

Albert W. Harris as president of the Harris Trust and Savings Bank in Chicago.

Foundation Breeder

Albert W. Harris

by Mary Jane Parkinson

In 1937, when he was 70 years old, Albert W. Harris entered the 100-mile Town and Country endurance ride through the Cook County forest preserves near Chicago and won the horsemanship prize. Earlier, in 1910, someone suggested that our country had no men left who could take a prairie schooner across the country. Harris decided he could. He outfitted a wagon in Los Angeles and for four long months and ten days he drove his team across the mountains, deserts, and prairies between Los Angeles and his farm near Williams Bay, Wisconsin.

Albert Harris's life was like that, all the way. Tough, adventuresome, self-confident, goal-oriented, tenacious, and beyond the ordinary. That he applied those traits to the welfare of Arabian horses is the good fortune of the breed.

Horses became important to Albert Harris as a youngster and as a young adult, as he grew up in Minnesota. He was intrigued by Mustangs and their background; he bought several, and wrote a short history of the breed, *The Ponies of Kemah*.

In 1907 in his exploration of horse breeds, Harris encountered Arabians and all other breeds paled in his interest. The contact came through newspaperman Homer Davenport who had imported horses from the desert in 1906. Harris heard about them when Davenport wrote, asking that Harris verify the statements that he made in telling the history of the Mustang. Harris submitted his book to a professor of history at Northwestern University, asking for a review. The professor wrote back: "The statements you make are correct, but your English is very poor."

In sending the Mustang material to Davenport, Harris asked if he might see these desertbred horses and wondered, "How different were they from those that had started from there via the Barbary States twelve hundred years before?" Harris got a chance to see for himself and to get acquainted



One of the many tributes to Albert W. Harris after his death included the statement "... he stood for this ancient and amazing breed in every kind of activity in which a horse and a man can enter." In 1927, Harris wrote to W. R. Brown, telling him of his experience hunting a mountain lion. "I certainly want to take off my hat to the horse that looked him [the dead mountain lion] over very calmly and didn't mind a bit having to carry him out. It was all I could do to get down into the place on foot, but I guess a horse can go anywhere a man can, except up a tree."

with Homer Davenport. Harris was so impressed with Davenport's imports that he asked to buy one. Eventually, Davenport agreed to sell him Nejdran Jr, a yearling colt that had been injured in a fall on the ice. Nejdran Jr's dam Sheba, brought more history to the story. Her sire and dam were part of the Hamidie Society display of Arabian horses in the Wild East exhibit at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, where Homer Davenport saw his first Arabians.

Nejdran Jr came to the Harris farm at Williams Bay, Wisconsin, and lived next door to Ponca, one of Harris's Indian ponies, for decades. Harris purchased Ponca from a Ponca Indian chief for one hundred silver dollars. He became one of the stars of the Mustangs, and Harris named his farm "Kemah," an Indian name meaning "in the face of the wind."

"We have splendid pastures with spring brooks running through them; woods, in which they are sheltered in bad weather, and warm, spacious barns for the winter," Harris wrote in 1922. "The Williams Bay station of the Chicago & Northwestern Railway lies just across the road from the south line of the farm, where in summer numerous trains come and go and where the piers are crowded with steam and pleasure boats of all descriptions, and automobiles are as numerous as the boats, so that the experience our ponies get before leaving Kemah, in the ways of sights and noises, cannot be improved upon for training and no country roads carry more automobiles in summer than do those around Lake Geneva."

Mr. Harris wrote of the arrival of Nejdran Jr at Kemah: "My first Mustang from the Southwest, my first Arab from



As a young man, Albert W. Harris was so intrigued by Mustangs and their history that he bought several. Here are two of the stallions, Little Bear and Ponca, ridden by Mr. and Mrs. Harris.



Homer Davenport brought *Nejdran, a desertbred Arabian, from England in 1904. Captain Gainsford of the British Army brought *Nejdran from the desert. He played in the International Polo Match in Ireland in 1903. "He was as beautiful a horse as probably ever came from the desert," Mr. Harris wrote of the stallion.



Albert Harris and his son Norman shared several interests, Arabian horses among them. Nejdran Jr, Albert Harris's first registered Arabian, was just two when this photo was taken. Norman is up. Norman rode in one of the 300-mile endurance rides in New England, and took over Kemah Farm when his father died.

the East, meeting in Chicago. So this blood of the desert was joined with that of our Spanish Barbs here in Wisconsin, while the Spanish Barb's blood in Hidalgo was joined with his ancestor's blood in Arabia — thus making the circle both ways."

In spring 1919, the United States Remount challenged owners of Arabians to enter an endurance ride to see what account the Arabs would give of themselves in timed hard-riding. Such a challenge could not be ignored, and Harris chose Kemah Prince (Nejdran Jr x Princess, an 800-pound Indian pony) for his mount. To condition themselves, they rode 30 to 60 miles per day. Just as Harris and Kemah Prince were ready to leave for the ride, Kemah Prince was injured and could not compete. "I was greatly disappointed," Harris wrote. "Prince and I had traveled so much together. We slept where night overtook us, did our work in rain or shine, and had every confidence in each other."

So the Harris family (Albert W. and his wife and their son Norman and his wife) decided to attend the ride as spectators. When they arrived at the start of the ride, W. R. Brown (Maynesboro Stud, Berlin, New Hampshire) offered one of the Maynesboro mares to Harris as his mount. After trying out *Ramla (*Astraled x Ridaa by Merzuk) briefly, Harris decided to enter her.

The five-day ride consisted of 60 miles per day for a total of 300 miles. Fourteen horses started, including Thoroughbreds, Morgans, and Arabians. "The Ride represented a forced cavalry march," Harris wrote. "Visualize

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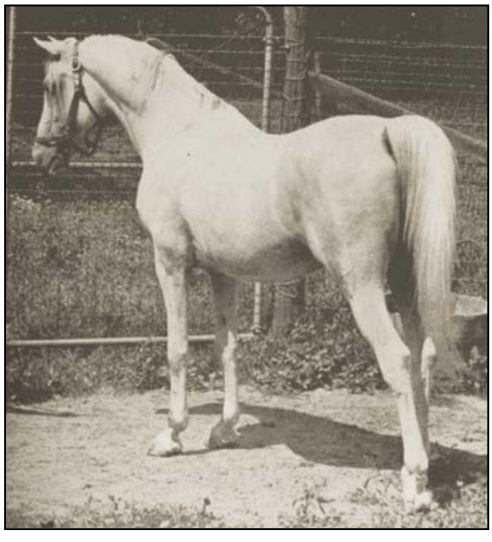
60 miles per day for five days, by the same horse and rider, with more than ordinary weight, under all weather conditions from rain to snow, and over every kind of road, at forced speed." Harris and *Ramla won first place, she a 14.3 hand, 850-pound mare carrying 200 pounds, in 52 hours, 16 minutes, and were presented the United States Mounted Service Cup. Of the ten finishers, Arabs won the first five places, and Harris felt they had proven themselves as excellent cavalry horses, horses that exhibited the stamina required and needed less feed than the larger horses.

In 1920, Mr. Harris acquired another stallion in a roundabout way. This one was *Nuri Pasha (*Nureddin II x Ruth Kesia by Ben Azrek), a grey bred by Sidney G. Hough of Essex, England. One of Mr. Harris's friends, John Macomber of Boston, called Harris to say he had received word that an Arabian colt and an Arabian filly were being shipped to him and was Harris interested in them. No further explanation given.

Later, when Mr. Macomber, Harris, and Phil Allen also from Boston, got together, the story came out. Allen had spent a weekend at the Hough farm, where he looked over Shahzada, who had won the English 100-mile endurance ride and placed second once. Allen also took a fancy to Shahzada's half brother *Nuri Pasha, who he thought would make a splendid endurance mount for Mr. Harris. "So without consulting anybody, Allen bought *Nuri Pasha and then," Harris wrote, "so *Nuri would have company on the way, he bought a three-year-old filly and smilingly inquired whether I wanted them or not. Needless to say I did want them and in due course they arrived at my farm at Lake Geneva."

*Nuri Pasha stayed at Kemah all his life, and *Ana (the three-year-old filly) later went to the program of the Wrigley family on Catalina Island, off the coast of Southern California. *Nuri Pasha was a large horse for an Arabian of those years. At 15.2 hands and 1,110 pounds, he was taller and heavier than the horses Harris had found so useful in endurance riding and in other work.

In his booklet "The Biography of a Sire," published in 1949, Harris wrote of the stallion: "*Nuri Pasha has a conformation which horsemen can hardly fault and beautiful tail carriage. He has a marvelous disposition, never did a wrong thing in his life, and is a perfect gentleman. While we have driven him a good deal, he is at his best under the saddle, a regular powerhouse, and nothing delights him more than a jump." *Nuri Pasha never got to start the 300-mile endurance races. "He was doing splendidly in training," Mr. Harris wrote, "but when I thought of the chances I would be taking in sending him all the way to New England and back, I decided that I would not risk doing so and therefore kept him at home."



*Nuri Pasha came to Kemah from England in 1924. In 1949, Mr. Harris wrote a booklet about the stallion entitled "The Biography of a Sire," telling the story of his acquisition of the stallion and heaped high praise on him as an Arabian horse and as a sire. In England, *Nuri Pasha received the Special Prize for Best Colt in the London shows of 1921 and 1922. In the United States he was shown only once, when Harris sent him to a local county fair "to bring back the blue ribbon." He and his rider returned ribbonless because *Nuri Pasha spooked as a band suddenly started playing, jumped into the infield, but was turned back to the judging area by his rider, as though the episode were planned. For this, *Nuri Pasha got a lot of applause from the grandstand, but no rewards from the judges.

Harris very thoughtfully began *Nuri Pasha's career as a sire. He bred him to only three mares so that his foals might be carefully evaluated before further use. For these test breedings, Harris chose Ophir, descended on both sides of the family from Kismet, the famous racing Arab; Nanda, the daughter of *Nejdme, one of the mares brought to the United States for the 1893 Chicago World's Fair; and *Ana, *Nuri's Pasha's old stablemate from the Hough stud.

Harris wanted the *Nuri Pasha offspring tested for speed, so he sent Kaaba (out of Ophir) to race training and to run if he showed any speed. Kaaba never missed a meal or bucked a shin, and he won a one-mile race against two Thoroughbreds, in 1:50 carrying 132 pounds. Kaaba was sent to Anazeh Ranch, Harris's ranch in Southern California, where he had a



Katar (Gulastra x *Simawa by Rustem) sired at Kemah from 1934 to 1941, when he was donated to the Remount. He came to the Kellogg Ranch in 1943 when the Remount created an Arabian depot there and sired 15 horses for the Remount.



Albert Harris much admired the desertbred stallion *El Bulad and made him head of the Kemah stud. He brought a bit of the romance of the desert as he carried a scar on his left cheek made by a Bedouin's lance in a desert battle. Homer Davenport imported *El Bulad from the desert in 1906. He sired 15 foals in the United States, ten of them bred by Albert W. Harris.



Horma (*Nuri Pasha x Dawn by Nejdran Jr) was one of several Arabians Albert W. Harris donated to the Remount in 1941. He wrote of her in this photo, "This mare has been running out all year raising good colts. Just got her out of the brush and got the burrs out of her tail."



The stallion Kaaba (*Nuri Pasha x Ophir by Segario), here with Mr. Harris up, carried the Harris preferences in horseflesh to the West Coast. He was raced with Thoroughbreds and did a mile in 1:50, then later, he went to the Wrigley program on Catalina Island where he was used as a stock horse. His son Kabar became a working cow horse for L. W. Van Vleet's Lazy VV Ranch at Nederland, Colorado, and worked cattle near the Continental Divide.

fine career as a stock horse before going to the Wrigley program. Kora (out of *Ana) went to a cavalry officer who took her to the government Cavalry School at Fort Riley, Kansas; there she established a reputation as a jumper and as "the best horse in the Fort" and trained for the 1932 Olympics. Kemah (out of Nanda) was trained for dressage and approved for the Olympics, but no rider could be found and Harris felt the judges would not look favorably upon a horse under 15 hands. So the stallion went back to Mr. Harris's farm and to his exhibitions at horse shows.

Horsemen were extravagant in their praise of *Nuri Pasha. "Never had such a grand ride in my life." "One of the most prepotent stallions I have ever seen. The best evidence of his greatness is shown by the fact that practically all mares now in the Albert W. Harris stud are daughters or granddaughters of *Nuri Pasha, kept solely because of their superior individual excellence."

The stallion *El Bulad came to the United States in 1906 with the Davenport imports and became head of the Kemah stud. In 1922, Harris wrote of him: "*El Bulad, a grey stallion born in the Euphrates Valley 19 years ago, ridden to Alexandria, shipped to Naples, then transshipped to Boston, is an example of the stamina and courage which these horses represent. He has a spear scar on his left cheek made by a Bedouin's lance in desert battle. A few years ago on a mountain road in Virginia a motor truck rounding a bend struck him in the flank, tearing a hole that would have put most horses out of commission forever. He has played polo, besides being hard-ridden and driven for many years, in the stud has sired many wonderful colts, and today stands straight and clean without a puff or blemish, except for the scars on his cheek and flank, and still has the courage to do it all over again. A child is safe in his stall and anyone can ride or drive him."

In addition to daughters of *Nuri Pasha and *El Bulad, Harris bred or bought English horses of non-Crabbet lines and of Davenport lines. By 1927, Harris had 40 registered Arabians.

Albert W. Harris

In 1931, Mr. Harris imported five desertbred mares, several of them bred by the Sa'ud Royal Studs. Only after the horses arrived at Kemah did Harris send gifts to the royal family; he remembered W. K. Kellogg in a similar situation. In the early 1930s, Kellogg sent an expensive and complicated watch to King Ibn Saud, hoping to receive some Arabian horses in return in thanks. The watch was acknowledged, but did not inspire a gift to Kellogg.

In addition to raising Arabians and Mustangs, Mr. Harris bred Chesapeake Bay retrievers. Gordon Stocking, DVM, remembers visiting the Harris home in Chicago in the early 1950s. "Mr. Harris had a beautiful home, and I learned that he owned the entire block around his home. He had chain link fence installed around the perimeter to give his dogs a place to run and play."

The Arabian horse brought together two pioneers of the Arabian breed. In 1924, W. K. Kellogg wrote Mr. Harris asking if he knew of a "good Arabian saddle horse" for sale. Harris had none to sell, so referred Mr. Kellogg to the Diamond Bar Ranch at Spadra, California, and to W. R. Brown at Maynesboro Farm in Berlin, New Hampshire. Harris and Kellogg met when Mr. Harris visited the Kellogg Ranch during its building stages. Their friendship was to endure until 1951 when Mr. Kellogg died. Harris cheered when Kellogg bought his first Arabians in 1925 and asserted that he would buy the horses himself if he had the chance and that they were the "pick of the best in America"; consoled Mr. Kellogg when he learned of the difficulty of getting horses out of Arabia in the late 1920s; listened to Mr. Kellogg's frustrations about the future of his horses and ranch; accompanied Mr. Kellogg to the 1934 National Arabian Horse Show in Memphis, Tennessee; sold a mare to Kellogg; congratulated Kellogg on the donation of his horses and ranch to the University of California in 1932; and in 1928 established a western branch of his farm at nearby Chino, California.

The *Pomona Progress Bulletin* of October 16, 1928, headlined "Harris to Bring 20 Arabian Horses to Local Estate" and described the new buildings on the 200-acre site: a house that could accommodate more than a dozen guests; extensive landscape gardening, and large and modern stables. "The Arabian horse stables of Mr. Harris at Chicago are among the best known in America," the article continued. "He owns about 50 head of blooded Arabians, and he intends to bring about a third of the herd to his ranch near Chino in December." Now, Kellogg and Harris were near neighbors and could visit each other's farms easily, look over the horses, and, like other owners, talk horses for hours at a time.

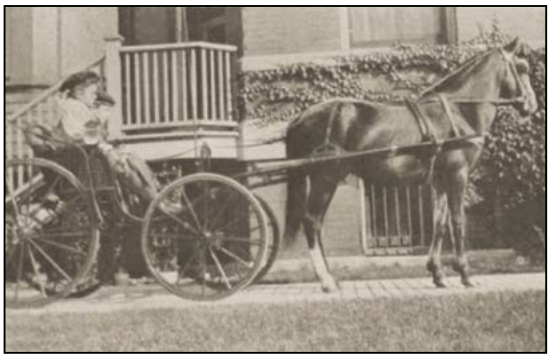
Southern California breeders were naturally curious about the new horses in their midst and came to inspect them. Alice Payne visited the ranch one day, so the story goes, and Mr. Harris showed her all the horses. When she was ready to leave, she asked him if he wanted her opinion on the horses. "No," he replied. "They suit me just fine." Never did Mr. Harris make sacrifices or concessions that might conflict with his own ideas about the breeding of Arabian horses.

Mr. Harris contributed support and advice when the Kellogg Ranch was, after a prolonged period of negotiation, turned over to the Remount in 1943. All the Remount Arabians were sent to the ranch, including Mr. Harris's 1941 donations of Horma and Kehefe (daughters of *Nuri Pasha), Niht, (by *Rodan), and the stallion Katar.



W. K. Kellogg's first Arabian purchases in 1925 included the stallion Jadaan (shown here with Mr. Kellogg) of Davenport and desert bloodlines. From his second ranch near Chino, California, Mr. Harris visited the Kellogg Ranch often and occasionally rode Jadaan there.

World War II mechanized warfare. The Army planned to abandon the Remount program after World War II and announced a plan to sell the Kellogg Ranch and horses as "war surplus." Harris immediately went into action, enlisting political help, doing some investigating on his own, and reporting to Mr. Kellogg on his findings. "I guess we all have to admit that the horse, except as a pleasure animal in this country, is practically extinct. I saw a



From their Chicago home, Ponca took the Harris children to school each day.



In 1907, Harris established Kemah Farm at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, just across the state line from Illinois and therefore within easy commuting distance of his Chicago home and office.

horse hitched to a milk wagon the other morning and he looked rather lonesome," Harris wrote to Mr. Kellogg. (The ranch and horses were reprieved from a war surplus auction, and in 1949 the ranch became the campus of California State Polytechnic University.) In later decades Harris and Kellogg corresponded frequently, much of the content devoted to commiserating on the aging process. Mr. Harris was losing his hearing and, like Mr. Kellogg, was losing his eyesight.

Largely through Mr. Harris's effort, the Kemah horses had earned a reputation for their toughness, adaptability, gentleness, and hardiness. When ranchers needed to infuse more athletic ability into their herds, they went to Kemah for breeding stock. Tom and Carolyn Wells of Rushcreek Ranch at Lisco, Nebraska, bought their first Harris horses in the 1940s, a supplement to the 1,000-mare brood band of mixed breeds. Later, they bought a Harris-bred colt, Khadine (Khalil x Medinah by *El Bulad). With their first foal crop incorporating Arabian blood, in 1946, the Wellses were convinced they'd made a right decision. "They were so much better than anything we had up until then," Carolyn noted. "They had so much more action, such nice dispositions. We knew we were on the right track."

A parallel chapter in Mr. Harris's life deals with his activity in the Arabian registry. When he acquired Nejdran Jr in 1908, he became eligible for membership in the newly founded Arabian Horse Club of America, an entity created that year to promote the breed and to provide a breed registry for purebred Arabians in this country. Earlier, Arabians were only registered with the Jockey Club.

Harris became a director of the Arabian Horse Club of America in 1924, moved to the vice presidency in 1925, and in 1939 to the presidency. As was the custom with AHCA presidents, Harris moved the organization's office to his office in the Harris Trust and Savings Bank in Chicago, and his secretary took care of the detail of registering and transferring Arabian horses. At the same time, AHCA was incorporated in the state of Illinois, a transfer from New York State. In that year, there were only about 1,300 Arabians in the United States.

Jimmie Dean, manager of the Selby Stud at Portsmouth, Ohio, now and then attended meetings of the officers and board of directors. "I was there by proxy for Mr. Selby," Jimmie recalled. "The meetings were generally held in some part of the Harris Trust and Savings Bank in Chicago. We would all gather on one of the upper floors and we would generally meet and talk in the anteroom, or in the hallway. Then the directors would move into the meeting itself and the governing members would sit outside and wait for them to come out. After the meetings, we'd go down to the lounge of the Blackstone Hotel until everyone had to catch a train or meet other appointments."

During his tenure as president (1939-1949), Mr. Harris provided encouragement and help to three people who became important to the breed. First was Bazy Tankersley who, in her teenage exploration of the breed, called on Mr. Harris in his Chicago office and had a pleasant and encouraging visit with him. After 60-plus years with the breed, Bazy is recognized as the breeder of nearly 2,500 foals, a figure that puts her in first place of American breeders. Mr. Harris suggested that Bazy would enjoy knowing another young lady just getting into the breed. Bazy got acquainted with Gina Manion, and the two became lifelong friends.

A third person was helped along the way. In 1939, when Daniel C. Gainey's top salesmen planned the gift of an Arabian colt, the idea picked up speed when the colt Kaniht (Katar x Niht by *Rodan) was purchased from the Kemah program. Gainey became one of the top breeders in the United States; he was elected vice president of the AHCA in 1949 when Mr. Harris retired. After the presentation of the gift horse, Harris invited Mr. Gainey to come visit him at the Chicago office. "Anyone whose employees think enough

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of him to give him an Arabian colt has to be a pretty good guy, and I'd like to get to know you," Harris wrote. With that visit, another lifelong friendship began, and Gainey bought two mares (both in foal) from Harris. From that beginning, the Gainey program progressed to worldwide fame as founders of "the Gainey look."

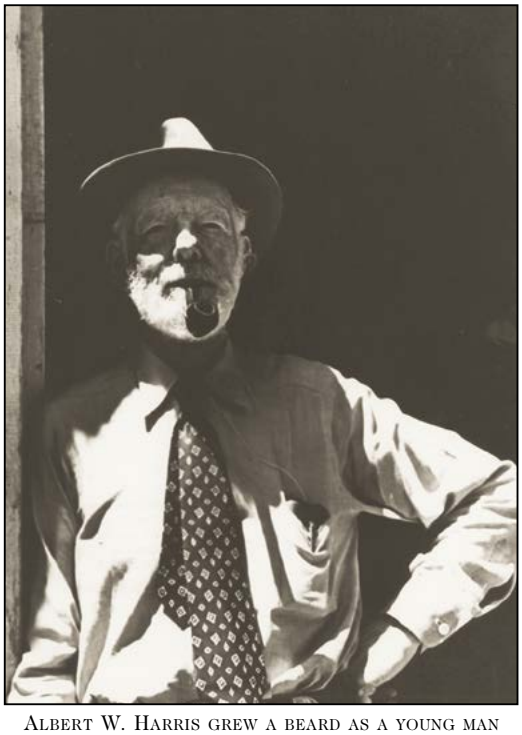
In 1950, the Registry asked Mr. Harris to prepare a history of the Registry from its inception to 1950. *The History of the Arabian Horse Club Registry of America, Inc.* was the outcome of that request. In the preface to the book, officers and members of the board of directors noted: "And so to this fine gentleman, world-renowned horseman, and long-time devotee of the Arabian horse, we say thank you for this. Also, we want to tell him that with the generous use of his time and money over the years, he has done more for the Arabian horse than any individual living today."

When Mr. Harris retired from the presidency, he noted increases in horses and members, as well as in the number of transfers. During his last year as president, the word *Registry* was added to the Club, thereby becoming the Arabian Horse Club Registry of America. By 1958, Harris predicted, the number of registered Arabians would reach 10,000. In 1950, the Club had more than 1,200 members, 5,864 registered horses owned by about 1,500 persons, a healthy treasury of $10,000, Volume V of the stud book had been printed and distributed to members, and Mr. Harris's book *The Blood of the Arab, the World's Greatest War Horse* was in its fourth printing.

Albert W. Harris died in a Chicago hospital in November 1958, at age 91. He was so important in Chicago's world of finance and philanthropy that the *Chicago Tribune* did not have enough room to list his every interest and accomplishment. The paper described him as "the last of the titans." In the business world, Harris became a messenger in the investment banking house of his father, the Harris Trust and Savings Bank. In 1907 he became vice president and succeeded his father as president in 1916. In the Arabian horse community, he was recognized as the leader who made the Arabian Horse Club Registry of America a responsible organization. Even though he had retired as president of AHCRA in 1949, annual meetings were held in his Chicago office and he remained in control of the organization until his death.

The Harris Arabians had enlarged their reputation as working horses, many going to ranchers and endurance riders for that "good old Harris blood." "Definitely a man who had his own priorities," Bazy Tankersley noted. "He didn't care a hoot whether a horse was pretty. I think he rather didn't like a horse if it was pretty. But it had to be tough."

Two years after Mr. Harris died, the Arabian Horse Club Registry of America published a booklet on 52 years of the Registry's history. The publication was dedicated to the memory of Albert W. Harris. The dedication reads, in part: "Seldom is one favored with the opportunity of enjoying years of association with a man of the stature and character of Albert Harris …. In his more than 50 years of close association with the Arabian Horse Club Registry, he was a bulwark of strength and inspiration. Few have shown greater love or more enduring faith in the future destiny of the Arabian horse in the United States."



Albert W. Harris grew a beard as a young man because he felt that it made him look more dignified as he called on bank clients.

Norman Harris carried on with Kemah, adding some different bloodlines, those of Gulastra, Al-Marah Radames, *Fadl, and Raktha. A partial dispersal was held in 1966 at Kemah; the sale offered 24 lots, several of which were grandget of the early Harris horses.

One of Mr. Harris's goals through his activity with the breed was to prove that modern Arabian horses were fully capable, with proper training, of doing the things that made them worthy thousands and thousands of years ago. This goal he accomplished. Admirably.