

Life On The Oldest Lancaster County Bicentennial Farm

BY LOU ANN GOOD

EAST EARL (Lancaster) — Harold and Elizabeth Zimmerman consider themselves lucky.

Not only do they own the family farm that has been passed down through seven generations but also they have the distinction of owning one of the two oldest bicentennial farms in Lancaster County. Their farm dates back 261 years to 1715 when three brothers, Henry, George and Jacob Weber, who sailed from Germany to Pennsylvania settled in the Weaverland Valley, 18 miles east of Lancaster.

The brothers homesteaded 3,000 acres. George, Zimmerman's ancestor line, eventually claimed 300-acres that was divided over the years until the homestead is now 40 acres.

Two generations after the brothers' arrival in Pennsylvania, they adopted the English spelling "Weaver" for their name. Today, the three brothers' gravesites are marked in a field behind the homestead. It's the oldest gravesite known in the county.

The heritage of farming was passed on to their children and their children's children. At one point, the land was divided among five siblings. The daughter, who was Harold's grandmother, married a Zimmerman and hence the family farm name was changed. Zimmerman recalls his grandmother was one feisty lady.

He said, "She smoked a pipe and a cigar. When the teamsters came to pick produce at the farm and take it to Philadelphia, she wasn't afraid of them." The teamsters had a rough reputation. It's rumored that when they tried to turn around their wagons pulled by eight mules in the driveway, "they could only make the turn if they were drunk. If they weren't drunk, they couldn't make it."

Somewhere during the seven generations since the original settlement, the oldest farmhouse was sold to someone outside the family, but the Zimmermans own one that is 150-year-old.

"It doesn't have as much character as the original home," Elizabeth remarked. Regardless, the home still boasts such amenities as a walk-in fireplace with bread oven and plank floors.

The Zimmermans are restoring and remodeling much of the downstairs.

Harold, who always showed a perchance for farming, stuck with his dad for 26 years and in 1987, after his parent's death, he acquired the homestead. "I paid for it," he said, "because other family

members were involved."

Nor did he inherit the prize herd that he has built up over the years. His 55 Holsteins have a herd average of 20,948 with 740 pounds of butterfat.

"I'm proud of that," he said. "I've been working on increasing the herd average every since I bought my first cow when I was 16."

He credits the improvement to artificial breeding using better bulls, which he chooses himself. He added, "I raised every cow I have. Most are registered. You get out what you put in it."

He points out that it doesn't cost much more to feed a cow that milks 100 pounds rather than 60." He said. "The nice thing about dairy farming is that cows are around a long time and you can see how you improve them."



Harold and Elizabeth Zimmerman consider themselves lucky to live on one of the two oldest farms in Lancaster County. Shown with them are their two children, Eric, 9; and Scott, 4.



Son Eric finds an after-school snack in the Zimmerman's newly remodeled kitchen.



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Ridomil's systemic action allows it to be absorbed into the plant through the roots to prevent disease attack and keep the entire plant safe from disease.

