bared teeth. These animals were so protective of Liebech, so that the neighbors were forced to dispose of the animals before they were able to gain entry into the home where subsequently they found Liebech asleep in eternal slumber.³¹

In contrast to the case of Christina Liebech, other women in the valley also found success without being married. This maybe most evident in Irvin Coulee with Ida and Randina Lien, who lived on adjoining farm to the west of the Anna Everson farm. The Liens were two sisters who had owned and operated their own farm till their retirement. It can be noted that both in 1915 and 1930

³¹As recounted by Anna's son, Roderick to author in her childhood.

they were acknowledged as landowners in the atlases of Trempealeau County.

The Lien sisters never married but despite being single they owned and operated a rather large farm for the time. They had a dairy herd of about 40 jersey cattle which was noted to be of considerable numbers for the era. In addition to their dairy business they also raised silver foxes which were sold for their fur. It can also be surmised that the Liens had good business sense as well. This can be noted by their utilization of advertising for their farm business. An ad appears along with other business of the time in The Atlas of Trempealeau County 1930, where both their jersey cattle breeding and silver fox business were advertised. Another element that stands as a testament to their success in farming is their beautiful home, which is large and square and was once heavily decorated with gingerbread railing on the flat portion of the roof where the chimney rises above the

roofline. Although now owned by an unrelated gentleman it still remains well kept.^{32 33}

The Lien sisters helped to illustrate the point that although the farming industry of this time was heavily dominated by males, women could also complete and thrive in the business. With this example of successful single women in the area would have given a sense of support and a model to other women of the time who were trying to make it on their own as well.

The Irvin Coulee School

The Irvin Coulee School played an important role in the community until it was closed in 1955. Not only did it serve as a place that the children of the valley could receive a free primary education, it also served as a community meeting place. In addition to this the school

³² Atlas and Farmers' Directory of Trempealeau County Wisconsin, Webb Publishing Company: St. Paul, 1914.

³³ Atlas and Farmers' Directory of Trempealeau County Wisconsin, Webb Publishing Company: St. Paul, 1930.

served another purpose one of which extended opportunities to women, in employment and also in leadership roles.

In early years, the school was located on Square Bluff and served both the children of Irvin Coulee and those in Welch Coulee but as the community grew it was necessary to split the districts. The first school building in the main valley of Irvin Coulee was of wood frame construction and located across the road from what would become the Anna Everson Farm. By 1913 it was decided to build a new school in the same location and the old building was moved to the Bennett Anderson Farm. The second school building was made of block and still remains today, though since the district disbanded it has served as a honey house for a local beekeeper and then was subsequently converted into a residence.³⁴

Throughout the long history of the Irvin Coulee School women have played a pivotal role in the educational process. During the early 20th century school teaching was one of the only professions women were encouraged to enter. Almost all of the teachers that taught in the Irvin Coulee

³⁴ History of Trempealeau County School Districts, unknown year.

School were women. As previously noted several of Ellen Everson's daughters were teachers, though they taught in several other local districts as well, both Millie and Florence taught in the Irvin Coulee district.

Along with job opportunities, women in Irvin Coulee School district were afforded leadership roles. This can be illustrated by women serving on the school board as far back as 1908 when Mrs. Dolven assumed the role after her husband declined nomination. After this time other women served on the board including Anna Everson. This is notable because one must remember that at the time Mrs. Dolvin assumed her role women would not be extended the right to vote in presidential elections for another decade. It can also be noted that women were given the right to vote in school meetings as far back as during the building project of 1913.³⁵

The school also served as support for Anna during the time after the loss of her husband. Since she had three small young boys it was difficult to divide time between the farm and the family. At the time of Claude's death

³⁵ Irvin Coulee School District Records, 1908-1955, Everson Family Collection.

Chester was already of school age, then the following year both Walter and Roderick joined him, even though they were two years and one year respectively younger than their classmates. This probably would not have been made possible had it not been for the fact that Anna's younger sister Ester Mortenson was the teacher during this time.

In addition to salaries for the teachers, the school also provided an extra income for the family which housed the teacher. Throughout many years the teacher boarded with Anna Everson who in turn she received a small monetary reimbursement. This can be noted in Irvin Coulee school records as well as the 1930 census records which indicate that Miss Georgia Klanrud, who was teaching at the school, stay with at the Anna Everson Farm.^{36 37} Perhaps the most memorable teacher that would board with Anna Everson during the early 1940's was Valborg Thomte, who was raised in Coral City and had taught in several other country school districts in the area and came to teach in Irvin Coulee. During this time Valborg and Roderick, Anna's middle son,

³⁶ Irvin Coulee School District Records, 1908-1955, Everson Family Collection.

³⁷ United States Census Bureau, Census of Population: Trempealeau County, Township of Preston, 1930.

became better acquainted with each other. However, Roderick was a shy young man and so his mother Anna asked Valborg if she would be interested in going on a date with Roderick. After several months of dating each other, Roderick and Valborg married in June of 1943. This just goes to show another way in which the Irvin Coulee School played an important role in the Everson Family.

The Irvin Coulee School was pillar of the community. It not only served to educate the children of the valley it served an important role for many women of the area. It afforded job opportunities as well as early leadership roles.

It is clear that women played a very important role on Wisconsin farms. They often worked alongside their husbands in order to maintain their farms. For the last several decades the role of these women has been examined more thoroughly, however little attention was given to the women who were widowed and their relation to the maintaining of the Wisconsin farm.

Although Anna and Ellen Everson's situations were somewhat different they are excellent examples of how young women dealt with and met adversity head on. Both women proved that with strength and determination they would be able to not only hold their families and farms together but they could succeed as farmers. One of the elements that aided in to this success was the women ability to utilize the resources which were available to her, whether this was wild blackberries or rich soil. Another important element of the two women's character gain on experience in the case of Ellen and instilled from her parents for Anna, was the immigrant ideal, the desire to succeed and make a better life for their family. Moreover, the sense of community and importance of education served as important tools to the women of the time. In addition, it is clear that not

only widow of the time could be successful but single women in the area also met adversity and often succeeded.

The study of gender and more specifically widows helps to add an additional element to the base of the knowledge of local history. There is still room within this area for further research as this piece just focused on an example from one family. However, the study of widows not only show how women dealt with challenges but it goes deeper than that, it helps to illustrate the raw character of what made up the women of Trempealeau county and with or without their husbands they had a vision for the future and a hope to pass on, not only their families land but the ideals in which went into its accumulation.

Everson Family Photos



Christian and Ellen Everson along with their young family.



Ellen Everson with her adult children.

Millie, Helen, Florence, Clara

Edward, Ellen, Claude, Gilbet



Ellen Everson Home



Grain field during harvest on Ellen Everson Farm.



Claude and Anna Everson in 1910



Anna Everson with her sons Chester, Roderick and Walter.



Anna Everson Farm (in far left center can see Lien Sister's Farm)



Chester, Walter, Anna and Roderick playing in the snow in 1923.



Lyder Nelson, who was farm foreman for a decade after the death of Claude Everson, with Anna's sons.



Anna Everson feeding chickens on her farm.



Chester and Roderick working with the tobacco harvest on
the Anna Everson Farm.



Irvin Coulee School



Christina Liebech standing near her home.



Christina Liebech home.

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This book is an important piece of Wisconsin history. It was used to better understand Trempealeau County History.

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"Trempealeau County Map."

[http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://feingold.senate.gov/recovery/images/By County/recovery map trempealeau.gif&imgrefurl=http://feingold.senate.gov/recovery/map/trempealeau.html&usq= u wgtrzIfQ-1me4Gir_3WAbxzjg8=&h=439&w=495&sz=20&hl=en&start=68&um=1&itbs=1&tbid=pGpg24319o00xM:&tbnh=115&tbnw=130&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dtrempealeau%2Bcounty%2Bmap%26ndsp%3D21%26hl%3Den%26rlz%3D1T4GGLG_enUS310US310%26sa%3DN%26start%3D63%26um%3D1](http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://feingold.senate.gov/recovery/images/By+County/recovery+map+trempealeau.gif&imgrefurl=http://feingold.senate.gov/recovery/map/trempealeau.html&usq=uwgtrzIfQ-1me4Gir_3WAbxzjg8=&h=439&w=495&sz=20&hl=en&start=68&um=1&itbs=1&tbid=pGpg24319o00xM:&tbnh=115&tbnw=130&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dtrempealeau%2Bcounty%2Bmap%26ndsp%3D21%26hl%3Den%26rlz%3D1T4GGLG_enUS310US310%26sa%3DN%26start%3D63%26um%3D1) (accessed December 10, 2009)

Utilized site for map of Trempealeau County.

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Society Microfilms. 1939.

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Chicago, 1892.

Has a one page biography on Christian Everson which helped
to give background information on his life and family.

Atlas and Farmers' Directory of Trempealeau County
Wisconsin. Webb Publishing Company: St. Paul, 1914.

Illustrates the location of Anna Everson's and Ellen Everson's farms. I also used image from this book to help reader understand the area of Trempealeau County

Atlas and Farmers' Directory of Trempealeau County Atlas.
Webb Publishing Company: St. Paul, 1930.

Illustrates the location of Anna Everson's and Ellen Everson's farms.

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"Obituary of Christian Everson," *The Whitehall Times*.
August 17, 1893.

Brief over view of Life of Christian, used for background information.

"Ellen Everson Obituary," *The Whitehall Times*. June 15,
1927.

Brief over view of Life of Ellen, used for background information.

Oral Interviews:

Everson, Gary. Interview by Jennie Everson. Whitehall, WI,
November 2009.

This interview helped to fill in the gap of information which were left in the family collection.

Jackson, Ethel. Whitehall, WI, November 2009.

This interview helped to given me information on the use of the spring tank in the Ellen Everson Home.

Family Collection:

Everson Family Collection, 1875-1990. In possession of author. Whitehall, WI.

This collection was the foundation of the material for my paper. Some of the pieces that were most useful were obituaries, a scrapbook, and a history of Trempealeau County Schools