

Gordon Philip: From Perth To Chicago And Beyond

Farm Update:

Reversal of fortune would be an apt description of our weather this year. We have gone from the hottest temperatures we have ever had recorded to the wettest/snowiest December we have had for several years. As I write this we have 6" of snow on the ground which is quite unusual for us. It is really helping to refill reservoirs that were decimated by the extended 2021 drought. Our cows have settled into a normal routine since they are not out on pasture due to the snow/mud. We are expecting our first calf about the middle of February and he will be sired by Thornwood Major out of a Kinnaber Leader 9th daughter.

Quarterly Topic: Gordon Philip: From Perth To Chicago And Beyond

History:

My insatiable interest in Shorthorn history has led me down many trails and resulted in innumerable contacts around the world. In the process I have met many interesting people in and out of the Shorthorn business. About a year and half ago I was contacted by Gordon Philip because he had noticed that I had semen on a bull called KC Clipper Duke. He had managed the KC herd owned by Mr. & Mrs. Dave Lorenz of Kansas City, Missouri. The KC herd was one of the most prominent and successful Shorthorn herds during the 1960's showing nationally and winning many championships, including The International Livestock Show at Chicago, with Gordon as the herd manager. After many phone conversations, Gordon and I struck up a friendship, and my wife and I had the opportunity to spend a couple of days at his farm next to the airport in Kansas City, Missouri. What struck me was the life road he has traveled from the hills of Scotland, to Perth cattle shows in Perth, Scotland, to emigrating to America, to the hallowed Shorthorn show ring at the International in Chicago, to being named the outstanding 1973 Missouri "Farm Family of the Year", to helping bring Simmentals into this country, to facilitating the movement of several European cattle breeds to North America, to world class designer of Sporting Clay layouts, to leading celebrity Sporting Clay shoots around the world, to finally being a successful commercial cattle breeder today at 83. Quite a trip for anyone. I thought it might be interesting for the readers of the Shorthorn Bulletin to take this trip and read about how he achieved his goals as an immigrant to this country with Shorthorn cattle playing a large role.

Scotland

Gordon was born into a family of 7 children in the town of Strichen, Aberdeenshire, Scotland in 1938. Strichen is located in the NE of Scotland a few miles from the North Sea. Many would consider this area inhospitable but Gordon saw it as normal since he was born into it. His father raised some Angus and Angus cross cattle in addition to a large number of sheep. His father often purchased cattle for finishing and rented land for cattle production. As he got older Gordon had decided that someday he wanted to have a large commercial cattle ranch which would have been nearly impossible to achieve in Scotland. He also developed a keen interest in the fitting and showing of cattle starting at the local level. As his skill increased he was taken under the wing of Alex Ogg who was known worldwide as the best fitter and showman around. Obviously this was a great opportunity for Gordon to not only learn "the tricks of the trade" but at the same rub elbows with many well known cattle breeders.

Perth Shows and Sales

The Perth Scotland cattle shows and sales were world famous and became a mecca for cattle breeders/buyers from all over the world where they would come to see and be seen. This gave Gordon an opportunity to fit and show cattle, primarily Angus, at a world class level. He worked for Gordon Blackstock who managed the famous Bapton herd in Scotland. As Gordon became better known through the Perth shows and sales he was given several opportunities to become herdsman at different cattle operations around the world. He had narrowed his options to the USA and Australia but ultimately settled on the USA. It is important to note that during this time period Scottish Shorthorns were all the rage and herds such as Calarossie, Collynie, and Bapton had the attention of the international Shorthorn community.

Coming to America for Shorthorns

Gordon Blackstock (herd manager of the Bapton herd) and Wib Donaldson (herd manager at Louada Manor Farms owned by Louis Cadesky in Peterborough, Ontario Canada) partnered on the purchase of many Scottish Shorthorns that were brought to Canada. Louada was selling many top quality Shorthorns to Otto Grosse in Cary, Illinois. Grosse was known as the "Mink King" because, through selective breeding, he developed unusual mink fur colors which became popular worldwide and at one point to the extent he was the largest grower of mink in the world. Because of Blackstock and Donaldson's sales to Otto Grosse they were aware that Grosse needed a quality herd manager. They suggested Gordon to Mr. Grosse and he was immediately hired which facilitated Gordon's move to the USA in 1959. Gordon helped Otto build his Shorthorn herd as Mr. Grosse wanted to have a world class Shorthorn herd. Unfortunately about a year and half later Mr. Grosse became ill and his herd was put up for sale. Eventually Gordon was approached by the Lorenzs of Kansas City, Missouri to manage KC Shorthorns. Through Gordon's stewardship KC Shorthorns gained a national reputation in the Shorthorn industry by winning nationally throughout the 60's including the International in Chicago along with countless major Shorthorn championships coast to coast. For those readers who have a collection of old "Shorthorn Worlds", the 1967 Year in Review issue front cover shows Gordon, along with the Lorenzs, collecting the Levendale Challenge trophy (Lee Mathers, Sr presenting) for the best champion Shorthorn pair at the 1967 International Livestock Show at Chicago. KC Shorthorns "cleaned up" that year. It is important to note that much of Gordon's success (i.e. KC Shorthorns success) was based on the innovative ideas that Gordon employed in the selection, fitting, and marketing of KC Shorthorn cattle. There is no doubt in my mind that Gordon could "show a thing or two" to the "hot shot" showmen of today. I have long considered TPS Coronet Leader 21st one of two most influential Shorthorn bulls in the in the last 60 years with Mandalong Super Flag the other one. One of Gordon's interesting experiences was when he helped show TPS Coronet Leader 21st. Gordon had been an admirer of Leader 21 at the time. Parenthetically Gordon's interactions with Leader 21 were not always positive because Leader 21 stepped on Gordon's foot injuring his toes while he was showing him, proving to Gordon that Leader 21 was a really big bull, and Gordon is still mad about it today. During his time at KC Cattle Company he used "George the Giant" Kinnaber Leader 3rd (a Leader 21 son) extensively in the KC Shorthorns breeding program. Gordon strongly feels that "George the Giant" was the best son Leader 21 ever produced.

Changing Course/Simmentals

Gordon's disenchantment with Shorthorns grew subsequent to his "discussions" with C. D. "Pete" Swaffer who was the Executive Secretary of the American Shorthorn Associations at the time. Swaffer did not want to put any production information (birth weight, weaning weight, or

yearling weight) on Shorthorn pedigrees. Because Gordon is what I call a “three dimensional thinker” Gordon simply made the production information part of the animal’s official registered name. Gordon believed Swaffer had a strong allegiance to the “show crowd” and did not have the vision to move Shorthorns ahead to compete with the influx of many Continental cattle breeds hoping to dominate the North American cattle industry at that time. Gordon felt strongly that the “pony era” of small framed cattle had gone on too long and the Shorthorn breed had lost an opportunity to become a major contributing breed in the “new” commercial cattle industry. According to Gordon, another factor contributing to the loss of interest in Shorthorns by commercial cattle producers was a Federal Lands policy for many years in the West, which was put forth in the early nineteen hundreds, that only Hereford/white faced bulls could be used for breeding cattle on Federal Lands. This was done to bring uniformity to the beef cattle sold off the ranges in the West that were going to the major stockyards in Denver and Kansas City. Prior to this many Shorthorn bulls were being using as range bulls but the variable color patterns of Shorthorns led to confusion because they would be similar to brindle, longhorn, and Mexican cattle that were considered inferior at the time. Consequently Gordon decided to leave Shorthorns behind and move on to Simmentals as they were starting to gain traction as a continental cattle breed that could be useful in moving the commercial cattle industry forward because of their size and muscling. He joined with the Lorenzs in creating the “International Simmental Company” to both import and promote Simmentals. Gordon focused on Simmentals bred in Germany because they had a long production record history that was funded by the Marshall Plan (American funded programs to help rebuild Germany after WWII). All the German Simmental production data helped Gordon to ferret out the best Simmental bulls to import.

Importations

Because of the inability to import cattle directly into the USA at that time, cattle had to be first imported into Canada and then brought into the USA. The Canadian government limited the number of cattle import certificates they would issue so procuring permits was difficult. Financial incentives were often used to facilitate the procurement of permits. An additional problem was that the Canadian government would only allow bulls (not cows or heifers) to be brought into the USA because they did not want to just be a transport point for cattle moving from other countries to the USA. Because of all of Gordon’s connections in Scotland and Europe he also helped ABS, Carnation Farms, and Curtiss Candy Company Farms (yes the same company that brought us Butterfingers) find and import quality breeding bulls into the USA for use in their bull studs. One Shorthorn bull that Gordon imported for Carnation Farms, that some Shorthorn breeders might remember, was Butte Lee Leader 63 (nick-named “Tiny Tim” after a popular TV personality at the time).

Other Business Pursuits

Gordon had always been engaged in shooting and shotguns going back to his childhood in Scotland. This was the segue way to Gordon’s involvement in the world of Sporting Clays that allowed him to set up “shoots” around the world for wealthy individuals who wanted a world class travel experience and a world class shooting event through his company “Sporting Holidays International”. Eventually Gordon became involved in the design of world class Sporting Clay Shooting courses through his company “Sporting Clays Course Design”. An example of his eminent reputation in the world of sporting clays is exemplified by his design of the 1990 National Championship course at the famous Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado. Even today Gordon receives requests to set up sporting clay shooting courses but he gave up designing courses in the late 90’s. These businesses helped Gordon weather the economic

downturn that the USA had during the late 70's and early 80's, thus enabling Gordon to continue to fulfill his dream of gradually acquiring a large commercial cattle herd.

Commercial Cattle Breeder

Because of Gordon's strong belief in the value of utilizing performance to build a commercial cattle herd he has migrated from show cattle to real world commercial cattle utilizing a combination of survival of the fittest with enhanced selection metrics. He has a low cost/low input model of production that defies many of the conventional preachings of the so called "experts". Currently he runs approximately 500 commercial cows along with about 30 Registered Angus cows to produce some of his herd bulls. At 83 he still is on a 24/7 schedule running his herd with one "intern". Gordon has always tried to help younger cattle breeders get started and his innovative approach, combining a working internship with building a herd, provides young cattle breeders with opportunity to both learn and build their herd. It is Gordon's way of giving back to the cattle industry that has provided him with the opportunity to lead a richly rewarding life that he could have not imagined when starting out in Scotland in 1938.

Other Interests

Gordon is a voracious reader with a special interest in American Presidential and American Western history. He has visited Monticello, the home of his favorite President (President Thomas Jefferson), several times including a private tour. Part of his interest in the American Western History stems from a distant relative, James "Scotty" Philips, who is considered the man who saved the American Buffalo from extinction even though he was from Scotland. When I visited Gordon he actually sent me home with a stack of history books he thought I should read.

Final Thoughts

Over the last 15 years I have been very lucky to meet and converse with many different people involved in the cattle industry. The two individuals that stand out to me are Rick Pisaturo in Australia and Gordon Philip in Missouri. Each one has a unique story to tell with life lessons for all of us. They are quite different individuals but they share some common traits. They both persevered through trying times, did not whine or complain about their lot in life, "worked their tails off", never giving up on their dreams, and they exemplify what it means to be a successful immigrant in a new country. Perhaps in today's trying times we can all reflect back on the battles they fought to become successful and realize that with hard work and determination there really can be "light at the end of the tunnel" for each of us despite what we have endured over the last 2 years.

Future Topic: What Constitutes A Constructive Livestock Breeder?