

Legend of Gold Honoree reflects on 58 years of stock show involvement

By JAYNA BOYLE

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X B Cox Jr. can't recall missing a single San Angelo Stock Show & Rodeo since 1949.

The former rancher, who grew up on a farm in the Ben Ficklin area, said he started volunteering at the stock show 58 years ago, when he helped with the steer show.

The San Angelo Stock Show & Rodeo Association honored Cox in 2006 with the Golden Spur award, an honor bestowed on individuals who have provided exceptional volunteerism and contributions to the stock show.

"I think mine was for longevity more than anything else," Cox said of the award.

Cox, who turns 92 on Monday, is the sixth winner of the Golden Spur award, and as such, he is the sixth person appointed to the committee to select future Golden Spur award recipients. Only previous Golden Spur winners comprise the committee, and this year, Cox will serve as chairman and present the 2007 award.

The committee is scheduled to meet before this year's rodeo, and Cox said he has no idea for whom he'll vote.

While in high school, Cox presented the winning steer in the 1931 Tom Green County Fat Stock Show. A photograph of him and the steer still hangs in the stock show office, as does the ribbon he won.

"Growing up, farming was really all I knew," Cox said. "I had my first

- ### The Cox file
- Name: X B Cox Jr.
 - Age: 91 (92 on Monday).
 - Hometown: San Angelo.
 - Family: Wife, Melba; one daughter, one son.
 - Education: Bachelor's degree in animal husbandry from Texas A&M University, 1937.
 - Occupation: Retired rancher.
 - What else: 2006 Golden Spur award recipient.



pair of boots and saddle when I was 5 years old."

Cox graduated from San Angelo High School in 1932 and attended San Angelo College for his first year of college because he received a \$50 scholarship that covered a year's tuition. He then transferred to Texas A&M University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in 1937 in animal husbandry.

"When I went to college, I thought I would be a wool-buyer," Cox said.

After school, Cox worked as a county agriculture agent for the Extension service in Robert Lee, Lamesa and later Snyder. In June 1941, he was called to active duty in the Army and later fought in World War II.

As a member of the 101st Airborne Division, Cox went overseas and was involved in the invasion of Normandy. He left active duty in March 1946, retiring as a full colonel. He remained in the Army Reserve until 1961.

After the war, Cox returned to his job with the Extension service for a short time before taking a job with

the U.S. Department of Agriculture. He had an office based in Denver and tested wool samples and had other wool-related job duties.

In 1949, Cox left his job with the Department of Agriculture and began ranching full-time at a ranch he had bought 128 miles west of San Angelo, where he raised sheep and cattle. He owned the ranch for 58 years until he sold it in 2005.

Beginning in the 1950s, Cox helped manage two additional ranches in the San Angelo area with some of his family members.

Once he became a rancher, Cox started volunteering with the stock show. He was the superintendent of the steer show in 1954, and he served as stock show president from 1964-66.

"We would build pens out of wooden planks," Cox said, "and we would do all the manual labor ourselves."

In the early 1960s, Cox began a 20-year stint working on the calf scramble, an event in which young people involved with 4-H or FFA compete to catch, halter and coax a calf across a

finish line.

Cox said his favorite thing about the stock show and rodeo is seeing and talking to all the people — everyone from friends and competitors to celebrities.

Years ago, he said, country-and-western music stars, such as Barbara Mandrell and Roy Clark, performed at the rodeo. Some were part of the rodeo circuit every year, so Cox and his wife, Melba, got to know some of them and followed their careers.

While Cox was president of the stock show and rodeo, he held annual parties at his home to thank volunteers and allow them to meet celebrities such as Doc (Milburn Stone) and Festus (Ken Curtis) of "Gunsmoke," and Judy Lynn.

"We've had 200 to 300 people come to our house to meet the stars," Cox said.

Over the years, the stock show and rodeo has made some monumental leaps, he said.

"The stock show has progressed out of this world," Cox said. "It needed to change — no doubt about it."

The stock show started as a county event with a handful of participants, Cox said. The construction of the San Angelo Coliseum in 1956 helped draw spectators and participants alike, and the 1st Community Credit Union Spur Arena also continues to promote growth.

Despite the advancements, Cox said, some of the magic is gone.

"People now don't get the enjoyment out of it that we did," Cox said. "We knew everybody at the show."

"Growing up, farming was really all I knew. I had my first pair of boots and saddle when I was 5 years old."

— X B Cox Jr., rancher

Coxes surmounted setbacks

By JERRY LACKEY

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SHERWOOD — When X B “Mage” Cox first saw the banks of Spring Creek in 1898, he liked what he saw and spent several years working as a ranch hand on the Fayette Tankersley, Lewis Hinde and Monte Noelke ranches before going to South Dakota as a chuck wagon cook for trail drivers.

“He came back to Sherwood two years later and opened a saddle and harness shop,” said his son, X B Cox Jr. “A month after he and my mother, Myrtle Teague Cox, married, the shop building burned down, and they lost everything they had.”

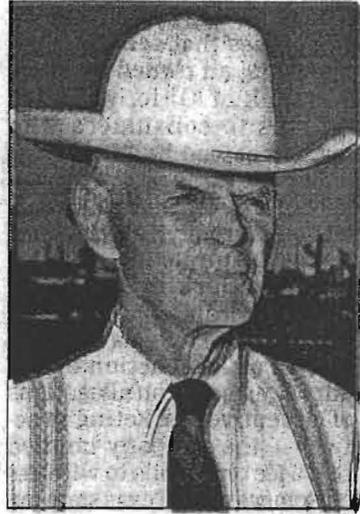
After that, Mage Cox went



into fence building, house moving and the windmill repair business, and he even had a motion picture operation when Mertzon was organized in the early 1900s. He contracted with area ranchers. With the help of hired laborers, he could build a mile of fence a day.

“All the fence construction was done by hand,” said X B

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COURTESY PHOTO

X B “Mage” Cox came to Irion County from Belton in 1898.

RANCH

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Cox Jr. "They brought post to the site on mules and horses. He had 48 mules and horses that he also used to haul freight on a line he ran from San Angelo to Ozona. For each head of horse or mule in the team that pulled the wagons, they would carry 1,000 pounds of freight."

Sherwood served Irion County as the first official seat before the railroad tracks were laid in present-day Mertzon, 25 miles west of San Angelo, and the new courthouse was erected on a hill overlooking Mertzon in 1937.

In 1924, Cox purchased a stock farm at Ben Ficklin and moved to San Angelo. The Cox family raised vegetables on irrigated fields west of the South Concho River and north of present-day Loop 306 on approximately 600 acres.

The couple had two sons, the late Donald Cox, who died last year at age 97, and X B Cox Jr., who will celebrate his 92nd birthday Tuesday.

Mage Cox and sons operated ranches in Schleicher, Glasscock and Gaines counties. In 1947, X B Cox Jr. bought a ranch in Upton County on his own.

"We had the seven-year drought of the 1950s, but I ran cattle all that time," Cox Jr. said. "We had to sell our sheep. However, we had a few drought years in the early 1960s and the 1980s that were really bad in Upton County, and I had to sell the cows at that time."

X B Cox Jr. met his wife, Melba Ruth White, in Bryan while he was attending Texas A&M University to study for a master's degree. They were married Nov. 4, 1948. The couple have a son, Dr. X B Cox III of Fairfax, Va., and a daughter, Melba Ellen Williams of Kerrville.

After graduation, the couple moved to Coke County, where Cox Jr. was assistant Extension agent. In January 1939, he was named Scurry County agent and stayed there until he was called back to military service in 1941.

Standard-Times: How did your family get into ranching?

X B Cox Jr.: My father, X B Cox, and brother, Donald Cox,



COURTESY PHOTO

X B Cox Jr. and son, X B Cox III, inspected a crossbred lamb in April 1966.

Cox Farm & Ranch

■ **Founded:** In the 1920s by X B "Mage" and Myrtle Teague Cox.

■ **Location:** Ben Ficklin farm west of the South Concho River and north Loop 306; ranches in

Schleicher, Glasscock, Gaines and Upton counties.

■ **Crops/Livestock:** Vegetables, sheep and cattle.

and I worked together every day on the farm or ranches.

What kept you in the business?

I loved the farm and ranch business and the people I came into contact with because of it. In my opinion, no one would be in ranching today if the screw-worm eradication program in the 1960s had not come to pass.

What's the most unique feature of the ranch or farm?

The river at the farm in the days when we could irrigate.

We used horses to pull the equipment until tractors came along in the 1940s.

How have you diversified the operation?

We had a thick prickly pear problem in the pastures on the Upton County ranch. At one time a ranchhand grubbed six sections of pear.

What's the history of the family brand?

Our brand was an "X" and a "B" without a back. It looked like a numeral "3" attached to the "X."