

Telling the McInnis Story

Chapter upon chapter details this family's Hereford history.

by Teresa Oe

Twelve miles north of Brownwood, Texas, on Highway 183, a Hereford bull sign on the east side of the road directs you onto McInnis property, home to registered Herefords for almost 111 years. Visitors to the ranch are greeted by Claude McInnis, the most experienced of the McInnis clan at age 90. With him live his son and daughter-in-law, Bill and Jessica. And just down the road live their son and daughter-in-law, Ben and Rachel, and their baby, Levi. Levi is the sixth McInnis generation "in" the Hereford breed. He has much to learn about his family's Hereford heritage and Century Breeder ranch. The story, as it will be told to him in later years, goes something like this...

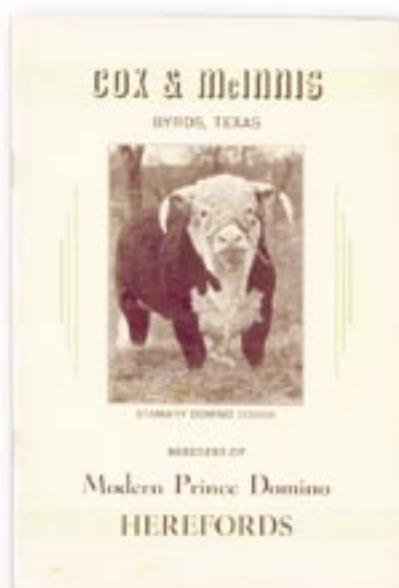
Chapter I A Hereford Beginning

S.P. McInnis, Claude's grandfather, is reported to have brought the first purebred Herefords into Brown County, Texas, in 1873. A registered herd was then started in 1896, when his son, Mitchell (Bud) Cox, bought 10 registered heifers from B.C. Rhome of Ft. Worth, Texas. Mitchell and his half brother John McInnis formed the Cox & McInnis partnership in 1902, which lasted until the herd's dispersion in 1959.

A *Hereford Journal* article dated May 1, 1959, explains how the partnership began. Cox was the older of the two half brothers and not fond of all of maintaining records. He told John that if he would do the bookwork, he could be an equal partner in the ownership of 10 registered heifers. John agreed, and so began a notable journey in the registered Hereford business.

The first herd bull Cox & McInnis purchased was Earl of Shadeland 75th by Garfield, and his dam was a Sir Bartle Frere daughter. "In him was combined the blood of two of the most popular bulls in the early history of the breed in the United States," reports the *Hereford Journal*. Some of the sires to follow included The Laird, What's Wanted, Onward 24th, Onward 44th and Keep On 47th.

Cox & McInnis kept the best heifer calves in-herd, consistently building a quality cow base. The *Hereford Journal* article references this 1941 Cox & McInnis sale book excerpt: "In the cow herd we have a record that we doubt can be equaled anywhere. Exclusive of the original 10 foundation



Shown is the front cover of a Cox & McInnis breeders' reference book published in the 1930s. The catalogue acquainted potential customers with bloodlines used on the ranch.



Two herd sires featured in the breeders' reference book were WHR Safety Domino 6th and WHR Princes Domino 61st. They are pictured on the banks of Lake Brownwood.



McInnis family members on the ranch today include (back row, l to r): Ben and Bill, and (front row, l to r) Rachel, Claude and Jessica. Not pictured is Levi, Ben and Rachel's son.

females, every female that we have ever sold or retained in the breeding herd since it was founded was bred on the ranch, with the exception of four, and they are in the breeding herd at present."

The quality of the cow herd was reflected in resulting calf crops and in the showing. In 1954 Cox & McInnis won the President's Trophy as breeder of the best group of three steers at the San Antonio Livestock Exposition. In 1956 they won this award again at the Southwestern Livestock Exposition in Ft. Worth.

As the Cox and McInnis families grew and some family members decided to pursue other interests, the cattle herd was sold in 1959 and the ranch divided. Those wanting to continue on in the cattle business already had started herds independently of Cox & McInnis.

Purchasing the Cox & McInnis herd were Jack Turner & Sons and W.W. (Bill) Wright of Ft. Worth. The transaction included approximately 375 head. Turner and Wright later dispersed the herd in a Ft. Worth auction with some 250 additional head of Turner cattle.

Chapter II In the Meantime

Claude, John's son, grew up to be an instrumental part of Cox & McInnis. He served as manager from the time he married Lillie Mae Hallmark in 1939 until the ranch's division. Claude tells that he and Lillie Mae's vacations consisted of traveling the countryside looking for herd bulls.



Claude bought Husker Mischief 1076 in New Mexico in the early 1950s. The bull went on to be the basis of the cow herd that gave him so much success.

One bull Claude found in his travels was Husker Mischief 1076. He bought this sire in New Mexico for Cox & McInnis in the early 1950s. Turner Ranch, Sulphur, Okla., bought half of the bull as soon as representatives saw him. "He was almost sterile, but Doc Easley, the veterinarian that worked for Turner Ranch and a pioneer in the AI (artificial insemination) and reproduction field, brought the bull back to become the herd bull he



Claude (second from left) and Bill (third from left) exhibited and sold this pen of bulls at the El Paso Range Bull Sale in 1965. The McInnis family consigned bulls to the sale for a number of years and had many loyal customers from Chihuahua, Mexico.

turned out to be,” Claude says. “The bull was about 7 years old at the time.” The cow herd reflected Husker Mischief genetics for years to come, as well as the Prince Domino bloodline.

Claude was not only the Cox & McInnis manager for 20 years, but also the family’s lead detective. He recalls that when 10-plus dwarfs hit the ground in the early 1950s, he began researching pedigrees and was able to trace the problem to a certain cattle family. He went to Kansas City, Mo., to inform the American Hereford Association (AHA) Board of Directors of what he found at the ranch. Cox & McInnis ended up selling about 50 cows and two herd bulls to try to eliminate the dwarfism problem from the herd.

Claude also was an avid promoter of local livestock and youth activities. He was instrumental in helping organize the purchase and ultimate construction of the first livestock exhibition facilities in Brown County, and he served as president of the Brown County Fair Association from 1957-58. (Bill and Ben would later serve as president and vice president, respectively.)

Claude started his own polled Hereford herd in 1947. He concentrated on the Bonny B Domino line and was extremely competitive in the showing, exhibiting in Ft. Worth; San Antonio; El Paso, Texas; Kansas City, Mo.; and Denver. He also served as president of the Texas Polled Hereford Association. Claude sold this herd in the 1950s, but continued in the horned Hereford business, despite the Cox & McInnis dispersion and division of the family ranch.

Chapter III Passing on the Torch

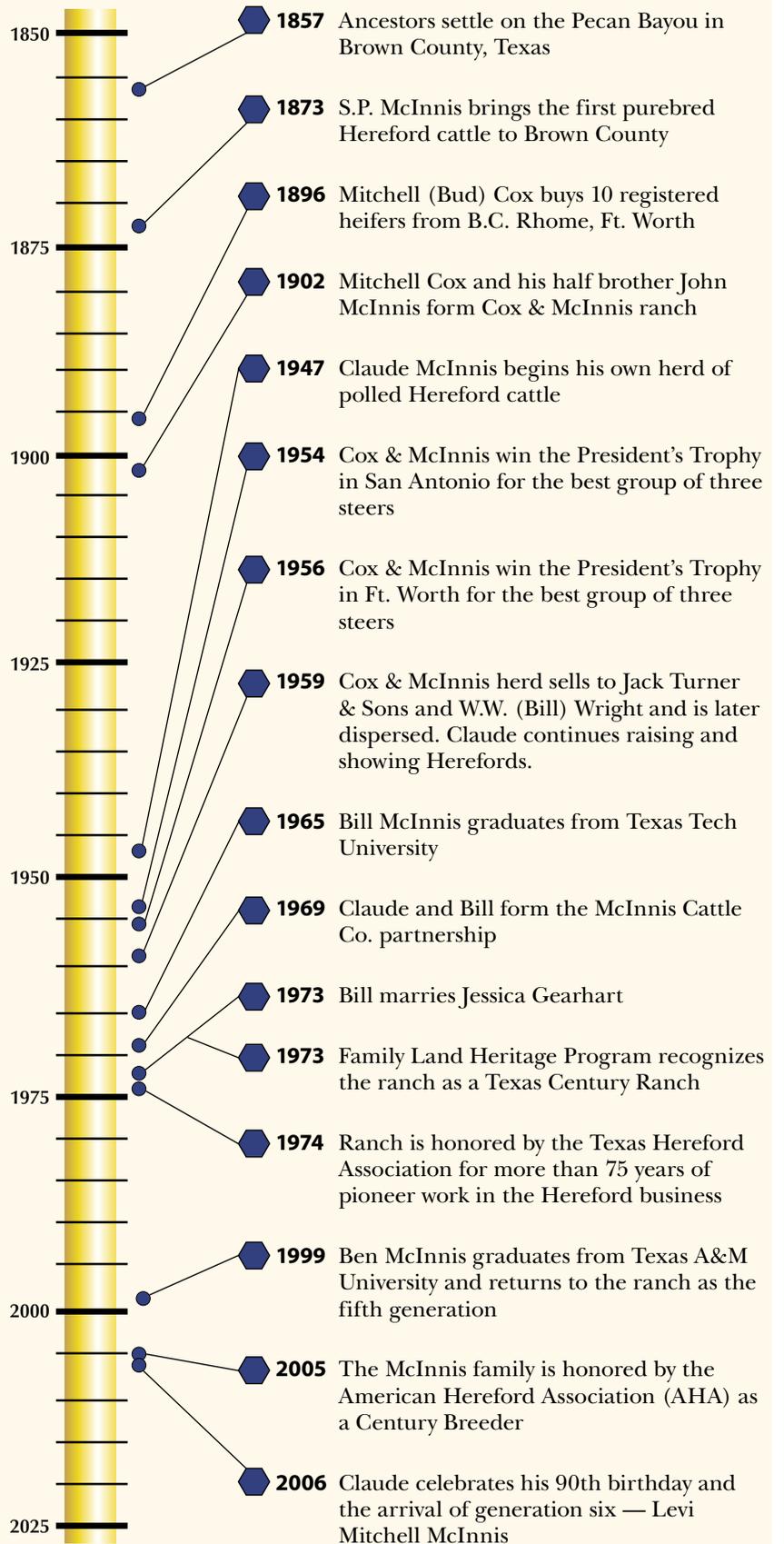
As a result, Claude inspired in his son, Bill, a love for the cattle business. Four years after Bill graduated from Texas Tech University, he and Claude formed McInnis Cattle Co.

In 1973 Bill married Jessica Gearhart, who also has a long ranching heritage. Her family owns a Brahman operation near Ft. Davis, Texas, and her great-grandfather W.T. Jones brought some of the first Herefords to western Texas. Appropriately, she and Bill first got acquainted at a bull sale in El Paso. The couple is now responsible for the day-to-day operations of McInnis Cattle Co., along with their son, Ben. In addition to Herefords, the family also maintains a registered herd of Angus cattle, as well as a herd of club calf females.

Ben says he returned to the ranch after graduating from Texas A&M to continue the history and family lifestyle. He adds, “Ranching is an honorable profession, which is enriched by being able to be associated with great people of like minds and interests.”

While not on the McInnis ranch, Ben’s sister, Rachel, is also involved in the agricultural industry. She married Scott Myers and the couple resides near Amarillo, Texas. He raises show steers and she works for the Texas Wheat Producers as the vice president and director of producer and legislative affairs.

TIMELINE



Chapter IV How the Ranch “Works” Today

At McInnis Cattle Co., Bill and Ben do all the cowboying themselves. The crop work is also divided between the two. Ben plants the grain and hay, and Bill cuts and bales. Jessica utilizes her 15 years experience as a school teacher to help keep the ranch organized. She takes care of cattle registrations, expected progeny differences (EPDs) and bookkeeping. Ben’s wife, Rachel, is a registered nurse and works in Brownwood, but has taken time off recently to care for the new little one.

Bill, like Claude, is a pro at finding the bloodlines that work. He utilizes AI, but also seeks out top-quality herd bulls. McInnis Cattle Co. bought the high-selling Hereford bull at the 2001 Houston Livestock Show, BR L1 Domino 8045, and also has made purchases at the National Western Stock Show in Denver several times.

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“Bill is a sharp cowman,” says Jack Chastain, Texas Hereford Association secretary/treasurer. “I respect his ability to judge cattle.”

While the family doesn’t show anymore, they do consign cattle to the Ft. Worth and Houston bull and female sales. Just last year, they consigned a Hereford bull, MCC Changer Lad C409, who was the overall high grader in the Houston All Breed Range Bull Sale.

John Dudley of Dudley Bros., Comanche, Texas, speaks highly of the McInnis family and their contributions to the Hereford breed. He says, “The McInnis family has been breeding good Hereford cattle in central Texas longer than anybody — some of our earliest female purchases were from this great outfit — and I’m talking in the 1930s and 1940s. Bill and I at our age now enjoy thinking about these early Hereford trades between our forebears. They are great Hereford breeders, good neighbors and friends, and great people.”

“Herefords are the legitimate choice for crossbreeding. You get the hybrid vigor, while still maintaining the British breed carcass quality.”

— *Ben McInnis*



This bull raised at McInnis Cattle Co. is a son of Mister Mom. Bill aims to sell the bull at the 2007 Houston All Breed Range Bull Sale.

Chapter V

Why Hereford?

From the get-go, the McInnis family was successful with its Hereford genetics. Clearly, the trend continues today. Claude, Bill and Ben explain why the breed remains a part of the ranch after 100-plus years.

“At the time when I went into business, Herefords were the breed of choice and were the most dominant breed in Texas,” Claude says. “Their dispositions and mothering abilities were strong assets.”

In today’s economy Bill appreciates Herefords for their feed efficiency. “Herefords have the ability to convert grass and grain into quality meat, and not all breeds can boast that,” he says.

Bill is currently using Pure Gold, Online and Olympian genetics to add more muscle to McInnis calves, while maintaining quality and structural correctness.

As for Ben, he sees the opportunity now and in the future to sell to commercial producers utilizing Hereford bulls on a growing number of Angus-influenced cows. He says, “Herefords are the legitimate choice for crossbreeding. You get the hybrid vigor, while still maintaining the British breed carcass quality.”

The End

The ending of the McInnis Century Breeder story is a great one in that there is no end in sight. With four generations now on the ranch and an engrained family passion for the cattle business, McInnis Cattle Co. stands to continue its success in the future. Little Levi just may be the next page in his family’s Hereford legacy. Until then, he’ll be busy learning from the stories of those who came before him. **HW**



Claude takes a stroll through the McInnis herd. Although drought has taken its toll on Texas ranches in recent years, these Hereford mommas are doing just fine.