

Severn Chief

by Hope Holland

A MARYLAND STALLION OF DISTINCTION

Ponies, good ponies, are a blend of adorable small faces, out-sized hearts of gold, extra large quantities of horse hair that shed on contact, plus that particular brand of stardust that can infect susceptible families with an addiction to the world of horses for generations afterward.

Louise Hollyday's Welsh Pony stallion, Severn Chief, was one such pony and the line that he sired carried on his inimitable charm, trustworthy ways and excellent looks.

The story of Severn Chief starts on the Severn Oaks pony farm in Arnold, Maryland where he was born. Mrs. Charles Iliff bred his dam, the imported mare Revel Betty to her stallion, Farnley Sirius. On June 13, 1949 the resulting foal, Severn Chief, arrived as a red roan. While most of the pictures are in black and white, a few color shots show him in all his glory with a definitely rusty red colored head, and a black mane, tail and points, while the rest of his body was a soft blending of gray and red hairs.

While Severn Chief spent the first year of his life at the Iliffs' pony farm, Louise Este Hollyday and her mother, Louise Fisher



Hollyday, were tiring of the continual trips to breed the mares that young Louise used to produce crossbred ponies.

As Louise says now, "Mother finally put her foot down and said, 'Louise, we need to find a pony stallion that you can keep here.'" At the time, 'here' was an estate in Towson that was large enough to keep a small herd of small sized equines.

Hollyday said, "I believe that taking pony mares here and there was interfering with her social life, but actually she was the one who picked out Chief. When we went out to the Iliffs' farm, there were five fine yearling colts who were slated to be gelded the next week. We looked at all of them and the one who really stood out was Chief. He was one of the most attractive movers that we had seen and mother thought he was perfectly lovely. So we bought him and brought him home."

Chief's introduction to his harem of mares was suitable for a stallion that would be a herd sire for years. Louise grins and says, "In those days, everyone figured that a yearling was still sterile, so he was tossed out with the mares to run with the herd." said Louise Hollyday. By early the next year, it was apparent that Chief, yearling or not, knew his job. Two years later it was evident that Severn Chief was indeed the right choice of a stallion for Louise and for many other people as well.

The Proof Is Always In The Progeny

To Chief's credit are almost too many good ponies to mention. The Hollydays' neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Carroll, bred their mare Fran, a part Arab, to Chief at least twice and both times got excellent ponies, Sundae and Substitution.

Sundae went to Harry Love whose children showed her to distinction at the better pony shows in the Maryland show world.

On the strength of Sundae's reputation, Charles Gartrell purchased Substitution. Mr. Gartrell was a famed horseman in his day, showing hunter ponies and horses on the line in breeding classes at major shows up and down the East Coast. Substitution became one of the finer show ponies of its day.



Severn Chief with Sally LeVerina up (Sally is Louise's niece)

Sue Powers of Harford Co. bred Mighty Mouse from a cross of Severn Chief onto her unregistered chestnut Shetland mare, Goldie, which she had purchased from Harriet Rogers.

All around these better-known belonging to the finer lights of Maryland's horse community were a small legion of ponies, identifiable as Severn Chief's get via their roan coloring or their simple ability to adapt to whatever task might be at hand. That coloring regularly showed up in the smaller shows in the Maryland countryside and graced the fields of the fox chasers.

Sons and daughters of Severn Chief were known as fine field hunters and were among the ponies of the Valley area, and beyond, that were handed down in families. From brother to sister, to younger cousins and even to a grandchild or two, depending upon the ponies' own longevity. Down the dusty years of the half century between Severn Chief's birth and the new millennium, many of the names of those ponies have faded into the memories of their owners, but the influence of one good pony on the larger horse community cannot be denied.

The author's own Celynnen Rafael, by Severn Chief and out of Louise Hollyday's pony mare, Heidi, was the Junior Champion of an early Maryland Pony Breeder's show and also won an in hand driving class at the same show. While this was barely a minor blip on the radar of Maryland's horse scene, it did help to cement a budding relationship with the horse community that has lasted more than 40 years.

Such is the influence of a good pony on the world around him, and such was the life of Severn Chief.

A Working Farm, A Working Life

The years between Severn Chief's arrival at the estate in Towson in 1950 and his death in 1971, from the effects of a long life and impinging medical conditions, were full for both Chief and Louise Hollyday.

There was a stay on a Thoroughbred farm as a teaser while Louise completed her studies for a BHSAI certificate in England. There was a move from Towson to the farm that became Chief's final home on Wheeler Lane in Sparks.

His small herd of mares evolved from crossbreds to the registered Welsh, purchased by Louise to complement her fancy roan stallion. She also kept a group of registered Shetlands to breed to various Shetland stallions. Louise was breeding not only for resale but also for her school, Ponies For Children, Inc., which dealt only with children 12 and younger.

The bred mares were used in the school for teaching. It was not unusual for a mare to foal during the night after a day spent teaching confidence and "up-down."

"Those little mares were fit and healthy," said Louise, "I never had a problem with them in foaling, most probably because they were fit and healthy." She added, "I probably wasn't a very 'nice mommy' to the mares: they went back into the school after a layoff of about a month. But back then, ponies weren't the little specialists that they are today. They worked for a living, just like the rest of us."

It was not unusual in the spring to see a group of ponies walking, trotting and cantering obediently around the ring with their little riders while foals played in an adjoining paddock. After the lesson, the mares and their foals were reunited, the babies had a drink of milk and the business of being a broodmare continued.

Chief himself was also used in the lessons for more advanced child riders.

The Pied Piper

The mares were not the only ones on the farm with the multiple duties of being a working parent. Once the foals were weaned, they were put in Chief's paddock. It was not unusual to see Severn Chief walking about his paddock, a trail of seven or so pony weanlings following. His stint as a herd sire had taught him the necessary patience and good humor it takes to be "father" to a shoal of tiny ponies in his private reef.

Breaking New Ground



Severn Chief with Louise Hollyday as whip

Louise drove Chief in a rather fancy large copy of a Sicilian donkey cart. "It was our exercise," she said. "I often drove him down Wheeler Lane and along Belfast Road clean down to where I-83 came through and then back again. We both enjoyed it."



That led to an unusual opportunity in the early days of the Welsh Pony's introduction to Maryland. Mrs. Murray Clark, a renowned driver of fine harness horses and ponies, believed that there was no reason why a Welsh pony could not enter in the fine harness classes as well. She worked with then-10-year-old Chief for just five days, and then drove him at the Cecil County Horse and Pony Show. The pair placed third in the Open Har-

continued on the next page

Never Too Old To Learn

Severn Chief, registered ten-year-old Welsh stallion, by Farnley Sirius, out of Revel Betty, and owned by Miss Louise Este Hollyday, of Sparks, this summer was placed back in work for the handling classes held at a number of shows.

After Severn Chief had led the life of Riley on his owner's farm, some of Miss Hollyday's pupils talked her into entering him at the Talbot County Horse and Pony Show In Hand class in which he placed fourth.

He had never been in harness before, but Mrs. Murray Clark of Forest Hill handled Severn Chief for five days before entering him in classes at the Cecil County Horse and Pony show. Here he placed third in the Open Harness, second in the Stake, second in the Amateur class.

Besides these Harness classes he was second in the Stallion class In Hand. The turn out of the show for Severn Chief was Reserve Senior Champion.

This stallion has sired some outstanding ponies. Among them are Sundae, owned by Mr. Harry A. Love, the good pony Substitution, owned by Mr. Charles Gartrell, and Mighty Mouse, owned by Mrs. John B. Merryman.

—Peggy Ensor



Woods Photo

Miss Louise Este Hollyday's Severn Chief, ten-year-old Welsh stallion, being driven by Mrs. Murray Clark. Chief is a successful sire.

23

ness, second in the Stake, and second in the Amateur Class. In addition to the harness classes, he placed second in the Stallion Class in Hand. The day was topped off grandly by Chief's taking the Reserve Sr. Champion for the show.

His Own Mind

But in a more personal sense Severn Chief was a being in his own right and, in his own mind, took a decided responsibility for the ponies of the Hollyday Farm.

When Puss In Boots, Louise Hollyday's English style Shetland broodmare and the grand dame of the farm, suffered a stroke, she was put in the barn aisle in a temporary stall built of straw bales. A bale was put under her belly to

hold her up, with two more along her side to stabilize her. Puss lived like this for several days while it was determined whether she would survive her illness. During those days, Chief stood at the front gate of his stall, regarding the little mare and, seemingly, willing her to live. He was disobedient for possibly the first time in his life, refusing to leave the stall, even for exercise until Puss took a decided turn for the better.

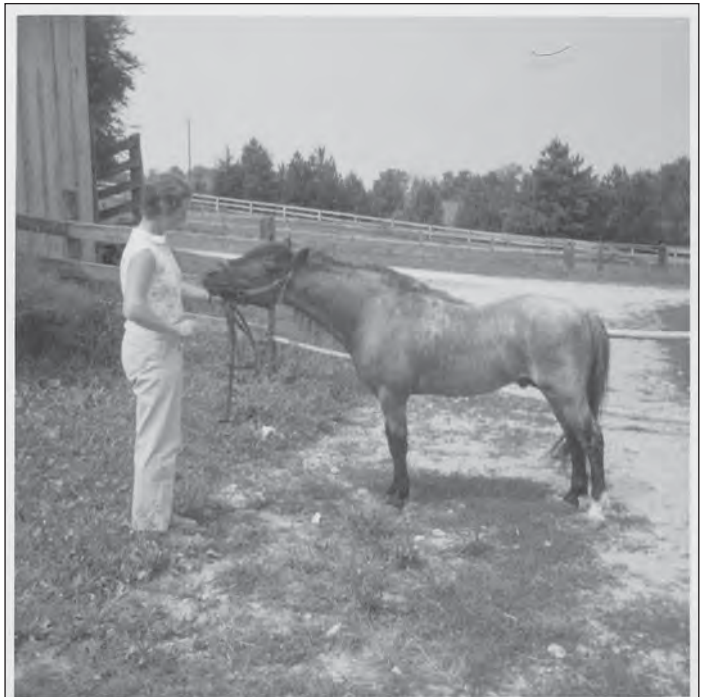
When one of the yearling ponies broke his leg, Louise, her mother and Dr. I. W. Frock set the leg, putting a cast on it. Once the pony in his cast was able to move about, he was put in with Chief, who coached him into full recovery.

Chief himself was prone to epileptic attacks. As a young stallion he was once separated from his mares and put into the riding ring for a short while. In his energetic attempts to get back to his mares, he attempted to jump the almost five-foot fence

between him and his band. Chief hooked his knees on the fence and fell, facedown, onto his head. Louise was watching, horrified, certain that she had just seen her pony stallion kill himself.

"I was certain that he was dead," she said. "For once I just stood there. I didn't want to go down and see that he was dead, if you have to know the truth. Then he moved. It took a while to get him back up to the barn and then, after that, the epileptic attacks started. They were quite infrequent, but they did occur. In those days, we could only guess that there might be a blood clot that traveled in his system, sometimes triggering these attacks."

The treatment was the same for each attack: remove Chief to his stall, stripping out the buckets so that he could not hurt himself during the attack. Then a bran mash that evening, followed by a day or so of rest. Chief went on for many years with the attacks arriving at rare intervals with no warnings.



SEASON'S GREETINGS



Chief was euthanized in 1971. His last Christmas picture, in 1970, shows a pony by then more gray than roan, with his heavy stallion's neck falling a bit to one side, as an older stallion's will. But he was still able to stand correctly for his portrait. He has a bit of a glint in his eye, and his friend and caretaker, Louise, is at his halter, smiling down at him. It is as good a place as any to bid goodbye to a lovely pony who made a difference not only to his breed, but to the lives of those who knew him. ■

If you have a Severn Chief story you would like to share, please send it in writing to:

**The Equiry • P.O. Box 610 • Lisbon, MD 21765
fax: 410-489-7828 • editor@equiry.com**

We will post stories on our website.

