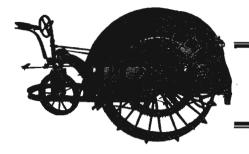
# Friends of the Lester F. Larsen Tractor Test and Power Museum



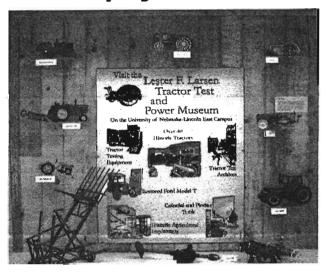
Judy L. Ray - Editor

**Newsletter #18** 

**April 2004** 

To collect, preserve, research and interpret the traditions and technologies of agriculture

### **New Display At Morrill Hall**



The Lester F. Larsen Tractor Test and Power Museum has a brand-new exhibit in UN-L Downtown Campus. Our new exhibit is located at the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor in Morrill Hall next to the main reception area. The exhibit showcases some of the historic tractors in our collection using 3-D scale models tractors and a central large-size poster showing all other collections and archives available in our museum. In addition, at this new exhibit people can find a good stock of our renovated brochures now with clear driving directions for visiting the Larsen Museum in UN-L East Campus. This new exhibit in Morrill Hall was completed in early March and it responds to the invitation received from the University of Nebraska State Museum in support and promotion of our museum.

Our sincere thanks to UNSM Director Dr. Priscilla Grew who provided our museum with this great opportunity. Also, to Joel Nielsen, UNSM Exhibits Facilitator, for his valuable assistance in the project. And, to Mark Nickolaus, Robert Kleis, and Leonard Bashford for lending us their great model tractors at this new exhibit case in Morrill Hall.

## Platte Valley Antique Machinery Association, Inc. Working Show

Featuring "orphans and oddballs", the museum will be represented by the 1909 Ford at this show Saturday and Sunday July 10 and 11. It will be held 8 miles south of Hastings, Nebraska off Hwy 281 at Dyer Park. The show features antique tractors, machinery, cars and small engines, country music, flea market, and a Civil War encampment. Field Demonstrations will feature horses and antique machinery.

Gates open at 7:30 a.m. Check out their website at: www.pvama.org Their e-mail is pvalleyantique@aol.com. This will be one week before the **Camp Creek Thresher Show** at Waverly, Nebraska on July 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>.

## Annual Open House Saturday, May 1<sup>st</sup>

Friends are welcome at 8:00 a.m. and then we are open to the general public from 1-4 p.m. Volunteers to explain the equipment and generally supervise our exhibits would be appreciated.

# Board Meeting 1:30 p.m. July 20, 2004

This meeting will be in Chase Hall, just south of the Tractor Museum on the East Campus UNL. All Friends members are welcome to attend. Lester F. Larsen
Tractor Test & Power Museum
UNL East Campus, 35<sup>th</sup> & Fair St.
P.O. Box 830833
Lincoln, NE 68583-0833
Phone (402) 472-8389

FAX (402)472-8367
E-Mail tractormuseum2@unl.edu
Web http://tractormuseum.unl.edu

#### Officers:

President: Charles Borcherding V. President: Don Edwards Secretary: Leonard Bashford

Treasurer: Bob Kleis **Board of Directors:**Past Pres.: Earl Ellington

Vern Anderson Harold Borman

Charles Fenster (Gering)

Richard Goodding Lawrence Hermann Jerry Kohl

Mark Lynott
Bill Overturf (Oak)
Ervin Rolofson
John Smith

Russ Tooker (David City)
Dale Vanderholm

Ex-Officio:

Louis Leviticus Susan Norby William Splinter

#### MUSEUM HOURS

We are doing our best to keep the hours consistent 9noon and 1pm-4pm, M-F, but please call to confirm any visit. 472-8389

## **Director's Report**

- Bill Splinter

Things are moving along at the Larsen Tractor Museum. We have applied for three grants, to install a climate control system for the library area and hand tool artifact area, to renovate the garage where the stucco is failing and to add to efforts to restore and protect our archives. If all three come through we will be very busy but that is not likely and we will hope to be successful in at least one.

Having Luis Vasquez full time has greatly improved our visitor count. We have had over 140 people sign in to the guest register since the first of the year and we have had three tours ranging from 35 to over 50 participants. We completed installation of an exhibit at Morrill Hall that tells visitors there of the Larsen museum and have already had visitors who learned of our museum there.

Our volunteers continue to greatly assist in the renovation of the building. Thanks to Phil Dinges we have a new sink, mirror and pegboard for cups in the coffee room. Thanks to Bob Kleis we no longer have the unsightly pipes and sinks and the room is painted. Judy has rearranged the supply cabinets and the area looks much more inviting. Curt McConnell is progressing with the renovation of the MM "Z" tractor that Les had started to work on before he had to step out.

Although arrangements are not complete we are working with a potential donor for a 1917 Moline Universal tractor. The Moline Universal tractor we currently have on exhibit is on loan. This tractor represents a significant development in the agricultural tractor as it was the first with starter, lights, articulated steering and a complete line of mounted equipment.

Everyone is invited to our OPEN HOUSE on May 1. We will be open at 10AM for members of the Friends and will have a public open house from 1 to 4. We will be allowing members of the Friends to operate some of the tractors in the display in the morning but will not operate tractors during the public open house.



Judy Ray (left) and Donna Martin

See Donna's story on the next page.

## **Tractor Testing Experiences**

by Stan Liedtke, Class of 1948 Dubuque, Iowa

Discharged from the then known as Army Air Corps I joined Paul Exstrom, Robert Mitchell, and Phil Corke, intending to complete our Ag E degrees. Mitchell remarked that is was time to Graduate or Quituate". The GI Bill and our spouse's income needed to be augmented and that need let to part-time and then full-time summer work for Les Larsen.

Never before or for that matter since have I worked for a person who managed as he. Les in his own quiet way simply instilled the ethic of completeness, accuracy, and documentation of your test work results.

When Dr. Hurlbut chose to use the class Les would have taught as a way to get to know the students, I missed the opportunity to experience Les as a teacher. I did come to know him well and develop a great deal of respect for him as I worked in the Test Lab.

Working at the Lab involved whatever needed to be done during a test and whatever needed to be done when there was no test in progress. During a test Paul and I spent a good bit of time with the planimeters used to measure drawbar test results. Another task that fell to me quite frequently was to measure and record the fuel consumption during belt tests.

By today's "whiz bang" standards of instrumentation now available, ours was very basic but I think best understood by our visitors of that time. Farmers of that era had little knowledge of flow meters and computers to integrate data and simply present a printout of test results.

When there was no test in progress, there were always floors to sweep, tools to replace, or something needing paint.

Working at the Test Lab provided a very real opportunity for any student wishing to become a tractor engineer. No interview in an Engineering Department could reveal the nature of the prospective employer so clearly.

One question frequently asked by visitors was "you see them all, which is the best tractor?" My response was that "No matter the maker, sometime there will be a problem and the ability of the service dealer was an important consideration."

The Oliver incident that Bob relates is well remembered. (December Newsletter) Les showed me a handwritten note locating certain punch marks on an Oliver tractor then on test. Not at all conspicuously placed, I readily confirmed the marks existence. Reportedly as the test engineer expressed a hope for better results, all Les said was "Well you didn't expect them to be much different than when we tested the engine before, did you?" Nothing was reportable on the Test Result Reports.

Post WWI brought forth a flood of aspiring tractor makers, many of doubtful ability and created the need for Nebraska Test Law. Subsequent to WWII there was a much smaller group of aspirants, among them American Steel Tractor, and Fate Root Heath with the "Silver King". Sharp looking machine with its aluminum or silver color paint job. Unfortunately the silver color painted radiator was not particularly efficient.

It was American Steel that was most interesting and a more spectacular flop.

Mr. McDevitt, the only Company man present, held that most manufacturers must spend a lot of time contemplating their navels (actually more pithy words more appropriate). That conclusion was reached because the American Steel was claimed to be a ninety-day wonder. No use testing for strength, just measure a few competitors machines to average the wall thickness of final drive, transmission cases and mainframes and then expect that when made of cast steel they would be more than adequate. No provision for wheel weights had been made and the tires were of inadequate size. Fine cigars and all that bombast were to no avail. The machine failed miserably.

With the certain exception of American Steel, manufacturers sent knowledgeable and competent personnel with the test machines, not all groups seemed equally competent however. It seemed that the representatives from Deere and Company were the best prepared and knew best what to expect. Any crew from the JD Waterloo Works or the JD Dubuque Works I always enjoyed working with. Some experiences during tests show that it was not always easy.

Merlin Hansen from Deere Waterloo knew well that there were acceptable methods of bringing test results to a standard barometric pressure reading. No matter, Merlin would only test when the barometer was considered high at Lincoln. During one lengthy stretch of favorable barometer readings the writer recalls thirty-six hour continuous stretch of test.

Part of the belt test was carburetor adjustments determined by running a series of short tests at various settings. This was known as running a "fishhook" because when plotted the results assumed that shape. Art Shell the Marvel Schebler Carburetor rep often became impatient and would mutter to me "if they would just let set the carburetor."

The first tractor that I helped to test was the John Deere Model M manufactured at the JD Dubuque Works. The Chief Engineer, Willard "Nordy" Nordensen was assembling the engineering staff for this new tractor plant and I chose to go with the John Deer Dubuque Tractor Works. Nearly thirty-four years later I retired after a varied career with John Deere.

Insert to Lester F. Larsen Tractor Test & Power Museum Newsletter #18 April 2004

### **My Internship**



#### - by Donna Martin

It was a sweltering August afternoon when I first stepped in to the Lester F. Larsen Tractor Test and Power Museum Archives. Vasquez, assistant curator, had posted an email to entice a Museum Studies student interested in audiovisual material to intern at the museum. When I walked in to the small narrow room that contains all the files of past tractor tests and all the millions of glass plate slides, photographs and films I felt like I had found my niche. First I set out to inventory what we had in the mysterious gray cabinets. There were layers of objects and images. I had no idea what many of these objects were used for. That is where the expert knowledge of Mark Nickolaus, docent extraordinaire, comes in. Mark has spent many a day looking over my shoulder viewing the mystery movies. He often knows what year and make the tractor is as well as what test number Lou Leviticus the head curator also it is. enjoyed the occasional "film fest" and would always inform me of great stories about his life and the many ways agricultural technology relates to everyday life.

One memorable day early on in my internship was the day Luis and Judy Ray, accountant, resident answer woman, and all around great gal put a window air conditioner in the archive room window. Wow, I am telling you that made a difference. I am sure the artifacts and records appreciated it too. No such luck during the winter months. The one time I did try to raise the temperature above fifty-five with a space heater a breaker somewhere clicked off. It wasn't until Bill Splinter, director of the museum, noticed me wandering around confusedly staring at various fuse boxes that I found the correct breaker. I remained cold but I had light!

The people at the Tractor Test museum are very knowledgeable about many things. More endearing is the fact that they are extremely patient. For instance one day I made the brilliant discovery that tractors pull plows. For years I had the idea that a plow was a type of tractor. Now everyone who reads this knows that I am not anywhere near the country girl I would like people to think I am!

### Volunteer Highlights

-by Luis G. Vasquez

Since September 2003 our museum counts with the invaluable help of Phil Dinges, our new "multitask" volunteer on every Tuesday morning. Phil, a Lincolnite born in the historic North Bottoms to a German-Russian immigrant family, has recently celebrated his 81st birthday. He remembers driving his 1<sup>st</sup> tractor in the early 1930's: A red Farmall. During WWII Phil served for 3 years in the Navy and in 1947 came back to Lincoln, when he got married and for the next 27 years worked as a specialized mechanic at the local Siedel's Buick. In 1974 he joined the crew at UNL Downtown Campus Power Plant and worked as Utility Maintenance Mechanic for 12 years. After his retirement in 1986, Phil became an active volunteer at the different organizations in Lincoln and enjoys so much of his time working in a variety of projects at his garage: "My Shop" as he calls it. I first met him during the years I worked at the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia and where Phil was already a well-known volunteer. Last fall he decided to follow me on my new job at the Larsen, and since then Phil has become our unconditional carpenter. His work is now all around and it is slowly changing the looks of this old building.

In addition to his old fascination for old John Deere tractors, Phil has begun to portray them on colorful stained-glass artwork and these are now available for collectors in our shop area. Funny though, the only thing that can take Phil away from a project: a warm homey meal for lunch or supper prepared by his beloved wife, Irene. The two of them have just celebrated their 57<sup>th</sup> anniversary last February!!



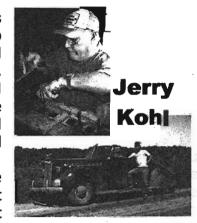
Phil and Irene Dinges relaxing at home.

Another Volunteer story continued on back page.....

#### Volunteer Highlights continued from page 3

With a life-long passion for mechanics and engines of all kinds, Jerry Kohl's favorite tractors are "all of the crawlers!" he says, "...although they are hard to put up with." Jerry came on his first visit to the museum after having been told of its location by Bill Splinter, Jr., a former student of his at Lincoln East High. Once at the museum Jerry met with Bill, Sr. and told him about the casual re-encounter with his son. Since that very first visit in 1998, Jerry realized he had found the perfect place for helping around with the maintenance and restoration of old tractors. He also found a safe place to keep restoring his old collectible, a 1948 Oliver HG crawler.

Born at his family farm in Nora, Nebraska, Jerry drove his first tractor at the age of 10. That tractor was his grand father's John Deere "A" and Jerry recalls it with fond memories. He remembers how easily the hand clutch allowed him at such a young age to operate and shift gears out there in the fields. At his father's shop, Jerry had the chance to begin learning about engines during the weekends and there he managed to drive his first crawler: a huge Caterpillar



Above: Jerry at work restoring the MM Twin City ZTU in the museum, and with his 1940 Packard in 1949.

D-9 brought to the shop for repairs. Soon after high school, Jerry found a job working at the kilns of the Ideal Cement Co. Later in 1951 he joined the Navy and specialized in GMC "Jimmy" diesel engines. After 6 years in the Navy sailing all over the Pacific Ocean, Jerry decided to move back to Nebraska and started selling GM cars in Fairbury, where also met and married Kay. Soon after the wedding, the new couple moved to Kearney and there, Jerry graduated from teachers college with a BA in Mechanics and a minor in Social Studies-History. Omaha South High was the next stop for Jerry at which he started the vocational auto-mechanics programs in the early 1960s. Then, in 1966 came to work in Lincoln for Job Corps, but got immediately involved with setting up the vocational auto-mechanics program at Lincoln East High and stayed teaching in the program for 28 years. After retirement, Jerry is still busy in school as substitute teacher, plus doing all kind of projects at his home's backyard, and volunteering at the museum. More than six years have passed since his first visit. We hope keep having Jerry's enthusiasm and cooperation around for many more years, and soon seeing his Oliver HG on permanent display at the museum.

Friends of the Lester F. Larsen Tractor Test and Power Museum P.O. Box 830833 Lincoln, NE 68583-0833

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED