

Allen Bogan with Ches Benson, founder of TTBA



Allen Bogan as a young newspaperman

ALLEN BOGAN

Editor's note: Anne Lang worked closely with Allen Bogan during her seven years as editor of The Texas Thoroughbred (1982-89) and continued to keep in touch with him during her subsequent freelance career. The following is her personal tribute to Allen, along with a retrospective on his decades-long career as an editor, journalist and unparalleled Texas racing expert.

There's a letter sitting on a far corner of my desk that's been there for months, sent to me by Allen Bogan not long after his beloved wife Maxine passed away last spring. It consists of Allen's usual pleasant chatter, albeit tinged this time with a melancholy undertone. Yet as was typical in conversations with Allen as well, his letters (and this one was no exception) always turned the subject away from himself and

focused on the recipient -- with liberal expressions of praise, reiterated gratitude for continued friendship, and heartfelt inquiries about the recipient's family.

It was because of Allen's interest in the latter that I hadn't yet replied to his letter when I received the news of his passing. Silly, really: I'd been waiting for recent photos of my daughters to be developed so that I could

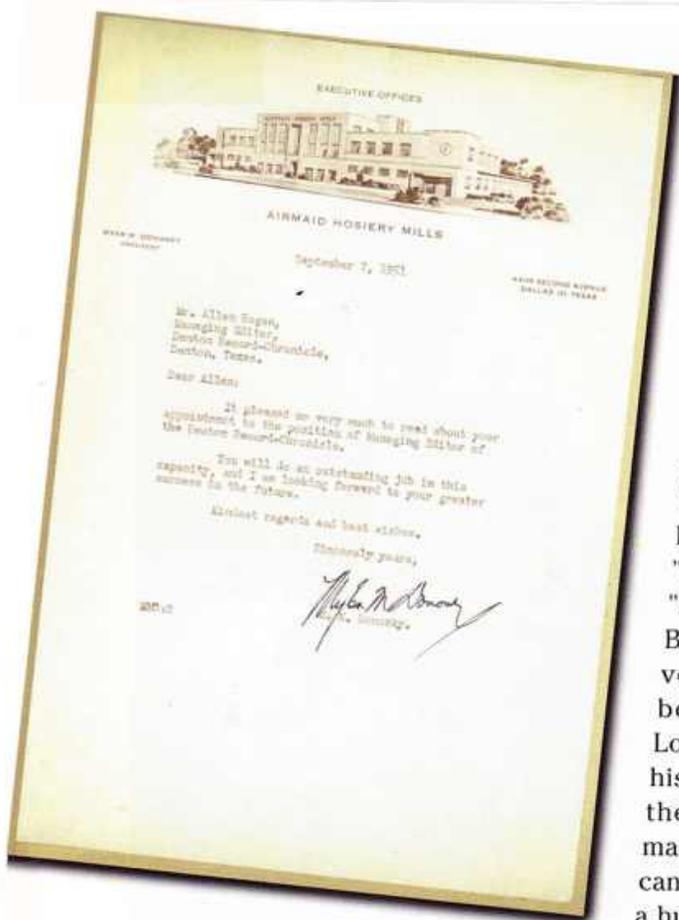
Bogan in press box covering football game in 1930's (bottom left)



enclose them in the envelope. What's that old saying about hindsight? I just wish I'd answered that letter right away and sent the photos later.

Memories of a much earlier letter, received in 1992, also came to mind. In it, Allen (who'd just turned 80 at the time) forthrightly asked me if I'd promise to write his obituary when he

died. He enclosed a large packet of clips pertaining to his personal and professional background, hastily adding that he'd understand if I was uncomfortable with accepting such a task. I immediately called Allen and said that of course I'd be honored to pen his eulogium when the time came, but



sternly reminded him that St. Peter wasn't likely going to be calling him to the pearly gates any time soon.

"You've got too much left to do right here," I chided my old friend, "not the least of which is to improve your golf handicap – and your race handicapping!" Allen laughed with glee. "Besides," I went on, "remember that George Burns (who then was very much alive) is booked to appear at London's Palladium on his 100th birthday. By the time your century mark comes around, you can count on there being a huge party to celebrate 25 years of successful racing in Texas as well as your birthday!" Allen

laughed again, and agreed to dance with me at the big event.

Wanting to further turn Allen's somber request into something positive, I turned all the information he'd sent into a lengthy profile for Daily Racing Form. Though the tribute was indisputably well-deserved (and long overdue), the modest Allen protested that it was "far too much attention on the likes of me." Needless to say, the widely-respected turf writer was alone in that assessment. Following is the gist of what appeared in that Racing Form feature:

From an early age, Allen's destiny was to become immersed in horse racing, growing up as he did in a Dallas suburb that later happened to fall under the shadow of Texas' premier track, Arlington Downs. While attending Southern Methodist University, Allen saw his first horse race at Arlington and immediately fell under the spell of watching Thoroughbreds in motion.

In 1935, Allen was hired as a writer for the Dallas Journal, which then was one of the metropolitan area's four major daily papers. He went on to become editor of the paper's Oak Cliff edition, then advanced to assistant city-wide sports editor.

When he wasn't working, Allen and Maxine would often head for the Texas tracks – which at the time included Arlington and Fair Park in Dallas, Epsom Downs in Houston and Alamo Downs in San Antonio. The couple also frequented Oaklawn Park (and much later, Louisiana Downs). The national economic crisis of the 1930's didn't deter the Bogans or thousands of other entertainment-starved Texans from placing wagers, using one method or another.

"Most people couldn't even afford to bet at the two-dollar window," Allen explained, "because \$20 a week was a typical salary back then.

Bogan as managing editor of Denton Record Chronicle, 1951





So the bookies were very popular, because they'd take one-dollar bets."

At that time, Quarter Horse racing had yet to develop, so the Thoroughbred was solely responsible for luring fans to the tracks. And lure them it did. "Every Saturday, when most folks didn't have to work, Arlington Downs was just jammed to the rafters," Allen said.

Despite the subsequent death of pari-mutuel wagering (and all four tracks) in Texas, Allen's dream of covering racing for the newspaper came true in 1941, when Journal managers chose him to fill the new position of national handicapper.

"I was enthusiastic," Allen recalled, "before I found out what a tough job it was, and how the mechanics involved in making the selections caused the endeavor to be even more difficult."

Clocks are the nemesis of any daily reporter, and because the Daily Racing Form didn't hit the newsstands until a scant 30 minutes prior

to deadline, Allen had only a half-hour to handicap the day's cards for Belmont, Pimlico and Suffolk Downs. All his life, he vividly remembered every detail of that harrowing first day.

"I frantically looked over the entries and typed my selections – even a 'best bet' for each track," Allen explained. "But the results were fantastic. One of my best bets won and paid \$28.80, and I had a big winning day at each track with my longest-shot winner paying \$33.20. I think I picked a total of 12 winners from 24 races.

"Being an egotistical young novice at the business of handicapping," Allen continued, "I reasoned that I would soon become the world's greatest handicapper – especially since I had only 30 minutes to do the job. How much better would I be if I had a couple of hours or so to study the Form?"

Allen quickly returned to earth, however, when subsequent efforts failed to yield another

jackpot anywhere near the magnitude of his maiden attempt.

"Over the years, the job of handicapping humbled me, like most of us 'experts,'" Allen ruefully admitted. "I had that one lucky day, but why, I don't know."

Allen's journalism career survived, however. After a three-year wartime stint with the Navy, he worked as a sportswriter and copy editor for the Dallas Times-Herald, concurrently establishing an 80-acre dude ranch in rural Denton. In the late 1940's and throughout the 50's, Allen worked for the Denton Record Chronicle – first as farm editor, then as managing editor. With the boundless energy that defined his character, in 1970 he helped start the weekly Lewisville Leader, for which he also served as editor.

New horizons continued to beckon. In 1955, Allen joined advertising executive Ches Benson and several other Texans in forming the Texas Thoroughbred Breeders' Association, and shortly thereafter, launched the premier issue of The Texas Thoroughbred. Named as editor at the time, Allen acted in that capacity for many years before shifting his focus to the writing of his popular monthly column, "The Morning Line" (and countless additional features over the years).

Until now, every single issue of the magazine since the time of its formation has included at least one article by Allen Bogan. His skillful, informative and tireless contributions to the Texas Thoroughbred, as well as to the association in general (he was a board member from 1970-79, and for years spoke to numerous service clubs to enlighten citizens about the benefits of a pari-mutuel racing industry) earned him numerous TTBA honors: including Honorary Life Member, the 1983 Man of the

Year Award and the 1995 T. I. "Pop" Harkins Award. In 1988, the Texas Horse Racing Association also feted him for his status as the leading historian on racing and Thoroughbred bloodlines in Texas.

During the 1960s and 70s, Allen had worked as an officer in various Denton banks – but the Sport of Kings remained in his blood. Upon his retirement from banking, he returned to the Record Chronicle as its racing columnist – working most weekdays in the press box at Trinity Meadows; then later, Lone Star Park at Grand Prairie. It had been Allen's decades-long dream to see major-league pari-mutuel racing return to North Texas, and the success of Lone Star Park fulfilled that dream.

When I think of Allen Bogan, a montage of images comes to mind. One of my fondest recollections is of a TTBA-sponsored stakes weekend in Bossier City back in 1982. As a brand-new editor for Texas Thoroughbred, I'd yet to experience the magical dawn hours of watching morning workouts. Allen was the one who initiated me to that rite of passage, enthusiastically rising at 4:30 AM to escort me from our hotel to the backstretch at Louisiana Downs. Can anyone ever forget their first time witnessing such a scene? Mine was all the more special because Allen was my guide.

I see Allen, in my mind's eye, standing under an umbrella in a driving rainstorm at a running of the Friendship Stakes, maybe a decade or so ago. Smiling as usual, he was presenting the trophy to the winner of a race that he'd not only covered journalistically since the race's 1974 inception, but acted as TTBA's ambassador for as well. I see his kind face and hear his cheerful hello in the numerous places where we happily ran into each other over the past 15 years: pari-mutuel rallies, racetrack

press boxes, racetrack aprons, racing seminars, press conferences, more backstretches, TTBA functions and the like. Throughout the 1980s, we watched as board members and TTBA administrators came and went – while the magazine remained a constant. And no one was a more constant component of the magazine than Allen.

Overall, to me, Allen was more than an invaluable editorial advisor, more than a walking encyclopedia of Texas racing history, more than a true-blue friend. He was perhaps the last of what I fear is a dying breed: a first-class gentleman of the old school. There will never be another one like him.

And yet it's comforting to assume that if there is indeed a great Hereafter, Allen has made himself quite at home. I envision Maxine standing at his side, shaking her head but smiling affectionately as Allen regales George Burns with one racing story after another. Two old-world gentlemen who both led remarkable lives with similar measures of dignity, humor, compassion and unquenchable thirsts for new knowledge. If those qualities are what kept Allen Bogan going 110 percent strong until the absolute end, then perhaps we who knew him have gained new knowledge as well.

Somehow, it softens the loss.



*In Loving Memory of
Allen Bogan*