

John W. Cooksley

devoted to
Nebraska

John W. Cooksley was born in the small community of Weissert, east of Broken Bow, Nebraska, in 1904 to a family of 11. He graduated from Broken Bow High School along with Marmien Pedersen, a fellow Hereford breeder. During his high school years, he met Thelma Skinner, whom he ultimately married. To this union were born three children: Roland, Donitta and Norman.

John had several jobs growing up and at one time sold cars in Broken Bow. His father-in-law had a farm northeast of town and he continued working there and on the family homestead. John later started farming on his own and grew to like the cows with the white faces. He purchased seven cows and that was the start of the Bow Hereford Ranch.

John bought a reserve champion bull, shown by Samuel R. McKelvie, at the annual Futurity Show and Sale. That bull, Via Dom Donation 14, was to be the main herd sire for the Bow Hereford Ranch. The ranch would become known as "the Home of the Donations." Later on, the Donation cows were bred to the Crusty and Regulator lines and produced many quality calves.

John was a founding member of the Nebraska Hereford Association and was the secretary of the organization since its inception. In 1958, the organization was in severe financial straits and the board of directors closed the office in Central City, Nebraska.

At that time, John took over the added responsibility of the manager of the association. The office was moved to the Bow Hereford Ranch from 1958 to 1966. John and Thelma worked together to take care of the mass mailings of the three quarterlies and the annual directory. These mailings would be in the thousands. They also added the concept of an annual Hereford Tour to be done in the different sections of the state. The first one was the "Northwest," beginning at the Circle Dot Ranch. John and Alfred Meeks, then president, drove the circuit of the tour to get the times for the itinerary. John rode with a state patrolman during the tour and was horrified to see the patrolman was only driving 45 mph. John had the sickening feeling that their itinerary timing was no longer going to be accurate. The patrolman assured John that in a long caravan when the lead car is going 45 mph the last car will be going 70 mph. All things worked out well.

John and Thelma did the planning and implementing and staffed the yearly state fair booth and the annual Hereford-O-Rama Show and Sale. John did a lot of driving to all of the members' cattle sales and special events. Thelma accompanied him on many of these trips. The slack at the ranch due to his absence was taken up by the herdsman, staff and youngest son.

John passed away in November 1966 while attending a member's annual cattle sale. He gave a pre-auction speech discussing the owners' contribution to the breed. That is one of the major things John liked best—discussing Herefords. He is probably still discussing those cattle with the white faces.

