

How Do We Know What Farm Life Was Like?:



Lester Pyle

in 1909

LESTER PYLE'S DIARIES, 1919

In 1910, at the age of 25, Lester Pyle married Myra Cable, 23. He and Myra settled down to farm at Myra's home in Stoneycreek Township with her parents, Francis and Maria Cable.

Lester started his diaries in 1912, perhaps inspired by his father-in-law Francis, who kept a diary for twelve years during his youth. Except for a gap of three years, Lester wrote in his diary until 1964, a period of about fifty years. Lester Pyle died in 1974.

WHAT LESTER TELLS US

Lester's diaries document more than fifty years of the daily and seasonal work of a typical farmer in Somerset County. They also record the family's church, community and social activities.

WHAT LESTER DOESN'T TELL US

Lester rarely mentions doing the milking or caring for poultry. He rarely records what his wife and in-laws did each day.

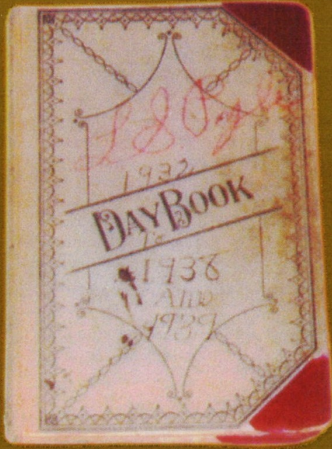
We might conclude that someone else in the family was in charge of milking, churning butter, processing eggs, and taking produce to market. The diaries of Lester's father-in-law Francis Cable show this to be true.



Francis Cable and his daughter Myra did much of the dairy work, tended to the chickens and turkeys, and regularly took produce to market. Myra, and probably her mother, too, also took care of the garden, the laundry, the cooking, and the house.

Myra (Cable) Pyle
and her son Stewart,
with the chickens, circa 1928

LESTER'S DIARIES



Lester kept his diaries in a series of daybooks, account books and notebooks – whatever he had handy when the year began. The entries transcribed in this book cover events in the year **1919**.



Diary For June - 1933

Thu 1 Leonard harrowed & shelled corn made garden
 Fri 2 hrowed in garden & planted corn & ect
 Sat 3 Leonard & I to Somerset Alfred & I cut potatoes
 at Sipes we plowed corn P.M. Alfred & I had ice cream
 Sun 4 We all to church & S.S. & to Saglers for dinner
 Mon 5 Helped Sipe finish potatoes Leonard harrowed & worked
 garden
 Tue 6 I lined cultivator cultivated corn planted beans
 Wed 7 Alfred left for the worlds fair Leonard steered
 Thu 8 Elizabeth & I to Walkers barn raising
 about 100 men & fifty women there
 Fri 9 I cultivated the sweet corn & ect Leonard
 Sat 10 Elizabeth & I to Somerset P.M. cleaned brush
 garden
 Sun 11 Leonard to S.S. P.M. I to Sipes a while
 Mon 12 Sipe & I to Somerset for lumber to fix barn
 Tue 13 Weaded garden P.M. Planted Corn
 Wed 14 Calvin Singler worked at barn Boys & I
 Thu 15 Cal & I worked at barn P.M. boys & I finished
 Fri 16 I helped Cal at barn boys don varieties
 Sat 17 Elizabeth & I to Somerset delivered P.M. helped
 Cal
 Sun 18 We all to church heard Rudisills fair well sermon
 Mon 19 mowed sweet clover & cultivated
 Tue 20 Roped up around barn & ect Alfred mowed
 Wed 21 Alfred cultivated I replanted beans
 Thu 22 Helped Cal at Barn & hauled in hay
 Fri 23 I to Somerset ect egg mash P.M. hauled in hay
 Sat 24 To Somerset loaded horse with Lann P.M. to James
 to Cot children in ^{embroidery} ^{mountain} ^{scrip}
 Sun 25 To Simpsons park read the minutes
 Mon 26 Alfred harrowed & hauled garden & ect
 Tue 27 Cal & I packed the roof of the barn & ect
 Wed 28 Alfred mowed & hauled garden
 Thu 29 Alfred weaded potatoes I cultivated corn
 Fri 30 I cultivated pulled weeds

A sample page
from Lester's diary
in his own hand.

More of Lester's diaries.

NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS

Farmers relied on help from their neighbors for big tasks, like threshing grain, baling hay, and filling silos with corn.

**TAKE A LOOK AT THIS ENTRY
FROM LESTER'S DIARY**

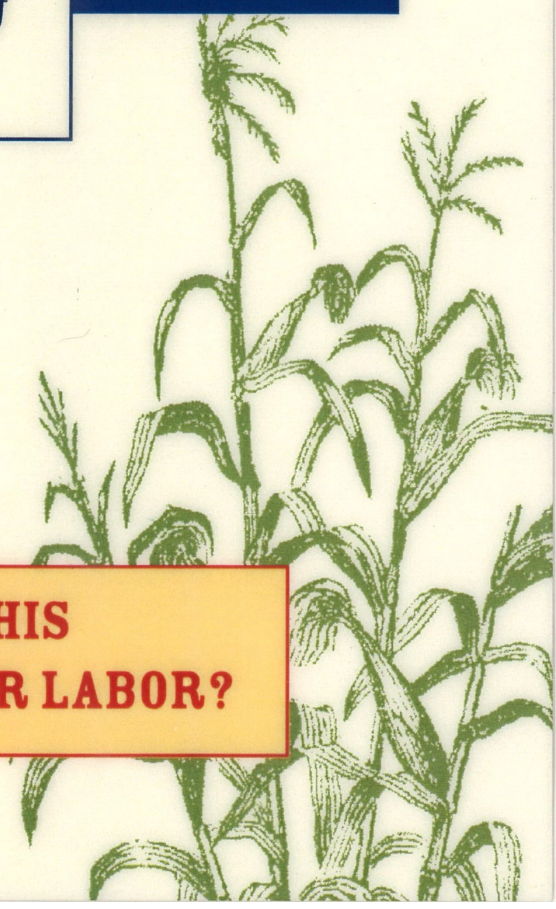
Friday, October 24, 1919

We thrashed. Our hands were H.G. Yoder, Gene Knepper, Morty Zarfoss, John Walker, John Cramer, Merle Mostoller, Gladen Walker, D.C. Martin, Joe Walker, Chas. Walker. Misty.

Note: *The last word in each of the entries is a weather report.*



**HOW DID LESTER PAY HIS
NEIGHBORS FOR THEIR LABOR?**





HERE'S HOW LESTER PAID HIS NEIGHBORS:

Monday, January 6

I walked to Coleman and helped Joe Walker to load his hay in a car. We hauled it from the Barnhart farm. I worked about 3/4 day. Fair.

Wednesday, March 12

I hauled manure. PM I started to plow. Eve I went to H.G. Yoders to help lift his cow up as she is sick. Fair.

Monday, May 26

I helped D.C. Martin to bale. PM I hauled stones went to Homer Kneppers for the corn planter and planted a little corn. Fair.

Monday, September 15

I set up the buckwheat Then I went to Gene Kneppers to help him fill silo.

Saturday, October 25

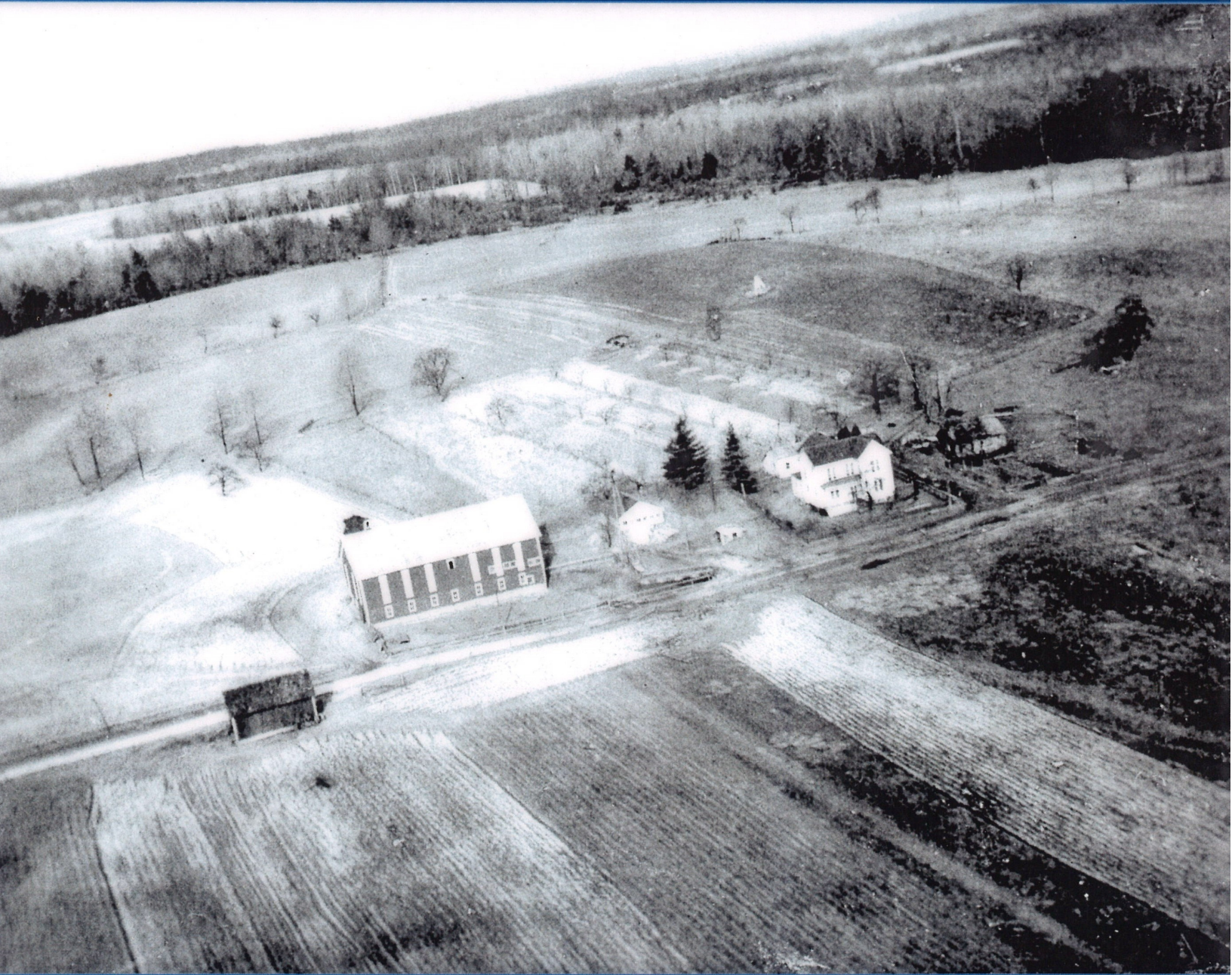
I helped H.G. Yoder to thrash. From there to Homers Walkers. Eve family and I went to a box social at our school. Misty.

Tuesday, October 28

I went to D.C. Martins to thrash, finished till dinner. PM I started to plow oats ground. Rain.



A PYLE FAMILY ALBUM



The Cable-Pyle farm, circa 1938

LESTER PYLE'S DIARY

Back row, Lester Pyle and his brother Oscar Parker (Park); front row, their father, Cyrus A. Pile, and stepmother Elizabeth Vogel Pile, 1909. The family uses either Pyle or Pile for their last name.




Lester Pyle's family, circa 1913, just one year after he began keeping his diary.

Myra and Lester are standing at the far left. Their first child Larrie is at front center. The other people in the picture are Lester's brothers and sisters, their spouses, and his stepmother Elizabeth Vogel Pile, seated at center right.

“SOLD A LOAD OF OATS...”

Much of what Lester, Myra, Francis and Maria raised on their farm was for their own use. But they sold some of their farm products, too.

Lester probably did not record all the farm's income in his diary. Myra's dairy, egg and garden vegetable business brought in money, too.



**LOOK AT THE OPPOSITE PAGE TO SEE
SOME OF THE FARM PRODUCTS
LESTER AND MYRA SOLD FOR CASH.**

**❓ WHAT KINDS OF PEOPLE
BOUGHT FROM THEM?**

*Note: The last word
in each of the entries is
a weather report.*

Saturday, January 11, 1919

Pap and I made ready and *butchered a beef*. PM I took the hide to Shanksville got 13 cts a pound, weighed 38 lbs. I settled up with Wilce Keifer in full. H.G. Yoder bought a front quarter, 15 cts. per lb. Cloudy.

Thursday, January 16

I went into the woods to make props [for propping up the roof of a coal mine] but I have the cold too bad. I did not do much. *Myra and I took eight dozen eggs to Ed Raymans at 60 cents. Fair.*

Tuesday, February 11

I finished hauling logs out of the woods, loaded 520 feet of lumber and in the PM I hauled it to Coleman mine at \$24.00 per thousand feet. Fair.



Tuesday, February 25

I sold a cow and steer to Lee Emerick . . . Cloudy.

Saturday, June 7

I worked at the silo, digging out. PM . . . Sold a load of oats at Skip Snyders, 80 cts, bu. Threat [of rain].

Tuesday, September 30

. . . PM I went to Somerset, took 22 bus. oats to Skip Snyder and a bus. potatoes to the restaurant. Home and husk a little corn. Fair.





**READ THROUGH THESE ENTRIES
FROM LESTER'S DIARY.**

**① WHY DO YOU SUPPOSE LESTER
AND HIS FAMILY ATTENDED SO
MANY **FUNERALS** IN
THE YEAR **1919**?**

Saturday, January 18

*I done the feeding. That is about all. I am sick with the cold, sore throat.
Myra and I went to Wills church to the funeral of Levi Walker. Fair.*

Tuesday, February 4

*I greased and fixed my buggy. PM Myra and I went to the funeral of
Billy Spangler.*

Thursday, February 6

*Pap and I went to Shanksville to a funeral of Mrs. Wm. Weigle.
Myra went down with Chas. Walker in the car. Cold.*

Monday, February 10

*I hauled logs out of the wood. PM H.G. Yoder and I went to Landis' from
there to Shanksville cemetery as pall bearers for Bessie Landis, 17 years.
Little snow.*

Sunday, March 2

Myra and I went up to see Bill Trent as he is sick. there were a lot of people there. I gave J.L. Trent my sub. money. Fair.

Wednesday, March 5

I soled my sled. PM Harvey Ephriam Coleman, Homer Walker and I dug Bill Trents grave. Rainy.

Friday, March 7

We all made ready and went to the funeral of Bill Trent, preached by J.C. McCarney. PM I done various things.

Saturday, April 5

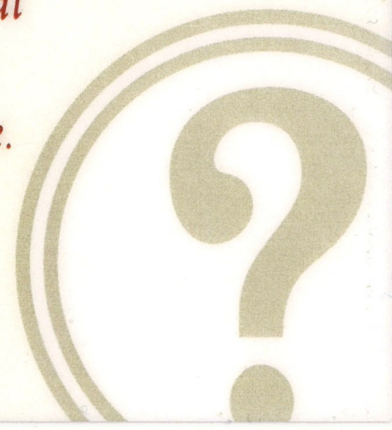
Harvey Yoder, Merle Mostoller and I dug Chas. Trent's grave. Gladen Walker helped. Pleasant.

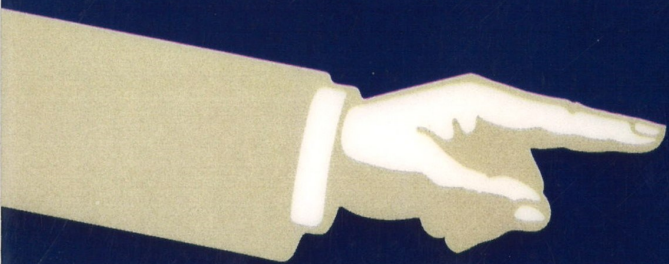
Monday, April 7

We all went to the funeral of Chas. Trent, a large crowd by Rev. J.C. McCarney. PM Papa and I sowed the spring wheat, two acres. Fair.

Sunday, May 18

We all went to SS [Sunday School] and church, had Memorial services for Morton Hunter. PM we all went to Will's church, had Memorial services for Oscar Mosgrove who died in France. Preached by Lewis Knepper. Fair.





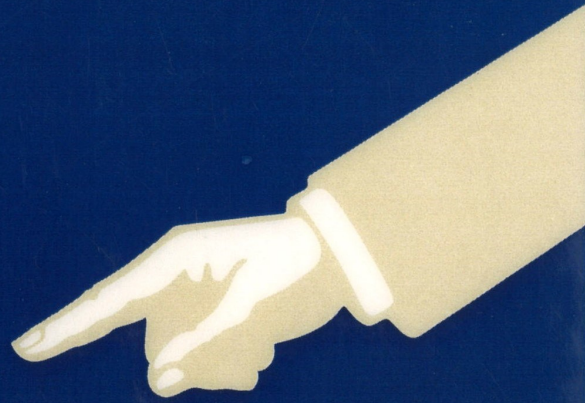
WHY THERE WERE SO
MANY **FUNERALS**
IN THE YEAR **1919:**

Sunday, February 9

*We were all to church at Mizpah. PM we went to Jeff Landis to see Bessie as **she died this AM of the flu.** Fair.*

Lester and Myra were among the countless Americans – and people from many other countries – who attended far too many funerals in the years 1918 and 1919. An **epidemic of Spanish influenza** took an estimated 30 million lives throughout the world before it finally ran its course in the spring of 1919. More than half a million Americans died, many of them young people in their twenties and thirties.

WHY THERE WERE SO
MANY **FUNERALS**
IN THE YEAR **1919:**



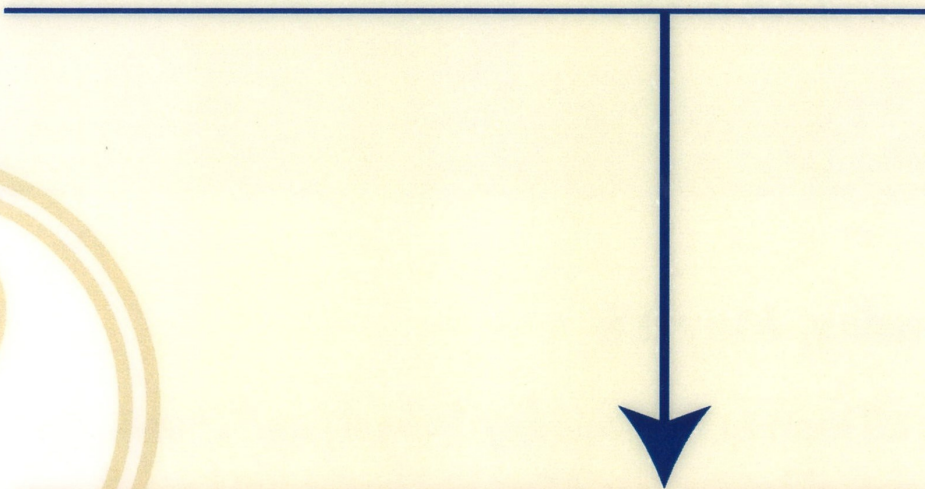
Sunday, May 18

*We all went to SS [Sunday School] and church, had Memorial services for Morton Hunter. PM we all went to Will's church, had Memorial services for **Oscar Mosgrove who died in France**. Preached by Lewis Knepper. Fair.*

On November 11, 1918, **World War I** had finally ended. More than 116,500 American soldiers died in the war's unprecedented slaughter. Months after the war ended, families scheduled memorial services for loved ones who would not be coming home.

READ BETWEEN THE LINES

Lester made these entries in his diary between June 15 and July 13, 1919. All the entries are related in some way.



**“READ BETWEEN THE LINES”
AND SEE IF YOU CAN FIGURE
OUT HOW THE ENTRIES
ARE RELATED.**



Sunday, June 15, 1919

We all went to SS [Sunday school] and church and communion, except Myra, she stayed home. Thunder showers.

Saturday, June 21, 1919

*I planted cabbage, cleaned out the spring and dug at the silo. PM I took a few boards up to the church and fixed up a table for a festival. **Eve [Evening]: kids and I went up.** Large crowd. Fair.*

Tuesday, July 1, 1919

*I was sick in bed awhile. Caught potato bugs and worked at the machinery. **Eve [Evening]: to Millers to see about a girl, could not get any.** Hot.*

Sunday, July 6, 1919

***Kids and I went to SS [Sunday school].**
The old folks went to Rayman to church.
Eve: we all took a car ride. Little Rain.*

Friday, July 11-12, no entries



**WHAT WAS HIDDEN
"BETWEEN THE LINES":**


Sunday, July 13, 1919

We arose very early. Myra got sick. Russell went for the doctor. We got Dr. Shaffer and at daybreak we were blessed with another baby boy. PM Pap and I went to Millers for a girl. Got Bessie Miller. Warm.

Lester's diary shows no entries from July 14 until July 27. We can imagine he was much too busy and tired with a new baby in the house to write in his diary. Though he had hired Bessie Miller to help out, he still probably had to help take care of the other children. He probably helped his in-laws with Myra's chores while she recovered. He also had to keep up with his own work. His diary entries for July show that he was just about able to finish up haying before the baby came. But he had to get started on the plowing as soon as the hay was gathered in.

Sunday, July 27 (first entry since July 13)


Ed Heinemeyers were here, also Mrs. Wash Custer. PM I took Bessie to Shanksville. She went home. Ed Heinemeyer went along. Fair.



By July 27, with baby Leonard just two weeks old, life at the Pyle house was apparently starting to get back to normal. Congratulations, Lester and Myra!

LESTER BUILDS A SILO

Lester Pyle had a silo built in 1919,
but he did a lot of the work himself.



LOOK AT THE HIGHLIGHTED
ENTRIES ON THE NEXT
PAGES TO SEE HOW LESTER
BUILT HIS **SILO.**

Notice that Lester started planning for the silo in January, but the silo was not complete until November. Lester could only work on the silo when he had finished his other farm work, like seeding in the spring, haying in the summer, and harvesting in the fall.

*Note: The last word in each of
the entries is a weather report.*

Friday, January 17, 1919

I did not do much. In the PM I went to John Walkers to see him about putting up a silo. He promised to put us one up. From there I went to Shanksville. Fair.

Monday, January 20

I made logs all day for the silo. Pleasant.

Tuesday, January 21

I continued making logs, worked at them all day. Fair.

Saturday, January 25

I worked in the woods all day making logs.

Monday, January 27

I made a few logs. In the PM Pap and I cut feed. Fair.

Tuesday, January 28

I started to haul logs out of the woods to the road. Hauled all day. Snow and stormy.

Thursday, January 30

I hauled logs all day out of the woods. The snow is going away. Wm. Feig got 8 bus. at 85 cts per bus. Fair.

Wednesday, February 19

I hauled logs to mill at John Walkers all day. I made two trips. Fair.

Thursday, February 20

I made a trip of logs to the mill. PM I done various things. Thawing.

Friday, February 21

I fixed up my anvil and vice. PM I made two trips of logs to mill at John Walkers. Misty.

Saturday, February 22

I made a trip of logs to mill. PM I went to Somerset. Myra went to Shanksville, also Larrie went along. Sleet Ice.

Monday, February 24

I went to Joe Mostollers for the feed cutter then I made two trips to saw mill at John Walkers. Thawing.

Monday, March 3

I made props and posts, cut a little wood. Pap hauled the last load of logs to mill in the wagon. Fair warmer.

Thursday, March 20

I plowed till dinner. PM I went to John Walkers to drag our logs in to get sawed. Fair.

Friday, March 21

I went to John Walkers to the saw mill got our logs sawed and stacked the lumber over there. Fair.

Monday, March 31

I hauled logs out of the woods. PM I hauled a load to mill at John Walkers. Stormy.

Friday, April 4

I hauled manure. PM I went to John Walkers saw mill and got the balance of our logs sawed and stacked as lumber. Fair.

Tuesday, June 3

I harrowed the potato patch then we started to dig at the wall for the silo. Eve sawed wood, went to Wm. Walkers to see his silo. Fair.

Wednesday, June 4

I dug out at the silo. Made rows for sweet corn and beans. PM Pap, S. B. Yoder and I went to O.P. Shaver's funeral at Friedens by Rev J.C. McCarney. Fair.

Thursday, June 5

I worked in the garden, hauled stones and at the silo, and other things. Threatening.

Friday, June 6

I worked awhile at the silo. PM Pap and I mowed weeds in the oats. Eve I went to Parks and Friedens. Fair.

Saturday, June 7

I worked at the silo, digging out. PM Pap and I went to Somerset. I paid one hundred and twenty-five dollars on Victory Bond. Sold a load of oats at Skip Snyders, 80 cts, bu. Threat [of rain].

Tuesday, June 17

I fixed fence and hauled sand for the silo and other things Threat [of rain].

Saturday, June 21

I planted cabbage, cleaned out the spring and dug at the silo.

PM I took a few boards up to the church and fixed up a table for a festival.

Eve, kids and I went up. Large crowd. Fair.

Monday, June 23

I made a gate, hauled stones and broke them in the foundation for the silo wall, fixed the porch roof, hoed corn. Fair.

Tuesday, June 24

I went to Joe Mostollers got Prince shod, hoed corn, hauled stones for the wall. Threat.

Tuesday, August 19

Pap, Larrie and I went to John Walkers with the two wagons and hauled the staves home for the silo. PM I sawed them square and stacked them up. Threat.

Wednesday, August 20

I hauled the hoops to Berlin, got them threaded at the Pulley Works and got them bent at John Walkers and home till seven. Fair.

Thursday, August 28

Jeff Landis and Ray came to build the silo wall. I helped. Cool.

Friday, August 29

I helped Ray Landis at the silo all day. Fair.

Monday, September 1

Ray and George Landis and I worked all day at the silo wall. Fair.

Tuesday, September 2

Jeff Landis and his son Ray and Pap and I finished the silo wall.

PM we started to sow wheat. Cool.

Thursday, September 4

I cleaned up around the silo, then I went to Somerset for the lugs for the silo.

PM John Walker came. I helped to stand it up. Fair.

Friday, September 5

I helped John Walker to finish silo Eve I took him home and he made a door.

I brought him home. Fair.

Monday, September 8

*I mowed the potato patch and **Painted the silo** and hauled the weeds off and picked beans. Fair*

Tuesday, September 9

*I took up a few potatoes, **finished painting the silo.** Threatening.*

Wednesday, October 15

I worked at the silo, put a roof on. Eve Pap, Myra, kids and I went to Shanksville, got three pigs at John Lamberts. Rainy.

Wednesday, November 19

Pap and I made a channel at the silo, one side. PM we all went to a funeral of W.N. Feig, preached by Rev. J.C. McCarney. Cold and stormy.

We don't have a picture of Lester's silo. It may have looked like this one.



Silo, Berks County area, early 1900s

Photograph by H. Winslow Fegley

*Courtesy Schwenkfelder Library
Pennsburg, PA*



Lester and Myra's sons, winter 1925.
Left front, Leonard, born July 13, 1919;
left back, Larrie; right, Alfred holding baby Stewart