



E-NEWS AND E-NOTES FOR FRIDAY, MAY 2nd, 2025

The big shipsky

Hopefully, by now, our wandering troubadors have safely returned home. We hope it was "a good ship" as they say. A couple of grooms arrived late and a little on one line as the trainer just shook his head and said "they're just bad shippers."

I had one old lovable fool that would see the trailer the day of the race and take off in the opposite direction. We'd get him loaded though but his full sister was even worse: she absolutely would not load for the trip from New Jersey to Yonkers and - as her trainer told me - they had to scratch her several times as they gave it up as a lost cause.

Probably the roughest ship I can think of began in 1893 in Bedford, Ohio when horse breeder/seller Christopher "C.F." Emery (born 1832) sent several trotters from his Forest City Farm to St. Petersburg. After months without hearing anything, his farm manager/trainer/driver 41-year-old William Franklin "Frank" Caton volunteered to check on the situation himself so he took a trip across the big pond and journeyed into the far reaches of Mother Russia. He found the missing equines safe and sound and also discovered an untapped market for their American trotters. He would return in 1894 with his family of five kids including his 18-year-old son William Franklin "Will" Caton. For 23 years they trained for the Czar Nicholas as they developed a new strain of trotters that raced throughout Russia. Before the

MATINEE DATES

WE ARE GOOD TO GO!

SATURDAY 5/10 - CELINA

SATURDAY 5/17 - GREENVILLE

SATURDAY 5/17 - BUCYRUS

Catons' arrival the Russian trotters only competed against time and they, along with most of the European stock, were decidedly slower than the Americans.

They would introduce race colors, racing equipment and the races themselves. Will would be the leading driver/trainer as their factories turned out everything needed for harness racing. Will married a gal from Warrensburg, Ohio and they would have 5 little Ruskies, all born "over there."

Unfortunately, in 1906 there was a scandal in Randall as C.F.'s son-in-law, the head of the Cleveland Stock Exchange, got involved with something of a "Bernie Madoff" type scheme and cost numerous investors a chunk of change. The lawyer for several of the victims then got elected mayor and in 1908 banned gambling at Glenville Racetrack in East Cleveland. That effectively shut down the operation & the racing elite of the the area wanted a place to race their Grand Circuit horses. The 77-year-old C.F., in order to pay off the debt incurred

by the son-in-law, sold his farm in Bedford, the spot was incorporated as North Randall and in 1909 Randall Park opened for business. It was a huge success as it attracted investors such as Harry K. Devereux who would become the General Manager, Presiding Judge, and leading Amateur Driver.

Meanwhile, over in Moscow things were going royally as Frank and Will prospered. The new style of American racing attracted huge crowds and they even developed their own cross-breed of trotter.

Rumor has it that the good racehorses were the *Trottinoffs* while those that were rammy and hard to steer were called *Runninoffs* and the one's that couldn't stay sound were the... *Limpinoffs*.

Tough crowd, tough crowd.

As the threat of war loomed, papa Frank Caton would return to the States in 1913 but Will & his brother Sam and their families remained behind.

Then WW1 broke loose in 1914, C. F. passed in 1916, and with the Russian Revolution in 1917 the Caton Brothers were imprisoned, their factory raided and burned as they all were in danger.

With a lot of political maneuvering through Frank and the prominent men they were released & the whole troupe would journey by railcar through Siberia, Mongolia, Korea, Japan then by ship to get back home to Bedford, Ohio.

Frank Caton would pass in 1926 at the age of 74 while Will would continue his Hall of Fame Career as he developed many good trotters. In 1932 at the age of 68 he would capture the Hambletonian with The Marchioness before he died in 1943. Although they say that in his later years every time he saw **any** type of railcar, he'd take off in the opposite direction.



This offering from 1956 is one of the most enjoyable pictures that you will see. I was a mere lad in knickers when I first saw it as it is a well-made homespun tale of an Indiana Quaker family who must contend with the Civil War and Gary's penchant for them trottin' horses. Through true-to-life action with a well-timed comedic effort we journey to a simpler time when horse was king or in this case, the mare was queen.

President Ronald Reagan gifted the film to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to symbolize peaceful solutions to conflicts. Supposedly he sent him a picture of the old horse's barn in southern Indiana saying: *Mr. Gorbachev... tear down this stall!*

