

STORY NUMBER 2 - MY CABBAGE CROP - SHERIDAN, NEW YORK

As told by William J. (Bill) Kuhrt, 1990

A number of people have asked me to repeat the story with regard to the cabbage that I grew one year. This happened in the Spring of 1917. It was shortly after the United States had entered the war against Germany, and apparently the allies were short of food. Soon after our entrance into the war the administration at Cornell suggested that all of those who had come from farms should go home and help grow as much food as possible. Apparently they were very short of food over in England and France.

So they came to me and I said, "Well, what about my courses?" I was in the first year of law expecting to finish up in June. And the administration in the law college said, "Oh, don't worry about that. We'll give you all your courses if you can go and help to grow some food." So I said, "Well all right, under those circumstances." I closed up everything and went home. I talked to my father about it. He said that he needed the help on the farm but he couldn't pay me much of anything for my services. I said, "Well, can you give me the use of a couple of acres of land? Maybe I can grow something and get some income that way because I don't have anywhere near enough money to go back to school for the second year." And I didn't know what my status would be either with respect to the draft or with respect to officer's training, which I had arranged for. But anyway, we discussed a number of different crops and finally he said, "Well what about cabbage?" I said, "Well I guess it would grow if we got some of that peat muck land down there." He said, "Well we'll do that. We'll fit up a couple of acres. But we have got to get the seed."

We sent away and got the very best productive Danish Ball-head seed, and we made a hot frame, planted the seed, and it came up just beautifully. And in due course we had all the plants we needed to set out the two acres of cabbage. It just grew beautifully, and all during the time after we set it out it was just a perfect stand. I was feeling very much elated. And then toward the middle of July, toward the last of July, we got no more rain. It was dry, too dry all during August and the early part of September. And the cabbage plants just sat there. They didn't grow but they didn't wilt either. Every night I used to go down and hoe until dark to try to preserve the moisture around the plants. And then finally about the middle of September it started to rain good again. The plants started to grow, and they had just started to show some heads when I had to go back to school.

So I went on down to school and I kept in touch with the folks to see how the cabbage was coming. My mother kept saying, "Well it's just growing fine, in fact every plant is heading up." That meant of course that it was making a head. And perhaps toward the middle or toward the latter part of October my mother wrote and said, "Well the cabbage is ready to cut. It looks like you've got a pretty nice crop here." She said, "We've been offered \$6.00 a ton." I said, "\$6.00 a ton for that beautiful cabbage?" "Well they're going to make sourkraut out of it." I said, "Well we're going to try to do better than that," but I didn't know which way to turn.

I decided to go in and talk with the Marketing Department there at Cornell and I got hold of Dr. W.I. Meyers who was assistant professor of Marketing at that time. I started to tell him the story and he exclaimed, "You mean to tell me you've got cabbage?" And I said, "Yes, why?" He said, "Why it's as scarce as hen's teeth." He said, "You ought to get a real good price for that cabbage." And he said, "Did it head up good?" I said, "Oh yeah, they tell me they're nice solid heads." He said, "Well you just hold on and wait till you get a much better price." I decided I'd better go home then and see the situation and see what kind of a deal I could make.

So I went back home and looked at it. It was a good stand, a very nice stand, but of course the drought did cut down the number of tons that I would receive. But anyway, very shortly after I got home there was an offer of \$30.00 a ton. And of course I didn't know first whether I'd take it or not, but I decided I'd wait awhile. There wasn't any harm being done. And the price went up to \$40.00 a ton. Finally a market gardener whom we knew very well, a very responsible person who grew vegetables and what not and sold them on the Buffalo market came over to the house. He said, "I understand you've got cabbage." And I said, "Yeah, you want to see it?" And he said, "I sure do." So we went down, took a look at the cabbage, and he said, "My gosh, you're just about the only person in the area that has any cabbage." He said, "I need that cabbage. I don't have any to round out my sales in the Buffalo market." So he said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. If you will cut this cabbage and pile it up in big piles, I'll come in my truck and get it and weigh it out on the public scales." He said, "I'll give you \$65.00 a ton for every head of cabbage you got here." Well I thought, now that's a good deal better. So I said, "Well I guess you got it."

So my father and I cut the cabbage and put it in piles. He came in with his trucks, carted it away, and after he got the scale tickets he had about 26 tons of just beautiful cabbage. So he gave me a check for the total amount. And I tell you, boy, I certainly needed that money which carried me all through the rest of the fall and winter and into the spring.

In the spring, on the 25th of I guess it was March, we (all of us who had registered for the Fourth Officer's Training School) got orders to report at Camp Meade, Maryland on the 12th day of April. And that's the end of that saga. So I had plenty of money, not only to finish that school year where they gave me all my credits again, but I was also able to have money when I went into the Army, the Fourth Officer's Training School.

So that's the story and thank you very much. Quid erat zu erzhalen, meaning that which was to be told. Thank you.