

The Conestoga Horse

By JOHN STROHM (1793-1884) AND HERBERT H. BECK.

The Conestoga horse and the Conestoga wagon were evolved in and about that part of southeastern Pennsylvania which, before it was named Lancaster County, was known as Conestoga. The region was named for a river that has its main springhead in Turkey Hill, Caernarvon Township, whence it crosses the Berks County line for a short distance and then returns into Lancaster County to cross it, in increasing volume, passing the county seat, to flow between Manor and Conestoga townships into the Susquehanna. The names Conestoga and Lancaster County are inseparably connected in historical records.

Unlike the Conestoga wagon, which was known under that name as early as 1750,¹ and whose fame still lives in history and in actual form in museums, the Conestoga horse—a thing of flesh—was not preserved and is now nearly forgotten. The undoubted fact that the Conestoga horse was famous in its day and way warrants a compilation of available records of that useful animal. Nor could this subject be more fittingly treated in any other community than in the Conestoga Valley.

The writer qualifies himself for his subject by the statement that he has been a horseman most of his life; that he has driven many hundreds of miles in buggy, runabout and sleigh; and ridden many thousands of miles on road and trail, and in the hunting field and the show ring. Between 1929 and 1940 he was riding master at Linden Hall School for Girls at Lititz, where he instituted and carried on an annual horse show. Furthermore he has been a teacher of Geology and Palaeontology at Franklin and Marshall College.

While the horse had its palaeontological origin, as a five-toed animal about the size of a fox, in North America, it was not known to the natives of either North or South America when the white man came here in 1492. Evolving from this five-toed animal into the horse as we know it to-day, the slowly ascending animal must have found its way across the land connection, now Bering's Strait, between North America and Asia. In this process of evo-

¹ There was a tavern in Philadelphia, "The Sign of the Conestogoe Waggon." *Pennsylvania Gazette*, February 5, 1750.

lution and migration the horse became extinct in America. The herds of wild horses that were found abundantly on the plains of the West are believed to be descendants of escapes and strays from a troop of 260 mounted men, who under Francisco Coronado rode across the Rio Grande northward as far as Kansas in 1540.² Anyway these horses had been brought into America from southwestern Europe.

It is unlikely that this horse of the western plains was part of the breeding stock in the Conestoga Valley in the eighteenth century. It is most probable that the Conestoga horse was evolved from animals imported from Europe about the middle of that century. The probable origin of this breeding stock, the general character and use and the cause of the disappearance of the Conestoga horse will be found in the records that follow.

The first apparent observation of the Conestoga horse the writer has been able to find is that of Benjamin Rush. Writing in 1789, Dr. Rush says: "A large, strong wagon (the ship of inland commerce) covered with a linen cloth, is an essential part of the furniture of a German farm. In this wagon, drawn by four or five horses of a peculiar breed, they convey to market, over the roughest roads, 2000 and 3000 pounds weight of produce of the farms. In the months of September and October it is no uncommon sight, on the Lancaster and Reading roads, to meet in one day fifty or one hundred of these wagons on their way to Philadelphia."³ The horses of so distinctive a type as to catch Dr. Rush's observing eye were, with little doubt, Conestogas.

The first record of the Conestoga horse the compiler has found under that name is in *The Cabinet of Natural History and American Rural Sports*, published by J. and H. Doughty, Philadelphia, 1832. In this publication, under the title "The History of the Horse," thirty breeds of the world are mentioned and briefly described. Under "The American Horse" three breeds are recognized; the Canadian, the English and the Conestoga. Of the latter the writer says: "The Conestoga Horse is found in Pennsylvania and the Middle States—long in limb and light in carcass—sometimes rising seventeen hands⁴; used principally for the carriage but when not too high and with sufficient substance, useful for hunting and the saddle." While this brief description of the Conestoga horse is the same in size and general conformation as those of later and more detailed writers, the statement "used principally for the carriage" is misleading to those who distinctly differentiate the carriage and the wagon, for the Conestoga was without doubt essentially a wagon horse. However, the mention of the Conestoga horse among thirty breeds of the world shows quite definitely that it was well known and widely recognized in 1832.

² H. R. Sass in *Country Gentleman*.

³ *The Conestoga Wagon*, by H. C. Frey, Vol. XXXIV, No. 13, Proceedings of the Lancaster County Historical Society.

⁴ A hand is four inches. Measurement is made at the withers, which is the highest part of the back between the shoulder blades. The average saddle horse is 15.2, which means fifteen hands and two inches.

In *The Practical Farmer* (Cincinnati, 1842) Edward Hooper says that "the best model of the heavier kind of farmer's or wagoner's horse is the Suffolk Punch. It strongly resembles the famous Chester Balls and the Conestoga horses of Pennsylvania."

Frank Forester⁵ (1807-1858), in his *Horse and Horsemanship of the United States*, published by Geo. E. Woodward in 1871 (thirteen years after the author's death), says: "In 1750 the French of Illinois possessed considerable numbers of French draft horses, and since that time, as the science of agriculture has improved and advanced, pure animals of many distinct breeds have been constantly imported into this country, which have created in different sections and districts distinct families easily recognized; as the horses of Massachusetts and Vermont, admirable for their qualities as draft horses, both powerful and active, and capable of quick as well as heavy work—the Conestogas, excellent for ponderous slow efforts in teaming and the like—and the active wiry horses of the West, well adapted for riding, and affording mounts to most of the American Cavalry."

Later on Forester says: "In fact, with the exception of the Conestoga horse, there is in the United States no purely bred draft or cart-horse, nor any breed which is kept entirely for field or road labor, without a view to being used at times for quicker work, and for purposes of pleasure or travel."

I. Daniel Rupp, in his *The Farmers Complete Farrier*, published in Lancaster by Gilbert Hills in 1842, mentions the breed thus: "The Conestoga Horse—This Horse is found in Pennsylvania and in the Middle States. He is generally long in the leg, and rather light in the carcass; sometimes seventeen hands and a half in height—he is used for the plough and carriage—he is an excellent carriage horse. Those of middle size, when well made, are much used for the saddle, and are useful for hunting." Facing page 80, the author shows a picture of 'A Lancaster County Draft Horse.' This drawing has all the conformation characters of a typical Conestoga horse as described by other writers and by observers still living.

In the Report of the United States Department of Agriculture of 1866, Colonel Samuel Ringwalt of Downingtown, Pa. has an article on "The Horses of the United States." He says: "The Germans of Pennsylvania displayed a preference for heavy draught horses which led to the development of the Conestoga breed, resembling Flemish and Danish horses or the English Suffolk Punch."

L. F. Allen, writing on American Draft Horses in the Report of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, 1877, says: "Of this class first in order stands the Conestoga of Pennsylvania. * * * These horses ranged from

⁵ Frank Forester (Henry William Herbert), well educated in England, where he was born, came to America in 1831 to become the leading writer of his day on American Field Sports. His *Warwick Woodlands* was an inciting classic to the writer in his boyhood. More than any one factor, this tale of Woodcock, Quail and Ruffed Grouse shooting in Orange County, New York, led him into many happy days afield with gun and dog.

sixteen and one-half to seventeen and one-half hands high with bodies solid and bulky in proportion. * * * It is doubtful if a better class of heavy draught horses than they ever existed. It is claimed by some that the Conestoga has been bred to this high degree of excellence by crosses with the thoroughbred English horse."⁶

John H. Wallace in *The Horse in America*, New York, 1897, says: "In that grand old repository of ancient, curious and valuable things relating to Colonial affairs, the New York Historical Society, I found a file of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, commencing in the year 1729, published by 'B. Franklin, printer.' To these I resorted, as usual, and they presented results that were a great surprise to me. Pennsylvania has long been famous for the production of great massive draft horses, and before the days of railroads just suited, with six or eight of them in a team, for the transportation of freight from the seaboard to the Ohio River. This was a great business at the beginning of the century and for forty or fifty years afterward. The fame of those great teams, the great wagons and the great loads they hauled over the mountains, spread far and wide, and as a special designation that went with them they were called Conestoga horses, and the wagons were called Conestoga wagons, named after a creek in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, where many large horses were bred. There was no particular line of blood to be followed, for a large horse bred west of the mountains was just as certainly a Conestoga as though he had been bred in Lancaster County. The Conestoga was simply the horse that was best suited for a big team with an enormous load, and he varied in size from sixteen and a half to eighteen hands in height and from one thousand six hundred to one thousand nine hundred pounds in weight. These measurements were reached by breeding for the one purpose of strength and weight."

W. J. Kennedy, of the Iowa Agricultural College, writing on "Selecting and Judging Horses"⁷ in 1902, says: "The Conestoga horse had no growth of long hair or feather between the knee and the fetlock, as this would have been an unending source of trouble to the driver on muddy roads; a long tail also was a nuisance. The feet were moderately large but not flat, the top of the neck or crest well arched, body and legs rather short than long, stride rather long than short, temperament rather docile than nervous, movement forward steady, and not wobbling, height to withers sixteen to seventeen hands, and weight 1800 pounds or over in normal condition. The horse must be well muscled, less so than a brewery wagon horse; and the best colors in order are found to be bay, black, gray, brown, chestnut, sorrel, roan, with not too much marking. Although strong, these heavy horses need careful attention to keep them in health and the horse doctor is needed occasionally. The mule

⁶ A thoroughbred is a horse originally bred in England for the running race, incidentally for the hunting field. They are bred and used for running only. Thoroughbreds of to-day are essentially direct or indirect descendants of the famous English running horse, Eclipse, foaled in 1764.

⁷ *The Conestoga Six-Horse Bell Teams of Eastern Pennsylvania*, by John Omwake, 1930, p. 93.

was later found to need practically no doctoring, lived long, worked hard and was tractable when well treated, so that he found a permanent place in farm work. Hardy western horses were low priced and did not eat so much as the Conestogas, and were found to be strong enough for farm work. So that when wagoning stopped, Othello's occupation was gone, and the Conestoga breed of horses became a memory."

Quite the most complete record of the Conestoga horse the writer's research reveals, and probably the best in American literature on the subject, is by a son of Lancaster County, John Strohm. The Honorable John Strohm—he was Lancaster County's Representative in Congress, 1844-1848—was born in 1793, near Pleasant Grove, in what is now Fulton Township. In 1833 he bought a property in Martie Township, later Providence Township, where he lived, along the Beaver Creek, until 1882. He died in 1884, in his ninety-second year, remembered by his friends as "Honest John Strohm." Living his life in the great farming region of Lancaster County, he evidently was well acquainted with the Conestoga horse as early as 1810. He often saw the great Conestoga Wagon teams when their picturesque and eminently useful career was at its height, which seems to have been in the eighteen twenties. His article appears in the Report of the United States Department of Agriculture for 1863 as:

THE CONESTOGA HORSE

BY HON. JOHN STROHM, NEW PROVIDENCE, PENNSYLVANIA

The wide celebrity acquired by this distinguished animal has induced a belief that he springs from some peculiar species or breed of that genus of quadrupeds whose services contribute so largely to the comfort and prosperity of man, especially in an agricultural community, and has inspired a desire to know something about the origin, comparative merits, and system of breeding, of a class of horses whose fame is commensurate with a large portion of the United States.

Fully impressed with the belief that the superior excellence attributed to the Conestoga horse is not derived from any strain or breed that can now be traced to its origin, the following sketch has been penned with the view of exploding that idea, and at the same time to rescue the history of that celebrated animal from that oblivion to which modern inventions and recent innovations are rapidly consigning it.

The name of "Conestoga" is derived from a river (to which the aboriginal inhabitants had given that name) that rises in the northeast part of the county of Lancaster, one of the southeastern counties of the State of Pennsylvania, and flows through the central part of said county, in a south-westerly direction, disemboguing into the Susquehanna at a place now called "Safe Harbor," where extensive iron works have been established. This river rises in and flows through a region of country of unsurpassed fertility, where cereal grains and nutritious grasses are grown to an extent unrivalled in any part of the United States.

The settlement of this valley commenced in the early part of the last century. The first European settlers emigrated mainly from Switzerland and the adjoining parts of Germany, interspersed with French Huguenots, who sought in this new country a refuge from the persecution which oppressed them in their native land. They were principally agriculturists, and, from necessity as well as choice, devoted their attention to the same vocation in their new home.

Their first care was to clear the ground of the heavy growth of timber that extended over the whole region; for here were no prairies covered with rich grasses, furnishing abundant nourishment for stock without labor and without price, and requiring but little cultivation to produce the grain that composes the principal sustenance of man, and the domestic animals subservient to his comfort, convenience, and pleasure. The laborious task of clearing away the forest was mainly effected by the use of the axe and the action of fire. The huge logs were collected together in piles, the interstices filled with the branches, when the application of a torch soon reduced the whole mass to ashes, which served to ameliorate and fertilize the soil. The next object was to break up the ground, and prepare it for the reception of the seed, from which the abundant harvest was anticipated.

In the accomplishment of this, the horse was found a useful and convenient, if not indispensable, assistant, for without the aid of this useful animal the cultivation of the soil must have been very limited. The horses used by those early settlers were no doubt the progenitors of the far-famed "Conestoga horse," which in after times became so extensively known and spoken of; but of what particular stock or strain they were, or whence they came, history and tradition are equally silent, or afford no reliable information.

As Chester County and the vicinity of Philadelphia were partially settled and considerably improved before any settlement was effected in the Conestoga Valley, it is quite probable that the first immigrants to this valley derived their first stock of horses from their nearest neighbors inhabiting the above-named localities; and it requires no great stretch of imagination to suppose that the first settlers of Pennsylvania who came here with William Penn, or some of their immediate successors, brought some of those useful animals with them from England, from which the whole stock of horses in the country at that time were derived. But it was not only in the cultivation of the soil that the horse was so essential to the immigrants to this (then new) country. There being then no flouring mills in the county of Lancaster, the inhabitants were compelled to carry their grain to the Brandywine mills, near Wilmington, in the State of Delaware, some forty miles distant, to be manufactured into flour for family use.

This was a laborious task, that could hardly have been executed without the aid of the useful animal that forms the subject of this essay. These important services were fully appreciated by those honest and industrious settlers, and the horse, who was a companion of their toil, and so essentially necessary to their success and prosperity, became to them an object of great

attention and (I had almost said) affection. Just, humane, and generous, this rural people treated this trusty and faithful domestic with a degree of consideration seldom bestowed upon any of the brute creation. Their superior intelligence restrained them from that ardent affection, approaching to adoration, which the wild Arab of the desert is said to entertain for his courser; and, though the horse was not an inmate of the same apartment that sheltered his wife and children, as we are told is sometimes the case with the Bedouin Arab, he was provided with comfortable quarters, at no great distance from his master, and partook generously of the cereal grain and nutritious grasses which his own strength and labor contributed so materially to produce.

Being thus well fed, protected from the cold and inclemency of the weather when not actually in service, and never overworked or abused, this horse, under this kind treatment, attained to the full development of his natural powers, and arrived at a degree of beauty and perfection seldom found in any other country, and much surpassing the original stock. The deep interest with which the farmers of this region regarded this noble animal, naturally stimulated a desire to improve the stock and to bring him to a still greater degree of perfection. This was not attempted by any scientific system of breeding; for this frugal people, always having an eye to economy and utility, kept neither males nor females for the exclusive purpose of breeding. Sometimes a stud horse was absolved from labor during the two last months of spring and the first of the summer season; but at the expiration of that term he was put to the harness again and compelled to do his share of the labor which the interest of his proprietor required. So with the mare; she was generally worked until within a few weeks of foaling; and instances are not unfrequent where they have been kept in the harness until the time of parturition. This, however, was only done through ignorance or misapprehension of the time when the foal is expected. In about a week after the mare has foaled, she is again put to the harness and performs her ordinary share of labor on the farm.

The colt is permitted to run with its dam until it is about three months old; it is then weaned and turned to pasture, generally receiving a little oats once or twice a day for a month or longer. Judicious farmers advise the feeding of a small quantity of oats daily during the first winter; but colts frequently, if not generally, have to be content with a warm stall and plenty of good hay. The second winter they require no grain, and unless regularly and very sparingly fed, are considered better without it.

At about two and a half years old they are usually "bridle broken," and sometimes lightly worked for a while in the autumn; but during the ensuing winter they are commonly suffered to run idle, being seldom regularly worked until fully three years old.

Under this system of breeding, by selecting their best stock for the purpose, the farmers of the Conestoga Valley were very successful in improving their stock. As the country was brought under cultivation, and the dense forest was succeeded by fertile fields of waving grain and rich pastures of

succulent grasses, roads were opened and facilities afforded for transporting the surplus productions of the farm to the sea-board. Wagons were now introduced, (for railroads and canals were not then in vogue), and the strength and fidelity of the horse were relied upon to drag those heavy-laden wagons to their destined places.

In the performance of those services it will readily be perceived that strength and activity were the most essential requisites. To these points, then, the attention of the sagacious farmer was constantly directed in the improvement of this indispensable quadruped—their aim being to produce a strong, heavy, well-set, and tolerably active animal, with great powers of endurance.

The immigration to and settling of the western states created a demand for the transportation of large quantities of dry goods and groceries to supply the wants of those engaged in opening up and settling those new countries; and many of the farmers in the Conestoga Valley occasionally employed their teams in hauling "store goods" from Philadelphia to Pittsburg, the latter place being the terminus beyond which eastern teams seldom went.

During the war of 1812 these noble teams rendered essential service to the country in the transportation of arms, ammunition, and supplies to the army on the frontier. Long lines of those teams were frequently seen wending their weary way to the theatre of action, and contributing greatly to the comfort of the army and the defence of the country. Their usual route of travel was from Philadelphia through Lancaster, crossing the Susquehanna at Columbia or Marietta, and thence over the mountains to Pittsburg, and sometimes northward to Lake Erie. This was before the construction of turn-pikes and canals, and the capacious wagons which the Conestoga farmers then had in use, and the heavy teams of large, fat, sleek horses attached thereto, were the best means of transportation which the times and circumstances of the country then afforded. These wagons and teams attracted attention and commanded admiration wherever they appeared; and hence the origin, as I conceive, of the horse and wagon to which the appellation of "Conestoga" has been attached. The farmers of those days seemed fully to appreciate the importance of these teams, and evinced considerable taste and no little pride in their style of fitting them out. The harness was constructed of the best materials, with an eye to show as well as utility. In the harness and trimmings of these teams they frequently indulged in expenses that approached to extravagance. In addition to what was indispensably necessary, articles that by some were deemed mere decorations were sometimes appended, and served to increase the admiration which the noble animals to which they were attached so universally attracted. It was, indeed, an animating sight to see five or six highly fed horses, half covered with heavy bear-skins, or decorated with gaudily fringed housings, surmounted with a set of finely toned bells, their bridles adorned with loops of red trimming, and moving over the ground with a brisk elastic step, snorting disdainfully at surrounding objects, as if half conscious of their superior appearance, and participating in the pride that swelled the bosom of their master and driver.

The Conestoga horse, then, though his origin cannot be traced to any distinct species or breed, though his pedigree is not recorded in any stud-book, or his exploits blazoned forth on the pages of a turf-register, is still not a myth—not the creature of a fervid imagination or a disordered fancy—but a veritable, strong, active animal, pre-eminently useful in his day and generation, brought to perfection by judicious breeding, kind treatment, and careful management; and the term Conestoga is used as denoting superiority in the class of draught horses.

Subsequent to the period above referred to, as the improvements in the country advanced, and the population became dense and prosperous, a spirit of enterprise was fostered and excited that culminated at that time in the construction of a continuous line of turnpike road from the city of Philadelphia, on the eastern margin of the State of Pennsylvania, to the city of Pittsburg, near the western border of the same state. This great improvement, constructed to facilitate the constant and rapidly increasing trade to the western states, introduced innovations that imposed new and additional duties on that useful quadruped which forms the subject of this essay. A line of stage coaches was established, running between the above-named cities, which brought into requisition a class of horses widely different from those above described. A lighter animal, combining strength with more agility, was required for the transportation of passengers and forwarding the mail, which, in consequence of the vast increase of business, had become an object of public solicitude. These innovations directed the attention of the Conestoga farmers, as well as of all others engaged in the breeding of horses, to the peculiar qualities of the English race horse, whose slender form and tapering limbs seemed well calculated for light and active employment. Stallions were imported from England, and by a crossing of those with the native breed of the country, or rather with the stock then existing in the country, an animal better suited to the exigency of the times was produced; while at the same time the heavy draught horses to transport the weightier and more cumbersome articles of commerce were constantly in demand. At a later period in the history of our country, when the construction of railroads and canals subserved the purposes of transportation both of passengers and freight, the services of the class of animals hereinbefore described were to a great extent dispensed with; long journeys with heavy teams were no longer necessary, and less pains were taken to propagate a class of horses for which there was no pressing demand.

As the new states of the west became settled and cultivated, the western farmers drove large numbers of horses and mules to the eastern part of Pennsylvania, a considerable portion of which were purchased by the farmers of Lancaster County; the former, as being better suited to the business of the times, while the latter were well calculated for heavy draught and endurance of labor, at less expense of feed and provender than the horses formerly used, being less liable to disease, and capable of sustaining labor at a much greater age, they have in a great measure superseded horses; and, at the present

time, a good western horse finds a readier market even on the banks of the Conestoga than one that has been raised in the immediate vicinity.

The construction of railroads, locomotives, steam engines, and telegraph communications has infused a spirit of activity and energy into all business circles. Numerous light vehicles are now daily used on our common roads in the ordinary transaction of business, as well as for the purpose of travelling and the interchange of friendly visits betwixt neighbors and relations; and "Young America" can no longer endure the slow, steady, but sure and regular gait of the "Conestoga horse." A "two-forty" nag is more highly valued and seems more in keeping with the rapidity with which business of all kinds is driven at the present day. Notwithstanding, there are still a great many fine teams in the Conestoga Valley, and in despite of youthful opinions and modern innovations, many of the old-fashioned farmers cling to the use of the faithful horse that has so long been the boast and the pride of Lancaster County; and on occasions of public demonstration, such as cattle shows, fairs, political conventions, etc., these teams may be seen parading the streets of Lancaster city under the merry jingle of their well-chimed bells, and championing their bits with all the pride and fervor of days of yore.

From the preceding considerations, I come to the conclusion that the Conestoga horse is not a distinct species or strain of that noble quadruped, but belongs to a class that has attained a great degree of efficiency for a particular purpose; and that the appellation by which this class is so widely known denotes superior excellence in the class of draught horses, although the individuals composing it may have sprung from a crossing or mixture of various breeds or families into which the horse family is at present divided.

There is, however, one distinguishing characteristic in the history of this animal that has been but slightly adverted to, which deserves, perhaps, a more extended notice; and that is the high condition in which the animal is usually kept in the region of country from which he derives his name and his fame.

The farmers of the Conestoga Valley (which includes so large a portion of the county of Lancaster as to be almost synonymous with it), as a general rule, are in the habit of feeding more grain to their horses and keeping them in higher condition than those of any other section of country known to the writer of this article. Indeed, the keeping of very fat horses has become a passion with them. This passion, stimulated by pride, as is frequently the case, has a tendency to deteriorate rather than improve the animal; for being encumbered with an unnatural load of flesh and fat, the horse becomes sluggish, unwieldy, and incapable of undergoing or enduring the same amount of labor that he might otherwise do. This morbid condition of the system renders the animal more liable to disease, and in various ways detracts from his merits and impairs his usefulness.

But in this as in other things "passion rules the hour," and the individual who neglects or refuses to keep his horses plump, sleek, and fat, is

deemed careless and thriftless, or exceedingly penurious, loses cast with his compeers, and becomes an object of ridicule and contempt. I do not mean to intimate that every fat horse is a Conestoga horse; but I never knew that flattering term to be applied to a lean, gaunt, half-starved-looking animal, whatever his merits, good points, or other qualifications may have been; and hence we frequently hear such expressions as "broad as a Conestoga horse," "fat as a Conestoga horse," "has a neck (or breast) like a Conestoga stallion," used either in compliment, irony, or derision, according to the humor or design of the speaker.

I cannot close without expressing regret that the "Conestoga horse," whose name for so many years has been suggestive of strength, usefulness, and beauty, is likely in a few years more—from disease and neglect in breeding—to become quite extinct as a breed of American horses.

The horse from which the illustration [opposite page 81] for this article is taken is owned by Calvin Eshelman, of Martie Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and will be three years old next July, is 16 hands high, and weighs 1,350 pounds. His color is black, and he is a very good specimen of the Conestoga Horse.⁸—From the Report of the United States Department of Agriculture for 1863.

English recognition of the Conestoga horse is shown by "Stonehenge" (J. H. Walsh, F.R.C.S.) in *The Horse, in the Stable and the Field*, London, 1869. After describing the Mustang, the Indian pony, the Canadian horse, the Morgan horse, the American trotter, the Narragansett pacer, the American thoroughbred (imported into and evolved in America as early as 1745⁹) and the Vermont cart-horse, the author ends his list of American horses with the Conestoga horse. It is one of three American breeds which he illustrates. Under the title "The Conestoga Draught-Horse," Stonehenge says:

"The last on the list of American horses is that known under the above name, which was given to it from being produced in the valley of Conestoga, within the state of Pennsylvania. It is a very large muscular horse, often reaching to seventeen hands and upwards, and closely resembling the heaviest breeds of German and Flemish cart-horses. The early settlers of this part of the United States were mostly Germans, and they either brought over with them some of the horses of their country, or else they have since selected from those within their reach the animals most resembling in appearance their

⁸ In 1938, George W. Hensel, Jr., Colonel Henry W. Shoemaker and the writer searched Martie and nearby townships for possible inherited memories of this Conestoga horse, which seems to have been the last of the breeding stock in that part of the county. None of the many Eshelmans of the region knew anything about it.

⁹ The names of more than 250 thoroughbreds imported into America, beginning in 1745, are listed by Stonehenge.

old favourites when in their fatherland. There is, however, no record of the origin of the breed, and all that can be done is to describe it as it now exists.

"The accompanying sketch [on opposite page] embodies the general appearance of these horses, and by comparing it with the London dray-horse, it will be seen that it differs only slightly, having the same heavy outline of form, united with similar comparatively light limbs, but not burdened with the mountains of flesh and heavy crests which have been produced in England for purposes of show. In Pennsylvania, these horses are chiefly used for waggons, and some few of them, when of inferior shape, for the canal traffic. They are good honest workers, and are quicker and lighter in their action than might be expected from their weight. Indeed, some of them are still used for heavy carriages; but even in Pennsylvania, for quick work, they are generally replaced by the Vermont horse, or some nondescript of mixed blood, with which America is completely overrun.

"In colour they follow the Flemish horses, except that black is rare among them, but like the Flemish they are free from chestnut, and the larger proportion of them are bay, brown, or iron greys."

John Gilmer Speed in *The Horse in America*, New York, 1905, says that the paternal grandam of one of America's most famous horses, Rysdyk's Hambletonian, was a Conestoga mare. Bred to Mambrino, she had foaled Abdallah, the sire of Rysdyk's Hambletonian (1849-1876), "Progenitor of the American Light Harness Horse." When it is remembered that Hambletonian's dam, the Charles Kent mare, was of uncertain ancestry and that Hambletonian never made a mile faster than 3.18, the turf records of our modern trotters and pacers, over ninety per cent of which are his descendants, with many of them going below 2.00, are mysterious as well as miraculous. Was a thoroughbred strain in Hambletonian's Conestoga grandam a genetic factor in this most important nick¹⁰ in American horse breeding—Abdallah and the Charles Kent mare? Were not the docile characters of the Conestoga blood a factor in modifying those of the bad tempered and vicious Mambrino and Abdallah into the generally easily handled standard bred¹¹ of to-day?

In these days when not one per cent of the college men of America know the difference between a trotter and a pacer, there are few left with personal memories of the Conestoga horse. Henry H. Snavely of Lititz, who was born in 1858, is one of the local few. He was a boy on a farm near Oregon, Mannheim Township, and he has been a horseman all his life. He says the Conestoga horse was the common talk among the older horsemen of his youth. He well remembers a famous Conestoga horse, known by that name, on the neighboring farm of John Shirk. This was between 1870 and 1875. He says

¹⁰ A nick is a fortuitous crossing of bloodlines to the extraordinary improvement of the breed.

¹¹ A standard bred horse today is one essentially of the Hambletonian line—used for light harness racing.

this horse was considerably taller than the other farm horses, well over seventeen hands, and weighed over 1800 pounds. It was a white-faced bay with one glass eye.¹² It was long legged, not chunky. It was notable for its pulling strength. Mr. Snavelly well remembers a wager, the talk of the county at the time, which was taken by John Shirk. It was that the white-faced bay could pull three tons from Lancaster to the farm near Oregon. Mr. Shirk won the bet.

Henry K. Landis (b. 1865), of the Landis Brothers Museum in Manheim Township, Lancaster County's authority on the Conestoga wagon, remembers the Conestoga horse only as a tradition among the horsemen of his youth. He says of it, however, "In connection with the Conestoga wagon it was a distinct type of horse. It was the horse best adapted to Conestoga wagon service. Many Conestogas were black, but mixed breeding soon produced bays (probably from the Suffolk Punch), and later dappled grays."

Probably the last authentic account of the Conestoga type of horse is from Colonel Henry W. Shoemaker of "Restless Oaks," McElhattan, Pa. He was in his seventeenth year when he made the observation. From his early boyhood he had a keen interest in horses. Later he was a horse breeder and he had his racing stables. He says: "One bright morning in the second week in August, 1899, while visiting my uncle, the late John A. Shoemaker, at Speedwell Mills, we drove to the Lexington Hotel (Warwick Township, Lancaster County) to see his old friend Daniel Furlow. In front of the hotel stood a team of horses, a white and a black, harnessed to a huge Conestoga wagon. The hoops and the cover were off and the bed loaded with farm produce. Either Mr. Furlow or my uncle took me by the shoulders and directed me to look at the big black horse. 'That,' he said 'is the last of the Conestogas hereabouts, which used to haul the great freight wagons in four and six-horse teams east and west. This animal is not a pure bred, but he is the real type.' All my life a lover of horses, I studied the huge black horse carefully. Though a gelding, he carried a fine arched neck and crest, for which the breed was noted; yet his head was small and bloodlike for so large an animal and not at all on the Arab cast, like so many Percheron stallions I had seen in the buses and carts and wagons in Paris. This black stood easily seventeen hands, had a powerful chest, legs on the long order but well made, fine flat bones, flat hoofs, good hocks, tight drawn belly, splendid hindquarters, yet rangy compared to the chest, and a rat or switch tail. The dark eye was large, clear and intelligent. I could see the thoroughbred in the head and frame, but with the size and heavier bones of the German and Flemish cart horses."

Colonel Shoemaker says of the picture of "A Lancaster County Draft Horse," as shown in Rupp's *The Farmers Complete Farrier*, "It is a close image of the horse I saw at Lexington in 1899."

¹² Glass eye is a term used by horsemen for a white or partly white iris. This minor detail of the horse, as told by Henry H. Snavelly to the writer, is evidence of the clearness and accuracy of the report.

The Lancaster County Historical Society has the shoe of a large Conestoga horse, which was wrought on the anvil of Phares E. Will, veteran blacksmith and horseshoer of Penryn, on the Newport road, Lancaster County, in 1934. According to Mr. Will (who with some local friends signed an affidavit which was presented with the shoe), from the memories and records of the blacksmith shop on this formerly important highway, this shoe is identical with those of a set forged over a century ago for a Conestoga horse. The shoe is what Mr. Will termed a number 9. Its greatest length is 9½ inches, its greatest breadth 9 inches. Studded as it is with handwrought nails, it weighs 5 pounds 10½ ounces. Mr. Will made this shoe from an old wagon tire, the iron of which had been forged at one of the three Hammer Creek forges about 1797. This is probably the only authentic, material exhibit of the Conestoga horse in the world.

With all breeding records lost, probably because they were never written, the original blood lines of the so-called Conestoga horse are conjectural and must always remain so. However, from legendary accounts as well as the general conformation and character of the animal, as described by earlier horsemen and remembered by men still living, it is a fair surmise that the Conestoga horse, which of course was subject to minor variations, as all breeds are, collectively was the outcome of breeding Flemish or similar imported draught horses, like the famous Suffolk Punch of England, with lighter boned, higher blooded stock identical with or similar to the thoroughbred of to-day. Improvement within the established breed to high, though doubtless quite variable standards, was then the result of careful feeding, stabling and general handling and the selection of the best of the sires in the immediate neighborhood. For about a century Conestoga was a name applied over the general range of Pennsylvania and neighboring states to a type of horse best adapted to pulling heavy loads over long, rough and hilly roads.

An analysis of the data on the animal would indicate that the Conestoga horse, in general, was usually a bay or a black, rather long of leg, muscular but not chunky, with a fairly small head and arched crest. It was well mannered and it had enormous pulling strength. Its average height was 16.3 hands; its average weight 1650 pounds.

In support of the belief that the Conestoga horse was evolved from a heavy European draft horse and a thoroughbred, the author shows a photograph of a dappled gray gelding, six years old, belonging to H. W. Prentis, Jr., of Lancaster. This horse is by a thoroughbred sire, and out of a Percheron dam.¹³ He is 16.3 hands, weighs 1350 pounds and wears a number 7 shoe. He has all the gentle manners of a Percheron, as the author knows from riding him. He has been used in the hunting field and can jump five feet. Except in the head and crest, his conformation is closely similar to that of a typical

¹³ The Percheron horse of to-day, which may weigh 2250 pounds, was evolved from the Flemish draught horse.

Conestoga. This is shown by comparing his picture with the "Lancaster County Draft Horse," which is the best, and apparently the most accurate, of the three drawings used by the author.

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