

Harry Sheets has witnessed many electrifying changes in the beef industry over the last 50 years. Still, he remains ...

Devoted to His Doddies

by Jerilyn Johnson

Ask Harry Sheets about the Eileenmere line of Angus cattle and watch his eyes light up. Quiz him on grand champions of the Chicago International and catch a glimpse of a grin on his face. Inquire about famous breeders, such as J.C. Penney and J. Garrett Tolan, and you better pull up a chair and sit a spell. He has a few stories to share.

Sheets, an Angus breeder with 48 years of experience under his belt, has become a humble historian of the Angus industry. Unlike most history buffs, however, Sheets hasn't spent all

his time reading and researching history, he's lived it.

"Harry is a walking wealth of historical Angus information," says John Crouch of the American Angus Association. "His experience spans from the days cattle rode on railroad box cars to Chicago and Denver to the modern technological, jet-age in which we live."

Sheets is proud of his heritage and livelihood. He's a third generation Missouri farmer whose grandfather bought his first 160 acres from the government back in the mid-1800s. Today he and his wife, Dorothy, operate

a 130-acre farm with a registered cow herd of 36 of their beloved "Doddies"—an Angus nickname of Scottish origin.

They appropriately renamed their farm, Suburban Angus Farm, due to the encroachment of the neighboring town of Eagleville and Interstate 35.

A tour of Suburban Angus Farm is a worthwhile experience. Don't believe it when Harry first warns you, "Don't look too close and see how bad it needs a paint brush." Between the green rolling hills dotted with black cattle and Dorothy's colorful flower gardens, this charming place is postcard perfect. Add



A pasture full of Angus cattle has kept Harry Sheets happy for 48 years. He maintains a small but select herd of 36 Angus cows on his 130-acre Missouri farm.

some down-home cooking and cattle conversation and it's easy to hang your hat and stay a while.

From his humble beginnings, Sheets grew up to be an honest, hard-working individual who has a special talent for working with cattle and people. He's had the "staying power" to survive the ups and downs of the cattle business throughout the years.

Economics and a changing ag industry weren't the only forces he had to fight. Don't ever tell Sheets that lightning never strikes twice. He has amazingly survived two direct hits from lightning while working on his farm. He suffered nerve damage as a result of the second strike.

After joining the American Angus Association in 1943, Sheets began traveling to other Angus farms, shows and sales to learn all he could about the purebred business.

In the 1950s he was hired by J.C. Penney and Orin James to work as a consultant for their Homeplace Farms at Hamilton, Mo. Sheets spent four years there, traveling to all the major shows with their string of show cattle, attending sales and meeting more Angus enthusiasts across the country.

"My fondest memory is traveling by train to my first Chicago International," Sheets says. "We rode in the box car with the cattle. "It was a long, cold trip, but I was so excited and my adrenaline so pumped up, I really didn't feel the cold."

In June of 1955, Penney and James decided to disperse their famous Eileenmere herd. The three-day sale attracted people from throughout the Angus world. It was at this sale that a son of the Homeplace Farms bull, Eileenmere 999, sold for a then record price of \$87,000.

Leading the bull into the ring that history-making day was Harry Sheets.



Harry and Dorothy Sheets display their affection for Angus wherever they go.

"It was quite a feeling to be a part of that event," Sheets says.

Working for Homeplace Farms, which was one of the leading Angus breeding farms of its time, created many opportunities and friendships for Sheets. While delivering that record-selling bull back East to Ankony Farms, he met Les Leachman. They've been friends ever since.

Soon after the dispersal, Mr. Penney paid a visit to Harry's farm and made him a business proposition. "Dorothy and I had just been married and he was our very first house guest," Harry reminisces. "He joked that he was 85 years old, but his doctor said he was good for 100! Then he got serious and told me that although he'd been trying to sell off his land, he hated to give up Homeplace. He wondered if I would be interested in buying half-interest and taking it over. What really floored me was when he added, 'Harry, I've had you in mind for quite some time.'

"It was a generous offer, but I decided that because of my nerve damage from the lightning strikes, I'd better turn it down. I could better manage my own small farm."

Sheets says he has no regrets of this decision. "I'm very happy with what I'm doing. We still travel to Louisville every year for the annual meeting and show and attend as many Angus events as possible."

A few years back, some local cattlemen asked Sheets when he was going to go to crossbreeding. "I told them never!" he says. "I've been dedicated to the seedstock business and to me, Angus are the right kind of cattle to have."

This small but spunky cattleman can't resist to add with a mock-serious tone, "Why would anyone want to change at my age?"

Perhaps most rewarding to Harry and Dorothy has been their work with young people. Although they couldn't have children of their own, they "adopted" several young men and women over the years. Dorothy, who taught business at an area high school until 1990, generously offered her love and support to two young students who had been orphaned.

One young man, who Harry took under his wing and taught the basics of farming and the cattle business, was Fred Conner. Today Conner is an Extension livestock specialist at Albany Mo., and consults area livestock producers on the latest production practices and has his own herd of beef cattle.

It seems Conner has been sidetracked for awhile with Hereford and Simmental cattle, which Sheets overlooked until recently. "I've been telling the cattlemen up here about our Certified Angus Beef program and the strong demand for Angus bulls and replacement heifers," Harry says. "Not long ago I told Fred he oughta have a place full of black cattle."

Conner replied, "Well, Harry I'm beginning to think so myself. When you get a good set of daughters out of your Power Drive bull, then we'll talk." That soothed Sheets for awhile.

"That Harry is amazing," Conner says. "He is an Angus supporter from morning to night!"

