

Renaissance

Robert S. "Bob" Weddle almost chokes on the word "hobby" when it comes to describing his quest to unravel the Spanish colonial history of the Gulf Coast. For 15 years that hobby has been competing for the time he spends on Ash Grove Angus, a seedstock operation he runs with his wife, Avis, near Bonham in north Texas. In October 1995, his twelfth book was published.

BY MAUREEN CREAMER

Man of the

Although raising Angus and researching history have been Bob Weddle's main concerns since 1981, neither was his original aim in life.

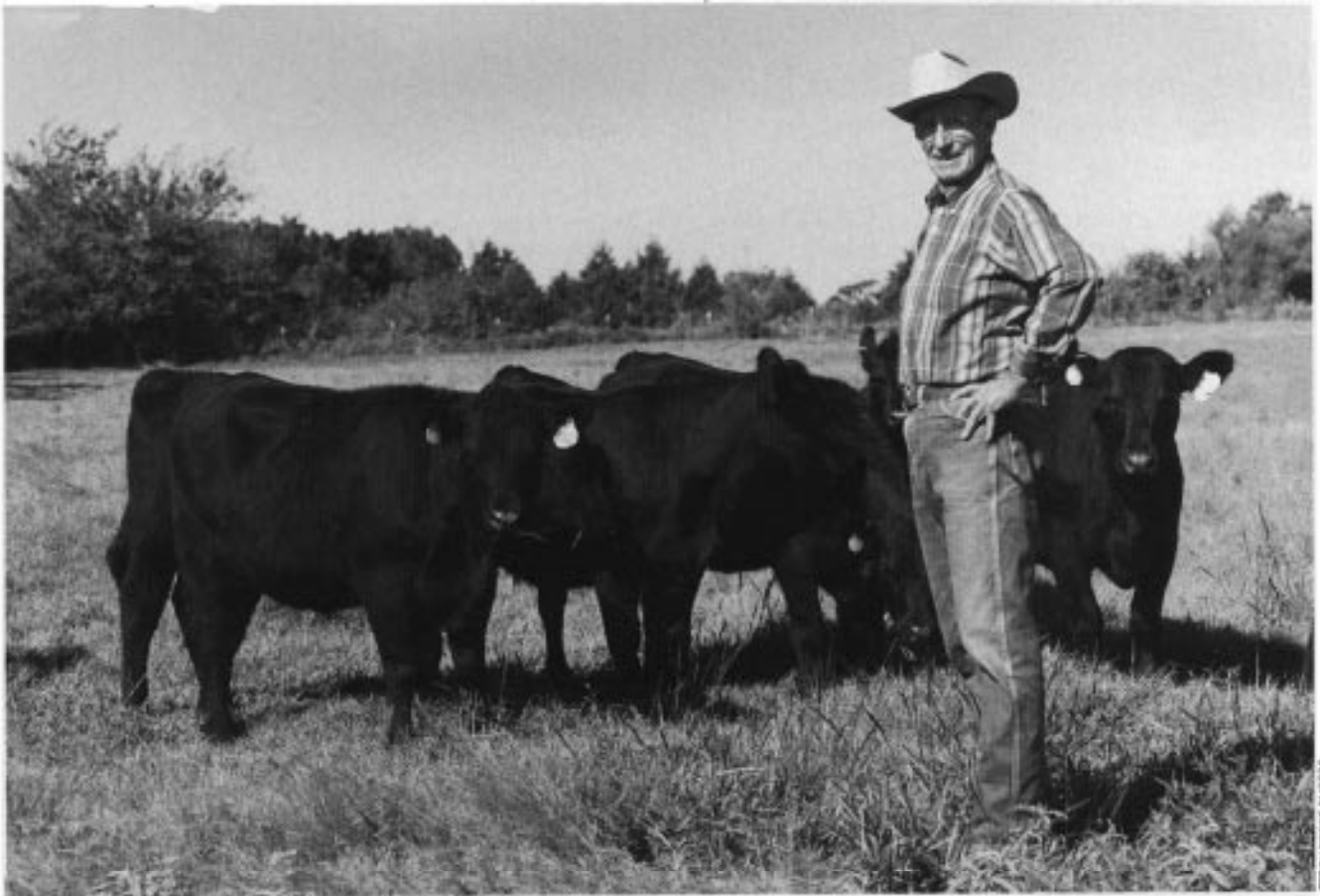
"I was born and reared on a cotton and dairy farm scarcely a stone's throw from our 132 acres northwest of Bonham," he says. When he went off to study journalism at Texas Tech University in 1940, he vowed never to milk another cow or pick another boll.

After returning from service as a Naval Reserve officer in World War II and going to work for United Press in Dallas, however, Bob discovered two things about himself. "I never quite got the 'country' out of my system, and I had this desire to do serious writing," he says. He soon owned a small Hereford-based commercial herd, managed by his father while Bob worked in the newsroom.

The opportunity to do serious writing was the direct result of his journalism and ranching interests. "In 1956, following my father's accidental death, I moved to Menard [Texas] and purchased the weekly newspaper there. Menard, with a diversified-ranching economy, was still in the grips of the great seven-year drought. You might say I blossomed into a crusading editor, with the mission of bringing the local populace out of the economic doldrums," he says.

Texas Plains





REPICK GREAT PHOTOS

Bob Weddle looks over a group of yearling heifers, part of the first crop from Clearcreek Wizard, an embryo transfer son of QAS Traveler 23-4 and a Pine Drive daughter in the Marshall & Marshall herd at Gilmer, Texas.

One undeveloped asset of the Menard community was its local history, dating back to 1757, when the Spaniards established there a fort and mission for the Eastern Apache. "Dusting off my college Spanish, I began researching what I expected to be a chamber-of-commerce brochure," Bob says. The project mushroomed into a book, published in 1964 by a university press.

In writing that first book, Bob discovered many gaps in the published history of the Spanish colonial era in North America. He began tilling in those gaps with a second and then a third book. In 1967 he moved to Austin and went to work for the press that had been his first publisher. Although working for that press and later setting up his own private publishing enterprise were good learning

experiences, his dual nature of country boy/serious writer was not satisfied.

In 1978 came the turning point in Bob's life. He was awarded a two-year research grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. It allowed him to travel to archives in Spain and Mexico. There, he studied explorers' maps and diaries, drawn and written centuries ago in archaic Spanish. He made discoveries himself, such as finding out how difficult it was for the explorers to navigate with only rudimentary instruments and without an accurate means of determining longitude.

"When the grant ran out Avis retired from teaching, and in 1981 we returned to our land in north Texas — neglected for 25 years," Bob says. He felt he had the best of

two worlds then; he had retired to raise Angus and turn his research into a book.

The two worlds soon collided. "Days were tilled with brash and weed control,

would fill two books. He was wrong. "In the end, it was three books," he says. And it took 15 years to get those three books written and published.

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seeding pastures, and restoring fences," Bob says. "And writing often had to be delayed — 'til the late-night and early-morning hours."

As he slowly progressed in writing his book on exploration and discovery in the Gulf of Mexico, he began to realize that the material

"Spanish Sea: The Gulf of Mexico in North American discovery, 1500-1685" came out in 1985; "The French Thorn: Rival Explorers in the Spanish Sea, 1682-1762" appeared in 1991; and "Changing Tides: Twilight and Dawn in the Spanish Sea, 1763-1803" (all from Texas

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A&M University Press) arrived in 1995.

So far, these and other books by Bob have won eleven awards for historical research and writing. *The Journal of American History*, which usually deals with work done by historians in the ivory towers of universities and museums, has reported that "Weddle's increasingly sophisticated contributions to the history of exploration . . . should be known to every American historian."

Bob is almost apologetic about the lapse of time between the publication of volumes one and two of his trilogy. But he explains that he was upgrading his Angus herd with some natural service sires, entering his first venture into artificial insemination, and expanding his acreage. As his market area spread to neighboring counties, he enrolled in the American Angus Association's Angus Herd Improvement Records program. More recently, he purchased Angus Herd Management Systems software to provide his customers with better information.

"If our customer needs our help or advice, we're available," Bob says. "We don't fear competition from those to whom we sell starter herds, we welcome their support in spreading the word about Angus."

His willingness to share what he knows about both of his special interests have brought Bob opportunities to serve in other capacities. He is an advisory editor for a six-volume encyclopedia of Texas that has been 13 years in the making. He gave lectures and papers during the Columbus Quincentenary and the Texas Sesquicentennial observances. He has also been intimately

involved in preserving the history of Fannin County Texas, where his ancestors settled in 1846.

In addition, Bob has served as director of the Mid-Texas Angus Association, is a charter member of the ALOT (Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas) Angus

Association, and is serving on the Fannin County Extension beef and forage committee. He recently entered bulls in the Texas Angus Association performance test.

Bob says that his writing hobby has been following along behind him "like a tail – one that's wagging the

dog." Now that his trilogy on the Gulf of Mexico is finished, will the tail stop wagging?

"I'm not ready to say I'll give up writing altogether," Bob replies, "but for right now, I want to be a full-time Angus breeder."

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