

O'Neill Riding Stable, R.A. McElroy and Riley Boy, Texas' Most Beautiful Horse

Thanks to TCHC associate member / THC history steward Lanny Ottosen for his considerable assistance in researching this property.

R. A. McELROY presents
. A Golden Beauty
... From the Heart of Texas



RILEY BOY

Any person would consider himself fortunate to own a Palomino that has been called the "most beautiful horse in Texas", especially a horse that need not depend on his beauty alone but which can perform and win in open all-color competition.

When Mr. McElroy bought Riley Boy he acquired a horse that can show and win in five-gaited events; an acclaimed rodeo performer good enough to place reserve to a seasoned colicking champion the first time he was entered, and a horse so outstanding that he is to be starred in a forthcoming motion picture featuring the famed Texas Rangers.

Mr. McElroy's daughter, Madeline, the young lady who is up in these pictures and who has shown Riley Boy so successfully in Texas shows, will double for the feminine star of the motion picture.

You will see Riley Boy again and again either in the flesh or in pictures because his beauty, intelligence and personality are too potent to be fenced in even by the great State of Texas.



RILEY BOY
 PHIA 814 PHBA 2216

Palomino stallion of exquisite golden color. He is sired by Fort Concho and is out of Daisy Mae, a registered mare. Miss Madeline McElroy, who is up in this picture, has won numerous awards with Riley Boy in the stiffest competition Texas and the Southwest has to offer. They are to have an important part in the forthcoming motion picture, "The Texas Ranger."

Madeline McElroy O'Neill riding Riley Boy



Richard Denney
Vice-Chair
Travis County Historical Commission

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Surrounded by office complexes near 8329 N MoPac, nestled against the railroad tracks, sits an old riding stable hidden from view. If you didn't know it was there you would never notice it. Indeed in 2017 the Travis County Historic Commission's (TCHC) survey of historic properties in Northwest Travis County conducted by Hicks and Company missed the building.

We know it was a riding stable because it was serendipitously "rediscovered" by someone who as a kid rode there. On a Facebook history group, other people that had spent their childhood taking riding lessons there came forward. Other people local to the neighborhood that knew about the building chimed in "We always wondered what that building was!"

Once rediscovered, and recognized as having been a riding stable, the question was what was the history? Unfortunately the people that took riding lessons there as young children didn't remember the name. Here's what we've learned thus far.

A look at aerial photographs of the area showed the stable was part of a larger ranch / farm; the building dates to *at least* 1940, the earliest aerials available to us. The first name we can put on the property with confidence is the O'Neill Riding Stable, 8500 Balcones Trail. That address predates MoPac, the construction of which, and later the renaming of Balcones Trail to Balcones Drive, threw street numbers off. So we relied on properties on old Balcones Trail in that area whose location we were confident of to confirm O'Neill Riding Stable at that address.

O'Neill Riding Stables shows up in newspaper advertisements in 1959, run-by Frank "Dutch" O'Neill and wife, Madeline O'Neill (deed search thus far is

inconclusive as to whether they owned the property or just the business).

Here is where the story gets really interesting. Madeline was the daughter of Robert Allen (better known as R.A.) McElroy who raised Palominos. One named Riley Boy is in several "who's who" of Palominos, e.g. *Official Stud Book and Registry, Palomino Horse Breeders Of America*. McElroy had three daughters, one, Pat, was a "model" that moved to New York. But Madeline was into horse riding and training.

Austin's paper in 1946 proclaims "McElroy's Riley Boy To Go on Tour Of Nation Soon .. often called 'Texas' most beautiful horse,' will leave his Travis county ranch home soon on an exhibition tour that will take him pretty well over the nation, and is expected to culminate in Madison Square Garden next winter ... *McElroy for the past five years [i.e. 1941] has been engaged in raising and training Palomino horses, and now has approximately 50 on his ranch northwest of Austin* (italics mine). Miss McElroy is an expert rider and trainer. A picture of Miss McElroy riding the famous horse will adorn the cover of the National Palomino magazine next month."^[1] In 1947 McElroy presented a framed picture of Riley Boy, with daughter Madeline riding him in a classic "Lone Ranger Hi-Ho Silver" pose, to then Governor of Texas, Beauford Jester.^[2]

So was the stable at 8500 Balcones Trail part of the ranch cited in 1946 about McElroy? Another article from 1950 cites the ranch "at Fiskville"^[3]; the stable is less than 2 miles from the Edward Zimmerman home on Payton Gin Rd, one of the founders of Fiskville^[4]. The Balcones Trail location fits the criteria of being both northwest of Austin and near Fiskville.

We don't know if O'Neill Riding Stables was in business before 1959, but in 1960 Dutch and Madeline O'Neill sold the property (or business) and it was renamed Balcones Riding Stables.^{[5],[6]}

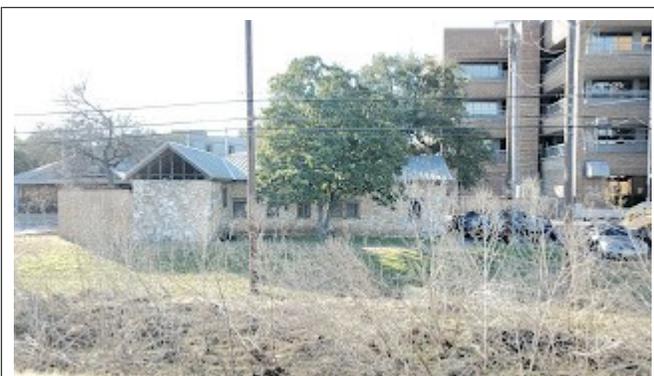
We know a riding stable by some name was here until MoPac was constructed from talking with people who as children rode here, and from one of the last owner's daughter. If you have information about the stables, would love to hear from you!

Photos of the stable

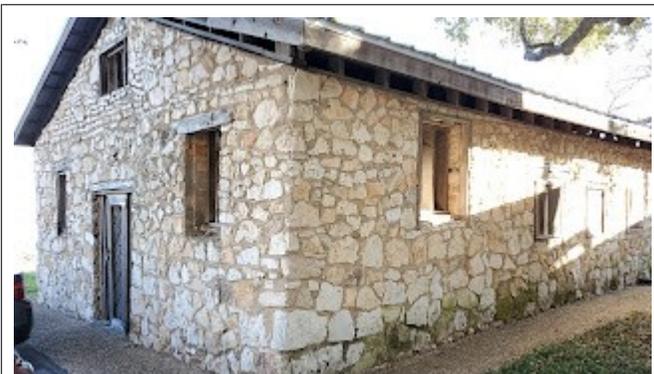
Click to enlarge photos



1940 aerial photo showing stable



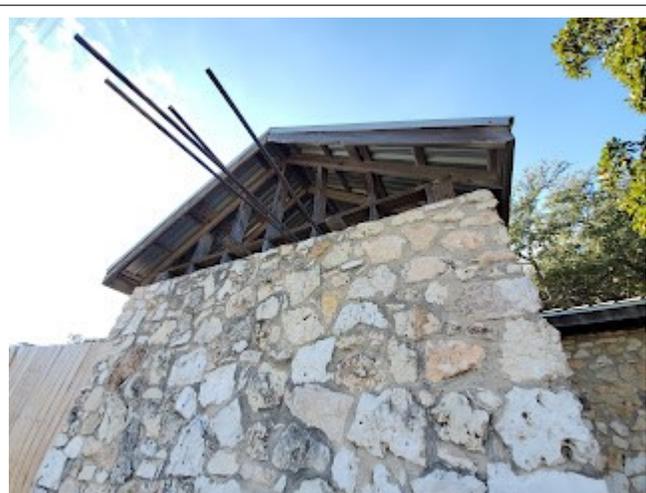
View from railroad tracks looking west



North and west walls. One source said window over door may have been hayloft.



Window lintels are hand hewn, may have been repurposed from older building.



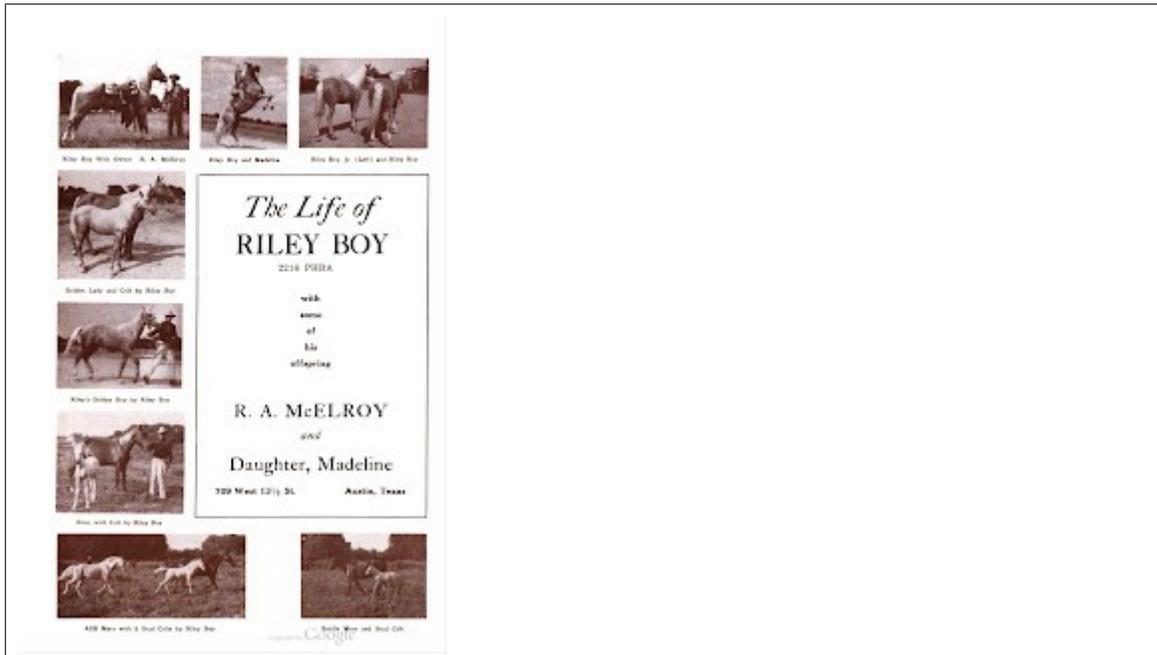
One source thought this was the tac room.



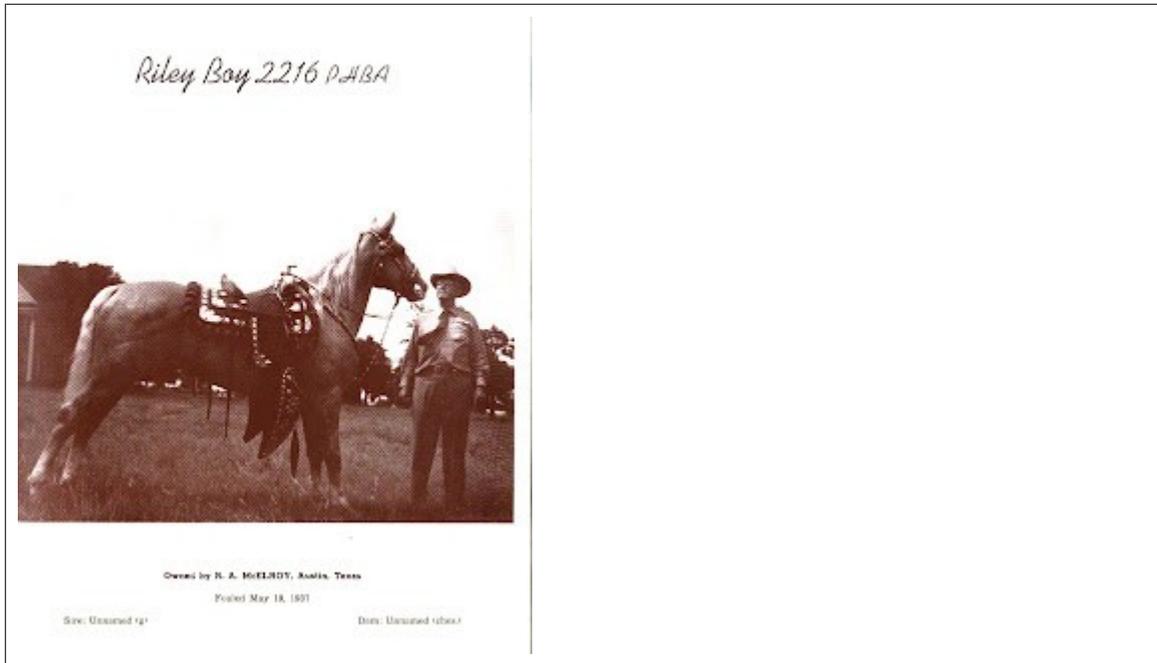
West wall.

In the News

[Click to enlarge photos](#)



1945 PALOMINO PROGRESS, Official Stud Book and Registry, PALOMINO HORSE BREEDERS OF AMERICA, Volume IV



1945 PALOMINO PROGRESS, Official Stud Book and Registry, PALOMINO HORSE BREEDERS OF AMERICA, Volume IV

Newspapers by Ancestry

The Austin American (Austin, Texas) · 28 Jun 1946, Fri · Page 25
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R. A. McElroy and Daughter
First Auction Sale

35 — Palomino Horses — 35

Most of these are sired by
Riley Boy, Texas' most
beautiful Horse

SATURDAY, JUNE 29, 1946
2 P. M.

Just north of city limits of Austin, Texas,
on US Highway No. 51. We are equipped
to deliver horses anywhere in the USA.

R. A. McElroy & Daughter
Austin, Texas

Col. Walter S. Britten
Auctioneer

Bill J. Castellaw
Texas Livestock Journal



1946 R.A. McElroy and daughter Madeline riding Riley Boy

Newspapers by Ancestry

The Austin American (Austin, Texas) · 6 Apr 1947, Sun · Page 15
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—Photo by Neal Douglas

PALOMINO BEAUTY—R. A. McElroy, Austin Palomino horse breeder, is here shown presenting Governor Beauford Jester with a frame autographed photograph of Riley Boy, famous Palomino stallion, with Mrs. Madeline McElroy O'Neil, daughter of McElroy, riding the steed. The horse, acclaimed among the most beautiful in Texas, is a sire of Riley Boy's Dollana, declared the champion Palomino stock horse mare at the Southwestern Stock Show at Fort Worth this year.

1947 McElroy presents framed photo to Governor Jester. Notice same photo as above.



1948 photo of Riley Boy at "McElroy Ranch". Lady is Patricia Douglass; relation to ranch unknown; may simply be a "selfie" with famous horse. UNT Portal to Texas History / Austin History Center.



1948 photo features daughter Pat riding Riley Boy

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1948 HERE'S WHO IN HORSES of the Pacific Coast Horsesdom's Hall of Fame. Madeline riding Riley Boy

Austin American-Statesman (Austin, Texas) - 31 Mar 1950, Fri - Page 17
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BRACKENRIDGE Hospital Check Begins April 6

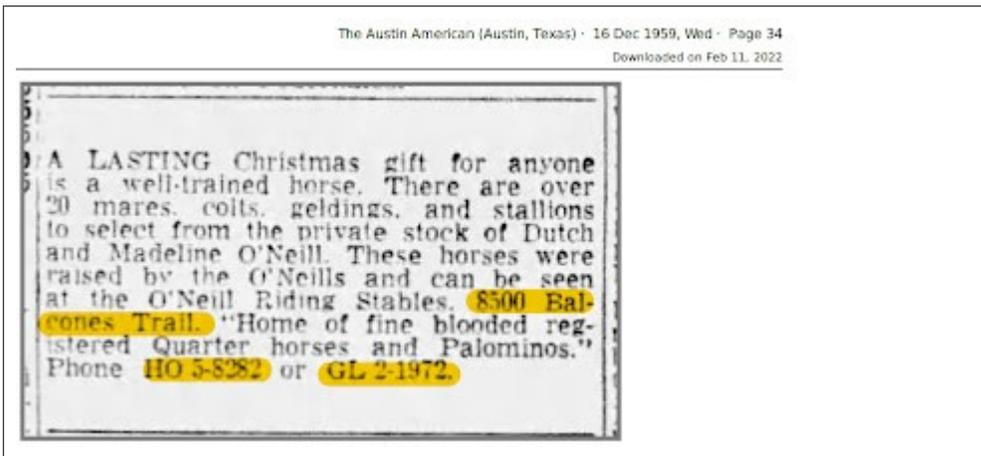
TAG SEEKERS THE TRAFFIC

DAUGHTERS HORSES HIS FOND INTEREST
Beauty Surrounds Rancher McElroy

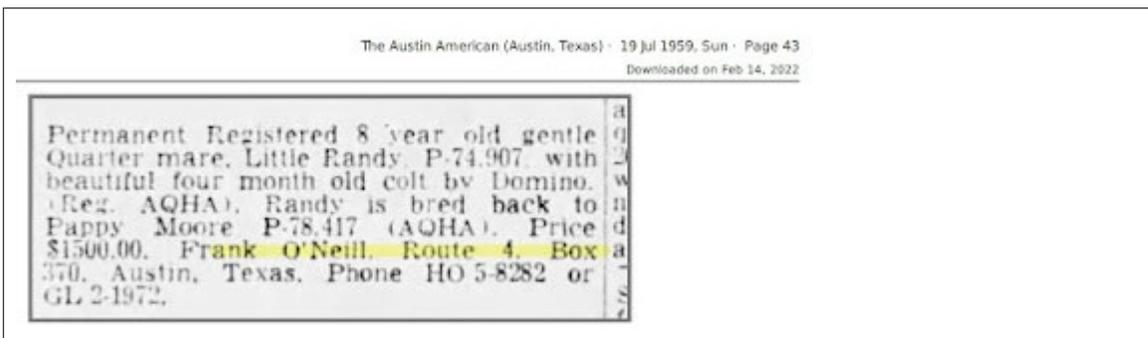
Raised Up Faced By Cloudy Skies

Future Needs Studied by City

1950 photo of daughter Pat with Riley Boy



1959 advertisement of O'Neill stables located on 8500 Balcones Trail



1959 advertisement by Frank O'Neill provides a postal address of Route 4, Box 370. Notice phone match that of O'Neill Riding Stable in other ads.



1959 horseback contest at O'Neill Stables



APPLAUSE GETTER—This horse with five-year-old Rusty O'Neill up demonstrates a quick turn around the barrel, sure to capture applause by the audience attending the annual horse riding recital for the pupils of the O'Neill Riding School. The show is scheduled Friday from 4:30 to 6:30 p. m. at the O'Neill Stable, 8500 Balcones Trail.

1960 ad for O'Neill Riding School features Rusty O'Neill (5 yrs old)

Comptroller of Public Accounts

THIS IS to inform you that my wife and I are selling O'Neill Riding Stable to Miss Sally Ann Shultz. While we are no longer associated with O'Neill Riding Stable, the business will continue with the same horses, the same location, and Mrs. Gordon Warren and Lynn White will continue in their same capacities.

We have appreciated your patronage and feel confident that the business will continue to meet with your approval.

FRANK O'NEILL

1960 announcement of sale of O'Neill Riding Stables

FOR SALE:—Bay mare. Gentle for children or adults. Can be seen at Balcones Riding Stables. Call HO 5-8282 or GL 2-3427.

1961 Balcones Riding Stables ad; phones are same as former O'Neill Stables

Frank O'Neill

Football coach

Frank "Dutch" O'Neill of Eastland, known as the most winning coach in Texas and named "Coach of the Year" twice during the 1960s, died Sunday, Nov. 22, 1998 at Hendrick Medical Center in Abilene. He was 79.

He was the father of Pat Robbins of Granbury.

Private family graveside services were Tuesday, Nov. 24, 1998 in Pilot Grove Cemetery in Yoakum.

The family suggests memorials be made to local youth organizations or charities.

1998 obit; Frank "Dutch" O'Neill had a long history in football that included coaching and athletics director at high schools all over Texas. In 2014 he was inducted into the Yoakum Athletic Hall of Fame as "All-South Texas Back; Southwester University (1937)"

Misc. Notes

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/120825231/robert-allen-mcelroy>

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/72957922/madaline-lucille-o'neill>

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/72957959/frank-marion-o'neill>

[1] The Austin American (Austin, Texas) · 24 Jan 1946, Thu · Page 7

[2] The Austin American (Austin, Texas) · 6 Apr 1947, Sun · Page 15

[3] Austin American-Statesman (Austin, Texas) · 31 Mar 1950, Fri · Page 17

[4] Fiskville, TCHC article. <https://traviscountyhistorical.blogspot.com/2021/09/fiskville-application-to-texas.html>

[5] Austin American-Statesman (Austin, Texas) · 21 Jul 1960, Thu · Page 39. A Comptroller of Public Accounts news clipping reported a sale to a "Miss Sally Ann Shultz". A deed search by the Travis County Clerk's Office found no deed transfer leading one to believe it was possibly the sale of a business, not property.

[6] The Austin American (Austin, Texas) · 6 Aug 1961, Sun · Page 45. While the address for Balcones Riding Stable is not given, the phone number is the same as O'Neill Riding Stable.