

## **RAISING MINK AND FOXES SEEMED LIKE A GOOD IDEA**

**4/29/97**

While casting about for topics one was suggested by Jack Foster, Jr., that piqued my curiosity. To learn more I went "straight in the horse's mouth," which proved in a way to be somewhat prophetic.

Wade Gordon was the founder of what came to be known as the "Fox Farm." Wade was Frank deCamp's brother-in-law and was a participant in the farm's operation from start to finish.

The operation started in 1945 at Pine Acres on Second Lake, which was owned at the time by Frank's father. A total of 20 each female foxes and mink were the nucleus of the business and six corresponding males of each species completed the complement.

Jack Foster, Sr. and Jack Turner, along with Wade and Frank, made up the staff- After the individual housing for each animal was constructed (by nature they are not social animals) the work consisted feeding, breeding and pelting the crop.

The animals were fed horsemeat to the tune of one horse a week, which had to be ground up before feeding. To supply the demand, no further details are necessary to describe what an unpleasant aspect of the business this was.

At six cents a pound, Gordon thought he had come up with a way to cut costs in half. He bought a truckload of cow stomachs for three cents a pound.

Problem was, they still contained the contents which the foxes and mink would not eat. Elimination of the contents was not only extremely unpleasant, but brought the cost back up to six cents a pound.

The idea had one more drawback that soon caused the cow stomachs to be written off. Cows eat metal, such as nails, which end up in the lining of their stomachs. This caused havoc with the grinder blades.

Breeding was a real hands-on activity that required daily handling to check stages of estrus. Another unpleasant task, compounded by the fact that the animals availed themselves of every opportunity to bite the handlers.

After the young were born, extreme care was necessary not to excite the animals in any way or they would kill their young.

As hard as it is to imagine, the pelting process was probably the least unpleasant and least work intensive part of the whole business.

In 1948, the bottom line was finally reached when it was impossible to make a profit. The pelts were brought back at auction for \$20 each in the fall and sold (after being stored all winter) for \$7.

To make a long story short, the business came to an end, I suspect thankfully for everyone including the animals.

With ever changing and improving technology, I am sure it would be a somewhat more appealing business today. It is still not one that appeals to me.

This was just one more of many failed attempts to provide the community with a viable way to make a living.