

Much of the credit for Iowa's prominence in agriculture goes to its outstanding draft horses. For more than seventy-five years they were the power for every farming operation from plowing to harvesting. Horses still hold their colorful popularity in the state.

13. Horses Pull Iowa Into Prominence

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THE FIRST WHITE SETTLERS IN IOWA FOUND SOME horses already in the state, probably descendants of animals brought to America by Cortez and other early Spanish explorers. Early pioneers had few horses because they were too expensive. Oxen were used for pulling the prairie schooners and the few crude agricultural implements.

Pioneers recognized the value of horses. They acquired them from east of the Mississippi River and they were soon extensively bred by Iowa's pioneers. By 1850, the census indicated 38,536 horses within the state, most of them in the eastern and southern counties. Ten years later, there were 175,088 with the demand steadily increasing.

Most of these horses have been described in early histories and documents as "horses of all work," suitable for the saddle, driving, and general farm work. One historian states: "Above almost every other form of property the horse had monetary value. Good horses were worth from \$100 to \$150 a head."

Rapidly horses and mules replaced oxen. In 1860, there were 3.2 horses and mules for every ox in the state; by 1880, the ratio was 335 horses and mules to each ox.

Early fair and agricultural reports indicate a wide range of horse breeds, including Thoroughbred, Morgan, Bashaw, Black Hawk, Abdallah, Printer, Hambletonian, Trump, Copper Bottom, Rob Roy, Tuckahoe, Grey Eagle, and Bellfounder. Many of these were not distinct breeds as recognized today, but were merely strains or families descended from certain sires.

INTRODUCTION OF THE DRAFT HORSE

While the Morgan, Black Hawk, and Bashaw were recognized as being the most popular horse breeds in the early days of Iowa, expansion of agriculture, business, and transportation created need for horses with greater power and more weight. Excellent for riding and hunting, the light horse did not have the size and strength for the early agricultural tasks of breaking prairie sod, pulling stumps, and moving stones and boulders—all jobs which had to be accomplished with the slow and sluggish oxen.

As early as 1857, at the fourth State Fair, it is recorded that "an English draft horse, of truly elephantine proportions, was exhibited by F. G. Broughton, of Muscatine County. It was raised in Kentucky, weighs 1,900 pounds, seven years old, and is a jet, glossy black." No other record was ever found on this stallion, so it is not known what influence he may have had on the horses of Muscatine County.

Since there were no draft breeds native to North America, it was necessary for Iowa farmers to turn to European countries for larger horses capable of performing heavy agricultural and industrial work. New agricultural implements were being produced, and heavy horses were required for motive power. This development of machinery before power with which to operate it was available is in direct contrast to the industrial revolution, which resulted following the discovery and application of steam power.

Principal source of heavy draft breeds was in northern Europe, especially France, Belgium, England, and Scotland, and it was from these locations that Iowa horse breeders imported draft stallions to mate with the light and medium-weight mares available within the state.

First Percheron stallion to enter Iowa was brought in by A. W. Cook, of Charles City, in 1869. This horse, Duke of Normandy, weighed approximately 1,600 pounds, and in 1874 was sold to Jacob Erb and Company, of Ames. This same year, Pride of Perche 382 was obtained by the Iowa Agricultural College at Ames. These two stallions were the first of many importations responsible for the widespread expansion of the Percheron and Norman horse business throughout the state. While the Percherons all came from the section known as LaPerche in France, the name "Norman" was generally used to describe any one of the five French draft breeds.

It is believed the Norman horse was imported into Iowa at about the same time or possibly a bit earlier than the Percheron. In the late sixties and seventies, more Iowa counties reported Norman horses

than they did Percherons. Early breeders of Percherons in Iowa were Singmaster and Sons, Keota; J. H. Barnett, Indianola; Humberts, Corning; D. M. Baughman, Pulaski; M. L. Ayres, Shenandoah; and Daniel McCarthy, Ames.

Good, medium-weight draft horses were produced through breeding the native mares of Iowa to these French draft stallions, and the number of grade and purebred Percherons and Normans increased steadily. More Percheron stallions were registered by the Stallion Registration Division of the Iowa Department of Agriculture than any other breed of horses up to 1932, when the Belgian stallions forged ahead in number.

One of the greatest breeding horses in the history of the Percheron breed, both in Europe and the United States, was Brilliant 1899, known in livestock annals as "Old Brilliant." Foaled in 1867, he was extensively used in the stud of Ernest Perriot, Sr., of France, until 1881. Imported to America in 1881 by Leonard Johnson, the Brilliant was taken directly to East Castle Rock, Minnesota. The following year he was sold to P. C. Fockler, of Independence, Iowa, where he was kept at stud until he was almost thirty years old. Although he was never bred in this country to other than grade mares, colts sired by Old Brilliant were sold at remarkable prices, and the Brilliant family is the largest and best known family in the Percheron breed.

There is no official record of Belgians in Iowa until the late eighties but Belgians were found in Illinois as early as 1866. D. P. Stubbs and Sons, of Fairfield, generally are credited with the first importation into Iowa. The Lefebure family, of Fairfax, also was active in promoting this breed. Much credit for the tremendous improvement in type, quality, style, and beauty in the Belgian horse since its introduction into North America must go to the numerous Iowa breeders, who through the years have selected their breeding stock carefully and cultivated desirable characteristics.

Outstanding Belgian stallion in the United States to the present time was Farceur 7,332, bred by Nerinck Brothers, of Hal, Belgium, and imported in 1912 by William Crownover, of Hudson, Iowa. He was purchased by C. G. Good, of Ogden, at the dispersion of the Crownover stud in 1917 at \$47,500, the highest price ever paid for a draft horse in this country. His stud fee was \$200.

Polled in 1937 by the *Chicago Daily Drivers' Journal*, on the question: "What Belgian stallion has contributed most to the development of the breed in America?" leading Belgian breeders throughout the country unanimously answered "Farceur." Farceur and his colts

were and are noted for quality and finish and for correctness of set of the hocks and hind legs. They have consistently won high awards at leading fairs.

No Clydesdales were reported in Iowa previous to 1870. H. Post, of Moulton, obtained a Clydesdale in 1871, and in the following year M. L. Divin, of Des Moines, Owen and Allison, of Lone Tree, and G. Eilers, of Monticello, imported Clydesdales from Scotland. Clydesdale stallions were shown in Kossuth and Lucas counties as early as 1873. By 1881, Clydesdales were recorded in eighty-six counties.

Early records of Iowa agriculture make reference to English draft horses, but not specifically to the Shire breed. Joseph Arnold, of Oto, is credited with importing the first Shire to Iowa in 1876. Other pioneer Shire breeders were W. H. Jordan, of Iowa City, W. M. Fields and Brothers, of Cedar Falls, L. Banks Wilson, of Bedford, Bremer County Horse Importing Company, of Waverly, A. B. Holbert, of Greeley, Peter Hopley, of Lewis, and J. H. Love and Company, of Albia.

While the Suffolk breed was introduced into Iowa in the nineties, it has never been as numerous as any of the other draft breeds mentioned.

THE DRAFT HORSE IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

Although the automobile, tractor, and truck today are replacing the draft horse as a source of power on many farms, the outstanding draft horses for which Iowa has long been famous deserve much of the credit for Iowa's prominence in agricultural production. It was these heavy horses that for more than seventy-five years furnished the power needed for every farming operation from plowing to harvesting and even for transporting the produce to market.

Growth of the draft horse industry and utilization of the draft horse in Iowa kept pace with the rapidly expanding agricultural and industrial program of the state. It was fortunate that Iowa, dependent almost wholly upon horse power for extensive farming operations, had the climate and available grain, hay, and grass which made possible the economical production of high-quality draft horses. These factors, in addition to the great number of intelligent, energetic, and ambitious breeders, quickly placed Iowa out in front as a draft horse breeding state.

As introduction of additional farm implements increased the demand for horse power within the state, so did the demand from other

states increase. With its central location, Iowa was in a favorable position for breeding and raising draft horses for shipment to both agricultural and industrial centers outside of the state.

There was an almost uninterrupted increase in horses from 1850 up to the depression years of the nineties. Then prices dropped appreciably and the number of horses in Iowa actually decreased for the four years from 1895 to 1899 (Fig. 6). The demand for horses to pull street cars in the cities was growing faster than the supply until

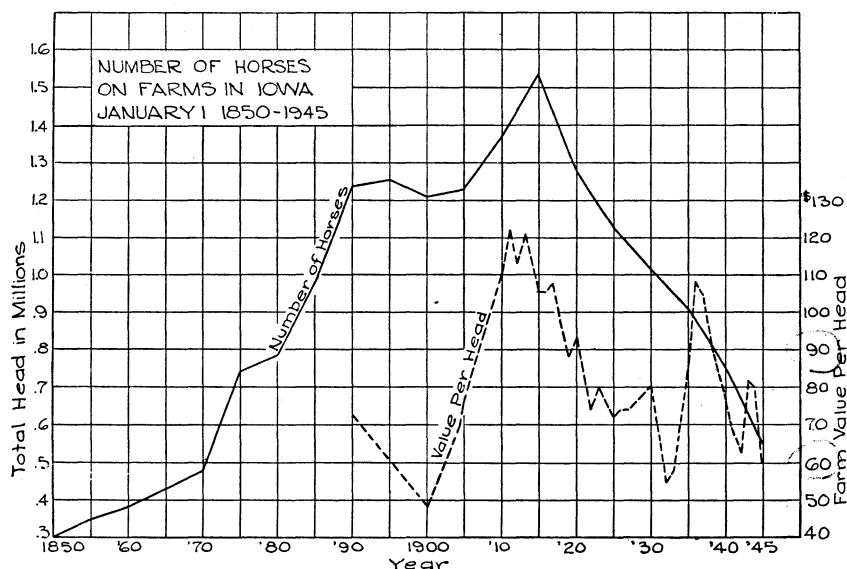


FIG. 6.—Numbers of horses on Iowa farms January first of each year, 1850-1945, with average value per head.

the middle of the eighties. By that time, however, electric street railways had been perfected, and by 1895, electricity had practically replaced the horse on street railways.

Demand from foreign countries for American draft horses increased tremendously in the late nineties, with export rising from less than 3,000 in 1893 to 82,250 in 1901. Further mechanization of agriculture increased the demand for heavy horses. Farmers were using more machinery, all horse drawn, and the machinery was getting larger and heavier. During the period 1850-1900, the number of farms in the Midwest increased 296 per cent, the number of acres of improved land 267 per cent, and the number of horses 291 per cent. Average value of machinery on the Iowa farm increased from \$79 per farm in

1850 to \$253 per farm in 1900. Commenting on this increase, the census of 1900 stated:

Machinery is valueless unless driven by some power other than human muscle. The power of steam and of falling water gives great effectiveness to labor in factories. The corresponding power of the farm at present is principally that of the horse and mule. The horse and mule enable the farmer of this country to produce grain, transport it thousands of miles and sell it in Europe cheaper than it can be produced there.

To supply the demand for horses in cities of the United States, exclusive of providing horses for export, animals must be bred to the number of three hundred thousand annually. To supply the demand for horses on farms and elsewhere, exclusive of cities, one million two hundred thousand more must be bred annually. The demand from cities and towns is, therefore, one-fifth the total for the United States.

A growing proportion of the city and export demand for horses was met by Iowa horse producers. As early as 1863 records indicate horses were being shipped to eastern markets, and later Iowa-bred horses were to be found in all the large eastern cities, throughout New England, and in southern port cities.

Available export markets for more wheat and other cereals increased the demand for horses after 1895, and prices began to improve. They continued an upward trend until the peak was reached in 1911. Iowa continued to gain as a horse-producing state. In 1890 it ranked second to Illinois, and soon took and held the lead in number of horses produced.

Draft horses were not solely responsible for the growth of the horse industry in Iowa, as thousands of riding, roadster, and carriage horses were produced to meet demand principally from the East. Good markets also existed for delivery wagon and express horses, midway in weight between the carriage and draft horse. Because of high priced land, and lack of pastures and grain feeds, it was more economical for eastern buyers to import their horses from the West than to attempt raising them.

Until the introduction of the farm tractor in Iowa, the continued increase in the use of new farm machinery and the increased acreage under cultivation kept the draft horse industry steadily growing. While the advent of the automobile reduced the demand for light and carriage type horses after the turn of the century, the need for draft animals continued to increase until 1914, when the number of horses in Iowa reached an all-time high of 1,667,000. As tractors became cheaper and better adjusted to the needs of the average farmer, with rubber tires, lighter weight, and more maneuverability, the number of horses in the state declined steadily. By 1945, there were 581,000 horses in Iowa, only slightly more than in 1870.

World Wars I and II contributed to the replacement of the draft horse by the tractor, since wars accelerated the development of farm machines designed to save time and labor. During both wars, production of food was paramount in farmers' minds, diverting interest and time from breeding and raising of horses. Conversely, during the depression years more attention was given to horses. The number of colts produced in Iowa showed a steady increase from 25,173 in 1932 to 64,000 in 1938, the highest number produced in recent years.

Despite the adoption of tractor farming in Iowa, the horse still has a prominent role in the state's agriculture. During 1942, a year less affected by wartime conditions than any succeeding year, 45 per cent of Iowa's farms still were dependent entirely upon horse power. In that year, horses were used for planting 90 per cent, cultivating 39 per cent, and picking 53 per cent of the total Iowa corn acreage. Horse power also was used for cutting 40 per cent of the grain, and for disking 32 per cent and harrowing 62 per cent of the cultivated acreage. In addition, horses were used widely for other farming tasks such as haying, threshing, and hauling manure. Horse power still is considered advantageous for certain types of farming operations, especially where the land is rough or fields are small.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE LIGHT HORSE IN IOWA

While the first horses in Iowa were light in weight, suitable primarily for riding and light farm work, they made two important contributions to the people of the state: first, supplying the brood mares for mating with imported draft stallions, and secondly, providing horses suitable for the Iowa and eastern riding and carriage trade. More than either of these contributions, though, these horses were important in that their descendants, improved by breeding and selection, are the foundation of a new horse-producing industry rapidly gaining prominence in Iowa.

In the early history, mention was made of a number of light horse breeds suitable for use under saddle or driving to light buggies, but the coach or heavy harness type did not appear until later. The Cleveland Bay, an English coach breed, was first imported by Captain W. H. Jordan, of Iowa City, in the seventies and was popular in Iowa for a generation. French and German coach horses and Hackneys have been found in Iowa in limited numbers for many years.

Shetland ponies were first shown at the Iowa State Fair in 1880. Eli Elliot, of West Liberty, imported ponies to Iowa in the eighties. Shetlands have always been popular in the state, and there is probably

a greater demand in present years for a good pony than at any previous time.

Early records of the Iowa State Fair do not mention the American Saddle Horse, although there were ladies' riding classes at the Fair as early as 1854. The American Saddle Horse record shows that eight Iowa horsemen owned registered saddle horses in the early nineties, but it seems that representatives of this breed must have been brought to Iowa much earlier, since Missouri was one of the three states in which the breed was developed.

Closely associated with the development of light horses within the state is the story of horse racing in Iowa. Horse racing has been popular in Iowa since the state was first settled, but never has been developed as extensively as in some other states because of Iowa laws prohibiting betting, and the limited number of large population centers.

One of the first breeds to be introduced into Iowa was the Standardbred. Trotting and pacing races have been held in all sections for nearly a century. Today, nearly every county or district fair in Iowa has a race track and holds harness and running races during the fair week. One of the early and important centers of harness horse racing in Iowa was at Independence, where two of the greatest race horses of all time were bred and raced, and the famous "Kite track" was built.

Charley Williams, of Ossian and later Independence, had for some time been interested in trotting horses, but up to the middle eighties had not owned any that were especially outstanding. In 1884 he purchased a Standardbred mare, Gussie Wilkes by Mambrino Boy, from a Dubuque firm for \$75. The same year he purchased another mare, Lou, also for \$75, and shipped the two mares to Lexington, Kentucky, where they were bred to two well-known sires—Gussie Wilkes to Jay Bird, and Lou to William L, both sires being sons of George Wilkes. Trained as two-year-olds, the offspring of these matings, Allerton and Axtell, immediately showed great promises of developing unusual speed. Entered into competition as a three-year-old during the season of 1889, Axtell trotted a mile in 2:15½ at Minneapolis on July 7. At Terre Haute, on October 9, he went the mile in 2:12, a world's record for a horse of his age. On that day he was sold to a syndicate of breeders for \$105,000, and it is doubtful if Iowa has ever produced an animal of any breed that has brought more acclaim to the state than did Axtell.

After Williams sold Axtell, he continued to develop Allerton, and on September 19, 1891, Allerton set a new trotting record for

stallions at 2:09½. Williams, it is said, refused an offer of \$150,000 for Allerton. With a service fee of \$1,000, it is estimated that Allerton earned more than \$150,000 in stud fees. One instance has been recorded of a German horse promoter shipping a mare across the Atlantic to be bred to Allerton.

In the early history of the state the light horse was popular but for a time after the automobile appeared, production decreased. Since 1930 the interest in light horses has been growing steadily in Iowa, as has the number of such horses and the opportunities for exhibiting and demonstrating them. Indication of the trend toward light horses is found in the records of the Iowa State Stallion Show, resumed in 1943 after a lapse of thirty years. Of the 180 stallions and jacks shown in 1944, only 70 were draft stallions. Of 150 stallions shown in 1945, only 50 were of draft type. Of 125 stallions in 1946, only 20 were draft stallions and the balance were light stallions and ponies.

The Iowa Saddle Horse Futurity was organized in 1944. Since the Futurity has had a noticeable effect on improving the quality of saddle horses, the American Saddle Horse Association has served as an important working nucleus for the Futurity organization. Iowa had more licensed American Saddle Horse stallions at public stud in 1946 than any other state.

Vigorous progress also has been made in the breeding and development of the Palomino horse within Iowa. Organized in 1941, the Iowa Palomino Exhibitors' Association has taken an active role in influencing improvement of the breed. With forty-one Palomino stallions registered in the state by 1944, and three state Palomino shows held in as many years, Iowa is rapidly gaining a prominent place in the development of this breed.

Considerable activity also has taken place in the breeding of the Tennessee Walking Horse, Quarter Horse, Morocco Spotted Horse, and Hackney Pony. The harness show pony, "G. I. Joe," bred and developed in Iowa, won the championship at the Chicago show in December, 1945, and sold three times during the show for reported prices of \$10,000, \$13,000, and \$15,200, successively.

Especially indicative of the mounting interest in the light horse in Iowa is the number of horse shows held the past few years. These shows were dominated by light horses and ponies. In 1942, 25 horse shows were recorded in the state. There were 67 in 1943, 152 in 1944, and 176 in 1945. This tremendous increase came despite the wartime handicaps and travel restrictions. In the various shows held during that span of years, it is estimated 49,000 horses were shown before an audience of 772,000. In addition to putting many county fairs back

into sound financial standing, these light horse shows have earned thousands of dollars for charity and created an exceptionally fine market for Iowa light horses and ponies.

With the increase in the number of horses kept in Iowa for pleasure and recreation, horse enthusiasts have organized to promote horseback riding and trail rides. By the end of 1945, there were fifty-eight such clubs in the state. "Trail Rides" are becoming very popular in every section of the state and for several years a 100-mile Trail Ride has been held in Des Moines with trails taking the riders to cities about forty miles away, such as Indianola, Nevada, and Pella.

This interest in light horses has by no means been limited to city residents of Iowa. Many Iowa farmers have found that the well-trained light horse has a definite place on their farms in providing recreation for the family, as a means of travel about the farm, in doing light harness work, in handling livestock, and in the production of colts for both show and sale.

IOWA HORSE ASSOCIATIONS

This history of the horse-producing industry of Iowa is not complete without mention of the extensive association and exhibition activities of horse breeders and fanciers whose work contributed largely to improvement of the various breeds and the widespread use of the horse by agriculture and in cities. Meeting in Grinnell on February 9, 1887, a group of Iowa horse breeders organized the Iowa State Draft Horse Association, the first society of its kind in the United States.

At the first State Fair in 1854, as might be expected, the horse division of the fair was the largest and attracted the most attention. Commenting on this fact, the Secretary of the State Agricultural Society in his annual report for 1856 said: "The horse deserves a prominent place in all our exhibitions. There is no class of animals in the improvement of which the farmers generally are so much interested as the horse. There is no class of animals in Iowa in which so much money is invested as the horse."

All of the state, district, and county fairs in Iowa have been effective in improvement of all classes of horses. When breeders exhibited their animals they could readily compare them with those shown by other breeders and determine if they were progressing satisfactorily in the improvement of the strain or breed. Many horse breeders, encouraged by successes at county fairs, continued improvement of their stock through breeding and selection.

On January 16, 1912, the Iowa Horse and Mule Breeders' Associa-

tion was organized at Ames, because of a widespread desire among the horse and mule men to foster production of better horses and mules. From the beginning, the association has worked toward that goal. The State Assembly of Iowa in 1927 passed a bill creating the office of "field representative" for the association. This representative has aided the production and use of work, saddle, pleasure, and stock horses and mules. In addition, he has worked with 4-H club boys and girls of the state in the selection, feeding, care, and training of colts. First field representative of the association was Harry D. Linn, elected Iowa's Secretary of Agriculture starting in 1942.

The Iowa Saddle Horse Association was organized in 1934 to promote breeding and development of show and pleasure horses, both farm and urban.

In 1943, the Iowa Stock Horse Association was formed. It has established rules and regulations for conducting stock horse shows and has been aggressive in promoting this class of horses before the public.

While competitive and exhibition interest has been kept keen among breeders of light horses through the numerous riding shows and trials, draft horse men have participated for many years in horse pulling contests. First contest of this type was held at the Iowa State Fair in 1923. In the following years, pulling contests became regular events at state and county fairs, attracting many entries and interested spectators. According to the Iowa Horse and Mule Breeders' Association, interest in these pulling contests has revived in recent years, and in 1943 there were fourteen such contests held in the state. During 1944, nineteen contests were conducted, and in 1945 there were twenty-nine with 423 teams competing. The world's record heavy-weight team of pulling horses is owned by L. J. Smith, of Hedrick. This pair of purebred Belgians established a record of 4,175 pounds' tractive pull on the dynamometer at Hillsdale, Michigan Fair, September 26, 1944.

Legislation, too, has done much to foster the breeding of sound horses and mules within the state. The Iowa Stallion Registration Law requires that a stallion or jack must pass a veterinary examination to obtain a license to stand at service, and that a stallion or jack must pass two consecutive examinations to be granted a permanent soundness certificate or license. The law also provides that all stallions licensed after 1924 must be purebred animals registered with a recognized breed association. The result of this law has been the gradual improvement of stallions at public service in Iowa through the elimi-

nation of unsound and scrub stock, and the production of healthy colts, uniform in type, on Iowa farms.

INFLUENCE OF THE HORSE

The horse, as the farmer's principal source of power, had its effect on a great number of industries and individuals whose income was directly or indirectly derived from the widespread use of the horse. Among those directly affected were livery stable keepers, saddle and harness makers, blacksmiths, carriage and wagon manufacturers, saddlers, wheelwrights, draymen, hackmen, and teamsters.

Census figures for the past ninety years graphically portray the rise and decline of these activities and serve as an index of magnitude and importance of the horse industry of Iowa during the century. For instance, 2,609 blacksmiths were listed in Iowa in 1860, with the numbers mounting rapidly to a peak of 6,228 in 1900, and then declining steadily to the 1,665 reported in 1940.

Another enterprise almost as universal as the blacksmith in the "boom" days of the horse was the livery stable, which has become an institution of the past. This type of establishment, where horses could be stabled and fed overnight or for longer periods, once was found throughout Iowa, and in the peak year of 1900, numbered 1,978. This figure rapidly declined to 1,462 in 1910, and with the introduction of the automobile dropped to 434 in 1920. Since then census reports have not listed them.

More than just a "hotel" for horses while their owners transacted business or attended school and church, these livery stables became community centers and clearing houses where hundreds of horses were bought, sold, and traded each year. Horse buyers frequently would make the livery barn their headquarters. Most stable keepers had both saddle horses and horses and buggies for hire. These were widely used by salesmen in visiting clients in the country or in small towns not yet reached by the railroads.

Not to be forgotten, either, is the role of the horse in furnishing transportation to the country doctor in the days prior to the automobile and good roads. First in the saddle and later with a buggy, the doctor made his rounds in both rural and urban communities. Too, we should remember the horse for making possible the heavy attendances at religious and social gatherings, and for transporting rural youths to school.

MULES

Mules have been produced in Iowa for a century. The number increased from 1850 to 1885 when there was a decrease for about ten

years. From 1895 to 1927 there was again a steady increase to a total of 101,000 head. The peak in mule numbers came about fifteen years after the horse reached its greatest numbers (Fig. 7). Since 1927 the decrease in mules has been rather rapid and in 1945 there were less than thirty thousand head in the state. The average price of mules always has been somewhat higher than that of horses and Iowa farmers have found a ready market for their surplus mules. They have

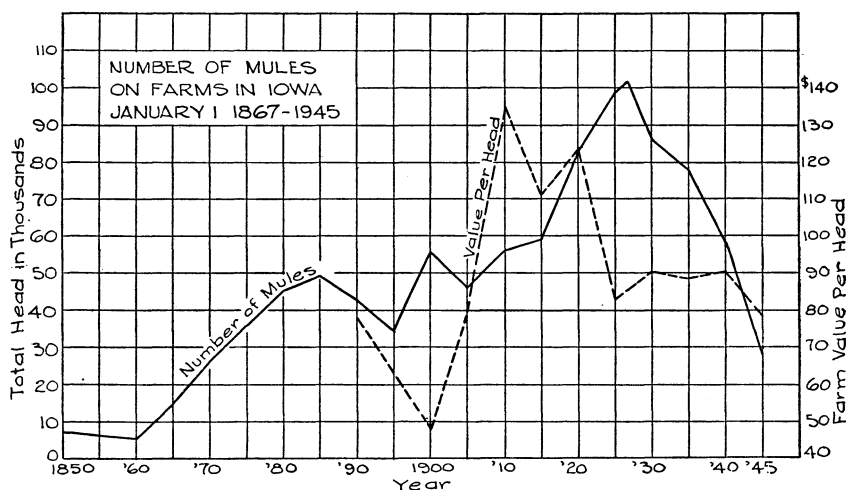


FIG. 7.—Numbers of mules on Iowa farms January first of each year, 1867-1945, with average value per head.

never reached such numbers that they could supply more than a small fraction of the power supplied by horses. Mules found in Iowa are generally larger and more rugged than those of the southern states, where they are more numerous. This has been attributed to the fact that in Iowa they were produced by heavy draft mares.