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SADDLE BROOK HISTORICAL SOCIETY – MARCH 2014

PEOPLE YOU MEET ALONG THE WAY

As the saying goes, “you meet a lot of interesting people along the way.” For me, Mike Soriano was one of those people. Mike is an active eighty-eight year old who lives in Rochelle Park. He had telephoned me after learning that I was in the process of writing a book about Saddle Brook’s history and told me that he had information about Cogger’s Farm. Cogger’s once located on Market Street across from Caldwell Avenue, was a key attraction after 1930 and offered produce, apple cider, donuts and, above all, pony rides.

Market Street, especially during the pre-television days, was lined with many wonderful pastime offerings including a golf driving range, Weiller’s Dairy with its excellent ice cream, batting cages and archery. Mike lived in Garfield during these early days and found employment at Cogger’s. These were the days when children were happy to find part-time employment to contribute to their family’s income. Mike performed the many jobs required at Cogger’s, from picking beans to leading the ponies around the track. His heart, however, was with the ponies and horses. Pony rides in those days were five and, later, ten cents for three times around a track that was approximately two hundred feet long. All of this engendered a lifelong interest in horses; and Mike spent most of his adult years working for racetracks, from Saratoga Springs to Belmont and Hialeah. He recalls, as a most memorable race, seeing Dark Star best Native Dancer and can detail the many events that led up to that famous race.

During World War II, Mike was drafted into the Navy and served aboard the USS Pensacola. He saw action in the taking of Iwo Jima and Okinawa which was gateway to the landed invasion of the Japanese mainland. Interestingly, Mike still drives a super Harley Davidson motorcycle and can be seen in Maywood’s Fourth of July Parade. Most recently Mike telephoned and asked me if I would like some manure for this coming summer’s garden. I said “sure,” and Mike showed up two hours later with a barrel of “the good stuff.” Evidently, he is still close to his equine friends. Mike is a straight-talking, generous guy with a Niagara of intriguing stories, “one of the interesting guys I met along the way.”

Jack Wasdyke: Township Historian

