

## **William Robinson Brown and his Maynesboro Stud**

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**William Robinson "W. R. " Brown** (January 17, 1875 – August 4, 1955) was an American corporate officer of the Brown Company of Berlin, New Hampshire. He was also an influential Arabian horse breeder, the founder and owner of the Maynesboro Stud, and an authority on Arabian Horses.

He purchased his first Arabian horses in 1910 and founded the Maynesboro Stud near Berlin in 1912. The farm was named after the original settlement in the area, Maynesboro, located in the White Mountains in an area also known as the Great North Woods Region.

The main stallion barn, although moved from its original location, has been preserved and restored by the Berlin and Coös County Historical Society, which is also restoring the workhorse barns of the Brown Company. On September 15, 2012, the society celebrated the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Maynesboro Stud.

At its peak, Maynesboro was the largest Arabian stud farm in the United States. In 1919, Brown had 88 horses, some at his main farm in New Hampshire, and others at farms he owned in Decorah, Iowa, and Cody, Wyoming. He is credited as the breeder of 194 horses, and became known as one of the most knowledgeable breeders and authorities on Arabians. He served as President of the Arabian Horse Club of America, now part of the Arabian Horse Association, from 1918 until 1939.



*Brown on an Arabian horse, 1919*

### **Foundation stock**

As he built Maynesboro, Brown studied the pedigrees of almost every purebred Arabian in the USA at the time. He believed the Arabian was actually a separate subspecies of horse, a once popular but now discredited theory. He found that, even though developed in the desert, Arabians adapted well to the severe winter weather of his New England farm.

When he started Maynesboro, Brown obtained his original foundation bloodstock from his oldest brother, Herbert, who had purchased Abu Zeyd, a stallion bred by the Crabbet Arabian Stud in England. Abu Zeyd was considered the best son of his famous sire, Mesaoud. Herbert Brown obtained the stallion from the estate of Homer Davenport following Davenport's death in 1912.

The Maynesboro stud also acquired 10 mares from the Davenport estate. Brown considered Abu Zeyd an ideal representative of the Arabian breed, and when the stallion died, Brown donated the skeleton to the American Museum of Natural History. His other American purchases included most of the horses owned by Spencer Borden's Interlachen Farms in Massachusetts, following Borden's decision to disperse his herd. These horses included animals descended from the breeding programme of Randolph Huntington, one of the first people in the United States to breed purebred Arabians. Brown also obtained Borden's extensive collection of literary works on horsemanship, Arab culture, and the Arabian horse, which included 8th-century Furuṣiyya manuscripts. Following this start, he looked abroad for additional bloodstock, eventually importing 33 horses into the United States.

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### International purchases

Many American breeders had purchased horses from the Crabbet Stud, which at the time Brown founded Maynesboro was owned by Lady Anne Blunt and Wilfrid Scawen Blunt. American breeders obtained some of Crabbet's best Arabians during the early 1900s owing to the turmoil within the Blunt family. The couple separated in 1906, and following Lady Anne's death in 1917, Blunt's daughter Judith, Lady Wentworth, became involved in a rancorous and expensive estate battle with Wilfrid over the Crabbet lands and horses. Wilfrid, needing to appease creditors, sold many of the stud's best horses to international buyers for low prices. Through an agent, Brown purchased 20 Crabbet horses in 1918, although for reasons unknown, only 17 actually made it to Maynesboro; he paid only £2727 for the entire lot. The most significant horse purchased was the well-known stallion Berk, who died in America after siring only four foals, much to the dismay of Lady Wentworth, who was trying to buy back the best breeding stock lost to Crabbet because of her father's actions. Brown bought two additional Crabbet-bred horses from England in 1923, although not directly from Lady Wentworth.



One of the most notable Crabbet-bred stallions Brown eventually kept at Maynesboro was Astraed, who had come to America in 1909. This horse had been sold by Wilfrid Blunt to an American buyer from Massachusetts, but after siring only two purebred foals in New England, was sold to the remount, shipped west, and lived in obscurity in Oregon, where he sired no purebred Arabian offspring. Brown ultimately obtained Astraed in 1923, who shipped the aged horse by rail from Idaho to New Hampshire. Astraed only sired one foal crop at Maynesboro, but that group of foals included his most notable American-bred son, Gulastra.

Brown travelled to Europe with the U.S. Army Remount Service in 1921, (the U.S. Army Remount Service provided horses and later mules and dogs to U.S. Army units) visiting a number of major European studs in Austria, France, and Hungary. He met Lady Wentworth at Crabbet on the way home, but did not purchase any of her horses. He imported several Arabian mares from France in 1921 and 1922, in part owing to France's reputation for producing excellent cavalry horses.

In 1929, Brown travelled to Egypt and Syria with Arabian expert Carl Raswan in search of desert-bred horses. According to Brown's wife, the two apparently did not get along well, and the five horses purchased during their journey somehow never made it to America. Following that trip, Brown wrote *The Horse of the Desert*, still considered to be one of the best works written about the Arabian horse.



In 1932, Brown sent his stud manager Jack Humphrey to Egypt, where acting for Brown he bought two stallions and four mares from Prince Mohammed Ali.

The Prince was known as a horseman and scholar, publishing a two-volume treatise on the breeding of Arabian horses. Two of the mares purchased were daughters of Mahroussa, whom Brown described as "the most beautiful mare he ever saw". The stallions were Nasr, a successful race horse, and Zarife.

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## Endurance testing and remounts

Brown's horse Crabbet won the 1921 U.S. Official Cavalry Endurance Ride. Brown's horses won the race three times in five years, and by doing so retired the trophy.

Brown was a remount agent, who served on the U.S. Remount Board, and his interest in improving the quality of horses used by the U.S. Cavalry may have been his motivation to breed Arabians.

Spencer Borden shared Brown's interest in Arabians as remount bloodstock.

Seeking to prove the superior endurance and durability of Arabian horses to the U.S. Army Remount Service, Brown actively encouraged the participation of Arabians in endurance races. He had most of his horses trained to ride and drive. Many were used in endurance races, others shown, and at least one was a polo pony.

In 1918, Brown set up a test ride in which he had two of his horses travel from Berlin to Bethel, Maine, a distance of 162 miles (261 km). They completed the ride in just over 31 hours including breaks; each horse carried a rider and equipment weighing 200 pounds (91 kg) in poor weather and on muddy roads. The horses were Kheyra, a purebred seven-year-old mare who weighed 900 pounds (410 kg), and Rustem Bey, half-arab by Khaled out of a Standardbred mare of the Clay Trotting Horses line.

Rustem Bey was taller and heavier than Kheyra. Both horses were examined by a veterinarian, assessed as being sound and fit to continue at the end of the ride, and showed no evidence of soreness 24 hours later. A third Arabian, Herbert Brown's 'Crabbet', was ridden by a military officer supervising the test, and that pair covered 95 miles (153 km) in seventeen hours. The results of the test were reported in *The New York Times*.

Following the 1918 test, Brown helped organise the first U.S. Official Cavalry Endurance Ride in 1919, which was won by his mare Ramla, who carried 200 pounds (91 kg). The race covered 306 miles (492 km) in five days. The U.S. Remount Service requested the weight horses carried in 1920 be raised to 245 pounds (111 kg), and required horses to travel for about 60 miles (97 km) a day for five days. Arabians won the highest average points of any breed, and although an Arabian horse did not win first place that year, Rustem Bey was second. In 1921, with a weight requirement of 225 pounds (102 kg), again covering 300 miles (480 km) in five days, Brown's gelding Crabbet won the race and Rustem Bey placed third, despite a donation of \$50,000 from The Jockey Club to the Army to buy the best Thoroughbreds possible in a failed attempt to beat the Arabians. Brown won again in 1923 with an Anglo-Arabian named Gouya, thus retiring the U.S. Mounted Service Cup.

Brown used Arabian stallions owned by the remount service as breeding animals, and over time he also provided 32 of his own stallions to sire remounts.

He advocated cross breeding Arabians to improve other breeds. He concluded, however, that attempting to breed purebred Arabians for increased size resulted in a sacrifice in quality and Arabian type.

## Dispersal

Brown sold all his horses in 1933 in an attempt to raise funds to keep the Brown Company solvent. They were bought by the Kellogg Ranch, Roger Selby, William Randolph Hearst's San Simeon Stud, and "General" J. M. Dickinson of Traveler's Rest Stud, who acquired most of the horses from Brown's 1932 importation from Egypt. Dickinson in turn sold Zarife to Wayne Van Vleet of Colorado in 1939, and Azkar, the last foal bred by Brown, to a ranch in Texas.

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There Azkar was left to fend for himself on the open range as a herd stallion, but, a testament to the hardiness of Brown's Arabians, he survived and was returned to the Arabian breeding world by Henry Babson. Dickinson sold the mare Aziza to Alice Payne, who later owned Raffles.

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