

Much of the following article originated from: <http://www.cvm.missouri.edu/org/muleclub/>

# THE MISSOURI MULE

For Missouri, the mule is the embodiment of a living, breathing - kicking - connection with a rich cultural heritage, a bridge that spans centuries. Seemed like an appropriate "mascot" for our **2007 Show-Me Tour: Excellence in Dementia Care.**

According to tradition, in 1822, William Becknell of Howard County led the first trading party over the Santa Fe Trail and returned with a herd of Mexican mules and donkeys. Missouri breeders, quick to recognize the need for a hardy animal to endure the rigors of the 900-mile journey, developed the large, intelligent draft mule that efficiently pulled the wagons west. By 1840, the mule industry flourished, and Missouri, the "jumping-off" place, funneled hundreds of thousands of pioneers to the great frontier.

Missourians promoted mule power all across the country - to the Cotton Belt and America's developing lead, coal and logging industries. Consequently, in 1870, Missouri emerged as the largest mule-holding state in the United States.

As the foundation of the nation's commerce, Missouri mule production gained a reputation for quality. The typical Missouri Mule is a cross between a mare (female horse) of a draft breed and a mammoth jack (male donkey). This cross produces a stout, strong animal that is more easily managed and more agile than his draft horse cousins. The state's major mule centers supplied both domestic and foreign markets; moreover, the firm of Guyton and Harrington, headquarters in Lathrop, won an exclusive contract with the British Army to provide over 350,000 Missouri mules and horses for service in World War I. Missouri mules also served the U.S. Army in World War II. *Photo to the left: President Harry S. Truman at the Missouri State Fair with the State Champion team. c1955.*



The mule's story is the history of rural life and the family farm. At one time 45 percent of Missouri farmers were involved in the use or breeding of mules. With \$700 as the average farm income at the turn of the [20th] century, mules offered the farmer an opportunity for economic growth. But eventually, new technology diminished the mule's dominance, and, by 1940, the tractor had driven the mule off the farmland and out of the marketplace.

Still, the mule is not gone from our state. Mules and Missouri will always be synonymous; especially thanks to Governor Mel Carnahan who signed the bill officially documenting the mule as Missouri's State Animal.

The modern use of mules is chiefly recreational. Professor Melvin Bradley, an enthusiast who has researched the mule's legacy, affirms, "They farmed our land, hauled our lumber, drained our swamps, took us to church and war. Now we're having fun with them."

*Information on the above listed website was obtained from:*

*Alive and Kicking. c1988. Missouri Mule History Project, Records. 1980-1993.*

*Bradley, Melvin; The Missouri Mule: His Origin and Times. Curators of the University of Missouri. Columbia, MO. 1993.*