



Homecoming for hundreds of Neffs will happen on this Manor Township farm, where some of the Neff's ancestors settled in the 1700s and where Dean and Doris now live. From left are Dave, Jean, Paul, Doris, Dean, Cyrus, and Joey, sitting on his tractor.

Farm Is Site Of Neff Family Homecoming

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff
WASHINGTON BORO (Lancaster Co.) — It's always good to come home. And, that's exactly what many Neffs will be doing when they visit Dean and Doris Neff at their Washington Boro farm on June 25.

The Neffs are hosting a "picnic down on the farm" during the four-day Neff reunion, scheduled from June 23 to 26.

Neffs from across the U.S. and even from Switzerland and Germany plan to attend.

According to research, the first Neff emigrants to arrive in America settled in Lancaster County about 1717. After that, there was a constant trek of more Neffs who fled religious persecution in Switzerland and Germany and sought religious freedom and economic opportunity in the New World.

Now, an estimated 7,500 persons scattered across the U.S. carry the Neff name.

According to cousins Cyrus and Paul Neff, who are instrumental in planning the Neff Reunion, there's a swelling interest in finding

geneological roots.

"It seems like everyone is digging up their roots. I'm not sure why so many people are becoming interested," Paul said, "perhaps it's because they see their heritage disappearing or maybe it's just because they enjoy history."

Whatever the reason, the Neff cousins find geneological research fascinating.

"My only complaint is that my interest started too late in life," Cyrus said. "By the time I started researching, the old ones were gone and I was one of the old ones."

These cousins and other Neffs are keeping records for future generations. "Neff News," is published four times a year and sent to subscribers. The publication includes brief historic accounts of Neffs and seeks to preserve their Swiss ancestry and family heritage. William Neff, who is also organizing the reunion, authored a book on the Neff-Naf Family history.

According to European researchers, the surname Neff is a shortened version of nephew.

Many unrelated families referred to their nephews in this manner before surnames were established. This complicates tracking down ancestors, but genealogists were able to establish that three unrelated branches of Neffs settled in the New World. All three of these branches are invited to the reunion and separate tours are planned relating to each of these branches, referred to as "A," "B," and "C" lines. The one branch settled in Manor Township, another in the Strasburg area, and another in Huntingdon County.

Cyrus, called the historian by the Neffs, delights in traveling on Weaver Road in Central Manor township, which he refers to as Neff territory. He knows the names of the original Neffs who settled on the land, and how the land was passed down through the generations or sold to other families. Cyrus will be the tour guide for what is referred to as the "B" line Neff families who settled in Manor Township.

The Neff farm, where the picnic will be held, was once part of a larger parcel of land owned by the Neffs. It was divided in 1880 into separate homesteads for two brothers. Later, the farm with the original farmhouse was sold outside of the family, but it will be one of the stopping places for the tour.

The 13-room farmhouse, where the picnic will be held, is surrounded by pungent pines.

"I remember planting two of those pine trees," said Paul. The trees now tower above the three-story house.

Doris has dozens of geraniums to plant in the window boxes, which Paul had built for the farmhouse after a visit to Europe where windowboxes are prolific.

The older Neffs pointed out that the house was built before footers

were poured. The rock foundation has remained firm. "The walls are straight — not a crack in them," Paul said of the three-brick-wide walls.

The farmhouse holds many memories for the Neffs. "I was born in the living room and lived there 60 years," said David, father of Dean.

"I guess I was born in one of those rooms too, though I don't remember which one," Paul said. He does remember playing in the hay and falling through the hay-loft. It took doctors nine months to diagnose a cracked hip that stopped leg growth and caused Paul to have a hip replacement in recent years.

Cyrus, Paul and Dave spoke of the times they carried eggs and milk up and down the basement stairs.

"One step is higher than the rest," Paul said.

"It still is," Dean said.

The basement has an arch and the attic a smoke room to hang hams, a feature characteristic of that era.

The inside doors and woodwork still have the original comb-painted finish.

Changes have been made. The front yard was at one time an orchard surrounded by a white picket fence. Now thick green grass grows among the pines. Grandfather Harry Neff truck farmed produce, which he peddled in town. Dean's parents raised poultry, but Dean turned the chicken houses into a pig nursery to operate a farrow through feeder pig operation. Dean also grows 15 acres of fall ornamentals (mini pumpkins, gourds, and Indian corn). The original barn, in excellent condition, is now used to dip wash and shellack the ornamentals.

Dean said that he got the idea to raise fall ornamentals from an Indiana farmer about eight years ago. Since then, other farmers have followed his lead and Dean said that it is a cut-throat business. Dean crop farms the additional acreage.

An old-fashioned pig roast will held on the Neff farm during the picnic. Rain or shine, the Neffs are prepared.

"We built a dining hall that seats 200," Dean joked.

The "dining hall" in reality is a newly erected implement shed that will serve double duty for seating the crowd.

A hay ride or something memorable for the kids will be held, Dean promises.

In addition to the farm cook-out and tours, plans for the three-day event include geneological sessions at the Lancaster Historical Society, tours of the Amish country and Hershey, a banquet, and a Neff quilted wall hanging auction.

The reunion committee has reserved Days Inn for overnight accommodations.

"We aren't sure how many people are coming but we anticipate several hundred," Paul said.

It is known that families from across the U.S. and even some from Europe will attend the reunion.

Reservations for the Neff Reunion should be made by contacting Bob Neff Tours (717) 397-000.



The original barn is in excellent condition. It is used to dip wash and shellack the fall ornamentals that Dean grows on 15 acres of the land.

*Homestead
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