

## California CattleWomen –A Look Back Over 65 Years

California CattleWomen has been an active, vibrant organization since 1951. At convention in 2016, CCW will celebrate 65 years as a state organization. Our "older brothers," the California Cattlemen's Association will be celebrating their one hundredth convention. What an outstanding accomplishment! Both of these state beef associations have a long history of service to the cattle ranching community and both organizations are looking forward to celebrating in December 2016 at the CCA/CCW Convention. In the lead up to this celebration, we thought it would be fun to look back at how the California Cowbelles came to be.

Ranch women have always been an important part of the cattle industry. Many of them work alongside their husbands and contribute to the decision-making, bookkeeping, and ranch work. In the early years the CCA Annual Conventions were held in San Francisco. At that time women did not play an active roll at the conventions. Instead, women would shop, sight see, visit, and then join their husbands in the evening after discussions and decisions had been made. All of this would change when Helen Carver of Delano attended the annual CCA Convention in Fresno in 1951. Helen was a charter member of the Kern County Cowbelles which had formed three years prior in 1948. Kern County was the first cowbelle unit in California.

At the Fresno convention, ladies enjoyed a fine afternoon with a luncheon and a fashion show. Although Helen had requested a few minutes to speak to the ladies, the busses arrived to pick up the ranch wives before Helen had a chance to present her idea. Helen Carver ran for the podium and called for order. A quick show of hands from the ladies in attendance brought the California Cowbelles into existence. The women were very much in favor of having this organization, and officers were quickly elected as women were heading for the busses. Helen Carver became the first president, Lillie Sheldon-Vice President, and Nona Williams-Secretary. It only took five minutes to vote the Association into existence and elect the officers. Women were very interested in the organization, and it soon grew from 58 members to 2400 members by the year 1966. According to *A Brief History of Cowbelles*, dated May 24, 1965, "The initial purpose of all Cowbelle groups is the same - To promote friendship between ranch women, better public relations and to assist the Cattlemen in promoting the welfare of the cattle industry."

By 1956 the Cowbelles were participating in many projects including the Beef for Father's Day Program. Beef roasts equal to the weight of the first baby born on Father's Day were presented in hospitals. Thousands of Beef Cookbooks were published. Many were sold to Cowbelle Units for promotion purposes and were donated to schools for home economic classes.

Local activities were so great in the county units that an annual book called *The Roundup* was published for an exchange of ideas and to leave a historical record of our organization's yearly activities. It is still published each year and distributed at the annual convention.

In 1963 Sonoma County built the first Red Barn on their fairgrounds. Soon many other local units had Red Barns too. Cowbelles used the barns to promote beef and many were large enough for festivities and meetings. In 1965 the California Cattlemen's Association and the California Feeders Association donated money for a Red Barn to be built on the California State

Fairgrounds in Sacramento. This barn started a state fair promotion for the California Cowbelles.

The local fair promotions brought such great responses that a workshop was held at the state meetings for an exchange of ideas on beef promotion. Beef promotion at the Los Angeles County Fair, as well as Livestock Tours at the Grand National Livestock Show at the Cow Palace created much public interest.

The Cowbelles have always worked closely with the California Beef Council and promote many of their publications and materials. When the first California Beef Cook-Off was held in 1974, the Beef Council and Cowbelles worked together to insure its success. Around this time the Cowbelles developed the state truck sign project. Cowbelle units statewide promoted beef with clever signs on cattle trucks and even a few busses.

It was in 1987 that the "Cowbelle" name was changed to CattleWomen in cooperation with the change at the national level. California CattleWomen has been very effective on legislative issues helping to defeat adverse legislation and to promote the passage of friendly bills. CattleWomen participate in legislative visits at our state Capitol and in Washington DC.

In 1992 (Sacramento) and again in 2009 (Sonoma) California CattleWomen was privileged to host the National Beef Cook-off. CattleWomen from throughout the state worked very diligently to make these truly premier events. The National Beef Ambassador Contest came to California in 2000 (San Francisco) and again in 2012 (Sacramento). As the host state, CattleWomen from across California turned out to work and make sure the shows ran smoothly and were top-notch events. California CattleWomen hosted the ANCW Region VI Meeting in 2008 (Sonoma) and in 2014 (South Lake Tahoe). Excellent speakers and field trips were planned to make these meetings worthwhile for our guests.

CattleWomen have always had a heart for educating children and providing youth development opportunities for young people. In recent years one focus area has been on Ag in the Classroom. Many units hold annual *Ag Days*. CattleWomen are known to invite classrooms of children out to the ranch to learn about livestock production first hand. At these events children are often exposed to animals, ranch practices, nutrition, and agriculture in general. These experiences provide important knowledge about where and how our food is produced. Each year local units and the state association provide scholarships to college students that collectively total over \$100,000 per year. Local units sponsor numerous fair awards to 4-H and FFA competitors. They provide opportunities for kids to hone their knowledge and public speaking skills through the Beef Ambassador Contest.

In 2010 the California CattleWomen compiled and published a book called, *Some California Ranches Their Stories and Their Brands*. For many ranch families, the book is a treasured keepsake.

Each year CCW has a presence at Tulare World Ag Expo where our trivia wheel attracts hundreds of people to our booth. Those folks leave with a bit more information than when they arrived. Ag Day at the Capitol is an event where we partner with the CCA and the Buckhorn Grill to serve over 1800 tri tip sliders on the grounds of the state Capitol. We use this as an opportunity to share beef brochures and information about the cattle business.

The California CattleWomen has a long and proud history. The organization was created to promote the beef industry. Women throughout the state have dedicated their time and energy, with great devotion, to educate the public about beef.

Because California is a world leader in food production, and one of the most productive agriculture regions on earth, and because the production of cattle and calves is one of California's top five commodities, we the California CattleWomen will focus on promoting a better understanding to consumers as to where their food originates; the quality controls used towards its safety; the impact the beef industry has on the economy of California; and the overall, far reaching contributions the beef industry has to society as a whole.

\*Special thanks to CCW Past President, Karen Rasmussen, for sharing information on the history of CCW.