

LOCAL HISTORY CENTER

## Black karakul sheep once grazed in Palos Verdes hills

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Photographs tell a visual story on their own. When paired with the recorded experiences, memories and reflections of community members from days gone by, the story becomes even richer and more vivid.

A small photograph collection of a peninsula shepherd and the oral history interview of former Rolling Hills resident Gordon Shultz, recorded in 1976, tell the untold story of Bob Boyd, a little-known Montana cowboy-turned-shepherd, who grazed his sheep in the Palos Verdes hills for more than 10 years.

Boyd came to the peninsula in the late 1930s and managed one of the largest flocks of karakul sheep in Southern California. The karakul, a hardy breed of sheep with distinctive black fur and fat tails, are native to the desert regions of modern-day Uzbekistan.

Boyd had three camps on the peninsula: one near San Pedro, another on the west side of the peninsula and his winter camp, roughly near Silver Spur and Crenshaw. Shultz recalls how Boyd worked expertly with his border collies to keep the sheep together. Even though the dogs were far away, with a "shrill whis-



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LOS ANGELES TIMES PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

Bob Boyd was a Montana cowboy-turned-shepherd who grazed his sheep in the Palos Verdes hills in the

1930s. "One day, a finger pointed to a few stray sheep, Boyd could get them to bring the sheep back into the flock.

Shultz describes the sheep coming over the hills into the undeveloped Peninsula Center area "almost like a flow of water."

With his partner Addis Kelley, said to be the first to introduce the unusual sheep to California, Boyd started the California Karakul Breeders Association. They hoped to build the karakul industry in California, keeping registers of breeders and sheep, and promoting mutton and other karakul products.

Ad campaigns for this breeders association included famous actresses Peggy Lee and Peggy Dow modeling clothing

made of "kara" fabrics (kara-tweed, kara-flannel and kara-plaid). Peggy Dow was named Ms. Bo-Peep of 1949.

In just over a year, the association had a membership of more than 600 and changed its name to the American Karakul Breeders Association, reflecting the growing interest in the industry across the country.

However, the industry had its share of problems. Unethical ranchers with get-rich-quick sheep raising schemes were partially to blame. One such rancher was H.K. Hemingway. Hemingway was charged and pleaded no contest to mail fraud by using the Postal Service to get customers to buy into his business.

For Boyd, who was se-

rious about developing the karakul industry, these ranchers raised his ire.

In a letter to noted cowboy, ranchman, author and friend, Frank M. King, Boyd wrote, "I am still on the warpath with those damn shepherders, the worst of the lot is the people who have entered the karakul industry. I have seen cattlemen, hogmen, horsemen, sheep men but never in my whole put together did I ever such monkey business. It is no wonder the karakul industry is where it is today."

In 1951, the bad press and loss of grazing land due to the boom in residential development on the peninsula led Boyd to give up sheep and return to cattle raising. He moved to Upland, only to die unexpectedly of a heart attack just three years later.

A recorded interview of a longtime Rolling Hills resident, a set of unique photographs of a shepherd and his flock grazing on the peninsula hills, plus some good old gumshoe sleuthing, all come together to bring to life the story of a man, an industry and a unique slice of Peninsula history.

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