



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF WASEEKA'S IN COMMAND

That he is the most influential sire in Morgan show horse pedigrees is well-documented.

The private history and colorful circumstances of his life are less well-known.

People who remember the stallion and his connections share firsthand accounts of his life story.

By Stephen Kinney

A MATING IS MADE

"Mother was absolutely against breeding [Miller's] Adel to [Waseeka's] Nocturne," Sue Annis says of her mother, Elizabeth Power, doyenne of the Waseeka Farm dynasty. "She was a very elegant mare. Probably before her time, as Nocturne was before his time. Adel's pedigree went back to some very stretchy Morgans. We were committed to a gene pool that we thought would make more compact Morgans. That's what we were trying to breed for."

What, then, instigated the 1964 mating that created Waseeka's In Command?

"John Lydon wore her down," comes the mirthful response from Sue. "When John stopped working horses on any given day, they'd go to the house to have a drink and talk about horses. John wanted horses that could tip their heads, had good throttles, their necks set on in the right places. And that were easy to work."

"Vodka may have been involved," Sue's daughter, Nicky Caruso, chimes in, laughing.

Waseeka's In Command was born in 1965. From all reports, the arrival of the gawky colt confirmed his breeder's concerns. Sue says, "Mother had been breeding dogs—Pembroke Welsh Corgis—

since 1955. At that time Corgis had trouble with crooked legs and that doesn't change as a puppy grows up. We hadn't had enough foals to know that they were born with crooked front legs, and that they straighten out as they grew."

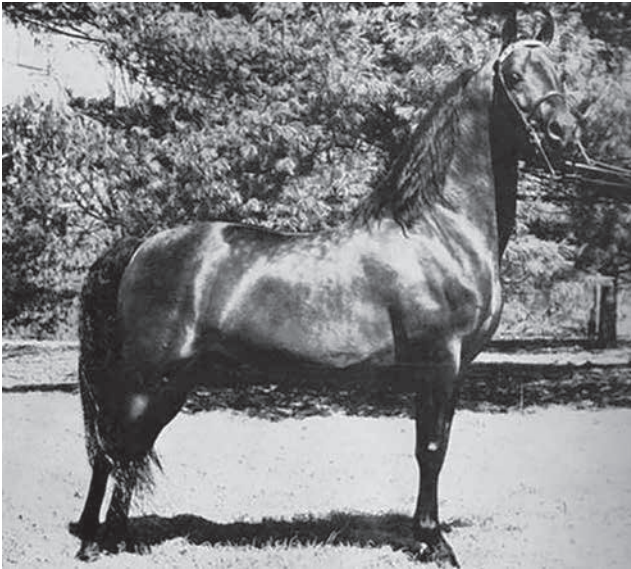
They decided to hide the colt. In the kennel!

"At Waseeka, we had horses stuck in places everywhere. We had altered what had been a dog kennel into a run-in shed. It was safe, but it was not very fancy," Sue says. "We had put him down back where no one would see him. Mother and I didn't know what the heck to do with him. We didn't think anyone would want to buy him. But John talked Mary [Dewitt] into buying him when he was 15 or 18 months old."

Janie Murphy remembers her mother, Claire Murphy's, story well, recalling, "When they weaned him, they put him in the kennel. That's where mom saw him and John Lydon tried to sell him to her, but he was gawky, and my mother didn't want him. As it was explained to me, Mary bought In Command and Waseeka's Joy over the phone for \$3,000. Mary could do impulsive things. If it felt right, she did it. And look what happened!"

"At some point we discovered that John knew what he was

ABOVE: Waseeka's In Command, posing at Fiddler's Green Farm and under saddle with John Lydon.



LEFT TO RIGHT: Sire Waseeka's Nocturne and dam Miller's Adel, with Sue [Power] Annis up (photos © Warren Patriquin).

doing,” Sue adds, acknowledging the irony that the ugly duckling turned into a swan, and a one-of-a-kind swan at that. Miller's Adel was bred one more time in 1966 to Waseeka's Nocturne and sold in October of that year to Margaret Vanderweel in Marcellus, New York. She lost that foal and thus no full sibling was born.

She continues, “Waseeka's In Command was really Mary Dewitt's horse. We had little to do with him after we sold him, except we trusted John Lydon to do right by him. Mary was the one who did everything possible for the horse.”

The stallion stayed in the care of Waseeka trainer John Lydon for his early years. Mike Goebig calls himself “...probably the biggest groupie of Waseeka Farm and John Lydon there has ever been.” He recalls, “John brought him out as a three-year-old at Northampton. He won three-year-old park saddle, and he was absolutely stunning. But other than his three-year-old year, he was never happy at New England. The footing in the ring was clay, just like the track. He got so he hated it, and he just wouldn't fire.”

Ben Qua wrote memorably in an article in *The Morgan Horse* about the stallion's coming out year, saying when word circulated through the barns at New York Morgan in Syracuse that John Lydon was outside working an exceptional colt, “...the barn couldn't have emptied faster if there had been a bomb threat.”

Of his show career, Mike says, “He won a lot of his classes, but he was ahead of his time and didn't look like the other ones. He was really high-headed for a Morgan of that time. He was a consistent show horse and when he got beat it was often because he was different, and judges didn't quite know what to do with him.”

MOVING TO MARY'S

Around 1970, Waseeka Farm was privately dispersing their Morgan horses and John Lydon, Waseeka's In Command, and a few select mares moved to Mary Dewitt's Stonecroft Farm in Dalton, Pennsylvania. John was a renowned companion on the dance floor and Mary had a socialite's reputation as a bon vivant. She kept her per-

sonal horses in a small barn at her farm. The famous show gelding A-Okay was one, as were a handful of broodmares. To accommodate incoming horses, “...they added stalls. They didn't make it bigger, but they arranged things so there was room for more horses,” Mike says. “They put up a workspace behind the barn that was very small and short—it was comparable to working in a barn aisle—as a place for John to ride in the winter. They lived an hour and a half from me. Even when I was a teenager, I went there a couple of times a month to watch John work horses. You'd go up and there would be John on In Command and the horse would just start to look good when John had to stop him and turn around. You got glimpses in the winter of what he could look like, but only as he was going by.

“He was Mary's horse, and she wanted to ride him. This was pre-Grand National and [New York Morgan at] Syracuse was a big show. She badgered John to get the horse ready for her to ride. The horse was ready, but she wasn't. Her biggest problem was that she'd lose her stirrups. So, John got rubber bands and rubber banded her feet into the stirrups. He was trying to be discreet, so in the strip there was one person on each side of her and they made it look like they were adjusting or wiping off her pants. In Command made a great show, and they won.”

BREEDING BEGINS

Before she even brought In Command home to Stonecroft Farm, Mary Dewitt's homebred Hello Dolly, the full sister to the aforementioned A-Okay, was in foal for the stallion's first offspring. In 1970, First Command was born from the mating, but those who remember him recall him as disappointing and AMHA Registry records indicate he was sold without papers.

But his breeding career took off in subsequent years, with one filly, Rejoice Command, in 1972; two foals, Kathryn Command and Wynne Command in 1973; and five, including Noble Command, in 1974. Mike remarks, “Waseeka was closing up, John knew what he wanted and got his pick of the litter. Which is how

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ABOVE: An aerial of Waseeka Farm, Ashland, Massachusetts, in the 1960s; Elizabeth Power, Waseeka's Nocturne, and John Lydon.

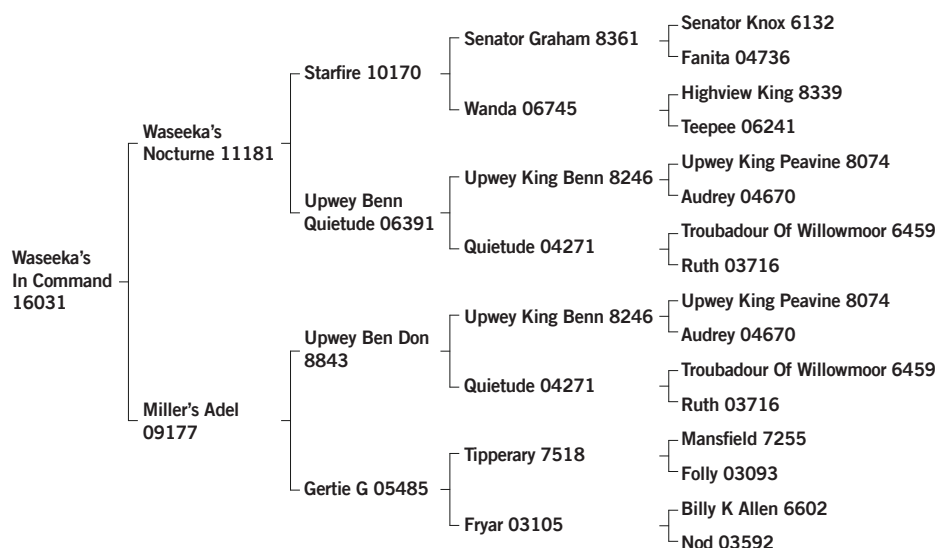
Mary got Waseeka's Joy, Joyful Command's dam, and Waseeka's Interlude, Noble Command's dam."

Mike tells a classic Mary and John story. "The property was unlevel. Stonecroft was literally carved out of rock. They carved out areas for the house and the barn. There was a pool that overlooked the ring right below it. Mary was sitting out by the pool one day and John was having a bad ride on this mare. He stopped and said, 'For a nickel I'd breed this bitch.' Mary had some change on the table next to her and tossed John a nickel. That gives you the tone of John and Mary. That kind of exchange was an everyday occurrence. She was incredibly witty, incredibly smart."

That coin toss sealed the fate of the mare Highmeadows Kadie who ultimately produced 11 foals by In Command including 1978 Park Harness World Champion Wynne Command, as well as Glory Command, Honor Command, Rejoice Command, and others.

Those first foals were glorious, and it was Mary Dewitt's determination to declare them so with some of the most memorable

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LEFT TO RIGHT: Portrait of Waseeka's In Command by the late Hal Hoover; Waseeka's In Command pedigree

names ever given to Morgan horses. Mary's daughter Winnie says it was a mission of her mother's "...to make sure the name Command was always included in his get."

In 1977, the Mary Dewitt and John Lydon partnership split. It was time for the horse trainer to retire, and it left Mary with a stallion and other horses to care for. That is how In Command went to live at Leo Picard's Troutbrook Farm in Rhode Island. Of Picard, who also chaired the New England Morgan Horse Show for years, Sue Annis says, "Leo did a lot to promote the Waseeka horses. Not just In Command, but Waseeka's Moonshot and others. Leo did a great deal of good for us." The champion in-hand stallion Troutbrook Playboy, by Waseeka's Nocturne, was bred by Leo.

Mike says that Mary, "...signed a lifetime lease. I'm not positive, but she got something like 50 percent of the stud fees and no expenses. But it was not implied, it was written that In Command could not leave." Having sired the likes of Noble Command, I Will Command, and the many coveted mares who bore his surname, he "was already famous," Mike says.

IN COMMAND IS IN DEMAND

Kentucky trainer Peter Palmer, who is one of the original "Baker Boys"—a term coined for the proteges of Bob Baker—worked at Troutbrook at the time. He says, "In Command, in my opinion, was just an exceptional horse. He was beautiful and talented. Everything about him was wonderful. He'd try to help you if he could. When he came on the scene, he had a different look about him. Then as a breeding horse, he passed it on. He was all show horse and just an impeccable individual. I can't say enough good about him.

"He had a wonderful owner, Mary DeWitt, who was a dear friend of mine. When he came to me, Mrs. Dewitt had several other Waseeka horses she sent with him. I was lucky enough to also get to work some kin to him. I worked him for a year before he went exclusively to the breeding shed. The old-time trainers say that when you get old enough to quit, you'll have five horses from

your lifetime you remember. He'll be one of those for me."

More than half of In Command's foals—96 out of a lifetime total of 165—were conceived in only seven years during which he stood at Troutbrook. Dr. John Stoker had previously bred Trophy's Corrigan to him, producing the soon-to-be leading sire I Will Command in 1976. He sent the mare back, inciting the craze surrounding the cross of In Command on Trophy daughters, producing the influential stallion Wham Bam Command in 1979 and Ladybird Command in 1981. The significant broodmare sire Troutbrook Hallmark (x Waseeka's Joy), foaled in 1978, was one of the first bred by Picard himself. He joined his full sister Joyful Command at Saralin Farm, and in the heart of Sally Longenecker. Other noteworthy get from this period included the stallion Duke Of Wynne, the dynastic broodmare MyBlue Heaven, World Champion Stallion Carlyle Command, Ladies Park Saddle World Champion Summerbird MsCommand, the iconic sire Tug Hill Commando, and so many others immortalized in show records and pedigrees.

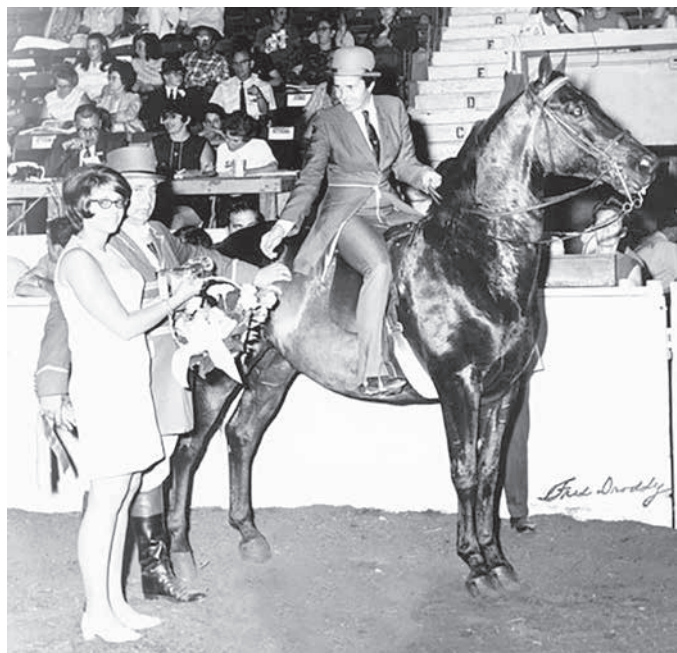
At the height of all this, Waseeka's In Command was prolific, highly sought after as a sire, arguably advancing the goals of so many breeders, and no doubt a money maker for owner and lessee alike. Then, his story took a much different turn.

TUMULTUOUS TRANSITION

In the year 1983, In Command was having little success settling mares and both Mary and Leo had to worry about satisfying breeding contracts. Mike Goebig says, "As he got older his semen was very delicate, and he wasn't getting his mares in foal reliably. [Mary Dewitt] had no control and was getting a lot of grief about it. That's how the plot was put into place. He went to Cornell legitimately and one of the things they learned was that his semen was only good in the cooler months of the summer. When it got hotter, he wasn't as potent. He was not impotent, but there was a better time for him to get his mares in foal."

Claire Murphy of Fiddler's Green Farm, at that time in George-

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A-Okay (Waseeka's Nocturne x Ebony Dancer), shown here with both Mary Dewitt (photo © Fred Dreddy) and John Lydon up, was a big time show horse for both riders in the 1960s.

town, New York, was on close terms with Mary Dewitt, John Lydon, and the coterie of In Command fans around them. They were all social, partied, and danced together at horse show parties. Mary Dewitt had only a few stalls at Stonecroft, so Fiddler's Green provided a home for the stallion, visiting mares, and young stock that would result from his breeding activity. In hindsight, there was irony that Claire had turned down the chance to purchase In Command as a yearling, only to provide his final home years later.

Janie Murphy describes the events that led to the stallion coming to spend his final years at Fiddler's Green. "He wasn't settling mares at that time. He had been declared sterile by Tufts. Mary wanted a second opinion. Eddie Raymond and Cheryl Rizzo went to Troutbrook to get him. In Command was taken to Cornell University for semen evaluation, but he had a layover at our place first. He arrived at Fiddler's Green in October 1983, around Halloween. I'll never forget. It was momentous, to say the very least. He passed his tests at Cornell. His semen count was sky high. He came back to our place. At that time Mary decided not to return him to Troutbrook. It was October, so he wouldn't have been breeding until spring anyway."

According to those with firsthand knowledge, a legal battle ensued. "Leo was not happy," Janie recalls. "My recollection is that for six months to a year, it became a matter in court. My mother and I and Mary had to go to Rhode Island to testify. Maxine Snow was there also—she had been breeding to In Command regularly."

"At one point In Command had to leave New York state. Based on the arrangement Mary had with Leo, it was feared Leo could have come into New York state to get him. In Command, with [his sons, the full brothers] Centurion Command and Centennial Command, went to live at Muffin Dupont's farm in Delaware. Muffin wanted to buy him, but Mary wouldn't sell."

As far as anyone can verify, the legal struggle simply dissipat-

ed. Mike Goebig suggests a theory: "Mary had lawyers involved about breaking the lease, but it went to court when he didn't get returned. A reason why it didn't get resolved—and I'm projecting this—was that for Leo he wasn't as valuable as he once was. He was probably not getting enough mares to make it worth an expensive court battle. If that hadn't been the case, I think it would have been a different outcome."

Janie remembers his return to Fiddler's Green, saying, "When they hauled the horses back from Delaware, the van drivers would not deliver them all the way to our barn. It was a long way up a steep hill. My brother, Pat, and I walked them up the driveway, a mile-and-a-half up hill, in February to the barn. I can tell you In Command didn't take a flat step. He was 19, but old age never set in with him until he was 25."

A relationship for the horse grew with Janie's brother, Patrick, who made a habit of regularly hand walking In Command. He recalls, "I would take him up to the hay meadows from the time he arrived until we took him down to Cornell. And I'd let him graze. He felt more comfortable if someone was with him. When he got to Cornell his semen was good enough to breed."

"All the horses in the barn developed their own culture. They knew what was going on throughout the barn. He was very comfortable there. He liked all the activity and was very alert to everything in the barn. I think he was at ease. Kadenvale Don was in the barn at the same time. There was a little bit of competition. Centurion Command was there too. The barn had 25 or 30 stalls, and it was full."

"When spring came, we put him to the real test of breeding mares. They got in foal right away," Patrick enthuses. Only one foal resulted from the stallion's final year at Troutbrook, curiously named Final Command, born in 1984. But in 1985, 11 foals were born as the result of In Command's first year standing at Fiddler's



WINNIE DEWITT ON HER MOTHER MEETING THE HORSE OF A LIFETIME

My mother had been an admirer of Waseeka Farm for many years and felt they had the nicest horses she had seen. We owned a Dyberry Bob daughter and had bred her to Waseeka's Nocturne three times, the foals being A-Okay, Lucky Lucifer, and Hello Dolly. She also had purchased Waseeka's Buccaneer [Vigilendon x Upwey Benn Quietude], a half-brother to Nocturne. We lived in Dalton, Pennsylvania, but would regularly travel to Waseeka in Ashland, Massachusetts, to see Mrs. Power and John, and of course all the beautiful horses as my mother always seemed to be in the market to buy a new one!

My mother loved to have me travel with her and I loved to go because it got me out of school. I believe I was in seventh grade when we traveled to Waseeka that day. I was just so happy to be out of school that I didn't care about anything else...but was pretty tired standing around while my mother and John talked about horses. So, I basically was just wandering around the indoor arena looking in each stall because there was nothing else to do. I did

wander back to where my mother was and I overheard John say to her, "Before you go, I want to show you something. It's a two-year-old colt by Nocturne." At that point, I probably rolled my eyes thinking, "oh great, another horse." My mother told me to just hold on, we'll see this last horse and then go. We waited what seemed to me a half hour—it was probably ten minutes or less, but I was 12 and anything over two minutes was an eternity. We could hear John and this two-year-old finally coming into the ring from one of the stalls. The sound of John and the horse caused us to look in that direction and he brought out a young horse who resembled a dragon with his stance and presence. We were in shock. He was lanky, had a naturally upright neck, huge eyes, but utterly breathtaking. I think our mouths were just hanging open as we watched John lunge him. He had so much action, snorted and strutted his stuff like nothing we had ever seen before. He was two, and he was astounding. So, what motivated my mother to buy him? In Command himself motivated her. ■

ABOVE: Winnie Dewitt presents Vincent and Anna DiNapoli with a portrait she painted of Waseeka's In Command, with her mom Mary looking on.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF WASEEKA'S IN COMMAND



LEFT TO RIGHT: Waseeka's In Command arriving at Fiddler's Green Farm, October 1983, with Cheryl Rizzo, Mary Dewitt, Eddie Raymond, and Claire Murphy; another photo taken at Fiddler's Green before the move to Cazenovia.

Green. Among them was Waseeka's Bold Ruler (x Waseeka's Elegance by Waseeka's Showtime) the son with whom the Annis family restarted the Waseeka's prefix but who died young after producing only eight foals, seven with the Waseeka's prefix, and one for Eddie Raymond, ER Best Of Life.

CHALLENGING FINAL CHAPTER

With the return of his availability to the breeding public, mares started arriving to his court again. Fiddler's Green needed a bigger facility to accommodate incoming mares and growing youngsters. The Murphys bought a new, larger facility in Cazenovia, New York. They moved young stock there as well as mares in for live cover, which they would transport for breeding back to Georgetown.

Then, another monumental event occurred. In May of 1987, a fire burned down the barn in Cazenovia.

"We lost a lot of horses in that fire," Janie explains. "We were

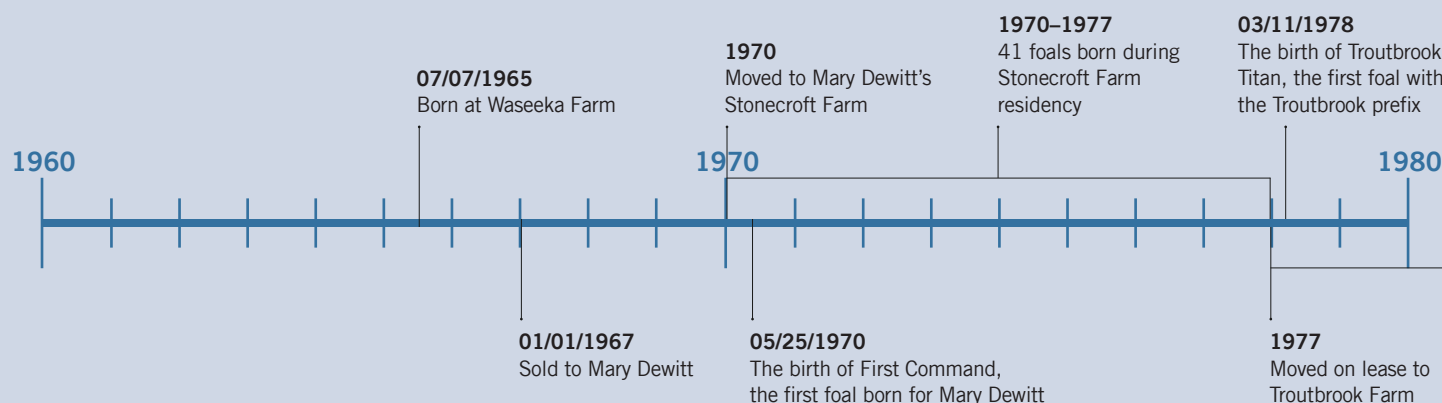
in the process of moving from the breeding farm in Georgetown to Cazenovia. Overnight it was gone. The police kept an investigation open. People were worried that In Command was in the fire, but we had kept him in Georgetown where we could watch over him up close. It was a rough time."

The herd moved to the rebuilt Cazenovia facility, with Waseeka's In Command in tow, after the 1987 breeding season, around October.

Janie says, "The barn in Cazenovia was big. Mares were coming in from all over the country. So many of them had been show mares so it was a chance to get mares and foals out on grass. In Command was almost like a Wal-Mart greeter. He had a nice, big stall, he could hang his head out, he was a very good guy and very interested in his surroundings. He enjoyed breeding mares rather than artificial insemination."

Twenty-seven foals were born during In Command's residency at Fiddler's Green. Nineteen had the Fiddler prefix. Ultimate

~ WASEEKA'S IN COMMAND TIMELINE ~



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF WASEEKA'S IN COMMAND



Waseeka's In Command with Patrick and Janie Murphy at the stallion's retirement at Covent Garden Farm.

Command and Immortal Command were bred during that time by Meg Preston, who gave them their stylish names without applying her Rum Brook prefix.

A LOVELY CODA

In 1988, a lavish retirement was held to celebrate the life of the 23-year-old stallion at a newly-developed farm six miles from Cazenovia.

Vincent DiNapoli, a New York City parking garage developer, was building Covent Garden Farm, named and modeled after the London opera house. The 1987 In Command son Luciano (x Fiddler's Delilah) was named for opera star Luciano Pavarotti—DiNapoli had taken Claire Murphy and her husband to see the world-famous tenor in New York City. The developer also wanted a summer camp associated with his new farm, to get kids out of the city. The idea was to have a promotional party with Waseeka's In Command as a drawing card.

Janie says, "He heard we wanted to have a party to retire In

Command. He offered his facility and catered it. Local and out-of-state people came. They invited other studs to come, including In Command sons. It was a really good event."

Although the Covent Garden Farm and breeding program had a limited run in the Morgan world, final photos of the equine star were taken at the open house and are published for the first time with this article.

Waseeka's In Command was the ugly duckling who turned into a heart-stopping show horse; vaunted breeding stallion and dominant sire of his era and beyond; an object of celebration who became the subject of strife. For any other horse such a colorful tale might be their claim to fame. It is a tribute to his breeding prowess that this backstory has been obscured by the bigger legend he forged as a name in Morgan show horse pedigrees.

Waseeka's In Command died in 1993 at the age of 27 and is buried at Fiddler's Green Farm, among his barnmates. He remains an indelible influence in the Morgan breed today. ■

~ WASEEKA'S IN COMMAND TIMELINE ~

