

John

Deere

Blacksmith Boy



Illustrated by Robert Doremus



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Deere

Blacksmith Boy

By Margaret Ann Bare

Macmillan Publishing Company
New York

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Macmillan Publishing Company
866 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10022

Printed in the United States of America

First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 64-24808
ISBN: 0-02-708381-0



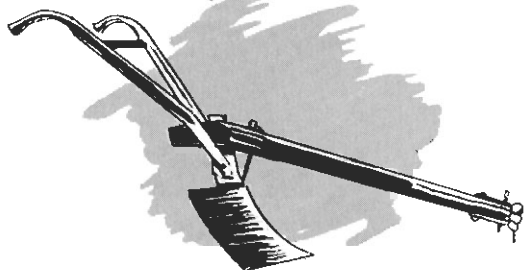
*To my mother
in loving memory of my father,
Worthy A. Matthews,
whose lifework also benefited
the prairie farmers*

With sincere appreciation and gratitude I wish to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Mrs. Caldwell R. Rosborough, Moline, Illinois, in gathering research material for this book about the childhood of her great-uncle, John Deere.

I am also grateful for the excellent cooperation and assistance of Deere & Company. Especially do I wish to thank Mr. George F. Neiley, Jr., Director of Public Relations; Mr. Roger J. Fritz, Secretary of John Deere Foundation; and Mrs. Charlotte L. Anderson, Librarian.

For their help with the authentication of the Vermont chapters, I wish to thank Mr. and Mrs. Worth Champeny, Rochester, Vermont, and Mrs. William Burrage, Middlebury, Vermont.

For supplying the initial impetus which led to the writing of this biography, I wish to thank Mr. Marlin Baxter, Director of Curriculum, Moline Public Schools, Moline, Illinois.



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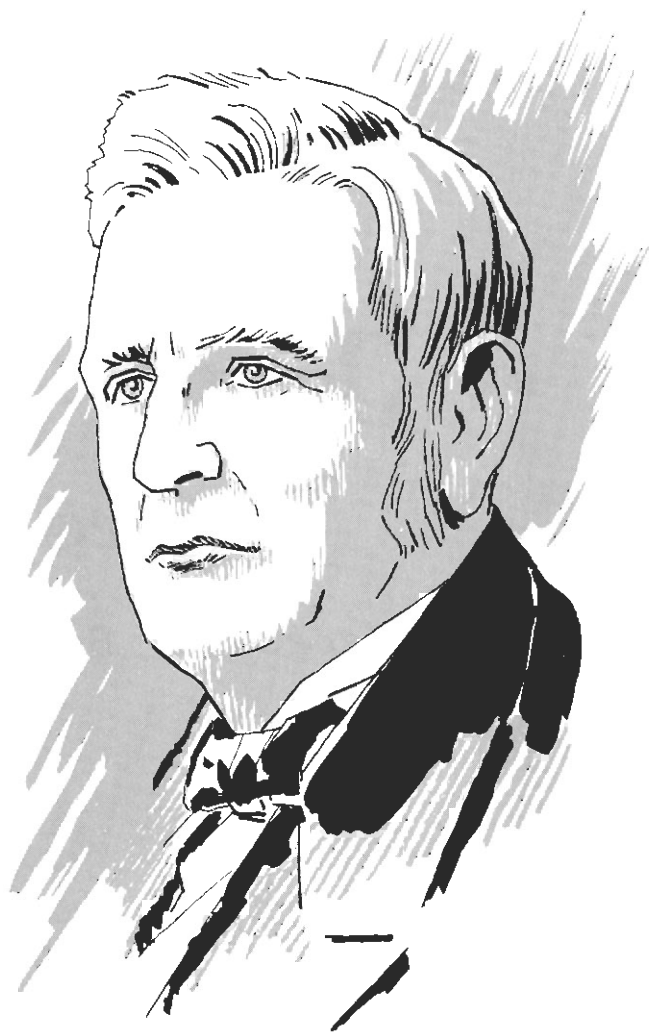
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Muscles Count

JOHN WAS worried. Where was Seth? Why didn't he come? This was their last day to play! Tomorrow was Sunday, and no one could play on the Sabbath! Monday school began!

On the bridge just above the waterfalls, John Deere, a nine-year-old boy with light wavy hair and blue eyes, was waiting for his friend, Seth Miller. It was ten o'clock. On this September day in the year 1813 the sun was already hot in Middlebury, Vermont.

"School!" John mumbled to himself. "Who wants to go to school when there are so many things to do outdoors?" He leaned over the rail-

ing and watched the waters of Otter Creek go roaring over the falls,

"Hi, there, John!" Seth came running across the bridge. He was out of breath. "I had to pick—two baskets of peaches—before I could leave. Have you been waiting long?"

"Oh, about fifteen minutes, I guess," John admitted. "I was afraid you weren't coming."

A team of brown horses pulling a carriage rattled past. The boys stepped closer to the bridge railing and leaned over.

"Look! There goes a big log over the falls!" John exclaimed. "Let's see if we can hit it before it gets by!"

Both boys found stones on the bridge floor. Seth threw and John threw. They missed. John got another stone.

"That log's too far away now," Seth decided.

"No it's not!" John insisted. Back went his arm. Away went the stone.

Kerplunk! It hit the log!

"Golly, you sure can throw far, John!" Seth said admiringly.

"Oh, I come here and practice a lot," John replied modestly. He lived on Main Street close to the south end of the bridge. "Let's get going, Seth. Let's see how far we can follow Otter Creek. We'll pretend we're explorers."

Just then a team of black horses pulling a farm wagon clattered up onto the bridge.

"That's my Uncle Amos coming!" Seth shouted and waved at the driver.

"Whoa, Dolly! Whoa, Prince!" Amos Miller pulled back on the reins. "You boys want to ride over to Captain Lawrence's blacksmith shop with me?" he asked. "Get in if you do. Prince, there, needs a new shoe!"

"You bet! We'd like to go!" John accepted for both of them. The boys climbed up over the big wheel and into the back of the wagon.

"Giddyap!" Uncle Amos shook the reins and the horses started on again. The wagon jolted across the bridge and on down Main Street.

John's eyes were sparkling. It was fun to ride in a wagon, but it was even more exciting to go to the blacksmith shop! He'd rather watch Captain Lawrence even than go down Otter Creek. Anyway, the shop was right along the Creek. They could still go exploring.

Even before the wagon stopped, they could hear the loud clang! clang! of the blacksmith's hammer on the anvil.

Uncle Amos unhitched the horses. He looped Dolly's reins over a hitching rail and led Prince toward the wide door of the shop. "Now you lads stay out of the way," he warned as the boys followed him inside. "You can get hurt here."

Down came the blacksmith's hammer. Clang! Sparks flew from the red-hot iron which Captain Lawrence held on the anvil with a pair of tongs.

Clang! He was bending the iron to make another link in a heavy chain.

What strong arms and big muscles the blacksmith had! John watched him admiringly.

Clang! Clang! Now the two ends of the link were joined together. Captain Lawrence lifted the chain with his long-handled tongs and plunged it into a tub of water.

SSSSSsssst! Steam rose and hissed. When the iron had turned black and the steam was gone, he raised the chain from the tub and hung it over an iron peg on the wall.

Captain Lawrence rubbed his hands on his leather apron and grinned at the boys. "I see you brought me a couple of helpers, Amos."

"Yep, Captain, so I did! Thought you and I could go down to the creek and fish while these lads put a shoe on old Prince!" The men and the boys laughed. All of them knew John and Seth couldn't shoe a horse.

It was fun to watch, though. First, Captain Lawrence held Prince's foot between his knees and trimmed the hoof with a sharp knife.

"Doesn't that hurt Prince?" Seth asked.

"No more than it hurts you to have your toenails cut," the Captain answered.

"But when you nail the shoe on, that will hurt, won't it?" Seth was still doubtful.

"No, lad, that won't hurt Prince either. You watch, and you'll see that I drive the nails just through the horny part of his hoof," the smith explained.

While Seth asked his questions, John had been looking at the blacksmith's tools. There were big hammers that looked too heavy to lift. There were small hammers with round ends. There were sharp-pointed chisels and tongs of all sizes. Across wooden beams overhead were long bars and rods of iron. John wished he could use some of those tools.

John stepped closer to the forge where the coals of a hot fire burned. He liked the smell of the burning coke. He was sure he would like to make useful things from hot iron.

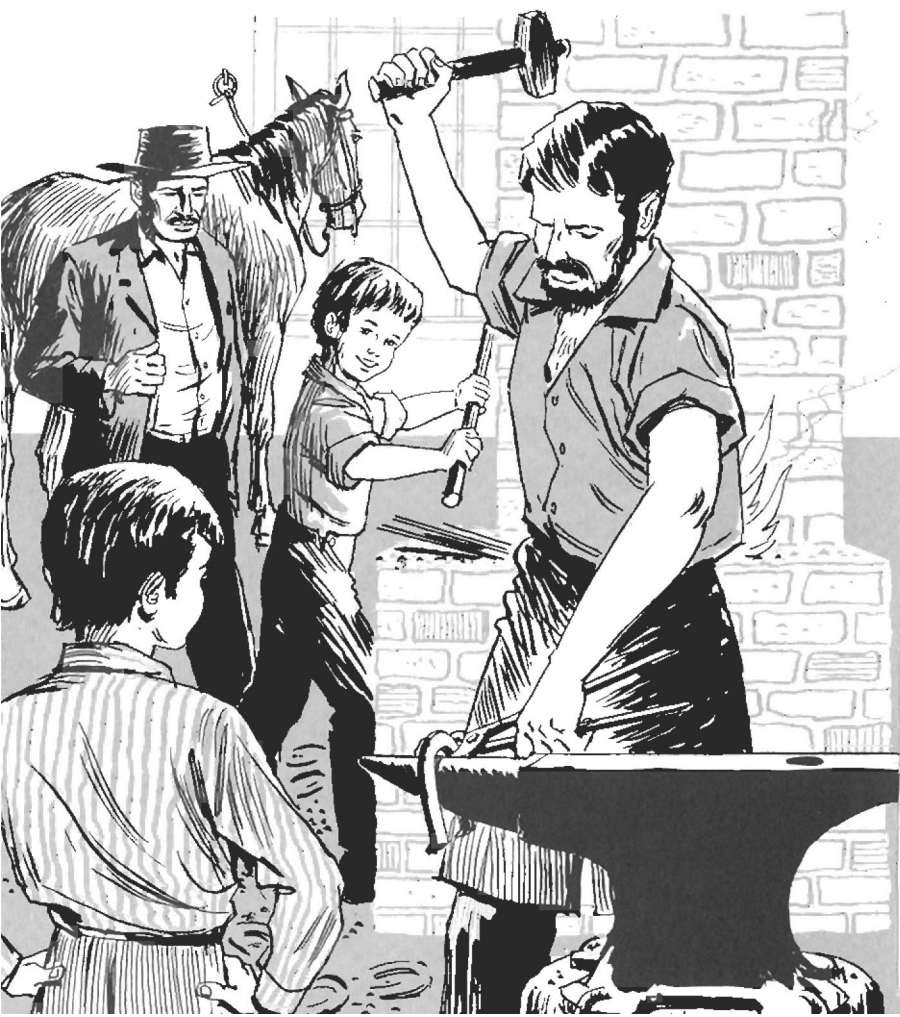
Many horseshoes hung over a pole along one side of the shop. Captain Lawrence took one of these down. He held it against Prince's hoof and scratched a mark on it with a nail.

"I'll have to make this one a bit longer," he said. With the long-handled tongs he pushed the ends of the horseshoe deep into the bed of hot coals. John watched with interest.

"John," the captain called, "work the bellows for me. You've got strong arms, boy!"

John took hold of a long wooden handle that stuck out beside the forge. As he pulled it down, the big sack, or bellows, behind the forge squeezed shut and pushed air up through the fire. The flames burned upward, hot and bright. When the handle went up, the bellows filled

with air. When the handle came down, the air blew through the fire and made it glow and blaze. John liked the sound of the air whistling through the bellows.



Soon Prince's new shoe was hot enough to be bent and pounded into shape. Captain Lawrence took the glowing iron from the fire with his tongs and turned and hammered it on his anvil. When it was the right size for Prince, he quickly stuck it into the water tub. Cooling the iron made it harden again.

When the shoe was cold, Captain Lawrence lifted Prince's hoof between his knees. Using flat-headed horseshoe nails, he carefully nailed the shoe to the horny part of the hoof.

Prince stood quietly. He seemed to like getting a new shoe. The boys knew he hadn't been hurt at all.

Captain Lawrence patted Prince. "You're a fine fellow, Prince. I wish all horses stood as quietly as you do."

The blacksmith walked to the door with Uncle Amos and the two boys as they led Prince outside to hitch him to the wagon.

"Amos," he said, "I'd a lot rather shoe Prince than Dolly over there. She's a nervous one."

"Yes, Captain, Dolly's afraid of most everything. She's a good worker, though," Uncle Amos replied as he walked Prince toward the hitching rail where Dolly was tied.

"Good-by, Captain Lawrence. Good-by, Uncle Amos. John and I are going to hike down along the creek. Race you down there, John!" Seth waved to the men and ran down the path.

John waited a moment, patting Dolly's and Prince's soft noses.

"Thanks for the ride, Mr. Miller," he said. "Thanks for letting me work the bellows, Captain Lawrence!"

Just then a yellow cat streaked around the corner of the shop, followed by a wildly barking dog. They ran right between Dolly's front legs. The mare snorted, reared, and plunged backward. The reins pulled loose from the rail and

she started to run. John jumped and grabbed the reins near her head. He hung on.

"Whoa, Dolly, whoa!" he shouted and pulled with all his might. Dolly danced and threw her head up. John held on tightly, although he was lifted right off the ground!

Then Captain Lawrence was there. He pulled Dolly's head down and made her stand still. John could let go now.

Uncle Amos ran toward John. "Are you hurt, boy?" he asked.

"No, sir. I'm all right."

Captain Lawrence patted John on the back. "Good work, lad!" he said. "You've a quick wit and strong muscles. You saved Amos from having a runaway horse today!"

John felt proud as he ran to catch up with Seth. He thought of what his mother had said at breakfast. "Eat every bit of your oatmeal, John. It will make you big and strong."

He thought of what his older brother, Francis had said last night. "You are a good worker, John. Carrying water and wood for mother makes you both helpful and strong."

They were right. John resolved that from now on he would look for more hard work that would not only help the **family** but make him strong. Throwing stones helped, too! It really paid to have strong **arms** and **muscles**.