



One of Nancy's biggest joys in working for the AHA was building relationships with Hereford breeders across the country.

# The End of an Era

**Nancy Thomas retires from the American Hereford Association after 49 years.**

by *Kayla Jennings*

Click click. Click click. Sounds of a data keypunch system were all too familiar for employees of the American Polled Hereford Association (APHA) records department in 1968. As the years progressed, the records department transitioned significantly in method, location and name. Today, the American Hereford Association (AHA) even utilizes an online registry system. Just as the idea of a keypunch machine is foreign today, the concept of online registry had not yet been imagined 49 years ago.

Employees who remember those days are few and far between. In fact, the last employee of that era retired Dec. 1, 2017. Nancy Thomas, a Kansas City, Mo., native has dedicated her life to serving Hereford breeders. Many breeders, as well as staff members, will miss her always ready to lend a helping hand.

"Nancy really does mark the end of an era for AHA," says Stacy Sanders, AHA director of

the records department. "She is one of those solid rocks who is very dedicated. We will miss her in our office."

## Early days

After Nancy graduated high school in 1967, she knew she wanted to find a job in the area. Following in her aunt's footsteps, she became certified as a keypunch operator and sought out her first job with Sears. It was not long before other career opportunities caught her eye.

Nancy says she heard about the opening at the APHA and applied for the data entry position without hesitation. She knew little about the cattle industry — having grown up in urban Kansas City — but she was eager to learn. After starting April 1, 1968, she remembers the intense learning curve fondly.

"It has really come a long way from when I started," she notes. "I can't begin to tell you everything, but we had boxes upon boxes all over the floor and full filing cabinets when I came in '68. It looked like a nightmare."

Since the APHA had recently split off from the AHA when Nancy started, she remembers sorting through many cards to put together full pedigrees on animals. Each animal had its own keypunch card with its information. She says she and her fellow workers would have to pull at

least 15 cards to put together one registration certificate. To put it into perspective, one lady could complete 15 certificates in one hour — that was fast. In 1974 the group of data entry ladies completed 204,000 certificates utilizing the keypunch system.

As time progressed, so did the technology and the environment. The keypunch era came to a close, and the progress in data entry began. Soon after, the Association adopted the utilization of computers. Nancy says the first computer screens were so small it was almost impossible to see what was being entered. While many are reluctant to changes, Nancy always viewed herself as progressive.

"I really like using the computers the way they are now," she says. "I caught on fast. To me, it was wonderful. It was important to me to understand how to utilize the new programs, so I could explain it to the breeders."

It was this desire to understand and most effectively adopt the new technology that made Nancy unique. With every new technology, she was the first to ask questions and to learn it.

"Nancy is always someone who welcomes change, and she is adaptable," Sanders says. "She has seen a lot of changes, and she is very curious about how and why things work. She is not satisfied to take it at face value. If we ever needed to test a new program, she was always involved with that because she was always the one figuring out how things worked."

Sanders says she has had a hand in everything from implementing Whole Herd Total Performance Records (TPR™) to creating the American Beef Records Association (ABRA) service. He says she is very meticulous and accurate, making it evident her work is always done well. Aside from adopting new data tracking technologies, Nancy had the opportunity to see breed improvement progress and the merging of the APHA and the AHA in 1995.

## Everlasting memories

In her 49 years, Nancy has had the unique opportunity to see generations of Hereford breeders grow. She recalls visiting with producers about not only their cattle but also their kids and lives. Those relationships have made this position more than just a job for her.

"You would think you would get bored with the same thing over and over again, but everyday it is something new," she explains. "You get to talk to the breeders and really get to know them personally."

She recalls a specific phone conversation recently when she asked a breeder how old his son was. The breeder said his son was 13 and reminded her he had been

calling Nancy at the office since he was 13 himself. For her, seeing generations of Hereford breeders grow up has been truly special.

Sometimes, Nancy even had the opportunity to meet particularly interesting people in the office. In fact, the Alabama band lead singer, Randy Owen, registered his Hereford cattle with Nancy. She remembers the band members coming by the office to visit any time they were in the area to check on their Hereford records.

"Randy was standing with Teddy Gentry one day while I was working, and he said, 'don't you wish you could go that fast?' That was funny because I didn't think I was that fast at typing," she laughed. "They must not have seen Dorothy Bower, my supervisor — she was a really fast typist."

Aside from Hereford breeders, Nancy always enjoyed the people she worked with. When she was still with the APHA, she fondly remembers teaming up with the field staff to compete against other employees to see who could recruit the most new members each year. "It was really fun to try to persuade breeders to join the Association," she remembers.

## Exciting times ahead

Outside of work, Nancy is involved with Order of the Eastern Star — a Masonic appendant body. The organization promotes leadership amongst women. Its members take trips and take part in several other community activities. Now that her time at Hereford has come to an end, she hopes to increase her participation with them and to travel.

"I want to go see some of the friends I have made, and some of the people I have known for years," she notes. "I also plan to travel with the Eastern Star to Utah and Texas, and just enjoy life."

She says she has been invited to several farms and ranches over the years, so this is the time to take people up on those visits. She has made many friends over the past 49 years, and she looks forward to spending the time to visit them all across the country.

Stacy says he knows the environment of the office will be different without her around, but he and the rest of the staff are excited for her in her new chapter.

"We certainly wish her the best and welcome her back to visit at any time," Stacy says. "The AHA wants her to realize she has a ton of friends in our members that want to thank her also. We want her to know she always has a home at AHA."

Leaving the AHA after many years is bittersweet for her. "I will miss all the people in the office," she says. "I will really miss talking to all my friends — the breeders — and making new friends." **HW**



Nancy's 49 years were celebrated at the AHA office with many friends.