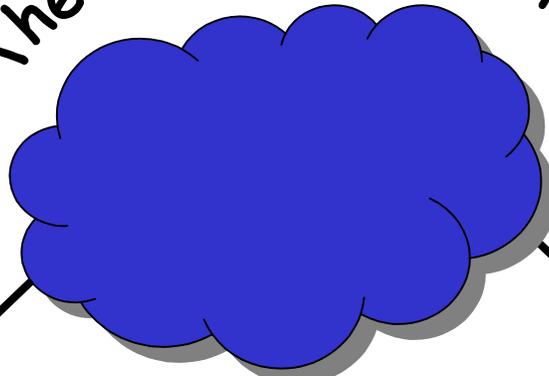


The Sheep of Shetland

A Historical Perspective

The Shetland Gene Pool



The Modern
Shetland



The Classic Shetland



The Primitive Shetland

Shetland Wool, taking all its properties together, is perhaps the completest article of the kind in the universe, possessing at the same time, the gloss and softness of silk, the strength of cotton, the whiteness of linen, and the warmth of wool.

Sir John Sinclair

September 22, 1790

Explanatory Note

This research began several years ago as I tried to reconcile the different phenotypes so abundant in the broad population of Shetland Sheep. In the text below I have drawn extensively from published and unpublished historical documents relevant to the history of the Sheep of Shetland. I have avoided rigorous adherence to references and footnotes to lighten the burden of reading. I have perhaps over quoted from these historical documents but I want to give the reader enough information to draw his or her own conclusions. Full references may be found in the unabridged version of this document, available on request.

Nevertheless, the interested reader will find the majority of the underlying historical information in:

His Majesty's Spanish Flock, Sir Joseph Banks and the Merinos of George III of England, 1964, H. B. Carter, Angus and Robertson,

Spain's Golden Fleece, Wool Production and the Wool Trade from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth Century, 1997, Phillips and Phillips, Johns Hopkins University Press

The Sheep and Wool Correspondence of Sir Joseph Banks. 1781-1820. edited by H. B. Carter, 1979. The Library Council of New South Wales in Association with the British Museum (Natural History).

I have preserved the original spellings and punctuations of the correspondence cited, amending them only to provide clarity of meaning.

The intent of this article is to elucidate a critical phase in the history of the Sheep of the Shetland Islands. That era, spanning less than 15 years, I believe, is a most critical point in the history of these interesting sheep. For it became the line of demarcation between what was a landrace population of broad phenotypic and genotypic diversity and what was, through stages, to become the source of the finest hosiery in Britain during the 18th, 19th and early 20th Century as described initially in the 1927 Flock

Book Standard and ultimately was refined to become the Modern Commercial Shetland.

Prior to this time period there is ample evidence to support the idea that the Sheep of Shetland were by and large double-coated sheep of mixed Northern European Short-tailed genetic heritage commingled with the indigenous Soay-like sheep of the Islands with occasional and highly prized animals nearly free of "stichel" hairs and more nearly single-coated.

Similarly, there is much known about these sheep in the 20th Century, especially after the establishment of a standard for the breed first promulgated in 1927 by the Shetland Flock Book Society.

However, despite the many historical references to the interest in the Sheep of Shetland in the 18th and 19th Century, relatively less comment has been made on the historical context and significance of this period on what was to become the Shetland Breed. During my research on this period I was delighted to have the opportunity to read both published and unpublished correspondence between the protagonists of a bold experiment that captured the interest, imagination and full attention of King George III of England and the most prominent men of science of the day as well as politically motivated men of significant wealth and rank in Scotland, England, Spain and elsewhere.

The citations below are a minute sampling of more than 1000 letters and private writings that I have read from the time period spanning roughly the years from 1780 to 1810. The vast majority of these letters are from the sheep and wool correspondence of Sir Joseph Banks whom many will know as the "Father of Australia" and is less well known as the scientific architect behind the experimental flocks of King George III of England.

Not cited here, but of great historical interest to the Shetland Breeder, is a relatively new volume by David Kinsman, *The Black Sheep of Windermere* published by Windy Hall Publications, 2001. ISBN 0-95402-830-9.

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So wrote Sir John Sinclair to his good friend Sir Joseph Banks on the subject of Shetland wool in the late 18th Century. That he could qualify as a modern day genius in advertising is debatable. But his enthusiasm for the Sheep of Shetland was probably second to none. However, his glowing comments do not begin to reveal the issue that swirled through Britain in his time. That issue centered on the strategic importance for Britain to regain from Spain the leadership of the global sheep and wool industry.

To fully comprehend the implications we must remember that during the period of roughly 300 years prior to the time of Banks and Sinclair, the sheep and wool industry was by far the most important economic sector in the economies of the major European nations and the British Isles. It was an economic activity that was analogous to the Technology Sector of the 21st Century or the Steel Industry for much of the 20th Century. The success and wealth of nations was directly linked to the quality and productivity of a nation's flocks.

Sir Joseph Bank's ([1743-1820](#)), work as an explorer and botanist was among the most important in the eighteenth century. His principal claim to the continuing regard of posterity was the founding and stocking of Kew Gardens as the foremost botanical repository and research institution in the world. In [1768](#) he traveled with [Captain Cook](#) on a botanical expedition to the South Seas, collecting hundreds of previously unknown plant specimens. He

also served as president of the [Royal Society](#) for forty-two years. But, equally important, Banks was chosen by the King to tackle the problem of the Wool Industry in Britain; a matter of utmost importance to the Crown.

King George III, a "Scientist King" if there ever was one, had given a mandate to Sir Joseph Banks to find or breed a sheep of such quality that England could once again compete against the Spanish in these markets. Banks, an Etonian and Oxonian of no mean background first met George III in 1771 and became a life-long friend of the Royal Family and Advisor to the King.

To Sir Joseph Banks:

The King is much hurt he was not apprised on Tuesday that Sir Joseph Banks was at Kew; or he would have found time to have seen him. The King is much pleased that two (Merino) Rams and four (Merino) Ewes are sent for, and should wish the commission could be extended to twenty Ewes and ten Rams. . . The King trusts that this number from Bilboa will not stop the attempts of getting some through France as well as others through Portugal.

George III, H.M. King
August 10, 1787

This period of time of course, also marked the birth of modern animal husbandry in Britain and Western Europe. During the 1780's and early 1790's, Banks and his compatriots searched the world diligently to find possible sources of breeds that might help him in his quest to breed the English counter part to the Spanish Merino. Few expenses were spared as Banks examined sheep from as far away as Tibet and as near as England itself. And this was also a time characterized by a great flurry of experimental breeding and husbandry with scientific discussions of the findings.

Banks himself thought that the best approach might entail cross breeding the finest Merino's with the best sheep that Britain had to offer.

The only problem with this approach was that Merinos were impossible to obtain because King Charles of Spain had banned the export of Merinos from his country.

The note of approval above from George III to Banks references a covert operation put together by Banks in an effort to get even a few of these mysterious sheep out of Spain. In all, he attempted soliciting contraband Merinos through agents in Portugal, Austria, France and even directly from Spain.

Spain had gained control of the industry with the continued breeding of its “mysterious sheep” known as the Merino. As a result, more economic value was derived from sheep and wool than all the plundering of the New World could produce during that period.

The Merinos of Spain were a critically important resource if not an economic weapon. So much so that exportation of these animals was a serious crime against the state and in defiance of King Charles of Spain. Much has been written about the transhumant herding culture that characterized the Spanish sheep industry throughout this time. With well over 4 million animals at its peak, Spain exported on average more than 14 million pounds of washed wool annually.

As might be imagined, this episode in the history of the Merinos and the Sheep of Shetland was characterized by a pervasive sense of high intrigue and covert activity. The wealth of nations was at stake.

I stated fully that I was not empowered to make use of his Majesty's name in the Transaction. . . and we agreed that it would be highly improper to have it known in the Court of Spain that the King of England wanted Merino Sheep. . .

Banks to his compatriots attempting to spirit away specimens of the famed Merinos of Spain.

Meanwhile, in Scotland, Sir John Sinclair and others seized upon the Shetland as perhaps the best candidate for the purpose of improving the wool of Britain. It had long been known that the quality of stockings and, particularly hosiery from Shetland was second to none.

“The Finest Shetland Stockings I ever saw passed through my hands two years ago as a present to His Majesty[.] they were of ample size for a tall man & yet both together passed thro Lady Banks’s wedding Ring in these tho no doubt the utmost care had been taken...”

Sir Joseph Banks to Sinclair. September 17, 1790

As a result, Hosiery made of Shetland wool became the King’s favorite and the Hosier to the King regularly procured wool from Edinburgh for the purpose of making hosiery for His Majesty, the King.

Shetland Stockings are I am told Lighter & warmer than any others[.] since I have had the Gout I have dealt much in warm Stockings[.] Pray buy me a good Lot as many as will Last me some years...”

Sir Joseph Banks, June 16, 1791

Sinclair and Banks exchanged letters and continued to argue the pros and cons of the Sheep of Shetland. Specifically Banks, who, by 1791, is already leaning toward the use of the Merino, observes that he has yet to see raw Shetland wool that did not have “stichel hairs” present in it despite Sinclair’s vigorous arguments to the contrary.

Sinclair counters that Banks has simply not seen proper Shetland wool and offers to send more samples to prove his point to Banks. Further, he will

send a full fleece to show that there are “kindly” sheep of uniform fineness to rival the Merinos of Spain. And, indeed, he promises to send live animals of the “kindly bred” to amend the King’s flocks.

Part II

By this time Sinclair and his fellow agriculturists had formed “The Highland Society” and issued a report for the the Improvement of British Wool in Edinburgh and the findings of this Society were used to support Sinclair’s notion that the Shetland is the great hope of the British Wool Industry. The excerpts below are exemplary of the tone and style of these exchanges :

“We have heard much of the stockings &c made of the wool of...Shetland. It will be found on inquiry that it was pulled from under the throat & those parts of the animal where it is finest, but not in any quantity.”

John Baker Holroyd. November 6, 1785

“I have received your Favor & the Lock of Shetland wool I nclosed which is certainly the Softest Lock I Ever felt. Whether each individual hair of the pile is as fine as the Spanish, [Merino] requires instruments I have not in my possession to ascertain with precision

It certainly is & has been long known to be the best wool for hosiery known...”

Sir Joseph Banks to Sir John Sinclair. September 27,
1790

Sinclair lobbies others with regard to his mission for Shetland Sheep and gains the support of John Holroyd:

The completeness of the first Specimens of Shetland Wool, which you sent me, surprised me extremely & very agreeably--- I was not prepared for such a sample & till then I did not believe such could be got north of Spain. I shall be ravenous to know something more of the K indly Breed---what sort of sheep---their size & shape---the weight of the fleece. . . whether it is a short sweet grass they feed in the Shetland I slands & whether the circumstances of the near neighborhood of the Sea to those small I slands does not correct the coldness expected in a Situation so far north & prevent the extreme not only of cold, but of heat, in the lower lands--- I mentioned in a late letter written in much haste that I had been disposed to think that wool as fine as Spanish might be raised in this I sland--- I t seems to be proved---

I shall pick out. . . Ewes the fineness and closeness of whose fleece intitles them to be sent so far. . . & a closewooled Spaniard shall attend them--- I saw the Caithness Sheep with Sir Joseph Banks whose fleece was abominably loose and hairy, but there seemed to be a short & fine kind of wool mixed at the root. . .

John Holroyd

A year later and Banks is still not convinced of the merits of the Shetland in his breeding program. Sinclair, however, is relentless and continues to push for acceptance of the Sheep of Shetland. Sending raw samples and processed wool to Banks for his approval or criticism.

The Shetland wool is remarkably fine but not equal to the Spanish, nor so well calculated for making cloth. It does not spring out forcibly when compressed, as the Spanish does, and is not so much twisted or crimped. The crimping in clothing wool cannot be too minute. The Spanish wool is not above an inch or an inch and a half long. M. D'Aubenton has sent fifteen of his best flock [of Merinos] to Sir John Sinclair and will send a score more. . .

Banks to Sinclair

Banks begins to distrust the veracity of Sinclair's opinion on Shetland Sheep and begins to inquire of others regarding these fabled wool bearing ovines...

There are two matters on the Shetland Isles about which I have my wants, the First is the Sheep I want much to see a Shetland Sheep that has no hair sticking thro its wool & has a coat of fine silky wool either white or black in Shetland which Sir John Sinclair describes under the name of a Kindly Sheep pray procure me one or two that have the Least proportion of Long Hair to their wool that you can find. I beg also that you will attend the Shearing or rather Plucking of the sheep for they say that:

The Shetland Fleece
The Shepherds pull
Their Sheep for wool
As Gosherds do their Geese

I want much to know exactly how this odd operation is Performed I conclude that the Down of the animal which lives at the Roots of the Long Hairs detaches itself first & may be pulled out by a Comb or otherwise without drawing these from the sheeps back so that plucking answers the double purpose of Sorting and Shearing at the same time how they take notice if they have any such animal as a Sheep without hair among them and how he is treated & send me a lock of its Fleece

I expect a long letter on this Subject for it interests me to have one from a man whose fidelity I can place full reliance upon
Banks To John Lloyd, 1791

Sinclair advises..

I am getting Kindly Shetlanders for your inspection...
Sinclair to Banks

And continues to ply Banks with samples of the best Shetland has to offer...

I sent by, yesterdays post, a pretty large specimen of Shetland wool properly dressed and prepared, and, I have now the honor of enclosing a small sample for Lady Banks. But I am persuaded that the specimens you have seen, will have altered in some measure your opinion of Shetland wool. It was never dressed properly before & consequently had never any justice done to it.

I have now the pleasure of informing you, that we already got ten of the Shetland sheep safely landed at Leith. I saw them this morning. Some of them looked like little Camals, from their length of their neck &, shape in general, and appearance, having no horns &c. Eight of them are of the real kindly breed... The eight are free from stichel hairs. The other two have them in abundance...

You'll be astonished by the spirit we have raised in Shetland, by this inquiry...

Lord Sheffield has promised us some of the Spanish breed sheep... Perhaps you might dispose of some of yours.

Sinclair to Banks

Meanwhile, Sinclair had been quietly but aggressively trying to bring Merinos to Scotland on his own as hinted at in the note above. By this time George III, through the exhaustive work of Banks has an established flock of Merino's procured through agents in Portugal, France and Austria.

Sinclair, although he never publicly admits, must also be giving up on the Shetland, for he begins dropping hints to Banks that he would be pleased to receive a ram from the King's flock if it could be arranged. He also, apparently even goes to Denmark to find fine woolled sheep to address the "Stichel Hair problem" .

I have seen several Shetland sheep whose fleece was perfectly free from hair- and Sir John Sinclair got one of the same kind in every respect last year from Denmark which had a beautiful fleece without a single hair to be found in any part of it...

Dr. James Anderson to Banks

The debate continues and after examining many samples of Shetland wool provided over a period of years by Sinclair and others as raw fleece and as processed wool, and "on the hoof", Banks through his own observations and those of friends comes to believe that he is correct in his decision to move away from the Shetland and promote the extensive infusion of Spanish blood into the best sheep of the British Isles if he is to succeed and win the favor of George III.

While I was in Shetland I made every possible Enquiry into the nature & quality of the different sorts of wool in the Country, and as I was there very soon after their Shearing time, I had an opportunity of seeing the fleeces as they come of the Sheep in all the Different parts of the Country which I visited, and by seeing a great variety of Samples I am convinced there is no such thing as a Shetland Sheep without Hair, the difference I found betwixt the fine woolled Sheep & the Coarse, is, that upon the fine I found a considerable quantity of long Hairs amongst the Wool, upon the Coarse I found a small Quantity of Wool amongst the Hair... The detail of all the absurdities attending the mischievous manner of breeding Sheep, Cattle & Horses in Shetland is too long for a letter...

I think with your assistance I may be able to improve the breed of their Sheep and the wool...

Thomas Dundas to Banks

Part III

Sinclair's continued failure to deliver on his promise to provide Banks with live Sheep of sufficient quality to please Banks begins to grate on Banks

and becomes evident in his writing. Banks believes that the processing of Shetland wool to remove the numerous "Stichel Hairs" is so laborious and expensive that it is hopeless for a business enterprise and further suggests to Sinclair that he should send his fleeces to the felt markets...

If this theory of mine is True, you will see that the Society by cultivating Shetland Sheep will begin their work at the wrong end indeed I would advise them to begin by offering to an english manufacturer a Shetland Fleece either as it comes from the Sheep back or cleand from hairs having taken however account of the expence of picking them out in order to deduct from the estimated value if they find the price below their expectations they may try the Ryland sheep of Herefordshire which are surely the finest woold in England ... I conclude that the Hatters will be found the best Customers for Shetland wool but I fear the Prices will not come up to the expectations of the Society or even to the fourth part of them...

Banks to Sinclair

Sinclair's allegiance to the Shetland wanes as he notes:

D'aubenton's [Merino] sheep have arrived.

Sinclair to Banks

The Royal Ram has safely arrived...

Sinclair to Banks

And so, Sinclair the adamant defender of the Fine wool of the Sheep of Shetland and the role they should play in revitalizing the British Wool Trade capitulates completely:

Our progress [in cross breeding], I trust will be very rapid, for, having collected rams of the Spanish breed from every quarter, we shall have next year, in Scotland alone, about 2000 lambs with Spanish blood in their veins and Spanish Fleeces on their backs. The progress afterwards will be rapid beyond conception.

Sinclair to Banks

The extraordinary collection of correspondence sampled above gives additional credence to the view that the Sheep of Shetland from the Bronze Age up at least through the end of the 18th Century were characteristically a double-coated sheep of mixed indigenous genetic make-up overwhelmed by the influx of Northern Short-tailed Sheep of Nordic extraction.

Some time after the wave of influx of Merinos to Britain with thousands of them being acquired by Sir John Sinclair, records suggest that the "Stichel Hair Problem" was solved and it is speculated that during the 19th century there was an increasing number of single coated, uniformly fine woolled phenotypes being bred. Whether this was the result of introducing "Spanish Blood" to the Sheep of Shetland is an arguable point not well documented here. However let us not forget that Sinclair was the "Laird of Orkney" and the Scottish Isles and was keenly interested in both the Sheep of Shetland and the improvement of British wool. Further, there is documentation of Merinos going to the Orkneys, Iceland and the other Islands surrounding Scotland and even to Iceland.

Prior to the 18th Century, almost all the earlier descriptions of Shetland Sheep indicate a double-coated animal with clean legs and face. During and after the 18th Century we know that Merinos, Scottish Blackface and Cheviots to name a few, were introduced to Shetland more than once. And we know that the breeding programs began focusing on uniformity of fleece and fine wool lacking "Stichel Hairs".

In any event, I believe that the pressures created by Sinclair and Banks culminated in the establishment of a refined Shetland similar in phenotype to the best examples of the Standard of 1927 as interpreted by the SSBG. For it was these marvelously fine-wooled sheep of crimped fleece that the 1927 Standard sought to preserve, the Classic Shetland, as I call it that finally met the criticisms of Banks by breeding out the "Stichel Hairs" that prevented him from adopting it as the core of the King's breeding program.

During the early years of the 20th century there was concern at the continuing prevalence of crossing, which especially in the case of the Cheviot and Blackface, led to a marked deterioration in the wool clip for Shetland as a whole. It was recorded that in some districts purebred animals no longer existed.

This realization prompted a group of Shetlanders to conclude that if the quality of the wool deteriorated so as to be no better than that obtainable elsewhere in the world the hosiery industry would be at serious risk. In the early 1920's the revenue derived from hosiery, according to Cluness (1951) was "in the vicinity of £100,000 per year." As a result the Shetland Flock Book Society (SFBS) was established in 1927 with Dr. J.C. Bowie of Bixter as its President and Andrew Tait of Vementry its Secretary. The Department of Agriculture for Scotland co-operated by providing a subsidy for purebred rams and the tide began to turn slowly despite the continued desire of many to produce crossbred lambs that were more commercially attractive.

In 1977 the Rare Breeds Survival Trust classified Shetland sheep as "Category 3: endangered", but in 1985 a change was made to "Priority 5: Above Numerical Guidelines" and a Breeders' Group set up within the Trust to maintain the characteristics of sheep in mainland Britain as defined by the SFBS in 1927.

Since the 1970's, Breeders in the UK SSBG adhering to the Shetland Flock Book Society Standard and oral tradition have bred to maintain a "Classic" fine-wooled single coated phenotype that probably reflects the best that Shetland had to offer in the years following the influence of Banks and Sinclair. These Shetlands were probably developed and bred

during the 19th Century because of the need to address the problem of Stichel Hairs as shearing replaced rooing.

The Shetland Sheep characteristic of American breeding are closer to the Shetland that predates the 18th Century when rooing was the principle means of harvesting the wool. It differs from the Shetland Sheep bred elsewhere by having a predominantly longer staple that is double-coated and wavy to crimpy in nature. It, like its SSBG cousins in England and Scotland usually has clean, fine-boned legs and a clean face with a slight but noticeable concavity between the muzzle and the poll.

The Flock Book Trust Shetlands have continued to respond to the demands of industrialization and technological developments in the wool industry. They are larger in size, with a moderately heavier skeletal structure, yielding a heavier fleece of great uniformity with respect to fiber diameter, staple length and crimp and are decidedly single-coated. Today's Modern commercial Shetland represents the culmination of the breed and as the Sheep of Shetland always have, they reflect the great plasticity of phenotypes that can be pulled from the genepool by the interplay of the demands of animal husbandry, the environment and the economic pressures of modern life.

Epilogue

Several years ago while seeking understanding and hopeful for some degree of affirmation from breeders in the UK, I offered fleece samples and photographs to all who would take the time to look. I did this with great trepidation because I had concluded on day one of that trip that whatever breed my sheep were they were certainly not the same as that which stood before me in the UK. On more than one occasion I received only the vaguest hint of encouragement regarding the sheep in my paddocks back in the USA.

“Ah yes, well. Right. Yes. (Long uneasy pause).

Yes, Well I have seen sheep like these (pointing at my pictures, but not admitting where these sheep might have been seen, A British book on BAD Animal Husbandry, perhaps?).

Brilliant sheep aren't they?

Right! (Another pregnant pause)

Well, lets have a look at some of MY Shetlands as long as you've come this far."

And it did nothing for my self esteem as a Shetland enthusiast when I caught sight of an entire wall clad in blue and red ribbons. So much for affirmation.

Some years later in the Shetland I slands, the response was somewhat more direct;

"Hmm, yes. Quite. Well, I'd say those sheep of yours are simply the result of indiscriminant breeding. Now let's go have a look at some real Shetland Sheep, shall we? You've come a long way, haven't you?"

As stunned as I was by that comment, I realized that it contained a clue. By this time I had seen many flocks in the US and far more in England and Scotland and here we were in the "Homeland" with yet another perspective on the breed.

I t was only after a few years of showing up again and again (usually rudely and without fair warning) at the doorstep of yet another unsuspecting breeder in the UK that I began to have a look at ALL of their sheep. With a more relaxed attitude on subsequent visits, explorations of the flocks became less structured and I was allowed to see the rams and ewes lurking here and yonder but always accompanied by restrictive covenants not to reveal the sources of some of my photos. So. I will honor my pledge of anonymity but suffice it to say that wavy double-coated sheep are alive and well in the UK and you may even see a bit of britch and scadder from to time.

Over time this gave way to the admission by several UK breeders that they had, indeed, seen sheep like mine. Yes, they had seen Shetlands that looked like my mini wooly mammoths at home. "Where?" I asked. "Oh, right here of course, 10 years ago we all had sheep like that. "

And let's not forget that all the Shetlands in England and Scotland DID ultimately derive from the Shetland I slands.

But the final piece of the puzzle for me occurred after reading Banks and Sinclair, when on a visit to England, I was invited to see the flock of a breeder who had eschewed the show ring entirely. These sheep, we could demonstrate came from good pedigreed stock, and yet, there they were looking all the world like my Shetlands back home! This breeder had raised her sheep in the Park Sheep fashion and, left somewhat to their own devices, it would appear that they had reverted to the phenotype we in America know so well; the primitive looking tuskless mini-mammoths in my barnyard.

And so, like the Dailley import that Benji Hunter selected to represent the Sheep of Shetland and purportedly left the islands looking quite single-coated and proper from Benji's standpoint, her sheep, too, had been indiscriminately bred for that particular trait and now, from different breeding lines, we had the same sheep so to speak,

Indiscriminate breeding. The Zetlander was right. Not in a condescending way, but rather in the true sense of the word. This English breeder and I had both neglected to discriminate the "kindly sheep" from the "beaver sheep". We had not bred our flocks specifically for the fleece type that put Shetland Sheep on the map and created the Classic Shetland of the 18th Century and 19th Century. And, we certainly had not bred for the traits that characterize the Modern Commercial Shetland of my friend in Shetland. But, I believe, we all have Shetland Sheep.

So, my proposal is that Shetland enthusiasts collectively recognize the great variety of phenotypes that we, as breeders, can pull from the depths of the Shetland gene pool. That the reservoir of genetic material underlying the breed contains remnants of contributions from outside the Islands will always be arguable but is undeniable. From the very beginning the Sheep of Shetland have been repeatedly influenced by exogenous genetics. These sheep are surely the result of a thousand years of Nordic influence amended by genetics from Britain and Europe in man's attempt to better the lot of the sheep and people of Shetland. But, rather than argue endlessly over the validity of our sheep, we should celebrate this plasticity that has resulted in a marvelously hardy, fascinatingly and undeniably variable creature. Each of these phenotypes can be thought of as a genetic

time slice, a phenotypic snapshot in the development of the Shetland gene pool through time. Each of these phenotypes is rightly called a Shetland.

From all of this I am driven to conclude that the 1927 Standard for the breed promulgated by the Shetland Flock Book Society is an appropriately flexible document against which to benchmark our sheep. It is at once restrictive enough to keep us all on the correct course of stewardship and yet flexible enough to allow each one of us to extract from the breed the variable traits each of us puts to such good use in our separate settings.