

The First 27,000 AQHA Horses Foundation or Not?

The recent Foundation Meeting hosted by AQHA was an opportunity to introduce the Foundation movement not only to AQHA but to several large Quarter Horse breeders in attendance. During this meeting it became painfully obvious to the NFQHA representatives how very confusing all of the information from so many different groups is to those who are not familiar with what is going on in the Foundation world. In fact, in listening to all the various methods of researching Foundation blood, it started to sound like the old double talk routine: "Whos on First, Whats on Second". (It's no wonder that many elect not to join any group). The main area of confusion stems from how far back each group researches in determining Foundation blood. Many stop their research at AQHA horse #27,000 considering all horses with a lower number to be 100% Foundation just because they were physically inspected.

The following quotes and excerpts from the works of Robert Denhardt and Don Hedgpeth will help explain why NFQHA does not embrace the philosophy of the first 27,000 registered Quarter Horses being foundation just because they were inspected. Upon researching the history of the first 27,000 it was found that many were not considered Bulldogs or Steel Dusts, and in fact, were not originally intended for permanent registration. Many of these horses were accepted just to make financial ends meet for the new association. Over 5,000 of the first 27,000 horses have one registered Thoroughbred parent (with the Jockey Club). In addition, many of the Inspectors were not Bulldog men, and passed horses based on their personal opinion.

Quotes from *They Rode Good Horses* by Don Hedgpeth:
Courtesy of the American Quarter Horse Association

Page 6 - July 1940 - 1st AQHA-sanctioned show Cowboy Reunion, Stamford, TX

Controversy growing between Bulldog men or (Cowboys) and Quarter Horse Breeders.

"At the bottom of the controversy was the fact that registered horses brought more money than unregistered ones. Opposition to the Association came from those breeders who were not producing bulldogs, and, consequently, could not pass the conformation requirement for registration."

Page 7 - 03/14/1941 Second Annual meeting.

"...once registration of horses was actually underway, the practical interpretations of qualifications was left to AQHA Secretary Bob Denhardt and to the man who was doing most of the field work, J.H. Minnick." Jim Minnick ".....believed there was room in the registry for bulldogs, half-Thoroughbreds and everything in between. Minnick did the majority of the early field inspections and judged most of the first AQHA-sanctioned shows." "It was one thing to sit in a Director's meeting and agree to hold the line on the conformation policy. But Minnick was out in the country, and he knew there were just not enough bulldog-type horses to support the Association's operations." "The only way to improve these figures was to register more horses and bring in new members. "

Page 9 - Spring 1941 meeting "there was an attempt to develop a classification system of "A, B, and C" types, which would cover everything from bulldog to racehorse conformations." Jack Hutchins, AQHA President remarked on the class system "We have seen the beginning of the end of the bulldogs."

Page 9 - "During 1940 and 1941 Jim Minnick was doing almost all of the inspections...." "A good market had developed for AQHA registered horses, and breeders were trying to register everything with hair on it."

Page 10 - By 1942 "Hutchins had inspectors in eight states visiting some 279 breeders...."

Page 13 - 02/06/1946 AQHA Directors meeting

“Among specific complaints heard at about this time were, for example, a man who wrote saying that an AQHA inspector had turned down his horses for registration, and then tried to buy them at a cheaper price....”

Quotes from Quarter Horses A Story of Two Centuries by Bob Denhardt

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“Jack’s (Hutchins) reactions to the A,B,C classifications as set up at an executive committee meeting at Lee Underwood’s Windthorst Ranch was typical. “Well, boys,” he said, “you are all for it so I’ll not vote against it, but it will never work.” The next day on the way home he told me that we had seen the beginning of the end of the bulldogs. As usual he was right.

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Many volunteer inspectors were more willing than able, more worried about hurting the feelings of the breeders than interested in the good of the Quarter Horse.

Page 153 - Jim Minnick

The financial success of the AQHA during its early days was due primarily to the work of Jim Minnick because he found so many horses to register. Also to a large extent, Jim should be given credit for the present conformation of the Quarter Horse. In his role of inspector he determined which animals were to be registered. He frankly admitted that he, as a polo player, preferred the half-breed type. He also pointed out that there would probably not be enough A type, or bulldogs, to finance the early operations of the AQHA. He therefore suggested to our executive committee that he be allowed to register three general types, A,B, and C from the Steel Dust type to the half-Thoroughbred. By careful use of the A type, he pointed out, we could keep on breeding Steel Dusts.

The plan had some attractive features - most of them financial. We agreed. The end was foreseen only by Jack Hutchins. Naturally, once they were in the book, all horses, A, B, And C, became equal. Since the A’s were scarce, the B’s and C’s were interbred and soon far outnumbered the original Steel Dust type.

Quotes from Foundation Dams of the American Quarter Horse by Bob Denhardt:

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In the end it was agreed to register a horse of the “correct” type with an “A” after its number, a horse that showed at least half-Quarter Horse characteristics was to have a “B” after its registration number, and half Thoroughbreds were to be registered “C”. Very few breeders could boast of an “A” band of horses. Then came the annual meeting, where the majority (“C” breeders) abandoned the “ABC” classification, and all numbered horses were simply registered Quarter Horses.

One of the promoters of the “C”-type Quarter Horse was, in my opinion, the best horseman ever employed by the AQHA. His name was Jim Minnick. He frankly told the first executive committee that he was personally a “C”, or half-breed-type, man.

Jim was hired as the first inspector, and during the first years his selections provided the base stock for the breed. His choices set the pattern. He also judged most of the early official shows. His activities should have provided some clear indications how the association was going to go.

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Many breeders besides Jim Minnick preferred the half-breed horse. Some were directors of the new American Quarter Horse Association. Take Bob Kleberg, of the King Ranch, for example.....the Klebergs were not bulldog breeders, nor did they want to be.... Bob Kleberg explained his position in the first edition of the AQHA Stud Book: “...the Quarter Horse makes an ideal foundation on which to cross the Thoroughbred.”

Quotes from Foundation Sires of the American Quarter Horse by Bob Denhardt:

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Jim Minnick pointed out to us that it would be very expensive for the association to send an inspector out on the road. He wondered if we did not need to register some of the lowbred horses to stay solvent....

We agreed at the time because we thought it would be only a temporary measure. Time was to show that the momentum, once started, could not be stopped.

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It is rather easy to look back now and see what caused the trouble, although I do not think anyone foresaw it at the time. Basically, the issue had been present from the first. It came to the surface briefly at the meeting where we compromised with ABC registration. The compromise only put the lid on the kettle, but it was boiling just out of sight. It all came to this: was the more leggy, Thoroughbred-type eligible for complete registration, or should we be strict and permanently register only the old Steel Dust Quarter Horses. Although we did not realize it at the time, those of us who wanted to go down the straight and narrow path were "gone goslings." A terrific market for Quarter Horses had suddenly appeared. Out-of-state buyers were flocking into Texas and buying anything with a number. Most of them had never seen a Quarter Horse and could hardly be expected to know one. It was a horse raisers paradise. Most breeders put tremendous pressure on the directors and officers to register any horse that had any kind of Quarter Horse blood, regardless of how remote that blood was or how lacking in Quarter Horse conformation the animal might be.

When Jim Minnick placed Margie-as champion mare at the Fort Worth show-the same mare he put up at Tucson (and who was still in racing shape) he struck the match that was to set off the first pyrotechnic display. The second floor meeting of most of the directors that night spelled the doom of the ABC classification. As a result, no horse ever appeared in the stud book with an A, B, or C after his number, and Steel Dust conformation was no longer a basic requirement for registration.

What happened was this. Margie was definitely class C. Since originally class B and C horses were only to be registered to furnish breeding stock (and not because they were good Quarter Horse specimens), some felt she should not have been placed champion. Naturally, those who had agreed under protest to allow the registration of B and C horses were upset. However, in the future they were all to be considered equal: A, B, and C. It was the will of the majority, and as such was justified.

By January of 1943 there were almost 2,000 registered horses, and almost half that many more pending in the files. There were fifty-five inspectors in eight states, busy as beavers. There were members wanting service in sixteen states. The simple fact was that there were not that many authentic Steel dust Quarter Horses of the type envisioned by the founders. However, there were many honest, enthusiastic breeders who admired the Quarter Horse, and wanted to raise them. Their voices could not be ignored, and the AQHA was on its way to making the American Quarter Horse the most popular in the world.