

Coping with Summer Heat in the City

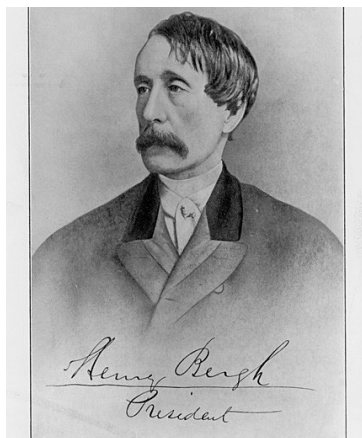
Summer heat in cities can be brutal for man and beast, and this was especially the case in the days prior to air conditioning and automobiles, when horses did all the work of pulling street cars, wagons, and carriages for private and public transportation.

In the late 1800s, sources estimate that there were about 170,000 horses pulling street cars and delivery wagons at any given time in New York City. Without these animals, cities such as New York and other urban centers would not have become economic powerhouses driving regional and national growth. However, it is an unfortunate historical fact that they were not always treated well. Spending their days in summer heat and winter cold, Kiter notes that horses were routinely beaten by drivers, and often literally worked to death.

Henry Bergh (1813-1888) (Fig. 1), a wealthy New Yorker, became concerned about the welfare of animals he had seen in cities in Europe and the United States. On April 10, 1866, he became the founder and first president of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). This was three days after the first effective legislation against animal cruelty in the United States was passed into law by the New York State Legislature.

According to Kiter, “Initially, the ASPCA focused their efforts on the welfare of horses and livestock. The organization operated its first ambulance for sick and injured horses in 1867 (Fig. 2), even developing a derrick with which to pull animals from ditches and excavations by 1875. Concerned about the lack of proper hydration working horses received, Bergh began installing drinking fountains in public areas.”

Figure 1. Henry Bergh (1813-1888). From: Lossing BJ, Perine GE. *History of New York City*. Vol. 1 New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1884, p. 280. HathiTrust Digital Library, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nnc1.ar01402161>; Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Henry_Bergh_by_George_E._Perine.jpg



During a particularly hot summer in New York City in 1868, Bergh asked for the professional advice of John Busted MD, president of the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons, on treating horses affected by intense heat. Willing to “cooperate with you in your humane exertions to relieve horses exposed to effects of intense heat,” Dr. Busted’s reply was published on July 23 in *The New York Times* (Fig. 3) following Bergh’s introductory letter. Busted stated that his “crude ideas...may assist somewhat in alleviating the sufferings of which you so justly complain.”



Figure 2. The ASPCA instituted the first horse ambulances to transport animals needing medical care. Note the “ambulance” lettering on the side of the vehicle, “New York Veterinary Hospital” on the door of the building behind, and horse statue above the entrance. Source: Ephemeral New York: Chronicling an ever-changing city through faded and forgotten artifacts. <http://ephemeralnewyork.wordpress.com/tag/ambulance-for-horses/>

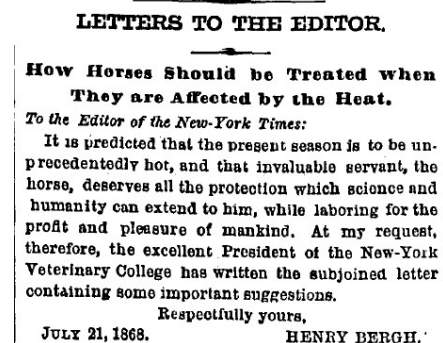


Figure 3. Introductory letter by Henry Bergh to Dr. John Busted’s response. *The New York Times*, 1868, July 23; pg. 2.

Professor John Busted MD (1814-1876) was a New York City physician who became interested in veterinary medicine. Having also studied at the second veterinary college at Alfort in France, he served as president of the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons and was one of the founders of the United States Veterinary Medical Association, later renamed the American Veterinary Medical Association.

First, Dr. Busted indicated that since “prevention is better than a cure,” horses should be driven slowly and in the shade whenever possible, rested frequently, and given a little water and feed four times per day. In addition to doing away with check reins, an awning supported by hoops on the collar, shaft or pole to shade the head and neck was suggested. Railroad companies should provide shade and change horses frequently along with reducing the number of passengers carried. In addition, “horses working for rail cars should have their nostrils and mouths frequently washed, and be offered a *little* water every mile or so.”

Busted also recommended that police should be empowered to remove horses from railroad cars or other vehicles upon complaint from citizens and disperse onlookers who might gather around a fallen animal.

Dr. Busted next presented symptoms of heat prostration and described what to do and how best to destroy an animal if that were to become necessary.

When a horse falls in the street from the effects of heat, his head and neck at least, and his body if possible, should be protected from the sun; an umbrella will answer when nothing better is at hand; a blanket or bundle of straw should be placed under the head, to prevent injury to it; all harness should be removed, particularly so, the collar. The head should be kept continually wet with cold water, as much cold air as possible be supplied to his nostrils, as he breathes through them, not his mouth. The body and legs should be well rubbed, and dried, when wet. Should this fail to relieve, a table spoonful of spirits of hartshorn, in three to four ounces of some alcoholic spirits and twice the quantity of water may be carefully administered....Horses unable to walk ought to be placed on a sled and removed to some place where they can receive proper medical care.

In support of Mr. Bergh’s campaign, he lastly recommended that “The City authorities ought to erect a number of water troughs throughout the city, from which horses and dogs could allay their thirst.” (Fig. 4)

Many granite watering troughs were installed by the ASPCA and often paid for by wealthy women patrons. Some are still in place today (Fig. 4), including the one frequently used by carriage horses in New York City at 6th Avenue near Central Park South.

However, as life-saving as those drinking troughs were for thirsty urban working horses that might run their noses almost up to their eyes on hot summer days, the vessels could also be



Figure 4. Looking south at granite watering trough at 6th Avenue entrance to Central Park, New York. Inscription reads “presented to the A.S.P.C.A. by Mrs. Henry C. Russell 1908.” Photo by Jim Henderson, Aug 5, 2015. Source: Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:6th_Av_CP_entrance_horse_trough_jeh.JPG

unhealthy and put the animals at risk. The fear of spreading highly contagious glanders and need for its prevention caused some city boards of health, such as in Jersey City in 1903 and Boston in 1908, to propose abolishing or replacing them with faucets or stand pipes. By carrying a pail or two on the vehicle, drivers could easily fill it to furnish clean drinking water.

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