

# Collection Showcases Rare And One-Of-A-Kind Tractors

By Jim Ruen, Contributing Editor

Rick Egger set out to collect John Deere letter-series tractors, but he was sidetracked by a Waterloo Bronco. He does have five Deeres, but it was an oddball tractor built in Kitchener, Ontario, that stole his heart. It was the first, but not the last, unique tractor he purchased. He now has nearly 40 in his "Rick's Toys" collection.

"When I took my John Deeres to a show, people walked past them to ask about the Waterloo Bronco," says Egger. "That got me interested in collecting oddballs."

After nearly 30 years of collecting unique, one-of-a-kind tractors and other rural antiques, he has more than filled a 30 by 70-ft. building. His 30+ tractors include Canadian-built models like the WILMAC, built in Windsor, Ontario, in the 1950s.

"I don't know of another that exists," says Egger. "I have the street address where it was built, but nothing else."



1948 Canadian-built WILMAC tractor.

The 1927 Centaur (Central Tractor Company) is another rare tractor in the collection. It's a 10-hp tractor with a LeRoi engine and a front-end belt drive. The articulated tractor steers with its rear wheels and is equipped with a dirt blade with factory-installed front extensions and a plow on the back.

"The extensions were installed to push dirt past the front wheels," says Egger. "A collector I know posted it for sale, and I brought it home. It's the kind of thing you don't leave sitting there."



1927 Centaur articulated plow tractor.

Other brand names in the collection include Silver King and Leader, both built in Ohio. He has 6 and 8-hp Shaws built in Kansas, and two Empires: one built in Windsor, and the other in Philadelphia, from leftover war equipment.

"They used Willys Jeep parts, including the engine and transmission, back to the final drive," says Egger. "The grating on the platform was salvaged from a battleship."

Not all of Egger's tractors are one of a kind. He added the Case V, built for only two years, with its Continental engine. His Bolens

Ridemaster is equipped with an original disc and plow, with factory tags still attached. It has two front drive wheels, while the rear wheels are steered by a chain drive that articulates the tractor.

He has a 1954 David Bradley Tri-Trac grader that also articulates, turning in a 7-ft. circle, and is equipped with a front-mounted blade.

"It's very rare," says Egger. "I've seen pictures of them in the U.S., but I don't know of another in Canada."



1954 David Bradley Tri-Trac grader.

His Gravely, also equipped with a blade, isn't that old, but Egger snapped it up when he saw it was serial number one.

In addition to rare tractors, Egger has collected antique washing machines, butter churns, tools and more. The museum also features a "new/old" exhibit.

"I have a quarter-scale Rumely Oil Pull Model F," says Egger. "It was made from scratch, every piece except the magneto, by the late William Ives, Peace River, Alberta. He's long gone, but I was fortunate his son, Jeff, sold it to me."

He has a special love for his Canadian hit-and-miss engine, built in his hometown of Dunnville, Ontario. Each model of these engines, later known as Monarchs, was painted a different color, from deep pine green to blue and shades of red and burgundy.

"It sits on a cart with a buzzsaw, all made here," says Egger. "It was pulled around by horses to the job site. We used it at a tractor show, cutting up an old wood post into little pieces and stamping them with the show logo. We gave them away for donations to the show."

Everything in the collection has been restored, with some restored by Egger and others by previous owners.

"It's cheaper to buy them already restored," chuckles Egger. "The Monarch engine and buzzsaw were in good shape, but I had to rebuild the cart. My son has a sawmill and cut out the wood."

At nearly 90 years old, Egger is pleased that one of his sons has taken an interest in the collection. The museum building is one he put up on his farm. Fortunately, it's designed to accommodate additions. Egger admits he still scours the internet and auction sales and hears from other collectors about rare equipment.

"I've slowed down, but if something shows up that's odd, I'll grab it," he says. "I don't have a favorite. Everything in my collection has a story. That's why they're here."

To view Rick's Toys, contact Egger for a private showing.

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Egger spent more than 30 years collecting unique tractors and rural antiques.



"Today, we sell at farmers markets, to a local wholesale flower farmer, and to local businesses in Marion, Ohio," says Lee.

## Her Second Career Is Flower Farming

By Lydia Noyes, Contributing Editor

Frontier Farm Flowers of Waldo, Ohio, offers homegrown flower bouquets from spring through fall. For founder Elizabeth Lee, the path to this point has been unexpected.

"From early childhood, I wanted to be an archaeologist," says Lee. "I earned an undergraduate and a master's in archaeology. I was ready to start work in the Pittsburgh area when my grandmother asked me to drive her to Michigan. When we arrived, my 18-year-old cousin had started a market garden business and asked for my help with harvest and delivery. We harvested the most beautiful tiny vegetables: perfect baby scallop squash, tiny carrots, and tomatoes that the kitchen staff gushed over. I thought, 'I want to do this.' I kept the idea in the back of my head."

In 2007, Lee moved to Marion County, Ohio, continuing her archaeological research focusing on 18th-century farm families.

"I quickly realized I would rather be a farmer than write about historic farmers. The idea of naming our farm 'Frontier Farm' originated from the fact that our land is situated on what I consider the Ohio frontier. Starting our farm was a new frontier for us, too, since neither of us had any experience with growing for market."

Lee stayed home with her second child, growing vegetables and raising chickens for the family.

"As we got better at growing and added our first high tunnel, we decided to try growing with the intention of selling at a farmers market."

Vegetables sold well to restaurants until COVID hit.

"With the world in turmoil, I decided to grow more flowers in the garden to make myself happier. The farmers market in Delaware did open up that summer, so I sold a lot of flowers in addition to our vegetables. I was really hooked on flowers at this point."

Flowers remain the heart of the farm, although Lee continues to sell vegetables and free-range turkeys.

"Today, we sell at farmers markets, to a local wholesale flower farmer, and to local businesses in Marion, Ohio."

She also sells through bouquet subscription services.

"It works well for the farmers, since it guarantees some income before the growing season, when we have a lot of expenses. For me, it expands my season by at least six weeks. My farmers market doesn't open until the end of May, but I have flowers in bloom in April."

Lee warns against romanticizing flower cultivation.

"The work's physically demanding. I work intensively for 11 months of the year. Picking thousands of beautiful stems of flowers every week sounds fantastic, but quickly, you discover which species cause skin irritation after stripping the leaves off several hundred stems."

Similarly, she believes that flower farm-

ers face unique challenges compared with vegetable growers.

"Flower farmers have to be more on-trend than farmers growing vegetables and other agricultural products. I look at wedding magazines, the social media accounts of larger farmer-florists, and color trends, like the Pantone Color of the Year."

Even more challenging, sales can be unpredictable.

"Flowers are a luxury item. Other agricultural products feed us. Flowers are often an impulse or special-occasion purchase, rather than a consistent shopping-list purchase at the farmers market."

Still, Lee encourages aspiring growers to try their hand at flower cultivation.

"It's rewarding, especially when the garden is in full bloom in the summer and so, so beautiful. There are numerous good resources available now, including YouTube videos, books and online classes. If you want to grow flowers, you should try it out. Even if you don't sell hundreds of bouquets every week, even if you just grow enough to make a weekly bouquet for yourself, it's just good to get your hands in the soil."

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