


Century Farm

One spunky lady recalls another spunky lady

BY DICK ANGLESTEIN

NEW PROVIDENCE — The moment I saw her I liked her.

She opened the door of the farmhouse at my knock, stood on the wide sill between the storm and inner door and looked up the foot or more that separated our gazes.

She had that sparkle in her eye — a sparkle that wasn't dimmed by 79 years of watching and living the tremendous changes that have come to agriculture in that time.

I said to myself: "Hey, this is one spunky lady."

And as I talked to her — the spunkiness in her voice was as if each statement she gave was automatically finished with an exclamation point.

She's Frances K. Shenk, of R2 Providence, and along with her brother, J. Fred, she's half of an ag duo who were among those honored this week for their Century Farms.

And their farm on a hillside that overlooks Rt. 322 south of New Providence is a Century Farm more than two and one-half times over. It dates back some 262 years.

Frances' spunkiness shows up best when she talks of her grandmother, another Frances, after whom she was named.

"Grandfather John M. Shenk was very kind and even-tempered," she explains.

"But grandmother Frances was something else. Whenever she scrubbed the doorstep, you always stepped over it or else."

The New Providence area was a popular stop on the Underground Railroad as slaves slipped up from the South through Maryland and continued toward Columbia on their way to Canada.

"I'm sure that Grandmother Frances helped the slaves," her namesake said.

"If anyone around here would have helped them, it would have been her. Believe me."

With her brother Fred, Frances proudly displays the wedding photo of her grandmother. I can see that same spunky sparkle.

Their 140-acre farm is part of 1200 acres that was acquired by Michael Shenk of Switzerland in



Frances and J. Fred Shenk in front of their stone farmhouse.

1720. The brother and sister are the seventh generation on the farm. It doesn't take an Einstein to figure out that many of those generations lived to ripe old ages in order to accumulate 262 years on the land.

As two of five children of John F. Shenk, they assumed the operation in 1940. Two brothers and a sister have since died.

The Shenks gave up dairying some dozen years ago and the other farming a bit later. The land is now rented to Lester Gerhart of New Providence.

They grew things like tobacco and tomatoes, along with the

regular field crops. And these take a lot of work.

The spacious stone farmhouse that sets up on a knoll was started in 1812.

"The workmen started the house but then some of them had to go off and help fight the war," Frances explained.

"After they came back, it was finished in 1813-14."

The brother and sister recall the days of farming with horses and mules before they got their first International tractor in 1939.

Now, working the land is limited to a sizable garden.

But as they tend just a few tomato plants, I'm sure their thoughts drift back to the days — not that long ago — when they grew 12 acres of both green and red.

As she gazes out the living room window, Frances' sparkling eyes

fall on the neighboring Amish farm down below.

"We have such good neighbors," she said.

"You know they had a wedding there the other week. There were 320 people there."



Grandfather John M. and Frances Shenk on their wedding day.

If anyone would have helped the slaves,

it would have been Grandmother Frances

THIRD ANNUAL
GRAND
Social Croquet Basket Pic-Nic

TO BE HELD IN JOHN M. SHENK'S GROVE,

ABOUT MIDWAY BETWEEN QUARRYVILLE AND NEW PROVIDENCE,

ON SATURDAY, AUGUST 16th, 1873,

Commencing at 10 o'clock, A. M.

The company of yourself and Lady is respectfully solicited.

The Shenk farm was the scene of weekend socials.