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## 06 West Cestrians and their Animals

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## **West Cestrians and their Animals**

by Mary Kivlin, HIS 480 (submitted March 31, 2004)

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### **Introduction**

West Chester, the seat of government of Chester County, Pennsylvania, has long enjoyed a reputation for rural attractiveness, a progressive business environment, a center of education and gentile town center. Settled over 200 years ago by Welsh immigrants who received land grants from William Penn, the multifaceted perspective held by its residents during and through the course of time provides a fascinating study of a mixed-use area.

My research explored the history of West Chester through the use of, and attitude toward, the animal population residing within the borough. Rural animals, being critical to the survival of the original agricultural settlers, were valued, and their close proximity was a way of life. As West Chester emerged as a county seat, animals became less essential and were less tolerated. With the advent of the automobile and a more urban economy, the attitude towards animals evolved from acceptance to one of nostalgia. An exploration of the use and role of animals throughout the history of West Chester may provide insight into the minds and hearts of the economically developing West Chester population and reveal some sociological insights that allow modern historians to better appreciate the development of the borough.

### **Methodology**

My hypothesis required a comparison between economic dependence on animals and sociological attitudes about the disadvantages of living with them in close quarters.

My statistical data sources include the United States Federal Census for West Chester for the years 1820 and 1840, which provided a categorized total of persons employed in various occupations. The 1820 census itemizes those

employed in agriculture, commerce and trade and manufacturing, while the 1840 census adds the category of professional engineers. Both censuses supply the total number of workers and the total population which allows me to calculate the importance of agriculture to the economy and the percentage of workers employees in the various categories.

[Editor's note: The number of people employed in agriculture may not be directly proportional to the importance of agriculture. The mechanization of agriculture in the 20th century reduced the number of agricultural workers, but may not have reduced the importance of agriculture at the same rate.]

Subjective data sources include the Chester County Historical Society's clippings file of newspaper articles. The clippings, from the *Daily Local News*, the *Village Record* and the *American Republic* include editorials, borough ordinances, news stories, announcements and letters to the editor. These provide insight into the changing perspective of Cestrians over time to living in close proximity with a largely agricultural animal base.

Additional data sources include nineteenth century contemporary histories, Boyd's West Chester and Chester County directories, West Chester Borough Code, the Wilmer Business Directory, the Board of Trade publications, and the West Chester centennial, 175th anniversary and bicentennial publications.

### **West Cestrians and their Animals**

From its incorporation as a borough, West Chester began to change from a community of "six or eight small farms"(1) at a rapid pace. In the mid-nineteenth century, it underwent a dramatic transformation from an agrarian based economy to a true industrialized system. In a brief span of less than one hundred years, the daily life of residents was radically altered as they apparently accepted and embraced a new way of life. Economic development brought a change in self-identity as residents began to view their town as a county seat, a center for education and culture, and an area for industrial development. A part of this changing identity was an evolving perspective on the use of animals, and growing tolerance of their accompanying nuisance.

Rural animals, being critical to the survival of the original agricultural settlers, were valued, and their close proximity was a way of life. The land area that now comprises the borough of West Chester was among the three contiguous land grants made to Welsh settlers by William Penn. In these earlier times, life was harsh, and living in the virtual wilderness could be dangerous indeed. The utility of animals was essential to survival as evidenced by the decision of

Richard Thomas, one of the original Welsh settlers, in choosing his first camp. Thomas located his camp close to an Indian settlement at what are now Route 100 and Route 30 in Exton, so that he could share the protection of their dogs that would scare away any wild animals venturing near his settlement. From the first, partnerships between men and beasts employed to advance Chester County life.

In 1762, at what was known as the "Crossroads" (roads connecting West Chester with Philadelphia and Great Valley with Wilmington), Robert Eachus petitioned the state for an inn license for the Turk's Head Tavern (near the current Southeast National Bank). Subsequently, the area became known as Turk's Head.(2) This inn serviced the needs of the passenger and freight wagons, one of the first non-agricultural activities to be performed in that area.

In the first attempt at moving the county seat from Chester in 1780, in what is now Delaware County, to West Chester, was unsuccessful. In 1784, the Pennsylvania Assembly passed a second act, authorizing three commissioners, including Colonel John T. Hannum, to begin construction of the new county seat. Hannum sought to profit from this venture and immediately bought up lots in the immediate area of what is now the Court House. The transformation of the sleepy agricultural center had begun. On March 3, 1788, the Pennsylvania legislature converted a one and one-quarter square mile area surrounding the Court House from a district in Goshen Township to a "country Town." West Chester attained borough status on March 28, 1799 necessitating government by Burgesses and Assistants.

Reflecting the new perspective of the area as a county seat, the first ordinance passed by the new Burgess addressed the very rural character of the town. An ordinance banning swine from running loose was enacted in December of 1799 because of problems experienced with property damage and the chaos of having the animals run throughout the country town. A fine was set at \$0.25 per swine or pig found running loose. If a pig was caught trespassing, the owner was liable for the property damage in addition to the fine. If the owner wasn't known, the pig would be impounded for up to five days. If the pig was not claimed after that time, it would be sold. Drovers were exempted from this requirement as West Chester, as the county seat, had an opportunity to become a major market center.(3)

By 1800, the population had grown to 374 with the addition of a small town center consisting of four square blocks encompassing the county seat, homes and the beginnings of the necessary service industries for a town economy. By 1804, the Burgess apparently felt the 1799 swine ordinance needed to be

strengthened and an amendment was enacted that called for the establishment of public pound on the southwest side of Church Street to hold the wayward pigs. Fines were changed to be charged according to the number of pigs, and constables were to be paid a portion of the collected fines as incentive. But if the constable did not pick the pig up after a complaint, the constable himself would be fined \$0.25 per pig. The "rescuing" of swine by individuals was made illegal: any person rounding them up before they were impounded or breaking them out of the pound was fined four dollars and held liable for the damages.

In 1906, an effort to gentrify the borough, the public mating of horses was banned and strict regulations designed to shield this more rural activity from public view as this "indecent practice offended" residents who felt that "Principles of order and decency has been violated." In the future, it must be done behind a solid fence at least eight feet high. Violators would be fined five dollars for each unlawful incident. In a mere twenty years after becoming a country town, the sensibilities of the residents took on a new, more urbane perspective.

As the new borough grew with the apparent success of its early residents and the bevy of craftsmen that developed to support them, its rural flavor continued to change. The first Post Office opened and mail delivery began in 1802(4). By 1820, the population grew by approximately forty-eight percent. The increased activity within the town and the efforts to control its unruly influence resulted in additional regulation. A new ordinance was passed in 1818 for the "prevention of horseracing, disorderly riding, pilfering fruit, etc." was enacted.(5) A fine of five dollars was set for disorderly riding, letting horses run at large in the streets, or disorderly driving a wagon, carts or carriage. A fine of eight dollars was set for someone riding or driving on pavements or other areas of pedestrian traffic. Animals were beginning to be viewed as a nuisance that required control and by 1821; the issues of the smell of pigs in the summer time began to become an issue that would frustrate borough residents.(6)

Horses, in particular, continued to be an important economic factor. West Chester's location at the junction of two major roads, the Wilmington Road and the Lancaster Turnpike, led to the establishment of a successful transportation industry. John Riley, a Cestrian shop keeper, started a tri-weekly stage coach service between Philadelphia and West Chester. The author believes that it was successful because a rival surfaced within the next few years and they competed with each other by offering daily coach service before "the era of railroads arrived."(7) By 1833, a very profitable line of four-

horse stage coaches ran through Chester County, along the Lancaster Pike, hauling freight and passengers. Freight was hauled by two-ton capacity wagons owned by local county farmers, and almost every farmer owned at least one sturdily built wagon with high wheels.(8) After the Columbia railroad opened in 1833, the Conestoga through stage lines were transferred to the track. The new rail coaches were much larger, carrying fifteen to twenty people.(9)

During the 19th century, West Chester's basic economy was transforming from an agricultural market based system to a more urban one. Appendix B shows the distribution of major classes of occupations in West Chester in 1820 and 1840, and suggests that these initial transportation successes provided opportunities in addition to agriculture. In 1820, over forty-two percent of the population was engaged in farming, but by 1840, that had dropped to just under eleven percent. Manufacturing and trade were flourishing and their growth clearly foreshadows the direction of development in the second half of the century.

With the advent of a less rural economy, the tolerance of rural animal issues is lessened, in some cases, eliminated. Dogs, in particular, were the focus of the next round of attempted control. In 1837, Chief Burgess W. M. Everhart passed an ordinance requiring all dogs in the borough to have "a brass or other metal collar securely fixed upon his neck, with the owner's name engraved thereon." The assistant burgess was authorized to hire people to catch dogs running at large whereupon they would be detained for twenty-four hours and killed if they were not claimed by that time. Owners that claimed their dogs would pay a one dollar fine.(10)

While the perspective of common animals changed from a welcome income producing enterprise to one that required regulation, West Cestrians began to envision some of them as exotic. Traveling circuses featuring lions, tigers, bears and even horses began to enthrall the community in the spring, summer and fall and became very popular. West Cestrians continued to advance the gentility of their town. In 1830's, educational lectures became popular with the local community with series lectures being presented featuring such topics as philosophy and chemistry.

Throughout the industrialization period of the mid nineteenth century, the borough continued to grow. Immigrants provided the labor that allowed industries such as wheel manufacturing, and nurseries to grow and prosper. Steam locomotion began to replace horse power as the energy behind long distance transportation and allowances for horses began to disappear. Around

1840, railway traffic had decreased due to bad economic times, and the West Chester Railroad was heavily in debt. The Columbia Railroad attempted to increase their tolls and ban the use of horses on the rails because, they claimed, horses interfered with the locomotive traffic. In 1844, the West Chester Railroad contracted to have their passengers and freight transported by steam power, hooked up to their own carriages, although the West Chester spur and the inclined plane into Philadelphia still required horse driven cars. In 1846, the tracks on the West Chester to Intersection line were replaced to handle the steam powered cars, although the Philadelphia inclined plane had not yet been improved, and still could not handle the steam powered locomotives.

Since horses were still essential to local transportation and remained an important fixture in West Cestrian life although attitudes toward them began to evolve. As they became a less intrusive part on the day-to-day life, some West Cestrians were allowed the luxury of improving their lot. This set them at odds with others who still depended upon them for their existence. Some residents complained of cruel treatment and urged the SPCA to investigate. The SPCA would continue to provide this service until the present day.

While horses were passing from the scene from most residents, they continued to be valued for entertainment. Horse racing at the Fairgrounds (now a part of West Chester University) was popular and the subject of interest. In 1881, a speedy trial conducted by Nathan Haynes attracted so much attention that an account was published in the Daily Local News.(11)

Although the population of West Chester increased by almost thirty-three percent between 1880 and 1890 (see Appendix A), the number of blacksmiths required to support the horse population remained the same. The declining growth of industry based on horses continued to have an impact on the philosophy of residents. Keeping one's horse in a stable in the backyard began to decline as residents began to pick up other pursuits. In 1900, borough resident Barclay Lear had a theory that only newcomers wanted to maintain their own horses. Older (earlier) residents rented teams for driving, except in special instances, and only those willing to keep a horse, rather than do something more exciting, held onto their own animals and vehicles.(12) More exciting ventures included bicycles. By 1881, they began to appear on the streets of West Chester and children even formed clubs.(13) Other pursuits included boating and baseball, which was played at the fairgrounds.(14)

By the end of the century, the era of dependence on animals for economic sustenance was in decline and residents displayed the intolerance of an urban population. In 1907, Burgess A. P. Reid instructed Police Chief R. O. Jefferis to impound all dogs running loose. If they were not claimed within forty-eight hours, they were to be shot. In addition, Chief Jefferis was told to arrest anyone who did not hitch their horses properly, which allowed the horses to damage shade trees. The appearance of the borough was of utmost importance.(15)

The adoption of the automobile began in earnest in the beginning of the twentieth century in West Chester. In 1904, the borough enacted a requirement for automobile licenses. Each owner paid three dollars per year to the Borough Treasurer. In addition the law stipulated that automobiles must yield for horses, must not exceed eight miles per hour, and must sound a "gong or alarm" at streets or crossing.(16)

By 1921, horses and their activities had been relegated to a form of nostalgia. In the Daily Local News, a local resident reminisced about familiar West Chester scenes such as: "Strycennial, Howard Fulton's fast nag with a stretch of limb that is hard to beat and when Howard draws the ribbons and the cutter slides over the snow", "the Adams Express company sled", "teams moving furniture", and "William Kautz's sled with a chair full of groceries", memories of which were surely fading.(17)

## **Conclusion**

Throughout the history of the borough of West Chester, animals have played an important part of the economic and social life of residents. In an agrarian society, they were essential to success and were welcomed as such. Through West Chester's evolution into an industrial center and ultimately an urban town, attitudes toward animals reflect the decreasing economic dependence. Horses played an interesting role, not only as personal transportation and entertainment in horse racing and equestrian events but also in the successful stage coach industry and travel industries. Facilitated by West Chester's geographic location with access to major roads, these industries were important successful enterprises that provided the capital for continued development. Along with develop came intolerance, first toward the animals that disrupted daily life and then toward those that apparently inhibited the town from becoming the image of a gentile urban society. Borough image shaped the regulations and perspectives of its citizens as West Chester became a county seat, a transportation hub, an industrialized town and a true urban community.



## REFERENCE NOTES

1. "West Chester, past and present: centennial souvenir with celebration proceedings ... 1799-1899", (West Chester, Pa: Daily Local News, 1899), 6.
  2. *175th Anniversary of West Chester*, ed. Ray Doyle, (West Chester, Pennsylvania: D. Edward Biehn, 1974), 26.
  3. "Amendment to an Ordinance to prevent swine from running at large" (August 8, 1804) in "West Chester Borough Ordinances," vol. 1, in Chester County Historical Society (henceforth CCHS) Library.
  4. "West Chester, past and present: centennial souvenir with celebration proceedings ... 1799-1899" (West Chester, Pennsylvania: Daily Local News, 1899), 10.
  5. *Village Record* (July 1, 1818), in CCHS clippings file: "West Chester Public Offices: Ordinances 1835-1839."
  6. *Jeffersonian* (July 29, 1821), in CCHS clippings file: "West Chester Ordinances."
  7. "West Chester, past and present: centennial souvenir with celebration proceedings ... 1799-1899" (West Chester, Pennsylvania: Daily Local News, 1899), 9.
  8. *Ibid.*, 19.
  9. *Ibid.*, 20.
  10. *American Republic* (April 8, 1833), in CCHS clippings file: "West Chester Public Offices: Ordinances 1835-1839."
  11. *Daily Local News*, May 26, 1881, in CCHS clippings file: "West Chester History, Amusements."
  12. *Daily Local News* (February 10, 1900) and editorial in *Philadelphia Inquirer* (July 30, 1900), in CCHS clippings file: "Market Street."
  13. *Daily Local News* (June 28, 1881), in CCHS clippings file: "West Chester History, Amusements."
  14. *Daily Local News* (July 4, 1881), in CCHS clippings file: "West Chester History, Amusements."
  15. "Will Enforce Ordinances" in *Daily Local News* (May 24, 1907), in CCHS clippings file: "West Chester Ordinances."
  16. *Daily Local News* (June 4, 1904), in CCHS clippings file: "West Chester Ordinances."
  17. "The Artist's Chance" in *Daily Local News* (January 21, 1909), in CCHS clippings file: "Market Street."
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## Appendix A: West Chester Population in the 19th Century.

Source: US Census Data and 1857 Borough Directory, reprinted in the West Chester, Pennsylvania Centennial Souvenir 1799-1899, 9.

Year	Population	Percent change in ten years
1800	374	
1810	471	25.9
1820	553	17.4
1830	1244	125
1840	2152	73
1850	3172	47.4
1857	4500 (est.)	
1860	4757	50.6
1870	5630	18.3
1880	6046	7.4
1890	8028	32.8

## Appendix B: Distribution of occupations in West Chester, by sector, 1820 and 1840.

Source: US Census.

Year		Agriculture	Commerce	Manufacturing	Professional	Total Workers
1820	Number	39	9	44		92
1820	Percent of total workers	42.4	9.8	47.8	0	100
1820	Percent of Borough population	7.1	1.6	8.0	0	16.7
1840	Number	42	26	265	78	411
1840	Percent of total workers	10.2	6.3	64.5	19.0	100
1840	Percent of Borough population	2	1.2	12.3	3.6	19.1

## Appendix C: Census of Occupations of West Chester Residents 1879 to 1914.

Source: Borough Directories published by W. Andrew Boyd.

Occupation	1879	1884	1886	1888	1904	1908	1914
Auto Supplies and Repairing	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Automobile Garages	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Automobile Sales	0	0	0	0	3	3	2
Bicycles	0	0	0	0	2	1	0
Billiards Rooms	0	0	0	0	0	5	0
Blacksmith and Horseshoers	5	5	6	6	7	7	0
Booksellers	3	4	4	4	0	0	3
Bowling Alley	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Coach, Carriage and Wagon Makers	4	16	4	3	9	5	0
Coachmen	0	6	0	0	0	0	0
Dentists	6	7	8	7	12	13	0
Department Stores	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dressmakers	33	20	0	18	40	52	0
Drivers	0	23	0	0	0	0	0
Drovers	2	3	3	1	0	0	0
Farmers in Chester County	22	17	0	0	0	1	0
Farmers in West Chester	96	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grocers	29	43	42	39	37	40	45
Hacks	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Hairdressers	0	0	0	0	1	4	0
Harness Makers and Saddlery	5	15	0	6	7	4	2
Horse Boarders	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Horse Dealers	1	2	1	1	0	0	0
Horse Livery Stables	7	9	10	5	7	11	7
Horse Sales Stables	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Horse Trainers	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Hotels	6	7	7	7	8	7	9
Kennels	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Lawyers	43	28	38	35	44	43	51
Live Stock Dealers	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
Massage Therapists	0	0	0	0	3	2	0
Milliners	0	9	9	7	8	4	8
Occultists	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Physicians	24	22	7	23	22	18	31
Real Estate Brokers	2	7	4	11	11	14	14
Restaurants	0	0	0	0	12	9	11
Saloons	0	0	0	0	0	4	0
Swine Breeders	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Veterinarians	3	4	2	2	3	3	6

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