



Horsemanship through the Ages of Great value still!

By Elizabeth Graves©2010

What has inclined me to write about this topic is once again is reading through the issues of the US Calvary School Manuals.

I grew up on these manuals in that my mother had my Grandfathers Manuals. My Mother was also taught these philosophies in working with horses in her childhood.

It would be of great value to all horse owners to acquire copies of these manuals in that the information imparted is solid, tried and true methods that even today have more value than some of the new age methods we see in practice today. Horses before the age of automobiles were a valuable tool to man's livelihood, be it in the battle field, working the farm, and just simply transportation. Very different today in that they are a means of entertainment for most, and in many circles deemed as disposable as much of our culture is today. Unlike our cars, horses are living, breathing feeling creatures that don't see their own lives as disposable, with no value, otherwise their need for self preservation would not be so clear in how they communicate to us.



Making Plans

Many folks are getting ready for spring and getting back out and working on their horses for the new season. Many are thinking through what their goals are to achieve in advanced education with their horses this year. While others are looking forward to getting out on those trails, others are going to the shows. It's time to think about how we are going to get our horses ready. Each spring I hear of lots and lots of accidents that could be prevented if people would think a little more rather than just get on and go. We need to remember many horses have been on down time for most of the winter. Even those older horses that have been the tried and true performers for many years need a spring tune up and a conditioning program. This is part of getting back in the routine of working again, checking that they are physically sound and getting the relationships re-established.

Some folks will be starting young horses in their ground work and under saddle phases of education.

I feel most upon reading the Calvary manuals as a teaching tool it will find the philosophies will be very close to what many people have been seeking in direction for help and that's it's reasonable and sound information. Much safer to the rider and the horse than much of the fantasy market has imparted in the cowboy era presented to us in television and movies and now in training programs across the country.



Finding Clarifications of Meanings

I'm almost to the point myself when every time I hear the terms "Natural Horsemanship" or "Classical Dressage" I want to pull out a can of disinfectant and give a good spray before I step in and hear and or see just what is defined in each person's methods and approaches to teaching horses.

First it seems using the terminology has become the tool of choice in marketing to get the folks in the stable door first. Often definitions have been bastardized from what the original methods truly meant.

It's very bothersome when used, when in fact in the gaited horse circles that we still see mechanical manipulation it's still happening in the name of natural horsemanship and dressage. Those big bits, weighted shoes, side reins, German martingales, shackles, wood rattles, rollers, turn backs, long toes, low heels, manipulated head flipping, rolkur, on and on the list goes. I don't care if some start out this a snaffle in the beginning it's that the other poor image methods still seems to show themselves later. The term lite shod no longer means a simple shoe for protection but a whole realm of weights to effect gaits.

A Perspective on Content

I feel in the manuals you will find a nice balance of both Natural and Classical work for solid basics. I like that it was seen that nature dictates the maturity of a horse and must be observed, in when to start a horse, and how to work with one when you do.

They have wonderful "how to" instruction and programs are laid out for ground work development. These manuals advocate that a horse should not advance on in new lessons until it is properly "confirmed" in the basics. You know the old saying "take the time it takes".

In the relationship work it is about being a guide, gentle, not irritating, but also be firm, not harsh. It is encouraged to use verbal and physical support for positive reinforcement and its importance in emotional support or encouragement when doing well. Very much a different approach than the run them around, make them submit and "break" them out philosophies. These manuals also make it very clear that the "errors of the horse are the errors of the teacher".



It's in There

If you are looking for a conditioning program in detail that is real and sane, it's in these manuals. They really drive home the message that "Increased work will not advance physical development" nature has to do its work. They don't endorse any methods of training without being based on conditioning of the horse as acceptable. Also it's discussed on the value of developing the "wind" of the horse. I grew up being taught this and we rarely hear this term or application considered any more.

The manuals also drive home the importance of building up the qualities of the walks to long periods of time without fatigue.

How many times have myself and Lee Ziegler when we still had her, tried to drive this message home in all horse people and in our gaited community hard for developing gaits.

We did so more than 30 years, and this is where it came from for both of us through our parents and these manuals they brought in to our lives.

Through their tried and true research in working and training horses it's stated conditioning of a horse 4 years old it will take 1 year, 5 years old- 6 months, 6 year old-4 months, 7 year old -2 months.

Most people don't even think of what conditioning entails these days. Just in the spring with a horse standing unused it has to redevelop the muscles just to carry weight again let alone do so and move forward.

Theses manuals have

Some food for thought for those that trail ride also in that it's not uncommon for folks to just grab their horse and go on a weekend trail ride. Times being 1 to 4 hours and I hear of 6 and 8 hour rides yet the horse may be ridden

once or twice a week and these days, that's seems to be for most of the population. Humm, ever wonder why your horse is not glad to see you except for food or is hard to catch?

It's very common to hear in the gaited community is " we gaited all day", your horse, is a horse first, before a breed as I've stated over and over again, gaited horses should not hold gait longer that a properly conditioned trotting horse should hold trot. Some of the field practices of the US Calvary should be applied today also and remember they are taking about riding conditioned horses in various speeds of walks, intermediate gaits and canter.

It was practiced that in the first 45 minutes of riding astride a 10 -15 minute halt should be applied and repeated every hour thereafter. At these halts equipments was checked, saddle adjustments made etc. This was up to 6 hour ride duration. For longer day rides and/or excessive conditions such as heat, an added halt of 1-4 hours were made midday with saddle and gear being removed.

I'm not hearing of the population of trail riders stating they use these practices and indeed the very opposite often.

They also state, the reposition of saddles and blankets help in preventing pressure and friction. It is well known and documented, the research, development and money spent in saddle fit and function was vast by the US Calvary and I suspect way beyond what many manufactures today actually spend in research and advancement or field testing. Our horses of today are developed into very different shapes and sizes of that era, and that research in shapes for the most part would not work on most of today's horses but how they should function would apply.

Theses manuals also have good solid pattern work along with definitions and application of lateral work.

The explanations and definitions are easy to understand and programs of application are given.

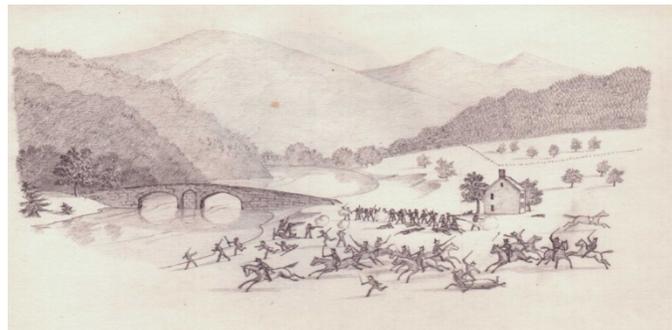
There are 3 volumes with 2 parts to each volume.

Title; Horsemanship and Horsemastership

Volume 1 and 2 are the most important and for those interested in the showing and steeple chasing volume 3 would be of interest.

They can be purchased through The US Calvary Association on line at very reasonable price.

Those seeking out good solid information on training and managing horses won't want to miss out on the information in these gems of history into horsemanship.



This sketch is one that was done by my 4th cousin Adolphis Pennington Young

A field reporter during the War Between the States, during the Shenandoah Valley Campaign.

It measures in original form of 4 x 3 inches which he sketched into little handmade booklets, held together with thread.

Included, are the writing of his eye witness accounts of the war.

I have a lot of his writings and drawings but the majority of his work can be found with the New Jersey Historical Society.

After the war he was in employment with the Historical society as a historian until his death at a rather young age.

I have spent many an hour reading his hand written account of the Battle of New Market many times over.