

HISTORY OF KARAKUL IMPORTS TO NORTH AMERICA

Compiled by Deborah Y. Hunter-Simon

1908 - 15 individuals from Russia imported by Dr. C. C. Young, Holliday, Texas; born in Russia & educated a medical doctor (Ewing)

1913 - 17 more Russian Karakuls were brought in (Hagerman)

1914 - 21 Bokharan (Russia) Karakuls reached these shores (Hagerman)

1914 - 130 Karakuls from European Russia were brought to Prince Edward Island, Canada by the Agnew Syndicate and Royal Investment Company. The project was abandoned in 1916 and the 24 animals that proved to be of fur bearing quality were brought to New York to the farm of Mr. F.E. Dawley, Fayetteville. Mr. Dawley formed the American Karakul Fur Sheep Registry which was active until 1928 (Ewing)

1929 - 10 individuals were imported from Halle, Germany. These were the last Karakuls to reach this country (Hagerman)

1936 - Kanaga Ranching Co. (fox farm) imported 3 rams & 8 ewes to the Aleutian Islands (between Alaska & Siberia) from USSR. (Ewing) Since Alaska was not admitted as a state until 1959, these Karakuls have never been included in the numbers with the original imports.

TOTAL of 87 head of sheep, 48 rams and 39 ewes; 53 from their native land and 34 from other countries. (Hagerman) [15 + 17 + 21 + 24 + 10]

While every effort was made to secure the best blood obtainable, the stock was not registered and no records accompanied it. Upon arrival, they were dissipated to different breeders in several states. Several so-called registries or flock records became prominent; some representing bloodlines and breeding records tracing altogether to imported stock, some representing bloodlines tracing to good fur producing sheep even if all of the blood was not traceable to imported animals. (Hagerman)

In 1943 in the U.S., there were approximately 1,000 breeders of Karakuls, 10,000 registered head, 20,000 grades & commercials, producing about 10,000 merchantable pelts per year, all consumed locally. (Ewing) After World War II, sheep numbers in the U.S. in general were at their lowest point since 1867. Persian lamb coats went out of style & so did the sheep that produced them. Since then, the history of most of the original imported Karakuls has been lost.

From 1986 onwards, the secretary of the American Karakul Sheep Registry, Julia DeVlieg, opened up the registry to try and locate some of the old stock. The AKSR currently has less than 1,000 head accounted for in the U.S. And now in 1990, every country in the world that has a large Karakul sheep population is in the midst of political unrest or war—the USSR, South Africa, Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq. Relief agencies for Afghanistan have felt the need is so great for farmers without their Karakul sheep, they have contacted the AKSR for help in re-population. A shipment of rams to Shelter Now International working out of Pakistan is planned for February 1990.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ewing, P. V. 1943. *Karakul Sheep-Producers of Persian Lambskins*. Chicago: Breeder Publications. 127 p.

Hagerman, L. 1951. *The Karakul Handbook-Selecting and Breeding Karakuls for Fur Improvement*. Denver: Smith-Brooks. 211 p.

Deborah Y. Hunter-Simon 1/8/1990 Published in *Karakul Friends Newsletter*

Epilogue

In the 28 years I have been involved with Karakul sheep I have never heard one mention of the Karakul sheep that were imported into Alaska. However, I have come to believe that CC Young was bringing Karakul sheep to the US from his breeding farm in Mexico, teens and 1920s. I have heard two fairly recent stories concerning other uncertified imports. The first, stock in California came in through Canada, sometime in the 1950s maybe. These sheep supposedly came from the Shah of Iran as a gift to England's Prince Philip. The second story was concerning a (I think Jordan) Jordanian family who brought Karakul sheep from their homeland when they immigrated to New Mexico through Mexico, sometime in the 1940s perhaps.

It is my desire to follow-up on all of these stories concerning the Alaska, California, New Mexico, Canada and Mexico Karakul imports.