

IMAGES

. . . then and now

From The Indian Hill Historical Society



Bill Grob: Indian Hill Farmer

Drive past 7405 Given Road any early autumn morning, and the sight of cows and horses grazing in fog steamed pastures and clean hayfields amidst barns and outbuildings will evoke thoughts of a bygone era in Indian Hill. Despite changes in the village, the Grob farm remains an agricultural oasis in our landscape, and Bill Grob still works the land. Immigrants from Switzerland to Ohio in 1870, the Grob family raised four children on the 100 acre farm, in their two-story I-frame house. When the children moved to their own homes, Bill Grob's father, Carl, and his uncle, John, continued to farm the family property.

Three generations of Grobs raised cows, soybeans, hay, and oats. Crops were rotated, hay was cut, and livestock thrived. Farming traditions were passed on to family members, and harvests were plentiful. Bill Grob can point to the spot in his current pasture where, more than 100 years ago, his grandfather burned trees to clear more land for agriculture. When he speaks of it, his voice shows pride in the ownership of this land independently husbanded by his family for generations.

There have been changes over the years. Carl, John, and Bill Grob used to farm considerable additional leased acreage in Miamiville and Camp Dennison. They also hayed fields for William Semple, John Turner, Warner Atkins, and Lola Bonnell. The horsedrawn equipment of the early 20th century was replaced in the late 1940's by tractors. People came to the farm to buy eggs and rich milk in glass jars. Grob says what is labeled today as 2% milk "would have gone to the hogs" when he was a boy. Beef and pork were marketed at the Spring Grove stockyard, and later at the Hillsboro slaughterhouse.



Like most farmers, the Grobs were plagued by foxes raiding the chicken coop, groundhogs rooting in the garden, and crows feasting on corn seedlings—problems they usually solved with a gun. Grob also remembers his father's tale of trapping polecats, skinning them, and selling their hides for \$2—one way a boy could earn extra cash. Over the decades weather impeded hay baling, snows flattened soybean fields, and frosts diminished crop levels, but Bill Grob worked the farm and kept it intact.

Cutbacks came when Bill's father and uncle died. Today the main farmhouse, which used to have tenants, sits vacant, and the orchard and the vegetable garden are gone, as are the hogs and chickens. Horses are still boarded, and Grob says he still makes "plenty of hay." He's an expert on that subject, knowledgeable about combinations of timothy, clover, alfalfa, redtop, and bluegrass. When he was a boy, the hay was put up loose in the barn, later was stored in square bales, and now in round bales, which are easier when there is only one farmer to do the labor.

Today Mr. Grob manages the farm by himself, due to the improved capacity of his machinery. He has eight tractors, and though some "have some age," each is kept clean and "ready to start up." Other equipment includes balers, threshers, disc cultivators, and even a band mill, which allows Grob to cut boards from surplus lumber. He says, "My office is the seat of my tractor," — a unique claim in Indian Hill.

A homemade weathervane standing near the farm driveway symbolizes Grob's self-reliance, handiness, and diligence. More than a decoration, it predicts the weather "better than the forecasters," he says. With a commitment to the family farmstead, Bill Grob stands distinctly on the local landscape, a reminder of generations of local independent farmers.

