

2006 May Be 'Year of the Draft Horse' on Island



2006 may well be known as the "Year of the Draft Horse" on Mackinac Island. Our working harness horses are to be the feature of an art exhibit in June at the Mackinac Island Public Library. The artist, Elizabeth Pollie, has depicted them on canvas. Many people who love Mackinac love it because of all of these kinds of equines. Here they not only get to see these animals at work, they find that they're all around them.

This artist's idea for her paintings on Mackinac seemed to have been inspired by keen observations of the beauty in these beasts at work. Paintings depicting the end of a shift or horses waiting for their drays to be loaded are nostalgic. She has captured the everyday life of a horse at the dock and teams heading home for the barn.

There is, however, a lot more to working horses than meets the eye. Mackinac, as well as the state of Michigan, have been key players in the draft horse market. Every fall in Lansing is the International Draft Horse Show and this February will see the Great Lakes Draft Horse Sale at the livestock pavilion at Michigan State University, with more than 230 horses for sale. My

sales catalog lists 34 Belgian mares, nine stallions, 64 Percheron mares and 16 stallions, four spotted drafts, and 107 Clydesdale and Percheron geldings, as well as tack and harness.

But what really is a draft horse? By definition, it is a working horse that pulls something on a wagon. It's a horse that is capable of dragging or drawing heavy weight, be it logs, or freight, or people. There is a wagon called a drag that is pulled by four horses and it is essentially a stagecoach. The fancier "park drag" carriage used in days of yore to view hunts and races were of a heavy weight. Draft horses pulled fire engines, early ambulances, and water wagons.

It is interesting to note that a "teamster" is a person owning or driving a team of working horses, not sporting horses. A drover was a person who drove animals to market in heavy carts pulled by, you guessed it, draft horses. Drovers often wore long waterproof canvas coats, which are known as drover coats.

Draft horses are primarily referred to as "cold-blooded" horses. These are large, heavy horses bred for hard work.



A black Percheron draft team pulls the old Mackinac Island Fire Engine in a 1980s Lilac Day parade.

They originated in the colder climates of Europe. Although some lighter riding horses, namely Morgans, have been used for this tough work, many a draft horse lover would not consider them to be part of the pack, categorizing a good set of mules over them. Remember, mules pulled barges and canal boats.

Draft horses have a short action, or way of going, which is perfect for the purposes they're used for. Short action gives the horse maximum traction. Their straight shoulders can accommodate a collar to bear weight and allow their forelegs to bend well at the knees, which lift high before the hooves are brought down. All of this helps to increase their pulling power. The drafts have deep chests with legs and feet that have a wide stance. These horses can weigh between 1,800 to 2,400 pounds.

Today, in the Great Lakes region, we tend to consider three breeds of cold bloods as drafts. These are the Belgians,

Percherons, and Clydesdales. All of these can be found working on Mackinac Island. There is also a team of spotted drafts (Bird and June) owned by Dale Gough, that somehow were graduated to the lighter life of an hourly touring buggy. Michigan, however, has many other draft breeds, such as Shires, Suffolk Punches, and Brabants.

The sampling of private Friesians that live on the Island should not be considered to be part of the draft horse gender. Though the Friesian breed is considered to be a cold blood, has the distinctive high knee action, and is a heavily puller, they're not part of this working class. Those animals are good examples of free-moving coach horses, like the Cleveland Bays and Gelderlandes.

Some breeds of drafts have more distinctive markings than others. Belgians are the most numerous of the breeds, both on Mackinac and in the state. They have chestnut hue coats and most have thick, blond manes and tails. Clydesdales, like Belgians, have broad blazes down their noses and feathered ankles.

In the 1950s and early 1960s Rueben Cowell, owner of Cowell Dray Line, had one

of the best of Mackinac's Belgian teams. They could be seen daily, proudly waiting at the Arnold Transit Dock for the arrival of the old *Algomah*, to deliver the mail. In the late 1970s and 1980s, the late Randy Bazinau was known for his eye-catching and well-trained team of black Percherons.

In late June, the 13th annual Modern Draft Horse and Mule Powered Framing Trade Show will be held outside of Clare. Ever wonder where you can get a haybine, forecart, sickle-bar mower, or a springtooth harrow? How about a hay tedder? Looking for a Suffolk, Shire, or Spotted draft team? Oxen? You can find them there. In the meantime, I'm headed to see more on "draught" and "horse power" best this February at MSU. Who knows? Just maybe I will run across a horse or two headed for Mackinac this spring.

Candice Dunnigan is an active member of the American Equestrian Association, the Waterloo Hunt, and the Mackinac Island Horsemen's Association. Seasonally she resides at Donnybrook and Easterly Cottage.

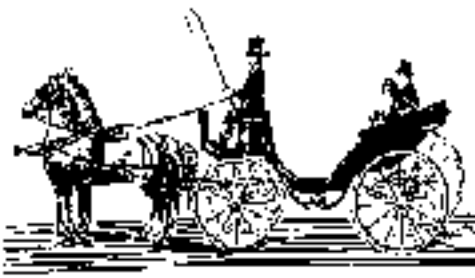
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Hallmark Cards To Feature Island

Scenes from Mackinac Island will soon grace the front of Hallmark greeting cards, with officials from Hallmark, Inc. of Kansas City, Missouri, visiting the Island in mid-February.

Mary McGuire Slevin, director of the Mackinac Island Tourism Bureau, learned the news in a call from the company Friday, February 3.

Ms. Slevin said the Tourism Bureau initially received a call from Hallmark inquiring if the Island had snow and architecture appropriate for a card series.

"They are looking for architectural gems, frozen ponds, horses, gaslight districts, wreaths, trees, snowy lanes," explained Ms. Slevin.

"I am hoping the Mayor will keep her house as pretty as it is today," she added.

The Hallmark representatives are scheduled to visit the Island from Wednesday, February 15, through Tuesday, February 21.

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