

FERDINAND THE BULL

By David P. McKenna, November 18, 2024

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"The adventurous career of 'Ferdinand the Bull,' who has been ducking bullets and running wild in the West Peabody woods for eight weeks, was abruptly ended at 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon (JAN. 20, 1939) when he was shot and killed in the rear of Goodale Street by John Ross, a fox hunter." ~ Quoted from the Salem News, "25 Years Ago" column, JAN. 20, 1964

*J*ohn M. Ross of 50 Buxton Road Danvers was my grandfather.

On Columbus Day weekend in 1969, I had been home from College at the Stockbridge School of Agriculture at U Mass. As we were leaving for my parents to drive me to the Bus stop to go back, we heard Dad's German Shepherd barking behind the house. We drove up to investigate and found him chasing a bovine around in the cemetery. Dad collared the dog and chained him up and we left.

There were reports of the critter around the neighborhood over the next couple of months. Rumor had it that it had gotten loose from one of Richardson's herds and tore up a couple of greens at the Middleton Golf Course, so THEY never claimed ownership.

Fast forward to Presidents' Day weekend and I'm home again. In mid-afternoon on February 19, I heard the dog barking furiously from the direction of the old gravel pits. My Father was not home so I went to investigate the commotion.

There was a steep slope about 15 feet down to the swampy bottom and the Shepherd was down there with the bovine once again, harrying it among the aspen saplings. On further observation, I could see that the dog had chewed both ears off its quarry and was trying to take it down.

I quickly descended the slope in an attempt to contain the dog. He noted my arrival and apparently thinking, "OH. Reinforcements!" decided that if he and I "surrounded" the young bull, we could finish it off quickly.

The bull however looked from me to the dog a couple times. Noting the disparity in our teeth, he decided I was the lesser threat and charged me. I soon found myself flying through the air and landing flat on my back with him blowing and pawing the ground preparatory to another charge.

I decided discretion was the better part of valor and scrambled through the aspen and scurried up the slope as fast as I could, leaving the dog and bull to settle their differences on their own.

Just then my father, Ed Ross arrived with his hunting rifle and put an end to the impasse.

We ate a LOT of beef that winter, but after the bull's running around the woods for three months, they were the toughest steaks I ever chewed.

Only ONE month over being exactly 30 years between the two Kills. I was tempted to go to the Hilltop Steak House in Saugus with a paintball gun and shoot one of the plastic cows on March 18, 1999, to keep up the tradition, but I figured they wouldn't see the humor in it.