



C.T. Fuller stands in front of a painting of Joe Cody. Although a cutting horse, the stallion became known as one of the founding sires of reining horses.

TONYA RATLIFF-GARRISON

# Legend MAKER

*There's more to C.T. Fuller than just reining sire Joe Cody.*

**By Tonya Ratliff-Garrison**

ALL LEGENDARY HORSES COME FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS. IT TAKES A GIFTED INDIVIDUAL TO RECOGNIZE potential and mold it into greatness.

C.T. "Tom" Fuller is one such person.

His name is synonymous with renowned reining sire Joe Cody, and both are in the American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame. However, few realize Fuller's impact on the horse world is much wider spread.

Besides being a Quarter Horse breeder and owner, Fuller also raised champion Thoroughbred racehorses and was a photographer, magazine publisher and movie producer. Through his generosity and hard work, AQHA and the National Reining Horse Association flourished.

But for Fuller, all of his accomplishments and contributions came down to his love of a good horse.

## Solid Foundation

FULLER'S STORY BEGINS IN THE LUSH PASTURES AND ROLLING hills of Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley on a farm named Willow Brook.

"In the 1920s, my father, James W. Fuller, acquired a number of small farms consisting of about 1,800 acres," Fuller recalled. "His thought was to form an area that would always be rural, one that would avoid encroachment of developments and industry."

The families who sold their land were encouraged to continue farming, but many chose not to.

"So Willow Brook became a working farm," Fuller said. "In those days, haying and such was done with horses. So as a child, horses were always a part of my life."

Born in 1919, Fuller began riding at a young age when his father hired Joe Carol, an ex-World War I cavalryman, as a riding instructor.

"During the war, he and his horse were gunned down by a machine gun," Fuller said. "The horse fell on top of him and saved his life because Joe had been shot in the leg and would have bled to death if the horse hadn't acted as a tourniquet."

After riding lessons, Carol would take Fuller out to the farm's alfalfa fields where they would ride their Saddlebreds at top speed.

"Joe would always pretend we were in the cavalry. He would say, 'Charge!' And away we would go over the alfalfa fields," Fuller recalled with a laugh.

But it was on one of these runs that tragedy struck.

"I wasn't with him that day, but Joe was cantering across the fields and a sink hole opened up, and he and his horse fell into it. The horse broke a leg and Joe was killed instantly. It was a strange happening how one horse saved Joe's life and another one took it."

It was shortly after Carol's death that Fuller stopped riding.

"I guess you could say I peaked in my riding ability when I was 5," Fuller said.

With machinery taking over the farm, horses disappeared from Willow Brook.

In the late '30s, Fuller left for Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia. While pursuing a bachelor of arts degree in literature, he was a wrestling star with an undefeated record, captain of the team and later became a member of Washington and Lee's Hall of Fame.

But by the time he graduated in 1942, the country was at war. Fuller was whisked off to serve in the U.S. Navy, where he fought in the Atlantic and Pacific theaters of World War II.

"Near the end of the war, my unit was changed into a high-speed attack transport, and we were preparing in the Philippines to invade Japan. I believe I wouldn't be here



C.T. Fuller

COURTESY OF C.T. FULLER



COURTESY OF C.T. FULLER

As a boy, C.T. Fuller rode often with his riding instructor, Joe Carol, bottom, who was tragically killed in a riding accident when his horse hit a sink hole.

today if we hadn't dropped the bomb. That was the end of the war, and I think (dropping the atomic bomb) saved a lot of lives because the Japanese would have fought to the last man. Thousands of us would have been killed, and so would thousands of Japanese."

## Coming Home

IN 1941, FULLER MET THEN-16-YEAR-OLD ALEXANDRA HUSTON at Sea Island, Georgia, while he was on summer break from college. It was love at first sight.

"I first saw her at the swimming pool," Fuller recalled. "I went over to her, and I said very politely, 'Do you mind



Haying in the 1920s on Willow Brook Farms was done by horses, mostly Percherons and Belgians.

COURTESY OF C.T. FULLER

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After returning from World War II, C.T. Fuller and Alexandra Huston married. The couple just celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on June 12.

if I talk with you,' and she said, 'Not at all.'"

"In those days, you usually would need an introduction by some member of the family or friend, but because we lived in a resort, people were much more relaxed about those things," Mrs. Fuller added.

Fuller kept in touch with his sweetheart while he was at college and serving in the Navy. Upon arriving back in the States, Fuller immediately married the girl who had stolen his heart.

They wed in June 1946, and Fuller took a job at his family's cement plant as a laborer. When the company sold two years later, Fuller returned to the family farm in Catasauqua, Pennsylvania, with his young wife. They decided Willow Brook was the best place to raise their three children: Holly, Peter and Victoria.

### Enter, Joe Cody

IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR A DEDICATED GROOM, A HORSE-CRAZY girl and two dun sisters, Joe Cody might never have come into Fuller's life.

In the early 1950s, 5-year-old Holly caught horse fever, and her father decided it was time for horses to return to Willow Brook. Fuller brought in Thoroughbreds and Saddlebreds for his daughter to show as hunters and jumpers.

C.T. FULLER



It was because of Holly, C.T. Fuller's daughter, that Quarter Horses came to Willow Brook Farms. She is pictured here with Sappho Cody.

### Joe Cody

For more on Joe Cody, see page 46 of the March/April 2006 issue of *America's Horse*.

"But then we hired Bob Anthony as a groom and to drive the children to school," Fuller said. "Bob was into Quarter Horses."

One weekend, Anthony took his little Quarter Horse to an open stock horse class in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Holly went along and was amazed by the horse's athletic ability and Anthony's skill in western riding.

"Bob became a hero to Holly, and so Quarter Horses became the horse of choice at Willow Brook," Fuller said.

In the early '60s, Fuller purchased two full sisters who were mirror images of each other. Sappho Cody and Easter Cody were by the cutting horse Joe Cody, a son of AQHA Champion Bill Cody and racing mare Taboo.

The duns proved to be easy to train and ride, and because Anthony was interested in reining, that was the direction he took two fillies.

With Anthony in the saddle, "Sappho" was her sire's first Honor Roll champion and the 1963 AQHA High-Point Reining Horse. "Easter" followed suit the next year, earning her AQHA championship in 1964 and becoming



Bob Anthony is shown with Sappho Cody (left) and Easter Cody, the two sisters that inspired C.T. Fuller to purchase their sire, Joe Cody.

C.T. FULLER

C.T. FULLER



Joe Cody was inducted in the American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame in 1995 and the NRHA Hall of Fame in 1989.

the high-point reiner in 1965. She was also the high-point working cow horse in 1966 and 1967.

"Mr. Fuller thought they were great horses," Anthony said. "One day, he said to me, 'I should call Virginia Harper and see if she'll sell me Joe Cody.'"

It wasn't long before Fuller returned and told Anthony that he'd made the deal.

"Virginia was a good friend, and I just told her, 'Virginia, I'm buying all these horses from you. I need the stallion.' And she said, 'OK. I think the horse will get further with you than it would with me. I love that horse, but I know you love him too,'" Fuller recalled. "So she finally acquiesced, and my and Joe's story began."

Harper also sold Fuller some of her broodmares, including Hapgood's Sal, the dam of Sappho and Easter.

Joe Cody arrived at Willow Brook in the summer of 1964, and there, with the help of his devoted owner, the sorrel stallion began to establish his legacy.

## Creating Legends

JOE CODY IMMEDIATELY BECAME THE HEART OF WILLOW BROOK.

Fuller developed a large band of mares, mostly halter and pleasure horses, for the stallion and also promoted him heavily to outside breeders.

"When I talk about Joe Cody, I talk about Willow Brook," Fuller said. "He was the guiding light of our breeding operation. As Bob Loomis said, 'Tom Fuller and Joe Cody were the magic ingredients to my success.' It was a kind remark, but he was right about Joe Cody. Bob's breeding program thrives because of Joe Cody blood, and so did Willow Brook's."

But without Fuller, Joe Cody might not have been such a successful sire.

"If someone down the street had owned Joe Cody and only a few mares, he probably wouldn't have gotten anywhere," said Dick Pieper, who got his start training Joe Cody horses. "But Mr. Fuller owned him, and that made all the difference."

Of the 324 foals Joe Cody sired, 149 were performers, 81 were Register of Merit earners, 13 were AQHA Champions, nine were AQHA Honor Roll horses and five were AQHA world champions. His get earned almost \$130,000 in NRHA money and \$17,000 in the National Cutting Horse Association.

Some of the notable Joe Cody offspring bred by Fuller include Corona Cody, Kid Five Cody, Betsy Bar Cody, Cassandra Cody, Titan Cody and Red God.

One of the most unforgettable moments for Anthony was aboard two of Joe Cody's children at the 1974 AQHA World Championship Show. He rode the 1968 mare Tawny Cody to the senior reining title and the 1970 gelding High Proof to the junior reining title, the only time in history that both divisions were won by offspring of the same stallion.



Every three years, Willow Brook Farms would have a production sale. It wasn't unusual for Frank Vessels, Morgan Freeman and other legendary Quarter Horse breeders to show up at the sale.



C.T. Fuller was an active participant in the breeding operations of Willow Brook Farms.



At age 32, Joe Cody still enjoyed a romp through the pastures at Willow Brook Farms. The stallion died in 1989 at 37.



High Proof was the 1974 AQHA junior reining world champion and the 1976 AQHA senior reining world champion.



Joe Cody is buried on a hillside overlooking Willow Brook's outdoor arena alongside Hapgood's Sal, Easter Cody, Sappho Cody, Paprika Cody and High Proof.

## ON THE TRACK

Although show horses, especially reiners, were Fuller's love, he also had an interest in racing.

At his Louisiana Stud Farm in Opelousas, Louisiana, Fuller raised some of the best racing Quarter Horses.

Although he owned many racing greats like Mr Meyers, Dusty Margo and Lion Charge, it's Barred's Rocket's win at the 1969 Bay Meadows Futurity in San Mateo, California, that he considers his greatest accomplishment.

"That is pretty remarkable for a horse from the East," he said of the 1967 Rocket Bar daughter. "Matter of fact, Frank Vessels, who was a good friend, told me after the win, 'We don't like people from Pennsylvania coming out and winning our futurity.' I'll never forget that. To win in California was especially gratifying."

But Fuller wasn't just involved in Quarter Horse racing. At his Winterwood Farm in Unionville, Pennsylvania, Fuller was successful in producing top Thoroughbred racehorses. In 1983, Ambassador of Luck, a mare he bred, earned the Eclipse Award as the nation's champion older female.

"The Eclipse Award is the highest honor a horse can get in Thoroughbred racing, and this was the first time a Pennsylvania horse ever won it. That was quite an honor."

The daughter of What Luck was undefeated as a 4-year-old in six starts at Aqueduct, Belmont, Monmouth and Saratoga. She still holds the track record for the Molly Pitcher Breeders Cup Handicap at Monmouth, and she has an annual stakes race named in her honor at Philadelphia Park.



C.T. Fuller had this painting done of his Winterwood Farm, where he raised Thoroughbred racehorses.

When Anthony left Willow Brook in 1976, Loomis took over as trainer. It wasn't long before he was a Joe Cody fan.

"High Proof was the first one I rode, and he was a big horse with a great attitude," he said. "I'd never ridden a horse that could run so hard and stop so pretty and so smooth. He was a very special horse."

But it was another Joe Cody son that changed Loomis' life.

In 1978, looking over a field of yearlings, a chestnut colt with a baby-doll head and a blaze ran up to Loomis. He was immediately taken with the striking yearling.

"At least 98 percent of the Joe Codies were sorrel with Thoroughbred-looking heads and a dime-sized white spot on their foreheads. This horse just really stood out," Loomis said.

Little did he know at the time how much of a standout Topsail Cody really was.

The 1977 stallion would eventually win the 1980 NRHA Futurity and the 1981 AQHA junior reining world championship before retiring from the show pen undefeated and carrying on his sire's legacy in Loomis' breeding shed.



Topsail Cody was Joe Cody's last performing offspring. He was undefeated in reining, winning the 1980 NRHA Futurity and the 1981 AQHA junior reining world championship.

Topsail Cody was Joe Cody's last performer. Fuller retired his stallion in 1976, and Joe Cody lived out the last of his years at Willow Brook. On July 1, 1989, on the first morning of the farm's annual Joe Cody Classic, the stallion died at age 37.

He is buried on a hill overlooking Willow Brook's show pen beside his favorite mare, Hapgood's Sal, and his offspring, High Proof, Paprika Cody, Easter and Sappho.

"When I die, I want to be buried beside my horses," Fuller said. "But Alex said she doesn't want to be buried up there, and she wants me to be with her."

### Good of the Horse

WHEN FULLER FELL IN LOVE WITH QUARTER HORSES, HE WANTED to share his passion with the rest of the world.

The original publisher of equine publications *Practical Horseman* and *Performance Horseman*, Fuller was also successful with his photography. His photos graced the covers of several *Journals*, and his eye-catching advertisements appeared on the back of the magazine for more than 20 years.

"I would have liked to work for *National Geographic*, if they would have let me," he said. "I admire great photographers, especially *National Geographic's*. I just can't seem to throw them away."



**C.T. Fuller was an avid photographer and many of his photos appeared on *Journal* covers.**

But for Fuller, his biggest accomplishment was producing “The Horse America Made,” a film demonstrating the beauty and diversity of the American Quarter Horse.

“I did that film for AQHA, but the real reason I did it was because people didn’t really know a lot about the Quarter Horse and what a great horse it is,” Fuller said. “It is the best-minded horse of any horse, and I thought people should know about it.”

The movie includes a variety of scenes, including the All American Quarter Horse Futurity at Ruidoso, New Mexico, match racing between fences in Louisiana, children showing horses, reining and cutting horses at their best, the Cheyenne Rodeo and some of the Southwest’s great cattle ranches.

“I knew this film had to be made, and it’s got everything in it about the Quarter Horse,” Fuller said. “For one year of my life, I traveled thousands of miles all over this country to capture the Quarter Horse in this movie.”

## End of an Era

FOR HIS SECOND LOVE, REINING, FULLER STARTED THE JOE CODY Classic, an NRHA event at Willow Brook Farms’ outdoor arena. Although for 17 years the event has been the first stop for many 3-year-olds on the futurity circuit, it had its last run this year.

“My son, Peter, wants to start using the farm more now for natural horsemanship clinics,” he said. “He’s a wonderful natural horseman. He’s a student of Pat Parelli.”

Willow Brook is also not the same as it was in its glory days.

There are still a few horses grazing in the pastures. Some are his son’s, but most belong to boarders.

“I keep looking for Joe Cody in them, and sometimes I catch a glimpse of him,” Fuller said.

The Fullers have also sold some of the farm for a new high school and a housing development. However, much of the land has been taken by the city airport through eminent domain.

“The airport has a lot of our land, and I’m just afraid they are going to take even more,” Fuller said. “It’s just ridiculous.”

But even with the changes, Fuller has no regrets.

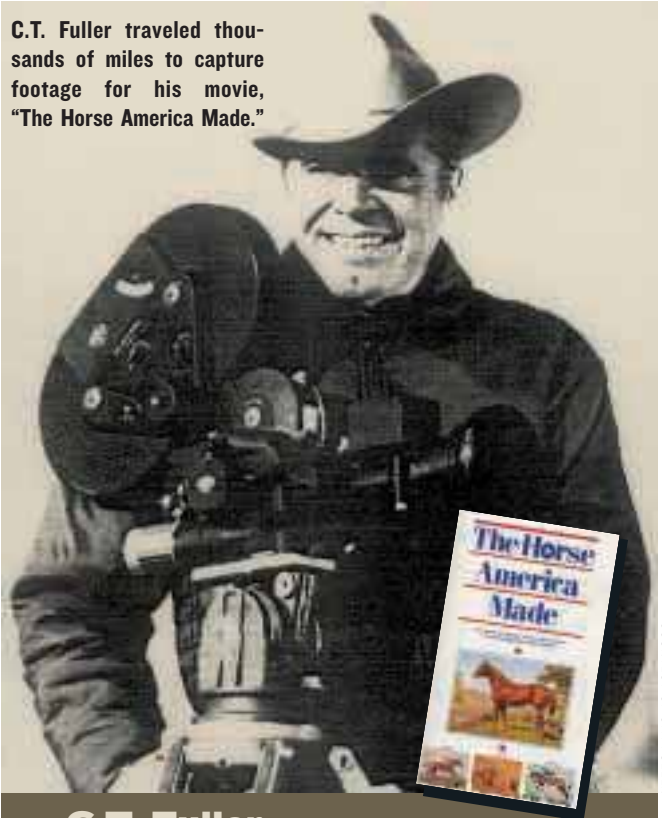
“In life, there are always things that you wish you had done differently,” he said. “Yet in the horse business, I can’t think of any. The horse business has been kind to me in friendships and otherwise. I owe my happiness to being a part of it.”

Although few people today know who Fuller is, they recognize Joe Cody’s name as his great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren continue to win in reining events around the world. And Fuller has no problem letting his beloved stallion overshadow his own accomplishments.

“Everybody knows Joe Cody, but they don’t know me, and that suits me fine,” Fuller said. “The horses made me; I didn’t make the horses.”

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**C.T. Fuller traveled thousands of miles to capture footage for his movie, “The Horse America Made.”**



## C.T. Fuller

- Inducted in the American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame in 2001. Joe Cody was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1995.
- Inducted in the NRHA Hall of Fame in 1989 along with Joe Cody.
- Named AQHA Honorary Vice President.
- Breeder of 736 Quarter Horses, of which 306 earned 3,555.5 performance points and 448 halter points.



**Reining participants warm up their horses for the last Joe Cody Classic in Willow Brook’s outdoor arena.**