

Centennial Farms

(Editor's Note: This history of the local Centennial farms was compiled through the cooperation of Alexis Wappelhorst and Don Roth. TPc and the Morton Historical Society wish to thank both for their contribution.)

The farms which are featured in this Centennial section are some of the homesteads around the Morton area which have been in their respective families for over 100 years. Some of the buildings may have been changed and on some of the farms, original buildings still stand but in spite of the hardships the families have worked the land for generations and continue to do so.

Ackerman Farm

Born in Bavaria Dec. 25, 1813, Christian Ackerman migrated to the United States at the age of 24 by sailboat across the Atlantic Ocean. Ackerman originally set foot in New York before he started his travels westward. He started his trip on foot and by wagon train and settled on a farm in Ohio for approximately six months in order to earn enough money to continue moving west.

After leaving Ohio, Ackerman

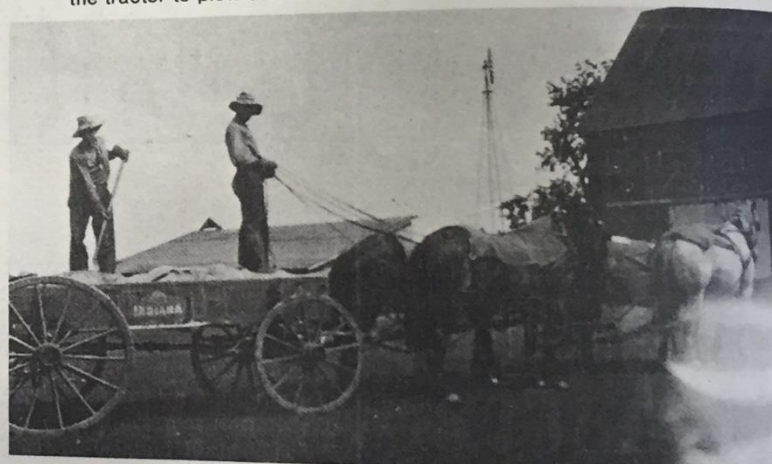
traveled by riverboat to Spring Bay, Illinois where he stayed to work for farmers. While in this area he married Anna Belsley who had also recently come from Europe. About two years after arriving in Spring Bay, Christian and Anna decided to move to a farm between Morton and Pekin so they could remain within driving distance of the Illinois River.

After living in the area for about 10 years, the Ackermans decided to buy their own farm, about one and one half miles straight north of Evans Corner, which was located approximately where Main Street now goes under Route I-74. Evans Corner had a general store, a post office, a library and one dwelling house. Aside from the convenience of having a place to buy supplies, the area was also desirable because of the running stream which was used to furnish water for livestock and cold water for domestic use. The woods around the area provided protection from cold north winds and furnished timber for logs, firewood and lumber.

It was here that Christian and Anna built a two room log cabin for their home. 40 acres were enclosed



J.C. Ackerman in 1909 using a Holt Caterpillar Tractor to plow. Caterpillar came out to the Ackerman farm to see how efficient this tractor would be in furnishing belt power for a threshing machine. They used the tractor to plow the Ackerman and Eli Staker land.



George Ackerman driving the horses to spread limestone sometime before 1920.



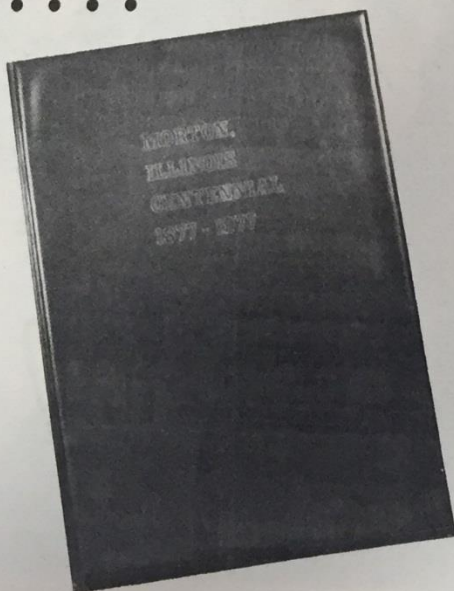
One of the earliest experimental Avery tractors. This demonstration was given on the Ackerman farm.

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with a rail fence to prevent the livestock from roaming and a large barn was built on the property to house the wheat after it was sown. When wheat was ready for harvesting it was cut with a scythe and carried to the large barn floor where horses were used to separate the kernels of wheat from the heads of grain which was accomplished by driving the horses in a circle over the grain. The straw was then removed and the wheat was tossed into the winds to have the wind separate the chaff from the grain.

By this time a more permanent dwelling was built since bricks were manufactured on the farm. Brick molds were filled with sloppy clay from the creek and after they were dry the bricks were removed from the molds and cured with green timber wood fires. Rough lumber was then used for the framework of the house and bricks were laid. Windows, window casings, doors and door casings were brought back from Chicago when a trip was made up to that area to haul the harvested wheat. This home was the dwelling of the Ackerman family which included two boys and five girls.

The Rapp brothers, who were potters by trade, came from Europe about the time that Christian Ackerman Jr. was ready to begin farming on his own. The Rapps started making pottery and drain tile in Morton. These tiles were used

to drain the prairie land which was swampy and could only grow prairie grass. As this land was drained farmers began to cultivate it and the ground proved to be more fertile than the timber lands. Christian Ackerman Sr. then bought land directly east of the present location of Lincoln School where he built a house and barn and tiled the land. His son, Christian Ackerman Jr. married Mary Gerber in 1868 and they moved to this farm.

In order to induce Rev. George Welk to come to Morton and become the minister and elder for the Apostolic Christian congregation in this area, the improved farm was sold to the Welks and Christian Ackerman Sr. purchased a farm in Sections 15 and 16 in 1871 from Nathaniel Brown. This land consisted of three tracts, one of which had originally been granted to Sally Brown in 1841, one to William Lomis in 1842 and one to Eli T. Messenger in 1841. This was accomplished by depositing a Certificate of Register of the Land Bank Office of Springfield with the Land Office of the United States showing that they had made full payment according to provisions of the Act of Congress of April 24, 1820. It was this act which made it possible for public land to be sold to individuals.

Of the original land bought by the Ackermans in 1871, 112 acres were



Threshing crew in the late 1920's on the Ingold farm. Left are George Oertle, Robert Bartelmay, John Ackerman and Elmer Knapp.

recognized as a Centennial Farm in 1972. Nathaniel Brown, who sold the land to the Ackermans raised horses and a barn which he built for his herd is still standing today (1977) although it has been altered slightly. Brown built a house along the trail that was used for travel between Metamora and Tremont. At that time the Tazewell County Court House was located in Tremont and Woodford County Court House was in Metamora. It was here that Christian Ackerman Jr. and his wife, Mary, moved with their infant son, John C., and started farming in 1872. They had a dairy herd and made butter and cheese which they sold. Aside from farming, Christian Ackerman Jr. did custom threshing

and corn shelling. Power was provided by eight horses hitched to a horse power beam which was connected to the machines with a tumbling rod.

In October 1884, as Christian Ackerman Jr. was standing on the platform of a Cider and Sorghum Mill in Morton, he was hit on the back of the head with a piece of steel when the steam engine furnishing power for the mill exploded. He was fatally injured and died three days later. Mrs. Ackerman was a widow with six children, the oldest of whom was John C., 15 years old and the youngest was, Chris, seven months old. The custom work was discontinued and the dairy herd and equipment were sold at a public sale.

This was from November 1977 Morton Centennial book that was out on the table during the 2016 reunion.