

Years of show ring experience earn Beattie May Ball respect of her peers.

-BY JOYCE BUPP
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BUNKER HILL, W.V. — Beattie May Ball was seven years old when she stepped into a cattle show ring for the first time. At the other end of the halter was an equally inexperienced showing participant, the youngster's purebred Guernsey calf.

The year was 1919.

That showing appearance was to be the first in a lifetime of cattle showing experiences for this plucky farm woman.

One of three daughters of Allen C. May, Beattie has since become a familiar face on the Middle Atlantic cattle show and sale circuit. While judges, cattle trends and known names in the business have come and gone, the respect that her knowledge of fitting and showing commands continues among purebred breeders.

The May family operated a relatively large dairy operation, maintaining a milking herd of about 40 head. A highlight of each year for Beattie and her sisters Dolly and Catherine was the showing competition at the York Fair.

"We would drive the cattle from the farm to the fairgrounds," she

recalls, a process that took many hours to cover the several-mile distance. "The animals had to be clipped and washed at home, because there was no place then to do that at the fair."

Clipping, too, was a more tedious job than today, since the clipper mechanism had to be operated by hand-turning.

"When the Fair got electricity, we got electric clippers," Beattie recounts.

"Well, we didn't know any better," she jokes, comparing those early years of showing to today's truck and trailer hauling, high-pressure washers and vacuum blow dryers.

While showing was even harder work than it is today, a show string of 18 or 20 head was not uncommon. One reason for large herd exhibits was a class known as the County Class, for animals bred by county breeders. But animals exhibited in that class could not be shown in any other area, making it necessary to bring additional entries to compete in other categories.

Then, the fair ran from Monday through Saturday, with the cattle remaining the full six-day period.

"On Sunday, we always had lots



Part of exhibiting cattle includes bookwork, such as checking health and registry certificates. Beattie and Mike Welsh get the showstring papers in order for the family's Brown Swiss entries.

of help at home to get ready. The spring wagon would be loaded with supplies; but the fair supplied all the hay and straw, so that didn't have to be hauled there," she relates.

Equal employment for women is certainly not a new concept to Beattie. Since the May family had only daughters, the trio of sisters learned at early ages to pitch in doing whatever chores demanded attention.

"I did what the boys would have done on a farm," is Beattie's description of her farm responsibilities as a youngster.

Still, there were probably not too many young ladies who received their own team of horses as an eighth-birthday present. Beattie remembers well the set of bay geldings, Duke and Doc, that her father gave her at that tender age.

"I was so proud of them," she fondly remembers. "I used to do a lot of harrowing with that team."

In spite of the lack of today's labor-saving devices, life was not entirely all work and no play for the May sisters.

"We took a lot of hayrides for groups, and once that word got around, it was hard to get stopped. Hayrides helped earn a little extra money and they were fun."

One particular booking that still is fresh in Beattie's memory was by a group that scheduled a hayride for forty people. They neglected to mention that each would then be bringing an additional friend. While the event

went off as planned, it was one hayride with a lot of "togetherness" as double the expected number squeezed into the wagons.

"Father used to take us along to cow sales. We went to banquets and to the parties that the Guernsey breeders had. And we danced a lot; we used to go to the Valencia," she adds, referring to the famed York night spot noted for hosting the then-popular big bands.

Showing horses at the fair, though, was one of Beattie's favorite pastimes. At times, that created a problem for Beattie and Catherine, who also enjoyed horse exhibiting, because the horses and cattle would be scheduled for showing at the same times. Particular favorites that she recalls were three- and five-gaited individuals, and a prized Tennessee Walker.

When her father died in 1949, Beattie and Catherine took over operation of the family farm and continued running the dairy herd for the next four years. When Catherine announced her wedding engagement, the sisters began making plans for sale of the herd.

With the sale scheduled for October 1953, the May showstring reached a record number that year at the fair. Singlehandedly, Beattie exhibited 32 head.

Out of the milking business, Beattie purchased a home north of York, and merchandised cattle for a number of years while assisting friends and acquaintances with farm work. She also handled painting and wallpapering jobs for local homeowners.

Beattie's cattle handling talents were not about to be forgotten, however. The year following the sale of the family herd, Avalong Farms employed her to assist with their fair show string. Similar jobs followed, and she traveled occasionally, exhibiting for a local Brown Swiss herd.

Through her cattle involvement, Beattie met and married Jack Ball, former manager of Blakeford Guernsey Farm on Maryland's Eastern Shore, and a self-

employed cattle hoof trimming specialist.

With Jack's expertise on feet and legs, and Beattie's extensive background in fitting and handling show cattle, the couple provided an ideal team for assisting purebred exhibitors on the show circuit. Among the annual shows they have worked on a regular basis are the Pennsylvania Farm Show and the prestigious Harrisburg Eastern National Dairy Show.

Between shows, they were frequently booked to assist with preparing for cattle sales.

"We worked many Holstein sales for Doty Remsburg's company, and with John Merrymen's Guernsey sales," relates Beattie.

Married 17 years, the Balls now enjoy "semi-retirement" on their Bunker Hill Farm. Beattie maintains a large garden, tends their three and one-half acre lawn and enjoys the companionship of the couple's only livestock, two pet dogs.

But, a few times every show season, Beattie packs up clipping and fitting gear, and heads out the road to lend a hand to dairy friends. The "barbering" of show cattle continues to be more of an art than a science, and veteran clippers are hard to find. It's a skill that Beattie, who credits her training to "just watching how others did it," keeps honed by accepting these few jobs each year.

"I'll do it as long as I can," she figures. While an eye problem did curtail her activities earlier this year, that condition has improved, and enabled her to keep her hand in a few of the fall shows.

With more than 60 years of showing expertise, Beattie's advice to novice exhibitors is based on sound experience.

"Don't give up until you have that ribbon in your hand," she admonishes interested youngsters. She can quickly back up that advice with anecdotes about exhibitors she remembers who let their animals "fall apart" in a

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Forking manure is one phase of cattle showing that has remained virtually unchanged over Beattie's tenure on the show circuit.



An accomplished cattle fitter, Beattie Ball remembers clipping with the hand-turned clipper. When the York Fair hooked up to electricity, her family was quick to purchase one of the electrical clippers.

Homestead Notes