

## Southwest

### **Ayers Family Farm**

Caleb Ayers, Micagah Ayres, Elias Ayers, Charles Ayers, Roy Ayers and Eugene Ayers have all signed the deed to the farm as they have gotten ownership from the previous generation. Caleb founded the farm in April of 1820 when he came to Ohio from New Jersey in search of better farmland. He purchased 80 acres in Clark County and 6 generations later, Eugene Ayers still has the original goatskin deed.

Nothing better represents the hard work that has taken place on the farm than the tools used to do it. Eugene has a substantial collection of tools used on the farm. Some date back to the 1800s. The farming tradition has gone unbroken on this land but it has gone through many changes. Eugene's father, Roy, would go into town looking for help and could always find workers willing to thresh wheat or pick corn.

Roy never worked off the farm until he started driving a school bus in 1959. Eugene began farming with his father at the age of 14. He was the part of the first FFA class at his high school and among the first Clark County residents to earn his State Farmer Degree. Eugene later took over the farm and grew crops part-time while maintaining an off-farm job. After retiring in 1997, he still continues to grow corn, beans what and hay and maintains a small flock of sheep on the land of his forefathers.

Eugene has also taken time to restore several antique tractors that are part of the history of the farm. One of Eugene's favorites is the 1937 John Deere Model B that is complete with hand crank operated cultivators and was the first tractor he drove. Peggy's favorite tractor on the farm is the 1940 McCormick-Deering Farmall H.

Along with the tractors, Eugene can remember the other new machines used on the farm as he was growing up. In 1947, Eugene's father started baling hay and straw on the farm. Although it was an improvement over working with loose material, the bailer still required a lot of hard work. The combine was an important new addition to the farm in 1949. Eugene can also remember the addition of a corn picker to the farm in 1950.

Another important part of the farm that has been preserved is the barn. The bank barn was built in 1860 and has the hand-hewn, 60-foot-long logs from the era. The barn also features a visible block foundation and wooden pins.

The farm is currently being rented out but Eugene and Peggy are in the process of putting up a new home on the land that has been in the family for nearly 200 years. Eugene now gets help around the farm from his 4 grandchildren who are continuing the family's tradition in agriculture by participating in 4-H and taking livestock to the fair. Eugene's grandchildren will be also the third generation in FFA as the Ayers agricultural tradition continues.

### **Barnhouse Family Farm**

How much are memories worth? That is a decision the Barnhouses of Warren County had to make as more people moved into the community and land prices skyrocketed. As farms were sold all around them, the Barnhouses decided they could not part with the farm for any amount of money.

The pressure to sell continues to increase for the farm. Bud and his wife, Belva, were offered \$25,000 an acre for their 130 acre Warren County farm. The money was not enough to replace a lifetime of memories for Bud who was born on the farm.

The Barnhouse farm was part of nearly 250,000 acres owned by George Washington. Washington gave the land away in September of 1794. In March of 1894, John McKinney, Bud's great-grandfather, purchased the 130-acre farm. In 1905, John built the house Bud and Belva still live in. John passed the farm on to his son, Joseph. Joseph's daughter and Bud's mother, Cecile, married Bud's father, Richard Barnhouse and moved to the farm in 1923. Bud and Belva met at a square dance, were later married in 1951 and moved into the house in 1956.

A dollar value cannot be put on Bud's childhood memories that can be relived each morning when he wakes up in the house he was born in. In the house is an old icebox used on the farm that Bud later used to hold his welding rods. The antique has been refinished and now served as a place for Belva to store her cookbooks.

There are many items around the house and sights around the farm that remind Bud of his childhood. A lamp on a shelf serves as a reminder of the days before the farm got electricity in 1937. The ringer washer in the basement was used up until 2 years ago when the Barnthouses got a washer and dryer set. Even the dining room table has a lot of history on the farm.

A jug on display reminds Bud of the days before 1961 when running water and a bathroom were added to the house. Bud can remember that jug and the pitcher pump well because one of his childhood jobs was to fill up water jugs and use one of the goats on the farm to haul the water to the men threshing in the fields. As Bud got older he drove the horses to haul the wheat.

Much has changed in the area since Bud's childhood. The new houses that have appeared have brought lot of people and traffic to the country road. The new neighbors are not farmers and are not used to the agricultural lifestyle but they love to visit Bud and Belva to learn about the farm.

Though Bud sold the dairy farm 7 years ago he continues to produce food on the farm. Bud still grows hay, corn, wheat and soybeans and raises some beef cattle and hogs.

## Northwest

### **Bridenbaugh Family Farm**

In 1855, Michael Bridenbaugh traveled to Putnam County. Since the age of 15, he had been on his own, taking care of himself by working as a farm hand or at whatever work he could find. As one of 14 children in his family, he had been forced to leave home at such an early age to fend for himself. Born in Summit County, Michael's grandparents had come to the U.S. from Germany.

Michael fell in love with the land he saw in Putnam County so in February 1857, he purchased 160 acres of land and began farming on his own. He built a log cabin, bred Belgian horses, raised grain and sold vegetables. From Riley Creek which meanders through the farm, he quarried stone to use for a foundation for a house, barn and outbuildings.

Later, he added 110 more acres and in 1877, he built the house which still stands as the family homestead today. Michael also served as a county commissioner and a township trustee as well as the local school board. It was this last service which began a family legacy which stands today.

Michael believed in the power of public education, so much that he donated one half acre of land for a one room schoolhouse which was built in 1878. A wooden building was erected first and used until 1889 when it was replaced by a brick structure. The schoolhouse was used to teach children until 1927, when it was closed because of consolidation. For many years, the building was used for storage as windows were boarded over, the front porch was removed and it began to look like anything but a former schoolhouse.

But in 1995, Michael's great grandson, Dale, and his brother, Daryl, decided the schoolhouse should be restored and they undertook that effort. They worked with former students and the last surviving teacher, Mildred Beery George, to restore the school as completely as they could.

Michael died in 1895 and the farm passed to his son, John, who became a well-known farmer and active in the community like his father, also serving as a school board member. He had five sons and one of them, Warren, took over the farm on John's death in 1935.

Warren had been born in 1909 in the homestead. He farmed all his life, starting with horses and single bottom plows as a youth and ending with four wheel drive tractors. He was also responsible for adding an additional 170 acres to the farm. Like his grandfather and father, he was active in the community, serving on the local bank board and also as a school board member for the Pandora Gilboa School District. After mandatory retirement from the bank board, he was asked to serve as director emeritus, an unprecedented move, and served until his death at age 74 in 1983.

Today, Warren's widow, Idella, and her two sons, Dale and Daryl, operate the farm together along with Dale's son, Gary. Daryl and wife Peggy live in the original homestead built by Michael in 1877. It is a red brick Victorian style house with its original white gingerbread and green shutters. A section was added in 1902 and now includes the kitchen, a bathroom and one bedroom, but the exterior of the house has been unaltered.

Next to the house is a restored red brick spring house and former summer kitchen. It features a large fireplace and an artesian well which runs underneath the house. During Warren's time, it served as a farm office, but today, it has been turned into a "mini-museum" with antique furniture and other items.

The farm operation consists of a cash grain and hog finishing setup. The Bridenbaughs market around 4,000 hogs per year using bedding made from recycled paper waste. They have added a small cattle finishing operation as well, also using paper as bedding.

### **Sun Web Farm**

On Sept. 1, 1896, Friedrich Bruggemeier, a German native, paid \$1,200 for 60 acres in the east half of the northeast quarter of Section 23 in Webster Township, Wood County. On that date, he probably had little if any

inking that more than 100 years later, the legacy he started would eventually be culminated with the farm and family being named as an Outstanding Century Farm in Ohio.

Today, Paul and Marcena Sundermeier and their sons, Alan, Keith and Lee and their families, continue what Freidrich started with the Sun-Web Family Farm, a cash grain operation located just south of Toledo. The family has preserved the original deed and Paul has conducted extensive genealogical research on the family as well. Freidrich came to the U.S. in 1852 when he was 16 years old, leaving behind family in Prussia, Germany. Paul and Marcena have traveled to Germany to meet some of the offspring of these family members left behind.

Apparently Friedrich had purchased the land for his daughter, Clara, who had married Henry Sundermeier, Paul's grandfather. Henry's name never appeared on the original land deed, presumably because the land was destined to remain in Clara's ownership. Clara died of tuberculosis in 1903 and Henry left the area, leaving his children to be raised by relatives. One of those children was Edwin, Paul's father. When Freidrich died, the land passed to Clara's five children, not to Henry. The land was rented out for several years until Edwin, one of Clara's children, and his wife Carrie moved to the farm in 1920, which is when the farm came under the Sundermeier name.

The house was built in 1929, just before the Great Depression hit and the farm economy soured. Paul returned to the farm after serving in WW II; he and Marcena, who were married in 1946, moved to the farm while Edwin and Carries moved to a house in Luckey. In 1950, like their predecessors, they added 81 acres and five years later, added another 59 acres.

As their four children-Alan, Janet, Keith and Lee-grew older, a farm partnership was formed and the "Sun-Web" name was added; The Sun coming from the Sundermeier name and the Web coming from the web-shape of the farm.

Freidrich came to this area of Ohio along with other people from his area. Entire villages of Germans came at once and settled here, preferring this Black Swamp area because of the strong German influence in the region.

The first electric came to the farm during WW II and the family used a Delco battery system prior to that. The year 1932 saw the first tractor on the farm; it was a gray F-12 with a two bottom plow.

While Paul and Marcena have retired from active farming, they still help with the family operation as needed. Keith, who lives at home, has added 40 acres of certified organic production to the operation and started selling organic products at the Erie Street Market in Toledo, including organic meat, soybeans, speltz and other crops.

Located just south of Toledo, like every other farm in the area, the Sundermeier's Sun-Web Farm is feeling the pressure of organization. They have seen houses literally springing up in all directions from the main farm. However, the farm's web-shape has kept development from impacting them closely. The nearest neighbor, as Paul points out, is more than a half-mile away and although the traffic on their road has increased because of development, the land itself is relatively untouched by the development.

## Southeast

### **Barthelmas Family Farms**

From its early days as a stagecoach shop and inn, to serving as a haven for homeless drifters on the old Jackson Pike during the 1930s and 1940s, the Barthelmas farm has a rich history of welcoming visitors. Located in southern Pickaway County, the farm's unmistakable 16-room, white Jeffersonian-style house has rested on the property since 1825. The unique history and setting is probably what convinced George Barthelmas, to purchase the original 235-acre farm in 1868 and begin raising dairy cattle and growing crops. A native German, George immigrated to America in 1851 to settle and raise a family.

He died in 1879 at age 44, leaving children William, Charles, Rosa, Sarah, Jacob, and George to manage the farm. William acquired ownership of the property and farmed until 1920. At that time, his sister Rosa obtained the farm and Charles' son Asa assumed daily operations. In 1928, Rosa passed ownership to her brother Jacob. In 1937, Asa's son, William, acquired and began farming the land. William had married Marguerite Gardner in 1935 and they moved into the family house in 1938. William and Marguerite had five children: William Jr.; Barbara; Marilyn, nicknamed "Cookie"; Sandie; and Steve. The first three were born on the farm. Marguerite and Cookie still live in the house today.

In the 1960s, the dairy herd was exchanged for beef cows. Milk and beef cows weren't the only livestock on the farm, they also had geese, guineas, goats, pigs, sheep, and chickens. The family butchered on the farm until the 1960s. A two-story brick smokehouse still stands next to the house. The top level was used for smoking and the bottom is where Marguerite stored canned foods.

After William's death in 1977, his youngest son, Steve, took over the farm and expanded it to its current 495-acre size. Corn, soybeans, and wheat are grown, hay and straw are baled, and the Angus and Maine-Anjou beef cow herd numbers about 50. Steve's two sons, Steve Jr. and Scott, help with farm chores in addition to going to school. Steve Jr. graduated from OSU in the spring with a degree in animal sciences and is applying to veterinary school. Scott and Steve's daughter, Holly, are still OSU students.

The Barthelmas family enjoys sharing the rich history of their farmstead. They feel it is important to preserve the heritage of Ohio's farms. They describe it this way: "If we don't know where we come from, how do we know where we're going?"

### **Alt Family Farm**

Joseph Alt was born in Switzerland and loved his native country. However, opportunities seemed limited for him in that country and he had heard about a new land across the Atlantic Ocean which promised unlimited opportunities for an eager and enterprising young man. So in 1805 he packed his belongings and with his family, traveled to the United States, following the path of two friends who had made this same journey a year earlier.

Landing in Philadelphia, they traveled through Pennsylvania to Pittsburgh, where they boarded a flat boat and headed down the Ohio River to the mouth of the Hocking River, then by canoes to the falls of the Hocking, then overland to the wilderness of Liberty Township, Fairfield County. Joseph had been given a grant of 600 acres with a deed signed personally by the President of the United States.

Joseph cleared the land and began farming while also raising a family of seven children. He also started a legacy of active involvement in the community which has been a part of the Alt family ever since.

Joseph's original 600 acres eventually became part of the city of Baltimore and today, part of that land is known as Alt Park. However, Joseph's sons and grandsons bought more land on their own and the current Alt legacy holders are Dan and wife Betsy, their son Robert, and Dan's mother, Florence, who reside on land which has been in the family for more nearly 110 years.

Emmanuel Alt, Joseph's grandson, bought land in Section 1 of Liberty Township. Daniel Webster Alt, his son, bought land adjacent to this land in 1893 and this land is now farmed by Dan, Betsy and Robert.

The family's community and civic involvement is almost legendary. Daniel Webster was a member of the Fairfield County fairboard for several decades, followed by his son, Russell who served 50 years on that board, and now Daniel W. Alt. All together, the family has nearly 100 years of service on the Fairfield County Fairboard. Russell was the first inductee into the Ohio Fair Managers Hall of Fame and was considered a "fixture" at the county fair for many years. He also served as president of the Ohio Fair Managers Association for many years. He passed away in 1990, although he and wife Ruth had remained an active part of the fair until the late 1980s.

Their son, Robert, married Florence Miller in 1942 and had two children, Mollie and Daniel, who along with wife Betsy manage the family farm today.

The family's legacy includes banking and community service. Robert served on the board of directors of The Bank of Basil and was president of the First Bremen Bank. Looking back over the family history reveals service on numerous local boards, clerk of the township, township trustee, service organizations and even stints on the county library board.

He, Betsy and Robert have a beef cow/calf operation plus more than 225 acres of cash crops. The farm has three houses with Daniel and Betsy living in the oldest one, built in 1865. Florence lives next to them.

"We love our farm and feel grateful to our families and our connection to Ohio agriculture. That's been an important part of our family for many years," Daniel said.

"Although farming can be tough, we wouldn't live any other way," said Betsy. "Whenever I hear the 'gloom and doom' news reports about the younger generation, I have to wonder if these reporters have ever met any farm kids. These youth are smart, resourceful, hard-working and a tribute to their families and communities."

It is that kind of optimism about farming and community involvement which has sustained the Alt family in Fairfield County for more than 200 years and which is being preserved by the current generations.

## Northeast

### **Heidelbaugh Family Farm**

Rev. Henry Hassler was a born preacher-man, or so it seemed. Born in the Lancaster, Pennsylvania area on Jan. 22, 1795 and orphaned at an early age, he had moved to the Ohio area as a young man in the early 1800s. He was a young circuit rider preacher when he met Rebecca Rauch at the first Evangelical Church Conference held in Ohio, convened on the farm of Rebecca's father.

In 1820, Henry and Rebecca married and moved to a farm near West Salem in Wayne County. Henry farmed and preached, although he spent much fewer days away from home than he had as a circuit rider because he and Rebecca eventually were blessed with five children, which made their farm a little too small for such a large family.

Some of their friends had moved from Wayne County into Morrow County and suggested Henry and Rebecca move as well. So in 1831, they obtained 273 acres of timberland in the northwest quarter of Section 30 and began clearing it for farming. In the spring of 1832, they moved into their newly constructed log cabin. On this farm, they had seven more children.

That original cabin has served as the foundation for the family ever since, with the current house built on the site of that cabin. Although the house has been remodeled and upgraded, some of the original hand-hewn beams, stone walls and flag stone can still be seen in the basement.

One of Henry and Rebecca's children was Mary, who married Andrew Meckley in 1856. Andrew had been born in York County, Pennsylvania in 1834 and had moved to the Ohio area with his family in 1848. They took over the family farm in 1871 and raised five children on the farm. Andrew was also a township trustee, land assessor and a land appraiser.

Edward, their oldest son, was born in 1863. He did well in school and eventually received higher education, returning to the area as a school teacher and administrator for the county school system. In addition, he farmed and served as a township clerk and county auditor. In 1888, he married Winnie May Miller and also took over the family farm that same year.

One of their daughters, Maria, married Henry Heidlebaugh in 1914 and they took over the family farm in 1918. Henry was an innovative and energetic farmer. He raised a variety of crops, including some non-traditional crops, such as soybeans. He expanded the family's Holstein dairy cow herd, making it one of the county's best, and also served on the Lexington School Board, as a township trustee and was active with the local Farm Bureau. All this, Rollin points out, and yet Henry never had more than an 8th grade education.

Henry expanded the barn, originally built in the 1860s, and incorporated such innovations as feeding chutes and other little things which were far ahead of their time. The barn has hand-hewn beams, cut from trees growing on the farm, and arranged in a non-traditional setting. Who actually built the barn is not known, since some farm records have been lost, but the interior style is not representative of other barns in the area. Henry and Maria had their first son born in 1919 and named him Rollin. He has lived his entire life on this family farm, having been born in the homestead, and he and wife, Gloria, still live in the family homestead, having taken over the farm in 1955.

Prior to that, Rollin farmed with his Dad for many years; he and Gloria were married in 1946. Gloria was not raised on a farm and she says it was a real "culture shock" to get married and become a farm wife all at once. However, she adds, she has grown to love farming and everything it entails.

Rollin credits his experience of growing up on the farm for helping him survive one of the toughest times of his life, when he served as a prisoner of war in WW II. Rollin had been one of the first men drafted in Morrow County to serve in that war. He eventually became a pilot of a B-29 Superfortress, flying 17 missions in the

Pacific Theater. He was shot down over Tokyo and was a POW for 100 days. When released at the end of the war, he immediately returned to the family farm and began farming with his Dad.

Since then, he has also served on the Farm Bureau board of directors, as a township trustee and has served on the Rural Electric Cooperative Board for 36 years.

### **Hickory Grove Farms, Inc.**

Many farm families are forced to make changes over the years to remain profitable or suit the family's needs, and the McConnell family is no different. Despite a deep history in registered Ayrshire cattle, the family sold the herd in 1997 and made crop farming its primary focus. They began preparing for the switch in the late 1970s by gradually expanding their crop operation. Today, the family rents or owns more than 2,000 acres of corn, soybeans, wheat, alfalfa and forages.

The family history on what later became known as Hickory Grove Farms, Inc., began in 1892. That year, Frank Whitney purchased the house, barns and 46.46 acres and moved there with his new wife, Lou Emma Green. They added acreage in 1901 when Lou Emma inherited land from her parents. An additional lot was purchased in 1915, increasing the general livestock and crop farm to 160.76 acres.

In 1918, Frank sold the farm to his daughter Roena and her husband of three years, James Alexander McConnell. James' father, Amos Boyd McConnell, had moved his family and Ayrshire herd to Pittsfield Township, not far from the current site of Hickory Grove Farms, in 1889. He had 12 children. All of his six sons and six daughters grew up to own Ayrshire cattle, with the top animals often exported to Mexico, Bermuda, other areas of South and Central America, and throughout the United States.

James and Roena exchanged their Holstein cattle for Ayrshires in 1918. James became one of the early founders of the Ohio Ayrshire Breeders Association and served as a national director from 1956 to 1961.

James and Roena raised six children: Norman, Ida, Dorothy, Howard, Elsie and Hazel. Five of the six children were born in the family house. A seventh child died as an infant. In 1967, the farm's deed was transferred to Howard and his wife, Jean. Howard and Jean were married in 1944. They moved to the family farm in 1947. Jean grew up on a farm, so was used to the rigors of farm labor. She had to carry milk, feed chickens and cultivated quite a few acres of corn with an old 1942 model cultivator.

Soybeans returned to the farm in the early 1970s as a cash grain crop. Howard and Jean had three sons: Jim, Mark and Frank. Jean and Frank still live in the house. Howard is deceased. In the late '60s and early '70s, as the boys were graduating from high school, the dairy farm was expanded from 50 to about 100 cows.

In 1972, the farm was incorporated and the deed was changed to read Hickory Grove Farms, Inc. Today, the three sons and their families run the farm, with Jean acting as accountant and secretary. Frank serves as the mechanic, Mark manages the Pioneer seed dealership and the crop acreage, and Jim manages the dairy animals. The dairy barns now house 125 replacement heifers raised for a nearby Holstein farm.

Jim has served as a state and national Ayrshire Breeders Association director and president, and was World Ayrshire Federation President from 1996 to 2000. He and Mark have served on numerous township and county boards and committees, and Hickory Grove often is recognized for its contributions to conservation through the Lorain County Soil and Water Conservation District.

The farmstead has seen many changes over the years, from additions to the house, to adding and replacing barns. As the farm has changed, so has the community around it. "When we were little there were only seven houses on a two-mile stretch along this road," Mark said. "Now I can see seven houses from here." But while the community becomes less rural, the McConnells plan to change with the times and keep on farming.