

THE INSTITUTE FOR THE DESERT ARABIAN HORSE

PERPETUATING AN ORAL TRADITION

Our past has the power to inform, instruct, and inspire present and future generations. The Desert Arabian horse is inextricably bound to the Bedouin people who developed, nurtured, and valued its unique characteristics over several millennia and archived its history in their oral traditions. As these horses formed a core element of traditional Bedouin culture, breeding practices and accounts of famous horses and their feats were passed from generation to generation via stories and poetry. The lineage of horses—maintained in memory and transmitted orally—has been reduced to writing only for Westerners.

In the West, the Bedouin-bred Desert Arabian was used to create and improve breeds around the world. Emerging from Bedouin culture, it traveled to the studs of kings and commoners, surviving the tumultuous shift from being the central focus of a living semi-nomadic culture to being an adjunct element in post-industrial societies. Only since the late 1800s has it also been bred outside of its cradle countries for its own intrinsic value.

During the first half of the 20th century, the Arabian was a rare breed in the West. The nascent Arabian Horse Club in the U.S. recorded fewer than 250 imports and 7,000 foals born by 1950. The Arabian horse was used as a saddle mount or working ranch horse. At the mid-point of the century, the world was still recovering from the enormity of World War II. Economies in many developed nations were booming, and colonialism was teetering on the brink of dissolution. Political independence came to characterize much of the Middle East. The Bedouin culture was increasingly settled. Saudi Arabia's oil riches attracted American investors; some of those who went to the Arabian peninsula returned with magnificent horses. In 1952, Egypt underwent a political revolution and established a populist government. The Royal Agricultural Society of Cairo (RAS) was reorganized into the Egyptian Agricultural Organization (EAO). The EAO's breeding program changed direction, and horses formerly unobtainable were available for export.

In the U.S., the era of the 1950s-1980s marks the heyday of the Arabian horse industry. More than 2,700 horses were imported, and registrations reached almost 30,000 annually. Concurrently, a resurgence of interest emerged in the original Desert Arabian horse (the asil horse) and the physiologic, temperamental, and genetic qualities developed by its original custodians. This increased interest led to formal and informal efforts to perpetuate what remained of the asil Arabian horse in the West. The U.S. became the world's largest repository of the Bedouin asil horse, and concerted and coordinated preservation efforts on behalf of the Desert Arabian were initiated. Many of the breeders involved were drawn by the allure of Bedouin culture and the characteristics that had been bred into the horse over millennia. Additionally, the period marks a profound change in organized competition opportunities, with the rise of shows and races dedicated to the Arabian breed, and the creation of venues specifically to showcase Desert Arabians.

The contemporary period from the 1990s through the first decade of the 21st century has seen a substantial decline in breeding, with annual registrations in the U.S. averaging fewer than 8,000 since 2000. There has been a concurrent increase in interest, especially in the area of origin. Although the future of the Arabian horse is uncertain, the current period seems markedly different from those which preceded it.

Despite some efforts to capture the knowledge of individuals who played key roles in perpetuating the Desert Arabian and popularizing its use in the West, much factual and contextual information has been lost. Written records from the first half of the 20th century are available, but the breeders who established the Arabian horse in the U.S. are gone. Such written materials as exist for the period 1950s-1980s are largely uncataloged and unindexed. Many of those who were involved in the industry during this period have critical knowledge that has never been recorded. Neither the character of significant horses nor the passion of their breeders is well-captured in print or other durable media.

To supplement the written history of the Desert Arabian in the West and to record the passions and recollections of its breeders and other custodians, The Institute for the Desert Arabian Horse has initiated an Oral History Program. Through dynamic recorded interviews, the Institute seeks to preserve the stories of individuals who helped create the fabric of this history and whose lives, in turn, were shaped by the people, places, events, and ideas of their day.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Objective: The Oral History Program (hereafter, Program) aims to extend the oral tradition of the Bedouin by making recollections of Western breeders, trainers, and other individuals associated with the Desert Arabian available to the public, researchers, historians, and future custodians of the breed. These recollections will be collected through taped interviews and archived as part of the Institute's permanent collection. As funding allows, the Institute plans to organize and publish the material gathered into a series of articles, books, and audio-visual documentaries.

Scope: The Program will focus initially on the crucial period of the 1950s-1980s and on those individuals whose length, breadth, and depth of knowledge of the Desert Arabian can best inform future breeders, custodians, and others captured by the magic of the Desert Arabian horse. Early interviews will capture recollections of this dynamic period, documenting breeding practices and decision processes of master breeders who produced significant Desert Arabian horses and recording first-hand memories about key horses—characteristics not apparent from written records of awards, competitions, and the success of progeny and events. Subordinate projects will develop that may cover various bloodline traditions, subsequent historical periods, innovative breeding and conservation practices, and other related themes.

Advisors: The Institute will consult with advisors, both those with subject matter knowledge of the horses and people and those with expertise in the professional practices of oral history. Such advice will advance the Institute's goal of sustaining a program of high scholarly standards that is inclusive of all historical aspects.

Interviews: Foundational interviews will be held with those whose efforts during the period of the 1950s-1980s established the concepts of perpetuating the original horse of the Bedouin in the West. From such interviews, the Institute will establish sub-projects to ensure that the broadest range of memory will be captured. Interviews will generally be conducted by volunteers with some subject-matter knowledge who have received training in the interview protocol established for this program. Interviewers will be expected to conduct preparatory research and to adapt a general list of questions for specific use to each interview based on that research. Such research will become an integral part of the program archives. Interviews will be conducted according to professional standards. They will be as complete, verifiable, and usable as possible, with due regard for the ethical protection of the subjects and respect for the proper use of history.

Acceptance of prior interviews: Some informal interviews are known to exist. Subjects or their families may offer such materials (audio tape or video recordings) for inclusion in the archives of the Institute. Acceptance for use in this program will be in accordance with the standards established by the Institute for inclusion in its archives.

Ancillary material collection: Through oral history interviews, researchers often identify useful background materials. The interview subjects may also offer printed materials, photographs, video, and other ephemera that supplement the material covered in the interview. The Institute will welcome the contribution of such material to its archive, subject to the standards and protocols for accepting material for that archive.

Cooperative relationships: The Institute may enter into cooperative agreements with other organizations that have an interest in the project and that can help further its realization and completion.

Archive: All materials, including copyright releases, donation forms, contributed print materials, interviewer notes, the audio/video recordings, and any transcriptions related to the Program will be maintained in the Institute archives in accordance with best professional practices.

Funding sources/budget: Initial funding for equipment will be through donations to the Institute. Travel expenses for the foundational interviews will be paid by contribution of the interviewer or by funds donated to the Institute. Additional funding for sub-projects and for the development of text and video products will be sought through grants, donations, or support from cooperating organizations.

Access and use: All materials will be for the non-profit purposes described in the Institute's mission statement. The Institute will retain all rights, while making the materials available to researchers and other interested parties. The Institute anticipates creating both text and video products to be delivered in multiple modes (periodicals, monographs, stand-alone video, and text+video via the Web).

TERMS OF USE

(adapted from policies established by the Cleaves Law Library for their oral history project on the history of law practice in the state of Maine — <http://www.cleaves.org/pdf/ohguidelines.pdf>)

Compliance with Release Agreements:

The Institute will abide by the terms of the agreements signed by narrators, interviewers, and/or donors when they assigned ownership, including copyright, to the Institute. Interviews cataloged as “unrestricted” are open to the public. Interviews cataloged as “restricted” are subject to various time seals and other special conditions. Material from these restricted interviews may be used by compliance with the imposed conditions.

Copyright:

All images, sound recordings, transcripts, or texts for the Institute’s Oral History Program are protected under U.S. Copyright law. The Institute controls copyright to most materials in the Program. It will not loan any materials where a narrator/donor has retained copyright and/or imposed access restrictions of any sort, although research access to such materials may be arranged.

Permission to Publish:

Users are expected to comply with the generally accepted policy known as “fair use.” Fair use permits reproduction of single copies of selected items for personal research or private use. In no case should entire tapes or transcripts be reproduced, and only brief passages should be quoted verbatim. Any individual or organization desiring to publish, distribute, prepare for public performance, broadcast, or display a substantial portion of an interview shall obtain permission in writing from the Institute or other copyright owner. As a condition of publication, a copy of the final product in which the oral history was used will be donated to the Institute and added to the Program archives.

Citation:

Patrons are expected to properly cite the interviews they use, even for personal or research use. Citations should include the following elements: copyright notice, names of the narrator, name of the interviewer, date of interview, number of the interview as it appears in the collection catalog.

Publicity:

The Institute will maintain a page within its Web site describing the materials obtained through this program, including a list of the interviews that have been completed and transcribed and descriptions of ancillary materials. Program policies, agreement guidelines and forms, and sample release and deed of gift forms will also be posted.