

Hey Neighbor



For The Love Of Horses

By Frank J. Buchman

Draft Teams Demonstrate Old-Fashioned Haying Methods

Horses help make their own feedstuff.

That's the way it was in days gone by, as horsepower was responsible for harvesting grass to be made into hay. Those days were relived recently at the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve south of Strong City.

A steady stream of visitors from throughout the Midwest, as indicated by a parking lot survey of car license plates, watched the action of draft team mowing and raking the prairie grass. Then spectators got hands-

on experience as they pitched dried hay onto what appeared to be a new hay rack pulled by a team.

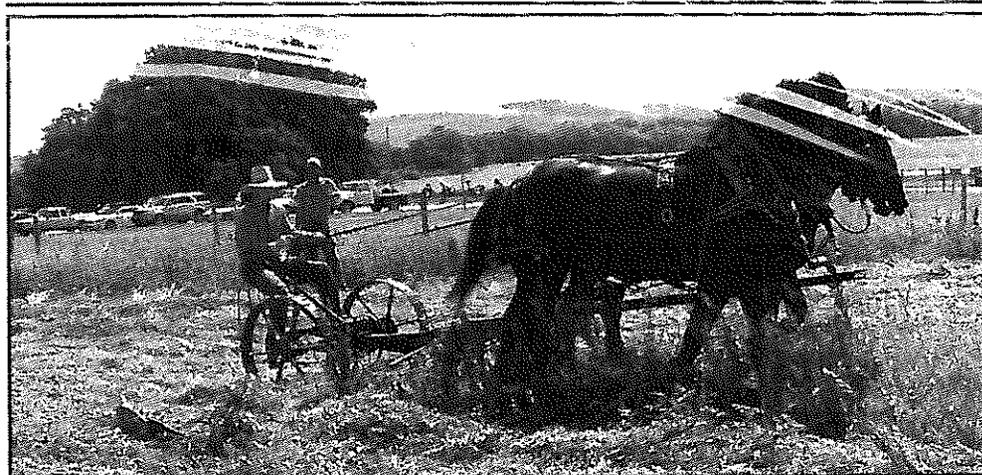
The team-powered dump rake had accumulated dried prairie hay into a windrow for more convenient work of the inexperienced pitchfork handlers. Hay was then to be stored in stacks for later feeding.

Some of those in attendance couldn't understand the procedure, indicating that they always thought hay came in bales. They didn't know it was really grass

grown on the prairie, mowed and dried, then stored in haystacks, or baled as is now common.

Four teams were on hand for the demonstrations. However, Winston Sommerfeld of Newton had brought his team a couple days earlier to mow down some of the native Flint Hills bluestem acreage, so it would be dry enough for stacking.

An early century McCor-



Larry Patton of El Dorado drove his team of black Percherons, Linzy and Lucy, pulling an antique sickle mower during the old-fashioned haying demonstration at the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, south of Strong City. His wife, Vicki, was on the sidelines discussing operation of the equipment and history of the area with visitors.

mick-Deering seven-foot, wheel-powered section mower, owned by Derral Sommerfeld, Tecumseh, was used for part of the mowing. His son-in-law, Matt Klass, was on the lines of the Belgian team, Bob and Bill.

A parts book for the antique mowing machine was located on the internet, so the owner can readily make repairs on the century-old implement when necessary. "It's getting kind of dull, so the mowing isn't as good as

we'd like," Derral pointed out. "If a section would happen to break, I can get a replacement at a farm store," he added.

Larry and Vicki Patton of El Dorado had their team of black Percherons, Linzy and

Lucy, pulling another mower with Larry on the lines. Vicki was on the sidelines discussing operation of the equipment and history of the area with visitors.

About noon, the Pattons unhooked their horses from the mower and hauled the team to Cottonwood Falls, hooked them on another vehicle and participated in the Flint Hills Rodeo Parade into Strong City.

The couple helped start

Protect the Flint Hills, which Larry serves as president and Vicki as secretary. Their goals include encouraging Sierra Club members and the general public to understand the role that prairies play in the health of the planet.

"The tallgrass prairie is one of the most endangered ecosystems in the world," Larry related. "Only 3 percent of North America's tallgrass prairie remains undis-

turbed, and most of that is in the Flint Hills."

With 14 horses on their Harvey County farm, Winston and Jan Sommerfeld have two Belgian teams, along with a Percheron team and a team of half-Standardbred, half-draft horses. "We're semi-retired, so we spend quite a bit of time working with our horses," Winston admitted. "We operate the Country Boys Carriage and Prairie Adventures."

They do some of their own farm work with teams, go to re-enactments like this one, parades and about anything where the big horses are exposed to the public. "We have been to a number of festivals, parties, school parties, company picnics, business promotions and fund-raising events," Winston stated.

The Prairie Adventure side of the business offers groups of families, friends or others an opportunity to "live the past" for a day or half a day on a covered wagon train in original wagons doing things that the pioneers did.

"Share the wide-open spaces with our crew. Come hungry for a delicious pioneer campsite meal or picnic on the trail or both," described Winston. "Re-enactors may be added to further enhance your prairie adventure. Travel back to earlier days through stories and other fun activities."

In addition to horse-drawn farm implements and covered wagons, Winston has several other vehicles which can be pulled with his horses. "We have a white wedding carriage, a vis-à-vis, a six-seated surrey with a fringe top, an intimate two-seated carriage and others," he said.

Their Country Boys business was presented the award for Keeping the Pioneer Story Alive by the Kansas Sampler Foundation in 2000.

Having raised a number of their own horses, Winston does the training personally at the Sommerfeld's place.

"I generally hook a colt

on a well-broke old horse, start out slow and before long they learn what I expect from them," he explained.

The teams are a common sight around the farm neighborhood. "We needed milk the other day, so I hooked a team, and we drove to Newton and bought a gallon at Braum's," Winston declared.

During the haying demonstrations, son Derral

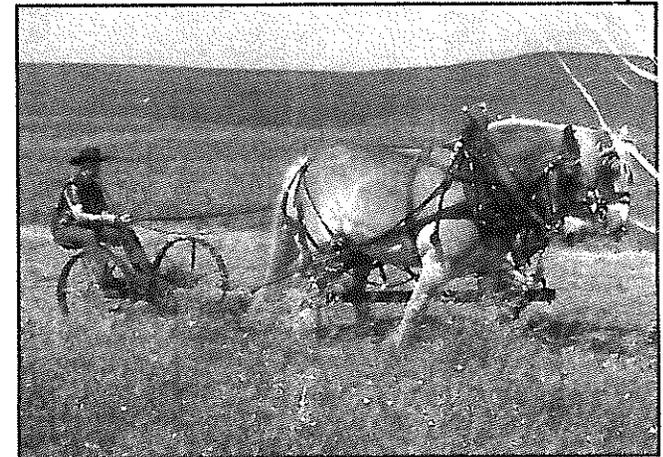
and his wife Sheila had another Belgian team, Amos and Andy, hooked to a Bain box wagon giving visitors tours into the Flint Hills pastures.

"I built this wagon, according to exact factory specifications for an original Bain wagon, and then sold it to the Preserve," Derral remarked. "This is actually the

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Derral Sommerfeld of Tecumseh drove his Belgian team, Amos and Andy, pulling a Bain box wagon giving visitors tours of Flint Hills pastures during the haying demonstrations at the Prairie Preserve near Strong City. He built the new wagon exact to Bain factory specifications for an original wagon over a century ago.



Matt Klass was on the lines of a Belgian team, Bob and Bill, owned by Derral Sommerfeld of Tecumseh, mowing native Flint Hills grass during old-fashioned haying demonstration in Chase County.

For the love of horses . . . continued

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first time the wagon has been used. All of the construction is new, except for

the hubs, which are from an old wagon.”

Brightly painted green, with a red Bain insignia, the wagon has a step on the back

making it easy for passengers to board. Bows can be conveniently installed to make the vehicle into a covered wagon, almost exactly like the ones pioneers crossed the prairie in over a century ago.

In addition to offering overland wagon train excursions for the public, Derral and Sheila operate a wagon reproduction and wagon works business.

While other implements such as stackers, loaders and go-devils were not available for the demonstrations, their design and uses were explained briefly to the interested visitors.

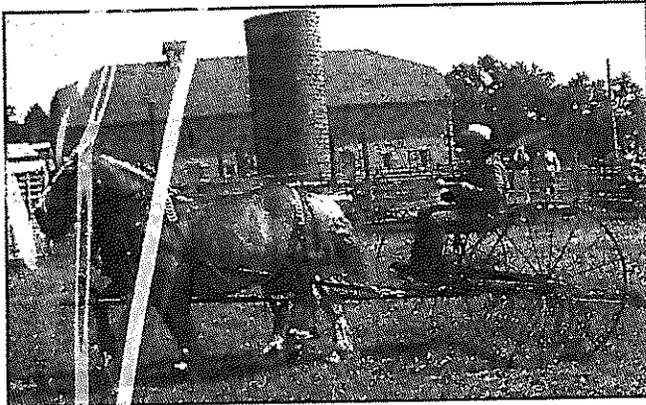
Throughout the day, tours were also given of the picturesque home and large horse and hay barn on the original Spring Hill Farm

and Stock Ranch, now better known as the Z-Bar Ranch.

Staff of the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve provided tours of the facilities, which had other re-entractments such as wool spinning in progress at the same time.

Park ranger Jeff Rundell, who assisted with the haying demonstration, has been an employee at the Preserve for three years. While the horse activities draw special favor, Rundell verified, “I do a little bit of everything around here.”

The Sommerfelds and Pattons were obviously enthused about their participation in the old-fashioned haying demonstration and welcomed opportunities to assist other communities in such endeavors.



Winston Sommerfeld of Newton mowed native grass at the Prairie Preserve near Strong City a couple of days before the public haying demonstrations when he raked the hay to be stacked by visitors on the hay wagon in the background. The historic native stone barn was built in the early 1880s.