

From a phone conversation overheard:

- ☎ *"I think the experience just did them a world of good... yes, exactly."*
- ☎ *"Right, especially at this time of year with the weather an' all."*
- ☎ *"No, that will be fine. It'll be good to see you again."*
- ☎ *"Saturday—no, wait. We'll all be out at the farm, I forgot."*
- ☎ *"No problem. In fact, it's even better—we'll be unwinding. You remember how to get there? All right, Saturday, at the farm."*
- ☎ *At "the farm... the farm... the farm."*



A more pastoral scene would be hard to find. Lake Erie in the distance keeps frost at bay when the grape harvest is on.

AT THE FARM

A place called Ballantrae

By Jim Cotton, Editor

Usually, Americans assign a goodly measure of personal commitment or emotional mythology to the word "farm". Unless, of course, one's memories are of a desperate existence of a Great Depression—battered ranch or farm where times remembered can be anything but "great".

But traditionally we in this country pay homage to the family farm as one of the foundations of our nation and culture. Today, the role it plays in the lives of many serves as a point of reassurance, a place of "time out" from harried lives and careers, a source of root stock and refreshment.

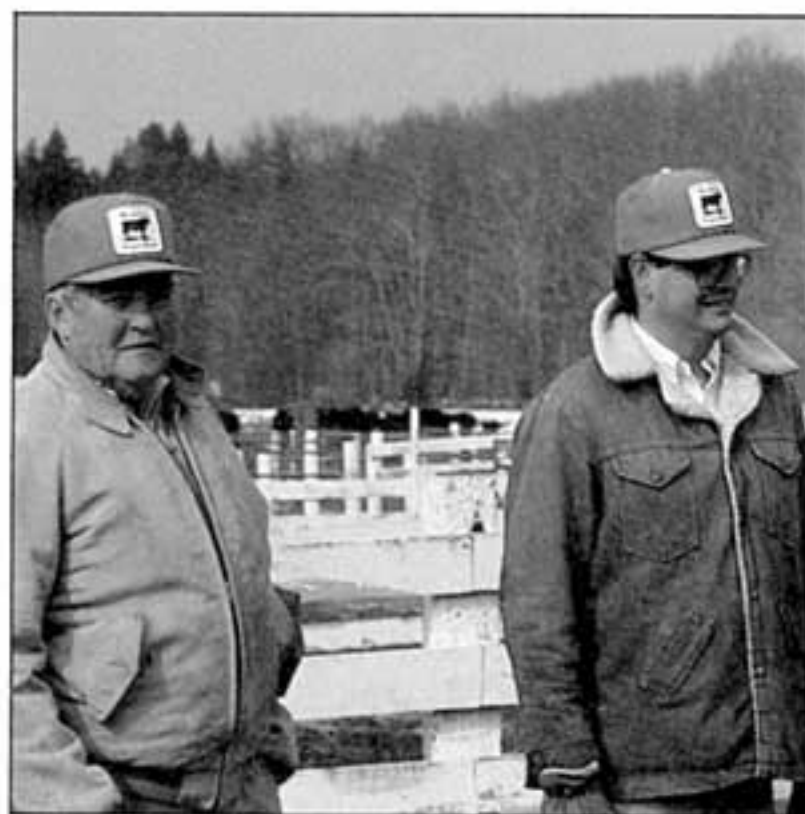
For those so fortunate to raise their families on the home place, the farm instills a sense of the soil into the soul. The farm described here represents such a place, one where growth, sturdiness, and a lifelong allegiance is forged toward preservation, improvement, and lasting values.

Five generations, now, on the fields of Ballantrae. From its more lofty portions, one can view the cobalt gray of Lake Erie or its pacific blue if the day is agreeable and the light is right. To the founder, Samuel Nixon of Ballynahinch, Ireland, the scene and surroundings bore promise for the future. He was justified. Each generation has made its improvements and additions in the form of land, buildings, and vineyards. The ethic of caretaking and stewardship was ingrained.

Father Nixon must have been quite the enterprising and forward-thinking gent. He also founded the oldest family-owned independent telephone company in the United States in 1897, not long after the patents by Alexander Bell had expired. During its 92 years, the Chautauqua & Erie Telephone Corporation has grown to become one of the top 100 independent telephone companies in terms of gross revenue. Ownership and direction remains with the Nixon family at nearby Westfield, N. Y.



Peter Nixon
Ballantrae Angus Farm
Westfield, New York



Alastair and Peter Nixon.

In addition, the Honorable Samuel Frederick Nixon served as Speaker of the Assembly of New York State (its state legislature) from 1899-1905.

Ballantrae is located in the heart of the grape belt, sometimes called New York State's "Blue Belt" in recognition of the vital importance of the Concord grape to its farm economy. The narrow coastal zone of Chautauqua County has been called "irreplaceable" by the New York Commission on the Preservation of Agricultural Land. This lee shore of Lake Erie contains almost 50 percent of the total Empire State's vineyard acreage and most of its processing plants. Welch's dominates as the most notable nationally, Westfield Maid is a local loyalty.

Tread lightly, treat gently the soil beneath

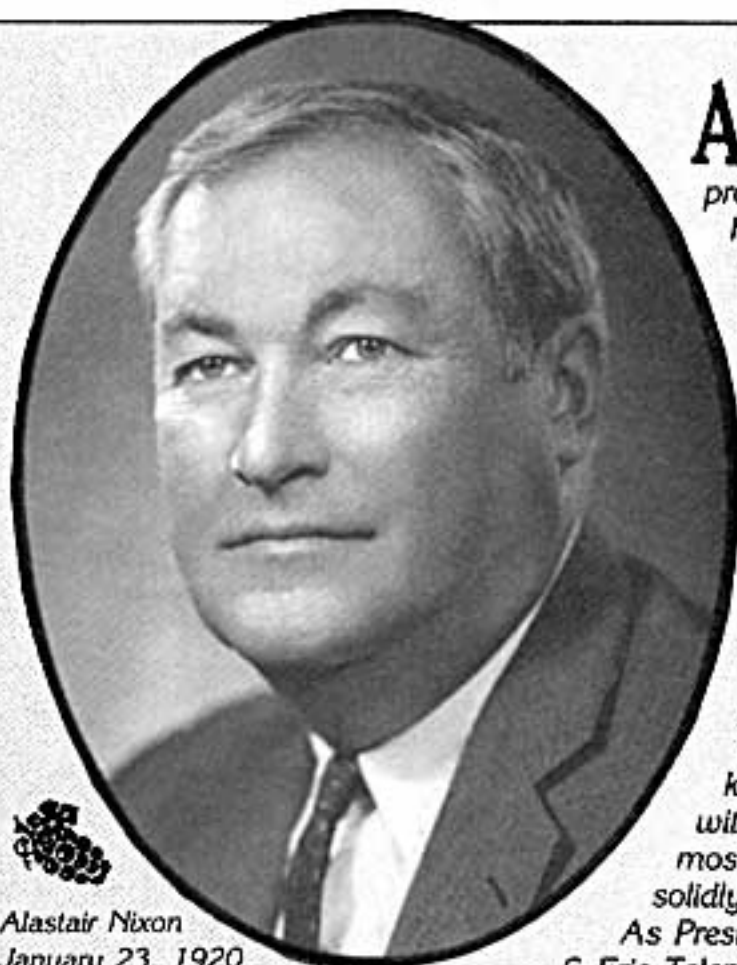
In contrast to the wintry reputation of Buffalo to the north, the area enjoys a record of the least frost damage of any major Concord grape producing area in the country, thanks to the moderating influence of Lake Erie. This microclimate plus expertise of the growers and research support from Cornell University and other agencies have created the single most important grape producing and processing district in the USA, outside of California. The Nixon Brothers Farm established in 1868 as a small diversified dairy and fruit farm has grown to some 500 acres. The gravel and loam soil so well-

sued to Concord grapes affirms the importance of dirt to destiny.

Eighty percent of the state's Concord production is in the Chautauqua grape belt. This level pushes New York to the nation's second ranking grape-growing and wine-producing state. It's home to nearly 1,500 vineyards, covering 38,000 acres, producing an annual average crop of 170,000 tons, worth typically \$30 million. The state's wineries produce about 30 million gallons, generates gross revenue exceeding \$200 million, and with the grape industry employs approximately 20,000.

Grape growers are paid like maple syrup producers, on the basis of sugar, called "brix". Sugar content of wine grapes is usually .8 percent which will produce a 10 percent alcohol level. Despite all the favorable combinations presented in the "Blue Belt"—Lake Erie, gravelly soil, and wind drainage—the grape grower is not sheltered from competition of soft drinks or the citrus farmers. The Nixons have sought diversified markets: Welch's for jams, jellies, and grape juice; their wine grapes such as catawbas and French hybrids are offered to Taylor and Myer Wineries. And, they have the Ballantrae Angus herd for additional opportunities from the farm's marginal land.

Continued on Page 100



Alastair Nixon
January 23, 1920
February 1, 1988

Alastair Nixon exemplified a life lived toward productivity and progress and was recognized by his peers for that quality. He excelled in telephony and grape husbandry, and while he credited son Peter's expertise as responsible for the enviable herd at Ballantrae, Alastair confided his greatest thrill in recent years was witnessing the arrival of an outstanding array of E.T. calves. He applauded such harnessing of practical science. He was no stranger, of course, to the accelerating pace of technology. Fiber optics and laser transmission of information found its natural proving ground in voice communications and the telephone industry. He saw it begin and urged it along in his own company. But more than a receptive attitude, Al Nixon possessed a keen business acumen based on service. Along with his father and brothers, he guided a modest, mostly rural independent telephone corporation solidly into position as one of the top 100 in its field.

As President and General Manager of the Chautauqua & Erie Telephone Corporation, he invested more than 30 years of service giving service and was elected to the Hall of Fame of the New York Telephone Assn. by virtue of both his business sense and his commitment to community welfare.

Under his direction, the Chautauqua & Erie Telephone Corporation expanded from a net income of \$29,228, 4,846 stations, and a plant value of \$745,326 in 1952 to a net income of \$917,000, 13,207

stations, and a plant value in excess of \$15,000,000 thirty years later. The company entered the digital age from a posture of sound fiscal strength.

There was no school nor department of telephony when Al Nixon began his training. He studied hotel administration at Cornell University after graduating from Pawling School in 1940. The Cornell years were interrupted by World War II where he served as a Captain in the 1st Cavalry Division in the South Pacific Theater. During his stint at Cornell, he was also captain of the track team.

When he returned to his studies, he graduated with a degree in agriculture and hotel administration—"one of the best business educations one can get—" he said of his preparation.

He began as assistant general manager of the Homestead in Hot Springs, Va., and gained experience over the two years there that was likely invaluable for serving the public's telephone needs

later on. He returned home to become plant manager of the family corporation, and in 1958 he became general manager. He assumed the presidency in 1961.

Alastair served as a director of the New York Independent Telephone Assn., 1966 through 1977 and was elected president for two terms, 1969 and 1970. It was during his term as president when the annual management seminar was initiated, as well as the still-followed practice of personal visits to all independent telephone companies.

In between all this activity, he found opportunity to be a contributor of time and effort to his church, Rotary Club, the local hospital board, and the town council. Then, there was the attention paid to family, the Nixon Bros. vineyard and its participation in the improvement of the grape industry, and the growing herd of Angus that eventually became Ballantrae.

He was born in Westfield, N. Y., a hometown boy who made very good indeed.



Telephone spoken here



A bucket of sand was kept beside the early switchboards as lightning arrestors were not well-developed and the wires were known to catch fire.

Torch singer Julie London included a smoky-throated rendering in her repertoire, a song about waiting for a telephone call—

*"All alone, by the telephone
Waiting for a ring, a ting-a-ling..."*

In fact, at the Museum of Independent Telephony, there's a pedestal displaying a surprising number of song titles and sheet music devoted to America's love affair and dependence on the telephone.

If someone's charting and mapping all the little wayside museum's across the land, leaving out this treatment of telephone history would be a grievous oversight. Such a geography would be deficient for here's a good one and a neighbor to the Dwight D. Eisenhower Center, Old Abilene Town, and the Greyhound Hall of Fame, Abilene, Kan.

The museum is a tribute to this rather vast industry, a free enterprise achievement that works in a society where capitalism and ingenuity have thrived. Independent telephony shines as example of what American citizens can and will do to deliver service at a fair profit.

It was established in 1973 to honor the men and women "whose early efforts on behalf of independent telephony continue to contribute to the social, political, and economic health of today's suburban America."

While the museum treats telephone history and development in general, much of its display area and archival material is derived from United Telecommunications, Kansas City and Shawnee



"Don't let anyone discourage you. You second-graders are the inventors of tomorrow."

Mission, Kan. Its ancestor, the United Telephone Company, maintained its executive offices in Abilene until 1966.

The divestiture of American Telephone and Telegraph in January, 1984, ended the distinction between Bell and the nation's independent telephone companies. The companies formerly known as independents are no small potatoes, continuing to serve half of the geographical area of the United States and nearly one out of five of the nation's telephones.

Theirs is a history too easily dismissed in the grade school textbooks. The breakthrough of the telegraph and the genius of Alexander Graham Bell are often treated well enough, but the telephone companies that sprang up before and after the turn of the century wrote an heroic chapter in linking town and country, breaking the isolation and delays that plagued commerce and just plain daily living.

Usually undermanned and almost always underfinanced, the independent telephone companies survived the competitive wars largely through the loyalty, determination, and inventiveness of their employees.



"Can you imagine? Some newspaper man wrote: 'The telephone is nothing but a toy. It will never be a practical necessity.'"

And it was competitive. Bell's patent expired in 1893, 17 years after his famous summons to Mr. Watson. The original Bell company had barely established a foothold in major U. S. cities. The countryside was not going to be left behind, so as the patent barriers came down, nearly 6,000 non-Bell telephone companies—"independents"—grew up.

Curator of the museum is Mrs. Peg Chronister, Abilene farm wife and mother of five, who has become authority, tour guide, educator, and entertainer in the realm of telephone lore. Her employment is a logical extension of her own experience and sense of history. She's witnessed the telephone's impact on rural living and uses those experiences to entertain her grade school visitors especially.

"My last kid went off to college. So what do you do? Sit and twiddle your thumbs?" she asks. When her employer challenged her to give three reasons why she should be hired, she said: "Well, I'm not going to get pregnant; my husband is a farmer so I'm not going to move; and I've watered pigs once too often." That settled it. The pig comment apparently impressed the interviewer that of all the aspiring and well-educated applicants, Mrs. Chronister could lend a reality and earthiness to the subject that made the telephone saga touchable and lend personal meaning to museum visitors.

"I have a very supportive husband," says Mrs. Chronister, "and everything I had done—4-H leader for 30 years, giving talks and demonstrations, teaching Sunday School for 30 years, working in a library—everything went together."

The museum is viewed on a self-guided basis or tours can be scheduled throughout the year. Displays are both permanent and rotating/changing to present new contributions or "finds". Some of the period telephones are on special loan from the Smithsonian Institution. The Thumper, Butterstamp, and Coffin Set are included in this collection. The museum's display case of insulators features many of the 36



Vintage Switchboards have been preserved here including one from the Angus farm of President Eisenhower at Gettysburg, Pa.

separate patented designs. Collecting insulators is vigorously pursued by glass and ceramic hobbyists, and the rare specimens on display are part of the museum's permanent collections.

Evolution of the dial telephone—an innovation spurred by the independents—is another popular attraction. Switchboards and the recreation of a typical telephone exchange offer tourists a good demonstration of how calls were made and how the nation communicated before the era of lasers and satellite transmissions. Decade-by-decade progress of hand sets, receivers, and even phone booths reveal the transitions.

Museum hours are 10 a. m. to 4:30 p. m. Monday through Saturday and 1 p. m. to 5 p. m. on Sunday during the months of April through October. During November through March, it's weekends only. Conducted tours can be arranged anytime through the year. Angus showgoers or travelers who plan to "make Abilene by nightfall" should consider sticking around the next morning and connecting with communications as they used to be.

Continued from Page 97

Putting the cattle enterprise in place

As the late Alastair Nixon and his son Peter began studying their Angus enterprise and its contributions, the importance of diversification became clear. Peter says it was a process of identifying market niches within the cattle industry. They selected: the commercial cow-calf segment, the backgrounder, feedlots, and fellow purebred producers.

"Once the decision was made to develop a purebred Angus operation, a determination had to be made as to the level or segment within the breed we would concentrate on," he explains. Those segregated into the investor, the show-oriented, and those of performance persuasion.

Decisions required included diversifying markets by selling: 1) purebred cows at private treaty and consignment or production sales; 2) bulls at private treaty and bull test sales; 3) 4-H steers and junior heifers; 4) freezer beef; 5) finished cattle to the packer; and 6) feeders.

Ballantrae's geography was beneficial in serving a variety of customers for, as Al Nixon pointed out, the farm is accessible by interstate travel and located in the corners of Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York.

The validity of that statement was proven during the Vintage '86 consignment sale at the farm. The first such effort, it attracted folks from a 300-mile radius and acquainted them with Ballantrae and its herd. Nixon and other consignors' cattle sold to average \$2,148. Forty buyers were among the 300 people present. Planning for Vintage '88 to be staged this autumn is underway.

If the firm's taken a tack, it's been toward developing a performance-oriented herd which "adapts to the diversified marketing strategy. The finished cattle satisfy the retail (freezer beef) customer and the commercial packer plus the commercial cattlemen looking for bulls.

"We will not sacrifice performance for show, but we will show performance cattle.

"We are now selling boxed beef in addition to the typical side of split sides of beef," he continues. "Several years ago we put carcasses into 1/8 boxes ranging from 55 to 75 pounds per box made up of steaks, roasts, and ground beef. The price is \$2.30 per pound as opposed to a retail equivalent of approximately \$2.50 per pound.

"In addition, we sell one-pound and five-pound packages of four and 20 one-quarter pound ground beef patties respectively. These are very attractive for summer cookouts and families with active and growing children. The boxed beef is attractive since most people don't want to invest in a side of beef or the necessary freezer. . . . The meat income represents 50 percent of our gross beef income, a level we are very pleased with."

Part of the marketing strategy is tied to herd improvement while keeping purebred breeders coming back. First, the concern is to avoid fads,

such as frame at the expense of milk. Second, conduct a careful and annual review and ranking of bulls being considered for A.I. use through the Sire Evaluation Report and performance certificates. Third, keep abreast of the Association's recessive list. Fourth, try young bulls along with the veterans. "We normally bring in two young bulls each year." Fifth, select cattle based upon multiple trait evaluation.

Commenting on the progress and the strengths emerging from the program, it was Al Nixon's observation that AHIR proved fundamental to the successes achieved so far. He said: "AHIR records and sire evaluations have moved our cattle operation to the forefront in a shorter time span than was ever anticipated. A.I. and E.T. have made the difference over mediocrity." When asked about the strongest aspect of the herd and program—"the continued pressure to use, to the greatest benefit, the tools made available to us through membership in the American Angus Assn.," he replied.

Hindsight helps focus foresight

Peter Nixon adds he wished they would have launched a more intensive A.I. program earlier. "We have used A.I. since the early 1970s, but we did not use it intensely until 1980-81. And," he offers, "we should have put our herd on AHIR sooner. We've been on since 1976 and I believe it takes five to six years to really see and be able to use the results."

Maternal depth is Peter's analysis when considering Ballantrae's strong suit. "It's the result of emphasizing performance and concentrating on several cow families. The cows are fertile, milk well, and are young. The average age is 4 and one-half years."

A favorite cow is Ballantrae Marjorie N172. The Nixons bought her great grandam in the 1973 Cow Power Sale, a consignment of Elmplace Angus. The sire was Elmplace Colossal. She's a prime donor now, the matron of a cow family that readily became the most prolific and highest-performing cow family on board. Five heifer replacements joined the herd this spring.

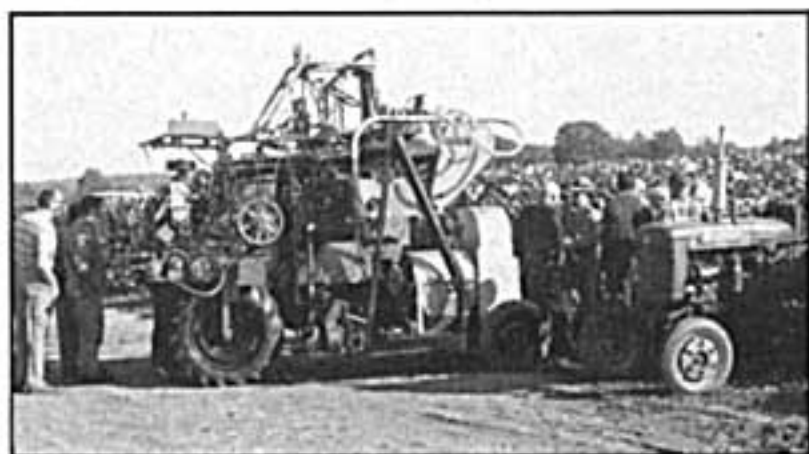
As of 1987, the original Marjorie had placed 18 daughters or granddaughters into production. She gave birth to 10 daughters and two bulls with an average ratio on nine calves of 106. Also as of



Calf 173 by Leachman Hoss. Two Ballantrae—Leachman Hoss sons topped the New York state bull test this spring.



Ballantrae's A.I. program seeks the best from Dameron Linedrive, Premier Top Gun, Waldeck Shocker and Leachman Hoss.



Some of the first field trials of mechanical grape harvesters were conducted at the Nixon Bros. Farm. Today, more than 85 percent of Welch's grapes are picked by machines manufactured by Ford and what is now Case IH. Expect to pay upwards of \$90,000 for such a unit.

1987, granddaughter Marjorie 172 produced 70 fertile embryos in three flushes. The first nine calves were born that spring.

Weaning ratio of this line remains uniformly high, several in the 110—119 range.

The Ballantrae herd of approximately 125 cows is based on a Wye-bred foundation.

One of the first registered cows ever to sell from the Wye Plantation took up residence at Ballantrae. Ladylove of Wye heads up a strong influence that will remain predominant until daughters of other purchases and A.I. sires earn their place. Ladylove's Pine Drive Big Sky calf topped the 1987 Cornell test.

Females have been selected from Rally Farms and Summitcrest and other sources with A.I. providing input from Pine Drive Big Sky, 4S Ponderosa, Rosebank Connection, Premier Independence, and Prince of Wildwood. Calves and flushes of the past two years will be an assortment from Pine Drive Big Sky, 4S Ponderosa, Harrison, Waldeck Shocker, Genetics Yukon Jack, Leachman Hoss, Broadway, and Genetics Madison Avenue.

Some other matings: Premier Independence and a heifer calf by Leachman Hoss; a 1981 PS Power Play daughter with a Harrison heifer calf who will be flushed to Leachman Hoss. Cow number 173 is a four-year-old PS Power Play daughter out of a Sayre Patriot dam. Her maternal brother was the top-gaining bull in the history of the Ohio State Bull test with a 4.93 rate over 140 days. She has three daughters in the herd.

Solace and solitude from the fields

Though his forte' was grape culture, Alastair



At Vintage '86, spectators enjoyed the combination of Angus and vineyards—a testimony of the fruitful earth. An authority on viticulture (the science of grape growing), Alastair Nixon played a key role in the development of the now industry-standard Geneva Double Curtain trellis.

Response to fertilization produced enough foliage that lower leaves of the grapevine became too sheltered. By redesigning the trellis toward a Y-shaped configuration and modifying row spacing, Alastair and his colleagues at Cornell University were able to improve yields by two to three times than previously possible. It was a major breakthrough in grape culture and enhanced mechanical harvest as well.

According to Alastair, each spur of the vine should produce three clusters of grapes. Through the Geneva Double Curtain, yields of 14 to 15 tons per acre became possible, and many growers were able to achieve 12 tons after adopting the new method.



Mr. and Mrs. Alastair Nixon (Joanne) were hosts at Vintage '86 where the 42 lots averaged \$2,148. Among the consignors were Rally Farms (New York), Kiata Farms Inc. (Ohio), Genetics Unlimited (Pennsylvania), and Summitcrest Farm (Ohio). Ballantrae sold the top heifer to Indian Creek Farm, Stahlstown, Pa., for \$5,000. Vintage '88 is planned for this fall.

Nixon was clearly caught up with the Angus cycle when he stated: "Our greatest satisfaction took place this month (April, 1987) when nine E.T. calves were born, as a third generation (from Marjorie 172) was produced at Ballantrae. These calves out of Harrison have the frame, conformation, and uniformity of the ultimate in Angus cattle today.

"It's a great treat," he said, "to leave the trials and tribulations of telephony and come back here to the Back Forty and sort of get lost. Last year was our first crop from E.T. That's probably one of the biggest thrills I've ever had. There have been satisfactions in the grape business and so forth, but to see this top-notch flush kind of parallels some of the accomplishments in those other areas. I don't know when we have been as thrilled with a new program, whether in telephony, viticulture, or otherwise, as we have been with E.T.

"I think we will be breeding more uniformity into the Angus cattle for generations to come."

Al Nixon was also unreserved in his praise for A.I. and its impact: "Wish we had the benefits of A.I. to the Angus breed in earlier years, but I do believe the bull power available in the past five years has undoubtedly had a most profound effect on our herd performance. More complete records concerning traits and milking ability are a must," he advised.

Satisfactions for Peter Nixon have been derived from the genetic and performance improvements through selective matings, success at bull tests, plus being involved beyond the immediate business at Ballantrae.

"Sometimes you're fighting the fires and forget to think about the larger aspects of your business."

Like his father before him, concern for his industry has compelled him to play several public roles and spearhead programs of benefit not only to his breed but also the state cattle industry.

Peter's served as president of the New York Angus Assn., president of the New York Beef Cattlemen's Assn., vice chairman and developer of the New York Beef Industry Council, and represented the state on the Beef Industry Council of the National Live Stock & Meat Board. One of

his consuming projects of the past two years has been working on a direct marketing plan for selling feeder calves in volume.

All this has been conducted in the Nixon—Ballantrae spirit. As a committed "doer" and community man, Al Nixon would have approved. "Peter did a lot better job on the cattle end of things than his father," he confided. The elder Nixon described himself as an expert on grape culture and Peter as expert on cattle and beef industry affairs.

The marketing program began in 1986 with a grant from the New York Department of Agriculture and Markets awarded to the New York Beef Cattlemen's Assn. Purpose was to implement a feeder marketing system.

The cattle enrolled in the program are pre-graded on the farm with castration and dehorning to be accomplished prior to the grading. Cattle are vaccinated, including the administration of Ivomec, and weaned 28 days in advance of delivery. They are sold over a teleauction and assembled at several locations for delivery and buyer pickup. Booster vaccinations and final weight and grading are done at the time of assembly.

Peter says the original goal of 500 ended up with 1,300. One of the objectives was unspoken but certainly just to see if it could be done. It succeeded and how!

According to Peter's figures, the state's cattle demographics works against a unified marketing plan or the typical attempts to market in volume. "New York has approximately 130,000 beef cows with the average herd consisting of 13 cows. As a result, it took 90 producers to get the 1,300 head consigned."

Getting order and packer buyers interested was a bit like securing interest from commercial bull buyers, perhaps. Peter finds keeping the name in front of potential clients is easier through central testing, for one. Consequently, Ballantrae bulls have been sent to Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, and New York state tests since 1976. "They've been effective for us to compare our program to others, develop a performance image, and merchandise cattle," Peter states. As of 1987, Ballantrae had sent 54 bulls to test with the Ohio topper mentioned earlier the high-point.

Testing can serve as an affirmation of a program and even as a demonstration of technology. Al Nixon surveyed both biotechnology and telecommunications from his unique vantage. He commented:

"I compare genetic engineering to our radical engineering changes from the old hand crank telephone to the digital age, the information age, which will spawn new market opportunities of various sorts. As technology changes will alter customer needs, we will serve tomorrow's markets as we have today's. We will continue to honor our historic commitment to breed nothing but the best, Angus cattle."



The Marjorie cow family is a foundation branch and highly thought of by both the Nixons and others who've toured the herd. A limited on-farm E. T. program is now taking shape using registered Angus recipients. Selection for recipients is slanted toward the smaller framed, though absolutely sound types.

"Management, including health, nutrition, heat detection, and marketing must be perfect to make E. T. work effectively," says Peter. "It's a herd improvement tool and must be kept in perspective."

Goals and concerns often intertwine

Al Nixon said the number one goal—not just for Ballantrae but the most important ingredient in all of agriculture—should be to improve cash flow. Peter echoed that statement succinctly: "The farm becoming financially self-sufficient." More markets would be his second goal. Al expressed being able to continue satisfying customers through the professionalism of Ballantrae's business. He and Peter shared the commitment toward betterment of the breed and to be recognized as a "seedstock producer *par excellence!*"

Improving annually and genetically the uniformity of the herd remains paramount; rewards proceed eventually after that core and foundation are in place. In that respect, Peter does list concerns regarding breed purity. One, is the freedom from genetic defects not only through the use of A.I. and its far-reaching ripples but also from A.I. offspring being used in natural service.

Also, he's hopeful Certified Angus Beef, AHIR, Angus sire evaluation, and other programs will continue to address and preserve unique Angus values and contributions, valuable and identifiable traits to not be lost or diluted in what he calls "generic" beef.

As Ballantrae is an aggressive E.T. breeder, the issue of E.T. and performance recordation has been encountered. He'd like some attention devoted to how "a performance herd can utilize E.T. without losing performance assurance and documentation." He's pleased to see the frame pendulum swing declining. His industry concerns are consumer education and, conversely, the cattle industry being more receptive to consumer wants and expectations.

What does it take to get there?

At Ballantrae it's apparent milestones and new challenges are not taken lightly. Progress isn't expected

overnight but rather each step is tested, then the program proceeds. Biotechnology has spurred the herd forward significantly in recent years. Yet, there's been forethought and planning to avert disappointment, even disaster. Founder of the family Samuel Nixon undoubtedly did the same.

For example, the E.T. program has succeeded by an understanding that, in Peter's words, "management, including health, nutrition, heat detection, and marketing must be perfect to make E.T. work effectively. It is a herd improvement tool and must be kept in perspective." Same with A.I. which Peter considers an absolute must for a purebred breeder, "especially in the Northeast." He's experienced first service conception of approximately 60 to 65 percent with a total A.I. conception of 85 to 90 percent. This, from an approach based on no synchronization, excellent nutrition, and careful heat checking.

Peter bases his selection on multiple traits—birth weights, weaning weight and grade, yearling weight and grade, frame, and pedigree. "Single trait selection by the breeders and show judges has been the single most influential factor in removing the unique Angus attributes.

"Frame selection is very easy to measure, see, and qualify; therefore, it is an attractive method of selection. We are now seeing the cost to the breed of single trait selection and must do a better job as breeders, not reproducers."

An anti-show position? Not really. "Shows," he says, "provide an essential element to the breed and industry. They create interest and enthusiasm and another means of comparison. Like other selection criteria, showing should be viewed as part of the total selection process, not the selection criteria.

"We don't breed cattle for showing specifically. There always seems to be two or three calves that have the potential, that can be raced a bit," he acknowledges. "If they can stand it, we might try it."

But during these days for Peter Nixon and Ballantrae, there are more enduring goals and bigger fish to fry. Even the luck of the genetic draw and producing one that might be able to run for the roses is not that alluring. There are other challenges. The strain runs deep and there are promises to keep to the ones who've gone on and to those for whom tomorrow must be secured. Why venture when there's so much yet to learn in familiar territory?

"You still breed cattle by conviction," he says.

