

Chandler Hereford Ranch

By Richard Engeman

Charles G. Chandler (1818-1880) and his wife Rachael were the progenitors of the Chandler Hereford Ranch, a family enterprise that became nationally known for its breeding of Hereford beef cattle. In 1970, the Chandler ranch was inducted into the Oregon Century Farm and Ranch Program, marking its continuous family operation for more than a hundred years. One of the family's noted Herefords from the 1940s, Mark Donald, continues to influence breeding lines today.

Chandler and his family emigrated west by wagon train from Missouri in 1862. Previously, Chandler trekked to California and back to Missouri during the 1850s gold rush, and his experience on the trail led to his honorary title of captain for a second trip planned to California. During the subsequent journey, news of gold strikes in northeastern Oregon led the Chandlers and others to split off. They arrived in the Powder River Valley on September 15, 1862, and the family was one of several which remained, initially as squatters, to build homes and ranches. The homestead is located on the southeastern portion of the traditional homelands of the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla Indian tribes. During seasonal rounds, Native families returned to the area to fish, hunt, and gather roots, berries, and plants. Their descendants are part of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation in Pendleton, Oregon.

The family, consisting of Charles G. and Rachael, four daughters, and son George, settled near the community of Wingville, about four miles northwest of Baker City. George Chandler (1845-1934) recalled that in the fall of 1862 his father secured about seventy pounds of potatoes, not for food, but to plant the eyes the next spring. Only then did they eat the remaining parts of the potatoes, which were "the first vegetable we had for perhaps eight months."

Eventually the Chandlers purchased 160 acres of land, having determined through experience that freight hauling and general farming were more lucrative than gold mining. By the late 1860s, George joined his father in adding cattle raising to their subsistence farming. In 1870, George married Adelia Ison; they raised six children. Their son Herbert (1884-1973) became the heir to the growing cattle operation.

Charles G. Chandler was elected to the Oregon House of Representatives in 1874 and 1878. Charles died in 1880. Son George was elected to the House in 1885 and to the Senate in 1887 and 1889. George also served as a Baker County commissioner and on the state board of agriculture. In the 1880s, the Chandlers branched from general ranching into the breeding of Shorthorn and Hereford cattle, and in 1889 began raising thoroughbred Hereford stock. When the Oregon Stockbreeders' Association was formed in 1901, George Chandler was elected its vice president. By 1902, the Chandler family was "the largest and wealthiest dealer in thoroughbred Shorthorn and Hereford cattle in the state." At that time, George Chandler operated 1,120 acres in the Powder River valley, "the finest hay land in the state," plus 480 acres nearby on Wolf Creek in Union County.

By 1970, the Chandler Ranch was comprised of some 2,700 acres, operated by Charles H. Chandler (1919-2015) and his son George. The operation included some 300 brood cows of recorded ancestry, and all of their stock was traceable back to 1889. Both Herbert Chandler and his son Charles H. served as presidents of the national American Hereford Association (AHA), and the AHA named Charles H. to their Hereford Honor Gallery in 1989.

The Chandler Hereford breeding operation continued into the twenty-first century, operated by the fifth and sixth generations of descendants of Charles and Rachael Chandler. When the Chandler Hereford Ranch was named to the AHA Hall of Fame in 2015, it was noted that it "has been known for producing some of the top cattle in the country. Most notably, Herbert Chandler bred Mark Donald in the early 1940s. Mark Donald's influence continues in the Hereford breed today." While the Chandler family sold their ranch of more than 2,700 acres in 2021, the land continues to be in agricultural use.

Sources

Chandler, W. B. "Some Pioneer Experiences of George Chandler." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 66:3 (September 1965), 197-207.

"Chandler Herefords inducted in Hall of Fame." *Baker County Press*, October 9, 2015, p. 1.

"Chandler Herefords, Inc." Oregon Century Farm and Ranch application, 1970.

An Illustrated History of Baker, Grant, Malheur and Harney Counties." Western Historical Publishing Company, 1902.

The Oregon Encyclopedia

<https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/chandler-hereford-ranch/>