

From Your Commissioner



The Summer House

It is probably about 115 years old and it is only 100 square feet (10' X 10'), but for many years it was a central part of the lives of children in the Jasper Family. Today it sits on a hill in about the same place as where it was built, but it has gone for a couple of trips down the road over the years. When it was built there were no trees anywhere around and the top half was screened on all four sides with a full screen door. No doubt there was usually a breeze passing through the building.

Back in the early part of the last century it was used as a place to relax and escape from the heat that had built up in the farmhouse during the hot summer days. This was before the days of electricity and fans, let alone air conditioners. When my father was a boy, he would sleep in the summer house to escape the heat of his second-floor bedroom. He told me he would usually stay out there until the snow started blowing in.

When my father got married, for the first time, and began having children he jacked the building up, backed a flatbed truck under it and drove it down the road to the farm he was living at. It was placed about 25 feet from the side door to the house. He made no changes to it, and it was used as a playhouse by my half-siblings and my cousins.

By the time my sister and I came along the screens were long gone, but we still used it as a playhouse. My earliest memory of it was when at the age of three or four I decided that it would be fun to stand in the middle of it and throw dishes out of it like frisbees; it was not one of my best ideas. Not too many years later my mother decided that it was time to remodel it.

My father, as if he had any spare time, took the project on. The summer house soon had only three large, screened openings instead of eight. The screen door was replaced by a solid one, but it now had a built-in bunk bed (with horsehair mattresses), shelving and a light! I was probably about seven at the time and I decided that it was time to move into it for the summer.

There were two issues with that, both relating to me being scared to be out there by myself. The first was that it was dark when I went to bed, the second was that I didn't know what I would do if I heard a strange noise when I was out there all alone. The first problem was solved by a small kerosene lantern that I would bring with me and then hang on a hook outside (yes, I could have used a flashlight, but my lantern was more fun). The second solution was one that I don't really understand the mechanics of to this day. My father ran a phone line to the house and if I picked up the phone it would automatically ring into the home phone.

When I was 15 my grandmother died, and we moved to the home farm. The summer house got jacked up again, put on a truck and driven back to its original location (about 75 feet from the back door

of the house). I continued to sleep in it, this time with no electricity and no phone. I had my father's old bedroom, and it was still too hot to sleep in during the summer.

The summer house never got much use by our daughter and the blocks it was on began to sink in an uneven manner and the west side of the roof began to leak. I couldn't just let it rot away, so I took on a project that made no sense. Today that old summer house, that no one uses, sits on solid footings, with a watertight roof and a new coat of paint. Maybe someday some young boy or girl will get as much joy out of it as my father and I did.

Shawn N. Jasper-Commissioner