

The History of Caldwell Hereford Ranch

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1946-1970

In 1946 Samuel C. Caldwell (known to the cattle world as "Sammy") and his friend Durr Wise purchased 10 cows and a half interest in a bull and began operation as Caldwell Wise Hereford Ranch. Although this partnership lasted only a few months, several foundation animals carried the CW prefix. The bull was named OJR Royal Domino 59 3698955, sired by WHR Royal Domino 51. A second bull was added the following year, WHR Royal Duke 34 4311355 by WHR Royal Triumph. Both of these bulls, as well as the original cows were purchased from Carl Freiler of Hazlehurst. Anyone familiar with the history of the Hereford breed during this time can imagine what those first few years in the business were like. The cattle were sold in the early 1950s, and Caldwell Hereford Ranch began again with a clean slate — and somewhat cleaner pedigrees.

Even though the cattle were eventually replaced, a lasting bond was established between Sammy and the Lazears of WHR that would last for the life of this herd. Things were started off once more with WHR Lord Vern 77 9664429, sired by the imported bull Vern Diamond. Next came WHR Sir Sidney 12 10614366, a descendant of both Vern Diamond and the other WHR import, Free Town Contribute. The cowherd by the early sixties, besides WHR breeding, had started to show Sammy's strong bias towards Mill Iron (Colorado Domino) females.

Here is an interesting piece of trivia: Our first manager was Earl Purdy, member of the American Polled Hereford Association Hall of Fame and father of perhaps the greatest cattle judge who ever lived, Herman Purdy of Penn State University.

The herd of 1970, despite the WHR foundation, was constructed from three parts, only indirectly involving WHR. The first was the purchase of two sons of Advance Regulator, D Regulator Dom 4012 13613628 and D Regulator Dom 4014 13614560. These bulls originated in the herd of Wilbur Drybread of Valentine, Nebraska whose herd was purchased by WHR. These bulls were definitely modern with yearling weights well over 1100 lbs. and showing length and frame that wouldn't become common for several more years.

The second was the acquisition of the herd of Arlie R. McClard of Farmington, Missouri. McClard had been an owner of CK Colorado D34, the sire of Advance Regulator, and had been conducting an extensive linebreeding program around this bull. This proved to be a wonderful fit for the CHR

program which was in a position to take a good thing and make it better.

The third piece, the capstone perhaps, came in the form of two sons of Mischief 678 from George M. Harris of Winona, Mississippi. Mischief 678 was the bull of the hour in the Hereford breed at that time, but these bulls did more than just sweeten CHR pedigrees with a popular name, these bulls niched with the Regulators better than anyone could have anticipated. This was the program that Sammy ended with in 1970 when he decided to call it quits and dispersed the herd.

The goal that Sammy always stated for his herd was the improvement of the quality of cattle in his surrounding area. This he achieved in grand style. We still have visitors today who tell us about the fine bulls they purchased here. Even into the mid 70's a ride down any country road in Covich County would reveal horned Hereford bulls at work and most of those certainly were Caldwell bred. My personal opinion is that he also had higher goals that were not being achieved, and the size of the herd when he left the business (over 400 head) required a substantial commitment.

A friend of mine once said that to become truly exceptional at anything took 10,000 hours. This is about 14 months, but assuming you keep a normal schedule, this is more like 5 years. For something with such a painfully long cycle, like the generations of beef cattle, I think it would have to take 20. That would be just about how long it took my grandfather to find his groove, if you like. I wonder if he ever realized how far he had gotten.

1974-present

Writing the history up to 1970 was relatively simple. It has a definite beginning and ending, and in a sense I have been studying it all my life. I draw from conversations with my mother and grandfather, old sale catalogs and *American Hereford Journal* ads. The second part, however, is still evolving and is in some ways my own history as a cattle breeder. The version I wrote 12 years ago seems to completely miss the point today.

To begin with, I am an economist and a mathematician. My instincts are to weigh it, measure it, graph it, and put it in a database. In some ways I have always been like this, but I have many more tools available to me today than I did when I was a teenager.

We purchased our first cows in October, 1974, from Hayes Hereford Ranch. There were seven cows and three heifer calves with most of the

cows bred to Winrock D4. Earlier that year we had purchased two bulls from George Harris, one of those being a son of D4 President. So my breeding career started with Evan Mischief cattle and I have a fondness for those cattle to this day. One of those first cows, Miss Colorado 429, calved on her way to Mississippi from that sale, a bull calf by Winrock D4 that we still find in our pedigrees today. Alas, one of the last lessons I learned after I had put in my 10,000 hours was one that was presented to me in the first year. We knew that bull was special, but couldn't bring ourselves to accept that a good bull didn't have to come from somewhere else. Genetics works, trust your own cattle.

We lost my grandfather about a year after the reestablishment of the herd. He never got to see a single calf we bred. He was here when we enrolled the herd in TPR in the summer of 1975, though I wonder how important he believed it was, and if he could have imagined how it would warp me for life. But when we lost Sammy Caldwell, we lost our 10,000 hours. My mother Ann and I had to start our own clocks as rank amateurs.

I remember the years from 1975-1980 as being very enjoyable with cattle and I can recall some of the specific animals very fondly. We did have some bright spots, but mostly our results were disappointing. There were several herd sires that came along without leaving much of an influence. Looking back, I can see why, but we were about to change that forever.

Late in 1979 my mother and I had a meeting of the minds. We were both intrigued with what we were seeing in the Healey Brothers herd and believed that they had what we were looking for to get our program moving. We attended their sale in 1980 as total strangers. There is no explanation why Burke spent an hour before his sale driving us all over the pastures showing us their cattle and talking about their program, but that day had more of an effect on me than any other. Principles that form the core of my beliefs as a breeder came directly from that trip. That form follows function; that objective measures are necessary for improvement; that cattle breeding is all about data, data, data. Nobody had more data than the Healey Brothers.

We purchased three pairs that day. One of those cows was FL Wetmore Lass 626, the granddam of CHR Ygera 123, the most influential cow we have ever owned. Most of all, though, these cows confirmed that the Healeys did in fact have what we were looking for. The next year we went back and purchased the high selling bull, Flying L Latigo 14 17922263. We haven't looked back since.

Interesting to note that Flying L Latigo 14 was a grandson of FL Northern

Piegan, a Descheemaeker bred bull. It is probably fair to say that the first 10 years of this herd was dominated by Evan Mischief breeding, although I'll confess it wasn't planned that way.

Flying L Latigo 14 put us on the right road, but we lost him unexpectedly at the tender age of four. This left us scrambling somewhat for a replacement. Our next bull came from Glenkirk Farms. The original interest was in a King Ten son, but there was this one standout calf that just seemed to have everything we were looking for. There was some luck in this selection as well. We still didn't know just how maternal Latigo was going to turn out to be, but he had certainly been a moderate framed bull working on a cowherd that was smaller still. As it turned out, Flying L Latigo 14 and GK Big Bang 835S 18627498 made for good chemistry.

That trip to Glenkirk was quite interesting. I remember killing some time walking around the barn and saw a 2 year old GK Encore 609R and a yearling MKP GK Blastoff 4ET there. They pointed at Blastoff and said, "There's still a quarter left on him for \$" (Use your imagination.)

We added one more bull each from Healey Brothers and Glenkirk. In 1988 we topped the Healey Brothers sale again with FL Yeoman 2, whose name was changed to CHR Bedevere 18841460. Looking back, if I had to choose a single bull as our prototype it would certainly be Bedevere. A short while later we purchased GK Applause 439T 18702685 from our neighbor in Brookhaven, Peter Swalm. This was maybe the luckiest move we ever made. Now that we have the benefit of hindsight, 439T was probably one of the 10 best sons ever of GK Encore 609R. He had unbelievable performance and sired wonderful females, too. This rounded out the second decade of the reformed herd. If you look back through our pedigrees you will see the Latigo/Big Bang/ Applause combination a lot. At one point in the early 90's most of our cows were at least three quarter sisters, and a good many 7/8's.

It took just about this long for some things to sink in. For one thing, we really liked these cattle. We weren't famous, but these cattle were good enough that it wasn't obvious where to go next. As a result, we wound up using some of our own bulls. CHR Percival was a Bedevere son out of Latigo's best daughter. We also used a 439T son out of a Healey Brothers cow. Percival was at least as good as his sire.

So here is the other thing, these were our cattle. We weren't following anyone. We were doing our own thing and it felt really good. Looking back, it took my grandfather about that same length of time to get to that place.

It would be nice to think that our herd had a life of its own and just forged

ahead with or without us, but that is not the case. Marriage, divorce, graduate school, career changes and upheavals have all resulted in interruptions of the herd's progress over the years. But some of these have brought positive changes, too. The several reductions that we went through have culled this herd far more ruthlessly than most herds ever go through. My education has provided tools in mathematics and information technology that most cattle operations never have access to. So guess what? We like EPD's — a lot!

What we come to now would be appropriately called the current era. To my mind, this started somewhere around 1996 when we decided to introduce polled genetics into the herd. Now, this is technically not true since both Big Bang and Encore were already polled genetics, they just had horns. It was probably the result of being around the Glenkirk program that made me start to view the horned/polled distinction as pointless, and the economist in me recognized all along that there was no economic advantage to having horns on cattle.

I know it was in 1995 that I began researching the idea because I still have the copy of the *Polled Hereford World* that I ordered. How much was chance and how much was fate I do not know, but in hindsight it is no surprise that I almost immediately dialed into Witherspoons' Nizhoni Herefords. If I ever felt like I had a kindred spirit in the cattle business it would be Gary Witherspoon.

We came along at a time that would prove to be a turning point for Witherspoon. I was drawn to MSU Optimum Z03, but Gary was about to shift his emphasis to cattle out of Frank Felton's program. We eventually shared three bulls with Witherspoon, two Z03 grandsons and one Z03 son, as well as several females. All the polled cattle in our herd came from Witherspoon; there was no other source (at least none that stuck around).

About this same time we also purchased JV General 603 19562897. I call this my curve bender phase. In fact, General really was a bull that did all things well and I like to think that we aren't done with him yet. I call it a phase, but that is not to say that I have abandoned the idea of breeding cattle for excellence across all traits. The breeders who have accomplished this have forever put to rest the myth that genetic antagonisms cannot be overcome. Everything in this world worth doing involves antagonisms: I want a car that can accelerate on the highway but has good fuel economy; I want to eat food that tastes good and won't cut years off my life; I want calves that are born small, yet vigorous and that grow quickly while being feed efficient. Breeders who say they can't do it all are being more lazy than

honest.

So rather than belonging to a curve bender cult, I prefer to think of them as what they are, truly exceptional cattle, and just go with that. Along those same lines, in 2003 we acquired another truly exceptional bull, EE 8020 L1 127 42217684. While following General with 127 may look like a plan, it is more like recognizing a good idea when shown.

Originally, the thought was that 127 complimented the Optimum cattle very well. But my thought process changed a bit from trying to blend the two, to letting the two lines develop separately, each with its own strengths. Over time the two would cross pollinate, so to speak, and each improve the other. If the former was called curve bending, maybe this would be curve breaking. Take two different sets of cattle, push each in specific directions and cross them intermittently to introduce the strengths of one with the other.

The result was what you see today in the CHR Mark Dominos and CHR Optimums. There is also a pure marketing aspect to this. We have found it very beneficial having both horned and polled cattle. You wouldn't believe how many calls we get from people looking for a horned (polled) bull, and of course we can say that we have some of those. Yet when they get here they find a polled (horned) bull that they like even better.

Another marketing move is in the names. In the past we have used some rather esoteric names, pretty much burying the family identities under names like Bedevere, Ygera, Roweena, etc. Most of these names came from the Arthurian legend and probably result from my need to differentiate this herd. But I have always envied ranches that stamp their name on a line. There is so much more power in names like "HH Advance" or "DH Beau Mark" than you can get with the prefix alone. So we are now identifying CHR with our specific linebred families. Someday I hope people are as tickled as I am to have an animal whose pedigree is just wall to wall CHR Optimums and Optimas or CHR Mark Dominos and Markettes. Now that we have a few generations stacked, I must admit I love it.

The herd today is as closed as it has ever been, and that is not likely to change any time soon. I have spent a long time thinking and studying the animal breeding business. All the breeders I've come to admire had this in common: they were synonymous with their cattle. None ever achieved greatness with someone else's cattle, and almost every one of them practiced linebreeding in one form or another. You cannot borrow another herd's reputation. How many new breeders become disenchanted after paying top

dollar at a top sale, only to find that they can't sell their cattle for a fraction of what they paid? They might as well work at developing their own brand rather than try to sell under someone else's. I can only think of a handful of marketing powerhouses that can pull together a mongrelized herd of cattle and sell the resulting mutts at a premium. The really great breeders all were doing their own thing. Here is my list, you must have one too: Ferry Carpenter, Frank Felton, Les Holden and Jack Cooper, the Mousel brothers, Robert Meeks, Charles Descheemaeker, Oxley (Robert Shafer). Want to be like those guys? Do what they did. I'm not saying you should be an island, but you have to be comfortable in your own clothes.

We have had a few bright moments over the years, and I would like to share a few here at the end. Between 1988 and 1991 we participated in 4 bull tests conducted at Hinds Community College in Raymond, Ms. The 7 head we entered averaged 4.24 lbs. per day. Our contingent was the high gaining Hereford group in 3 of those 4 tests. In 1998 we participated in Mississippi's Farm to Feedlot Program. Our steers averaged low choice and 12.1 *in*² ribeye area. Overall, 67% graded choice.

I was honored to serve as president of the Mississippi Hereford Association for a couple of years in the late '90s. During that time we accomplished one of the most worthwhile tasks ever for that organization, the merger of the Mississippi Hereford Association with the Mississippi Polled Hereford Association. For me it was a Hallelujah moment.

In 2000 a heifer sired by our bull, WNH CHR MCA Decathlete 23900838 was the National Champion female in Denver. That same year, a bull sired by JV General 603 and out of a heifer also bred by us was Champion Bull at the Louisiana State Show. This bull's dam remains the only heifer we have ever sold out of our replacement group. The junior who bought her took her to Reserve Champion female the year before and had bred her back to General.

Also in 2000 General was ranked #5 active sire in the nation on the multiple trait index. His daughter CHR Val K011 was the #7 ranked heifer born that year, too.

In 2011 we completed a comprehensive DNA profile on our entire herd. We found and corrected a few errors in our pedigrees and identified a couple of animals that were carriers of genetic defects. Until you have experienced it, you can't appreciate what a wonderful breeding tool it is. We were among the first herds to do this, and we are looking forward to the improved quality assurance and data integrity that this will provide.

If you are reading this today, likely you are raising Herefords yourself or using them in your program. There hasn't been a better time for this in my lifetime. We have better tools and a better economic understanding of our industry. The black cattle phase has run its course (I suppose most of them were Angus) and left the nation's cowherd bred into a tighter corner than ever before. People are rediscovering heterosis and finding Herefords that can provide them with that advantage and still let them keep the end product quality that remains necessary in the industry. When I was a boy we used to brag that there were as many Herefords as all the other breeds combined. This is no longer true, but I am starting to appreciate the benefits of being second. Make no mistake, our breed is *necessary*, but not plentiful. As the other breed we have the advantage of defining our own niche, while the other guys are faced with being everything to everybody. They will become the breed of choice for casual breeders, and their numbers will be polluted with cheap, inferior product. Just as the Angus breed set the agenda from the second slot before, the Hereford breed will find itself more and more on the cutting edge in the future. And always remember, the efficiency advantage that Herefords have over every other breed is an economic reality that trumps everything else in the end.