

Saddle & Sirloin inducts

Col. Ray Sims

by Troy Smith



► This photo accompanied an April 1965 *Angus Journal* advertisement for Ray Sims' auctioneering services. He pioneered a faster-paced, practical marketing event that other livestock marketing professionals soon followed.

Business associates have called Ray Sims a consummate professional whose clear voice and distinctive auction chant was readily recognizable. Friends refer to Sims as a gentleman with a kind and generous heart — the kind of man who “wears well.” His professional acquaintances agree to that description, too — for they rank among his friends.

Though retired for close to 25 years, many buyers and sellers of purebred cattle still consider Ray Sims to be one of the best auctioneers they ever heard. His career spanned 46 years. But long before he laid his gavel aside, Sims' style became the model for young, aspiring auctioneers.

According to Keith Evans, retired director of communications for the American Angus Association, “Ray led a revolution that turned purebred auction sales from slow-moving, auctioneer-testifying showpieces into practical, effective marketing events. Nearly all auctioneers and other livestock marketing professionals follow the pattern laid down by Sims.”

A Missouri native, Sims was raised on a diversified livestock farm but developed an early interest in the auction business. He made up his mind to become an auctioneer while still in high school and, soon after graduation, attended Reppert's School of Auctioneering in Indiana. He returned to Missouri and went to work, initially for an older local auctioneer and then on his own.

“I had planned to get a college education, but just about the time I'd get ready to go, there would be a string of sales to work,” tells Sims. “I stayed busy enough that I never did get to go and finish college.”

Answering a call from Uncle Sam, Sims entered the Army during World War II. His service included a year stationed in the South Pacific, on Guadalcanal. Following discharge, Sims returned again to Missouri and took up where he left off, conducting auctions. In those very early years, most were farm sales, but Sims soon transitioned to selling purebred cattle and mainly Angus cattle. A veteran auctioneer of the day, Roy Johnston, helped introduce Sims to the seedstock auction business.

Quicker pace

“It was fortunate for my career that, about that time, the Angus business was expanding westward. Angus breeders were becoming established in Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Nebraska and Colorado. I started to acquire some of those sales — more and more as time went along,” explains Sims.

Demand for Sims' services grew steadily, because both buyers and sellers appreciated the momentum he set and maintained. Previously, a typical purebred cattle sale might offer 50 to



► **Left:** From left, country music star Leroy Van Dyke, Ray Sims and American Angus Association Communications Director Keith Evans during filming of the 1960s movie, *What Am I Bid?*

60 animals. Conducted at a slow pace, with much pontificating, an auction might take four or five hours. With Sims presiding and plying his rapid, rhythmic chant, the auction often was completed in half the time. His enthusiasm and quick pace spurred bidders on and generally resulted in higher selling prices.

“Everybody seemed to like it better,” Sims says. “The people on the seats didn’t want to be preached to; they wanted to get on with the selling of cattle. Those people make an auction. If the sale is speedy, you hold their attention. They get involved in the sale, with more enthusiasm, and that makes the market. The buyers liked it and the results were better for the seller.”

Sims understood what the sale meant to the host breeders. He knew they had made a great investment of time, effort and money to breed, raise and present their cattle for sale.

“They deserved to get all the value they could get from their cattle. They looked to me for help in getting a return on that investment. I knew I could do it if I worked hard, but I enjoyed it, too,” grins Sims.

Fellow Missourian Leroy Van Dyke is best known as a country music entertainer. But before becoming a successful recording artist, Van Dyke served as a fieldman for the *Chicago Drivers Journal*, working with many leading auctioneers, including Sims.

According to Van Dyke, a prominent sale manager of the day once claimed that Ray Sims could sell more cattle, move them more quickly through the ring and market them for more money than any auctioneer in history.

“He became the most imitated auctioneer in the industry, the inspiration for hundreds

of young auctioneers and the benchmark to which they all aspired,” Van Dyke adds.

Sims also inspired Van Dyke to attend auction school, and to write and record “Auctioneer,” the song that helped launch the singer’s career as an entertainer.

Broad reach

To borrow a line from the song, Sims’ “fame spread out from shore to shore.” While the majority of his sales were located in the Midwest and Southwest, Sims cried auctions all across the United States and in Canada. At the peak of his career, he traveled to 200 or more purebred sales per year. Additionally, Sims conducted the Kansas City Stocker/Feeder auction for 15 years. He also conducted sales for three U.S. presidents, including Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy.

Over the course of his career, selling an estimated 7,000 auctions, Sims watched the Angus industry change. The cattle changed, of course, but marketing changed, too.

“I saw the Angus breed struggle to compete, but eventually overcome Herefords as the dominant breed. I watched the use of AI (artificial insemination) grow, allowing many breeders access to popular sires and speed up herd improvement,” Sims says.

“Auctions have changed, moving away from the consignment sales that were so common years ago, to more breeders having their own production sales. And the prices have increased,” he adds.

Sims maintained a busy schedule until 1986. During the Gardiner Angus Ranch Sale, in Ashland, Kan., he announced that after completing that spring’s bookings, he would retire. For most of the next two decades he devoted more time and attention to his own farming and cattle operation. The cattle were dispersed about six years ago.

Along with his wife, Melva, Sims still lives in Missouri. The Raymore-Belton area has been his home since 1946. Since his retirement, Sims has been inducted into the Angus Heritage Foundation (1989) and the National Auctioneers Association Hall of Fame (1990). And he’s proud that auctioneering is really the only job he’s ever had.

“It’s a great profession and it’s been good to me. Every day was different. I always looked forward to the next day and the next sale. It really wasn’t like working because I loved doing it,” Sims says. “Fortunately, I’m still able to be active and I still like going to sales.”



Angus breeders announce fundraisers

Two Angus breeders have announced fundraisers to help with the expenses associated with the portrait and ceremony that will honor Col. Ray Sims as he is inducted into the Saddle & Sirloin Club Portrait Gallery this fall.

Gardiner Angus Ranch, Ashland, Kan., has designated one-half of the sale proceeds of Lot No. 330, GAR 5050 New Design 5619 (+16496974), out of GAR Objective N226 (+15614357 [AMF]) and GAR New Design 5050 (+13728513 [AMF-CAF-NHF]) to be offered during their bull sale Sept. 27, 2010, to the fundraiser.

In Ray’s honor, McCurry Bros. Angus, Sedgwick, Kan., will donate one-half of the sale proceeds of the Lot 10 pregnancy out of Sedgwick’s Erica S3321 (15803087) to be offered at their sale scheduled for Oct. 10, 2010. The calf from this pregnancy will be a full sister to Sedgwick’s Erica U332, the grand champion owned female at the 2010 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS).

Sims’ portrait will hang in the Saddle & Sirloin Gallery, the largest devoted to a single industry, with the earliest portraits of European stockmen dating from the 1700s. It was established in 1903 at the Union Stock Yards in Chicago, Ill., and moved to Louisville, Ky., in 1977.

— by Linda Robbins