Children of Lester Keiser accept Dawson County Pioneer Farm Family Award.

Land and history have always connected Melody (Keiser) Gustafson to this part of the country.

She's lived in Colorado Springs the past 25 years but once in awhile returns to Gothenburg where she visits family graves—always where her father Lester Keiser is buried—and drives by the home place northeast of town.

Gustafson, her two brothers and their families were honored Saturday night when they received a Dawson County Pioneer Farm Family Award at the fair.

The awards are given to families who have had farm ground in the same family for more than 100 years.

"I think Dad would really be proud," Gustafson said. "He only got to the eighth grade because he had to farm with his dad and that's what he did.

"He never felt educated but he knew how to plant and care for corn."

The Keiser farm family story begins in Newdorf, Germany, in 1848 when Renke Keiser was born.

Renke traveled to the United States in 1857 and settled in Golden, IL, where he married Gretje Harbets.

In 1882, he came West to land that two years later became platted as Gothenburg and homesteaded northeast of town.

An obituary Gustafson provided reads that Renke “was a leading citizen of the community, a conservative business man and had 1,360 acres of fine valley land—besides property—in the town of Gothenburg. He died at age 61 of asthma and grippe.”

One of Renke’s children was George whose siblings sold him the Keiser land in 1919 for $12,000, Gustafson said.

George and his son Lester raised corn together on the land until George died in 1961.

Of the 160 acres George owned, 80 were given to Lester which he farmed and 80 went to an aunt who sold her share.

Gustafson said she and her brothers—Pete Keiser of Winside and Yancey Keiser of Lincoln—were born while her parents lived on the home place.

However the family moved into Gothenburg when Gustafson was 4 years old.

Lester retired from farming in 1968, went to work for the local agricultural cooperative and rented out the family land. He died of a stroke in 1998.

Today, the Keiser land is farmed by Tim and Tricia Maline who have built a home on a section they bought.

Gustafson said she decided to apply for a Pioneer Farm Family Award after visiting her father's best friend Raymond Gray—who was originally from Gothenburg—in Steamboat Springs, CO.

"He (Raymond Gray) had applied and received it two years before," she said.

A 1981 Gothenburg High School graduate, attended Kearney State College and later received a nursing degree from Pike's Peak Community College in Colorado Springs.

She married Glenn Gustafson, who's chief financial officer for a Colorado Springs school district, and the couple has three children: Nick, 26; Andrew, 23; and Alyx, 20.

Last year, Gustafson discovered a way to reconnect with childhood memories. She and her husband bought a property at Jeffrey Lake.

"It's a meeting place for my family and my brothers," she said.

Gustafson has fond memories of boating on the lake with her father and friends while growing up which has been passed on to daughter Alyx who can't stay away.

“It feels so much like home,” Gustafson said.