

Washington County RURAL HERITAGE MUSEUM



Celebrating Washington County's Rural Heritage

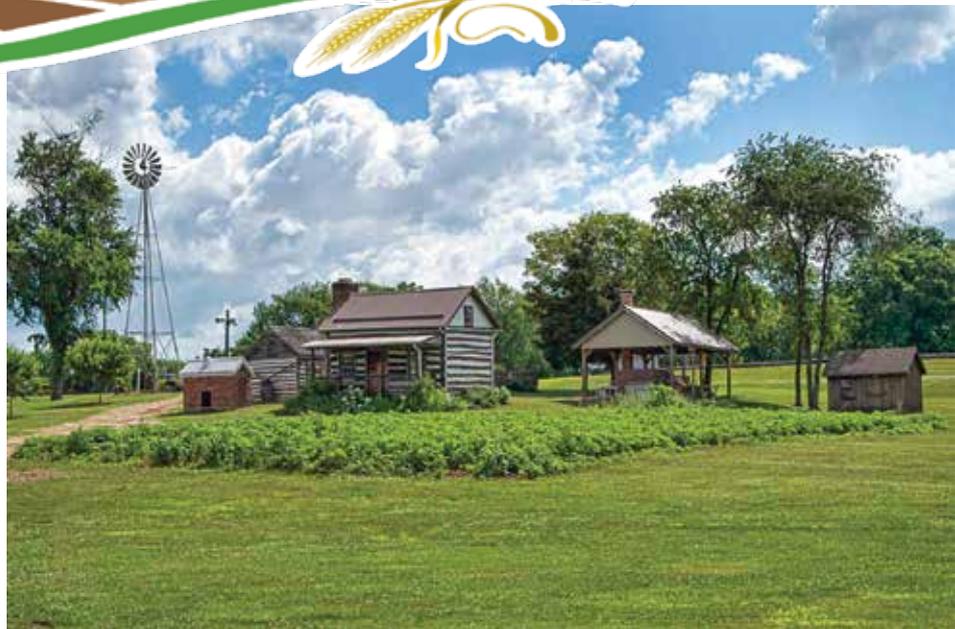
Written by: **Sara Mullins**

Photos courtesy *Rural Heritage Museum*

In a fast-paced era dominated by high tech gadgetry, the Washington County Rural Heritage Museum offers visitors an opportunity to learn about a simpler time when family, farm and community prevailed. Located just north of the Antietam Battlefield along the Sharpsburg Pike, the museum lies within the grounds of Washington County's Agricultural Educational Center. Its focus is rural life before 1940 in Washington County, toward the end of the horse and buggy era. Admission is free and donations are welcome.

The museum complex consists of three 7,200 square-foot buildings containing more than 3,500 artifacts, plus a homestead and village featuring authentic period buildings from the 1800s. Many items on display have been loaned or donated by local residents and others who support the museum's mission. Volunteer members of Friends of the Rural Heritage Museum provide critical support by staffing museum facilities, recruiting and training volunteers, and fundraising.

The Rural Heritage Museum began as a small vision during the 1990s. Many people in the agricultural community recognized the need to educate citizens about the old ways of farming and rural living. Through many discussions, plus the support of the County Government and citizens,



The Rural Heritage Village Homestead, located on the upper grounds, features two pre-1865 log homes.

the museum evolved as a concept that has grown exponentially through the years.

Rural Heritage Building One, dedicated on May 12, 2001, is the first of the three large buildings. It serves as the main museum, providing a glimpse of pre-1940 everyday life in Washington County. Exhibits include an authentic country store, four rooms furnished in farmhouse style of the Victorian era, examples of vintage clothing, antique children's toys, textiles with information on how they are processed, plus exhibits featuring communication technology of the era. Another display offers a glimpse into mourning customs of the day. The museum gift shop offers an array of items for sale.

Rural Heritage Building Two showcases large farm equipment and implements, with exhibits showing the progression from human-to-horse-to-motor-driven machinery used for all phases of growing food: preparing soil, planting, harvesting, and processing crops. Dedicated on July 14,



The Heritage Spudfest is held in August, when potatoes are harvested with a horse-drawn plow, and children are encouraged to pick the potatoes off the ground.

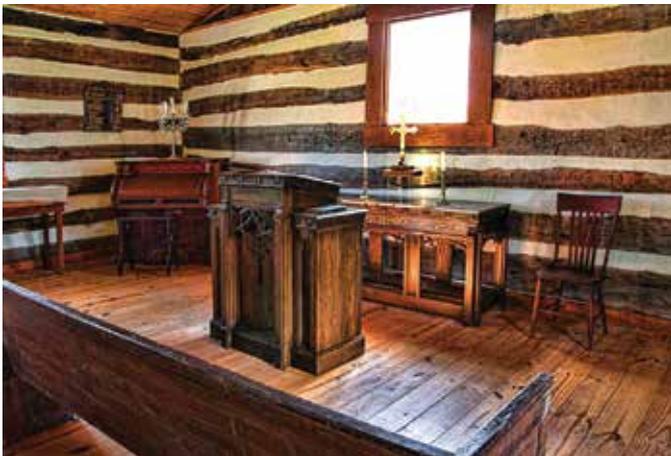
2009, this museum displays a sizeable collection of early farm equipment, including tractors, plows, cultivators, harnesses, grain and seed cleaners, and implements for planting and harvesting. Other exhibits include items used in orchards and dairy processing equipment.

Rural Heritage Building Three, dedicated on April 6, 2013, tells the story of travel during an earlier period ranging from the era of horse-drawn buggies and sleighs to the horseless carriage known as the automobile. Highlights include Hammonds Garage, a replica of an early auto repair shop, a 1928 Ford fire engine contributed by the Maugansville Volunteer Fire Company, and an early Conestoga wagon that traveled the National Road from Baltimore to Wheeling. Many of the museum's bicycles and automobiles were manufactured in Hagerstown, known as The Hub City because it served as a crossroad for several railroad lines – notably the Baltimore & Ohio, Western Maryland, and Norfolk & Western.

Located on the upper grounds of the museum complex, the Rural Heritage Village Homestead features a windmill

placed onsite in 1999 and two pre-1865 log homes, one known as the Poffenberger Cabin and the other the former home of Grant and Laura Reeder. The Homestead includes a pavilion housing a sawmill located somewhat apart from the other structures. During the growing season, a German Four-Square garden is alive with heirloom varieties of vegetables, herbs and flowers. Another garden serves as a potato patch for the museum's annual Spudfest. It was recently expanded to include rye and wheat, plus the Three Sisters, the three primary agricultural crops cultivated by Native Americans in North America – winter squash, maize and climbing beans – and a berry patch. An outdoor drying shed to preserve foods and a brick wood-fired bread oven are located nearby.

The Rural Heritage Village, located on the lower grounds, features a growing assortment of buildings from the 1800s. The Mt. Tabor United Brethren log church was constructed in 1850. Several businesses important to a rural lifestyle



are represented by a carpenter's shop, a blacksmith shop, and a cobbler and broom maker's shop. The Shank & Spickler General Store advertises that it is open for business. Dr. Peter Fahrney & Son's office, which first welcomed patients in 1803, has exterior siding that protects its original log cabin structure. Located nearby is the Dr. Peter Fahrney Medicinal Herb Garden that includes strip beds popular during the 19th century.

Although the Rural Heritage Building One is the only building open throughout most of the year on Saturdays and Sundays from 1 to 4 p.m., the museum offers a cornucopia of special events throughout the year. The entire complex is open to visitors during the annual Spring Open House in April. During the Heritage Spudfest in August, potatoes are



Several businesses, farmhouse furnishings, and Mt. Tabor United Brethren log church offer a glimpse into everyday living in the 1800s.

harvested with a horse-drawn plow, and children are encouraged to pick the potatoes off the ground. Additional events include Artisan Bread Baking in the outdoor wood fired oven and in December, the Holiday Open House, when kids can enjoy craft activities and visit Santa for a photo op as he sits in an authentic sleigh. Activities available during special events feature an abundance of demonstrations and

activities: crafts for kids, blacksmithing, weaving, spinning, rug-hooking, broom and candle making, artisan bread baking, hearth cooking, garden activities, watching the sawmill in operation, stone crushing...and more. There is truly something for everyone.



Left: The Rural Heritage Village features a growing assortment of buildings from the 1800s.

Below: This 1934 Dodge Brothers truck is housed in Rural Heritage Building Three, which tells the story of travel and transportation.

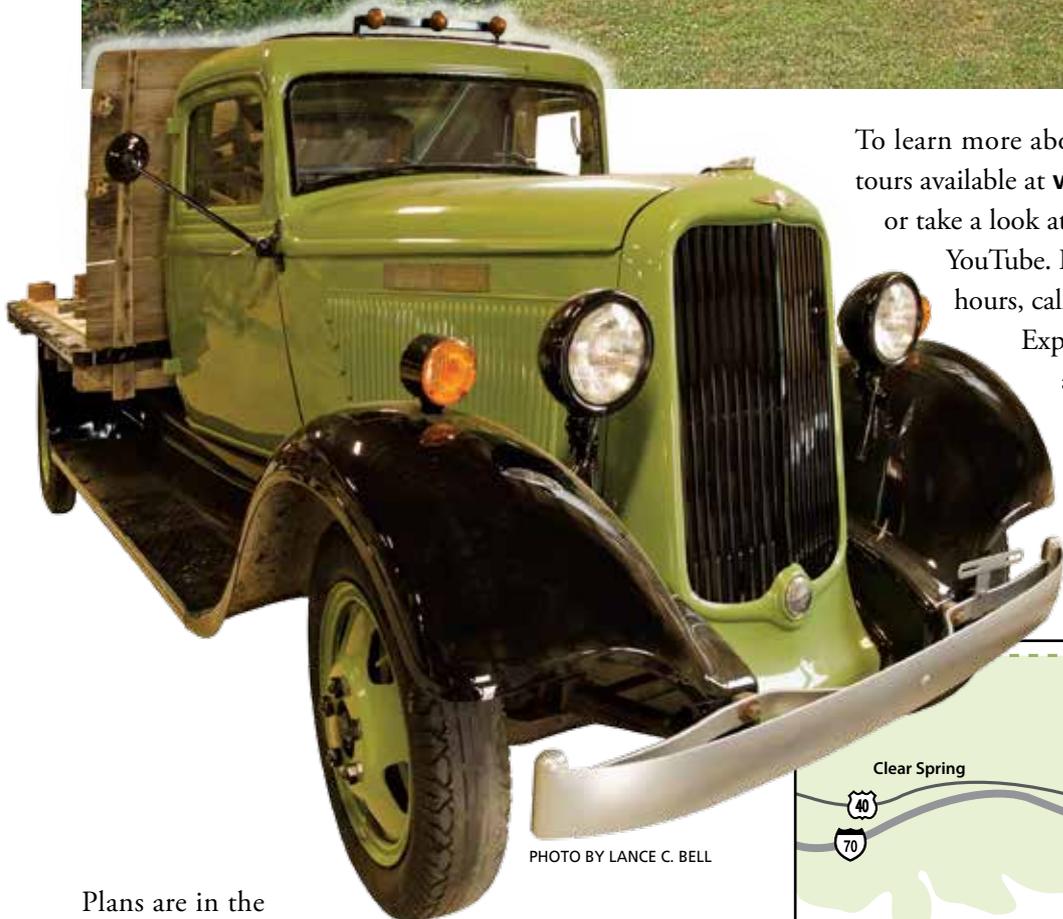


PHOTO BY LANCE C. BELL

To learn more about the museum, explore visual tours available at www.ruralheritagemuseum.org or take a look at several visual tours available on YouTube. For information regarding museum hours, call 240-420-1714, Monday – Friday. Exploring the museum offers visitors an opportunity to travel through time, to catch a glimpse of a time gone by. And volunteers are always welcome.



Plans are in the works to expand the Rural Heritage Village and Homestead. The staff is currently seeking a log schoolhouse that meets specific criteria: it should be an existing structure located in Washington County that fits into the Village concept of depicting rural life during the 1800s - 1900s. Other features proposed for the site include a bank, barber shop, undertaker, and saloon – plus a couple of outhouses.

Rural Heritage Museum – Open Saturday & Sunday 1-4 pm and by appointment, 240-420-1714. 7313 Sharpsburg Pike, Boonsboro, MD 21713.