

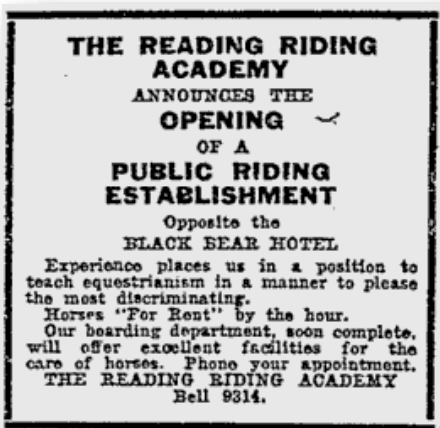


The Golf Chronicles

The story of golf at Reading Country Club and in Berks County



Number 21 • October 8 , 2015



An ad from the Reading Eagle, October 5, 1926, promotes the Reading Riding Academy. A future issue of The Golf Chronicles will tell the story of the Black Bear Hotel.

The Riding Academy Opens

The RCC Riding Academy was established in 1925 when the club entered into a contract with Frederick W. Hannon, who opened the stables that September. Mr. Hannon had been master of the Detroit Riding and Hunt Club, overseeing a barn of 80 horses. Mr. Hannon brought six horses to RCC.

A. Lincoln Frame, RCC president and founder of the Gray Iron Manufacturing Company in Reading, stated that the club was planning to develop a bridal path. Mr. Hannon's availability hastened things along. Mr. Hannon and his wife cared for horses and gave riding lessons.

The club constructed a barn with a green Swiss roof. A spring fed a reservoir atop a nearby hill that provided water for the stable and the house in which Mr. and Mrs. Hannon lived.

The Saga of Flowing Gold

The horse. The movie. The book. The RCC connection.

A most curious item popped up on Reading Country Club's Facebook page on September 28: A photo showing a loving cup from the 1930 Reading Country Club horse show. **Charlie Paris**, an RCC golfer, got the [photo](#) from his brother, who espied the artifact in a Dallas, Texas, antique shop. How it reached the Lone Star State we may never know. But a little digging reveals the story of the show and the champion horse, **Flowing Gold**, whose name is engraved on the cup.

RCC staged its first horse show, The Autumn Leaf Horse Show and Gymkhana, on October 17, 1925, as reported in the *Reading Eagle* on October 18. According to the *Eagle*, this show represented "...a revival of horse shows in the vicinity." The event attracted 1,200 spectators and featured seven classes of competition. Because of slippery grounds caused by heavy rain the previous days, the saddle-horse jumping event was called off. The winners in each class were awarded handsome silver cups and the coveted blue ribbons, while white, red and yellow ribbons were presented to the second, third and reserve winners in each class.

A grand affair. In 1926, RCC presented a grand affair conducted with judges from the Association of American Horse Shows, Inc., of which the riding academy was a member. The judges were experts in the group's rules and regulations. The spring RCC Horse show became a regular feature on the Berks County equine scene; the fall event continued as well.

The 1930 show was conducted at the RCC riding stables on May 23 and 24. The *Reading Eagle* reported in its May 23 edition that more than 100 horses would compete in 18 events.

Cloudless. Opening day, Friday, May 23, 1930, attracted 2,500 spectators who witnessed 11 events under a clear, cloudless sky. The riders competed for first prizes between \$20 and \$35, ribbons and cups. Competition included Saddle Horses, 14 hands, 2 inches, for the Mr. and Mrs. J. Fred Ludwig Trophy; Five-gaited Park Type, manners and confirmation to decide, for the Mr. and Mrs. Martin L. Hoffer Trophy, won by Flowing Gold; and Three-gaited Paired Horses, lady and gentleman riders, for the Mr. and Mrs. J. Lewis Lingle Trophy.

The second day, Saturday, concluded dramatically as a violent afternoon storm brought driving rain and high winds that chased hundreds of spectators from the grounds and uprooted tents and the refreshment stand. The final two events were contested in a downpour.

Sudden departure. **Thomas A. Reedy**, *Reading Eagle* sports writer, described Saturday afternoon thusly: "All the color and gaiety of the Junior leaguers, who ran the refreshment stand and otherwise assisted the country club officials, took sudden departure when the wind and rain caught their tent, uprooted it and scattered provisions far and wide. The other canvas on the outside course, which housed horses entered in the show, was also blown down, but the horses were safely removed with no further damage.

"Despite the rather violent conclusion, officials who conducted the show declared it the most successful ever held here."



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Unstoppable. The wet grounds didn't stop Flowing Gold. The chestnut gelding, competing out of the Oldtown Hill Stables, Newberryport, Mass., and owned by **Mrs. Florence Dibble**, won the Hancock Cup on Saturday in Class 23—champion five-gaited horse of the show open to winners of first and second prizes in previous classes. First prize included a ribbon, \$20 and the silver cup donated by **Mr. and Mrs. F. Woodson Hancock**, owners of Sunwood Farm in Valley Forge. The Hancocks, former residents of Wyomissing, participated in horse shows throughout the region and were patrons to the equine world. Their horse **Bond Street**, a bay gelding, was so dominant in the hunter class that a trophy, the Bond Street Challenge Cup, was named to honor the horse at the 1940 Reading Horse Show.

Prancing proud. Here's how Reedy saw Flowing Gold's performance on Saturday: "The rangy gelding won the championship of the five-gaited horse class and also the combined harness and saddle championship of the show. Under the guidance of rider **Tom Beauford**, the Oldtown horse drew the most applause as it walked, trotted, cantered and paced with its proud head ached and hooves prancing as though enjoying the admiring gazes."

Horse Gait. Flowing Gold competed in the five- and three-gaited events. A gait is defined as a sequence of foot movements by which a horse moves forward. A five-gaited horse can move in five different styles, such as walk, trot, canter, slow gait and rack.

Reedy also reported that Mr. Hancock took a spill in a jumping event when his horse, War Paint, failed to clear one of the bars. No damage to horse or rider was done.

Mrs. Dibble entered Flowing Gold in the 1931 and 1932 RCC horse shows with great success as the champion captured blue ribbons in multiple classes.

In 1935, the Reading Horse Show, under sponsorship of the Junior League of Reading, moved to the Old Mill Farm, Shillington Road, Wyomissing, a property owned by **Samuel R. Fry**.



Flowing Gold won the Hancock Cup as Champion 5 Gaited Horse in the 1930 RCC Horse Show. When last seen, the cup resided in a Dallas antique shop.



Those who heeded this May 20, 1930, Reading Eagle advert witnessed two days of outstanding horsemanship. Horsemanship, too.



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Why was the horse Flowing Gold so named? People aren't talking and the horse ain't neighing.



Movie promotion excess was in full flight in 1924. The poster above and the ad to the right tied the Teapot Dome scandal to the movie, Flowing Gold. Oily, yes it is.

The ad to the right appeared in the Pittsburgh Press, February 29, 1924.

Retired champion. Flowing Gold, one of the most celebrated show horses of the era, was winning championships as early as 1926. In July 1931, Flowing Gold won the Grand National Saddle Horse championship of the United States. Mrs. Dibble retired the horse from the show ring in November 1932 after a winning performance at the Royal Winter Fair in Toronto.

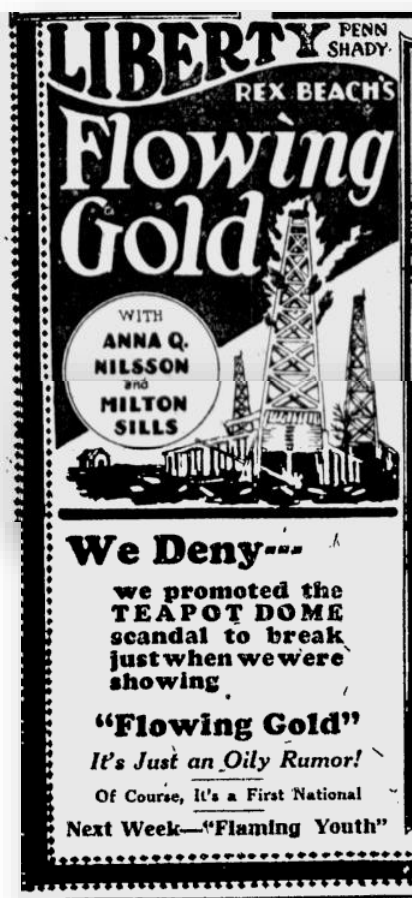
The name Flowing Gold in itself is interesting. Although no attribution was found, the term flowing gold may refer to oil. The silent film *Flowing Gold* was released in 1924. The film, based on a 1922 novel of the same name by Rex Beach, an American novelist, playwright and Olympic water polo player (St. Louis, 1904, silver medal), is a melodrama set in the East Texas oil fields. A second *Flowing Gold* movie (see the promotional poster to the left), released in 1940, claimed inspiration from the book was not faithful to the story line.

Scandal and excess. The 1924 movie was released at the time of the Teapot Dome scandal. Teapot Dome had it all: money, rapacious oil barons and crooked politicians; under-the-table payoffs; murder, suicide, and blackmail; and the excesses of the Jazz Age.

President **Warren G. Harding** and his so-called "oil cabinet" made it possible for the oilmen to secure vast oil reserves that had been set aside for use by the U.S. Navy. In exchange, the oilmen paid off senior government officials, bribed newspaper publishers, and covered the GOP campaign debt. It was the most serious scandal in the country's history prior to the Watergate affair of the Nixon administration in the 1970s.

What's the connection? Movie studios, then and now, aren't about to miss a promotional opportunity when it falls from the sky. They connected the oil of Teapot Dome to the oil in Flowing Gold for an ad campaign worthy of our era.

Was the horse named after the book? Or the movie? I'd like to think so.



Unstoppable. Now that we've traveled this far afield, let's keep drifting.

Mrs. Dibble, Flowing Gold's owner, was a tireless patron of all things equestrian.

In 1936, she set out to break the record for driving a coach-and-four from New York City to Atlantic City, a distance of 118 miles. She wanted to prove a point, that the trotting horses of her day were more suited to pulling a coach that were previous generations of horses. She was determined to beat the time turned in by Paul Sorg, inheritor of his father's tobacco fortune, who in 1910 made the trek in 12 hours and 18 minutes.

Mrs. Dibble put her 13 horses and 50,000 of her own dollars where he mouth was. She left New York from the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel on May 12 and easily eclipsed Mr. Sorg's time. She arrived at the Municipal Auditorium, where the Atlantic City horse show was in progress, in 10 hours, 4 minutes and 33 seconds. This is rolling-wheels time; it excludes stops.



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Mrs. Florence Dibble is shown with one of her horses in this photo from 1936.

Making good time. Gustavus Town Kirby served as the official timer, carrying six watches. Mr. Kirby, a Philadelphia-born lawyer, was the president of the Amateur Athletic Union from 1911 to 1913 and a member of the United States Olympic Committee from 1896 to 1956.

Mrs. Dibble drove the same coach she brought to the RCC horse shows. **Tom Reedy**, *Reading Eagle* sports writer, described the coach as "...a high, top-heavy thing, but quite authentic...Rumbling around the ring at the Reading Country Club it looked perfectly well." The cream- and red-colored coach, known as Valiant, was built in France for William Tiffany, of the jewelry Tiffanys. Mrs. Dibble purchased the coach from John McEtee Bowman, the Canadian founder of the Biltmore hotels who also built the Westchester Country Club, Rye, N.Y.

Well rested. Lest you think the trip may have been overly taxing for the horses, the teams were rotated after 20 miles. The horses not in harness were transported by a van and allowed to rest. Mrs. Dibble also rested, as the driving was shared between her and three expert coachmen.

Mrs. Dibble employed the service of 13 horses for her trip compared to the 64 used by Mr. Sorg in 1910. Newspaper accounts reported that Mrs. Dibble and Mr. Sorg traveled the same route, but the route was not described except that they exited New York through the Holland Tunnel to New Jersey. From there, they most likely hoofed it down Route 9.



On May 12, 1936, Mrs. Dibble and her teams – two- and four-legged – departed New York City by coach for their record-setting jaunt to Atlantic City. This same coach appeared at the RCC horse show in the 1930s.

Fully afar. And now that we've gone fully off the rails, let's go just a little further afar.

The 1932 RCC horse show featured a booth staffed by members of the Berks County Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform. The members were on-site to rally support to their cause. The date of the show, May 18, coincided with national repeal week. The booth was decorated with posters that were used on billboards in the city and county.

The organization was founded in 1929 to "...rescue America's families and communities from the ravages of ten years of alcohol prohibition. These women had been instrumental in bringing about alcohol prohibition, yet once they saw the damage this was having on their homes, families and communities, they united to bring about an end to this failed and unconstitutional legislation."

The description comes from the WONPR's [web site](#), and yes, the organization still exists, albeit as a one-page entry on the www. In 2006, it refocused its mission to counteract what WONPR sees as the failures of the "War on Drugs."

It's like déjà vu all over again but without the horses.