



Background Research on Norfolk Hunt Horse Show

for

**United States Equestrian Federation Heritage
Designation Application**

Prepared by Gil Rodgers

August 4, 2012



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Introduction

Heritage is the legacy handed down over generations that resides all around us but is often invisible to the casual passer-by. It is the embodiment of generosity of our predecessors such as Miss Amelia Peabody acquiring and gifting large parcels of land, the training and veterinarian skills of dedicated people such as Drs. Frank and Cecila Powers, and of “Honey” Craven wearing his top hat and majestically blowing his coaching horn to open the Show. It is the immeasurable number of hours donated by visionary volunteers that have been spent over the last one hundred years to build a living and sustainable tribute to the sport. It is the thousands of children who were introduced to the thrills of equestrian competition -- some of whom became world-recognized riders, trainers, and Olympic champions. This is the legacy and heritage of the Norfolk Hunt Horse Show, for consideration to receive the prestigious *Heritage Designation* by the United States Equestrian Federation.²

Origins of the Norfolk Hunt Horse Show

The origins of the Norfolk Hunt Horse Show (NHHS) can be traced back to 1910, when the Show was first held at the Richard M. Saltonstall farm estate in Chestnut Hill, MA, near the Longwood Cricket and Tennis Club. The Saltonstall's were avid horseback riding enthusiasts. The Show was first held in backyard paddocks with a small number of entries (perhaps 10 - 12) including the Saltonstall sisters -- Muriel and Nora -- and neighboring families. It was initially called the “Chestnut Hill Horse Show.”

*The show therefore dates back 102 years (from 1910 to 2012) and is the second oldest continuously running horse show in the United States after Devon, that began in 1896, and is 116 years old.*³

Dedham Horse Show

Outgrowing the farm estate, the Show moved to the more spacious Brookline Country Club, and then, in 1934, to the Dedham Country and Polo Club in Dedham, MA, where it was renamed the “Dedham Horse Show (DHS).”⁴

- This became a prominent show with some of the leading riders and horses from all of New England competing on the beautiful polo field beside the Club House over the traditional Memorial Day weekend. (The large polo field is still there -- as well as some of the jumps -- and is currently used as a golf driving range.)

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² The only three existing heritage shows are: Pin Oak Charity Horse Show (Texas), Devon Horse Show (Pennsylvania) and Deep Run Horse Show (Virginia)

³ Personal conversation with Sally Saltonstall on June 13, 2012.

⁴ Personal conversation and records from Lil Cabot Minot (Former President of NHC); ribbons and photos from the first Horse Show at the “Dedham Country and Polo Club” in 1934.



- Thanks to very hard work and dedication by the surrounding communities, the Show continued through World War I, the Great Depression, and during World War II. After World War II, the Show grew considerably. In a single day, as many as 375 entries competed and thousands of people were in attendance. In 1962, for example, almost 4000 spectators watched the colorful event with 34 separate riding classes for children, amateurs, professionals, and experienced hunt club members. Almost one-half of classes were devoted to children and junior riders of all ages down to beginners under eight. The Show received a great deal of publicity in newspapers, horse magazines, and on radio and television.
- The Show had two main jumping arenas: an outside course readily visible from the stands, that meandered around the countryside and featured fixed hurdles such as coops, log fences, brush fences, ditches, stone walls, and a gravel pit; the inside field consisted of two rings, where hunter and jumper classes, equitation, and other events were held.
- The Show included carriage driving; family classes in which father, mother and children all rode together; pairs classes with two people jumping synchronously as a team; and even saddleless, bare-back riding, where children would race around the outside course.
- Most of the competing riders and horses actually hunted on a regular basis or were school horses ridden by students and made available through local riding stables -- such as Powers Stable in Dover and the Dedham County and Polo Club stables. One of the most popular and colorful classes was the George T. Rice Memorial Challenge Cup Team Class with teams from Dedham, Groton, Myopia, Cohasset, Norfolk, Millwood, Quansett, and Jacob's Hill Hunt Clubs all competing.⁵
- An icon for this Show was the charismatic Clarence "Honey" Craven from Brookline, Massachusetts. He was a handsome sight in coaching livery, top hat, and coaching horn, who would say a reassuring word to a nervous competitor such as "you look good" or "take a deep breath." In addition to his friendly demeanor, "Honey" was a professional ringmaster and manager not only at Dedham but the National Horse Show at Madison Square Garden holding forth in this role for over 40 years. He instituted a high level of professionalism to the Show, and was respected by all for his knowledge and fair decisions.
- The show was very successful and remained at the Dedham Country and Polo Club for the next 36 years.
- Each year, the Show donated 20% of the proceeds from the event to the Children's Hospital Medical Center in Boston (Children's Hospital.)

The success of the Show, however, led to parking, participant, and spectator constraints, as more people began bringing their horses in trailers (instead of hacking over or transporting in large vans). Competitors were crowded into a small warm-up space and vendors had a limited area for display and sales.

Norfolk Hunt Horse Show

For these and other reasons, the Show was moved in 1969 to the expansive Norfolk Hunt Steeplechase Course in Medfield, MA. The Steeplechase Course, part of the Wardner Farm Trust property, was acquired in 1927 for the Norfolk Hunt Club (NHC), initially for hound training and steeplechase races. The Show has been held in this location continuously for the last 43 years -- renamed the *Norfolk Hunt Horse Show (NHHS)* -- and will continue at this site indefinitely.

- It became a two-day "A" rated show by AHSA / USEF in 1977.

⁵ Horse Show Programs (We have a complete file of all programs. Several samples are included with this application.)



- It is currently rated USEF “B” Rated Junior Hunter, Amateur Owner Hunter; “C” Rated Children’s and Adult Hunter, Children’s Hunter Horse/Pony; USEF Rated Children’s/Adult Jumpers. The Show is affiliated with the New England Horseman’s Council, Massachusetts Horseman’s Council, and South East Hunter Association. (The “B” rating is more consistent with the family oriented horse event this Show epitomizes.)
- Similar to the Dedham Horse Show Field, the Norfolk Hunt Steeplechase Course upper field is a flat, closely mowed grass surface well suited for hunter and jumper classes.
- Over the years well-known equestrians including: Olympian Jim Powers (Munich 1972); Louisa Lenehan; Olympian Dottie Morkis (Montreal, 1976 – Bronze Medal Dressage); Sue Ashe; Brian Flynn; Frank Madden; Bill Cooney; Olympic Gold Medalist Peter Wylde (Athens 2004) and Maclay National Championship Finals (Madison Square Garden 1982); Norman Hall, and; Olympic Gold and Silver Medalist Karen Stives (Los Angeles 1984) have competed at the Show. All considered it a highlight of their competitive experiences.⁶
- The Show was one of the very few select events in which Miss Eleanora Sears entered her prize winning jumpers. Eleanora Sears was inducted into the US Show Jumping Hall of Fame in 1992.

Significant Involvement and Support from the Community

- The Show and NHHS played an important role in keeping equestrian sports alive during a tenuous and difficult time for the United States. As a result of the Great Depression in the 1930’s, followed by WW II -- with many fighting overseas or devoted in other ways to the war effort, and families struggling with a fragile economic situation -- interest in horses and equestrian sports practically died out altogether. Many people got rid of their horses and breeding came to a standstill. The tractor had replaced the horse for farm power. Nevertheless, with hard work and dedication, communities in New England banded together to support continuation of horseback riding competitions such as the Show; the event was held on one day each Memorial Day weekend during this period and thus helped keep the interests in equestrian sport alive.⁷
- Historically, the NHHS has played a dual role for the Norfolk Hunt Club (NHC), both as a fundraising source and more importantly, as the thread that helped weave the membership together. The Show brought everyone together -- non-riders and the riders, non-landowners and the landowners, children and adults alike.
- The NHHS is managed by the NHC. Many members of the NHC and their children (and grandchildren) compete at the Show. One of the longest tenures (20 years from 1975 to 1995) managing the show was Louise Crane who was a member of the NHC. Her daughter (Mary Crane, Ex-MFH) and grandchildren all competed in the Show, while other members of the family worked on the planning, operations, and as resident physician.
- Currently, the 165 members of the NHC come from surrounding communities including Dover, Medfield, Middleborough, Natick, Needham, Sherborn, South Dartmouth, Walpole, Weston, Westport and Westwood, among others.
- The Chairpeople of the NHHS have always been members of the NHC.
- One year -- in the 1940’s -- the community pitched-in to build jumps at the last minute as the building in which the jumps were stored had a fire and burned down.

⁶ Notes and article written by Mary Crane, Ex-MFH, “Norfolk Hunt Horse Show,” Norfolk Hunt Newsletter, April 2006.

⁷ Conversation with Rennie Clark (Roberts) Ex-MFH on June 26, 2012.



- The Show also contributes to, supports and partners with other community organizations such as the Boy Scouts -- who assisted with the Show by attending to jumps and exhibiting a mounted drill team from Wellesley -- and local Pony Clubs, which provide a steady flow of promising young riders.
- The NHHS has benefited the NHC membership and their families by bringing together a large group of volunteers committed to one common goal: making the NHHS a successful, fun, and rewarding experience for all participants, spectators, and volunteers.

Significant Contributions of the NHHS to the Equestrian Sport and Community

The major benefit of the NHHS to the equestrian community has been providing a high-quality horse show for thousands of competitors from the New England region over 102 years, including through difficult economic times. The Show has been a professionally run event, attracting participation from the many surrounding stables, trainers, back-yard barns, and riders of all ages and levels, to show their horses and participate in a friendly, family-oriented setting. The Show has been particularly valuable to the large number of children who compete. For example, during the two-day May 26-27 2012 Show, there were: 117 Classes; 519 Entries in Classes; 102 Entries in Sections, and 30 classes for children and juniors.⁸

Preservation of Open Space

- The NHHS also played a large role in promoting equestrian activities in the area. One benefit has been maintaining open space in towns including Medfield and Dover, Massachusetts, that would otherwise have been developed. Land is of course a requisite for equestrian activities. Preserving open space has maintained and enhanced the quality of living in the area -- sustaining a rural and natural environment with abundant forests, streams, rivers, ponds, trails, paths, natural terrain, clean air, water aquifers, and wildlife.
- An example of this open space is the Wardner Farm Trust property which represents 200 acres of connected properties in Dover and Medfield, including the Norfolk Hunt Steeplechase Course where the Show is held. Another major property is the Miss Amelia Peabody acquisition of approximately 800 acres of land explicitly for equestrian purposes (Powissett Farm, Mill Farm, and Noanet Woodlands,) and gifted this to The Trustees of Reservations (TTOR), providing it would always be available for equestrian activities. (Miss Peabody was an avid horsewomen, competitor, sculptress, and Show chairperson). Other examples of open space in Dover and Medfield used for riding include: Wylde Woods, Rocky Woods, and Springdale Field. In total, these open spaces sum to several thousand acres available for equestrian activities associated directly or indirectly with the NHC and NHHS.
- The preservation of open space has benefited the towns of Medfield and Dover as well by avoiding significant incremental capital and operating costs for schools, water and sewer systems, police and fire departments, highway construction, and maintenance that would otherwise have been spent and passed on to tax payers to support land development.
- The open space is used for a variety of equestrian activities in addition to the NHHS, including drag fox hunting, hunter paces, Norfolk and New England Hunter Trials, fox hound schooling and training, riding clinics and demonstrations, riding lessons, pleasure riding, and many other purposes.

⁸ Norfolk Hunt Horse Show Financial Summary and log book (May 27, 2012).



Maintaining the Trail Network

- NHC maintains hundreds of miles of trails in Medfield, Dover, Sherborn, Walpole, and surrounding communities that interconnect riding areas but also complete a network for bicycling, hiking, and walking. If the intricate trail system was not maintained, properties could become “islands” isolated from each other, effectively diminishing the viability of equestrian and non-equestrian activities. The NHC spends thousands of dollars and hundreds voluntary labor hours each year to maintain this trail system – it is a major contribution to the entire community.
- Funds for many of the NHC events are donated for this purpose. Two examples are major regional attractions, “Grounds for Celebration” and “Polo in the Country,” which draw thousands of residents – both riders and non-riders – to the Show site. Proceeds from these events are used to maintain open space, trails, jumps, panels, and fields.
- Events are publicized in local newspapers (e.g., *Boston Globe*, *Medfield Press* and *Medfield Hometown Weekly*), magazines (e.g., *Yankee Pedlar*, *Chronicle of the Horse*, *Boston Magazine*), local television stations (e.g., *Medfield and Dover TV*), and online (e.g., *Dover – Sherborn Patch*, *Medfield Patch*).

Additional Benefits

- The site of the Show is used for other community services. For example, the town of Medfield used the Norfolk Hunt Steeplechase Course for the Fall Fair. It has also been used for show dog trials, dog shows, and a variety of other recreational purposes such as cross-country skiing, hiking, dog walking, disc golf, kite flying contests, and bird watching. On occasion, the property has been used for weddings.
- The NHC began paying all taxes, insurance, and upkeep of the Norfolk Hunt Steeplechase Course and Wardner Farm Trust property in the 1930's.⁹ Property taxes paid to towns of Medfield and Dover are estimated to be about \$2 million¹⁰ over the last 80 years.

Conclusion

The Heritage Designation is an honor bestowed only upon horse shows that are sustained over a long period of time, have broad involvement of the local communities, have made outstanding contributions to equestrian sports, and are distinguished by national or international recognition or other unique characteristics. This historical summary of NHHS has documented that the Show has been continuous for over 102 years (even during the Great Depression and the War Years,) and has been rated by ASHA/USEF for the last 35 years. The Norfolk Hunt Club -- which is composed of 165 families from the surrounding communities -- has been the manager of the Show for 43 years. The show has received and given community support through local merchants, land trusts, and other organizations. It has made outstanding contributions to the community by providing a high-quality, professionally run, yet friendly and family-oriented for thousands of competitors from the New England region including a number of Olympic champions. The Show has also been instrumental in preserving thousands of acres of open space and maintaining an intricate trail network for equestrian and non-equestrian activities.

⁹ “The Norfolk Hunt: One Hundred Years of Sport,” Ex-MFH David Lewis and Norman Fine, p. 38, 1995

¹⁰ Property taxes paid 1994 – 2009 = \$363,004, property taxes paid in 2010 - 2012 = \$40,000/ year (NHC financial records); Assume average of \$25,000/year x 80 years (1932 to 2012 = 80 years) = \$2 million in property taxes.



Chestnut Hill Horse Show (1910 – 1933)



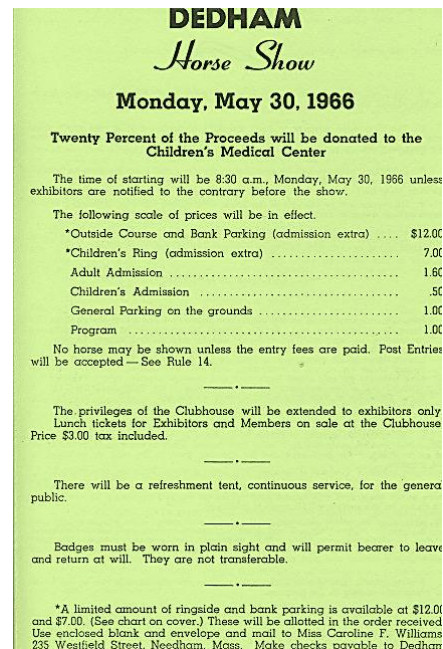
Nora Saltonstall on "Bully Boy", Chestnut Hill Show, May 30, 1917. Origination of the Norfolk Hunt Show was at the Saltonstall Farm.



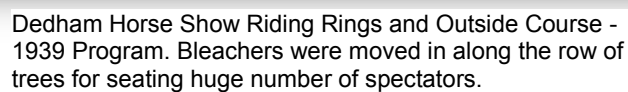
Carriage Driving at Chestnut Hill Horse Show, Saltonstall Farm, Chestnut Hill, MA



Precise Synchronous Jumping in Pair Class, Chestnut Hill Horse Show



Dedham Horse Show Program, May 30, 1966.
Twenty percent of the proceeds donated to
Children's Hospital in Boston





Family Riding Class at Dedham Horse Show
1934/35 – L-R: Mrs. Cabot, Chris Cabot
(Wood), Lil Cabot (Minot), Paul Cabot



Ribbon from First Dedham Horse Show
– 1934, Courtesy of Lil Cabot (Minot)



Honey Craven and Miss Peabody Presenting
Mill Farm Trophy to Rennie Clark (Roberts)
Dedham Horse Show 1962



Thousands of Spectators at Dedham
Horse Show, May 30, 1962



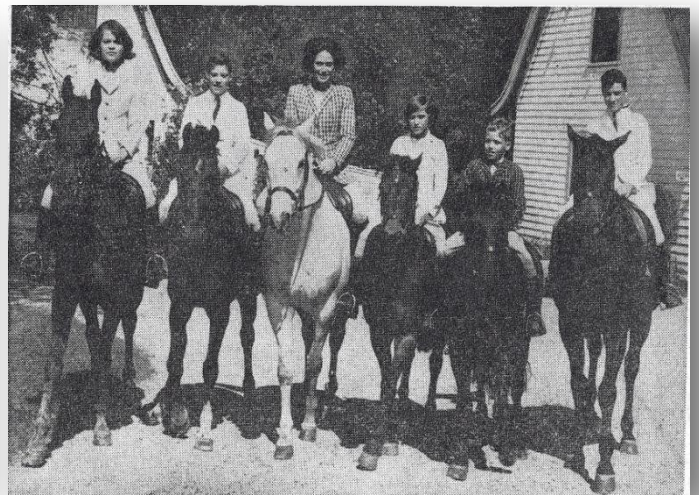
Inside Show Field at Dedham Country and Polo Club.
Boy Scouts Attended to Jumps.



Large Riding Class Waiting to Enter Show Ring at
Dedham Horse Show, 1962



Mrs. Arthur Lyman Presenting the George T. Rice
Memorial Trophy to the Winning Norfolk Hunt
Team, May 1954, L-R Mrs. Theodore T. Whitney, Jr.,
Miss Jean Neiley, and Mr. Jack H, Lewis



Powers Children -- L-R: Joan, Jimmy, Diana, Sandra,
Richard, and David Preparing for Family Ride at
NHHS. Jim and David competed with the USET -
Jim was reserve member of the 1972 Munich
Olympic Team



Norfolk Hunt Horse Show (1969 – Present)



Young Riders at 69th Annual Norfolk Hunt Horse Show, South Middlesex News, May 31, 1979



Lead-Line Class for Children – Sanders Family, 2011



Parade of Hounds at 100th Year Anniversary
Led by NHC Huntsman John Elliot



Cormac Kennedy in Adult Jumper Classic
at 2011 NHHS



Norfolk Hunt Horse Show – 100th Year
Champion Ribbons and Trophies

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