

THE HANCE HOUSE AND THE HANCE-LAMMERS CONNECTION

By Matthew C. Perry

When I was working on a national wildlife refuge in Florida in 1971 and considering transferring to Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, I got a very interesting offer. Mr. Ralph Andrews, who was the hiring officer, mentioned in a telephone conversation, “Oh, by the way, there also is a house available at Patuxent for rent if you are interested.” It was the clincher that made up my mind that I would accept the job, transferring from an assistant refuge manager position to a research biologist position. When I arrived at Patuxent in 1971, I settled into the Hance House for a very enjoyable 8-year residency. The small concrete-block structure was not the original Hance House, as the government had destroyed that old wooden structure. In fact, my house was officially Quarters #9, but because the location of the house was at the same exact place on the historic Hance Farm, it was commonly referred to as the Hance House. That name sure sounded better than calling it Quarters #9. Both homes were shaded by a tall sycamore tree and a large black walnut tree, and two smaller maple trees were located in the front yard.

The Frank Hance family had lived on the land, which had become Patuxent Research Refuge, and several Hance family members were also employed by the government. The story I learned when I arrived at Patuxent was that the original Hance House had been demolished when Mr. and Mrs. Hance, the last residents, were away on vacation in California. This story is corroborated by Dr. Leland Morley, the Refuge Superintendent, in his history of Patuxent. The government was building new structures to replace the older houses and barns on the Refuge and the Hance house was one of many destroyed in the late 1930s. It was replaced with a “Bureau-modified Type F residence” and in the early years was referred to as the “cottage.”



Original house of J. Frank Hance.



Outbuildings and livestock of J. Frank Hance.



Hay Barn on Hance Farm that was destroyed by government



Hance barn with government workers. Barn was used as first WPA tool room and time office.



Construction of new storage building to replace old Hance barn, 1942.

I also soon learned stories of Mr. Frank Hance, who according to Dr. Francis Uhler, “with one arm, could work twice as hard as any man with two arms.” Mr. Hance had his own farm, where he and Mrs. Estella Hance raised their family, but he also worked for Mr. Snowden on the farm within a mile distance. The Hance couple had a son, Raymond Hance, who worked on the Refuge in the late-1930s, and a daughter, Elizabeth, whom I met when she was elderly. She told me many stories about the family and Patuxent history, including how she walked to the Fairy Spring School on the Laurel-Bowie Road in Laurel in the 1920s. She would stop at the Snowden residence to meet her teacher, Miss Ida Waring, and then walk the remaining distance with her. Miss Waring had rented a room from Mr. Snowden for many years and had eventually married him when he was late in life. Mrs. Lammers died on March 28, 2012, just three months short of being 100 years old. She was a unique and charming lady.

I was always curious on how Mr. Hance had lost his arm, but I was reticent to ask for personal reasons of not wanting to give the impression that I was dwelling on the tragedy. I never asked his daughter, but did ask one of the relatives and received the following explanation.

According to his granddaughter, Beth Lammers Elliott, Frank was working in the wheat field when a bunch of wheat got stuck in a machine that was being used to harvest the wheat. Frank reached in to pull the wheat out, when his arm was pulled into the machine. According to Beth, Frank was transported by horse and buggy to the Laurel train station, where he was transported by train to a hospital in Baltimore. In this day of helicopter transport to trauma centers, it is hard to imagine the pain and apprehension that Mr. Hance endured. He came home and continued to do the hard work on the Hance and Snowden property, and later on these properties when they became part of Patuxent. Mr. Hance retired from the government in 1942.

Frank's daughter, Elizabeth, married Charles Lammers, who was part of a local family living west of Patuxent along the Laurel Bowie Road (Route #197). Charles worked as a mechanic and then was promoted to maintenance supervisor in the 1940s. His cousin, Lawrence, also worked in the maintenance section, starting in the late 1940s.

Elizabeth and Charles had two daughters and were raised in the two-story home on Route #197 near the Baltimore Washington Parkway. One daughter, Ruth Lammers Barton, accompanied me and her mother in 1985 when we visited the Snowden cemetery located at Fort Meade. This historic burial ground is now part of Patuxent Research Refuge. Beth Lammers Elliott is the other daughter, who lives locally in Laurel.

The early history of the Lammers family is a little confusing, but very interesting. There were two brothers, Arnold and Henry, who had originally emigrated from Germany in the early 1900s and each developed a farm on opposite sides of the Laurel Bowie Road. The two brothers married two sisters with the maiden name of Otten. Charles Lammers was the son of Arnold and married Elizabeth Hance, while his cousin, Frank Lammers, married Elizabeth Hanus. The unique similarity of the names, Elizabeth Hance Lammers and Elizabeth Hanus Lammers, created much confusion with the local banks, doctor offices, and other businesses in the Laurel and Bowie area.

Although I did not know Elizabeth Hanus Lammers, I did know her daughter-in-law, Marylu Lammers, who was secretary for my first boss, Ralph Andrews, at Patuxent. Marylu was extremely competent and provided good guidance and assistance to myself and other younger biologists being hired during the environmental movement of the 1970s. Marylu was promoted through several positions in the government and was the Administrative Officer at Patuxent when she left for a higher position in Department of Agriculture in Beltsville, before retiring.

I also did not know Elizabeth Lammers' brother Raymond. His daughter, Martha, however, married Pete Hobbs, who also was part of a local family living on the Laurel Bowie Road. Pete's brother was Tom "Buck" Hobbs, who worked as a heavy-equipment operator at Patuxent for many years. He tragically died at Patuxent on July 12, 1985, from a heart attack following an accident with heavy equipment. In 1989, at our 50th anniversary, Pete and Martha's daughter, Barbara, represented the Hobbs family when we dedicated Hobbs Pond in memory of Tom, who had given a lifetime of work on the impoundments of Patuxent. Mrs. Martha Hobbs now lives in Delaware, and her daughter, Barbara Hobbs Morris, lives in Crofton, Maryland.

After the Hance family left the house in 1942, the cottage was occupied by the Patuxent mammologist, Mr. Leonard Lewellyn, and his wife in the 1940-50s. I was told that Mr. Lewellyn used the beautiful sun room on the eastern side of the house for his bedroom during the last days of his life. In the late 1950s, Eugene Knoder lived in the house. Ralph Andrews told me that Gene commonly shot clay pigeons from the ridge on the east side of the house close to Hance Creek. This was the reason the creek was never dammed to become an impoundment due

to the potential problem of poisoning of ducks using the wetland if they ingested the lead shot in the soil. Patuxent employees, who lived in the Hance House in the 1960s, included Frank and Marilyn McGilvrey, who were followed by Fred Sampson and his wife, Sue. My wife, Patricia, and I lived in the Hance House from October 1971 to October 1979, and were followed by Mike and Nina Haramis, Chris Franson, Patrice Klein, and other numerous short-term residents from the 1980s to present.



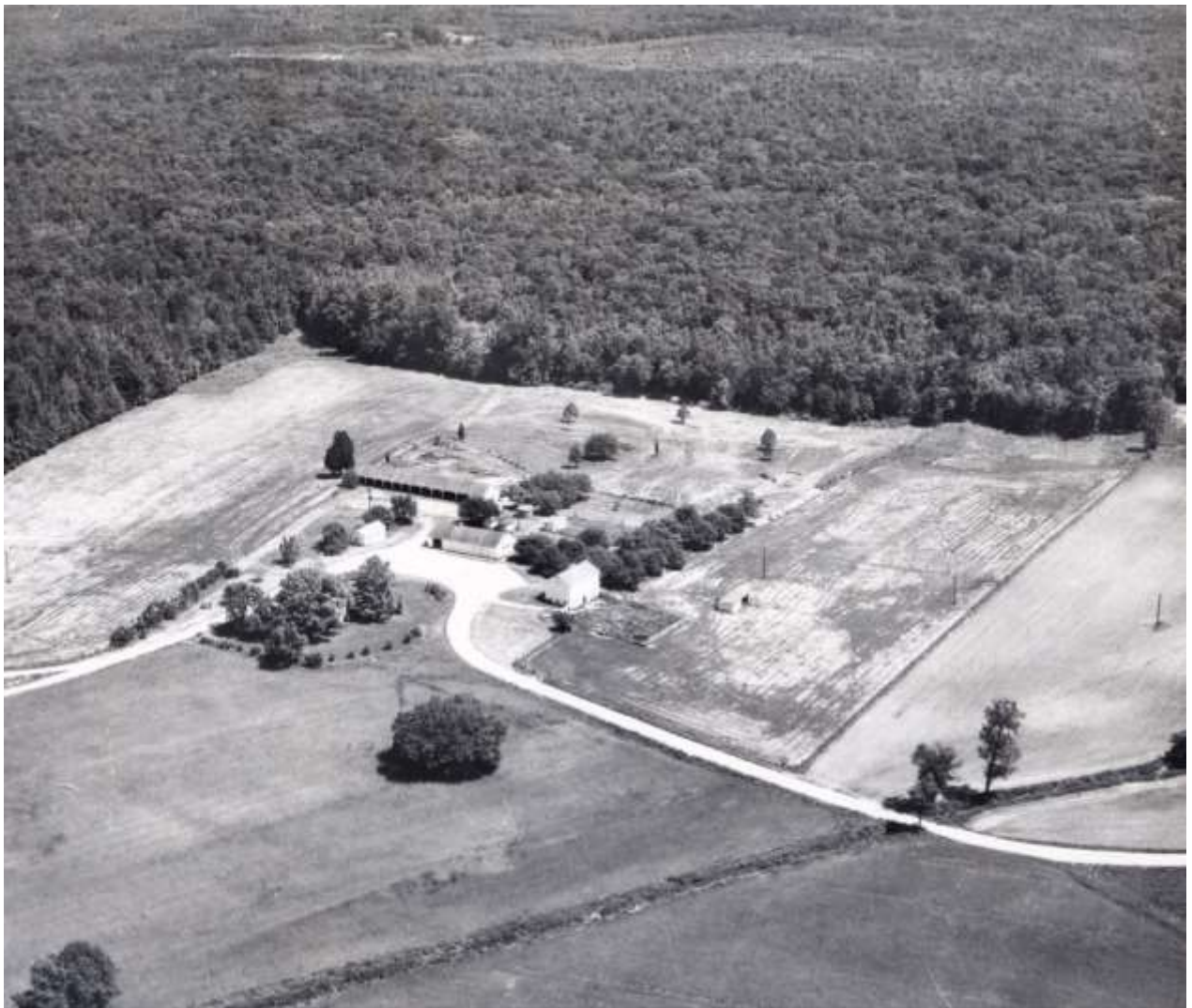
The Hance Cottage (Quarters #9) in 1939, with black walnut tree in front yard.

The Hance Farm was the location for several key science findings of international significance. Two buildings (Coburn Laboratory and Coburn Annex) were constructed by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) on the Hance Farm in the 1960s. The research conducted there focused on the deadly disease called Kuru that was a mysterious disease in humans caused by a latent virus. Monkeys were the surrogate species for this research and were maintained in cages in one of the buildings. This research revealed crucial knowledge of the disease and resulted in a Nobel Prize for the NIH researchers. Forty pens for the DDT studies with black ducks were built to the north-east of the Hance house. This research conducted mainly by Jerry Longcore led to the finding that this chemical resulted in egg shell thinning in birds. Steel Shot shooting tests in an open field that was critical in leading to the conversion of the use of steel shot instead of lead shot for waterfowl hunting. Pen research continues on site.

The connections with the persons in the Hance, Lammers, and Hobbs family represents some of the strong family connections with Patuxent Research Refuge. I was happy to make the connection with the families by living in the Hance House and also knowing and working with members of the Hance, Lammers, and Hobbs families. These local families lived and worked at Patuxent and their names and personalities are woven into the history of Patuxent in an inextricable fashion, of which they can be extremely proud.



Hobbs family men harvesting wheat in Patuxent floodplain.
Photo by Sophia Lammers Hobbs from Snowden Hall porch.



Aerial view of Hance Farm in the 1950s with Hance House hidden in trees in left center of picture.