

Three Eras Of Agriculture At Somerset Historical Center

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SOMERSET (Somerset Co.) —

Today's computer age set can observe life of the "good old days" as three former eras of farming are developed at the Somerset Historical Center. The working farmsteads will portray 1770s, 1850s and 1920s farm life on 55 acres at the Center, 4 miles north of here.

In conjunction, a permanent exhibit will focus on the industrial revolution's impact on agriculture and farming methods in southwestern Pennsylvania.

Site administrator, David Dunn, a farmer's son with roots in eastern Pennsylvania, said the project has taken six years of planning.

While you can take the son off the farm, realistically, some of the farm stays with the son, or at least some farm knowledge stays with him. Add to that Dunn's expertise in historical preservation and you've probably found a well-equipped captain to sail this project's ship.

Dunn, who worked with the state's historical museum network, once said this project is unique.

"There won't be anything like it in Pennsylvania," he said. "When we're done with the farmsteads it

will be like a living history with people and animals on the three farmsteads. They will do laundry, food preparation, and smoking meat."

The land will be tilled and crops raised in accordance with each era's history, in routine daily form.

Dunn added, "This will be the only one where you will see the transition and transformation of Pennsylvania agriculture."

And of course, the new permanent exhibit will acquaint visitors with the effects of the industrial revolution upon the mechanization of agriculture and the consequent changes in rural lifestyles.

Dunn said the Somerset County pioneer period was over by 1780. Explaining what is meant by "pioneer period," he said, "A pioneer period is coming on the virgin land, clearing it and finally producing a surplus crop." According to Dunn, once that happens, you are no longer pioneering.

That's where the 1770s settler's cabin fits. The second farm, dated 1850 to 1860, during and after the Civil War, would be the era when the McCormick reaper became common. The steel industry was also burgeoning.

The development of the 1850s farmstead will see a relocation of the 1798 Adam Miller house.

Dunn says prior to the influx in dairying all animals were housed in the same barn. As sanitary regulations came into being other outbuildings were constructed to house the different farm animals. Then, as now, complying with government regulations ended business for some farms.

From 1910 to 1920 was the era of American horse farming, according to Dunn, followed eventually by steam, internal combustion, diesel and so forth.

Oral histories, quoting older farmers will enhance the permanent exhibit. "The exhibit will discuss variables farmers face like soil, weather and labor."

The 3,000 square foot exhibit will outline the history of agriculture from some nine area counties, including feed mills, woolen mills and the steel industry. Agriculture statistics will be quoted from the 1840 census information.

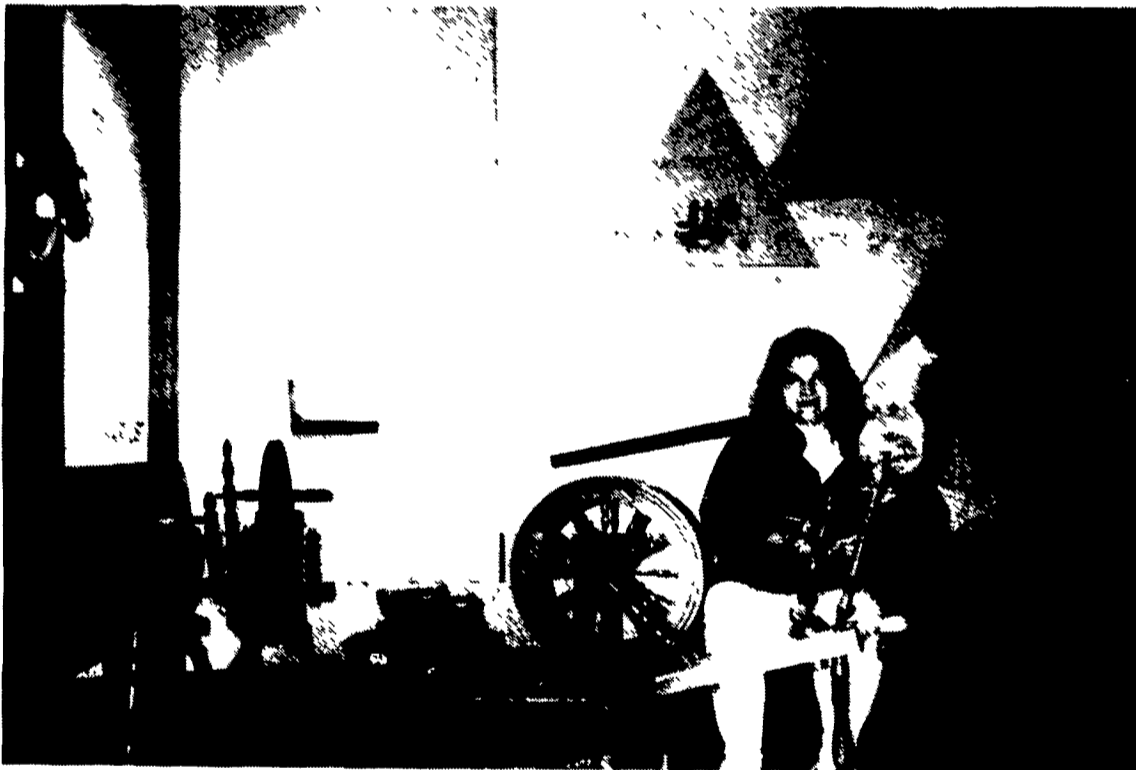
Science played a prominent role for the early farmer who girdled the trees and planted crops between them. By removing the bark around the trunk of the tree (girdling), it ultimately dies. In process, this allowed light and sun



This covered bridge on the grounds of the Somerset Historical Center is not only historically preserved, but adds beauty and shade for the pleasure of visitors. David Dunn, site administrator is pictured.



David Dunn, site administrator at the Somerset Historical Center north of Somerset, can't resist picking some currants from the crop growing in the raised bed garden at the Center. There are also ground cherries, tomatoes and Egyptian onions among the various plants in the fence protected garden, forbidden to four-legged intruders.



Beth Holler, a summer intern working at the Somerset Historical Center is pictured spinning flax. The Center is ready to begin a major expansion which includes an addition to the visitor's center and the development of farmsteads from different farming areas. A permanent exhibit will trace the progress of local agriculture during the Industrial Revolution.

to reach the crops and supplied his source of needed wood. Many hand tools are also in the exhibit.

Dunn says that very often the wives of early farmers, because they could market butter, eggs and other produce, brought a greater cash contribution to the family than did their husbands.

The promise of higher income and regular paychecks often lured many farm sons to the steel mills for jobs.

But Dunn says the only time that area agriculture was eclipsed was when coal was big from 1900 to 1910, after which, following the end of World War I, coal production plummeted. Agriculture, today, continues as the number one industry in Somerset County.

Developing the farmsteads is part of a three-phase, expansion project about to get underway at the Somerset Historical Center.

Phase 1 will enlarge the current visitor center, install the permanent exhibit and see construction of the 1770s settler's cabin by staff and volunteer persons.

Phase 2 focuses on developing

the 1920 farmstead, outbuildings, fields and animals.

Phase 3 concerns the relocation of the Adam Miller house for the development of the 1850 farmstead.

Matching funds from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and the America's Industrial Heritage Project will cover the \$1.4 million cost of Phase 1.

Historical and Genealogical Society of Somerset County has a goal of \$750,000 for its recently initiated endowment fund according to official information. This will ensure that future operating costs are covered.

Projected completion of the project is 1998.

Meanwhile at the Historical Center, annual activities will continue, like Mountain Craft Days the second weekend in September; Fiber Day and Herb and Plant Day; school programs, junior historians and ongoing research.

Persons desiring other information may call the Center at (814) 445-6077.

Homestead Notes