"THE INDIAN HORSE PERIOD"

Much of central North America was discovered and claimed for Spain by Hernando Cortes and Hernando DeSoto during the early Spanish exploration periods in the 1500's. As the territories were claimed and settled, horses were brought in and out, lost, or stolen. Many people including settlers, entrepreneurs, tradesmen, and others relied on the horse to get them through life. The horse made the economy grow and the people prosper and it did not take long for the Native Americans to see this. To prevent the Native Americans from becoming a greater threat to the colonies, the Spanish government forbade them from owning or using horses.

What the Spanish did not predict was that the Indians whom they held as slaves would learn to work and handle horses on the Spanish Rancheros. Ultimately the Indians newly acquired horse skills would aid in the Pueblo Rebellion of 1680 that forced the Spanish out of what is now known as Mexico. The Indians took advantage of the horses left behind and maintained control over a portion of the herds that had not gone astray during the battles. They began to trade the horses for goods and teach other tribes the skills of horsemanship. This is how the Plains Indians acquired their first horses.



Regardless of Indian attacks, Spain still had a firm claim over what was known as the Louisiana Territory. This territory was vast and included over 828,000 square miles of land. Spain signed over the territory to France in 1802 and France in turn sold it to the United States in 1803. This land acquisition, made by President Thomas Jefferson, doubled the size of the United States and played an enormous role in the lives of the Indians and the horses they rode.



On their expedition over the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean in 1804, Lewis and Clarke discovered many Indian tribes on horseback. The most famous of these Indians were known as the Cheyenne who were excellent warriors. These particular Indians were known for making war on the "white people" around 1861 in the western territories. They killed hundreds of soldiers and raided colonies due to broken peace and trading treaties. The Cheyenne were finally defeated by General George Custer at the battle of Washita River on November 27, 1868. During many of these territorial battles, the Indian and cavalry horses were lost or taken into possession by the victors. As the horse population grew, bloodlines began to mix the cavalry mounts with the Indian mustang. Thus, the roots of the American Quarter Horse flourished.