

History of player piano interesting

By Casey McCormick

The 50th annual Tri-State Antique Engine and Thresher Show will begin on Thursday, Aug. 31, at the show grounds in Bird City.

For most folks, the first vision of the show is of monstrous machines belching black smoke. But upon further review the list of wonders to see is countless. One particular item of interest is Maynard Wright's player piano.

When the show opens many will flock to the Egger's building where they will gather around a vintage player piano and enjoy an old fashioned "sing along," just like the old times back home. Mr. Wright's piano is capable of hours of entertainment since it comes with a collection of several hundred song rolls. But the history of the piano is as unique as anything at the show.

Mr. Wright's parents bought the Gulbranson piano in the early 1920s. The family had many happy times around the instrument. However, in the early 1940s, a "hot-shot shyster came to the country and told folks that if they didn't remove the player part it would destroy the piano," said Mr. Wright. Not only did he convince the Wrights but many other locals paid the con-man \$20 to dismantle the player unit.

"The player part was stored in the granary and during World War II people stole all the brass off it," said Mr. Wright.

But he had a dream to restore

the family heirloom and told his family so. When, through inheritance, he got the Gulbranson piano and began the awesome task.

Mr. Wright contacted an outfit in Denver that specialized in repairing player pianos.

"We won't touch a Gulbranson at any point!" the man said.

He realized that if this piano were to play the rolls again he would have to use his country skills, knowledge and own hands to make it happen.

He began by steaming what was left of the player unit to separate each part from the animal glue which held it together. At this point he saw how many parts were missing.

"I couldn't imagine he would ever get it together again, there were too many pieces," his wife Lucille said.

But Mr. Wright would not quit, he found another Gulbranson player unit but it was from another model. This would provide some of the necessary parts.

One of the most difficult steps of the remodel was the recreation of tiny bellows needed to pump air for each one of the 88 piano keys.

"These are made of cloth and can't have leaks. Also they must fold right to work," he said.

The bellows must pump air to the correct place as the roll passes over a slot. The length of the note is determined by how long the hole is in the paper. To coordinate this mechanism without formal



AN OLD-FASHIONED SING-ALONG takes place at the Tri-State Antique Engine and Thresher Show with Maynard Wright at his player piano. Times staff photo by Casey McCormick.

training seems impossible.

Looking back Mr. Wright said, "I know why they won't work on them, I wouldn't do it either!" Through the experience, "I got a pretty good education on it."

Luckily he continued this winter project and after about six months the 1920s Gulbranson player piano was in pre-con-man service again.

Mr. Wright went further with the job and added a vacuum pump so, "you don't have to peddle it if you don't want," he said.

Those coming to the Thresher Show are likely to see Maynard Wright and his good friend Martin Busse leading folks in songs from the past accompanied on a player piano that is the real deal.

Cancellation stamp available

By Casey McCormick

The Bird City Postmaster will be presenting a commemorative, pictorial stamp at the soon to be held Tri-State Antique Engine and Thresher Association Show. As a community service, the postal service is offering a cancellation stamp, with a picture of a steam engine and the Association's logo, that postmaster Sonja Weeden will use to imprint envelopes or postcards at the show.

Postmaster Weeden will be at a temporary post office in Building 2 on Saturday, Aug. 2, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. She will have envelopes and postcards available to be stamped with the commemorative imprint.

For those who can not attend the event but would like the cancellation may submit a mail order request instead. All requests must include a stamped envelope or postcard bearing at least the minimum first-class mail postage (37 cent per

envelope or 23 cents per postcard.) Items submitted for cancellation may not include stamps issued after the date of the event. Such items will be returned without service.

Individuals wishing to obtain a cancellation should affix stamps to any envelopes or postcard of their choice, address the envelope or postcard to themselves or others, insert a card of postcard thickness in envelopes for sturdiness and tuck in the flap. Place the envelope or postcard in a larger envelope and address to Pictorial Cancellation, Tri-State Antique Engine and Thresher Association Station, P.O. Box 9998, Bird City, Kan., 67731-9998.

After applying the pictorial cancellation the postal service will return the envelope or postcard through the mail. Customers who want their stamped item returned with in a protected cover should send a larger, stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Country school open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The Highland Country School house now resides on the Tri-State Antique Engine and Thresher site and is a historic example of an early rural school. It is hosted by Rosemary Powell, Marsha Magley and Dorothy Mast during the show and will be open from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. for activities and visitation.

Each morning of the show, except Sunday, from 10 a.m. until noon there will be a historical, hands on craft project offered for students of the fourth, fifth or sixth grade level that enroll before the show. The class will be limited to eight. To enroll call Mrs. Mast at

734-2750. Supplies will be furnished but only those who enroll will be offered a free pass to the show. The project will take at least two mornings to complete.

All students and adults are welcome to come and watch the fun and learn a part of history.

An old fashioned literary will be held at the school house Thursday evening at 7 p.m. Bring poems, stories, recitations or play musical instruments.

The honor roll increases of former country school students or teachers every year.

Thresher Show Activities

Who will be the 2003 Queen?



2003 THRESHER QUEEN

This year's queen was born on her father's homestead in the early 1900s in Cheyenne County. Her childhood was filled with many happy memories with her parents and siblings. She helped with the farm chores as a young girl. She says they milked cows, gathered the eggs and raised chickens. Her mother made the best bread, pies and cakes and the aroma is one she will never forget.

As a child she did a lot of traveling with her parents and siblings.

She remembers hearing the threshing machine whistles as the wheat was threshed in the summer time. The threshing crew harvested wheat for many of the area farmers. Their whistles were always calling for something they needed right away. The women worked hard cooking harvest meals for the crew in the cook shack that they pulled to the different farms where they were threshing the

Enjoy the activities at the Eggers Building 8

There are lots of activities held during the four days of the Tri-State Antique Engine and Thresher Show but one of the buildings which draws many of the people is the Eggers Building 8. Each day, there is a schedule of events and, to help those get to the activities, the days and times are listed below:

Thursday, July 31

Morning: welcome and registration.

Afternoon: Introduction of Thresher Queen and placing of the doll.

Introduction of the Junior Miss and talent number.

3:30 p.m.: Drawing for door prizes (must be present to win.)

3:45 p.m.: Sing along with Martin Busse around the old player piano.

Friday, Aug. 1

10:00 a.m.: Beaded angels and snowmen demonstration by Phyllis Wingfield.

2:30 p.m.: History of early post offices by Marsha Magley.

3:30 p.m.: Drawing for door prizes.

3:45 p.m.: Sing along around the player piano.

Saturday, Aug. 2

10:30 a.m.: Tabetha Ketzner and

her innovative Bird City bird seed treats.

11:00 a.m.: Helene Landenberger, The Wild Rose Poet, with poetry and song.

2:30 p.m.: The Quilting Lady "Orphan Blocks" demonstration by Dee Dorsch.

3:30 p.m.: Door prizes.

3:45 p.m.: Sing along around the player piano.

Sunday, Aug. 3

Morning: attend one of the 30 minute services at the Country Church (9, 9:30 and 10 a.m.)

11 a.m.: "Across the Plains in 1864" with a grandmother's diary by Dorothy Mast.

2:30 p.m.: Visitation time at the Old Piano Parlor.

3:30 p.m.: Door prizes.

3:45 p.m.: End the day with a joyful song around the player piano with Martin Busse.

St. Francis News-

Last Wednesday evening friends took Arrilla Zimbelman and Margaret Holzwarth to Big Ed's for supper for their birthdays. Friends were Dorothy Schield, Helen Peter and Violet Cranmer.

Relatives attending the funeral of Don Cort in Concordia were sister-in-law Arrilla Zimbelman, Mr. and Mrs. Ron Krien and son Wade, Mr. and Mrs. Dale Weeks, Francis O'Leary, Ilene O'Leary and friend Ivan of Stratton, Neb., Ronnie O'Leary of Topeka, Paul O'Leary of Denver, Colo., Michael O'Leary and son Patrick of Olathe.

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Congratulations to the Tri-State Antique Engine & Thresher Association for 50 years of bringing the past to light!

Bird City Times

The Saint Francis Herald

Thank you to these businesses for showing their support by advertising the show:

- ✦ Bird City Storage & Car Wash
- ✦ Big Ed's Steakhouse
- ✦ Bird City Storage
- ✦ Bressler-Young Aviation
- ✦ United Methodist, Catholic & Wesleyan Churches
- ✦ Downtown Repair & Auto Sales
- ✦ First National Bank - St. Francis
- ✦ Frontier Equity Exchange
- ✦ Hometown Market
- ✦ Krien Farm Supply
- ✦ Krien Pharmacy
- ✦ McDonald Grocery
- ✦ Milliken Law Office
- ✦ Peoples State Bank
- ✦ Prairie Land Electric Cooperative, Inc.

FUNDRAISER

for Heartland Rural Counseling Services



Sunday, July 27 at St. Francis

Tuesday, July 29

All Day Long at Colby, Goodland, Hill City, Wakeeney, Oberlin and Oakley

Dine-in, Carry-out or Delivery! 20% of all proceeds are donated to Heartland Rural Counseling Services

Contact your local Pizza Hut or Heartland Rural Counseling services at 462-7588

Thank you for your continued support! Coupons not valid with this offer.