

Written Profile

Farm: Bee Family Farm

Location: Fort Collins, CO

Date of Origination: 1894

Industry Sector(s): Sugar Beets, Sheep, Cattle



Rich in history and family values, the story of the Bee Family farm is one that will draw you in and captivate you like a well-crafted novel. Their story is the story of America; the story of immigrants who came to this nation to build a better life, and in doing so, built the agriculture industry as we know it today. Join us as we explore the story of the Bee Family and celebrate their contribution to **Agriculture's Lasting Heritage**.

The story began in 1853 when George Bee moved his family from England to Upper Sandusky, Ohio. Struck by the reality of the times, George lost his wife and son shortly after arriving in the New World. In 1861 his oldest son Francis enlisted in the Union Army, only to face the most gruesome battle fought on our soil. Held captive in a Confederate prison, Francis died of illness. John Bee, brother to Francis and son of George moved shortly thereafter to Iowa and married his wife Fanny. In 1882 John and Fanny moved to Fort Collins, Colorado and purchased a small herd of cattle. Fanny was able to entice her sister, Lizzie Morse, to move to Fort Collins as well. With the arrival of Lizzie and Al Morse, the foundation of the Bee Family Farm had been laid.

Al Morse raised and trained teams of horses that built reservoirs and irrigation canals in Fort Collins. In 1894 Al Morse acquired a homestead under the "Timber Culture Act", a federally funded program providing land in exchange for planting and maintaining a certain acreage of trees. Interestingly, the government at the time believed that the dry climate in northern Colorado was due to a lack of trees, and was attempting to alleviate this problem through the federal act. Today a single Cottonwood tree remains on the land, originally planted during the homestead process.

The harsh conditions of the time struck the family once again, as Lizzie Morse lost her son to typhoid and her husband four years later. Left to run the farm on her own, Lizzie was approached by her nephew Arleigh Bee, son of John and Fanny Bee. Arleigh moved to the farm to help. John and Fanny soon moved their house to Lizzie's farm - they literally moved their two story house and attached it to Lizzie's small cabin! This effort established the newly combined Bee-Morse Farm.

Great change soon came to Northern Colorado with the emergence of irrigation and the sugar beet industry. Known as "White Gold", sugar beet production increased exponentially with the opening of a beet sugar refinery in Northern Colorado in 1903. Sugar beets would soon surpass mining as the most profitable industry in the area.

On May 22, 1905 the family would be forever shaken with the loss of Fanny Bee. While hurrying to cover her garden from the torment of an oncoming storm, Fanny was struck by lightning and died instantly. Her husband John never recovered from his emotional loss and died the following year.

Positive change was just around the corner, however. In 1910 Arleigh Bee dug one of the first irrigation wells in the area, bringing much needed water to production lands. In 1930 the family purchased their first tractor, and in the late 1930's they planted their first crop of Pinto Beans. By 1971, as new family members became involved in operation of the farm, the Bee Family had acquired an additional 140 acres and rented over 300.

In 1994 the Colorado Historical Society recognized the Bee Family Farm as a Centennial Farm. In 2002, the farm was recognized as a National Registered Historic District, the same year the Bee Family harvested their last sugar beet crop. Challenging economic times brought challenging decisions to the family, and in 2002 the family sold 140 acres to Colorado State University. Ten acres, including the original homestead, remain in the family and operate as a historic museum. According to "All Good Gifts", a video about the family farm, "The Bee Family Centennial Family Farm Museum represents the most complete record of a single family's efforts to cultivate the high plains of Northern Colorado."

We acknowledge the great dedication and sacrifices made by the Bee and Morse families as they cultivated the land. Today we celebrate their contribution to **Agriculture's Lasting Heritage**.



John and Fanny Bee with children Arleigh,
Arthur and Emma circa 1896