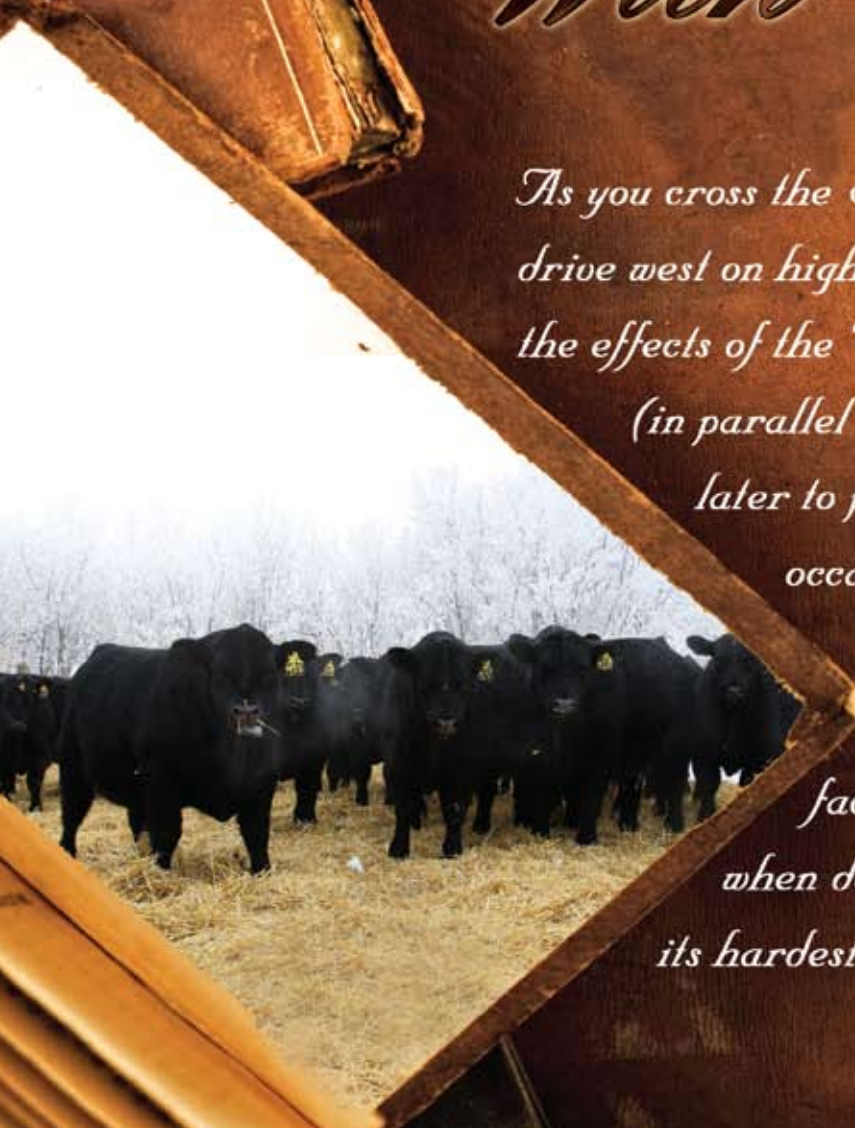


# *Determination With Passion*

*As you cross the South Saskatchewan and drive west on highway fifteen, one can still see the effects of the "dirty thirties." Shelter belts (in parallel rows) were planted years later to prevent soil erosion. The occasional fallen farm site leaving memories of hardships homesteaders in the area faced during the traumatic 30's when developing agriculture suffered its hardest blow.*



Just fifteen minutes west of Outlook, lays the village of Bounty (formally known as Botany) or what is left of it. Bounty was once a small village of 200 residents, with nineteen businesses, which included a three-story twenty-four room hotel, three grain elevators, two banking establishments and a newspaper called the Fertile Valley Echo. Today, Bounty sits lonely on the prairie skyline, for all that remains is a few scattered buildings, a community hall and the local cemetery.

A mere short run south of the forgotten hamlet is the home of a family breeding operation built from pure drive, determination and necessity. Their family forefathers migrated from Ontario to the Mildren area, a short drive west of Bounty, where they established a homestead in the early 1900's. But the "dirty thirties" caused traumatic family ruin, and the children were farmed out, leaving the family scattered. James T. Johnston was relocated to Marsden, Saskatchewan where he took a job with Jay S. Palmer, an affluent rancher who raised purebred Herefords under the farm name of EXL Herefords. It was there that James developed a knowledge and fondness for breeding purebred seed stock.

In 1939, Germany declared war on Great Britain and being a member of the commonwealth, Canada joined the Great War. Many young Canadian farm boys joined the forces to fight for our freedom and amongst them was Private James T. Johnston. During his tour of duty, James met Mary, who hailed from the neighbouring province of Manitoba and after the war in 1945, the couple were married.

Johnston and his new bride returned to Saskatchewan where James found employment as a carpenter, a trade which he had learned and used while



in the service, but he could not forget his rural roots. With the help of the VLA, James and Mary purchased three quarter sections of

farmland in 1952 which was the start of Fertile Valley Farm, named after the municipality, located near Conquest.



The VLA (Veterans' Land Act) was passed in 1942, following a Canadian tradition dating from the 17th century of settling ex-soldiers on the land. With only a very small down payment, ex-servicemen could purchase land with the help of a government loan; additional funds were also available for livestock and equipment. Repayment terms allowed settlers time to re-establish themselves without incurring heavy financial obligations.

James and Mary raised three children, Dennis, Dorothy and David. The children received their education in a one room school house located a mile from the farm, then finished high school at the neighbouring center of Outlook. Dennis recalls, "Our early years growing up were not much fun. The first home was a sort of fixed up granary and what I remember most, is how cold the nights were. We were poor, but I think our growing experience made us stronger and more determined."

In 1952, James T. Johnston added a small package of registered Hereford females purchased from EXL Herefords to his commercial herd of cattle. This purchase was the foundation of what became one of the leading Polled Hereford herds in Canada.

The eldest son, Dennis, entered the University of Saskatchewan on completion of high school, with aspirations of veterinary medicine, but after his first year chose to be closer to livestock and obtained a position with a new and exciting Hereford operation, Glenkirk Farms, Maysville, Missouri, in 1969. Dennis worked with the show team in the fall and winter and in the summer months, he AI'ed and treated cows. In his first year with Glenkirk, they showed the National Champion Bull "Can-Am Investor," the Canadian bred bull from Mel Clark, Grandview, Manitoba and the start of change in

belt buckle cattle. During his four year tenure with Glenkirk, they won four grand champions at the National Western Stock Show.

After leaving Glenkirk Farms, Dennis accepted a position as manager of Paul Deere Farms, Springfield, Ohio from 1974 to 1984. Paul Deere was a very affluent industrialist involved in the oil and steel industry. The farm was based on reclaimed land and included corn, soybeans, a hog operation and in addition, a large registered Polled Hereford herd.

The first Angus influence to touch the Johnston family was through Dennis, when he accepted the position of ranch manager at N Bar Ranch, Grass Range, Montana. This 41,000 acre ranch ran 1350 Angus cows and marketed over 200 bulls each year. It was during his term that N Bar EXT was bred and born, later becoming a legend in the Angus breed. In the fall of 1987, with father James getting on in years, Dennis returned to Canada and the family farm; bringing a new horizon with him... Angus.

The youngest son David, on completing his high school education, formed a partnership with his father and continued building the great Fertile Valley cow herd, as well as establishing a bull market for the Fertile Valley Farm. Like his older brother, David was quite competitive in his own right showing numerous champions. The most significant win was the 1977 Grand Champion Bull at the famous Regina Bull Sale, FV Massive Man. The bull topped the sale at \$20,200.00 but most significantly paid for the purchase of a bale wagon to forage feed for the 100 plus cow herd. David recalls, "I wish we had him now; great ones of any breed are timeless."



Crowd shot at an early Ranchers Choice Bull Sale

In 1979, the Fertile Valley Polled Hereford cow herd was sold in a private treaty deal of 100 cows selling for a quarter of a million dollars. It was a most welcome boost for David and his father, as it paid off the family debt and the balance of funds was put into a high interest earning fund for his parent's retirement. (In that era, bank interest was at record all time high.) It enabled the Johnstons to continue with their farming program.

Building the Angus dream ... began with the purchase of two females from Jim Turner, Green Valley Angus, Hobson, Montana. The boys recall, "The cows come in February. The first one calved and had a scrawny heifer calf, while the other gave us a stout bull calf which we sold for \$6800.00. The next year the females reversed roles and we sold the bull calf for \$5000.00. Remember the scrawny heifer calf, well as a two year old she gave us a bull calf that topped the Midland Test station. By then, we realized the Angus breed and the business around it would be good."

They added Dennis's pick of ten cows from the N Bar program, a group of females from the Double AA program at Coleville, a package of heifers from Prairie Lane, Souris, Manitoba and a group of bred heifers from Auzzie Dodge, Shellbrook, Saskatchewan. The Dodge heifers were all daughters of Brookside Bandolier 12U who was four years of age at that time. "After calving the 12U daughters out the next spring, we went back and bought 12U and used him until the age of sixteen. Over eighty percent of the herd goes back to that great

FV Massive Man - Regina Bull Sale 1977 Grand Champion Bull

foundation bull,” David adds. 12U was used very successfully; line breeding for the high maternal traits developed at Fertile Valley.



Brookeside Bandolier 12U

In 1997, Dennis and David journeyed to the Government Research center at Manyberries, Alberta and purchased a group of females from the One Four Ranch. The package of females included Queen 362E who produced the great breeding FV 20K King 308M who is now owned with Schaff Angus Valley and Basin Angus Ranch. Fertile Valley sold a flush in Queen 362E for \$30,000.00 which was considerably more than they paid for the package of cows.



FV 20K King 308M



Queen 362E

Although both brothers loved to show and were very successful in their endeavours, breeding a product which is required and accepted by the commercial sector became priority one. Dennis states, “Commercial people are not about ribbons, they are about sustaining a living in an industry they love.”

In 1987, a meeting with Bill Dillabaugh, Double AA Angus, Coleville, Saskatchewan, Dennis and Bill shared a common definition in what the market place required. A



Ultra Sounding cattle at Fertile Valley

common bond was formed and along with Kim Robertson, Saskalta Angus, Alsask, Saskatchewan, they formed an Angus producer group called “Rancher’s Choice” and held the first “Ranchers Choice Bull Sale” in 1989 at Double AA. In 1991, the sale was relocated to Medicine Hat, Alberta. The sale filled a void which was badly needed and from the first sale in 1989, a tremendous success. They expanded to having sales in Provost, Alberta and in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. In 2004, the “Ranchers Choice Sale” was moved to Saskatoon and was in operation until Bill Dillabaugh’s health forced his dispersal and a break-up of the group late in 2005.

In April of 2006, Johnston’s Fertile Valley started their own bull Sale in Saskatoon and has continued annually; the 2012 sale will be held on April 13th at Saskatoon Livestock sales. In 1989, Fertile Valley was the original research program for ultra sound in Canada, providing carcass data for their customers and is the longest running herd in Canada providing this information.

The Fertile Valley program is based on four thousand acres and in excess of six hundred breeding females. They AI the majority each year to proven bull which advances the program at a rapid pace. The entire livelihood is based on the cattle. Since they use swath grazing throughout the fall and early winter months, all extra grain and forage is purchased. Each spring the bull sale offers 80 to 100 bulls and they maintain the same number at the ranch for their many private treaty customers. David states, “We always need extras throughout the summer for customers who have wrecks ... it’s just part of our customer service mentality.”



*What lies in the future at Johnston's Fertile Valley?*

*"Our program is commercially driven and we do not want to be irrespective of our fellow purebred breeders, but we will continue to supply the best product we can produce for either segment of the industry. We must never forget the struggle and commitment our parents and grandparents offered in giving us a better way of life ... therefore we will continue the tradition." To ensure that our customers can continue to purchase the genetics they have come to depend on as well as the customer service they need, we have involved some younger, more energetic personnel to help move the program into the future. Dave Sanborn and his wife Keri and their young family have been involved with us for two years now.*

*Dave is a very capable stockman who has become a very valuable part of the operation. As well, Dennis' step son Shane Whiteman is making arrangements to relocate from his current home in Montana, where he worked for Stevenson Basin as a marketing specialist. Shane and his young family will play a major roll in taking the Johnston/Fertile Valley program into the future. So the answer to the question, what lies in the future, is more generations of determination with passion breeding Angus cattle.*

