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At Normandy Farm

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Saga of farmer vs. progress

By Jack Authelet

Douglas Daniels of Normandy Farm felt the weight of seven generations on his shoulders this week as he fought yet another battle to protect a portion of the family homestead on West Street.

Behind him were five generations of the family, which have worked the land for a living in continuous operation since Normandy was founded in 1759 by Francis Daniels. Doug and his brother Norman are the sixth generation, and their children and grandchildren have already taken their place in the long family line at Normandy. Norman and his family run a campground. Doug, recently returned from the West Coast, is raising Christmas trees as a cash crop.

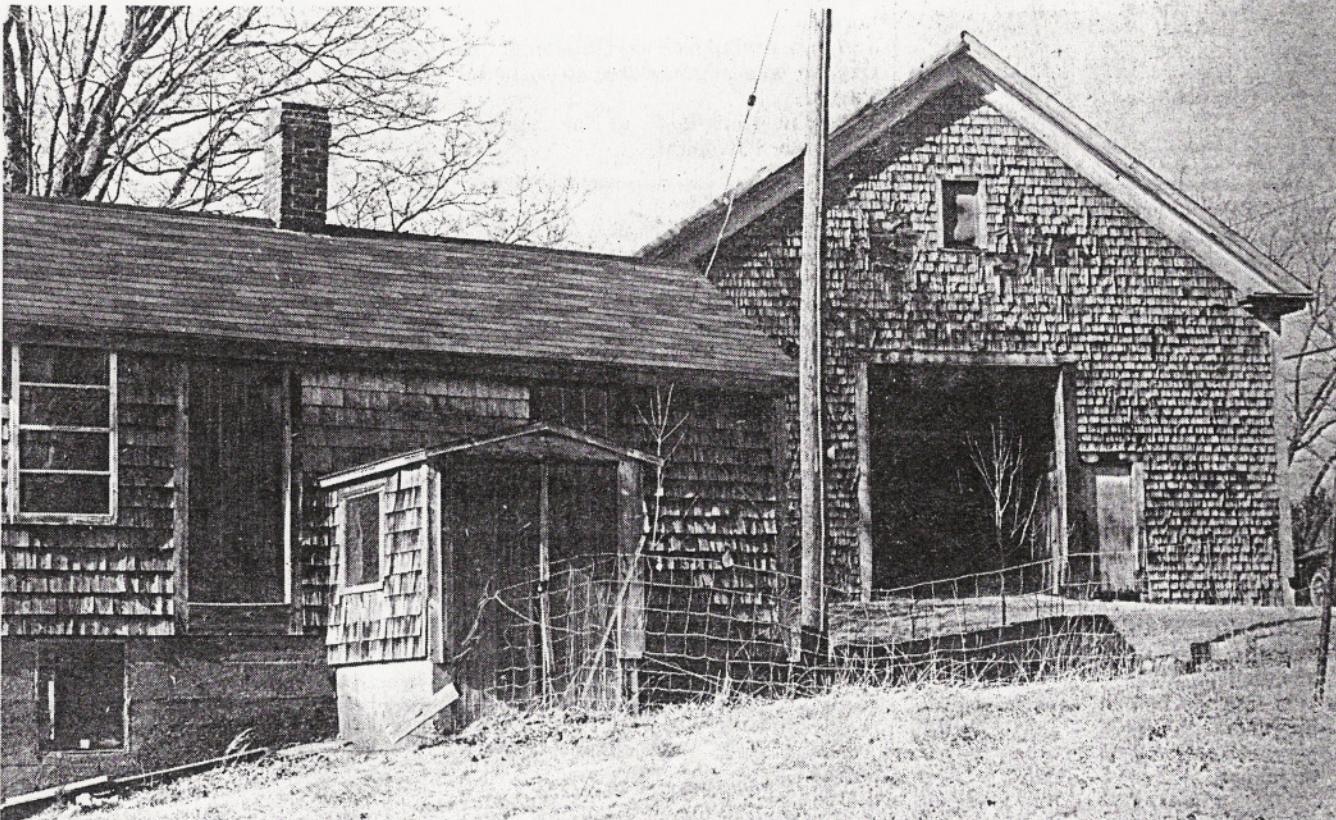
The latest battle comes with the Norfolk County Commissioners over the proposed relocation of West Street.

As presently proposed, the relocation of the road could severely restrict the use of a portion of the property, and take additional acres out of production.

There have been other reductions in the size of the farm over the years, some voluntary, others of necessity, others forced.

Doug's mother, the late Marion Daniels, sold a portion of the farm to the town, and Coggeshall River Park was built. The town gained a swimming area, she had money to pay the taxes.

The Water Department has taken nine acres, including a right of way, for



NORMANDY FARM, continuously owned by members of the Daniels family since 1759, will experience another loss of land with the proposed relocation of West Street. A portion of the former hired man's quarters in the foreground will be taken, and the new road will limit access to the underside of the barn, used to store equipment.

in that transaction was not only the land, but also the sand pits which, over the years, provided unusually high quality sand to area foundries.

West Street is, at best, a relatively narrow, winding road. In 1970, the Board of Selectmen asked the County Commissioners to make a layout for rebuilding the street. The premise was that eventually the road would have to be wider to safely accommodate the expected increase in vehicular traffic.

As many of the houses on West Street were built close to the road, it was deemed inadvisable to attempt a wider layout over the route of the present road.

Consequently, a new route was planned, going behind the large barn at Normandy Farm, as well as behind the houses on West Street, with a new bridge crossing the river downstream from the present location. The new layout was 50 feet wide, showing a proposed road surface of 36 feet.

Small sections of many houselots were involved in the land taking, and the County paid out \$18,226 in compensation to owners of the land. As part of the settlement, the owners retained the right to contest the damages paid.

Meanwhile, Doug had moved back to Foxboro from California, living in the family homestead, working the land. In preparation for his return, he had made

'It's an awful lot to have to go through just to try and protect your land.'

Doug Daniels

periodic visits to plant trees and keep the buildings in repair.

His first crop of trees went on sale this past Christmas, and business was good. Traditional tree growing requires a ten-year cycle from planting to harvest. Observing methods used in California, he feels he can cut the cycle in half to five years, increasing the productivity of the land. The success of the effort, in terms of earning a living, depends on having a sufficient number of acres planted.

"You have to look at the potential of the land," said Doug. "When you split a field with a road, the damage is greater than you can show in court."

He plans to plant 2,000 trees per acre. The ten year return would be \$30,000. "The trees are a renewable resource," he pointed out, "so that money would be earned over and over again with each cycle."

If the new road is built as planned, 1.35 acres of land would be lost for production forever. "Actually, it is

more than that," he said earlier this week. "When you consider the slope on the side of the road, it would be closer to 1.52 acres." To that, he adds the loss of the distance he would have to allow between the road and the plantings, to reduce damage from road salt, and the loss becomes even greater.

Another major problem would be the close proximity of the new road to the back of the barn. Although the road passes by the barn, he alleges that the slope line comes nearly to the edge of the structure, which is open in the back below ground level for the storage of machinery. "I won't be able to use the underside of the barn. There isn't room to swing the manure spreader."

The County valued the land at \$3,410.86. He feels the loss is much greater. Moving the proposed road further from the barn would relieve that problem. The other alternative is \$6,584 for a new foundation and \$19,500 to move the barn.

As presently laid out, the new road

would take the end off an adjacent building used for many years as quarters for hired hands at the farm.

Many people have expressed doubt that the new road will ever be built. When problems developed with the West Street bridge, voters flatly denied an alternative plan which would temporarily connect the present road to a new bridge downstream, reached by an S-curve configuration. The theory at the time was to build the bridge which would eventually serve the new road while making temporary provisions to access the present road in the interim.

Highway Supt. Alfred Truax said "not in our lifetime" when asked when he thought the new road would be built. "I think it will have to be done someday, to handle the increase in traffic in the area, but I don't think you or I will ever live to see it."

Meanwhile, Doug Daniels is left with mixed feelings while trying to protect the future of the farm, which must depend on the land. "If they just forget the whole thing, and abandon the layout, I have to pay back the money that was paid and pay all the legal fees," said Doug. "If the road is built, additional damages have to be paid so the barn can still be used. It's an awful lot to have to go through just to try and protect your land."