

Canadian Luing Cattle Association Newsletter



Volume 14, No. 1 January 2020

Message From The Secretary

Iain Aitken

Welcome to our 2020 Winter Newsletter. Let's hope the benign weather over the holidays was a harbinger of what's to come after the challenging conditions encountered in many areas last year!

As we begin a new decade we are also entering a new era for the Canadian Luing Association with the sad loss of Dr Bob Church. Bob was at the centre of everything Luing in Canada since before the first cattle importation in 1973 until his passing in September. His encyclopedic knowledge of the people, places and pedigrees can never be replaced. To his wife Gina and family we offer our deepest condolences.

(A Profile of Bob appeared in the January 2015 Newsletter, available on our website under the Resources tab)

2019 again brought strong demand for our cattle with another increase in bull sales and a few heifers sold to new and expanding herds. With so many repeat, and volume buyers we only managed to supply two new customers last year. Thank you for your purchases and a warm welcome to the Luing world;

Joe Gartner, Brandon, Manitoba.
Tyler Preston, Chauvin, Alberta.

Luings currently for sale.

A good selection of rising two year old bulls from the Medicine River and Greywood herds. Located Belmont, Manitoba. We will also be exporting bulls into the United States this spring. Luing semen is also available, please check out our website www.luingcattle.com or contact the Secretary for further information.

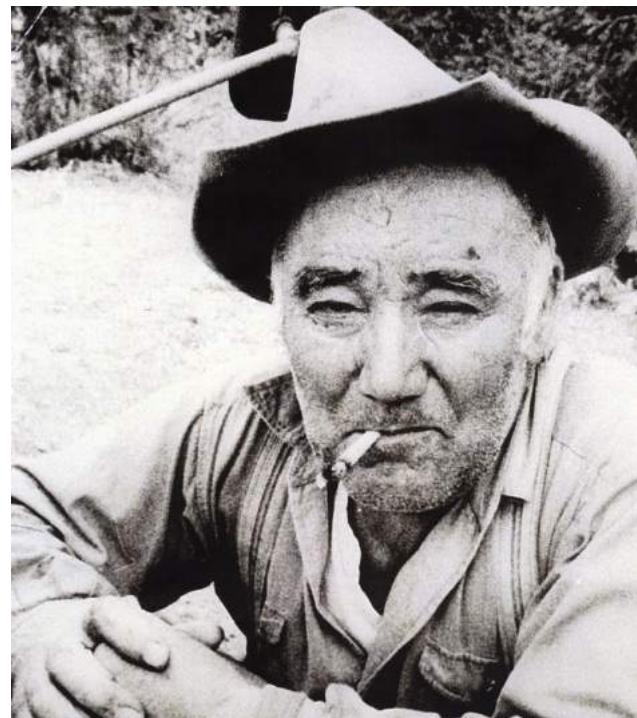
Charlie Flick and the “Snowlander” cattle.

Iain Aitken

I've long been fascinated by the cattlemen who create their own breeds, recognizing the exceptional commitment of time, knowledge and observational skills required to accomplish it successfully. Given how few cattlemen are successful at building and maintaining a good herd of purebred cattle over a length of time within an established breed, the challenge of forming an entirely new one is obviously a task of infinitely greater magnitude.

The Cadzow brothers, Tom Lasater and Waldo Forbes were the well known creators of the Luing, Beefmaster and Red Angus breeds respectively. All three breeds have gone on to make a substantial impact to commercial cattle production in different environments. The fact that these pioneer's breeding programs were all based entirely on functional efficiency within their natural environment is something that attracts me to study them.

Another name I believe belongs on the list above is that of the late Charlie Flick, breeder of the Snowlander cattle. These cattle would be considered a strain, rather than a breed, only because they never sought or gained official Governmental breed recognition. To all intents and purposes the



“An undated photo of Charlie Flick”

painstaking work of creating a breed or strain are the same.

Charlie Flick was born in Luxemburg in 1902 and emigrated to Canada as a young man. In 1924 he headed through the Rockies from Alberta to Southern British Columbia in a horse drawn wagon. He settled near Edgewood, on Arrow Lake, in the Kootenay region of the province. This is a mountainous area of heavy timber with very limited flat, farmable land beside the lakes. Judging by historical photographs Charlie was involved in logging but also maintained a herd of dairy Shorthorn cows to supply the local community with milk.

In the late 1930s Charlie and his wife Edith embarked on a breeding program to create a strain of cattle that would be able to utilize the huge

areas of land covered by tall timber that were otherwise unsuitable for agriculture.

The basis for the program was mating Scottish Highland cows to a Shorthorn bull. A homozygous polled Shorthorn bull was sourced in Wyoming - no small feat at the time as it would require a thousand mile trip by train to get to Revelstoke before being trailed the last hundred miles south to Edgewood.

As with the creation of all new breeds or strains the initial offspring would be mated to each other utilizing in-breeding and line-breeding to expand the population. From this foundation, after many years of the slow meticulous work of breeding, the Snowlander was born. One difference with these cattle is they were based on an initial 50:50 cross of the two breeds as opposed to the Luing which had a 5/8ths Shorthorn, 3/8ths Highland composition.

When the first Luings were imported into Canada in 1973 the Snowlanders appeared to have already made a name for themselves as good cows among ranchers in southern British Columbia. Charlie Flick, by this time joined in the operation of his ranch by his grandson Dave Bilinski, purchased the Luing bull Rothney Gideon from Sandy Cross which was born in 1975. I believe this would be the first outside blood introduced to their Snowlander genepool since it's creation 40 years earlier.



"Russet, a 4 year old Snowlander bull 1970"

At the first Annual General Meeting of the Canadian Luing Association Dr Bob Church spearheaded a discussion on the idea of incorporating Snowlanders into the Luing registry. The primary reason would be to access the polled genetics in the Snowlander gene pool as all the Luings imported from Scotland were horned. Bob later told me that he had never seen cattle with such foraging ability in a browse situation. The Snowlander cows were not maintained on grass pasture as little existed there other than the small area by the lakeshore which was hayed in summer and used as the feed ground in winter. These cattle spent the summer among the tall timber browsing forbs and bushes - and travelling many miles along Hydro cut-lines to access it. Given the amount of treed and bush pastures there are in some areas of Western Canada I think Bob probably saw potential to add this grazing trait to the Luings existing repertoire.

After gaining approval from Canadian Livestock Records a party of Luing

directors travelled to BC to assess and select Snowlander cattle for inclusion in the Luing registry. In total around a hundred animals were selected - mostly from Charlie Flick's herd but including some from other small herds of Snowlander cattle in the area that had been founded from Flick bloodlines. The females selected were entered in the grade register at 3/4 Luing status meaning that their female calves by a Luing bull were registrable as fullblood Luings. The male calves required a further generation ie 15/16ths before they attained fullblood status. A further proviso was that any male animals entered in the grade-up register had to be polled.



"5th generation Snowlander cows"

The Snowlander females that were entered in the grade registry in 1976 included cows born in 1965 so clearly longevity was a feature of the cattle, as we would expect given the partial Highland ancestry. Dr Church purchased one cow that went by the name of "Snowlander Fancy" that he successfully performed embryo transfer on at the age of 20. Was it a

coincidence that my Lochend Luing 223U cow that produced 18 grade one embryos when flushed, also at the age of 20, would have the highest percentage of Snowlander blood in the Luing breed at that time?

When the first public sale of Luings in Canada took place at Roundup '78 it included three grade-up calved heifers from Flick/Bilinski's Diamond Ranch. These cattle, and their successors at subsequent sales, met a good demand from the other Luing breeders and the genetics of the two strains were quickly integrated. Charlie Flick passed away in 1981 but Dave continued to sell their Luing/Snowlander cattle for a number of years and also served as an early director of the Luing Association. The herd at Edgewood sadly was dispersed in the late 1990s.

A side note that I found intriguing was the suggestion that the Shorthorn bull that was the foundation of the Snowlander strain was purchased from the Cross family in Wyoming.

The Cross's Ranch near Douglas, Wyoming was established by brothers of the famous A.E Cross who came to western Canada with the Cochrane ranch, the first large scale ranching operation in what was to later become Alberta. If this is correct Sandy Cross, the noted Luing, Galloway and Shorthorn breeder from Rothney would have been buying Snowlanders whose foundational sire was a Shorthorn bull bred by his Wyoming cousins!

While it's said that you don't get much done in a lifetime breeding cattle (due to the slow generational turnover) it's also true that genes live on. Charlie Flick's lifetime work creating the Snowlander strain of cattle was not in vain. They have proven a valuable addition to the Luing gene pool with their strong polled trait and exceptional browsing ability.

WANTED!! - Luing Breeders

Due to the limited number of cattle and herds we have at the moment we are very keen to encourage new breeders. As a breed we have tripled our bull sales over the last decade, supplying only Western Canada.

We are now being approached by American customers seeking Luing genetics which I think is logical given the climatic similarities between the Northern tier states, parts of New England and Canada. Considering that Montana combined with North and South Dakota contain as many beef cows as the whole of Canada the potential for expansion is huge, even as a "minority" breed.

In addition to supplying new customers it would be beneficial for genetic and biosecurity reasons to expand our gene pool and disperse it across the country. Having herds in different regions also would allow us to supply our customers with cattle better adapted to their local

environments and reduce the distances we are moving animals.

We would be keen to encourage existing owners of Luing cattle, people interested in starting up small herds or anyone interested in establishing a herd using our grade-up registry.



"Modern Canadian Luings incorporating Snowlander genetics"

I feel it is particularly important that existing owners of purebred Luing females consider registering their purebred calves. This is not so that the Association can get rich but so that we can achieve breed sustainability. Breeding Luings and selling them as "purebred, but unregistered" is a waste - they just become commercial cattle and are lost to the gene pool.

Our costs to register cattle are quite reasonable - \$35 annual membership and a registration fee of \$20 per animal under a year of age. As a further incentive we will refund the first year membership and set-up registration costs for registering a herd name/tattoo letters etc.



“Diamond Ranch Luing cows 1980”

Canadian Luing Cattle Association

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