

# Oley Valley Farm: Where Life Is Simpler And Lovelier

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**OLEY** (Berks Co.) — Six years ago, David and Lorin Tuttle had never heard of Oley Valley. But the minute they drove down the lane to the 1769 stone home surrounded by acres of rolling farmland and hills of scattered woodland, they fell in love with the area.

"It was like a whole new world in the middle of nowhere," Dave said.

Vacationers at their Little House Bed and Breakfast, a renovated spring house, feel that same sense of awe at the pristine beauty of the Tuttle's 125-acre farmstead.

Tall catalpa (bean) trees stand like sentinels guarding the stone 18th century home, which was built by a Quaker farmer. The area is known for its many surviving pre-revolutionary houses and the entire Oley Township has been placed on the National Register of Historic Districts.

"We were Long Island duck farmers," Dave said as he explained how and why they relocated to the Oley Valley.

When Dave and Lorin were growing up, Long Island was mostly inhabited by folks that could trace their roots back to the Mayflower and to England. Like the Amish and Mennonites, the Long Island families were proud that they could trace family inter-relational ties for generations. As

the island became a popular vacation spot for the well-to-do, land prices climbed. There was no where to expand Dave's family's duck farm with its processing plant.

For several years, Dave and the family co-op contracted farmers in Lancaster County to raise ducks. Every week, Dave flew to Lancaster airport to bring baby ducks to local farmers and to take about 125,000 back for slaughtering.

In 1987, the co-op wearied of the restrictions placed on them from the population growth.

"The neighbors in the resort areas would send their maids to complain that a duck feather or that straw floated into their swimming pool," Dave said of the frustration of dealing with a changing environment.

When reassessment tripped the taxes on the co-ops' properties and processing plant, the company decided to dissolve.

The Tuttle's wanted to escape to a quieter place, and decided upon Lancaster County until they saw an ad for an Oley Valley farm while reading the *Lancaster Farming*.

That was the first time the Tuttle's learned that Oley Valley existed. The farm property had been rented out for 15 years and the place was overgrown in poison and briars.

"The inside walls were painted a Pepto Bismol pink," Dave said. "It



Dave and Lorin Tuttle's 1769 home maintains its pristine loveliness in the midst of Oley Valley's rolling fields and scattered woodland.

## HOMESTEAD NOTES



took a lot of work, most of what we did ourselves."

The Tuttle's restored the property for several years before moving

into it.

"We were so excited about moving," Lorin said. "But after we moved, reality hit. We lost our identity. We were no longer duck farmers well-known by everyone in the area, but totally anonymous."

But the Tuttle's are both friendly, outgoing people who seem to be more Pennsylvania Dutch in origin than stereo-typed New Yorkers. They soon established friendships with church and community, and for them and their three children, Betsy, 14; Warner, 12, and Sarah, 9, the area is an answer to their dreams.

Lorin said that she had always admired quilts, but knew little about them. After purchasing her first quilt, she bought a pricing

guide and was soon learning all she could about quilts through books and a friend who is a dealer.

It's old quilts, not new ones, that capture the couple's attention. They now have about 150 quilts that are featured in several historic quilt books and used in exhibits in Japan and other faraway places. They also lecture on quilts for historic and auctioneering societies.

After attending many auctions to purchase quilts, their interest was wetted in collecting homemade type sewing boxes, quilt stamps, spool shelves, tape measures, pin cushions, and other related antiques.

The couple's home is filled with antiques — not passed down through the family — but from (Turn to Page B5)



Although she mostly collects quilts, Lorin is a proficient quilter. Much of the Tuttle's quilt collection has been featured in quilt books and is often shipped to Japan for quilt exhibits.



Last fall, the Tuttle's turned this cornfield into Oley Valley Perennials. Two greenhouses have been erected and a third one is in the plans. Lorin and the children grow 80 varieties of perennials to sell to wholesalers and landscape garden centers. "But we won't turn away any customer," Lorin said.



The Tuttle's furnished their home with antiques and collectibles purchased from five years of attending auctions every Saturday. Lorin said that her husband is trying to teach her to buy one good thing at a sale instead of purchasing box lots of junk to sort through.