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Stable of dreams

Mexico group working to save nation's oldest and largest public stable

By SUSAN DENKLER
Special to The Advocate

MEXICO, Mo. – If you build it, they will come.

This line from the movie “Field of Dreams” could describe an ongoing effort to save an historic old horse stable that for many epitomizes an era when Mexico, Mo., rivaled the Bluegrass State as “The Saddle Horse Capital of the World.”

It's been an uphill battle – and a Herculean one – to preserve this stable, and to burn the dream of what it could mean into the hearts of those who should care the most. The fact Simmons Stables is still standing is largely because the handful of citizens rallying to save it is a stubborn lot.

“Let me tell you, this has been a roller coaster ride,” says Bobette Balser Wilson, co-president of the Simmons Stables Preservation Fund with Mary White Littrell. “Every time we hit a low spot, somebody calls and we hit a high spot. But I've never intended on quitting this project. And the others are just as bull-headed as I am.”

Perhaps too many people have forgotten how to daydream.

A diminutive woman with a whirlwind spirit and giant vision, Wilson possesses the ability to daydream much like the girl who grew up attending church across the street from Simmons Stables. In those days, she'd peer out the windows of St.



MAKING HISTORY: Bobette Wilson is eight years into a crusade to save Simmons Stables, a hallmark of a time when Mexico reigned as Saddle Horse Capital of the World. As much as anyone, owner Art Simmons had a hand in making this barn's reputation, training and trading some of the world's foremost Saddlebreds. In this inset, he is pictured atop the famous five-gaited champion The Replica, which once occupied one of this stable's stalls. (Advocate photo by Susan Denkler/inset courtesy of Audrain County Historical Society)

Matthew's at the teeming activity right across the Boulevard, and fantasize.

What must it be like to sit astride a sleek Saddlebred horse with long lean lines and a flowing tail, or to ride in a cart alongside the master as he jogged one of his world champion harness horses around a cinder track?

The visionary got her chance to find out, for at age 21, on a trip into town, this cattle woman who knew nothing about Saddlebreds decided to pull her pickup over and watch the aging master once again.

“The master” was Arthur Simmons,

internationally-known breeder, trainer, showman, judge, and salesman, who had racked up more ribbons and trophies in the ring than most anyone in the Saddlebred business.

Simmons had a hand in training, trading or stabling some of the greatest names in Saddle Horse history, and along with his counterparts, helped put Mexico and Audrain County on the map as a veritable rival to Kentucky's Saddlebred heritage.

Art started the American Royal's Heart of America Saddle Horse Sale, the nation's premier auction for Saddlebreds, and garnered a raft of professional recog-

initions during his career.

And when this man competed in the ring – whether it was for one of the athletic county shows of the agriculture states, or the popular state fairs of the South and the Midwest, or the highest of society affairs in places like Kansas City, Denver, Houston, Chicago, and Lexington – his stature parted the way.

Would someone like that notice Bobette?

“That day I was coming down the street and saw him in his two-wheeled

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The cost of NAIS may be national sovereignty

By R. M. THORNSBERRY, D.V.M., M.B.A.
President of the Board
R-CALF-USA

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) was once the envy of veterinarians, producers, and taxpayers. President Abraham Lincoln told 1860's taxpayers that USDA would become the “People's Department.” While USDA's role in government has expanded tremendously since President Lincoln's time, USDA is still supposed to be a department of the government of the United States. Each department leader, and particularly the Secretary, takes an oath to uphold the Constitution of the United States against enemies, both foreign and domestic. Yet, former USDA Under Secretary Bruce Knight, at the 2007 annual convention of the American Association of Bovine Practitioners in Vancouver, Canada, while answering a question from a bovine

practitioner who asked Mr. Knight why USDA was pushing so hard to implement the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) in the United States, told several hundred veterinarians that it is really quite simple, we intend to be in compliance with the Office International des Epizooties (OIE) by 2010. I know what Bruce Knight said, because I was there.

Unfortunately, USDA officials no longer view their role as upholding the oaths they are administered but now have, on numerous occasions, voiced publicly their change in roles. Now USDA sees its primary role as enforcing international treaties, and they have not been shy about saying so, even in U.S. courts, where their words are maintained for history. How did this transition come about? When did USDA begin to understand its role as supporting and implementing international treaties and international agencies? What happened to all those

career officials and veterinarians who saw their service to the United States as part of their employment responsibility? I don't know. I used to think USDA walked on water. I experienced the successful Hog Cholera eradication, the Brucellosis eradication, the eradication of Equine Piroplasmiasis, and I have watched as international trade policies have reintroduced Equine Piroplasmiasis into the Kansas City, Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas, areas.

I have watched as free trade with Mexico – a country that has not expended the necessary resources to eradicate bovine Brucellosis and bovine tuberculosis, has reintroduced bovine tuberculosis across the United States, resulting in huge quarantines of exposed cattle, and massive expenses for U.S. cattle producers.

It has become perfectly clear that USDA

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“USDA has lost its way.”
– R. M. Thornsberry,
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