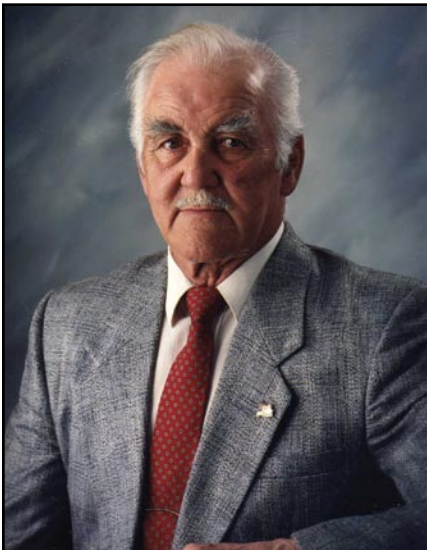


feature **story**

Reflections on 150 Years of Herefords in Canada

By **Catherine A. Brown** ASSOCIATE EDITOR



➔ **VANCE WILSON**
May 2009 was the scheduled opening month for a new meat store in Fredericton. The poster signs outside, signaled the Grand Opening and one of its featured products: Black Angus Beef. New Brunswick Hereford breeder, 84-year-old Vance Wilson, saw the sign and visited the shop owners. They were staunch Black Angus supporters. One of the partners owned an Angus-based cow herd while the other owned a feedlot. Wilson raved about the qualities of his own Hereford beef and convinced the store owners to give it a try. He

also got the owners out to a New Brunswick Hereford sale last fall where they purchased more than a couple white faces.

On opening day, two big beef displays were featured in the store – one for Angus and one for Hereford beef. Currently, the store can't keep up with orders for the Hereford beef. They hired a total of five meat cutters and Wilson has a standing order for

saw them, he decided that he would “own a herd like that some day.”

After his release from the military in 1970, Wilson declined police work and he and his wife Kathleen established a small land holding near Fredericton, near where his father, Harry once raised crossbred cattle. Wilson set to buying six females, which led to six more. He then went to the nearest bull test station to buy

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his finished steers; for all that he can supply from his small operation.

Wilson's son was the host of a local television fishing show. He used to take steaks and burgers to cook for his buddies at fishing tournaments. This also started a thriving freezer beef trade for the family's Hereford beef.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained. Wilson has been a Hereford breeder for 38 years. He was in the military for 25 years and ended up in Toronto in the 1960s. At the time, his brother-in-law was in Richmond Hill, sharing a fence line with Doodie Dale-Harris. Her Herefords on pasture were a beautiful sight-to-see. When Wilson

a bull, later buying cows and bulls from some of the top production sales in the country.

Kathleen passed away due to a farm accident in 1992. But Wilson has remained active in the breed, always persevering with a smile on his face. He has been the secretary of the New Brunswick Hereford Association for the past 26 years. His biggest source of pride has been that of facilitating the Canadian National Hereford Association annual meeting and convention in 1993, which some say was the best organized and best attended in the history of the breed. At total of 385 guests attended the banquet.



➔ **GRANT & MARY ELMHIRST** pictured with Billy, Juanita, Owen and Katie, with cousin Josh Boyles ElmLodge Polled Herefords

Grant Elmhirst grew up with Shorthorns and Standardbred horses. In 1971, the Cornishes, long-time neighbouring Hereford breeders near Peterborough, Ontario, convinced Grant to join them at a Hereford sale one day. When one particular cow, which was bred out of season, was

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selling cheaply, Grant bought her. His father, Alfred Elmhirst, accepted the cow and said if he had one, he may as well have more of them. So they purchased a few more. Neil Reavie of Elzevir Polled Herefords, also lived in the vicinity and ran a bull test station. The Elmhirsts sent one Shorthorn and one Hereford bull to the station. At the end of the test, Reavie made an agreement with the Elmhirsts to take the two bulls, representing each breed, to

Belleville Fair. They went to several fairs thereafter, often with the Shorthorn beating the Hereford in the show ring. Both bulls were ultimately sold at the Ontario bull sale the following spring, where The Shorthorn sold for \$450, while the Hereford topped the sale for \$1,250.

The rest is history. The fourth generation of Elmhirsts is now raising Herefords near Peterborough. A highlight was the year 2000 at the Royal Winter Fair where the family exhibited the Champion Hereford Bull and Champion Female. In 2004, son Billy and his wife Juanita judged the Polled and Horned Hereford show at Agribition.

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Today, the operation runs 90 Polled Hereford cows and 40 Simmentals. The cows at Elm-Lodge are the main source of income for the farm. Source for Success V, will be the family's fifth consecutive production sale at the farm on the third weekend in September.



➔ **ROSS & LORRAINE MADSEN**

It is the month of May, 2010, and Ross Madsen, of Redvers, Saskatchewan,

just got back from a local 4-H show. He didn't see a Hereford at the show so he approached one young boy and offered him a good steer calf from his ranch, "provided he'd look after it and feed it well."

A Canadian Hereford Honour Roll member, Madsen is now winding down a very successful operation on which the first Herefords appeared in 1932. In 1964, the horned Herefords were dispersed and Madsen and his brothers Harold and Lynn took over the polled herd. Harold passed away in 1999, after which time, Ross and Lynn continued the operation.

Madsen Herefords runs on 20 quarters or about 3,200 acres, 2,000 of which have been under cultivation.

In its most active years, the ranch ran 150 cows and sold 40 bulls per year. Some of those were sold at the Regina bull sale, which the family attended for 27 years.

Madsens also exhibited cattle at the first Agribition and twenty years hence. They have also shown at Toronto's Royal Winter Fair and at several local fairs.

Through the fifties, Ross says "we were outlaws because we didn't follow the belt-buckle trend." Now, he says, he is happy where the breed is at.

"Hereford breeders have done a good job fixing up the breed," he says. "[Today's Herefords] have thickness and depth and plenty of milk, with good legs under them." He says they are also in the right weight range, on average, between 1,200 and 1,400 pounds.

Asked what he likes about the Hereford cow, Ross says "They're crossing to beat hell!" He says he's getting more and more calls from Angus breeders looking for a Hereford bull.

Madsen is down to selling five or six bulls annually, from his cow herd of 30.

"If I can't get \$2,000 I won't sell them," he says. For starters, Ross says he won't sell a bull that he can't guarantee. But for another, he refuses to give one up under cost. If he did, it would do his fellow Hereford breeders a disservice.

Madsen has sold cattle the world-over. His genetics have moved across Canada, to the U.S., to Russia, Japan, Chili, Bulgaria and Budapest.

This past February, 78-year-old Ross had a scary "wake-up call" when, on

his way out the door at 6:30 a.m., he dropped from a heart attack. It's forcing this "roadrunner" and community man to slow down. Ross has consigned cattle to all but two of the 50 Southeast Hereford Association Sales; a consignment sale that was inaugurated by his father. He was the Reeve of his municipality for 18 years; and

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chairman for the Agricultural Society, the Saskatchewan Cattle Breeders, the Saskatchewan Livestock Association, the Regina Bull Sale and the Check-Off Board. He was director of the StockGrowers' Association for 20 years, of the Southern Supreme Show and of the Redvers Activity Centre.

Ross and Lorraine also hosted the Governor General's Study Conference and a number of Hereford tours, including the World Hereford Conference in 1976. Ross has coached hockey and has been active in community health issues, his community activity centre and his church. He was awarded the Provincial Volunteer Award in 1990 and was listed on the Saskatchewan Livestock Honour Roll in 1994. His recent health issues are forcing him to give up the last 30 cows on the Madsen ranch, though his interest in the breed has far from waned.

➔ **MAC & PAT CREECH** M C Quantock Livestock Corporation **BILL & SHERRY CREECH**

Hill 70 Quantock Ranch Ltd.

Frank Creech, father to Barney, Mac, Bill and Pat, started breeding Herefords in 1951. Nearly 50 years before, his father homesteaded the property after walking 180 miles from Saskatoon to Lloydminster, one year after the Barr colonists arrived. The ranch was originally home to a herd of Shorthorn cattle. When the boys came along, the



Mac & Pat Creech

Creech family started showing cattle. They showed the Champion Hereford Bull at the second Agribition and exhibited cattle there for 25 years, 13 of which they were named Premier Breeder of the Horned Hereford show. They exhibited cattle at the National Western Stock Show in Denver for 20 years and established a great American clientele. They amassed a lot of championships. Industry changes resulted in the shows no longer benefiting their business. The Creech's continue to make their living selling bulls. Between Mac and Pat's M C Quantock operation and Bill and Sherry's Hill 70 Quantock Ranch, the two operations sell 900 bulls a year. These include both Hereford and composite-type bulls. Both are still located with their respective families in the Lloydminster area, near the Alberta-Saskatchewan border.

"Herefords have weathered a lot as a breed," says Bill. "Our Hereford bull market has always been strong and is on the upswing."

Mac says that Herefords have a strong place in their crossbreeding lines. And his family is getting more and more calls from people looking for straightbred Hereford females. A shrinking industry and competition from other breeds have hurt their



Bill & Sherry Creech

Hereford bull sales up until recently. So has the fact that straight Herefords have tended to be knocked in the stockyards.

Mac says the Hereford breed lost track of its direction when large frame scores became acceptable. Birthweights became too big and birthweights are the biggest priority for his commercial customers.

"The worst thing bull sales ever did was start weighing bulls," says Mac. "It shouldn't be how big they get but how quick they get big that matters," he says, paraphrasing one of his father's favourite lines.

The Creech family formed a limited company in 1973. Eldest brother Barney's share was bought out in 1985. When Frank Creech retired in 1990, Mac and Bill divided the ranch. In total, 1,100 females run the M C Quantock pastures.

"To make a living in the commercial beef cattle industry, you need lots of cows and you have to be able

to manage them as efficiently as possible," says Bill, of Hill 70 Quantock Ranch. That means you need easy-keeping, problem-free cows, he says. Bill and Sherry calve out 600 head on their home ranch and winter 1,600 head in total.

Bill learns a lot from the operation's commercial customers and says there is a small window of opportunity that exists for the Hereford breed out there that shouldn't be wasted. The breed has been somewhat marginalized by Angus cows, he says.

Larger cow herds means cows have to survive on less, according to Bill. One of his customers has moved to complete winter grazing. The larger framed, high maintenance cows on that ranch eliminated themselves. He believes there is a bright future for the right size of Hereford cow, polled or horned.

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Bill sells 50 Hereford bulls annually and believes demand could soon push this to 60 or 70 bulls, partly because most cow herds he deals with are Angus.

"There are no cattle anywhere with a temperament like Herefords," says Bill.

Bill & Sherry's bull sale ads say "more grass, less diesel" and easy-keeping cattle are what they're selling.

Bill and Sherry and their four children enjoy what they do and say raising cattle is a great way of life for a family.

At nearly 90 years of age, grandma Gertie, Mac and Bill's mother, has never missed a bull sale. She is proud to see the fourth generation involved on the ranch.



Celebrating 150 Years





of Hereford Memories