

Former dairy farmer delights in woodcarving

BY BARBARA RADER

JAMESTOWN — John Vanderstappen and his wife, Ann, recently moved to the outskirts of Jamestown, not far from Adamsville, where they had originally been dairy farmers. Giving up his "Dutch Dairy" of approximately 40 black and white milking cows and going into semi-retirement, John hopes to pursue his hobby of woodcarving in his new home.

Still a farmer at heart, John is leasing his 200-acre farm to a young man with the dream of becoming a devoted dairy farmer, a dream John once had himself. John hopes that selling his cows and equipment and leasing his land to the young man, Jeff Raney, is a good move for both parties, allowing each to pursue his own interests.

John came to the United States in 1951, immigrating from Holland after his family's farm was destroyed during World War II. He and his brothers separated, each going his own way. With the help of one of his brothers in the United States, John obtained sponsorship to work in a nursery near Chicago.

Watching Dutch soldiers whittle to help pass the long hours in the barns during the war provided John with the knowledge he needed to become a woodcarver.

Although he started woodcarving only three years ago, John plans to expand his craft in his new home. Downstairs he is working on making a special room just for his

hobby. Because of the dust he creates while hand sanding, he hopes to make his wife's cleaning duties easier by confining the dust to one room.

Spending at least eight hours each day on his hobby, John works with butternut, catalpa or bass wood.

"You've got to have good wood or you'll have lots of knots in bad wood, making it harder to carve," John says. "I like to buy my own trees, a whole tree at one time, and go to the sawmill nearby to do my cutting."

"Takes about two years for the wood to dry to use for good woodcarving work," he adds.

The dozen or more figurines sitting on the mantle represent John's first work.

But because he cut himself so many times while whittling them, John, who bleeds easily, turned his talents to woodcarving.

John uses very sharp knives which he orders specially and sharpens each one himself. As his work progresses, he purchases additional knives to make his work easier.

To highlight his work, John uses a special woodburning knife, various colors of wood stains, and very little white paint. He tops off these touches with a finishing coat of varnish.

"Staining and carving is what the folks want," he says, adding that animals, birds, covered bridges, houses and windmills are

the most popular pieces.

"I like to do cows. That's what I'm most familiar with," he says. "The farmer is always pleased with the cows I've done."

John recently completed an order for a well-known Holstein breeder in the area and has a number of orders waiting to be filled as soon as his new workroom is completed.

Two of the works hanging in his display will be packed and mailed to Germany to fill still another order. John has distributed his woodcarvings in about 15 states, going as far south as Florida, west to California, and north to Alaska, with some going into Canada. He advertises by word of mouth and by attending a few craft shows and community fairs.

John is determined to have his customers pleased with the woodcarving he does for them.

"You give me a picture or a photo, and I'll try to make what you want," he says.

Each of his pieces carries his special insignia - his name written in his native Dutch tongue. He added this special touch after a customer who had purchased one of his works asked him to sign it.

No two pieces of his work are identical, even though he has made many pictures of quail, covered bridges, Dutch home and windmill. Each one is slightly different.

John says he tries to avoid making cats and dogs because people are too attached to their



John Vanderstappen carves one of his pieces from a piece of wood, demonstrating the use of his special carving tools.

pets and expect the finished carving to be an exact replica of their animal. However, he does make a beagle dog's head and a few cats just to display, and he will sell them to interested customers.

John always works on at least three pieces at a time, with each piece in a different stage. Sometimes he etches the drawing on one solid piece of wood, and other times he pieces it together,

but you can't tell the difference.

He has worked with very small pieces and bigger pieces of up to six feet long.

He uses glue only when piecing wood together or when making eyes for his animals to give them an even more lifelike appearance.

Making his carvings look as real as possible is John's goal.

Customers prefer the carvings to

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John stands beside some of his finished work on display. A price tag is added for people interested in purchasing his work.



The same picture is shown here in three different stages of work, but each will be unique when completed. The special Dutch home and windmill are one of John's most popular offerings. At top left the picture is etched out on the wood. In the center it is carved with the stain added and in the bottom portrait the varnish is added.

Homestead Notes



A friend painted this picture of John working for him to hang in his studio. Here it is shown with the photo album he keeps of his work.