REMEMBERING RUETENIK GARDENS

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Figure 31 – Onion harvesting saw crates give way to forklift boxes and forklift boxes give way to gravity bin wagons as seen above. By the mid 1960s, onion production had been streamlined, and a handful of workers could harvest thousands of bushels in a day. (Photo – Phillippi family)

Figure 32 – This photo (from the late 1960s or early 1970s) shows one of the bins in the onion storage building filled to capacity. Elevators and conveyors were used to fill the huge bins with thousands of bushels of onions. The onions were piled several feet deep. Huge fans forced air up from subfloor tunnels through the onions to aid in drying and curing the crop. Shipment would begin in late summer and continue throughout much of the winter. (Photo – Phillippi family)
Figure 33 – This photo, from the late 1960s, shows onion fields from a different angle. It gives a sense of the size of the operation and the beauty of the green onion tops against the black soil. (Photo – Phillippi family)

Figure 34 – For decades, consumers in the Cleveland and Pittsburgh area were accustomed to seeing the familiar Ruetenik Gardens logo – a little girl with a market basket, walking in the sunshine. The printing on the 10 lb. bag above reads: “Grown & Packed by Ruetenik Gardens of Orwell, Inc., Orwell, Ohio 44076 – Since 1883.” (Photo – Harry Lucik)
Figure 35 - This photo, from 1968, shows dry onions growing at mid-season. (Photo – Tim Rodgers)

Figure 36 – In another view of dry onions (1968), the onion storage building can be seen in the distance. It is the large, white building. To the right, barely visible, is the long, low root storage building, partially hidden by trees. (Photo – Tim Rodgers)
Spinach

A crop grown on the farm from the beginning was spinach. Spinach can be difficult to grow, but Ruetenik's successfully grew the crop for many years. Here are a couple of pictures from the early days.

Figures 37 & 38 - At left are several acres of spinach in the 1930’s ready for harvest by the workers at the right. By the 1960s and 1970s, the growing of spinach was reduced and finally discontinued as leaf lettuce took over as the preferred leaf crop. (Photo – Ruetenik family)

Turnips

Another farm staple was the turnip. A fast growing vegetable, turnips are planted in mid summer and can be harvested up until heavy freezes in the fall. In later years, many of Ruetenik's turnips were grown off the farm on land rented from surrounding farmers.

Figure 39 - A group of workers (that appears to be Howard Ruetenik on the left) harvest a crop of turnips around 1929 or 1930. (Photo - Ruetenik family)
As time went by and the quantity of root crops increased, a larger, more sophisticated "continuous flow" root washer was designed and constructed on the farm in the main building. It consisted of a soaking tub and two tumblers that turned the root crops over and over while they were sprayed with water under high pressure. Long conveyor belts gave workers the opportunity to inspect, sort, trim, and size the vegetables before they were boxed or bagged. Eventually, most of the turnips as well as the parsnips and carrots were sent to a special room (the so-called "cellophane room") where they were weighed and placed in one pound packages. The packages were then boxed for shipment.
Celery

In 1943, two greenhouses were constructed near the main building for the purpose of starting celery plants. Celery was an important crop to the farm, and growing it was a Ruetenik family tradition. (Remember that Howard Ruetenik's father was referred to in the Cleveland area as the "Celery King.") In late winter, the seeds were sown under glass in order to have the celery ready for transplanting at the earliest possible time, usually early May. The young plants were carefully removed from the greenhouses and transported to the fields where they were set in the ground by means of a gasoline powered transplanter as seen in the next photograph. (In most years, Ruetenik's used two celery planters.) As the transplanter slowly crawled along, two seated workers rode down the field backwards, placing the celery plants in revolving wheels which in turn lowered the plants into grooves cut into the soil by shoes which also backfilled the grooves and secured the plants in the ground as the machine passed. A worker, on foot, followed the celery planter to assure that no spaces were skipped and that all plants were properly placed, also making sure that the workers on the machine had an adequate supply of plants.

Figure 42 - Planting celery. Workers are seen here planting some of the many acres devoted each year to growing celery. Note the stationary irrigation pipes that separate the fields. Celery requires a considerable amount of water, usually more than nature can provide. These irrigation lines were connected to the farm's main well. Each line had a riser or "header" which brought the water up from the underground pipelines to the pipes in the picture. These pipes had small nozzles every 36 inches that when turned on provided a fine, gentle shower of water over the crops. The pipes were turned back and forth, assuring even coverage of the field, by a device called an oscillator which was attached at the header. (Photo - Janice Lucik Olshevski)
By mid to late summer, these tiny plants had grown to a height of nearly two feet each. When harvested, several inches of top had to be removed from each plant, and a thick growth of roots had to be cut from the soil and trimmed from the butt of each stalk. This was a difficult task to perform with just a knife. For years, a device resembling a large hand cultivator was pushed along (with great effort) to sever the roots of the plants. Eventually, a celery cutter/trimmer was designed and built. An Allis-Chalmers Model G tractor was fitted with a rotary (lawnmower-type) blade to remove a portion of the celery tops. Attached to the toolbar on the rear of the tractor was a blade which was lowered into the ground to undercut the celery roots as the tractor went along. This made the job of the celery trimmer much easier and faster. This device was just another example of the ways in which the farm was always in the process of creating specialized equipment for particular needs.

After harvesting, the celery was washed under high pressure and packed into crates for shipment. And like all other crops, the weeks prior to harvest required that the plants be watered, weeded, and treated for prevention of disease and insects. To spur growth, fertilizer was applied to the plants during early summer as a "side dressing."

Figures 43 & 44 - Celery does not tolerate extreme cold. At the left, young plants are protected by special paper laid over wires that held the paper safely above them. Springtime in northeast Ohio can sometimes bring wild temperature swings, and the grower has to deal accordingly. (Photo – Joan Lucik Wildman) At right, workers are seen bleaching celery. Some of the celery was grown inside special bleaching paper that was secured along the sides of the plants by wires. This provided lighter colored, or "bleached," stalks that some consumers found more attractive and tender. (Photo – Rutenik family)

On the next page, workers are seen harvesting celery in the 1940s, filling the air with its rich, summertime aroma. On days when celery, green onions, and leaf lettuce were washed and packed, the washhouse smelled like a giant tossed salad. Those little celery plants that had emerged from the soil in the greenhouses when the late winter snow was still flying were now on their way to the tables of consumers in eastern Ohio and western Pennsylvania. If you happened to be working on the celery washer and just happened to break off a piece of celery after it emerged from the cold water wash and just happened to bite into it (when management was not looking), celery never tasted better.
Figure 45 & 46 - In the photo at the left, a worker operates a sort of rotary mower on stilts to cut the tops off the celery plants. At right, the deep root system of the celery plants is severed by a cultivator-like device equipped with a U-shaped knife that slid along under the roots (1940s). Both of these jobs were later performed with special equipment mounted to an Allis-Chalmers Model G tractor. The shearing of the tops and the severing of the roots allowed for the hand trimming which was usually done by the Women’s Gang. (Photos – Phillippi/Rutenik family)

Figure 47 – Workers in the Women’s Gang trim the celery and place it into crates to be transported to the washhouse. There it was washed, repacked, and put into cold storage immediately. (Before the coolers were built, ice, harvested from a pond in winter, cooled the produce.) Rutenik celery often found its way as far east as Philadelphia. (Photo – Phillippi/Rutenik family)
Leaf Lettuce

Leaf lettuce is a fast growing crop, usually ready to harvest in less than 60 days. At Rutenik’s, leaf lettuce was planted with walk-behind hand drills, thinned so that plants could form plump heads, and cut by hand. Unlike most other crops, it was packed into its final shipping baskets right in the field. Each half bushel basket was filled with approximately 10 pounds of lettuce. The baskets were immediately transported to the washhouse where they were dipped in water, sprayed, and protected under paper-lined basket lids. The lettuce was then cooled and stored, ready for shipment. At least some lettuce was cut on most days throughout the summer, and on many days, several hundred baskets were cut and shipped. The Kid Gang usually thinned and weeded the lettuce, and the Women’s Gang usually cut and packed. (Rutenik’s also grew iceberg head lettuce for many years prior to the 1960s and 1970s.)

![Leaf Lettuce field](image)

Figure 48 - Here is a field of leaf lettuce in 1968, almost ready for harvest. In the distance, a row of willow trees (once used as windbreaks) grows along the property line, and far in the distance, buildings on the North Bloomfield-Greene Townline Road (North Park Avenue Extension) can be seen. Again, note the stationary irrigation system that was critical to growing crops such as spinach, celery, and leaf lettuce. (Photo – Tim Rodgers)

Usually two or three fields like that shown above were planted each week. Because approximately 60 days were needed for maturation, planting ceased around the middle of August, and by late summer, attention turned to the harvest of carrots, parsnips, turnips, and dry onions.
Figure 49 – Here is how that field of lettuce started. After the plants emerged, they were thinned and cultivated. Note the “header” or “riser” in the irrigation pipeline in the center of the photo. This is the point where the pipes were connected to the waterline that was in turn connected to the farm’s main well, half a mile away. Here, the oscillator was attached that turned the pipe back and forth to evenly distribute the shower of water. The water, cold and clear, was suitable for drinking. (Photo – Phillipi family)

Figure 50 – After the lettuce was packed in baskets and washed, it was stored in one of two walk-in coolers (shown above) awaiting shipment. The large forklift boxes in the background were used to store carrots, parsnips, and turnips. (Photo – Phillipi family)
Figures 51 & 52 - Much of the time, the Kid Gang "skinned" or "bunched" green onions on piecework. The outer skins were pulled from the individual onions and depending on size, about six onions or so were bound together in a bunch by a rubber band. If you were particularly fast with your hands, you could make several dollars a day. Note that most employees wore hats or other forms of head cover and often, long sleeves for protection from the sun. Note also the old school bus in the top photo, often referred to as the "field bus." (Photos – Phillippi/Ruetenik family)
Figure 53 – After skinned and bunched, green onions are washed under high pressure and packed in baskets for shipments. This same washer was used for celery. Crates of onions, newly arrived from the field, are seen stacked in the background. (Photo – Phillippi family)

Christmas Trees

Figures 54 & 55 – For many years, Ruetenik’s grew Christmas trees on the “upland” soil. At left, a worker trims and shapes the young trees, and at right, a wagon load of dug or balled trees is moved from the field to the road to await shipment. Christmas time found employees busy cutting, digging, and shipping thousands of evergreens. This, of course, was in addition to the usual work of packing and shipping vegetables. (Photos – Phillippi//Ruetenik family)
A FEW MISCELLANEOUS PHOTOS FROM AROUND THE FARM

Figure 56 - This is the original Ruetenik washhouse and packing shed, built around 1929. As the farm expanded, this structure was added on to (according to Ruetenik family records) in 1932, 1940, 1949, 1954, 1955, and 1956, resulting in a large complex of buildings which also included three large sheds for the forcing of rhubarb, added in 1935, and the two greenhouses for growing celery plants, added in 1943. (Photo – Ruetenik family)

Figure 57 - Trucking of the produce was done at first by an independent contractor, but it was not long before the farm required its own fleet of trucks. Most shipments were to Cleveland and Pittsburgh markets. The year and identity of the driver here are unknown, but the marking on the truck is unmistakable. The original washhouse stands at the left. (Photo – Ruetenik family)
Figure 58 – In this photo from the 1950s, one of Ruetenik’s semi tractor-trailers leaves the main building loaded with produce. Two nearly indestructible International Harvester tractors did the majority of the farm’s hauling in the 1950’s. (Photo – Phillippi/Ruetenik family)

Figure 59 – As the farm continued to grow, so did its fleet of trucks. Manager Bill Phillippi is seen here with the farm’s trucks in 1966. The farm was now well-served by Chevrolet trucks – trucks that logged thousands of miles during summer, fall, and winter. (Photo – Phillippi family)
Think of farm tractors today, and names like John Deere may come to mind, but did you ever hear of a Silver King? The early years of Ruetenik Gardens had the indispensable services of four of these fast, lightweight tractors. They had to be cranked to start and they had hand brakes. Here is a snapshot of one of Ruetenik's Silver Kings.

Figure 60 - A Silver King tractor pulls a single-bottom breaking plow through the deep, dark muck in the 1930's. When the original farm was purchased in the 1920's, there were many acres of muck land that had not yet been cleared for cultivation. Trees were cut, stumps were blasted with dynamite, and the old swamp was converted to farmland, as seen above. The Silver Kings played a major role. (Photo – Phillippi/Ruetenik family)

Figure 61 & 62 - At left, a Silver King hauls crates of onions from the field, and at right, the tractor applies lime or fertilizer (1930s). (Photo – Phillippi/Ruetenik family)
In the 1940’s and early 1950’s, Allis-Chalmers began manufacturing the Model G tractor. These little tractors still turn heads at antique tractor shows. The Model G had a rear-mounted engine, large but narrow rear wheels, a cut-away steering wheel, a power take-off, and a drawbar for the various tools mounted in the front where the operator could easily see the rows of crops directly beneath his feet. The wheel width was adjustable, allowing the tractor to be adapted to a variety of applications. The tractor, although not very powerful (about 10 horsepower), was light in weight and could move at extremely slow speeds. It was an ideal machine for the truck farmer. At one time, Ruetenik’s had four of these tractors: one was used to plant the crops, one was used as a Tillivator (see explanation below), and the other two were used to spray pesticides, hill and windrow (put into rows to dry) onions, and top and sever celery plants for harvest. For a couple of years, one was even used to battle weeds with a propane flame thrower! Allis-Chalmers only manufactured these tractors for a short time, but there are collectors in the area who still prize them. You might see one in the antique farm machinery section the next time you are at the county fair.

Growing vegetables in highly organic soil required machinery that often did not resemble the type of farm equipment local residents were used to seeing. Visitors to the farm would often ask, “What’s that contraption?” Imagine, for example, that you needed to till your garden vegetables, but instead of a couple of hundred square feet of backyard crops, you had several hundred acres that needed to be tilled. The Ariens Company had the solution: the Tillivator. The Tillivator was comprised of several rototillers mounted to a tractor’s tool bar which could be lifted and lowered either manually or hydraulically. The tine depth and width could be adjusted according to the maturity of the crop and the condition of the soil. The tines were driven by the tractor’s power take-off. In the top photo on the next page, a Tillivator is shown mounted to an Allis-Chalmers Model G tractor. It was used especially for tilling celery, green onions, and turnips. The photo at the bottom shows the G that planted most of the
fam's crops. (On the page that follows, a larger version of the Tillivator is shown mounted to an Oliver HG crawler tractor. The larger tiller was used for the bigger fields of dry onions, carrots, and parsnips.)

Figure 64 - Allis-Chalmers Model G tractor with Ariens Tillivator. This was the ideal way to combat weeds in this field of celery in the 1950s. Because the tillers were adjustable, this machine could handle up to six rows of green onions or turnips depending on the spacing of the rows. (Photo – Phillippi/Rueterenik family)

Figure 65 – This photo from the late 1960s shows a worker planting (drilling) crops with the versatile Allis-Chalmers Model G tractor. The field shown covered over 30 acres, and the rows had to be straight. Fertilizer (liquid) had already been applied to the field by a special spreader, but the planter was able to apply a protective insecticide as the seeds were drilled. (Photo – Phillippi family)
But what if you wanted to till an entire field that was not yet planted in crops? Below, an Oliver tractor pulls a Seaman Tiller, powered by a large Waukesha gasoline engine. This really made the dust fly!
Figure 68 – Eventually, all cropland was prepared for planting with a moldboard plow. Here, an Allis-Chalmers D17 tractor turns over the rich, black soil. This photo is a good illustration of what muck looks like. If you have had gardening experience with the usual clay upland soil prevalent in the area, it might be hard to imagine that this type of soil existed so close by. (Photo – Phillippi family)

Figure 69 – The importance of the forklift to Ruetenik’s in the 1960s and 1970s cannot be over emphasized. Compare the two small crates on top (about 1 ½ bushels each) which required individual handling to the crate boxes (about 15 bushels each) the forklift was able to handle. (Photo – Phillippi family)
Figure 70 - Employees harvesting carrots in the 1940s. Note the Oliver HG crawler tractor pulling the "carrot digger." That tractor served the farm for several decades, in a number of capacities. (Photo – Joan Lucik Wildman)

Figure 71 - Miscellaneous equipment: In the foreground is a soil sterilizer and behind it, a soil tiller (known as a Seaman Tiller). This photo was taken in one of the sheds built to force rhubarb. When rhubarb production was no longer profitable, the sheds were used for equipment repairs and storage. (Photo – Joan Lucik Wildman.)
Figure 72 – At times, a crop duster was employed to spray pesticides. It was quite a sight. By the 1950s, however, chemicals were applied by more conventional methods – specially designed spraying equipment pulled by a tractor, as seen below. (Photo – Phillippi/Ruetenik family)

Figure 73 – With a 300 gallon tank and a 40 foot hydraulically operated boom, this pesticide sprayer could cover five acres of crops between fill ups. It was used for insecticides, fungicides, or herbicides as needed. Here, a selective herbicide is applied at low pressure to a field of parsnips to eliminate the windbreak crop (oats or barley) that was planted to prevent wind damage to the emerging plants. (Photo – Phillippi family)
Figure 74 - This photo shows workers pushing hand cultivators in the late 1930's or early 1940's with the main building/washhouse in the background. The low buildings, directly behind the workers, were the rhubarb forcing sheds, and the brick building without windows, roughly in the center of the picture, was the icehouse where ice from the pond was stored to cool the produce. When the electrically powered coolers were added, the icehouse was converted to the company’s offices. The washhouse contained many windows and skylights to utilize natural light as much as possible. (Photo - Phillipi/Ruetenik family)

Figure 75 - From the farm’s rhubarb days - A worker packs the crop in boxes for shipment. (Photo - Phillipi/Ruetenik family)
Figure 76 - As discussed earlier, Ruetenik’s raised Christmas trees for several decades. The trees were actually started on the farm from seeds in special seed beds. The workers in this photo are preparing the beds. The snow fence, rolled out on low wooden frames, was used to shelter the young trees when they emerged. When the young seedlings had grown to about 12” or so in height, they were transplanted into the upland fields where in another 15 years, give or take, they were ready for Christmas. (Photo – Phillippi/Ruetenik family)

Figure 77 – Here’s another view of crops in mid-summer - dry onions in the foreground and parsnips beyond. Note the two distinctly different shades of green. In the distance, on what many local residents referred to as “The Island,” the root storage building can be seen at the right and a couple of other storage buildings elsewhere. Running from left to right, roughly in the center of the photo (but not visible), is the Dredge Ditch. (Photo – Tim Rodgers)
Figure 78 – In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Ruetenik’s began raising bluegrass sod for homes and businesses. Here, a worker prepares a shipment of sod that would provide someone with an instant lawn. Sod takes at least two seasons to mature. After the seed germinates, foreign grasses and weeds must be eliminated, and a good root base must be established. Specialized equipment is required for planting, mowing, and harvesting.  (Photo – Phillippi family)

Figure 79 – In the 1960s, the farm began using some of the upland soil formerly used for growing Christmas trees to raise beef cattle. Here a mother Hereford cares for her newborn twins. Fortunately, the farm had enough acreage to allow growing hay and grains for feed in addition to pasture land. (Photo – Phillippi family)
Figure 80 – From the farm’s beginnings until operations ceased, work to maintain and improve drainage was constant. In any given year (the above was from the 1960s), a dragline and bulldozer were at work to make sure that the former Bloomfield Swamp continued to drain as well as possible. This photo shows work on the banks of the Dredge Ditch. (Photo – Phillippi family)

Figure 81 – Because it covered over 1,200 acres, showing the entire farm in one aerial view would be impossible. This photo, taken around 1970, shows just a portion of the southern end of the farm. Running on a curve from left to right through the center of the photo is the Dredge Ditch. (Photo – Phillippi family)
In the summer of 1958, Ruetenik Gardens celebrated its 75th anniversary. The Ruetenik family’s history in agriculture could be traced back to Howard Ruetenik’s grandfather, Herman, who began farming in the Cleveland area in 1883. The North Bloomfield/Orwell Farm had its beginnings in 1925. These are some of the full-time employees of the North Bloomfield/Orwell Farm in 1958. Owner Howard Ruetenik is fifth from the right at the back, and Manager Bill Phillippi is sixth from the left toward the middle. The background shows a small portion of the greenhouses, the rhubarb forcing sheds, and the truck pits of the main building. (Photo – Tim Rodgers)
Figure 83 - If you entered the main road to the farm in winter, you might have seen something like the picture above. Chances are, root crops from storage (and possibly onions as well) were still being processed and shipped. Each of the farm's main coolers had 15,000 bushel capacity, and a smaller cooler (from the 1950 expansion) added several thousand bushels, and production continued throughout much of the winter. The main buildings can be seen in the distance. The small building at the center of the photo, the pump house, contained the farm's main well which supplied water to the entire operation for irrigation and washing vegetables. (Photo – Tim Rodgers)

Figure 84 – In the early 1960s, directly across from the pump house, a small lake was constructed at the entry to the farm. (An ice pond to provide chopped ice for cooling the vegetables had once occupied this site. In those days, as mentioned earlier, part of the main building acted as an icehouse. With the advent of electric refrigeration, the icehouse was converted to offices, and the ice pond was abandoned. This small lake replaced the ice pond.) The lake is seen here in summer with a flock of Canada Geese floating on its surface. (Photo – Tim Rodgers)
In retrospect, the heat and cold, the mud and dust, the long hours filled with crawling or operating machinery, the heavy lifting, and the smell of pesticides all fade, and memory recalls a once-vibrant business thriving beneath the summer sun. It was hard work, but there was a certain kind of beauty all around. Perhaps the best way to end this story is with a simple picture of a field of parsnips – the work of man and nature combined – looking its finest.

REMEMBERING RUETENIK GARDENS