

Appaloosa Sires of the Palouse Country— and the Men Who Rode Them

By GEORGE B. HATLEY

IN every breed of livestock developed in a specific area, the men and the sires of that area who influenced the breed become of interest. With Appaloosas it has been possible to talk to some of the owners and breeders of foundation sires, and people who knew them.

Seeking information about Appaloosas from old-timers in the Palouse country, I was most often referred to the following men: Sam Fisher, an aged Nez Perce Indian who lived at the mouth of the Palouse River near Lyons Ferry, Wash.; the Lamb family at Central Ferry, Wash., owner of the stallion Knobby; Floyd Hickman of Almota and Colfax, Wash., breeder of Dan, Old Blue, and the Tobys; and Faye Hubbard, a rodeo cowboy who rode the Appaloosa stallion, Rex.

Sam Fisher was a straight, lean horseman from the family of Nez Perce occupying land north of the Snake. They have been considered by some writers to be a separate tribe, being referred to as Palouse Indians. Not being of Chief Joseph's band, it is doubtful if many of their people joined in the war of 1877, and thus their horses remained intact.

I visited Sam Fisher in the summer of 1946, but he was not feeling well so I stayed only a short time. The next summer, Dr. Francis Haines and I visited him. He was then said to be 98 or 99; and, other than suffering some from a toothache (he still had a full set), he was in fine spirits. Despite his advanced age, he seemed very glad to talk to us about his breed of horses. He said he once had many Appaloosas, and that his family had always had Appaloosas.

Some people argue for and believe in some particular pattern of markings or color phase of Appaloosa as though it was the original and only true pattern. We asked him about patterns before there was any influence from horses brought in by settlers, and he said, "Some few spots, some white (some Appaloosas become nearly white in old age), some many spots." He also made gestures describing the spots. This statement proves that there has always been variation in Appaloosa markings from slightly mottled roans to very colorfully marked horses.

The Indians were very fond of the colorfully spotted ones, and even had a ritual for the mare to go through during at least two stages of pregnancy which would further insure a nicely marked foal. He became unusually enthusiastic when he told us about the "medicine" used for raising good Appaloosas. First he explained that you should mate the most desirable mare with the most desirable stallion. He then gestured by putting his fingertips together with his arms about six inches from his belt to describe a mare showing the first signs of being with foal. This was followed by gestures and descriptions in Nez Perce of the ritual the mare was put through. Then he said, "Just before mare have colt," and made a wide circle with his arms indicating the final stages of pregnancy, followed by the gestures and descriptions of the second ritual the mare was to go through to insure a well-marked foal. Then he concluded by saying, "If everything right, it work."

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• Rex as a three-year-old with Faye Hubbard up. Rex died in 1945.



• Sam Fisher of Lyons Ferry, Wash., at the age of 98.



• Floyd Hickman photographed by his saddle shed at Almota, Wash., on a stallion sired by Toby L.



• Knobby, owned by Glen Lamb of Central Ferry, Washington. This picture was taken in 1928.

Photo Courtesy Maude Hinds