

CFR 0762

James and Sarah Wilkinson

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## Henry Dunn's farm joins centenarians

Jas. and Sarah Wilkinson

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The place has changed over the century. The beautiful house burned down, the barns that sheltered work horses now store hay and the original pear tree grows crazily high, beyond any ladder's reach.

Henry Dunn, 70, who runs the Beaver Creek farm with the help of his son Michael, 36, says he doesn't spend a lot of time thinking about the fact that his family has worked the same farm for more than 100 years.

"I'm too busy making a living," he says.

In a way, that's the idea of the state's Century Farm program — to honor farms which continue to produce as the years go by, under the hands of new generations.

Friday, Dunn joined a long list of other Benton County Century Farms. Representatives of the Oregon and Benton County Historical Societies presented him with a certificate signed by the Gov. Vic Atiyeh, giving his 300-some acre place the historic designation.

Dunn's grandparents, James and Sarah Wilkinson, came to the Benton County farm from Illinois in 1875. Though some Easterners still headed West by ox and wagon in those years, travelers also had the choice of going by train.

That's what James and Sarah did, arriving in San Francisco by rail and coming to Oregon by boat.

What brought them to Benton County was that some Wilkinson relation already had settled the farm, although Dunn has no record of who it was. The place was originally settled in 1852 by a John K. Reiley. Dunn does not know who Reiley was or whether he was related to the family.

James and Sarah ran a "general purpose" farm — originally grain and dairy cattle, pigs and a few sheep. Taking over the farm from James and Sarah were Dunn's parents, Edward Dunn and Luella Wilkinson Dunn.

Edward and Luella took their family to Eastern Oregon for a while to try another kind of farming, leaving the place in the hands of Henry's brother Wallace.

The couple came back after a few years and eventually the farm was left in Henry's hands.

Henry's memories of the early farm are dim. He was "just a little kid" when he lived in the old white house and it burned when he was away in Eastern Oregon, where he spent most of his childhood.

Some things about the land have changed, he says. A big garden seen in a photograph of the old white house didn't need to be watered in those days, but "now you couldn't even grow a cucumber out here without watering."

He's not sure why there is less water now, but he thinks it may have something to do with the amount of the logging that's taken place in the Coast Range since the farm was established.

During all those years, has he ever thought he might like to live somewhere else? Henry laughs at that question.

"No, not particularly," he says.

Henry and Frances met when he was a clerk at the now-closed Beaver Creek school and she was an elementary teacher.

Henry is a 1932 graduate of then-Oregon State College, and so are the three children: Deanna Berry, 37, who lives in Seattle, her twin brother Henry, a sergeant with the U.S. Army in Ft. Bragg, N.C., and Michael.

Frances, who earned a two-year teaching degree in 1932 from Eastern Oregon College of Education in La Grande, went back to school and earned a bachelor's degree at OSU in 1968.

Henry's farm now produces hay and sheep which are sold as breeding stock. He ran cattle for a while, but has cut down so that he can more easily manage the place.

"The cattle were the easiest to get rid of," he says with a laugh.

"Yes, especially after the old cow got in and tore down the corral," adds Frances.

"I should still be raising cattle — there's more work in sheep," he says, although it's easier to wrestle a lamb than a calf.

General farming is a lot tougher these days, says Dunn. Prices of machinery, fertilizer, irrigation, "practically everything" make it hard to make a living on a small acreage.

But you can make a living of sorts on 300 acres, he says.

"Darn right you can, if you want to do enough work. 'Course, you're not going to make high wages for your time, not likely."