



Pictured with the restored sculpture of Golden Design 14 are members of sculptor Arlo Bray's family. Pictured (l to r) are: son Brad Bray, son-in-law Roy Cole, grandson Austin Bray, Mrs. Arlo Bray and daughter Judy Cole.



Early stages of restoration, show the corroded sculpture.



Daughter Judy Cole and grandson Austin Bray at work during restoration.

A Return to Fame

Prized bull sculpture, Golden Design 14, is back on the show circuit.

by **Troy Smith**

Nebraska Hereford folk, of a certain age, can remember when Charlie Warner hauled the bull to nearly every Hereford event he attended for display at cattle shows, sales and the Nebraska State Fair. For a few years, Charlie mailed

out Christmas cards bearing a photograph of himself and the bull. It wasn't an actual live bovine but a sheet metal replica of a prized Warner Hereford Farms herd sire named Golden Design 14. The sculpture was created by neighboring farmer

and artist Arlo Bray, and it was hard to tell whether Charlie was more proud of the sculpture or the real live bull.

That was decades ago. Charlie is long gone, and the Warner Hereford operation is no more. The metal likeness of Golden Design 14 was stored away, out of sight and out of mind, for 20-some years. But now the sculpture is back on the "show circuit." How it was brought out of retirement, restored and returned to exhibition is a story worth telling. Full appreciation, however, requires some historical perspective.

Original Golden Design 14

This true tale begins near Waverly, Neb., just east of Lincoln. That's where Warner Hereford Farms was founded by Charlie's father, Charles J. Warner, in 1926. The senior Warner went on to serve 26 years as a state legislator followed by four terms as Nebraska's lieutenant governor. His youngest son, Jerome, also became a long-serving state senator while the elder son, Charlie, tended to the day-to-day operation of the family farm and registered Hereford business.

The "real" Golden Design 14 enters the story in 1968. Named reserve champion at the Old Reliable Hereford Association Show and Sale in Grand Island,

Neb., the bull became the second-high seller on a \$1,100 bid from Warners. In 1975 Charlie asked Arlo Bray to forge a sculpture in the herd sire's likeness. The finished piece, mounted on its wooden base, stood 32 inches tall, 56 inches long and 18 inches wide. And despite its hefty 110 pounds, Charlie delighted in loading up the "bull" and taking it to various Hereford cattle doings.

Following the deaths of Charlie and Jerome in the 1990s, the Warner family leased the farm to neighbors. The sculpture ended up in an outbuilding on the property, where it remained until 2013. That's when Jerome's daughter, Liz Warner, rediscovered her Uncle Charlie's pride and joy. She remembered that Charlie and her father had wanted the sculpture to be given to the Nebraska Hereford Association.

Saving the sculpture

Liz contacted Richard Brown, who, as assistant clerk for the Nebraska State Legislature, was well acquainted with the late Senator Jerome Warner and Charlie too. Brown also had Hereford ties, having grown up on a Hereford operation near Taylor, Neb.

"Liz asked me if I remembered the bull sculpture,

The artist Arlo Bray

According to his family, Arlo Bray kept pretty good records. An entry in the late artist's journal indicates the sculpture he created for neighbor Charlie Warner took 100 hours to complete. For the completed work, Arlo was paid \$600.65, including sales tax.

A lifelong farmer from Prairie Home, Neb., Arlo considered his art a hobby — something he did for fun. Always humble, praise for his artistic ability only embarrassed him. According to Brad Bray, his father usually thought his art wasn't quite good enough.

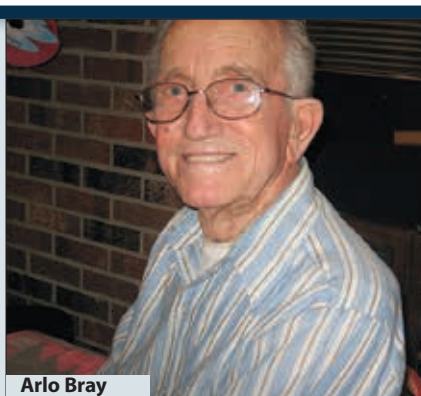
"Dad was brilliant, under-appreciated and under-paid," Brad says, noting how his father had to be coaxed and cajoled into entering his first sheet metal sculpture, an eagle, in a Nebraska State Fair art contest.

Ultimately, the Mutual of Omaha insurance company bought that piece to display in its headquarters lobby. The firm later commissioned Arlo to create 10 charging bulls, which it awarded to its top salespeople.

Arlo favored wildlife and domestic livestock as subjects of his art, fashioning remarkably life-like pieces of art from sheets of 16-gauge iron alloy. He frequently incorporated cast-off scraps of metal from farm implements. He especially enjoyed creating sculptures depicting the mascots of area high school sports teams.

"From 1967 to 2005, Dad produced over 500 sculptures," Brad tells. "They are scattered all around the world, even in India, Mongolia and South Africa."

Arlo Bray sculptures have sold into at least 40 states and a few Canadian provinces. Notable art aficionados that have purchased Arlo Bray pieces include Nelson Rockefeller, former Nebraska Cornhusker and Los Angeles Ram George Andrews, and organizations including Tyson, the Audubon Society and Ducks Unlimited. **HW**



Arlo Bray

and I told her I remembered it well," Brown says. "I particularly remembered seeing it on display at the state fair. Liz thought something needed to be done pretty soon to save the sculpture. It was rusting and mice had built nests in its base."

Agreeing to help initiate an effort to save it, Brown took the sculpture to the Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center in Omaha, Neb., for evaluation. Experts in art and artifacts judged the sculpture structurally sound, but years of exposure to wide fluctuations in temperature and humidity had caused corrosion of its metal surfaces. A goodly amount of paint had flaked off, and the wood laminate base was a goner.

Along with providing restoration advice, Center personnel offered to keep the sculpture in climate-controlled storage until Brown found someone to perform the restoration work. It remained there for most of a year while Brown sought funding and the right person or persons for the job.

Artist Arlo Bray passed away within a short time of the sculpture's discovery, but Brown sent a letter and a copy of the Center's report to Bray's family. Unfortunately, Brown's name and return address were lost. Through an article published in the Waverly newspaper, the family eventually connected with Brown and expressed their desire to do the hands-on work to restore the sculpture.

Bray's son and daughter, Brad and Judy (Cole), and Brad's son, Austin, devoted 150 man-hours, laboring in the artist's own workshop, to return Golden Design 14 to like-new condition. The rust and old paint were removed with steel brushes, and then the sculpture was blasted with sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) before it was painstakingly repainted and mounted on a new solid wood base.

"It was a great project for us to do as a family," states Brad, who is particularly glad that Austin is involved with restoring one of his grandfather's largest sculptures.

It also provided the opportunity to tell Austin a few "Charlie stories" — like the time Charlie took the sculpture to a Hereford show in Oklahoma. While there, Charlie also attended an Oklahoma-Nebraska football game. He parked in the stadium parking lot with the sculpture standing in the bed of his pickup truck.

"What surprised us was the interest people took in the restoration project," Brad adds. "A lot of them remembered seeing the sculpture in the past. They

kept asking, 'How's it going? Can we take a look at it?'"

Restoration complete

The family relented once, displaying their work-in progress at a Waverly High School FFA function. Since the restoration was completed, the sculpture has been exhibited at the Camp Creek Threshers' Antique Machinery and Threshing Show, also at Waverly, and at the Old Reliable Hereford Association Reunion held during the Nebraska State Fair in Grand Island.

Next came a two-month showing at the Thedford Art Gallery in Thedford, Neb. Following that

is a three-month stint at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture in Curtis, Neb., where Judy Cole is an instructor.

According to Richard Brown, planning is underway for an exhibit at the University of Nebraska-Kearney — formerly Kearney State College. That's appropriate because (the senior) Charles Warner was instrumental in making that campus part of Nebraska's state college system. To Brown's pleasant surprise, requests to display the sculpture just keep coming.

"Our intent is to display it as much as possible, as an ambassador for the Nebraska

cattle industry and the Hereford breed. Based on the interest expressed so far, we could easily keep the bull on the road for another year to 18 months," Brown adds.

"We don't know yet where the bull's permanent home might be. It could travel for quite a while. I hope so," says Brad. "It was made for people to see." **HW**

Editor's note: *The Loup County Historical Society has established a fund dedicated to the restoration and display of Golden Design 14. Contributions can be sent to the Hereford History Preservation Project, Box 137, Taylor, NE 68879.*

Meeting at Hereford Crossroads

It was a reunion of past and present Hereford breeders, their families and guests. More than 100 of their kind gathered for the first Hereford Crossroads reception held October 16. Hosted in Thedford, Neb., at the junction of U.S. Highway 83 and Nebraska State Highway 2, the event was conducted in conjunction with a Hereford art and historical exhibit hosted by the Thedford Art Gallery and offered a tribute to "Hereford Alley."

Due to the abundance of purebred and commercial Hereford ranches located along its course, the 60-mile stretch of Highway 83 running northward from Thedford to Valentine, Neb., was once known as Hereford Alley. Roadside signs bore names like Imig, Keller, Faulhaber, Drybread, Churchill, FairWay, Lovejoy and others. Prior to the mid-1970s, Herefords dominated the landscape on both sides of the road.

"When I started working the area, the highway wasn't paved yet and Herefords were predominate," says Hereford breeder and retired veterinarian Alanson (Lance) Jones, of Broken Bow, Neb., who shared his memories as a young cow doctor serving area ranches in the 1950s and '60s. "There was hardly anything but horned Herefords — other than a few milk cows."

Lance adds, "At that time, there were 10 registered herds along the 'Alley' plus some 30 commercial operations that ran straight Herefords. I knew most of the cows on those ranches, and I knew which ones had the best cooks too."

A focal point of the art show was a sculpture of Warner Hereford Farms' herd sire Golden Design 14 by the late artist Arlo Bray. Guests included members of the Bray family, who recently completed the restoration of the 40-year-old sheet metal sculpture. Following its exhibition at Thedford's gallery, the "Warner bull" will be displayed at various locations around the state.

Four Hereford seedstock operations, including VanNewkirk Herefords, Oshkosh, Neb.; Spencer Herefords, Brewster, Neb.; Hoffman Herefords, Thedford; and Ridder Hereford Ranch, Callaway, Neb., donated \$500 each toward the purchase of a trailer for transporting the sculpture to various exhibit sites.

Additionally, \$4,000 was raised through an auction of donated items, plus cash donations, to further the vision of establishing a Nebraska Hereford Museum. **HW**



Richard Brown, Lincoln, Neb., initiated efforts to restore the bull sculpture, Golden Design 14. Brown explained how the sculpture, after being stored for years in a Warner farm outbuilding, was restored by the family of sculptor Arlo Bray.



Valentine Hereford breeder Ken Stephens served as emcee for the Hereford Crossroads reception and exhibition of the restored sculpture of Golden Design 14.



Hereford Crossroads event organizers are pictured with Nebraska State Senator Al Davis, a rancher from Hyannis. Pictured (l to r) are: Ken Stephens, Valentine; Linda Teahon, Chadron; Senator Davis; Richard Brown, Lincoln; and Gerri Monahan, Lincoln.



Retired veterinarian Lance Jones, Broken Bow, Neb., presented a history of "Hereford Alley." During the early years in practice, Jones attended to many of the registered and commercial Hereford herds in the area.