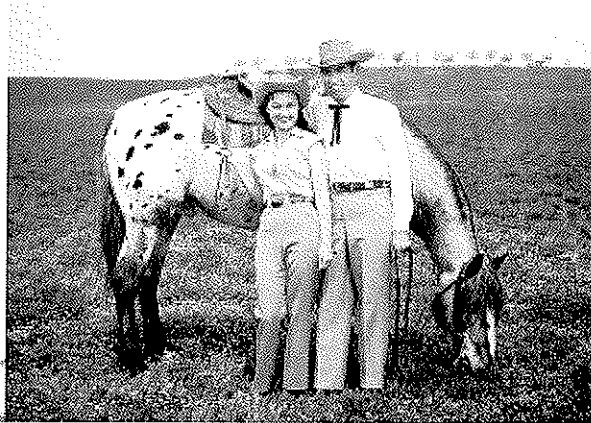


Last ride for 'Mr.Appaloosa'

George Hatley, a fervent advocate for spotted horse breed, dies at 87

Tribune/Steve
Hanks



**Last ride
for
'Mr.Appaloosa'**

George Hatley
poses for a
photograph in
front of the
Appaloosa

Museum in Moscow on Feb. 2, 1995.

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[Last ride for 'Mr.Appaloosa'](#) By David Johnson of the Tribune The Lewiston Tribune |
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MOSCOW - George B. Hatley, known worldwide as "Mr. Appaloosa," was remembered here Tuesday for his tireless promotion of the spotted horse breed.

He was also remembered for his dedication to the Appaloosa Horse Club and Museum, his compassion as a friend to many and his tenacious love of life.

"We were married 64 years. And you know, we worked together all of our lives," Hatley's widow, Iola Hatley, said at the couple's home. "George was really a famous person, but he never cared about things like that. He was humble. He was just a guy who enjoyed people."

George Hatley died Friday at the age of 87.

Hatley took the reins in 1947 of what is today an Appaloosa Horse Club headquartered here with an international membership.

Armed with a bachelor's degree from the University of Idaho in animal husbandry, an innate love of horses and a wife "who could type," Hatley hand-wrote extensively about the Appaloosa and became known as the foremost authority on the breed and its history.

"He meant almost everything to the club. For 30 years, while he was executive secretary, he established so many of the great programs and traditions that we still take advantage of today," said Steve Taylor, the club's current executive officer. "But even more than that, he had such a love for the breed and the people, and he worked so hard to make sure that was contagious."

A memorial service is planned at the University of Idaho and details will be made public later this week. Burial of ashes will be at the Hatley Cemetery south of Pullman.

Julie Thorson, editor and associate publisher of Horse & Rider magazine and a long-time Hatley family friend, said Hatley left a hand-written epitaph for his grave that reads: "He has returned to the hills he loved as a boy and will be a part of them forever."

Thorson, of Moscow and a UI journalism graduate, said Hatley gave her her first job with the horse club's magazine. "There's a reason why he was known throughout the world in the Appaloosa community as Mr. Appaloosa," said Thorson, describing Hatley as the architect of what evolved into the modern club. "He's been a legend for decades. His name and Appaloosa were basically synonymous, which is why he came to earn the colloquial title."

King Rockhill of Harvard, a retired clergyman and member of the horse club who'll officiate at the memorial service, said the late Claude Thompson, founder of the Appaloosa Horse Club in Oregon, recognized Hatley as the man to take the club beyond its humble beginnings.

"George had a special dream about a horse," Rockhill said. "And he was able to communicate that, and share it with an incredible number of others."

Iola Hatley said her husband suffered a recent stroke, after having two earlier strokes, and didn't recover this time. She recalled a recent conversation with George when the two were watching a cable television news show that featured squabbling political pundits.

"He looked over at me and said, 'Isn't it wonderful that we've lived all this time together and we still really like each other.'"

George Hatley, who was executive secretary of the Appaloosa Horse Club for 31 years, started the club's magazine, "Appaloosa News," which now called the Appaloosa Journal. He published its first studbooks, organized the first National Appaloosa Shows in Lewiston in 1948 and 1949, and started the Appaloosa Museum. He wrote scores of articles and several books, including "Pioneer, the Life and Times of Riley B. Hatley," "Riding the Nez Perce War Trail Twice," and "Horse Camping," a classic now in its third printing.

Iola Hatley remembered they were married just one year when George went against advice from her and others who said the club was too small to have a national show. But 65 horses competed in the 1947 Lewiston event and afterwards she and George were so exhausted they fell asleep with their boots on and didn't wake until morning.

"George was always willing to try something new and different, if it was going to help the breed," Taylor said. "That's another part of his legacy, that he helped spread the gospel for Appaloosas worldwide." Taylor also lauded Hatley for his dogged determination to make the Appaloosa Museum a place where the horse's legacy would live beyond him.

"And he was really instrumental in making the trail program popular with members," Taylor said. "The biggest example is the Chief Joseph Trail Ride that we do. He was in on it from the very beginning."

Hatley also weathered disconcerting times. Hatley himself was targeted in the 1990s by club executives who wanted him out. But the rank-and-file membership rallied behind Mr. Appaloosa.

"He was always revered by the Appaloosa public," Thorson said. "He was also a role model about how to move on from something that was very destructive in your life at one point."

Hatley was the recipient of many awards and honors that included election to the University of Idaho Alumni Hall of Fame. He also received a UI College of Agriculture outstanding alumnus award and was afforded a place in the Washington State University Lariat Club Hall of Fame. The Nez Perce Tribe also recognized Hatley for his dedication to the tribe's traditional war horse.

Iola Hatley said her husband was a gentle soul with "horseman's hands" that joined ranks with his words to communicate in his signature soft manner. After his last stroke, she said she noticed his hands were failing and she knew it was time to prepare.

"George had beautiful hands. And he would use his hands to demonstrate a lot," Iola Hatley recalled. "But in the last few days he couldn't use his left hand. And so, he died in his sleep."