

# Histories Intertwine through National Western

Commentary by **DAN GREEN**

As word came down that the American Angus Association and Angus Foundation would be hosting a special event to celebrate the 75th anniversary of “Angus in the West” at the 2017 National Western Stock Show in Denver this January, precious memories came flooding over me.

My heritage goes clear back to that first National Western in 1906. Among the founding group was one Fred Johnson, publisher of our family livestock newspaper, in modern times known as *The Record Stockman*. Johnson was a lifetime member and director of the National Western from Day 1. He even spent several years as the general manager — only a part-time, seasonal job in those days.

For 25 years, starting in 1955, *Record Stockman* editor Willard Simms became the first full-time National Western general manager, and a noted livestock industry leader in his own right.

All the sources of National Western history I’ve read list four breeds of cattle at that first event: Aberdeen-Angus, Galloway, Hereford and Shorthorn. They were shown in a borrowed circus tent, pitched on the hill overlooking the Denver Stockyards. Who showed those cattle and where they came from is lost to history.

That’s how my life and career unfolded in both the cattle and publishing businesses. My grandfather, H.E. Green of Greeley, Colo., put the first AM broadcasting station on the air in the state in 1923 — six months ahead of Denver’s 50,000-watt clear channel blowtorch, KOA.

He quickly got Johnson to call in livestock market reports several times a day from the paper’s booth in the lobby of the Livestock Exchange Building in the Denver Stockyards to the Greeley studio, by phone line, live on the air. Granddad stayed with it until his death in 1963. On the death of the last Johnson family member in 1937, Granddad bought full control of *The Record Stockman*.

My father, Harry E. Green Jr. came into the family newspaper during World War II while a student at the University of Denver. I joined upon my graduation from the University of Colorado in 1969 and continue a lively and active interest in the cattle industry to this day. As the oldest grandchild, I inherited my granddad’s lifetime membership in the National Western Stock Show — one of fewer than 100 founding lifetime memberships, which are no longer inheritable by heirs.

That all said, I don’t remember not attending the National Western each January, virtually from my birth in 1947. Somewhere, there’s dim, faded, old black-and-white photos of me being toted around the grounds by a proud dad and granddad, so all their friends in the cattle business could see their first son/grandson.

That little personal history neatly summarizes what the National Western

and, truth be told, the cattle business are really all about at their most basic level. It probably isn’t what the Denver city fathers and the lions of the Denver Union Stockyards Co. had in mind for their infant stock show in 1906, but it’s sure how it turned out. Their vision was for a big social event to build business for the railroads, who owned most big city stockyards in those days.

To many, the National Western is the Cattle Supermarket or the Big Store. It’s like attending an auto show, to see and kick the tires on the new models each year. Breeders want to see what’s hot and what’s not, as they say, in beef cattle — and what it will take genetically and financially to bring their herd up to snuff. They make a lot of friends and business connections along the way.

Cattle people were doing the trendy buzzwords of Silicon Valley, like “networking” and “leaning-in,” long before they became the mantra of the modern-day business social media. Thank God they were, because in the first 40 or so of those 75 years, showing Angus cattle in Denver was more a labor of love than profit for the Easterners, Midwesterners and Southerners who brought them, because there wasn’t a critical mass of black cattle and breeders in the West yet.

When the beef industry saw the onslaught of crossbreeding, the development of the Great Plains cattle-feeding industry and the move from visual appraisal to a data-driven business — Angus came to the forefront. These new industry trends played right to the Angus breed’s greatest strengths. The breed was the first to really go all in on performance testing and data collection, becoming the foundational, major repository of genetic information — leading the industry on what today they call the information superhighway.

That all would have been for naught, except for the heroic efforts of those early-day Angus breeders who came to Denver faithfully with their cattle at great personal expense and effort. But they had established the contacts and connections across the West that, decades later, when the industry was literally crying out for Angus genetics, would prove fruitful.

It’s a great story of the personalities, the ranches, the cattle, the industry trends and the rise of the National Western, on the same soil that had been the vaunted Denver Union Stockyards Co., which joined the demise of the big-city stockyards across the United States.

Watch for it in the January *Angus Beef Bulletin*. See you in Denver in January.



**Editor’s Note:** Dan Green is a Denver-based historian, author, retired editor of the *The Record Stockman* and the voice of “Along America’s Angus Trails,” a regular feature on Angus Media’s SiriusXM satellite radio program, Angus Talk. Angus Talk airs at 10 a.m., Central time, every Saturday on Rural Radio, Channel 80.

