

## HUNDREDS OF RARE MACHINES ON DISPLAY

# California Collector Runs Unique Ag Museum

By Bill Gergen

If you ever make a trip to the California Farm Equipment Show near Tulare, you may want to schedule extra time to visit the Ag Museum & Fruit Basket about 90 miles away in Merced, Calif.

Charlie Parish welcomes visitors year-round to his museum, located on one of the main roads to Yosemite National Park. It consists of two large buildings jammed full of rare and unusual equipment, including about 80 1-cyl. "hit and miss" gas engines as well as everything from antique washing machines to antique tractors. Wives may be interested in his 1920's beauty salon equipment.

Parish recently gave me a personally guided tour of the museum. "I started my collection in 1984 and have added to it every year since then. People have arrived from as far away as Europe to visit it," says Parish. "They're particularly interested in my specialty gas engines which represent one of the biggest collections around. There are even a few items in my collection that I built myself. My friend Elmer Nelson has helped me keep the museum going."

Here's what I saw on my tour.

**Engines** - The museum has more than 170 engines on display which range from 1 to 150 hp. There are 15 "side shaft" engines which use a shaft instead of a push rod to transfer power. "Side shaft engines were more expensive than conventional engines and were considered to be the best," notes Parish. Most of the 80 "hit and miss" engines run. "Many of them came from gold mines. They're becoming harder and harder to find," says Parish. He's particularly proud of his horse-drawn Fairbanks Morse 6 hp "Z" gas engine. "It came out of Oregon and was used to operate grain elevators. The engine was cooled by a water tank and was used to belt-drive a hydraulic pump. My model was junked out when I got it. I spent more than 300 hours restoring it and made a cart to support it. Now it runs nice. I also had someone hand paint the letters on the tank."

**Homemade Miniature Caterpillar** - Parish's home-built, miniature D11N Caterpillar is only 2 ft. high, 4 ft. long, and 14 in. wide, and equipped with a 32-in. wide blade. Its 2 hp gas engine is used to chain-drive the tracks, which are just 6 in. wide. There's 14 in. of space between the tracks.

"It's a pretty little tractor," says Parish. "Someone sent me a photo of a small Cat that they had built. I used the photo to build my own. It fires right up and runs like a top. I use one lever to put the tractor in gear and another lever to turn it. Sometimes I drive it in parades and people love it. They're always taking photos of it. The tractor is equipped with a small toolbox, gauges, and a dummy gas tank on back. It even has head lights."

**Reel Mower Powered By Gas Engine** - In the 1920's, Ideal Power Lawn Mower Co., Lansing, Mich., came up with the idea of motorizing lawn mowers. They used their Ideal air-cooled engine to power a reel-type mower. The engine belt-drives a pulley that powers the drive wheels and also chain-drives the 22-in. wide reel, which mounts on front. "Although these units were quite heavy and clumsy, they did save a lot of time and work, especially in large areas," says Parish. "The company also offered a larger size

mower with a 30-in. cut.

"I found the mower last year in Vermont. My wife spotted it sitting on a porch at an antique shop. I paid \$750 for the mower and spent \$200 to have it shipped here."

**Gas Engine-Powered Milking Machine** - Built in 1918, this portable milking machine was mounted on a 4-wheeled frame. The rope start 1 1/2 hp gas engine was used to belt-drive a vacuum pump which operated the milking inflations. It pumped milk directly into a milk can. "If you were able to afford this machine, you had a little money in your pocket," says Parish. "There are very few of these machines left."

**Angle Drive Pulley** - Patented in 1881, there are only 3 or 4 of these machines left in North America. They were made by T.R. Almond Mfg., Brooklyn, N.Y. The machines were designed to power shafts used in blacksmith shops, wood milling shops, manufacturing plants, even water wheels, etc. A steam engine, paddle wheel, or other power source was used to belt-drive the pulley. Another belt connected off the pulley was used to drive the equipment. "At the time angle drive pulleys were built, gas engines hadn't even been invented yet. People were still using steam or water wheels," says Parish. "Angle drive pulleys have no gears and are bathed in mineral lubricating oil, as they didn't have 'oil well' oil in those days. The machines were used for only a few years. I mounted a gas engine on my model for demonstration purposes only."

**Self-Propelled Solar Earth Dryer** - This self-propelled, pedal-powered "solar earth dryer" is built just for fun after seeing a similar model at a show he attended. It's equipped with a series of round magnifying glasses mounted on a steel arm. The operator lowers the arm to dry out the soil or to melt snow on the ground, as needed. He uses bicycle-type pedals to move forward. "It also works great as a solar powered weed killer," notes Parish.

**1905 Car Powered By Morton Engine** - "This car was made in San Jose, Cal., in 1905. Only 5 of the cars were ever built, and this is the only one left," says Parish. "Mr. Morton built his own engines in Fresno, Calif. A big steel disc serves as the transmission. A chain ran from the transmission back to the rear end in order to drive the car. The same kind of disc drive transmission is used today in some riding lawn mowers."

**Home-Built Steam Tractor** - It took five months to build this 20-ft. long, 12-ft. high steam tractor that looks just like the real thing. It's equipped with gauges and a "flyball" governor. The boiler has a smokestack on front. Both axles are chain-driven. "It doesn't run, but looks like it does," says Parish. "Someone gave me the boiler, and I already had the wheels. I built it by looking at a photo in a book."

**Power Horse Tractors** - These tractors were designed to be used by walking behind and using reins to control the tractor, somewhat like driving a horse. They were manufactured in 1938. Parrish has two of them.

**Hog Oilers** - Parish has four different hog oiler models. They were designed to prevent lice. Some of them have pivoting cylinders that get bathed in oil as the animal pushes



Parish with the museum's 1905 car powered by a Morton engine.



Gas engine-powered milking machine.



Right angle drive pulley patented in 1881.



Self-propelled solar earth dryer.



Mini D11N is only 2 ft. high and 4 ft. long.



Power Horse tractor built in 1938.

against them. "About 100 different types were made over the years. I happened to overhear one lady who was leading a children's group on a tour of the museum. She told the kids that the pig was put inside the cylinder and then barbecued."

Parish doesn't charge admission to the museum but says he appreciates donations.

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