

## SELF-TAUGHT HOBBY TURNED INTO FULL-TIME BUSINESS

# Farm Family Turns Willows Into Furniture

By Linda Tank

Janice and John Garrett have taken scrub from the Nebraska prairie and turned it into a work of art. Their self-taught hobby of making bent willow furniture has sprouted into a full-time venture called Willow Maid. The craft business which evolved five years ago, supplements their 500-acre crop farm near Minden, Neb.

Today their bent willow tables, chairs, baskets, shelves and magazine racks are marketed in 80 cities from Boston to Denver.

Janice Garrett, who has a knack for crafts of all kinds, developed an interest in bent willow furniture after seeing some antique pieces at auctions and craft shows. "I begged John to make me something," she says. Since patterns for the rustic craft couldn't be found, Janice drew her own. Most of Garretts' pieces are made from original designs. "Sometimes what I want a piece to look like and what John needs for strength and endurance are two different things," she says.

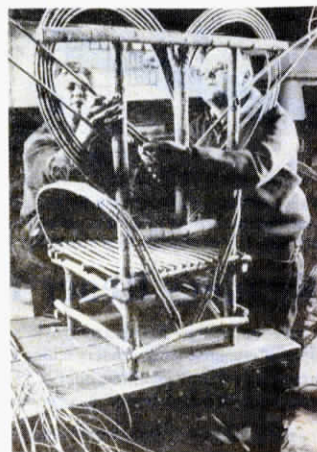
The couple works well together, though. Janice designs the patterns, and both she and John build the furniture.

Most of the construction is done in winter, which fits well with grain farming. Half of a large machine shed on the farm has been converted into a workshop for the couple's thriving business.

The Garretts harvest willow branches in winter when the boughs are dormant and more pliable. They scout ditches and low spots for Red Willow thickets which are more scarce now due to the recent drought. The couple looks for willows of all ages. A 10-year old tree is sturdy enough for the framework of a table, bed or chair, while a 5-year old willow makes a comfortable chair seat. Children's chairs and doll furniture are made from younger willows.

The wood has to be used within several weeks after it's cut so it can be bent and shaped. "If you let it dry out, it splits like a zipper," John says.

Construction is time-consuming and tedious. With both Janice and John working full-time, it takes a month to build a dozen straight-back chairs. Once a piece is finished, it takes about 6 mos. for the wood to cure. After it's cured, the Garretts apply a



Janice and John Garrett's furniture is now marketed in more than 80 cities.

linseed oil finish to give the furniture a smooth, leather-like texture which enhances the wood.

Sales are handled by a marketing representative. That way, the Garretts can focus on production and expanding their furniture line. "You can't produce and sell," Janice says. "You've got to stick to one thing, do it better than everyone else and delegate the rest."

Their rep displays samples of Garretts' wares at trade shows throughout the country. Buyers from gift, floral and craft shops attend the shows and place their merchandise orders. Garretts also have a brochure which features their entire line, so shoppers can order items that aren't displayed at the show. They'll also custom-design furniture.

To diversify, they've branched out into other crafts including cut metal designs and dried ornamental flowers. "I keep looking for new ideas all the time," says Janice. She scans decorating magazines for inspiration and then comes up with her own creations.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Janice & John Garrett, Willow Maid, Rt. 1, Box 81, Minden, Neb. 68959 (ph 308 832-1188).

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Dave Carpenter is shown knocking out a couple of staves to create a hole for pulling out the silo unloader with a skid steer loader.

## ALL IT TAKES IS A SLEDGE HAMMER, MUSCLE, AND LOTS OF KNOW-HOW

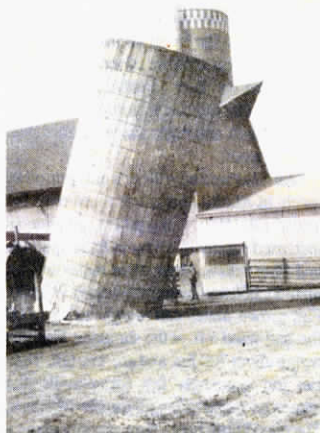
# Silo "Take-Down" Pros Tell How It's Done

There's a lot of interest in taking down old, unused silos. FARM SHOW talked to a couple of professionals who've taken down hundreds of silos over the years.

Dave Carpenter of Welch, Minn., uses a sledge hammer, muscle, and know-how to take down old stave silos, such as the one he photographed during take-down on the Brian Rynda farm, Montgomery, Minn. He first picks the direction he wants the structure to fall, then marks a point on that side of the silo. From that point he counts the staves for a quarter of the way around the silo in each direction. Then using a heavy sledge he starts at the middle and knocks the staves out, alternating from one side of the midpoint to the other. By the time he's gone halfway around the silo, it's usually ready to fall.

"I can drop the silo exactly where I want it about 95% of the time," says Carpenter, whose main business consists of sandblasting and recementing silos and installing feed unloading equipment. He takes down a dozen or so silos a year. "For example, the silo I took down on the Rynda farm fell right where I wanted it - between a barn and shed on one side and feed bunks on the other side. I can hear the staves start to crunch before the silo actually begins to tilt. Then I move out of the way and watch it drop. If a feed room is cemented to the silo I have to use the sledge hammer to remove it before knocking the staves out. If the silo unloader is in good shape and still inside the silo I can remove it by knocking out a couple of staves and pulling it out with a loader." Carpenter charges \$100 per silo plus mileage and says he sometimes is able to salvage the staves from big silos.

Larry Vomhof of Chatfield, Minn., takes down up to a dozen silos each year and charges \$50 to \$200, depending on the distance he has to drive. "There are several ways to bring down silos, including dynamite and pulling them over using a tractor and long cable after some of the bottom staves have been knocked out," says Vomhof, who specializes in rebuilding, extending, and plastering silos. "However, if the silo has no salvage value, hammering out the staves is the easiest, cheapest, and safest way. I usually knock out the second row of staves from the ground because it's easier to swing the sledge hammer on them. It takes



After Carpenter had knocked staves out halfway around the silo it slowly started to fall between the shed and feed bunks.

only 10 minutes to actually knock the staves out. I usually go half way around before the structure will fall. It can be dangerous because sometimes the staves fly off in different directions while the silo is falling. That's why I don't recommend anyone try this on their own. After a silo is down there's usually nothing left to salvage.

"I know of farmers who've used a sledge to knock out most of the bottom staves and then, to play it safe, left two or three in place which they shot out from a distance with a high-powered rifle. Solid cement wall silos with roter are the most difficult to bring down. I don't work on these silos because they have to be dynamited or jack hammered. The problem with dynamite is that you can never be sure where the silo will fall."

Vomhof also dismantles old unused silos that are in reasonable shape piece by piece for later reconstruction.

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Dave Carpenter, Welch Silo Repair, Rt. 1, Box 146, Welch, Minn. 55089 (ph 612 258-4387), or Larry Vomhof, Rt. 2, Box 98, Chatfield, Minn. 55923 (ph 507 867-3809).



After the silo fell down there was nothing left to salvage - just a big cleanup job.