

John H. Knox, 1898–1979: A Brief Biography

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John Harvey Knox was born the youngest of seven children on a livestock farm in Geauga County, Ohio on September 10, 1898. After completing high school at Auburn Township Ohio in 1917 he enrolled in Animal Husbandry at The Ohio State University, where he earned a B.S. degree in 1921. Noteworthy animal husbandry professors at The Ohio State University during those years included D. J. Kays, Charles Plumb, and Dr. Carl Gay.

In the fall of 1921 Mr. Knox began his graduate training at the University of Illinois. After serving as an assistant in the Animal Husbandry Department

until 1924 he received his M.S. degree and was appointed as an instructor on the Illinois faculty.

In 1927 Mr. Knox moved to Texas A&M to accept the position as Assistant Professor in charge of beef cattle in the teaching division. He was promoted to Associate professor in 1928 and also was appointed as secretary of the Texas Shorthorn association. Over the subsequent seven years he developed a solid reputation as a livestock judge and considerable expertise on the pedigrees of beef cattle.

Mr. Knox married Frances Eda George in 1928. They had originally met at the University of Illinois while he was a graduate assistant and she a departmental secretary. They had two daughters, Carolyn and Irene, and five grandchildren. The support provided to Mr. Knox from his wife and family made much of his professional success possible. Likewise, Mr. Knox was a devoted family man; throughout the remainder of his career following his marriage, Mr. Knox always walked home for lunch whenever possible in order to be with his family. The Knox family continued to support his efforts as an educator even after his death; they made monetary contributions to the Animal Science Department for the purchase of textbooks for deserving graduate and undergraduate students.

In 1935 Mr. Knox was selected as head of the Animal Husbandry Department at New Mexico A&M (later to become New Mexico State University, NMSU). His move to New Mexico was thought to have been influenced by the 63,000-acre ranch operated by New Mexico A&M. He correctly envisioned this facility as a tremendous asset in developing the superior research and teaching programs over the years that followed.

In New Mexico, Professor Knox came to be affectionately known as "Prof" Knox to students, his colleagues, and ranchers in the state. Although Prof's primary training was in the animal field, he quickly developed an appreciation for the vast range areas in the west and their potential for livestock production. He never failed to point out the importance of proper range management to students and ranchers alike. One of his favorite remarks in discussions of range livestock production was that "feed supplements should be used to bring out the best from our native forages rather than replace or exploit them." From the beginning, his department at New Mexico A&M included range management (or range science)

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faculty members with whom Prof Knox had a deep and lasting respect.

Almost immediately after coming to New Mexico Prof assumed a daily behavioral pattern that he followed throughout his career. At 7:00 a.m. daily he would enter the livestock complex located adjacent to campus and walk rather slowly through this facility, stopping frequently to observe a pen of livestock or a certain individual animal. Following this morning "inspection tour" Prof would walk direct to his office or proceed to the ranch to carry out field work. One of his colleagues surmised that Prof used this early morning hour to carefully plan and organize the particular tasks to be performed that day and simply used the livestock as a pleasant "backdrop" for this process. Prof would also walk through the livestock complex after work each day and again on weekends.

Prof Knox had a long list of professional achievements during his lifetime; the following represent some of the more obvious ones. He served as president of the Western Section, American Society of Animal Production throughout the World War II years (1942–46), having held this office for the longest period of time in the organization's history. For his early work in performance testing of beef cattle Prof received the Beef Improvement Federation's "Pioneer Award." In 1954 the New Mexico Cattle Growers Association named Prof Knox as the "Cattleman of the Year," making him the first university researcher to receive this award.

Prof Knox's outstanding teaching skills earned him the first teaching award to be given by the American Society of Animal Production in 1959. This award was bestowed at their 51st annual meeting in Chicago on November 27, 1959, and a fitting summary of his teaching accomplishments to that point in his career appeared in the *Journal of Animal Science* (19:342). At a meeting after Prof's retirement in 1964 it was estimated that he personally had taught some 1,500 students during his career at NMSU. One of his first duties that he assumed midway through the fall semester of 1935 at New Mexico A&M was taking over the teaching of the introductory animal husbandry course. A student enrolled in this course at the time wrote me that his grade jumped from a low "C" at mid-semester to a final grade of "A" because of the motivation provided from Prof Knox. He continued to teach the introductory course at New Mexico State throughout most of his career; also, he taught several other courses, including two of his very favorites, "Range Beef Production" and "Breeds of Livestock."

Later in his career Prof Knox received an honorary doctorate in 1962 from his alma mater, The Ohio State University, in recognition of his many contributions to animal agriculture. In 1963–64 Prof Knox received the most prestigious award given to faculty members at NMSU, the Robert Westhafer Award, for his excellence in research. Also, in 1964, Prof Knox was chosen

as the first recipient of the Distinguished Research Award granted by the NMSU College of Agriculture and Home Economics. Prof Knox retired in 1964 but remained a popular professor emeritus on the NMSU campus, published a very useful memoir series of experiment station bulletins, and continued to attend livestock meetings in New Mexico until his death on February 15, 1979.

One of Prof Knox's greatest assets was his unique ability to extend his research findings and classroom teachings into practical application. He initiated annual Feeders Day and Ranch Day programs in New Mexico beginning in 1936. These programs became very popular among cattle producers in the state not only because of their educational value but also because they offered information that, if put into practice, could potentially increase ranch incomes. Word spread relating the success Prof Knox was having with New Mexico producers and he soon became a popular speaker for livestock meetings across the nation. One of his close associates indicated that, in order to ensure conciseness and inclusion of all pertinent points he wished to relay in a presentation, Prof Knox always wrote his talks out in longhand and memorized them prior to delivery. It was amazing how much material he could cover in a 30-minute presentation.

On certain occasions Prof Knox made long-term commitments with large ranch operations to demonstrate and/or test particular management techniques or concepts. He collaborated with Mr. George Ellis, manager of the famous Bell Ranch in New Mexico, for over 20 yr beginning in the 1940s in establishing one of the earliest demonstrations of selection for performance in a large Hereford herd under true range conditions. Prof Knox seemed to favor cows over bulls in discussions comparing the relative importance of the two in herd improvement. In this regard, one of his often used comments was that "every great bull had a great mother." His opening remark at a cattle breeders school devoted to the range cow held in New Mexico during the mid-1950s was, "We must remember that the mother cow not only furnishes half the genes to her offspring but also provides all the milk!"

In 1942 Prof Knox started a practical selection program in a large commercial Angus herd at Rancho El Sueco in the Mexican state of Chihuahua. A seedstock herd of about 400 cows was selected from the 4,000-cow commercial herd. This select group produced all the bulls used on the ranch after 1945. Mild inbreeding and selection under natural conditions for weaning weight, yearling gain, and conformation produced a uniform herd that was well-adapted to the semidesert environment and the calves always brought top-dollar in the U.S. market. Prof Knox selected all the replacements and carefully maintained herd records on the ranch until 1976, a period of 34 years. He averaged going to the ranch six times per

year. After 1976 the cooperative program was continued by Dr. Bobby Rankin of NMSU into the early 1980s when the ranch was divided up. Results from this effort were published and well-received in both the United States and Mexico.

Prof Knox was a dedicated scientist and an able administrator. He was a keen observer of livestock and people. He was able to visualize the application of science to industry. His writings during the 1940s and 1950s about supplemental feeding and herd improve-

ment strategies are still remarkably applicable today. Throughout New Mexico and the Southwest he will remain a legend among animal scientists and ranching families. A street bordering the livestock facilities on the campus of New Mexico State is appropriately named "Knox Street." Also, as a posthumous addition to his long list of lifetime achievements, a new building that houses the Animal and Range Sciences Department on the NMSU campus was formally dedicated as Knox Hall in 1981.