

Hermans make buggies their business

BY SHEILA MILLER
LEOLA — When you think about carriages and horse drawn vehicles, scenes of yester year are conjured up in the minds of most people. Landed gentry and noblemen riding elegantly down roads that at a moments downpour turn into muddy quagmires and cover the piano-finish shines on luxurious cabriolets and

phaetons into bespattered messes — these were the hay-days for carriage makers, right? If you talk to people familiar with the carriage business, you'll find that most of the vehicles that are rolling down the highways these days are restored antiques, like the ones bought at Saturday's Martin sale. But, what of the hor-

seman who doesn't want "last year's" model? Where can you buy a brand new buggy? Believe it or not, there is a place in Lancaster County where carriages are made from scratch. The place — Lancaster Carriage, of course. This unique business is the enterprise of Robert and Sandra Herman, Leola, which was established in 1971.

According to Bob, their's is a unique carriage shop because he designs and builds new carriages. "There is only one other carriage maker of this kind in the world, and he's in Vienna, Austria. That carriage maker is a decendent of a line of carriage makers who built vehicles for kings and queens," he said.

How does someone in the twentieth century become interested in building brand new carriages? Settling back into his chair, Bob said he owes his interest to his childhood upbringing. "I was raised to be inventive, and carriage building involves creativity and imagination. I enjoy working with my hands and three-dimensional objects," he explained, adding that model-building was one of his favorite childhood hobbies.

After graduating from Conestoga Valley High School, where he took first place in the science fair for three years, Bob went on to Lehigh University in Bethlehem where he received his Bachelor of Science Degree in physics.

Still not tired of school, Bob continued his education at Lehigh and studied for his Master's in psychology. He laughs as he recalls how one day he ran across a note on a professor's desk that said "The more education a person receives, the harder it will be to find employment". That settled it, he chuckled, and that day he quit graduate school.

As fate might have it, Bob said he returned to Lancaster County, primarily because he always liked the area. Out of school and unemployed, he had to come up with a means of supporting himself.

So, he started a business of driving tourists around the Amish farmland. "I needed to get out and be with people because I had been raised in an isolated environment," he said.

Bob recalled taking his idea to a local bank, laying out his plans for making a living driving tourists. At the time, he owned no horse, no buggy, and he didn't know the first thing about driving.

"I found a motel where I could park while I was waiting for the tourists," he said, "and I located an Amishman that had a carriage and horse that I could drive."

It was a four mile drive from the Amishman's farm where Bob stabled his horse to the motel. It was on his daily commute, he said, that he learned the rudiments of driving.

"It was a wacky enough idea," he declared, "and it worked." When the business was at its peak, Bob said, he employed 5 drivers, had 6 horses, and owned 3 carriages.

How did he get into building carriages?

Bob recalled that when he'd get home to a second floor apartment on North Duke Street, he'd sit around and talk horses with his landlords, Mr. and Mrs. Thorpe.

"For something to do, I started dragging carriage parts upstairs — it was the start of my first courting buggy. When I finally finished it, it had so many mistakes."

Sandy, his right-hand assistant and partner in the business, came into Bob's life in 1977. She worked at a

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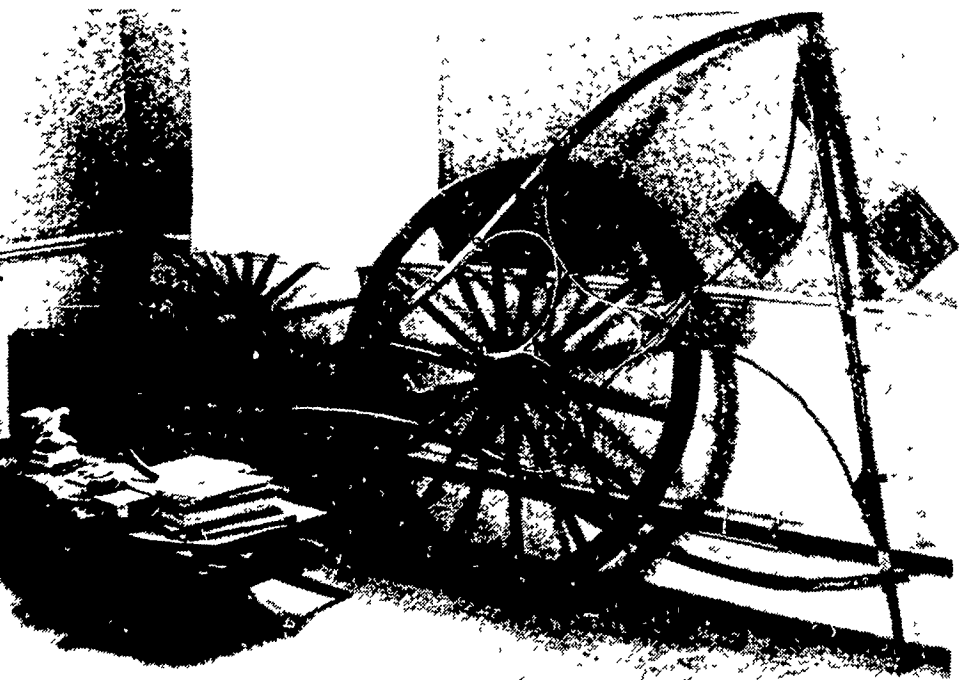
Bob and Sandy Herman are the proud owners of Lancaster Carriage, manufacturers of original-design horse drawn vehicles located in Leola.



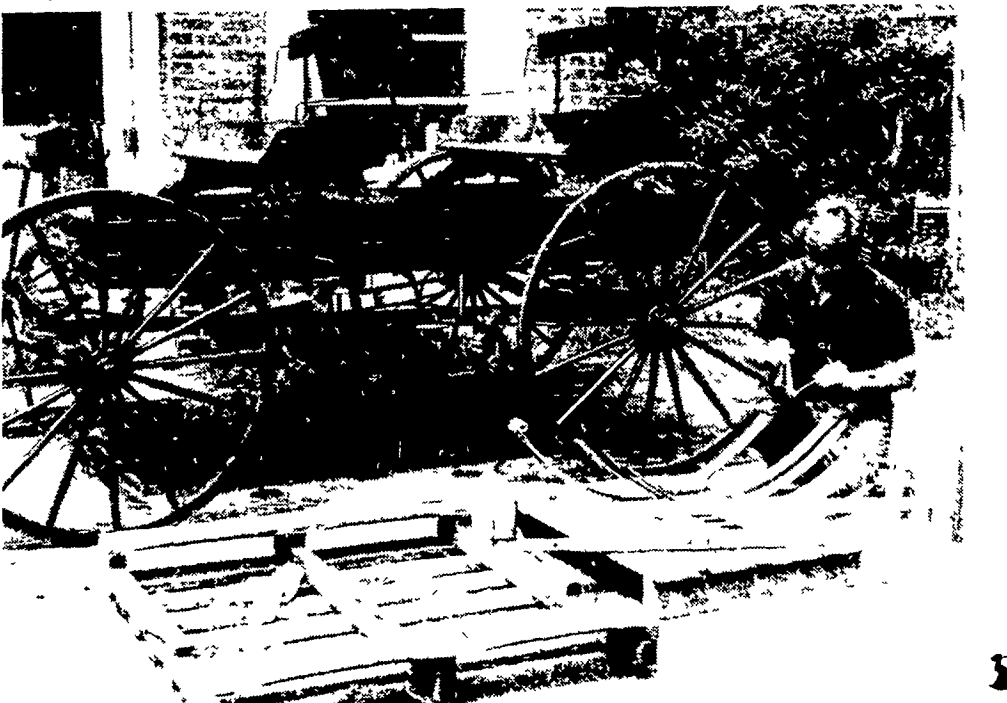
Sandy concentrates on sanding a pair of shafts. Until they are ready for their first coat of paint, at least five coats of primer are sanded to a smooth finish by hand.



A dining room is transformed into a workshop in the Herman home. Shafts and box, wheels and running gear are propped against wainscoting awaiting their final assembly and transformation into a carriage.



One of Bob's creations is this Gentleman Farmer's cart which took fifth place in the 1978 Devon Show.



Bob works on painting body loops and springs for a surry he is building. In the background is a spring wagon he built and uses when driving Amish country tours.