AREA FARMS C. 1900

The Zezeb farm on Chilson Road is the topic of this research issue.

Investigation takes one back to the date of Samuel Casa’s arrival in Livingston County. By 1836 land in Undria Township has been recorded in his name. January 25, 1836, 40 acres in Hamborg Township are his. 160 acres in Genoa Township, Section 34, SW, and 80 in the W1/2 SE, are recorded November 1, 1844, and May 10, 1847, respectively. Of ten sons, at least four also purchased land in the county about that time. A number of cases are on record but we are unable to determine relationships without further research. (Anyone interested?)

A son, Norman, by second wife, Clarissa, was born in New York State March 1, 1825. All of Samuel’s children were born before he came to Michigan. At the age of 23 the ownership of Samuel’s farm in Genoa was transferred to Norman in 1846. Sam became a shoemaker after the crippling effects of feet frozen while hunting in Oswego County, New York. It can be assumed Norman’s older brothers had acquired farms, leaving his home to help at home. (Sam died 11 days after amputation surgery by Drs. Bingham and Smith, April 15, 1845.)

In 1851, Norman married Maryette Watrous of Genoa Township. They had four daughters. The youngest, Donna Edna, was only five when father Norman died. Widow Maryette remarried but it was unsuccessful. George Sevney was hired to manage the farm. He was a man of meticulous record keeping: a spade and shovel .30; ice cream freezer .40; corn planter $1.25; two horse blankets $2.50. During this period the Ann Arbor railroad needed gravel for the road bed. Mr. Bradley of Toledo, Ohio, opened a gravel pit on the farm, the Ohio Michigan Sand and Gravel Company.

About 1909, Donna went to Arizona to wed William Frederick Zezeb, a first generation German-American. At the time he was employed by the U.S. government building bridges. Upon returning to Genoa Township, Mrs. Frederick Zezeb began working at the gravel pit. In fact, he remained employed there until the pit closed. He also assisted his mother-in-law with the farm. Son, Harley Zezeb was born on the Casa farm June 3, 1913. After buying out the interests in the farm of her three sisters, Donna and Fred owned the farm July 31, 1917.

During the nationwide depression of the 1930s, a neighboring family lost their farm and had to move. A few days before leaving, their hired man, Pat Downs, offered to work for the Zezeb family for no room and board. Donna and daughter-in-law, Cecelia, cleaned painted and furnished a nearby box car from the gravel pit for him. They also paid his $30.00 a month. Pat remained with the Zezeb for the rest of his life. Donna died March 19, 1956 and Fred, September 9, 1955. They are buried in Lakeview Cemetery, Howell. (Compiled by Marileann Bair from information gathered by Stephen S. Leith and Milton Chartboune’s “Early Settlers and Landowners of Livingston County.”)