



Haymarket's Burnside Farms

Where our agricultural tradition continues

by John T. Toler

In the early days, the economies of communities in the Piedmont were based on agricultural production. Most people engaged in farming, or supporting the farmers through commerce and skilled trades.

It can be argued that Haymarket's "Golden Age" of agriculture was from 1875-1900, a period of stability and security that was enjoyed by both the families that had lived in the area for generations, and the new residents who purchased land and brought new energy and ideas to the agricultural scene.

A group of prominent landowners established the Haymarket Agriculture Club, which met monthly to discuss the latest farming techniques, share ideas, and predict market conditions. Members included Col. Newland DePauw, owner of "Waverley;" Col. Edmund Berkeley of "Evergreen;" Christian Heineken of "Mill Park;" William Dodge of "Bonnie Brae;" Franz Peters of "Batavia;" and W. Louis Heuser of "Burnside."

New types of agriculture were tried – notably wineries – and money was available to acquire more land for production and other investments. But the good times didn't last, and the

large farms were hit in quick succession by lower financial return on their production, manpower shortages, and finally, the Great Depression.

Both the Waverley and Mill Park properties have been absorbed into Dominion Valley; Evergreen is now a country club and the setting of fine homes on large lots; Bonnie Brae is part of Piedmont; and Batavia is long gone, with Haymarket's CVS Pharmacy standing on the site of the old house.

However, Burnside Farms just north of Haymarket has survived. Although much smaller than it was when

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This photograph of the Haymarket Agricultural Club was taken in 1905, while the group was meeting at Waverley. William Louis Heuser, the owner of Burnside, is standing second from the left.





The front of Burnside in early 1950. At this point, the house looked much like it did in the 1800s. Courtesy of RELIC.

Mr. Heuser owned it, agricultural production is alive and well there, having evolved and met the challenges and opportunities of the times.

Bordered by U.S. 15, James S. Long Park and the Gates Mill subdivision, the 15-acre property is owned by Burnside Farms LLC. Three generations of a family have lived and worked the farm since acquiring it in 1995: Mrs. Marjorie Raney; her daughter, Mrs. Leslie R. Dawley and her late husband, David M. Dawley; and their children Michael, Katie and Daniel.

The family has had to overcome adversities and make many sacrifices since coming to Burnside. But they love the land, and like the gentlemen in the Haymarket Agricultural Club, they have adapted to the changing face of farming in the area, and developed new products and ideas to make their farm prosper.

The mother-and-son team of Leslie and Michael Dawley currently has about 5½ acres in production, with plans to add about three more. The rest of the property is in farming infrastructure, or will be left in woods.

They grow over 100 varieties of specialty-cut flowers including tulips, dahlias, sunflowers and daffodils for florists and other wholesale accounts. All are grown using organic and sustainable farming practices.

In addition to their wholesale business, Burnside Farms is open to the public for special events during the year, most recently the “Festival of Tulips – Holland in Haymarket” event. With over 100,000 bulbs planted on the property, “Burnside Farms has one of the largest pick-your-own tulip fields in the United States,” notes Leslie.

On special dates in July and August, the farm is open for “pick your own” sunflowers.

Other events include the Fall Farm Festival, held from mid-September to

mid-November at Burnside’s roadside market, featuring over 40 varieties of pumpkins and gourds, chrysanthemums, apple cider, straw bales, cornstalks and “pick your own” flowers. Seasonal produce and preserves – as well as raw honey from hives on the farm blended with goldenrod honey from other local beekeepers – are also available.

The Christmas Celebration runs from Thanksgiving until Christmas, with Virginia-grown Christmas trees, wreaths, garlands and greens cut from the ancient boxwoods on the property.

“We are planning to expand our fall events,” said Leslie. “People around here are always looking for something family-friendly to do in the fall.”

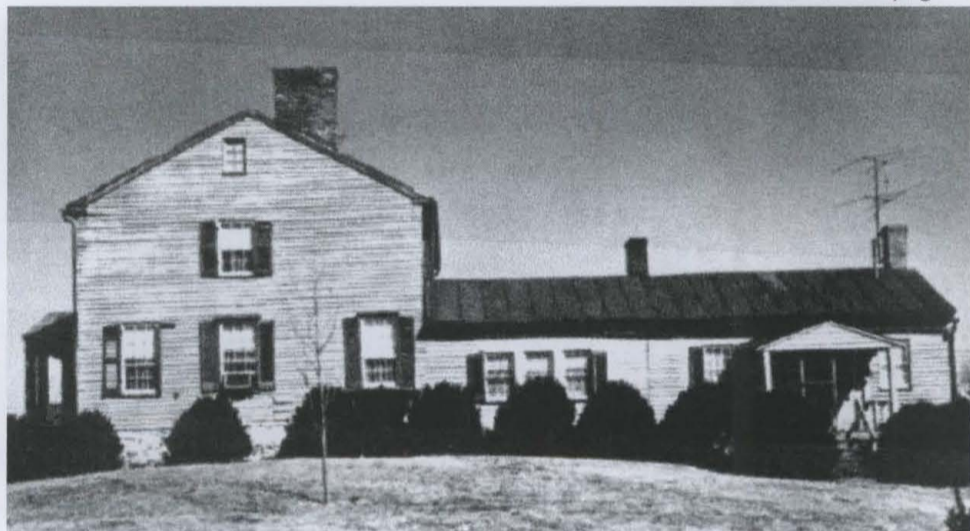
The Dawleys sometimes get help with the special events and the roadside market, and the Christmas tree sales are handled by a trusted friend. But most of the time, it’s just the two of them.

Today, it’s much different from the old plantations – with hundreds of acres under production and small armies of farm workers – that used to surround Haymarket. Farming remains a tough business, but with a different focus and new methods, Burnside Farms has been proven to be sustainable.

Changes at Burnside

The original house at Burnside dated back to the early 19th century, and during the Civil War, the property was owned by Mr. and Mrs. George S. Hamilton.

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Before Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Collins made renovations, the rear of Burnside had a shed-type addition, as shown in this 1950 photograph. The addition was later rebuilt as a Florida room. Courtesy of RELIC.

It is interesting to note that the long-held belief that Burnside got its name from Union Gen. Ambrose Burnside – who was said to have spared the house from destruction during the Civil War – is untrue.

Research done by staff at the Ruth E. Lloyd Information Center at Bull Run Regional Library in Manassas found that the property was already known as “Burnside” as early as 1855, when that name appears in the birth record of an Arthur Gray, born there as a slave. It appears again in 1859, when George S. Hamilton recorded another birth at “Burnside.” Clearly, both records pre-date the alleged Civil War incident.

This issue was addressed in the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission survey done on Burnside in the late 1970s. “A more likely explanation is that the house was named for its location near a creek, Catharpin Run, ‘burn’ meaning a brook or rivulet,” according to the survey.

The Hamiltons sold the property, then consisting of 345 acres, to the aforementioned W. L. Heuser in February 1873. Subsequent owners were Mr. and Mrs. Evan G. Creel, who purchased the property, by then down to 278 acres, in 1933.

The Creels sold Burnside to Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Collins in 1951, who used the property as a horse breeding facility. At that time, the property consisted of 203 acres.



Burnside was photographed again in 1979 for a Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission survey. Alterations included aluminum siding, new porches, and extensive interior remodeling. Courtesy of RELIC.

Wishing to update the old main house, the Collins commissioned Washington, D.C. architect R. J. “Waddy” Wadsworth, who came up with what amounted to a redesign of the house, rather than a restoration. “Just about the only parts of the original house that were left were the heavy timbers in the floors and walls, and the little steps leading up to the attic,” remarked Leslie.

According to the VHLC survey, “The fireplaces and chimneys at both ends of the main house were removed, the kitchen wing altered, and former entrance wing removed, and a mudroom installed in the former basement. The

shed addition on the rear of the main house was enlarged, or removed and rebuilt as a bay containing a ‘Florida room,’ and aluminum siding applied over existing weatherboards.

“The front door surround was replaced, a porch added on the north gable end, and the windows on the north end replaced and re-arranged. The former study and part of the main hall on the first floor was converted to a bedroom and bathroom, and wall-to-wall carpet installed over existing old pine floors. Interior trim was replaced.”

Outside, the former meat house was enlarged and converted to a guesthouse, but the early 1900s barn remained unchanged.

Mr. and Mrs. Collins sold Burnside to Linda Meyer in 1989, and in 1995 Mrs. Meyer sold the farm, then at 52 acres, to the Dawley family.

The Dawleys of Burnside

Burnside was still a horse farm when David and Leslie Dawley and their children – Michael, Katie and Daniel – moved there from Chantilly. At the time, they owned a very busy flower shop in McLean, and had a contract with the Marriott Corporation to supply all of their silk flowers worldwide.



The tulip field lies adjacent to the backyards of homes in the Gates Mill subdivision, providing Burnside Farms’ neighbors with a unique, if not spectacular view when the flowers bloom.

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Three generations of the Raney/Dawley family work all year to prepare of the Festival of Tulips. From left: Michael Dawley, Marjorie Raney and Leslie Dawley.



In addition to seeing all the flowers, Burnside visitors learned about the chicks and ducklings raised on the farm from Marjorie Raney and her daughter, Leslie Dawley (center).

The original purpose of the farm was to help supply their flower shop with fresh flowers, and several greenhouses were added. Burnside also became the shipping and receiving site for the business. "The farm was the distribution point for all that activity," said Michael.

That the Dawleys would have a business in Prince William County and be involved in agriculture seems to have been pre-ordained. Michael McLean Dawley is the great-great grandson of Wilmer McLean, the Scottish sugar trader whose home was "Yorkshire," east of Manassas. "Wilmer would go down from Yorkshire to the seaport of Alexandria to do his trading," explained Leslie.

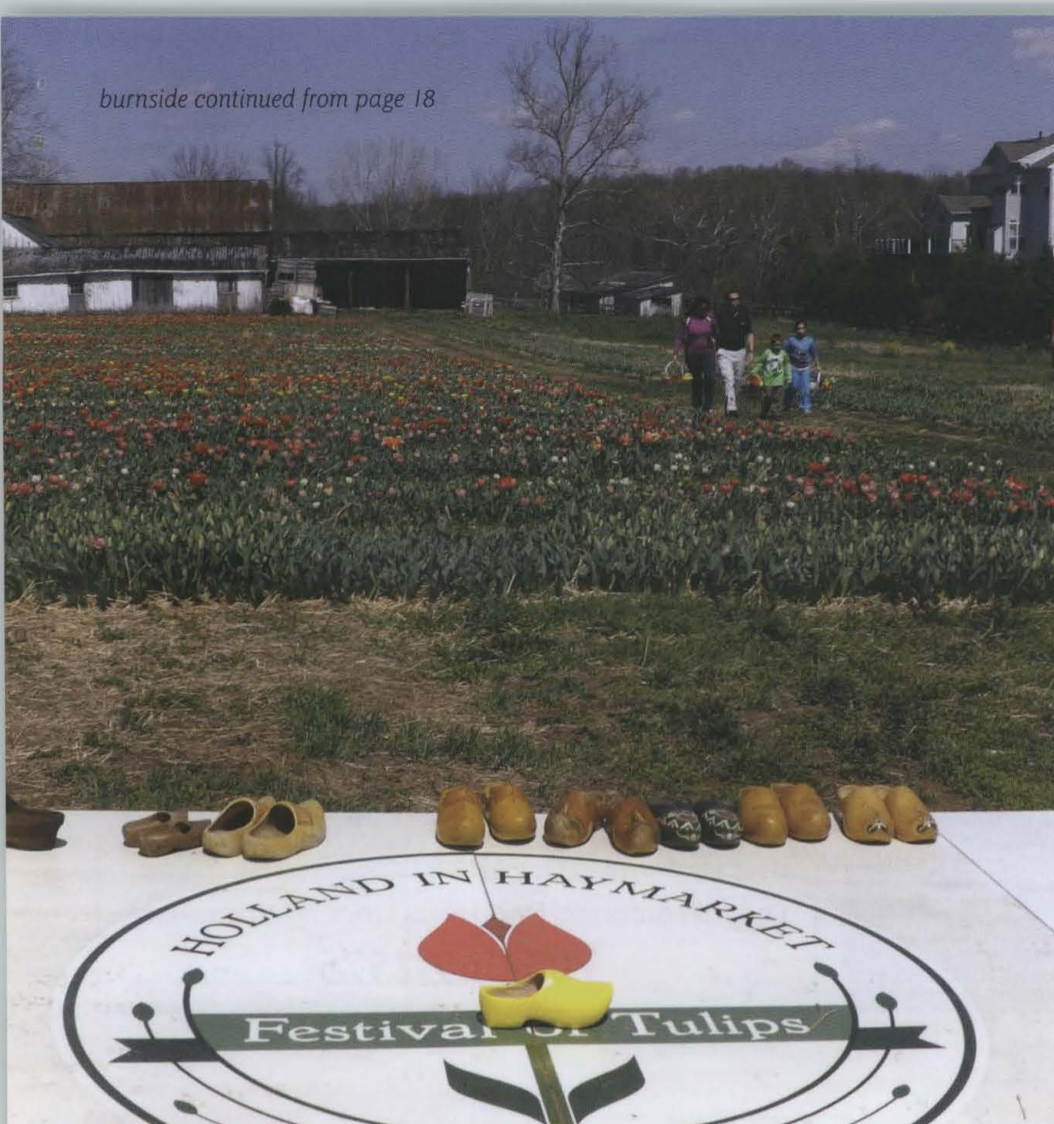
During the First Battle of Manassas, shots struck the house at Yorkshire. Realizing that war was too close, McLean moved his family south to Appomattox Court House. Ironically, four years later it was at the McLean's house at Appomattox where Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia to Gen. U.S. Grant, ending the war.

As for the agriculture business, "I'm actually the third generation of 'growers' in the family," remarked Michael Dawley. Grandmother Marjorie Raney operated green houses in Richmond, and great-grandmother Carrie Craig was the first white child born in the Dakota Territory of homesteading parents.

Diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 1996, David Dawley died in 2002. And in 2003, the building in McLean that Leslie was renting for the flower shop was found to have environmental health problems. The building was basically condemned, and the business forced to close. "Those were very, very difficult years, but we managed to get through it," noted Leslie.

Concerned about providing for Burnside after his death, David Dawley sold about 30 acres east of the house to developers, who later built the Gates Mill subdivision. "I'm sure if he hadn't sold the land, we wouldn't be here now," said Leslie. Later, Burnside lost about five more acres when U.S. 15 was widened.

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Visitors to Burnside Farms' recent 'Holland in Haymarket Festival of Tulips' were welcomed by this sign, a large collection of Dutch wooden shoes, and over 100,000 hand-planted tulips in many colors and various stages of blooming.

'Seven-day-a-week job'

It is no surprise that running the farm at Burnside is full-time work. "The plants don't stop growing, so we can't stop," said Michael. Mrs. Raney, who will be 88 years old soon, still helps with weeding and other chores, but Leslie and Michael handle all operational responsibilities.

This has resulted in some experiments and innovations designed to save time or maximize efforts. One recent example is over-wintering the dahlia field near the barn. "Dahlias are tropical plants,

and the tubers are very delicate," explained Michael. "They can't be left in the ground over the winter without protection."

The traditional method is to dig up the tubers and transplant them, but with over 12,000 dahlia tubers in the ground at Burnside, it would be impractical to go that route. In addition, continually disturbing the earth destroys beneficial microbes.

Instead of transplanting the tubers, Michael devised a plastic-sheet ground

cover that provides enough protection for them to get through the winter. "Michael came up with the idea and we tossed it back-and-forth," recalled Leslie. "All we could lose was 12,000 dahlias."

As the winter of 2012-13 finally loosened its grip, it appears that the tubers have survived. "It was like a greenhouse under the plastic," Michael added. "Even on the days when the field was covered with snow, or frozen over."

In addition to weather challenges, the local deer population must be kept out of the tulip field, which is protected by a deer fence. "Last year, we had a breach in the fence, and the deer got in and ate a couple thousand tulips in just one night," Michael recalled. "That was a tough morning to wake up to."

Tulip bulbs have a difficult time surviving the winter in the clay soil in this part of Virginia, so each new crop is grown from bulbs produced on family farms in Holland, and imported. "So, these tulips come from one family farm to another," remarked Michael.

Planting 100,000 tulip bulbs is very labor intensive, as no machines are used in the process. "We place a 4-ft. by 75 ft. grid on the ground, which is divided into equal-sized squares," said Michael. "We then take a dibber (a pointed hand tool) and make four holes in the ground, and plant the bulbs in the holes."

While the method is exacting, it also allows them control of what comes up where, as well as the ability to create some fascinating floral designs when the tulips bloom.

Over the years, the Dawleys have improved on methods of growing sunflowers and hydrangeas, both of which are popular with the florists. They are currently looking for additional parcels of land they could lease for additional tulip and daffodil production.

For more information on Burnside Farms and their schedule of activities, visit their Web page, www.burnsidefarms.com.

Author John Toler is a writer and historian and has served Fauquier County for over 50 years, including 4 decades with the Fauquier-Times Democrat. He has written and lectured about many legendary characters in Fauquier County's history. Toler is the co-author of *250 Years in Fauquier County: A Virginia Story*, and author of *Warrenton, Virginia: A History of 200 Years*.

