

David Lambert – Furniture Repair shop

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

“Built to last.” That’s a phrase which refers to an item or structure which is especially well-built, strong, and enduring. It’s the type of well-made, lasting furniture which our grandparents might have had. Today we’ll meet a man from rural Kansas who not only repairs and refinishes that type of furniture from yesteryear, he also builds handmade replicas of early American furniture. It’s a type of craftsmanship which is not often seen in our modern times. This is today’s Kansas Profile.

David Lambert is owner and operator of the Furniture Repair Shop in Manhattan. His craftsmanship goes back to his family roots.

David grew up at Abilene where he studied industrial arts and his father built houses. “We had a good industrial arts program and a good teacher,” David said. By his senior year of high school, David built a bedroom set and was designing furniture for other people.

David’s grandfather liked to go to auctions and buy old furniture. “He would pay 75 cents for an old vanity,” David said. Then David would refinish it and give it to a relative. Soon the relatives and their friends were asking for more.

David served overseas in the Army. Then he moved to Colorado and later back to Kansas where his parents had moved to the rural community of Wakefield, population 841 people. Now, that’s rural.

David met his wife in Manhattan and worked in construction with his father. They put up 256 metal buildings while working together. Meanwhile, he continued to work on furniture refinishing and repair on the side. “It was my rainy day and cold weather job,” he said with a smile.

But the demand for his products continued to grow. In 1986, he bought an old house in Riley and opened a furniture repair, refinishing, and antique business there. In 2005, with a daughter at K-State, he built a new shop on the east side of Manhattan where his Furniture Repair Shop is today.

The Furniture Repair Shop does repair and refinishing of all types of furniture. David also builds handmade replicas of early American furniture, does caning and rush chair repair, and old trunk restoration. He also collects and sells barbed wire and other antiques such as wooden corn planters.

David estimates he has worked on perhaps two thousand pieces of furniture through the years. His most challenging piece was a late 1700s chest of drawers built of cherrywood tongue in groove. Wow. Two of his pieces are in a bank in California, including a large dresser made of mahogany. His general trade area is from Kansas City to Denver and from Oklahoma City to Lincoln.

David’s interest in barbed wire goes back to his days overseas. He was stationed in Germany’s Black Forest area. A friend of his dad’s was a barbed wire collector who asked David if he could find barbed wire in Germany. David didn’t really find that type of farm fencing, but he did find entanglement wire dating back to World War I. “It was vicious, a high tensile wire with four point, 1 ½ inch barbs,” David said.

David was, well, hooked. When he came back to Kansas he asked his relatives on the farm if he could look at their old fences. Now he collects and sells framed displays of different types of barbed wire.

David likes antiques, especially the old furniture. Before the mid-1800s, most furniture was made of cherry, mahogany, and walnut – a far cry from the plywood and cheap construction of today.

“Seventy percent of our country’s furniture now comes from China,” David said. “Some people call it ‘disposable furniture’ because it is cheap and easy to make.” That is a stark contrast to the type of furniture which David builds and repairs today.

“Built to last.” That’s the type of solid, sturdy furniture owned by our grandparents, and the kind of furniture on which David Lambert likes to work. We salute David Lambert and the Furniture Repair Shop for making a difference with his craftsmanship and commitment to enduring high quality. Those are the type of values which are built to last.

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