

*Reliving the horrors of Agnes and other floods*

# Farming with a mighty river at your door

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**SOUTH WILLIAMSPORT** — With Ned Young's story, Hollywood could make an epic film, complete with action and suspense, heroes and a villain.

The Ned Young family farms 265 acres of flat corn and hay bottom ground, just outside this small borough in Lycoming County. Ned and Molly, and the families of their sons Ned, Jr., and Jeff, milk a herd of 90 registered Holsteins, retailing their production through an on-farm juggled-milk store.

Young grew up here on the home place purchased by his dad, James "Abe" Young. Over the years, the look of the farm has changed, as a large free-stall and feeding complex, several silage and haylage storage units, young stock facilities and the retail store replaced and added to the appearance of the farm he remembers as a child.

**Always the river**

But one thing hasn't changed. Always, the river is right there, just a glance away.

Barely yards from the farm's road frontage, across a narrow two-lane country road and over a steep bank, flow the waters of the Susquehanna. A large island runs somewhat parallel to the farm, forming a quiet, narrow channel along the road and shielding the farm's view of the river's greater width and the city of Williamsport, directly across on the opposite shore.

Just upriver from the island, the

Susquehanna curves in a gentle bend away from the sort of giant sand bar on which Youngsway Farm sits. A railroad bed, raised several yards above the farmland, forms a definite border along the back edge of the flat fields.

As Young grew up in the lap of the Susquehanna, he paid little attention to it, other than for the recreational angle offered by a four-and-a-half foot deep channel and island to a group of exuberant country youngsters.

**It's a headache**

"I used to see the river as a plaything," he reminisces. "Now, I just see it as a headache. I can understand why my mom and dad worried about it."

He was six years old when he first saw the river's villainous side. It's not something he's ever forgotten since that March of 1936.

At that time, the James Young family lived in the house next to the dairy store, occupied today by Ned's son. Already aware of the river's rising, they received word that a cloudburst had dumped volumes more water upriver at Clearfield.

With just a little forewarning, they were able to move the 15 head of dairy cattle. A rescue boat took the family from their home surrounding the rising waters to safety at a neighbor's home just a few hundred yards up the road, where they remained for three days waiting out the flood.

**Large bull lost**

Although the milk cows were unharmed, a large bull was lost to



Cradled in a bend of the scenic Susquehanna, just south of Williamsport, lies the bottom ground Youngsway Farm owned by the Ned Young family.



Jeff Young points out the water line in the feed room, graphic reminder of the most recent flood at the farm of the Ned Young family.



Youngsway farm store cashier Lillian Snyder waits on a customer, who is numbered among many who have faithfully returned each time the store dries out and is reopened following flood.

the waters. Two horses owned by the neighbor had tangled in harness and drowned. The Young's potato crop, in storage, was ruined.

Building damage, though, was minimal, mostly a cleanup problem of mud and debris. By planting time, the sandy soil had dried and spring crops went in to

replenish feed supplies.

Ten years later, again the river turned nasty, washing several feet of water over the Young's farm. This time, floodwaters came in May, and the 50 acres of potatoes just beginning to grow were washed away. With a few hours of warning, again the family had been able to move the cows to safety and then take refuge themselves with the neighbors.

**Repeat plot**

November, 1952, the river again went on a rampage. By then, the plot was a repeat of former floodings, with cattle saved, but the year's stored potato cash crop a total loss.

By the early 1960's, when Ned had joined his father in the dairy farm operation, the all-too-familiar warnings of rising water sent family members hurriedly to moving tasks they'd learned by reluctant necessity. As always, when the cattle were moved, herd production dropped, with relocation and feed changes.

Still, the Youngs returned to clean up the mess each time, grateful that buildings, herd, machinery and lives were spared, and only the layers of mud and muck remained.

**Hurricane Agnes**

In 1972, that all changed as Hurricane Agnes wrote a chapter of Young's history that they'd like to forget - but which is forever, indelibly, etched in their senses.

It was mid-June when the unrelenting rains of the violent storm moved up the Eastern Seaboard. Corn rows were just beginning to shade the Young's fields, and second cutting of hay lay in windrows waiting the baler.

Two years before, the dairy store had been added, for retailing of the production from the 75 head of milking animals.

Forecasters repeatedly predicted a crest level consistent with earlier floods, and the Youngs hoped that the losses would hold to the usual mess of old tires and soggy fields.

"We suddenly learned that the river was expected to keep rising much higher than had been anticipated," wryly recalls Young, reliving the painful experience.

Only one road, immediately on the bank of the river, leads into the farm. About a quarter-mile above the Young's buildings, it dips, closing off road access to the farm at a 16-foot river water level. At 22-feet the waters begin lapping around the dairy barn.

**Second floor haven**

As the muddy river overflow edged toward the barns, the road already cut off, only the service road along the raised railroad bed offered a way out. Tractors were quickly moved to higher ground at a neighbors. Heifers and calves went to havens up to six miles away.



Placid waters of the Susquehanna, flowing behind a small island a stone's throw from the Young farm house, bely the fury and devastation wrought by the river at floodstage.