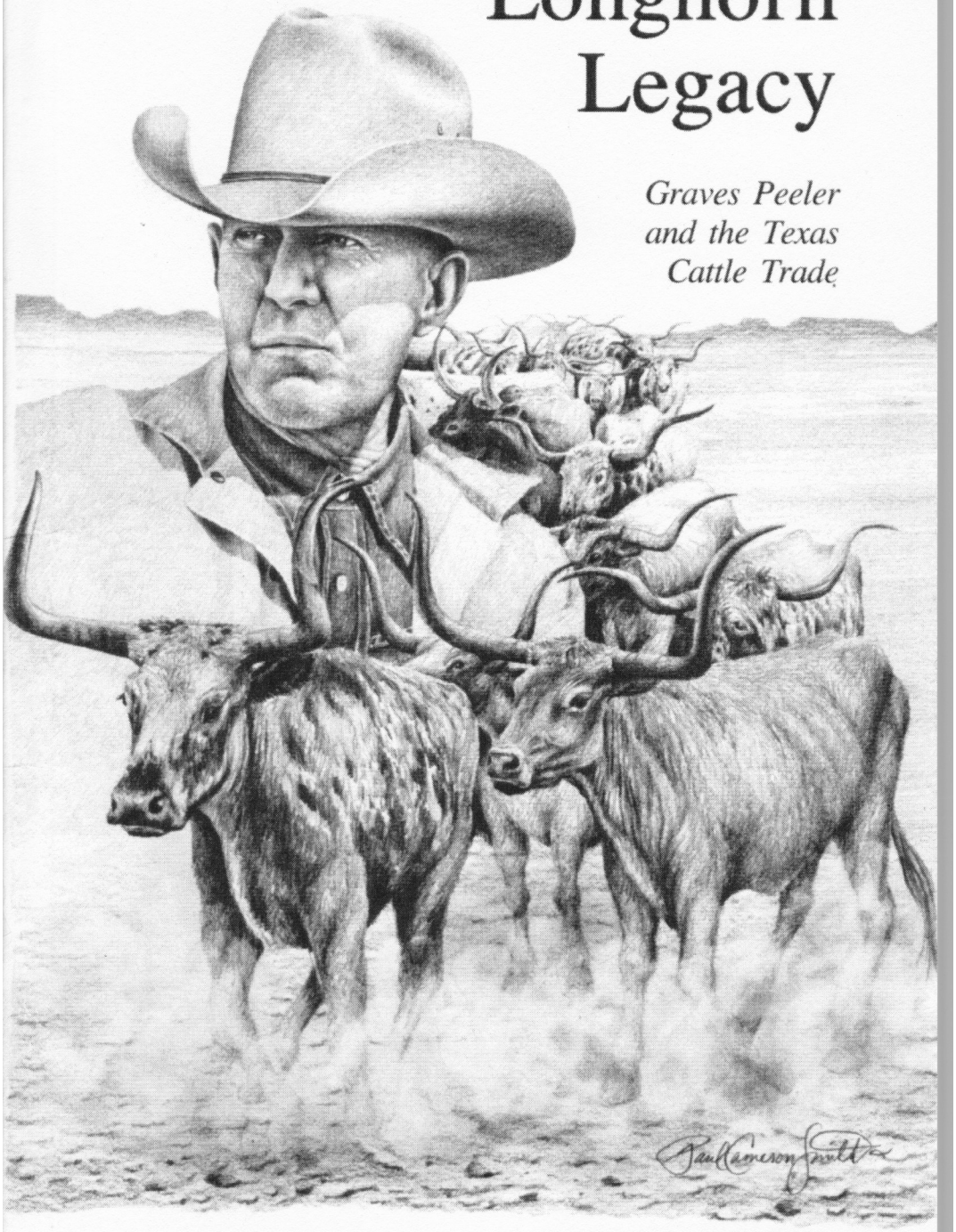
Longhorn Legacy

Graves Peeler and the Texas Cattle Trade



by Lawrence Clayton

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PREFACE

Unique is often an abused, overused term in describing the exploits of humans. One who examines the life of Graves Peeler, however, may be able to call to mind other adjectives, but unique is certainly one that fits.

As a brand inspector for the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association, he set a high-water mark in catching cattle thieves in the act and gathering the evidence necessary to get convictions in court. He faced danger many times in confronting desperate men preying on other men's livestock, and he held to justice and fair play despite threats on his life.

In addition, more than anyone else, he made the singular contribution of being a prime mover in saving a piece of not only Texana, but also western Americana-the Longhorn breed of cattle. With untiring effort despite opposition, criticism, and even derision, Peeler put together what cowmen call a "set" of cattle that proved to be one of the most significant ever assembled. in them was' much of the diverse genetic heritage of today's Longhorns. These animals have offered the opportunity for the once almost extinct breed to re-emerge in numbers large enough to support registering the breed, which has seen widespread use for cross-breeding with other kinds of cattle. His lifelong association with cattle and ranching made this activity a natural part of his interest.

Peeler was also a hunter and collector of wild game and primitive artifacts. By the time of his death at age ninety, he had a remarkable collection of horns and heads of museum quality. These specimens are now placed in a suitable repository at the Conner Museum in Kingsville, where they are available for viewing.

I knew the work of Graves Peeler long before I had even heard his name. I saw the result of his effort when I passed Ft. Griffin State Park north of Albany and saw the Longhorn herd grazing on the hills along the Clear Fork of the Brazos River around the old fort named Griffin. I did not know how these cattle came to be at the state park, but I knew they were a valuable addition. It was not until I met Leonard Stiles, retired manager of the Santa Gertrudis division of the King Ranch, that I began to appreciate the work of this fascinating man who had been Stiles' mentor in the business of brand inspection and, to some degree, in the livestock business.

With Stiles' assistance I contacted Tommy Peeler, the executor of Peeler's estate, at his home in Pleasanton in South Texas. He graciously consented to allow me to write the following story, but without the efforts of Leonard Stiles, I would not have had the material to do so.

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CHAPTER I FAMILY BACKGROUND AND EARLY DAYS

A person as unique as Graves Peeler proved to be in his long association with Texas range life and Texas cattle may have seemed to some to have sprung full blown, not from the forehead of a god as Pallas Athena of Greek myth did, but from the hot forge of Thor, the artificer of the old Norse gods. Peeler was instead shaped and toughened in the humid heat of South Texas, scratched by the brush of the brasada and stimulated by the demanding life he found there. Like his Longhorns, he came from hearty stock.

His father, Thomas Madison Peeler, was born on November 15, 1849, in Kosciusko, Mississippi, and remained in that state until he had completed his formal schooling.1 The call of the West may have pulled at the young man because at about the age of eighteen he left the South for a cattle country of the West. His daughter Beatrice's account of the circumstances of his leaving suggests that he had to get away. After the Civil War when carpetbaggers flooded the South, Thomas and a friend went to the aid of a neighbor who had been run off his land by a carpetbagger. In the confrontation the boy shot at the interloper, who screamed and fell to the ground. Thinking that they had killed the man, Thomas jumped on his horse and fled the area. It was not until seven years later when Thomas finally felt safe enough to contact his family that he discovered the carpetbagger was uninjured in the incident, but he, too, had left the country.

Peeler went first to Idaho and then to Wyoming, where he worked on ranches and learned the cattle trade. Then he moved to Texas, where he continued working on ranches, first on the Irvin and Millet Ranch near Seymour. One of the infrequent visitors to the ranch was Alice Irvin, a sister of Will Irvin, a partner in the ranching venture with the Millet brothers. During these visits, the two became acquainted.

On January 21, 1880, Thomas married Alice. Daughter of Jorden and Sarah Irvin of Seguin, Mrs. Peeler was the offspring of prominent early Texas settlers in the Seguin area. Like many families in early- day Texas, Mr. Irvin's family had come to Texas from the South, in this case Alabama, in 1835. Mrs. Peeler's grandfather, also named Irvin, had come from Tennessee. He served in the Texas army dining the war against Mexico for Texas independence and missed being at the Alamo only because General Sam Houston had sent him on a special mission to Washington County to move women and children in that area to safety.

By 1882 Thomas Peeler had settled with his wife in Atascosa County, an area where the family would sink in their roots. The couple had seven children: Mamie (Shannon), Alonzo, Graves, Jeff, Grady, Beatrice (Thomson), and Travis. The children grew up in a four-room ranch house that their father had built with his own hands.

Mr. Peeler's interest in ranching paid off, for he and his wife began building the spread into a fine cattle operation. The ranch, known as Basin Hill Ranch and located three miles north of Campbellton, was made up of state and school land amounting to some 11,000 acres. Thomas branded the 7PL brand, which, contrary to some interpretations, never meant "seven little Peelers.

Ranching in this area of Texas has always been demanding because it is a region of scant rainfall and hot temperatures as well as heavy brush. One unusual incident Graves later recalled about the family ranch was disaster brought on by a January blizzard that coated the area with a layer of ice and snow. It was unusual to have this kind of severe weather this far south. When Thomas Peeler went out to check the cattle, he found the only survivors were one Holstein cow and nearly eighty calves orphaned by the storm. That is a disaster on anybody's ranch. Undaunted by the incident, however, Thomas, who lacked the money to restock the ranch, leased his range to the Keystone Ranch from Frio county on shares and thereby, after several years of hard work, recouped his loss.

Another time, a range fire threatened their home range. In an older method of fighting fire, his father shot a yearling and split the carcass open. Then he and a Mexican hand tied a rope to each front leg and pulled the carcass, with the flesh side down, along the edge of the fire and put it out.

Thomas Peeler was intensely interested in Longhorn cattle, and, according to Charles B. Searle in an article in the Texas Longhorn Journal, convinced Graves that "Longhorns were the only cattle worth owning,"2 a belief that would shape much of the direction of his son's life work. The father taught the sons as much as he could about range life. He saw that his children

learned to ride first on a gentle jenny. Once the boys had learned to ride the jenny ably, their father bought them horses and saddles. These small saddles were then passed along to younger brothers as the older boys grew larger and needed bigger saddles. The father regularly took the boys along with him when he worked cattle and saw to it that they carefully observed what was being done. He saw to it that the boys were attentive to their duties, even if he had to take a switch to punctuate the teaching.

In addition to the education on the range given to the boys by their father, both Alonzo and Graves worked on neighboring ranches to hone their skills, but also to make money. It was a slow task, however, because wages ran about fifty cents a day. Graves would later recall, however, that the cost of items necessary for living were not all that expensive--$4.50 would buy a pair of boots while a duck jacket sold for $1.00. The heavy duck pants which most cowboys preferred sold for between .75 cents to a $1.00, and brogan shoes cost $2.00, less than half the price of a pair of boots.3

At this time Graves became fond of good horse flesh. He would later say, "I rode some mighty good brush horses;. . . they could catch any cow brute living, provided they didn't knock you off going under a limb while they were doing it."4 Peeler also worked with some good hands who taught him how to work cattle in the brush as well as how to train horses to do that sort of work. One of these men was Lonnie Martin of Tilden; another was Manuel Tom. Graves remembers the latter man as a "big man" weighing "around 260 or 270 pounds."5 Naturally, the man had to ride a large horse to carry his weight, but he saw to it that the horses were always of good breeding and well trained. This man, Graves remembered, never wore the traditional brush jacket or leggings or chaps but could nonetheless ride through the brush without tearing up his clothing. Both of these men were outstanding trackers, a trait that Graves himself was to develop to a high level.

The father always wore a .45 caliber single action Colt pistol, certainly a necessary form, of insurance in the rugged country filled with rustlers as well as rattlesnakes and predators. His custom, however, was not to wear the pistol when he was cutting cattle from the herd. In these cases, he often took his pistol off and placed it in a woodpecker hole in a nearby post or tree. Once he had finished his work, then he retrieved the pistol.6

Rustling was a threat to ranching across cattle country, and Atascosa County was no exception. In addition to his ranching, Mr. Peeler began to work as a brand inspector for the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association. Some say he was the first man ever hired for this important job by this famous organization after it was organized in Graham, Texas, in 1877. He checked trail herds going to Kansas during the heyday of open range ranching. His brand book is preserved in the Witte Museum in San Antonio.

Thomas Peeler was a man of principle and did not avoid confrontations, two traits that made him a successful brand inspector. Once when he saw men he knew to be driving stolen cattle, the men threatened him to keep him silent. He returned the threat with a promise to testify against them before a grand jury. The men did not doubt his courage, apparently, because they

shot Peeler to death in Campbellton on May 18, 1897. The murderer received a fifty-year sentence at his trial in Pleasanton.7

This situation left Mrs. Peeler and her small children (Alonzo, the oldest boy, was 13) in demanding circumstances, but she responded by holding the ranch together and seeing to the children's education. Because there was no nearby school, the family hired a governess. Graves would later recall governesses including Miss Bird Manning, Miss Lena Yates, and Miss Annie Roundtree.

Peeler had an experience as a fifteen year old youth that may well have shaped his future. On June 12, 1901, Karnes County Sheriff W. T. (Brack) Morris, a former Texas Ranger, and two of his deputies, John Trimmell and Boon Choate, drove into the countryside looking for a horse thief from Atascosa. Following a lead that a Mexican in the vicinity might have information on the thief, or be the thief, the three men drove toward the home of a family named Cortez,8 where two brothers were to be found. Trimmell got out of the buggy near the gate going into the Cortez place, perhaps to investigate some pens near by. Morris and Choate drove on to the Cortez house and confronted Romaldo and Gregorio Cortez. Choate, the interpreter, asked Gregorio if he had traded a horse to a man named Villareal. Gregorio said no, because he had traded a mare, not a horse. This confusion in translation of horse and mare led to the sheriff's unfortunate decision to arrest the brothers. Again translation caused confusion. Gregorio said in Spanish that the sheriff had nothing upon which to arrest him. The sheriff understood the statement to mean that the man would not let the sheriff arrest him. Thinking that the two men were resisting arrest, the sheriff shot Romaldo and turned toward Gregorio and fired but missed. Gregorio, who had a pistol stuck in the back of his belt, returned the fire and did not miss. The sheriff fired two more times but missed. Gregorio fired again, and as Morris staggered along the fence, Gregorio shot him again, severely wounding him but not killing him. Morris later died in the brush about two hundred yards from the house.

After Choate had fled, the family took Romaldo inside the house, treated the wounds in his face and shoulder as best they could, loaded him into the sheriff's surrey, and drove to Romaldo's house in Kenedy. Later Gregorio carried his brother to the wounded man's house, the rest of the family having gone on ahead of them, and rode toward the sanctuary of Old Mexico. Thus began one of the most famous manhunts in Texas history.

On a series of fleet mares, Gregorio Cortez rode for the Rio Grande. Posses chased after him, but his skilled horsemanship enabled him to elude pursuit as he cut fences on his ride for the border. Along the way he also killed Gonzales County Sheriff Robert Glover and Constable Henry Schnabel.

The route of his flight took him across the Peeler Ranch. On June 16, W. M. Dabney, foreman of the Peeler's ranch, and Jeff Peeler, younger brother of Graves, took a wagon to Tom Smith's ranch to take delivery of some sheep Mrs. Peeler had purchased. The two met a Mexican watering a mare in their Jim McAda Pasture, and Jeff suspected it was Cortez. When the two returned to the Peeler house with the sheep, Jeff told his story to his mother and Graves. She

immediately sent Graves to Campbellton, a task Graves took so seriously that he almost ran his horse to death. The posse, some members of which had spent the previous night at the Peeler ranch house, were so excited that some mounted without untying their mounts. Others were pitched off by mounts that sensed the excitement. Peeler later confessed that he suspected that some of the men had been drinking whiskey.

Dabney saddled a mare belonging to the ranch and set out later to intercept the posse. He saw the men coming, dismounted, and laid his rifle across his saddle. The men in the posse mistakenly thought Dabney was the fugitive and fired some shots. Graves recognized man and horse and called for the shooting to stop. Taylor Whitsett, a locally prominent official who was leading the posse, stopped the gunfire before Dabney was injured. Because some of the posse rode up and cursed Dabney for his less-than-wise act, the foreman rode back to the ranch and refused to join the search.

The men discovered where Cortez had entered the Peeler properly by finding a spot in the fence with the top three wires cut, but the men lost the trail in the hard ground of a brushy flat. Other efforts were made to find his exit point, and when it was discovered, the men who found it fired shots into the air. Thinking that the men had the fugitive on the run, others rushed to the sound. Graves was still part of the chase at this point. When Whitsett's horse stepped in a badger hole and fell, Peeler stopped to help him up.

Soon darkness fell, and the posse headed back to Campbellton. The hunt continued, but not until June 22, ten days after the first killing, did Ranger Captain J. H. Rogers and Kitt Merren surprise Cortez asleep in a shack near the Rio Grande. They had found the third of his exhausted horses near by.

After several trials, Cortez was sentenced to life in prison for the murder of Sheriff Glover. He was pardoned in 1913 by Governor Oscar Branch Colquitt. Part of the mitigating circumstance was the misunderstanding of Sheriff Morris' intention to question rather than to arrest the brothers.

The events of the chase were recorded in a ballad, a book by Americo Paredes, and later a motion picture. Novelist Elmer Kelton wrote a thinly veiled account of the story in his novel Manhunters. The legend became part of the oral lore of the Mexican community in South Texas and added to the early experience in chasing fugitives by one of South Texas' strong Sons.

Following this exciting period, the children continued their formal education. The older children attended school in Pleasanton and lived with one of the teachers, a man named Lee Allen. The two older boys went on to attend and graduate from West Texas Military Academy in San Antonio. Graves continued his study with two years at a San Marcos business college because his mother felt he should learn how to keep accounts.

Graves was an unusually able athlete. As a baseball pitcher he was outstanding in his play for Campbellton, Pleasanton, and other teams.9 Graves went on to attend the Agricultural and

Mechanical College of Texas (now Texas A&M University), where he played football and was a member of the first team that ever played the University of Texas on Thanksgiving Day.

Three of the Peeler brothers entered military service during World War I. Grady and Jeff both served overseas, with Grady serving in the 36th Division and Jeff in the 90th Division, both units that returned to National Guard status after the war. Travis L. also served in the military service. While the brothers were gone, Graves stayed at home to operate the f ranch, an activity at which he proved particularly adept and which he found rewarding.

When the war ended and Grady returned home, Graves turned the running of the family ranch over to him and took a job with the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association. Thus began a chapter of his life that was to bring a great deal of attention and even notoriety to this unusual Texan.

CHAPTER II INSPECTING BRANDS AND RANGERING

Grady Peeler's return from soldiering in World War I left Graves free to pursue other options, and like his father, he went to work as a brand inspector for the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association (T.S.C.R.A.). Graves was ideally suited by personality and background for this work. Leonard Stiles, who served the King Ranch for long years as cattle manager for the Santa Gertrudis Division, said, "Graves was a natural-born lawman."1 Jack Phillips, a South Texas cowman, stated that Peeler "was one of the finest cattle detectives the T.S.C.R.A. ever had." Phillips goes on to say that Peeler had "an eagle eye, . . . which made him an excellent tracker and marksman."2 Aggressive and fiercely independent, Peeler had the initiative to work alone and the drive to be successful in his demanding and dangerous job. His "tools" came to include a good pair of binoculars; a pistol; a rifle; a horse, which he later traded for a car; ample patience; and an abundance of courage.

His first assignment was at the stockyards in Laredo for just over a year.3 Then he was transferred to San Antonio for about a month before he moved to the Fort Worth yards for about three months. Then he began his career as a field inspector.

E. B. Spillers, secretary of the Association, sent Peeler on his first field assignment to Barber's Hill to investigate a case that Peeler found common as a mode of rustling cattle. Because branded cattle would be detected if sold alive on the hoof, the man slaughtered the cattle and sold them as beef and hid the hides. But Peeler quickly discovered the method of operation, caught the man butchering an animal belonging to an Association member, and was able to get a conviction in court that sent the man to the penitentiary.

His next case involved a man rustling cattle along the Trinity River. At this time, Graves worked alongside two other inspectors, G. A. Stoner and Jack Eckols. They watched a man from Houston and his hands pen some steers under a large shed. The next morning Peeler observed

the men kill one of the steers and begin skinning it. Peeler got the drop on the men with his rifle. The Houston man, realizing that he had been caught in the act, offered the three lawmen $12,000 to let him go. Naturally, the men refused his offer. Peeler is quoted as saying, "He's our prisoner, and he's going to have to face the music." The rustler then made his last effort--he made the sign of a Mason in trouble. The other two men with Peeler were not Masons and did not recognize the sign, but Peeler, who was a member of the group, responded to the man that he should leave the cause of the Masons out of this incident. Several hides belonging to Association members were found in the man's hide house, so the man was indicted. Although he was tried twice, a jury conviction was never forthcoming. Peeler always felt that the man bought his way out of the incident.

Many of Peeler's arrests were not as calm as these already recounted. In the case of a Cajun named Tibadeaux, the arrest almost brought an end to Peeler's life. It did end the rustler's days. The incident took place in Liberty County, where the rustler and his two teenage sons were stealing cattle from at least two members of the Association, F.Y. Dew and Bassett Blakly.

The three rustlers owned a few gentle cattle and held them on almost 200 acres of fenced range. To steal the cattle, the men let the fence down, drove their gentle cattle out onto open range, and then added other cattle to the herd. Then the men drove all the animals back onto the fenced range and re-erected their fence.

Through his binoculars, Peeler observed this practice and waited for the time to act. One day he saw the two boys drive a cow into a pen. The father shot the cow three or four times and then urged his three dogs to attack her. Once the dogs knocked her down, the men finished her off with an ax. Then the sons began butchering her while the father hid behind a downed pine tree to act as lookout. Peeler moved in to make the arrest. He quietly approached the two skinners from the rear and aimed his rifle at them. Telling them to sit down, he demanded that one of the boys call the father from the hiding place behind the tree. The boy did so, but because of the tall weeds, Peeler could not see for sure what the man was doing. Peeler got the drop on the father and demanded that the man lay down the rifle that he was carrying. The man pretended to be putting his gun down but suddenly turned and fired at Peeler. The shot shattered Peeler's ear. Peeler returned the fire and hit the man in the abdomen. Because he considered the man dangerous, Peeler put two rounds from his six shooter into the man and killed him.

The boys ran to the house for protection. To avoid shooting them in the back, Peeler let them go. From inside the house the family sicced the three large dogs that had downed the cow on Peeler. He shot one in the mouth as it tried to bite him and another in the head. The third one recognized the danger and fled the scene. The boys and the mother then ran out the back door of the house and made their way to a neighboring ranch.

Peeler waited for help to arrive. Dew, one of the ranchers whose cattle had been stolen, and his foreman rode in. They feared an ambush and left without contacting Peeler. By 11:00 P.M., Peeler saw no point in waiting any longer. Blood-stained and assaulted by swarms of

mosquitos, he mounted his horse and rode to a set of pens some distance away. There a Negro named Roach awaited him. Peeler then went to nearby Devers for treatment of his ear.

He had broken the operation by killing the father, and no charges were filed against the two boys or their mother. Later the two sons took up their father's ways, got caught, and were sent to prison. They loudly voiced their threats to kill Peeler for killing their father. When they were released from prison, Peeler saw them on a downtown street, borrowed a pistol from the local sheriff, and went to confront the men. They saw him coming and abandoned their planned revenge. They had seen Peeler in action and wanted no further experience with the quick-witted lawman.

Not all of Peeler's arrests had negative long-term results. Peeler had a run-in with a troublesome man in Post, Texas, in the first of several dealings with the man. The man had a reputation for rustling stock and was known to have killed one man. He was so direct in his dealings with others that he had run off one brand inspector, and Peeler was called in to replace the man who had left. When Peeler and a Texas Ranger named Light Townsend, along with another inspector named Cooksey, were attempting to talk to the owner of the stolen cattle in question, the rustler and some of his men confronted Peeler's group in an automobile repair shop in Post.

The incident proved a bloodless face-off. Peeler's lack of fear was likely one of the factors that kept the situation from erupting into bloodshed. The situation was so tense that Cooksey quit his work as a brand inspector.

Later Peeler went to Fort Stockton in far West Texas to investigate theft of cattle from the Elsinore Cattle Company. Peeler rode the fence line of this ranch and deduced that rustlers had removed staples from a barbed wire fence, let the wire down, driven the cattle across, and put the staples back into the same holes to hide the act. They had been careful to protect the staples with a piece of leather when reinserting them so that the staples would not be marred by the hammer.

Peeler followed the trail to the rustler's hideout. About a quarter of a mile from a house were several unbranded calves tied in a heavy screen of mesquite brush. The rustlers kept the calves tied up during the day, but they penned the animals for feed and water at night. When the herd grew to thirty or more, the men hauled the animals to a buyer. With what he had seen, Peeler had all of the evidence he needed.

At daybreak the next morning, Peeler and several lawmen including Ranger Captain Will Wright moved in to arrest the culprits. When the lawmen approached, two of the men saw them and bolted to release the calves but were apprehended. The rustler, that same man with whom Peeler had had the confrontation in Post, was arrested, still in bed. Peeler retrieved the man's pistol from underneath the man's pillow. All three men got a free ride to Fort Stockton, and the hungry calves were returned to their mothers. The head rustler was later sentenced to ten years in prison.

Peeler's dealings with the man, whom he named only as Smith in his interview with Jane Pattie, continued at the Ramsey Prison Farm, where the man was incarcerated. In time the man became a trusty and was put in charge of some of the livestock on the farm. Some years later when Peeler was working for the Nash Ranch located near the farm, he saw the man again. He gave Peeler some interesting information. He confided in Peeler that the manager and another trusty were stealing cattle from the state-owned herd. This case took an interesting twist.

Through an informant that had been bootlegging whiskey to guards at Ramsey before he was double- crossed by his partner and sentenced to Ramsey, Peeler got inside evidence on the case and moved in to make the arrests. He got a man named Dan Hines, a special deputy to Sheriff Benford, to go with the bootlegger, who was now released, to pick up some stolen cattle at Ramsey. The thieves did not oppose the loading of the cattle but had a special surprise-they cut a tree that fell across the road and prepared to ambush the truck and kill the occupants.

Peeler's luck held here; he was in the hospital with kidney stones and missed the trip. Because the thieves could not kill all three men, they elected not to kill only two and risk certain punishment for this additional crime. But the affair did not end here.

The sheriff in Angleton arrested the two men in the truck--Hines and the bootlegger--and refused to release them. Peeler went to check the situation and saw the problem. He called Ranger Captain Frank Hamer, with whom he worked on more than one occasion. Hamer intervened, and the men were quickly released.

Peeler's old enemy had proved himself, but he was not through. Not long after this case closed, the man was summoned to testify in a lawsuit between two cattlemen. The attorney, Dayton Moses, secured the man's release to testify, because the man knew the circumstances of the case. His testimony so inspired the attorney that the lawyer was able to get the man released to the T.S.C.R.A. and himself and made him a brand inspector. Because he was experienced in the activity, the former rustler proved to be one of the most effective inspectors the Association had. His reputation became so widespread that he was able to warn some thieves to leave the lawless side, and they did.

This incident with this thief-turned-lawman extended over several years and proved that Peeler was an astute judge of character as well as one willing to forgive and forget, under the right circumstances. He never compromised his principles.

In 1928, the Association sent Peeler to Arizona to work for a time. The work he did there had the same adventurous spirit and careful law enforcement drive that characterized his work in Texas. The ranch on which the rustling was a problem was the Double Circle, an outfit owned by a partnership of men, some of whom were members. of the Association. Their range included more than 1000 square miles of rough country in the White Mountains near Clifton, Arizona. The men had purchased 10,000 head of branded cattle already on the range and all of the unbranded cattle running there as well, an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 additional head. These

unbranded cattle were a real lure to thieves, especially in the isolated and rough country, which thieves who knew it used to their advantage. Although the range was fenced, there was no cross-fencing. A few line camps, holding traps, and wild cow traps dotted the range.

To begin his investigation Peeler accompanied Billy McGill, a cowboy on the ranch, to camp on Eagle Creek, an area where the rustlers were working. McGill had neglected to pack the grain for the horses, so when he returned to the headquarters for the needed feed, Peeler patrolled along an area where the thieves were known to work. He soon detected their simple method of operation. He saw that two men had roped some yearlings and led them out. Their efforts to camouflage their activity included wrapping burlap around the feet of both horses and yearlings to make their trail in the January snow less apparent.

Once safely outside the border fence, the men took the burlap off and rode on to their camp with the stolen cattle led by the horses. Peeler found evidence where the thieves had slaughtered one of the animals, and because he was an experienced tracker, he even recognized the tracks of a mountain lion, which had followed the men. He also found their camp, their supplies, and the other stolen yearlings. Fortunately for them, the men were gone when Peeler found the camp.

Peeler hurried back to his camp and laid his plan out to McGill, who had returned to camp by this time. The next morning the two went to the rustlers' camp and retrieved the stolen cattle. Then they filed charges on the two rustlers, men known to the management. Two ensuing trials with hung juries dismayed Peeler, but the thieves agreed to leave the area, a victory of sorts for the Association.

Peeler was then sent to another area of the ranch located on Black River. There he found some wild cow traps set to capture cattle. These traps, featuring a V shaped trap gate, lured cattle in with salt and kept them from escaping. Peeler found one with about forty head trapped inside. The cowboy whose responsibility it was to ride that area had neglected his duties for several days, and the rustlers took advantage of him.

Early the next morning Peeler was at the trap with the cowboy when the rustlers rode up. Peeler was as cool as the brisk morning. He confronted the men with the information that these cattle were Double Circle cattle threatened them with legal charges for trapping the cattle, and then convinced two of them to help him brand the mavericks with the Double Circle mark. Peeler became friends with the leader of the rustlers and some weeks later, spent the night in his camp.

Peeler remained in Arizona for almost two years and worked with ranchers on problems with rustlers. After he had returned to Texas from Arizona he got a call from E. B. Spiller about a rustling operation in Fort Bend County. Peeler went to the range indicated b Albert George, a director of the Association a Richmond. He observed the rustler working in the usual method of driving gentle cows out onto a range and returning with his own cattle and some of the stolen ones. In this case, a fellow inspector named Sid Baird worked with Peeler. The three of them

got three cows and marked them with a brand they could positively identify. They then planted these cattle in the pasture where the rustler kept the animals he would later slaughter.

One evening Peeler saw the rustler pen some cattle with one of those specially marked ones in the herd. That night a big thunderstorm hit, so Peeler, who was working alone at the time, sought shelter in the hayloft of the barn. Early the next morning, Peeler observed the rustler and two men who helped him come to the pen to slaughter the cow. He watched the activity through a crack in the barn wall, but he also had to keep his eye on the house because the rustler's wife was there and might pose a threat to him. Peeler crept out of the loft and approached the site of the skinning. The rustler demanded Peeler's identity, and Peeler responded simply that he was a brand inspector. He instructed the men to continue skinning the cow and indicated that when they had completed the task, he would take them and the evidence to authorities. The leader then challenged Peeler to lay down the pistol he was carrying so that he could "whip hell" out of the inspector. Peeler declined the option and threatened to make the man's stomach "look like a piece of screen wire" if he gave any more trouble. Once the task of skinning the cow was completed, Peeler had the men load all of the evidence into the rustler's pickup and took it to a butcher shop in Needville. Peeler instructed the butcher that the animal was stolen and that the butcher was to keep the evidence in the cooler at the butcher shop. When a search warrant was executed on the rustler's hide house, seventy-eight hides were discovered, all belonging to ranchers other than the rustler.

When the case finally came to trial, the rustler had hired a lawyer who was determined to get charges against his client dropped. He failed. After the man was convicted on the first Count and sentenced to four years in prison, the guilty man's lawyer wanted the Association to drop the other charges. Peeler insisted that the rustler be tried on all ten counts. The attorney kept Peeler on the witness stand for almost three hours and tried every way he could to confuse Peeler's testimony. When he was unable to rattle Peeler, the lawyer simply charged that the inspectors were "a bigger menace to the public than hijackers" and that they "were always so eager to use their pistols that they were a menace."4

Peeler made a mental note of the outrageous charge, and after the court had recessed for the evening, Peeler went to get something to eat. As he sat in the restaurant, he saw the lawyer and his client walking his way. Handing his six-shooter to the cashier and instructing her to put it under the counter, Peeler walked out and faced the two men. He confronted the lawyer and voiced his resentment for the caustic remark made to the jury. Then Peeler punctuated his feelings with a slap to the side of the man's head.

A crowd, including the sheriff and his deputy, gathered to watch the fight. A large man grabbed Peeler's arm from behind and at that point the lawyer was able to free his arms and deliver a blow to Peeler's face. Peeler simply braced himself against the man who was holding him and kicked the lawyer in the stomach and turned him over backwards. Undaunted, the lawyer jumped up and attempted to strike Peeler again but instead hit the man who was holding the inspector. The man then freed Peeler, and the lawyer lost interest in continuing the fight.

The court proceedings continued, and on the second count the rustler got another four-year term. On the third count, two more years were added to his sentence. One of the ranchers involved was then approached by other men in the area who asked him not to press the charges further. Because the rustler had a total of ten years prison sentence for his activities and did have a wife and child, the ranchers and Peeler decided to prosecute no further.

The rustler, however, refused to give up. He vowed that when he got out of the penitentiary, he would kill Peeler. Years later, the man was out of prison and came face to face with Peeler. Undaunted, Peeler confronted him by repeating the threat the man had uttered. The man, apparently not recognizing Peeler after all those years had passed, at first claimed not to remember the threat. Peeler identified himself and reminded the man of his threat. He then invited the man to go get a gun and come back and settle the argument. At this point, the man begged Peeler not to kill him. He admitted that Peeler had told nothing but the truth on the witness stand and asked the brand inspector to forget the whole incident.

In another case, in Matagorda County, Peeler had an easy time of getting the evidence he needed for a conviction because of kindness to a young Mexican boy to whom Peeler had given some candy. The boy's father would reveal no information, but when Peeler asked the boy where the hides were, he indicated that they were buried in the hide house. Peeler discovered that the man had rolled each hide into a slender bundle, inserted it in a hole dug with post hole diggers, and covered the hole. Then he wet the soil and brushed over it to conceal the location. Peeler was able to get a conviction in this case as well.

During his later years with the T.S.C.R.A. and even after he had left the Association, Peeler held an appointment as a Texas Ranger,5 the elite force of Texas law enforcement. He first served as a Private after enlisting on May 22, 1926, and re-enlisted on February 19, 1927. Peeler was forty years of age at the time. The enlisting officer named on his record was Gen. Dallas J. Matthews. Peeler gave his occupation at the time as "stockman," and his duty station is listed as Campbellton. No unit is mentioned, but the document lists the Texas Cattle Raisers Association.

Peeler again joined the force for one year on January 27, 1931, after he had left the Association and started his next career. The documents indicate that he was assigned as a Special Member of the Ranger Force, and his occupation is indicated to be "ranchman." In the remarks section of the document is indication that his term of service was extended to January 20, 1933.

Events in which Peeler participated as a Ranger are not so well documented as are his other activities. One source does state that Ranger Frank Hamer asked Peeler to help him track down and capture the notorious Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker. Peeler asked if Hamer intended to offer them the chance to surrender when he caught up with the gun-happy couple, and Hamer responded in the negative. Hamer knew only too well that their pattern was to shoot their way out of any traps into which they might wander. Peeler refused to accompany Hamer because he felt that the sense of fair play required that the subject be offered the chance to surrender, or

the lawmen were guilty of murder. Hamer went his own way and led in the ambush that killed the two. But Peeler had his principles.

In an interview with W. K. Daetwyler, Peeler recounted another case on which he worked with Hamer.6 The Ranger captain was sent to investigate an instance in which two men named Dumas and Wood had lured some men erroneously labeled as bank robbers into a trap in which a sheriff named Reeder and a deputy from Odessa killed them for the $5,000 reward money offered for bank robbers dead or alive. Hamer arrested Dumas and Wood and jailed them in Austin. The two men refused to reveal any information because, Peeler said, Hamer "went at them the wrong way."

Dumas, who had worked as an undercover man for the T.S.C.R.A., asked that Peeler be brought in. Peeler entered the cell holding the two men, but a guard stood a short distance away. After a long conversation, Peeler convinced Dumas that Hamer wanted to punish the guilty sheriff and deputy, not the two men in jail. Under Peeler's influence, Dumas confessed.

Once this information had been gained, Hamer insisted that Peeler accompany him to Odessa to confront the two corrupt lawmen. After questioning the sheriff for about two hours, Hamer asked to see the deputy. He was told that the deputy was at the jail in Rankin. Hamer took Peeler in the Ranger's car and headed to Rankin.

Along the way a car sped past them, and Peeler recognized Reeder. It was clear that the sheriff hoped to get to Rankin ahead of the pair and set a trap for the two investigators. Hamer had a plan to the contrary, however. He and Peeler went to the hotel, not the jail, and called the two men on the telephone. The message was clear--the two men should come to the hotel. The confrontation was set.

In an Old West style face-off, the two investigators sat in the hotel lobby, one watching one door and the other keeping a steady eye on the other door. Both men sat with their backs to the wall and their hands on their pistols.

Suddenly the two men burst in separate doors and confronted their antagonists. The four stood face to face for a time and "bristled" at each other. Hamer invited the sheriff to draw, but the man lost his nerve. Both Reeder and the deputy darted from the hotel, and Hamer and Peeler let them go. The two Rangers had all of the information needed at this point.

The two allegedly corrupt lawmen were indicted but never convicted on the charges. Dumas and Wood, however, were convicted and sent to prison, but Hamer secured their release after they had served only two years of prison time. Once again Peeler participated in a dangerous situation requiring skill and nerve and out alive.

Cattle rustling and other crimes continued to plague ranchers and law enforcement officers as 'well. By 1930, however, Peeler had decided to make a change. The contribution that Peeler made certainly belongs to the best efforts of these rugged individuals who risk their lives in

stopping thieves whose crimes can run ranchers out of business because the cattle stolen are often the profit margin that allows the rancher to remain in business.

CHAPTER III RANCHING

Not every case of cattle rustling Peeler was called to investigate proved to be theft. One very important one proved to be misunderstanding and led to a new career for Peeler, one still challenging and exciting but somewhat less dangerous.

On the Nash Ranch in Brazona County,1 the tally came up about five hundred head short, and the owners, ma (Mrs. Will) Nash and her daughter, Mrs. Kittie Nash Groce, believed the cattle stolen by neighbors. Inspectors G. 0. Stoner and Sid Beard went to the ranch, and after checking the cattle carefully, agreed with the short tally. Stoner asked that Peeler be sent to investigate the situation.

Peeler checked the countryside thoroughly, as was his custom, and because he knew most of the people in the area, was not convinced that the cattle had been stolen. Negroes living in the area suggested that the cattle had died on the range during a disastrous blizzard and ice storm the previous winter. Peeler then began riding the Nash pastures counting the remains of dead cattle. Each time he found one, he marked the carcass in such a way that it would not be counted again. After a thorough search, he was able to tell the two ranch women that the cattle had frozen to death. He then took Mrs. Groce on a horseback tour of the ranch to show her the evidence.

So impressed was Mrs. Nash with Peeler's handling of the situation that she offered him a job managing the ranch. Peeler, who by this time in his life was tiring of the dangerous activity of brand inspecting and open to another line of work, told Mrs. Nash that he would need a wage of $5.00 a day plus room and board. Because times were difficult during these days of economic depression, Mrs. Nash was unable to make him a satisfactory offer. Only three months later, however, Mrs. Groce called to tell Peeler that a hurricane had wrecked the ranch and that they were in desperate need of his help. Peeler responded to their appeal to get the ranch operational again. With help secured from the area, he rebuilt the fences and repaired the windmills. Then they were able to return the cattle to the range and begin operating again.

Only two weeks later, however, Peeler received another troubled call from the ranch. Mrs. Nash had received an offer from Bert McCloy and a Mr. Merchant from Sour Lake to buy the ranch. She was considering selling to them, but she wanted Peeler's advice. Because he was by this time very familiar with the operation of the ranch, Peeler was able to advise her wisely. He knew that the herd of seven hundred cattle on the ranch was far too few for the grass-rich 15,000 acres located in an area where four or five acres would support a cow. He told Mrs. Nash that her ranch was understocked and that if she would stock it wisely, she could make money. He pointed out that the two potential buyers knew that they could make money with it.

Mrs. Nash again offered Peeler the job of running the operation, but he insisted that he could not afford to work for less than the Association was paying him--$5.00 a day and expenses. Mrs. Nash insisted that times were too hard for her to pay that kind of wages (Cowboys were getting $30.00 a month.), but Peeler was adamant. His response showed his verve: "1 didn't makes times hard. I will admit they are kind of tight, but that's all right-I have lots of work to do for the Association. They are calling me every day."2

Before long Peeler received another call from Mrs. Nash, who consented to Peeler's terms. He presented her with the following plan: "I'll run the ranch under one condition-whenever I make a decision, you have got to back me up. We can't have three-way managing of a ranch." He went on to say that if the two women did not have enough confidence in him to run the ranch, then they should fire him. They agreed, and Peeler began his work in earnest.

Peeler had promised that he would work virtually every waking hour, and he did. He soon confirmed his belief that the ranch could not operate successfully without more cattle. Even though the ranch already owed the Agriculture Finance Credit Corporation of Houston some $60,000 depression-era dollars, he told Mrs. Nash that she was going to have to borrow more money in order to buy more cattle if the ranch were to have a chance to make a profit. Peeler and Mrs. Groce traveled to Houston, convinced their creditor to lend them the additional money, and returned to the ranch to begin looking for suitable stock.

Because of his familiarity with ranching in the area, Peeler soon located 1,600 head of cattle at the Koon Ranch, the remnants of a herd of several thousand head that had been wintered on the ranch by a partnership of cattlemen. He inquired of the price of the cattle, and he was quoted $12.50 each. He offered a dollar a head less for the branded cattle with the understanding that all the unbranded ones went with the deal. The owners consented, and Peeler had the additional cattle the ranch needed to eventually make a profit.

The ranch began to make progress. The larger calf crops made a difference in the profit and loss in the ranch. Unfortunately, Mrs. Nash died about three years after Peeler came to the ranch, but Mrs. Groce, a former socialite before her father's death required that she take a more realistic view of ranching, continued to operate the spread. Her husband, a Galveston banker, had died two years after their marriage. They had no children. Gradually the picture improved. By 1942, the ranch was debt free and showed a profit of $25,000.00; by 1944, that figure had risen to $45,000.00. At her death in 1968 she left $300,000.00 to various charities in her area. Peeler's management was the major factor in the dramatic improvement of productivity on the ranch.

Peeler had been planning a time when he would work for himself and had begun buying up ranch property in McMullen County. By 1943 he was ready to work for himself. In the fall of 1943 he told Mrs. Groce that he intended to leave the ranch in the spring, but she did not think that he was serious. When the spring work came around, Peeler saw to the dipping of the cattle for parasites and vaccinating the stock for anthrax, a threat to cattle in the region. Then he

returned the cattle to the proper pastures and told Mrs. Groce that he was leaving. She was surprised but consented. She did ask him to leave behind the Ford roadster that he had driven on the ranch, and he moved to his McMullen property. He lacked six days having worked on the Nash Ranch for fourteen years.

His McMullen County ranch would be his home until his health failed near the time of his death. Peeler's bachelor life in the simple house on the ranch was to his liking-remote, quiet, even somewhat primitive. He never had the luxury of air conditioning in the house itself, though he did air condition the building in which he housed the various collections of artifacts that he had put together over the years. He also lived many years in the house without indoor plumbing. In this remoteness, broken by an occasional trip to a Cattle Raisers Association meeting or a visit to a relative, Peeler preferred to spend his life.

He loved dogs and kept several, partially to act as watch dogs to protect him from his various enemies from his days as a brand inspector and Texas Ranger. An interesting anecdote told by Fay Peeler reveals the kind of dogs that Peeler kept. Once a cousin, Barlow Irvin, former Athletic Director at Texas A&M University, came to the ranch for a visit when Graves was away. Irvin stepped from his car to open the ranch gate only to be bitten by one of Graves' dogs. After he had returned home, the cousin wrote to Graves to determine if the dog had been vaccinated for rabies. Graves' reply was characteristic: "No, but he already bit twenty-five people, and none of them have rabies."3

Peeler was an outstanding stockman and rancher. Running his own ranch proved to be genuinely fulfilling to him. Being his own boss also allowed him the opportunity to pursue a major project related to one of his life-long loves, Longhorn cattle.

CHAPTER IV RESCUING THE LONGHORN

Although Peeler is highly regarded as a brand inspector and trophy game collector, his work as the "Savior of the Longhorn" may well be his most significant contribution to the heritage of the West.

Acceptance of the Longhorn by cattlemen has an interesting history. The value of this breed to early cattlemen was simply its presence in large numbers on the Texas ranges when ranching began to spread into this part of North America. Ranching developed because the cattle were an untapped, plentiful resource there for the taking. After a long and colorful history including the trail driving era, for which these animals were well suited and which brought badly needed gold to Texas after the financial collapse brought on by the Civil War, the breed suffered rejection following the disastrous period of 1886 to 1888 when drought and incredibly severe winters, collapsed markets, and other factors brought an end to the open range. Ranchers decided they would have to fence the ranges to keep inferior animals away from their imported Durham, Angus, Devon, and Hereford stock; feed to help the cattle survive the winter months;

and in the final analysis, produce a more desirable beef breed for consumers. It was a turning point in ranching.1

The Longhorn seemed to be following in the path of the American bison toward virtual extinction. It appeared that numbers had dropped below what some feared was a critical mass of pure Longhorn blood to keep the breed from disappearing. At this point some concern began to develop for the impending loss of what had become an American icon of the Old West-the Longhorn with its classic sweep of horns, ridgepole spine, tall thin frame, and prolific reproduction over a relatively long lifetime.

Early efforts were made to rescue the Longhorn. In 1927 two men--Will Barnes and John H. Hatton- began the effort with $3,000 that Barnes, with the help of Senator John B. Kendrick of Wyoming, convinced Congress to appropriate for the project. The two men found ten cows and two bulls in the area between Beaumont and Corpus Christi as well as ten more cows, one bull, and three steers in Southwest Texas. This herd was placed on the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge near Cache, Oklahoma.2

Peeler's lifelong love affair with the Longhorn had begun early. His father Tom Peeler had raised Longhorns and had convinced his sons that these cattle were the only ones worth the trouble of raising. If the old adage that one should ranch in the country where he grew up has any validity, then it is likely also valid that one should raise the kind of cattle he has seen raised. That is a very deep link that Peeler had with the Longhorn breed.

Peeler's real determination to save the Longhorn was strongly influenced by J. Frank Dobie, whom he had met in either 1902 or '03 on the ranch of Jim Dobie, J. Frank's uncle, in Nueces County. The two men became close friends. Around 1930--dates range from 1928 to 1932--a major part of the Longhorn preservation effort began. Dobie, a South Texas ranching son and renowned folklorist, loved his region and its flora and fauna and wrote about all of it in classic works such as The Longhorns He convinced Sid Richardson, a wealthy Texas oil man, to fund a comeback for the Longhorn breed. Dobie's argument to Richardson was a telling one. He argued that the Longhorn "would enrich the blood strains then in existence and would, he believed, become the nation's choice for crossbreeding."3 Dobie went on to argue that the Longhorn should also be saved because of its contribution to early Texas history.

When Richardson agreed, Dobie asked that Graves Peeler be given the task of gathering the initial herd of the best specimens he could find from available stock. He argued that Peeler's experience through travel as a brand inspector, his innate cow sense, his hunter instinct, and his understanding of human nature would make him successful. The task was not easy. Peeler found out what most ranchers already knew. Pickings of Longhorns were poor. This situation had developed for several reasons, the principal one being that the more desirable animals had already been sent to market and little interest existed to produce pure Longhorn cattle. Remaining on Texas ranges were only culls and outlaws.

Peeler had specific criteria in mind when searching for authentic examples of the Longhorn. Parker recounts that the true representatives of the breed had an undeniable characteristic--a "fish bone" in the "form of a dip across the hips of the animal at the point where the tail joins the spinal column." This dip is "wide enough to accommodate three fingers and deep enough to permit the top of those fingers to be as low as either side of the 'dip.'"4

Peeler looked for other characteristics as well. One of these was a hardiness or ruggedness that would make these animals durable over the generations to follow. He also expected the cows to be prolific and calve an offspring every year with no exceptions. And he liked spirited cattle, those that had some fight in them.

An article in The Longhorn Journal about Peeler's admiration for spirit recounts an incident involving Peeler at a Longhorn sale in the late 1960s. A Longhorn cow entered the ring and charged the ringmaster, who was mounted on a horse. This man escaped the charge, but the cow then turned on another rider. Ordinarily cattlemen do not desire that characteristic in animals that they are looking to buy, but to the surprise to everyone else present, Peeler shouted with delight and opened the bidding on the cow. Perhaps, the writer speculates, his own ruggedness drew him to appreciate that kind of spirit in the cattle.5

Peeler also wanted his cattle to have a large frame. His herd is well known to have the size commercial breeders find appealing and which make the breed desirable for cross-breeding. Although some breeders look for color, Peeler, on the contrary, was interested largely in size and performance.

Mothering ability was one of the most important attributes of Peeler cattle. Peeler had been told earlier that the Longhorn "can outrun a cow thief and whip a panther" and one that could whip a panther could surely run off a wolf or coyote.

Another trait that made the Longhorn desirable was its ability to survive the often drought-stricken ranges of South Texas, and the most desirable trait in years past was the ability to resist the screwworm menace. The Longhorn cow could kill out the worms in her calf unless the affected area was located in some part of the calf's body that she could not reach.6

Peeler's odyssey proved an interesting one.7 It included trips to Mexico, where good specimens were found. Peeler's first buying trip netted ten cows and one bull placed in the State Park at Mathis north of Corpus Christi, ten cows and one bull placed at the Brownwood State Park in north central Texas, and ten cows and a bull placed on Peeler's ranch in McMullen County of South Texas. One of the animals was a large red bull found tethered on a rope in the front yard of a residence in Brownsville. Peeler ranged this bull with his cows. Other cattle were placed in the TA Bar pastures on the Nash Ranch and on Alonzo Peeler's ranch in Atascosa County.

One of the more interesting incidents of this search for excellent examples of the Longhorn grew out of a contact with a Hollywood movie icon, early-day cowboy star Tom Mix. Mix asked Peeler to buy twelve cows and two bulls for him, but before the small herd could be delivered,

Mix was killed in a car wreck. These Longhorns, rather than going into Mix's herd, instead went into the state herd of Longhorns being accumulated by Peeler and paid for with Richardson money. The source of the cattle was Fausto Yturria of the famous Yturria Ranch north of Brownsville.

Other cattle were purchased from Sam and Oscar Jourdan in Hardin County and Lupe Linda Garza and Fausto Guerra in Starr County. The project prospered, and the naturally prolific Longhorns produced fine crops of offsprings.

Bringing new blood into the herds to prevent inbreeding required continuing efforts. In 1969 Graves and Walter B. Scott traveled to Mexico looking for new blood.8 They bought and imported ten bulls from Enrique Guerra's ranch.

Darrell Dickenson of the Dickenson Ranch, one of those widely known for its Longhorns, describes his initial introduction to the breed and to Graves Peeler. In
1967 he saw an advertisement for Longhorns for sale from well-known personality Happy Shahan, on whose ranch near Bracketville stands the Alamo village movie set. Dickenson called his uncle Art Shahan to see if they were related to Happy. Discovering that they were distantly related, Dickenson brought up the notion of buying some Longhorns from Shahan. His uncle, however, suggested instead that the nephew buy the cattle from Graves Peeler since Peeler's herd was "generally regarded as one of the best." Dickenson bought six cows and six calves from Peeler's herd at $300.00 a pair. Peeler also told him they could pick out a bull for $300.00.

Peeler soon discovered that Dickenson's eye for bulls was better than most because Dickenson picked one of Peeler's favorites. Peeler complained that he could not let the bull go for only $300.00 and asked instead for $325.00. The bull proved worth the price because of the number of quality cattle that he produced.

Charlie Hellen of Hebbronville got his initial herd stock from Peeler in 1964. He met Peeler through Dick Holbein, a game warden who had worked with Peeler. The two men visited Peeler's ranch, ate a meal with Peeler, and bought thirty steers. A year later, Hellen purchased six Longhorns cows from Peeler as well.9

Eventually Longhorn herds would be established on many notable ranches including the Shreiner' s Y 0 Ranch at Mountain Home as well as the ranches of Larry Smith, John Protho, and others. Now many of the ranches across the state have herds ranging in size from one or two steers to large breeding herds. These include the Long X at Kent and Lambshead near Albany as well as hundreds of others. The Longhorns on the King Ranch in South Texas also trace back to Peeler stock.10

One of the crises that disappointed Peeler was the lack of proper care given the cattle at Mathis. In a letter to a Western artist named Jimmy Walker, J. Frank Dobie indicates that the problem that upset Peeler was that the park manager, who kept the bull penned up, also did not see that the cows had proper forage. Later much of the herd was moved to Fort Griffin

State Park between Albany and Throckmorton. Although other blood has been brought into that herd, many of the animals there today trace their lineage from the original animals purchased by Peeler.

By 1970 Peeler wanted to pass the project on to someone else.11 Jack Phillips and Walter Scott bought Peeler's personal herd bearing the Wine Glass brand, a spur brand with the fork up and a bar across the bottom to form the bottom of the glass. They leased Peeler's ranch and left the cattle on it. On January 11, 1972, Scott bought Out Phillips and shipped the cattle to his ranch in Goliad County on June 30, 1973.

Peeler had kept some of the herd when he sold the rest to Phillips and Scott. Retained were seventeen cows, one bull, and three steers, all wearing the Peeler 7PL brand which Graves' father had registered in 1880. This herd grew until March of 1978, when nephew T. E. Peeler, the executor of Graves Peeler's estate, sold the 7PL cattle to John Ball, Jr., of Arlington and Larry Smith of Crowley. By this time the herd consisted of thirty cows, thirty calves, fourteen steers, and eleven heifers and yearlings. The two men moved the herd to a ranch east of Lake Benbrook near Fort Worth. When the remaining animals were sold, Peeler had been collecting and had owned Longhorns for forty-six years.12

When he wrote The Longhorns published in 1941, Dobie felt the breed was doomed. He wrote that "the moving finger has writ. The Longhorn is of the past--a past so remote and irrevocable that sometimes it seems as if it might never have been, though in years it was only yesterday." He continued by saying that "it is easy for the ignorant, the superficial, and the self- adulating to regard that vanquished dominator of annihilated ranges as a monstrous joke on cattle-kind, a kind of phantasmagoria of vacancy now populated and machine-modernized. But I have an immense respect for the breed," he said. Dobie's respect was based on observation: "They possessed an adamantine strength, an aboriginal vitality, a Spartan endurance, and a fierce nobility that somehow makes one associate them with Roman legions and Sioux warriors." He also appreciated the memories associated with these noble beasts: "The winds of memory still shift the dust that their millions of steel hoofs raised, over trails guided by the unvarying swing of the Great Dipper or the sinking sun's infallible direction--trails across a world that then seemed as vast as the Milky Way when it canopied a lone man on the lone prairie."13

Dobie's passage puts the life of the breed in past tense. He had not given Peeler time to execute the plan that Dobie himself had conceived and Richardson had funded. Peeler did not fail in his task, as even a cursory look at the ranges of the contemporary West will show. The Longhorn has become a registered breed very popular with ranchers and breeders, particularly for crossbreeding first-calf heifers at an age earlier than is advisable with bulls of the larger breeds, such as Hereford or Simmental.

Longhorn breeders may still argue over which is more important--configuration or horns. The fact this question is even moot is due to the dedication of Graves Peeler because without his efforts, there would be no Longhorns to argue about.

Before he died, Peeler amassed the largest herd of Longhorn cattle in the world. The registry of this most Western of all breeds of cattle would not have been possible without the efforts of this rare individual.

Even though he believed firmly in the characteristics, traits, and hardiness of the breed, Peeler never anticipated the popularity the breed would achieve. Phillips said, "1 had a tough time just getting Graves to register his herd. He had no idea how popular they would become."14

CHAPTER V TROPHY GAME AND ARTIFACTS

Peeler was an inveterate collector of many kinds of items, especially wild game trophies and primitive artifacts. As a youth Peeler developed a love of hunting, and not just any game animal--he liked trophy hunting. He also had the tracking skills and sharp eye necessary to be successful. And successful he was, for despite his busy career as a brand inspector, special Texas Ranger, ranch manager, rancher, and Longhorn sleuth, he amassed a significant trophy game collection now in the hands of the Conner Museum at Texas A&M University, Kingsville.

Peeler's remarkable shooting skill had been ingrained early in his life. His father taught him to shoot a small Stevens .22 caliber rifle at an early age, and the experience enlivened Peeler's enthusiasm for hunting. Later he graduated to a larger .22 rifle and then; after his father's death, to his father's Winchester .44-40, which he used until he wore it out. Then in 1907 his mother gave him a Savage .30-.30 caliber rifle, which he used for many years.

Peeler killed his first deer as a boy of only eight years of age, but it made an impression that kept him at the task for the rest of his life. He had been invited to visit the ranch of his uncle Will Irvin in La Salle County. On a visit to the Peeler Ranch in 1894, Uncle Will invited Graves to come to the 60,000-acre ranch that fall to "kill me some deer."1 Peeler was so eager that he made the visit in later summer to take his uncle up on the offer.

Graves was up early the first morning he was there, his imagination already spurred by the idea of killing a deer. He mounted a horse and rode into a 3,000-acre pasture where one the deer's favorite food, prickly pear apples, was at a stage certain to attract the animals. His search was soon rewarded when he spotted a buck white-tail deer with an extremely large rack. The animal was quietly eating pear apples behind a stand of prickly pear. Dismounting about a hundred yards from his quarry, Peeler shed his noisy canvas brush jacket and chaps and began working his way toward the buck, which seemed unconcerned about the lad and kept on feeding on the apples. At forty yards, Graves shot the deer with his .44-40, a heavy rifle for a boy only eight years old. The shot was characteristic of Graves-- in the neck to drop the animal immediately and not ruin any of the most desirable portions of the meat.

In his excitement, Graves threw down the gun, pulled out his pocket knife, and cut the deer's throat. He field dressed the deer, and, bloody from his activity, mounted his horse to search for

his uncle, who praised Graves for his action. Graves was a dedicated hunter from that moment on.

Peeler loved a challenge, so he developed the habit of hunting from horseback. He trained a number of outstanding mounts to aid him in this activity. Sometimes, but not always, he shot from a moving, even a running, horse. One of his favorite tactics was to ride the horse through the brush until he jumped a suitable buck. Then Peeler would ride after the buck until it ran into an opening in the brush or stopped on the side of a hill. He would sometimes dismount if he had a chance, but if not, he simply raised up in the stirrups of the saddle and shot the deer.2

At age fifteen Peeler killed a forty-eight point buck on the Baker Ranch. He fired his shot from a running horse with his trusty .44-40 Winchester. Unfortunately the rack was lost when he asked one of the ranch hands to saw the antlers off. The hand did not fully understand the importance of the rack, used an axe to remove the horns, and ruined the set. It was the most points on a deer he ever killed, but at age fifteen Peeler did not worry much about it; he assumed he would just kill another. The closest he got to this in his collection is a thirty-two point whitetail and a twenty-nine point blacktail.

The largest set of antlers he ever took--thirty-two and a half inch spread with eleven points--was on the Irvin Ranch in 1917. The rack drew the praise of Gene Irvin, Graves' cousin. The head went into Graves' collection, but his brother Jeff wanted one to mount to give to his future wife, whom he wished to impress. Graves offered him any of the hundred and fifty or so heads in the collection at that time, but specifically told him not to take the thirty-two and one-half inch spread. Nevertheless, Jeff selected it because it was the most impressive. He took it with him to San Antonio on the train to meet Margaret, his future wife. In the excitement of seeing his sweetheart, Jeff forgot the head on the train, which pulled out of the station, and the rack was lost to Graves forever.

By 1944 Peeler had tired of hunting his regular haunts and took on the Yukon and Canada. His hunting companions became Ed Campbell, Henderson Coquat, and Phil Tom. Once in the Yukon when he was hunting with two Indians, he spotted a grizzly bear digging out and eating gophers about four hundred yards away. He dropped that one and added it to his collection.

Another time with Henderson Coquat and a guide he observed a she-grizzly bear and a couple of two-year-old cubs. The next day the party returned to the scene and spotted them about two hundred yards away. It was Peeler's turn to shoot first, and he indicated he intended to shoot the large female, although only part of her head was visible. To Coquat's question about where he intended to shoot her, Peeler responded, "In the ear."

Coquat fired at one of the cubs, a silver tip, but hit him only in the tongue. The two bears took off in a dead run up the side of a mountain. Coquat's efforts to hit the running bear failed, and in frustration he told Peeler to fire. Peeler steadied his aim on a nearby rock and adjusted his line of fire to allow for the distance-- nine hundred to a thousand yards. Then he fired one shot, and the bear tumbled over, its spine broken by the bullet. When the men went over to examine

the carcasses of the bears, Peeler's bear was shot in the ear, just as he had said he intended to do.3

On another occasion Peeler was riding at full gallop on a horse and pulled his rifle from the saddle boot. Then he fired three shots. A companion who was riding beside him noticed that when Peeler pulled his horse to a stop, he was exceedingly upset. The companion assumed that Peeler had missed his deer. Peeler drew his friend's attention, however, to two deer that he had killed. One went down from a shot in his spinal cord just behind the head; the other was shot in the head. Peeler was upset because he had missed the third one, and all of that from the back of a running horse.

Peeler had opportunities beyond average to take outstanding trophies. He was one of the first to hunt game in the national parks in the United States after they were reopened following their closure during World War II. The trophies that had grown in those forests during that time were extraordinary.

Peeler developed a schedule which allowed him in late summer to drive to Alaska and begin hunting. He would then "hunt" his way back to Texas by the end of December. Along the way he hunted in Alaska, Canada, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico. One of his most interesting jobs, as related by Fannie Grace Hindes, was killing wild game to feed the construction crews on the Mexican National Railroad.4

Peeler's collection eventually came to include, in addition to numerous whitetail and mule deer specimens, excellent examples of elk, moose, mountain goat, big horn sheep, antelope, caribou, javelina, Russian boar, and grizzly bears. Three of the mule deer racks qualify for non-typical Boone and Crockett register of North American big game animals, and one of the typical racks is also included in that list.

Peeler also was a lifelong collector of various kinds of artifacts. He began as a boy picking up arrowheads and other interesting pieces of stone along Metate Creek. He particularly favored stone arrow and spear points, and over the years he collected about a hundred thousand arrowheads. Peeler found attractive also petrified wood, flints of various kinds, and unusual stones. Bits, spurs, stirrups, rifles, pistols, unusual cooking utensils, and branding irons drew his attention as well. He even collected idols and stone tools in Mexico. He really began seriously collecting these items in the 1930s when he worked on the Nash Ranch and found numerous arrowheads there and in other such places as the Yukon and Canada when he was there hunting. On one of his most profitable ventures, he found eight hundred arrowheads in one week while working with Howard Sturges and a professional tracker named Juan.

Peeler was not a trained archeologist or anthropologist. He kept no records of where he found the items. Jimmie Piquet, at the time the Director of the Conner Museum where Peeler's collection resides, says that she was nonetheless intrigued by the uniqueness of his collection and the vast array of items found in it, which also includes fossils and sea shells.5

As to his passion for collecting arrowheads, Fannie Grace Hindes, who ranched with her husband Roy near Charlotte, recalled that Peeler would come to their ranch for a visit and get so carried away looking for arrowheads that it might take him several hours to get from the car to their door.6

The exhibit of Peeler's collection opened to the public in the Conner Museum in Kingsville in 1982. It had been purchased by King Ranch, Inc. for $50,000.00 on April 10, 1968. Leonard Stiles, long-time manager of the cattle operation on the Santa Gertrudis division of King Ranch, assumed the role of packer and original curator. He managed to get the items stored in a warehouse in Bradshaw, where they resided for some years before being moved to better quarters and eventually to a suitable setting in the Conner Museum. It was Stiles who in his interviews with Peeler determined, from Peeler's memory, where Peeler had taken the animals that made up the collection.

Two of Peeler's lifelong passions, hunting and collecting artifacts, rose from the same drive which motivated him to be the rescuer and savior of the Longhorn breed of cattle. The efforts of this remarkable man in his hunting and collecting, however, have left a rich reservoir for the benefit and pleasure for those of us who can enjoy vicariously the vigorous activity of Graves Peeler.

CHAPTER VI CONCLUSION

Graves Peeler was no doubt a Texan's Texan. His adventures spanned his ninety years like a shadow follows sunlight. His work as a brand inspector for the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association and his experiences as a Texas Ranger are in the best tradition of the Texas myth. It is men such as Peeler who created the reality from which the myth emerged and grew to heroic proportion.

As a hunter of wild game and artifacts, Peeler proved incredibly prolific. The collection in the Conner Museum, thanks to Leonard Stiles and King Ranch, Inc., is one of the treasures of the area where hunting and history are still rich lodes to mine.

It is as savior of the Longhorn, however, that Peeler deserves the most credit. His efforts, aided by J. Frank Dobie, another giant in the state, and Sid Richardson, whose oil empire funded and continues to finance a number of worthy causes, have preserved a piece of Texas myth that may be the ultimate part of the mosaic of Texas culture. Walter B. Scott called Peeler a "very special limited edition Texan." Scott went on to say that both Peeler and his cattle "knew tough times and how to survive them."1

Despite all of these accomplishments, it is a human Graves Peeler that friends and relatives recall after his death. Walter Thomson, one of Peeler's nephews, remembered him as a larger than life hero. Thomson recalled the athleticism of Peeler, his "unbelievable reflexes and

coordination,"2 abilities that probably saved his life in such close scrapes as the shooting incident with the rustler Tibadeaux and no doubt accounted for his incredible skill in hunting deer, especially those shot while he was astride a running horse. It is no wonder that he was a stalwart athlete in baseball and football as a young man both in high school and later as a professional baseball player and college athlete at Texas A&M University.

Peeler's memory for events fifty or more years in the past was remarkable. Were it not for Peeler's memory, Leonard Stiles would not have been able to capture on this tape recorder the date and place of each of the trophy heads in Peeler's game collection. That information would have been lost, for Peeler did not document it in writing anywhere through his long life. Stiles had first suspected that Peeler was just making up the dates and places, but as he asked Peeler about the heads, he noticed that the same information came forward for each one. This regularity convinced Stiles that Peeler actually remembered the facts that he was giving.

Peeler's love for the outdoors and hunting and his tendency to prefer nature's peace and quiet to close association with people fostered his bachelor rural life. Concerning his bachelorhood, Peeler once responded in characteristic wit in an interview with T.V. personality Gary DeLaune. Peeler quipped, "Well, I never found a woman who could remember the next morning what she'd told me the night before, so I decided it wasn't worth it."3 Much of Peeler's life he lived under fairly primitive conditions, even for the time in which he lived, for he disdained indoor plumbing for most of his life, and he never felt the need for air conditioning, which most people now consider a necessity.

Short visits to urban centers convinced Peeler he was meant to be a loner in the wilderness. One incident is recorded by Mrs. Roy Hinds, wife of one of Peeler's hunting partners, who invited Peeler as a guest to her house not long after she and her husband had married in 1949. Peeler sat down at the immaculately set table, glittering with new dishes and silverware. From habit, however, he took out his bandana handkerchief and carefully wiped the plate and silver before he began to eat.4

Peeler's uniqueness did not appeal to everyone he met. He was, recalled Jack Phillips, a West Columbia rancher and friend of Peeler, "the kind of man for whom you cared a great deal, . . . or disliked a great deal."5 Leonard Stiles, a protégé' of Peeler, believed him to be the best at his work that he had ever seen. Stiles said of him, "He was a legend, one of the greats."6 Despite his eccentricities, Peeler was loved by many. George Hardeman Smyer, who grew up near the Peeler Ranch, called Graves "a man of sterling qualities" and notes that "many enjoyed his wry humor."7 Roy Hindes calls him "the only man I ever met who had no fear of anything or anybody."8

As Peeler's health began to fail, he moved into the Christine, Texas, home of Dorothy Rugh and her husband. As his condition worsened, he eventually moved into Retama North, a nursing home in Pleasanton, Texas. He died on March 11, 1977, at the age of ninety and was buried in the family plot in the Pleasanton cemetery. Only three of his siblings survived him--Mamie, Beatrice, and Travis. But many people remember Graves Peeler and knew that they had lost a

good friend when he died. He is still remembered by annual wild game dinners held in the Hall of Horns at the Conner Museum. He should be remembered as well every time when in a pasture or park a Longhorn cow or steer provides a living image to link the present to the fascinating past.

NOTES

I

1 Information on the background of the Peeler family can be found in Ellis A. Davis and Edwin H. Brobe, The New Encyclopedia of Texas (Dallas: Texas Development Bureau, n.d.), III, 1966; J. Marvin Hunter, ed. Trail Drivers of Texas, (1924; rpt. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), p. 759; and several obituary notices in the Leonard Stiles Collection, all undated and without sources indicated.
2 Charles B. Searle, "Graves Peeler-Larger than Life," Texas Longhorn Journal, May-June, 1985, p. 47.
3 "Life and Times of Graves Peeler . . . a Hunting Man," The Pleasanton Express, August 21, 1968, p.4D.
4 Ibid, p. 1D.
5 Ibid., p. 4D.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 The full story of Gregorio Cortez is related in Americo Paredes, With His Pistol in His Hand (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958); a discussion of Peeler's role in the chase is found in "Life and Times of Graves Peeler," The Pleasanton Express, p. 1D.
9 "Life and Times of Graves Peeler," The Pleasanton Express, p. 1D.

II

1 Charles B. Searle, "Graves Peeler-Larger than Life," Texas Longhorn Journal, May-June, 1985, p. 47.
2 Ibid.
3 The events related in this chapter are taken largely from the three articles based on interviews of Peeler by Jane Pattie, who deserves an enormous amount of credit for doing this work. If not for her effort, many of these stories would have died with Peeler. These articles are found in The Cattleman Magazine under the title "To Catch a Thief": 61 no. 5 (October 19690, 35, 68, 70, 71, 73, 76; 61 no. 6 (November 1969), 48, 62, 64, 66; and 62 no. 7 (December 1969), 42, 74-76, 78, 80. See also "Life and Times of Graves Peeler," The Pleasanton Express, August 21, 1968, p. 4D.
4 Pattie, "To Catch a Thief," 61 no 6, 74.
5 Copies of Peeler's enlistment documents in the Stiles Collection were taken from originals in The Texas Ranger Museum in Waco, Texas.
6 Undocumented clipping, Stiles Collection; and Graves Peeler interview by W. K. Daetwyler, typescript, Stiles Collection.

III

1 The episode of Peeler' s experience on the Nash Ranch is found principally in Pattie, "To Catch a Thief," 61, no. 7, 74-76, 78, 80. Other details are found in "West Columbia's Miss Kittie," undocumented article, Stiles collection; and "Kittie Nash Groce Will Published," Brazoria County News, October 17, 1968, p. 10, Stiles collection.
2 Pattie, p. 75.
3 Faye Peeler, Untitled, unpublished manuscript dated April 9, 1979, Stiles Collection.

IV

1 See Lawrence Clayton, "The Evolution of the Cowboy," in The Catch Pen: Proceedings of the National Cowboy Symposium, Ed. Len Ainsworth and Kenneth W. Davis (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1991), pp. 177-183.
2 Undocumented article, Stiles Collection.
3 Ben L. Parker, "The Evangelist," The Pleasanton Express, August 15, 1979, p. 14B.
4 Ibid.
5 Charles B. Searle, "Graves Peeler-Larger than Life," Texas Longhorn Journal, May-June, 1985, p. 50-51.
6 "Emil Marks and Graves Peeler: Friends Who Built Bloodlines," p. 36, undocumented clipping, Stiles Collection; and "Life and Times of Graves Peeler," The Pleasanton Express, August 21, 1968, p. 8D.
7 Details of these trips can be found in Walter B. Scott, "Graves Peeler and Texas Longhorn Cattle One and the Same," Longhorn Scene, undocumented clipping, Stiles Collection.
8 George Carmack, "Peeler Helped To Restore Longhorn Herd," San Antonio Express-News, May 11, 1974, Weekend Visit, p. 1C; and Scott, p. 63.
9 These details are found in Searle, p. 49.
10 "Herd of Longhorns Finds Way Back to King Ranch," Corpus Christi Caller-Times, n.d. 1953, p. 8F, Stiles Collection.
11 Scott, p. 60.
12 Worth Wren, Jr., "FW Area Men Buy Longhorns," undocumented clipping, Stiles Collection; and Bill Cunningham, "Longhorns Leaving South Texas," Undocumented clipping, Stiles Collection.
13 J. Frank Dobie, The Longhorns, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1941), pp. 344-345.
14 Scott, p. 51.

V

1 "Life and Times of Graves Peeler," The Pleasanton Express, August 21, 1968, p. 8D.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Quoted in Lauraine Miller, "Longhorn Savior," undocumented clipping, Stiles collection.
5 Ibid.

6 Conner Museum Brings South Texas' Past into the Present," Kingsville Record, August 25, 1991, n.p. Stiles Collection; see also "Mounted Animal Heads Displayed at Museum," Kingsville Record, October 24, 1982, p. 1C, and "Arrowheads, Animal Heads, Skins- He Collects 'Em All." Undocumented clippings, Stiles Collection.

VI

1 Walter B. Scott, "Graves Peeler and Texas Longhorn One and the Same," Longhorn Scene, p. 63, undocumented clipping, Stiles Collection.
2 John Bruce, "Hall of Horns Honors a Legend," Corpus Christi Caller-Times, March 26, 1990, p. l2A.
3 Undocumented clipping, Stiles Collection.
4 Undocumented clipping, Stiles Collection.
5 Charles B. Searle, "Graves Peeler-Larger than Life," Texas Longhorn Journal, May-June, 1985, p. 47.
6 Ibid.
7 P. 2D of undocumented clipping, Stiles Collection.
8 P. 1D of undocumented clipping, Stiles Collection.

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