

# The Lancaster County Farmers Market Serving the Main Line for Over Eight Decades

Daniel W. Neff

## Beginnings:

S. Clyde Weaver Smoked Meats began in Northern Market in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in 1920. Clyde and Emma Weaver were looking for marketplace opportunities as the country adjusted to economic depression. Their early years included selling ham, dried beef and bacon from a folding table on a curb market near the Lancaster County Courthouse on Duke Street in Lancaster, Pa. They believed that to be profitable in business, one needs to sell things that people use every day.

In 1933, Norman and Florence Sweigart opened a farmers market in Rosemont, Pennsylvania, 11 miles west of Philadelphia. The most sought after commodity was dressed poultry, and while the custom was to sell a defeathered chicken with the insides not taken out of the bird, the farmers from Lancaster County offered completely dressed chickens prepared ready to be put into the oven.

The market was named simply the Lancaster County Farmers Market. Inside the front door of the Rosemont Market was the S. Clyde Weaver stand, with Roy Burkhart as manager, selling smoked meats and cheeses. One of the products in great demand was our scrapple—with no sage added. There were, in addition, at least 18 other independent standholders, offering everything from chicken to baked goods; farm vegetables to fresh meats; candy to cut flowers. Many of these standholders would remain involved with us at market for many decades.

Several young people, some as young as 12 or 13 years old, worked regularly at the market in the 1930s. One of these, Anna Mary, worked for her father, S. Clyde Weaver, in the smoked meat and cheese stand. Another, Paul Neff, worked for his neighbor, Ralph Ranck, at Ralph's farm vegetable stand—located next to the Weaver stand at the Rosemont market. As such things progress, interest led to a developing relationship, and Paul and Anna Mary were married in 1941.

In 1951, the market was informed that the land and building in which they operated had been sold to Acme Markets. Mr. Sweigart had no interest in continuing as rental agent, and the market seemed



In 1951, the Lancaster County Farmers Market moved from Rosemont to a former Acme grocery store in downtown Wayne, at the corner of the Lincoln Highway (now known as Lancaster Avenue) and Louella Avenue. This is the best photograph that we have ever seen of that market. Note that the market was open only Wednesday and Saturday, from 6:00 AM – 4:00 PM. A side benefit of this image, taken about 1953, is the array of beautiful vintage 1950s automobiles in front of the market. *Courtesy of Dan Neff.*



This image, c. 1953, shows Paul Neff, son-in-law of C. Clyde Weaver, standing with his sons Dan (LEFT, born 1951) and Sam (RIGHT, born 1949) on the hood of the company's 1953 International Harvester truck that was used to deliver smoked meats and cheeses from East Petersburg, Pa. to the downtown Wayne and 69<sup>th</sup> Street farmers markets each Wednesday and Saturday. The gray stone building in the background was the Paul Neff home on the west side of East Petersburg. The house, built in 1940 with Lancaster County limestone, is, in 2019, occupied by Matthew Huacani, who operates the Country Twist stand in the Strafford market. *Courtesy of Dan Neff.*





(LEFT) With a 1966 Ford Fairlane in the foreground, and a Verigood Crullers delivery truck and another van delivering product through the front entrance of the downtown Wayne Farmers Market, this late 1960s image is a classic. The Market was open on Wednesday and Saturday only, and clearly, this image was taken on a non-market day—parking on market days was notoriously bad. Notice the nearby bell tower of St. Mary's Episcopal Church across Louella Avenue. *Courtesy of Suburban & Wayne Times collection, Radnor Historical Society.* (RIGHT) The Wayne Farmers Market, which operated so successfully from 1951 until March of 1977, looks a bit shabby a couple of months after being abandoned for the new larger market in Strafford. *Courtesy of the Radnor Historical Society.*

*"We were waiting for a parking space in front of the farmers' market in Wayne the other day when a woman drove beside us and then grabbed the space. "Madame," we said, "we were waiting for that space." She called us a pig and, in a very shrill voice, declared she'd been waiting for that space for half an hour. We drove around the block." From The Philadelphia Inquirer, in an article entitled 'What Happened to Courtesy,' page 78, January 9, 1977.*

*Always remember my mom driving around the block a million times waiting for someone to pull out so a parking spot would open up. — Larry DiSipio*

threatened with closure. The Weaver family stepped in to find a new and even better location nearby. A Wayne real estate agent informed the Weavers that a former Acme Market at East Lancaster Avenue and Louella Ave. in Wayne (some 4 miles west of Rosemont) was available. The Weavers soon acquired the property, and the Lancaster County Farmers Market opened their downtown Wayne location on April 7, 1951. A substantial number of the original standholders made the move to Wayne, and new independent standholders were quickly added.

The Market remained in downtown Wayne for twenty-five years, becoming a local Upper Main Line legend. But though the farmers market prospered in downtown Wayne, it increasingly



Images from the old Farmers Market in downtown Wayne. (ABOVE LEFT) Walter Himmelreich (center) and Bob Wiker serve their customers at their Old Homestead Farm vegetable stand in the front of the market, c. 1960s. (ABOVE CENTER and RIGHT) The Longacre Poultry stand, located in the front, left corner of the market. (BELOW LEFT) The Rittenhouse Poultry stand, c. 1960s. (BELOW CENTER) Norman Rittenhouse in front of his stand, c. 1960s. (BELOW RIGHT) In this undated photo, Mel Lefever is shown at his stand in the left rear corner of the market, near the dock. Lefever's sold loads of fresh cut flowers from his greenhouses on Jarvis Road in Lancaster, Pa. *Photos courtesy of Dan Neff.*

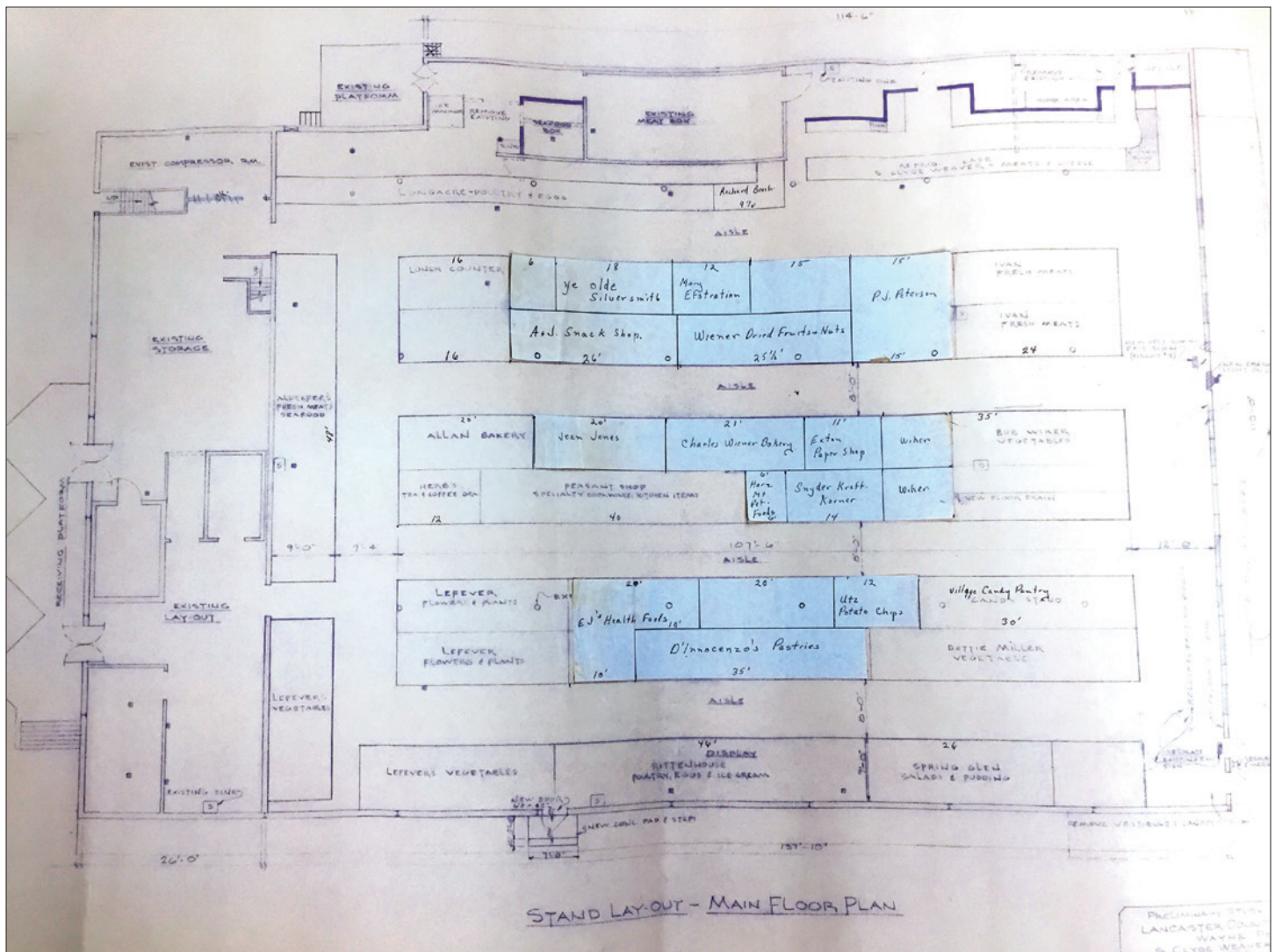




The present Strafford location, at 389 W. Lancaster Avenue, had been a vacant lot until the late 1950s. Several customers remember going to the circus there when the “big top” came to town.<sup>1</sup> Penn Fruit had built on that corner, and operated for almost two decades as an apparently thriving grocery store. But

a bankruptcy in the 1970s placed their Strafford supermarket, then owned by the Dorrance family, up for sale. Initially Paul Neff felt that this 20,000 sq. ft. building would be too large, and its asking price beyond the scope of the family's resources. But as time and conversations continued, the price became more favorable. The building was thus purchased in 1976 by Paul Neff and his brother-in-law Hiram Royer (both sons-in-law of S. Clyde and Emma Weaver).

1. Carolyn Rivers remembers "... the Hunt Brothers Circus. They came to Strafford for several years. I think their daughter Marcia had an elephant act. A fairly small circus, but it did have a big top," Jim Falcone, Jr., who grew up in Strafford, remembers that " ... between 1955-58, the Hunt Bros. Circus came to the vacant lot in Strafford each summer where the Penn Fruit supermarket would later be built. All my friends and I would ride our bikes over there and spend a lot of time during the several days of each annual visit. Honestly, it was a slightly 'seedy' affair—a 'carni-thing'—but it sure was fun. They had a peep-show, a shooting contest using a real .22 rifle, and a booth where you try to knock down prizes with a ball ... but it was almost impossible because the prizes were weighted. They had at least one elephant, which they used to erect the 'big top' tent." The land remained completely undeveloped until the Penn Fruit supermarket was built in the late 1950s.



This rare blueprint, titled “Stand Lay-Out – Main Floor Plan,” was made for S. Clyde Weaver Inc. in December 1976, to depict how the former Penn Fruit supermarket in Strafford was to be renovated to replace the Lancaster County Farmers Market in downtown Wayne. A review of proposed standholders listed on the plan brings back many memories: Bob Wiker Vegetables, D’Innocenzo’s Pastries, Ivan (Heebner) Fresh Meats, Lefever Flowers & Plants, Longacre Poultry, Rittenhouse Poultry, and Utz Potato Chips. *Courtesy of Dan Neff.*