The Kansas Beef Industry

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Purebreds Move West: The 1890s

One of the most interesting and important single contributions that Kansas cattlemen of the late nineteenth century made to the western beef business was in the area of upbreeding. Before the century ended, thousands of well-bred cattle were sired and matured in the state and then shipped to the western range country. Prior to the 1890s most of the well-bred cattle had originated in England and Scotland or in the midwestern states of the Mississippi River valley. Kansas, initially a transfer point for these bovine aristocrats, gradually began to add its own improved stock to the growing flow westward.1

The westward path of improved stock was counter to the traditional movement of cattle. To the flood of stocker and feeder cattle that moved out of the West toward the midwestern markets was added a stream of upgraded stock moving in the opposite direction. This movement continued well into the twentieth century—until western producers had established their own purebred herds—and a shadow of it remains even today.

In a larger sense, upgrading of range cattle was an integral part of the transition from open range to ranch. It was both cause and effect. Because improved stock was dependent upon close herd management, cattlemen recorded few successes in improving their herds until after fences were built. A little barbed wire enabled stockmen to improve their herds and, most importantly, to harvest the products of good sires. Upbred stock, since they were more valuable, deserved more winter feeding and water close at hand, and required supervision during the calving period to minimize the risk of calf losses, all of which were possible only on a well-managed ranch.

Small and large farms that specialized in purebred production supplied much of the upgraded stock that moved West. The owners of these farms
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worked seriously at improving the breed and spent a good deal of money in the effort. Range producers then bought the bulls for use with commercial cattle or to start their own purebred herds for bull production. Frequently, these purebred establishments were owned by men who had considerable money, made not in agriculture but rather in some urban business. Some men made money and gained fame in the business, while others accomplished neither, but most contributed some impetus to transforming the long-legged scrubs into modern beef-producing machines.

Almost from the beginning there were attempts to upgrade the nondescript cattle that stocked the grasslands, but not until the 1870s and 1880s did the movement reach full force. Reasons abounded for upbreeding, but pride and profit were the prime movers. Most cattlemen had always desired to produce the best stock that their particular circumstances allowed. Improved cattle were more pleasing to the eye, a source of pride for the owner, and, most importantly, more profitable. During the last half of the nineteenth century, when the country was becoming increasingly urbanized and industrialized, there were demands for increased quantity and quality in the beef trade. A growing export trade, especially to England, also contributed to these demands. Many cornbelt feeders had stopped feeding Longhorns by the 1870s and were in the market for upbred feeder stock that fattened better and did not bring the dreaded Texas fever into the Midwest. Upgrading stock and the turn away from Longhorns, then, helped ensure profits for those who fed cattle.

An Ohio correspondent to the Kansas Farmer, who was typical of those who fattened stock, wrote that cornbelt feeders wanted animals that gained weight rapidly and thus reduced feed costs. Further, he said, feeders desired "compact, medium-sized, thick-fleshed, easy keepers, that will mature at 3 years old and make a 1,500 to 1,700 pound steer." A quiet disposition, no horns, broad backs, deep loins, and massive quarters were highly desirable qualities too, because, he noted, "it costs no more to produce a pound of steak than a pound of neck or tripe." Another correspondent suggested that an improved digestive and circulatory system that utilized feed to the best advantage was the most desirable quality in the upgraded stock. Only blooded animals could fill the requirement of increased quantity and quality. The upbred steer often weighed 500 to 600 pounds more at three years of age than his poorly bred counterpart. Reports of experiments at Kansas State Agricultural College that were published in the Kansas Farmer and other agricul-
tural publications supported the gainability qualities of blooded stock when compared with scrubs.\(^4\)

The premium paid by meat packers for quality stock obviously helped stimulate the feedlot demand for upgraded cattle. The packing industry played no small part in the upbreeding process. Not only did packers help create the demand, but several engaged directly in purebred production themselves. Kirk B. Armour of the famous packing family, for example, bought the herd of C. M. Culbertson, when in the 1890s depression forced the latter to liquidate his famous herd. Armour placed this herd on his farm near Excelsior Springs, Missouri, expanded it through additional purchases, and sent most of the increase to the range country. George A. Fowler, a Kansas City meat packer, was associated with William J. Tod, long-time rancher of Maple Hill, Kansas, in the production of purebred cattle, many of which were used in the Flint Hills or were sent to upgrade the commercial herd on their Crosselle Ranch in New Mexico.\(^5\)

As a result of observing these improved animals, many range producers by the late nineteenth century agreed that not only did blooded stock adapt well to range conditions but they were also better money-makers. Only the specific breed—Shorthorn, Aberdeen-Angus, or Hereford—remained a matter of dispute.

As early as the eighties some improvement was noticed in the cattle being trailed from Texas. This improvement was largely the result of cattle moved south from Kansas shipping points to the Texas ranges. A. M. Lord of Dodge City, for example, assembled 1,300 yearling bulls from Missouri, Iowa, and Illinois and trailed them south from Dodge City in 1882. Lord's cattle must have passed several herds of Longhorns moving in the opposite direction on the first leg of their journey to urban markets. Also during the 1880s, the Burlingame, Kansas, firm of Finch, Lord, & Nelson estimated that they had sent around 10,000 Hereford bulls to Texas between 1881 and 1888, and Lucien Scott shipped breeding stock from his Ridgewood Farm near Leavenworth. Scott, a banker by trade, used his upbred Kansas cattle to improve the quality of the stock on his LS Ranch in the Texas Panhandle, a spread that became famous throughout the West. Other Kansans followed the example of the large exporters of fine cattle, much to the advantage of beef producers in Texas and throughout the Great Plains.\(^6\)

Shorthorns were the first breed to be used extensively in upbreeding
programs. The first were imported into the United States during the late eighteenth century, with hundreds more following during the next century. By the 1860s Shorthorns had migrated as far west as Kansas, where a few farms were being devoted to upgraded stock. Samuel S. Tipton, a cattleman in eastern Kansas, brought about fifty Shorthorns into Kansas Territory from Ohio after a brief stay in Iowa. As early as 1859 he recorded fifteen of these purebreds in the breed's herd book, the first purebred Shorthorns known to have existed in the state.

Additional Shorthorn cattle appeared soon after the Civil War. Albert Crane early in the 1870s kept a famous herd at his Durham Park farm north of Wichita. Crane had graduated from Harvard Law School before making a fortune in Chicago real estate and investing in Kansas land and cattle. He soon bought Shorthorn bulls to use on 3,000 Longhorn cows, while building a small purebred herd of his own with cattle brought from the Midwest or imported from England. For a while during the seventies, cows that Crane had purchased for more than $20,000 apiece, as well as a bull from England at $25,000, grazed the bluegrass that he had sown after plowing under the native grass. It is doubtful that Crane's heavy investment in fine cattle ever paid for itself, but he did sprinkle some fine Shorthorn blood throughout central Kansas.

George Washington Glick, first Democrat to govern Kansas, also bred Shorthorns. A threshing machine accident that severely injured both feet had forced young Glick from his father's Ohio farm and into the law office of Rutherford B. Hayes. After some experience with Hayes, Glick practiced law in Ohio, then moved to Atchison, Kansas, where he prospered in both business and politics. But practicing law did not satisfy Glick's longing to improve the agriculture of his adopted state. Thus, during the 1870s he bought what was called the Shannon Hill stock farm west of Atchison, and there built a herd of more than a hundred purebred Shorthorns. Glick claimed that he chose the breed because of its large, well-marbled carcass, its early-maturing qualities, its mild disposition, and its superior milk production. Murdo Mackenzie, manager of the Matador Land and Cattle Company, bought many of Glick's bulls for use with range cows, paying $80 to $120 per head during the 1890s. The herd was finally dispersed in 1900, when Glick went to Florida to spend his twilight years on a citrus farm.

The master Shorthorn breeder during this early period was W. A. Harris of Linwood. According to C. W. McCampbell, beef cattle specialist at Kansas State Agricultural College for many years, Harris had the "most famous herd
in America during the '80s and '90s.” Harris made his specific contribution by following the lead of the great Scottish Shorthorn breeder, Amos Cruickshank. Both men devised matings and made herd selections based on individual merit rather than on ancestry, as the Bates Shorthorn people had tended to do. Using many animals of Cruickshank breeding, which he obtained from Canada, as well as a few superior Bates cattle, Harris revolutionized the type of Shorthorns raised in the United States. His cattle, when compared to the older Bates Shorthorns, improved markedly the size and fleshing ability of the breed. His fame spread even to the British Isles, where some of his cattle were exported during the late eighties and early nineties.

The depression of the 1890s and a growing interest in politics forced Harris to sell his prized herd. He was first elected a United States congressman, then a United States senator in 1896. His famous herd was dispersed the same year, but his Shorthorns had already made their mark in American breeding circles, not least of which was the effect they had on the Tomson cattle, probably the most enduring herd of Shorthorns in Kansas.  

T. K. Tomson, who had migrated to Kansas during the Civil War, established a farm near Dover and another south of Topeka, around Wakarusa. It was 1886, however, before he got into the Shorthorn business with a small herd of common grade cows. To this he added a famous bull named Phyllis Duke, which he purchased at a sheriff’s sale in Kentucky for the paltry sum of $25.50, as the bull was in poor flesh. Thistletop, a bull bred by Cruickshank, was also placed in the herd. Then during the 1890s John and James G. Tomson became their father’s associates, and the purebred business was expanded. Young Jim Tomson displayed early the shrewdness and determination that was essential in making their herd famous. Jim, the genius who built the herd, became known as one of the best judges of cattle in the country. Kansans tell the story that W. A. Harris mistakenly listed for sale one of his coveted herd sires, Gallant Knight, in a letter to young James Tomson, who insisted that the letter constituted a bona fide offer, and Harris was persuaded to sell this excellent bull that he had intended to keep for his own herd.

Gallant Knight and several good cows purchased later at the Harris dispersion sale were added to the growing herd of Shorthorns, aiding in the development of what came to be known as the Tomson Type, cattle that were of “scale and substance, thickly and evenly fleshed, combined with quality and breediness.” During the twentieth century the Tomson name became almost synonymous with Shorthorn, especially in Kansas. The contributions of the Tomson Shorthorns to their home state can be judged from the fact that
over half of their production was sold to Kansas breeders. A few were sent west, and the remainder were sold in states to the east of Kansas.\(^{10}\)

The black Galloway and Aberdeen-Angus, nature's dehorners, were not far behind the Shorthorns in arriving on the western scene. George Grant is usually given credit for importing the first Aberdeen-Angus into the United States. Grant had made a fortune as a London cloth merchant, part of which, it was said, came as a result of hiscornering the supply of black crepe at the time of Prince Albert’s death. Be that as it may, he did have money. After visiting Kansas he decided to plant a colony on the state’s western grassland. Thus, in 1873 he brought a group of immigrants and four black bulls through the port of New Orleans and on to a site a few miles east of Hays, which he called Victoria. The colony soon failed, but the bulls sired hundreds of calves from Texas Longhorn cows.

At the time of Grant’s death in 1878, over 800 crossbred calves had been dispersed from his herd. These mixed-blood calves “created a sensation” when their rapid gainability became evident to eastern feeders. McCampbell, who may have been a bit too laudatory, noted in his study of upbreeding that Grant’s importation “more than any other single factor stimulated a desire for better sires.” It was an odd turn of fate, McCampbell continued, “that Angus cattle which furnished the inspiration that really started the work of improving Kansas cattle, were not used extensively in this work.” The greater availability of other breeds accounted for the smaller role of Angus cattle, but one might also question McCampbell’s evaluation of the blacks as the inspiration. Shorthorns were already established to some degree by 1873, and the great Hereford boom was not far off. But Grant’s work did help stimulate interest in the Aberdeen-Angus and contributed to the founding in Kansas of several herds of purebreds.

Probably none of the other purebred herds descended from Grant’s importations, although no one knows for sure what became of the original four bulls. T. J. McCreary of Highland had one of the first purebred Angus herds in the state, and he was joined shortly by J. S. and W. R. Goodwin of Beloit. A representative of the Goodwin herd won a major prize at a Kansas City stock show as early as 1885. Many of the finest Angus herds in the state, however, were begun around the turn of the century, or several years after.\(^{11}\)

Shorthorn and Angus cattle certainly helped upgrade stock, but it was the white-faced Herefords that played the most significant role both in Kansas
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and throughout the West. The Herefords' popularity was based on their availability, their attractive appearance, and, most heavily, upon the belief that they were the best winter and summer grazers, especially on scanty pastures. Ironically, the poor milking ability of Herefords when compared with Shorthorns enhanced their popularity, because udder and nursing problems were reduced and the cow's strength was not spent producing milk. Rather, Hereford cows had excellent records of breeding back quickly and producing calves the following year, even though drought might have ravaged their pastures. Hereford bulls were even more popular than the female stock. They were virile and aggressive breeders during the hot summer months, and even came through long winters in good physical condition when feed was short. It was the Hereford bull, more than any other single factor, that increased the size and quality of range cattle, enabling any producer to increase his beef production without necessarily enlarging his land holdings.

Herefords fattened well, too. Their quiet dispositions in feedlots and their ability to manufacture grain into a highly desirable meat were cited repeatedly by those who championed the breed. The fattening ability of the breed was indicated by the prices paid at marketing centers. During the first forty years of the twentieth century, for instance, the highest price paid each year for fat steers at Chicago went to Herefords more than half the time.\(^{12}\)

The Hereford first came to America after being developed in England during the eighteenth century in response to the increased demands for meat in the growing urban centers. Breeders in western England were responsible for Hereford development, especially the elder and younger Benjamin Tomkinds of Herefordshire, a county in England adjacent to Wales. Henry Clay, United States senator and frequent presidential hopeful, as well as an agriculturalist, from Lexington, Kentucky, imported the first Herefords into the United States in 1817. But to avoid continuous inbreeding, Clay soon mixed the breed with Shorthorns and their identity was lost. A few whitefaces were brought over after Clay's initial importation and were used sparingly from New England to Ohio. Although there is an authentic record of Clay's import, the first importation of Herefords to the United States that resulted in the founding of a breeding herd of a substantial basis, a shipment from England in 1840 consisting of twenty-two head, was made by William H. Sotham of New York.

Importations of purebred Herefords before the mid-1870s, however, were not great and probably did not exceed 250 head. This changed rapidly during the next decade. New imports, along with the cattle already here, helped
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establish several Hereford farms in midwestern states during the 1870s. Thomas Clark, for example, produced excellent Herefords, first in Ohio, then Illinois. About the same time, T. L. Miller, whose industrious promotional work was equally as important as the quality of his cattle, and C. M. Culbertson helped move the center for Hereford production from Ohio to Illinois. Culbertson, a wealthy Chicago packer, imported the first Anxiety blood, a line destined to have great influence on American Herefords. He also persuaded other men of wealth to enter the purebred business, among the most significant of whom were Moses Fowler and W. S. Van Natta. These men, along with many others, worked not only to improve the breed but also to spread it into the West.¹³

Hiram Woodward and Walter M. Morgan, both of Marshall County near Blue Rapids, share the honor of introducing Herefords into Kansas. Both had connections with Thomas Aston of Elyria, Ohio, who had brought some of the original Tomkins blood to the United States when he migrated from Herefordshire. Woodward brought the first Herefords into the state in 1872 and showed them at a Leavenworth fair a couple of years later. But Woodward died in 1877, before the cattle were fully developed, and the herd was sold to T. L. Miller.

Walter Morgan did more to popularize Herefords in the state than did Woodward, as his herd advertised the breed from the 1870s until a year before his death in 1916. Morgan had migrated from England to Ohio in 1852 and there became associated with Thomas Aston. Several years after beginning this position, he married Aston's daughter, and they moved to Kansas in 1876. With them the Morgans brought Aston cattle that had been crossed with blood from T. L. Miller's herd. They attempted to show their cattle almost as soon as they arrived, but getting the Hereford accepted by fair judges as a legitimate beef breed was no small task. Morgan's son reported many years later that it would have been as easy for "Governor Al E. Smith to get justice in a K.K.K. lodge in 1928 as for Herefords to win over Short-horns at that time." Despite prejudice, however, Morgan's herd eventually won many prizes at top shows, and soon established Marshall County as the "Herefordshire of Kansas."¹⁴

Other Hereford herds were established in widely scattered areas of the state soon after the pioneering work of Morgan and Woodward. Shockey & Gibb near Lawrence, J. S. Hawes of Colony, T. J. Higgins around Council Grove, and W. E. Campbell, whose headquarters were near Kiowa, all had

³²
Herefords during the early period. Campbell was especially significant in introducing the breed to range herds.

W. E. Campbell had been one of the first to trail Texas cattle into the state after the Civil War, and he eventually bought grazing land of his own southwest of Wichita. To his herd of native cattle he introduced blooded Shorthorn bulls and championed their value throughout the Southwest. Neighbors called him "Shorthorn" Campbell, but this sobriquet soon gave way to "Whiteface" Campbell when he began using that breed in 1879. His enthusiasm for Herefords grew to more than double that which he had expressed for the former breed. Campbell even established a purebred herd, which produced bulls for his range cattle and won top prizes at the best stock shows in the area.

Campbell's greatest contribution was in demonstrating the Hereford bull's ability to transmit his desirable qualities to scrub cattle. In 1881 six of his small south Texas cows strayed into the pasture of his purebred herd and were serviced by Hereford bulls. Three of the calves from this chance mating were carefully fed before becoming Campbell's demonstration exhibit at the Kansas City Fat Stock Show in 1883. His favorite, a heifer called Texas Jane, weighed 1,260 pounds as a yearling, some 500 pounds more than the Texas cow that had mothered her. Texas Jane was kept for three years in a special pen at the Kansas City market where she demonstrated before hundreds of range producers the results from good Hereford bulls.15

With men like Campbell showing that added weight on upbred cattle resulted in increased profits, and with many of the agricultural journals urging stockmen to eliminate the plug, scrub, and runt, it is not surprising that the upbreeding of range herds became an important concern towards the end of the century. The Hereford was in a prime position to facilitate the change, especially after breeders had eliminated some of the deficiencies in the breed.

The Herefords' thin, cat-hammed hindquarters were their principal fault and the source of much criticism during the early years of their development in the United States. This deficiency was especially significant because many of the more expensive beef cuts come from the hindquarters. When improvement of this trait occurred, not only was the Herefords' meat-producing abilities enhanced but also their popularity. The Hereford boom in the 1880s followed closely the first successful steps to solve this hind-end problem.

Charles and James Gudgell and Thomas A. Simpson were most responsible for taking the first step that led to enlarging the hindquarters. These
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Transplanted Kentuckians did much of their early breeding work around Pleasant Hill, Missouri, where they founded in 1876 a purebred herd that was to become easily the most famous and influential of its time. Later, they moved their headquarters to Independence, Missouri. Donald R. Ornduff, in his history of the Hereford breed, judged that “in ultimate influence upon the Hereford breed in America, no contemporary herd came close to matching the contributions of Gudgell & Simpson and no bull that of Anxiety 4th 9904.” Regarding this bloodline, Ornduff had written earlier that there was little doubt that Anxiety had “supplied the foundation upon which the improvement wrought in the United States in the old English-type Herefords was primarily based.” Even today most purebred Herefords trace their ancestry to Anxiety 4th.

Thomas A. “Governor” Simpson, a quiet man with an endearing dry wit, was a distant cousin of the father of the Gudgell brothers, and had been a partner from time to time in some of the elder Gudgell’s farming activities. Perhaps as a mark of his willingness to make decisions, he was nicknamed “Governor” early in life, and the Gudgell sons, who were some twenty-five years younger, naturally picked up the term, as did his friends in the Hereford field. Upon their father’s death before they attained their majority, the “Governor,” who never held political office, became their legal guardian.

The Gudgell brothers became engaged in the range-cattle business at Las Animas, Colorado, more by circumstance than by deliberate design. When they first came to Missouri they entered the employ of a bank in Kansas City. When hard times struck in the early 1870s they acquired a financial interest in a cattle operation through a transaction which had to do with a loan the bank had made. Their partners in this venture, which eventually reached into Oklahoma and Kansas and gave them an insight into the need for high-grade range bulls, were Major W. A. Towers and John R. Towers, the firm operating as Towers & Gudgell. Simpson never had a financial interest in this venture.

Following the death of his wife, Simpson made his home for the remainder of his life in Charles Gudgell’s large home in Independence. This house also served as the first office of what was to become the American Hereford Association, and became a renowned meeting place for important cattlemen from throughout the country. Simpson always kept on hand a barrel of excellent Scotch whisky, which was always available to guests, he himself professing to indulge a bit only when struck by “a cold.” Gudgell & Simpson also made notable importations of Aberdeen-Angus cattle from Scotland, but sold them out within a few years. They were, however, charter
members of both the Angus and Hereford breed associations, and Charles Gudgell served as the secretary of both organizations from the office in a large room in his home in Independence.

Charles Gudgell, whose brother James had died in 1897, continued the purebred business alone after Simpson’s death in 1904 until the entire herd was dispersed in 1916. The Gudgell sons had no desire to continue the purebred business, although ranching interests, including land in northwest Kansas, were retained. The elder Gudgell retired to California soon after the dispersal of the purebred cattle and began construction of a beautiful new home. Death, unfortunately, claimed him barely three months after the herd was sold. Observers of the Gudgell & Simpson enterprise have given both men equal credit for its accomplishments. Gudgell received praise for his keen business sense and willingness to provide capital, while Simpson was lauded for his remarkable ability to judge cattle and plan breeding programs.17

An often-repeated story concerns Simpson’s journey to England in 1881 to find a bull with a “hind-end on him,” as he had been admonished by Charles Gudgell. This was the trip that produced the famous Anxiety 4th, a son of the original Anxiety that had died shortly after arriving in 1879 in Illinois. Through a judicious and skilled use of linebreeding—a practice of mating animals that have as close a relationship to the foundation as possible and the least amount of relationship to each other except through the foundation—Gudgell & Simpson were able to concentrate Anxiety 4th’s blood in his numerous progeny. Much criticism and many predictions of failure were leveled at the firm by those who failed to understand that linebreeding was a useful form of closebreeding when accompanied by a rigid culling of the herd. The bull Don Carlos, which in turn produced Beau Brummel and Lamplighter, was the most famous son of Anxiety 4th; but another son, Beau Real, the sire of such famous sons as Kansas Lad and Wild Tom, should not be overlooked. These six bulls and many other bulls and heifers represented the high concentration of Anxiety 4th’s blood that was destined to make major improvements throughout the nation.

It has been estimated that Anxiety 4th had more effect on Kansas up-breeding than any other animal, by improving such influential purebred herds as those of Shockey & Gibb, Scott & Whitman, C. S. Cross, and Robert H. Hazlett. But the effect that Gudgell & Simpson had on purebred herds was only part of their magnificent story, as they also directly influenced many commercial range herds. The Horace G. Adams family and the Tod-Fowler interests, all of Maple Hill, along the northern edge of the Flint Hills, were
only two examples of the many who used Anxiety 4th breeding on large range herds. Likewise, the Gudgell brothers, as previously noted, had ranching interests where Anxiety 4th's blood was used on commercial herds. The firm of Gudgell & Simpson also eventually raised purebreds in Kansas, first on a ranch near Richmond, then on a ranch of nearly 10,000 acres in northwestern Kansas, near Edmond. In fact, the entire breeding herd was sent to the Edmond ranch after 1909, with only small holdings retained in the Independence area for show or sale. This latter location near Kansas City, where hundreds of prospective customers patronized the stockyards, was helpful in spreading Gudgell & Simpson's blooded cattle.

It is not surprising that the Gudgell & Simpson influence was so widely felt when one considers that their purebred herd sometimes approached 800 head and that it "shelled-out" bulls by the carload. Fully two-thirds of Anxiety 4th's own sons and literally thousands of bulls with Anxiety 4th's blood went into commercial range herds, most of which grazed the plains of Kansas and the Southwest. Gudgell & Simpson enlarged the hindquarters of the Herefords, improved their "mellowness of flesh" and easy feeding characteristics, and helped decrease the age at which they matured. Even more important, they had demonstrated to American breeders that the blood of a superior animal could be successfully concentrated through linebreeding. It was this practice that the Kansan Robert H. Hazlett employed in becoming one of the greatest Hereford breeders of the twentieth century.

One of the largest purebred Hereford herds in Kansas during the 1890s, if not the largest, was that of Charles S. Cross, who had built a herd of 300 cows by the end of the decade. In addition to fine breeding on his model Sunny Slope farm, a few miles northwest of Emporia, Cross illustrated again that purebred breeders frequently had large financial resources, money that was often made in nonagricultural pursuits. The literature abounds with examples of men who had made fortunes in oil, real estate, banking, or other urban-centered businesses before going into the purebred trade. The Cross experience illustrated several other characteristics of purebred production during the 1890s as well, especially the widening influence of Anxiety 4th, the continued ties American breeders retained with England, the large amount of capital that was required, and the precarious nature of the investment. Finally, Cross exemplified a certain mystique that developed around this class of breeder and his livestock.

C. S. Cross had come to Emporia with his parents just after the Civil War. His father invested in the First National Bank in Emporia a couple of years
before the financial panic in 1873, but neither the panic nor the depression permanently harmed the Cross banking interests. At his death in 1891 the elder Cross passed to his son his interest in the bank, which must have exceeded 50 percent. C. S. Cross first diversified his economic interests during the middle 1880s when he began to fatten stock for slaughter. Then, with the depression in the 1890s and the low prices for purebreds that resulted, Cross was encouraged to enter the purebred business. He bought foundation stock from Shockey & Gibb, who were forced to liquidate, Gudgell & Simpson, Fowler & Tod, and several other well-known breeders. Among the cattle purchased from Fowler was the bull Wild Tom, a grandson of Anxiety 4th, which became not only the most important sire for the young herd but also a nationally famous bull. All of the stock was kept at Sunny Slope farm, which consisted of a large residence, a bunkhouse, several large barns—all scrupulously kept in the finest condition—and over 2,000 acres of land. Some 760 acres of this land belonged to Cross, and the balance was leased. The day-to-day work was performed by a manager and a score of other hired hands, while Cross divided his time between the farm and the Emporia bank.

A practice not uncommon for fine cattle breeders was that of keeping purebred hogs. Cross kept quality Poland China hogs until he disposed of them in 1896 to make room for more cattle. The hog sale was reported as one of the biggest social events of the year for the community. It needed, according to the local newspaper, “only a red lamp shade and a head prize to get into the Gazette’s society column.”

Moreover, there were a number of other sales prominent in the Cross story. The yearly progeny of the large cow herd were sold at special auctions or by private contract to those who visited the farm. The Gazette proudly announced in 1898 that Sunny Slope was the one famous thing in Lyon County and that “buyers from all over the country come here to buy fine stock.” The largest and most publicized sale at Sunny Slope was one that was held in March, 1898. Billed as the highlight Hereford auction of the decade, it included in the listing forty head of highly blooded animals that Cross had recently imported from England at a cost of over $150 a head. The Breeder’s Gazette, Harpers Weekly, and dozens of newspapers covered the two-day sale, which was attended by over 3,000 people. Gross receipts totaled over $61,300 for an average of $407 per animal. Almost four decades later, one of the auctioneers remembered the sale in 1898 as one of the greatest he had ever attended. Advertised in many national stock journals and by an elaborate catalogue bound in red, velvet-like
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cloth, it attracted the leading breeders of the nation. Bidding was moderate to begin with, but when a gentleman from Virginia finally bid $3,000 for the bull Salisbury pandemonium broke loose at ringside. The enthusiasm carried through the remainder of the sale. Some have said that the national attention that surrounded the event, as well as the nationwide attendance, did more for the breed during the difficult 1890s than anything else. "It was without doubt," one observer said, "the greatest sale of Herefords ever made in America up to that time." 20

With the assets of "unlimited capital, energy, and brains," according to the local newspaper, Cross built one of the largest herds of blooded cattle in America. The herd was the source of much pride in the community, as the Cross cattle not only attracted many distinguished visitors to the Emporia area but advertised the small town by winning top prizes at most of the shows on the western circuit.

All the transactions of the Cross enterprises were not apparent, however, and when the financial crash came the community was shocked. The crisis became visible several months after the large sale in March, 1898, which was a last desperate attempt by Cross to regain financial stability. The effort failed, however, and a bank examiner closed the First National Bank in November, 1898. The Cross bank had lent so much money that less than 16 percent of the deposits were on hand, while other local banks, by comparison, maintained close to 40 percent. Cross and his partner had been heavy borrowers, mostly without adequate collateral. Cross alone was estimated to have borrowed as much as $150,000, with Sunny Slope as collateral; but only a month after the bank was closed the model farm and remaining stock were sold for only $40,000. On the day that the bank's activities were officially suspended, Cross paid a final visit to his beloved Sunny Slope and there, in an upstairs bedroom of the large house, shot himself. He had lived just forty years. 21

Cross had built what many breeders could only dream of, but he had done so at great expense. His own small fortune was lost, as well as the deposits of many members of the community, although the bank did eventually pay much of its debt after several years of litigation.

The Cross experience related directly to some of the larger problems of financing purebred as well as other cattle herds toward the end of the century. Long-term, low-interest loans to cattlemen were almost nonexistent, unless of course one owned a bank, as Cross did. Short-term loans that were rediscounted by commission firms or smaller banks and passed to the larger
sources of capital in the East were more common and even quite adequate in the view of some, but the long-term needs of cattlemen were seldom satisfied. Interest rates were also high, sometimes approaching 10 percent, and the availability of capital did not correspond well with the need. During depressions, when there was an increased need for credit, as in the early 1890s, cattlemen had more difficulty in finding capital, while the reverse was true when there was a great deal of optimism about the beef industry. In fact, the greater availability of money towards the end of the decade and the lack of precaution exercised by some bankers led to several situations in Kansas similar to that of C. S. Cross.

An eager, swashbuckling young man named Grant G. Gillett, for instance, was able to parlay his self-imposed reputation as the largest cattle feeder in Kansas into a small fortune of borrowed money without ever having adequate collateral. Gillett had a small cattle-feeding operation near Abilene during the last part of the nineteenth century that was moderately successful, but he was impatient for fortune and began to expand rapidly. Soon, hundreds of cattle began arriving at the Gillett farm and departing with such rapidity that the bank examiners did not bother to keep adequate count of the cattle or the dollars that were involved. A score of banks in a half-dozen states were involved in loans to Gillett, some on the same cattle and some on stock that did not exist. Gillett, meanwhile, traveled around in a private railroad car with his own cowboy band and hosted lavish parties for his friends and creditors in Kansas City and other large cities. But someone became suspicious in 1898, counted the cattle and dollars, and found some $200,000 to $600,000 in loans—other estimates ranged up to a million dollars—while only a few cattle could be found.

Before the audit was completed, Gillett beat a hasty retreat with a relay of fast horses to Chihuahua, Mexico. "It was reported that he took with him $100,000 in gold," but not his young wife, one newspaper reported. She and their small son joined him later, followed, it was said, by a mysterious stranger, dressed in black, and wearing a heavy, sandy mustache. Legend has it that the stranger intended to steal the gold, or kidnap Gillett and bring him back to the United States. In fact, there probably was not much gold, although the cattle king did eventually make enough money in mining and real estate to repay part of his debt. Accusations of stock frauds, and even some arrests, dogged Gillett’s footsteps for the rest of his life. He died in the 1920s, living as if he were wealthy even if he was not, after crashing a “fast car” into a telephone pole in California.22
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After another disaster in western Kansas similar to the Gillett affair, a local editor lamented philosophically that the big busts experienced by some cattlemen have a “redeeming feature, for they hasten the time when any kind of a little 2 × 4 cow-boy with only a six-shooter and a stinking cigarette can’t buy a thousand head of cattle for his individual note and mortgage.” And the editor was right. Procedures for loaning money on cattle needed revision. The dishonest hustler only increased the prejudice that some lending institutions already had against cattle paper. But most of all, those cattlemen who had collateral needed more long-term, reasonable credit. This situation, some feel, has not been entirely corrected even today, although there has been notable improvement during the twentieth century.

Financial shenanigans and subsequent disasters were not confined to these two men. Others besides Cross and Gillett also exploited the loosely organized system of financing the cattle industry. Yet in the case of Sunny Slope, the demise of Cross caused only a temporary setback in the farm’s increasing importance to the purebred trade. In 1898 C. A. Stannard, who already had a large Hereford interest as well as extensive oil properties, purchased the farm and combined his purebred stock with what remained of the Cross herd, doubling the number to almost 600 head. Stannard also reinstituted the practice of raising hogs at Sunny Slope, with a herd of 300 registered Berkshires.

The farm grew in fame, and probably fortune, under the astute management of Stannard. He spent much time on the show circuit and dispersed purebred breeding stock to many sections of the United States at almost double the rate that Cross had. Sunny Slope stock was included in auctions held in widely scattered towns and cities, including Fort Worth, Denver, and Kansas City. Many sales also continued to be made at Sunny Slope itself. One, in 1903, included on its list of large purchasers the name of Frank Rockefeller, a younger brother of the famed industrialist John D. Rockefeller. This is another example of nonagricultural money being brought into the purebred business. Led by young Frank, the Rockefellers had become interested in Kansas ranching as early as 1876, buying several thousand acres in Kiowa County and engaging in general ranching and the production of purebred Shorthorns. A herd of 400 registered Shorthorns had been accumulated by the middle 1880s. When C. S. Cross staged his large sale in 1898, Rockefeller added Herefords to his line of stock and continued to increase the number until by the early twentieth century it equaled the size of his Shorthorn herd. The Rockefeller interest was important to upbreeding in Kansas and surrounding states for several decades, for it provided an outlet for stock bred at Sunny
Slope and also helped to distribute registered stock among many range herds. A disastrous fire in "barn #3" during the winter of 1904 was about the only setback in the growth of Sunny Slope under Stannard ownership. Almost a hundred head valued at over $20,000 perished in the flames. Judging by the local newspapers, the farm remained a source of much pride in the community even after the fire. "Best" and "largest" in Kansas, "larger than the Gudgell & Simpson's herd," and "largest thoroughbred Hereford herd in the World" were only a few of the superlatives aimed at Sunny Slope. A degree of the community's pride, as well as the mystique that often surrounded purebred cattle operations, might well be judged from an unusual obituary written by the editor of the Gazette. He wrote:

Several days ago one of the most distinguished inhabitants of Lyon County died and no telegraphic reports were sent out of town, and the Gazette wouldn't have heard of it but for the fact that a friend of the Gazette went out to Sunny Slope farm Thursday and asked to see Wild Tom and was told by one of the men that Tom had been "laid away" . . . . He has won blue ribbons from cattle shows all over the United States and Canada, and his picture hangs in the rooms of all lovers of white face cattle in this country and England. At one time, while Wild Tom was the property of C. S. Cross, an offer of $25,000 was made for him and refused.

Stannard continued to operate Sunny Slope until 1910, when political obligations and an increased preoccupation with his oil interests forced him to sell. The luster of purebred breeding had also declined for Stannard by this time because of personal misfortune. His only son had contracted typhoid fever while showing Sunny Slope cattle at a county fair and died in 1907, and his wife succumbed to the same disease the following year. In 1910 the entire herd, down from over 800 head to less than 250, was sold at public auction. Sunny Slope was sold privately to a local resident and then resold the following year. Both buyers were described as "successful businessmen" who were seeking rural investments. The sum of $60,000, or more than double what Stannard had paid for the land only twelve years earlier, was cited as the sale price in each transaction.

Any picture of upbreeding in Kansas during the 1890s or in any other part of the country, for that matter, is apt to overemphasize the importance of
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the colorful producers of purebreds because they were the men who caught
the fancy of the press. The owners of range herds who patronized the pure-
bred breeders were often relegated to obscurity, even though these were the
folk who used the purebred animal for the basic purpose for which it was
bred. But the producers of purebreds were important because their herds were
the fountainheads of improved blood. Several herds in Kansas had acquired
national stature by the 1890s, and these were often owned by men of financial
means who seemed to engage in the purebred business as something of an
avocation. The depression in the early part of the decade eliminated a few
herds, but the business had recovered well by the end of the decade.

By 1900 the Hereford was well on its way to becoming the most popular
of the several breeds of beef cattle. Most important for the twentieth century,
however, was the fact that this blooded stock had begun to work its magic
on the range as more and better beef was being produced in a shorter period
of time from fewer cattle and on fewer acres of land. The “blue jeans roasts
and corduroy steaks” that had formerly stood for Kansas meat were fast
becoming a thing of the past. Finally, there was much optimism toward the
end of the nineteenth century about the present and future condition of the
industry. One enthusiast went so far as to predict that the whole country
would soon recognize Kansas as the “hub of the cattle industry of the United
States, and consequently the world.” The northwestern section of the United
States, the article noted, had too much winter weather and not enough grain
for major cattle production, while the South had less grain and more “green-
head” flies, and the East had land and grain that were too high-priced. Only
in Kansas, he said, were the conditions and resources ideal for large-scale beef
production.27

Production, however, was only the first step in putting steaks and roasts
on the American table, and in many ways it may have been the least compli-
cated. After growing and fattening the stock, cattlemen were forced to con-
front the several large businesses that were in charge of the marketing and
processing phase of the industry. As a result, many disputes between producers
and big businesses arose, and cattlemen were compelled to spend increasing
amounts of time and energy in attempting to resolve these disagreements. The
box score of the cattlemen-big-business confrontations revealed both their
successes and failures.