

CFR 0617

Manford J. Morris



Received  
1 May 98

UNION

p. 2 of 3

APPLICATION FOR CENTURY FARM HONORS  
Deadline for Filing Application - May 1, 1998

(Please print or type)

Telephone:

Redacted for Privacy

Your Name Manford J. Morris

Your Address

Redacted for Privacy

(Street, Route or Box #, City, Zip, and County) Union

Redacted for Privacy

Location of Farm

To qualify as a Century Farm, a farm must have a gross income from farm use of not less than \$1000 per year for three out of the five years immediately preceding application for Century Farm honors. Does your farm meet this qualification? yes

Name of family member(s) who was founder or original owner of farm: Rascellas MorrisFounder gained ownership of farm in (year) 1896

(Attach verifying documentation, see Rule 9)

Founder came to Oregon from McPherson County, KansasWho farms the land today? Manford MorrisRelationship to original owner GrandsonAre any of the original buildings still in use? No

If yes, which ones?

If you know crops or livestock raised on farm one hundred years ago, please list Draft horses, mules, hay, hogs, grain

What do you raise on the farm today?

Wheat, barley, hayHow many generations live on the farm today? one (present owner)Please list names Manford MorrisWilma Morrisowner & spouse

Do you declare that the statements made above are accurate and correct to the best of your knowledge? yes

Manford J. Morris  
Signature of Owner

Please return forms to: Century Farm Program, Oregon  
Historical Society, 1200 S. W. Park Ave., Portland, OR 97205  
Telephone (503) 306-5215

CFR0617



p. 3 of 3

Century Farm Program 1998  
STATEMENT FORM

I, Manford Morris  
hereby affirm and declare that the farm which I own at  
Redacted for Privacy  
in Union County,  
shall have been owned by my family as specified in Rule 2  
of the RULES FOR 1998 CENTURY FARM PROGRAM for at least  
one hundred years by no later than December 31, 1998.

Manford Morris  
Signature

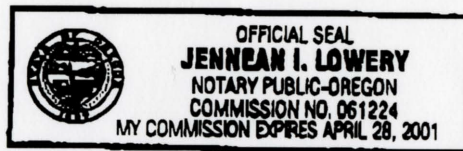
-----Acknowledgement----- for use of Notary Public-----

State of Oregon

County of UNION  
Be it remembered, that on this 08th day of MAY  
1998, before me, the undersigned, a Notary Public in and  
for said County and state, personally appeared the within  
named MANFORD J. MORRIS  
known to me to be the identical individual described in  
and who executed the within instrument and acknowledged to  
me that MANFORD J. MORRIS executed  
the same freely and voluntarily.

In Testimony Whereof, I have  
set my hand and affixed my  
official seal the day and  
year last above written.

Jennan I. Lowery  
Notary Public for Oregon

My Commission Expires 04-28-2001



## FAX MEMO

DATE: 5-4-98 TIME: 3: pm NO. PAGES: 3 (10-3)

TO:

NAME: RICK READ, FIELD REPCOMPANY: OHS

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_

STATE: \_\_\_\_\_

ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

FAX: 1-503-221-2035

FROM:

NAME: Kathleen AlmqvistCOMPANY: Union County Museum

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

Redacted for Privacy

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: 1

MESSAGE: The Morris's cannot get into their safe until the "Safe Cracker" comes today or tomorrow - so am sending notarized statement as part of application.

Phone message to you today - will call you Wednesday - cheers!

K Almqvist

P.S. Hand <sup>(original)</sup> copy in today's mail -

PLEASE CONFIRM RECEIPT BY PHONE ☐ OR FAX ☐



TO FAX: 503-221-2035

page 1 of 1

5/1/98

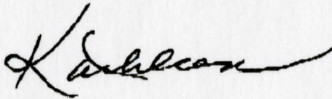
TO: RICK READ, OHS Field Representative

FROM: KATHLEEN ALMQUIST, Union County Museum

Dear Rick:

Thanks for your transmission. The Morrises have postponed the return of their forms from today (Friday) until Monday morning. I will fax immediately plus send you a hard copy. (I'm unable to leave museum today to travel there).

We hope this is acceptable and thank you for your dedication. Lots of irons in the fire and stray calves to brand, eh? See <sup>you</sup>~~in~~ in June in Ontario--





**From:** "David Yerges" [Redacted for Privacy]  
**To:** "Rick Read" <rickr@ohs.org>  
**Date:** 1/5/01 7:44AM  
**Subject:** Fw: The Morris Century Farm - article for Jan 11 issue

1998

The Morris Century Farm  
By Trish Yerges

If ever there was a pioneer story rich with tales of adventure, risk-taking, resourceful tenacity, and compassion it would be the story of the lives of Rascellas and Lydia (Elmer) Morris, who came to this valley from Farland, McPherson County, Kansas. Though they have been gone for sixty-odd years now, they are not apt to be forgotten as long as their names remain etched on the sign outside the Morris Century Farm on Lower Cove Road. The Morris Century Farm, established in 1896, has been in the Morris family ever since.

1998  
In 1996 Manford and his wife, Wilma, applied for and received their distinguished century farm status. "At first I wasn't interested in getting the Century Farm certificate. After all, I knew how long we've been here. But when others started getting their Century Farm certificates, I got interested," admits Manford. The history of the Morris Century Farm and those who built it is a story that Manford and Wilma feel should be shared, especially with the younger generations. "They ought to know," said Manford, about the sacrifices and work it took to tame this land. For this reason, the Morrises are proud to relate the story of the Morris Century Farm.

"My grandfather, Rascellas Morris, was a real salty guy," began Manford. He was born in Stevens Point, Wisconsin in 1858, and nicknamed, "Mike", a name that stuck with him all of his life. When he was a young boy his mother died, and his father remarried. Mike and his step-mother contended with a less than amicable relationship. One unforgettable day, in a fit of rage, she tied Mike's dog, "ole Bob" to a pole in the barn and beat it to death. Terribly angry and hurt, eleven year old Mike packed some food and a few personal belongings and ran away from home, leaving his father, step-mother and two half-sisters behind him for the next fifty-six years.

For a year he found a temporary home with a childless couple who cared for him and sent him to school. Resistant to their guidance he left their care, ending his formal education. Then he heard of jobs out West building railroad beds and laying track for the Santa Fe Railroad. He impulsively rode the rails to Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he became employed as a chore boy, caring for the horses used in building the railroad. Over time, he saved his wages of 25 cents a day and bought his own team and slip scraper. Equipped as a youthful businessman for the first time, he proudly earned \$2.50 a day.

In 1879, Mike was employed driving Texas long-horned cattle to railroads along the route to Kansas. At a stop in McPherson County, Kansas, he met Miss Lydia Elmer at a neighborhood dance. They corresponded by letter over the next two years, letters that Lydia saved and tied with a ribbon. On July 4, 1881, Lydia, 21, and Mike, 23, were married at the home of her parents, Harvey and Amelia Elmer. The newlyweds established a farm near the Elmers and a year later Lydia gave birth to their son, Elmer Story.

Despite frequent hailstorms, drought, grasshoppers and pestilence Mike and Lydia were able to save enough money to make the payments on the farm. On the day when that final payment was in hand, Mike rode off to the land office in McPherson. Before he got to the land office, he was persuaded instead to buy a team of fine looking horses, an investment he could double easily if he found the right buyer. However, not only did buying the horses delay the last payment on the farm, but it led him on a marketing search westward and eventually to the Grande Ronde Valley. While there he was struck by the valley's awesome beauty, a verdant jewel amidst a sagebrush wilderness. When he finally returned back to his



home in Kansas, he eagerly shared his memories and experiences of the Grande Ronde Valley with his wife, son and in-laws. After a little planning, the Elmer and Morris families decided to move to the Grande Ronde Valley in October of 1888, eager to leave behind a hard life in Kansas. Lydia and Story, who left Mike behind until he could sell the farm and join them later, traveled with her parents and four siblings. It was a time of mixed emotions for Lydia as she left her home and her husband behind.

"My great-grandparents and Lydia came to Imbler in 1888," said Manford. Arriving in late October, they spent their first winter near Imbler. Soon afterward Lydia's father found a farm just west of Imbler and he bought it without a second thought. By March of 1889, Lydia and Story moved near Island City where she worked as a cook and housekeeper for Mr. John Frazier. While there Lydia wrote about her first impressions of this valley in a letter to Mike, in Kansas. She wrote, "I think the soil is as good as you thought it was. It don't look quite like I thought it would here. The mountains are steeper than I expected to see them. You said you was thinking of leaving your accounts and coming out here this spring. I won't advise you to do anything rash, but we would be glad to have you come. You could make more than \$15.00 per month. There is some raw land on the ridge for sale at \$18.00 per acre and people that have bought land say they can pay for it the first year. I will never live any place but the West again. It seems more like home than it ever did in Kansas."

When Mike arrived in 1889 to rejoin his family, Lydia's employer, Mr. Frazier, helped them to homestead 160 acres five miles from Elgin on the Palmer Junction Road. Lydia was delighted to have a nice two story frame house and a place for a garden. Mike was likewise pleased with the natural spring on the property and a good meadow for hay.

Story was six years old when he came to the Grande Ronde Valley. He attended a one room school about a mile from their rural Elgin farm. When he was ten, his mother called upon him in an emergency to run 1.5 miles to the neighbor's house for help. Mike was away on business when Lydia went into labor in her bedroom. She tied a rope to the bed post and delivered the first of two babies on her own. By then Story brought the old neighbor lady with him, and she helped Lydia with the second baby. Over the course of two days, the twin infants died and were buried in the front yard. Story was sad that he was going to remain an only child.

The Morris family would have stayed on their homestead if it were not for the persistent and violent harassment by their neighbors. The threats came to a head one day in 1896, when one of the neighbor's sons shot Mike with his .45-70 caliber rifle while Mike was working in his garden. The shot lodged in his hip and Lydia and Story brought him into the house, where Lydia performed a crude surgery to remove the bullet. In time Mike healed, albeit with a permanent limp.

In the fall of 1896, while yet on crutches, Mike started looking for another home. He found a 320 acre ranch to rent six miles north of Cove, just below the foothills of Mt. Harris. With a wagon load of possessions including the coffins of their twins girls, the Morrises moved from Elgin to their new farm. The farm was equipped with a home that was actually two houses joined together, a horse barn, a shop, a granary and other outbuildings. In January 1900, Mike began making payments to buy the farm, and after seven years, it was paid off. During those difficult years, Mike resourcefully raised hogs, which were always a good investment, and mules which he sold for \$175-\$225 a pair. This extra income, especially from the mules, helped the Morris family pay off their farm, after which Mike was able to pursue his true love, raising and selling beautiful horses. Mike's annual grain crops and hay helped feed the horses.

Lydia, who was concerned about making ends meet, planted an orchard and took care of the 13 milking cows, marketing their cream and butter weekly in La Grande. Meanwhile Mike was often away from home, carrying on business, sometimes over a game of high stakes cards. But often after a long



absence, he would come home with some significant acquisition that made Lydia wonder just where he had been and how he managed these things. He had a knack for orchestrating money-making deals, and over time, he made enough deals to increase his land holdings to 3,000 acres, some adjoining the homestead and other acreage in Ladd Canyon and Pyles Canyon.

Story was 14 years old when he moved with his parents to the Cove farm, and during that first year he spent all his daylight hours plowing on the 160 acres. He attended school sporadically, riding horseback 12 miles round trip to Cove and back. In 1909 when Story was 27 years old, his mother took in a family of five motherless children, including the eldest, Agnes Merony, who was then 15 years of age. Lydia volunteered to take them into her home temporarily as a favor to the father. Months turned into years and on December 11, 1912, just one week before Agnes turned eighteen, she married Story. The young couple initially lived with Mike and Lydia after their marriage.

In 1914 the Morris family acquired their first automobile, a Studebaker 4 door touring model for \$500. Unlike horses, Mike had an aversion to "the darn thing", so Story drove it. In those years an Oregon State driver's license cost 25 cents and was good for a lifetime. Another significant addition to the Morris farm was the building of their new home in 1914. First, they built a large, two car garage to store the lumber that was pre-cut and shipped from a model house Mike had seen in Portland. Creek gravel for concrete was hand shoveled and hauled by wagon to the building site just 450 feet from the old home. The house was white clapboard, two stories high with a full basement. It was wired for electricity and had a central vacuuming system. After two years of work by two full time carpenters and two part-time carpenters, the \$7,000 house was completed and then furnished with brand new furniture and appliances.

By 1918 Story and Agnes were making their home a half mile northeast of the Mike Morris farm. That year Agnes gave birth to their third child, Manford. When Manford was two years old Agnes contracted the Spanish Influenza. It caused a permanent weakening of her heart and with it, acute fatigue; consequently, Lydia and Mike took the three young children into their home until she recuperated. Meanwhile, Story and Agnes relocated to a home directly across the road from Lydia and Mike's home. When Agnes was able to care for the children again, Lydia and Mike sent the small children home, all but their little "Manie". Manford had the best of both worlds. He played across the road with his brothers and sisters during the day, but he went home to grandma and grandpa's every night. That was his home. During those years Manford attended the one room "Frosty School" one and three quarters mile away.

In 1931 Mike Morris died and in 1935 Lydia died. They were buried in the Summerville Cemetery where their twins were eventually laid to rest. Manford lived with his parents and helped his father, Story, to operate the family farm. Explaining how Manford came in line for the Morris farm, he said, "I was the only one of my brothers who seemed to want to make farming a lifetime career." "They were hard years on the farm," said Manford who remembered using horses to plow the fields. "Dad (Story) got his first tractor in 1935. Manford helped on the farm while he attended La Grande High School, and after his graduation in 1938, he stayed on with his folks and continued to be an integral part of the farming operation. About the time of the draft, Story had a serious heart attack, and Manford, who lost an eye at age eleven, was excused from service on two counts and allowed to manage the farm.

On August 31, 1941, Manford and Miss Wilma Burch, daughter of Spencer and Nellie (Pool) Burch were married at the Presbyterian Church in La Grande. "After we were married we moved into my grandparent's home here, and we've been living here ever since," said Manford. The home had been left vacant ever since Lydia's death in 1935, and so Manford and Wilma rolled up their sleeves, painted the walls and did a little remodeling in the kitchen. Regarding their future goals together, Manford told Wilma, "I want to have something in life, something to call our own." Wilma replied, "Me too and I'll help you."



Willing to pull together under the same yoke, Manford and Wilma applied themselves to the development of the Morris farm. "We were both Depression kids and we knew what it was like to be poor," explained Wilma. "When we were first married we didn't even have a dog," Manford said with a smile. But they bought one dairy cow they called "Red". In 1946 they built a dairy barn and started buying more dairy cows until they had 29 cows by 1950. "We milked 29 cows to pay the utility bills and the gas man," said Wilma. That same year they built a machine shed and shop; in 1954 a garage. For these construction projects, Manford and Wilma frugally cut their own lumber and made their own concrete with sand from the river. "We made everything but the nails," said Manford.

Although Manford started farming with a used gas-engine Caterpillar in 1942, he eventually saved up to buy a new Minneapolis Moline in 1950 for \$1,500. Later he bought a new John Deere for \$25,000. With the help of his equipment, he raised barley, oats, grass, and Austrian dry peas on their farm. For six years, Wilma helped by driving the wheat and grass trucks. They started in the grass business in 1960 with 40 acres and stopped in 1981 with 110 acres. "We've been irrigating since 1965 for our grass crop. We raised blue grass which was bought by O.M. Scott & Sons from Ohio," Manford said. Year after year, the Morris grass crop passed the stringent inspection by a representative from O.M. Scott & Sons, and no doubt the 8 weeks of meticulous field hoeing by Manford and Wilma had a lot to do with that.

Besides crops they also raised sheep for twenty years from 1951-1971.

During the five weeks of lambing, Manford and Wilma were up checking the ewes at 10 p.m., 2 a.m. and 4 a.m. every day. "We named our sheep after people we knew, like Colon Eberhardt, the lawyer in La Grande. It's funny but the lambs really looked, acted or walked like people we knew," said Wilma with a smile. Finally raising sheep came to an end. "When the coyotes got seven lambs in one night, we quit that," said Wilma.

Explaining the reasons why he endured in farming, Manford said, "The challenge of farming and the love for the land is what keeps me here. I love the freedom and the fresh air." Reflecting on his farming career, Manford continued, "I wanted to farm and stay with the land, and I did. If I had to do it all over again, I'd stay with the land. It's been good to us. If I leave this place it will be because the sheriff locked the gate because of back taxes or because the mortician came."

After 60 years of farming, Manford, 82, analyzes his current circumstances like this, "I'm debt free, saved a few shillings, and we don't have no wants." "It was really Mike, Lydia, Story and Agnes who paved the way for us. We're just enjoying the fruits of their labors," Manford admitted. Today he leases out the land to his second cousin, Howard Elmer, who raises wheat and hay. Manford and Wilma's four daughters, Sharon, Carolyn, Mina and Joyce will one day share the 1000 acre Morris Century Farm. "The girls will probably lease it out and split the profits four ways," Manford said. The Morrises also raised two of their grandsons, Jeff and Russel Miller. Jeff now lives in La Grande with his family and "he will get the house," said Manford. Gratefully, Jeff assured his grandfather, "It'll never go out of the family." Most certainly this commitment to the land is how the Morris farm has endured the past one hundred years.



Manford J. Morris  
Redacted for Privacy

5 June 1998

Dear Manford,

It gives me great pleasure to inform you that your **Century Farm** application has been approved. Congratulations on receiving this prestigious honor for the Rascellas Morris Farm, founded in 1896. A total of 23 farm and ranch owners submitted applications this year and *all* of them met the requirements for Century Farm status. This brings our grand total of Oregon Century Farms to 921 (recognized since 1958 when the program started).

Now that all 1998 applications have been reviewed, we can begin the process of creating the award certificates. These special documents, signed by Gov. Kitzhaber and dignitaries from the Oregon Historical Society, will be available in the late summer or fall.

To recognize your family's accomplishment, it's customary that the certificate be presented in a meaningful way. If you already have an event in mind—such as a special family reunion—please share that information with me so I can have your Century Farm certificate ready by that date (and attend if you wish). The Union County Historical Society (562-6003) may be interested in hosting a certificate presentation ceremony, perhaps during a regular meeting or event, when you and other family members can officially receive your Century Farm certificate. These are just some of the options available to you.

If you are interested in sharing recognition of your honor, you may want to purchase a distinctive "CENTURY FARM" sign for your property. Please see the attached fact sheet for the details. The Oregon Historical Society *does not* sell these signs.

Thank you for participating in this popular, and important, heritage program. If you have any questions about the Century Farm Program, please feel free to call me at (503) 306-5215.

Sincerely,

Rick Read  
Field Services Coordinator

cc. Kathleen Almquist, The Union County Historical Society