

Herbourne Shorthorns - The Acheson Family

By Grant Alexander



If you ask Bill Acheson why he raises Shorthorns, he would say that Shorthorns are the only breed of cattle that have been on the Acheson farm since it was settled in 1900 by his grandfather Dudley Easton Acheson. He is, in fact the third generation to raise Shorthorns on this farm located near the town of Somerset, MB. His father, Herb Acheson was born in 1890 and lived at the farm until his death in 1975. During that time he raised a family of seven children on a quarter section of land, something that is hard for us to even imagine today. The Shorthorn herd was maintained at around 12 cows and since all the calves were finished and sold by the pound, the Acheson's always emphasized selection cattle that put on weight efficiently. Bill remembers the cows he grew up with as being big red cows that stayed in excellent condition. Along with the Shorthorn cows, the Acheson family also raised pigs, horses, chickens and turkey, and even some chinchillas for awhile, so there was always lots of chores to keep everyone busy.

Bill and his twin brother Bert (1938-1960) were born on the family farm in 1938. Bill and Bert worked together on the farm and when they turned 17, they started renting some extra land to work on their own. The two brothers took turns working off the farm and Bill worked on several occasions for a few months at a time helping out farmers who were disabled. Bert passed away in 1960, in a drowning accident, and from this time on, Bill stayed on the farm. Through the years he has continued to take short courses in the areas of farm business management, farm electrification, welding, pasture management, and artificial insemination. He also took a series of home study courses offered by Manitoba Agriculture.

Bill and Isabel were married on October 20, 1973 in Elgin, MB. Isabel had been raised on a mixed farm so she had lots of experience in farm life. She had been in 4-H for several years as well, but had no idea at the time that this experience would be very useful in the future. Prior to their marriage, Isabel worked as a Medical Lab and X-Ray Technician in Swan Lake. From their marriage to today, Bill and Isabel have worked as a team on the farm. Bill is quick to tell people that he has an invaluable asset in his wife, as she makes up for all of his shortcomings. He also says that Isabel is tops when it comes to public relations and promotion of their farm and their Shorthorns and for handing out lots of encouragement along the way. Bill and Isabel had three children. Robert was born in 1975, Teresa in 1976, and Sheri in 1980. All three children worked with the Shorthorns and took part in junior Shorthorn events throughout the year. All three children received scholarships from the John A. Nevin Scholarship fund, that is managed by the Shorthorn Breeders of Manitoba, Inc. Both Teresa and Sheri were Shorthorn Lassies and they attended many shows through this involvement. Robert passed away in 2002 following complications from injuries received in a traffic accident. Teresa now lives in Whitehorse, Yukon where she is a customer service representative in the Canada Games Centre and she also works as a promoter and part time DJ for the CIAY-FM radio station. Sheri now works as a metallurgical



mining engineer with Syncrude in the Alberta oil sands at Fort McMurray, AB. Sheri still makes sure she can attend Canadian Western Agribition each November so that she can help with

the Herbourne cattle in the show and sale.

The first Herbourne entry into a purebred show and sale occurred in February, 1974, when they entered the bull, Herbourne Buster, in the Canadian International Sale in Brandon, MB. For Bill, it was the first time he had ever showed an animal, in fact, it was the first time he had ever attended a cattle show. Herbourne Buster was the talk of the barns at this sale and he was selected by Bob

Gordon, Souris, MB at the top of the sale, for Seven T's Shorthorns, Yukon, Oklahoma. At the time, Seven T's was a very prominent herd in the U.S. so this was quite an honour for the Achesons. Herbourne Buster was an AI sired son of Kinnaber Leader 6th.

When artificial insemination became available in the early 1960's, the Acheson's were amongst the first in their area to use it. Their first technician was a man named Sandy Paul, who had been the herdsman at the famed Killearn herd of Claude Gallinger, in Alberta. With Sandy's help they looked for bulls with mature weights of over 2000 lbs, even though the show ring at the time was selecting much smaller cattle. Some of the early sires used in their herd were Shadybrook Commando 55th, Lonedale Baron 22nd, Kinnaber Leader 6th, and Kinnaber Leader 9th. They calved their cows in November and December so that they could have them all rebred prior to moving them to a rented spring pasture. They gradually moved to calving in January and early February to accommodate for show classes and bull test regulations.

Following the deaths of Bill's parents, Herb and Emily, in 1975, he inherited the farm and the herd of Shorthorn cattle. He decided that they needed to increase the size of the herd, and within a few years they had built it up to number 25 head. The largest purchase came in 1982, when they acquired a group of 14 females from the Gold Crown herd owned by John Buchan of Southey, SK.

Purebred Yorkshire pigs were also raised on the Acheson farm for many years. In the late 70s, Bill and Isabel started to show some of their swine at the Carmen, MB fair. They always took time to watch the Shorthorn show and they thought they had better cattle back at home. They were overheard by some Shorthorn breeders when they were discussing this, and it was suggested that they should bring some of their cattle out for others to see. They took up the challenge and started to take a few head out to some local summer shows.

In October, 1981 Lynn Ewald of Waldorf, Minnesota, stopped in at the Acheson farm for a herd visit following the late Lorne Edmondson's near dispersal sale. It was on this visit that Lynn saw a bull calf named Manitoba Sunrise for the first time. He felt that Sunrise was a bull that should be shown in Denver, and he purchased the US rights in him. Manitoba Sunrise was taken to the 1982 Denver show where he established a new record

weight per day of age for bulls shown in his class. He truly was the talk of the Shorthorn show that year. Later that spring Lynn Ewald took Manitoba Sunrise to the North Dakota Winter Fair in Valley City, ND. Bill and Isabel traveled to Valley City to see him shown and brought him back to their farm for the summer of 1982. Lynn took possession of the bull again that fall, after Canadian Western Agribition, and showed him again at Denver in 1983, where he was Reserve Junior Champion bull, and later showed him in Fort Worth as well. Bill and Isabel also returned with their own cattle to show and sell at the Valley City in 1983 and continued to do so for over the next 10 years. They enjoyed many good sales there in these years.



The Acheson's made their first visit to Canadian Western Agribition in 1982. Seeing they were planning on going to see the show, they decided to enter 4 head of cattle from their herd. What was unique about these entries was the fact that they were all the offspring of one cow, named Hewellen Riverhurst Lass 7J. They were, in fact, the only four offspring this female had produced. The Acheson's had purchased her in the 1977 Trip West Sale in Virden, MB, from J.H. Kirton of Crandall, MB. When the Agribition show was finished that year, the Acheson's had won Grand Champion Bull, Grand Champion Female, Breeder's Herd, and Best Pair of Bulls. They won everything that four head could win in the show. Since this time, the Acheson's have been big supporters of the Agribition show and have shown their Shorthorns and Yorkshires on numerous occasions. I doubt if there are many who are reading this that can claim to have had this much success in their first attempt at showing at a major show, as the Acheson's had.

When asked about some of the highlights of their time in the Shorthorn breed, the Acheson's say that

the friendships they have developed have been very important to them. Bill relates a story of his traveling with Lorne Edmondson to several Manitoba Shorthorn herds in search for some yearling heifers. The Acheson's were trying to increase the size of their herd and Bill was trying to find someone who would trade 4 yearling heifers for his yearling bull at home (Herbourne Buster). Looking back, he says it is probably fortunate that he was unable to complete this deal with anyone as they would have missed out on having the success with Buster at the Canadian International sale. What he did gain from this trip, was a friendship with Lorne Edmondson that lasted until Lorne's death. It was from Lorne's lead that Bill decided to enter bulls in the Manitoba Bull Test Station. For many years, Lorne and Bill entered their best bulls in the test station and they enjoyed the keen competition it provided. Each of them delighted in the other's successes. This friendship also resulted in partnerships on several herd bulls and there were several sales to each other over the years.

The Acheson's have consistently had bulls at the Manitoba Test Station since the early 70s. Through this involvement, they have become true believers and ambassadors of performance testing program. They have had many top gaining bulls and top sellers at this test station, including 2007 when one of their bulls topped the sale at \$3650.

Throughout the years, there have been many successes, but there have also been many challenges along the way. Nitrate poisoning from green feed bales killed several of their best cows that were bred to Manitoba Sunrise. A few years later, a late spring snowstorm resulted in several head being lost in a dugout. This loss included some of their recipients that carried ET calves, as well as some of the ET calves that had been born that year. After most of their biggest and best cows came home from a rented pasture open, they did some testing and found out that this pasture was deficient in 7 out of 10 trace minerals. Despite these and several other setbacks, the Achesons have picked up the pieces and continued on. I am sure many would have given up, but this is a testament to Bill and Isabel's commitment and dedication.

On June 2, 2007 at the Canadian Shorthorn Association Annual Meeting, Bill Acheson was called to the front of the room to receive the Legends of the Breed award. He was totally caught off guard and surprised to have

this honour bestowed on him. The rest of the Acheson family had been notified that Bill was to receive this honour, but they did a very good job of keeping it from him, so that it would be a big surprise. In giving his thank you for this award, he said that he had thought he should stay at home, as there was lots of work to do, but Isabel convinced him that he should attend the meeting, and seeing that Sheri was coming from her job in Alberta for the annual meeting, Bill decided he should go to Winnipeg for the day. He also said that while he was the one receiving the award, it should be considered as an award to both him and Isabel, seeing that most everything they had accomplished had come with her help. I think anyone who knows this couple would agree, as they are truly a team. Bill's closing comments were "I would like to thank the Manitoba Shorthorn breeders for nominating me and the Canadian Shorthorn Association for bestowing this honour on me, but really, I don't need all this attention as I am only doing something that I love."

I think that anyone who knows the Acheson family would agree that this was a very fitting award to a man and his family who have lived on the land... and from the land. They have carefully cared for their livestock so that they would take care of them. They are humble in their accomplishments but work hard to produce the best Shorthorns they can. This breed could use many more breeders like them.