

# MOOseum

*An educational center for children.*

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS

Little Jackson Britton knows exactly what to do. He's been to the MOOseum before, dashed up the carpeted chute to Slim's Buckaroo Cattle Club, and dressed up in the child-sized cowboy duds. Today he's wasting no time. Within minutes, the energetic 4-year-old boy pulls on a wide-brimmed hat and selects a leather vest from a collection hanging on three wooden pegs on the wall.

"Need some help?" asks his mom, Shannon Britton. She's hovering nearby, smiling and watching Jackson play. "Here," she offers, leaning over, "let me tie that bandanna for you." Jackson obliges and patiently stands still a few fleeting moments while Shannon knots the red kerchief beneath his chin. When she's done, Jackson zips across the room, crawls onto a miniature saddle, and pretends to gallop away on his lightning-fast steed.

Mark up two more satisfied visitors to the MOOseum, a children's educational center housed at the Alabama Cattlemen's Association (ACA) headquarters in Montgomery. Opened in 1996, the unusual museum — with its interactive, hands-on Buckaroo Cattle Club and two more galleries — teaches youngsters about the cattle industry in a fun way.

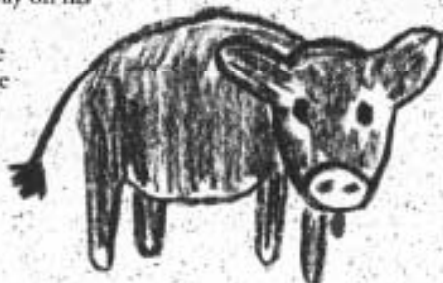
"The MOOseum is geared toward the fourth-grade level,

but we have children of all ages who enjoy it," says Meg Truman, director of the Alabama Cattlemen's Foundation. "During our first year, we had more than 10,000 kids come through."

**The idea** for the MOOseum unfolded when association members contemplated expanding their headquarters building.

"While I was visiting the Texas Cattlemen's building, I toured its Cattle Industry Museum," recalls Billy Powell, ACA executive vice president. "Don King, the executive director, told me that 80 percent of the museum's visitors were kids, and I thought, 'This is the answer to the ACA expansion program.'" Powell proposed, why not expand the building and, at the same time, incorporate a children's educational center?

"The response from donors



throughout the state was tremendous," he says, "and within two years pledges reached \$2.2 million, which covered the cost of the expansion project. After the expansion plan had been fully developed to include the physical space for the museum, we went to the state

Four-year-old Jackson Britton is a fan of the Alabama Cattlemen's Association MOOseum.



(Left) Inside the MOOseum, kids first meet Adam Bainbridge, an electronic host who discusses Alabama's cattle industry and the MOOseum's many attractions via a state-of-the-art video projection system. Shown here (l to r) are MOOseum visitors Rosemary Ragsdale, Jackson Britton and Craegh Ragsdale



(Right) Slim's Kitchen is designed for children to learn about the nutritional benefits of beef and safe food handling while having fun, says Valerie Bass, consumer information director for the Alabama Cattlemen's Association.



legislature and received a one-time appropriation for the education component of the MOOseum, which highlights the role of cattle in agriculture today and the value of beef as a food."

**Teachers and students** alike love the MOOseum. Located within walking distance of the state capitol and the fascinating Alabama Department of Archives and History (which has its own interactive children's area), a visit to the center fits well into a school field trip to Montgomery. Educational materials, available free to instructors, also enhance a tour.

Inside the MOOseum, kids first meet Adam Bainbridge, a fictional, high-tech rendition of a 20th-century cattleman who perpetually leans against a fence post in the "Sights and Sounds" gallery and "chats"

with visitors. The electronic host realistically speaks via a state-of-the-art video projection system that transfers a talking human face onto the mannequin's. During his 12-minute chat, Adam Bainbridge, whose claims to fame are the two city streets he's named for, discusses Alabama's cattle industry and the MOOseum's many attractions.

For instance, how is a cow more than a meal? When parts of it other than beef are converted into gelatin, chewing gum, camera film, piano keys, candles, cosmetics, medicine, boots and crayons, to name a few examples. So proclaims a wall in the "Sights and Sounds" gallery, which showcases a hodgepodge of products made from cattle byproducts. Another wall pays tribute to the many cattle breeds, with 20 framed

pictures of various breeds, including Angus.

The "Hoofprints Through Alabama" gallery traces the state's cattle industry from the 1500s to modern times. Artifacts, photographs and text highlight 14 historical highlights about cattle, such as their arrival in the New World, their role in the Civil War, the importance of stockyards, and the organization of breed associations.

**Kids can be kids** in Slim's Buckaroo Cattle Club, four rooms filled with interactive displays. In whimsical Slim's Kitchen, children step into a cartoon-like kitchen and learn about the nutritional benefits of beef and safe food handling. Open the refrigerator door. Inside, a zany-looking woman, shares one of 10 food safety rules — "Keep frozen meats at 0 degrees Fahrenheit." Other

cupboard and cabinet doors open to reveal more rules.

"The kitchen is designed to engage children in learning about beef and eating healthy," says Valerie Bass, consumer information director. "We try to make it fun. But while we promote beef in a healthy manner, we also promote healthy eating across the board."

Slim's Buckaroo Cattle Club also promotes healthy cattle with help from half a cow. Half a cow? Yes, Coco, as she's called, patiently stands midway in a cow pen. This exhibit tells how cattlemen care for their bovine livestock and what kinds of things a cow eats. Kids can climb on a real livestock scale and compare their weight to a cow's.

In the Rodeo Arena, youngsters can dress up in cowboy clothing and sit astride an authentic saddle. The exhibit also highlights



(Top) The "Hoofprints Through Alabama" gallery traces the state's cattle industry from the 1500s to modern times.

(Bottom) The "Sights and Sounds" gallery showcases a hodgepodge of products made from cattle byproducts.

## Angus on the MOOseum's time-line railing

1902

J.S. Kerachan of Lauderdale County registered the first Alabama-born Angus bull, Bainbridge Prince.

1938

Alabama Aberdeen-Angus Association formed at a meeting on the Passmore Farm near Montgomery.

about 1950

This era saw increased crossbreeding in commercial herds. Angus and Hereford were popular crosses to improve beef quality.

1982

Central bull test sale record was set when Angus Acres Power Play 70, owned by R.C. Price of Newville, sold for \$320,000 at Auburn University.

the past importance of branding and in a separate area, two major rodeo events - bull riding and steer wrestling. Two huge wall murals depicting a bull rider and steer wrestler in action form the backdrop for a heavy, worn down's barrel. A sign hanging on the barrel's side kindly asks visitors not to climb inside.

No visit to a museum is complete without a trip to the gift shop. The MOOseum's offers an array of T-shirts, glassware, toys, books, puzzles, pencils, yo-yos, bandannas, Christmas ornaments, children's luggage, and more all-cow-related, of course.

Little Jackson likes the gift shop, but he enjoys another part of the MOOseum more. "I got in the barrel!" he announces with an excited grin.

Mum's the word!

### Author's note

In *Montgomery* you can't miss the Alabama Cattlemen's Association's headquarters at the corner of Adams and Bainbridge streets. It's the three-story building with the show-stopping, moo-ving van parked outside (see photo on page 2). Yep, that's a cow standing at attention on top of the maroon-colored "Beef Wagon," as it's affectionately called. Kids love the 1967

Dodgevan, which occasionally wheels around town touting beef.

The MOOseum, housed on the ground floor of the Alabama Cattlemen's Association building, is open Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. The building, at 201 S.

Bainbridge St., is located two blocks south of the capitol. Admission is free. For more information, write the MOOseum at P.O. Box 2499, Montgomery, AL 36102-2499, or call (334) 265-1867.

