

## Greece History

### Willow Creek Ranch

by Gene Preston

Located at 1118 Long Pond Road about 80 years ago was the Willow Creek Ranch. Far in the rear of the 10 acres was a farm house. Owner, **Irving James Thompson** known as "Tommy" Thompson, was a big strong fellow weighing nearly 400 pounds at one time, who could pick up a heavy iron anvil by its point with one hand. He was a cowboy who created Willow Creek Ranch where he had several horses and a large pasture. In the late 1940s he went to Nebraska and brought back several horses to his ranch where he broke them and sold many of them. Others he trained for rodeo events. There was never a horse he couldn't ride. Rodeos, combined with a western theme parade, became a very popular event at the Long Pond Road location .

A Greece Press newspaper dated August 4, 1944 shows an advertisement headed, "Come One! Come All! Come to the home town rodeo at Willow Creek Ranch, Long Pond Road near Maiden Lane, Sunday, August 6, 1944 at 1 PM, with a parade at 2 PM led by Monroe County Sheriff horses. Thrills for young and old." It goes on to say: "Bucking broncos, calf roping, knot tying, bull dragging, bronc-busting, and a western horse show. Local amateur cowboy entries invited. Cash prizes and trophies." It shows Tommy Thompson and his trick horse, Duke Thunderbolt, an Arabian gelding. Said the poster: "Tommy Thompson, Ray Slaght, Lucky Boy Williams, managers. 10% goes to Red Cross."



Duke Thunderbolt performed amazing tricks such as pulling the family wash off the clothesline, blowing the horn on the family car with his nose, counting, rocking a chair, and executing a horse prayer. Other tricks included: taking off Thompson's hat, rolling over and playing dead, and holding an American flag in his teeth. Thompson would demonstrate his rope skills and knot tying.

Much of this information I learned from sons **Gary** and **Bob Thompson**. Bob is my brother-in-law and lives in Greece. Today the Willow Creek Ranch site is the Ronald J. Arndt Funeral Home. Nothing remains but memories from the days of the Thompson family being there and the excitement of the rodeos. Mr. Arndt was in awe learning of the history of his place.

At the rear of the property was Round Pond Creek. Our family farm was not far away at 1036 Long Pond Road where the same creek flowed through our property. As a lad I remember the "ranch" being up the road and Tommy Thompson who always wore a large western cowboy hat and leather boots. My dad, "Cap" Preston, was a friend of Tommy's and would take my brothers Eddie and Ken and me along to visit at Willow Creek Ranch. It was named that because of the many large willow trees along the creek.

Tommy Thompson was also a heavy equipment operator at Kodak and retired in 1969. He was born in Napanee, Ontario, Canada, arriving here at age 18 on a ferry boat from Cobourg, Canada to Charlotte. He passed away in 1982 at his Hamlin, NY home at age 72.



**Gene Preston** is a lifelong resident of Greece, retired Kodak Deputy Fire Chief, Army veteran, 58-year active member of the North Greece Fire Department, produce grower, president of Chapter 35 NYS International Harvester Tractor Club, and a freelance writer of numerous publications. He lives on what remains of the family farm today.

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