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Unique and Worthwhile Museum, Which Displays a Collection of 200 Water-Pumping Windmills

Compelling Sculpture Garden

Windmills are yet another of those things we take for granted. Many readers of Farm Collector remember the essential role windmills performed on the farms where they grew up. Others, students of history, understand the role windmills played in settlement of this country. Even those who have no idea what windmills did, but who have deep appreciation for pastoral rural scenes, equate windmills with farm country.

"Maybe 50 years from now," he predicts, "this will be the only place you can come to see a water-pumping windmill."

American Windmill Museum exists as an educational organization to help diverse audiences explore the ways in which people have harnessed the wind in order to live in varied environments.

An exceptional private collection amassed by the late Don Hundley forms the museum's bedrock. Today, that collection (purchased by the museum in 1993) is complemented by a vast collection of rare windmills and related pieces. Large collections of millstones, hand pumps, windmill weights, patent models, salesman's samples and oil cans lend context.

In recent years, the museum has expanded its focus to trains. "One hundred years ago, you could not have crossed Texas without railroad windmills," Coy notes. "Railroads were the first big buyers of windmills. Up and down the tracks, those windmills provided water for steam engines."

It doesn't hurt any that trains are every bit as popular with visitors as are windmills. "We built one of the largest model railroad displays in the country," Coy says, "and our visitor numbers went up immediately."

Whatever brings them in, visitors leave with a new perspective. "When people visit, we explain everything about windmills," he says. "They're already familiar with the big wind turbines, so we give them a good history lesson on the old mills."

Museum operations include an extensive restoration program at fully equipped shops located on the property, where master windmill Benji Sosa has refined his craft. "He's learned everything," Coy says. "The angles of the blades are all different from manufacturer to manufacturer. They have to be done correctly, mechanically and historically, because we restore the mills to their original factory condition."

The museum actively solicits donated mills from collectors; purchased pieces must be correctly restored. A limited number of wood windmills are erected on the museum lawn, and all of those are restored and rebuilt every three years. Another 200 mills are in storage, awaiting restoration.

It all comes down to time and money. "I still want to raise more endowment money," Coy says. He's proud of the museum's \$3 million endowment, a number many similar operations would envy, but he readily admits that the museum can't operate off of admission revenues alone. Still, he runs a tight ship. "We don't borrow money," he says, "and we don't owe money."

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