Volume I: THE EARLY YEARS

by

Vicki Watson

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Where in this wide world can man find
nobility without pride,
friendship without envy,
or beauty without vanity?
Here where grace is laced with muscle
and strength by gentleness confined.
— Ronald Duncan

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Introduction

Imagine the history book horses could write if only they knew how to type! You see, they were there for it all, working for thousands of years alongside man as his strong and faithful partner. Man provided the brain power—and horses, the brawn. Together, they accomplished amazing things.

Through their bond with humans, horses shaped our past in ways no machine ever could. You'd think such a significant contribution would be highlighted in history books. However, in most, horses are strangely absent.

Their role in transportation, agriculture, communication, commerce, healthcare, and other vital areas has been largely unrecognized—or forgotten altogether.

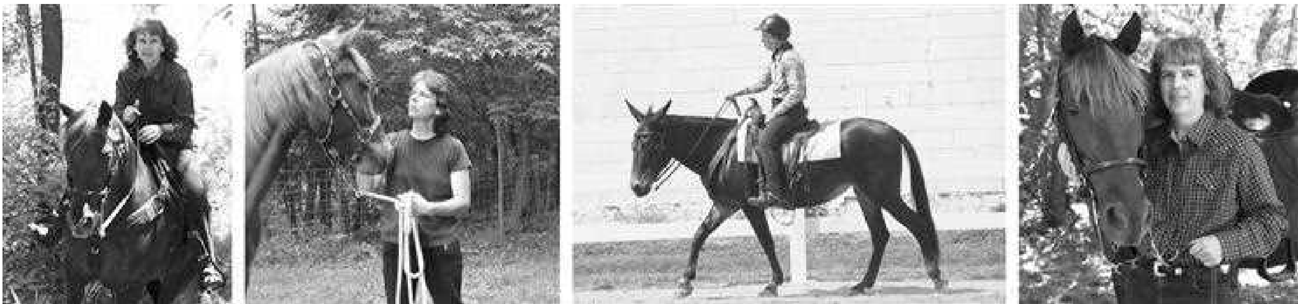
From the days of the Spanish explorers to modern times, the three-volume Horsestory series brings the past to life from a unique perspective—the back of a horse—or perhaps a horse-drawn vehicle.

In the series, you'll learn the stories of a variety of horses—from Cortez's black stallion, El Morzillo, who was worshiped as a god by the ancient Mayans—to the modern-day Cinderella story of Harry de Leyer's Snowman[1], rescued from a slaughter truck to become a national jumping champion.

The journey begins with the arrival of horses in America in the 1500s.

Let's get started!

Vicki Watson



[1] *Snowman's story appears in Volume III.*

1

Arrival in America

Many consider the Mustangs out West to be wild horses, however there are no true wild horses in the United States. Horses aren't native to North America. How did they find their way here?

The name, Mustang, comes from the Spanish mesteño meaning wild, stray, or free. These animals are descendants of once-tame horses. Mustangs are feral horses—once tame, but having reverted to a "wild" state. Explorers brought the earliest horses from Spain to North America. These were generally known as Iberian horses, the ancestors of the Andalusian, Lusitano, Paso, and Criollo breeds. Many modern breeds have these horses somewhere in their ancestry.

- Columbus brought no horses on his first journey in 1492 when he landed in the West Indies (Caribbean). On his trip the following year, the ship carried fifteen stallions and ten mares. Columbus also brought several donkeys to the New World.
- Hernando Cortes brought the first horses to the mainland. Sixteen of those animals traveled to Mexico in 1519.
- In 1539, Hernando de Soto landed in Florida with 250 horses.
- Francisco Coronado brought as many as 1500 horses to Southwest America in 1540.

This influx of horses continued as other explorers arrived in following years. Initially, many Native Americans were afraid of horses. They had never seen such an animal and thought perhaps the

man on horseback was a new creature—a combination of horse and man. Recognizing the power and advantage horses gave them, the Spaniards didn't want Native Americans to own or ride horses.

Catholicism was the dominant religion of Spain. Catholic missionaries came with later explorers and established missions in the Southwest. In 1680, the Pueblo tribe rose up against the Spanish at Sante Fe, in the area of New Mexico, killing more than 400 Spanish soldiers and many of the Catholic priests.

After the Pueblo revolt, thousands of Spanish horses ran free or were taken by Native Americans. This spread of horses became known as the Great Horse Dispersal and is considered the official beginning of the Mustang herds. The horses spread northward from tribe to tribe. By 1690, horses had reached Idaho. The Comanches gained a reputation as the most skilled horsemen.

Recent blood typing of western Mustangs has shown that only a small percentage of the horses trace back to their Spanish ancestors. Over the years, the Spanish lines have been diluted by ranch stock and other horses that have mingled with the herds. The Kiger Mustangs in southeastern Oregon are one of the purest remaining Spanish strains.

In addition to the Mustangs out West, there are several breeds in the East that descended from the colonial Spanish horses. Carolina Marsh Tackies were used in the American Revolution by Francis Marion, known as the Swamp Fox. Marsh Tackies range in size from 13.2 to 15 hands and weigh 700 to 900 pounds. They have a unique gait known as the swamp fox trot. The British forces couldn't navigate the swampy land in that area, but the colonists' Marsh Tackies were accustomed to it. The Tackies were also used in the Civil War by Confederate forces. In World War II, Carolina Marsh Tackies patrolled the eastern coast of the U.S. on the lookout for attacks by sea.

Two breeds closely related to the Marsh Tacky are the Banker Horse found in the Outer Banks of North Carolina and the Florida Cracker Horse. In 1926, five to six thousand wild horses lived in the Outer Banks area of North Carolina. The Florida Cracker Horse was named after the crackers or cowboys known by the sound of the whip they cracked to drive cattle.

Several of these breeds have been chosen as official state horses.

- Florida - Florida Cracker Horse
- North Carolina - Colonial Spanish Mustang
- South Carolina - Carolina Marsh Tacky
- Oregon - The Kiger Mustang has been proposed but not yet officially adopted.

2

The Weather God

Hernando Cortez is remembered as a Spanish conquistador, but few know of his connection to the Mayan God of Thunder. Cortez, born in 1485 in Medellin, Spain, sailed for the New World in 1504 and landed at Santo Domingo in the Caribbean. The island was known then as Hispaniola.

In 1519, Cortez led an expedition to Mexico with hundreds of men and sixteen horses. The emperor, Montezuma, initially thought Cortez might be Quetzalcoatl, an Aztec god. Montezuma gave the Spaniard gold, hoping that would keep him from taking over the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, but Cortez and his men conquered the Aztecs the following year. Tenochtitlan was renamed Mexico City and became the capital of the Spanish territory.

In 1524, Cortez traveled south to Honduras in Central America. The expedition included ninety horses. His personal mount was a black stallion named El Morzillo (from the Spanish morcillo—black with reddish hairs). While traversing the rough terrain, Morzillo was injured and unable to continue. Cortez left the horse in the care of natives from a local tribe at Lake Peten-Itza. In a letter, the explorer wrote:

I was obliged to leave my black horse with a splinter in his foot. The chief promised to take care of him, but I do not know that he will succeed, or what he will do with him.

The natives didn't want to incur the wrath of Cortez who had promised to return for Morzillo. But, apparently they had no idea how to care for a horse. El Morzillo was housed in a temple and fed delicacies of fruit, nuts, chicken, and other meats, all topped with flowers. Whether due to this unusual diet or his foot injury, the stallion didn't live long.

Cortez returned to Spain in 1541 and never knew what happened to his favorite horse. He died six years later, never making it back to America.

When Spanish missionaries visited Peten-Itza in 1618, they found a strange sight. In the temple, was a statue of the stallion. The stone Morzillo was seated on his hindquarters with his forelegs stretched out in front of him. He was known by the Mayans as Tzimin Chac, the God of Thunder.

In the intervening years, El Morzillo had been worshiped as a weather god. The missionaries considered the stone horse a pagan idol and destroyed it.

4

Old Billy

According to Guinness World Records, the oldest verifiable age for a horse is sixty-two—an English horse called Old Billy. Well, the "Old" part was probably tacked onto his name after a considerable number of years. Billy was brown with a white star and resembled a big cob or Shire horse. Multiply Billy's age by three for a rough equivalent of his age in human years!

Billy was born in 1760 in Woolston, Lancashire, UK and died on November 27, 1822.

Could a horse really live that long? Is Billy's age reliable?

It seems so. Billy was raised by Edward Robinson, a farmer in Woolston. At two, Billy was trained by seventeen-year-old Henry Harrison to be a plow horse.

William Bradley, a portrait artist, painted Old Billy in his retirement in 1821, the year before the horse's death. Henry Harrison is also pictured in that portrait. They included the following description with copies of the painting.

This print exhibiting the portrait of Old Billy is presented to the public on account of his extraordinary age. Mr. Henry Harrison of Manchester, whose portrait is also introduced, has nearly attained his seventy-sixth year. He has known the said Horse Fifty Nine Years and upwards, having assisted in training him for the plough, at which time he supposes the Horse might be two years old. Old Billy is now playing at a farm at Latchford, near Warrington, and belongs to the Company of Proprietors of the Mersey and Irwell Navigation, in whose service he was employed as a Gin horse until May 1819. His Eyes and Teeth are yet very good, though the latter are remarkably indicative of extreme age.

Harrison was given the job of caring for Old Billy in his retirement, which didn't last long. Amazingly, the horse worked until he was almost sixty years old.

Although as a young horse, Billy was trained for farm work, at some point he was purchased by the Mersey and Irwell Navigation Company. Some accounts claim he was a barge horse, pulling boats along the canals. That may have been a seasonal job, but he also worked as a "gin" horse—gin being the short form of engine. In the days before electricity and steam engines, horses provided the power for many tasks through gins. The horse walked around and around, rotating a central drum connected to a system of cables and pulleys. Billy likely worked a gin used to raise goods from the decks of ships.

Until he reached the age of fifty, Old Billy had a bad temper, particularly shown when, at the dinner hour or other periods, a cessation of labor took place; he was impatient to get into the stable on such occasions and would use, very savagely, either his heels or his teeth (particularly the latter) to remove any living impediment… that happened, by chance, to be placed in his way…

Another artist, Charles Towne, painted Billy in June, 1822. At that time, Billy had

the use of all his limbs in tolerable perfection, lies down and rises with ease; and when in the meadows will frequently play, and even gallop, with some young colts, which graze along with him. This extraordinary animal is healthy, and manifests no symptoms whatever of approaching dissolution.

But five months later, the old horse passed away. Oddly enough, Old Billy's skull is on display at England's Manchester Museum while his stuffed head is exhibited at the Bedford Museum.

19

Funeral Horses

Even the transportation of a deceased person for a funeral or to a cemetery for burial was done in the past by horses pulling a hearse. Black horses were most often used as hearse horses. White ones might be used for a child's death.

In London, England, the funeral horses were known as the Black Brigade. At their peak, there were seven hundred of them in London. They were imported as three-year-old Flemish stallions and were most likely the breed we recognize today as Friesian. The most desirable animals were about 16 hands tall, coal-black with no white markings, and had a long, flowing tail. A horse with small patches of white might be accepted if the white could be dyed or painted over. If the tail was not as impressive as desired, a fuller, false tail was attached when the horse was at work. To ensure their coats remained glossy, the horses were fed special diets.

Black Brigade horses were kept by stablemen known as black masters and were rented by funeral undertakers as needed. During cholera or influenza epidemics, the horses might be used four times a day, six days a week.

The Dottridge Brothers, the most famous of the black masters, kept about eighty horses at their stable. The Dottridges named all their horses after famous people. Some of their horses were Charles Dickens, Henry Ward Beecher, John Wesley, Louis Pasteur, Aldous Huxley, and General Booth, as well as a mixture of poets, politicians, artists, actors, and musicians.

Each horse's personality was well known by the men who worked with them. It was noted that General Booth (named for William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army) was "most amiable, and will work with any horse."

Other horse personalities did not get along so well.

> *Huxley will not work with Tyndall, but gets on capitally with Dr. Barnardo. Tyndall, on the other hand, goes well with Dickens, but has a decided aversion to Henry Ward Beecher.*
>
> *—The Horse World of London (1893) by W.J. Gordon; Chapter XI, The Black Brigade; p. 138-147*

In 1911, E.F. Parks, an undertaker in Bryan, Texas, purchased a Canadian team of perfectly matched white horses, full brothers five and six years old. Parks ran a contest in the local paper, the Bryan Eagle, offering a prize of a handsome piece of furniture to the girl who could come up with the best names for the pair.

The winning entry was from Bernadine McKnight.

> *Dear Sir: I think Prince and Pilot would be appropriate names for your beautiful team of hearse horses. These names are short, easily pronounced and will soon be recognized by their owners. The horses are very closely related as well as very similar in appearance. … It is in death these horses are to serve their chief function. And it is in death that we hope of a Pilot and a Prince for us all. … The very color of these horses as well as the purpose they are to serve suggest the appropriateness of these names. For do we not find in sacred literature many references to the white robed Prince and the Pilot that is to be?"*
>
> *—The Bryan Eagle Bryan, Texas Mar 02 and 16, 1911*

Although funeral horses received extensive training, accidents sometimes happened, serving to compound the sorrow family and friends were already experiencing. Newspapers of the time include many stories of accidents involving funeral horses including this one caused by a sudden hailstorm.

The funeral of Joseph Berger had just started up the Charles Street Hill when the great chunks of ice began to pelt down. Six carriages in addition to the hearse were lined up. As soon as the horses felt the hailstones, they became unmanageable and a wild stampede up the hill ensued.

A brand new carriage from the undertaking establishment of Kress Brothers led the charge and all of the horses ran at the top of their speed.

The length and steepness of the hill was the only thing that prevented a frightful accident as all of the horses were thoroughly terrified and wholly beyond the control of their drivers. But by the time the frightened animals, beaten and urged forward by the merciless pelting of the great pellets of ice, reached the top of the hill, they were so much exhausted that the drivers managed to get them under control again.

The hearse was considerably damaged, but the casket had remained in its place.

—The Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania May 21, 1893

In 1889, five men were killed in an explosion in Rockland, New York. When the procession of five hearses headed to the burial grounds, the team attached to the rear hearse became frightened and bolted. According to the Springville Journal:

A collision with the hearses seemed inevitable. However, the hearses in the lead were driven to one side of the road and the runaway horses with the fifth hearse attached dashed wildly down the road. The driver could not hold the frightened animals and when alongside the third hearse, the hearse to which the runaways were attached upset with a crash and was smashed to pieces. The horses finally broke loose … and ran into the woods, where they were caught. The driver was thrown from the hearse … and badly hurt. Eventually the casket containing the body of the one of the victims of the explosion was placed in a wagon and in this manner was conveyed to the cemetery.

Not all horses were cut out to be funeral horses. A horse named The Los Angeles Del Sur Wonder was known, for short, as the “hearse horse.”

Bred by an undertaker, he was used for a while to pull the hearse, but was found to be faster than was needed to keep at the head of the procession. During his training to switch professions, he trotted a 2.20 mile and paced in 2.18.

—Los Angeles Herald, Los Angeles, California April 5 1892

It’s unclear whether the Del Sur Wonder was ever successful as a racehorse, but he certainly seemed better suited to that than pulling a hearse.

Many long-term funeral horses were known and loved by members of the communities they served.

A local celebrity recently died after a kind, useful life of thirty-eight years, says the Indianapolis Journal. His name was Jesse, and the one act which entitled him to mention was participation in the funeral cortege of the martyred Lincoln. He was the last of the six white horses which drew the hearse containing the honored body along the streets of Indianapolis. His mate in the proud but sorrowful lead of the team died eight years ago.

—The McCook Tribune July 3, 1891

A similar horse, Dan, worked twenty years for Thomas O'Brien, an undertaker in New Jersey. O'Brien arranged for a farmer to take care of Dan in the horse's retirement. Dan was not to do any more work, and he was always to have good food.

> *Twice, on the way to the railroad station to be shipped to his retirement home, the horse balked. Each time he stopped it was in front of a house with a crape, a symbol of mourning, hanging on the door. When the driver whispered in Dan's ear that his boss already had the jobs, the intelligent animal moved on.*
>
> *—The York Daily, York, Pennsylvania February 10, 1909*

Old Bob, a large, white funeral horse that served the Sanford, Florida community for twenty-eight years, was honored by being buried in the Lakeview Cemetery. The horse that had carried most of the people to that cemetery is the only non-human buried there. Old Bob could find his way to the cemetery without a driver. Born in 1877, the horse faithfully pulled hearses until he was retired to pasture in 1913. He died the following year at the age of thirty-seven.

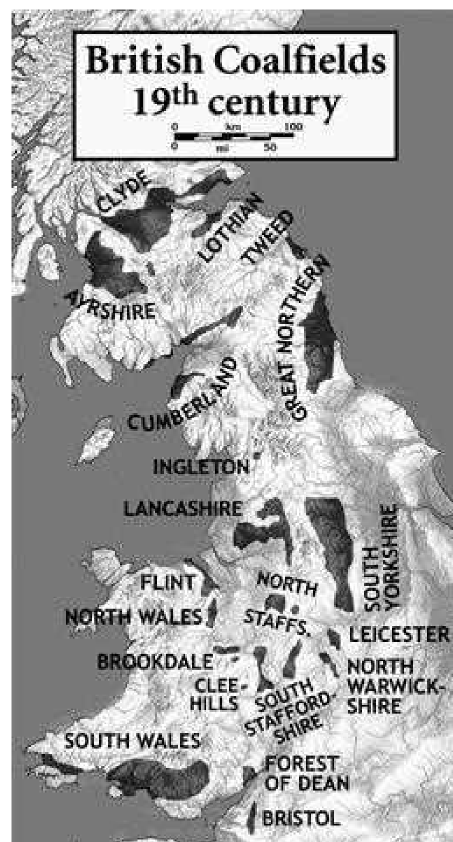
38

Ponies in the Pits

Coal is a sedimentary rock formed from dead plant matter under pressure. In the past, people burned coal in stoves and furnaces to heat their homes and for cooking. When steam engines were invented, coal was used to power them. Coal also fueled the blast furnaces which produced steel from iron ore.

In 1882, Thomas Edison developed the first power station to generate electricity from coal. Throughout recent history, there has been a huge demand for this natural resource. At its peak in 1968, 60% of America's electricity was generated from coal. In 2016, for the first time, natural gas passed coal as the top resource for generating electric power in the United States. World-wide, coal still fuels 37% of electricity production.

Until the Middle Ages, coal was dug out from just below the ground's surface. When those coal outcroppings were exhausted, pits were dug to access coal deeper underground. When those supplies dwindled, a mine shaft was dug hundreds of feet into the ground. Horizontal passages branched off from the deep shaft to access multiple coal seams.



At the working edge of those seams, called the face, miners chipped off chunks of coal with a pick ax and tossed them into coal cars. Coal mining was dangerous work. Breathing in coal dust caused Black Lung Disease, resulting in the early deaths of many miners. The buildup of gases in the mines sometimes caused explosions and cave-ins. Although coal is mined in many countries, including the United States, this section focuses primarily on the mining operations in Great Britain where ponies were often used.

In the early 1800s, it was common for children to work long hours at physically-demanding and dangerous jobs such as in factories, lumber and textile mills, and mining. In the earliest days, coal was carried by hand in baskets. An improvement upon that was hauling coal in small carts or wagons. In the early days of mining, this job was often performed by women and children.

A woman attached a chain to her waist which connected to a coal cart. As the "hurrier,"[1] she pulled the heavy cart, sometimes on her hands and knees through passageways that

[1] *See the mining terminology section at the end of the chapter.*

might only be three feet high. One or more children, the “thrusters” would help by pushing the cart from behind. The children’s small size allowed them to move more easily through the tight mine passages. With no restrictions on child labor, there was nothing to prevent children as young as five or six from working all day in the mines. Many children worked as hurriers or thrusters. The youngest worked as trappers, sitting all day in a dark tunnel where their job was to open or close a door when needed.

Huskar Pit Disaster

The Huskar coal mine is located near the village of Silkstone Common in South Yorkshire, England. On July 4, 1838, a tragedy occurred at the mine. Heavy rainfall extinguished the fire on the steam engine which powered a winding machine that lifted miners up the shaft. The workers stranded at the bottom were instructed to remain there until the equipment could be restarted.

Some of the child miners, confused or frightened, tried to escape through a flooded ventilation shaft. Twenty-six children drowned, the youngest a seven-year-old boy. When the Huskar tragedy came to the attention of Queen Victoria, she demanded an inquiry which became the Ashley Mines Commission Investigation of 1842.

Several children testified of their experience working in the mines. Sarah Gooder began working as a trapper at the age of eight.

> *I’m a trapper in the Gawber pit. It does not tire me, but I have to trap without a light and I’m scared. I go at four and sometimes half past three in the morning, and come out at five and half past. I never go to sleep. Sometimes I sing when I’ve light, but not in the dark; I dare not sing then. I don’t like being in the pit. I am very sleepy when I go sometimes in the morning. … I would like to be at school far better than in the pit.*

Mary Davis also worked as a trapper, at just six years of age.

> *I went to sleep because my lamp had gone out for want of oil. I was frightened for someone had stolen my bread and cheese. I think it was the rats.*

Patience Kershaw, seventeen, also testified.

> *My father has been dead about a year; my mother is living and has ten children, five lads and five lasses; the oldest is about thirty, the youngest is four; three lasses go to mill; all the lads are colliers, two getters and three hurriers; one lives at home and does nothing; mother does nought but look after home.*
>
> *All my sisters have been hurriers, but three went to the mill. Alice went because her legs swelled from hurrying in cold water when she was hot. I never went to day-school; I go to Sunday-school, but I cannot read or write; I go to pit at five o’clock in the morning and come out at five in the evening; I hurry in the clothes I have now got on, trousers and ragged jacket; the bald place upon my head is made by thrusting the corves; my legs have never swelled, but sisters did when they went to mill; I hurry the corves a mile and more under ground and back; they weigh 300 cwt.; I hurry 11 a-day; I wear a belt and chain at the workings, to get the corves out…*

After hearing these, and other, testimonies, the British Parliament passed the Mines and Collieries Act of 1842. This prohibited all females from working underground in the mines and required boys to be ten or older. Women were permitted to work at mining jobs but only above ground.

The mines were to be inspected periodically to ensure they were in compliance with the new regulations. But, initially, there was only one mining inspector for all of Britain. Because he was unable to keep up with all the work, women and children continued working in the mines. When the number of inspectors was increased, most had no desire to actually go down into the mines. To do so meant facing the wrath of the miners and mine owners.

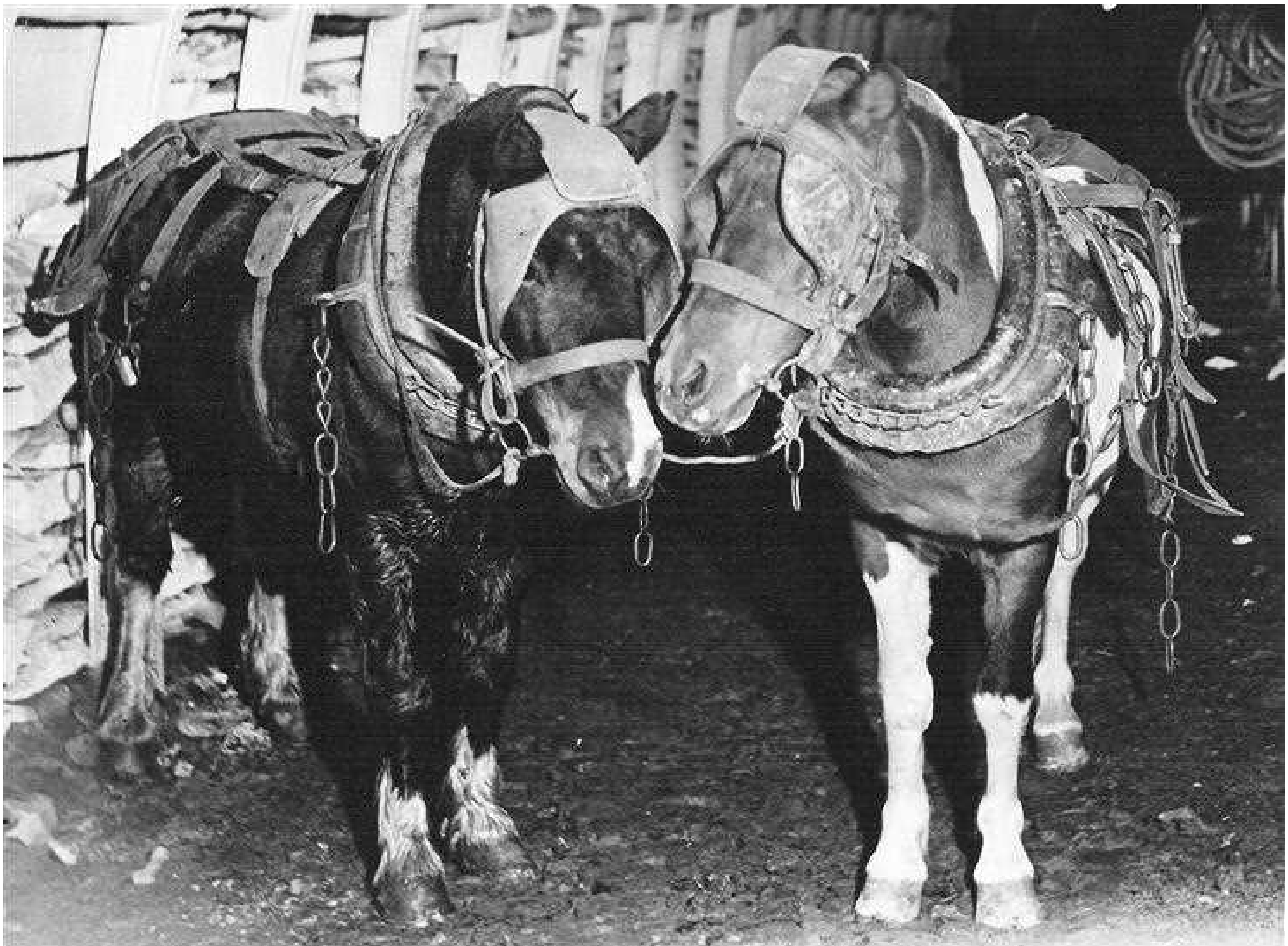
In 1854, Commissioner of Mines, Hugh Seymour Tremenheere reported two instances where persons attempted inspections and were "maltreated, and very nearly lost their lives."

In 1872, the legal age for boys to work in the mines was raised to twelve; and in 1903, it increased to thirteen. Since births weren't scrupulously recorded, it was common for the boys or their parents to lie about a child's age so they could work.

Pit Ponies

While the Mining Act of 1842 protected women and children, it had the opposite effect for ponies. After its enactment, mine operators were desperate for cheap replacements to do the work women and young children were no longer permitted to perform.

Strong ponies were in demand to haul coal in the mines. Equine mine workers varied in size depending on the job they were required to do. Taller horses were used above ground or in the large roads near the main shaft. As the tunnels became smaller near the coal face, shorter animals were needed, typically averaging 12 hands in height. Nearly all pit ponies were geldings. Mares and stallions would cause too many behavioral problems in the confined quarters of the mine.



This is a limited preview of the 284-page Horsestory I: The Early Days