

*Harlinsdale Farm*  
1935-2017  
*A Peaceful Journey In Time*

**by James Harlin Hayes**

*The Trip to Tennessee*

When W.W. Harlin Sr. arrived in Nashville in 1909, the last thing on his mind was leaving a legacy in the horse business. Born in 1886 as the youngest of four children, Wirt Harlin had left his native Gamaliel, Kentucky seeking to improve his prospects. His father was known to raise only quality livestock including some of the finest saddle horses in the area. Wirt later reminisced that his favorite way to spend a teenaged afternoon was to ride one of his father's fine saddle horses across the rural Kentucky countryside to visit the girls. As a young man farming with his father and older brother, Harlin quickly came to the conclusion that his future would not be found by tilling the soils of Monroe County Kentucky, so he attended a school in Bowling Green to learn bookkeeping. His first adventure was a year-long teaching stint across the East River in New Jersey, but after a year, he was restless again and headed to Nashville.

W.W. Harlin's first stop in Nashville was a tailor for a hand-made suit. He was a trim handsome young man very neat in his appearance. Always fastidious about his attire he obviously made a very good first impression. Wirt landed a job with a wholesale mercantile operator in downtown Nashville. He had established himself in the mercantile trade when his career was interrupted by World War I. Harlin often remembered he was one of the oldest drafted. Serving in the states, he made rank of Sargent before the war ended and he was allowed to return to Nashville.

Wirt Harlin established himself in the clothing manufacturing business before he met and married his wife Louella Leek of Nashville. The first of four Harlin boys was W.W. (Bill) Harlin Jr born July 12, 1924. Bill has early memories of the family living in a large house on Kirkwood Lane with a fifty acre field neighboring. Bill remembers every family in the neighborhood having a cow, a pony, or a horse, and horse rides became a neighborhood activity. Wirt Harlin's business prospered and by this time, he had been joined in Nashville by his older brother A.F. (Alex) Harlin. The Harlins were established in the clothing manufacturing business making and marketing work clothing across the south under the brand name Red Kap. As the Wirt Harlins added boys and ponies, Wirt began to look around for a place that offered more room for his active family.

It was 1932, when Wirt first began to seriously look at land near Franklin. He apparently already had a grand plan. His boys rode and showed gaited ponies which were stabled in Nashville. Although Wirt had prospered,

the depression had taken its toll on many farmers, and sometime in the early thirties, Harlin purchased a large tract and a dilapidated old house one mile north of Franklin. The house is now known as Jasmine Grove and sits at the head of Winslow Drive (formally known as Miles Manor). The farm property had fallen into receivership, and through the purchase, the nucleus of Harlinsdale Farm was formed. He later told the author that during his youth, he had made himself a promise that someday he would own a nice big farm where he could raise and enjoy horses.

Wirt's first step in fulfilling his promise was to resurrect the old house and make it livable. The building had fallen into a terrible state and pigeons roosted in the structure. It took more than a year before the house was ready to receive his family. Although Tom and Bill Harlin disagree, the date of the move was probably in August 1935.

The house had come with a adjacent barn, used to house the first horses on Harlinsdale - gaited horses and a few saddle horses. Gaited horse trainer Major Buntin, moved into a house on the property to assist in the growing operations. Wirt Harlin had already started making friends in the horse circles of Middle Tennessee. At the same time, he apparently realized he would need trusted help to put his plan together and he made the first moves to recruit his young nephew Harlin Hayes and convince him to move from Gamaliel to Franklin to take over farm operations.

Bill Harlin remembers the farm's former owner was reluctant to leave, and it took more than a year for Wirt Harlin to gain full control of his newly purchased acreage delaying the start of improvements. In the meantime, he had begun to add to his holdings buying small adjacent parcels as they became available. Thus from 1935 through 1943 the present lands of Harlinsdale Farm slowly took shape.

No one knows exactly why Harlin chose to name the new enterprise Harlinsdale. Harlin's purchase included a partially completed housing development called Allendale. A few small houses had been constructed on the property by Allen Manufacturing Company before the company and the housing project apparently fell victim to the depression. Wirt Harlin probably drew from the Allendale name to come up with his chosen name of Harlinsdale Farm. It was about this time Wirt Harlin met Robert Campbell, a Franklin man, who began to introduce Harlin to the horse later to be known as the Tennessee Walking Horse. In these saddle horses, Harlin discovered the same characteristics his father had prized..... the same traits that had impressed the girls of Monroe County Kentucky when young Wirt came to call. The smooth four-beat gait, gentle disposition and endurance of these horses made them much more suited to the Harlin boys than the gaited stock they were then using.

Campbell became an advisor to Harlin and told him about a move to start a registry for the walking horse. Harlin and Campbell, accompanied by the two oldest Harlin boys – Bill and Tom – attended the organizational meeting of the **Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders Association** held in Lewisburg in **1935**. Bill Harlin remembered the meeting made a big impression on him. He was impressed by the orderly manner in which the business was conducted. Jim McCord – later Tennessee Governor – presided, and each man rose in a mannerly fashion to either agree or

disagree with his peers. Bill remembers most of the great historic figures of the walking horse world were there to contribute their opinions to the new organization. "I'll never get over how mannerly these men were to each other and how efficiently they disposed of the business", Bill Harlin commented. From that day, Harlinsdale Farm was in the Walking Horse business and Harlinsdale Farms became a founding member of the breed association.

### *A Partnership Forged*

During this time, Wirt Harlin had made several trips back to his native Gamaliel to recruit his nephew and convince him to join the new Harlinsdale operation. Harlin Hayes was the son of Wirt's oldest sister, and in 1935 was farming in Kentucky. Hayes was the son of a successful farmer and had developed a local reputation as a keen judge of livestock. He had been exposed to his grandfather Harlin's taste in horses – a taste shared by his uncle Wirt Harlin. Later, Wirt Harlin reminisced to his son Bill that Harlin Hayes made an impression on him from the beginning. The elder Harlin told his son he liked everything Harlin Hayes was doing in his Kentucky operation and quickly decided he was the right man to manage Harlinsdale in Franklin. Incidentally, it seems no coincidence Hayes' boyhood nickname was "Hoss".

In late 1936, the 25 year-old Hayes, temporarily left his wife and small daughter behind, packed up his trusted farm hand Philip Shirley, and made the trip to Franklin to work for Wirt Harlin managing the new operation. This would prove to be the only move Harlin Hayes would ever make as he remained manager of Harlinsdale until his death in 1980. Hayes was soon joined by his wife and young daughter. Thus was forged one of the greatest partnerships in the history of the Walking Horse as both Harlin and Hayes made major contributions to the industry.

### *The Serious Beginning*

During the same time period, Wirt Harlin had been joined by his brother Alex in the Harlinsdale operation. Alex moved to Franklin purchasing a house and property adjacent to the original lands. The property which was bordered by the Harpeth River on the south at Franklin was known as Riverview and included a historic home and about 100 acres. When Alex's land was added, Harlinsdale took its final form of about 300 acres.

Improvements were started at Harlinsdale including extensive fencing and the building of new barns. Existing barns were rebuilt and new ones built to accommodate a horse operation. At the same time Harlinsdale began to assemble their first group of Walking Horses. Among the first acquisitions was the stallion No Limit Allen. Wirt and Alex Harlin set the horse industry buzzing by paying \$1,500 for No Limit Allen as a yearling. Brood mares were acquired and the blueprint of a breeding program was drawn. Wirt Harlin also purchased the stallion Gold Bond, and slowly the gaited horses in the barn begin to give way to the new Tennessee Walking Horses. No Limit Allen was trained by Floyd Carothers of Wartrace. An early newspaper article reported there were about a dozen brood mares at Harlinsdale.

Harlin Hayes once remembered that that there was a very level playing field in the early days, because all the breeders and trainers were learning and still formulating their breeding and training ideas. Hayes discovered quickly that the new Walking Horses were almost exactly like the horses his grandfather Harlin had raised in Gamaliel. Bill Harlin remembers that Harlin Hayes was a quick study in the new trade and quickly established himself as influential in the business.

Meanwhile, the Harlin boys continued to exhibit gaited horses as well as Walking Horses. Bill Harlin remembers there were lots of small shows, but gaited classes dominated the shows. This quickly changed as interest in Walking Horses increased. During the late thirties, Harlinsdale became more and more active in shows and all horse activities. Several horses from Harlinsdale were exhibited in the first Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration held in Shelbyville, Tennessee in 1939. Among the exhibitors are listed A. F. Harlin and brothers Bill, and Tom Harlin.

During the same period, Wirt Harlin became good friends with W. H. (Henry) Davis of Wartrace. Bill recalls many trips with his Dad to Wartrace to see Mr. Davis and seek his counsel. Henry Davis –now regarded as the father of The Celebration – was one of the very early promoters of the Tennessee Walking Horse. According to Bill, Henry Davis was without question the most knowledgeable man in the business. He knew everybody and the horses they were breeding. Wirt Harlin saw in Davis a friend as well as a man that could help put Harlinsdale on the map. Sometime in the late 1930's Wirt Harlin charged Henry Davis with the task of helping Harlinsdale find a horse that would enable the farm to make its mark.

### *The Late Thirties at Harlinsdale*

During the late thirties, Harlinsdale was developed into a classic Middle Tennessee farming operation of its day. A full range of crops were raised, cattle were part of the operation and even a few mules became part of the program. Horses – while important – were not the only source of farm income. A second farm was added about twelve miles southwest of Franklin in the Boston community.

No Limit Allen and Gold Bond became popular sires and Harlinsdale became more and more active in the Walking Horse classes of area shows. The Harlin boys were growing into men, and the gaited stock disappeared at Harlinsdale. There is every indication however that the potential of No Limit and Gold Bond were soon reached and Wirt and Alex Harlin became more intent on finding that one great horse to boost their program.

### *Harlinsdale the War years*

One day after the main show barn was finished at Harlinsdale, Pearl Harbor was attacked and America was at war. The war not only affected Harlinsdale, but it had an impact on the fledgling walking horse world. Many of the able bodied young men within the industry were soon in service. At Harlinsdale, Harlin Hayes was a 30 year old married farmer with two young children so he was deferred. Bill Harlin however, by then in

college, was soon headed for service. The war served to make small community horse shows more popular, because they could be attended with little use of precious gasoline or tires, and most were close to home. The larger events were a different story. Most were cancelled for the duration, however the fateful decision not to cancel The Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration probably effected the fate of Midnight Sun more than any single decision during his lifetime. Had The Celebration been cancelled for the duration, Midnight Sun would have largely missed the stage on which he played to the walking horse world. He would have been a six year old before he could contest the best.

### *The Early Days of Midnight Sun*

In June of 1940 a black stud colt was foaled out of Ramsey's Rena on the farm of S.M. Ramsey in Viola, Tennessee – near McMinnville. Sire of the black stud colt, Wilson's Allen, died just before the black colt's birth putting him in the last crop of Wilson's Allen colts. About the same time, John A. Hendrixson, a Middle Tennessee horseman, began searching the county for Wilson's Allen colts reasoning the last group would be very valuable. Hendrixson paid \$300 for the black stud colt as a suckling. The young stud colt was named Joe Lewis Wilson. Wallace Brandon – legendary Walking Horse trainer – recalled seeing the black stud colt entered along with his dam in a mare and foal class at an area show. Although Brandon stopped short of calling the black stud colt ugly, he remembered him as unremarkable.

Although Midnight Sun was foaled in 1940, he is registered with a 1941 number. In the early days, it was customary to assign a number beginning with the year the foal was registered.

There is a well circulated photograph of the black stud colt as a yearling with a group of his siblings also owned by Hendrixson. Apparently Hendrixson had no trouble selling the others in the group, but there were no takers for the black stud colt. Among those who looked him over only to leave unimpressed were brothers Wirt and Alex Harlin. One colt in the group – Hi-Boy - impressed the Harlins, but they were unable to strike a bargain for him. Wirt later recalled Joe Lewis looked like nothing they would like to own. Hendrixson's quest for a buyer went on with no takers. He advertised the colt for sale in *The Blue Ribbon* but got no result. The black stud colt had been registered as Joe Lewis Wilson, and the ad erroneously named him as Joe Lewis Allen and described him as "black as a crow". No buyer was found even after taking Joe Lewis to the Celebration grounds during the 1942 show. It was here Wirt and Alex Harlin took another look but decided not to buy. Finding no buyer, Hendrixson trucked the two year old back to his farm to spend another winter. In the end, Hi-Boy, the pick of Wilson's Allen's last crop was a flop while the ugly duckling, Joe Lewis, in 1965 became The Walking Horse of the Century!

Sometime in the spring of 1943, Hendrixson took Joe Lewis to the training barn of Winston Wiser so the up and coming young trainer could give the stud colt his start under saddle. There is no exact record of how long

Wiser rode Joe Lewis. In the fall of 43, Wiser is said to have ridden Joe Lewis to Wartrace to show him to Henry Davis. In remembering that day, Davis has been quoted as saying he had never seen a more honest true walking horse.

A few days later, on one of his frequent trips to Wartrace, Wirt Harlin walked into the Henry Davis home as Davis was about to have lunch. Harlin recalled as he went through the Davis back door, he greeted Henry by asking "What'ca know Henry"? Harlin remembered Davis looked up from his lunch, smiled and replied "Everything". He then began to tell Harlin about seeing Joe Lewis in action. That afternoon, Harlin and Davis went to see the black stud in action.

Henry Davis was regarded as the final authority on Walking Horses and the Harlin brothers had complete confidence in Davis' judgement. Without even conferring with his brother Alex, Wirt Harlin authorized Davis to negotiate the purchase of Joe Lewis. Davis contacted Hendrixson and brokered the sale of Joe Lewis to Harlinsdale for \$4,400. Joe Lewis arrived in Franklin in January 1944. The story is told as Joe Lewis was unloaded the ever curious Alex was told his brother Wirt had just negotiated to purchase Joe Lewis for \$10,000. Rather than being upset, Alex headed for the barn office to write the check when he met brother Wirt hurrying to see his new prize. Only then did Alex learn the true price. Harlin Hayes recalled the black stallion was just beginning to fill out, but impressed all who watched him work that day at the farm.

### *Midnight Sun's First Year at Harlinsdale*

The name Midnight Sun is surrounded by several stories. Most generally agree a Franklin man – Ben Ashley – is credited with the idea. At any rate, Ashley who was watching the stallion work on a very hot early summer day commented the horse was as powerful as the sun and black as midnight. Wirt Harlin picked up on the idea and made the historic name change. Harlin always toyed with potential names for horses. When he died at age 99, his barn desk was filled with small slips of paper on which he had written names he planned to use on horses. Naming horses was a favorite pastime, so there is little doubt the final credit for the name Midnight Sun must be given to Wirt Harlin, but the idea came from Ben Ashley.

Midnight Sun's first trainer at Harlinsdale was Harlin Hayes assisted by Carl Lee. An acquaintance of Hayes from Kentucky, Lee had some limited training and show ring experience. They were instrumental in Midnight Sun's early Harlinsdale training and all photos taken of Midnight Sun during the period show Hayes or Lee in the saddle. Neither man had extensive show ring experience, so when 1944 show season arrived, Harlinsdale was faced with the dilemma of who would exhibit Midnight Sun. Sun was not shown until the 1944 Celebration. Carl Lee exhibited Sun to a second place tie in the stallion class and later in the week, Winston Wiser exhibited the black stallion to a sixth place tie in the Championship Stake. The story has been told the tempestuous Wiser was so bitter when he lost the stallion in late 1943, he took him from his barn, led him down to a country road, turned him loose and tried to run the horse away. Apparently by Celebration time in 1944, bad feelings had mended enough for Wiser agreed to show Midnight Sun in the stake.



The Harlins wanted their prized stallion at Harlinsdale in Franklin, and after the Celebration of 1944, Wirt and Alex Harlin realized the importance of matching Midnight Sun with just the right high profile trainer. Fred Walker had grown up in Bedford County as a contemporary of Henry Davis. He had even accompanied Davis to that historic 1939 Shelbyville Lions Club meeting where Davis presented the idea for The Celebration. Wartrace was a railroad town and Walker had worked as a locomotive engineer, while remaining heavily involved with the walking horse scene. By 1944, he was managing the Franklin farm of John Amos just two miles from Harlinsdale. Fred Walker had exhibited horses at the first Celebrations and was considered a Walking Horse insider. Most of all, Fred Walker was an accomplished trainer and showman who fit the black stallion like a glove. Although Harlin Hayes later steadfastly minimized his involvement with Sun during the championship years, press photos as late as the summer of 1945 picture Hayes in the saddle. Apparently, the training of Midnight Sun was a team effort. During the life of the great stallion he was trained and exhibited by four men and one woman. They were Mrs. Henry Davis, Winston Wiser, Carl Lee, Harlin Hayes and Fred Walker. Fred Walker was up for both championship years.

When he did the running walk, Midnight Sun has been described as flowing like a powerful river. Every step he took was calculated, deliberate, and just like the last one. He was Walker's kind of horse because he and Walker were very much alike. Midnight Sun never tired and Walker believed in working his horses hard. Fred Walker was a popular Shelbyville insider who could help expose the horse and present him on just the right occasions. So the decision was made to put Fred Walker in the show saddle for the 45 season.

### *Red Laws Comes to Harlinsdale*

A few months after Midnight Sun arrived at Harlinsdale, Fred "Red" Laws arrived to replace Major Buntin as head groom. Red's father was a harness horse groom and Red was raised around horses. He brought with him a keen eye and an immense volume of information needed in the care of horses. The Red Laws – Midnight Sun match was a match made in heaven; a match that would last almost 22 years. From the first day, Red Laws became Midnight Sun's personal handler, greatest promoter and faithful friend. He can be remembered much like a wise trainer taking care of a fine athlete. Midnight Sun's long healthy productive life can be directly credited to his friend Red Laws.

Seldom has there been a bond between man and animal like the one between Red Laws and Midnight Sun. Red cared for Sun's every need and was his daily companion. As this bond grew stronger and stronger, those who witnessed it swore the horse and the man knew each other's thoughts. Red was the first person Midnight Sun saw each morning. As the stocky groom neared his stall, Sun would nicker, the door would open and the giant black stallion would push his head and neck through the opening for the daily exchange. It was Red who fed him, groomed him, saddled the big horse for his daily ride and cooled him down after the workout. When Sun traveled, Red traveled with him, and at The Celebration grounds, Red bunked in an adjacent stall. Throughout the life of Midnight Sun Red Laws

was his greatest fan, defender and protector. It was truly a heaven made match, and, if horses go to heaven, there are those who believe the relationship continues.

By 1944, Harlinsdale already had a strong breeding program in place. Since the very beginning, the Harlin brothers and Harlin Hayes had steadily acquired some of the very best brood mares of the day. It was during these early days that Harlin Hayes had experimented with artificial insemination, and had already earned a reputation as an expert in choosing brood mares and matching them to the right stallion. After his arrival at Harlinsdale in January 1944, Midnight Sun was bred to a select group of mares the following spring.

During the same period, Harlinsdale developed an aggressive training program. The main barn had been finished in December 1941. One can still see a crude inscription in the concrete made by Tom Harlin and dated just one day before Pearl Harbor. The Walking Horse program called for raising colts, starting them under saddle on the farm, and developing them into finished show horses for the market. It was a labor intensive business and Harlinsdale became a very busy place. On one side was the traditional farming operation with one staff of men dedicated to field work. On the other hand was the horse operation with a second “barn” staff handling and working horses. There was also outside breeding and training customers to serve. The farm added additional acreage southwest of Franklin, and at one time there were as many as ten families living and working on Harlinsdale. Much later, both Harlin Hayes and Bill Harlin acquired nearby farms where the horse operation could be enlarged.

### 1945 and 1946—*The Championship Years*

Harlin Hayes remembered in early 1945 Midnight Sun appeared to “settle in his gaits” and became consistent in his performance. Fred Walker had arrived to aid in the training of the big stallion. Sun’s first colts began to arrive, and it became evident to all that Midnight Sun was much more than just another good show horse. Wirt Harlin later described every day as a pleasant surprise as the horse progressed and his colts looked better and better. Remembering those days, Alex Harlin told a reporter “ We were off and running”.

In 1945, Midnight Sun showed four times before arriving at The Celebration. At Murfreesboro, Franklin and Columbia, Tennessee and in Lexington, Kentucky he captured both the stallion class and the stake. Those who remember recall his Murfreesboro performance as perhaps the best show he ever made. Wallace Brandon remembers 1945 well and commented there was no horse alive that could have beaten him. Miss Margaret Lindsley Warden, prominent Nashville columnist, watched Sun at Murfreesboro and declared him the best Walking Horse she had ever seen. So when Midnight Sun arrived at the 1945 Celebration in early September, he was already the odds on favorite to “win it all”. The Celebration covered four days and nights and the weather was hot and humid in Bedford County. Midnight Sun showed all four nights earning a victory each evening. On Wednesday September 5<sup>th</sup>, he won the class for stallions four and over. Thursday night Mrs. Henry Davis rode Midnight Sun to a blue in the amateur class for ladies. Friday night it was Sun again in the open stallion class and Saturday



night Fred Walker guided the big stallion to the Championship of the World. Midnight Sun was the first stallion to wear the roses.

Bill Harlin had been away from Tennessee in service and he recalls seeing Midnight Sun show for the first time at the 1945 Celebration. Although he had received letters from his mother and father expressing their excitement about the big horse, Bill's first glimpse of Midnight Sun was when he won his first blue in the 45 Celebration. Bill remembers the excitement that spread across Middle Tennessee as folks followed the big black horse. Bill recalls how good it felt being on the winning team.

While Midnight Sun was sweeping the 45 Celebration aged classes, there was a young two year old stallion continuing to make his mark. Merry Go Boy came to The Celebration under the direction of Winston Wiser and created a sensation on the grounds as he swept the two year old honors. The youngster's way of going was highly animated and completely different from the style of Midnight Sun. It was clear to many in 1945 that Go Boy was one to watch in future years. Wiser, who had been very upset earlier over losing Midnight Sun, had an added incentive when it came to challenging the king. As the curtain set on the 45 Celebration, Midnight Sun returned to Franklin to continue his brilliant breeding career while Merry Go Boy returned to the Wiser Stables to continue development. The stage was clearly set for two of the most memorable years in Walking Horse history.

In the spring of 1946, the breeding services of Midnight Sun were in great demand. His first crops of colts were on the ground and looking great and the reputation of the great black horse quickly spread. Although service was limited in 1946, Midnight Sun still served more than 100 mares while being maintained in show condition. His great strength and disposition easily permitted this, but the breeding commitments limited his show appearances to one show before the 46 Celebration. Wirt Harlin and Harlin Hayes were quick to see greatness in the first colts and began a twenty year program to cross only carefully selected mares to the stallion.

Midnight Sun's fame was now worldwide. Ed Woodard, former Franklin Mayor was serving in the Pacific on Guam in 1946. He was one of the unlucky few retained after the war ended and half way across the world was very homesick. Since there was little to do on Guam, movies were shown every night. He remembers how surprised he was when one night, the movie news reel featured Tennessee, Harlinsdale Farm and the great Walking Champion Midnight Sun.

Midnight Sun arrived on The Celebration grounds in late summer as the reigning champion and again favored to "win the roses". He swept the 1946 Celebration preliminaries winning Walking Stallions, Four and Over, The Get-of-Sire Class, and Aged Walking Horses any Sex.

Merry Go Boy had swept the three year old class and won the Junior Championship but few thought Winston Wiser would bring him into the stake against aged horses. Midnight Sun had electrified the Walking Horse world for two years and developed a loyal following of those who endorsed his bold way of going and thunderous running walk. Merry Go Boy had captivated the crowd with his animated nodding style and speed. As the crowd waited for the stake the stage was set for a classic battle that is still

talked about today. Nobody was surprised to see Fred Walker appear on the big black champion, but everybody was surprised when Winston Wiser rode the new Junior Champion into the ring to take on all comers. Walking horse fans who witnessed the class still speak with emotion when they describe the battle. High praise was settled on both horses and both riders, but, in the end, Midnight Sun was the victor and claimed his second Championship. Merry Go Boy tied second, but as the horses left the Celebration ring, everybody knew a re-match was coming in 1947. Midnight Sun ended the 46 show season by winning the Walking Stake at the first post-war Tennessee State Fair.

1947 has been described as an electric year in the Walking Horse World. Midnight Sun had become a crowd favorite and enjoyed a certain celebrity status nation wide. Breeders rushed their mares to Harlinsdale and the spring breeding season was described as one of the busiest on record. Bill Harlin – who was by then back from the war and employed by the farm – remembered the serious breeding load shouldered by the big stallion began to take a toll on the performance of his gaits. “All of us could see that he was not quite as good in 1947 as he had been the year before. I know we all discussed it, but, as far as I remember, never once was serious consideration given to not showing Midnight Sun in 1947”, Harlin said. Harlin Hayes once remembered they all knew that Merry Go Boy would be waiting for them but “ We honestly thought our horse was up to the task one more time”. After Midnight Sun’s first class outing in the 1947 Celebration resulted in a second place tie behind Merry Go Boy, it became obvious the big stallion was in for a battle. Fred Walker apparently was so upset over Sun’s performance, he took the sweating stallion from the show ring back to the warm up ring and preceded to work him hard for another thirty minutes – an act that failed to endear the trainer to Sun’s groom Fred Laws. A second disappointment came with a second place finish in Get-of-Sire, but his prospects for a third Championship brightened when he tied first in Champion Walking Stallions.

The 1947 Celebration stake is not remembered with the same excitement as 1946. Fred Walker rode Midnight Sun into the ring and hugged the rail with his thunderous flowing walk. Winston Wiser answered the gate on the nodding Merry Go Boy. Bill Harlin remembered, “ Fred stayed on the rail with Sun during the entire class and Winston showed Go Boy near the edge of the grass. He looked like he was making three trips in front of the judges to our one .... I know that’s my imagination ... but it seemed that way. Our horse just didn’t make his best show. Winston’s horse was exciting”! In the end, Merry Go Boy captured the crowd and the crown and Midnight Sun was tied third. Later that fall, Midnight Sun ended his career under saddle by again winning the Walking Stake at the 47 Tennessee State Fair.

There is no doubt the two Celebration battles between Midnight Sun and Merry Go Boy started a rivalry that lasted during the entire lives of these two great stallions and extended into their breeding careers. The rivalry polarized breeders, but ultimately produced great benefits to the breed and shaped breeding and training ideas for the industry.

Midnight Sun won a total of eighteen ribbons at The Celebration - one sixth, one third, three seconds and thirteen blues. His last win was the 1951 Get-of-Sire. His last visit to The Celebration grounds was in 1962

where he was paraded with several other living champions. During his life, Midnight Sun was shown under saddle by Carl Lee, Winston Wiser, Mrs. Henry Davis, and Fred Walker and in all halter-bridle classes by Harlin Hayes.

### *The Dynasty Begins*

Soon after the 1947 season, Fred Walker left Harlinsdale to manage a large farm and horse operation also located in Williamson County. Although defeated for the third championship in 1947, Midnight Sun's breeding career continued to soar. The 1948 season was heavier than 1947 as breeders rushed their mares to Harlinsdale. Midnight Sun colts were already winning area shows and every breeder seemed to want a piece of the action. The stud fee in those early years was \$50 with a live foal guarantee, so almost any farmer who owned a walking mare could afford to breed to the best. As a matter of fact, Midnight Sun quickly began to dominate the Walking Horse breed.

Harlinsdale certainly encouraged this with skillful promotion and salesmanship. Alex Harlin was a natural salesman and became a tireless Midnight Sun promoter. Harlin Hayes saw to it that no breeder with good mares was turned away. Many lasting partnerships were formed between Harlinsdale and a select group of breeders who had particularly fine brood mares. The skillful use of artificial insemination permitted almost any number of mares to be served.

Trainers were discovering Midnight Sun horses were smart, easy to train, and endowed with exceptional ability. They began to win showing Midnight Sun horses, and before long the shows would be dominated by Midnight Sun entries from coast to coast. When this dominance was recognized by critics, they began to express public concern that – if left to continue – it might ultimately be damaging to the breed. Judges were accused of favoring Midnight Sun bred horses in the shows, and owners of other stallions feared loss of business if the dominance continued. Being aware of their critic's concerns, Harlinsdale raised stud fees to \$100 in an effort to control the numbers. During the period, horses were still selling, and in spite of the fee increases, the breeding load remained high.

In the 1949 Celebration, Midnight Merry – the first Midnight Sun bred champion – was crowned, and that win apparently became the rallying call to break the breeding dominance of Midnight Sun. Critics believed the crowning of Midnight Merry demonstrated their concerns. Horsemen may always debate the championship quality of Midnight Merry, but most will agree that the mare's winning the crown together with a recession in horse prices set in motion the changes that resulted in the ban on artificial insemination in the early 1950's.

All during the 1950's – even with a ban on artificial insemination – Midnight Sun continued to attract as many mares as he could serve. The dominance of Midnight Sun bred horses continued as the show rings were filled, and although horse prices were lower, Midnight Sun horses were still in demand. Some of the greatest of the Midnight Sun line were sired in the 1950's. Midnight Sun's critics proclaimed if his breeding numbers were reduced, the playing field would be leveled, and his dominance would end.

Midnight Sun horses continued to dominate and in the end, every World's Champion – save four – since 1949 can be traced directly to Midnight Sun through the sire's pedigree line.

A great deal has been speculated and written about the amount of money Midnight Sun brought to Harlinsdale. One publication reported the stallion produced upwards of \$100,000 a year in stud fees. The farm records do not support this. During his 22 year breeding career, Midnight Sun sired about 2,000 colts. During the first years, the stud fee was \$50 and later \$100. During the earliest years 150 to 200 mares per year were served. Later in the 1950's this number was controlled at about 120 per year, and during the 1960's as the sire aged, the numbers were highly limited. His stud fee stayed at the \$100 level for more than a decade and was never high by today's standards. Harlin Hayes always insisted the fee be affordable by all breeders. Review of farm records, reveal that – although profitable – the great stallion produced only a fraction of the income from stud fees speculators have credited to him.

The main source of horse income to Harlinsdale was from crossing Midnight Sun with their carefully developed brood mares and selling Midnight Sun colts. Early in the 1950's, Harlinsdale decided to limit their training program and devote it's major effort to the breeding program. The training operation was phased out, and a more concentrated breeding program began. Since the beginning, Wirt Harlin and Harlin Hayes had bought or raised what has been called the finest band of brood mares in existence. The farm maintained a brood of 150-200 mares and with each year refinements were made to the band. Harlin Hayes has been credited by many as the best judge of walking brood mares who ever lived. He had the ability to just look at a mare and accurately predict what kind of foal she would produce. Wirt Harlin had a keen eye especially for fineness and Bill Harlin soon developed his own skills in selecting mares. If there is one secret ingredient to Harlinsdale's success, it is their great band of mares. Those who have come after Wirt Harlin and Harlin Hayes have carefully studied their lesson in that regard and carried on the tradition of refinement.

### *Little Things About Midnight Sun*

Long after his death, visitors who come to Harlinsdale are always interested in the little things about Midnight Sun and those who handled him. For example, during his entire life – including his show years – he wore only a #4 keg shoes. His championship shoes were made into displays and can be seen at the farm. He was ridden for at least thirty minutes five days per week including the day before his death. He was never allowed to run loose in a paddock. Often he was used by Harlin Hayes to inspect cattle, crops and other farm projects. Anybody could and often did ride him including children. He was very gentle enjoying human attention. After his daily workout, he was cooled down, given a bath, and grazed on a long lead line by his friend and handler Red Laws. As they both grew older, one of the classic memory pictures is that of the big back stallion dragging the tottering Red around the barn as the horse grazed. Many of us believed in the early years Red took care of Sun, but in the later years Sun took care of Red. Red Laws died just a few weeks after Midnight Sun's death in 1965. For years a

Harlinsdale guest book recorded Sun's visitors until the practice was discontinued because so many books were filled. Like most horses he loved treats, but one of his favorites was an ordinary biscuit. Few people call their horses by their registered name and Sun was no different. Midnight Sun had a farm nick name too ..... He was simply "Pap" and later "Ole Pap!" Yes, you guessed it, it was his pal Red who gave him the name.

Midnight Sun was a big powerful horse with a long flowing tail. There was not a single white hair on him. People loved him – especially kids and he never protested when they sat on his back for a picture or stole a ride as Red led him down the hall of the barn. Red loved kids too and he and the old horse had a favorite trick. Sun would be standing in the cross ties as Red groomed him and any kid who entered the barn would head straight for the horse to pet his nose. When the kid wore out his welcome, Red would warn, "Don't you bite him now Pap". The old horse would open his mouth, loudly snap his big hay stained teeth and slobber all over his young victim.

### *The Harlinsdale Sale*

It became obvious during the 1950's that the key to a successful breeding program was providing a convenient market for breeders and buyers. Thus was born the annual Harlinsdale Yearling Sale. Both the Harlins and Harlin Hayes had always favored public auctions as the best way to arrive at a fair price while drawing public attention to one's endeavors. The first sale including about twenty entries was held in the hall of the Harlinsdale barn in Franklin in 1955 and was an immediate success. The second almost proved disastrous. A much bigger sale was planned under a big tent erected next to the barn. Somebody got the idea of providing free lunch and placed a sale ad in the local newspaper. On sale day there was a great crowd of interested horse buyers, but they were totally outnumbered by the locals who saw the ad and came for the free lunch. While many of the expectant diners were disappointed, the horse buyers went home happy.

The sale continued to be held in Franklin throughout the 50's and 60's, but as The Celebration grew, fewer and fewer were willing to make the fifty mile drive to Franklin and leave The Celebration area. It was thought a much better sale could be held if a site could be found near Shelbyville.

Harlinsdale had become friends with C. A. Bobo – a leading trainer and influential figure in the Walking Horse world. Bobo had built a sales facility near Shelbyville. In 1974 Harlinsdale struck a deal with Bobo, and the sale was moved to Shelbyville. Over the years, the sale grew from one to as many as four days and set records almost every year in number of entries and prices paid for yearlings.

Harlinsdale has always had the policy of offering all of their yearlings in the sale – none before. By doing so, buyers soon discovered all the best colts were up for bid and they had a fair chance to buy. Individual Harlinsdale family members were required to bid against all comers to buy a colt they fancied or settle a partnership. The policy was begun early to subject each entry to a veterinarian inspection and publicly call all matters of soundness to the bidders attention. Consignors were encouraged to

participate in the sale of their entries making for some colorful sale pitches. Bidders soon realized bid prices were real and consignors went away happy with their prices.

Harlin Hayes became the voice of the Harlinsdale Sale, and some have described his sale speeches as a cross between a class room, revival meeting and a carnival barker. He would openly chide the bidders if they were off the mark often yelling "You boys better study your lesson". Always keeping a long buggy whip in one hand, he would wake the audience with a crack of the whip and entertain them with one of his homespun homilies . Clay Harlin and Rocky Jones who spent their sale days leading colts through the sale ring dreaded the crack of the whip. Clay said, "Harlin would pop that whip and we'd go sailing toward the end of the barn". Needless to say Harlin Hayes enjoyed an auction sale.

All the Harlinsdale boys cut their teeth on breaking colts and leading them through the sale. The first Harlinsdale boys were the four Harlins; Bill, Tom, Alex and Bob, but there were many more to come. In addition to boys in the family, Harlin Hayes usually hired local boys for summer help and many of them got their first lesson in physics in the form of a green yearling on the other end of a lead line. Harlinsdale has been blessed by hard working young men and women who came for a summer job but left with an appreciation of the horse business. Clay Harlin and Rocky Jones got their starts working for Hayes getting colts ready for the sale. Many of today's accomplished horsemen and veterinarians got their starts leading colts for Harlinsdale.

Harlinsdale has been joined by many partners in the annual sale. Other breeders with complimentary lines have been invited to add their stock to the sale. In peak years, especially the Pride years, up to 160 yearlings were sold through the ring including the first walking yearling to ever bring \$50,000. Over the years, an estimated 5,000 yearlings have been auctioned through the sale. Harlinsdale established lasting relationships with select breeders who shared the farm's criteria in selecting brood mares. Many of the breeders raised the colts and delivered them to Harlinsdale for finishing in the early summer before each sale. The practice insured a uniformity of finish when the final presentation was made to the bidders. Harlin Hayes developed a routine for preparing yearlings for sale and those same techniques are used today to prepare the colts for the event each year.

### *The Sale of Midnight Sun*

In late 1956 Alex Harlin suffered a mild stroke and was advised to simplify his life style. In the aftermath, of his medical problems, he and his brother Wirt decided to end their partnerships and Alex moved back to Nashville . Since the lands were individually owned, only the jointly owned horses and livestock were affected, so the brothers decided to offer their partnership horses in an auction sale. The walking horse world was stunned to learn Midnight Sun would be included in the 1957 sale. Although a shock to others, it had been a long standing family tradition to settle horse partnerships at auction - a tradition which continues today.

All was not well with the walking horse industry. Horse prices had dropped, and political in-fighting caused by the early 50's take over of the



breeders association had split the association and given it a public black eye thus worsening the breed's problems and driving prices even lower. Harlinsdale responded to the loss of horse revenue by getting into the registered Hereford cattle business. Registered cattle prices soon tanked making the farm's venture into the Hereford business an expensive disaster. It could well have been for the first time since founding Harlinsdale, Wirt Harlin was having second thoughts. We do not know if he intended to participate in the auction sale of Midnight Sun to buy his brother's interest. As far as is known, he never discussed the matter with anybody except his brother.

Bill Harlin was as puzzled as the rest of the family and remembers the sale of Midnight Sun would have proceeded as scheduled had not Mrs. G. M. Livingston arrived at the sale and summoned Wirt Harlin to join her in the privacy of her automobile. Harlin sat in the car talking with Mrs. Livingston for some time before emerging to announce Mrs. Livingston and her daughter would purchase Midnight Sun for \$50,000 with the stipulation that Sun remain at Harlinsdale under the management of Harlin Hayes. Had there been any prior conversations with Mrs. Livingston? No one knows. Merry Go Boy had sold a short time before for a reported \$55,000 and Bill Harlin does remember his father had worried that horse prices had fallen so low, Midnight Sun might bring an embarrassingly low price. Like most of the Harlins, Wirt was a very quiet man who never talked about his personal business. Neither party to the Midnight Sun transaction ever enlightened the horse world or their families with additional details of the sale. The relationship with the Livingstons remained solid and Midnight Sun spent the rest of his days at Harlinsdale.

Midnight Sun returned to Harlinsdale and nothing changed except the owner's name on the registration. The relationship between the Livingstons and Harlinsdale was most amicable for the remaining nine years of the stallion's life. From time to time, Mrs. Livingston would visit Sun at Harlinsdale and she regularly spoke with Harlin Hayes, but according to Hayes she left management details to Harlinsdale. To this day details of the sale of Midnight Sun remains one of the mysteries of the walking horse world. During the 2000 Celebration, museum exhibits revealed that Merry Go Boy had sold for \$35,000 – not the \$55,000 originally reported, so the worries of Wirt Harlin about the sale price of Midnight Sun were unfounded, yet he never lived long enough to know it.

### *Midnight Sun Writes Breeding History*

From his first day at Harlinsdale in 1943, Midnight Sun began to re-write walking horse breeding history. During the twenty-two years of his service he sired about 2,000 offspring. A review of Celebration World Champions from 1949 through 1999 reveal every winner except four can be traced directly to Midnight Sun through the sire's pedigree line. His sons became legendary sires with their own brilliant reputations and his daughters have been recorded as legendary brood mares.

Interestingly, Midnight Sun produced champions in every crop. He was consistent in the quality of his get year after year, and he was a very potent stallion. Some of the old timers said Old Sun could look at a mare and get her in foal. He remained healthy and strong well into his last year. He

was named Walking Horse of The Century.

### *The 1940's and 1950's at Harlinsdale*

In 1947, the first Midnight Sun horses were entering the show ring under saddle and they were winning. Bill Harlin remembers 150 to 200 mares each year were brought to Midnight Sun service in the years between 1947 and 1950. Midnight Sun's first Celebration winner was Midnight Merry – a three year old owned by Mrs. Dawson Morgan of Cookeville who also owned the dam. Midnight Merry was exhibited by Steve Hill, and Bill Harlin recollected the mare was one of the first walking horses to exhibit the new show gait. Harlin described the show gait as step above the traditional running walk. “She did this naturally, and trainers began to refer to it as a show gait – a lick they saved for their last passes before the judge”, Harlin said. “From that time, all the big winners had a show gait and by that time there was a Midnight Sun horse in almost every training barn, and the better trainers had a barn full. All this made Midnight Sun even more popular”, commented Harlin. He credits Sam Paschal and his brother Donald for being the first trainers to promote Midnight Sun horses.

Back at Harlinsdale, there was an aggressive training program in place. Harlin Hayes showed Skipper's Son of Midnight and Bill Harlin exhibited Sun's Nightcap to great success. Most colts were proven in shows and sold at two or three years old. Midnight Sun's stud fee was raised to \$100.

The next Midnight Sun Celebration winner was Talk of The Town and Bill Harlin remembers seeing him in 1948. Harlin and his father Wirt were driving home from the Baton Rouge show when they made a detour into Arkansas to see a two year old prospect that was attracting attention. The Harlins drove up to the training barn and a groom recognized the senior Harlin and offered to show the horse for the visitors. The Harlins were told to wait and about five minutes later the groom appeared riding Talk of The Town. “He made one pass in front of us, and that little bay horse was stepping up and had the deepest stride either of us had ever seen on a walking horse. His running walk looked like that of today's padded performance horse and the groom was working him in a set of chains. He took the chains off and he stepped even higher”, Harlin remembered. Talk of The Town – already a gelding – was sent to Steve Hill who guided the bay to becoming The Celebration's only three time winner. Steve Hill and Talk of The Town and other top contenders like Midnight Mystery and Sun's Big Shot solidified both Midnight Sun as the dominant walking horse sire and Harlinsdale as the industry's premier breeding organization.

Other great Midnight Sun Celebration champions and breeding sires were to come. In 1957 Sun's Jet Parade won the championship followed by Setting Sun in 1958 and Sun's Delight in 1963. Delight became the last son of Midnight Sun to win The Celebration. There were many other great sons who never won the Celebration. Among the two most notable were Midnight Mack K and Pride of Midnight.

Sun's Delight is remembered as one of the truly great sons of Midnight Sun and was raised by Mr. Audie Dean one of the legendary

Tennessee breeders. Who can forget Sam Paschal demonstrating the disposition of the great stallion by having him follow his trainer out of the show ring. Sun's Delight is known for producing 1973 Celebration winner Delight's Bummin Around, but he is best remembered for his almost endless production of legendary walking brood mares. It was a prized mare which carried the blood of Sun's Delight.

Midnight Mack K produced 1959 World Grand Champions Rodgers Perfection and 1960's champ Mack K's Handshaker. While Midnight K. left an amazing trail of winning show horses, no son of Midnight Sun was able to come close to the record of Pride of Midnight. Pride produced Pride's Secret Threat, Delight of Pride, Pride's Final Edition, and Pride's Jubilee Star – all World Grand Champions – and Pride's Gold Coin and Pride's Generator, both raised at Harlinsdale, - two of the greatest sires of all time.

The number of great walking horses to come through the Harlinsdale barns is almost endless. Space permits neither their naming or listing their accomplishments. Harlinsdale certainly did not own them all for great Midnight Sun horses came to almost every training and production facility across the nation, but a large percentage were the offspring of Harlinsdale's famous brood mare band. Over the history of Harlinsdale, those mares have proved to be the most important stage played by any stallion and the making of many.

All during the Midnight Sun years, there was a great rivalry between the fans of Merry Go Boy and Midnight Sun, but the leaders of the Merry Go Boy camp did not hesitate to own and show Midnight Sun horses. Of course the poster boy for the Merry Go Boy camp was Winston Wiser who had shown the great stallion to such success. Feelings ran high, and Bill Harlin remembers a great Midnight Sun mare – Midnight Mystery – was placed with Wiser for training. "I remember we sold the mare to our neighbor Mr. John Amos and Winston came over to pick her up." Bill said, "Being the young upstart that I was .... I walked up to Winston and said .... Well I guess we're finally gonna put Winston Wiser in the horse business. I don't think he took it very well" The two opposing camps differed on almost everything and every year the rivalry was reinvigorated at The Celebration. Although feelings ran high, the two camps were brought together in the mid 1950's when the breeders association was beset by one of its many crises.

### *Horse Politics, the 50's, Low Low Prices*

As Talk of the town was repeating thrice as Celebration winner, there were critics who feared Midnight Sun's dominance would adversely affect the walking horse breed. Although he owned and prized Midnight Sun stock, the leader of a movement to limit this dominance was Mr. John Amos of Franklin. John Amos was a self-made man who had made his fortune in the coal business and he could best be described as a hard knuckle player in his every endeavor. He was convinced the dominance of Midnight Sun on the breeding world had brought about a glut of colts which was driving prices down and might ultimately destroy the breed.

A movement led by Amos succeeded in taking control of the Breeders Association and one of the first acts of those new in control was to outlaw artificial insemination. It was a direct blow at Midnight Sun, but it

also had serious impact on Merry Go Boy who was by then the second leading sire in the breed. The meetings leading to the takeover of the association were rowdy and made regional and national news. One of the now famous Proxy Meetings was even featured in Sports Illustrated in a very damaging piece. When the ban on artificial insemination became unenforceable, the new association leaders attempted to place a limit of 100 as the number of colts which could be registered to any stud in a given year. This action brought public charges of restraint of trade and made the national black eye of the industry even worse. Meanwhile, horse prices continued to fall, almost everybody in the walking horse world ignored the associations regulations, and the morale of those within the industry was never lower.

Bill Harlin remembers the ban on artificial insemination had an opposite effect than was intended, "Rather than the business being diverted from Midnight Sun to other stallions, the breeders just quit breeding their mares and business just went away. Nobody benefited from the ban. Everybody was hurt", Harlin commented. "Interest just dried up".

In a few short tempestuous years, the new leaders succeeded in polarizing the industry, destroying all the goodwill previous years had brought, destroying the credibility of the association, and contributing to the very problem – low horse prices – they set out to correct. Lifelong friendships were severed as almost everyone came down on one or the other side of the controversies. It is generally agreed the practice of soring became common place at that time because the association had lost its credibility and some began to spurn all the association's rules, regulations, and policies.

The problem did serve to bring the Midnight Sun and Merry Go Boy camps together. By combining the strengths of both camps, a great number of votes could be brought to bear and the balance of power on the board could be tipped. Among the first acts of the new compromise board was to repeal the ban on artificial insemination and registration limitations. The resulting cooperation on these few issues defused the rivalry between the two camps, but they always remained spirited competitors in the show ring.

Once this unrest had passed, horse prices slowly began to recover, but the loss of goodwill never recovered, and the association has found itself locked in controversy most of its life. The credibility issue remained. About that time, Harlinsdale decided to essentially leave the show ring. Midnight Sun had a new owner and Harlinsdale planted itself squarely in the breeding business. "Because of the horse recession, the failure of our cattle business, and the general political climate existing in the horse business, we determined our best interests would be served as breeders rather than exhibitors", Bill Harlin remembered. "Harlin Hayes trained and showed Midnight Secret in the mid 50's and I think that was the last big time outside horse we showed. From that moment, if we raised a prospect we wanted to show, we sent it to an outside trainer. We were now completely in the breeding business." Bill concluded.

It was not long until the Harlinsdale barn was filled with fine champion walking stallions. In addition to Midnight Sun, some of the more famous horses to stand at Harlinsdale during the period were Sun's Delight, and Midnight Mack K. As the farm concentrated exclusively on the

breeding business, Harlin Hayes was becoming more of an influence on the Tennessee Walking Horse industry.

“By that time, Harlin Hayes was The Man in the walking horse business. He was the man everybody sought out for answers, and he solidified Harlinsdale’s position as the leader of the breeding industry”, Bill continued. “Ours was a proven program. It wasn’t based on advertising or expectations. It was based on prior performance”, Bill remembered, “And it was what people wanted”. “By that time, Harlin had taken a leadership roll in the industry and was rapidly being recognized as senior statesman for the breed.” Bill remembered these years as among Harlinsdale’s best – at least until the arrival of Pride of Midnight.

### *Harlinsdale and The Pleasure Horse Market*

During the horse recession of the 1950, Harlinsdale began to explore alternative markets for their production. Both Wirt Harlin and Harlin Hayes often used the term “using horse” to describe a colt they felt wouldn’t make a show horse. “He’ll make a good using horse” one of them would say. Both had grown up in Kentucky on farms than kept a few saddle horses to use in rounding up stock or making a short trip down the road.

At the same time, trail riders were discovering the joy of riding a walking horse on a long ride, and the “using horses” suddenly were in demand. Harlin Hayes took a special interest in those interested in pleasure horses. Then, few Tennessee shows had flat shod classes, but interest in pleasure walking horses was growing especially in the west and north west. Harlinsdale was among the first to send horses to the other coast. Soon, interest began to grow in Tennessee and the result was pleasure horse classes being added to many one-night shows.

Often, Harlinsdale has purchased production from breeding customers when the colts were deemed important to the farm’s breeding plan. Harlinsdale’s entries in the annual yearling sale usually averages about sixty. It’s estimated about two thirds go into the training barns aimed at producing performance horses and the remaining one third go to the pleasure horse trainers. There has been a long standing tradition to serve all segments of the industry.

At about this time, Harlinsdale settled on the business plan that is still in use today. The farm maintained a select brood mares always under refinement. Select fillies were kept to strengthen the brood each year. A few colts were judged to have potential importance to the farm’s breeding program and were sent to expert trainers. The remaining production was offered at public auction. Harlinsdale has always tried to keep a family of young stallions in the pipe line. Many of them have gone on to be winners in the ring and have returned to the farm as breeding horses. More often however, they are recognized as potential breeding horses and brought back to stand without a show record. The best example in Harlinsdale history are Pride of Midnight and Gold Power.

### *The Death of Midnight Sun*

By late 1964, Midnight Sun's handler and faithful friend Red Laws had become sidelined by illness. He made occasional trips to the barn, but they became less and less frequent. About the same time Midnight Sun began to have bouts with colic. When Red was sidelined, Wirt Harlin is remembered to have speculated that Ole Sun wouldn't last much longer now. The black stallion did however remain strong meeting his obligations of the 1965 breeding season with his usual vigor.

In the early fall of 1965, his personal vet Dr. DeWitt Owen attended the old horse more and more as the bouts of colic came more often and were more severe. Whether or not Midnight's Sun's decline was related to Red's decline we shall never know. Each time the horse would bounce back, and *Voice Magazine* even did a 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition on Midnight Sun which pictured a horse much younger than his age. But, Sun continued to be plagued by colic and on a Sunday morning in November, the old stallion came down with colic again for the last time. Dr. Owen attended him at the time of his death.

The following morning a small gathering of mostly family and farm folk gathered at Harlinsdale. Midnight Sun's body lay covered by a new blanket in the hall way of the historic barn. A local earth contractor had been called in to prepare a site near the barn and those who had lived with the old stallion carefully lined the grave with a cushion of fresh straw.

When time came to carry the great horse to his final resting place, he was gently rolled onto a lifting canvass and a large machine was called in to transport the body. Those who had worked with Harlin Hayes had seldom seen him show emotion, but as the machine operator positioned to make the lift, he was heard to utter in crackling voice, "Be very careful .... You are carrying precious cargo". Midnight Sun's grave was marked with an appropriate memorial and the site remains the most visited spot at Harlinsdale.

News of his death was carried in most Tennessee newspapers and on television. All national equine magazines and at least one national news organization. In the years to come many touching tributes to Ole Pap were written and published. Among the greatest was a series by award winning newspaper artist Jack Knox of Nashville. Harlinsdale, Midnight Sun and Red had become favorite subjects of Knox who was a student of The Tennessee Walking Horse. He used illustrations of Midnight Sun to demonstrate what a walking horse ought to look like. He managed to capture the true essence of what Harlinsdale and Midnight Sun and the people around them were all about.

Probably the very greatest tribute to Midnight Sun was spoken to Knox by Sun's old friend and handler Red Laws who said, "Ole Sun! He's the head of the stream. Walking Hoss folks'll remember him, and colts carrying his blood will be 'hittin his lick' when all them other hosses of his time, and before him, will be plumb forgot!"

***The Great Mares of Harlinsdale are the Secret to Success***



Although the death of Midnight Sun stunned the walking horse world, the reality of his advancing age had caused Harlinsdale to prepare for the loss of his service. Sun's Delight had become the breed's premier sire and he along with other great sires were standing at Harlinsdale. For the first time since 1944, Harlinsdale was dependent on stallions they did not own or control. During the life of Midnight Sun, Harlinsdale had kept a string of stallion prospects in the pipe line, but none of the farm's horses had emerged to win The Celebration, and by that time, Celebration winners were a major attraction.

Realizing the difficulty in finding another Midnight Sun, Harlinsdale bet the future on assembling and refining the greatest band of brood mares in the industry. This paid great dividends with Midnight Sun, Son of Midnight, Sprit of Midnight, Sun's Delight and Midnight Mack K as the power of the Harlinsdale brood had provided the venue through which these great sires solidified their reputations. Owners were anxious to have their stallions exposed to these mares and now with Midnight Sun gone, the ladies became the main attraction.

Often, Harlinsdale folk are asked how brood mares are chosen. The process has been passed down from generation to generation. While pedigrees are important, they were never top priority in selecting a mare. Both Wirt Harlin and Harlin Hayes wanted a mare to be loose in front and roll her shoulders as she walked. They liked to see a mare with size and good conformation with extension of stride. They looked for fineness of features with a good high head and smart eyes. Harlin Hayes liked a mare with a large cavity where a colt could develop and he looked for intelligence. In his selections, Wirt Harlin liked extra fineness in the mare's features. After finding a prospect that met the appearance and conformation characteristics, then and only then would the pedigree be studied. "It never hurts to have famous kinfolks", Harlin Hayes was fond of saying. He also believed no matter how a mare looked or moved or what her pedigree might be, if she had a record of having good colts, all other considerations could be put aside. Both Harlin and Hayes started the tradition of keeping the best daughters, so over the years, lines of breeding have developed within the Harlinsdale brood mare band. Harlin Hayes developed a reputation of being able to look at a brood mare and predict the kind of colts she would have.

The Harlinsdale brood mare band has been called "the stallion makers". Bill Harlin remembers the farm's policy of ever refining the brood mare band became very obvious during the late 50's and 60's. "Folks could drive down the road and look at a field full of our mares and compare them with other groups, and the Harlinsdale mares had a look of quality to them. It became obvious to others before it became obvious to us", Harlin remembered. "When stallion owners looked for a place to stand their horses, the Harlinsdale brood mares were the strongest selling point. We sacrificed a lot of opportunities to sell our best fillies for top money to keep our band of mares strong." Harlin Hayes as well as Wirt Harlin believed it took a minimum five year exposure to the band of quality mares to prove a stallion. Harlinsdale's modern records reveal that to be fact.

When once ask what percentage of a colt's qualities came from the stallion and from the mare, both Wirt Harlin and Harlin Hayes agreed that the traits of a colt was at least 75% due to the mare. "Good mares would

have good colts by average horses, but they would likely have great colts if crossed to a great stallion” HarlinHayes was often quoted as saying, “and on the other hand, little could be produced by breeding a great stallion to a mediocre mare.” Harlinsdale has produced many great brood mares starting with some of the top producing Midnight Sun mares. In more modern times, three which quickly come to mind are Delight’s Joanna, dam of Pride’s Gold Coin and Pride’s Genius, H.F. Spirit’s Nell dam of Pride’s Generator, and Pride’s Donna, dam of Coin’s Hard Cash and Gold Power. These same three mares also produced top quality daughters many of which still remain as major contributors to the Harlinsdale band of mares.

### *Pride of Midnight, A Successor is born*

Midnight Sun died in November, after meeting his spring breeding obligations for the 1965 season. Since Harlinsdale owned no stallion to succeed him, it became a top imperative to locate a successor. At his death, there would be one last crop of Midnight Sun colts and Wirt Harlin set out to look at every one of them.

Hubert Worell of Goodletsville, owner of Solitude Stock Farm had bred his mare Pride of Stanley to Midnight Sun in the spring of 1965 and she foaled a black stud colt with white markings in 1966. There are two stories of how Wirt Harlin came to own Pride of Midnight. One story says Harlin made the deal to buy the foal at the time of the mare’s service in 1965. The second story says when the mare was returned to Harlinsdale for service with the stud colt by her side in 1966, Harlin saw the foal and made the trade. It is certain, Wirt Harlin owned Pride of Midnight from the time he was a baby colt. Neither buyer or seller ever confirmed a price. One thing is for sure. Pride of Midnight was Wirt Harlin’s horse. He had looked for a horse like Pride all his life. For more than twenty years he had tried to produce such a colt from his own mares, but in the end, it was a loyal friend and customer who bred the prize. Harlin sought to breed a true honest walking horse with extra fineness – a trait he thought Midnight Sun lacked.

Wirt Harlin never let one forget Pride was his horse. He beamed when he talked about him and absolutely delighted in getting him out and showing him to farm visitors. Bill Harlin always referred to Pride as “Dad’s Horse” and the rest of the clan referred to him as “Uncle Wirt’s Horse”. Pride of Midnight was delivered to Harlinsdale as a weanling and thrown in with the other weanlings to winter. He was handled some to familiarize him with the halter and lead, but was treated no different from any other colt on the farm. One thing was obvious to all from the start. Pride of Midnight stood out from his peers.

Pride was not the only colt from Midnight Sun’s last crop to be acquired. As a matter of fact there were three, and the decision was made to allow them all three to winter and mature and look at them in the spring.

As a two year old the decision was made to send Pride to Herman “Dot” Warren for training - the only trainer Pride of Midnight ever had. He was shown neither as a two or three year old, but did make seven show appearances as a four year old. Pride of Midnight was never defeated and was the center of attention where ever he was exhibited. He won major one night shows and everybody in the horse world expected Pride to be a contender to win The Celebration. But it was not to be.

Back at Harlinsdale, there was still major concern about not having a breeding stallion which belonged to the farm. Harlin made the decision to bring Pride of Midnight out of training to stand at Harlinsdale. His first years of service were not easy for he was not a popular stallion. Breeders were more interested in breeding to Sun's Delight and other proven sires. Harlin Hayes and Wirt Harlin had so much faith in Pride they bred many of their best mares to him. Bill Harlin admits he was not easy to convince. "My Dad came to me and said Son, why don't you breed some of your mares to my horse", Bill remembered. I told him that we had Sun's Delight in the barn and I knew what his colts would bring. "I only wish I had listened to Dad earlier", Bill lamented.

Although Wirt Harlin and Harlin Hayes went on a Pride selling spree, the horse was slow to catch on with breeders. Then the Harlinsdale Pride colts began to arrive in the hands of trainers and show rings. Trainers found they were natural smart walking horses and easy to make into a show horse. Pride colts began to win in show rings all over the country and the Pride era was on. As Pride horses began to win, Harlinsdale wisely began to add Pride mares to the brood. This would later prove to be a blessing when the farm faces it's next crisis.

Pride of Midnight had a very short breeding career. After he became popular, he had only four or five great years. During the period 1974 through 1979, the farm had so many requests for Pride service they could hardly be met. Although Pride of Midnight horses were winning almost every show, there would be no Pride world champion until after the sire's death, so even at the time of the sire's death, the jury was still out on how history would remember Pride of Midnight.

Pride, like his father Midnight Sun, was a hearty horse, but as he aged he developed his father's propensity to colic. In 1979 he was hit with a severe case that demanded major intervention. Dr. DeWitt Owen attended Pride and recommended immediate surgery. He suggested the great sire be taken to Lexington, Kentucky where those most expert in the operation could attend him. A plane was chartered, and Harlin Hayes along with Dr. Owen flew to Lexington, while Dr. John Haffner and Rocky Jones drove the prized stallion from Franklin to Lexington to the waiting surgeons. The operation was a success, but the attending veterinarians suggested Pride be left with them to recuperate. All appeared to be well and Hayes and Owen returned to Franklin with a good report. Each day thereafter began with a call to Lexington for a report on Pride. Attending veterinarians reported the recovery was going well and on schedule. After a suitable period, the vets called to say Pride could go home to Tennessee. Harlin Hayes was preparing to leave Harlinsdale to retrieve the valued sire when a call from Lexington stopped his departure. The news could not have been worse. Those attending Pride of Midnight had found the black stallion lying dead in his stall early that morning.

The first son of Pride to wear the roses was 1982 Celebration winner Pride's Secret Threat, followed in 84 by Delight of Pride, 85 by Pride's Final Edition and 1986 by Pride's Jubilee Star. Perhaps the two greatest Pride of Midnight Sires who never won Grand Championship honors, were without question Pride's Gold Coin, and Pride's Generator – both bred and raised by

Harlinsdale. Gold Coin went on to sire Celebration winner Coin's Hard Cash and Generator sired Gens Armed and Dangerous and Santana. In addition, both Gold Coin and Generator sired big time show horses too numerous to list and Gold Coin has been responsible for giving the breed some of its most famous daughters.

Pride's Gold Coin was sold through the Harlinsdale yearling sale. Bill Harlin remembers, the farm had hoped Gold Coin would sell for more than \$5,000, but when he went through the auction sale and less was bid, Harlin Hayes cried "no sale" with the idea of bringing him back to Franklin. About that time C. A. Bobo approached Dr. William Wellborn and offered to go partners with the doctor on the colt. Each pledged \$2500 and bought the prospect. The rest is history. Dr. Wellborn owned Gold Coin for years before selling him to Mr. Joe Regan his last owner. Gold Coin spent most of his breeding life at Harlinsdale the land of his origin where in addition to his great sons, he is best known for producing daughters of the quality produced by Midnight Sun, Sun's Delight, and Pride of Midnight. Pride's Gold Coin lived out his days at Harlinsdale.

The story of Pride's Generator is a bit different. In their day, Wirt Harlin and Harlin Hayes would periodically review each colt to select the ones they planned to keep and the ones they planned to sell. Each colt would be critiqued, and often there was heated debate when one or the other disagreed. When they looked at Pride's Generator, Hayes who bred the colt nor Harlin showed any enthusiasm for keeping him, so the decision was made to sell him in the fall of 1976. He later went through the Harlinsdale Sale in 1977. In later years, the author would remind Hayes of his decision and he would smile, sigh and say, "Yep Son ..... he's the one that got away!"

Although he never got a chance to stand him, Hayes was very proud of Generator's record. There are many stories like the Generator story because during the peak production years of Pride of Midnight, several hundred great yearlings passed through the Harlinsdale sale.

### *The Death of Harlin Hayes*

In early 1980, Harlin Hayes became ill and became steadily weaker. He was diagnosed with cancer, underwent surgery and radiation treatments and was in remission by late spring. As the spring breeding season got underway, he was recovered enough to take his usual active part and seemed to be returning to his full vigor by the time The Celebration started in August. He conducted the Harlinsdale yearling sale in 1980 and seemed to be feeling great when the cancer returned in late fall. After a very short acute illness, he died in early November. He was mourned and memorialized by the walking horse world and every major equine publication chronicled his contributions to Harlinsdale and the walking horse world and took note of his passing.

By the time of his death in November 1980, Harlin Hayes had managed Harlinsdale for almost 44 years. He had been responsible for the breeding careers of Midnight Son, Midnight Mack K, Son of Midnight, Sun's Delight, Pride of Midnight, Pride's Gold Coin, and many more of the breed's most important sires. He had served in a leadership capacity in the walking horse breeding industry for more than three decades and he had helped build Harlinsdale in what is now called "The Mother Church of The

Walking Horse World”.

At the time of Hayes death, his uncle, mentor, and friend Wirt Harlin was 94 years of age and unable to take over the day to day operations of Harlinsdale. Since Hayes illness and death were so sudden, no one had been specifically groomed to take over the job. There was open speculation at that time about the future of Harlinsdale.

### *The Bill Harlin Years*

Bill Harlin – eldest son of Wirt Harlin – had always remained close to the Harlinsdale operations. Although in an unrelated business, he had maintained interests in the Harlinsdale operations and had an active breeding program going with his own mares. Bill and his cousin Harlin Hayes had worked side by side at Harlinsdale in the late 1940's and Bill was an accomplished horseman who was respected in the industry. Supported by the rest of the family, Bill took over as manager of Harlinsdale in late 1980. With the help of his son Clay Harlin and Harlinsdale's trusted stallion manager Rocky Jones the Harlinsdale operations never missed a beat. Clay and Rocky were responsible for the day to day operations and Bill was a daily visitor to Harlinsdale to review and direct the farm's programs.

Under Bill's leadership, Harlinsdale continued to grow attracting many of the breed's top stallions to stand at the historic farm. Production of champions continued as Bill campaigned Pride's Genius to the four year old championship before returning him to Harlinsdale to stand. Under Bill's watch, the annual Harlinsdale Yearling Sale was refined with emphasis placed in quality rather than numbers. It is still held today during Celebration week. The Harlinsdale barn has been filled with big name stallions like Pride's Dark Spirit, WGC Dark's Spirit's Rebel, Gen's Major General, WGC Out on Parole, WGC Motown Magic, Pride's Gold Coin, Gold Power, Pride's Genius, and many more. (*WGC = World Grand Champion*)

Bill Harlin has continued the industry leadership traditions established by his predecessors at Harlinsdale by taking an active part in the Walking Horse Breeders Association and other walking horse related organizations. He and his wife Barbara are active in the show ring exhibiting in many of the amateur walking classes. For more than two decades under his leadership, Harlinsdale has continued to be recognized as the industry leader in breeding high quality horses. Today, in addition to still offering live stud service at the farm, semen from champion stallions is shipped world wide on a daily basis to trained veterinarians eliminating the need to bring the mare to the stallion.

Emery “Rocky” Jones still acts as stallion manager and is completing more than thirty years of service at Harlinsdale. Jones joined the organization and worked with Harlin Hayes in the 1970's. He is regarded by his peers as one of the best in the business today.

Bill Harlin's brother, T. C. “Tom” Harlin has been a supportive yet quiet partner in Harlinsdale during all these years, and extended members of

the Harlin and Hayes families still participate in the horse business.

### *Harlinsdale A Family Affair from 1935—2017, 82 Years of History*

From the beginning in 1935, Harlinsdale has been a family affair. First there was Wirt Harlin and his brother A. F. Harlin. They were joined by their nephew Harlin Hayes and soon there were Wirt's four sons who followed. After the deaths of the senior Harlins and Harlin Hayes, Bill Harlin assumed leadership and has been joined by his children, his grand children and members of the extended Harlin and Hayes families.

The horses have been a family affair as well when it all began with the arrival of a solid black stallion named Midnight Sun in January 1944. To a great extent, the first seventy years of Walking Horse History has been written at Harlinsdale Farm in Franklin. It is said well over 90 percent of all Tennessee Walking Horses alive today can trace their ancestors back to Midnight Sun The Horse of The Century and Harlinsdale.

#### *Note from Jim Hayes:*

*As of this writing, The City of Franklin, Tennessee has purchased the Harlinsdale lands, and plans to convert more than 200 acres into a passive park while maintaining and protecting the Walking Horse history. An agreement has been reach with Bill Harlin to maintain the Harlinsdale breeding operation at the farm for the immediate future. While the main Harlinsdale breeding operation will remain at the historic barn, other Harlin lands nearby will be used for pasture and hay production. The leaders of the City of Franklin have been very vocal in their support for keeping a horse presence on the lands for local citizens to enjoy.*

#### *Addendum by Clay Harlin: 2021*

*Bill Harlin moved the Harlinsdale operation to College Grove a few years after the City of Franklin assumed ownership of the Franklin Farm. He and Rocky Jones continued to carry the Harlinsdale banner until Bill Harlin's death in June 15, 2017 at the age of 91.*

*Bill and his brother Tom were active supporters of the efforts of Friends of Franklin Parks in the preservation of Harlinsdale Park. Both men were pleased to see that there would continue to be a horse presence on the historic property. The Harlin and Hayes families continues their active support of Friends of Franklin Parks and the ongoing preservation of Harlinsdale Park.*

### *About the Writer and this History*

I am the son of long time Harlinsdale manager Harlin Hayes. Born on



the farm in 1940, I grew up on Harlinsdale and was immersed in the walking horse world from an early age until I graduated from college in 1962 to pursue a career in broadcasting. I always had a great interest in Harlinsdale and the role it and Midnight Sun played in the walking horse industry, and over the years, I interviewed many well know horsemen about their relationships with Harlinsdale. I spent many hours interviewing W. W. Harlin Sr. and Harlin Hayes about the earliest days of Harlinsdale Through those interviews and conversations with Bill Harlin, I have been able to fill in the blanks where my memories were unclear. After the death of Harlin Hayes in 1980 and W. W. Harlin Sr. shortly after, I was urged by many to write a history based on my own memories as well as those of my kinsmen and those who did business over the years with Harlinsdale. This history is the result of those requests.

The writing of this history has been in progress for more than five years, and over that time, I have received many calls, letters and e-mails from those offering stories, tidbits, pictures, and their memories. All are greatly appreciated. It has become clear that any Harlinsdale history is a work in progress and many horse folk have important memories to contribute. So, for now..... we leave the history book open with hopes more information will surface so it can be added.

And one more thing..... I'm a broadcaster not a writer or journalist. I apologize for my rather disorganized style with hopes than any readers will forgive.

*James H. Hayes*  
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