

# 'Horse King' of Arroyo marks 50th year here

By Nelda Thompson

Chuck Williams, a hard-riding, soft-hearted sort of a guy is the legendary "horse king" of the Arroyo. He knows every watering spot and Sycamore that once made the valley picturesque. He is acquainted with most of the horses and riders that ever loped through the valley, where his Arroyo Seco Stable is now celebrating its 50th year in the area.

Williams, who now heads a three-generation family of horse-lovers, got started with six stalls, four polo ponies, no job and a fierce affection for the big outdoors.

"The best thing for the inside of a man is the outside of a horse", says jig Chuck, who adds emphasis to the words by saying:

"If it hadn't been for living outdoors, I'd have been dead 20 years ago."

He means it literally. **STRICKEN IN THE SADDLE**

Recently while taking part in one of his favorite "Rancheros" (week-long

riding treks into the wilds) he suffered a stroke.

"Fortunately, the truckers got all my animals back safe."

Concern for his four-footed companions was more important to Williams than his own wellbeing.

"And when I get too old to go on a "Ranchero", they can just pat me in the face with a shovel."

He's fond of the life he lives, but isn't without painful nostalgia about the way things used to be.

"Nowadays the brain trusts have got everything screwed up," he observes as he sits in the sun at the stables, pointing toward the freeway than simmers by the end of the stables, its noise out-decibeling the whinney of the 50-some horses that make their home there.

When Williams got his start, there were groves of giant sycamores ("they don't grow as big now, what with all the pollution"). Somewhere back in the hills was a little brook with a covered bridge. His dad, Charlie Williams,

built a road to that brook and he and Chuck hauled out stones, wagon loads of them, to build the family home on Thorne Street, where the family still lives when they aren't at the stables.

### NEVER A COWBOY

Wearing his broad-brimmed hat and talking with a slow drawl, he says he surprises people when they find out he never was a cowboy . . . nor did he come from cowboy country.

"Born right here at the corner of Temple and Beaudry Street."

He wasn't a robust kid. His family sent him to the ranch in the San Joaquin where he took to the saddle right away and became expert with horses and rigs.

When the ranch was "flooded out" he came back to LA about the time the world was preparing for World War I.

His job in munitions that looked so promising, "flunped" after the Armistice. That's when he ended up with the ponies and no job.

Little by little, the father-son team began to buy up property in the Arroyo, piecing together odds and ends of land until they had quite a holding: Then up went a barn and stables.

Many of the trees now standing in the park were planted by the pair. There was a lot of blood, sweat and tears put into their midtown ranch. It continued to increase in popularity with the horse-loving public.

### TALLY-HO

Not only did Williams go in for horses, but he became active in collecting old carriages and rigs. They came from all quarters: one that used to carry Salvation Army preachers from one town to another during the Gold Rush days; another with luxurious wicker seats, known as a "summer carriage"; a handsome rig from old Nob Hill society in San Francisco; and, just for kicks, a jerry-built contraption with its wheels made from cable spools.

Many of the carriages were used in the early days of movie-making, and you could always expect to see at least one of them in the Rose Parade come New Year's morning.

Williams, his wife, and the kids, often rode in the Tournament of Roses. But a few years ago Chuck said he "just got tired of getting up before dawn and shivering until nine."

### TURN-ABOUT

"I told Harlan Loud, who was in charge of the parade that year, that the next time I got myself out of a warm bed that early, the Tournament was going to have to PAY me."

He meant it as a joke, but it happened.

In last year's (1975) Tournament, the Association rented one of Williams' rigs to be used as part of an "original Rose Parade" float.

Very few of the old carriages remain.

"Had to sell them to buy feed," he explains practically.

"Do you know when I first started I could get good hay for \$9 a ton. Now it's \$80 and isn't nearly as good. All I can afford to do is feed horses."

The land about the stable has shrunk to a mere two acres, but it has been put to good use.

#### STILL TEACHING

Mrs. Williams, a former school teacher who taught Spanish in Alhambra and did a lot of work with handicapped children, puts in a better than eight hour

day teaching riding classes.

"I don't teach," says Williams "I'm, too mean", but there's a twinkle in his eye when he says it.

The demand for classes is greater than it used to be.

"People are more horse-minded than ever. They just seem to be sick of all this automation."

More than 80 percent are learning to ride English saddle, rather than western.

In addition to classes, the stable has also provided horses for many parades (always the Highland Park march); also wedding party galas and hay rides (less in number now that the traffic is so congested.)

#### FAMOUS 'FRIENDS'

There are horses who

stand out in Williams' memory with respectful homage . . . like Gray Dawn, who "starred" in the movie "Androcles and the Lion" and went on to play in 17 major films.

Then there was "Red Wing", another handsome bit of horseflesh who pursued a movie career.

"That was one helluva horse", says Chuck, with reverent fondness, as he looks at a picture of his old pal.

Williams has managed to instill the love of horses and the outdoors in all of his four children.

"Taught them to ride as soon as their heads wouldn't wobble," he recalls.

And they went right on learning from their mother and father and from a stable employee whom they remembered affectionately as "old John."

Although all four of the youngsters know horses and love them, the two daughters have followed the sport more avidly.

Damaris ("Dammy") is state champ at barrel races, a highly competitive and sometimes dangerous bit of "horseplay in which the horse rounds barrel barriers at an almost impossible angle and must straighten in 14 seconds.

Dexter, the other daughter, goes in for endurance riding and has chalked up many a trophy for herself. She's also a big help at the family-style

stables.

#### GRANDDAUGHTER TOO

Sons Tod and Terry aren't participants, but do follow the horse shows. Tod's 12-year-old daughter is already taking up the third generation honors, going through the jumps.

Maybe the Arroyo isn't what it used to be; maybe the horse is losing his race against horsepower; but the Williams family remains a hopeful symbol of the kind of life that keeps America riding toward its goal in this Bicentennial year.

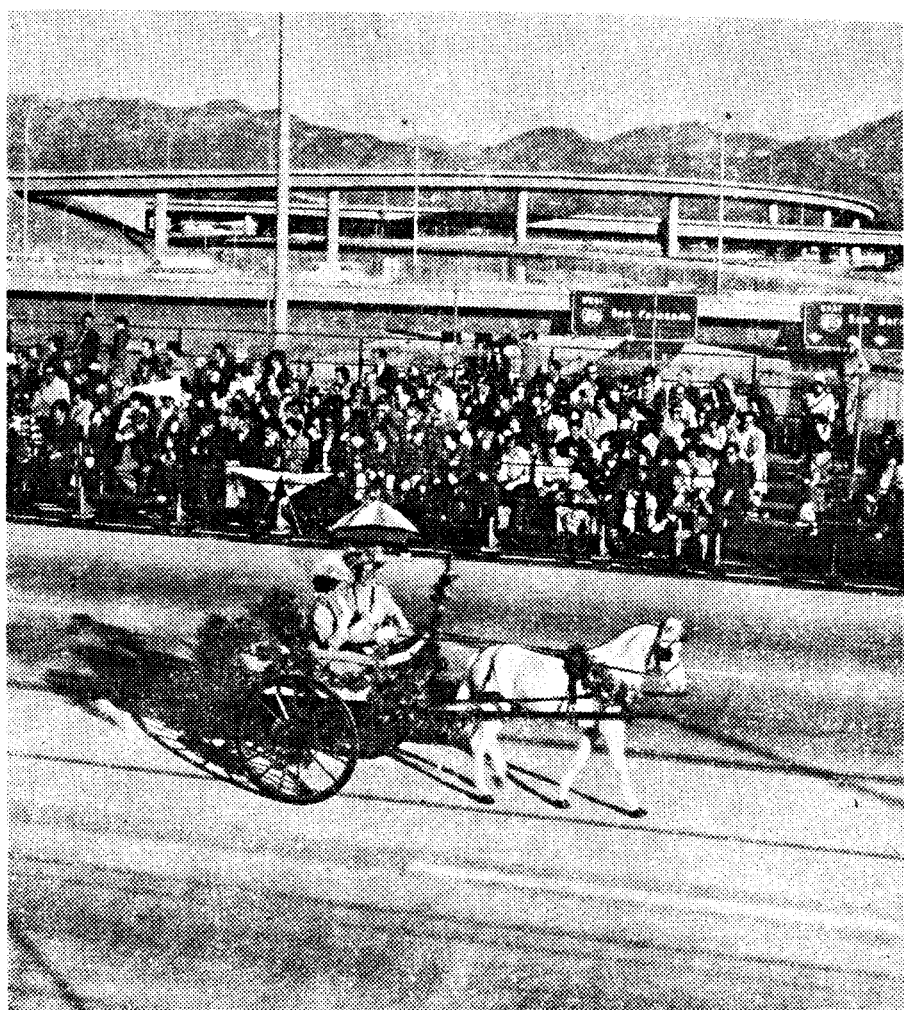
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## Fiftieth anniversary

Chuck Williams, owner of Arroyo Seco Stables in Los Angeles, has many stories about oldtimers, horses and riders he's been associated with during

50 years in business. He is shown with a favorite Arabian "ring horse." Many famous people have used the Arroyo Seco stables over the years.



## Riding teacher

Mrs. Charles Williams (center) former school teacher in Alhambra now teaches riding classes at the stables where she puts in a ten-hour day on weekends and is now starting a week-day class for women.



## In parade

Dammy and Dexter, the two Williams daughters are trophy-winning horsewomen, shown here in the 1975 Tournament of Roses.