

97-year-old Third Street Livestock to hold its final sale

Business brought wide acclaim to Grand Island

By Carol Bryant

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The last auction at Third City Livestock Commission Co. at 611 E. Fourth St. will be Monday, owners of the 97-year-old business said Wednesday.

Thomas E. Bradstreet started the business in 1905, and in the early 1900s it was the second-largest sale site in the world of horses and mules, next to Kansas City, said co-owner Ken Carnes, 56, of Aurora. Carnes has been an owner since 1981 and began working there 38 years ago. Co-owner Elmer Becker, 78, of St. Paul has worked at the business for 54 years and has been an owner since 1960. He farms and has a feedlot.

"There are some other people looking at it who might take it over," Becker said.

Monday's final auction, a hog sale, will begin between 11:30 a.m. and noon, depending when all of the hogs have arrived, said bookkeeper Linda Schlieker, 67, of Chapman, a 30-year employee. Her husband, Henry, 67, began working at the business carrying sale tickets when he was 10 years old.

Third City Livestock has two full-time and 18 part-time employees, Becker said.

"I'm getting up in age. My partner hasn't been there. His health isn't good," he said. "We used to have three sales a week. We cut down to two. The last three or four weeks, we've only had one sale a week. We've had a lot of these customers many years, third- or fourth-generation customers. We used to sell horses and sheep, too. Lately, we've been selling hogs and cattle."

Linda Schlieker said she and her husband have a "certain amount of sadness, but we've had the privilege of working with the best people on earth, the buyers and the sellers. We've made a lot of friends. It's been a good place to work. My husband is going to miss meeting the sellers as they come in."

Carnes, an auctioneer and real estate agent, said he hasn't worked at the business since January 2001 because of his health. His father, Clyde Carnes, also was an auctioneer at the sale barn from 1960 until he died in 1976. Carnes has a briefcase at his Aurora office filled with photographs, newspaper articles and other memorabilia from the business.

"Someday I'd like to write a book on this thing," Carnes said.

Before coming to Grand Island, Bradstreet had been a livestock dealer in Sioux City, Iowa, an Aug. 7, 1950, story in The Independent said. Bradstreet had his first auction in Grand Island in June 1903. The sale ring was a pen covered with a canvas tent. Bradstreet opened the business at its current location in 1905, near current Burlington Northern and Union Pacific lines. In 1910, Bradstreet and Jesse Clemens formed the Bradstreet and Clemens Co. and sold about 12,413 head of horses and mules, an ad said. Two years later, the business sold about 15,890 horses and mules. The company built the Central Horse and Mule barns, around which the horse market spread. By 1919, Bradstreet had five barns.

Carnes knew the late Joe Christie of Grand Island, who wrote "Seventy-five Years in the Saddle," which includes history about Bradstreet's business. Christie began working for Bradstreet at the sale barn in 1907 when he was 14 and retired from the livestock business in 1960.

In 1912, Jack Torpey Sr. and others formed the Grand Island Horse and Mule Co., which used the same barns and yards as Bradstreet and Clemens Co. According to the "History of Hall County" by A.F. Buechler and R.J. Barr, the horse and mule market was "the industry that has probably done more than any other one industry ever represented in Grand Island to spread the name of this city over the entire world."

In 1914, livestock firms in Grand Island included Bradstreet and Clemens Co., Grand Island Horse and Mule Co., and North and Robinson Co. Christie wrote about the history of the black tin stallion which remains on the roof of Third City Livestock today. The North firm originated the landmark black tin horse, used as an advertising symbol. The horse was made from wood and covered with tin.

"That old horse has witnessed a lot of history and has seen many people come and go," Christie wrote.

Bradstreet, William I. Blain and Will R. King filed articles of incorporation in 1915 and changed the name of the company in 1918 to Blain Horse, Mule and Cattle Co., the Hall County history said. Bradstreet owned barns leased from him for the Grand Island Horse and Mule Co. and the Blain Horse, Mule and Cattle Co. His sons, Archie and Deo, were in business with him. Torpey bought the Blain Livestock Commission Co. in 1931 and organized the Grand Island Livestock Commission Co. The firm's newsletter reported that 2,500 people attended an August 1931 hog and cattle auction there. It moved to west Grand Island in 1945.

The Harry Livestock Commission Co. opened in 1945 at the Bradstreet site. William Harry owned the commission business, and Archie Bradstreet owned the barns and yard. Harry had come to Grand Island in 1916 and became an auctioneer for the Blain company. In 1949, the business sold more than 100,000 head of hogs, more than 30,000 head of cattle and about 2,600 horses and mules. It later became Third City Livestock Commission Co., which replaced its sale barn with a metal building opened in 1977 after the Nebraska Livestock Auction Board requested that the old barn be replaced.

Hazel Tully of Grand Island is Thomas Bradstreet's granddaughter, and her father, Archie Bradstreet, also operated the business. Archie Bradstreet died in 1963, and his wife, Helen Bradstreet, continued as an owner of the business.

"I think that's one of the things that helped make Grand Island. I know that the farmers around the city will miss not having the place available to them," Tully said. "It's been there so long. I was hoping it would continue and it may, but

we don't know."

Hazel Tully's sister, Marian Arrasmith, formerly of Grand Island, lives in Phoenix, Ariz. Arrasmith remembers that wind blew the tin horse sign down several times.

"Buyers wanted it back up. We managed to get it put back up again," she said.

Arrasmith said closing the business is "pretty sad."

"It's a loss to the community, but that's a sign of the times, I guess."