

Personal Memories of the Market

Carol and I are not native “Main Liners,” having arrived from the Chicago-area in the early 1980s. And it was not for several years that friends mentioned the Lancaster County Farmers Market in Strafford as a place we might enjoy visiting ... especially on a Saturday morning. We listened courteously, but somehow farmers market and the more familiar flea market seemed to equate to the same thing ... and neither to our preference.

But on an unremembered Saturday morning almost 30 years ago, we visited the market for the first time. Spotting tables near the entrance, we deferred our shopping, bought coffee (from the legendary Bill Drinkwater), and occupying one of the few tables remaining, we “people-watched.”

With the hindsight of decades, I believe our first impression of this place was the collegiality of so many early on a Saturday morning. Not just greetings shared among shoppers, but between those on both sides of the numerous booths, selling everything from pretzels to meat, vegetable to candy to cheese. Friendly places were not uncommon to Carol and me, but this seemed different.

Perhaps it was a “guy-thing,” but grocery shopping, for me, was instinctually, something to be endured ... and ended quickly. But these visits seemed different. Folks who waited on us were not only friendly and courteous, but truly competent in answering our questions and making recommendations that made sense. And, uniquely, though each stand was clearly independent, with a personality of its very own, here there was a sense of family, of camaraderie ... and all helpful to us as both visitors and shoppers.

And so, this first visit, this first impression, led to its successor the following Saturday. Soon, these visits led to a remembered name, a friendship and then another, and soon we anticipated each following Saturday at the Market. Friends and family would come to visit us in Pennsylvania, and we would invite them, early on a Saturday morning (always without pressure, when sleeping in was always a reasonable option), to join us on these visits. Their first exposure, generally guarded, led, on subsequent visits, to preemptive requests to join us. The habit was catching.

The years quickly passed, and soon our grandchildren would eagerly await their visits with “Gammy and Papa” to the Farmers Market for donuts and chocolate milk. One of our granddaughters would express her concern that maybe we wouldn’t arrive early enough, and the sprinkled donuts would be gone. She was never disappointed.

The years pass, and our chance visit decades ago has transformed into a warm and friendly habit that has become part of our lives. We await next Saturday. — *Roger D. Thorne*

Roger Thorne has been a Tredyffrin resident since 1983, and is a past president of the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society.

Memories of the Lancaster County Farmers Market in Wayne

In the Fall of 1966, I was new to the western Main Line area, and was looking for something pleasant to do on Saturday mornings. Having a leisurely breakfast at the counter of the Wayne Diner (located where Margaret Ku’s Restaurant is now, across Lancaster Avenue from St. Mary’s Episcopal Church), I soon learned that on Saturday mornings in particular, there was an unusually heavy amount of foot and automobile traffic to be experienced due to the Lancaster County Farmers Market located across from the Diner.

I had seen farmers’ markets before, e.g. in Norristown and Pottstown, but they were just that, places where “local” farmers sold their goods to people who thought it worth their while and extra effort to buy there instead of at local food stores or the supermarkets which had become so ubiquitous in the 1950s.

After a few Saturday morning walk-throughs I soon learned that this place was indeed a source of especially good fresh food; but what did a bachelor with no cooking skills or ambitions in that direction want with a freshly-killed chicken or a bunch of locally-sourced turnips?

But there was an offsetting compensation to going there. The clientele featured some very well-dressed and handsome people who apparently were there not only to shop for especially good food—yes—but also to see and talk with each other. Something like a toned-down version of the Devon Horse Show, or the St. David’s Church October festival, but here it was every Saturday of the year. I never saw any “celebrities,” but if they were there, I suspect they would have blended in well with the people I did see.

One other memory dates back to a Saturday in the Fall of 1968. I stood outside the Farmers Market in a large crowd, taking an 8mm movie of Richard Nixon’s presidential campaign motorcade passing through Wayne heading west toward Paoli. I remember being surprised that there he was in an open car, just like JFK five years before. — *James Brazel*

James Brazel is a retired optical physicist who has lived on the Upper Main Line since 1976, and a long-time member of the Society.