



AGRICULTURE IN OLD LYONS FARMS

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*By the Staff of
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Today in another harvest time only the Earl farm and a 4-H Club garden in Dod Place are reminiscent of the glory that was once Lyons Farms.

While it is generally understood that all of the Township of Hillside once was called Lyons, Woodruff or West Lyons Farms because of the many families by those names residing here, fame of these farms has been forgotten

Until 1750, most of the property was owned by a group of planters who used the "farm" area as farming or pasture land and had home lots in Elizabeth Town or Newark.

With the increased population, members of these families began to erect dwellings on the "farm" portions. They included in addition to the Lyon and Woodruff families, Bakers, Baldwins, Bonds, Chandlers, Meekers, Thompsons and Tichenors.

Most of them were of Puritan stock, according to Samuel R. Winans, former Princeton University professor, and the section was considered to be "a bit of transplanted New England which long remained true to type."

The land extending toward Elizabeth Town was a plain while the area toward Newark was marked by abrupt steep rounded hills, gullies and depressions, he wrote.

The area had a turf meadow on the Lyon's tract in Weequahic Park, Mr. Winans noted, while George C. Woodruff, Hillside historian, lists a peat bog on Baker property in the vicinity of Central Avenue.

Both the peat and turf were used by the early residents as fuel in their stoves.

Records show that during the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, ox carts carried produce from the area to Bound Creek near Meeker Avenue, Newark, where it was loaded onto peragers, a type of boat made in Camptown, and shipped to New York City.

The records do not list the produce. However, account books from 1798 to 1820 of Enos Woodruff, a weaver here, lists products that he sold as including hay, apples, cider, butter, corn, buckwheat, flax, wheat, rye and various meats such as mutton and beef.

As the years advanced, produce was sent to New York City by sloops sailing from wharfs in the Arthur Kill in Elizabeth Town. By 1893, the railroads were being used to haul milk and peaches into Communipaw where they were transferred to ferries for the trip into New York City.

Despite this activity, few farms exceeded 50 or 60 acres in size and many were about 10 acres large. Most of them raised garden vegetables for their kitchens, had several fruit trees and berry bushes and up to 20 cows to provide sufficient milk for their families.

Most of the farmers had milk routes.

James Jay Mapes

Acclaimed as one of the country's outstanding scientists and foremost agriculturists of his time was James Jay Mapes, father of Mary Mapes Dodge, author of "Hans Brinker or The Silver Skates," who moved to Lyons Farms in 1847.

Professor Mapes proved that a sterile, barren and unpromising farm in Elizabeth Avenue at

Mapes Avenue in today's Newark could become a productive garden spot through successful agricultural experiments dealing with plant nutrition.

For nearly 20 years here he studied the utilization of chemical fertilizers. In 1859, he obtained a patent for the original use of phosphates.

Among the farming implements he invented was a plow which lifted the sub-soil. He also studied the growing of sweet corn and distributed seeds for his sweet corn to interested farmers throughout the state.

These experimental activities were described in a magazine, "The Working Farmer," which he edited from 1849 to 1864. He died in 1866.

The area early became famous for its apples. Two of these varieties had been developed in Newark. These were the Harrison obtained through grafting. It was described as being small, light, yellow, slightly tart and very juicy.

The other was the Canfield, a large red sweet apple. E. B. Jagers entered twenty varieties of apples in one of the New Jersey Agricultural Society Fairs at Waverly when they were held there between 1867 and 1899.

The Winans apple orchard in the rear of the property which once fronted Maple Avenue and Clark Street also was noted. Other orchards included the Tillou apple orchard in Morris Place, Aaron Baker's orchard in the West Newark section, the Pierson orchard in King Street and the Jewel orchard in Conant Street near the old grist mill.

The Woodruff orchard near Conant Street and Salem Avenue included peaches in addition to apples. The cider mill, one of two in the section, stood at 111 Woodruff Place, now the home of Mr. Woodruff.

David H. Doremus recalls that a cold drink of freshly made cider could always be obtained at the mill when he was a small boy.

The mill was burned about 1906 and the present dwelling erected from its ruins. The other

mill was owned by the Tillou family and was removed in 1912.

Desirability of these apples also was recognized by the management of Waverly Fair, who according to Howard V. Tichenor, awarded free admission to the fair to any boy who could present a bushel of apples.

Dr. Isaac Ward, grandfather of Dr. William R. Ward Sr., grew 50 varieties of pears on his extensive farm. Many of these varieties he developed himself and he gained fame in the area because of them.

The Wards also were known for their vineyards. Juice from their grapes was supplied to the Lyons Farms Presbyterian Church, now the Elizabeth Avenue Presbyterian Church, for the observance of the Sacrament of the Last Supper.

Another farm in today's Newark section of Lyons Farms was the Goldsmith Farm in the vicinity of Goldsmith Avenue which also was noted for its peaches and grapes.

The Earl Farm

The most famous vegetable farm in the area after Mr. Mapes died was the Earl farm. Moved here from Elizabeth Town after the Civil War, the family operated a canning factory from about 1870 to after the turn of the century.

The factory was chiefly known for specializing in tomatoes, although all garden vegetables were raised and canned in season. During peak production from 35 to 50 persons were employed in the factory. These cans in turn were shipped to Newark and New York City for distribution.

At a meeting of the Farmer's Club of Union County in 1881, Ogden Woodruff reported that the Earls raised 500 bushels of potatoes to an acre compared to 200 to 300 bushels grown by other farmers. Mr. Woodruff observed that the success of the Earls was due in part to use of Paris green to kill the bugs.

Greenhouses were erected by the Earls and used to grow vegetables to maintain a supply through-

out the year. The last of these was removed in 1956.

Despite the limitation of fertilizers, in most cases only stable manure was used, crops also included barley, rhubarb, peas, okra, pumpkins, peppers, turnips, watermelons, lima beans, string beans, asparagus, carrots, muskmelons, cucumbers, cabbages, pineapple squashes, beets, mushrooms and sweet potatoes.

Chestnut trees abounded throughout the area until a blight in the 1890s destroyed many of them. Both the Winans and Ward farms had many chestnut trees. There also were many hickory trees.

The William Grumman farm in Chancellor Avenue contained many cherry trees.

Strawberries were probably the most famous of berries raised in the area. Others included gooseberries, raspberries and blackberries.

The residents were interested in improved methods of farming. In 1881 John Doremus was elected a member of the Farmer's Club and Dennis Long was president of the Union County Board of Agriculture and on the Board of Trustees for Waverly Fair in 1893.

Dr. Ward urged the residents to send entries to the Columbian Fair. They won many prizes at the annual Waverly Fair.

All was not work or competition. Individuals and organizations marked their summer programs with strawberry, cherry, or watermelon festivals and by the serving of rhubarb pie.

The farmers and their influence on the area is illustrated by the erection of a footbridge over the Lehigh Valley Railroad near Salem Avenue to enable a farmer to reach his cow pasture without traveling to the Long Avenue crossing.

The railroad opened the area for industry and commuter residence. Soon after its erection in 1890, the farms began to be subdivided into house plots or industrial sites bringing to an end the "farm" area.