

## Learning About the Charles Fish Barn, Family, and Farm

**Lesson 1:** Learning from historical documents about the type of farming for which the ca1850 Charles Fish Barn was the center of activity.

### Goals:

To learn about the kind of farming that was done in Hopewell Township, Mercer County, New Jersey in the mid-nineteenth at the time the Charles Fish Barn was the center of farming activity on the farm owned by Charles and Andrew Fish.

To help students appreciate how the saving and preservation of documents and structures is important in helping people understand the history of specific families and communities.

To help students understand that it is possible to learn about the histories of ordinary people, doing ordinary things in addition to the big events and famous people included in the history books. Everyone is a part of history and everyone, to some degree, is part of the historical record.

To help students understand that we can never know everything about the past, but that those records that are saved and preserved determine just how much of the past it is possible to learn about.

**Curriculum Links:** Social Studies, History, Geography, Economics, Math (adding up values of items, etc.)

### New Jersey State Education Standards:

This lesson can be used to help students in a range of grade levels develop the understandings and skills relating to the following standards.

**6.1:** All Students will utilize historical thinking, problem solving, and research skills to maximize their understanding of civics, history, geography, and economics.

(This lesson introduces students to documents containing data about 19<sup>th</sup> century farming in central New Jersey, requires collection and organization of data, and then interpretation of the data. Students must also consider what information is not given in the documents and why preservation of documents is important.)

**6.4:** All Students will demonstrate knowledge of United States and New Jersey history in order to understand the life and events in the past and how they relate to the present and future.

(This lesson helps students understand farming life, the predominant life-style at the time, in central New Jersey in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This can then be compared to life in the same area today and how structures like the Charles Fish Barn and places like Howell Living History Farm take on new, educational roles once their original roles in the life of families and the community are finished.)

**6.5:** All students will acquire an understanding of key economic principles.

(This lesson helps students understand how diversified farms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century provided both food for the farm family and products to be sold to bring income to the family. It can be adapted to help students understand resources, such as land, and capital investment, such as in farm machinery, as factors in production and creating wealth. Students can also see fluctuating values over time.)

**6.6:** All students will apply knowledge of spatial relationships and other geographic skills to understand human behavior in relation to the physical and cultural environment.

(This lesson helps students understand how the physical environment of central New Jersey combined with a cultural environment that was relying on advancing technology to help produce the nation's food supply in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.)

### Lesson Description:

In this lesson students do some research and collect some data about the farm on which the Charles Fish Barn was built and used. This barn was the center of production on the farm and was used to process and store some of the crops, house some of the animals, and store some of the tools and equipment. It was a place that Charles and Andrew Fish, the owners of the farm, went to and used every day for most of the years of their farming lives.

## Learning About the Charles Fish Barn, Family, and Farm

**Step 1:** Distribute to students the introductory handouts - the information on collecting data, the glossary, and the data collection chart. The chart lists things about the farm that were recorded in agricultural census documents in 1850, 1860, and 1870. These census documents were created throughout the country for every farm so that the United States government could get a complete picture of the way that most people at that time made their living. Because those documents were saved and preserved, we can now learn about this one farm in Mercer County. In 1873 the oldest brother and half-owner of the Fish Barn, Andrew, died and an inventory of his possessions was made so that his sister, Margaret, would know exactly what she had inherited from him, since he gave her his half of the farm in his will. This document has also been saved and preserved at the New Jersey State Archives and it can give us some similar, but also additional, information about how this family farmed and used their barn.

**Step 2:** The information from the three agricultural census years has been transcribed from the original documents and placed on the Howell Living History Farm website at [www.howellfarm.org](http://www.howellfarm.org). Have students go to this website and click on the link to the information about the Fish family and farm. Then check the information for each of the four years needed to complete their charts. For each year they should fill in the information given. Students will find that not all the items are recorded each year. Sometimes there was different information that the government wanted to collect and sometimes the Fish family might have changed a part of their farming. For example, in one year they may not have raised one type of livestock, such as sheep, so nothing was recorded for them. When filling in their charts, tell students to leave blank any information they cannot find.

**Step 3:** The information from the 1873 inventory has also been transcribed and placed on the Howell Farm website. Have students go to the family information for 1873, read through the inventory, and record the information as best they can. This document was made for different reasons than the agricultural census so students will find that they record different things. For example, they may not find exact numbers of some types of animals or exact numbers of bushels of some crops. They may have to add up the value of farm implements and machines to get a total value.

**Step 4:** When the charts are complete, have students look at their completed chart and think about some, or all, of the questions on the three worksheets in the student packet. The three sheets contain a series of questions in ascending order of difficulty and complexity. Younger students might only do the first page while older students might complete all three. Alternatively, all three sheets may be used and the depth of thinking and responses to the questions may appropriately differ for younger and older children. In some cases it may be appropriate to have students work together in pairs or small groups to answer the questions and then bring the group answer back to the full class as part of a general discussion.

After the lesson, students can be encouraged to continue learning about the Fish family and their barn through other information on the Howell Living History Farm website. They can also learn more about the Henry Phillips Barn at Howell Farm on the website and compare it to the Fish Barn. Students may wish to visit Howell Farm to see the Fish or Phillips barn and learn more about farming in the late 19th century. Many of the animals and crops learned about in this lesson can be seen and experienced in weekday school programs and Saturday events open to the public throughout the year. The style of farming demonstrated at Howell Farm is similar, and in some ways identical, to the farming done by the Fish family between 1850 and 1873.

It is also important for students to know that the census and inventory materials they used are public documents that are available for anyone to use at the New Jersey State Archives in Trenton. Students may want to visit the website of the Archives (at [www.njarchives.org/links/archives.html](http://www.njarchives.org/links/archives.html)) to learn more about how that government agency is saving and preserving documents important to the history of New Jersey and making them available to people who want to learn more about the history of the state, its communities, and its families.