

NOBLE AND WORTHY

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This is the seventeenth article I have written to commemorate Rush County's Bicentennial in 2022. The subject of this month's writing is Mary Amos Duffey Ashley and a Standardbred racehorse named A. Worthy.

Mary Amos was from Noble Township. Noble Township was the gateway into Rush County. When settlers bought their land at Brookville and headed west, they knew they were in Rush County when the land flattened out. The Brookville Road (U.S. Highway 52), and the Orange Pike from Connersville were the major routes into and through Rush County.

Noble Township has excellent farms reflecting its agricultural based history and economy. Along with farming, horse breeding and harness racing became big business before and after the Civil War. James Wilson operated a large horse operation on the Little Flatrock River northwest of New Salem. The famous stallion Blue Bull 75 stood at Wilson's farm. Jim Wilson also had four sons that were successful in harness racing, regionally as well as on the Grand Circuit.

After WW I harness racing in Rush County had dwindled, but there were still horse stories of note. One such story was Mary Amos Duffey and her horse A. Worthy.

Mary was from a family with horse history. In her words: "Born as a lone child in a horse loving family, as I was, my father a mule and horse buyer, and my mother a buckboard operator and side saddle rider, who taught me the art. I was early and easily fascinated, because the Amos-Poston families to which I belonged could talk 'hoss'. Having no brothers or sisters but possessed of many horse minded uncles, aunts and cousins, it was easy for me as a child to accept my ponies in spirit as practically 'next to kin.'"

Mary's uncle Joe Amos owned a horse named Joe A (2:01 $\frac{3}{4}$), and Czar (2:12 $\frac{1}{4}$). Uncle "Nine" Amos had Alhambra and Legal Tender. Her uncle Orph Harton was the most active horseman. His stable included Aileen Wilson (2:03 $\frac{1}{4}$), Dale Axworthy, and Blond Lady. He also owned Estella Amos, a horse that was exported to New Zealand in the 1930's. (At this point I need to mention most of the race times in this article were recorded for a horse that trotted one mile on a half mile or mile track pulling a sulky and driver.) The "standard" for Standardbred harness horses pre WW II was anything under 2:15 and preferably close to 2:00. Times were clocked to the nearest $\frac{1}{4}$ of a second. Today it's the nearest $\frac{1}{5}$.

Mary Amos Duffey's husband Luke Duffey developed the habit of presenting her with a new horse on her birthday. One of her first presents was a horse named Greywood. Greywood raced successfully and eventually was sold to Sep Palon, the trainer and driver of the great horse Greyhound. Sep trained at the Indiana State Fairgrounds in Indianapolis. One of the speed barns is named in his honor.

But the most special birthday gift to Mary was the horse named A. Worthy. Known as "Little A" his sire was Worthy Tregantle and his dam was Bernice A. Thus the name A. Worthy.

A. Worthy's notoriety came as a seasoned racehorse. As an eleven year old gelding he won eight races. As a twelve year old he raced in six states: Minnesota, Iowa, Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana. In September of 1939 he set a world record for 12 year old trotters at Van Wert, Ohio, trotting the mile in 2:06 ³/₄. He later lowered his world record to 2:05 ¹/₄ at Lexington, Kentucky, in a field of eleven horses.

It is probably best to describe A. Worthy in Mary's words: "He is lovable, very intelligent, and seems to apply life's successful theory that one without friends is a misfit in world affairs. He is tremendously attached to his young Kentucky caretaker. In the racing paddocks of the Grand Circuit, he will nicker for Jimmie like a lost child. His driver calls him the race track mathematician, because he figures the short distance at the rail for negotiating a fast-time mile over any track a distinct advantage. My husband calls him the "Ugly Duckling" of the horse world, but concedes he is plenty smart and as fine a racing tool as ever wore a set of harness."

A. Worthy died in February of 1949 in Rush County at the age of 22. He was buried north of U.S. Highway 52 on the Noble Township/Rushville Township line. A red granite memorial marker sets on the south side of U.S. 52 between Road 200S and 300S. It is visible from the highway. Some confuse this marker with the one for Blue Bull 75. Blue Bull's grave marker was moved to the Rush County Museum many years ago. It has been preserved and now sits inside the museum's carriage house.



Eighty-two years ago Mary Duffey commented, "I find horse racing, in addition to being a sport of kings, is almost a fixed science. It has many clever rules, limitations, and classifications for contending horses. It is, I believe fast moving to a higher level, as only registered animals of the younger bracket of horses can be entered in the races of the future on accredited tracks. In fact, moral values are as good in horse racing as they are elsewhere in life." Those of us involved in horse racing today would do well to remember that. Mary's words then are very appropriate today.

Being a Standardbred racehorse owner in today's world, I obviously have an interest in Rush County's equine history. The legacy of A. Worthy, Blue Bull 75, and many others remains alive in Rush County even in a much smaller way. The Black and White Stable near Milroy, the Mattingly Stable near Manilla, Fred Smith near Falmonth, and this writer near Arlington continue to be active in the sport of harness racing. Hopefully when Rush County celebrates its Tricentennial the sport will still be alive and well.

Sources for this article were A. Worthy Trots Toward Fame by Mary Amos Duffey, Rush County Interim Report (1988), and the A. Worthy monument. Special thanks to Ron Land for his help.