



Medicine Hat Cowboy Life

June 2021

Official Newsletter for Medicine Hat Cowboy Poetry Foundation

Stories from Seniors

A collection of stories and poetry by and for seniors
who've lived and worked in rural areas around Medicine Hat



Cover Art: Preacher and Parson
by Gena LaCoste



Our first edition of Stories from Seniors, a booklet to accompany our video series is now available for purchase. Meet the contributors to our series, read their stories and the poems inspired by their stories. This handsome book is illustrated by two local artists, Donna Mae Goldade and Gina LaCoste. To order your copy, contact Jen Zollner at 403.529.6384. Only \$15, with all proceeds going to the Medicine Hat Cowboy Poetry Foundation. Thanks to Hale Hearing for being our print sponsor.

Our June story is from Ila Dillabough. In May we published our Treasurer, Carol Eisenbarth's memories of her family (Becker) barn. In April we featured George Rissling, and his dairy farm.

To view the videos visit www.MHCowboyLife.com. Select Stories, then Stories from Seniors.

Also of interest: Jack Fischer barn story and Harry Forbes Remembers, all under Stories.

In this issue: Dunmore history, Henry Cavan,
Phantom Train, the Clydesdale horse.

www.MHCowboyLife.com



From My Perch on the Corral: President's Message

With spring comes calving and seeding and hoping for rain - more than the odd drop here and there. The May snowstorm reminds us of the one Henry Cavan and a multitude of cattlemen experienced in 1903.

The livelihood of farmers and ranchers depends on the weather and the need to rearrange not just our day-to-day lives but the need to alter the way we manage our operations. The free-range ranchers in southern Alberta learned that lesson the hard way, not just with economic loss but from the tragic suffering and death of hundreds of thousands of cattle. I can almost see the helpless cowhands risking their lives to do what little they could. I can almost smell the air in southern Alberta when the spring of 1907 came.

It's a delight to share what I've discovered and rediscovered about Dunmore and area, its past and its present. I'd forgotten it was in Assiniboia before Alberta became a province. Apparently our ghost train story has become a Canadian legend. Little did I realize that Dunmore Junction was such a busy rail intersection for coal and clay, passengers and other goods. Little wonder it rivaled Medicine Hat's population at one time. Dunmore's struggle through the years brought to the foreground the value of water for domestic, as well as agricultural use. I got to know about Henry Cavan and his vision of irrigation as a way to harness rainwater in our drought-ridden area.

We can take pride in being first in Western Canada to have Clydesdale horses (which came to alter rangeland to farmland). What a surprise to learn that we have a team of Clydesdales in our own community, ready to demonstrate original horsepower with nine other top teams from Western Canada. See you on June 19th, Covid permitting. I'm impressed with the amenities this strong-willed community has to offer.

So it is that we, as farmers and ranchers are less affected by Covid because isolation has been a part of our heritage and still is a part of our lifestyle. As well, we're well-practiced with the need to adapt to the weather, to the down-prices of our products and the up-prices for the machines that produce it. We're like Dunmore and district: we're steadfast and determined to persevere.

Besides the newsletter, our website is proud to feature the barn story from our treasurer, Carol Eisenbarth. Thanks to Cheryl Dust for her video expertise and her secretarial duties.



Jen Zollner, President, Medicine Hat
Cowboy Poetry Foundation

Our vice-president, Shelley Goldbeck has been patiently nursing her three broken leg bones and still managed to format this newsletter, introduce Carol on the video, etc. Ken Feser is part of our team and also part of the library team that's busily inventing ways to provide library service from a library that's sometimes closed. Sincere thanks to each of you.

Covid prevented us from interviewing Harry Forbes in Maple Creek on his 103rd birthday, but excerpts from his books are featured on our website. Be sure to check our website for regular monthly postings: MHCowboyLife.com.

We are busy planning our 2021 Medicine Hat Cowboy Poetry and Western Music Show. It will be at Kin Coulee again, at 1PM, September 11, 2021. Save the date!



Medicine Hat Cowboy Life

CATTLE TERMS FROM TRAILING DAYS

- acorn calf -a weak, runty calf
- beeves -beef cattle
- bell cow -a cow, with a bell on a collar, which the herd willingly follows
- bossy -refers to a calf on the trail; on the homestead it's the milk cow(s)
- dogie -a motherless calf, also refers to a yearling, by extension can mean any cattle
- Judas steer -the steer that would lead the other cattle to slaughter at the end of the trail
- leppy -an orphaned or abandoned calf
- long horns -generally means wild cattle, term from the hardy Texas Longhorn cattle
- moss head -a very old steer
- pilgrim cattle -cattle brought from Eastern Canada that had a high mortality rate, much higher than the prairie-bred cattle. Cowboys complained about them wandering away, falling over cliffs, drowning in water holes, etc.

The End:

Cowboy life on the trail was dangerous with stampedes, river crossings, rank horses and more. Maybe that's why they had so many euphemisms for death. Here are a few:

- bite the dust
- branded for the eternal range
- buzzard food
- cash in
- cut his suspenders
- hang up one's fiddle
- kicked the bucket
- last round-up
- lead poisoning
- pass on the chips
- the big jump

Then you have the:

- cold meat wagon -the hearse
- the bone orchard -the cemetery

Activities with Low Risk of Contracting (COVID-19)

- hanging around your barn admiring it
- sweeping the barn floor
- soaping your saddle
- hanging up the bridles and halters
- making a box for your grooming tools
- looking for that hoof pick that's missing
- making a tack room
- recoiling that tub of mixed up ropes and hanging them up
- repairing that broken window and bent hinge
- taking a picture of your horse or barn
- telling your kids and grandkids about the history of the barn (by phone)

Cowboy Wisdom:

While you're alive there'll always be somebody richer, smarter, stronger. But once you're dead, nobody will be deader.

Before you let anybody measure you for a big wooden overcoat, make sure you've wrung all the life out of your livin'.

By Jen Zollner

Medicine Hat Cowboy Life is the official newsletter of the Medicine Hat Cowboy Poetry Foundation, (a registered Society in the Province of Alberta), published four times per year. Our mandate is to preserve, promote and celebrate cowboy traditions and country living. If you wish to submit articles or information of interest to our readers, please email jen@MHCowboyLife.com subject: Newsletter.



Henry Cavan, Dunmore

Henry Cavan's notable life started on April 21, 1887. He was the first white child born in the Dunmore area and the first-born child of Daniel and Annie Cavan. His mother Annie did not have sufficient breast milk to feed baby Henry so an indigenous woman nursed him.

Henry grew up on his father's modest sheep ranch. By the time he was 12, Dunmore Junction and nearby Coleridge (now Dunmore) were bigger than Medicine Hat.

At the tender age of 16, Henry experienced the tragic cattle losses from a week-long snowstorm in 1903. Then came the hard winter of 1906-7 when he was 20 years of age. It changed his life. He saw first-hand the dire need for ranchers to put-up hay, the need for irrigation and thus initiated a new era in the ranching industry.

He worked for the Prairie Farm and Rehabilitation Act (PFRA) and was an authority in irrigation and water matters. His plan was to get irrigation to the Dunmore and Irvine areas. He was the sole founder and surveyor of the Cavan Lake Irrigation system. He worked unceasingly to develop many projects in the drought area of Southern Alberta and now the Ross Creek project has some 3000 irrigated acres between Dunmore and Irvine. For good reason, the Cavan Lake Recreation Area was named after him.

Meanwhile he became a rancher of renown. He was in his 50's when he increased his holdings by purchasing 10,000 acres from one of the old 76 Ranches (which was one of nine such ranches started by Sir John Lister-Kaye in 1886). He ran 250 head of Hereford cattle, and then ten years later, added a herd of 100 Morgan brood mares and a Tennessee Walking Horse stallion.

He was generous, he was community-minded and he was an initiator. The Medicine Hat Exhibition and Stampede had him as a founding member (supplying them with roping calves and cows for the wild cow milking contest for 40 years). He was a Municipal District Official, the Secretary/Treasurer of the Dunmore School District, as well as a land assessor, an ardent hunter and an excellent marksman.

There's a donation from Henry Cavan in front of the Esplanade, a distinctive black rock that was near the ranch. He had donated it to the original museum.

Henry Cavan died on June 5, 1966. See the Cavan Ranch on our website under Ranch Histories. *by Jen Zollner*



Henry Cavan





WHEN CATTLE WORE NECKTIES

By Jen Zollner

The last week of May in 1903
Is when cattle were wearing neckties.
Cavan was keen, just a boy of 16,
Already a man, beyond years he was wise.

He saw the clouds fret and anyone could bet
Nature's devil was stirring a brew,
And thousands of dogies were about to arrive
By trainloads; this week they were due.

The cowmen were positive, this was their chance
To make big bucks and they'd make 'em fast.
The spring this year early and they thought that surely
The market would swell and good prices would last.

The two years preceding had seen loads of moisture,
Free prairie rolled endlessly, green and lush.
The railroad would haul them, the bankers were all in.
For plenty of cowmen, this venture a rush.

"What a disaster!" is what Cavan's thinking,
That the storm and the dogies should arrive the same time,
He knew about blizzards and then he considered,
This nightmare could really cause victims and crime.

Whipped crystals of ice, they stung like bee bites,
The arrival of trains on each other's rear lights.
The stockyards were crowded, beasts too wet for branding,
So how could each cowman know his steers by sight?

The answer was: ties 'round each yearling's neck,
Each owner his colour, keeping rustlers in check.
But the temp is now freezing and there's no guaranteeing.
The bedlam, the crowding caused a big bottleneck.

It was seven days straight that the storm would explode,
Trainloads came faster than they could unload,
Out cattle were pushed, cold and hungry and bushed.
What a crime, worse than Cavan had even forebode.

These were soft skim-milk dogies, never hustled for chow.
Had they come the right time they'd have had to learn how.
The scene it was gory; it revealed a grim story,
Where snow banks once were, dead carcasses lay now.

Young Cavan'd been hired to pilot an outfit.
Five dollars a day was the going man's pay,
He knew this here land like the back of his hand,
But still couldn't hold 'em; he did lose some strays.

The setting was perfect for rustlers of cattle,
Survivors turned up with another man's brand,
Owners weren't certain their own to determine,
If he knew his cattle, still couldn't make a stand.

Imagine the stockyard scene, all neck on neck,
Coloured rags a-milling, bovines a wreck.
A financial disaster, beast suffering amassed here,
The week cattle dressed up with ties 'round their neck.

Read more of the details in "The May Blizzard of 1903" in Canadian Cattlemen, August 1950 edition
http://static.canadiancattlemen.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/The-May-blizzard-of-1903.pdf#_ga=2.1960562.2144555976.1623989371-1371450610.1623730533 (Copy and paste into browser)

The blizzard such as the one in 1903 at Dunmore was disastrous as were many such localized storms through the years. Wide-range killer winters were recorded in 1886-87 and 1906-7. It was the devastating losses in 1906-7 that ended free-range ranching in favour of fences, winter feed and relatively smaller operations. In 1906 less than 30% of the 1.5 million cattle in southern Alberta survived that winter. The details are grizzly of that many cattle perishing from thirst, cold and starvation. What suffering of animals and of cowhands trying to do the impossible! And a financial megaflop.



Date unknown. Calvin Cavan with guitar, Lionel Cavan with fiddle, grandfather Henry in front row in the middle. Taken on a parade route in Medicine Hat.

Thank you to the Cavan family for contributing to this article and providing pictures.



Medicine Hat Cowboy Life

The **Medicine Hat Public Library** serves as a community hub, providing equitable and convenient access to books, media, information, and programs that help to educate, enrich, entertain, and inform. Anyone can use the library and its resources. During library opening hours, you are welcome to read, listen to music, access your e-mail and search the library's online magazines and newspapers. If you become a library member, your library card allows you to take home books, e-books, magazines, DVDs, CDs, and audio books. **Current Library Hours Monday to Friday: 10am-6pm.** <https://mhpl.shortgrass.ca>

Library Resources Featuring Doris Daley & Doc Mehl

Enjoy the words of professional cowboy poets, Alberta's own Doris Daley and Doc Mehl. On disc or audiobook OR you can read their work. During Covid, phone your library and you can pick it up.

Medicine Hat Public Library:

Poems From the Million Star Resort by Doris Daley
Collection: non-fiction, Call # 811.6 DAL

Once Upon the West by Doris Daley with Eli Barsi
Collection: compact disc ,Call # COU DAL

Good for What Ails You by Doris Daley
Collection: compact disc ; Call # COU DAL

100 Years of Thunder by Bruce Innes
A Salute to Rodeo and the Calgary Stampede
Additional Contributor: Doris Daley (author)
Collection: compact disc (music), Call # COU INN

West Word Ho

The Western Poetry of Doris Daley
Narrators: Doris Daley & Shyba Lorene
A collection featuring 34 poets
Collection: audiobook

Read Two Poems and Call Me in the Morning by Al Mehl,
a 211 page book Collection: Non Fiction, Call # 811.6 MEH

Brooks Public Library:

Beneath a Western Sky The Cowboy Poetry of Doris Daley Collection: Audiobook CD, Call # General Poetry

Bassano Memorial Library:

West Word Ho, The Western Poetry of Doris Daley, Paperback, Nonfiction

Note: Doris and Doc performed at our event September 2020. That's when they donated resources to Medicine Hat Public Library.



What is Cowboy Poetry?

Learn about the history of Cowboy Poetry.

<https://www.rattle.com/a-brief-introduction-to-cowboy-poetry-or-whos-the-guy-in-the-big-hat-and-what-is-he-talking-about-by-rod-miller/>



Phantom Train

Nora Maidman is the author of the song Phantom Train, which tells about the 1908 collision of a passenger train and freight engine near Dunmore, our featured 'Round Medicine Hat community this month.

Nora is a member of the Board of the Alberta Cowboy Poetry Association, which is where MHCP President, Jen Zollner and I got to know her. She lives with her husband, Rick on a farm near Dalemead, Alberta, but after 35 years Canada Post recently changed their mailing address to Carseland.

When asked about the inspiration for the song, Nora said she had read a book called "Ghost Stories of Alberta" by Barbara Smith. Nora had previously written a song based on another of the ghost stories, about Scott Lake Hill near Morley, a site she had visited.

Phantom Train (on her CD Angel of St Mary's) is about the vision of a train wreck two train engineers had a few days before the crash. They thought people would question their sanity. When the crash occurred, it was discovered that one of the engineers who had seen the vision lost his life in the crash. The song is written from the perspective of the surviving engineer.

Nora's music career began when her mother taught her to play the piano as a pre-schooler. She took Royal Conservatory piano for several years. In high school, in addition to singing in choirs, she took up the guitar and as an adult, took lessons through Calgary Board of Education continuing education program. Then she was led to take up the mandolin. In 2007 she found a flute on sale at Wal-Mart. Her first attempt at playing yielded no sound at all! So she decided to take lessons. Nora also plays the lap harp, bass ukulele, Dobro (resonating guitar) and took up the fiddle a few years ago.

Nora confided that the most terrifying musical experiences were when she competed in festivals and the Royal Conservatory of



Nora Maidman,
Singer, Songwriter, Multi-Instrumentalist

Music, where she was adjudicated. She said she's a little nervous when she performs for an audience but eventually relaxes. But half an hour in a room with a stern judge is half an hour of pure terror! No relaxation!

Nora has been involved in many folk clubs and jams where she has honed her craft and made many friends. There are 60-80 members in the Fairmont Fiddlers and around 100 in her ukulele jam. She has played at the Calgary Stampede's Window on the West for years, at an annual concert in Airdrie, and recently in Okotoks, with the fiddlers. She recommends playing with others. It stretches you and you learn more than you can alone.

Covid-19 has severely curbed her live music opportunities. Nora misses busking at farmer's markets and performing at seniors residences where the feedback has always encouraged her. She is currently involved in Zoom jams but it's not the same as being together. It does help her stay in touch with her musician friends. →



Medicine Hat Cowboy Life

'Round Medicine Hat, Featuring a Local Destination Dunmore

Learn more about Dunmore History.

Did you know Dunmore was called Coleridge for 71 years?

Did you know Dunmore was in Assiniboia, NWT for 22 years before it was in Alberta?

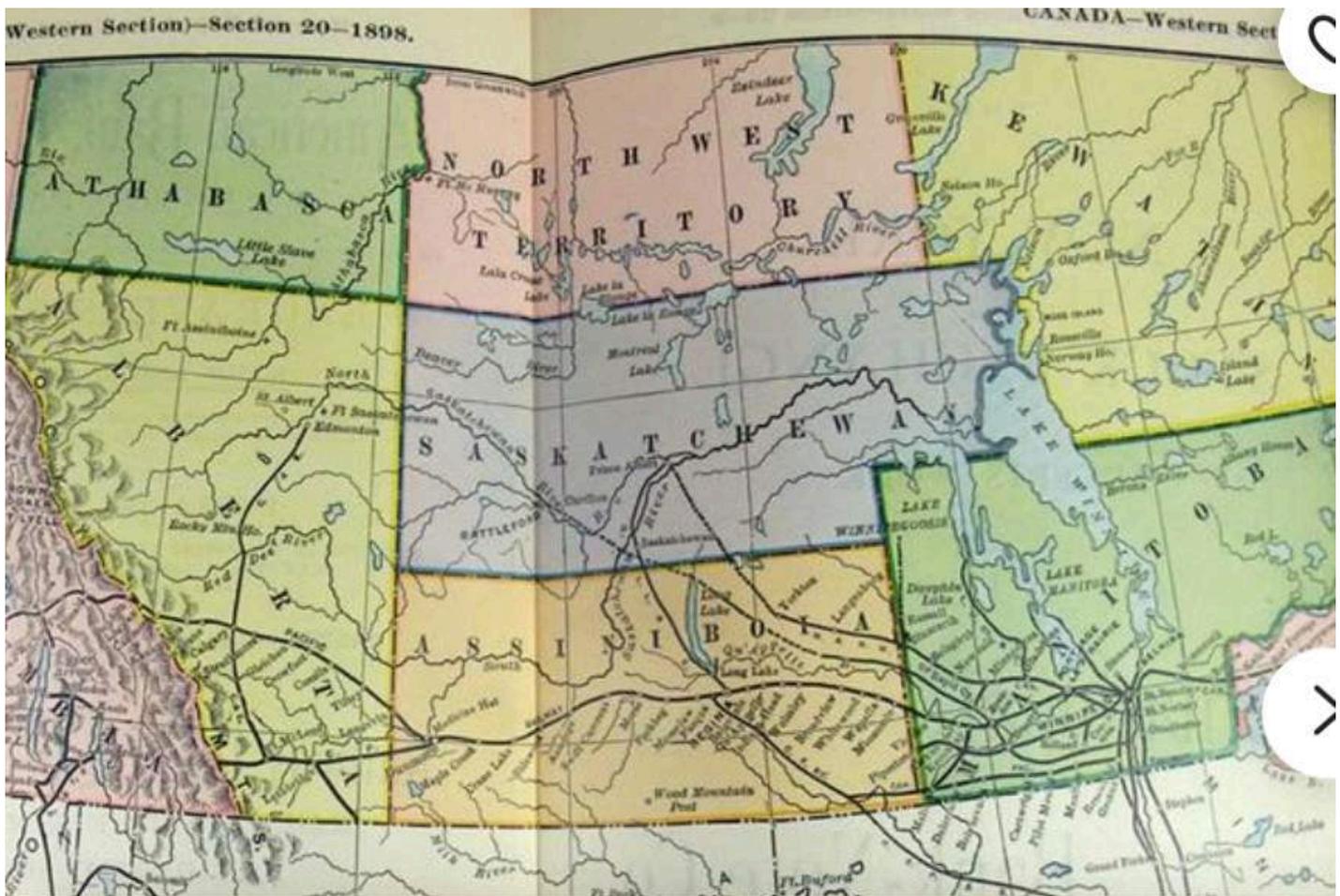
Did you know Dunmore was once a booming town whose population more than equaled that of Medicine Hat?

Discover all the fun things to do in and around Dunmore. Check our website, click 'Round Medicine Hat

(continued from page 7) When asked about her best advice for aspiring musicians, Nora said, "Work at it; practice as much as you can. Take lessons. Resist "imposter Syndrome" ("I am not good enough") and use every tool you can."

She said every experience is a vehicle for learning. She said learning the first instrument is the hardest. Subsequent instruments are easier because you have the basic musical knowledge you need.

Big thanks to Nora for sharing her song and insights with Medicine Hat Cowboy Life. Phantom Train is on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OS7VJN1CNMc> (copy and paste link into your browser) *By Shelley Goldbeck*





DUNMORE LAYS CLAIM TO THIS GHOST STORY

This infamous story is now a Canadian legend. It's about a CPR train on a single track heading east to Dunmore from Medicine Hat. The eerie part of this story is that a westbound Ghost Train threatened a head-on collision, but just in time floated on by them.

Gus Day witnessed it, not just once, but twice. Then when he was off-shift, a train wreck did happen at almost the same spot. Three decades after it happened, he finally dared tell his experience to a Vancouver reporter. He was still shaken by the death of his co-workers, Jim Twohey and J. Nicholson.

It was near midnight June 15, 1908 when the first Ghost Train was seen. Gus Day was fireman; his friend Bob Twohey, the engineer. Firemen were needed to shovel coal into the fireboxes of steam locomotives. It was hot; the humidity was almost unbearable and the sweat made his skin itch. He glanced at Twohey beside him. Being conductor at the controls was less punishing than shoveling coal into the fire. Twohey had already paid his dues as fireman; had even helped Day prepare for his exams.

They were on a single line connecting the town of Medicine Hat to the mainline at Dunmore. As they rounded the corner of one of the cutbands of Ross Creek Coulee, they found themselves face to face with another train. Twohey yelled at Day to jump but there was no time. Then mysteriously the train veered to the right and floated past them with its whistle blowing and the ghostly crew members waving as CPR crew members would typically do. Both were too spooked to talk about it. Besides who would believe them?

Day passed it off as one of life's experiences. No way would he let something like this keep him from working his way up to being an engineer. Engineer Twohey on the other hand feared it as an omen, something he should know

more about. Apparently he went to a reader who foretold his impending death within a month. He booked time off work for a couple of shifts to stay with family in Lethbridge.

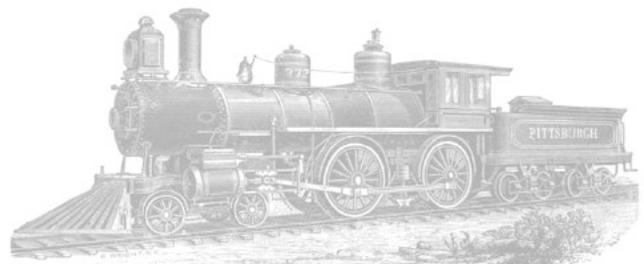
A few weeks later Day is stoking the fire for an engineer named Nicholson on the same line. Again the brilliant light of the Ghost Train burst out of nowhere. Then at the last possible second, it veered off to the right. It was hard to comprehend this phantom racing past them on tracks that didn't exist and again the apparition crew waving and and again the windows of the passenger train were lit as it rushed past. That did it. Day wasn't about to go on the tracks after that. He did yard work for the rest of the month.

On that fateful day, July 8, 1908, just when Day was ready to resume his role as fireman again, he was assigned yard duty. Nicholson was the engineer eastbound on that single line to Dunmore. On the same spot another train headed straight for them but this time it was for real. And who was the engineer on the westbound passenger train from Lethbridge? His buddy Twohey. The shift guard had failed to inform Nicholson that the inbound passenger train for Lethbridge had not yet arrived.

This link is to "The Ghost Train of Medicine Hat on Vimeo" by B.D.Gale, with some local people like Lyle Rebbeck and Bob Wanner. (Copy and paste into your browser)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sr_erg8vDMI

By Jen Zollner





Medicine Hat Cowboy Life

The Clydesdale Horse

by Jen Zollner

Clydesdales first came to Ontario from Scotland in 1840. In 1888, 500 Clydesdales mares from Ontario were introduced to Southern Alberta and Southwest Saskatchewan by Sir Lister Kaye. He was setting up ten farms (10,000 acres each) from the Regina area to the Calgary Foothills. He needed horsepower for his huge agricultural undertaking. The Dunmore farm (one of the '76' ranches) was noted for its Clydesdales. (The '76' ranches will be a focus in the next newsletter.)

Battle of the Breeds:

Scots preferred Clydesdales.
French preferred Percherons.
Belgium folks preferred Belgians.

In the 1920's and 30's the rivalry reached the point in some areas where Clydesdale supporters were on one side of a country church, while Percheron and Belgian devotees sat on the other side.

Clydesdales have been world famous for pulling the Budweiser hitches since 1933, first celebrating the end of prohibition. In 2011 they were at the Calgary Stampede and in 2012 one of their foals was named Century in honour of Calgary Stampede's centennial.

1. How do you become a Budweiser Clydesdale?
2. Why do Budweiser Clydesdales have short names?
3. What is their mascot?
4. What is unusual about their gait?
5. Are there Clydesdale teams around Medicine Hat?

Answers on Page 11 -->



Photo courtesy of Willow Way Clydesdales

Clydesdale Quiz

Have you ever seen a Clydesdale horse? If you've seen 'feathers' on the horses' feet, you've seen a Clydesdale. Take this True/False quiz to see how much you know about the breed. Answers on page 11. True or false?:

1. Clydesdale was the first draft horse breed found in most Canadian provinces.
2. Clydesdales are the biggest of the draft horse breeds.
3. Clydesdales are not suitable for riding.
4. Full grown Clydesdales have hooves bigger than dinner plates.
5. Average height for a Clydesdale is six feet and they weigh a ton or more.
6. Most Clydesdales are solid bay, black, grey or chestnut.
7. Buyers often choose horses with soundness problems if they have the desired colour and markings.
8. Some Clydesdales were used in World War I.
9. Clydesdales are listed as a threatened breed.
10. Clydesdale foals drink up to ten litres of milk a day.



Medicine Hat Cowboy Life



Joe and Wally represent Dunmore at Drumheller, Patricia, Picture Butte, Shaunevan and Swift Current Frontier Days. At Kindersley museum they do demonstrations. (Glen Bishoff, their teamster, is the main coordinator for the Chore Horse Competition at Dunmore.)

Chore Horse Competitions

Come to the Chore Horse Competitions on June 19th at the Dunmore Equestrian Centre (across the highway from Dunmore Coop) starting at 1:00.

Ten top heavy-horse teams from various points in Western Canada will be competing at timed events like log skidding, stoneboat pull and parallel parking. Everyone welcome. (Phone Glen @ 403-866-1875 to check if AHS restrictions allow the event.)

Budweiser Clydesdale Demonstration Video:

(copy and paste this link into your browser.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPIMVY-Cfvc>

Clydesdale Quiz Answers

1. T
2. F Belgians are larger.
3. F Clydesdales are excellent riding horses and have any easy-going temperament. But can be difficult to mount and are wide to straddle when riding.
4. T The horseshoes of Budweiser Clydesdales are 20 cm in diameter and weigh five pounds.
5. T
6. F Most Clydesdale horses have white markings on the face, feet and legs.
7. T
8. F Many draft horses (1.8 million of them) were vital in winning World War I. 50,000 horses, mostly Clydesdales were in use at Vimy Ridge.
9. T After World War II their numbers started decreasing with the advent of gas-powered tractors.
10. F Clydesdale colts drink up to 100 litres of milk a day!

Budweiser Answers

1. You're a four year-old or older, bay gelding with four white stockings and a full white blaze.
2. It's easier for the driver to give commands (Yes, they respond to their own name.)
3. A Dalmatian dog.
4. They lift each foot cleanly from the ground so the bottom of each hoof is visible from behind.
5. Yes, Glen Bishoff owns a black and white team, Joe and Wally. (The heavy horse team that are mascot for the Dunmore Equestrian team are Percherons -Jake and Joey). The most common color for Clydesdales is bay with white; black and whites are much less common.



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Joe and Wally, and Glen Bishoff

Need Purpose?

Do you have unused skills?
Do you have the desire to contribute?
Consider joining Medicine Hat Cowboy Poetry Foundation board or as a volunteer committee member.
Make a difference and have fun. Contact Jen Zollner to volunteer. jjollner10@gmail.com



2021 Membership Gift