

Lancaster Farming *Antiques Center*

War Historian Sees Art In Early American Pieces

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STONYCREEK (Somerset Co.) — Richard Sturtz of Stonycreek Township in Somerset County combines his love for Somerset County artifacts and his passion for war history into an impressive collection of Americana.

"I've always had an interest in local artifacts. Everything Somerset County intrigues me and I love to go searching for items with a story behind them," said Sturtz, who works as a record specialist in the county's mental health agency and in his spare time, enjoys Civil War re-enacting.

He most recently played an extra in the upcoming movie "Gods and Generals."

Amidst original, one-of-a-kind items made only in Somerset County, like a ladle and a skimmer made by hand in the 1800s, a bee hive made of rye straw banded together with oak strips made in the mid-1800s, a school bell from a one-room schoolhouse in Wills from the 1910s, Sturtz' collection boasts of well-researched and well-kept pieces.

He gives much credit to his friend, the late Ernie Fritz, an antique dealer in Somerset, for peaking his interest years ago.

"I learned a lot from him and I miss him," says Sturtz. "We traveled throughout Somerset County looking for Somerset County items and learning the history that went along with them."

During one of those travels, Sturtz came across a redware pottery spittoon made by Henry Grady, from Shanksville. The spittoon is one of three known to exist.

He also has a flour box dated 1852 made by Samuel Thomas, a local person, a Lewis Weighley coverlet made in Somerset County in 1855 and a Amish quilt made in Springs in the 1800s. He has also acquired a signed and dated Pennsylvania Long Rifle. His Goeb New Testament Bible and Almanac are also prized possessions. Frederick Goeb was the first to print a German Bible West of the Alleghenies.

His collection does not stop there. Sturtz, who is a local historian and re-enactor, has enjoyed picking up both Civil War and World War II objects.

He owns a Civil War cartridge and cap box and more than 20 World War II uniforms. He has recently acquired the World War I uniform of the late Lester Kimmel, who was more than 100 years old when he died.

Also, he owns the late John Barchey's Pacific Theater medic helmet, which has a small cross on it and is a much-prized relic. He also has World War II weapons and other items, like cigarette

lighters, insignias, canteens, and field gear.

A few years ago, Sturtz purchased and restored a 1944 World War II personnel carrier, which he is often asked to use in local parades.

Sturtz' father, the late Wilbert Sturtz, died Nov. 20, 2000, on Veteran's Day, and the younger Sturtz has found a new interest in collecting and researching World War II memorabilia.

"My father never talked about his war experiences much until the August before he died," says Sturtz. "We sat down on the front porch and he told me some interesting stories. I'm glad I have that. Everyone needs to take time to talk to our World War II veterans. They are a part of history now and an important part of their life will be forgotten if we don't document it now."

Although Sturtz remains discreet about his historical pursuits, he is a well-traveled Civil War re-enactor who has a long list of credits to his name.

It all started about six years ago, when he and a fellow historian, Tom Fisher, went to see the re-enactment of the 125th anniversary of Gettysburg.

Since that time, Sturtz has re-enacted locally and regionally and most recently, played an extra in the motion picture film, "Gods and Generals," filmed in Maryland.

From Nov. 12 to Dec. 13, Sturtz took a sabbatical from his job in medical records and played the role of both a northern and southern Civil War soldier during the Battle of Fredericksburg. The movie itself was mostly filmed at the Flook Farm in Ketysville, Md. but the crews first worked at Harper's Ferry, W.Va., which was made to look like the town of Fredericksburg. Sturtz stayed mostly in Hagerstown, Md.

"This film was also of special interest for me," says Sturtz, "because my ancestor Hiram Sturtz, a soldier in the 142nd Pa. Volunteers Co. F, the Berlin (Pa.) Company, was killed in Fredericksburg."

"Gods and Generals," written by Jeff Shaara, serves as the first novel in a three-set historical novel series. The first book written in the series was "Killer Angels," the book Jeff Shaara's father, the late Michael Shaara, authored and the same book which served as the basis for the movie "Gettysburg."

Since his father's death, Jeff Shaara has written the prequel, "Gods and Generals," which details the life of legendary Stonewall Jackson and the Battle of Fredericksburg, and the newly-released sequel called "Last Full Measure."

Sturtz works closely with Antietam National Battlefield and Harper's Ferry, W.Va., for special events and a few years ago, he played a soldier in a documentary filmed by the National Park Service for Antietam National Battlefield.

Sturtz believes that the casting company for "Gods and Generals" got his name and telephone number from the National Park Service. Sturtz has also served as the Provost Marshal at Harper's Ferry on the Fourth of July for the past few years. He also started going to the Eisenhower farm in Gettysburg for World War II re-enacting a living history weekend in September.

"In seventh grade I wrote an essay on Gettysburg and drew the figures on the cover with crayon so I must have been interested back then. I guess that's where it started from," he said.

Sturtz can also be credited with locating Civil War Col. Robert P. Cummins' saddle, which had been in storage but is now on public display at the Berlin Historical Society building in southern Somerset County. Col. Cummins was of 142nd Pennsylvania Volunteers from Somerset County and was a county sheriff.



This Lewis Weighley coverlet is Sturtz's most prized one of his coverlet collection. Notice also the beehive made of rye straw banded with oak strips, the redware pottery spittoon, the gun and powder horn from an 1800s gunsmith, and many photographs depicting Somerset County history.



Richard Sturtz, a Civil War re-enactor, enjoys acquiring war uniforms and artifacts with stories that accompany them.

Sturtz has since become friends with Marion Runnells of Utah, the great-great-granddaughter of Col. Cummins, and although the family had a sense of history within their genealogy, they were never involved. Now, the family travels to Remembrance Day on Nov. 19 in Gettysburg and they correspond with Sturtz often.

Although Sturtz has been getting back to the routine of his usual lifestyle in Somerset Coun-

ty, he foresees another movie extra part in the near future.

Sturtz says that Ron Howard is supposedly making a film of the Alamo and another Civil War film based on the book "Stone Mountain" is supposed to be in the works.

In the meantime, he will no doubt continue collecting Somerset County handcrafted items and already has some pieces in mind.

"Somerset County has a unique history," he said. "People

moved through this county west. They may have stopped here for a night or longer but because of the military roads, Forbes Road and Braddock Road (Route 40),

Many passed through this area. The craftsmen here were creative and had an individual style. They expressed themselves in their work and that's one of the reasons I enjoy collecting items from this area. It might have been a farming community but there were artists here."