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# The Farmhouse on Beaver Island

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This was how the farmhouse looked when I moved in to it. Far different from the way it had looked when my great-grandfather, Henry, directed the construction and moved his family into it. Different from the way it looked when my grandfather, George, was the head of household, and my father was growing up. Soon, Aunt Katie would retire to the farmhouse, and put her own mark on it. Today, my cousin, Bob, raises sheep, chickens, and pigs on the land there, along with a big vegetable garden. When I lived there, though, it was pretty much the same as it was when I was a child. Then, the yard around the house was enclosed in a metal fence to divide it from the barnyard, but otherwise, no different.

The wood siding was original to the house, when it was built in 1900. The kitchen, on the back, was added one year later. At some point, a change or repair had been necessary, and one of my Grandma Florence's relatives had done a poor job of matching up the shakes that covered the exterior kitchen walls. Dad mentioned it every time he visited. The front porch was added in the

1930's, when my Grandpa George, and grandmother, Otelia, were raising their family there. The names of each of their children are preserved in the cement.

If you climbed the cement steps up to the front porch, you'd find the door right in the center. Long, narrow windows were centered in the walls on either side. Inside, the stairs were straight ahead. To the left, blocked by the exterior door when it was open, was the master bedroom. To the right was the living room.

Inside were reflections of my Grandma Florence. She was my grandfather's second wife (Grandma Otelia had died of complications from Scarlet Fever when my father was thirteen years old) and came to the farm from Chicago around 1950. The rough plaster walls in the living room and master bedroom were covered with wallpaper. The living room furniture consisted of a Scandinavian style sofa and chair with removable cushions in a nubby blue stripe, a dark wood rocking chair, and a green vinyl ottoman. Grandma's big, ornate organ sat in the corner. A cast iron wood stove encased in brown enamel took up a good portion of the stairway wall. Around the stove, if you looked left, a low door opened to a little closet under the stairs. Grandpa had usually kept a bottle of good Irish whiskey there, for special occasions. If you turned to the right, you'd be in the kitchen.

The kitchen had a wall of metal cabinets on the right, where the door opened to the kitchen porch. The table sat in the center of the room. One small room built into the front corner kept the kitchen from being rectangular. That had originally been the pantry, with a trap door in the floor to lead to the basement, where root vegetables, squash and pumpkins were stored. With the advent of indoor plumbing, it had been converted to a tiny bathroom. In the nook created behind that room, a big cook stove and a second table filled the space. A door on the back wall led to the shed. The refrigerator stood on that wall, too. In the back corner was a second door into the master bedroom.

The shed had space for the wringer washer and the big wash tub that went with it. There were shelves for canned goods. A door opened into the back yard.

Upstairs, hasn't changed much since I lived there. There is a pink bedroom off to the left at the top of the stairs. One of its walls makes a little jog to accommodate the window. Straight ahead, a low door leads to an attic space above the kitchen. Around the corner, the hallway leads to two doors facing each other. The door on the right leads to a long room that extends from the front to the back of the main house. The one on the left is a small blue room, with one crooked wall that matches up with the one in the pink room. When the house was built, the upstairs had been just two large rooms; at some point, one of them had been divided in two. Rods were hung in corners of each bedroom, for hanging clothes. There are no closets.

I settled my girls into the pink room, and claimed the blue room for my husband and myself. We put our clothes in the dressers, or hung them from the rods. Books were arranged in rows on each dresser top. For now, all art supplies stayed in their boxes, and were stored in the shed. Toys were stored where it was most practical: dolls and soft toys upstairs, puzzles and games in the kitchen. With little more to do, we were ready to begin our new lives.