

►Left: Grace Ehlers, Maquoketa, Iowa, painted Rosemere Farm in 1970, shortly before the herd dispersed and the farm was sold.

board chairman, clerked the sales at Maquoketa. He was also a pallbearer at Battles' funeral.

Rosemere's legacy

"Mr. Battles took an interest in cattle when he was about 12 or 13 years old. He bought a couple head of Angus, and then as the years progressed, he had very good success in showing as a young man," Hansen says.

In Rosemere's 50th-anniversary sale book, W.J. Kennedy, former head of the animal husbandry department at Iowa State College, Ames, includes the story of why Rosemere was founded and how it grew to international fame.

Kennedy visited Rosemere in 1907 to observe its show animals. "After spending several hours looking over the cattle and answering hundreds of questions, I informed Otto and his mother that their prospects looked good to me; that, in my opinion, they were good enough to go to the Iowa State Fair and other leading state fairs and stock shows," he wrote.

In fact, the relatively unknown Battles won both grand champion honors in the Aberdeen-Angus breeding classes that year at the International Show in Chicago, Ill. For the next nine years, Battles continued to make showing history.

In 1916 Battles entered into a partnership with Chester Congdon, Yakima, Wash. The partnership was credited with introducing the Angus breed to the West, where the breed had been virtually unknown.

"It had pretty much been a matter of Midwest — Iowa, Illinois, plus New York state. The breed just wasn't prominent at that time," Hansen says. "That move out West was quite a switch for the Angus breed."

The Battles-Congdon partnership flourished for 26 years, with two herd locations — Yakima, Wash., and Maquoketa. A newspaper clipping from the time of the partnership found in one of Grace's scrapbooks referred to the Rosemere herd in Yakima as the largest and finest in the nation. At the same time, the newspaper reported, Battles continued to raise Angus at the farm in Maquoketa. That farm was also used to hold production sales because of its central location.

Nelson Crow, former editor and publisher of the *Western Live Stock Journal*, quoted Battles in the 50th-anniversary sale book. The quote summed up Rosemere's success in one simple statement. "My entire life has been spent with Aberdeen-Angus cattle, and



A Piece of Angus History

The influences of Rosemere Farm on the Angus breed can still be seen in herds today.

Story & photos by **Stephanie Veldman**

Thirty years ago, concrete was poured and housing developments were built on 120 acres of farmland that had been home to one of the most influential farms in the history of Aberdeen-Angus in the United States. Now, the only remembrances of the farm in the area are a few street signs named after the herd and the owner.

Rosemere Farm, Maquoketa, Iowa, was founded by Otto Battles in 1898. He owned and operated the herd until his death in 1970, after which the herd was dispersed. The herd is credited with helping bring the Angus breed to prominence in the United States, and many cattle of the breed today descend from the Rosemere herd.

The legacy of

Rosemere Farm lives on through the work of Grace Ehlers. Grace was the wife of Roland Ehlers, Rosemere's herdsman/partner from 1938-1970. She has compiled scrapbooks of newspaper clippings, letters, sale books and photos of Rosemere's famous show animals. Breeders who remember Rosemere add a personal touch to the story.



►Grace (left) and her daughter Ann Bowman, look through a scrapbook containing pictures of Rosemere's show cattle. "I hope it is preserved in some way and doesn't get thrown into the winds," Oliver "Ollie" Hansen says of the books containing Rosemere's history.

"These were the people who were the pioneers of the breed, and their success in showing and being at the fairs, and so on, was innovative. They brought the breed out in front of the public," says Oliver "Ollie" Hansen, Durant, Iowa.

Hansen says he first met Battles when he was 12 years old, showing a heifer at a state fair. Later, Liberty Trust and Savings Bank, where Hansen is

I love them,” Battles said. Crow wrote that Battles’ driving ambition to develop the perfect Aberdeen-Angus was “tempered with love strong enough to enable him to take the disappointments, the failures and discouragements along with the glory, in stride.”

Partnership dissolution

In 1938, a few years after Congdon’s death, his heirs dissolved the partnership, and the interests were sold at auction. It also was in 1938 that Roland began working as a herdsman for Rosemere, Grace says. He entered into a partnership with Battles in 1950.

In a tribute story to Battles in 1967, the *Jackson Sentinel*, a Maquoketa-based newspaper, reported that Battles continued to maintain his own foundation Angus herds in Maquoketa and Yakima after the partnership dispersion sale. The Yakima farm was later replaced with a small farm in California.

Another newspaper clipping from the scrapbook collection quoted Roland, saying his main responsibility was to care for the cattle, but he also determined which could be champions.

“You bet your life I was the one to pick them,” Roland told the newspaper. “In show herds there were seven classes of bulls and seven classes of females. We always carried 14 or 15 head in our top herd.”

Famous bloodlines

At the time Rosemere was celebrating its 50th anniversary, its cattle had won more International grand champion honors for the farm than any other cattle breeder of Aberdeen-Angus or any other breed, Crow wrote. “His Rosemere cattle held the record for years of continuous showing at the Chicago International, a record also unsurpassed by any other breeder of any breed,” Crow continued.

Hansen, once Battles’ longtime friend and banker, says Rosemere’s most famous line of cattle is the Eileenmeres. One bull, Eileenmere 4th, is considered the foundation bull for the Eileenmere line. He was sold in 1917 to J. Garrett Tolan, Pleasant Plains, Ill.

“It was a well-known fact that our herd is ‘The Home of the Eileenmeres,’” Tolan wrote, in a letter of congratulations to Battles. “During the Christmas holidays I went to the farm at Maquoketa and decided on taking Eileenmere 4th. I picked him on account of his smoothness and his great sire and dam and the fact they were producing.” He added that purchasing the bull solved all their herd bull problems.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GRACE EHLERS

► Otto Battles (right), owner of Rosemere Farm, and Roland Ehlers, herdsman, showcase a grand champion pen of three. Battles believed in raising his own cattle, not buying from outside herds.

► Several grand champions originated from the Rosemere herd, among them was the Barbara of Rosemere line. “These were the people who was the pioneers of the breed, and their success in showing and being at the fairs, and so on, was innovative. They brought the breed out in front of the public,” Hansen says.

Other famous foundation lines produced at Rosemere included Oakville Quiet Lad, who is considered the “real foundation sire of Rosemere breeding,” according to a Rosemere history pamphlet that lists several famous bulls and females. The lines of Prizemere 32d and the Rosemere Barbaras also went on to win several International Show awards.

Hansen says Battles had a very straightforward philosophy for breeding cattle. “Mr. Battles was a great believer of

breeding his own cattle, not buying outsiders,” he says. “A lot of linebreeding was done in those days. He didn’t think it was always necessary to go buy other people’s cattle to do it, and he was very successful in his show winnings as a result.

Hansen adds, “Mr. Battles was held in the highest respect because of his ability to breed cattle and ability to judge cattle, and the articles he wrote regarding breeding programs.”



Remembering history

Most of the information included in the story, “A Piece of Angus History,” was pulled from the scrapbooks Grace Ehlers compiled on the history of Rosemere Farm, Maquoketa, Iowa. The wife of Roland Ehlers, Rosemere’s herdsman/partner from 1938-1970, Grace says she wanted to organize the information in a way that the next generation could use. Currently, there are no plans for them to be preserved outside the family.

“I hope it is preserved in some way and doesn’t get thrown into the winds,” says Oliver Hansen, Durant, Iowa. “It made mighty fine reading material for me when I was accumulating the eastern Iowa history. Young people would do well to read some of it.”

Hansen says knowing the history of how Angus was established in the United States is important for today’s breeders. “The Angus breed was just plain unknown in the early 1900s. It’s hard for people today to realize how few Angus cattle there were in the early history of the breed,” he says. “There just weren’t many Angus cattle. These people, like Mr. (Otto) Battles (founder of Rosemere Farm in 1898), helped bring the breed to prominence.

“So many people today take it for granted that the Angus have been here forever and have no conception of how few there were,” he adds.

► **Right:** Grace has worked to organize Rosemere’s history. There are several old sale catalogs and history books on Rosemere Farm that she hopes will be preserved.

