

Steve Garner

Tonight we are inducting an honorary member into the Iowa Horsemen's Hall of Fame, Steve Garner, who was born in Missouri in 1889 and passed away in 1967. Mr. Garner was one of the most influential horsemen of his time in promoting the American Saddle Horse and the horse industry in Iowa. He moved his family, which included his wife, a daughter, and three sons to Oskaloosa in 1936 and opened a public stable at the fairgrounds. This was during the time when there were few public training stables in Iowa and only a few private stables featuring the American Saddle Horse. It was a brave move, coming to Iowa, and leaving Missouri, that already had a rich heritage for the breed. As his stable became a success, he built his own facility in 1941 on the southeast side of Oskaloosa and named it Edgetown Stables. He closed the stable in 1955, after years of success in the training, breeding, showing, and supporting the horse shows in Iowa. A few of his top horses include; Storm Peavine, Glorianna Dare, Music Man, Golden Beau, Menards Victory, Duchess of Stonewall, and the stallion Menard Rex, who he donated to Iowa State University, to use on their band of broodmares.

Although he operated a successful stable, we think much of his legacy lies in what he, and his fellow horseman, accomplished in promoting the American Saddle Horse and the overall horse industry in Iowa. When he came here, this state was a leader in draft horses and standardbreds. Our county fairs had horse shows for the draft horses and for light horses of mixed, or unknown breeding. Horse racing was also a big part of the fairs. Our State Fair is one of the longest running horse shows in the country, and was the climax, to the show and racing season. In the late 20's and early 30's exhibitors were wanting to upgrade their riding stock, and started to bring in the American Saddlebred. Steve Garner, and others like him, spurred the development and by the late 30's, shows were offering classes for three and five-gated horses. Then World War II came along and many fairs and shows came to a halt. With the aid of the field representative of the Iowa Horse and Mule Breeders Association, an organization of horseman in the state, which Mr. Garner, joined and became a long time director, started to promote Saddle Clubs all across the state. There were hundreds of clubs established, where trail rides, and family get-togethers were held, often on a weekly schedule. They often had a horse show for members, just for the fun of it. Mr. Garner, helped in organizing many of them, and promoting the American Saddle Horse, to be used for the trail and pleasure. Many were used and some of the

show horses were turned into pleasure horses, since most of the shows had been canceled. With the promotion as a pleasure horse, it also created a market for the breed. After all the American Saddle Horse, was developed as a versatile animal, and now he was proving it.

After the war ended, these same Saddle Clubs started having horse shows; and again with the aid of the Iowa Horse and Mule Association, their field representative, Cecil Rooks and then Harlan Connelly, these shows from one night to three, became an instant success. Steve Garner, and the directors and members of this group, wanted a versatile horse show, and insisted on having classes, not only for the American Saddle Horse, but for ponies, draft horses, western horses, and pleasure classes for all breeds. Then in 1944 Steve Garner, accomplished two major endeavors – he and a group of local horseman and others, established the American Saddle Horse Futurity of Iowa and the National Stallion Show. Both turned out to be instant successes. Both were held at the fairgrounds in Oskaloosa, but in 1946 the Futurity moved to the Iowa State Fair, where it remained until last year. It is one of the longest running futurities in the country, and for many years, Iowa has been in the top five states in the number of colts registered by the Breed Association.

The stallion show was first, only for stallions, with every breed being represented. This show was held in early spring, but after a few years it became too large for the facility, and Joe Dumond, a media tycoon from Waterloo, and an exhibitor of Walking Horses, took over and held it at the Dairy Cattle Grounds. He opened it up to mares and geldings, and being held early in the year, soon became one of the top ten horse shows in the country. Leading trainers and stables competed there, and some of us can remember a young, Tom Moore, brought out future world champions; Miss America, Mr. America, and The Rambler, in Waterloo. This show finally was cancelled in about 1954 or 1955, but Mr. Garner's dream of an important horse show, became a reality.

He was a modest man, who had a vision for the American Saddlebred and the industry in general and during the 40's and 50's his vision came true. On a personal note, I have seen nearly all of the great horses in the past 50 years, and have seen battles between the World Champions. However, some of the most exciting classes came right here in Iowa at our local shows between Menards Victory and Bud Garner and Co-Pilot, and Mouse Yoder. You never knew which one was going to win til the dust had cleared, but it was sure fun to watch.

Here in center ring are Edith Garner Rice, Bud Garner and John Garner – both Bob passed away earlier this year. And with that we induct Steve Garner, as an honorary member of the Iowa Horsemen's Hall of Fame.