

The Myers of North Carolina

Celebrating More Than 55 Years Of Saddle Horses

BY ANN BULLARD



Many in the Wellington family gathered to celebrate the world's champion of championship rides last year. Pictured (back, l-r) Ashley Myers Crim, Linda Myers, Wendy Myers, Steve Myers, Brenda Kelly, Tanner Parham, Holly Gassen, Charles Gassen and Steve Gassen, (middle row) Kaley Gassen, Blake Crim, Stephanie Wellington, (front) Molly Crim, Allie Wellington Nunley, Tyler Nunley and Louise Allen. Jean Myers, Jeanna Gassen as well as Stephanie's father and his friend were in attendance but are not pictured.

There are cheering sections and then there are cheering sections. In the Saddle Horse world, North Carolina's Myers family defines the latter. Today, the fifth generation of Clyde and Posie Myers is following their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents into the winner's circle. And when one is in the arena, odds are most, if not all, of the family are in the stands.

A case in point: Louisville, 2014 where 16 of the 20 family members in attendance gathered at their seats behind the trophy table to celebrate the family's fantastic week. They had a lot to cheer about. Allie Wellington Nunley won a pair of world's title with Palisades Ladyhawke. Charles Gassen rode CH Little Lord Huntly to the Five-Gaited Pony World's Champion of Championship. The youngest family members each won a world's title. Blake Crim teamed CH High Heat to win both Junior Exhibitor Park titles; younger sister Molly won the Walk and Trot Saddle Seat Equitation 10 and Under Championship.



The family patriarch, Clyde W. Myers traded everything from horses to cars and land.



Louise and Mr. Terrific brought home many a blue.



Posie loved her Hackney ponies. She is pictured driving Chips Masterpiece.



Clyde and Posie Myers (front) 'trained' their four children well. Steve Myers, Jean Myers, Brenda Myers Kelly, and Louise Myers and their families have been excellent stewards of their parents' legacy.

It was quite a six-days for trainer and father, Steve Gassen, Molly's trainers Lisa and Bill Waller, Tammy DeVore, trainer of CH High Heat, and Maureen and Rich Campbell, who trained Palisades Ladyhawke, as well as for the entire Myers family.

Today's Saddle Horse fans recognize the names Allie, Tanner, Blake, Molly and Charles. Their pictures have appeared in countless stories and advertisements over the past few years. Many know their parents and other family members who own horses and ponies today. However, the story of the Myers family is much more than show ring success. It is one of a family whose bonds are sealed by more than 70 years of love for horses, ponies and one another.



Jean Myers enjoyed showing both English and Western, especially the colorful parade horses.

Clyde and Posie Myers established their farm and business, Myers Trading Post, in Winston Salem, N.C., shortly after World War II. Why trading post?

"He was a trader," his son, Steve Myers, said. "He traded mules, ponies, cars, land and many other things. He had real estate all over Winston as well as other places. He had one piece in Texas that he paid taxes on but we never could find. He traded for a lot of property sight unseen."

In the 1950s, Myers, his wife and growing family moved onto what remains the family farm. Here their daughters, Louise Allen, Brenda Myers Kelly, and Jean Myers, and their son Steve grew up. Today, Steve and his daughters live on the property; his sisters and their offspring reside in Winston.

Louise recalls their father bringing home Shetland ponies in the back of the car.

"He put me on one and it ran away with me," she said, adding she was

four-years-old at the time. She didn't ride again until she was six or seven.

"Daddy brought home horses and ponies from Tattersalls," she recalled. "We had to ride them. Being the oldest, I was the guinea pig. I had to groom; Dad and I trained them."

Louise was an only child for nine years. Brenda (Myers Kelly) came next with their siblings, Jean and Steve following at two-year intervals. All were and are involved with horses.

"Mother showed Tennessee Walking Horses and Hackney Ponies," Louise recalled. "If horses are in your blood, they stay there."

When her parents bought the family's first "real show horse," they placed it with the late Royce Cates in Knoxville, Tenn. Later Billy Bunn and Jimmy Thompson trained the Myers horses. In the early '60s, Claude Myers built his barn and established Double M Farm. The late Claude Alexander was their first home trainer.

"Stephanie [Wellington] learned to walk in that barn," Louise Myers said fondly.

"Daddy and the late Cas Walker [from Knoxville, Tenn.] were big in Shetlands. They used to make shopping trips to Perry, Okla. Jean, Steve and I would pick out the ones we wanted to break," Brenda said. "We were so close; we'd go to the barn together. Our parents had a guy named Wes to look after us and make sure we didn't kill ourselves."

The older generations had horses with a number of outstanding trainers. Among these were Ed Becker and his sons Joe, Bill, Dave and Bobby. In the late 1950s, the family had several horses among the 100+ wearing tail sets at the South Carolina barn.

"Ed had known Clyde Myers years before; Mother and Posie were good friends," Dave Becker said.

On April 8, 1957, a tornado destroyed the Beckers' barn; they moved to Winston-Salem, setting up at the barn Cash Lovell Stables now occupies. Among the horses the Beckers had in training: Bright Star and Sugar Boy for Jean, Brenda's Maid Of Motion, Steve's fancy turnout pony and numerous harness ponies.

While Louise stayed with Saddle Horses, she basically stopped showing in the 1960s while her daughter Stephanie continued. Later, she supported Stephanie's husband, the late Johnny Wellington, and her granddaughter, Allie Wellington Nunley along their equestrian journeys. Together they have bred and raised a number of outstanding saddle horses.

Stephanie wasn't as enthusiastic about riding as some of her family. As Louise put it, "We practically had to beat her to get her to take lessons."



Brenda Myers Kelly showed many nice saddle horses. Perhaps the best known was her walk-trot star, shown as The Contractor. They won a Lexington blue in 1966, 40 years later, she won Lexington Junior League's Amateur Roadster Pony with CH Cappuccino. (Painting by Bill Alexander.)



Steve was well-known for his driving in the popular fancy turnout classes.



Many family members enjoyed the 1980 North Carolina State Fair. Ashley Myers Crim, Wendy and Posie Myers and Claudia Kelly joined present ASHA President Bill Whitley.



Stephanie may have preferred the social end of the horse business but she did well in the show ring. She is pictured with Blissful Dream.



Claudia won a Reserve World's Championship aboard Command's Ego in 1979.

Regardless, she joined her aunts and cousins in showing Saddlebreds. At the North Carolina State Fair Horse Show, she met the love of her life, the late Johnny Wellington. At the time, Stephanie was riding with Cash Lovell, Johnny with Jimmy Norris. It wasn't long before Louise, Johnny and Stephanie began a 32-plus year relationship with Lewis Eckard.

"I've worked horses for everyone in the family," Eckard said. "Johnny was one of the most versatile horsemen I've known."

Stephanie was more than happy to step back from showing. "We moved to Lewis and Johnny took over showing Lady Of York for me. He rode so much better than I. I loved the social end of the business more than riding."

In the early 1990s, Stephanie and Johnny adopted a baby girl. Allie Wellington may have been adopted, but she 'inherited' her father's love of riding and the show ring.

Wellington stories abound. One that Eckard likes to recount concerns Johnny and his good friend, David Rudder. Johnny was showing CH Playing With Fire FVF and David had CH Harlem Town in amateur three-gaited competition. Their friendly rivalry led to the Wellingtons breeding one of the nation's outstanding show horses.

"They showed against each other 12 times; each won six classes," Eckard recalled. "They planned to breed the two after Playing With Fire retired."

They did. The foal: CH Ninety-Eight Degrees. Eckard introduced the gelding to the show ring in the Junior Park Division. He went on to win 12 world's titles with several different owners.

"That's one horse I sold too soon," Louise Allen said. "Johnny didn't want to show Park and Allie was too young for him at the time."

"Allie is just like her Daddy, she loves to show," Stephanie said.

Allie agrees. "I mainly saw Daddy ride at

Lewis'. He was such a great jockey. I never saw him show any fear. I saw him get on and ride with everything he had. From the time I was able to understand what it was, I knew what I wanted to do. I begged to take lessons, but Mom made me wait a year, until I was four."

Johnny, Stephanie, Allie and Louise enjoyed several good years together in the saddle horse business after Allie began to ride. On Saturday, November 20, 2004, Johnny died in a single-car accident on his way back from their barn. He was two blocks from home. One way to honor his memory was to continue, to star in the sport he loved.

Allie has done that and more. Teamed with various horses and ponies, she has won five world's titles and four reserves. More than that, she has grown up to be the young lady her Daddy and the rest of her family anticipated she would be.

On April 27, 2013, Allie married longtime fellow exhibitor Tyler Nunley. Tyler not only is known for his junior exhibitor career with roadster ponies, but his mother, Alice, showed many world's champions, including the great World's Grand Champion CH Callaway's Criterion. He trains his mother's and outside horses at a barn in Winston Salem.

Louise's three younger siblings have remained faithful to the horse industry. While some 'strayed' to another breed for a while, all have come back to the Saddle Horse world.

As a youngster, Brenda's parents paired her with such horses as Maid Of Motion. Like many of her generation, Brenda has left much of the showing to her daughters, Claudia and Holly (Gassen,) Holly's husband, Steve, and their son, Charles. While Brenda's daughters inherited the family's horse passion, she says, "My two sons came to a horse show because they had to."

Supporting her family's horse habit doesn't mean Brenda is a stranger to the show ring, and even the green shavings.



Wendy stepped away from Saddlebreds for several years. She starred with Appaloosas, winning a barrel racing world's championship.



The Dreamer has been an outstanding horse for the Lassett family. Jeanna showed him in the roadster division; her sons Dustin and Sean have won with him and today he is one of Kyleigh's lead line mounts.



The late Johnny Wellington loved showing horses almost as much as he did introducing his daughter, Allie, to the sport. He took her for a ride on his champion three-gaited horse, *Playing With Fire*.

Allie Wellington Nunley and Dustin Lassett began their equestrian careers in walk and trot.

As an adult, Brenda has starred with driving horses. Her most recent pleasure driving horses: Bold Irish Spirit, Grand Prize and Sophisticat. Perhaps more important, she owned and has shown what might be called 'the family pony,' CH Cappuccino. The two earned good ribbons throughout the country, including at the World's Championships. Among their favorite memories: getting two of three first-place votes in the Amateur Road Pony Championship on the Red Mile in 2006. Steve Gassen won the Road Pony Stallion and Gelding World's Championship in 2002; his wife, Holly, son Charles and nephew, Tanner Parham, have all starred with Cappuccino.

Today, Brenda owns several brood mares and has several horses in training with her son-in-law. Among these: a three-year-old five-gaited filly by First Watch and out of the CH Talk Of The Town daughter, Latte. Both she and Steve are excited about this filly's prospects.

Claudia began her career riding with Allen Chester, later joining the family at Cash Lovell Stables and Drowning Creek Farm. In 1979, Claudia earned a Reserve World's Championship with her Three-Gaited Pony, a Hackney/Saddlebred cross named Command's Ego. In the mid-1980s, she showed her parents' black walk trot horse, Silkwood BS under Eckard's direction. Claudia stopped showing when she aged out of the junior exhibitor division but remains a staunch supporter of the family hobby.

Claudia's sister, Holly, the youngest of the Myers' grandchildren, says her memories of the early days and her grandparents are not as vivid as her cousins'.

"My grandmother got sick as I grew older, so I didn't get to enjoy the horses with her as my cousins did. Mom got out for a while so I really started riding in ninth grade," Holly said.

One of Holly's mounts: the walk-trot pony, Native Ego, offspring of her sister's Command Ego. "She didn't get broke until she was 10. I had the privilege of showing her at Louisville. I remember coming down the chute and wishing my grandmother were there to see me.

"I met Steve [Gassen] when he worked for Lewis. I graduated from high school in 1994. He asked me to marry him that September and we married in January."

A Louisiana native, Steve Gassen learned his trade when working for Leon Roberts and Morris Caffery in the New Orleans area. In 1988, he joined John Champagne at Alpha Sun Stables and later moved to Kentucky to work for Charlie Smith. In 1990, he joined Eckard in Winston-Salem.

Steve continued working for Winston-area trainers. In 1997, he opened Holly Tree Stables. He closed his barn temporarily to work for Johnny Lucas, reopening in 2004.

Steve and Holly's son, Charles, needs little introduction. He began his career showing the 'family pony,' winning his first Louisville blue and tricolor in 13 and Under Roadster competition. He showed academy only once when his parents lived in Florida. After Charles took a year off, Brenda purchased the seasoned five-gaited pony, Little Lord Huntly, for her grandson. Charles and the half Saddlebred/half hackney pony have simply been magic. They received a standing ovation when they won the 2014 Five-Gaited Pony World's Champion of Championship.

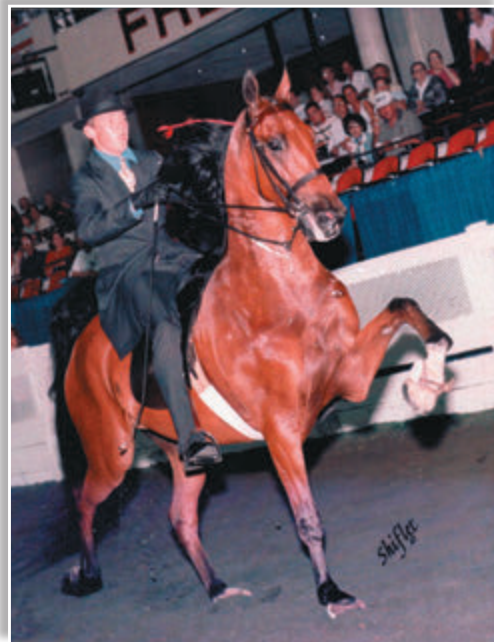
His six-year-old sister Kaley has rides around at home. She now has started in lead line.

"She loves it," Holly said. "She's looking forward to showing this year."

Family horses comprise much of Steve's business. He has Brenda's and Louise's stock, which includes the horses shown by his son Charles, Allie Nunley and some for Amy Stinnett's Woodlea Farm.

Unlike her aunts and cousins, Holly has elected to be a stay-at-home mom. She and Steve have two children. Charles now is 13; his sister Kaley is "six going on 16."

"Some people question why I don't work [outside the home]," Holly said. "I know we have fewer material things than others, we may get behind and play catch up. But my main goal has been to raise two great kids, kids society likes. I want them to be home concentrating on their studies. I think we're doing pretty well at that.



Sean Lassett and his mother, Jean Myers, shared rides on Harlem's Leading Star in the early 2000s.



Charles Gassen was totally relaxed before showing at Blowing Rock. He had a fantastic season with Little Lord Huntly, earning the 2014 Five-Gaited Pony World's Champion of Championship.



Tanner Parham and his cousins Molly and Blake Crim grew up at the barn their great-grandfather built. They are pictured there with *Jewels For A Lady*.

"Charles follows sports regularly. He wants a career in sports broadcasting, to bring saddle horses to ESPN," Holly said. "David Rudder encouraged him, saying, 'you're a strong man; you set your goal. Everyone said you couldn't beat Sprinkles and you did.'"

Charles was selected Athlete Of The Week for WXII, NBC's affiliate for the Winston-Salem/Greensboro area. They came out and videotaped at the Gassen's Holly Hill Stables.

Jean Myers, the third of Posie and Clyde's children, enjoyed showing family horses, including the three-gaited horse, *Hit Parader*. Her daughter, Jeanna Lassett, and son, Stephen Lee James, grew up in the business.

"Our trainers were a big part of my kids' lives," she said. "I wouldn't change that for anything. Saddle horses, any horse business, are a great social environment for kids. They know how to carry on a conversation with adults, to learn manners and discipline."

Jean, Jeanna, her grandsons, Sean and Dustin Lassett, and now great-granddaughter, Kyleigh, have enjoyed the horses together. Such horses as *Harlem's Leading Star*, *Who's That Guy* and the roadster pony *Keep The Spirit* won many top ribbons with Jean, Jeanna, Sean and Dustin.

While they have had horses with Eckard in the past, for the last 10 years, Jean and Jeanna have been part of Steve Hanks' program in Statesville, NC. In 2004, Jean purchased Callaway's *No Problem*, a horse she and her grandsons shared in five-gaited pleasure competition. In 2006, Jeanna and the boys began showing the road horse, *The Dreamer* both in under saddle and bike classes. In 2010, Jean added the Dun Haven Phenomenal son, *Crystal Creek's Big Time*, a pony Jeanna and Hanks initially showed in the roadster pony division. More recently, he has shown in Hackney Pony Pleasure Driving, and, along with *The Dreamer*, as one of Kyleigh's lead line mounts.

Both Sean and Dustin have worked in the saddle horse business. Dustin primarily

helped Eckard's Drowning Creek Farm at shows. Sean worked with Evan and Mary Orr's High Caliber Stables last year. Among his responsibilities were being entrusted as the 'home man' while they were on the road. Today, both 'boys' now are in their 20s and hold responsible jobs outside the horse industry. Their mother enjoys taking her granddaughter to lessons and shows.

The youngest of the second generation, Steve took a somewhat different interest in the equestrian world than his sisters. Although he showed saddle horses and particularly ponies for a while, he focused on western, more specifically Appaloosas. Later, he and his daughters, Wendy Myers and Ashley Myers Crim, branched into the Western world.



Kyleigh Lassett is the youngest of the family to enter the show ring.

Steve pointed out that Wendy actually was the first family member to win at Louisville. However, the shavings weren't green; she won an Appaloosa National Championship in barrel racing when their finals were there.

"The girls got out when they were teenagers and discovered boys. After that, I bought a good cutting horse that I showed for about four years," Steve said.

Steve and his wife, Linda, live on the family farm. After both girls married, they settled in homes on the family property. For a number of years, the former show barn largely was unused. In 2006, Randy Cole and Becky Teater leased the barn, and the youngest of the Myers family soon became 'hooked.' Wendy's son, Tanner (Parham) first began going there to visit and ride. Not surprisingly, Blake and Molly Crim followed in their cousin's footsteps. Blake became interested when Molly was still a baby.

As Tanner progressed and ended his academy career, his grandfather purchased *Jewels For A Lady* for junior exhibitor five-gaited pony competition. They enjoyed a great career, including a UPHA American Royal National Championship and Reserve World's Championship. Later, the family teamed him with *What's Your Daddy*.

At the beginning of 2014, Tanner moved to Tammy DeVore. He finished his junior exhibitor career showing Virginia Stanley's *He's Born To Royalty* to a pair of reserves in the American Royal's junior exhibitor five-gaited competition.

After showing academy, his family paired Blake with the roadster pony *Seamair's Nobility*. In 2013 he moved to DeVore Stables, showing the seasoned Kalarama's *Lady Bancroft* in junior exhibitor five-gaited pleasure competition.

After Louisville 2013, Steve Myers purchased *CH High Heat* for his grandsons. Tanner showed Justin Cowley's former park horse once; by May, Blake was the only one in the irons. Simply put, they are the reigning Junior Exhibitor Park Horse Champions for Lexington Junior League and the reigning Junior Exhibitor Park World's Champion of Champions.

The family's 2014 saga wouldn't be complete without Molly's contributions. The most petite member of the Myers family graduated from academy to riding with Lisa and Bill Waller in Knoxville, Tenn. The petite blond with the winning smile showed in front of Freedom Hall crowds for the second time in 2014. She went home with a red ribbon from the Saddle Seat Equitation 8 and Under Walk and Trot qualifier ... and carried the yellow roses back to the Clover Leaf tack room.

And so, another spring has come. With a few shows already in the record books, the Myers' clan is ready for another stellar year. Some will be presenting new horses. Others will be seeking to improve on last year's records. But even more important than the horses, the trophies and ribbons is the family itself. In and out of the show ring, they are a great example of what the words family – and showman – are all about.

Clyde and Posie Myers must be smiling.



Not only does the family share a love for horses, they enjoy many 'adventures' together. Most recently, Wendy Gassen, Molly Crim, Allie Nunley and Stephanie Wellington played with a mid-size cat at the T.I.G.E.R.S. Preserve in Myrtle Beach.