

Kid's KOrner

Mule has earned respect throughout history

WASHINGTON — "He's got long ears and a Roman nose/He's knobby kneed and I suppose/It's only fair to ridicule/That curious animal called a mule."

Hiram Savage, who wrote that immortal stanza (and many others) in his poem, "Anatomy of a Mule," may not be exactly what William Faulkner had in mind when he urged the muses to inspire "some Homer of the cotton fields" to "sing the saga of the mule and of his place in the South."

Yet, a curious thing is happening to that curious animal called a mule: It is winning not ridicule but respect at this late date in American history.

The U.S. Army, which eliminated its last mule units and disposed of its last mules in 1957, is considering bringing at least some mules back.

Enter George Washington

A Tennessee congressman, noting the coming bicentennial of mule-breeding in this country (a process begun by George Washington with the aid of the king of Spain and Marquis de Lafayette), has urged his fellow legislators to designate Oct. 26, 1985, as "Mule Appreciation Day."

And out in Denton, TX, where Paul and Betsy Hutchins founded the American Donkey and Mule Society in 1967 because they feared that those noble beasts were plodding toward extinction, the Hutchinses now report a tremendous resurgence of interest in mules, as well as a sizable increase in the American mule population.

Clearly, something is happening

out there that proves again the truth of the old adage: What goes around, comes around.

A mule has, to its supporters, innumerable advantages over its more generally esteemed competitor, the horse.

For example, a mule confronted by unlimited food will eat only enough to satisfy its hunger. A horse will eat until it makes itself sick. But that's not all.

"A mule stands heat terribly well," says Betsy Hutchins, the ADMS executive secretary. "It stays sound in the legs and the feet better. It's tougher, and it takes care of itself better. It is sure-footed and enduring. But most of us use mules, and donkeys too, because of their personalities. They are extremely intelligent; in a dangerous situation, they'll hesitate until they think a way out of it. They're partners in a ride; you don't just get on it and tell it where to go."

If, that is, you can get it to go at all.

Need it be said that a mule is the hybrid offspring of a male donkey, or jack, and a female horse? Or that the reverse cross between a male horse and a female donkey, or jenny, produces an offspring called a hinny?

Historically, of course, mules were used as pack animals as well as for riding. Their history goes back very far; mules are mentioned in the Old Testament books of Ezekiel and 1 Chronicles, and most authorities trace their ancestry to Cappadocia, in the center of modern Turkey.

Valued By Emperors

Mules carried supplies for



Despite the mule's history of service to the armies of Alexander the Great and Napoleon, this Missouri pack mule balked in 1944 when ordered into a transport plane at a loading base in India. Nine mules were airlifted in bamboo stalls with bulldozers, tractors, and jeeps to Burma during an Allied World War II campaign against the Japanese. During the airlift, one mule kicked a hole in the glider in which it was traveling at 8,000 feet.

Alexander the Great's armies, weapons for Roman armies, and artillery for Napoleon. Their sure-footedness, which derives in part from feet that are smaller and more oval than those of a horse, makes them ideal for mountainous terrain. And their strength, endurance, and longevity make them extremely useful as draft animals, too.

It was this multiplicity of utility that led George Washington to consider becoming the Father of American Mule Breeding as well as Father of His Country. Mules had been in America since the days of the earliest Spanish explorers, but it was Washington who foresaw a major role for them.

The general acquired a pair of highly regarded Spanish jacks from King Charles III. One died on the cross-ocean voyage, but the other, aptly named Royal Gift, arrived in Boston on Oct. 26, 1785. It is this arrival that the congressional resolution, introduced by Rep. Jim Cooper, D-Tenn., seeks to commemorate.

Royal Gift was joined soon by a Maltese jack, the Knight of Malta, sent to Washington by Lafayette. Washington's breeding experiments showed that Royal Gift's mule descendants were best suited for heavy draft work, the Knight of Malta's for saddle riding. John Fairfax, overseer of Washington's Mount Vernon

estate, sent the pair of triumphant stud tours of the South for several years.

Mules became vital to the development of American agriculture, especially in the cotton fields of the South. At their peak in 1925, government census figures listed more than six million of them. They the Depression, crop diversification, and mechanization on the farm led to a long decline.

No Mule Census

Paul Hutchins, president of the ADMS, guesses there are about 250,000 in America today; the government for some reason no longer has an official mule census.

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| 1. BLACK | 6. PEACH |
| 2. RED | 7. LT. GREY |
| 3. YELLOW | 8. LT. BROWN |
| 4. DK. GREY | 9. LT. BLUE |
| 5. BROWN | 10. LT. GREEN |

ARMOR: THE FIRST PIECES OF ARMOR MEN USED WERE SHIELDS. THEY WERE MADE OF TOUGH WOOD AND HIDES. AS SOON AS MAN LEARNED TO WORK WITH METAL THEY MADE SHIELDS OF BRONZE AND IRON. THE ANCIENT WARRIORS SOON DEVELOPED ARMOR THAT COVERED THEIR WHOLE BODIES. ARMOR REACHED ITS PEAK DURING THE MIDDLE AGES.



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