

IMAGES

... then and now

From The Indian Hill Historical Society



Buckingham Lodge
1861

Remembering Uldin Wilhelms



Considered one of Indian Hill's institutions, Uldin Wilhelms instructed many residents in the art of horsemanship. His European background, devotion to his profession, and ability to teach gained him a loyal clientele of riders.

Born in Hungary, Wilhelms was orphaned at a young age and taken in by his aunt and uncle. His cousin Bert De Nemethy was as close as a brother; they attended military school and served with the Royal Hungarian Cavalry. Both represented Hungary in international competitions in Three-Day Eventing and Open Jumping. After the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, they came to the USA to pursue careers as equestrians. De Nemethy stayed on the east coast and coached the US Equestrian Jumping Team for 25 years, and Wilhelms, his wife (Stella), daughter (Marta), and mother-in-law moved to Ohio.

After briefly working with Chili Rodgers at Red Fox Stables, he became manager of the Riding Club at Winding Creek Farm on Blome Road. Here members joined for

an annual fee and were billed monthly for board, training, and lessons. Mr. Wilhelms kept school horses (used for teaching) and privately owned horses in the ivy covered tri-level barn. The Club had a sand rink, a cinder track, a jumper course, and an open field for educating horses and riders. Mr. Wilhelms arrived early in the morning and was the last to leave at night. He supervised the care of as many as 40-50 horses, did entry forms and paperwork for horse shows, arranged for transporting horses, managed the books for the Riding Club, trained horses, maintained the grounds, and gave lessons to both youths and adults.

In the 1950s and 1960s he competed successfully in horse shows, sometimes riding clients' mounts. His classical technique with the forward seat system (sitting forward on the horse, not back in the saddle) contributed to his victories and those of his students. In the early years some of his riders competed on the East Coast, and one became champion of the Junior Hunter Division at Madison Square Garden. Many of his riders competed in the national finals held each year in New York City. In later decades, he focused on local regional horse shows and stayed closer to Cincinnati.

His students respected him. Beginners were perplexed by his thick accent and tendency to yell instructions. He had high standards and expected each person to pull his/her own weight. Each rider rode every school horse, and group lessons were given by appointment after school, and everyday in summer. There was an emphasis on dressage, with lots of precision and patterned movements. Students learned each horse's strengths and weaknesses. They were not allowed to speak or chew gum during lessons. Mr. Wilhelms commanded in his uniquely strong voice, and riders followed his instructions. When nonmembers of the Riding Club heard him at a horse show they asked his students, "Are you afraid of Mr. Wilhelms?" Though intimidated at first, they knew they were learning from a master, and they frequently took home trophies from horse shows. Gruff at times, he genuinely cared for his charges. He placed broom handles behind the backs of students to teach them proper posture in the saddle, and according to one former student, was "always slapping his crop against his thigh." Once at a horse show he assisted a student with her Latin homework – an easy task as he was fluent in 5 languages. Often on Saturdays, Wilhelms led groups of 15 on trail rides through the Green Areas of Indian Hill, testing them on the names of trees and birds, querying "Vat bird is that?" as they rode along.

The school horses at the Riding Club were personally selected by Wilhelms and purchased from the race track or country farmers. He had horse sense, and his rule was "Never ask the name or look at the head". He bought wonderful equines like Mame and Gray Goblin. He trained them, using lunging with side and front reins until they achieved the form and grace that he required.

Mr. Wilhelms retired in 1995, died in 2000, and remains a legend in the village. Many former students have continued their equestrian involvement. Some are judges or instructors, and some have children showing horses that are direct descendants of the Riding Club's school horses. The impact that he had on his students can be summed up as "Work hard, whatever you do – WORK HARD!"