



## THE J. H. Ryan Family Story

Ryana, Northridge Farms and Lindley Ridge Ranches

### NORTHRIDGE FARMS TIMELINE

*Originally Marwyck Ranch*

1943 -1961

Excerpts and quotes have been taken from articles provided by Lexington, Kentucky's Keeneland Library, the Blood Horse and California Thoroughbred Breeders Association's digests and reference materials: The Thoroughbred (July '41-July '45), The Thoroughbred of California (August '45 - December '96) and California Thoroughbred (January '97 - present).

#### **Background**

**1937 - 1943** Marwyck Ranch operates in Northridge California, 120 acres, "*cost of land and improvements, aside from Marx and Stanwyck homes, is \$185,000.*"

(November)

Marwyck Ranch was a premier Thoroughbred breeding farm owned and operated by The Devonshire Company comprised of Barbara Stanwyck, Marion and Zeppo Marx and Harry S. Hart of Swing Along Stud Farm. Harry was a well known Kentucky horse trainer and inventor of the Fleet Foot horseshoe.

Harry S. Hart and Mrs. Hart, according to the San Fernando City Directory for 1939-40, resided in the ranch manager's house at 10127 Reseda Boulevard between the existing LeMarsh and Mayerling Streets. That Marwyck Ranch house was apparently located near the ranch entrance on Reseda and is still being researched.

**1941** The Barbara Stanwyck residence, 18650 Devonshire, on 9.5 acres was sold to actor Jack Oakie. Stanwyck's portions of the Marwyck Ranch ownership shares were sold to Zeppo Marx.

#### **The J.H. and Annette Ryan Story**

**1930-1953/4** **Mr. John H. Ryan, J.H. as he preferred to be called, was a successful Seattle businessman who loved Thoroughbred horses. This is their story.**

Mr. Ryan owned a national music school, the National Institute of Music Art, which operated in 13 western states and western provinces of Canada. A second music school, the Institute of Educational Music, located in Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas was also owned and operated by the Ryan's. The Institutes were comprised of many thousands of grade school music students. The schools had main offices in Seattle, Los Angeles and Dallas - all connected by Western Union and Teletype. All music instruments were owned by the school and loaned to students. With WW II approaching, Ryan filled west coast warehouses with clarinets, trumpets, and violins purchased in Germany, Italy and Czechoslovakia. The Ryan's also owned and managed real estate holdings in the Western United States: Texas, Arizona, and California. Mr. Ryan began purchasing Thoroughbreds for breeding in the mid 1930's.

(April 1959 The Blood Horse)

**1938** J.H. Ryan, a Mississippi native, purchases 40 acres for his private Thoroughbred breeding stock, plus citrus trees, and poultry. He names it Ryana Ranch. The ranch was located in Northridge on Balboa Blvd. between the existing Lassen and Plummer Streets. Douglas Pregelant was the farm manager who resided on the property.

*"It's ladies day every day at Ryana Ranch. There isn't a male on the grounds."*

(Dec. 1950 Thoroughbred of California)

J.H. purchases two Thoroughbred yearlings, Miguel and Pocket of Gold for his two young children, Rosemary and Robert.

**1941** *(Stanwyck sells house to Jack Oakie and her shares of Marwyck to Zeppo)*

**1940 & 50's** Sunday Bar B Q gatherings were often held at Ryana Ranch that was shady and rustic with large picnic tables. Because there were no kitchen facilities all food and coolers were brought in to the ranch. A wide variety of Thoroughbred racing enthusiasts, owners and breeders frequently socialized at the ranch. Sunday was a day to socialize because the southern California racetracks were closed on Sundays.

**1941-1945** Thoroughbred racing on the West Coast goes dark due to WW II after the program at Tanforan on December 6, 1941, until the Santa Anita program on May 14, 1945. The best of Thoroughbreds are transported by train to race in Chicago and the East coast.

1942 "Ten horses of various owners are now training at Marwyck Ranch under the supervision of Harry S. Hart with an additional 13 in training at Caliente."  
(July)

### Marwyck Ranch becomes Northridge Farms

1943 J.H. Ryan, Annette Ryan and Mary Strnad are principals in the purchase of the 120 acre Marwyck Ranch from Zeppo Marx. They rename it **Northridge Farms**. The Ryan's first ranch, Ryana is located on the NE corner of Plummer Street and Balboa Blvd only a short distance from the newly acquired Northridge Farms. Lindley Ridge farm is leased from orchestra leader Ted Fio Rito. All three ranches are located within three miles of each other.

(Sept. 1947 *Thoroughbred of California*)

As part of the WW II effort over 40 acres of Marwyck have been planted with crops of tomatoes, corn, squash and melons.  
(July)

Thirty-six broodmares reside at Ryana with other private racing stock. (November)

**Style Prince** is foaled at Northridge Farms also **Free Fault**. (Nov. *The Blood Horse*)

1944 Harry S. Hart continues as barn manager at Northridge Farms until Ray Wilgus assumes that position. Hart, Wilgus and Pollock are credited for development of the stallion War Knight winner of the Arlington Handicap in 1945.

1945 "J. H. Ryan ranked fifth in the standings for California breeders. A remarkable progress."  
(May 1956)

1945/6 Harry S. Hart joins the Louis B. Mayer Stock Farm operation in Perris, California.

Ryan **combines** his three ranches: Ryana, Northridge Farms and the leased Lindley Ridge to operate as one breeding and training business in Northridge but each with a specific purpose. A total of 200 stalls exist between the three ranches; 100 at Northridge Farms, 20 at Lindley Ridge and 50 at Ryana. J.H., his wife Annette and Ms. Mary Strnad continue managing the business from their Beverly Hills residence.  
(November)

**Style Prince**, owned by Miss Rosemary Ryan, wins First Race on Santa Anita Derby Day beating Louis B Mayer's filly, Honeymoon.  
(June)

1946 Jacques Cartier becomes Northridge Farms manager – ranch housed 107 Thoroughbreds. Northridge Farms advertised as the "Cradle of Champions."

**War Knight** is foaled, broken and trained at Northridge Farms.  
(March)

The full-length movie, "*My Brother Who Talked to Horses*", is completed at Northridge Farms. "*Thoroughbred nursery will continue to resemble a studio lot for some time to come.*" (June)

Dah-He stands at Northridge Farms. (October)

**1948** Northridge Farms hosts the **Parade of Stallions**: "*200 or more horse enthusiasts, including many of the most important breeders and racing stable owners gathered for a breeding center inauguration and planned annual event. A circus tent outfitted for refreshments, like a field canteen with a bar, hors d'oeuvres and piano. Dinner buffet followed after eight stallions of the 1948 season at Northridge were led out and paraded up and down the crowd while announcer Ted Williams gave a running description of each horse's feats, blood lines, breeding record or potential. The studs, bedecked in ribbons and groomed to the **n-th** degree alternately posed and pirouetted for the audience.*" (January)

**1949** "*The most fortunate possessor of **Alibhai** blood in California, or anywhere, other than Louis B. Mayer – who is selling out - is J.H. Ryan.*" (May)

Ryan has forty broodmares in his breeding paddocks.

**1950** Apple Valley a homebred by Eiffel Tower out of Blue Alibi was foaled February 19, 1950. He made his debut in Annette Ryan's silks at Tranforan on May 6, 1953 with Billy Shoemaker aboard and "Red" Mc Daniel trainer. Apple Valley won the Santa Anita Maturity on Jan. 30, 1954. He was retired to stud at Northridge Farms where he stood for two seasons. (Jan. 2014)

Mary Strnad's **Call Bell** is winner of California Breeders Champion Stakes. (Dec.)

**1951** **Call Bell** joins Northridge Farms studs. Ryan has 45 horses training at Northridge Farms with 35 yearlings.

**1952** The original Zeppo Marx residence, a Connecticut Country style home on 11 acres, at 18600 Devonshire Street, is purchased by the Ryan's from Adrian and Janet Gaynor as their ranch home. The 7200 sq. ft. main house and the guesthouse are remodeled. A window filled kitchen is added allowing the Ryan's to view the farms broodmares and foals while in their paddocks and pastures. The purchase of the 11 acre property extended Northridge Farms to the SW corner of Reseda Blvd. and Devonshire Street.

1953

Flavio Lomax assumes position of Northridge Farms manager with eleven stallions standing: The "boss man" - **Reading II** also **Call Bell, Mafosta, Pedigree, Karimkhan, Biscailuz, High Jip, Phar Rong, Esprit de France, Master Gunner, and Bullfighter**. Bullfighter was owned by Mrs. Annette Ryan. (Aug. p. 153)

*"Northridge Farms seems to have more horses per acre than any breeding farm we can think of at this time."* (Aug. p. 450)

**Good Excuse** was grand race mare of Ryan's. (August)

Northridge Farms is upgraded and expanded.

1954

The Ryan family and Mary Strnad move from Beverly Hills into Northridge Farms ranch residence on Devonshire Street.

Northridge Farms has the largest collection of stallions in the state. (March)

*"Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Ryan and Miss Mary M. Strnad of the progressive and well organized Northridge Farms have the handling of their yearling on a workable basis. They do much of the breaking and schooling of the babies on the farm's six-furlong training track and send to the track only the most advanced pupils and then interchange, using the same stall. The Santa Anita racing department acknowledges the helpful cooperation. Some of Mrs. Annette Ryan's yearlings that have been showing well on Santa Anita's new Anita Chiquita training track are: **Reading II** colts out of **Good Excuse, Ste. Louise, Blue Lea** and a chestnut filly out of **Golden Touch**. Miss Strnad has some promising prospects from her good stud, **Call Bell**."* (Dec. Thoroughbred of California)

1955

Fred Johnston takes over Lindley Ridge Farm from Mrs. Ted Fio Rito.

*"Probably more movies with horse backgrounds have been made at Northridge Farms than any other farm in the world."*

*"The hustling Harry S. Hart has been buzzing elsewhere in southern California for a long time, but the storerooms are still loaded. The horses at Northridge Farms still get everything."*

*"The water bill at Northridge is about \$1,000 a month," said J.H. Ryan. (October)*

1956

**J.H. Ryan's Northridge Farms Dispersal Sale Announced**

*"The philosophy, the policies and the operations of Ryan in the horse business may be traced and understood by any stranger able to look at the record. He built up a model breeding and boarding establishment that was able successfully to cater to and satisfy some remarkable temperaments through the years. His operation was always first class in every respect."*

*"This is an impressive testimonial to the contribution John Ryan has made to the sport of his choosing. He has added prestige and dignity and qualities not easily defined in racing and breeding. There is something else, however, that needs to be mentioned, John Ryan was the absolute leader in a phase of our sporting industries that seldom receives adequate attention. That is in the field of public relations. I would be impossible to estimate the good he has done in this direction."*

*"Northridge Farms is always open to the public. Uncounted numbers of people received their first impressions of our sport from early visits to the San Fernando farm where they were always welcomed with courtesy and consideration."*  
(May)

June 25,  
1956

### **Results of Ryan Dispersal Sale at Northridge Farms by J.H. Ryan and Associates**

Mr. J. H. Ryan, Mrs. Annette W. Ryan, Ms. Rosemary Ryan Jordan and Miss Mary M. Strnad sold 95 horses with a gross of \$388,700. The sale was conducted by Fasig-Tipton Company. Buyers included: Travis Kerr, Charles Turner, L. C. Howard, W.R. Johnson, Tom Ross, William Helm, Lin Howard, El See Stables, Tom Ross, and Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. The top of the sales, a 14 yr. old broodmare, Blue Alibi dam of Blue Reading and Apple Valley. Travis Kerr, owner of Kentucky Derby winner Round Table, paid \$24,000 for her

*"Mrs. Annette Ryan, one of the co signors, is the gracious hostess at Northridge Farms. She is a flower of Southern culture that makes an art of hospitable entertaining. A close second is Mary Strnad who knows more about the horses of Northridge Farms and Ryana Ranch than any other single individual barring perhaps, Flavio Lomax, ranch manager."*

Northridge Farms continued to operate as a commercial Thoroughbred breeding facility under the capable direction of Flavio Lomax, its long time manager, providing every service and all facilities to the Thoroughbred breeders of California.

1957

J.H. Ryan announces a "face lift" of Northridge Farms barns and fences – extensive repairs and several thousand gallons of paint were added to generate an attractive appearance. Ryan states, "Lack of proper help has

*been the major contributor to the delay."*

*(April)*

*"We are proud of the fact that we hold the record in the West for having foaled, bred, broken and trained more winners than any other ranch operated for public patronage", said J.H. Ryan.*

*Stud fees at Northridge Farms range from \$500. - \$1,000.00. Ryan's knowledge of all phases of the breeding farm is thorough and deep. "He keeps in touch with details in a battery powered vehicle – like a golf cart for farm travel. The vehicle is a quick starter and Ryan likes quick starters."*

*(Nov.The Blood Horse)*

**1959**

**"The Blood Horse" Digest Interview of Miss Mary Strnad**

Miss Mary S. Strnad entered into the Thoroughbred horse business about the same time the Ryan's began acquiring horses. Born in Seattle, Mary attended business school then helped her father with his tailoring business. J.H. Ryan and Annette owned the National Institute of Music and Art which was a chain of music stores. "In 1931, I was recommended for the position of assistant to Mrs. A. Ryan who was over the dean and supervisors in the administration end. I lived with them ever since." Mary eventually became secretary and treasurer and served in the same position in a real estate operation owned by the Ryan's in California, Arizona and Texas. "Got out of that business several years ago." "Here at Northridge Farms I'm in charge of registration of all foals and breeding agreements and supervise the manager's office amongst other things".

*(April The Blood Horse)*

"Mr. Travis Kerr sends eight weanlings, seven yearlings to Northridge Farms from Kentucky to be broken, trained and readied for the 1960 season. Weanlings will remain for the following season."

**Jan. 1960**

Mr. J.H. Ryan dies of a lengthy heart illness at age 68. Survived by wife Annette, daughter Rosemary Jordan, grand children Cheryl, Maryann and John Jordan.

*"Ryan, with his wife Annette, his daughter Mrs. Rosemary Jordon, and Miss Mary Strnad, whom he started in the Thoroughbred business, formed one of the strongest and most successful blocs in California breeding, and surely one of the most popular. "J.H." as he was known to his friends, and they were legion, was a steady patron of the races at the Southern California tracks, and his grandstand box was always a mecca for his many intimates. His popularity was attested to by the fact that the great majority of clients boarding and training hoses at Northridge had been with the Ryan's for many years. John H. Ryan will be sorely*

*missed by the Thoroughbred industry, and particularly in California where he was so well known. His kind pass this way all too seldom.*" (March)

**1960** *"It has truthfully been said that more winners of more races have been bred, raised, trained and sent to the races from Northridge Farms than from any other public boarding and breeding farm in the West. We have not heard anyone refute the statement. The fact is that these are such nice people with whom to do business. The farm has always been noted for the friendly attitude to everyone on the place from the owners down to the last stable boy."* (April)

**1961** "The breakup of Northridge Farms is announced by Mrs. Annette Ryan and Miss Mary Strnad." (March)

Annette W. Ryan and Mary Strnad move to Brentwood, California. The ranch house is sold along with the Northridge Farms acreage and all its buildings.

**1964** Harry S. Hart races Royal Eiffel in Del Mar Handicap after winning The La Jolla Mile Handicap and finished second in the Will Rogers Stakes at Hollywood Park. (LA Times Sports )

**1966** Northridge Farms, approximately 100 acres, is subdivided according to LA City zoning regulations. New homes were constructed from Le Marsh street south to Lassen Street in a subdivision named Peppertree. On Reseda Blvd. a commercial strip mall, with retail stores and a movie theatre, was built from Devonshire Street south to Le Marsh Street.

**1966** Harry S. Hart passes away at age 71 after a long colorful career in all branches of Thoroughbred racing. (April 1966 LA Daily Racing Forum)

**2013** In August, Mrs. Rosemary Ryan Montrose, age 85, was interviewed at The Oakridge Estate, the former home of Barbara Stanwyck then Jack Oakie, which was directly adjacent to her parent's Northridge Farms ranch home from 1952 - 1961.

Rosemary and her daughter Cheryl shared many fond memories of ranch life at the farm and their neighbors Jack and Victoria Oakie:

Rosemary's father's love of horses began in his youth. He purchased cavalry horses for the U. S. Army for service in WW I.

In 1938, J.H. bought Rosemary and her younger brother, Robert, their first Thoroughbreds – Miguel and Pocket of Gold.

Annette Ryan's southern Louisiana style hospitality created a very social, welcoming atmosphere for many years at the farm. Hundreds of horse owners, trainers, breeders, and racing enthusiasts were welcomed guests of the Ryan's.

The farm was such a beautiful place full of memories of the wonderful people from all walks of life and different areas of the country.

Our thanks to The Museum of the San Fernando Valley for video taping the Oral History interview of Rosemary Ryan Montrose in August of 2013. When edited the Oral History will be posted to the Friends of Oakridge website and shown to interested audiences who attend the Speakers Bureau presentations, fundraising events and public meetings.

**April 2014** Special thanks to Rudi Groothedde, Managing Editor, of the California Thoroughbred Digest, who has continued to provide information and contacts allowing us to prepare this historic Northridge Farms information. Our research is ongoing and updates will occur.

2013