
BE SURE THE MARKET IS READY

**ALEXANDER GRAHAM
BELL'S**

Six-Nippled Sheep



George Davis, agricultural researcher in New Zealand, is right now engaged in a multi-nipple breeding program, which includes the six-nippled ewe on display here.

1847-1922

"It is astonishing how ignorant we all are about common things. Just test the matter on yourself. Sheep are quite common; and we are all more or less familiar with their appearance, and should therefore be able to answer some questions about them. Well then . . . how many nipples has she, and where are they located?" So asked Alexander Graham Bell of *Science* readers. Bell himself was made aware of his own ignorance on the matter in 1890, when he examined the flock of sheep that came with the property he purchased on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. The examination taught him that sheep have two nipples and that they are positioned under the hips, like those of a cow. The occasion also marked the onset of Bell's longest standing experiment, which entailed a selective breeding program for multi-nippled sheep. But the origins of this work lie several years previous, in 1886, when Bell, his wife Mabel, and their two young daughters bought a summerhouse in the village of Baddeck, Cape Breton. A pet lamb was purchased to go with it. After a pleasant summer, the Bells returned to Washington, DC, for the winter. When they returned to Baddeck the following spring, they now owned two sheep — last summer's lamb had turned mother.

Why only one lamb, wondered Mrs. Bell and her husband. Specifically, Mrs. Bell reasoned, "A progeny of nineteen was no uncommon event in a pig's family. Even dogs generally had as many as six at a birth, while twin lambs were rare, and quadruples unheard of. . . . Neither the pig nor the dog mother had difficulty in rearing a large proportion of their children to fine maturity. Why could not the sheep do so too? The problem fascinated Mr. Bell."

That the inventor of what is now known as the single most valuable patent in history, the telephone, could spend 32 years attempting to breed sheep that had litters of progeny might come as a surprise, but not to those who knew the man. Bell had a Scottish countenance and disposition. He had massive black eyes, a massive shock of hair, massive features, and a massive personality to go with them. He was a dramatist with an insatiable curiosity about everything around him and a genius. He was well married