

Skunk Development Bureau

By Scot H. Dahms



In the 1890s, Frederick Montgomery Holbrook started to research his interest in the domestication of the skunk. He wanted to demonstrate that the skunk was really quite "innocuous" and worthy of a place in public esteem. Frederick understood that to properly introduce the skunk into society it was necessary to make skunks absolutely safe to handle.

In the summer of 1894 between his freshman and sophomore years at the School of Mines, Columbia University, Frederick researched the domestication of the skunk while conducting survey work in connection with hydraulic engineering in northern New York State. He studied techniques for the removal of skunk scent glands. During that summer, he removed the scent glands from seven or eight skunks. Frederick developed a technique where no anesthetic was used and no scent was released. It was documented in the booklet entitled "Directions for Removing the Scent Sacs from Live Skunks Without Spilling Any Scent Fluid". Frederick found that removal of the scent glands did not interfere with the fertility of the skunk, the comfort or the quality of fur coat produced.

In September of 1894, Frederick exhibited a pair of descended skunks at the Jefferson County Fair in Watertown, New York. The Jefferson County Agricultural Society gave Frederick an award for his skunks and called them an "Unprecedented Exhibit".

In the summer of 1895, Frederick prepared five skunks for the Menagerie in Central Park, New York City. Unfortunately, the authorities refused to accept the gift and were very unappreciated of the sentiment.

In 1911, Frederick established the Skunk Development Bureau in Chicago

with a breeding station in Glencoe, a suburb of Chicago. In 1913, the station was moved to Lombard, also a suburb of Chicago, in order to have enlarged facilities because of the rapidly increasing demand for high grade breeding stock. Sub-stations for breeding were established in some states to more rapidly meet the demands for breeding stock. The goal of the organization was to produce and distribute fine breeding stock and share knowledge of handling and breeding of the skunk.

A mating and pedigree chart was devised and distributed for free to breeders. A system for marking skunks for identification was devised utilizing the removal of specific toes from all four feet along with a correlating numbering system. Eight grades of skunk fur were devised from an all black skunk, AAA, to an all white skunk, DDD. Frederick noted in 1915 that the Bureau had not been able to produce a grade AAA skunk.

The Skunk Development Bureau worked with the University of Illinois to conduct genetic research on recession and dominance. As of 1915, no results were available for distribution. From 1911 to 1915, the Skunk Development Bureau had responded to over 5,000 inquiries. In the same time, the Skunk Development Bureau sold 379 skunks as breeding stock including 137 in the US, 230 in Canada and 12 to England. The Bureau also sent 150 complete sets of surgical instruments for removing scent sacs including 135 in the US and 15 in Canada. The Skunk Development Bureau received \$5,935.66 during the time period with \$5,127.76 being for breeding stock.

In the May 1914 issue of Hunter Trader Trapper, Frederick shared a swindling scheme where he sent money to a person in January believing the person had high grade skunks to sell. The check was cashed, but no skunks arrived. Letters were sent to the person, but they were returned and marked "Party removed - left no address". Frederick turned the correspondence and cancelled check over to the Post Office Inspectors. On March 10th, the Post Office Inspectors arrested the person on a charge of using the mail to defraud. The person received an undisclosed term in the penitentiary.

This person also obtained a large sum from a Minnesota skunk breeder.

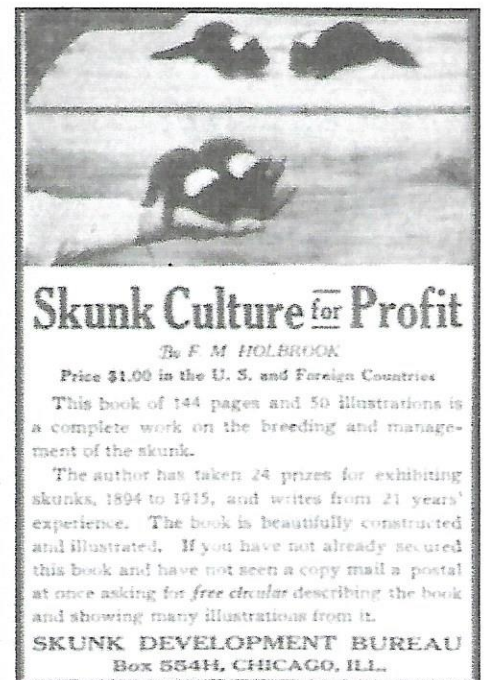
The Skunk Development Bureau was created by a man whose interest in skunks appeared boundless. Frederick worked hard through research and education to change the understanding of the skunk. This work achieved his goal of skunk being accepted into society for a short duration. Unfortunately after fashions changed and prices dropped, the skunk returned to its previous place in the hierarchy of furbearing animals.

If anyone has information contrary to what is in this article, I encourage them to contact me via email, mail, phone or through the magazine.

References

Frederick Montgomery Holbrook. Skunk Culture for Profit. 1915. Skunk Development Bureau, Chicago.

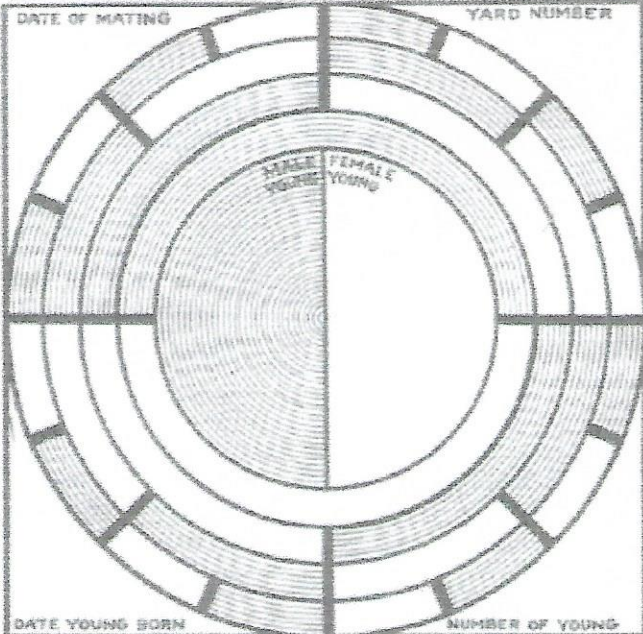
Hunter Trader Trapper, Swindler Jailed, May 1914, Skunk Development Bureau, Chicago.



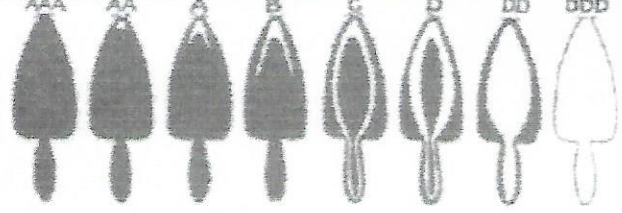
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SKUNK MATING AND PEDIGREE CHART

BREEDER'S NAME _____ BREEDER'S ADDRESS _____
 DATE OF MATING _____ YARD NUMBER _____

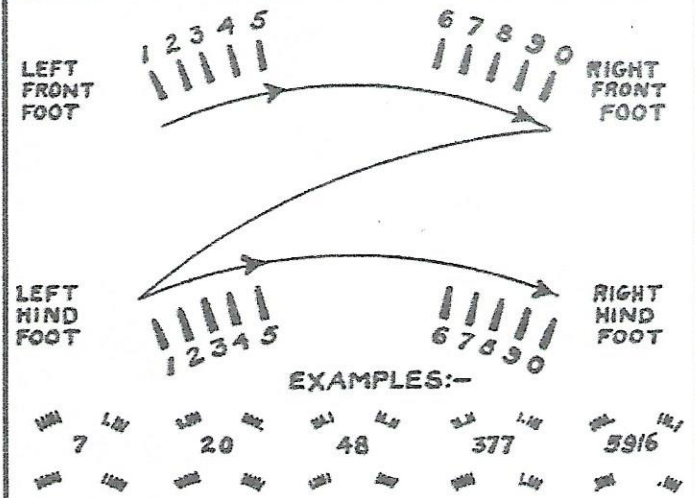


DATE YOUNG BORN _____ NUMBER OF YOUNG _____

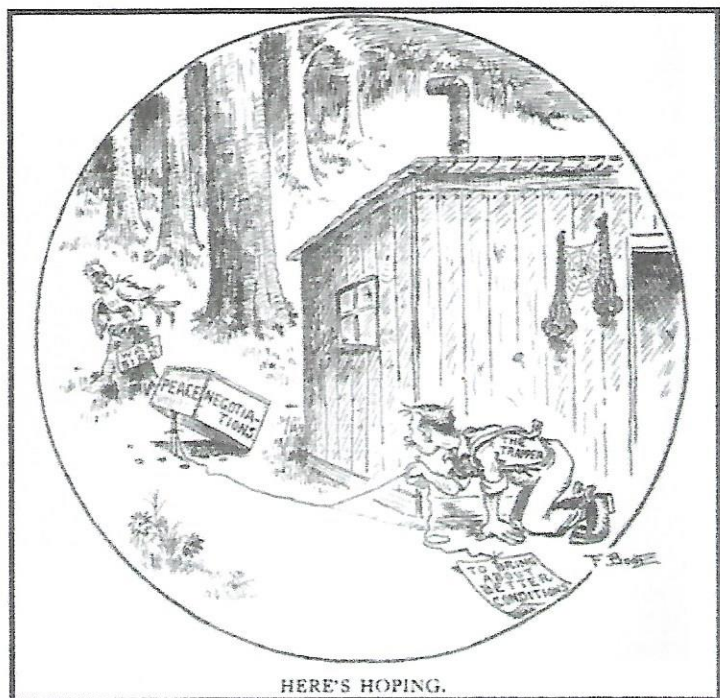


Use one chart for each mating and litter as follows:
 Show grade of every Skunk recorded, young as well as old,
 Record all males on dark and females on light spaces.
 Record young in bulls-eye with sexes properly divided.
 Record mated pair in ring next to bulls-eye.
 Record lineal ancestors of mated pair as far back as known.
 The following system for recording Skunks is recommended:
 59AAA10 means—serial No. 59, male, completely black, born 1910.
 74All means—serial No. 74, female, body black, born 1911.
 The odd serial numbers indicate males, the even numbers females.
Keep this record. Mail exact duplicate to
SKUNK DEVELOPMENT BUREAU
 Box 554 Chicago, Ill.

A SIMPLE METHOD OF MARKING SKUNKS



The above diagram shows the twenty claws of a Skunk viewed from above as it stands on the ground.
 By removing not more than one claw from any foot and reading in direction of the arrows almost any number from 1 to 5859 may be represented.
 Cut the claw far enough back so it will not grow again.
 Do not use any number which would take two claws from any foot.
 The examples given under the diagram illustrate the system.
 Each breeder has his own ideas and systems in these matters, but the above is the simplest method of marking which the Bureau has found.



LIVE SKUNKS
 With All Scent Sacs Removed

To _____

Via _____

IMPORTANT: Give Fresh Water and Feed Bread daily Enroute. (Bread Accompanies Shipment.)

FROM
SKUNK DEVELOPMENT BUREAU
 Address Box 554 Chicago, Ill., U. S. A.
 Breeding Stations near Chicago and other points in the U. S.

Scot H. Dahms
 2270 W Willow Lane
 Peru, Indiana 46970
 765-327-1531
 ranger1971@comcast.net