

20th Century City Boy Restores

19th Century Farm Tools



(EDITOR—Perry Minton joined *Las Voluntarias y Los Ayudantes* about three years ago after he retired from Chevron USA. His motive for volunteering may have initially been to see more of his wife, Siby, who in 10 years put so much energy into *Las Voluntarias* projects that in 1986 she was named Department Volunteer of the Year.

But after spending a year on the California Arboretum Foundation Board of Trustees, Mr. Minton began looking for engrossing projects for which no one else had time. In the following account he tells about the 28 months during which he researched and restored antique farm implements for a display in the Coach Barn. Mr. Minton spent about 450 hours on the project, not counting his research in museums across the United States and Canada. To make the display of tools more significant, new explanatory labels on each tool will highlight some of the information he uncovered including the tool's name, its function, and its price when new.)

The author examines a Sears Roebuck "Planet Jr." cultivator to determine if it is suitable for restoration.

Deanna Bracci



AS A RELUCTANT city dweller most of my life, I have had an admiration for old-time country folk who got by without the blessings of civilization as we know it nowadays. Therefore, when I encountered the Arboretum's collection of old farm and blacksmith implements I decided to try my hand at restoring a few of the more serviceable-looking items.

As a warmup project historical curator Sandy Snider suggested a damaged wheelbarrow at the Santa Anita Depot. At once I learned the need for research, for there wasn't enough left of the barrow to indicate just what it looked like during its heyday. Eventually it was restored, but only after a three-hour conference with the man who laid the tracks at the Depot, plus much eye-straining study of one old photograph in which a similar wheelbarrow appeared. The resulting restoration was 85 percent new. Only the iron wheel, axle and a couple of straps were salvageable from the original, and practically every piece of wood was beyond help. Naturally, after the work was completed, I discovered a near twin wheelbarrow in the Arboretum's collection.

As Mark Twain noted, ignorance and confidence breed success. Full of these requirements, I proceeded to tackle the farm tools in the Coach

Barn, starting with a single-wheel hoe, a type of garden cultivator from the late 1800s. Having been told by the Depot track layer that 19th century nuts and bolts were not hexagonal like current ones but square, I searched several local and very up-to-date supply stores for the square type and found none. Lengthy exploration turned up a specialty hardware store which could supply the square type for a price. After that, I had no qualms about sawing apart hopelessly rusted 100-year-old nuts and bolts. Before long the single-wheel hoe was totally functional. In fact, it was so functional I ripped up a fair piece of my sideyard testing it.

One of the most interesting items was the "Handiman" dropping seeder, another old garden tool. It was designed to plant seeds of various sizes by means of a chain-driven reservoir. Unfortunately, the chain was missing. This detachable malleable

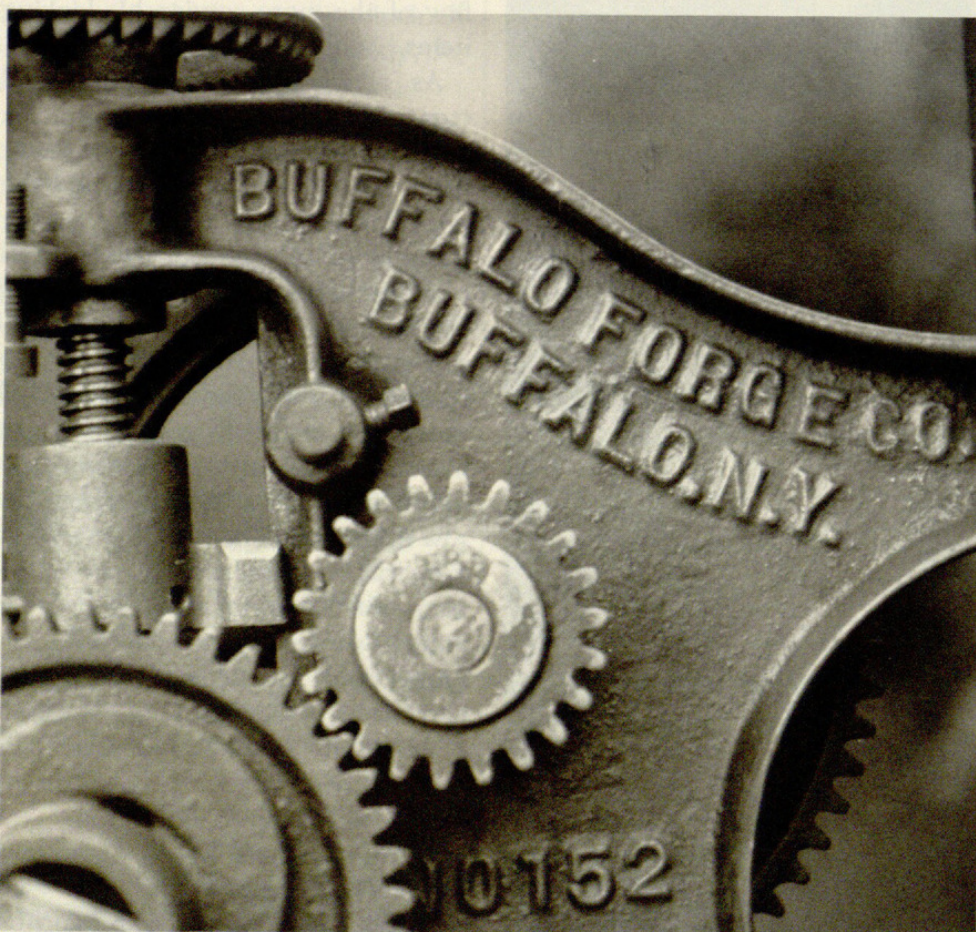
link type is no longer seen but was quite common a hundred years ago. "Old Bill," the oldest native-born citizen still living in Buena Park, found a 15-foot section of chain in Bakersfield after a two-month search. Now the seeder works again and the California Arboretum Foundation is the owner of an extra 10 feet of detachable link chain not needed on the seeder.

As I tackled each project, more people came to my aid. Neighbors Lou Muto and Reno Yurada helped with rewelding broken iron, lifting heavy pieces and furnishing ideas. Mike Vetti, owner of Alhambra Mower Shop, provided blades for the silage cutter. Bill Peters of Trail Chemical gave a sample of polyethylene glycol to preserve wood.

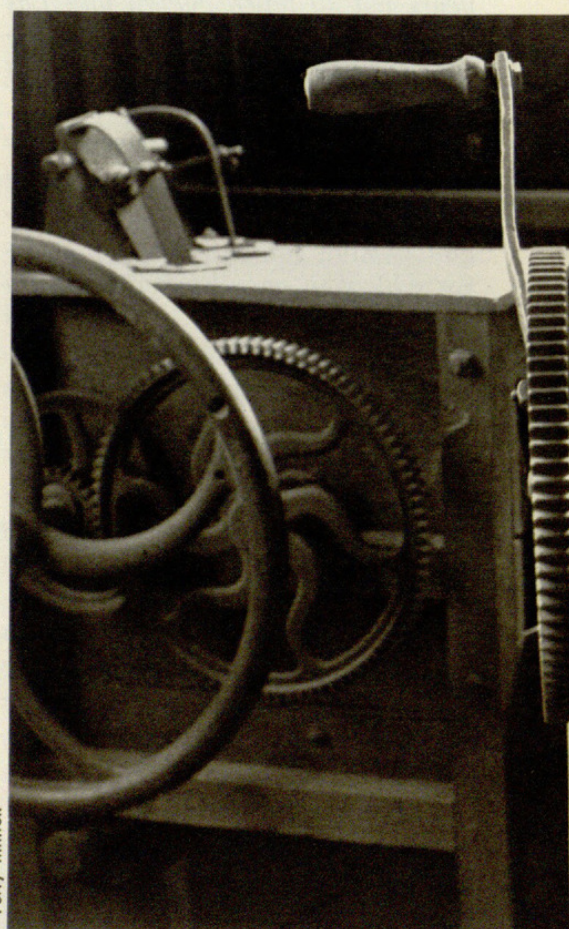
As a result of growing interest in the restoration—and the approval of Special Services Chief Tak Niiya—Sandy Snider and my wife, Siby, spent many hours planning new

wrought iron gates for the two stalls in the Coach Barn. Visibility of the display is now greatly improved with no loss of security.

Each restoration supplied new insights into the ingenuity of 19th century craftsmen who designed and built machines which, after many years of hard use and many more of neglect, could usually be made to function again with the application of paint, a little oil and some strong language. It must be admitted, however, that a few problems cropped up, usually something involving rust—when the rust is very old and an inch thick as it always seemed to be, drastic measures were required. The moldboard plow, for example, had an almost impenetrable layer of rust holding all the parts together, as did the grindstone. When restoration is the objective it isn't wise to give way to temptation and apply a sledgehammer to recalcitrant pieces. Other solutions had to be found, such as



Gears of a Buffalo drill



Restored clover cutter

heating with a blowtorch or using acid to descale iron. At one point I found it necessary to clean a large steel surface by means of a grinder equipped with a coarse disc turning at 10,000 rpm. I worried about grinding clear through the part being cleaned until I realized rust doesn't give off sparks. Therefore, when the first sparks appeared I was just reaching clean steel and could stop grinding.

Twenty-six tools were restored between December 1985 and February 1988. Most, but not all, can now be used for their original purposes. In a few cases, vital parts were missing and could not be duplicated. In others, fragile wood was retained for the sake of appearance and historical authenticity.

Invaluable sources of information were old Sears Roebuck catalogs dating back as far as 1897. When catalogs were insufficient, librarian Joan DeFato guided me through the

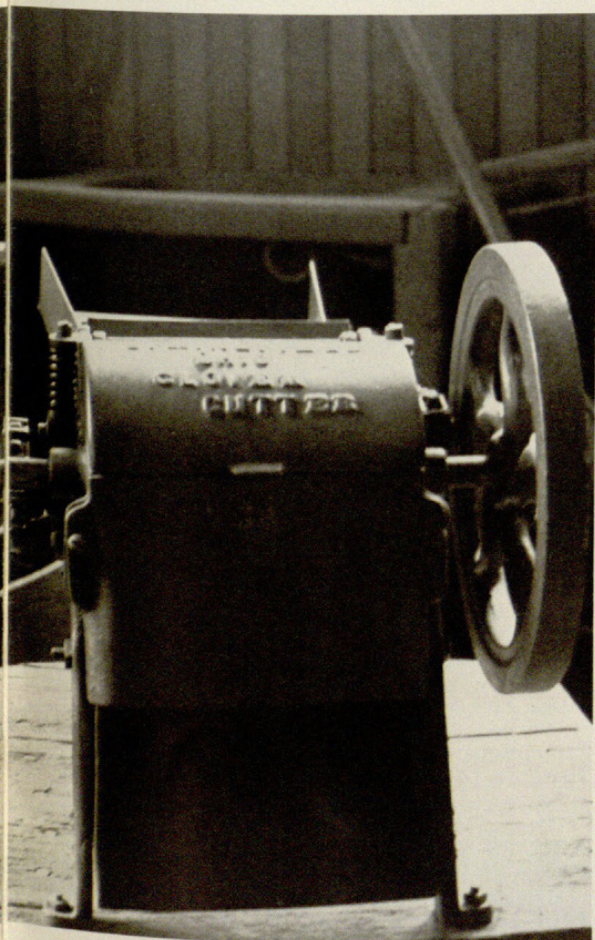
catacombs of the Plant Science Library. Billy Hawk led me to the proper rusty steel drum in the maintenance yard when it was needed to double for a forge hearth. The staff people in the offices of Francis Ching, John Provine, and the Foundation were invariably helpful and friendly even though my requests and questions must have seemed strange at times. Harry Kelsey, chief curator at the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, tried to educate me in at least two philosophies of restoring antiques, while other museum representatives in this country and Canada, by mail and in person, took time to provide information and guidance.

The display on view in the Coach Barn is a window into the past which lets us see what implements were available in the Baldwin years when earlier gardens were created on the site of what is now our Arboretum.

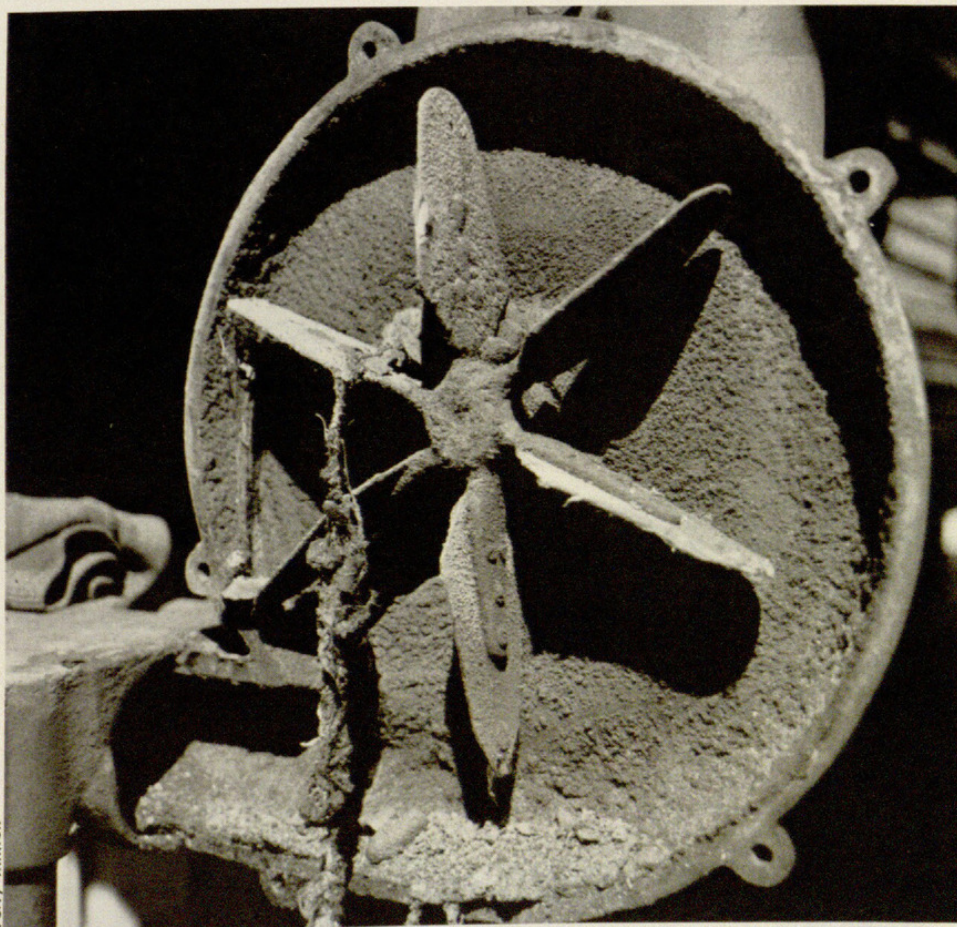


Deanna Bracci

Perry Minton will install these new handles after he restores the metal parts of a dropping seeder.



Perry Minton



Rust-covered blower of a forge



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