



Historical Background Wilbur-Cruce Spanish Barb Horse

Colonial Spanish Horse is the collective name for all strains of the horse that was brought to the Americas by the Spanish.

The Reuben Wilbur strain of Spanish Barb Horse has a unique historic and genetic background. They are considered a landrace, having developed over time in one place and with a particular set of genes. All such strains of Colonial Spanish Horses can trace their origin to the royal breeding farms set up in the Caribbean Islands by the Spanish monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella. After horse populations were increased, they were then exported to mainland Mexico where the Conquistadores, the missionary fathers and the native Indians took part in moving them northward into what is now the United States.

In the late 1600s, Father Eusebio Kino, a Jesuit priest and missionary, first brought the Spanish Horse into the Pimeria Alta, the area made up of southern Arizona and northern Sonora, Mexico. Father Kino established his headquarters in the San Miguel River Valley, approximately twenty-five miles east of today's Magdalena, where he founded Mission Dolores and Rancho Dolores. It is from this area that the Wilbur Cruce (WC) horses originated. His mission remained arrived in the production of livestock for many decades, producing stock that was destined to be spread northward as each new mission was established.

The Spanish Horse played an important role in the early development of North America. During the 15th, 16th and 17 centuries, the Spanish Horse was the most common equine, existing in an arc from the Carolinas, down to Florida, across the southern part of the country and throughout the western mountains and plains. At the start of the 19th century, the Spanish Horse became rare as it was replaced by larger horse types brought by pioneers from the Northeast. Herds held by Native Americans were all but exterminated in the latter years of Indian domination by the U.S. Calvary. A few herds remained in isolation but for the most part, the fate of the Spanish Horse was in the hands of a few individuals, families and Native Americans who recognized their value and sought to preserve them.

One of those families, the Wilbur family, had preserved their Spanish Horses for over 113 years on their ranch.