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*For more than a century, the National Western Stock Show stockyards have served as a source of marketing and rich history for America's cattlemen.*

by *Christy Couch Lee*

No doubt about it — for anyone who's attended the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver — the image of century-old wooden pens, carloads of cattle and the catwalk to provide the best view come to mind. Yes, the stockyards are what make this legendary show what it is.

The NWSS began with only a stockyards show more than a century ago. Cattlemen brought their carloads of cattle by train

to the Denver Union Stockyards to be evaluated and sold in the Yards' pens. The show evolved to an exhibition in a circus big-top tent, then to shows in established buildings in the stockyards, to the individual competitions on the "Hill" and to the similar — yet different — "Yards" shows of today.

"They used to bring their cattle to sell them," says Bill Angell, NWSS livestock manager. "Now, they use the Yards show to market their

programs. It's more marketing and advertising now — the whole concept has changed."

Although the concept may have changed, many cattlemen have found success in showcasing their offerings in the same setting utilized by great cattlemen of years ago.

#### **Providing the setting**

The goal of the NWSS Yards show is for producers to showcase a consistent, quality group of cattle



Bill Angell, NWSS livestock manager, says the NWSS Yards show provides a unique opportunity for cattlemen. "There's no other show like it in the world."

their genetics can provide. Decades ago, cattlemen would bring train carloads of cattle to be evaluated and sold to Western producers.

The carload competition today — consisting of an entry of 10 head of bulls — is still deemed the "granddaddy" of the show. However, as the industry has evolved, the pens show of three head has gained popularity.

"The Yards show has evolved into more pens being exhibited," Angell says. "There are fewer large breeders. The fact is, with the pens show, we can see groups of cattle bred alike and looking alike. On the Hill the show is individuals. There's no other show like it in the world."

Angell says the Yards show is intended to attract the commercial breeder and producer.

"It's a loose, commercially oriented atmosphere," he says. "That's what they hope to draw — those guys that buy lots of bulls. We couldn't have this show in, say, Maryland. There are no large producers there. Western ranchers buy lots of bulls."

And, for that reason, producers from across the country travel to Denver to reach that Western market.

### Decades in the Yards

Jim Milligan, Milligan Herefords, Kings, Ill., remembers the days of hauling his cattle by train to the NWSS. His family homesteaded their Illinois farm in 1836 and



Jim Milligan, Kings, Ill., recalls the days of traveling by train in a passenger car to the NWSS Yards show. His family has exhibited in the NWSS Yards for more than 60 years.

purchased their first Herefords in 1918.

His father, Robert, began attending the NWSS in about 1946, marketing his cattle to producers in the Western states from a boxcar.

"My father told some great stories about the cattle that would come by train through the mountain passes with their heads covered in soot," Milligan says.

Milligan began attending the NWSS as a youngster, making his first trips by train with his dad.

"When I was young, we would get a boxcar about Thanksgiving time," Milligan recalls. "We'd use a cattle



car and side it up with cardboard, because it would get pretty cold."

As time progressed, the Milligans began using a livestock

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Decades ago, cattlemen hauled their carloads of bulls by train to the Denver Union Stockyards to market their genetics to Western bull buyers.



Today the NWSS Yards show offers cattlemen the chance to showcase their genetics through a unique marketing outlet.

hauling service. But, their mode of transportation isn't the only thing that's changed since Milligan began attending the NWSS.

"I got to see this when it was really a dynamic place for marketing cattle — especially feeder cattle and market cattle," Milligan says. "There have been a lot of changes. This show was built on a supply of good quality bulls for the commercial breeders out West. Now, it's more of a show and a display of what you have to offer."

However, one thing that hasn't changed in the NWSS Yards is the atmosphere, Milligan says.

"A lot of the people here in the Yards have been here for years," he says. "We've developed real friendships and camaraderie, and the friendships last."

Amidst the changes, Milligan believes he will continue to attend the NWSS for years to come, with help from his brother and partner, Malcolm.

"This stock show is the greatest stock show in the world," he says. "It's a place you can advertise your animals, and you'll have more people viewing them than you can anywhere else. The history of the show is like a magnet. It draws people."

This attraction has also drawn more Hereford breeders to the Yards in hopes of reaching that market in recent years.

### Seeing the opportunity

Lowell Fisher, Spencer, Neb., has spent a lifetime in the Hereford industry. His father, C.H. (Clyde), purchased his first herd of Hereford cattle in 1943. And, from an early age, Fisher has exhibited cattle.

He and his wife, Carol, purchased their first modern Hereford bull — a son of Red Ox — at the 1979 NWSS. Although Fisher has exhibited individual cattle on the Hill since 1995 and pens in the Yards for two years, this year was the first time he showed a carload in the Yards, something he has always wanted to do.

Fisher says showing in the Yards with his son, Steven, allows him two opportunities — the chance to evaluate his own herd against others and the outlet to market his cattle to cattlemen.



Lowell (right) and Steven (left) Fisher, Spencer, Neb., consider the Yards show as an opportunity to market their cattle.

“We try to attract people to my cattle,” he says. “Most of the people that walk into my pen are making their living off of cattle. It’s a pride thing, also. It shows me where I’m short. People who never take their cattle out have difficulty knowing how they measure up.”

Fisher says the atmosphere in the Yards encourages him to return year after year.

“The atmosphere is fantastic,” Fisher says. “You meet a lot of wonderful people. Denver is kind of like a high. You can feel it about November, and you get hyped into it. It’s one of the highlights of the year.”

It doesn’t take long for that hype to set in — even for producers who are new to the Yards.

### Getting their start

For more than a decade, Bernie and Stacie Buzanowski, Snowshoe Cattle Company, Pompeys Pillar, Mont., have attended the NWSS and shown cattle on the Hill. However, this is only their second year to exhibit a pen of heifers in the Yards — taking advantage of the three-year-old NWSS Hereford heifer pen show.

They believe exhibiting in the Yards provides customers and potential customers with a broad view of their operation.

“We try to breed uniform groups of cattle in a reasonable calving time frame,” Stacie says. “The pen show presents a concise viewing of our offering.”

The Buzanowskis appreciate the atmosphere and marketing approach of the Yards.

“When someone walks in your pen gate, you have a one-on-one opportunity,” Bernie says.

They, along with their children, Rachael and Austin, attend the Junior National Hereford Expo, Montana and North Dakota junior beef expos and the Northern International Livestock Exposition (NILE). Although they find great benefits in

each of these shows, Bernie says, the NWSS is different.

“It’s the granddaddy of them all,” he says. “There’s a different mystique. It’s a different event.”

Stacie says the relaxed environment of the Yards allows breeders to visit and do business.

“At the NILE, we’re in and out, and we don’t know our neighbors,” she

says. “We get a lot more business done here. There are less distractions when we try to visit with other cattlemen.”

And, when the goal is to sell your genetics and promote your operation, time to visit is priceless, the Buzanowskis say.

Although the Buzanowskis have only brought pens of heifers the past two years, they have hopes of bringing pens of bulls in the future to tap into the bull market of the Yards.

“Producers are on the hunt to know what bulls are out there,” Stacie says. “People know they can come here to find them.”

There have been discussions of moving the NWSS to another location. Angell says, although the Hill show would not likely be affected, the Yards show would be difficult to duplicate.

“In all the discussion that’s come up about moving the stock show, it always comes back to what that will do to the Yards show,” Angell says. “To try to reproduce this somewhere else — it wouldn’t be the same. There’s a uniqueness and tradition for what the Yards show has meant for the NWSS and for Denver.”

Yes, that tradition and uniqueness are what make the NWSS what it is today. **HW**



Bernie (seated), Stacie (right), Austin (left) and Rachael (front) Buzanowski, Pompeys Pillar, Mont., have found success in exhibiting pens of three heifers in the newly formed Hereford heifer pen show.