

A Morgan On The Famous 101?

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from
THE WESTERN WORKING FAMILY NEWS
published Feb 1996

Vol. I. No. 1



George W Miller, founder of the 101

Truly surprising is a persistent preconceived notion that the Morgan is an 'eastern style' horse as opposed to being a longtime regular in 'Cowcamp'. How this modern impression came to be is perplexing. It's high time to put this misconception where it belongs - in the grave and may it rest in peace!

The Morgan did begin his journey across these United States from New England and as he did so, the United State's first native bred breed of horse played a major role in the 'winning' of the West from the beginning so that the White race could move westward in earnest. Respectfully it needs to be stated that there were already Native Americans there to meet their new neighbors but that is another story. However, 'Cowboys & Indians' will be part of this particular tale as we travel a little further into this story about one of the west's best known historic ranching empires.

Some people have average dreams that involve what we call 'realistic goals'. There exists in some men a much larger vision that tips the scales, the kind of vision most of us would not even consider - apart from sheer fantasy. 'Visions of Grandeur' is a cliché that is suitable to set the stage here. Conservative and ho-hum will never do in the telling of the story of the 101 ~ perhaps one of the most flamboyant and romantic ranches of the Old West. Fitting the theme for rich visual imagery, it would appear that in this quest for power and prestige, a horse would be sought after that would capture attention. As evidenced in his portrait, the ranch founder rode a Morgan and had his portrait painted, to include his splendid steed and a 'work of art' saddle.. A Morgan? In this case, its as obvious as grass is green (his identification is a work in progress). The saddle and tack in the above photo was described as having rubies and emeralds set in the elaborately engraved silver pieces. The purchase price of the saddle alone near the turn of the century was \$5,000!! Highly doubtful that the horse it sat on was a

'commoner'. That possibility doesn't in any way shape or form fit the 101 patriarch's personality. The commanding presence of this horse suggests the finest quality Morgan ~ (perhaps old Midwestern and Herod breeding?). George would have the best of everything ~ nothing less, nothing else. He was a believer in a vigorous work ethic and here too the Morgan would have fit him to a T.

You now have a feel for the character of this story. The above portrait print was discovered recently as I was moseying through Ebay (internet auction site), when this image filled the screen. I confess that I hollered the irreverent exclamation " Holy Buckets !!! " The print is highly collectible and commanded a high price. I couldn't stand it, I had to contact the winning bidder to see if a Kodak copy of the original could be arranged. He graciously agreed. Then the natural course of learning more about the 101 began.

"The story of the 101 Ranch is the story of its progression from a ranch under the directorship of the father and founder, to a diversified farm under the reign of the brothers. To read of the wonderful accomplishments of these four men, Col. George W. Miller and his three sons, in the establishment and development of the 101, is like reading a tale of the Arabian Nights which exceeds our wildest imagination."

~ Ellsworth Collings, author of the book 'The 101 Ranch' George Washington Miller was born in Lincoln County, Kentucky in the year 1841. It was there that he was reared in the traditions of the Old South on a typical southern plantation. He married Miss Mary Anne Carson in 1866. Four children would be the result of this union, the first son arrived in 1868. George was enthralled by the opportunities that could be had in the West. It would be the place where he could realize his ambitious mammoth livestock ranch. From St. Louis, they struck out southwestward with the intention of finding their destiny in California. However, as they traveled across the prairie, he wisely realized that under his very feet laid the opportunity he sought. This was cattle country, without cattle. After wintering over, with a small herd of Texas steers, he headed to Kansas and established his first ranch a few miles south of Baxter Springs, Kansas, near the present Miami, Oklahoma. This was known as the 'LK' Ranch.

By 1881, George and Mary Anne had 3 sons and a daughter, and they were living in Baxter Springs. As the advancing railroad system moved westward, so did George. The old Cherokee Strip was a cattleman's paradise. "Indian-owned", the very pathway of the Texas cattle trails and land could be leased for about 3 cents per acre annually. There were no fences. Two larger pastures were leased, 60,000 acres total. In 1882, the family moved to Winfield, Kansas and it was decided that a new brand was needed. The '101' was chosen because it was simple, easy to read and describe. A deep respect for the Native American made good relations possible between George and the Indian Nation. He spoke to them in their own tongue and it was his desire that all could benefit in the exchange of 'good business'. And so it was.

George W. Miller never lived to see some of the grand plan that lay in the future. In 1903 he died of pneumonia at 61 years of age. His old friend and Ponca Chief, White Eagle, refused to go to the railroad station when the body was shipped to Kentucky for burial. He said, "I would not weep where men and women could see me". George left no legal will, but decreed that the ranch should remain intact in the Miller family. The ranch had become huge, the ranch income at that time was between \$400,000 and \$500,000 annually. 200 men were employed. Farming was also a huge part of the ranching operation ~ wheat, corn and hogs. At least 200 horses were used on the ranch as saddle mounts. Mules and horses used for farming are not numbered. The 'dream home' plans were carried out soon after George's death. On Christmas day, 1903, the family ate their first meal in 'The White House On The Plains' ~ as it was known. Each son had his own particular talent..Joe managed the ranch & farming enterprise, his hobby was orchards and horticulture; Zachary was the Cowboy and horseman and a trader to the

bone like his father. He devoted his time and energy to the livestock and the ranch itself. He was no stranger to business transactions of huge proportions; George Jr., the youngest son, was the financial genius and was a gentlemanly sort, and, like his mother, a gracious host. Upon the death of their father, George Jr. assumed the financial responsibilities of the ranch. The ranch prospered under his care. Their father's dream became a reality. The 101 was a perfect illustration of a successful business empire in the Old West.

How could this get any better? Dreams have the chance to be lived to the fullest when there is healthy banking to fuel the dream. In 1905, the 101 Wild West Show was born. Of the other Wild West Shows so popular in that era, the 101 was based on reality. One of the more famous 101 cowboys was black. Bill Pickett was a lifelong 'member' of the 101 and he was buried on the ranch after he was killed by a horse. He and others who had worked for the ranch were sometimes buried in the small ranch cemetery in Bliss, Oklahoma. The golden age of the Old West was in the height of its glory. The legends were living at that time. The 101 spanned four counties.

During the 1920s, the 101 Wild West Show traveled the world. The ranch itself was completely self-contained and had its own tannery, dairy, ice plant, cannery, electric power plant, cider mill and 25,000 Longhorn steers. The ranch even printed its own currency! The 101 ranch was in operation for over 50 years. Eventually, it all came to an end in 1932 and the ranch was auctioned off into parcels that became smaller farms and ranches. Oddly, none of the buildings remain but memorabilia can be seen at the Ponca City Cultural Center and Museum, the town recognized as home to the 101 ~ located in the north-central part of the state. The 101 produced as many vivid memories and stories as it produced anything else. Friends of the ranch were both numerous and famous. One young fella that had a knack for storytellin' and ropin' got his start within the Oklahoma Wild West show circuit and would later become famous for his knack with people, politics, humor and philosophy. His name was Will Rogers, one of the most beloved cowboys and Americans of all time ~ He was also a lifelong 101 'friend of the family'. Will, of course, was Oklahoma born & raised too ~ he being from Claremore. It seems that perhaps Will was no stranger to Morgan horses either. That I know of, there is no documentation but Paul Kunz of Moorcroft, WY told me that his father told him many years ago that it was common knowledge "Will's horse 'Soapsuds' was a mule-footed Morgan". Mind you, he may not have been a purebred.

The 101 Wild West Show included all the classic features: Trick riders, sharp-shooters, beautiful horses and women, Indians, re-enactments ~ highly romanticized western pageantry that went 'over the top' with Gusto! But, like everything else, the Old West and all that it included in its panoramic epic began to fade, becoming only a glorious memory. The 101 provides us with a story like no other and fortunately, there is much information on the ranch that can transport you back in time to the 101 in its heyday. In your mind you can visit the ranch by way of the written word and even though its just a fantasy, you'll not want to be a'foot. It would be fitting & proper to saddle your Morgan for a ride on the 101. The owner did.

**So, you think you'd like to know more about the 101?? READ THIS: *The Real Wild West: The 101 Ranch And The Creation Of The American West*, by Michael Wallis ~ (St.Martin's Press, 1999). This book can be purchased online through Amazon.com.