

≈ HISTORY LESSON ≈

Clark Ringling ALONE, SAVE FOR HIS MORGAN HORSES

*Clark Ringling bred Morgans for half a century in the remote high desert of Nevada.
His legacy is the respect of ranchers and Morgan breeders alike.*

A tall, rugged, and solitary individual with light brown hair and blue eyes, Roger Clark Ringling was born in 1886, in Phillipsburg, Montana, which began as a trading post and silver mining town in 1866. Phillipsburg was home to the Hope Mill, Montana's first silver mill. Little is known of

By Brenda L. Tippin

Clark's family or early life, other than his father, Frank Ringling, was a German immigrant, and his mother, Adelpia Ringling, was from Ohio. Clark was somehow related to the Ringling Brothers, and had a lifetime pass to the circus, although it is doubtful he ever used it.

Clark learned early the ways of ranching, farming, and hard

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Clark Ringling; Neighbor Bob Siard and Clark; Clark putting the iron to a calf at branding time (photos from the National Museum of the Morgan Horse).



LEFT TO RIGHT: Clark Ringling's house (photos from the National Museum of the Morgan Horse); Pleasant Valley earthquake scarp, Mt. Tobin, taken from near the area of Clark's Pleasant Valley Ranch, and similar to the view he had of the Mt. Tobin range (photo by R. E. Wallace, 1915, USGS Photo Library, Public Domain).

work. He grew up not far from the huge Morgan ranch of C. X. Larrabee, who established his Brook Nook Stock Ranch in Home Park, Madison County, Montana, which at one time exceeded 25,000 acres. Today, the main part of Brook Nook is the Snowcrest Ranch, owned by Ted Turner, second largest landholder in North America, and home to herds of bison. Larrabee also owned the smaller Ruby Dell Ranch, about 10 miles west of Brook Nook. On these ranches he raised the finest of trotting horses and had a herd of 200 of the best-bred Morgans, in addition to a large number of Standardbreds. As a boy, Clark was taken with Morgan horses, and they made a lasting impression on him. He left home at an early age, traveled to Oklahoma and Missouri to visit a brother who worked for the railroad, then traveled west, riding through Yellowstone National Park, and even spent a couple of years in Australia working at livestock stations.

Eventually he returned to America and the remarkable story of Clark Ringling's Morgan horses took place in the remote wilds of Nevada. There, Clark began in his early twenties to save what he could earn from Mustanging and working as a vaquero for various ranches. Finally, after several years, he had saved enough to purchase a small property with a tiny adobe dwelling near Kyle Springs in Pershing County where he chose to eke out his living in the high desert of one of the most remote and unforgiving areas the state afforded. This was located at the north end of the Stillwater Range, on a high plateau sheltered by mountains on either side, while overlooking the ranges below with a view that stretched for countless miles.

For ranch work in this unforgiving country, good using horses were a must. In the beginning, Clark's resources and funds were limited, but he was well informed and had not forgotten the Morgans of C. X. Larrabee, believing these were the ideal horses which would suit his needs. When Larrabee died in 1914 and his estate was up for auction, Clark was able to obtain some of the horses he so admired and would later claim that nearly all of

his horses traced back to Larrabee's breeding. Clark raised beef cattle and also grew his own hay and kept a small orchard. To accomplish his work, he began a painstaking program of breeding his own herd of registered Morgan horses, a process which would take years. He bred many but would only register those he intended to use for his own breeding program, or sell to other Morgan breeders. The majority were sold as unregistered working ranch horses.

After arriving in the rugged Nevada sagebrush country, the first horse he acquired to establish his breeding program was a Morgan mare he called Red Bessie, who was to become his foundation. She is listed in the pedigrees of later Morgans Clark registered as simply "of old California stock," but Clark specifically described her as "a good Morgan mare." When he referred to most of his horses tracing to C. X. Larrabee breeding, Red Bessie must have been the primary source.

Clark's goal was to start with the best mares he could and watch for an opportunity to participate in the Remount program which had begun in 1908. He bred Red Bessie to the best stallion he could find available in that remote region, a Saddlebred named Nevada Chief (Sterling Chief x Kate Henry), who carried Morgan crosses to Tom Hal, Copperbottom, Davy Crockett, Indian Chief, Black Hawk, and more. This cross produced the mare Flora MaGee, foaled about 1917. Clark then took time out to serve in World War I for a couple of years. It was another ten years before he was finally able to acquire the remount stallion, Dewey, and begin his Morgan breeding program in earnest.

By this time, Clark had been able to add a second ranch of 44 acres in Pleasant Valley, which lay in the 9,778-foot shadow of Mt. Tobin, one of the most prominent peaks in the state, and the highest mountain in the Tobin Range of Pershing County, Nevada. Interestingly, the Tobin Range bears a prominent 35-mile long fault scarp on its west slopes with vertical displacement of up to 19 feet, from the 1915 earthquake which at 7.3 magnitude

was the largest quake in Nevada history, with a damage radius of some 50 miles. Clark's second ranch, about 15 miles from the first, was situated in the treeless Nevada desert, in full view of this prominent scarp.

Mt. Tobin's slopes were also home to the Badger Mine, an early site for mercury mining, discovered in 1929. The region was dominated by sagebrush and juniper trees. Clark retained the Kyle Springs place for growing hay and for the small orchard he had planted. Both ranches were surrounded by public lands and were extremely remote, many miles from the conveniences or necessities of town, or even from any neighbor. Winters on the high desert were subject to bitter cold winds and drifting snow. To even survive year-round in such a place, much less to successfully raise livestock with no one to depend upon but himself year after year, surely provides a testimony to Clark's sheer grit and spartan spirit, and must have required meticulous planning in which there was no room for error.

Clark began his endeavor as Remount agent when he was finally able to acquire the stallion Dewey, a full brother to Bennington (General Gates x Mrs. Culvers), who had previously been used at the remount station in Montana. The requirements for remount horses mirrored his own. Over the years, his experience in using horses for rigorous work in the often steep, rocky, and brushy country on a daily basis had made him value the willing and always ready Morgan disposition above all else, with all other characteristics closely intertwined. In an article by Charles Roth interviewing Clark Ringling, first published in a Remount magazine called *The Horse* in 1936 and reprinted in the November-December 1942-January 1943 issue of *The Morgan Horse*, much of Clark Ringling's philosophy is revealed. He kept detailed notes on the temperament, conformation, and physical traits of all his horses, and his goal was to breed what he called endurance horses. By endurance he meant not simply for competitive rides, but literally a horse that would work all day and keep going. He based his conclusions at that time on 16 years of breeding 18 to 20 endurance colts a year, and tried them under all kinds of conditions, as well as handling all different breeds of horses for other men as well as himself, and concluded that horses with a predominance of Morgan blood were invariably the best. "What I like in a horse," he said, "is the ability to quietly keep putting one foot ahead of the other regardless of the footing or the distance ahead. To me that is the supreme test of a horse—endurance. So, all my experiments have been to the end of developing a horse that could keep going hour upon hour, and finish at the end of the day, head up, spirit undimmed."

Good feet and legs were essential; with a deep body and well-sprung ribs, powerful hindquarters, and broad chest with lots of room for lungs and heart. Clark paid special attention to the long, well-developed muscling on the lower part of the chest, attaching to the breastbone on one end and the upper arm at the other end. These muscles, he noted, support two-thirds of the weight of both horse and rider. A short, strong back with five lumbar vertebrae, wide in the loin, and good withers, well-shaped so a saddle would stay in place without constant adjusting or making the horse sore when riding all day in rugged country.

Clark was a large man, and firmly believed that size was important for the work he had to do. He weighed 190 pounds, so with saddle and gear, the horse would be carrying 240 to 250 pounds. Accordingly, his preference was to breed horses that would mature at 15½ to 15¾ hands tall and 1,100 to 1,250 pounds of hard muscle. He gave the mare Flora Magee as an example of this type, describing her as nearly 15¾ hands, 1,150 pounds, deep-chested with short broad back and blocky conformation, and still perfectly sound at 24 years of age. He recalled one winter having to go into Lovelock, a 55-mile trip from his ranch one way, and the roads were impassable by vehicle due to deep, heavy, wet snow. He started out on Flora Magee and made the trip to Lovelock and back in just 29 hours with four hours rest in Lovelock, for a total of 25 hours on the road. The mare's courage was fully equal to the occasion and she had recovered her full condition within two days.

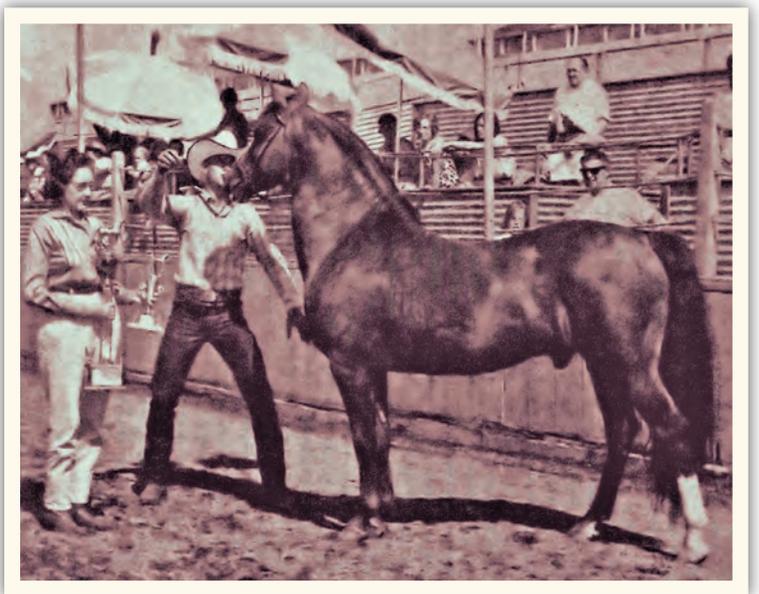
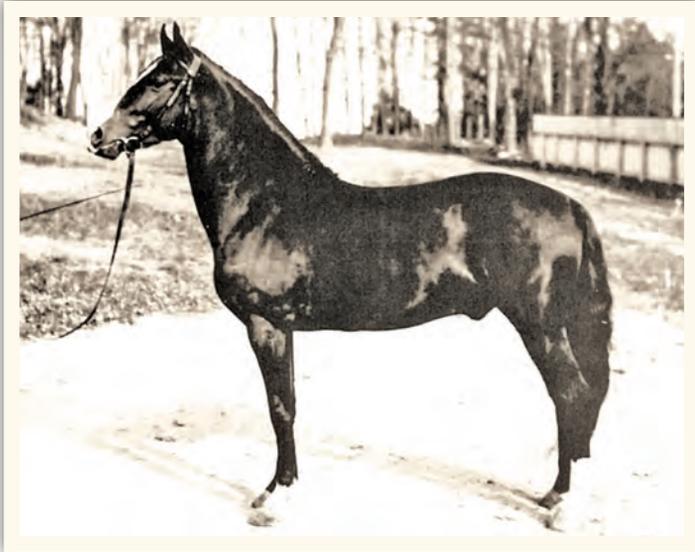
The Roth article goes on to state that Clark owned the original Larrabee Morgan stallion War Eagle and bred many fine colts from him. Unfortunately this horse was not registered and does not appear in the pedigrees of the 50 or so registered Morgans Clark bred.

In the February-March-April 1943 issue of *The Morgan Horse*, Clark wrote his further observations on the importance of disposition: "I have a few words to say in regard to disposition in horses. It has been shown to me on many occasions by a lot of horses, that if you don't get a horse with the right disposition, no matter how good his conformation, you still have not got a very satisfactory using horse. I could name many specific instances where this has been true. It is pretty hard to tell the true disposition of a stallion that has not been properly handled, but as for a broodmare—shun that flighty or cranky mare as if she were a plague for you are almost sure to get that kind of colt from her. While there are good horsemen that can handle them and get fairly satisfactory service from them, remember it is only a very small per cent of present-day users of horses that will qualify as good horsemen. If one buys a horse for pleasure use, it should be one that is a pleasure to use and not a temperamental brute that requires an expert to handle."

DEWEY

(General Gates x Mrs. Culvers)

A handsome, well-proportioned bay stallion marked with a stripe on the face and left front and both hind ankles white, Dewey was bred by the US Government Farm and foaled in 1910. A younger full brother of leading government sire Bennington, he was regarded by many as the better of the two so far as quality of Morgan type and conformation, although at 15¼ hands tall and 1,025 pounds he was a little smaller than Clark's ideal. His daughter, Dolly (x Nelly by Tommy), bred by the US Government Farm, placed 6th in the 1920 US Cavalry 5-day endurance test which involved a grueling 300-mile ride. Dewey was entered into the remount program and sent to North Carolina at six years of age. He later served as a remount stallion in Oregon and Montana before he was finally sent to Clark Ringling in 1927. Clark bred Flora to Dewey, and among her produce were two unregistered



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Dewey (General Gates x Mrs. Culvers by Harrison Chief), full brother to Bennington; Revere (Mansfield x Folly by Bennington); California King (Duke x Clovernette); Mr. America (California King x Bea Nickerson).

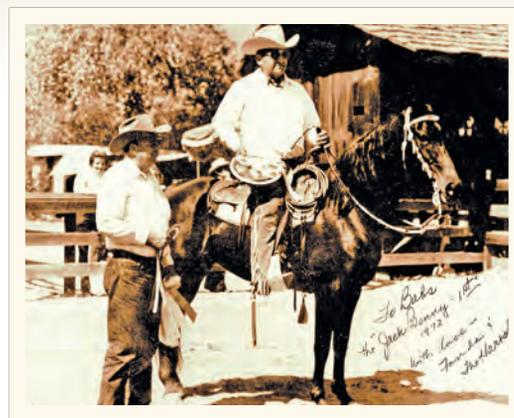
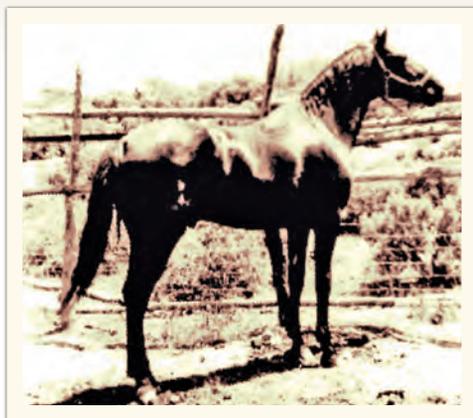
daughters named The Lovely One, foaled about 1926, and Vera, foaled about 1929. Clark called The Lovely One the best mare he had bred to date. He did not hesitate to breed her back to her sire, producing the registered mare Aneka Van Horn, a chestnut marked with an irregular blaze and both front and right hind ankles white. Clark kept her for breeding and she was the dam of five foals.

Flora, meanwhile, had earlier been bred to the Thoroughbred stallion Rifle Shooter, producing another daughter named Bessie, who was also bred to Dewey. This cross produced an unregistered black mare who also bred back to her sire to produce the registered mare Fanchon, a bay marked with left hind pastern and white hind heel. Clark retained her as well and she also produced five foals. Fanchon was Dewey's last registered foal, born in 1931. Altogether he produced 14 registered foals and an untold number

of unregistered. Clark Ringling alone was credited with breeding 82 colts from Dewey and was said to have kept 10 of his daughters but only two of these were registered. An unregistered double granddaughter of Dewey bred by Clark and sold to a neighboring rancher, Bernie Bowman, became famous as a top Mustanging mare. This mare had enough endurance and speed that Mr. Bowman was able to rope over 200 wild horses from her during a single summer and fall season. Whip, an unregistered son of Dewey bred by Clark, ran in quarter-mile races for three years and was never defeated, even while the newly formed Quarter Horse breed was rapidly gaining popularity.

REVERE
(Mansfield x Folly)

A bay stallion with a snip and both hind socks white, Revere was



LEFT TO RIGHT: Vanguard (Romax Light x Kitty Edna by Winterset); Bellhelen (Vanguard x Anneka Revere by Revere); Bab Verdugo and Fonda K R, 1st Jack Benny class, 1972.

bred by the US Government Farm and foaled in 1924. A son of Mansfield, the premier of all sires used by the government and bred from the golden Bennington x Artemisia cross, Revere's dam Folly was also a daughter of Bennington. His second dam, Polly B. was by Gillig, a son of Aristos by Daniel Lambert. Through his dam Gillig also traced to Engineer, son of Justin Morgan. The dam of Aristos brought in multiple additional crosses through Gifford, Black Hawk, and daughters of Justin Morgan. Norma, the 3rd dam of Revere, traced her sireline back through the famous Morgan trotting sire Seely's American Star whose sire, Coburn's American Star, and grandsire, Cock Of The Rock by Sherman Morgan, were both out of daughters of Justin Morgan. Norma also carried rare lines back to the old trotter St. Lawrence and to Tom Hal by Justin Morgan through old Pacing Pilot.

Revere was sent as a three-year-old to the US Range & Livestock Station in Miles City, Montana, to begin his career as a Remount stallion. From there, he went to W. J. Gardner in Ruby Valley, Nevada, and then Clark Ringling kept him from 1936 to 1940. After this, he served several other agents in Nevada, and finished his last Remount stint in Susanville, California, from 1944 to 1947. He sired 50 registered foals altogether. His daughter, Anneka Revere (x Anneka Van Horn), was another good mare Clark kept and was the dam of seven foals, including the stallion Ringling's Revere (x Revere) and the good mare Bellhelen (x Vanguard). Clark also kept the bay mare Star Ruby R (x Fanchon by Dewey), dam of four foals, and the chestnut mare Golden Revere (x Vera by Dewey), dam of two foals including Sunshine R (x Revere).

Another daughter Clark used was Brown Leaf R (x Fanchon by Dewey), dam of six foals including Van's Lady (x Vanguard), and bred back to her sire she produced the stallion Winnemucca. Winnemucca, the most influential son of Revere bred by Clark, was a dark bay stallion marked with a blaze extending to his nostrils, both hind socks, and right front sock white. Deep-bodied and muscular like his sire, he stood 15½ hands tall and weighed 1,150 pounds. Winnemucca was also one of the best-known registered Morgan stallions Clark sold. He was transferred as a yearling to W. T. Carter of Sanger, California, and later to

George Vierra of Turlock, California, winning Grand Champion Stock Horse Stallion against all breeds in Salt Lake City, Utah. He was the sire of Duke (x Roseta Cortez), who in turn sired the well-known California King (x Clovernette), sire of 84, who appears in numerous Western pedigrees, especially through the Impala and Windswept prefixes. California King also sired the popular black California stallion Mr. America (x Bea Nickerson) owned by Roy and Janie Coates, and sire of 51 offspring. As just one example, this line appears twice in the pedigree of Gerry Paiva's beautiful Grand Champion stallion Hijo De Valdez (Primavera Valdez x Kizan's Sonita) who won World Champion Western Trail Horse in 2017 and 2018, as well as multiple Grand National and world titles in Western Dressage and numerous championship titles in trail, Western dressage, reining, sport horse, and more at major shows up and down the West Coast.

Revere also bred on through his son Sunshine R (x Golden Revere [Revere x Vera]), another example of Clark's favorite pattern of breeding good mares back to their sire. Sunshine R was the sire of 17 foals and many descendants today may be found through his daughters, as well as through his son, Stormy H (x Gay Girl [Roosevelt x Del Rio by Revere]), sire of 81 offspring. Revere was known throughout the region as a top cow horse and roping horse, consistently passing on these abilities to his offspring.

VANGUARD

(Romax Light x Kitty Edna)

Clark's next stallion was Vanguard, a powerful black stallion marked with a small star, foaled in 1939. Vanguard was bred by and purchased from Robert Tynan of Nebraska. Vanguard's sire, Romax Light, was a son of Romanesque, out of Lemax by Sparhawk, and bred by Elmer Brown. This cross introduced some valuable lines into Clark's program for which he quickly gained deep respect. Romanesque was bred by Richard Sellman and represented the culmination of years of the Sellman breeding program. A son of the government bred stallion Red Oak (General Gates x Marguerite), his dam was the good mare Mariah K by Headlight Morgan (Peter's Ethan Allen 2d x Lady Stratton);

second dam Sweet Marie by The Admiral (Jubilee De Jarnette x Morrill Queen); 3d dam Sweetheart by Gold Medal (Meteor Jr. x mare by General Lee); 4th dam Nell Gordon by Major Gordon, son of Young Octoroon (Octoroon x mare by Old Joe Brown).

Kitty Edna, the dam of Vanguard, was a daughter of the typey and powerfully built stallion Winterset (Captain Jack x Judea by Prince Herod). These lines were rich in the blood of Black Hawk, Golddust, and Woodward's Ethan Allen, full brother to Daniel Lambert. Vanguard's second dam was Jay, a daughter of St. L (Rancho x Ben's Daisy), tracing her rare sireline through the old trotter St. Lawrence, back to the Hawkins Horse, son of Justin Morgan. Jay's dam, Ben's Daisy (Ben Franklin x Daisy) represented classic Brunk breeding. Vanguard's 3d dam, Tony (Morgan King x Black Beauty by Fred Hudson) was intensely bred with numerous lines to Black Hawk as well as rare lines to old Gifford and Billy Root.

Of Vanguard, Clark wrote: "The young stud Vanguard, which I bought one and a half years ago in Nebraska—his first crop of colts are here. They are a fine lot. They have ample size and bone and colts never stood on better legs. It looks like I had a real stud in him... He also is a real saddle horse" (*The Morgan Horse*, May-June 1942).

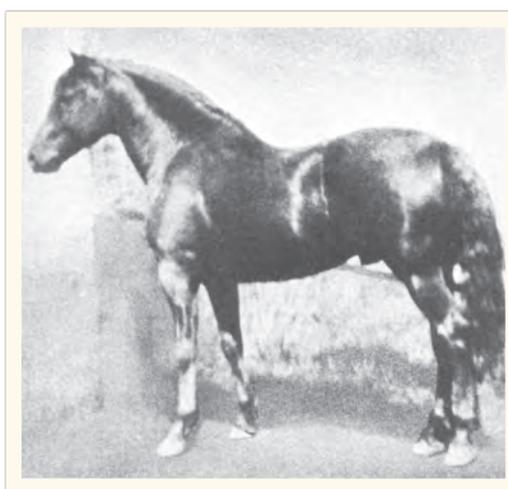
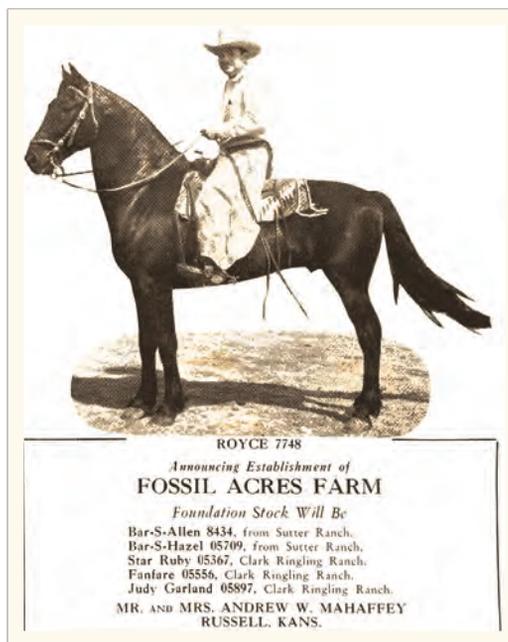
Vanguard sired just 13 registered offspring, all bred by Clark. Among these were the mares Bellhelen (x Anneka Revere) and Van's Lady (x Brown Leaf R), influential in Clark's later breeding. Van's Lady was the dam of six foals, including the excellent producer Royce's Falcon (x Royce), a brown mare with star and snip bred by Clark Ringling and foaled in 1943. She was the dam of 14 foals, among them the lovely mare Fonda K R (x Kings River Morgan), bred by W. T. Carter, owned by the Harrods, and trained and shown by the old-time vaquero Bab Verdugo. Royce's Falcon also produced the great sire Farceur Morgan, a full brother to Fonda K R. Owned by the Hazelwoods, Farceur Morgan was the sire of 70 foals and was the broodmare sire of Nancy Hazelwood Savage's famous sooty chocolate palomino, Farceur's Fools Gold, who later went to Sweden. This line also continues through Farceur Morgan's later sons A Midnight Special (x Richwood G D Marj) and Hot Creek Cavalier (x Hot Creek Miss Minnie).

ROYCE

(Winterset x Potena)

A muscular black Morgan stallion of 15¼ hands and 1,075 pounds, Royce was bred by Thomas C. Doak of Osceola, Iowa, and foaled in 1940. Clark purchased him from Andrew Mahaffey of Russell, Kansas, in 1943, a deal he wanted badly enough to trade two of his good mares and a filly for. He admired the Winterset blood behind Vanguard so much he wanted more of it and would never again be without it. He was deeply impressed with the intense Black Hawk breeding behind these lines, and along with this, he also developed a preference for black horses. Mr. Mahaffey was reluctant to sell Royce, but felt the horse would have an exceptional opportunity in Clark's hands that was too good to pass up. He also badly wanted some of Clark's mares which he otherwise was unwilling to sell. The deal was completed with the trade of the 1936 mare Star Ruby R (Revere x Fanchon), her 1940 full sister Fanfair R, and the 1942 yearling filly Judy Garland (Vanguard x Red Falcon R).

Mr. Mahaffey had this to say about Royce: "He has style and I would say more sparkle under saddle than any horse it has been my pleasure to see. He has wonderful wind and endurance, his feet are tough, black, and what I call mule feet. He never needs shoes in the toughest going. He has the heart and willingness to try anything that he is asked to do... Roping, polo, snubbing young horses, all came his way after he was ten years old, but he didn't have to learn, we just asked him to do it and he did."



TOP TO BOTTOM: Farceur Morgan (King's River Morgan x Royce's Falcon); The Mahaffey's 1943 advertisement featuring Royce and mares acquired from Clark Ringling; Winterset.

HISTORY LESSON *≈ Clark Ringling*

In May 1947, Clark wrote to *The Morgan Horse*, “I am enclosing some pictures of my old stallion Royce 7748. He has many of the virtues and not too many of the faults of a good Morgan. His colts are of such disposition that if they could talk they would probably say, ‘just tell us what you want us to do and we will do it.’”

Royce was the sire of 19 offspring, 12 of which were bred by Clark. His primary influence among registered Morgans was through the mare Royce’s Falcon, already mentioned. His daughter, Kitty Royce (x Brown Leaf R) was the dam of four foals but none of them bred on.

BLACK WINTER (Flyhawk x Midnight Beauty)

A coal black stallion who matured at 15¾ hands tall and 1,200 pounds, Black Winter was the last stallion used by Clark. Black Winter was not only Clark’s pride and joy but the ideal of all he was trying to produce. Foaled in Belloit, Wisconsin, in 1946, he was originally named Nighthawk and was bred by George Garrigan. Clark, still enamored with the Winterset blood and intense Black Hawk breeding, chose to rename him Black Winter in order to emphasize this. Black Winter’s dam, Midnight Beauty, was a full sister of Royce. Flyhawk (Go Hawk x Florette) was not only a masterful example of Brunk breeding, but also carried rich Black Hawk lines through his sire, Go Hawk.

It is also worth noting that Potena, the dam of Midnight Beauty and Royce, was a daughter of Morgan Star, grandsire of Go Hawk. This line traced to Black Hawk through his little-known son, Benedict’s Pathfinder. A large, handsome horse standing 15¾ hands tall and weighing 1,100 pounds, Benedict’s Pathfinder was black or dark bay in color and marked with a large star. He won Grand Champion Stallion at the New York State Fair in 1856, as well as the Oneida County Fair in both 1856 and 1857. Although never trained he had a natural trotting speed of 2:40 and his stock were known for both speed and endurance.

Morgan Star’s sire, Goldfinder, was out of the mare Lucy Goss by Vermont Hero, a son of Sherman Black Hawk. Black with white heels and a little white in his face, Vermont Hero was an imposing horse at 16 hands and weighed 1,150 pounds. He was the sire of General Knox who also appeared in Flyhawk’s pedigree behind Knox Morgan. Thistle, the dam of Morgan Star, was the highly regarded dam of Star Of The West by the Black Hawk son Jackson’s Flying Cloud. Star Of The West was a handsome, black, 15½ hands tall and 1,050 pounds, who trotted all over the United States from the Atlantic to the Pacific for 17 years, developing a formidable reputation for speed and endurance and a race record of 2:26½. He was said to be the sire of more fast trotters than any other stallion in Iowa. Fandango, the second dam of Morgan Star, traced to Webber’s Tom Thumb, a son of Sherman Morgan who was reputed to have trotted a race of ten miles in 29 minutes. Lady Westlake, the third dam of Morgan Star, was a daughter of the Black Hawk son Tom Hyer, who made a name for himself at the Iowa State Fair by setting a record of 2:28, and winning Grand Champion Stallion in 1857, champion roadster for three consecutive years between 1861 and 1863, and Grand Champion

Trotting Stallion in 1864.

Hebrona Morgan, the dam of Potena and third dam of Black Winter, traced her sireline to Billy Root with an additional rare cross through the Ethan Allen son Panic. Through her dam she traced to Herod and to Golddust. These lines were concentrated in Black Winter through both his sire and dam, and further intensified when Clark bred Black Winter to his mares who carried Winterset blood through both Royce and Vanguard. It is also interesting to note that Winterset, the sire of Royce and Midnight Beauty and of Vanguard’s dam Kitty Edna, represented more than five generations of breeding efforts by the Royce family, dating back nearly a hundred years. Winterset also carried half a dozen close crosses to Woodward’s Ethan Allen, the lesser known full brother of Daniel Lambert. In addition to Royce and Midnight Beauty, Potena was the dam of three other full siblings by Winterset, at least two of whom were also very influential in Morgan pedigrees. The notable family of Red Correll (Will x Kate Smith), valued among sport horse breeders, is among those tracing to these lines.

In addition to *The Morgan Horse* and other livestock journals, Clark also owned a set of Morgan Registry volumes, which he carefully studied when he had spare time. In a letter to *The Morgan Horse*, February 1950, he wrote, “I believe this young stallion Black Winter carries as high a per cent of Black Hawk blood as any other horse living today.” Clark was convinced not only by what he could see on paper in tracing back the pedigrees of these horses, but his detailed notes on each of his horses provided him valuable documentation of the results he could see firsthand in working with these horses on a daily basis. In the final stages of his breeding program, he had succeeded in producing solid and reliable endurance horses, which also carried a very high percentage of Black Hawk blood. More than 125 years later and armed with a remarkable likeness to the original Black Hawk, Black Winter sired ten registered offspring, all bred by Clark. After another year had passed, he wrote to *The Morgan Horse* again in February 1951, saying “I try to breed them big and strong, and with unquestioned good temper, able and willing to do the work required of horses in this country. For several years now I have not had a stud colt left on my ranch after he was old enough to wean. They have all gone to cattlemen to sire cow horses on their ranches.” Although most of these horses were never registered, they were ambassadors for the Morgan breed just the same, and highly respected by the ranchers who owned them.

CLARK RINGLING’S PHILOSOPHY

The harsh life on the Nevada desert would eventually take its toll on Clark, although one wonders how he managed for half a century with nothing but one day of hard work following another and only his horses for companionship. Year after year, Clark took all Mother Nature could throw at him, from the greatest earthquake in the state’s history in 1915, until the bitter winter of 1948. He almost seemed to enjoy pitting himself against the elements and little else mattered as long as he had his Morgans. The 1915 earthquake damaged or destroyed many buildings for miles around and offset stretches of fence line by several feet. If Clark suffered any damage from this early event, he did not



LEFT TO RIGHT: Clark Ringling with Black Winter and Partnership (photo from the National Museum of the Morgan Horse).

mention it, but would have quietly taken stock and repaired or rebuilt as needed. Clark's tiny holdings of 56 acres between his two ranches were dwarfed by the surrounding miles and miles of public lands and widely scattered vast cattle and sheep ranches, most of which were a thousand acres or more. It was often a minimum of two weeks and many times even longer between his contacts with other humans.

Nevertheless, he gained the respect of his neighbors far and wide for the quality of the horses he raised. Reading *The Morgan Horse*, *Western Horseman*, *Western Livestock Journal*, and a few other stockmen's publications to which he regularly subscribed was both his sole source of entertainment as well as a valued source of information. He wasn't shy about sharing his opinions, and his letters to *The Morgan Horse* were often published. In 1949, Clark wrote to *The Morgan Horse* about an exceptionally frigid winter they had just passed through in his area. "Many people were not prepared for it, the main reason being: It has been twelve years since we have had as bad a winter and a lot of stockmen seemed to have forgotten how bad they could be and had built up their herds beyond their capacity to feed them when it got really tough. I learned it many years ago—learned it the hard way by going broke. Since then I have never gone into the winter without hay enough to feed—come what may. Cattle and horses can stand any kind of weather IF they have a belly full of good alfalfa hay. It is the poor and hungry ones that freeze. The mercury went to 46° below here in the valley." —*The Morgan Horse*, June 1949.

Throughout the years, in addition to raising 18 to 20 foals a year of his own breeding, Clark worked with and trained horses of all breeds for other people which gave him ample opportunity to study differences in temperament, keeping qualities, endurance ability, and points of conformation. As he made these observations he also slightly modified his views. Early in his breeding program he had followed the practice of the US Government Farm, keeping to a strong Morgan sire line with a few judicious crosses of Saddlebred or Thoroughbred blood

in the mares. This, he believed, helped to increase the size and endurance qualities he was trying to build. However, beginning with the stallion Vanguard, he was seeing these qualities without any of the outcrosses.

After *The Morgan Horse* magazine was established in October 1941 it was only a few months before the subject of a half-Morgan registry became a hotly debated topic. In the May-June 1942 issue of *The Morgan Horse* Clark wrote, "Any line of breeding that breeds away from the Morgan horse I do not wish to see. For instance, breeding a registered Morgan mare to other than a Morgan stallion." Then he added, "I favor some sort of provision for keeping records of the female produce of registered Morgan stallions until such time as the breeder has added enough top crosses of Morgan blood that the fillies can be given Morgan registry. And no stallion should be registered that has not both sire and dam registered." This varied somewhat from his earlier views in which he particularly valued Dewey for the Saddlebred blood of Harrison Chief through his unregistered dam. However, Dewey had been bred more than 30 years earlier, and he also felt the breed registry had been established sufficiently that further addition of outside blood, especially through the stallions, would take away from the strength of the breed. The gradual changes in his views also paralleled the progression of his own breeding program. Where originally he had started out with part-bred mares and felt that horses of mostly Morgan blood with some outcrosses made better endurance horses than the purebred, the solid breeding of his later stallions who had none of those outcrosses made him believe more and more firmly that pure undiluted Morgan bloodlines yielded the best results.

It would seem that Clark's tiny ranches, dwarfed by neighboring outfits, could hardly be worth the efforts of battling the elements year after year in that unforgiving country, and one might expect it to be nearly impossible to find a market for the horses he raised. Yet he did. All the work of caring for the livestock, feeding, doctoring, shoeing, delivering calves and foals, training,

HISTORY LESSON *≈ Clark Ringling*

and selling his own horses, as well as training stock for many other ranchers, mending fences, digging wells, haying, and more, he did himself. According to the research of Robert Manley, Clark used a team of his Morgans to power a well-drilling rig to dig the wells at his Pleasant Valley Ranch, and then erected windmills to bring the water up for his livestock and irrigate his crops. There was no veterinarian or farrier within miles. He had no electricity, no indoor plumbing, and no telephone. The only means he had of spreading word about his horses was by mail, which he collected once or twice a month; occasional ads in *The Morgan Horse* and other journals; and by word of mouth. The Great Depression sandwiched between two World Wars, and finally followed by the Korean War dominated the lean years of his breeding program, but this did not deter his efforts. The fact he was able to sell as many as 20 colts a year for decades from such an isolated place speaks volumes for the quality of the horses he raised. A number of horses he raised were selected for use by the US Cavalry. Later in life, when traveling through a Midwestern city, he recognized a horse he had bred serving as a police horse. If there had been any doubt, his own Rocking R brand—the letter R set upon a quarter circle—upon the left shoulder was indisputable proof the horse was one he had bred.

Of all the horses Clark bred over the years he only registered 53 Morgans, his last being the stallion Royce Winter (Black Winter x Kitty Royce by Royce), foaled in 1953. The Morgans he had registered found their way into many states and Canada. However, his health was beginning to fail and he was not able to continue. Over the next few years, he sold his remaining horses and livestock, and in 1961, finally sold his little ranches and went to live with family in Colorado. Clark was suffering from cancer and had already lost an eye. He kept one of the last mares he bred which he nicknamed Pardnership. Which mare this was is not known, but it seems likely he would have kept one which reflected the culmination of his breeding efforts and carried the blood of all the stallions he had used. Just two daughters of Black Winter

he had registered fit this description, Sue Winter and Winter Seal, both out of Kitty Royce by Royce. Given his preference for black in later years, it may have been Sue Winter. Clark finally died of the cancer in 1969 at 83 years of age, having made a remarkable contribution in spite of limited resources. It is a legacy still valued by many Morgan breeders today. ■

RESOURCES

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