



The Farm Story: A South Dakota Memoir

Helen Ruth (Ackley) Johnson

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A story from the heartland, told from the heart What was it really like to live on a South Dakota farm during the sweeping changes of the 20th century American Midwest? Helen (Ackley) Johnson grew up on a farm in the years between the two World Wars. In this remarkable personal memoir, enhanced with black and white and color photographs by the author (see deluxe color edition for color version), she describes day-to-day farm activities at a time when the small family farm was still a widespread, viable economic way of life in the United States. Johnson chronicles community customs, picnics, parties, and shared labor, and shows how the introduction of such inventions as the telephone and the radio changed her family's ties to the wider world. Johnson's words and photographs give us a detailed look at farm methods, farm innovations, and seasonal farm tasks. She tells us about the hard times—dust storms, fires—as well as the good. This is American history through a close-up lens: the story of one family's farm, and one child's growth to womanhood there. Helen Johnson was an "ordinary" person who left us this extraordinary document and photographs of everyday life on an American farm during decades of rapid and unprecedented change. It is a story of the Heartlands, told from the heart. Johnson was well aware that family farming was a vanishing way of life, and she wanted to describe that life before it disappeared. The farm story is essential reading for anyone interested in Americana, South Dakota history, the evolution of farm technology in the 20th century, and anyone curious to know what life was really like back when farming was a central experience in the American psyche.

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