

## **Taking History for a Ride at the Keystone Truck and Tractor Museum**

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If you have kids who love tractors, trucks, or history, the Keystone Truck and Tractor Museum is a must-see for your family! Located just half an hour from Richmond, in Colonial Heights, the museum houses a 75,000-square-foot private collection of not just tractors, but everything transportation. You'll find restored antique farm tractors and related farm equipment; trucks of every size and shape; classic cars; gas station equipment and supplies; and automotive ephemera, such as old advertisements. Each visit will also feature ongoing restoration projects in back rooms.

My family has visited the museum twice in the last 18 months, once by ourselves and more recently with guests from out of town. My middle-school- aged son loves anything transportation related, and our guests included a high school freshman who owns no fewer than six tractors. Needless to say, we had a rapt audience!

The museum isn't just for tractor or transportation lovers. I don't fall into those categories; yet even I found myself interested because the breadth of the collection and the quality of the curation provides such a unique lens through which to view the timeline of history: the evolution of tractor and agricultural innovations over the last 100 years. It is akin to taking an art history or music history class: you have the opportunity to see history from a new and interesting perspective. For kids of all ages, this is certainly a splendid opportunity to expand on or introduce history.

The museum is large, so bring your walking shoes! You start in a cavernous room that is full of tractors as far as your eye can see. These are surrounded by vintage advertisements on the walls that can be fun, and often amusing, to look at. Included with the advertisements is a collection of tobacco ads from around the state and the South—a vital part of Virginia's agricultural history. It is quite interesting to see how attitudes toward tobacco use and tobacco's portrayal in the media have changed over the decades.

The tractors eventually segue into gas stations and trucks and then classic cars. A pristine antique fire engine can even be found in the collection. It's interesting to compare the progression of tractor designs to the progression of car and truck designs. As you walk, you will also come across various collections that have been donated to the museum—including collections of glass bottles and miniature die-cast trucks—all displayed with the same pride as everything else (and equally as interesting when you read the displays). There really is a little bit of everything. No one in your group should get bored; there is so much to see!

You could spend a few hours or an entire day at the museum, depending on your children and their interest levels. Younger kids may be disappointed to learn that, just like any other museum, the tractor displays are all "look, but don't touch." However, at the very start of the tour, there is a John Deere tractor that the kids can climb on. It has a backdrop that provides a nice photo opportunity.

The museum is open seven days a week, minus major holidays, and is located right off Interstate 95. It offers inexpensive admission prices for students. There are plenty of places to eat near the museum and a barbecue restaurant recently opened within the museum itself. Given the amount of traffic the

restaurant was generating, it must be pretty good.

Agricultural heritage is an important part of Virginia history. Being able to explore and experience it with a field trip to something as unique and specific as a tractor museum is something you should definitely not pass up!

*Mary Sandkam lives in Richmond with her husband and son, who is in middle school and has always been homeschooled. She is pretty sure "fieldtripping" is a homeschool subject and has never met a museum she didn't like.*