

# the little horse mystery

## Chapter Eight by Kay Hively

Every day at school Nathan thought about Willie and his family. He hoped they were safe. He hoped Willie's feet didn't hurt any more.

Nathan also thought about Abner. Was he fighting in Tennessee? When would he come home?

Early Saturday morning, after a week of wondering about his friends, Nathan got up early. At the breakfast table, he asked if he could go see Mr. Walters.

With breakfast under his belt, Nathan headed to the blacksmith shop. He had not been there since Abner rode away to fight. It would be good to see Mr. Walters again, he thought.

When Nathan reached the shop, Mr. Walters was pounding his big hammer against a red hot horseshoe. Nathan loved the Ping! Ping! of the hammer striking the anvil. The sounds in the blacksmith shop were like a band concert.

To Nathan, the song of the blacksmith shop even included the chatter of the old men who came by to visit each day.

Mr. Walters broke into a big smile when he saw Nathan. Laying down his hammer, the blacksmith scooped a dipper of water from a bucket and sat down on a big wooden stool.

Nathan leaned against a big wagon wheel that stood along the wall of the blacksmith shop. When Mr. Walters finished his dipper of water, Nathan asked about Abner. Mr. Walters had no news for Nathan. Nothing had been heard of the volunteers since they left town. Sending a letter was not easy in war, Mr. Walters said. But he was sure Abner would write as soon as he could.

Mr. Walters said he missed Abner around the shop and could use some help. Since school would be out soon, Mr. Walters asked if

Nathan would like to work with him. Nathan was quick to accept the job – if his parents would allow it.

The old blacksmith told Nathan that his first job would be to help make a weather vane for George Hayward's barn. Mr. Hayward had said he wanted a tall weather vane, with a big arrow and an animal on top.

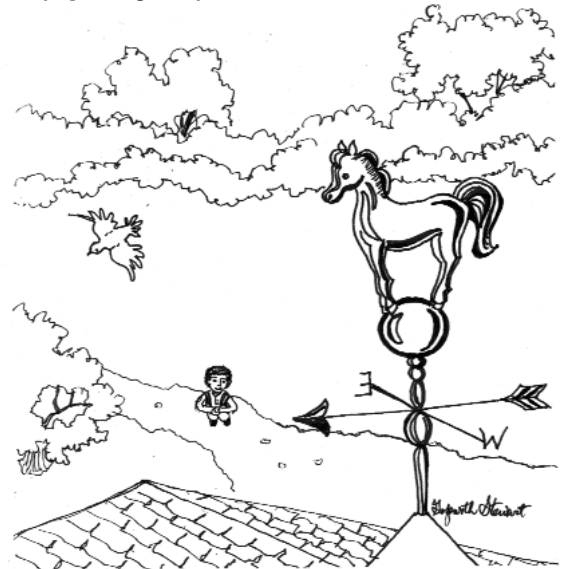
Nathan asked what animal would be on the weather vane. Mr. Hayward had said it didn't matter – just a farm animal.

The old blacksmith asked Nathan if he had an animal in mind. Nathan said he had a little horse at home that he would like to copy.

Mr. Walters thought a horse would be a good choice. Nathan then asked if he could give the weather vane a name. "I'd like to call the horse on the weather vane Liberty," Nathan said.

Mr. Walters agreed to call the horse Liberty.

Just about a month later, a handsome weather vane with a horse named Liberty was hoisted high over Mr. Hayward's barn. Nathan was proud of the new weather vane. And he was sure that somewhere in Canada there was a boy who would be very happy to see Liberty spinning freely in the Illinois breeze.



Author Kay Hively and Illustrator Billie Gofourth-Stewart are both of Neosho, Missouri. Produced in partnership with this newspaper and the Missouri Press Foundation with support from Verizon Foundation. Copyright 2002.

## Classroom Extensions

### Things to Think About and Do –

- What is an anvil? What is a dipper? Do you know anyone who has an anvil or a dipper? Ask an older person if he or she ever saw an anvil or a dipper?
- Why did Nathan choose the name "Liberty" for the weather vane horse? What does a weather vane do? Design a weather vane. What will you put on top?