



Branding Iron

► by **Eric Grant**, general manager

Connections

Just a few miles from where George Grant founded his colony in 1873, thousands of people now drive along I-70 each day. Most pass the exit for Victoria, Kan., completely unaware of the significance the town holds for American agriculture.

Isolation

One of the challenges Grant faced in establishing Angus cattle in America was the isolation of the frontier he chose to settle. The railroad had just recently connected Victoria with the rest of the country, and telegraph lines were just then being strung across the West. It took great effort for anyone homesteading on the High Plains to procure the provisions they needed to survive, let alone secure the logistics necessary to import the first Angus bulls from Scotland.

In the mid-1950s, when President Eisenhower — a Kansas son himself — oversaw the development of the Interstate highway system, small towns like Victoria suddenly found themselves connected by a network of pavement instead of just rails. The efficiencies of distribution, particularly for agricultural commodities, was forever enhanced, and it became much easier to transport cattle to markets and distribute beef to consumers.

Over the years, I've traveled the stretch of I-70 across Kansas and Colorado countless times. Western Kansas, for the most part, remains an isolated part of the country, its open spaces checked with fields of winter wheat, corn and pastures for cattle.

One of my memories was listening to a Broncos-Seahawks game in the mid-1980s on 850 KOA, a popular AM station located in Denver. As we drove east, away from Colorado and crossing into Kansas, the signal began to fade, and as the game came to its final play — a Broncos field goal attempt to win the game in the waning seconds — we lost the program completely.

Unlike today, when information is a smartphone away, we remained ignorant of the game's outcome for another five hours. All we could do was speculate on the outcome.

New frontier

I was reminded of this a few weeks ago

when my family was driving along that same stretch of highway, just a few miles from Victoria.

My wife, an Auburn University alum, was watching the Auburn/Alabama game live. The streaming program came to her iPad in HD quality and, despite the relative isolation of western Kansas, the game played with virtually no disruptions due to inadequate cell coverage.

Meanwhile, my 11-year-old son played Minecraft, a popular video game with kids these days, on the Internet. There were no restless "Are we there yet?" coming from the backseat.

As we passed the exit for Victoria, I thought about how all of these things have shaped the world we live in.

I'm told that shortly after Grant's passing in 1878, German settlers used the stones from the church he built to construct the Cathedral of the Plains, its twin spires rising from the heart of Victoria, a historic landmark on the featureless prairie that surrounds it.

Grant's grand experiment lasted just a few years, but his dream, much like the stones in the cathedral, remains. American Angus cattle, which he helped establish, now flourish across the land — the beneficiary of good roads, which enabled the flow of commerce and technology that continues to drive advancements in genetic evaluation, advertising and marketing.

More than 30,000 people, for instance, now use the Angus Mobile app to manage their cow herds. They viewed millions of pages of digital sale books and hundreds of thousands of online Angus videos during the last 12 months. Plus, they bought and sold hundreds, perhaps thousands, of cattle on online auctions.

No doubt, this is just the beginning of a technological revolution that will have profound impacts on cattle production and marketing in the years ahead, and will continue to reshape the rural landscape for good.

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