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## Amos Lemmon's Farm Journals, 1902-1937

*Gerald O. Haffner\**

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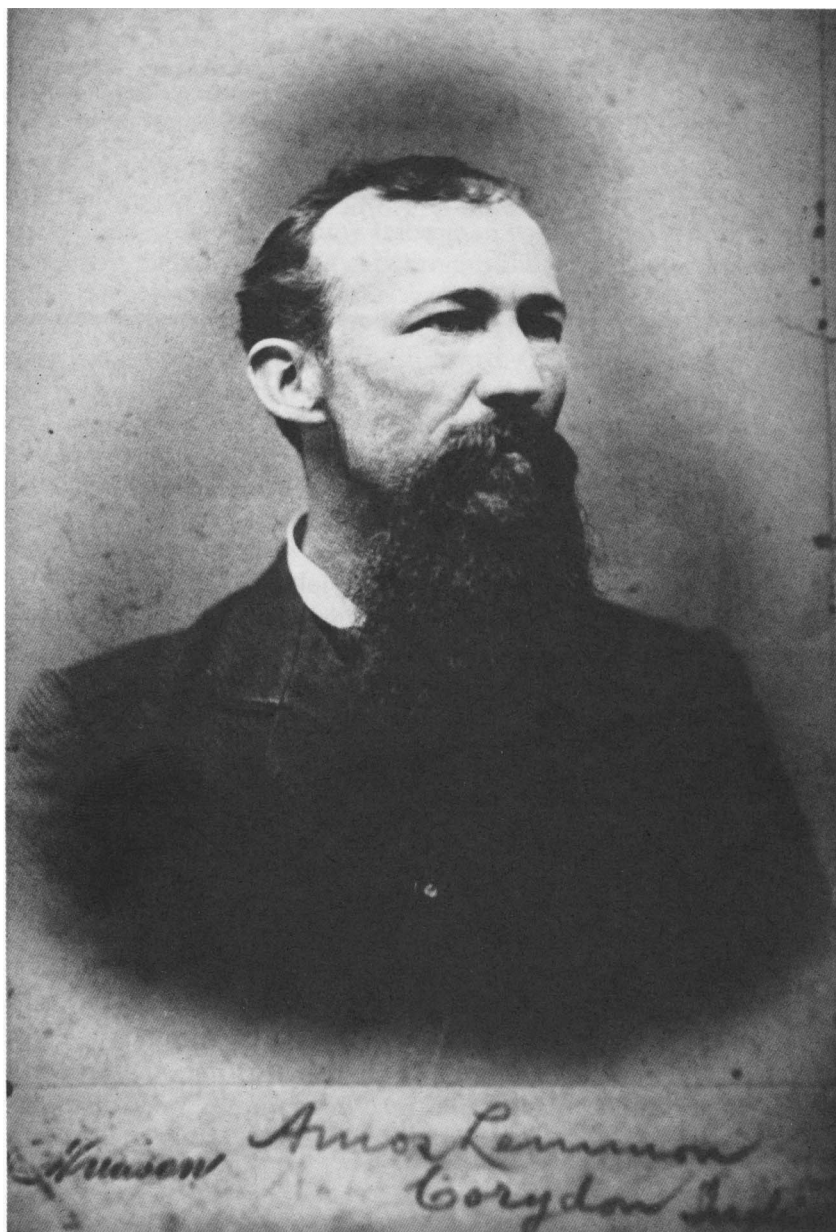
A view of rural life in Harrison County, Indiana, during the first third of the twentieth century can be extracted from three farm journals or record books kept by Amos Lemmon between 1902 and 1937. Although most of the pages are filled with notations concerning bovine behavior, careful gleaning yields a sizable harvest of information. Readers can gain insights into work habits, customs, economics, family life, and general conditions in the Hoosier state during the thirty-five years covered by the volumes.<sup>1</sup>

Lemmon was one of ten children. His father, John, had come to Harrison County from Kentucky in 1825. The father and another son served in the General Assembly of Indiana. Amos was born in Franklin Township on August 3, 1850. He attended the local public schools and received some additional education in Bartholomew County at Hartsville Academy, which had been established by the United Brethren church. He obtained a license and taught school for a while. If many personal accounts and reminiscences can be believed, teaching in the common schools of that time could be an occupational hazard; but, evidently, Lemmon escaped personal injury within the walls of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Earlier in life he had not been so fortunate. A wood-chopping

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<sup>1</sup> Amos Lemmon, *Farmer Directory and Account Books*, 3 volumes (Indiana University Southeast Archives, New Albany, Indiana). Before these journals and account books were given to Indiana University Southeast in 1982, two pages were removed from the volumes. By whom or for what reason these historical records were thus compromised is unknown.



AMOS LEMMON  
C. 1897

Courtesy Helen Fried Reynolds.

accident maimed his right hand for life—a deformity that was concealed always by a black stocking.<sup>2</sup>

For twelve years, beginning in 1871, Lemmon was a store clerk at Rockport in Spencer County, Indiana, downstream from his home. In 1877 he married Caddie Sharpe, who lived in the town where he worked, and they set up housekeeping in Rockport. On one Sunday afternoon in 1882 Amos left the house for a time. Caddie was washing the dirty dishes from the noon meal. When he returned, his wife had disappeared. The body was eventually found in the cistern that was beneath a kitchen pantry. Evidently Caddie intended to hang the wet dishcloths in the pantry to dry; but the flooring over the cistern gave way, and the waters took her life.

By the next year, 1883, Lemmon had returned to Corydon in Harrison County with Caddie's silver napkin ring; a lock of her golden hair, which he kept in a locked box; and the grief, which was locked in his heart. Yet life continues, and gainful employment is usually necessary. A brother, D. F. Lemmon, offered Amos the position of deputy clerk of Harrison County—a job that lasted five years. He was appointed a deputy in the auditor's office in 1890; however, he resigned sometime later to enter the dairy business—cows and bulls. In politics Lemmon was a Democrat. He ran for the office of Harrison County clerk in 1892 and, according to the Corydon *Democrat*, was "elected by the largest majority given to any Democratic candidate on the ticket."<sup>3</sup> The *Illustrated Atlas and History of Harrison County, Indiana*, states that by 1906, the date of the atlas's publication, Lemmon had served fourteen years as clerk.<sup>4</sup>

Lemmon's strong ties with the Democratic party made him widely known throughout the county. He was a director of the Harrison County Fair Association. At times he was also its secretary and its treasurer. He was a member of the board of directors of Corydon's Savings and Loan Association. For years he was a member of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. Although his father was an ordained preacher of the Baptist persuasion, Lemmon at-

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<sup>2</sup> Biographical information concerning Amos Lemmon and his family can be found in the Corydon *Democrat*, January 1, 1897, Souvenir Edition, 1856-1897; F. A. Bulleit, comp., *Illustrated Atlas and History of Harrison County, Indiana* . . . (Corydon, Ind., 1906), 70; Rebecca A. Shepherd *et al.*, comps and eds., *A Biographical Directory of the Indiana General Assembly*, Vol. I: 1816-1899 (Indianapolis, 1980), 233; Cedar Hill Cemetery Records (In the care of Rick Beard, caretaker, and James Ellis, assistant caretaker, Corydon, Indiana); "State Historical Almanac for 1951," *Indiana History Bulletin*, XXVII (December, 1950), 228-29; Helen Fried Reynolds, "Genealogical Sketch," manuscript (In possession of Gerald O. Haffner). Reynolds is the granddaughter of John P. Sonner, the father of Dora Lemmon, Amos Lemmon's second wife.

<sup>3</sup> Corydon *Democrat*, January 1, 1897, Souvenir Edition.

<sup>4</sup> Bulleit, *Illustrated Atlas*, 70.



AMOS AND MEDORA LEMMON, NELSON, KENTUCKY, 1911



AMOS AND MEDORA LEMMON  
C. 1925

Courtesy Helen Fried Reynolds.



tended the Presbyterian church. During the years when he was practicing politics, attending lodge meetings, and going to church services, Lemmon was also acquiring a second wife, plus a farm that was located two-and-one-half miles southeast of Corydon.

In fact, Lemmon had not been back in Harrison County very long after Caddie's death before he realized that he needed another helpmate. A party at New Middletown provided the romantic backdrop and the right woman. Upon seeing "a small lovely red-haired lady," Medora (Dora) Sonner, and being smitten by Cupid's arrow, Lemmon reportedly said that he was going to marry her. The matrimonial knot was tied on June 15, 1884. She was twenty-one (b. 1863; d. 1951), and he was approaching thirty-four. A newspaper source states that by 1897 three children had been born to this union; however, two only were living at that time—John Hardin (b. 1889; d. 1975) and Georgia Lemmon Vogt (b. 1888; d. 1973).<sup>5</sup> The move to the farm occurred on April 11, 1904. Amos continued his duties at the Harrison County Courthouse and, each morning, left a lengthy list of chores for his wife to do. She had to milk six to ten cows; drive them to pasture; take care of the calves, dogs, and cats; watch the children; and manage a multitude of household tasks. It is no wonder that Dora, being constantly overworked, lost her patience. On one occasion, having had her fill of daily back-breaking work, Dora lashed out with a barnyard language that stopped her petrified husband in his tracks. Apparently, he had never dreamed that his diminutive Dora possessed a smidgen of such ribald assertiveness. The farm record books do not reveal whether Lemmon ever changed his domineering demeanor and attitude toward his wife. Generally, men of that time did not.

The farm records do reveal some interesting expenditures for shoes and clothing. In 1902 Amos spent 77¢ for a new dress for his wife, 45¢ to get Hardin's shoes half-soled, 55¢ for mending Georgia's shoes, and \$3.00 for a new pair of shoes for himself. In 1905 Hardin got a new suit and hat that cost \$6.00, while Georgia's new dress and trimmings for it came to \$4.35. During these early years items purchased from the grocery store included sugar, salt, black pepper, salmon, oysters, buttermilk, bran, meal, flour, rice, meat, raisins, oranges, crackers, maple molasses, and coffee. Matches and "coal oil" (kerosene) were bought to start the fires in the stoves and to light the kerosene lamps. How much talent Georgia had is not known; nevertheless, she took singing lessons which cost \$1.50 each. If Dora paid for the lessons out of the egg money, about ten dozen eggs were needed for one lesson. Hoosier farm families in 1905 were getting 12¢ to 15¢ a dozen for eggs. They received 17¢ to 20¢ for a pound of butter and 8¢ a pound for hens. Dora sold one lot of preserves and jelly for which she received 75¢.

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<sup>5</sup> Cedar Hill Cemetery Records.



AMOS LEMMON (SECOND  
FROM RIGHT) IN HARRISON  
COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE,  
APRIL 11, 1916

Courtesy Frederick P. Griffin.



LEMMON FAMILY  
FROM LEFT: JOHN HARDIN, MEDORA, AMOS, GEORGIA

Courtesy Helen Fried Reynolds.



LEMMON FARMHOUSE, HARRISON COUNTY, INDIANA

Courtesy Helen Fried Reynolds.

Many of the daily entries in the journals and record books tell about field-and-garden activities:

Sowed corn, rye, millet, wheat, cow peas, oats, sugar corn, and soybeans [by the late 1920s].

Set out raspberries, sweet potatoes, and strawberry plants.

Planted potatoes, mellons, cantelopes, kale, turnips, beets and squash.

Took care of plum, apple, peach trees and grape vines.

For pasture and hay the Lemmons spread lime and sowed timothy, bluegrass, sudan grass, and alfalfa; thus, they "cut alfalfa," "took in hay," "put up 4 tons of straw," and "shredded fodder" for their livestock, which included cattle, sheep, and hogs. Of course, a team of horses was standard for the early part of the twentieth century. Obviously, much grain and roughage was grown on the farm; nevertheless, some supplements for the livestock and poultry had to be purchased. Those supplements included chicken feed, laying mash, oyster shells (for chickens), and "feed and salt for animals." Some of those well-fed barnyard creatures were selected for the Lemmons' table because the journals tell about the butchering of pigs, hogs, and cattle.

The pages of the journals are filled with the events and activities associated with the farm animals. Lemmon took some prize cows to the Harrison County fair for showing. The big red sow gave birth to eight pigs. Nannie had twin lambs. The hens were hatching their baby chicks. One prospective mother hen selected a strange nesting place: "set hen, in, Toilet." Josephine had kittens. On February 9, 1935, Lemmon "altered Pigs" (the polite way of saying "castrated"). Princess "dropped" heifer calf by Stockwell. Pride was bred to Dempsey, who had a ring put in his nose on October 3, 1925.

All of the Lemmons' cows and bulls had names, which did much to personalize each animal. Thus, readers become acquainted with Ruth, Lulu, Hazel, Ruby, Isabelle, Kentucky Maid, Flossie, and Lady Lee. These cows, and all of the others, were kept for milk production and breeding: "Fern in heat, not bred, would not stand." The bulls were called upon not only to service the cows on Lemmon's farm but also all those that the neighbors brought in. Some of their names—Ruler, Senator, Prince, Victor, Don, Bud, Socks, and Lad—possibly echoed a modicum of their male proficiency.

In addition to the daily and seasonal tasks the work on a farm goes on and on. General maintenance and gradual improvements are all a part of rural life. Lemmon's record books mention this type of activity. For instance, the walls of the cistern were given a coat of cement to prevent them from leaking; a roof on the wood-house was finished; an addition to the barn was constructed; and a pond was dug in the barn lot.

Because the elements played such a vital role in agrarian prosperity or despair, every farmer kept an eye on the weather. Lem-

mon was no exception. In August, 1911, he noted, "Rains came after a long dry spell." Other pithy comments about the weather reveal that the farm record keeper at various times had to stop threshing because of rain, saw the season's first frost, experienced the "greatest snow for years," and shivered in twenty-two-below-zero temperatures. All newspapers of the period printed much information about the bitter winter of 1917-1918. Lemmon penned a succinct description, "Coldest weather ever known by any person living," and the freezing temperatures mandated his cutting more wood to keep the stoves burning full blast.

Visiting with friends, relatives, and neighbors was an important feature of rural life in the early 1900s. Lemmon's notation for August 13, 1905, catalogs the number of visitors at the family's home, and on Amos's birthday in 1920 twenty people came to the farm. Hardin's and Georgia's visits home were events to be recorded in the journals. For example, Hardin came from Chicago at Christmas in 1925 and gave his parents a radio. Sunday basket dinners at the church or local meeting grounds were enjoyable occasions. And June 15, 1934, had to be a red-letter day. It was Dora's and Amos's golden wedding anniversary.

Local, national, and world news are all reflected in the pages of the three journals. Neighbors and other Harrison Countians are mentioned—especially when they died, were shot accidentally, committed suicide, had a stroke, or were killed by a train. Events of the time influenced the lives of the Lemmons. Hardin entered the army in December, 1917, during World War I and returned "at 2 o'clock a.m." on September 14, 1919. Amos bought Liberty Bonds and heard rumors that the German kaiser had abdicated. When peace was declared on November 11, 1918, Lemmon was able to write, "4:30 a.m. received telephone [message] of Peace Terms signed at 1:30 a.m."

The closing of banks ("only 5% available at Corydon Banks"), President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Banking Holiday, and the conditions of the economy concerned everybody during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Lemmon's account books illustrate some of the harsh realities. Eggs were 8¢ a dozen, butter was 11¢ a pound, and "top" hogs brought just 3¢ a pound. This was a great contrast to the high prices of the World War I era, during which, according to Amos's records, butter rose to 50¢ a pound and eggs were 61¢ a dozen.

Mundane prices and national events, however, do not take precedence over concerns about accidents and poor health. In 1914 Amos mentioned that he fell and broke his left arm. Four years later he penned, "Fell from wagon and broke my hand." By 1923 he was having trouble with his eyes ("Went to Jeffersonville about my eyes"). Someone has written in the margin of the journals that Amos went blind later in life. Lemmon's penmanship—never too good—

showed steady deterioration. Amos worried about the "flu going around" in 1932 and about his and Dora's being sick during January and February of 1934. Amos Lemmon died on March 12, 1935; Dora in 1951; Georgia in 1973; and Hardin in 1975. All are buried in Corydon's Cedar Hill Cemetery.<sup>6</sup>

Amos, as he wrote his daily entries in his farm journals, probably did not think about preserving a historical record for the years 1902 to 1937. Nevertheless, this was what he did; and, by his so doing, later generations have the opportunity to understand a little better the rural life of his time.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*