

Descriptions of the Rare Breeds at the Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm 1991-2010

--Jim Combs, manager, Overstreet-Kerr Farm

Preservation of Pineywoods cattle and heirloom varieties of poultry continues at the Kerr Center.

Pineywoods Cattle History & Breed Classification:

The Spanish first brought this small, but hardy breed of cattle to the New World during the 1500's. In time, these Spanish cattle acquired different names from the localities where they were concentrated, such as Mississippi, Florida, and Texas. One breed is called Pineywoods due to their location, the Pineywoods of southern Mississippi. The Pineywoods cattle resemble the related Texas Longhorn and Florida Cracker cattle in color.

Early settlers and Native Americans used the cattle for oxen, meat, milk, hides, and a trading commodity. Pineywoods cattle numbers started to decline in the late 1800's and early 1900's as improved English and European cattle were brought into the southeastern United States.

During the early 1800's the Choctaw Indians began migrating west in search of agricultural opportunities and brought livestock, including Pineywoods, with them. History tells us only a limited number of livestock was brought west during the great Indian removal of the 1830's. Many people and livestock were lost due to the harsh traveling conditions and therefore never set foot on what is now known as Oklahoma. So, the majority of Spanish type livestock were introduced to Oklahoma prior to the 1830's.

As the overall popularity and abundance of Pineywoods declined, only a few families continued to keep purebred herds. As time passed, these herds became isolated from one another to the point that each herd has become a unique and self-contained strain. The strains are named after the families that preserved them such as the Holt in Georgia, Barnes in Alabama, and Conway, Bayliss and Carter in Mississippi. Some of the family strains have been selected for specific colors or patterns. For example, Conway cattle are red/white in various patterns; Holt cattle are nearly all black/white spotted to roans; while the Griffin strain tend to be yellow.

Pineywoods cattle (Carter strain):

The cattle on the Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm are of the Carter strain. These Pineywoods are purebred descendants of the Spanish cattle of the 1500's, preserved by the Carter family of Mississippi. The Carter strain began to be developed in 1850, by William Carter of Perry County, MS. No outside genetics have been introduced to the herd since 1895.

Charles Carter of Petal, MS, obtained his first strain of Pineywoods cattle from his grandfather, Print (son of William), in 1934 at two years of age. The Carter family owned a dairy and selected

their cattle for milk production. After 1942, which marked the end of their dairy business, using the same strain of cattle, they began selecting stock for beef quality.

Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm has 20 mature cows, 6 yearlings heifers, 17 calves, and 1 herd sire of the Carter strain, for a total of 44 head. 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. Less than 1000 head of pure stock, but not necessarily registered, have been located by the Pineywoods cattle registry.

Description: The Pineywoods cattle have been developed largely through natural selection. They are generally red, brown, or occasionally black and white, spotted, or speckled. Compared to the Texas Longhorn, the horns of the Pineywoods cattle are small to medium in length and tend to curve inward or upward. Mature weight ranges from 600-1000 pounds, occasionally larger depending on the environment. The smaller structure and horn size has been retained to meet the needs of farmers and loggers of southern Mississippi.

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 is noted for its excellent mammary system, reproduction, longevity, docility, self-sufficiency and calving ease.

For more information on Pineywoods cattle at the Kerr Center, see:

- [Stewardship Ranch Pineywoods cattle page](#)
- [Field Notes, fall 2007](#)

Rhode Island Red Chickens

Appearance

The rich, reddish-black plumage and red comb, either single or rose of the "Old-Type" Rhode Island Red chicken is an iconic symbol of American agriculture. Their eyes are red-orange and they have yellow feet, with reddish-brown beaks. Chicks are a light red to tan color with two dark brown bars running down their backs. They are generally good pets to keep and safe around children. They can happily be kept in a run.



Rhode Island Red rooster.

History

The bird was originally developed in both Massachusetts and Rhode Island in the 1880s and 1890s, respectively, and its ancestors include the Malay, Shanghai, Java, and Brown Leghorn chickens. The single combed variety was admitted to the American Poultry Association's Standard of Perfection in 1904 and the rose-combed birds were accepted a year later in 1905.

Characteristics

Rhode Island Reds are tough birds, resistant to illness, good at foraging and free ranging, and are typically docile, quiet and friendly, though males can be considerably aggressive. They are widely known as good layers through cold periods, but if the coop temperature drops below freezing their output drops considerably and the tips of their combs become very susceptible to frostbite. The comb of the Rare Rose Comb Rhode Island Red is less susceptible to frostbite.

Eggs

Rhode Island Reds are excellent egg layers. Although they can sometimes be stubborn, they can end up producing up to 250 to 300 large, light brown eggs per year. When free ranged, their first-year eggs can be too large to fit comfortably in a standard egg carton.

Rhode Island Reds are also bred for meat, with roosters weighing in at 8-1/2 pounds, the hens slightly less, at 6-1/2 pounds, cockerels at 7-1/2 pounds, and pullets at 5-1/2 pounds.

Choctaw Pony (Spanish Mustang)

The Spanish Mustang was brought to America by the Spanish Conquistadors in the 15th and 16th century. By the 18th century, this tough, intelligent, beautiful horse had been acquired by the Indians and was being used to improve their daily lives.

The horse transformed the buffalo-hunting culture of the Plains Indians in particular, but even tribes such as the Choctaw, who were agriculturists, put the animals to good use. The Choctaw Indians whose homeland was centered in Mississippi used a small strain of the Spanish horse that became known as the Choctaw Pony, which measures between 13.2 to 14.2 hands. Obtaining food became easier and transportation was greatly assisted since these horses make great pack animals.

Among the Choctaws, these ponies determined wealth, prestige, glory, and honor. They were also used like money to barter for other goods.

Many members of the Choctaw Indian tribes were forcibly removed from Mississippi in the early 1800's. Before their removal, many Choctaws had already gathered their livestock and left Mississippi for the new promised land, known today as Oklahoma.



Choctaw pony named Progression.

In the 1970's, the distinct breed of Choctaw ponies began to face extinction. Many ponies had been sold or crossbred with other breeds. With thanks to the late Gilbert Jones, and Bryant and Darlene Rickman of southeastern Oklahoma, several small pure herds are being preserved for their size, stamina, and disposition.

The Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm entered into a program to help preserve the Choctaw pony in December of 2002. Dr. Phillip Sponenberg, DVM, PhD, of Blacksburg, Virginia, The [American Livestock Breeds Conservancy](#), of Pittsboro, North Carolina, and Bryant and Darlene Rickman of Soper, Oklahoma have assisted us with the selection of brood stock to meet the needs of our educational and preservation program.

For more information on the Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm's Choctaw ponies, see the [spring 2009 issue of *Field Notes*](#).