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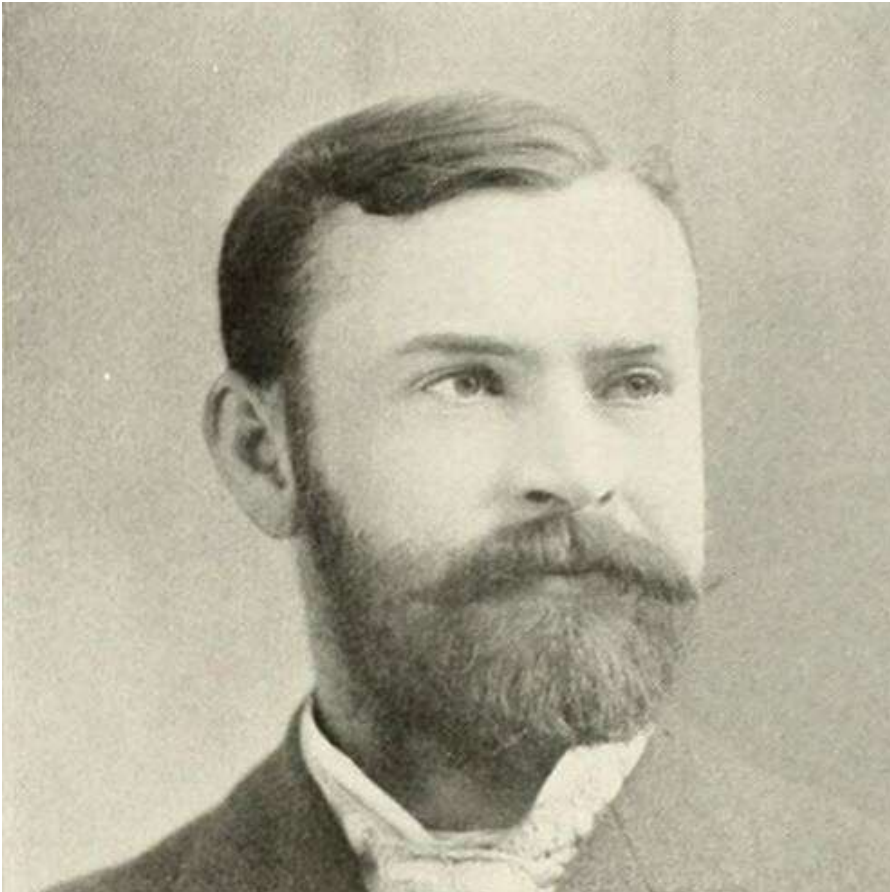
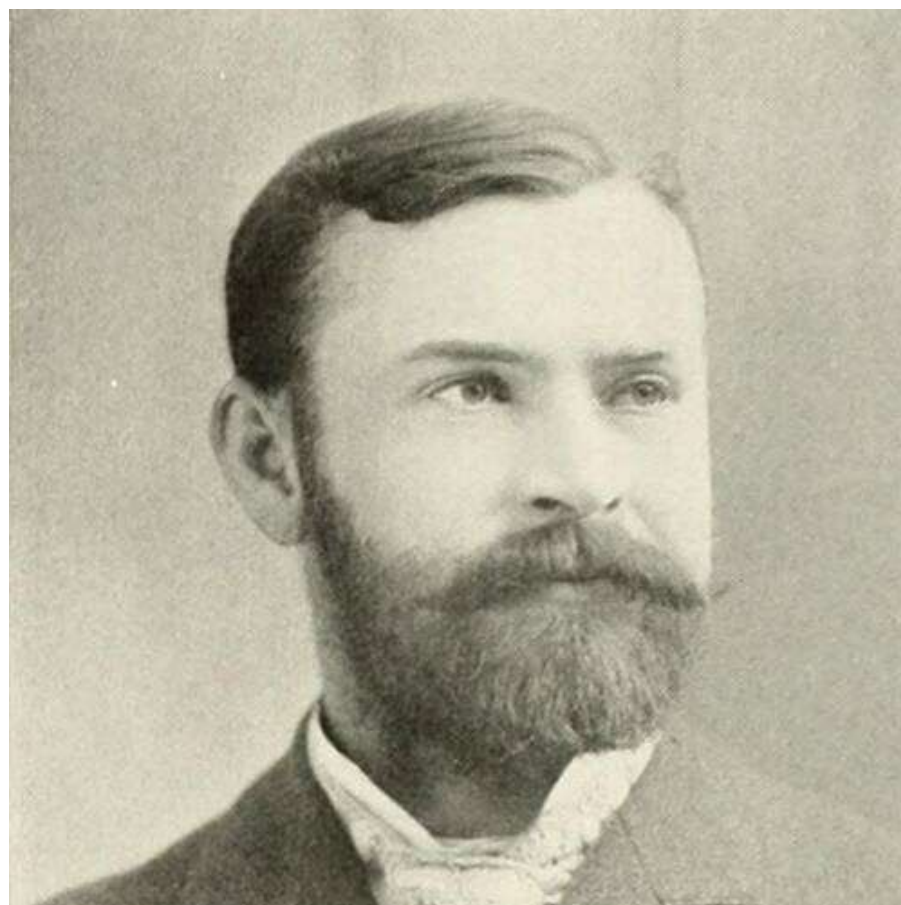
Clear Lake (605)874-2191

Thank God I'm Not a Cripple! - the story of Michael J. Dowling

Inspired by Andy Kreuzer's presentation on Michael Dowling at Central Park in Canby, MN, sponsored by MECCA (Museum Encompassing Canby Community Area).

Michael John Dowling was born in Massachusetts on February 17, 1866, to Irish immigrant parents, John Jerome Dowling and Honora Barry Dowling. The family moved around often, following the father's work as a carpenter. They were living in Chicago when they lost their home in the Chicago fire of October 1871. Michael attended schools in Massachusetts, New York, Chicago, Michigan, Missouri and Minnesota, mostly winter terms where he would start late in the session as he moved around with his father, his mother having died when Michael was ten years old. He arrived in Minnesota in 1877 and was on his own making his way in the world. He obtained work on local farms and by herding cows on the open prairie during the grazing season near Canby in southwest Minnesota. He earned \$1.50 per head for his herding job over the five month season. In 1880 he oversaw a herd of over 565 cattle on the surrounding prairie that was yet unclaimed. Then the blizzard of October 15th struck. Michael successfully brought the cattle in from the prairie with no losses when many other herds had loss due to the cows' noses being frozen over in the storm. The hard winter of 1880 had now begun and would continue until April of 1881, causing great hardship for the settlers. Michael was boarding at the James Larson home in Canby when, on December 4th, he caught a ride with some farmers heading toward Porter, MN to the farm where he was boarding his pony. A sudden blizzard came upon them and they changed course and became disoriented. They attempted a shortcut and ended up in a plowed field where Michael was bounced out of the wagon and, though he tried, he could not catch back up to the wagon. He was alone on the prairie in the midst of a terrible storm.

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A black and white portrait of Michael John Dowling, a man with a full beard and mustache, wearing a suit and tie. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera. The background is a plain, light-colored studio backdrop.

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You Choose

Your Limitations

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School Memories

Continued from last month

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Fairchild Farmgirl

A Perfect Summer

Page 8

He walked in search of shelter and came upon a wood pile. Knowing this pile should be in proximity to a house, he began throwing wood in all directions, expecting to hear a thud when it hit a building. He heard nothing so he began walking until he ran into a straw stack and climbed in for shelter from the storm. In the morning he awoke to find that his limbs had frozen solid during the night. He made his way to a farmhouse for help, crawling much of the way. The kind Norwegian family did what they could to thaw his limbs and Dr. Herman Farnsworth of Canby was called. The doctor recommended that Mike be brought back to Canby so he could be better cared for. Gangrene set in and it was decided that his limbs must be amputated to save his life. On December 20th, the operation took place on the kitchen table at the Larson home as Canby did not yet have a hospital or any facilities for an antiseptic surgery. There was not enough chloroform in town to guaranty complete anesthesia throughout the lengthy procedure. As Mike began to gain consciousness, it required three men to hold him down so the surgery could be completed. It was a five hour surgery under the most primitive of conditions. The medical field had gained a lot of information and surgical techniques from the amputations done during the Civil War but the outcome was doubtful. Both legs were amputated six inches below the knees, and the left arm was amputated below the elbow. The fingers on his right hand were also removed as well as part of his thumb. The surgery was performed by Dr. John Andrews of Marshall, assisted by Dr. Farnsworth and Dr. De Willis Little.

When Mike was bandaged and put to bed, one doctor voiced the opinion that he could not survive such an operation. Mike was awake and emphatically said, "I'll live longer than either of you!" The healing of his stumps proceeded without serious complications.

In the summer of 1881, Mike traveled to Granite Falls, county seat of Yellow Medicine County to meet with the Commissioners. He stood in front of them on his padded knees. The chairman offered to house him with a farmer at the cost of \$2 a week for the rest of his life. This was the accepted practice, the rehabilitation of a 'cripple' was not considered in those days.

Mike had spent the last several months contemplating his future. Being a cowboy or farmer was out of the question now. He had spent all his earnings and the money from the sale of his pony and his few cows to pay for his medical costs and lodging. He knew that what he needed most was education. Years later when speaking to wounded soldiers, Mike phrased it this way, "There is just one thing to do when you have no legs or arms... that is to polish the machinery above the shoulders".

Another of the commissioners asked Mike for his thoughts. Mike proposed "If you give me two terms at Carleton College, it will never cost this county another cent as long as I live to keep me going." The next day, the commissioners held the vote. The Chairman voted to make Mike a ward of the county but the other two Norwegian commissioners voted to accept Mike's challenge and give him an education as well as artificial limbs.

*Michael Dowling,
before his prosthetics*



Continued on page 6

Mike's Trip Back in Time at Gary Independent School

-Continued from last month

The north end of the second floor had an extension to the library built into it. It was out of character with the rest of the school. The wall was painted white and had a lot of windows. There would always be a teacher and some students moving around in there, looking busy. It was used as an Annual room and for the Paper staff. I never went into that room.

I shook my head to clear the cobwebs, went down the stairway, did another 180 and went outside for a while. Gary built their fancy , new gym in 1958-60. The main entrance doors were built in the southeast corner of the gym. These doors were the main foot traffic doors whenever there was any kind of event going on in the gym, whether it was homecoming events, prom or winter carnival events, or a science fair, or the Catholic Church bazaar. Fans streamed in through these doors for basketball games, class plays, and graduation. A ticket booth was snugly fit into the corner by the larger doors that opened into the gym. Volunteers took the money. As people walked into the ticket area, they could look at the large sports trophy case. This case was full of trophies from the Dennis Cole, Mile Gilbertson and Coach Smith eras 1957-1963. Gary was quite a sports town for many years and was widely heralded by sports fans around South Dakota.

I would walk the block from our house to the main doors of the gym. Every game, every event at the new gym would be packed with people. All the bleachers would be full, fans would be standing in every hallway, sitting on the stage, or standing in line to buy popcorn. Popcorn and buttery smells would fill the whole gymnasium and this would all be twenty minutes before the game or event started. The popcorn machines worked overtime in the cafeteria,. Hungry fans would be standing in lines, waiting for a bag of popcorn and a 12 ounce cup of pop.

On the cold winter nights, the hot water and steam heating system's pipes would pump, pound, shake, rattle, and roll. These loud, explosive sounds were scary at first but they became reassuring and calming after the bedlam of a high school basketball game in the 1960's. The crowds would scream and yell at every basket, every rebound, every foul. They would go bananas whenever a referee made a questionable call. The large and robust crowd would yell in unison, "Hey, he got fouled!", "Hey, he traveled!", "Hey, he was out of bounds!" Garyans loved to get loud and rowdy.

I remembered the other team's buses on those cold, dark, icy nights. The windshields would be iced over so bad after a game that the drivers would have to pour warm water on the windshield to clear them. The sleet would be turning to snow, the roads would be terrible and all those kids from South Shore, Florence, or Strandburg would be getting on the bus for a slow ride home. I remembered all of those eight feet high piles of snow along the streets, with only a lane and a half of space for the two lanes of traffic. I remembered all of the idling cars, warming up on all those cold nights. The streets around the gym would become invisible in all that cold air car exhaust.

Popcorn was the big kahuna at every home football game, too. The whole football field would be engulfed by the smell of popcorn and butter. Everyone would buy at least one large bag of popcorn. Gary had no football stands, so everybody parked their cars ten or fifteen feet from the football field. All night long, hundreds of people would be sitting on the hoods of

someone's car, walking around visiting, or standing on the sidelines, watching the game. Everybody had a bag of popcorn!

Gary had a great cafeteria, and great homemade meals were made there every single school day. The people of Gary sure did a good job building that gym, with its kitchen and stage and everything else about it. Job well done!

I went outside and walked east of the gym and saw the two elm trees along the street. In 1967, there were two, twenty-foot tall trees next to the gym's main entrance. The new teacher in school kept parking his compact car right next to these trees. Any normal kid walking by the car and the two trees could easily see that the small car would squeeze right in there, between the trees. I showed some other kids the possibility and a day or so later, during recess, about eight of us boys picked up the car and sat it down between those two elm trees. Wow, the school took that seriously! We had an immediate and very scary school meeting with every kid 12 years and older being put under the microscope. They wanted full and unconditional confessions immediately or the cops would be called and beat the truth out of us! I raised my hand and asked, "Can't we just go back out there and put the car back?" Nobody confessed so Mr. Taylor, the superintendent said, "I want a bunch of you Juniors and Seniors to put that car back." The crisis was over.

I walked over to the big front doors of the school and opened them up. A wide stairway greeted me and went upstairs to the main hallway. My interest though was the hallway to the left where a very long, narrow stairway went all the way down to the basement floor. There must have been fifty cement steps, which used to go down to the basement floor. There were good, solid handrails on both sides. After a couple of months of serious practice, I got good enough to jump from the top landing, catch the handrails, slide all the way down and jump to the floor at the bottom, all without having to use a single step. The trick was to have dry hands. This was one of my proudest school accomplishments!

I took a quick look at the old tiny basketball court, which was now a musky, dark basement room, with the newer chemistry room built above. This was the basketball palace where Dennis Cole became a star. When his younger brother, Garry, started high school, I remember people around town talking about the pressure that must be on Garry, having to follow in his brother's footsteps. The great Mike Gilbertson had two younger brothers, too, Merlin and Keith; there must have been a lot of pressure on them, too.

The large, smelly boys' and girls' bathrooms were down there, too, in the basement of the school. I climbed half a flight of steps where I could look into the janitor's (boiler) room. The teachers' smoking room was next door and, finally, the doorway to the Shop room. This was definitely the deepest, darkest bowels of Gary Independent School.

I scanned the shop room and there in the northeast corner was the old school safe. It was still there, where it had stood for ninety years. The most sacred items in the whole school were kept securely locked in that safe. No one was allowed to ever see the safe open. No one was permitted to know what was stored in that safe. It was the Holy Grail of the Gary Independent School.

I had to look again and then rub my eyes. The door to the safe was open! All of the sacred items that had once been safely hidden away, were now laying there on the floor. Wow! That was all that was left from Gary Independent School's glory days, and, unbelievably, it was a powerful symbol for me: the safe door open with all the most sacred symbols spilled out, discarded, left to rot away. I bent over to look at those great documents. They were nothing but

attendance rosters. They covered most of the years from 1920-1970. "That's all it was?" "This is what was so important?"

This concludes Mike's trip down memory lane before the demolition of the main school building in April of 2002. I wish I had taken one, last walk through the halls as the memories are fading.

Following are some photos from the demise of the main building as covered by the Clear Lake Courier.



The southwest corner of the building was the first part removed.



After a day of rain Thursday, work got underway again on Friday. This picture was taken from the west side of the building.



This picture taken on April 10th shows nearly one-third of the west wide of the school torn down.



Another picture from the west side of the building with part of the northwest corner of the wall still standing.

A Look Back...

150 years ago, September 1901

Train sparks fire west of Moritz
Old Interstate building moved
HN Miller moves barbershop to new quarters
House fire at OL Callahans'
Auctions: Stewart and Snell - HN White

100 years ago, September 1926

Miss Marvel Grinol injured in car accident
Fishing good at Lake Cochrane
No children under the age of 15 allowed at the theater unless accompanied by parent of guardian
Marriages: Martha E Kemp & Melvin Miller
Mabel Clare Grinol & Francis C Leathy
Births: Girls to Mr. & Mrs. Ufkn Sweetser
Mr. & Mrs. Earl Gordon
Deaths: Thomas Fitzpatrick -
baby Elizabeth Jensen
Auction: Bartels Store - Huffman Hardware

75 years ago, September 1951

School opens September 4th with small increase
Rabid skunk found in Gary area
Bandstand moved to more central location in the park
Electric lights strung to portion of park and bandstand
John Banwarth, Marcella Kennedy and Murphy Carlson involved in serious car accident
Marriages: Lois Cox & Harold Wiese –
Iona Mae Olsen & Dwaine Woldt
Births: Girls to Mr. & Mrs. Harvey Nelson –
Mr. & Mrs. Jack Hentges
Boy to Mr. & Mrs. Melvin Simonton
Deaths: Julius Runge - Mrs. WR Schuttler

50 years ago, September 1976

Fire calls at Howard Winrow, Earl Thorson, Roger Baer, and Bostic Farms
Homecoming festivities set for September 23 and 24
Sheriff urges residents to lock houses
Sue Stone and Rod Meadors Homecoming queen and king
Death: Ida Bailey
Auction: Mary Gordon estate

Mike Dowling - Determination Outweighs Obstacles

Mike was placed in the home of the county treasurer, Ole Lende, and he began school in Granite Falls where he "learned to learn". In the summer, before the county bought him artificial limbs, he painted the courthouse fence on his knees. The following summer, the board appropriated the \$225 for his new limbs. By the summer of 1883, Mike had caught up on his education, and the County Board sent him to Carleton College for the next term. He was a diligent student but did not pass up any of the fun. He was implicated in a Halloween prank that resulted in a cow being stabled in the college belfry.

President Strong of Carleton Collage wrote a letter to the Yellow Medicine County Commissioners requesting they send Mike for an additional term at the school. In April of 1884, Mike returned to Granite Falls to release the County from any further obligations of support.



Timeline of Achievements:

- 1884Country school teacher at Stony Run and East Granite Falls. He was a successful teacher even teaching penmanship. "You don't need fingers to write, they just get in the way," he is quoted, "But I don't advise removing them."
- 1885School principal at Renville
- 1889Started the Renville Star Farmer, sold and bought again in 1892
- 1892-1894Assistant clerk to the state legislature
- 1894Secretary of the Minnesota Editorial Association and Western Press Association
- 1895-1898Clerk of the Minnesota legislature
- 1895Secretary of the Republican Clubs
- 1895Marriage to Johanna (Jennie) Bordewich with whom he fathered three daughters.
- 1897Led legislative efforts to provide aid for children with disabilities. The first public hospital for disabled children - the Gillette Children's Hospital - was created.
- 1899Appointed by President McKinley as a special commissioner to study the education situation in the Philippines following the Spanish American War.
- 1901- 1903Minnesota Speaker of the House
- Specific dates unknown* - Bought controlling interest in the Olivia State Bank
- 1912Conceived the idea of the Yellowstone Trail and spent much time in propaganda for the project. He motored out with family and friends in 1913 to map out a trail to Yellowstone Park. Roads that looked easy enough on a map were not so easy to follow on the ground. The original Yellowstone Trail went through Olivia, later changed to Highway 212.

- 1919 Dowling envisioned a route for ocean vessels to load wheat and iron ore at the head of the Great Lakes and travel to world-wide ports. The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Tide Water Commission was created to study the feasibility of such a project and its benefit to the state of Minnesota. The banker from Olivia was one of the first men appointed to the commission.
- 1919 **World War 1** - Dowling approached the Surgeon General regarding amputations. He shared that the site and length of the stump were vital and that Army surgeons should be so trained. But he was rebuffed by the Surgeon General whose response was that the job of the Army surgeon was to amputate and that was all there was to it. Mike pointed out his prosthetics and stated that it made a big difference to the amputee. Dowling shared that amputations needed to be done in a manner that would allow healing as well as successful prosthetic attachment. The Surgeon General's stance was changed, and Army surgeons were retrained.
- 1919 Dowling began his involvement with the Red Cross Institute for Crippled and Disabled Men. A film was made showing how he functioned as a normal man although he used multiple prosthetics. This film was used in hospitals to inspire the Doughboys returning from Europe. This silent film can be viewed on You Tube.



One of Dowling's greatest gifts was the gift of encouragement and promise that he gave to the veterans of World War I. Soldiers who had lost limbs heard his message of courage and strength formed from his own experience. He spoke to American veterans at Ft. Snelling and to English veterans in London through the efforts of the Red Cross. He traveled to Belgium and France offering hope to the disabled soldiers.

1920 Dowling was in line for the Republican nomination for governor but was defeated. His defeat was a great disappointment as he had coveted the honor of being governor of the state of Minnesota.

- 1920 A school for crippled children was opened in an old church building in Minneapolis. It was named the Dowling School for Crippled Children. Michael Dowling worked for legislation to provide for the education of crippled children in the state of Minnesota. The bill passed February 24, 1921. "The chance granted to a crippled child to make a good life is not charity. Economically it is the soundest business proposition a state can engage in." It cost Yellow Medicine County \$1342.25 to house and educate Michael Dowling (including prosthetics). The cost to house him only for the forty years until his death would have been \$4160.
- 1921 Michael J. Dowling passed away on April 25, 1921, and is buried in Olivia, MN.
- 1928 William Henry Eustis (a man crippled as a child) turned over a million and a half dollars to the University of Minnesota to found the Minnesota Hospital and Home for Crippled Children. He gave a wooded site of 28 acres on the Mississippi River to the Board of Education for the building of a new and modern Dowling School for Crippled Children with instructions to maintain the Dowling name.

Fairchild Farmgirl

Have we had a good summer? This is the first summer that I can remember that I felt satisfied with it's length. It always felt too short. This summer was literally perfect...can we go back and you know, try it again? Kidding, but what a great summer I had. Let me tell you my highlight from the last few weeks of August, before I go into September.

My daughter Rachel took me on a trip to Michigan, the Upper Peninsula. Oh my gosh, if you've never been there, please, PLEASE do yourself a favor and go! We stayed in St. Ignace, and we spent some time in Mackinaw City, and then...we went and spent the day on Mackinac Island. So happy we went there on a Wednesday, and next time I go, I'll be spending a few days on the island. To say it was beautiful is a complete understatement. No cars are allowed, time is slow, and the flowers and landscaping is a degree that I'll never know again in my life. We had a picnic, took a private carriage ride (that's a must), walked around, peeking in shops, ate ice cream, and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. The neatest thing was when our daughter saw a Michigan State Trooper, and she asked if she could go up and see the ambulance (she's an EMT while she's in college to be a paramedic). He walked us right up to their small trauma bay, and the EMT's on staff showed us everything. They even pulled their ambulance out of the bay to let her go up inside it. So fun! Watching her listen intently as they told her about their EMT job on the island, how sometimes the Coast Guard will fly patients out, and you have to go with them, and asking her if she'd like to fill out an application to work there next summer.

It was magical.

Then we got home and Ron and I took Levi and the three younger ones on a weekend trip to Yankton before he flew the nest for school. That was really fun too. We got to show the kids the bridge; we took some of Maggie's senior pictures overlooking the Missouri River. We also got to visit Riverboat Days, and the Lewis and Clark Museum is so neat.

Then our middle son started college in Pipestone! Levi likes it and is in the Carpentry program. So if you ever see a black pickup with a cattle guard on the front, give him a little wave. If you talk to him, tell him his momma misses him, and a man cannot live on junk food alone; buy some produce at Colburns. He hears it so much from me, but maybe coming from a nice little grandma, he'd listen.

What's up for September, you ask? Well, football - I have one more boy playing, and I have to say, I love it so much! I'm going to miss watching Levi play. But I'll relish watching Tedd. We're pulling produce out of our 9,000 square foot garden like mad for 3 farmers markets, and we've got another 1200 square foot produce garden that is really producing too. The worms ate our broccoli like crazy, and it's no good to us. The chickens will have green eggs after eating as much broccoli as we planted. Cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, and beans are crazy good right now, and I'm starting to bring in a gallon pail of cherry tomatoes almost each night. Oh and our market flowers are going just as crazy.

Ron starts back on second shift right after Labor Day at the school. He misses those kids and games. I decided that while I go back to school, I'm just going to substitute teach for Deuel.

So that's it in a nutshell. Keep on keeping on and enjoy September!

Until next time,

Fairchild "oh, and have some bonfires too" Farmgirl

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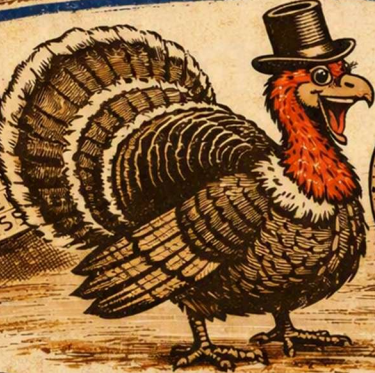
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