

Thom Wheary Family Turns Iron Seat Collection Into Museum Of Learning

EVERETT NEWSWANGER
Managing Editor

PARADISE (Lancaster Co.) — "Welcome to the agricultural museum of Lancaster County. I think you will see things you forgot your grandfather did."

For Thom Wheary, Jr., turning 400 old iron farm equipment seats into a museum enterprise is just a matter of sharing what he has learned over the years. In the process of rejuvenating old horse-drawn equipment for the Amish farmers, Wheary found "older stuff that has character," and started buying it before anyone else had an interest. Unlike collectors who pay high prices for scarce pieces, Wheary found his collection while buying and selling farm equipment at local farm auctions over the years.

In the 1800s, farm equipment manufacturers in the U.S. cast their company names in the iron seat that adorned each implement. Since Wheary is a history major, he knew that when the Civil War ended, foundries suddenly stopped making war goods and immediately turned to farm equipment to keep their small businesses going. At the time, 1,200 to 1,500 different foundries had their trademarks cast in iron seats.

Wheary calls his "rusty iron" collection small in comparison to the total that was made. But no one has all the seats and only a few collections are larger.

"I like to work with my hands," Wheary said. "And when I got out of college, I just naturally worked with my dad fixing up Amish machinery. I found older stuff that has character and bought some pieces and 'rat holed' them away. No one was interested at the time. But I was, and I learned a lot of history in the process."

The new museum is located along Route 30 west of Paradise behind the former Dutch Haven.

"I have several goals," Wheary said. "My children are getting to the age they are looking for sum-

mer jobs. Maybe as a family we can do things together around the museum. The learning experience for them is borrowed from the farm family who keeps their children employed while teaching them integrity. Maybe we can do this too.

"In addition, I would like to educate tourists about the farm. At field work time the farmers around here do not have time to answer the questions visitors have about what they are doing."

In addition to the iron seats, the museum has real tobacco hanging in a curing-type setting and an extensive display of the 1800s farm kitchen. The museum has an emphasis on the farm wife.

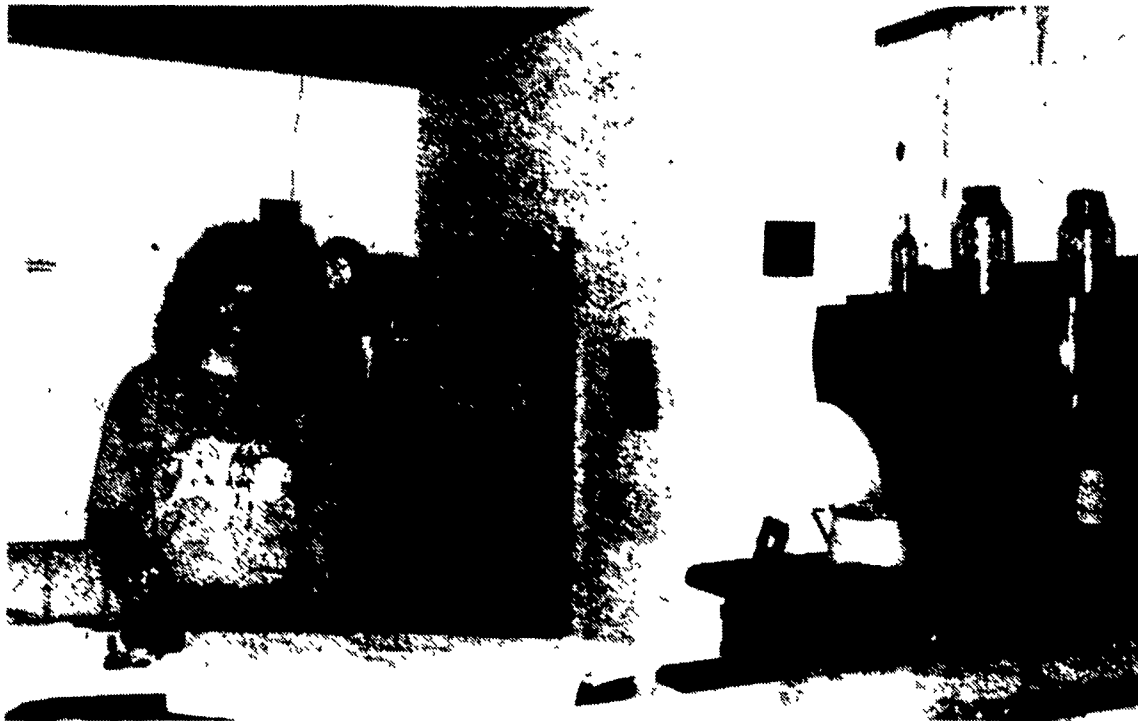
"I want the museum to tell a story," Wheary said. "Many of the things I have collected relate to the early home. The farm wife was the first to recycle things. She used feed bags to make clothes and curtains. She had the first day-care center to care for her own children. Rounding up the dog for the dog tread to power the wooden washing machine while running after the children was all in a day's work."

The old cook stove, sink, wooden ironing board, and irons are only a few of the things you will see in this kitchen.

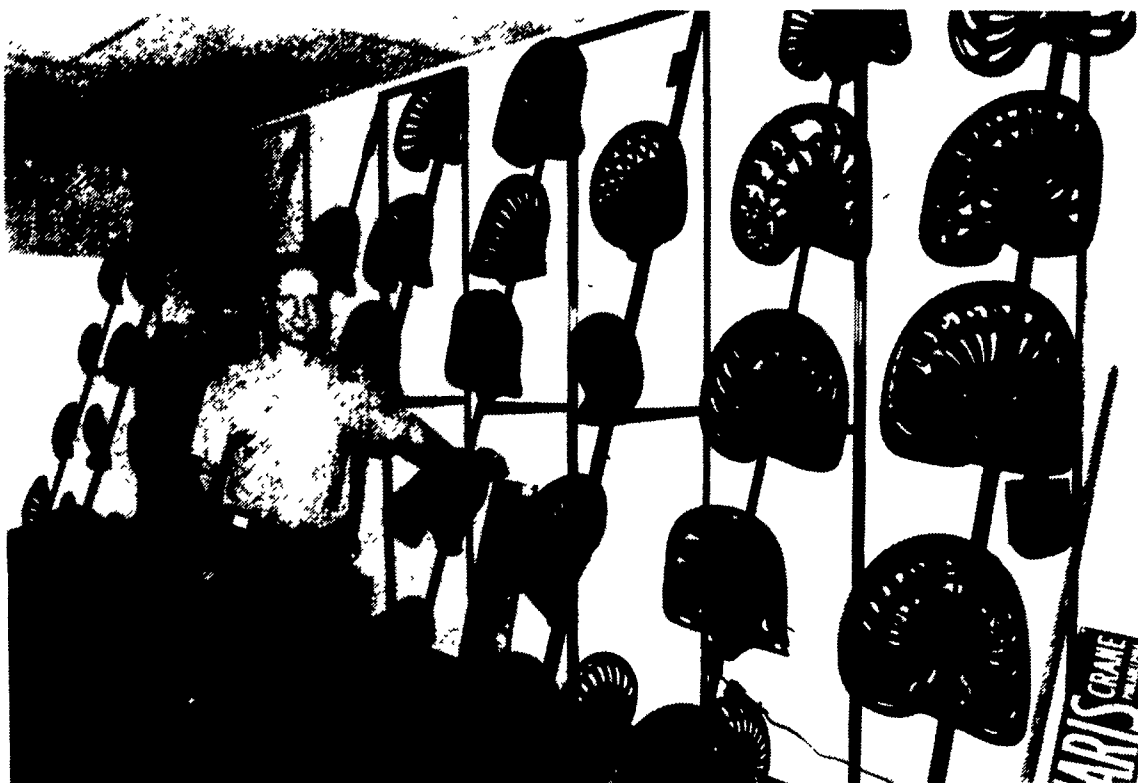
To augment the museum, Wheary has opened a farm toy business in the front shop area. Here he offers to buy, sell, or trade. There are farm toy auctions, but this is designed to be an on-going outlet for merchandising farm toys.

Wheary also has the rights to manufacture the famous New Holland bale elevator which he does at 2971 Lincoln Highway East, Gordonville, PA 17529.

"I enjoy the learning process myself," Wheary said. "I want to share what I have learned with the uninformed. The old-timers die off, and the intelligence they knew dies with them. I'd like to preserve what they knew for future generations."



Beth Ann Wheary poses in the 19th century kitchen that is part of the Lancaster County Farm Museum.



Thom Wheary, Jr., with part of his 400 piece collection of farm equipment seats. Each seat has the name or trademark of the foundry that made the equipment.

4-H Center Open House In Northampton

The Northampton County 4-H Center will hold an open house and horse school in conjunction with the Farm/City Tour on Sunday, October 2, 1994. The 4-H Center, located 2.2 miles south of Rt. 512 and 4 miles north of Nazareth on Bushkill Center Rd., will be open from 12 p.m. (Noon) to 4 p.m. during the open house. The horse show will start at 10 a.m.

During the day, people from the community are invited to view the club displays, completed 4-H projects, and various informative displays in the display building. There will also be a wide variety of 4-H animals present for a petting zoo and informative demonstrations.

The 4-H Center Board will be making their famous BBQ chicken for the public to purchase. This will be offered from 12 p.m. (Noon) till 4 p.m., or until the chicken is completely sold. So, come early. If you can't come early, call the 4-H Center, (610) 759-9859, during the day to reserve your portions.

An Open Youth School Horse

Show will be included in the events this year. This will start at 10 a.m. and is open to any youth between the ages of 8 and 19 years. Various types of classes will be offered, including Walk-Trot, Walk-Trot-Canter, and Jumping. For information concerning this horse show, call (610) 837-7294.

The 4-H program in Northampton County is open to all youths between the ages of 8 and 19 years. Projects include almost everything you might want, plus opportunities to learn leadership skills and interact with youths from around the county, region, state, nation, and world. If you would like more information concerning the 4-H program, please call the Northampton County 4-H Offices, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., at (610) 746-1970.

The 4-H program is "Youth doing all the right things." Won't you come join us? Sunday, October 2, Noon to 4 p.m.

If there are any questions, please call the above number of Janice Martin, (610) 837-7294.



The Wheary family posed on an old horse-drawn road grader used by farmers around 1850 to maintain the roads on a volunteer basis. From left, Thom, Beth Ann, Jason, and Megan. Not present for the photo is Thom's sister Jeanette Grissinger who has been very much a part of getting the new business started.