

Association Marks Its *Anniversary* Move to St. Joseph



Forty years ago the American Angus

Association opened its doors for business

in St. Joseph, Mo. The day was Monday,

June 25, 1956, and it brought to an end 73

years of operating out of people's homes

in the early years and later in rented, often

inadequate, office space.

by Keith Evans

The move into a new building at 3201 Frederick Blvd., came after years of planning, site selection and construction. It closed out a 54-year era which saw the American Angus located in the historic Chicago Union Stockyards. For most of this 53 years Exchange Avenue, the main street of the stockyards, was considered the heart of the livestock industry. Facing on this street were the Stock Yard Inn which also housed the Saddle and Sirloin Club, the Pure Bred Live Stock Records Building, which in its heyday was home to the prestigious Angus, Shorthorn and Percheron Horse Associations, the *Chicago*

Daily Drivers Journal, the Chicago Stock Yards Exchange Building, and the national headquarters of Swift & Co.

In 1956 leaders of most of these organizations and other livestock related businesses located in or near the stockyards met daily for lunch at the Saddle and Sirloin Club. They rubbed shoulders in the social events surrounding the International Livestock Exposition, the largest and greatest livestock show in the world that ended its 75 year run in 1975.

Many leaders of the American Aberdeen-Angus Breeders Association, as the organization was then called, were loathe to

see the Association's headquarters relocated. "Frank Richards, then the powerful and influential secretary of the Association, didn't think the Board of Directors or the delegates to the annual meeting would vote for the move," Lloyd Miller observed recently. Miller, now a St. Joseph, Mo., realtor, worked 33 years for the American Angus Association, first as publicity director, then director of public relations and the last 10 years as executive secretary. He retired in 1978.

"Frank thought that too many Association leaders were tied to Chicago and the stockyards," Miller says. "He believed that their influence would keep the offices there."

But Richards underestimated the members' ability to understand the Association's need for expanded work space, and improved labor force. They didn't want to see the Association invest good money in a declining area of Chicago. There was also the resolve and power of Missouri Angus breeders. Missouri at that time was the largest Angus state both in terms of members and annual registrations and transfers. Many of the other influential Midwestern states were also interested in a move, because cities in these states made proposals to attract the Association headquarters.

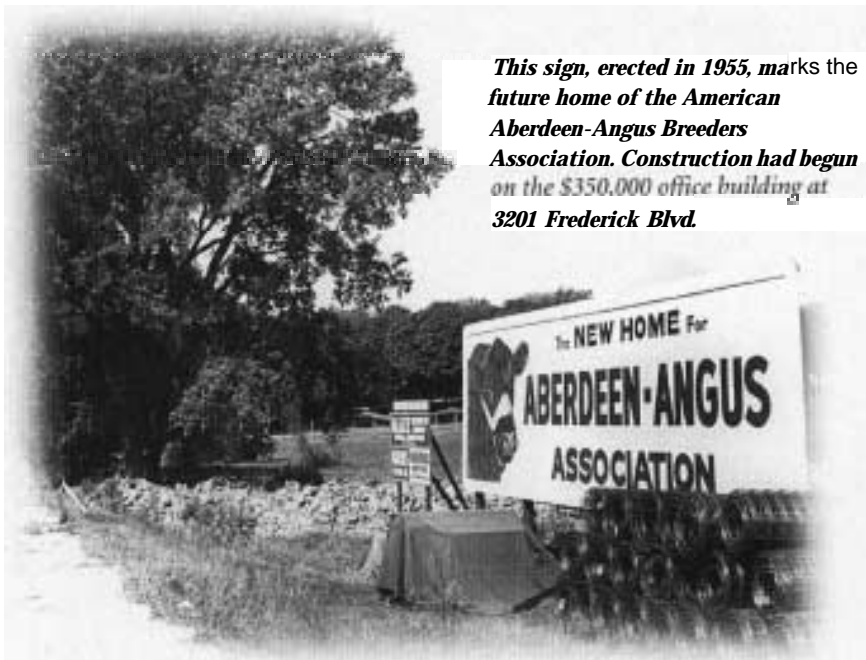
Initially several dozen towns and cities contacted the Association site selection committee. After some investigation, five cities were recommended for further consideration. They included St. Joseph, along with Columbia, Mo.; Lincoln, Neb.; Ames, Iowa; and Hutchinson, Kan. These cities were all located in powerful Angus states, with plenty of annual meeting delegates, so the decision to move out of Chicago was easier than some anticipated.

The site selection committee was headed by Adlai Rust, chairman of the board of State Farm Insurance Company, Bloomington, Ill., and a prominent Illinois Angus breeder. Rust drew upon State Farm's resources for office site selection and relocation. His committee eventually narrowed their recommendations down to St. Joseph, Lincoln and Hutchinson.

In a historic vote Dec. 1 at the Association's 1954 Annual Meeting at the Palmer House Hotel in Chicago, the delegates approved a resolution to build a new office in St. Joseph. An important deciding factor, aside from the available



The Pure Bred Live Stock Record Building in the Chicago Union Stock Yards was home of the American Aberdeen-Angus Breeders Association for more than half a century, Before the move to St. Joseph Association offices were on the second floor.



This sign, erected in 1955, marks the future home of the American Aberdeen-Angus Breeders Association. Construction had begun on the \$350,000 office building at 3201 Frederick Blvd.

work force, low costs, central location and excellent access to transportation, was that the land on Frederick Blvd. was donated to the Association. Less than two years after the vote, the building was complete and the move to St. Joseph was accomplished.

The American Angus Association was chartered Nov. 2, 1883 in Chicago, Ill. The first headquarters, however, was located in Independence, Mo., in the home of Charles Gudgell, the Association's first secretary.

When Gudgell resigned in 1886 the office was re-located in the home of the new secretary, Thomas McFarlane, at Iowa City, Iowa. In 1890 McFarlane received permission to move the Association offices to Harvey, Ill., some 20 miles south of Chicago's stockyards. Then in June 1902 the Board of Directors approved a motion to locate in the Live Stock Record Building at 817 Exchange Ave., in the Chicago Union Stock Yards. The headquarters remained in that area until 1956.

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Some 16 Allied moving vans like this one unloading at the Association's north loading dock in June 1956 were needed to move the office equipment from Chicago to St. Joseph. All work ceased in Chicago on June 15 and didn't resume in St. Joseph until 10 days later.

Only one major disaster has struck the Association office in 103 years. Fire swept the stockyards in Chicago early one July morning in 1934, burning out the Angus office. Fireproof vaults preserved most of the Association's permanent records. The office of the current executive officer of the Association, Richard L. Spader, contains a

charred copy of "A History of Aberdeen-Angus Cattle" by Alvin Sanders, that partially survived the 1934 blaze.

Shortly after the end of World War II the Association's Board of Directors began planning for a new office. It was becoming obvious that the space in the old Pure Bred Live Stock Record Building was inadequate.



Association president Otto G. Nobis, Davenport, Iowa, addresses a crowd of some 500 people present for the dedication of the Association's new home on June 19, 1954. Standing in front are Association directors, and Secretary Frank Richards is at the far left. In back are Association staff and fieldmen and some of the workers who came from the Chicago office on a temporary basis to help start the new operation and train new employees.

There was no room for growth and the Association was growing rapidly. Registrations in 1946, when Frank Richards took over as head of the Association, totaled just more than 74,000 head. By 1953, when a new building was being considered, registrations were more than 160,000 and the building fund was growing rapidly.

Ground was broken in July 1955. Lloyd Miller, who acted as the unofficial secretary to the building committee, represented the Association at the ceremonies. Five other people also turned ceremonial shovels of earth. They were Don Spalding of the St. Joseph Livestock Exchange; Stanley I. Dale, St. Joseph mayor; E.Y. Lingle, Seitz Packing Co., St. Joseph and John Bennett of the St. Joseph Stockyards.

The building was designed by local architect George R. Eckel. It was to measure 127 by 123 feet, with a full basement. The solid brick building, with red brick facing and Indiana limestone trim, would be built facing Frederick Blvd. on the five acres donated to the Association.

Construction began almost immediately after the June 1955 ceremony, and the building was ready for use a year later. The floor was reinforced concrete covered with asphalt tile. Walls were of green ceramic tile. On the first floor were modern offices for staff members, a large open work area, restrooms, a board room and reception area. In the basement was a lunch room, kitchen, restrooms, a mail room, and large storage area. The contract cost was \$350,000.

On June 15, 1956 all work ceased at 9 Dexter Park Ave., Chicago 9, Ill. Some 16 Allied moving vans were loaded with files, office equipment, and all manner of books and paraphernalia needed for operating the Association. Ten days later, Monday, June 25, the equipment was in place and the Association began the first day of operation. The move was coordinated by Al Birmingham, the Association registrar. Birmingham was a detail person.

"The most amazing thing to me was how smoothly the move went," says Lyle Springer who was executive assistant to Frank Richards, and later director of breed improvement for the Association.

"Birmingham marked every piece that was loaded on the vans. In the new office there was a corresponding mark on the floor where that piece was to be set. When we moved in the office was ready to get back to

work,” says Springer, now in the real estate business at Denton, Texas.

New employees had been hired in St. Joseph and some of them had received at least a little training. Although all of the staff moved to St. Joseph, none of the hourly employees did. To ease the transition, 15 key Chicago employees agreed to move temporarily to St. Joseph. They helped get the office back in business in its new location, and trained new employees. Some worked for more than a month, living in the Hotel Robidoux in downtown St. Joseph.

Work began slowly that first day with about 35 new employees plus the staff and the 15 temporary former Chicago employees. It was mid-summer before the full contingent of 100 employees were on board, and workflow was more normal. Lloyd Miller points out the staff wasn't accustomed to the kind of people who came to work for the Association. Many were farm people from the surrounding area with a strong work ethic and commitment to getting the job done. Unlike their Chicago predecessors, they knew what cattle were and the difference in a cow, bull and heifer.

Two employees who started work for the Association on June 25, 1956 are still working today. They are Don Painter, director of member services, and Barbara Kelly, supervisor in the membership and CRT departments.

“It was a long time before the office worked through the backlog of business that came down from Chicago,” Barbara Kelly says. She worked in the department that took the incoming registrations and pulled individual IBM punch cards from the files for the sire and dam, breeder and first owner.

Kelly and others in her department then took these cards back to their desks and put them in order for the IBM card reader. This began the automated process of printing the registration certificate. It was slow, but not as slow as researching pedigrees and hand typing certificates. The small certificates used in 1956 contained only the breeder, first owner, name of the animal and its sire and dam. Three generation pedigrees came later, not to mention such things as performance registration certificates.

“It probably took us a year to learn how to process work and get on a regular schedule,” says Don Painter. “We were registering a lot of cattle (186,771 in 1956),

The new offices of the American Angus Association as they looked at the end of 1956. Note the name of the Association on the front of the building. It was officially shortened from American Aberdeen-Angus Breeders Association between the time that the office was being planned, and its completion. A crowd of some 1,000 people toured the new headquarters after the dedication.



almost as many as we do today, but with a very cumbersome system,” Painter says.

“Sometimes two or more people were looking for the same IBM card for a sire that was needed to complete registrations each was working on. Then every day all the cards that were pulled had to be re-filed. Once we learned the system it probably took three weeks or more for a registration to clear the office,” Painter recalls. “Those weren't the good old days.”

At the end of the first week of operation in St. Joseph a gala dedication ceremony and open house was held for the new home of the Angus Association. Master of Ceremonies for the dedication was Frank Richards, Association executive officer. He introduced St. Joseph Mayor Stanley I. Dale to welcome the Association to the Pony Express city. “Mr. and Mrs. Black are now residents of St. Joseph, and we are going to make them feel at home,” the Mayor said.

Otto G. Nobis, Davenport, Iowa, president of the American Angus Association, formally dedicated the new headquarters to all members, past, present and future. “This building belongs to the thousands of Angus breeders who have been members of the Association over the 73 years of its existence. In turn, it will belong to other thousands of (members) who will follow in the footsteps of the founders,” Nobis told the group assembled at the first entrance of the new building.

After the ceremonies more than 1,000 people toured the new building. Guides were the Association field representatives.

These included Milton Miller, Jess Cooper, James Coyner, Vern Kerchberger, William Terry, Lyle Haring, William Roche, Dale Baird, Raymond Buchanan and Val Brungardt. Visitors were registered from 20 states.

What looked like all the space the Association would ever need in 1956 proved inadequate a decade later. At that time the size of the building was increased by 50 percent, and the front entrance was moved to its present location on the west side of the building. Today every office space is filled by Association and **Angus Journal** employees. In addition there is a large Certified Angus Beef Program office in Wooster, Ohio, and a smaller one in Denver, Colo.

In those 40 years much has changed. The Association that moved to Missouri in 1956 had no performance records department, no sire evaluation report, no computers, no **Angus Journal** and no Certified Angus Beef Program.

In Chicago the Union Stockyards are gone. Forty years after the American Angus Association left, only the famed “Stone Gate” entrance to the stockyards remains, with a plaque to explain its significance to the few big city folks who might be interested.

Today a number of breed associations are located in the St. Joseph - Kansas City area. Many would now argue this area is now the heart of the cattle industry. The American Angus Association is right at home.

