

National Apple Museum Opens

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BIGLERVILLE, Adams Co. —

If an apple a day keeps the doctor away, a new Adams County museum can look forward to a long and fruitful existence.

More than a thousand visitors have already enjoyed the educational and historic displays at The National Apple Museum since it opened to the public on Memorial Day weekend. Housed in a restored, 143-year-old barn on West Hanover Street, the museum is a tribute to Adams County's nationally-known fruit industry and to the community spirit of this quiet town in the heart of orchard country.

Scotch-Irish pioneers settled and subsistence farmed these rolling lands, once favored hunting grounds for local Indian tribes. German settlers followed, planting the early rootstocks of what would blossom into today's thriving acres of fruit trees.

Railroads made fresh fruit shipping by Biglerville growers a reality of the early 1900's, and supporting industries - processing and storage facilities, container manufacturing, trucking - grew with the town.

Celebration of the nation's 1976 Bicentennial "awakened" Biglerville residents to a renewed awareness of the area's history and heritage, believes Dr. Bruce Beacher, president of the Biglerville Historical and Preservation Society.

"There was a groundswell of support for preserving that heritage," says the retired federal soil scientist, whose work with the United States Department of Agriculture and land grant universities gave him a background and interest in the area's fruit production uniqueness.

Efforts focused initially on reorganizing the Biglerville band,

first established about the 1880s. Town musicians of all ages turned out with their instruments, and today the Apple Core Orchestra and Jazz Bands include more than 100 men and women, from teens to retirees.

The Historical and Preservation Society was officially chartered in 1981 promptly setting a long-term goal: establishing an apple museum as a tribute to the area's agricultural heritage. When Biglerville's railroad station became available for their use in 1986, the Society, with assistance from the Inland Container Corporation, began restoration of the small, but historic, building.

But as deeds, documents, photos, heirloom equipment, and assorted bits and pieces of Biglerville's past came into the Society's possession, it soon became apparent that the railroad station was too small to house the historic collections.

"We decided we needed a barn," relates Violet Ondek, now the National Apple Museum's chairman. "I saw the owner of this barn in a restaurant one day and asked him if he might consider giving it for our museum." Two days later, local building contractors Clair and Marie Ditzler offered the 92'x50', pre-Civil War bank barn for the Society's use.

According to Dr. Beacher, the tract on which the museum barn is located is a historic one. Holder of the original land warrant was one Ephraim Johnson. Valentine Sillick, builder of the barn, acquired title in 1854. Slavery was practiced on the tract until the practice was abolished and slaves freed.

When the Society accepted the deed to the barn and surrounding property, one horse was housed in the barn's lower level. Years ago, it had been home to a herd of dairy cattle. Like most aging barns, it had acquired layers of cobwebs and dust, and an assortment of stored miscellaneous items.



The National Apple Museum at Biglerville is a tribute to Adams County's fruit-production history and heritage.



National Apple Museum chairman Violet Ondek joins the mannikins on display in the gallery's reproduction of a 1857 kitchen.

An outgoing, enthusiastic individual, Violet's background as a home builder gave her contracting background, but no hands-on expertise on barn restoration. Nevertheless, she and a dedicated core of supporters and volunteers set up a four-year building program and dug in to the monumental task.

They began a mere one year ago - opening three years ahead of the original plan. Both chairman Ondek and society president Dr. Beacher have unending praise for the community support and help of numerous individuals who wholeheartedly donated time, physical and financial support.

"It's just a miracle we have this," Violet Ondek marvels, recounting how the remodeling was completed far ahead of schedule. "The weather cooperated, and we would get concrete within an hour of the time called." Biglerville Fire Company hosed down the barn's interior of old hay residue, the Ditzlers offered ideas and help, and Musselman's contributed the lighting.

One corner of the barn had to be raised and a whole new concrete foundation installed. Every original support post was moved and set on new concrete as well. A crew of Lancaster County Amish builders assisted with some of the barn's major restructure work.

"We used all the wood that was originally here - but just put it back together a little differently," chuckles Violet.

Complete excavation of the ground floor allowed for drainage installations and concrete flooring

finished with a plastic sealer. Area resident Bill Smith painstakingly repointed the beautiful field stone central supporting wall of the lower level, now a focal point of the Main Hall. Oak plank flooring replaced the original floorboards in the barn's upper level. A complete new wiring system, along with numerous other measures, brought the barn into compliance with state standards for fire and building codes. Part of the roof was replaced, as needed and finances would allow.

"We only redid what we had to do, but we tried to do it all well," adds the museum chairman. "We did not want to go into debt. With the help of so many people, we've been able to avoid borrowing."

Visitors enter the National Apple Museum via a reception area featuring apple and area memorabilia. Adjacent is the Main Hall, suitable for auditorium and reception use, including a stage where the popular Biglerville Band rehearses weekly and presents frequent concerts.

Adams County Fruit Growers Association has enthusiastically supported the museum's establishment, including donation of a television and video cassette

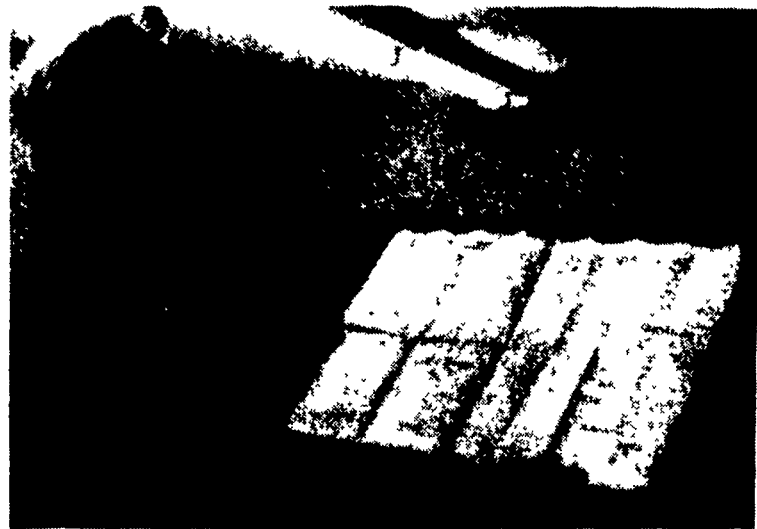
recorder for use in the "Apple Theatre." Featured presentation is "Apples, Apples, Apples," an 18-minute video produced by the Pennsylvania Apple Marketing Board.

At the foot of the open stairway to the upper gallery is the Book of Memories, a corner of the museum set aside to memorialize the founding fruit growers. One prized artifact on display is the Musselman family Bible. Also on the floor level is the non-profit gift shop, featuring unique items and a few select hand-crafts along the apple theme.

The entire spacious upper level of the museum has been transformed into a gallery of apple memorabilia, historic artifacts, and cultural heritage displays. Apple production equipment ranges from ground tillage plows to a grading line and commercial apple peeler. A kitchen, circa 1857, depicts the everyday life of that era.

Even orchard production problems are addressed with an educational display on beneficial and pest insects, along with information on integrated pest management. Pesticide needs and use of

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Biglerville Historical Society president Dr. Bruce Beacher admires a 1750 patent deed, on sheepskin, from the Penn family to William Carson for a tract of land near Biglerville.



This is how the barn appeared when it was donated to the Society for restoration and museum use.

Homestead Notes