

"Making their way to Macomb County, they [Peter and Sarah Lerich] purchased 220 acres from N.C. Naramore, and a little later bought 160 acres, which is still known as Spring Hill Farm. There for 54 years they have lived, having the usual experiences of the pioneer life, money scarce, roads - none, neighbors, few and far between, but strong in each other's love and help, they buckled to the hard and discouraging work before them, and knew nothing of the words failure and defeat."

An excerpt from Peter Lerich's Obituary
Published in the *Utica Sentinel*
August 23, 1907

SPRING HILL FARM'S MAIN HOUSE

The farm's main house (right) was originally built by the Lerich family in the 1800's. A large annex was added onto the house around 1940 during the time Joe Louis owned the farm; Louis converted the building into a restaurant and night club (bottom left). The main house burned completely to the ground in 1973.



Peter Lerich came to Shelby Township on May 19, 1835 at the age of 22 with his wife Sarah and his mother. They named their farm Spring Hill because of a natural spring which flowed from the side of a hill on their property where Peter dug a spring house to serve as the family refrigerator.

Spring Hill Farm has a historical past.

1835

Peter & Sarah Lerich settled Spring Hill Farm

1849

Underground RR station at Spring Hill

1939

Joe Louis purchased Spring Hill Farm

1944

State of Michigan took ownership

1954

Leased to US Army for missile base

1964

Turned over to MI National Guard

1972

Annexed to Rochester-Utica Rec. Area

1973

Main farm house burned down

Early 1980's

Shelby Township River Bends Park

Both Peter and Sarah Lerich were active in the anti-slavery movement, as they helped many slaves escape to freedom along the Underground Railroad. The spring house was enlarged to form a hidden cave which was used to conceal the fugitive slaves.

In 1939, heavyweight champion Joe Louis purchased Spring Hill Farm for a training camp. Under Louis's ownership, the farm hosted many equestrian events, such as his annual horse show, and became a prominent area night club. However due to his financial problems, Louis sold Spring Hill to the State of Michigan in 1944.

In 1954, the property was leased to the United States Army, which established and maintained a NIKÉ missile base on the site until 1964 when it was then turned over to the Michigan National Guard.

In 1972, the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority took control of 277 acres of the property adjoining the Rochester-Utica State Recreation Area. Around this same time, the Utica Community Schools also obtained a portion of the property for the Shadbrush Environmental Center.

In the early 1980's, much of the original Spring Hill Farm property became Shelby Township's River Bends Park as it remains today.

Adapted from materials collected by the Shelby Township Historical Committee.

SPRING HILL FARM'S CARETAKER'S HOUSE



The material for this display has been provided by
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