

Finding Yoders Has Farmer Plowed Under

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GRANTSVILLE, Md. — Kenneth L. Yoder, whose 250-acre dairy farm flanks the Dorsey Hotel Road, insists he's a farmer. But more often than not, it's Ruth, his wife, and Dwight and Annetta, their two children living at home, who are milking the 68 registered Holsteins in the barn.

That doesn't mean Yoder doesn't do his sharing of plowing, mind you. It's just that he's usually digging into a new project that doesn't call for a tractor or sod for that matter.

His latest undertaking has Yoder on a quest (along with a few committee members), to locate all the Yoders in the world. You see, they're going to build a Yoder House this summer that will eventually contain a history of Yoders back to the fourth century when it all began with St. Yoder.

The house will be built in the Spruce Forest Artisan Village east

of here along Route 40, next to the Penn Alps Restaurant and Crafts Shop. Inside will be an archives.

Unique features in it will be the soul window where, it was believed, the spirit flew out once the person died; a Holy corner and walk-in fireplace, and an apartment for the hosts.

Yoder learned to know other Yoders in Europe when in 1955, he joined the Mennonite Central Committee's PAX program in lieu of military service and was sent to Germany. He was to help resettle refugees still homeless from World War II. The place was Espelkamp.

That's where he met Ruth. With her family, she was a refugee, and in the same youth group with Yoder.

He had taken his MCC orientation seriously. He said, "We were told by MCC we weren't to be chasing women." So while he and Ruth chatted on a platonic level, nothing of romance entered the



Ruth and Ken Yoder are holding two books about Yoders that were given to them by the late Karl Joder from Germany, a researcher.



Annetta Yoder, daughter of Ken and Ruth Yoder, Grantsville, Md., says she enjoys farming and would much rather work outside than inside. She stands with Cringle, one of 68 registered Holsteins in the herd.

relationship for several years.

Jokingly, he says, "I got to Germany and found the lady who wanted to change her name to Yoder."

The two dated the last six months of his three-plus years in Germany. Communication wasn't too difficult. He spoke Pennsylvania Dutch and knew some high German. She spoke German, was taught English in school but never used it. Then too, she was from a farm family.

Yoder returned to the U.S. for a year before going back and marrying Ruth. It was scary in a way, especially for her mother, when Ruth married and came to the U.S. Still fresh were the vivid memories of Denmark where they had been held in the refugee camp.

"My mother made sure I had enough money in the bank for the back trip," laughs Ruth.

When his dad retired from active farming, Yoder and Ruth moved to the family farm where he had grown up and became the fifth Yoder generation to run it. Both the house and barn were built in 1874, he says.

"I was always interested in disadvantaged people," says Yoder, now an ordained minister. He got

the idea to start a housing project in Harrisburg's inner-city. Working independently, he purchased decrepit, old houses to fix up and resell or rent to refugees and recovering alcoholics. The business is Harris Homes.

He made good friendships that crossed racial lines and became lifelong friends with a black pastor and his congregation. They've shared visits.

Such business ventures often take Yoder away from home. He says, "The only way I can do it is because I have a good family." He and Ruth have seven children.

The Yoders have been to Germany and Switzerland several times. One person they met was the late Karl Joder who was researching Yoders since the 1930s and had an ancestral pedigree that covered six meters (probably 18 plus feet). He gave books relating to Yoders to Ken and Ruth. One he'd personally handbound and the other was a secular history from Steffisburg, Switzerland, wherein were the actual signatures of the town council members from 1980.

It was in Steffisburg, that a number of Yoders held prestigious positions such as judges or governors, according to the book.

Yoder is also the secretary-treasurer of the Casselman Valley Amish and Mennonite Historians who celebrated the 250th anniversary of Yoders coming to America from Germany, last year.

That's when all the brainstorming Yoders decided that what they

want is one house in which to preserve their long history. And they're after artifacts from houses all over the world to save within the 30- by 40-foot walls. Even the house design they've selected is a pre-1750 style.

Ruth sent a rather accusing look toward her husband, which was meant to remind him that he would be better off without another project. But she already knows he's in over his "waders" and the water keeps on risin' when you're talking Yoder House project.

No wonder Yoder says, "I went out this morning to feed the cows, but by the time I got around, it was already done."

Anyway, folks if you are reading this article, you must be a Yoder yourself. Or maybe a descendent of one. How could you not be, after all, when back in 1987, Yoder listings in the national telephone directory exceeded 8,000.

So, do Ken Yoder a favor and get in touch with the folks here who want to know about your Yoder line. You will be sent as much information about the Yoder House project as you want. You can contribute something by way of an artifact or treasure, information, money, time or suggestions.

Call Esther Yoder at the Spruce Forest Artisan Village: Telephone (301) 895-3332.

The address is The Yoder House Spruce Forest Artisan Village, Route 2, Box 5, Grantsville, MD 21536.



Ken and Ruth Yoder of Grantsville, Md. stand beside the beautiful new sign to their farm. Cornucopia was the name of the original tract of land. SCHOENENBERG means beautiful mountains. Neighbor Dee Spiker painted it.

Homestead Notes