

"Lucky Farmer Rural Photo Quiz"

Carroll County Times Article for 24 September 2000

By Jay A. Graybeal

During the early 1950s when farming was still leading Carroll's economy, this newspaper featured a mystery photograph series about local farms. The paper published an aerial photo of a farm and asked readers and the owner to identify the location. A follow-up article identified the farm and provided its history. The owner received a framed photograph of the farm and gift certificates. The first image appeared in the August 14, 1952 issue of The Times and an article about the Ben King farm appeared the following week:

"The Times had some lucky visitors on Tuesday. The first farmer to recognize the picture of his farm as printed in last week's issue of the paper brought his wife Vola and his twelve-year-old daughter Barbara, into Westminster to get the framed picture and gift certificates awarded them through the cooperation of local merchants.

The picture printed last week in the Lucky Farmer Rural Photo Quiz and reproduced here is an aerial view of the farm home of Ben H. King, general farmer who lives near Mt. Union Lutheran Church on the road from Uniontown to Middleburg. The King family have owned their sixty-seven acre farm for three years, having moved to the present home from Mt. Airy. Before Coming to Carroll County, they resided in Lee County, Virginia. Along with his general farming, Mr. King has 21 holstein cows and a number of heifers. The home is about 40 years old and the family has tried to improve its appearance since they acquired it."

The Lucky Farmer Rural Photo Quiz continued into the fall 1952 with some challenging images. In October it took several weeks to identify a farm on Middleburg Road near Taneytown as reported in The Times:

"Carroll's lost farm has been identified after almost two weeks. The staff of The Times was stricken with anxiety as press time drew nearer and the farm which appeared in the October 9 issue remained unclaimed. All possibilities of finding the farm's owner were discussed and then laid aside as impractical.

On Wednesday, F. Kale Mathias, well-know monument dealer in Westminster, walked into the office on official business and during the course of the ensuing conversation, the mystery farm was mentioned. Mr. Mathias was shown the picture and recognized the farm as one on the Middleburg Road, one mile from Taneytown, where he had sold a monument. After checking with his office, to be sure he was correct, he offered to stop at Taneytown and notify the owner.

Shortly thereafter, we received a phone call from Mr. Mathias. He reported "mission successful" and then identified the man as Walter L. Harner. Mr. Harner appeared later in the morning and identified the farm.

Occupying the "mystery farm" are Mr. Harner, his wife Hazel M. and two daughters, Elaine, 12, and Harriet, 6. Both children attend the Taneytown Elementary school. The Harners have lived at their present location since 1939 and Mr. Harner specializes in dairy farming and does some general farming.

The seven-room house situated on the property is partly built of log in the interior, showing that the house must be quite old. The outside is weatherboard covered. Several modern buildings increase the value and productivity of the farm.

William H. Miller told Mr. Harner on Saturday that he was the owner of the Lucky Farm, but Mr. Harner could not leave at that time as he was busy filling his silos. However, he was preparing to leave for The Times office when Mr. Mathias dropped in to tell him the good news.

Mr. Harner received the usual framed aerial view of his farm and the gift certificates from each of the advertising merchants on the farm page.”

The popular mystery farm series continued into the spring of 1953 and eventually included about twenty-five properties. Nearly half a century later, the articles are a valuable historical resource for documenting local farming practices in the mid-twentieth century.

Photo caption: An aerial view of the Valentine-Kiser Farm near Taneytown is similar to those published in this paper during a 1952-3 mystery farm series. Historical Society of Carroll County Collection, gift of Charles J. Trout, 1991.