

By Susan Fox

When James Riethman set out to document the history of his family farm located at 04974 Wuebker Rd., Minster, he found out that researching that information was easier than he thought it would be.

"When you go to the recorder's office at the county courthouse, they make it really simple," he said. "In 15 minutes, we had found the documentation of the farm's ownership from the time Henry Riethman bought it in 1851, to the latest acquisition of land."

Riethman said he knew his family's history, more or less, and he was interested to see what was officially recorded. Currently the farm is owned by James and his brother, Richard.

John Henry Riethman, known as Henry, came to Minster in 1851 and purchased 40 acres of farmland from Bernard Neuhaus for \$500. Although it is known that Henry's father, Johann Heinrich Riethman, lived in Germany (1778-1837), and didn't emigrate to America, exactly how Henry got here and when, remains lost in the past. It is recorded that he came to the Minster area from Butler

County.

"I like to think of him coming to Minster on a canal boat with his wife to start a family," said Riethman, "and maybe even sending hogs he raised on his farm here back to Cincinnati, on the canal boats, for processing...to 'Porkopolis,' as Cincinnati was known back then."

Henry died in 1869, and his 13-year-old son, Casper, acquired the family farm. He married Mary Schwegman, and then Agatha Plageman, who was the mother of Julius, the next owner of the Riethman farm. Julius was father to Elmer, who acquired the land, Jan. 2, 1962. The farm grew to 135 acres when Elmer added 110 acres in 1984. Elmer Riethman had married Mary Bertke and the couple had eight children, including James and Richard, the current owners of the farm.

The Riethmans presently own 497 acres, and they farm 256 additional acres, growing corn, soybeans, alfalfa and wheat. James Riethman has 80 head of Holstein dairy cows, and raises dairy beef and some hogs.

"My dad said grain had to walk off the farm to be worth

anything," he said. "I'm not so sure that's still true, given the recent price of pork, especially."

James Riethman considers himself fortunate to be able to be a full time farmer. "We grew up right here on this farm," said Riethman. "I worked right beside my father, and I always feel blessed to have had that experience. I know an awful lot of guys who would like to be able to farm full time for a living," he said. "and you will notice that my wife isn't able to be here, right now. She works full time for Preferred Insurance in Coldwater."

Riethman received a degree in agriscience from The Ohio State University in 1976. He said he was considering becoming a veterinarian, but he realized he would rather work with healthy animals, and raise crops than spend his life treating disease.

"I feel close to God when I am working in the fields, and with the animals," he said. "There's no other way to put it. I am a farmer."

Reithman and his wife Kathleen Link Riethman, have four children and Riethman would like think the farm will stay in

the family for another 150 years.

"The past is really very interesting, and gives us something to think about, but we can't do anything about it," he said. "The challenge is to keep the next generation interested, and, if we can, keep the farm in the family."

Riethman's research was in answer to a call from the Auglaize County Historical Society to recognize families which have continuously owned property in Auglaize County for 100 years or more. The Centennial Farms program honored 33 farms and one family home in March, 2003. The Riethman farm and a couple of others qualify as 150-year-old farms, and a special recognition of the 150-year-old establishments in Auglaize County is planned for this November, according to Barb Harrod of the Centennial Farms, Homes and Businesses Committee.

"We will be honoring Centennial Farms, Homes and Businesses again in ours."



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November, and we will have special awards for those establishments that can document 150 years," she said. "All families who qualify will be awarded a certificate, free of charge. Plaques will be available, too, and the awards ceremony will Nov. 2, 2003 at the Dicke Auditorium in New Bremen. Applications should be received by the Historical Society by Sept. 30." "I hope other families will look into their history, and the story of the land they live on," said Riethman. "I know there are other farms around here with as much family history as ours."