I have been asked to write something about the business of hauling milk in Rollin Twp. Some is from personal experience and some from what I have been told. Back in the very early days, I’m sure most farmers had only enough cows to take care of their own personal needs. They made their own butter and cheese. By the time they fed their family and made the cheese and butter there wouldn’t be enough to sell.

In later years as some creameries had been established and the farmers began to produce more milk, they would sell the extra to the creameries. I don’t know of any creameries in Rollin Twp. I suppose some of the people would take theirs and some of the neighbors’ milk to the creameries with horse and wagon. I understand some was put on trains to be transported. Many farmers separated their milk and sold the cream. This was a way they could feed the skim milk to their livestock.

Somewhere down the line some enterprising person made a business of hauling milk from several farms to a local creamery. Later, as trucks came about, it expanded the area covered. Ernie Elston tells of hauling milk using trucks with hard rubber tires to Hudson and Adrian. As trucks and roads improved more area was covered. Now it is nothing for milk picked up at farms to be transported several hundred miles.

Now dairy farming has changed to where not every farm has cows. There are now only three dairy herds in Rollin Twp. Some dairy farmers have several hundred cows compared to only a few as it used to be. Dairy farms and milk production have become one of the most highly regulated industries. The consumer has been better for it. Milk is now of the highest quality.

The milk goes from cows to a refrigerated tank cooled to 36-38 degrees quickly. The hauler has an insulated tank truck which sucks the milk from the farmer’s tank into the truck to be transported to the dairy. Sometimes these dairies are many miles away. At the dairy the milk is tested for bacteria, antibiotics, and somatic cell count before being unloaded. The truck tanks are washed and sanitized after being unloaded at the dairy after each load of milk.

After being released from the army, I went into a farming partnership with Mom and Dad on the farm. There always seemed to be lots of work, but not much money. Of course, I lived at home, so was lucky that way. In the winter of 1956 I started to drive milk truck for Walt Sanderson. He was our milk hauler at the time. It was a job I really liked. In fact that winter job lasted 39 years. I never had a job I didn’t like. The money was fairly good, so we hired someone to help around the farm. In 1967 the cows were sold, and Mom and Dad retired.

While driving the milk truck for W.D. Sanderson, Lyle Ames offered to sell his milk routes. When Laurence and I talked to Sanderson about it, he offered to form a partnership with us. Since Laurence and I didn’t have the money for that sort of thing, we decided to join him. It was a very good decision.
Somewhere in the early 80’s, we bought Sanderson’s part of the business. It was a very demanding business with long hours and hard work.

An unpleasant memory started with a snow storm on Jan. 26, 1978. The blizzard started with high winds and about 26 inches of snow. The next day I spent about all day trying to get to Rollin where we had our trucks serviced. We finally gave up, as we couldn’t keep the snowmobile on top of the snow. We only had one truck get out to pick up milk. That milk went to Adrian. It was about three days before we could get all the trucks running. It was another week before we got all the milk picked up. The farmers put milk in anything that would hold it.

With the ownership of the business came the servicing of the trucks. We were able to buy the garage in Rollin, and hire a mechanic. One man working was not enough so we, as owners, spent a lot of time working on trucks.

In 1995 we retired from the milk hauling business when we were able to sell the routes. Our son in law Brook Ferris bought some of the routes. He has expanded the business, which now includes his two sons, Brook and Brady, as drivers, mechanics, and runners.