

## KINDNESS REAPS REWARDS

DEB KIDWELL, LAKE NOWHERE MULE AND DONKEY FARM

I do not claim to be a “Mule Whisperer” or “Mule Expert”. I am just an owner, breeder and lover of the hybrid. I have been reading articles about the mule found in old newspapers and some of the knowledge and attitudes towards mules from these folks that dealt with mules their entire lives should maybe be revisited by those of us fortunate enough to own a mule today.

An article published in *The Sun* newspaper from NY on March 16, 1902 was titled “The Mule Getting His Due”. Subtitle: “Growing recognition of his sterling qualities” and “Mules not vicious, but susceptible to kindness”.

The article is about the numbers of mules being sent overseas at the time, to South Africa and the West Indies. The heart of the article centers around quotes by “a member of the Jersey City concern”. The statements were made by one of the sons that owned E.B. Bishop’s Sons Company – a mule acquisition and shipping company. This un-named son continues with the following:

“The mule is a splendid fellow, and has been grossly slandered by ridicule and by direct accusations. My father began shipping mules to the West Indies as far back as 1835, and from father to son we have been in business ever since. I have been in the business my entire life and I think I may venture to say that I know something about the mule. And I repeat that he is as fine a fellow as ever stood on four legs. He knows more than the horse, he will do more hard work than the horse, he costs less to keep than the horse and he is as gentle and friendly as the horse if you know how to handle him. “

“The mule is a born slave, patient, uncomplaining, all-enduring, provided he is kindly treated. He resents ill-treatment. It is that which develops his stubbornness. And he can be sot in his ways if he once makes up his mind that he is not getting a fair deal.”

He then relates a story of a mule that he heard about in Peekskill, NY and shows the reporter a photograph of the mule standing quietly and being shod without even a halter. “He simply couldn’t be shod. The blacksmith wasn’t living who could do it. Simply because when he was taken to be shod for the first time the fool of a blacksmith tried to overcome his natural timidity by pounding him with a hammer.” ‘He is a mule’ reasoned the human mule or jackass rather, ‘therefore go at him like a brute and knock the mulishness out of him.’

“Now that man up in Peekskill had handled mules and knew his business. Nobody would buy that particular mule because he had a reputation for ugliness. But the Peekskill man bought him and bought him at a bargain.”

“After treating the mule kindly for a few days and convincing him that he was not going to be clubbed, he was gentle as a kitten. The Peekskill man had himself photographed in the act of putting shoes on the mule as you see and he sent the photograph down to me.”

“The mule has been sadly slandered as to his disposition. He is not the awful kickers he is represented to be. I have been kicked and trampled on by horses, but I have never gotten hurt by a mule in my life.”

“He is very susceptible to kindness, the mule. He knows his friends and likes them.”

“The mule has no offspring. The big Spanish jack is his father; fine imported animals these jacks, or bred perhaps in this country as sires to future mule generations.”

Reading articles such as this bring to mind articles written by Mr. Ben Tennison. One in particular, in the September 2005 issue of Western Mule magazine advised the reader to try and understand that the mule needs to trust you, and until that happens and he knows that you are not going to eat him, you must be patient. When one of our young mules is not behaving as we would like, I have to remind myself of what Mr. Tennison said, and tell myself and my mule that I have opposable thumbs, and I am smarter than the mule and I will win. I just have to think harder and figure out a way to let my mule think that whatever it is I am asking of her was in fact her idea, not mine. Reading what someone like this man in the article has to say with all of his experience, over 100 years later makes one think. All this leads to me treating my animals with intelligence and kindness, and no, I have never been kicked by a mule either!