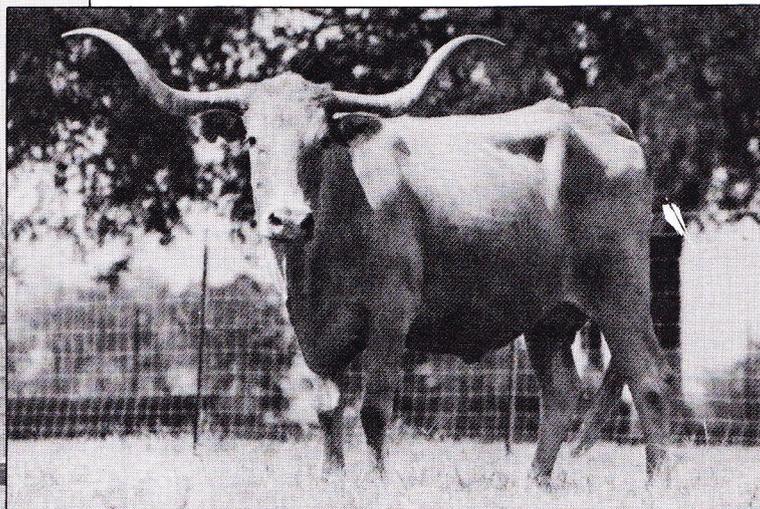


Above: Graves Peeler, a lifelong bachelor, "stayed hitched to his firm belief in the Longhorns," according to Walter Scott, despite strong prejudice against the native cattle. **Right:** Peeler, left, and brother, Alonzo, right, with a large bunch of Peeler's Longhorns on his ranch, circa 1951. **Opposite:** 17-year-old La Brasada 260/8 is out of Graves Peeler's original herd. Raised by Walter Scott, she was bought by Robert King and recently sold for \$20,000 to David Karger at the Yellow Rose Sale.

Graves Peeler— Larger than Life

*Hunting rustlers, saving Longhorns and
making history in the Lone Star State*



In 1920, at the age of 34, Peeler went to work as a cattle inspector for the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association. (His father, T. M., had been a well-known TSCRA inspector and, in fact, was killed in the line of duty when Graves was just 11.) Graves' career with the TSCRA would prove worthy of a book in itself, and contributed a great deal to the Graves Peeler legend. Recounting his adventures as an inspector to Jane Pattie for a series of articles in *The Cattleman* ("To Catch a Thief," Oct.-Dec. 1969), Peeler included accounts detailing shootouts with cattle rustlers (see inset).

"Graves Peeler was one of the finest cattle detectives the TSCRA ever had," recalls Jack Phillips (of West Columbia, Tex.) a long-time friend and fellow cattleman. "At the same time, though, he enjoyed a lot of fun. He had a dry humor and wit about him, and was generally at ease with folks. He had an eagle eye, like the Indians were supposed to, which made him an excellent tracker and marksman. He was the kind of man for whom you cared a great deal, or disliked him a great deal. I loved the old rascal myself, like I would a favorite uncle."

"Graves was a natural-born lawman," adds Leonard Stiles of the King Ranch, a close protegee of Peeler's. "He was very understanding, although many people feared him—of course, mainly those on the wrong side of the law. As far as I'm concerned, he was a legend, one of the greats."

by Charles B. Searle

Every generation has had its share of "Great Americans," a description fitting our trailblazers, pioneers and trend-setters. Although this all too often reflects a widespread infatuation with a passing fad or image, there have been those truly worthy of such a distinction. One of history's real-life great Americans, based on his contributions to our heritage and culture, is the late Graves Peeler. Texas Longhorn breeders, in particular, owe him a debt of gratitude,

as they are the beneficiaries of one of Peeler's lifelong goals: the preservation of the Texas Longhorn breed.

Raised as a Texas cattleman, Peeler early-on learned to love and appreciate the state's native cattle, as well as the Western way of life which has long been chronicled and romanticized by novelists and poets alike. Peeler's father, Thomas M. Peeler, began raising Longhorns in 1880, leaving his son with the sense that Longhorns were the *only* cattle worth owning.



Peeler-bred steers at Charlie Hellen's El Ebanito Ranch in Hebbronville, Tex. Darol Dickinson took this photo in 1973.

Along with his colorful ten-year stint with the TSCRA, Peeler will also be remembered and appreciated for his role in saving the Longhorn from imminent extinction. He was foreman of the Nash Ranch, Brazoria County, in 1927, when he was asked by fellow Brazoria County resident Frank Dew for assistance in tracking down true

Longhorns for the original herd at the Wichita Wildlife Refuge in Cache, Okla. The two were able to acquire five cows, one bull and one steer for the federal preserve.

In 1933, with the assistance of J. Frank Dobie (famous historian and author of *The Longhorns*), and at the request of Sid Richardson of Fort

Worth, Peeler set out to round up a foundation Texas Longhorn herd for the Texas Parks and Wildlife. The cattle were scarce and difficult to track down, and Peeler and Dobie wound up traveling six thousand miles in four months to find 30 cows and three bulls. Ten of these mother cows and one of the bulls became the Peeler

herd, with the remainder going to the state.

By the time the TLBAA was formed, the Texas Longhorn was no longer a vanishing breed. More and more ranchers had begun raising the cattle, with Peeler's herd being among the most prominent and highly regarded. Many of today's well-known Texas Longhorn breeders got their start in the business with help from Peeler. Among these are Dickinson Ranch, Y.O. Ranch, Walter Scott, King Ranch, Jack Phillips, John Ball, Happy Shahan, Larry Smith, John Prothro, and C. W. Hellen.

Darol Dickinson describes his introduction to the Texas Longhorn and Graves Peeler: "In 1967, I saw an ad which Happy Shahan had run in a cattle magazine talking about having Longhorns for sale, and it interested me, first of all, because I was interested in the cattle, and also because I had an

\$325 for him. [The bull, Sam Bass, has produced offspring which can be found in a number of herds today, including Miss Lin, Mr. Dillon and Mr. Lin.] When we made that first purchase, Peeler was known to have one of the best combinations of quality and quantity in the Longhorn business, so naturally his herd has played a major role in elevating the breed to its current level of popularity."

Charlie Hellen of Hebronville, Tex., also got his start in the business through Peeler. "In 1964, a friend of mine named Dick Holbein, who was a game warden up around where Peeler was at that time, took me to Graves' ranch to meet Mr. Peeler. He fed us well, made us feel right at home. I bought 30 steers from him that day and, in '65, I bought my first six Longhorn cows from the Peeler herd."

Jack Phillips and Walter Scott purchased the bulk of Peeler's Longhorn



Copy Right, a three-quarter Peeler, one-quarter Guerra bull, owned by Walter Scott.

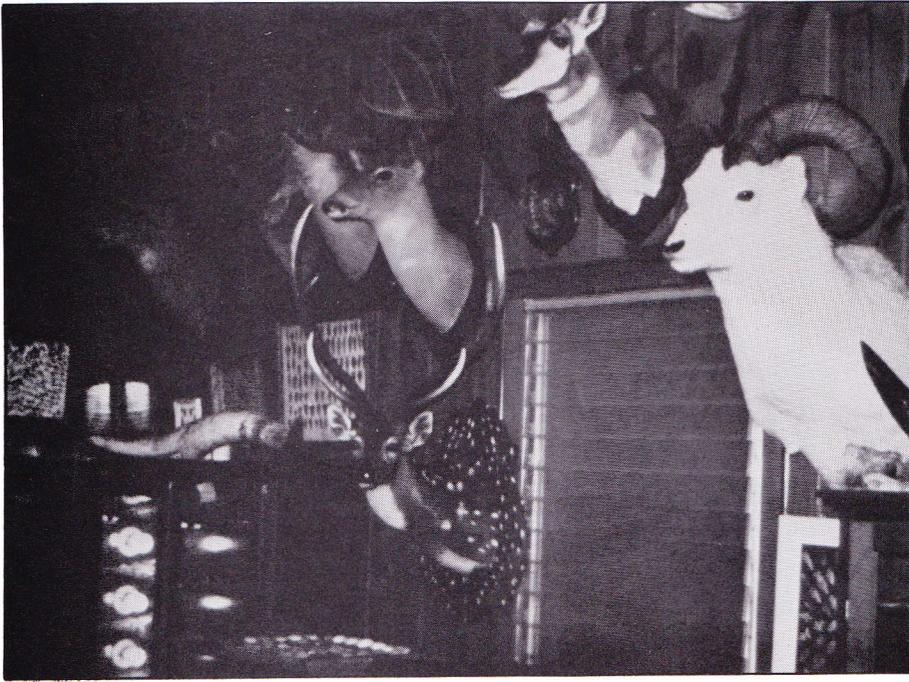
uncle living south of San Antonio by the name of Art Shahan. I called my uncle and asked whether or not he was related to Happy and if he would buy some of his cattle for me. He told me that in fact he was a distant relation, and he knew Happy had bought the Longhorns from Graves Peeler, who was my uncle's neighbor. He suggested that we buy from Peeler, since his herd was generally regarded as one of the best. So, we went to Peeler's ranch and made a deal to buy six cows, six calves and a bull from his herd. He wanted \$300 for each pair and another \$300 to pick out a bull.

"When we found the bull we wanted, Peeler said no, he couldn't let that one go for such a low price. So we settled on

herd when he decided to sell them in 1970. (Two years later, Scott bought out most of Phillips' share in the cattle.) Peeler kept 17 cows, a bull and some steers, and it was what remained of these, plus the offspring, that were purchased by John Ball and Larry Smith in 1978.

The cattle that Peeler had chosen to start his herd were professional range cattle: hardy, rugged and durable. To Peeler, a Longhorn cow was a cow that would bring in a calf every year with no exceptions. And, according to Dickinson, "He liked his cattle to have some fight in them, real Wild West cattle."

A popular story is told about a Longhorn sale which Peeler attended in the late 1960s. A feisty cow was brought



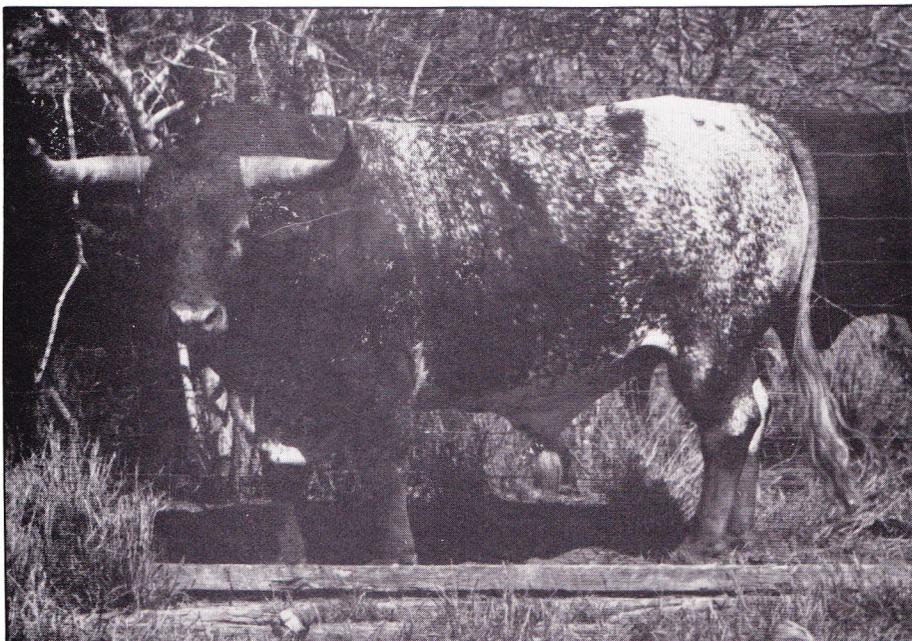
Peeler was an avid hunter and arrowhead collector. He built a museum on his place to house his trophies and collections. The artifacts are now on display at A&I University in Kingsville, Tex.

into the ring and proceeded to charge Elmer Parker, who was on horseback. Parker escaped, which prompted the animal to go after the other rider, Gene Bartnicki. While the sale spectators, the majority of whom wanted absolutely nothing to do with such a badly-behaved Longhorn, watched in amazement, Peeler jumped up, whooped with delight, and placed the final bid on the cow. "He was a rugged individual, and he appreciated the same quality in his Longhorn herd," adds Dickinson.

Other noteworthy characteristics of Peeler cattle are size and mothering ability. "The best thing about Peeler cattle is that they have the size that appeals to commercial breeders and is desirable as far as crossbreeding is concerned," says Robby Robinson of Junctin, Tex., whose herd is straight Peeler. "Graves didn't breed for color, as is commonly done today. His goal was performance, and his cows were mothers first and foremost."

One factor contributing to Peeler's original breeding guidelines was Peel-

KR 107, a straight-Peeler herd sire on King Ranch.



er's failure to anticipate the Longhorn's meteoric rise in popularity. "No, he didn't see that coming at all," according to Phillips. "I had a tough time just getting Graves to register his herd. He had no idea how popular they would become."

Concludes Robinson, "The future of the breed depends on our ability to do business with commercial cattlemen, so the Peeler characteristics will prove essential to the Longhorn's continued usefulness and survival."

The arguments over which should take priority among color, conformation and horns will continue. But such questions and the Longhorn itself might not have existed today if not for the efforts of Graves Peeler, who passed away in 1977 at nearly 91 years of age. His attitudes about life ran a direct parallel with the nature of his Texas Longhorn bloodline.

As Walter Scott, another close friend and admirer of Graves Peeler, put it, "He and the cattle knew tough times and how to survive them."

"I waited there one evening until I saw Tibadeaux drive some cattle up. I got down a foot with my rifle and pistol, crossed an irrigation canal, and got up in some weeds this side of where they had a cow to kill. Tibadeaux shot the cow three or four times, then set three big dogs on her. They caught her and he knocked her on the head with an ax. The old man then hid with his Winchester behind a pine tree that had blown down, while his two boys began skinning the cow. I slipped right up close to one of the boys, who had his back turned to me. I reached out, grabbed him by the nape of the neck, and shoved him in the ribs with my rifle. 'Just sit down!' I told him. The other boy was sitting across from the cow, skinning the underside, and I said, 'Call your daddy out here. He's hidden behind that tree.'

"So he said, 'Papa, come here,' and the old man stood up and looked in our direction.

"When he came over, I covered him and said, 'Put your gun down. You and these boys are under arrest for butchering this cow.' Tibadeaux was at a disadvantage. He had his gun pointed away from me, cocked, and I was on his left. I said, 'Drop that gun or I'll shoot it out of your hand.'

"He stooped over, like he was going to lay his gun down, but all of a sudden he squatted and shot at me, getting me through the ear. Then I let the hammer down on him. It spun him around and I shot him twice more with my six-shooter. That was the end of it." —Graves Peeler