

John S. Rarey and Cruiser

John Solomon Rarey was born December 6, 1827 in the brick tavern that had replaced his father Adam's original structure. At a young age, John exhibited a talent for horsemanship. People from throughout the area brought their unruly horses to John to be trained. Horses were of great importance in the nineteenth century as a major mode of transportation and beasts of burden on the farm. A person with a talent for taming and training horses was quite valuable. Adam gave John his first horse when he was twelve. At age 25, John had written his first book on horse training, *The Modern Art of Training Horses*, and had given many lessons. Endeavoring to learn all he could about horse training, the young Rarey traveled to Georgetown, Kentucky, to study with Denton Offut, a renowned horse trainer in his own right. From Offut, Rarey blended his own humane methods of kindness, firmness and patience with traditional Arab methods.

In 1855, Rarey traveled to Texas and began his career as a horse trainer working with wild plains horses. While successful at his craft he was not so successful financially and returned to central Ohio to better his prospects. In 1856, he held his first major public exhibition of his methods at the Ohio Stage Yards in Columbus. There he was given the task of breaking two rather surly and belligerent horses. Rarey astounded the crowd by taming one horse in 20 minutes and the second in 15 minutes. Soon after this exhibition he began to teach others how to train horses and published a lesson manual to raise funds for a trip to England.

Rarey arrived in England in 1857. His skill as a horseman garnered wide attention among British army officers. This attention eventually led to a performance for Queen Victoria. His rousing success in taming wild horses before the queen led to nearly instant international fame and fortune for Rarey. He toured widely - to France, Sweden, Germany, Russia, Norway, Egypt, Turkey, and Arabia - performing before large crowds. His unusual methods and philosophy of using kindness, firmness and patience did attract skeptics and many accused Rarey of using drugs on the animals or practicing the occult. A challenge was presented to ultimately test Rarey and his methods.

The Earl of Dorchester owned a magnificent stallion named Cruiser, sired by Venison and dammed by Little Red Rover in 1852. The Earl's horse was a large dark bay mixed with black and stood 16 hands high. At age two, Cruiser was said to have been the fastest horse in England but was too unruly to race. Cruiser was famous for his foul temper. The great stallion was vicious from the start. He would go to his knees and tear at the

ground with his teeth; he once tore an iron bar in half with his teeth. Cruiser killed two grooms during one frenzy; after that, while one groom fed the horse, others would hold the horse's chains while another stood by with a gun in case the beast got loose. Cruiser would kick and scream in his stall for ten minutes at a time. Few would go near the stallion. Kept in an enclosed brick stall with a solid oak door, Cruiser wore an eight-pound iron muzzle for three years with an iron bar in front so that he could only eat or drink by taking small licks with his tongue. Horsemen considered Cruiser unbreakable. Cruiser was the challenge the Earl of Dorchester and the English racing writer Argus had in mind for Rarey. Rarey accepted.

Upon arriving at Dorchester's estate, Rarey immediately went to Cruiser's stall. Rarey was not a large man. He stood around five feet nine inches and weighed a wiry 167 pounds. But he at first bewildered Cruiser by flinging the stall doors open and quietly standing before the stallion. After some moments of confusion, the screaming horse twice lunged at Rarey. Rarey calmly dodged the animal and approached it speaking softly. Lord Dorchester pleaded with Rarey to abandon his task and flee the stall. But Rarey deliberately worked his way to the horse all the while speaking to it in a calm, low voice. Cruiser calmed enough to allow Rarey to tie the horse's head to a rack on the wall. Cruiser became maddened by the restraint and kicked and screamed to exhaustion. Rarey moved to the weary horse and tied small straps to one leg all the while talking and stroking him. After a time, he eased Cruiser on his side and the horse calmed. To the astonishment of all present, Rarey was able to mount and ride Cruiser in three hours. The Earl of Dorchester was so impressed that he made Cruiser a gift to Rarey. Taming Cruiser sealed Rarey's international fame.

In 1861, having achieved both professional and financial success, Rarey returned to Groveport bringing Cruiser with him. In 1862, he built Cedarlawn, a 24 room mansion that incorporated the existing brick home built by his father. The cost of construction was over \$23,000. The home featured a landscaped lawn of cedar trees, shrubs and gardens. Groveport became internationally known as the home of John S. Rarey and Cedarlawn hosted many foreign visitors. In the 20th century, the mansion would become the elegant Elmont Hotel.

At the height of his success, Rarey, who had suffered a stroke in 1865, fell ill in Cleveland, Ohio and died on October 4, 1866. He was buried in the Groveport Cemetery.

In his will Rarey left instructions for the care of Cruiser. Cruiser's foul temper returned upon Rarey's death and people again gave the animal a wide berth. Cruiser died on July 4, 1875 and locally there is much speculation as to the location of his grave site. Recent documents have been discovered which indicate that Cruiser was buried on the north bank of Blacklick Creek on Fred Rarey's farm. In the 1920s, the name Cruiser became the mascot for the Groveport High School athletic teams because of the strength and spirit and his example that combining power and discipline brings success.

(Excerpted from *The Changing Village: A History of Groveport, Ohio 1847-1997* by Richard Lee Palsgrove.)