

3010 So. Blvd.,
Port Huron, Mich.
Sept. 29, 1981

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Stager & Family
at Hidden Valley Camp,

It was not our intention to take so long to write as we had promised when we visited you in July. The summer months go by so quickly. It is already the fall season and the trees are changing color. We fondly recall the beautiful array of colors your Hidden Valley put on for us in the past.

We arrived back in Port Huron, Michigan the first week in August after visiting about thirty families and friends in Maine whom we had not seen for eight long years. Of course, we had to tell everyone about your Hidden Valley Camp and all the changes and activities taking place there on the old farm where we had lived in 1946-47. Everyone wanted one of those beautiful brochures. We placed two in Camden, two in Portland and were lucky to get home with three for our children. If you have any more that you would like to circulate around out here we have lots of friends that might be interested. Some have asked ~~asked~~ what your rates are for the season per child.

When we sold the farm in April of 1947 to Ann Zucker of Mass. we hoped the new owner would develop it as a summer home or camp for children ^{to come} and enjoy the serenity and freedom to work and play while learning the wonderful secrets of nature that we had in abundance there. We saw the great potential there and only dreamed of doing with the farm what you have now accomplished. We loved the place dearly and like Mr. Tasker, were very reluctant to sell it.

Having been born and raised in Maine Mr. Dymont and I were very familiar with the rural areas of Washington, Oxford and Hancock Counties; the cold winters and deep snow along with the hardships due to the lack of year around employment. We made our home in Seal Harbor, Maine until the children were three, four and five years of age while Mr. Dymont was employed as chauffeur and later Police Officer. One of the Town's most prominent summer residents was the senior Mr. Henry Ford and his family from Michigan. It was in response to Mr. Ford's invitation to the local young men to go to Michigan to work in his factory that Mr. Dymont moved his family to Detroit in the fall of 1939. It was a big change for all of us. The big city with its hustle and bustle of fast moving cars and buses with people coming and going everywhere one looked, the long rows of buildings and neon lights flashing, was all frightening and confusing at first. Our only daughter, Constance being the oldest had just started school in Maine. Many adjustments had to be made. It was a difficult time for the family but our pioneer spirit and our faith in God helped us through as it has since then.

The second World War was under way and we soon got caught up in the War effort at the Ford Motor Company Factory. Mr. Dymont had been hired into the Plant Protection Dept. but was soon changed to Auxiliary Military Plant Police since Ford was under government contract to build Army Tanks, airplanes and their spare parts and ship them to the Armed Forces overseas. As more help was needed, I was hired into the Tank Parts Shipping Dept. along with other women, as packer, checker and clerk. Needless to say, these jobs kept us involved for almost seven years, much longer than we had anticipated. We didn't intend to leave Maine for good, just long enough to work and save enough to return and buy a farm. Mr. Dymont even took on another job of selling Real Estate so that we could save more for our farm. We also purchased a modest home with all the modern conveniences which helped us save money in the end. Our children were all in school and doing well in their new environment, making new friends daily as we were but none of us were really happy with city living.

As the War was winding down Mr. Dymont began to search the Farm Journals real estate advertisements of farms for sale in Maine. There he found Mr. Tasker's ad for his Montville, Maine farm. He called the Realtor's agent in Liberty, Maine and got the necessary information concerning the farm and

then began negotiations to purchase. We had no difficulty in selling our home in the Suburbs of Detroit and by April 1946 we were homeward bound by car. My sister Irma Fickett had been living with us, so there were six of us along with a big Collie dog, a stray we had befriended and a caged canary bird, with a small utility trailer packed with the few worldly possessions ~~we~~ we needed including three bicycles, in tow.

After about three days of hard travel, we arrived in Maine to stay at the Dell Dale Cabins on Rt.#3 near George's Lake until we could locate the Realtor and Mr. Tasker. It was a bright and sunny morning that day in April when we made our way into the farm. At the first sight of the place we were overjoyed. We felt like we had finally arrived home. We knew before we had even gone around the boundary lines or seen the inside that this was the place we wanted and had come so far to buy for our home. Mr. Tasker was there to greet us. He was seventy three years old then and somewhat stooped from his years and arthritis but in good health otherwise. His legs were strong from all the walking he did. He had lived there for fifty years and now he was living alone since his family grew up and moved away. He took us around the boundary lines that day which was quite a trek for even us younger ones. He became a good friend and neighbor to us as long as we knew him. He was a fine man. Shortly after that day he went with us into the County Seat at Belfast, Maine to his lawyer's office and had the necessary papers drawn up to complete the purchase of that farm of ~~of~~ 180⁺ acres at the unbelievable price of \$1495.00 plus \$195.00 to the Realtor-Receipt dated April 27, 1946. Mr. Tasker then moved onto the small farm bordering the one we purchased. He sold us all the old furniture that he left in the main house separately from the farm.

We moved onto the farm in May and school in Montville was closed for the summer in early June. There was much to be done and Mr. Dymont had to return to Michigan to tie up some loose ends. One of the local farmers volunteered to plow a garden for us and the children and I got the seed in while he was away. He came home in June and our main concern was to get the children enrolled in school for the next term and to try to get transportation for them. We went to the School Board and the Superintendent of Schools to discuss the issue with them. They told us that the Town of Montville could not stand the added expense to send the school bus down the hill from the Wheldon farm, a distance of one forth mile, to our farm to pick the children up but if they would walk to the Wheldons, he, as the bus driver, would transport them into the center of Montville to school and they would ~~would~~ have to walk home from his place after school. The road into the farm was indeed in very poor condition and was even worse in the winter. The grade school in town was also in disrepair and very obsolete. There was one teacher for thirty or more pupils from sub primary to eighth grade, all in one room. I had the opportunity to learn first hand how one teacher managed to teach there under such trying conditions. The fall term had not been in session more than two weeks when the teacher quit, leaving the school superintendent in a quandry as to who he was going to get to teach in her place. There was a shortage of teachers in Maine at that time due to so many leaving the State for better paying jobs. It was out of sheer desperation that he came to me to ask if I would take over the job until he could find another teacher. My high school diploma was all I had to offer as a qualified teacher so I was very reluctant to do it but he convinced me that it would not be for long and I felt I should help out in this emergency as I didn't want the children to miss school. There was no other ~~+~~ teacher available that term and I stayed on until the Christmas vacation doing my best to keep up with all the school activities as well as caring for my own family. It was about the biggest challenge of my life. When I left Mr. Grey told me he and the school board were very pleased with the way I managed that school.

School opened the next term with a new teacher but our children were having difficulty getting to school due to the increasingly bad weather. We realized we had to make some changes then. Life on the farm was getting more difficult, the children had taken sick and it was next to impossible to get a Doctor to come in from Belfast. We had no telephone, no electricity, no indoor toilet

facilities and only one cold water faucet at the kitchen sink which we treasured as our only luxury along with an old battery radio.

We decided to get some one to stay on the farm to care for the few animals we had and then we bundled the children up and all went into Waterville, Maine to spend the cold months with Mr. Dyments relatives. The children were enrolled in school there until after we sold the farm and moved to Portland, where we lived for three years before returning to Michigan To start all over again. Our hearts were broken to have to sell the farm but it was the only way open to us and it wasn't long before we had adjusted to city life again.

Maybe you can understand now why we were so delighted when we saw you and the children on the farm in July. It was thirty five years ago that we left the farm. We had visions of it being run down and uncared for. So we were both amazed and happy to see it come alive again with all those children and the lovely animals. It was somewhat like a dream come true for us. We wish we could have stayed longer and got to know you all better but it makes us happy to know that you are living there and enjoying it as we did.

Since pictures do convey so much more than words we have made these photostatic copies of the old snapshots we have of the farm, the school and the pupils at Montville Center Grade School that I taught. They are not very good but they are all we have to remind us and our children of that year on the farm that we hold as precious memories. It is amazing how much children can learn in a very short time. They are so eager to learn. Our youngsters got more out of living on the farm that year than they could have learned from books. Things that have been of benefit to them in so many ways and that they can and do pass on to their children.

They had a share in all the work; the gardening, harvesting, canning and preserving, the cooking and cleaning, washing and ironing without electricity., the cutting and preparing of fire wood for the stoves and storing it for winter, the caring of the farm animals and their pets. They learned to milk the cow and to take care of the milk, even had a hand in making butter. There was no end of the things they were learning about the woods and the wild animals. One morning they woke up early to see about thirty white tail deer feeding on the hill by the old carriage house. They even learned from their dog Laddie also. One incident that comes to mind was a time we took them down to the lake to fish. Laddie followed along as usual. We were all on shore busy with our lines and bait when a huge mud turtle came swimming up out of the water close to the little raft we had made earlier. Laddie spotted it and started barking. He wanted to go in after it but was afraid to get wet. He put his front feet onto the raft and it started drifting away from the shore so far that he finally had to drop off into the water. The children were sure he was going to drown and were so afraid for him that they started to cry. But their Laddie surprised them by swimming right back to shore. He jumped out of the water and gave a big shake of his body to dry off. The children were so happy they grabbed him and hugged him in spite of his long wet fur. They knew then that even dogs know how to swim without being taught. That simple lesson gave them courage to learn to swim and they soon became good at it. The most important lesson they learned was self reliance. Life on the farm was much like one long camping trip for all of us.

We read your own philosophy of camping and we like what we read. You are doing a fine thing for those boys and girls. We hope you will be able to continue there at Hidden Valley and be happy. Our children are of course up in their forties now as many of the Montville Center School children will be. It would be nice to see them and learn how their lives turned out. Our own children went on to bigger and better schools and all have good jobs and their own families and homes. They are content to live in their adopted State of Michigan but will never forget Maine.

This is a part of our story and life on the farm but I'm not sure I have answered the questions you had in mind. If not, please feel free to write. We both want to thank you for the brochures, for showing us around you lovely Camp and sharing your time with us. We realize we came unexpected and at a very busy time so we appreciate it very much. You may get some other callers from Michigan in the future who now know about your Hidden Valley Camp.

Sincerely yours
Philip & Jennie Dymment