

COMMUNITY

A journey of discovery

Long road travelled to unearth family history

By Stephanie Hounsell
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Many years ago, Bob Stoutley set out on a journey of discovery, delving into the previously undisturbed history of his ancestors.

Along the way he found kinship with a half-brother he'd never met and discovered his grandfather was black and his ancestors slaves.

It's been a roller coaster ride, to say the least — and surprisingly emotional.

Last month, Stoutley's journey took a huge leap forward with an abundance of information coming to light thanks to the History Channel's *Ancestors in the Attic*, whose producers decided Stoutley's story had all the makings for riveting television.

The episode was filmed last month in Milton and Nova Scotia and is scheduled to air this fall.

Bob's story starts as a child growing up in Vancouver. His father, Earle Edward Stoutley, didn't tell his family much about his background. Earle had a bit of a darker complexion, but his son was told that was the French in him.

Earle kept much of his past to himself. When a young Bob asked his dad about a medal — the Member of the British Empire (MBE) — he was awarded after the Second World War, he shrugged it off, saying everyone got one.

Earle died of a heart attack when Bob was 11. His mom didn't know much more about his dad's heritage, leaving Bob, now a local real estate agent, with more questions than answers about his father's history.

"It would be great to sit down and have a beer with him," Bob said. "We knew little bits of his past, but not a lot."

Perhaps because there was so much unknown regarding his father's background, Bob developed an early interest in history.

While in his twenties, Bob decided to research his father's military background, hoping to discover why his father was presented the MBE, which Bob had inherited. One page was all the information he turned up from the military archives at the time, but when he resumed the search 15 years ago, there were 400 pages available.

Bob discovered his father had received the MBE for his role in obtaining enemy weapons and then instructing Allies in how to use those small arms.

It spurred Bob on to learn more.

Unbeknownst to him, a half-brother he'd never met but knew existed — his father had been married twice before marrying Bob's mother — was conducting his own research, building a family tree.

John Stoutley and Bob came face to face about 10 years ago after John curiously looked up his last name in the phone book on a trip to Canada from New Zealand.

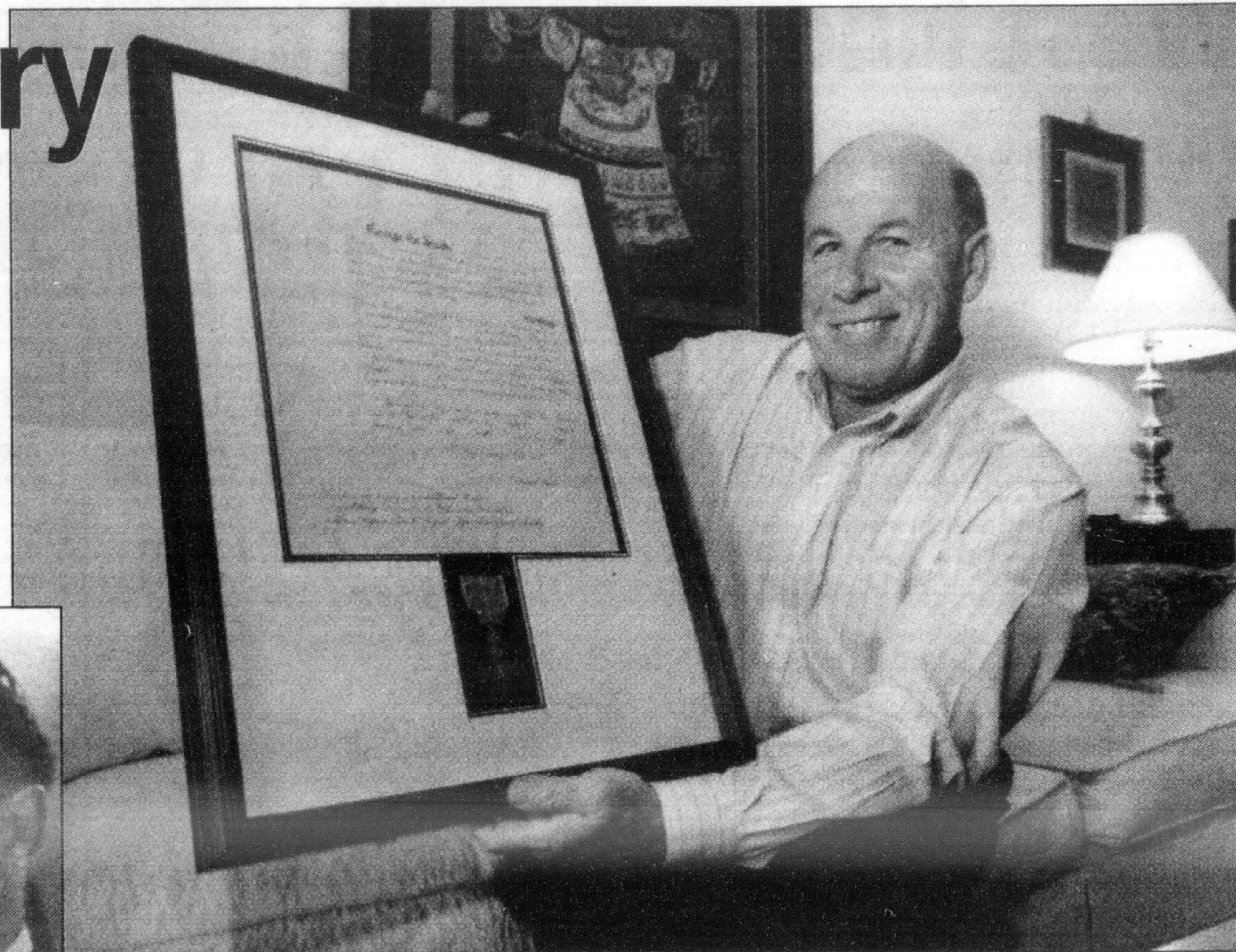
One thing led to another, and the half-brothers began to collaborate on their quest for knowledge about their shared father's past.

Another unlikely discovery occurred soon after; John came in contact with a man, Glenn Willis, in Nova Scotia, whose grandfather had the same name as John's and Bob's.

It was the same man. It turns out their grandfather had married twice and had nine children from each marriage.

Bob visited a webpage Willis had created about his ancestors and was surprised at what he saw.

"There on the front page were five little black kids on the couch with bright blue eyes," he said, explaining they were the confirmation of what he'd wondered for years,



PRECIOUS KEEPSAKE: Bob Stoutley displays a framed MBE medal (Member of the British Empire) that his father, Earle (inset left), received after the Second World War.

ever since finding military papers that described his grandfather as "dark."

Although there was no photo of his grandfather, Bob deduced that he was a light-skinned black man and that his grandmother was a white, French-Canadian woman.

"We kind of beigned out on her side of the family," Bob said with a chuckle.

But that's where Bob's search ended. He wasn't able to go back any further in his family's lineage than his grandfather. (He now knows a lot of black history in Nova Scotia isn't well documented.)

So Bob contacted the producers of *Ancestors in the Attic*, one of his favourite shows, for help. And last fall they responded, choosing his request out of thousands received.

The show utilizes a team of genealogical sleuths to uncover secrets from the past. For Bob's story, three researchers in Nova Scotia were hired to dig deep.

What they found was a wealth of informa-

tion about Bob's family — most of which he can't share, since it would spoil the episode.

"They pulled stuff about gramps that none of us knew," Bob said.

He travelled to Nova Scotia last month with the crew, where they traced the Stoutley name beyond his grandfather. He eventually found out his descendants were likely slaves from the U.S.

One of the most poignant moments for Bob was visiting his grandfather's grave in Toronto, where he moved after the war; his burial location had been unknown until then.

"It was very emotional," Bob said.

As to why his father hadn't told his family he was black, Stoutley said it was partly because of the times. But there's more to it than that.

And you'll have to tune in this fall to find out the rest.

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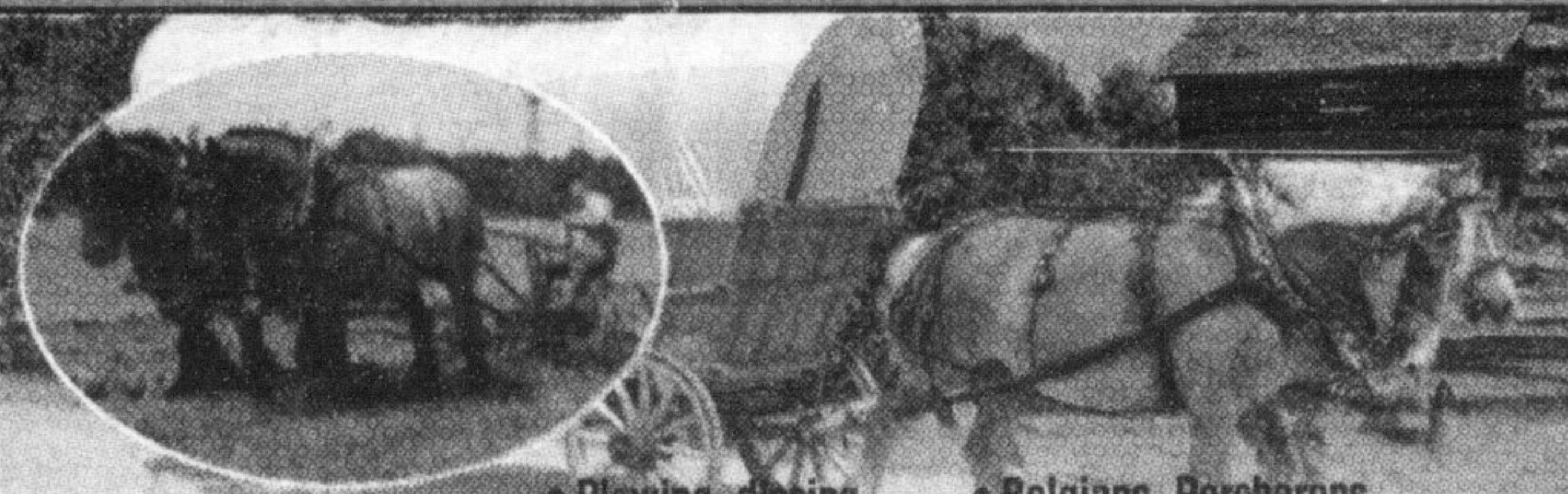
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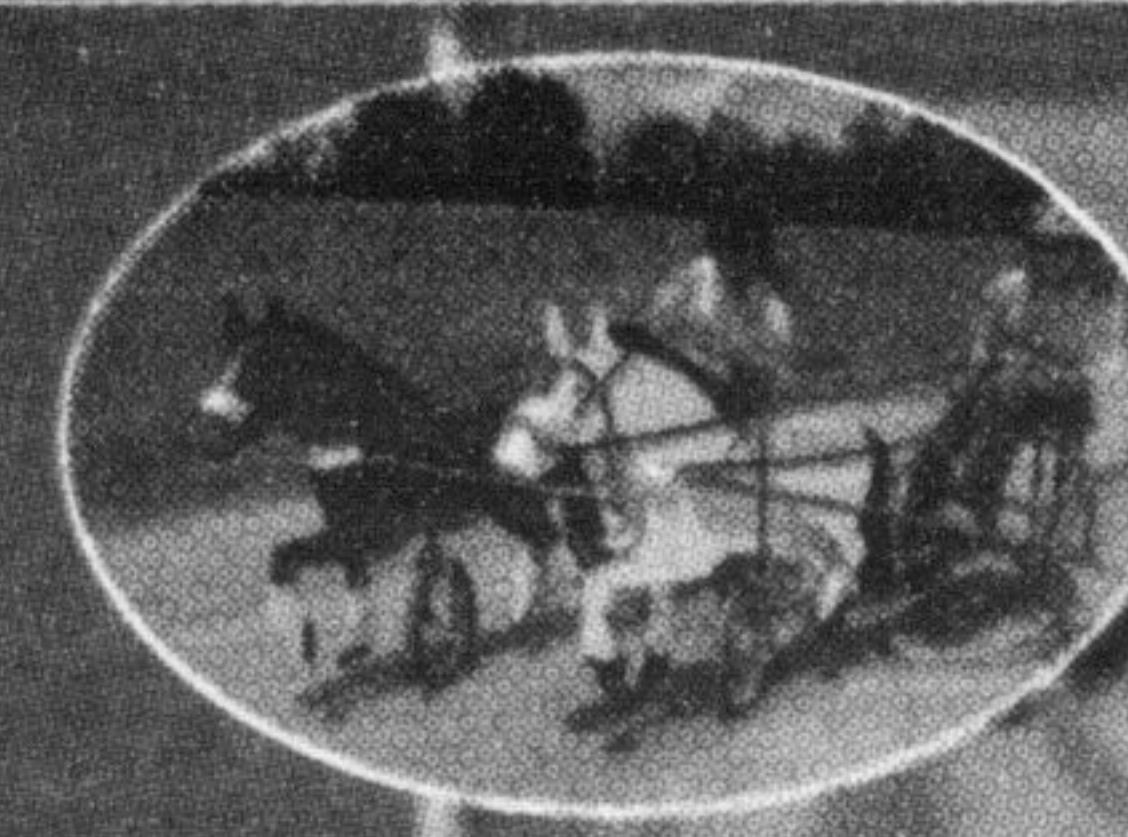


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