



Champaign County Historical Society and Museum
Est. 1934

July/August 2021

CHAMPAIGN CHRONICLES

Thank You!

Hello everyone and Happy Summer!

In my last address, I mentioned that we were very excited to host our 2nd Annual Antiques Appraisal Fair on May 19, 2021. We were able to have the event; we had a great turnout and many antiques and items came through the Museum doors and were appraised! We even had a local gentleman bring in a ukulele that was appraised for around \$4,000!!! I personally asked the gentleman if he knew how to play the ukulele and he told me “only the first four (4) strings Greg.”

All jokes aside, the event would not have been as successful if it were not for the dedicated appraisers, Museum staff, and many gracious volunteers that assisted throughout the night. We thank you all so very much. A special thanks to all four (4) Appraisers, Freshwater Farms for sponsoring the event, and our very own Robert Pollock and Sandy Gonzales for managing the event!

As always, our regular Board Meetings are the 4th Wednesday every month at 6:00 P.M.

Hope to see you all at the Museum this Summer.

Respectfully,

Gregory L. Harvey, Esq.

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*The banner picture above is a photograph of Fireworks at the Grimes Airport 2018. taken by local photographer Robert Ogden.

Upcoming Programs

Nancy Patzer: *A Light In The Sky*



Warren G. Grimes

On Sunday, July 25th at 2 pm Nancy Patzer will present a program on Warren Grimes, a member of The National Aviation Hall of Fame, at the Urbana Aviation Museum.

Warren G. Grimes, the inventor of the familiar red, green and white navigation lights still found on the wing tips and tails of modern aircraft, made his home in Urbana, Ohio and created an internationally known manufacturing company, Grimes Manufacturing. As businessman and community leader, Grimes provided jobs for thousands of local workers, built the Grimes Field airport on the north side of town.

From his humble beginnings in an orphanage near Dayton, and as day worker at Ford Motor Company, Grimes had the grit and ambition, not to mention ingenuity, to live the American Dream. Grimes served as mayor of Urbana and chairman of the State of Ohio Aviation Board. . This "Father of the Aircraft Lighting Industry" built airplane lighting that helped the U.S. and Allied Forces win World War II.

Grimes Manufacturing is now part of Honeywell International's Aerospace Division. Mr. Grimes passed away in 1975. In an effort to celebrate Mr. Grimes and his legacy, Mike Major, visual artist and sculptor, published a book on Grimes at Main Graphics, his design shop in downtown Urbana. With the help of writer Nancy Patzer, who grew up in Urbana and has written historical non-fiction throughout her writing career, the book *A Light in the Sky: A Biography of Warren G. Grimes and the History of Aviation Lighting*.

Nancy Patzer, a 1983 graduate of Urbana High School, currently resides in Columbus, Ohio. She has written a number of articles on Ohio history. She owns a marketing communications company, providing consulting services to the residential housing and healthcare industries. Ms.Patzer also dabbles in fiction and has twice received the Thurber Treat Award for Humorous Fiction by the Thurber House Literary Center.

1950 National Plowing Contest

On Sunday, August 15th, at 2:00 pm there will be a program on the 1950 National Plowing Contest that was held in Champaign County. There will be several presenters talking about their memories this event. The presenters will include; Howard Brust discussing the history of this event, members of the Dean Wilson family relating how the publicity from their father's success affected their family, Sue Evans Berkemeier covering the conservation project connected with the event, and finally, Sarah Finch will introduce Shirley "Payne" Prosser who was crowned the Queen of the Furrow of Champaign County in 1950.

Dean Wilson preparing for the plowing contest in 1950 after having won the competition the previous two years.



Judith Borst Smith Photography Exhibit



*John Weller house,
Millerstown, Ohio.*

There will be a new exhibit opening in mid-July focused on the photography of Judith Borst Smith. The photographs in this exhibit were taken in the late 1980s and were of various buildings and history of Champaign county that were being lost to time. They are black and white with a couple having accent colors added. These are a sampling of what you will see in this exhibit.



*Jr. O.U.A.M. Lodge
Hall, Mutual, Ohio.*

2021 Membership Picnic

On June 27th at 2 p.m. the membership gathered for a picnic under the trees! There were over 60 people in attendance and the weather co-operated making for a wonderful day! We would like to thank the volunteers who turned out to help set up and tear down for the event, Elton Cultice, Doug Cultice, Vince and Sandy Gonzalez, and Pam Bolton, we appreciate your help! We would also like to thank Amy Forest and her staff from In Good Taste for the fabulous meal they provided, and People's Bank for Sponsoring the event!



JOSEPH WING the ALFALFA KING

by Candy Gilliam with special thanks to Emily Wing Rozmus & Amy Wing Boeck



Joseph Wing taken July 3, 1911

When the Wing family moved to the Mechanicsburg area in the 1860's, Joseph Wing was 6 years old. His father William Wing was a strong self-made man who bought 100 acres, later named Woodland Farm. He was the first man in the area to have drainage on his land by using hollowed logs. His mother was a charming woman with a love of poetry and flowers. So with parents such as this, it's no wonder Joseph grew up to have a keen business sense with a love of nature and farming.

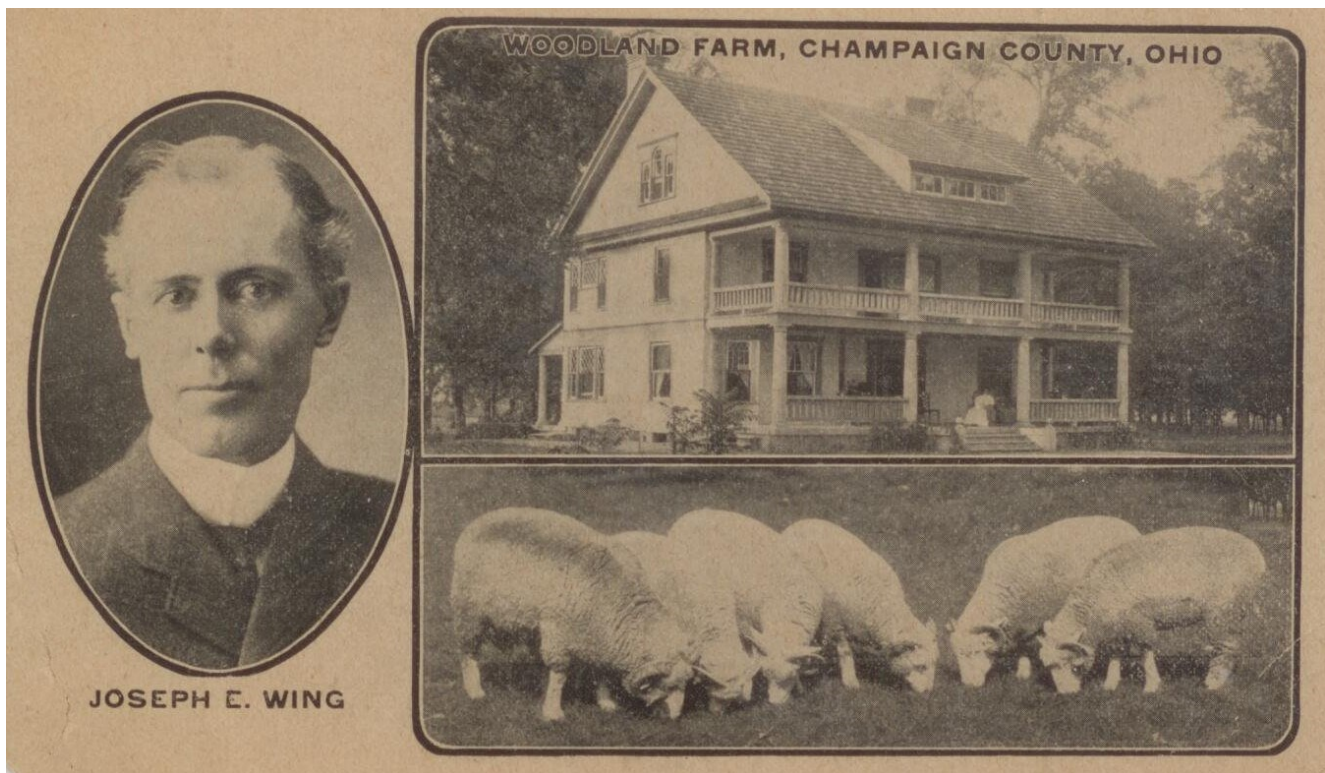
As a young man, Joseph Wing first went to New York for schooling, then went West for a time to visit relatives, as well as to find work. In 1886, he was working as a foreman on a cattle ranch in Utah located along the Green River. Eventually he became part owner of the ranch named Range Valley, and often wrote home telling of the beauty of the area, the difficulty of ranching, surviving forest fires, flash floods, and bragged over his health with how good he felt. It was while living at Range Valley that he became interested in alfalfa as a hay source for livestock.

Three cuttings of

this very heavy hay impressed him, and seeing the great possibilities of this crop, he sent seeds back home to his father in Mechanicsburg. But his father couldn't get the seeds to grow because the chickens kept eating the small sprouts. In 1889, at his father's request, Joe returned home and devised a plan to grow his alfalfa. He put an open bottomed barrel over the sprouts to keep out the pecking chickens, and soon Joe was growing the first crop of alfalfa east of the Mississippi on his farm! When a depression hit in the 1890's and Woodland Farm began suffering financially, Joseph and his two brothers were determined to make alfalfa successful. Joe dreamed of a good life for everyone on the farm and he felt alfalfa could help answer that dream. He began spreading the word to local farmers in Champaign County, then to farmers all over Ohio. Unfortunately, most farmers thought the Wing boys were "a little crazy" and laughed at the brothers. It took years to convince everyone that it was a real money crop as well as a great soil builder.



Joseph Wing taken while living in Utah

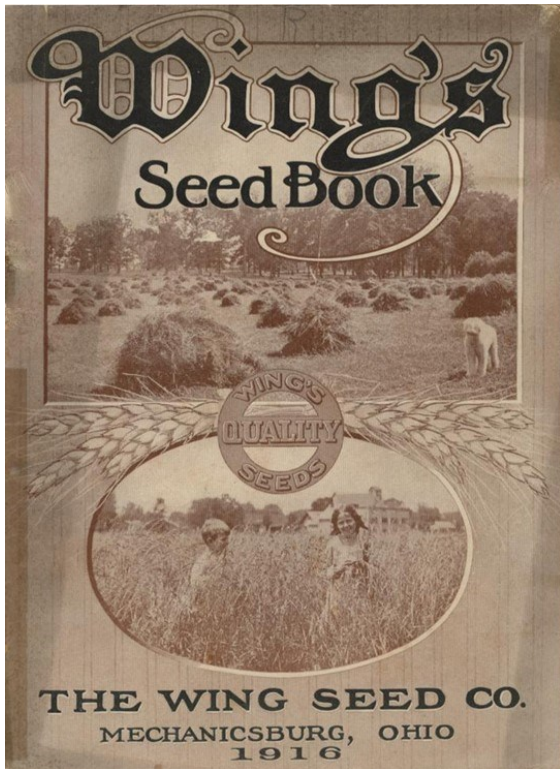


Woodland Farm, Champaign County

Joseph built a new barn on his property with an enormous haymow. Again, the neighbors laughed at him while wondering if the farm would ever produce enough hay to fill it. But Joe proved them all wrong and was given the nicknames 'The Alfalfa King' and 'Alfalfa Joe' because of his enthusiasm in growing alfalfa.

In addition to specializing in alfalfa, Joseph had a deep interest in raising Dorset Sheep, and by 1896, he had a thriving business at Woodland Farm in sheep stock. He served as recording secretary of the American Dorset Association. In 1900, Joe had 1200 head of sheep fed with his home-grown alfalfa and corn. The lambs were the best he had ever raised, and soon the farm was functioning at a profit again. About 1895, he became a staff correspondent of *The Breeders Gazette* magazine, writing articles on the care of sheep, and became one of the better experts on that breed for over 10 years. He also wrote articles for several farming papers, promoting agricultural development by answering questions about purchasing seeds, handling plants, and raising alfalfa and its benefits to farm livestock. Alfalfa Joe wrote profusely, and expressed his thoughts so clearly and worthwhile that his writings soon came to be considered a standard authority on many topics. About this time, he began traveling around the United States to observe other methods of growing alfalfa, as well as to promote his sheep. Eventually he traveled to other countries to gather new material for his articles. Joe always had his trusty Hammond typewriter with him and would type up his stories on the trains between his destinations. In 1900, he sailed to

JOSEPH WING the ALFALFA KING continued



Wing's Seed Book dated 1910

England to cover the International Livestock Show. And in 1910, President Taft asked Joseph to go to South America after Congress was demanding information on the cost of wool production in other countries. He investigated and reported on agricultural conditions in Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires and Patagonia. When Joseph arrived back in the United States in 1911, he went to Washington DC where he met with President Taft and was greatly impressed with how the President never treated him as a common farmer and seemed to value his opinions. President Taft put his arm around Joe and talked with him as equally as he would have any Senator. It was after that trip that Joe wrote a book titled *In Foreign Fields* (1913). Other books he wrote were *Sheep Farming in America* (1905), *Alfalfa in America* (1909), and *Meadows & Pastures* (1911). He wrote so often that it was only a matter of time before he was asked to speak at various gatherings. And for the next few years, he gave lectures on subjects connected with farming at well-known institutions and colleges all over the world. Alfalfa Joe was one of the most popular speakers, as he gave farmers insight into the newest technology and how to use it. His speeches glorified the benefits

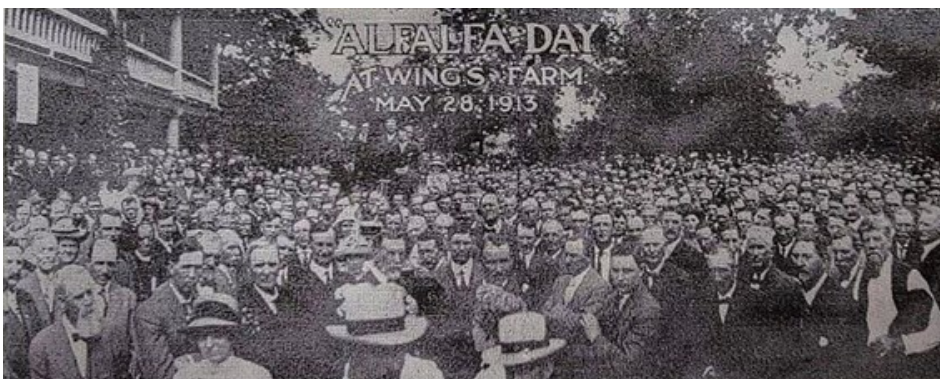
of alfalfa and the rewards of using this marvelous plant. When Alfalfa Joe spoke, everyone listened.

Back home in Mechanicsburg, Joseph married and began a family, raising three sons. And along with his two brothers, the families started the Wing Seed Company in 1906. They were first growing alfalfa on a limited scale, and decided to increase their alfalfa acreage to boost production. They partnered with the Mechanicsburg Elevator to store & weigh their seeds while the brothers tended to correspondence and billing. By 1915, their seed company expanded the original warehouse and office, and they were selling many types of vegetable seeds and flower bulbs on 125 acres while employing 50 people and 125 traveling salesmen. The Wing Seed Co. mailed four catalogs yearly to over 75,000 homes. One entire field along Route 29 was planted in peonies and when they bloomed in late May, people would come from miles around just to see this display of beauty.

On **May 28**, 1913, a grand event occurred at Woodland Farm. Joseph and his brothers, Willis and Charles, hosted the "Alfalfa Picnic" with over 3000 people arriving to visit, observe and listen to many guest speakers. A special train came from Columbus bringing professors and students of the Ohio State University, and hundreds of business men arrived from other states. The farm was beautifully decorated for the occasion, and every field was placarded with information on seed type and fertilizer for the open walking tours. Local boys were on hand to

discuss operations and pass out literature on the farm. Church ladies sold refreshments while the guests of honor gave their speeches from a hay wagon parked on the front yard. Mr. Allen of the International Harvester Company acted as Master of Ceremonies, Ohio Governor James Cox gave appeals for better living, and of course, Joe Wing told his story of Woodland Farm. It was on this day when it was announced that Joe was the new president of the recently formed Ohio Alfalfa Growers Association.

Joseph Wing's last public speech was in Piqua at the Ohio Alfalfa Growers Association in June of 1915. He had been ill for a while, and died shortly afterwards of pellagra, a vitamin deficiency, and is buried in Maple Grove Cemetery, Mechanicsburg, where his family surrounded his tombstone with his favorite flower, the bearded iris. Because he pioneered the use of alfalfa and for his strong advocacy to farming, a memorial was suggested and people from all over the world gave contributions in his honor to build a library. Joseph's son, William Wing, designed the building and in 1937, the Wing Memorial Library was opened in Mechanicsburg. Joseph Wing was a master of human nature, he knew the heart and soul of a farmer. His desire was to help humanity and make the world a more beautiful place. In 1968, he was posthumously inducted in the Ohio Agriculture Hall of Fame.



Wing Picnic Day May 28, 1913

Volunteers Needed

We are still looking for volunteers to be trained as docents for the museum. If you are interested please call the museum at 937-653-6721 and ask for Cheryl Ogden or email the museum at champhistmus@ctcn.net

Mission Statement

The Mission of the Society is to tell the Champaign County story and to administer the collection, preservation, and display of our county's artifacts, documents, and other historical resources.

Welcome New Members

Terry Bussa

James and Joni Holycross

Coverlink Insurance

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY
MUSEUM