

Pages Out of

Part 2

Under Association ownership, the *Angus Journal* experiences some bumps and bruises before establishing itself as the information leader it is today.

by Keith Evans

The dream of owning *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal* was nurtured for years by a handful of American Angus Association leaders. But the time never seemed right to make a move.

Few people wanted to offend Fred Hahne, the man who had founded the magazine in 1919, or his son Dick by implying that the Association could do a better job. What's more, many staff members, dating back to Frank Richards in 1946, were reluctant to enter the magazine publishing field. But all this changed in 1978 when C.K. Allen was hired as the Association's eighth executive vice president.

Allen, 35 years old, full of ideas and in a hurry to get things done, was determined that the American Angus Association would publish its own magazine. Before joining the Association, he worked as director of education and research for the now defunct American Polled Hereford Association. He helped the editor there develop the first performance issue of the association-owned *Polled Hereford World*. It demonstrated to him the value of association ownership of its breed publication.

At his first meeting with the Association Board of Directors in June 1978, Allen discussed informally the idea of an Association-owned magazine. He wanted to either buy *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal* from Murray Fretz and the Hahnes or convert the quarterly *Angus Bulletin* into a monthly magazine. Board members told him there wasn't much point in talking about buying *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal* if it isn't for sale. Within days Allen called Fretz, majority owner of *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal* along with the Hahne family.

As Fretz recalls, Allen told him that the Association was interested in buying him out. If



that wasn't possible then the Association would likely start its own breed magazine, Allen explained.

"Then you are probably going to buy me out," Fretz told Allen. "I didn't want to run a breed magazine in competition with the American Angus Association," Fretz explained in a 1999 interview. "I never had any second thoughts about it; it seemed like the thing to do at the time."

Allen reported his findings at the next Association Board Meeting. The members approved the concept of buying the journal or converting the bulletin to a magazine. Association President Gilman Stewart

appointed a Publication Committee. The group flew to Webster City, Iowa, a few days later and negotiated the terms of the sale.

Stewart and Fretz signed the agreement in November at Louisville, Ky., prior to the Association's Annual Meeting. The purchase price was \$200,000 for the trademarked name *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal*, the negative files, back issues, records, subscriber information, editorial material and the goodwill of the magazine and its owners. The agreement also called for Fretz to publish the magazine through the June 1979 Herd Bull Edition.

The Association set up a for-profit entity, Angus Productions Inc. (API), to publish the magazine. Control was placed in the hands of a seven-member Board of Directors, with all the stock held by the Association. The name of the magazine was shortened to *Angus Journal*, the name most people had used for years. All this took more time than some anticipated.

Time of transition

Allen had big plans for the Association-owned magazine. He wanted it to have a circulation of 40,000 and to be sent free to every adult and junior member of the American Angus Association. He figured that the advertising page rate would need to be between \$700 and \$800 and that the Association regional managers would serve as magazine representatives in addition to their regular jobs. To make a clean break from the past, Allen and the API Board decided that none of the Webster City staff would move to Saint Joseph. A completely new staff would be formed.

Things didn't work out as planned. The Association Board thought the \$800 page rate was too high and pegged it at \$690. Furthermore, they decided they didn't want regional managers



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to function as *Angus Journal* sales representatives. This meant additional staff was needed to sell ads. Also, the magazine couldn't offer ring service because there were not enough people to do it. And time was running short.

Finally, on March 1, 1979, Allen hired Michael Sweet as the new *Angus Journal* general manager and editor. A graduate of Kansas State University (K-State) with a degree in technical journalism, Sweet was executive director of the Red Angus Association of America (RAAA) in Denton, Texas, when he was hired. He had little more than three months to assemble his staff and publish the first issue — a daunting task.

The new staff set up shop in the basement of the American Angus Association and started to work. "It was [work] seven days a week as long as you could stand it," said Ann Huffine Gooding, associate editor on the first magazine and, later, the second editor of the *Angus Journal*. Despite many problems, the first issue rolled off the presses in time to make the July deadline. The cover featured a new bull head painting by Frank Murphy. Editorial content covered more general farm and ranch issues with less coverage about the Angus business. This wasn't generally popular.

The ring service issue, combined with the decision not to hire any of the former staff, caused an additional problem. Greg Garwood, former advertising manager and a popular ringman for the old journal, started a new magazine, *Blacks Unlimited*. The magazine quickly gained the support of members and advertisers who knew and liked Garwood, and those who wanted ring service as part of their advertising investment. Colin Kennedy came out of retirement to write "On Angus Trails," and Veryl Jones, a popular ad salesman and ringman for *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal*, joined the *Blacks Unlimited* staff. It quickly siphoned revenue from the *Angus Journal*.

Changes were made at the October 1979 Association Board Meeting. Ring service was instituted for advertisers who placed a minimum of two pages of advertising, and the page rate was reduced to \$595. This pleased the majority of advertisers, and *Angus Journal* income increased. *Blacks Unlimited* remained a competitor until January 1985, when Garwood ceased

publication of his magazine and was named general manager of the *Angus Journal*. This was well after Allen and most of the original employees of the *Angus Journal* had moved on to other jobs.

Though the magazine was profitable, things still were not running smoothly. In late 1980 and early 1981, Allen and the Association Board discussed the need for change and improvement. Sweet had left in 1980, and Allen had become the *de facto* general manager.

Putting things in motion

At the March 1981 Association Board Meeting events were put into motion that resulted in the *Angus Journal* we know today. The Board was set to interview Dale Runnion, the onetime manager of *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal*, to see if he would help reorganize the magazine. Events at the meeting happened in this order. Allen's contract was up, and he and the Board could not agree on the terms of its renewal. As a result, Allen resigned. Then, Runnion was hired as a consultant to the *Angus Journal*. Later he would become acting general manager. Finally, Richard "Dick" Spader was hired as the Association's new executive vice president. It was a historic meeting.

Spader and Runnion teamed up during the next two years to reorganize the magazine, improve its performance and build a smoothly running management team. Some changes were already in place. Additional advertising salespeople had been hired. Terry Cotton, who would eventually become *Angus Journal* general manager, was hired in 1979. The next year, Jones, who had worked for the old journal and then briefly for *Blacks Unlimited*, became an *Angus Journal* sales representative.

But the lack of an adequate magazine field staff was still a problem.

Spader, the *de facto* general manager of the magazine at the time, had a plan. He made the conversion of the Association field staff into representatives for both the Association and the *Angus Journal* a priority. At his first Board Meeting as executive vice president, Spader asked for permission to gradually begin the conversion of Association regional managers into what he called "dual role"

► Signing the agreement for the Association to purchase the *Angus Journal* are Murray Fretz (left), publisher and majority stockholder of the magazine, and Gilman Stewart, president of the Association in 1978.

employees — regional managers and *Angus Journal* representatives.

There was opposition, but Spader assured the Board that no employee would be forced to change. He also won approval for regional managers to receive a small commission on advertising sales, in addition to their regular salary. Within a year, four dual-role territories were set up. Three of the older regional managers decided not to take on the extra responsibility. But by March 1985, after three retirements, the conversion was complete. By that time, Cotton had been named general manager of the *Angus Journal*, and Spader and Cotton worked out a compensation program that ensured a balanced effort in magazine responsibilities and member services.

Stacking the deck

Probably no one other than Runnion had better qualifications to revamp the *Angus Journal* when he was hired in 1981. He had worked in almost every area of the beef breed magazine business. Not only had he been an advertising salesman for livestock publications, he had managed *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal* in the late 1960s. Moreover, he started the *Limousin World* and ran it for several years before selling it and retiring. He told the Board in the March 1981 interview, "Boys, I think I can help your magazine."

"Production held the key to everything," Runnion said in a 1999 interview. "We had to speed up ad and editorial production and find ways to better serve the advertisers."

Based upon Runnion's advice, Spader appointed Cheryl Oxley to manage production, a job she still holds. She grew up on a west-central Missouri farm and earned a degree in secondary education from Southwest Baptist College in Bolivar, Mo. She

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taught school and later worked as assistant advertising manager for *The Packer* in Kansas City, Mo. She started as an *Angus Journal* typesetter in 1979. In 1991 she was named advertising/production manager.

Runnion was soon named acting general manager, and in 1982 he hired Jones to direct advertising sales. Jones, who had sold advertising for the *Chicago Daily Drivers Journal*, *The Aberdeen-Angus Journal*, *Blacks Unlimited* and the new *Angus Journal*, had the experience needed to guide the new dual-role regional managers, many of whom had little experience in sales and ring service.

Another Runnion protégé was Cotton, an advertising salesman when Runnion started consulting. "I was immediately impressed with Terry," Runnion said in 2004. "Cotton worked under me and then Veryl Jones, and later got his 'Ph.D.' watching (Greg) Garwood wheel and deal for two years. By 1986 he was ready to become general manager of the *Angus Journal*."

During the next two years Runnion cut the time it took to produce a monthly issue. He and Spader replaced some employees and authorized the purchase of the newest Compugraphic typesetting equipment. Runnion praised Spader's dedication and support. By August 1983, Runnion felt he had fulfilled his promises to the Board of Directors and submitted his resignation.

One serious problem remained — *Blacks Unlimited*. Breeders (particularly advertisers) and Board Members were fed up with the two competing magazines. In fall 1984 talks began with Garwood, owner of *Blacks Unlimited*. By December an agreement had been reached. Garwood would cease publication of his magazine and become general manager of the *Angus Journal*. It was a good move. Angus breeders liked doing business with Garwood, and *Angus Journal* business increased.

Garwood helped set up a Special Services Department to produce sale books, herd brochures and other collateral material. Cotton was tapped to lead this department, which soon led to his next promotion.



► Technology plays a big part in the *Angus Journal's* ability to serve its readers. API's Web pages provide easy access to its publications.

Garwood worked as general manager for less than two years, resigning to go into the real estate business. Cotton was immediately named to replace Garwood and will complete his 20th year as general manager in 2004.

Born in Lansing, Mich., Cotton grew up in Deadwood, S.D. He earned a degree from K-State in animal science. He worked for a registered Angus and Polled Hereford operation near Maysville, Mo., then became agricultural service manager for the Wichita (Kansas) Chamber of Commerce. He joined the *Angus Journal* as an advertising salesman in 1979, then served as regional manager in California, Arizona and Nevada before managing the Special Services Department.

The editors

Through the first six years of the *Angus Journal's* existence in Saint Joseph, the editor's job was little more than temporary. General manager Sweet gave up the title of editor in July 1980. He appointed Ann Huffine Gooding, an editorial assistant, to the post. She resigned two years later. Nancy Anne Sayre, Churchville, Md., an assistant editor, served as interim editor until Jeri Lynn Sloan (later Gilleland) of Cameron, Mo., was hired. Gilleland resigned in July

1984, and Sayre returned as editor for about a year. When she resigned, her assistant Lori Riffel served as interim editor for two months.

James "Jim" Cotton (no relation to the general manager) was hired. He held the reigns for nearly four years, providing stability to the editorial department and solid writing and editing skills. A native of Meadville, Penn., he was a graduate of the University of Arizona, Tucson. He had served as assistant secretary and fieldman for the American Murray Grey Association in Bozeman, Mont., and editor and publisher of the *Simmental Shield* in Lindsborg, Kan. His last *Angus Journal* issue was the 1989 June-July Herd

Reference Edition with a then record 714 pages.

Kansas native Jerilyn Johnson, named editor in September 1989, helped turn the *Angus Journal* into the most respected breed association magazine in the world. Born in Emporia, Kan., and raised in Pittsburgh, Kan., she graduated from K-State with a degree in agricultural journalism. Prior to joining the *Angus Journal*, she served as assistant and then associate editor of the *Missouri Ruralist*, specializing as the livestock editor, and was an award-winning writer and photographer.

Under her leadership the *Angus Journal* emphasized the human side of beef cattle breeding and featured more useful information about genetics, management and sales. Instead of hiring an assistant, she used the money to set up a field editor program using freelance journalists from different parts of the country. They extended the reach of the magazine, helping make it more national in scope. She also set up the Land Stewardship Program in 1990 to honor Angus breeders who take care of the land and the environment. She resigned in 1997.

Shauna Rose Hermel, *Angus Journal* editor for the last seven years, was born into the Angus business. The daughter of registered Angus breeders, she grew up on the family farm near Bethel, Mo. She is the only editor to bring to the job extensive experience in beef publishing as well as

owning, breeding and showing Angus cattle.

Actively involved in the Missouri Junior Angus Association, she was a delegate to the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) Annual Meeting, received the Gold Award in the NJAA Recognition Program and placed first in the American Angus Auxiliary's scholarship contest. She earned bachelor's and master's degrees in ag journalism from the University of Missouri-Columbia and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, respectively. Hermel worked eight years for *BEEF* magazine and one of its sister publications before joining the *Angus Journal* in September 1997.

"I'm research-oriented," Hermel says of herself, explaining she's tried to increase the publication's focus on economically relevant production and marketing themes. She likes working with Angus people because they tend to be progressive breeders who look "at the true value of cattle."

She is also devoted to small-scale producers. "They need to know as much if not more than owners of 200-cow herds," she says, pointing out that segment of the industry is fast losing access to information.

Growth in *Angus Journal* business has made it possible to include more news and information in every issue. "It is important that we look to industry and to science to bring our readers potential new ideas and techniques," Hermel says. On the other side of the coin, she points out that it is important to not get overly scientific. This, she and Cotton agree, could scare off less-experienced producers.

"Our main goal," Cotton says, "is to get more information to breeders to help make them more profitable. Growth has also provided space for more information on Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) and its benefits to both registered Angus and commercial cattle producers."

Benefits of technology

Technology plays a big part in the ability of the *Angus Journal* to serve its readers and to provide more service at less cost. In 1979 the magazine was composed by the labor-intensive paste-up method. Type was set by machine, pasted by hand onto paper page forms and then photographed to make printing plates. Desktop publishing and computers have changed all this. Today, a completed page comes from the computer and is converted directly into a printing plate with no intermediate steps.

In order to free up more pages for

production features, research, etc., the staff makes increased use of API's Web pages and the Internet. Sale reports are now posted online, often within 48 hours of the sale. Real-time coverage of super-point Roll-of-Victory (ROV) shows and industry events provides in-depth reporting within minutes of the activity.

By the mid-1990s the staff of the magazine and API had outgrown its space in the basement and a few first-floor offices of the Association headquarters. Expansion plans were made, and in 1998 the staff moved into a new *Angus Journal* wing that adjoins the northeast corner of the headquarters building.

Today API, the parent company of the *Angus Journal*, has a budget approaching \$5 million. The regional managers service some 600 registered Angus auctions a year. The magazine publishes a record number of information and advertising pages.

What's more, the staff provides additional information to breeders via the Internet and the *Angus Beef Bulletin*. The *Angus Beef Bulletin* gives commercial cattle producers news and information about

Angus programs and how they benefit users of Angus genetics. Each issue contains features on farmers and ranchers who successfully use Angus cattle and Association programs. Circulation is more than 80,000, ranking its circulation (mailing list) among the largest beef publication circulations in the nation.

Across two centuries, for nearly 85 years, the *Angus Journal* has promoted the Angus breed, supplied solid information for breeders, and offered support and encouragement during tough times. For the last 25 years it has been a full partner of the American Angus Association, edited and published in Saint Joseph, Mo.

"The future of the *Angus Journal*," says Cotton, "depends upon the strength of the Angus breed and the collective strength of individual Angus breeders."

If so, then the magazine's future is in strong and capable hands.



Editor's Note: In his first installment (see page 142 of the June 2004 *Angus Journal*), Evans chronicled the creation and formative years of the publication now known as the *Angus Journal*.