



Three-month-old Heidi is the eighth generation of Benners to live on the farm. She is held by her mother Susan with grandparents Mildred and D. Edwin Benner. The house was built in 1870. The elder Benners live on one side of the double house while Susan, husband Leonard, and Heidi live on the other side.

## Benner Homestead Farm Preserves Agriculture Heritage

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff

GETTYSBURG (Adams Co.)

— Who said, "Things aren't like they used to be?"

Whoever made that comment should visit the Benner Homestead Farm in Gettysburg. There, the farm has been in the family since 1802. The same values evident in the 1800s are still prominent today: love of the land, family, and country.

Today, the Benner Homestead Farm will be placed on the National Register of Historic Places during a formal presentation. The farm is considered historically significant because it has preserved the agriculture lifestyle of the past.

The farm was surveyed by the Penns as part of the 43,500 acres laid out for the Manor of Maske. Boundaries were marked with axe marks on the trees. At one time, three of the trees were still standing on the Benner property, but now only one of the trees remains.

Three generations of the Benner family now live in the double farmhouse. D. Edwin and his wife Mildred of 52 years live on one side. Their daughter Susan, her husband Leonard, and 3-month-old Heidi live on the other side.

D. Edwin farms the land similar

to those of his ancestors. He uses no pesticides or herbicides. Although he has tractors, he prefers to do much of the field work with horse-drawn equipment on the 145 acres, and he thinks water drawn from a hand-dug well and sipped from a tin dipper tastes better than running water in the house.

Susan works full time in the operating room of the local hospital but she much prefers working on the farm. Recently, she added 25 sheep to the farm's melange of animals: 5 horses and mules, 20 beef cattle, 35 hogs, and a mixture of 200 chickens, geese, ducks, and turkeys that roam the property.

The farm is within six miles of the Gettysburg Battlefield. Susan said that her great grandfather could hear the soldiers as they walked up Taney Town Road but no soldiers invaded the farm. However, Civil War bullets and arrowheads have been found on the grounds. Susan's great-grandfather was there to hear President Abraham Lincoln proclaim the famous Gettysburg Address.

Although no ground was sold from the original landholdings, some ground was given to build the Mt. Joy Lutheran Church and parsonage in 1851. The Benners continue to be involved there. D.

Edwin has been elected Sunday School superintendent for 50 years. Each family member was a Sunday school teacher and held other leadership roles. Susan plays the organ.

Political involvement is another part of the Benners' heritage. Susan said that one of her ancestors was a congressman. When Susan was only a few months old, President Eisenhower held her in his arms for a picture-taking session when he went to the polls to vote. The Eisenhower farm is a neighboring farm to the Benner Homestead. With such a heritage, Susan said that she had no choice but to be a Republican. Her mother is a past president of the Republican Women and a township auditor. Susan is a state committee woman for the Republican Party and has held other offices in the local organization. Along with many political artifacts, Susan has a cross-stitch picture that proclaims: "Republican born, Republican bred. When I die, I'll be Republican dead."

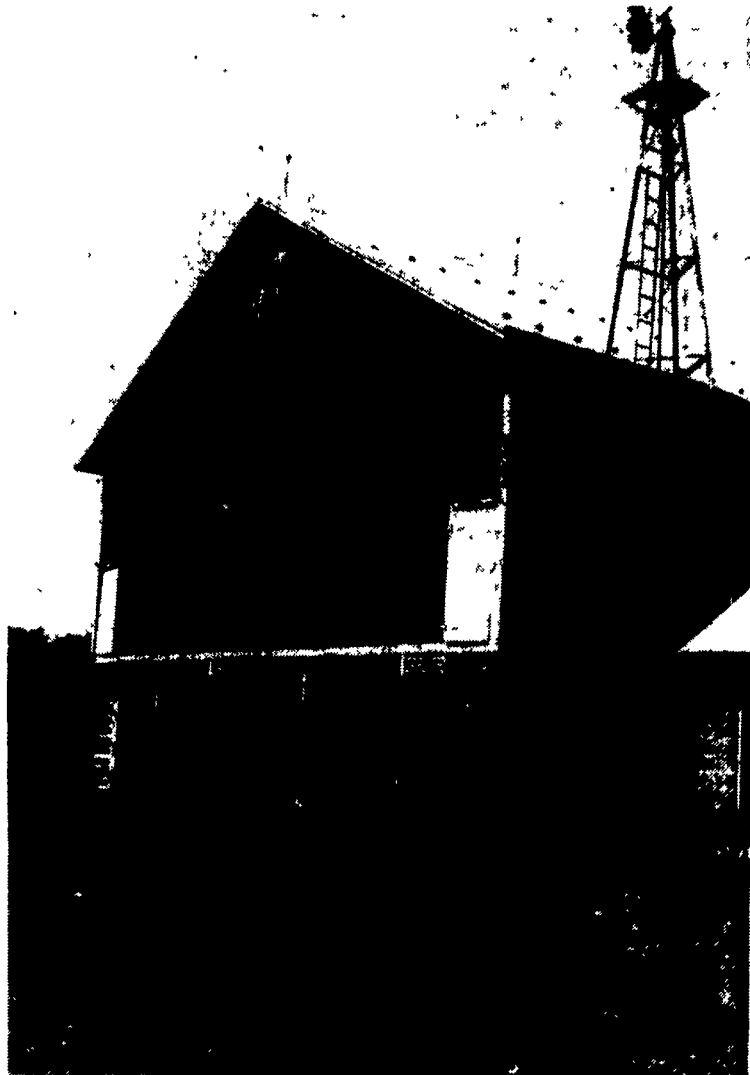
Both Susan and her mother attended the National Republican Convention in Texas last year.

"But my first love is home and farm," Susan said. She is thrilled that her daughter can grow up with her grandparents living in the same house. "I think grandparents are important in one's life. I had a lot of good experiences growing up with mine," said Susan who is an only child.

In keeping with her love for her heritage, Susan's wedding in 1990 incorporated some traditions of the past. The groom wore her great-grandfather's suit and rode by horse and buggy to the Benner Homestead where the wedding took place. Surrey rides were given to wedding guests. And, an old-fashioned pig roast was held for the reception.

Susan said the homestead, which was built in 1870, has been the site of weddings, baptisms, funerals, and public suppers.

The original house is built of logs. Susan said that it was her decision to have the house vinyl-sided because "I hated to see Daddy climb up to the high point to paint it."



The red-painted barn with louvered vents, a wooden silo, and a metal windmill signifies the authenticity of agriculture's past on the Benner Homestead Farm.

She does enjoy watching him farm with mules, horses, and the wooden-wheeled grain wagons made in 1900.

"Daddy enjoys the peacefulness of horses," she said. "It's cost efficient. He uses the tractors for plowing, but the horses for hay baling. And, he still makes the old-fashioned corn stalks."

D. Edwin practices crop rotation and finds it effective for pest and weed control.

"This was always an organic farm even before organic farming was popular," Susan said.

"I think we have just as much yield as anyone else," D. Edwin said.

He advises that other farmers should watch machinery expense. "There's nothing that kills quicker (financially) than machinery," he said. "If you can expand without going in debt, it's OK, but if you need to borrow, it doesn't pay off."

He trims the fence rows on the farm by walking with a power scythe. The sheep are supposed to keep the meadow trimmed, but they prefer "Mom's flowers." A herd of goats was quickly sent to market when they invaded the garden.

Susan sells lamb to local

restaurants after taking it to inspected butcher shops.

The Benners home butcher hogs and beef. Twelve to 15 relatives come for the day-long affair and the dinner that Mildred prepares.

Because Susan's husband is a stone mason, he recently built a stone fireplace in the old summerhouse located in back of the house. The Benners estimate that the summerhouse was built in the late 1700s. They also chinked the logs and renovated the summerhouse that still has the original wide floorboards.

Many family heirlooms and antiques that were stored in the attic during the past eight generations of Benners who lived in the home are now in use. Susan had the parlor suite reupholstered and placed in the parlor with the antique baby carriage and cane rocking chairs. Numerous pictures from the attic are now hung on the downstairs walls along with heirloom displays of dishes and knickknacks. A pair of candlesticks that once belonged to Napoleon Bonaparte's brother set on the Gothic Revival mantelpiece in the parlor. Numerous pieces of antique furniture are used throughout the house

(Turn to Page B16)



Susan Benner draws water from a hand dug well on the farm.



The original 1802 deed of the farm and the plaque showing the Benner Homestead Farm has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places are treasured by the Benner family. The farm was surveyed by William Penn who notched the trees to show the land boundaries. Only one tree with the axe markings still visible remains on the farm.