

There's Gold in them there Ponds - Gold Fish!

By: Bob Myers



Anyone from Mt. Airy or vicinity that has used Google Maps has probably noticed something that may have caused them to scratch their heads. On the corner of Colerain Ave. and Shepherd Rd. just south of Mt. Airy Tanks, it shows a series of 12 ponds that do not exist. Driving by, all you see is an open field, a small parking lot and a playset known as Colerain Shepherd Recreation Area. In fact, before the Cincinnati Recreation Commission (CRC) took over this property over 40 years ago, it was indeed a series of ponds that operated as a goldfish hatchery for many years owned by a prominent Mt. Airy family by the name of Denier.

As it turns out, the Denier ponds were not the only goldfish hatchery in Mt. Airy as there were even larger ponds located further north on Colerain behind what is now Speedway gas station at Kirby Rd. These ponds were known as Lakeview Aquatic Farms owned and operated by Robert Dolle. They published sales catalogs for both retail and wholesale buyers providing fish, aquatic plants, aquarium equipment and other water critters like snails, turtles, frogs and even baby alligators! Copies of these catalogs can still be found by digging on the internet. Both the Denier and Dolle families trace their roots to the early days of Mt. Airy when it was a crossroads farming village independent of Cincinnati. Their common ancestor was a successful entrepreneur and Mt. Airy resident named Joseph Brigel who built the original ponds behind his mansion at Colerain and Kirby and started stocking them with fish back in the 1880's. It is thought that cousins James Denier and Robert Dolle worked together for a time at the Brigel ponds and then split into competing businesses that both thrived for most of the 20th century. It seems that goldfish collecting was a very popular hobby as it was estimated that Cincinnati pet stores sold over 5000 goldfish every day during its heyday in the late 1920s.

While the Mt. Airy cottage industry of goldfish farming is long gone, remnants of this bygone era still remain. James Denier opened a second set of fish ponds on Poole Rd. in Groesbeck and even though he died in 1970, his family carried on the business for many more years. One pond and a company sign still remain on the property and the James C. Denier Company still operates but now manufactures structural pipe fittings. James' great-great grandnephew, Justin Denier still works there. The Monfort Heights Aquarium which has

been in business for more than 50 years can also trace its origins to former employees at the Denier goldfish farms who branched out to start their own business.