

Dynamite Blast from Road Construction Destroys Otto Blum's Barn in 1924 - Part 2

After the barn on the Otto Blum farm along what is now Highway 81 in Jordan township was accidentally taken down by a road crew on June 26, 1924, farmers from all over the locality gathered at the Blum place to view the wreckage. As the news reached the city, many went out from town in automobiles to view the damage.

Excited and depressed because of the loss of their fine barn during haymaking time, Mr. Blum and members of his family mingled with sympathizing friends without thought of anything else, forgetting the house and the evening meal until darkness. This was their second calamity, since the barn that stood in the same place was struck by lightning and burned down four years earlier in August.

The new barn had been erected at a cost of \$10,000 without paying for labor since it was largely contributed by neighboring farmers. The structure was modern throughout with stanchions for 56 cows, milking machine, and electric plant.

Fortunately, the only stock in the barn at the time it was wrecked happened to be four calves, which were uninjured. Much of the lumber did not happen to be badly splintered and some was saved for rebuilding. The extent of damage to the foundation could not be ascertained until the wreckage was cleared away. At that time, they were certain that at least part of it would have to be rebuilt. It was amazing that very few of the windows in the barn were broken.

Three weeks prior to this incident, a much larger blast of 1,250 pounds of dynamite had been made on the same hill, but more to the west. That time the dynamite was put down 40 feet in 14 different holes. That force was spent in the ground. It was not anticipated that this charge would have such a disastrous result and little thought was given to it. However, the consequences proved to be so much worse than could have been imagined since the building was so far away and appeared to be protected down the hillside.

The newspaper did not report any damage to the large 12-room residence. However, Mary Ann Meichtry Blum related years later that several rocks had flown through a window and one landed near the crib where young Delbert was. Fortunately, it did no more than startle him.

It was reported on Saturday that 15 men who were employed by contractors Webb & Dixon began the work of removing the barn wreckage. The lumber that could be used again in reconstruction was piled and the site cleared for erection of yet another new structure. The work was to be conducted by the contractor's men, possibly bringing in more men. It was expected that some work to repair the damage to the foundation would also have to be accomplished. New lumber was also needed to add to the salvaged material.

George Huxtable, the blaster had returned to his home in Mineral Point after the accident and was expected back to work the following week. The Blum family, however, heard that he never did return to collect his paycheck.

Pre-pavement work on Highway 61 continued and was not slowed by the additional barn work. Mr. Dixon said, "We have enough men to push all the work." The debris had been completely cleared by the Monday after the accident. The work of raising the new barn began immediately.

That barn still stands on the homestead at W7360 Highway 81. A shorter addition was added to the barn years later so that 100 cows could be milked. Otto and Anna (Kubly) Blum had purchased the farm in 1913. It remained in the family with Oscar and Martha Blum, and then their son Delbert and Mary Ann, farming there until 1987 when it was sold out of the family.



This is a photo of the house on the former Blum farm where they lost two barns in the 1920s, as told in the column last week. This house, which might have served as a stagecoach stop at one time, was destroyed by fire decades later.

The Blums were understandably nervous when the Ahlgrimm explosive company was hired to set off explosives near the farm about 1980 when work was being done again on the highway. This time the shot went off without incident, much to the relief of the family.

The barns were not the only major mishaps that happened on the farm. The house also caught on fire in April 1989 after the renters put an aerosol can in the clothes dryer and left the house. The house was only partially burned at that time so the Browntown Cadiz Jordan fire department burned it completely a few months later. It is thought that the large house may have been a stage coach stop at one time, but it has not yet been documented.

Due to the pandemic, I did not have access to the newspapers of August 1920 and April 1989 before the deadline for the paper. Otherwise, I would have read and shared information about the barn that had burned and the loss of the house - if it was available.

