



► Lloyd Miller served the American Angus Association for 32 years.

# A True Trailblazer

Lloyd Miller laid the foundation of the Association's public relations and advertising programs and guided the organization through some of its toughest years.

by Keith Evans

Lloyd Miller got his call to join the American Angus Association in the summer of 1946, in a Kansas City, Mo., hospital room.

In perfect health himself, Miller was summoned to the hospital by Frank Richards, the fifth executive secretary of the American Angus Association. Despite being quarantined in the hospital with spinal meningitis, Richards was moving ahead with plans for his new administration.

As Miller told the story a few years ago, "Richards got me past the nurses by claiming I was a member of the family. In bed, dressed in a hospital gown he got right down to business. 'Miller,' he said, 'I want you to be my publicity man at the Angus Association.'"

Miller, who knew Richards from their days together at the Corn Belt Farm Dailies, wasn't sure he was ready to make the move, and expressed his concerns to Richards. He



had a young family and a good job at the University of Missouri (MU) in the agricultural editor's office. The thought of moving his family to Chicago, combined with the uncertainties of holding a publicity job with a breed association, caused him to hesitate.

"Hell, Miller," Richards finally said, "come on with me, and we'll sink or swim together."

And swim they did. Richards went to work in October 1946, and Miller joined him a month later. From the start, Richards wisely gave Miller some rein, and throughout the next 22 years, he built an Angus marketing program that won acclaim throughout the beef industry and beyond.

Miller had the background, the education and the work ethic to succeed in his new job. He was born May 25, 1916, on a farm near Savannah, Mo., and graduated from MU in 1941 with a degree in ag journalism. He landed his first job as a photographer, news

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► **Above:** While working as publicity director for the Association, Miller captured many Angus events on film. He also used a motion picture camera to film Angus in all kinds of geographical and climatic settings.

reporter and feature writer for the *Chicago Daily Drivers Journal*, and later, the *Kansas City Daily Drivers Telegram*.

He served in the U.S. Army in the Philippines during World War II, then returned to the university to work in the ag editor's office.

In 1939, while still in college, Miller married Mabel Kurz, his high school sweetheart. They were together for the next 60 years. The two were a smooth-working team. He never made a move without consulting her and gaining her approval, and she did everything possible to support and encourage him while raising their four children. Then, as now, working in the Association's Communications and Public Relations (PR) Department meant spending many nights away from home.

### A new era

Except for short periods, there had never been a full-time staff person in charge of the Association's breed promotion and advertising. Consequently, Miller had to start from scratch.

He was a good writer, a good photographer and, from experience, knew what farm newspaper and magazine editors needed and wanted. He started by writing news releases about the accomplishments of Angus members. He built a professional darkroom to develop film and print Angus pictures to be mailed to magazines and newspapers.

He wrote feature stories about commercial cattle producers who used Angus bulls in their programs and illustrated them with his photos. He wrote like the kind of professional that many editors only wished they had on staff. They printed almost everything Miller sent them.

He purchased a motion picture camera and carried it with him as he traveled around the country to film Angus in all kinds of climatic and geographical conditions. A year or so later, the exposed film was edited into the movie "On America's Angus Trails." Paul Harvey, then a Chicago radio announcer, was hired to narrate the production. It was the first of many promotional and educational motion pictures produced by the PR department.

In 1950 Miller teamed up with Harry Barger, a Missouri farm boy and an MU journalism school graduate who worked for a Chicago advertising agency. Together they produced a dramatic, groundbreaking promotional booklet titled *Blacks Breed Better Beef*. The next year Barger became an

advertising consultant to the Association, an arrangement that lasted through 1983.

Angus advertising had long been used primarily to highlight the many live and carcass shows won by Angus cattle. But Miller's new PR program was getting this job done without paying for ad space. It was time, he decided for a professional-quality advertising program, and Barger was the one to help him get it done.



► Miller (left) presents a Centennial Angus Herd award to Dave Nichols, Anita, Iowa, at the 1973 World Forum and Centennial Celebration in a tent on the Association parking lot.

Miller convinced the Association Board of Directors to approve a \$20,000 advertising budget to support an advertising program developed by the two men. "The Blacks" advertising series was the result. It combined dramatic illustrations and hard-hitting copy to drive home the basic advantages of Angus cattle (see Chapter 18 in *A Historic Angus Journey*). These first ads set the pattern for most of the Association's subsequent advertising.

Artwork was used to illustrate the ad program. The man selected to illustrate the second ad in "The Blacks" series, and as it turned out every other Angus ad through 1975, was Chicago artist Frank Murphy. Murphy credits Miller with sparking his artistic career.

Aside from advertising art, their collaboration produced a gallery of Angus paintings that grace the walls at the American Angus Association. (See the new book, *Angus Art*, to be released at the 2003 Annual Meeting in Louisville, Ky.)

A few years ago, Miller commissioned Murphy to do a painting for his home. Before his death in July 2003, he arranged for the painting to be donated to the American Angus Association. It graces the cover of this October 2003 issue of the *Angus Journal*.

In 1959 the Association produced the beef industry's first crossbreeding ad. The illustration showed an Angus bull with Hereford cows and black-baldie calves. The

headline read, "Angus bulls breed more profit into your calves."

Miller also planned the national Angus conferences. At the first National Angus Conference in 1955, he arranged for a speaker who called for the Angus breed to collect more accurate performance records and use them to breed superior, more-efficient seedstock. Show winnings at this time determined the most popular Angus bulls in the breed, and many breeders scoffed at the idea of performance records.

### Recognition

Miller's PR work drew national recognition. In 1953 the Association's program received a certificate of achievement from the American Public Relations Association. Nine years later, in 1962, the Public Relations Society of America Inc. (PRSA) presented a Silver Anvil Award, the Society's highest award for professional achievement, to Miller and the American Angus Association. Many of his innovations, with modern touches, are still used today.

Though a very private man, Miller loved to tell stories about the people he had encountered and the situations he had experienced. His dry wit, humor and deadpan delivery were his trademarks to those who knew him well.

Ask him about his dentist appointment, his retort was "Same old grind." Every joke someone told about sheep was met with, "That's pretty baaaaaaad." His repertoire seemed to be endless.

During the last fiscal year (FY) Miller served as PR director (1968), the Association registered 406,310 head of cattle, an all-time Association record. This compares with 81,992 in 1947, his first fiscal year as PR director.

But change was coming. In October that year Association Executive Secretary Glen Bratcher died unexpectedly. After considerable deliberation, the Board of Directors decided Miller was the right man to be the seventh Association executive secretary. It was a job he wanted and had worked hard to get. The next 10 years, however, would test him as never before.

During FY 1969, Association registrations began a long period of decline — slowly at first, and then more rapidly. With only a few exceptions, this slide continued until 1986, frustrating two subsequent Association executive officers as well.

The popularity of Continental cattle was rapidly gaining favor with commercial cattle producers. Big, heavy-muscled, late-maturing cattle were in; smaller, early maturing cattle were out.

Unfortunately many breeders who had been very successful in the 1950s and 1960s suddenly had the wrong kind of cattle. Some simply switched to another breed. Others, instead of changing their own breeding programs, blamed the Association for the declining demand for their Angus cattle, and Miller became the lightning rod.

He also inherited an antitrust lawsuit filed against the Association by the U.S. Department of Justice. Fighting it cost the Association several hundred thousand dollars. It was

successfully settled in 1970 and eventually opened the way for new rules on artificial insemination (AI) that revolutionized Angus cattle breeding. But for several years the suit hung like a millstone around the neck of the Association.

Miller served nearly 10 years as the Association's executive secretary, much of it in a pressure cooker, dogged by declining registrations and second-guessing, even by some Board and staff members.

Despite all this, steady progress was made during his tenure. For example, the first National Junior Angus Heifer Show [the forerunner to the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS)] was held in Columbia, Mo., in 1969.

Development of the Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR) program became a high priority. In 1972 the first estimated breeding values (EBVs) for growth were calculated, and the Board approved the establishment of the National Sire Evaluation Program. The first *Sire Evaluation Report* was



► Lloyd Miller (second from left) is shown with his family: (from left) daughter Sharon Schumacher, wife Mabel, son Jeffrey, and daughters Rosemary Miller and Donna Bodinson.

published in 1974. The first maternal EBVs were calculated in 1976. The problem of how to handle genetic defects in Angus cattle was met head-on. The first complete list of bulls with known genetic defects was published in 1978, and the information was printed on registration certificates.

The Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Program was approved in 1977 with a separate budget, despite declining Association income. The first *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) product was sold in Columbus, Ohio, in October 1978, a few months after Miller's retirement. CAB later revolutionized the marketing of Angus cattle and of beef in general.

### Strong representation

Miller believed that the Association and its staff needed to be good community citizens, and he set the example. He was a strong and active leader in his church. He served as president of the Saint Joseph Area Chamber of Commerce in 1969. He was chairman of the board of the Heartland (hospital)

Regional Medical Center, Saint Joseph, Mo., and chairman of the Missouri Western State College Foundation, Saint Joseph, to name just a few of his extracurricular activities.

In 1978 he retired from the American Angus Association with a contract to serve as a consultant until 1981. Knowing that consulting would require a negligible amount of his time, he determined at age 62 to start a new career. He chose real estate and for the next 20 years was one of the top-

performing realtors in Saint Joseph. He was a life member of the Million Dollar Sales Club of the Missouri Association of Realtors. During his "retirement" he met and beat cancer with the same dogged determination that marked the other accomplishments in his life.

What struck him down, though, was the illness of his beloved wife, Mabel, and her death in January 2000. His health deteriorated, and he retired from real estate later that year. Miller died July 19 at his residence.

Lloyd Miller made a difference in the lives of many people, including mine (see sidebar). His innovation, his vision, his hard work, and his dedication to the American Angus Association and the Angus breed set high standards for those who followed him. His pioneering PR program positioned the Angus breed as the industry leader. During his more than three decades with the Association, he helped build it into the modern organization we have today. 

### A personal note

If you will pardon a personal note, Lloyd Miller started me on my Angus career. How he did it illustrates how he was always thinking about Angus business, always testing the water to see when it was time to jump in.

In August 1962 I was covering the Ohio State Fair for the *Chicago Daily Drivers Journal*. Somehow or other I ended up in the bar at the old Fort Hayes Hotel in Columbus, Ohio, with Herman Purdy, head of the animal husbandry department at Pennsylvania State University; Dale Baird, fieldman for the Association; and Miller. There may have been another person in the group, but I don't recall.

It was an unlikely group to congregate in a bar. Baird didn't drink and Miller seldom did. But there we were, and from somewhere a lady appeared claiming to be a palm reader. For a few dollars she

would tell your fortune or, if you were cheap, she would check your palm and answer one question for a dollar. When it was my turn I told her I wasn't interested. Without hesitation Miller pulled a dollar from his pocket and told her to check my palm. It so happened that earlier that afternoon I had interviewed for a job with another ag publication, so I asked her if I should change jobs or stick with my present one. Her answer was, "Stay where you are."

The next day at the state fair's Angus show, Miller had Baird ask me if I would like to work for the Association, since they had an opening in the public relations department. This led to a meeting with Miller, an interview a week later in Saint Joseph, Mo., and a new job in October.

— Keith Evans