

# The Legend of the Fryeburg Fair

*by Elena Trunfio*

Thousands of people look forward to the Fryeburg Fair each year in October. The large country fair takes place in the small town of Fryeburg, in a valley in southern Maine, bordering rural New Hampshire farm villages. The region is surrounded by gorgeous yellow, orange, and red maple trees. This specific fair put Fryeburg on the map. Each year the fair grows in size and popularity. The fair began in 1851 and now, 85 years later in 1936, the citizens in and around Fryeburg are hoping for the biggest fair yet. There is a bounty of food, attractions, and entertainment. Best of all, there are plenty of animals. There are large cows, goats, pigs, chickens, ponies, draft horses and rabbits. Some farmers will actually sleep in the barn with their animals. People of different ages come to see the wide variety of attractions.

One attraction most people do not witness, but have heard about, is the *Legend of the Fryeburg Fair*. Many do not believe the legend is true, for during the last few days of the fair there is always much partying, which includes large amounts of dancing and drinking of ale. The Legend says that there is a big burly ghost with an axe in one hand, and a round ball of hay that resembles a human head in the other. He haunts the fairground on the last night of the fair. It is said that you can often see his shadow under the south entrance gate that opens to the fairground.

From a small farm in Paris, Maine, with two small black cows, came Ethan Crane. Ethan was tall and as skinny as a stick with the nose of a scarecrow. Women admired him mostly because he was the local veterinarian, as well as being a farmer. Ethan, in all his years of being a veterinarian, had attended many fairs but had never won a ribbon. When Ethan came to Paris, he agreed that in exchange for room and board he would show his landlord's cows at the fair. This year there was only one thing keeping him back, and that was big Jim Bruiser.

Jim had a large farm, also in Maine, with well over 30 cows. The stalls his cows were kept in were big and messy, and his cows measured seven feet in height and weighed more than most trucks. Jim brought five of his cows to the fair. He had won blue ribbons at the fair each and every year. Jim Bruiser was tough as nails and because of that, they called him Knuckles. He didn't go to college. Most would say, when Jim was not present of course, that he was not the brightest bulb. The women in town liked his thick, full head of hair and his tremendous muscles. His flaws included a short attention span, and the lack of ability to carry a conversation for more than two minutes.

There was another young farmer at the fair, and she was Abigail Van Trapp. She was not the kind of farmer you would be thinking of. She always had two long blond braids that went over her shoulders, and she had big brown eyes, as did her cows. Abigail was a kind-hearted girl and preferred to spend her time with animals rather than humans.

However, when she went into town or found herself at large gatherings, she enjoyed being the center of attention. She was an only child and her parents had given her everything she had ever wanted. At times she could be a bit conceited. Ethan had never seen this side of Abigail and had always admired her. He admired her so much that he was often too shy to talk to her. Abigail was a prize that many men would like to win. Although Ethan thought fairly high of himself, he thought if anybody else was going to win Abigail's affection, it would be Jim.

Abigail's father was a wealthy merchant and they lived on a large, old New England farm. From a young age, Abigail beseeched her father for all kinds of animals. Each day she seemed to have a new request. Her father was astonished when one day she asked him if she could keep a crow that she had found with an injured wing. On another, she asked him if she could take in a stray cat that she had found along the road. On yet another, Abigail asked her father if it would be possible to buy a peacock and allow it to wander the grounds of the family farm. Finally, her father gave into her and agreed to buy her three calves to raise by herself. The farm had a lovely barn that was often used as a dance hall. In the cellar of the barn her father ordered his men build three, sturdy stalls. The calves he bought were of the highest quality. Abigail immediately thought that with her cows she could easily win a blue ribbon at the fair.

She named her calves Daisy, Lily and Blossom, and they had a fine life in Abigail's care. The Brown Swiss Cattle were six-months old when she brought them to the fair. The calves were a caramel-colored brown with the most beautiful brown eyes. As her calves grew prettier and stronger with each day, Abigail could barely wait for this year's fair. When the day came, her father's men brought her and her calves to the Fryeburg Fairground. When "Knuckles" spotted Abigail, three stalls over, he strutted up to her and offered her some grain. "Good to see you. Do you need this?" he asked, holding out a bucket of feed.

Abigail turned around and replied, "No thanks. I have plenty already."

"Yep," said Jim, and he walked back to his cows.

Abigail and Jim had grown up together in Paris. Ethan did not have the advantage of having known Abigail his whole life. He grew up in the bustling city of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and only had been introduced to Abigail a short time ago when he was dispatched to Paris as a country veterinarian. Ethan watched the interaction between Jim and Abigail. His mind began to put together an idea. He wandered out toward the concession stands and bought two ice-cold, foamy root beers. His next move was to saunter up to Abigail's stalls. She was busy shoveling cow manure in an attempt to keep the stalls tidy.

Ethan quietly said, "Sorry to bother you. Why don't you enjoy this root beer while I take care of that work for you."

Abigail seemed pleasantly surprised and said, "Oh Ethan, that the nicest thing anyone has said to me all day." Just then Jim turned his head around and gave Ethan the "evil eye" with a frown on his lips.

The next morning Ethan woke up to the sound of cows eating, drinking and mooing. "Good day, Ethan" he heard an angelic voice from behind his head call out. He turned around and saw Abigail. Abigail was behind him!

"You slept in," she said.

Since Ethan was fairly new to town she said, "Have you ever heard of the *Legend of the Fryeburg Fair*?"

She went on to explain that on the last night of the fair, an axe-bearing ghost is said to haunt the fairground. Knuckles overheard her telling Ethan about the ghost and a smile formed on his face. As Ethan was listening, his mind dozed off thinking about it, and his teeth began to chatter. Abigail noticed she had upset Ethan. She changed the subject by telling him about the dance her father threw every year on the last night of the fair. Ethan agreed. The dance sounded like fun, and he hoped for a chance to dance with Abigail. He found her pretty, but even more attractive was the thought of an easy life on her father's large farm with many hired helping hands.

That week Abigail won three blue ribbons, one for each of her calves. Jim, of course, won too many to count, and Ethan won none. This did not bother Ethan all that much. He only agreed to show the cows out of obligation to his landlord. He would rather spend his time reading books next to a warm fire. Most of his hobbies were those that could be done sitting down in a warm, cozy room. For example, he enjoyed playing the flute and playing cards.

Since there was no heat in the barn, the nights became chilly. Every evening when the fair attendees had left, the remaining farmers gathered around a bonfire and told stories. One story that kept being brought up again and again was the *Legend of the Fryeburg Fair*. Ethan didn't like what he was hearing, so he pulled out his flute and began playing. Jim didn't like the attention that Ethan was gathering, especially from Abigail, so he began to tell jokes. Abigail liked Jim's jokes and was laughing loudly. Ethan began to play louder and more complicated songs in an effort to regain her attention. It was clear that Ethan and Jim were always going to be in competition with each other. Abigail liked both men, but clearly Ethan a bit more.

On the last night of the fair no one slept over, but they all stayed for the big dance sponsored by Mr. Van Trapp. Abigail, who was enjoying the attention from both Jim and Ethan, made sure she looked dazzling for the dance. Ethan stood on the sidelines working up his courage to ask Abigail for a dance. Just as he began to walk toward Abigail, she spotted him and smiled. When there was only about five feet remaining between Abigail and Ethan, Knuckles stepped in and asked her to dance. Abigail

smiled kindly and said, "Maybe later. I have somebody special in mind for this dance." A scowl formed on his face as he cracked his knuckles and walked away.

As the dance ended and people were leaving, Ethan wished Abigail a good night. He set off toward his stalls and loaded his cows in the trailer to take back to the farm. This took a while since he wasn't as quick as the others, and he wanted to leave everything in perfect condition. As he left the barn, he noticed that he was the last to leave and shut off the lights.

Ethan realized that in order to take the quickest route back to Paris, he would need to exit at the south gate. Images flashed through his head and he tried to convince himself that the stories were just stories. However, he couldn't help but shut his eyes as he was turning the corner toward the south gate. He knew if he could just make it through the gate he would be safe. The ghost, the legend says, cannot leave the fairground. He was terrified as he drove toward the gate staring at the open exit which lead to the main road. "Yes!" he thought. "I've made it safely."

As quickly as he blinked his eyes, a figure of a burly body holding an ax and a ball of hay appeared 20 feet in front of him. He shut his eyes and shook his head thinking he was just imagining the whole thing. With his eyes still closed he heard the squeak of the gate. When he dared to look again, he saw that the figure was still in front of him as the gate slammed shut. The figure jumped on the windshield, knocked Ethan out of the truck and took over the driver's seat. Ethan was scared stiff for it was dark out and he couldn't see very well. Without thinking, Ethan jumped into the back of the truck and the ghost drove off. The next morning, all that was found of Ethan was one barn boot lying next to a small, scattered pile of hay.

A few months later, Abigail and Jim got married. Jim lived happily on the farm with Abigail. They quickly built a family of their own. Abigail's experience of caring for animals was put to good use caring for six children. Together Abigail and Jim continued to show cows each year at the Fryeburg Fair. Each year, on the last night of the fair when the farmers gathered around the bonfire, the *Legend of the Fryeburg Fair* was always brought up, and so was Ethan. Knuckles always smiled and chuckled to himself.

Ethan never returned to Paris or the Fryeburg Fair. Some think he got frustrated and ran away. Others say he has now taken over the ghost's spirit and haunts the Fryeburg Fair on the last night every year without fail. No one knows for certain, but it's probably a good idea if you find yourself at the fair on the last night, to make sure you leave before it turns dark!