

Storybook Exhibit Showcases Farm Life History In Southwestern Pa.

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display at the Somerset Historical Center in Somerset County.

"People made the patterns on the land," said Barbara Black, curator at the center, located off Rt. 601 north on Rt. 985 a few miles north of Somerset. "This is not just an exhibit about farming, but about the people and how their lives were improved by farming. People continued to change the pattern on the land throughout history and they will continue to change those patterns through time."

The winding storybook about the farmers in southwestern Pennsylvania begins with Native American culture and ends at the age of modern farming in the 1970s, intertwining 200 artifacts, 1,500 graphics and photographs, sound effects, telephone interactive sites, life casts similar to mannequins, and even a simulated maple tree being tapped for sugar water.

"What we have tried to do is tell a truthful story of how life really was, and not embellish it with too much nostalgia," said Black. "This is not necessarily an exhibit that reminds one of 'Little House on the Prairie,' but a more accurate view of life in southwestern Pennsylvania."

The Somerset Historical Center, a Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) site, has been based at the location along Rt. 985 north of Somerset for more than 30 years, and includes an expansive 165 acres. The late Dr. Earl O. and Elizabeth "Betty" Haupt, local historians from Somerset and founders of the Somerset County Historical and Genealogical Society, donated three acres to the state commission, along with an additional purchase of acreage by the commission, to provide enough land to build a center in 1970.

After their deaths in 1985 for Earl and 1990 for Betty, the Haupt's legacy included the donation of their home and property, which provided 135 acres for the Historical Society. In the meantime, the society and commission were able to purchase additional acreage, all of which creates a spacious location rich for development and a unique agreement between the commission and society to work together to preserve the history of Somerset County.

In 1997, part of the older center was replaced with a grand, steel-framed museum simulated to look like a big red barn. Center staff began working to put together an interpretive exhibit, including farmsteads. For the past 33 years, the Mountain Craft Days Festival, a well-attended event highlighting old-fashioned crafts and demonstrations, has been conducted every September as a community outreach and major fundraiser for the site.

"Mountain Craft Days serves as our single largest visitation weekend," said Black. "Craft Days visitors said what a top-notch exhibit it was, and many remarked that they would need to come back because there is so much to see. So many local people said, 'I learned things about this area that I never knew before'."

After viewing a 13-minute orientation video, visitors are warmly welcomed into the exhibit with a mural-size photograph of a 1907 barn raising at the Joe Miller Farm in Bakersville, Somerset County. In this particular photograph, farmers, their wives and children alike wave for the purpose of the photograph as they are scattered throughout the framing of the massive barn.

This exhibit begins first with

the very first farmers in the county, the Monongahela Native Americans, prehistoric gatherers and permanent farmers who lived year-round in the area from about 900 to 1625 A.D. A scaled model of a Monongahela hut done by Crissman Studios in Pittsburgh was done in conjunction with the leading expert on Monongahela culture, Dr. Richard George of Carnegie Mellon, Pittsburgh. In addition, artifacts found from a recent archaeological dig in Meyersdale are also on display

as reminders of these ancient agriculturalists.

Then, the exhibit moves into Settling the Frontier (1750-1820), when the first Europeans crossed the Allegheny Mountain. Life-size models, called life casts, of a young frontier couple become visible around one of the first corners. At that phase in time, settlers made one of the foremost impressions the land by cutting down old growth forests and settling into the wilderness. Also, conflict made its

impression upon the land when struggle arose between the British and the French in the French and Indian War, and also between the settlers and Britain during the Revolutionary War.

Although photographs were nonexistent prior to the late 1800s and original research was difficult to find for the earlier portions of the exhibit, visitors can explore reproductions of ledgers, books, and diaries and

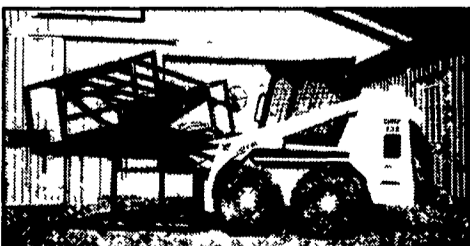
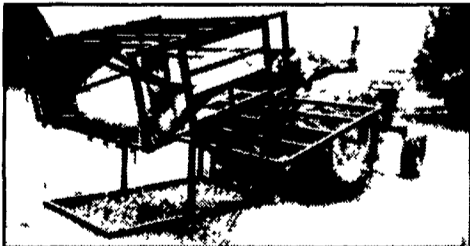
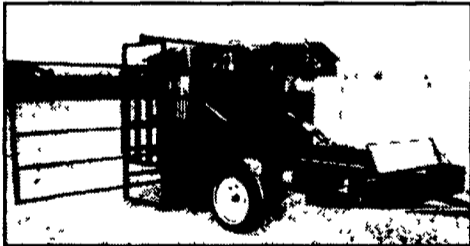
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A reaper, fanning mill, and corn sheller are just some of the many items that tell the historical story of farming in southwestern Pennsylvania in an exclusive exhibit called "Patterns On the Land: Farming In Southwestern Pennsylvania." Here, Vernon Berkey, president of Historical and Genealogical Society of Somerset County, right, Charlie Fox (at the phone), administrator at the Center, and Barbara Black, curator, look over some of the tools.

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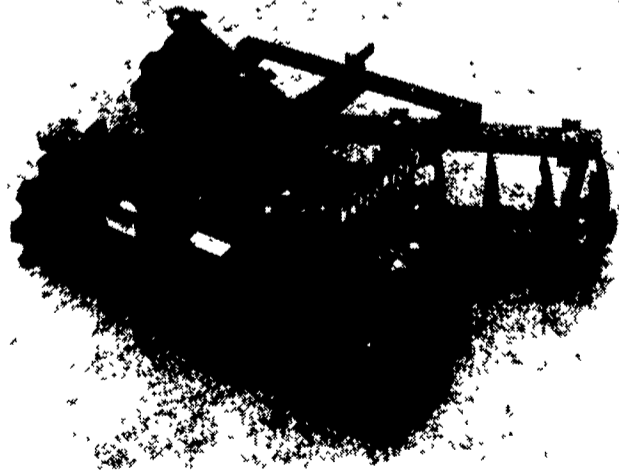
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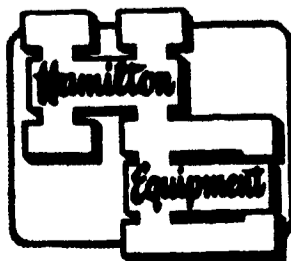
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