

Living History

Volume 1, Number 3

Autumn 1991

Joust a little bit longer

"If you hear the words, 'Hold, freeze,'" the woman calling herself Shawna of Brandwen told me, "it means someone is in grave danger, possibly you." I was already feeling conspicuous, dressed in curduroys and a J. Crew maroon shirt and snapping pictures of knights in non-metallic armor whacking each other with duct-taped sticks disguised as swords. "People don't usually get hurt," m'lady added, "but you can't be too careful.

Little did I know what I was in for as I followed the SCA signs up Zena-Highwoods Road recently and descended upon the King and Queen's Champion Rattan Tournament at the Highwoods Sportsmen's Club at the juncture of Saugerties, Woodstock and Kingston. SCA is a acronym for the Society for Creative Anachronism, Inc., an international organization of amateur medievalists "focused on historical reenactments from the time of the fall of Rome up through the Renaissance."

SCA is holding its unofficial 25th anniversary this year, and last weekend was one of a series of battling events sponsored by the northern Ulster County Shire of Nordenhalle. The Shire, I was told by Shawna of Brandwen (Sharon Benson of Kingston), is part of the Kingdom of the East, whose

monarchs, King Ronald and Queen Katherine, and consorts, Prince Belfour and Princess Luna, would surely be in attendance.

"These events are definitely not open to the public," m'lady tells me as I proceed with her through swarms of tunic-clad squires, armored knights and damsels in big dresses. "It's a very complicated event," she adds.

In a ring before us, Lord Elvis of Presley stands before Lord Kahil of Gibran while a berobed marshall speaks to the assembled. "Respect your

honored opponent, respect your highnesses, the King and Queen of the East," the marshall declares, reading from a scroll. "Pay heed to your marshall and run not me over," the marshall adds, as squires check codpieces, and the knights bow to their monarchs and ladies, swords in each hand.

"God, I'd marshall this one from outside the ring if I were you, Hal," a jester quietly says to the marshall, who hightails it under the rope as the two knights have at each other in a flurry of whackings. Within a minute, both are on their knees, beating

Continued on page 11



Paul Smart is a reporter for the Woodstock Times. This article appeared in the July 3, 1991 issue of the Woodstock Times.

COMMUNICATIONS

To the Editor

Greetings. We received Volume 1, Number 2 of "Living History". I presume this must be a regional ALFAM newsletter like Kudza (southeast) or MOMCC (midwest), but you don't have a vary clear editorial page. Please let us know who you are. We would be interested in a newsletter exchange. We include AMBC material you might wish to publish.

Best Wishes,
 Don Bixby
 The American Minor Breeds Conservancy
 Box 477, Pittsboro, North Carolina 27312

From the Editor

Dear Don,

Thanks for the nice letter and information on your AMBC group (The American Minor Breeds Conservancy). Your nationwide efforts to conserve and promote endangered and minor breeds of livestock are certainly important to the living history movement. I would like to feature AMBC in a future issue of this quarterly journal. Whom should I contact?

I know of ALFAM (The Association for Living Historical

Farms and Acricultural Museums: Smithsonian Institution: Washington, DC 20560) and the effective network they have created, but what are the regional newsletters you mention? I am a newcomer to all of this.

Having recently adopted a rural Hudson Valley heritage, this editor comes to the task with a Dutchman's bias and a passion for reviving his local (Ulster County, NY) New World culture which he sees as being neglected and moved aside like its vanishing barn tradition. and forgotten tools but he is hoping the journal will continue to attract articles about living history from many viewpoints and regions of our contemporary world. The number of subscriptions to Living History has been small but the wide geographic distribution is encouraging.

To the Editor

Gentlemen,

I would like to subscribe to your publication "Living History". I am especially interested in finding information regarding pre-European contact, Native American agriculture techniques.

Curtis R. Best
 Holden Massachusetts

From the Editor

Me too. Check out Arthur C. Parker's book on maize, page 4 of this issue.

To the Editor

Dear Mr. Sinclair:

First let me thank you for the complimentary issues of "Living History". Our ad looks very attractive. However, we were a little disappointed not to find an article on the Winery.

Our Winemaster, Cesar Baeza, would still be interested in a telephone interview. Perhaps your story could highlight the new Champagne, Grand Monarque Cuvee- 1989 R.D. (Recent Disgorge); Methode Champenoise; 70% Pinot Noir, 30% Chardonnay from Hudson River vineyards.

We hope to be hearing from you soon regarding the above.

Sincerely,
 Hilda Ellis, for the Brotherhood Winery
 Washingtonville, NY
 10992

From the Editor

Dear Hilda,

Sorry not to have gotten back to you sooner. I did appreciate your ad and will give Cesar a call. This magazine appreciates all of its advertisements and subscriptions because you and they are what will hopefully make this publication successful financially through being a service to both.

Being the oldest winery in America certainly makes you historically noteworthy, but I can not always write material about my advertisers. Most of the businesses, organizations and services who advertise in *Living History* I know and would recommend their work. I look forward to talking with Cesar and hope that we can do business again in the future.

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GROWING IN PLUMAS COUNTY

Many people in Plumas County are investigating new ways to bring in much needed outside dollars. Many ideas are under discussion, including promoting tourism, attracting non-polluting high-technology industry and stabilizing the timber industry.

In the process I've been asking, "Whatever happened to farming in Plumas County?" Some people say that nothing can be grown around here. A short trip in the Plumas County Museum and a look at old photographs and agricultural reports proves this to be wrong. The diversification of agriculture addressed most local needs 130 years ago, including the planting of wheat in American Indian and Thompson Valleys and the operation of flour mills in Thompson and Indian Valleys where local grain was milled. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, local dairy herds produced butter and cheese. We can still see remnants of apple orchards. Large vegetable gardens were much more common than today.

What has caused our agriculture industry in Plumas County to shift from being diversified to centering mainly on cattle ranching? This same trend of abandoning local agriculture and relying on food from other areas is common all over the United States. Communities are dependent on costly and energy-inefficient transportation systems for food. Local independence, which was once the foundation of our nation's strength, has for the most part, ended.

The possibilities of reversing this trend are considerable. Plumas County is

ideal for the creation of a regenerative agricultural system. Because large-scale farming hasn't existed here for several decades, intense insect problems found throughout the rest of the state wouldn't be as serious. By looking at the problems faced by the agricultural industry today, we can incorporate alternate farming techniques, thus avoiding trouble before it starts.

The establishment of a Living History Farm is one step toward a regenerative agricultural system. A Living History Farm is what the name implies: a farm of historical interest operated as in the past, usually focusing on a time span of 20 to 50 years, such as 1850 to 1880, and utilizing farm equipment and vegetable varieties from the period.

The presence of a Living History Farm in Plumas County would boost the local economy. Jobs would be created and the attraction to tourists is obvious. A Living History Farm could lead the way to a more substantial agricultural system. Would-be farmers could see what grows well in the area before they make investments.

A Living History Farm would be a major step in preserving the historical uniqueness of this area. Already, many people work hard to preserve what is left of the past, and this would be a way to focus all of their toils.

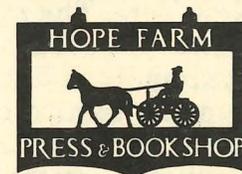
The concept of a Living History Farm isn't new. Many such farms are in operation all over the country. As our economy and social structure shifts, more creative means to secure a promising future for ourselves

and our children must be devised. Instead of looking solely ahead for all of our answers, a look into the past can help sort out our priorities and shape a new direction.

Cindy Robinson

Cindy Robinson is a poet and writer from Quincy (population about 5,000) in northern California. She grows a heritage tomato that suits the short growing season of her mountain home and she is interested in local history. She likes the writings of Wendell Barry.

Living History is published and edited by Peter Sinclair, P.O. Box 202, West Hurley, NY 12491, (914) 338-0257. Graphic design, typesetting and layout are done by Wickwire Graphics, 21 Dixon Ave., Woodstock, NY 12498, (914) 679-7562.



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CORN HUSKING

The following article is an edited chapter on corn husking from *The Book of Corn*, to be published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., in the spring of 1992. It's author, writer and food historian Betty Fussell, says that it will be well illustrated, with bibliography, etc., and is a food history, not a recipe book.

The husking peg or husking pin as it is sometimes called in the eastern states, is a tool which evidently originated with the Seneca Indians of western New York. The pin was of bear bone and the leather strap went around one finger. Its modified and manufactured models were still in use by Hudson Valley farmers until recently and it is sometimes fondly associated with the husking bee and nighttime gathering where the youths played the game of the red ear and danced to a neighbors fiddle. If you opened the husk of a red ear you could kiss the one of your choice.

In the days before hybrid corn the harvested crop came in a variety of sizes and sometimes colors. An occasional red ear could hopefully be found. It was a game the Iroquois had played although their prize of a braided strand of corn seems less alluring than a kiss. A French observer of the Iroquois wrote the following in 1724 and it may indicate the roll the husking bee played in the changes which would soon take place in Native society. Women had originated agriculture and now it was time to get the men to take a rest from their hunting and war making and come join in the harvest work and have some fun.

"At harvest time the corn

is gathered with the leaves surrounding the ears which serve as cords to keep the ears together. The binding of the ears belongs to a peculiar ceremony which takes place at night and it is the only occasion where the men, who do not trouble themselves about harvesting or field work, are called by the women to help." Fond memories of these native husking bees are recalled by Arthur C. Parker in his classic study of his people, *Iroquois Uses of Maize and other food plants*. A 120 page paperback reprint of this 1910 bulletin of the New York State Museum is available from Living History, \$10 including postage, Box 202, West Hurley, NY 12491.

See photo on page 8.

COURTLAND'S CORNHUSKERS

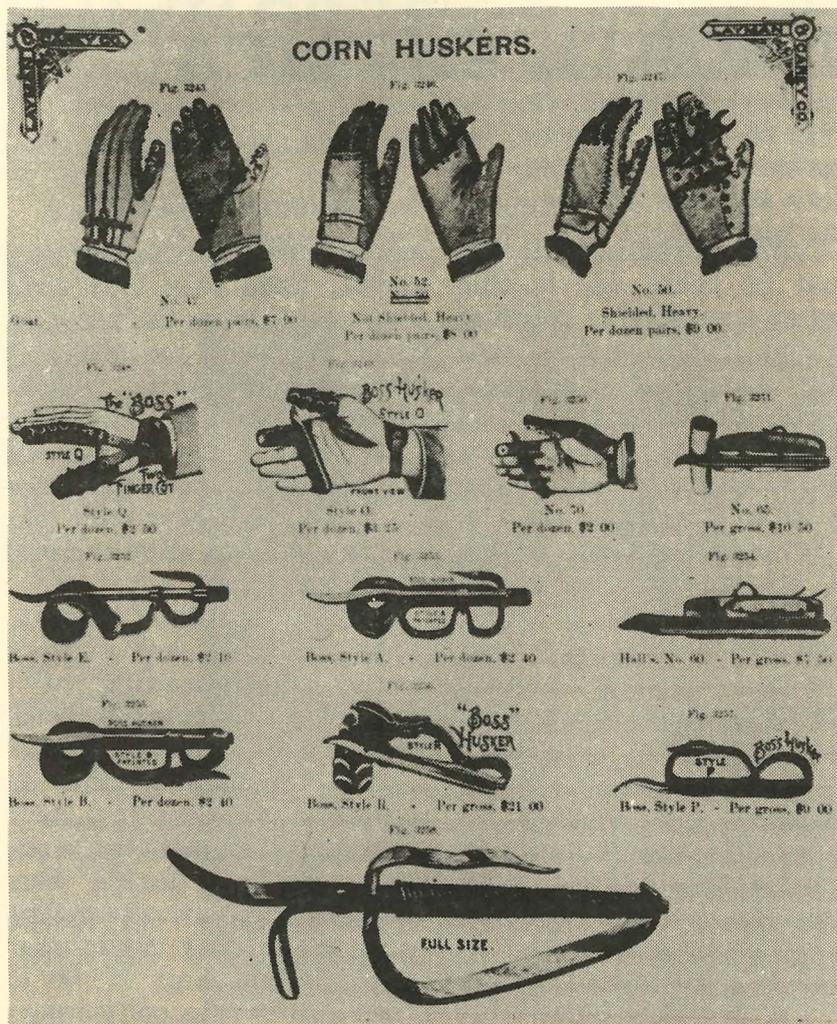
The liturgies of industrialism boomed over the car radio on Sunday morning as I drove through miniscule Illinois towns, headed for Hog Days in Kewanee. The paradox of the Midwest is that its farms and farmers are children of the industrial revolution, at once progressivist and conformist, like a capitalist Jesus.

As an ex-Presbyterian, I saw the paradox of rural America celebrating Labor Day, a rite of the urban proletariat, with country corn festivals and church-going. For paradox, take Delavan, Illinois, where all but a handful of its two thousand inhabitants were attending the town's six churches before enjoying a communal barbecue in a cook-shed decorated with corn. First the eating, then the

Frog Jumping Contest, Needle in the Straw, Tomahawk Throwing, Nail Driving, Corn Shelling, Lip Sink Contest and Cow Patty Throw—all played in the birthplace of factory corn. In Delavan in 1847, the corn that Robert Reid planted, and his son James crossbred, laid the foundations of America's corn industry—Reid's Yellow Dent.

Kewanee, while far from urban, was more proletarian than Delavan. At Kewanee the bars outnumber the churches and beer is not sequestered in a tent. Along the Main Street Midway was the World's Largest Pork Chop Barbecue, surrounded by mountains of deep-fried onion rings, foot-long corn dogs, lemon shake-ups for the temperate, deep-fried elephant's ears with maple glaze and funnel cakes with apples and candied cherries for the fatties. There's nothing genteel about Kewanee, Hog Capital of the World. I missed the Hog Jog Stampede, the Hog Calling Contest and the Kiddie Tractor Pull, but I found Kewanee's secret treasure, the National Corn Huskers' Hall of Fame and an ex-corn husking champ, Bill Rose.

Bill, a tall barrel-chested man of seventy-nine with hog-sized hands and thumbs like cigars, was selling raffle tickets for an afghan to benefit the Kewanee Historical Society, which devotes a corner of its building to the Hall of Fame. Bill pointed to a display of husking paraphernalia—the wrist hook, thumb hook, palm hook—and a wall of photos. "Here we're lined up waiting for the bomb to go off," Bill explained a *Life* photo of the 1935 national in Indiana. "Eighteen wagons, contestants from nine states, over 100,000 spectators mashed the corn down. There's Henry Wallace, he's the one started it in '24 in De Moines, Iowa. I got fourth place that day in Indiana, got second in the state, won the county." Bill is



Corn Husking Pegs, 1890 Laymen and Carey Trade Catalogue.

recalling a world that ended as abruptly in 1941 as the Pony Express in 1861. For corn husking, not only a necessity, but a national sport in the 1930s, stopped when the war ended the contests, and the combines ended husking by hand.

“Years ago we’d husk two rows at a time and the ears’d hang down. Now they plant the corn so thick we pick only one row at a time and you grab the ears different and got to hold onto ’em. They’re bred for combines ’cause that’s what’s doin’ the pickin’. Then a man’d do good to pick a hundred bushels a day, or about two acres. Now a combine picks eight hundred bushels an hour.”

In 1922 Henry Wallace challenged Midwestern farmers to improve the efficiency of their corn husking (not just quantity but clean ears) and offered a prize of \$50 for the best husking record for a day. The first contest took place in Des Moines and was won by Louis Curley, who picked 1644 pounds. The following year Wallace doubled the prize and set up the rules. Farm magazines became sponsors, donating prize money and crowning husking queens. Churches got into the act, providing food and tents for husking banquets. Entertainment by bands and barbershop quartets, automobile and farm machinery exhibits, educational

displays like Indian wickiups turned the contests into community fairs.

Almost overnight champion cornhuskers became national sports heroes, sought by promoters to endorse everything from steak restaurants to insurance policies. About the time one husker was signed for a promised Hollywood movie about corn husking, the farm papers required contestants to sign a pledge against paid promotions.

Wallace, who was no slouch at media promotion, used the pages of the *Farmer* to critique the husking techniques. Wallace compared the pinch and twist versus the free swing methods of a pair of major contenders in the December 1923 issue of his *Farmer*:

“Both Rickelman and Paul used thumb hooks, one a Kees and the other a Clark. Their method of husking, however, is totally different. Rickelman uses almost invariably the pinch and twist husking method, grasping the ear at the butt with the left hand with the thumb up. The thumb hook on his right hand brushes the husks aside so that he can grasp the ear and give the twist which usually breaks the ear quite clean of husks. Occasionally, however, the Rickelman method results in a sleep-shucked ear... Paul uses the standard hook method, but he has a free and easy, rhythmical swing which makes his husking rather prettier to watch than the Rickelman husking.”

By the 1930s the contests were covered by *Newsweek* and *Life*, by radio and newsreel, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt fired the opening shot from the White House. In 1940, the Nubbin Derby or Battle of the Bangboards, as NBC’s National Farm and Home Hour called it, drew a record crowd of 160,000



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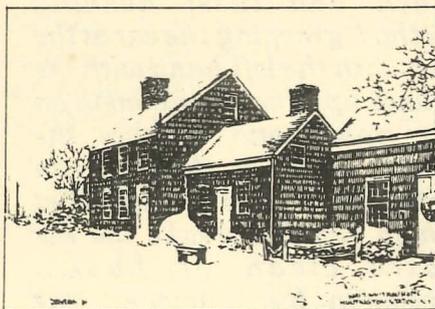
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TIMBER FRAMERS GUILD OF NORTH AMERICA

Timber Framing all but died out 50 years ago in this country as a method of building with wood. Today a small but growing group of craftsmen, architects, builders, historians and interested people are joining forces to make the old techniques accessible to future generations.

Several hundred enthusiasts associated with the Timber Framers Guild of North America met in Troy, New York in early June for their seventeenth annual convention. Timber framers from all over the U.S. and Canada plus representatives from abroad were on hand for networking, demonstrations, lectures, and workshops.

You can easily recognize traditional timber framing without much technical knowledge. It is a method of constructing the framework of a building using large timbers of wood which are joined, drilled and held together with wooden pins sometimes called "tree nails."

From the mid 19th century and into the early 20th century sawed wood and iron nails became less expensive and more widely available. Builders abandoned timber framing and adopted a technique called balloon framing, or stick framing as it is known to some modern timber frame carpenters. It is the common method of building with wood today.

The frames of old houses and barns built with timbers remind us of the days when, aside from log construction, timber framing was the only method used. It was a craft

learned on the job and by word of mouth, little was ever written down, so that in the remains of these historic buildings, the traditions of North American timber framing have been preserved. Today the architectural historian and the modern timber frame carpenter share their knowledge, often combining the two interests.

Through this sharing of information we are gaining a better understanding of the cultural and historical development of the timber frame and its regional traditions. This more complete and accurate picture of our past is important to the many living history farms across America which are attempting to recreate farming traditions of their region and it is also important to the contemporary builder who learns new techniques of joinery and traditions of style. Timber Framing has entered a new and expanding era.

This was evident at the June gathering at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy. Founded as an educational institution less than a decade ago, the TFG has grown to a membership approaching 1,000, including 165 commercial concerns. The guild sponsors national and regional conventions and publishes a journal and newsletter.

The 400 people who attended the three day convention included 31 exhibitors of hand and power tools, panel systems and demonstrations of computer graphics. There was a display of historic tools and examples of

early joinery salvaged from old frames, lectures on historic and technical aspects of timber framing, and demonstrations of hand hewing, assembling and raising the bent. The event was an extraordinary example of living history.

The Guild encompasses a wide range of interests from architectural scholars to industrial manufacturers. However, the core of the guild is the growing number of independent carpenters and builders who are turning to timber frame construction. They come from many walks of life attracted by the beauty, practicality, and rich cultural heritage of timber framing.

Members of Amish communities in Pennsylvania and Ohio maintain shops which construct custom frames for barns and houses. John Mill, a young Amish carpenter was there with his family. He is a Guild member who owns Oakbridge Timber Framing of Howard, Ohio. He said that his two man shop, which builds about 12 frames a year, uses wood working tools operated by compressed air generated by a diesel-powered compressor. John loves the Amish barn raisings which are a time of celebration and an affirmation of community among his people, just as much now as they have been in the past.

Jack Sobon from Windsor, Massachusetts, is a builder who

uses only hand tools. Sometimes he hews the beams with his axe from the logs of a nearby stand of timber. He builds about three new frames a year, but much of his work is with barn restoration, an expanding field as individuals and communities recognize the heritage value of their old barns and frame

barren campus where they met; by making the effects of logging in California and the Northeast known; and by expressing the need for forest management, a concern at this year's conference.

Next year's gathering will be at Guelph, Ontario, about 40 miles west of Toronto where the erection of a covered bridge is planned.

P.S.



For further information write:

Timber Framers Guild
P.O. Box 1046
Keene, NH
03431

Oakbridge Timber Framing
20857 Earnest
Earnest Rd.
Howard, OH
43028

Jack A. Sobon
Box 201
Shaw Rd.
Windsor, MA
01270

His book, *Timber Frame Construction*, is available from him for \$12.95.

houses.

Jack, like a number of the experienced timber framers, conducts workshops privately and at museums. For the student of the craft this personal contact and hands on instruction is always the best teacher. Jack, a graduate architect, has co-authored an excellent book giving practical and historical information.

A timber framer often knows and uses a variety of local woods and works closely with saw mills and loggers in his area. As a business, timber framing is good for the local economy but the Guild membership at the Troy Conference this spring also expressed their environmental awareness by the ceremonial planting of 38 trees on the rather

Caption for above photo: Timber framer, Jack Sobon demonstrates an antique boring tool at the Guild's 7th annual conference.

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COURTLAND'S CORNHUSKERS

Continued from page 4

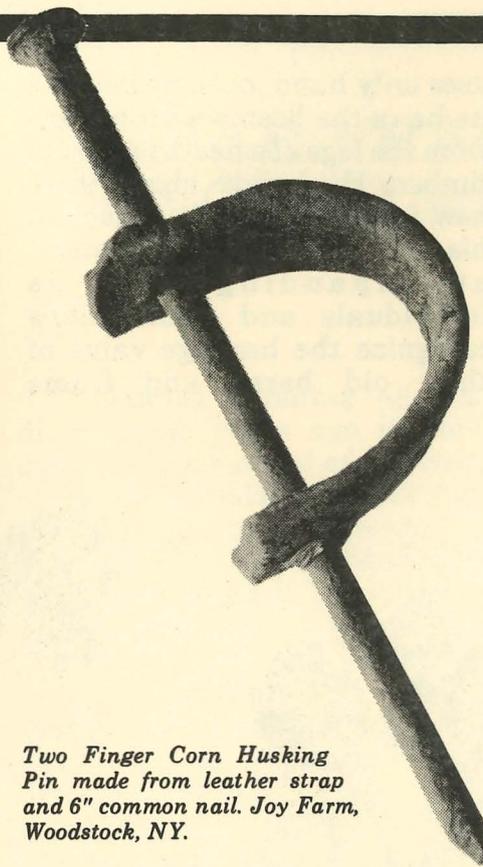
people, before the war ended the contests were already doomed by the advent of harvesting machines.

Machines may have supplanted the hands but not the hearts of veteran huskers. A few old timers began to revive local contests in 1970 and revived the national in 1975 in Oakley, Kansas, purely for sport. Today nine states—Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, South Dakota, Minnesota and Missouri—compete in the national, the host town and state varying from year to year. This year it was Oakley's turn again, Bill said.

Courtland is just across the border from Hildreth, Nebraska, and is inhabited mostly by three generations of Johnsons and Thompsons, who run the show. Courtland is the kind of small town that wears its sporting heart on its shop windows: "Eat the Bluejays," says Gero's Cafe; "Bank the Panthers," says the Swedish-American Bank. I found the husking field on Highway 36, just 3½ miles east of Courtland.

Most of the folk were standing around waiting, waiting for the drivers to hitch up the wagons, waiting for the heats of each division to be announced, waiting for the starting gun to go off and then to go off again at the end of thirty minutes, waiting for the loads to be weighed and the results posted, waiting for the combine to finish off the picked rows, waiting in line to eat a porkburger and a lard-crust rhubarb pie and to drink a lot of lemonade to assuage the hot dry heat. But no one's in a hurry in Courtland and waiting leaves plenty of time to talk. I talked to oldsters and youngsters and unhusked a whole new world of corn.

"This is my thirtieth contest," said Vernon Erickson, who is seventy-five and makes all



Two Finger Corn Husking Pin made from leather strap and 6" common nail. Joy Farm, Woodstock, NY.

the trophies for the contest by hand. His big competition is Gene Wawlker, a mere sixty-nine. "Gene won last year, so Vernon's hot to win today," said Gene's wife. Gene said his best score was twenty-four pounds a minute, "but the corn is heavier this year and that slows you down." As a boy he shucked from September to April, six days a week, with maybe two foot of snow on the cornfields. "You got ten cents a bushel and if you shucked a hundred bushes, ten bucks a day—ideal for a boy who wanted to get out and hustle."

As seniors, they don't compete with the age group designated Men's National, twenty-one to sixty-four. Of the seven divisions at each contest, this is the toughest, for the men have to pick for a full half hour. Youths and seniors pick only for ten minutes, women for twenty. "Ideal age is twenty to thirty but if you didn't grow up with it, it's kinda hard," said one husker, "gotta be able to do it blindfold."

At 7:00 sharp I joined the chowline with three hundred others in the high school

gymnasium of a nearby hamlet. Sitting at a table across from me, Orville Peterson, at eighty, had just competed for the fifty-eighth time. Next to him Roy Hubbard, at nine, had competed for his third and won first place in the sixteen-and-under division.

Afterwards, as I drove to a distant motel through a landscape totally black, totally flat, the horizon exploded. "We have a little bit of everything our here—floods, droughts, tornadoes," some Thompson had told me. "A little twister the other day hit Harding and leveled the town, you wouldn't believe the debris." I believed it now, watching pitchforks of lightning stab ricks of clouds, booming like Armageddon, obliterating on my radio Big Joe's Polka Show and Your Radio Bible Class.

I caught up with Bob Ferguson again at the Iowa state contest, held at the Living History Farms in Des Moines. I also caught up with Herb Plambeck, who's been broadcasting farm news on the radio for fifty years, with time out for reporting World War II and Vietnam, and for serving as assistant to former Agriculture Secretary Earl Butz. Herb, an intense, worrying man of seventy-nine, is the guiding spirit behind the 1984 husking revival and founder of the National Corn Huskers Association and its newsletter, *Shucks*.

The theme song of all this cornhusking revival is, "There's been a change." "In the old days a couple would pick together and put the baby in the back of the wagon," said Herb. "The whole family picked or the harvest wouldn't get done. Tried to get it done by Thanksgiving, get the house banked up to insulate against the cold, get the produce stored in the root cellar, get the livestock penned. Then it was 365 days you had work to do. Now it's corn, soybeans and Florida."

There's been a change,

says Joe Anholt, a former national champ from Fort Dodge: "We'd stay out of school six to eight weeks every fall to get the crop done. They don't allow that anymore." There's been a change, says Ernest Heidecker of Lakota: "Nobody's got cattle anymore so nobody's using silage. Most people store corn shelled, 'cause last year we shelled 105,000 bushels from six hundred acres and if you did that with ear corn we'd a had to have cribs from here to Kansas and back."

There's been a change, says Garry Kupferschmid, of Mediapolis, Iowa, who capitalized on change in 1981 by founding International Corn Hook Collectors. With over a hundred members, they've expanded into all corn-related software and hardware, from corn sacks and shellers to Shawnee pottery, and now call themselves Corn Items Collectors. "About ten of us have got maybe 300 to 350 of them cornhooks, but I've probably got the biggest collection," Gary says, pointing to his display boards of antique pegs and hooks, with rare beauties like the "twin-spurred palm hook" or the "iron-mesh thumb stall."

But some things don't change, like the "two-buckle thumb hook" made since 1929 by the Raidt Manufacturing Company of Shenandoah, Iowa, and used today by Tony Polich. Or like the husking mitts and gloves that Raidt still sells.

Some things don't change, like the voices of American men talking corn-husking as if it were baseball or football or golf. "Good huskers are born not made," says Ray Oroke of Oskaloosa. "It's rhythm and stamina," says another. "It's breathing and concentration," says a third. "You just work hard as you can," says Bob Ferguson. "Hard work, clean living and a fierce determination to win,"

says Bill Rose. Winning takes the passion of Herb Plambeck, still broadcasting in the pages of *Shucks* the glory of champions who contend for honor on the fields of corn.

For further information:

Iowa Living History Farms
2600 NW 111th Street
Des Moines, Iowa 50322

National Corn Huskers Association
Herb Plambeck, Secretary
4909 Harwood Drive
De Moines, Iowa 50312

Terry's Specialties
Chillicothe, Missouri 04601
(The last manufacturer of husking pegs.)

BARN REPORT

To the Editor

What area of the country does *The New World Dutch Barn* cover? Are there any in Saugerties?

Barry Benepe
Saugerties, NY

From the Editor

Thanks for your \$20 Contributing Membership to *The Dutch Barn Preservation Society*.

There are some wonderful Dutch barns in Saugerties, but I think less than a dozen remain. They are an excellent and varied collection which demonstrates 100 years of regional development of this ancient and presistent architecture. The Dutch barns of New Jersey and New York, and a few in Ontario, Canada contain a number of local characteristics but together form an eastern tradition that originated soon after the Dutch settled the Hudson Valley. There are also later New World Dutch barn traditions in Michigan, Wisconsin, and other places in the Mid-West, where the Dutch established settlements in the 19th century.

CORN REPORT

In the Proceedings of the ALFAM Annual Meeting, Volume XI which is available to association members, in an article on genetics by Terry Sharrer, a possible future for maize is predicted.

"At present, maize converts about 1.3% of the sunlight it receives into everything that it is. Molecular biologists believe that the conversion ratio might be increased to a maximum of about 12%. The current average corn yield for the U.S. is 119.4 bushels per acre, with a total production of over 7 billion bushels. At 125 photosynthetic efficiency, average yields might reach over 1,100 bushels per acre, to a maximum of nearly 3,600 bushels. Even if corn acreage was drastically reduced under such conditions, our existing agricultural policies would be unworkable in almost any imaginable form."

Terry is a person who believes that as we glide into our unknown future we should hang on to a bit of the past behind us.

EEL REPORT

Do you have arthritic pains or are you healthy and thresh your sheaves of grains on the wooden floor below barn beams? Stop a moment, please, because in this quaint neck of the woods a flail is always tied with an eel skin and an ache is often treated with the same eel leather.

Don Conlkin of Port Jervis, New York has offered *Living History* a bag of fresh eel skins for tanning and they are available to you who live history. Throw away those flimsy and unsafe straps of cowhide and shabby wash cords that tie up your flails and do them right with Living History Eel skins. \$4 each including postage.

J.C. OF THE SCA

Upon the 4th of July, after reading Paul Smart's article (see page 1) in the local weekly newspaper, the *Woodstock Times*, which is published in a neighboring kingdom of these Catskill Mountains, I set off for the Cantine Field in distant Saugerties, and there, beyond the busy baseball field, the hot dog stands, the cars and milling crowd, back where the woods began again, among the clatter and noise of Medieval time, I met the patriarch J.C. dressed in a peaceful brown hooded gown. We arranged to meet and later in his accounting office in a nearby village we talked.

"Yes." J.C. told me, "The Society for Creative Anachronism is a Living History group. It all started at a Halloween party with a medieval theme in California 25 years ago. Everyone had so much fun they planned to do it again. Today there are two million members, 150 shires in the easter Kingdom but half or less pay their dues."

"I know it's like that everywhere," I said, thinking of my own preservation group, "and your membership is only \$6 and up. The many specialized journals and papers you people publish, on blacksmithing, herbology, gardening and weaving certainly are important to the New World Living History Movement, and you seem to have developed quite a cottage industry of independent craftspeople."

"Courtesy and chivalry is what sets us apart from other organizations." J.C. assured me, quoting from Queen Carol's Guide (See bibliography), "Courtesy involves simple politeness, common sense, and the Golden Rule... treat others as you would wish to be treated. As you progress in the Society you will easily learn the customs and mores of each kingdom and how history relates to our Current Middle Ages."

"Many of our members come with a scholarly interest in the culture, history and literature of the Middle Ages, but we create that historic period not as it was but as it should have been." J.C. spoke to me, sitting there at his desk, in his business suit, his brown robe hanging in the closet. "They take out religion which was 80% of the original," he confessed. "Don't get me wrong, there are ministers, priests, and rabbis who are members, but religion of any sort is *not* part of the SCA."

"So who carries your liability insurance?" I asked.

"We neither practice fencing nor archery in



public." J.R. said, and falling into an earlier role he concluded, "The Society has its own insurance against your claim. Give a membership and I'll introduce you to the King."

P.S.

For further information on SCA write:

The Society for Creative Anachronism, Inc.
Office of the Registry
P.O. Box 360743
Milpitas, CA 95035-0743

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Queen Carol's Guide was actually taken from Jay Anderson's book, *Time Machines: The World of Living History*, Nashville, Tennessee: American Association for State and Local History, 1984. It is an excellent overview of the living history movement. Stacy F. Roth of the Pennsbury Manor in Pennsylvania suggests it would also be helpful to read some of the critics of the form and suggests, *The Past is a Foreign Country* by David Lowenthal: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

JOUST A LITTLE BIT LONGER
Continued from front cover

on each other with sticks. Finally, one reels over onto his back and murmurs, "Nice one," to the victor, Lord Elvis.

"You literally fight to be king," m'lady tells me as we walk past archers, to the dark forest where lords and ladies quest for grail. "You have to beat everybody, then you become a prince. Finally, you become king for six months. The women fight, too." M'lady tells me there are 12 kingdoms, all based in the United States. Australia, she tells me, is a shire of the Western Kingdom, based in California, and Drakenwold, or Europe, is now a shire of the Kingdom of the East. A bit ironic, that," she laughs.

The SCA, Shawna tells me, backed up by her squire, Lauras Mercator, is looking for members. To help build up local membership, she says, the Shire of Nordenhalle will hold special demonstrations of their fighting and dancing methods at Saugerties' Cantine Field the afternoon of July 4, following a morning parade through town.

"We're trying to build up for Pennsic," m'lady adds. Pennsic, her man of Marcator says, is the kingdom's annual gathering in northwestern Pennsylvania, where over 8,000 "intimate friends" come together for a week of festivities, including great battles with a thousand armed knights on each side. Mercator lets me look through m'lady's copy of *Pike Staff*, the official SCA monthly magazine, while she speaks with another.

"M'lady, I must go now," I say to the damsel of Brandwen, bending on one knee. As I walk carefully through the growing festivities, the sound of manly battle about me, someone cries, "Hold, freeze!" I stop, mid-way to my Oldsmobile, and quietly await the world's end.

Paul Smart

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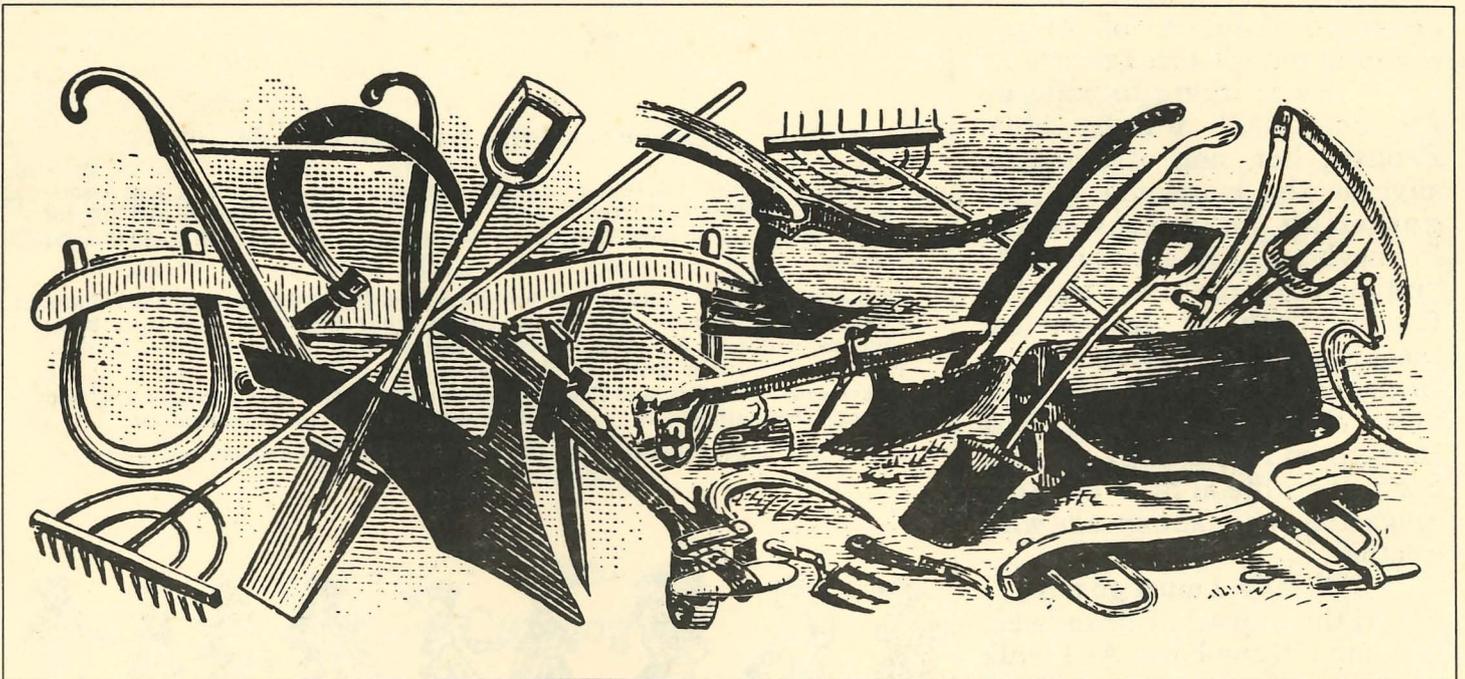
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