

Links to county's farm-life past preserved by Shorty Peck in new Fair museum

Harold "Shorty" Peck is at it again this year—only on a bigger scale than ever before.

In addition to his now-traditional Collectors' Corner exhibit at the Morrow County Fair, the Upper Rhea Creek rancher will be featuring a full-fledged antique farm equipment museum, plus a booth displaying old-time horse tack and accessories.

For the past several weeks, Peck has spent his scarce free hours converting an old horse barn at the fairgrounds into a museum, in which he will display items ranging from a horse-drawn corn planter to an 1876 vintage buggy, complete with kerosene headlamps.

Jim Launer, left, helps Harold "Shorty" Peck unload "footburning" plow outside Peck's new Fair museum.

The museum will include a wide assortment of old-time farm implements of the area, plus a restored pioneer kitchen.

Peck, a lifelong resident of the area, grew up working with many of the implements he now collects and restores. He owns a horsedrawn, single-bottom "foot burner" plow, similar to one he recalls his father used. "It took him 42 days to plow up 40 acres with that thing," he recollected. "And when the crop came up, the grasshoppers ate it." Why do they call the plow a "footburner"? "Just spend a day running one, and you'll find out," Peck replied.

Peck's father bought the first combine in Morrow County in 1906, a huge machine that required 32 horses to pull. During those early years of wheat produc-

tion in Morrow County when Peck started work on a threshing crew at age 11, it took a lot of extra manpower to get the job done.

Threshing crews generally required about 14 workers,

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whose jobs were given titles like hoedown, roustabouts, and sack sewers. Each crew also included a cook, and an average of 21 horses.

Peck hopes to revitalize—temporarily at least—one of the old threshing-era skills, that of sack sewing. During this year's fair he hopes to give demonstrations of the now antiquated art. Sack sewers customarily received the second-highest wages on threshing crews, ranking just

below the separator operator on the crew's pecking order. Grain had to be crammed into 140 pound sacks to be hauled to storage areas, prior to the advent of grain elevators in the area, just before the

see through the flying chaff while harvesting, especially "when a good tail wind came up."

Peck insists that he doesn't have anything against the new lines of farm equipment, "except for the price...you can pay as much for a new tractor as you did for your whole place." By collecting and restoring the earlier farming tools of the area, he hopes to preserve a link to the county's past.

Other duties at this year's Fair and Rodeo will include Peck's serving as chauffeur for King and Queen Adrian and Velva Bechdolt during the annual parade, using his restored 1906 International auto. The Bechdolts are not strangers to Peck—Adrian was his geometry and typing teacher at Lexington.

Peck hopes to build a permanent museum in which to preserve the implements he has spent so much of his life making a living with, and later restoring.

