

Grube Family Surrounded By Rich History

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LITITZ (Lancaster Co.) — If you are a history buff who is intrigued by the glamour and mystique of the famous, then the life of Judy and Don Grube would thrill you.

The Grubes and their two children, Todd and Sheree, live in the Stiegel House and are caretakers for the Coleman Mansion near Brickerville.

This former home of aristocrats brims with history, glamour, and a bit of mystery. It's the house where Baron Stiegel amassed great fortune until his frivolous lifestyle forced him to sell the property to Robert Coleman who built a nine-room addition and amassed 22,000 acres.

For the past 14 years, the property while owned by descendants of Robert Coleman, is home to the Grubes. Judy is quick to point out that living on the estate is not all glamour. It's a lot of hard work both inside and outside the mansion to keep it in shape. In addition, the couple operate their own business, Don Grube's Property Services, which has mulch, firewood sales and offers custom skid-loader and back hoe work.

In the fall, Todd was admitted to DeVry Institute of Technology in Columbus, Ohio, on a full scholarship for electronics engineering. His absence means that 16-year-old Sheree and Judy need to help more with the business. They tend the business located along Route 322, load mulch with the skid loader and even split firewood with a splitter. Judy also does the bookkeeping.

"Caring for the grounds and operating our business is a family

affair and keeps us busy," said Judy. "It takes seven to eight hours to mow the lawn and we hire neighbor kids to pick up sticks."

Despite the business, Judy admits the breathtaking beauty of the grounds is exhilarating.

The history of the Coleman Estates begins in 1746 when John Jacob Huber, an immigrant from Germany, acquired 400 acres of land on the northern end of Lancaster County where he amassed a fortune in ironmaking.

About six years later, Heinrich Wilhelm Stiegel, an employee in the blast furnace married Huber's daughter Elizabeth. Five years later, Stiegel with partners, Alexander and Charles Stedman and John Barr, purchased the land from his father-in-law. Within three short years, Stiegel increased the acreage to 10,544.

Stiegel updated the Huber Furnace and when the official opening ceremony was held, the torch which set the Furnace ablaze was held by his wife Elizabeth and christened Elizabeth Furnace. That same year, the surrounding lands were named Elizabeth Township.

One year later, Elizabeth died while giving birth to her second child. Elizabeth Furnace experienced a building boom and in less than a year, Stiegel married another woman named Elizabeth.

Judy said that during that era, people referred to the property as the Elizabeth Furnace Plantation because it was a village complete with schoolhouse, grist and saw mill, 25 tenant houses, a general store, blacksmith shop and wagon maker's shop.

Four of the buildings still standing today include the long stables with their flattened arch doorway,



Although surrounded by the fascinating history of the rich and famous, the Grube family believe they live an ordinary life as caretakers of the Coleman Mansion. From left: Don, Judy, Todd, and Sheree Grube.

the charcoal house where charcoal was stored to provide heat to melt the ore, the original home of John Jacob Huber, and the original tenant worker's house now used as a play house. A large stone outhouse containing two rooms, one for men and one for ladies, is still standing. Each side has three seats, one low enough for children.

In 1763, the Baron began his glass blowing business for which he became famous. Bottle glass and windows known as Stiegel glass are rare but several pieces remain in the Coleman mansion.

At first, it seemed that Stiegel was born to amass fortunes, but unfortunately Stiegel, who claimed to be a baron although it was never documented, was prone to grandiose living and high risk business ventures and he ended up in debtor's prison.

It is said that Stiegel had a 75-foot tower erected where a watchman fired a cannon to salute the Baron and announce his arrival.

Later, the Baron founded the town of Manheim and had a band and orchestra play whenever he approached the town. The townspeople were expected to dance in the streets whenever the band played to greet the Baron's arrival.

After the Coleman family took over Elizabeth Furnace, they



The grounds surrounding the Coleman Mansion are excellent for horseriding, which the Grube's two quarter-horses offer.



Several of the buildings that made up the iron plantation during the 1700s are still in good condition on the Coleman Mansion grounds.

amassed a great fortune from the iron business.

During the Revolutionary War, 70 Hessian prisoners of war were lodged in the Belfry addition. It was their job to dig a canal 6x6 feet to reinforce waters to run the wheel which drove the blast engine at the furnace. It is known as the Hessian Ditch and remains of it can still be found today.

During the era when former President James Buchanan was Lancaster's most eligible bachelor, Coleman's daughter, Ann, fell in love with young James Buchanan. When the relationship ended during a lover's quarrel, Ann traveled to Philadelphia where she died suddenly and mysteriously.

Although no legal evidence exists, it is rumored that she committed suicide. Her father must

have believed Buchanan was responsible for his daughter's death, because he refused to allow Buchanan to attend the funeral or visit his home again. It is believed that Buchanan never forgot Ann as he kept her portrait above the mantel in his Wheatland bedroom and he never married.

Tragedy increased for the Coleman family when a younger Coleman daughter became romantically attached to William Augustus Muhlenberg, a minister for whom Coleman built a church. But when the minister attempted to hold evening services in the church, Coleman forbade the minister to visit his daughter. Two months after her father's death, the daughter traveled to Philadelphia where she died as suddenly and mysteriously.



In addition to being caretakers of Coleman Mansion the family works together in their business called Don Grube's Property Services. Here Don and Judy load firewood for a customer.



The Coleman mansion on the left is connected to the Stiegel house (home for the Grubes) that has a long connecting belfry wing that was used to house Hessian prisoners of war during the American Revolution.