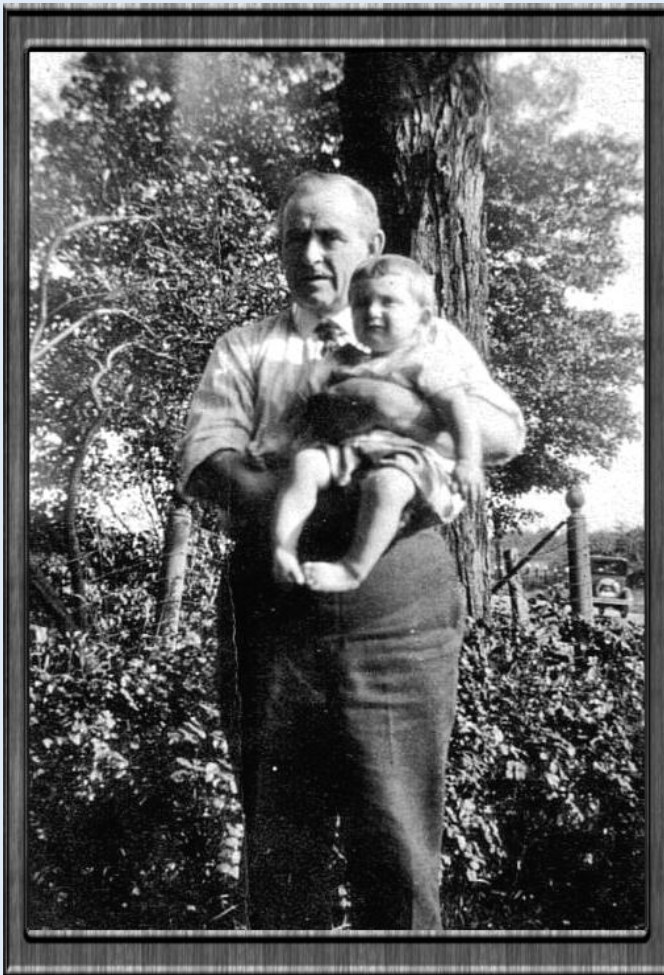


A Limousine of a Different Nature

by Frederick Wickert



Count pictured with David's nephew, Bill Phelps



David Gould holding his infant daughter (my mother)



Count resting in the yard

David Gould was a diabetic. The disease cost him both of his legs. He was fitted with artificial legs and he learned to walk quite well with them. He used a cane to help maintain his balance.

David had a business, but lost it when his business partner embezzled the funds and left town with them, never to be seen again. It spelled financial ruin for the business. David needed to find another means of income. He became a janitor at Slocum Hall, one of the buildings of Syracuse University.

David was able to do well enough on his artificial legs to perform the duties of his new job, but getting to and from work was a problem. He no longer had a car, nor did he have a place to keep a horse and buggy at Slocum Hall, if he chose to go to and from work that way. His home was four miles from where he worked.

David had lost a beloved dog because of a fire a couple of years before*, and someone more than a year later gave him a St. Bernard puppy he named Count. Count grew into a beautiful dog and was devoted to David. They bonded strongly with one another.

David was a very handy man and had invented a number of things in his lifetime. He had a number of pieces of horse harness in his workshop. Using these, he fashioned a harness for Count. He also possessed a wooden wagon or cart, with side racks on it. He made some padded oil cloth covered seats to fit in the bed of the cart, put dual wheels on the back to give it more strength, and removed the handle normally used for pulling it. He modified the attachments to the front axel. When all was completed, he put the harness on Count and taught Count to pull the wagon. Count easily adjusted, and seemed to enjoy doing the job.

Soon, Count and the cart were David's mode of transportation to and from work. Count faithfully pulled David the four miles to Slocum Hall Monday through Friday every week. When they arrived at Slocum Hall, David removed the harness from Count. He hid the cart with harness behind a cluster of evergreen trees that grew beside the front steps of the building. He had fashioned a large poncho type covering out of rubberized canvas, and he used it to cover the wagon and harness. It also served to keep David dry in rainy weather. Count never minded getting wet or being covered with snow.

Count, after seeing David up the front steps and into the building, returned home on his own. About a half hour or more before it was time for David to get off work, Count was seen trotting down the road on his way to Slocum Hall. When David came out of the building at the end of his workday, Count was always sitting there at the bottom of the front steps.

David pulled the wagon out from the hiding place behind the evergreen trees, put the harness on Count and proceeded home with Count pulling him. David always talked to Count as they traveled and one can never know just how much Count understood, but he did his work happily, wagging that huge tail all the way.

David attended church every Sunday where he took his duties as usher very seriously. Count always pulled him to church, and there, waited outside until David came back out and was ready to go.

In those years, mid to late 1930's, snow plows were lacking the efficiency of today's equipment, and pulling a man on a wagon through the snow of winter was no easy task. Count performed the task with gusto, if not with ease.

The loyalty and faithfulness of Count was the ultimate. He never failed to always be there for David. Whenever David was not inaccessible, he was always at David's side. Count loved people and especially loved children, but David was the one he gave his heart to.

At the end of the decade, David succumbed to his diabetes and passed away. Count was heart broken and was listless for a few weeks, but before David passed, David's daughter and her family had moved into the house and Count loved the four children. The two youngest even tried to ride on his back like a horse, but were told not to by the parents.

Count did have one serious fault. Disregarding his great size, Count was a housedog. He was never chained outside. He was part of the family. The rooms were sufficiently large that wherever he might lie on the floor, family members could step around him. Count always became excited whenever there was a thunderstorm. He insisted on chasing the lightning flashes. No amount of discouragement worked. Whenever there was a thunderstorm, you better let him out the door. Otherwise, he was going out the window, whether it was opened or not.

On a particularly chilly night, there came a thunderstorm. Count became excited. He was let out the door. After the thunderstorm was over, Count did not return. Adjacent to our farm was Tecumseh Golf course. They were doing some work with water or sewer lines and had some deep trenches open on the golf course area adjacent to the farm.

Dad, son in law to David, went out with a kerosene lantern looking for Count. When he called, Count answered, leading Dad to Count. Dad found him at the bottom of one of the open trenches on the golf course. During the storm the trench had flooded with water. Count was in muddy water up to his neck.

Dad went home to get a ladder. He carried the ladder back to the golf course and used it to get in and out of the ditch. Dad was a powerful man and managed to pick Count up in his arms and carry him up the ladder, out of the ditch. All were happy that night that Count had been rescued and was back home.

Count was already an old dog by then. He came down with pneumonia. Antibiotics had not yet been invented and little could be done. A couple days of hot humid weather with strong sunshine followed, and Count lay under a Lilac bush near the house. My youngest sister and I sat with him and petted him for a while. My sister finally decided to go back in the house. I remained with him. Within a half hour, Count drew a deep breath, shuddered a little, then let out his breath in a great sigh. It was his last breath. Count had gone on to be with his beloved David.

Count had chosen the spot under the Lilac bush, and Dad believed, since it was the spot he chose, he should be buried right there, and so he was. Count never stopped missing David. Now he was with David and we missed them both.