



# Research Links

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## HORSE DAYS AT THE COW RANCH

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While many of the large corporate ranches of foothills country wound up their affairs during the first decade of the 20th century, the Bar U Ranch transcended its regional importance and became, for a time, internationally famous as the largest purebred Percheron stud ranch in the world. George Lane and his Alberta ranch were well-known not only in the Midwestern States and throughout the Pacific Northwest, but also in France and on the landed estates of lords and dukes in Great Britain. It was no accident that when His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales expressed a desire to see a "real ranch" during his cross-Canada tour in 1919, the Bar U was selected as his destination.

In 1906, George Lane persuaded his reluctant partners, the Winnipeg cattle shipping firm of Gordon, Ironside, and Fares, to allow him to expand his horse breeding business at the Bar U. (Lane already ran a herd of good grade Percheron mares at his YT Ranch on the Little Bow River.)

During 1907-9, Lane and his agents repeatedly visited La Perche area of France and purchased both stallions and mares from the best available bloodlines. By the outbreak of World War I, Lane was running as many as 300 brood mares at the Bar U, and he obtained an increase of more than 100 foals in a good breeding season. When Louis Aveline, the son of the president of the French Percheron Society, visited the Bar U, he recognized many of the horses imported from his home region and declared the Bar U Percherons were the equal of any found in France (Bruce 1992:13).

For a decade or so, Percherons from the ranch dominated North American show rings, and the ranch house became a depository for a wonderful collection of cups, trophies, and medals. Unfortunately, the agricultural depression, which followed the end of the war, caught Lane in failing health and financially overextended, and the glory days of the Bar U Percherons were over.

This important episode in the long his-

*For over a decade, Bar U Ranch was the largest Percheron stud ranch in the world, exporting stallions to the United States, Europe, and even Japan*



*Pride of the Prairies: Bar U Percheron horse team*

tory of the Bar U Ranch demands investigation and raises some interesting questions. What were Lane's motives for embarking on this new venture? What messages was he receiving from the economic environment that prompted him to diversify his operations and to enter the specialized field of horse breeding?

Lane must have been acutely aware that

the open range methods of raising cattle, which he had perfected, were under threat of extinction: the big closed leases had been canceled; the railway had been built through the heart of the ranching country between Calgary and Fort Macleod; and farm settlement was burgeoning around Nanton,

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