



# THE CRITICAL STATUS OF THE SHIRE HORSE IN CANADA

## A BRIEF HISTORY

It is over 127 years now since the incorporation of the Canadian Shire Horse Association in 1888. It was only ten years earlier, in 1878, that the English Cart Horse Society (which later became the Shire Horse Society) had been formed in the breed's homeland.

The first stud book published in Canada, Volume I, was printed in 1901. Farmer's Glory, the first entry in Volume 1, was an imported stallion who had been foaled in England in 1848. Volume II of the CSHA stud book was printed in 1909, and Volume III in 1914. Volume IV was never completed, but the last entry recorded by Canadian National Livestock Records was a Canadian bred mare, Berry Creek Lucille, was foaled in 1941, and registered in 1946.

Shires were the dominant draft horse breed in England. At the 25th annual show of the English Shire Horse Society, which was held at Agriculture Hall in London in 1904, 862 horses were entered. 121 head competed in both the two and three year old stallion classes. Volume 31 of the SHS stud book, published in 1910, lists a total of 1086 new stallions, and 3604 new mares.

Although the Percheron dominated the draft horse scene in the United States for many years, the Shire stood second to them for a respectable period of time. In 1909, of the 677 Shires which had been exported from England, 466 went to the United States, while 107 came to Canada, and the remainder were divided up between eight other countries.

Here in Canada, one of the larger breeders from earlier years was J.W. Forster who settled on Berry Creek, north of the Red Deer River in Alberta. Mr. Forster and his sons imported six mares and a stallion from England in 1904, and by 1918 their numbers had

increased to seventy five head of registered Shires. They also owned 250 head of grade Shires and Percherons at the time.

In the early 1920s, the Shire Horse Society undertook a campaign to promote the breed in Canada. After a couple of years, the Society concluded that the money they had been spending was proving ineffective, and decided to try a different approach. A committee of three were instructed to purchase five horses to be presented as a gift to the Canadian government. An additional stallion was donated, making for a total of six horses to be gifted.

Unfortunately, most of these horses were lost to illness and other tragic circumstances within two to three years after their arrival in Canada. They did succeed however, in demonstrating that there were excellent animals within the breed. A few respected horsemen affiliated with the other draft breeds were quoted in various newspapers of the time as saying that the gift horses were some of the most outstanding horses they had ever seen.

The years following World War II were discouraging for horsemen and women everywhere. Despite a brief rally which had taken place during the war years, the onset of mechanization meant the demise of a countless number of horses. No matter their location, or respective breed, draft horse associations and societies entered their most trying times, and some of them even ceased to exist for a while.

On July 30, 1984, the CSHA held their first national meeting in over 40 years, in Calgary. The dormant CSHA constitution from 1933 was reviewed and amended, and was later officially approved on December 31, 1985.





*Metherringham Upton Tara, imported from England in 2013 by Dale and Maxine Campbell of Dawson Creek, B.C.*



*Gladwin Janie, owned and exhibited by Gord & Fay Campbell of Fawcett, Alberta.*



*Gentle Giant Rolex, owned and exhibited by Blake & Fran Anderson of Didsbury, Alberta.*



*Westwind Frances Anne, owned by Kim Smith of Burlington, Ontario.*



*Manor Mac T, imported from England in 2013 by Dale and Maxine Campbell of Dawson Creek, B.C.*



*Windcharger Duke, owned by Lindsay LaRiviere of Stony Plain, Alberta.*



## NOTABLE BREEDERS

In 1980, Blake and Fran Anderson of Gentle Giant Shires, now of Didsbury, Alberta, bought their first Shire stallion, Ox Kill King, who had been imported in dam. At that time, there were only two Shires in all of Canada. The following year, the Anderson's went to England, where they traveled for many miles and selected five mares. They returned to England in 1982, once again choosing and importing five mares.

Fernand Barsalou of Quebec also imported 5 mares from England in 1981, and Cliff Kelsey of Alberta purchased two mares in the United States.

Both Blake and Fran have served terms as directors of the CSHA. Fran was secretary for 8 years, has been the CSHA Registrar since 2006, and has also been the CSHA Newsletter Editor since 2011.

Dale and Maxine Campbell own and operate Windcharger Heritage Farm Ltd, located on the Alaska Highway, just outside of Dawson Creek, B.C. Dale has owned and promoted rare breed livestock, and in 2006, purchased his first Shire.

In 2010, Dale and Maxine imported two weanlings and a yearling from England. In 2013, they imported the stallion, Manor Mac T, and a yearling filly, Metherringham Upton Tara (both pictured in this article). There are now over 20 Shires in residence at the Campbells.

Lindsay LaRiviere of LaRiviere Farms at Stony Plain, Alberta, is the current CSHA President. He owns about 10 Shires, and has served the CSHA as a Director, Vice-President, or President, several times over the past 12 years. Four years before he started breeding Shires in 2002, he entered his son Zephrein in the 4-H Draft Horse program with a young team of Shire geldings, and has been an avid supporter ever since. After 4-H, Zephrein studied

under Brian Coleman in Didsbury, and is now a respected draft horse farrier, trainer, and driver of multiple hitches.

At the 2013 National Shire Show in Calgary, Lindsay's yearling filly, LaRiviere Ruskington Unique was the Junior Champion, Grand Champion Mare, and Supreme Champion Shire. At the 2015 National Shire Show in Calgary his first place yearling colt, Windcharger Duke, was chosen as the Reserve Grand Champion Shire Stallion.

Other breeders of note over the past few years include Keith Gibson, now of Westlock, Alberta, and Dennis and Joan Woodhead, now of Thomasburg, Ontario.

## CRITICAL STATUS

In 1996, less than 20 years after the re-introduction of the breed in Canada, numbers had increased from just two horses, to over 200. However, since that time, things have reversed, and numbers have been decreasing over the past few years.

In 2012, there were 12 females registered, while in both 2013 and 2014, only 8 females were registered in all of Canada. Based on the few registrations that have come in for 2015, it looks as though numbers will be even worse.

With such a low number of females being registered, the Shire is now included in the Critical category of Rare Breeds Canada's Conservation List. Breeder's agree that the situation is getting very serious.

For more information about the Shire, and the Canadian Shire Horse Association, visit their website at: <http://www.canadianshirehorse.com>

*Below: Current CSHA president Lindsay LaRiviere of Stony Plain, Alberta, and a team of his Shires.*

