

# FEATURE

## From the Past to the Future

*Santa Rosa Ranch ushers in a new era  
on the historic Rattlesnake/Seven J*

**W**ith the changing rural landscape due to drought or development, there are landowners who still maintain their commitment to holding their land for agricultural production. The state of Texas boasts some of the most famous farms and ranches in the United States, and one of those is entering a new chapter in their storied history. The Rattlesnake Ranch/Seven J Stock Farm was one of the first ranches incorporated in Texas and has been held by the same family for more than 65 years.

The history of the Rattlesnake Ranch and Seven J Stock Farm reads like the history of Texas - literally. The acreage (both entities hold contiguous tracts) is located in Houston County, the first county created by the Texas Republic in 1837 by order of President Sam Houston, for whom the county was named. This part of East Texas is significant to not only the establishment of Texas as a republic and eventual state, but to the creation of the United States of America.

The ranch is set upon the main wagon road which once ran between Spanish Mexico and French Louisiana. In 1690, the Governor of Coahuila set out to locate any remaining French incursions in this new Spanish colony. As he traveled on this road, he arrived in May 1690 along the bank of a river and named it "Rio Trinidad"; this is the site of the Seven J. Three more days took him to the site in Houston County

on San Pedro Creek where the first mission in Texas, San Francisco de Los Tejas, was founded. Both Spanish and French commerce began along this old wagon road which was renamed El Camino Real, or Old San Antonio Road (OSR).

In the early 1800s, Texas settlement began when the Spanish (and later, Mexican) authorities started granting land tracts to lure American immigrants to the new lands. Most entry into Texas took place along OSR. Settlers, soldiers and bandits traveled through the area. In 1836, as soldiers fled the Battle of the Alamo, they settled along the west bank of the Trinity River until they heard of Sam Houston's triumph at the Battle of San Jacinto along Galveston Bay. From 1836 to 1845, while Texas was a Republic, OSR served as the main artery for overland commerce between the United States and Texas.

In 1838, Wayne Lafayette Parten arrived in Texas as he and his siblings

left Alabama with a family friend to establish a life in the new republic. They spent the first winter on the coast, and it was here that Wayne adopted the 7J brand because there were no "hot spots" in the brand and it was easily identifiable. Today, it remains one of the oldest registered brands in the state. The Partens eventually settled in Madison County and raised their family of 11 children in Madisonville.

In 1886, following the Civil War, a man named George Murray arrived in Texas from Mississippi, accompanied by a large number of free black families. Between 1890 and 1925, Murray had accumulated enough capital to assemble thousands of acres in the Trinity Valley and farm a considerable area to become what was known as "the largest cotton plantation in the world". One of the most revolutionary developments that Murray made was the construction



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of an 11-mile levee, which protected the land from floods and allowed the Murrays to prosper from bountiful harvests on the protected land. The Murrays were very progressive in their use of technology for the farming operation, but the price of cotton dropped in 1929. Over the next 25 years, the family tried to recover by diversifying their operation, but eventually, Murray Farm was sold in 1948.

The purchaser of the Murray Farm was a new corporation, the Seven J Stock Farm, Inc., named after the cattle brand the Parten Family has used since 1838. This corporation was a venture created by JR Parten, one of the eleven Parten children. In 1959, JR Parten began to assemble several adjacent tracts, and he established The Rattlesnake Ranch under his sole ownership. Interestingly, records from 1805 show that cattle trading took place on that same land. During the acquisition of the Rattlesnake acreage, JR Parten established a resource conservation program as the land was improved and put into pastureland. Although the Rattlesnake and Seven J were contiguous land

holdings, their operations were totally separate – there were no shared resources. The Rattlesnake Ranch was the site of the purebred Brahman operation, and the Seven J was home to the commercial cow/calf operation. It was at this time that oil and grass drilling began among the continued farming and livestock operations. In the 1980s, the decision was made to concentrate on ventures where the Seven J and Rattlesnake could prosper, so the livestock was dispersed, and the productive land was leased to ranchers and farmers.

Today, while the land is leased for farming and ranching, oil and gas production continues along with a new enterprise – pecans. There is a retail shop open along Highway 21 during the holiday season, and most Rattlesnake Ranch Pecans are sold online. John R. “Randy” Parten, JR’s son, continues to oversee the land holding and

company operations. Although the agricultural production land is leased to outside producers, Randy and his sons continue the tradition of responsible land stewardship through the establishment of the Rattlesnake Mitigation Bank, almost 600 acres in conservation easements which help maintain the integrity of the land as a working ranch. The easement prohibits commercial and industrial activities or any activities that disturb the natural condition of the land. This further solidifies the Rattlesnake and Seven J’s agriculture productive potential in perpetuity.

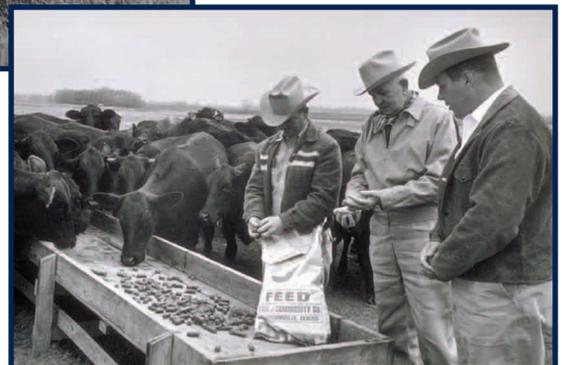
Upon Seven J’s 50th Anniversary, Randy Parten wrote a letter in a historical booklet released for the occasion: “(This ranch) has promising developments in agriculture and energy.... We cannot do everything but in those things that we choose to do, we will be the best, the most innovative and the

most efficient producer.... Our farmers are the most productive in the county. The ranches operating on Seven J are known nationally. We continue to look for opportunities to carry this success into the next century.”

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The Rattlesnake Ranch and Seven J Stock Farm have a long history in Texas agriculture. These photos show just a small piece of the significance the ranches have in Texas history. Santa Rosa Ranch is excited to be a part of their future.



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## A New Chapter

In 2013, The Rattlesnake and Seven J will begin to write a new chapter in their history. Santa Rosa Ranch (SRR), a commercial cow/calf and seedstock producer of Brangus, Angus and Ultrablack cattle, will take over the operation of the ranch land and some of the farm land on these two ranches. Under the guidance of General Manager Kent Smith, Manager Scott Broadus and Owner Gerald Sullivan along with his daughter, Kelley, the new era for this historic agricultural land will reflect the original intent that the Partens had in mind.

“We are encouraged about our relationship with the Partens and what our operation brings to the

Rattlesnake and Seven J,” offers Gerald Sullivan, owner of Santa Rosa Ranch. “Like the Partens, our family has been running cattle, primarily along the Coastal Bend, for over 100 years. We are conservationists and believe that good land stewardship will preserve these tracts. With Kent Smith’s expertise, we have a program that offers tremendous benefits for our customers. This is our business, and we believe the Rattlesnake/Seven J offers an incredible opportunity not only for our operation, but for the expansion of the commercial cowherd and the Brangus breed in particular.”

Sullivan goes on to mention that changing environmental conditions are ushering more producers to Brangus cattle for their adaptability to the intense summer heat and lack

of water while maintaining their reproductive efficiency. Plus, the reintroduction of Angus genetics to produce Ultrablack cattle is capturing the attention of many producers from around the U.S. SRR is seeing bull buyers from the Midwest and Northern U.S. who are recognizing the value the Brahman influence offers to their progeny.

“The operation of Rattlesnake and Seven J will allow us to take the Santa Rosa Ranch breeding program in a number of directions,” adds Kelley Sullivan. “First, it allows us to expand our seedstock herd development. We feel that Brangus cattle are a great foundation for many breeding programs. Second, we can diversify our operation into various programs: bull development, replacement females, commercial herd expansion, hay, etc. This additional space really gives us the opportunity to respond to the market and produce the type of cattle that have broad appeal.”

With the relationship between Rattlesnake/Seven J and Santa Rosa Ranch, the heritage of operational farms and ranches is being preserved. Both groups have shown a commitment to land conservation and fostered a culture for responsible agricultural production. The future is bright for the industry, and this new initiative offers great promise for beef cattle production in the state of Texas.

For more information about Santa Rosa Ranch, visit [www.SRRTexas.com](http://www.SRRTexas.com).

To read about JR. Parten and the establishment of the Seven J Stock Farm, Rattlesnake Ranch and Parten Oil Company, find “A Breed So Rare: The Life of JR Parten”



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