



Aunt May's Golden Age

This resilient farm wife wrote a captivating account of life at the height of the nation's agricultural prosperity.

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The Golden Age of Agriculture was just beginning when May Lyford married Elmo Davis.

Elmo was my grandfather's older cousin. As children, my siblings and I walked down Bell School Road, past Spring Creek Road, and over Keith Creek to Bell School. The school occupied a corner of the land my father farmed. Before that, it had been Elmo and May's farm. Although they died before my parents were married, Elmo and May's memory was alive in the barns we played in as kids.

I had the honor of writing the story of May and Elmo's life on the farm. My book, *Days on the Family Farm: From the Golden Age Through the Great Depression*, is based on diaries May kept from 1896 until her death during WWII. From the get-go, I was completely enchanted by her story.

May and Elmo grew up on farms across the road from each other in the old Guilford Township of Winnebago Coun-

ty, Illinois (it's now Rockford Township).

The happy couple tied the knot on January 1, 1901, at the start of the Golden Age of Agriculture.

This era stretched from 1901 until WWI began in 1914. During this time, the United States was the largest and most innovative industrial entity in the entire world.

With U.S. industry attracting European immigrants, urban areas grew rapidly, and so did the demand for food. Food prices moved higher and farm income increased. In Elmo and May's neighborhood, this meant the men worked together with large machines, threshing grain, baling hay and filling the silos on their thriving farms.

May's Triumph

You would never guess from her diaries that May was disabled.

Early in her marriage, May lost her ability to walk due to rheumatoid arthritis. But she and Elmo had a full and hap-

