

Hirt Family Historical Driving Tour

July 23 & 24, 2016

100th Casper Hirt Family Reunion

This driving tour focuses on Casper and Verena Hirt and their sons Sam, Frank, Ed, Charles, and Lew Hirt. Sam's family wears the royal blue shirts. Frank's family wear the turquoise shirts. Lew's family wears the red shirts. Ed's family wears the tan shirts, and Charles's family wear the green.

You are at the Sandusky County Fairgrounds. It is appropriate that our reunion be held at this locale. The Hirts were agricultural people and have been involved in the county fair or the Agricultural Society for many generations. Sam Hirt served as the Fair Board president in 1909 and as a director of the Sandusky County Fair for many years. Greg Diedrich, the grandson of Lew Hirt, is presently serving as a Fair Board director. Countless Hirt descendants have exhibited their animals, displayed their crops and presented their 4-H projects on these grounds. An abundance of ribbons, trophies, and awards have been gathered throughout the years. As a child, Mary Zilles Manifold of the Lew Hirt family even graced the cover of the Fair Book. She posed with a "little lamb." You walk today in the shadows of Casper Hirt family members.

The driving tour has several locations. All the locations have historical significance to our history. There are many sites with Hirt history throughout Sandusky County. Not all sites are mentioned. If there is a site or a story you wish to share, please bring a written account to our attention so we can include it in the archives.

Driving directions are included. Histories about the people mentioned in this tour as also included. On the way to the cemetery, you will pass by Grace Lutheran Church. Hirt History related to the church is contained in the tour.

Many elder Hirts from several family branches are interred in Oakwood Cemetery. There are pink flags throughout the cemetery marking gravestones. After leaving the cemetery, you will drive to Riley Township to visit sites there. You will then head back to Fremont for one more location and then back to the Fairgrounds.

Let's get started.

Smoky the Clown

Just before you leave the fairgrounds from the Rawson Avenue gate, you will find a tribute to Phil Huss. Look for the tall, large black stone on the left across the road from the Log Cabin Stage.

Phil is a member of the Sam Hirt family. His alter ego was “Smoky the Clown.” It is this likeness that is carved into the stone. As a teenager he ran away from home to join the Ringling Bros. Circus and became a clown.

After marrying, he returned to Fremont and became a policeman. Smoky the Clown was not left behind at the circus. He came back to Fremont too. Smoky could be found at parades, the Fremont Speedway spring car races, and, of course, at the Hirt Reunions. He rode a red Cushman motor scooter and would give rides to children. He also drove a 1930 Model-A name “Leapin’ Lena.” He and Lena were fixtures at the Fremont Speedway. He helped between the heat races. Much of his memorabilia is found in the Fremont Speedway Hall of Fame. Both the racetrack and the Hall of Fame building are located by the grandstands here at the Fairgrounds. Phil worked with at-risk youth. He was a boxer and trained many young boys to box.

The pavers around the stone bear the names of individuals who donated monies for this project. You will see that several Hirt names are included.

Grace Lutheran Church

On the way to the cemetery, you will pass by Grace Lutheran Church (705 W. State Street). Many of the Hirts were members of Grace Lutheran.

St. Johns Lutheran Church, which sits behind Grace Church, was and still is one of the other Lutheran Churches in Sandusky County. Church services at St. John's were conducted in German. The younger English-speaking element was dissatisfied with this situation. So, with St. John's blessing and \$4000, these individuals formed Grace Lutheran, the first English-speaking Lutheran church in Sandusky County.

This small band of 150 people quickly grew in size and outgrew their first church structure. They needed to find a location where a larger church could be constructed. That new location is the present location of Grace Lutheran church—705 W. State Street. Lew Hirt was on the building committee for the present-day church building. Sam and Frank Hirt were also members of Grace Church.

The construction of Grace Church was interrupted by the Great Depression. Much of the church was built but not completed. The sanctuary was a big empty shell. It stayed that way for several years. The congregation decided to raise the necessary funds for completion and also to do as much work as possible themselves. Clarence Hirt, Frank Hirt's grandson, was a woodworker and he helped complete the front of the church.

Throughout the structure you will see plaques bearing the names of members who generously gave monies above and beyond regular giving to help fund projects. There are Hirt names found on these plaques. In fact, the story is told that it was really the Riley Township members of Grace Lutheran that were the driving force behind the completion of the sanctuary. There were many Hirts in that group! Several Hirt family members are still members of Grace and attend services there today.

One last Hirt connection—in 1930, Pastor Hugh Peffley was called to serve as the pastor to Grace Lutheran. He became the father-in-law of Ruth (Rudy) Hirt (Lew Hirt's daughter) when she married his son, Paul Peffly.

Cemetery Driving Instructions

*****Look for pink flags marking gravesites*****

1. Enter the main entrance of the cemetery on the west side (left) of Oakwood Street
2. Immediately on the left you pass by the grave site of Helen Hirt Hiebel, the third child of Lew Hirt
3. Drive straight ahead to the Hayes monument. This is the family plot of the Rutherford B. Hayes family. Hayes was from Fremont and became the nineteenth president of the United States.
4. Bear left then right. On the left you will see the Schepflin family (Sam Hirt) monuments. Look for the white and purple flowers. Notice the markers of Emma and William Schepflin. Sam's daughter, Emma, married William Schepflin. You will hear more about them later on in the tour.
5. Bear left.
6. At the crossroad, turn right. You will immediately see the grave sites of Casper, Verena, and their sons, John Henry and Adolph. Also, Ed and Carrie Hirt and their son Vincent. Next Frank and Louisa Hirt and their sons, John Casper and Chester, and finally, Chester's son Clarence and his wife Christine.
7. Continue around the circle. Bear right. Continue right. Bear right again. You will be back at the crossroad. This time, turn left toward the "Tobias Cornelius" stone.
8. Turn right at the flagpole.
9. Bear right and up the hill. Straight ahead is the Hirt marker. You will find Sam and Sarah Hirt, their daughter Charlotte and son Henry.
10. Turn right and follow the fence around the cemetery.
11. Turn left and continue to follow the fence around.

12. Turn right at the circle with the military graves and cannon. Drive toward the mausoleum. The Lew Hirt burial site is on the left by the mausoleum. Other Lew Hirt family members are also buried here: Paul and Ruth Hirt Peffly (the daughter that married the Grace Church minister's son), Lew's wife Clara, their son Alfred, and two small stones for Joseph and John Zilles. The two small stones are the infant sons of Grace Hirt Zilles and Walter Zilles. The twins are buried above Alfred.
13. Bear right, then left, and continue around the circle. Pass by the mausoleum and the Lew Hirt stone again. Continue straight.
14. Turn right at the "Nickle" stone.
15. Look for the "Zilles" stone under the two large trees. This is the grave site of Grace Hirt Zilles (Lew Hirt's daughter). To the best of my knowledge, Grace was the longest living Hirt in the United States. Grace was born September 5, 1909 and died January 23, 2010—age 100 years, 4 months, 18 days. She is also the mother of Joseph and John Zilles, the twin infants that were buried at the Lew Hirt burial site. The twins were born at home as was the custom. They were born premature and suffered from lung problems. This all took place during The Great Depression. There was no money for a burial plot, so the babies were buried at their grandparent's (Lew Hirt) plot, above their uncle Alfred.

The other stones at Grace's gravesite are daughter Kay Louise who died at the age of nine from spinal meningitis. Kay was the first child baptized at the present Grace Lutheran Church site and the first child to be buried from the present Grace Church site. The larger stone is Gwen Dunster, the oldest child of Walter and Grace Zilles.

16. Turn left. Continue straight to street exit. Turn left.

Riley Township Tour

After leaving the cemetery, your directions will guide you to Riley Township and the settlement of Casper and Verena Hirt. You will also find the homes of Frank and Lew Hirt.

1. 1543 Co. Rd. 226—This house is the Frank Hirt Family homestead. It is now occupied by Adam Hirt, the great-great-great grandson of Frank Hirt. Originally the house was located across the road. Apparently, it was a very big deal when the home was lifted up and moved to its current location!
2. Vickery Environmental, 3959 St. Rte. 412—This is the original home of Casper and Verena Hirt. It is now the site of Vickery Environmental. This facility is a deep well waste disposal site. Turn around in the driveway and head back down Rte. 412. Continue following the directions to Co. Rd. 232. At the corner of Co. Rd. 232 and 233 you will see a red brick building. That used to be Stokes School. Grace Hirt Zilles and Ruth Hirt Peffly (Lew Hirt's daughters) used to teach school there.
3. 2325 Co. Rd. 233—this is the Lew Hirt homestead. His youngest daughter, Marion (Poochie) Hirt Diedrich, was not only born and raised there, but continued to live there after her marriage to James Diedrich. They occupied the house until their deaths. Their eldest son, James (Butch) Diedrich now resides there.
4. Down the road from the Diedrich home is Schoch Cemetery. There you will find the resting place of Charles Hirt and his wife Lydia Schoch. He is the son of Casper and Verena and died at the age of 27. I have searched for the actual stone of Charles Hirt but could not find it. You will notice that there are many very old stones in this particular cemetery and many of them are indecipherable. It is likely that this is the correct cemetery since it is named after Lydia Schoch Hirt's family. You might note that Sam Hirt's first wife, Sarah, was also a member of the Schoch family.

You will notice the grave site of Marion Hirt Diedrich. She was Lew Hirt's youngest daughter. She lived her entire life in the Lew Hirt homestead. You just went by this home. The Sam Hirt family is also represented at the Schoch Cemetery. Jean Hirt Smith (The Pie Lady) and her family members rest here.

5. 2027 E. State Street—The big white house on the left. On the way back to Fremont you will see the present day home of Chuck and Paula Schepflin. Remember, I told you that you would hear more about the Schepflins as you passed by their cemetery

plot? This farmstead is part of their history. The house was built in 1904–1905 by Sam Hirt. Sam was unable to complete the house. In the late teens of the 1900s, Sam Hirt's daughter Emma married William Schepflin. They took over the farm. The house is furnished with curly maple floors and oak trim. Through the years a den, summer kitchen, and summer porch were added. A new back hallway and entrance were also added. Together they lived on the farmstead and operated the Wilema Farms Golden Guernsey Dairy, one of several local dairies that operated in Sandusky County.

After college, their son Paul (Boze) Schepflin and his wife Hazel Coy Hirt took over operation of the farm. Hazel was actually a maid in the house and it was in this manner she met her future husband. In fact, Emma's other son Carl met his future wife Vi Kranz in the same way. She was also a maid at the house. Paul and Hazel's grandson William Charlest (Chuck) Schepflin and his wife Paula Hirshburg now own the farmstead. They are restoring the farm house as it was circa 1940. They have found writings on many of the walls under layers of paint and paper. They act as messages to encourage Chuck and Paula to continue on with their project.

You will now head back to the Fairgrounds. We hope you enjoyed this historical excursion.

The 100th Hirt Reunion Committee