

Pages Out of

In Part 1 of this two-part series, author Keith Evans focuses on the early years of *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal*, from the time Fred Hahne conceived the idea for the publication through when the Hahne family turned over its control.

by Keith Evans

It was 1919, during the heady days of high cattle prices and soaring agricultural profits that followed World War I, that the *Angus Journal* was born. That year, an enterprising 42-year-old country printer from Webster City, Iowa, decided that the Angus cattle business would be his future. His name was Fred Hahne, and on Aug. 10 that year he published the first issue of *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal*.

It proved to be a wise decision. The move helped make Hahne, a printer since 1902, a fairly wealthy man and a respected publisher and editor. Eventually, *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal*, which became the *Angus Journal* in 1979, established the largest circulation of any beef breed magazine in the world. Hahne's dedication and the dedication of those who followed in his footsteps helped the American Angus Association (the American Aberdeen-Angus Breeders' Association until 1956) become, in 1963, the largest beef cattle registry organization in the world.

Hahne had entertained thoughts of starting an Angus magazine for several years. The seeds that grew into the *Angus Journal* were sown in 1918, when Hahne approached Otto Battles, a highly respected Angus cattle breeder from Maquoketa, Iowa, with his idea. Battles, at the time, was an Association Board member and would become its president in 1920. Battles encouraged Hahne to start his Angus breed publication. He believed that it would help unite Association members and promote the breed.

The Association was then the only major beef breed in the country that wasn't supported by an official publication. *The Hereford Journal*, established in 1910, and the *Shorthorn World*, established in 1915, were flourishing, and the two breed associations they represented were also going strong. The connection between the magazines and the successful associations must have been obvious.

Battles had other reasons for wanting an Angus magazine. Despite good economic times, there was mounting dissension among Angus breeders. The old guard insisted on maintaining the Association's proxy system of voting while others wanted a representative form of government. With the proxy system, a handful of breeders controlled the Association with an iron hand. Progress, or lack of it, was dictated by those who controlled the proxies — sometimes as few as five people. Battles, though a part of the establishment, opposed the proxy system. He believed that a well-edited national magazine would help reshape and expand the Angus breed.

An instant hit

Hahne could see the growing acceptance of the Angus breed all around him. Iowa was home to many top Angus herds. He had held back on starting a magazine, his son wrote in 1969, because he felt that there were not enough members of the Association. But by 1919 total membership had topped 5,000 — enough, he believed, to support a magazine.

Encouraged by Battles, and strengthened by his good business sense, Hahne published the first bimonthly issue of *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal* in August. There were more than 60 pages in the first issue, and another issue about the same size was published two weeks later. From the start, either red or green ink or both were used on the cover until full-color covers were initiated in the 1940s.

The magazine was attractive, filled with Angus news and information, and beautifully



History

printed, as one would expect from Hahne, the master printer. The subscription price was \$1 in the United States, \$1.50 in Canada and \$2 elsewhere.

The connection between Hahne and the American Aberdeen-Angus Breeders' Association was very close. F.H. Higgins was the magazine's first editor in chief. Higgins was the assistant secretary of the Association, hired in 1918 to oversee Association advertising and publicity. The Association paid his full salary. In addition, two of the Association's three field representatives, C.D. Lowe, Knoxville, Tenn., and E.T. Davis, Iowa City, Iowa, also acted as *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal* representatives.

The new magazine was an instant hit and thrived for nearly two years. The Dec. 10, 1919, issue had 80 pages, with another 26 pages in the Dec. 25 edition. Throughout 1919 and 1920, bimonthly issues of 40 to 60 pages were common. The Angus business was growing. From 1907 through 1920 registrations more than doubled, increasing to 24,000 a year. The average price of Angus cattle sold at auction increased from \$134 in 1907 to \$705 in 1920. People were buying ads and subscriptions with gusto.

Staying afloat

But the good times didn't last. In 1921 a devastating postwar agricultural recession hit, and the bottom dropped out of farm markets. The average price of Angus sold that year was just more than \$272. By the end of the year, the Association eliminated its field staff, cutting the magazine field staff in half. Higgins' Association department was eliminated, which meant that Hahne would have to hire Higgins outright. As a result, Hahne, in August 1921, became the magazine's editor, as well as publisher and main ad salesman.

The publication struggled throughout the 1920s into the mid-1930s. Just as the agricultural recession ended, the Great Depression was inaugurated by the 1929 stock market crash. Journal business declined dramatically. The bottom came in 1933, with only 14 registered Angus cattle auctions nationwide. The average price per head sold at auction was a mere \$92.30 — not the kind of business that could support a bimonthly magazine. Publication was cut back to one issue per month in August 1933, but many issues were still small and unprofitable.

However, Hahne never lost his faith in the

Angus business. In 1923 the fight among Association members to change the proxy voting system was coming to a head. Hahne had been neutral on the issue of proxy voting, no doubt because some of its proponents were good advertisers. However, he saw the damage it was doing to the business and, with the encouragement of Battles, waded in on the side of the reformers. Battles later wrote:

"Hahne threw the pages of *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal* open to the advocates of reform and put his own powerful editorial policy in action. I am convinced ... that without (his) wholehearted support ... our cause would have been lost."

Had Hahne been on the losing side, it probably would have cost him the privilege of being the official publication of the Association. It could have put him out of the magazine business.

During the reformation battle, Hahne became close friends with Judge S.C. Fullerton, owner of Sunbeam Farms, Miami, Okla. Fullerton had played a major role in revising the Association's system of representative government. A few years later Hahne got into the Angus business as owner of Strathmore Farms. He also bought two famous Iowa Angus herds and saved them from dispersion, if not sale for harvest. He later sold these cattle to Fullerton. During the darkest days of the Depression, Fullerton loaned money to his friend Hahne to help keep *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal* afloat. In his 16th anniversary issue in August 1935, Hahne rejoiced for having survived the tough times.

The first post-Depression fieldman (ad salesman) for the journal was Gay Quammen, who joined the staff in 1936, a sign of growing prosperity. In 1938, two more fieldmen were added to the roster. Throughout the years, as the Angus business grew, journal fieldmen became a staple of the Angus business, representing the magazine in set territories covering all states and most of Canada, and often working out of their homes.

Another Hahne joined the magazine staff



in 1937. He was Richard "Dick" Hahne, Fred's only son. Dick became associate editor, with his father as editor, and was involved with the journal until it became the property of the American Angus Association in 1979. He had learned the Angus business from his father, and he believed in supporting the people who produced the most advertising revenue. It was a policy that continued basically unchanged until 1979.

World War II seemed to have little effect on the publication. Food production was a national priority. Despite beef price controls that a July 1942 journal article claimed allowed cattle breeders to make little profit, the Angus business grew, and so did *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal*.

The August 1942 magazine, billed as the "New Bull" issue, was loaded with advertisements and totaled 143 pages, the largest single issue up to that point. By 1946 there were 54 pages of advertising in the front of the magazine preceding the first editorial page. The ad revenue allowed the Hahnes to hire a staff artist, Henri Fjetland. Fjetland designed the magazine and sale books, and also did oil paintings. Many of his paintings were used as covers.

Communicating the Association message

There were other big changes during the

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war. Fred decided to provide several pages for the Association to fill with news. Starting in 1942, these pages were written by Colin Kennedy, who had just been hired by the Association as its "publicity" manager. This meant that the Association could communicate monthly with its members. Kennedy played a major role in *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal* for years to come.

In 1945 Dick stepped down as associate editor. He became assistant publisher, and Sam Bartlet was hired as managing editor. Bartlet had been a center of controversy, having worked briefly for the Association during a period of discord between a few Angus breeders and the Association and between the Association and the magazine. When the Association let Bartlet go, Fred hired him. Bartlet did not last long. He started in November 1945 and was gone by January 1946.

Hired to replace Bartlet was Colin Kennedy,

who had worked for the Association since 1942. Kennedy edited the publication for nearly 30 years. Born on a farm near Battle Creek, Iowa, Kennedy was a journalism graduate from Iowa State College, Ames. He worked as farm editor of the *Waterloo* (Iowa) *Courier*, then served 12 years as associate editor of the *Chicago Daily Drivers Journal*. In 1942 he joined the staff of the Association.

A good writer and photographer, Kennedy covered many Angus events and wrote feature stories about his favorite subjects, registered Angus breeders. His column "On Angus Trails" became one of the most popular features of the magazine.

"Colin was quiet and reserved and a good journalist," said Murray Fretz who joined the magazine's staff in 1968 as general manager. "He brought out the human side of the Angus business. He wrote more about the people rather than how great their cattle were."

The Aberdeen-Angus Journal changed forever in 1952. Fred died at his home March 19, two days past his 75th birthday. He missed, by a few months, the dedication ceremony he had planned of a large, two-story addition to the offices and printing complex in Webster City. His drive and his strong presence, which had guided the magazine for some 33 years, would be missed.

For the next six years Dick ran the company and the magazine. He loved the printing business, but seemed to feel less comfortable managing the magazine. He had a hard time dealing with dwarfism, a genetic defect that was threatening the Angus business. Some of the publication's best advertisers were affected dramatically by the problem.

Although the magazine had printed stories explaining the proven genetic cause of dwarfism, there was also some hedging on the issue, no doubt to appease some advertisers. As late as 1957 the magazine carried a story from a breeder who claimed to have proof that dwarfism was nutritional rather than genetic. This upset many scientists, as well as Association staff who were trying to fully inform Angus breeders and lay the controversy to rest.

A solid, honest, hardworking man, Dick was not the leader and inspiration that his father had been. Profits from the magazine began to dwindle. In a letter to the field staff in January 1957, he outlined how advertising pages had slipped from 2,055 in 1953, the year after his father died, to 1,814 at the end of 1956. Profits were declining at an even faster pace.

"The first five months of 1954, our profit was \$6,981.03; the first five months of 1955 it was \$5,728.70 and the first five months of 1956 it was \$380.40, and the first five months of the current volume (fiscal year) we will be lucky to break even," he wrote. The solution, as he outlined it, "We have to sell more business, and it must bring in more revenue."

In an effort to improve advertising revenue, Dick initiated a western edition of the publication. Most western breeders had looked at the magazine as a Midwestern and eastern publication. The new magazine carried lots of local news and also became the official publication for many of the state associations, as well as some of the western Canadian provinces. With little fanfare, however, the two magazines were combined in August 1959. The experiment, Dick wrote, had increased circulation of the journal by some 27%. But it was time, he decided, to turn the money-earning segment of the business over to someone who could be more productive. As a result Dale Runnion, a

Push for change

The brief rift between the magazine and the Association began in 1945 and concluded in late 1946. For a period, Fred renounced the designation as "Official Publication of the American Aberdeen-Angus Breeders' Association." The big problem was that the Association's venerable secretary, W.H. Tomhave, was nearing retirement age. In addition, the Association had grown faster and increased business faster than Tomhave and his staff could handle.

As a result, a number of Association members were pushing for changes in the Association and the retirement or firing of Tomhave.

The elder Hahne joined the group critical of the Association. In the process, he made serious and seemingly unsubstantiated charges about the Association. He renounced his official publication status beginning with the December 1945 issue, and that continued until late 1946. By that time, Tomhave had retired and Frank Richards was Association secretary.

Richards and Fred were well-acquainted. Richards was a journalist, a past manager of the *Kansas City Daily Drivers Telegraph*, and he had no interest in starting a competing Angus magazine as others had suggested. The two soon came to an agreement, and there was never any serious discussion of the Association owning a magazine until 1978.



field representative for *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal* since 1952, was hired as advertising manager in December 1958.

Raised on an Ohio general livestock farm, Runnion was a graduate of Ohio State University, and had broad cattle business and beef publication experience. He had been a livestock buyer for the Kroger Packing Co. and served in the Army in World War II, leaving with the rank of Major. He managed a stockyard and then worked as an advertising salesman and field representative in the East and Southeast for the *Corn Belt Farm Dailies*.

Runnion had his work cut out for him. In addition to the slipping revenue, the staffs of the magazine and the Association were at odds. There was “constant bickering,” Runnion said. Dick had been good friends of the Sunbeam people (good advertisers, but who were suffering losses because of the Sunbeam-dwarfism connection). The journal fieldmen didn’t like to talk about the genetic causes, which the Association fieldmen were bound to do. This kept things stirred up. Runnion’s first priority was to revitalize his field staff, and Dick had given him full power to fire and hire.

Runnion got rid of some fieldmen and rewarded the performance of others. He told everyone he hired, “Now, I’ll pay you a salary (to start), but my men will work on commission within a year, or they won’t have a job.” When a salesman started making a larger income by selling more business, Runnion let him keep it rather than reduce the person’s commission as had been done in the past. From 1960 to 1968, the publication’s field force cooperated with the Association, Runnion said, and everyone worked together to sell Angus cattle.

Runnion convinced Dick to eliminate the long sale reports. They took up so much space that many were months old before they ran in the magazine. Under the new system the reports were timely and to-the-point. He encouraged the editors to run more stories each month, and a staff member was hired to page the magazine and get more information into each issue.

Going outside the family

In 1965 Dick named Runnion general manager, the first nonfamily member to take charge of the magazine. Runnion presided

over the publication during the biggest growth period in Angus history. In 1960 registrations of Angus cattle totaled 235,701. In 1968 registrations hit an all-time high of 406,310. The years were productive and profitable.

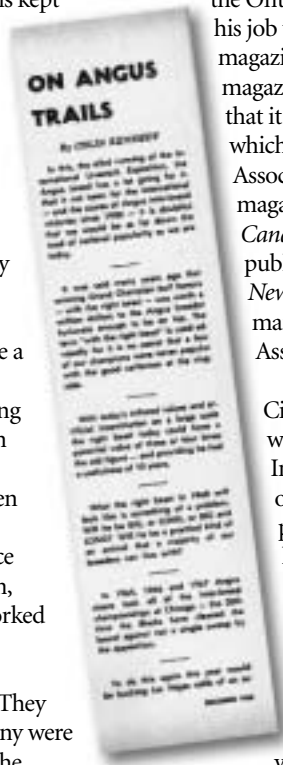
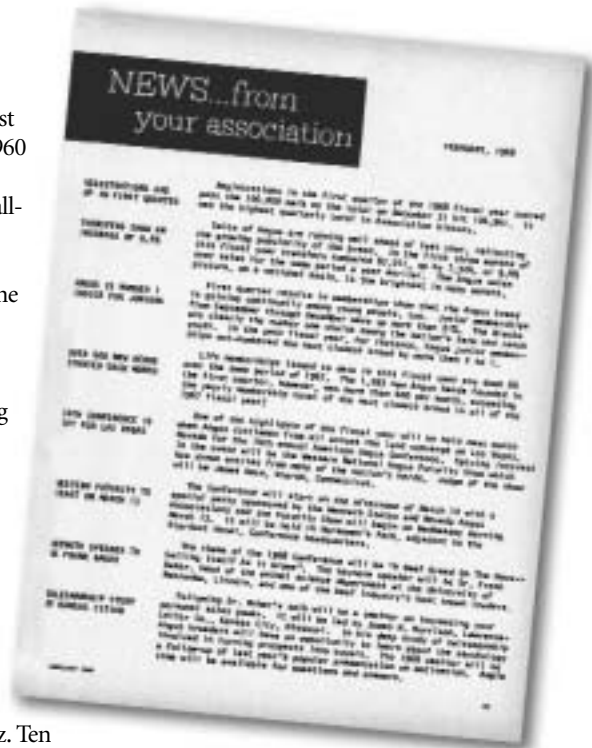
However, the future of the magazine didn’t look all that rosy to Runnion. Dick’s sons were becoming more and more involved with the business, and Runnion wasn’t interested in breaking in a new generation. He considered starting his own competing Angus magazine. While exploring this possibility, he got an offer to work for Ankony Angus, and he took the job.

The man who replaced Runnion in 1968, and who eventually bought controlling interest in *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal*, was a young Canadian named Murray Fretz. Ten years earlier, Fretz began his career in livestock publishing as secretary-fieldman of the Ontario Angus Association. Part of his job was to publish a quarterly magazine for the members. The magazine proved to be so successful that it was distributed nationally, which led the Canadian Angus Association to request that the magazine be published as the *Canadian Angus News*. Fretz became publisher of the *Canadian Angus News* and was later hired as general manager of the Canadian Angus Association.

When Fretz arrived in Webster City, *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal* was still being set in hot lead with Intertype machines. It was printed on an old-fashioned letterpress printing press that had to be hand-fed, one sheet at a time. “When a sheet was printed, it had to pass over a gas fire to dry the ink,” Fretz recalls. “If something went wrong there was a good chance of a fire, and we had several over the years.”

Fretz presided over the conversion of the publication to modern offset printing. The Hahnes bought high-quality Heidelberg presses from Germany. The old Intertype machines were discarded, and type was set on tape or paper. The type was pasted on sheets of paper that could be photographed and turned into printing plates. The change in production efficiency and printing quality, Fretz recalls, was “dramatic.”

There was another change in 1973.



Kennedy, who had been on the editorial staff of the magazine since February 1946, decided in late 1972 that it was time for him to slow down. His last issue as executive editor was December 1972. He became a contributing editor and continued writing his popular column, “On Angus Trails.” Hired to replace Kennedy was Jim Orton who had been a journal field representative in Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas and New Mexico since 1964. Prior to that, Orton had edited the *Kansas Stockman* for 13 years, where he established his reputation as an excellent writer and editor. An agricultural journalism graduate from Kansas State Agricultural College (now Kansas State University), he served in the Army Air Corps during World War II.

The next few years were good years for the journal and Fretz. One disappointment, he said, was that many breeders wouldn’t use the new cattle breeding technology in their herds, thus they couldn’t support their advertising claims with performance records. “Too much of the advertising was just propaganda,” Fretz said. “Although we didn’t believe all of it, we printed it to sell space.”

By 1975 Dick was ready to get out of the printing and magazine business. As a result, he basically turned the printing business over to his sons, and sold controlling interest in the publication to Fretz. For the first time in its 56-year history, control of the magazine was out of the hands of the Hahne family.



Editor’s Note: In his next installment, Evans chronicles the Association’s purchase of the publication and its history under Association ownership.