



NEWSLETTER

BRUNSWICK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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LIVESTOCK MARKS

From colonial times until well into the first decades of this century, livestock ran loose in the woods and grazed on what they could find. During the days of the "Open Range" only dairy cows were kept close to the farm for daily milking. All others were taken out in the Spring, turned loose to range, and then gathered up in the fall to be fed at home throughout the winter.

In order to identify whose stock was whose, an identification system was used which involved the marking or cutting out of a section of the animal's ear in a certain pattern. Quite frequently, "marking" was used in combination with branding. Each owner's mark was distinctive and recorded at the court house.

All mature stock both male and female was required to be marked prior to their release on open range in the spring. Marking and castration were performed at the same time. This practice resulted in the evolution of the term "marking" to

include both of these operations. Even today, the vestiges of marking remain as some of the older farmers in the area refer to castrating stock as "marking stock".

The basic alphabet of marking is as following :

Shaded areas are the portions cut out.

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|-------------------|---|
| 1. swallow fork |  | 5. overhalf crop |  |
| 2. underbit or underkeel |  | 6. underhalf crop |  |
| 3. overbit or upperkeel |  | 7. split |  |
| 4. crop |  | 8. hole |  |
| | | 9. fleur-de-lis |  |

EXAMPLES

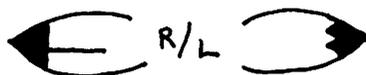
13 December 1738 Brunswick Court

Jonathan Swain record his mark: an upperkeel in each ear; and brand: **ES** a heart atop.



14 September 1738 Brunswick Court

Thomas Bell recorded his mark: a crop and split in the right and fleur-de-lis in the left ear; brand: B.



14 September 1738 Brunswick Court

Edward Wingate recorded mark for his son Edward Wingate; a crop, hole and underkeel in each ear.



Whenever stock was butchered and sold, the marks had to be produced as proof of ownership. However, this was not always true

as evidenced in the Minutes of the June Court 1740
meeting at Wilmington:

Many complaints are made to us that cattle are frequently lost to the owners on the Sound, and down the neck to Brunswick, and places adjacent to this town and that it is suspected that they are often killed in a private and clandestine manner and brought to market after having been shot in the woods and no marks of them produced. Also that a great many wild and unmarked cattle are suffered to range in several parts of this County to great damage to His Majesty's subjects by other tame cattle among then which cannot be got from them again.

Picket, splitrail and wrought iron fences were designed not only for an ornamental use but a very functional one -- not to keep livestock in, but actually to keep them out. This concept of fencing to keep livestock out is somewhat difficult to grasp today, but our colonial forebearers considered it commonplace.

Frank E. Galloway, Editor