

July, 2011

Authentic Reproduction Conestoga Wagon Built by Local Vermont Craftsmen

First built in 1750 in the Conestoga Valley of Pennsylvania, the Covered Conestoga Wagon, pulled by 6 to 8 oxen or horses, served for more than 100 years as the primary means of transporting freight and pioneer families into unknown territories of the west. The body of the wagon was painted blue and red and built with deep sides. The front and back ends were slanted to keep the contents from spilling out when traveling on steep terrain, and the white canvas covers, stretched over 8-12 wooden bows, protected the rider and contents from storms and heat and provided privacy.

Owner of Heritage Ox Farm in Northfield, VT, Ray Morvan, Sr. intrigued by early American history and the challenges of building an authentic reproduction Conestoga Wagon, started researching designs five years ago. His wagon, completed in July 2011, is based on an original Conestoga Wagon housed in Shelburne Museum's collection, and on blueprints he obtained from England.

Morvan commissioned his friend and local craftsman Kendall (Hoppy) Martin of Northfield to build the wagon, a four-year project. Made from ash, the body of the wagon is 16 feet long, and 32 feet from tongue to tail. Martin also hand-forged the irons, an important part of the overall design of the wagon, to include the tool box hardware, hound plates, axe carriers, and stay chains.

To make the bows that hold the canvas canopy top, made by Priscilla Larocque of Tunbridge and Jackie Merriam of Snowsville, Vermont, Martin used ash trees cut on Morvan's property. They were milled to the correct size, then steamed and bent.

Don Randall of Roxbury, Vermont, made the fifth wheel and hammer pin, while the massive iron wheels measuring 47" in the front and 60" in the back were custom made by Fred Merriam, a professional carriage builder from Snowsville, Vermont. A grease bucket made at the Ross Farm Museum in Nova Scotia, and four handcrafted wooden barrels will complete the trappings on the wagon.

The Morvan's Conestoga Wagon made its maiden voyage at the Roxbury Independence Day Parade on July 2, 2011, pulled by a team of their Brown Swiss show oxen, Ace and Joker, each weighing more than 3500 lbs. The team's black leather studded harnesses or britching were specially made by Amish craftsmen in Fonda, New York, and an extra-wide yoke used with a singletree arrangement was handcrafted from ash by Hoppy Martin, who crafts all of Morvan's yokes.

Ray and Hannah Morvan are equipped to have their four Brown Swiss oxen pull the Conestoga Wagon and show them at fairs, parades and events around the state. On

their farm, Sweet Retreat Guesthouse & Sugarworks in Northfield, they offer ox-drawn wagon rides in a smaller forecart for up to 4 people and during the winter in a double seater sleigh.

With the help of her grandfather, Ray Morvan, and the 4-H Green Mountain Teamsters, twelve-year old Analiese Morvan is training her team of year-old Brown Swiss steers, Doc and Dan, which she is showing at fairs for the first time this season.

For more information or to make an appointment to see the Conestoga wagon and oxen, contact Ray and Hannah Morvan at Sweet Retreat Guesthouse and Sugarworks at 802-485-8525 or visit www.SweetRetreat-Vermont.com.