

A sepia-toned photograph of a log cabin with several longhorn cattle in the foreground and people in the background. The cattle are standing in a field, and the cabin is made of stacked logs. The overall scene is rural and historical.

An Overview and History of Pineywoods Cattle

*The Culture and Families
That Shaped the Breed*

Author

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With strain commentary by
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Amazon ox in the field. Photo by ALBC staff.

The Authors

Justin B. Pitts is a passionate steward of Pineywoods cattle and the culture of the Deep South. Under the direction of the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy, Mr. Pitts traveled throughout the Deep South to gather historical information from the older breeders about Pineywoods cattle and the culture in which they were and still are raised and used.

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Introduction

The Pineywoods is one of the oldest breeds of cattle in the United States, descending from Spanish cattle brought to the Americas beginning in the early 1500s. The Pineywoods breed was shaped primarily by agricultural and environmental conditions in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and other parts of the southeastern United States. Environmental conditions, along with some human selection, has resulted in a breed that is heat tolerant, long-lived, resistant to parasites and diseases, and able to be productive on marginal forage.

In 2009, the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy partnered with Justin Pitts, a passionate steward of Pineywoods cattle and the culture of the Deep South, to capture the story behind the breed. Pitts traveled across Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia, collecting the oral history of Pineywoods cattle. For hundreds of years, families across the Deep South have devoted their lives to the breed. This is their untold story – a story filled with sacrifice, hardships, tradition, family heritage, and culture. It is this story of history and culture that has helped shape the breed into the hardy breed that it is today.

The Story of the Pineywoods by Justin B. Pitts

Origins

When Pineywoods breeders are asked where they think the original cattle came from, the initial response is that an ancestor, usually a grandfather or great-grandfather had them and so on back as far as anyone remembered. As the conversations deepen, Pineywoods breeders generally add that the cattle are Spanish in origin. Sometimes along the coastal counties, they are referred to as “French cattle.” Jim Holt of Cordele, Georgia, however, believes the Pineywoods cattle in his region came from Britain since Georgia was once a penal colony established by Lord Oglethorpe. Documentation later showed that the cattle in Georgia were brought out of Florida (a Spanish Colony) and were of Spanish descent. Breeders tend to agree that, as a breed, Pineywoods cattle are the hardiest of the bovine species in the Deep South.

During my travels through the Deep



A young Pineywoods cow and calf at the Carter farm. Photo by ALBC staff.

South, I heard the same story told over and over again. Most of those interviewed tell of some relative moving into the local community and establishing herds and flocks of livestock after marrying into a local family. It was around 1920 that Fred Diamond’s grandfather married a local girl (Saucier) and established his herd from local cattle. The stock was generally received from the bride’s family members. Rarely did a person bring with them any livestock other than maybe mules, or in the case of Billy Anderson’s grandfather, oxen. Neither mules nor oxen are used for breeding purposes, so they had no impact on the local livestock.

In nearly all the stories shared, the ancestor(s) arrived in the home community following the timber business as some form of tradesman in that enterprise. Fred Diamond states that his grandfather arrived in the Howizon, Mississippi, area as an engineer on the dummy lines that hauled timber out of the deep woods to the sawmills.

Bruce Conway shares a similar story. The Conways became established in Perry County, Mississippi, around the 1890s. Originally from Florida, James Jefferson Conway migrated into Perry County after having settled around Atmore, Alabama. Here he married a local girl, homesteaded a farm, and began raising stock on the open range in the Buck Creek community.

His herds of cattle and flocks of sheep began from local stock that was purchased and traded. In addition to farming and herding, Conway logged and cut cross-ties for Richton Tie and Timber. It is from these beginnings that Bura Conway, James Jefferson’s son, began his herd of unique Pineywoods cattle.

Occupations

About the only occupations available in the Deep South, other than farming and moonshining, were in the timber industry. The only things the South had left after the devastation of the War Between the States were natural resources. The Coastal Plains region held millions of acres of Longstraw Yellow Pine and it didn’t take long for timber barons to take full advantage of these resources. Countless acres of timber were bought from Southern families who were desperate for cash. Timber was bought for as little as 50 cents per acre which, even in those days, meant thousands of dollars of profit per acre for the timber companies. In addition to lumber, the Yellow Pine provided tar and turpentine for the naval industry. Long before timber became the rage, naval stores for tar and turpentine were in high demand and many Southern families took advantage of this resource as a means to obtain cash.

Billy Frank Brown remembers dipping gum from the pans placed on the sides of pine trees. First you took an instrument called a peeler and cleared the bark and cambium from the side of the tree. Next a hack or hack ball was used to make a series of cuts pointing down in a “V” form, causing the resin to flow downward into a pan that was tacked to the bottom of the cuts. When injured, a pine’s resin flowed to the wounded area as a means of protecting the area from disease and insects and to keep it moist until healed. It was through the manipulation of this healing process that resin for tar and turpentine was collected. The collection pans were made of both clay and metal. The pans were collected at regular schedules. To insure that the resin continued flowing, sulfuric acid was applied to the cuts. Print Carter of Perry, Mississippi, kept crews in his timberland doing little else but harvest resin.

Countless sawmill towns sprang up overnight all across the South. These towns were thriving and bustling until all the timber was cut, at which point, the timber company moved on and started the process all over again. It was this type of timber industry that led to a complete culture of its own with jobs uniquely its own. Ox drivers were needed to drive the cattle teams and often Pineywoods oxen

The South’s Settlers

In the book *Cracker Culture*, Grady McWhinney discusses the herding culture of those who would become Southerners and the particular beliefs and ideas surrounding a livestock culture.

According to McWhinney, it was Celts, primarily the Scottish and Irish, that settled the South. They brought with them knowledge of herding (and distilling), and it is this cultural background that made them seek out the remote areas in order to continue living as they had for centuries in Europe. These people established homes in the backwoods and lived as they pleased for centuries almost until present times. Of those Pineywoods breeders interviewed, all had surnames or were descended from other surnames that were either Scottish or Irish.



An image of an ox cart in Savannah, Georgia, circa 1886. The ox appears to be a Pineywoods ox. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

were used. These ox teams bunched logs for hauling to the mill or to the dummy lines for further transport. The use of oxen in the timber industry created a demand for broke cattle ready to work. Many young boys set out to break cattle to make a living. Blacksmiths were in demand since they sharpened tongs, built staples for ox yokes, crafted hooks for coupling chains, and performed countless other daily jobs that required metal. Yoke makers built yokes and bows for sale. Sawfiles sharpened saws and sawyers dulled them by felling trees. Many men filled not one, but many of the various jobs that a sawmill community created. Crossties were hand hewn to lay tracks for the dummy lines and were in constant demand both by the regular railroad and the dummies. Hub Pitts and Bura Conway often spoke of hewing ties and then taking them to sell when they had a wagonload.

Today we have equipment rental dealerships; then you had ox renters. Both Vic Anderson and Wyatt Broadus, Sr. rented teams of Pineywoods oxen to the lumber companies for a daily fee. Sometimes the ox driver was supplied by the owner and other times the renter supplied the driver. These rental arrangements came with terms addressing what would happen if an ox was either killed or injured. A certain fee was expected for a broke horn, a knocked off hip, or a damaged eye.

Most ox drivers took pride in the manner in which they worked their oxen. They attempted to extract as much work as possible by merely speaking to the oxen. In many drivers’ opinions, the testament of a good driver was the ability to speak to the oxen and to use the whip as a guide and rarely as a means of punishment. This does not mean that a driver would not use force when necessary, but it was applied in the right place. According to Bura Conway, if discipline of an ox is necessary, the feet are the area that gains the most respect with the least amount of damage done. A good, sharp rap with a whip around the penny hoof (the small, nail-like structure part way up the inside of the leg) and the ox is all ears awaiting his next order. The best way for a driver to be fired by Bura Conway was for him to see “whip signs” on a steer’s side or back. One sign of abuse and a driver would be fired forthwith and he better not argue or else he might find a little “whip sign” on himself. Bura would not tolerate his oxen being abused.

Oxen drivers were common in those days. There was much competition among drivers as to who could handle a whip the best, whose oxen team could move the largest load, and whose leads minded the best. Lead cattle are the first yoke in the team and are generally the best behaved and most mindful when given an order. An ox team is as follows: leads in front;

swings in the middle (there can be more than one yoke of swing cattle); chain or tongue steers in the back closest to the load (such as next to the log “chain” or the “tongue” of the wagon).

If a person was working five yoke of cattle it would consist of leads, lead swings, swings, chain (tongue) swings, and chain (tongue) steers. Each ox had a name and knew it when called. Commands differed with each person. Rarely did any two drivers use the same style to drive their oxen. Ola Moran, for example, calls his near ox to him and sends his off ox away from him while Jimmy Vice does the opposite. Two oxen are called a yoke, never a team. A team is comprised of more than one yoke of cattle. A driver would work a two or three yoke team depending on the amount of work to be done. It used to thrill me to see all the “ox people” get together and talk about their cattle. It is hard to believe they are all gone now. All that is left are a few old yokes and pictures.

Aside from the aforementioned jobs, there was work available in the sawmill turning logs into lumber. Mechanics were needed to keep the engines that powered the mills going as well as to maintain the mill itself. Manpower was needed to keep logs on the carriage, to operate the saw, and to unload the lumber and slabs. All of this was grueling hand-labor and it was

“ In those days, whips were usually four to five feet in length and made of leather. They were attached to a whip stock that was five to seven feet in length and was generally nothing more than a black gum scantling (a sapling) cut to shape. Many of the whips were four plait, but some drivers liked a six plait. By “plait,” I am referring to the number of strips of leather plaited together to make the whip. Narrow strips of leather tapered from widest at the handle to the most narrow at the tip and were plaited to form the whip.

Drivers liked a whip with good “pitch” which meant it was well-balanced and could find its mark with little trouble. The skill with which the whips were cracked and popped was unbelievable and can hardly be described without some skepticism on the behalf of the listener. The famous Mississippi “double pop” was a renowned feat among ox drivers. A “double pop” meant the whip could be cracked as loud backwards as forwards and with such rapidity that the two sounds were almost indistinguishable.

Once Mr. Bura Conway was logging in Petal, Mississippi, and many carloads of people stopped to see this passing art form. A carload of “suits,” as he referred to them, pulled up. These men obviously thought of themselves as superior. Mr. Bura stated, “they kept making smart remarks and laughing.” Directly one says, “Old Man, are you any good with that whip?” Mr. Bura responded that if a horsefly lit on old Toney’s (an ox who had a fly hovering over him) shoulder, he could pick him off and the ox would never be touched. This sent the men into hysterical laughter. Sure enough, the fly lit on Toney’s shoulder and Mr. Bura called the gentlemen’s attention to the fact. With almost no effort, the fly disintegrated and Toney never budged. The “suits” looked at each other, got in their car, and left. ”



Logging with Pineywoods cattle circa 1950. Pineywoods oxen played an important role in the timber industry of the Southeast. Photo courtesy of Charlie Carter.

never too hot or too cold for work. Life for our grandparents and great-grandparents wasn't easy.

Farm Life

In days past, farming was a necessity for each family since food was produced, not bought. Land was cleared and planted with a variety of food crops. Variety was the key. Corn was grown without so much as a thought, as barley was in the “old country.” From lowly corn came meal for bread, feed for stock, and the key ingredient for “white mule.” As L.P. Herrington used to say, “If you got a crib full of corn you can raise and feed cattle, mules, hogs, dogs, chickens, young’uns, and whatever else you’re a mind to raise.” Corn was the staff of life. Few meals were had where cornbread wasn't present. Peas, butterbeans, string beans, squashes of various kinds, peppers, potatoes, both sweet and Irish, okra, and other foods were grown to

Moonshine and More!

Of those interviewed, most had been farmers and loggers until recent times. Aside from timber and farming, Fred Diamond explained, “there was little or nothing else to do besides making whiskey on the side.” From the earliest arrival of Scottish farmers in the colonies, making moonshine whiskey played a key role in the livelihoods of these backwoods farmers.

Now I will leave out particular names so as to protect the innocent and shield the guilty, but this is a story worth telling. Usquebaugh, the Gaelic word for whiskey, has been a part of Celtic culture since antiquity and its use as a refreshment and as a form of currency is as much a part of the Southern herding culture as the stock and people themselves. In an area where jobs providing hard cash were scarce and hard to come by, corn, when converted into whiskey, became a value-added commodity. The mash that was left after the whiskey was made became feed for cattle and hogs, ensuring that nothing went to waste. Some folks in the area had the mindset that it is better to drink a meal than eat one, so whiskey had steady demand and became a ready form of cash.

During prohibition days, Al Capone, the infamous gangster, is said to have purchased the majority of his whiskey from Kiln, Mississippi, so named because of the huge kiln located there. One famous moonshiner earned the nickname “Rabbit” from the revenuers due to his ability to out run them through the swamps in the region. Harassed, shot, and his family intimidated, this old boy never gave up and was never caught. His name is still a legend amongst lawmen today. One family leader shared that moonshining was about the only thing that kept the family from starving to death during the Great Depression since there were no jobs and no one had cash to buy anything. People will always find a way to pay for a good time and the cities demanded a drink, so the countryside responded. Many are the tales surrounding moonshining and how herding and shining were compatible.

One individual stated, “By having livestock it drew the revenuers’ attention away from the large usage of corn and other grains needed for moonshine. It was merely feedstuff and if you had stock you had feed.” Hogs loved to raid a still site before the mash was run and there is no better drunk than a hog. He’ll lie on his side and squeal and run his little trotters silly all the while going nowhere. As soon as he is able, he’ll go back and drink enough to put himself right back in the same condition. One man told me the story of his father’s cattle finding the neighbor’s still and drinking all the beer (the liquid off the mash before it has been run). The cattle were in pitiful shape. While hogs are funny drunks, cattle are pathetic ones. They stagger, fall, groan, moan, and bellow in the most piteous manner and are virtually impossible to handle. With the help of his father and two brothers, they worked nearly a day driving the cattle home and putting them in a small pasture in the back of the barn. Within a week, the cattle had eaten the pasture down and had nothing to eat. Feeling confident the cattle had forgotten about the still, the farmer turned the cattle back onto the open range. The cattle left running. When the farmers following on horseback finally caught up to the cattle, they were back at the still, with those not already drunk fast becoming so.



Bura Conway cattle circa 1950 driven by Conway workman. Photo courtesy of Charlie Carter.

meet the families’ nutritional needs. Nearly every house had a cane patch from which syrup was made.

The tools used to cultivate crops were rather simple and were mainly designed for lighter animals (when compared to the animals used in other areas of the country). Early settlers to the area used a simple, wooden plow to which various points could be attached with the most common being the bull tongue. As advancements came along, the middle buster (a double mold board plow), a turning plow, a gee whiz (a type of cultivator), a Georgia stock, and a planter were all that could be found on most farms. All of these plows were drawn by a single animal with the exception of the middle buster which required two animals to pull it. In the North and Midwest, teams of animals were primarily used. In the South, animals were plowed singly. The soil in the South simply could not meet the nutritional needs of larger ani-

mals, so the Pine Tacky horse and mules raised from such were the principle plow animals. Oxen were used to plow, but generally a horse or mule was preferred. Oxen were the animals of choice for logging and heavy wagons.

Generally speaking, land was “laid off” (row distances established in a field) with a middle buster drawn by a pair of animals, but after that a single animal was used at a time. After the land was “laid off,” a mule and turning plow were used to “bed out” or “up” the furrow left by the middle buster. Once this was done, the bed was then reopened using either a Georgia stock with a large shovel or the middle buster once again. Corn was typically planted in this fashion so that soil could be worked down by means of a Gee Whiz or similar harrow. Eventually a Georgia stock with a bull tongue and sweep was used. The majority of the soil in the Coastal Plains is a sandy type soil, making cultivation of crops easier and lessening the need for hoeing since undesirable plants were covered during cultivation.

Management

Cattle raising was one of the earliest forms of agriculture in Mississippi and the coastal regions of other Southern states. Since there were no stock laws to be contended with on the open range, cattle were turned loose to graze. Little input was needed aside from marking, castrating, and keeping the cattle from ranging too far from home.

Of those Pineywoods breeders interviewed, most admitted that prior to the 1950s herding was mostly a “hands off” enterprise. During the winter, only the milk cows and work stock were cared for to any degree since these were the most valued animals. The majority of the livestock fared as best they could and the old Southern adage of “root little hog or die poor” was the law of the land. Most cows calved every other year, and only the weakest were fed during the winter. Feed was “nubbins” which were ears of corn hacked with a hatchet or broken into halves or thirds. The “nubbins” were fed to individual animals that were weak while stronger cattle were left to fend for themselves. Bay trees, such as the White Bay and Magnolia, were sometimes felled during severe winters so the cattle could eat



Lionel Ladner cattle of Broadus breeding enjoying some hot mix. Photo by ALBC staff.

the leaves and attempt to survive until the spring burns began. Otherwise, cattle were expected to survive on reed cane, acorns, and whatever forage could be found in the creek swamps. De-wormers were virtually unheard of and if they did exist, most admit they were not affordable.

Cash was hard to come by and was often non-existent. Open or cleared land was devoted to food crops such as sweet potatoes, peas, corn, and other crops intended for humans. The residue or excess went to the livestock which generally meant hogs. Those farmers who did attempt to provide extra feed for their herds and flocks grew corn, velvet beans, cowpeas, and soybeans for feed. Hay and hay making equipment were virtually unheard of. Luther Carter never cut a blade of hay in his life but had hundreds of head of cattle. He grew vast fields of corn and when he ginned his cotton he exchanged the whole seed for cotton seed meal which is extremely high in protein (42%). Cotton seed meal, when added to crushed corn, makes an excellent feed. Crushing corn, however, only became an option in the 1940s when feed stores added trucks with hammer mills on them. Prior to this technological advancement, corn was fed by the ear.

The process of growing corn and beans varied with each farmer. Some planted corn on two rows with the third row planted in velvet beans. Other farmers with duplex planters planted the beans in

the drill with the corn. Duplex planters have double hoppers with one side containing a seed plate (for instance for corn) and with the other side planting cowpeas or beans. This allowed two compatible crops to be planted and grown in the same row. Since velvet beans are a vining crop, they soon overtook the rows of corn and made clusters or “tags” of large pods of highly nutritious beans. Cattle, hogs, mules, horses, sheep, and goats all readily consumed them. Both the corn and beans were harvested by hand. When the corn was gathered the bulk of the beans were also gathered, but many were deliberately left in the field. With the corn and most of the beans gathered, the gates were opened and stock was allowed to glean the fields before winter set in. Sweet potatoes were also grown as a feed crop. In winter they were chopped into pieces with a hatchet and fed to all species of stock.

Beginning of the End

Beginning in the 1950s, most farmers began to convert from mule power to tractor power. According to Fred Diamond, this is when the care of cattle greatly improved. A man could now cultivate more ground with less trouble allowing more attention to be paid to the herds. Farmalls, Fergusons, and Fords began to appear on farms that had operated on animal power for

generations. Pastures could now be mown and kept free of weeds as farmers now began to clear and create improved pastures. Winter grazings (such as oats) were now being sown for the cattle and other stock. Feed which had originally been given to mules and horses was now available for cattle. These advancements, however, began the demise of the native flocks and herds.

With modern equipment becoming available, many banks and agricultural institutions began to promote the introduction of "improved" breeds. Prior to these advancements, these "improved" breeds would not have survived on the care given to the native stock and would have been a waste of money, as many who tried them early on found out. Most farmers began to "improve" their stock. Brahman, Hereford, Devon, and Shorthorn bulls were introduced to the range cattle. The crossbred calves were good and brought better prices; therefore, they were ruled superior to the old or traditional stock. With each subsequent generation, the imported blood increased and the native blood decreased.

De-wormers, fly control, and more hands-on care for the cattle began to be necessary. While weight gain was achieved, parasite resistance and survival ability was bred out. Few credited the fact that the "improved" cattle required pampering to survive. For centuries the native stock had made their masters a living, often receiving nothing in return. The newcomers had to be cared for on a scale never before seen.

In the late 1940s, stockyards began to be built all across the Coastal Plains and selling calves younger than one-year-old began to be the norm. Previously, only mature (3-5 yrs. of age) steers had a market. Prior to stockyards, cattle were marketed in one of two ways. Individual butchers came to the farm and bought the cattle live and then processed the animal on site, prepared it into cuts, and then peddled the meat door to door. In other cases, the drovers periodically came through the rural communities and purchased whatever was ready for market. It is the latter method that I shall now address. Grown on native range, these steers were purchased by drovers or "cow buyers" and

driven to towns or cities that had slaughterhouses, stores, and hotels, allowing for consumption by the local populace. Feedlots were unheard of in the South and it was grass-fed beef that people consumed. Food was literally a local thing. Steers that were ready for market brought on average \$10.00 per head. This is an impressive price considering farmers had virtually no input in the animal. Comparatively, cotton might bring 80 cents a pound with an average yield of 250-350 lbs of lint per acre, growing cotton involved much more labour! Little wonder many stuck with herding as opposed to farming cotton. Herders seeking to add cows to their operation would sometimes buy cow/calf pairs for \$10.00-\$12.00 per pair. Charlie Carter remembers cattle being sold at his father's (Luther Carter) farm for such an amount.

The cow buyers' arrival in a community meant a roundup which meant a break from the normal day-to-day farm labours, and it lent a festive air to things as "company" had arrived. Jack Baylis used to tell of his grandfather, Eustus Baylis, buying cattle out of Eastern Alabama and driving them westward through South Mississippi, buying cattle all along the way. The larger and better-tended farms had large lots and small, fenced-in pastures where the trail herd could be temporarily penned while the buyers spread out through the community and bought cattle, as was the case with the Print Carter farm. Eustus and the Carters made fast friends and Eustus always made a point to stay with them when on the road. Little did he know that one day some 40 years later his grandson, Wiley Jack Baylis, would marry a granddaughter of Print Carter. Bura Conway used to tell of hearing the buyers approach his father's farm by the sound of the cracks and pops of their whips as they drove their cattle on horseback. They were so skilled with the use of their whips Mr. Bura said they could almost play a tune. Cattle, dogs, horses and men filled the road as they headed for the next stop which in Perry County usually meant Print Carter's place just outside of Petal. Once a part of Perry County, Petal was located just a few miles into what became known as Forrest County, Mississippi. The Carters held some of the largest herds on the range and generally had an ample number for sale. They would gather in their cattle to be sold. Other farmers in the community would drive their cattle to the Carter's

Beef, It's What's for Dinner

Beef was a luxury item that the producer seldom, if ever, enjoyed. Most of the meat consumed came from the "lowly hog" since it was easier to cure and wasn't as expensive. Cattle were cash and if a steer could be sold for hard cash then why not eat a hog instead? Prior to stockyards, most stock was sold on the farm to butchers who came directly to the farm and slaughtered the animal. Sometimes stock was sold to drovers who purchased the cattle for a set sum and then drove them to market and re-sold them to slaughter houses.

If beef was consumed, it was generally done so immediately with the animal being divided among the various families in the community. For instance, if a farmer killed a cow this month, all his neighbors and family would divide it and it would be eaten before it had time to spoil. The next month someone else in the community would butcher a beef and the process would start all over again. Herbert Pitts remembers his grandmother having large numbers of cattle on the open range of eastern Jones County in the 1920s. She and her brother, Neese Shows, would butcher cattle and dry the meat. Planks of Cypress were set up on sawhorses and cheese cloth spread over them. Next the meat was placed on the cheese cloth and then covered with another layer of cheese cloth. Small fires were kept going all around the meat while this operation was in progress in order to keep the flies away. Each night the meat had to be placed inside in order to keep the dew off. After the meat had dried, it was dark and hard. It was then wrapped in new, clean cheesecloth and placed in a Cypress box. Whenever beef was desired it was removed, washed, and soaked until it was pretty and pink again.

When canning became available to farmers either through the Cooperative Extension Service or home systems ordered from catalogs, beef became a more accessible food item for the producer. Beef, pork, chicken, and vegetables were processed to resemble fresh products instead of being dried, smoked, and cured. Many folks have said that if too much tallow (fat) was kept in the canned beef it would stick to the roof of your mouth. While this was not detrimental to one's health, it was very annoying.

farm to be sold or Baylis would go out to their farm, purchase the cattle, and drive them to holding pens on Carter's place. Here jugs were uncorked and horse races were held on the long, straight road that runs past the Carter homestead. Luther Carter used to love to tell of a horse that he had owned that no matter how many horses Baylis raced against him, he never could win against that favorite little horse. Country folks love to visit and the buyers brought news from other communities and a brief change of pace. Buyers also brought much needed cash with them. The company and cash were most welcome. After a day or two of haggling, the buyers either moved onto the next community or, if their money played out or their bill was filled, they headed to their markets with the cattle.

If enough cattle could be gathered, sometimes communities organized their own drives. For southern Mississippi, New Orleans and Mobile were the markets that were able to take significant numbers of cattle, sheep, and hogs. Even turkeys were driven to Mobile. Cattle were gathered all across the community's range and, once gathered, representatives from the various families would then drive the cattle to their destination. This removed the middleman from the equation and put all the proceeds into the hands of the owners. It also provided an outing for the usually isolated farm folks. Often two or three wagons accompanied the drive with lists for goods not readily available locally. These and specialty items were brought

back to the folks at home.

When they were asked how the cattle were herded, all those interviewed stated that horses and to a lesser degree mules were used to herd cattle. The use of dogs varied as it still does today. Some producers such as Bura Conway could not tolerate the idea of a dog chasing one of his cows. Others welcomed the canine assistance. This was in the days prior to many owning automobiles, much less four-wheelers and motorcycles, so it would be expected that horses were used. As to the bloodline of horse used, Shoat Broadus was quick to state that it was the "Woods horse" or Pine Tacky. Broadus further stated that these animals were ridden, ploughed, pulled wagons, and did just about everything that was needed on the farm. As with the cattle, only after "improved" methods came to the Pineywoods did other breeds of horses come into play. Lionel Ladner stated that his father had large groups of horses on the open range in the Kiln, Mississippi area, and they were the old "Woods" horses. They were used for everything on the farm. Often with nothing more than a bridle, these horses were ridden for miles in search of their quarry with no obvious affect on the mounts as these were truly the race that endures. Luther Schell of Wagarville, Alabama, also remembers this type of horse and speaks of their endurance, versatility, and hard-working nature.



Brown family Pineywoods cattle. Photo by ALBC staff.

The Range

Bruce Conway states that prior to fencing, their cattle would periodically range up to and sometimes across Highway 42, a distance of some two to three miles. When the cattle ranged too far, he'd simply saddle a horse and drove the cattle back onto home range. It would take several weeks for them to stray off again. Others with larger herds allowed their cattle to have wider ranges since the land around them would be over grazed if such large numbers were kept within close distance.

Shoat (Wyatt) Broadus, whose father's cattle numbered over 400 adult head, stated that their cattle typically ranged 10 to 12 miles in all directions from their home. While most of those interviewed typically were not large landowners, their herds and flocks tended to be massive compared to the land they owned. Landowners who held no more than 40 to 80 acres of land had herds of cattle that numbered into the hundreds of head and flocks of sheep into the thousands. The only large landholding family interviewed was the Carters whose holdings at one point were into the thousands of acres of land. The majority of herders depended on public and other lands for grazing.

Mississippi Livestock Laws

69-13-1. General stock law.

(Excerpted)

There is declared, created and now in existence a statewide stock law which embraces all of the territory of the State of Mississippi and which is declared to be uniform throughout the state, except as hereinafter provided. Any person or persons owning or having under control any livestock such as cattle, horses, mules, jacks, jennets, sheep, goats and hogs, shall not permit such livestock to run at large upon the open or unfenced lands of another person, except as herein expressly provided, but shall keep such livestock confined in a safe inclosure or upon lands belonging to such person.

(Approved August 7, 1968)

End of an Era

With progress came better jobs in factories and mills. The people of the Pine Barrens were no longer tied to their farms as they had been for years. Grocery stores made gardening obsolete and the ease and convenience with which food could now be obtained and prepared paved the way for the death of centuries of food customs. Improved roads meant ever increasing speeds and cattle bedded down in the road began to be blamed for wrecks. The more “progressive” element in the communities began to call for the range to be closed. Bura Conway, then supervisor in Beat 2 of Perry County, Mississippi, relates that it was hard to see the open range end, but the people demanded it. In some areas it had to be put to a vote. It failed the first time or two, but eventually made it. Most areas were given a time period, usually three years, to fence in and gather up their stock. At first, most areas fenced off the highways and main roads and the back country was left to open range. Cattle guards were put into the roads leading onto the main roads and highways and for a time this worked, but when the backcountry roads began to be blacktopped the problems began anew.

Finally enough people gave way. On August 7, 1968, the Mississippi Stock Law that prohibited the free range of livestock was approved. Tens of thousands of head of sheep, cattle, horses, and hogs made their way to the stockyards as most ranchers did not own enough land to keep their entire herds. As stated earlier, many who owned 40-80 acres held herds numbering into the hundreds and could not possibly keep them on this little bit of land. Some were fortunate enough to live close to government and timber company land and were able to lease enough land to keep sizeable herds. This was the case for Ulysses Lee, who until the early 1980s, had huge herds in the timber company woods.

But for most, it was over. No longer allowed to range at large, many producers sold out rather than confine these animals to a few acres in an improved pasture. They felt it somehow unfair and demeaning to them to confine them and take away their liberty to range as they always had. Herschel Ladner today says it is not fair to keep a “Woods” cow in a fenced pasture as it is against her nature. Maybe it is against ours as well.

Family Strains

Beginning in the later part of the 1980s, Dr. Phil Sponenberg, technical advisor to the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy, embarked on a mission to investigate rumors that herds of old-timey, Southern stock persisted in isolated communities throughout the Deep South. Countless miles were driven and hours were spent searching, locating, and documenting these flocks and herds. From Georgia down into Florida, back up into Alabama, and across into Mississippi, he traveled in search of these animals. Fortunately, it was a rarity that he failed to find his quarry. Many people who believed they were the last to hold this type livestock discovered that there were indeed others in isolated areas that still held these cattle. Georgia and Alabama held one herd each with Mississippi having 12 herds of different strains of Pineywoods cattle (not to mention flocks of sheep, goats, and Cotton Patch geese). The Floridians chose to go their own way.

As a result of Dr. Sponenberg’s efforts, several registries have been formed in the Coastal Plains region of the South. These organizations are dedicated to the conservation and promotion of animals native to the Deep South. The Pineywoods Cattle Registry and Breeders Association (PCRBA) was founded for the advancement of Pineywoods cattle and is headquartered in Poplarville, Mississippi. The Coastal South Native Flock Alliance was formed for the promotion of Native (Gulf Coast) sheep and is headquartered in Jones County, Mississippi. The Gulf Coast Sheep Association was founded for similar purposes and is headquartered in Sandia, Texas. The most recent association formed was the Spanish Goat Association which promotes and preserves the unique characteristics of Spanish or brush goats. Through these organizations and their supporting organization, the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy, traditional Southern livestock is making a comeback.

Agricola

Commentary by Phil Sponenberg

Luther Schell and Bo Howard, of Wagarville, Alabama, have assembled an important group from remnants of a variety of herds. Many of these cattle are from lines that date back to the Agricola, Mississippi area. This line includes cattle that are attractively spotted and speckled, several of which are black in base color instead of the more usual reds and tans.

In later years, both Schell and Howard used Conway, Bayliss, and Carter bulls. In the early 2000s, they began to use the herd for crossbreeding, though many old cows remain pure Pineywoods. In 2006, several that were half or greater Agricola were still in the herd.

In 2006, Thomas Allen bought most of the remainder of Howard’s herd. In 2005, the Kerr Center bought some old cows from Schell who subsequently sold the herd to Jared Wilkenson of Summerfield, Oklahoma. Earlier animals were in herds of Ozborn and Pitts Sr. Howard’s herd went back to Knapp cattle, from his kin. His practice of buying in a bull every few generations, and then using home-bred sons, would have assured that much of this breeding is still in that herd.

Barnes

Commentary by Justin Pitts

The Barnes’ cattle come from the Floral, Alabama, area and are the only herd left originating in the state of Alabama. Oakley Barnes and his father ran large herds of cattle in the swamps and woods of Covington County, Alabama, until recently when age and other forces took control. At one time, a good percentage of the Barnes cattle were polled with horned cattle having varied lengths and patterns of horns. Black, red, and blue colors were found with most of the cattle being color-sided with the head, topline, and underline being white. The Barnes’ Pineywoods cattle tend to be rather

stocky cattle and are easily maintained even under harsh conditions. Care was minimal when on the range and the cattle developed the ability to fend for themselves. Billy Barnes, nephew of Oakley Barnes, continues to run a small group of these cattle today. Curtis Bilyeu is also a conservation breeder of Barnes cattle.

Commentary by Phil Sponenberg

These cattle were kept by Oakley and Dewey Barnes (brothers) and their father. They had this strain of cattle at least since 1910 and at one point Barnes had up to 500 of these cattle on the open range in southern Alabama. Colors varied immensely, with many having black ears and noses. Since the 1960s, the herd only numbered 100 to 150 head.

Oakley Barnes died in 1983, but Calvin Hutchins and Noah Oliver both kept the Barnes line going. Barnes used polled bulls of his own breeding, and polled cattle were considered as pure as any of the others. Barnes consistently culled any cow that failed to calve annually, and no bulls bred outside the herd had been used since 1910. Calvin Hutchins actively preserved the Barnes line for several years, with all of its color varieties and types, and the qualities of resistance to the environment built up over the decades. As a method to maintain the original type, he did not de-worm the cattle and kept careful records on the production of the cows. Several teenagers were in his herd, and he knew of one cow that Barnes had that calved up until 31 years of age.

The Barnes line cattle that remain are interesting because they are of uniform body type, but they vary immensely as to presence and shape of horns as well as in their coat color. Most of these are color-sided, but in recent years the herd is also producing solid colored animals. Such non-spotted animals were reputed to have been in the original Barnes herd, but only popped back up in the 1980s.

In addition to the patterns considered typical of Pineywoods cattle found in this herd, there were also some recessive spotted cattle. These are rare in most lines, although cattle of this pattern do occur in Spain in some of the oldest breeds such as the de Lidia fighting cattle. In these old lines with accurate histories of genetic isolation, these somewhat unusual or rare spotting patterns are perfectly acceptable.

Baylis

Commentary by Justin Pitts

Jack Baylis began his herd from cattle purchased from his wife's father and grandfather, Luther and Print Carter, respectively. After marrying Mattie Lee Carter, Baylis began raising Carter cattle on their farm in Petal, Mississippi. He purchased, worked, and traded for cattle from the two Carters while adding other strains to the mix as well. Conway, Batson, Griffen, and other strains were periodically added until Baylis had a strain all to his own.

Yellow Griffens were a favorite of Mr. Jack's and his herd showed heavy Griffen influence. Most of his cattle tended to be somewhat larger than most other strains and were usually heavier horned as well. Colors were as varied as any herd left with blue, black, yellow, red, and dove grey being present in a multitude of shades and patterns. Baylis cattle tended to be heavy milkers and like their cousins the Carters, they could have very nasty dispositions. At one point, Jack had over 400 head of cattle, but as time waxed on the herd dwindled. Jack kept his cattle until the late 1990s when health and vandalism problems forced him to sell down to a small herd of 25 to 30 cows. One dark yellow bull was purchased from Baylis by Jess Brown in the early 1990s and has influenced Diamond, Hickman, Carter, and Conway blood. The bull died in 2008 at the age of 18 last year after having bred the Pitts herd.

Commentary by Phil Sponenberg

The Bayliss herd was one of the larger source herds of Pineywoods cattle. The herd numbered about 160, and consisted of cattle from older lines of Griffen, Thornhill, and Carter cattle. The Griffen cattle are yellow, and can reputedly be traced at least in part



Agricola animal. from Luther Schell.



Broadus cow.



Shoat Broadus with Pineywoods in background.



Broadus bulls.



Broadus cows.

to French cattle introduced to the area in about 1850. The Griffens ran a sawmill, and the original importation included 300 head. These are small round cattle, with large twisted horns that have a very Spanish character. The Griffen cattle were used locally as dairy cattle, although this no longer continues. The Thornhill cattle are white with red points and are reputed to be English origin. The Carter strain have been in existence for 100 years or so and are a family strain of cattle from wife of Jack Baylis. Carter cattle vary in color immensely, but do not include black or black derived colors or patterns since this was taken as evidence of Angus breeding. It is interesting to note that black was the preferred base color in several of the other pure herds, such as the Holt cattle strain.

Broadus

Commentary by Justin Pitts

Wyatt Broadus Sr. began his herd of cattle from his father's cattle and maintained this strain with his son Wyatt Jr. or "Shoat" as Broadus Sr. called him. Wyatt Sr. passed away in the 1970s and today Shoat maintains this strain. These cattle were once extremely varied in colour but today are mostly white with solid or brockle faces and heads. At one point in time, the Broadus herds numbered well over 400 head of mature cattle and 1000 head of sheep ranging as far as ten miles in both directions of home. With the introduction of coyotes in the late 1980s and early 1990s, sheep raising became an impossibility and sheep were soon off the Broadus ranges.

Horn pattern is varied as some Broadus cattle have short, crumpled horns while others have long, graceful, twisted horns. Guinea cattle were once common in the Broadus herd, but that trait has been selected against. Other breeders of Broadus cattle are again selecting and keeping guineas. Guineas are the dwarf variant of "Woods" cattle and nearly all herds at one point had at least a few guineas in them.

Commentary by Phil Sponenberg

Wyatt (or Shoat) Broadus Jr. is from the southern portion of the range. He had cattle that were family cattle. These tended to be short and blocky. Several were nearly white and included a "white face" pattern similar to Hereford cattle.

Carter

Commentary by Justin Pitts

Solomon Prentiss ("Print") Carter began raising cattle in what was then Perry County, Mississippi, in the late 1800s and remained in the cattle business until his death in the late 1950s. In his lifetime, Print Carter saw the end of slavery, the invention of the automobile, airplane, and the end of animal power as a means of farming. Print was an innovator in Southern agriculture. He was a nurseryman and grew and sold pecan seedlings and fruit trees in addition to having his own orchards from which he sold fruit and nuts. He grew tung nuts for the paint industry, dairied, grew and shipped produce, raised and slaughtered hogs on farm and sold the meat to a grocery chain, produced eggs, grew starch potatoes for the starch plant, owned rental property, and made and sold moonshine whiskey. Mr. Print was truly a self-made man. He was orphaned at age nine when a typhus epidemic hit South Mississippi and took his parents. None of his brothers or sisters would take him in as he was the baby of the family and his siblings had children his age and older. His favorite quote was "make hay while the sun shines, set out 'tater' draws when it's raining."

Print became a sharecropper for a man and earned enough money to buy his own mule. He then traded a pocket knife, a pair of overalls, and three dollars as down payment on his first 40 acres of land. He farmed for the other man during the day and came home and cleared his own land by night, plowing by the light of the burning piles. He obtained a start of sugar cane from the man he farmed for and in a few years was farming for himself. He meticulously managed his cane patch and soon had over ten acres of fine cane that produced hundreds of gallons of syrup each year. It was with syrup that Print Carter began building his own empire in Perry County, Mississippi.



Print Carter.

McClendon Lumber Company had a commissary that supplied the sawyers, ox drivers, blacksmiths, and other tradesmen of the timber industry with groceries and supplies. In those days, syrup was a mainstay in the diets of working men and the commissary desired to purchase syrup from Print Carter. Print sold his syrup for 25 cents per gallon and McClendon Lumber sold cutover land for 25 cents an acre. Print traded syrup for land and was soon the largest private landholder in South Mississippi.

Carter began raising cattle in his teens and through good management, wise dealings, and hard work, he soon had hundreds of head on the range. He went down into Pearl River County once to visit relatives and admired the sleek, red herds of cattle his cousins owned. Once Carter decided he wanted something nothing stood in his way, so he returned

home driving a herd of what he called the Pearl River Reds. Their descendants can still be seen in his grandson's (Charlie Carter's) herds today.

Print had tenants who did little else but tend to his numerous herds of "Woods" cattle and sheep that were scattered for miles in what is now Forrest County, Mississippi. He introduced his own method of range management and it is still in use in South Mississippi today. He brought in Hereford bulls to cross over the "Woods" cows. This was a terminal cross meaning all half-Hereford calves were sold and none returned to the herd to breed. The Mississippi State Extension Service of the 1950s, as evidenced by a Hattiesburg American article, had nothing but praise for his method of long straw pine management using livestock and fire as tools to keep the woods clean and grow quality pine timber. He was a true leader in the community and laboured to bring new methods and money crops into his area. He failed at some but prospered at others and his attitude was "you don't know if you don't try."

Print's son, Luther Carter, grew up under his frugal Irish father and, as most country boys did, began building his own herd at an early age. Luther loved working oxen and began breaking and selling yokes of steers to sell to the timber companies and logging crews that were hard at work in the "Pine Barrens" of South Mississippi. He began his herd out of his father's cattle and kept them until his death in 1976. Owning his own timber land, Luther (and later his son Charlie) kept his own ox teams to log out the Carter timber lands. While most people had to hire loggers, the Carters practiced that age old Southern trait of self-sufficiency and cut their own timber and grew their own corn and whatever else they might need on their own farms. If lumber for a barn was needed they simply cut the necessary amount of logs, bunched and loaded them onto the log truck with the oxen, and hauled them to a local sawmill where they had them cut into the needed bill of materials.

In the 1950s, Charlie Carter became good friends with Mr. and Mrs. Thornhill out in Marion County. The Thornhills owned over 500 head of white "Woods" cattle that they referred to as the "English" cattle. Luther and Charlie purchased 25 of these heifers and brought them back to their herd. Any white cow on the Carter farm today is still referred to as the Thornhill stock. Carter also loved yellow Griffen cattle. In the late 1930s, he added a yellow bull from some of his relatives in Pearl River County, driving several head of bulls home by mule. In the 1930s and 1940s, Carter ran a dairy using "Woods" cattle. While total production was less than the Jerseys cows his neighbors milked, the "Woods" cow's milk tested higher in butterfat and was highly sought after by Hattiesburg Creamery.

Carter cattle are varied in patterns and shades of color. Some are solid red, yellow with roans of these colors being common. Many cattle have dark almost black streaks over their eyes as if they have been rubbing on a burnt stump. Bluish-colored cattle were once common in the herd. Horn length varies from the short and crumpled to the long and twisted. Most Carter cows are heavy milkers and the steers are prized among ox drivers as hard pulling cattle. At one time, the entire Carter family had well over a thousand head. Today only about 100 or so are pure Carter strain.



Carter cow.



Carter bull.



Carter herd.



Charlie Carter with Pineywoods herd.



Conway heifer, Maya.



Dedeaux heifer.



Dedeaux cow.



Dedeaux cow among the pines.

Commentary by Phil Sponenberg

Print Carter swam a group of red cattle across the Pearl River, and began the Carter herds. Very few bulls were added over the years and none since the late 1890s.

Print Carter's son was Luther Carter, and he referred to small, typically horned, light red cows as the "Pearl River Reds." This type still persists in a number of herds, generally going back to the Carter line. The present Carter herd varies from this type to a larger type. Most are light to medium red and are either linebacked, colorsided, or more rarely roan. A few yellow cattle with white spots are still in the herd. A few calves that blacken with age tend to occur even today in the herd. Charlie Carter still maintains nearly 100 head of these cattle today and Justin B. Pitts is also helping to conserve this line.

Conway

Commentary by Justin Pitts

Probably the most widely recognized of all the strains of Pineywoods is the Conway cattle. Developed by Bura Conway of Perry County, Mississippi, the Conway cow is a deep red animal with some type of white markings on the body. Mr. Conway was one of the last to log for the public with oxen and was often the subject of newspaper articles and television news shows which helped to make the Conway line famous. In the 1960s, a lumber company offered as a prize a new dress suit to the logger who could haul the most logs to the sawmill. By this time, nearly all loggers were using machinery and no one thought that oxen could outperform their machines. Mr. Bura won the suit of clothes and his ox drivers and truck drivers each received a new jacket. He out did the nearest competitor by ten thousand feet. As a result of his cattle's celebrity, Mr. Bura sold seed stock into 19 states and all over South Mississippi.

Bura Conway began his cattle out of his father's herd and when he found something he liked elsewhere he added it to his herd. Over 70 years ago, the last outside cattle was added when Bura added an O'Neil cow and her half-Devon bull calf to the herd. Bura was hunting along the Pascagoula River when he came upon this herd of cattle and saw a cow he really liked (along with her bull calf). The owner agreed to sell Bura the pair and this was the last "outside" blood ever added. Conway kept the cow's bull calf, bred him to his cows, selected a bull out of that cross, and has maintained a closed herd ever since. While his cows were once varied in colour, Conway sought to keep only deep red and white coloured cattle while removing all the brindles, blacks, doves, and other colors. Conway cows are good milkers and tend to be somewhat more docile than other strains as Conway culled any cows with bad dispositions. Oxen out of this strain have been known to reach weights of 2400 pounds but usually weigh 1600-1700 pounds. Of all the strains of Woods cattle, this one is in the best shape numerically; however, it is sad to report that no cows from this strain remain in the hands of any of Mr. Bura's descendants.

Commentary by Phil Sponenberg

The Conway cattle are raised by Bura Conway and his son Bruce in Richton, Mississippi. Bura began managing his father's herd in 1910 at the age of 14 because his father had an injury that kept him from actively managing the herd himself. Bura preferred red, speckled cows and tended to keep those for the herd. The herd was maintained within itself until about 1938 when a bull was added to the herd.

Initially single sires were used in the Conway herd, but as numbers increased they began to use two bulls at a time. In the 1980s, bulls were used in the herd until they were eight or nine years old. The Conway cattle were used extensively for the production of oxen for use in the southern logging industry. At one point, Bura had a team of four yoke of identical twin oxen. Each pair was identical in color and horn length and shape. All of the Conway cattle are some variant of red and white, with many of them attractively speckled. Although the shade of red does vary, the overall impression of the whole herd is a herd of peppermints. As late as the 1960s, there were also black and yellow cattle in the herd, but these are now all gone. The cows are of good conformation and produce calves regularly until they are in their teens. As with other herds, some of the cows are polled, although these are now rare.

Jerald O'Neal has a herd of 40 some head of cattle that originated from the Conway herd in the early 1970s. His start was seven heifers and a bull from Bob Eubanks, who was an oxdrover of the Conways and had started his herd from the Conway herd in the 1950s or 1960s. Otis O'Neal, an ancestor, sold Conway a bull that he had himself bought from Eubanks, so the herds are interconnected at several levels. Bob Eubanks was the last one to have black and grullo-based Conway cattle. The present O'Neal herd is important as a source of Conway genetics that is slightly different from the more recent herd. Due to its early separation from the main Conway herd, the O'Neal herd has minimal Devon influence. The colors are a light red (distinct from the deeper red of most Conway cattle) with either linebacked, colorsided, or speckled patterns. Today, David Moore, Virgil Berry, and Mitchel Amason also are important stewards of the Conway line.

Dedeaux

Commentary by Justin Pitts

This strain is probably the rarest strain of cattle with less than a dozen pure cattle left. Jess Brown has many ½ blood cattle and Wayne Dedeaux has a small group of pure cattle. When numbers were larger the cattle were more varied in colour but now tend to be a very beautiful brindle and white colour. They are medium-sized cattle with excellent udders and have smaller horns than other strains, shaped like a pitchfork, going out and up. There used to be guineas in the Dedeaux strain and some of the guineas had the old, wide, twisted horns. This strain is on the brink of extinction. If properly managed, this strain will survive, but management is the key and every calf counts.

Commentary by Phil Sponenberg

The Dedeaux cattle are somewhat similar to Broadus cattle, with moderate horns and blocky body conformation. Dedeaux and Broadus cattle ranged close to Hickman cattle, but had very little to no mixing with that line. They remain a different body type and horn type. The present Dedeaux herd is greatly reduced from that of the past.

Diamond

Commentary by Justin Pitts

This herd hails from Howizon, Mississippi, and is one of the most unique sets of cattle out there. Fred Diamond began his herd out of his father's stock but would periodically add other strains of Woods cattle to his herd such as Seals (now extinct), Broadus, and Hickman cattle. Large, smooth, fertile, and heavy milkers, Diamond cattle are truly a sight to behold as they are varied in colour unlike most herds. Black, blue, purple, (that's right, purple) red, yellow, brindle, and all patterns imaginable make up the Diamond herd. This was never a large strain. At their peak there were around 100 head.

Commentary by Phil Sponenberg

Diamond got his start from old family cattle that included several old cows of old traditional type and old family breeding. The cattle vary in color, but include several dark reds and browns. Horns are long, twisted, and typical. The size varies, but many are larger-framed rangy-type cattle. Fred Diamond milks one nice dark purple roan cow that produces a gallon of milk a day after weaning her calf. In addition to the Seal bull, other recent ones include the "Blue Speckled Butterbean bull" from Fresco, Alabama, and Jess Brown's Yellow Griffin bull (likely 3/4 Griffin, 1/4 Baylis breeding). The Diamond herd has some Bounds influence too, which is otherwise rare.

Hickman

Commentary by Justin Pitts



Fred Diamond with Pineywoods in background.



Diamond cow.



Fred Diamond's "purple" Pineywoods milk cow.



Blue Hickman cow owned by the Browns.



Brindle Hickman bull in the Brown herd.



Hickman cow in Brown herd.



Holt strain bull at Well's farm.



Cow and calf from Holt strain at Well's farm.

It is only due to Jess and his father Billy Frank Brown's hard work and dedication to our way of life that the Hickman strain has survived. Once numbering nearly two thousand head, the Hickman cattle dwindled to less than one hundred after the loss of range and the death of the herd's founder, J.R. Hickman, in the late 1980s. The Browns bought every Hickman cow they could find from various sources. The largest and last group came directly from a Hickman heir. Through careful management and careful breeding, the Hickman cattle are in good shape and are growing in popularity with new breeders starting herds. Hickman cattle once ranged for miles along the Little and Big Biloxi Rivers, where the Ladnier and Broadus herds also ranged. DeSoto National Forest (also known as the "government woods") now includes part of this range area within its boundaries.

Hickman cattle come in a wide variety of colors and patterns and still contain the guinea variant within their genetics. They have wide, twisted horns. These cattle are more angular and heavier (i.e. longer) horned than other strains of Woods cattle.

Commentary by Phil Sponenberg

Hickman cattle ranged with Ladnier cattle and cattle of these strains are very similar. Hickman names included Lowery (Jube) and his son J.R. Lowery is the source of the LH brand. J.R. died around 1991 at 80 years old. JR was rumored to pick up cattle from other local breeders from time to time and add them to his herd.

Holt

Commentary by Justin Pitts

These cattle are from Georgia and were the property of James Holt of Cordele, Georgia. The Holts had long been stock people and ran huge herds and flocks of cattle, hogs, and sheep in their respective community. The original cattle Mr. Holt had came from his father's herds. In the early 1980s, Holt went to Florala, Alabama, and purchased a white, black-eared bull from Oakley Barnes and placed him in his herd as the sole herd bull. He kept this bull until its death in its early teens. When I first met Mr. Holt, he had hundreds of cattle on the open range. At one point there may have been 1400 head.

It is doubtful that very much original Holt blood exists in the cattle now being called by that name and even Mr. Holt himself once remarked there were no more pure Holt cattle. DNA analysis of this line is greatly needed to determine the amount of Holt genetics left and if there is anything to be saved. Mr. Jay Wells from Americus, Georgia, is working very diligently to save any Holt genetics out there and is currently working with the state of Georgia to have this herd preserved as a Georgia landmark.

Colors of Holt cattle varied, but Mr. Holt's father preferred the dun ones. Among the current herd, horns are mostly crumpled with some having pitchfork horns. None have real long or uniquely twisted horns.

Commentary by Phil Sponenberg

The Holt line is from Georgia and originated in the Hawkinsville area. In 1917 or 1918 the old family herd, already 100 years old, was moved to the Okefenokee area. James Holt's father had this sort of cattle, and he has maintained a herd from that base. James clearly remembers traincar loads of cattle coming into the swamp areas from the west during the droughts of the 1930s. The imported cattle were all cows, and he never remembers steers or bulls among the hundreds of cattle brought to the Southeast in those shipments. Of the cattle introduced into the area only a very, very few survived more than a few months due to endemic diseases and the adverse environment. As a result, the local herds received minimal genetic input from the introduction of these Western cattle. This was the first major influx of non-Pineywoods cattle into the area.

In the days when Holt's father and grandfather had herds of these cattle it was common for breeders to swap bulls back and forth. Later, when few pure herds existed, this practice was stopped and no bulls were introduced into the Holt herd until a white bull was introduced in 1985. This was probably the Barnes line bull that came

from Carl Williams, another breeder with predominantly Holt line cattle. In the early 1900s, Holt says it was easily possible to distinguish between the herds of the various owners of these Georgia strains, because each preferred a different color or spotting pattern and would select most of the herd to be of a specific variant. This is somewhat in contrast to the more lax selection for color in most other geographic areas. The final cattle in Holt's herd were mostly black, color-sided animals.

Ladnier

Commentary by Justin Pitts

Brothers Claude and Leo Ladnier also ran their cattle in the government woods of DeSoto National Forest. The last two Ladnier cows that Jess Brown owned died of old age in the spring of 2009. They have left behind 8 – 10 calves that are ½ Ladnier.

Ladner

Commentary by Justin Pitts

The Ladners are from the same family as the Ladniers. Somewhere along the line someone dropped the 'i,' creating the Ladner name. Lionel Ladner owns the last of the pure Ladner strain. Lionel is Ola Ladner's grandson and brother-in-law to Shoat Broadus. Of the remaining five cows, four are polled and one is horned. There are no known Ladner bulls. The Ladners, like the Hickman and Broadus families, ran their cattle in the "government woods."

Palmer-Dunn

Commentary by Justin Pitts

Palmer-Dunn cattle are a composite of Woods cattle. They include old cattle from the Palmer family herd, all the muley headed bulls that Bura Conway would part with, and other Woods cattle that Elijah (Lij) Palmer picked up. Earl Dunn, Lij Palmer's nephew in-law, is said to have introduced a polled Shorthorn bull to his herd at one point. Genetic analysis will help verify this. The Kerr Center in Poteau, Oklahoma, is now working to save this strain. They are increasing numbers and starting satellite herds with area farmers.

Palmer-Dunn cattle are about 50/50 polled to horned. They are red, red and white, brindle, and white.

Commentary by Phil Sponenberg

This is a small herd and several are polled. Muriel (Palmer) Dunn is the last owner. Evidently these come from an old family line. She bought her last bull, a polled one, from her uncle Elijah Palmer in 1984. He was used until replaced by a polled son born in 1998.

Vice

Commentary by Justin Pitts

Ollie Vice was one of those who started out with "Woods" cattle, changed to other breeds after the stock law came in, and years later went back to "Woods" cattle. He established his herd by buying whatever strain of cows he could and bred them to various "Woods" bulls he could either find or raise. Early on, his cows were about 50/50 polled to horned cattle and most were brindle to red and white color-sided cattle. In the mid 1980s he met Bura Conway and began using Conway bulls over his existing cows and by the time of his death in 2003 he had bred his cattle to a high percentage Conway genetics. He added a heavily Baylis influenced bull, a Carter bull, and briefly



Old Ladnier cow in Brown herd.



Lionel Ladner cow and calf.



Lionel Ladner heifer.



Palmer-Dunn bull.

a Barnes bull. The cattle that were raised out of these crosses were kept in the form of females. After Vice's death, son Jimmy took over the herd and added a Broadus bull, keeping a few heifers out of this cross. He recently added a heavily Griffen influenced bull with some Carter and Conway genetics in the mix. He intends to add a little different color by using some other strain bull and then closing his herd to make it a unique genetic group. Mr. Vice currently has about 70 cows. There are no Vice strain bulls. He is using a bull which is heavily influenced by the Griffen strain.

Today Vice cattle are colored much like Conway; red and white. Some have "mealy mouths" meaning tan around the mouth. A few will be brindle around facial area. Vice cattle have small horns.

Commentary by Phil Sponenberg

The Vice family did have an old family strain, but consistently brought in bulls so that the present herd is largely made of this strain heavily upgraded with mostly Conway influence.

Today Pineywoods cattle, Gulf Coast Native sheep, Pine Tacky horses, Guinea Hogs, Dominique chickens, and Cotton Patch geese are some of the Southern breeds that survive because of the stewardship of a handful of breeders.

The American Livestock Breeds Conservancy (ALBC) has helped to uncover remote and isolated herds and flocks, network the breeders, advise them on breeding strategies that conserve the genetic pool, and bring attention and value to these important cultural and genetic resources. Breeders, breed associations, ALBC, and others are finding new opportunities for these animals in our ever changing cultural and agricultural landscape.



Billy Frank Brown's animal.

For more information about Pineywoods cattle, contact the Pineywoods Cattle Registry & Breeders Association:

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Pineywoods owned by Jay Wells in Georgia.



Pineywoods.

