

## Backwoods Trading Post

As you ease off U.S. 79 approximately 13 miles north of Carthage, the hombre propped on the porch of the Backwoods Trading Post doesn't wave or even offer a polite "Howdy."

No offense, pardner.

Despite the western garb and lifelike features, he's only a mannequin, one of hundreds handcrafted over the last ten years by sisters Linda Grinstead and Patty Bartek, co-owners of this unusual roadside antique and gift shop.

The posable mannequins--no two alike--depict cowboys and Indians mostly, plus pioneer grandmas and saloon girls. Each wears a life-like face researched from Old West books and made from a sculptor's mold. Supported on padded, jointed wooden frames, the \$300 mannequins sell nationwide to a variety of stores and restaurants for display...as well as more offbeat uses.

"The owner of a professional football team bought 40 Indians for his private western museum, and another man bought a mannequin to leave in his travel home for security purposes," says Grinstead. "A New York movie producer once bought a cowboy he named 'Bruce' and drove around in his limo for pure shock effect."

Housed in a refurbished 1898 general store moved from Elysian Fields six miles away, the Backwoods Trading Post takes on the feel of a historical museum. Taped dulcimer or bluegrass music plays in the background as a dozen or more mannequins pose in several displays with antiques from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Where, decades ago, the original store's proprietor hid from bandits Bonnie and Clyde, a white-aproned mannequin shopkeeper now oversees an authentic mercantile establishment.

A pole-mounted turkey feather duster (for cobwebs in corners of high ceilings) leans against a long glass case packed with authentic period goods--patent medicines, sewing needles, salesmen's samples, and various wire eyeglass frames and lenses. Nearby sits a bread making invention introduced at the 1909 World's Fair, alongside a wooden wash tub, scrub board, and wringer from the Twenties. From the ceiling a Thirties-era rubber display pig from a Tennessee butcher shop hangs over a slatted tobacco showcase.

Over in the trading post's saloon, tough-looking poker players gamble over a knife and spurs made, according to Grinstead, by the grandfather of frontiersman Daniel Boone. In the cowboy corner, an 1883 Old Hickory-brand work wagon from Kentucky shows off its original paint.

Nearby, the old post office from Sevierville, Tennessee (home of Dolly Parton) seems open for business alongside the barber shop, featuring an 1890's wooden barber chair, and the country kitchen, featuring cooking collectibles and an extensive array of cookbooks.

On the wide rustic front porch sits an old lye soap pot, hand-forged locally, and an 1880's "walking wheel," a spinning wheel that packed easily in pioneer wagons heading west.

Sisters Linda and Patty delight in unusual finds with interesting histories--old items which sometimes find their way into movies. Producers for "Lonesome Dove" leased a flour barrel, bread display, and Arbuckle-brand coffee boxes from the store, and a recent James Bond film used a bearskin rug.

"We love talking with customers about the background of what's new--or rather what's old--in the trading post," says Linda, adding that the store also stocks

handcrafted seasonal and gift items. "Since we're only six or seven miles from the state line, we're often the first or last stop for visitors to Texas. So we want to make a lasting impression on them."

**--Randy Mallory**

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