

THE ACKERMAN CENTENNIAL FARM

Written by George Ackerman in the 1980s.

Christian Ackerman was born in Bavaria on Christmas Day in 1813. Bavaria bordered Germany and the inhabitants were almost all German speaking people. At the age of 24, he migrated to the United States. The long trip across the Atlantic Ocean was made by sailboat. After setting foot on American soil in the New York area, Christian soon started westward. He did this by traveling on foot and riding wagon trains. When he reached Ohio he stopped for six months to work on a farm to earn enough money to keep on going west.

After he left Ohio he traveled by riverboat on the Ohio and Illinois Rivers until he reached Spring Bay, Illinois. At Spring Bay he also worked for farmers in the area. While there he married Anna Belsley, an European girl who had recently arrived at Spring Bay. They both worked for farmers in the area. Approximately two years after coming to Spring Bay, Christian and Anna decided to move to a farm between Morton and Pekin. They wished to be on a farm within driving distance of the Illinois River.

After ten years of farming in the area Christian and Anna decided to buy and live on their own farm. The land they chose for their homesite was 1 1/2 miles straight north of Evans Corner which was located approximately where Main Street now goes under Route 1-74. Evans Corner had a general store, a Post Office, a library, and one dwelling house. This gave the Ackermans a place to buy supplies and a place where mail was brought by postal rider once a week to be picked up by

area residents. Some other attractions for this particular homesite were that there was a running stream to furnish water for livestock, there was a coldwater spring to furnish water for domestic use, and there was timber for logs, firewood, and lumber. The woods also protected them from cold north winds.

Here Christian and Anna built a two room log cabin for their home. Forty acres were enclosed with a rail fence so the livestock could be kept from roaming. A large barn was built and wheat was sowed. When the 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. This was done by driving 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 house was being built. Bricks were manufactured on the farm. Brick molds were filled with sloppy clay from the creek, and after the bricks were dried they were removed from the molds and were cured with green timber wood fires. Rough lumber from the timber was used for the framework of the house and bricks were laid. After the harvest a load of wheat was hauled to Chicago with oxen, windows and window casings and doors and door casings were purchased and brought back to the farm on the homeward trip. Soon the Ackerman's were living in the comforts of a brick home. Here the family of Ackerman's, father, mother, and seven children (two boys and five girls) lived until the children were grown.

At the time when the Ackerman's son, Christian Jr., was almost ready to farm on his own, the Rapp Brothers who were Potters by trade came from Europe and started making pottery and drain tile in Morton. These tile were used to drain the prairie lands which had been swampy and where nothing had grown except 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. now bought land directly east of the present location of the Lincoln School. He built a house and barn and tiled the land. His son, Christian, Jr. married Mary Gerber in 1868 and they moved onto this farm.

To induce Rev. George Welk to come to Morton and be Minister and Elder for the people of the Apostolic Christian Faith in this area, the improved farm was sold to the Welks, and Christian Ackerman, Sr. purchased a farm in Sections 15 & 16 from Nathaniel Brown in 1871. This land consisted on three tracts, one of which had originally been granted to Sally Brown in 1841. This was done 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 Lull payment according to provisions of the Act of Congress on the 24th of April, 1820. It was this Act that made it possible for public lands to be sold to individuals.

Of the original land bought by the Ackerman's in 1871, one hundred twelve acres were recognized as a Centennial Farm in 1972. Nathaniel Brown who sold the land to the Ackerman's raised horses, and a barn that he built for his horses is still standing today although it has been somewhat altered. He 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 the Woodford County Court-house in Metamora. It was here that Christian Ackerman, Jr. and Mary Ackerman moved with their infant, John C., and started farming in the year 1872. They had a dairy herd and made butter and cheese to sell. Besides farming Christian Ackerman, Jr. did custom threshing and corn shelling. Power was provided by eight horses hitched to a horse power beam connected to the machines with a tumbling rod.

In October of 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 his 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 left a widow with six children. John C. the oldest was 15 years old and Christian S. the youngest was 7 months old. The custom work was discontinued. The dairy herd and equipment were sold at a public sale, and with John C. the fifteen year old boy taking much responsibility general farming was continued.

John C. Ackerman married Eliza Welk on January 28, 1894 and they moved into the older house. A new house had been built 40 rods south, and Mrs. Mary Ackerman and three daughters and young son moved into the new house. John C. purchased the Ackerman farm from his mother in 1905, and with some other land that he had purchased from Horatio Crosby he was farming the Ackerman farm. In 1911 the big cement house still located on the farm was built, and the old house was moved to town. In the early 1920's eighty acres of land were purchased from Mr. & Mrs. John Gerber. The Gerber's had purchased the land

from the heirs of Uriah Crosby who had received title to it during Martin Van Buren 's administration as President.

The John C. Ackerman family lived and farmed here until 1928. The eight children attended a country school in the same district that their father and grandfather had attended. On this farm Belgian Horses, Shorthorn Cattle and market hogs were raised. Feeder cattle were also bought and fattened for the market.

In 1928 George, a son, was married to Corinne Knapp and they moved into the large farm house and took over the farming operation. John C., his wife, four daughters and a son, Sam moved into a new home on North Main Street in Morton. George and Corinne did the farming. Hogs were raised, feeder cattle were purchased and fattened and grain farming was done. Another forty acres were purchased from the Albert McClellan Estate. The farming operation was now 290 acres. When the Ackerman's son John returned from Army Service in 1959, George and Corinne moved into a home at 216 5. Louisiana Ave., and John and his wife Joann Rhoades Ackerman took over the farming operation and still live there and operate the farm.

In 1959 the State of Illinois purchased a right of way for Route I-74. This highway cut through the farm segregating some of the land from the main farm. Land that was one quarter of a mile from the homestead now had to be reached by driving 2 1/2 miles on public township roads with an access road from Tennessee Avenue to the land. Eighteen acres of land were purchased for the right of way purposes.

Ground for fill to be used between Bull Run Creek and Main Street was also purchased, and there is now a spring fed lake that serves as a private recreation spot for the Ackerman's. John and Joann have four children. Douglas is the oldest and he was born in Hawaii while John was doing Army Service there.

Farming this land has been most interesting and one wonders when this productive land will be pushed out of production by Industrial and Housing Development. Certainly the thought of this brings with it a feeling of regret.

I have tried to give a little history of Ackerman farming during the years 1838 to 1977. Much of the material for this was related to me by my father John C. Ackerman who received the information from his grandfather Christian Ackerman, Sr.