

## History- Gunther Barn and Property By Harriet Gunther



The first barn (circa 1892) was built on the same spot as the present one. The cows were housed on the lowest level with the hay barn above. Most of this information is hearsay, but I got most of it from my mother-in-law.

On July 7, 1900, Frederick Gunther and his son Charles were milking when a severe thunderstorm broke out. Charles was scared. He was about 12 years old. He told his father he was going to the house and would come back to finish the milking (by hand) later. He was at the door when the lightning bolt struck. He called to his father several times, but never heard a response from him. By this time, the burning hay

was falling into the milking area. The first cutting of hay was finished a few days earlier. Edith told me that all they found of Fredrick was under the cow he was milking. Since the stanchions were partly melted, he most likely was electrocuted and never knew what hit him.

When the Northeast School on East Street was built in the early 50s, they discovered this area sat atop an underground lake. When we drilled our artesian well (under orders of the State of Connecticut) in the 1950s, it took the drillers the first half of the day bailing out the quicksand. They didn't hit ledge until after the 200 foot mark. These facts probably explain why two barns were struck by lightning and destroyed by the fires.

The second barn across the driveway to the left of the present barn was built circa 1920 or 1922. Charles was running the farm for his mother. She (Mary) moved to 153 Grove Street about a month after Charles and Edith were married in April 1918. Dorothy (Dimmock) has lived in that house since 1952 or 1953.

When the second barn was destroyed by fire after a lightning strike, Mary Gunther went out of the dairy business, but she did give Charles and Edith a mortgage to get them started.

Barn #3 was built on the site of Barn #1. Russell and I were married November 22, 1951. On our honeymoon, we drove to St. Petersburg, Florida to visit with Aunt Rose. We got home on December 5, 1951. Between that date and November 1951, Charles' estate was settled. He died in February 1950. The farm and other assets were distributed on January 1, 1952. Russell's share was the farm plus cattle and machinery and the farm house.

On December 18, 1951 (one week before Christmas) at about 4pm, we were hit with a microburst, almost a tornado. All the cattle were in the barn. The entire roof of that area was blown off along with the roof of the silo and cupola on the hay barn. One end of the hay barn was blown in down to the plate. The fact that the hay barn was quite full saved losing the whole hay barn. The cattle had to be moved that night and Frank Niederwerfer helped us find a place to move to and helped to transport the cattle. Our marriage got off to a great start! The cattle didn't return until mid June 1952.

In 1952, we rebuilt the cow shed in the same area, but made it 25 feet longer. We turned the cows around as we put in an automatic manure remover.

We went out of business in 1962. Cumberland Farms set up retail stores and took our business away. After World War II, all the returning G.I.s bought cars and ruined the small milk delivery service. It's hard to believe that there were 17 small dairy farms serving the city of Rockville and environs. As you well know, you had to be big or bigger to survive.

The cow barn was converted into a horse barn with box stalls. We had the business until Russell died in April 1983.

P.S. When we restored the barn in 1952, we made sure lightning rods were installed on the barn and house. One week after the cows came back to the farm, we had a ding-dong thunderstorm. One of our customers on East Street saw a lightning bolt bounce off the lightning rod points on top of the hay barn. So we almost lost barn #3 to the same fate as the first two barns.



*Gunther Family Homestead on Route 30*

\*Editor's Note- According to Dorothy Dimmock, Harriet Gunther's sister-in-law, Harriet Gunther continued to operate the farm after her husband's death. She sold hay grown on the property. The interior space of the barn was converted into horse stalls and she rented the units to riders. Her younger daughters who were still at home helped care for the horses. When she could no longer manage the farm, Mrs. Gunther sold most of the property. She has life occupancy of the family farmhouse where she still resides.

\*Editor's Note: This article originally appeared in the report entitled "Gunther Property and the Tolland Agricultural Center prepared in June 2012 by Eastern Connecticut Environmental Review Team of the Eastern Connecticut Resource Conservation & Development Area, Inc. for the Planning and Zoning Commission of Vernon, Connecticut and the Inland Wetlands Commission of Tolland, Connecticut. This article is reprinted with the permission of the management of the Tolland County Agricultural Center. The report can be found in its entirety at [http://www.ctert.org/ERTWebsite/pdfs/Tolland\\_Vernon\\_Gunther\\_Tac\\_628.pdf](http://www.ctert.org/ERTWebsite/pdfs/Tolland_Vernon_Gunther_Tac_628.pdf)