



HISTORY OF THE BASS BIT

Following written by Valerie Schofield

In the late 1800's, a young Tom Bass was a green stable hand at Potts & Clark's stable, having recently transitioned from his position as a groom at the Ringo Hotel. While he was already building his reputation as a gentle and highly skilled horseman, none would make a believer out of his naysayers than the mare simply referred to as the Blazing Black. When she arrived at the stable, a young Bass was instructed not to enter her stall without a pitchfork given her cantankerous attitude. She was a fiery beast that while striking, was too temperamental for even the most skilled horsemen employed at the stable. She could hardly be handled, let alone ridden, but Tom turned the lion into a lamb.

Sometime later, the stable was short of horses one year and Tom was asked if he knew of any stock that could easily be trained and shown to generate publicity. Having been sent to pasture, Tom took his colleagues to the Blazing Black and amazed them with her finesse under saddle. His secret? A new bit he himself invented. Tom Bass had determined that a good deal of the mare's problems related to a sore mouth from poor biting. The new bit, deemed the Bass Bit, was much gentler on a horse's mouth than its contemporaries.

Tom never attempted to patent his new bit. Being born a slave and by no means a man of wealth, he was often asked why, as he could have been a rich man many times over with his new invention. Time and time again, Tom stated that his bit was a gift to horses everywhere. He did advertise the bits for sale in the early 1900s for the price of \$15 C.O.D., but it was never a money making effort for him. For Tom, it was always about the horses. We decided to honor our International Saddlebred Hall of Fame inductees with a special

presentation of the Bass bit because like Tom, their careers have always been about the horses. Whether they devoted their career to breeding, showing, or training, these individuals were selected due to their dedication to not only the industry but to the horse itself. It is only appropriate that we use the Bass bit to symbolize the contributions of one simple act and the cascading significance it can have.

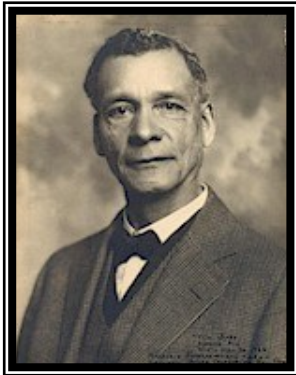


Photo courtesy of Audrain County Historical Museum

The Bass bit – a legacy honoring legacies.



TOM BASS 1859-1934

Visit our website /www.saddlebredhalloffame.org/

Friend us on Facebook! www.facebook.com/pages/Simmons-Stable-Preservation/

THANK YOU FOR JOINING US THIS EVENING.



International Saddlebred Hall of Fame
warmly welcomes you to our



INAUGURAL HALL of FAME INDUCTION CEREMONY



SATURDAY, JUNE 4, 2016

International Saddlebred Hall of Fame
Paulette Schroeder, Master of Ceremonies
Mexico Country Club, Mexico Missouri
Social Hour: 5pm, Dinner: 6pm



Tonight's Itinerary

Welcome: Bobette Balser Wilson

Invocation: Harold Enslin

Dinner: Served at 6pm

Bass Bit History: Tom Usnick

Introduction of Master of Ceremonies: Mary White Littrell

Master of Ceremonies: Paulette Schroeder



Honoring Art Simmons 1913-1995

Art Simmons was born in California, Missouri in 1913. He moved to Mexico to work for the Hamilton Brothers Bluegrass Stock Farm in 1929 at the age of 15. He worked for \$3 per week plus room and board. A normal day was to wake up at 3:30 to work horses, eat breakfast, then off to St. Brendan School, and then work horses after school. He purchased the Big Ol' Barn on the Boulevard in 1948. He trained horses and riders and Simmons' Stable became the largest commercial training, sales, and show stable in the country. Art was the first person to win all three stakes at the American Royal – five gaited, three gaited, and fine harness. He is in four Hall of Fames – Missouri State Fair, St. Louis National Horse Show, United Professional Horseman's Assoc., and World's Championship Horse Show Hall of Fame in Louisville, Kentucky. We honor his legacy and contributions to the Saddlehorse world.



The Big Ol' Barn on the Boulevard proudly stands today as a tribute to the saddlehorse industry throughout the world.



2016 Honorees

VIRGIL HELM

Virgil is known as a sharp businessman and trainer who can not only "make" a saddlehorse but has an outstanding eye for a colt. He is on record as a world's champion and breeder of world's champion horses. Virgil is known for always wearing a starched shirt, jeans and cowboy boots when he works horses.

Virgil grew up in Indiana. His father had saddlehorses, but as a youngster Virgil showed little interest. He showed livestock with his dad and started out in the registered hog business showing them in 4-H. He was interested in western horses and participated in barrel and contest horses as a teenager. After graduating from high school, he headed to work as a roughneck in the oil field. After working in the oil fields for three years, Virgil decided to get into the horse business. Virgil worked for Hall of Fame trainer, Marty Mueller, for two years and then traveled to Oregon to work for Bill Blacklaw. Blacklaw hired Virgil over the phone at Mueller's recommendation. Helm and his family moved back to Missouri in 1986. Some of his champions include Memories Citation, CH Chandler, and Desert Supreme Memories.

Dr. E. L. Robinson, a Missouri Saddlehorse breeder, says Virgil "is a very quiet, unassuming person. When you have a colt with him, he'll quickly tell you whether or not it will work out. He'll just say, I think you've put enough money in it." Blacklaw echoes those sentiments by saying "his ability to look at a horse, to be able to judge its quality, that sort of a thing. He's a true gentleman of the breed and a very good quality person." Roberta Williams says, "Virgil's greatest passion is young horses. He is a master at picking out a colt. He studies them, watches them move. He usually can tell if they are going to work out or not."

Source: Saddle Horse Report, May 2009



2016 Honorees

ALICE NEIHARDT THOMPSON

Alice Neihardt Thompson spent her early years in the Ozark Hills in Branson. She was born the daughter of Dr. John Neihardt, author, poet, and professor at the University of Missouri. Her mother was Mona Martinsen, a sculptress and accomplished musician. From a very early age of pretending to be a horse with her sister while eating candy corn underneath the piano to riding horses in the Ozark Hills, Alice always dreamed of being a horse trainer. When she grew up she traveled with a ballet troupe in the United States and Mexico. After that she enlisted in the Navy and served at Cape Canaveral Naval Base as a Link Trainer Operator teaching pilots to fly by instrument. After WWII ended, she and her husband moved to Skyrim Farm, north of Columbia where she still lives today. Alice attended the University of

Missouri in Columbia and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture, majoring in animal husbandry. Alice's dream of being a horse trainer was not forgotten and she began taking riding lessons from world-famous Caroline Drew at Christian College Stables. Later, Alice became an assistant riding instructor to Drew at Christian College until she began her own riding program at Senator George Spencer's farm near Columbia. During this time, she partnered with Dick Cook and began breeding, raising, and training American Saddlebred Horses along with teaching riding lessons. Her 40-year partnership with Dick Cook produced the great stallion Skyrim's Bourbon Stonewall. Alice taught many to ride horses.....children, their children, and then grandchildren of her first students. Her hope was that her students would become complete horsemen, both body and spirit. In honor of her accomplishments, Alice received the 2012-2013 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Missouri Horse Show Association.

Sources: missourihorshowassociation.org/news/lifetime-achievement; *The Great Adventure* by Alice Neihardt Thompson



SONNY SUTTON

Sonny was born into a family of horse trainers. His father, Roy Sutton, trained saddlebreds and hackneys and his brother, Bill, was also a successful saddlehorse trainer. At the age of 18, Sonny went to work for Tom Moore and spent two years gaining experience that allowed him to go out on his own. In his early twenties, he began training for Elizabeth Schell at Schellcrest Farm in Liberty, Missouri. He continued there for 22 years and trained horses that won at the American Royal such as Schellcrest Top Secret, Sea Goddess, and Schellcrest Que Sera. With Schellcrest Que Sera, he won the Mare Class at Lexington Jr. League defeating two legendary trainers, Tom Moore and Don Harris. In the 1980's he partnered with Jim and Debra Orr and began one of the most successful partnerships in the horse industry. Champions owned by the Orr family and trained by Sonny were Wrapped in Rainbows, Spanish Santana, You Betcha, WC Heir to Champagne, and WC Highland Commander.

Other highlights of Sonny's career include winning the Amateur Fine Harness Stake two consecutive years with Special II; winning the Fine Harness division with Schellcrest Top Secret; winning the two year old five gaited class three times with Heir to Champagne, Perfectionheir, and Day by Day; winning the Junior three gaited division with New Girl In Town; the Junior five gaited mare class with Wings of a Dove; the Junior under Two class at Louisville with Lace's Last Tango.

In addition to these champions, Sonny has received these awards over his 60-year career- UPHA Tom Moore Hall of Fame, CHPT. 5 Hall of Fame, and UPHA Chpt. 5 Horseman of the Year. Sonny's seventeen World and Reserve World Champion horses include: Highland Commander, Heir to Champagne, Day by Day, Spanish Santana, Perfectionheir, Supreme Admirals Premier, Mr. Champagne, Token Favorite, TheWings of the Dove, Lace's Last Tango.

Source: American Royal Program 2013



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