

WORD PORTRAIT

Jane Simmons

Art Simmons: Writing Dad's Biography

By Jane Simmons



Jane Simmons. Photo by John J. O'Keefe

Writing the biography of Art Simmons has been a long labor of love by daughter Jane Simmons, who completed Volume One this year of her planned trilogy. Walsworth Publishing Company in Marcelline, Missouri, was Jane's selection for doing her history book.

The goal of writing an historical biography about my parents, Art and Ollie Simmons, actually started while I was still in high school. This January 11th, I celebrated my 69th birthday, so I can honestly say the process has been a long one for me.

My horseman father's early start in the horse business is a virtually undocumented story. I wanted to share he and mother's young years and the experiences that helped to formulate who they became as adults. Reaching back into those decades of so long ago proved more of a job than I originally had thought.

Gathering information about those long past years was one of discovery after discovery. The material filled many boxes. Piecing together this wealth of facts into an easy to read story proved to be the next formidable task.

I bless *all* of the incredible people who helped me. In the book are the names and photographs of many of these dear people. Often they "appeared" in my life ... like angels ... at just the right time, in just the right place, and with just the right facts or suggestions or help. Their input was so valuable because I was only able to infuse my personal memories, of course, from the early 1940s onward.

For those years before my birth, I found my skills as a professional reporter to stand me in good stead. I was one happy researcher when I found boxes with old notes scribbled about family tales told to me by relatives, mom's early

household bookkeeping ledgers, and scrapbook pages that escaped the yuck waters of what came to be known in the Midwest as the historic "Flood of '93."

Most precious were the old photographs. My mother Ollie loved sending to, and receiving pictures from, her family members. When she was growing up in mid-Missouri during the Great Depression, one of her most prized possessions, I truly believe, was her camera.

Along with the many family photos, I tucked into the chapters a flavor of the current happenings in the country and the world, the community life, and the environment around my parents. I included information about the towns where Art and Ollie were reared and lived. I tried to highlight the key people who surrounded them during their growing up years.

I believe family and friends and professional mentors, along with one's physical surroundings, influence the character and personality of an individual. The many family photos that grace the book are going to make some genealogists extremely happy.

Also included in my book are some very youthful pictures of horsemen who went on to become famous trainers and showmen in the Saddlebred Horse industry. Most are taken from old clippings. Thankfully, my mother cut out articles and pictures from newspapers and magazines. Unfortunately, not all had names and dates.

Most of the old photos reproduced in



Art Simmons is to the right of the bus' doorway in which a man is standing. I showed this picture to many ole-timers at various horse shows and meetings. No one could unequivocally confirm the names. From my work on the book, I identified: Melvin Peavey, the wife of Mr. McClasky and, of course, Art Simmons. Can you help attach names to these faces?

Photo by McClasky

the book rather nicely. The graphic artist did his best to make every photograph show as well as possible. Some pictures' flood damage shows. I know those who read my book will be understanding about this. For every picture, I credit the source ... as best as possible.

I thank all who took original pictures for me, and who sent photos from their own scrapbooks.

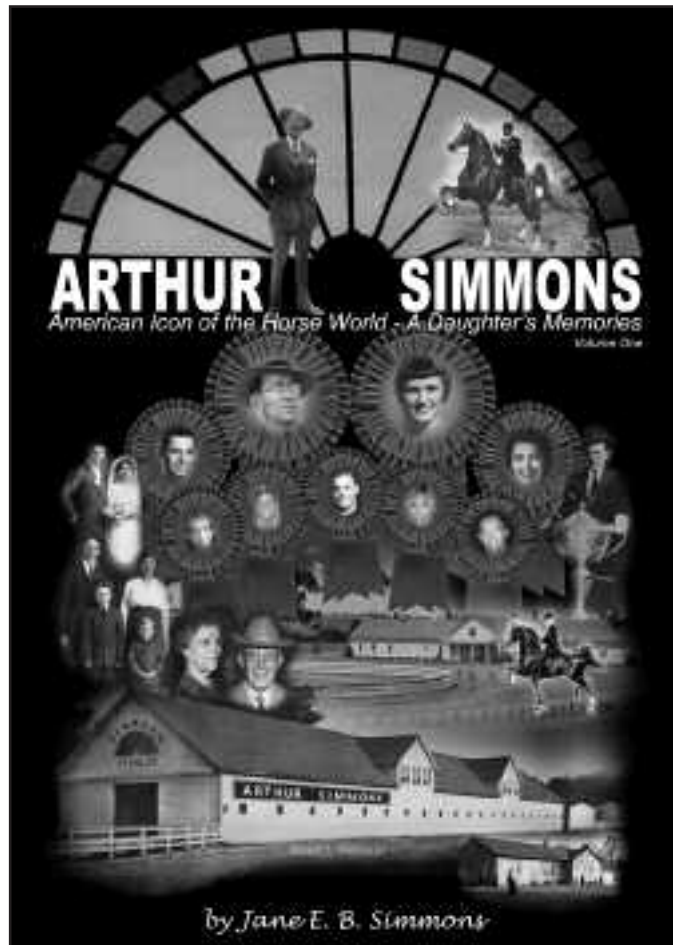
Many fabulous photos passed through my hands during these years of research. One I am sharing here. In dad's files, I found a marvelous photograph by Jay McClasky I call the "mystery" picture. I hope at some point all of the people in it will be identified. So, if you know the names for persons in the "mystery" photograph, please send them via email to my website, SimmonsBook.com. Then, we can rerun the nearly 70-year-old picture in a future issue, confirming the names-to-go-with-the-faces historical information ... for a grateful posterity.

I plan to gift this "mystery" McClasky photograph, and those I have in my files, to the collection at the American Saddlebred Horse Association headquarters in Lexington, Ky., for use by future researchers.

"Arthur Simmons: American Icon Of The Horse World – A Daughter's Memories" has 724 photographs. The layout I designed with a coffee table book look. Then, doing 8x10 pages helped to reduce the book to 332 pages. The stiff (not hard) cover allows the book to be bent, like a magazine, to handily slip into the side pocket of carry-on luggage.

Saddle & Bridle Publisher Jeffrey A. Thompson wrote the fabulous Foreword. I am touched by his gracious comments. It seems like only yesterday I wrote my first Word Portrait for *Saddle & Bridle*, yet it was March 2003. It's really true — time passes quickly for those of us having fun!

I plan to continue writing my Word Portraits in between the various upcoming book-signings throughout the country. Right now, I am up to my ears



Cover of Jane Simmons' book.

On the cover of my historical biography of Art Simmons' years up through his purchasing the famous Lee Brothers Stables in Mexico, Missouri, shows images of: Simmons Stables and its icon window; Almarel Stables in Omaha, Nebraska, where Dad gained national fame as its Manager; our Mexico home that Mother designed; Albert and Eliza Billings who owned Almarel Stables; youngster Arthur with his mother, father and brother Alvin Simmons; Ollie Simmons' parents' wedding photo; and 5-gaited champions — The Replica with his unique white hip marking, and Lady Jane as presented in George Ford Morris' oil painting (used by permission of the American Saddlebred Museum). In the center of the blue ribbons are the faces of Art, Ollie, my brother Jim Simmons and his wife Mary Jane Gridley Simmons, their son Scott and daughter Jennifer, and my picture, with my son John O'Keefe and daughter Elizabeth O'Keefe. The entire Simmons Stables complex, including our home, is now on the National Register of Historic Districts in America.

learning how to manage my website and how to update the information I want to share as I travel from event to event. And, if I get proficient enough, I hope to upload photos from the events to accompany the prose updates.

I know little ladies in tennis shoes like me can learn new technology, especially with the assistance of two super helpers.

Son John O'Keefe took 10 days out of his busy life earlier this year to drive hours to my home and teach me the Macintosh computer program called Pages. He kept me on task for 10-hour

days. Eventually, I was able to lay out whole pages with text and photographs. He stays ever ready by phone to further help me.

Daughter Elizabeth O'Keefe took on equally unglamorous jobs: helping me learn about ISBNs and PCNs and PayPal and the ins and outs of the State Sales Tax formulas.

As proud Mama, I am pleased to announce that Elizabeth's recent book — 3 Truths 5 Laws 1 Cycle — came off the presses in November 2007. It can be ordered through my website. Of course, my book can be ordered from my website too.

Before the end of this year, I plan to offer a fun and informative writing workshop to help others. I am calling it: Writing A Biography Without Going Cross-eyed. No one should have to reinvent this wheel.

Even though Walsworth Publishing Co. is doing my book, I know of many aspiring authors who would like to have print-on-demand books, or desktop published books. I am happy to share what I have learned over the years as I have moved through the process of birthing my four published books.

For more information on my current book, just visit my website: SimmonsBook.com and, if you get one "look" on one visit, and then later a different looking site, that just tells you I am conquering the technology!

In appreciation for their help during my years of research, I plan to do a book signing fund raiser during 2008 for the Moniteau County Historical

Society in California, Mo.; the Audrain County Historical Society's Horse Museum in Mexico, Mo., with a share of the proceeds going to the Simmons Stables restoration fund; and the Saddlebred Horse Museum in Lexington, Ky.

I look forward to seeing many of you at a book signing somewhere this year. The book signing dates, as details are firmed up, will be given on my website: SimmonsBook.com, so do keep visiting it when you have a few minutes.