

# HARVEST DAY

From calves to oxen, corn seed to cornbread, all at Dudley Farm

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By Lisa Reisman  
Special to the Times

**T**HIS IS THE STORY of Bob and Dave. And, on a larger scale, of the Harvest Day festival at the historic Dudley Farm in Guilford this Saturday.

Bob and Dave, named after Dudley family forbears, were born at the beginning of April. On a crisp morning two weeks later, Mark Dudley and his son Evan led the wide-eyed, wobbly-legged calves on separate halters from the dim-lit barn to the sun-dappled pasture and talked to them by name. Not long after, a light training yoke was placed on their bony shoulders to accustom them to its weight and feel. For 20 to 30 minutes every morning and evening since then, Mark and Evan have gently rounded them into form.

As of this week, Bob and Dave are a strapping 550 pounds each. They're on their fourth yoke, having outgrown the previous three smaller ones. This Saturday, Oct. 29, they'll display their ability to respond to a series of voice commands. True to their proverbial name, these beasts of burden will also pull loads of varying weight—in perfect step. They may even make a turn or two.

"Early New England farmers preferred oxen for their heavy work," said Mark Dudley. Training them in farm skills requires time, patience and, above all, twice-daily repetition, but the hard work has paid off. Because there are

few, if any, working oxen in the area, "we now can show the public how a team would have performed on a farm from the late 1700s onward," Dudley said.

It's all in keeping with the mission of Dudley Farm, a non-profit 19th-century farm museum and educational center located at the intersection of Routes 77 and 80: to honor and sustain Guilford's almost-vanished agricultural past.

Perhaps there is no better example of that impulse than

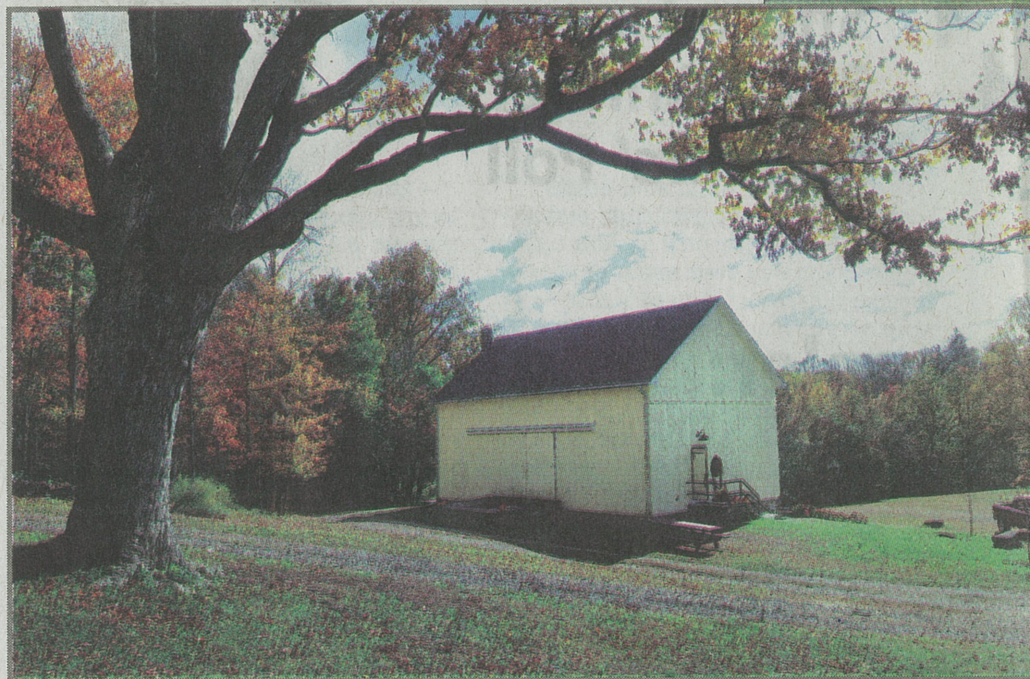
in the person of Durham's Al Kostuk, who will be plying his craft on the old working forge in the farm's recently reconstructed blacksmith shop. Asked why he enjoyed showing off his talents as a blacksmith, the retired auto mechanic clicked his tongue in a typing sound. "Too much of that around," he said. "This is much better. You're actually working with your hands and making something."

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Janet Dudley is photographed next to a spinning wheel at Dudley Farm in Guilford. Left, A stove inside the farmhouse. Photos by Arnold Gold

## LOCAL FEATURE



Munger Barn at Dudley Farm in Guilford is photographed on 10/16/2010.

Photo by Arnold Gold AG0388D

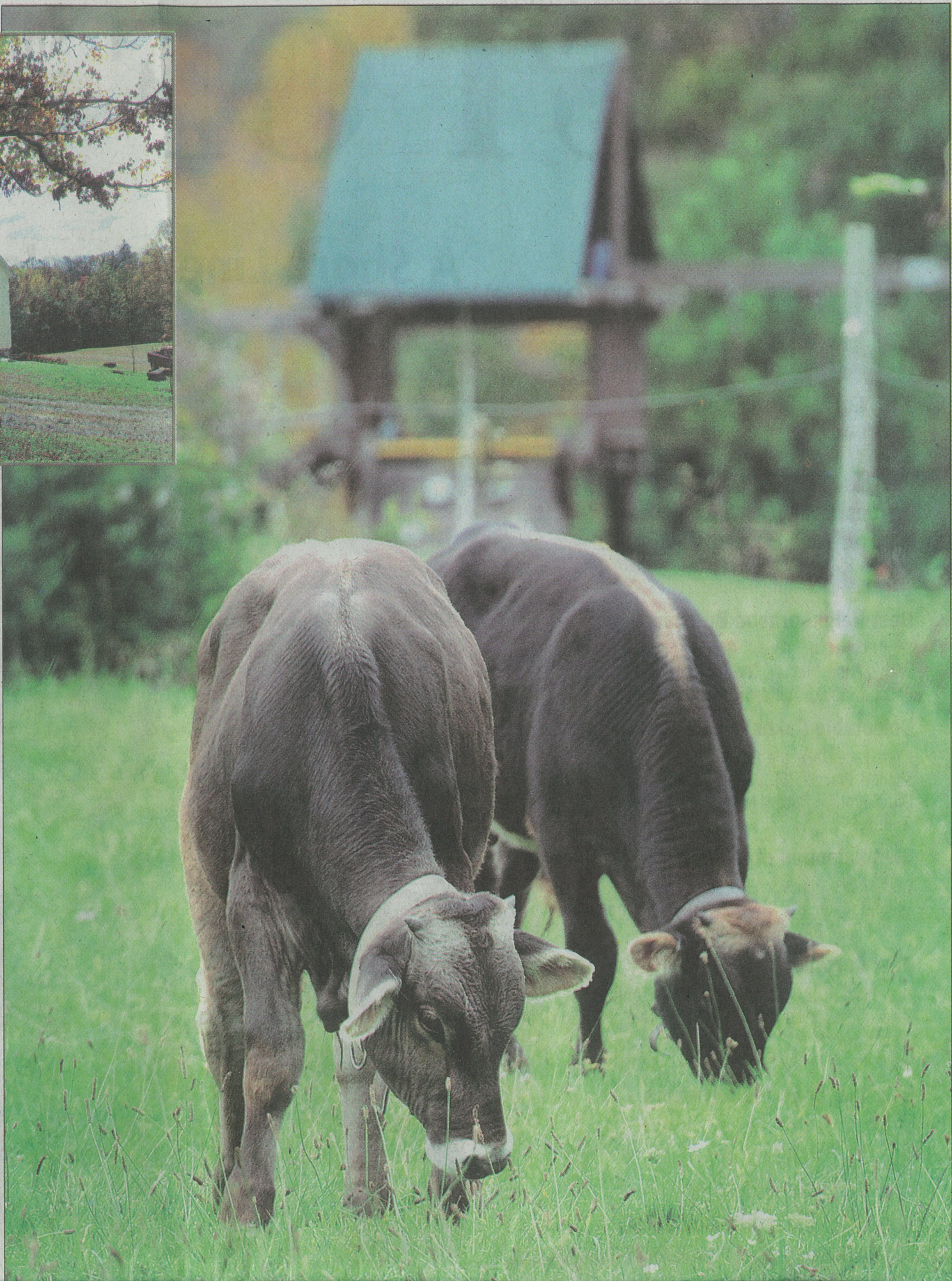
# OLD TIMEY HARVEST FEST

used to attire himself in period garb: "A lot of people see all this old stuff still in use, it gets them excited."

Janet Dudley, Mark's wife, who will demonstrate how the Dudley women of yore processed wool fiber from raw fleece to yarn for blanket and clothing, had a similar take. "Working at a 1860 spinning wheel has a way of transporting you back in time," she said. Not to mention "there's

Harvest Day fall favorites like hot cider and the legendary Dudley Farm hotdogs. As the final farmer's market of the season, it's also an opportunity to stock up for winter, as earlier generations did, with jams, jellies, pickles, and maple syrup and to deck out your home with gourds, pumpkins, and Indian corn.

"More than anything, Harvest Day is a time of celebration," said Gordon



a certain satisfaction in transforming wool from the sheep at your own farm into something you can wear and that will keep you warm."

Back in May, Mark Dudley was perpetuating yet another tradition: planting corn. This wasn't seed commercially developed to ensure uniform size and ripening time and to fit to a harvesting machine, with taste and flavor only secondary considerations. The so-called heritage seed, Dudley said, is meant to be harvested by hand, not by machine, and, as it happens, is the same variety that was grown at the farm in the late 1800s.

By then, Bob and Dave were used to Mark Dudley's voice and body language, but it's unlikely they took much notice of what he was doing in the garden. Or, for that matter, of the volunteers mulching and weeding the corn over the summer and then, a month ago, bringing the ears inside to dry; the two were occupied grazing in the pasture after their morning workout.

It's possible though, they'll pick up on the coffee-grinder sound this Saturday when a hand-cranked cast-iron wheel strips the corn kernels off the cob. And no doubt they'll start at the pop and fire of the 1890 antique corn grinder as North Guilford's Adam Ashman loads the kernels into the machine until they're ground into meal. Whether Bob and Dave will be fed a sample of the fresh baked cornbread from the corn meal coming from the Dudley farmhouse kitchen has yet to be determined.

To go with the cornbread, there will be chili, as well as

Brainerd, a member of the

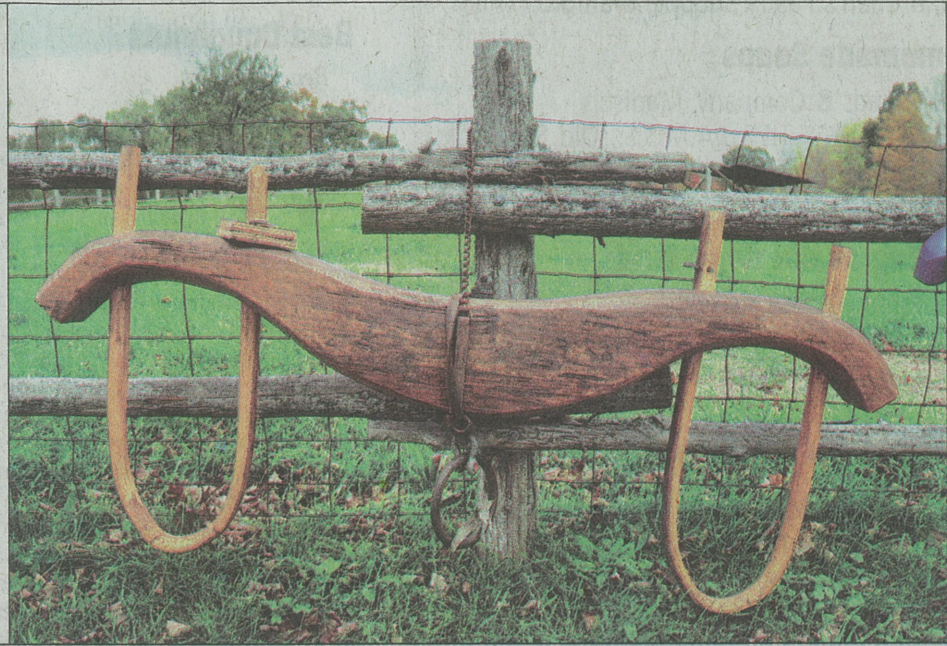


A bedroom inside the farmhouse at Dudley Farm in Guilford.

Quinnipiac people who will display his skills at fire-making and lead tours of the popular Native American museum on the farm. "I don't know if most folks are aware that Harvest Day is Thanksgiving for Native Americans," he said. "It's an occasion to enjoy the fruits of one's labors over the course of the growing season."

That's why, amid the lively bluegrass tunes of the Dudley Farm String Band, the sound of the peddlers peddling and the grinder firing, and the smell of charcoal from the bellows in the blacksmith shop, the cornbread from those heritage seeds that were planted all the way back in May will taste that much better. And Bob and Dave, who got their unsteady start a mere seven months ago, can finally show the world what they've become.

Harvest Day runs from 9 A.M. to 2 P.M. on Saturday, October 29th at Dudley Farm, 2351 Durham Road, Guilford; 203-457-0770. Oxen demonstrations at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.; wool spinning at noon; corn grinding and blacksmith demonstrations ongoing.



Oxen graze at Dudley Farm in Guilford. Photo by Arnold Gold

An ox yoke at Dudley Farm in Guilford,

Gordon "Fox Running" Brainerd is photographed at a Quinnipiac Native American exhibit inside Munger Barn

