

# What do you think would be the most popular mule name?

*Useful and economical creatures were once a big part of life in area*

One of the many New Deal programs initiated during the Great Depression was the Production Credit Association (PCA) set up in 1934. Farmers could borrow money from the federal government for short terms at much lower rates than banks offered.

Farming is a risky business, and the banks, which had far higher rates than PCA, had traditionally required a mortgage on the entire farm. One poor crop year caused many a farmer to lose his land.

PCA allowed farmers to mortgage their mules and horses at about the same rates that they had formerly mortgaged the whole farm. The mortgages were handled by the clerk of court in each county. The clerk entered the name of the mule or horse in the records.

A.M. Grist, the editor of the Yorkville Enquirer, was intrigued

## NEARBY HISTORY

Louise Pettus



by all this. All his life he had been fascinated by the names farmers gave their work animals. He remembered a poem about a mule named Maude and thought that might be the most common name.

Grist found 125 mules and three horses had been registered. He copied all the names and found that Kate led in number with eight mules.

Pet was the second choice with seven, followed by Mary (six) and four each named Daisy, Ida, Henry and Rhoda. There were 3 Maudes. The horses were named Polly, Dan and Crowy.

The editor didn't want people to think him frivolous (indeed, they might have for the story was on the front page). Tongue in cheek, no doubt, Grist went on to explain that his study was of a "very important social element in York County after the fashion of modern social service workers,

economists, and other statisticians." He also wanted his readers to know that his study of mule names was done without any aid from the federal government and that he did not anticipate an appointment by any government organization. Grist concluded that his study was a "labor of love."

Nowadays, mules are not so commonly seen, but in 1934, on most any day and especially on Saturdays, mules pulling wagons or carts could easily be found on the streets of all the towns around this area.

Census takers recorded the number of mules and horses (but not their names) owned by each household.

According to agricultural histories, mules were introduced to America right after the Revolutionary War when the king of Spain sent a Maltese Jack as a gift to George Washington. S.C. histories credit Gov. David R. Williamson with introducing mules for field work in this state in 1804.

There were many reasons farmers preferred mules to horses for field work. The mule required less grain than horses

when working. Mules matured earlier and lived longer. They were less prone to disease. They were not as easily frightened as horses and thus less likely to bolt and run. Mules were less likely to step on cotton and corn when pulling a plow.

For many years mule breeders in Kentucky and Tennessee would bring herds of mules by foot over the mountains to sell them in the Carolinas. Over time, certain sites became known as centers for mule trade.

John Rosser, a native of Indian Land in Lancaster County, when in his 70s, wrote that as a child in the 1820s and '30s, he witnessed a large market set up on the old Revolutionary War campgrounds of Gen. Thomas Sumter on Clems Branch.

Farmers came to the campground from all over central Carolina to buy mules.

Mules were an important element of South Carolina's economy. Savvy mule buyers always checked the mule's teeth to determine its age. Older mules were "long in tooth." There was even an S.C. law making it illegal to file down a mule's teeth.