

Growing up on the Cooper Pony Farm

by Laurel Soper, BGHS

If you lived in Bourbonnais any time between the early 1900s and late 1960s, you remember the Cooper Pony Farm, located at Davis Creek on Rt. 102, about two miles out of town. The house and barn still stand, home to a local antique dealer.

In a recent interview, Frances Cooper Wertz, born Dec. 3, 1915, tells Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society members about her family's history and her childhood on the farm.

It all started with the 1850s Gold Rush. Wertz's great-grandfather, Wesley Cooper, and his younger brother, William, went west to seek their fortunes and they were successful. When Wesley returned, he bought a large parcel of land near Davis Creek and began raising Percheron horses.

Wertz describes the day in 1892 when her grandfather, John B. Cooper, acquired the first Cooper pony.

"My grandfather imported an English ram, because he had a herd of sheep. He went to the Kankakee County fair and he took his ram. And he met a woman who had a pony. It was a registered Shetland and the name was Lady Bird. My grandfather traded the ram for the pony and the pony was in foal. So he ended up with two ponies to start with and that was the start. My grandfather raised horses, so he was interested in young ponies too. What was good about it was it was a registered pony and that meant all colts were important."

Wertz's father, Harry W. Cooper, ran the farm from 1907 until his death in 1969. He was nationally known for his prize Shetland ponies that he showed throughout the U.S. A 1959 "Portrait Gallery" article in the Kankakee Journal states that Cooper's three best ponies, Black Patton, Greyhound and Greyhound Commander, were the farm's "meal tickets," siring many prize colts. The farm produced hundreds of ponies over the years.

Harry Cooper was not only a successful man, but a generous one.

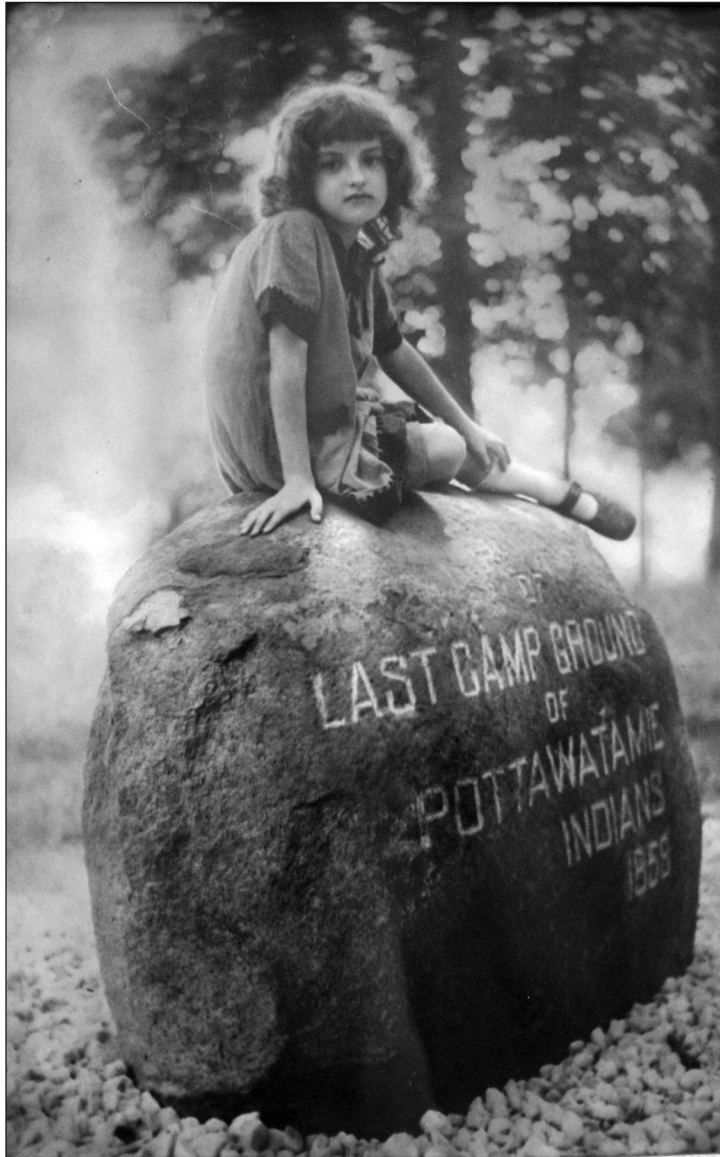
"My dad used to let ponies go out, sometimes even with a buggy, just for their use. A lot of kids had ponies that would never have had a pony. When he let a family take a pony, he made them promise they would take care of the pony. It was to keep the pony in action. My dad supplied the feed for them. And there was a LaMontagne family in Bourbonnais that had a pony and a buggy for a long time."

As a little girl, Wertz and her older brother, Jack, used the woods and fields near Davis Creek as their playground.

"I spent a lot of time in the woods. I used to go out in the spring and pick wildflowers and sometimes I would venture over into the neighbor's woods across the creek next door and look for mushrooms. We went barefooted and rode horses bareback. And that was kind of tough, to jump off on the ground with your bare feet."

When Wertz was very young, Dr. Benjamin Franklin Uran, then president of the Kankakee County Historical Society, paid a visit to her father. At that time, the society was marking historic places throughout the county with large inscribed stones.

"He came to my house when I was very small and talked to my father. And I presume, in my mind, I think it might have had something to do with the setting of this boulder. They talked a long time and he said his father was a doctor, a country doctor with



Frances Cooper Wertz on last encampment boulder, circa 1920, photographed by Duane Hodgekiss, Powell Studio, Kankakee.

a horse and buggy, and he used to take him when he was a young boy, down through our woods, to where their encampment was, to the Indians, to see if they needed any medication. I remember he said, 'That was 60 years ago.' And I thought 'oh my, 60 years! that was a long time ago.' And he was an old man at that time."

"I consider myself lucky that I met Dr. Uran. I presume the rock had just been laid. Or he might have come to get permission. The rock is located kind of like on a knoll. And it looks down on Davis Creek. And the area where it looks down, there is a beautiful spring. The water is just as clear and everything and it worked out well for the Indians. It seems to me, when my brother and I would ride ponies through the woods, that there was a place near the rock that had tobacco."

Wertz gestured toward a large framed photograph of the granite boulder on Davis Creek that marks the last Indian encampment in the area. The boulder is inscribed "Last Camp Ground of the Pottawatomie 1859". A young girl sits atop the boulder. She wears a brown dress and shoes, her thick curly hair frames her face. She looks straight into the camera with a somber expression. Behind her, sunlight dapples through tree shadows.

"Powell Studio took this picture. Duane Hodgekiss took it. And I never saw it for years. And one day, he called my mother and said, 'When Frances is downtown have her walk by Powell Studio and look in the window.' That's when I saw it the first time," Wertz laughed.

"That's a great picture," one BGHS member remarked. "Yes," replied Francis Cooper Wertz, "I love it."

The Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and promoting local history. Monthly meetings are held at 7 p.m. on the first Thursday of each month March to December. Museum hours are 1 to 4 p.m., first and third Sundays of each month, March to December or by appointment. Visit bourbonnaishistory.org, [facebook.com/bourbonnaisgrove](https://www.facebook.com/bourbonnaisgrove) or call 1-815-933-6452

Candidate announces new program

Ed Glazar, Republican candidate for Kankakee County State's Attorney, announced a new program in protecting the public on Thursday, Sept. 29, 2016.

"As I've talked to people in every corner of the county, I believe every resident should feel as though they're a part of the solution, to have a say in their own safety, security and quality of life," said Glazar.

He proposed a new proactive program and website, Safer4All.org.

Safer4All.org is a two-tiered program designed to bring current, vital information to Kankakee County residents on the most topical crime issues facing the community and how citizens can best protect themselves from becoming a crime victim.

Safer4All.org has two connected delivery methods: a website consisting of a large public access library of information, including resource videos, podcasts and printed materials exclusive to Kankakee County, which the State's Attorney's office will oversee; and a series of live public educational events on specific topics of concern in targeted neighborhoods, with the intention to serve everyone, especially those without access to a computer.

A beta version of the website is available at www.Safer4All.org. The finished version will be available in the next 60 to 90 days.

The website will contain vital links to Kankakee County law enforcement agencies, CrimeStoppers and many other resources, all designed to put the power of information into the hands of everyone to deter and even stop crime.

Any press releases put out by the county or city law enforcement agencies will be put up on Safer4All.org, so that more people can be informed and take more control of their own safety and security. Updates to the site will automatically be uploaded to a Facebook page with the same name.

"I will enlist the help of the Kankakee County sheriff's department and every other law enforcement agency in the county to help choose those topics that are of major importance to our neighborhoods and put out the information that's needed most," Glazar said. "I will also look to get input from our local schools and even allow some of our young people to record some of our videos, using tips that will be sourced and/or written by our local law enforcement experts to assure their validity."

Topics to be covered may include things the public can do to keep their home safe from burglars, signs to look for to tell if your child may be using drugs, current phone scams, preventing gun violence in the home, keeping your car from being stolen or vandalized, the do's and don'ts of walking to and from school more safely, the safest ways to report a gang-related crime and what to do if you're stopped for a traffic violation.

There will be a Safer4All.org advisory board made up of people representing every corner of the county. This board will be chosen to act as a sounding board for topics that should be covered, as well as where the live educational events should take place.

Glazar noted that he will update the website on his own time with no expense to the county or taxpayers.

"With the help of volunteers and others, we estimate that the entire project will cost no more than \$1,000 a year to operate. There will either be a modest fundraiser each year to get the money or a private donor will be found to fund the program," Glazar said.

"Safer4All.org will not only be free to the taxpayers, it will save money in the long run," Glazar added. "By helping to clear our courts of crimes that will NOT be committed, we'll save the county money, because our citizens will be better prepared to turn criminals away."

Super Crossword

Answers

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