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# The Famous Triple Silos at Normandy Farm

Ask a group of Whitpain children to name the tallest thing they see on the horizon, and they will say a cell phone tower. Ask that question 100 years ago, or maybe even 50 years ago, and they would say a silo. Farms covered Whitpain Township in its early years, so barns with silos scattered its rural lanes, with the most famous of all the silos being the triple silos at Normandy Farm.

The farm began in 1730, and in 1913 it was named Normandy Farm when Ralph and May Strassburger purchased it to raise thoroughbred horses. Then in the 1920s, so wealthy that they were unaffected by the Great Depression, the Strassburgers shipped their horses to one of their estates in France and bought 300 head of Ayrshire dairy cattle from

Scotland. Why the change? Due to the poor economy, and the area's increasing population, milk was profitable, and labor was cheap. The giant "Whitpain herd" needed many men.

Building the silos meant increased earnings. The scientific research of those years showed that cattle with better food produced more milk and milk of better quality. Fermenting in those air-tight silos were nutritious chopped grasses and corn stalks, harvested in September and fed to the cattle throughout the winter.

To store enough food for their 300 cows, the Strassburgers constructed three concrete-block silos, but then they needed more land to raise more crops to fill them. So they continued to buy property until Normandy Farm reached 1500 acres, becoming the largest farm in the area. The barn, built in 1879, was already one of the most enormous in the United States!

Today the barn and its silos entertain guests at the Normandy Farm Hotel and Conference Center. There the Silos Ballroom often hosts a wedding, and one of the silos has a special duty: Under a spotlight, alone in the center of the dark silo's circular walls, stands a beautiful wedding cake.

The iconic triple silos are near the Franklinville School, featured in the previous two issues of *Blue Bell's Finest*. The one-room school's white-stucco walls and red-trimmed shutters follow the color pattern BBCC residents see at Normandy Farm.

*Carol Kalos, Saint Andrews resident and interim president of the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society, is working to save the historic school. Find details at [WValleyHS.org](http://WValleyHS.org).*

