**Happenin's 'Round The House**

**Horseshoes Everywhere!**

#### by Museum *Education and Volunteer Coordinator*, Rachel Barnes

A walk through the Hart Museum’s Dining Room can reveal a curious sight: 8 horseshoes mounted on shaped, stepped, wooden blocks hanging on the room’s south wall. Tarnished brass nameplates affixed to each block reveal the once proud owners of these simple shoes: Fritz, Lisbeth, Cactus, Roaney,…

We might chuckle inwardly at Bill Hart’s obvious love for his equine companions. But considering the importance of horseshoes in the health, safety, and longevity of horses themselves, it is no small wonder that Bill Hart took the time to create this “wall of shoes.”

**History of the Horseshoe**

Horseshoes in some form are almost as old as domesticated horses[[1]](#footnote-2) – and since some sources report that horses were domesticated as early as 5,000 years ago[[2]](#footnote-3) – these early horses were wearing “shoes” before their human companions! However, part of that stems from early man figuring out quickly that if he wanted to make the most of his new equine counterpart, he would need to protect their fragile hooves from the hazards of long work hours and countless miles of travel.

The earliest horseshoes appear to have been hide-woven “booties” that slipped over the hooves, and the Ancient Romans used a sandal they called “hipposandals,” that were attached to the hoof and leg with leather straps.[[3]](#footnote-4) The colder, wetter, and thus more slippery ground of northern Europe, however, prompted new innovations in horseshoe-ry: by 600AD, we’re seeing the proliferation of metal shoes affixed to horses’ hooves with nails, and by 1300AD, iron horseshoes were manufactured en masse across Europe.

At the same time, horseshoes started to occupy a more prominent role in culture and society. Rachel Cohen writes, “the horseshoe was such a popular invention that it inspired European folktales …[in one tale,] St. Eligius, a real-life goldsmith, remedied a horse’s ails after removing its leg, shoeing the hoof, and replacing the limb. He later became the patron saint of farriers.”[[4]](#footnote-5) The Germans understood the crucial nature of the horseshoe, as evidenced in their saying: “‘a nail preserves a country,’ for the nail keeps [the horseshoe in place], the shoe protects the foot of the horse, the horse carries the knight, the knight holds the castle, and the castle defends the land.”[[5]](#footnote-6) Horseshoes were so valued, they even became an acceptable way to pay taxes – especially during the Crusades when the shoes were then used on the fearless steeds that carried the armies into the Holy Land.

By the American Civil War, we have machines that manufacture horseshoes, and today, a formal profession dedicated to the shoeing of horses – farriery – complete with its own professional organization, the American Farrier’s Association.[[6]](#footnote-7)

**The Hart Horseshoes**

Bill Hart, the avid horse-lover he was, would have understood the importance of the horseshoe in horse health. And maybe that is why the Mansion’s Dining Room now has a wall of shoes. Or maybe they are there simply as a tribute to horses he so loved. Either way, Fritz, the pinto horse co-star and favorite of the steeds is represented: his shoe is mounted in a block shaped like a heart and occupies the top row of the shoes, no less.

Then there is Cactus Kate – a beautiful mare originally used for bucking scenes. In fact, according to Hart, she was considered an “outlaw” because she “had no value outside of this [bucking] work.”[[7]](#footnote-8) Hart purchased “Kate” from her cowboy owner when he discovered that Fritz had formed a tight attachment to her during his initial “retirement” from the movies (between 1917 and 1920),[[8]](#footnote-9) and later brought her to film sets to keep the temperamental Fritz happy.

Lisbeth, whose shoe features extra knobs at the heels, was a giant mule Hart met while filming the 1919 flick, *Wagon Tracks*. She won our cowboy movie star’s heart when she decided to muscle her way into a scene in the movie … that she was not scripted to appear in! Hart couldn’t resist her spunk, and Lisbeth “came under the pinto pony regime.”[[9]](#footnote-10)

The “pinto pony regime” was Hart’s name for what the Museum staff and volunteers jokingly call “Fritz’s girlfriends” or “Fritz’s entourage.” Cactus Kate and Lisbeth both traveled with their famous companion to film locations, and, as previously mentioned, Kate was often brought out on set to calm a sometimes-harried Fritz down. One day, while filming the 1921 flick, *Travelin’ On*, the crew were shooting a particularly difficult scene that featured Fritz inside a barn with a monkey. Poor Fritz. He refused to perform. So Kate was brought out on set, and suddenly things went well. The scene was captured, and all were happy. All except poor Lisbeth, who had been left behind in the corral. Hart reports that while filming, the crew suddenly heard a terrible wailing and screaming, and a few moments later, a wild-eyed Lisbeth barreled onto the set, chest scratched and bleeding from where she had stormed through the corral fence. The giant mule had stampeded through a mile of traffic to reach her beloved companions, and from then on, both ladies were brought to set when Fritz needed some soothing influences.

All 3 horses lived long, healthy lives on the Horseshoe Ranch, as well as the other horses represented on the wall of shoes. So, if you have not yet had a chance to see Hart’s own monument to his beloved equine companions, be sure to stop by sometime soon for a visit!

1. Cohen, Rachel. (February 1996). “The History of Horseshoes.” *Dressage Today*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. *The Horse*. Exhibition staged by the American Museum of Natural History. May 17, 2008 – January 4, 2009.

   Mitchum, Petrine Day and Audrey Pavia. (n.d.). *Hollywood Hoofbeats: Trails Blazed Across the Silver Screen*. BowTie Press : Irvine, CA. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Cohen, Rachel (ibid).

   Bellis, Mary. (n.d.). “Horseshoes, Nails, Saddles, and Riding.” *Inventors About.com*.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Cohen, Rachel (ibid). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Ryan, Tom. (n.d.). “History of a Farrier.” *Hony’s Web Stable*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Visit the American Farrier’s Association website for more information: [http://americanfarriers.org](http://americanfarriers.org/). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Hart, William S. (1929). *My Life East and West*. Houghton Mifflin : Boston. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Hart, William S. (ibid). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Hart, William S. (ibid) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)