

Weaver Homestead, a farming legacy

BY TRISH WILLIAMS

BLUE BALL — He came to settle in Lancaster County early in the 1700's. To work and worship in freedom, to pursue his desire to farm the rich limestone soils and build a future for his family. He was Heiner Weber, born in 1690, and the founding father of Weaver Homestead Farms, just west of Blue Ball.

Today, over 250 years and nine generations later that farming tradition is as strong as it was when Heiner first broke the soils with a single plow shear.

Living that legacy today are Donald and Nelson Weaver, ninth generation descendants of Heiner Weber. Don and Nelson are partners in a dairy operation with 85 Holstein cows and 75 replacement heifers. Dennis, their younger brother, is also part of the farming operation, but not yet a partner.

John M. Weaver, their father, is the eighth generation owner of the land, but leaves the farming up to his sons. Through time the original 400 acre tract of land has seen a diversity of agricultural enterprises, from poultry to tobacco to vegetables. And as is many times the case the land came to be divided among the descendants. John owns 86 acres of the original Weaver Homestead Farm. Another 20 acres was acquired by John to help feed the dairy herd. An additional 30 acres are rented by Don and Nelson for cropping.

John Weaver recalls some of the family history, as it has been passed down and recorded. With the same pride that has carried the legacy through the years, he shared with me the genealogy and heritage of the Weaver Homestead.

The original 400 acres was vested to the first and second son of the first settler, back in the 1700's. They, Christian and Henry, divided the farm into an east and west section. Henry Weber got the western section of the original plantation. Again the land in the western section was divided by the next generation into north and south. David Weaver took the southern half of the farm, upon which he built the house that is still standing and is occupied by Nelson.

David and Christiana, his wife, built the Weaver Homestead barn around 1800, it is still used today by Don and Nelson to house their herd. After David and Christiana retired from the farm in 1830, they



The Weaver Homestead Farm, west of Blue Ball. This house built around 1800 by David Weaver is still stands largely unchanged. Nelson Weaver now lives in the house.

built a brick house on the north side of the barn, where Don now lives.

Additions to the houses and barn have been made to accommodate a growing family and farming operation.

John recalls when he was a boy his grandfather, Harry M. Weaver, did not have many cows and dealt mainly in horses.

"In those days we did our own butchering," John remembers. "We sold eggs and cup cheese, dressed ducks and chickens."

John's father, Chester H. Weaver started a dairy herd during World War I, and started a retail milk route in 1932.

"We were milking 30 cows at the time," John explained, "and making chocolate milk, skim milk, regular milk, cream and butter. I can remember riding on the delivery route with my father,

selling to customers in New Holland and Blue Ball. At our peak we were selling 300 quarts a day. We sold quarts for eight cents until the Pa. Milk Marketing Board required that we charge ten cents per quart."

The dairy was bought out by White Oak dairy in 1944, when regulations governing milk sanitation became more complex and the sale of raw milk prohibited. But a few of the glass quart bottles embossed with the Chester H. Weaver still remain and are treasured by the family.

When John took over the farm, he started out growing tobacco for the first couple of years, then added tomatoes and potatoes to the farm mix. In the mid 50's John began his dairy herd, by 1963 he was milking 32 cows, and the herd had outgrown the old barn. The first addition was then put on the

barn, but again by 1974 with Nelson becoming involved in the operation the herd had outgrown the barn and a second addition of 44 stalls was added.

The 85 cow herd now has a rolling herd average of 19,282 pounds of milk and 688 pounds of fat. The Weaver brothers ship to Lehigh Valley Farmers and are progressive dairymen. They monitor milk production and the

factors that affect it closely.

Their replacement heifers are raised in modern calf hutches and modified VPI barn. The manner in which they farm are far different from those of Heiner Weber, in the 1700'd. But the reason for which they farm is still the same, as is evident by a statement made by Don and Nelson. "Our children will be the tenth generation to farm this land."



John Weaver, second from right, has relinquished his farming duties to his sons, Nelson, Dennis and Don, because he wants to see them enjoy the opportunity to farm the same land their ancestors settle over 200 years ago.



Don Weaver feeds hay to heifers housed in a modified VPI heifer barn. On the right are calf hutches and a manure storage facility. Not what someone would expect to find on a farm with such a long history, but it does suggest a strong future.



Nelson Weaver mixes the herd's ration of haylage and silage.