HERSHEY ESTATES

Orchards

The Hershey Estates Orchards are best remembered being along Hershey Park Drive close to Hummelstown. For a while, they extended down to the road that goes into Union Deposit, across Hershey Park Drive onto the golf course land, on the hill where the State Police Academy is, and up in Oakmont.

In 1956, management of the orchards was transferred from Hershey Estates to Milton Hershey School. The orchard was closed in 1991 and the trees were removed in 1993.

FRUITFUL HARVEST is going on this week at the Hershey Farms Orchard, north of the Hummelstown-Hershey railroad underpass, where this trio is shown checking over some freshly picked Stayman Winesap apples. In the photo, left to right, are Ray L. Kirkpatrick, who is in charge of the orchards, Robert Snyder and Russell Huey. The orchards produce some 22 varieties of apples on approximately 150 acres. This year's crop is reported exceptionally fine, and visiting agriculture men from Pennsylvania State University said they've never seen the local apples look so good.

WINTER:

We trimmed the trees in the snow. When finished, all the branches lay in the rows between the trees. A giant rotor tiller mower with heavy blades ran down the rows grinding it all up. I hated that because some of those branches would fly out hundreds of yards.

SPRING:

In April or May, when the blooms would come out, there was a danger it would freeze all the blooms and you lose the whole crop. Hershey would bring in tractor trailers of tires and pack them in the back of the orchard. If the temperature started to get low, my dad stacked three or four tires at every couple of trees over the entire orchard. If the temperature dropped below 32°, they set all those tires on fire. The heat would make it warm enough to keep the buds from freezing. There was a problem with that, however. A burning tire burns black, And in the early morning, a black fog would be over the orchard. If the wind blew toward Hershey or Hummelstown, those particles of black soot would come down on wash hanging on lines. Hershey Estates would get many phone calls from very unhappy housewives. Later they solved that problem by using smudge pots. When the smudge pots were lit, it looked like campfires were burning all over the orchard.

SUMMER:

Summer was the time to thin the peaches and set up the irrigation system. Thinning peaches was not a good job. You were hot and peach fuzz got on you. To irrigate, Swatara Creek was damned, and a huge pump brought the water to a system of irrigation tubes. My dad had a particular nozzle that would spray 1.5 acres at one time. People would come from Airport Road, and I would see them parked and watching the sprinkler because it was awesome!

AUTUMN:

Fall was apple time. Apples and peaches were stored under the old museum because it was an icehouse. There were so many apples they sent tractor trailers over to Musselman's, which is now Mott's. And it was cider season. My dad had a special formula. It was awesome and I have never had any cider like it.

FRUIT AT HERSHEY ORCHARDS:
(OVER 310 ACRES)
APPLES - 22 VARIETIES ON 150 ACRES
PEACHES
NECTARINES
APRICOTS
SWEET CHERRIES
SOUR CHERRIES
PRUNE PLUMS
PURPLE PLUMS
RED HEART PLUMS
YELLOW PLUMS
CONCORD GRAPES
STRAWBERRIES
BLACK RASPBERRIES
RED RASPBERRIES
BLUEBERRIES
WALNUTS
ALMONDS
CHESTNUTS
PEARS
VINEGAR
CIDER
PUMPKINS

...and HONEY. Mr. Moose (the zookeeper) managed the bees and produced honey.
"He was always sticky..."

Hershey Orchard To Be Closed

Patrons of the Hershey Orchard fruit and vegetable outlet have been reporting rumors in the past two weeks that the Orchard will be closing up at the end of October as is the custom, but this year there is a difference . . . it won't be opening again.

The Hershey Orchard has been operated by the Milton Hershey School Trust for a number of years, and has provided fresh fruits and vegetables for both the Milton Hershey School and local patrons.

The Milton Hershey School Trust verified this week that such was the case. They indicated an effort will be made to find a private party to lease and operate the Orchard lands and facilities, but if none are found, the land will be put to other use.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 23, 1991

January 27, 1993

HERSHEY ORCHARD NO MORE — Workers from the Hershey Nursery chip branches from trees cut down at the former Hershey Orchard Friday, January 22. The apple and peach trees were cut because the majority of the plants were very mature and no longer economically viable, according to Gary Craig, vice-president and director of Real Estate for Hershey Trust Company. He added the trees from the dormant orchard were also removed to prevent the spread of plant diseases. Craig said once the trees are removed, most of the land will be plowed and used for other agricultural use. The Trust shut down the 40-acre orchard in fall 1991.

For further discovery, explore the Hershey History Center's Photo Archive.

HERSHEY HISTORY CENTER