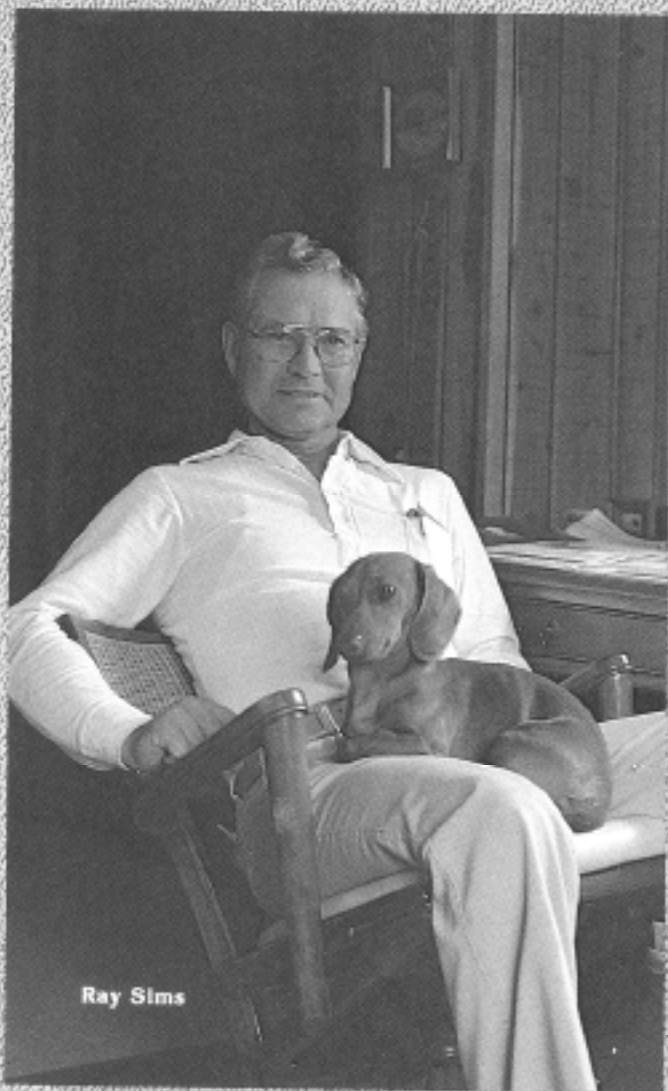


RAY SIMS: THINGS HAVE COME FULL CIRCLE



Ray Sims

"My life has been dictated by that date book; I kept it in my pocket at all times, but now I've laid it down. It took me five years to make up my mind to do it."

By Jim Cotton, Editor

An auctioneer of purebred livestock is a bit like a U.S. Senator:

- 1) There aren't very many of them;
- 2) They must keep their mouth engaged to their mind;
- 3) They're highly visible, almost public **personas**. If they're transparent or incompetent, it's quickly obvious.

Ray determined he was going to become a livestock auctioneer while in high school and enrolled in a home study course from the Fred Reppert School of Auctioneering.

Following his graduation from high school Ray tells, "I caught a bus and went to the school that fall. Decatur, Indiana." The Reppert school was one of the few available for folks wanting to study this trade. Reppert was a leading auctioneer of the day, Ray recalls, along with Art Thompson, Roy Johnston, the Garton Brothers, Guy Petit, to name a few he followed in his formative days.

It was intensive in Decatur. "But I'd made up my mind, and I didn't see anything else," he says of his career choice.

Fresh from school he was when Ray sold his first sale back home at Greenridge, Mo., southwest of Sedalia. That took nerve, to come back home and try out in front of the folks that knew y'. But, Ray didn't falter and began selling farm sales in the area. "There were a lot of them in the early 1940s. I was fortunate in that I worked alongside a fellow by the name of Hughey Johnston, and later Colonel Roy Johnston heard me and invited me to sell club calves with him up at St. Joseph, Mo."

Ray acknowledges that may have been his "break." Plans for a partnership between the two were suspended. "I had a venture with Uncle Sam," Ray explains. He went overseas in early 1943 for 20 months.

When he returned from the service, Ray studied public speaking and animal husbandry at the University of Missouri, then moved to Belton, Mo., and resumed his association with Col. Johnston. It was a long-term arrangement. Johnston was a model for Sims and a pace-setter for the industry and well as the style of auctioneering. He helped move sales away from oratorical showpieces to more practical and less extravagant

events. Ray says of the typical auctioneer in that era:

"They would talk. They would expound. It would take from 1 p.m. to 5 or 6 p.m. to sell 50 cattle. Then we came into the Roy Johnston era and he speeded them up."

Ray credits Johnston with helping boost the fortunes of the Angus breed. "His style. . . created enthusiasm."

The art of an auctioneer:

"(It) depends on whether you know what you're talking about or just blowin'."

People began looking toward Angus as a change, as a breed with a following and potential for growth.

There were other breeders, managers, owners Ray cites as responsible for carrying the momentum forward. Phil Ljungdahl, Dave Canning, J.B. McCorkle, Joe Hooten were sale managers right for the changing times, men with vision and drive. There were breeders, too, both from within the breed and others attracted to it and the lifestyle and fraternal qualities it offered. He remembers Ralph L. Smith, Penny and James, J. Garret Tolan, Otto Battles, men of industry such as Bill Mennon of Mennon Shave Cream, Eugene Dalton of the garment industry, Allan Ryan of Ankony and Royal Typewriter, Myron Fuerst, Freeman Keyes.

Association fieldmen and members of the livestock press included Milt Miller of Texas, Benny Scott for **The Cattleman**, Bobby Vincent of **The Ranchman** (Okla.), Claude Willett for the **Drovers Journal**, "Red" Anderson for the **Angus Journal**, Jim Orton for the **Kansas Stockman**. Others: George Fritz, Dean Spencer, Darrell Overholt, Veryl Jones, Tom Adams, Wally Gladdish, Bobby Duprea, Bill Barton, Jess Cooper were familiar names and faces working with Colonel Sims at ringside.

Bobby Vincent wrote in **The Ranchman** and labelled Ray Sims "The Belton Belter" after his home of residence. It was 1961 and the JFK expression, "New Frontier" was much in vogue. Here's what Vincent had to say of the Ray Sims of those days:

"Nowadays, to get along in this business, an auctioneer has to know



Earlene Sims

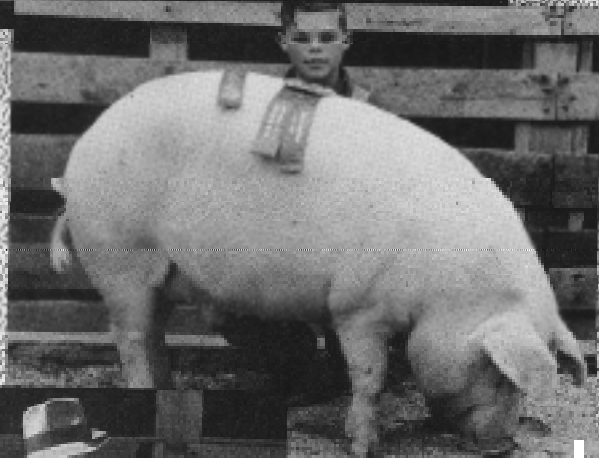
Their plans and future travels:

"I'm going to . . . stop at every historical marker and have her read it."

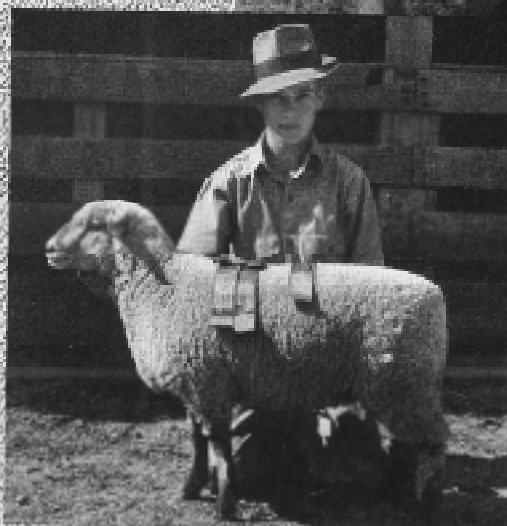
At the Cardener Angus Ranch Sale where Ray's retirement from the ring was announced, April 3, 1966. From left, Harry Cardener, Betty Cardener, Kay Cardener (Ray's), Mark Cardener, Ray



In front of the Kansas Cowbelles Booth, the Sims brand to Ray's right.



1957, Soles, Mo. 4-16, 1st Prize, 3-year-old, Ray, 1st Champion Lamb and Kid and was also named "Best Showman."



his business. It's hard now to get any position where you can do folks pay for listening. The days of the swashbuckling, big-voiced, and big-hatted Colonels are history, Today's leading auctioneers are truly men of business.

"A good example of the New Frontier Colonels is Ray Sims of Belton, Mo., seen mostly and regularly at the leading Angus sales throughout the land. Colonel Sims needs to be properly classified as a man of business. . . He still looks more like a youngster than the seasoned selling power he is.

"He doesn't give his listeners time to get pessimistic. Ringmen who are called upon to stand at the ringside throughout auctions appreciate auctioneers that get them off their feet quicker by doing business with the bidders instead of arguing the selling force into a predicament."

High praise for the man approaching the mid-point in his career. Such acceptance, though, was based on what people—both those doing the selling chores and those who hired his service—came to expect from Ray Sims. He'd be there, on time, and enthusiastic about the task before him. He traveled to 7,000 sales and touched down in 44 states earning the reputation.

Of auctions:

"It's just a method that always fascinated me—I loved it."

Blizzards were occasional problems he had to surmount, but he was very seldom late or unable to fill a commitment. An auto accident in 1951 was severe enough to force him to cancel his remaining spring sales that year.

Travel by air was helpful. He can vividly remember only one scare on a flight across the Red River Valley toward Wichita Falls. "The plane was a four-motor with space for 20 passengers. It was jumpin' and buckin', and our pilot for some reason bore into this storm at full throttle. We hit a pocket and the back door popped off. Got pretty serious there until we landed."

Mrs. Sims, Earlyne, traveled with Ray when her schedule and demands at home would allow. She had to endure his single-mindedness. "My wife was always after me to stop at every historical marker. She didn't realize I had one thing in mind and that was to be at that sale on time."

Ray admits to a shade of duplicity

in meeting the future Mrs. Sims. It was a bit contrived.

"She kinda thought it was a blind date, but an ol' boy at Windsor where she lived was a good friend of mine... I had him set us up.

"I took her to a dance, she was a good, light dancer. We loved to do that. We still do, pretty often."

Earlyne apparently was the type of helpmate this busy marketer needed for she kept the family on track while the public made its demands on her husband. Asked what he would change or do over again Ray says without hesitation: "I would've married the same woman and adopted the same two children."

"I wanted to quit while I thought I could still get the ball over the plate."

He doubts he could have pursued such a career had it not been for Earlyne keeping the home and raising the children, Daye and Tullis. She says she'd never lived on a farm, but when the kids wanted to show calves, that's where they moved. "It's made a wonderful life."

Now it's their turn. Traveling the United States is their goal. "I've looked at it, but I want to go back and see it now," says Ray.

It must have been evident to those that hired him: Ray brought his values to their sale. He understood family and the importance of this sale day to its future welfare. The hopes and aspirations of Mom and the kids were riding on the outcome; the auctioneer was a pivotal character in the drama about to be played out.

"To me, a sale should be handled in a very dignified way. The man that I sell for may need to pay a note, may be paying off the mortgage, may be sending his kids to school. That was always deep in my heart and mind because I always felt I was working for people that had a purpose.

"Paying off the farm, educating the children, living a better life, that was what registered cattle were all about. I've taken it seriously.

"I've taken it to heart to keep it that way. I didn't always get done what we wanted to get done but I never did get behind the microphone that I didn't give it all I had, and my date book was always closed for Sunday sales."

His work brought him into contact with captains of industry and political figures. He sold cattle for Presidents Eisenhower and Truman, sold cattle to Vice-President Johnson, and

Plying his trade...



January 21, 1952: Then-record price for an Angus female of \$35,100. Shown with Blackcap Bessie 4th of Sunbeam are Ray, Sunbeam Farms owner Sam Fullerton and children, Sunbeam manager Phil Lyngdahl. Sold to Ralph L. Smith, Chillicothe, MO

Paul Canning, Ray



Ray, Ham James, Phil Lyngdahl



Frank Richards, Association secretary, Ray, Bill Barton, Association fieldman

Leroy Van Dyke, Nashville, Tenn., on "The Auctioneer's Song" he authored while stationed in Korea, 1953:

"The song just came to me over there. Later it sold three million records around the world. Ray has been my idol all my life. I can remember as a kid showing calves at the American Royal and watching as Ray sold 1,000 head of cattle without stopping for six hours."



Ray, E.H. "Red" Anderson, Delbert Edwards



House set for the Larry Van Dyke motion picture featuring his "Ludlow" song. Ray Grant provided the background music. In the box Ray and Keith Evans of the Association, Bill Roche - picking Dads

demonstrated the art of presenting registered sale cattle for President Kennedy.

"You're always impressed with the man who holds the highest office in the land, but I was especially impressed with two presidents. JFK seemed to be quite a gentleman. He moved with quite a sense of grace. He knew what he was about.

"And Harry Truman was ready to fire at any minute. He was right up on the bit all the time. He was sharp. When I was around him, he was always talking about what a great country this was. He said he was going to spend the rest of his days telling folks what a great country we had."

"I always thought a lot of my parents. They had a lot of bearing on me."

Of course, everyone knows the life wasn't plumb or deadly earnest all the time. One doesn't spend four-plus decades traveling, sharing, selling with companionable spirits without a good measure of humor and memories spicing the hours on the road. All the funny things would fill a half dozen cassettes. Perhaps one of Ray's most cherished stories involves Jim Silver, the man responsible for arranging the date between Earlyne and Ray. Jim was a cattle trucker. His episode includes a lady driving a convertible, Jim's "trick cow," and what Ray calls "some green solution."

Another yarn describes a cow in the ring, the cattleman's daughter, and the status of being "bred back," an actual incident involving ringman Bobby Vincent.

Ray's witnessed great change in the cattle industry and the Angus breed. He watched the new breed influx nudge Angus producers away from the traditional attitudes and type. He's seen breed associations discarding their animosity toward one another, adopting a spirit of togetherness in promoting beef to the public.

Cattle promotion in the 1940s and Fifties was easier than now, Ray thinks. Before the introduction of A.I., it was common to promote the bull through his sons. Today, it takes more imagination, but he's confident.

He considers registered breeders the leaders of the industry. "A lot of people have put their time, money, efforts, and resources into producing better cattle, and they are leaving the breeds better than when they found them. That's what it's all about and anytime you detract from that, you are putting them in a category of ordinary cattle."

There have been attempts to sell

Rubbing shoulders...

Ray at the risk with President John F. Kennedy at Senator Robert Kerr farm in Oklahoma. President Kennedy had never seen a livestock auction until that one.



Ray sold dairy cattle for the Truman family. Harry Truman, nephew of the President, Russell Feiback (also an auctioneer), the President Ray, another nephew, Gilbert Truman

cattle through methods other than the time-tested auction method. Ray's seen most of them, and he understands good promotion is the foundation of selling.

"I'm not against anything that's honorable and will make money. But, it's hard to beat the auction method with everyone setting their own value on the product.

"The auction method will always be around because people get to a place in life where they want to quit, or they want to change or sell out for some reason.

"In 24 hours, you can bundle that money up and at the end of the day, you've gone to the bank and you've closed the store. That's a great advantage. It's competitive and up front where everyone can see it."

Ray states he's not retired in the sense of quitting. He's transferred his energies to old familiar loves and things—back to the land, horses, some feeder stock on hand. "I've retired from selling sales, but I'm doing more physical work than I have in years. I get up pretty early every morning and go to the barn, go to the cattle, and do it for a business and not for a hobby or just for pleasure. I really wanted to quit so we could spend more time together and travel."

It's taken Ray about five years to arrive at this decision and he really wondered if and how he could just walk away from it. The setting for his announcement was the Gardiner spring sale at Ashland, Kan., April 5, 1986.

"I knew it would be awful hard because I had so many friends and people I loved to sell for. Those were my steady customers. When it came time to announce it, I really couldn't," Ray confides, offering a glimpse of a very private man. "I had to turn it over to Henry Gardiner and Phil Ljungdahl.

"I got myself ready ahead of time. I haven't been sorry."

Screenwriter Horton Foote has enriched American arts with two legendary works. "To Kill a Mockingbird" and "Trip to Bountiful." In the latter, the main character tells her son: "You might lose what you had, but you never lose what it's given you. We don't have this land or this house anymore, but we still have what it meant to us."

Somehow, that sentiment applies to all the Angus industry participating in a new aspect of the Ray Sims era.

The most personal reward must be having such impact on the fortunes of so many. Few are chosen to such a high calling, fewer fulfill it so masterfully. It's a well-deserved transition, and none of us are sorry either, Ray, in allowing you to enjoy it.



With the family . . .



Good year, 1968 Daughter Days with Tully (Tully) at the halter—the year his steer won Champion Angus, Supreme Reserve Grand Champion Steer, Arizona National



John Wayne came by to visit



Wife at the halter of her Missouri State Grand Champion Female. Sam Barr next to Ray



Our thanks to Ann Huffine, executive secretary of the Montana Angus Assn., for contributing material used in this article.

Country Gentleman