

Neil Staal by Artie Maglionico, Lodi Borough Historian

If you want to hear Lodi history speak, then turn an ear in the direction of Mr. Neil Staal. At 85 years of age this interesting gentleman remembers, quite clearly, a town comprised of mostly Dutch immigrants who had come to the USA in search of the American dream. In doing so the building blocks of the future were being formed, and with that the town of Lodi would experience the early signs of progress and prosperity.

Through the toil, and seemingly endless hardships that befell them, the Staal family and their neighbors found within them the courage to persevere and to succeed at making their American dream a reality. If one listens carefully, however, to Mr. Staal's story it soon becomes apparent that our early settlers didn't pursue the dream, rather they brought it with them.

Neil Staal was born on March, 19, 1916. His parents, Jacob and Nellie, arrived in Lodi from the Netherlands in 1900. The couple put down roots on James St. and later purchased land from a Mr. Zweener in the part of town that is now the top of Terrace Ave. The property included the land around Terhune Ave. and Wrights Village. The entire area was soon to become known far and wide as Staal's Dairy Farm, established in 1902.

"My dad came to Lodi broke," says Neil. "He had to get two bank loans to buy that Farm. Back in the early 1900s all of the milking was done by hand and was kept cool in well water since electricity had yet to find its way to the Lodi border. Heating was made possible by the use of wood burning stoves, while light came by way of a kerosene lamp. When nature called it was heard in the direction of a facility known as an Out House. It was on that farm where Neil, his sisters Lillian, Marjorie and Brothers Frank and Edward were born. "We were a happy, hard working family." remembers Neil.. "We used to travel to church by horse and wagon."

The Staal family's place of worship was the Reformed Church where today stands the K Mart shopping center. The Pastor was the Good Reverend Isaac Contant who owned a coal yard on Main St. The Staal family purchased coal from him. Upon graduating from Roosevelt Grammar School, Neil went to work for his Father on the dairy farm. His duties included milking the cows twice a day, washing bottles, cleaning the barn, taking care of the horses, and yes.....delivering the milk! Staal's customers included the De Luca family, the Denude family, the Torre's, the Didta's, the Accamando's, the Di Chiraro's ,Seraino's, the Di Julio's and the Ingenito family to name a few. Among the local merchants who were steady customers were Fusco's butcher shop, Trippodi's fruits, as well as two Drug Stores located on Nicholson St; Kuhens and Chickens. "It

wasn't all work," says Staal. " We often caught our favorite silent movie at the American Theater. For a dime you got an entire afternoon's worth of entertainment."

On April 15, 1945, just 21 days before it ended, WWII claimed the life of Neil's brother Frank. "He was killed in Germany," Recalls Neil. " After that, my father lost his will to live and died in November of that same year." Before the war , Neil worked side by side with his brother Edward at a coal and feed company in Garfield NJ. By 1941, with his brother Frank overseas, Neil returned to the farm and remained an active part of the business for years to come.

In 1985, Staal's Dairy Farm was purchased by Mr. Frank Averso of Lodi. What was once vast farm land is now the home of twenty town houses located on what the Borough has named Staal Lane. After the sale of their farm the Staal Family operated on a wholesale level selling mainly to businesses and schools.

In 1949, Neil married Garfield's Miss Clair Pirog who passed away in March of 1999.

"Back in my youth, the doors on the farm were never locked," recalls Neil."We never lost a quart of milk or worried about getting mugged during a delivery.

Is the future really the past in disguise? On the journey through life, the answer is revealed to us in the voices of History.....Mr. Neil Staal is one such voice.

Neil Staal, since the interview of 01, has passed away