

BUTLER BREEDER'S 20 Years and Counting...

Labor Day Weekend, 2017, will mark the 20th anniversary for the Butler Breeder's Invitational Sale. This historic milestone for one of the industry's most popular and unique Texas Longhorn Sales provides an excellent opportunity to look back at the sale's history as well as the state of the Butler bloodline yesterday, today and tomorrow.

BUTLER BLOODLINE HISTORY

Milby Butler, born in 1889, was a cowman at birth with a Brahma cow registered in his name when he was one week old. Initially, Milby's primary interest was the family's excellent Brahman herd. It was his son, Henry, who actually started the Longhorn herd, beginning with cattle he had received for working as a hand during the cattle roundups on the open rangeland between Houston and Galveston, Texas. From the time he was ten-years-old, Henry helped with the roping and branding and took his pay in heifers. "I always took the big-horned ones," Henry said. Their origin was "just old, big-horned East Texas cattle." These became an important part of the Butlers' foundation herd. The Butler family also ran an extensive stock pen and slaughterhouse business. The best cattle were sifted out over the years and retained for the growing Longhorn herd.

In 1923, Milby separated the Longhorns from the rest of his cattle. While he was very interested in preserving the native Longhorns, it was not until Henry was away in the service during World War II that Milby took an active interest in raising the cattle. He soon assumed responsibility for the ranch's Longhorn breeding program.

In 1931, the Butlers traded Pat Phelps of Newton County (Texas) two Brahman cows for a white, "flea-

bitten" Longhorn cow. This white, speckled cow with red ears, red rings around the eyes and nose, and red specks on her ankles became the first source of the color trait many people refer to as "Butler color." Henry once described her as a medium-sized cow with a double twist corkscrew horn shape.

In his search for outside Longhorn blood, Milby purchased five cows from Esteban Garcia of Encino, Texas. These cattle were not of the East Texas variety, but were true Mexican cattle. They came off of a dry desert and had been living on cactus most of their lives. They had callouses on their knees and hocks from getting up and down on rocks and cactus. Their mouths were so full of pear spears that their muzzles looked like the backs of porcupines. When the cattle were shipped to the Butlers at League City, only two of the five survived. Although of an entirely different bloodline, these cows



Beauty - Milby Butler's favorite cow and the queen of the Butler bloodline

bore the "Butler" trait of large, corkscrew horns. One of the two, a red cow with a white star on her forehead, was among the longhorns loaned to John Wayne for use in the film, *The Alamo*. Subsequently christened "Miss John Wayne," this cow lived to be 37 years old, giving birth to 12 bulls and no heifers. These sons were used as outcross Longhorn blood on the original Butler herd. Milby had Miss John Wayne's

head mounted after she died, and it now resides in the Butler Longhorn Museum in League City, Texas.

The Butlers used many white and roan bulls as herd sires. The main cow herd had been dominated by the solid colors common in most herds of the day. By breeding white bulls on solid cows, many unusual and outstanding colors resulted in the offspring. In conversations with Sam Partlow, F.M. "Blackie" Graves and Dewitt Meshell, they all remember the Milby and Henry Butler herd as filled with cattle of every color imaginable.

Although he enjoyed the many wonderful colors that would "pop up" in the herd, Milby's true passion was the horn growth the cattle could produce. No

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one will argue with the fact that Milby bred for horns. His cows were carefully selected and put with the bull that he thought would produce length, base and corkscrew shape in the horns of their offspring. His herd sires were out of the cows with the best corkscrew horns. "Color," Milby would say, "is unpredictable. Breed for horns and you'll get color."

During the mid-1960's, Garnett Brooks, a registration inspector for the newly-formed Texas Longhorn Breeders Association of America, visited the Butler herd on two occasions. His comments to the TLBAA indicated, "The Butler cattle are mostly light colors of cream, dun, grulla and white speckled. I did not see any black cattle. The pastures were partially chain-linked with excellent gates and working pens. There are many old cattle with the Texas screw-type horns. They are unusual cattle and different from other Longhorn herds. They are bigger-framed cattle than most southeast Texas cattle. Many of the cattle could be considered real outstanding on horns." Of the second inspection, Brooks recalled that "again we saw the identical type of twisted, big-horned cattle. The cattle were very uniform. They were selected for a specific type of [Milby's] own desire. He felt he had a true type of the old blood."

Milby Butler died on October 16, 1971, a few months before his 83rd birthday. A year or two prior to his death, some of the Butler cattle had already been sold by private treaty as part of Milby's wife's estate. J.W. Isaacs of Alvin, Texas, was among the private treaty buyers, purchasing fourteen two-year-olds. Immediately following Milby's death, the bulk of his remaining cattle were sold at auction. Approximately eighty percent of the Butler herd was slaughtered. The other twenty percent was purchased by those Longhorn breeders fortunate enough to learn of the sales. These included Dewitt and Sammy Meshell, Ruel Sanders, W.D. and Sam Partlow, Luman Holman and J.W. Isaacs. Pauline Russell, Milby's secretary, kept at least twenty of the best Butler cattle which she then sold in 1977 at Raywood, Texas. Among the buyers of



Early Butler Breeder's Invitational Sale

these animals were Blackie Graves, E.B. "Booster" Stephenson, Wiley Knight and Edward Faircloth.

THE BUTLER INFLUENCE

Nearly fifty years after his death, there still survives an easily identifiable type of Texas Longhorn which bears the Butler name and can be traced in an unbroken line to the native big-horned cattle of East Texas and the Gulf Coast. It is only by chance that any survive at all. Through the efforts of a few breeders, a precious number of cattle were saved. These small herds were line-bred, with each becoming a closed genetic pool. Many times where these lines have been crossed, the resulting offspring have shown size, color and the outstanding horn growth of the original Butler herd. Today, there are seven recognized subfamilies of Butler cattle: Graves, Partlow, Lepper, Meshell, Holman, Sanders and Shinn. There were also a few pure Butler cattle not included in these herds. From these



FM Graves 102 - A breed production leader, considered by many to be the perfect Texas Longhorn female.

cattle descend today's Butler Texas Longhorns offered through the Butler Breeder's Invitational Sale.

The Butler family was one of seven families credited with saving the Texas Longhorn breed from extinction. It is important to note that five of the other families introduced Butler breeding into their herds in the '60s and '70s. Those included the Phillips, Peeler, Marks, Wright and the WR herds. An interesting side note is that foundation animals for the WR came from the same geo-

graphic areas where foundation Butler cattle originated. Only the Yates bloodline had no known use of Butler genetics and while Butler supported and bought cattle from other breeders, there is no documented evidence that these cattle were ever used by Milby in his breeding program. All agreed his uneasiness over using outside unproven blood prevented him from doing so.

Butler cattle have always had a history of strong market demand and during the 1980s, embryo transfer and

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semen syndications helped to propel the bloodline to the top of the industry. Cows such as FM Graves 102, Rose Red and Maressa along with bulls like Classic, Bold Ruler and Monarch took horn growth to a whole new level. The blend cattle produced using a Butler genetic base in herds such as those of Johnnie Hoffman, Blackie Graves and Dickinson Ranch, to name three of the most prominent, solidified the Butler bloodlines value to the entire Longhorn industry.

THE BUTLER BREEDER’S INVITATIONAL

The inspiration for the Butler Breeder’s Invitational Sale was born following the dispersal of the FM “Blackie” Graves herd which consisted of straight Butler and blend cattle. The overwhelming support for his straight Butler cattle, including the record setting sale of the mother-daughter combination of Classey BluButler FM386 and Miss Blue Denim FM 102, convinced us the time was right and the market demand strong for pure Butler genetics. In January of 1998, seven Longhorn breeders, known to have been strong lifetime supporters of the Butler bloodline, met to discuss the possibility of having a sale. After watching the other original Longhorn families slowly disappear, a sale seemed the best way to help preserve and promote the bloodline and give the participants a place to market their cattle. The Butler Breeder’s Invitational Sale is unique in that it is the only Texas Longhorn Sale dedicated to a single bloodline and hosted by a group of breeders. (While the Wichita Refuge and Ft. Niobrara have had pure bloodline sales, they were held by the refuges as surplus sales.)

The original group joined with other interested breeders and the Butler Breeder’s Invitational Sale was born, holding its first sale on Labor Day Weekend, 1998. Help and guidance from legendary auctioneer Colonel Eddie Wood and his wife Joyce proved invaluable and the sale could not have happened without them. Colo-

nel Eddie remained the auctioneer until his retirement and in fact chose the 2008 Butler Breeder’s Invitational Sale as the last sale he would ever auctioneer. Since that time, Joel Lemley has done an excellent job as auctioneer, having already participated in the sale on many different levels.

The Butler Breeder’s Invitational Sale quickly became one of the highlights on the Longhorn calendar each year. In addition to outstanding Longhorn cattle and the finest genetics offered in a no-games-played atmosphere, breeders enjoy unmatched hospitality including endless food, drinks and desserts as well as the camaraderie of the Butler Group’s greatest asset, our people. Just a short visit with these breeders reveals their passion for and commitment to this extraordinary bloodline. While the sale has enjoyed many high-selling, high-dollar animals, the Butler Breeders are proudest of the consistency, longevity and honesty of the Butler Breeder’s Invitational Sale. We have survived droughts, hurricanes, high fuel prices, politics and other adversities by keeping the focus on the cattle.

Many household names in the Longhorn industry were first made available at the Butler Breeder’s Invitational Sale. Some of the most exceptional must be men-



Five Star BR3 - Third generation of the Dark Star family and over 80 inches

tioned – Delta Rockette, Dark Star BR3 and their progeny. **Delta Rockette**, with her two daughters, **Little Ace Swamp Guinea** and **Dalgood’s Velvet Lady**, as well as a great granddaughter, **RVR Ashley Rose** combined with **Dark Star BR3**, Dark Star’s daughter, **Evening Star BR3**, and then Evening Star’s daughter, **Five Star BR3** represent seven of the high sellers at the Butler Breeder’s Invitational Sale.

BUTLER RESOURCES

Today, the Butler Group is also involved in two very
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important related ventures that serve to inform and educate the public about Butler cattle. One is the free online website, ButlerTexasLonghorns.com, which provides history, articles, photos, past catalogs with buyers and prices, and a pedigree herd book to research Butler pedigrees. It was created under the direction of the same committee of breeders that brought the TLBAA

whole has long been established. It is unquestioned that the best blend cattle all have one thing in common: Butler genetics. However, the blend segment of the Longhorn industry finds itself in an interesting predicament. Although blend herds began with an infinite genetic pool, nearly all of today's blend cattle go back to maybe ten herd sires with most of the ten related to each other in one way or another.



Hunter MC 69 - The longest horned Butler bull and over 80 inches

the HORNS online program. Many breeders have commented that the Butler website is by far one of the most informative and easiest to use websites available.

The other resource, the Milby Butler Texas Longhorn Museum in League City, Texas, is a project begun by the citizens of League City. Originally, the museum focused on the Butler family and the salt grass cattlemen of the Gulf coast. Through the support of the Butler Group and their generous donation of numerous artifacts, the museum now houses the world's largest collection of horns, skulls, shoulder mounts and related longhorn items. It is a fantastic vehicle to educate people about the Butler bloodline. There are several specimens that were actually owned or bred by Milby Butler himself. Anyone interested in Texas Longhorns, the Butler family in particular or the salt grass region should visit this hidden gem just south of Houston.

TODAY'S BUTLER TEXAS LONGHORNS

In wondering what the future holds for the Butler bloodline, the outlook is very positive. In addition to the consistently strong demand for outstanding straight Butler cattle by Butler Breeders seeking to keep the family pure, their value to the Texas Longhorn breed as a

New blood will have to be brought in to continue the outcross breeding scheme. The Butler bloodline is perfectly positioned to provide blend programs with top quality, time-proven, market-friendly genetics, just as it did for the foundation breeders in the '50s, '60s and '70s and has continued to do ever since.

Like many Longhorn cattle, through genetic selection and management practices, multiple Butler animals have eclipsed the 80-inch horn mark with a host of others knocking at the door. Two of the finest examples are Hunter MC 69, the longest horned Butler bull, and his full sister, Jackie Lynn 578. Both over 80 inches, they were bred and are owned by Michael McLeod and show the consistency of this line. Another important contribution of the Butler bloodline is to provide the industry with some much needed breed character. As more and more Longhorns look less and

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less like Texas Longhorns, Butler cattle have long been used to return the "Longhorn" look to coarse and unrefined cattle, with rounded polls, heavy in skin and lacking more subtle Longhorn traits. The breed is made up of much more than just pretty colors and long horns. The Butler cattle can help bring these valuable phenotypes back to the industry before they are lost for good.

In conclusion, the Butler Breeders' Group would like to invite everyone to join us on Labor Day Weekend for our 20th anniversary sale to enjoy the outstanding cattle and great times that this sale is known for. If you cannot be there in person, the sale will be webcast live with internet bidding available. We would also like to thank all those who have participated in the sale in any capacity over the years because it is YOU that make the Butler Breeder's Invitational Sale possible and keep the future of the Butler bloodline bright. 