

5.0 Agriculture

5.1 Introduction

Early European settlers to the Cuyahoga Valley arrived as early as 1797 and primarily subsistence farmers. The Early Settlement and Pioneer Farming period lasted from 1797 to 1827 and is characterized by family farms with simple structures including single, double, and hall and parlor type houses (National Park Service [NPS] 1993: 3). These simple structures were often constructed of logs, utilized on a temporary basis, and often replaced as a farm grew prosperous. Corn was the most important crop during this period and livestock was primarily pigs. Farmers also cultivated oats, potatoes, tobacco, onions, turnips, cabbages, and apple trees. Outbuildings included the English or three-bay barn, which consisted of a double crib separated by a central aisle (NPS 1993: 7).

The Ohio and Erie Canal was completed to Cleveland in 1827 and allowed farmers to more readily access markets (Grismer 1952: 49). Wheat began to replace corn as the primary crop and a shift from pig livestock to cattle and dairy farming occurred. The canal also brought additional settlers and industry to Cuyahoga County. As farmers became more prosperous, many replaced their original farmhouses with larger wood frame homes reminiscent of their New England heritage. Style elements, including Greek Revival, were common in the new farmhouses. The raised bank barn, which combined crop storage and animal shelter into a single building, grew popular in the nineteenth century (NPS 1993: 9).

In 1860, the United States Census showed an increase in staple crops throughout the western states, including Ohio (NPS 1987:10). Farming became even more profitable throughout Ohio with the advent of railroads, which provided even more access to market industries for farmers. Industrialization and modernization

followed the railroads and were considered cheaper, faster, and more dependable than the canal system, which was prone to freezing, flooding, and delays due to the seasons (Grismer 1952: 151-154). Cleveland became an industrial center based around the railroad system and many of those industries were focused on increasing farm productivity through changing technology. In 1841, the Cuyahoga County Agricultural Society was founded, and its overall aim was to aid the shift towards a more scientific farming (Ohio State Board of Agriculture 1899: 775). County fairs designed to showcase the best produce, increase exposure to new farming technology, provide experts on new farming techniques, and introduce new markets sprang up all over the country, including Ohio. Change from the traditional farming practices was slow and the Civil War provided the catalyst which allowed the more scientific farming improvements to take hold due to an increased reliance on technology to overcome a lack of labor (Lloyd et al. 1918: 14). Popular vernacular farmhouse styles included Queen Anne and Italianate with new barns, such as the Wisconsin Dairy Barn and gambrel roof barn. Silos were invented in Europe and began to be utilized in Ohio and across the Midwest as a means for storing fodder for livestock.

In 1913, the Ohio and Erie Canal flooded due to torrential rainfall, and to reduce the potential damage to cities, the majority of the locks and dams were destroyed (NPS 1987:11). However, several locks in Cuyahoga County do still exist and were listed on the NRHP in 1976, including Locks 37, 38, and 39. In addition, when the 4-mile stretch of the canal was listed on the NRHP in 1966, the three locks, an aqueduct, and two structures were identified as part of the canal. The canal was not rebuilt, and its destruction marked the end of the agricultural era in Cuyahoga County. Cleveland experienced a significant industrial boom in the early twentieth century and many farmers left their rural

farmsteads for higher wages in the city. In addition, stiffer competition from northwestern Ohio and the western plains states and the Great Depression of the 1930s combined to push farmers to look for better opportunities elsewhere.

Olmsted Township, in the southwest quadrant of Cuyahoga County, managed to retain many of its nineteenth century farmhouses due to its distance from Cleveland. The area relied on agriculture as its main industry and produced wheat, corn, oats, hay, potatoes, apples, peaches, grapes, and berries. Livestock including sheep, goats, cows, pigs, chickens, and turkeys were commonly raised. Greenhouses were built in the twentieth century to grow tomatoes and flowers. The number of greenhouses gave the township the reputation as “the largest greenhouse area in the country” (Olmsted Township 2017).

5.2 Mid-Century Cuyahoga Valley Agricultural Issues

Very few farms survived the increased competition in the 1920s and the Great Depression in the 1930s. However, demand for agricultural products increased during World War II due to the heightened need for produce to feed the soldiers fighting in Europe. A shortage in farm labor occurred due to farmers enlisting in the military and was supplemented by migrants from Mexico and the West Indies (Ohio History Central [OHC] 2017a). In addition, prisoners of war from Germany and Italy were also put into work farms. Local Ohioans joined the victory garden movement to supplement the increased demand for fresh food.

Following the end of World War II, the spread of suburbia characterized many areas surrounding large industrial cities, including Cleveland (OHC 2017a). Increased mobilization in advanced automobile technology and expanded interstate and road systems helped spread the suburbanization of the nation during the 1950s and 1960s. The

farms that did persist tended to become specialized and increased their mechanized equipment with twine binders, self-propelled combines, corn pickers, tractors, and other equipment. This technological shift towards gasoline engines required new building types to accommodate the equipment. Due to the flammable nature of gasoline, farmers needed to construct structures to accommodate the fumes and heat produced by the engines. The pole barn was patented in 1953 and consisted of corrugated sheet metal laid over a pressure timber frame (Shortridge 1999: 23-24). Later in the 1950s and 1960s, pole barns were also constructed with a steel frame. Metal contractors often constructed structures with steel roof trusses spanning 70 feet or more and creating long low barns and garages. The big wooden barns of the past became relics and were often torn down or converted to a new use (Shortridge 1999: 23-24).

During the mid-twentieth century, the majority of the agricultural industry was composed of the few existing farms from the nineteenth century. These farms were more indicative of the older farms containing mainly original, nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings supplemented with newer buildings, such as pole barns, metal frame stables, and other outbuildings. One such example, the Lyman Stearns Farm (also known as the Earl Gibbs Farm) in Parma, was listed on the NRHP in 1981 and began in 1855 (Foran 1980). The farm continued as a working farm until 1976. Another example on the NRHP, the Stebbens Farm in Brecksville began in the 1840s as a farmstead and was listed on the NRHP in 1996 with six contributing resources dating from 1830 to 1930 and one noncontributing ca. 1940s cabin (Winstel 1992).

Although the agricultural industry waned in the twentieth century, the Cuyahoga County Fair in Berea, which started in 1893, continues today. Focus of the fair has shifted from livestock, farm equipment, and produce to a more family-oriented carnival with rides, fireworks, and

games; however, it provides a reminder of the county's agricultural history.

5.3 Agriculture Conclusion and Survey Results

In the 1982 agricultural census, Cuyahoga County reported only 8,854 acres and 193 farms, which represented approximately 12 percent of the reported 1,589 farms in the 1950 census (Encyclopedia of Cleveland History [ECH] 2017a). Much of this decline was due to the spread of residential, commercial, industrial, and associated developments during the mid-century period.

During survey work, neither field team recorded any agricultural-related resources constructed during the mid-century period. Furthermore, the survey teams saw very few agricultural-related resources from any period across Cuyahoga County. The results of fieldwork do not mean that Cuyahoga County does not have any agricultural-related resources worthy of survey, but that further research and survey are needed to identify these resources. Any existing farmsteads in the county would be worthy of survey to better understand the area's agricultural history and each property's ability to survive massive development and other changes from the mid-twentieth century and later.



Figure 5-1. 1964 Cuyahoga County Fair scene (Cleveland Press Collection, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University)