

The Other Hook ... Hilda

There were two highly important Hooks, right? John T. and his son, Leonard.

Well, actually, there was another: for several years, Leonard's wife, Hilda, wrote a column for *Saddle & Bridle* and reported on some of the most significant shows. We knew she had existed, but didn't know she was a journalist. Coming across her work while seeking something else is an example of the serendipity that researchers can almost count on. Her column, "Pages from the Missouri Album," ran through five or more mid-'50s years. Having numerous gaps in our collection of old issues, we cannot be sure just when her column began or ended. Besides the usual reports — identical to those we have today — on barns visited and fantastically promising young horses she saw, Mrs. Hook often gave us choice details about such history as the deaths of prominent horses and people:

We can envy Mrs. Hook for the interesting segment of Saddlebred history that her watch covered. She conveys very well the excitement of seeing such champions as The Lemon Drop Kid, The Cock Robin, Lady Carrigan, Mr. Sandman, MiMi Genius, Live Wire (the farm-fence jumper who became famous as a competitor for Stephens College), Calcutta, Murray Cason, Peep Of Dawn, and Golden Butterfly Again, were just a few of these.

WWII was still fresh enough in people's minds in the mid-'50s that a number of horses — most not competing for very long with those mentioned above — were named for war; Buzz Bomb, Fond Farewell and Bugle Call were three of these. And it's always impossible not to wonder about the fates of many horses who didn't make it to immortality, but deserve to, just for their names — for instance: Thing Of Beauty and Joy Forever (not a team, but both belonging to one poetry-minded person), Strut Away (a parade horse), Fairlawn's Likely Story. All of these had their moments in the sun. Mrs. Hook mentioned Shepherd Of The Hills two or three times as being "one of my dear loves; I see him every chance I get."

But we all know that each of the

animals whose names appeared in any issue of *Saddle & Bridle* represents a tremendous investment of money and effort from their humans. On the animals' part, we can only guess at how hard they worked, especially those who lacked the energy and endurance necessary for doing acceptably what their people were demanding of them. And what became of all those horses who were discarded as not quite good enough for the show ring? We must hope that each of them became somebody's treasured pleasure horse, or the beloved star of a well and kindly run lesson or therapy barn. Sometimes these names surface quietly in show reports that could be valuable to a researcher, but now are not easily found elsewhere. One such report came from Mrs. Hook for a show given at Lindenwood College in June, 1957. It had seven classes and a square dance done on horseback. Fern Palmer and Shirley Drew Hardwicke, directors, respectively, of the Lindenwood and Stephens College's riding programs, judged. The story mentioned that 75 girls were enrolled in Lindenwood's program at that time, and two of the outstanding winners were Lovely Kalarama and Sweetheart Stonewall.

Only once, however, did these issues carry any editorializing by Mrs. Hook. Apparently she was acutely aware of first inklings that the horseworld was changing, that fewer shows were being held and attendance was declining. She told us of the era during which in Audrain County, Mo., "if somebody hollered 'Horse!', spectators would come from every direction." She said that during the season, in the South and Mid-Continent, one could formerly go to a different show each weekend, a show in easy driving distance of their own home.

Mrs. Hook reported deaths of horses and horsemen (and then, as now, the demise of choice among horsemen seemed to be heart attack: stress, perhaps?). When Jimmy Buford, "Bill Cunningham's right hand man" died in a jogging cart, at the Cunningham barn in Mexico, she relayed the horseworld's shock and admiring regard and concluded "Jimmy went as he would have wished, doing his work." Buford, as a quite young man, had worked for John T. Hook and Hilda said "Pop always said that Jimmy was one of the very best trainers and exhibitors." She told us that the horses Buford exhibited with distinction and/or made were Anacacho Denmark and Edna Mae's King. She concluded, "Jim went as he would have wished,

exercising a horse, doing his job to the end."

And there had to be some orientation, at that point, to Ireland-born Bill Cunningham, who gained a top reputation for selecting and developing outstanding horses, and matching them up with exactly the rider they needed. He was one of the most in-demand judges in the country and we're told he had at least 50 bids a year, from which he selected the 15 to 20 shows he wanted to work with.

One exclusive facet of Cunningham's fame: he had been the Standard Bearer (how would that be for a horse's name? Probably used long since) for General John J. Pershing during WWI, riding at his right shoulder or in front of him, dependent on the occasion. One famous classic horse world photo shows Cunningham and Pershing riding together through the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, France at war's end. Other military duties for Cunningham included making sure that ceremonial riders involved were dressed to perfection and impeccably drilled to be a credit to Pershing and to the States, riding as tradition and protocol demanded.

Cunningham was in Europe when Buford died and did not hear of it until he returned to the States many days later. Mrs. Hook told us that he could not say enough about how important Buford's contributions had been and how he would be missed.

In conjunction with this sad news, Hilda Hook gave us a few details from Cunningham's account of his trip to Europe, made with Senator T.W. Wood. The objective was, of course, to visit barns and see horses and trainers at work. The two men toured England, Ireland, Holland, and France. She said they also visited the stables of Aly Khan, but did not mention where these were located. Details Hilda gleaned about the Dublin Show included the fact that there were 1155 box stalls to accommodate the horses who were expected to assemble and compete.

And so it goes ... some priceless. Saddlebred memories that many of today's readers have not seen before — and might never otherwise have seen — may be buried in any old issue of *Saddle & Bridle*. These are throw-aways, not deliberately recorded for posterity, the writer assuming that someone else will do that in a formal manner or that nobody will ever forget the history they saw in progress. How fortunate researchers of the present and future are that certain facts don't fall through these particular cracks!