

Thorn, Charlie

(2)

*Intelligencer*

*Remember Letters*

*Jan. 23, 1994*

## Dogs didn't chase Mr. Thorn's car

For the better part of four decades the Thorn name was well-known among animal lovers in Belleville and the surrounding area.

It began in the early 1930s when city resident Thomas Thorn was sworn in as a special constable and given the task, among others, of looking after Belleville's animal population. The job would be handed to his son, Charlie, in 1950, although the title would change to animal controller.

Charlie Thorn Jr. is the son of Charlie Sr. and grandson of Thomas. He says Thomas was the first person in the city to be sworn in as a special constable empowered to make arrests similar to a police officer, while also monitoring the treatment of farm animals and house pets.

Special constable Thorn had a uniform and carried two guns, handcuffs, a whistle on a chain and a small club wrapped in leather.

Most of Thomas' duties involved family pets, strays or farm animals, but occasionally something bigger would demand his attention.

Charlie Sr.'s widow, Marjorie, recalls the time her father-in-law had to give shelter to a bear. His garage was equipped with a metal cage and normally served as the dog pound. But...

"A circus truck upset and he ended up with monkeys and bears and everything in his garage," says Marjorie.

Charlie Jr. recalls his uncle was nearly clawed by the bear when he came to close to the cage.

Once a year Thomas went door-to-door checking and updating his list of all the animals in the city to ensure they

were properly tagged. In his ledger book he kept information on every registered pet in Belleville.

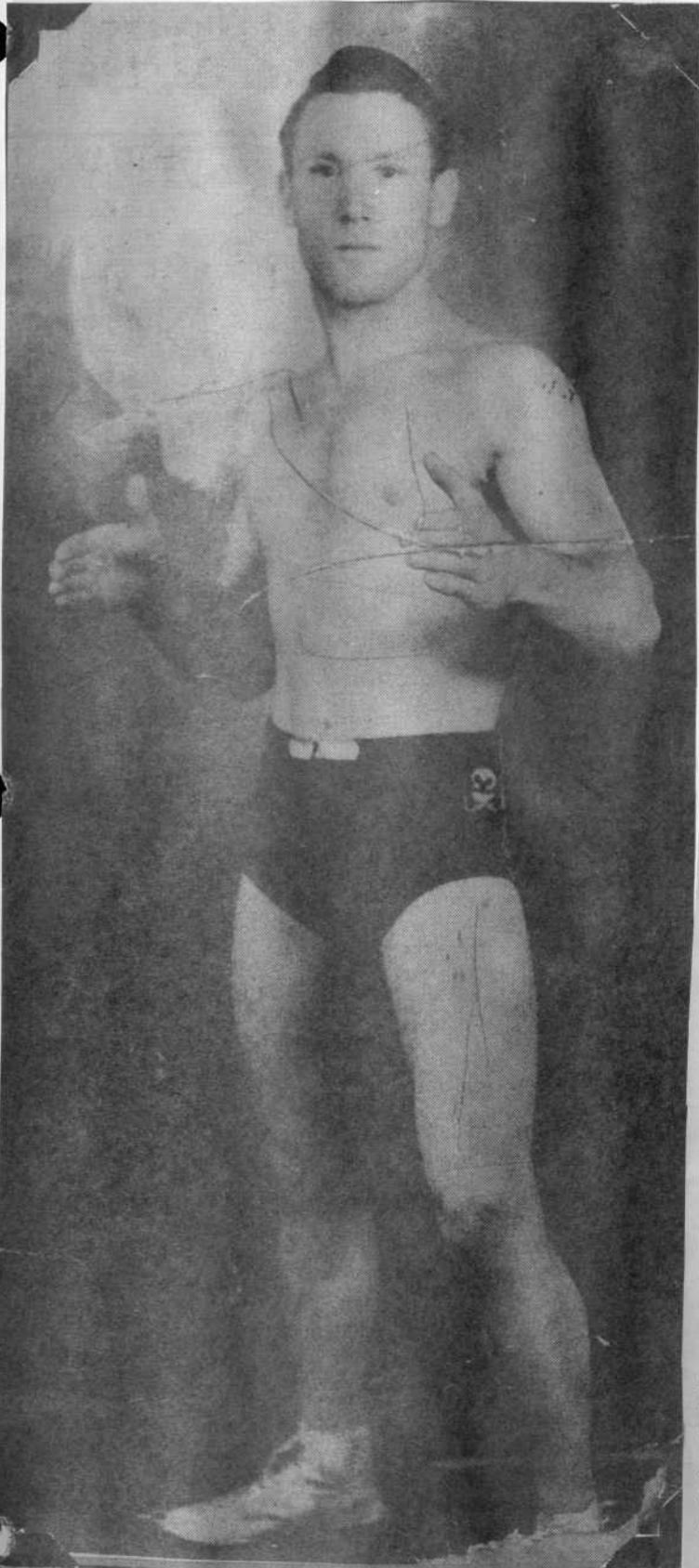
However, as special constable he also investigated police matters around the city such as the time a boy fell while playing on a railway box car and was killed.

In 1950 Thomas became involved in a tussle with a transient in front of C.R. Clapp's and Son service station and garage on Front Street and suffered a heart attack and died.

Immediately after his father's death, Charlie Sr. took over as animal controller for the region. Charlie had been a jack-of-all-trades and worked at various jobs before donning the dog catcher's uniform. Not surprisingly, he was fond of animals but his job also had an unpleasant side. Although he didn't carry a set of six-shooters like his father, he did have a rifle at his house used for killing rabid animals or shooting skunks and other pests.

But most of his efforts were made caring for animals. Charlie Jr. remembers his father going to Spencer Frigid Locker Ltd. (west of The Intelligencer, on space occupied by Century Place today) and picking up the bones from the butcher and storage business. The remains likely caused a minor feeding frenzy when returned to his house.

Like his father, Charlie kept stray dogs and other animals in cages in his garage. He built or bought the cages himself with his own money. In later years he purchased a lot and old barn near the area known as the Coleman flats (approximately where the Belleville Transit Commission building is today) and used it as a ken-



Former Belleville animal controller Charlie Thorn is show here in his wrestling days. The shot was snapped when Thorn was about 18 and is courtesy of his son, Charlie Jr.