



Three of the Itell Brothers who still live in the Portage-Munster area—Bob, Pat, and Jim. Pat and Jim still live on a piece of the farm once owned by grandfather James Itell.

To Everything There Is A Season

LORETTA GOLDEN

Cambria Co. Correspondent

PORTAGE (Cambria Co.) — When James Itell began keeping a journal in January 1866, he probably didn't realize that it would be instrumental in piecing together a little of this area's agricultural history. His grandson, Pat Itell of Portage, is amazed that the book, which he's had for many years, found stored in a trunk in the attic of his home, has created so much interest.

The Portage Station Museum has focused on this journal to create an exhibit entitled "To Everything There Is a Season — A Farm Journal." Many local farmers have contributed items to this exhibit and the museum director, Kathleen Shuler was surprised to find that so many of these tools are still in working condition.

A copy of the journal is displayed on the first floor of the museum. The journal covers a period of six years from January 1866 through December 1872. An entry was made each day — basically "one-liners" — sometimes a sentence, but many times merely a phrase or even just a few words. Along with the journal some family letters and a list of teachers from the "Itell School," one of the first in the Portage area, are included at the museum. The school was built in 1829 on land donated by the Itell family and James later taught there. There are references to his teaching days throughout the journal.

Shuler comments that "the display includes horse-drawn implements, hand-held tools, and items rarely seen today. The visitor can follow the farm theme through spring and summer with harrows and a potato digger, hay knives, corn planters, and more." Hunting, trapping, butchering, and blacksmithing equipment highlight the autumn and winter display on the second floor.

James Itell was born on a farm along Munster Road in Portage, in 1860. His journal gives a glimpse into the post-Civil War era of the Portage area and his life as a young farmer. He was only 16 years old when he began keeping this daily account of his life. Upon reading some of the entries one gets the impression that he was a hard-working farmer, interested in the weather, as all farmers are. Single words describe some days: wet, cold, stormy. On days such as

these he busied himself with things such as "putting in window" or "hauling wood."

His entries for September 1866 include: "thrashing for John (James' brother); helping John to clean oats; killed a sheep; fixed the machine; cutting buckwheat; sowed the rye; hauled two bushel of wheat to mill; plowing."

Local farmer, Vince Golden, who has grown and marketed buckwheat for a number of years, notes that it is interesting to read so many references to buckwheat throughout the journal. Apparently buckwheat was more of a staple crop in this area during the 1800s than it is today. Other crops mentioned throughout the journal are wheat, corn, rye, oats, hay, flax and beans.

James also helped with the butchering. The entry for December 7, 1867 is as follows: "Killed our hogs 4 hog 375 lbs." Itell seemed to be very interested in record-keeping, and perhaps numbers in general. Weights for everything butchered are included. He also recorded bushels of grain taken to the mill, the number of gallons of molasses and syrup made, and even the number of fish he caught when engaged in what appeared to be a favorite leisure activity. "Plowing. Was fishing. Caught 75 fish." (June 14, 1866) That paints the picture of being a good day!

James makes mention of different church services which he attended throughout the years. Apparently, his religion was an important part of his life. He also kept a record of the amount of money expended for church purposes. On May 7, 1871 he "rented a pew" for \$12 and on November 6, 1871 he contributed \$1 for coal at the church.

An agricultural record for each year was kept. In January, 1870, Itell sold one bushel of flax seed for \$2. On November 23, he sold "a hog weighing 160 lbs. at 10½ cts per lb. \$17.60."

Leisure activities are described, and besides fishing, Itell enjoyed attending dances, sledding, picking berries, and ballooning.

On Sunday, December 1, 1872, the Itell journal reads: "On account of my being absent from home and other inconveniences I have ceased to keep accounts any longer."

Last week, 500 students from the Portage and Forest Hills area toured the museum where they

heard talks by museum volunteers on various aspects of farm life during the 1800s. This special workshop, sponsored by the Portage Station Museum and the Portage Area Historical Society, with cooperation by the Portage Area School District, gave the students a better insight into the area's past. One of the "hits" was Portage area farmer, Bob Yetsko, with his description of "hog butchering."

Since Itell spent some time as a teacher, an 1800's school room is also set up on the first floor. Tenth graders, Jen Koenigsburg and Claire Wagner, acted as 1800's teachers. "Miss Wagner" admonished her "class" not to jump into mud puddles during recess.

The journal itself has become a valuable "teaching tool" in some of the area schools. Shuler pointed out that "students from the Portage Area Elementary-Middle School, St. Joseph School, and Penn Cambria Elementary School in Lilly have created dioramas depicting some of the activities mentioned in Itell's writing. Fishing, logging, cherry picking, maple sugaring, and hot air ballooning have been recreated.

Gary Yusko, Portage Area social studies teacher and also the president of the Portage Area Historical Society, along with Shuler were instrumental in helping to recreate the 1860's day for the students. After the tour of the museum the students were shuttled by bus to Crichton-McCormick Park in Portage where they were "treated" to food indicative of the 1860s. Mr. Yusko's eighth-grade class prepared homemade butter, pumpkin butter, sausage, popcorn, buckwheat pancakes, and everyone's favorite — homemade ice cream. Some of the eighth graders were dressed in period clothing and gave short talks (which they previously researched) on many aspects of life in the 1860s.

Shuler and Yusko feel that this "hands-on" learning was a valuable experience for all.

The display "on a tour of farm life of days gone by" is open to the public from 1-4 p.m. Wednesdays and 1-5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. Admission is free. The exhibit will run through mid-June.



SEE YOUR NEAREST



**DEALER
FOR DEPENDABLE
EQUIPMENT & SERVICE**

PENNSYLVANIA

Anville, PA
BHM Farm
Equipment, Inc.
RD1, Rte. 934
717-867-2211

Honey Grove, PA
Norman D. Clark
& Son, Inc.
Honey Grove, PA
717-734-3682
Loysville, PA
717-789-3117

Carlisle, PA
R&W
Equipment Co.
35 East Willow Street
717-243-2686

New Holland, PA
A.B.C. Groff, Inc.
110 South Railroad
717-354-4191

Elizabethtown, PA
Messick Farm
Equipment, Inc.
Rt. 283 - Rheem's Exit
717-367-1319

Oley, PA
C.J. Wonsidler
Bros.
R.D. 2
215-987-6257

Halifax, PA
Sweigard Bros.
R.D. 3, Box 13
717-896-3414

Pitman, PA
Schreffler
Equipment
Pitman, PA
717-648-1120

Honey Brook, PA
Dependable
Motor Co.
East Main Street
215-273-3131
215-273-3737

Tamaqua, PA
Charles S.
Snyder, Inc.
R.D. 3
717-386-5945

West Grove, PA
S.G. Lewis &
Son, Inc.
R.D. 2, Box 66
215-869-2214

MARYLAND

Frederick, MD
Ceresville Ford New Holland, Inc.
Rt. 26 East 301-662-4197
Outside MD, 800-331-9122

NEW JERSEY

Bridgeton, NJ
Leslie G. Fogg,
Inc.
Canton & Stow Creek
Landing Rd.
609-451-2727
609-935-5145

Washington, NJ
Smith Tractor &
Equip., Inc.
15 Hillcrest Ave.
908-689-7900



Woodstown, NJ
Owen Supply Co.
Broad Street &
East Avenue
609-769-0308