

# Historical Clippings

Three Lakes Museum

August 2022

## We Have a Cow Pass?

Well, we had a cow pass, in some places called a cattle creep or underpass. It has been a part of Three Lakes for a long time, right there under our nose, but most have never seen nor heard of it. The following was written by Nancy Brewster to explain it's history.



### The Old Cow Pass

Not very many people know about the cow pass under Highway 45 in Three Lakes. Bruce Brewster and his family know about it. The cow pass was constructed under the highway to connect the Maple Lake Dairy farm with the pasture on the other side of the highway. Bruce remembers moving cows through that cow pass twice a day many summers during his youth.



**THREE LAKES**  
**Dell Brewster has commenced work**  
**on his new farm near this village.**

The New North - 4 May 1911 - p 12 (Rhineland, WI)

His grandparents, Dell and Nora Brewster, owned the farm on the corner of Hwy 32 & 45. Dell started building the farm in 1911. . Four years later, in 1915, Dell built a barn for the cattle they would purchase.

**Dell Brewster is building a new**  
**barn on his place at Ever Green**  
**Farm.**

The New North, 24 Jun 1915, - Page 10 (Rhineland, WI)



In time, the farm would consist of a farmhouse, barn, and Maple Lake Dairy. Nora Brewster took care of the livestock, ran the dairy and the store while Dell purchased farm equipment for planting and harvesting. Nora had a knack for buying land and eventually they owned the land to the north on Maple Lake and the land to their south, where Bruce's parents, Norman and Jean Cunningham Brewster, eventually built their house and raised their family after World War II.

The Brewster farm was on the north side of the current Hwy 45. The cow pass was at the back of the barn. The cows were led to the narrow opening and walked in single file through the pass under the highway. The cow pass was constructed of sturdy wooden boards laid horizontally and nailed into place. The cows would come out on the south side of the road where they would spend the day grazing in the pasture.



This summer (2022), the old cow pass will be filled in as part of the reconstruction of Hwy 45. Bruce took his grandson, Liam, through the cow pass one final time to see the back of the old barn that Dell built in 1915.



The following is from the Maple Lake Dairy exhibit in the agriculture section of the Three Lakes Museum

Millard Brewster and his son Dell ran a sawmill in Three Lakes in the first decade of the 20th century. Dell returned to southern Wisconsin to claim a wife, Nora Nelson Brewster, who financed the purchase of a tract of land on Maple Lake. Dell bought the sawmill from his father and moved the operation to that land. Over the years Nora acquired several adjacent parcels of land and built a large barn.

Nora built up a herd of Guernsey dairy cows, the breed that had the highest butterfat content to their milk. Nora separated out the cream and made cheese and ice cream. They built a small store and had glass milk bottles imprinted with "Maple Lake Dairy." They sold their products to summer residents and tourists. Dell died in 1952 and Nora continued managing the operation for several more years. But the movement to form dairy cooperatives finally came to the north country and electricity became common even in the deep woods. Milk and cheese became widely available commercially, and the cost of maintaining a herd was quickly outstripped by the value of the lake front land.

The remnants of the dairy can still be seen in Three Lakes. A large white barn, now serving as storage for Watercraft Sales, hovers over Highway 45 South, just adjacent to the intersection with Highway 32. Beneath the highway there is a "cow pass" that allowed the cows to leave and return to the barn in safety from the field across the highway.

So, that's why we had a cow pass



The Maple Lake Dairy was owned and operated by Bruce Brewster's grandparents, Nora and Dell Brewster. The store was located just to the east of the large grey barn on the east end of Superior Street, where Watercraft inventory is now displayed. Bruce remembers that people used to walk to town to pick up their mail, and then stop at the Maple Lake Dairy store for an ice cream cone on the way home. The larger than normal culvert on that end of Superior Street allowed the cows to travel from the barn-side to graze on the other side of Highway 45!

Bruce Brewster and the Maple Lake Dairy label

From the archives -

*Most pioneer families had a milk cow, two if they were lucky. Cows provided a daily source of milk to be churned into butter, or curdled into cottage cheese on the stove.*

*Dairying as a small Northwoods industry began in earnest around the beginning of the 20th century. The cut and burned-over land provided some pasture, though in the end not enough to sustain large industrial herds. Local dairying involved small, community-based dairy farms and creameries. Some farms combined the whole operation and produced cheese and ice cream for sale to the public. The invention of refrigeration and changes in transportation and competition from outside the region ultimately contributed to there being fewer Northwoods dairy operations.*

