

April 1998- AREA FARMS c. 1900- BIG OAK FARM

The recent donation of a scrapbook of clippings from Eva Whalen sheds light on the origin of the list of local farms, their names and owners, which has been the inspiration of recent study to locate and learn about them. Around 1900 the editor of the Brighton Argus, Seth Jacobs, was encouraging farm owners to endow their property with an official name. He assured them a long term identification of the farms with the owners ‘ . . . until it becomes so closely associated with your name that the name and the farm are inseparable’’, would be a valuable asset. He also urged the farmers to have letterhead and enveloped printed (by the Argus) to “ . . . show the world that ‘ we lead, others follow.’ ”

Frank L. (sometimes E.) Hacker’s Big Oak Farm is the present topic of research of land ownership and family ties. Among the earliest settlers in the area were Wilhelm and Barbara Hacker, from Germany, Frank’s parents. They were the first to purchase 40 acres in Section 23 of Genoa Township. (October 4, 1837.) This was probably a speculative purchase since we learn they were living in Section 36 of Oceloa Township when they sold the Genoa piece in 1858.

Records indicate the 40 acres in Oceloa were purchased August 8, 1838, probably from Gustav Baetcke who is recorded as the first owner in 1836. (another speculative venture?) By 1862, the Hackers have added a neighboring 64 acres (104 acres total) and a residence is indicated on the map on Hacker Road about half mile north of Gold Club Road.

The Civil War found sons Philip and Ralph giving their lives for the sake of the Union. (a number of their letters are in the Clements Library at U of M.) Daughter Augusta attended a one-room school and taught for a while before marrying Alpheus Macomber in 1862. They made their home in a log house in Green Oak Township. There seven children were raised and Augusta became known for the poetry she composed about local people and events. Daughter Lucy married Ed Sounders, daughter Serena married McLoulin, son Theodore married Sarah L. Griffin and Little Willie died as an infant. Barbara died in 1877; records indicate the 104 acres were sold to son Frank. October 16, 1887, is the wedding day of Frank and Tillie Euler, daughter of Henry Euler, from Germany. Henry owned and lived on the 160 acre lying across Hacker Road in Hartland Township, Section 31. This piece bears the Hacker name also by 1895. A total of c. 350 acres are Frank’s responsibility.

The 1915 atlas shows Ben, Frank and Tillie’s son, owning 60 acres on the south border of his fathers. Ben married Mary E. George (also long time neighbors in Oceloa Twp.) and in 1935 their names are recorded with Frank’s as owners of the c. 400 acres. B the 1960s Big Oak Farm is quickly being platted into 2,5 and 10 acre home sites. WW II vets were often the buyers. Wilhelm, Barbara, little Willie, Frank and Tillie are resting from their labors in the Brighton Village Cemetery. (researched by Marieanna Bair.)