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Photographs / Images: William Deichmann and Dazzler, April 6, 1928 (*Leigh World*); Clyde W Ice in the cockpit of a Ford Tri-motor; the Deichmann family in the early 1920s

Editor's Showcase

Dazzler's Story

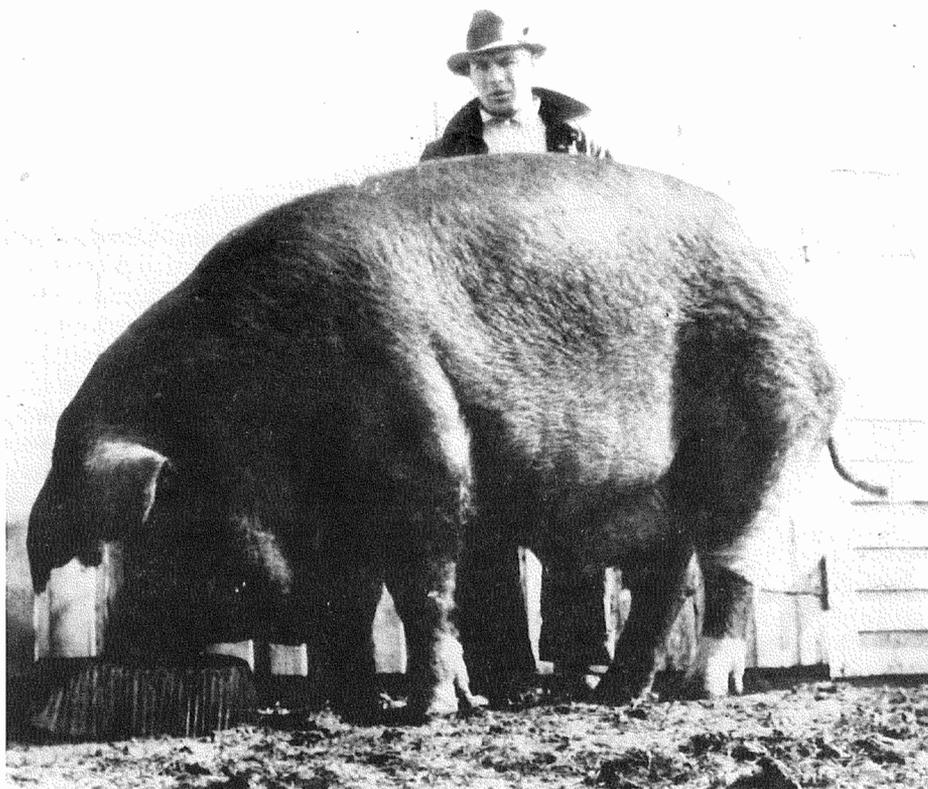
By Mary Krugerud

It happens frequently in our news-hungry world: the local weekly paper writes about a hometown celebrity, a news service picks up the story and publishes it nationally, people seek out the celebrity, and soon a manufacturer realizes the marketing opportunity and offers product sponsorships and promotional tours. It could be the tale of a phenomenal baseball pitcher or football quarterback, but this story is about Dazzler, a Poland China hog from Leigh, Nebraska, who held the unofficial title of World's Largest Hog in 1928.

Dazzler was farrowed on March 10, 1925. His mother, "Clan's Mayflower," was bred to "The Armistice Boy" by G. N. Neely of Scribner, and then sold to C. G. Luedtke of Creston. Dazzler was purchased by the Deichmanns of Leigh on October 3. William, the third of nine brothers, assumed operation of the family farm southeast of Leigh after their father, Arthur, died in 1926. William Deichmann raised about six hundred pigs year round with the help of his brothers, Herbert, Walter, and Hans, who lived on the farm with their mother, Anna, and brother George.¹

Dazzler ate the same food as the other hogs, mostly corn and barley, but he grew large, even for a Poland China, which were bred to be big. As his weight increased, he became unable to perform his duties as herd boar and he was castrated. One fall day when a trucker from Schuyler came to take a load of hogs to market in Omaha, Dazzler was due to be on board. The men worked up a sweat persuading him to go up the ramp and into the truck. When Dazzler turned around and shot back out, Hans recalled that William said, "Let him go, we'll get him the next time."²

Mary Deichmann Krugerud, daughter of Hans, lives in Minnetonka, Minnesota, and works for the Minnesota Department of Administration's Management Analysis Division in St. Paul.



This picture of William Deichmann and Dazzler appeared in the April 6, 1928, issue of the *Leigh World*. The hog weighed 1,220 pounds at this time, according to the scale at the Diechmann farm, one hundred pounds short of his top weight. Because Dazzler was never "officially" weighed, it is uncertain whether he could legitimately claim the title of "world's largest hog." Courtesy of author

Reprieved, Dazzler spent a few more weeks in the fattening lot, and fatten he did. One of the hog doors in the shed had to be enlarged to allow for his height. The next shipment of hogs went without him—neighboring farmers were already dropping by with their families on Sundays to take a look at the massive porker. By spring of 1928 the enterprising Deichmann boys were charging admission for people to see the hog. Anna felt it wasn't right to make the neighbors pay and so William set out a jar by the hog shed with a sign suggesting a ten cent "donation."³

Dazzler made the leap from local novelty to national star when Mrs. Charles Kuhle, wife of the *Leigh World* publisher, wrote about him in the paper's April 6, 1928, issue. The accom-

panying picture showed Dazzler standing shoulder high to William, who was about five feet, six inches tall. Dazzler weighed 1,220 pounds, stood fifty-one inches high, and measured nine feet from the root of his tail to the end of his nose. He "stands right up on his feet and is unusually active despite his enormous weight and size," noted Mrs. Kuhle.⁴

The next Monday, Mr. Neely visited the Deichmann farm in hopes of repurchasing the hog. "Deichmann Isn't Selling," headlined the April 13 *World*. By then, the original story had also appeared in the Omaha, Lincoln, Sioux City, and Chicago newspapers. A flood of letters started arriving for William Deichmann from all over the country, some "from men who wish to buy the hog or his get; others ask for information



Clyde W. Ice in the cockpit of a Ford Tri-motor. NSHS-RG3882-550

on his raising and feeding.”⁵ Soon the Associated Press published the story in newspapers all over the United States.

In June the *World* reported that an international news bureau had contacted William Deichmann asking for a photograph to be published in papers in Europe. The paper also reported that Dazzler was to be a feature of the “immense livestock exhibit” at the Colfax County fair in Leigh, and described William as “perhaps the best-known hog man in the world today.” The giant animal, by then weighing 1,285 pounds, had been put on a diet so he wouldn’t get too heavy during the hot weather.⁶

Dazzler’s publicity attracted the attention of the Raven Pig Meal Company of Omaha. On July 1, T. Scott Simpson, president and manager, visited the Deichmanns and arranged to sponsor a show tour to various state fairs. The hog, accompanied by William and Herbert, would be shipped in a special railway car to fairs in Missouri, Iowa, Illinois, and Kansas. The schedule was not to include the Nebraska State Fair nor the local fair in Leigh.⁷

In late July the Deichmann farm hosted two film crews. Both the Fox Film Corporation and the War Film Corporation filmed Dazzler, the latter for a library in New York that supplied other

film companies with “pictures of unusual specimens.” Dazzler’s weight was reported as 1,320 pounds.⁸

The *World’s* August 17 issue reported that Dazzler was being prepared for the Iowa State Fair in Des Moines. The railway car plan had been scrapped and the schedule had changed, too. The hog would be going to Lincoln, Topeka, and Hutchinson (Kansas) after the Iowa appearance. Insurance had been secured, but only for \$140 because Dazzler couldn’t breed and was valued at market price.⁹ Dazzler, William, and Herbert rode to Omaha in a chain-driven Federal truck with solid tires. Water from the Deichmann farm was shipped along with him so his digestion would not be upset.¹⁰

As it turned out, Dazzler didn’t travel to Iowa by train or by truck—he flew. Raven recruited well-known barnstorming pilot Clyde Ice to fly the hog to Des Moines in a new tri-motor Ford monoplane. Several hours were required at Carter Lake landing field to take the chairs out of the plane, reinforce the floor, and build a \$75 crate to contain Dazzler. “I didn’t want him trying to turn around in there,” Ice later wrote. “When you’re up in the air and something that big starts moving around, it could create quite a ruckus.”¹¹

In order to have Dazzler emerge from the plane headfirst in Des Moines, they covered his head and backed him into the crate.¹² Cameramen from the dailies and hundreds of other people had gathered at the field to watch the loading. William described the adventure:

When we started up [in the plane], Dazzler was lying down but he became nervous and got up and stood for about ten minutes. It was windy so the riding was not smooth as it is sometimes. The draught took Dazzler’s breath. After ten minutes he laid [sic] down and did not get up again. Every move he made caused the plane to lose balance. Every time he threw his head up the plane shot up 30 or 40 feet. That took my breath away too.¹³

The plane made the trip at an altitude of 1,600 to 2,000 feet and traveled at eighty to one hundred miles an hour. When they reached Des Moines, five hundred people were on hand to see them unload. Three thousand people visited Dazzler’s pen on the first day of the fair. The arrangement with Raven was for the company to pay travel costs in exchange for using Dazzler to promote its feed; the Deichmanns could keep whatever they charged for admission. Eleven-year-old Walter was often responsible for collecting the money.¹⁴

Clyde Ice was to fly Dazzler to the Nebraska State Fair in Lincoln, but Walter and Hans recalled that everyone involved in the first flight decided against repeating the experience. Instead, the group traveled by train with Herbert and Dazzler sharing a livestock car. When the door was opened in Lincoln, Herbert was leaning against Dazzler and both were sound asleep.¹⁵

Dazzler continued to draw large crowds during his tour, and he made his last appearance at the Spencer, Iowa, fair. In September, he was sold on the Omaha market for five cents a pound to a man who specialized in buying unusual animals, and who planned to use him for exhibition. Dazzler died two months later.¹⁶

William’s annual boar sale in 1928 attracted buyers from all over Nebraska and neighboring states. The average

Nebraska History – Winter 1999

sale price was \$44 per head. After the Deichmann farm was sold to Roy Folken, William went into business in Leigh, where he operated a tavern and Deichmann's Westinghouse appliance store. Herbert moved to Omaha, where he worked for Cummins Diesel. Walter lived in Omaha, too, and worked for Nebraska Light and Power. George farmed near Leigh. Hans, the only surviving brother, farmed near Milan, Minnesota, and now lives in Dawson. The Deichmann cousins and their families gather in Nebraska every summer for a reunion.

Notes

¹ "Nebraska Grows 'Em Big," *Leigh (Nebraska) World*, Apr. 6, 1928; Hans Deichmann, interviews with author, 1997–98.

² Hans Deichmann interviews.

³ Walter Deichmann, interview with author, August 1997.

⁴ "Nebraska Grows 'Em Big."

⁵ "Deichmann Isn't Selling," *Leigh World*, Apr. 13, 1928.

⁶ "Local Hog Drawing Europe's Attention," *ibid.*, June 15, 1929; "Immense Livestock Exhibit at the Coming Fair," *ibid.*, July 6, 1928.

⁷ "World's Largest Hog to be Shown at State Fairs," *ibid.*, July 6, 1928.

⁸ "Dazzler, World's Largest Hog Now in the Movies," *ibid.*, Aug. 3, 1928. In 1946 C. F. Waldo of DeWitt, Nebraska, showed a Duroc boar weighing 1,300 pounds at the Nebraska State Fair. "Heavy

Set" was credited as being the largest Duroc ever shown at the state fair. *DeWitt Times-News*, Sept. 4, 1947.

⁹ "Dazzler at Des Moines, IA, Next Week," *Leigh World*, Aug. 17, 1928.

¹⁰ Hans Deichmann interviews; "Dazzler Given Airplane Ride to Iowa State Fair," *Leigh World*, Aug. 24, 1928.

¹¹ "How Dazzler, World's Largest Hog, Was Affected by Airplane Ride to Des Moines," *Leigh World*, Aug. 31, 1928; Rhonda Coy Sedgwick, *Sky Trails: The Life of Clyde W. Ice* (Newcastle, Wyo.: Quarter Circle A Enterprises, 1988), 109.

¹² Walter Deichmann interview.

¹³ "How Dazzler. . . Was Affected by Airplane Ride."

¹⁴ *Ibid.*; Walter Deichmann interview.

¹⁵ Hans Deichmann interviews.

¹⁶ Walter Deichmann interview.



The Deichmann Family in the early 1920s: front row (left to right), George, Arthur, Walter, Anna, Herbert, and Hans; back row (left to right), Ewald, William, Paul, Ernest, and Art. Courtesy of author