

News from Rare Breeds Canada: Do you know your goat history?

Part 1

by Rebecca Lange

The goats that appear on Rare Breeds Canada's conservation list must not only have low annual female registration figures; but also be designated as a heritage breed. The four breeds that fit into this category are the Angora, Nubian, Saanen and Toggenburg, all of whom were entered into the first Canadian Goat Society herd record book. Each had to meet a certain criteria, specific to the breed; which resulted in a few well bred pure animals being recorded in Canada. Alongside these purebreds were foundation stock; goats that met a set breed standard, but were not registered in Canada or abroad. It took an entire year for the Foundation Stock to be inspected and as a result J.R King of the Sheep and Goat Division in Ottawa passed 200 goats in 1917 as worthy of being entered into CGS records. Essentially these were Canada's first grades and amendment in CGS by-laws in May 1918, stated that only female progeny from these animals could be recorded.

The beginnings of established breeds in this country were by no means small - breeders brought in stock from the US, UK and Switzerland that were bred along some of the finest lines of their time. Importations required effort on the part of the purchaser, with a 50 cent importation certificate being required, as well as a 25% import duty and on top of that a 7.5% war tax. After which time a certificate of registration cost a further 10 cents. Purebred American dairy goats averaged approximately \$150, meaning that only a few could afford such animals. However Nubians in particular were extremely successful; mainly due to the efforts of one person D. Mowat, who consistently imported Nubians from throughout the UK and went on to sell his stock in virtually every province in Canada. Mowat was also the first President of the Canadian Goat Society and was heavily involved in the establishment of the British Columbia Goat Breeders Association.

To become a member of the Canadian Goat Society in 1917, it cost \$2 for an annual membership and \$50 to become a life member. There were also fees for registration, transfer of ownership and a one time herd name fee. Tattoos were not required by law until 1923. British Columbians dominated the membership list in the early years, but there was also a strong contingent of members in Ontario and a small few scattered in the Prairie and Atlantic provinces.

Angoras

The first Angora entered into Canadian Goat Society records is a female, born in 1913, simply named Lathrop 376, bred by K.E Lathrop, Spring Brook, Wisconsin and owned in December 1916, by A.C Hardy of Brockville Ontario. Hardy also happened to own the first registered male Angora: Phillippi 231, born in 1914 and bred by George A Philippi, Bear Creek, Wisconsin, USA.

But, it was not Hardy who was the most prominent breeder during these early years - the Experimental Farm in New Brunswick was responsible for the breeding and selling of more stock than any other person. (The Experimental Farm was opened in 1912 and as with all farms run by the Canadian Government was designated to research and test new forms of crops,

livestock housing, nutrition and management of animals and the use of manure as a fertilizer, as well as planting trees, shrubs and shelter belts.) Fredericton Hero 4, was the first buck registered as a result of 2 parents entered into the CGS herd registry. Born on April 6, 1919, Hero was later owned by W.G Pringle of Arden, Ontario. Hero's sire being Sky Farm Hero and dam Sky Farm Winnie. Capella 2, was born on April 24th 1919, also at the Experimental Farm and she remained at the experimental facility. Also sired by Sky Farm Hero, her dam was Sky Farm Tunie.

Besides being in New Brunswick and Ontario, Angoras could also be found in Saskatchewan and British Columbia. The Angoras brought to Saskatchewan were all from the Northern Angora Goat Company in Helena, Montana. Established in 1900, the company not only promoted their livestock, using the slogan 'the largest breeders of long mohair Angorasin America' - but also sold mohair. At the peak of production there was a Mohair Sales Depot in Helena and an Eastern office in Boston. Long Mohair was commonly used for blankets, rugs, carpets and automobile tops.

A bulletin published by the British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture in 1918, stated that there was no established market for mohair in Canada. There was a belief however, that given more of a supply, textile mills in Canada would be willing to start processing mohair. Further encouragement for the expansion of the industry was given in part by letters from producers in the US, as well as facts and figures pertaining to Angora goats there. Not only were fleeces in demand for a wide variety of uses, but Angora wethers (averaging 68lb) were dominating meat markets in Kansas, in the summer of 1915, where they fetched from 4.5 to 5 cents per pound. Skins were also in high demand, as they were considered to be suppler than other goat breed skins, averaging \$2-3 per animal. Angora skin was steadily being imported for use as book bindings and gloves. Lesser grade hides were used for making workmen's gloves.

Further encouragement was given in the publication for producers considering the Angora. Best combing mohair was set at 36-38 cents per pound during the spring of 1915. Oregon producers benefitted the most from the rise in popularity of fibre animals, as the mohair from this region was considered to be the heaviest and lengthiest in staple. Shearing took place once a year and a prize buck named "Romeo" gave a fleece that weighed 18lbs and measured 20 inches in length - his fleece sold for \$115.

With a population of 400,000 Angora in the States, buying stock from over the border was considered to be an economical way of establishing a herd for Canadians. Does could be bought for \$6 to \$10 per head and bucks \$25-100 dependant upon breeding. To clip the Angoras machine powered clippers were available for \$12.

Despite all the optimism surrounding the Angora goat industry in 1918, the growth of the breed in Canada was a slow and steady one. Many producers suffered health set backs in their herds and the kids were often described as being born in poor health and having glandular problems; with a high mortality rate. Also of concern was the fact that the does were not always good mothers and did n't appear to have enough milk for their young. Besides which one producer stated "there is a general prejudice against goat meat in my area." There was however positive evidence that besides being dual purpose animals the Angora were excellent at brush clearance and demonstrations were held to that effect.

By 1923, 53 purebred Angora had been registered with the Canadian Goat Society, from their small beginnings, producers overcame the health problems they were encountering in their herds by asking the advice of breeders from South Africa and the US. So the Angora went on to become a part of Canada's livestock heritage but remains a rare goat today, listed as "vulnerable" by Rare Breeds Canada.

With thanks to Sharon Hunt, General Manager of the Canadian Goat Society for the use of the original CGS Herd Record Book, which was invaluable in writing these accounts.