

LIFESTYLES

HOOD COUNTY NEWS
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2003



Al Norman displays his prize coondog, Stopper. Norman has been raising and shipping coondogs since the early 1950s.

Courtesy photo

Collies & Coonhounds

Granbury's window to the world

by PETE KENDALL
Staff Writer

Mineral Wells bills itself as the city built on water. Fort Worth boasts a heritage of saloons and Dallas a lineage of hucksters.

Hood County, semi-rural population center on the rise, touts its four historic contributions to Southwestern commerce:

Cotton, Cattle, Catfish and Canines.

Cotton was farmed, cattle raised and catfish caught. We know these things from consulting Farmers Almanac.

The canine was a more specialized product. It was bred, weaned and exported, first by rail and later by air and



Courtesy photo

A young Mary Kate Durham bids farewell to a shipment of her father's collies headed to the Granbury railroad depot in the early 1930s.

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Coonhounds

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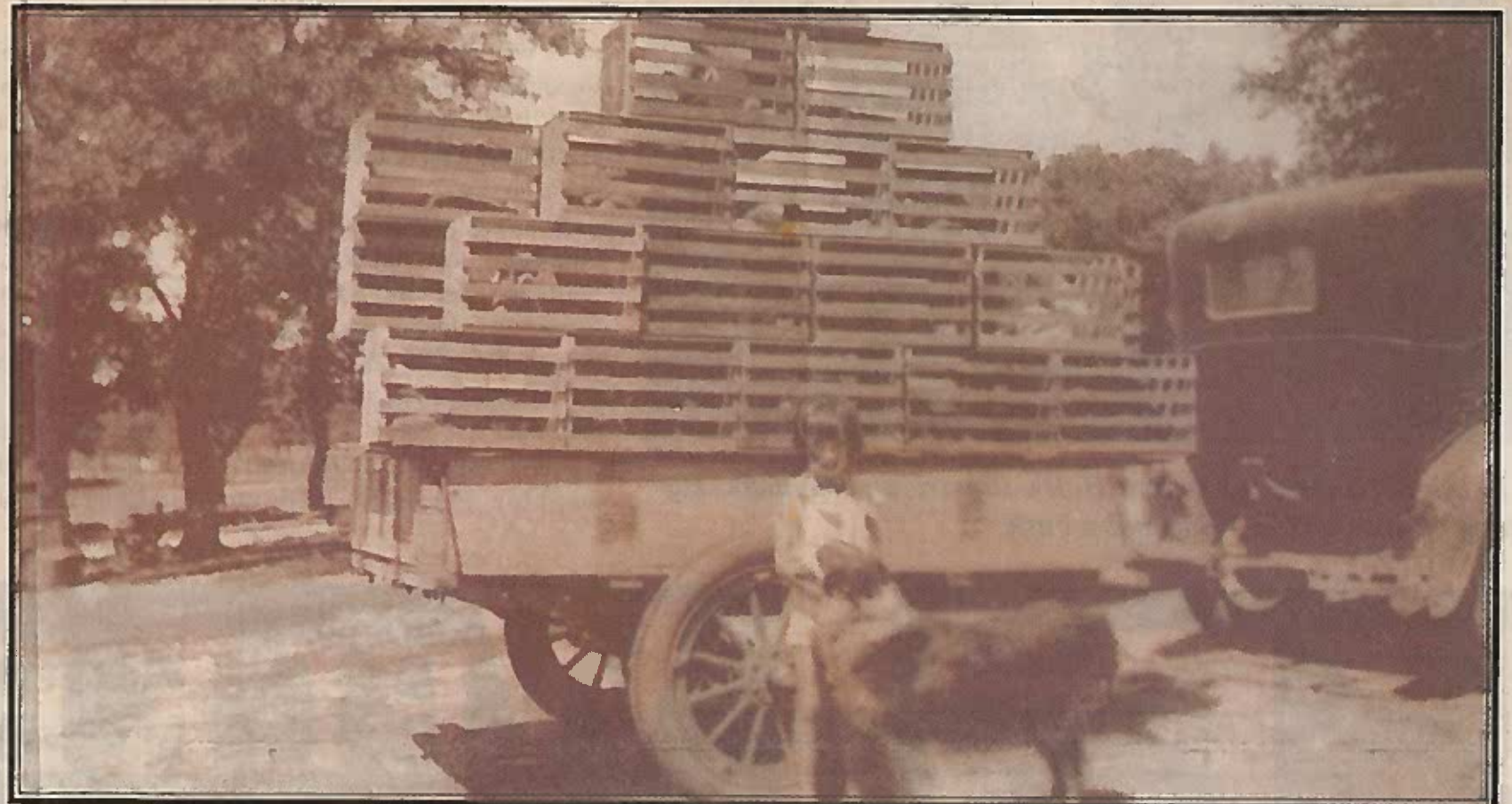
Through war and peace, boom and bust, the nation waited eagerly for the arrival of Keith Randle's Collies and Al Norman's and Delton Hall's Coonhounds.

The demand was greater than the supply.

In the case of Norman's and Hall's tail-waggers, it still is.

They're not your everyday, garden-variety dogs.

Poodles, Pit Bulls and other generic species are noteworthy for their inclination to snarl and drool.



Courtesy photo

A young Mary Kate Durham bids farewell to a shipment of her father's collies headed to the Granbury railroad depot in the early 1930s.

Sporting and working canines are a cut above.

Not every dog can herd 75 profoundly brilliant sheep toward shelter in a driving rainstorm. Randle's Collies could and did.

Not every dog can sniff out and chase down a raccoon that looks like Dick Butkus. Norman's and Hall's coonhounds can and do.

Randle's business blossomed in the early 1930s and Norman's in the early '50s. Hall followed Norman into the industry.

Dog enclosures behind Norman Lumber Co. are a half-century old.

"I built those pens in 1954, and I had dogs a little before then," Norman said. "I started out with two dogs. I had eight or 10 dogs at the peak. Delton has that many or more right now."

Norman may be overly modest. "Back in the '70s, when I was laying brick for Mr. Norman, he went to the airport and shipped 17 dogs in one day," Hall said.

Generally speaking, coonhound puppies grow into coonhound adults. There

are exceptions.

"You can sell a coonhound to someone in another area to be trained on bear, lion, bobcat, whatever," Hall said.

Once trained, a coonhound has tunnel vision.

"They'll run the coon maybe two or three miles and tree it," Norman said. "They'll have sense enough to smell it on the tree. They'll bark until you get there."

Coonhounds have an affinity for raccoons. Thus, the name.

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CANINES

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"When you start to define a coonhound," Hall said, "you want one that won't run anything but a coon. He won't run a deer or fox or tree a possum.

"If you're on a competition hunt and they run anything that's not a coon, it goes against your score."

Coonhounds disdain rock hunting, even in recreational downtime.

"Once you take them to the woods, you don't have to do much correcting," Norman said. "They have it in their heads by nature."

Theoretically, a coonhound would make a good pet, Norman said.

"Most people don't use them for that, but they're not hard to get along with."

Most pet owners would be unwilling to shell out coonhound bucks.

"A pretty good one that's bred right will bring \$300 to \$350, sometimes up to \$500," Norman said. "It depends on what he's out of and what kind of record he's got in his family."

"We had a special cross one time out of my stud dog and Mr. Norman's female," Hall said. "There were four or five pups, and he sold them for \$1,000 each. You get the right cross, and the sky's the limit."

A coonhound is known by its booming voice. To a proud

coonhound owner, the voice may be as melodic as Frank Sinatra's.

"They've all got a different bark," Norman said. "If Delton had his hounds out there, he could tell you which one was barking. He's not going to guess. He knows."

A successful raccoon hunt doesn't necessarily end with the demise of a raccoon.

"We very seldom kill one now," Hall said. "At one time when the pelts were \$20 to \$30, we'd skin a few. But if you leave them alive, you can hunt them again."

Randle's Collies were bred to be pets or field hands. Occasionally, like a coonhound, they developed hunting skills.

Lindy, a male Golden Sable Collie, was unique in that way and others. He was, naturally, named for pioneer aviator Charles Lindberg.

"Lindy was the smartest dog I ever saw," Randle's daughter, Mary Kate Durham, remembered. "When Mother would send me out to get a chicken, Lindy and I would walk among the fryers.

"I would tell Lindy which one I wanted. He'd catch the chicken, put his paw on its wing, and look up laughing. When Lindy died, we nearly starved."

Randle's collies were shipped nationally from the east end of the Granbury railroad depot. Keeping

them hale and hearty on the journey was a priority.

"Grocery stores got their fruit in wooden crates back then," Durham said. "Dad would haul those home, knock out one side, and make a solid bottom so the puppies wouldn't get their toes caught.

"Every crate would have a container attached for water. The freight people would add water. If it was a long trip, a second container would be added for food.

"He shipped Collies to 44 states. He advertised in Farm & Ranch, Progressive Farmer, the Houston Chronicle and Star-Telegram."

Lindy had plenty of company at the Randle estate.

"Dad bought a female and kept adding females until he had a dozen," Durham said.

"They all lived in a three- to four-acre enclosure with individual pens and individual houses with floors and roofs. The male was kept apart.

"Collies have litters twice a year. They have between six and 13 puppies per litters. I remember counting 75 puppies one time."

Randle, Durham recalled, was no fan of registered Lassie Collies.

"Dad said that when they put a pedigree on collies, the noses got longer and the brains fewer."

Pete Kendall can be reached at (817) 573-7066, ext. 248, or e-mail pkendall@hcnews.com



Courtesy photo

Sudden Death Killer, among Delton Hall's illustrious coondogs, signals to prey in tree with a point and a bark

NEW LOCATION! Mike

WEEKEND