



Commitment Makes a Century

Six generations of the Taylor family have bred Hereford cattle in the Potomac Valley of West Virginia at Cottage Hill Farm.

by *Sharla Ishmael*

It is hard to comprehend how long 100 years really is — more than a lifetime for most folks. A century ago, the Treaty of Versailles ended World War I, the 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote and the Taylor family purchased their first Hereford.

In 1920, Clarence Taylor brought the first Hereford cattle to Cottage Hill Farm in Petersburg, W.Va. Six generations later, the family still raises Herefords on the farm, with the youngest members of the Taylor clan already dreaming about their turn running Cottage Hill. That sort of legacy does not just happen.

“It takes commitment to the lifestyle,” says Mike Taylor, one of three sons of W.C. and Carole Taylor, who are the third generation at Cottage Hill. “My father and younger brother, Will, have been pretty much full-time farmers. They have a college education, but came back to the farm after college.”

In addition to their Hereford cattle, the Taylors also manage 1 million broilers for Pilgrim’s Pride, a global food provider. The first broiler houses were built in 1990. That diversification brings in an additional revenue stream seven times a year, and recycling chicken litter as fertilizer cuts expenses for the entire operation.

Cottage Hill Farm was established in 1896 in the picturesque Potomac Valley, about 2.5 hours roughly west of Washington, D.C.

Corn and sorghum also grow on the farm, established at the base of the eastern panhandle of West Virginia. Located on the eastern side of the Allegheny Mountain Range, the area receives considerable rain shadow, but is an extra beautiful part of the U.S. “Normally it’s pretty good grass in this area,” Mike says. “This country is good for grazing cattle. We can run about three acres per cow.”

Early days

When Clarence and Sarah Taylor bought the original 190-acre tract in 1896, the first cattle to graze Cottage Hill were Shorthorn. Soon, Herefords grew more popular in the area.

“My father was showing some fat steers at that time. That’s how he got over to the Herefords,” W.C. explains. “They were crossing Shorthorn and Hereford on the steers, strictly commercial. The primary market for show cattle was the Eastern National Livestock Show in Timonium, Maryland.”

Horned Herefords made up the herd from the 1920s until 1956, plus some backgrounding steers. The Hereford herd was relatively small — 25 to 30 cows at that time. When W.C. got involved in 1965, there were 125 cows, and the herd has since grown to 150 cows on 1,000 acres. Nowadays, Cottage Hill Hereford cattle are mostly polled, though they do still have some horned genetics.

“We’ve seen several things that have improved with the Hereford breed over the years,” Mike says. “The milking ability of the Hereford cow and the meat and thickness of the animals, as well as overall quality has all improved in the breed. Those are things we really work on as well.”

Cottage Hill has a good market for heifers as well as for bulls, which are marketed off the farm and at the West Virginia, Virginia and Kentucky beef expos. The Taylors also participate in consignment sales in Ohio and Kentucky. They truck feeder calves to Kentucky and Illinois to find a better price than what is typically offered for feeders in their area. From 1965 to 1985, the family hosted their own production sales.

Looking ahead

So, what are the family’s plans for the future of Cottage Hill Farm? More of the same.

“We have a lot of interested young family members,” Mike explains. “We have folks here that are committed and willing to do the work.”

His nephew, David, works on the farm full-time and was appointed cattle manager in 2016. David uses the genetics his grandfather, uncles



Pictured is the Cottage Hill Farm family: (front row, l to r) Callie, Carole, W.C. “Sonny” and Katlyn; (back row, l to r) Will, Beth, David, Mark, Shari, Jonathan, Sarah, Nancy and Michael.

and father had in place and improves upon them. With successes in both the showing and in the sale ring, David continues to critique the herd, identify weaknesses and choose the next steps appropriately. Using past wisdom and his experiences, he plans to carry the legacy of the Taylor family for many more years.

Like David, Mike’s niece, Callie Taylor Dayton, was brought up through the National Junior Hereford Association. Callie says, “Having been raised around Hereford cattle with my family, I feel a strong affinity toward the breed and its potential. Watching my grandparents work hard to sustain the operation after so many years inspires me to continue to support the family business as much as possible.”

That is a refreshing sentiment when too often the younger generation is not interested in carrying on the tradition. At Cottage Hill Farm, there seems to be no shortage of commitment to upholding the Taylor family Hereford legacy for another 100 years. **HW**



Pictured is NJW 6W 80X Stella 95Z, the lead donor dam at Cottage Hill Farm.