

Devons From Heaven

Text and photographs by John Coffey of New York

Away in the manger, no fleece for his head, lay the bundle of fabric that was supposed to be the baby Jesus sleeping. We, the cast of the 1983 Butternut Hill Living History Farm and Village Christmas Live Nativity Scene, had decided the bundle of fabric in the straw laden antique wooden baby crib was good enough. We'd just tell the visitors the Christ child was sound asleep under the swaddling clothes. Yes, it was the Christmas season and my wife, Sue, and I had been asked to man the nativity scene. I guess I wasn't exactly thrilled to be the Joseph. Sue seemed to be delighted to play the part of Mary. This wasn't exactly a volunteer job, though, we had some dues to pay at the museum.

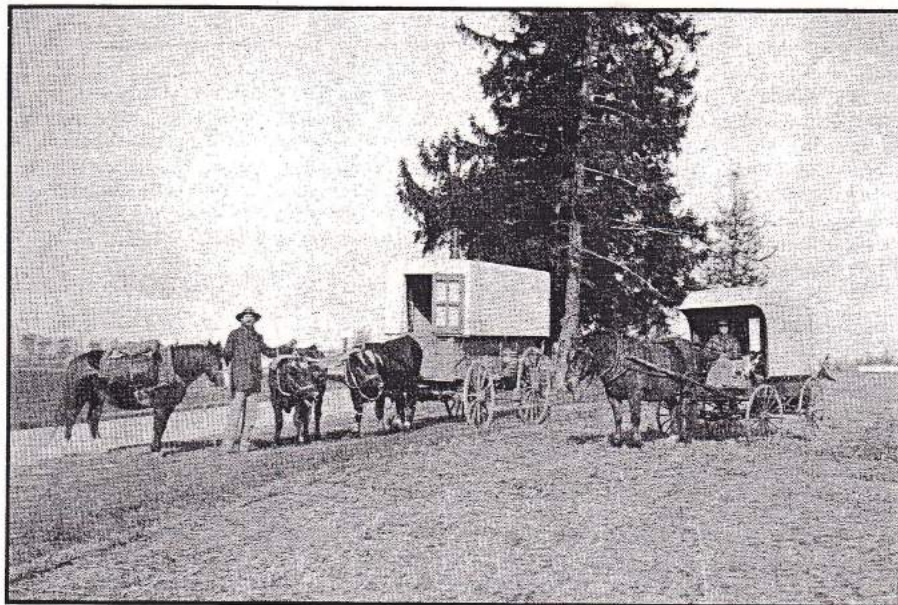
How that came to be, started about five years beforehand. To make a long story short, in a great bid for youthful adventure, I had taken to the back roads of America, in 1978, in a covered spring wagon pulled by an Amish plow horse. I made my living doing authentic 19th century tintype portrait photography along the way. In a couple years time, my horse and I had plodded our way from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, to southern California, via a very winding path. When I had started out, I had no intention of going to California. It just worked out that way. I guess, they say, a rolling stone gathers no moss. But, I was to prove that old adage wrong.

Sue and I met in California, and soon thereafter got married. Together, we continued on with the wagon travels. Sue brought along her Springer Spaniel dog. In western Oregon we were given a small mustang horse. He became our riding and pack horse. When the snow cleared in the Cascade Mountains, we pointed our compass east. Reaching Des Moines, Iowa, in the fall, where we arranged to stay at the Living History Farms for the winter. We ended up staying there a year and a half. That gave me time to add a second wagon to our troop and also to train a pair of Shorthorn steers for oxen to pull it. So, on east we went in the spring of 1983 with ox team, two horses, two wagons and a dog.

Once again, by late fall, it was time to find winter



May '84 Butternut Hill Farm. Daisy resting in the barn yard.



Oct. 1983 North Central Ohio. Our traveling outfit just prior to our arrival at the Butternut Hill Farm. 8 x 10 contact print from glass negative.

quarters. As providence would have it, we came upon the Butternut Hill Living History Farm and Village in northeastern Ohio. The people in charge there were very receptive to us and hospitable. They offered to let us stay through the winter. But, we weren't going to be any freeloaders. So, in exchange for simple living quarters in one of their old restored houses, and to be able to keep my livestock in one of their pastures, I would help out in various ways. One thing they needed was a good ox teamster. They had an older, very large Shorthorn Devon cross team that their staff didn't know how, or care, to work. They also needed someone to help feed the farm animals a couple days a week. When the idea of the Nativity Scene came up, we seemed likely candidates to help out there, as well. Maybe it was my long beard that got me the part. I don't know for sure. But, none the less, there I was in long robes playing the part of Joseph.

The Nativity was set up in the old sheep barn, and to add to the live nature of things, lots of farm animals were put in the pens and stalls in the barn. There were sheep, pigs, geese, chickens, turkeys and two American Milking Devon heifers named Daisy and Baby.

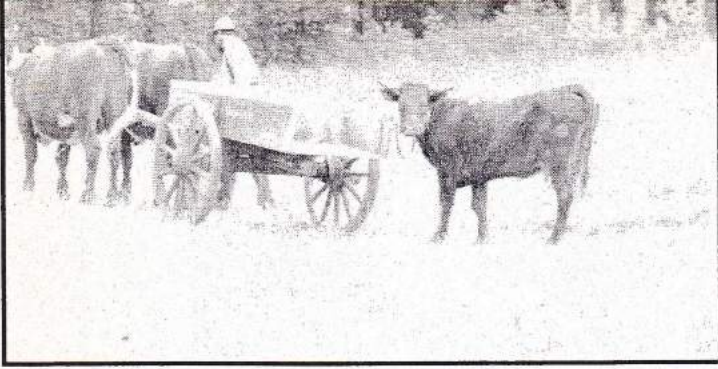
Many families visiting the museum grounds for the special Christmas weekend came to see the live nativity. They seemed to enjoy it very much. But the star of the show turned out not to be the baby Jesus, nor Mother Mary, nor Joseph, or a shepherd. No, it was

Daisy the little Devon heifer. All slick and pretty with her red fur coat, white tail switch, little horns and big bright brown eyes, she beckoned all to come pet her. She leaned over her pen rail and soaked up all the attention everyone seemed to lavish on her. Baby, the heifer, on the other hand didn't care for the attention and stayed out of arms' reach. But Daisy well made up for her cousin's shyness.

For many of the children, and most of the adults too, it was, no doubt, the first time they had actually laid a hand on a "little cow", as they called her. Some even got to experience the feel of her raspy tongue when she'd give them a lick. The children would squeal with delight. Parents would just about have to drag their children away so they'd have time to see the rest of the museum sights. Sometimes I'd see the same small faces again before the day was over. The parents would say, "The children had to come back and say good-bye to the little cow." I must admit, I stood by Daisy and Baby's pen far more than I stood by Mary and the bundle of cloth. I think I liked petting that "little cow" as much as the visitors did. I also enjoyed telling them about Daisy and Baby's interesting heritage.

The American Milking Devon breed is a very rare one. At that time, there were only about three hundred registered animals. Butternut Hill Farm had gone all the way to New Hampshire to buy Daisy and Baby.

The Milking Devons' roots go back to at least ancient southern England; in the area called County Devonshire. They were the common cattle of that part of England. This was the region from which the Pilgrims migrated to the New World in the 1620's. Supply ships soon brought to them their Devon cattle. Devons came to be the common cattle of colonial New England. They served the three fold purposes of producing milk, beef, and oxen. In those days the most important aspect being oxen. They are a quick, medium sized, very intelligent animal. Attributes ox drivers prized then, and still do. Although not heavy milkers, what milk they do produce



May '84 Butternut Hill Farm. Daisy's first lesson in trailing behind an oxen drawn cart.

is high in butter fat, and extra sweet. The breed is exceptionally hardy and can survive on a lean ration, which was a must on the frontier. American Milking Devon cattle are always red in color with a white tail switch. Their horns are long and very classic and graceful in form. That would, of course, be a help in the wilds to protect themselves and their young. But there at the peaceful Nativity, all the children wanted to touch Daisy's small horns. She didn't seem to mind. The children were always surprised to find they were warm. I explained how much blood circulates through the inside of a cow's horns. Such is the beauty of a hands on approach to learning at a living history museum. Daisy was glad to do her part.

The Christmas activities soon ended and the museum closed for the winter. Kent, the staff farmer, put the two Devon heifers out in the pasture with a couple head of beef steers and an old white horse. They had a half fallen down tin shed for shelter. My oxen and horses got

the pasture next to it with no shed.

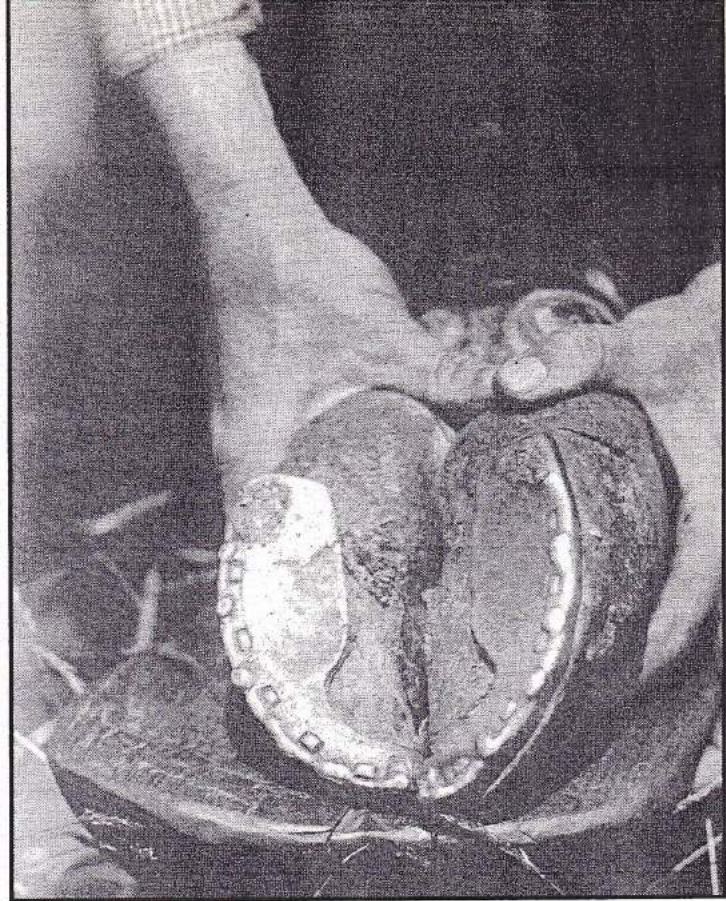
I didn't forget about little Daisy even though I was plenty busy everyday taking care of my own stock across the fence. It was a cold winter and I made sure my animals got plenty of hay and corn. I noticed that Kent didn't give Daisy and the others any grain. They just got fair quality grass hay. I felt sorry for them and would sneak some of the farm's corn their way. And I tried to make sure Daisy got a good portion of it as she was the youngest and smallest of the group.

By March I had the farm's big ox team working for me very well. I used them on a cart or sled to haul maple sap out of the woods for the farm's annual Maple Syrup Festival.

As spring began to show itself in early April, my wife and I moved back into our wagons and began getting ready for our trek on east. We figured we'd push off about the first of May.

The fields and pastures were beginning to green up a bit but still I had to keep feeding hay to my stock. Looking across the fence one day, I noticed that the Devon heifers Daisy and Baby were getting quite big in the bellies. "Could they be pregnant?" I thought. I asked Kent about it. He said they weren't supposed to be. So, I took his word for it. After all, what did I know about cows and bred heifers. All I knew much about was raising up oxen and working them. And that I had learned by necessity only over the past couple years. Before I had gone on the road with the horse and wagon from Lancaster County, Pa., I had been a studio photographer in Orlando, Florida, and before that I had grown up in Las Vegas, Nevada. Kent, on the other hand, although still in his teens, had grown up right there on the Butternut Hill Farm. His father was, in fact, the director of the whole place. Kent had the walk, the talk, and the look of a typical mid-west farm boy down pat. He even dipped snuff tobacco.

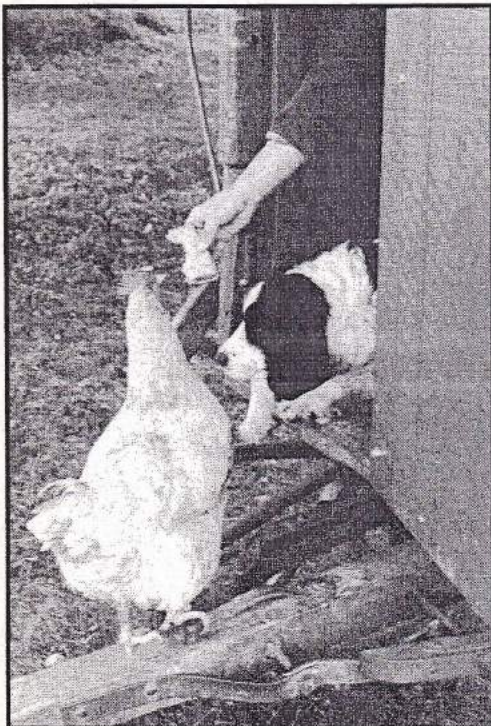
A couple weeks went by and then one morning, out in the pasture, I noticed Daisy off by herself laying on her side and acting strangely. I went out to her to see what



June '84 Butternut Hill Farm. One of my oxen's hooves (front) shod for the road. Drill Tex on the heel for traction and smooth hard surface rod welded on outer edges for abrasion resistance.

was the matter. As I had thought, she really was pregnant and now was trying to give birth. I went and got Kent and one of his helpers. This time he could not deny the situation. "Well," he said, "I guess that little Hereford bull we had in here last summer for awhile must have bred the heifers. That wasn't supposed to happen. They were so young." As it turned out, the calf had to be pulled out of Daisy. A big bull calf and upon arrival quite dead. Daisy continued to lay on her side, moaning. They kicked at her, demanding she get up. But she just laid there not making any effort to rise at all. The vet, who had been called hours before, finally showed up. He looked her over and gave her a shot of something. When we asked why she wouldn't get up, he replied that she had probably pinched a nerve in her hind quarters and had lost feeling to the point that she couldn't use her rear legs. His advice was to let her rest and by morning she would probably be alright. To help as best we could, I got a pick and shovel and buried the calf while my wife brought a bale of hay and a bucket of water to Daisy.

The little cow was getting more alert now, with her head up and not groaning anymore. Kent had gone home right at five, as usual. He said he'd check on her when he came into work at nine the next day. When my wife and I went to bed we had visions of Daisy being on her feet ambling about the pasture in the morning. Instead, we woke up early to a cold, dreary rainy day. Right to the pasture we went to see about Daisy. There we found her



May '84 Butternut Hill Farm. "Yellow Hen" gets her favorite treat: peanut butter sandwich. "Level" the dog tries to look unconcerned.



August '85 Ontario County New York. Sue milking "Daisy".

some distance from where she had been the evening before, and down in a low spot that had filled with a few inches of cold rain water. She lay on her side with one horn stuck in the mud, propping her head out of the water enough so she could breathe. Evidently, the other cattle and the old horse in the pasture had eaten the hay we had put around her and caused her to flee by dragging herself with her front legs. At this point, her breathing was labored and rough sounding. She was trembling terribly, as well.

I never waited for farmer Kent to show up. I could see Daisy was going to die soon if we didn't get her out of there quick. Together we dragged her out of the water. I ran and yoked up my ox team and hitched them to a simple little farm sled I had made that winter and drove the outfit to Daisy. The bovine ambulance corps was on the spot, Johnny be quick! By then, Kent and his helper showed up. I explained I was going to move her up to the inside of the old sheep barn. He agreed to that. So we simply tied her feet together and rolled her over onto the sled and drove the team, and all went smoothly out of the pasture, across the road and up into the empty sheep barn, which was the same building the Christmas nativity scene had been in. We rolled her off the sled onto a pile of straw in the middle of the barn floor and untied her legs. All seemed to be under control now. I went on about my business and left matters to Kent, whose job it was anyhow. He assured me everything would be alright.

I again turned my thoughts to the details of my own beasts and wagons and the prospect of hitching up and leaving soon. But I couldn't help going over to the old sheep barn and checking in on Daisy. She was warm there in the barn, but still unable to stand. I'd call her name and she'd moo a reply from her straw nest.

The days went by and still Daisy was down. All I could think was, "Poor little cow. I hope she gets better. But it's not my problem."

Two more days went by. Twice more the farm had the vet out to see Daisy. Yet, she wouldn't get up or even move her hind legs. I asked Kent what they were going to do with her. He responded, "Likely we'll be

selling her for cheap meat if she don't get up soon. Better if you sell them while they're still alive rather than have to pay to have the dead carcass hauled away."

"How much do you think you'd get?" I asked.

"Maybe about \$35. But that's better than having to pay that to have her dead body trucked away."

I asked, "How in the world would they load her alive on a truck if she can't get up?"

"No problem," Kent said, beaming, "they got this electric winch with a long steel cable. They put the cable around her neck and drag her on."

"She doesn't deserve that kind of treatment," I protested. "You ought to have the vet come and give her a shot to put her out of her misery before you resort to that!" I added.

Kent pulled out his Skoal can and packed his mouth with snuff, then with a disinterested grunt said, "I'd have the truck come drag her away today and be glad for the cash. But it's up to my dad to decide."

I sensed that Daisy, short of a miracle, was doomed. So I went back to my wagons and tried not to think about it. After all, she wasn't my cow.

My wife, a few days later, was in the farm museum's main office getting our mail when she overheard the director, Fritz, saying to his secretary that they had monkeyed around long enough with that sick cow and he was going to call the meat wagon and have her hauled away. My wife stuck her head into his open office doorway and suggested he just give Daisy more time to heal. "After all," she reasoned to him, "she's such a rare breed."

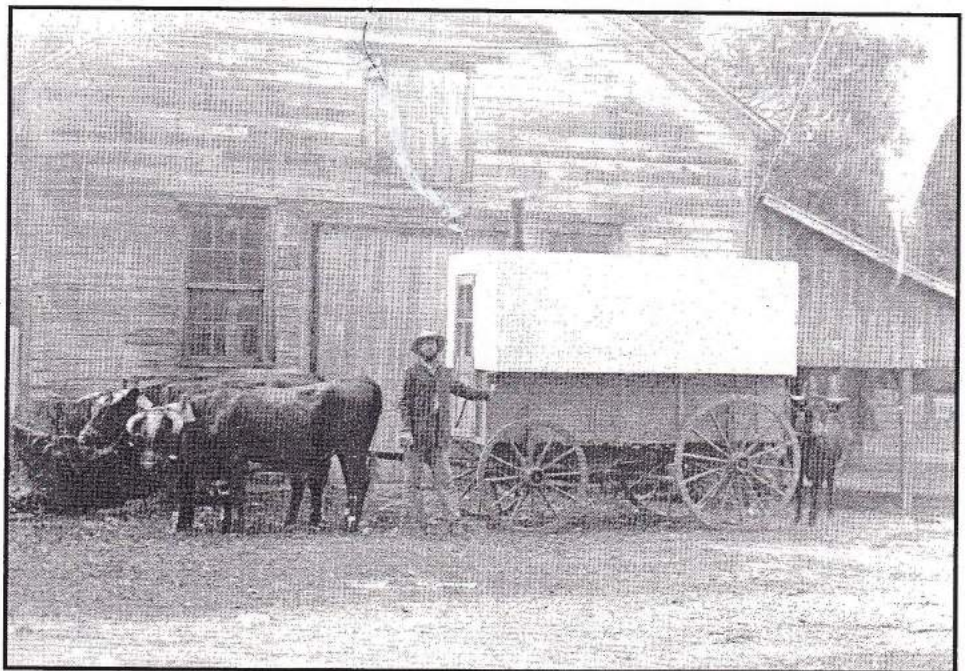
But he reasoned right back, "It is not cost effective to have to pay staff to look after her anymore."

Sue continued to urge him to give the nice little cow a break.

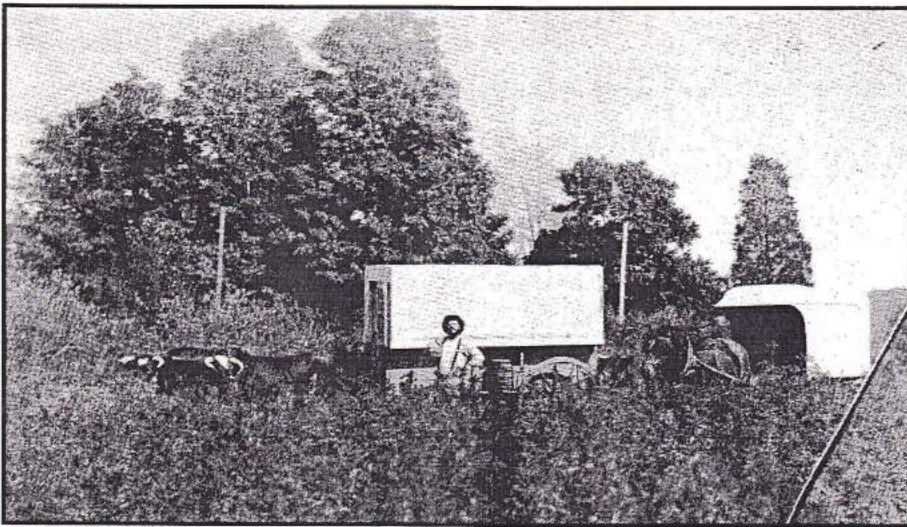
Then quite off the cuff, Fritz said, "If you like her so much, you can have her."

She replied she'd go ask me about it and would be back shortly. Well, this would hardly be a tale worth relating had I said "No!" Almost to my wife's surprise, because we already had so many animals with us, I, without hesitation, said: "Yes, we'll take her. Once we get her on her feet I'll put small ox shoes on her and she can trail on a lead behind the oxen-drawn wagon. One more animal shouldn't make much difference, considering all the animals we have already. Quick, go tell Fritz we'll take her!"

Sue hurried back to the office with my decision for Fritz. His smug reply was, "When she dies, you know



Oct. '84 Panama, New York. John Coffey by his campwagon pulled by ox team "Bodie and Dillard". "Daisy" in tow.



Sept '85 Dundee, N.Y. John Coffey and wagons and livestock as we looked at first arriving on our new homestead property. (from cracked glass negative)

of course, you will have to pay for her removal." She agreed, but on the way back to our camp started getting cold feet and wondered if we had done the right thing. I told her not to worry, Daisy would get better now and we'd have ourselves a nice little milk cow to travel along with us. The idea of fresh milk on tap was pretty exciting to me as I've been a milk lover all my life.

We dashed to the barn to see "our" little cow. She was still lying in the middle of the barn floor, much as we had left her a week before. Soon it became painfully evident she had been seriously neglected. No one had done anything for her, outside of putting a pail of water and feed in front of her. The straw wasn't much under her now, and she lay on the hard wood floor in her own soupy excrement.

Much of the rest of that day we spent cleaning her up and getting fresh bedding under her. To accomplish this we had to flip her completely over. We'd get along side of her back, and together holding on low on her legs, pull her over. Daisy didn't much care for the treatment and would give out a pitiful groany moo.

The first time we flipped her we were sickened to find terrible raw places on her underside. The worst being a patch about three inches in diameter completely gone on the outside of the hock of her right rear leg. Once I washed the filth away, you could see just muscle tissue and even a little bare bone. The hair was gone and skin raw on a big patch on the hip of the same leg and also on parts of her belly. Her knees had the hide nearly worn off them. Kent had said she had been trying to crawl out of the barn using her front legs and knees, a few days before. The rough wooden floor, with nail heads sticking up here and there, had evidently acted on her like a grater. Worsening matters was the filth she had gradually come to lay in. She was rotting down alive.

After washing her wounds and putting on them some powered antiseptic I happened to have, and bandaging her awful looking rear hock, I decided it was time to milk out her swollen udder. Some years before, I had been given a quick lesson in how to hand milk a cow, by a friendly small farmer. I remember his showing me by first holding one of my fingers and squeezing it like he would a teat. I got the idea right off, milked his cow a few minutes to good effect, and went away feeling I had a rough idea of how it is done. I then had no idea I'd someday have my own cow, but still thought it a pretty good thing to know how to do.

Here before me lay a challenge that even most veteran hand milkers wouldn't want to tackle. Not just a cow to milk, but one laying down. At her young age, Daisy's teats weren't any handful. I was, basically, having to milk with my thumb and two fingers. I just did the best I could, directing the squirts into a small pail tipped toward her udder. Only her teats that were uppermost could be milked, laying as she was on her side. I'd lift and push her upper leg back so as to get to the back teat. Twice a day we made it a habit to milk her on one side, then roll her over and milk the other half.

After a few days, the milk started looking pretty good. So I cooled it in the farm employees' lounge refrigerator and began drinking it. Daisy was already giving back.

The days, and then weeks, went by and even though Daisy was eating and drinking fairly well and her wounds had begun to heal, she still lay like her rear half was a sack

of potatoes. She wouldn't move her hind legs at all, let alone stand up.

The farm then threw us a curve. They would be opening up for their regular tourist season in a week and they would like to have the sick cow out of the sheep barn, figuring it would upset the public if they saw her. I was, however, determined to stick by my little cow even if I had to move her off somewhere on the sled into the woods out of sight. But, miraculously, a day or so later a safety inspector, from somewhere, showed up to look things over before the museum opened and decreed the old sheep barn as structurally unsound. In consequence, museum visitors were forbidden to go into it. My wife and I were elated, and continued to keep Daisy there while we made sure no tourists went into the barn, to our's and the museum's mutual benefit.

Several weeks had gone by since Daisy had become our cow. She was still down, but I remained convinced she would soon walk. I felt she just needed a little more time. Then she would need a good leather halter, I figured, and so I got a ride to the local farm supply store where I bought one for her. I was all excited, upon my return, to put the halter on Daisy, and went with it right to the barn. Kent happened to be there poking around for something, saw the halter in my hand and chimed in, "Looks like you got a new halter. Who's that for?"

"Daisy," I responded.

He laughed loud and mockingly, saying as he went out the barn door, "A new halter for a dead cow!"

It didn't phase me a bit, I still had all the faith I needed that Daisy would make it. As she lay head up and bright eyed, I put her new halter on her and told her how pretty she looked in it.

Although I didn't get any help from Kent with the cow, some of the others there offered their assistance. I talked to as many people as I could about getting Daisy up on her feet. Finally, the general consensus was I had to hoist her up to make her realize she could stand. Some had said the nerves mend but due to being



Oct. '95 Dundee, N.Y. John Coffey milking "Daisy".

down so long they don't try or remember they can stand.

After five weeks, I had thought I'd seen some voluntary movement in her rear legs. So, I had some reason for hope. My wife, however, said I was just seeing things and we ought to just have her put to sleep. I refused to listen. Instead, I decided it was time to make an all out effort to hoist her up onto her feet. In an adjoining tool shed I found an old painter's canvas drop cloth. I used it and some poles to make a crude sling. I told one of the friendly maintenance men at the farm about how I hoped to rig up something where I could hoist Daisy onto her feet. Quickly he volunteered a big steel pipe tripod and chain fall hoist he had at home for pulling car engines. He brought it in the next day and we set it up in the barn over Daisy.

Six whole weeks has past since Daisy was last on her feet. But I was confident she would make it. My wife and a couple of the farm workers, on their lunch hour, came and helped me with the "raising of the cow." We rolled Daisy onto the sling, gathered it up around her sides, attached the ropes to the pole ends and chain fall hook, and then slowly began hoisting her up. Daisy was as limp as a wet noodle. Her middle was coming up but her front and rear ends sagged down in an awkward way. She made no attempt to stand. So, we planted her feet under her, for her, and slowly lowered her middle. For just a half minute, and no longer, she had most of her weight on her feet. She then collapsed, causing the canvas drop cloth sling to tear in half. Now I was disgusted and out of frustration, gave her a kick in the rump and said, "You are a dead cow!" and turned to walk away. Suddenly the others shouted, "Look!" Daisy had sprung to her feet as if to follow after me—but then collapsed again in her effort to take a step. We all cheered for her and I know then we had won the battle. We got the sling out of the way and in a few minutes she was up once more and took a couple faltering steps before going down. My helpers had to return to work and my wife went off to the wagon to make us a victory lunch.

I was alone with Daisy, talking to her, praising her and encouraging her to try again. Soon she again mustered all her strength and sprang to her feet and managed several steps toward the barn wall, where she awkwardly collided into it but with my help remained standing up against the wall. I steadied her wobbling back legs. She was quivering with the strain, as I leaned against her side; just me and Daisy and God there; tears came to my eyes as I gave thanks to the ultimate giver of Life.

Sue returned with the sandwiches and milk. Daisy was still up. She'd stood for, maybe, a whole fifteen minutes. I came away from her and she sank quickly down to rest. I put some sweet feed out for her and we sat down alongside and enjoyed our lunch together.

I must say, there have been few other times in my life when I have felt so triumphant and so close to God. It was nothing short of a miracle.

Over the next few days Daisy was getting up more often and standing longer. Now, thankfully, we didn't have to roll her over to change her bedding and wash her sores. I was even able to start milking as she stood, which made the chore infinitely easier. However, in the long ordeal of being a "down cow" Daisy had lost a lot of weight. Standing up, you could really notice it. She looked like just hide on bone. You could count all her ribs. There were knobs, bumps and bulges on her that I'd never before noticed on a cow. I wondered if she had developed internal problems. But her appetite was strong and improving daily. We gave her plenty of hay and sweet feed and water twice a day. She seemed contented for the time being, there in the ancient sheep barn.

Mean time, the farm's other Milking Devon heifer, Baby, had given birth to a bull calf of half hereford ancestry, as expected. Thankfully, cow and calf were doing fine. I had had enough of rescuing cows.

It was now about mid-May and the tourist season was starting to pick up there at Butternut Hill Farm and Village. In order to recharge my cash reserves I began doing my usual tintype portrait photography at my wagon camp near the old sheep barn and Daisy. When nobody was around, I began to leave the barn doors facing my camp open so Daisy could have some nice warm sunshine as she lay on her straw nest.

Well...it didn't take her long to spot the new lush grass coming up in the barnyard. Next thing I knew, I saw her out lying in the grass happily chomping away. She would eat all she could reach around her and then force herself up and wobble over to another patch, lay down, rest and eat some more. We agreed to just let her enjoy herself. I knew the grass would be excellent for her and also make her want to get up and walk around to get more of it. Sorta like bovine rehabilitation therapy. It seemed to be just what the doctor ordered. After only a couple days she was walking almost normally. We put her in the big pasture with the ox team. She held her own like a regular cow.

Many of the farm and village museum employees came by to see Daisy and heap praises on her and to tell us what a fine thing we had done. Even Fritz, the director, was impressed. He congratulated us and reconfirmed the verbal deal we had made. She was definitely our cow. But as expected, his son Kent didn't have much to say about Daisy other than, "You got her on her feet, I see, but she's probably never going to breed again. Likely she's too scared up inside."

My answer was, "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it."

Whatever the case, I was sure enjoying Daisy's fresh creamy milk in ever increasing abundance. Maybe it was just the newness of it all, but Sue and I practically fought over who would milk her. We compromised. I would do the evening milking.

Sue and I both thought it a shame that the museum visitors couldn't see us milk Daisy. But they weren't there in the early morning and evening. The nine to five world just wasn't our world. The Butternut Hill Farm wasn't our world, really, either.

It was now time to get Daisy ready for life on the road. First, she had to get used to being tethered to the back of a moving wagon. So we tied her to the back end of the farm's ox cart while my ox team pulled the cart around the farm roadways. She was hesitant to follow but soon caught on to the program and went along willingly.

Next, she had to learn to be staked out by her halter on a chain and picket pin for an extended period of time. I staked her out on a lush grassy area just on the other side of the pasture fence. This presented no problem for Daisy. She calmly moved about eating everything she could reach.

But the biggest hurdle to cross was going to be putting shoes on her. Without shoes, her hooves might wear down too much as we traveled.

The shoes for cattle and oxen are different from a horse's. Cattle have a split hoof. Each half has its own crescent shaped steel shoe.

To forge out Daisy's shoes, and more shoes for my ox team, I used the farm's blacksmith shop. I was well used to shoeing my own oxen, as well as my horses, as they stood. In spite of a few battles with them, I always got the job done. Now, would Daisy stand for me to nail shoes on her? I had to drive four light horseshoe nails

through her thin hoof walls, avoiding any sensitive area of nerves and blood vessels, in order to secure a shoe on each half of her foot. Amazingly, when the day came, she gave me hardly a moments trouble. There she stood contentedly as I held her foreleg and foot up on a padded wooden box, flattened the surface of the hoof with a rasp and nailed on the shoes. And her rear feet were no problem to lay back on the box and work on. Perhaps she was so good because of my constant attention and handling of her over the past two months, I don't know. I do know any ordinary cow would have kicked me, and knocked that box to pieces. Even my ox team, that I had shod many times before, gave me some fits the next day. The meat was ripped out of one of my fingers when an ox jerked his foot away and the end of an unclenched nail caught me. I taped my finger up tight to stop the bleeding and to keep dirt out, and continued on. Likely there was no one within eight hundred miles who has ever sod an ox. So I had little choice but to grit my teeth and finish the job. A couple days later I reshod my horses, as well.

In the winter we had planned to push off by about the first of May. But Daisy had changed that to mid-June. We were sure now it had been well worth the wait. Daisy was a fine addition to our entourage. But Daisy wasn't our only new addition for also we had rescued another farm animal while waiting for Daisy to mend.

"Yellow Hen" was the name we gave her, and a fine big yellow hen she was. The only one to survive out of the farm's chicken flock after a night when raccoons had gotten into the coop. Kent had forgotten to shut the coop door, which invited the killers to come in. Poor Yellow Hen had a very bloody and banged up head when we found her in the corner of the coop among several dead chickens. She seemed half dazed when we put her in a box and took her to our wagon. Everybody thought that, this time for sure, we were wasting our time. With some TLC, a few freshly dug worms, and peanut butter sandwiches, she soon perked up and in a few days was out pecking around the wagon. Quickly she adopted the wagon as home and would come right back to her nest box in the wagon at sunset, or any time she felt the undeniable urge to lay an egg.

We asked Fritz if we could have the hen and he happily complied. I can't recall having any finer, obedient and more useful little pet than that hen. She laid us a nice big brown egg almost every day. We were now practically a small farm on wagon wheels, with our own fresh milk and eggs. We were ready to push off.

Before we could get away, Fritz called us to his office for a meeting. He offered us jobs if we would stay. I declined. Had he made it a month or two before, I might have taken him up on it and could still be there today.

We hitched up and left the next day, to fond farewells.

The trials, tribulations and glories of my wagon travels are worthy of a book, and in fact I have written some about them, so I won't go into the details here of the travels on east. In short, we meandered on out of Ohio, through the northwest corner of Pennsylvania and on into central New York's Finger Lake country. We liked the area so much that we decided it was probably time to settle down to some land of our own and try our hand at small farming. Near the small town of Dundee we bought 46 acres of half-wild but nicely laid land. By hand I dug a well, built a log cabin, put up a split rail corral and primitive shed and then settled in for the winter.

By spring we decided it was time Daisy be bred. Visions, we had, of our own little herd of registered American Milking Devons. But because there wasn't a bull of the breed within some five hundred miles of us, we had to try the artificial insemination method. Through



interesting experience but it was time to return to what she called "The Real World." She had made the acquaintance of a young fellow who had been working with me learning the rare old tintype photography skills I had mastered while on wagon travels. So it happened that one day the two of them got in his new mini-van and drove away. She never returned as my wife, but divorced me and married him and settled in Virginia to pursue the much more opulent "real world" lifestyle. Sometime later, after they had gotten a nice little farmette in the Shenandoah Valley, she remembered Daisy and wrote to ask if I would let her have her. Immediately I replied with a letter saying, "No way would I allow Daisy to fall into the hands of the faithless."

I've remained alone here all these years; but not for Devons. Daisy has gone on to have five more calves for me and is in a couple weeks due to birth another. A fine unrelated registered Milking Devon bull I've purchased, now does the breeding. He has proven to be very effective.

Yes, Daisy, the little reject cow, became the cornerstone of my little Milking Devon herd. Truly a gift from God.

My thoughts turn back to that Christmas Nativity scene there in Ohio years ago and also to the original one almost two thousand years ago. The Christ Child in the cow stable went on to be scorned by the orthodox of his day. He was the stone the builders had rejected. Yet, through faith, He had become the cornerstone of mankind. May we always remember that and cling to such faith, and may Daisy's descendants number in the thousands on a thousand hills. Amen!

NOTE: SOME OF THE NAMES OF PEOPLE AND PLACES HAVE BEEN CHANGED IN THIS STORY.

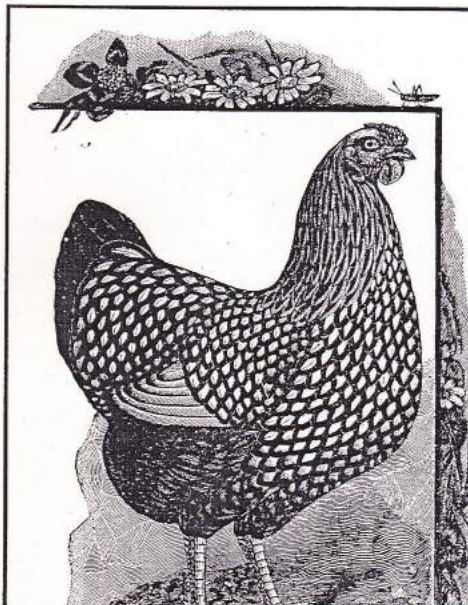
the Sturbridge Village Living History Museum in Massachusetts, we were able to find a source of the frozen semen straws we would need. Seven straws were relayed to our local A.I. technician. When Daisy showed signs of her estrus (or heat cycle), I borrowed a neighbor's phone and called the technician, who arrived in a short time and inseminated her with one of the straws. Things did not click, though. She kept coming into heat every 21 days. Each time the A.I. man bred her we were minus a valuable straw of semen.

I wondered now about Kent's prediction that she would never breed again. With apprehension, I had the

vet come round for a check up. His verdict was, "All seems normal inside."

Down to our last straw, we tried one more time. She caught! Life is indeed a mystery. We dried her off. Nine months and ten days later she delivered, without any complications, a nice big healthy bull calf. Once more Daisy has proven the critics and the faithless wrong. It was yet another God given miracle in our own little nativity scene.

But life is not all triumphs. After a couple years here working hard to try to carve something out for ourselves on this land, my wife Sue decided it had been an



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