

A Stone Arabia Legend

A thick white frost lies on the fields of Stone Arabia on this mid November day of the twelfth year of a new century. Not far to my east I see the corn shocks in my Amish neighbor's field. My mind drifts back for a half century to a picture I was shown by a now long gone friend. The view was of another field of corn shocks from yesteryear. History has a way of repeating itself. The old photograph recorded a trend of agriculture that was present in the earlier years of the century which preceded ours.

My friend Ralph Vosburgh showed me that picture and commented on how straight the rows of shocks were on that long ago day. Such views of shocks were long out of date until our Amish neighbors brought back to us a realization that they still used those ways of our yesterdays. The Amish come to Stone Arabia in 1986 and with them a living history lesson.

When Ralph Vosburgh and his old photograph came to mind so did Ralph and his family. All of that immediate family has now gone beyond the sunset. I treasured my friendship with that family and the memories they left with me. The Vosburgh family went far back into Stone Arabia history. They were leather tanners long ago.

When I came to Stone Arabia the family consisted of three sons and two daughters. I did not know the preceding generation. Only one of the daughters ever married. I must tell you that the Vosburgh family were some of the most honest, thrifty and hard working farming people that I have ever known. I can still see in my mind's eye Ralph's red mustache and smiling face. They owned much Stone Arabia farm land including the site of revolutionary war Fort Paris. My deep interest in Stone Arabia's past and the fort doubtless brought the Vosburgh family and me together.

There were many interesting connections with the Vosburghs that broadened my knowledge of early 20th Century Stone Arabia farm history. I will now tell of a happening that could be a legend although it is quite true. No one now survives that can be injured by its telling. The brothers were well known to produce large amounts of cash to purchase expensive machinery. Money was the topic of this story. Ralph did most of the driving to deliver farm products to village customers. His older brother Vaughn usually accompanied him. On one of these trips they were involved in a vehicle accident near home. No one was injured but Ralph received a traffic ticket. He asked me to take him to his appearance before the town justice of the peace. That night he asked me to drive him to a local bank the next morning.

When he came out of the bank he explained that he and Vaughn were putting some money in an account for younger brother Gerald. It seems that Gerald had been janitor of the county school he attended. He had accumulated a few dollars and deposited it in a local bank. The year was 1928 and with the depression he lost his money. After that he did not trust banks. I will insert at this point something about Gerald. His family belonged to the Megiddo Mission Church of Rochester, NY. They had a deep religious belief but were conscientious objectors during World War 2. Gerald was sent to the north western US to work in a lumber camp. It was his only long journey from home. Several times he told of his experiences there. I will now resume my memories of the day I took Ralph to a Fort Plain bank. When his business was completed there he asked if I would take him to another bank at Johnstown that afternoon.

Ralph was a big stout man who had somewhat of a hard time getting around. When I arrived at his home the first thing into the car was a bulging paper bag. I had no doubt that it was filled with money and he proceeded to tell me so. I visualized it containing lots of very old bills. He showed me silver certificates but nothing I believed of more than face value. We had a nice visit on the way to Johnstown. The bank happened to be one that I did business with. Upon reaching the parking lot I told Ralph that I had other business to attend to and would return soon to sit in the car to wait for him. It was cold weather and he insisted I come in where it was warm. Before I got a chance to sit down I noticed Ralph sitting with a bank employee at a desk completely covered with paper money. He said: "Ho Ho, there is my driver now," and motioned me to come over.

The lady bank employee said: "I have tried to tell Mr. Vosburgh that one bill might have a collector value beyond face value." Since I had been invited I asked what the bill was and she handed me a one thousand dollar bill. Ralph did not seem to care about the possible collector's value. So the bill stayed with the pile on the desk. About then my Stone Arabia friend said to the bank lady: "What did you say your count was? It was a little different than ours." Her reply was twenty four thousand dollars and a little over. He left the hoard to deposit in the bank. We walked out but our conversation about money had not ended. I told him that numerous people thought the family had a lot of cash stashed at home. My advice was if someone breaks in and threatened them to surrender some cash rather than be injured or killed. He replied: "Oh, we still have a little around the house." This ended a Stone Arabia legend for me. I kept it a secret in hopes that it would help protect my friends. Now the legend can be told.

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Stone Arabia

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