

The ‘news’ for this month is the article submitted below by Sybil Sewell.

### **The Early History of Alberta Donkey and Mule Club**

#### **Part 1: Paving the Way for ADMC**

Prior to the establishment of the Alberta Donkey and Mule Club in the province, the Sewell family arrived from eastern Canada in 1981 bringing with them all their effects including 13 donkeys, two horse mares and a mule foal. They also brought connections with donkey and mule folks from across the country.

Those connections stemmed from their involvement with the Canadian Donkey and Mule Association which Sybil and the late Miss Betsy Bilodeau of Maple Ridge B.C. established in 1976. Miss Bilodeau was the first CDMA President and Editor until 1980 when Sybil took on both positions. She served as President for two terms (six years), and 13 years as Editor of CDMA News until forced to retire for health reasons.

As editor, Sybil had been in correspondence with many people who owned and used long ears across Canada. Part of the correspondence from Alberta had been exchanged with such folks as Jim MacIntosh and Keith Kendrew of the Rimbey area, George France of Peace River, as well as Keith and Carol Pettijohn of Bowden. So it was logical that once settled on a farm in the Bluffton area, Carl and Sybil Sewell would seek to start a provincial club under the umbrella of CDMA. Such local clubs or chapters generally organize local shows and seminars, like the many state clubs under the umbrella of the American Donkey and Mule Society (ADMS). The Sewells by this time had been members of the latter group for almost a decade.

During 1982 - 83 efforts to establish an Alberta club by those mentioned above failed due lack of interest. However, other contacts were made with longtime donkey lovers such as Abe and Phyllis Epp of Stettler, Morris and Kathy Helmig of Tofield and others. Although as yet numbers were insufficient for a long ears club, an invitation did come from The Alberta Pony and Small Horse Breeders Promotional Group led by Pat Clay out of Strathmore.

The Alberta Pony and Small Horse Breeders Promotional Group represented Connemara, Shetland and Welsh ponies, Fjord, Icelandic and Miniature Horses whose numbers were too small to have their own provincial organizations. For such a group to add donkeys and mules to

their numbers did not pose a problem - the long ears were welcomed! The wide variety of members were expected to be knowledgeable about all other breeds within the group and promote them equally at shows, or demonstrations.

## **Part 2: The Alberta Pony and Small Horse Promotional Group Opens the Door to Spruce Meadows**

This group was very active with at least one annual show in the province, plus numerous demonstrations, excellent annual clinics and seminars around the province, particularly in driving which was the forte of most smaller equines. The group held shows in various locations such as Olds or Thorsby, and in 1987 made a huge 'hit' with their big show at Edmonton Klondike Days. In 1983 they also conducted a well-attended production sale at the Olds Cow Palace. In 1983-84 donkeys and mules established a presence at Spruce Meadows Masters Tournament as part of the Alberta Breeds for the World display and demonstrations courtesy of The Alberta Pony and Small Horse Breeders Promotional Group . That presence continues to this day thanks to the efforts of the current Alberta Donkey and Mule Club !



Members of the Alberta Pony and Small Horse Breeders Group participating at Edmonton Klondike Days show in 1987. Left to right ;  
Morris Helmig, George France, Iain Sewell & Sybil Sewell.

The Sewells showed the first Mammoth donkey jennet, Dry Gulch Sweet Nuthin' and her foal Windy Ridge Joker, at Spruce Meadows in 1983, and made such an impression they were invited by Ron Southern to return for the weekend and participate in the Parade of Nations. For Carl and Sybil that was the start of eight consecutive years wherein they showed the world of Spruce Meadows fans three different Mammoths and four different Large Standard donkeys in various demonstrations at halter, long reining, single driving, and packing and talked to thousands about the positive features of donkeys and mules. No mules were available to show at that level, but later in the early '90s the late Norm Peterson did exhibit his saddle mule for a few years.

Ensuing years have seen a variety of donkeys and mules shown at Spruce Meadows culminating in Team Mule regularly participating in the Battle of the Breeds.

A year or two after starting the demonstrations at Spruce Meadows, the Helmigs joined in with spotted Miniature donkey jack “Two Bit Pete” put to a cart. Two Bit Pete was the only donkey in Canada ever to earn a place in the American Donkey and Mule Versatility Hall of Fame! The preparation and experience for Spruce Meadows demonstrations by both Helmigs and Sewells was the sport of Combined driving - the endurance test of the driving animal. Both couples had helped to found the Alberta Combined Driving Association during the early ‘80s, hence their interest in driving donkeys. Just as today, the criteria for showing at Spruce Meadows was strict, with quality being desired for both animals and their turn out in order to truly show Alberta Breeds for the World.

### **Part 3: Early Years of the Alberta Donkey and Mule Club**



Members of the Alberta Pony and Small Horse Breeders Group participating at the equine display of all breeds in honour of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II who came to present the first Queen Elizabeth II Cup in show jumping, June 1990 Spruce Meadows.

Left to right: George France, disabled whip driving his pair of Shetland ponies, passenger Sybil Sewell; Morris Helmig, whip with Two Bit Pete Miniature spotted jack put to a two wheeled cart.

As numbers of the different small breeds grew large enough, some gradually established their own breed organization and said farewell to The Alberta Pony and Small Horse Breeders Promotional Group. The donkeys and mules eventually did likewise. By the end of 1989 there

was sufficient interest in a donkey and mule group to make application under the Alberta Societies Act. Said application was signed by the founding members of Robert McCallum of Tofield, George France of Peace River, Sybil Sewell of Leslieville, Joan Strobl of St. Albert, Kathy Peterson of Tofield and witnessed by Morris Helmig of Tofield. And so the Alberta Donkey and Mule Club (ADMC) was born!

The Founding meeting of ADMC was held January 27, 1990 at the Capri Centre in Red Deer. The first Board of Directors was as follows:

President:	Morris Helmig
Vice-President:	Dennis Debruyne
Secretary-Treasurer:	Joan Strobl
Director:	Keith Kendrew
Director:	Keith Ruttle
Director:	Sybil Sewell
Director:	Phyllis Epp

The minutes included a discussion about By Laws, 'Fun Shows', hosting the CDMA annual meeting with speakers and a Fund Raising Auction, as well as the need for a provincial head count (census) of donkeys and mules. By the end of that year Sybil had already contacted the Westerner show in Red Deer with a proposal for a donkey and mule show.

However, the donkeys and mules had to prove themselves before being invited to establish a show at The Westerner. Thanks to the Ladies Draft Horse Association of Alberta donkeys and mules got their big chance in 1991! Friday evening and Saturday afternoon openings between the horse pulls needed to be filled in order to keep the interest of the crowd. Volunteers riding saddle mules were Reg and Hazel Rust plus Irene Morck and Mogens Neilsen. Other club members brought out their donkeys: Keith Kendrew with a Small Standard pack donkey; Morris Helmig with a Miniature pack donkey plus single driving with Two Bit Pete; Sybil Sewell packed with a Mammoth jennet and for variation, George France gave a driving for the disabled demonstration with his pair of Shetland ponies. Such a variety of well turned out equines delighted the Westerner crowd. The response was not only encouraging for those who performed, but their efforts were rewarded by an invitation to start a donkey and mule show at the 1992 Westerner Days Exhibition. There was a show in operation at Tees about the same time and eventually its' management came to ADMC.



ADMC members who presented the demonstration at the Westerner in 1991:

Left to right : at the back - Mogens Nielsen & Irene Morck on their saddle mules.

Middle row: Keith Kendrew packing Small Standard donkey; Sybil Sewell with Mammoth pack donkey; Hazel Rust and Reg. Rust mounted on saddle mules.

Front row: miniature pack donkey beside Morris Helmig with Two Bit Pete driving single, George France with pair of Shetland ponies (disabled driving presentation) with Merv Hollihan as passenger in the four wheeled carriage.

Aside from showing, the educational aspect of donkeys and mules, and their handlers was met through a wide variety of clinics and seminars, a trend that continues to this day. Members learned more about equine conformation and judging, preparation for showing, harnessing and driving, plus packing and riding in the mountains. Their care for, and desire to demonstrate the versatility of donkeys and mules that was shown by ADMC members in those early days continues today.



Irene Morck showed Baby Doll in English tack at 1st Westerner Donkey and Mule show in 1992.

Happy 20th Anniversary ADMC!

Contributed by Sybil E. Sewell