

History of Sunset Hill Farm County Park

Colonel Murray: The Man Behind it All

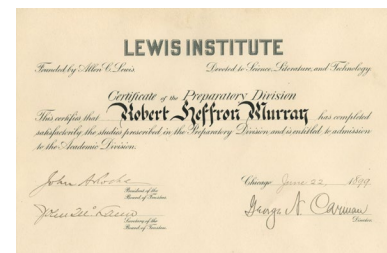
Robert Heffron Murray was born on October 18, 1881 to Robert Henry Murray and Mary Fuber Boutwill Murray. From an early age, it was obvious that he would do great things. He excelled in school at every age. In August of 1897, he graduated eighth grade at Alice L Barnard School and was awarded the Daily News medal. He then began secondary school at the Lewis



Institute where he studied chemistry. After graduating from the Lewis Institute, he began studying at the University of Chicago. While there, Dr. Steiglitz, a professor of chemistry, noted him to be a “most excellent and diligent student” and that he was a “pleasure to work with”. This proved to be an agreed upon position as he was offered a graduate scholarship upon graduation. However, he did not accept this scholarship as he was eager to move forward in life and marry his first wife, Sue Murray. In 1905, he married Sue Murray in Richmond Virginia after being relocated there to manage Paramount Knitting Company’s cotton spinning mill.

His prowess in intelligence and management was also admired by the Army Reserves. During the first World War he received a commission as a captain in the US Army Reserves. He was promoted to a major and then to a lieutenant colonel when he was in command of the 311th and the 21st Engineer Regiment. After returning home, he was elected to the American Society of Civil Engineers.

Colonel Murray’s drive as an entrepreneur was soon seen when he founded the Neumode Hosiery Company that produced women’s stockings in 1926. His company was successful even through the Great Depression. By 1933, his company was operating out of 56 store fronts and he continued as the president of Neumode until just before his death in 1972. He would go to Chicago for this position multiple times a week after moving to Valparaiso. In 1934, his passions found him purchasing the original 80 acres in Liberty Township that would become Sunset Hill Farm in 1934.



Outside of business, Murray was well loved due to his generosity, caring heart, and the general good temper he displayed to those who lived and worked on the farm as well as those in the surrounding community. Sunset Hill Farm housed many tenant farmers at its peak. Murray, as documented by many individuals, was a beloved boss and landlord. In one account, it was recollected that he was known to visit all of the tenant homes with children in them every Christmas to see the children enjoy their presents and gifted their parents nylons from his company every year. He considered those who worked on the farm as his family. At his first

wife's funeral, he declined to sit in a chair set for him upfront in favor of sitting in the adjacent room with the farm hands. According to an interview in 1997 with the Prossers, he said that he would rather sit with family. His love of the people on the farm also led to him building a bobsled with a steering wheel for the kids on the farm to ride on. He also had the trees between the top of the hill to the pond cleared for sledding. It is memories such as these that still stand out in the minds of the many tenants who survive the Colonel.

Sadly, Colonel Murray passed away on October 28, 1972 of cancer complications. In his will, he gifted the property to Purdue for agricultural education or to Porter County to create a recreational property.

Developing the Farm

The early days of the farm were dedicated to land acquisition and improvement of the land. Prior to Murray's purchases, much of the farming land was deemed too poor to



support even one rabbit. Because

of this, much of those early years

went into regenerative agriculture. He also planted the forest that

now lies on the East side of the property. It originally consisted

of over 30,000 pine trees to prevent erosion. Between 1935 and

1937, the first barn was built, the swamps were filled in with

land dredged to make new ponds, and the roads were cut through

the hills on the property. The first

barn was built in 1937 that held

two horses, 3 Guernsey cows, 100 sheep, and 1200 chickens.

Originally, the primary revenue came from selling meat, chickens

and eggs. Later, after recognizing the demand for raw milk in the

areas, the production shifted to focus on dairy.

A large part of the farm's success was the many hands that

went into supporting it. Indeed, many of the people that worked

on the farm even lived there. The benefits of doing so included a

house free of rent, heat, electricity, milk, eggs, meat, garden space, as well as their weekly or

monthly salary for each family. They were also given a bonus in addition at the end of each year.



The Helping Hands of Sunset Hill

Despite the long hours Murray dedicated to creating Sunset Hill Farm, he by no means

did this alone. There were two men that helped more than most in the success of the farm. Leroy

"Pete" Hanrahan was the first farm manager. Pete was 26 when he was hired to be the farm

manager in late 1935, almost immediately after the initial 80 acres were purchased. He grew up

on his parent's farm that was adjacent to the newly purchased land. When you visit the park

today, what is now known as “the farmhouse” was the home that Hanrahan lived in during his time with the farm. Also living in the house was his wife Helen and their two kids, Sharon and Don. Pete is largely credited with helping create the plans when the farm was in its infancy. Many recall him being the hands-on leader of most of the developments made to the land. Unfortunately, Pete’s time on the farm was short-lived. On December 3, 1952, he died of a heart attack in the main barn around 6:15 in the morning after going to check on the cows. He was only 44 years old.



After Hanrahan’s death, Lloyd Prosser was promoted to the position of farm manager. While most of the original planning was already completed and the farm had a strong reputation Prosser was a vital part in continuing that progress. In fact, he did so much work that in 1961, Col. Murray and Lloyd Prosser made a partnership contract due to Murray believing that the profits from the business should be shared with the man who was doing a great deal of the work.

The Milking Process

A short while after they began selling milk, pasteurization became required by law. However, even after, homogenization was not practiced at Sunset Hill Farm. The butter fat was nearly six inches across the top of each glass milk gallon bottle. Prior to this, Sunset was one of the last sellers of raw milk in the area, a major part of the appeal to many of the farm’s customers.

After they began pasteurizing, Ethel Prosser (Lloyd’s wife) documented in detail the milking process. In May of 1996, Ethel recounted:



“We arrived at the barn at 4:30 am.

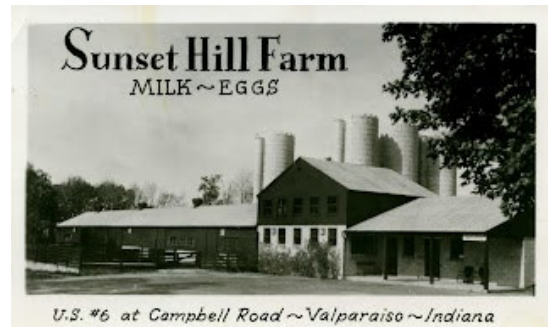
While one set of workers brought the cows in from the pasture or the loafing bar and secured them in the holding pen next to the milking parlor, others were preparing the milking equipment. This meant filling the wash tank with hot water and sanitizer and flushing the pipeline and the milkers. This was drained, and the pipes attached to the two milk tanks were hooked up. A strainer pad was inserted in the line to strain any dirt that might get in the milk. One line went to the pasteurized tank, and a valve could be turned to go to the bulk tank once the first one was full. The milkers that had been sanitized were taken to the milking parlor and attached to the overhead glass pipeline, and the air hose was hooked to an air spigot that ran to the vacuum pump did the milking. Feed was put in the bin in the milking stall to encourage the cows to come in and to add supplement to their diet. Each stall had two gates operated by the person doing the milking. One was opened to let the cow in; and when she was milked, the other one opened to release her. The door leading from the holding pen to the milking parlor was opened by a rope pulled by the person in the parlor. The cow came up wide steps and entered the

first stall opened and was then shut in. The next cow went to the second stall and so on until all five were full. Most cows have a leader and the cows came through the room in about the same rotation each time. Once a cow was secured in her stall, a water hose with a spray nozzle and warm water was sprayed on her udder to both clean it off and to encourage her to let down her milk. A paper towel was used to dry her off before the milker was attached. You had to be alert as some cows did kick. On average, it took, five minutes to milk a cow. You could check the milker hose that ran to the milk pipeline. When a cow was milked, you opened the front gate of the stall, and she left to walk around and down a ramp to an exit door which she pushed open with her head. The cows went out into a loafing barn with stalls filled with straw to sleep in, and there was a long feed manger where an automatic feeder filled it with silage direct from the silo.

As the cows were being milked, the pipeline drained into a receiving vessel that, when full, tripped it to go to the two tanks. We milked between 80 and 90 cows two times a day, and the process took around two hours. After the last cow was milked, the milkers were taken down and



returned to the wash tank to be washed in hot soapy water and pumped through the pipeline also. Then it was rinsed and drained. While this was being done, one worker was sweeping and hosing the manure from the milking parlor floor and walls and steps. It was important that this room be kept clean and free of flies.”



Ethel stated as she went on, that this all happened before they had even eaten breakfast. After all of this, pasteurization would take place and the whole cycle would repeat again at 4:30 pm every day, 365 days per year.

Experiments in Milking

Colonel Murray was very methodical about how he ran his businesses. He only wanted the best. On the farm, this led to his milking experiments. He meticulously recorded the milk and butter fat production of each cow. He did this to help his production, but also with the hopes that the information would be useful to students of agriculture as well as other dairy farmers. His main goal in his experiments was to produce high quality milk and to produce the best feed to reach this goal. In pursuit of this, he worked with Purdue University, regularly checking his ideas with professors there. He also corresponded frequently with the US Department of Agriculture on his findings. Later, his methods were shared at a Liberty Township Farm Bureau meeting through a paper he wrote titled "More Cans of Milk" in October of 1950. In a letter he wrote to the director of the Purdue Dairy program on the 6th of January in 1961, he said, "In 1946, I came

to the conclusion that Guernsey cows were not suitable for my program, which was to produce essential human food at a minimum cost to the consumer, with an acceptable standard of living for the dairyman.” He continued that he “was not interested in fancy breeding stock to be sold at inflated prices to unsuspecting hard-working dairymen.” He followed this up by stating he has proven his theories due to his high production of milk and butter fat.

The Wives of Colonel Murray

Sue Murray, his first wife, was known by those who lived on the farm as a very detail-oriented woman. She expected her decisions on property details to be executed to her exact specifications. She was in charge of all landscaping as well as the upkeep of the tenant homes. Her quirks carried over into the design and care of the property. The pond behind the Hanrahan’s house was dubbed “Lake No Can Do” due to Mrs. Murray’s insistence that it not be used for fishing, swimming, or boating. However, she did allow for skating in the winter. She also designed the main house, as well as all the tenant houses.



Despite her rigid exterior, she was known to be extremely generous and go out of her way for someone in need. Her chauffeur remembered stopping numerous times on outings for her to scold a child who was not treating their pets well. The Prossers also claim that part of why the sheep were removed from the farm was owing to the fact that she couldn’t stand to hear the bleating of the ewes when their lambs were taken from them. Lloyd Prosser was often sent with baskets of food to people in need by the instruction of Mrs. Murray, and after the birth of Prosser’s daughter Janet in 1941, Mrs. Murray insisted that the house was too small and unfit to raise a child and so she had a new house built on the property for them that they stayed in from 1942 until the death of Pete Hanrahan in 1952. She even paid the hospital bill of a friend in need once.

It was obvious that Robert Murray loved his wife. When she passed away, Col. Murray had a window removed in order for a stretcher to be used to move her body, refusing to put her through the indignation of being put into a body bag. After the death of Sue, Murray remarried a Chicago School Board Member named Elizabeth “Bips” Murray on January 11, 1964. The two were avid travelers prior to his death. Upon his death, it was Col. Murray’s wish that the land either be given to Purdue for educational space, or to Porter County for recreational space. His second wife, Elizabeth, was largely responsible for making his wish a reality. On July 26, 1983, she got her wish and the original Porter County Department of Parks and Recreation was created to complete this project, making Sunset Hill Farm the first Porter County Park.



Genealogy of Colonel Murray

The Murray family can trace its descendants in an unbroken line all the way back to 1280. As far as where they were from, Patrick Murray originally acquired an estate at Philipaugh in the county of Selkirk in 1477, but the family can trace its origins all the way to 1330 when Roger Murray acquired a farm at Falahill in the north of Scotland.

Murray's most notorious descendant was probably John Murray of Falahill, more widely known as the Outlaw Murray. He was celebrated for his defiance (along with 500 other men) of the King of Scotland, James IV. The story of this encounter is immortalized in a ballad that has had many retellings through the centuries. The ballad tells the story of an insurrection held in Ettrick Forest that was so notorious the king was forced to humiliate himself by traveling to meet the Outlaw and eventually compromise by awarding him the heritable sheriffship of the shire of Selkirk in exchange for him calling off his men. On a trip to Selkirk Robert and Elizabeth made in 1968, Elizabeth remembered a woman asking if he was related to the Outlaw and when they said yes the woman claimed he was too small to be a descendant. Colonel Murray was over 200 pounds at the time and stood at 6 feet and 4 inches. John "Outlaw" Murray went on to marry Lady Margaret Hepburn who was the great great granddaughter of King James the first and thereby the great great great granddaughter of Mary Queen of Scots.

Though our own Col. Murray was a direct descendant through his father's side to two important historical monarchs, his claim to the lands of Philipaugh ended with his great great great great grandfather, Sir John Murray knight of Philipaugh who's second born son begat Col. Murray's line and was not the heir to the land.

On his mother's side, Col Murray was the great great grandson of Willoughby Nason who fought in the Revolutionary War and was also blood related to two other soldiers from the same war. This was proven upon his entry into the Society of the Sons of the American Revolution in 1917.

Timeline of the Farm and the Park

- 1881
 - October 18: Robert Heffron Murray was born to Robert Henry Murray and Mary Fuber Boutwill Murray
- 1897
 - August: Robert graduated eighth grade at Alice L Barnard School and was awarded the Daily News medal. He then began secondary school at the Lewis Institute where he studied chemistry.
- 1901
 - June 20: Robert graduated from the Lewis Institute

- August 9: Robert began study at University of Chicago. While there Dr. Steiglitz, a professor of chemistry, noted him to be a “most excellent and diligent student” and that he was a “pleasure to work with”.
- 1904
 - June 14: Robert graduated from the University of Chicago. He was offered a graduate scholarship but he did not accept it because he was eager to move forward in marrying his first wife.
- 1905
 - November 4: Robert married Sue Murray in Richmond Virginia after being relocated there to manage Paramount Knitting Company’s cotton spinning mill there.
- 1917
 - May 23: Robert received a commission as a captain in the US Army Reserves. He was promoted to a major and then to a lieutenant colonel when he was in command of the 311th and the 21st Engineer Regiment.
- 1920
 - Col. Murray was elected to the American Society of Civil Engineers.
- 1926
 - Col. Murray founded the Neumode Hosiery Company that produced women’s stockings. His company was successful even through the Great Depression. By 1933, his company was operating out of 56 store fronts. He continued as the president of Neumode until just before his death in 1972. He would go to Chicago for this position multiple times a week.
- 1934
 - Col. Murray purchased the original 80 acres in Liberty Township that would become Sunset Hill Farm.
- 1935
 - 34 more acres were purchased.
 - Pete Hanrahan was hired as the farm manager.
- 1937
 - Llyod Prosser was employed at the farm.
 - The first barn was built that held two horses, 3 Guernsey cows, 100 sheep, and 1200 chickens.
 - 40 more acres were purchased.
- 1938
 - The No Can Do Pond was dug, ending in 1939. It was 15 feet deep.
- 1943
 - 6 more acres were purchased.
- 1952

- December 3: Pete Hanrahan died in the barn at 6:15 am after going to check on the animals.
- 1953
 - 25 more acres were purchased
- 1954
 - July 29: The milk barn burned down due to an electrical fire. No animals or people were harmed.
 - 50 acres were purchased.
- 1961
 - Col. Murray and Lloyd Prosser made a partnership contract due to Murray believing that the profits from the business should be shared with the man who was doing a great deal of the work.
- 1962
 - February 26: Sue Murray died
- 1964
 - January 11: Col. Murray married Elizabeth “Bips” Murray
- 1967
 - Milk was no longer sold on the farm, only to Dixie Dairy.
- 1972
 - October 28: Col. Murray died of cancer complications.
- 1982
 - Purdue yielded its claim, as long as Porter County was willing to accept the farm for recreational purposes.
- 1983
 - July 26: The original Porter County Department of Parks and Recreation was created to begin work on Sunset Hill Farm County Park
- 1997
 - June 14: Elizabeth Murray died