

OUTSIDE THE BOX

by Tom Field, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Better Together

The power of community, stockmanship and serving others.

The barn was quiet on the last afternoon of county fair — kids, cattle and parents mostly worn out. My grandmother would have described the ambiance as “the shine is off this apple.”

Several of us were having catch-up conversations when I happened to glance towards the far end of the barn where I noticed a member of another 4-H club motioning towards us. Given it was our first year showing in Saunders County, we were still getting to know everyone. I had noticed her several times that week because she was always pleasant towards her cattle and other kids, clearly a natural stockman, and dedicated in her attitude and work ethic.

I hesitated and then headed her way as she pointed towards a steer that had his head through a fence panel and was struggling to free himself. Three 14- or 15-year-old kids were doing their best to free him but without success. The steer was getting agitated and beginning to choke, so I hurried to the facilities shop and grabbed a hacksaw.

As I returned to the group, I noticed two other experienced cattlemen I had been chatting with had joined the team. We cut through one of the panel bars and managed to bend it far enough to allow the steer to free his head. The panel was

moved, the halter and neck rope re-tied, and without fanfare everyone began to move on with their day. I caught up with the young 4-Hers and told them, “You did good today.”

While not an extraordinary event, that experience reminded me about the power of community. Those kids had spotted a problem, taken ownership, sought assistance, worked together and delivered a solution. They had worked quietly, competently and in concert with others to solve a problem not of their own making. In their actions that day, they had demonstrated the best of the stockmanship ethic and of serving others.

Some weeks later, I found myself standing on a wharf at Boston harbor with about 40 college students learning the history of what the British called “the unpleasantness on Griffin’s Wharf” and what we now call the Boston Tea Party.

The pent-up frustrations of serving an unjust master had finally reached a boiling point in the colonies, and the tax on tea and other goods levied by the Townshend Acts proved to be the spark that would ignite a revolution. Throwing the tea from three East India Trading Company ships under the protection of the crown into the harbor was treasonous and punishable by hanging. Yet in protest, a well-

coordinated effort of some 100 citizens managed to methodically destroy the protective casings and pitch nearly 92,000 pounds of tea into the cold waters of the Atlantic. That act of protest 250 years ago was not the actions of an irrational mob, but rather a collective choice to have a say about their own future.

John Adams would pen that “the Revolution was effected before the war commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people ... this radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments, and affection of the people, was the real American Revolution.”

The Tea Party is symbolic of our national character of practicality, self-determination and community spirit — the choice to act as the result of our mutual longing for liberty — the freedom to choose.

The spirit of the nation that would rise from the courageous decisions of our forefathers was alive and well in those four young citizens whose deed demonstrated the very best of our disposition and nature.

May we have the good sense to follow their example. **AJ**

Editor’s note: Tom Field is a rancher from Parlin, Colo., and the director of the Engler Agribusiness Entrepreneurship Program at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln.