

# M. L. (Buck) Buchanan, 1913–1976: A brief biography

D. S. Buchanan

Department of Animal Science, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater 74078



Marion Lynn Buchanan was born on October 17, 1913, near Chelsea, Kansas. His parents were Orlando and Bertha Buchanan. Marion grew up as the middle child in a family of five. Orlando was a blacksmith. Bertha died when Marion was 12 yr old, and he moved to the nearby Hazlett Ranch. Robert Hazlett was a prominent breeder of Hereford cattle. This job started Marion out on a lifelong love affair with the livestock industry. While working at the Hazlett Ranch, Marion witnessed some of the last cattle from the great cattle drives loaded into railroad cars near his home town. He also helped show cattle at many of the great livestock shows around the nation.

After graduation from high school and a year at El Dorado Junior College, he matriculated with a major in Animal Husbandry to Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, where he learned animal husbandry from Al Darlow and W. L. Blizzard. While working at the college's beef barn, his boss, Mr. MacArthur, awakened him on his first morning at the barn with, "Time to work, Buck," thereby giving him the nickname that he kept for life. During his college years, he was an excellent student, was president of the Block and Bridle Club, and competed on the college's judging teams.

Upon graduation from Oklahoma A&M in 1935, he went to the University of West Virginia to work on a master of science degree with E. A. Livesay. Soon afterward he married his college sweetheart, Lucye Nell Yates, from Forney, Texas, on her birthday, October 2, 1935. Two children, Arthur Lynn and Lynnel, were born during their years in Morgantown. A third child, David Shane, was born several years later when the family lived in Fargo, North Dakota. While working on his research into the genetics of coat color in rats, he also taught classes in meats and livestock production and coached the livestock judging team.

Buck completed the M.S. degree in 1937. During the next 5 yr, he worked toward, but did not complete, a Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin under the supervision of A. B. Chapman and was on the faculties of the University of Georgia and the University of Idaho, each for about 1 yr. He was at the University of Idaho at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor, and most of his students left for the war. He took leave of absence from the university to work as an agricultural agent for the Great Northern Railroad. During the war years, Buck traveled by train throughout the Northwest promoting the sheep industry. During this time he helped to establish the Columbia Sheep Breeder's Association and served as its secretary.

After the war, while preparing to rejoin the faculty at the University of Idaho, J. H. Longwell, an acquaintance from his West Virginia days, invited him to join the animal husbandry faculty at North Dakota Agricultural College, in Fargo. Buck never returned to the University of Idaho but instead went to Fargo to start a career that lasted the remainder of his life.

He was initially appointed as associate professor of animal husbandry, and then in 1946 was promoted to professor and became chairman of animal husbandry and chief of the Division of Animal Industry. At that

---

Received July 27, 2000.

Accepted August 3, 2000.

time there were two faculty members in each of the four departments in the division (animal, dairy, and poultry husbandry, and Veterinary Science). There was steady growth in the departments over the next 30 yr. The Animal, Dairy, and Poultry Husbandry Departments were joined to form the Department of Animal Science in the late 1960s with Buck as chairman. He remained in that position until 1976, when there were 23 faculty members in the department, all of whom he had hired.

At the time Buck went to North Dakota, the department had few land holdings, and most of the livestock facilities were on the campus. The growth of Fargo and the college soon made this situation untenable. He was instrumental in the gift of a large tract of land northwest of the city to be used for the college's livestock. By 1952 there were new sheep, beef, swine, poultry, and dairy units in place with living quarters for managers. Purebred livestock from these units were shown with great success at shows in North Dakota and throughout the nation. There was also a new arena on the campus, with a modern meat laboratory and a research center for intensive nutrition research of all types of livestock. Buck also influenced the growth of several of the branch experiment stations in North Dakota during his time as chairman.

Buck recognized that strong relationships between the college and livestock industry were critical. He judged many regional shows as well as the Canadian Royal in Toronto and the International Sheep Show at Brandon, Manitoba. He worked closely with the North Dakota Stockmen's Association to strengthen the cattle industry in the state. Buck managed the futurity show at the North Dakota winter show for many years, during which time it grew to become one of the premier livestock events in the region. He also served as adviser to other North Dakota livestock groups, including the Beef Cattle Improvement Association, the Poultry Improvement Board, and the Turkey Federation.

Buck's own teaching and research remained important throughout his tenure in North Dakota. He represented North Dakota on the regional beef cattle breeding project NC-1. His own research interests were in the areas of genetic anomalies of cattle and the effects of inbreeding. His research contributed to the understanding of dwarfism in Hereford and Angus cattle. While at North Dakota, he taught almost every course offered by the department and had more than 10,000 students. To him, club activities were an important opportunity for students to try out their own wings. The Little International at NDSU became the largest event run totally by students on the campus. By the 1970s, several thousand people were involved in the activities during Little International weekend. Despite the size of the event, he insisted that the students should remain in charge, with faculty members providing only advice. During the latter years of his life, he taught a very popular course in beef cattle pedigrees that drew heavily on his lifelong involvement with pure-

bred livestock. Students were taken by the easy way that he wove the technical details with history and "cowboy logic."

To the people with whom he worked in North Dakota, his scientific, educational, and administrative contributions all pale beside his contributions as a friend, counselor, and adviser. Whether the issue was technical or personal, he was there with a helping hand. One of the most recognizable items to the livestock industry of North Dakota was his familiar pipe. The sight of the pipe frequently meant that "help was on the way." When he was honored in 1971 as North Dakota Man of the Year in Agriculture by the Saddle and Sirloin Club, the student club in animal science at NDSU, the students asked that he have the pipe in his mouth for the portrait.

He was also recognized with membership in Sigma Xi and Alpha Zeta and was an honorary member of Alpha Gamma Rho. He was listed in American Men of Science and Who's Who in America, and was honored in 1962 by his alma mater, Oklahoma State University, as a graduate of distinction. He also received honors from all of the major livestock organizations in North Dakota.

Buck's family was always very important to him. One of his early students in North Dakota was his younger brother Raymond. After graduation, Ray went on to a long career as a field representative for the American Angus Association. The two brothers had many opportunities to work together at various cattle events in North Dakota. The family lived in Fargo for 16 yr then moved a few miles across the river into Minnesota, where Buck began raising purebred Hereford cattle while continuing his work at the university. The oldest child, Arthur, graduated from Harvard University and has enjoyed a career in Massachusetts as a computer systems analyst. Lynnel is a homemaker near the family farm in Minnesota and graduated from Moorhead State University after a lengthy sabbatical while raising her family. The youngest child, David, graduated from North Dakota State University with a degree in animal science while his father was chairman of the department, after which he went to the University of Nebraska for his advanced degrees. Since 1980, David has been on the faculty of his father's alma mater, Oklahoma State University. There are 12 grandchildren. One of Buck's great joys was showing the cattle and the grandchildren to each other. Six of his grandchildren have become teachers.

Buck was active in his community and his church. He taught Sunday school and was a deacon and trustee. He also lent his long experience in education for the improvement of the local public school in many ways.

Buck died in 1976 after a short experience with cancer. His funeral had the largest attendance of any funeral ever conducted by the funeral home in charge. Two of Buck's early students, Kelly Miller and Jack Dahl, were asked to serve as pall bearers and consid-

ered that service to be one of the greatest honors of their lives.

It should, by now, be obvious that the author is not an unbiased recorder of the life of M. L. Buchanan. I am the child who decided to follow in my father's large footsteps. He never pushed me into this profession. Instead, he lead me in such a way that following him

seemed perfectly natural. He died while I was still in graduate school. There is much that has happened, both personally and professionally, that I would have enjoyed sharing with him since then. Even though the technical aspects of our profession have grown beyond what he could have imagined, I still feel the need for his "cowboy logic."