

THE MORGANS BEHIND THE AQHA LEGENDS, PART V

by Gail Perlee

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SAPPHO U0079283

Brown King x palomino mare x brown Morgan stallion

1913 - 1939

No photos exist and little is known about Sappho, the palomino stallion who was both a foundation sire for the Palomino breed and an important early source of color in Quarter Horses. An article, "Influence of Sappho on Southwestern Palominos," in the September 1940 issue of The Cattleman states,



"He and his get are the best known palominos in the United States today, and it is no exaggeration to say that Sappho is to the Palomino line what Anxiety 4th was to the Hereford family."

"Sappho's sons and grandsons have made their way to 36 different states. Those who have acquired these horses comment after using them that the same gentle disposition, free moving qualities, intelligence, good conformation and beautiful color that characterized this great horse are predominant in his descendants."



The article goes on to mention some of the breeding sons of Sappho and their accomplishments. The only other information on Sappho is a tribute to him in an advertisement placed by his long-time owner, W. B. Mitchell of Marfa, Texas, in the first paperback edition (1941) of the AQHA Stud Book. It says, in part,



"Sappho was bred with the idea of producing the type of horses that I am sure is the purpose of all those who care for a beautiful animal, wonderful character, intelligence and disposition."

"The dam of Sappho was a big palomino mare weighing 1100 pounds, and the sire of this mare was a brown Morgan horse. The sire of Sappho was a brown stallion bought from Mr. Sykes at Southerland, Texas. Mr. Sykes had been breeding Quarter Horses for half a century and had produced what is known as the Rondo stock of Quarter Horses. Later on he bought a brown snip-nosed Thoroughbred stallion from O. G. Parks at Kyle, Texas. The name of this horse was Arch Oldham. The mating of Arch Oldham to the Rondo mares produced the sire of Sappho."

"Sappho lived to be 26 years old. The day before he died one of the boys rode him, and one would have thought that he was a six or seven year old horse rather than the age he was. He exemplifies more fully the type of horse in demand at the present time than any other horse I know of. His colts run from 900 to 1100 pounds in weight, with a remarkable degree of intelligence, and a wonderful disposition. They are all wonderful cow horses and could qualify as polo horses, which many of them have done."

"We think so much of this blood and influence that we dare not go out and purchase another horse or other mares, as we are trying to concentrate as much as possible on the Sappho blood. We are today using one son and one grandson of Sappho together with a great many of his mares."

The exact birth and death dates for Sappho are unavailable, but we do know from various sources that he was deceased by 1940, that he lived for 26 years, and produced at least one QH offspring in 1932. Therefore, he could have been foaled no later than 1914, and may have been born earlier. He was owned for most of his life by the W. B. Mitchell & Sons of Marfa, Texas. Mitchell may have been the breeder, but according to QH historian Victoria Short, correspondence between AQHA Secretary, Helen Michaelis and the Mitchells mentions that they got him from Jap Bishop, a breeder in Marfa.

W. B. Mitchell was a native Texan and a second generation rancher. His parents came to Texas from Tennessee, and William Burton (W.B.) Mitchell was born in Wilson County, Texas in 1871. In 1885, W.B. arrived in Marfa to assist with his father's ranching operation near Antelope Springs. By 1899, he was married and had established his own ranch, Rancho Escondido, about 25 miles southeast of Marfa. A second ranch, the Sierra Vista, was added in 1918. It was about eight miles east of Marfa. In 1928 the family holdings were brought together in the W.B. Mitchell & Sons Company. The Mitchell ranches ran Hereford cattle and raised their own cow horses. When AQHA was established, they began registering their line-bred Sappho horses as QHs with the "Mitchell" prefix, and also registered the palominos with PHBA. Sappho Jr, 376, a

SAPPHO [®] pal. H, QUARTER HORSE, 1913							
SAPPHO pal 1913 QUARTER HORSE U0079283	BROWN KING 1 br 1908 QUARTER HORSE U0054841	ARCH OLDHAM b 1902 THOROUGHbred (USA)	GALLANTRY br 1890 THOROUGHbred D	GALOPIN* br 16.0 1872	VELETTE FLYING DUCHESS	blk/br 1854 b 1853	
			PEARL BARNES b 1896 THOROUGHbred D (USA)	JENNIE B br 1883	LONGFELLOW* BROCADE	br 17.0 1867 b 1874	
			SYKES RONDO dk ch 1887 QUARTER HORSE U0069118	BARNES b 1880	BILLET* MERCEDDES	br 1865 b 1874	
			MORGAN HORSE	BETTY W ch 1887	SILENT FRIEND BETTY BASS	ch 1869 ~1877	
			MORGAN U0076732	MCCOYS BILLY	OLD BILLY	br 14.3 ~1860	
	ST CHARLES MARE pal QUARTER HORSE	BROWN MORGAN STALLION MORGAN	MARE BY SYKES RONDO QUARTER HORSE U0075209	MORGAN MARE U0076733	GRASSHOPPE R 1874	MARTIN COLD DECK ALICE	br 1868 1858
						* - Photo Available	

Sappho grandson, was herd sire in the 1940s. W.B. Mitchell and his wife Martha raised six children on the ranch and lived out of their lives in the Marfa area. W.B. died in 1943, but his family still owns Rancho Escondido and uses his "mashed O" brand.

The question of just which Morgan stallion was the sire of Sappho's dam remains a mystery. One possibility is a brown horse, Cloud McGregor 4836, that was sold into the San Angelo, Texas area. Foaled in 1900, he was one of the

Pedigree from All Breed Pedigree

McGregor line of Morgan trotters bred in Minnesota in the 1870s and '80s. His grandsire, Robert McGregor, is pictured in Volume II of the Morgan Register. He made a mark of 2:17 1/2 on the track and sired over 60 racers that met the 2:30 standard. Oddly, one of his daughters was named Sappho. Robert McGregor was by a Standardbred sire, but out of a daughter of Seely's American Star 75, a grandson of Cock of the Rock, by Sherman, by Justin Morgan. Cloud McGregor also showed old Morgan blood through his dam, who traced to Black Flying Cloud 168 by Black Hawk 20. San Angelo is about 200 miles northeast of Marfa and the time frame fits, so it is possible that Cloud McGregor was the sire of Sappho's palomino dam.

However, it is just as likely that her sire was a Sellman ranch horse. Richard Sellman began breeding Morgan cow horses in West Texas in the 1880s, and the use of Sellman stock on ranches across Texas is well documented. Tom Burnett's Triangle Ranch, the JA, SMS, and Matador all used Sellman studs. Many were sold to ranchers as weanlings or yearlings, and may never have been registered. Robert Denhardt in his book, *Foundation Sires of the American Quarter Horse*, says that Sappho's dam was by St Charles, but gives no information about his breeding. There is no St Charles listed in the Morgan Register, but he may have been purchased as an unregistered colt, or his name changed. Also the Morgan Register recorded that Fitzgerald & Fitzgerald of Marfa, Texas purchased a five-year-old bay stallion, Golden 5691 (Gold Medal x black by Major Gordon) from the Sellman ranch in 1911. Although the timing is close and the registered color different, it is possible that this horse was Sappho's grandsire. Surely the Mitchells valued Morgan blood in their cow horses. T. C. Mitchell, Jr. of Marfa, a nephew of W.B., later owned Presidio 7347 (Moleskin x Nedda K x Headlight Morgan), a 1922 chestnut Morgan stallion bred by Richard Sellman. He probably was used on Sappho daughters and granddaughters to continue the line.

No matter who his Morgan grandsire was, Sappho was one quarter Morgan, his descendants were line bred to him for over 30 years, and his blood spread far and wide in the Palomino and Quarter Horse breeds. Working my way through the first two bound volumes of the AQHA Stud Book, which cover the years 1941 to 1961, I have already found almost 300 close up descendants of Sappho and I am only half way through Volume II. Many of them, especially the stallions, have Sappho in their names, such as Sappho Jr., Oro Sappho, El Sappho, El Red Sappho, Don Sappho, Ramon Sappho and Sappho's Birtie. The most prolific Quarter Horse sire of the Sappho line was named Sobre. He was a palomino colt of 1936, bred by W.B. Mitchell & Sons, and owned by Lane Hudson of Big Springs, Texas. Sobre 793 was sired by a grade



Thoroughbred from California, Red Lantados, and out of Donna Sappho VI, a daughter of Sappho. Born just in time for the palomino craze of the 1940s, Sobre became a major sire and his get were soon as numerous and prominent in the Quarter Horse breed as Sappho's had been among the Palominos. Like his grandsire, Sobre became so famous that many of his descendants bear his name. Whenever you see "Sobre" or "Sappho" in the name or pedigree of a Quarter Horse, you can be pretty sure that it has a little bit of Morgan behind it. Along with their golden color, the Sapphos carried the legacy of Justin Morgan into the Quarter Horse breed.

Sappho Jr., 376, a grandson of Sappho