

Dr. A.V. Bartenslager, president, 1985-86
. . . A teacher, healer, breeder, leader

It's a Saturday morning. A veterinarian is making a call and barely getting through it. On his way home, he calls his family's physician: "I need to see you," he tells him.

The vet had already diagnosed his problem, but the doctor suspected spinal meningitis.

"Lockjaw was not very common, and I can understand why they hadn't seen much. It was the third

Enriching lives through service and dedication

By Jim Cotton, Editor

of July. I was in the hospital three weeks, and I just barely scratched through. I didn't think I was going to, to tell you the truth, as I had an acute case. I lost 70 pounds or better and to completely recover took about six months. I was a skeleton.

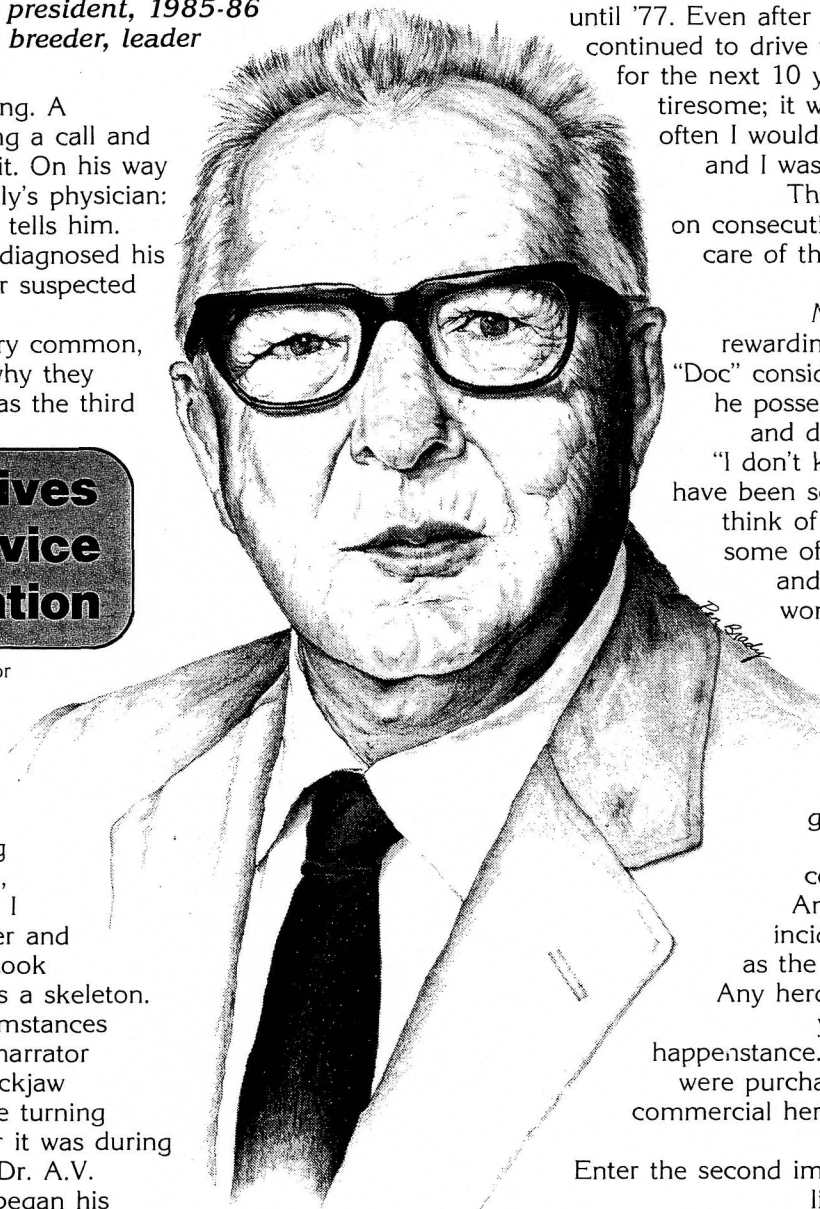
"It's funny how circumstances change your life," our narrator continues, citing the lockjaw episode as one of those turning points in his career, for it was during his recuperation when Dr. A.V. Bartenslager—"Doc"—began his specialization in large animal reproductive and fertility problems. The bout with lockjaw opened a new phase.

"I did farm animal practice until 1947. I was making a living and I had a family. I was very interested in reproductive problems and fertility, and I had been doing this kind of work along with my general practice, but the practice was taking too much of my time. Pregnancy testing was being done by only a few people. At that time, we weren't much advanced beyond going up along the right side of the cow and bumping her in the flank."

After his detour in the hospital, Dr. Bartenslager was given the opportunity to teach a course in reproduction and surgery at his *alma mater*, the veterinary school of the University of Pennsylvania. This he did for 20 years.

As he was teaching just the first semester two days a week, he had the opportunity to develop this other work. At first his consultation was confined close-by to dairy animals. The business gradually expanded until "Doc's" reputation encompassed Colorado, Texas, Florida, New England, and states in between, plus some foreign activity.

"It gravitated more toward beef cattle, and at the last it was practically all Angus cattle. I did that from 1947



until '77. Even after we moved to Virginia, I continued to drive to Philadelphia to teach for the next 10 years. That did get a bit tiresome; it was a 300-mile drive. So often I would drive up Sunday night; and I wasn't very peppy Monday.

The classes were arranged on consecutive days so I could take care of the classwork on Monday and Tuesday."

Mostly, these years were rewarding and fulfilling for him. "Doc" considers himself fortunate as he possessed "wonderful stamina and doing what I liked to do. "I don't know how anyone could have been so fortunate as I. When I think of all the nice people and some of the characters I've met and all the fun I had . . . I worked hard and I traveled widely. I've driven 2.75 million miles. I enjoyed that. I still do—I love to drive a car."

While all this was going on—during the 30 years of travel and consulting—there was an Angus herd. It was not an incidental enterprise, either, as the fruits of today indicate. Any herd marketing 100 bulls a year is not an overnight happenstance. Three purebred heifers were purchased in 1938 to join the commercial herd in place and that was the beginning.

Enter the second important influence in the life of A.V. Bartenslager.

"There was a magazine published in Chicago, and it presented glowing accounts of the International. I just couldn't read enough about it. The first opportunity I had to go to Chicago, I took it—I went with some cattle. It was in the early 1920s.

"I felt I knew what I wanted to do at an early age. I wanted to be a veterinarian, raise Angus cattle, and then have the International champion. As a kid, I thought, well, if I'm going to raise Angus cattle, I want to be able to take care of them."

He credits his father, grandfather, and uncles with modeling good animal husbandry and instilling the stockman's lore. Farmers in York County, Pa., made their living feeding steers from what they raised each summer on their small farms. Steers were tie-stalled and fed individually. Most were shipped into Lancaster from the west and were later received from Virginia.

Times, in the grandest dimension, haven't changed much there in the Churchville, Va., area, for Bartenslager cattle are still fed out just as they were in southeastern Pennsylvania. Both fall and spring calves utilize the facilities to the fullest. All bull calves are fed to 12 months of age. Those making the grade find homes with commercial breeders; the remainder are sold through a well-

developed locker trade. Bulls are marketed through farm-tested sales under the auspices of the Virginia Beef Cattle Improvement Assn. and sold at private treaty.

All females are sold as bred heifers. Replacements are added and cows culled rigidly on performance standards with silage and ear corn fed to the bulls on test. Very little supplemental feed is purchased with most protein coming from farm-raised alfalfa.

Highland Marshall is strongly represented in the pedigrees with the influence of Eileenmere 487, sons and grandsons of Wye breeding, Schearbrook Shoshone, and sampling of current A.I. sires also evident.

The move to Virginia was prompted by the need for more land. York County was developing into a Baltimore bedroom plus there wasn't a bull market in the region.

"I felt that was essential," "Doc" points out, and his hunch about the Virginia location proved correct.

He did run counter to one proverb of the veterinary trade by opening his practice in the area where he grew up. He also didn't enter vet school directly from high school (one could in that day; a pre-vet curriculum was not required) but got married instead. "During those years—1929-30—there wasn't much money so I got married instead of going to school. It didn't cost as much!"

He credits Mrs. Bartenslager as being so important to those days. "She was a great help to our practice, so diplomatic on the phone, and raising the family, of course. She's still a great help. When we first bought the farm, it had a dairy in place, and we carried that on for a while as it helped the cash flow we needed during that period."

He recalls being a York County practitioner during WWII as a busy time "trying to keep tires on a car, a car that would run. We had five children by then." He can relate to the world-famous veterinarian-author James Herriot and the latter's accounts of the amusing and challenging daily incidents and escapades of the life. "Some of mine are similar and some are almost exactly the same. I enjoy going back to York and visiting."

Two clients he remembers vividly include an attorney whose dairy farm was a matter of great concern and who recorded Bartenslager's every comment and pregnancy prediction for later cross-examination.

"And, I remember a place in Texas primarily because of a Mexican man who worked there. He entertained us the whole time I was on the place with his tales about armadillos.

"I remember his neat little house out along the road, very nicely mowed yard and flower garden; it always impressed me to see flowers in a rather barren sort of area."

As witnessing cattle types fade and change, he's been there. "One who never changed was Jim Lingle of Wye Plantation. He could afford to stick to his opinions . . . and he didn't have to sell for high prices when his kind of cattle weren't popular. The small cattle proved very impractical and coupled at that time was the fad of fitting cattle by fattening. Cattle weren't fitted; they were just pure fat.

"That type had the advantage of fattening easily which contributed to their calving difficulties and infertility. It was a challenge," he says of that era. "There was a lot of interchange between buyer and seller over animals that wouldn't breed. You'd hear—'I paid \$10,000 for her. She's got to breed!'"

Dr. Bartenslager helped usher in the infancy of A.I. working with Dr. Perry of Rutgers University after the pro-

fessor's study of the procedure in Sweden.

"We think A.I. has only arrived since open A.I., but in those days, there was quite a bit done within herds. Of course, it was fresh semen, so each farm had to have a small lab. Freezing was the great breakthrough."

Dr. A.V. Bartenslager has watched, rode, and stood against the shifting tides sweeping across his breed of choice and its association.



When honored last September for his service as president, American Angus Assn., it was the culmination of a youngster's interest in Angus fostered on a Pennsylvania stock farm. A velvet-lined oak briefcase was presented by the Association.



John Crouch and "Doc"—two Southern Gentlemen—agree the case would perfectly display a matched set of dueling pistols.

"It's been a real interesting experience, and I have no doubt it will be even more so from now on." He expects changes: "They're just more rapid as time goes on." He's confident of the future: "We've had temporary setbacks in this business before, and each time they've been followed by a period of advancement." He's witnessed the frontiers breached by skillful breeders and merchandisers: "We have more facts now to make decisions." And, he expects a new era across the beef industry's public: "We used to sit down to a roast beef dinner at noon when we brought the horses in to feed. That's a bygone era.

"I've seen a lot of animals that have made history," he reflects. And, after nearly 50 years in the business and a lifelong association with cattle, a brush with deadly tetanus, and open heart surgery, A.V. has written a fair chronicle himself. Life has been demanding and anything but tedious down the path he chose to trod.

A son, a son-in-law, and six of seven grandsons have helped on the farm and all operate the herd as one unit though each owns individual animals. The Bartenslager clan has become pretty well entrenched there in the Churchville area where the fabled Shenandoah Valley, the Blue Ridge, and Skyline Drive converge to offer plenty of scenic attractions. It's one of those hunter havens, and "Doc" acknowledges he loves to hunt, speaking of diversions, but he hasn't expended much time toward it lately. He thinks he'd like to fish more. "But I must not enjoy it, or I'd find time to," he laughs.

So much for distractions, then. Angus cattle have been "Doc's" devotion, one he's served well. An adopted son of The Old Dominion, he has represented the State of Presidents in the spirit to which it's accustomed. AJ