

The Seven Families of Texas Longhorns

By Michael Casey

Modern day Texas Longhorn cattle are descended from the following seven herds. Some characteristics of each follow:

Marks:

This is a now nearly extinct line that had its beginnings on Emil Mark's Barker Ranch just west of Houston. Characteristics include twisty horns and lots of coloration, featuring brindles, strong reds, duns, and browns. This line is also often associated with higher (and frequently "V" shaped) horns. Mr. Marks prized long bodies, a long distance between the hooks and pins, and good travelling legs. He also insisted on high fertility. The herd was nearly entirely wiped out by Brucellosis, so examples of this line are now very rare. These cattle were typically very quiet and easy to train for riding or pulling wagons. Many believe there was some oxen influence in the bloodlines.

Yates:

The Yates Ranch is located in Alpine, Texas, about 70 miles north of the Mexican border and in tough west Texas country. Ira "Cap" Yate's herd of Longhorns originated in Mexico where Yates would travel in search of purebred examples of the breed. His herd, which at one time numbered more than 500, is, by all accounts, the purest of all the lines ñ eg. being the least influenced by any British cattle bloodlines. Yates was absolutely unyielding about maintaining that purity of bloodline which was of the utmost importance to him. In his buying trips to Mexico he was able to easily distinguish Longhorns from Corriente Mexican cattle by differences in the shape of the head and body characteristics, and he never purchased any animal that was other than a purebred longhorn (see the March/April 1987 issue of the Texas Longhorn Journal). Characteristics of his line include structural soundness, relatively large frames for the breed, good milk production, and excellent mothering instincts. His cattle are known to be very durable and are bred to be able to produce calves in the desert. They have probably the smallest horns (both length and circumference) of the seven families, and they are known for their "Texas twist." They are also known for being largely solid colored. His herd was widely dispersed after his death in 1959, and there are probably very few, if any, pure examples of Yates' breeding left.

Phillips:

These cattle began on the Battle Island Ranch near West Columbia, Texas. The herd was initially begun by J.G. Phillips, Sr. In the early 1930s his son, Jack, joined his friend Graves Peeler in search of "native cattle" both to expand the family herd and to obtain animals for what was to be the Texas State Parks collection of native Texas Longhorn cattle. Phillips looked for long bodied and long headed "twisty horned Texas Longhorn cows" with high tailheads and long tails. He was also looking for "high water" cattle (cattle that stand tall off the ground, are somewhat rangy, and have long ribcages and "lots of daylight under them.") Characteristics, other than as above noted, include solid coloration, beefiness, and long horns. They are also known to be very long legged with narrow homely heads and faces. Texas Ranger JP is far and away the best known member of this family, and his line, when properly mated, will produce adult bulls weighing 1800 to 2000 pounds with well over average length horns. (See 1980 Summer Issue of Texas Longhorn Journal).

Texas Ranger JP set the standard for the longhorn industry beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s when he continually sired offspring with the then unheard of statistic of 40+" horn lengths. He, himself, achieved a tip to tip horn measurement of 48.75" which, in those days, was remarkable. This bull's name probably appears in more pedigrees than any other bull in the breed, and he was the first to be certified for artificial insemination by the TLBAA.

There is suspicion among some breeders that Texas Ranger JP was not a purebred Texas Longhorn. While being blood typed, apparently a hereford genetic marker was found which has caused one registry to refuse to register him or his descendants. As pointed out in an article by Arthur Burns, MD (published in the September/October 1998 issue of the Texas Longhorn Journal), since all cattle ultimately trace back to a common ancestor, and since blood typing cannot tell how many generations back it was that an outside marker was placed in the animal's genetic string, such evidence of "impurity" may well be insignificant. Certainly, by appearance and by the consensus of breeders, he was a purebred Texas Longhorn.

Butler:

This herd began with cattle destined for slaughter and rescued by Milby Butler's son, Henry, out of the family owned stock pens in League City, Texas. It was not until Henry left to serve in the military, leaving his father with his longhorns, that Milby even took notice. As Milby became more interested, the herd became quite large, numbering in excess of 600 animals at its peak. Milby Butler bred for horn length, base, and a corkscrew shape. It is not unexpected then that this family is best known for huge horns (eg. Classic @61", Monarch, Superior, Blue Horns, Dixie Hunter, Dixie Rebel, Conquistador, Bold Ruler, Man O'War, Holman B1, and Sam. Also Beauty - mother of Classic who had 58" horns.) This herd was intensely inbred, with resultant typical smaller than average frame size and beefiness. Bulls of this line generally weigh 1,200 to 1,400 lbs at maturity, while purebred Butler cows often weigh less than 800 lbs. This family is also often white with dark coloration around the nose, eyes, ears and ankles, and it is also known for "crocodile eyes", a unique tailhead attachment, and for colors not often found in other Longhorns.

Peeler:

This herd is largely a reflection of the personality of Graves Peeler. In the 1920s Peeler was one of those Texans who were seeking out examples of purebred Texas Longhorns for the Texas State Parks native Texas Longhorn herd. As he searched, often in the company of his friend, Jack Phillips, he held back for himself the feistiest of those he could find. He wanted an animal with lots of fight since his herd lived in semi-desert conditions with mesquite, diamond backs and timber wolves. He also was a good friend of Cap Yates, and he purchased a number of cattle from Yates, thereby adding to his own line the beefiness which is characteristic of Yates' cattle. Other characteristics typically include large frames, excellent udders, and very fertile cows who raised large fat calves. His calves were generally sold at auction for meat, so carcass size was emphasized, as was the fertility of his females. If a cow failed to breed back, she didn't stick around. Horn size was not emphasized, so this family is not known for horn development. Some outcrossing with other breeds may have occurred in this herd.

Wright:

This is one of the oldest lines of purebred Texas Longhorns. M.P. Wright's Bow and Arrow Ranch was started along the Nueces Strip in southwest Texas in the 1870s. This is a very pure strain with extremely little, if any, influence from the British breeds. It features very feminine cows with trim necks and straight backs. They are generally long in the body but not tall, and they generally have "dish" shaped faces. The animals typically have dun, red, and lineback coloration. They tend to have long, high horns with an upward twist to them. Wright 498 was the mother of Dougherty 698 and was the first cow to sell for more than \$10,000.

Wichita Refuge:

This family derives from an Act of Congress in 1927 whereby Federal money was allocated to search for purebred Texas Longhorn cattle and protect them on a wildlife preserve in Cache, Oklahoma. The original members of this herd were found in the Nueces Strip of Southern Texas and in Mexico and were selected with an eye toward minimal, if any, contamination with the blood of British breeds. They have ever since been very carefully managed to maintain traditional longhorn characteristics. This herd is not known to be particularly

colorful or large of horn. Most bulls are in the 1,100 to 1,400 pound range, are 52"-54" tall and have 40" horns or less. Exceptions include Don Quixote and the famous cow Measles. Although not known for their own long horns, many of the cows of this line have successfully outproduced themselves when mated to great horn producing bulls. Cows are consistently good milk producers. They are also very protective of their calves, not only because it is a typical Longhorn trait, but also since the refuge is situated near a protected coyote preserve. The herd is rather intensely inbred.

(The foregoing is provided courtesy of articles published at various times in the Texas Longhorn Journal about each of the foregoing families. Also credit is given to Darol Dickinson, Candy Judd, and others who have published summaries of the traits of those families, including: Dickinson, Darol, Seven Families, revised 1992)