

Hopedell Tradition

(Continued from Page B14)

and Bill Handy are presently the only two permanent residents, they're much too busy to feel lonely in the big farm house. "We have a lot of company and we have grandchildren here almost every weekend," said Ruth. "We really enjoy it."

Each summer more than 100 Hopes gather at Hopedell for a family reunion. For the farm's 200th anniversary Ruth's parents planned a special open house. Twenty-five years later the Handys held a three-day party with 500 drop-in guests.

Ruth's easy hospitality was developed during her growing-up years when her mother ran a tourist home. She indicated the sign that beckoned travelers to Hopedell Farm during the two Depression years that U.S. Route 30 was under construction. "The first sign, that Mother made herself, is really primitive; it's in the attic. A man in Parkesburg painted this one. He didn't get it done, and he didn't get it done. So finally my dad would take every rainy day that he couldn't work on the farm and go up there and sit with (the painter) to see that he didn't get drunk."

Before Lena Hope advertised the tourist home, city-based vacationers would come to the farm for as long as six weeks each summer, Ruth remembers. She recalled a Rhode Island hardware salesman who liked staying on the farm so much that he went back to Providence and brought his wife and two children down.

"They stayed here two weeks while he went to Wilmington, Reading, Lancaster and Harrisburg, and then back here in the evening," she said. "We played around the barn and played with the animals and swam and went hiking. They came back every single year until the girl started to college."

Hopedell Farm has been in the middle of American transportation development for most of its 245 years. Valley Road bisects the farm south of Sucker Run. Next to the road the Conestoga Traction Company's trolley tracks used to run along the meadow.

"We rode on the trolley very seldom," Ruth stated, "It cost five cents to go to Parkesburg. When you were making two dollars a day, five cents was something you just didn't throw around. But we got more pleasure watching other people ride it, especially in summertime when Lukens Steel Company had their picnic at Rocky Springs Park. Hundreds and hundreds would ride in open air trolleys with banners across the sides."

In the 1800's, after Robert Hope divided the original farm with his brother, the Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad cut through the property. Robert was given permission to cross the tracks to harvest his wheat and corn. Later the railroad denied access to the north fields.

Robert overcame what could have been an economic hardship by burning quality limestone from the shallow hillside north of Sucker Run, spreading it on his fields

and sharing the excess with neighbors. By 1850 crop production was evenly divided between what, Indian corn and oats at 150 bushels each.

Robert's son, Thomas, started dairying when it came his turn to manage the farm about 1860. Twenty years later he'd increased the herd 500 percent, generating an income of \$13,500. Even so, the family had to cope with the railroad's new owner, the Pennsylvania Railroad. In 1879, Thomas sold land north of the line to the Pennys and used the money to add a veranda and Italianate windows to the house.

The railroad planted locust trees as replacements for their old stone ties, but never harvested a single one, according to Ruth. The railroad also began using a spring in the woods to fill the wooden water tower built next to the tracks. The tower was dismantled after the line

was electrified.

Bill has seen changes at Hopedell since he married Ruth in 1944. Horses were used on the farm until 1950. "I remember Frank and Barney," Bill recalled. "Back in the day of steam locomotives old Duke filled the haymow--the horse was blind but strong; the hayfork was manual but efficient."

Ruth added that her father oiled harnesses next to a pot-bellied stove on the second floor of the springhouse. "He also had a tractor," she declared.

The next change to Hopedell Farm may come from the 35-foot Sucker Run dam proposed by the Chester County Water Resources Authority. "It would take over our whole farm," Ruth stated. "In case of a hundred-year flood, water would be up in our bedroom. For that reason we couldn't live here."

"We can't sit around waiting for that," Bill says. "We had the hall, front room and three bedrooms papered. We're going to keep going on faith."



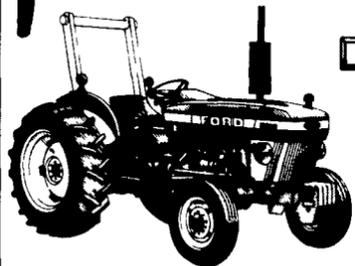
An artistic arrangement of colorful wax fruit was made by the ladies of the Hope family and their friends about 1830.

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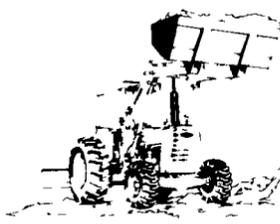
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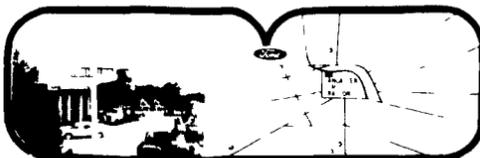
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