

# Chapter Four

## The Test

With my search for a good horse over, my wagon packed and shelves fully stocked, I had no reason to stay at Chris's any longer. By Monday afternoon Jake and I decided the trade suited us both. It was August already. I had to get going. I'd miss the warm pulse of this community and the drumming horses' footsteps which filled the air. Chris Lapp, his family, the Fishers, little Susie with her fresh baked goods, the Stoltzfuses and others had made my stay so special. It made me feel a little blue to think about leaving.

Chris said his farewells Tuesday before leaving for work. "I know you can do it," he assured me. "Keep in touch. There's a lot of people around here who will want to know how the traveler is making out." Chris's wife, Rachel, and daughters, Nancy, Naomi, and Lydia Mae, all came out to see me off. They gave me some hearty sliced meat sandwiches and a few glass quart jars of home canned soup to help me on my way. Standing by the house, wearing their pastel colored dresses, they waved goodbye as Brownie and I headed down the drive.

I hadn't gone far when I came upon an older Amish man working in his field. He was driving a team of mules to a mower. He wore the Lancaster County Amish style of clothing I was now completely familiar with: light colored short sleeved shirt, gray denim vest, broadfall pants, suspenders and wide flat brimmed light colored straw hat. I was surprised to see the man stop his mowing, kicking the machine out of gear. He left the cutter bar down, stepped down and left the mules on their own. He strode over to the fence line and called out to me, "Can say Dutch?"

I stopped Brownie and replied, "No. I'm not Amish". He looked back at his mules who shook their heads a bit to rid themselves of flies as best they could but stood their ground.

He looked my way again, stepping a little closer, and said, "I guess I've never seen a wagon like this around here and had to find out about it."

This man had a pleasant intelligent face, I thought. He seemed to be quite comfortable talking with an "English" as the Amish tend to call anyone who is not Amish. "I'm going to Florida with this horse and wagon. It's my first day out."

"Oh! Florida! All the way! That sounds really quite a big adventure. One things for sure, you'll really see the country."

The man showed himself to be very interested but in a non-probing sort of way. I found myself opening up, volunteering information about my stay at Chris's. As I related my pleasure in finding Brownie and being horse-drawn, the

man smiled and nodded his head, showing his appreciation for what I was doing. That was a nice encounter to have, especially on my first day out.

I continued on. The road I took was narrow and very quiet. The miles passed. As I approached one house two dogs came bounding my way, barking. Very shortly their owner, a chunky middle aged woman appeared, shouting and calling to her hounds. They complied with her commands partially, continuing to bark some but with less ferocity. When the woman saw me and had curbed her dogs well enough, she called out to me, "Oh please hold up. I want to get my camera." And off she went, back in to the house, dogs following.

I studied a covered bridge just up a ways as I waited. I thought maybe I'd get my antique view camera out and take a picture of it and made mention of this idea to the lady when she returned. She had left the dogs in the house, thankfully. The lady snapped a few pictures with her little camera. Then she suggested, "Pull up here on the lawn and let your horse get a bite to eat while you think about your picture. Does your horse need any water?" she asked. "I'll go get a pail full for him. Just wait." She was soon back with the water and Brownie took a few sips then put his head down and continued to nip the tender lawn grass off. It was totally impromptu and, as I'd discover through out much of my journey to come, a very typical kind of daily occurrence. The woman talked a bit more, wished me a safe trip and then went back to her house. I ate a quick couple of peanut butter and jam sandwiches and decided to just move on and not do any photographing.

As I ambled along down the peaceful county roads, questions ran through my mind, such as where will I camp tonight exactly? I would need to find some place to put my shingle out fairly soon and do some tintype portrait business, as well. All the money in the world I had left at that point was about \$125. While I had been at Chris's, I had heard of one of the more popular tourist attractions in the area. It was The Strasburg Railroad, a faithfully restored 19<sup>th</sup> century train that gave a tour by rail of Lancaster County's Amish country. It seemed like an ideal place for me to camp for a few days and do some picture business. I had given them a call only to be told it would have to be approved by the board of directors and that would take weeks if not months. So, in other words, no dice.

As I pulled up to the Caboose Motel, which was actually made up of old train cabooses, I was thinking about that "No" from the Strasburg Railroad. But, I was also hearing Doddy {what an Amish Grandfather is called} Fisher's voice in my head. He had said the people at the Caboose Motel, I'm sure, will have a spot for you to set up. He had also given me a brochure of the place. It was noticeably a thriving concern. It had a restaurant as well. The man in charge of everything was nice enough to take the time to come out and look at my outfit and see what I was doing. But he thought the Mill Bridge Village, on down the road not too far, would be more of an ideal location for me. He went back to his office and called

the folks at the Mill Bridge Village. I waited anxiously outside with Brownie. Pretty soon he came back to report that they would be waiting for me. I thanked him and headed on out in the wagon for the mysterious village. But first we had to wait at the railroad crossing for the old steam engine drawn train from the Strasburg railroad station to go by. The tourists were instantly busy snapping their cameras at me from the train car windows, whereas my undivided attention was glued on Brownie's ears and head. Would he spook? No, he did fine. He seemed to be only mildly concerned about this huge rumbling steam hissing behemoth going by in front of him. The train was soon on by, the bells stopped clanging and the white and black slashed crossing arms went up. My thoughts quickly returned to what lay ahead at this Mill Bridge Village place. What would it be like, I wondered and fantasized. Soon I was there and shaking the hand of a very up-beat and enthusiastic Mr. Jim Vitali. He was in his early 40's and, as he informed me, new in the business and excited about it. He was very glad to have me added to the old time atmosphere that was all over the place. We decided on an excellent mowed grassy location near the old mill to park the wagon. Brownie got to stay in a good sized pasture close by with a friendly female pony he seemed to fancy. Jim appointed his two young sons to help me with anything I needed.

Mill Bridge Village is located on a back road, but I noticed very quickly that the tourists have no trouble finding it. The Village featured a camp ground, snack bar and gift shop. On the historical theme, there was spinning, weaving and broom-making demonstrations going on in little buildings on the grounds and in the old mill. The mill itself is an original classic. It was built in 1840 out of cut stone and has a wooden overshot water wheel. Inside, the mill stones grind corn. The cornmeal was sold in little cloth bags as souvenirs. There's also the old covered bridge, which is Lancaster County's longest.

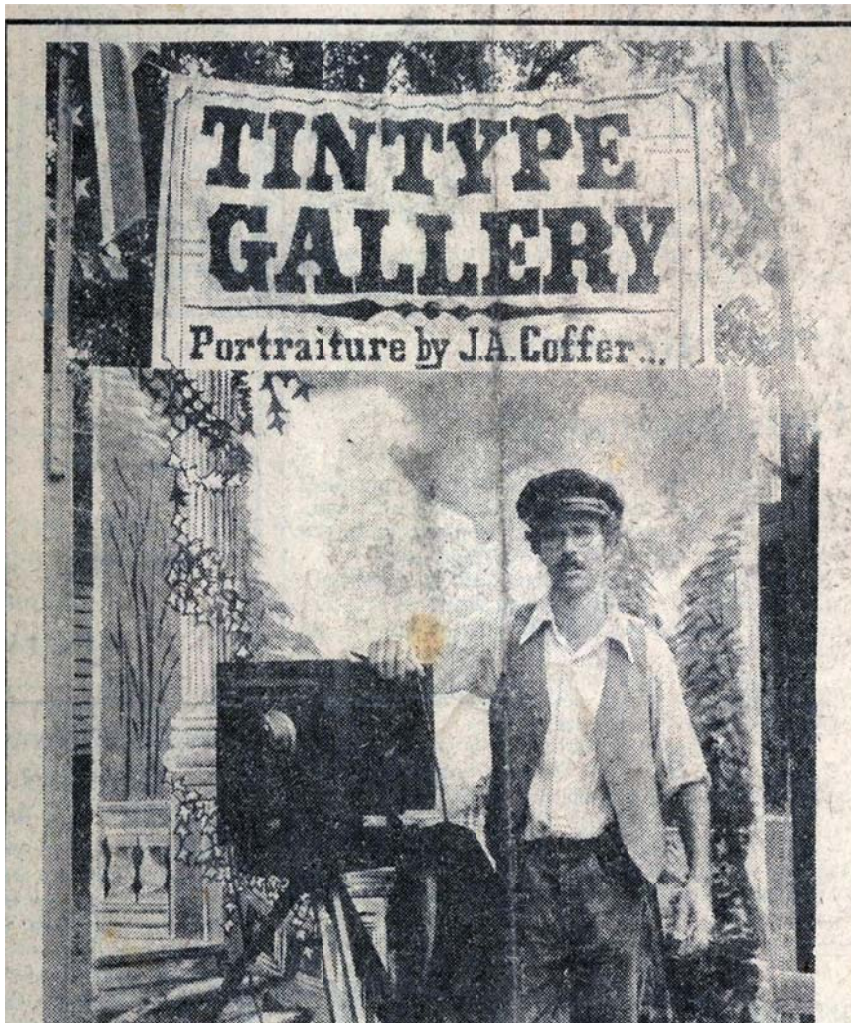


Across from the village in plain sight was an Amish farm. An Amish girl from that farm came by most days with her cute dappled grey pony to give the tourists rides in a beautiful little governess cart.

There was also ample evidence of the modern world there as well. Like the loudspeaker system blaring through from time to time with such things as, “Jim Vitali telephone, line 7, Jim Vitali.” I was awakened most mornings by a very loud tape recorded voice explaining the history of the mill and the covered bridge. It took a moment to realize where I was the first time or two. People would stroll by as I straightened up my blankets and rolled them up in my canvas bedroll. One couple watched as I unpacked my big old camera and photographic supplies out the wooden trunk-like box that sat just behind the back end of the wagon. Then I converted the inside of the wagon into my darkroom. A woman stopped, picked up one of my old hats and called to her husband a short ways off, “Come, look. I’d love to see how you’d look with this on.” They laughed and went on their way.

Each morning I unfurled my banner and put it high on top of the poles that held the background up. I’d hang up some 19<sup>th</sup> century style cloths on the

outside of the wagon as well. Then I would unroll my fancy Victorian style background, painted in tones of black, white, and grey, as were the original backgrounds, and hung it up from a pole frame work. It added such grandeur to my otherwise plain and simple camp. The background featured marble steps and a Grecian style pillar covered with ivy with a serene looking lake and hill and dale scene behind it. It did seem to impress the local newspaper reporter Jim Vitali summoned to interview me. I did not thoroughly grasp it then, but such interviews would become all too common in the days, weeks, and years to come.



Sunday News Photo

## Watch The Birdie

During the past week Lancaster Countians and tourists have enjoyed the services of an itinerant photographer who does only tintypes and ambrotypes — working out of an Amish-type carriage that's both a darkroom and home to him.

He is John A. Coffey who came to Intercourse from Orlando, Fla., last year and purchased an Amish carriage chassis from a local maker. He took it back to Florida, built a top and has converted it into a darkroom and a home on wheels.

He brought it back here, purchased a horse to draw it, has spent a week at Mill Bridge Village and will be on his

way to Gettysburg Tuesday, with stops in between to ply his trade. And thus he will return to Orlando.

"I started with Mill Bridge Village because of its historic significance and plan to make major stops at historic spots along the way, photographically recording history as I ply my trade professionally," Coffey explained.

His "buggy" also carries "costumes to fit everyone" and he makes his tintypes and ambrotypes while you wait. And if you young 'uns don't know what these are, the serious young man has a brochure to explain.

Many days while at the Village, I hardly had time to grab a bite to eat all day, I was so busy doing tintype portraits. By 8:00AM I'd already be swept up into a day of picture taking.

When I did step away from my camp to check on Brownie, grab a bite to eat at the snack bar, or fill my wooden bucket with fresh water to rinse my tintype plates in, someone would often be waiting for a portrait when I returned. A woman with a 7 or 8 year old boy started things off one morning.

“I love your camp here. Do you really use that old camera?” the woman asked me.

“Yes, of course,” I exclaimed, and then proceeded to show her samples of my work on my display board. “I made all these pictures using that camera,” I was proud to tell her. One tintype showed a little boy wearing a big bow tie, grimacing. Another was of a man in correct period garb holding my original carpet bag.

“Oh, they look so old!” the woman exclaimed appreciatively. “I’d like one made of my son. Could you do that?” I told her my prices, which were from \$4.00 to \$20.00 and briefly explained the picture-making procedure. Soon I was thumbing through my rack of old time clothes.

“Want to look like a Civil War drummer boy?” I asked the boy. Of course he did! As soon as he saw the blue coat, leather cross buckle belt, drum sticks and kepi, he was into it. He was glad to slip the stuff on over his clothes and have me pose him in front of the background.

Once things got going, everything seemed to fall into place quite smoothly, customer to customer. I was pleased about the interest people were showing in my camp and my work. This was especially so after experiencing many a slow day and lots of uncertainty back during the grind days in my old shop in Florida. Such were my thoughts as I ducked under the black focusing cloth over my camera, focused, framed the sitter, came out from under the cloth and explained a few things. Next, I would go back into the wagon darkroom, load a plate into the plate holder, then come out with it and make a time exposure of a few seconds by simply taking the lens cap off the camera’s old brass lens, then go back to the wagon and develop the plate. This was the routine back and forth all day. I enjoyed the steady vigorous rhythm. The cash coming in sure didn’t hurt my feelings either.

Sometimes it’s nice to take portraits just for me and especially historically correct looking ones. One afternoon I hung my little chalk board up on the back end of my wagon with the words, “Gone Photographing” and went to shoot some portraits of some of the craft people at work in the mill and around the village. That’s when I came upon C.W. Wells, who was the broom maker working in his shop in the basement of the old mill.



It took a bit of effort to get my big old camera on its wooden tripod in position and everything set up. I could hear the great granite millstones grinding grain overhead. It was a relaxing rumbling noise. To add to that were the sweet

scented smells of hot wax coming from the candle-makers room next door. I exposed a single 8x10 glass plate of the broom maker. Later I would develop it as a negative and make a contact print on a type of photographic paper called printing out paper which would have been commonly available in the late 1800's. This print was probably my best picture I took during my stay at the village.

I wasn't always busy with photography each day. The weather had something to say about that. One morning I woke to the drumming sound of a heavy rain coming down on my wagon top. I turned over for a few more winks of sleep but it started coming down even harder. There was no sleeping through that, not to mention the thunder boomers.

I got up and rolled my bedroll up inside the wagon and tried to straighten up my tiny space. I could see well enough what I was doing by my small skylight/air vent/red safelight in the ceiling.

As the morning wore on the rain eventually stopped and I got out of the wagon and took a look around. I was especially interested in Pequea Creek, which was just down a short slope from my camp. Jim and his sons had stopped by earlier, poking their heads through the back wagon flap, saying there was rumors of a flood coming. The creek definitely had risen and seemed to be slowly rising. I decided to get Brownie and the wagon to higher ground. Jim had actually suggested that I could move into the covered bridge. This might seem like an unlikely place to camp, but since a new bridge was built just up stream from it, no traffic was allowed on the old bridge. I loaded the wagon, hitched Brownie up to it and drove into the bridge like it was a nice cozy barn. After I unhitched and unharnessed Brownie I tied him to a stout beam near the wagon. The pasture was flooding so I got the pony and brought her into the bridge as well, and tied her next to Brownie. That seemed to put them both very much at ease.

The creek rose up to its crest as lots of churned up muddy water, small trees, and assorted debris rushed below us. Considering the bridge had been around 140 years, I felt completely safe.

About dusk, as I sat on my wooden folding chair, I noticed the water level under the bridge was subsiding. I was frying up some baloney sandwiches on my home made little wood fired cooker, I called the "smoky stover". It was nothing but an extra large tin can on metal legs with a wire grill on top. I'd make a quick fire in it with scraps of paper and chips of dry wood. It was enough to heat up my small sheet metal frying pan in short order. I guess I was my own "short order cook".

By the light of the setting sun I could make out initials and dates carved into the beams of the bridge's superstructure. Some of them dated back to the last century. Also, a good many lovers had left their "+" marks. I guess there could hardly be a better lover's lane than a long quiet covered bridge. A couple

going slow in their buggy could get in quit a few kisses.

As I ate my sandwiches and warmed up a small can of corn, an older Amish man entered the bridge on the far end. He slowly walked down to me inspecting the bridge as he went. He smiled and stopped to talk. I explained why I was there and also my plans as a traveling photographer. He seemed interested. Then I asked him about the bridge. He was quite up on it having lived near it all his life. He said the bridge had come through much worse floods than this one. It had even caught fire once but the heavy timbers had come through it alright. He pointed out some charred areas on the beams near us. He gave my “smoky stover” an apprehensive sort of look. I assured him I’d be extra careful and besides, I was all done cooking anyway. He seemed to be satisfied with that, wished me a safe journey and went on his way.

While at the Village I actually had quite a few Amish visitors. All were my new friends from Intercourse coming to check on me. Chris came by first for a quick visit after work with a friend named Ben Lapp who I had met at Chris’s. Then, Benny Fisher from the wagon shop and his family dropped by one afternoon. Little Susie Fisher who had been my supplier of sticky cinnamon buns when I was at Chris’s brought me a complementary bag full to enjoy. Then, finally, Chris came back for yet another visit in the family spring wagon with his wife Rachel and their girls. They were all set to have a grand picnic with me and explore the Herr’s Mill Bridge Village.

“How’s the traveler?” Chris asked as he tied up his horse to a nearby tree.

“Couldn’t be better,” I started and went on to describe in glowing terms how the week had been going.

“Can’t get over it,” Chris exclaimed. “You just pull in here under the trees all free of charge and set up shop.” He had to chuckle and shake his head in amazement to his wife. Rachel got out of the wagon and gave me a shopping bag full of produce from their garden. She was enjoying looking at the beautiful grounds at the Village and the old things. In their own way the little girls were too. The girls played by the wagon and came over to listen to us talk from time to time, but were mostly waiting for the signal to go exploring about.

Jim the owner came by and I made the necessary introductions and I then explained how the Lapps had been my special mentors getting me wise to wagon ways and rigged out for my travels.

“This is quite the place you have here,” Chris told Jim. He meant it too. Jim couldn’t have asked for more ideal visitors.

This was a major family outing for the Lapps and I was the guest of honor. While Chris and I visited some more over slices of home grown cold watermelon, the girls got their wish and did a quick tour of the sites at the Village. When Chris and his family finally left in the spring wagon I felt a little blue. The little girls waved their little arms and hands off at me as they went. I thought this would be

the last time I'd see them.

Yes, I had lots of good times at the Village but there were some tense and anxious moments and some down right miserable ones mixed in as well. Like the night I found myself being stalked by a middle aged homosexual predator out trolling at the campground bathhouse. I had gone there to take my nightly shower. At first I thought the guy was there to do likewise. We engaged in some light conversation. I filled him in on what I was doing there at the Village and was camping out of my wagon. All this while I disrobed and went into one of the individual shower stalls with curtain drawn. He stood outside the curtain trying to continue a conversation. That seemed a little weird. I practically had to push him out of the way to come out of the shower, him ogling me up and down as I toweled off and got my clothes back on as fast as I could. Trying to be civil I bade him goodnight and he said he'd stop by in the morning to check my set-up out. I hoped not. Only moments after I got back to the wagon I saw a shadow moving my way and stop nearby behind a clump of bushes. I stood facing it and called out, "Who is it". The answer came back. "It's your new friend from the bathhouse". I called back, "The hell you are my friend. You're the queer at the bathhouse and if you don't get the bleap out of here I'll shoot your bleepen kneecaps off!" End of conversation. He quickly left. Sitting on the back end of my wagon by the light of my kerosene lantern I loaded up my 22 caliber six shot black powder pepper box pistol and put it under my pillow for the night. I slept surprisingly well. Next day I told Jim Vitali about the stalker at the bath house. He told me to point him out if I saw him around again and he'd send him packing down the road. I guess I had put the fear into him the night before and he had left the county as I never saw him again.

That afternoon the Vitali boys and I went off to the woods and we shot the pepperbox pistol to unload it. Kaboom! Kaboom! Kaboom! it went with each pull of the trigger. Its bark was a lot louder than its bite. You couldn't hit the broad side of a barn with it, either. The gun was much more useful to me as a prop for my Tintype portrait customers to hold in their pictures.

Then there was the drizzly morning I woke up sick to my stomach. I retched most of the morning with what seemed to be a bad case of the stomach flu. Thankfully no Tintype customers came around, due to the weather. By days end I was feeling better. It was just a 24 hour bug and I was very grateful for that. Life would go on and after a full week at the Village, I was ready to move on.

I gave my gracious host, Jim Vitali, a couple 8x10 prints I'd made off some of the better glass negatives I'd shot of scenes around the Village. I had also made Tintyes for his two sons. Jim suggested that I check out the Rough and Tumble Gas and Steam Thresherman's Reunion that was about to start up in Kinzer which was only four miles away. I easily decided to make that my next stop. I hitched up Brownie and away we went, Brownie's pony friend whining a

sorrowful good-bye as he trotted down the road, the wagon's steel tired wagon wheels rattling along behind him.

The folks at the Rough and Tumble grounds were completely fine with me setting up shop to do my Tintype portraits for a few days. I got permission to put Brownie in a big pasture nearby that the neighboring Amish farmer kept his mules in. Business was good enough when I did business. I must admit I spent a good deal of time just looking at all the amazing old time things and events going on. I was especially impressed with the huge steam traction engines, quietly puffing along, blowing their steam whistles. An Amishman came up the road and onto the grounds driving an original Conestoga wagon pulled by eight Belgian horses. Another man had a beautiful pair of big white oxen pulling a cart. They were beautiful. Maybe I'd have a pair myself someday, I mused.

After a couple days it was time to head on again. Upon fetching Brownie out of the pasture, I discovered in his running around with the mules, he'd lost one of his shoes. Intercourse was only a few miles away, so I decided to go back to the Lapp's for the night and have Brownie get a new shoe on the next day. They were surprised but glad to see me. They sent me to a young Amish horseshoer/blacksmith just starting out in the business a couple miles north of them.

On the way back through town I stopped at Zimmerman's grocery store, there on main street, and got an ice cream. I noticed a state trooper parked nearby and decided to go over and ask him what would be a good way to go on back roads to Gettysburg, which I planned to make my next extended stop.

"You going to be driving that wagon there?" he asked.

"Yep, and from there eventually on down to Florida", I matter of factly replied.

"You're crazy," the trooper shot back. "The only way to get to Gettysburg is to take highway 30 through Lancaster and then through York. There's no other bridge across the Susquehanna going that way except at York. The whole way is no place for a horse and wagon to be unless you want to get yourself killed." He was quite sure. I thanked him and headed back to Chris's. I figured there had to be a way to get there on back roads. That evening Doddy Fisher came by and I asked him if he knew a back way I could go. He suggested I cross the river over the bridge near the Holtwood dam.

"It will take you out of the way a little but you will not have to get on Highway 30 and you'll be on nearly all back country roads," he assured me. We studied my map of Pennsylvania and I roughed my route out with a pencil.

The next day I headed out with fond farewells and again more home canned soup and garden veggies to put on my wagon shelves.

"Send us a postcard from Gettysburg," Chris suggested. I assured him I would.

I felt like I was really on my way now. It would take me several days to get to G-burg. It was a fine sunny warm August day and all went well. At quitting time, an hour or so before sunset, I came upon a Methodist Church Camp. No one was there aside from the caretaker and his family that lived nearby. They were nice and gave me permission to make camp on the grounds. I was relieved, a spot for the night had come my way quite easily.

I'd worked up a large appetite that day and decided to make myself a nice big spaghetti dinner. The grazing was good for Brownie and a small clear creek ran nearby. All seemed just heavenly here at the Church camp. I tied Brownie to a heavy steel pipe fence post only a few yards from the back of the wagon and turned in for the night, all comfortable in my bedroll on the floor of the wagon. At about 5AM I awoke with an overpowering urge to up-chuck and barely got my head out of the back of the wagon in time to let fly in my wooden bucket. That done, I lifted my head to see something that made me feel even more sick to my stomach. Brownie was gone!

I got dressed as fast I could. The first light of dawn was starting to show itself. I began following Brownie's trail which wasn't too hard as he had taken the steel post along with him. After a way, across an open field, I found the post, the frayed piece of the lead rope still tied to it. His tracks petered out. I headed back to the camp stopping to vomit and relieve myself in the bushes as I went. This bug was hitting me hard at both ends. At the camp caretaker's house I used the phone and summoned the local taxi driver for the Amish. We drove around and around in an ever widening circle on all the roads near the camp. I was feeling horrible and about to give up but decided to go down one last country road we hadn't yet checked. We had hardly gone far when there was Brownie by the side of the road tied to the corner of an old red barn. I thanked and paid the driver and got out with my reserve lead rope and went to the house across the road to tell the people thanks for catching and tying up my horse.

They said, "No problem. We figured it was one of the Amishes horses and somebody would come by sooner or latter to get it".

Brownie had gone about three miles from my camp. It was pretty much a straight line in the direction of Intercourse. He still remembered where his old home was. He had crossed a busy highway in his flight. I thanked God he hadn't been hit.

It was an extra long and miserable walk back to camp leading Brownie. I had to stop from time to time and sit on the ground to rest and quell my nausea. I thought to myself, if I make it through this test the rest of the trip should be a cake walk. When we eventually got back to camp my strength was so sapped I just tied Brownie securely to a tree by the wagon and crawled back into my bedroll in the wagon and took a long nap. Toward evening I was up and starting to feel a little better. An Amish man came calling. His name was Jacob and he

had the farm just a quarter of a mile down the road. He offered to let me put Brownie in his pasture. He said his driving horse would enjoy the company. He also wanted to know if I'd be interested in some work, helping him with his harvest. I turned this very tempting idea around in my head a moment but told him I really needed to be traveling south if I expected to reach my goal of Florida by Christmas.

After awhile I conjured up enough energy to ride Brownie to Jacob's farm and put him in the horse pasture. Without Brownie to care for I could rest and rejuvenate much better. By the end of the next day I was fully up and about, taking a much needed bucket bath and washing some clothes on my little scrub board. Jacob's teenage son dropped by with some leftover supper from the family dinner table. He was quite fascinated with my travel plans. The next morning I retrieved Brownie and headed out in the wagon with a renewed eagerness. I was anxious to make it to Gettysburg. I would have some major miles under my belt once I got there and would have proved, to at least myself, I was really going places.

I will say here, Dear Reader, I will not be relating the events of each and everyday as I traveled on despite each one being unique and interesting. To do so would turn this book into something in the order of the Encyclopedia Britannica. I don't believe either one of us is up for that.

We crossed the Susquehanna River Gorge a day later. I couldn't help but look out at the blue swirling water dashing over the boulders below and feel a little anxious. The gorge was very wide and very deep. We started over the nice new looking two lane bridge. Brownie balked then kind of leaped over the first ugly looking steel expansion joint. He swerved hard right, which had the wheels scraping on the high curb near the guard rail. I got him settled down and stopped and then got down off the wagon and lead him the rest of the way. He got better about going over the expansion joints each time we crossed one. Luckily only one car passed us the whole way over the bridge.

That night we camped with the Harold D. Douglas family. They had just recently moved to the area from the Carolinas. They hadn't left their southern hospitality behind them. They insisted I sleep in the house and in the morning Mrs. Douglas whipped up the best breakfast I'd had and I don't mean so far in my wagon travels but in my entire life up to that point. Meanwhile Brownie had the run of the old cow pasture out behind the house. The whole family and I headed out the back door as I scanned the pasture for Brownie. He was nowhere in sight. Oh NO! not this again, my mind raced. I called out repeatedly, "Brownie, Brownie!, Brownie!!" I thought I heard a whinny come from the little old very dilapidated barn off in one corner of the pasture, then suddenly Brownie charged out one of the side doors and trotted down to us. We all burst out in laughter. What made it extra funny is that Brownie was covered from head to toe with huge

swaths of grey cobwebs that the barn was apparently full of. I gave him his bucket of sweet feed and a good brushing, harnessed and hitched him up and to fond farewells we traveled on.

A few days after this I made camp at Codorus State Park camp ground. I found a pasture for Brownie to stay in at a nearby farm. In the morning I was washing off my dusty wagon, making use of a nearby water hydrant to fill my wooden bucket, when the head park ranger was suddenly in my face telling me I was breaking all kinds of park rules. He angrily went on to tell me no vehicles were to be washed in the park and no pets were allowed.

“What pet”, I asked.

“Your horse!”, he snorted.

I explained I was only using a couple buckets of water to mop the dust off my wagon and my horse wasn't in the park but at a farm down the road. But, I'd need him to pull the wagon so I could leave. He gave me exactly one hour to be gone and I was not to bring the horse into the park.

While my neighboring campers were snapping pictures of me and my wagon and asking me about my wagon adventures so far, my head was spinning thinking how I was going to get the wagon out of the park without a horse to pull it. I told the other campers about my dilemma. They were outraged and a couple of them went to the entrance booth, which was only about fifty yards away, and talked to the ranger. They came back and said he decided I could get my horse, hitched up and leave. I thanked them and did just that, glad to leave that place behind in my rear view mirror. Well, if I had a rearview mirror, anyway.

Little did I know that my troubles with stuffed suite types with oversize badges were not yet over. We continued on. Traffic became heavier and heavier as we had to go through the large towns of Hannover and adjoining McSherrysville. We were soon in the thick of the business district with its sidewalks, parking meters, multiple traffic lights, and rush hour traffic. People sitting in restaurants and businesses behind big glass windows looked up from what they were doing, saw us coming down the street and pointed, smiled, and some waved. The heavy traffic coming at me in the other lane did much the same but the backed up drivers of the cars and trucks behind me had some pretty sour looks to give me when I looked back over my shoulder at them.

Finally I could see the “Leaving McSherrysville” sign down the road ahead not too far. My elation was soon canceled out when I heard a “whoop” of a police car siren. I turned to see the town cop and his car behind me, flickering blue lights and all. He was waving at me to get over. I stuck my arm out and motioned him to go around, the way was clear, thinking he was in hot pursuit of a crime in progress further down the road. But instead he pulled along side and yelled out through the passenger side window, “Hey! I told you to pull over”. So, I did and stopped. Next he tells me, “You are going to have to go back into town

and pick up what your horse did on the street or I'm going to have to arrest you." Yes, Brownie had lifted his tail and left his initials as we trotted through the main downtown intersection.

I told the young officer, "I can't very well do that under the circumstances. It's rush hour traffic and there's no safe place for me to park. I'd certainly cause a huge traffic jam at the very least. Besides, I continued, "I must be moving along to find a farm I can camp on for the night."

"I don't care what it takes," he retorted. "You have to go back and pick up the mess your horse made or you! Mr.! Are under arrest."

"I'm going to explain my situation to you one more time," I said, hoping he would somehow see some reason. I added I was in the midst of a historical pilgrimage to Gettysburg. It was of no use. When he persisted, I requested a reading of the law I was breaking.

With great sternness, his face getting redder by the second and his big nickel plate badge glistening in the afternoon sunshine, he read, "Falling debris from a moving vehicle must be picked up by the driver of said vehicle immediately or they are subject to arrest."

I was stunned by such abuse of the law. What was designed to keep car drivers from leaving their rusted out exhaust systems laying behind them in the road was being applied to my horse's exhaust system's by product.

I pondered the situation a moment, then I informed the officer, "I absolutely will not go back into town in that traffic with my wagon. What I will do for you if you want the manure removed is the following: I'll stop at the first farm out of town and tie up my horse. Then you can take me back and stop traffic while I scoop it up with my little shovel and take it away in your squad car in my bucket."

He reluctantly agreed. He followed me a short ways, then turned down a side street. As Brownie walked along, tired from a long warm day on the road, I fantasized the scene if the policeman had really arrested me and then later when it went to trial. I could see myself laughing along with the jury when the evidence was brought in on a tray for the judge's inspection!

When I approached the first farm I saw group of people outside looking my way smiling. So I pulled up the drive. They were interested in my outfit, asking the usual question of "where to where." I gave them a quick review and then I told them about the "Barney Fife" style town cop and my great crime.

They all laughed and said, "Yeah, you're welcome to tie up here while you deal with that." About then the cop pulled up looking a little sheepish in front of the smirking folks about me. I had my bucket and shovel in hand ready to go back to the scene of the crime.

He said, "You don't have to go back and pick up the manure. Somebody else did." Then he promptly left. The farmer and his family and friends and I

made our speculations. Probably so many cars and trucks had run over it by now he couldn't find it anymore. So ended my day butting heads with the men who wear the badge, or is it badges who wear men.

I pushed on early the next morning after having had a comfortable stay for the night at a farm that raised and trained Standardbred harness race horses. By noon I was in the town of Gettysburg, the seat of Civil War history and hopefully my next business stop. I'd sure been looking forward to this day. Much of the huge battle that had taken place here and the Civil War in general had been captured by famed 19<sup>th</sup> century photographer Mathew Brady and his associates. Brady had a darkroom wagon not unlike my own.

After going around the busy traffic circle in the center of town, I found my way to the National Park Service visitor's center and museum complex. It was just a stone's throw from the National Cemetery and the Confederate High Water Mark area. I tied Brownie up to a tree in the far corner of the parking lot. I took a quick walk about to survey the surroundings. I knew Gettysburg is one of the nation's biggest historical attractions but had often wondered why. Now, as I stood and looked out across the fields, I understood. The scope of the battle was quite evident, even today. The Park Service had done a great job of keeping much of the landscape intact, natural and historic. Cattle grazed beside split rail fences. Homes within the park had to be from the time period and well preserved. Then there were the bronze and marble statues and monuments dotting the land as far as the eye could see. All were commemorating those who gave their blood and lives for causes they were caught up in, be they from either side of the Mason-Dixon Line. Most were just wanting to get this thing over with so they could go home.

After my short ramble I went into the huge modern structure that was the main museum building and park headquarters. Lots of tourists were milling about everywhere. The walls in the lobby were covered with huge enlargements of scenes of the 1863 battlefield taken by Brady and other horse drawn photographers of the time, only a couple days or so after the shooting was over. At the reception and information desk sat a young neatly uniformed park ranger.

"Excuse me Ma'am," I said. I told her about my living history trip I was on as a 19<sup>th</sup> century horse drawn traveling photographer.

"That's nice," she said, "what can I do for you."

"Ah, yes," I said, "I suppose it would be alright for me to tour the battle field and perhaps shoot some glass plates from different vantage points?"

"Wait a moment and I'll give the superintendent a call about that." She talked briefly to someone on the phone and came back over to me to inform me that there was a ruling forbidding any horse drawn vehicles from going down any of the park service roads.

I was stunned. Here I'd been thinking I was going to be welcomed with

open arms as a sort of fine new addition to the show like I had been at Herr's Mill Bridge Village back in Lancaster County. Now what? I decided to check with the private sector in town for a spot to set up for Tintype business. I checked around town. I even talked to President Lincoln. Well, the guy who puts on a darn good impression of him anyway. By days end nothing had presented itself. I headed out of town not far and paid to make camp at a private campground that had a horse pasture with a couple of horses of their own in it. It was getting into the off season and so there was only me and a couple of other campers. After all the hustle and bustle of being in town all day I was sure appreciating a nice quiet evening to myself. I was reading my mail I'd gotten that day General Delivery at the post office, eating fried baloney sandwiches while sitting on the back end of my wagon. A gigantic motor home pulled up off in the distance at the campground office. It soon rolled on into the camp ground area, passing unoccupied camp spot after unoccupied camp spot. A few moments later they were backing the monster onto the pad in front of me. It stopped with its bumper and diesel fume belching tail pipe no more than about five feet away from the back of my wagon. They turned the engine off and then started up their gasoline engine powered generator mounted under the motor-home somewhere. Super quiet muffler technology for small generators hadn't quite been invented yet. It put out a high pitched whine only an octave or two lower than the average chainsaw. I sat dumbfounded, trying to make sense of all this incredibly rude behavior. Soon a black man and a white woman got out of the motor-home. I stood glaring at them. The woman walked back to me, correctly sensing my disgust.

"If you don't like us here we can help you move your stuff to another spot," She shamelessly announced.

"You can help me move to another spot?" I shot back, "You can move to another spot. I'm not going anywhere."

"Oh, but this is the one they assigned us", she explained.

"Move your dinosaur as far away from me as you can get it or I'm going to the office and have you thrown out. Get it!" I bluffed.

The guy stayed back and said nothing. Soon, they both got back into the belly of their beast, the engine started up and they moved off to a slab on the far side of the campground near a couple other smaller motor-homes. Years later thinking on this encounter and seeing pictures of the controversial Supreme Court Justice nominee Clarence Thomas, and knowing of his life long avocation for RVing in king-size motor-homes and other things that were present that day, I'm pretty sure it was him or at least it could have been.

Next day I checked out of the camp ground all too gladly and headed back into town to try to scope out a business spot I could maybe settle into. Abe Lincoln the day before had mentioned that they already had a fellow doing old time portrait photography in town down on the lawn of the Civil War Wax

Museum. So, that's where Brownie and I and the wagon headed.

There the photographers were in their Civil War soldier uniforms, one in Federal blue and the other in Confederate butternut, working by a canvas Civil War style wall tent on the front lawn of the Wax Museum. I stopped and they came right over and introduced themselves and wanted to know all about what I was doing. The Federal and chief photographer was named Brian Fitzgerald and his Reb assistant was Joe something or other. I gave them a quick run down about my act and that I was looking for a spot for a few days where I could set up and shoot real Tintype, Ambrotype, and glass negative portraits. They were truly impressed and apologized over the fact that they were just offering black and white Polaroid print portraits mounted in a cheesy old time mat with a piece of brown toned cellophane over the print to give it the "Old Timee" look. At news of what I did, they decided they wanted me to make their portraits and quickly closed shop.

I said, "Sure, I'd be glad to. I just need a good spot to set up for a few days."

They spent the next couple of days calling people and going here and there on my behalf until I found a great place to pasture Brownie and a good location to do my portrait business. My eventual spot was on the beautiful shady lawn in front of the Larson's Quality Inn near the Robert E. Lee Museum on Highway 30. Today the big trees and lawn are gone in favor of an ugly asphalt paved parking lot. No marker saying John Coffey camped here in 1978, either.

The local newspaper came out and interviewed me at the motel owner's request.

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## Drawn By A "Brownie" Traveling Photographer Visits Gettysburg Area



**BACK IN TIME** — John Coffey is setting the clock back about 100 years with his traveling tintype gallery. Coffey has stopped off in Gettysburg for about a week before heading south. He began his trip in Intercourse, Lancaster County, and hopes to make it to Orlando, Fla., by December. (Times Photo)

By JAMES A. LOOSE

Even though the clock can't really be turned back, John Coffey is giving it a good try.

Coffey 26, is passing through Gettysburg this week on a horse-drawn wagon, known as a photographic van. Not only is his mode of transportation old-

fashioned, so is his style of photography — Coffey is a tintype and ambrotype photographer.

The tintype, America's first contribution to photography, was patented in 1856. It became instantly popular in all parts of the country and traveling tintypists became a standard feature of the

19th century landscape. Ambrotypes were first introduced in England in 1851 and spread rapidly as a fast, inexpensive form of photography.

Coffey formerly operated a tintype shop in Orlando, Fla., but he wasn't happy working in a shop.

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## "Brownie"

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"It just wasn't really authentic the way I had to do business in a shop," Coffey said. "Business was picking up in Florida, but I wasn't happy with it. I wanted to go out on an adventure, also, when I was still young and single."

In May, Coffey visited Intercourse, Lancaster County, where he purchased a basic spring wagon bed. He returned to Florida and built the top part of the wagon, making it suitable for use as a darkroom. In July he returned with the wagon to Intercourse, where he was taught how to drive the wagon by an Amishman, who also helped him find his horse, Brownie.

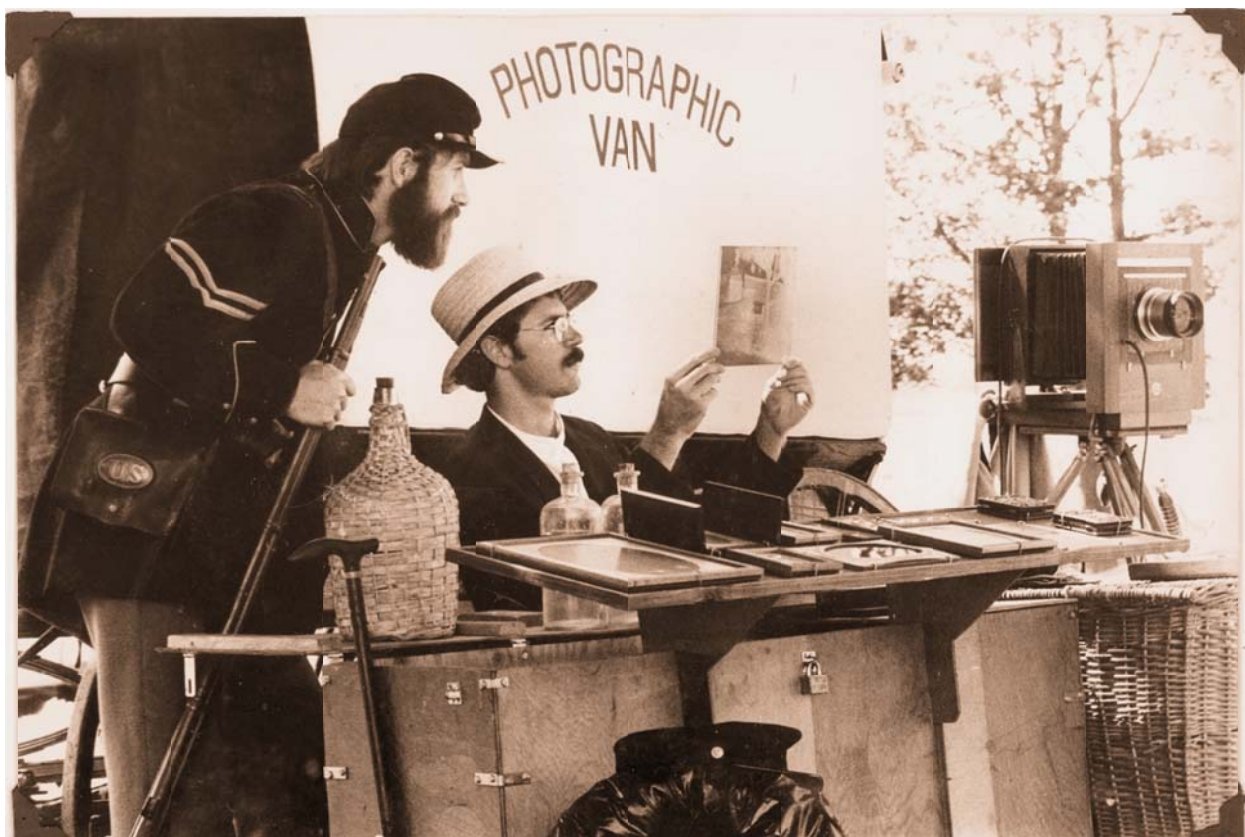
### STAYS AT FARMS

After a week's training with the horse and wagon, Coffey began his travels. He visited several towns in Lancaster County, setting up his photographic business during the day. At nights, he tries to find a farm to stay at. When Brownie needed a

new shoe, Coffey went back to Intercourse. From there he came to Gettysburg, although his trip took a little longer than it would take most other people. He was on the road seven days and estimates that by using back roads he traveled about 150 miles, while a usual trip would take only 75 miles.

The biggest portion of Coffey's business is doing portraits for people. He has costumes for all ages and sizes to make the subject conform to the 19th century dress style. While in Gettysburg, Coffey will be set up for business on

Now the business poured in. I especially enjoyed the men and women who were into Civil War soldier and civilian reenacting. They often had a good knowledge of Civil War period photos, wore newly made but beautifully detailed authentic mid-19<sup>th</sup> century clothing, and knew how to pose well. I did over seven hundred dollars worth of business in a week's time.



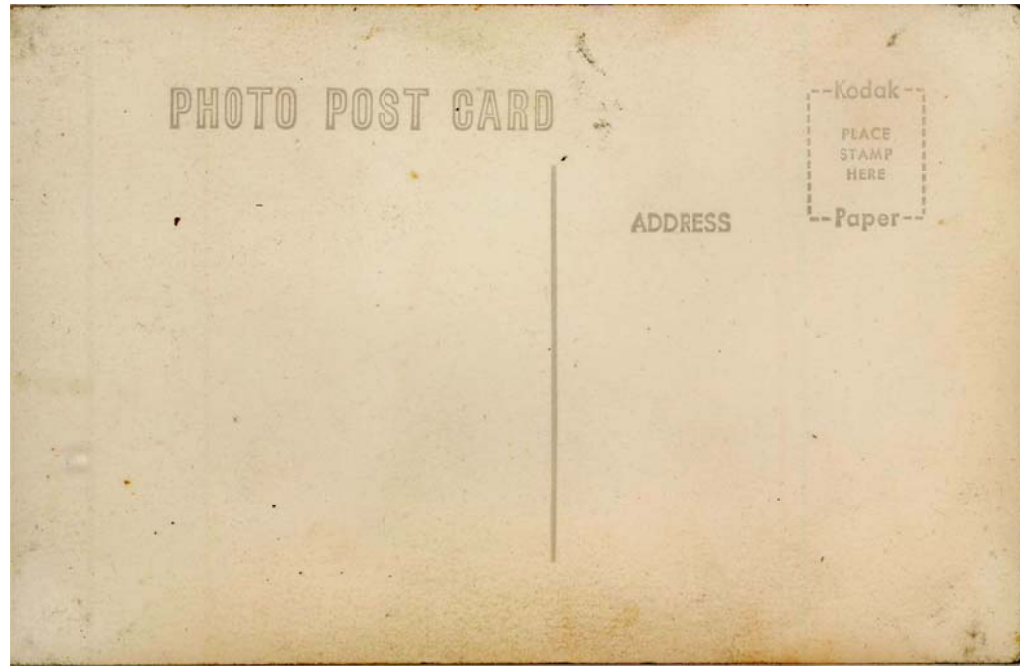
Somehow I didn't find the time to tour the different museums in town. I wasn't in a very good position to leave my wagon for very long, anyhow. Although, I did get an offer of a free guided tour of the battlefield sites by a professional licensed battle field tour guide, if we could go in the wagon. I told him I'd been told no horse drawn vehicles were allowed on the park service roads. He scoffed at that and said he knew the people in charge and he'd get clearance. The next day he was back to inform me it was indeed the law and they wouldn't give him any kind of a variance. But, I felt I got a good enough education about the place anyway. Usually it was the unexpected, well off the tourist- beaten path kind of things that made up the difference and more. For instance, there was the John Hooke family who lived just a half mile down the highway from my camp and kept Brownie for me in a neat little grassy pasture to himself. John's house was about a hundred and fifty years old.

John showed me the attic of his house. I could see the rough hewn beams and rafters all marked with roman numerals at the mortise and tenon joints. The frame of the house had all been cut out on the ground before it was assembled, a great engineering wonder but common practice in the early days. He also showed me where a hole had long ago been patched in the roof and then another in a nearby wall. This was where a cannon shell had penetrated back during the great battle and luckily had failed to explode. John had been able to retrieve the shell

where it had fallen between the wall boards and lain for over a hundred years. He showed me the shell along with a few spent musket balls he'd found outside around on the property. We enjoyed talking history. The Hooke's expected nothing in return for the use of their pasture and loving care, carrots and apples they'd lavished on Brownie. But, I gave them a couple tintypes I made of their teenage daughter as a token of my appreciation. Oh, and one more important thing: I got to see the daughters very extensive moth collection. I thought, eat your heart out you Gettysburg tourists!

It was a cool misty day in early September when I resumed my trek south. The state road ran through much of the battlefield area. The park service couldn't keep me off that one. I could see numerous old cannons and battlefield monuments on either side of the road. I decided to stop and tie Brownie up to the split rail fence and shot a 5x7 glass negative of him and the wagon on the Gettysburg battlefield itself. Some time later I made photo postcards contact printed off the plate to send to friends and relatives.





In the message space on the postcard I explained, that's the famous Little Round Top behind Brownie in the background.

Putting my big camera away in its usual padded and protected spot in the wagon, I continued on. After rounding a long curve, the road straightened out through a wide open area. Up ahead I could see a park ranger's vehicle pulled off to the side of the road. In the road stood the ranger. Brownie was going at an extra slow speed, probably due to the now sunny extra warm day and also his reluctance to leave his cushy situation at the Hooke's. When I finally reached the ranger, he walked towards me and I stopped to hear what he might have to say.

He snapped out at me, "Keep it moving. There's no stopping here."

Much to his frustration a family in a station wagon going the other way stopped and a couple of cameras started clicking at my outfit.

"No stopping here, please folks", the ranger informed them in a nicer tone of voice. He waved his walky-talky to encourage the cars to keep on going.

"Git-up Brownie! Full speed ahead!" I commanded, for the benefit of the ranger's ears. Brownie and I knew each other well enough by now to know I really didn't mean it. So, he walked on or perhaps I should say he oozed on, leaving the ranger behind to steam in his own frustration, I just sat back and enjoyed more of the scenery. Across a wide stretch of grassy field was an exceptionally large monument. I noticed a large cavalcade of limousines and state trooper cars pulled up in front of it. Now I recalled something in the local paper about President Carter, Sadat, and Begin planning to do a tour of the battlefield that day. All the top security made more sense now. I waved in their direction. Who knows, they may have even seen me. I'm sure the secret service agents did and had me clearly scoped should I make one false move. A few

minutes passed and then they all sped off to the next monument or whatever.

After awhile I could see I was getting close to the southern most edge of the park service controlled part of the battlefield. I noticed a nicely restored and white washed log cabin near the roadside. I decided to stop and take a little break and shoot a glass plate of it. No sooner had I stopped and tied up under a shade tree, given Brownie a bucket of water from the oaken water cask I had in the back of the wagon and got my camera out and on its wooden tripod, when who should show up but two park rangers in a pick-up. They asked what I planned on doing. I told them I was about to shoot a glass plate negative of the old cabin. They informed me that was against the park rules. They said I looked like a commercial photographer and none of that was allowed without special permission. I protested but was told to pack it up and get on down the road. I was glad to do so. But, I would be back. It would be twenty years later and the closing of a wide loop that took me from coast to coast. I would then go down the park service roads unmolested in my wagon and I would shoot glass plates as much as I wanted.