

Wilbur-Cruce Spanish Barb Horses

Marjorie Dixon, Dragoon Mountain Spanish Barbs

IN THE 1880S, Dr. Ruben Wilbur purchased a stallion and twenty-five mares from Juan Sepulveda, a horse trader in Magdalena, Sonora, to breed working horses for his cattle ranch near Arivaca, Arizona. What became known as the Wilbur-Cruce strain of Spanish Barbs—horses whose antecedents developed on North Africa’s Barbary Coast—is thought to be descended from horses raised by Father Kino at Rancho Dolores in Sonora. Kino provided thousands of head of livestock to Mexican settlers and Native Americans in northern Mexico and southern Arizona.

Wilbur’s horses lived in a closed-herd situation on the Wilbur-Cruce Ranch until 1989, when the ranch was purchased by the Nature Conservancy. In 1990, the horses were taken off the ranch and distributed by the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy to conservation breeders who had preserved other strains of Spanish Barbs. The horses were blood typed and determined to have no Arabian or Thoroughbred markers and many Spanish Barb makers, confirming Eva Wilber-Cruce’s belief that they were from the original Mission Dolores herd.

Preserved on the isolated ranch near Arivaca for more than one hundred years, Wilbur-Cruce Spanish Barbs are now bred and trained on at least thirteen ranches in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nebraska, and New Mexico. Known for its exceptional disposition, great beauty, athletic ability, and historic importance, the Wilbur-Cruce Spanish Barb is a significant part of the agricultural heritage left to us by Spanish explorers and missionaries. In fact, at our ranch in southeastern Arizona, we have a herd of nine Wilbur-Cruce mares and their foals, which roam on a thousand acres of pasture.



These two Wilbur-Cruce Spanish Barbs are probably descended from horses bred by Father Kino.

Maureen Kirk-DeBourner

Father Kino’s Cows

Diana Hadley, Office of Ethnohistorical Research, Arizona State Museum

THE CATTLE THAT ACCOMPANIED Father Kino to the Pimería Alta were *criollos*, or “cattle of the country.” The term *criollo* could be applied to either livestock or people, and throughout the Spanish Americas it indicated that the individual was of unmixed Spanish heritage but had been born in the New World, a designation that with time came to have pejorative overtones. Descended from the Andalusian cattle of the southern Iberian Peninsula and ultimately from the Brown Atlas cattle of North Africa, *criollo* cattle were the only bovine livestock in the Americas for more than a century.

In November 1493, the first Andalusian cattle to arrive in the New World were unloaded onto the beaches of Hispaniola. Along with horses, sheep, and hogs, they were part of the agricultural cargo on the seventeen ships that

accompanied Christopher Columbus on his second voyage. Within three decades, Hispaniola became the major export depot for shipping *criollo* cattle to the mainland. The first breeding herd reached Mexico in 1521.

The Jesuit-led ranching frontier moved northward along the Pacific coast, reaching the Pimería Baja portion of central Sonora in the 1620s. By that time the open-range methods of grazing management imported from Andalusia were well established. *Criollo* bulls were not castrated, and herds were semi-feral. Round-ups were held twice a year for branding and slaughter or sale. Vaqueros were mounted and used the *garrocha* (prod) and rawhide *reata* ropes for gathering stock. In practice, the herds belonged to the missions rather than the villagers.