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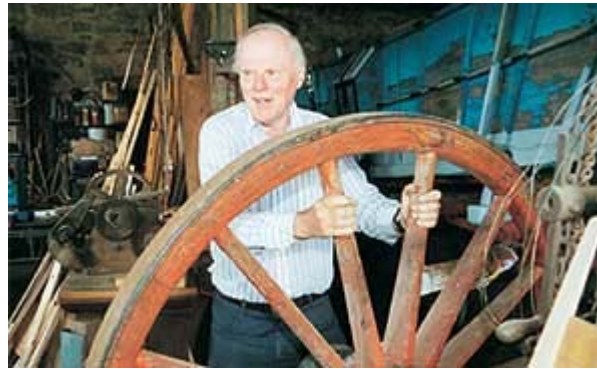
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**In tiny
 Mercersburg,
 Pa., a seasoned
 curator has
 restored a 'huge
 blue and orange
 piece of F&M's
 rolling history.'**

WAGON GOES WEST



Don Berkebile admits that he lives in the past. You need only step onto his property, situated on a rolling hill off a rural road in Mercersburg, Pa., two hours west of Lancaster, to journey back in time.



Berkebile examines the wagon's feed box.



A badly worn wheel hub gets extra attention.

The stone farmhouse, which dates to the 1770s, and adjacent barn and shed are filled with relics and handmade objects the 75-year-old has gathered over the years. Wrought-iron cooking utensils hang from the fireplace in the home's original kitchen, and the other buildings are packed with everything from the insides of a player piano to the coffin of rough barn lumber that Berkebile built for himself. "I couldn't be confined in a steel box of modern construction," he said.

Most of his collection, though, centers around his lifelong fascination with transportation: two New England pleasure wagons, a 1916 truck, a two-wheel stagecoach that he designed and built, and dozens of chains used as brakes on Conestoga wagons. The collection reflects Berkebile's 27 years with the Smithsonian Institution, most recently as a transportation curator. He retired in 1981.

In one of the only open spaces in the barn stands the focus of his attention lately--the Conestoga wagon purchased by Franklin & Marshall in 1948 as a symbol of the College's tie to Lancaster County. Since October 2000, the wagon has been in Berkebile's care, getting a badly needed restoration so it can be returned to the College and displayed on campus.

On this day, the wagon, which at 17 feet in length is among the larger ones that Berkebile has seen, is propped on wooden posts, its wheels and cover removed.

Berkebile has no idea how many hours he has invested in the

wagon, so he simply says that the tedious restoration process takes a long time. It's a process he knows well. His interest in transportation prompted him to buy his first Conestoga wagon in the 1950s for \$15. Since then, he has restored eight more wagons, including F&M's.

"It was a hobby," he said. "The first one I just picked up for myself."

Each wagon is a puzzle to him. Every inch, from the wheels to the feed box, fits together into an intricate story.

For more than a century, the wagons--named after Lancaster County's Conestoga Valley--were used to carry freight. Berkebile thinks the College's wagon dates to the 1850s, near the end of the Conestoga period, because its ironwork is less ornate than wagons constructed earlier in the period.

He uncovered pieces of its story when he pried up plywood and sheet metal that had been nailed into the wooden floor of the wagon to reinforce it. Worn into the wood were crevices, probably from the rims of barrels used to carry freight.

"Everything was shipped in barrels then," he said.

He believes three teams of horses pulled this particular wagon, because the feed box on the wagon is long enough for six horses. Berkebile replaced the metal strips along the edges and bottom of the feed box that kept horses from gnawing on the wood.



This hammer was used both as a working part of the wagon and a tool.



Berkebile stands in the bed of the wagon, where barrels were carried.

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When Berkebile began inspecting the body of the wagon he discovered it was in worse shape than he anticipated. The left sill, or edge of the wagon bed, for instance, was badly rotted. So he preserved and treated as much of the original wood as possible and spliced in new wood where needed.

He carefully combed every inch of wood on the wagon, determining what needed reinforcing and what could stand as it was.

Three wheels of the wagon required only minor work, but the fourth created headaches for Berkebile. He opted to have a new hub for the wheel made by a Lancaster County wheelwright, only to find an unsatisfactory job when he returned to pick it up. So he painstakingly used liquid epoxy and wood to "build up" the old hub.

"When I restore something, I try to keep it as original as possible," he said.

Berkebile has discovered that his interest is a link to his ancestry. His great-grandfather owned a wagon factory; one of his great-great-grandfathers was a blacksmith who likely worked on wagons; and his other great-grandfather drove wagons as a profession.

"I guess it was in my blood," he said. "There was something so colorful about the period of time when so many of these were on the road."

The story of F&M's wagon relates not only to that era, but to a more recent time. F&M's chapter of Alpha Delta Sigma national professional advertising fraternity purchased the wagon from John J. Good, a Rohrerstown, Pa., farmer, and

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presented it to the College at an Oct. 23, 1948, football game.

From that time on, the wagon was stored in the barn of Good's son, Bob. But it also could be seen in parades and halftime celebrations at F&M football games. It traveled to Washington, D.C., as a mascot for the 1949 U.S. Bond Drive, to Philadelphia a year later for the Army-Navy football game, and to the New York World's Fair in 1964 as part of an exhibit by the Boy Scouts of America.

In the mid-1980s, the wagon was removed from Good's barn and stored in the College's warehouse, according to Carol Fail, curator of college collections and director of the Phillips Museum of Art. When Fail inquired about the right person to handle its restoration, she repeatedly was pointed to Berkebile.

Originally, plans called for unveiling of the wagon during Alumni Weekend 2001, but Berkebile's health and the condition of the wagon prevented that. The College now is studying various locations that would be appropriate for displaying the wagon.

The wagon's restoration is being underwritten by gifts from the Class of 2000 and from Richard J. Waitneight '60, who, as president of Alpha Delta Sigma when he was a student, cherishes what he calls "that huge blue and orange piece of F&M's rolling history."

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