



Polled Palmer bull owned by Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm. Photo by Tammy James

FROM THE PINEYWOODS

Volume 7 Number 3 - Summer 2010

Conserving the Pineywoods

Newsletter of the Pineywoods Cattle Registry & Breeders Association

Farewell to a Friend and a Way of Life: Honoring Mrs. Muriel Dunn

Biography of Mrs. Muriel Dunn

By Freddie Brinson

Muriel Elizabeth Palmer Dunn was born on January 23, 1922 in Wayne County, Mississippi. She was one of four children born to William Stance Palmer, Sr. and Odie Kittrell Palmer. In 1957, she married Earl Dunn but the marriage produced no children. Their home was located near State Line in Wayne County.

Muriel and Earl Dunn had a farm, which included some colorful "woods" cows. Before his death in 1982, he told Mrs. Muriel to sell the cows when he passed away. Because she had gotten attached to those cows, after he passed away, she decided that she would keep them and care for them by herself.

Along with her siblings and nieces and nephews in Mississippi and Georgia, those cows became part of her family. She gave them names such as Rose, Star, Ruby, Speck, Brownie and Bully. Each name was one she thought appropriate for that animal. For years, she fixed fences, moved cows from one pasture to another, took them rolls of hay during the winter, and did whatever else was necessary to care for those cows.

By the time Mrs. Muriel reached her early 80's, she began to realize that physically she could not keep up the work that was necessary to properly care for her cows. At first, she sold a few of them to the Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm in Oklahoma. In December of 2006 at the age of 84, she decided that the Historical Farm was the best place for all of her cows, and sold them the rest of the herd.



Mrs. Muriel and Bo

Ms. Muriel, My Friend

By Jim

Combs

Explorers introduced "Spanish cattle" to the "new world", more specifically the Southern states during the 1500's. Some of these cattle became known as Pineywoods cattle and eventually migrated to neighboring states, especially the mid-West, along with the Native American and pioneer farmer.

The Overstreet -Kerr Historical Farm selected the Pineywoods cattle to help preserve and show the type of cattle that was used as draft power, meat, milk, clothing, and trading commodity during the early settlement years of the agriculturists in the area and to provide seed stock to others. In 1995, I contacted Dr. Phillip Sponenberg, presently the Pineywoods Cattle Breeders Registrar. Dr. Sponenberg assisted me in contacting Charley Carter and Jack Bayliss of Petal, MS. In August of 1995, these two fine gentlemen delivered seven very nice Pineywoods heifers and one bull. I immediately fell in love with Pineywoods cattle.

Ten years later in 2005, through a Mississippi cattle trader, I learned of a nearly extinct strain of Pineywoods cattle, many of which were polled (no horns). This fellow was commissioned to purchase three heifers and one bull calf for us. My love affair with Pineywoods really kicked in gear at that time with the polled calves that were delivered on Nov. 11, 2005. In December 2006, I contacted and sent pictures to Ms. Muriel Dunn, from whom these calves were purchased. I explained how much I enjoyed the calves and appreciated the opportunity to own them.

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Pineywoods – The Palmer-Dunn Line

By Phil Sponenberg

Palmer-Dunn cattle have moderate frames and are blocky. Several are polled. Colors are usually red and white several are linebacked.



Palmer heifer owned by Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm. Photo by Tammy James

MARK YOUR PCRBA FALL CALENDAR

Fall Field Day and Meeting

Saturday, October 2nd at the
Diamond D Ranch, home of
Mr. Fred and Mrs. Dottie
Diamond.

Schedule:

10:30am: Meeting

11:15am: Guest Speaker

12noon: Lunch and Farm
Tour

Directions are available on
page 4. Please let Jess or
Mrs. Julie Brown know if
you plan to attend.

Biography of Mrs. Muriel

Continued from page 1



She missed those cows, but got periodic updates on them and any offspring they had. She especially liked getting pictures of them. To her, those pictures were the next best thing to having the cows out in the pasture. She also loved to engage in “cow talk” about her cows and the “woods” cows in general. She eagerly shared the knowledge she had gained over a lifetime with people from Mississippi, Oklahoma, Georgia and other states.

At home, after the cows were gone, Mrs. Muriel still had her cats and her little dog “Bo” to keep her company. Both of them at times were quite lively and needed only to be shown the switch that Mrs. Muriel kept nearby. She continued to be active and very independent until the last four days of her life. Muriel Elizabeth Palmer Dunn died on July 13, 2010 at the age of 88.

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Ms. Muriel, My Friend

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A few days later, I received a very nice letter from her, and a follow-up phone call from her nephew, Tom Anderson. This dear lady, at age 84, had decided she should no longer be putting out them “big ole bales” of hay in the wintertime, especially since her tractor wasn’t running well. She offered to sell us her entire herd. Within 3 weeks, Mary Penick and Andy Makovy of the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture, (parent company of Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm) and I were on our way to State Line Mississippi. On Dec. 18, 2006 we pulled into 0146 Earl Dunn Road where Ms. Muriel and her nephew’s wife, Rhonda Anderson, were waiting to show us the strain of cattle that she and her late husband, Earl Dunn, had enjoyed since their marriage in the late 1950’s. Nearly 60 years later, Ms. Muriel entrusted us to acquire the herd of Palmer/Dunn cattle that began generations ago.

While visiting with Ms. Muriel I learned that she and Earl had purchased their first seed stock shortly after their marriage in December of 1957. They purchased Palmer strain cattle from Uncle Elige Palmer, a brother to Ms. Muriel’s dad. On his deathbed in 1982, Earl instructed Ms. Muriel to disperse of the cattle after he was gone, but she just couldn’t carry out that one last wish of her late husband. Ms. Muriel’s exact words were “I didn’t tell him I would, and I didn’t tell him I wouldn’t, and I didn’t.” There was a bond at that time between her and the cattle that just couldn’t be broken. She spoke of the cattle with love in her heart as though they were family members.

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Editor’s Note. Putting together this edition has been an honor. The November after Hurricane Katrina, we met Ms. Muriel at her farm. Talk had been of helping some of the older farmers repair fences so I asked Ms. Muriel who was repairing her fences. “I’ve been out pounding fences all week,” she said. When I asked who was helping her, she said, as though it were a strange idea, “Why nobody. I just do it myself!”

We talked a long time that day about her being a girl on a farm and promised to visit next time I was in Mississippi, which, sadly for me, didn’t happen. But she stays a big part and symbol of my incredible experience with the Pineywoods breed and the community that produced it. Ms. Muriel will always, to those of us who knew her, represent the spirit she and the other original breeders embody. *Bonnie Fritz*



Rascal, a rare polled Pineywoods bull from the Palmer-Dunn strain.

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Ms. Muriel, My Friend*Continued from page 2*

On December 18, another special bond was formed. I soon came to love Ms. Muriel and appreciate the love she had for her family, friends, and cattle. Due to this friendship between us, Palmer/Dunn genetics are being preserved, promoted, protected, and loved by select cooperative breeders in Oklahoma, Kansas, Florida, and Georgia.

Ms. Muriel had a special place in her heart for a polled herd sire she called Bully. Bully was a son of the last "mule" bull (also known as Bully) she purchased from Uncle Elige in 1984. We at the Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm are pleased to have several of his daughters and granddaughters in our herd and his sons, or the influence of his sons, either in our herd or in the herds of cooperative breeders.

I will forever miss the correspondence with Ms. Muriel and I will always remember the special bond and love that we shared which was made possible by early explorers of the "new world" during the 1500's.

Special Note:

The Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm has recently been transferred to a new owner. I plan to retain a small group of PD genetics for myself, and the remaining Pineywoods cattle including the Palmer Dunn program will be transferred to The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture in Poteau, Oklahoma. The program that began in 1957 by Earl and Muriel Dunn will continue under the direction of Mary Penick and Andy Mckovy of the Kerr Center.

Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm / Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture is helping to preserve the Palmer Dunn genetics. Cooperative Pineywoods cattle breeders in Oklahoma, Kansas, Georgia, and Florida are utilizing semen, or breeding stock from one or more of the four select naturally polled herdsires of Palmer/Dunn breeding. Those herd sires include:

**PD Bully II P205****PD Rascal P201****Excellence of KCSA****Unique of KCSA**

The bull Rascal was raised by Ms. Muriel and probably is the best know of the Palmer-Dunn strain. The younger version of him is included in the masthead photo on page one of this issue. The bull named Bully sired Rascal. Ms. Muriel had both of them on her farm. The bottom two bulls were born after the cattle were moved to Oklahoma. Ms. Muriel and I often talked about her bull (Rascal is part of his registered name) that became a celebrity. *Freddie Brinson*

Directions below are from the **Pearl River County Airport-M13**, 4298 Highway 53, Poplarville, MS 39470) to the **Diamond Ranch**, 19152 Diamond Rd, Saucier, MS 39574-9152. If you need help once you are in the area, call Jess Brown (1-601-270-1619) or Fred and Dottie Diamond (1- 601-832-3190). See you there!

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Start out going NORTHWEST on MS-53 toward VFW RD. (go 1.53 miles) 2. Merge onto I-59 N toward HATTIESBURG. (go 2.68 miles) 3. Take the MS-26 exit, EXIT 29, toward POPLARVILLE/WIGGINS. (go 0.22 miles) 4. Turn RIGHT onto MS-26. (go 20.42 miles) 5. Merge onto US-49 S. (go 13.44 miles) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Turn RIGHT onto PINE ST. (go 0.27 miles) 7. Turn RIGHT onto OLD HIGHWAY 49. (go 0.05 miles) 8. Turn LEFT onto DIAMOND RD/FRED DIAMOND RD. (go 1.73 miles) 9. 19152 DIAMOND RD is on the RIGHT. (go 0 miles) <p>TOTAL ESTIMATED TIME: 49 minutes DISTANCE: 40.36 miles</p> |
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Pineywoods Cattle

Another good example of adaptation is the Pineywoods cow. These speckled cattle grazing the Kerr Center pastures south of Poteau on highway 271 may look like Texas Longhorns, but they are something different, and unique—a heritage breed of cattle that are in need of protection.



Pineywoods cattle graze near the Kerr Center office.

The breed developed from the cattle brought to the New World in the 1500s by the Spanish, just as the Longhorn did. But they evolved their unique characteristics in the pinewoods of Mississippi (hence the name), by just a few families, and so are unique to the United States.

The nearly extinct Pineywoods cattle are listed on the "critical" list by the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy (ALBC). The conservancy's definition of critical is fewer than 200 North American annual registrations and an estimate of fewer than 2,000 global population. The Pineywoods registry has located fewer than 1000 head of pure stock.

A pineywoods herd has been established at the Stewardship Ranch. The cattle are being managed to emphasize meat production on pasture. The cattle were brought to the Stewardship Ranch from the Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm, ten miles south of Sallisaw. The Historical Farm has a larger herd and has long been active in preserving breeds of farm animals and types of poultry whose numbers are declining, but which have many important genetic characteristics which need to be preserved.

The Pineywoods cattle are noted for their ability to survive and reproduce under the often-harsh conditions of the South, withstanding internal and external parasites, high temperatures, high humidity, and low quality forage. They are very self-sufficient due to their varied foraging habits, low birth weights, gentle disposition and hardiness. The Carter strain of cattle kept on the ranch is noted for its excellent mammary system, reproduction, longevity, docility, self-sufficiency and calving ease.

Resources

Kerr Center resources on beef cattle management

Contact:

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