

Hazel Zimmerman – Ag Heritage Park

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

“Heritage.” It’s defined as “the traditions, achievements, beliefs, etc. that are part of the history of a group or nation.” Today we’ll learn about a farm family which is celebrating the history of agriculture by displaying farm equipment that has been used through the decades. It’s today’s Kansas Profile.

Hazel Zimmerman is co-founder of Ag Heritage Park which displays generations of farm equipment.

Hazel grew up on a farm near Alta Vista. She met and married Everett who also grew up on a nearby farm. They farmed together and raised three children: Connie, Calvin, and Kirby. Calvin and Kirby farm nearby, and Connie lives near Olsburg.

Everett semi-retired in 1995. At farm auctions, he noticed that some of the oldest equipment was being sold for junk. He saw historic horse-drawn equipment, for example, which was being sold simply for salvage.

Everett and Hazel realized that such equipment was a part of the legacy of agriculture. They recognized that such history could be lost if no effort was made to capture and preserve it.

So, Everett and Hazel started collecting classic farm equipment. Of course, they wanted to share it with others. “We were trying to find a place to put it,” Hazel said. In 1999, Everett and Hazel bought four acres on the south side of Alta Vista, a rural community of 434 people. Now, that’s rural. They built buildings, moved in equipment, and prepared to display it.

On October 3, 1999 – Everett’s birthday - they opened Ag Heritage Park in Alta Vista.

The purpose of Ag Heritage Park is to preserve the history of old farm equipment and rural lifestyles. It has been described as “the ultimate collection of memorabilia commemorating ag life in rural America.” Much of the collection is found in two large museum buildings, surrounded by many more pieces of equipment. Additional period buildings have also been brought in.

The collection expanded through the years. Everett passed away in 2010, but his work is being carried on by Hazel and the other family members who serve on the board. The Council Grove Area Foundation has provided supportive grants. Sponsors are recognized with signs on the fence. Ag Heritage Park is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization which depends on donations for operating support.

Admission to Ag Heritage Park is by voluntary donation. The park is open by appointment. The entrance sign lists three phone numbers for various family members who, within minutes, can open the park for visitors. On the third Saturday in April, the park hosts Spring Crank Up. On the fourth Saturday in September, the park hosts special events in conjunction with Alta Vista’s Old Settlers Day.

Ag Heritage Park features hundreds of pieces of farm equipment that have been used through the decades, including a full line of horse-drawn equipment and some of the first tractors and pull-type combines that existed before self-propelled combines came into use. Nearly 50 tractors are on the grounds. When a grant was received so descriptive signs could be placed on each piece of equipment, some 450 signs were made.

There are also household goods as well as oldtime elements from such places as beauty shops, barber shops, telephone exchanges, and more. Also on the grounds are a one room schoolhouse, log cabin, two room house, chickenhouse, blacksmith shop, barn, and corn crib/granary from the 1885 era.

Hazel's daughter Connie Larson is a leader in the barn quilt movement in Kansas. Three barn quilts are displayed on buildings at the park.

School classes and 4-H groups have visited the park as well as guests from all over. It is especially rewarding to Hazel when older people who know this equipment come to the park and share this history with their children and grandchildren. "You see those older fellas light up when they see this equipment," Hazel said.

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

Heritage: It's been defined as "the traditions, achievements, beliefs, etc. that are part of the history of a group or nation." We commend Hazel and the late Everett Zimmerman plus all those who are making a difference by preserving this heritage at Ag Heritage Park.

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