

**SPRING 2005**

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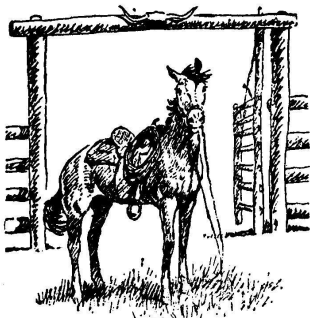
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*and more .....*



# The Pony Express

## The Walpole Island Pony - Same? or Different?

During our stay at the 2005 CanAm Equine All Breeds Emporium, a very nice fellow named Robert Gentleman came to our booth a few times and we got talking about the Walpole Island Ponies that he remembered from his youth. What caught his attention he said, was how similar they looked to the Lac La Croix Indian Pony.

I asked Robert to put down his memories on paper so that they may be recorded and researched. He also offered to do some checking with people he knew from that area. Sure enough, a nice long letter arrived in the mail explaining his interaction with the ponies and what he remembers of them.

"I was born in 1931 in a small Western Ontario village. Both of my parents had been raised on farms and we had a number of relatives, including both grandparents, still operating measly family farms. While I was aware of the wild herd of ponies on Walpole Island, I had never seen them. It was the depression and families did not travel fifty or sixty miles to do sight-seeing. I do not now if it was an annual event, but ponies were captured, tamed and sold from time to time.

Students who desired an education beyond the limits of the rural one-room elementary school had to find their own transportation to the nearest high school. Our village boasted a continuation school and there were students who travelled from farm to village on horseback. One resident had a well appointed village stable, with a couple of stalls available to these students,

where their mounts could spend their day in the company of the family Jersey cow.

Two of these saddle horses within my memory were Walpole ponies. One of the riders died in a scarlet fever epidemic in 1939; she had been riding her pony to school up until the time of her death. It was later that I had experiences with 'Tony', the pony that had been her mount. A little later, Douglas, who was four years my senior, rode 'Brownie' to school.

My acquaintance with Tony began when I spotted the family who owned him in the village to shop using a horse and buggy for the trip. They were neighbours of my grandparents. I managed to hitch a ride with them for an overnight visit on my grandparents farm. Even back then a five or six mile ride in a buggy was much preferable than by car. Pulling the buggy was a well mannered little bay gelding (*Tony*). He trotted along at a good clip, his full mane and tail flowing. He had some white lines on his neck which were said to be caused by rope burns when he had been captured. A number of farmers still had their "drivers", mostly Standardbreds, that pulled the family buggy rather than sulkies. Tony matched them very well in style, willingness, and reliability. I later had a chance to ride him, probably bare backed, and he was a gentle animal but still retained a fair spirit. He was also valued as a "cow pony" with a good deal of cow sense.

Now to Brownie and as his name applied, he was brown almost black with very little white except for a slight snip. I was now at an age to envy Douglas and his opportunity to ride a horse five miles to school and five miles back home, every day. I often accompanied him to the stable to "help" him saddle up and hoping he would ask me to clamber up behind him for the two block ride to the centre of the village. One day, Doug spotted a ball game in progress and wanted to join in. He told me to ride Tony as he dismounted until he was ready to head for home. I was in seventh heaven with this little horse on my own and rode around the block. I made the mistake of going on to the street that lead out into the country. Each day at a certain point Douglas would leave the village in a flourish. Just because I was on his back rather than his master, Brownie saw no reason not to perform and this quiet little pony exploded under me. I was not a good horseman, the stirrups dangled a few inches below my feet and I pictured myself ending up at his home stable five miles out in the country. Thank goodness about (can't read it) having a 'take off' point, he also had a 'slow down' point. About half a mile out of town he slowed down and I was able to control him. My pant cuffs were up to my thighs and I was able to get myself straightened up before returning to the village. The need to backtrack confused poor Brownie but he was obedient and I turned him over to Douglas with no harm done.

When I saw the Lac La Croix ponies they reminded me of the Walpoles of my youth. It has

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