

Celebrating 150 years of Agriculture in the *Howell* family

By Jessica Bartel

There is nothing more Texan than farming and ranching roots. Decedents of families generations back settled this territory against overwhelming odds. That heritage is what built Texas.

The Texas Family Land Heritage program (TFLH), a program through The Texas Department of Agriculture recognizes people have owned and continuously operated land in their family for 100 years or more. A ceremony is held at the senate chamber of the capital in Austin lead by Commissioner Todd Staples.

Rodney Howell and his family in November were recognized and awarded with the TFLH award for 150 years of generations in production agriculture continuously on the same place founded by his great-great-grandfather, Judge Robert Dillard. In 1859, brothers Robert and Joseph Dillard were plantation owners in Missouri.

Before the civil war broke out, and to avoid rising hostility, the two moved to Texas. Robert Dillard bought 370 acres near the Red River in the community of Sivells Bend.

On that property Dillard built a log cabin. The cabin burnt in a fire years later but the cement hearth from the home sits behind Howell's house today.

Robert Dillard and his wife Sara had two children, Elizabeth and George. Elizabeth would come to marry a civil war veteran, James Houston "Huse" Howell. Huse's brother Joseph Howell was said to have settled further west in Saint Jo and ran a trading post. He and another by the last name of Bogess were recognized for founding the town.

Bogess ran the local saloon and cafe. As the story goes, Howell said, "When it came time to name the town, Bogess said since you've become such a saint, Jo, maybe we should just call the town Saint Jo."

This was after Joseph quit his habit of drinking. Today the two main streets in Saint Jo are entitled Howell and Bogess. Howell's great-great-niece Donna Howell-Sickles currently owns and operates a art gallery on the square in the same stomping grounds as Joseph Howell.

In 1869 the ranch was bought by Huse and wife Elizabeth from her parents, Robert and Sara Dillard. The two had five children. After a stern disagreement between Huse and Elizabeth, Huse took off horse-back never to be seen again. After that, Elizabeth and son Boss Howell were left operating



Photo by Jessica Bartel

Rodney Howell stands next to wife Margaret, holding their award from the Texas Family Land Heritage program.

the ranch.

In 1919 Boss built the home that Rodney Howell with wife Margaret lives in today. Years later he acquired the ranch from his mothers estate after her passing. Starting out Boss hired carpenters to work on the project, but part way through didn't like their work and fired them.

Howell went on to say Boss finished the home himself. Boss came to marry Anna Langford and have three children. William Houston Howell, the only boy was Rodney Howell's father.

During WW1 Boss trained mules. He purchased jacks from Mexico because of the scorching summers, they tolerated working in the heat better than horses. When the



Photo by Jessica Bartel

The Howell's now operate the Lone Star Ranch on the same land founded by their ancestors 150 years ago. Presently they raise registered Angus cattle.

war ended, Boss had 20 to 30 pairs of trained mules that he sold. The market for mules after the war was good and Boss made good enough money that in the 20's he owned and farmed 1,400 acres of land.

For the time that was a large operation. Rodney Howell said, "In 1926 Boss sold 200 acres to a neighbor for \$200 an acre. Dad said during the depression you could buy land for \$15." Rodney went on to say, "That money allowed them to go into the depression with money."

Boss Howell died in 1936. Unfortunately leaving William Houston at the young age of 12. William Houston and two sister inherited a portion of their father's land and later William Houston and sister Anna Lou bought out their other sisters, Betty Sue's interest and divided the land.

William Houston would come to marry Pauline Pierce and have two children, Rodney Howell and Donna Howell-Sickles. In 1976 Rodney entered into the cattle business leasing country from his now wife's parents, Raymond and Betty Davidson.

Years later Rodney partnered with his father and bought the business from him in the late 80's totaling 850 acres. Three years after leasing the country from the Davidsons, Rodney met their daughter and the two were married in 1981.

In the beginning Rodney farmed and ran a herd of commercial cows and stocker cattle. In 1986 the rancher bought his first registered black Angus cow. Today Rodney, Margaret and sons, Brett and Brady operate Lone Star Angus.

Lone Star Angus is a embryo transfer and artificial northtexasfarmandranch.com

insemination operation with approximately 350 registered Angus females. Raising bulls as well, the ranch has an annual production sale. This year the sale will be April 19 at the Gainesville Fairgrounds. Lone Star Angus will be selling 85 bulls and 65 females.

Rodney Howell was in business with his father for years and was grateful for the time. His father, William Houston didn't have that time with his father. Surprisingly Rodney says his father discouraged him from going into ranching. Perhaps it was the struggles and experiences he went through. Rodney remembers a story his dad told of the country, long before him that was past down, of how wild and rugged this country once was, "In 1869, 30 to 40 Indians came across the river through Sivells Bend and stole all the horses." Laughing Rodney said. "No one came out of their houses to stop them."

Through Indian raids, drought, floods and merciless heat and cold the pioneers of farming and ranching stood the test of time. Rodney Howell said the difference between ranching today and in his fathers time is self-sufficing.

Rodney's father, William Houston told of days growing crops of barley, corn, oats, cotton and butchering hogs and raising chickens. Today Rodney still farms but his crops of hay and wheat all go back to feed his cattle.

Today Howells home sits on 600 acres and runs cattle on approximately 2,000 acres. For the future of Rodney said, "My goal is to build a multi-generation business with top seed stock staying in registered Angus." For more information on Lone Star Angus visit their website at lonestarangus.biz.*