

LESTER WELCH LIPPITTS FOR A LIFETIME

By Stephen Kinney

A recent edition of *The Lippitt Club Newsletter* published a happy birthday message to Lester Welch. Lester, who recently turned 90, has his homebred Ryegate Dirty Sallie bred to produce a 2021 foal for him, only the most recent event in a nearly lifelong journey with the Lippitt legacy.

In the newsletter author Jim McClay alludes to Lester Welch's unique role in Morgan history. In 1949, he was hired by horseman Joe Boulris to work at Robert Lippitt Knight's Green Mountain Stock Farm. Upon the death of Boulris in 1951 Lester took over management duties at the Stock Farm, rode the fabled Morgans there, made many of the breeding decisions, and cared for the foundation Lippitt stallion Ashbrook, among others. Clearly, he was intimately acquainted with the horses behind the pedigrees.

Fellow Lippitt enthusiast and breeder Nancy Plimpton says Lester has been central in inspiring others. "I met Lester in 1968 the year his first full-Lippitt was born. I was around for a lot of the breeding and training he did. He told me all those Green Mountain Stock Farm stories so I became convinced I had met every horse in that barn. He would tell me stories and I could picture it all. He spent hours teaching me the pedigrees of those horses. He introduced me to every Lippitt he could find for me to meet. He got me and many others started in their breeding programs. Lester taught me how to appreciate this horse deeply."

In 1963, Lester established his own Ryegate Morgan Farm on six acres in Randolph, Vermont, the same town as the Green Mountain Stock Farm. His breeding program focused on his firsthand knowledge of the 1928 stallion Lippitt Ethan Ash

(Ashbrook x Trilby). Lester says he was not hesitant to make close matings back to the stallion he admired so much. For example, Ryegate Dirty Sallie, the mare mentioned above, is a daughter of Ryegate Black Bart. Black Bart was both sired by and out of a daughter of Lester's foundation stallion, Stillwater Indigo (Moro Hill's Adonis x Natick Moro Independence). Indigo carried three crosses to Lippitt Ethan Ash in four generations and six to Ashbrook himself. Lester shares his thoughts about these intense crosses in the interview which follows.

For Lester, a horse's usefulness was as important as its bloodlines. He plowed with them, trail rode, hooked them as pairs for sleigh driving, and even once took then vice-presidential candidate George H. W. Bush on a carriage driven campaign tour of Burlington.

"The most special horse he owned was [Stillwater] Indigo," Nancy Plimpton comments. "He loved Lester and would do anything in the world for him. He drove him single, double, in sleighs, rode him in parades, and went everywhere with him. Lester had a unique way with that horse."

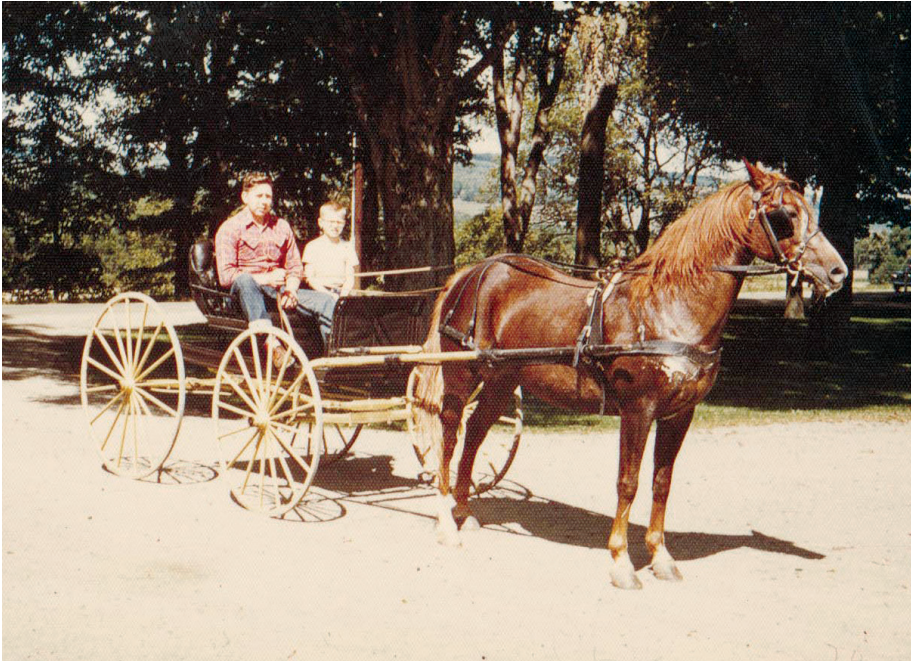
The Morgan Horse invited Lester to share his Lippitt Morgan memories in a recent interview from his home in Brooksville on the Gulf side of Florida where he moved in 1987.

How old were you when you first encountered the Green Mountain Stock Farm?

I was 19. I graduated from high school in 1948. At that time the Vermont State School of Agriculture had a one-year course that was located in Randolph Center. When I went there I discovered the Green Mountain Stock Farm. Having always had horses I went



ABOVE: Lester Welch and his foundation stallion, Stillwater Indigo.



LEFT TO RIGHT: Lester driving Bethal (Allenwood x Hepsibeth) one of the mares Robert Lippitt Knight repurchased in 1954; Stillwater Indigo & Lester as parade marshalls.

to the Stock Farm a lot. I graduated in June and in November of 1949 Joe Boulris, the head horseman, called and wanted me to come work for them. I worked there until May of 1952 and then I was drafted. In June of 1952 Mr. Knight had the dispersal sale and sold all the horses. Mr. Knight and his secretary made a list with all the prices and sent it to me in Korea. I still have it today. I returned from Korea in April of 1954. When Mr. Knight heard I was home he said he missed me and wanted me to come back to work. That was when he was buying horses back again. I stayed at the farm until 1956.

Talk about Robert Lippitt Knight—the person and the Morgan breeder.

He left it up to whoever was in charge of the horses to breed. He never told you how to breed them. He left it up to Joe Boulris and then to me—I made up my own mind how to breed some of them. Mr. Knight was one of the nicest guys I ever worked for. He was at the farm on weekends a lot. He didn't care about showing, but he loved to have the horses doing things. At the time he was one of the top ten richest men in the United States due to Fruit of the Loom.

Share memories of some of the horses you knew at the Stock Farm.

Lippitt Dusky Kate & Lippitt Duplicate

Full sisters. Beautiful mares. Absolutely gorgeous. Very, very special, pretty mares. They didn't produce as many foals as we would like to have seen them have. There is the photo of them together with their brother, the gelding Lippitt Ethan. Gorgeous individuals.

Lippitt Victory

He was a nice horse and would do all kinds of things for me. His granddam, Green Mountain Twilight, was not a pretty mare. She had a big, bald face. Victory got his name because he was born on VJ day and he had a perfect little V on his nose.

Lippitt Sam

I used to ride Sam. He was a nice horse too.

Ashbrook

Ashbrook was 32 when I went there. He got so when he laid down he couldn't get up. We had to help him. He was put down at 34. I led him to his grave. He never walked a step. Every step he took was a prance.

Lippitt Ethan Ash

He was an older horse when I got there and he taught me how to ride English. When I got on him if I didn't do something right he'd put his ears back and shake his head. If I did it right his ears would go forward and he'd do what I asked him to do. He taught me more about how to ride than any human ever did. He was my favorite and I thought the prettiest of them all. I based my whole breeding program around Ethan Ash.

How did the stallion Stillwater Indigo come into your life?

I didn't choose Indigo. He chose me. I found him, I leased him, and his owners were so impressed with what I did with him that at the end of the year they gave him to me. He was just one of those

“I didn't choose Indigo. He chose me... He was just one of those horses of a lifetime.”

MORGAN PEOPLE ≈ LESTER WELCH—LIPPITTS FOR A LIFETIME



TOP ROW: Brother and sister, Stillwater Indigo and Stillwater Amora driven by Lester Welch; Lester's pair being filmed by Disney for "Journey To America".

BOTTOM ROW: Lester gets a raucous ride with Major's Nubbin; Lester with fellow Lippitt breeder Nancy Plimpton.

horses of a lifetime. He never refused to do anything I asked him to do. He even plowed the garden for me.

Indigo had three crosses to Lippitt Ethan Ash in four generations and six crosses to Ashbrook. Did you have concerns about such intense inbreeding?

Not at all. I bred full sister to full brother and they were some of the best crosses I ever had.

Did you breed only full-Lippitts?

I had some of the more modern type Morgans at one time. I bought some of them fairly cheap and selling them for good money helped

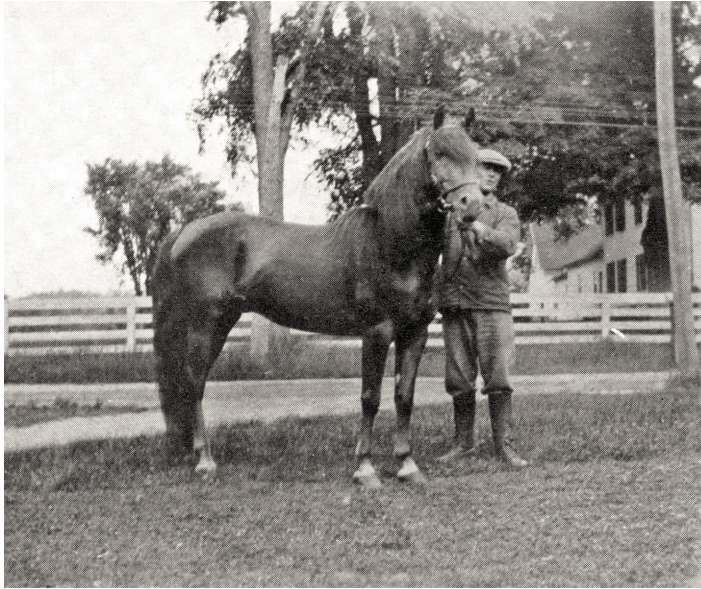
me acquire the Lippitts I had. I'm a purist. I like things to be what they are.

There are 74 Morgans with your Ryegate prefix. Talk about two or three who were special to you and why.

All of them. They were all special. I'm one of those guys who had horses and enjoyed having fun with them. I did all kinds of things with my horses.

You made a video for Disney. Was that fun?

In the early '80s I did a Christmas scene for them that played for 14 years on the East Coast and the West Coast in Disney World and



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Foundation Lippitt stallion Ashbrook; his son, Lippitt Ethan Ash; Ethan Ash's grandson, Stillwater Indigo; Indigo's son Ryegate Black Bart; Black Bart's daughter Ryegate Dirty Sallie, Lester's mare in foal for 2021.

Disneyland [respectively]. It was called “Journey To America.” It was a minute or two. It played in a circular theater and came in one side and out the other. I used Indigo and his full sister Stillwater Amora to pull the sleigh.

Is there a story about naming foals after “Gunsmoke” characters?

There was an old gal [on the TV series “Gunsmoke”] who was always chewing tobacco and was named Dirty Sally. She was such a good actress that I named the horse I have now, Ryegate Dirty Sallie, [after her]. Then I had a gelding named Ryegate Festus. He was a nice little horse.

You used to give sleigh rides to visitors of the AMHA office in Shelburne?

I helped over there when they were raising funds for the building. I

took my horses over and made a big crockpot of beef stew. I’d serve beef stew and take people on rides. I did that with a pair, Indigo and Hope. Or her full sister [Stillwater] Amora. I could drive either of those mares with Indigo.

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You have bred a mare for a 2021 foal.

It will be a full-Lippitt. The sire is River Riders Rich. The dam is Ryegate Dirty Sallie. She lives up in Maine with Heather Smith.

And parting thoughts?

I have enjoyed every minute of having my horses. I’ve used them. I’ve had fun with them. It was nothing for me to take six or seven people out on a trail ride in the

evening. I enjoyed them most when other people enjoyed them with me. I probably had more fun with those horses than anyone can imagine. That’s what they are for. ■