

The Colonial Williamsburg
ANIMAL NEWS

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INJURED SHEEP RECOVERING

The five sheep injured by dogs February 24 are all finally on the road to recovery, three having been turned back out in the pasture, two still being kept at the main stable at least another two months for treatment.

Beltane, the most seriously injured of all, is out of danger, but his worst wound will take a long time to heal. His ears were ripped off and his neck very deeply and badly chewed. Dr. Steve Chapman did his best to graft skin onto the gaping neck wound. This operation failed. Since there is no way to stitch this type of injury, it is open and there is still danger of infection. Until it heals he will stay at the main stable for continuing care and medication.

During his convalescence he will be kept company by Quentin, who had all of his legs very badly bitten. For some time Quentin could not stand up. A sling was built to hold him up during the day and a sort of physical therapy started. He was carefully walked between two people who held him up with broad nylon straps looped around his body so he could begin to use his legs again. The "physical therapists" looked rather like two travelers struggling to carry an oversized wooly suitcase. Now he no longer needs the sling and gets up and down by himself. He gets his exercise, but takes it more like a sheep than a suitcase. Quentin will likely be ready to go back to the pasture before Beltane, but he'll stay with Beltane to keep him company.

Polly (who had one bite requiring stitches), Bobby (who suffered cuts, bruises, and hypothermia), and Hannibal (who was bitten in several places) were kept in the main stable a week or more for treatment. They all have returned to the flock.

A total of eight hours of surgery and suturing were required to try and repair the damage to the five sheep. Many more hours have been spent caring for them day after day. It is sad to watch their wool fall out in big clumps as a result of shock.

NEW HORSES ON THE STREET

Three new horses started work last month. One pair, Mel and Molly, are sorrel with flax manes and tails, and white markings. Mel has 2 white legs and a stripe down his face. Molly has 4 white legs and a wider blaze on her face. They are both old enough to vote. Which is good -- seasoned professionals are preferred for our colonial streets.

They were purchased from a gentleman in The Plains, Va., who used them in a carriage ride business.

Mel and Molly have good experience. But nothing else in the world equals our crowds, guns, buses, and fifes and drums. Besides that, you must be nice when you're told your nose is "as soft as velvet" for the ten thousandth time in a day. So our new pair will be given a good chance to show their suitability to our working environment.

The third new horse is Jake. He is a black percheron type, 10 years old, and was purchased from a gentleman in Maryland. Jake's resume includes work on city streets, but only as a single horse. Hopefully he will be a good partner for our long-time employee, Suzie, and together they will pull the stage wagon.

Jake, too, will be given time to adjust to working as part of a pair and tested in our particular conditions.



OX OPERATION

Willie, the ox, recently had a large tumor removed from under his jaw by vet, Gary Doxtater. The tumor has been sent to a lab to be analyzed. Willie's recovery from this operation has been uncomplicated.

Willie's partner, Waylon, has received medication for his thyroid problem all winter long and, so far, its effects look promising.

We are hopeful that Waylon and Willie will be able to get back to giving rides to the kids.

LAMBING TIME SCOREBOARD

All five expecting ewes have produced healthy half-Leicester offspring fathered by the late Willoughby: Glenda - boy, Arthur; Penny - girl, Duchess Diana of Lyndonberg; Patience - boy, Richard; Rachal - TWINS! boy and girl, unnamed; Constance - TWINS! two boys, Romulus and Remus.

JOE JONES -- THE RIGHT STUFF

Joe Jones, head coachman, has more of the Right Stuff than any of those Top Guns. Those fly boys have jet plane F-whatevers that respond to a switch or button. Jet planes do what they are made to do and have no emotions. Horses are different. Horses often react according to very strong instinctive emotions. Let's explain the difference between horses and airplanes this way: You are sitting on a plane waiting to take off and the pilot announces,

"This is the captain speaking. Our flight will be delayed for an indeterminate period. The plane is afraid to go down the runway."

That's a silly scenario, but it is not unusual for a horse to refuse to go down a familiar path because he sees something that scares him. When the paths are unfamiliar and the objects along them new, it takes a driver with the Right Stuff to make horses feel comfortable and safely learn their new surroundings.

Joe Jones is responsible for training new horses, introducing them to our Historic Area, and judging their suitability for the job of giving carriage rides.

Sure, the horses we choose are already broken to drive, but our situation is unique. They must accept loud noises, crowds, skate boards, and more. A steady confident driver helps new horses overcome their natural timidity in strange surroundings.

You can tell at a glance when Joe is training on the street. He will be driving one of our two training vehicles. We have a yellow carriage-without-a-body called a skeleton break. It's the kind of vehicle you can crash without hurting it much. We also have a small dark green 4-wheeled carriage called a dog cart.

If you see either of these vehicles you can almost be sure Joe has some brand new employees to drive. Be careful of these horses. Don't run in front of them or get behind the carriage, even if they are tied up. If visitors close by you are about to do something you think may frighten the horses, warn these visitors of the danger, if you can -- especially if it's happening where Joe cannot see it. This might include skateboard riders, soccer players, loose dogs not at heel, kids with cap guns, or something we haven't even thought of.

Always remember horses are naturally timid creatures. Even those who have pulled carriages for us several years, and have never once seemed scared of anything, can be frightened.

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?

Please write to: Animal Editor, MHW. Colonial Williamsburg Animal News is published by Coach and Livestock Operations, Historic Trades Department. Kay Williams, Editor; Richard Nicoll, Manager.



POULTRY PROGRAM UPDATE

by Richard Powell

The key to successful poultry breeding is early planning, so the focus of our winter activities was preparation for summer production goals. We began by replacing the open rearing pen at the stable with a fully enclosed breeding cage divided into three separate runs for controlled matings. We built a number of portable houses to improve sanitation and facilitate egg collection. Other projects included construction of a small brooder, isolation pens, and other minor items.

Donations from various sources contributed to the program's progress. In December a noted poultry breeder gave us a set of Dominique chickens, now on display in the Powell pen, to expand our work with the American Minor Breeds Conservancy. Virginia poultry enthusiasts have provided guinea fowl for release at Carter's Grove, and authentic fighting game birds for display at the Windmill site. In addition, the recent donation of a modern battery brooder unit will complement the department's purchase of an automated incubator.

Spring chick production will aim at replacement of birds used or lost during the year, and maintenance of several eighteenth-century varieties for exhibition in town. We are experimenting with hybrids for use at the Carter's Grove slave quarter, and hope to release additional birds to establish a self-perpetuating feral flock in that area. Geese, guineas, and turkeys are being considered in long-term planning for lots from the Palace to the Grove.

We are researching aspects of colonial poultry husbandry for incorporation in our livestock interpretations. Particular attention will be given to housing, cockfighting, and the people who raised poultry, as these topics occasionally arise during discussions with visitors.

GERVASE MARKHAM ON CHICKENS

"The best time to set Hennes to have the best, largest, and most kindly Chickens, is in February . . . , so that she may hatch or disclose her Chickens . . . in March, for one brood of March Chickens is worth three broods of any other."

from - Cheape and Goode Husbandry
1614

