William and Jean Bonnett Farm
Lorain County

This family-run farm was founded by David Bonnett, Sr., a Huguenot who came from France to America to find religious freedom. He bought 10 acres of land on Feb. 2, 1860 in Lorain County. From that acreage, his son, David Bonnett, Jr.; his grandson, Walter Bonnett and his great-grandson and current owner, William John Bonnett, have expanded into a 204 acre family cash grain and dairy operation.

While not much is known about David Bonnett, Sr., his son was very active in the farm community. David Sr. built the barn and smokehouse, which remain on the farm today but worked off the farm. His son built a house in 1915, which serves as the Bonnett home today.

He also helped found the local farm cooperative, then known as the Kipton Elevator, which is still in business today as Sunrise Co-op. He purchased six parcels of land between 1865 and 1901 and added these to the farm operation.

The farm has a long history of soil conservation, dating back to Walterís time when grass waterways and other soil conserving practices were instituted. The farm was selected Conservation Farm of the Year for Lorain County in 1984.

Born and raised on the farm, William expanded the dairy operation when he took over the farm in the late 1950s. He added a milkhouse in 1962, a pipeline milking system, and bunk feeders. When he married Jean in 1964, she didnít have any farm background although she admits she learned quickly.

They have four sons, Mike, Matt, Mark and David. Mike manages the 35 cow dairy herd for the family operation. All four were active in 4-H; both Jean and William have been 4-H advisors. Jean serves on the county 4-H committee and is a 17 year advisor for the Firelands Farmers 4-H Club. She has been a school bus driver for more than 20 years while William has served as township trustee for several years.

The Bonnett dairy farm is one of only four dairies left in Henrietta Township as Lorain County becomes more populated.

Biography provided by Tim Reeves of Ohio's Country Journal.

Rohrer Farms
David and Paul Rohrer
Wayne County

The Rohrer Family Farm was established on Feb. 4, 1861 when Jonathon Smucker purchased 117 acres of land in Green Township, Wayne County. Smucker was born and raised in the area and purchased the land to start his own farm and family. He built a house and barn while serving as pastor for the Oak Grove Mennonite Church and also farming on the side. His son, Amos and his wife Mattie, took over the farm in 1879. One of their four children, Emma, married David Rohrer and took over the farm operation when Amos passed away in 1935. They added 220 acres of land and built several additional buildings and began raising potatoes which is a part of the family farm operation which continues today. Their son, Milton and his wife, Ella, moved onto the farm in 1939. They farmed on the shares with David and eventually purchased the farm in 1944.

Since then, the family has added an additional 500 acres of farmland and also began building the family's dairy operation. The farm was incorporated in 1966 so the farm would remain in the family. Two sons, Paul and David, and their families, operate the farm today which includes the 200 cow dairy and an 1,100 acre cash grain operation which includes 200 acres of potatoes.

The original barn built by Jonathon Smucker remains today and is used for dairy cattle. The house also built by Smucker is home for the Paul Rohrer family.

The family is active in the Mennonite Church; Paul is Sunday school superintendent and he and Paul teach Sunday school classes regularly. Paul and his wife, Alta, have served in foreign ministries for their church. They spent 2 1/2 years in Bolivia as part of the church's Heifer International Project teaching how to raise better livestock and also spent a year in Mongolia for an agricultural-related ministry. Family members are also active in Ruritan, Farm Bureau, the Gideon Bible Society and the Wayne County Historical Society. Paul has served as president of the Green Local School District, and David has served for several years on the board of supervisors for the Wayne County Soil and Water Conservation District.

The Rohrer farm features many soil conservation and water quality preservation projects. Milton was one of the earliest promoters of soil conservation in his area, having instituted soil-saving methods before WW II. David and Velda are also former 4-H advisors.

Even though she is "retired" from active farm work, Ella continues to promote farming and agriculture. She has co-hosted more than 20 of the "Today in Cleveland" television shows on Channel 3 in Cleveland, using these to promote Wayne County agriculture and farms. A very active senior citizen, Ella said it is the job of everyone involved in agriculture to tell the truth and present the facts about what it's like to farm, regardless of age.

Biography provided by Tim Reeves of Ohio's Country Journal.

Neff Farms
Vernon Neff
Auglaize County

Dating back to 1850, when Lewis Zerkel traveled from Champaign County to purchase newly opened land in northwest Ohio, the Neff Farm is one of the oldest continuing family farms in Auglaize County. Ohio had granted the U. S. government a tract of some 500,000 acres for construction of the Miami-Erie Canal. After this was built, the land not used by the federal government was opened up for homesteaders such as Zerkel.

Zerkel purchased 80 acres of land on March 30, 1850 for $160.80 and began clearing the land for farming. His brother, Jonathon, bought land across the road and also began farming. When Jonathon died in 1860, his daughter, Abila was only seven years old. She went to live with Lewis and grew up with his family, eventually marrying John Neff and the two of them taking over farm ownership in 1891. Their son, Alva and his wife Bessie, assumed ownership in 1930. Their son, Vernon, and his wife Margery, took over ownership in 1968.

In 1983, the farm was incorporated into Neff Farms with principal shareholders being Vernon and Margery Neff, their son William, daughter Marsha Neff Baker, and family members William Page Baker, Christian Neff and Shannon Neff.

Lewis Zerkel built in 1868 the main house used by Vernon and Margery today. It features hand-hewn timbers cut from trees on the farm. The main barn was built shortly after this, and is still used today for equipment storage.

An oil boom which hit this area of Auglaize County in the 1890s, and allowed the farm to produce 17 wells, was an important part of the farm's heritage.

"The money from that oil enabled the family to make improvements on the farm and do some things which many other farms weren't able to do back then, including adding more land. It also greatly helped John and Abila raise their family of 11 children," Vernon said.

Today, the farm operation encompasses nearly 840 acres of corn, soybeans and wheat.

Vernon, born in 1922, has lived on the farm all his life, having gone from horse-drawn plows to computerized combines.

Vernon worked in a local foundry to make enough money to buy the family farm. He started milking cows, farming the home farm on shares and working in the factory. He eventually quit the off-farm work and started totally farming. He has 45 acres of land he has rented for 45 years but the rest of the farmland is totally owned. He and son Bill run the farm.

Biography provided by Tim Reeves of Ohio's Country Journal.

Rymers Family Farm
Tom and Gretchen Rymers
Ottawa County

When Ezekial Rice paddled across Lake Erie from Buffalo to Sandusky by canoe in the early part of the 19th century, he was looking for a permanent home for his family. When he bought 150 acres of farmland, he established a farm ownership which has lasted more than 172 years and makes the Rymers Family Farm the oldest farm in Ottawa County.

Current owners and operators, Tom and wife Gretchen Rymers, represent the fifth generation of Rymers' family members to farm this land. Their four sons - David, Steven, James and Jonathon - represent the sixth generation of farmers.

The current farmhouse was built in 1869 and serves as home for Tom's parents, Charles and Lois Rymers. It replaced a wooden frame house which had replaced the original log cabin built by Ezekial Rice. Henry Rymers built the brick house after he returned from duty during the Civil War.

Although it was partially destroyed by a windstorm in 1975, roughly one third of the original structure, including the sandstone foundation, hand-hewn beams and three walls, still remain. It housed livestock until 1985.

For several years, the family did not actively farm the land. Charles lived in town, taught school and rented the land on shares with a neighbor, Howard James. Charles' son, Tom, wanted to learn to farm, though, so James hired him and taught Tom how to farm. Charles' father, Robert, died while Charles was a sophomore in high school. Although Robert was actively farming, Charles wasn’t able to continue the farming operation at that time because of health problems and economic constraints, so the farm was rented and Charles became a teacher.

Although not raised on the farm, Tom had always wanted to strengthen the family's farm ties. He literally started farming from scratch. He started by purchasing five feeder pigs for $12 per head, feeding them out and selling them. He bought more, raised these and kept expanding, raising hogs for 20 years until last December when he sold his last pigs.

Today, Tom and Gretchen farm more than 200 acres of corn and soybeans, have a complete line of farm equipment, which they have purchased on their own, and have a 12,000 bushel grain storage setup on the farm.

Besides working to build a farm operation, which is both profitable yet also could serve as a foundation for their sons to continue, the Rymers have also preserved the heritage of their farm. Tom has done extensive work researching his forefathers, using local records as well as historical family records. These include farm account and business account record books kept by Ezekial Rice and Henry Rymers, who had married Ezekial's daughter, Mary. The family still

has the original deed for the farm signed by President James Monroe in 1824 and written on sheepskin parchment.

Biography provided by Tim Reeves of Ohio's Country Journal.

Kithcart Family Farm
Glenn and Edna Kithcart
Jefferson County

The Kithcart family ownership of 140 acres of land dates back to Oct. 19, 1808, when current owner Glenn Kithcart's great-great-great-grandfather, Ezekial Cole, purchased land in what would eventually become Wayne Township, Jefferson County, in the state of Ohio.

Ezekial paid $420.03 for the 140 acre homestead and began farming and raising a family. His son, Ezekial Cole, Jr. took over the farm in 1811. His daughter, Mary Ann, married Cunningham Kithcart and the family ownership came under the Kithcart name, although it's been known as the Cole-Kithcart farm.

The family has maintained a log beam hay mow which was part of a log barn built by Ezekial. The log mow is part of a newer barn built around the original structure. The original log cabin succumbed to age a couple years ago but the main house, which now serves as home for the Kithcart family, including two sons Glenn Lee and Carl, was built in 1898 and at one time featured a 50 ft. high cupola and a small porch. Because the farm sits at an elevation of 1,200 ft. family members could see as far away as Smithfield and Steubenville from the cupola.

The family has maintained extensive historical records, including farm account ledgers from as far back as 1880, when five bushels of wheat sold for $4.35, 98 pounds of beef sold for $4.90 and six bushels of potatoes sold for $2.15.

Today, the family raises cash grain and sells hay plus runs 60 head of feeder cattle. The farm received the Goodyear Soil Conservation award in 1981 and served as host for the Jefferson County Farm-City Tour in 1977. The family has been contour farming and strip cropping since 1936 and follows a crop rotation between corn and hay. They are active in Farm Bureau.

For many years, the family milked dairy cows but this phase of the operation was discontinued several years ago in favor of the beef operation. Today, the farm encompasses 70 acres of corn, 130 acres of hay, 80 head of feeder cattle and a herd of 20 beef cows. Only family labor is used to operate the farm.

Unlike most other farms in this area, the Kithcart farm has never been mined for coal and the family plans to keep it that way.

Glenn Lee and Carl represent the sixth generation to live and work the Kithcart Farm. The family has added two modern pole barns within the past ten years but has maintained the smaller log-mow barn, the barn built in 1898, which has its original slate roof and a carriage house built in 1898.

Biography provided by Tim Reeves of Ohio's Country Journal.

West View Farm
Chester and Dorotha McCormick
Morgan County

West View Farm was established May 24, 1878 by Boyd McCormick. His parents had moved to the area in 1840 and he was raised on the neighboring farm. The family still has the original deed for the farm signed by U.S. President John Quincy Adams and presented to the farm's first owner, Ebenezer Bankis, on June 4, 1825. This was most likely presented as part of the land grants given to veterans of the War of 1812.

Bankis sold the 164 acre farm in 1831 to Joseph Sigler for $470, and Boyd McCormick bought it in 1878 for $4,000. Present owner, Chester McCormick, is only the third generation to operate this family farm, Boyd McCormick being his grandfather.

The barn built by Joseph Sigler in 1860 is still used in the family's beef cow/calf operation to house cattle and equipment plus hay/straw storage. It still has its original slate roof although it has been resided with poplar siding and electric has been added.

Boyd McCormick was a schoolteacher before he bought the farm and was married. He quit teaching to become a farmer and raise his family. His son, Howard, took over the farm operation in 1916. Current owner, Chester, took over the farm in 1958.

An interesting sidelight: Chester's mother died in 1932 and Howard was left with five children to raise on his own. He didn't remarry but decided to raise his children and keep his family together with the aid of friends and relatives. In 1935, Howard was severely injured and nearly crippled in a logging accident on the farm. In the midst of the Great Depression, he was urged by neighbors and relatives to break up the family and send the five young children to other homes. He refused. With the assistance of the local granges, Howard nursed himself back to health, kept the family together and also persevered in keeping the farm operating.

When Chester returned from service in the U.S. Army, he bought the farm on land contract from Howard in 1954. He and Dorotha were married in 1957. They have two sons, Tom and Mike. Mike works for the local school system and also helps run the family's Simmental cow/calf and cash grain/hay operation.

The family has maintained active membership in the Grange. Howard was a 50 year member of the Neelyville Grange #299 and the Morgan County Pomona Grange #81.

Biography provided by Tim Reeves of Ohio's Country Journal.

Fred Habekost, Jr.
Preble County

When Fred Habekost, Jr. speaks of his family farm being "homegrown"; he's totally correct. Every building on the farm has been constructed of framing materials cut from trees raised on the farm. He is only the third generation to operate this farm, which has been in his family since 1889.

His grandfather, Henry Habekost, bought 80 acres of farmland in what was then Montgomery County on Oct. 22, 1889. Although born in Germany, Henry was not the oldest son in his family and thus stood little chance of inheriting his family's farm. His only option was joining the German army, so he found a sponsor and sailed to America, settling in the southwest part of Ohio.

He worked as a farmhand, saving enough money to buy a farm of his own. He paid $5,000 for the 80 acres, putting $1,667 as a down payment and financing the remaining $3,333 to be paid in two installment payments at 6% interest. He worked the farm the rest of his life, living to the age of 90, adding additional acreage and raising a family. He tore down a brick house and built the current homestead, the main barn, a tobacco barn and numerous other buildings, which still stand and are used today.

The house was constructed in 1910 and included an ultra-modern convenience for that time, an inside bathroom. Although electricity wasn't available yet, Henry knew it would be someday, and so the house was planned so electricity could be added. The house cost $5,000 to build but was big enough for two families to live in.

The barn was built four years earlier and is one of the largest in southwest Ohio. It is still used in the family's hog operation today.

Fred and wife Donna, and son Hank, operate the 200 acre cash grain and hog operation today. Fred Habekost, Sr. took over the farm in 1954 when Henry died and Fred Jr. took over in 1980. An additional 80 acre farm, which Fred and Donna own through Donna's family, will be a century farm in 1997.

Biography provided by Tim Reeves of Ohio's Country Journal.

Riddle Family Farm
Mary Riddle
Pickaway County

The Riddle Family Farm traces its roots back to Peter Young (Jung) who immigrated from Germany to the U.S. in the early part of the 19th century to escape the oppressive army draft laws. First settling in Pennsylvania, the Young family eventually moved to Ohio where John Young was born in 1831. Through the late 1840s and into the 1850s, John hired out as an itinerate farm worker in Ohio and Indiana, saving his money to return to his home area and eventually start farming on his own.

In 1868, he and his wife Lucinda Kauffelt, purchased a 340 acre farm from Lucinda's parents. That farm, plus an additional 190 acres, is today being farmed by Mary Riddle and members of her family. Her husband of 63 years, Frank, passed away in 1994.

The farm has been in the family for more than 128 years, and today it is a cash grain and beef cattle operation. Original buildings still in use today include a frame barn, a chicken house and a small barn used to stable the carriage horses. The house built by John Young in 1876, which serves as home for Mary Riddle, features oak hardwood floors and woodwork made from lumber cut on the farm.

John's son, Tenny, and his wife Loretta, took over the farm in 1915 when John died. At Tenny's death in 1955, the farm operation was split between two sons, Franklin and Russell. Franklin married Mary Scott in 1931 and they lived in Jefferson County for three years before moving to the farm in 1934. They had three children, John Franklin, Carol and Richard. The farm was incorporated in 1988 so it would always remain in the Riddle family.

The farm has been modernized with additional buildings but the historical significance has not been overlooked. The original log house, which John and Mary Elizabeth first lived, stood for more than 100 years on the farm. The family has been actively involved both in agriculture and rural activities. Franklin was a 4-H advisor for 30 years and all the children and grandchildren have been 4-H members. Franklin also was very active in the local Masons and Shrine organizations. He was a past master of the Mt. Sterling Lodge and was a 50 year Masonic Order member. Mary is a 50 year member of the Eastern Star and has served as organist for the United Church in Mt. Sterling for more than 26 years. She still plays piano and organ for the church, Eastern Star and Pythian Sisters at 86 years of age.

The family has maintained its Masonic association with Franklin's two sons, one son-in-law, three grandsons, one grandson-in-law and one nephew serving as masters of the Mt. Sterling Lodge.

Franklin also served for 14 years on the Darby Township School Board.

Biography provided by Tim Reeves of Ohio's Country Journal.

Colonel Charlie Gries
Biography

Colonel Charles E. (Charlie) Gries began building models as a young boy growing up on his family's farm in Iowa. After graduating from college with a B.A. in History, Charlie began his military career. For the next 26 years Charlie flew planes as a test and fighter pilot for the U.S. Air Force, accumulating more than 4,000 hours of flying time. During his Air Force career he received two Master's degrees, one in Counseling and Guidance and the other in Education. Upon retiring from the Air Force in 1987, Charlie had achieved full Colonel status. For the next few years he taught Management at Shenandoah University in Winchester, Virginia. In 1992, Charlie expanded his model-building hobby into a museum and craft shop called Old Barns of America. In 1993, Old Barns of America relocated in Yuma, Arizona.

Old Barns of America devotes itself to "preserving America's rural treasures in realistic miniatures." Charlie specializes in constructing and displaying custom order miniature models of anything "except something modern and urban." In May, Charlie traveled to Ohio from Yuma to interview regional winners in Ohio's Outstanding Century Farm Awards Program, and to begin a new project. For the summer months he has moved his workshop to Malabar Farm. Charlie has donated his considerable artistic and personal efforts, with more than 1,000 hours of his time in recreating miniature replicas of the winning 1996 Ohio's Outstanding Century Farm regional winners.

Charlie has taken special care to recreate the century farm winners' farms as accurately as possible. In creating the models, he has removed the farms from any specific moment in time in order to immortalize them. For instance, he might combine the original farmhouse, which no longer stands, with a barn built 50 years ago which still stands today. Charlie mostly builds his models without the assistance of photographs or blueprints. In each of the models he has constructed, Charlie has incorporated memorable events from the family's history. Each model also is partially built with material (a tile, shingle, stone, etc.) from the actual farm. Charlie visited each of the farms and interviewed family members for the project. Charlie informed each of the families that he was interested in farm history and was working on a research project. The families do not know that Charlie has created a model of their farm, and will be surprised by the gift during its presentation on August 7, 1996.