

Margaret Kraisinger – Hardware store

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Let's go to Japan, where a buyer has ordered an antique cabinet accessory. The authentic antique has now arrived. From where do you suppose it was shipped? Yes, it came from halfway around the world, from a remarkable business in rural Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Margaret and Gary Kraisinger are owners of The Old Hardware Store which provided this antique item for the Japanese. Margaret was born in Garden City and grew up at Great Bend. "I grew up liking antiques and collecting antiques," Margaret said. She went on to Fort Hays State where she got her education degree. She also met and married Gary Kraisinger.

She and Gary were teachers for a time in western Kansas where they developed a strong interest in history. Then Gary chose to go into a business career and he joined a construction company. His business career ultimately took them to Wichita. When they had children, they looked for a small town school system. In 1979, they moved to Halstead where they raised three children. After 51 years of marriage, they now have eight grandchildren also.

Margaret continued her teaching career and retired in 1997. Shortly after she retired, the old hardware store in downtown Halstead came up for sale.

"I had always admired that store," Margaret said. In 1998, she and Gary bought the business and renamed it "The Old Hardware Store." I call that truth in advertising.

The store was located in a historic building that had been built in 1878. The original owners had started the hardware store in 1885. In 1910 they installed a tin ceiling and in 1916, they brought in oak wall cabinets. In the 1950s, another generation of owners covered the cabinets with pegboard, painted many of the fixtures, and installed fluorescent lighting.

When the Kraisingers bought the building, they set out to restore its classic look. "I wanted to create a time capsule of the 1920s era," Margaret said. They removed the pegboard, restored the cabinets, repainted the tin ceiling, changed the lights, and oiled the old plank flooring. In August 1999, The Old Hardware Store reopened for business.

Margaret realized that the business needed a special niche, and she decided to build on her interest in antiques but with a specialty. She decided to specialize in original, authentic antique hardware. This might be architectural hardware, for doors and windows, or furniture hardware, for cupboards, cabinets, trunks, boxes, etc.

Margaret insists that the products sold be genuine antique items: No reproductions or replicas.

Today, The Old Hardware Store has an amazing inventory of vintage hardware items from the 1870s to the 1970s and beyond. "I probably have a selection that (customers) can't find anywhere else," Margaret said. Furthermore, this inventory is found in a building which itself is beautifully restored and 137 years old.

Customers travelled to The Old Hardware Store from far away. They told Margaret that she needed to have an on-line catalog. So, in 2013, she hired a tech-savvy assistant and launched a website catalog with 1400 items and point-of-sale software. The

catalog even lists hardware by era. Since that time, The Old Hardware Store has shipped products to 42 states, Australia, and Japan. Wow.

This is quite a remarkable record for a business located in a rural community such as Halstead, population 1,880 people. Now, that's rural.

Margaret guarantees that all these items are authentic antiques. She even offers same-day shipping. An architectural salvage specialist in Illinois described The Old Hardware Store as one of the top three antique hardware sites in the nation.

For more information, go to www.theoldhardwarestore.com.

It's time to leave Japan, where we can find an antique furniture item that was shipped all the way from rural Kansas. We commend Margaret and Gary Kraisinger of The Old Hardware Store for making a difference with entrepreneurship in authentic antiques.

And there's more. Remember that Gary and Margaret were interested in history? That interest would lead them to study the old cattle trails. In fact, they wrote the book on them – and I mean that literally. We'll learn about that next week.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.