

HISTORY OF THE NORTHEAST HARNESS NEWS

This is a history of the Northeast Harness News. It is written by Jean B. Emerson of Saco, Maine for the State Library in Augusta, who with a Federal Government grant for 2017, is making all issues available online at the following:

digitalmaine.com/northeast_harness_news

In Maine, Standardbred horses (trotters and pacers) race the extended meets and fairs from spring to late fall. Early in 1970, my husband and I purchased a fifty acre farm on the river in Saco, with the intention of getting in the harness racing and breeding business. We soon purchased racing stock... but breeding was not as simple. Maine did not offer a funded Breeders program, like some of the surrounding states (New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey). As others soon came to realize the importance of this, a meeting was planned at the Norton Farm in Falmouth and the Maine Standardbred Breeders & Owners Association (MSBOA) was organized. Things began to fall into place, as this group moved to better the business of improving the breed in Maine.

It was fortunate for us that Joe Kenneally, who raced top horses in New York and the New England circuit, was also on the Maine Harness Racing Commission. He was ably assisted by Executive Secretary, Tom Webster. Portland lawyer, Dana Childs, who served on the MHHA board and Bert Fernald, Executive Secretary of the MHHA also rallied to the cause, as did many others. It was a grassroots movement that succeeded because of knowledgeable leadership.

A short time later, at a meeting in Augusta chaired by Joe Kenneally, a plan for the establishment of the Maine Standardbred Breeders Stakes was formulated with the recommendations that (a) it be funded by the breakage from betting at the various tracks, and (b) that Maine ownership of the mare would be the only necessity for participating. Then for the next three years the groundwork would be prepared for utilizing "The Maine Stallion" as the necessary ingredient for closure. In view of this, the Harness Racing Commission: Joseph Kenneally (Chairman), Tom Webster (Executive Secretary), Thaxter Trafton and Stanley Hall (Members)... along with the newly appointed Maine Standardbred Breeders & Owners Association: Ival Cianchette (President), Dana Childs (Vice President), William Hughes (Treasurer), Jean Emerson (Secretary) and Loring Norton, Bruce McGhee and Donald Watson (Members)... joined forces to introduce the long

awaited L.D. 625 an Industry Bill, recognizing “The Breeder” for the first time and considering Harness Racing as an Agricultural Industry... not a Gambling Entity!

At this time, my secretarial reports were mailed out after every meeting and they became an important MSBOA newsletter “For Those In The Standardbred Industry”. As this continued it became more inclusive and more expensive, so I entertained thoughts of a monthly newspaper that would serve all of New England on a regular basis. It would focus on the positives of the industry and also give breeders and others an opportunity to advertise.

In early 1980, I contacted the local Biddeford Journal Tribune and found them to be very supportive. On the basis of this, I decided on doing the newspaper with ten issues (omitting December and January as that was ‘down-time’ in New England). I took my stories, ads and pictures in and with the help of their staff (typing, pasting and cutting), the layout work was done and the printers took over. The first edition of the Northeast Harness News came available just as the newly purchased Scarborough track was opening.

After the official entry of the Northeast Harness News, reality set in. It was very daunting to serve as editor, publisher, staff reporter, photographer, advertising manager, layout artist and bookkeeper. The publication was circulated not only in the Northeast, but also in nearly every other harness location on a regular basis. It was a lot of work on limited funds. At this time help came unexpectedly from Joe Ricci, owner of Scarborough Downs, in the form of a full-page advertisement for the back page of the publication. It appeared there regularly in nearly every issue without a contract or a permanent commitment for years. That ad helped tremendously and he never once asked for any special consideration editorially.

In retrospect, it was always my goal to emphasize “positive news” in the advocacy of harness racing. I was very fortunate being able to attract capable writers like Robert Lowell, K.C. Johnson, Clark Thompson and Gardner Patterson, plus others, to submit interesting material on a regular basis. Local raceways and Fair tracks, breeders and owners and those interested in the industry kept us busy with notices, ads and reports relating to all phases of the business. It was well received in New England and on the eastern seaboard for fifteen years (with a very comfortable number of subscribers).

It was then truly an honor on October 16, 1994 when I became the first woman inducted into the prominent New England Harness Racing “Hall of Fame” at Foxboro Park. This gave me the opportunity to recognize a number of the

women in the area who have contributed so much to the industry over the years. Thanks is due to the many capable women like Leona Batchelder, Dale Childs, Diane Stevenson, Jean Ferland and more recently, Diann Perkins, who picked up the reins at the Maine Standardbred Breeders & Owners Association early-on, serving on the Board continuously ever since. Then there are the others... drivers, grooms, owners, trainers; those who work in the barn or paddock, those who work closely with the horses and could never be replaced... so many dedicated women who work in conjunction with the men. It was a pleasure to be in this sport/business for so many years.

However, in 1995, with the advent of the “Electronic Age” and its advanced forms of communication, I realized that the emerging Internet would more efficiently enable the entire horse community to keep current with relevant news. After 15 years, I ceased production of the paper... it was finally time to move on.

HOPPI AT SCARBOROUGH DOWNS

August 10, 2017

Purse: \$10,013



Maine Standardbred Breeders Stakes two year old pacing colt, HOPPI, wins in 2:00.2 at Scarborough Downs on 8/10/17 for the Switzers. In Winners Circle: Driver, Ron Cushing with presenters: Caroline Corso, Florence O’Keefe, Jean Emerson and Diann Perkins.

Photo by: Michael Newman

The Maine Breeders Stakes program; that started at \$85,000 some forty years ago, is expected to be in the range of \$2,000,000 plus, at the end of the 2017 season with 131 mares bred. It has also been maintained as a drug-free program since its inception... and should continue in this direction. Planning for ongoing enlightened leadership is imperative!

The Emersons continued winter racing in Florida, with Chet training and driving and Jean joining the Florida Harness Writers Association, where she continued promotion of the sport. She was inducted into the Florida Harness Writers "Hall of Fame" in 2010. Later in 2012, she was chosen for the ultimate national award, USHWA "Communicators Corner" in Goshen, N.Y. completing a lifetime of involvement in the Standardbred Sport.

"She did what she could..." Mark 14:8

Note from Jean Emerson:

I am so grateful that the Maine State Library accepted The Northeast Harness News as part of its digital library. Peggy O'Kane and Adam Fisher, of the Library staff, have impressed me with their dedication and hard work towards insuring that the scanned issues of the Northeast Harness News will be available to future generations of readers and enthusiasts of the sport of harness racing.

I also extend my appreciation to Stephen D. Thompson, founder of the Lost Trotting Parks Heritage Center, who encouraged me to meet with the Library Staff and who also contributed his time scanning issues. Thanks, also, to Rick Simonds who contributed necessary back-up issues for scanning.

Hopefully this Internet program at the Maine State Library will bring back some of the nostalgia of the past... ensuring success in the future.