A

Background and Secondary Research on "Mushroom House" at Auer Farm

Prepared by Ty Tryon
September 12, 2007

The mushroom house sits on the property of the Auer Farm, 158 Simsbury Rd, Bloomfield, which is the regional HQ for the Education 4-H Center of University of CT. Auer Farm was an active dairy farm 1920/1950s.

Thomas C. Perkins bought the land in 1912 and named it Benvenuto Farms. George S. Auerback purchased the farm from Thomas C. Perkins in July 1925 according to a November 11, 1917 edition of the Hartford Courant. The newspaper story depicts the farm as the most modern and scientific facility in the state. The article describes a wide variety agriculture and dairy products produced on Benvenuto Farm but no mention of mushrooms production.

Unsubstantiated Oral History:

Believed to have been built by Russian Bolsheviks from Washington State to cultivate mushrooms. Believed to be built ca 1900, prior to Auer Farm. Barn was not built by owner of the land. No oral history to support mushrooms were cultivated there.

Building Desciption:

Building dimensions: 21 ft wide X 50 ft long.
Height to roof-line approx 20ft.
Windowless, no lower level vents.
It is visible from main road, Rt. 185

Roof Type/Style:

Roof line called "Monitor". Wooden shingles. A portion of the roof has deteriorated exposing inside to the elements.

Building Design:

Building design follows recommendations from period literature.

Title: Mushrooms: how to grow them: a practical treatise on mushroom culture for profit and pleasure
Author: Falconer, William.
Print Source: Falconer, William. Orange Judd Co. New York :[1891]

Exterior walls:

There is an external chimney as well as signs of an attached shed to house a boiler/furnance. Exterior is double walled, hollow terracotta. Some tiles damaged and need replacement, otherwise exterior appears in good condition except for one stress crack. Tiles are stamped with "NATCO". NATCO was located in Haydensville, Ohio.

"NATCO (the former Haydenville Firm) were manufacturers of Conduit Tile for Western Electric Co. These were used to carry telephone, telegraph and electric wires underground and were shipped to all parts of the nation. They from 1912 to 1916 built silo tile which was used on farms from New York, Michigan, Wisconsin, Indiana and Ohio. Structural tile Tex-Tile were used for small and large buildings such as garages, stores, elevators, manufacturing industries and theatres". Source: History of Hockunum Valley.

Interior:

Dry-earthen floor. Back door is a doubled walled door as specified for doors in the 1892 "Treatise" on mushroom cultivation. There are pipes running through out the lower interior side of the wall that may have been attached to an external furnace.

Farm machinery equipment inside appears to be "cultivation/sorting/processing" machinery made by Friends Manufacturing Co, Gasport, NY

A wooden storage bin and other wooden structures appear to have been installed later for other purposes. May be connected to apple cleaning and sorting processing.

Surroundings:

Building is on original site situated in active cultivated farm land. Nearby houses are from 18th & 20th century as well as a (ca. mid 1830s) one room, stone school house.

There is an abandon well-head on crest of hill, due west of building that may have supplied water to the Mushroom House.

Hazards to the structure are: Continued deterioration and vandalism.

Misc History:

1949 Hartford Courant photo shows interior of mushroom house being used for apple cleaning and sorting. Apple cleaning and sorting equipment, made by "Friends Mnfg of New York", is still in place as depicted in photo.

Extract from two Hartford Courant stories 1917 & 1949

Original farm name was Benvenuto Farms. A November 11, 1917 edition of the Hartford Courant writes about the farm as the most modern and scientific facility in the state. The article describes a wide variety of agriculture and dairy products produced on the Benvenuto Farm but no mention of mushrooms production.

Key dates from this article are:

1912 Thomas C. Perkins buys abandon farm land and names it Benvenuto Farm.
1913 a cottage is built on hill
1913 500 fruit trees planted
1914 5,000 apple, pear, quince trees are planted
1915 Small dairy heard started
1916 Barn built to hold 72 cows
1917 Hartford Courant calls Benvenuto Farm as one of the state Show Dairy Farms
1925 Benvenuto Farm, 150 acres, was purchased by George S. Auerback
1949 Hartford Courant "Inspiration Farm" article calls Auer Farm a "Modern Farm"
1976 Auerbach family gives farm to 4-H Development Fund.

MR. PERKINS HAS A LOG CABIN THAT IS FITTED UP WITH EVERY MODERN CONVENIENCE INSIDE, BUT LOOKS LIKE THE MAINE WOODS OUTSIDE.

A GENERAL VIEW OF THE FARM BUILDINGS ON BENVENUTO FARM—TO THE LEFT THE COWBARN WITH SILO TANKS, TO THE RIGHT THE OFFICE, GARAGE AND DAIRY.

B

MUSHROOMS:

How to Grow Them.

A PRACTICAL TREATISE

ON

Mushroom Culture for Profit and Pleasure.

BY

WILLIAM FALCONER.

ILLUSTRATED.

NEW YORK,
ORANGE JUDD CO.
1892.

CHAPTER III. GROWING MUSHROOMS IN MUSHROOM HOUSES.

A mushroom house is a building erected purposely for mushroom culture. It may be wholly or partly above ground, and built of wood, brick, or stone, and extend to any desired dimensions. But a few general principles should be borne in mind. Mushrooms in houses are a winter and not a summer crop, and they are impatient of sudden changes of temperature and of a hot or arid atmosphere. Therefore, build the houses where they will be warm and well-sheltered in winter, so as to get **FIG. 7.** the advantage of the natural warmth, and spare the arti- ficial heat. They should be entered from an adjoining building, or through a porch on the south side, so as to guard against cold draughts or blasts in winter when the door would be opened in going into or coming out of the house.

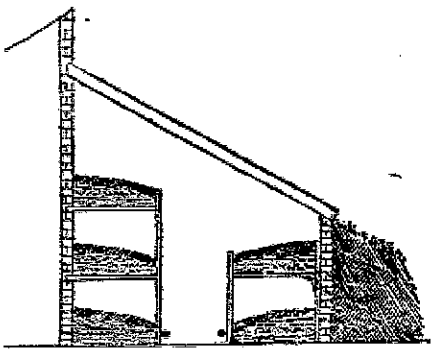


FIG. 7. MUSHROOM HOUSE BUILT AGAINST A NORTH-FACING WALL.

At the same time, do not lose sight of convenience in handling the manure, either in bringing it into the house or taking it out, and with this in view it may be necessary to have a door opening to the out- side. All outside doors should be double and securely packed around in winter. Side window ventilators are not necessary, at the same time they are useful in the early part of the season and in summer time; they should be double and tightly packed in winter. The walls, if made of brick, should be hollow, if of wood, double; indeed, walls built as if for an ice house are the very best for a mushroom house, and should be banked with earth, tree leaves, or strawy manure in winter, to help keep the interior of the house a little warmer.

The floor should be perfectly dry; that is, so well drained that water will not stand upon it, but it is immaterial whether the floor is an ordinary earthen one or of wood or cement. The roof should be double and always sloping,never flat. The hoar frost that appears in severe weather inside a single roof is likely to melt as the heat of the **FIG. 8.** day increases, and this cold drip falling upon the beds below is very prejudicial to the mushroom crop. A double roof saves the beds from this drip,

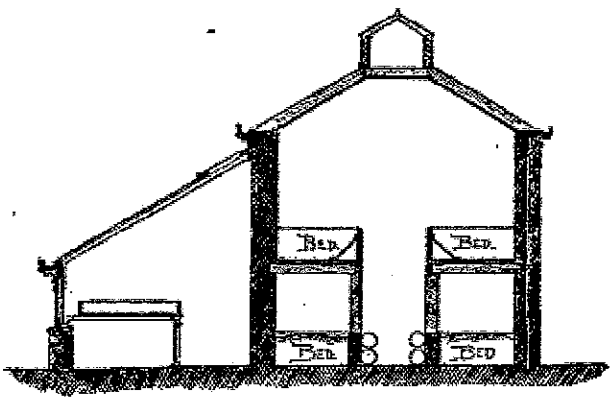


FIG. 8. SECTION OF MRS. C. J. OSBORNE'S MUSHROOM HOUSE.

and it also ren~lers the house warmer, and less fire is needed to main- tain the requisite temperature. One might think that a single roof like that of a dwelling house, and then a flat ceiling under it, would be equivalent to a double sloping roof, but it is not. The moisture arising from the interior of the house condenses upon the flat ceiling, and the water, having no way of running off, drips down upon the beds. With a sloping ceiling or inside roof the water runs down the ceiling to the walls. A very pointed example of this may be seen in Mrs. C. J. Osbornes **FIG. 9**. excellent mushroom house at Mamaroneck, N. Y.

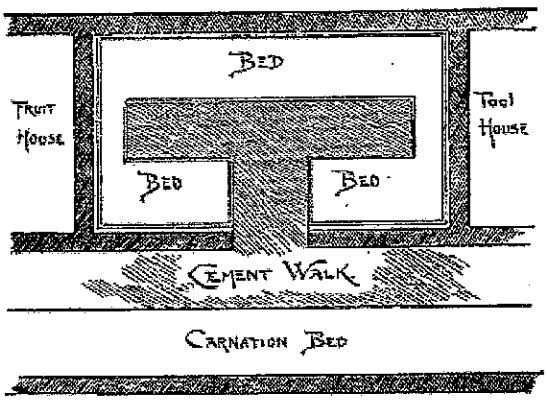


Fig. 9. Ground Plan of Mrs. Osborne's Mushroom House.

It had been built in the most substantial manner, with a sloping roof and a flat ceiling under the roof, but so much annoyance was caused by the drip falling from it upon the beds below that her gardener had the flat ceil- ing removed and a sloping one built instead, and now it works splendidly, and a few months ago I saw as fine a crop of mushrooms in that house as one could wish to look at.

The interior arrangement of the mushroom house may resemble that of the mushroom cellar. Beds may be made alongside of the walls and, if there is room, also along the middle of the house, and shelves erected in the same way as in the cellar. But in the case of cold, thin outside walls, the shelf-beds should not be built close against them, but instead boxed off about two inches from the walls, so as to remove the beds from the chilling toach of the wall in winter. Economy may suggest the advisability of high mushroom houses, so that one may be able to build one shelf above another, until the shelves are two, three, or four deep. But thiss a mistake. The artificial heat required to maintain a temperature of 550 in midwinter in a house built high above ground would be too parching and unsteady for the good of the mushrooms; besides, a second shelf is inconvenient enough, and whetn it comes to a third or a fourth the inconvenience would be too great, and over- reach any advantage hoped for in economy of space. An unheated mushroom house must be regarded as a shed, and treated similarly, as described in the following chapter. In large, well appointed, private gardens, a mushroom house is considered an almost indispensable adjunct to the glasshouse establishment, and is generally built against the north-facing wall of a greenhouse. In this way it gets the benefit of the warm wall, and may be easily heated by introducing one or two hot-water pipes from the greenhouse system; besides, in winter the house may be entered from the glass house or adjacent shed, and in this way be exempted from the inclement breath of the frosty air that would be admitted in opening the outside door.

Mr. Samuel Henshaw s Mushroom House.

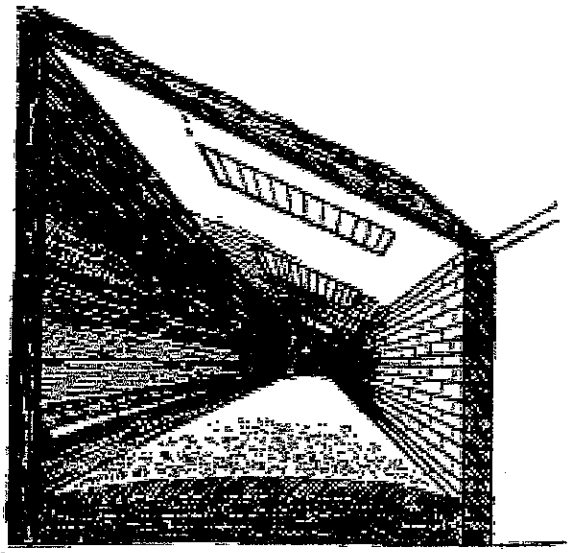


FIG. 10. INTERIOR VIEW OF MR. S. HENSHAW'S MUSHROOM HOUSE.

Mr.Henshaw has raised mushrooms several years at his place on Staten Island. His mushroom house is nine feet wide and sixty feet long. One side is a brick wall and the other is double boarded. The roof is of tin, in which there are three sash- es each two by five feet, supplying ample light. At each end is a door giving convenient access to the interior, for carrying in and removing material without disturbing the bearing beds. In winter the roof is covered with a coating of salt hay, to preserve an equable tempera- ture and prevent the moisture from condensing on the ceiling and falling in drops on the beds. The floor is of earth, which, when well drained, he thinks preferable to either brick or lumber. The floor is entirely covered with beds, no shelves or walks being used. This makes it necessary to step on the beds, but as no coveilng is employed it is always easy to avoid stepping on the clus- ters of young mushrooms, and so long as they are left uninjured the bed is seldom, if ever, impaired by the compacting effect of the treading. In order to main- tain a necessary winter temperatnre of 600 a four-inch hot-water pipe extends the whole length of the house about two feet from the floor. On the other side of the brick wall is a greenhouse which, by keeping the wall warm, helps to keep the mushroom house warm. Mr. ilenshaw divides this house into three equal beds. The part at the further end of the house is made up in the fall and comes into bearing in December; the middle part a month later to come in a month later, and the near end still a month later, to follow as another succession. Then, if need be, and he wishes to renew the bed at the further end of the house, he clears it out and supplies fresh material for the new bed.

C

Auer Farm "Mushroom House" photos and diagrams

1892 Illustration

Here is an illustration of the Mushroom house from the 1892 "Treatise".

The Auer Farm Mushroom house is nearly identical in structure minus the attached green house.

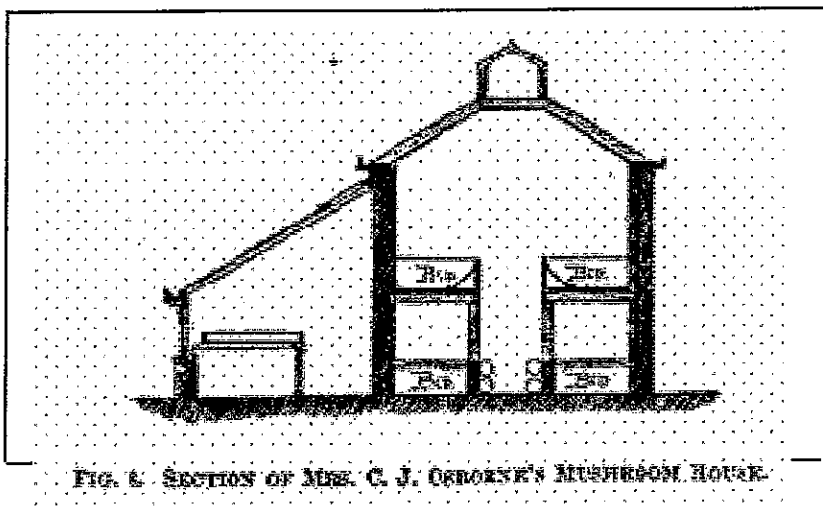
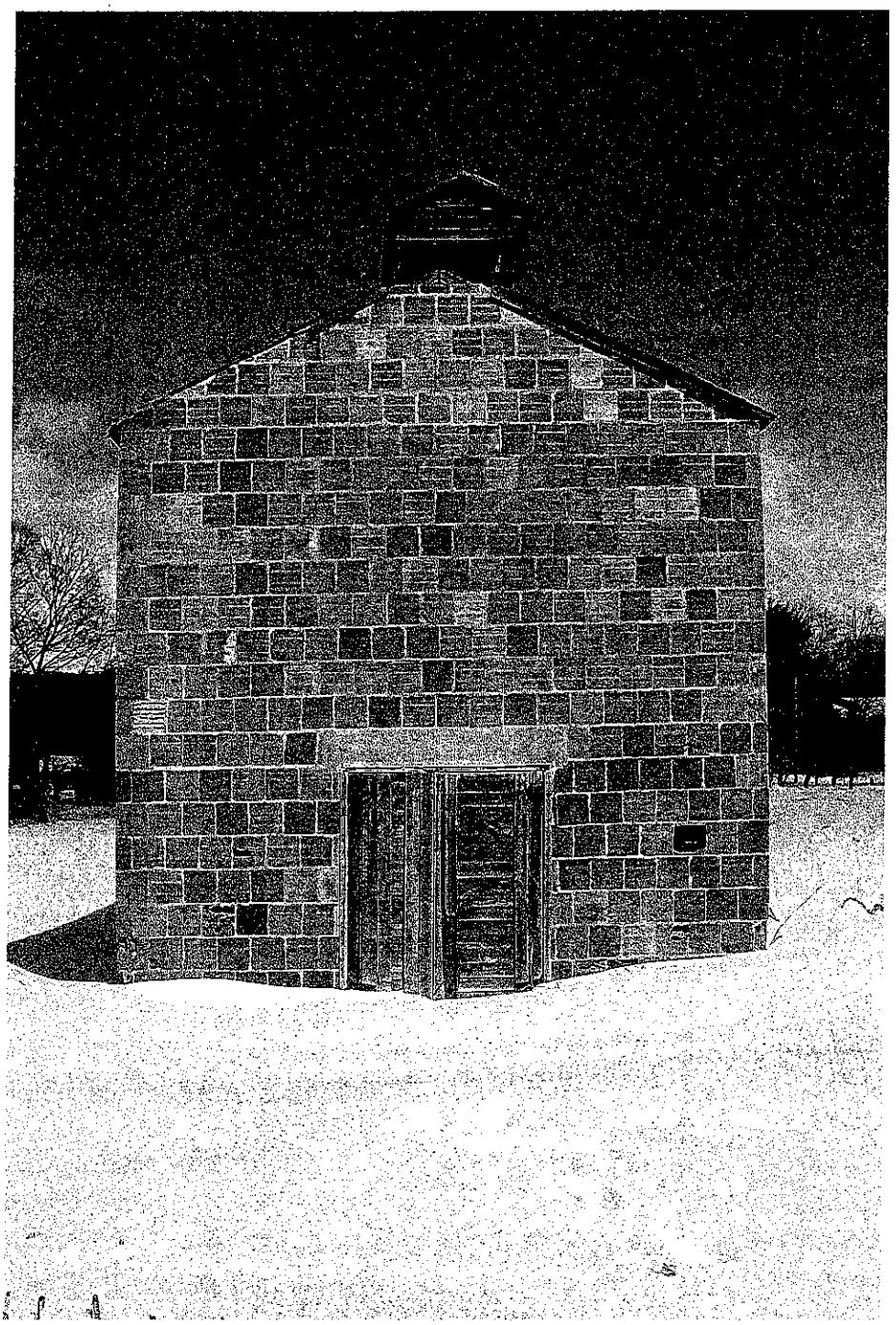


FIG. 6. SECTION OF MRS. C. J. OSBORNE'S MUSHROOM HOUSE.

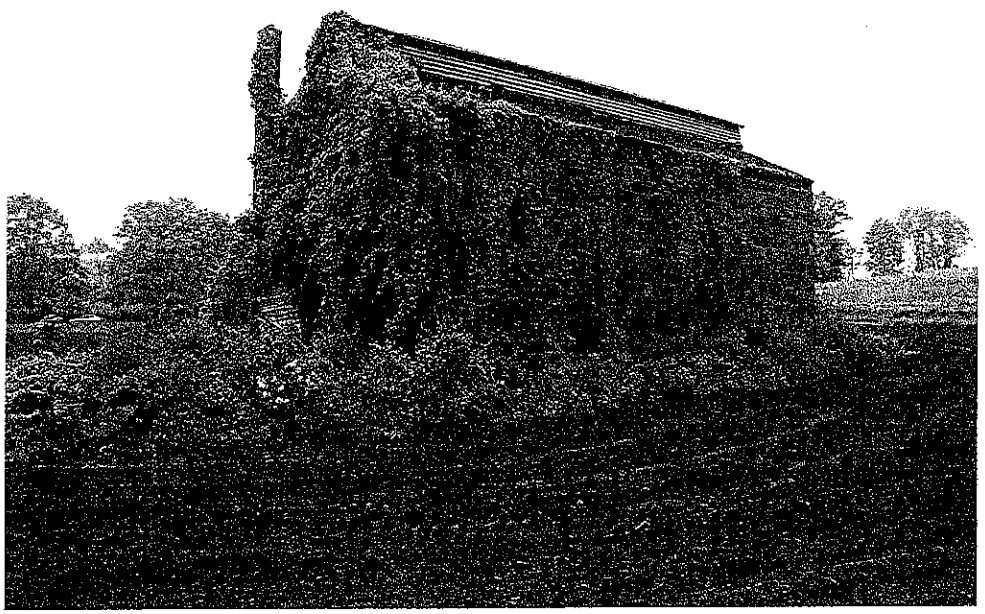
West facing door. Looking East



East facing door. Looking Northwest.
Winter 2007

Ariel View, Rt. 185/Simsbury Road

Spring 2006
North side wall looking South/West.
Encased with poison-Ivy



Winter/2007 Pic. taken from Rt. 185 looking west.
Main entrance facing east.
Poison ivy removed

2006, Front view looking west
Covered with Poison-Ivy