

# Green Dragon Livestock Auction Ends After 65 Years

**Editor's Note:** This story, reprinted by permission, first appeared in the *Ephrata Review*, the 119-year-old town and community newspaper that serves Northern Lancaster County.

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*Ephrata Review* Editor

EPHRATA (Lancaster Co.) — Watching Walter Risser prepare for a livestock sale at Green Dragon on a Friday morning, it is not hard to see what a special tradition the event has become.

Welcoming prospective buyers with gentle chiding, a warm smile and truckloads of enthusiasm, Risser certainly seems to be in his element in the old barns at the Dragon. After all, he has run the auction for about 20 years, and has been a part of it for 33.

On Friday, Dec. 27, Risser and all those involved said goodbye to one of the oldest traditions in our communities, as the last livestock sale was conducted.

Co-owners Bill Rohrbach and Larry Loose announced this news recently and gave several reasons for the decision, one of the main

ones being Risser's decision to leave the Dragon and go full time with his cattle business in the Palmyra area.

"People ask why," said Rohrbach. "We don't know that much about livestock. It is very regulated and if you don't know what you are doing it is best to stay out.

"We don't need a livestock sale to have a successful (market)," he continued. "Others are successful that don't have it."

It was at this point that Rohrbach stressed the fact that the small animal sale which is held every Friday night will indeed continue. This sale, which consists of many types of small animals such as guinea pigs, rabbits, pigeons, goats, etc. (but no dogs or cats) will be taken over by Jeremy Heinsey, who had previously helped Risser run the sale.

"He'll do a good job," Rohrbach said. "That (small animals) is an interest here—it brings in farm people and is a necessary part of the auction. That is not to say that the livestock didn't help also.

Indeed, the livestock sales were not only a big draw through the years—they were actually what got the popular farmers market started.

"Livestock started the Green Dragon in 1932," Rohrbach said.

Noah Burkholder started the Green Dragon that year and a man named Paul Stoner shipped the cattle in. Later, Stoner would buy the market and then in 1961, Rohrbach and Loose (only in their early 20s at the time) took over and have run it since then. Loose added another historical tidbit, stating that the original Green Dragon, located in the market house, was originally going to be called "My Blue Heaven," but sticking with the oriental motif—"The Green Dragon" was born.

"The livestock has been going strong ever since," Rohrbach said.

The livestock sale, according to Rohrbach, consists of slaughter animals, heifers, calves and dairy cattle. Every once in while he said they will get a horse, goat or donkey. The auction usually started at 11 or thereabouts (more on that later) and on especially big days could run as late as 5 p.m.

"Recently, the dairy sales have not been that great but in their heyday we had some nice dairy cattle," Rohrbach said.

As for Risser, this change means much more than just doing something different on Fridays.

"I come up almost every day of the week," said Risser, who began renting the sale in March of 1976. His wife Joyce has been with him the whole way, with 20 years of service working in the office. "There are lots of things to look after. Friday is the big day of course, with Risser finding himself at Green Dragon from about 6 a.m.-10:30 p.m.

Risser does admit that there has been a decline in the past year which he attributes to depressed prices.

On this day, the end of an era not only for the Dragon but for Risser as well, he was quite upbeat. When asked if he's had a good time doing this he quickly states, "Oh yeah. "We've had our ups and downs," Risser added.

"It's not all bad and not all good. We wouldn't have stayed this long if it were all bad," he said with a smile.

Meanwhile, back in the office, many of Risser's seven children and 13 grandchildren gathered for the big day. Joyce indicated that all of them had worked at the sale, one time or another. Despite the mounds of paperwork and details, the atmosphere was quite relaxed as the final sale time approached.

"There's no time clock," one person joked, alluding to the charming atmosphere.

Clad in sweater, tie and wool hat and brandishing a wooden cane, Risser heads to the sale ring at Green Dragon for the last time. While handing out sale cards, he jokes fondly with the buyers for a moment or two, then gets to work moving the first animal about the



Walter Risser keeps the action moving in the livestock ring on its final day, before a full house of spectators and buyers. Photo by Preston Whitcraft.

cozy ring surrounded by the wooden bleachers.

It's definitely a piece of history that has completed its final chapter—but the Dragon, as popu-

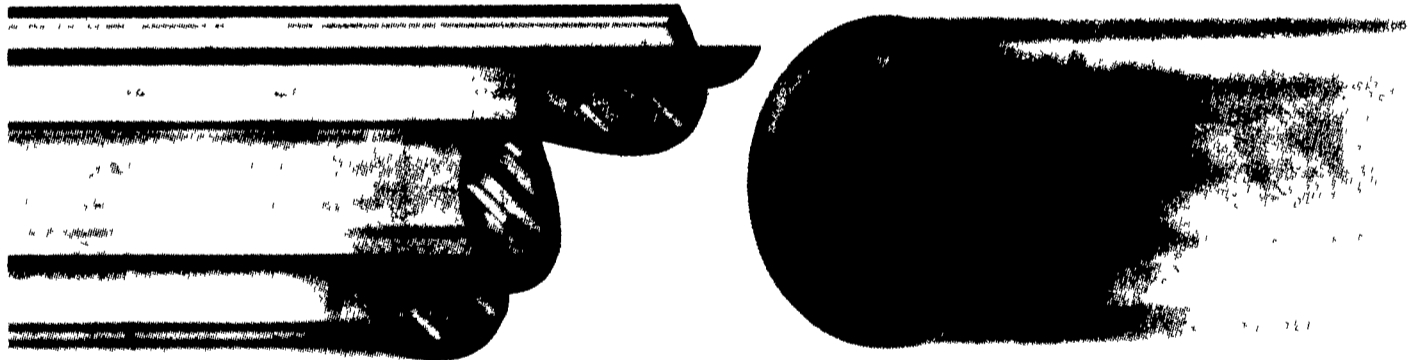
lar as ever, will go on. Although definitive numbers are not available, Rohrbach estimates that the 3,500-car parking lot can turn over three times a day and on the best

days—as many as 20,000-25,000 visitors come to the market.

According to Loose and Rohrbach, only the front barn will (Turn to Page A19)

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