

# Visitors Invited To See Colonial Plantation

Slowly, but surely, in a corner of Delaware County's Ridley Creek State Park, the "Colonial Pennsylvania Plantation" is taking shape as a major Bicentennial project, a living example of 18th century farm life.

Supported by the Bicentennial Commission of Pennsylvania and Delaware County, along with local groups and businesses, the project was conceived by the Bishop's Mill Historical Institute and is designed to have visitors participate in colonial life.

A family will live on the plantation year-round, working the land and living as farmers in 18th century Pennsylvania did.

Visitors can take a tour of the plantation — as farms were generally called the — but are welcome to stay much longer. Right now the process of becoming a working farm museum is still an on-going thing, so visitors to the plantation can watch the workers, mostly volunteers, as they restore the buildings, dig up broken pots and other artifacts, tend the animals and gardens, and experiment with 18th century recipes. Some even wind up staying to help out.

When the reconstruction work is finished, the plantation will consist of a farmhouse, spring house, barn, plantation store, smoke house, and wagon shed, plus fields of flax, rye, corn, an orchard, and all the animals normally found on an 18th century Pennsylvania farm.

Visitors will be able to help

the family with the daily chores, from feeding the animals to spinning wool, if they wish. They will also be able to join in their storytelling sessions, fiddle and bagpipe playing, and singing.

A brochure and map is now being prepared to give visitors historical information and to enable them to take a self-guided tour of the plantation.

According to Dr. Jay Anderson, director of the project, "What we want to do here is to tell the story of ordinary people in colonial America. Everyone commemorates the rich and famous, but what about the vast majority of the people, the ordinary farmers and workers? In fact, this land belonged to a succession of typical farmers, no one you would've read about anywhere — sort of the prototype of today's average American.

"When I say, 'typical farmers' though, I really include everyone on the farm — husband, wife, and children. Each played a very important role here. Colonial women had to be strong and worked just as hard as the men did, and children started working at an early age."

The aim of the "Colonial Pennsylvania Plantation" is to be the most accurate colonial re-creation in America.

"When visitors come here, and ask us, 'Is this really the way it was then?', we want to be able to say to them, 'Yes, it is as close as you'll ever get to the real thing,'" said Anderson. "That's why we have to proceed slowly and carefully in our work."

They have done, and are doing, extensive archaeological digs. The

Southeastern Pennsylvania Archeology Society has made the Plantation their Bicentennial project. Mr. Donald Callender is the Plantation's "resident archeologist" or research director.

"Callender specializes in experimental archeology," explained Anderson. "That means recreating a situation — such as this whole farm, or the spring house he is now involved in restoring — then using it as it would have been used, and seeing what happens. In fact, this whole plantation will be a research center, finding out how people lived then by re-living it."

In an effort to have the physical aspects of the farm as accurate as possible, the workers are removing all the modern conveniences. Since the farm was lived in until 1966, the work and research involved is considerable.

Not only will the buildings be as close to the original as possible, so will the living things.

"we are trying to obtain animals and plants as close as possible to the 18th century strains and varieties," said Anderson.

To help defray some of the costs of the project the Plantation is asking nominal donations from visitors — 75 cents for adults, 25 cents for children.

Anderson emphasized that the plantation will not be a "Do Not Touch" kind of museum. "We try not to use antiques here, because they are too valuable. If we need a tool, for instance, we make it ourselves, either copying antiques or from a book. This



Jay Anderson, director of the "Plantation" shows off the wooden harrow the group has made by hand.

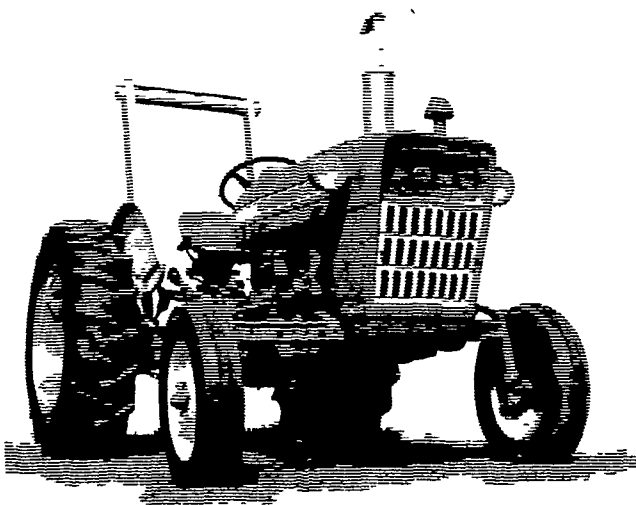
way nothing will be too valuable to break, and people won't be afraid to touch things or to try things out."

Some of the tools that workers on the plantation have already made include bow saws, a shingle froe (used in splitting logs into shingles), shingle horse

(used to hold the shingle for finishing), harrow and plow. done at a forge on the Special metalwork for these [Continued On Page 25]

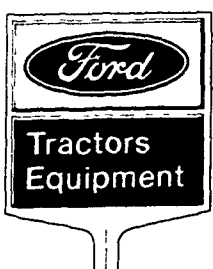
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