

# Then, Now And Tomorrow

By Colin Kennedy

We aren't sure of the time of our first encounter; it was far back up the road, many moons ago. So when Dave Canning paid a visit this spring to Iowa and the *JOURNAL* office it was the occasion for a lot of good Angus conversation.

Dave's enthusiasm for the breed reminds me very much of that of his old boss, Kenneth McGregor. It was Ken who sent him down east many years ago with a shipment of heifers to help blacken Virginia. Dave stayed to straighten the fenceless operation and a lot of breed history has been written since.

Conversation got around to some of the old-time herdsmen. "After World War I there was a great influx of Scots. They had served in the military and many went to Glencarnock in Canada and then to the States. They were master fitters and showers."

*Continued on page 165*



*Jim Ironside at the halter of the Grand Champion Bull at the 1952 Eastern States Exposition.*



*Pete McIver as herdsman at the Cold Saturday Farm, Finksburg, Maryland.*



*George Edwards with the Grand Champion Steer "Jack" exhibited by Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa at the 1961 International.*

Names mentioned included Jimmie Ironside and Pete McIver. And of course the Edwards brothers, three of whom were prominent with Angus herds. "Another good one," Dave mentioned, was Colin Campbell. "Although he was a second generation Scot he was typical of the breed - - a great eye for a show prospect and an uncanny knack for developing a young beast."

It was typical of these men to have their cattle at "12 o'clock" for what ever show had been designated - - usually the International at Chicago. We recall one of the Iowa State Grand Champion Steers, probably Mah Jongg of 1925, on whom we were getting a story from Herdsman George Edwards for the student daily. When we got around to ration the champion the canny Scots' answer was "oh, a handfull of this and a dab of that."

In later years in the breed, we recalled many of our herdsmen managers have come out of strong livestock schools - - Oklahoma State, Ohio State and Penn State.

It was inevitable that our conversation would get down to the era of small cattle and the dwarfism that hit all three British breeds about the same time. Dave: "Up to about World War II our International Champion Bulls of 1939, 1940 and 1941 were individuals with acceptable scale. Envious Blackcap B 6th, Glencarnock Eric of Cremona and Wintonier 4th were not small bulls, they were reasonably large, and thick, meaty bulls."

A partial answer to the era of smaller was recalled. The leading judge of the day was a man of small stature, a point about which he was somewhat sensitive. With big cattle he was all but obscured. Almost without exception his champions were on the small, refined side. Other judges were inclined to follow his pattern, or so the story goes.

Dave: "One mistake we made in suddenly getting our cattle larger, and it was a natural one in trying to speed up progress, was that some got too narrow and losing in constitution and vigor. Remember how our Field Day experts used to talk about heart girth and spring of rib? We still need an animal that makes two tracks in the snow. Ken McGregor used to tell me that the best way to judge an

animal was to stand at his head and look down his back.

"But we have been fortunate in the Angus breeding in getting back to a more practical, and larger beast, by having a stockpile of genes and pure strains going back to the good old herds. And now that we have stabilized in the matter of size we are getting red meat on them again. Our western Canadian friends have had little trouble in this respect. Because they were practical cattlemen and interested in pounds the small cattle were never popular with them. When they came down to the States for a sale it was the bigger, "old fashioned" cattle that were a bargain. And they bought them.

"I think in the Angus business we have made a mistake in somewhat forgetting the importance of the female in our breeding programs. In theory a calf inherits equally from his sire and dam. But I find that Thoroughbred horsemen figure that the genes contributed by the mare account for up to 70 per cent to the colt's outcome."

I mentioned that John Brown of El-Jon, who was responsible for countless famous matings, including Earl Marshall, always told me that in great breeding bulls the dam's contribution was 60 per cent.

All of which brings to mind, as I write this, of a plane trip from Chicago to Baltimore, some years ago, to the Eastern National Show. Quite by chance my seat companion was Cameron Hawley, a Madison Avenue advertising executive and the author of a best selling novel, "Executive Suite", later made into a successful movie. Hawley had been born on a South Dakota cattle ranch and always kept his interest in cattle, which included an Angus herd in Pennsylvania.

Cameron Hawley had an interesting theory. "All great sires are genetic 'sports', sires while the product of good matings are better than their ancestry would indicate". He cited Earl Marshall in Angus, Prince Domino in Herefords and Man O'War in Thoroughbreds. "Certainly it is possible, by good matings, to insure improvement from generation to generation. But it is slow work. The real progress in any field of livestock is made by these genetic 'sports' whose sons and grandsons carry the breed farther than it would ordinarily go." Again I say, an


*Continued on page 168*

interesting theory.

The talk got around to size present and future. Dave: "good rule of thumb for cow efficiency is an animal that will wean a calf half her weight, given normal care. I doubt that this will ever include many cows over 1,400 pounds. A 700 pound weaning weight is certainly a rarity. Maybe a cow between 1,200 and 1,400 pounds is a more realistic goal to go for. With the bigger cows there is the problem of higher maintenance costs, fertility and longevity. I think bull size has been rather well established at 2,200 to 2,400 pounds providing he is not too heavy up front. Unassisted calving is certainly an Angus trait that should be preserved."

Other breed characteristics were discussed. "I wonder," Dave said, "if we are not too much concerned with the brisket on our cattle. In the retail market corned beef is certainly one of our premium cuts. A point that is seldom mentioned in the States, but is very important in New Zealand, is whether an animal has a strong jaw. Where roughage is the bulk of the ration this is an important point to consider."

We agreed that the change is our Angus back to the practical had been for the good. Aside from minor mistakes the change had been made without too much sweat. Dave: "As long as we keep the length and the height we now have and watch capacity and muscling we are in good shape. We don't need any single barrel Angus. We must always look for good feet and legs, guard against droopy rumps.

"The future looks awfully good to me." 

## ***Lauderdale To Head Mid-South Association***

Joe Frank Lauderdale, Hernando, Mississippi, was elected president of the Mid-South Angus Association at their meeting in Memphis.

Elected vice-president was Doug McGill, Baldwyn, Mississippi; and serving as secretary-treasurer is Reeves Hughes, Germantown, Tennessee.

Director's posts went to Harold Lewis, Carlisle, Arkansas; Reggie Caviness, Blue Mountain, Mississippi; James H. Branch, Memphis, Tennessee; David Rhea, Somerville, Tennessee; W. H. Gibson, Memphis, Tennessee and John S. Smith, Jackson, Tennessee. 