

Greenwich Horse Show Venues Make a Full Circle

First held in 1914, the Greenwich Horse Show celebrates its 90th anniversary this year. Over time, the show has been held at various locations in and nearby Greenwich. Although the run isn't a consecutive one, for various reasons, it is an impressive one.

"The 9th annual horse show of the Greenwich Riding Association and Fairfield and Westchester County Hounds, held at Nutbourne Farm, the estate of James McClenahan [on King Street and Harrison Avenue] in Port Chester . . . was a brilliant society event . . . more than 3,000 people witnessed . . . from ringside. One of the features was a farmer's luncheon given by the Association and Hounds to the farmers and their families under a large tent on the show grounds in appreciation of the privilege accorded members of the Association and Hounds in riding and hunting over farmers' estates during the year." ¹ Over the years, the event was held on the race track or on the summit of a hill overlooking the track.

In 1925 the show moved to the Greenwich Polo Club Grounds, on the John Sterling 1400 acre estate at Quaker Ridge in Greenwich. In the mid 1930's Mr. Sterling gave this property to Yale University and it subsequently became known as Yale Farms with roadways named "in honor of several of the past presidents of Yale" ² (see attached NY Times article).

The June show relocated briefly in 1948 to the Blind Brook Turf and Polo Club on Anderson Hill Road in Purchase, NY before returning to Yale Farms in 1950 for a few years and then back to Blind Brook for the 38th running in 1954.

"The 39th annual Greenwich Horse show is back, after a five year absence . . . will be held . . . on the property of Mr. William Heron at Lower Cross Road and Lake Avenue – happily combining as a benefit for both St. Barnabas Church and the Greenwich Riding Association." ³ Betty Davies and Norma Bartol recall a terrific storm coming in one year just after Rector Hardy of St. Barnabas blessed the horses - tents and fences were blown down and horses got loose. In time our affiliation with St. Barnabas came to an end; however, a lovely trophy in honor of our history with them is presented annually. I remember the challenge of riding an outside course which at times sloped downward not only to the north but also to the west. Eventually the course was redesigned by Robert "Bob" Freels and stone walls were built and rebuilt by Frank "Bud" Parker. A gazebo in Bud's memory, dedicated by his friends and family, still stands on the Heron property in honor of his commitment to the GRTA during his lifetime.

¹ New York Time, 9.17.22

² New York Times, 8.22.37

³ Greenwich Social Review article by Helen Castles, 5.60

After the Heron family sold their property, the show was moved in the late 1970's to Coker Farm in Bedford, NY thanks to the generosity of Judy Richter. She recalls those days as "more about getting kids, mine and others, to the ring. We had two grass rings and a small fenced in short stirrup ring."

In 1982, the Greenwich June Horse Show came full circle, returning to Yale Farms, when the Gerrish Milliken family welcomed us to their property on Pierson Drive. By way of background, Abraham Pierson, for whom Pierson Drive was named, was rector of the Collegiate School in New Haven (1701-1707) which later became Yale University. Additionally, he served as pastor of the First Congregational Church of Greenwich and his tenure is remembered in one of the stained glass windows of the current edifice.⁴

I wish to thank the various individuals who shared their memories and helped with the research for this article.

~ Alice A. Fisher

⁴ Wikipedia