

## Mystery Photo 5

When I first started working at Havenwoods (a long time ago!), I was told that the foundations shown in the mystery photo were stone silos built by the Zautcke family. Land records show that in the early 1900s, Zautckes owned and farmed the area where the silo foundations are located, so I had no reason to doubt the story. For many years, I faithfully passed on this bit of history trivia.

However, as the soil around the silos settled, interesting tidbits of information came to the surface. On one visit many years ago, I noticed that the “stone” silos looked more like concrete with metal reinforcements protruding from the top. Having a few spare minutes and an Internet connection, I googled “reinforced concrete silos.” With each link I followed, I became more certain that these silos were not made of stone and were not built by the Zautckes.

I’ve always enjoyed History Detectives. On this TV show, experts try to track down the truth regarding a family heirloom or a museum artifact. I submitted the story of our mysterious silos about a year ago. Well, I’ve waited patiently, and I recently concluded that the producers of the show are not going to contact me or help me solve the mystery! I guess we will have to do it ourselves. Here are some things that I have learned:

- o To the best of our knowledge, the Zautckes were truck farmers who sold produce and possibly other farm products to people in the city of Milwaukee.
- o Silos were marketed to dairy farmers for corn storage. The silage (chopped green corn) allowed farmers to keep a dairy herd in production over the winter. Before this time, dairy farmers either sold their cows in fall and bought new cows in spring or allowed their cows to go dry (stop producing milk) over the winter.
- o Wisconsin had its first above-ground silo in 1880, and its first round silo in 1888. By 1904, there were 716 silos reported in Wisconsin. By 1923, that number had grown to over 100,000. Silos went from being an expensive, crazy experiment to a necessity in just a few decades.
- o Silos followed a gradual change in construction materials and methods, progressing from stone construction to concrete foundations with wood stave sides (built like a wooden barrel) to concrete stave sides. There were also brick and tile silos. The next “generation” of silos was all concrete or concrete block. In 1948, Harvestore introduced the blue steel silo. Now, new “silos” are often huge white plastic tubes filled with silage, lying horizontally on the ground.

I really wanted to answer three questions: Who built the silos? When were they built? What did they look like? From the information I’ve gathered, here’s my current theory. While the Zautckes probably had a cow or two for milk, butter, and cheese, no records indicate that they were dairy farmers. Without a herd of cows to feed during the winter, the Zautckes wouldn’t have needed a silo. Even if they had planted corn on every inch of their land, they probably couldn’t have filled three silos! The old story claiming that the Zautckes built the silos doesn’t stand up to the facts.

On the other hand, the House of Correction did maintain a dairy herd. Silos would have allowed them to keep a milk-producing herd through the winter and to provide dairy products for use in the prison kitchen year-round. The HOC farmed about 240 acres and probably didn’t have any problem filling three silos!

I’m going to assume that our silos were built around 1917 (the year the prison opened). The prison farm claimed to be a “state-of-the-art farm.” It would have been hard for a dairy farm to make that claim in 1917 if it didn’t have a silo!

It’s difficult to know exactly what these silos looked like before they were demolished. This was a time of rapid change. Farmers were building silos made of wood stave, concrete stave, tile, brick, stone, monolithic concrete, and concrete block. We can probably eliminate some of these choices. Stone is out because we can now see the concrete! Since our silos appear to have foundations, they couldn’t have been constructed of monolithic concrete. Commercial companies always built concrete stave silos. I can’t imagine the managers of the HOC hiring a commercial company when they had abundant free laborers available to do the work! Brick and tile were more expensive. That leaves us with wood stave or concrete block. Of those two, I think a fiscally-cautious prison board would have built wood stave silos. The biggest disadvantage of the wood silo was the need for maintenance, and the prison had no lack of people needing meaningful work to fill their days.

What do you think? Given the information that we have, did you come to a different conclusion? I’d be happy to hear your thoughts!