

The Museum of Eastern Shore Life

Preserving the Heritage and History of the Eastern Shore



A Museum By Any Other Name

If I'd only...

If you're a yard sale, flea market or Antiques Road Show junkie like I am you probably said that line a hundred times, "If I'd only". The question that often follows that remark is, "How do I know what's going to be an antique and what going to be junk?"

According to the dictionary an antique is an old collectible item. They're collected because of age, rarity, condition, beauty, utility or other unique feature. Junk on the other hand is really an antique that no one has decided they can't live without, YET! Remember that really ugly, vine encrusted, cherub covered bowl that Aunt Bertha gave you for your wedding that became the dog's water bowl?

According to Roadshow experts it's very rare, valued at \$75,000.00 and sought after by Museums all over the world.

If you think this problem perplexes you, try being a museum where items are donated or just dropped off and you have to decide whether to keep them, toss

them, or give them to other groups. Are they really antiques,

lyhistorical significant artifacts or just junk?

The idea for this article occurred when I walked into a rather unique "antique/junk" store last summer. I turned to my friend and remarked, "Wow, this is just like a museum". Rusty ice skates, keys and locks that were in style a 100 years ago, pictures of long gone local sports teams, and a real bull whip (my wife wants me to explain why I bought it). I have to admit the fact that the store building itself looked like it was a hundred plus years old (it is) added to the feeling. It was obviously not a shopping mall store with bathrooms, food service and fancy price tags. It was old, a bit dirty and a wonderful adventure. Now I'm sure there are two types of museums! Those like the Museum of Eastern Shore Life where items are displayed for future generations and those that house items just waiting to be bought, taken home and treasured by present and future generations.



Need a 5 iron or a slightly used putter? Want to learn golf without spending a fortune? Try an "antique" store.

Located in the town of Ridgely on Maryland Avenue is a rather unique antique\junk store. Like its past uses this store has two faces. It was built at the turn of the century by a Mr. Simon with a hardware store on the first floor and a part time town hall community center on the second . Through its many incarnations it has been a hardware store, a pool hall, a stable, a kindergarten, a temporary school room, and a roller rink but its longest run was as a shirt factory.

The Rob Roy shirt factory started out in New York in 1921 and as the demand for factory made clothing expanded it grew and moved on to the Eastern Shore. The Ridgely plant originally was opened by the Mayfair Co. about 1940 but became a Rob Roy plant by the mid to late 1940's. Business grew and by the 1950's there were advertisements for additional help to keep up with demand. Eventually the Greensboro and Ridgely factories were merged into one in this building.

From April to November Rob Roy produced cowboy shirts with the Roy Rogers, King of the Cowboys, logo. Roy himself visited the plant. The rest of the year they manufactured bathing suits.

Rob Roy closed its doors in Ridgely in April of 1980. Many of its former employees still live in the area and get together to renew old acquaintances.

I said earlier this store had two faces. The downstairs is like a massive yard sale. There are thousands of items stacked in every corner. With a little perseverance you can probably find anything you want or things you didn't even know existed. The upstairs, however, contains better quality furniture, bedding, bicycles and some true antiques at very reasonable prices. For a very small fee you can even hold the item for a week until you make up your mind or arrange to pick it up. Many thanks to J.O.K. Walsh from the Caroline Historical Society for this information.

Next issue we will take a look at Mr. Gibson's incredible antique store in downtown Queen Anne.



-Fancy to Frumpy-
antique stores have a wide
variety of historic and just
plain junk for sale



In January of 1963 Dan Tabler, Editor of the Record-Observer, asked 13 county leaders for their opinion on what lies ahead for Queen Anne's Co. Forty six years later Dr. Harry Rhodes' comments seem prophetic.

" Some of the self-evident things which lie ahead for the county will include: Increase in population, rising standard of living, more public services, more new households, increased number of business establishments, decrease in farm land and farm workers, growth in banking and investment activities, growth in service industries, increase in automobiles and auto traffic, and no lessening of the tax burden."

We are fast losing the historic character of our county. This would be a good time to search your basements and attics for items that really belong in a local museum. If you can't donate an item you can help by joining the Museum and helping us preserve that history.



Corsica Antique Tractor Club

The Corsica Tractor Club is having a raffle for this beautiful OLIVER pedal tractor at its annual tractor show Sept. 26, 2009 from 9 to 3 on Glendale Ave. just off Chesterfield Ave. in Centreville. This show, sponsored by Trice Auctions, will feature Oliver and David Bradley tractors.

You can't tell in this picture but it is a beautiful lavender color.



School Page

The Museum often shares its artifacts with schools for special activities, such as Grandparents Day. Grandparents get to show and explain how these items were used in the "olden" days. If your school or organization would like to take part in our "Sharing" program please call Kathy Draper at 410-758-1122 or E-mail her at ozmonstore@verizon.net for additional information.

12-2-08
Dear Mr Lampman
Thank you for bringing old stuff that people used back in the day. It was very fun to see what they used. I hope you come to 3RD grad so I can see more stuff from back in the day. I am glad you helped us when we were stuck. Mr. Lampman you are very nice you told us what we were suppose to do when we did not know what to do.

Dear Mr Lampman,
Thank you for the stuff you let us use. I liked them they are cool. I liked the butter thing it was really cool. I thought the shoe looked weird. We will give them back.



Dear Mr. Lampman
+ thanks for letting us see you stuff
My favorite was all of it. But if I had to put it wild be the shoes. I never saw a old artifacts before. The stuff is so cool I wish that I had a old artifact. My Dad have lot and lots of artifacts. But I have cool artifacts in my family is My big brother and My momma to my big brotner is so cool. I just want me to have cool artifacts.



12-2-08
Dear Mr L ompman
Thankes for the fines we liked the idums you let us borrow. The egg sk If my granparits were Heer they woed love the stuff and



CHANGES, CHANGES, CHANGES

Since early February the Museum volunteers have been working on clearing, cleaning, and redesigning the interior layout of the museum. It is now easier to see the interior displays with our open area design. Part of the main floor has been converted into a replica of the first floor of a house as you might find it between 1900 and mid 1950. You can walk through this house and examine artifacts as they might have been used in that time period.

We also have been gifted by Nancy Sadler from Stevensville with many photographs depicting people and places from that time period.

Come see our new layout and display whether on a weekend from 1 to 4 or during the fair.



The MESL has been the recipient of grants from the Maryland Historical Trust, The Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area, a Maryland Certified Heritage Area, United Way of Queen Anne's Co. and Choptank Electric Trust, Inc.

LOST AND FOUND

Cleaning out a closet or attic often releases a flood of memories when you discover something put away and long forgotten. As part of our Archive Project we have discovered or perhaps more accurately re-discovered artifacts collected over the years and filed away. You're invited to share some of these with us.

Special Thanks to Nancy Sadler of Stevensville who supplied many of the prints in our new display

Homemakers at UM 1961



Homemakers at UM 1953



Court House Snow Storm 1956



Kent Island Ladies

Building the 4-H Park



Pfc. Eddie Walls accepts the first place trophy in musical competition in France.



1934 OAK TREE INN. First beer after the end of Prohibition. Photo courtesy of Nancy Sadler

First Beer served on KI after prohibition Oak Tree Inn 1934

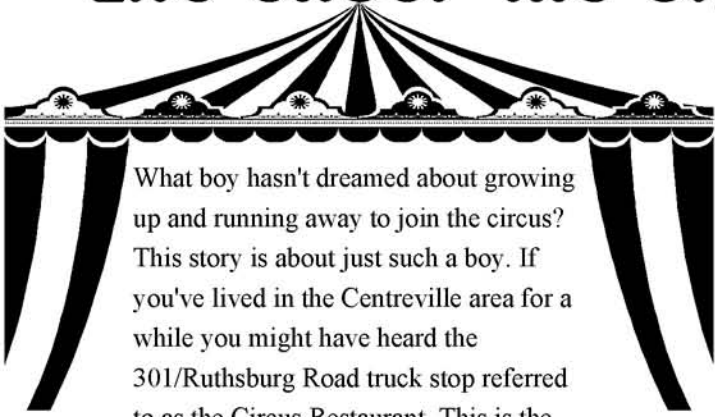
A very young Eddie Walls

1954



Bill Young becomes Eagle Scout

6 Life Under the Bigtop



What boy hasn't dreamed about growing up and running away to join the circus? This story is about just such a boy. If you've lived in the Centreville area for a while you might have heard the 301/Ruthsburg Road truck stop referred to as the Circus Restaurant. This is the rest of the story.

While cleaning out a file cabinet we found this poster that had once been a part of a display we had on the circus. Out of curiosity I Googled the D.B. Wharton circus and found an article by the Rev. Don Brewer, Recollections of a Circus Pastor, written for the Circus Fans of America web site. (www.circusfans.org) Rev. Brewer was kind enough to give me permission to excerpt some material from his article.

"I considered the D.B. Wharton Circus to be about as small a show as could still be called a circus. While being interviewed by a group of young folks I said something about the show being about as small as it could be, and the interviewer said "yeah, we figured we would call this film "Circus Minimus". Recently I saw a show with just that name. There was an interesting change in Dave when he donned his clown costume. He was hell on wheels toward the town kids who were helping him set up but when the clown suit went on his personality changed completely.

His main tent was quite small. It was about a thirty footer with two twenty foot center pieces and three wooden centerpoles and seats seven high. Even though it was small it took a long time to set up and since there were no ropes for the sidewalls the boys had to scrounge for what ever they could use. At teardown time they would just use their pocket knives to cut the ropes. After watching for a couple of days I couldn't stand it any longer and told Dave that if he would spring for the side wall ropes I would get them and put them on. He was making money, so he agreed and after that the set up went a lot easier.

The show traveled on a car carrier, one of those structures that was built to carry five autos. It was an unusual rig for a circus, but as I recall some relative of Dave's gave it to him. It carried everything, the top, poles, seats, and stakes. He also had a long trailer that had

concession windows at one end. Dave lived in the front of the concession trailer.

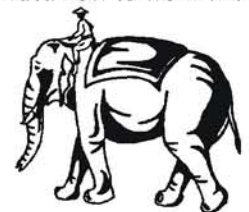
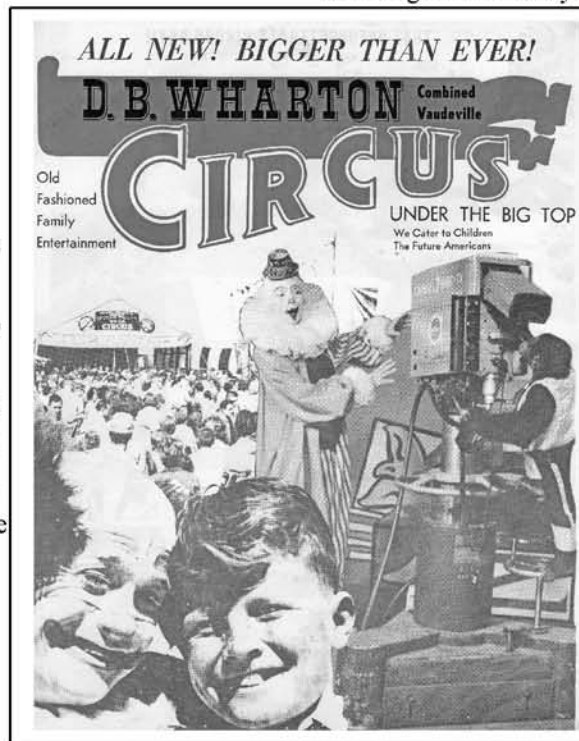
The 1970 show consisted of Yvonne Steven's act. Yvonne and daughter Lee Ann on ladder and web, and aerial leg perch. The music was provided by a record player. He had only one small generator, and during the performance whenever the concessionaire would turn on the cotton candy machine there was not enough power to run the record player. The music would slow down to a crawl until the cotton candy machine was running, then go back to normal again.

By 1971 Dave had a wonderful elephant named Jenny, who was about as nice an animal as could be. She had her own trailer, and all you had to do was say, "Get in the house, Jenny," and she would climb right in. One day a family came onto the lot pushing a baby

stroller. Joe Myers, the current circus clown, after talking to the couple offered them a ripe cantaloupe. They put the melon in a basket at the back of the stroller and headed over to see Jenny. She smelled the melon and stuck the end of her trunk around the stroller after it. Dad pulled the stroller back, but Jenny wasn't about to let go. So here is the stroller complete with kid hanging four feet off the ground, Jenny pulling one way, dad pulling the other and mother and kid screaming. Joe was yelling, "Give her the melon, give her the melon!". Several of us got there about the same time and convinced Jenny to let go. The family did give her the melon. A related story from Dave Wharton. He owned a circus restaurant at his home in Maryland. He had some animal cages

outside, including a bear. About this time there was a TV show called "Ben and Me", about a tame bear. One day a man brought his granddaughter to see the bear. He reached inside the closed fence gate and unlocked it, brought the girl in, lifted her up and set her on the apron of the cage. The bear reached under, grabbed her feet, pulled her in up to her knees, and proceeded to chew on her. People see these "tame" animals on TV and think they are all like that. It cost Dave quite a bit for that incident.

One day Dave's partner showed up with a flatbed trailer and two bears in a wheeled cage. They were a male and female, and supposedly did an act, but the partner had no idea how to work with



them. In order to consolidate they decided to put the bear cage in the back of the elephant carrier. They did not, however, consult Jenny the elephant on this arrangement. It was unacceptable to her. The evening after they had put the bears in the semi, Jenny refused to go in. It took a full two hours of beating on her before they finally got her in the truck. This repeated itself every night.

Two weeks later, after the Reading Fair, and headed to their next location, Jenny got enough slack in her chain to push that bear cage right out the back door and onto the highway. That must have been an exciting day!

For the 1972 show my wife Melody joined the show in Maryland. It was really a small show. It consisted of Dave as announcer and clown, Melody with trapeze, magic, and balloon sculpturing, and Jane Randall with dog, pony, and horse acts. The show rarely ran an hour, and everybody had to be ready before they could start the show.

Jane and her animals traveled with a bus and a truck. She and the dogs lived in the bus while the equipment went in the truck. Her husband got to sleep in the cab of the truck. Jane made her own clothing but had no color sense. Any two pieces of clothing that shared the same color went together, never mind if one was striped and the other plaid.

The show was never very well booked. Dave did not use a booking agent. He simply contacted past committees by phone during the winter and set up any route he could. The show played only two or three days a week.

The show was in progress when it received the backlash from Hurricane Agnes. They finished the show, and fortunately a lot of town folks stayed around after the show and helped them get off the lot. They spent the night at the edge of the road, in a torrent of rain and wind. The next date was in Richfield, NY but the lot was flooded and the rig had blown an engine and was in the shop. We played what we could in an ex-Methodist Church which was used as the community center.

Dave informed us that he had no more dates for the week, and the next date was the following Monday, and he wasn't even sure of that. It had been a shaky booking, and he had been getting road messages from the committeeman for several days. He didn't want to get back to them because he figured they wanted to cancel and he didn't want to know. When we got to the fair ground there was Dave setting up the tent singlehanded. He told us the committee man had actually canceled the show and sent all the publicity posters and tickets back to winterquarters. No tickets had been sold. Dave asked if he could set up anyway and the committeeman could have a percentage of the door. I then took some blank posters, printed the info with liquid shoe polish, and went around town putting them up where I could.

Showtime the next day was two o'clock. There were four paying customers, plus the committeeman and his family, an audience of eight. I asked Dave if we could just return their money. He replied that he was broke, and if he returned their money he wouldn't have anything to eat on that day. So we did the show for eight. He had enough money to buy some bread and baloney for himself and the concessioners.

The evening show had a few more people and Dave got permission for us to stay an extra day. Tuesday's receipts were enough for the gas necessary to get us to the next town, eleven miles away.

The committee in the next town had done a great job with publicity and had sold all their tickets. We had two full houses. Dave's pockets were bulging. Next day's town had a fancy buffet and Dave took us there to the most expensive dinner I had eaten up to that time.

Dave kept no financial records. He just stuffed money in his pockets. He claimed that reporting income taxes was only for those who were making money, and he wasn't making any money, so he didn't report it. I will say that he treated us right all the time. When he had money he paid us every day, and when he didn't have it he made up the difference as soon as he could.

Dave loved to eat. He must have tipped the scales close to 300 pounds. Since the show had no facilities for cooking he ate off the lot when he could. He loved New York because he could always find a fair or festival somewhere nearby. He could put away an enormous amount of food at these events.

I understand that some years later he met someone and married. I never saw him after we left the show, but I hope he had a happy life." We had a lot of fun being on his show."

Rev. Don Brewer

Board member, Mike Kader worked as the manager of the gas station part of the circus restaurant for a short while. "My duties included pumping gas and checking oil and filters, repairing flat tires and tending to Dave's animals. These animals were used as an attraction to draw customers. A pair of chukkar quail, a tame groundhog and not so tame bear. I never stuck my hand inside his cage and no one ever opened the door and walked inside. I used a garden hose to squirt down the floor of his cage and keep the water tank filled. The bear loved to drink soda pop and beer. People could pour drinks into a funnel that had a tube the bear could drink from. The groundhog was very tame and liked to play by chasing me around the grass. Unfortunately he made the mistake of running into the bear cage one afternoon and did not survive the experience. I left that job and returned to college after my short stay at the circus."

PICTURES. - WE NEED PICTURES - The Museum is designing a new exhibit on the daily life of the Eastern Shore family. We would like pictures of grandma and grandpa, working at home, baking a pie, peeling apples, doing the wash, having a birthday party, putting on a new roof or any other thing that happened in your family. The pictures will be scanned and placed in our computer AND RETURNED as soon as possible. They will be enlarged and placed in the exhibit or made into flip books. Please include some information on who, what, when and where the pictures were taken and also don't forget YOUR name and address so we can return them. Pictures can be mailed to the Museum of Eastern Shore Life, P.O.Box 525 Centreville, MD 21617. IF necessary we can make arrangements to pick them up. Call Bill at 410-758-2137 or E-mail him at starroad@verizon.net. You may also be able to e-mail pictures if you scan them at high resolution and have a fast Internet connection. Your family just might see one of their ancestors the next time you visit the Museum!

Name _____ Address _____
City _____ Zip _____ E-mail _____
Date _____

MEMBERSHIP ENROLLMENT FORM

_____ INDIVIDUAL \$15 _____ FAMILY \$25
_____ CONTRIBUTING \$50 _____ SUPPORTING \$100
_____ BUSINESS \$200 _____ LIFE \$300

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Please write "MEMBERSHIP" on your check's memo line

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