MEADOWCROFT Village is situated in the southwestern corner of Pennsylvania, near the Ohio border and the West Virginia Panhandle. It is an idyllic spot — 200 acres of sylvan glades, meadows and streams — and the setting for a unique collection of historic buildings which represents the most significant attempt in the region to preserve our rural heritage.

It has been the fascinating life work of two equally fascinating brothers, Delvin and Albert Miller. The Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania is currently studying the possibility of a formal partnership with Meadowcroft Village in hopes that our professional assistance will help ensure that the work begun by the Millers in the 1950s can always be counted among our region's historical resources.

One of the treasured structures at Meadowcroft is the 1831 schoolhouse, which is where the Miller brothers went to school. The schoolhouse was used until 1921. This 1966 reunion photograph shows, left to right, Delvin Miller, Grace B. Thompson, the school's teacher in 1921, and Myrtle Sutherland Lantz, who not only attended the school but taught there in 1912 and 1913.
Delvin Miller is himself a part of Western Pennsylvania history. At age 81, he is counted among the leading harness racers in the world, having driven hundreds and hundreds of races, in eight decades. He has raced in all parts of the world and has met the world's great sports enthusiasts. Brother Albert Miller, 79, has always had a passion for the past. The brothers were born to an old Washington County family whose ancestor, George Miller, came to the Avella area and built a log house there in 1795.

The Miller brothers' grandfather sold several hundred acres of the family farm to the Jefferson Coal Co. in 1920, and by the 1950s, strip mining had ravaged the acreage, scarring the land they knew so well. Moved by the devastation caused by one of the region's major industries, Delvin and Albert Miller purchased back from the coal company 200 acres of the former family farm. That was 1957.

They were avid collectors of local history anyway, and as they worked to reclaim the land, replanting more than 300,000 trees, an idea took hold. The Millers began to envision a historic village representing the pre-industrial past and providing visitors with a living history experience. They added to their private collections artifacts of a larger kind, buildings and structures of Western Pennsylvania's country past. The collection has come to include four log houses, including George Miller's original 1795 home, a cobbler shop, chair-maker's shop, two general stores, a carriage barn, cattle barn, smokehouse, schoolhouse, barber shop, covered bridge, and to mark the opening up of rural life in the mid-1800s, a locomotive and train from the Union Pacific Railroad. To make a visit pleasant for others, a visitor's center, craft shops, outdoor chapel, concert stage, nature center and exhibit hall have been added. In 1969, the Millers turned the village, grounds, buildings and collections over to a private not-for-profit organization to operate as Meadowcroft Village. Many thousands of people have enjoyed visiting since.

The Miller brothers joined an American tradition of the 20th century in their development of Meadowcroft. The efforts of industrial giants Henry Ford, with his Greenfield Village near Detroit, and John D. Rockefeller, patron to Colonial Williamsburg, inspired other more modest historic villages throughout the United States.

During this century, the landscape of the greater Pittsburgh area has reflected sharp contrasts of industry and rural life. Due partially to our rugged topography of mountains, valleys and rivers, steel mill and coal mines were juxtaposed with farmsteads and chicken coops. As heavy industries disappear from the region, suburbanization takes its place in winnowing out the remaining rural environments. In Allegheny County, communities such as Upper St. Clair, Peters Township and Cranberry Township are examples of places where farm fields, orchards, and open spaces are being rapidly replaced by housing tracts.

Meadowcroft Village, a 45-minute drive from downtown Pittsburgh, preserves both the rural landscape and an authentic feel for rural America. Delvin and Albert Miller have labored long and generously to vouchsafe an historic and natural environment for generations who come to learn about the past of a very special part of America.
Living history is the goal of Meadowcroft Village, which provides the visitor with a view of rural life in Western Pennsylvania beginning with the early years of European settlement.