

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



**Buckingham Lodge
1861**

Remembering Bonnie Mitsui

Ten years ago, Bonnie Mitsui passed away. Her visionary leadership in creating an organic farm in the suburbs of Cincinnati was a success, and Turner Farm is a vital asset of Indian Hill and the larger surrounding community.

Marie Elizabeth “Bonnie” Crudgington’s parents divorced before her 1944 birth. Her mother Elizabeth remarried George Raymond Drew, who adopted his wife’s daughter. In 1956 Bonnie’s mother died. Mr. Drew did not want to raise her, so Bonnie’s grandmother, Mary Cunningham Stephenson (later LeBlond) of Meshewa Farm on Given Road took her in. After attending Hillsdale and graduating from the elite boarding school Foxcroft (Middleburg VA) in 1962, Bonnie went to Bennett College in New York City. There she took International Studies and learned Japanese.

An adventuresome young woman, she moved to Tokyo to teach English after graduation. When she returned to the U.S., she took courses at Columbia and got a job working for the Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper, considered the largest daily circulating paper in the world at that time. On assignment at Mexico City’s Summer Olympics in 1968, she met Japanese photographer Yoshiaki Mitsui. They married in 1969 at Meshewa Farm and moved to California to live. They had a daughter, Natsu in 1972 and a son, Charles (Chuck) in 1974. But the marriage faltered, and Bonnie and Yoshiaki divorced in 1977. In the meantime, Bonnie’s grandmother acquired Turner Farm in 1968, with the thought that it could be subdivided later and become an asset for her heirs. Bonnie was busy raising her children in California and pursuing other interests. At a 1990 family meeting to determine how to develop Turner Farm into homesites, Bonnie objected. She wanted to preserve the land. With her usual determination, she purchased the parcel from her uncle (who had inherited the property) and began to make plans.

In 1993 Bonnie came back to Ohio with the intention of farming. She was 49 years old and a novice. She had held a special affection for Turner Farm since she was a child and realized her dream when she moved into its small 19th century farmhouse that year. Her first attempts at gardening were not very successful, and she faced numerous challenges. She studied the works of Bromfield, Coleman, and Rodale, and got advice from Carter Randolph, Bill Grob and Jack Johns. Eventually the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association verified her fields “organic”. She sold farm produce at Findlay Market, the Madeira Farmer’s Market, and on site at 7400 Given Road.

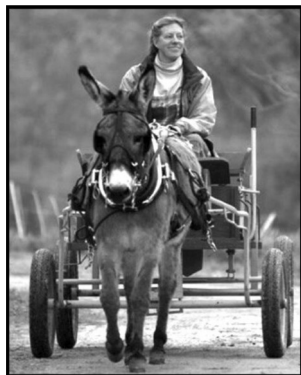
Bonnie and Turner Farm evolved together. Headstrong and independent, she focused on farming naturally, raising crops and animals for sale, and educating future farmers. The trials and errors of the early years were replaced with tried



Turner Farm

-and-true practices later. The seven acres of cleared land on the farm had pastures, fallow land, vegetable, flower, and herb gardens, and pork, sheep, cows, and poultry. Organic farming education was important to Bonnie. The farm manager and staff were committed to chemical free farming. With the CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) program, more people could take vegetables home by working several hours a week at Turner. Also interns were hired to learn about sustainable agricultural methods.

Bonnie spread the news about the benefits of farming the old-fashioned way. She acquired draft horses and used them in the fields and for transportation locally. Bonnie, wearing a straw hat and long dress, often rode in a carriage guiding the horses on Indian Hill roads. Turner Farm offered tours, workshops, conferences, day camps, and classes about all kinds of ecological topics. Also, Bonnie created an agricultural easement, ensuring that both Turner Farm and Meshewa Farm would always have organic agriculture and never be developed, which protected the 230-acre parcel permanently.



Despite her health setbacks of a stroke in 1999 and lung cancer diagnosis in 2007, Bonnie persevered with grit. She was devoted to her vision and the mission of Turner Farm. She was an active steward of the land and a promoter of healthy ecosystems. Bonnie died in 2013, but her legacy continues to benefit many people and the natural world.