

Chapter 22

Texas Longhorns



Texas Longhorn, 8.5" 12" x 8", Wood Carving



Texas Longhorns is a Registered Trade Mark of the University of Texas - BEVO

The Texas Longhorn is a breed of cattle known for its characteristic horns, which can extend to over 1.8 m (5.9 feet) tip to tip for bulls, and 2.1 m (6.9 feet) tip to tip for steers and exceptional cows. They are known for their diverse coloring, and can be any color or mix of colors, but dark red and white color mixes are the most dominant.

Unlike most breeds of cattle, no one set out to develop the Texas Longhorn as a breed. Instead, they evolved in North America from descendants of cattle brought into the Americas by the Spanish in the late 1400s and early 1500s. ¹

Christopher Columbus, the Italian explorer and navigator, sailed from Spain and arrived in the New World on December 5, 1492. His expedition landed on a large island in the Caribbean, naming it as La Espanola, meaning the Spanish Island, later to be re-named Hispaniola. It is now the present-day countries of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Columbus made a total of four voyages to the Americas between 1492 and 1502, setting the stage for the European exploration and colonization of the Americas. ²

The first cattle were brought by Columbus on his second voyage when he returned to Hispaniola in 1493. Between 1493 and 1512, Spanish colonists brought additional cattle in subsequent expeditions. The first cattle to be brought to the North American Continent (NAC) arrived in 1529 at Vera Cruz, Mexico.

Spanish explorer and conquistador, Hernán Cortés (1485 – 1547), credited with the overthrow of the Aztec empire and winning Mexico for the crown of Spain, brought 16 specifically identified horses to Mexico in 1519, some ten years prior to the arrival of cattle. Subsequent explorers, such as Francisco

Vázquez de Coronado and Hernando de Soto brought ever-larger numbers, some from Spain and others from breeding establishments set up by the Spanish in the Caribbean. Horses were an absolute essential for the Spanish to explore their new conquests.

The cattle consisted of three different breeds: *Barrenda*, *Retinto* and *Grande Pieta*. Longhorns are direct descendants of the first cattle in the New World. Over the next two centuries the Spanish moved the cattle north, arriving in the area that would become Texas near the end of the 17th century. Spanish herding tradition did not castrate bull calves therefore there was very little management of the accumulated vast herds. Some of the cattle escaped from make shift holding areas or were turned loose on the open range, where they remained mostly feral for the next two centuries.³

Over several generations, descendants of these cattle evolved into an animal that could forage on brush and survive for days without water. Longhorns to this day are a singular breed of cattle unlike any other and are in a class of their own for their widely recognized characteristic of long horns.

Early US settlers in Texas obtained feral Mexican cattle from the borderland between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande and mixed them with their own eastern cattle. The result was a tough, rangy animal with long legs and long horns extending up to almost seven feet. Although this interbreeding was of little consequence to the makeup the Longhorn, it did alter the colors. The varieties of color ranged from bluish-grey, various yellowish hues, browns, black, ruddy and white, both cleanly bright and dirty-speckled.⁴

As Texas became more heavily settled and populated following annexation by the US, the frontier gave way to established farms and ranch lands. The leaner longhorn beef was not as attractive in an era where tallow was highly prized, and the longhorn's ability to survive on the poor vegetation of the open range was no longer as much of an issue. Other breeds demonstrated traits more highly valued by the modern rancher, such as the ability to gain weight quickly like the Hereford, known for their white faces. The Longhorn stock went through a slow, steep decline and dwindled to the point where people became very worried about extinction. Fortunately, it didn't happen. Starting in 1927 the breed was saved from near extinction by enthusiasts from the United States Forest Service, who collected a small herd of stock to breed on the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge outside of Lawton, Oklahoma.⁵

The breed gained significant attention after a longhorn named *Bevo* was adopted as the mascot of The University of Texas at Austin in 1917. An image of the animal became commonly associated with the school's sports teams, known as the Texas Longhorns.⁶

A few years later, J. Frank Dobie (1888-1964) and others gathered small herds to keep in Texas state parks. Dobie, a prominent folklorist, writer, and newspaper columnist, is best known for his many books depicting the richness and traditions of life in rural Texas during the days of the open range. Prominent Fort Worth oilman and philanthropist Sid W. Richardson helped finance the project. They were cared for largely as curiosities, but the stock's longevity, resistance to disease and ability to thrive on marginal pastures quickly revived the breed as beef stock and their important link to Texas history.⁷

Longhorns with elite genetics can often bring \$40,000 or more at auction with the record of \$380,000 set on March 18, 2017 for a cow, *3S Danica*, and heifer calf at her side during the Legacy XIII sale in Fort Worth, Texas. ⁸

Due to their innate gentle disposition and intelligence, Longhorns are also increasingly being trained as riding steers. They can be seen daily at the historic Fort Worth Stockyards.

Charles Franklin “Frank” Reaugh (1860-1945), besides being an artist, was an amateur naturalist, photographer, philosopher, inventor, patron of the arts, and teacher. He was also given the crown of *Dean of Texas Painters*. He came to Texas as a boy of 16, with his parents in a covered wagon from Illinois and settled on a farm near Terrell in Kaufman County southeast of Dallas in 1876. ⁹ Young Franklin, who always had “a liking for drawing,” as he put it, watched the passing country for subjects for his pencil as the wagon kept heading south toward their final destination in the Lone Star State. ¹⁰ His interest in drawing, sketching and art in general that developed during his youth later convinced him that he could and would make it his career. His enduring interest in animals helped him succeed as an artist at a time when art was not a must have possession.



Photograph of Frank Reaugh from the 1890's

He discovered his “fondness for painting Texas cattle in their natural wildness Like any artist that attains a degree of success, Reaugh drove himself to” succeed that never left his imagination. ¹¹ His mother encouraged his art career throughout his development as an artist. She was always there to offer encouragement and support. ¹²

In 1884, Reaugh went to Saint Louis to study art at the Saint Louis School of Art for several months and then returned home to Terrell. His second experience as an art student was in 1889 when he spent a short time in Paris, France furthering his studies to become an accomplished artist. Upon returning to Texas in July of 1889, he began sketching trips to West Texas with various cattle outfits. ¹³ It was around this time he started teaching and taking students with him on his many trips to west Texas. From 1905 until 1939 he took his art students on his annual sketch trips to west Texas, New Mexico, and as far away as Arizona. ¹⁴



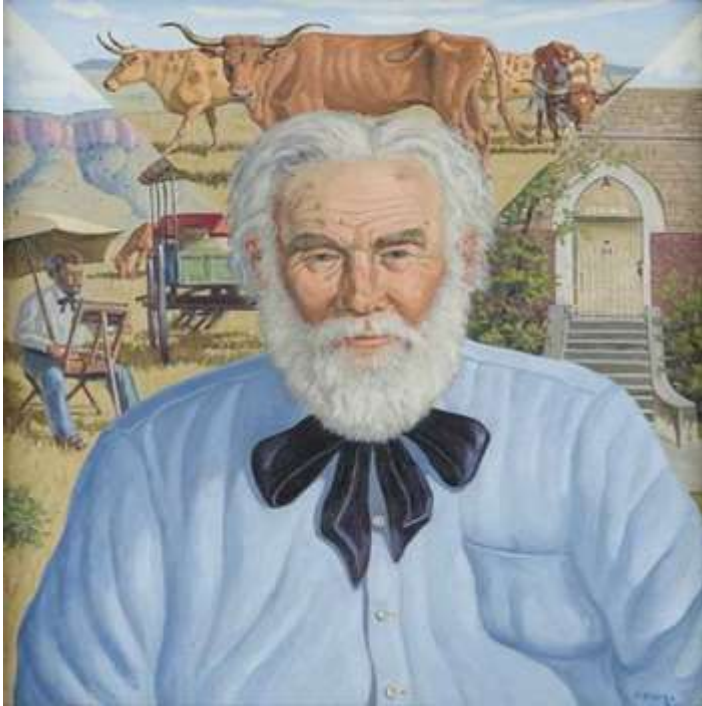
Frank Reaugh: Driving the Herd, 24" x 48", Pastel on Canvas, Circa late 1920's, Courtesy of the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin. (Twenty-four Hours with the Herd-1)

Many authors, writers, educators, and historians have written volumes about Longhorns and the early day cattle drives from south Texas to the railheads in Kansas along the Chisholm Trail. Many artists have executed paintings depicting this very popular subject matter. There is only one artist, Frank Reaugh, that made this subject matter of painting Longhorn cattle a successful life-long endeavor and, the only one known to have painted cattle drives while on the trail. Reaugh has left historians, private art collectors, museums and the State of Texas a valuable historical legacy that will remain and endure forever.

A shining example of the importance of Frank Reaugh resided in the personal art collection of Edmund P. Pillsbury, PhD. (1943-2010). Mr. Pillsbury was a distinguished American museum director known for adding a string of European masterworks to the permanent collection of the famous Kimbell Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas that catapulted the institution to the top ranks of world class museums. A specialist in Italian Renaissance art, Mr. Pillsbury was the Kimbell's director from 1980 to 1998. He was previously the founding director of the Yale Center for British Art. In 1986, the National Gallery in London offered its directorship to Mr. Pillsbury. His personal art collection included seven Frank Reaugh paintings. ¹⁵

There are only a select few artists that dedicated their life's work to relatively one narrow subject matter. Frank Reaugh is in a distinct class with the likes of John James Audobon (1785-1851) and and Martin Johnson Heade (1819-1904).

When it comes to painting the nobility of the Longhorn and capturing the heart and sole of the man responsible for helping preserve one of the greatest icons of Texas history, Fred Darge's montage portrait of Frank Reaugh, *Dean of Texas Painters*, handsomely portrays the man himself. What more can one say about this deep-felt tribute to a fellow artist that obviously was well respected by Darge as well as many others.



Portrait: A Tribute to Frank Reaugh, 24" x 20", Oil on Canvas, The John L. Nau III, Collection of Texas Art

This colorful portrait expressed in the Darge style of panoramic art, with the inclusion of Frank Reaugh at his easel, grazing Longhorns and El Sibil, Reaugh's home, explicitly highlight the iconography associated with the *Dean of Texas Painters* and his legendary legacy left to the State of Texas. It would be hard to imagine this portrait done in any other style. Darge's simplistic, but visually effective composition captures the greatness of the *Dean of Texas Painters*.

By the time Darge began leaving his home base of Dallas and traveling to the ranches of the Big Bend and beyond in 1936, Longhorn cattle had become almost a memory and a relic of the Old West. What happened? Where did they all go?



Longs at Pasture, 12" x 16", Oil on Canvas Board, Circa 1950's, Courtesy of Vogt Galleries 2016

Like the buffalo, there was never any concern about conservation until it was almost too late. An estimated five million plus Longhorns had been rounded up and moved off the Texas open ranges and driven up the cattle trails to the Midwest and beyond between 1869 and 1890. The true Longhorn began to rapidly disappear by 1920 and it became apparent that only prompt action could save them from extinction.

Through a special Congressional appropriation, funds were made available for an intensive effort to save them. Forest Service employees, Will C. Barnes and John Hatton, armed with descriptions of the Longhorn "type", set forth on a 5,000-mile search for typical animals. After inspecting more than 30,000 head of cattle, a herd of 20 cows, 3 bulls, 3 steers, and

4 calves were assembled. In August of 1927 they were shipped to the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. The W.M.W.R. still maintains the offspring to the original herd. ¹⁶



Photograph Courtesy of Oklahoma Humanities Council, Inc.

The W.M.W.R. was only one of seven groups of people with seven different origins and different genetic bases assembled to preserve and protect the breed from extinction. These groups became known as the *seven families*. They were for the most part unrelated. They are J.G. Phillips, Sr. (West Columbia), M.P. Wright, Jr. (Nueces Strip), Henry Butler (League City), Emil H. Marks (west of Houston), Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge (Cache, Oklahoma), Cap Yates (Alpine) and Graves Peeler (Christine). Peeler is credited more than anyone else with his singular contribution of being a prime mover in saving a piece of not only Texana, but also western Americana, the Longhorn breed of cattle. ¹⁷



Texas Longhorns, 9" x 12", Oil on Canvas Board, Private Collection

There are said to be other unrelated families, but the numbers are very small and no other groups with origins this old are commonly referred to in Longhorn circles. All *seven families* originated in the early 1930s and before. They were separate from other herds with minimal exchanges of blood stock prior to 1932. Each of the *seven families* introduced a blend of new genetics to avoid inbreeding after their herds matured.

Oddly enough, it was not the meat on the bones that made the demand so high for Longhorn cattle. It was the hide and tallow companies, as early beef processing plants were known, that were a major industry in the early days of the

industrial revolution. Meat was mostly an economic by-product. The demand for tallow and hides was the driving force of the cattle business. For nearly 2,000 years, candles had been the chief source of light. By the dawn of the 20th Century, with the invention of electricity and the light bulb by Thomas Edison, the demand for large quantities of tallow eventually faded. ¹⁸

Another reason Longhorn cattle almost touched on extinction was because cattlemen thought there were other breeds, like Herefords, that could gain weight quicker and were more resistant to various diseases even though it was learned that all breeds are subject to their own peculiar diseases and traits.

Many prominent artists have included various renditions of Longhorn cattle in their paintings. Fred Darge, staying true to form, also painted Longhorns and used the drama of the long trail drive, the roundup and stampede to highlight his artistic work. He also chose to go where cattle were pastured and paint the natural surroundings as he did in the Big Bend and Trans-Pecos Region. Darge of course

always favored the grandeur of high mountains as a background for his paintings. It is almost his personal trademark.



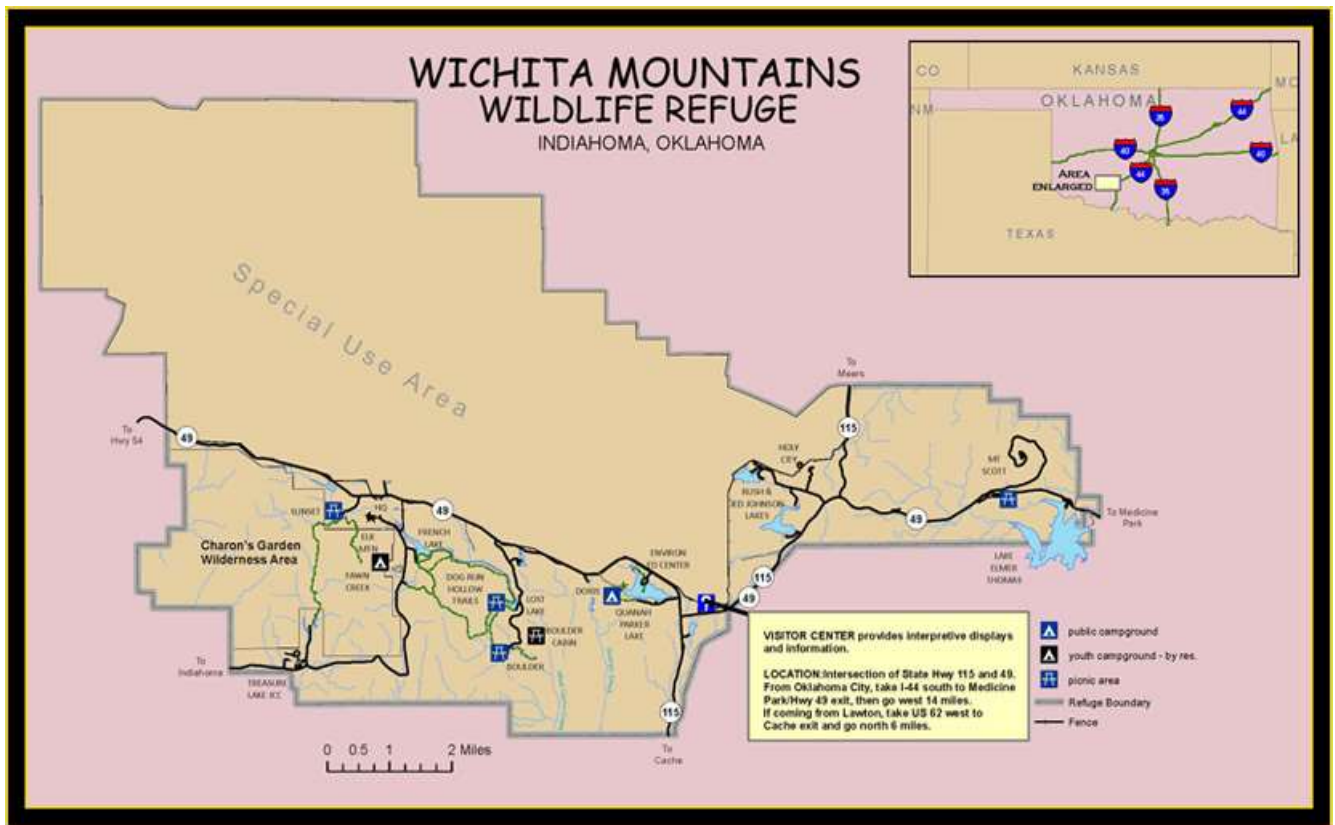
Roundup at the Wichita Wildlife Refuge, 12 x 16, Oil on Canvas Board, Circa 1950's, Collection of Bob and Gayle Coffee

It seems like only Darge and Reaugh would take the time to go up to the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge to see for themselves what Longhorns actually looked like in their protected government reservation. Reaugh knew better than anyone on this earth the likeness of Longhorns in a pasture grazing or being driven up the cattle trails.

The W.M.W.R. was just the sort of place where Darge felt at home. High mountains and cattle in their natural pastured surroundings grazing on grass, laying down and resting or maybe gazing off into the distance. No drama, just plain old cows doing what they do best every day, day in and day out. Nothing fancy so to speak, just Darge working at his own simplistic style of art, painting what was in his vision and providing us a legacy of the past as it happened in that moment of time.

It is unfortunate that Darge did not see the historical importance of dating and adding more description and location to his art work. Maybe even a one or two sentence story. He has left us all with great visuals of important historical significance. Unfortunately, he left it up to us to dig up and research the stories behind his wonderful scenes that are an important legacy of former times. Actual dates can only be guessed, but circa late 1940s or early 1950s seems appropriate for these pieces.

Christopher Columbus must be credited with some real foresight to have selected cattle which could produce over 500 years of offspring, pull thousands of wagons over the National Road, and the Oregon Trail, set the stage for the creation of the legendary American cowboy and still play a prominent role in producing cutting edge quality, lean nutritional food. Indeed, the once unappreciated Longhorn has earned the respect not only of those who love history, but of professional ranchers who are totally profit minded. The *old breed* is front and center in a high-tech world. ¹⁹



Map of Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge, Indianahoma, Oklahoma.