



Cassel farm is 141-year-old legacy

BY SHEILA MILLER

MANHEIM — It all began 141 years ago when Joseph Cassel purchased a 92½-acre farm in Penn Township, Lancaster County. Since then this limestone farm has become a legacy in the Cassel family as five generations assumed the honor and responsibility of ownership of this prime farmland.

On Thursday evening, 49-year-old John F. Cassel and family received the honor of having their farm designated as one of six Century Farms in Lancaster County for 1982. According to John, he acted on the prompting by daughter Sherry Maestle, an employee for Penn-Jersey Harvestore, in "entering our name" for consideration in the program which honors farms that have remained in one family for at least a hundred years.

John took time out of his hectic corn shelling schedule on Wednesday morning to talk about the farm's history. Digging out a time-

yellowed deed, he read down over the four Cassel men who owned the farm since 1841 until the time he purchased the farm from his grandfather in 1967.

The farm passed from Joseph Cassel to son John Cassel in 1860. In 1900, the farm became the property of John H. Cassel who in turn passed it to John K. Cassel in 1919.

John smiled as he recalled the dramatic changes his grandfather John K. brought to the farm. John remembered how his grandfather was one of the first farmers in the area to specialize in a single agricultural enterprise — that being dairy farming.

"My grandfather was a progressive farmer. If there was an improvement to be made, or something new, he had it," John said with pride.

"This farm was a dairy farm from 1929 until 1977," he added, pointing out that health and labor problems prompted his own departure from the dairy business



The John F. Cassel farm, R7 Manheim



John F. Cassel is quite proud of the grandfather's clock that he received from his own grandfather, John K. Cassel, proprietor of the family farm from 1919-67.



John and Lorraine Cassel of R7 Manheim look over the family's deed to the 92½-acre farm that was passed from generation to generation of Cassels since 1841. In the background is the "Cassel Corner" of their living room, featuring the family's restored butcher table and solid black walnut cupboard built with wooden pegs.

five years ago. John has since converted his existing barn into a hog fattening facility — marketing 2,000 hogs a year.

"Years ago, farmers around here only had a few cows," John continued. "But back in the early

'30s, my grandfather had a herd of 60 or 70 cows. That was a large operation for those times. And I continued with the same number of dairy animals until I went out of the business.

"Back then, too, the emphasis was on butterfat. So one-third of my grandfather's herd consisted of Guernseys, with two-thirds Holsteins. That was the makeup of his herd until the early '40s when butterfat wasn't as important and he went to all Holsteins."

Milk from the John K. Cassel herd was shipped to Moore Dairy in Lancaster — a dairy that no longer is in business. When grandson John took over the dairy operation in 1958, the milk from his Holstein herd was shipped to Penn Dairies in Lancaster. Young John leased the farm from his grandfather from 1958 until 1967 when he purchased the property.

Another area where John remembers his grandfather as an innovative farmer is in machinery.

"I was six years old when the last of the horses went," John said, after some thought. "That's when we got our second tractor (1939)."

The first tractor that worked its way into the Cassel operation appeared in the early 1930s. It featured cleated tracks instead of wheels. John's grandfather bought his first rubber tired tractor — a John Deere B — in 1936.

John recalled how he and the other children of the family

gleaned their first experiences of tractor-driving aboard the old cleat tractor.

"My folks often told me I was only five years old when I started working in the field — but that was on the tobacco wagon. I was seven or eight when I started driving the tractor and disking," he said with a smile. "I never worked with the horses."

"I never had any accidents, either — just a lot of dirt and heat with those cleats," he added. "Now I have a tractor with a cab and air conditioning — that's a pleasure to run compared to the old cleat tractor."

Another area where grandfather John K. was progressive was in his thoughts about farmland preservation, recalled John's wife Lorraine.

"He was always emphatic that this land remains a farm," she said. "It would always get his Dutch up when people would buy farms and make golf courses out of them."

John said he shares his grandfather's sentiments on keeping the farm in agriculture "pretty well" but admitted that suburban pressures could pose a problem. However he added he didn't feel he would have to think about that problem "during my time." Some insurance against being surrounded by acre-lot houses is the fact that John's brother,

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Although there is no date stone on the old limestone house which the Cassel family has called home for the past 100 or so years, the house is of enviable age for fancier's of historic homes. Thick stone walls require deep window ledges which are ideal for raising house plants and displaying bric-a-brac.