

THE HORSE CALLED OLD KATE (1873)

“As it is customary to make honorable mention of notable persons and things in the columns of the Islander, I deem it but a simple act of poetic justice to embalm within these pages, for the benefit of posterity, a passing notice of one of the notables of the Island. I refer to my horse – which her name is Catherine – but more commonly called Old Kate.



I have known her for a long time and I have found her...ever faithful. I never knew her to ‘go back’ on anything, from a cloud of ice to a barrel of corn. But the most remarkable trait in this remarkable horse is her remarkable appetite. When I bought her, the man told me she was easy to keep. She would eat anything, and from the bottom of my heart, I believe she will. I believe she would eat a stone quarry without winking. Last fall she ate up all my grapes before they had a chance to ripen. She ate all the whitewash off the fence and she has licked nearly all the yellow paint from the Ball Alley. *[Although the Himmelein’s built a ball alley next to their hotel in the 1880’s, and today it is actually painted yellow, this particular ball alley was likely the one associated with the Island House hotel.]*

She has eaten the past winter, in addition to all the corn and oats that I could procure, one side of the bar, the Pig Pen, and part of the School House benches that were stored under the Hall shed. She broke into the smoke house and ate up a barrel of soap – barrel and all. And the other morning I went into the wood shed and found that Old Kate had crawled through the window where she was eating up my hard coal, which I had especially designed to use in the ‘Brilliant’ [a stove]. This disgusted me and I turned her out. The next day Mike Hughs sent me word that my old horse was breeding a famine at the West End. What is the more remarkable, her eating is only exceeded by the quantity that she will drink. Charley says every time he takes her down to the lake to drink, the water falls a foot more or less.

A few days ago a friend of mine [apparently John Dean] wanted to borrow [her] to take the place of one of his that was crippled. I said certainly, take her, use her kindly, and don’t forget to feed her, as she is bashful and will dislike to remind you when she is hungry. Two days after he brought her back. He said he had miscalculated when he agreed to feed her all she could eat. There was not enough feed on the Island for that. He had treated her to a splendid set of bright new shoes and that night she had eaten two bales of hay besides several barrels of corn. And in the morning it took two men to pull her head out of the manger, long enough to put a collar over it.

All the time the man was telling me, Old Kate stood silently by and as I turned around and looked at her, she gave one of her jolly winks, drawing her mouth down as if she was ready for a regular horse laugh. She spoke in language more plainly than words ‘Didn’t I make John Dean’s corn crib look sick?’

Well, with all her faults, she has many good qualities and when the summer comes, when the perspiration rolls down our fevered brows, Old Kate will appear at our door as a bright harbinger of cooling joy as she brings us the delicious cubes of solid happiness in the shape of crystal ice to the door of thirsty souls.” *Old Kate was*

apparently the horse that pulled the ice wagon in the summer. She was not the only animal to be honored in word. Jack the Horse was included in several deeds for one of the island docks.

By Leslie Korenko from the book Kelleys Island 1872-1876, the hotels, the telegraph & the Lime company.