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**The UMM Saddle Club:  
More Than Just Horsing Around**

**by  
Colleen Butler  
for  
History 3402: Historical Research  
May 29, 1984**

In 1971 a great deal of student protest occurred on college campuses across the United States. The University of Minnesota, Morris campus was no exception. The cause of this unrest happened to be the VietNam War. Into the midst of Morris's protest stepped MCUB (Morris Campus Union Board).

Apparently MCUB felt that students needed something to do other than studying, partying, protesting. The next problem then became deciding exactly what should be done. MCUB decided that a group of new clubs should be started on campus. There were several of these clubs at first, but not many lasted long. One organization that survived turned out to be the UMM Saddle Club.

When MCUB held the first meetings for these clubs, they had no idea of which would last, or even gain student interest. MCUB was also a bit short on staff who knew exactly what to do in each of the new clubs. The UMM Saddle Club's meeting showed a fine example of that. The first meeting happened to be rather unorganized to say the least.

The person chairing the meeting did not know exactly what a saddle club should do. The main goal at first turned out to be just getting together students who liked horses. Actually, the idea of having a saddle club of some kind was appropriated from the Waseca Rodeo Club on the Waseca campus. This happened to be what MCUB wanted to emulate. It turned out that there were more people interested in having a saddle club than a rodeo club.<sup>1</sup> The saddle club would naturally be more popular



at UNM because of the many horse shows in the area. Four of the students attending the first meetings were Jeff Melander, Linda Baumgartner, Rick Sohnek, and Vicki Brown. These four were to later become the core of the new Saddle Club.

Once the first few meetings determined that there was enough student interest to keep the Club going, the next step had to be finding a place for the club. The idea to have a Saddle Club, or rather a Rodeo Sports Club which became the Club's first official name, was fine, but if students are going to have a club there should be a place to house the member's horses. The next problem turned out to be where to keep the horses. At the time, the West Central Experiment Station still used the dairy barn (the current Saddle Club barn). Unfortunately plans were already laid to tear the dairy barn down and make a parking lot as soon as West Central moved out. The only other barn available, also ready to be demolished, happened to be the old sheep barn. This barn was, and is located next to the current pastures. The members of the club finally managed to convince the administration to allow them to use the sheep barn. The size and condition of this barn left a great deal to be desired, especially since there were no stalls built, but it provided a good start. It took quite a bit of hard work, but by employing lots of student labor and used lumber, stalls were built and the barn turned out to be useable.

Even though the barn was ready, not many horses lived on campus that year. In 1973 however, West Central moved its

animals out of the dairy barn. As stated before, there were plans already made to demolish this barn as soon as West Central moved. As is typical on a campus, the funds were not readily available to tear down the barn. The Saddle Club saw that the barn's demolition had been postponed, and started petitioning for use of the dairy barn. The Club had several reasons for wanting this barn. First of all, despite all of the work on the sheep barn, it was still small and damp. The dairy barn was quite a bit larger, and the Club happened to be expanding. Finally, the dairy barn was in generally better shape than the sheep barn.

At first the idea of the Saddle Club having the dairy barn did not gain widespread approval. Contrary arguments included the fact that the barn was due to be torn down, and that its location so close to the campus apartments might create problems. Eventually the problem was resolved, and the UMM administration and Plant Services agreed to let the Club use both the dairy barn and the sheep barn. Under the terms of the agreement, the Club agreed to move everything back into the sheep barn if funds became available to tear the dairy barn down.

Even though the Club gained the dairy barn, the members still had some problems. One of the problems was that of storage. Although West Central had vacated most of the main floor of the barn, it had kept a feed mixing room and the loft for its own storage. Because of this, the Club members had to store their hay and straw on the main floor. Also, Plant



Services took over part of the main floor for their storage of large equipment.<sup>2</sup> Since there were only about half as many stalls as currently exist, this cut down on Saddle Club space even more. Since members still kept a few horses in the sheep barn, then called the "annex", space was no problem.

With a club, a barn (or in this case two), pasture space, and horses, the members needed a place to show and train their horses. Again members of the Club, primarily Melander, Brown, and Baumgartner, went back to Provost Imholte to ask for a place for an arena. As before, the Saddle Club received its request. A space was allocated where the current intermural fields are. The stipulations for the arena were that the Club members had to build the arena, and pay for the materials themselves. Since most of the members came from farm backgrounds, the fence, or in this case arena, building should have been no problem. On the day of construction Melander, Baumgartner, and Brown had to be out of town. When they returned to Morris they found the arena half way completed, unfortunately, built inside out. Inside out meant that instead of having the boards on the inside of the poles (arena style), they were on the outside (fence style). The finished half looked good, and since no one wanted to tear it apart and start building again, the arena continued to be built inside out. Dedication of the Melander-Brown arena took place in May of 1975.

Shortly after the construction of the arena, West Central decided to move completely out of the dairy barn. Their move

opened up the loft for Saddle Club use. At roughly the same time, the art department had been asking Plant Services for a place to store their large equipment. The art department had been keeping their eye on the sheep barn. Finally, Plant Services, the art department, and the Saddle Club made a deal. The Saddle Club would give up the sheep barn if Plant Services would help remodel the dairy barn. Plant Services agreed to this, and the art department gained their storage area.

Plant Services probably did not realize everything that they would have to do to keep their end of the bargain. The barn needed quite a bit of reworking to handle the extra horses. When West Central had the barn they had box stalls along one side, and stanchions along the other. Horses do not use stanchions, so all of these had to be torn out. The next part was even more work. Before new stalls could replace the stanchions the gutter in back of them had to be taken out. Plant Services had two choices of how to do this. The first choice would have been to level the floor of the barn. The place where the stanchions had been was raised about six inches above the rest of the floor. If this choice did not work, Plant Services could simply fill in the gutter leaving the floor raised. Plant Services decided on the second option because it was faster, more economical, and less work than the first. After the filling in of the gutter, the next step had to be building the actual stalls. The existing stalls along the East wall and in the back room were made out of pipe, but



Plant Services decided to make the new stalls out of wood. They ended up building eight stalls along the West wall and four stalls, two on each side, in the back room. This was also when Plant Services put in the partition dividing their side from the Club's. The final bit of work consisted of tearing down the ladder that had led to the loft, and replacing it with a staircase. The staircase made things much easier for the Club members, especially since they now stored their hay and straw in the loft.

The Saddle Club had been active in other areas when all of this moving, construction, and reconstruction were taking place. One of the biggest issues had been deciding on a horse show. When the Club first started, they did not have an arena, or a barn for that matter. After a barn became available, a place for a horse show had to be found. Although the Club originated in 1971, the first show did not take place until 1972. The Melander-Brown arena had not yet been built. The first three shows ended up being held at the Stevens County fairgrounds in Morris. After the arena was built, show places were no problem. The weather caused problems at a couple of shows. In fact, one show even got rained out, but the horse shows usually went smoothly. The only other problems with the arena itself were in keeping it graded, deciding what events to have at the shows, and managing to keep it clean.

Unfortunately, with a large group of horses more unpleasant issues arise than showing or housing horses. With groups of



horses from different areas came health problems. These problems included distemper, respiratory diseases, and sleeping sickness. A few epidemics did sweep through the barn, one of distemper, and another of an upper respiratory disease. Because of the danger of these illnesses, health requirements started to be enforced. At first, tetanus, sleeping sickness (eastern and western), and worming were the only vaccinations required. A Coggins test was required if the horse came from out of state, or an infected area. Later on a Strangles vaccination became required. One health problem that always existed had to be that of ventilation in the barn. During the Spring, Summer, and early Fall, the barn doors have always been kept open, unless the weather happened to be bad. This ensured that there would always be plenty of fresh air circulating throughout the barn. In the winter, problems arose. Some members of the Club wanted all of the doors shut so that what heat there was would stay in. Other members wanted the doors open slightly so that the air could circulate freely. For the barn to stay warmer, and so that there were no drafts, the doors had to stay closed. For health reasons, there had to be adequate ventilation. If the air became too stuffy, illness would pass from horse to horse easier. This problem has never been resolved, and members have argued about it almost every winter. Different solutions have been proposed, but none have developed into a solution. During the winter the manure tends to pile up and block the draft from the front barn door anyway.

Regretably, the manure pile tends to build up at other times of the year too. The Saddle Club has always had a problem with getting rid of manure. The Club has to arrange for its own pick up and disposal of manure. Different farmers have been contracted with through the years, and almost every one had a different means of collection. At one time, Club members even had to clean out their stalls and lead the manure into a truck by a specific time in the morning. Then again, requirements about stall cleanliness use to be fairly strict. Stalls had to be cleaned out every day, and the barn aisle had to be kept spotless. This was due to the fact that the barn had to be almost a "showplace" because the Club was still existing on a trial basis.<sup>3</sup> Regulations about cleanliness have gradually been relaxed so that now stalls have to be cleaned out at least once per week instead of once a day. Also, the manure pile is removed by Plant Services and taken to a farmer who has agreed to accept the manure. Plant Services has also used some manure for winter protection around trees, especially those on the UMM mall.

As aiding with the manure removal shows, Plant Services has helped the Saddle Club on occasion. However Plant Services personel and Saddle Club members have not always seen eye-to-eye. Interviewing members of both groups showed supprisingly different opinions about the relationship between the two. When the Saddle Club first started, members believed that Plant Services felt some animosity towards the Club.<sup>4</sup> The main reason seemed to be



the dairy barn. When the Saddle Club had wanted to use the sheep barn, Plant Services had seemed relatively in favor of the idea. Their only stipulation was that the Club members do all of the necessary work on the barn themselves.<sup>5</sup> This included building all of the stalls in the sheep barn. Plant Services did not help with the building of the first arena either. The situation between Plant Services and the Saddle Club went along fairly well like this. The problems started when West Central Experiment Station moved out of the dairy barn. The Saddle Club wanted to use the dairy barn because it needed more room, and the dairy barn was bigger than the sheep barn. It was also in better condition. Plant Services wanted the dairy barn for storage. It turned out that Plant Services and the Saddle Club ended up sharing the facilities. Relations between the two however remained tense. Club members felt that Plant Services would use almost any excuse to get rid of the Club. Because of this feeling, members were always on the alert for trouble. The superintendent of Plant Services, Harold Fahl, had to be the person most disliked by Club members.<sup>6</sup> In the interview with Mr. Fahl, he stated that he had always been in favor of the Saddle Club.<sup>7</sup> This was hardly the opinion that members of the Saddle Club received. If horses just happened to walk on the grass next to the road leading into central parking lot, members heard about it. If horses were ridden on inter-campus roads members heard about that. If horses were on the grass anywhere on campus (other than the pastures),

Plant Services sent another memo. Time has also shown that it takes a long time to get Plant Services to fix anything major. Major includes the barn roof which had leaked badly for several years. To be fair however, Plant Services views the situation a bit differently. According to Mr. Fahl, Plant Services has always been in favor of the Saddle Club, and think that it is a fine organization.<sup>8</sup> As far as problems, Mr. Fahl did not believe that there had ever been any big ones. Horses walking on the grass was just a very minor issue. Plant Services has been good to the Club at times in the past. One of the first times was when they built the new stalls in the dairy barn. Admittedly, it had to be done so that the art department could have the sheep barn, but it did cut down on the amount of possible space for Plant Services in the dairy barn. Another time was when the new arena was built in 1978. When the road that goes between the current intermural fields and the present Saddle Club arena was constructed, the old arena had to be torn down or moved. Plant Services ended up building the new arena for the Club. This took a lot of work because the area had to be leveled first. Plant Services even built the new Melander-Brown arena to WSCA (Western Saddle Club Association) regulation size. Also for smaller repairs such as the water pipes freezing, and the pipe stalls pulling away from the walls in the barn, Plant Services has been fairly good. Part of the reason for the dislike of Plant Services may have been due to the feeling held by many students that Plant Services was and



is inefficient. In the early 1970's, when food service was being built, a new sidewalk had to be constructed. Plant Services put the sidewalk in once, decided to build it differently, ripped it out, put it in a second time, decided that they did not like it that way either, ripped it out again, and put the sidewalk in a third and final time. Students on campus were upset at the large amount of money that was being wasted on one piece of sidewalk. Plant Services still conducts rather questionable activities such as watering plants in the rain.<sup>9</sup> Add this evidence to the memos received by the Saddle Club about horses walking on grass, being on campus roads, being out too late at night, and everything else, it is possible to see why Plant Services was not too well liked by members of the Saddle Club.

To keep relations as smooth as possible between Saddle Club members and Plant Services, special by-laws were put into the Saddle Club constitution. These by-laws included items about not riding on campus roads, and not having horses out at night. The Saddle Club constitutions have been added to and changed in other ways over the years, but most of the portions concerning Plant Services have remained the same. The Saddle Club has had three different constitutions, each slightly different from the preceding one. Most of the changes have been in the by-laws, but some of the changes have taken place within the actual constitution. Such items as having the horses in at night (unless with special permission), keeping tack and grain rooms

locked, and sleeping sickness and tetanus shots have always been part of the requirements. Some important organizational changes have occurred. An example of this was the office of Club Historian. This office was established in 1974, but in 1977 it was removed as a separate office and added to the duties of the vice-president. Also in 1977, the creation of a new office took place. Prior to this date, the offices of Secretary and Treasurer had been combined. After that constitution, the two became separate offices. In 1980, yet another office was added to the club. This office happened to be that of Barn Foreman. Other changes have taken place in the areas of fees, membership, attendance, and horse health requirements. In the first constitution, the only required vaccinations were tetanus, sleeping sickness, and worming. The current by-laws have added Strangles, an upper respiratory disease, to the list. One final constitutional change happened in the article concerning stud colts (stallions). In 1974, colts' had to be gelded or taken out of the barn at six months of age. By 1980, (the last major constitutional change), the colts could stay in the barn until they were twelve months old. Other than these changes not many major revisions have taken place in the Club's constitution.

In other areas however, there have been fairly drastic changes. The first change lies in the area of Club requirements. Fees have always been a bit of a problem. When the Club first started, there were only basic dues, and barn fees for stall



reservations and manure removal. Gradually things have changed so that the fees now include dues, stall reservation, manure removal, and a yearly damage deposit. Another change in requirements includes the area of horse health. Each horse has to have all of its shots, now including Strangles, and be checked over by a veterinarian before it can be brought into the barn. Once the horse is at UMM, the owner has to clean out the stall at least once a week, but even that has changed from the once a day requirement in the beginning of the Club.

The dairy barn however, has to have seen the most change. This barn went from holding cows when West Central had it, to being threatened with demolition and being turned into a parking lot, to holding horses. Through the various transitions the barn went through quite a bit of remodeling. New stalls and Plant Services' partition were built. Again in 1982, major renovations started with the old pipe stalls. The pipe stalls in the main part of the barn have, for the most part, been torn down and rebuilt using wood. The loft still leaks though, but tentative plans have been discussed to fix that. All the work done on both of the barns can barely compare with the amount of work done on the two Melander-Brown arenas. The first arena was small, square, and student built. The second arena Plant Services built to regulation size. Together, the arenas have seen ten horse shows. The current arena however has seen the largest number of shows. Its construction also caused the most disruption. When the road that runs between the current arena

and the intermural fields was constructed, the old arena had to be torn down and moved. When this move occurred, the Saddle Club's pastures had to be rebuilt. Originally, the pastures had reached as far out as the present road. When the new arena was built, the pastures were moved into their present location. One advantage of the site of the new arena was that of natural seating. The place where the arena sits use to be part of a hill. Plant Services leveled just enough of the hill to provide a flat area for the arena. The rest of the hill was left intact to provide seating for people who wanted to watch the horse shows. Club members were at first worried about the road being between the barn and the arena and pastures. Members even went as far as discussing the idea of a cattle pass under the road. Nothing further developed from the discussion because the road turned out to be less of a problem than expected.

Despite the fact that the Club's building and moving activities kept the members busy, they still found time to have "fun" activities. One of these events happened to be riding in parades. The UMM Homecoming parade has received the most support from Club members. Besides riding in the parade, Club members usually build a float. These floats have even captured first place in the contest on occasion. The annual Morris Memorial Day parade has also received Club support from time to time. These two parades have been the only ones that the UMM Saddle Club regularly participates in.



Parades were not the only fun that Saddle Club members had. Every year the Club has held a public horse show. Club members put many hours of work into each show. With all of the various crews such as registration, ribbons, and grounds crew, almost the entire Club does get involved with the show. The few people that do not work on a crew at the actual show usually show their horses. Few of these annual horse shows have been exactly alike. The amount and type of classes have changed almost every year. New classes have become added while others have been left out. At the 1984 show, there were twenty-seven different classes. This was one of the largest shows. Attendance has been fairly good, but that is probably due to the fact that the show is WSCA approved. Bad weather has managed to cut down on the attendance from time to time.

Along with the annual public show, the Saddle Club has usually held "fun shows". This type of horse show has always been for Saddle Club members only. Although there is only one annual show, there have been as many as three "fun shows". "Fun shows" are not as big as the annual show, but their main purpose has always been to provide an extra training session for the members horses. Members would then be able to tell how their horses would react at the annual show.

After all of the shows were held, the annual Spring banquet took place. At the banquet, events of the past year and plans for the next were discussed. The officers for the next year were elected at this time too. Currently five officers are

elected. These offices are; president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and barn foreman. Past years have seen fewer or different offices. Secretary-treasurer use to be combined, and there use to be an office of Club Historian. Ever since 1977, being Vice-president has carried the responsibility of being the club historian. The office of Barn Foreman was instituted fairly recently too.

Something not quite as entertaining as the banquet, or even the election of officers, is another activity that has been done every year, fund raising. The reasoning behind the fund raisers has been to produce money for the annual show. Many different money making measures have been tried. Some of the various methods have included bake sales, ice cream sales, and raffles. The raffle has been used the most in recent years. Prizes have ranged from groceries, to clothing, to a monetary prize. As unpleasant to members as the fund raisers were, they almost always managed, with the help of entry fees, to pay for the annual horse show.

Even with all the work on fund raising, horse shows, the barn, and the arena, ex-Club members generally feel that the Club was worth all the trouble.<sup>10</sup> Many felt that the Club had a lasting effect on them, whether it had been in the area of college, of career choice. Some students chose UMM simply because they could keep their horse on campus.<sup>11</sup> Other students felt that being members of the Saddle Club had helped them decide on their career, and/or later had an effect on gaining employment.<sup>12</sup>



Not all members believed that the club had much of an effect on their career choice, but they too believed that being in the Club had been worthwhile and fun.<sup>13</sup>

Worthwhile or not,,the UMM Saddle Club has managed to exist for thirteen years. Currently, the Saddle Club is twenty-seven members strong. Not all of the members own horses, but there are enough activities, and enough work, to keep everyone busy. The annual horse show is held in mid-May with the Spring banquet following a few weeks later. The last two year have shown the advent of something new, a queen coronation. This was tried a few years ago too, but nothing really developed from that. Now, the woman who becomes the UMM Saddle Club queen goes on to compete in the WSCA (Western Saddle Club Association) queen contest in the Fall. The UMM coronation takes place at the Spring banquet. Other current activities of the Club include pizza parties, trail rides, and occasional field trips.

Despite the fact that everything sounds fine, what with parties, horse shows, and coronations, the Saddle Club still has its share of problems. The pro's and con's of barn ventilation are brought up every winter. This issue has always been a problem, and will probably be a problem for years to come. Changes in health requirements and the amount of fees have caused a great deal of discussion. One of the largest concerns, however, has been that of unauthorized people in the barn at night. Usually, the Saddle Club welcomes visitors, but on occasion strangers have come in and let the horses out of their

stalls at night. Also, alcoholic beverage containers and cigarette butts have been found in the barn loft. These findings caused a great deal of concern, and led to the placement of a lock on the lift door. The idea of locking the main barn doors had been discussed, but it was discarded due to the danger of fire. Other than these problems, the life of the Saddle Club has generally run smoothly.

In its short thirteen year history, the UMM Saddle Club has seen more than its share of changes and problems. The very name of the Club has changed three times. In 1971, the Club was christened the Rodeo Sports Club. Later, the name changed to UMM Horsemen Inc.. Finally, the Club's name changed to the UMM Saddle Club. Other changes happened in the areas of barn choice, and construction, arena location, and Club requirements. Throughout the thirteen years and all of the changes, the UMM Saddle Club has managed to grow and become firmly established at UMM.

Most, if not all of the credit for the Club's existence and continuation has to go to the original members. Vicki Brown and Jeff and Linda (Baumgartner) Melander deserve the credit for keeping the Club on its feet those first few years, and in setting up a firm foundation for the Club to stand on. They, and the other members of the Club, past and present, have managed to prove that the UMM Saddle Club is quite a bit more than a group of students out just "horsing around". The members have proved that the UMM Saddle Club is a lasting club with a bright and strong future on the UMM campus.



# FOOTNOTES

1. Interview with Jeff and Linda Melander conducted 4/25/84.
2. Interview with Harold Fahl conducted 5/14/84.
3. Interview with Jeff and Linda Melander conducted 4/25/84.
4. Interview with Jeff and Linda Melander conducted 4/25/84.
5. Interview with Harold Fahl conducted 5/14/84.
6. Interview with Jeff and Linda Melander conducted 4/25/84.
7. Interview with Harold Fahl conducted 5/14/84.
8. Interview with Harold Fahl conducted 5/14/84.
9. Author's personal observation.
10. Interview with Jeff and Linda Melander conducted 4/25/84,  
and interview with Pam Bretz conducted 4/4/84.
11. Interview with Pam Bretz conducted 4/4/84.
12. Interview with Jeff and Linda Melander conducted 4/25/84,  
and interview with Pam Bretz conducted 4/4/84.
13. Interview with Jeff and Linda Melander conducted 4/25/84.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Interview with Jeff and Linda Melander. This source was very useful. Both Mr. and Mrs. Melander were original members of the UMM Saddle Club. The information gained from this interview was heavily relied on for this paper.
2. Interview with Harold Fahl, superintendent of Plant Services. This interview corroborated some of the information from the Melander interview and Saddle Club records. However, Mr. Fahl's opinion of the Saddle Club did not agree with the Saddle Club's opinion of Mr. Fahl or Plant Services. This interview, other than supplying a few different opinions, was not very useful except in discovering Plant Services views.
3. Interview with Pam Bretz. This source backed up information from the Melander interview. Ms. Bretz also filled in a few details not mentioned in the other interviews. This particular interview was not as heavily relied upon as the Melander's interview, but it was more useful than Mr. Fahl's.
4. The UMM Saddle Club records. These records were available from the Saddle Club Secretary and Vice-president. The records were very useful. Unfortunately, they only went back until the Fall of 1973. As with other non-professional records, there



were gaps, and places where the writing was illegible. The records included a copy of each constitution. This, was very helpful. The records were excellent for finding dates, names, and events. Included in the records were the minutes of the Saddle Club meetings from September, 1973, until May, 1983. Old membership lists, correspondence to and from Club members, show bills, and miscellaneous clippings and flyers were also included. In short, the records alone could have provided enough material for the research paper.