

# Stock Marks Aren't Just Brands: Use them to Identify People Also!<sup>1</sup>

By Diane L. Richard<sup>2</sup>  
Copyright 2024

## SYNONYMS:

Brands  
Cattle Marks  
Earmarks  
Flesh Marks

## Introduction

I became fascinated with stock marks when researched a colonial NC family and realized that stock mark records are some of the earliest extant records found in North Carolina. We often associate stock marks and brands with the large cattle ranches in the western states; we do that at our own risk. That said, let's explore stock marks, their role, and, most importantly for genealogists, where we can find them across the U.S. and Canada.

## EXAMPLES - PUBLISHED VOLUMES

- (1) "Pilgrims, Farmers, and Ranchers: Marks and brands as a Genealogical Source," Kathleen W. Hinckley, *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 79 (December 1991):253-67
- (2) Princess Anne County, Virginia, list of earmarks and brands, 1691-1778, Michael Schoettle, 2015
- (3) Abstracts of deeds, Marion County, Mississippi, containing deeds, marks and brands, bonds, mortgages, and deeds of gift, E. Russ Williams, 1962
- (4) Cattle marks of Northampton County, Va., 1665-1742, Frank V Walczyk, 1999
- (5) Earmark and brand book, showing all sheep and goat earmarks and brands recorded, and all new marks and brands recorded up to February 12, 1937, comp. by Tom Snell, New Mexico Sheep Sanitary Board
- (6) Livestock brands & marks: an unexpected bayou country history: 1822-1946 pioneer families Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana, Christopher Everette Cenac & Claire Domangue Joller, 2013
- (7) Marks & brands of domestic animals as registered in Knox County, Indiana, 1807-1841, Helen Kackley, 1951
- (8) Marks and brands of Effingham County, Georgia 1790-1908, Norman Vincent Turner, 2002
- (9) Old Albemarle County, North Carolina, Pasquotank precinct (county) births, marriages, deaths, brands and flesh marks & county claims, 1691-1833, Weynette Parks Haun, 1981.
- (10) Early livestock brands of Carteret County, North Carolina, 1768-1849, Sharon Guthrie, 1997
- (11) North Carolina Genealogical Society Journal, Tyrrell Stock Marks (1763+), Volume 42, No 1, 2016

<sup>1</sup> To be clear, it is "records" created regarding stock marks that help us identify people; not records regarding human branding.

<sup>2</sup> Mosaic Research and Project Management, Raleigh, NC, [www.mosaicrpm.com](http://www.mosaicrpm.com), [www.tarheeldiscoveries.com](http://www.tarheeldiscoveries.com), 919-231-8137, [dianelrichard@mosaicrpm.com](mailto:dianelrichard@mosaicrpm.com) & [mosaicrpm@gmail.com](mailto:mosaicrpm@gmail.com)

## EXAMPLES – ONLINE RESOURCES

- (1) [Index] [North Carolina] Bertie County NC Cattle Markings 1722-1741, <http://files.usgwarchives.net/nc/bertie/deeds/cattle.txt> & Stock Marks of Tyrrell County, North Carolina, 1763-1819, <http://www.ncgenweb.us/tyrrell/STOCK.HTM>
- (2) [Finding Aids] Oregon Historical County Records Guide – Coos County Records Inventory, Marks and Brands Records, 1857-1945, <http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/pages/records/ocal/county/coos/inv/marks.html> & Douglas County, Marks and Brands Records, 1852-1949, <http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/pages/records/ocal/county/douglas/inv/marks.html>
- (3) [Index] Levy County Clerk (FL), Historical Marks & Brands, 1865-1907, <http://www.levyclerk.com/historical-records/>
- (4) [Index] Monroe County (MO), Marks & Brands 1831-1870, <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~momonroe/marks.htm>
- (5) [Abstract] Sumner County (TN), Stock Marks & Brands, 1837-1869, <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~we3sumneritesjblcsf/receipts&c3.htm>
- (6) [Gateway] Cyndi's List, <https://cyndislist.com/pets/brands/?page=1>, maintains a "Livestock Brands and Marks page." There is some overlap with the resources listed here and probably others not included here.
- (7) Index to Livestock Marks Registered in Hendricks County, Indiana (1824-1848), [https://www.genealogycenter.info/search\\_hendrickslivestock.php](https://www.genealogycenter.info/search_hendrickslivestock.php)

## Historical Context

Unlike today where it would be unlikely to find cattle, horses, pigs, etc not enclosed behind a stone wall, fence, or some other barrier, in non-cattle ranching states, in earlier times, it was common for stock to freely range.

"Marks and Brands. Until the early twentieth century, North Carolina's range was open – that is, crops, not livestock, were to be fenced in. Marks and brands were used to prove ownership of the cattle, horse, hogs, sheep, and goats roaming free in the woods. Marks were cuts made in the animals' ears, varying in location, number, and type – crop, slit, swallow fork, over keel, under keel, poplar leaf, bit slice, circle, and square. Owners normally used several cuts, which in combination constituted the identifying mark ... Brands were generally initials stamped onto animal rumps.

Marks and brands were publicly recorded in order that duplication, confusion, and controversies might be avoided. Parents often recorded marks in the names of their children. Before 1868, their period of greatest use, marks and brands were recorded in county court minutes or volumes assigned to that purpose. After 1868, registers of deeds usually placed them in Record of Marks volumes."<sup>3</sup>

As with any records, understanding the law helps determine what actions had to be taken and what records were required to be created. For NC, we have "An Act to appoint the Marking Horses, Cattle & Hogs & to prevent injuries done by killing, mis-marking, driving away or destroying

<sup>3</sup> North Carolina Research – Genealogy and Local History, 2nd Edition, Helen F.M. Leary, C.G., F.A.S.G., editor, North Carolina Genealogical Society, Raleigh, 1996, pages 292-3

people's Stocks" found in Acts of the North Carolina General Assembly, 1715-1716, Chapter XLII.<sup>4</sup> In later years we find additional laws such as this one about defacing/rebranding (1742)<sup>5</sup>

### Value of These Records

Recognize that early registrations of stock marks might coincide with land grant purchases or other initial land purchases as the listed individuals moved into the neighborhood. And, not just sons are mentioned! References to daughters and even grandchildren can be found.

### Accessing these Records

We are fortunate in that there are many ways to access these records. See the three boxes:

Examples – Published Volumes

Examples – Online Resources

Examples – Historical Published Volumes & Archive Holdings

Additionally, FamilySearch, <https://familysearch.org/catalog/search>, and its digitization efforts now provides access to these records for select states. Select the Keywords option (you can also restrict by Place). A search on "Stock Marks" yields entries found for Alabama, North Carolina, Indiana, Missouri, Tennessee, Arkansas, West Virginia, and more. Recognize that these are a mix of original records and published volumes. A search on "Brands" + "Cattle" yielded entries from Oklahoma, Kansas, Louisiana, Texas, Arizona, Missouri, Georgia, and beyond. Recognizing that different locales used different terminology, search on several different words and phrases.

## EXAMPLES – HISTORICAL PUBLISHED VOLUMES & ARCHIVE HOLDINGS

(1) Internet Archive, <https://archive.org> – a rich research for late 19<sup>th</sup> century & early 20<sup>th</sup> century information. A search on subject: Livestock Brands yields 24 hits including records from MT, Alberta Canada, MO, WY, CO, etc, while a search on subject: Cattle Brands yields 23 hits including records from TX, MT, OR, NE ...

(2) HathiTrust, <https://www.hathitrust.org/> -- similar search terms as for internet Archive – records of CA [includes a collection of 22 items under earmarks], OR, WA, WY, TX, & IA.

(3) JStor, <https://www.jstor.org/> – you can access select content for free. For example, Stock Marks recorded in South Carolina, 1695-1721, A.S. Salley, The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine, Volume 13, 1912, <https://archive.org/details/jstor27575337>

(4) Worldcat, <http://www.worldcat.org/> -- provides great insight into published volumes (though also microfilm and other formats as well). It is not unusual to find that a microfilmed version of original records might be available in multiple libraries and for interlibrary loan.

(5) ArchiveGrid, <https://beta.worldcat.org/archivegrid/> -- several collections of original material are found such as for Decatur County (IN) Stock Marks, 1822, <https://beta.worldcat.org/archivegrid/collection/data/247135179>. Similarly found records for UT, OR, MT, TN, CA, WI, and elsewhere.

(6) Google Books, e.g., Record of Marks and Brands for the State of Utah: Embracing All Marks ... By Utah. State Recorder of Marks and Brands, <https://books.google.com/books?id=-1pNAAAAYAAJ> & The Texas Stock Directory: Or, Book of Marks and Brands. In a Series of Volumes Designed to Embrace the Entire State, S. A. Long, 1865, [https://books.google.com/books?id=vsYj-hq\\_h4cC](https://books.google.com/books?id=vsYj-hq_h4cC)

<sup>4</sup> <http://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr23-0001#p23-57>

<sup>5</sup> <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.php/document/csr23-0012>

Don't forget to research into the library or archival catalog of choice for the locale you are researching. All repositories do not have their catalogs online as part of the already mentioned resources.

Knowing that the western Canadian counties were/are big on livestock ranching, I checked the Archives of Manitoba where I found – Livestock Branch Brand Registers, 1877-1962, [http://pam.minisisinc.com/scripts/mwimain.dll/144/PAM\\_DESCRIPTION/DESCRIPTION\\_DET\\_REP/REFD+9112?SESSIONSEARCH](http://pam.minisisinc.com/scripts/mwimain.dll/144/PAM_DESCRIPTION/DESCRIPTION_DET_REP/REFD+9112?SESSIONSEARCH). Or, maybe they lived in Alberta and the files of the Stockmen's Memorial Foundation, Cancelled Brand Files, <http://www.smflibrary.ca/brand.html>, are relevant.

### GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

- (1) "Stock Marks Aren't Just Brands – Use them to Identify People Also!" Diane L. Richard, *Internet Genealogy*, April/May 2017, [http://www.mosaicrpm.com/yahoo\\_site\\_admin/assets/docs/Stock\\_Marks\\_IG\\_May2017.334124411.pdf](http://www.mosaicrpm.com/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/Stock_Marks_IG_May2017.334124411.pdf)
- (1) A Different Set of Vital Records, The Legal Genealogist (Judy G. Russell), March 2022, <https://www.legalgenealogist.com/2022/03/08/different-vitals/>
- (2) Search Livestock Brands for Your Ancestors, *Genealogy's Star*, James Tanner, Dec 2015, <https://genealogysstar.blogspot.com/2015/12/search-livestock-brands-for-your.html>, mentions these UT resources:
  - Utah General Assembly, and William Clayton. "Book of Recorded Marks and Brands." Book of Recorded Marks and Brands.
  - Utah, and State Board of Agriculture. Utah Livestock Brand and Anti-Theft Act, 1959. [Salt Lake City, Utah?]: State Board of Agriculture, 1959.
  - Utah, State Department of Agriculture, Utah, and Division of Animal Industry. "Official Brand Book of the State of Utah." Official Brand Book of the State of Utah.
- (3) "Genealogical Evidence: Marks for Cattle and Sheep," Thomas H. Roderick, *The National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, 57 (1969): 88-92

Also check the SC ArchCat, Catalog for the South Carolina Archives, <http://rediscov.sc.gov/scar/> where, apparently, records of interest might be the Estrays records, extant for several counties, where "appraisers certifying the valuation and describing the animals as to kind, marks, brands ..." would provide some information about marks and brands.

**Recognize that you will not typically find these records at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) as they are not federal records. These are state and/or locally created records.**

Also appreciate that many states still have requirements for registering marks, brands, etc.



"Branding Irons" by jkirkhart35, <https://ccsearch.creativecommons.org/photos/71174663-6294-466a-9611-7d50e909696c>