

The Horse Breeder's Tale

I. Introduction

On Monday morning Sept 9, 1935, as the national news was captivated by the stories of recovery from the strongest Hurricane ever to hit Florida on Labor Day, the Fulton county Ohio coroner, Milton Warner, made his way to the Rupp farmhouse. "Minnie, I'm sorry and I know how difficult this must be, but can you tell me what happened?"

I will tell you a tale to answer the coroner's question of what happened, a story I have longed to understand. It's a story of a people group, a people of faith that lived simply and close to the land. It's an Ohio farm story set in the early 1900s. It's a love story of a hard-working couple's teamwork that laid a valuable foundation for future generations. It's a story of innovative technology that changed how work was done and made a business obsolete. It's a story of medical science in its infancy with very few effective treatments. Though the story ends during the Great Depression it has persisted because of the shame and mystery passed on to the generations that followed. It's a dark story, a special genre not common in our Literary Club. Most families have a one. The kind of story that is an embarrassment, not told to the children, or if mentioned, is shared in hushed tones or in code. Dark stories include social behaviors that are morally unacceptable, featuring the fearful side of humanity rooted in our fallen angels. They are also uncomfortable, but their secrecy begs us to seek answers, but all too often there is scanty, inaccurate information. That first generation rarely, if at all, talks about it. In the absence of open discussion the story takes on a life of its own. Imaginations seeded by rare kernels of truth. With incomplete

understanding, interpretation can be fraught with error and perpetuate falsehood into the future. Dark family stories shape a mindset and actions, and in turn, a life. So powerful is personal myth and lore.

This story has troubled me from the time I first heard something of it as a boy. When I was older my dad shared what he remembered and later the revealing of additional information at a family reunion by my dad's cousin rekindled my yearning to know because clearly for those family members it must have caused agony, deep regret, mournfulness, resignation and many questions without answers. My desire here is to share with you what I have discovered.

Allow me to set the human context with an old story familiar to some of you.

In the Greek city of Ephesus, now modern Turkey, over 2000 years ago there was a silversmith named Demetrius. He was an expert craftsman who made silver shrines of Artemis, the daughter of Zeus—king of the gods. Artemis was the “goddess of the hunt” of wild animals, the wilderness, childbirth and chastity. She was the protector of young children and would relieve women of disease. A temple built in her honor was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Demetrius had a thriving business making silver idols honoring the Greek gods and threw off work to other craftsman. But then a new view of God came to Ephesus that threatened his business. This new view said that gods and idols made by men were not real gods at all. People in Ephesus were starting to turn away from Artemis and Demetrius's business began to suffer. It was becoming such a threat that he gathered other tradesmen who were also being affected. He said this, “Men you know we enjoy a good income from our silver business honoring Artemis. And you now see

and hear how this new teaching has convinced large numbers of people here in Ephesus and the whole province of Asia. They say that man-made gods are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself.”

When his fellow craftsman heard this they were furious and began shouting over and over, *“Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”* Soon the whole city was in an uproar and a near riot ensued and they went after the individuals who shared this new teaching. But a city clerk, a lawyer in his time, well-respected by many, eventually was able to quiet the crowd by saying, *“Men of Ephesus, doesn’t all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image which fell from heaven? Therefore since these facts are undeniable, you ought to be quiet and not do anything rash. You have brought these men here though they have neither robbed the temple, nor blasphemed our goddess. If then Demetrius and his fellow craftsman have a grievance against anyone, the courts are open, presided by the proconsul. If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. As it is we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today’s events.”* After he said this, he dismissed the assembly. A cool head prevailed to stop the near riot and violence.

Change is hard. In response we humans certainly resist it, but sometimes we resort to violence or alternatively we take people to court. But this story also conveys another message: *Demetrius’s business model needed to change with the introduction of new ideas and he struggled to adapt.* This is the same reason I was told to explain our family’s dark story. Technology changes how we live and work. Failing to

recognize how innovation changes your business can have grave consequences if you cannot adapt. I often wondered though if there was more beyond that interpretation to understand our dark story.

II. Family Origins.

On a Mennonite farm in Putnam County Ohio on cold Feb 7th in 1873 a son, Henry, was born to David and Susanna Diller. He would be the first born of 10 children—3 sons and 7 daughters. His father David was a 1st generation American whose father, John, immigrated in 1824 from the little French town of Normanvillars in the region of Florimont in Alsace about a kilometer from the Swiss border.

In the Old World the Mennonites were also known as Anabaptists who came into being in Switzerland around the time of the Reformation. Ulrich Zwingli, a contemporary of Martin Luther, was the leader of the Reformation in Switzerland. The earliest mention of the Anabaptists in the canton of Bern Switzerland is in the 1520's. One of the old Anabaptist families in this region was named Thüller with the name dating as far back as 1559. Early evidence suggests the family lived for a time in the Emmental valley as farmers supplementing their income producing cheese and linen from flax. The Thüller's later moved near Bern to the small village of Landiswill in the parish of Biglen, and then moved again to the poor farmland of the Jura Mountains along the French-Swiss border. Then they finally immigrated around the 1750s across the border to the more remote forested area of Florimont in France, a country with more religious tolerance than Switzerland.

Why did they move so much? For nearly 250 years from the 1520's to 1770's the Anabaptists were persecuted for their faith; at least 40 individuals, men and women,

drowned or beheaded between 1529-1571 in the Canton of Bern. Others were burned at the stake and those who were allowed to live often were sold as galley slaves in Italy. What was so unusual that led to such treatment by the Government? In Switzerland during the 1520s and the subsequent 250 years the Church and State were together as one. The Reformed Church was the state Church and any opposition to the state church was viewed as a threat to the government itself. The Anabaptists were the liberal wing of the Reformation movement in Switzerland. For the Anabaptists there were three very serious points of contention that led to persecution. First, they believed in complete separation of church and state. Second, church membership, including baptism, must be based on an intelligent and voluntary decision. The state church practiced infant baptism, but of course infants were incapable of making intelligent or voluntary decisions. This is why they were called Alttäufers or Anabaptists. Third, the anabaptists believed in religious toleration. All three of these positions, taken for granted here in the United States and now in Switzerland were seen as a threat to the Swiss Church and State of that time period. Though peace loving, the Anabaptists were very principled and willing to die for their beliefs.

The periodic persecution led to the various migrations within and out of Switzerland into neighboring Germany, France, the Netherlands and the US. It was in the Netherlands that Menno Simons, a converted monk, led the movement and followers of Menno Simons were called Mennonites, and the name has stuck through the centuries. Conscription for the Napoleonic wars was a threat to the peace principles of the Mennonites in Alsace and the high taxes to pay for those wars shaped the desire to immigrate to America. When John (Jean) Thüller (age 13), arrived in Virginia on the

ship Boston (Sept 4, 1824) with his mother (Marie) and brother (Peter, age 11), the name Thüller was Americanized to Diller.

This background provides insight into the heritage of the German-speaking Swiss Mennonites who found their way to America and eventually Putnam County, Ohio in the mid 1830s where they could live simply and worship without persecution. Mennonite families did not marry outside the faith for nearly 400 years. As a result, I am $\frac{3}{4}$ Mennonite and $\frac{1}{4}$ Welsh. My parents were related to each other 6 different ways, and there is one couple responsible for both sides of the family. But inbreeding is not what makes this a dark story.

III. Early Life, Building a Family and Becoming a Horse-breeder.

Life for Ohio Mennonite families from the 1850's to the 1930's was simple and revolved around the fellowship and practices of the religious community, raising a family and achieving self-sufficiency working the land as farmers.

Mennonite tradition followed the admonitions of the Apostle Paul: Be rich in good deeds, be generous and willing to share (1 Tim 6:18). Aspire to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: mind your own business and work with your hands, ... so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody (1 Thess 4:11-12). Be subject to rulers and authorities, be obedient, do whatever is good, slander no one, be peaceable and considerate, and always be gentle toward everyone (Titus: 3:1-2). Industry, frugality, simplicity, integrity and service have been values in Mennonite communities for generations and these values shaped Henry A. Diller.

As the oldest of 10 siblings and a son he was expected to work on the farm, learn the flow of the agrarian seasons and to participate in the religious community. Little time was spent foolishly. Strict discipline was the norm. Henry grew to be a large man about 6 feet tall who loved the land, animals and hard work. It was said of him that he could do the work of two men.

He eventually married Anna Basinger who came from another family of the same Normanvillars community in France. Her father and grandfather were deacons in the Defenseless Mennonite church.* It was Anna's father who donated a portion of his farmland for the church building where the Diller's attended.

How they came to be married provides a glimpse into Henry's listening for guidance in his spiritual life. Anna was very sick and battling typhoid fever, an intestinal infectious disease now rarely seen, but then very common in the poorly drained Black Swamp of NW Ohio. In the pre-antibiotic period the fatality rate for typhoid fever was 10-30%. Typhoid fever*, begins with the gradual onset of high fever (103-104F) over several days accompanied by weakness, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, headaches and vomiting. In severe cases of typhoid, delirium and confusion are common. Without treatment the symptoms may last weeks and into months and require supportive nursing care and a simple liquid diet. During the course of her protracted illness, Anna's hair fell out signaling the severe stress on the body coupled with being malnourished, and she developed secondary infections with pus draining from skin wounds on her arm. Her life was in the balance. Henry was courting another Mennonite maiden, Sarah Amstutz, and young people from the church including Henry were regularly gathering to pray for Anna's recovery. One day while currying one of the family farm horses, Henry

heard a voice speaking to him of Anna, “She’ll not die, she’ll be your wife.” She began to get better soon after that. They were married on Christmas day, 1894; he was 21 years old and Anna 22.

It was not an easy time to start a new family, the country was reeling from the economic panic of 1893; farmers were experiencing economic distress that would not improve for the next decade. Prices for oats, corn and hogs were rock-bottom. Newlyweds in the Mennonite community were given useful, practical items. Quilts, canned goods, bed frames and other household items were common gifts. Henry and Anna received livestock, and a handcrafted wooden corner cupboard to hold their set of Haviland wedding china (with a brown clover-leaf rim). It was also customary for parents to present the couple with a gift of land and his father set aside 20 acres for Henry to start his own farm. In time Henry paid for these 20 acres and eventually rented another 40 acres from his parents. A map passed down through the family of the layout of 60 acres and location of the out-buildings provide a picture of a self-sufficient farm. Life came to include: working to live off the land, creating sources of supplemental income, and training children in the values of faith and hard work.

In that first year Henry and Anna lived with his parents, and his time was spent clearing the ground for larger field crops and a garden, planning for livestock and preparing to build their own house. Harvesting and milling logs from the nearby woods was the first step—much of the work Henry did with occasional help from family and friends; it took him 10 months to complete it. House and barn raisings and threshing during harvest were major community events that brought many families and neighbors together. Once Henry had prepared the wood for large posts, framing, boards, and

shingles, neighboring family and friends first nailed the boards into a frame to form each section. As the frame sections were being assembled, corner end logs were placed in the holes at each corner and then connected together with heavy crossbeams put into place by maneuvering them using poles with spikes. The heavy beams and corner logs were joined together using wooden pegs. The side sections were attached to this large frame and after these were in place the men nailed the first layer of boards on each side. Once the sides were completed the roof boards were nailed and finished with hand-hewn wooden shingles. Through such community teams of workers homes and barns were raised and built in a day. After the work was done long tables were spread with a bountiful meal. Henry and Anna's house was completed by fall of 1895.

The house was a two-story home with five bedrooms^{***}, four upstairs and one downstairs. The downstairs had a living room, a dining room, kitchen with a large cast-iron stove and a hand-pump to draw water from the cistern. In the kitchen was a large table where food preparation for meals, canning and drying occurred. The house also included a root cellar for storage of potatoes, dried apples, pears and corn. In addition, wood and coal were kept for the stoves.

The five bedrooms were built with the anticipation of a large family. Mennonite families typically averaged eight children and families of 12 to 15 were not uncommon. Anna and Henry had 7 children—6 sons and a daughter. Two of the sons died at around 1 year of age—one from typhoid, the other from meningitis. In order of birth, oldest to youngest separated by 17 years, were Minnie, Clarence, Jesse, Oliver, and Hiram.

Religion was a daily feature of family life, and both parents modeled the tenets of the Mennonite faith. In the morning it was customary to pray for good weather favorable to the crops, large litters of healthy livestock, guidance and strength for the day, and gratitude to God. God's blessing was asked before every meal, and in the evening it was common to thank God for His care throughout the day. Bible reading and study were part of the regular routine and children were required to memorize scripture.

The family motto taken from John Wesley was, "*Do all the good you can, to all the people you can, as long as you can.*" The children's public education was limited to local country schools and learning on their own. Henry was interested in education serving as a school officer for the Scheetz one room school where the children attended, and in the church he served as Sunday School Superintendent where he taught, even giving a session on "How to Select Teachers." Anna was even more inclined toward seeing that her children were educated and encouraged them all to go to College—Minnie and Clarence attended Defiance College and returned to teach in the local country schools in their early careers. The younger three boys all graduated from Bluffton College and two of them got their doctorates in Forestry, Jesse from Yale and Oliver from Ohio State University. This was most unusual. Many Mennonite families in that time period saw farming as the primary livelihood and expected their children to take over the family farm. Henry and Anna allowed their children to choose.

Anna and Henry were a team from the very beginning and cultivated the farm over the next 35 years. Henry planted an orchard that included apples, cherries and pears. Anna was responsible for tending the garden after Henry and the boys would prepare the ground and sow the seeds. She would can or dry the fruit and vegetables

and make apple butter in a big cast iron kettle and prepare the food for the winter. She would bake bread, pies and cakes. Her grandchildren could always count on her to have plenty of big sugar cookies. She also helped care for the chickens and ducks. Henry raised hogs, Shropshire sheep, and shorthorn cattle. In addition, Anna helped milk the cows and separated the milk and cream, and used some to make butter and cheese. She would carry water from the outside well to the house for bathing, laundry and some cooking. She sewed some of the clothes and would pluck down feathers from the ducks and hens for pillows. Some of this produce was sold to help supplement the family income. As the children got older they all assisted with the chores.

The horse was central to farming life in the late 1890s and Henry started to breed draft horses for the other family farms and this became his core business. Farmers in the 1890s in the US had only two sources of power aside from their own strength: steam engine tractors and horses. Steam engines were too heavy for the wet spring fields of NW Ohio and not practical. Draft horses and mules provided most of the power on all types of farms. The average farm had 3 to 4 working horses. In addition to supplying farm power, horses were the prime source of transportation of local goods and people. Plowing and mowing hay required two horses and a whole team of horses were needed for the community threshing machine. Horses were used to turn the mill to grind the grain.

Henry bred registered Percheron and Belgian draft horses, and in time he developed a reputation as a horse-breeder that produced strong, healthy horses. At one point he had 26 stud horses of these breeds and farmers would bring their mares to be bred by Henry's stallions. This is how my dad first learned about sex. As a young

boy he would peer through the knotholes in the barn and watch the stallions mount the mares, but he was inevitably caught and told to get away from the barn. To advertise Henry would show his stallions at county fairs in the region and brought home top prizes and typically a sale. To help advertise son Oliver painted a larger than life size picture of a horse on the front of the barn.

Henry became a leader in the community. Testifying of his integrity and high level of respect, he was one of the founding board-of-directors for the local bank, and for the Brotherhood Mutual Insurance company, serving the latter for 15 years. This company was limited to the community and immediate surrounding area to assist members with covering losses or organize needed help when illness hit a family. He also held leadership positions in the local Defenseless Mennonite Church. Within the extended family he became the recognized leader and for a decade organized and was president of multiple family reunions to capture the early history of the family and pass that on to future generations.

In 1919 he purchased an additional 70 acres for \$21,000 (\$300/acre) when prices were relatively high. The automobile was becoming more common with the Ford Model T introduced in 1908, and it was in 1917 that Henry Ford began to mass produce the "Fordson", a gasoline engine powered tractor. 1918 was the peak year for the highest number of horses and mules in the United States: 27 million, nearly one for every adult male. With WWI there was a high demand for draft horses and this created a relative shortage of horses for the farm. There were only 100,000 tractors in 1918 and the shortage of horses for the farm helped launch the Fordson. This mass production of the

tractor posed a real threat to Henry's core business he needed to help pay off the farm mortgage.

IV. A Series of Adverse Events.

The Role of the Tractor Increases

Following WWI there was a post-war crash in farm prices. As the decade progressed farm income from crops remained low and the demand for draft horses declined. By 1930 the number of farm horses and mules dropped by 30% to 19 million. Ford initiated a price war with International Harvester in 1922 by cutting the price of its Fordson from \$625 to \$395 dollars. By 1923 Fordson tractors owned 77% of the US market and by the middle of the decade tractors with gasoline-powered internal combustion engines became the norm. In 1925 International Harvester introduced a general all-purpose tractor, the Farmall. Other competitors jumped in, Deere, Massey-Harris and Case all developed general all-purpose tractors. Henry became increasingly concerned about how he would be able to make payments on the additional land he purchased in 1919. And then came the stock market crash in October of 1929. He still owed more than \$5000 on the original note. Like many families they struggled and had to economize. He continued to breed livestock, horses and cows, and show them at the county fairs to a dwindling market.

Nearly Killed When Gored By a Bull

In the midst of this changing business climate and financial stress Henry, now age 57, experienced the first of a series of adverse events. On November 15, 1930 he was selling a 3 year-old Guernsey bull weighing over 1500 lbs to a farmer (FJ Deters) from nearby Glandorf. Standing in the stall, Henry was directing the bull when the bull

turned quickly, charged and cornered him, goring him in the genitals and inguinal area. If not for Mr. Deters with a pitchfork and his driver (Mr Clair) with a club distracting the bull Henry would have been killed. It all happened in a flash, and he was fortunate that the bull's horns did not penetrate the abdomen and cause internal injuries that are common when rammed by a charging bull that lowers its head, using its horns to penetrate and lift. The newspaper said he suffered severe bruises, but that was the sanitized version. I later learned that his testicles were swollen and contused and that he was "laid up" for about two months. There are no records of exactly what his injuries were, but initial consequences were clear based on family members recollections of this experience: "He was never the same after that." "He was unable to carry on his work as before." Another said, "irreparable damage had been done", "he was a beaten man." That made it even more difficult in the early period of the Great Depression when self-sufficiency was essential for survival and this working farm lost its prime caretaker.

Only Anna and his youngest son Hiram were at home when this accident happened. Hiram, then 18 years old and recently graduated from high school, took on all the farm work and delayed going to college. Older brother Clarence also helped with the farm as I suspect other church members did. Son Jesse was working for the National Forestry service and Oliver was working on his PhD at Ohio State and would help when he came home, but their encouragement from their mother was to continue with their schooling and careers. By this time Clarence was building an insurance agency and Minnie had married and was a farmer's wife in Archbold. Ohio.

Henry required a long convalescence during the winter. Into the fall of the next year, 1931, he was unable to do physical work and his mood began to change. Sleep

was poor, his appetite was less, and sex was not possible. He could not make sound judgments or decisions. Over time he showed no improvement and instead became worse. He was losing a sense of reality and increasingly was dependent upon Anna. All that Henry had been responsible for became impossible. As an indication of how incapacitated he became, the farm was transferred from Henry to Anna as the sole owner, just two years after the goring, November 30th 1932. Eventually he experienced delusions. Delusions occur in about 8% of patients with protracted, untreated depression. They sought help from his physician, Dr. CD Bixel, but very little could be done, and the severity of his condition was making it increasingly impossible for Anna to care for him. It was creating a strain on her and she had to make a difficult decision.

The decision was made to hospitalize him at the Toledo State Hospital on Dec 12, 1932 with a diagnosis of "Insanity". This was the same year that the first Mennonite sponsored Mental Health Hospital (Bethesda) in North America opened in Vineland, Ontario, but the family did not know about that. The family likely did everything in their power to find alternative means of dealing with Henry's behaviors due to severe depression accompanied by delusions. Committing a person to an insane asylum often meant there were variety of aberrant behaviors such as hallucinations, agitation, immobile unresponsiveness, and also the threat of or the actual use of violence or attempted suicide. I imagine there must have been some crisis that occurred like a mental hurricane raging within—swirling racing disconnected thoughts, voices and visions creating a false reality and aggressive behaviors prompting a cry for help. The decision to commit Henry to a state hospital for the insane was likely undertaken with

great reluctance, and as a last resort. At that time his diagnosis of “insanity” included many possible causes including psychosis with mental deficiency and depression.

His Stay at the Toledo State Hospital

The Toledo State Hospital built in 1888 and originally called the *Toledo Asylum for the Insane* was the place for treating mental illness in the 1930s for residents of NW Ohio including Putnam County. This hospital complex was a 240-acre oasis with manicured grounds, a lake, gardens, fields for produce, barns for cows, hogs and chickens, its own power plant and 20 unique cottages to promote a home-like environment and neighborhood. The hospital also had infirmaries for physically ill patients and secure wards for the severe mentally ill. The patients were part of the labor force as a form of therapy. This design was to replace the prison-like environment common in mental asylums.

Treatments for mental illness in the early 1900s were based on the concept of “moral treatment” that dated back to the French physician, Philippe Pinel (1745-1826). Moral treatment stood in opposition to the physical-medical approach of isolation or confinement in jails and dungeons where chained restraints were used. Restraints and abuse were to be replaced by kindness and tolerance by the caregivers. This approach spread to England and the United States in the early 1800s. Ohio’s first asylum opened near Columbus in 1838.

The moral treatment approach was based on the belief that insanity was the result of damage caused by a person’s environment and that by moving the person to a different environment they might have a chance to recover. It advocated treating the mentally ill persons with sympathy and kindness in a place away from family, stress,

and the overstimulation of modern society. It required a clean healthy atmosphere with good food, fresh air, productive work, exercise and education; all considered key elements of rehabilitation and recovery. This was what was created at the Toledo State Hospital. Meaningful work for men meant gardening, caring for the livestock, farming and other manual labor suited for the person's mental and physical status. Diversion and entertainment were important to occupy the mind. The goal was to produce a sense of self-worth and build back a level of independence. Other forms of therapy included hydro- and occupational therapy and early forms of psychological counseling and education. Physical restraints were to be kept to a minimum.

Only two medications were used at Toledo State Hospital and recently introduced in 1931 insulin and Metrazol. In 1927 Austrian-American psychiatrist Manfred Sakel serendipitously observed that depressed diabetic patients who experienced insulin shock and had a return to normal blood sugars "woke up" and seemed to have an improvement in their depression symptoms. Metrazol, was a medication that caused convulsions and coma, and after waking up, led to some improvement in depression. But it was later discontinued for safety concerns due to deaths and broken bones caused by severe muscle contractions. Insulin and Metrazol were the forerunners of electroconvulsive shock therapy subsequently introduced in the 1940s.

It was not possible to get records of Henry's treatment, but because of the severity of his condition he was likely kept in the secure ward. I doubt that Henry was treated with Insulin shock therapy or Metrazol because he was not there long enough. Both of these were labor-intensive and required trained staff and a special unit. For

insulin shock therapy injections were administered 6 days a week for 2 months—inducing 50-60 comas until the psychiatrist thought maximum benefit was achieved. Henry was only there for 90 days so those treatments were unlikely.

Why was he discharged so soon? Being in one of the secure wards Henry's personal liberties were constrained and his behaviors regulated. Regulating behavior of unruly or non-compliant patients was the job of the attendants. Attendant turnover was high in most asylums, their tenure lasting about 8 months on average. The attendants had one of the hardest jobs. They were the least educated and trained and were the enforcers with non-compliant patients. Available were isolation rooms and restraints, but to get the patient in a room or restrained required physical manhandling. My dad told me that Henry was beaten by one of the attendants, learning of this from his father Clarence. I imagine once the family learned Henry was beaten they could not allow him to stay there any longer. He was discharged back to home on March 12, 1933 with the discharge note simply reading, "Unimproved."

Once home, family and close friends took turns watching him. He could not be left alone. There are some family letters in 1933 that suggest he "was doing better," but these letters are not very specific and probably reflect more hope than reality. His time at home with Anna and Hiram continued for another year.

Loss of his Wife

On March 16th 1934 Anna proudly attended Oliver's doctoral graduation from Ohio State University. Two weeks later on Monday April 2 Anna and Hiram had just finished the evening milking of the cows (just after 7pm). They were carrying the full milk can to the house when Anna suddenly collapsed and died from a heart attack. She

had a diagnosis of chronic angina prior to this event, but the physical demands of carrying the heavy milk can, added to the emotional duress of caring for Henry, caused too much strain on her heart. She was 62 years old.

With Anna's death her sister came to stay for a month to help, and Clarence and Hiram with input from the others had to decide what to do. The farm that had been the center of the family's life was taken over by the bank 3 weeks after Anna died. Clarence moved Henry and Hiram to his house of 6 children, ages ranging from 10 to 2. Henry had his own room but was a wanderer. He would roam the house and on several occasions his grandchildren were startled by him standing over them staring with a blank far-off look. At times he was locked in his room and he could be heard pounding on the door and struggling with the doorknob to get out. It was too much and the family decided it was better if he moved to Archbold to live with Minnie and her husband Ephraim and their 3 older girls and young son. This was in July of 1934.

V. His Final Year

It was not easy but for the next year the family seemed to settle into a flow and Minnie took the place of Anna and looked after him with help from her husband Ephraim and their teenage daughters. Henry achieved his 62nd birthday in February 1935 and later in the spring the family gathered for another reunion and took pictures. In these pictures Henry is physically wasted, a shell of his former self, and unsmiling as he stares into the camera. His sons, standing behind, are holding him by his shoulders to keep him still in the chair. What a dramatic change in a four ½ year period: from a community leader to a mental invalid.

In the first week of September as the girls were looking forward to returning to school, a Labor Day Hurricane ravaged Florida from Sept 2 to Sept 10th. It remains one of the strongest Hurricane on record with winds of 185MPH. On Sunday Sept 8th the family gathered as they typically did after church for a meal. Henry sat staring in a quiet way and ate little, but that was typical.

On Monday morning Sept 9 Minnie got the girls off to school and was cleaning up breakfast. Ephraim and his 4 year-old son Howard had gone to town on an errand. Minnie realized that Henry was not in the house; Henry had slipped away and had gone to the barn. Minnie saw a horse in the barnyard and went to investigate. Henry never lost his love of horses, and I can imagine that on this morning he took a rope and tied it to one of the beams stretching across the two sides of the barn, and then got one of the horses out of the stall. He put the rope around his neck and got on top of the horse and in one swift motion jabbed the horse to go as if they were going riding. Minnie entered the barn and found Henry still alive, struggling. She tried to cut the rope and get him down, but could not, so she went to the neighbors to get help. By the time she returned with a neighbor Henry was hanging limp with his life gone. The struggle of the last 5 years was over. He was buried next to Anna in the Old Swiss Mennonite Cemetery just a few miles from their farm in Putnam County.

VI. The Epilog. An Interpretation

This is the dark story of my Great-Grandfather, Henry Diller, the Horse-Breeder. A story passed down, but with few facts. I learned from my Dad and his sibling that their father Clarence shared very little of this story; my dad was old enough to have memories of that time—helping his grandfather as a six year old driving the hay wagon.

Jesse and Oliver were not living at home during those last 5 years, so they did not have many first hand experiences. It was Hiram who was there for all of the final years, and so difficult it must have been he never shared any details with his youngest son. Hiram had resolved like his older brothers, that he would not become a farmer, and as I mentioned earlier the family gave up the farm after Anna's death. Hiram started College in the fall of 1934 and graduated from Bluffton College in 1938. All of Henry's children left this trying chapter behind, focusing on their own families and looking to the future.

It was my dad who was startled awake by a staring Henry as a 9 year-old boy in the summer of 1934. My dad became a physician and seriously considered Psychiatry as a career path, in part to understand what happened. The lesson he took away from Grandpa Henry's life was that he did not manage the changes caused by the loss of his livelihood as a horse breeder. He was not able to change his business model when the tractor became the norm after 1925. As a result of this interpretation my dad adopted an approach to life that was captured by business guru, Peter Drucker who said, "Identify the trends and changes that have already happened." Don't resist change, instead seize the opportunities that come because of change. So strong was this lesson, it has taught me to be an observer and recognize trends, expect and accept change and to the extent you can, work to create positive change.

But based on what I discovered about the additional details of Henry's last years there was more than not being able to deal with change. His support of his children getting an education speaks against that and we know he and Anna had a phone and a car. To go from a respected community leader to an invalid after the going suggests the injuries he suffered led to his mental illness. My dad said that Grandpa Henry was

never the same after the bull gored him. Was that part of the answer? His testicles were contused and there are case reports in the literature of evisceration of the testicles or the need for castration, and I wonder if this was true of Henry. We now know that depression in some men is correlated with low testosterone levels, and was Henry in that group? In addition, his self-concept of being a man was likely impacted by this too. His loss of purpose and meaningful work fed back into the development of his depression.

His depression was untreated for 4 ½ years and eventually included delusions. In the 1930s there was nothing that could be done to reverse this. Thus, unlike today where active early treatment is possible, his brain took on a new normal that prevented him from ever returning to his previous state. Delusions carry a higher risk of suicide and in the 1930s delusions due to untreated depression meant an early death. We do not know the state of his mind that morning when he went to the barn. Did he have a flash of insight into his state that he was becoming a burden and chose to relieve everyone of that—in one last self-less act? Did he just fall into his final thoughts of hopelessness and saw suicide as a way out? Did he have delusions? Did he hear voices telling him what to do? Or was it that he longed to see and be with his beloved Anna and that suicide was a way to do that. As is often the case, we will never know.

In the end he was a victim of the limitations of treating mental illness in the 1930s. In some respects the asylum treatment was idyllic, and with some measures of success for the milder cases, but in the end too costly and not sustainable, and certainly limited in treating severe cases.

There are two other lessons that I learned from examining Henry's life. Until now I did not appreciate what else he and Anna passed down to their descendants, and I suspect many in my extended family have not realized these either. First, is the family motto that still continues and is evident in the subsequent generations: "*Do all the good you can, to all the people you can, for as long as you can.*" For Henry and Anna this grew out of their faith, and though not all of their descendants are of the same faith, as a group they live this core value expressed by that motto: we are here to do good to others and to help others in need in whatever way we can for as long as we can. The value of hard work is also very strong.

There is one other lesson that he imparted that was not common among Mennonites of that time period and that is the value of education. In this sense he was an early adopter. Bluffton College, a Mennonite College, was formed in 1899, but did not really see significant enrollment until the 1920s. All of his adult children went to college. Four of them taught at some point and others made teaching and research a career. It was highly unusual that all of his Mennonite sons did not take up farming, but instead became insurance agents, or foresters. The value of education has been passed down to subsequent generations. In Clarence's children alone—there were 26 grandchildren with College and of these, there are 3 lawyers, 3 doctors, 5 PhDs, a Nurse practitioner and 4 missionaries. And of the other descendants from Jesse, Oliver and Hiram—there are Harvard and Stanford lawyers, nurses, PhD college professors, school teachers, missionaries and accomplished musicians. My generation takes much of this for granted not recognizing that it was Henry and Anna who transmitted these values that are manifested in our lives today.

Yes, studying your family's dark story is risky—you do not know what you will find, but you may unravel a period story like the Horse-breeder's Tale that explains the forces that shaped you and your extended family generations later.

Philip M. Diller MD-PhD
Cincinnati Literary Club
February 1, 2021

*(The Defenseless Mennonite church denomination was founded by my great-great grandfather Bishop Henry Egly in 1866 in Berne, Indiana).

**Typhoid Fever. If a person survives he/she can become a carrier, ala Typhoid Mary Mallon, the first person in the US identified as an asymptomatic carrier that infected at least 53 people over a decade leading to 3 deaths (she was forcibly quarantined for 3 decades so that she could no longer cook for families).

***In the bedroom was an antique wardrobe that had come from the Basinger family.

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