

PERKINS

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“Wallace was born in Chatsworth, Ill., and he met my mother Maurine in Worthington,” said Jerry, adding that his father — a smart and clever man who was a mechanical innovator with several inventions to his credit — was the couple’s first-born child. That meant his formal education ended after the eighth grade so he could help out full-time on the farmstead.

“He probably went to the same country school that my brother Jim and I attended, about a mile and half northwest of our place,” Jerry said, mentioning that Wallace’s younger siblings all attended high school and a few went on to college.

Jerry and Jim sometimes rode a Shetland pony bareback to school; walking and biking were additional modes of transport. Jerry fondly remembers

camping, playing games and splashing in the creek (technically County Judicial Ditch No. 8, a rerouted south branch of Elk Creek) with Jim and their younger siblings Daniel and Karen during their childhoods.

“The ditch was dug in the early 1900s at a pretty hefty price, and that stressed many farms financially and caused some bankruptcies, which was not atypical at the time,” said Jerry.

Flax, oats, corn and hay, along with milk cows, chickens and pigs, were raised on the Perkins’ farm, with soybeans added to the mix around 1950, according to Jerry.

“It was good farmland and we had a rotating pasture model,” Jerry said. “I enjoyed going out on a horse and bringing the cattle in for the night or to be milked — and I didn’t know it at the time, but I did not like getting up early (around 6 a.m.) to help with the chores.”

Around the world and back again

Jerry graduated from Worthington High School in 1958, having moved with his classmates into the existing Clary Street building midway through his senior year.

“We transferred to the new building over Christmas vacation,” Jerry recalled.

All four of Wallace and Maurine’s children went on to college; Jerry and James attended South Dakota State University (James later worked in Bolivia as an agricultural missionary), Daniel graduated from the University of Minnesota and taught vocational agriculture at the high school level before farming with his father-in-law, and Karen is an alumna of St. Cloud State University.

After pursuing a graduate degree for a time, Jerry was hired as an agricultural advisor to the Peace Corps. He met his wife of 57 years, Terry, when they were both

in Peace Corps training at the University of Notre Dame; work in Chile and Bolivia followed.

“Because of our work globally and later in Montana, Terry and I have a great appreciation of diversity and a broader perspective of what community means,” said Jerry. Therefore, the Perkins family has volunteered and led in many capacities in the Worthington area over the years, aided by their Spanish fluency. Notably, Maurine was a founding member of the committee that established the Worthington International Festival in the late 1990s.

The younger Perkins family, which by then included daughter Julie and son Michael, returned to the family farm in 1974, taking up residence in the circa 1923 house where Jerry was raised; Wallace and Maurine then moved into the city of Worthington.

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Submitted photo

Gilbert and Amelia Perkins on their wedding day, Jan. 25, 1905.



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