

# Haying with the Mules

By Ray Woodside  
Photos by Michele Smith

**O**ur hay ground was very wet this early summer; however, the grass was ready to cut. So, I borrowed our neighbor's swather to get the grass on the ground. Because we still had a little water in the field, I laid the grass flat so it would dry faster. While cutting the grass, I thought it would be fun to see if I could find a good used rake to buy; I could rake it with our mules and forecart. After cutting our five acres of hay, I got on Craigslist and found a nice rake. I had it home by 6:00 p.m. that night. The next morning, I greased the rake, fixed a couple of things, and hooked it up to our Pioneer Forecart. We were raking hay by two o'clock that afternoon.

I started raking with our lead team, the "Little Girls," as they have had the most experience in pulling noisy equipment. The mules and the rake did a fine job. Late the next morning, I rolled the hay over again with our wheeler team, Julie and Ned. Julie started jumping around a little (for about thirty seconds), when I kicked the rake into gear, but she settled down quickly. We had the hay all baled up by that evening.

On July 12, 2018, about noon, I loaded the same four mules into our Living Quarters trailer and headed to an old fashioned haying bee in Riggs, Idaho. It was a four-hundred mile, seven hour trip for the mules and me. This event was sponsored by the American Bradant Association Field Day 2018, on the ranch of A.J. Woolstenhulme. This association is trying to keep this breed of draft horses active and thriving.

Friday morning I helped to get a ground drive mower working and getting the ranch ready for 150 people the next day. There were twenty or thirty folks there helping put up tents, getting equipment ready, cooking food and even some people fishing in AJ's private pond. People were also coming and



*Ray mowing with his team, Julie and Ned*

going with horses and some of the old farm gear.

On Friday afternoon, AJ asked me if I wanted to cut some hay. I was lucky enough to be able to borrow a mower and also have someone to tell me how it operated. So off

I went with our wheeler team and cut hay for two hours. The mower we were pulling was set up very well with the clearance on the cutter bar set at .010 of an inch. It was a gear, ground drive. It pulled hard but we cut two rounds, maybe seven acres, and never

plugged up once before we took a five-minute break. I had a hard time pulling the sickle bar up at the corners, backing the mules up a few feet, and then getting started cutting again. I was sure glad I had cut grass hay when I was a kid with a tractor pull mower as I knew what I was supposed to be doing. But, getting the mules around the corner and dropping the sickle bar at the right time was a completely new ball game for me.

After about two hours, Julie and Ned got tired out, so, we changed teams. The “Little Girls” pulled the mower just as well as the wheelers did, or maybe better. With the “Little Girls” cutting hay for two hours, all of the other folks that were mowing left, and we were the only team left in the field. I was getting tired and so were the mules, so we headed to the barn with the rest of the folks.

Saturday morning, more folks started rolling in. I raked for two hours in the morning and then cut more hay in the afternoon. Soon, it was all cut, so our mules were done for the weekend.

While I was raking and mowing, some of

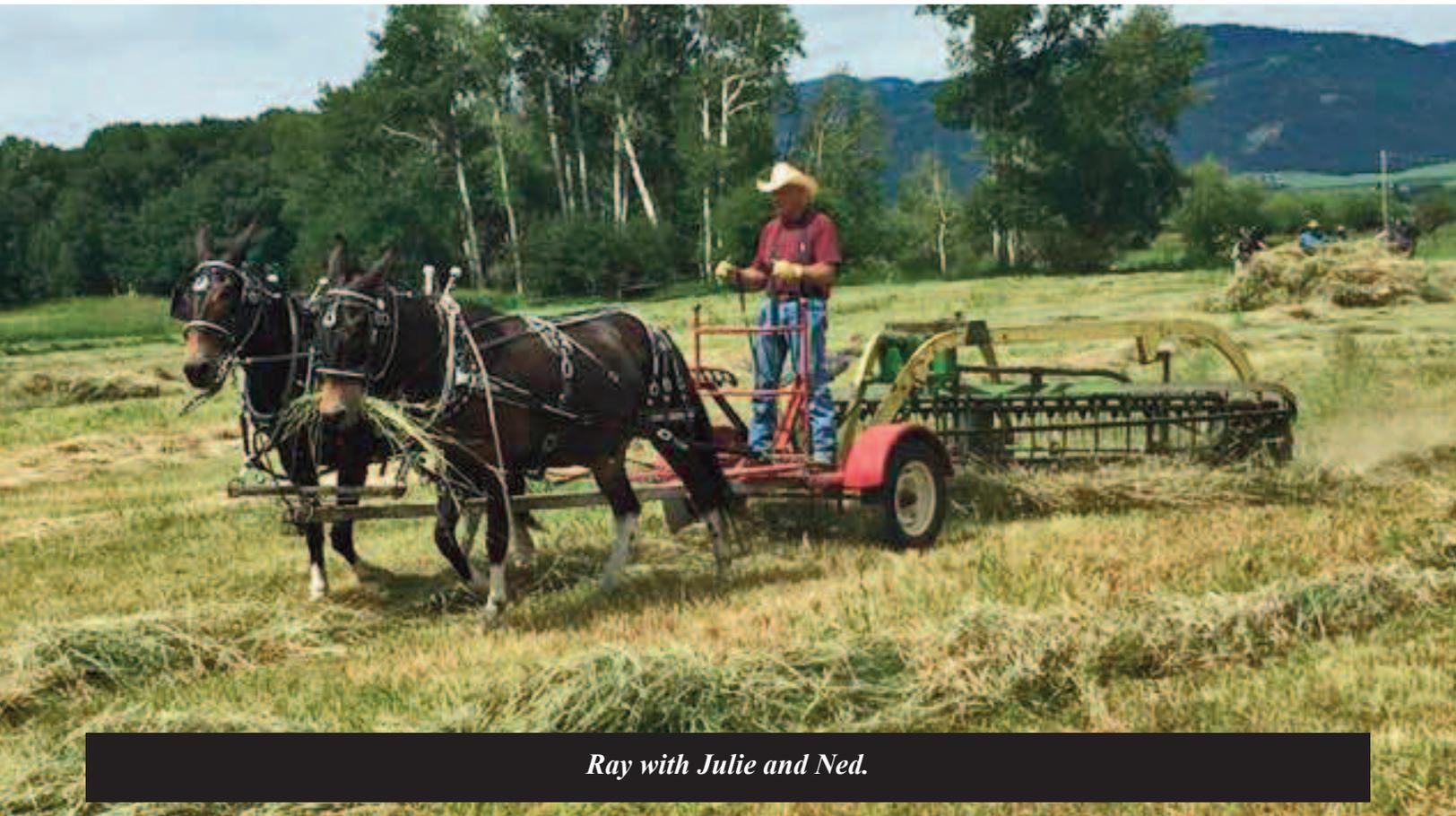


*Julie and Ned*

the teamsters were using a sweep to pile the loose hay, and then they set up the overshot. The overshot would take the hay off of the sweep, and with the help of a team of horses, pick the hay up and dump it on the haystack where three or four people were

forking it around to keep it level and square.

It was fun meeting many new friends and an enjoyable two days of farming old style, but sadly, I headed home early Sunday morning!



*Ray with Julie and Ned.*

