

TO IMPROVE AND PROMOTE THE BREED

Organized in 1868, incorporated in 1880 under a charter granted by special act of the General Assembly of New York, then reincorporated in 1994 under its present name, the AJCA's purposes have remained unchanged for 130 years.

The early history of The American Jersey Cattle Association is a complex tale of multiple motives centered on one object: a group of geographically isolated cattle that, by human design, were developed and given an identity for economic gain.

The story begins twelve decades before the Revolutionary War.

The Jersey Brought To America

It was as a family cow that the Jersey first crossed the Atlantic Ocean to America.

George Poingdestre, with his wife Susanna and their children, emigrated to America in 1657 and settled in Middle Plantation (now Williamsburg), Virginia. Accompanying the family were several cows from Poingdestre's childhood home, Swan Farm on the Island of Jersey.

English sea captains also had a hand in bringing cattle from Jersey to the New World. Occasionally they would ask their wives and young children to accompany them on long voyages. "This was establishing a floating home," R. M. Gow wrote in 1936, "and where there is a home there must be a cow." Reaching their destination, these captains

"had a cow to sell or give away."

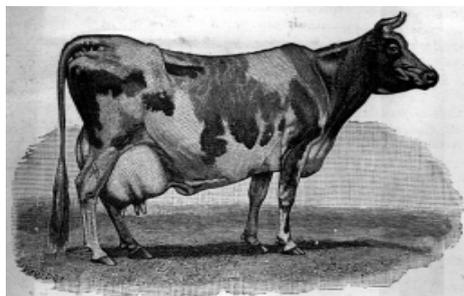
These cows were called Alderneys. "Breed name had rather an uncertain significance in those early days," Gow noted. In the case of cattle exported from the Channel Islands, the ships stopped first at Jersey, then went on to Guernsey and finally Alderney. When asked where they had come from, sailors most likely answered "Alderney" leading to the accurate, but imprecise description of any cattle on board as Alderney cattle.

Planned importations added more of the Alderney cattle to the American cattle population after 1800. What reason would there have been to go to such

pains and expense? Richard Morris, a member of the Philadelphia Society for Promotion of Agriculture, enlightened other members in this 1817 letter:

"I have upon my farm on the Delaware a cow of the Alderney breed, imported a short time since by Mr. Wurts. She has been fed in the

usual way with potatoes, and during the last week the milk from her was kept separate, and yielded eight pounds of butter. The cow is a small animal, and is supported with less food than our ordinary stock."



A Jersey? Indeed. But a color print of this cow hung in the offices of the American Guernsey Cattle Club for many years, until she was identified as Jersey Belle of Scituate 7828. According to Gow, she "was considered in her time 'the best model of a Jersey ever known.'" Such confusions were not uncommon, and undoubtedly were a factor encouraging the development of Jersey herd books on the Island and in the United States.

An editorial note to Mr. Morris's letter states, "the cow . . . is now in the possession of another member of the Agricultural Society; and after a fair trial . . . the superior richness of her milk, when compared with that of other cows, has been fully tested. She gave 9½ pounds of extremely rich, highly-coloured butter per week."

A small, docile cow that could produce "rich milk," and a considerable quantity of it, was a novelty in the United States in the 1800s. That, however, was typical of the cattle on the Island of Jersey. A good cow was one who could produce a pound of butter a day, up to two pounds daily when just fresh and on pasture.

For centuries, Jersey farmers had bred their cattle for maximum productivity. "The Jersey has always possessed the head of a fawn, a soft eye, an elegant crumpled horn, small ears, a clean neck and throat, fine bones, a fine tail; above all a well formed capacious udder, with large, swelling milk veins," Col. John Le Couteur reported. "The first question on the selection of a bull was, 'Have his progenitors been renowned for their milking and creaming qualities?'"

By 1870, hundreds of cattle known to be from Jersey had been imported. They were located in Connecticut, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Maine, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Vermont. (Interestingly, no mention is made in AJCC records of "Jerseys" in Virginia until 1872.)

The Need For A Herd Book

The idea of an independently supervised herd book of pedigrees was an innovation of the 1800s.

The members of the Royal Jersey Agricultural and Horticultural Society, founded in 1833, were unconvinced of the need for a Jersey Herd Book.

"It was argued that, there being but

one breed on the Island, a herd book was unnecessary," Gow recalled. The argument was settled in 1866 on two grounds. First, "a proper registration system . . . would foster careful breeding and the elimination of undesirable types." Second, there having been "frequent complaints of fraudulent representations," the construction of an authoritative herd book would protect the identity and value of the cattle that had been developed on Jersey Island and that were being exported at great profit.

About this same time in the United States, three self-described "men of business who made importation and breeding their recreation" started a correspondence that would end with the organization of The American Jersey Cattle Club. They were Samuel J. Sharpless of Pennsylvania, Charles M. Beach of Connecticut, and Thomas J. Hand of New York.

Hand, in particular, took great pride in owning Jerseys. His comments suggest that he was bothered by widespread indifference to pedigrees, particularly as he believed the cattle were a promising business venture.

"While some . . . had kept accurate herd records from the start," he wrote, "the greater number, as well as those who fell into line as buyers and breeders, had failed to do so. The awakening to a sense of the need of a trustworthy record of pedigrees did not come a day too soon, and the failure of some previous individual attempts made it evident that organization was essential to establish (a herd book) that should be of authority."

HEADQUARTERS OVER THE YEARS



The American Jersey Cattle Club first operated out of offices secured in Newport, Rhode Island, the residence of the first secretary, George E. Waring, Jr.

Since 1881, the Association has occupied ten office buildings.

On July 11, 1881, the headquarters were moved to No. 3 John Street in New York City, a facility that the second secretary, Thomas J. Hand, described as a "straight-jacket." Roomier quarters were found within a year at 49 Cedar Street, but it was still undesirable because it was not "fireproof." That quality was to be found in the Washington Building, located at No. 1 Broadway, which served as the headquarters until 1893.

The Association made its first investment in real estate in May 1892, when it purchased No. 8 W. 17th Street and this building was occupied until 1912. At that time, President E. A. Darling facilitated the purchase of two lots on West 23rd Street, and the first offices built to accommodate the organization's needs were constructed.

In 1946, the AJCC moved to Columbus, Ohio, leasing space downtown at 107 N. Sixth Street. The building at 1521 E. Broad Street, next to Franklin Park, was completed in 1951. That building was sold in 1972 and the association again rented office facilities on the far eastside of Columbus at 2105 S. Hamilton Road.

The current headquarters (pictured above) at 6486 E. Main Street in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, were completed and occupied 10 years ago this month.

The idea of forming "an association" was that of George E. Waring, Jr., of Rhode Island, who had been approached by Charles Beach on behalf of himself, Sharpless, and Hand to edit their proposed pedigree book.

Waring recalled in 1878 that he told Beach that "I should not be willing to publish a Jersey Herd Book on my own unaided authority, but I would undertake it if I could have the support of an association of breeders."

That settled, the four pioneers met in the spring of 1868. A constitution was drafted and circulated to a number of East Coast Jersey owners during the summer. A letter authored by Thomas Hand invited their participation as an "original signer of the constitution." The draft

constitution began:

We, the undersigned breeders of Jersey Cattle, recognizing the importance of a trustworthy Herd Book that shall be accepted as a final authority in all questions of Pedigree, and desiring to secure the influence and co-operation of those who feel a genuine interest in zealously guarding the purity of this stock, do hereby agree to unite in forming an Association for the publication of a Herd Book, and adopt for our government the following Constitution:

ARTICLE I.

This Association shall be styled the AMERICAN JERSEY CATTLE CLUB.

Voting by mail, the 43 original signers elected Samuel J. Sharpless as President, Thomas J. Hand as Treasurer, and Waring as Secretary. This was followed

in short order by the Club's first meeting. The officers, a three-member Executive Committee, and a majority of signers met November 17, 1868 at 31 Broadway, New York City, and The American Jersey Cattle Club began to establish its rules "for the admission of pedigrees."

References

Minutes of The American Jersey Cattle Club, 1869 to 1880; an unpublished manuscript, "Contributions to Club History" (Thomas J. Hand, c. 1896); *The Jersey: An Outline of Her History During Two Centuries, 1734 to 1935* (R. M. Gow, 1936); *History of The American Jersey Cattle Club, 1868-1968* (Guy M. Crews, 1968); *Jersey Sailing Ships* (John Jean, 1982); "The Jersey Cow and Its Importance in Our Cultural and Economic Development," the Societe Jersiaise Joan Stevens Memorial Lecture (Anne Perchard, 1998); and a Jersey history website maintained by Hans Nørgaard (www.syd-fyn.dk/historye).