

Woodworth's Winner is Wright

After the photo of the Pony Race Track appeared in the Chenango American, I received a phone call from Milly Auwarter telling me that I should contact Don Wright in Florida. He and Ralph Woodworth had been friends and that Don had raced ponies for years. So I did. And here is the result-an article that features both Don Wright and Ralph Woodworth.

Don is one of four children of Leland and Bessie Wright. His mother, Bessie, still vibrant in her 98th year, lives at the Vets' Home in Oxford. He graduated from Greene High School in 1945, married Rae Coutermarsh and had four children-Carinne, Jeanne, Donna and Danne. He worked at the Raymond Corporation for 32 years, retired to Florida and now lives in New Port Richey. The Wrights have a summer home on Seneca Lake and come north around the middle of May.

Donnie did not mention his accomplishments racing ponies and horses, so I had to ask his wife, Rae. He raced for over forty-four years and in his last year of racing, 2003, he won every race at Sunshine Raceway. When I asked what was one reason for his great success, Rae said, "He worked his horses every day." In the background I could hear Donnie say, "Well, I missed a few." He couldn't have missed many to have gained the achievements and respect he has in the field.

Following is what Donnie wrote about Ralph Woodworth:

'I believe I met Ralph Woodworth in 1960 at the Depot Saddlery which he started in the railroad depot on Water Street. He sold, shipped and repaired all types of equipment, leather, clothes, etc. that had to do with ponies, horses and different equine breeds. Ralph had heard about pony racing started by a man, Howard Small, in Yarmouth, Maine. Mr. Small worked out plans for special harnesses, sulkies, and other equipment by scaling down the size used by Standardbred harness horses to accommodate ponies. Ponies would be trained to trot ½ mile to a certain time to qualify to race on a ¼ mile track.

Ralph had an 1/8 mile oval track put in on his property on Stillwater Road for the purpose of training harness ponies. Ralph had a pony, I purchased one through him and a man from Binghamton, Ed Barton, also had one. We trained our ponies on this track four or five times a week. On weekends, after many hours of training, we would have match races and the loser had to buy lunch. I went on to race for the next 44+ years all over the United States and Canada. A national organization was established for the sport called the National Trotting and Pacer Association.

Through breeding ponies to horses today, a recognized breed called Trottingbreds was created. They, pacers and trotters, now race ½ mile distance on a half mile track in an official time of less than one minute. Now a height limit on the Trottingbred is 51 ½ inches. When Ralph and I started racing, the qualifying time was 2 minutes 30 seconds for a half mile distance on a quarter mile track and the height limit was 46 inches.

It was rewarding and a pleasure to be a friend of Ralph Woodworth. He was a business man as well as a friend to a regular person. He was a very educated and intelligent man. After retiring to

his daughter's in North Carolina, he wrote and published four books about horses. I have one that he gave me called *Rhymes Equine* which I treasure. Here is one of the poems.'

A boy and a girl alone in a horse-drawn sleigh on a moonlit night. In the past days of controlled courtship, this was a rare opportunity for two lovers to be alone.

I'll Take the Old Mare

**There's a Church dance tonight and I'm read to go
The cutter's cleaned up and we've ten inches of snow.**

**I could take the colt, he is frisky and slick
But I have no real need to get there so quick.**

**There there's Big Ben, he's stylish and proud.
A sixteen hand Saddlebred would stand out in a crowd.**

**Dad says take the team and the double bob sleigh
Stop by the old barn and bring home some hay.**

**But I'm picking up Sarah May Proctor at seven
She won't have to be home 'till after eleven.**

**This is no time for speed and no time for style.
The ride home in the moonlight should take awhile.**

**In the barn Old Molly is quietly munching her grain
I'll sharp caulk her shoes and brush out her mane.**

**She don't look like much but she'll plod on alone
Don't need no steering, she knows the way home.**

**Then under the bearskin a boy can get snugly
With the prettiest girl in the whole darn county.**

**So thank you for offering the fancy horses and pair
But if you don't mind, I'll take the old mare.**



Ralph Woodworth



Don Wright in Pony Race