

Chapter Seven

Wagon Man Comes to Town

It was a cool morning as I continued on. The fog began to lift. I plotted my course to yet another historical town, Appomattox, Virginia. Lancaster County, Pennsylvania seemed far behind me now. My destination for the time being, Florida, felt more in reach each day. Not that I wanted my new horse-drawn nomadic lifestyle to ever end. It was exciting to be so free and able to also pursue my chosen craft of 19th century photography. I was also learning back to the basics living skills and the old ways of doing things.

At lunch time I came to an ancient white clapboard church next to an equally old graveyard. I let Brownie loose to mow the grasses while I looked on and ate peanut butter and jam sandwiches with cold milk. As the day wore on my peaceful road turned into a busy thoroughfare, Highway 60. I was jolted back to the hustle and bustle of the greater society and was instantly keyed up, constantly on the look out for cars and trucks coming at a high rate of speed up behind me. I guided Brownie carefully, keeping off the road as far as I could when it seemed the safer course to follow, then veering back onto the blacktop to make Brownie's pull easier when nothing was in sight.

Just a few miles north of Appomattox I stopped at a little country store and bought more bread, milk and some other simple food items. I asked the store keeper if she knew of a farm or an out-of-the way place where I could make camp for the evening. She took it up with another lady who was shopping. They concluded that the Lewises would be the most likely candidates.

"They have draft horses and go for that sort of thing," they said.

The store keeper was very outgoing and even called the Lewis family to explain the situation. I was encouraged to come on down.

It was just a mile away. I said thank yous and goodbyes to the nice ladies. Then, as I started to head out the door, the store keeper lady said, "Come back." For an instant I thought I must have forgotten something and hesitated for a moment. But then I realized it was just southern country folks way of saying in short hand, "Y'all come back now, real soon and see us again sometime." I heard this "come back" more and more as I continued on south.

The Lewises were congenial farm people up in years. Mr. Lewis, called C.D., had gotten into draft horses ten years before. He had four beautiful Belgians, two of which were year old twins. The twin's mother had been shot by a deer hunter not long after

their birth. So C.D. had raised them on a bottle. He had a couple of light driving horses as well and a restored buggy that was nearly one hundred years old. I quickly learned that the Lewises were very different from my Amish horse driving friends. They weren't interested in using their horses for any practical purpose. Power around the farm was electrical and by internal combustion engine, and their sole source of transportation was by their motor vehicles. C.D. expressed to me that he was enough of an odd ball in the community, just from making a hobby out of driving horses, much less farming with or replacing his car with his horse and buggy. C.D. hauled the horses and wagons to participate in parades, horse shows and to give hay rides at area events.

I enjoyed a good home cooked meal with my host. There was plenty to eat. Often they'd say, "Hep yo' sef." There was a warm sincere tone in the way Southerners said this. After supper they had to watch their favorite TV program, the Lawrence Welk Show. Lawrence never got much of our attention. We talked all the way through the show. We had a lot to say to each other and had to repeat ourselves a good bit, due to the loud volume of the TV.

At bedtime I got my own room upstairs to sleep in. Mrs. Lewis pointed out a few things, like the light switch on the wall. Then, pulling out a gray enamelware chamber pot from under the bed, she exclaimed, "It's a long way to the bathroom downstairs." I was glad to sleep inside because it had gotten quite cold outside. By morning the ground was covered with frost, the first of the season.

After I was hitched up and ready to go, I had to play small time celebrity. Friends and relatives of the Lewises gathered around and took numerous snapshots of Brownie, the wagon and me. Their little plastic cameras were clicking away. One relative had a newspaper with a story about me from an interview I'd given a couple of days before. Mr. Lewis quickly snatched the paper up and read the caption.

"It says here you are 22 years old. You told us you were 26. Now just whose leg are you trying to pull?" he asked in all seriousness.

I assured him I was indeed 26. The reporter hadn't even asked my age. He probably felt he had to put something down and simply guessed. At this point in my journey I was coming to realize just how much artistic license some reporters used. I was surprised that a man like Mr. Lewis, with so much life experience, would take the newspaper's word over my own.



Florida Photographer Lives In Past

John Coffer, age 22, of Orlando, Florida spent Saturday night on the C.D. Lewis farm in Appomattox County.

A photographer, he wants to live and work like the photographers of 100 years ago. August 2, 1978, he started a tour from Intercourse, Pennsylvania and will travel by horse and wagon back to his home state of Florida. He has made stops at historical places where he sets up wagon-living for a few days at a time. While in Appomattox he visited Appomattox National Historical park. He shaves with a straight razor and even uses a "wash board" to do his own laundry but he really seems to be enjoying his way of life.

There was a cool north wind on my back as I continued on. I was glad I had my long-johns on. I went into Appomattox proper and then out to Appomattox Courthouse National Historic Park which was a couple of miles east of town. I was under no illusion that I'd be able to camp or set up for picture making business. I parked in one of the grassy fields near the paved parking area and tied Brownie to a tree. Then I toured the grounds on foot. They had a restored 1860's village as well as the famous old house where Lee surrendered to Grant and officially ended the Civil War. It was interesting but not exactly to my taste. The mowed lawns, sterile

appearance and tape recorded dissertations did little to help me appreciate the real history of the place. A couple of buildings had guides. I found one of these guides to be quite interesting, the highlight of my tour in fact. She was college age and attractive. We talked awhile after she finished giving one of her house tours to a small group of tourists. Later on in the day, I was carting my big camera around, looking for the right vantage point for one of the old houses, when our paths crossed again. She volunteered to carry my tripod. Her name was Ann. We talked as the sun sank lower on the horizon. Then we had to say our farewells. We both agreed it was a shame I couldn't camp right where I was. I invited her to come and find me the next day. I suggested we share lunch together. So we left each other with a 'see you'. I knew if I hadn't been traveling, a romance could have blossomed. But things were different with me now. I didn't structure my life to suit real or potential girlfriend's needs or wants anymore. I had enough of that when I lived in Florida with my cool condo and sports car. I was now determined to live up to no other expectations but my own. I never saw Ann again.

After being out in my wagon for over two months, I'd begun to accumulate a few things. Or I should say, I was noticing things I was lugging along from the start of my travels that I simply wasn't using. With such a small space there really wasn't room for clutter. Besides, why burden Brownie any more than I had

to? It was time to take an inventory. Going through my camp boxes and wagon shelves I asked myself, why am I lugging this along? Throw it out, give it away or send it to Gary to put in storage. Then there were things I had along that I might use only on a rare occasion such as: an extra lens for my old camera, a quart of anti-thrush medicine for horses feet, a couple of books, and a few extra costumes. These were tougher calls to make than the things I noticed I was getting absolutely no use out of and likely never would. A nice couple back in Pennsylvania had given me some boxes of old glass plate negatives. Some other nice folks had given me several pairs of 19th century ladies spats. And of course, there were the slowly but surely accumulating 8x10 and 5x7 inch size glass negatives I was shooting along the way. Unlike modern roll film, the glass dry plates I was using then were expensive at \$8 a pop for an 8x10, and weighty.

I got some sturdy boxes from a dumpster behind a store in Appomattox and packed things up carefully. Actually, I couldn't bear to throw anything away. In my heart of hearts I was and still am a pack rat. At the next post office, in Java, Virginia, I sent it all to my friend, Gary, in Florida. He'd put the boxes into my warehouse space.



Not that this was the perfect solution. For some of the things I was only delaying the real decision that needed to be made. Some day, when I reopened the door to the warehouse and all my possessions stared back at me, I'd have some serious sorting out to do. I knew I was on my way to a healthier attitude toward possessions. After spending my whole life thinking, "What more do I need?" I was asking myself, "What can I live without?"

I camped overnight just outside of Chatham, Virginia with a nice family appropriately named Good. Mr. and Mrs. Good were middle aged and had no children around. They took me in for the night and treated me like kin. A teacher who'd seen me on the road that day and knew the Goods called on the phone that evening. She talked to me and asked if I'd be so kind as to visit with a group of children from her school, the Woodlawn Academy. I told her, sure. After I hung up, I wondered what I had gotten my self into. I'd never given a talk to any sort of group before.

After a delicious breakfast with the Goods, the teacher called and said the two buses of children from kindergarten to sixth grade were on their way. I was getting Brownie out of the pasture when the big yellow buses roared up the driveway. A herd of noisy excited kids piled out. They were nearly all white as was the case with private schools which abounded in the South then. I conferred with three teachers and the principal. Quickly we quieted the group down and organized them in a circle around Brownie, the wagon and myself.

I told them where I'd come from and where I was going. I sensed that the children were most interested in Brownie. So I told his story. I picked up one of his big hooves to show them what his horseshoes looked like. Then I harnessed him up, naming some of the harness pieces as I went. A question and answer session started up.

One child asked, "Do you have a home?"

I told them, "You're looking at it. It's right here, this wagon."

"How did Brownie get so fat?" one asked as the others giggled.

I tried to explain Brownie's never ending appetite. "Maybe some of you have heard the old saying 'Eat like a Horse'? Well, it didn't start with Brownie, but it could have." More giggles and laughter filled the morning air.

Some of the little kids would ask what they thought was a question. It would go something like: "My Grandpa has a pony on his farm and its name is Buttons and me and Cody ride it every time we go there and...and..." Show and tell was easier for their little minds than asking questions. The teachers had to refresh everyone's memory on what a question is exactly before we could go on.

A couple of students presented me with a box of goodies they'd donated from their packed lunches. It was an assortment of cookies and a few Hostess cup cakes. Brownie got a bag of apples and carrots. I immediately fed a good sized apple to him which he gulped down in one bite to the children's

amazement.

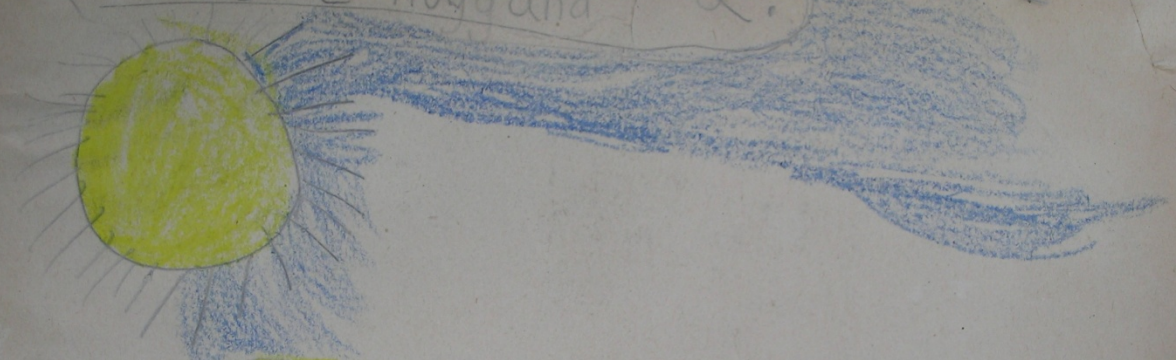
Then I made a suggestion to the children. "If I send you a couple of letters as I continue south, would you draw pictures of Brownie, the wagon and me?" Heads nodded yes and the teachers agreed it would be a fine art project.

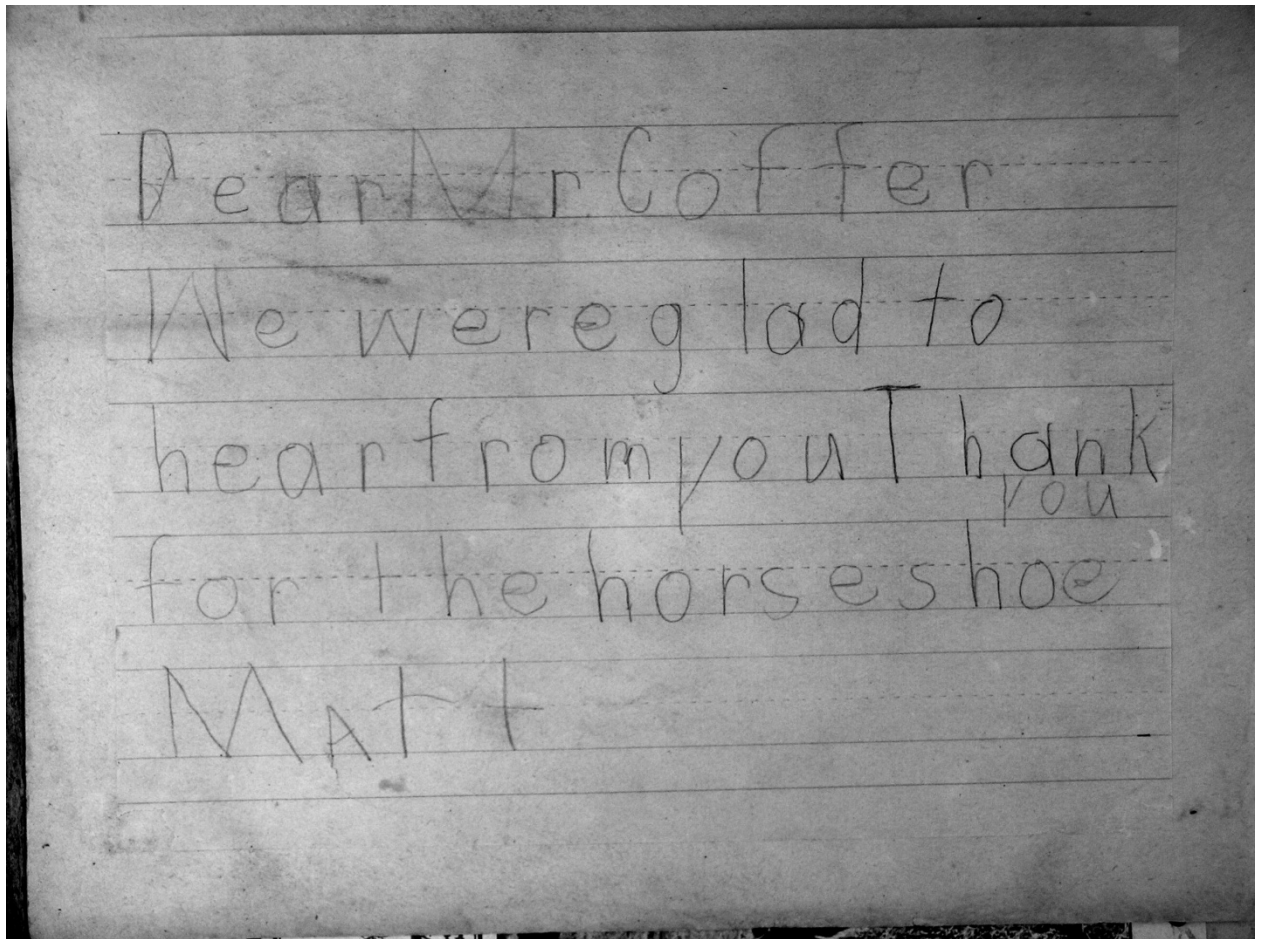
The children all shouted yes in unison and began to board the buses. I overheard some comment that they'd rather go back to school in a horse and wagon.

In the months that followed we kept our promises to each other. I wrote and sent along a couple of Brownie's worn out horseshoes. In return I received 60 crayon drawings, many of them with a letter attached. One fourth grader wrote and told me how much fun she'd had. She went on to say I could call her collect any time and included her phone number complete with area code.



Name Eric Hogdand 2.





The attention I attracted as I traveled south seemed to increase. In my previous life people had rarely dropped out of nowhere to find out about me. Now it happened several times a day. Sometimes it was to the point of being annoying. Something simple like going into a small town to pick up supplies could end up being anything but simple. Coming into Chatham, Virginia was a prime example of this. Many “discovered” me that day in town. Soon the rest of town would learn about me too. The Chatham Star Tribune’s headline in the next issue read, ‘Civil War Photographer Look-Alike Stops Here’. The first sentence read, “The famous Civil War photographer Matthew Brady look-alike was in Chatham Thursday.” The writer had taken great liberties in putting this article together. When a copy of the paper caught up with me I had to chuckle at his exaggerations. I never told anyone I was trying to be Matthew Brady’s look-alike. Maybe he described me as famous because the locals in town seemed to treat me like I might be.

Chatham was a small town with a population of a couple thousand. It was the county seat of Pittsylvania County. I passed the marble columned, one hundred and twenty five year old courthouse as I came into the business district. The downtown was a block long. There were ancient red brick buildings lining

both sides of the street.

I tied Brownie up to a telephone pole in the corner of a nearby vacant lot. I then went on a veritable shopping spree. I bought a pair of lightweight work boots at the shoe store. Next, at an antique shop a couple doors down, I purchased an old cork stoppered bottle that had once held Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound. When I returned to the wagon there was a little crowd of people standing around it. Cars went by extra slow with the occupants staring and craning their necks out the windows gawking at me.

Shyly some of the people approached me as I stepped up onto the wagon seat. Others maintained their distance. I could hear them making assorted speculations. They ranged anywhere from, "Oh what a dismal way to have to travel," to "How terribly exciting. Wonder where he's going?" and "Did you ever see such a fat horse!"

I got a plastic bottle of vegetable oil from off one of my wagons shelves and poured the contents into my new Lydia Pinkham's old bottle. I liked replacing modern containers that were visible in my wagon with old ones to make the wagon look it was right out of the 19th century. Perhaps the reporter saw what I was doing and was prompted to write later, as he did, in his over the top fashion, "The only thing modern in Coffey's wagon is a 1978 Texaco road map."

Eventually a brave soul broke through the crowd and came toward me grinning from ear to ear.

"Well now, what have we here? Where to where?"

The others pressed in to hear better and get an even closer look. I began fielding the usual rapid fire who, where, when, how far questions, as the curious came and went. It wasn't long before I had repeated myself a dozen times. Then, rushing onto the scene, with his Polaroid camera dangling from his neck, a pen in one hand, and a note pad in the other, came the Clark Kent of Chatham.

With a reporter's excitement, born of a feeling he was in for the scoop of a lifetime, he began firing questions at me relentlessly. It wasn't one of my finer moments. I decided I'd had enough, but the reporter had just begun. I untied Brownie and started off. The reporter walked along with us as we headed down Main Street and out of town. He kept me informed as to when and where I should stop so he could take another picture. Finally we parted. I got what I wanted, namely, to get out of town, and the reporter got what he wanted which was a big front page story for his paper about an imaginary famous person, someone quite different than myself.

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CHATHAM, VIRGINIA, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 19, 1978

Traveling by horse and wagon on way to Florida

Civil War Photographer Look-alike Stops Here

The famous Civil War photographer Mathew Brady look-alike was in Chatham last Thursday.

Mathew Brady was a traveling photographer who became world famous for his daring pictures taken on battle fields during the 1861-1865 Civil War period.

Emulating Mathew Brady, John A. Coffey, a 26-year old photographer, set out eight weeks ago from Lancaster, Pa., in a horse drawn van looking every bit like the famous Civil War photographer.

Prodding down Chatham's main street last Thursday, Coffey and his photographic van stopped in front of the 125 year old courthouse for a picture of a perfect match-up in the 19th century tradition.

Coffey has copied the Civil War photographer's equipment in almost every detail - with his look-alike horse and white canopy wagon marked "photographic van" for identification. He even dresses like Brady, with white brim hat, black vest, a big pocket watch and chain...he even shaves with a straight blade razor.

All his photographic equipment is exact replicas of the pioneer era. He has an old-time camera that takes tintype and ambrotype pictures (which he sells from \$2.75 to \$19.75 depending on size).

All photographic materials are kept in old bottles with cork stoppers. The van serves as his darkroom. He just rolls

down a canvass flap, and depends on the sunlight and red filter when he develops his pictures on the tin plates and glass plates. He has no need for electricity and shuns all modern methods of photo-

graphy.

About the only modern convenience Coffey has in his van is a 1978 Texaco road map - which he uses to plot his way on the back-roads in his wagon trip to Florida.

Coffey passed through Chatham last Thursday on his way to Florida, and attracted much attention with the old-time mode of travel.

He was born in West Virginia. He got a degree in

oceanography from Florida Institute of Technology and worked for a short while at it, then got a job as a portrait photographer and moved out

Cont'd on Page 3



TURNING BACK THE CLOCK. The 125 year old Chatham courthouse provides the proper background for the 19th century look-alike traveling photographer (John Coffey) who passed through here last Thursday.

Civil War Photographer Look-alike Stops Here

Cont'd from Page 1
to Las Vegas, Nevada.

He came across an old 19th century camera that takes the old-fashion tintype and ambrotype pictures. It fascinated him!

"I always had a hankering for history and old things," says Coffey, "and my interest in photography naturally carried me back to the days of the pioneer traveling photographers. Mathew Brady was the most famous, so I decided to copy him."

He started on his trek to Florida from Lancaster, Pa., the Amish country, because that's where he was able to find a horse and wagon. He bought them from an Amish farmer, paying \$700 for "Brownie," an 8-year old heavy set work horse. (One set of horseshoes have been worn out since starting on the trip eight weeks ago). He had the body built to specifications for the wagon, copying the van used by Brady in his Civil War picture taking adventures.

Eight weeks ago Coffey left Intercourse, Pa., (in the heart of the Amish country near Lancaster) and is traveling to Casselberry, Florida. He expects to get there in another 10 to 12 weeks.

He's in no hurry. Coffey and his horse amble along covering about 15 to 20 miles a day - traveling mostly the back roads - "because of the safety for the horse and wagon and because it is much more interesting," he says.

He sets up his tintype camera mostly at historical landmarks where there are tourists. He says it takes about a couple of hours to get ready to take portraits on the tintypes - in the old-fashion way.

That is how he is financing his travel, taking tintype pictures, and says he always gets more work than he can do when he sets up. He found historic Appomattox courthouse park a profitable place for his camera.

He has very little expense. Before darkness each day, Coffey says he stops at a farm house and asks permission to put his horse in the pasture to graze. Most every time the farmer will invite Coffey in for the night, and serve him supper and breakfast, and

furnishes him with a little bag of feed for the horse.

When not given lodging, Coffey gets out an old Civil War sleeping bag and crawls under the wagon for the night.

Coffey says people have been real friendly, especially in Virginia where "they go out of their way to show southern hospitality."

He passed through Halifax county on the weekend, spent Tuesday night at the farm of Wilson Jones (between Riceville and Java), and there took time to do his laundering, washing out a pair of long-johns using the water from a handpump well.

He came to Johnny Motley home near Chatham on Wednesday evening and was taken in by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Good at the Motley stables for the night.

About 60 children from Woodlawn Academy came by school bus to see the traveling photographer Thursday morning. They brought along a big box of cookies for him, apples for the horse, and he showed the children how to hitch up the horse to the wagon. Coffey asked the Woodlawn pupils to draw a picture of his horse and van and send them to his Florida address.

Coffey spent about 30 minutes looking to buy a cork-stopper in Chatham Thursday - to fit an antique "Lydia Pinkham's Compound" bottle he had purchased from Mrs. Jeannette Adkins' Student Shop on center street here.

With the recent trend back to the old and more emphasis being put on history, Coffey says he has found a ready sale for his tintype and ambrotype pictures.

He notes that some families still have tintype pictures of a grandfather, an aunt or uncle, in their old collections which were made in the 1860-1900 period. Many people are anxious to get portraits of themselves by this old-fashion method as a keepsake.

He explains that the tintype is America's first contribution to photography, and was patented in 1856. These pictures became popular when traveling tintypist was a fixture in the later part of



John Coffey set up his old-fashion tintype camera at Gettysburg. A uniformed guide, dressed as a "Yankee soldier" posed with him to add authenticity to the picture of the Civil War photographer Mathew Brady look-alike.

the 19th century.

Explaining the tintype method, Coffey says the camera takes the picture directly on a sensitized tin plate - without a negative. When the sensitized tin plate is placed in a holder in the camera and the shutter snapped, it takes the picture directly on the tin plate - which is then developed in a chemical solution in a matter of minutes. This method became very popular and provided a fast picture at a very small cost back in the late 19th century.

Ambrotype pictures are taken in much the same way. Instead of using tin, the pictures are taken on a sensitized glass plate and it is developed. A black piece of paper is glued on the back of the glass plate to bring out the picture.

Coffey says there is only one firm in America that still manufactures tintype plates, and he gets all of his materials from the company in New York.

photographic van, talked the officer out of giving him a ticket.

When Coffey finally gets to Florida, he says he'll likely set up a photographic studio to take authentic old-fashion tintype portraits.

He is single and noted he has no intentions of early matrimony...and with a sort of wistful look, Coffey says he may just keep on being a traveling photographer - because he finds the life style free and easy, interesting and the living cost very cheap, financially speaking.

He says Mathew Brady took all of his Civil War pictures by ambrotype, using glass plates - because if the picture didn't turn out to suit him - he'd wipe the glass plate clean, recoat it with a sensitized material, and retake the picture and develop it in his traveling photographic van.

Coffey insists his horse and wagon trip is not a publicity stunt, but something he is doing for his own pleasure and satisfaction.

In fact he is not very talkative. When asked about anything funny or amusing that might have happened along the way since he left Lancaster...he thought a minute, and answered: "Well, this wasn't very funny at the time it happened...but a policeman in a Pennsylvania town started to arrest me when "Brownie" (the horse) used the bathroom in the middle of main street."

Coffey says the policeman got very angry - but let him off when people who stopped to look at the antique

I breathed a sigh of relief after getting a few miles south of Chatham and back on a quiet country road. At quitting time I found a spot on an old farmstead owned by an elderly gentleman. He described himself as a temporary bachelor because his wife was on a trip for a week. He invited me inside to share a meal of hamburgers and tossed salad. We exchanged stories. He'd been born and raised on this very farm and had lots of tales about the good ol' days. Some of the country lore he had to share I took careful note of. Some pertained to the weather. If there's a lot of acorns on the ground and the corn husks are extra thick, it's going to be an extra cold winter. Then there was the medicinal herbal concoctions such as, Rat's Vein Weed makes a good pep you up tonic. He also told me how to tell a horse's age.

"You look at their teeth," he said. "The two tusk like teeth in the lower jaw near the front rise at seven and sink at eleven. After eleven they're called smooth mouthed and there ain't no way you can tell after that."

We shared our interest in horses. He was reminded of a funny story.

"Well, you see sir, there was this boy who was given twenty dollars and sent to buy a horse at the local horse traders. The boy inquired about a horse for sale and the trader told him he had a real nice one. But it didn't look too good. The boy said, 'I'm just going to work him. I don't much care what he looks like.'" He paid the man his twenty dollars and turned for home. On his way, the horse stumbled into a ditch and then later, smack into a tree. Soon the boy realized he'd bought a blind horse. But when he took the horse back to the horse trader he was informed, 'I told you the horse didn't look good!'"

My host told me when he was a boy how he and his dad cut ice from their pond in the winter and stacked it in the ice house near the shore. They'd cover the tiers of ice blocks with leaves and dry saw dust packed on the outside to the walls for insulation. They'd have ice all summer this way. That night I was able to use the bathroom and clean up. I slept in one of the bedrooms upstairs. The house was over a hundred years old. The room I stayed in hadn't changed much in probably a hundred years either. The bed had a feather tick mattress and was especially high. Old portraits hung in beautiful walnut oval frames about the room and oriental rugs adorned the oak wood floor.

After a delicious breakfast with my host and a hearty thanks for his hospitality, I continued on my way. I noticed the pond and the old ice house as I plodded past the farm's pastures and fields. The day turned into a warm sunny one. I was able to keep on back roads most of the time. It was just Brownie out ahead of me against the beautiful fall scenery. The leaves were changing colors and when a puff of wind blew, they'd flutter down gently and carpet the road ahead of us.

The horses and ponies in pastures along the way would come running up the fence lines to investigate the strange looking horse with a weird contraption

behind him coming down their road. They would put on quite a show, prancing back and forth, running and bucking. With their heads held high, some would blow loudly through their nostrils trying to get maximum attention. Brownie was cool and could hardly be bothered with as much as a glance their way. But, I'd whistle and call out to them, "Hey Babies!" Even the cattle were curious about us. Often they'd line up along the fence line when they would see us and then follow along single file until they came to the corner of the pasture. I felt like some kind of latter day 'Pied Piper'.

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The News

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SOUTH BOSTON-HALIFAX COUNTY, VIRGINIA

County and South Boston

and Record

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 12, 1978

15 CENTS

This man will shoot you for five dollars

BY CHARLEY RAMSEY

Eight weeks ago, 26 year old John Coffey loaded a wagon in Intercourse, Pennsylvania, and hitched a horse to it.

He filled the wagon with 19th century photographic equipment.

He filled the horse with hay.

Then John Coffey and his horse Brownie took off for Florida, sticking to the back roads "for safety, and because they're more interesting."

Working his way along by his skill in the old style photographic arts, John shuns motel and city, asking only for pasture for Brownie, who is eight this year.

"I used to be a regular portrait photographer," he said when I caught up with him near Mt. Airy.

"Had a studio and everything. I sure like this a lot better."

Wherever he and Brownie go now, John Coffey draws attention—and envy. During our half hour interview, no less than five passersby stopped for a while, admiring Brownie and asking questions.

"One guy drove by in a shiny pickup,"

John remembered.

"He offered to trade me his truck just for the horse and wagon."

Coffey didn't take him up on the offer. He has taken up tintype and ambrotpe (glass plate) photography, learning both a few years ago when his interest in history combined with his interest in photography.

Tintype was invented in 1856 and became instantly popular across the country. Early Traveling photographers like Matthew Brady became part of the mythic American folklore of pioneering spirits in the tradition of Johnny Appleseed.

It is these early artists John Coffey emulates in his work. It is work, though, work that pays "better than the studio."

John Coffey's not on a lark or a publicity stunt; making portraits at historical landmarks is the way he makes his living.

Once he finds an area of historical interest, (he just came from Appomattox Court House) this latter day Matt Brady takes two hours to set up shop, using his wagon as a darkroom.

Curious tourists and history buffs can have authentic tintype portraits made for as little as \$2.75, or as much as \$20.00.

When he's studied a little history and made a few dollars, John moves on south in advance of winter.

Any trouble along the way?

"Just with a policeman in a small Pennsylvania town."

"He got upset when Brownie used the bathroom in the street."

"He was going to arrest me, but I talked him out of it."

Are the people he meets friendly?

"Really friendly. People in Pennsylvania and Maryland were nice, but once I got into the southern part of Virginia, they really went out of their way."

Monday night, for example, John and Brownie got a sample of Halifax County hospitality. As usual, John asked only to let Brownie graze for the night.

But Kyle Bowie, who lives in Cody and works for the Virginia Employment Commission in South Boston, went further

(See TRAVELER, PAGE 3)



"COME ON, BROWNIE"—On their way south, this traveling photographer and his horse paused recently for an interview near Mt. Airy. They travel to historical sites, making authentic untype portraits to pay their way. (Charley Ramsey photo)

Fr

Traveler

than that.

Bowie and his family took Coffey into their home for dinner and gave him a room for the night.

That doesn't happen everywhere.

"Sometimes I share the pasture with Brownie," he said.

Asking what he thought was the inevitable question, "where do you use the bathroom?" John said, "You're the first person ever to ask me that."

"I use whatever facilities are available at the time."

That ended that line of questioning. Where does he get his food and replenish his photographic supplies?

"I stop at country stores for canned goods, and I have equipment mailed ahead general delivery by a friend in Florida."

Coffey expects to reach Florida in ten weeks, but it wouldn't bother him if it takes longer.

"I'm not trying to make time," he said.

That's pretty obvious considering his mode of transportation. He doesn't even use rubber tires on his wagon, since that wouldn't be authentic.

"I hope to set up a totally authentic shop someday," he mused, "with not even any electricity in it."

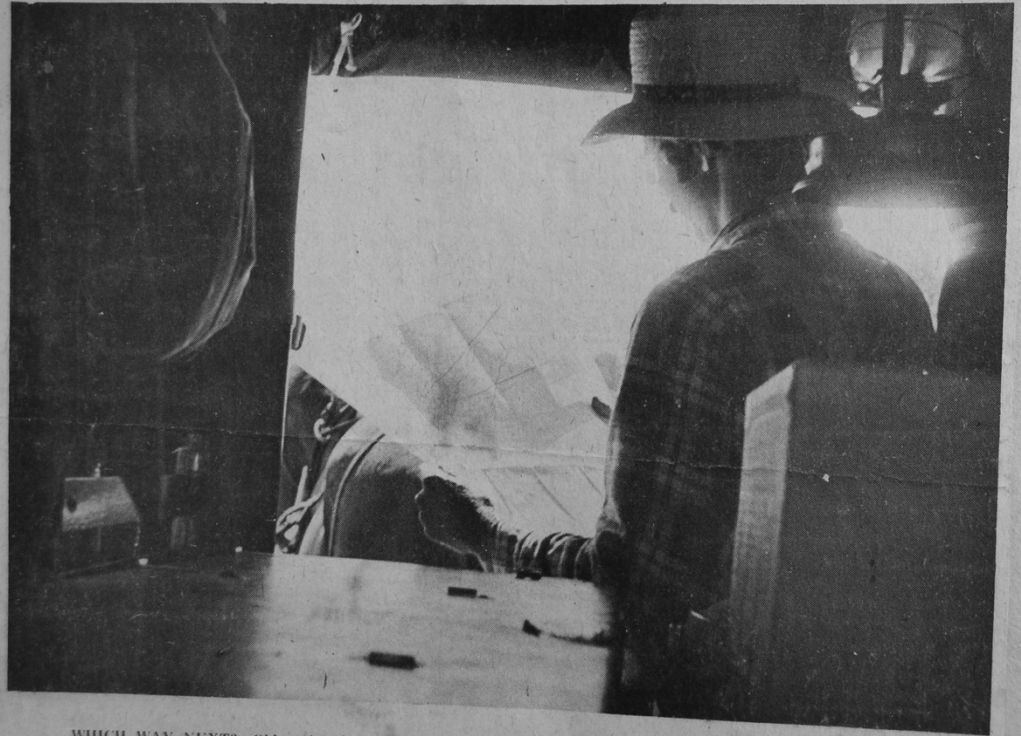
"In the meantime, though, I may decide to go across the country."

What does his family think of all this? "I just have my mom and a sister now,"

he said.

"I grew up in Nevada. They live in California."

That fact may make his cross country



WHICH WAY NEXT?—Old style photographer John Coffey consults his map near the Halifax County line before deciding the best road to take next on his way to

Florida. The picture was taken from the back of his wagon, looking in. See his story on page one. (Charley Ramsey photo)

North Carolina was state number five on my travels so far. Not that I was anxious about keeping count. But how could a person traveling as slowly as I was fail to notice? The road I took across the state border eventually lead me to the small town of Eden. The sun was starting to sink in the western sky. I began studying the area in earnest for a potential camp spot. I decided to check at a farm along the way that had a nice grassy spot out back behind the barn. But no one responded to my knock on the door. I'd seen a lady go into the house a moment before I had pulled in the door yard. She was probably alone, I figured, and didn't want to deal with any strangers, horse and wagon or not.

On up the road a ways I could see a church with some vacant ground around it. Coming closer I noticed a couple of new brightly printed 'No Trespassing' signs stuck around the perimeter of the property. I asked myself, what would Jesus do? I continued on down the road. Going through an intersection I saw a farmer slowly towing a hay rake behind his Ford 8N tractor down a side road. I decided to follow him to his place and ask him where I might find a place to camp. I urged Brownie into a trot easily enough, as if he sensed I

was onto something with his best interest in mind. Soon I caught up with the farmer just as he was turning up a driveway to a large old house with barns and out buildings outback. He stopped, got down from his tractor seat and walked over to me.

“Looks like we are in for a good cloud burst,” he said as he glanced toward dark clouds now moving in on the horizon. I agreed. “Where’d you get a fine rig like that?” he asked.

“Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. I’m traveling from there and am on my way south to Florida.”

“Well, I’ll be. That sure is something. I thought you might be some local boy out just driving around. How long did it take you to get from there to here?”

“Two months. I plan to be in Florida by Christmas.”

“What about tonight?” he asked me. “With the storm coming on you ought to put up here.”

With a great sense of relief, I heartily agreed. “I don’t travel at night. I sure appreciate your offer.”

“We’ve got a stall in the barn for your horse and plenty of fresh cut hay.”

By now the rest of the family had come out to see what was going on with the guy in the horse and wagon. There was the farmer’s wife, grandfather, and two teenage boys. Soon I had the wagon under a shed roof and Brownie put up in style in the barn. One of the boys asked me a few questions. He was curious about how I planned to spend the winter.

“I’ll keep traveling but I’ll be down in Florida before real winter weather sets in. No sense being out in a wagon like this any farther north than that during the winter months.”

He agreed. Then I heard the farmer and the other boy talking seriously about having to haul in the hay bales from off a nearby field before it got wet and ruined in the rain. The sun had dropped out of sight, a stiff wind was beginning to blow and the clouds were looking grayer and more ominous all the time. Here I’d been thinking only about my own needs, where as my farmer host had hay to make. He’d put my well being ahead of his own, taking time to get me settled in instead of rushing back to the rain threatened baled hay in his field. Wet hay will get moldy and is then not much good for anything but mulch.

I stepped up and offered to help. The air was suddenly getting cooler and the clouds even darker as we hopped into the cab of the big flatbed truck. For about an hour and a half we worked as fast as we could, loading the bales onto the back of the truck. A big flood light on top of the truck cab illuminated the field all around us. Each bale weighed about 50 pounds and we worked up quite a sweat.

It was enjoyable to be out with the farmer and his boys, talking as we worked and accomplishing a very important task at the same time. It was starting to sprinkle rain by the time the farmer backed his stacked high truck into

a bay in the barn out of the weather. We had just made it before the rain came pouring down. I was invited up to the house for supper. I expressed my gratitude for a very filling, delicious meal. But I was told, "Save the compliments. You had to work for this meal." That brought on a hearty round of laughter.

The next day I skirted the edge of Eden. It wasn't much like the Garden of Eden but more like a beer garden. Strewed along the road was a large assortment of beer cans and bottles. I also passed a gigantic Miller High Life brewery. There was also a lot of noisy road construction going on. They were making the way into this Eden a broad and wide one. Brownie was unaffected by the monster road graders and other heavy equipment roaring past us. Soon I came into a commercial strip and managed to stop at a convenience store.

I rushed in for my usual gallon of milk and chocolate frosted donuts. Then I used a pay phone. Brownie was tied to a nearby telephone pole so I could keep a better eye on him while I made my call. I was trying to call my lady friend Jan in Atlanta. But no one answered. I swallowed up my disappointment and traveled on. Amid the dust, noise, and angry drone of the big machinery there in Eden, Jan's angelic voice would have been a welcome relief.

Soon I was back on the quiet country roads I'd grown so fond of. This was the heart of tobacco country. Tobacco curing barns abounded. These buildings were about twenty feet square and about twenty feet tall. This was where the harvested tobacco leaves were hung to dry and cure. A smoky fire was built in one end to carry on the process as it had been done for centuries. I would often see the smoke coming out the peaks of the roof and through the many little apertures in the barn walls and door frames. I especially liked the old barns made of rough hewn logs.

One evening I made camp with a family who were small time tobacco farmers and owned one of these log tobacco barns. The man, Jessie Carter, and his wife, Verna, were in their forties and had one teenage daughter living at home. They also raised a few head of beef cattle. Their small wooden clabbered old home spoke of their modest and somewhat hard scrabble life. They were respectful and quiet people.

After we were acquainted, the women went back into the house, leaving Jessie and me to care for Brownie. I complimented him on his log barn.

"Oh that," he replied. "I haven't had it all that long. About a year ago I bought it from a neighbor for a hundred dollars. We took it down log by log, numbering each one as we went. Then we put it back up like it was a big puzzle. Some folks around here have to have fancy gas fired metal tobacco barns. But with the gas getting so expensive, I'll bet they go back to wood."

"You got a bargain on that barn," I said. And I agreed with him about going back to the old way with wood fuel instead of gas. From my own experience, I felt there were a lot of things better done, more ecologically, and

more enjoyably, the good old way.

Jessie went on to say, "When you make a new log building you should fell the trees on a full moon when the sap is up."

After getting Brownie and the wagon squared away we joined the rest of the family. It was fried chicken for supper, no doubt from the flock of chickens I'd seen roosting on the branches of the large pear tree near the house. After the excellent meal we went into the living room. There was a large artist's depiction of Jesus and other pictures relating to Christianity on the walls.

The home was in every way as humble as it gets. Nothing had been remodeled in a very long time. The furnishings were well worn and even a little thread bare. But it was home. And for that, one of the nicer ones I'd been in.

We had a peaceful visit with no television in the house interrupting out thoughts and conversation. Jessie showed me the muzzle loading Springfield musket his grandfather had carried as a Confederate soldier in the War of Northern Aggression. As I traveled south I'd often hear the Civil War referred to in that way. Bed time seemed to come early. Verna had already made up her mind I was to sleep in her bed. She would sleep on the couch. Of course, I could sleep in my wagon but she insisted she couldn't rest unless I had the best she could offer.

She showed me the light switch in the bedroom and the ubiquitous chamber pot. So far there was no sign of any indoor plumbing. I mentioned I needed to go out and roll down the flaps on the wagon. I used the opportunity to go off a ways and drain my bladder. Sleeping in a bed was nice, I had to admit. But maybe it wasn't as healthy for my back as sleeping on my much firmer bed roll on the hard wood floor of my wagon. I did not linger long on such thoughts. I was soon asleep.

The next day, I headed out to the wagon after a bacon and eggs breakfast. I noticed a well worn path going from the back door to a little four by four building. This was no doubt the privy. I had a feeling the Carters were probably embarrassed about not having indoor plumbing and so had neglected to show me the outhouse. When I left I was loaded down with pears from their heavily laden tree. Verna insisted that I take a bag of sandwiches and cake. I felt a little overwhelmed by all their hospitality, but they wouldn't let me refuse their gifts. As I headed out their plain dirt lane to the paved road, I marveled at the kind spirits of these simple country folks.