

When the Missouri Fox Trotting Horse Breed Association was first started, the original Charter Members published the following statement about the new association:

“In the early settling of the Ozark upland, the settlers brought horses with them from Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia and other states of the east. These three states named had long been famous for good traveling horses. These early horses were then crossed, resulting in many good saddle horses, that traveled the gait best suited for long riding, both man and horse, namely the “Fox Trot”. Among these early settlers were the elder Alsups who were famous for good horses. They introduced many good running horses and these were crossed with other horses of this region, adding speed and stamina. One of the famous Alsup horses was Old Bremmer or Brimmer, a very fast racing horse with lots of stamina, probably of Morgan or Denmark breeding as there has never been an association of Brimmers. Old Brimmer left his mark on the horses of this region and anyone who has been in this region very long has heard the expression, “He is a pure bred Brimmer”. Most of these Brimmer horses were good travelers and added to the quality of horses bred here”.

Who were these Alsups, and what was their contribution to the early development of the Fox Trotting horse. The Charter Members gave them enough importance to mention both them and their horses above all other early breeders and their horses. Here you may find the reason why.

The earliest Alsup of record in this country, John, came to Virginia from his native Scotland. His son, John II, settled in Giles County, Tennessee, which at the time was still considered Indian Territory. While living in Giles County, John II married Sally Locke Robinson whose family came from Ireland. Three of their children: Ben, Moses Locke, and William Newton were born in Tennessee, but all moved to what today is known as Douglas County. Moses Locke was born on October 31, 1813. He always went by the name, Lock. Lock married Martha “Patsy” Grant, a first cousin to Ulysses S. Grant, on July 23, 1835 in Madison County, Tennessee. Lock wrote in 1875 that his father was a “man of strong intellect but of a rambling disposition”. These Alsups spent time in Tennessee and Mississippi before deciding to come to Missouri. Wagons during that time were pulled by oxen, and not by horses. Oxen provided not only strength for farm labor, but also provided meat and leather. Along with their livestock the Alsup’s brought their horses which they called “popcorn stock”. These horses were short bodied, kind eyed, and extremely fast. We know now that they weren’t Morgan or Denmark bred. They were rumored to be descendants of the thoroughbred, Tennessee Brimmer, who was by Brimmer, a stallion owned by Thomas Jefferson. These horse tended mainly to be dark chestnut or sorrel, with some bays. They were also reported to have little, well-shaped fox-like ears. Even today, this “fox ear” characteristic will still show up in some fox trotting horses.

In the late 1840’s the California Gold Rush was on, and the opportunity for quick riches was on everyone’s mind. Lock, his brother Bill, (William Newton), and a few local families had a meeting at what is now known as Ava, and decided that they would make the long trip to California. The intent of the trip was to obtain wealth, but Lock’s intent was to get wealth without the use of a pick and shovel. Lock and his family took along two race horses, three riding horses, and 44 head of cattle. In Webster County they were joined by four other wagons occupied by relatives of some of the Douglas County families. When they reached the Kansas City area, they were joined by other westward bound families, and Lock was chosen their Captain. They reached the Sacramento Valley in September 1857, and finally settled near what is now Santa Rosa. Due to the gold rush, livestock and commodity prices were extremely high. Lock sold his cattle, oxen and wagons for prices much higher than what they were worth in Missouri. While

there, Lock conditioned and raced his horses, and the horses were unbeatable in certain distances. Bill Alsup had taken a claim for a homestead, but Lock, thinking the title based on Spanish rule would be worthless, did not file a claim and persuaded his brother to return with him to Douglas County. In 1858, Lock Alsup, Bill Alsup, and about a dozen other Douglas and Webster County men returned by horseback to their homes in Missouri. Their women traveled by sail boat from San Francisco to the Isthmus of Panama, crossed the Isthmus by wagon, and then took a sail boat to New Orleans. When they returned from California, the Alsups were one of the wealthiest families in Douglas County. When Lock rode to New Orleans in order to meet his wife, he attended a slave auction and bought a slave woman, Leatha, who had a little boy. Lock had not intended to buy the boy, but Leatha carried on so about their being separated that Lock bought the boy, too. The boy was named Logan Alsup. Lock must have provided well for all his children, including Logan, as Logan was a successful merchant in Springfield, Missouri, leaving a will in the Greene County, Missouri Court records. Incidentally, the only slaves known to have been brought into Douglas County were the property of Lock Alsup.

Lock and his brother Bill, located land on Fox Creek that had broad level fields suitable for a race track. This land is located near the present day Denlow community, and became known as “race track hollow”. It soon became a popular place for the men to gather from all over the county. There they talked politics, drank corn liquor, gambled, and settled many feuds. Some of the names of horses raced there were “Old Grinder, Cold Deck, Gulliver, Bidy, Gray Fox, Brown Kate, (who was an Alsup horse that sold for \$1500.00, an unheard sum back then), Paddy, Little Esther, Sherman, Gray Jenny, Fly, and Red Buck. The Red Buck strain also produced their own family of fox trotting horses.

When the Civil War broke out, the Alsups declared for the Union and the local militia was commanded by Captain Lock Alsup. Lock’s older brother Ben was captured by the Confederates and spent a little over three years in a Confederate prison located near Jonesboro, Arkansas. The warden of the prison contemptuously hitched Ben alongside an old blind mule and worked him this way with the mule until his hands were ruined for life. After the war was over, Ben returned to Arkansas, sought out the warden, and killed him .

Many of the Alsup stories, both factual and legendary, centered around Shelt , Lock’s third son. Shelt was born in 1844 and died in a gun battle in 1879, and from all accounts was a very remarkable character. While all other Alsup men stood six feet or better, Shelt was barely over five feet tall. He had a remarkable ability with horses though, and his favorite racing mare, Little Esther, was unbeatable. Little Esther was considered the fastest horse in the region.

According to one legendary account , Shelt, while serving as sheriff and ex-officio county collector walked into the room where the county court was in session. Some of his collections and his reporting of same had been put in question. The story goes that Shelt pulled out his revolver, fired one shot into the ceiling and one into the floor and stated: “The third shot is saved for the first county Judge that turns down this report”. Needless to say, his report was approved.

After the Civil War ended, prosperity soon followed peace. Homesteaders came from the east; schools, almost unknown before the war, were being established; better roads were being constructed, and more churches were being built. The old ways of drinking moonshine, gambling, and betting on horse races were now considered to be “sins of the flesh”, and was looked down upon. Lock was now older and he no longer bred race horses. He began to search out for, and buy, gaited horses to cross with his Brimmer horses, and he began to selectively breed for the fox trot gait. The fox trot was now in demand for transportation down these new roads, and Lock wanted to profit from it. The name of the gait supposedly came from a fox trotting in snow, the fox leaves only two tracks as his hind foot will step into the same print that his front foot just left. The earlier fox trotting horses were judged on their ability to “cap their tracks”, where their hind foot had to step into the print of their front. In later years, horses were allowed to

“disfigure their track”, and now they’re not judged on this characteristic at all. Lock Alsup could well be the first recorded breeder for selecting and breeding for the fox trot gait as he began to do so right after the Civil War.

Lock’s wife Patsy, died on July 9, 1879. Lock then married twenty-two year old Ettie C. Smith on October 19, 1882 and had another daughter, Lemontine. Lemontine was born on September 11, 1883 when Lock was seventy years old. Lock passed away on July 22, 1896.

The Alsup family presence in Douglas County is all but gone. Their love for blooded horses is uncontested. The original Charter Members gave their testimonial to that fact by drawing attention to both their family name and the importance that their horses had on the fox trotting breed. After the Civil War, Lock Alsup was considered the most powerful man in Douglas County. He had the power to say who could stay in Douglas County, and who had to leave. For a time period, Alsup family members held every elected Douglas County post. Today, if you travel to the small community of Denlow, you can still see the remains of “race track hollow” that was owned by Lock Alsup. You will also find this monument to the Alsup brothers, Ben, Lock, and William Newton Alsup that has stood the test of time.

Information for this story was token from article written by Charter Member Claude Hibbard written in 1962, and information provided from the Douglas County Historical Society.