



Above: The Elms Near General Store, a display Jack Allen created to take "on the road" to nearby fairs. Below: Part of a Hinman milking machine.

# 'Hobby' Takes on a Life of Its Own:

Dairy items at the heart of extensive collection

By Leslie C. McDaniel • Photos by Jack Allen

**J**ack Allen ran a dairy farm for nearly 30 years. Now retired, he collects dairy items. But it's a little more complicated than that. He also collects typewriters. And old sweepers. And potbellied stoves. And cultivators. And plows.

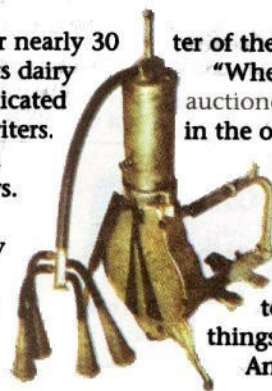
"I had a stroke when I was younger," he said. "After that, my wife said I should get a hobby. She probably thought I'd take up needlepoint, like Rosie Grier."

Then, too, there was the mat-

ter of the barn to deal with.

"When we sold the cows, my son was an auctioneer, and he set up an auction barn in the old cow barn. But the upper half was still empty. Then he moved to a different barn on the farm, and the whole barn was left empty," he said. "Well, when a barn's left empty, when it's not used, it'll go to pieces. So I started collecting things."

An obvious starting point? Dairy



items.

"In the old milk house, we have 35 or 40 butter churns, all different," he said. "There's glass churns, and wood, and the kind you'd sit in a rocking chair and rock. Some of them date to the 1890s. And we have half a dozen cream separators."

... and six different kinds of gas pumps ... ice cream dippers ... egg beaters ... herb grinders ... apple peelers ... cherry pitters ...

Jack's dairy collection also includes milk testing equipment and milking machines. The testing equipment dates to the late 1920s.

"It's what would have been used by the tester who made the rounds of all the dairy farms," Jack said. "It worked by centrifugal force. It'd make the cream come to the top, and then they'd test the butterfat content."

Jack's first hands-on experience with a milking machine was in the '30s, with a McCormick-Deering.

"Then we went to a Surge in '43-45. Then, when we had milking power put in, we got a DeLaval, a Herringbone system," he said. "That's what we ended with."

... and signs for butter and ice cream ... a device that cut 'pats' from a quarter-pound of butter ... papers to wrap butter in ... milk bottle caps and bottles ...

His collection of milking machines includes a Rightway, a Surge, a Universal, and a Hinman that he'd like to restore.

"The Hinman (which is not complete) is the oldest. It goes back to the '20s," he said. "It was one of the first few out. I've only met one other guy who had ever used one."

The early milking machines -- typically made of wood and tin -- were far from user friendly.

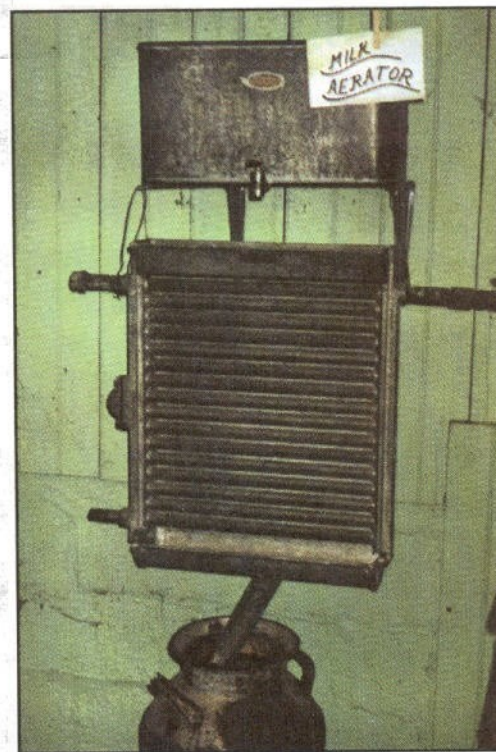
"Compared to what they have now days, and what we used to have, the old stuff is complicated," Jack said. "Most of the time, they'd just milk one cow at a time. You might have one that you'd run three or four cows on at once. Now they do 20 at one time."

The real trick, he said, was getting the idea off the ground.

"I think farmers were kind of afraid of the milking machine at first," he said. "They had to be sold on the idea.



Above: Part of Jack's collection of vacuum cleaners.



At left: Well water (at a temperature in the low to mid-fifties) was used in this aerator to cool milk as it was transferred to the can. This aerator was made by the Cherry Burrell Corp.

But after they got it perfected, it was really a timesaver."

Today, he said, there's a lot of interest in old milking machines, particularly pieces made before 1930.

"They're hard to find," he said. "But if you're interested in it, the price doesn't mean anything."

... and a potato planter ... treadmills ... hay-forks ... well drilling equipment ... vegetable dryers ... washing machines ... pedal cars ... horseradish grinders ... pig equipment, down to and including sausage stuffers ...

Jack's collection goes well beyond dairy items. ("I specialize in everything," he said.) The old milk parlor, for instance, has been set up as an old-time school

house. It has a potbellied stove, blackboards, cupboards and hardwood flooring from an old school, and vintage lights from an old church. Neat rows of old desks with cast iron sides recall days long since gone. A hand-crank eraser cleaner is a unique touch.

"I've only seen one other like it," he said, "and it was in a museum."

And there's more, much more.

"I have all the stuff for a tinsmith shop, and for a blacksmith shop," he said. "I have 10 different forges, and all the

equipment that goes with 'em."

He's recreated an old country store on a flatbed trailer, for display at the county fair. When a nearby bank closed, he got ahold of some of the original furnishings.

"I got the first counter (the bank was built in 1863), complete with the cage," he said. "It may be cherry; it looks pretty good. And we got some of the old equipment -- a money counter, check writer, ledgers ... that kind of thing."

... and cranberry sorters, scoops and boxes ... an ancient hand-crank dishwasher ... an old telephone booth ... seed counters ... old oak refrigerators ... 35-40 sleds ... old bikes ... doctor's equipment ... bag holders ...

For some, a collection of this magnitude would be overwhelming. For Jack, it's just plain fun.

"And my wife enjoys it all, too," he said. "We enjoy going to sales; that's where we get most of this stuff."

The pieces in his collection are a reminder of the past, which he is happy to keep at arm's length.

"I like the old stuff, but I don't want to have to pump water or cut wood or churn butter," he said. "I just like the old equipment. When it comes to the computer age, forget it. I

keep records on everything I have, but I do it on paper."

Those records detail the collection's sheer size.

"If I were starting over, maybe I wouldn't have so much of one thing," he said. "I've got 40 corn shellers, 40 washing machines ... maybe I'm spread too thin. Maybe I should have specialized more.

"I'm to the point where I don't know what I'm going to do with it all," he said.

"Should I leave it to my children, or grandchildren, or have a sale?"

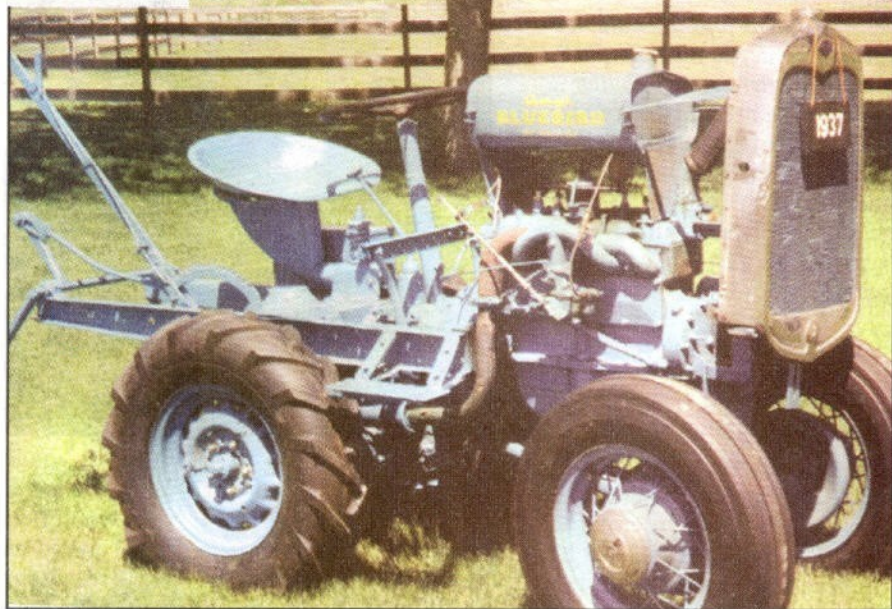
Decisions for another day. For the time being, Jack's happy revisiting another era, surrounded by his treasures.

"Some people call it a museum; I call it a junk collec-



Top right: Jack's chicken display, featuring (kneeling) his grandson.

Center and bottom: Jack's completely restored Cooney's Bluebird Tractor, before and after. The tractor was produced with either a Model A or T engine with two transmissions, allowing it to gear down. "It was designed just for blueberry farmers," Jack said. The tractor was produced in small numbers, somewhere between 200 and 700. Exact production figures have proven elusive, he said.



tion," he said. "I won't tell you what my wife calls it!"

For more information: Jack Allen, 228 Landing Street, Southampton, NJ 08088; (609) 859-2030. FC