

The Rural Experience in southern
Erie County

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The census of 1870 indicates that there were 4,683 farms in Erie County. One of them, presently within the limits of the Borough of Edinboro, was purchased by George Seymour Goodell, an Edinboro merchant, in 1875. His son Todd farmed the land from his marriage in 1907 until his death in 1956. The property then passed to his daughters, Carrie and Margaret, who have preserved the property much as it was when they were growing up in the period between the two world wars. With their co-operation and with the aid of a substantial collection of old photographs of farming in the immediate area, John L. Marsh and Karl E. Nordberg, both on the faculty at Edinboro State College, have attempted to tell the story of agriculture's golden age in southern Erie County.

In Todd Goodell's youth, horses were both scarce and expensive. As a consequence, farmers used teams of oxen for many of the heavy farm chores. L.V. Kupper, a turn-of-the-century photographer, shows them pulling a walking plow in a field that is now part of the Edinboro State College campus. A boy guided them with a long stick even as the farmer started and stopped the animals by voice commands. Often they were put to pulling the hay wagon, and one of Kupper's most nostalgic views shows them waiting patiently as the farmer pitches hay from the wagon to a stack in the field. Yet another Kupper photograph captures these same animals after a trip to Edinboro's Keystone Mill. Particularly in evidence in the picture are their brass-tipped horn caps.

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The farmhouse into which Todd Goodell moved with his bride in 1907 had been built perhaps as early as the 1840's and used by a local physician as his surgery or office. Today it reflects a number of additions: the earliest dating from the 1870's; the latest, the glass-enclosed porch, from the 1950's. Within, Carrie and Margaret continue to use wood or coal burning stoves for heating and cooking that date from their parents' era. As well, they have preserved and added to the room that was their mother's especial pride, a country Victorian parlour. Its furnishings-- from Eastlake chairs to cheery whatnot stand to a bird dog print on the wall-- call to mind Edinboro's years as a dirt-street farm community.

Todd's especial world, of course, was centered around the barns, the earliest dating, in part, from the 1850's. When George Goodell purchased the property, they stood much closer to the house and the Waterford Road, but in 1885 he had them moved further from the house to their present locations and placed upon stone foundations. Commemorating the event is a cornerstone that captures the visitor's eye almost immediately. Within the upper story's interior, hand-hewn beams capture the viewer's attention as does the double-pronged hay fork, dating from the days when hay was stored loose in the mow. At ground level Todd Goodell stabled his three teams, and their harness is to be seen, just as he hung it for the final time early in the 1950's.

Literally hundreds of items, like Todd Goodell's McClellan saddle, remain in the barns. Many, of course, are scarcely recognizable, even to the farmer of today. Some, like the townships' first horse-drawn corn planter, have an historical interest. With a grant from The Public Committee for the Humanities in Pennsylvania, John Marsh and Karl Nordberg have spent the winter and spring photographing the farmhouse and the barns

(Rural Experience cont.)

together with their contents. The public is invited to see the results at a program to be held in the auditorium of Miller Learning Center at Edinboro State College beginning at 10 A.M. on July 25th. The day-long program looks not only at the Goodell farm but at the farm of today and of tomorrow in southern Erie County. Following an opportunity to visit area farms, the program concludes with an open house and display of old photographs in Edinboro's borough building. Those interested in attending are urged to contact the borough office by mail or phone for registration materials. The charge, including lunch, is \$6 per person.