

Down on the farm
Sharon Letts/The Times-Standard
Article Launched: 07/19/2007 04:27:59 AM PDT



EUREKA -- "Down on the Farm," a new exhibit at the Clarke Historical Museum in Old Town Eureka, chronicles the vivid history of farming in Humboldt County.

The exhibit, which will remain on display through the fall, contains farming equipment, photographs -- including one of museum founder Cecile Clarke's father posing in the family's vegetable garden -- milk bottles from local dairy farms and brands used by area cattlemen that date back to 1841.

Museum Curator and Director Pam Service said local folks don't always realize how important farming is and has been to the North Coast.

"Humboldt is officially a rural county," she said, "and farming has been essential to our economy since the 1850s."

Some of the earliest local enterprises, Service said, were dairy farming in the Eel River Valley and the Arcata Bottoms, with some of the first settlers coming to the area from farming communities as far away as Switzerland, Portugal and Scandinavia.

Butter churning equipment, as well as butter molds and receipts for milk-at-the-door from local dairy farms, are also included in the display. One receipt -- dated April 30, 1916 -- is from the Diamond Springs Creamery Co. and touts a fair market price of four cents a can.

Other dairy fodder on display includes bottles from Arcata dairies now gone, such as the Cottage Dairy on Ninth Street, and Foremost Golden State in Fortuna, which is noted as being part of a large network that

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serviced the state of California and then some.

A book, titled “The American Agriculturist Law Book,” was published in 1886 and boasts that it is “A Compendium of Every Day Law for Farmers, Mechanics, Business Men, Manufacturers, Etc., Etc.” A quick check of the table of contents shows that the publication may have been indispensable to farmers, explaining everything from contracts and debts to trademarks and patents.

Children's books about farming are also included in the Clarke exhibit, and a 1940s volume depicts city kids visiting a farm, detailing the surprises that an urban child might find on a farm, including an interaction with a goat.

The museum has not forgotten World War II and its place in history in terms of agriculture. Items such as posters depicting people taking part in tending victory gardens and “helping the war effort” are also on display.

Because of the Humboldt County climate, Service said agriculture still dominates the scene today.

”Because of the wonderful new strain of grass that was introduced to the area in 1880, dairy has always been a prime product for Humboldt County,” she said. “And, the climate hasn't changed. It's still ideal today. We don't have to use a lot of hormones or alter crops. We have a really good, basic environment for agriculture here. The proof is evident when you visit a local market and see all of our local agricultural products and byproducts.”

The Clarke Historical Museum is located at 240 E St. in Eureka. The museum is open Tuesday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is free, though donations are appreciated.