



BICENTENNIAL BULLETIN No. 34 ***—Sheffield Celebrates 200th Birthday***

The Sheffield Bicentennial Commission will issue a *Bicentennial Bulletin* each Monday throughout 2015 that illustrates the rich heritage of our communities. **View them at — www.sheffieldbicentennial.org or sheffieldvillage.com**

THE ACKERMAN FARM—the last of its kind ***1737 Abbe Road, Sheffield Village, Ohio***

*J*ean Ackerman is proprietor of the oldest operating farm in Sheffield Village, founded by her ancestors over 160 years ago. In fact, Jean’s farm is the only one left with a full agricultural complement—including livestock, poultry, honey bees, row crops, grains, orchards, and even fish and turtle ponds managed by her son Paul. To visit her farm on “apple butter day” is a treat always to be remembered. From sunup until late afternoon bushels of apples are stewed in a large iron cauldron over an open fire. Visitors take turns continually stirring the boiling apples with a wooden paddle until a thick paste evolves. The “butter” is then poured into glass jars and sealed for later enjoyment.

Aerial View of the Ackerman Farm in 2007



The Ackerman Farm, which might more properly be known as the Schwartz–Blaha–Ackerman Farm has its roots in Bavaria. Heinrich and Magdalena Schwartz were among a group of German Catholic immigrants who settled in Sheffield and organized the mission parish of St. Teresa of Avila in 1845. The 80-acre Schwartz Farm was located on Bennett (now Abbe) Road about a quarter mile north of French Creek. Their son, John Schwartz, was a young boy when the family

came to America and eventually became the proprietor of the family farm. On June 8, 1869, John married Franceska Blitz at the bride’s parish church of St. Mary on French Creek in Avon.

Franceska was born in the Bavarian hamlet of Schwarzhofe about 1840. She immigrated to Avon Township with her family in 1847. Being small for her age, she was excused heavy farm and household chores, which enabled her to attend the log school at French Creek. This experience was to play an important role in her future and the lives of her children.

John and Franceska’s home and farm were only a short distance to the north and across the road from St. Teresa parish church. At that time, a one-room parish school was located northwest of the original frame church (1852-1907), about where the community building now stands. In the 1870s and 1880s it was customary for lay schoolteachers to stay with local families throughout the school year. During the time when their three children (Mary Magdalena, George, and Francis) were growing up, John and Franceska boarded the schoolmistress in their home. With the teacher in their midst, dinner conversation was often stimulating and informative. Franceska, inspired by

one of the teachers who was an accomplished organist, purchased an organ and enrolled herself and her sons in music lessons. Her eldest son, George, turned out to be the most talented and frequently played his mother's favorite hymns. Unusual for families in the 1880s, Franceska saw to it that all of her children completed the eighth grade and long after graduation encouraged them to read and learn.

George Schwartz (1873-1942) went on to be the proprietor of the family farm after his parents died. He married Margaret Gubeno on July 6, 1904 and they had two children, Frances in 1908 and John in 1916. George was of medium build, had red hair and blue eyes, and possessed an easy-going personality. Because of his good education, he worked for many years as a clerk for the Nickel Plate Road in South Lorain, but at the same time he was able to continue managing the farm. Margaret was stricken with influenza in 1918, which may have weakened her heart and she died the next year. At a young age, George's daughter Frances took over the responsibilities of housekeeper and raising her brother John. As a reward for her years of sacrifice, on her eighteen birthday George bought her a robin's egg blue convertible.

Then came the Great Depression. In the early 1930s George realized that his son John was destined to become a priest. The family went without pleasures to pay for John's education at St. Ignatius High School in Cleveland, John Carroll College, and St. Mary Seminary. John J. Schwartz was ordained a priest of the Diocese of Cleveland on May 31, 1941. John has the honor of being Sheffield's first native-born priest. George lived to see this proud event, but died the next year. Frances married Rudy Blaha on August 31, 1932 and they continued to operate the family farm.

Frances and Rudy had one child, Jean, born on February 6, 1934. Jean attended nearby St. Teresa School through the eighth grade and graduated from Lorain Catholic High School. She completed training as a nurse at St. Joseph Hospital in Lorain. On November 4, 1961, she married widower Fred "Jake" Ackerman. Jake's first wife, Alice Gilbert, had died a few years earlier leaving him with four young children to raise (Harold born in 1949, Suzanne in 1952, Max in 1956, and Larry in 1958). Jean and Jake went on to have seven children of their own (Barbara born in 1962, Ann in 1964, Paul in 1965, Rudy in 1967, John in 1968, Frances in 1970, and Daniel in 1973). With the death of Rudy Blaha in 1978, the Ackerman Family took on the management of the family farm. In 1991, Jake passed away, leaving Jean and her children to carry on the tradition.

Ackerman farmhouse, built in 1860



Jean Ackerman watering her hogs



Apple butter time at the Ackerman Farm

