Yesteryears

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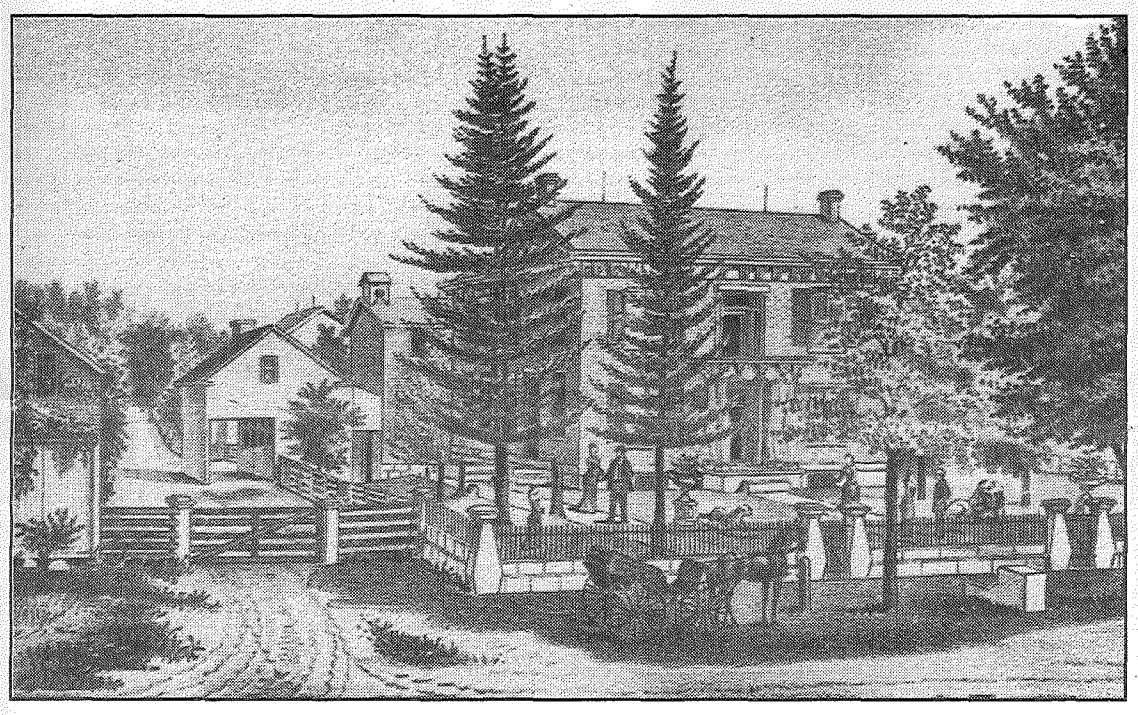
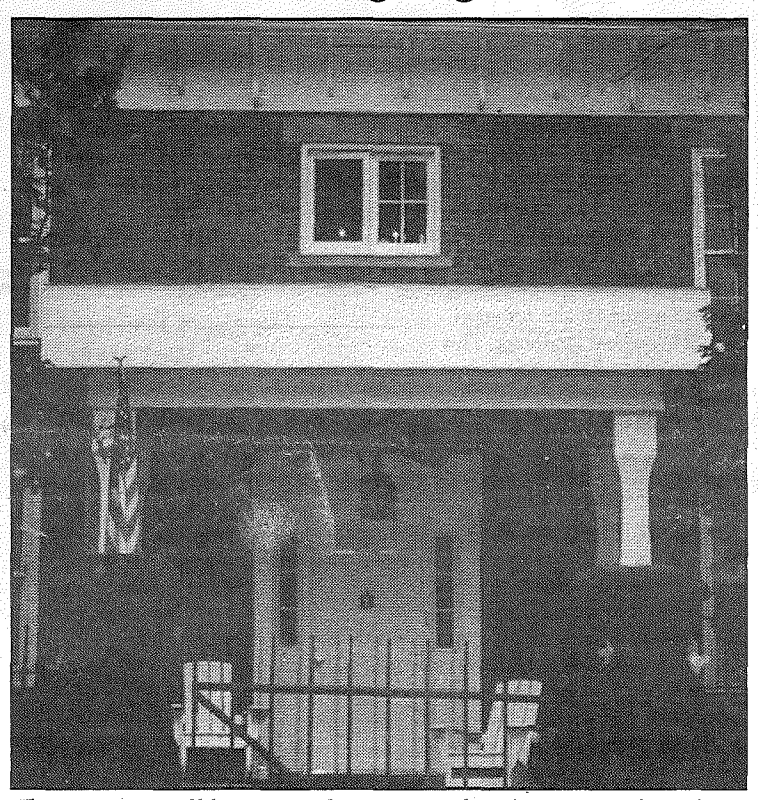
Bell farm showcases area's early years



Hiram Bell's farm situated along Route 517 is pictured in the 1879 Columbiana County history.



The 124-acre Bell homestead was named to the National Register of Historic Places in 2000.

By Lois Firestone

The 124-acre farmstead along state Route 517 is a prime sample of the evolution of farming in the area, stemming from the 1850s to the present.

The man who tilled the land and erected the house and outbuildings on the property, Hiram Bell, was the son of early settlers who migrated to Elk Run Township when Columbiana County was in its infancy.

Hiram was the great grandson of Thomas Buzby who was born in England, migrated to America and settled in Rancocas, Burlington County, N.J.

Thomas Buzby had five sons and a daughter. One of the boys, Isaac settled in Philadelphia. He married a Philadelphia girl, Martha Lippincott and they had two children. Isaac's first two wives died, but he and his third wife, Sarah Alberson raised his 10 youngsters.

Martha Buzby and Smith Bell met in Delaware, married and moved to Columbiana County in 1805. The couple made their home 21/2 miles southwest of East Fairfield and raised a family of 12 youngsters.

By 1879, six were still living - Sarah, Hiram, Smith, Mary, Robert and Martha - and all of them residing within seven miles of where they were born and raised.

Hiram married Martha Freed, the only daughter of George Freed and the granddaughter of Jacob Freed and Samuel Kemble of Columbiana County.

Martha and Hiram had two youngsters who died as infants and nine other children, Sydney, Lewis, Naomi, Rebecca, Elizabeth, Mulford, Anna, Clifton and Norman.

A successful businessman in his carpentry and building contractor business, Hiram erected several churches in the area as well as residential homes and businesses.

The sawmill on his farm was the source of lumber for residents, and the brick made in the kiln furnace on his property provided the facade for the home he built for Martha and the children and the houses he built for his home buyers.

The plan of the house reflects the traditional building forms that carpenters in Hiram's family brought with them from Pennsylvania to eastern Ohio in the early 19th century.

The front door with sidelights and the wide frieze and heavy cornice at the roof line are typical of the stylish Green Revival architecture popular in Ohio from the 1830s to 1850s.

Besides his successful businesses, Hiram was a community-minded man who served two terms as a county commissioner, beginning in 1878. He died in 1885.

The first permanent settler in Fairfield Township was Maryland native Mathias Lower who packed his bags in Westmoreland County, Pa. and headed to the valley of Bull Creek where he lived as a squatter. Later on he bought the northern part of Section 23 along with William Heald.

The first session of the Columbiana County Common Pleas court was held in Lower's log barn in 1802. The jury deliberated sitting on a log in the nearby woods.

Heald was an interesting character who, as a surveyor, determined boundaries in most of the county during the more than 60 years he lived in the county and practiced until 1850.

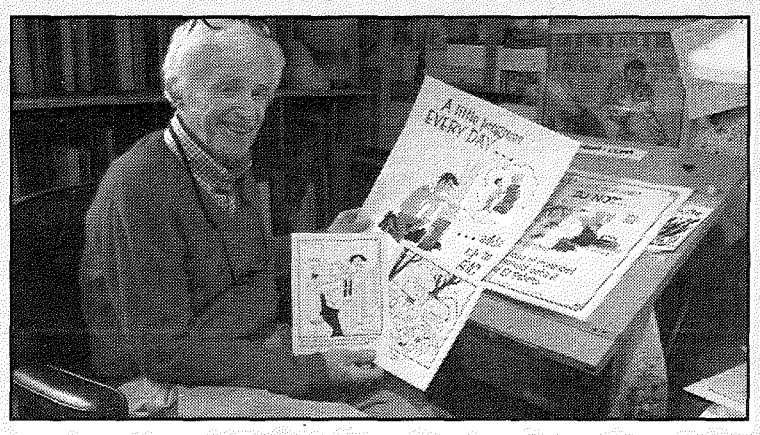
Heald came from Bucks and Chester counties in Pennsylvania in 1801 with two brothers, John and Nathan. The brothers joined a large settlement of Friends who pitched their tents in the southeastern sector of the township.

Later on he bought the land with Heald and also bought land on section 23; he built a log cabin where he and his wife raised his family of five children. John and Nathan lived in Elk Run.

Heald lived to be 100 years, eight months and 28 days, and retired to Cedar County, Iowa where he died on June 4, 1867.

Other early settlers were Samuel Oliphant, William Ferrall, John James, Isaac James, Joseph Bradfield and John Crozer, first township justice of the peace and Joshua Dixson who built the first brick house in the territory and platted Columbiana.

Ketchum's Dennis is 50



Cartoon artist Henry "Hank" Ketcham, creator of "Dennis the Menace," holds some panels from the comic strip in his studio in Carmel, Calif., March 21.

A little freckle-faced boy leans out from the back seat of a vintage car and taunts a policeman as his parents wait apprehensively for the traffic ticket. The caption reads: "You didn't catch us! We ran outa gas!"

It was March 12, 1951 — America's first glimpse of the blond, towheaded tornado known as "Dennis the Menace." Still "five-ana-half" on the comics pages, he celebrates 50 years of publication Monday.

The cartoon still runs in 1,000 newspapers, 48 countries and 19 languages, and "the only thing that has changed is the toys," creator Henry "Hank" Ketcham said as he recalled a lifetime of cartooning in an interview at his home studio.

Even now, Ketcham is surprised that his work is so popular. Other cartoonists also marvel at the loyalty of his readers.

"If Dennis the Menace fell out of his swing and went into a coma the world would probably stop," said Brian Walker, who writes "Hi and Lois" with his brother, Greg. "It just shows how much these characters are part of these people's lives.

Ketcham credits Dennis' innocence for the strip's longevity.

"He doesn't have any answers but a lot of questions and a lot of energy and you've got a lot of loyalty and a little bit of mischief in him, too, but that's the way kids are," Ketcham said.

Being a "menace" also is key, said Jim Davis, creator of "Garfield." "If Dennis were a perfect little boy, he wouldn't have lasted."

Ketcham, who turns 81 on March 14, put down his pencil nearly a decade ago. Today, he moves a little slower while clicking from image to image on his Web site, but his artistic eye is still sharp and critical while overseeing the day-to-day drawings faxed to his home.

A Seattle native, he dropped out of the University of Washington after his freshman year in 1938 to pursue his childhood dream of becoming a cartoonist.

He got his first job as an animator for Walter Lantz, the creator of "Woody Woodpecker," and then for Walt Disney, working on "Pinocchio," "Bambi," "Fantasia" and others.

While Dennis stayed in the suburbs, playing with Ruff the dog, his friends Joey and Margaret, and of course the crotchety neighbor Mr. Wilson, Ketcham traveled the world. For nearly 20 years, he kept the strip going while living in Geneva, Switzerland.

How did he stay in touch with American culture among the Swiss Alps?

"I'm a former kid, you see, and I have that great memory," said Ketcham, wearing black-rimmed glasses. "I had a Sears Roebuck catalogue, which I kept over there, and I have a great team of writers which kept supplying me with stuff."

His inspiration for the strip came from the real-life Dennis, his son from his first marriage.

Ketcham and Dennis' mother, Alice, separated and she died soon after in 1959 from a drug overdose. Ketcham took the then 12-year-old to Switzerland, but when the boy struggled with his studies there, he was sent to boarding school in Connecticut. Ketcham and his second wife, Jo Anne Stevens, remained in Europe.

Dennis went on to serve a 10-month tour of duty in Vietnam and returned suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. He has little contact with his father today (and has been estranged from his own daughter). Still, he's kept "Dennis the Menace" books, dolls and other cartoon paraphernalia displayed at his house.

"He's living in the East somewhere doing his own thing," Ketcham said. "That's just a chapter that was a short one that closed, which unfortunately happens in some families."

Ketcham returned to California in 1977 with Rolande, his third wife, and their two children.

Although his own family hardly fit the idyllic 1950s model, Ketcham has insisted that Dennis' neighborhood remain untouched, even as other cartoonists responded to wars, scandals and social upheaval.

"In the Dennis world, there's a swing in the back yard and the houses are close to each other with picket fences," Walker agreed. "This isn't a strip about a contemporary kid growing up in America today. It's about Hank Ketcham's daydream about childhood."

Walker, the son of "Beetle Bailey" and "Hi and Lois" creator Mort Walker, is putting together a 50th anniversary "Dennis the Menace" exhibit at the International Museum of Cartoon Art in Boca Raton, Fla., opening in May.

"I've been looking through a lot of old material, and it's got some philosophical, very profound religious undertones to it," Walker said. "I think Hank Ketcham has managed to do it in sort of a gentle type of way that makes people think a little."

The strip was born with the baby boomers and symbolizes the country's attitude following World War II, said Robert Thompson, a professor of media and popular culture at Syracuse University.

"Dennis the Menace was extroverted, hyperactive and powerful," he said. "America was feeling pretty big by having won the war and about to move into the space race. The cold war was a hyperactive medication to the nation's sense of power and entitlement and a dark but real sense of optimism, and it was causing a lot of trouble."

As times have changed, Ketcham's work hasn't gone unchallenged. He's received letters from women and feminist groups saying Mrs. Mitchell should work and Margaret should stop trying to groom Dennis to be her future boyfriend. Ketcham doesn't pay much attention.

"Dennis doesn't care much for girls at all and doesn't want to play tea party with them and will listen to them play the piano if there's enough cookies and Coke around, but other than that, Dennis is an outdoor boy," Ketcham said.

Ketcham stopped drawing the Sunday panels in the mid-1980s and gave up the weekday panels in 1994. His assistants, Marcus Hamilton and Ronald Ferdinand, handle the bulk of the work now.

That gave Ketcham time to pursue another art form. He painted oils and watercolor portraits for a decade before his ailing health forced him to stop. His work gained acclaim from critics and was showcased at several shows nationwide with collectors paying $1,000 to $10,000 for various pieces.

His large studio is filled with jazz musician prints, dark portraits of women's faces, cartoonists and golf scenes. He even painted the birthing center at a hospital in Monterey, which worked as physical and mental therapy after his own stint in the hospital.

"I've had people come up and thank me because they had to spend the night there, and I brightened up their day for a while. That got me painting," he said. "I have a bronze of Dennis and one is up at the hospital. His toe is almost glistening because the people rub it for good luck when they go in."

Dennis' panels also inspired several books of cartoons, a musical and a television series that ran from 1959 to '63. A playground in Monterey where Ketcham had his first studio is named after Dennis.

Other cartoonists consider him one of the true masters of the art.

"I can remember as a kid every Christmas there would be a nice 'Dennis the Menace' book in my stocking. It was one of my favorite presents," said Patrick McDonnell, who draws "Mutts." '

'Just look at the folds in his clothing. He has really studied and has a great eye. I think he draws the greatest elbows. Whenever I draw an elbow, I think of Hank Ketcham."

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