I see a lot of so-called history of the fandom, but it usually skims over how it all started, the imageboard scene and its history, either out of shame or out of sheer ignorance and lack of reliable sources. I tried to remedy that. Note that this might be slightly hard to read if you're not used to imageboard terms. I've done my best. If anyone ever reads this, I hope they understand why I wrote it, and don't misunderstand my intent. I hope they get to know a bit of me and the site they post on, whichever it might be, through this document. I apologize to those I forget or offend.
With love and tolerance - Liz

Edit:
This was written in November of 2013, and edited/corrected in early 2014. Any reference to "now" or "today" in this document should not be understood as anything happening after May 2014.

The early days, and my sources
People will often argue whether the fandom on /b/ or on /co/. It's a trick question.
I'll start with facts. The very first **threads** about MLP FiM were made on /co/, on the very day the first episode came out: October 10th, 2010[1] [3]. Threads on /b/ would not start for about a month (Around the 2nd of November)
However where the community is from is a broader question. A lot of shows had and still have their own threads on /co/, but MLP was also posted on /b/, to the point where a group of posters created a stable community to chat there, around pictures of ponies. That would have a huge influence on the fandom as a whole, but we'll come to that later.

As most /co/ posters outside the content creators were anonymous, it's hard to get reliable sources from that time, however Big McIn!Tosh, one of the first tripfags on /b/, was also one of the first avatarfags on /co/, so his version of the early story is as close as it gets.
For the record, these were the 4 "first" tripfags, on the /b/ threads, whom everyone seems to clearly remember, in the very first days[1] [8]
- Big McIn!ToshdAyGxE, who was later !!Pinkie Pie on Ponychan. They are to this day !!Big Mac on MLPchan
- Rainbro Dash, who moved to Ponychan as soon as it was created as the !!Rainbow Dash moderator. They are still !!RD there.
- Granny Smith, who disappeared after about half a year, and reappeared early 2013 briefly.
- Apple!jack, who is also unheard of after their implication in the early threads. They were last seen in Derpychat in April 2011

First threads: /co/
On October the 10th 2010, the first pony thread is made on /co/, the comics board on 4chan, about MLP:FiM. The show itself is touching and genuinely enjoyed by the people who watch it for the first time as seem in archives. This new generation of MLP also has cute images to make reactions from and, like many shows on that board, it gets its share of art. Most people in there are Anonymous, except content creators: some notorious artists, like Megasweet, will come from that community. The very first threads were not archived, that would begin later [1]

The art, the reaction pictures, are being posted a bit everywhere, including on /b/[2], mostly for the fun of it. However in the /co/ community, some anonymous pôsters were avatarfagging, and had developed an identity, an identity they're allowed to have on the /b/ threads, where some of them take names[1]

So from November 2010 to January 2011, you have MLP General on /co/ and the occasional pony thread on /b/. More people start drawing ponies, and using ponies as reaction pictures, and before you know it both communities grow, however they quickly develop different mentalities. /co/ was very much an Anonymous culture based community, meaning names are only required when posting content you made yourself. It also becomes the source for a lot, and I mean a **lot** of the art for the fandom in general. /b/ however becomes more of a chatting hub for namefags and anons alike, talking about ponies or about anything else.

It should be made clear that most of what's considered part of the "brony" culture originated from /co/, including a lot of fanon character personalities, art, and using words from the show - more or less ironically with time - such as 'everypony', etc. What I mean by ironically is that I've seen people saying the "brony" phenomenon was originally a joke, people pretending to like the show, and other people took it too seriously. It's the **other way around,** the first posters genuinely loved MLP and wanted to spread love to others, but with time it became a joke to refer to "love and tolerance" in some parts of the community, and other parts just became about chatting and not about the show at all.

All of that had a lot of impact on the content posted across the fandom, however something originated from /b/ which, in my humble opinion, made the whole difference: the concept of "Love and Tolerance" being attached to MLP.

/b/ pony threads
As more users entered, the /b/ threads had to eventually stop scattering themselves and people got organized. Around January-February 2011, the one and only /b/ pony thread was running uninterrupted 24 hours a day, being re-made every time it hit the image limit. To this day it remains quasi-uninterrupted since Feb 2011, through community splits, ban waves, and immense amounts of spam.
(Note that occasional pony threads were created on /b/ that were more in the spirit of image dumping, and refused to be mixed with the "official" thread. These are not the ones I'm talking about here)

The term "brony" was also coined on /b/, and was usually spelled "/b/rony". As a matter of fact, on /co/, it was akin to an insult to call someone a brony. They also felt that way about "Love and tolerance".[13]

/b/ being the most active place on 4chan by far, having an active thread up there 24/7 helped recruit a lot, and I mean a **lot** of people, some of those who became active members of the community - and not only on the imageboard scene. RainbowCrash for example, mod of /r/mylittlepony since its beginning, discovered the fandom on /b/[4], so did a lot of EquestriaDaily staff, and obviously a lot of Ponychan members (and their admin)[1][5][9].

As the /b/ thread starts flourishing, its culture is also growing more precise: On /b/, a cesspool of edginess and gore and porn and whatever people posted at that time, the /b/ pony thread was just a bunch of people who wanted to be nice to each other. One of the tripfags, Flutter!shy, started using this at the beginning of every thread:
"This is the official pony thread! If there is another thread, redirect them here.
Everypony equal, everypon loved, you don't have to have a tripcode to be a brony, it's just for fun!
Love, tolerance, friendship, and kindness are the most important things a Brony can have, let's spread some joy and post some ponies!"

This will become the OP of the pony thread on /b/. As time goes by, mods will make it so any set of word from this message autosages the thread, or autobans the poster, but people will always find a workaround, and find a way to make it the OP text.
Love and tolerance becomes a slogan, a way to unite against the common enemy, mods. pony haters… Turning a lot of them to the ponies' side (including at least one 4chan mod who liked to poke fun at the /b/ pony thread, who was nicknamed "Discord")

In March 2011, 4chan mods decide that they're tired of this pony stuff and, despite their own rules regarding /b/ (/b/ had one rule: No rules, except anything that breaks US law) they start banning ponies en masse.
This, instead of destroying the community, strengthens its bonds. People organize, share proxies to go around the bans, a Steam chat is used for people to re-group in when a ban wave hits and share the new thread's link. It becomes quite obvious ponies are not going away from /b/.

The /b/ community at the time shares a lot of its users with two places: Derpychat, and Ponychan.

The Derpychat IRC isn't an imageboard in itself but it was a central point to a lot of members from /b/, /co/ and Ponychan in the early days, making it notable. It seems that a lot of people in the fandom at the time had some kind of connection with that IRC[1] [4] [8]. It is still around, albeit less active than before.

Ponychan, the first Pony imageboard
Disclaimer: A lot of things have been said about Ponychan's original admin - !!Celestia. However one must keep in mind the guy was only human, I, for one, believe that !!Celestia was victim of his site's own success. Regardless, I'm not here to shit on anyone.

In February 2011, Orange !Blaze visits 4chan /b/ for what seems to be a very short period of time[5]. He discovers the pony threads and decides that this subculture deserves its own imageboard. Thus is born Ponychan.[6]
The original Ponychan staff is made out of (with their previous posting place in brackets):[1] [6] [7]
- !!Celestia - Orange !Blaze (/b/, arguably)
- !!Rainbow Dash - Rainbro!Dash (/b/)
- !!Rarity - Crimson Risk (?)

- !!Fluttershy - Stormbolt (?)
- !!Applejack - Brofessor Brony (?)
- !!Pinkie Pie - Arctic Tempest (/b/ & /co/)
- !!Twilight - Twilight (/b/)[1]
- !!Scootaloo - Blazing Starshine (?)
- !!Cheerilee - Nature Blossom (/b/)[1]

2 months later, the staff welcomes:
- !!Trixie - Lemming (/b/)
- !!Derpy - Cherry Sundae (/b/ & Derpychat)

  Note that the mods' identities are and will remain hidden to the majority of the community until January 2012 when !!Celestia asks his moderators to reveal their names - and does it himself.[1] [5][9]
  Ponychan is for a large part populated at the time -as it's clear above- by people who, if they weren't directly from /b/ and its community, at least discovered the fandom through it[1] [9]. Which makes sense - after all /b/ is the biggest english-speaking board on the internet and thus the biggest source for members to populate a new imageboard.

However what surprisingly happens is that Ponychan grows very fast. (There are unfortunately no official numbers, but having seen the site myself and knowing the imageboard scene I can tell you Ponychan became one of the biggest english-speaking imageboards, by **far**, in a few months, obviously not counting 4chan).

 The community and the staff grow fast during Spring 2011, and as it does Orange starts becoming more strict in how he wants his moderators to handle the community[1][9]. That trend would only get worse over a whole year.
Ponychan's history is plagued with drama, in particular staff drama, the amount of mods going in and out over the following year is tremendous and I can't possibly cover all of it. However there's a few events that had some impact on the site in the long term:

 During summer 2011, a member (called Gunthor) makes 'friends' with a few mods, managing to get himself elected as moderator - !!Octavia- with the sole purpose of eventually becoming admin as he himself confessed[9]. Ensues a lot of drama, resulting in Gunthor being de-modded the following month. Gunthor would become one of the fiercest critics of the Ponychan staff, not helping the mood that starts settling in the community during Fall 2011.

  Fall/Winter 2011: the staff grows increasingly harsh towards its own boards' communities - in particular, /oat/, the random/silly board. People start to protest openly, a lot of notable members leading the talks, including Anonthony, /b/ and Ponychan member, who writes entire pages of text to the Ponychan staff, trying to reach a compromise with them - unsuccessfully most times. The posts in /meta/ (site issues board) are never ignored, but nothing ever spawns from those endless debates - Because in the end, Orange dictates where the site goes, and he rarely if ever is here[9]

Early 2012, Orange makes his staff's identities public[5][9], and trying to answer the community's needs, he makes /ef/ - The Everfree Forest, where moderation is extremely lenient compared to other boards. His true motives for it are still speculation even for his mods[9], but one can assume it was to release some of the pressure accumulated due to overzealous moderation, through the creation of a "Ponychan /b/".

The board's activity explodes[10] and it quickly becomes one of the active places on Ponychan along with /oat/. Matters seem solved when, in March 2012, Orange decides he wants to delete /ef/ after 2 months of it running and everyone assuming the "experimental board" was here for good. Without any warning to the community in any way, /ef/ is deleted in two hours, replaced by this message when trying to access it.
The community is in outrage, Cross Breeze (At the time !!Twilight moderator) quits the Ponychan staff and a few /ef/ members go found their own site called efchan, splitting the community.[9] The site still exists today.

Moony, moderator and extremely active member across the whole site, writes in February 2012 a huge post addressed to Orange, proposing a series of simple changes to how it is ran - in particular towards /oat/, where at this point a lot of members have left due to the overzealous moderation there. He does so in private, sharing a GDoc he made. Since Orange doesn't react, he makes that document public for people to support it[10]. This document, and the events in the following months, would eventually trigger the creation of MLPchan.

Ponychan almost dies - and the creation of MLPchan
Between March and June, things don't get better on Ponychan. A member called Zamoonda (Who during the past year had managed to make himself a personal adviser of Orange, despite being described as "conniving" and "slick" by Orange himself)[11] who had previously attempted to access the mod boards multiple times and gained power over the staff, including by starting a relationship with a mod and influencing the site's drama through multiple well crafted identities, manages to convince !!Celestia to hand over the site to him. [11]

 It is to be understood that Zamoonda is indeed conniving, power hungry, and extremely manipulative, using multiple identities to stir drama or influence people through peer pressure, Zamoonda had also previously urged Orange to de-mod Moony for his popular opinions[11] of being more lenient towards members.
When the rest of the Ponychan staff sees Orange leaving and Zamoonda entering the mod chat without a hello or goodbye, everything goes to panic, and everyone tries to reason with Orange. The latter, realizing he's been manipulated, comes back as administrator. In a fit of rage, he then attempts to delete the website, but is stopped by members and moderators in private.

After that, it becomes clear to a lot of people Orange is not to be trusted with a site's administration, and a few influent Ponychan and ex-Ponychan members including Anonthony, Cross Breeze (ex-!!Twilight), Starshine Sprint (ex-!!Pinkie Pie), and well, myself, start getting together in private, talking about making another imageboard.

In July 2012, MLPchan is born, with Anonthony as its administrator. The site's traffic explodes and in a few months it becomes as active as Ponychan.

With MLPchan proposing a more lenient approach to moderation, the Ponychan staff is eventually forced to in turn give their members more leeway. Mid-2013, Ponychan's /oat/ board will finally have its rules changed, with Moony's discourse being listened to after a year and a half of him fighting for members' rights. The board is re-purposed to being an off-topic discussion one, instead of limited to pony, allowing its members to post a bit more freely.

Early 2013, there are talks between MLPchan's admin Anonthony and a few Ponychan staff members to merge the two sites. The discussions are private, and end very quickly when it becomes obvious the two staffs can never work together for a plethora of reasons. However the relationship between the two staffs stays, if not friendly, cordial, some of the staff members being close friends, and Anonthony himself being the one to uncover the fact that Zamoonda had managed to be made a Ponychan admin through one of his multiple identities: Aurroria, during the summer of 2013.

4chan's Rule #15 and /mlp/'s inception
While all this drama was shaking Ponychan up, The 4chan community was far from being event-free. In October 2011, the /b/ community knows a large community split when hard ban waves hit the threads again: A good portion of users move to Ponychan, but a new pool of members arrives quickly and, in December 2012, the threads are more active than ever, hitting the image limit of 250 images posted in about 10 minutes on a bad day.

 Early 2012 is when /b/ went full Anonymous again - it still is as of August 2014. Probably meant to destabilize the namefags threads on that board, including the pony thread, the measure will fail utterly when a pony thread member, milky, writes a script allowing people to write and see each other's names. But that event is minor compared to the creation of /mlp/.

 /mlp/ - the My Little Pony 4chan board, is the result of two things:
- The brony fandom is still going strong after one year, and even though it originated on 4chan, moot (The 4chan admin) has always turned his back on the fandom and missed the train.
- Ponies being posted across 4chan, on /co/, /b/, /v/, you name it, are allegedly the #1 source of complaints from members.
As someone who's dealt with the /b/ haters, I can personally say a lot of them were the same few anons coming in regularly, mostly because when the whole thread got banned, there wasn't much hate on it for 2-3 days (Duration of those bans), then we saw them come in again. It wouldn't surprise me if a lot of emails moot got were from the same few people spamming him with multiple email addresses. /rant

/mlp/ becomes a very active hub of the fandom. It's arguable how understanding 4chan mods are of the phenomenon: In March 2013, mods will start banning serial threads and anything resembling nsfw content on sight, leading to an exodus of a lot of members to different sites, mostly MLPchan. The event is now referred to as the Scruffening.
However, the /b/ community just won't move. They have their roots on that board, and though

another community split happens, with a second /b/ & friends being created on /mlp/, the /b/ threads keep going. A few days after the creation of /mlp/, Rule #15 is added to the list of 4chan rules: No pony content whatsoever outside of /mlp/.

 What's so special about this rule is it is also applied to /b/[12], along with anything illegal under US law. *At this point I'd like to point out that to this day, two contents are the source of bans on /b/, thanks to Rule #15: Child pornography, and pictures of ponies. Just saying.*

MLP General, the /co/ pony serial, however moves over to /mlp/ completely, though some posters desire to stay there, moderation keeps them from it. It should also be noted /mlp/ has a culture much closer to the /co/ threads, as in everyone "should" be anonymous unless producing content. And content, /mlp/ produces a lot of it: the board is the main source of content, new popular OCs and inside jokes of the fandom even today.

Today, the future, and conclusion
Firstly if you actually went through all of this, congratulations- and thank you for reading. As for the state of the community today, now that Season 4 has started, as of November 2013.
/mlp/ is a center point that can't be ignored, and unless mods fuck up royally again, it should stay this way for a while. Whatever one's opinion may be of the board, it's still bringing in new members and doing new things.
Ponychan and MLPchan have similar activities, and have grown to have some separate role in the community while they do share a portion of their posters.
A plethora of smaller imageboards exist, that I haven't mentioned here to try and stay on topic, but let's mention the existence of Lunachan, GETchan and of course Efchan.
Now, you may have noticed I've kind of skimmed over anything related to MLPchan, or too recent events. There's multiple reasons for that, but mainly that I know I am biased towards my own site - and everyone's biased towards recent events. Maybe when this is all over I'll edit this document further. but I do hope it serves as a good source of information for newer members in the fandom.

If I may add a personal note. You can stop reading now if you want.

"Love and tolerance" has become a buzzword in this community, because it's been re-used and misused by a bunch of people whom, to be perfectly honest, I wish wouldn't identify as being part of our fandom.
But its original meaning holds a special place in my heart. No matter how dark things may seem, no matter how lonely or sad, or angry people may be, this fandom has been the place for them to rest and be part of a group of people, coming together to share some good times.

Whether it be through /co/'s philosophy of anonymity or /b/'s mindless chatter, we have tried to provide people with a message: You are not alone. I sure as hell try to convey that message every day the best I can. It may seem idealistic, but it works, and I honestly believe in its unstoppable power.

So yeah. call me whatever you want for it, but to me, love, tolerance, friendship and kindness are the most important thing a person can have. So let's have some fun, spread some joy and post some ponies.

2021 addendum:
MLPchan has since seen its activity dwindle along with Ponychan, and so both communities have merged in an attempt to keep the websites relatively active, they are now both under the "Ponychan" name.

The pony thread is still running on Ponychan's /oat/ as far as I can see, at this point it's only got a few posters, very few of which are from the old days. The rest of the old posters still hang out to some degree, I believe a lot of them have migrated to Discord, in particular around Script Kitty, whom I did not mention in this document, but he's from pretty far back.
You can also still find some old pony posters hanging around avatar threads on 4chan and 8chan, though for the most part they're posting with anime avatars now.

However my account of all this is getting very stale - I haven't actually interacted with this community in over 7 years now, and I only talk to one or two people from back then. I've very much moved on. So I don't think any further edits from me will bring any information to anyone reading. I will keep maintaining this document, though :)

Sources: Chat logs, links… It's all in here.
As I gather more information, I'll try and add more sources. However due to imageboards' inherent nature (as in everything is deleted after a **day** of existing) it's extremely hard to get a lot of direct sources. I have done my best, and I can only promise that I have written all of this document in the most truthful manner possible. I encourage you to do your own research, by all means, do not take anything I or anyone says for granted.

1. BigMcintosh, Old community member, ex-ponychan mod and mlpchan mod.
2. A Pony thread on /b/
3. MLP episodes list
4. RainbowCrash, /r/mylittlepony mod
5. Ponychan staff identities, january 2012
6. /80/, a window into the old Ponychan (link deleted)
7. Complete Ponychan staff list
8. Aeris, old /b/ and Ponychan member
9. HipsterBrony, ex-Ponychan mod (!!Soarin)
10. First Discourse on the Nature of /oat/ by Moony
11. Orange X Zamoonda chat logs, Part 1, Part 2 (Warning, huge document)
12. 4chan /b/ rules
13. The Zam's reddit AMA

Changelog:
05/10/13: Wrote this!

27/04/14: Corrected some dates and words. Clarified for non-imageboard users. Hi reddit.
11/12/17: Made some things clearer to someone who may not be familiar with those websites.
25/04/21: Looks like some people are still reading this. Some of the pastebins were privated by Pastebin, it wasn't me! So I moved them to Google Docs instead. I'm also moving Moony's document to my own GDrive in case his account gets closed. I also added The Zam's reddit AMA to the sources and added a little addendum on how /co/ felt about /b/ culture thanks to that new source!