

# The **Charolais** **BANNER** Story

**Candace and Helge By**

*This article contains excerpts from Rodney's Ramblings by Rodney James*

Among the crowd gathered at Quebec City when the first Charolais imports arrived in Canada in June, 1966, was Hayes Walker III, from Kansas City. He was the founder, publisher and editor of the Charolais Banner, an American publication that was eventually renamed the Charolais Journal. Hayes gave the importation tremendous U.S. coverage. It was obvious this was a North American phenomenon.

The Canadian publication was a monthly newsletter put together by Rodney James, the General Manager of the Canadian Charolais Association. It was eight pages, the maximum length for the process used at the time. The pictures weren't very good

reproductions and it was obvious the importation did not receive the coverage it deserved.

On September 26, 1966, four months later, Rodney received a phone call from Hayes. "I'm arriving in Calgary tomorrow evening. If you are interested in discussing starting a Canadian Charolais Banner, meet my plane!"

Rodney and Pearl didn't get much sleep that night as they weighed the implications. Obviously, Hayes had no intentions of moving to Canada. He would expect Rodney to carry the load. This would be in addition to being General Manager of the mushrooming CCA, running the farm, family, etc.

They met Hayes in Calgary and spent most of the night talking in a hotel room. They left early the next day for Columbia Valley, B.C., to see Winston Wolfenden, Birchfield Charolais, an established Charolais breeder, friend and partner in their French Import Division with Lloyd Wilder, owner of Fairmont Hot Springs, to see what they thought of the idea.

They agreed to buy the inside front cover for twelve months, so their support came with action. Within the next two days, Ron Rouse had page three, and the back cover went to John Rudiger, then in Cutknife, Saskatchewan, which he had until we sold the Banner in 1984. Then after a phone call to Paul Lacroix, who lived in Quebec City, we had the inside



Rodney James



*The first cover of the Canadian Charolais Banner*

back cover sold. We sold some other ads throughout the book and after three days, Hayes boarded the plane to return to Kansas City.

The idea was met with enthusiasm and Rodney became an equal partner with Hayes. Hayes was the publisher and Rodney was the editor. Hayes came back in ten days to help put the first issue together. In October, 1966, the first Canadian Charolais Banner went to press and Hayes left and Rodney was on his own.

It was quite a change from the eight-page newsletter when the first issue came with 42 pages. It grew all winter and the June-July 1967 issue was 122 pages.

Most of the directors had an ad in the first issue and many had signed contracts for a page each month. There was support for this new magazine. An emergency board meeting was called to discuss this new development and how it would affect the CCA. There were some objections or maybe some questions. The question that ruffled Rodney's feathers most was, "You are our employee, so if there's going to be a magazine, we should own it." Rodney posed the question of where the money was going to come from to finance the undertaking. This thought

was well discussed and they agreed that this was more financial exposure than the board could or was willing to take on.

The very legitimate concern was "Who was going to run the CCA?" Rodney made it clear from the get-go that he had given serious consideration to the welfare of the CCA. It was obvious that the new Banner could only succeed if the CCA flourished. The CCA office was on Rodney's property at that time. The only employee besides him was a neighbour, Gladys West, and she wasn't going to take over the CCA or move.

Everything rolled along as usual with the CCA. In addition to Rodney's previous activities, by the February meeting, he and Pearl had produced four issues of the Banner. That meeting had some very heated discussion where Rodney was asked to take a cut in his \$325 monthly salary, now that he was looking after the Banner too, and so wasn't spending full-time on the CCA. Paul Lacroix, who owned many businesses said, "You have to look at management differently than employees. It's not how many hours managers put in, but rather how well the business is running." They agreed

that Rodney would continue as in the past.

Obviously, changes had to occur to keep up with the growing Banner and CCA. The office on the farm was too small and it wasn't easy hiring staff when they had to drive in the country in winter road conditions. Rodney was just too busy, so they decided to sell the farm. In April, 1967, they purchased a bungalow in Lacombe, Alberta. It had two finished bedrooms in the basement. They renovated the balance into a very nice CCA and Banner office.

In June, 1967, eight months after they started the Banner, Hayes Walker needed money, so Rodney bought his portion and became the Publisher/Editor. The only names on the Banner masthead were Pearl and Rodney James.

The Banner office staff had been growing, but there was no editorial or field staff. In February, 1971, Rodney was fortunate to hire a young Charolais breeder from Marsden, Saskatchewan, named Ted Pritchett. Ted had been elected president of the Saskatchewan Charolais Association. He was a University of Saskatchewan graduate and wanted to do things other than farming. Ted became the advertising fieldman and he moved his wife, Doreen, and their daughter, Amy, to Lacombe, and sold their Charolais herd.

Ted proved to be one of the very best agricultural writers of his day.



*Helge and Oliver By visiting with Ted Pritchett*



*Dale Norheim started with the Charolais Banner in 1973*



He went on to be editor of the Banner and later editor of Beef Today and Canadian Livestock Journal, in which Rodney and Ted were partners. Ted later became the publisher and editor of the Simmental Country and was very successful. After selling the magazine to the Canadian Simmental Association, he followed his lifetime interest of becoming a pilot and then flying instructor, residing in Calgary.

Dale Norheim started in November of 1973, as the fieldman for Saskatchewan/Manitoba for the Banner. Dale was a great ambassador for the breed in this position as

well as in the sale management and breeding of Charolais. One of Dale's contributions to the industry was promoting the formation of breeder groups to provide market places for production sales and bull sales. This allowed many breeders to market their genetics at a time when herds were too small to host individual sales. It was a time when people worked together to promote the growth of the Charolais breed in Canada. Dale was a great mentor to many breeders over the years until his untimely death in October 2010.

In 1975, the Banner office moved to Calgary into the offices with sales management companies Charcan and Transcon Livestock a multi-breed company of Rodney James, John Owen and Bob Wilson. In 1978, Dale and Hugh Tomlinson were hired to cover AB/BC and Bill and Donna Cooper in Ontario. Hugh had worked with Charcan sales management since 1972 and unfortunately died in a car accident in 1979. Also, in May 1978 Rodney's son Bob James, who had just graduated from University was hired to be the assistant editor and advertising co-ordinator and the roll of editor and manager developed over the next few years. Bob also worked as a fieldman on and off over his time with the magazine. His wife Heather was also then working along side him in the office.

In 1981, Rodney James was looking

for a new fieldman and George Anderson told him about a young man he met that was working for Universal Semen Services. Rodney knew Helge from the family's early involvement in the Charolais industry and as being a member of the Junior Charolais Association. He called Helge and asked if he was interested in the job and asked him to see him the next time he was in Calgary. A week later, they met and Helge started two weeks later as the SK/MB fieldman, replacing Dale Norheim. Knowing the people and being a pedigree buff was a big asset to his enthusiasm for the job.

In 1983, Mark Kihn, a journalist grad originally from Manitoba was hired to be the AB/BC fieldman. Mark's skill set was writing and he was soon moved into the office to take over the editing and help with production.

How magazine production has changed. At this time the ads and editorial we sketched out and sent out for typesetting. When the type came back, if it was correct, it had to be cut and pasted on layout sheets, then sent to the press to be put on plates and then printed. Ad proofs had to be mailed out and back so deadlines were a month ahead because of the timelines.

In order to lower costs and increase editorial content, in April of 1983 part of the Banner was printed on lower quality paper. This, combined with Rodney James not being as involved in the Charolais world anymore, led to a group of breeders purchasing the Banner from the James family in the spring of 1984. The group decided to bring the original co-founder Hayes Walker up to run the magazine, with the first issue being June 1984. His first stop as he drove into Canada was to our place in Regina to hire me to continue working for the magazine. He also kept Mark Kihn on staff.

Just after his arrival in Canada, he and I went to Ontario for their AGM and sale. We needed a fieldman for AB/BC and it was here that I met Rod McLeod, who had just started with the World of Beef magazine. He and



*Heather and Bob James started working on the magazine in 1978*



*Rodney James and Helge By in 2018 at John Rudiger's memorial service*



I ringed the sale and had a big visit after discovering he thought working for the Banner was a better option for him. That evening I told Hayes I had found the fieldman and when they arrived back in Calgary, Hayes took Rod to meet a few of the key investors and he was hired.

There was a need for a vehicle to promote the sale of Charolais bulls to the commercial industry. The Charolais Connection was born in October, 1984, to fill this need. It had an increased mailing list to include

commercial bull buyers for the last six years. The first Connection came in a newspaper format. That eventually evolved into the magazine format we have today. The main reason for the change was to increase the shelf-life of the publication. Magazines stay in the magazine pile longer than large newspapers. The two winter publications were set to assist the growing bull sales in the industry and the Fall issue promotes the success of the breed and offers an opportunity to soft-sell to commercial producers.

Hayes was a colourful person with an outgoing personality, but didn't possess very good money skills. He changed the look of the magazine, amid some controversy. The word Canadian was dropped from the magazines name and the French flag was not included in the new logo. He wined and dined breeders to the extent that the money ran out. In August of 1985 after a forged cheque was discovered, it was obvious the company was bankrupt. Hayes was fired and went back to the U.S.



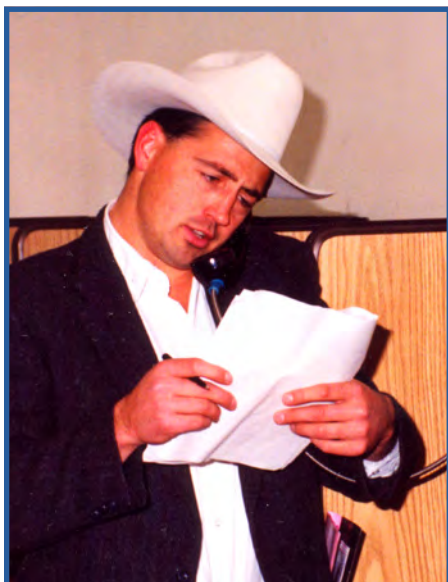
*Hayes Walker, Helge By, Rod McLeod and Mark Kihn doing Banner Bull presentations at the CCA AGM*



*Helge By, Mark Kihn and Rod McLeod became partners in the Charolais Banner*



Mark, Rod and I put a proposal together to inject some equity and give the company a loan to get the investors their money back in a few years, at which time we would own the magazine. Gerry Roe, a future CCA president and astute business man, was president of the Banner group. He taught us some great lessons about business and really helped us get the magazine financially healthy ahead of schedule



*Rob Pek joined the staff in 1991*

to get the investors paid. These three developed the current logo for the Charolais Banner incorporating the maple leaf and a bull head for a more stylized look. In the spring of 1991, Rod McLeod sold his shares in the magazine to Mark and Rob Pek was hired to be the AB/BC fieldman.

In 1993, we started the Breeder's Classic to create some excitement in the breed. It was held in October each year with the last one being in 1999. The format was \$1000 to buy a membership and be a judge of the many bull calves from breeders to determine a champion. Each member received 10 doses of semen in the champion and the champion received \$50,000 in cash and prizes and the finalists all received prize money. The first champion was Carlson's Ice 301C.

In January 1997, with some government assistance, we took the eight finalists, less the Champion from the 1996 Classic to Denver and displayed them in the yards at the stock show. The colourful display with Canadian flags opened a lot of eyes to the genetics available in Canada. They knew we were there. One of the finalists, a bull called SLY Eastwood Pld 32F, was entered on the hill in

the open show and ended up being Reserve National Champion Bull.

The last Breeder's Classic was in 1999 with CS Pld Junction 4J being the winner. This program was resurrected in recent years under the name The Player's Club.

In 1993, Rob and I purchased Mark's shares. In March, Rob moved into the office full time and Jamie Palmer was hired to replace him in the field.

At this time, we also started another magazine called the Elk & Deer Farmer, promoting breeding stock among Canadian producers. This was published four times per year. Rob with a few partners also started into the elk sales management and the market was strong. This started taking Rob's time and interest and in 1999, we decided to split the magazines. Rob took the Elk & Deer Farmer and I, along with our new western fieldman, Craig Scott, replacing Jamie and our bookkeeper at the time, Chris Bueckert, took the Banner and moved the office to Regina. At this time Candace took on the position of managing editor and Dalyse Roberston was hired to work in the office and then became our web designer and more for the next 25 years.



*CS Pld Junction 4J was the last Breeder's Classic Champion, pictured with all the member judges*



In 2016, the Charolais Banner hosted a Breeder's School. The CCA had not held a school in a number of years. Their schools were focused on developing judges from within the breed for the industry. Now with the strong CCYA program flourishing, judging was not the biggest need. We felt that marketing changes needed to be addressed and we wanted a school that would introduce social media skills to breeders. We were working with second and third generation breeders and their parents could teach them animal husbandry and some marketing, but social media was not in their skill set. This breeder's school was an exciting opportunity to gather young breeders for networking and education. When the social media section was on, you could smell hot plastic in the lecture hall and many phones shutdown because they were too hot. It was timely and opened many breeders' awareness to the good and the bad that can come from social media.

There were two more schools hosted by the Charolais Banner. The experienced breeder panel presentations and questions and answers were always a highlight. The openness and frankness of their shares of successes and failures provided much food for thought.

Chris sold her shares ten years later and Craig sold his shares to us in 2019 after 20 years of working with us when he took the job as General Manager of the Canadian Charolais Association. Rob Chomik (pronounced Comic) was hired to become the AB/BC fieldman to replace Craig and five years later an agreement was made with him and his wife Candice to purchase the magazine. At a time when all other breed publications are association owned, the Charolais Banner remains a private company focused on offering services no other breed magazine in Canada offers. The opportunity to promote the breed in Canada and around the world is it's purpose.



*The staff posed for a Christmas photo featuring the three wise men - Helge, Rob and Jamie*



*Craig Scott started with the magazine in 1999*



*Helge presented Dalysse Robertson with artwork in appreciation for her 25 years of service with the Charolais Banner at Ag-Ex 2024*



*Candace & Helge By and Candice & Robbie Chomik*