

# THE ARTIST BEHIND THE SIGNATURE

## FRANK C. MURPHY

by Nancy Ann Sayre

**H**e has studied the expansion of our breed, growth of our Association and changes in our cattle from a unique point of view. He is well-known for capturing many of the highlights. Frank Murphy is an artist with a special interest in Angus cattle.

If you have ever mailed a letter with the Angus commemorative stamp, seen the *ANGUS JOURNAL* or attended a livestock event where an Angus booth or posters promote the breed, you are familiar with the work of this man. The F.C. Murphy signature appears on each of the original oil paintings copied for Association promotional prints, the stamp and several *JOURNAL* covers. His work also includes nearly every oil that hangs in the Association's St. Joseph headquarters.

From his familiar Angus calf and butterfly, to his more recent centennial poster montage, Murphy's work has seen wide circulation. His influence in the Angus world, though, stretches even farther for he has illustrated and designed Association ads and educational booklets since the early 1950s.

Murphy's relationship with the American Angus Assn. is deep rooted. His work has touched many in the livestock industry during a period when interest in the Angus breed has grown tremendously. The Association effectively used his talents to help promote their product, and in turn, that work formed the basis of Murphy's career. Free-lance artist from the start, he is best known for his Angus paintings and illustrations—in many circles.

"Among my friends and contemporaries I'm known by my work with the Angus Association," says Murphy, who now lives in Glen Ellyn, Ill., with his wife Evelyn. "People think of Angus when they think of me and that has been very satisfying."

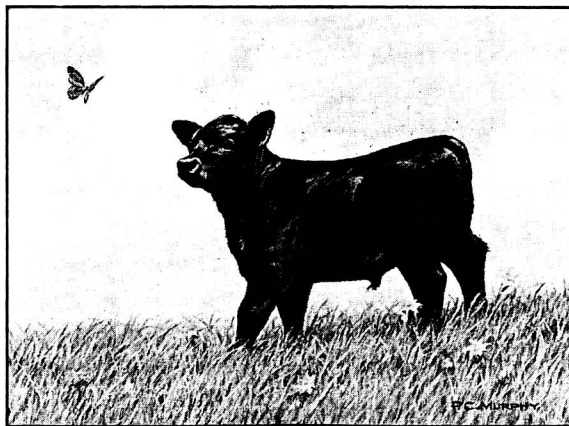
To depict Angus cattle realistically is difficult. The very subtle shadings of color are hard to capture on paper or canvas. In fact, it is comparable to doing the same on film; anyone who has tried to get good Angus pictures can attest to the difficulties.

"From an artist's viewpoint," explains Murphy, "an all black animal reflects the light around it—warm, cool or whatever. It's more like a mirror. A very interesting problem, but difficult."

Murphy likes a challenge, though, and painting black animals has made a distinctive career for the artist. His own history and experiences in the livestock industry are diverse.

Born in Vinton, Iowa, Murphy has always been interested in agriculture, although he had no formal training in that area. His mother's family had a ranch in Texas (in fact his great-grandfather settled in 1847 near Brownsville and ran the first stagecoach there). As a youngster, Murphy spent summers at the Texas ranch or working on other operations. He started drawing cattle, cowboys and ranch scenes, and even today Texas scenes and western history are predominant themes in his gallery work.

After studying engineering, architecture and journalism at Iowa State and the University of Texas—and



The first two oil paintings in Frank Murphy's successful free-lance career were these ideal bull and cow pictures requested by the Association when the headquarters moved to St. Joseph. He is shown here in the original board room (late 1950s photo) adding final touches.



despite discouragement from friends and family—Murphy finally decided to pursue art as a career. He attended both the American and Chicago Academies in Chicago and entered the livestock world as a freelance artist in 1947. Full-O-Pep feeds, a Quaker Oats Co. product, was Murphy's first account. Through contact with Harry Barger, an account executive with the agency handling Full-O-Pep ads, Murphy was first introduced to the American Angus Assn.

Barger was beginning to work on the Association's first big advertising campaign with Lloyd Miller, who was then the Association's director of public relations. Impressed by a Murphy steer illustration, (in the Full-O-Pep line), Barger decided they could use a similar approach in an Angus ad. Black Boy was the result and that was the start of the famous "Black family"—Murphy, Barger and Miller went on to create Mother Black, Mr. Black, Baby Black and Miss Black for various ad campaigns.

During this time, Murphy continued with Full-O-Pep and also took on many other agricultural accounts. Aside from illustrating many species of livestock and poultry, his work (for the Association and others) included the design of ads, booklets and other promotional material. His various assignments covered a wide spectrum of agribusiness and provided a solid rounding in ag-related art.

"I've covered nearly every angle of most animals, inside and out," elaborates Murphy. (His latest project with Salisbury Labs was an illustration of a hog's internal organs.) "I really enjoy doing this sort of thing. There's always something interesting to me."

The freedom of free lancing, of being able to find new challenges all the time and never knowing exactly what the next project might entail, has kept Murphy from working with just one company. He stresses, however, that he almost feels like a part of our Association—he has worked very closely with the people and it represents his oldest and longest-running account. And

his Angus work has presented its share of new challenges. Take, for instance, his various oil paintings.

The first Angus painting (Murphy's first canvas for any client) was requested soon after the Association planned to move its headquarters to St. Joseph (1956). Logically, the initial approach was to depict the ideal Angus of the time. Pictures of a bull and cow resulted, followed by several others in a series.

The artist now refers to the first two as "those big fat monsters" and emphasizes how difficult "for instance" or typical animals are to portray. However, the prints of his ideal bull, cow and calf, steer and baby calf have been distributed to all corners of the Angus world. (He must periodically update them, of course, to reflect changes in cattle type.)

Murphy finds it much more satisfying to create a scene with a special mood and atmosphere—the kind of picture that just builds up in his mind. A perfect example of such an accomplishment is the representation of the first Angus bulls brought to this country (eventually printed as a stamp in 1973).

In 1966, Miller (then the Association's executive secretary) wanted an oil illustrating the start of Angus history in the United States—an event which was soon

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*Frank Murphy is the artist whose paintings, illustrations and ad designs have helped to promote our breed since the late 1950s. He stands here with one of his most familiar works.*

to celebrate its 100th birthday. Murphy followed up with some research and claims the resulting scene just sort of grew from his reading.

The project of actually having the Angus commemorative stamp made was Bob Snyder's undertaking (Snyder was public relations director at the time), but Murphy was responsible for the design. Although the stamp proposal was accepted, the original design was changed and it was really by chance that the Angus bull and Longhorn scene was used for the stamp—a Postal De-

partment official with roots in Texas had seen and liked Murphy's painting.

The centennial montage (featured on the JOURNAL's January cover and as a poster for the Association's 100th year) represents one of Murphy's most recent efforts. His approach to the centennial ties together both the history and organizational aspects of the Association, resulting in a colorful expression of its many facets and accomplishments.

"This was especially fun for me," says the artist. "I was able to work in my knowledge of the Association and develop many things I knew were so significant. It was really a process of elimination—you don't know where to stop when you're this intimately connected with an association like this . . . I hope that it will have a lot of meaning to many people." (Murphy will be in St. Joseph for the Association's Centennial Celebration this September to sign copies of the poster.)

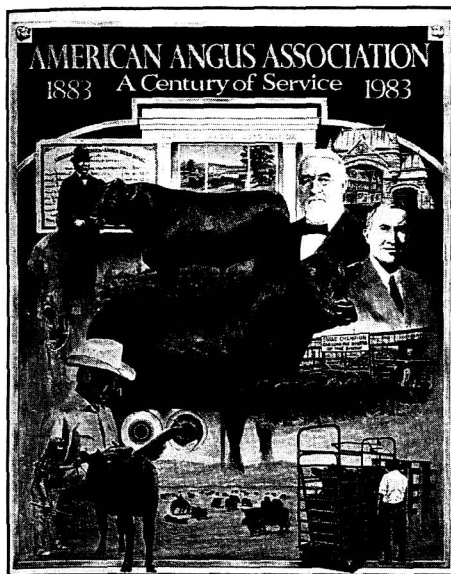
Clearly evident from the satisfaction Murphy takes in the results of each assignment he accepts, art is more than his livelihood, it is his life. And his work with our Association continues to hold a special place.

"What's been really great," he says, "has been that I came in with Harry and Lloyd at the beginning of probably the greatest expansion period of the Angus breed. I like to feel that between a group of us we made some contribution to that success.

"This tradition of excellence in promotion of the breed continues today under Keith Evans and Dick Spader. Perhaps the challenges have never been greater.

"It's been most rewarding to be able to do what I like to do best and feel that it's appreciated and a part of something worthwhile."

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*Frank Murphy will be in St. Joseph to sign copies of this poster during the Association's Centennial Celebration in September. The montage highlights our organization's first 100 years and holds special meaning for the artist who has worked so closely with the Association.*