CHAPTER XI

“GOODBYE OLD MAN”: THE PASSING OF THE HORSE

The shift away from human reliance on equine labor was rife with significance for organized animal protection, a movement whose own identity had so been associated with concern for the horse. At the dawn of the twentieth century, humane advocates had to face the horse’s rapid transformation into a symbol of an outmoded past. Even as horses began to disappear from the streets, animal protectionists remained vigilant in searching out and redressing instances of neglect and abuse. As certain uses of horses waned, the humane movement expanded its efforts to relieve equine suffering on other fronts. However, the horse also became an object of sentimental interest, ritualized enactments, and quaint public debates. As the horse gave way to the bicycle, the automobile, and other forms of transportation, the humane movement romanticized the animal’s faithful and loyal service to humans, civilization, and the state.

Dobbin Displaced

During the first quarter century of organized animal protection, the horse was the central focus of the humane movement’s practical work. No matter how successful, though, humane initiatives could only palliate the inevitable suffering of horses in a range of contexts, because the horse was a pivotal factor in the economy. Animal advocates lived and campaigned in a world in which horses were going to be used, and neither they nor other Americans could foresee a time when this would not be so.
Because the abuse of horses was ubiquitous and highly visible, the opportunities for both prosecution and prevention of cruelty were numerous. Wherever the community, a high percentage of anti-cruelty cases involved the mistreatment of horses. During the years 1868-1880, 70 percent of the 8,256 prosecutions mounted by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) related to horses. Between 1868 and 1878, 54 percent of the 18,389 complaints investigated by the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (MSPCA) involved horse-related categories of abuse.  

Of course, humane work on behalf of horses went far beyond the criminalization of harsh treatment to include a range of benevolent initiatives in equine welfare. In addition to seeking the arrest and prosecution of those who mistreated horses, animal protectionists provided veterinary counsel and care, waged campaigns against bits and restraints, founded rest havens for aged work animals, oversaw the distribution of food, blankets, bonnets, harnesses, and other equipment, and maintained fountains and watering stations.

If there was any single arena in which animal protectionists would have wished to see horses relieved from their burden of service, it was that of urban mass transit. Human invention, once it turned to the task, quickly demonstrated the potential for dramatic reduction in the sum total of equine misery. Compassion was an important motivation for the prime movers and sponsors of new systems of transportation. The earliest

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1 ASPCA, Ann. R. 1881; and MSPCA, Ann. R. 1878, 8. I conducted this analysis of humane society statistics with Dr. Philip M. Teigen, who used them in "Counting Urban Horses," presented to the Colloquium on Domestic Animals in American History and Culture, National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, MD, Nov. 9, 2001.
promoters of railroads and steamships sometimes emphasized the relief of horses from suffering as part of their case. Later in the nineteenth century, Andrew S. Hallidie (1836-1900), inventor of the cable car, revealed that the sight of horses struggling to draw their cars up the steep hills of San Francisco during the 1860s and 1870s inspired him to seek an alternative.  

The periodic epizootics of the nineteenth century were significant in setting scientific ingenuity to work. The 1872 epizootic—the worst ever—spurred interest and experiments centering on mechanical traction. An equine population so vulnerable and easily devastated by disease could not be relied upon to meet the demands of an expanding industrial economy. Health and sanitary concerns provided compelling incentives, too. Congested streets, crowded streetcars, shoddy paving, stench, dirt, manure pits, and the occasional human death from animal-borne disease marked the increasing unsuitability of the horse to the urban environment. It also led many citizens to contemplate a world without reliance upon horse-drawn transportation.

The key shifts began in the 1890s as horsecars gave way to electrically powered vehicles. When electric traction with underground wiring appeared, it spelled the end of


the horsecar era. "The wretched suffering of the street car horse is about ended," John G. Shortall told the 1899 American Humane Association (AHA) conference. Along with steam power, the traction system, and electricity, the bicycle too wrought its impact. Professionals and workmen alike took to the wheel to move themselves about. Within a few years of Henry Bergh's death in 1888, the horsecars he had labored to regulate had all but disappeared, and the occasional horsecar became an anachronistic sight. Between 1889 and 1894, the Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PSPCA) recorded a 20 percent decline in workload due to the advent of traction and the electric trolley, and PSPCA officials looked forward to the opportunity to direct their attention to other, previously neglected, horse-related cruelties.

Like other Americans, animal protectionists sometimes anticipated the development of a "horseless carriage." But few in the 1890s could have imagined the dramatic impact of the internal combustion engine on the fortunes of the horse. As the automobile and then the motor truck went into mass production, the potential for replacement became obvious. By 1910, the demise of equine labor as a factor in the

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American economy had accelerated beyond what even the most optimistic and forward-thinking humane advocates could have hoped.

Although regional variations could be significant, from 1900 to 1910 the horse and mule population of urban cities fell from 426 per square mile to 300, a thirty percent decrease. From 1910 to 1920, it fell further to 100 per square mile, a sixty-seven percent decrease. In the Northeast, where some of the most active humane societies operated, equine population density fell by fifty-nine percent in the latter decade, to 154 per square mile.7

**Helping the Horse**

One of the arenas into which animal protectionists expanded their activity at the turn of the century was the regulation and suppression of the traffic in broken-down and unfit animals. Humane societies did their best to educate horse buyers about the "skinner's" market. There, animals who had seen better days were bought, sold, and bartered into still more woeful circumstances, and opportunistic con men took advantage of less knowledgeable citizens.8 Typically, this commerce exploited recent immigrants, too poor or uneducated to purchase better animals for use in drawing carts and wagons, and other work. "Horse-sharper" took advantage of such buyers at the auction stables, using arsenic, laudanum, and other drugs to mask the animals' deficiencies until after they had been sold. Wily dealers also sold diseased and infected animals to unsuspecting

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7 Teigen, "Counting Urban Horses."

buyers. These transactions joined together dishonesty and cruelty, and proved difficult to curb, although animal protection organizations did their best to station agents at the markets on sale days. For many years, humane societies could only intervene against people they found using worn-out horses, lacking legal authority to punish the true offenders—the dealers who had sold the animals.9

Dealers were not the only parties responsible for the problem, however. All citizens who parted with old horses for a few dollars or for mere convenience condemned those animals to a life of misery as they passed downward in the equine economy. If people could be made to realize their obligations to care for superannuated animals or to administer a quick and painless death, advocates believed, the misery of the decrepit horse traffic would disappear. Animal protectionists asked owners who lacked sufficient funds to pension out their horses for their remaining years to spend the money to destroy them. They chided those citizens who chose instead to accept some meager sum that guaranteed the animals’ continuing misery.10

In a few states and communities, animal protectionists succeeded in gaining legislation to protect horses and consumers. In May 1909, for instance, Pennsylvania humane organizations succeeded in closing the legal loophole through which sick and crippled animals could be sold if not worked. Measures to hold owners and auctioneers

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liable also passed in a few other states. It was not normally possible for anti-cruelty
groups to condemn an animal to death without the owner’s consent. In a very few cases,
societies for the prevention of cruelty were authorized to condemn animals outright and
kill them. Frequently, however, the organizations took another route, purchasing unfit
and suffering animals in order to euthanize them. Under the decrepit horse laws, SPCA
agents secured the right to arrest those found leading horses to sales stables while the
animals were suffering from lameness or other painful conditions. They also gained
greater authority to condemn animals at the horse bazaars, where those no longer
considered useful or worthy of feeding often ended up. Since the last owner was liable to
arrest, he was usually willing to relinquish the animal.11

Another one of the areas into which the humane societies extended their vigilance
was the treatment of horses and mules at excavation and other work sites. Animal
protectionists watched for cruelty and neglect of animals at stockyards, train depots, and
steamboat landings, along the wharves, and in poultry and cattle slaughtering districts.12
In addition, humane organizations had more time to investigate the all too prevalent
practice of poisoning horses and mules, often undertaken by rivals in a number of
businesses and trades in attempts to hinder competition.13 It even became feasible to

11 “Sale of Old Horses,” ASPCA Bulletin 1 (Apr. 1910), 55; Margaret Halvey, Letter to the
We Buy Old Horses,” OFF 11 (Nov. 1912), 2; “A Check on Old Horse Traffic,” NHR 1 (Jan. 1913), 20; F.
B. Rutherford, “The Decrepit Horse Law at Work in Pennsylvania,” NHR 1 (June 1913), 128; “Old Horse
Traffic,” NHR 2 (Jan. 1914), 13; “Old Horse Law’ Constitutional,” NHR 4 (Oct. 1916), 222; and McCrea,
Humane Movement, 48-50.

12 Phila. Bulletin, Undated article (1892), and “The Reservoir Brutality,” Lancaster Examiner, 18
SBK 1904-Feb. 1909.

secure state legislation that improved the lot of laboring horses. In the spring of 1913, Philadelphia humanitarians celebrated the passage of a law limiting the equine workday to fifteen hours.\textsuperscript{14}

Despite such gains, as long as horses were used, they were going to be abused. In 1909, agents of the Women’s Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (WPSPCA) raided a construction site in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, where horses unfit for service were being forced to labor in the worst possible circumstances, without veterinary attention. The WPSPCA arrested and successfully prosecuted the contractor on the charge of working twenty-five disabled horses. In 1912, in Chicago, the Anti-Cruelty Society successfully halted the work of teams hauling snow from the city loop to the lake for dumping, after three horses were killed (two from drowning) and a number of others injured as they fell down embankments.\textsuperscript{15}

**The Workhorse Parade**

The shift from prosecution of cruelty to horses toward prevention resulted in the creation of an important public ritual, the workhorse parade. The parade promoted pragmatic concern for animals within the framework of a heartwarming spectacle. Henry Merwin, a Boston journalist and author, introduced the idea to the United States in 1903,


and led efforts to nationalize these unusual cavalcades. In the years prior to World War I, the workhorse parade became a favored initiative of humane societies around the country, and the Boston event gained many imitators. From the perspective of advocates, it was educational and not simply a public spectacle, its objects being improved welfare and greater public awareness of the workhorse in daily affairs. Animal protectionists also believed that the parades would spur businesses and peddlers alike to reflect upon the degree to which the public judged them by the condition of the horses in their charge.

In a larger city like Boston, Philadelphia, or New York, the parade was an elaborate affair. It often took place on either Memorial Day or Labor Day, although in every community the date had to be set with due regard for the feelings of union men or members of the Grand Army of the Republic. Organizers recruited among those classes of workers—like hucksters, barrel-rack men, and expressmen—most likely to employ neglected or abused horses, enticing them with prizes of cash, medallions, and favorable publicity. The judges included veterinary surgeons who examined the animals for lameness and other conditions. Animals formerly run down through abuse or neglect occupied a special category—the Reconstructed Class.

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At their height between 1910 and 1914, the big city parades included between 1,200 and 1,800 horses annually, with 300 to 500 companies represented. Lame, sick, galled, and dock-tailed animals were of course excluded. Age counted in a horse's favor. An old horse was one in active service who had worked ten or more years for a current owner. Drivers were also recognized for long tenure and for good animal care.19

Merwin's Boston Work Horse Association (BWHA) had no endowment, but it benefited from important individual and institutional support. Over time, the BWHA took office space and extended its work, even cooperating with the Animal Rescue League to open a small hospital for horses in 1913. During the hottest days of summer, the organization maintained equine showering stations. In addition, the BWHA distributed guidelines for ensuring the quality of animals purchased from reputable dealers, and provided suggestions for the general care, feeding, and management of horses.20

The BWHA also celebrated model stable arrangements, distributing information about well-managed facilities and the treatment and care of horses, and honoring the best managed ones. For decades, humane advocates had promoted improved construction and adequate fire protection in horse stables, where sudden conflagrations could precipitate


the most horrible animal deaths. Finally, in 1917, the state of Massachusetts required
installation of automatic sprinklers or a second runway in any livery or boarding stable
housing animals above the first floor.21

There were other events geared toward the equine work force. On occasion,
humane groups worked together with teamsters to promote equine welfare. In 1912,
collaboration between the WPSPCA and the Team Owners’ National Convention resulted
in “Horse Tag Day,” a national campaign in support of which sympathizers sold
decorative trifles to be worn by working animals. The funds received were turned over to
local humane societies.22

In Boston, one of the most beloved annual rituals was the MSPCA’s celebration
of Christmas, a tradition that commenced in 1916. In most years, this took place in Post
Office Square at the Angell Memorial Fountain, where many of the city’s workhorses
took refreshment. MSPCA employees placed a tree on top of the fountain and decorated
it with treats such as apples, carrots, and ears of corn. Every participating horse received
four quarts of oats, some apples and carrots, and several ears of corn; in 1916, over 1,000
animals were served. “It does the horses good,” Francis Rowley commented, “but they
do not remember the food; it is only a meal to them. The real value of this is to bring
home to people the idea of caring for the animals.” Animal organizations in other cities

142; “Protect Horses from Fire,” ODA 46 (Aug. 1913), 43; “Horses in Fire-Traps,” ODA 46 (May 1914),
179; “To Save Horses from Fire,” NHR 3 (Mar. 1915), 53; “Scientific Stable Management,” NHR 3 (Oct
1915), 219-20; “The Betty Fire Escape,” NHR 4 (July 1916), 159; and “From the Boston Herald,” ODA 49
(Jan. 1917), 121.

22 Margaret Halvey, “Horse Tag Day,” JOZ 22 (June 1913), 84-85; “Tag Day,” NHR 2 (Apr.
1914), 2-4; “National Horse Day,” NHR 3 (May 1915), 111; and “Asks Help for Horses,” N.Y. Times, 18
May 1919, 1.
picked up on the custom. Others observed variations on the event that brought team owners and their horses to the animal society’s headquarters, or saw agents visit stables where the animals were housed. Both of these approaches provided opportunities for quick visual inspections of the horses’ health and surroundings.23

Equine Sanctuaries

The early twentieth century also saw the coalescence of another cherished initiative of the humane societies—the horse sanctuary. Early in the history of organized animal protection, the hard burdens that characterized the lives of many urban horses spurred interest in the establishment of equine havens where they might recuperate from their labors. In 1873, recognizing the hard lives of “the poor railway horses,” the Philadelphia Record proposed that such animals be sent to the country for three weeks of rest in pasture per year, on the assumption that both horses and men would benefit. As early as 1868, Henry Bergh told a reporter of his desire to organize a “retreat, asylum, or hospital” for worn-out and unwanted horses. At his country home near Lake Mahopec, Bergh kept a stable of broken-down equines rescued from the streets of New York City.24

Bergh’s operation was an informal one, and limited funds and unlimited burdens of work kept organizations like his from making the establishment of such sanctuaries a priority. The first formally organized horse refuge was founded in 1889 in Philadelphia


through a $70,000 bequest from Annie Waln Ryerss, who had been helping animals since the 1850s. While originally intended to assist the worn-out workhorses of the city, the Ryerss Infirmary quickly became subject to pressure from wealthy citizens who importuned the management to grant them priority of place for pensioning out old favorites. Eventually, a certain number of stalls were set aside for charity cases, including the rest and recuperation of urban workhorses. A few years later, the WPSPCA launched a campaign to fund a second rest haven in the Philadelphia vicinity.25

In Massachusetts, a similar project had its origins in 1883 when MSPCA supporter Nathan Appleton offered land for an animal rest haven. Some years later, Ellen Gifford, a major benefactress, donated $20,000 to build a proper facility, and assumed responsibility for its operating expenses. Gifford’s estate provided over $100,000 for humane causes, a substantial portion of it dedicated to what came to be known as the Methuen home. In 1899, when Anna Harris Smith founded Boston’s Animal Rescue League, she envisioned a country annex for horses. Eight years later, the Pine Ridge farm opened at Dedham. By then, Harriet Bird, another Massachusetts advocate, had opened Red Acre Farm, a similar facility.26

In subsequent years, a handful of societies across the country set aside deeded or purchased land for the same purpose. Their success usually depended on the development of an endowment or other means for self-sufficiency, including the

25 “A Horse Heaven,” Public Ledger, 22 July 1895, PSPCA-PA, SBK 1880-1902; “A Hospital for Horses,” Undated article, Phila. Record, repr. in JOZ 1 (Jan. 1892), 2; and “Comments and Reflections,” JOZ 12 (July 1903), 79.

generation of revenue through dairy and agricultural production. The establishment of such sanctuaries made possible another humane innovation—the horse vacation. Under this arrangement, promoted in the early 1900s by Cora Dow, owner of a Cincinnati drug store syndicate, individuals and companies that owned working animals in the city could place them for a few weeks a year in an equine haven for rest, treatment, fresh air, and extra nourishment. Advocates believed that the vacation would provide animals with a break from the tedium and ailments of their labor, better fit them for continued service, and sensitize their owners to the need for enhanced overall care. Anna Harris Smith thought this the right use of such facilities, arguing that long years of repose for a select few pensioners did not justify “shutting out weary laborers that might be greatly helped by even a few weeks of rest.” The working men who brought their horses to the Animal Rescue League’s home, she insisted, were “grateful, and anxious to keep their horses in the improved condition the animals are in when we send them back.”

Support for rest and retirement schemes received a boost when journalist Jacob Riis deplored the fate of horses sold off by the city after years of service: “When a fireman grows old, he is retired on half-pay for the rest of his days,” Riis wrote. “When a horse that has run with the heavy engines to fires by night and by day for perhaps ten or fifteen years is worn out, it is—sold, to a huckster, perhaps, or a contractor, to slave for

27 “Rest Farms for Horses,” NHR 1 (Dec. 1913), 270-72; “A Model Rest Farm for Horses,” NHR 2 (Sept. 1914), 201; Sydney H. Coleman, “Rest Farm for Horses a Practical Charity,” NHR 7 (May 1919), 86-87; and idem, Humane Society Leaders in America (Albany: AHA, 1924), 216-18.

him until it is fit only for the bone-yard.” Any animal who served so faithfully, Riis
continued, deserved “the grateful reward of a quiet farm, a full crib, and a green pasture
to the end of its days.\textsuperscript{29} The idea did catch on with the United States Postal Service,
which had frequently been attacked for alleged mistreatment and neglect of horses in its
employ. Even as the agency’s reliance on horses began to dwindle, postal officials
decided to reward equine civil servants an annual vacation of thirty days’ rest in a pasture
some miles outside the capitol.\textsuperscript{30}

\textbf{The Fountain Movement}

One of the humane movement’s most important contributions to equine welfare
involved the construction and maintenance of public fountains and water sources. In the
early twentieth century, health authorities, citing the risks associated with fountain use,
frustrated humane societies’ efforts to provide water to horses. Nevertheless, determined
to serve both horses and those who employed them, animal protectionists fought hard to
keep the fountains in operation, and, when they could not, spared no expense in
developing alternative arrangements.

The provision of water through fountains and other devices had been a
preoccupation of all the early humane societies, especially in July and August when
excessive heat caused severe suffering and high mortality. In Philadelphia, during the

\textsuperscript{29} Jacob A. Riis, “Heroes Who Fight Fire,” \textit{Century Magazine} 60 (February 1898), 497. Riis
would likely have approved the public outrage that attended the butchering of superannuated Chicago fire
horses fed to zoo animals in the late 1920s. See “Charges Fire Horses Fed Lions, Dogs: Two City Officials
Suspended in Probe,” \textit{Evening Express}, 8 Feb. 1929, PBC-TJUA.

\textsuperscript{30} “Vacations for Horses,” \textit{Our Fourfooted Friends} 7 (Dec. 1908), 8; “Vacations for Mail Horses,”
\textit{ODA} 47 (Dec. 1914), 100.
1860s, between fifteen and twenty horses died daily from heat exhaustion. Four decades later, in the early days of July 1901, the heat continued to take its toll on the city's equine population, as over 100 horses died during one 24-hour period. Humane workers assisted authorities with the distribution of wet sponges and horse bonnets to people who worked with horses, and also with the removal of dead animals. In New York City, during the same 1901 hot spell, the ASPCA gave free baths to horses in front of its headquarters and outside its ambulance house, serving over three thousand animals at each location. The organization also provided straw hats that offered the horses protection from the hot sun.

Henry Bergh’s ASPCA made the erection of fountains an important early priority. The first one installed under ASPCA auspices, on June 22, 1867, stood at the lower end of Union Square. The fountains, made of cast iron, provided cups for people, as well as troughs for horses and dogs. The ASPCA’s second annual report (1868) related that ten “useful and ornamental structures” were in place. “The utility, both in a moral and material point of view,” the report noted, “has been made apparent by the record of three hours during one day in August of last year. . . . [At] the fountain on the south end of the

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City Hall Park, 850 men, women, and children, 80 horses, and ten dogs partook of the water.\textsuperscript{33}

Like most of the ASPCA’s pioneering measures, the fountain-building idea took hold elsewhere. In 1869, twenty-six leading Philadelphians, most already active with the PSPCA, incorporated the Philadelphia Fountain Society. Before long, it had erected 31 fountains and troughs, and claimed to have reduced both intemperance and the death of horses from heat exhaustion. Another fountain society formed in Wilmington, Delaware in 1870, and quickly erected fifteen drinking fountains.\textsuperscript{34}

The establishment of fountains brought the humane societies into cooperation and conflict with local governments. Before the formation of the MSPCA, there was not a single drinking fountain for horses in Boston. Once the fountains were in place, however, municipal authorities tended to discount humane opinion in making decisions about them. In July 1871, the MSPCA complained to Boston authorities that only a few of the fountains it had helped to erect were in use. The water board had arbitrarily shut down a number of fountains because of water shortages and the perception that they were wasteful. Such decrees ultimately led to design innovations that conserved water. By the spring of 1872, the Massachusetts legislature had placed the responsibility for establishing and maintaining public drinking troughs, wells, and fountains with the selectmen of every municipality. George Angell and other editorialists encouraged


\textsuperscript{34} “Drinking Troughs and Fountains,” 222; and “Fountains,” ODA 6 (Apr. 1874), 95. On the fountain movement’s origins, see “Evolution of the Horse Drinking Fountain,” NHR 1 (July 1913), 150-51.
citizens to agitate for the construction of fountains, troughs, and water pumps in strategically situated locations in their communities.35

The SPCA-sponsored water sources ranged in style from simple wooden troughs to the more elaborate bronze or granite fountains characteristic of the central squares in larger cities and towns. Several basic models became popular. By 1910, in Philadelphia, the WPSPCA was responsible for maintaining twenty-two fountains—all but two of them granite—and 716 troughs—413 of wood, 242 of iron, and 61 of stone.36

In many metropolitan areas, the municipal art commission was a frequent impediment to the erection of fountains for horses and dogs, interfering with practical and inexpensive solutions to the provision of water by insisting on more costly and aesthetically pleasing designs. To meet this obstacle, Henry Bergh studied examples of European fountains with the aim of appropriating some of their architectural splendor. In New York, the Art Commission commonly rejected the less expensive and more functional fountains, and the city relegated cheaper troughs made of cast iron to commercial districts, prohibiting their placement upon public property. Eventually, an ASPCA competition resulted in the approval of three new designs by the Art

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Commission. Even so, however, the ASPCA continued to meet opposition from the Water Department, which objected to the amount of water wasted at the fountains.37

The erection of fountains in memory of deceased individuals was a popular tradition, making it possible to honor those who had cared for animals with a material contribution to animal welfare. Thus, at a cost of $1,000, Caroline Phelps Stokes endowed a public drinking fountain in memory of Anna Sewell in Ansonia, Connecticut. Sponsorship of less expensive models was possible for those of moderate means. ASPCA annual reports routinely included a photograph of a standard model—fitted for horse, dog, and humans—that donors could sponsor for the sum of $250.38

Quite often, too, the movement to construct drinking fountains relied on major bequests. Angell used a legacy from mental health pioneer Dorothea Dix, and a portion of the sum left by Ellen Gifford, to erect major fountains in their names. After receiving a $100,000 bequest from Arioch Wentworth, Angell applied the money to the establishment of troughs emblazoned with the slogan “Blessed are the Merciful” in small towns throughout Massachusetts. In the early 1900s, many humane societies commissioned “Ensign fountains,” in honor of Hermon Lee Ensign, who upon his death in 1899 had bequeathed considerable funds for their erection nationwide.39

37 George T. Angell, “Drinking Fountains for Horses,” ODA 41 (Nov. 1908), 82; and McCrea, Humane Movement, 78–79.

38 “In Memory of Anna Sewell,” ODA 24 (Dec. 1891), 79; and “Memorial Fountain,” ODA 6 (May 1874), 99.

Henry Bergh and George Angell were both memorialized with fountains. The admiring P. T. Barnum paid for one honoring Bergh in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and, in May 1891, the Wisconsin Humane Society erected a more impressive fountain dedicated to him in Milwaukee. It was an imposing granite work, 95 feet in circumference, with an eight-foot statue of Bergh stroking the head of a bandaged dog. After Angell’s death in 1909, Boston schoolchildren contributed $800 toward the erection of a fountain in the MSPCA president’s memory. The City Council appropriated an additional $2,000 toward the costs and the Angell Memorial Fountain went up in Post Office Square, where it replaced an older installation at which hundreds of horses took water every day.  

The decision of municipal authorities to close water fountains during winter was another impediment. This was the firm policy of the Boston City Water Board before 1884, because the problems created by freezing and overflowing apparently increased both costs and the potential of liability for damages. Emily Appleton and her husband William endowed thirteen of the city’s fountains and then offered to pay for modifications and attendants in order to keep the city free from all damages and expenses. Initially, three fountains remained open on this basis, and in 1886 fifteen were managed in the same way. However, Angell wanted all of Boston’s fountains open in winter. He stationed a man at the Dorothea Dix fountain in mid-December 1888 to count

the number of horses—583—that drank there during one day, and circulated commentaries commending the late reformer for this contribution to the life of the city.41

The humane society’s constituency in this politics of water supply included the horses of peddlers, junkmen, and other urban laborers. These animals were frequently housed in crude and cramped quarters without connections to water, and public fountains and troughs were their main supply. With the closing of fountains, the improvisation of watering stations became another important objective during the hottest days of summer. This approach, which usually received approval from municipal authorities, involved the filling of pails and tubs with water from fire hydrants. Humane agents and others not only provided water to drink, but also wet the horses down to give them relief. In summer 1907, the ASPCA employed 42 men to perform this service in New York City. In Philadelphia the following year, the WPSPCA maintained twenty such stations from June through September, each serving an average of 100 animals per day. Philadelphia humane advocates also outfitted an automobile for the distribution of water. The vehicle, with a carrying capacity of 150 gallons, held eight buckets for horses and an ice-water cooler to serve drivers. These various expedients often proved expensive, requiring the hiring of extra men and other costs, and the mobilization of volunteers to assure the supply of water during those summers where public fountains were declared off-limits.42

41 “To Keep the Fountains for Horses Open All Winter,” ODA 20 (Dec. 1887), 76; “583 Horses,” ODA 21 (Jan. 1889), 88; and “If the Sweet Spirit,” ODA 21 (Apr. 1889), 123.

Ultimately, the greatest threat to the sound operation of the fountain system was glanders, a transmissible disease symptomized by nasal discharge, swollen lymph glands, and ulcers of the respiratory tract and skin. In Massachusetts, between 1861 and 1885, there were at least seventeen human deaths from the disease. Concern over the spread of glanders led to the disappearance of wooden troughs, and to the practice of enameling their iron replacements, so that discharge or residue would be less likely to lodge within them.  

As sponsors and maintainers of numerous horse fountains, the humane societies were inevitably drawn into the public debate over the transmission of disease. The MSPCA was especially active in the struggle to keep fountains open. Conceding the increase of glanders within Boston’s horse population since 1909, MSPCA President Francis H. Rowley laid the blame on an unregulated traffic carried on by “utterly disreputable dealers that make our markets the dumping-ground of all the wretched diseased horses they can buy up.” Stables and blacksmith shops, too, Rowley noted, had gone unscrutinized as sites for spreading the infection. Rowley consistently argued that the threat from drinking fountains was exaggerated, and pointed to the elimination of glanders in Canada as a model for eradication based on quarantine and destruction of afflicted horses.

43 Massachusetts, Forty-Fifth Report of Births, Marriages, and Deaths for 1886 (1887), 110–11. Philip M. Teigen of the National Library of Medicine provided this reference. Before the formation of the MSPCA, there was no statutory law concerning the transmission of glanders and farcy. “New Laws of Massachusetts and New York in Relation to Glanders,” ODA 10 (Apr. 1878), 87; and “Cruelty to Animals,” Boston Transcript, 5 Feb. 1886, 1.

44 “Fountains and Glanders,” ODA 46 (Dec. 1913), 105; and “Glanders,” ODA 46 (Jan. 1914), 120.
In New York City, the ASPCA tried to address the problem by keeping a plumber at work inspecting, repairing, and modifying fountains and other sources to satisfy public health concerns. Nevertheless, in 1914, fear of a glanders epidemic led to the shutdown of water troughs throughout the state. The ASPCA, which had invested $100,000 in over 100 troughs, vigorously resisted the shutdown order. When the inevitable closure occurred, however, the ASPCA responded by creating a system of bucket and pail service near all of the conventional fountain sites. In Boston, authorities forced the shutdown of the Angell Memorial Fountain, once touted as epidemic-proof and ultra-hygienic.

Rowley attempted to thwart closure by collecting statistics, querying veterinarians, and challenging the evidence that water fountains were vectors of transmission.  

During the same era, Philadelphia humane societies shifted to the bucket system after the Board of Health shut down the city’s drinking troughs. Staff and volunteers supplied thousands of buckets of water daily. In spring 1916, a year after authorities closed them, the horse fountains of Philadelphia reopened under the direct supervision of the WPSPCA. Across the state in Pittsburgh, humanitarians waged a campaign to keep theirs open, submitting testimony from the state veterinarian that none of the 29 reported cases of glanders in two years could be linked to a fountain or trough. Reviewing these developments, Rowley argued that, “where proper inspection of stables, blacksmith shops, and public horse-auction quarters prevails, where suitable quarantine regulations

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are observed, and where health departments destroy animals found suffering from the
disease, glanders can be reduced to a minimum and no proper drinking fountain
closed."46

As it turned out, animal protectionists were fighting a losing battle, for the issue
became hopelessly bogged down in debates concerning the health risks associated with
fountains, troughs, and standing pipes. Along with the advent of motor vehicles, public
and veterinary health concerns doomed the fountain movement. Prohibition exerted its
impact as well, as saloon troughs, once a point of appeal for bibulous drivers with thirsty
horses, closed down along with the taverns that sponsored them. In early 1920, an AHA
representative lamented that, in Cincinnati, "all drinking fountains for horses have been
done away with. A magnificent granite Ensign fountain, which cost a thousand dollars,
has been dismantled and is now filled with soil."47 The horse fountain, once a vital
element in the humane movement's campaigns for equine welfare, had become a
monumental symbol of the horse's displacement.

46 "Philadelphia Protects the Horse," NHR 2 (Aug. 1914), 177; "Water Troughs and Glanders,"
NHR 4 (Apr. 1916), 81; "Horse Fountains and Glanders," ODA 48 (Apr. 1916), 168; and "Only 23,000
Horses in This City Now," Phila. Bulletin, 20 Apr. 1931, PBC-TUUA. Anxieties concerning disease led to
the proliferation of innovative design strategies. One result was the Jenks Anti-Germ Individual Cup
fountain. In some communities, more naturalistic designs that employed hollowed-out rock basins
appeared. These were fitted with inlet pipes linked to municipal mains and exit pipes leading to the sewer
system, ensuring higher levels of sanitation. See "A Model Fountain," NHR 1 (July 1913), 159; "New
Fountains for Horses," ODA 46 (Nov. 1913), 89; and Chester W. Shafer, "Rock-Fountains for Animals,"
ODA 48 (Sept. 1915), 76.

Trough is Missed by Horses," Phila. Bulletin, 15 June 1920, and "Troughs for Horses Vanish with Saloon."
Phila. Inquirer, 18 July 1920, PSPCA-PA, SBK Mar. 1917-Nov. 1922; "A Call to the Middle West," NHR
8 (Feb. 1920), 40; and "Drinking Fountain Converted to Flower Bed," NHR 10 (Nov. 1922), 209.
The Red Star Campaign

There was one arena—the World War I battlefield—in which the humane movement not only celebrated the continuing use of the horse but acceded to the necessity of animal suffering. The war was the last historical moment in which the horse played an absolutely essential role as a motive labor force. During the conflict, the AHA launched the American Red Star Animal Relief (Red Star), an initiative devoted to the care and handling of horses destined for use by the American Expeditionary Force.

There was more to the Red Star than the practical relief of animals in wartime. It also involved a hugely symbolic romanticization of the horse. In humane advocates’ enthusiastic support of the war, the concept of equine service loomed large. The campaign cast the animal not so much as a dependent in need of protection as an active agent making a sacrifice for the nation. Humanitarians expressed their own loyalty to the state by celebrating the American horse as an emblem and surrogate. The discourse of patriotic service reflected their hope that, by contributing to war effort, the horse would earn the right to better treatment for all animals in the postwar era.48

While the decision to introduce a national campaign for military horse relief was not inevitable, the humane movement’s wartime focus on army animals was understandable in the context of the larger pattern by which so many philanthropic reforms were redirected to the war effort. Besides, American humanitarians could not help but be aware of their European counterparts’ preoccupation with the horse’s role in

48 After the war, nostalgic narratives of equine military service took their place alongside more conventional paeans to the horse. “The Horse at the Front,” NHR 7 (Sept. 1919), 175; H. H. Jacobs, “Let Us Pay Our Debt!” Open Door 8 (Apr. 1919), 11; “Asks Help for Horses,” N. Y. Times, 18 May 1919, 1; “Man’s Debt to the Horse,” and “Eulogy on the Horse Contest,” NHR 12 (July 1924), 127; and “Lest We Forget,” NHR 16 (Jan. 1928), 15.
the conflict, and they endorsed the work of English and European horse relief organizations.49

Before the United States entered the war, when the issue of exports to the warring nations surfaced, animal protectionists strenuously opposed any shipment of American animals. Several organizations even asked President Wilson to declare their transfer illegal under the neutrality laws then in force.50 Notwithstanding, in May 1917, when AHA president William Stillman announced the formation of the Red Star, most of those who had questioned the sale of animals shifted to a position of enthusiastic support for their use. The Red Star campaign, modeled after the Red Cross and several British and European military animal relief charities, aimed to assist the government in all aspects of procurement and animal welfare. After America joined the conflict in August 1917, the Red Star campaign captured the attention and energy of virtually all of the major anti-cruelty societies. The SPCAs devoted themselves to raising money for veterinary medical relief, and celebrated the animal as an agent in the war.51 Through their participation in a campaign of patriotic unity, they sought to validate the claims of animals upon human beings. Animal protectionists supported the war and the use of


equine labor on the battlefield even though it meant terrible death for tens of thousands of horses. 52

"The Horse Still King"

The dawn of the automobile age generated a steady flow of stories about the horse’s replacement. The pensioning off of workhorses was a particular focus of nostalgic reportage. 53 At the same time, nostalgic reactions to the disappearance of the horse were accompanied by a deep-seated reluctance to admit the possibility of his ultimate extinction as a labor factor. Humane publications frequently printed articles concerning the durability of the horse as a factor in American life. Such accounts reviewed the census figures reporting the total number and value of horses, mules, and colts working in the United States, or emphasized continued reliance on horses for labor and transportation in a variety of sectors, including freight and transfer work, delivery service, the construction trade, and agriculture. 54


54 “A Misapprehension,” ODA 44 (Feb. 1912), 136; and “What a Horse Strike Would Mean,” ODA 49 (Oct. 1916), 71.
For a time, the horse did remain economically competitive with or even superior to the car or truck. While the truck quickly proved economical for hauling over longer distances, the horse team retained its appeal for urban delivery routes with their frequent stops and shorter distances. Supporters of equine labor made a comparable case for the horse's projected longevity as a farm laborer, citing the many factors that would retard adoption of the tractor in agricultural contexts. These included the difficulties of securing service, repairs, and reasonably priced gas and oil. Even humane advocates who were enthusiastic about the motor vehicle believed that there were a few things horses could do that the automobile could not.55

A number of breeders' and trade organizations with a stake in continued use of the horse--like the American Draft Horse Association and the Horse Publicity Association of America--waged active campaigns to emphasize the importance of the horse in commerce. In 1919, Wayne Dinsmore of the Percheron Society, arguing that there was a “limit of profitable replacement,” predicted a balancing of trucks vs. teams based on the fact that the horse would remain a significant factor in short-haul traffic. Another booster of the horse used a 1920 snowstorm as impetus for a story highlighting the hidden advantages of equine labor over motor transport. For a time, at least, teaming contractors in major metropolitan areas could point to a few colleagues who had gone

broke after making the shift to automobile and truck delivery. Certain delivery trades, like those attached to bakery and milk production, maintained horses even longer into the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{56}

While humane journals frequently published items concerning the horse's enduring presence, Francis Rowley emphasized that this was not so much because animal protection organizations "would rather see the overworked and tired horse on the street than the auto-truck." It was simply an acknowledgement that the horse would remain practical and economical as a factor in the transportation industry, and that "a good horse doing a good day's work is no more to be pitied than a man doing his."

To the critics who suggested that the anti-cruelty society's day was done, Rowley pointed out that there were not only many horses still in need, but numerous other animals whose circumstances required the attention of the humane societies as well.\textsuperscript{57}

Not every humane advocate endorsed efforts to increase and encourage the use of the horse. While one ASPCA author acknowledged a "sentimental regret at the passing of the magnificent carriage horse," he noted further that the lot of the horse was not always a pleasant one. Another animal protectionist, Robert Logan, wrote


\textsuperscript{57} "The Horse and the Massachusetts SPCA," \textit{ODA} 52 (Jan. 1920), 115; "The Horse Not Going," \textit{ODA} 54 (July 1921), 24; and "Not Going Out of Business," \textit{ODA} 56 (Nov. 1923), 83.
the passing of the horse seems to us an unmitigated blessing. . . . The hard pavements, the foul air, the crowded stables, the endless rumble of the wheels is but a hell on earth for horses, to say nothing of the killing days of summer and the falls and icy tortures of the winter. Every horse off the street should be a load off the heart of the true humanitarian, and we believe only those of hasty judgment could wish to see again the hollow flanks, the hanging heads, the lack-luster eyes that used to be so common.58

Mary Lovell reacted with similar disapprobation to the movement to preserve and promote the horse as a factor in the transportation economy. "Very few horses are well treated during the course of their lives," Lovell noted. "[C]omparatively few provide for their horses when they are no longer up to the requirements of their work. . . . The fewer the horses the less the sum of suffering."59

Conclusion

What Henry Bergh began, Henry Ford finished. The steady adoption of motor vehicles and other means of conveyance and transportation dramatically reduced reliance on equine labor. The decline in horse usage, especially in urban mass transit, made it possible for humane groups to extend their efforts on behalf of horses and other animals. Humane advocates focused on the sale, transfer, and disposition of worn-out and superannuated horses and mules. Cruelty enforcement concerning horses remained a high priority, centering on immigrant street peddlers and delivery workers in the major urban centers. Animal protectionists battled to keep fountains and other water sources open for the use of urban equines.


The gradual elimination of the horse as a motive labor force was a pivotal juncture for a movement whose work and identity had largely been based on the concept of sympathy for the suffering equine. The movement contended with this shift by celebrating the horse as a symbol of nobility and faithful service. During the first decade of the century, a movement to promote equine welfare through public rituals gathered momentum, even as the horse began to disappear. Humane societies sponsored workhorse parades, Christmas events, and other functions to encourage kindness, discipline, and veterinary knowledge among the working class populations who still used animals for delivery, transport, and other labor.

Despite the ostensible quaintness of such events, animal protectionists did not retreat into nostalgic retrospection and ceremony. They embraced the motor vehicle, adopting it widely for their own ambulance work between 1912 and 1916.60 Moreover, the ongoing process of replacement notwithstanding, hundreds of thousands of working horses carried on their labor in cities and towns across America. Decades into the twentieth century, horses were still hauling loads of lumber, stone, milk cans, coal, and perishable goods. For as long as they remained on the streets, horses continued to benefit from the determined assistance of humane advocates.61 After 1920, when the automobile had firmly established itself, the humane movement remained vigilant concerning


61 In Rochester, investigations of cruelty to horses peaked at about 1000 cases annually by the eve of World War I. Still, as late as 1939, the local humane society was reporting about 300 horse investigations per year. Joseph W. Barnes, “Friend of Every Friendless Beast,” Rochester History 25 (Oct. 1973): 19-20.
cruelties affecting horses, even as other animals began to receive more attention. Investigations and exposés of cruelty to horses in the cinema, in entertainment, in military usage, and in logging and mining camps continued to receive attention in the movement’s publications. But the movement also began to change its priorities, and humane societies shifted their attention to municipal animal control, the most troubling and visible challenge in most communities once the horse began to disappear. The passing of the horse thus marked a moment of transition, reckoning, and reinvention.

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