

The Jersey Park Hotel

will be opened again

This Summer.

With better accommodations than ever before, with parlor or sitting room added,

Parties desiring to spend a few weeks in the country cannot find a better place than this, situated as it is among the Knobs, back of New Albany. Plenty of shade and good water. Park is high and dry.

Just the place for Mamma's and Children. Our Table will be furnished with the best the Market affords, with Plenty of Milk and Butter, of the best, from our dairy of thirty cows. Parties wishing to come, address:

Seth Coffman & Brother,

 JERSEY PARK, 

GALENA, IND.

and we will call in any part of the city, and get you and your trunk

WRITE FOR TERMS.

Jersey Park

We come now to the other commercial summer resort – Jersey Park. A special place and we are lucky in having incredible records of the family and the business.

To give you a little background, one Abraham Coffman was mentioned in the History of the Ohio Falls Cities and Their Counties as one of the earliest settlers of the town of Greenville. This book was written in 1882 and Abraham's

widow was still alive. She had been a resident of Greenville Township since 1823. There was no mention, however, of Abraham's time of arrival on the scene.

Coffman accumulated some 780 acres of land and had become quite influential in the community. The book also mentions the fact that an eccentric son lived northeast of town and owned a large dairy farm. His great-granddaughter, Peggy Towers, tells me that this son was John Spear Coffman, the originator of the Jersey Park Summer Resort.

Spear may have been an eccentric but without a doubt he was intelligent, ambitious, and a craftsman who had a generous amount of Yankee ingenuity.

He kept a daily record of the weather, what he did each day, and the amount of money he spent, whether it was for a major purchase or five cents for candles, ten cents for fishing hooks and line, or the forty to seventy-five cent weekly purchase of apple brandy. He also recorded the amount of money he took in, again whether it was for 200 bushels of wheat or ten cents for some apples.

Spear even noted that he attended David Burkhart's funeral on September 10, 1876. Burkhart was the owner of the farm where we now live.

Peggy Towers today has possession of these records and has allowed the librarian of the Indiana Room to microfilm them. The records on microfilm

Part of a speech on Floyd County's Summer Resorts given to the Floyd County Historical Society in March 1982 by E. George Oster; See VF BUS & IND – HOTELS/TAVERNS (Jersey Park) for more information regarding Jersey Park Farm and Hotel; Also see VF COFFMAN

start in 1869 and continue until 1916, spanning parts of two lifetimes. Spear kept the records until his death in 1887. Seth, his son, carried on until his death in 1916, but was not as meticulous in keeping records as his father.

Even though in the late 1800s over half of Floyd County was still in woods, farming was already economically important. According to C. W. Cottom in 1873, the value of farm products in Floyd County was \$1,003,917. Corn, wheat, and oats were the major crops. Coffman's own farming practices were quite diversified, however.

They tapped sugar maple trees, raised small fruits, grain, and hay. They had a silo. They cocked hay and banded bales with white oak hoops. They kept about 30 Jersey cows. (One note said a yearling died of episodic in 1876.) Besides selling wheat, small fruits, and as much as 152 pounds of butter at a time, they supplemented their income with picnics, and later, with summer boarders.

Spear started in the resort business in 1884 with his first Fourth of July picnic. In preparation for these picnics he would lay an open-air dance pavilion, hire a dance band, and build a concession stand. A chicken dinner was served. The profits from these picnics ranged from \$103 to \$225.

The summer boarders would start arriving in early July and continue through August. In addition to the cool shade, the big attraction was the food provided for the guests. There were bountiful amounts of fruit – apples, plums, and berries. There was an abundance of fresh Jersey milk, homemade butter, real maple syrup, and a variety of meats and vegetables in season.

In 1885 they built a pond and stocked it with fish – an additional attraction. Horseshoes, hiking, botanizing, and watching the sun set from Sunset Hill with the pastoral view in the foreground were other activities for guests. Nowhere could we find exactly what guests paid but we think it was five dollars per week for all this food and fun. In 1886 the records show \$495 was lost. That was the year they built the dance hall. Perhaps that accounts for the red ink.

Spear died on December 7, 1887. He was buried in Pleasant Ridge Cemetery. Pleasant Ridge had been his church, perhaps because he was married to Nancy Nicholson and this evidently was her home community. In October of 1890, Seth went after a stone for his father's grave. We made a trip to the cemetery and saw the stone – a 12-foot granite obelisk.

After Spear's death, Seth and his brother Clair took over the business. In 1888 the records show that new sheets, blankets, bedspreads, lamps,

looking glasses, pitchers, and chambers as well as tablecloths, napkins, and ice cream freezers were purchased. Seth and his brother put out a flyer advertising the park and its fresh Jersey milk, butter, and produce. They also provided transportation to and from New Albany.

In 1890 Clair died and Seth continued the operation with Nancy, Spear's widow, as partner. The Coffmans loved flowers, many of which are still in evidence. Ivy and myrtle carpet the ground and daffodils bloom in profusion. Records show hundreds of dollars spent on plants. Nancy did not approve of these purchases and she wouldn't speak for several days after such buying sprees.

Bricks were made there on the farm. Beautiful stonework was cut out of the creek and laid. The marvel of it all is how the huge stones were moved and put in place. Many of them are still on the premises. When the dew was on the grass in early morning and other chores couldn't be attended to, they spent time carving out troughs, gold fish ponds, and so forth. We are the proud owner of one of these creations. The barn, smoke house, spring house, and other dwellings were all brick with slate roofs. The main house has unusual architectural features, including curved walls. In 1890 the hotel was built. It was called the manor house.

In the same year Seth hired a black cook for five dollars a week and local girls were hired as maids. They built the hotel kitchen in 1891. The summer hotel business flourished.

Nancy died in 1904, leaving Seth to carry on. This he did until his death on December 1, 1916. I was altar boy for his funeral at Navilleton. He is buried in the cemetery there. His wife and three children preceded him in death. Three daughters, Grace, Adeline, and Dora survived him. Grace is the mother of Peggy Towers, the present owner-occupant.

In my youth, Adeline used the hall for dances every Saturday night – 25 cents for admission. The player piano provided the music. The name Jersey Park brings back many happy memories for me. I cherish them.

E. George Oster