

According to Susanne....



The phrase above is repeated over and over by all who are involved with Saddlebred history. New generations of Saddlebred fanciers sometimes ask — a bit impatiently — who she was and why her words are so sacrosanct. From time to time *Saddle & Bridle* has answered all questions about her, the most exhaustive articles appearing in 1980 and in May of 1988. It is surely not amiss, then, to repeat the basics and some of the human interest embroidery of Susanne's double life.

Inspiration for this is a gift, from Rita Diekroeger of Columbia, Mo., show ring companion to many-times champion Ollie By Golly, and a client of Jerry Cook of Centralia, Mo. Rita presented us with a 1945 issue of a magazine named *The American Horseman-Sportologue*.

Listed on the masthead as editor is Susanne and as managing editor, Emily Ellen Scharf. Near the back of the publication is a very long column "Just Gossip", which was attributed to Susanne. By then, though, the long-standing intrigue about who Susanne actually was had been resolved. Everyone knew that the breezy show and barn reports that had mystified them for decades were actually done by the ultraproper Miss Scharf.

Product of a small Indiana town, we don't know her exact age on starting a career in equine journalism or what

preparation she had. We don't know if she was seeking what she ultimately found herself doing or whether opportunities just fell on her, so to speak. She began as a secretary for a small newspaper and — no doubt at least partly because there was not much competition — soon became managing editor. She went from that to the staff of a magazine named *Farm Home Journal*, whose editor she persuaded to let her develop a section serving the needs of horsepeople. This section became more popular and solid than its host and when FHJ took bankruptcy in 1933, along with most of its readers in an era unkind to agriculture, the young editor acquired copyright on her section. She was soon able to merge with a horse publication and eventually to stand alone with the magazine Rita gave us. She then became the author of a three-book series, *Famous Saddle Horses*, which is essential to any Saddlebred person's private library.

The quality of Scharf's work and her understanding of the kind of information horsepeople wanted, attracted the support of several men whose names were then very big in the horse world. One was J.H. Ransom, editor of a magazine named *Horse World*, and later of a 13-book series, *Who's Who and Where in Horsedom*. This series is a deathless collector's item today, a treasury of facts and figures and legends and truth about famous show horses and their people. It was compiled from material Ransom had written and by articles that appeared in HW. In many areas it overlaps Susanne's series, but focus of the two is different. Ransom seems to have just been preserving worthwhile material his magazine had generated. Susanne was bent on finding and presenting facts — easily obtained and otherwise — which told the whole story of the bloodlines and performances of early Saddlebreds and those of her own lifetime. She wanted to publish history that was being lost to posterity, and she did it the hard way, the only way her era offered, by correspondence and personal interviews. Technology taken for granted now was undreamed of then. The manual typewriter was considered a great blessing.

Though Scharf owned a car, we're told she seldom did any highway driving on behalf of her work, and that she attended very few horse shows held outside her immediate vicinity. Those who knew her best said that Susanne probably was never on a horse. That's one of several little mysteries about her.

Many of us have said as passionately, as she did, "no creature could be more beautiful than the horse!" but we do not devote ourselves to them as she did. Her three books contain more than 2000 pages of facts and figures, lists and indexing. Such tasks of compilation would make ideal assignments to mete out in Hell. We believe Susanne's contemporaries who said that she often spent 20-hour days in her business office and then carried home armfuls of folders for attention over the weekend. Her acknowledgments list many people she feels indebted to, but do not always say what they did. Perhaps some were dedicated volunteer assistants, some paid-for help.

We can only guess why Susanne was so engrossed in Saddlebred history. Were her loved-and-lost male relatives devotees of the breed, perhaps among those who established the first associations and show agencies? The late Lynn Weatherman, one of those who wrote about her at length, tells us that she was present at the 1891 meeting in which the American Saddle Horse Breeders Association was formed. She was young indeed, but had been called upon to act as recording secretary for the proceedings. One of the people who had known Susanne well said that she sometimes referred cryptically to an early love affair which left her so injured that she would never risk another, but would turn all her energy into what was to her, a highly worthwhile cause. Was the unlucky beau big in Saddlebreds?

In 1932, along with her work for her magazine, Susanne brought out the first volume of *Famous Saddle Horses*. It was followed by two more, dates of publication 1942 and 1947. The last book appeared after she retired from editing the magazine. All were alike in offering extensive data about the bloodlines of Saddlebred horses, their show and breeding records and those of their ancestors. Even details about appearance and personality were included where Susanne could obtain that data. Often she gained comments from people who had worked with a particular horse or with its "kinsmen" in Saddlebred genealogy.

Reading Susanne's books gives the impression that she recorded everything she knew or could find about each animal. Show histories are not always totally complete, but most animals' championships are summed up, with where and when these were won. Susanne listed the most illustrious offspring of each stallion.

Often she included details about the animals' behavior in training. All this has been invaluable to breeders and trainers, as indicators of possible capabilities of today's horses.

It must be stressed that Susanne's books are engaging reading, even to those of us who have no material interest in data from the past. Old news about the horse world can still intrigue us, just for its own sake. If we sit down in the evening with a Susanne book, we usually find ourselves drawn from one entry to another to another. Before we realize it, bedtime is long past.

Another big consideration about Susanne's work comes when we return to the realities of journalism in her day. There were no computers or word processors then, no all-knowing internet. We are staggered to visualize all this data being gathered, first in longhand notes, no doubt, then composed and edited on manual typewriters that were at least as cranky as our electronics are. And thinking of the correspondence that would have been necessary to locate the people she wanted to question, then to get their cooperation and probably in many cases, to meet their demands for reading her work before it was printed: how did she bear it?

If Susanne sought to fill the niche in her life that might have been occupied by love and marriage, she certainly had it. It is easy to imagine her evenings, before television or videos destroyed that time, consumed with research and writing.

But Miss Scharf did manage to have some diversions. Her home was described as being a cute and cozy limestone cottage, shared with a sister until the sister died. Those who visited the ladies and wrote about their home said that it was charmingly decorated and furnished and that for hobbies, Miss Scharf collected Dresden figurines and kept a pet cat. And she had one other very satisfying little hobby that is described in the sidebar. The adequacy of her income is proved by the fact that she could afford to take vacations. Her death occurred unexpectedly when she had just returned home from the Mediterranean.

Emily Ellen Scharf died in 1968 at an age we cannot offer, because in true ladylike fashion, this was a stat she protected.

Accounts from various sources say that her funeral was attended by an impressive number of horse people, many of them with very big names who came long distances to be there. Statements

Susanne's Other Side

Emily Ellen Scharf, editor, was praised everywhere for being absolutely correct as to use of language and grammar. Her writing style was concise and businesslike; she made almost no use of speculation or qualification.

Photographs of her reflected just what one would expect in a business woman of her day, a prim dark dress, spectacles, hair severely controlled. Susanne, on the other hand, as pictured with her column, wore flowing locks semi-controlled by a casual headband. Arms emerged from very short sleeves, one raised in a jaunty wave, and the face wore a fetching smile.



Work presented under this distinctive header seemed out of place. Why did Scharf allow among columnists in her magazine, one named "Susanne," who broke every literary rule, writing in a series of breathless sentence fragments separated by a series of dots, using up far more than her share of exclamation points and italics, coining words and phrases. Critics described her work as "Frothy and breezy."

This anonymous person, Susanne, babbled about doings of horse people, broke news of engagements and break-ups, speculated about relationships, elaborately complimented promising young horses, praised some riders and trainers to the skies. The show-going public quickly became obsessed with Susanne, poring over her every word to see if their own name might be included and some data they'd prefer not having mentioned. They watched their associates, thinking "is this Susanne?" They asked any red-haired woman they met, having heard rumors that Susanne could be so identified. Surely many of them became uneasy about sharing anything personal with anyone.

This suspense went on for years and we have no account of how it came to an end. Did Miss Scharf make an official revelation before her first book came out or did she let the book itself do that? Had some show reporter already found out and dropped hints until readers all agreed, "Yes, Susanne and Miss Scharf have to be one and the same."

However it came down, there is a great deal to think of in this situation. First, it is amazing that the staid Miss Scharf had time and energy to, in effect, live two lives. Did the Susanne work constitute a release for her from disciplines of serious work? Did it give her a chance to influence people by what she praised and didn't praise? Was it an experiment in the gullibility of the public?

People who knew Miss Scharf well said that her workaday writing style was not her at all, that she was witty and fun-loving, laughed a great deal and made others laugh. They described her merry, radiant brown eyes, her auburn hair. They almost make us think that the picture of "Susanne" was of Miss Scharf when she was younger. Some said, however, that it had to be just some girl selected to represent the spirit of the secret columnist.

All this is far from being the whole story of Susanne. We should have given a few words to other books she did besides the haloed series of three. We should have given respectful space to the fact that her whole body of work has been credited with doing more for the breed and for the industry than the efforts of any other single person in Saddlebred history. We should have warned readers that if they seek copies of *Famous Saddle Horses* for themselves they must be prepared to pay hundreds for replicas or — for the original issue in good condition — thousands of dollars. And though more data about her exists, in files of writers alive and not, limitations of column inches and time apply to all. It is unlikely that we will ever know all we'd wish to know about Emily Ellen Scharf — aka Susanne.

made at the time in horse magazines went on and on about her work, so vital to so many. They speculated about who would carry history on into the future. Could they have foreseen how many magazines would devote themselves to recording everything, they might have felt there was no need to worry. But unless magazines are meticulously indexed each year (and please tell us if you know of one that is!) they are all but

useless. They are big, heavy and unwieldy. Though full coverage of show results exists, and quantities of profiles on horses and people, few of us know exactly where and when these appeared. And how much is reachable in computer innards now? Who would undertake the tiresome and eye-destroying task of sorting through it? Does hoping that Susanne will have a successor make us as naïve as the people of her own time?