

An Angus Showman

A library and many memories are dedicated to Lee Leachman.



“Characters who had character.” With that opening Jim Leachman started his slide show commemorating the life of his father, Lee Leachman, and the people who played a role in it. Invitations from the family read, “Join us on Sunday April 17 at the Sheraton Hotel in Billings, Mont., for a celebration, The Life of Leland L. Leachman.”

“It is hard to believe that more than 200 people sat on the edge of their seats for five hours in a slide show presentation of more than 700 slides with only one short break,” Myron Fuerst, Rhinebeck, N.Y., observed. “But it was a production. It had the same kind of planning and execution that Lee, the old showman himself, would have presented.”

The day started for most with a brunch followed by a visit to the “Cowman’s Library” where mementos of their father and his life were displayed in a store fronted room and retail space on the hotel mezzanine. International Livestock Show trophies, his favorite saddle, trophy canes and those collected from his world travels, and more than 30 volumes of pictures and clippings were available for his friends to browse. His 200-year-old desk, a player piano and a montage of 150 Frank Harding candid shots of people taken at Ankony sales were among the 3,000 pieces of memorabilia.

The display was a perfect example of the family’s intent “to document his contributions to future generations of the Leachman family and the livestock industry.”

“My father was not a writer or speaker but a doer,” says Jim Leachman. “He was good with people but was not a politician.”

Life for Lee began Oct. 27, 1917 on a livestock farm near Adamsville, Ohio, the sixth of seven children (three boys and four girls) born to James H. and Alice Starrett Leachman. Lee was the first in the family to have a steer in 4-H Club and the first to go to college. He played a clarinet and his brother, Lester, the saxophone in the family orchestra.

Four eventful years at Ohio State University started in 1935. He would be president of the Saddle and Sirloin Club and earn the distinction of being the only student to win the showmanship contest at the Little International in all four species of livestock. He was a member of professor Don Kays’ 1938 livestock judging team.

Valued friendships that lasted a lifetime began here. J.B. McCorkle was Ohio State’s beef herdsman. Lee roomed and worked in the beef barn. Across the lane Paul and Byron Good tended hogs. Kenneth Haines and I worked in the meats lab. Later came Herman Purdy, Lee’s brother Lester, Bob Long, Don Good and Ray Roth . . . all later making their own contributions to the industry. But most important, at Ohio State he met



Mildred Leachman Claremont and her three daughters reminisce about Ankony as they look through the 200-page Leachman guest book. Daughters Joy Stanford, Carolyn Kircher and Gay Scheidegger are pictured left to right.

a lovely home economics coed, Mildred Herr. They were married in 1941. Her unheralded contribution to the partnership was great.

Lee traveled the Teegardin Polled Shorthorn show herd one summer and the El Jon Angus string after his junior year. After graduation in 1939 he returned to El Jon Farms, Rose Hill, Iowa. That summer he fitted his first International grand champion bull, Envious Blackcap B 6th. The next year he fitted Erianna B2, the 1940 International grand champion female. Late in 1940 Charles T. Bates, Tishomingo, Okla., purchased the "6th" from El Jon for \$10,000 with the stipulation that Lee went with the bull. Registered Angus cattle selling at auction in the United States that year as reported by the Association averaged \$210.

A year later when the "6th" was purchased by Ravenswood Farm in Virginia, the *Angus Journal* carried the following account . . . "Possibly next to Envious Blackcap 6th the best part of the deal for Ravenswood was securing the services of Lee Leachman as herdsman."

The Ravenswood herd was sold to C.V. Whitney, Old Westbury, N.Y., and Lee moved to Nanuet, N.Y., to manage Gallagher Farms. Lester took over the Whitney herd management after

his army service and graduation from Ohio State.

In 1947 Lee and Mildred rented a farm near Rhinebeck, N.Y., and moved there with their three children—Jim, Joy and Carolyn—and the small Angus herd they had accumulated as pay in kind from former employers. Another daughter, Gay, was born in 1956.

Soon after moving to Rhinebeck, talks began between Lee and Allan A. Ryan, owner of Ankony Farm and board chairman of Royal typewriter, about the possibility of forming a partnership. The pact was signed in 1948 and the two herds became Ankony Farm.

In 1949 Eileenmere 1032, the Ankony herd sire, was International grand champion. The following year they purchased Homeplace Eileenmere 999-35th in partnership with Myron Fuerst and Moles Hill Farm. He was International reserve grand champion in 1951. After that show, Lee took the first prize summer yearling, O Bardoliermere, owned by Lester, back to Ankony. In 1953 O Bardoliermere was International grand champion. The following year Lester and his wife Ruth moved to their own place near Claverack, N.Y., and became a part of Ankony. The businessman/cattleman partnership was an instant success. When it was dispersed in 1967 a new purebred Angus auction record of \$2,681,500 was set.

With the formation of the new Ankony partnership, the "characters who had character" Jim referred to at the opening of his father's life story, began to gather. Paul Good, Van Wert, Ohio, was an auctioneer on every Ankony sale and always a close family friend. Ham James, Ray Sims or Curt Rodgers shared the block with him on many of the successful sales.

Some of the characters referred to may have been three former herdsman, Bob Ernst, Glen Spafford and Gordon Schubert. They saw to the fitting of the Ankonian cattle that, in turn, filled a wall in the Cowman's Library with plaques and trophies from the International, National Western, American Royal and other major events.

Numerous peers in Lee's life were represented in the "Celebration" crowd. Dave Canning, Tim Pierce, Clayton Jennings, Al Maurer, Ben Houston and Clint Tomson to name a few.

In 1963 Myron Fuerst joined the Ankony group and Hyland Angus Ranch, Highmore, S.D., was purchased from the Jennings Brothers. The Jennings firm had been a major player in the expansion of Angus in the Great Plains. The Ankony Hyland herd was sold to Equity Funding in 1969. Although the Leachmans each established their own enterprises after the herd was sold they maintained their close ties over the years. Les with son Jay founded Leachman Angus Ranch at Bozeman, Mont. Son Jim estab-

lished Leachman Cattle Company in Billings, Mont. Lee started a herd of commercial Angus at Triple LLL Ranch, Hotchkiss, Colo. In 1973 Triple LLL Ranch bred and exhibited the grand champion carload of feeder calves at the National Western Stock Show.

After selling Triple LLL, Lee was never far from the purebred business. One of his major consulting efforts was the breed record making dispersal of the DeMier Sudbrink Limousin herd in Miami, Okla. He was building his last Angus herd with Beverly Jackson and her son Bill in Miami, Okla., at the time of his sudden death.

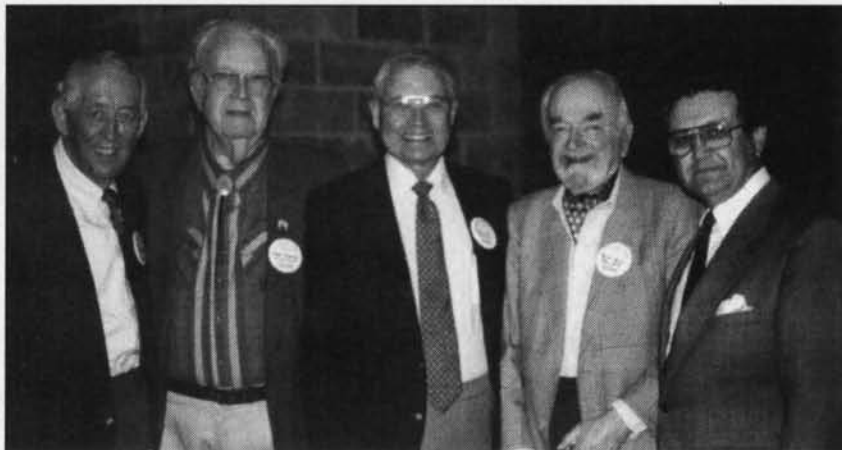
In the spring of 1954 after walking the cows and calves in the Mills Estate pasture just south of Rhinebeck, Lee and I sat down under an apple tree to talk. He told me of his plan to concentrate on the production of bulls. Only one or two heifers would be fitted to use in the "get" classes. He told me his goal was to win the International Livestock Exposition Best 10 Head class with all bulls. He did it that very November. Furthermore, he repeated the feat 11 times before the herd was sold. No other herd ever won this coveted award at Chicago even once with an all bull group.

The record of Ankony cattle at the International during the 20-year period from 1949-1969 is phenomenal. During this period Ankony had more individual class winners, more blues in the group classes and more champions than their four nearest competitors. They exhibited 10 International grand champion bulls. Of these, Eileenmere 1032 and O Bardoliermere are the only ones not bred by Ankony.

That afternoon under the apple tree was just one example of the careful program planning that propelled the Ankony program for two decades. The program deserves much credit for the explosive expansion of the Angus breed in the 1950s and '60s, on its way to being the most popular breed of beef cattle in the United States.

In 1964 Ankony started showing at the Denver National Western Stock Show. The record there was equally impressive. For five years in a row Ankony exhibited the grand champion bull and the champion carload at this great show.

The slide show presentation with crowd participation depicted a man with goals. He planned his approach to reach those goals and vigorously pursued his plan. When he judged Angus at the Perth Scotland Show and Sale in 1956 he noticed British breeders did not cross two of the most prominent bloodlines. That summer he visited England and Scotland and bought the best females available from the Gaidrew and Kerr bloodlines and established a pure Scotch herd at Ankony. Ankonian President is just one of the greats that came from this effort.



At this same show he repeatedly heard of a great young bull in northern Scotland. He was known to want to go look at "one more great bull." We secured a car and went to see Ballot of Beladrum. Two years later this bull was at Ankony.

As a doer Lee was always looking for ways to conquer problems. After "999-35th" was purchased he had an opportunity to sell his semen to Argentina. The bull was collected in Pine Plains, N.Y., the semen diluted and cooled, a plane landed in a nearby pasture, picked up the semen and took it to LaGuardia and then on to Buenos Aires via Pan Am. Cornell and the University of Connecticut worked with Ankony developing extenders for fresh semen. In later years the same people did early experimentation on frozen semen.

Two of many honors were cherished above the others by Lee. Both were shared by his brother, Lester. In 1967 their pictures were added to the Ohio State University Animal Science Hall of Fame as graduates of distinction. In 1989 the American Angus Association inducted the two men into the Angus Heritage Foundation for the major contributions made to the improvement and advancement of Angus in the United States.

"Lee Leachman will always be remembered as a knowledgeable cattleman, an excellent judge, and a man with a keen mind," Myron Fuerst says. "The Cowboy Library will stand as a memory to him and his associates and friends during the two decades they worked to promote and make Angus better under the Ankony banner."

The characters who had character all had one thing in common . . . Angus cattle.

Editors note: The Cowman's Library is open to those who wish to browse or study. Appointments may be made by contacting Leachman Cattle Company, P.O. Box 2505, Billings, MT 59103; (406) 656-9325.

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Cattlemen characters (l to r) Les Leachman, Dave Canning, Roy Sims, Myron Fuerst and Curt Rogers gathered in Billings April 17 to pay tribute to Lee Leachman.

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— Myron Fuerst