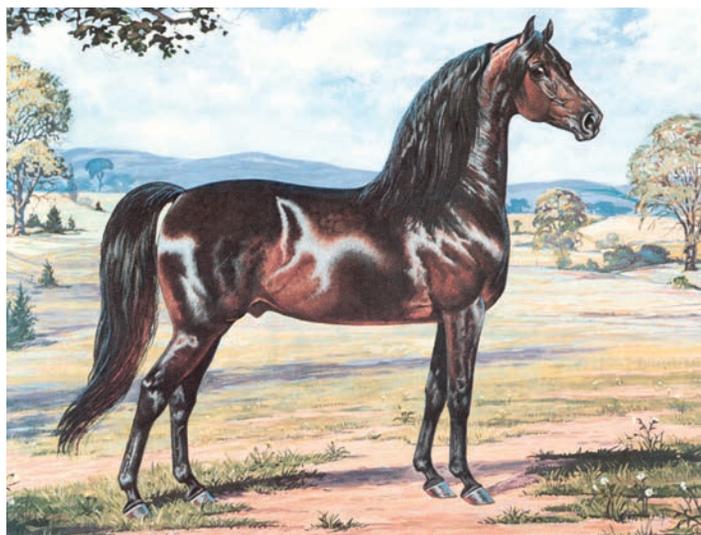


PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST AND HORSEWOMAN

An adoring friend from across the ocean discusses Jeanne Mellin Herrick's unique artwork, unflinching horsemanship, and her place in our breed's history.

By Doug Wade



Sometimes in life paths cross, fate intervenes and you meet individuals who shape your life. Such is the case here. A boy from the United Kingdom meets an effervescent, charismatic artist and horsewoman from the United States and a life lasting friendship is born. I first met Jeanne Mellin Herrick when I was about 10 years of age. She had flown into Great Britain to judge the first Morgan horse show, the Hertfordshire County Show, and she was staying at our family home. That very first evening, as a horse crazy kid, I was mesmerized—Jeanne talked and shared many beautiful images of her horses and, of course, of her paintings. I was completely hooked and transfixed by this amazing lady!

The story of Jeanne Mellin Herrick has been well documented. She was born into a non-equestrian family, restaurant owners by trade, based in New Canaan, Connecticut. As a young girl Jeanne and her sister Joan were shipped off to summer camp in Vermont. It's here, at camp, where a young Jeanne got the "horse bug" that would last a lifetime. Her mother said as a child Jeanne scribbled horse pictures on any blank surfaces, walls, and bookends that presented themselves. Little changed over the years!

As Jeanne grew, so did her serious commitment to her art. She was accepted at and enrolled in the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), where whilst staying with, in her own words, "me Irish

cousins," Jeanne developed and honed her skills with the paint brush, oils, gouache, watercolor, and also started to learn about sculpting, calligraphy, and design. Whenever in conversation about RISD, there would always be a raised eyebrow as she explained (animatedly) how the tutors never let her paint her beloved horses, but "they'd rather me go to life drawing classes to paint and draw people!" This infuriated Jeanne. She dreamed, and day dreamed, about her four-legged friends. All Jeanne wanted to do was paint and draw horses. This is what really mattered to the young aspiring artist.

I went to work for Fred and Jeanne Herrick during long, glorious, and very happy summers of the 1980s at Saddleback Farm, based in Hamilton, in upstate New York. For visitors to Saddleback Farm in its heyday, there would be two treats that lay in store. Not only would they be able to watch and see the late, great Fred Herrick work some wonderful Morgan horses, and laugh at his jokes, the trip usually ended with a visit to Jeanne's studio too. As you entered this unique work place, full of expression and beauty, historic memorabilia of Morgan horse heritage, one would immediately be hit by the calm and tranquility of the space, although it was full of paintings, photos, sculptures, prints, and sketches. With music softly playing in the background, a calm enveloped you as the magic of Jeanne's work took hold.

ABOVE: Jeanne Mellin's stallion (left) and mare (right) paintings illustrate correct Morgan type and conformation as developed and approved by the American Morgan Horse Association's Standards Committee and Board of Directors.



A glimpse inside Jeanne's studio
(Photo © Heidi Osgood Metcalf).



Jeanne's influences were the great classic masters: Rosa Bonheur, George Stubbs, Peter Paul Rubens, Theodore Gericault, and, of course, Leonardo da Vinci, particularly his pencil studies. If you look at Jeanne's work you will see reflections and influences, of all their work in hers.

(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP): *The Horse Fair* by Rosa Bonheur, 1852-1855, Metropolitan Museum Of Art, New York; *Whistlejacket* by George Stubbs, National Gallery, London; Study of horse from Leonardo da Vinci's journals, Royal Library, Windsor Castle (Images sourced from Wikipedia).

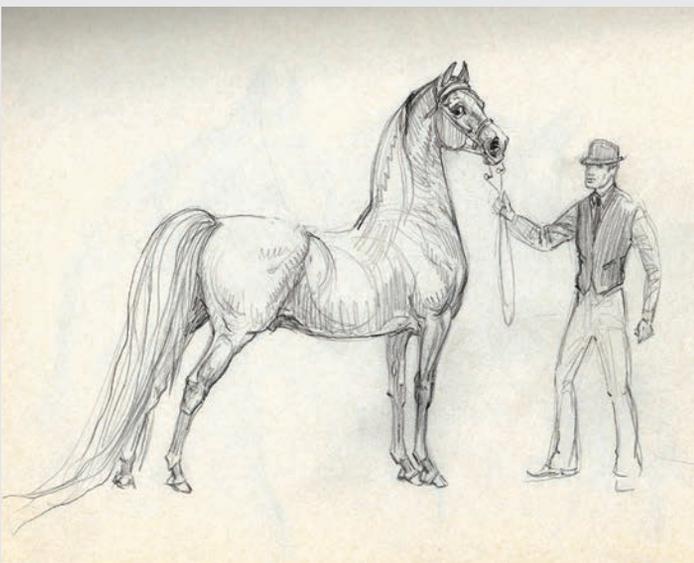
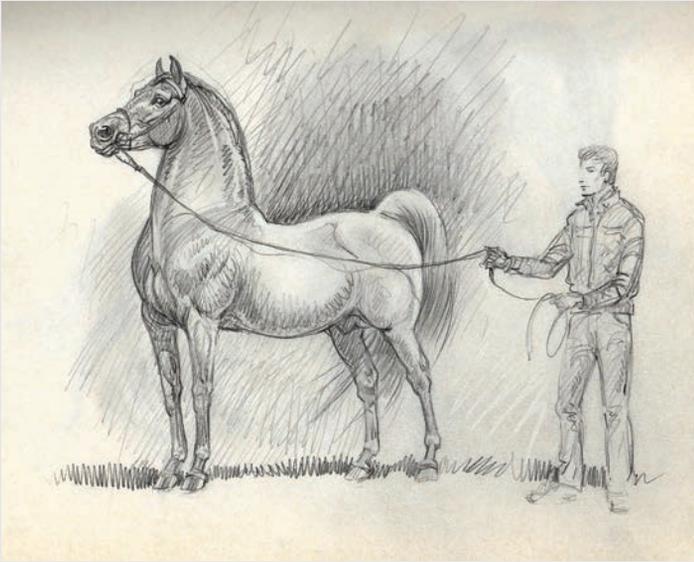
Jeanne was a Morgan horse fanatic to the core, her work in whatever form it took—paintings, sculptures, books, or illustrations—was an absolute physical and mental expression of her very being.

Jeanne made a living from her love and skill of producing equestrian art and she wisely realized that in order to make a living she needed to approach all forms of creativity. She worked on farm logos and “fixing ears” for show ring photos before the digital age too! Jeanne was truly the consummate and most versatile of Morgan horse artists. Through this complete immersion, Jeanne produced work over the decades for a huge number of patrons, collating a wonderful body of work that developed creatively over the years.

Trips to her beloved Monnington Morgans, the breed's

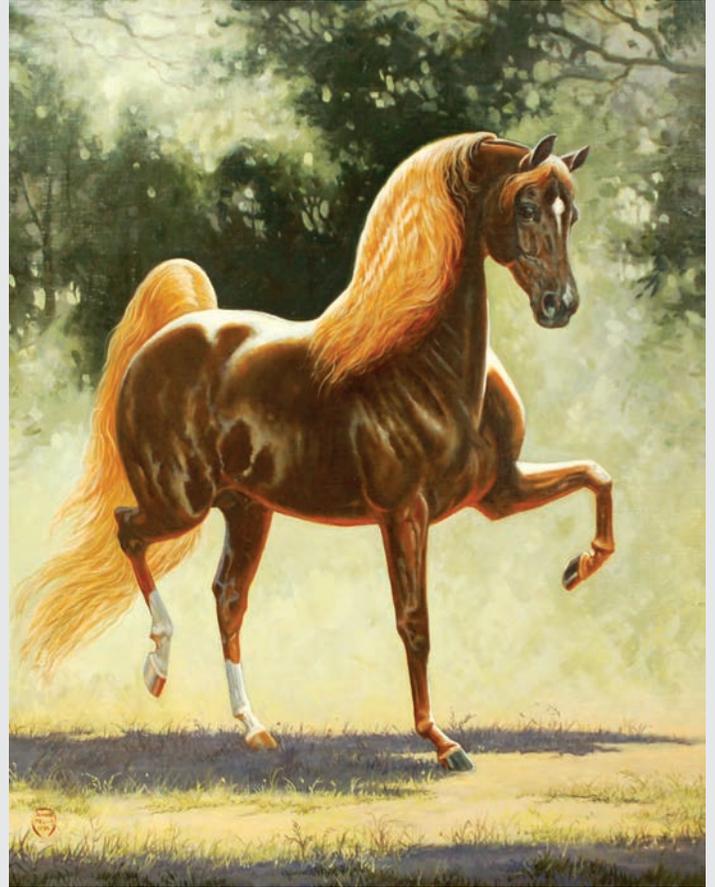
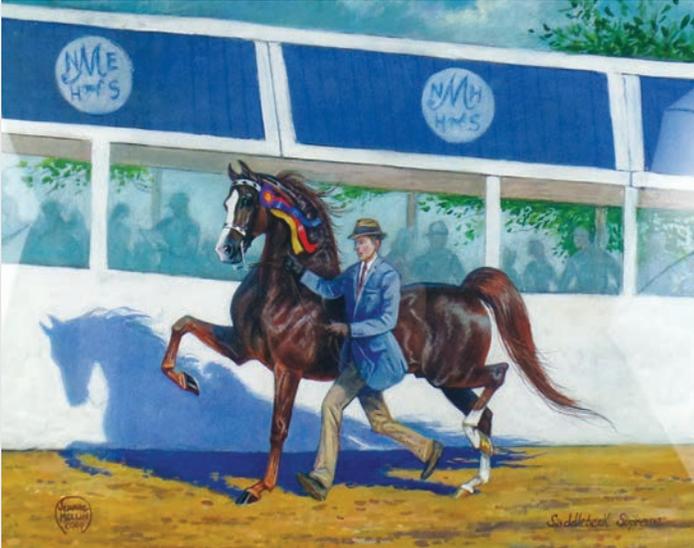
foundation farm in the United Kingdom, owned by John and Angela Bulmer, helped progress Jeanne's vision and she consequently grew artistically. Her ways of working and seeing her subject matter took on a more developed approach. Her painting style matured, her painting technique intensified, and Jeanne's talent literally flowed through her fingertips onto the canvas.

(As an aside, Jeanne's contributions to Morgan in Great Britain were many and they were unpaid. Jeanne and her sister Joan Osgood made two trips a year for as many as 10 years to do clinics, demonstrations, judging of early Morgan horse shows and with general help in keeping the British Morgan Horse Society thriving. The Morgan horse in Britain will forever be in her debt.)



ABOVE: A sampling of Jeanne's sketches.





PAINTINGS BY JEANNE MELLIN HERRICK

(TOP TO BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT): Ulendon with owner/trainer Lyman Orcutt; Woodbury; UVM Promise; Upwey Ben Don; Ethan Allen; Waseeka's Nocturne with trainer John Lydon; Elm Hill Charter Oak; Saddleback Supreme with Fred Herrick; Lippitt Royalton Ashbee; one of Jeanne's many book illustrations; Saddleback Superstar.



(ABOVE): Jeanne driving Ledgewood Pecora.

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Jeanne's oil paintings, in particular, show an awareness of Stubbs's famed "Whistlejacket." They're not dissimilar! Look at any of the famous Sir Alfred Munnings's work, in particular highlights on flanks, incredible sunlit skies and the actual application of paint all have similarities. Rosa Bonheur's amazing "Horse Fair" captures a moment in such a dramatic fashion, and again this can be seen as influencing Jeanne's work too.

Whatever anyone thought of Jeanne's "romantic" artistic expression, no one can deny her true and complete knowledge of horse anatomy. This comes to the fore in her sketches in particular; every line drawn represents form and shape, structure, light, and shade. Every line drawn has a purpose. I personally think Jeanne's sketches highlight her real talent, they seem to have a truthfulness about them, a genuine honesty to them.

In whatever form Jeanne's artistic expression was shown it came from a deep love of her subject matter. Her intrinsic love and respect for horses are the most predominant factors when looking at any of her work. There's not been a Morgan horse artist yet who's neared Jeanne's accomplishments, her painting commissions read like a who's, who—Upwey Ben Don, Ulendon, Pecos, Waseeka's Nocture, Waseeka's In Command, Topfield's Janet, Lord Appleton, R Bar B Lord Spence, Vigilmarch, Mizrahi, and JW That Special Flaire to name a few—the list goes on. And, of course, there are

the ideal Morgan stallion and ideal Morgan mare paintings, for the American Morgan Horse Association no less!

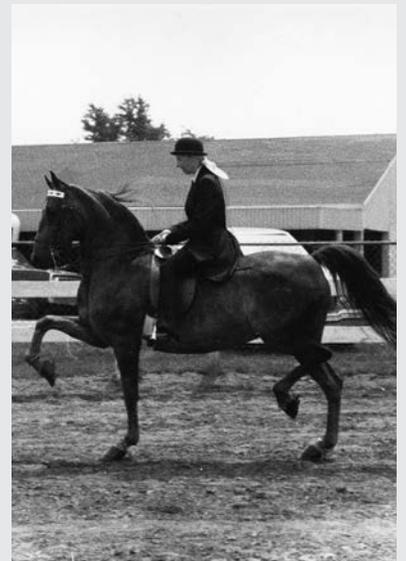
Jeanne wrote and illustrated several books over the years, initially illustrating books for her best friend Nancy Caffrey, (Fred and Jeanne's daughter is named after her) and then writing books herself. Her books include *The Morgan Horse*, *The Complete Morgan Horse*, *Morgan Horse Handbook*, *The Book of Horse & Horsemanship*, *Illustrated Horse Back Riding for Beginners*, *America's Own Horse Breeds*, *Horses Across the Ages* and *Ride a Horse*.

Jeanne also sculpted several Breyer Horses models including Friesan (1992); Misty's Twilight (1991); Pluto (1991); Roemer (1990); John Henry (1988); and Sherman Morgan (1987).

Additionally, Jeanne's work has entered the imaginations of young readers through the award winning childrens' books written by Ellen Feld. Jeanne's artwork illustrates this impressive series.

A modern day example of a progressive woman working within the horse industry, Jeanne was a hugely successful horsewoman in her own right. Showing and winning with such show ring greats as Trophy's Emerald, Saddleback Supreme, Applevale Challenger, Applevale Empress, Applevale Kinsman, Applevale Katonah, Elm Hill Charter Oak, and, of course, winning the ladies park harness class at the Eastern National, at least three times, with the famed mare of the era, Ledgewood Pecora. These horses were all trained by husband Fred.

Jeanne stood her ground uncompromisingly on equality for women in the horse show world. Just ask any competitor who went up against her in a workout, Jeanne did not give in to any sense that, at the time, it was a man's sport. She was simply a fierce competitor. Who could forget the workout between Bill Parker on



(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP): Jeanne with April's Choice; Saddleback Superstar; Trophy's Emerald; Jeanne and Fred Herrick riding in a pairs class; Applevale Challenger (Photos © Budd, Bob Moseder, D. Marsceill).

Houdini and Jeanne on Saddleback Supreme for the reserve spot in the 1981 East Coast Park Saddle Class? Annie Anderson had won on Topfield's Janet. I think there were 14 in the class. Jeanne and Bill went back on the rail to vie for the reserve spot, two different horses and, it might be said, different styles of horsemanship, both powering down the rail at each turn, it was fierce! Jeanne and "Supie" won out. It was memorable.

Jeanne had vim, vigor, attitude, and a real passion for what she

did. You couldn't help but get enthused by Jeanne—her magic was contagious! Jeanne will obviously live on through her work and, thankfully, because of those who knew and loved her, there are many, many amazing memories that will live on too. Thank you, Jeanne. ■

Author's Note: Thanks to all who helped source photos for this article: Heidi Osgood-Metcalf and Gene Fletcher—paintings and sketches; Judy Manchester-Vassie and Nancy Jeanne Herrick—equestrian photos.

JEANNE MELLIN HERRICK EXHIBIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE MORGAN HORSE

Jeanne Mellin Herrick: American Morgan Master; The history of the Morgan horse told through the art and words of one of the Morgan horse world's most inspiring advocates. Opening Friday, May 20, 2016, 6 p.m.; National Museum of the Morgan Horse, Main Street, Middlebury, Vermont. For more information, visit: www.morganhorse.com/museum/.