



A NEW DUPLIN COUNTY MUSEUM SHOWCASES

farm life in the “good old days”

Text and photos by Kim Whorton Tripp

Can you imagine a bill for \$2.90 for one month's electric service? Well, that's just what one member of Four County Electric Membership Corporation paid... in 1940. On display at the Tarkil Branch Farm's Homestead Museum in Duplin County is the original paperwork that describes when David and Ludie Fountain first got electric service from the cooperative in April 1940. All the original paperwork from when they became cooperative members and a booklet explaining how to use their electricity are also on display. The Fountain's home was the last one on Four County EMC lines. Jones-Onslow EMC's service begins less than a mile down the road. Those folks who lived in between had to wait another four or five years for the electric lines to reach them.

That is just one story of many preserved for posterity at this special country museum. Benny and Annette Fountain recently opened the Tarkil Branch Farm's Homestead Museum, located on part of the working 300-acre farm that has been in the Fountain family since 1912. It has been an arduous process, requiring countless hours of hard work, but it is plainly a labor of love.

Nothing is wasted or taken for granted here on the Tarkil Branch Farm. The Fountains have followed the wise lead of earlier generations and have put everything in their possession to good use. The home of David and Ludie Fountain, Benny's parents, has been charmingly restored and now his daughter and her family live there, just across the road from the museum. When Benny replaced the windows in his own home, he used the old sash windows as display cases in the visitor's center. People who know him donate their family artifacts or offer old buildings for the museum. They trust that he will honor their history and preserve it. Many of his exhibits come straight from his own life and childhood and that of his parents and grandparents.

The museum comprises 10 buildings, including a wonderfully preserved “Dogtrot” style farmhouse from the 1830s, a tobacco barn, a corncrib, a smokehouse, a country store and a chicken house which now serves as an exhibit hall. There's also a modern visitors center with exhibits, a seating area and bathroom facilities.

On four acres of land there are 32 exhibits featuring more than 850 items that elicit the sights, sounds, feel and even the smell, of bygone days

on the farm. You'll find feed sack dresses, antique quilts, and a foot pedal sewing machine. Handmade kitchen tables and chairs (many built by Benny's grandfather), used for many years by the Fountain family, now provide comfort in the visitor's center. The chicken house exhibit hall displays dozens of exhibits including one on the near forgotten art of gathering turpentine. You can find farm or kitchen tools for any purpose, a 1941 child's buggy, and an antique bill for a doctor's house call.

The Fountains hope to host tours of their museum beginning this year,



targeting middle school students who are studying North Carolina history and senior citizens who can remember the good old days when living was hard work. Groups are permitted to visit. Picnic lunches are welcome or catering

is available for groups. For more information, appointments or reservations, call (910) 298-3804.

Former Carolina Country associate editor Kim Whorton Tripp lives in Raleigh.

DIRECTIONS:

The Tarkil Branch Farm's Homestead Museum is located in Duplin County at 1198 Fountaintown Road, Beulaville, N.C.

From eastbound I-40 take exit 373 to Hwy. 24. Go 7.4 miles to Kenansville, then 10.2 miles east to Beulaville, then 3.5 miles to Fountaintown Road. Right on Fountaintown Road, go 4.1 miles to museum on your right.

From Hwy. US 17 in Jacksonville: Take Hwy. 258/24 East 6.6 miles to Hwy. 111 North. Turn left and go 10.6 miles past Albert Ellis Airport to Fountaintown. Turn right on Fountaintown Road and go 2 miles to the museum on the left.