

THE TOBIAS ZIMMER BARN

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Introduction:

Thanks to the Beavercreek Historical Society, the significance of the Tobias-Zimmer Barn as a representation of early Beavercreek life was recognized and efforts were made to preserve this important piece of history by moving it to the historical Wartinger Park in 1996. Here it joined the historical log houses already there to be a visible representation of farming life in early Beavercreek. It is important that these structures are saved and protected so that future generations will be able to see some of the typical buildings that served the needs of the pioneers and early settlers in Beavercreek, and were critical to everyday survival.

Over the years, until it was lost in the May 2019 tornados, the Tobias-Zimmer Barn has been an integral part of the Living History Program operated by the Beavercreek Historical Society. This program provides fall and spring educational programming depicting early 1800's life in Beavercreek for third grade students in Beavercreek City Schools, including Saint Luke School, fulfilling a state curriculum requirement to learn Ohio history. In the last five years alone, the program has served over 3,100 students, and it is estimated that since its origin in 1994, it has reached many thousands of Beavercreek schoolchildren, teaching them about early gardening, farming and homemaking practices. An integral part of the Wartinger Park, the barn also served as a gathering place for community for activities such as ice cream socials and heritage events, as well as private events.

2022 Note: Thanks to insurance funding and the strong commitment of both the City of Beavercreek and the members of the Beavercreek Historical Society, a historically accurate replica of the barn was built in 2022.

History of the Tobias-Zimmer Barn

By J. Robert (Bob) Zimmer

PREFACE

When the Land Grants were issued by President James Madison in August 1814, Jesse Hunt acquired adjacent Sections 28, 29 and 34 in Beavercreek Township, which he divided into smaller parcels for resale. The three sections and the surrounding area was known as "The Big Woods." Years later, the Tobias-Zimmer farm would take shape within this acreage.

The new owners cleared the land of trees and rocks, used the logs to build small cabins and barns, and eventually drained the wet areas in order to farm the land. Excess logs were sold for lumber; however, each owner retained a portion of their wooded parcel to provide a continuous fuel supply and lumber for future building needs.

As the farmers prospered and farm machinery became available, they began to buy up the small parcels to make larger farms for more efficient grain, dairy and/or swine operations. The farm

owned by my father, Joseph Zimmer (now Zimmer Estates) was 162 acres made up of six parcels. My farm (now Stone Falls), where the Tobias-Zimmer Barn originally stood, was made up of three parcels. Both of these adjoining farms were owned by Peter Tobias at some time between 1839 and 1887.

It was during the acreage expansion period that log barns were replaced by mortised and pinned framed barns, such as the Tobias-Zimmer Barn. While the Tobias-Zimmer Barn, built in 1858, is a one-story saltbox design, some in the area were bank barns, with the lower level designed to house livestock and the upper level for storage of grain, hay, and machinery. The Zimmer barn on my father's property, probably the oldest bank barn in the neighborhood, was razed to make way for the development of Zimmer Estates in 1965.

All barns were built with a strong threshing floor. Threshing is the process of separating the edible part of grain from the chaff. In those early pioneer years, the sheaves of grain (mostly wheat—some oats and barley) were stored in the mow following a short curing time in the shock. The threshing machine was positioned on the barn floor with the rear barn doors open so that the leftover straw was blown on a pile in the barnyard. Some built wire covered frames in their barnyards which, when covered by straw, made a warm den for livestock during the winter months.

In later years, mow space, once reserved for unthreshed grain, was used for the storage of hay for growing dairy operations. This necessitated a change in process, which was accomplished by neighborhoods forming threshing rings. Standing grain was cut and shocked as usual, but the shocks were left standing in the fields. Threshing would begin around the middle of July at a designated member farm, with starting locations rotating yearly. The threshing machine and steam engine were set up outside by the barnyard fence. Each member came with his team of horses or mules, wagon, and an extra "hand" to haul the grain from the field to the machine. This was repeated from farm to farm until all members were "threshed out."

Threshing day at a member farm was a very busy time for the farm wives also. Feeding the hungry crew was a challenge that they collectively met head on. The meals, all cooked from scratch, along with homegrown canned and/or fresh vegetables and fruits, usually topped off with more than one dessert, are really something to remember. The threshing ring and those memorable meals remained in existence until the late 1930's (I was a teenager then) when field combines became the method of harvesting grain in this neighborhood.

A fine four-bay barn that stood south of our property on Hanes Road (on the Ferguson Farm) was later dismantled, and three bays rebuilt at Deal's Landscaping Services on Dayton-Xenia Rd. According to past residents, the construction on that barn had begun just before the Civil War, but was not completed until after the war when the men returned home.

Both the Tobias-Zimmer Barn (1858) and the house (1859) built by Peter Tobias withstood the ravages of time. They are typical examples of the structures built in the mid 1800's and are monuments to the early settlers responsible for building them.

PETER TOBIAS—EARLY SETTLER

By the time Peter and Mary Tobias, and their infant daughter, Catharine, arrived in Beavercreek Township in 1839, Jesse Hunt's land had been divided, subdivided, and would continue to be divided, into a maze of parcels without regard to section lines.

Peter made his first purchase of 41.84 acres from Henry and Ester Ankeny on November 1, 1839. This was a part of a parcel of 172 acres that Henry had bought from Nathaniel Pendleton in 1834, who had bought it from Horatio Phillips in 1822. It is unknown when it came into his possession from Jesse Hunt. This parcel contains the buildings and is one of the three parcels that made up my farm of 102 acres, which I sold in 1995 and it became Stone Falls.

Peter Tobias, born in Pennsylvania, and Mary (Durnbaugh), born in Maryland, had seven children. Following Catharine's birth in 1839, John was born in 1840, George in 1843, Jacob in 1845, Harriet in 1848, Mary Ann in 1849, and Rebecca in 1854.

He deeded one-half acre of his first purchase in the northeast corner of Section 34, on September 2, 1843, to the School Directors of District 10, Township of Beavercreek, Greene County, Ohio, for the purpose of building a school. The one-room school, known as Big Woods School, was erected without fronting any road. The neighborhood children walked down lanes and across fields to get there. All of the Tobias children attended the school, but only Catharine, Mary Ann, and Jacob grew to adulthood. Classes were held there through 1916. Jonas Koogler was in the first grade that year, and Miss Maxey was the teacher for all eight grades.

Pisgah Church, at the northwest corner of N. Fairfield and Kemp Roads (now Walgreens), was then converted to a school and was known as Sunnyside School. It served as the school for District 10 until the fall of 1932 when the centralized school (now called Main) was completed.

The one-half acre and the building was bought back from the School Board in 1918 by Todd Rank. Harry and Minnie Reese bought the farm in 1920. Their daughter, Catherine (Reese) Cyphers, remembered driving the horses for her father when he moved the original schoolhouse across the field, placed it next to the Tobias-Zimmer Barn, and converted it into a corncrib and tool shed. It was demolished by a windstorm in February 1956.

Several great-great-grandchildren of Peter and Mary Tobias remained in Beavercreek. Descended from Catharine: Miriam (Koogler) Hawker and family, Everett Koogler and family, and Wilbur Koogler and family. From Jacob: Susan Saddler and family. Daughter Mary Weaver and family relocated to Sacramento, CA. There are no known descendants of Mary Ann.

Peter's next purchase was 80 acres on March 27, 1847, which was split in later years. This was the first of subsequent acquisitions that resulted in his ownership of the 102 acres that eventually became Stone Falls, the acreage that became Zimmer Estates, and 85.25 acres that became The Woods development.

The Tobias-Zimmer barn is listed in the Greene Country Tax Records as being built in 1858 with an assessed value of \$375, and the house in 1859 with an assessed value of \$300. The frame is white oak, mortised and pinned. The original siding was vertical white pine with hand split walnut lap sided gable ends. All materials came from the farm except the white pine siding.

From the plain style of both the barn and the house, it is my opinion that the carpenters were Shakers or Shaker trained. There was a Shaker settlement in Beavercreek in the vicinity of Shakertown Road and many features, especially in the house, were identical to those found at the Pleasant Hill Shaker Village, Harrodsburg, Kentucky.

Prior to his accidental death in 1887, Peter had disposed of all his properties except the Tobias-Zimmer farmland. He had accomplished much more in his lifetime than most farmers of that era, but his success resulted in a spirited fight among his survivors.

FATAL ACCIDENT AND THE LAWSUIT

By the 1880's, Peter Tobias was considered a very successful and prominent farmer in Beavercreek Township. Not only had he acquired land, given land for a school, replaced log structures with modern buildings, but also had helped his two daughters and young grandson get started on their own.

The following is the *Xenia Daily Gazette* newspaper account of the tragic accident that happened on October 4, 1887:

“The Bee Line train which left Springfield yesterday morning at 7:35 for Dayton killed an old man named Peter Tobias near Harries Station, which is a few miles from Dayton.

It was another case where a farmer foolishly attempted to drive over a railroad track when he could see the train coming. Tobias was in a buggy, driving east. The location of the track is such that when he was driving east he could see the train, but when driving west, buildings prevent a train from being seen. The crossing is on the outskirts of Harries and the train does not stop at the station. The farmer whipped up his horse, but failed to get across in time, as the engine struck his buggy. The train was going at the rate of forty miles and hour, and it knocked the buggy to splinters, the spoke of one wheel being found nearly 300 yards away. The horse escaped without injury and ran away. The train backed to where the accident occurred and the man was found to be dead. He was taken to Harries Station, which was not far off, and left there. Both legs were broken, but the immediate cause of death was from a buggy spring being driven into his brain, killing him instantly. It required the strength of two men to pull it out. He was identified as Peter Tobias, a farmer, living near Fairfield, Greene county. He was evidently a wealthy and respected man for he was well dressed, had a fine gold watch and \$60 in money on his person.”

The survivors that stood to share his estate were the widow, Mary, daughters Catharine and Mary Ann, and Edward, a grandson. Catharine had married Martin Koogler in 1860 and later in 1873 became the owner of the land that eventually became Zimmer Estates. Mary Ann married Rueben Miller and they became the owners of the farm to the north of our farm (now the site of the Hindu Temple). Edward was the son of Jacob, the only son of Peter Tobias that had grown to adulthood. Jacob married Rebecca Cosler and had passed away in 1873 at age 28. Samuel Cosler

was appointed Edward's guardian. Catharine, Mary Ann, and Edward had all received gifts of land and/or money from Peter prior to the accident.

Catharine filed suit against the rest of the family to make sure that the gifts given before Peter's death were equal and that she would receive her one-third of the farm. Peter and Mary had given by cash, notes, mortgages or land gifts: \$6,300 to Catharine, \$5,764 to Mary Ann, and \$5,255 to Edward.

The lawsuit lasted over two years and was settled by the court ordering the administrator to pay out of the money at hand in order to equalize the amounts received by each heir: \$1,108.20 to Edward (through his guardian), and \$600 to Mary Ann; and that the farm be sold at a sheriff's auction. It was purchased by Rueben and Mary Ann Miller, subject to a 33.34 acre lifetime dower for the widow Mary, for \$4,029.80. Catharine and Edward each received one-third of the net proceeds. Each of the three ended up with approximately \$7,650 plus any personal property that may have been divided. This totals \$22,950, which if converted to today's dollars would equal about \$661,134.

A search of the 1840 Greene County tax records revealed that Peter was levied a tax of 96 cents on his personal property consisting of a team of horses valued at \$80 and one cow valued at \$8. Through the years, in addition to acquiring additional land, he had built the barn, house, smokehouse, woodshed, small cow stable, hog pen, and chicken coop. To have accomplished so much from 1840-1887 is nothing less than phenomenal.

THOSE WHO FOLLOWED

Rueben and Mary Ann (Tobias) Miller were the highest bidders at the sheriff's sale of the Tobias-Zimmer farm held on June 29, 1889, which had been ordered by the court to settle the estate. Peter's widow, Mary, had a lifetime dower on the 33.34 acres which contained the buildings. She passed away in 1900 at age 90 and was no doubt cared for by either Catharine or Mary Ann for some time previous to her death, during which time the farm was rented to others. Jonas Koogler told me that his parents lived here for several years before moving in 1896 to Sam Hower's farm, part of which is now Cortez Estates, and the rest being the land at the northeast corner of N. Fairfield and Kemp Roads, which is currently the site of Milano's and other businesses along N. Fairfield, including Premier Health on Lakeview Drive. Bob Cummings, grandfather of Carrie Swigart Beck, lived here on the farm from 1900 to about 1920.

Rueben and Mary Ann sold the farm to Robert Albers and Harvey Dressler in June 1917 and several months later they sold it to Todd Rank, a local contractor. Rank sold the farm to Harry J. and Minnie Reese on February 16, 1920.

Harry Reese passed away and the farm was again sold at sheriff's sale in 1923 and was purchased by Victor C. (known as Clyde) and Clara M. Batdorf. This was the third time that the farm, or part of it, was sold in this manner. The first time was in 1882 following the death of John C. Harshman, who owned a lot of acreage, part of which Peter Tobias purchased in order to square up the Tobias-Zimmer farm with the adjacent Zimmer Estates farm. Clyde Batdorf passed away in 1938 and the farm went to Clara.

Batdorf's eldest son, Paul, started raising and selling turkeys at the farm in 1931. The venture was so successful that he kept increasing the number raised each year and also started a turkey hatchery in 1937 when electricity was extended to our neighborhood. By 1943, he was raising 5,000 yearly and needed more acreage. He purchased a much larger farm in the Troy area where he continued to expand. There he raised 25,000 yearly and the incubator capacity was 60,000 eggs. Clara moved there also and the farm was rented to Omer and Mabel Darding. The next occupants were Everett and Winnie Koogler.

Paul Batdorf was responsible for starting my father, Joseph Zimmer, in the business with baby turkeys (poults) from his hatchery. Dad started the Zimmer Turkey Farm, adjacent on Kemp Rd., in 1941 with 150, and by 1946 had increased the number to 4,000 yearly. The poults were started in brooder houses and put out on a range at about ten weeks of age. Shelters, feeders, and waterers were portable so that they could be moved weekly to provide a clean spot for feeding and roosting. The days before Thanksgiving and Christmas were very busy ones. Several neighbors were hired for the dressing operations and customers picked up their fresh dressed-to-order turkeys at the farm. Dad retired from the turkey business in 1958.

THE ZIMMER YEARS

Clara Batdorf sold the farm to me on March 7, 1950, but rental arrangements had already been made for the year, so I didn't get possession of the buildings until 1951. I spent that spring and summer putting in the plumbing for a bathroom and making other much-needed repairs to the house. Agnes Hemmelgarn and I were married in August 1951 and moved into the house. We raised 1,000 turkeys in 1953, but eventually found it was too much work in addition to managing my dad's turkey operations, milking cows, and raising around 200 hogs yearly.

Our first child, Elizabeth, was born in July, 1955, followed by Mary, Jay, Julie, and Bob. Things were well under control with the dairy and hog operations on our farm, and the turkey business at Dad's, until September 1955 when I fell off the house roof and suffered a broken neck. That misfortune was responsible for bringing about drastic changes in the farming operations.

AFTER THE FALL

I fell off the house roof in September 1955, suffering a broken neck and internal injuries. I was confined at Miami Valley Hospital in traction for nine weeks and wore a body brace for six months after that. In the meantime, my wife and father managed to keep things going. They sold the Ayrshire dairy herd, which I had started while still in high school, with animals purchased from The Ohio State University herd. About 100 hogs were marketed, but the brood sows were kept and I continued the swine operation until 1965. The neighbors banded together to harvest the corn, for which we were so grateful.

Since I was unable to do strenuous work for quite a while, I applied for a desk job and was hired by the Dayton Power and Light Company. I worked there until 1982, retiring as a manager of Receipts and Customer Contact. Bill Shawhan, a Beavercreek farmer, agreed to farm my land on

a sharecropping basis. We shook hands on the deal and he farmed the place until he retired in 1983. Another handshake was made, this time with his son, Tom, who continued the farming.

The three-year rotation of corn, wheat, and clover was discontinued when Bill took over. Internal fences were removed, and only corn and soybeans were raised. Some of the barn was converted for storage of ear corn. Corn was harvested in the ear and stored in corncribs until the mid-1960's when the Shawhan's began harvesting with a self-propelled combine that shelled corn in the field, and the corn was no longer stored at the farm.

Changes were again made in the barn in 1970, when our eldest son, Jay, later joined by siblings Julie and Bob, started raising steers for 4H projects. The steer projects were later dropped in favor of raising registered Ayrshire dairy heifers for resale as two-year-olds. They started out with just one heifer each but soon were raising more than project animals. We were very selective, only buying calves sired by proven sires and from dams with well above average milk production records. In addition to showing the animals at the Greene County Fair, they also showed at district, state, and national shows in both 4H and open classes.

From 1970 to 1982, they had seven animals that were nominated for Junior All American, and one that was elected Junior All American. Some were sold privately, but most were sold in state and national sales, and many times their entry topped the sale. One heifer, sold at the Indiana National Sale, was purchased by a breeder in Maine, and went on to be named Junior Champion at the Eastern States Exposition. Jay was named Outstanding National Ayrshire Boy in 1976. The barn served a variety of needs down through the years. It ended in 1982 when the last Ayrshire heifer was sold.

We sold the farm to Oberer Land Developers in 1995 and it soon became the Stone Falls development. We retained the Tobias-Zimmer house and barn, and two acres. I sold the house and moved to Kettering in 2011. The house is designated a Beavercreek Historical Landmark Structure and still stands within Stone Falls on its original site.

Owners of the land containing the Tobias-Zimmer Farm:

Purchase Date	Purchaser	Years Owned
August 3, 1814	Jesse Hunt	8
March 1, 1822	Heratio G. Phillips	12
May 17, 1834	Henry Ankeny	5
November 1, 1839	Peter Tobias (barn built 1858)	50
June 20, 1889	Rueben & Mary A Miller	28
June 14, 1917	Robert Albers & Harvey Dressler	5 months
October 15, 1917	Todd Rank	3
February 16, 1920	Harry J. & Minnie Reese	3
March 2, 1923	P. Clyde Batdorf	14
1937	Clara M. Batdorf	13
March 7, 1950	J. Robert Zimmer	46