

Sept. 9, 1987

# Wiaraton cattle sales started out in a tent

By TERRY WEBER  
Sun Times Staff

WIARTON — The auctioneer sings a strange song.

Bouncing off the walls of the metal barn at the Wiaraton sale grounds, the call is gibberish to a few and life to others.

For some the rhythmic sound recalls a different time.

Outside the arena, Roy Rathwell sits in the sun. It's too cold for him in the barn today.

One of the original directors of the Grey-Bruce Livestock Co-operative, Rathwell, 83, has been coming to the sales since they started 35 years ago in 1952.

On this crisp Thursday morning he talks about the old days, stopping occasionally to wave his cane, pointing out sons and fathers who've become an integral part of the agricultural community in the area.

Things were different when he started out — no barn, no office, no electricity, just a tent brought in for the first sale.

"We had to work harder, and I think there's no question that we did," he said.

And Rathwell said the group kept a tight rein on the proceedings in the few first years.

"We didn't let too much rough stuff go on in here. There was the odd time some things happened

that shouldn't have," he said.

The co-operative modelled the sale after one on Manitoulin Island. Although the original idea was set down in 1950, it took two years to convince area farmers of the worth of one central auction.

Two years down the road, the idea was presented again at a meeting of Grey and Bruce cattle producers and was unanimously accepted.

The 4.5-hectare site was bought for \$2,500 and 1,270 head of cattle were sold for \$214,700 at the first sale.

In 1986, a total of 13,700 cattle were sold at a total of \$9,436,000.

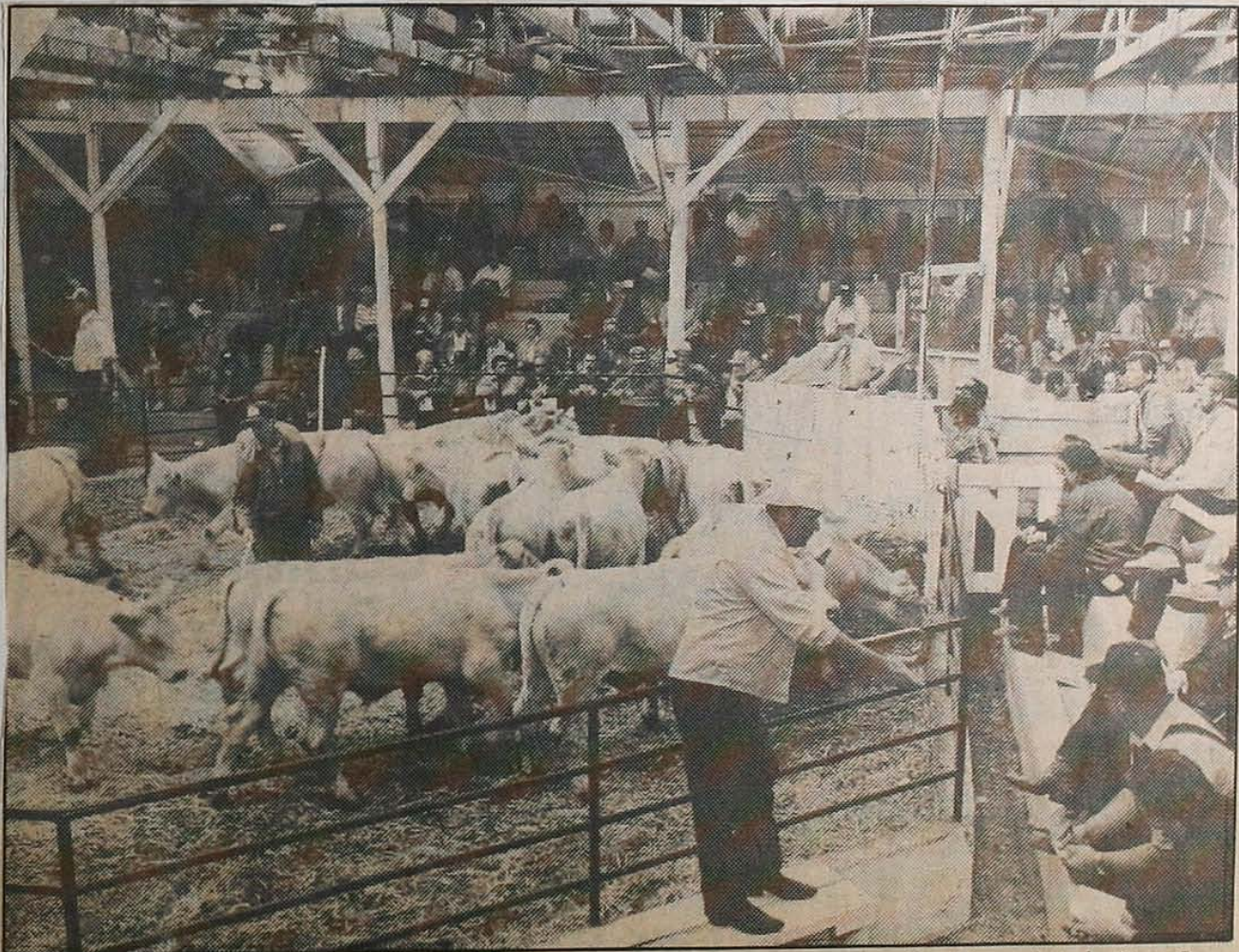
One of the few original directors still around, Rathwell doesn't stay for the whole sale, his days with the co-operative have settled into a memory. He just stopped by to see a few familiar faces and chat.

"They all know me here," he said.

"Today, why, my days are numbered but I get along pretty well. The little kids, they call me Grampa, even though I have no grandchildren," he laughed.

Others also remember the early days.

Auctioneer Gordon Ribey and farmer Ivan Mielhausen are both veterans of the Wiaraton sales.



Sun Times photo by Doug Camp

Ringmen pull in bids at the feeder sale in Wiaraton Thursday

Vol 19 Pg. 9