

People — Bowey, Luella

Family marks 150 years on farm

People
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Meidenbauers feted with others at state fair

By BRIAN HUBER
Freeman Staff

NEW BERLIN — For as long as Wisconsin has been a state, there have been Meidenbauers farming in New Berlin.

The Meidenbauers' roots run so deep on the land that the original property deed has the word "Territory" crossed out, replaced with a hand-written "State" instead, said Roy Meidenbauer, who accompanied his brother Jim and their wives, JoEllen and Marcia, in attending a breakfast at the Wisconsin State Fair, where they were honored this year with 42 other Sesquicentennial Farm families for their 150 years of continuous ownership of their farms.

The Meidenbauers were the only county family so honored this year, becoming the 17th Sesquicentennial Farm family in Waukesha County.

According to a state fair records, there are now 7,960 Century Farms, where the owners have been there for 100 years, in the state, with 194 of them in Waukesha County. One county farm was added to that total this year with the recognition of the Bowey farm in Eagle.

"We have all the original records from the Meidenbauer farm because they never moved and never threw anything away," Roy Meidenbauer said.

Jim and Marcia Meidenbauer still farm on the remaining family land, raising fruits and vegetables for sale at the New Berlin Farmers Market.

Jim Meidenbauer said he was "extremely proud" that his family's legacy continues in New Berlin, through several generations and decades of change.

The Meidenbauers weren't the first on the land, though. Roy Meidenbauer said a Francis Shore and his wife homesteaded the property, selling the 80-acre property to Johann and Anna Meidenbauer — the uncle of Roy's and Jim's grandfather — in 1848.

About six years later, they bought another 10 acres, and the farm passed down through the family to the present day.

Roy Meidenbauer said it was a dairy farm, supporting 12 to 16 dairy cows, and the family also

raised oats for the cattle, as well as chickens, corn and hay.

They also had horses until about 1938, when the family got its first tractor, an early Allis-Chalmers model.

Of course, all the farm work was done by hand until the advent of machines.

The family got a milking machine sometime around 1930.

Roy and Jim Meidenbauer recalled their father, Arthur, being a "truck farmer," raising lots of vegetables and chickens and developing a truck route of regular customers after starting out at the West Allis Farmers Market.

The route ran along South 92nd Street in West Allis.

"We used to deliver live chickens at that time, and I went right along with him, and we'd take them vegetables and live chickens," Roy Meidenbauer recalled.

"Sometimes they'd kill them themselves, and sometimes they'd ask us to do it so we took the heads off right there."

When electricity first came, Roy Meidenbauer said one light in each room hung down with a switch on it.

"Of course, they had no electrical outlets in there because appliances had not been invented yet," he said.

Central heat was added after World War II. Prior to that, a wood stove heated the home, fueled with wood cut on the farm.

As children, Roy Meidenbauer said he and his siblings were always building things, especially forts in the hayloft out of baled hay, or using lumber left over from fence-building.

They also made forts in the old Meidenbauer house, a log house constructed around the time a sawmill was built at Linnie Lac.

The Meidenbauers attended the Lawnsdale Road school in the town of Waukesha when it was a one-room schoolhouse and then went on to Waukesha High.

Jim Meidenbauer worked for the New Berlin street department, and Roy worked as a technician at Delco Electronics working on aerospace development and spent three years building guidance systems for the lunar lander used in the Apollo missions to the Moon. He later went to Allis-Chalmers for seven years before returning to Declo, working on auto diagnostic computers.

Roy Meidenbauer later got his real estate and broker's licenses, which helped in subdividing the farm in the 1990s, selling parcels lot by lot rather than to a large developer.

Two acres were left of the original farm, where Jim and Marcia Meidenbauer still reside.

"The woods has never changed and never will. I still get the chance to walk through and enjoy it," Jim Meidenbauer said.

Roy Meidenbauer and his wife belong to the Evangelical and Reformed Church in Waukesha, which was destroyed last year in a fire.

The congregation aims to rebuild, however, and Roy Meidenbauer and others work at various fund-raisers toward that rebuilding while the church meets at the Masonic Hall in Waukesha.

Roy Meidenbauer is also president of the New Berlin Historical Society and said the group is hoping to acquire the fire station adjacent to the historical park as office space when the city builds a new one.

He added the state offered the society an old post office on Prospect Hill when a project commences to widen Racine Avenue, but the society had to turn it down as there are hardly enough people to maintain the buildings already in the industrial park.

Roy Meidenbauer also restored a band organ, like the ones seen in carnivals in the early part of the last century, and played it at the Waukesha Old Car Club show earlier this month.

He also has an organ built around 1900, one he modified to play automatically.

He and his wife, JoEllen, celebrated their 50th anniversary this year along with their two children, three grandchildren and other friends and relatives.

Jim and Marcia Meidenbauer have two children and three grandchildren and are awaiting another due next month.

He enjoys fishing and following sports when not working with the city historical society and the Hoepfner-Horn Brothers Veterans of Foreign Wars post.

Jim Meidenbauer recalls the days when Lawnsdale Road was one of gravel near the farm and recognizes one can't stop progress.

But the Meidenbauers don't see a day where they won't be in New Berlin anytime soon.

"Even my daughter mentioned if anything ever happened to me or my wife or something, she'd like first chance at the property to continue it on just to keep the family name," Jim Meidenbauer said.

(Brian Huber can be reached at bhuber@conley.net)

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(Freeman Staff Photo)

Boy Scouts of Milwaukee's troop 570 march across the state forest. The Boweys and others are not anxious for the state to take over Kettle Moraine land.



(Freeman Staff Photo)

Mr. and Mrs. Austin Bowey of Eagle Rt. 1 stand in front