**THE HISTORY OF HIGH LAWN FARM**

Allow me to take your imagination back to primordial Western Massachusetts. Our beautiful Berkshires, then part of the ancient continent of Rodinia, would be unrecognizable as massive mountain peaks rising as high as the Himalaya thrust up out of the earth. Strange creatures roamed through its forests – the two-legged podokesaurus and the long-necked anchisaurus, while the crocodile-like stegomosuchus swam in her rivers.

Now, let us return to present day Berkshire County, and a drive down Lee’s charming Main Street with a quick left turn after crossing the Housatonic River takes us up Summer Street. Continuing until the houses fade from the rearview mirror, the world opens up into a panoramic view of our Berkshire Hills, where erosion has soothed the ancient colossus to the more gently rounded, wooded hills we know so well. No longer do prehistoric creatures prowl, but now herds of Jersey cows graze, their deer-like beauty never losing its charm.

Welcome to High Lawn Farm.

Originally, the land was owned by one Elmadorus Clark. Elizur Smith, founder of the paper mills which brought Lee to international prominence and a farmer of the hobbyist ilk, purchased the property over a period of years during the nineteenth century and it became the High Lawn Horse Breeding Farm. The trotting horses bred there were of such outstanding quality they became world famous, as did Alcantara, a race horse raised at the farm.

When Elizur finally passed, W.D. Sloane purchased 148 acres. Now, his wife was Emily Thorn Vanderbilt, her family being at that time one of the wealthiest in America, so he had done very well and continued to do so. In 1901 the 148 acres were integrated into another 1000 acres after Mr. Sloane lavishly invested his wealth by purchasing neighboring farms.

Mr. and Mrs. Sloane had a daughter called Lila. Lila was, by anybody’s reckoning, a very lucky young lady. In 1902, she married William B. Osgood Field. As one of the venerable Field family whose member, one Cyrus Field, created the Atlantic Cable, his lineage was none too shabby either. As befits the couple who has everything but a herd of dairy cattle, Daddy gave her the farm as a wedding present. Not for her a set of steak knives or a punch bowl!

During Lila’s tenure as landlady, the farm became very productive, growing rye, oats and wheat, artichokes and lima beans. As well as dairy cattle, there were turkeys, geese, ducks, chickens and pigs. It seems our Lila was cut out to be a farmer’s wife after all!

Lila’s husband William, by all counts a very personable and intelligent man who spoke several languages (not all at the same time, of course), made many improvements including providing electricity to the dairy, building a new stable , and several other very substantial buildings.

High Lawn has interesting architecture. The iconic tower that rises upward near the cow barn appears straight out of some European romance. Its actual function is as a water tower. The reason for its unusual and somewhat fanciful design, and that of so many other buildings on the estate, is that Mr. Field had traveled extensively in Europe and came back with a yen for some buildings emulating the ones he had much admired in Holland and France. His obliging architect, John C. Greenleaf, came up with the designs we see now.

It was on May 27th, 1914 that a fire consumed a wing of a building where the bullpen was housed and also destroyed one of the water towers, though thankfully not the iconic one previously mentioned. The first herd of Jerseys had health issues and, after the fire, were sold off.

It goes without saying that fire on a farm has the potential to be catastrophic very rapidly. As is well-known amongst farmers, stored hay, particularly when wet or moist, is susceptible to spontaneous combustion. If the hay is stored inside a building and catches alight, the result can be what happened at High Lawn in 1957. A three hour fire that started above the heifer barn consumed the cow barn plus three other buildings. It was then that the Wilde family, the current owners of High Lawn, made the decision to store the hay well away from the rest of the farm buildings.

So, how did the Wilde family become owners? This happened in 1935 after Lucky Lila had passed in 1934. Marjorie Field Wilde and her husband Colonel Helm George Wilde kept the farm in the family by purchasing it from Lila’s estate, she being Marjorie’s mother. The Jersey herd was then 45 strong and, by 1954, had grown to 180 milking cows.

The Wildes had made the decision to increase the herd size and, therefore, milk production and sales to help reduce their taxes. With this expansion, the one delivery route soon became six, and the Wildes were well on their way to turning High Lawn into one of the most prestigious dairy farms in New England. Mrs. Wilde loved her Jerseys and there wasn’t a day that passed when she wouldn’t be seen with them in the barns.

There is no doubt that her dedication contributed enormously to the spectacular success of High Lawn, both she and the Colonel being awarded Master Breeder designations by the American Jersey Cattle Club and Distinguished Dairy Cattle Breeder awards by the Dairy Shrine Organization. She and George worked steadfastly together for over 60 years, restoring the buildings and incorporating state of the art technology into the operation.

If Jerseys could choose where they would like to spend their days, High Lawn would have to be the top choice for any of them. Use your imagination just one more time and become one of these beautiful bovines. As a cow, you are not about to eat a steak, of course, but you would be more than tempted by the haute cuisine placed in front of you at High Lawn. The menu has been carefully crafted by a bovine nutritionist and is made up of corn and hay organically grown on the farm’s property, and silage plus haylage stored in the on-site silos, the percentages meticulously worked out for optimal nutritional value.

As a dairy cow, you will want to be milked regularly. None of this waiting around with a full udder for the milkers to come along. As a High Lawn cow, you take yourself to the robotic milking machine when you are ready where, while you are milked, you will be treated to a meal of your favorite grain. You just have to stand there while your udder is washed and the milking then takes place, the suction cups drop off once milking is complete, and off you go to your open barn to mingle with your fellow cows. Here, if you are feeling in need of a doze, your heated water bed awaits you. Cows by nature are not potty trainable, but standing in effluent will not be a problem as another robotic piece of equipment, a pooper-scooper, makes frequent forays across the floor to suck up all waste materials. What more could a cow wish for?

The farm is still under the ownership of the Wilde’s, and the commitment to excellence continues. There will be no expansion toward steel and glass buildings under their watch, just repairs and updates to the existing barns and other outbuildings; the tapestry of this unique enterprise will not be altered by one thread.

Many thanks to Roberto, General Manager, and Walter, Chief Herdsman, for their time and enthusiasm in allowing me to take them away from their many duties in order to pick their brains to produce this article. Also thanks to the darling Jersey who deposited a memory of her own on the end of my nose!