

Wild at Heart

Mustangs outran other candidates for the Nevada quarter.

by Sean Aldrich ANA1191712

PHOTO: WWW.LIGHTHOUSE-ELEMENTS.COM

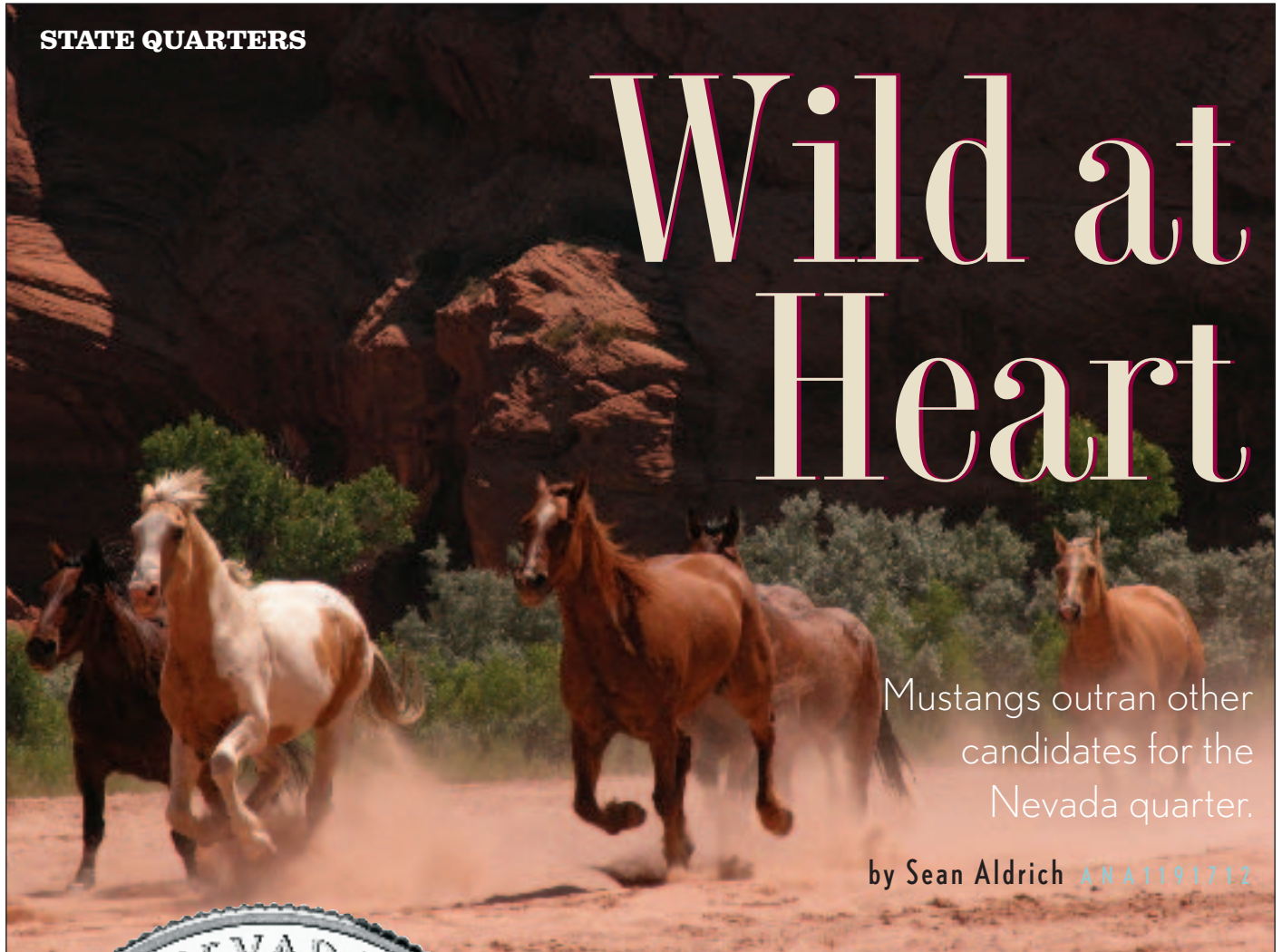


PHOTO: U.S. MINT



▲ The Nevada quarter, the first 2006 issue of the U.S. Mint's 50 State Quarters® Program, honors the venerable mustang, a fitting symbol of the 36th state's rich history and legacy of independence.

ON JUNE 2, 2005, Nevada State Treasurer Brian K. Krolicki announced the winning design of Nevada's state quarter. "Morning in Nevada," which depicts wild horses galloping in front of snow-capped mountains, won with 32 percent of the 59,000 votes, a large portion of which were cast by children. Some state legislators, however, expressed dismay over U.S. Secretary of the Treasury John Snow's refusal to allow consideration of designs reflecting gaming or private businesses, ruling out the Las Vegas Strip as a possibility.

The selected design, however, is an appropriate tribute to a state that is home to what the Bureau of Land Management estimates is almost half the nation's 31,000 wild horses. State Assembly Majority Leader Barbara Buckley was pleased with the choice, saying, "It is an excellent symbol of the independent spirit of Nevada," which attained statehood in 1864.

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Wild horses became extinct in North America around 8,000 B.C., when human population and climactic changes forced the animals to migrate to other parts of the world. They were not reintroduced to the Western Hemisphere until the Spaniards arrived in the 1500s. These horses encompassed many breeds, including Barbs, Sorraia, Arabians and Andalusians, and were used by explorers on their missions and in their colonies. Native Americans had never seen horses and were so impressed with the sight that many believed the riders were gods or that they and their equine companions were one being.

As Indians increasingly became employed in Spanish settlements, the Spaniards forbade them from riding horses. However, Indians were allowed to work as stable hands. They were so taken with the horse's gentle nature that they began to refer to it as the "big dog."

As the settlements grew, horses began to escape. Some had belonged to soldiers and explorers injured or killed in battle, and others ran away from settlements or were "freed" by wild stallions who wished to add the domestic mares to their herd. These emancipated horses became the first "mustangs," so-named from the Spanish term *mesteno*, which means "stray" or "ownerless."

As Native Americans began capturing mustangs, their lifestyles changed to incorporate the horse and its talents. Although some Indians (such as the Apaches) developed a taste for horse meat, others (especially the Plains Indians) discovered the benefits of a working animal. With the horse, they could hunt bigger game and transport large tepees that would have been too heavy

and inconvenient to carry themselves. They also could exchange the hides of the buffalo they hunted on horseback to Europeans for trade goods, such as metal tools and cloth.

After a time, the Indians learned it was easier to steal horses than to capture them in the wild.

When the Indians rebelled against the Spanish in 1680, colonists released thousands of horses to the land as they retreated. The Indians decided to ignore these domesticated outcasts. Indian raids became such an aggravation that Spain's government shipped horses to the New World for the sole purpose of letting them run wild along the Rio Grande. They hoped Native Americans would decide to round up these horses and leave those belonging to Spanish settlements alone.

For years, these animals ran free. Eventually, many joined up with escaped draft horses and cowboy ponies from local farms and ranches, adding to the growing mustang population. These massive, wild herds posed little threat to the United States, however. The pioneers' westward movement was paralleled by the mustangs, as they attempted to stay one step ahead of encroaching civilization.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the U.S. government imported large

numbers of massive, East Friesian draft horses from Germany and used them to pull wagons and artillery. When they broke loose from reigns or lost their riders in battle and escaped, the East Friesians joined the mustang populations already living in the area.

American frontiersmen were impressed by the mustang's speed and stamina. They captured the best specimens to mate with their



▲ Two sides of the coin: Nevada's rugged vistas and the neon glitter of the Las Vegas Strip.



▲ Finalists for the design of the Nevada quarter include (from top) "Battle Born Nevada," "Nevada Wilder-ness," "Nevada's Early Heritage" and "Silver Miner."

LANDSCAPE: NESSUS.GUNSLINGERS.ORG

DESIGNS: WWW.QUARTERDESIGNS.COM

Thanks to the people of Nevada, the mustang will live forever, not only in our hearts, but in numismatic history as well.

PHOTO: HIDDEN TRAILS. COM. USA/RT/CA-WILD-MUSTANGS.HTM



▲ Almost half the country's wild horses are found in Nevada.

domestic horses in hopes of blending the desirable traits of each. Unfortunately, as the 19th century came to a close, spreading communities finally caught up to the mustangs, and the horses were forced onto the Nevada desert and other land for which man had no use. Mustangs that migrated to pastures were shot by angry farmers.

By the 1920s, the clash between mustang and man became such a problem that the U.S. government began systematically destroying wild horses. Countless mustangs were sent to slaughter while the majority of Americans seemed indifferent to the tragedy. However,

Velma Johnston, a rancher's wife, made it her mission to bring public attention to the mustang's plight. "Wild Horse Annie," as she came to be known, was raised by a father who loved horses, and the sight of abused, malnourished mustangs awaiting slaughter

enraged her and incited her to action. Although she confronted Washington with her concerns, most of her success came from winning over America's youth. As a result of Annie's efforts, one child wrote:

▲ Some Indians, such as the Apaches, developed a taste for horse meat until they discovered the many benefits of domesticating this wild animal.

PHOTO: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS/EDWARD S. CURTIS



Dear Wild Horse Annie,

Today I read your news bulletin about the wild horses. When I saw those pictures I started crying. How can people be so cruel? Why can't we let the wild ones go their own way? Why can't we let them roam free in body and in spirit? Please, Annie, I'm only 11 but I want to help.

Wild Horse Annie's efforts paid off in 1971 with the passage of the Wild and Free Ranging Horse and Burro Act, which proclaimed mustangs and burros to be "living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West and [thus] protected from harassment or death." To control the mustang population, the Bureau of Land Management now captures and auctions a number of the animals to individuals each year.

To date, 140,000 wild horses and burros have been adopted through this program. The mustang now is a recognized breed of horse that, with gentle and proper handling, can be trained to do the same things as its domestic counterpart. These mustangs have gone on to excel not only in trail and English riding, but also jumping and dressage.

Today, wild mustangs number an estimated 31,000 to 40,000—only a fraction of the 2 million that roamed America in the early 1900s. Still, many believe this number is not low enough; there are too many wild horses for the land to support and for the resources allocated for their management. As a result, the Bureau of Land Management is faced with the difficult job of finding a humane and effective way to further reduce the mustang's numbers. One thing is certain—thanks to the people of Nevada, especially the children—the mustang will live forever, not only in our hearts, but in numismatic history as well. ©

Learn More . . .

"American Mustang." International Museum of the Horse. www.imh.org/imh/bw/mustang.html.

"Bureau of Land Management National Wild Horse and Burro Program." www.blm.gov/whb.

"Mustang Horses." www.mustang-horses.org.

"Wild Horses: An American Romance." net.unl.edu/artsFeat/wildhorses.