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Naperville's agricultural roots run deep at Naper Settlement's new exhibit

Naperville, IL — Naperville has grown significantly over the past 150 years. With a population shift of 12,933 residents in 1940 to over 146,000 today, few newcomers may realize that at one time the city had more cows than people. Naper Settlement is excited to announce, *Community Roots: Agriculture in Naperville*, an exhibit that will be on view from April 21 to Oct. 8. The exhibit will explore the powerful force agriculture was on shaping everything from the city's landscape to its local economy. This exhibit is free with daily museum admission, which is \$12 for adults, \$10 for seniors (62+) and \$8 for youth (4-12). Naperville residents (with proof of residency) and members receive free admission.

"Agriculture is a very important part of the community's story," said Naper Settlement's Curator of Exhibits & Interpretation, Jennifer Bridge. "Although Naperville isn't a heavily agricultural producing area any more, it doesn't mean that the city doesn't have connections to agriculture. I'm excited for people to have a better understanding of how significant farming was in the area, and for visitors to become more informed about how agriculture helped to create the Naperville of today and how the business of farming still has its roots here today."

The exhibit will allow visitors to see the progression of land use, learn why early settlers chose the livestock they did, how the community supported agriculture and the impact technology had on farming and the changing landscape and population.

The Gregory family, who owned a 400-acre farm which is now the Westfield Fox Valley Shopping Center, is among many Naperville farm families represented in the exhibition. On view is Larry Gregory's 4-H electricity projects from 1947 and 1948, where he laid out future plans for wiring farm houses after World War II.

"After Larry graduated from college, his father told him to make up his mind. 'Either become a farmer or an electrician,'" said Char Gregory, Larry Gregory's wife. "Let me tell you, you can take the boy out of the farm, but never the farm out of the boy. He was dedicated to farms, and he would do anything to help a farmer work more efficiently."

Larry Gregory went on to be the founder and chairman of Gregory Electric Inc. in Naperville. Larry made it a priority to help local area farmers with electricity powered labor-saving devices,

such as supplying power for milking machines and wiring many of their houses and barns for light and power.

Other highlights of the exhibit include a Platform scale from Boecker Coal & Grain Co. and a 1940s Future Farmers of America jacket, worn by Eldon Hatch, a long-time Naperville resident. Eldon's family ran the largest cattle feeding operation in DuPage County on the former site of the Amoco Research Center in Naperville.

The *Community Roots: Agriculture in Naperville* exhibition will include stories and artifacts that will be on exhibit at Naper Settlement's Agricultural Interpretive Center. The center will feature virtual technology, hands-on programming and interactive exhibits to share stories of area farming families and teach the business and science of modern-day farming to Naper Settlement's 140,400 annual visitors. The 5,000 square-foot center will be the ideal place to learn, share and talk agriculture, the engine that feeds the planet.

"Agriculture relates to so many things in the sciences and math, and it's a huge untapped career field," said Bridge. "Students may be surprised to see how things they are interested in connect to agriculture and how it might be a future career for them."

About Naper Settlement

Naper Settlement is a nationally accredited, award-winning outdoor museum set on 12 magnificent acres in the heart of Naperville, where history comes to play and community comes to connect. For more information, visit www.napersettlement.org or call (630) 420-6010.

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