



The History of the Irish Draught in America

Chapter One: Jim McGinty

By Cynthia Lurix



Figure 1 - Jim McGinty with Maggie Last

Even before the Irish Draught Horse Society North America was to begin its struggle into existence in Canada; here in the United States Jim McGinty had a plan for introducing the Irish Draught horse to the American horse community. Jim, a successful retired commodities trader wanted to make a contribution to the breed he had been familiar with for years. It became his passion and his mission and he was prepared to make many sacrifices to achieve it. In the end, while successful, he sacrificed more than most of us could bear.

In the spring of 1990 Jim took his new wife to Ireland to lay the groundwork for a long-range plan. He sought out the alliance of Kevin Culhane a respected farmer and horseman living in County Limerick. Jim needed a partner living in Ireland and he hoped Kevin would be interested in the venture

.Kevin Culhane was more than the logical choice. Jim McGinty had a decade earlier pioneered the importation of then rare Simmental cattle to the United States. Cattle could not be imported directly to the US from Europe due to disease restrictions but cattle born in Ireland could. Kevin, An experienced cattleman had worked with Jim to import and breed the Simmental cattle on his farm in Limerick. The cattle produced there were exported to the US where Jim worked with Texas A&M University. Due to then daring experiments with super ovulation, and frozen semen, it wasn't long before a strong herd of Simmental cattle was established. It was a major contribution as these animals are both superior meat producers as well as above average dairy cattle.

During that same time period Jim had boarded his first Irish Draught Mare Silver Lady with Kevin and his family. The mare could not be exported to the US as it was during the same time frame that a major equine venereal disease had found its way through Ireland to the US via a certain French Thoroughbred. It would be years before the quarantine restrictions would be lifted. The two men had a strong friendship as well as a superior working relationship. Kevin was also known and respected by the Irish Board Of Agriculture whose cooperation would be imperative in this new equine venture. The plan was to establish a strong herd in the US and guarantee the survival of the breed.

One of the primary components of the venture was to acquire the highest quality Irish Draught mares that they could afford as foundation horses to be brought back to America. One obvious but seemingly unattainable choice was the foundation mare of the Suma Stud, Mrs Thatcher, a regally impressive mare



Figure 2 - Mrs Thatcher

who not only produced top quality get but was herself a top quality competition horse. She had a nature so willing that she could be competed in nothing more than a halter with reins..

Marily Power and Susan Lannigan O'Keefe were justifiably proud of her, as she had been imperative in establishing their reputation for owning the most successful Irish Draught stud in Ireland. Marilee had just recently made the difficult decision to sell the mare at the Tattersalls auction in October of 1990. The timing for Jim was perfect. He instructed Kevin to bid on her with the understanding that he would bid whatever it took.

The mare auctioned for what was then a record price for an Irish Draught, well beyond what Jim had anticipated. . Though eighteen years of age at the time Mrs Thatcher was already in foal again to Glenagyle Rebel. A young stallion on the road toward becoming a grade A show jumper, an unusual accomplishment for a purebred Draught. He was also a descendent of the rare Irish Mail bloodline. Kevin also successfully bid on a second mare, Dark Glen by the much admired stallion Mountain View. Dark Glen was in foal to the Irish Draught stallion, Lake View Pride Jim and Kevin were elated. The mares were their pride and Joy but their elation was soon to turn to tragedy.

Before Jim returned to Texas he and Kevin enlisted the help Dermot Ryan of the Irish Horse Board. With his influence The Department Of Agriculture agreed to work in cooperation with the US Department Of Agriculture on a sophisticated plan to export frozen semen from six of the finest Irish Draught Stallions in Ireland to the United States. This impressive list included Kildalton Gold, Grey Macha, Mountain Pearl, Flagmont King, Pride of Glenogra and, Creggan Diamond. Two Additional stallions were in cooperated into the venture, Silver Granite, who was already in the States, owned by Richard Melde of Arizona and Kingsway Diamond who stood in New Zealand .Jim would bring one Irish Draught Stallion back to the US to cover mares that didn't take with the frozen semen as each breeding would include a 'live foal guarantee' They would produce multiple embryos with Mrs Thatcher, Dark Glen and one or two other Irish Draught Mares to establish the purebred foundation stock They would also encourage the owners of Thoroughbred mares in the US to breed to the Irish

Draught stallions. In Ireland this is the traditional formula for the famous Irish Hunter but with the reverse breeding. The Irish Draught is usually the Mare. Jim and Kevin set up the Irish American Hunter Association to record and keep track of the Irish horses that were certain to begin a strong population in America. The Irish Department of Agriculture set up a temporary quarantine in County Kilkenny with veterinarian Thomas Burns of the Victor Stud overseeing the collections. The Site they chose was an old hunter farm built in 1841. It was well set up and in wonderful repair plus it seemed to embody the history and romance of the breed. The six Irish Draught stallions were to spend thirty days being collected and their semen frozen for later breedings. Video footage was taken of each stallion to use for marketing purposes. Accomplished Olympic rider Jane Sleeper narrated the video and bought breedings for two of her own thoroughbred mares. The farmers involved were delighted. They were guaranteed an income and it was a wonderful way to promote their stallions. Jim set off for home to begin a multi tiered promotional program to begin to educate the American horse community about the superiority of the Irish horse for pleasure and performance. At his own expense he had the videos converted and mass-produced.. He marketed these to every member of the Master Of Foxhounds Association of America. All Pony clubs and every branch of the then Combined Training Association Have The United States. The cost of producing and mailing the videos ran close to a hundred thousand US dollars. Jim covered the expense out of his own pocket again.

In the meantime Mrs Thatcher was swelling with foal. Kevin monitored her closely being sure she was properly fed, exercised and stabled. He kept Jim posted on the progress of the pregnancy. As Mrs Thatcher reached her due date Kevin was faced with a dilemma. He needed to have cancer surgery that could no longer be postponed. He would have to be away from the farm at that time. Kevin sought the help of his kind horse-loving neighbor to look after Mrs Thatcher while he was away. He had known the man for years and was certain Maggie would not be ignored. Unfortunately this kind man made a tragic decision with the very best of intentions Maggie's paddock seemed sparse and unappetizing compared to the field adjoining it so he let her into the lush pasture to graze to her hearts content. All you horsemen can guess what happened next.

Mrs Thatcher developed a horrific case of laminitis from the excess feeding. Veterinary care was sought immediately but due to her age and the far advanced pregnancy treatment was difficult. After the filly was born Mrs Thatcher could hardly stand for the panicked trip to Limerick University's well-revered veterinary hospital. Jim was kept informed via phone of the mare's progress. The veterinarians and staff there worked frantically to save her. Nine days later they thought that Mrs Thatcher had recovered enough to go home where they felt she would be happier with her new foal. Kevin loaded the mare and her filly and set off for home. Once there he put Mrs Thatcher and her filly in a clean stall with hay and water before leaving the barn for the night. No sooner had he begun to head for the house when Kevin heard the most awful thud of the mare falling heavily against the wall of the barn. Mrs Thatcher was dead, of a heart attack. It had all been too much for her to bear. Kevin was heartsick and inconsolable.

Kevin's young daughter Linda Culhane helped her father and the foal through this terrible time. She bottle fed the filly and was personally responsible for her survival.

Jim reassured his partner that all would continue as planned. He knew from years of experience that all great ventures involve great risk especially ventures involving valuable animals. Mrs Thatcher's elegant grey filly was named Maggie's Last by Kevin's wife. Soon after Dark Glen also foaled a beautiful dark bay filly. Jim's wife named her Bonnie Belle Supreme.

The last foundation herd decision involved the choice of an Irish Draught Stallion to be brought back to the states. Tom Kerns offered a Kildalton Gold son as he felt he could reproduce the colt out of the same parents. (It never happened) The Irish Rover was a wonderful choice, a chestnut with white socks and a blaze he was a strikingly impressive colt. He had the distinction of being out of two champion parents plus he had won his class in all nine of the shows he had participated in. He was certain to mature into a wonderful representative of his breed. In an interesting side note Tom Kerns is an Irish catholic living in the south while the owner of the dam of the Irish Rover Knockavaher Pride was a protestant living in the north. Politics play no part in the production of fine horses in Ireland. John Shortill of Bar Mills, Maine helped to import The Irish Rover in return for an embryo transfer foal out of Maggie's Last

Maggie's Last and Bonnie Belle Supreme were inspected and passed RID by the Irish Draught Horse Society Ireland prior to exportation. The Irish Rover was not inspected until much later as stallions cannot be approved until their third year and it would have complicated his exportation.

In Texas Jim Contacted Texas A&M Veterinary School to set the groundwork for the collections and embryos transfers. It was an exciting but risky venture as frozen semen and embryo transfer were both procedures just being introduced to the reproductive world of equine medicine. While now relatively commonplace in the cattle business, horses presented a more difficult and complex situation. At a teaching facility such as Texas A&M the vets were once more delighted to be a part of such an innovative and daring plan. They were determined to do their part to make it work.

Bonnie Belle Supreme and Maggie's Last were shipped over from Ireland in the same horsebox. The fillies were inseparable. Bonnie already had developed into a beautiful substantial mare but Maggie was going through her ugly twos stage



Figure 3 - Maggie's Last at Two Years old

when the horses arrived in Texas. Buck Grass, a third generation horseman and the owner of Buck Grass Stables a show and training facility with a long reputation for its quality and professionalism welcomed the horses home. Most of Buck Grasses residents were elegant show Arabians. He looked skeptically at the young filly Maggie wondering how something so homely could be worth so much. He would change his mind as she developed into the elegant mare she finally became.

In December of 1993 a full two-page ad went into the stallion issue of the Chronicle Of The Horse. Several other prominent publications in the states

96 The Chronicle of the Horse Friday, December 10, 1993 97

At last!
You can easily breed
your Thoroughbred
mare to the top Irish
Draught Stallions!



**THE
IRISH
ARE
HERE!**

Trying to breed the ideal sporthorse?

Would you like to breed horses like Mill Pearl? Murphy Himself? Boomerang? Kilmore Quay? Or Wilton Fair? All are products of the consistently successful Irish Draught (pronounced Draft) and Thoroughbred cross. Known for its size, temperament and jumping ability, this cross is highly prized by leading horsemen looking for the ideal show jumper, eventer, or foxhunter. You begin to understand why when you realize that Irish Draughts won 17 Olympic Gold Medals from 1946-1976 from a small pool of just 600 registered mares and 100 stallions.

Now, in a special agreement with the Irish Department Of Agriculture and The Irish Draught Society, you can access 8 of the best Irish Draught Stallions by importing semen directly to the United States. But, you must hurry. Access is limited to just 1,000 breedings available on a first come basis.

Can now to learn how you can tap the potential of these superb individuals. The Irish Hunter is the ideal sporthorse and now, breeding them is easy and affordable!

1994 Fee
\$1000
Guaranteed 90 days safe in foal



Kildalton Gold
Champion Irish Draught at Royal Dublin Society in 1988 and 1989.



Flagmount King
Internationally successful jumper and proven sire of jumpers.



Pride Of Glenogra
First winner of the Irish Draught 100-day test easily carries 250 lbs.



Silver Granite
Perfect Irish Draught type. Second in 1990 Royal Dublin Society.

Mountain Pearl
Favored to win the 1994 100-day test. Already booked to 138 mares.

Grey Macha
1986 Champion at RDS. His dam was Champion Mare in 1979.

Kingsway Diamond
Son of King Of Diamonds and sire of Corran King, 1990 Champion at RDS.

Creggan Diamond
Refined and compact, this black bay stands in Ireland, nearly booked full.

Contact Jim McGinty, P.O. Box 46, Houston, TX 77046 713-975-1535 Fax 713-871-9801

The Irish American Hunter Association

Figure 4 - Ad in The Chronicle Of The Horse (Dec 10, 1993)

advertised the coming of the Irish horses and the unique opportunity they presented. The response to Jim's marketing efforts was gratifying. Some of the most prestigious names in the American horse community were anxious to breed their fine mares to the impressive list of Irish Draught Stallions Jim had provided. The stage had been set for the introduction of the love affair many Americans now have for the wonderful Irish Draught and Irish Draught cross. Unfortunately all was not to end happily for Jim. The enormous investment in time and money had taken a toll on his marriage. Texas community property laws precipitated the loss of his own Irish horses. Jim had spent so much of himself on his mission but due to unforeseen narrow mindedness and adversity

from certain key figures the financial strength of the venture was compromised. Specific rules were implemented by the fledgling IDHS society in America to prevent Jim from establishing a strong foundation herd of quality horses.

Jim instructed Buck to take over ownership of the three Irish Draught horses to pay back expenses. At this time Jim felt he had done all he could to plant the seeds of the Irish Draught Horse in America. It would now be up to others to continue to promote and nurture.

Anyone wishing to contact Jim McGinty with questions may do so at 713-320-3515

Anyone wishing to write a chapter for this history or wanting to be interviewed to have a chapter written on their contribution to the breed may contact Cynthia Lurix at 281-346-1552 or cynthialurix@crowndale.com.

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