

# Spirit of the WEST

BY Barbara LaBarbara

THE MONTANA ANGUS ASSOCIATION EMBODIES 50+ YEARS OF STRONG TRADITION, SOLIDARITY AND BOUNDLESS SPIRIT.



**A** wise Montana breeder once uttered these words of wisdom: "Though we have known success, let us not forget there is much work yet to be done — many new fields to plow and numerous old ones to cultivate."

The original purpose of the Montana Angus Association was to promote Angus cattle and maintain the purity of the breed. Today membership in the Montana Angus Association offers a wellspring of benefits to individuals

Power of Helena purchased them from a Canadian herd in the Province of Quebec. From 1888 to 1890 four more Montana Angus breeders joined the American Angus Association — W.D. Ellis, Montana Cattle Company, Alfred Myer and M.S. Holderbaum.

In 1892 Joseph Henderson purchased a purebred Aberdeen-Angus bull to use with his Shorthorn cows. It wasn't until 1914, however, that his ranch acquired its first purebred Angus cow. After their father's death, sons Jesse and George operated the ranch as Henderson Brothers. Jesse was a director of the Western Angus Association and the Flint Creek Angus Breeders Association. He became a member of the American Angus Association in 1919 and was a member of the Montana Angus Association for more than 25 years. Jesse was known as the "Grand Old Man" of Montana Angus at the time of his death in 1970.

Other well known Montana Angus herds whose bloodlines can be traced to many pedigrees today include the John Wylie herd, August Ohrman herd, Airyland Angus owned by Wilbur S. Acton, and Jack Milburn's N-Bar Ranch herd.

W.J. "Web" Harrer purchased 30 head of Blackcap Revolution and Earl Marshall females in 1934 and became a leader in Montana's Angus industry. He organized the American Angus Conference held at Great Falls, Mont., in 1966. His wife, Esther, organized the Montana Angus Auxiliary in 1960. Their son, Bill, and grandson, Grant, carry on the family tradition of raising outstanding Angus cattle at Lost Lake Ranch.

In 1941 there were 41 Montana breeders registered with the American Angus Association. As commercial breeders discovered that Angus meant profit, more and more blacks were being seen in that "Hereford" country. The American Angus Association asked breeders to form a state organization.

History of the Montana Angus Association is sparse because many of the old minute books were destroyed in a fire. A brochure printed in the early 1940s stated the association was organized in Great Falls during the Montana State Fair in 1942. Jack Milburn acted as chairman pro-term until the first general meeting



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Current Montana Angus Association leaders are (l to r): Malcolm Adams, vice president, Gary Poser treasurer, Dave Hinman, president; Dennis Voss, director; Yvonne Hinman, auxiliary president; Roger Jacobs, director Jim Larsen, director; Dale Fellman, director and Doug Amtzen, director.

who produce registered and commercial Angus cattle in Big Sky Country. The association has experienced steady growth despite numerous challenges. Interaction in a state the size of Montana, it covers 145,388 square miles, has been perhaps the biggest obstacle. Yet, its members have built close ties. They are true partners in Angus breed improvement as well as promotional and educational programs.

## Angus History in Big Sky Country

Kenneth Mortag, a long time breeder of commercial Angus cattle, reports the first Angus arrived in Montana in the late 1800s when T.C.

was held in Bozeman in February 1943. Elected as officers were: W.S. Acton, president; William B. Gleed, vice president; and W. J. Harrer, secretary-treasurer. Directors included Milburn, Carl Stimson, Archie Ginther and R C. Peterson.

A brochure telling of the advantages of Angus was printed and widely distributed throughout the state. The slogan, "In the West the Blacks are Best," was adopted by the fledgling organization.

The first MAA sale of registered Angus was held on Nov. 17, 1943 in Billings. Seventy-five head averaged \$369.66. The association's first sale of feeder cattle was held in October 1950. Fifteen hundred head of steers sold from \$30.50 to \$36.50 per hundredweight (cwt.) on a market that was paying \$20 to \$23 for Choice calves. Angus heifers brought from \$130 to \$155 per head.

"When cattle prices were down, it was hard to get members," says Pat Goggins of Vermilion Ranch. "Sometimes the association had a difficult time getting enough money for postage stamps."

Prominent breeders remembered Montana becoming a dumping ground for cattle with dwarfism genes in the 1950s. Although many fought performance testing, it led them beyond the dwarf problem. Goggins and Dale Davis, the father of performance testing in Montana, concur the success of the MAA can be partially attributed to the performance-oriented breeders.

Having a paid secretary since the early 1980s has also greatly contributed to the growth of the association and the cooperation of Angus breeders in Montana. Kathy Votaw Dubs was hired as secretary in 1988. By 1991 the association boasted 275 members.

Dubs recruits new members by analyzing a new member list she receives from the American Angus Association every month. She writes a letter inviting breeders on the list to join the state association and explains the benefits.

"We have 368 paid members today," Dubs says. "Our membership includes several commercial breeders who recognize the value of belonging to such a strong association."

Goggins maintains you have to give your membership a reason to join. "People have to feel they're getting something for their money," he says.

Montana Angus Association projects fall under three broad categories — merchandising Angus, promoting Angus and supporting junior Angus programs. Major projects include cattle sales and an annual ranch tour.

The association sponsors booths at the Montana Agri-Industrial Exposition and the

annual Montana Stock Growers Convention. It provides show premiums and awards. It publishes a directory every two years and the *Montana Angus News* four times a year. MAA provides financial support for state junior programs.

Leading the 200-member strong Montana Junior Angus Association are Kori Hartwell, president; Bill Cook, vice president; Kelly Cook, secretary; and Jamie Pepper, reporter.

### Local Associations & The Tour

Membership growth in the early 1960s led to the formation of area associations. They include: Central Montana, North Montana, Midland Empire, Western Montana, South Montana, Milk River and Eastern Montana. Each association has its own officers and activities but works in cooperation with the state association.

The major activity of the local associations is conducting the Montana Angus Tour, which is held each September. The first tour was hosted by the Central Montana Association in 1974. The tours have been held throughout the state since that time. Average participation is 500 people, but up to 800 have attended.

People come from almost every state, and as far away as Australia, to experience firsthand the beauty of Big Sky Country and special brand of hospitality from Montana Angus breeders. There were 25 states and two Canadian provinces represented at the three-day 1994 tour. With Eastern Montana Angus Association serving as host, participants traveled more than 550 miles on buses and in private vehicles to visit 11 ranches plus seven display herds.

A charge of \$50 per person includes transportation and meals. The state association gives the local group \$2,000 in support money. People who host the tour at their ranch usually offer financial support as well as a meal. The Central Montana Angus Association will host the 1995 tour.

### Communication Tool

Carl Stimson was the first editor of *Montana Angus News* which first published in 1959. After a sporadic existence, Jeanette Stevenson took over the publication in 1967. She obtained adequate advertising support and greatly



W.J. Harrer shown at his ranch in the 1960s, was the first Montana Angus breeder to serve on the national board of directors.



Kathy Votaw Dubs has a vested interest in the Angus breed. She has served as secretary of the Montana Angus Association and editor of *Montana Angus News* since 1988.

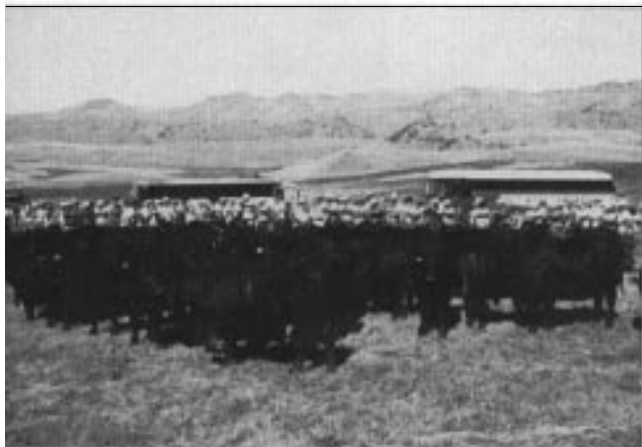


increased the circulation.

In 1988 Kathy Votaw Dubs became the editor. She receives a commission based on net profits of the magazine. Under her direction, circulation has increased from 3,000 to more than 6,000. It's published twice in the fall and twice in the spring, coinciding with the sale season. Magazine size has also increased. The

March 1991 issue was 64 pages; in March 1995 it was 105 pages.

Much of the association's financial stability comes from the magazine. There is no subscription fee. The magazine is financially supported by advertisements, which are limited to Montana residents. The only exception is the Midland Bull Test. For that sale, out of state bulls may be advertised in a special advertiser's section.



### **Great Montana Angus Tour**

*Dearborn Ranch Company (top) and Phil Wirth's Angus ranch near Wolf Creek, Mont., were featured stops of the 1990 Montana Angus Tour. America's most famous ranch tour draws cattle people from throughout the state, country and the world.*

board meeting, an annual barn party and an Angus pen show during the NILE. Montana's Junior Angus Showmanship contest is held during the event. The association receives one percent of gross of the Angus Female Sale held in conjunction with the show.

The Midland Bull Test Angus Sale is one of MAA's better sources of income and is held in April.

Other sales include the Black-Hided Feeder and Replacement Sale in November, Montana Winter Fair Angus Sale in January, and the Feeder Calf Video Auction in July.

### **Other Activities & Fund Raisers**

The MAA directory is published every two years. The association benefits from its advertisement sales. It also makes a small

amount of money on the annual MAA sales and events calendar.

The Northern Rodeo Association helped MAA promote Angus by sponsoring a \$26,000 Instant Rancher Sweepstakes in 1994. Tickets sold for \$20 each. From March 1994 through February 1995 drawings were held monthly for prizes ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000 or an Angus heifer. The grand prize drawing was held at the NRA Finals rodeo.

MAA awards \$500 to the top pen from Montana entered in the annual Certified Angus Beef Program Value Discovery Project.

### **Montana Angus Auxiliary**

The auxiliary, which promotes Montana Angus throughout the year, has approximately 100 members. It sponsors a scholarship program, queen contest, and belt-buckle and Angus jacket awards programs to recognize junior members who excel with Angus throughout the state. A hospitality booth at the NILE and an all-breed mixer for women at the Montana Junior Beef Expo are sponsored by the auxiliary. Money is raised through ways and means activities.

Directors representing local associations are Hilary McRae, Carol Davis, Shirley Menghini, Mary Kay Knudsen, Helen Bailey and Pam Patterson. Current officers are Yvonne Hinman, president; Jeanne Fellman, vice president; and Lorrie Vennes, secretary-treasurer.

### **National Impact**

Montana has contributed strong leadership as well as Angus bloodlines over the years. Five breeders have been elected to the American Angus Association Board of Directors, including W. J. Harrer (1963-67), Dale Davis (1974-79), Bob Sitz (1979-85), Keith Stevenson (1985-1991), and current director John Hamilton. Stevenson served as an officer from 1991 until he completed a term as president in 1993. Esther Harrer, Jeanette Stevenson and Janiece Mydland all served as presidents of the American Angus Auxiliary.

Five Montanans have been inducted into the Angus Heritage Foundation for making significant contributions to the Angus cattle business. They are: the late Robert "Bob" Sitz, Dale Davis, Les Leachman, Jeanette Stevenson and her son, the late Wayne Stevenson.

Jeanette Stevenson and her late husband, Jamie, began breeding registered Angus cattle in the 1940s and worked hard to build a successful family ranch operation and reputable Angus herd.

Bill Turner worked alongside the Stevensons in promoting and improving Montana's Angus breed during the early years. His son, Jim,

on the ranch took his life. His wife, Donna, and children carry on the Sitz ranching and Angus operations today

It's impossible to mention all of the many breeders who have contributed to the growth and improvement of Angus cattle in Montana in the past century. Many families carry on a tradition started by their forefathers. These veteran

breeders, along with many dedicated newcomers, continue to cultivate their breed, industry knowledge and friendships.

Echoes from the past reverberate into a bountiful future for Montana Angus breeders and the Montana Angus Association.

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currently operates the Green Valley Angus Ranch.

The Stevenson sons, Wayne and Keith, both built successful Angus operations. Although Wayne met an untimely death in 1994, his wife, Marian, and children continue to raise and promote Montana Angus.

Dale Davis was a pioneer in beef cattle performance evaluation. He helped develop the Montana performance evaluation program in the mid-1950s. He served on the American Angus Association Board of Directors from 1973 to 1980. Davis owned and developed the Rollin' Rock Angus herd, which is now owned by his son, Bill. Today Dale owns and operates the linebred PAPA herd with his wife, Carol, and daughter, Pat, and is a member of Performance Breeders, an Angus marketing partnership.

A dynamic partnership between Russell Denowh and his father-in-law, Joe Gartner, was formed in 1955. The Gartner-Denowh Angus Ranch became leaders in performance testing, embryo transplants and expected progeny difference (EPD) records. Russell's sons are actively involved in the ranch operation today.

Bob Sitz, another dedicated and performance-minded breeder, moved his Angus operation to Montana in 1960. By 1987 he had a registered cow herd of 887, the second largest in the nation at that time. Sitz bred for traits important to the beef industry — calving ease, growth maternal ability, feedlot efficiency and carcass quality. In 1989 a tractor roll-over accident