When the Gates Change Hands: Preserving the Legacy of Nydrie Stud

The Rebirth of a Historic Virginia Horse Farm

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There are horse farms that are beautiful. There are horse farms that are historic. And then there are places where you can almost feel the horses that came before you. **Nydrie Stud** is one of those places.

Located approximately 20 minutes south of Charlottesville, among the historic farms of Esmont, **Nydrie** stretches across roughly 585 acres of rolling Virginia countryside. Fields and pastures blend into hardwood forests, while a massive brick stable dating to the late 1890s remains a powerful reminder of the property's equestrian past.

Today, **Nydrie Stud** is entering a new chapter. But its rebirth is not about erasing what came before. It is about restoring a historic horse farm, respecting the people and horses who shaped its legacy, and creating a future worthy of the land.

A FARM BUILT FOR HORSES

Nydrie's history began in the 1890s when **Harry Douglas Forsyth**, a New Orleans sugar baron and financier, purchased what was then known as **Tom Coles Farm**. He renamed the property **Nydrie** and began developing an estate modeled after a Scottish baronial property on **Loch Nydrie**. A 50-room manor was constructed and completed around 1898, with hundreds of local workers reportedly involved in the project.

The stable complex was equally ambitious. Historical descriptions identify the brick horse facilities as among the largest and most elaborate in Virginia.

The mansion eventually fell into disrepair and was demolished in the 1970s. The stable, however, survived. Its brick walls, architectural details, and surrounding acreage continue to connect the present-day farm to the generations of horses and horsemen who came before.

Nydrie was not simply built as a country residence. It was built around horses.



ENTER THE VAN CLIEFS

In the 1920s, the **Van Clief family** purchased **Nydrie** as part of a larger collection of farms in the Esmont area. Their years at the property became an important chapter in its equestrian history.

The farm was associated with hunting, horses, and Thoroughbred breeding. It also became part of the surrounding community, providing employment and creating connections with families throughout the region. The property's Thoroughbred history includes associations with some of racing's most influential names.

Jet Pilot, winner of the 1947 **Kentucky Derby**, is connected to **Nydrie**'s breeding history. **Nydrie** was also associated with **Natalma**, who became the dam of **Northern Dancer. Northern Dancer** won the 1964 **Kentucky Derby** and **Preakness Stakes** before becoming one of the most influential sires in Thoroughbred breeding.

These connections illustrate the reach of a Virginia horse farm whose influence extended well beyond its own fields and stables. **Nydrie**'s legacy was not limited to the horses that lived there. It was also reflected in the bloodlines, people, and traditions that moved outward from the property.

WHEN THE HORSES LEFT

The **Van Clief family** retained ownership of **Nydrie** until 2008. Eventually, the Thoroughbred operation wound down, and the property entered a quieter and more uncertain period. For nearly 15 years, the farm received little of the regular maintenance and management required by a property of its size. Overgrowth spread. Buildings deteriorated. Dirt, dust, and debris accumulated. The once-active property became a place where the passage of time could be seen in nearly every corner. The history remained, but the future was uncertain.

That changed when **Phoebe Weseley and David King** took on **Nydrie** in 2022, beginning the enormous task of restoring the property and returning it to use as a working horse farm. Their goal was not simply to repair an old property. It was to bring **Nydrie** back to life.



THE WOMAN BEHIND THE RESTORATION

Phoebe Weseley is no stranger to the horse world.

A knowledgeable horsewoman and successful amateur rider, she won the 2010 **Washington International Horse Show** Adult Hunter Finals with her mount, **Just Ask Me**.

Throughout her riding career, she has earned champion and reserve champion honors in Adult Hunters and High Adult Jumpers at competitions ranging from Vermont to Florida. Her experience includes the **Vermont Summer Festival, HITS Saugerties, HITS Culpeper, HITS Ocala, the Winter Equestrian Festival, Tampa Tournament of Champions, Gulf Coast Winter Classics, the Biltmore Horse Show, and the Kentucky National Horse Show**, among others.



Weseley grew up in Manhattan, attended the **Brearley School** and **Barnard College**, and graduated from **Rice University** in Houston. Before managing her own farm, she worked as a writer and editor. She has now managed her own farm for more than 20 years.

In recent years, she has focused on bringing along young horses and ponies, helping them progress toward national titles. Her riding experience and years of farm management gave her an understanding of what **Nydrie** could become.

But even with that background, the scale of the restoration would prove greater than expected.

SEEING THE POTENTIAL BENEATH THE NEGLECT

Before purchasing **Nydrie**, **Phoebe and David** knew very little about the property. They had been looking at horse properties when **Phoebe** discovered **Nydrie** in an online listing. They understood Virginia's importance to the horse industry and began visiting towns, farms, and shows throughout Central Virginia.

Eventually, they contacted **Alex Webel of Hall and Hall**, the broker who helped guide them through the purchase. And the rest, as they say, is history.

When **Phoebe** first saw **Nydrie**, the property was in poor condition. Yet beneath the overgrown ivy, neglected grounds, and deteriorating buildings, she saw what she described as ***"good bones."*** **David** needed more convincing.

The work required patience, expertise, and a willingness to look beyond the immediate condition of the property. Removing years of overgrowth and cleaning the buildings revealed glimpses of the beauty hidden beneath the neglect. But the restoration was much more than a simple clean up.

"The scope of the restoration was much greater than we expected," they explained.



After years without proper maintenance, the property had accumulated layers of dirt, dust, debris, and unwanted visitors. Buildings needed attention, the grounds required extensive work, and the entire farm had to be evaluated with both its history and future use in mind.

David recently spent time cleaning years of trash from the main road alone, removing hundreds of pounds of discarded material. Among the debris were eight-track tapes and cans of National Bohemian beer—some of which still required a can opener. Even the smallest discoveries offered reminders of the people and years that had passed through Nydrie.

BRINGING THE FARM BACK TO LIFE

From the beginning, **Phoebe and David** understood that **Nydrie**'s future depended on returning it to a working horse farm. The goal was to preserve the property's history while developing an up-to-date Hunter/Jumper training facility. That required a careful balance between restoration and modernization.

The historic brick stable remains central to **Nydrie**'s identity. At the same time, the farm must meet the practical needs of today's horses, riders, trainers, and visitors. Some elements require preservation. Others must be repaired, improved, or adapted to provide a safe and functional environment. The restoration has involved work from floors to ceilings, from buildings to fields, and from visible structures to the infrastructure required to operate a modern equestrian facility.

Phoebe and David also credit the **Van Clief family**, particularly **DG** and **Court**, for their support and guidance during the process. Their objective is not to recreate the past exactly as it was. It is to honor the past while giving **Nydrie** a productive future.



RESPECTING THE PEOPLE WHO CAME BEFORE

Historic properties carry more than architectural significance. They also hold the memories of the people who lived there, worked there, visited, and helped shape the land over generations.

Phoebe and David describe the **Van Cliefs**, as supportive of the restoration. They expressed appreciation for those who came before them and pleasure in seeing **Nydrie** return to full activity, with horses once again moving through its fields and facilities. That perspective is important.

The current owners are not attempting to claim the entire story of **Nydrie**. Instead, they see themselves as part of a much longer history. The property has passed through many hands, and each generation has contributed something to its identity. The responsibility now is to continue that story with care.

A LEGACY THAT REACHES BEYOND THE PROPERTY

One of the biggest surprises for **Phoebe and David** has been the impact **Nydrie** continues to have on the surrounding community. They regularly encounter people who have a connection to the farm. Someone's father may have worked there. A relative may have visited the property. Another person may remember stories passed down through their family. The connections are often unexpected.

A historic farm can appear private from the outside, but its history frequently extends well beyond its property lines. The people who worked there, the horses that passed through its barns, and the families who visited all become part of its collective memory.

Nydrie's restoration has brought many of those memories back to the surface. One example is the fountain located in the courtyard, which has become known locally as the ***"Fertility Fountain."*** According to local folklore, women would take bottles of water from the fountain to give to women hoping to become mothers.

Whether viewed as tradition, superstition, or simply a charming piece of farm lore, the story adds another layer to the personal connections people have with **Nydrie**. It is also a reminder that the history of a place is not always found in official records. Sometimes, it survives through stories shared from one person to another.



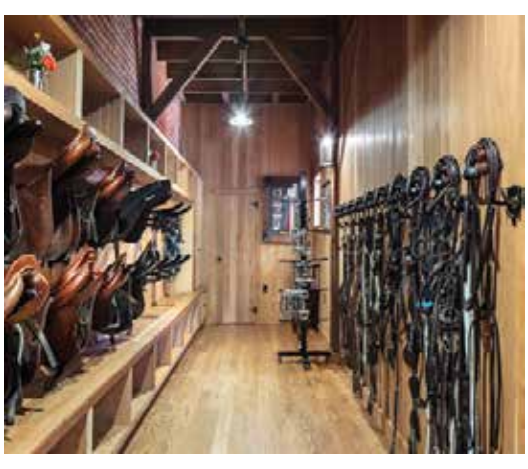
SAFETY AND CONSERVATION

Restoring **Nydrie** involved far more than improving its appearance. Safety is a major priority. Hundreds of fence-post holes were filled in, and the property now has modern technologies and practices appropriate for a contemporary horse facility. Improvements to airflow and other facility systems are intended to create a safer, healthier, and more comfortable environment for horses and people.

Conservation is another important part of the restoration. **Phoebe and David** have also made land stewardship a priority, including the removal of miles of old barbed wire, the cleanup of trash dumps, and efforts to address invasive plant species.

The restoration includes plans to replant indigenous flora and improve the natural environment. A permanent conservation easement is complete, another piece of the property's long-term conservation plans.

These projects may not always be as visible as a restored building or freshly maintained pasture, but they are essential to the long-term health of **Nydrie**. Preserving the farm means protecting more than its structures. It means caring for the land itself.



WHAT MUST BE PRESERVED?

When asked what must remain at the heart of **Nydrie, Phoebe** and **David** were clear: the property must once again function as a working horse farm. That mission does not mean ignoring the past. Instead, it requires understanding what made **Nydrie** important and finding ways to carry those qualities forward.

The historic buildings, the landscape, the equestrian traditions, and the connections to the surrounding community all contribute to the farm's identity. But a working farm must also remain useful. Horses need safe facilities. Riders need functional training spaces. The land requires ongoing care. Buildings need maintenance. Conservation demands long-term commitment. The challenge is to preserve **Nydrie**'s character while ensuring that the property continues to serve a meaningful purpose. The farm cannot simply be protected from change. It must be cared for through change.

ONE OF MANY IN A LONG LINE

There is a natural tendency to describe the current owners of a historic property as its caretakers. **Phoebe and David** see themselves somewhat differently. They describe themselves as one of many in a long line of people connected to **Nydrie**. Their responsibility is to continue that line, respect those who came before them, and leave something meaningful for those who will follow.

That perspective changes the idea of ownership. A property such as **Nydrie** may legally change hands, but its history cannot belong entirely to any one person. Each generation adds something, repairs something, changes something, and ultimately passes the property forward. The work being done today is part of that larger continuum.

The hope is that future owners will feel the same responsibility: to care for the land, respect its history, and continue giving the farm a reason to remain active.

LOOKING FIVE OR TEN YEARS AHEAD

When asked what success would look like five or ten years from now, **Phoebe and David** described a vibrant working horse farm that they and the surrounding community could be proud of. That vision includes horses, riders, training, conservation, and continued restoration. It also includes community.

Nydrie has already begun welcoming people back through its gates, and its renewed activity is helping reconnect the property with the broader Central Virginia horse community. The future will require continued work. But the direction is clear.

Nydrie Stud is not being restored simply to recreate a photograph from the past. It is being restored so that the property can continue to function, grow, and make history of its own.

IF THE GATES COULD TALK

Every historic horse farm carries stories that cannot be fully captured in a timeline or a list of notable horses. There are the stories of the people who worked in the barns, the riders who crossed the fields, the families who visited, and the horses whose names became part of the property's legacy.

There are also the quieter stories: the discarded objects found during cleanup, the memories shared by neighbors, and the traditions that survive long after their origins have been forgotten.

When asked what **Nydrie**'s gates might say if they could speak, **Phoebe and David** offered a response that captures the spirit of the restoration:

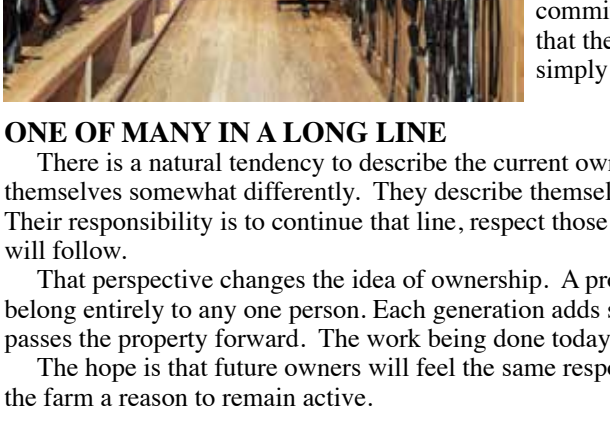
"These are hallowed ground and we are so thankful you have brought them back to life!!"

It is a fitting sentiment for a property with such a long and complicated history. **Nydrie Stud** has seen prosperity, decline,neglect, and renewal. Its buildings have endured. Its land has remained. Its connection to horses has continued through generations.

Now, the gates are open again. The farm is not being preserved in amber. It is being used. Horses are returning to its fields and facilities. Riders are once again creating memories on the property. The surrounding community is reconnecting with a place that has meant something to many people over the years.

Perhaps that is the most meaningful way to preserve history—not by keeping a place untouched, but by giving it another reason to make history.

At **Nydrie Stud**, the gates have changed hands. And they have opened. There is still a great deal of history waiting on the other side.



To find more information on Nydrie and River Run Farm, visit their website ***www.rrfhorseheaven.com.***

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