

Gypsies Pferdehändler – Horse Traders

In the early part of the century, wandering groups of people known locally as gypsies or horse jockeys camped on land northwest of town including the area of our trail and neighboring farms. Imagine the sounds of horses neighing and possibly joyous singing of the campers.

Various groups of Gypsies from different ethnic backgrounds roamed through the country. Some were thought to have had their origin in India as early as 1300 AD. They wandered in Iran, Syria, Egypt, and North Africa and later throughout Europe and then to America. Some spoke a language based on ancient Sanskrit and carefully followed their ancient customs, while others spoke the languages of the places where they lived. Internet resources indicate that the Romnichels, who were of English origin, were the ones commonly associated with horse trading at a time when American farmers relied mainly on draft horses to do their work. Gypsies have been associated with music, dancing, colorful clothing, metal work, rustic furniture, and used cars.

The local paper and Eleonore Kuse's diary made references to their activities.

The Star News in 1893 shared the following information:

"There is a camp of supposed Gypsies on the road between Carsten's farm and the fair grounds. For several days strange men were noticed about town; one a knife grinder with a wagon, another a horse trader, etc. but who they were or where they came from was hidden in darkness. It now transpires that they are camped at the place indicated and are thriftily attempting to turn a few honest pennies by plying their trades. To-morrow would be a good day to walk out that way, and have your fortune told."

The Star News in 1907 recounted the story of a Medford boy who claimed to have been kidnapped by gypsies. Then in 1911, they reported gypsy women telling fortunes and the problems caused by gypsies.

August 4, 1911:

"Four gypsy women dressed in all colors of the rainbow except those usually worn by women of this locality tried to tell fortunes here Wednesday but as the humbug is getting old it didn't take them long to canvas the businessmen."

August 11, 1911:

"Many places do not allow such outfits, as the gypsies who canvassed our city last week, to spend any more time in their limits than is necessary for them to get out. They are dirty outfits as a rule and this was no exception. One man gave one of the women a five dollar bill to pay a twenty five cent "fortune telling" bill and found it a difficult matter to get it back. That was just one of a number of similar cases. Why not instruct officers to notify such parties to pass on, and without any unnecessary delay."

When Hildegard Kuse was about four years old, Gypsies camped in the woods to the east of the house (Near Bench 9). At that time, the Billings family owned the land. They came to get water at the Kuse's well. Papa (Walter Kuse) was in the hospital after an appendectomy and Mama was afraid that they would know that he was not at home. When one of the men asked how the mister was, she knew they were aware of his absence and was even more afraid.

Grandma's (Eleonore Kuse's) diary entry states the following for June 17, 1932:

"Juni 17 Gorman und Schirlack Pferdehändler ziehen fort aus Billings Busch. Gorman waren die alten und Schirlack die Tochter". (People named Gorman with a daughter named Schirlack moved out of Billings' woods. They were horse traders.) This would seem to indicate that they actually camped on the land that is now the east part of the Kuse farm.

On September 22, 1937, Grandma wrote the following:
"Pferdehändler sind zum 2ten mal diesen Sommer hier Attwell, bis 4 Juli waren sie das erste mal hier Drüben auf Harris Yard." (The horse traders were here for the second time this summer. People named Attwell were here till July 4th on the Harris yard.)

In 1938, the Gypsies returned again and camped on the Harris land on the hill where the Brooks family lives in 2012.

Grandma's diary states:

"Juni 1938 24ten Pferde Händler bei Harris Morgens
Juli 4 ich verkaufte Gemiese an Pferdehändler Gormann
Juli 4 Pferdehändler klein Mary pflickte u war schenkten ihr 2 Quart Erdbeeren
Juli 12 Pferdehändlers Hatzvell sie meinen sich v Attwell und Gormans sind noch hier bei Harris oder Wagners"

(On June 24th they were on the Harris land in the morning. On July 4th I sold vegetables to a horse trader named Gormann. Little Mary picked strawberries and I gave her two quarts of berries. On July 12th horse traders by the names of Hatzvell, Attwell and Gormans were still on the Harris or then Wagner land.)

Hildegard remembers that a little horse jockey girl picked strawberries with her in the patch where our front lawn is now. Probably that was the girl referred to as Mary in Grandma's diary. She was wearing a bracelet that one of the neighbor's children living in the Harris house claimed had been stolen from her. Mary told Hildegard that she had purchased the bracelet and even had a receipt to prove it. Hildegard did not know which person to believe.

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