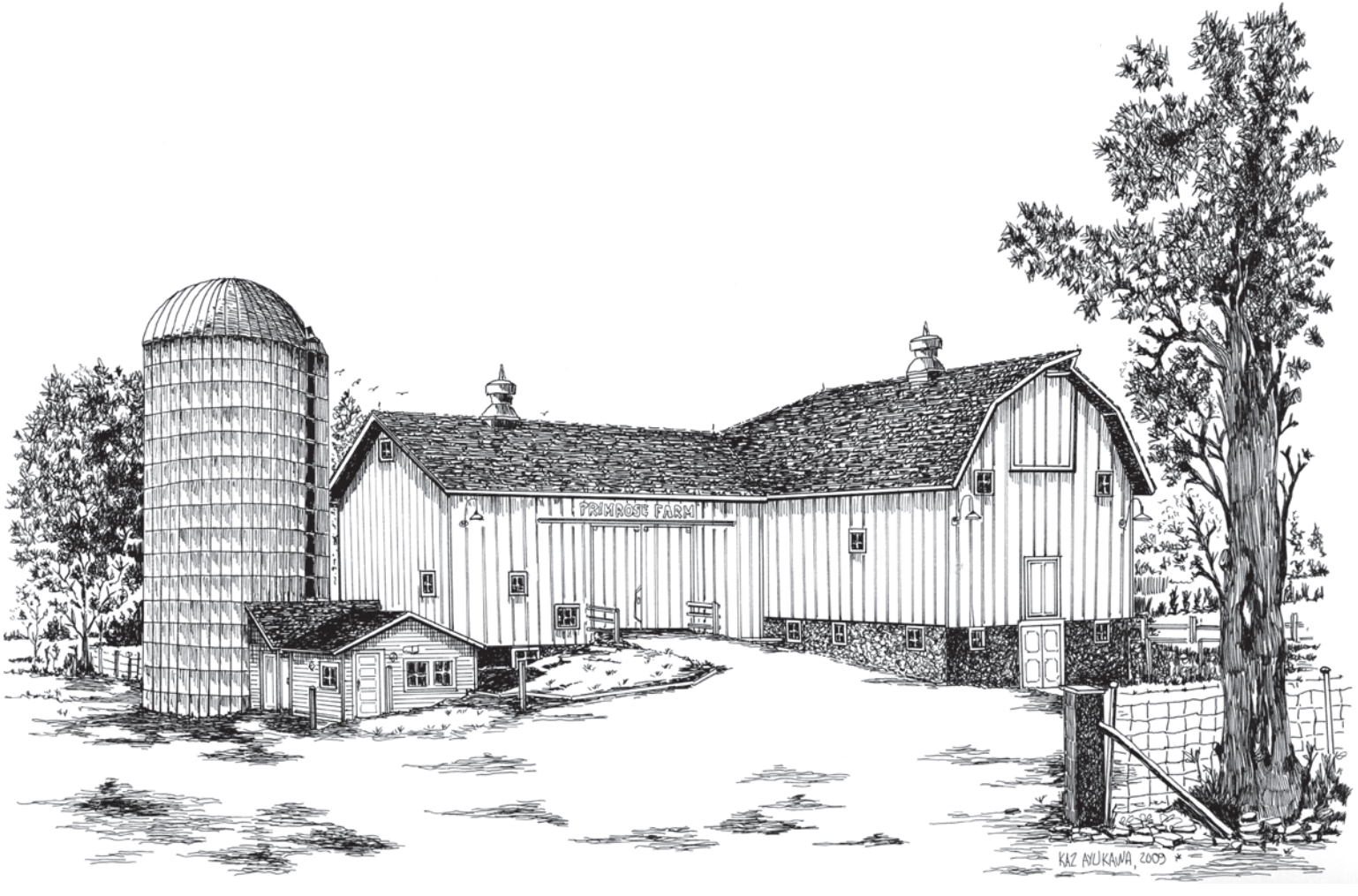

St. Charles Park District

PRIMROSE FARM

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The History of Primrose Farm Park

Before there were prairies, there was tundra. Before there were farmers, there were big game hunters. Ours is a rich and varied landscape, one whose majestic scope can be glimpsed through the microcosm of one parcel of land — Primrose Farm Park.

The Land and Its People

The lush and fertile farmland found in this part of northern Illinois would not be as attractive or as viable if it had not been for the Ice Age. As the slow-moving glaciers receded, they formed the lakes, rivers, hills, and valleys we see before us today. These thick, retreating masses of ice also pulverized rock into soil, and where once not a trace of life was to be found, plants, animals, and humans gradually began to appear and thrive.

The discovery of a primitive stone spearhead known as a "Thebes Point" enabled archaeologists to pinpoint the earliest evidence of human occupation on the land now known as Primrose Farm Park to approximately 5600 BCE. The area's first inhabitants were Paleo-Indians, prehistoric people who traveled in bands of about twenty to fifty members as they tracked mega-fauna such as the saber-toothed tiger and American mastodon that once roamed the continent.

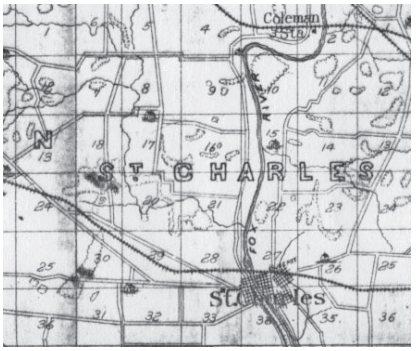
Over time, the culture that was driven by big-game hunting adapted to an agriculturally-based society, with several distinct groups, or nations, of Native American people occupying the upper Midwest. At the time immigrating Europeans first began actively settling North America, this area was home to tribes including the Kickapoo, Mascouten, Illinois, Fox, and Potawatomi.

However, this occupation effectively came to an end in the early nineteenth century during a conflict known as the Blackhawk War, named for the Fox Indian chief who incited his followers to protest a treaty with the federal government. Led by a regiment of U.S. Army Regulars under the command of General Winfield Scott stationed at Ft. Dearborn, a detachment pursued Blackhawk and his band across the northwestern part of the state, crossing the Fox River somewhere between St. Charles and South Elgin.

The deadly result of the Blackhawk War of 1832 and the presence of an armed militia was enough to persuade the remaining Potawatomi tribe to sell their claim to their ancestral lands along the Fox River. On September 27, 1833, Chief Wabaunsee signed the treaty that would open what is now Kane County, and the first intrepid European-American settlers began arriving shortly thereafter. Christopher Payne traveled here from North Carolina in October, 1833, and is considered to be the area's first settler; he built his home just east of what is now the city of Batavia. By the following spring, the first settlers of St. Charles began arriving.

A Tale of Three Farms

As one stands upon Primrose Farm Park today, it is impossible not to reflect upon the families who farmed this area, whose stories of births and deaths, successes and failures enrich the landscape and create a living history of what it was like to be a farmer in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.



1892 Map from Atlas of Kane County

Farming has taken place on this land for more than one hundred and sixty years. In 1845, a man by the name of John Hand purchased land from the federal government that was designated as Section 17, Town 40 North, Range 8 East of St. Charles Township. Three years later, Hand sold the property, thus beginning the proud farming legacy we celebrate today at Primrose Farm Park. Its story can best be told through the three major farms that achieved local success and recognition: the Primrose Farm, the Johnson Farm, and the Spriet Farm. As you will see, their stories are often interconnected, making it even more fitting that we celebrate the area today as one unified entity.

The Primrose Farm

The first person to establish a farm upon this land was George Minard. Born in Rockingham, Vermont, Minard left New England on August 11, 1833, traveling to Illinois with his brother, Ira, along with Dean and Read Ferson. After spending some time in Chicago, Minard moved to St. Charles, where he bought property from John Hand. The time frame makes the Minard brothers two of the earliest settlers of the St. Charles area. In a log cabin erected on their new homestead, George and his wife, Mary, welcomed the first of their three children into the world when, on February 10, 1841, their daughter Marion was born. Eventually, the couple would add daughters Arabelle and Annette to their family.

In 1859, Marion married George B. March, a clerk at the family mill. The son of John S. and Sarapeta Bundy March, George was born in Walpole, New Hampshire, in 1835. Educated first at home and then at the Walpole Academy, George worked for a time in Boston before venturing to St. Charles in 1857. After their marriage, he and Marion built the three-bay threshing barn and Italianate Upright-and-Wing house that are still located on the property to this day. Here the couple raised four children: George Leslie, born October 23, 1860; John Hubert, born January 14, 1866; William Elmer, born December 29, 1869; and Wilbur Curtis, born May 15, 1879.


Swan Anderson

Upon George Minard's death in 1863, his estate passed to Marion and her husband. Along with cattle, horses, and various farm implements, Marion and George March inherited ninety-three acres of land. Eight years later, in 1871, the Marches acquired seventy-three additional acres of the original farmland, some of which encompasses the present day residential area known as "The Maples" located just to the south of Primrose Farm Park.

When Marion Minard March died in 1917, the land was handed down to their eldest son, George Leslie, who promptly sold the farm to Chester Bolcum. Although he did not hold on to the property for long, Bolcum can be credited for officially registering the land with Kane County as "Primrose Farm." In 1920, Bolcum sold it to Swan and Minnie Speikker Anderson.

Primrose Farm changed hands once again in 1943 when Swan Anderson passed away. Minnie then sold the farm to their eldest son, Ernest "Ernie" Anderson and his wife, Grace. Their daughter, Joyce Anderson Diehl, in turn inherited the farm upon Ernie's death, and sold it in 1994 to local developers Jerry Boose and Ken Blood. The Kane County Forest Preserve bought the land from Boose and Blood, and in 1995 it was acquired by the St. Charles Park District in a land and easement swap.

The Johnson Farm

When George and Marion March settled George Minard's estate, they created distinct parcel divisions in order to apportion the land between themselves and Marion's two sisters. One parcel, recorded as number 09-17-100-010, is commonly known as the Johnson Farm and was inherited by Arabelle Minard and her husband George Clark, along with a nearby 15-acre wood lot. At some point, they sold the land to a P. Hempstead, who is listed as the owner of record in the 1892 Atlas of Kane County, Illinois. The 20th Century Atlas of Kane County, Illinois, published in 1904, shows an Ida R. Fisher as the owner of the Johnson Farm. Between 1904 and 1913, Fisher sold the land to Swan and Minnie Speikker Anderson. The Andersons registered their new farm as "Elmdale Stock Farm."

Upon Minnie Anderson's death in 1961, the farm was handed down to her twin daughters, Ellen Anderson Johnson and Edna Anderson. The women did not work the farm themselves, however, choosing instead to rent it to George and Kenny Johnson, who worked the land until 1992. It is because of the contribution of these long-time renters that the property came to be known familiarly as the Johnson Farm.

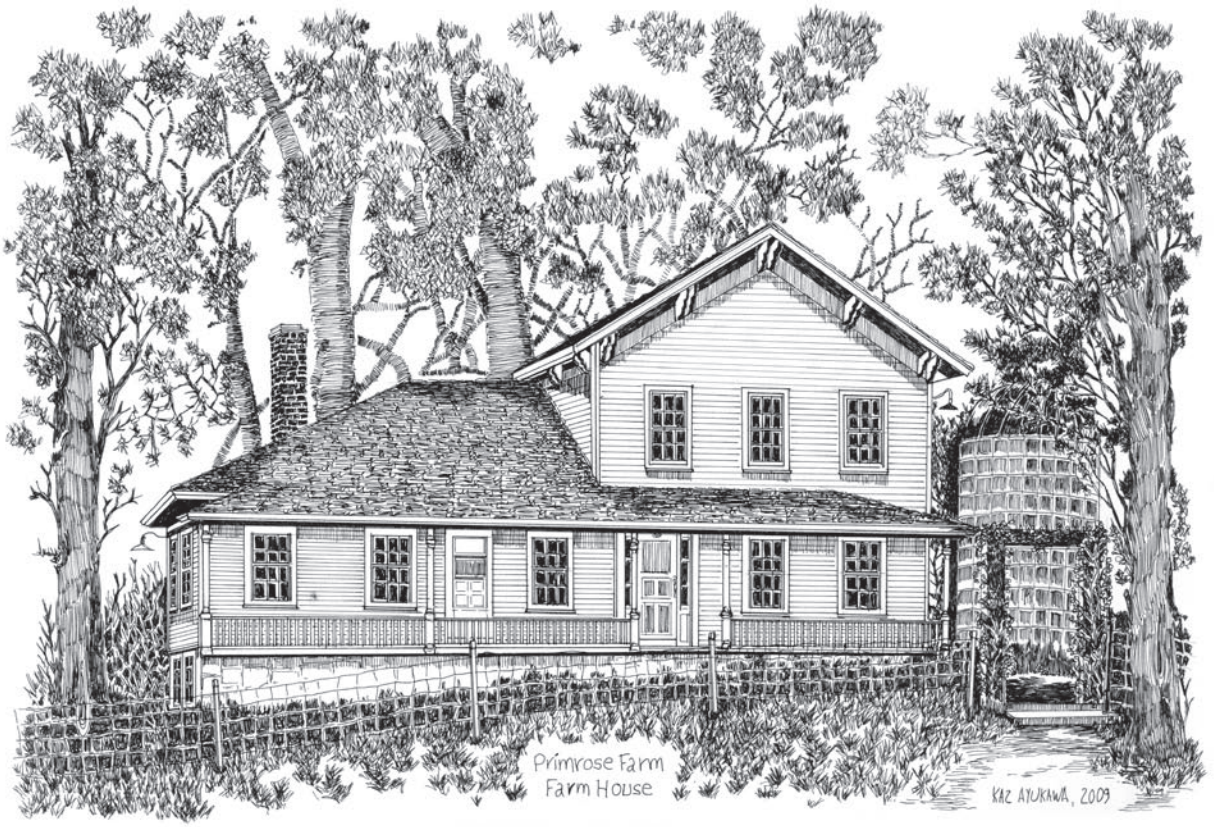
Ernest "Ernie" Anderson

The Spriet Farm

Two other parcels created by George and Marion Minard March that were recorded as numbers 09-17-100-008 and 09-08-400-003 came to be known as the Spriet Farm. These were inherited by Marion's sister Annette and her husband, Henry B. Haselhurst. Along with a 9.25-acre wood lot on the east side of Crane Road, the Haselhursts also inherited a 60.87-acre parcel of land that also would eventually become part of the present-day residential subdivision, "The Maples." It is not known how long the Haselhursts retained the property they inherited, but records show that as of 1892, the land was owned by a Dr. James K. and Louise M. Lewis. Dr. and Mrs. Lewis sold the Spriet Farm on February 10, 1894, to Karl Otto Bormann and his wife, and it remained in their possession until January, 1902. At that time, the property was sold to Augustin and Sidonie Coryn. When Mrs. Coryn died in 1947, the estate issued a joint tenancy deed to their daughter and son-in-law, Martha Coryn and Joseph M. Driessen, a local contractor. Martha and Joseph Driessen eventually sold the farm to their cousin, George Spriet and his wife, Flora.

As each of these families took ownership of the land, their mark upon it can be determined by the collection of farm buildings they left behind, structures that not only offer a tangible example of how they lived, but also illustrate the ways in which agriculture changed from generation to generation.

Ellen (Anderson) Johnson
with a prize Yorkshire sow



The Farm House

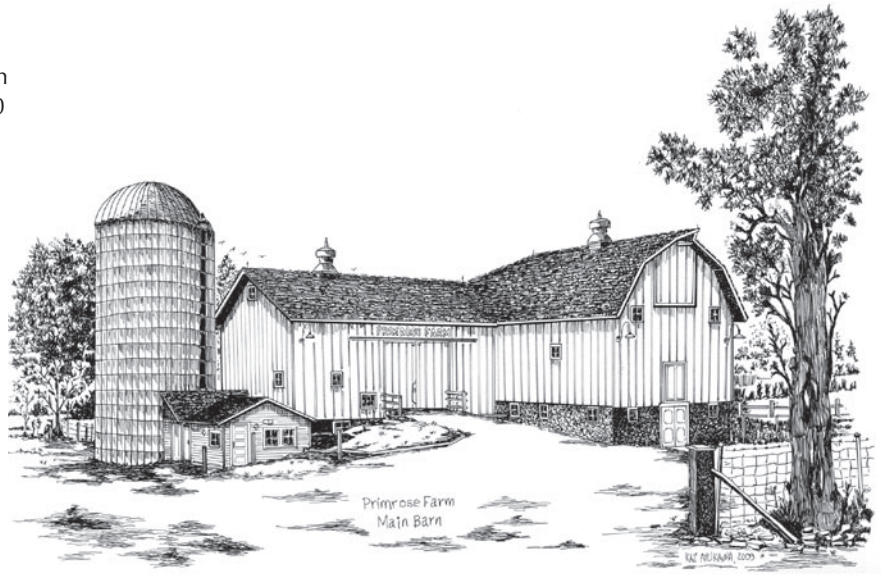
The main house at Primrose Farm is a prime example of vernacular Italianate Upright-and-Wing, a style that was prominent in the mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries. Often utilized by settlers of the Midwest who were familiar with the classic Greek Revival homes of their native New England, this adaptive style of so-called "folk architecture" became particularly popular with farm families who could take advantage of the Midwest's wide open building spaces to construct homes larger than those of their city counterparts.

Built by George and Marion Minard March in 1859, the two-story frame house and single-story wing rests upon a walk-out foundation constructed of limestone. As was typical of this style of architecture, the farm house's single-story wing housed the kitchen and featured its own entrance, as befitted the room's status as the heart of the home. Other identifying features include the wide band of cornice trim and gable roof.

In 1933, Ernest and Grace Anderson extensively remodeled the house by enlarging the kitchen wing, installing electricity and central heat, and building the covered porch that runs the full length of the house. The concrete porch columns represent the final improvement project begun by Ernie Anderson in 1931 to 1932.

The Main Barn

The original portion of the Primrose Farm main barn was constructed between 1859 and 1860 by George and Marion Minard March. Set on a limestone rubble foundation, this three-bay threshing barn — sometimes called an "English" barn — was the most common type of barn built in the United States from the late eighteenth century until the early twentieth. A one-story structure measuring approximately thirty feet by forty feet, the barn was constructed of hand-hewn lumber set vertically to allow for rapid water run-off, with the boards spaced slightly apart to provide ventilation. The barn was accessed by a large double wagon door that opened onto a central space used as a threshing area for separating grain and seeds. The other bays typically housed livestock, hay and stored grains.



When Marion Minard March inherited her father's estate in 1863, the proceeds included the following livestock:

— One red steer, two years old
— One roan heifer, two years old
— One gray stub horned cow, five years old
— One gray short horned cow, four years old
— One light red cow, seven years old
— One red long horned cow, five years old
— One red heifer, one year old
— Three red-and-white calves

To feed and tend to that livestock, she also inherited one lot of hay seed in bundles, thirteen milk pans, and five pails. Other equipment included a shovel plow; a corn cultivator; a stirring plow; a harrow; two scythe snaths; two long chains; a grind stone; a post auger; and a cross-cut saw.

In 1912, a fourth bay was added to the north end of the barn to accommodate a newly-installed hay-handling system. Chester Bolcum hired the company that would eventually become Driessen Construction to erect the gambrel-roofed horse barn sometime near the end of World War I. Driessen Construction eventually took part in a barn stabilization project conducted in 1998. Horses were introduced back onto the farm in the winter of 2008, when two Belgian geldings named Bob and Tom were purchased from an Amish farm in south-central Indiana. These eight-year-old draft horses have much experience working a farm such as this, and are instrumental in plowing, cultivating, and pulling sleds and wagons.

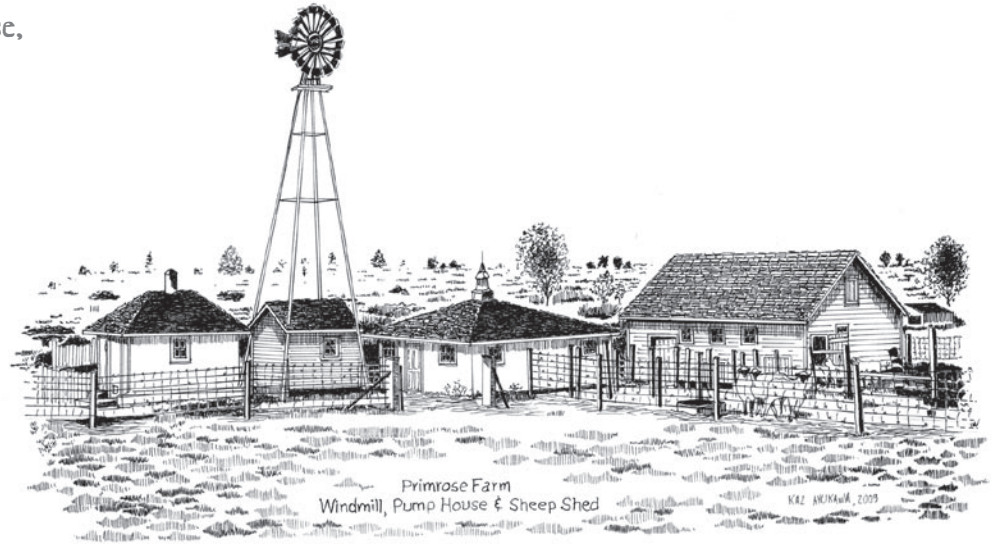
The Summer Kitchen

A testament to how resourceful farmers could be, the Primrose Farm summer kitchen beautifully demonstrates how everything on a farm — including buildings — could be put to other uses. The summer kitchen was originally the kitchen wing of another Italianate Upright-and-Wing House, this one located on the Spriet Farm. In the 1950s, the Spriet family tore down the old farm house to build a new ranch home (currently seen near the Primrose Service Center on Bolcum Road). When the Spriets disassembled the original house, the one-story kitchen wing was salvaged and relocated to the rear of the property where it was used as a chicken coop. In 1999, the structure was moved to its present location as part of Primrose Farm Park, where it serves as a living history demonstration center.

Just as its name implies, the summer kitchen was where the main work of preparing family food, as well as caring for clothes, took place during the hottest months of the year. There's an old saying, "if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." Well, in farm houses of the mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth century, it was easier to get the kitchen out of the house. In the main farm house, a large wood- or coal-fired cook stove protruded well out into the kitchen area and radiated heat — effectively in winter months, oppressively during summer. Since fruits and vegetables were harvested at the height of the hot summer months, this cook stove would have been going constantly as the farmwife canned, pickled, and preserved the garden's bounty. By having a separate cooking facility in an adjacent building, the farmer's wife could move these chores out of the main house to keep it cool. Quite often, farm families would eat outside during the long summer days.

Characteristically, summer kitchens were small, rectangular buildings, no more than 150- to 250-square feet, and featured a gabled roof and stone chimney or stovepipe. Windows on all four sides provided cooling cross-ventilation. Although the use of summer kitchens dates back to the eighteenth century, the term itself wasn't commonly used until the middle of the nineteenth century. But as electricity and natural gas became more available, old wood or coal cook stoves were discarded, and the summer kitchen fell out of use. In many rural areas, however, this did not occur until around World War II.

The Windmill, Pump House, and Sheep Shed



Rising some 40 feet into the air, a windmill was often the most visible symbol of the scope of a farm's operation. By harnessing the force of the wind, these skeletal giants could pump water from the ground that in turn would be used to supply fresh water to livestock, cool tanks where milk awaited shipment to the local dairy, and power machinery used for threshing and milling grain.

Constructed in the early 1910s, the Primrose Farm windmill tower and Goodhue motor were made by Appleton Manufacturing of Batavia. Some time after 1927, the Goodhue motor was replaced by a Challenge 27 sectional wheel windmill, also made in Batavia by the Challenge Company, one of the largest and most successful windmill manufacturers of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Manufactured from 1927 until World War II, the Challenge 27 was the last premium windmill offered by the Challenge Company. A self-oiling, back-geared, steel pumping mill, it was one of the most sought-after windmills of the twentieth century and can still be seen throughout the United States and in many foreign countries. Along with its characteristic vane sheet, it can also be identified by ornamentation on the mills reading "Challenge 27 Batavia ILL" in black letters with a red capital "C."

Beneath the windmill sits a pump house that was constructed after the tower was erected sometime in the 1910s, and was used to provide shelter for the well pump and speed jack. Next to the pump house, the farm's concrete milk house furnished a storage area for milk until it could be picked up by the Riverview Dairy. Built around World War I, the milk house furnished a clean, odor-free environment to hold cans of milk that were cooled by water pumped from the windmill. Such a cold-water reservoir system for keeping canned milk or cream chilled was a requirement of the Chicago Dairy Standard. Any overflow was then diverted into a trough on the shady north side of the building where livestock were watered. After Ernie Anderson stopped milking cows by hand in 1960, a bulk tank was installed in the frame building next to the silo to cool freshly produced milk.

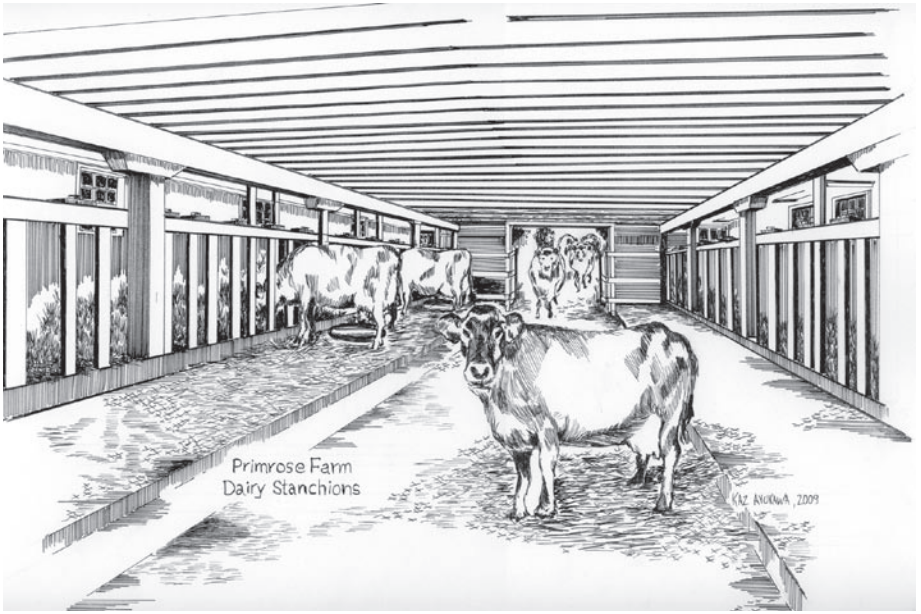
Water from the windmill was also pumped into an adjacent concrete farrowing house to provide a built-in trough watering system for what was, essentially, a nursery for piglets. One of the most elaborate buildings on the farm, the farrowing house held three birthing pens and one breeding pen for a stock of three or four sows and one boar, which could produce about one hundred piglets a year. Yorkshire hogs, which were a popular breed during the twentieth-century, have been reintroduced to

Primrose Farm Park. Up until World War II, Yorkshire hogs were valued for their ability to produce lard, which was used in everything from soaps to candles to ammunition. A long-bodied hog, Yorkshires were favored as a food source for the abundant sides of meat they produced.

After World War II, a sheep shed was constructed to house a small lamb-to-market operation. This year, a flock of about a dozen Shropshire sheep once again call Primrose Farm Park home. Shropshires have been a favorite breed since the 1930s, when they were raised for both their meat and their marketable wool. Many will recognize the lambs from 4-H livestock shows. The Shropshire breed originated in the Shropshire and Staffordshire counties in central western England, and was first exhibited at the Royal Show in Gloucester in 1833. It was first believed to have been imported to the United States in 1855, and records show that a ram and twenty ewes were brought to Maryland in 1860 by Samuel Sutton. The breed's adaptability to all types of pasture land, its ability to withstand harsh climates, and its oily wool that provides protection from the elements made them a widely demanded breed throughout the United States. A mid-sized sheep, rams grow to a mature weight of about 225 to 250 pounds, and ewes from 150 to 180 pounds. They are one of the heaviest wool producers, with dense fleece that demonstrates a slight elasticity to the touch. Known for their nurturing mothering and milking abilities, ewes are prolific breeders of hardy, vigorous lambs.

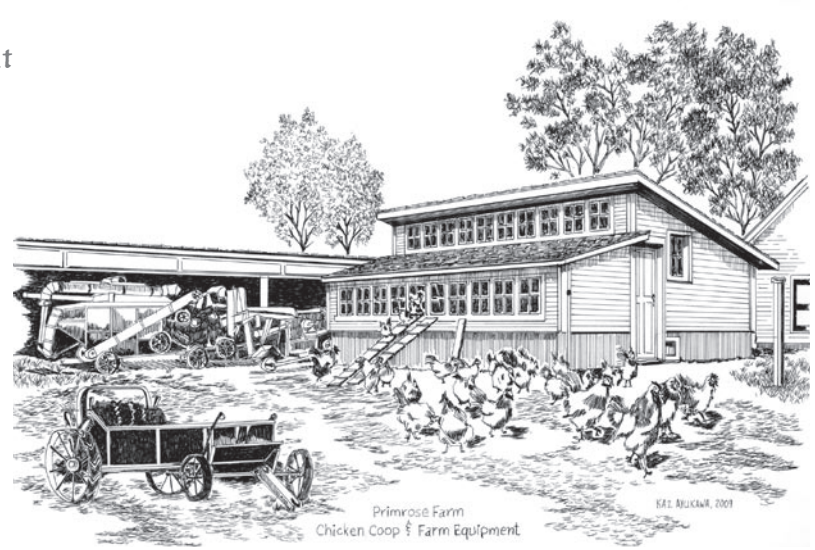
The Dairy Stanchions

Though modern farms rely on mechanized equipment, Ernie Anderson milked the Primrose Farm dairy cows by hand right up until 1960. Cattle were secured in stanchions where they fed from a trough, and were separated by a wide aisle that ran lengthwise down the center of the barn. Rows of windows along each side provided light and ventilation, and large double doors at the gable ends of the bar allowed access to pastures.



Primrose Farm Park is now home to a small herd of Jersey cows that are milked daily to help feed other livestock. Most people are already familiar with this breed, thanks to "Elsie," the cow made famous by Borden, Inc. who used her large-eyed, docile face to adorn many of the company's dairy products. Noted for their long, productive lives and nutrient-rich milk, Jerseys are one of the oldest dairy breeds in the country, having been first brought to the United States from England in the 1850s. They range in color from light tan to nearly black, with lighter bands around their eyes and muzzle, and a dark switch of long hair at the end of their tail.

The Chicken Coop and Farm Equipment



There may very well be a good reason why the yolk of an egg looks so much like a brilliant, shining sun. Chickens need about seventeen hours of light for maximum egg output, and smart farmers in the early twentieth century were apt to construct chicken coops in the so-called "Monitor" style because of the quantity of light they provided. Two rows of windows were separated by a shed roof, and windows in either end of the building brought in additional light and ventilation. Making it even more efficient, the coop was divided into two halves — one functioned as a laying area, and the other section housed older birds that would eventually be sent to market. Built in the early 1920s and large enough to hold between 300 to 400 chickens, the chicken coop at Primrose Farm was restored with the assistance of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and Kane County's Development Block Grant Program.

Primrose Farm Park is, in turn, providing assistance of its own to Chicago's Museum of Science & Industry's "Genetics and the Baby Chick Hatchery Program," designed to reestablish breeds that were the foundation of the modern poultry business. The Museum has donated a variety of chickens to Primrose Farm, including the Auburn Java, a breed that was functionally extinct at the end of the nineteenth century. Developed from chickens of unknown Asian extraction, the Java is one of the oldest breeds of American chicken, and formed the genetic basis for many other breeds. Today, it is critically endangered.

A second endangered breed of chicken with an illustrious past has also been reintroduced to Primrose Farm Park. The Columbian Wyandotte chickens were developed by Mr. B. M. Briggs of Woonsocket, Rhode Island, expressly for the Columbian Exposition and World's Fair held in Chicago in 1893. The handsome, white chicken with distinctive black tail and black wing tips took Best of Show. A good, dual-purpose bird that produced mid-sized eggs and ample meat, the Columbian Wyandotte became a popular breed in the 1890s and were known to be bred in St. Charles Township as late as 1918. The rarest of the Wyandotte variety, the Columbian Wyandottes raised at Primrose Farm will be furthering the cause of conserving a historic and genetically important breed.

Behind the chicken coop, a shed houses the many types of machines, tools, and equipment needed to keep such a substantial agricultural enterprise as Primrose Farm working. The machine shed was originally built on state property as part of the Illinois Youth Center's agricultural reform school program. When the St. Charles Park District acquired a parcel of ground south of the Illinois Department of Transportation maintenance facility at the corner of Peck Road and Route 38, the building was dismantled in the summer of 2004 and reconstructed at Primrose Farm Park during the winter of 2005. Used as a demonstration workshop, the shed houses the farm's inventory of agricultural implements.

At Primrose Farm Park, the St. Charles Park District has revived a 1930s working farm so visitors can see how technology and social change have impacted the lands and farming communities of the Fox Valley. Primrose Farm is a living history museum where visitors may experience many of the day-to-day aspects of farm life in the early twentieth century.

Set among its one-hundred acres of open agricultural space, historic farm demonstration plots and restored farm buildings offer an energizing environment where people of all ages can reconnect with some essential and long-lost arts and skills, such as learning how to milk a cow by hand, practicing the forceful art of blacksmithing, or participating in a farm chore day.

Offering a wide array of activities for visitors, the park also features a fruit orchard, an interpretive shelter, farm discovery trails, community garden plots, a picnic pavilion, a playground and an athletic complex that includes baseball and soccer fields, and tennis, volleyball, and basketball courts.