

# The Spanish Colonial

## The History of the Breed

When the Spanish explorers Coronado and DeSoto first came to America in the 1500s, they brought horses with them. Many escaped and wild herds were established. Some of these horses were later captured and domesticated by the likes of Father Eusebio Francisco Kino, an early explorer.

In 1681, Jesuit missionary Father Kino (*depicted in statue below*), one of the early Spanish explorers of the deserts of the American Southwest, arrived in Mexico City. He soon established a herd of Spanish horses and Andalusians for the treacherous travels and

journeys that were to be intrinsic to his explorations.

*"In January of 1681, a tall Jesuit missionary astride his horse rode north through the Santa Cruz Valley. Stopping at the Pima Indian village of Tumacácori, on the east bank of the Santa Cruz River, Father Kino celebrated Mass for the village inhabitants. From 1687, when he first entered the Pimeria Alta, until his death in 1711,*

*Father Kino was tireless*

*in his travels through uncharted desert, river valleys, and mountain ranges. He established missions in what are today northern Mexico and southern Arizona."* [www.nps.gov/archive/tuma/Father\\_Kino/](http://www.nps.gov/archive/tuma/Father_Kino/)

Father Kino developed quite a list of accomplishments, including proving in 1701 that Baja California was a peninsula, not an island. His 1705 map was the standard reference for the southwestern

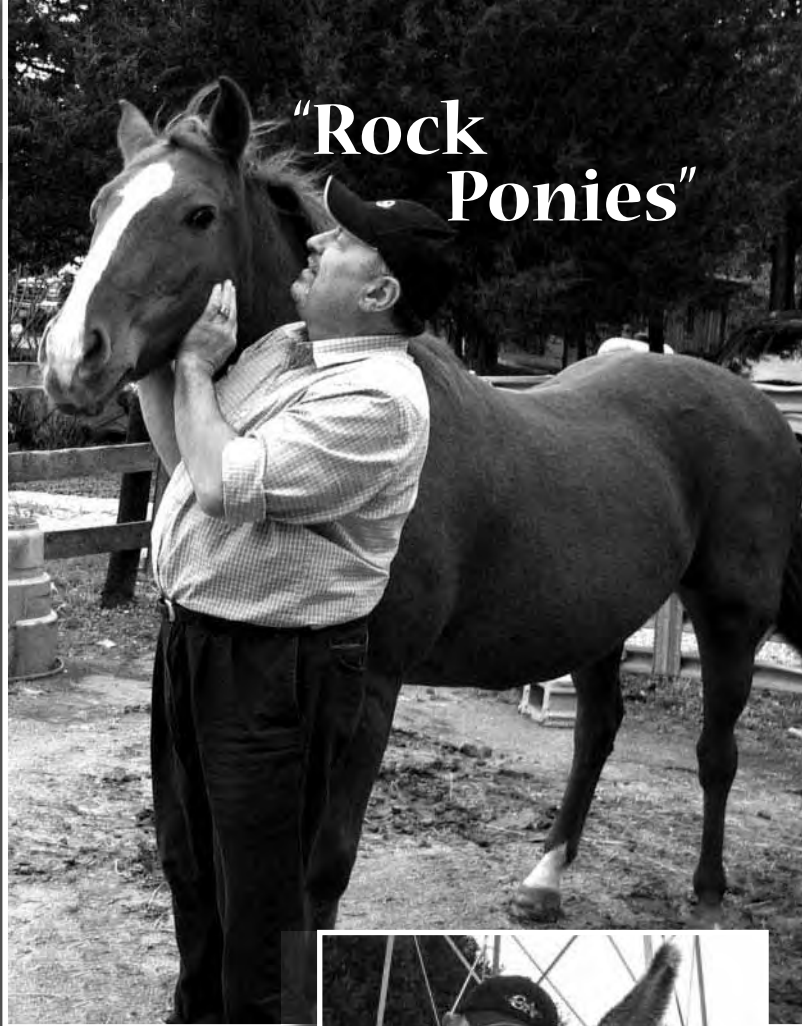
desert region for more than a century. And the sturdy Spanish horse continually played a role.

In 1885, Dr. Reuben A. Wilbur, a Harvard-educated physician, was hired by the Phelps Dodge Mining Company in Arizona's Arivaca Valley as the company's medical doctor. While in service there, he met and married a Mexican woman, last name "Vilducea." They homesteaded over 140 acres in the valley, and started a family. The "Wilbur Ranch" later came to encompass sixteen square miles.

When Juan Sepulveda, a Sonora, Mexico, horse trader, was traveling to trade in Kansas in the 1800s, he picked up a herd of horses from Father Kino's herd. Coincidentally, he stopped at the Wilbur Ranch and befriended Doctor Wilbur. As a gift, he left a few of the Spanish horses behind, which Dr. Wilbur

\*These horses were recently genotyped by experts at the University of Kentucky, determining that they are part of a pure breed, now registered as the "Spanish Colonial" breed of horses. They most closely resemble the Peruvian Paso breed of horses. Mr. Emery Henderson,\*\* originally of Central City, Iowa, and now a well-respected Morgan horse breeder in Arizona, was instrumental in this entire project, as was Kris Crooks.

## "Rock Ponies"



ABOVE: Gary Weinman spends a quality moment with "Juan."

BELOW: "Jerky" was part of the package.

bred and cultivated. Soon, these horses became an isolated herd of animals.\*

When Eva Antonia Wilbur-Cruce, granddaughter of Dr. Wilbur, inherited the ranch in 1933, she decided it was time to write a book about her recollections of girlhood in this lonely border country between Sonora and the Arizona Territory. [Her book: *A Beautiful, Cruel Country*]. In this book, she talks of the "little rock horses," which came to the ranch in the 1800s, a gift from the Kansas rancher. "[We] knew all about the intelligence and ability of the little Spanish horses. We sometimes called them the 'rock horses' because they were surefooted on rocky surfaces, and the Indians called them 'doghorses' because of the doglike devotion they had for their masters."

When Mrs. Cruce reached her 90s, the ranch became idle and the horses ran wild there. The land was sold to the Nature Conservancy

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**\*\* Mr. Emery Henderson has ties to Iowa! Originally from Central City, he has been raising Morgan horses near Cave Creek, Arizona, since the 1950s and is actively involved in horse welfare there. In fact, he and his Morgan stallion are depicted in statue at the state capitol of Arizona. Additionally, a well-known trailhead is named after him (The Emery Henderson Trail). Henderson is widely respected in Arizona and around the country as an active proponent of horse welfare.**

in 1989, which soon determined that the "rock horses" were competing with a ground-nesting bird, the Masked Bobwhite Quail. After this determination, it was decided that the horses had to be removed from the ranch within the next 30 days.

### **The Herd is Dispersed**

When the Pioneer Living History Museum in Cave Creek, AZ, got wind of this news, they decided to start a herd of their own on the edge of town, preserving a bit of Arizona history right there on site. It didn't take long, however, before they realized the enormity of this project, and decided they had to sell the horses.

When Kris Crooks and Emery Henderson subsequently learned of the Spanish Colonial herd dispersal, they made sure they were at the auction. They purchased several of the horses, as did others from the southwestern part of the US.

### **The Breed**

Most Spanish Colonial horses are around 14hh in size, with sturdy legs and hooves. They often sport a rather "Romanesque" (convex) head profile, and many are gaited. The eyes are often almond-shaped, with an almost Oriental appearance. They are best known for their stamina and wonderful temperament.

"The Spanish horses thrived in the desert and were the horses of the day... They had speed, stamina, and intelligence, and, strange as it may seem, they had feelings... And so the Spanish horses were made for the country and were much like the country itself, rugged and beautiful... It was amusing to see an 800-pound horse under a 200-pound man with an enormous saddle and a 1000-pound bull at the end of the rope. (Wilbur-Cruce 1987 - [www.horseweb.com/heritagebreedssouthwest/history.htm](http://www.horseweb.com/heritagebreedssouthwest/history.htm))

### **"Juan" at Home on the Crooks Ranch**

At home on the Kris & Billy Crooks ranch, one particular foal, "Juan," was exceptionally large, most likely because his mother was the alpha mare who got the best of the forage. Kris, a long-time horsewoman and trainer, reported that, "Juan was one of the last foals born on the Cruz ranch." When she acquired him at the age of two months, "Juan was already a calm and friendly horse, and very easy to work with." By the time he was four years old, he had been sufficiently trained and it was time to find him a new home. The Crooks's eventually sold all of the Spanish Colonial horses, once they had been trained. Most of the breeding groups are located in New Mexico, California, and Texas.

### **A Spanish Colonial Horse Comes to Iowa**

Billy Crooks and Dr. Gary Weinman of North Liberty, Iowa, have been friends since 1971, which is coincidentally the same year that Gary bought his first trail horse, "Speckles." Little did the two friends know in 1971 that their acquaintance would later lead to Weinman's possession of one of the Spanish Colonial horses.

Weinman, an accomplished trail rider, was without a horse fourteen years ago, and so Kris and Billy naturally contacted him when they had horses to sell. That's how Juan came to reside on Weinman's acreage, and except for the last year when Weinman has been off because of a "bum knee," the two have put in many trail miles together. As Weinman so aptly stated, "The Spanish Colonial horse is one of the oldest horses, and is now the newest recognized breed."

### **Looking Ahead**

Juan and Jerky came together as a package, and their home in North Liberty is destined to remain their forever home. Next year, after he gets his knee "fixed," Dr. Weinman plans on adding many more trail miles to the pair's list of accomplishments.



Drawing of Father Kino and one of his invaluable "Rock Ponies"