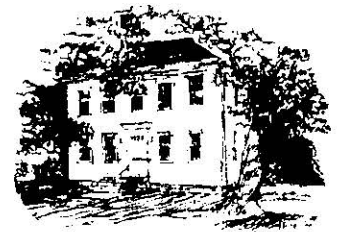


IMAGES

... then and now



Buckingham Lodge
1861

Bucephalus: An Equine Mystery



Preserved in the Historical Society's collection of village memorabilia is a life-sized carving of a wooden horse head. About 40 years ago the horse was a mystery to local residents.

Robert A. Reihle of Cunningham Rd. was walking through the woods near his property in the 1960's with his wife Lois when they spotted what appeared to be a dead horse. It turned out to be a warped and broken wooden horse. Reihle collected its pieces and took them to the lot where his new home was under construction. A German carpenter got excited about the horse and with Reihle's permission took all the equine's parts home to reassemble them. Over the next few years Reihle inquired about the reconstruction; but, since no progress was made, he took the horse back to repair it himself.

Upon examination of the pieces, it became apparent that the horse was a fine piece of woodwork with tendons carved in the legs, wrinkles beneath the eyes; and a perfectly arched mouth. On the horse's stomach was the word "Kissingen". The Cincinnati Art Museum deemed the horse folk art, and Bob tried to discover its origin. Library research led to a book on the German town of Bad Kissingen, a town renowned for woodcarving. Reihle found that apparently in the early 1800s the town was a popular destination for the wealthy, and Bob theorized that some well heeled Cincinnati of German descent had brought it home after visiting there. He wrote to the town mayor, who replied that local carvers there probably did not work on the discarded horse. The Mayor also enclosed a fancy brochure about the local spa, extolling the curative effects of the mineral springs and treatments at this world-class resort.

After that proved to be a dead end, Bob continued trying to determine the horses' roots. Simultaneously he entered a woodworking class to learn how best to restore the weather-beaten charger. He got in touch with local media to request information, contacted the Indian Hill Village Manager, Wray White, and corresponded with previous residents of the area where the horse was found.

During the investigation and restoration, friends suggested a name for the horse: Bucephalus, the horse of Alexander the Great. The name came from words that meant ox head because the original Bucephalus had a very large head. According to Plutarch, the stallion Bucephalus carried Alexander on numerous military campaigns and died in battle in India.

A three-year correspondence with Warner Atkins in North Carolina gave Reihle some answers. Mr. Atkins, once an owner of a large Indian Hill estate that encompassed the land where Reihle found the horse, had discarded the wooden body of a horse in the woods. Atkins had used the horse to practice polo in the center of a barn with vertical walls. When Atkins and other neighborhood polo players sat on Bucephalus, they would hit a ball and it would bounce right back to be hit again. This exercise improved each player's agility and coordination. When Atkins left the hill, the horse was left behind.

Bob used wood putty to reassemble the shattered torso of the horse, a job that took him more than 2 years. Though he had a patched-up look, Bucephalus was whole again and was put on display at the 1969 Indian Hill Art Show. No one ever figured out how the practice pony had become adorned with woodcarvings, but Bucephalus had been healed by a Villager. The body of the horse disintegrated over decades, but the head of Bucephalus remains as both a memento of polo on the Hill and also of Bob Reihle's dedication to solving the mystery and restoring a piece of village folk art.