

Aspects of the trade in British pedigree draught horses with the United States and Canada, c. 1850–1920

by R. J. Moore-Colyer

Abstract

The transatlantic export of pedigree draught horses was part of the extensive flow of livestock exports to North America in the nineteenth century. This article deals with various aspects of the organization of the trade in Clydesdale and Shire horses, considers the origin and destination of animals reaching the USA and Canada, and considers some of the reasons why the initial popularity of British breeds evaporated in the face of importations from mainland Europe.

The disappearance of the horse from both the northern and southern parts of the American continent is among the more intriguing mysteries of world prehistory. Whether by disease, excessive predation or some shattering natural disaster, the indigenously evolved *Equidae* ceased to exist in the Americas, and with the opening up of the Bering Straits between the sixth and fifth millennia BC, migrations from Eurasia were eliminated. It was to be some six thousand years before horses once again became established on the continent through the agency of Spanish colonists in the south and other European settlers in the north.¹

French settlement in Quebec, and Dutch and English colonisation of the Atlantic seaboard ensured that by the third decade of the seventeenth century horses had once again become firmly established in Virginia, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey and Lower Canada.² As settlement spread, so did horses, and as the animals were generally turned onto ranges to forage for themselves, many were forced to become feral or semi-feral. As little control was exercised over their breeding, conditions were created for the establishment of large herds of unowned horses. These appeared in a variety of localities from the Rio Grande to the Peace River. According to the demand for working animals and cavalry remounts, they were alternately rounded-up or left to their own devices.³

As European settlers headed westwards in the later nineteenth century, encouraged by the enthusiastic admonishments of the US immigration bureaux, they were accompanied by outflows of capital for investment in both farming and ranching in the seemingly limitless ranges of the west. The northwards expansion of the cattle industry from Texas offered enormous opportunities for financial profits by the late 1870s, when finished beef from the Great Plains found its way to the eastern seaboard of the American continent and thence to Europe. It was inevitable that when companies like the Edinburgh-based Prairie Cattle Company declared a

¹ R. Denhardt, *The horses of the Americas* (1974), pp. 104–6.

² R. W. Howard, *The horse in America* (1965), pp. 26–8.

³ T. McKnight, 'Wild horses in western Anglo-America', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 49 (1959), p. 198.

dividend of 28 per cent in 1881, Scots and English capitalists would rush to invest in corporations competing with American organizations for range land, farming enterprises and cattle. The fact that this would lead to overstocking and associated problems later in the decade was of no immediate concern and, as capital was poured into ranch development and the importation of pedigree Durham, Devon and Hereford stock to upgrade local animals, investors could take a sanguine view of future prospects.⁴ Ranching and farming, of course, demanded draught power, and part of the inevitable web of transatlantic connections in the later decades of the nineteenth century involved the export from Britain of heavy horses. It is with this trade that the present article is concerned.

I

By the close of the eighteenth century, the horse had substantially supplanted the ox as a draught animal in America, and except in the agrarian south where the mule held sway (the horse here being identified with pleasure and gentility), horse power was increasingly adopted on the farm.⁵ European experience over several centuries had highlighted the speed, versatility and flexibility of the horse for draught purposes, especially when it came to undertaking agricultural tasks for which timeliness was of the essence. In twelfth- and thirteenth-century England, horses progressively took over from oxen for haulage work, and if the ox remained the principal ploughing animal on the grounds of relatively low maintenance costs, it became clear as the centuries rolled on and heavier horses became available, that adoption of the latter for primary cultivation would enhance agricultural efficiency.⁶ As American farming was transformed from systems based upon the use of wooden, often home-made (and to some extent man-powered) field equipment to those utilising trailed machinery of iron and steel, the benefits of the horse became increasingly obvious.

In the 1840s, more than eight out of every ten Americans lived on farms, so that there was every incentive to invent and develop efficient means of cultivating, harvesting and processing. As the transition from wooden beam to steel mouldboard plough quickened, so were patents granted for disc harrows, grain drills, threshers and the whole gamut of equipment essential to the cultivation of wheat and corn.⁷ These changes inevitably led to an increase in cultivated acreage, an expansion of individual farm size and a general enhancement of labour efficiency. 'Fifteen years ago', it was noted in 1861, 'the writer required twenty men to cultivate properly a garden of thirty acres; now, by the use of a few judiciously chosen horse tools, he cultivates many times that area with but eight farm hands, four of whom are boys'.⁸

Much of the primary and secondary cultivation equipment enabling these advances could be

⁴ D. Ellis (ed.), *The frontier in American development* (1969), p. 396; R. A. Billington (ed.), *Westward expansion. A history of the American frontier* (4th edn, 1974), pp. 588–90; T. G. Jordan, *North American Cattle ranching frontiers. Origins, diffusion and differentiation* (1993), pp. 270–4.

⁵ H. Barclay, *The role of the horse in man's culture* (1980), p. 166.

⁶ J. Langdon, 'Horse hauling. A revolution in vehicu-

lar transport in twelfth and thirteenth century England', *Past and Present* 102 (1984), p. 39; *Ibid.*, 'The economics of horses and oxen in medieval England', *AgHR* 30 (1982), *passim*.

⁷ H. Rasmussen, 'The impact of technological change on American agriculture, 1862–1962', *JEcH* 22 (1966), p. 579.

⁸ E. B. Williams, 'The present condition of the farmer', *The New England Mag.* 3 (1890–1), p. 12.

TABLE 1. Horses and Mules on American farms, 1870-1922

	<i>Horses</i> (<i>'000</i>)	<i>Mules</i> (<i>'000</i>)
1870	7,633	1,245
1880	10,903	1,878
1890	15,732	2,322
1900	17,856	3,139
1910	19,972	4,239
1920	20,091	5,651

Source: USDA Yearbooks, 1870-1920.

readily drawn by cheaply-produced mature oxen or by horses, but only the latter could move forwards at a pace sufficient to work the reciprocating blades of the reaping machines first demonstrated by Obed Hussey and Cyrus McCormick in 1833 and 1834. The design problems of the early prototypes were rectified by the 1850s, and as mechanized reapers, and subsequently combine harvesters hauled by up to sixty horses were widely adopted in the cereal-growing areas of the United States and Canada, the humble ox, as an agricultural draught animal, was consigned to the backwaters.⁹ For the next seven decades the horse or mule would remain virtually the sole motive force in the cultivation and harvesting of the dramatically expanding arable acreage of North America. Wheat acreage in the United States, for example, expanded from 15,424,000 acres in 1866 to 42,495,000 in 1900, while corn increased throughout the same period from 34,306,000 to 83,320,000 acres, rising to 104,035,000 acres in 1910.¹⁰ Such a remarkable expansion could only be achieved with very high inputs of horse power. From the smaller farms of New England and the Middle Atlantic states, to the great corn and wheat holdings of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and the states to the west of the Mississippi, horse numbers increased sharply alongside concurrent increases in the mule population of the south. Indeed, by 1900 the farmlands of Iowa alone were host to 1,400,000 horses, and within ten years over one million horses were working on the farms of each of the states of Illinois, Texas, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska.¹¹ (Table 1)

Moreover, horsepower was required for industrial purposes in the decades before 1890. Apart from iron foundries, canal operations, freight haulage, railways, and a variety of other enterprises, urban transport was making growing demands on draught power. The opening of the first 'horse-car railroad' on Fourth Avenue, New York in 1832 and, shortly afterwards, of similar transport systems in Boston and Philadelphia, set the trend for the major cities between the Atlantic seaboard and Chicago, and by 1860 no less than five hundred miles of horse-car lines were in operation.¹² Together with the electric streetcar, these remained the principal means of urban mass transport prior to the development of the internal combustion engine.

⁹ A. Olmstead, 'The mechanisation of reaping and mowing in American agriculture, 1833-1870', *JECH* 35 (1975), p. 327; R. Pomfret, 'The mechanisation of reaping in nineteenth century Ontario. A case study of the pace and causes of the diffusion of embodied technical

change', *JECH* 36 (1976), p. 399.

¹⁰ Howard, *The horse in America*, pp. 215-6.

¹¹ F. W. Tuttle and J. M. Perry, *An economic history of the United States* (1970), pp. 312-3.

¹² Howard, *The horse in America*, pp. 170-1.

The evolution of local mass transport systems and the westwards expansion of agriculture inevitably stimulated demand for horses, yet no breed of draught horse emerged in North America to meet this demand. In the earlier nineteenth century the Conestoga, a distinctive light draught animal created from Dutch foundation stock in Pennsylvania, was the mainstay of the American haulier for general transport work.¹³ However, like the Vermont drafter or the Mustang/Morgan crosses of California, the Conestoga failed to evolve into a true registered breed and, by the 1860s, was limited in distribution to the farms of the Amish communities where it continued to be prized as a plough and wagon workhorse.¹⁴ The inability of these animals to establish any real national foothold can be attributed to their insufficiency of strength and substance either for urban draught purposes, farm-to-market haulage over rough prairie roads, or for pioneer ploughing work in the expanding croplands of the mid-west. Here, new and larger field machinery necessitated new and larger horses, and farmers, who had been impressed by the power and durability of Shires (or Shire types) imported from Ontario, became convinced of the need to look further afield for the sort of draught animals to meet their needs. An American commentator, noting in 1862 the success of English and Scots settlers with Clydesdale and other British heavy horses in western Canada, observed that whatever the intrinsic merits of these animals for farm and city draught work, '... they would be preferable to the horses now generally used for these purposes in this country'.¹⁵

So it was that American and Canadian farmers turned to Europe and despatched agents to Normandy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom with instructions to secure pedigree crossing sires of a type suited to produce horses capable not only of general draught work, but of supplying the power required for pioneer cultivation on the high plains. From the moment that Edward Harris of Moorestown, New Jersey imported two mares and a stallion 'of Norman breed' in 1839, there seemed, on the face of it, to be almost limitless opportunities for British and European breeders in the burgeoning North American market. Even as late as 1910, when the horse was assailed on all sides by the bicycle, the electric street car and the automobile, potential European exporters could still take heart from the assurances of the US Department of Agriculture that '... as a source of farm power and as a substitute for human labour in combination with machines, the horse's economic place on the farm is more strongly established than ever before'.¹⁶

By the mid-1850s North American farmers and breeders were no strangers to the qualities of the English heavy breeds since small numbers of stallions had been arriving from across the Atlantic for several decades. George E. Brown of Aurora, Illinois, a major importer of European draught horses with a knowledge of American horse breeding reaching back to the mid-nineteenth century, observed in 1901 that whereas substantial numbers of English horses were entering the USA from Upper Canada around 1850, there was no authentic account of direct transatlantic importations. Nevertheless, he had been informed by 'several old settlers' of the arrival of English cart horses in northern Illinois in the 'fifties; indeed, one of the

¹³ F. Haines, *Horses in America* (1971), pp. 90-1.

1862, p. 344.

¹⁴ Denhardt, *Horses*, p. 93.

¹⁶ *United States Department of Agriculture* [hereafter

¹⁵ S. Howard, 'Remarks on the Horse', *USDA Yearbook* *USDA*] *Yearbook* 1910, p. 191.

progeny of these animals had recently died on his own farm.¹⁷ It is not certain however, whether these horses were directly imported or were the descendants of Canadian stallions of the like of 'Tamworth', sold by the British army to John Battenburg of Brucefield, Ontario in the late 1830s, or 'King Alfred', the property, in 1847, of a Mr Davidson of Toronto. Although virtually all the earlier records have been destroyed by fire so that authenticated pedigrees are unknown, the first volume of the *Canadian Shire Horse Stud Book*, published in 1901, records the imports, mainly to Ontario, of more than a dozen Shire stallions. In the main these arrived between 1850 and 1856, coinciding with the importation of the first Suffolk Punch stallion to Oxford, Ontario in 1854.

At much the same time isolated specimens were being imported directly from Britain to the United States. Among early examples were 'John Bull', purchased by a Mr Strickland of Aurora, Illinois in 1853; 'Sampson', imported several years later as a travelling stallion operating along the Fox River, and, rather confusingly, a second 'John Bull' who found his way to Kendall County.¹⁸ Also, Clydesdales or, at least, Clydesdale types, began to arrive in Canada, initially to meet the needs of Scots settlers. Shortly after the landing of 'Cumberland', shipped to David Rowntree of Weston, Ontario, and the grey 'Young Clyde' who began his career in Toronto and eventually died in the United States in 1851, Clydesdale stallions travelled across the Atlantic in increasing numbers, and for years this breed and its cross-bred progeny were to become the dominant draught horses of Upper Canada.¹⁹ Largely under the inspiration of men like Robert and Albert Ness of Howick, Quebec, and Joe Thompson, a native of Yorkshire who settled in Columbia, Ontario, the Clydesdale became widely publicized, and by 1870 more than seventy stallions were busily covering mares in the colony.²⁰ The breed was also attracting the attention of American buyers and advertisements began to appear, both for Clydesdale and Shire stallions, in the western agricultural papers. The Chicago auctioneer, Colonel J. W. Judy, considered it worthwhile to print a catalogue of imported and homebred Clydesdale stallions which he offered for sale in 1875.²¹ These included the bay-roan 'Border Chief', bred in Berwickshire, the Lanarkshire-bred 'Rob Roy', and 'Sir William Wallace', a seven-year-old bay stallion who had swept all before him in shows throughout Yorkshire several years previously. The apparent success of this sale led to subsequent auctions including a major event at Norwood, Illinois in 1881 when the Colonel paraded numerous Clydesdale stallions and fillies for 'the consideration of the public'.²²

II

On 21 March 1890, Burgess Brothers of Wenona, Illinois, among the largest and most successful of American importers, emphasized in the *Livestock Journal* that as far as they were concerned, British breeders would do best to concentrate upon the production of weight and substance in their horses.²³ After all, foreign buyers were anxious to secure animals capable of improving

¹⁷ *Canadian Shire Horse Stud Book* 1 (1901).

¹⁸ *American Shire Horse Stud Book* 1 (1888).

¹⁹ R. L. Jones, *History of agriculture in Ontario*, 1613-1880 (1977), p. 148.

²⁰ E. Baird, *The Clydesdale horse* (1982), p. 75.

²¹ Sale Catalogue, *National Livestock Journal Print* (Chicago, 1875).

²² Sale Catalogue, *National Livestock Journal Print* (Chicago, 1881).

²³ *Livestock J.*, 21 Mar. 1890.

the bone, size and substance of indigenous types. Urging readers to ignore the fanciful notions of those Americans who argued that the Shire horse in particular should be 'improved' by being bred with lighter bone 'and that fatal quality, prettiness', the Burgesses echoed the opinion of J. M. Critchlow of Pennsylvania who argued that for both agriculture and industry the '... heavy muscular type best for Liverpool ... is best also for Pittsburgh'.²⁴ But in reality they hardly needed to have concerned themselves since, on the whole, British Shire breeders had the good sense to breed for the home market, correctly anticipating that the export boom would prove a transitory phenomenon. As the Huntingdonshire breeder and commentator Sanders Spencer wisely noted, by concentrating breeding effort on hardening bone and sinews and improving walking action,

... we shall still breed a sufficient number of these lighter-limbed horses to which our foreign customers appear to be partial, and at the same time produce animals which will command a remunerative price for draught work as long as England remains the emporium of the civilized world.²⁵

Like many of his contemporaries Spencer paid scant regard to the criticism that breeders were 'too careless of the trade which is done abroad', being fully aware that an obsession with fashionable quirks could readily lead to a home market overloaded with unsaleable horses.²⁶

While they were by no means 'fashionable quirks', the heavy feathering of the legs and softness of the feet of some British horses, notably the Shire, were considered a singular disadvantage by many potential North American customers. 'Feather', a profusion of hair on the lower parts of the legs, was viewed by Shire breeders as a desirable characteristic. While it was widely believed by British breeders that the presence of 'feather' was genetically linked to physical strength, the American farmer, often obliged to work with his animals in prolonged muddy and snowy conditions, realized that an abundance of 'feather' meant a great deal of grooming and viewed it as a rather irksome feature, to be avoided if at all possible. Insistence upon heavy 'feathering' led to grave problems during the Great War when heavy horses dragging ordnance through the mud of Flanders were often placed under severe stress. Subsequently, selection pressure was applied against the 'feathering' characteristic and to the surprise of some breeders, if not to practitioners of the new science of genetics, 'feather' was successfully reduced without loss of bone or substance.

In the meantime however, 'feather' and other quibbles did little to deter a flourishing export trade throughout the 1880s, a period celebrated among the British heavy horse fraternity as the 'American Boom'. No reliable statistics of the breed pattern of transatlantic equine exports are available for the earlier period, but it is clear from anecdotal evidence that Shire and Clydesdale animals were shipped in considerable numbers. References to export certificates in the earlier volumes of the Stud Books probably grossly underestimate the total volume of the trade since many more animals are known to have been exported than were actually offered for breed registration. Indeed, it was maintained by one contemporary authority that up to 80 per cent of Clydesdales exported in the decade before 1890 were horses of which neither breeders nor Breed

²⁴ *Livestock J.*, 20 May 1891.

²⁵ *Shire Horse Society Stud Book* 12 (1891).

²⁶ *Minutes of evidence, Departmental committee on the export trade in livestock* (Cd 6032, 1912), Q. 3595.

Society had much knowledge.²⁷ What is abundantly clear, in the case of the two major British heavy breeds, is that the overall quality of horses sent to North America in the 1880s left much to be desired, and that players on both sides of the Atlantic were sometimes less than scrupulous in their conduct of the trade. Some commercially short-sighted British exporters, operating in a market overloaded with sub-standard stallions, saw the buoyant American demand as a golden opportunity to dispose of stock which could not readily be sold at home. It would, of course, have been a simple enough matter to castrate these inferior animals or, at the very least, to reject applications for export certificates. Yet, human nature being what it is, various exporters contrived to off-load many poor quality animals on the American market. Ultimately, to the discomfiture of élite breeders who had carefully ensured the quality of their exported animals, this was to prove a totally false economy when the many unsound, unsuitable and even impotent British stallions came to be unfavourably compared with horses of the Percheron and Belgian types whose breeders made sure that only the very best specimens reached the shores of North America.²⁸

The Belgian (Brabançon), one of the numerous descendent breeds from the old Flemish heavy horse, was regarded for its massive size and great collar power, while the dappled Percheron, if smaller than the former, was widely prized for its innate docility and thriftiness of constitution. Originally bred as a powerful army and draught horse capable of pulling heavy loads over hard, rough surfaces – notably the stone block roads of Northern France – the Percheron developed a faster action than its British counterparts and, of major significance, was without ‘feather’. This feature, and the high degree of prepotency in stallions which enabled them to generate stock of uniform type when mated to nondescript indigenous mares, would ultimately secure their popularity in the United States and Canada. In 1885 fifty US breeders were importing Percheron horses. By 1900, however, 1634 were breeding and importing the Percheron (largely under the auspices of the National French Draft Horse Association based at Fairfield, Iowa), this figure advancing to 5338 by 1910. Within ten years from this date, some 70,000 animals were registered in the US Percheron Stud Book compared with 11,000 Belgian, 19,000 Shire and 21,000 Clydesdale horses.²⁹

In their rush to make short-term gains, numerous of the earlier British exporters appeared somewhat indifferent to the question of quality. Besides, many were of the opinion that well-bred, superior sires were wasted on the American farmer who tended to use them on indifferent local mares and thus to effect little in the way of improvement.³⁰ This view was even shared by some American observers, one of whom informed the editor of the *Livestock Journal* that whereas the Burgess Brothers, Peter Hopley and N. P. Clarke had achieved good results with their importations of Shires, Suffolks and Clydesdales, few other American importers had positively improved the standard of draught animals with imported British stock.³¹ The upshot of this lack of attention to breeding became clear in the early 1890s when, after a series of severe droughts in the mid-west and the financial crisis of 1893, American farmers were left with large numbers of virtually unsaleable horses.³²

²⁷ *Livestock J.*, 10 Apr 1891.

²⁸ *Livestock J.*, 14 Jan. 1913.

²⁹ W. H. Carter, ‘The story of the horse’, *National Geographical Mag.* 44 (3) (1923), p. 104; J. Dugast, *Le Cheval Percheron* (Amis du Perche, nd); R. Whitlock, *Gentle*

giants. The past, present and future of the heavy horse (1976), pp. 66–8.

³⁰ *Livestock J.*, 10 Oct. 1890.

³¹ *Livestock J.*, 4 Oct. 1895.

³² *Livestock J.*, 28 Aug. 1903.

If British exporters could justifiably be accused of forcing the market by despatching unsolicited shiploads of indifferent horses across the Atlantic, American buying agents travelling the United Kingdom were not entirely blameless. To begin with, the very high prices of quality heavy horses, Shires in particular, circumscribed the activities of American buyers with a finite sum to spend. Surely, argued British breeders piously, little could be done to prevent these impecunious foreigners buying sub-standard stock if this is what they selected within the limits of their budgets?³³ Anyhow, the American agent was continually in a frantic rush, tearing pell-mell across the country buying a horse here and a horse there, rarely giving himself a chance to draw breath and carefully to inspect the range of animals available. Praising the studious attitude of Charles W. Comstock of Lost Nation, Iowa, who spent several months studying horses in Britain before making his purchases, a correspondent to the *Livestock Journal* could not avoid contrasting this '... to the headlong haste in which the many Americans seem to delight to indulge'. He went on to note that such assiduous attention to detail on the part of a buyer was of great benefit to the British breeder since the former could ascertain '... the real condition of the livestock interest in Great Britain, and their comparative merits with the French and other Continental horses'.³⁴

While breeders hoping to sell stock to the likes of Charles Comstock were repeatedly advised to welcome the foreign buyer at their own front doors, some exporters preferred either to speculate by despatching a shipload of horses to America in the hope that purchasers would come forward, or to come to some prior gentleman's agreement with transatlantic buyers to buy shipments unseen. In the absence of a written commitment to cash on delivery or some other form of copper-bottomed guarantee, this procedure was fraught with risk. As many exporters found to their cost, their transatlantic cousins, in the full knowledge that altruism was far from the primary motivation of the exporter, were in the habit of refusing to pay the price demanded. Acting together in a pre-arranged manner, the Americans would allow the shipment into port and then refuse to buy the animals, insisting that they either return home or be maintained at the quayside at the exporter's expense. Knowing fully well that the last thing the exporter wanted was to see his stock returned to Glasgow, Southampton or Tilbury, the American buyers were accordingly able to procure the horses on their own terms.³⁵

As implied above, the early phases of the trade were not without a modicum of skulduggery and sharp practice on both sides. However, as time passed, the American and Canadian governments tried to apply some control to what had previously been an unregulated market. By 1890 both governments were insisting upon prior veterinary inspection of all imported horses, while the McKinley Tariff imposed heavy duties on breeding animals entering the United States unless they were accompanied by a certified statement testifying both to their Stud Book registration and their pedigree authenticity for five generations on the male and

³³ *Minutes of evidence, Departmental committee on the export trade in livestock*, Q. 399.

³⁴ *Livestock J.*, 14 Aug. 1891. Unless they restricted themselves to a particular part of the country, the dispersed nature of breeding establishments in Britain probably compelled American buyers to act in this

frenetic manner. This contrasted markedly with the situation in Le Perche where exports of Percherons were handled by four major breeders in neighbouring villages. American buyers frequently visited Nogent le Rotrou in May, taking their families with them.

³⁵ *Livestock J.*, 12 Nov. 1897.

four generations on the female side.³⁶ Meanwhile, the Editing Committees of the various British stud books, alarmed at accumulating evidence for the falsification of pedigree certificates which they viewed as a crime '... of national importance, because it also affects the honour of the country, more especially when fraud is discovered abroad', took positive steps to tighten up their registration procedures. Even so, by 1903 the US Treasury came to require for duty-free entry not only an authenticated pedigree certificate, but an affidavit, sworn before the US Customs, that the animal to be imported was identical to that described on the certificate.³⁷ The horse in question, furthermore, had to pass a strict veterinary examination at the port of entry and, if found to have the slightest symptom of one of a range of infectious diseases, was returned to its place of origin.³⁸ Kindred measures were taken in Canada where the government instituted rigorous veterinary procedures, and required certification from Ottawa in addition to the normal documentation, before a mare or stallion could enter the country free of duty.³⁹ The imposition of these various official hurdles concentrated the minds of British exporters and was to alter their attitude towards the North American market when demand began to recover in the years after 1900. Assiduous attention would now be paid to conformation, constitution and other aspects of quality, besides which no breeder worth his salt would offer an animal for export if it was possessed of the slightest hint of a veterinary defect. It will become apparent below that the British export trade in both Clydesdale and Shire horses in the early years of the present century was probably hampered less by quality considerations than by the price of the product relative to that of foreign competitors in the market.

III

Of the three major British breeds, the Suffolk Punch was a mere footnote in North American agricultural history. The Shire and Clydesdale, however, were of greater significance and some facets of the transatlantic export trade in these breeds is described below.

Under the guidance of a number of pioneer importers including the Powell Brothers of Springburgh, Pennsylvania, N. P. Clarke of Minnesota, Colonel Robert Holloway of Alexis, Illinois and the Galbraith Brothers of Janesville, Wisconsin, the American Clydesdale Society was formed in 1879. Within three years the British Clydesdale stud books were recording increasing American ownership, while registration of Canadian-owned Clydesdales escalated once the first volume of the Canadian Clydesdale stud book had appeared in 1886.⁴⁰ If the Clydesdale breed was eventually to prove more popular on the prairies of Canada than in the fields and cities of its southern neighbour, considerable numbers of stallions appear to have been exported to the United States in the 1880s. Indeed, many of these, together with Canadian-bred hybrids, crossed the border from Ontario whence they made their way to Boston, New York and Philadelphia, the farming regions of Dakota and Montana and the timber forests of Michigan.

³⁶ K. Chivers, *The Shire Horse* (1976), pp. 227–8.

³⁷ *J. Board of Agriculture* 11 (1904–5), p. 419.

³⁸ *J. Board of Agriculture* 10 (1903–4), p. 114.

³⁹ *Minutes of evidence, Departmental committee on the export trade in livestock*, Q. 4750.

⁴⁰ *UK Clydesdale Horse Society Stud Book* (1882). Complete runs of the UK Clydesdale stud books are available at the Clydesdale Horse Society's office in Ayr, while the Shire stud books can be consulted at the Society's headquarters in Woodbridge, Suffolk.

So much was this the case that it was maintained in 1885 that upwards of one-third of the horses bred in the hinterland of London, Ontario, travelled to the western states of America.⁴¹

Reflecting the predominance of British settlers in Canada, the Clydesdale was overwhelmingly the most important draught horse breed in the Dominion in the later decades of the nineteenth century. The Shire offered some limited competition, but this was of little real significance. Typically, the Clydesdale virtually monopolized the Toronto Industrial Exhibition of 1900, when 875 horses were exhibited. Again, at the Winnipeg Exhibition of the same year, two Shires and a single Percheron competed with several hundreds of Clydesdales.⁴² Even so, the threat of competition from the Percheron and, increasingly, the Belgian breeds, was never far away. British exporters were increasingly attentive towards quality considerations by 1900, yet the continued obsession of some of them with 'show points' did little to help their cause, while the Canadian Clydesdale breed society took a somewhat lackadaisical approach to advertisement relative to the vigorous efforts of the promoters of the mainland European breeds.

Within five years of the arrival of the railroad in 1881, Brandon, Manitoba had become the self-styled 'Horse Capital' of Canada and the Mecca of breeders and dealers in Clydesdale horses. Firms like Colquhoun and Beattie and Trotter and Trotter established livery yards in the town, while further westwards W. H. Bryce of Arcola, the Mutch Brothers of Lumsden and R. H. Bryce of Lundie imported a succession of quality Scots Clydesdale mares and stallions.⁴³ Of the many dealers flocking to Brandon and the surrounding countryside, perhaps the most influential was Alexander Galbraith of Brandon and Edmonton. Born near Loch Lomond in Scotland, Galbraith and his brothers had originally settled in Janesville, Wisconsin and had imported many hundreds of horses of a variety of breeds prior to the financial panic of 1893. At the time of the financial crash the brothers came close to bankruptcy and were obliged to sever their partnership, causing Alexander to move to Canada where he became a major force in the development of the agriculture of Alberta.⁴⁴

As a Scotsman, Galbraith strove to champion the Clydesdale horse arguing, during his period of office as President of the American Clydesdale Association, that as a crossing sire, the quality Clydesdale stallion produced stronger-legged and better-actioned progeny than stallions of competing breeds.⁴⁵ Yet, in both Canada and the United States, competition began to intensify. In 1884, Brandon Agricultural Society had purchased two Percheron stallions from M. W. Dunham of Illinois, thereby launching that breed on its western course through Canada. Ironically, as increasing numbers of carefully-selected, large Percheron mares and stallions came to North America from Europe, so Clydesdale quality was deteriorating. Throughout the 1890s some British breeders, obsessed with a craving to satisfy showyard judges, had committed the error of sacrificing weight and substance to what Alexander Galbraith had contemptuously dismissed as 'prettiness'.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, not only was the weight and draught capacity of imported Percherons increasing, but additional competition was on hand in the form of the heavy Belgian

⁴¹ C. B. Jones (ed.), *Livestock on the Farm* (3 vols, 1915), III, p. 275; *American Suffolk Horse Stud Book*, 1907; *Canadian Suffolk Horse Stud Book*, 1939.

⁴² G. MacEwan, *Power for Prairie Plows* (1976), p. 29.

⁴³ G. MacEwan, *Illustrated history of Western Canadian agriculture* (1980), pp. 123-5.

⁴⁴ MacEwan, *Prairie Plows*, p. 28.

⁴⁵ Chivers, *Shire Horse*, p. 286. It has to be said that precisely the same claim was repeatedly made for the Percheron.

⁴⁶ Baird, *Clydesdale Horse*, p. 70.

horse. Thus was the scene set for the celebrated 'Battle of the Breeds', fought, tooth and nail, at fairs, livestock shows and agricultural meetings throughout Canada. The first decade of the present century bore witness to vitriolic exchanges in the columns of the agricultural press, while some local communities were divided according to their breed allegiance with an intensity which reached almost religious proportions. Interbreed rivalry came to the fore at agricultural shows where marshals struggled to prevent enthusiasts from coming to blows, and at country churches where Clydesdale supporters attended to their devotions on one side of the nave while Percheron and Belgian men prayed on the other!⁴⁷ Active intervention in support of the Clydesdale by the Saskatchewan government's sponsoring breeding experiments at the local university, and the purchase from Scotland of the celebrated stallion 'Craigie Masterpiece' by the government of Alberta in 1920 in an attempt to stave off the Percheron onslaught were to little avail. By now the latter breed was dominating the American market and was beginning to threaten the predominance of the Clydesdale in Canada.

The westwards expansion in North America and the seemingly inexorable inflow of emigrants from Europe stimulated an expansion in the demand for horses. In the United States, for example, the human population advanced by 21 per cent between 1900 and 1910, with a concurrent increase in the horse and mule population of 70 per cent from 13 to 23 millions. This tremendous surge in horse numbers was due in large measure to the defects of transport technology. Automobiles and motor lorries were all very well on tarmacadamed urban roads, but were quite incapable of negotiating the quagmires, ruts and rocky lanes comprising most of the highways across the countryside, and these continued to remain the province of the horse-drawn vehicle. Here, then, was a market ideally suited to the sturdy, well-bred Clydesdale. And yet, British breeders as a whole failed to capitalize on the situation and allowed Percheron and Belgian importers to make substantial inroads into what in Canada, at least, could have been a virtual Clydesdale monopoly. Andrew Montgomery of Netherhall, breeder of practically all the winners at the Chicago World Fair of 1893, and Peter Walker of Liverpool, gold medallist at the same fair in 1900, could be congratulated '... for their spirited action in the interests of the breed', but they were in the minority and the overall quality of Clydesdale horses leaving Britain before 1900 left much to be desired.⁴⁸ An overzealous concern with 'show points', and a tendency to dump surplus stallions of questionable pedigree, conformation and breeding potential on the overseas market did little to enhance the reputation of the Clydesdale even among its most ardent transatlantic supporters. The Breed Society itself was not entirely blameless and made little real effort to advertise its wares in America beyond contributing medals and prizes at various fairs and, by way of acknowledgement of Canada's patronage of the Clydesdale, investing £1000 in Canadian securities.⁴⁹ This apart, there is compelling circumstantial evidence that the editorial board of early volumes of the British stud book unwittingly allowed suspect, or even forged, pedigrees to be passed for registration, a point emphasized on more than one occasion by the Clydesdale Society's secretary, Archibald McNeilage.⁵⁰ To be fair, the editors were under great pressure, especially at times when overseas demand was

⁴⁷ *Canadian Encyclopaedia* (Edmonton, 1985).

⁴⁸ *UK Clydesdale Horse Society Study Book* (1901).

⁴⁹ Baird, *Clydesdale Horse*, p. 70.

⁵⁰ *Minutes of evidence, Departmental committee on the export trade in livestock*, Q. 4745-4749.

buoyant and British breeders clamoured to register stallions which, under less propitious circumstances, would have been castrated.⁵¹ As early as 1883 the Council of the Clydesdale Society was imploring breeders to supply accurate and genuine details of horses before registration, and more than twenty years later it rounded on potential exporters for failing to give heed to these matters.⁵² The minds of both the Council and editorial board had been sharply concentrated in 1884 when legal proceedings in the American courts prompted considerable embarrassment. Apologising for the delay in publication of the second volume of the Clydesdale stud book, the Council pleaded in mitigation that

The case of pedigree fabrication and forgery occupied so much of the time of the officials of the Society during the past winter that the Council thought it to be advisable to delay other business that this important matter might be thoroughly investigated and brought to an issue.⁵³

The case in point concerned an American citizen, Joseph Raeside, who, along with his brother David, had conspired to procure the entry of fraudulent pedigrees in the British and American Clydesdale stud books. According to the transcript of the proceedings in Chicago, Raeside had bought horses from the Clydesdale breeder David Riddell and despatched his brother to Archibald McNeilage in the hope of persuading him to register their pedigrees. It took little time for McNeilage to realise that these were obvious forgeries. The Clydesdale Society subsequently took steps to arrange for the deportation of Raeside to Scotland where he would have an opportunity to defend his action. After four days of evidence and deposition, amounting to some 140 printed pages, the commissioner hearing the case in Chicago held that Raeside should be extradited. However, much to the irritation of the Clydesdale Society, the US Secretary of State ruled that the Raeside case did not fall within the provisions of the 1842 extradition treaty between the United States and Great Britain, so that no extradition warrant could be issued.⁵⁴ At the time this seemingly minor footnote in equine history was something of a *cause célèbre*; it seemed to threaten the very fabric of breed society structure and the much-vaunted notion of British fair play. 'This is ... an international affair' thundered the American *Breeders Gazette*, several days after the case had concluded, 'It concerns no individual; it threatens the honour and good name of a great industry. All breeders are interested in this question, and hence the importance that has been attached to this case'.⁵⁵

How far the Raeside case damaged the reputation of the Clydesdale breed in the 1880s and 1890s is not clear. However, with the onset of the second major phase of transatlantic heavy horse exports in the early years of the present century, not only were strenuous attempts made on both sides of the Atlantic to improve the quality of horses arriving in North America, but the increasingly stringent regulations imposed by both American and Canadian authorities virtually eliminated the possibility of pedigree fraud. Besides, a steady advance in shipping rates probably had a material effect on the export trade. For most shipping companies, transporting human passengers was a more remunerative business than transporting horses, and as emigrants flowed from Europe to America, the spaces available for carrying animals were reduced so that

⁵¹ *UK Clydesdale Horse Society Stud Book*, 1901.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1883.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1885.

⁵⁴ *Report of proceedings in the Raeside Case* (Glasgow, 1885).

⁵⁵ *The Breeders Gazette*, 11 Dec. 1884.

TABLE 2. Imports of Breeding Horses to the United States and imports of British heavy horses to the United States and Canada, 1892–1916 (quinquennial averages)

	Imports to USA			Imports to Canada	
	Total of breeding horses	Clydesdale horses	Shire horses	Clydesdale horses	Shire horses
1892–1896	—	222	210	138	15
1897–1901	—	180	143	484	22
1902–1906	14,611	274	213	2372	57
1907–1911	26,357	449	299	5135	67
1912–1916	17,817	218	268	2292	63

Sources: *USDA Yearbooks*, 1902–16; *British Clydesdale Horse Society Stud Books*, 1892–1919; *British Shire Horse Society Stud Books*, 1891–1920.

the cost, for example, of shipping a horse from Glasgow to Montreal increased from £4 to £6 between 1906 and 1910.⁵⁶ As shipping and insurance costs escalated, so the chances of profit from a shipload of indifferent mares or stallions declined. This apart, supply was by now ahead of demand and American and Canadian farmers were buying what they wanted, rather than absorbing a market surplus in the United Kingdom.⁵⁷

Accurate statistical details of Clydesdale and Shire horse exports to the United States and Canada prior to the 1890s are not available, while data on export certificates published in the stud books for the later periods probably underestimate the total by an order of magnitude since many horses were exported without official pedigree registration. Accordingly, the figures set out in Table 2 should be treated with some caution.

Deficient though it is, the data illustrates both the recovery of the export trade after the difficult years of the 1890s, and the preponderance of Clydesdale exports to Canada rather than the United States. It indicates, moreover, the small contribution of the Clydesdale and the Shire to the totality of US imports of breeding stock which included large numbers of thoroughbred horses in this later period. The fact that total stud book registrations of Clydesdales in the USA had doubled to 21,000 between 1900 and 1920, and those of Shires had tripled from 5924 to 19,380 during the same period, hints at the volume of earlier unrecorded importations and the extent to which American breeders had multiplied home-produced stock.⁵⁸ While a consideration of statistics alone may obscure the influence of a relatively small number of well-advertised breeding animals on breed as a whole, a comparison of total UK horse exports with the numbers of exported heavy horse breeds returned by the Breed Societies for the 1911 Departmental Committee is revealing (Table 3). Apart from a limited number of racehorses and thoroughbred breeding stock, the overwhelming majority of exports comprised redundant agricultural and commercial animals which were destined for the slaughter houses of Holland and Belgium.

Clearly then, the volume of heavy horse exports from Britain as a proportion of the whole was very small even though it increased significantly in 1906–10 compared to 1901–5. Moreover, British stallions (of all breeds), as a proportion of total stallion imports to the USA and Canada,

⁵⁶ *Minutes of evidence, Departmental committee on the export trade in livestock*, Q. 3322.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Q. 4750.

⁵⁸ *Clydesdale and Shire Stud Book* (US 1900–1920).

TABLE 3. The export of horses from the UK, 1901-10.

	<i>Annual average export</i>	<i>Exports to Holland and Belgium (%)</i>	<i>Heavy horses to all countries (as proportion of total exports) (%)</i>
1901-05	34,621	83.0	1.9
1906-10	57,789	85.0	3.2

Sources: Report of the Departmental committee on the export trade in livestock (cd 6032, 1912).

fell from 75 to 24 per cent between 1896 and 1910 as heavy breeds from mainland Europe increased their hold on the trade. This raises basic questions as to the overall importance of this small corner of the British export market. To the majority of heavy horse breeders in Britain, most of whom were concerned merely with breeding replacement stock for working their own farms and selling the occasional surplus animal, it was probably little more than a novelty trade. But it was another matter altogether to the various élite breeders, whose influence over the genetic advance of their breeds far exceeded what one might have expected from their numbers. Major players in the Shire horse market like the Forshaws of Worksop, the Freshneys of Louth, the Ambroses of Ely or the Trotters of Northumberland had no illusions about the significance of the export market both to their own pockets and to the reputation of Britain as one of the world's foremost stockbreeding nations. With this in mind, they expended a great deal of energy exhorting their colleagues to make every possible effort to sustain the quality of exports, especially to the United States. Not only did they tirelessly promote both Shire and Clydesdale breeds in the press and from the platform, but they carefully cultivated friendships and associations with American and Canadian importers. The latter, meanwhile, were primarily concerned with securing high quality, preferably prepotent, stallions which would either be mated with imported or home-bred mares of the same breed so to bulk up numbers of pure-breds, or be sold on to breeders of cross-bred draft horses.

Since it is impossible from the evidence available to state unequivocally the proportion of the 17.9 million American farm horses in 1900 which were genetically related to imported British and European draft animals, their overall importance in the development of the mid-West is difficult to assess. Given that there were very few 'native' animals capable of the draft power necessary for primary prairie cultivation, the value of a half or three-quarter bred Shire, Percheron or Clydesdale would be undeniable and it is probably reasonable to assume that any farmer able to lay his hands on such an animal would do so. As even a cursory glance at any stud book reveals, the influence of a particular sire over the genetic makeup of a breed can be enormous within a few generations. In the nineteenth century it was common for an active stallion to cover up to one hundred and twenty mares per breeding season and to continue doing so over ten or even fifteen seasons. Accordingly, given a generation interval of some five years, the 'blood' of a particular stallion would soon become widespread within a cross-bred population, especially where a proportion of his own cross-bred offspring were themselves used as sires. Provided every effort was made to avoid in-breeding, the use of cross-bred stallions would dramatically increase the number of draught horses in a very short time. In the meantime,

TABLE 4. Principal importers of Shire stallions to the USA before 1888

Name of Importers	(%)
George E. Brown & Co, Aurora, Ill.	17.0
Galbraith Bros, Janesville, Wisc.	16.0
Burgess Bros, Wenona, Ill.	15.0
William Fields, Cedar Falls, Iowa	6.0
Powell Brothers, Springfield, Penn.	6.0
L. Banks Wilson, Bedford, Iowa	5.0
J. D. Beckett, Chicago, Ill.	5.0
Premier Horse Importing Co., Waverly, Iowa	3.0
Norris & Clark, Dover, Ill.	3.0
Blair Bros & Curry, Aurora, Ill.	3.0
Total	79.0

Note: the total number of stallions known to have been imported is 967.

Source: *American Shire Horse Society Stud Book 1* (1888).

the quality of foundation stock would be maintained by increasing the pool of home-bred Shire or Clydesdale animals, which, on a particular breeding unit, would be regularly supplemented by fresh blood in the form of an imported stallion. Such heady matters would be of prime importance to heavy horse importers, some of whose activities are considered below. In this context, considerations of space limit the discussion to the Shire breed only.

IV

By 1888, there were one hundred and fifty owners of registered Shire horses in the United States, of whom 44 per cent were domiciled in Illinois, 12 per cent in Iowa and the remainder in Kansas, Indiana, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Pennsylvania and Minneapolis.⁵⁹ Although many of these owner/breeders had imported animals directly from Britain, others had purchased stallions or mares from one or more specialist importers, 64 of these being recorded in the first volume of the American stud book (Table 4). The ten principal stallion importers set out below bought in 79 per cent of the total numbers of stallions imported, with a mean of thirteen stallions per importer.

Of the names in Table 4, George E. Brown, Burgess Brothers and J. D. Beckett were responsible for no less than 47 per cent of the 246 imported and registered mares in the same period, the remainder being contributed by 29 importers at an average of five mares per importer. By 1890, George E. Brown & Co., and the Powell Brothers were less active, and other players like J. H. Truman of Bushnell, Illinois, O. Heffner of Bethany, Nebraska, S. Bell of Wayne, Ohio and Singmaster & Sons of Keota, Iowa became increasingly important. These four, along with the others named in Table 4, brought in from Britain some 25 per cent of all Shire animals imported between 1890 and 1900.

Some American and Canadian importers appear to have been unconcerned as to the English

⁵⁹ *American Shire Horse Society Stud Book 1* (1888).

TABLE 5. Counties of origin of Shire horses exported to the USA and Canada

	USA		Canada
	1888 (%)	1888-93 (%)	1880-90 (%)
Lincoln/Cambridge/Huntingdon	40.0	43.0	26.0
Nottingham/Derby/Stafford	17.0	14.0	18.0
York/Lancashire	21.0	15.0	30.0
Others	22.0	28.0	26.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: *British Shire Horse Society Stud Books* 9-14 (1888-93).

county of origin of their purchases, as in the case of the Galbraith, Powell and Burgess Brothers who evinced no noticeable preference for Shire horses from a particular area or with a particular stud prefix. Others, however, showed clearly defined regional preferences, so that of the 133 stallions imported by George E. Brown & Co., 93 per cent were bred in the counties of Cambridge and Lincoln. Similarly 72 per cent of L. Banks Wilson's stallions were born in these counties, while J. D. Beckett made the bulk (73 per cent) of his purchases from animals born and bred in Buckinghamshire. This may reflect demand for a particular type, as with the Galbraith's interest in stallions carrying the 'Carlton' and 'Grove' prefixes, and Banks Wilson's enthusiasm for horses from the stud of Cole Ambrose of Ely, Cambridgeshire. Equally it might be indicative of the strength of local business contacts and personal acquaintances, convenience, ease of transport and other factors.

Taken overall, the counties of origin of horses exported to the United States did not vary significantly between the periods up to 1888 and 1888-93 (Table 5). Although almost three quarters of exported Shires were born either in the Fens, on the midland limestones, in the Vale of York or in the Fylde of Lancashire, the remainder were widely distributed throughout the kingdom. Colts and fillies grazing the pasturelands of Devon, the Essex marches, the wetlands of Somerset, the chalk downs of Hampshire and the uplands of the Welsh border country were by no means immune from the uncomfortable, if not hazardous odyssey to North America. Upon arrival, a few found themselves despatched to Missouri, Minnesota, Kansas, Indiana, Pennsylvania and Michigan, but by far the majority ended up in Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin, and later in Nebraska and Ohio (Table 6).

Destinations of mares reveal a slightly different pattern in that for both periods, almost 85 per cent went directly to Illinois and Iowa to the studs of Shire breeders. Given that 34 per cent of mares registered in the first volume of the American stud book are recorded as being bred and owned in the USA, it would seem fair to assume that American breeders were by now well-established in their craft. This applied equally to Canada where, of the 156 Shire mares registered in the first volume of the stud book, only 38 per cent had been imported after 1880, while 82 per cent of the 318 stallions had been bought in from Britain.⁶⁰ All but nine of the 93

⁶⁰ *Canadian Shire Horse Society Stud Book* 1 (1901).

TABLE 6. Destinations of imported Shire horses, 1888 and 1888-93

	1888 (%)	1888-93 (%)
Illinois	47.0	30.0
Iowa	17.0	27.0
Wisconsin	14.0	9.0
Nebraska		8.0
Ohio		6.0
Others	22.0	20.0
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: *British Shire Horse Society Stud Books 9-14 (1888-93)*.

Canadian importers hailed from Ontario, and with the exception of a handful of horses reaching Manitoba, all Shire imports were destined for the former province, the location of the major firms of A. C. Fenson and Sons of Toronto, Hendrie and Douglas of Hamiltonville, and Morris, Stone and Wellington of Welland. The origins of the Shire horses entering Canada differed somewhat from the American pattern, with fewer from the Fens but a greater proportion from northern England (Table 5).

V

In 1897, Colonel Holloway of Alexis, Illinois, sometime lawyer and Civil War veteran, and by then of the world's biggest breeders of draught horses, exported the American-bred Clydesdale stallions 'Prince Sturdy' and 'Prince Cedric' to the United Kingdom.⁶¹ This coincided with a steady increase in the shipment to Britain from the United States and Canada of Clydesdale, Shire and Percheron crossbreds to be used for van and omnibus work in London and the major cities. As demand for urban horses in the United States began to decline with the expansion of bicycle and streetcar transport, there was some urgency in the need to develop an American export trade and it was fortuitous that Britain looked across the Atlantic for supplies of horses previously secured from Germany.⁶² Indeed of the annual average of 43,811 horses imported to the United Kingdom between 1895 and 1900, some 80 per cent derived from the United States and Canada.⁶³ With the entry of European and West Indian buyers into the American market, prices surged ahead and as the century turned British demand tended to slacken. Nevertheless, the US Department of Agriculture was sanguine about the future and firmly held that when prices began to fall, British buyers would return to the fold. In 1899 and 1900, Britain had purchased approximately half of all American horse exports (compared to one third in 1895), but in fact, with the exception of the four years of the Great War, the British market was never to recover to these levels.⁶⁴

On the British side of the Atlantic, breeders of high class heavy horses believed they had little to fear from the United States and Canada, but that 'the ordinary run of horse-breeders',

⁶¹ *Livestock J.*, 12 May 1898.

⁶² *USDA Yearbook*, 1895, p. 23.

⁶³ *Agricultural Returns*, 1894-1900.

⁶⁴ *USDA Yearbook*, 1904, p. 531.

producing vanners and omnibus horses as sidelines on their farms, had just cause for concern.⁶⁵ How far the profits of these people were affected by the growing volume of imports at a time of generalized depression in the agricultural industry is a matter beyond the scope of the present essay. For the breeder of pedigree heavy horses, on the other hand, there were apparent benefits to be gained since a buoyant American export trade to Britain in crossbred working animals would theoretically be dependent upon a steady supply of quality breeding stock.⁶⁶ At the time it seemed reasonable to assume that this stock would be obtained from Britain, and as many of those American importers who had closed their businesses after 1893 returned to trade in the early 1900s, British producers were optimistic. But their optimism was unfounded. The fact that 90 per cent of the 'bus horses in London in the late 1890s were cross-bred Percherons imported from the United States, speaks volumes for the transatlantic success of that breed, besides which, the potential for extensive British sales withered on the altar of greed. Having fared relatively well during the years of depression, breeders could not resist the temptation of demanding excessive prices from overseas traders. There was little point in a would-be importer even considering the matter, complained a *Livestock Journal* editorial, 'when he is not offered a two year old Shire at less than £200'.⁶⁷

Small wonder, then, that although British exports to America advanced in the first decade of the twentieth century, the focus of transatlantic attention concentrated increasingly on the Percheron which could be obtained at reasonable prices, and probably more consistent quality. Even so, the Shire and Clydesdale horses which had previously made the arduous and stressful crossing of the Atlantic had played out a significant role in the agricultural and urban development of North America. While the actual effect of pedigree blood from the British Isles on the draught and conformational qualities of the horses cultivating the plains of the mid-West cannot realistically be quantified, it is probable that, at the local level at least, these animals had a greater influence than the mere counting of heads would suggest. As importers advertised the qualities of their stallions and stimulated local interest, the genetic material of individual sires would soon become widely spread as farmers used them to upgrade their own stock. And yet, foresighted breeders and farmers in the first decade of the present century could not have failed to notice the fading relevance of all these efforts. The inexorable spread of mechanisation on the land and in the city meant that ultimately horse power was doomed. But for many, the horse was more than a mere tool; it was a potent symbol of strength and self-reliance, an icon of the pioneering past not to be lightly cast aside. People hoped against hope that the heavy horse would remain the focal point of the farm with the tractor as an adjunct, and that attention to breed improvement would tip the balance in its favour. But despite intensive Canadian experimentation to improve horse efficiency, and the innumerable demonstrations of equine strength by way of pulling contests (carefully measured by dynamometers pioneered at Iowa State University and sophisticated by Professor E. A. Hardy of Saskatchewan), the future of the draught horse looked increasingly bleak.⁶⁸ So bleak indeed that by the later 1920s, horses were disappearing from the farmscape to be despatched to the meat packers at the rate of half a million a year.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ *Livestock J.*, 28 Sept. 1894; 25 Oct. 1895.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 13 July 1900.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 3 Nov. 1899.

⁶⁸ T. C. Barker in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *Horses in*

European economic history. A preliminary canter (1983), pp. 105–107.

⁶⁹ Howard, *The horse in America*, p. 229.