

Golden Memories

Freeman Peek's Angus addiction spans more than 50 years.

by Joey Kubesch

"Si-kaow! Si-kaow!" This isn't an ancient fertility chant. It's the special call Freeman Peek of Lynn, Ind., uses to summon his nine cows for inspection.

Instantly moving from his usual quiet, conversational tone to a scream level, Freeman announced to his "girls" the arrival of their master. His herd gambolled toward a mailbox visit at a dead run. Asked whether he grains them, Freeman explains, "No, no grain, nothing. They come because they want to see me."

Such has been the rapport between this man and his cattle since he bought his first Angus heifer in 1939.

While puffing on his ever-present pipe, Freeman says with a chuckle, "I've had a lot of people tell me I've forgotten more than they know about cattle, but I think I forgot the wrong things. The first heifer I bought back in 1939 cost \$450 at a sale at Princeton Farms, which was then managed by Orville Redenbacher. She wasn't a particularly good heifer, but she had a good name and pedigree. She was a Ballindalloch Jilt. I sold her first calf, a heifer, for \$1,200. They were nothing great, but the family name was rare, from Scotland."

Peek worked for 14 years with Dr. Sigmund of Columbus, Ind., who was a surgeon. "He was a very smart man about cattle, but I didn't dare look at something

twice, or he bought it!" says Peek.

"Jack Frost managed the Purdue University Angus herd, and had a bull he told me had to go. I bought the bull for a little bit of nothing. His name was Peerless Rebellion II, and his first daughter from my herd was grand champion female at the Indiana Show."

Peek sold the heifer to Shadow Isle Farm in New Jersey after their female beat his heifer in the state fair open show. Armand Hammer was the owner of Shadow Isle; he paid \$1,100 for the heifer.

In his days with Dr. Sigmund, Freeman raised and sold several Blackcap Bessie cows... "that was a hot family, but there weren't too many good ones," Peek candidly admits.

As Freeman's horizons broadened, he and Sigmund travelled to J. Garrett Tolan's Springfield, Ill., farm and purchased a son and a daughter of Eileenmere 500. They also visited James Cash (J.C.) Penney's farm, and acquired two daughters of Eileenmere 467, from whence came a most successful cow, Briarmere Miss Pinehurst. Sigmund and Peek also purchased an Earl Marshall-bred bull from Gaugers Brothers' herd in South Dakota.

As we chat about the time capsule of knowledge Freeman possesses of our breed, pictures and catalogs are quietly requested. I sensed an exquisite mutual

admiration and cooperative spirit as Marcella, Freeman's wife of 46 years, dug out the many artifacts.

"See that cow in all that straw? We dug a hole to stand 'em in for those pictures!" she says.

At the 1958 Indiana State Fair, Peek's cattle won all female championships. Today,

when we see the Peeks at a show, we see a family enjoying each other as well as their cattle. There were four daughters born to Marcella and Freeman — Peggy, Sheila, Rhonda, and Christina. In 1978 Sheila died at age 24 of a brain tumor. Peggy is now Mrs. John Kidwell, and is a past





Above: Ever-Present pipe in his mouth, and Angus cattle nearby. Freeman Peek of Lynn, Ind., has 50 years of Angus farrey to his credit.

Below: In 1954, Short was "in," and meaty was what Freeman Peek had bred into Rothamere's Georgina. Her sire was Peerless Rebellion II of the Purdue Angus herd.



president of the Indiana Angus Auxiliary. Rhonda is Mrs. Greg Hill, and a member of the Indiana Angus Auxiliary. Christina is presently second vice president of the state auxiliary.

What's the dumbest thing Freeman has ever done in the cow business? It was to leave the Angus breed and spend two years with Horned Herefords on a 2,500-acre farm. "I objected most to training horns, pulling first calves, foot rot, and pinkeye!" he says.

The smartest thing he ever did, Freeman claims, was getting to know Hohnes Thompson of Cortland, Ind. It was in Freeman's 20s that he met Thompson. At that time, Thompson recommended that Dr. Sigmund get in touch with Freeman when he needed a herdsman. "Thompson started the Blackberry Family. They were big, smooth, really good cattle. He did a lot of line breeding, and even some inbreeding. He was one of the shrewdest breeders I have ever known Freeman says.

Interesting figures from a 1959 Bartholomew County Fairgrounds sale of Angus cattle gives us an idea of the changes our breed has seen: cows sold for \$500 and \$550; three bull calves brought \$295, \$280, and \$240. To contrast, Freeman's especially proud of his accomplishment this fall in topping the Randolph County Beef Breeders annual calf sale. There were 38 calves consigned (a crossbred calf historically tops the sale), and Freeman's calf by his renowned Pinette Pine Tar daughter brought \$975. To double his pride, the sire of the calf is Freeman's home bred son of Blacksmith, the Premier-bred bull, Peek's

Fifth Avenue. The calf weighed 730 pounds, and was calved March 14, 1993. Freeman is hopeful the buyers will raise and show the calf well—he's Peek's best steer ever.

In today's world of multiple products to force and free choice into our cattle for ever-spiraling costs and questionable benefits, Freeman's approach to nutrition is refreshing. "I don't feed mineral except trace mineral salt. I fertilize my pastures with phosphate and potash heavy, as called for by soil tests. My pasture is fescue and alsike clover."

He's had a 100 percent calf crop for 10 straight years. In 1993 his herd had three sets of twins by three different bulls. "My cows are out all winter and they're in good flesh. My hay comes from a 15-acre alfalfa field. I use half, sell the rest. We had three cuttings in 93, with some showers on the last cut."

Only one cow in Peek's herd was purchased. All but one go back to a Georgina cow, Rothamere's Georgina's out of the Peerless Rebellion II bull from Purdue (see photo).

"I'd rather have 10 good cows than 30 pretty good ones. At my age, that's all the cows I want to fool with — I love it. I fool with 'em every day!" he says.

This visiting cowgirl encourages fellow lovers of our breed to sit a spell and visit with Freeman Peek. We have in our midst a man who's carried a sparkle in his eye, and a soft spot in his heart for this kind of cattle. Freeman's a wealth of knowledge. Thanks Freeman, for all you've given to the Angus world.

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