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A Tennessee Donkey Association Newsletter-Blog

Origin of The Miniature Donkey

(Written by Carolyn Christian)

Quarter Moon Ranch

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Editor's Note: Thank You to the Christians for allowing us to reproduce this wonderful article

What a gentle, humble and fascinating creature is the Miniature Donkey. My husband Pete and I have been raising Miniature Donkeys here at Quarter Moon Ranch in Franklin, Texas since 1992. After all these years, we remain in awe of their intelligence, their friendly nature and their comic ways. Many times I have wondered how these extraordinary animals came to be and eventually managed to find their way to our ranch. I've wondered about their journey to the U.S. I've wondered who the early breeders were and if they felt as deeply about them as we do. But in order to understand their trip across the Atlantic, it is necessary to understand their arrival in their native home of Sardinia as well as elsewhere throughout Africa, the Mediterranean and Europe. Toward that end, please join me in a journey of discovery that begins far back in time when donkeys first made their presence known to man.

THE FIRST DONKEYS

The hunting peoples of the Stone Age had no domestic or domesticated animals; therefore, the wild ass was considered a food source to early man. The domestication of the wild ass, as that of other animals, point to the turnaround of human civilization as we know it today. The wild ass came to Europe from Africa. These wild asses that first crossed over fall into two categories...the Asiatic and the African Wild Ass. It is believed that the Asian ass split from the African group around 2 million years ago. The African Wild Ass (*Equus Africanus*) can be divided into "modern" subspecies call the Nubian Wild Ass and the Somali Wild Ass. The Nubian Ass came from the North between the Mediterranean coast and the Sahara Desert. The Somali Wild Ass came from further East to the South of the Red Sea. Both of these subspecies are the most relevant to the domesticated donkey (*Equus Asinus*) and ultimately the Sardinian Donkey although we should not rule out the presence of other extinct subspecies in the domesticated donkey.



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In various moments in the life of Jesus, a donkey is by His side at birth, carrying Him as he escapes Egypt, carrying Him when he triumphantly entered Jerusalem at Passover, and most likely was at His crucifixion. It was about this same time that the Sumerians pulled their war chariots with donkeys.

THE INTRODUCTION OF DONKEYS INTO ITALY AND EUROPE

The trade route called the "Silk Road" was in use for thousands of years and extended for six thousand miles from the Pacific coasts of China to Alexandria in Egypt. The docile donkeys provided a good pack animal for their travels which could have taken years and required donkey changes along the route at various villages and towns for fresh healthy animals needed to complete their journey. Because of this, there would have been much mixing of bloods, both accidentally and intentionally, between the different subspecies of donkeys that were found along the way. It is probable that the donkey reached Europe and Italy from Greece. Greece had close ties with Alexandria in Egypt and the Greeks were great sailors and transporters of animals in the vessels of the day.



The one civilization that really gave a boost to the popularity of the donkey in ancient times was the Romans and their conquest of a great part of Europe, Africa, Asia and the islands of the Mediterranean between 238 B.C. and 86 A.D. The Roman wagon was designed to be drawn by a team of four donkeys abreast and was extremely efficient in terms of the ratio of load carried to the combined weight of the team. That efficiency far surpassed oxen and horses. Horses were used only in battle and to transport the royal and elite in more ceremonial carts and wagons. Oxen were too slow.

The donkey was sure footed on rough roads. This means that donkeys carried supplies to the length and breadth of the Roman Empire. Once the many areas along the way were colonized, the Romans introduced vine growing. Wine production is where donkeys found a role that settled them in different parts of Italy and in Europe as far as Spain.

The Romans developed a great interest in donkeys not only for the services they provided in transportation and agriculture, but also in the production of mules. It is in Roman history that we see the highest prices being paid for donkeys surpassing those of any other domestic animal. Wealthy Roman ladies would bathe in donkey milk to preserve the freshness of their skin. Donkey milk is known for its nutritional, cosmetic, and protein value. Donkey milk is considered to be the closest to human breast milk. It contains more lactose and less fat than cow's milk. Donkey milk is used today in the manufacture of soaps and moisturizers. It is said that Nero's wife Poppea owned 500 female donkeys to provide milk for her baths so that she could preserve the beauty and youth of her skin. Cleopatra owned a stable of 700 jennets to keep her supplied with donkey milk for her baths as well. But enough of vanity in ancient times.



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THE DONKEY IN SARDINIA

How and when the donkey entered Sardinia and in what state is unknown. Another unknown is how these wonderful animals came to be the size they are.



There are only theories but no hard evidence to answer these questions. One theory is that a much smaller strain of Nubian and Somali Wild Asses found their way to Sardinia with the migration of the first "true inhabitants" of the Island called the Nuraghic people between 2000 B.C. and 1500 B.C. Because Sardinia is remote, the size of those donkeys remained small due to the fact that there were no other donkey subspecies with which to mix. Although plausible, there is no factual evidence to date as to how a smaller donkey made it to Sardinia but, as we will find out, they did.

What is factual and undisputed is that around 510 B.C., the Phoenician menace with the help of the Carthaginians defeated the native Sardinians and flourished there. For the next 270 years, donkey breeding reached its peak in Sardinia with donkeys being bred for agricultural uses, but more importantly, for pumping water for small scale farming as well as transporting agricultural products and water to the villages and cities.

In 238 B.C., the Carthaginians were defeated by the Romans in the first Punic War and Sardinia became a province of Rome. Roman domination of Sardinia lasted 694 years. Archaeologists have discovered donkey remains during this time and in this area and have made some outstanding observations especially in regard to height.

The donkey remains in different excavations on Sardinia have shown a height to the withers of between 31.5" and 39" for adult specimens. The most common heights were 32" and 34 1/4" to 37" . Other similar excavations dating back to medieval Sardinia have concluded similar results. "...It's smallness takes nothing away from its merit and does not stop (or impede) its service to its master. On the contrary, its merit grows because of its small stature that has been ignored in its homeland, but it has been sought after as a great marvel and taken to other seas to be shown in courts with bridle and saddle..."

Another interesting observation these excavations have revealed is that the skeletons of dogs, horses and donkeys have not been subjected to butchery like those of pigs, sheep and goats.

It was also observed that the Romans brought their wagons onto the Island designed to be drawn by a team of four donkeys abreast, but the wagons had to be modified to be pulled by the smaller donkeys they encountered there.



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This only adds to the proof that the Sardinian Donkey was smaller in proportion compared to those in use on the continent and neighboring islands.

Romans used the Sardinian Donkey for transporting wood, coal, grain and supplies. They were especially useful for grinding and turning the waterwheel and the Romans saw them as extremely important to agriculture. In fact, in the 14th century, donkeys were referred to as "Molentis Domados" which literally translates as "Domesticated Grinder", a much more elevated title than simply "Asinus or Equus" to which they had previously been referred. There were laws during this time that protected the welfare and treatment of the donkey

Donkeys were to be cared for and fed well with appropriate penalties applied should failure to do so be discovered. The donkey at this time was certainly recognized as having an important role in society.

The affable nature, small height and service of the Sardinian donkey gained more notice in the 18th century when Jesuit Priest Francesco Cetti wrote about the Island and its human and animal inhabitants. He wrote:

".....Moreover, what makes this donkey more particular is its calm nature and it's 'extreme smallness'."

"....It's smallness takes nothing away from its merit and does not stop (or impede) its service to its master. On the contrary, its merit grows because of its small stature that has been ignored in its homeland, but it has been sought after as a great marvel and taken to other seas to be shown in courts with bridle and saddle..."

Cetti also mentions the important service that this diminutive donkey offered to every Sardinian family who by this time had their own grinding mill inside the home. The Sardinian donkey had truly become a critical part of the survival of the family although the little donkey's plight was to spend all of his day walking in circles around a grist-mill. Blindfolds and blankets were attached to the donkey to protect it from rubbing against the pole of the grindstone as well as the dust from the milling process.

Fast forward to the 20th century where one of the better descriptions of the Sardinian Donkey is given by Douglas Goldring in his book titled "Sardinia, The Island of the Nuraghi" which was published in 1928. Here he describes the settings in which he finds the Sardinian Donkey. ".....The courtyards of those homes....were each divided into two distinct halves, one of them devoted to the stables for the oxen, the grist-mill (where the little blindfolded donkeys go round and round all day grinding the corn)..."

BUT WHAT ABOUT MINIATURE DONKEYS IN SICILY?

Is there a purely Sicilian donkey and is it different from a Sardinian Donkey.

It has long been believed and we breeders and owners have been told that a small breed of donkey was also native to the Island of Sicily, but there is no archaeological evidence suggesting that is the case much to the dismay of many who want it to be so. Unquestionably, there have always been donkeys in Sicily but excavations have revealed remains of donkeys whose heights to the withers are 49" to 55". Historical records dating from the 14th through the 18th centuries do not make mention of a small donkey breed that is native to Sicily, but do mention a breed of small donkeys on Sardinia. Additionally, historians of Roman times refer to donkeys in Sicily as heavy and large draft animals. The Miniature Donkeys that were exported to the U.S. and Europe from Sicily were, in fact, Sardinian Donkeys brought over to Sicily for their tourist attraction value or were direct descendants from those that were kept on the Island of Sicily from earlier imports from Sardinia.



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Royal children of Italy in their Sicilian festival cart.

THE SICILIAN DONKEY CART

What Sicily gave us that is undisputed is the magnificent Sicilian cart or the “carretto Siciliano” in Italian. Although carts were in use in ancient times all over the Mediterranean, the carretto Siciliano and its association with Miniature Donkeys are unique. The Sicilian cart is an ornate and colorful style of donkey-drawn cart native to the Island of Sicily. The cart has two wheels and is primarily handmade out of wood. Originally, these carts were used by peasants in their farm labors who painted them to preserve the wood from the elements. They were pulled by Miniature Donkeys. Gradually, however, the paintings became more elaborate and decorative, evolving into the grand works of art as we know them today. They were later built for donkeys and horses of all sizes.

The carts were introduced to the Island by the ancient Greeks who brought to Sicily the concept of a simple rectangular cart with two wheels. Carts of this type can be seen in the mosaics of early Rome. Carts that we would recognize today are mentioned in the “Chronicles of the Aragonese” by Federico III, King of Sicily from 1295 until his death in 1337.



Mary and Jay Nissen in their antique Sicilian festival cart.



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The carts of that time were pulled by horses in cities and over flat areas, but donkeys (especially Miniature Donkeys) and mules were used for rougher terrain. The carts reached the height of their popularity in the 1920s when many thousand were on the Island. The Museo de Carretto Siciliano in Terrasini in the province of Palermo is a museum dedicated solely to these carts.

The early carts were used for hauling miscellaneous light loads such as produce, wood, wine, water and people as well as for festive occasions such as weddings and parades, hence the name "festival carts". The crews that built the carretti included woodcarvers, metal workers and painters. The woodcarvers carved the many panels. The metal workers worked the iron which included highly decorated metal undercarriages. The Sicilian Carretto was made in several provinces in Sicily each with their own style.

Their use could be ascertained from their shape and colors. Most carts from the Trapani area were square and used for the transport of salt. They had higher wheels than other carts to keep the body of the cart out of the water when it crossed marshy areas. Most Palermo carts were slightly wider and were used for the transport of grapes. Other carts were used to transport grain. Carts from Catania were more rectangular and the base color tends to be red while Agrigento carts are the most elaborately decorated of all.



The craft of making the carts was handed down from generation to generation through the training of apprentices. The decoration of the vehicles did not begin until the second half of the nineteenth century. Early designs were based on blue colors and depicted religious themes, but gradually the decoration became more and more ornate and bright colors began to appear, most famously the red and yellow of the Flag of Palermo.





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Many of the motifs were primarily medieval or religious (including Crusader knights fighting the Arabs) with a few mermaids thrown in for fun. They were also carved with gargoyles, angels, flowers, mermaids and other designs. Underneath the carts hung such things as the cartman might need which included an umbrella, a lantern, a bucket, and of course, a jug of wine. These scenes also served the purpose of conveying historical information to those who were illiterate. The donkeys pulling the carts were often elaborately adorned as well. The carts became status symbols just like our cars today, but they were always working vehicles. Today, the carts are only used for show, but the government of Sicily considers them an important part of the Sicilian culture and has subsidized their upkeep.

THE MINIATURE DONKEY IN SARDINIA TODAY

As we speak, this small trusting and affectionate breed of donkey, from which the much loved Mediterranean Miniature Donkey in North America is descended, is in critical danger of extinction in its Sardinian homeland. With the advent of the tractor and mechanization in general, the Sardinian Donkey has been rendered obsolete in the Island's fields where they had adapted from antiquity. Additionally, cross-breeding in order to obtain larger animals suitable for heavier transport has made the true Sardinian Donkey practically extinct. Sadly, another factor contributing to their decline is the consumption of donkey meat on the Island. Even today, donkey meat is offered in restaurants throughout Italy and Europe.

In 1965, there were 27,000 registered Sardinian Donkeys, but many were not registered so we can assume there were many, many more. In 2002, The Italian Association of Breeders showed only 430 registered Sardinian Donkeys. Unfortunately, the Sardinian Donkey has constantly been on the critically endangered list in Italy with no significant progress being made. But with advocates such as Kim Pegler and Marcelo Bibiano who are selflessly working to rescue the Sardinian Donkey from extinction, there is hope for their future in that part of the world.

The good news is that the U.S. has truly become the savior of the breed. In the 1920s, the first Miniature Donkeys (many if not most of which were pure Sardinian Donkeys) came to the U.S. and with those original foundation herds, the preservation of the breed began in earnest. Because the distinction between the Sardinian Donkey and the Sicilian Donkey has become blurred, this small breed of donkey is now considered one breed properly called Miniature Mediterranean Donkeys. In North America, they are simply referred to as Miniature Donkeys.

MINIATURE DONKEYS COME TO THE U.S.

Donkeys were not uncommon to the Americas. Horses and large donkeys had been brought from Spain by Christopher Columbus in 1495 and were used to produce mules for their conquests into mainland America. Following the American Revolution, George Washington developed and became the father of the American line of Mammoth Jackstock. Noticeably absent was the Miniature Mediterranean Donkey, but that would change in the 20th century.

Miniature Donkeys came to the United States by way of wealthy families who saw and fell in love with them on their trips abroad to the Mediterranean. The very first importer of Miniature Mediterranean Donkeys to the U.S. was Robert Green, a stockbroker and partner in a New York brokerage firm. Mr. Green bought seven Sardinian Donkeys sight unseen while on a trip to Europe and had them shipped to his farm in New Jersey in May of 1929. Three of the imported jennets were killed by dogs only a few months after their arrival. The three jennets (Suzanne, Palermo, and Miranda) and jack (Impheus) that survived became the foundation stock of the Green herd which numbered over fifty donkeys by 1935.

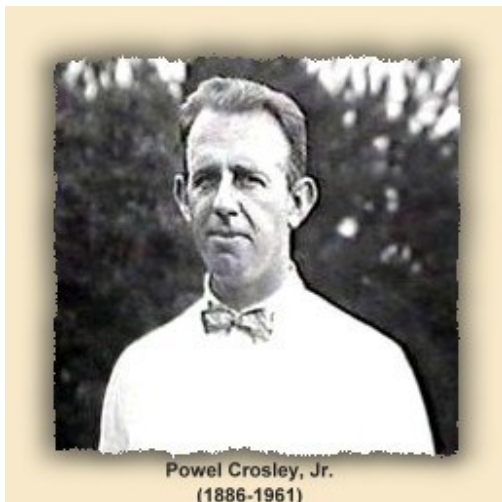


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Miranda, although in foal at the time, miraculously survived the dog attack and gave birth to Christopher Columbus on Columbus Day, October 12, 1929. He was the first Miniature Donkey born in the U.S. Robert Green enjoyed driving his donkeys and had an extensive collection of carts, sleds, chariots, woven basket carts, imported Italian antique carts and festival carts. He is perhaps best quoted when he said, "Miniature donkeys possess the affectionate nature of a Newfoundland, the resignation of a cow, the durability of a mule, the courage of a tiger, and the intellectual capability only slightly inferior to man's." Mr. Green was followed by two early importers of note, Powel Crosley, Jr. and the beer baron August Busch, Jr.

Powel Crosley, Jr. from Ohio was an industrialist, inventor, broadcaster and entrepreneur. He began Crosley Motors and produced many innovative cars of the time. One was the Crosley CC Four Model, a small light-weight three-speed car he introduced in 1946. Crosley was a brilliant man and, in addition to acquiring some of the first Miniature Donkeys in the U.S., he was responsible for the first car radio, massed produced economy car, fax machine, disc brake for automobiles and was the first to radio broadcast from an airplane. Crosley owned an Island off the Georgia coast named Ossabaw Island which later housed his donkeys until his death in 1961.



August A. Busch, Jr. was the grandson of the founder of the Anheiser-Busch Brewery in St. Louis, Missouri and was another early and influential importer of Miniature Donkeys to the US.

He first imported four jennets from Sicily and later brought over a jack and jennet from Africa. In addition to breeding Clydesdales for which his family is well known, he developed a herd of Miniature Donkeys that became quite sizable. The Busch children grew up riding and driving Miniature Donkeys as soon as they could walk. In 1903, August Busch, Sr. purchased the 281 acre tract of land which had been owned by Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, the great Civil War general. The Busch family farm is named Grant's Farm and is also referred to as Grant's Manor Farm. Their donkeys were registered with "Belleau" as a prefix.

More early importers, breeders and owners of Miniature Donkeys were Walter Erman of Illinois, Richard Sagendorph of Massachusetts, Harry T. Morgan (owner of Ken-L-Ration) and the actress Helen Hayes. It is an interesting fact that the early importers obtained their donkeys with no expectation of breeding for profit. These were people who were primarily wealthy and whose sole purpose for owning the donkeys was entertainment and family pleasure not unlike today's owner.



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These early breeders purchased from each other in order to obtain different bloodlines although, of necessity, inbreeding and line-breeding was not uncommon and had to be employed in order to grow their herd. Because there were so few Miniature Donkeys in the U.S., selective breeding as practiced today could not be done until the numbers permitted. It wasn't until the late 30's that Miniature Donkeys began to be sold to the general public. Because the Sardinian Donkey was not bred in its homeland for conformation but for utilitarian purposes, it is safe to say that what we consider good conformation today was random and accidental in the early imports.



HEIGHT OF THE EARLY IMPORT

There has been much discussion and controversy over the height of the original imports. Some claim the donkeys were 36" to 38" in height. Others believe they were much smaller. Let's explore what we know rather than what we think is true regarding the height of the Miniature Donkeys who crossed the Atlantic in the early 1900s. As previously mentioned, early excavations of donkey remains on Sardinia have shown the most common heights of the Sardinian Donkey were 32" and 34 1/4" to a maximum height of 37" .

Written evidence through the centuries has confirmed this finding. But what do we know of the height of the Miniature Donkey imported to North America by the early breeders? Photos of the Busch children sitting astride their Miniature Donkeys would indicate a size in keeping with an animal that is between 32" and 38" .

I'm in possession of a copy of actual correspondence dated June, 1935 from Harry T. Morgan, one of the early importers of Miniature Donkeys, to a prospective purchaser in the States. Mr. Morgan stated that the donkeys he had for sale were bred directly from Sardinian imports. (Morgan also sold donkeys for Robert Green and Mr. Cunningham.) Included in this correspondence are photos along with the color, height and price of ten of the eleven animals Mr. Morgan wished to sell. All were gray-dun and the sale price of the donkeys was between \$65 and \$100. Two donkeys were 36" in height, one donkey was 34 1/2" , four donkeys were 34" , one donkey was 32" , one donkey was 30" and one was not noted.

Additionally, I have a copy of correspondence dated January 11, 1938 to Mr. A. H. Sagendorf from an exporter of donkeys in Palermo, Italy (Daneu & Company) in reply to Mr. Sagendorf's request to purchase twelve Sardinian Donkeys. His request was for donkeys that were two to four year olds who were sound, had straight legs and were approximately 34" in height. With evidence such as this and other research, I feel it safe to say that the original imports were between 32" and 36" with most being 34" to 34 1/2" . As further proof of the diminutive size of the original imports, many of the antique carts that were purchased from Italy by Green, Crosly and Busch had to be driven by their smaller donkeys in order for the donkey to fit into the shafts. Several current breeders have also bought antique Sicilian carts with the same results.

So how did the notion arise that the early imports were much taller? There is evidence to suggest that Irish Donkeys were being exported to the States at this time as well. In fact, the letter from Mr. Morgan includes photos of Irish Donkeys he had for sale in addition to the Sardinian Donkeys. Irish Donkeys ranged in size from 37" to 45" . It is likely that the original imports of Sardinian Donkeys were bred to the Irish Donkey AFTER they arrived in the U.S. and produced a larger "miniature donkey" than the original Sardinian imports.



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The story of Miniature Donkeys in America now brings us to the year 1958 where we meet Daniel and Bea Langfeld of Danby Farm in Omaha, Nebraska. The Langfeld's contribution to the breeding, promotion, preservation, and registration of the Miniature Donkey is unequalled. It is safe to say that the history of Miniature Donkeys in the U.S. would have been lost were it not for the efforts of the Langfelds and Bea Langfeld in particular. Mrs. Langfeld was born into wealth in 1904 and married her husband Daniel in 1922. They bought their farm in 1951 and named it Danby Farm which is a combination of both their names. They became interested in Miniature Donkeys when they searched for a companion animal for their young daughter who had cerebral palsy. The Langfelds came upon an ad in House Beautiful that depicted a 3 year old child next to a small donkey and immediately knew they had found the perfect friend for their daughter. They purchased their first donkey named Pepi from the Busch herd and their love affair with Miniature Donkeys began. Their foundation herd consisted primarily of donkeys from the Busch and Crosley herds. At Danby Farm, the Langfelds kept six to eight jacks and between sixty and seventy jennets as breeding stock. Bea, who survived her husband, died in 1996 at the age of 92.

The MDR saw a real boom in registrations of Miniature Donkeys in the early 1990s. From 1958 when the Langfelds began the registry to 1991, registration numbers were below 10,000 during that 33 year period. In January, 2011, that number had jumped to approximately 60,500 registered Miniature Donkeys. That's a 500% increase in the 20 year period from 1991 to 2011. So what caused this sudden explosion? Having begun breeding Miniature Donkeys in 1992, I was witness to changes that were taking place here in the U.S. that facilitated the Miniature Donkey's rapid growth both in numbers and quality.

By the early 1990s, Baby Boomers were getting older. They were purchasing farms and ranches and second homes in more numbers than previous generations and for a variety of reasons. Some wanted a weekend home to get away from hectic city life. Many had successful businesses or careers that permitted them to either retire early or have the flexibility to spend a lot of time at the ranch. When they were at their ranches, they wanted a farm animal for the children and grandchildren that would neither intimidate nor be a danger to them, and one that they all could enjoy together as a family. In many states, there were agricultural tax exemptions that would apply if they owned and bred Miniature Donkeys. Most of the breeders during this time had little to no experience with larger farm animals or other equine nor did they want one. The small and easy going Miniature Donkey was the perfect solution.

In addition to the American Donkey & Mule Association that promoted the Miniature Donkey, the National Miniature Donkey Association (NMDA) was begun in 1989 by Lynn Gattari of Rome, New York. By the beginning of the next decade, NMDA was gaining in popularity and visibility and was actively promoting the Miniature Donkey. NMDA publishes the ASSET, a publication devoted exclusively to Miniature Donkeys. ADMS publishes the BRAYER, a publication devoted to all donkeys and mules.

Participation in Miniature Donkey shows increased dramatically during this time. This participation at state fairs and local shows introduced the Miniature Donkey to people who never knew they existed. More people could become acquainted with Miniature Donkeys at one show than by most any other means. By 2000, NMDA and ADMS sanctioned shows and local donkey shows were being held all over the U.S. and Canada with many exhibitors in participation. Not only did these shows increase the awareness of Miniature Donkeys, but they served to increase the quality as well. Pete and I began showing our donkeys in 1996 and have continued to the present day. The conformation of donkeys in today's arenas is far superior to that of the donkeys when we began showing. Because of the emphasis on conformation in halter classes and the functionality of donkeys in performance classes, donkey shows became a good way to promote the donkey and improve the breed at the same time.



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We must also not overlook the characteristics of breeders during this period. The qualities that made them a success in their careers and their businesses translated to Miniature Donkeys. They brought those same skills from the workplace to their breeding program and the promotion of their donkeys. Breeders began spending money to advertise in local newspapers and trade publications as never before. They recognized the Internet as a necessary tool for sales and the promotion of their ranches. Miniature Donkey websites exploded. Breeders and owners all over North America and eventually overseas founded associations whose mission was to promote, protect and educate. Miniature Donkey sales (auctions) began cropping up across the country. Because there was more disposable income during this time, herds grew larger and breeders more numerous. Owners were taking their donkeys to schools, nursing homes, fairs, birthday parties, and parades, and even using them as therapy animals to help heal the bodies and spirits of children and adults in hospitals. The world was becoming aware of Miniature Donkeys unlike no other time in their history.

Miniature Donkeys can be found today in many countries in addition to the U.S. and Canada including England, Ireland, France, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico and Brazil. I have no doubt that list will continue to grow. Were it not for the early pioneering importers, the Langfelds, our associations, and the dedicated breeders and associations of today, the Miniature Donkey would not have the place in the animal world it enjoys. Were it not for those around the world who own donkey sanctuaries and rescue organizations, many of our precious animals would be lost. Looking forward, the future of the Miniature Donkey is optimistic. Bea Langfeld was once asked, "How do you see the future of the mini donkey industry?" Her reply was, "Provided people don't let their greed take over their common sense, there's no reason why it can't continue moderate growth." What she was telling us was as long as there are breeders who make decisions based on the best interest of the Miniature Donkey, the industry and our donkeys will not just survive but prosper.

For the most part, the early breeders focused on numbers. It wasn't until later that the focus seriously turned to selective breeding practices. It is now up to today's breeders to make sure the Miniature Donkey we are producing is the product of a responsible and focused program that takes into consideration the welfare and preservation of the breed. Responsible breeders will not breed faults into the foal just to produce a color or size. As Mrs. Langfeld observed, those are fads that go in and out of fashion based on what is popular at the moment. Our job almost 100 years after the first Miniature Donkey stepped on American soil is to produce a healthy and happy foal whose future and his breed's future is secure. Along the way, we get to enjoy the process because we get to share our lives with these most remarkable animals. Our donkeys have gone from solely utilitarian to honored pets and companions. They have left the fields and grist-mills of old and have found lush pastures where they are loved and their intelligence and gentle nature are respected. What a remarkable journey they have made.



Quarter Moon Fancy That

SUMMARY

So what have I discovered about those magnificent donkeys who play in our pastures here at Quarter Moon Ranch? I've learned that our donkeys and every Miniature Donkey in North America today are descended from a handful of donkeys owned by Robert Green, August Busch and

Powel Crosley. I've learned that inside them are the genes of donkeys who helped build empires, donkeys who put bread on the table of ancient peoples, donkeys who were critical to the fabric of their native land, and donkeys who crossed an ocean to become pets and companions to family members long gone. Our donkeys have come a long way from the fields of Sardinia to the show rings of the world. Their past is finished and their future is yet to be written. I'm so honored to be a keeper of their heritage. I'm so thrilled to be a contributor to that future. I'm so happy to help put these animals in the place of honor they deserve.



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Simply put... I'm so proud to own Miniature Donkeys. I hope you have enjoyed this journey as we have discovered together how our amazing Miniature Donkeys came to be. We are all blessed to have them and to be loved by them. But that blessing comes with a responsibility to be good caretakers. As we walk in the steps of breeders and owners who have gone before us, may we all do our part in this generation to make sure their welfare is protected and their future is bright. future is bright.

Many thanks to Carolyn Christian for allowing The Tennessee Donkey Association to reprint his fine article.

Let's Chat with Brittney

A Column written by Brittney Conyer

Tips on exhibiting in Showmanship

Showmanship has always been a class directed toward youth in the equine world, but in TDA I have seen a lot of open (youth and adult) showmanship classes and think that is great! Not only does showmanship encourage proper halter showing etiquette, but it builds a polite, trusting donkey. Therefore, even non show people can benefit.



In case you did not know, showmanship is judged on how well the handler shows his or her donkey through a designated simple pattern. The handler along with the donkey must look well groomed and have the donkey do things such as walk, trot, halt, set up, back up, and pivot with ease.

Apparel and grooming plays a large role in the class. The best halters should be used and well polished. A leather lead and stud chain are usually what is seen most often. Stud chains are exceptional, however, they allow more control and are a good "just-in-case" tool. The handler should wear his or her best show clothing including gloves and boots. Finally, a well groomed donkey is a necessity. A lot of people think just because the handler is being judged that the donkey does not have to be groomed completely. Donkeys should always be groomed and clipped to their best quality, hoof black is encouraged as well.

The class will usually have a pattern posted outside the arena or in the designated pattern posting area. Remember, from the time the judge sees you to the time you exit, you are being judged! Upon entering, remember to stand your donkey square, (front and back hooves even beside each other. Be sure the donkey is not overly stretched out or too close in either.



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They should be standing as "square" as possible with their weight evenly underneath them), wait for the judge to cue you to begin the course, keep eye contact with the judge and do not look down as you are walking or trotting. Keep your body even with the donkey's neck while keeping a consistent pace. You and your donkey should walk to the judge in a straight line, and visually think that you are going to brush your right shoulder against the judge's left shoulder. This will ensure that you are walking your donkey directly in front of the judge. The same goes for trotting. If you are walking or trotting away from the judge, find a visual and try to stay in a straight line.

The halt should seem effortless with the handler pulling very little on the lead. If you are to halt before the judge, always leave one donkey's length between you and the judge.

Often you will be asked to back up your donkey (usually 4 steps). Straightness is key here, as well as making it seem smooth and effortless. Resistance will get points off.

You will also be asked to set up the donkey (Square up) and the judge will walk around to see the conformation. The tricky part is knowing where to stand, but a simple way to remember is if the judge is walking around the front half, you need to be on the opposite side of the donkey. If the judge is on the back half, you need to be on the same side. The reasoning is that you want to be out of the way while they look over the head, neck, and back, but you want to be on the same side for the hindquarters just in case the donkey decides to kick as they walk by. If this happened, you could easily pull the head and step the hindquarters away.

Finally, you will be asked to pivot. The donkey, if trained correctly, should put all of its weight on the inside hind hoof and step around it. Never ever pull your donkey toward yourself in a showmanship class. The main thing to remember when pivoting is to stay by the neck and as out of the way as possible so the judge can watch the front end. Whether you are pivoting 90 degrees or 360 degrees always pause when you are done so the judge can have one last look before you begin to walk off.

More than likely, everyone will line up after doing the pattern. Most importantly, keep enough space between you and the other donkeys so that if one decides to kick you will be out of the way. I usually keep about 2-3 donkey's lengths away. Remember to square up your donkey and whatever side the judge is on you need to stand on the opposite so if they decide to look over at your donkey, you are not in the way. Also, you should never touch your donkey in the class, and remember to always smile and show courtesy to the judge.

Showmanship is a lot of details but it can be a lot of fun! It's good training for both you and the donkey.

I've had lots of experience including showing at a national level. A couple years ago I was showing at a national show and the pattern wasn't typed correctly making it literally impossible. And of course, lucky me, I was first in the class to go. I did what made sense and came out with a blue ribbon. It's all about how you handle your equine and doing it with smoothness. I hope this helps!

Brittney Conyer

We are so proud to have Brittney as one of our Youth Members and excited that she has expressed an interest in helping all of us show better and be better equine owners.



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TDA NEWS

- ◆ The Great Mule and Donkey Celebrations has added a new class sponsored by TDA, "Classic Donkey"; an exhibition-only class to honor registered Donkeys (all sizes) 15 years and older. Come out and see these special Donkeys!
- ◆ Our Spring "Fun Day" was very successful with lots of informative discussions.
- ◆ Our work day at an equine rescue, Volunteer Equine Advocates is coming up. Should be a great day!

Please refer to the WebSite under "Current Events" for future activities.

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To bring together people, adult & youth, that own and/or are interested in donkeys of all sizes, with quality family-oriented activities in a spirit of good community. And, to be dedicated to the advancement and promotion of the donkey breed through educational, charitable and social events.