

The property has been in the family for 60 years. The farm was purchased in 1952 by William and Ethel Link, the parents of Bill Link and grandparents of Rob Gehm. The barn was built about 1940 by Julius and Hattie Pfiefer and their three sons, Rudy, Art & George. The building originally had 8 cow stanchions, two horse stalls and a calf pen and was used for dairy. Today the barn is used for hay and straw storage. The ground level is used to store greenhouse supplies, feed and tools. Beef cattle use an attached pole barn at the back. The barn has a poured cement foundation, wood construction and a curved steel roof. The roof rafters were fabricated by laminating dimensional lumber using nails which were driven completely through and hammered over. There are no center support beams. The curved roof barn was a design intended to optimize loft space for storage of hay. It was a popular design for barns built between WWI and WWII in the Midwest. The builder is believed to have been of German/Northern European background.

The “Crazy Quilt” design on this barn gained popularity in the late nineteenth century, particularly after the Japanese Exhibit in the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. Crazy quilting was as much art as it was practical. Close examination reveals an embroidered date of 1893 on this quilt. The style featured random sizes and shapes in various fabrics stitched together with various stitch styles and embellished with hand embroidered edges.

This barn quilt was artfully painted by June Schumacher from a photo of a quilt given to family matriarch Ethel Link by her Aunt Ida. Ethel’s grandmother, Jane Vennum, and sisters or sisters-in-law are believed to have created this beautiful quilt. The quilt was made in North Dakota where Ethel was

born and her grandparents farmed. Ethel's husband, William, also lived in North Dakota. However, it was not until later in life when they met in Milwaukee and eventually married.

William and Ethel forged a family during the challenging economic times of the Great Depression. Building a home and raising a family, both working throughout this time, they still yearned for the country life that had been their childhood. William's brother, Harold, also moved east from the Dakotas and eventually settled and farmed along the Fox River. William, Ethel and their three children would make the long drive Milwaukee in the 1940s to visit Harold on his farm. In late 1951, William and Ethel were informed that this farm was for sale by Harold. Negotiations were done by mail as phones were rarely found in the rural areas at that time. Ethel penned the letter of final offer and, once accepted, they financed the farm by mortgaging their home in Milwaukee. In March of 1952 they took ownership.

The family often traveled to the farm in the summers. William farmed the land a short time with his William farmed the land a short time with his brother, Harold. It soon became apparent that it was not very profitable or feasible to continue with William working full-time at AO Smith in Milwaukee. A crop of oats were stored in the barn and, after taking vacation time to come and hand shovel them out to sell them, William decided to find a better use for his free time. The land was put into "land bank" and opened to public hunting. Some crops were planted for wildlife at that time. William and Ethel always came up for pheasant season, a favorite hunting pastime of William.

In the fall of 1965 William passed away. Their children had grown and were having children of their own. Fewer visits were made to the farm and Ethel considered selling. In 1967 their oldest son, Bill, asked to move onto the farm. He had worked for produce farmers, greenhouses, and an orchard. The orchard had been sold for development and he wished to follow his own dreams. Bill brought not only fertility back to the land but activity back to the barn. He raised hogs as well as other common farm animals (chickens, a few sheep, and a pony). Ethel moved to the farm in 1974 and helped Bill begin his greenhouse business. Ethel passed away in her 96th year at 2000, still living on the farm.



Link's Greenhouse
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