

Collector's Passion for Cast-Iron Seats Runs Deep

Gerald Zimmerman likes old farm equipment. His collection includes nearly 300 wrenches, 26 walking plows, 11 horse-drawn planters, and a wooden plow from the 1700s. Over the past half-century, Zimmerman has also collected cattle dehorners, brass doorknobs, small promotional fry pans, and a cattle horn that once held a whetting stone for sharpening scythes. The list of items seems endless. However, if he has a favorite, it has to be his cast-iron seat collection.

"I have 260 or more," he says. "Some were very expensive; others less so. I have some duplicates, which I buy to better the collection. If one is cracked, I may get a better one if I find it."

If he has a favorite seat, it's likely his 1862 Buckeye. It's one of only five known, and one of those is in bad shape. His is in perfect condition, but its history sets it apart.

He first saw it around 1979. Every year, he asked the owner whether he would sell it, and every year the answer was no. In 1997, he was told the man was going to sell his seat collection.

"I couldn't afford it," recalls Zimmerman. "The next year, I stopped by and asked if he had sold the Buckeye. He said no, but told me what he wanted for it. My wife, Francis, said, 'If you don't buy it now, you'll never own it.' When I bought it, I cried like a baby; I was so happy."

Another favorite seat is a cast-brass piece

with the name Archer. It's unique and thought to have been sent to the U.S. in the 1860s as a demonstration. Zimmerman received it as a wedding anniversary present.

"We were at an auction, and Francis kept bidding on the brass seat," he says. "Finally, I threatened to hold her hand down. She bid once more and got it!"

In a day when many buy from online auctions or markets, Zimmerman insists on seeing the item before buying or bidding.

"I've only bought sight unseen once," he says. "I had three cast-iron milking stools, and as far as I know, there were only four ever made."

When he heard the fourth one was going to be auctioned, he sent in a bid because he couldn't attend.

"I had the high bid and paid for it," recalls Zimmerman. "When I went to pick it up, one leg had been shortened. I'll never do that again."

At 85, Zimmerman remains in the market for unique relics and looks forward to the Cast Iron Seat Collectors Association's annual meetings. The association has just under 300 members, including some from Europe and Canada, according to Jeanine Kintigh, the association's secretary/treasurer.

While Zimmerman reports seeing seats sell for as much as \$2,000, Kintigh notes that the highest price paid so far is \$8,000.

"Seats are rated from 1 through 10.5, with



Some of Zimmerman's cast-iron seats hung for display.



1862 Buckeye seat is one of only five known to exist.

1 being very common and 10.5 possibly the only one known," says Kintigh. "The rarer seats bring from hundreds of dollars to thousands for the rarest."

Zimmerman admits he has been offered a lot for his Buckeye, but he has no plans to sell it or any of his other relics.

"I won't sell my collections unless I need it to live on," he says.

While the relics are not for sale, they are available to be enjoyed.

"If people stop by, I'm glad to show them around," says Zimmerman. "No appointments needed."

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Pierce drives his pristine McCormick-Deering O-4 orchard tractor, pulling a restored pre-WWII Bean orchard sprayer, in Wisconsin tractor parades.

His Passion Is Antique Orchard Equipment

Growing up working in orchards operated by his dad, Ralph, and grandpa, Jim, near Baraboo, Wis., Nathan Pierce took a liking to the McCormick-Deering O-4 orchard tractor. Pierce says he marveled at the sleek, ribbed metal sheathing that covered both rear wheels and extended over the steering wheel and operator platform. He also loved its shiny red color.

When he learned that an IH collector in neighboring Illinois was auctioning O-4s, he was ready with his checkbook. Pierce looked them over at the auction and says some were quite rare, but the 1945 model he spotted wasn't drawing much attention. A short time later, he had his dream tractor in hand.

Touching up areas of body paint, adding back the auxiliary lights, and polishing the bright red metal brought the tractor to pristine show condition. Pierce says the tractor runs great for its age and draws a lot of attention in local parades. Nathan acquired a Bean sprayer to serve as the ideal implement to pull behind it, creating a unique parade showpiece.

Ralph says that when he bought the Bean, it was in surprisingly good condition. Built

on a steel frame with steel-spoked wheels, it showed some rust, but the tank was in good shape. Ralph had a neighbor sandblast the frame, and then they primed and painted it. The wooden tank was hand-painted in two-tone colors.

Ralph couldn't find new decals, so he provided a photograph of a Bean decal to a local graphic artist, who made custom decals. Installing new hoses completed the refurbishment, making it a parade-ready partner for the orchard tractor.

Because the Pierces all grew up in the orchard business, the tractor and sprayer hold special significance.

"When I was young, apple trees were much larger, so a tractor and sprayer like these were common," Ralph says. "In the 1960s, we'd have to spray our 1,450 trees every 7 or 10 days during the season, so it was a busy time. The orchard tractor, with its metal sheathing, would protect the driver and easily move between the trees and not damage them. The sprayer was low profile, too."

Ralph says the Bean was likely built before WWII, so it's definitely an antique.

"Those early models had wooden tanks,

Grotto Built From Sugar Cane Remnants

One of the first Lourdes Grottos in the U.S. was built inside the church at Convent, St. James Parish, La., using agricultural products. The grotto is located within St. Michael the Archangel Church. It's one of the oldest parishes in South Louisiana.

Theron Oubre, a local historian and descendant with a family history in the area spanning generations, led a tour group as part of the Southern Travelers Explore. He explained that the current church is the second one at this location.

The first church and cemetery were established in 1808, and the area is now beneath the Mississippi River. This initial church was built five years before Louisiana joined the Union. When the congregation grew too large for the first church, a second one was built about a mile upriver in 1833.

The Lourdes Grotto is located behind the altar and was built in 1876. It's modeled after the religious site in Lourdes, France, and was built 18 years after the Blessed Virgin's appearance to Saint Bernadette Soubirous. Bernadette is a Catholic saint and the patroness of the sick, those ridiculed for their piety, the poor, and shepherds, as well as of Lourdes, France.

James Parish earned the nickname "sugar coast" after Jesuit priests introduced sugarcane in 1751. The grotto was built using bagasse clinkers (bricks) made from sugarcane. Bagasse is crushed sugarcane residue, and in the grotto, it simulated stone.

Another link to the history of sugar cane is that the grotto's recessed dome is made



Grotto was built using bagasse clinkers (bricks) made from sugarcane. Bagasse is crushed sugarcane residue.

from an overturned sugar kettle. These kettles were commonly used in 18th-century sugar production.

The grotto also has an altar covered with clam shells gathered from the Mississippi River.

The grotto was built by a local resident, Christophe Colomb, an artist in stone and pottery. Florian Dicharry, a parishioner, served as the architect.

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were painted green, and rode on single axles with steel wheels."

He says the model he has with operated with a PTO pump. Newer models were painted red, had rubber tires, and sometimes dual axles to accommodate larger tanks. Ralph and Nathan took the tractor and sprayer to the National IH Roundup in Iowa a few years ago, and Nathan takes it to local events and parades in Wisconsin.

Ralph says, "There used to be 15 or more commercial orchards around Baraboo from the 60s through the 80s, but then people retired, sold their land, and now there's only a couple left. It's good to show equipment like the tractor and sprayer so people can have an idea what we used to work with."

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