AREA FARMS C. 1900

Research of local farm and farmers, listed in the Brighton Argus; their background and location continues. W. S. Smith’s OAK GROVE FARM is this issue’s subject.

As can be assumed, the name of Smith is not uncommon. It is found in the area as early as 1831. First Land Owners lists 42 with seven in Green Oak Township. However, W. (Winfield) S. is not among them.

His obituary in the March 7, 1923, issue of the Argus records his death at age 77. March 4, 1923. He had been born in Kensington in 1845. This likely was Oakland County.

W.S. OAK GROVE FARM was in the NE1/4 (40 acre) of Section 15 in Green Oak on McCabe Road. This was part of 80 acres bought by Peter McNamara from the U.S. government on May 12, 1834. It remained in the McNamara family until Smith bought it in 1891. After his death children Flora and Howard lived there until moving to California in 1932. American Aggregates owns it in 1955. By 1961 the Island Lake Recreation Area is noted as the owner.

Smith’s obituary records: “In young manhood he went to Eaton County to make his home on a farm and here he married Amanda Champlin who preceded him to the great beyond by nearly 20 years. After 15 years spent in Eaton, he returned to Livingston County and settled on a part of the old Gov. Bingham farm at Green Oak Station. After 11 years he moved to the Peter McNamara farm, two miles southwest...here he spent the remainder of his life. He followed the threshing business for 40 years and made life long friends wherever he went...he was the father of three children...One daughter died in infancy, another daughter Flora and son Howard, both at home.”

To have been in the threshing business meant several months each summer of intense labor. Near the end of the 19th century farmers grew more wheat, oats, etc. This became a cash crop since transportation of a product to market had improved with the coming of the railroad in 1870. If he were the owner/operator he’d have had several large pieces of equipment including the enormous steam engine and the threshing itself. The equipment would have been installed in the farmer’s yard and the bundles of grain transferred onto the conveyer belt. The shaft was blown into an ever-growing pile and the grain fell into waiting bags or wagons. It was not rare for a spark from the steam engine to cause a fire in the dry straw which could consume the threshing machine and even the farmer’s barn. As grain ripened in the south the thresher followed north at scheduled stops at farms. (Compiled by MariannaBait from early census records and atlases, and “First Landowners of Livingston County” and “Early Land Owners and Settlers of Livingston County” and obituaries copied by Milton Charboneau.)

Brighton Area Historical Society Newsletter
P.O. Box 481
Brighton, MI 48116
http://community.mlive.com/cc/bahs

Trail Tales
Preserve, Advance and Disseminate Knowledge of the History of the Brighton Area
ANNUAL MEETING, NOVEMBER 26, 2001, 7 p.m. LYONS SCHOOL, 11455 BUNO ROAD

All board officers’ and directors’ positions will be open to nomination. Elections for 2002 will take place. The organization has been fortunate through the years to have dedicated members; members who believe in its mission and are willing to devote time and energy. Several have been doing this for a number of years. It would be a good sign of the effectiveness of this organization to have more volunteers step up and participate actively on the board.

This will be the Society’s 20th anniversary. Much has been accomplished; of course much more needs to be done. New/additional board members will give a fresh direction as to where the Society will be in 2021.

An archives committee is functioning, the history book is moving along, research is continuing, the financial records of the Society are in good shape, the Lyons School is almost ready for regular visitors. The oral history program is underway, the photographing of local sites is ongoing, local cemeteries are being transcribed, etc.

The above may read very encouragingly. These and other projects are always short on personnel. Among them are fund raising (home tours, raffles, endowments, donations), participation in local events (parades, ‘Farmer’s Market, Art Fair), development of historic districts, a more centrally located site for artifact displays, improving publicity, interviewing more long time residents (their story is lost when they are gone), improving the historic resource survey, providing programs in schools, etc., etc.

There surely is somewhere, in all these possibilities, a place where you can be effective. Contact a board member for more information and offer a year of your time and expertise. The Society will continue and grow only as much as its members participate as fully as possible.

Dates to Remember:
Oct. 9, 16, 23, 30. 6 p.m. Lyons School Restoration.
18, 25, 1-3 p.m. Archives Filing. 810/729-9402 to confirm. Welcome.
**22, 7 p.m. Society board meeting, welcome.
**29, 7 p.m. Friends of the Lyons School.
*Lyons School, 11455 Buno Road.
*Brighton District Library, 100 Library Drive.