

# Some recollections from a "1903" model

To make major changes you have to get out and work, says long-time American Angus Assn. supporter Maurice, "M.L." McCrea. He's a living example of that philosophy, having helped make history happen in northwest Missouri.

Labeling himself "a 1903 model," McCrea was raised in DeKalb county. In 1926 he married his wife, Charlotte, and moved to his own farm. Today he has a rural Maysville address where he maintains a registered Angus herd and has an active management role on his family's acreage operated by his son, M.L. Jr.

McCrea was active in the American Angus Assn. for many years, and through his cattle activities he became acquainted with several public figures. "Harry Truman, who was a friend of Ray Simms, the auctioneer, was here at a sale before he became president," McCrea recalls.

"Harry had a farm background and was always interested in cattle and agriculture. He was able to communicate with the farmers because he could talk their language."

In 1959, McCrea says, the "Rawhide" television show wanted to use the grand champion steer of the Missouri State Fair as a promotion. That steer was selected because Sedalia, Mo., was the railhead destination of the herd on Rawhide.

"M.L. Jr.'s Angus steer was grand champion at Sedalia, and the Rawhide producers provided an all-expense paid trip to Tucumcari, N.M., for our family and the steer, named 'Big Mac,'" McCrea explains.

By Gary Van Hoozer  
Tarkio, Missouri

"We got to see the shooting of the show and meet all the stars. Clint Eastwood at that time was a young, little-known actor. My, how time can change a career! We also met Sheb Wooley, a member of the cast who was noted for singing 'Purple People

purebred cattle sales. I mentioned to him that quite a chunk of money was going to be applied to the Angus headquarters, and I said that St. Joe might as well have it."

McCrea says the St. Joseph Area Chamber of Commerce heard of the idea, and chamber members liked it because it would create new jobs. But few funds were available to spend on such efforts.

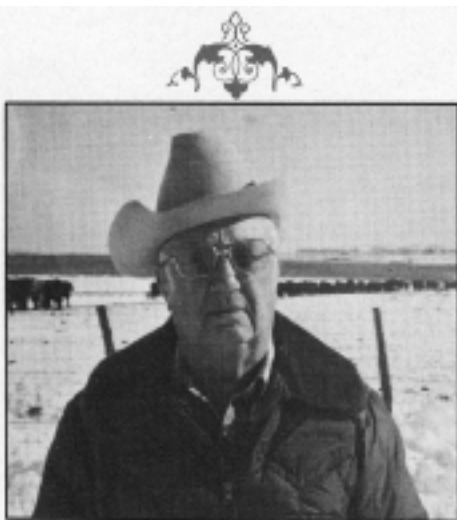
"What I thought would turn the thing was to have a good property location available that I could sell at a national Angus meeting," says McCrea. "But 62 towns in the United States were interested in getting it, and they had some elaborate brochures out. So I knew we'd have to have something good."

McCrea says the chamber tied down 20 options of possible St. Joseph locations which he disclosed at a 1,000-delegate Angus meeting in Chicago. "One guy near me at the meeting got up and asked what's better than having a specific location offer. So he made a motion for St. Joe to get it, and it rolled across the floor and it passed," McCrea says.

He adds that a site committee spent a day in St. Joseph inspecting the optioned properties. He says they liked a 19-acre parcel on Frederick Boulevard, which carried a \$20,000 price tag.

"The chamber still didn't have any money, and the option just lacked a few days of being up," McCrea remembers, "so Henry Bradley, who was president of the Chamber, laid down a check for \$1,000 to get the ball rolling. A campaign was started that was announced on the front page of the News-Press. Later, they published the names of contributors such as Swift & Co., which helped keep things going.

"Over \$22,000 rolled across the top of the table before we could get that thing stopped. But with the extra legal expenses and taxes, that was what we needed."



M.L. McCrea maintains an active role in farming and Angus cattle. He's worked hard on major projects that have brought long-term benefits to his northwest Missouri area.

Eater.' Paul Brinager who played 'Wishbone the cook' was also a colorful character.

"Needless to say, this adventure will be remembered for a lifetime, especially by my son who was 15 years old when it happened."

#### St. Joseph

McCrea was a central figure in bringing the American Angus Assn. headquarters to St. Joseph. "About 1951 the Angus people had a donation cattle sale and raised around \$250,000 to go toward purchase of a headquarters," McCrea explains.

"Around that time I was in St. Joe talking to Bob Barry, who was manager of the Robidoux Hotel, about establishing a headquarters for my

### “The current”

Another major project McCrea participated in was the bringing of electricity into rural homes and farms in his area. “The current,” as it was called, was not always taken for granted as it generally is today, he reminds.

“In 1935,” he says, “the government REA (Rural Electrification Administration) program was organized, but the first charter around here wasn’t until 1937 when the Andrew County Cooperative was started. The first lights went on October 14, 1938, but it took a lot of work to convince people we needed the current.”

McCrea says he and his father-in-law, L.C. Loest, traveled the area visiting farmers, trying to sign them up for electric service and to obtain right-of-way for power lines. “Times were tough. For instance, I went to Gentryville, worked all day, and never got a membership. I said to my father-in-law, ‘I spun out today.’ He replied, ‘Yes, but maybe you planted a seed! Of course that eventually paid off!’”

McCrea says electricity was hard to sell in some instances. “People had different ideas then. A lot of them thought the government might come back on them in case there was ever a deficiency judgment or a damage suit came up.

“Having lights in your house was the first thing we talked. We also talked some about refrigeration, but nobody had ever heard of electric heat since they had plenty of wood and coal.

“They had a \$5-a-month minimum charge, and some wondered about that. I guess \$10 would have probably bluffed them out as being too high. But to my knowledge we never had anyone take the current out after they got it.”

McCrea says they had to have a minimum density of three customers per mile “This encouraged some who accepted it to help sign up their neighbors. It was kind of a chain



McCrea, wife Charlotte, and son M.L. Jr., hold many fond memories of Angus activities. Right photo shows Harry Truman (third from left) on a visit to McCrea’s farm prior to his becoming president. Left photo shows cast of Rawhide TV series in 1959 with champion Angus steer held by M.L. Jr. Young Clint Eastwood is at extreme right.

effect where people who were converted to the use of electricity spread the word.”

The government said not to leave a stone unturned, McCrea recalls. If someone off the main power line wanted it, they had to be included in the plans.

“I’d say it was a great success—one of the most successful things ever promoted,” McCrea concludes. “It raised the country peoples’ morale and it put them on an equal living basis with those in town. Their kids would compare conveniences with the town kids, such as electricity and indoor plumbing. When they got electricity it very definitely picked up the morale of the country kids.”

McCrea adds that conditions in country schools also helped encourage adoption of electricity. “The schools had windows built to catch the sunlight, but that didn’t always work well, of course. And the government was getting concerned about having good lighting in them as well as in the country homes.”

To hear more of McCrea’s recollections, he says to contact him anytime—especially about Angus cattle. For a 1903 model, he remains in well-tuned condition.