

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



**Buckingham Lodge
1861**

The Story of Turner Farm

Turner Farm (7400 Given Road) is an iconic working farm in the Village, and its history spans almost two centuries. In 1840, John Symmes purchased one section (640 acres) of land in current day Indian Hill. It was about a square mile along Given Road.

When Symmes died in 1865, the property was divided amongst his heirs, one of whom was his daughter, Margaret Katherine Buckingham. She married Richard Turner of Miami Valley when she was 16 years old. They moved into the original homestead, raised crops, and added rooms as their family expanded. Of their 6 children only five survived until adulthood – John, Lulu, Viola, Alice and Mary. Lulu married and moved away.

John died in 1948. The three sisters continued living on their ancestral property. Viola was a bookkeeper; Alice taught at Washington School (today's Little Red Schoolhouse); and Mary taught at Jefferson School. In 1966 they sold their property to a neighbor, Mary LeBlond, and moved to a retirement center.



Mary LeBlond was an avid horsewoman and the first female Master of Foxhounds of the Camargo Hunt. She permitted the Miami Valley Pony Club to use Turner Farm for its activities. The Indian Hill chapter of this national organization trained youths in equestrian skills. Besides receiving instruction, they had horse shows there and helped rehabilitate the barn and paint and wallpaper the original farmhouse. One room was covered with pages from *The Chronicle of the Horse*, and others were painted in vivid colors. Pony Club used the farm for about 15 years.

In 1993 Bonnie Mitsui (Mary LeBlond Stephenson's granddaughter) moved back to Cincinnati – to the 60 acre Turner farm, a place she had loved since her childhood. Spurred by an interest in organic agriculture, she restored the farmhouse and became a farmer. She used a trial and error approach and reached out to others for help. She purchased antique farm equipment and draft horses.

Bonnie thought it was important that people understand the labor that goes into farming. So she created a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) operation, whereby people pay for a share of produce, but are required to labor each week on the farm. Soon after, the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association certified Turner Farm to be organic. Besides the CSA, the farm's produce was sold at Finley Market, and later at the Madeira Farmers' Market. In 2002 Bonnie established a conservation easement for Turner Farm, ensuring it would always remain in organic agricultural production. The easement is held by the Land Conservancy of Hamilton County in cooperation with the American Farmland Trust. The farm will never become a residential subdivision.

For the 20 years that Bonnie lived at Turner Farm, she taught others the benefits of farming organically. Bonnie Mitsui died in 2013. Turner Farm is now managed by a Board of Trustees, 5 farm managers, and a staff of 10. This year round operation educates and provides healthy local food to the larger Cincinnati community. The Turner Farm website (www.turnerfarm.org) describes many opportunities such as walking tours, field trips, horse drawn wagon rides, landscapes to paint or photograph, summer camps for children, and adult classes on many topics. The CSA program is ongoing, and a Veteran to Farmer Training Program is offered to soldiers.

The farm itself is home to many plants and animals, both domestic and wild. There are gardens, fields, hedgerows, meadows, woods, and a pond. The shed has self-serve organic vegetables as well as chicken, eggs, lamb, pork, lard, and organ meats. Organic potting soil and pesticides are also available. Turner Farm is a vibrant place. It fulfills its mission to “promote connections between people of all ages and the land that feeds them in body, mind, and spirit.” The land which has been continually farmed since the 1800s will always be farmed. It is a rural haven, and the legacy of Bonnie Mitsui (pictured at right).

