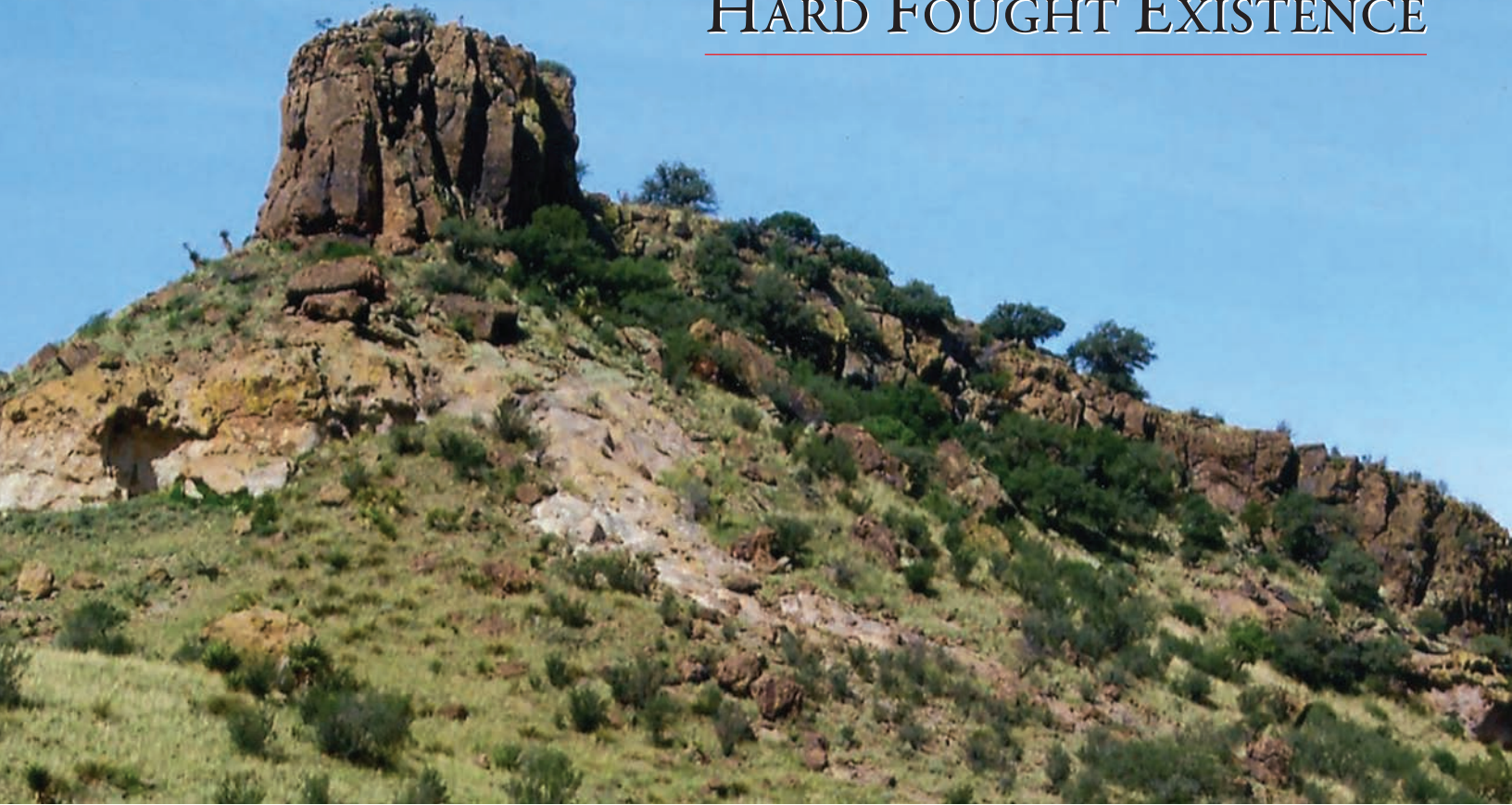


HARD FOUGHT EXISTENCE



West Texas cattle country.

The McInnis Cattle Company



BY THEA MARX

Indian raids. Ticks. Drought. Eminent Domain. The McInnis Cattle Company has survived them all, not unscathed, but alive. In fact, in Jessica McInnis' words, "The sixth generation is on the ground."

Threads of the present day McInnis ranch can be traced to the days before the Civil War and just twelve years after Texas was granted statehood. Its place in the history of purebred Hereford cattle is nearly as long.

In 1857, David Baugh, Bill McInnis' great, great grandfather, settled in Brown County, Texas in a rambling homestead built of three log cabins on Pecan Bayou. They were the second family to settle in the brush and tick laden county. It was full of Comanche Indians, but land was

plentiful and the river was a good water source. There was enough rain to grow crops and calves. Horses were a valuable commodity to the Comanche and the ranch on Pecan Bayou was frequently the target of their raids. At night, the fast horses were sequestered in a large sandstone barn with twenty-foot walls and bars on the windows. They were safe until a day when the sun was at its full height in the sky. That noontime raid left the ranch without a horse to ride.

Raiding Indians were not the only menace that the ranchers faced. Following the invention of barbed wire in 1865, the open range was being fenced. In the 1880s, the unrest from those who didn't want their open range



Bill, Ben and Claude McInnis, 2007

impaired by *fil de fer barbelé* (as it was first called by its inventor, Frenchman, Louis Jannin), started cutting the wire fences erected by day on the McInnis place into six to eight foot lengths at night. The family knew who had been cutting the wire and the fact that they were friends of Bill's Great Uncle Bud. To keep him out of the country when the Texas Rangers came, he was sent to San Angelo to start the round up early. On that moon lit night, three fence cutters were shot, resulting in the biggest killing on a ranch in Texas Ranger history, effectively ending the range wars in Texas.

Uncle Bud, as he was fondly referred to by everyone, began raising Herefords in 1896 when there were only six small herds in the state of Texas and three years before the Texas Hereford Association was formed in San Antonio. He started with 10 heifers and a bull. His perseverance borne of tough pioneer living and ingenuity paid off as Uncle Bud faced the challenge of bringing northern cattle south and losing them to tick fever. He created his own vaccination program for the dreaded fever by inoculating the new animals with a small amount of blood from the native cattle. The new animals then started to build immunity to the Texas tick. Bud continued to strengthen that immunity through the careful placement of

ticks from the inoculated animal into their bedding. This "booster" allowed them to build a strong immune response keeping them alive and allowing him to make the herd improvements he desired.

Claude McInnis was Uncle Bud's nephew and manager of the family operation, Cox & McInnis. Claude purchased a quarter of Bud's interest in the operation when Bud sold out to his brother's sons. Claude added those cows to his own growing herd. With Claude's vast knowledge of the breed and tutelage from his uncle, Claude developed outstanding genetics through carefully researched AI programs. The resulting cattle proved to be very competitive in the show ring. A natural leader in the industry, Claude was also president of the Texas Polled Hereford Association. In 1959, the award winning Cox & McInnis cowherd was sold and the ranch divided as members of the growing McInnis family decided to pursue other interests. When the family operation was split, Claude sold his polled herd as well, but continued in the horned Hereford business.

After Claude's son, Bill, graduated from Texas Tech University, he spent seven years operating a highly successful custom fitting service. During that time, Bill met his wife, Jessica, at a bull sale and they spent their first year of married life together on the road pulling show cattle. Fun at first, living out of a suitcase got old after awhile and when Bill was called home to form the present day McInnis Cattle Company, it was a welcome reprieve. "Bill is the hardest working man I have ever seen," says Jessica. "He taught me about the economics of ranch life, about the breeding programs and how to feed properly." The newly



MCC 9126J Domino R438 - Two-year old herd sire the ranch is using on keeping heifers.



Bill McInnis won at Ft. Worth with this Charolais heifer in 1974. The feed company Albers used this photo in their Calf Manna brand advertising for several years with the headline - "Here Comes The Judge!"

formed company operated from the ranch settled by David Baugh where the home on Pecan Bayou stands in perfect condition, though still five miles from electricity. The original ranch covered 20,000 acres and was bordered by a hand stacked stone fence that stood four to five feet high and two feet wide. Ranch history tells that a husband and wife built the 61 miles of stone fence together. The wife quarried and hauled the stone while the husband stacked the rock, reportedly building 100 feet a day. Today, Bill McInnis says they have tried to rebuild the awesome fences

when they fall down, but have yet to duplicate the intricate work that, not only included the exterior fences, but the partition fences as well.

In the 1930s, when the ranch still stood within its stone boundaries, the state of Texas condemned one-third of it to create Lake Brownwood. Through six cases in the Texas Supreme Court, the McInnis' gave up a swath of nearly 7,000 acres of viable land through the middle of the ranch, but did win the right to control their land to the water's edge so at least their cattle could water freely. As Bill McInnis says, "There was a lot of fighting to keep on fighting."

Keep on fighting they do. On the present day McInnis Cattle Company, there are 2300 acres of mesquite flats and farm ground. Amongst wheat and oat fields on Highway 183, twelve miles north of the county seat of Brownwood, Texas, Bill and Jessica have raised two children, Ben and Rachel, and continue to make history raising registered cattle.

McInnis Cattle Company now raises both registered Herefords and Angus. Their highest honor: winning the commercial bull contest at the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo. They also run 400 head of black baldies in the high mountain desert near Ft. Davis. "Four hundred and five miles away from gate to gate," Ben McInnis, Bill's son, says. Ben echoes his mother's sentiments about the vast country near Mexico where she was raised, "You never know what you will find when you ride on the Ft. Davis place. We are only 17 miles as the crow flies from the border: snakes,



McInnis ranch country in West Texas

mountain lions and illegal aliens are all possibilities. We always go prepared.”

Ben works side-by-side with his dad and lives on the ranch with his wife, whose name is also Rachel. Rachel is a nurse in Brownwood. “More ranches have been kept afloat by nurses and teachers than we know,” says Ben fondly of his wife who was raised in Weatherford. The couple are the proud parents of the first sixth generation McInnis to “hit the ground.” He is a lively little man named Levi who bounces beside his father daily in the feed truck helping feed cows. He is already learning the art of raising cattle in Texas. Ben, who graduated from Texas A&M University with honors in animal science, hopes Levi, too, will have the chance at keeping the McInnis legacy alive.

Ben knows that the McInnis legacy has been hard fought and is proud of his part. What he remembers most about his childhood is the hard work. “We never had any hired hands on; it was part of the deal. You start early, you stay late. It builds character.” This is a life he wants for his son. “It’s a life that means lots of hard days and you won’t get rich, but you work hard to build it so you can pass it along to the next generation. It’s about pride. It’s about a way of



From left: Jessica and Bill McInnis, son-in-law Scott and daughter Myers. Ben and Rachel McInnis, Claude McInnis in the Summer of 2004 at the rehearsal dinner before Ben and Rachel were married.

life. It’s about the nice, honest people you work with.”

Ben’s sister Rachel remembers the lessons she learned on the ranch. Some of the most poignant were how to resolve problems and learn to get along. “If Ben and I were fighting,” Rachel remembers, “Dad would lock us in the grain bin and tell us to sack oats. It’s itchy work and you can’t do it by yourself so you had better find a way to get along. It didn’t take long and we were friends again.” Rachel knows that growing up on a ranch gave her everything she needs to succeed in life. She spent over six years as the Vice President and Director of Producer and Legislative Affairs for the Texas Wheat Producers Board and Association where she was a tough lobbyist for agriculture at home and abroad. She now works in her first position outside of agriculture for a human pharmaceutical



MCC Lady Domino C 342 - one of the ranch’s top producing cows - at age 11, still producing.

company. “My supervisor told me I got the job because of my background. They didn’t question that I knew how to work.” She can now spend more time at home with her son, Brooks, and husband, Scott. They run a cow/calf operation and raise show cattle near Amarillo. Rachel is not afraid of any challenge, even pulling a calf before leaving for work. She remembers just such a day, “I called a guy up the road to help. It was a tough pull and he said, ‘I don’t think I can do this.’ I told him to get out of the way, this baby is coming out.” She continues, “You don’t stop in the middle of something.”

The McInnis Cattle Company has a history nearly as long as the state of Texas. It is a continuous hard fought legacy surviving elements and circumstances that have brought many family ranches to their knees. It survives today on the same work ethic and determination of its ancestors with that rare pride of ownership that trumps the odds and keeps ranch people going, often under nearly impossible conditions. The lazy j brand will go on through lightning, prairie fires, ice storms, droughts and economic downturns. All of it is worth it to the patriarch of the McInnis family, Bill McGinnis, who says, “There is no better way of life, if you are willing to work at it.”



Bill McInnis riding his mare, “The Hell Bitch,” on the home place.