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The Bretz Farmstead,
Bretzville, Dubois County, Indiana

Approximately four miles north of Ferdinand, Indiana, highway 162 runs through what was once the nucleus of a small but prosperous rural community---Bretzville, Indiana. The original Bretz homestead (hereafter called farmstead) lies a mile south-east of the town (St. Anthony's Quadrangle, S.W. 1/4 S.E. 1/4 Sec 33 T. 2S. R. 4W).

The first Bretzses came to southern Indiana in 1837, and in 1937 Jacob H. Bretz, the grandson of Jacob Bretz Sr., compiled the following account of their arrival:

It is the Summer of 1937---one hundred years since the first Bretzses trod on the soil of southern Indiana.

It was Jacob Bretz, Sr., and his family consisting of himself and his wife, Barbara, and their five sons---Philip, William, Leonard, Jacob Jr., John and a nephew, Jacob Bretz. Later another son, Valentine, was born to them here in Southern Indiana who became better known as Doc Bretz.

They were natives of Volks-heim, Hesse Dramstadt, Germany—a land at the time where people grew big on rye bread, wine, potatoes and milk.

In the spring of 1837, Jacob Bretz, Sr., sold out all he could afford to sell, then he and his family left for Havre, France, from which [sic.] they embarked on a French sail ship designated for New York Harbor, U.S.A. This trip across the stormy Atlantic one hundred years ago lasted seventy-five days, so it makes us realize the progress that has been made in ocean travel.

On their arrival in New York, they found things rather dull and were advised to go West. As some one gave them the address of Portersville, Dubois County, Indiana; they set out for Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and there boarded a steamboat going down the Ohio River. They landed at Troy, Indiana about mid-summer of 1837 and there they hired a man with an ox team and wagon to move them to Portersville, Indiana; along the Troy Jasper and Haysville highway. When they were about twenty-four miles north of Troy, which is now the vicinity of Bretzville, they met a German by the name of Melchior Jerger, who was living along this road. Mr. Jerger advised them to settle in his neighborhood. So, they lodged with him until they had entered forty acres of
land which they bought from the government. They built a
cabin thereon and then became settled. Andrew and Benja-
mim Bretz, grandsons of Jacob Bretz, Sr., are residing on
old homestead at this time.¹

Shortly after Jacob settled in Dubois County, his brothers joined
him. Philip Jacob Bretz, the youngest of the four brothers, ar-
ried in 1839 with his mother, Katherine Rothenberg Bretz (John
Bretz Sr., father of Philip and Jacob and husband of Katherine R.
Bretz died in Germany). John Bretz arrived in 1840, and William
Bretz arrived in 1841.

In 1850, thirteen years after Jacob Bretz’s arrival and sixteen
years before the town of Bretzville was established, Jacob Bretz
and a Peter Bamberger Sr. donated two acres of land for a church
and cemetery. The first church, St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, was
built of hewn logs and was used until 1871. The cemetery is still
in use and marks the south-west corner of the Bretz farmstead. Ben-
jamin B. Bretz, grandson of Jacob Bretz Sr., served as caretaker for
the cemetery as late as 1958, and the current caretaker still houses
his lawnmower in the Bretz barn. By 1871 the log church proved too
small for the Bretzville congregation, so William Bretz IV, son of
William Bretz and nephew of Jacob Bretz Sr. donated a plot of land
just south of the junction of highways 162 and 163 for a second
church building. In 1928 the second church was replaced by the build-
ing which stands today, St. John’s United Church of Christ.

William Bretz IV platted the town of Bretzville in 1866. The
original map bears the name Town of New Town, but its similarity to
"Newton" caused the government to request a new name when a post
office was wanted. In June of 1873, the name of Bretzville was
adopted.
Though much of Bretzville fell victim to the construction of highway 162, the original Bretz homestead has remained relatively unchanged. This lack of change is, perhaps, due to the fact that the farm has remained in the Bretz family to the present day. Jacob Bretz Sr. held the land until his death in 1876. I am not certain of the ownership during the interim period, but by 1918 the farm was owned by Benjamin and Andrew Bretz. Andrew did not marry, but Benjamin was married at the age of fifty-nine, in 1944, to Norma Rohleder, though the marriage was the result of practical rather than romantic considerations, according to great-nephew Charles Bretz. Andrew Bretz died in 1946, leaving his brother and sister-in-law in possession of the farmstead. Benjamin and Norma Bretz had no children, so Norma Bretz became the sole owner upon the death of her husband in 1968. Norma Bretz died in May of 1978, willing the land to her great-nephew Charles Bretz and his wife, Bonnie. Though the will is still in probate, the land will doubtless remain in the Bretz family for some time yet. Charles and Bonnie Bretz, however, live in Huntingburg, and while Mr. Bretz certainly intends to maintain the farmstead, he did not seem inclined to leave his house in town and move onto the farm. Thus, while the farm has remained in the Bretz family for one hundred forty one years, this year marks the first that the farm is not serving a Bretz as a primary residence.

The farmstead was built on a courtyard plan, with the house and smokehouse situated at the south-west corner of the property. Behind the house, to the north, was the summer kitchen, and these three buildings were fenced off from the barnyard (see map p. 7). The
barnyard began behind the summer kitchen with a frame granary, a relatively recent frame garage, a log corn crib which was probably one of the original buildings, and a frame privy, all built on a line running north from the summer kitchen. The original log barn, altered only by a frame addition to one side, was located north east of the corn crib and marked the north-east corner of the barnyard. The ridge lines of house and barn were parallel. South of the barn was a log chicken house, again probably one of the earliest buildings. A brooding hen house and an animal pen marked the south-east edge of the barnyard. The woodshed was located outside either fenced area, east of the house and south of the barnyard. Henry Glassie has noted a similar farmstead pattern in southern New Jersey:

In some cases the ridge lines of house and barn are set at right angles though a parallel arrangement is more common and seems to have been the ideal. On one side a line of buildings, consisting mainly of a long shed open on the inside, connects the spheres of house and barn. A few other dependencies are placed opposite this line forming a courtyard, a hollow rectangle--house at the front, barn at the rear, with one boundary typically a little ragged.  

Glassie describes this pattern as an English form which "dates back to Saxon times in England, where it is still regularly found. . . . In America, derivative plans are found not only in New Jersey but also on Long Island and in upstate New York."

The farmstead was clearly divided into two areas, house and barn. Of such division Glassie writes that

the groups of buildings may be considered, respectively, as extensions of house or barn and the two areas as spheres of sexual control, the barn being the man's domain, the house the woman's.  

Two exceptions to the clear division were the vegetable garden and the woodshed. The vegetable garden, generally a part of the woman's
domain, was outside the fence of the house area, though it was within a few feet of that fence in a field on the west side of the house. The woodshed, as noted above, was outside either house or barn area. Further, Charles and Bonnie Bretz observed that Norma Bretz was quite skilled at splitting her own kindling, though this seemed to be a matter of necessity rather than of choice.
Endnotes

1 John H. Weber, unpublished MS, "History of Township 3S Range 4W and Vicinity." This MS, lent to me by Charles and Bonnie Bretz, has been deposited at the Indiana University Folklore Archives.


4 Ibid., 51.

5 Ibid., 50-51.
Yard

The yard was fenced in. The dotted lines between the smoke house and the summer kitchen, on the northwest side of the yard, and the short lines between the summer kitchen and the gate, on the north side, indicate hand whittled pickets. The gates on the northeast, north, and east sides of the yard were also of hand whittled pickets with hand-made iron hinges. The remaining fence was wire attached to posts. Dotted lines running from the house to the cistern and from the house to the smoke house and south gate indicate brick paths (see figure 1). Bricks were set into the ground without mortar, similar to the path at the Schwartz house (formerly St. John's Parsonage) leading from the back door to the cistern. The cistern's wooden frame was three feet high, three feet one inch by three feet two inches wide. It was lined with rock, with rock forming the upper rim on which the wooden frame sat.

This cistern has become for focus for a local legend. Mr. Charles Bretz referred to it as a well, as did the printed sources I consulted, and he mentioned that it had been dug by a freed slave who received room and board for his compensation. An article from The Ferdinand News, written by John Weber and Albert Sonderman, provides a lengthier explanation.

Col. Jacob Geiger, founder of Huntingburg, frequented the forests of Dubois County on hunting expeditions. His home was in Louisville, Dy., where slaves were kept. Jacob Bretz I, First Pioneer of the Bretz Settlement, met up with Jacob Geiger and they became friends. It is related that a colored man swam the Ohio river to run away from slavery and came across the afore-mentioned two Jacobs. Since water was needed at the Bretz Homestead, they put the slave to work digging a well. It is a well walled out with native stone and furnishes a plentiful supply of water to this day.

An unpublished manuscript, compiled by John Weber and lent to me by
Charles and Bonnie Bretz, contains the following account.

It has been said that one of Col. Geiger's slaves dug a well for Jacob Bretz, Sr., the founder of the Bretz Settlement, for which he received 30 cents per day and the board. We know very little of Col. Geiger's slaves. It is possible that most of them stayed in Kentucky.

Although the above accounts refer to the structure as a well, pipes running from the roof fed rainwater into it. Charles Bretz mentioned to me that this summer was the first during which the pipes had not been removed. Norma Bretz had always removed the pipes in the months that did not have an "R" so that the water would not become wormy. Since the house does not have running water, this well/cistern still provides the water supply.

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Figure 1--Brick Paths

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JACOB BRETZ'S WELL
Gate to field west of house, where vegetable garden was located.

Grindstone in the yard behind the house.
Handmade Chairs on front porch.

Coal pile, back of Jacob's well.
Gate by coalpile.

Handmade hinge on gate.
Cellar, Framed House, Bretz Farmstead
House

The present house, of frame construction, was built in 1918 for Benjamine and Andrew Bretz. It was built by a Schwartz, probably the father-in-law of Mrs. Ardella Schwartz who currently owns the St. John's Parsonage-Schwartz house. It is the third house on the property, though the first log structure was, according to Charles Bretz, used only for a year or two and was built some two hundred feet north of the barn. The present house is built on the site of the second house, which was a log structure built around 1840.

Cellar

The cellar is located under room two, the northwest corner of the house. It was dug when the second house was built, and the Bretz brothers planned the third house around the old cellar. In the process of building the third house they raised the cellar walls slightly.

The walls were stone, chinked with mud and small rocks, and had been whitewashed at some point. The original wall is 6'3" with one vent in the north wall and two in the south. The floor is brick, laid in without mortar and with a shallow trough between floor and walls. The southeast corner of the trough was tiled. Ladder-like steps leading from the first floor were 2' 10" wide. On the south side, an arched recess had been built into the wall. The arch and the back wall of the recess were brick and it was 2' 1" deep (see figure 2). A rather delapidated pie safe was in the cellar, as well as several pottery 10 gallon jugs and some of Norma Bretz's canned goods.

![Figure 2](image-url)
First Floor

Room 1

The door between room one and the cellar stairway was board. The door between rooms one and two was a swinging door. The ceiling had been lowered, so the ceiling beams were not visible. Norma Bretz used this room as a kitchen and it contained a wood stove for cooking.

Room 2

A deep cupboard had been built over the stairway to the cellar. The stairs leading to the loft had no door in this room, and the door frame showed no indication that a door had ever been there. Thirteen steps led to the loft. The ceiling beams in this room had not been covered over. They were beaded and painted.

Rooms 3 and 4

Both rooms had artificial mantles built on the walls next to the staircase, though neither room had ever had a fireplace. Both rooms were equipped with wood stoves. The 1910 Berg house, southwest of the Bretz homestead and formerly a Bretz house, had a similar artificial mantle, also in a room with a wood stove. The ceilings in these rooms had been lowered, so again the ceiling beams were not visible.

Loft

The loft rooms were open to the rafters. Room six contained nine cakes of lard soap made by Norma Bretz. Mr. Charles Bretz did not remember the loft being used for anything except a place for the dog to sleep. I would suggest, however, since each end had been enclosed to form a separate room and since room six contained a small bookshelf, that the loft was used by Norma, Benjamin, and Andrew as a sleeping area.
The house faces south.
East side of house.

North (rear) of house. Note pottery jug on porch, pipes leading from roof to cistern/well.
Smoke House - BRETZ FARMSTEAD

N

14' 2"

4' 8"

3' 1"

4' 7"

12' 5"
Smoke House

This frame structure sat on brick piers. The iron latch on the door was possibly hand made (see figure 3); the door handle was a whittled peg. The floor was dirt. The building was constructed like the Fred Bretz house, frame with angled boards between timbers and siding on the outside (figure 4).

Figure 3

Figure 4
Summer Kitchen, Bretz Farmstead
Summer Kitchen

The frame kitchen sat on piers of concrete. The doors and windows were pegged together. Windows on the north and northwest sides were 4/4, but window on the south side was 6/6. The windows had functioning shutters. The flue was centered in the front gable. Siding had been applied with round nails.
North side. Note post in front of window.
It is one of a pair which supported a third horizontal pole from which a kettle was hung over a fire. Norma Bretz used it to make soap.
Garage - Bretz Farmstead

9'-10"

17'-5"

6'
4'-6"
4'-8"
6'
Granary

The floor boards were circular sawed. The outside walls were lined with bricks to 3' 6" above the floor. The bricks looked as though they had been used before—some were black and some were broken. The bricks were mortared with mud, and at numerous irregular points in the walls, corn cobs had been stuffed into holes in the mud. Walls had been plastered at some point. At a later date, the mud chinking had been covered with cement. Corners were supported with angle bracing. The pairs of short lines along the interior walls represent grooves formed by two boards placed approximately every four feet. Larger boards slid through these grooves, partitioning each large bin into three smaller bins.

The frame shed addition to the granary had a hewn sill. The boards forming the wall between shed and granary were 14 to 17 inches wide. One was 21". On south (outside) wall, boards were circular sawed and narrower. The floor boards were circular sawed. The plate was lap-jointed. The door used square nails and machine-made hinges.
Corner of granary.
Note angle bracing.
CORN CRIB

DIMENSIONS:
- Width: 10' 1"
- Height: 8' 10"
- Depth: 2' 9"
Corn Crib

The structure was log and the logs measured approximately 8' x 8'. Some notches looked like half dovetail, some like a shallow half-dovetail, and some like a square notch. The sill extended 4" beyond the wall logs. Floor to plate measurement was 10'. Siding had been applied to the outside with square nails. The crib had been roofed with hand-split square wooden shingles, though the shingles were badly rotted and, in many places, gone. The roof had no ridgepole. The east side of the crib had two openings. One measured 2'4" x 2'3" and had handmade hinges of a heart with teardrop design. The second opening was about seven feet from the ground, measured 1' x 4' and was covered with a board flap which was hinged at the bottom with rectangular hinges. These hinges may have been hand made. The flap fastened at the top with a hand whittled wooden peg. The structure sat on rock piers. The floor, also badly rotted, was braced down the middle by a 3" x 12" joist.
Nug butchering, ca 1900.
Original photograph by
Andrew Bretz. Note corn
crib in background.

North wall, inside
corn crib. Note
boards used for
chinking. Note
plow.
Toist in corn crib.
Note rectangular opening with board flap.

Rectangular hinge on outside of board flap.
Hinges, handmade.
Note square nails.

Wooden peg holding board over rectangular opening.
Privy

The privy was roofed with hand-split wooden shingles. Siding was applied with round and square nails, mostly round.
Barn

The log barn (ca. 1840) was difficult to document in detail because it is still being used for storage of equipment, hay, and machinery, including the riding-lawnmower used by the caretaker of the Bretzville/St. John's cemetery. The logs were 1" to 14" and the jointing was half dovetail. The exterior of the building was completely covered with siding. Benjamin B. Bretz added the six-foot frame section on the south side of the barn. As the photograph indicates, the bottom 2/3 of the siding on the west side of this addition is board and batten.

The log wall separating the west crib from the center passage had two openings about seven feet from the ground. Both were six feet long and two feet high. One opening had a clasp like that holding the wooden flap on the corn crib.

The three mangers in the stables on the east side of the barn were constructed of hewn boards. The wall between the largest stable and the center passage also had a rectangular opening, 2' x 1', about four feet above the floor. The ceiling joists in the stables were hewn flat on top and bottom.
 Hog butchering, original photograph by Andrew Bretz. Barn in background, prior to shed addition on south side.

West end of barn. Note portion of board and batten siding on corner. Note pile of shingles in barnyard.
Tointing inside barn.

Portion of log wall inside barn. Note rectangular opening into stable.
Chicken House - Bartz Farmstead

Dimensions:
- Length: 10' 9"
- Width: 14' 8½"
- Height: 3' 9" (left side), 3' 4" (center), 3' 8" (right side)
Chicken House

The structure was log, with exterior siding which prevented a view of the jointing. The board floor ran the length of the building. The front gable projects 10". The building rested on rock piers at each corner. A section of stump served as a doorstep. The roof had no ridgepole. The building was roofed with hand-split wooden shingles.

This building may well have served as a smokehouse before being used as a chicken house.
Brooding Hen House

This frame structure served to separate the brooding hens from the laying hens. The roof was wooden shingles.
Woodshed

Device for holding wood.
View of the barnyard from the site of the first house, about 200 feet north of the barn.

View of a portion of the barnyard.
Post and rider fence, north of corn crib.

Hand split shingles, piled in barnyard.
Cistern in barnyard.

Split rail fence. Several of these fences were standing on the farm. They were built by Jacob Britz Sr.
Photograph, ca 1900, by Andrew Bretz of one of the Bretz rail fences.

Gate in rail fence between barn and site of original house.
Charles Bretz, holding a ten dinner horn, 5'8" long, which the Bretzes brought from Germany.

Charles and Bonnie Bretz. Behind them is a quilt that has been in the Bretz family for over 100 years.
FARM SCENE — When Ray "Dayme" Krodel, Jasper wholesaler, spied this scene on a farm near his farm on R. 3, Huntingburg, recently, he was so intrigued by it that he photographed it. The corn shocks are something you seldom see anymore in this age of corn pickers. Also rare is the rail fence in the background. At left is cordwood stacked away for winter. The scene was recorded on the farm of Mrs. Norma Bretz of R. 3, Huntingburg. Despite the fact that she is in her seventies, she does much of the farm work—such as stacking corn stalks into shocks.