

Kershaw Angus

A Centennial Herd Rich in Breed History

by Jeri Lynn Gilleland

Robert Kershaw of Muskogee, Okla., remembers tales of when his father's Angus farm was one of the most prestigious in the nation. Robert was recently honored as owning a centennial Angus herd.

If you've been raising Angus for a good long while or you're a student of Angus history, you've probably heard of the L.R. Kershaw Angus herd. During the early 1900s until after World War II, this herd wrote Angus history. Show ring winnings and record-setting safes put L.R. Kershaw on the map of reputation pioneer breeders.

Today, in Muskogee, Okla., Robert E. Kershaw (son of L.R.) still owns and operates an Angus herd. In fact, some of the cattle in his herd trace back to bloodlines of cattle his father raised.

Robert never got into the cattle business to the extent his father was. His 150 cows comprise a typical Angus herd—a practical operation that has to carry its own weight.

Angus cattle are important to Robert Kershaw. His eyes light up when he talks of

them. The walls of his office are filled with pictures, news clippings and mementos of his father's Angus herd. And Robert is filled with tales of his childhood days when his father's Angus herd was one of the most prestigious in the country.

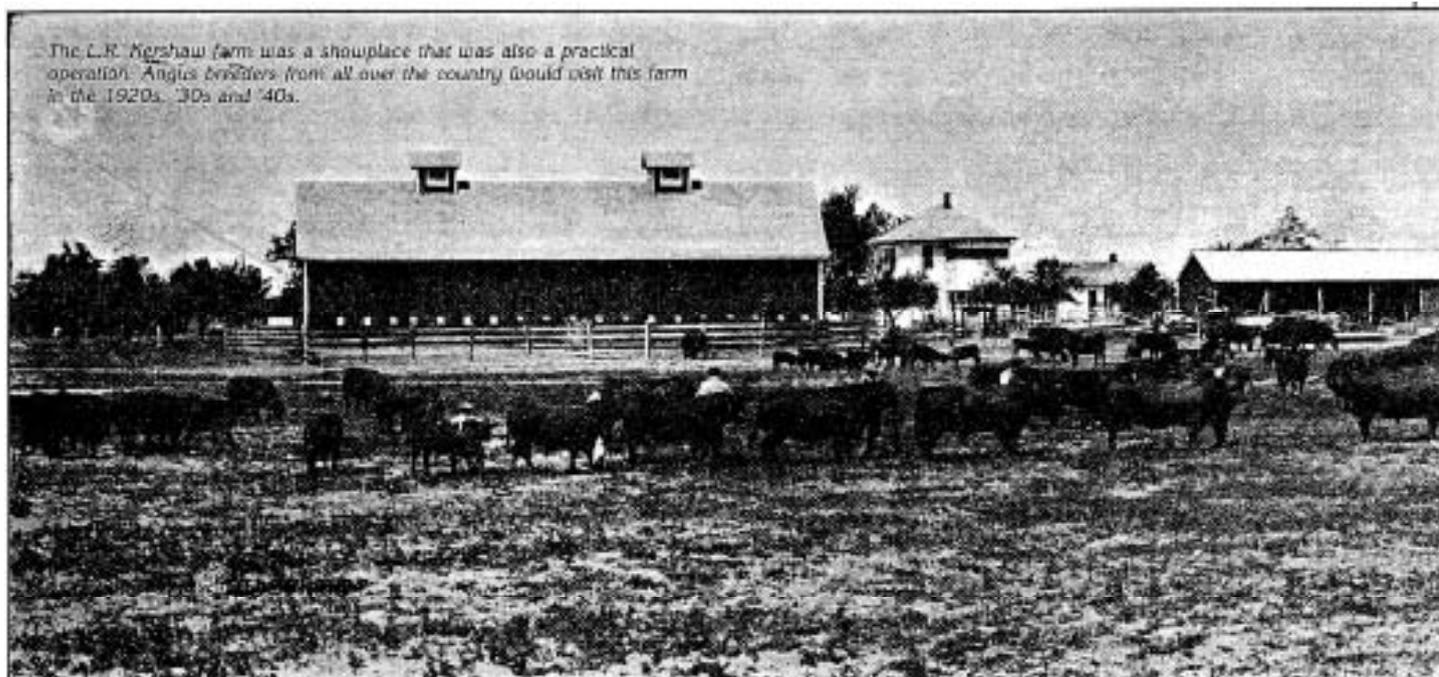
He says, "I grew up with a lot of famous people coming to our farm to look at cattle and I was just awestruck." He laughs when he recalls visits from J.C. Penney: "The manager of the local J.C. Penney store was always very nice to us because we would tip them off as to when Mr. Penney was coming to town. They then had time to spruce up their store before his visit."

"There were always people dropping in to look at cattle and I can remember Mom telling us to just take one piece of chicken because there was company to feed," says Robert.

L.R. Kershaw passed away in 1969 and Robert's mother in 1977. Even after his herd dispersion in 1948, L.R. loved to attend Angus sales and events to reminisce with old friends and breeders about the Angus era they helped make.

L.R. purchased his first Angus in 1912. From those first 50 cows grew a herd of 300 breed-influencing head. His belief in the breed helped "make the Southwest black," as Robert puts it.

Robert recalls a time when other Angus breeders in the area chastised his father for selling bulls too cheaply. His father would tell them, "The only way we're going to get black bulls out to compete with the Herefords is to sell them at the same price. If they're selling Herefords for \$200, then we're going to have to sell Angus for \$200 or we're not going to sell them."





Robert Kershaw has an office full of memorabilia from the days his father's Angus herd was one of the tops in the nation.

The elder Kershaw was a promoter. He believed in good black cattle and he believed in promoting them.

Whenever possible, he would use an International grand champion bull or a son of one in his breeding program. One such bull was Plowman (son of the 1911 International grand champion, Kloman). Kershaw purchased Plowman for \$3,050 after he won his class at the 1917 International. After an extensive show career (Plowman claimed 57 grand championships as a 2,250-lb. 3-year-old) the bull was sold in Kershaw's 1920 sale for \$40,000—a price unheard of at that time and a world record for many years. Plowman was the sire of the 1925 International grand champion, Playman of Sunbeam.

Playman of Sunbeam was purchased in dam from Kershaw by Judge Fullerton of Miami, Okla.

Kershaw sales were always a big event. There would be hundreds of people and a free barbecue. At one event they barbecued two steers, three goats and ten turkeys. It was at a Kershaw sale that Cal. Roy Johnston cried his first auction.

"I can remember Dad saying that in all the years he sold cattle, he never received a bad check from anyone," Robert says. "People were really genuine back then. Dad always said, 'Anybody that wanted to go out there and work to farm, had to have some substance to them.'"

The elder Kershaw himself was a remarkable man. In 1927 (the year Robert was born) he made an unsuccessful bid for governor of Oklahoma. Besides being a promoter, L.R. was also an innovator. Robert remembers his father being instrumental in securing the Swift and Co. packing plant to locate in Oklahoma City.

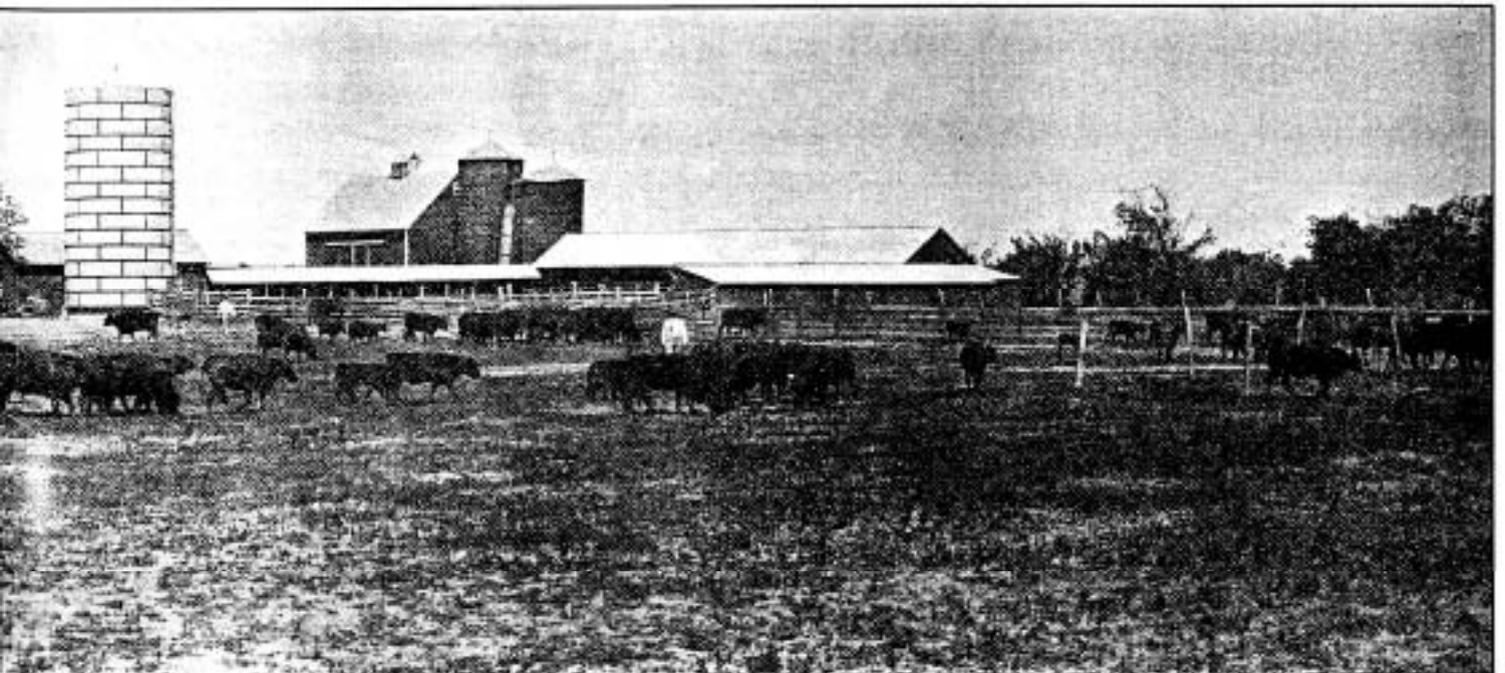
L.R. was also one of the first to demonstrate the benefits of Bermuda grass for pasture. Robert says, "Everyone wanted to get rid of Bermuda grass from their yards. They would dig it up and bring it to Dad. He'd plant it on the farm and pretty soon he had a good stand. He was instrumental in proving it was a good grass for this area."

A newspaper article of 1946 calls L.R. an "uncanny businessman" and quotes him as saying he "had to see checks coming in consistently as well as going out constantly."

"I can remember everybody always used to laugh at Dad and say he was calving horses. Dad always wanted big cattle," says Robert. Part of the reason for his type choice was customer demand. Most of L.R.'s customers were from Texas, Louisiana and Arkansas. As a result, the cattle had to be able to withstand and do well under Southern range conditions.

"I can recall the time Tom Slick came to the ranch to look at cattle. He didn't think the black cattle would stand up to the short grass and long walks to the water holes in south Texas," says Robert. "Dad told him to take a group of cows home with him. If, after a year, they didn't do as good or better than his other breed, then Dad would make other arrangements with him." Needless to say, the elder Kershaw made a believer out of Tom, and sold him more Angus cattle. It was these cattle that were later the foundation of the Kerr-McGee Angus herd which Dr. Paul Keesee went to Oklahoma to manage.

There are still herds in existence today which have roots in the Kershaw bloodlines. Robert says, "Most of the Witch of Endors that are in this part of the country will trace



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back to the Muskogee Witches. Generally, most cattle with the name Muskogee in the pedigree had something to do with Dad's herd."

Robert is currently using a Commodore bull in his herd that came from H.M. Harrington at Mounds. He says, "Harrington bought cattle from Dad in the '40s and his cattle still trace to those original animals which were mostly Revolution breeding."

The Kershaw herd was one of 125 herds around the country recently honored as a centennial herd (having been in the family for 50 years or longer). While Angus cattle are important to Robert, they are not his sole livelihood. Like his father before him, Robert is an entrepreneur. In addition to the land and cattle business, Robert is also in the oil business (buying and selling mineral rights), the building business (in connection with real estate) and the banking business (he is chairman of the board of the American Bank in Muskogee).

But having grown up with Angus cattle, they are in his heart. Robert says his father summed it up best when he once said, "I never was engaged in any business that was as fascinating and in which I received as much pleasure out of as I did in the breeding of Angus cattle. It was interesting from the standpoint of the people I met and with which I was associated."

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L.R. Kershaw (far left) received a lot of mileage from this 1917 international champion Angus steer. If later sold for \$5,940 and Kershaw donated the proceeds to the American Red Cross.

Kershaw Steer Internationally Recognized

The L.R. Kershaw herd of Muskogee, Okla., received much publicity after their steer, Muskogee Boy, was champion Angus steer at the 1917 International Live Stock Exposition (as well as grand champion steer at a number of state fairs). The steer sold in March of 1918 in the lobby of Oklahoma City's finest hotel. The price was a record \$5,940.

L.R. Kershaw donated the proceeds from his 1,800-lb. steer to the Red Cross. The carcass was frozen and shipped overseas to Gen. John Pershing in France. The hide from the steer was used to make a fur coat for the general. But as legend has it, the coat was stolen and never reached the general.

L.R. Kershaw later wrote, "The fact that this steer has made an international reputation and that he was raised, fed and exhibited from a section of the country which a few years ago was known for nothing except Longhorns, should mean lots to the cattle industry of the South and the Southwest."