

# Harvey Patton, Hartley's Melon Man

**Stories Gathered by Kathy Luedke and Betty Taylor  
Mark Schulz presented Harvey's story at the Cemetery Walk in 2007**

Harvey Patton was one of Herman and Annie Cave Patton's four sons, born in the Hartley/Moneta area on April 16, 1889; just ten years after Hartley's first buildings were erected. He lived in the area until 1917, when he moved to Canton, South Dakota. In 1922, he relocated in Sioux City, Iowa. Little is known about his life during that time, but he was married and had two daughters, Ruth and Ina. They are listed in his obituary along with five grandchildren and fifteen great-grand children. He returned to Hartley in 1935, to care for his mother.

Small in stature, but large in heart and personality, Harvey was known for his own brand of witticisms. Following are short paraphrased comments by some who remember him well:

*Lila Fahrenkrog:* I liked to buy snapdragons from Harvey. He would never let me pay in cash—instead I baked apple pies for him.

*Betty Eeten:* Harvey often provided rides to Sioux City for Virginia Albright and me when we were in nursing school at St. Joseph's. My mother bought strawberry plants from him, and others would try to swipe watermelons from his patch.

*Barb Haack:* Harvey took geraniums out to the cemetery at Memorial Day. Families from a distance would contact him, and order flowers to be placed on family graves. He was very good with children, and took the time to explain things to them.

*Connie Olhausen:* Harvey offered "discount" products at the beginning of the planting season. As he counted out the small plants he sold, he always added "one for the cutworm."

*Gary Sampson:* A local person became disgusted at men he'd hired to fix things, because they always packed up and left by five o'clock. So he asked Harvey if he would help and stressed that he didn't want him packing up his tools at five. Harvey told him he didn't have to worry; he'd have his tools packed at 4:30 and be out of there.

*Dale Olhausen:* Harvey had an outhouse that had a tendency to get tipped over at Halloween. At one time, it was painted pink. Soon after, someone painted the words, "PINK STINK" in big black letters on the side.

Clara's niece, the late *Kathy Storerau Kramer*, provided the following memories:

Harvey and Clara had known each other since childhood and attended rural school together. They renewed their acquaintance when he returned to Hartley and were married in a winter wedding on January 6, 1938. Kathy recalled many family gatherings and said the party always started when Harvey arrived. He always had something to say.

Harvey and Clara lived with his mother in the first house north of the Pleasant View Cemetery and raised a large garden. After his mother passed away, they built the house one mile east of Pleasant View where they raised a commercial strawberry patch. They also planted apple trees and added two greenhouses that served the community for many years. When Dennis and Elaine Dagle purchased the property from Harvey, they took the green houses down, but some of Harvey and Clara's trees are still there and bear apples in the fall.

Besides gardening, Harvey enjoyed attending boxing matches in Sioux City with Orlan Ott, Hartley's former Golden Gloves fighter.

Ed and Leona Olhausen along with sons Cloy, Roger, and Dale were neighbors and good friends of the Pattons. *Connie Olhausen* provided the following anecdotes related to her by family members:

On one occasion, Harvey happened by when Leona was cooking dinner for guests. He went straight to the dining room where the table was set, sat down, and called to Leona, who was frying chicken, "Where's the grub?"

To supplement his own crop of melons, Harvey traveled to Missouri Valley, Iowa, on Thursdays to purchase cantaloupe and watermelons for resale on Saturday evenings when the streets of Hartley were filled with shoppers. He parked his old blue pickup on the West Side of Central Avenue and sold melons out of the box in back.

The Olhausen boys would ride around with friends on Friday nights trying to locate the pickup and its cargo. The brothers were actually decoys because they knew the truck was parked in a shed at their own farm. It must have been hard for them not to reveal the secret, but there would be consequences if they did—namely, the end of “all you can eat” melons and punishment, as only Ed could enforce it.

*Roger Olhausen* tells the story that Harvey would back his pickup to the hog lot and proceed to “taste test” some of the melons. Roger was invited to participate and give his opinion—good or not good. He was frequently amazed, when after tasting a melon he thought was very good, Harvey would declare, “Nope, not good enough.” Then he’d throw it to the hogs who were happy recipients of all the melons that failed Harvey’s taste test.

Harvey’s favorite story, according to Roger, goes like this:

Harvey had a prize cow that he took to the County Fair every year and every year it took first place. This went on for several years until one year, right before the fair; the cow got into Harvey’s sweet corn patch and was found lying on its side, bloated and unable to move. The local veterinarian was summoned and after one brief look at the ailing cow, declared he could do nothing. Harvey suggested they try to deflate the cow’s monstrous abdomen by making an incision and removing the contents.

They proceeded to do so and extracted two and a half bushels of sweet corn from the cow’s belly. Harvey cared for the animal while it teetered on the brink of death for several days. Then one day, it got up and began walking around and continued to improve. The next year Harvey again took it to the County Fair where it won first place.

*Dale Olhausen* added the following recollections:

We occasionally did some jobs for Harvey with our equipment or pickup. Each year we cut and baled hay in his small hay field. I think he and Dad had some sort of barter system since no money changed hands. We always got melons, etc. and maybe some hay.

As busy as we seemed to be, Dad always found time to listen to the stories Harvey was ready to share. When he brought melons from places in Iowa or Nebraska, he would hide his pick-up in our

garage. Then we'd stop working and listen to Harvey share his recent experiences and give us a few melons before he walked home.

In her later years, Clara's health declined and Harvey cared for her as long as she lived. Shortly after his death on May 15, 1972, *Sentinel* columnist, the late *Buddy Arnold*, wrote about him. Following are some excerpts from that column:

"I often watched him as he sold his muskmelons on Main Street. When there was one who came and he knew that person could not pay the price, the cost was always reduced for that person or a melon was given free. Harvey knew his people.

"Harvey perhaps knew his time was near, but he was prepared. When I was in the hospital, he was also sick and he visited my room. He told me with a chuckle, 'I have my bags packed.'

"I will miss Harvey's jokes, stories and laughter. I will miss the lift that his hand on my shoulder could give me. Harvey Patton was a little common man, and I will miss him."