

I REMEMBER WHEN

On January 17, 2007, the following horse stories were related by Bill Rhodes, the master storyteller of Greene. Not one word has been changed so you can appreciate the flavor of his words.

‘These horse stories don’t amount to much but I’ll be glad to tell you about them. Horsey can remember part of this, I suppose. Well, the first story I remember about a horse has more to do with my own shortcomings than anything else. When I lived just above where I do now, the house north of Birdsall Creek where I lived my first sixteen years, we used to have milk delivered to the house and it wouldn’t always suffice. So we’d have to go over to the little store around the corner from where I live now, on Lucas Street, Lou Brown’s grocery store. It was a little IGA store. It was about 1931 or 1932 So we would buy milk there and the bottles were returnable for five cents. Being a sharp young boy of seven and knowing how good that penny candy would taste, I would drink that last glass of milk, wash the bottle up and head for the store. (Horsey interjects, “Did any of them have my father-in-law’s name on them, James Harry W. Elliott?” Bill answers, “Not that time, but they could have.”) When I got over there one day with the bottle, a horse and wagon drove up. The driver had one eye. He scared me so, I’d never seen a man with one eye, that I dropped the bottle and broke it. That was the end of my penny candy day.

The next story is really about mules. Across the street from where I live now, which is right next to the cemetery, lived a man, I loved this man, by the name of Zeke Perkins. I think of a country town and I say to myself, what better name could a man have, living in a country town, but Zeke Perkins? Anyway, he had a team of mules. And living up to his name, he wore a straw hat and bib overalls. If my memory serves me correctly, and it probably doesn’t, when I was a youngster, most of the housewives in town canned their own vegetables and Zeke used to go around the neighborhood plowing gardens for people with his two mules. And of course, they were always in evidence. He had them out for some reason or other. He was pulling somebody’s equipment or something. But it was a big thing in my life to see those big old mules. (Do you think many farmers had mules?) I don’t think so. They may have but my experience with farmers was that they had horses.

Then when World War II started and all the able-bodied people in town, men in particular, were in the service, the school was liberal to allow 15 and 16-year old kids to help fill silos. My good friend and one of my best friends for 80 years now is Don Excell. His dad had a farm and what they used to do in those days is maybe four or five farmers up County Road 32, which used to be East River Road , would get together and we would fill one silo, then another and then another. And everybody would chip in and help. I was brand new at it so Donnie asked me to come up and help. We were doing his dad’s farm first and the next farm up was a man by the name of George Clinton. His son Stanley Clinton and his wife still live here in Greene. The farm is where the Diaz family lives. We were down on the flat and I didn’t know anything about filling a silo but you grab a shock of corn and put it on the wagon and you go get another shock of corn and put it on the wagon. My first time out. I thought I was working along pretty good. All of a sudden Mr. Clinton says, “Bill, you son of a sea cook”, or words to that effect, “get to work! I said, “Yes, sir!” and I started throwing corn like you couldn’t believe. And in my haste, I finally turned around and looked at Mr. Clinton and he was laughing. It turns out that one of his horses’s name was Bill.

Another story that particular summer was about the Excells. Don had two younger brothers, David and Paul. Paulie, God bless him, is gone now but I would say that David and Paul were six and four at the time. Mr. Excell had a horse named Duke and I used to say that you could square dance on his back. He was just a huge horse. We were having dinner between the morning and afternoon sessions. During dinner Paulie was across the road, standing out next to Duke and he was crying his eyes out and Paulie couldn't talk plain. He could say words but nobody could understand him yet. He was hollering and yelling and everybody was wondering what was wrong. Finally I went out and Duke was standing on his foot. It was the same day that young David went to feed Duke an ear of corn. Duke took the corn and also David's arm about up to his elbow and lifted him right off the ground.

Donnie and I were on the football team along with Horsey here . After we got through filling silo, Donnie would hook up his pony to a cart. You know where the Excell farm was (on East River Road beyond the schools on the left hand side of the road) and we would take the pony cart and go to football practice.

That's about it for horse stories. You know where the livery stables were? There was one behind the hotel and another one on the ball flats where the restrooms are. I remember that one in the 1930s. I used to go and look at the horses. And the one behind the hotel was run by Willard Knickerbocker's dad. And we also had a blacksmith shop in the middle of Matteson Street. I used to spend some time in there because it was fascinating to a young boy. It was run by John Sampson. Then he moved it over to Water Street somewhere across from where the restaurant is. (The Old Mill Bakery)

Then in the 1940s there were a lot of people in town who had horses for recreational purposes. I don't think there's a horse on a farm now that isn't for recreational purposes. I'll tell you, if this wet weather continues, it's going to be the only way to get in and out of the woods anymore.'

Note: If anyone knows who the man and woman are with the little dog in the photo, please e-mail pogr@aol.com



Lou Brown's Grocery Store



John Sampson in his Blacksmith Shop 1943