

old photographs on the kitchen table. "These look just like the horses we have out here," Leo says. The pictures show some of the Marquis' horses. The animals are big-boned with square hind quarters and wide, bald faces.

"They have natural jumping ability," adds Frank. "And they are a lot hardier than a domestic horse. They'll eat whatever is out here. Bad weather doesn't seem to bother them much."

The horses have unique personalities as well, according to Frank.

"They gentle down fairly easily, but they always have a little bit of wilding about them," he explains. "They are cautious, always watching."

When the Kuntz's research led them to the conclusion that these horses are a unique breed with ancestry directly rooted in early North Dakota history, they appealed to the state and the National Park Service to preserve the animals. At first, no one paid much attention, but the brothers persevered.

The Park Service first began rounding up the horses and selling them at public auction in 1954. The first round-up attracted national media attention and featured several generations of old-time cowboys and an aura of the genuine Old West. The round-up netted 125 horses, but 99% of them carried brands from nearby ranches and farms. The Indian ponies had



Cowboys working for the Marquis de Mores in 1885 often were mounted on Nokota horses.

proven to be too sly and swift for conventional methods of capture. Eventually the Park Service began using helicopters to improve their odds.

Considered trespassers in the park, the feral horses were not seen as something to be managed until the early 1970s. The federal Wild Horse and Burro Act passed in 1971 did not apply to these horses since they occupied park service land. Jeff Bradybaugh, natural resource specialist at Theodore Roosevelt National Park, says it was determined that a herd should be kept as a historic demonstration of the way the country was when Roosevelt first visited the Badlands.

"Our target number is to keep forty-five head," says Bradybaugh, "but right now we're sitting on ninety-two."

The round-ups that took place every four or five years have been halted

since 1987 while park officials await the outcome of two studies: one on the ecological effects of horses in the park and the other on their historical status. The conclusions will help define the Park Service's horse management goals.

Prior park management had introduced studs from the outside to avoid inbreeding in the park herd. The Kuntz' claim this action interfered with the horses genetic consistency and was irresponsible. Bradybaugh admits the fear of inbreeding proved ungrounded.

"Our past decision may have been a mistake, but we need to look at what we will do now for the future," he contends. "We are spending the time and effort to research it now, so we can manage the horses better as a historic and genetic resource."

Bradybaugh credits the Kuntz brothers with having influenced park officials to stop and take a better look at the horses. Also, Sen. Pete Naaden, R-Braddock, had introduced a bill in the state legislature to designate the Nokota breed as the official state horse.

"Leo brought it to my attention that the state of Florida is passing a similar bill on a horse there that dates back to the early Indians," says Naaden. "If the research shows this is a unique horse to North Dakota, I

Hollywood interested in story of Nokota horses

The story of horse breeding and racing — Leo Kuntz' story — may come to the silver screen but only if some big "ifs" can be overcome.

Hollywood producers looking for variations of the successful rags to riches, "feel good" films like *Rocky* have focused on the Great American Horse Race as a back drop for a movie... IF several million dollars can be found to pay for the filming.

The success of Kevin Costner's big screen hit *Dances With Wolves* might help the longstanding efforts to get the movie *Dakota Dawn* filmed in North Dakota.

The story is Leo Kuntz's, about a rancher and fighter to save a breed of wild horses. The script centers around a troubled Vietnam veteran who regains his self-respect through his love of horses, a woman, and his recommitment to the Great American Horse Race circuit, all filmed in the sweeping panorama of the Badlands.

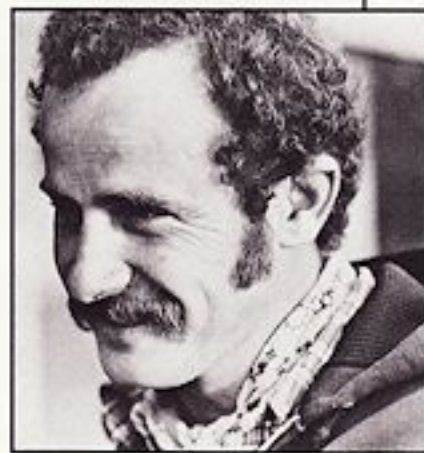
Supporters of *Dakota Dawn* are working with state officials to create film financing and incentives to attract movie producers to North Dakota. *Dances With*

Wolves, which was filmed entirely in South Dakota, has rekindled a dormant interest in making movies in North Dakota. State financing from private investors and the Bank of North Dakota has been sought for nearly three years, but movie-making is an expensive and risky business for banks, especially in a state where little film work has been done.

The *Dakota Dawn* script calls for filming at Medora and the Badlands, which the Hollywood producers found to be "one of the great undiscovered cinematic gems of our land." A modest by Hollywood standards budget of \$3.5 million has been targeted for the film.

"The movie is about our history and heritage," says Frank Kuntz. "Cowboys and Indians tested each other and their horses by racing. Using the descendants of Sitting Bull's war horses adds another dimension to the story."

Everyone involved in the project agrees the story is a compelling one...if the big IFs can be answered.



Leo Kuntz