

# Bingham's Orchard

## is a family business

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ST. THOMAS — Bingham's Orchard near St. Thomas is nestled in the protective shadow of Mt. Parnell, a mountain which helps deflect destructive frosts from fragile apple blossoms. The mountain affects the air movements in the area and acts as a shelter from harsh weather for the Bingham's fruit trees.

The apple is the orchard's largest volume crop, and in deference to the mountain's protection, the Bingham's merchandise some of their apples under the brand name Mt. Parnell. They have sold and sent gifts of tray-packed Mt. Parnell apples to all corners of the United States.

While apples are the largest crop, peaches are usually the most important crop based on dollar value. But this year, most of the peach crop was destroyed by killing frosts that even Mt. Parnell could not deflect.

It is estimated that the peach crop suffered a 99 percent loss in Franklin County and across much of the east coast.

This year, the Bingham's will be pleased if they harvest enough peaches to supply their own fruit market. During an average season, they sell about 35 percent of the peach crop at their fruit market, with some of the fruit being canned and sold under the Bingham label. The remainder of the crop goes directly from the orchard crates to truckers, unpacked and ungraded.

The truckers then take the peaches to markets in Ohio, Michigan and Northwestern Pennsylvania.

After the peaches leave the area, they acquire the label, "Chambersburg peaches." When retailers tell customers they are purchasing "Chambersburg peaches," customers think Chambersburg is the variety instead of the location where they are grown. During peach season many tourists descend on Franklin County in search of the delicious "Chambersburg peaches" they purchased at their local outlets.

Although much of the peach crop has been destroyed this year, the orchardists still have much work to do. They will have to maintain the orchards, pruning, spraying, mowing and fertilizing in preparation for next year's anticipated crop.

Despite the problems with the peaches, the Bingham's remain

optimistic about their largest volume crop, the apple. Marketing is slightly different with the apple; they mark and grade most of the crop. Some of the apples are held in cold storage for sale year round at the fruit stand. Others are processed for cider and apple butter, which are sold in several outlets other than the roadside market.

The Bingham's recently added a cider press to their operation. The press, the first in western Franklin County, is unique in that it came from Italy and was originally designed to press grapes. The press is controlled by a computer and will go through one pressing at the touch of a button.

Family member Billie Dixon helped lay out the plans for the cider making operation and specifically designed the hydraulic apple dumper. They are also using an apple grinder that was developed in New England.

During the busy season, press operator Rod Shields will average 1,000 to 1,200 gallons of cider per day. Last year, he estimates, he pressed 26,111 gallons during the fall season. Even during the off season, the press operates an average of once a week.

Bingham's Orchard cider is a high-quality product due to the care taken during the pressing and the careful blending of several varieties of apples. The recipe takes Red and Golden Delicious apples, plus a tart mixer or two such as Stayman.

After pressing is complete, the pulp or apple pumies are sold as a feedstuff to some area farmers since it still contains a high degree of protein.

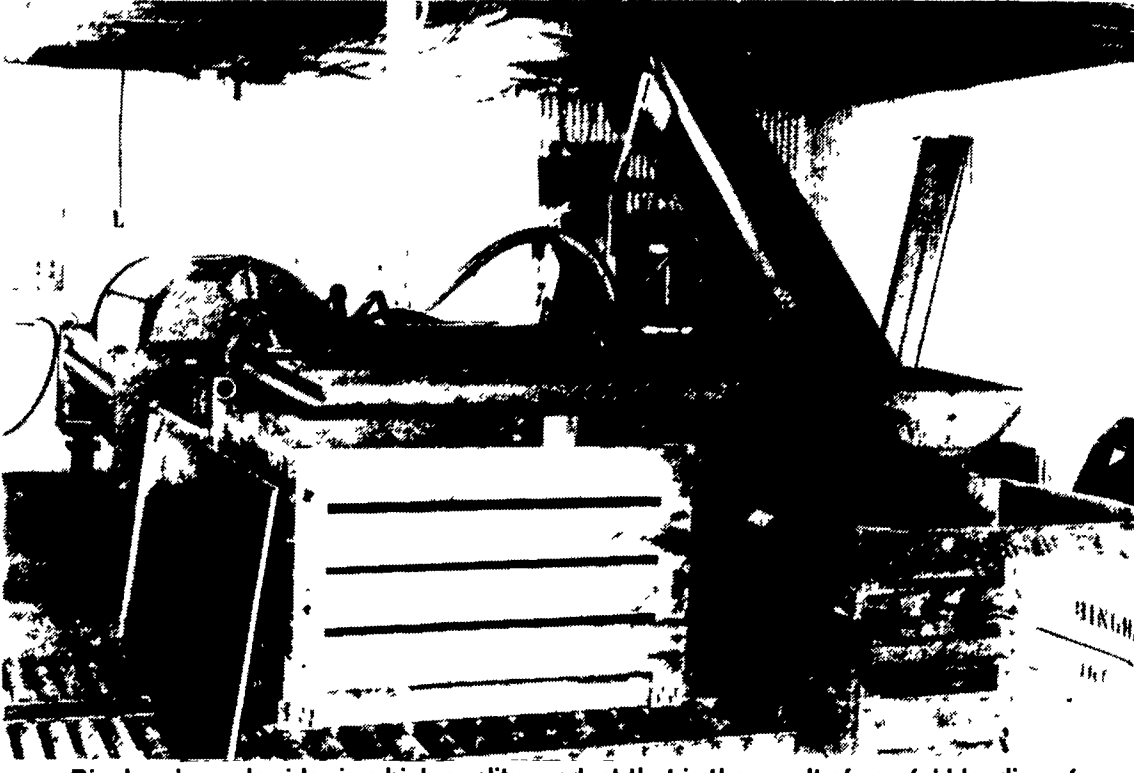
Their well-known cider is handled for sale at many local outlets in addition to their own fruit market. Other orchardists sell the Bingham's cider under their own labels at their markets.

As in many orchards, Bingham's Orchards is a family business. W.O. Bingham started the orchard with seven acres of apple trees in 1912. He processed the fruit by packing it in barrels and loading the barrels on freight cars, which took the fruit to Philadelphia via the railroad.

Gradually more land was cleared and the acreage has increased to the present 300 acres. The increased acreage gave them more room for diversification; today they raise approximately 150 acres of apples and 80 acres peaches, with the remaining acres



Orchard manager Bill Kriner chats with grandfather Billie Dixon, who although officially retired, works almost daily with the operation.



Bingham's apple cider is a high-quality product that is the result of careful blending of different varieties of apples. Pictured here is the entire operation.

planted in cherries, apricots, plums and pears.

All of these fruits, plus some not grown on the farm such as citrus and vineyard products, are sold at the roadside market, which W.O. Bingham started in 1928.

During the early days of the business, the Bingham's used a cold storage unit with a 7,500-bushel capacity. This cold storage was one reason they were able to remain open all year and to continuously market their fruit.

Growth continued and in 1945 W.O. Bingham turned the business over to his nephew, Billie Dixon,

who was working as orchard manager. About the same time W.O. turned over two additional orchards he owned to Billie's sisters. Of these three orchards, two — Bingham's and Shatzer's (owned by Wilma Bingham Mickey) — are still in business. The third orchard merged with yet another orchard in the area.

Today three generations of Bingham's are involved in the daily operation of the farm. Billie Dixon, although officially retired, works almost everyday with the orchard. He repairs equipment and is consulted on decisions regarding the operation of the orchards.

Betty Kriner, Billie's daughter and present owner, is the overall manager. In addition to the orchard, she operates an antique shop next to the farm market. Bob Kriner, her husband, is employed away from the orchard, but can be found helping at the market or orchard whenever possible.

Bill Kriner, their son, is orchard manager, and Tammy Kriner, Bill's wife, is the fruit market manager. Together they work to keep things running as smoothly as possible.

Their goal for the coming year is to survive the devastation of the peach crop and plan to improve their orchards in the coming years.



Press operator Rod Shield makes an average of 1,000 gallons of cider day with this Italian apple press.

# Homestead Notes