

California Red Sheep

History in the Making

Founders of California Red Sheep

Aime and Paulette Soulier



In 1975 Aime and Paulette saw their first red lambs. These lambs were at the home of their friends Glen and JoAnne Tomlinson who had received them from a Dr. Spurlock who had attempted to develop a wool free breed of sheep with a large carcass. Dr. Spurlock having failed in his attempt at wool free gave the sheep to the Tomlinson's. Aime and Paulette were intrigued by them and they decided to purchase three adult sheep, a ram Big Red #2 and two ewes #313 and #316 (all original crosses Tunis x Barbados). They brought them to the Pierce Ranch and over

the next two years they purchased the First crosses that were born on the Tomlinson's ranch as well as more of the original cross flock.

In 1978 they contacted Dr. Spurlock for his advise about improving the wool and body size. Dr. Spurlock suggested breeding back to a Tunis ram. At this time Paulette and Dr. Spurlock collaborated on calling the emerging breed California Red Sheep.



In 1979 the Souliers purchased two Tunis rams, Tempete #926 from New York and Big Shot #328 from Pennsylvania as well as five Barbados ewes from California (#1, 2, 3, 49 and 50). They also purchased the last of the original cross flock from the Tomlinsons, which consisted of nine ewes and a ram Big Red #1.

In 1983 they bought another Tunis ram Cesar #1841 from New York. At one point they had 180 ewes and six to seven rams. During this period they had to cull many sheep due to the black markings we refer to as "badger face".

The very first "true" California Red ram born on the Pierce Ranch was Don Juan. He was born on September 20, 1980 and given to Alice Gardner in Dixon, CA for her new flock of California Red Sheep.

The most memorable sheep for the Souliers were Boy Reg. 1, Romeo Reg 15 and a ewe flock #24.



Boy was a large framed stocky ram, born on March 25, 1981. He was gentle with the ewes. He produced 21 registered ewes and two registered rams in his time. They had Boy until the early 1990's.

Romeo born on November 15, 1983 had a beautiful mane but was mean with the ewes. Because of his temperament they put him down when he was 5 years old.

Paulette was amazed with Ewe #24 which produced triplets each year.



OM BAIR - Elverta Ranch

Tom Bair was born in Arcata, California on the 27th of May 1910. Arcata, home of the Hoopa Indians is situated in Humboldt County in northern California. The Bair family and the Hoopa Indian Tribe shared the beauty of the California Redwoods, the seashore, as well as the ravages of tuberculosis. Hundreds of white men and Indians died during these times; including both parents of two year old Tom Bair.

Tom bounced around the 50,000 acre sheep, cattle, horse and mule ranch owned by his family accepting guidance and care from whom ever cared to give it. A particularly fond caretaker was a Chinese man named Charlie Moon.

At thirteen years of age Tom was sent to boarding school. For Tom, academics were not a real strength, but football was. Every summer Tom returned to his beloved Hoopa country to help with the 10,000 ewes, 12,000 cattle and 500 horses and mules.

The Bair ranch was located 25 miles from Arcata and the ocean. The sheep and wool were shipped from Arcata to San Francisco by boat. The shepherds on horseback drove the sheep that grazed on front yard petunias and roses along the way. This was such a long parade that the lead sheep were on board ship before the last sheep had entered the town five miles away.

Tom graduated from high school and received a football scholarship to the University of California, Berkeley. His major was physical education and he added professional boxing to his physical prowess. The motion picture industry snagged Tom and got not only a boxer, but an assistant director and screenwriter as well. He maintained his own Rancho Cortez, renting out horses, mules, stagecoaches, buggies and all the trappings that made great western movies.

With the beginning of World War II, Tom enlisted in the Army. Although he volunteered for the Airborne, he ended up in the last graduating class of the Cavalry School. He also spent time in North Africa and Italy serving in the Infantry.

After the war, Tom went back to Hollywood for a short time. He then returned to Arcata and what remained of the family ranch. Tom ran two dairies and a 2000 lamb feedlot operation.

In 1964, after running for State Assemblyman, he was hired by the Governor of California, Pat Brown, to be Chief of the Division of Fairs and Expositions/Assistant Director of Food and Agriculture for the State of California. This necessitated a move, so Tom and his wife Delyte purchased an 80 acre ranch in Elverta, just north of Sacramento. They began their livestock operation with shorthorn cattle, Tom's first love. Next, they added Thoroughbred horses. After a few years they began to add sheep and chose the Suffolk breed. Just about the time that the

flock reached 100 head problems began to arise. A veterinarian diagnosed scrapie and the entire flock had to be destroyed.

From 1968 to 1973, Tom served as Manager of Cal Expo, the California State Fairgrounds and Racetrack in Sacramento. During this time, he assisted in the forming of the Quarter Horse Registry.

Tom retired in 1977. Little did he realize that he was getting ready for his next challenge, the California Red Sheep Registry. Delyte Bair, a beautiful redhead of Norwegian descent, his best friend and his typist too, heard of the Red sheep and asked Tom if they could try a few of this new breed. Tom agreed. He dutifully went to the two existing ranches, paying money for culls and ovine personality problems and I'm sure gritting his teeth the whole way. Within a couple of years Tom had a top notch flock of California Reds and was impressed with their gentleness, ease of lambing and vigor. Delyte loved their flock, and the two had fun naming their sheep after friends, relatives and boxers. Within another couple of years, the Bairs had a large Red flock and an outstanding line-up of rams.



Under the Bairs professional guidance and encouragement the California Red Sheep Registry was established in 1985. Their experience alerted the membership to the pitfalls of a registry and the importance of maintaining strict criteria for registration. In 1990 the Bairs guided the membership through incorporation.

In 1991, Delyte Bair passed away from cancer. Tom continued to reside at his Elverta ranch with his three dogs, a couple of horses and Dolly, his parrot. Tom's kitchen table is strewn with paper containing the stories and poems that he has written and continues to write. Many of these are printed in the New Yorker and the Atlantic Monthly.

We are proud to continue the ageless and noble heritage of shepherds caring for their flock and we are committed to continue this tradition with our California Red Sheep Registry, Incorporated.



Alice Gardner- Gardner's Sheep Camp

Alice Gardner was the granddaughter of a Fort Ross sheep rancher and had always wanted to raise sheep. Her husband promised when they married they would live on a farm, but he took his family to Los Angeles for 18 years when he studied viruses and cancer at the University of Southern California.

Dr. Murray Gardner then moved his family north in 1981 and chaired the department of pathology at the University of California, Davis. Alice finally got her ranch on Maxwell Lane in Dixon, CA. Originally Murray purchased a flock of Barbados sheep to raise for slaughter, but Alice took after her grandfather, who used to cry when the butchers arrived to harvest his flock. She contacted Dr. Glen Spurlock and switched to California Reds. Preferring to market wool instead of meat, she ran a small company out of her home called Flat Hill Farm Fibers. Alice cleaned and dyed raw wool then had them processed into roving. Alice preferred to leave the spinning to her customers. It was her favorite part of the process. "It's like magic. It's very satisfying, very relaxing. You don't have to keep track of anything."

For many years Alice held an "Open Barn" where she invited the public to her 10 acre ranch at shearing time. Much of her processed and raw wool was sold at this annual gathering. Spinners and weavers are on hand and lambs were barbecued, giving people a sample of everything from wool to meat.



Alice raised CA Reds from 1981 till 1999. She and Murray moved from their ranch to an "island" home in the delta near Rio Vista, CA where they are currently located.

Altomare Sheep Company

We got started raising California Red Sheep because of a broken ankle.

Mike and I were married in 1985 and had purchased a 110-year-old house in Dixon, CA. At first we tried remodeling it room by room while continuing to live there, but it became apparent that the remodel would go better if the house could be done all at once. My brother was moving from a home on 7 acres in Suisun, CA where we boarded our horses. Once we moved in we realized that we had about ½ acre to do with as we pleased, so we fenced it in at first as a backyard.



One day while attending a picnic in 1986, Mike broke his ankle playing football. On one visit to the hospital for a check up he picked up a California Farmer magazine and flipped through it. In the back were ads for sheep. We had discussed getting sheep so he took down two phone numbers, one for a Finn breeder and the other CA Red Sheep. The Finn sheep people never answered their phone, but Alice Gardner did.

We were invited out to see her place in Davis, CA and picked out two young ewes, SweetPea and Chloe. Later we went back and picked out two more, Melanie and Juanita. Then she recommended we get a ram from Tom and Delyte Bair. Our first ram Tom had named Booger. We then met Aime and Paulette Soulier and bought four young ewes Sophie, Mary, Hannah and Millicent. Later we purchased several older ewes from them.

That same year Alice invited us to a CA Red Sheep Meeting and we were duly elected as board members, eventually I became the Registrar and Mike has been on the board ever since. We have been through the growing stages of the registry with the incorporation and establishing the registry requirements. We helped to promote the breed by showing at California State Fair, where we organized as many breeders as possible to have our own CA Red Sheep category listing with the Fair. For three years we organized and coordinated this event until politics became too much for our grassroots breed. We never wanted to be a show breed, but the competitive atmosphere from the other sheep breeds eventually steamrolled our friendly values and forced us to leave this venue before corruption set in. The Fair board wanted us since we were a big draw for the public since we allowed the public to touch our sheep and we took stall space and had hands-on public displays of spinning, weaving and sheep education.

After we finally got our own personal computer and ventured on the Internet I stumbled upon the Oklahoma State University Breed Web Site and submitted the CA Red Sheep Breed to their list. After that success it was only a matter of time when I ventured into asking our Internet provider to let me use my personal web space for the CA Red Sheep Registry Web site. The rest is history.



Mike and I moved in 1988 to Turlock, CA and then about a year later to our property in Merced, CA. At one point we had about 60 breeding ewes. Our most memorable ram was Rhett. 217 Rhett was born on 3/25/89 and was put down in the fall of 1999. He sired 96 registered ewes and 9 registered rams. Another great ram was 926 Idaho which passed away in late 2004.

We have had so many memorable ewes that I will list our favorites: 74 Sophie, 12 Maude, 86 Millicent, 87 Hannah, 124 PattyCake, 190 Holly, 205 Daphne, 466 Elouise and 631 Leah. Leah (born 04/04/94) has been remarkable because she has consistently produced registerable

ewe lambs. Out of 19 lambs she has produced 10 reg. Ewes and 1 reg. Ram (her current twins are ram lambs born in April 2004). She has had one single and 9 twins.

The Shear Perfection Ranch Story

Jerry & Lyn Brown

Shear Perfection Ranch was born in 1989, when our kids came to us wanting to get a different breed of sheep for their 4H projects. Eirann (then age 15), Darcy (10) and Jared (6) combed through sheep books trying to decide what they wanted. Finally they came upon "Raising Sheep the Modern Way" and two paragraphs and a black and white photo caused love at first sight.



Now, it was our problem; how do we find this breed? We checked with local ag agents, searched the net, asked local shepherds...no one had ever heard of California Red Sheep. Then we called the American Sheep Industry in Colorado...who had the same answer as everyone else. "We've never heard of California Red Sheep, but, if they're from California call these people." We were given three or four numbers and after several phone calls we reached someone from the ag dept. of UC at Davis. He gave us a brief review of Dr. Spurlock's project and the phone number for Mike & Janice Altomare in Merced, CA.

We purchased four exposed ewes [264 Donnah, 271 Fancy, 274 Simone and 197 Candy] sight unseen from Mike & Janice and transported them home to New Mexico. No babies arrived so we decided we had to get a ram for our girls. This resulted in another phone call to Mike & Janice and before long 384 Shameless and two more ewes [314 Evie & 328 Paulette] were headed to AZ with Tom Sellers along with a couple ewes for the DeKeiffers in Colorado. Jerry was working in AZ at the time and brought our new group the rest of the way.



The kids had a great time showing their California Reds which resulted in some great successes [see Memorable Animals below] and some real frustrations. Eirann and

Shameless appeared on the Morning TV show in Pueblo, CO, where he was a perfect gentleman until the camera left him and then he flooded their stage area. Wherever they went to show, the Reds always drew attention, a crowd favorite, even if they weren't always the judge's favorite.

THE PURCHASES

Several years later we received a phone call that the Williams' out of Colorado wanted to disperse their herd of CA Reds. We weren't prepared to purchase the entire herd, so we teamed up with the Jones' out of Moriarty NM to split the herd. The Jones' picked up the herd and we met at their place to divvy them up. What we didn't anticipate was that the Williams' had not recorded numbers of babies and what mom's they went to. We spent several hours in a blizzard holding babies and then letting them go to see which mother they went to. At last we had everyone matched up and loaded our half and headed for home. Notables in this herd were: the ram 147 Titan, and ewe 184 Lizzie.

Somewhere around 1997 or 1998 we purchased another dispersal herd from the Sweeney's in Idaho. We gained lots of wonderful bloodlines from this purchase the most notable of which were: Rams-543 Sundance, 780 Chance and 882 Taos and Ewes-725 Callie, 406 Tuesday, 726 Jasmine, 454 Trudy, 625 Willow and 408 Polly.

There were a few other small purchases here and there including another group of yearlings from the Altomares in 2003. But since 2003 we have maintained a virtually closed herd and stand 5-7 rams to maintain diversity in bloodlines.

MEMORABLE SALES

We have sold California Reds from the West Coast to the East Coast and have met lots of wonderful people in the process.

Our most memorable sale was 64 head to the United Arab Emirates. We could not fill the order by ourselves, so Jerry called around and located other breeders with animals for sale and trucked them back to our ranch where we keep them quarantined from our own animals. Eventually we delivered them to San Angelo TX and they were flown out of Chicago airport to the UAE. All the animals arrived safe and healthy. On last report from the exporter, the California Reds were tolerating the 140 degree summers very well.

We also flew two rams to Canada; a very interesting process since 911.

MEMORABLE RAMS:

384 Shameless-He was a beautiful ram with a slight attitude. He wasn't really fond of any people except our oldest daughter, Eirann. For Eirann he would do anything. He stood Grand Champion Other Breeds Ram at Colorado State Fair and was 3rd in the Overall Grand Champion Class.

147 Titan-Titan was a mellow old boy when we got him. We found several niches with certain ewe bloodlines that produced nice big ewe lambs. And with Evie he produced Curly Sue.

543 Sundance-When Sundance arrived from Idaho, he weighed a whopping 285 lbs. and had rolls of fat. We slimmed him down to 250#. He was the longest, tallest and most mellow ram we have ever owned. He left us way too soon as a result of a snake bite.

882 Taos-This beautiful Sundance ram when bred to Curly Sue, gave us our most prolific ram, Tank.

1105 Tank-This son of Sundance and Curly Sue produced the largest babies of any ram we have ever owned. His average single was 11lb and his twins were often 10lbs each. Big healthy lambs were his trademark. With 725 Callie produced Supreme Grand Champion Ram Harvest Sheep & Fiber Festival, Humvie.

1137 Ivanhoe-Not as big as his grandfather, but what a producer. Great disposition. He has 8 rams in the registry to date: How's Bayou, Hocus-Pocus, Zuber Dude, San Antonio, The Grateful Red, Hail to the Sheep, Rude Dude and Korkonov



MEMORABLE EWES:

197 Candy-Candy was the widest ewe, she looked like she was carrying lambs even when she wasn't. Very, very dark red.

264 Donnah-Had the most compelling eyes and knew how to use them. Won best fleece at show and passed it on to her offspring. She was a light red, almost Palomino color.

274 Simone-Sweet Simone, if you were in the yard, she was by your side. She was so special. She had her last lamb at age 11 and didn't get milk, we bottle fed him but she still raised him.



She would bring him to the fence for feeding and wait for him and then walk proudly back to the pasture with him.

314 Evie-A dark beauty, she stood Reserve Grand Champion Ewe at the Colorado State Fair. She behaved so well for the whole show. That evening, she accompanied Eirann in the Ladies Lead Contest. She was jumping almost 6 ft straight up all the way around the ring. She was awarded the Most Stubborn Ewe Award.

683 Curly Sue-Evie's hard luck daughter was born in a 22 below blizzard. Her twin brother died of hyperthermia and she lost her ears and tail to frostbite. She gave us lots of beautiful lambs including the incomparable Tank.

725 Callie-This is one I wish I hadn't sold. She produced Humvie, Excalibur and Disrupter.

406 Tuesday-My triplet producer. She gave birth to three sets of triplets and I think 5 sets of twins during her lifetime. And she passed the triplet gene to her daughters.

726 Jasmine-The best mother and a well conformed ewe. Mother of Jess, Rhexx Ronin, and Jaina

454 Trudy-This ewe was not only beautiful and sweet, she was the strongest willed ewe I have ever seen. In her prime she weighed over 200#. At age 11, she had a stroke while delivering her triplets. For three weeks, she was unable to rise. We kept working with his moving her legs and we kept her triplets with her. She eventually was able to get to her feet and struggled with getting her legs to work, but she eventually was walking almost normally. She lived for five years more. We never bred her again, but she became Grandma Trudy. She was always surrounded by lambs even to the day she died. She will always have a special place in our hearts.

625 Willow-Willow the Pillow. We never mention her without thinking of her babies, who always slept on top of her.

408 Polly-One of our most prolific ewes. Fiercely independent. If the rest of the herd was going to the north field Polly was headed south.





1645 EweKnowWho-Born to 12 year old Rumor, who did not get her milk in, EweKnowWho was bottle raised. When the Daniels called us about purchasing CA Reds, I tried to convince him that he should take this ewe for his kids to show. She was just one of those lambs that drew your eye. Mr. Daniels was adamant; he did not want a bottle lamb. I finally convinced him; after all she would be weaned by the time he got here to pick her up. EweKnowWho ended up taking Grand Champion Ewe West Tennessee Expo at six months of age over older ewes.