

Cattle Mutilation

in Tillman County



Who — or what — has been carving these Oklahoma bovines?

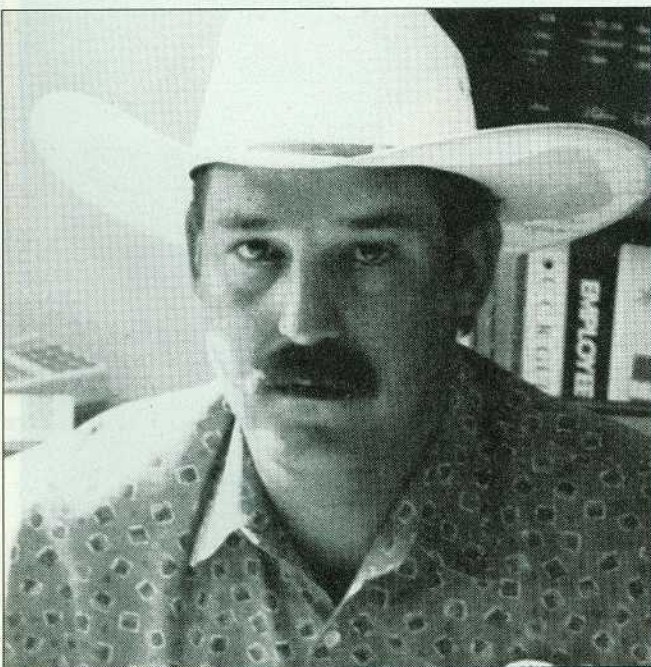


by James E. McWilliams

Looking at pictures of mutilated cattle is an unpleasant experience. Anyone having compassion for animals is repelled instinctively. One wonders what kind of twisted individual perpetrates such carnage on innocent, helpless creatures.

A few years ago, I crossed the Red River from Texas into southwestern Oklahoma with guarded anticipation and headed for the town of Frederick in Tillman County. I had heard of a recent spate of mutilations, so it was the time to learn.

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Sheriff Billy E. Hanes of Tillman County, Oklahoma, has investigated several cattle mutilations in recent years.

As I approached Frederick from the south, mesquite trees gave way to sparse scrub brush with stands of fruitless mulberry trees. The broad sprawling fields were in cultivation with neat rows of cotton plants. Large irrigation rigs broke the flat contour of the horizon as did the dotting of pumper wells. Occasional hay bales near the road looked like large brown rolls of paper towels.

A Sheriff's Problems

Sheriff Billy E. Hanes of Tillman County said he knew of four mutilations from 1993 to 1995, involving two bulls, a young steer, and an older cow. All the incidents occurred in March, according to the sheriff. "The reason I suspect mutilation is because all of them had some skin missing with clean, precise cuts," he explained, "not a lot of blood, and no trails or marks around indicating a predator."

The sheriff grabbed a stack of color photos and spread them out. The first picture showed a 700-pound white-faced black steer calf with no apparent bruises or broken bones. The left facial area had been denuded with what appeared to be a straight cut running above the nose back to under the eye with removal of tissue down to the bone below the cut. Some dried blood was evident, but none on the ground. A second view showed that the removal of tissue down to the bone included both lower jaws with removal of the tongue and throat. No other damage was noted on the animal, unlike what had been found in previous years with two bulls.

"This calf was found right beside the road," said Hanes. Reading from a report, he added, "It was found eight miles east and two miles north of Frederick and about one quarter mile back to the west. This animal and another were reported between the eighth and tenth of March 1995."

An additional pair of photos showed a red-colored Limousin cow lying on her right side. She had what appeared to be precise cuts and removal of tissue on the left side of her face — almost identical to the steer calf, but with the tongue still intact. The left ear had been sliced off neatly. Her posterior with the vagina and udder had been removed, and there



Someone — or something — removed the tongue and throat from this steer calf, leaving behind its bare jawbones. Were scavenger animals responsible, as the town veterinarian feels, or is there a more sinister explanation?

was a large lump under the skin near the middle of the back.

No puncture marks or bullet wounds were evident on this cow or any of the other mutilated bovines, Sheriff Hanes indicated. I asked about the other two cases. "They were two young bulls," he said. "One of them had the sac and testicles missing and on the other one, the penis was missing because they cut it all out. The other deputies worked these cases, and the pictures aren't available."

Of particular note was that in none of the cases had a veterinarian been called in to establish the cause of death or determine whether the wounds were caused by animal predators or human criminals. This was important because the vets take blood and tissue samples and then run fluid and toxicological studies. By looking at tissue samples under the microscope, they can determine if any trauma, such as burning, or any disease factors were involved.

Sheriff Hanes' explanation is the same as most sheriffs'. "It's budget restraints," he said, pointing out that his budget is meant for investigating human cases first and foremost. Newspaper research would bear him out with articles

through the years describing how sheriffs are often hampered by limited funds.

I asked the big question: "What do you think caused these mutilations?"

His candor surprised me.

"I really have no idea," he responded quickly. "I'm not sure how it happened."



Tillman County authorities don't know how this steer calf met its demise. But the precision cuts around its mouth resemble previous mutilations that a former member of the sheriff's office blames on ritual cults or would-be occultists.

An Ex-Lawman Remembers

Following the interview with the sheriff, I headed for the two newspaper offices in town. At the *Frederick Leader*, I looked through back issues from January 1984 to July 1995. Only three articles were relevant, but they were revealing.

In October 1990, there were four cases of cattle shootings in the Grandfield area, in southeastern Tillman County. The shootings involved young steers and a bull. One had never been proven to be a shooting because no entry or exit wounds were identified. The sheriff at the time, Montie Landrum, chalked these up to hunter spotlight shootings.

The following month, Deputy Robert Miller investigated an apparent ritual killing about seven miles west of Grandfield. A three-week-old calf was stripped of all its flesh and insides, exposing its bare bones. The hide had been pulled up above the calf's head, with squares and circles cut from the hide, but there was no sign of blood or animal hair at the scene.

In September 1992, a reward in excess of \$5,000 was offered to catch the culprits who had slaughtered a cow found north-east of the Laing School near Frederick.

The cow's tongue, heart, and udder had been removed in an apparent cult ritual.

I contacted Miller, who was born in Frederick and had lived there for more than half a century. A former sheriff's deputy and undersheriff for Tillman County, Miller had retired in 1993, later serving as a mental health worker at the Vernon State Hospital Adolescent Unit in Vernon, Texas.

When asked about the mutilations he had investigated, Miller replied, "Oh, I would say about 15 or 20 cows and calves over a 10-year period. I believe there's a horse in there, too.... The incidents occurred generally all over the county, except I don't remember any in the northeast."

Miller confirmed that the mutilations had taken place mostly in the spring and late fall and that they weren't from natural causes.

"Well, I don't know if it was natural or not, but whoever did it knew what they were doing," he said. "The udder would be gone, the heart would be gone, and they weren't torn. It looked like they had been surgically removed. And [the wounds] weren't ragged holes, like something chewing on it. They took heart, udder, the anus sometimes, and the tongue."

The animals had been examined carefully for bruises, broken bones, puncture marks, and bullet holes. Little or no blood had been found.

"I believed most of them died from the loss of blood. To me it looked like the blood had been drained out, the animal died, then the organs were removed," Miller said.

There was evidence of cult activity in Tillman County during this time, Miller said, but nothing that linked any group directly to the mutilations.

"Yes, sometimes three months after a mutilation, we would find evidence of a meeting," he said. "A pentagram, the stomped-down grass, the altar in a wheat field...was found several miles away.

None of these mutilations was ever solved, but Miller had some strong convictions as to what had been happening.

"I think it was the occult," he stated. "I really do. I don't think it was aliens or natural [diseases or predators]. It was either occult or wannabes." I was to learn that he wasn't alone in this conviction.

The Ranchers Speak

Bill Smith (who asked that his real name not be used), Roger Fischer, and Cleatus Calloway are farmer/ranchers who all had cattle mutilated. They all live east of Frederick on Rural Route 4. Their cows were reported mutilated on different dates, but they all occurred within a 10-mile radius of each other.

Smith's steer calf was one of the casualties Sheriff Hanes had told me about. No vet had ever seen Smith's calf, but he was sure it had been mutilated.

"I've had cattle go down through sickness and seen animals eat on carcasses, but they leave tear marks in the flesh. It won't look like a surgeon has been there and surgically removed something," Smith said. "This is a different look altogether.

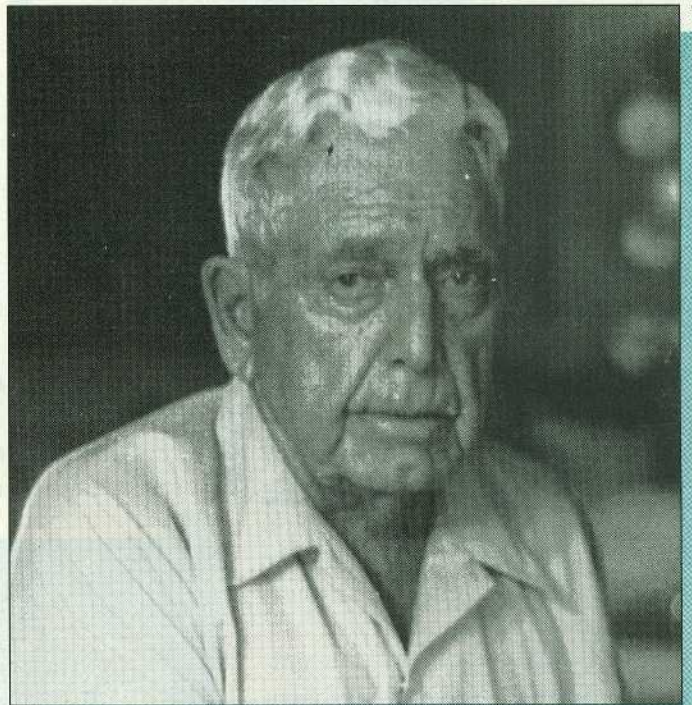
"There's no doubt in my mind that they [the culprits] have a good communication system. They have several people looking out. They do it at a time when there's not anybody around. We are not talking about some kid prank. We are talking about organized-type people who have the means to do this kind of thing. It's sad but it's the times we are living in."

Roger Fischer has been raising cattle for 20 years, running about 400 head with his family in a normal year. I asked him about his recently deceased father-in-law's red Limousin cow, one that

Sheriff Hanes had talked about earlier. The Limousin is a French breed that was imported into the United States in the early 1970s.

This cow had extensive damage to the left side of the face, the udder smoothly cut off, and the vagina removed. A large lump on the back of the cow, Fischer believes, is part of the cow's anatomy. "It's probably part of the pelvis, called her P-hooks and pins; it sticks up about like a cyst," he offered. Later, a vet confirmed this theory.

When I asked whether a vet had

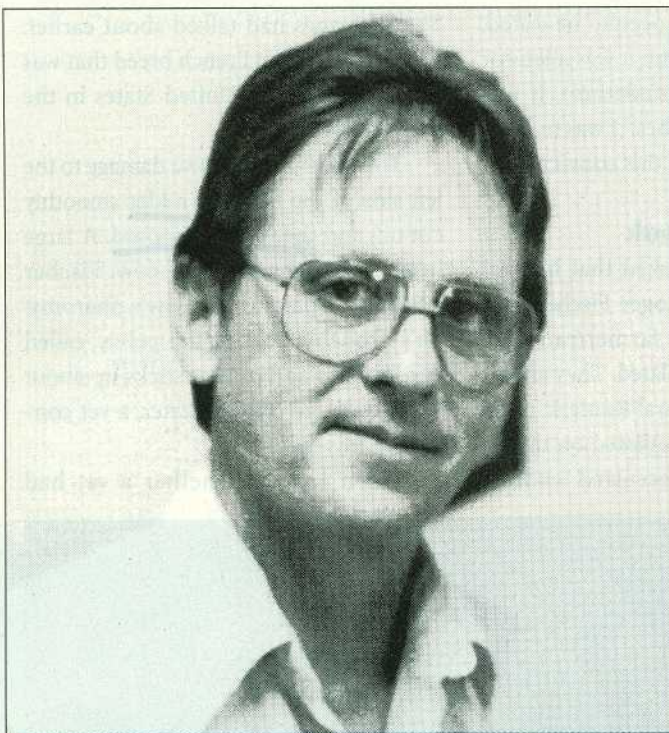


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Cleatus S. Calloway lost three cows and a bull to mutilation over a four-year period. He believes the animals were somehow poisoned before they were mutilated.

helped determine the cause of death, Fischer's answer was typical of the others. "It would have cost \$100 to post [autopsy] the animal. I hate to add \$100 to a dead animal. We just looked at her and determined that...somebody had to be cutting on her, because it looked like the cuts were all so smooth. You could tell that surgical instruments were used or a very, very sharp knife."

When asked about blood on or around the animal, Smith said, "The interesting part to me was that there was no blood on the ground and that's what



Dr. Kenneth O'Hanlon of the Frederick Animal Clinic isn't convinced the killings were deliberate mutilations. He blames the deaths on scavengers and other natural causes.

made me suspect there was some kind of cult activity or mutilation...either the cutting caused the death, or somebody took the blood out of her and then they cut her. [When] you cut a cow that much, there should be all kinds of blood on the ground. Especially in those areas because there are lots of blood vessels there."

Cleatus Calloway was the oldest farmer in the group. He normally runs about 200 mother cows per year. His pride and protectiveness toward the animals were obvious.

"I've lost three black white-faced cows and a Hereford bull in the last five or six years," he said, concern marking his voice. "I've got cattle in several pastures, and I watch after them all the time — feed them minerals and everything — and all of them are healthy.

"Well, I go out there in the pasture and just find one of the biggest, fattest cows in the pasture dead, and her bag completely cut off just as smooth as if you cut it off with a razor. I start looking for wounds...to find out what happened and didn't find a thing. Not a possible thing."

The scenario he described had oc-

curred three times in four years, with the udders being "slicked off," but the bull was different, Calloway said. "I was with the bull an hour or hour and a half before, and he was perfectly healthy. Then I go back the next morning and he's dead — and he's never been sick a day in his life."

The bull had no marks on him indicating trauma. Since no parts had been removed, he guessed that someone had killed the animal and then was scared off be-

fore being able to mutilate it.

"My suspicion is that they use guns like they tranquilize animals with," Calloway said. "Anyone can buy one of those

guns. They can put poison in it, shoot her, and...it kills them. When they pull the needle out, there's no sign of any wound or anything."

Calloway had reported the death of one of his mother cows to the sheriff but hadn't reported the other three. Again, a vet wasn't called to the scene, but Calloway said that he had consulted with a vet about the animals' deaths.

The Vet's View

Dr. Kenneth O'Hanlon of the Frederick Veterinary Clinic has been a welcome fixture in the town since 1974. A graduate of Oklahoma State University's veterinary school, O'Hanlon has served on the Oklahoma Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners.

He confirmed that none of the local vets had been consulted on any of the mutilation cases, including the spate of mutilations that occurred during the 1980s and the recent four that Sheriff Hanes had reviewed with me. O'Hanlon had viewed some of them on his own and was satisfied that what he saw wasn't mutilation.

I showed him the photographs of two



The sexual organs and udder were removed so precisely from the rear quarters of this red Limousin cow that one farmer suspects cult activity.

recent mutilations and after viewing them carefully he said, "Animals [predators] are like that. That [type of wounding] is very common. They clean out the vagina and rectum, udder, if they have an udder, the testicles on bulls, tongues, and anything around the mouth. The mucous membranes are what they are after."

He again looked carefully at the faces of the cattle where the flesh had been removed in what appeared to be a precision cut, then continued: "A smaller animal, like a skunk, will do this, and they clean them up pretty good as they go. This is typical of a smaller carnivorous animal because this is where they can get their bite. Not just skunks but wild cats, like bobcats, and just plain old country house cats.

While such sharp edges on the wounds may appear to be knife cuts, most people are not aware of just what sharp little teeth can do, O'Hanlon said.

But, I asked, "What about the type of animal that attacks the underparts and genitalia?"

"Predators are going for the softest parts," the vet said. "Coyotes will get the udder and actually go right on into the abdomen and clean out all the intestines. They won't eat the meat, they'll eat the intestines."

"But predators don't core through the chest wall to get to the heart, do they?" I queried, remembering pictures and stories about hearts being wrested from some of the animals.

"Rarely ever," O'Hanlon agreed. "They can hardly get through the rib cage, but I've actually seen where they have gone through the abdomen and into the chest."

The vet said he observed no blood on or around the animals, but felt that all were dead before any tissue had been removed. We discussed the fact that there were usually no bruises or puncture marks. "Lightning does that," he said tersely, "or the animal dies of disease first."

I asked what could kill an animal in less than 24 hours.

"Lots of things, like Anaplasmosis, a blood parasite, Johnson grass [in a certain stage], or lightning," he said. "A cer-

tain number of them are healthy until they drop dead. They eat wire which gets into their stomach and punctures through to their heart. A certain number choke to death."

O'Hanlon's observations reminded me of a quote from an article in the June 1988 issue of FATE. In the piece, Carl Whiteside, Deputy Director of the Colorado Bureau of Investigation, notes that 30,000 cattle die each year in Colorado of natural causes, mutilations or not.

In Tillman, some certainly didn't die

would-be occultists, or hidden agendas. These cases have continued in spite of diligent investigation and a money reward. Groups may have been involved in some cases, but certainly no extraterrestrials or other exotic explanations appear necessary.

Unless Tillman County gets lucky and catches someone red-handed, or an informant exposes an involved group, the likelihood of solving these cases is slim.

Even if Tillman were funded with adequate veterinary services, overtime for



No blood was found on or near this red Limousin cow, though one ear, soft tissue around its face, and other organs appear to have been removed with a precision instrument. Was the animal drained of blood before it was killed and mutilated, or did scavenger animals simply clean up after themselves?

of natural causes. Skinning a calf then cutting circles and squares in the hide speaks for itself. Gunshot wounds are obvious but rare.

Guarded Observations

Although the alleged mutilations in Tillman County may have been caused by natural causes compounded by predators, at least some appear to be a result of criminal intent — whether in the form of vengeful persons, occultists,

law officers, remote electronic listening devices, night vision equipment, and aircraft support, there is still no guarantee of arrests or prosecutions, as experiences in Colorado and New Mexico have shown. ■

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