

Harvesting tobacco beneath blue skies but in shadow of

BY DICK ANGLESTEIN
FETTERVILLE — It was perfect tobacco harvesting weather.

Outside, crystal clear blue skies were marred only by scattered puffy clouds.

A crisp breeze whistled gently

through the open slats of the tobacco shed.

The wind's whispers were mixed with two kinds of dull thuds on the wood floor. One was the occasional nervous dancing of the shod pair of horses tied off to one of the posts. The other was a softer sound made

when a loose tobacco leaf fell from the upper parts of the shed, landing heavy stem first on the floor.

The only other sounds were the Dutch dialect chit-chat among the three generations of the Lancaster County farm family hanging the tobacco.

As were many of their neighbors, the family was taking advantage of the ideal sunny, cool weather to spear tobacco.

But their crop, while outwardly resembling hundreds of others, was different. It was being harvested in the shadow of the Narvon

mine and in the even deeper shadow of the dump for hazardous wastes proposed for the mine site in Eastern Lancaster County.

Eli Newswanger farms the land closest to the mine and has already been intimately involved in the preliminary jockeying by various interests in the dump proposal.

Eli, his father Aaron and brother Aaron Jr. form a three-man relay team to transfer the tobacco laths from the wagon bed up some 40 feet into the upper reaches of the large shed.

The elder Newswanger hefts the 35-pound laths from the wagon to Eli, perched on the second level of hanging rafters. Up, the tobacco is passed from Eli to the younger Aaron, who's balanced spread-eagle on the fourth tier of rafters. He places the laths just beneath the roof.

The agricultural acrobats walk the rafters as easily as they walk the furrows. Eli slides his feet forward and backward on the rafters to get into position. Young Aaron bends lower than his feet to grab the lath and then straightens to bring it over his head for hanging.

Eli's young son scampers barefoot about the shed retrieving the

"How are we going to farm without water?"

loose leaves that sporadically flop down.

When it comes to discussing "that dump", Eli's silence is as meaningful as his words.

And his words, with the same

strong meaning, can come in two languages — English and his more comfortable Dutch.

"I'm flatly not in favor of it," Eli states in English for the benefit of a reporter who didn't have the foresight to take full advantage of learning his parent's second language.

"My spring is right against their line (the mine property)."

"The spring is fed from farther up and in a short time the water would be ruined."

"It supplies the two houses and the barn."

"It has been holding up pretty good. Quite a few around here have dried up this year."

"If it (the wastes) gets into my water, naturally it's going to go farther and get the neighbors."

"How are we going to farm without water?"

"You can't afford to buy water for the stock and everything."

A brief respite is taken by the trio as the wagon is inch forward to fill another section of the shed.

Eli recalls his first indication of something being afoot just as if it happened yesterday.

"It was back in March," he said.

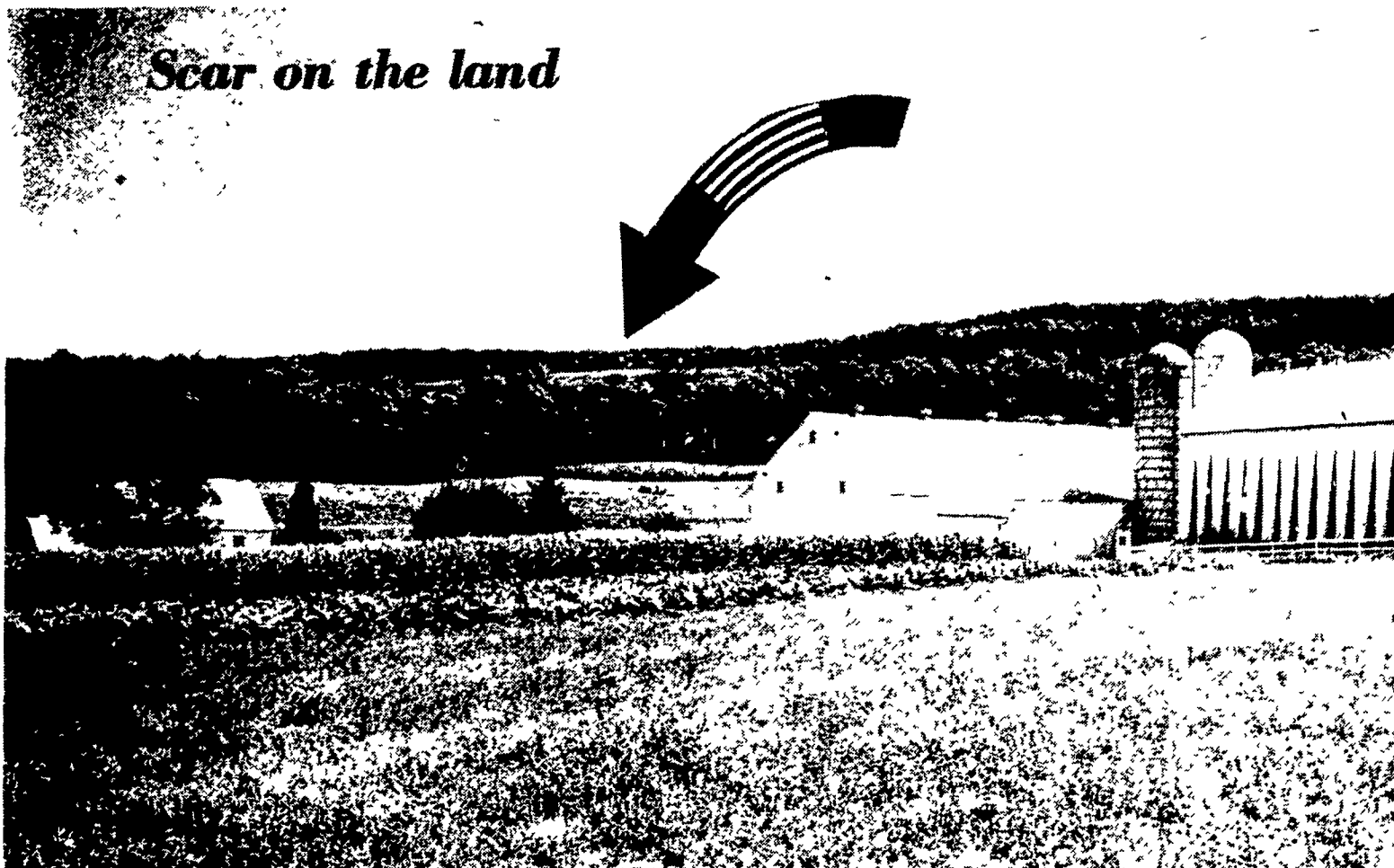
"A real estate guy walks in one day and asks if we want to sell the farm."

"He came all the way out from Lancaster and I thought it was kinda funny that he'd just walk in that way."

Then a week or so later, another piece of the puzzle fell into place.

"The mine guy came next and asked if we wanted to sell some land for a right-of-way to the mine," Eli explained.

"He said that maybe they wanted to mine some more clay."

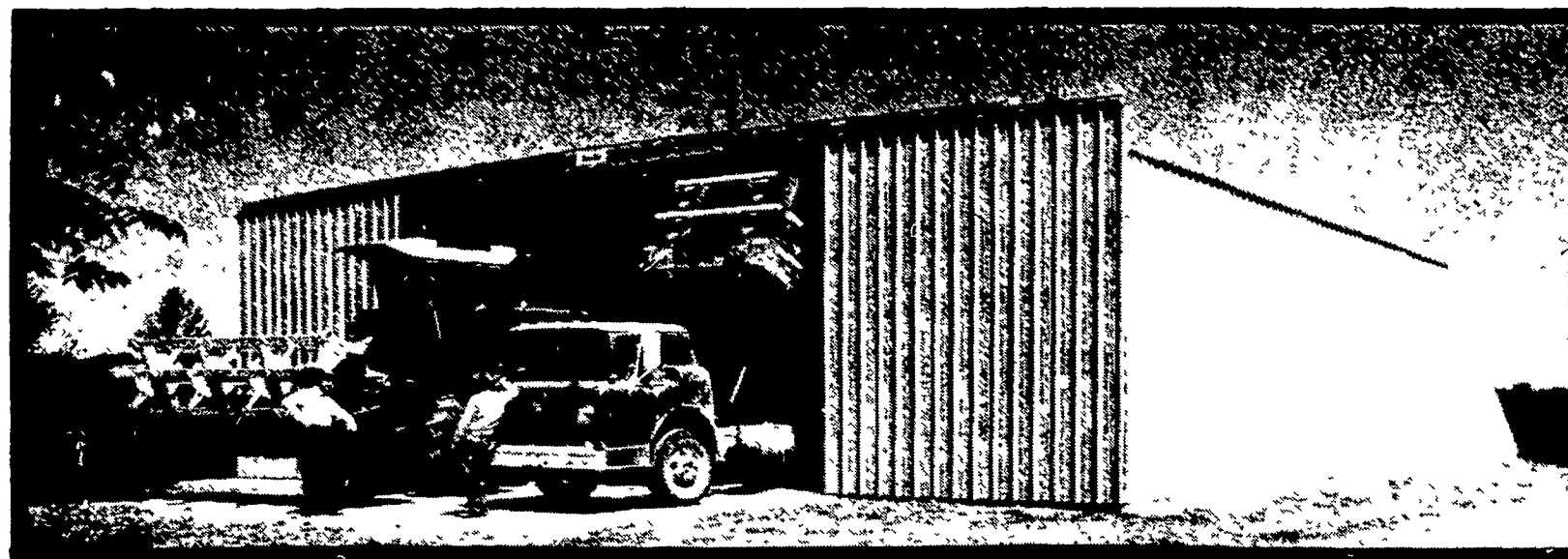


Just visible on the horizon (below the arrow) behind the Eli Newswanger farm along Rt. 322 at R2 Narvon in Lancaster County is a barren strip amidst the trees—the Narvon mine.

Is the scar an omen? The site is the proposed location of a dump for hazardous wastes.

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