OF A BYGONE ERA

Ray Pellerin Collects Buggies, Carriages To Preserve Heritage

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BREAUX BRIDGE — Ray Pellerin, Breaux Bridge businessman, has a hobby which brings a touch of the old into present day life. He collects and remakes old horse-drawn buggies and carriages.

Pellerin says he began the hobby six years ago with the purchase of an old horse drawn hearse. Since that time he has accumulated a two-seat surrey, sulky, backboard, mail wagon and a touring wagon.

Modern Terms

Pellerin describes his carriages in modern terms. "The surrey was the expensive automobile of the horse and buggy days; the buckboard was the pickup truck used to haul groceries and supplies; the touring wagon was the city bus used to carry people from the bus depot into town; and the rig was the family car, used as a run-about and for courting and dating," he says. The sulky was used for training horses.

He lists his prize carriage as an RFD mail wagon, used when the first free delivery of mail to rural areas was started in this area around 1893. He says it took about six months to restore the wagon, but that now everything is exactly as it once was.

"Most of the carriages were just rotting in fields or in somebody's barn," he says. He says many people are not aware that they still have these things.

A Shame

He says he thought it was a shame to allow a part of past heritage to disappear. "I wanted to save some of it for my children, and for other children," he says.

The buggies and carriages are kept in working condition, and are used in parades and festivals throughout the state and Texas.

At the start of each school year, Pellerin takes children from the local kindergartens for a ride. Recently, the carriages were used to take friends Christmas caroling.

Most of the buggies Pellerin now has were picked up somewhere in the area. They are then put into operating condition. Some require only painting. With others, the job is much, much more extensive.

Four Months

He says that on the average, it takes about four months to recondition a carriage he has brought in. Everyone connected with his business has a part in the refurbishing.

The carriages are kept, along with several horses especially trained to pull them, at the family camp in Breaux Bridge. Clarence Guidry takes care of the carriages and trains the horses.

At present Pellerin is working on rebuilding an old hearse, a buggy with a driver's seat, a single seat buggy and an old covered wagon.

Pellerin says he picks up the old pieces at anywhere from $20 to possibly several hundred dollars, but the articles are worth several times the price he paid after he fixes them up.

"However, none of my carriages or buggies are for sale," he says.

EVERYTHING IS KEPT IN GOOD CONDITION