Apron collection spans nearly a century

By Kathy Tandberg

Do your childhood memories include an image of grandmother or mother wearing an apron?

Visitors at Hazen Centennial Headquarters in July had a glimpse into the history of aprons, and perhaps a trip down memory lane, with a colorful display of 50 aprons.

The aprons are a collection gathered over the years by Lorina Zuern, Beulah, formerly a rural Hazen resident. The collection spans a period of about 90 years and includes many aprons once worn by family members and as such, have sentimental value for her.

Lorina has fond memories of aprons and their usefulness going back to childhood.

"My Mom used hers to gather eggs. Sometimes she would gather vegetables from the garden. Aprons were used for so many things, and even wiped away sweat, tears or noses," she said.

The oldest aprons in the collection are the practical aprons worn by Lorina's mother-in-law, Lydia (John) Zuehn.

Lorina said that's how her collection of aprons began, with aprons that once belonged to Lydia going back to around the 1920s.

Born in 1889 and a farm wife, Lydia knew firsthand the practicality of a good apron.

Lorina said she wore most of her aprons.

Most were the practical everyday bib-type aprons that hung to the knees, a fashion of those days. But she also knew how to sew beautiful, dressy aprons for special occasions.

Lorina (Zuehn) arrived at the John and Lydia (Geist) Zuehn farm north of Hazen the spring of 1947 as the bride of their son, Herb.

The newlyweds made their home there with Herb's parents, sharing it until the older Zuerns retired in 1952 and moved into Hazen.

"I was not into collecting aprons. Some I had, and Herb's mother had some I decided to keep because I thought they might wear them sometime. And that's how it began," Lorina shared.

Included in the collection are aprons Lorina wore over the years, some made by her mother-in-law and some given to her by friends.

She pointed to a red nylon chiffon half-apron trimmed in white lace, a gift from friends in the 1940s. She wore this apron often when serving dinner guests.

"I didn't cook in this one," Lorina explained. "We wore the practical ones in the kitchen and then switched out to the pretty ones when it was time to serve dinner."

Lorina's collection also includes a solid white bib-apron worn by men.

"The men wore them when they served drinks at local wedding dances. The tops were pinned onto their shirts, tied at the neck like the woman," Lorina said.

Lorina said girls waiting tables wore nylon or chiffon and lace half-aprons.

Lorina's collection of aprons expanded in the 1970s when she and Herb attended the South Dakota estate auction of his cousin. Lorina didn't recall why, but she was drawn to the many colorful aprons of the 1960s made in a variety of fabrics and designs.

Among Lorina's collection is a 1960s close-pin apron, handy when hanging clothes on the line to dry, aprons made from or decorated with handkerchief pockets, state souvenir aprons from trips and reversible aprons.

"One side gets dirty while you are working you just turn it around to a nice clean apron on the other side," Lorina explained.

The collection also includes several gingham aprons hand embroidered by Lydia. Lorina said her mother-in-law gave most of those away as gifts.

Lorina has three favorites from among her collection, a purple and lavender, a deep pink and one in green. In addition, Lorina has two other favorites.

One is a colorful bib-apron given to her by friends in the 1990s that she still wears. The other is a colorful bib apron with a shirred waist.

"I had this one before we were married. I wore it often and I loved wearing it," she said. "I have many memories when I look at these aprons hanging up here along the walls. It's been nice to see them like this."

This reversible apron has a full patterned fabric on one side and a solid green with patterned pockets on the other.