

Pasto Ag Museum: A Hands-On History Book

ROCKSPRING (Centre Co.) — Imagine what it would be like if you had to do all your chores by hand. No gas-powdered engines to drive vehicles or equipment. No electric motors--or electricity, for that matter--to power your household appliances.

Through unthinkable to most of us, it was a way of life for the farmers and families of yesteryear. Visitors Ag Progress Days, can get a taste of what life was like for our agrarian ancestors by touring the Pasto Agricultural Museum.

The museum houses more than 300 farms and home implements from agriculture's "muscle power era," which ended around World War II when gasoline engines and electricity began to reach rural American. Items on display range from a 6,000-year-old clay sickle used for grain harvesting, to a 175-year-old mechanized apple peeler, to a turn-of-the-century foot-pedaled milking machine.

"People are always talking about how high-tech we are now," says Dr. Jerome Pasto, museum

curator and associate dean emeritus in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences. "But when you take into account the general education level and availability of materials a century or two ago, these items take on new technological significance."

Much of the museum is arranged in chronological sequence to show technological progress. Sections are devoted to harvesting grain, cutting and handling hay, planting and harvesting corn, plowing and cul-

tivating soil and processing milk and cream. Items are displayed next to the ones that took their place in the endless quest to reduce labor and increase farm output.

Many artifacts have been restored to working order so visitors can turn the cranks and pull the levers. "I consider the museum a hands-on history book," Pasto says. "There's a story behind every item here."

Among the newest displays in the museum is an ice-harvesting

exhibit. It features an ice scorer used to mark off evenly sized blocks and a horse-drawn ice plow and large pond saws for cutting ice.

Ice harvesting was a major winter activity for farmers until the 1930s, when electricity started reaching farms. "On dairy farms, the evening milk had to be kept cool until it was shipped in the morning," explains Pasto. "Most farms had an ice house. Each evening, a block of ice was put into a trough of water where the milk cans were kept. That helped keep the bacteria count down in the milk."

Also on display is a vintage 1891 ice box with an ice compartment to keep contents cool, as well as a porcelain-lined chilled liquid compartment. On the door is a faucet for drawing cool beverages. "The feature seen on modern refrigerators--getting ice water through the door--is not a new idea at all," says Pasto.

The museum will be open to the public during all three days of Ag Progress Days. Group tours also can be arranged. To schedule a tour, contact the Office of Agricultural Short Courses at (814)865-8301.

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