

JULY 2020

HALIFAX NEWS

Remembering Farrier and Poet – Hank Wonsey, Jr., and the Racetrack Life

When I was a kid, we had horses. We started out with some draft horses from Clarence Canedy – they were tall! Soon we added a retired cavalry horse named Lady. Lady didn't think much of us fly-weight kids, but when my dad got on, she was full of pep! More horses followed— a crazy little pony named Indie, a grouchy dapple grey mare named Claudie, and as we grew bigger, bigger horses: a pacer (standardbred) named Raja who used to race pulling a sulky; a retired flat-racer (thoroughbred) named Honeoye (“honey-eye”) Boy —from upstate New York, of course; a large prankster of a pony named Jocko (liked to jump into a pond with you and roll...) and a



few others. But in the early years, we rode the horses all around Halifax. Some days we rode down the hill into West Halifax. We would tie the horses to the front porch posts of Rocky's General Store and go inside to choose penny candies from the glass-front counters. If we had enough pennies in our sticky hands, we might buy Indie a popsicle. He loved popsicles!

West Halifax had another business back then, a blacksmith across from the church. Joan still lives there. Hank Wonsey, Jr. was the farrier. Hank was born in 1918. When he was thirteen, his dad decided to return to horseshoeing, a skill

he'd learned as a young man, and he taught his son as they worked together. At the age of 31, Hank struck out on his own and started working at racetracks. Among many tracks up and down the northeast seaboard, he worked at Hinsdale Raceway for many years, shoeing the standardbreds used in harness racing. That's where he met Joan. They married on Valentine's Day 1979 in the West Halifax Grange. Hank also shod workhorses and saddle horses. My mom recalls spending the day while Hank talked and tended to our horses. I remember the glowing forge. Another friend remembers that Hank said he loved the smell of coffee and the smell of bacon in the morning.

Joan recalls life on the racetrack. I asked her if she worked early morning hours.

“Did people who worked on the racetrack have early hours? It depended on the responsibilities you were given. Yes, I had early hours on some of the race tracks I worked at. If I was there early, I fed horses and started cleaning stalls. Usually by then the trainer or owner showed up. Then I had to prepare the horses as he wanted them to exercise. Groom (brush the coat, comb the mane & tail, clean the feet) then harness. Then when he brought them back after exercise, I needed to be prepared to wash them down with warm water, then scrape off the water, put on a light blanket and walk the horse until completely cooled down -- usually that took an hour, sometimes longer. Then sometimes during the day you had to clean the harness -- that was time-consuming because there were a lot of parts to harness horse harnesses, especially if it was for a pacer because they wore hobbles to try to keep them on the pace and prevent them going into a trot. Then you cleaned the stall again if needed, then you hayed, filled water buckets, cleaned up the front of the stalls really well so you had a nice 'stable area' to be proud of. Then usually you could leave unless you stayed or lived right there. In that case, you were responsible for evening chores....feeding, watering, giving the horses hay, making sure all was secure and safe. If you lived there at the barn, you were responsible for evening hay & water and “putting them to bed.” I loved the work and (not bragging) was told more than once that I was a top groom. Probably because I liked it so much. My Dad taught me well. I wish I could still be doing it. I am sure

HALIFAX Betty Rafus

Wonsey Writes Book

HALIFAX — Mr. and Mrs. Henry “Hank” Wonsey recently spent the weekend in Concord, N.H., where he was a guest of honor along with six other New Hampshire farriers who were there to commemorate a book to be published in the near future. Wonsey has for many years done blacksmithing at Hinsdale (N.H.) Raceway.

The book is entitled “No Foot, No Horse” and covers different aspects of the trade as told by these seven men as well as poems written by Wonsey.

I left out some of the work we did because it is hard to tell it all; there are always lots of small things you just did because that was the way it was done. I worked on every harness horse track on the East coast, sometimes only for a day or two as with the Sire Stakes horses (that was a special race they qualified for). I have lots and lots of great memories. I have one picture of me 'jogging' (exercising) a harness horse."

But horseshoeing was not Hank's only passion. He was also a poet. He left behind a wonderful opus as well as a scholarship fund for young poets-to-be in Halifax Elementary School. Reading his poems reveals the history and people of Halifax, along with the events that made up Hank's life experience. Some of Hank's poems (and farrier-related artworks) were featured in an exhibit called "No Foot, No Horse", a compendium of the artworks of seven farriers working in New Hampshire. The exhibit ran from June 1 to July 14, 1982, in Concord, NH and August 27 to October 11, 1982, in Milton, NH. One of Hank's poems is featured on the back cover of the folder-style brochure. Pictures of the brochure and its contents are online at <https://czresearch.com/farriers>.

- Laurel Copeland, Halifax, Vermont

The Shooting of Walter Wells

It happened in 1930 in December
That's 50 years ago and few remember
Not even the grave inscription tells
The story of the shooting of my Grandpa Wells
He was hunting with a friend that fall
When he was struck with a flying ball
A buckshot ricocheted from a tree
And Grandpa stood at the right degree
It entered his back and through the kidney tore
And made a small hole through the shirt he wore
He had a Winchester Model 1885
That he prized dearly when he was alive
I still have it to this very day
And over the weekend it was on display
If that gun did it, I'll never know
But I got the award for "Best of Show"
From my story I seem to have strayed
For I forgot to mention my Grandpa's trade
He had sawmills that ran by steam
All his logs were drawn by a team
He hired lots of help, he fathered the town
But the Depression of the World War got him down
He picked apples and butchered to make a day's pay
Picked 75 barrels of apples in a day
And he butchered an ox that weighed over 2 ton
It belonged to Jim Avery Old Jersey was the one
Now back to the Winchester there's more to tell
For it's to the old "Low Wall" that Old Jersey fell.

- Hank Wonsey, Sept 9, 1980

Back Home in Vermont

I'm in a Florida motel, all alone
I've just talked to my wife back home
She misses me, she's lonely, too
Under the circumstances, what's to do?
I'm not here in any kind of wealth

Just trying to improve my health
She is home keeping the home fires bright
But her and my dog are lonely at night
She cleans the school and drives the bus
To try and keep a home for us
You may think she's a kind of fool
But to me she is a living jewel
They folks at home, they love her, too
For most there's not much she won't do
When I married her, it was really wise
She turned out a special prize
Her company here I really want
But she's back home in Vermont.

- Hank Wonsey, Jan. 4, 1983

Bus Driver's Dinner

We have ventured out in cold winter weather
For the sole purpose of eating together
So, each of us we sit in place
Thank the Lord for all his grace
So nice to be here with friends so true
No matter what we have to do
My wife for one – always cusses
When the roads aren't sanded for the busses
But as those little problems appear
It's Barry's advice on the radio you hear
When there is nothing you can do
He'll say, "wait there for the sanding crew"
Laura is not one that ever fusses
It's Barry that's always washing the busses
Yet that's why they look so neat
And all are proud to drive his fleet
In appreciation – and we all do
We're proud to be part of the Gerdes crew
We thank them now for this special treat
And the chance to get together and eat.

- Hank Wonsey, Dec. 20, 1981

Last month the Newsletter featured a photo of a local gardener when she was 3 years old. The young gardener is Liz Hull. (Nobody guessed correctly.)



June is the month many animals lay their eggs. We have watched robins, starlings, geese, turkeys, tree swallows and bluebirds hatch and raise their young already. But not all egg-layers are birds, of course. Neighbor David



Erickson reported his wife coming across a snapping turtle laying eggs on the edge of Gates Pond. The turtle spooked and dove into the water, leaving the clutch exposed. Their young daughter was very excited by the news. David and daughter went back and covered the eggs with the warm sand of the roadside. However, they wondered if that clutch needed to be moved? David sent photos and contacted naturalist Patti Smith of the BEEC (specialist in small mammal rehabilitation; <https://vtfishandwildlife.com/learn-more/living-with-wildlife/injured-and-orphaned-wildlife>) as well as Kevin Tolan, our coordinator on vernal pool monitoring with Vermont Center for Ecostudies, who looped in Jim Andrews from the Vermont Reptile & Amphibian Atlas (<https://VtHerpAtlas.org>)—turtles being reptiles, it seemed wise to consult the proper specialist. Jim commented that both Painted Turtles and Snapping Turtles often lay eggs in nests right on the road edge. Unless the location gets plowed up or dug up, activity on the ground surface does not usually impact the survival of the eggs. Most eggs survive perfectly well. He said you could try to move the eggs, but they need to be in an open and sunny area and do best if moved very early in their development. Kevin added that in his experience, snappers frequently lay eggs in the sand and gravel along



roads running through wetlands, so the roadside on Gates Pond seems like a pretty normal spot for them. He has seen people put chicken wire cages above the nest to protect them from people, raccoons and other nest predators. These turtle eggs are probably fine where they are (see photo with arrow and circle, below, left).

Interestingly, I also saw a turtle laying her eggs on the 19th of June, shortly after dawn on Shearer Hill Road in Fishers' Pond (below, right).



TOWN NEWS

KUDOS Our youngest daughter Lauren just graduated from college Summa Cum Laude from Palm Beach Atlantic University. She is an English Major hoping to complete her masters at The University of Roehampton in London (England) this Fall. She has created a blog with interesting articles. It was just launched recently and will come out weekly every Wednesday. To get notices of its weekly postings, subscribe by email. This is it: <https://conceptaspire.com> –*Monica Sumner*

ELECTIONS. The August 11 primary elections and the November election will be held in the HALIFAX COMMUNITY HALL, 20 Brook Road, in West Halifax from 10 AM to 7 PM. **Absentee ballots are strongly recommended** and can be obtained by either calling our Town Clerk Patty Dow at 368-7390 or going to the Secretary of State website [my voter page](https://mvp.vermont.gov/), <https://mvp.vermont.gov/>.



CORONAVIRUS IN HALIFAX. For information, visit the State of Vermont website: <https://www.healthvermont.gov/response/coronavirus-covid-19>

Stay safe, stay 6 feet apart, wear a mask, and wash your hands.

THE BELL CEMETERY ASSOCIATION will meet at the Fish/Bell/Grove Cemetery at Penfield Chester's on Saturday, July 18, at 2:00 PM. All are welcome.

THE HALIFAX HISTORICAL SOCIETY will hold its Annual Meeting on Friday, July 10th, via teleconference with the help of David Jones. No computer is required. Anyone wishing to participate, should contact Douglas Parkhurst, dpark127@aol.com or (802) 368-7164.

SENIOR MEAL (20 YEARS IN HALIFAX AND STILL GOING STRONG)

Friday, July 18 On Friday, July 17, the Halifax Senior Meal will be served at the Halifax Community Hall located at 20 Brook Road in W. Halifax. It will again be TAKE OUT ONLY to maintain social distancing and lessen possible exposure to the coronavirus. Please call Joan to let her know how many meals you want: 802.368.7733. **Menu:** sloppy joe sandwich, macaroni salad, potato chips, pickle, and dessert.

Pick up meals from 11 AM to 1 PM. The meals will be packaged in a to-go container placed outside on a table (or in the foyer in case of rain). Just come and get it. The can for a free-will donation of \$3.00 for age 60 and over or \$4.00 for under age 60 will be on the table. Gloves will be there if change is needed to be made and also hand sanitizer. Thank you for your faithfulness to our monthly senior meal in these trying times.

THERE WILL BE NO SENIOR MEAL IN HALIFAX IN AUGUST 2020.

The *NEXT* Halifax senior meal will be SEPTEMBER 18, 2020. The cook hopes to go on a trip with her sister-in-law to see the full-scale replica of Noah's ark.

Coronavirus affecting your household? Groceries are available from Deerfield Valley Food Pantry (802) 464-0148 or Foodworks (802) 490-2412.

CLAMBAKE Saturday, August 1st, 2020 - The HALIFAX FIRE COMPANY is planning a **DRIVE-THRU** clambake. You will be able to pick up your meal by driving through the village of West Halifax and presenting your ticket in front of the fire station. **YOU STILL NEED TO PURCHASE A TICKET AHEAD OF TIME.** Tickets are now on sale! \$38 with lobster & clams & chicken or \$18 chicken (all meals have all the sides). See a fireman or call Lewis Sumner at 368-2824 or Wayne Courser at 368-7733.

FIRE DEPARTMENT NEWS

On May 31, seven men and one truck went to West Dover on a mutual aid call to a house fire.

On June 1, four men responded to a medical call but were turned around en route.

On June 9, three men responded to Thomas Hill but again turned around en route.

On June 11, three men responded to a call on Brook Road for a woman who had fallen. Deerfield Valley ambulance transported to Brattleboro hospital. Possible broken hip.

On June 16, six men responded to a car stopping on Route 112 and needing an ambulance. Whitingham rescue also responded; Colrain ambulance was called as Deerfield Valley was already out on two calls. Whitingham transported to Greenfield. A medic met the ambulance en route. CPR was in progress.
On June 20, four men responded to Gregory Lane for a medical call. The man was transported to Greenfield hospital by Colrain ambulance.

HONOR ROLL. Donations are coming in for the repair and upgrade of the Veterans honor roll in Halifax. Thank you to all that have donated. To donate, send a check to Joan Courser earmarked “honor roll”. We hope to have the sign upgraded and repaired by Fall. It will be mounted on the lawn of the Halifax Community Hall; you can see it now, leaning against a tree there. It has been in Halifax honoring our Veterans since 1944.

HALIFAX DIRECTORY. We are compiling the Halifax Directory. To be listed, please send the information you want published to LaurelACopeland@gmail.com (or by mail to 1513 Hanson Road, Brattleboro VT 05301). Information may include: Name, Business Name, Address, Telephone, Cell Phone, Email, URL.
We need a little money to print the directory. Buy an ad – ask us! – *Penfield Chester & Laurel Copeland*

JOAN’S SIGHTINGS. There have been quite a few sightings. Wayne has seen turkey with and without babies, and Joan was fortunate enough to see a mama turkey with three babies; they were sooooo cute (pic). A fisher cat was sighted with babies -- you don't see those very much no less with babies! Joan saw a couple of small, half-grown beavers in the back yard. Andrea Rand has a great video of the beaver building their dam. There are sightings of a moose, deer, and a bear. I have not seen it but know it is around because it ripped the wire off of my coop and took two of my chickens. We put up an electric fence to try to keep it away. I am sure I (Joan) will be the one to get most of the shocks!!! I remember those growing up on the farm! My birds are numerous....Wayne saw 4 male Orioles; they are beautiful, and so are the females. A few Chickadees, Blue jays, Nuthatch, Sparrows, Woodpeckers, Nesting Jenny (House Wrens) are around. Mourning Doves, Cardinals, Purple Finch or House Finch, Goldfinch, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Tree Swallow, and my wonderful Hummingbirds. The Orioles are eating lots and lots of grape jelly!!!! I also saw a Red-Tailed Hawk not to mention Brown-headed Cowbird, Red-Winged Blackbirds, Robin, Catbird... I DO enjoy the birds!!!!
Send your animal sightings to Joan at jwcinvt@gmail.com - *Joan Courser*



Luna Moth, photographed by
Bobbie Groves at 1:30 a.m.

HERE’S THE STORY OF THE INSCRIBED ROCK on Deer Park Road in Halifax Center from Halifax historian, Constance Lancaster. Quoting from Vol. II History of Halifax page 424 under the photo of the carved stone: “Little is known about this inscription, but according to Joe and Oscar Cody, it was Adolphus (Dolly) Root who carved the rock; they did not know its meaning. Dolly was known as a loner. The Roots and the Codys were neighbors. Dolly’s father bought 190 acres on Old County Road in the early 1900’s. The farm was sold in 1940. The inscription suggests a melancholy state of mind, but what inspired “Dolly” to carve these lines permanently into stone remains a mystery.” ~ *Susan Rusten* Connie went on to say that the carver’s full name was Adolphus Napoleon Root [11/26/1914 to 9/04/1981]. The family moved to Brattleboro when he was about 25 years old. “Dolly” served in WW II. He died in the Veteran’s Home in Bennington, is buried in Locust Cemetery in Brattleboro, and never married. His usual occupation was “circular saw operator”. - *Connie Lancaster*
“A midsummer Rose // When friendship becomes hidden // By all laughter is forbidden.”

WILDLIFE CROSSINGS. Thanks for your calls and emails! If you see one of these 5 mammals **on or crossing a road**, or if you see tracks/scat that suggest one crossed the road, let me know (LaurelACopeland@gmail.com, 368-2439). I am interested in the date of the road crossing and the precise location. If you have a smart phone, take a pic of the location and email it (full size) to me; I will pull the geographic coordinates off the EXIF data embedded in the photo. The 5 animals are **Bobcat, Moose, River Otter, Black Bear, and Fisher.**

Newsletter

P O Box 27

West Halifax VT 05358

Hinsdale Raceway shoer part of Concord exhibit

CONCORD — Hank Womsey of the Hinsdale Raceway will be one of seven horseshoers featured in an exhibition entitled "No Fool, No Horse: The Art of Seven New Hampshire Traditional Horseshoers" at Phoenix Hall at 40 North Main St. in Concord.

The exhibition, open from June 1 to July 14, will include portraits of the seven horseshoers, photographs of their homes and forges, tools of their trade, pictures illustrating the process of shoeing and forging a shoe from bar stock and a variety of objects made by them on their own forges. Slides and a home-made movie documenting tradition from a community perspective also will be on view.

The exhibit will officially open with a potluck supper from 6 to 9 p.m. Saturday, June 3, followed by contra dancing in the Phoenix Hall theater above the exhibition. The exhibit will be open Sunday, June 6, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and thereafter from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays.

As part of the exhibition, a horseshoeing competition for farriers from New Hampshire will be held at 10 a.m. Sunday, June 6, on the State House Plaza in Concord. The competition will be directed by Dr. L. Allen Smith of Sherborn, Mass., a farrier and folklore researcher on the staff of Simmons College.

The competition will include three classes — plain shoe, saddlebred and bar



HANK WOMSEY

shoe — with three place awards in each class and with ribbons for the first six places in each class. Competing farriers should be at the State House Plaza by 9:45 a.m. Sunday. To register for the event, call the N.H. Commission on the Arts at 871-5788.

JUNE 1982



Surprise! Frost on June 1, 2020

Editor LaurelACopeland@gmail.com. Email me for the color e-mail version.

Halifax News

JULY 2020

Subscriptions for Mailed Newsletter:
MOST subscriptions for the newsletter are due in AUGUST (unless your address label says otherwise). You will find the month/year your subscription comes due on your label. The yearly fee is the same (\$7). Thank you!!! – Joan Courser, P O Box 27, West Halifax VT 05358.

NEWSLETTER - Send your Halifax story to Laurel LaurelACopeland@gmail.com or Joan JWCinVt@gmail.com (802.368.7733; PO Box 27 05358).