

110 Years of Shorthorns

You don't have to look long to see the pride on Charlie Campbell's face when he tells you that there has been nothing but Shorthorn bulls used on his farm since it was homesteaded in 1889.

One hundred and ten years isn't a long time in history of some parts of Canada. Here in Saskatchewan, this much time takes you back to the very early years of settlement when people from many parts of Canada, the United States and Europe moved here to farm the virgin lands.

The title of Charlie's home quarter shows that it was registered to his grandfather, John M. Campbell, in 1889. John Campbell was born in Scotland and immigrated to Ontario with his family. Her grew up and started farming there, however, moved to the plains south of the Qu'Appelle Valley at Lumsden, Saskatchewan in 1889. In 1890, he built a large yellow brick house and an 84 foot long Ontario style barn. These buildings are still on the farm and Charlie's nephew Scott now lives in the house. Scott works with Charlie on the farm

Allan Campbell, Charlie's father was born in 1896 and farmed the original five quarters of land until his retirement. Through all these years a commercial Shorthorn herd was maintained. Charlie was born in 1928 and has been interested in Shorthorn cattle for as long as he can remember. Charlie says Awe did things differently back in those days.@ "All the cattle were tied in the barn during the winter.@ He joined the newly formed calf club as a teenager during the 40's and got his first experience of feeding cattle. They quit selling feeder calves soon after this and since then all their cattle have been sold finished. The only exceptions were the cattle sold for breeding purposes and herd replacements. It was during his years in the calf club that his dream of having a purebred Shorthorn herd was born.

Charlie's wonderful sense of humour cuts in when he tells how he got started in purebred Shorthorns. In 1951, one neighbour, Charlie Kinnon was planning a sale of his purebred Shorthorns on his farm. Charlie offered to help him get ready for the sale, his idea being that this would provide him with excellent opportunity to see the cattle. He says he also got a real good look at a barn with three feet of packed manure inside that had to be cleaned out with a fork. Charlie and his father picked out a cow and calf from the sale offering and were successful in buying the pair for \$400. He was now officially in the purebred business. A few more females were added over the next



few years from Saskatchewan breeders such as: Charles Harris, John Small, Philip Bender, Harold Bateman and Ewart Underwood. Today's cowherd of more than 150 head consists mostly of descendants of those original cows. They still carry the family names of those females, which is something Charlie feels should be maintained whenever possible. He finds that the good cow families of the past are still the good cow families today.

The cowherd spends the summer divided into five individual pastures which means he needs five herd bulls. He says it also means that there are many miles of fence that has to be kept up.

Charlie and his wife Marj were married in 1970. She came from a farm background and had experience with cattle, although it was with another breed. Charlie is quick to point out that Marj has been an invaluable partner, often working side by side with him. "Without her, I would have never been able to get the South Plain farm over the humps of the 29 years,@ he says. "There have been occasional disagreements between us as to which breed we should be raising, but the Shorthorns have prevailed,@ he adds smiling. The present farm consists of 2400 acres, of which approximately 1200 acres is grass and pastureland. For many years, Charlie shared the buildings with his brother Ken who only grain farmed. When Ken passed away in 1993, Charlie purchased all his land.

Charlie Campbell is by any definition a true cattle breeder. You won't find him chasing the latest show ring fads. He has definite goals for his Shorthorn cattle and he sets out to achieve them. He has probably forgot more about Shorthorn bloodlines than many of us will ever know. He has always been willing to use any of the bloodlines available within the breed if he thought they would add improvements to his herd. To him, they are all Shorthorns and he feels we should be thankful we have this genetic diversity to draw on if one so chooses.

All this aside, what really impresses one about this herd is the extensive performance and carcass records that have been kept. The herd was enrolled on the ROP Program for 25 years starting in 1968. For many years, bulls were enrolled in the University of Saskatchewan Test Station in Saskatoon and the Saskatchewan Livestock Centre in Regina. There were several top gainers and sale toppers over the years. He was never afraid to keep some of his best performing bulls back into his herd as herd sires.

Charlie says that early in the 1970's he realized that the day was coming when we would be paid for the red meat in an animal. With this in mind he bluetagged all the virgin bulls that were slaughtered for nearly 20 years. When the Blue Tag Program ended in 1995, he continued to gather individual carcass data from the revised grading program. Even after several frustrating attempts to get the individual data on his cattle failed, he persisted and now feels he has developed this system he has received 100% of the carcass data on his cattle. He has also been a consistent exhibitor in the Beef Carcass show at Canadian Western Agribition for many years. In competition with mostly heavy muscled exotic breeds, like Limousin, Maine Anjou and Belgian Blue, the purebred Shorthorns from South Plain Farm have handled the test well. Several entries have placed in the top ten against very stiff competition. In 1996, one of his steers placed third overall, missing the Reserve Championship by only one point.

Rib eye measurements averaged 11.5 square inches when Charles started his progeny testing for carcass traits in the early >70's. He says that these were pretty good cattle with some of the popular beef and dual purpose bloodlines of the day. He wanted to improve carcass quality without sacrificing any of the other traits where they excelled. In 1981, he selected a Lincoln Red Bull at Agribition because he had a good ultrasound measurement for rib-eye as well as being very thick and correct. This bull improved the rib-eye measurements to a 12.25 square inch average.

In 1988 Charlie purchased Poplar Park Western Mist 8W at the Douglas Test Station in Manitoba. Western Mist was the high gaining bull on test with a 4.15 ADG and Charlie was impressed with his full quarter and excellent muscle pattern. He was also an outcross to most of his herd as he had Irish bloodlines on both sides of his pedigree. After breeding 70 cows as a yearling, Charlie exhibited him at Agribition and walked off with the Grand Champion Bull honours. It wasn't until the first progeny data was collected on Western Mist that he realized that he had his dream bull. This bull improved the rib-eye on his progeny to well over 13.25 square inches on average.

One group of Western Mist sons averaged 13.59 square inches with a top of 15.19 square inches. As more and more testing was done, Charlie found that Western Mist cons and daughters followed in line as their offspring consistently had better rib-eye measurements. In addition to this, Western Mist continued to have +EPD's for milk. His daughters and grand daughters have beautiful udders with lots of milk. Charlie says that he had been told that muscle and milk don't go together. This bull proved to him that they could. Western Mist was lost in 1991 to lightning but his influence continues to be high in the herd from many daughters and granddaughters that have been retained and sons and grandsons that have been kept for herd bull duty. Recently, Charlie raised three granddaughters of Western Mist. All three graded AAA with an average yield of 63%.

More recently, another herd sire has been added to the herd, this time from the appendix branch of the breed. He is a CCS Marc Drive x* son and the results from testing the first calf crop from this bull indicate to Charlie that he has another good one on his hands. Another calf crop is on the ground and he says he'll know a lot more when the data is collected on them.

Charlie, in recent years, has lost much of his hearing which has made it more difficult for him to communicate with other breeders the way he would like to. If you are willing to take some time to visit with him, you'll come away knowing that this man possesses an amazing amount of knowledge about the Shorthorn breed. You won't find a lot of high-powered glitter or promotion rhetoric. What you will find are a lot of the qualities the true cattlemen possess: dedication, purpose, integrity, logic and a hard work ethic. This breed or any other breed needs more like Charlie Campbell. Charlie will tell you that Shorthorn cattle have served his family well over the past 110 years. I think you could add that Charlie Campbell has served the Shorthorn breed well, as well.