

## When the Gates Change Hands: Preserving the Legacy of Equine Farms

Bryan Fleming

In my five years working in the equine industry through both the rescue and the magazine, I've watched many longtime horse properties close their gates or change ownership.

Some were family farms that hosted generations of horse shows, clinics, trail rides, fox hunts, and community events. Others were thriving training facilities and breeding operations whose owners have retired, downsized, or simply moved on.

The question facing every new owner is simple:  
**Do you inherit the land, or do you inherit the legacy?**

For some buyers, an equine farm is simply a functional property—a place to board horses, store hay, and enjoy rural living. The show rings may grow weeds, the announcer's stand may sit silent, and the farm's history gradually fades into memory. For others, purchasing an established horse farm means becoming the next chapter in a much larger story. These owners invest in restoring arenas, reviving horse shows, welcoming the local community back, and preserving traditions that made the farm special in the first place. They understand they didn't just buy acreage and barns—they became caretakers of a reputation built over decades.

Many properties in our region have remarkably rich histories.

Take **Fox Chase Farm** along **Route 50**. I drove past it for nearly thirty years before finally attending an event there. The property's legacy stretches back to 1876 and includes connections to **Show Jumping Hall of Fame member Benny O'Meara**, championship horses, the **Washington Redskins, Secretariat's trainer, USA Today, NPR**, record-breaking rides, horse shows, and countless memories shared by thousands of equestrians.

Another recent example comes from the loss of the **Middleburg Training Center** to local horsemen. Despite months of effort by members of the equestrian community to keep the facility under local ownership, the property was ultimately sold to the **U.S. Army's famed Old Guard Caisson Detachment**.



Middleburg Training Center



Fox Chase Farm

The **Virginia Equine Alliance** worked extensively to secure a deal with owner **Chuck Kuhn**.

"This will have a significant negative impact on Virginia's thoroughbred racing and training industry," **Alliance President Debbie Easter and Executive Director Jeb Hannum** stated at the time. The loss of the facility will likely force many trainers to relocate their operations to other states. **The Middleburg Training Center's** history runs deep. Even 1979 **Triple Crown legend Spectacular Bid** spent time developing there.

Further south, **Nydrie Stud** in **Esmont**, near **Charlottesville**, sold for approximately \$5 million. The historic 585-acre thoroughbred farm produced notable racehorses including **Jet Pilot** and **Natalma** and has experienced several ownership transitions throughout its storied history. Once held by the **Van Clief** family, the property has since passed through multiple owners while continuing its equestrian traditions.

The **Horse Time** family has faced a similar situation.

During COVID, we purchased a two-barn horse property complete with an arena and two homes. The farm itself did not have a celebrated equestrian history, but it was on the verge of being sold to a quarry and bulldozed. Instead, it became the new home of the **Shenandoah Valley Equine Rescue Network**, where we continue creating our own history and firsts.

We were also fortunate to acquire equipment and supplies from **Almeda Farm** after it closed its doors following ten years of memories and accomplishments. Its new owners chose a more private future and had no plans to reopen the facility to the public.

**Neither approach is wrong.**

Property rights belong to the owner, and every farm must evolve to meet changing economic realities. Yet when a farm with a rich equestrian history is reborn as an active gathering place once again, the impact extends far beyond the fence line. Local businesses benefit, horse enthusiasts reconnect, and younger generations gain opportunities to participate in traditions that might otherwise disappear.

The most successful transitions often strike a balance between honoring the past and embracing the future. New owners bring fresh ideas, updated facilities, and modern business models while still respecting the people, horses, and memories that gave the property its identity.

Ultimately, every sale presents a choice:

**Will this farm become merely a place where horses are kept, or will it remain a place where horse history continues to be made?**

That question came to mind recently while bouncing between events from **Red Gate Farm** to the **Upperville Colt & Horse Show**. Along the way, we stopped by **Storey Tails**, where owner **Erin Storey** had reopened the gates to host the annual **Blue Ridge Hunt Horse Show**.

The property itself carries special meaning for me.

Originally part of the prestigious **Locksley Estate**, known throughout the region for dressage, it was later operated by longtime trainer and Horse Time supporter **Luci Strange**. During show season, horse trailers once lined the nearby hillsides as far as the eye could see.

I attended my first horse show there and took some of my first photographs of what would eventually become a career covering the equestrian world. Because of that, the farm holds a special place in my memories.

Today, a new chapter is being written.

For more than thirty years, **Erin Storey** has competed across multiple disciplines through **4-H, Pony Club**, and upper-level eventing, qualifying for the **USEA American Eventing Championships** on numerous occasions. She remains active with **USEF, USEA, USDF, IDEA**, and the **United States Pony Club** while also restarting off-track Thoroughbreds and helping give horses a second chance—something we know well through our work at **SVERN**.

We sat down with **Erin** to discuss what it means to become the steward of a farm with history.

When asked what first attracted her to the property, **Storey** explained that she and her husband had grown up just over the mountain in **Loudoun County** and met through **Loudoun Hunt Pony Club**.

"When we made the decision to move back to Virginia, **Clarke County** seemed like a great fit," she said.

"My husband and I operated a large boarding and training business in Idaho, and part of the move was to downsize. This beautiful farm with rolling pastures, a quality arena, and a quaint barn checked all the boxes."

Although she knew some of the property's history before purchasing it, she admits she didn't fully understand its significance until becoming part of the local horse community.

"We had been told some of the history by the previous owner," **Storey** said. "But being across the country in Idaho while making the purchase, we weren't connected to the local community and didn't know the extent of that history."

As she settled in, stories began arriving from former competitors, clients, and neighbors.

"I've had numerous people tell me about memories they have showing here for years, or that their child's first horse show was here," she said. "That's something we would like to continue."

**Storey** understands firsthand what it means when a horse facility disappears.

"As an adult now, I drive by Foxcroft and remember showing there as a kid with my husband. It's a shame that it no longer exists in that manner."

When asked what truly makes a horse farm more than just land and buildings, her answer came quickly:

"The people."

"This is beautiful country that we live in. I love looking at all the farms with blackboard fences, lush grass, rolling hills, and old stone walls. I feel a responsibility to maintain my part of that beauty."

Fortunately for the local horse community, **Storey's** plans include keeping the gates open.

"We just hosted the annual **Blue Ridge Hunt Horse Show** for the first time and hope to continue doing so for years to come," she said.

"I also teach both **Blue Ridge Hunt Pony Club** and **Casanova-Warrenton Pony Club**, along with private lessons. We'd love to host clinics and are open for haul-ins to use our arena and small cross-country course, which we plan to keep expanding."

Looking ahead twenty years, **Storey** hopes people will remember the farm not only for its facilities, but for its atmosphere.

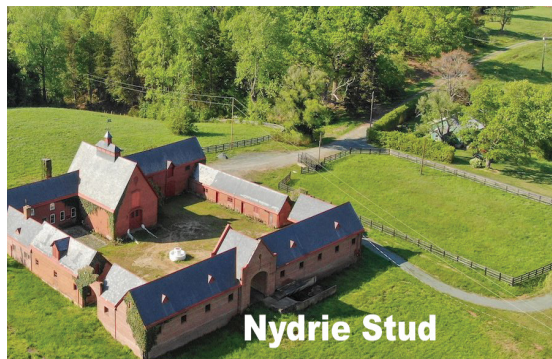
"We want to be a fun and educational place for people to come and enjoy their horse. Nothing about horses is easy. No matter the discipline or skill level, anyone who wants to enjoy horses, learn, and grow is welcome here."

And perhaps that's the answer to the question every new owner faces.

**A farm's legacy isn't preserved by the barns, arenas, or fences. It's preserved by the people willing to open the gates and invite the next generation inside.**



Storey Tails



Nydrie Stud



Erin Storey