



Schlickau Herefords Named Century Breeder

The Schlickau family has a long history of raising good cattle and giving back to the breed.

by Sara Gugelmeyer

Schlickau Herefords has been in business for 100 years, making it the newest American Hereford Association (AHA) Century Breeder. But that's not all there is to this family's legacy. Through unwavering commitment to quality, customer service and philanthropy, the Schlickau family has etched a permanent name for itself in the Hereford history book.

Nowadays, things look different around Haven, Kan., than when George "Gene" Schlickau homesteaded there in 1872. It's his great-grandson James and his wife, Charlene, and their three children that run the place. They're using innovative technology, the likes of which Gene couldn't have imagined. But, one thing hasn't changed — Hereford cattle are in the fields and hearts of the Schlickaus.

It all started with Gene Schlickau, who emigrated to the U.S. from Germany, but it was his son Albert (James' grandfather) that brought home the first Hereford bull in 1900. The ranch snowballed from there as Albert and his brother, Walter, got in the Hereford business in 1913. They never looked back.

Progressive management

According to the family's extensive historical records, they owe El Dorado, Kan., banker and cattleman Robert Hazlett some credit. In 1910 Albert and his father shipped a load of fat cattle by rail to Kansas City. Young Albert traveled with the cattle. On the way back, he wanted to make some purchases. So, at 4:00 in



the morning, he got off the train in El Dorado and waited outside the bank until someone arrived. Luckily for the Schlickaus, that person happened to be Mr. Hazlett, who was also the bank president. They took a carriage out to Hazlett's ranch where the cattle were bought on a handshake and shipped back home in a boxcar.

Albert said that first Hazlett bull, Bocalda 21 out of Bocalda 6, did as much to improve his herd as any sire that he had used. Two of his sons, Bocalda 50 and Bocalda 53, were also used in the herd for several years.

In 1935 Albert entered 19 head of Bocalda- and Domino-bred cattle in the Great Western Livestock Show in Los Angeles. Albert's sons, Harry and George, along with their cousins, traveled with the cattle, and according to their correspondence with their father, they sold a bull for \$155 while at the show. The Schlickaus also won champion pen of females there in 1940. The penny postcard George sent home after the sale explained that the pen had sold for \$500, which he was thrilled with



Charlene, James and Lois (l to r) with the 100th anniversary cake.

help him create a total performance records program. Together they measured, weighed and recorded data for years.

George often said, "If an animal can perform on paper, he deserves a second look to show what else he has to offer." In fact, when George served on the AHA Board, he used his experience collecting data for 20 years to help simplify AHA's Total Performance Records (TPR) program in 1973, after which it became more widely used.

In 1980 Schlickau Herefords was part of a testing program of the new drug Lutalyse, used in estrous synchronization. It worked well, and the tighter calving dates made a more uniform calf crop for the Schlickaus. Their success helped Kansas State University (K-State) demonstrate the benefits to the entire cattle industry.

Always interested in measurable traits, George served on the first committee to organize and implement the central Kansas bull station at Beloit.

Schlickau Herefords began using ultrasound technology in 1970. The Schlickaus used the data to make selection decisions and educated their bull buyers on its benefits. They also used artificial insemination (AI).

even when he thought that was for the whole pen. Imagine his amazement when he realized that price was per head.

In 1943 Harry hosted the first sale. The family sold cattle, sheep and hogs. The Schlickaus continued to host sales each year, although the focus shifted to premier Hereford genetics over the years. The sale was held at the Haven ranch in 1951 and remained there for the next 47 years.

At that time the operation was known as A.R. Schlickau and Sons and had a strong reputation for providing sound genetics to commercial cattlemen.

George was a progressive cattleman, before progressive was a buzzword. He sought out Reno County Kansas State Extension Agent Horbert Frederick to



George Schlickau and Tex Real Onward 178, the bull that was the 15th ever Super Register of Merit Sire.

Today's cattle

Continuing with the progressive approach, now the operation is managed by James with help from his wife and three children. In addition to raising cattle, the family grows wheat, soybeans, milo and alfalfa. James implemented an innovative rotational grazing system to help improve grass quality on the ranch. He is also beginning a new timed-AI program using sexed semen. His plan is to raise a two-thirds female calf crop.

"We'd like to skew our numbers," James explains. "Instead of roughly a 50-50 bull to heifer calf crop, we'd like to get two-thirds females so that we can rebuild our herd and offer more females to our customers."

When George became ill, the operation was grazing about 350 cows. His rare terminal illness, progressive supranuclear palsy, caused his condition to deteriorate over time before taking his life in 2005.

"We had to have in-home care for a great deal of time before we had to move him to a 24-hour care facility," James says. "We knew there would be cost involved in that. We also recognized that our grass quality needed to be addressed. We had overstocked, so our grass quality was down. We knew that we

would have to destock and allow the rotational grazing system to work," James says.

The solution was to sell cows. "That helped pay for my dad's care and also got us to a position where we had a smaller cow base, but they were very sound and very functional, and we could build from there. We got down to about 150 cows, which allowed for improved grass quality. We also established some really great relationships with both purebred and commercial producers," James says.

Now, the Schlickaus are ready to rebuild, but the majority of their customers are interested in buying females.

"We have a few every year that we let go," James says. "But now we have a core group of cows we're very comfortable with in terms of genetics and the phenotype, and they're in our plans for growth, but we recognize that we want to satisfy our customer base as well."

That need is where the sexed semen comes in. The registered herd is fall-calving and also utilizes some commercial cows for embryo transfer. Females and a select group of bulls are offered for sale private treaty.

James attributes the demand for females both to their quality

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The Schlickau family — Caitlin, Cooper, James, Charlene and Ashton — in 2008 showing off the much-improved grass quality after the rotational grazing system was implemented.



Schlickau Herefords has good demand for its high-quality, functional females.

Schlickau timeline

Jan. 20, 1850 – The first George (nicknamed Gene) Schlickau was born in Hohnstorf, Amt Medingen, Hanover, Germany.

1868 – Gene, his brother Henry and Henry's family traveled by ship to the U.S.

1872 – Gene homesteaded in Reno County, Kan.

1900 – Albert R. Schlickau, Gene's eldest son, bought his first purebred Hereford bull to breed his commercial cows.

1905 – Albert married Florence and raised four children — Mildred, Harry, Opal and George.

1913 – Albert and his brother, Walter, bought 16 registered Hereford cows.

1919 – Harry, at 10-years-old, exhibited a home-raised Hereford heifer to win overall champion 4-H female at the Kansas State Fair.

1926 – Albert won a trophy from the Kansas Wheat Improvement Council and Kansas State College (eventually K-State) for being the "Wheat King of Kansas."

1930s and 1940s – Despite the depression, the Schlickau family exhibited and sold cattle far and wide – traveling by boxcar as far as Los Angeles.

1942 – Albert's son, George, earned the American Farmer degree for his accomplishments in the former Future Farmers of America (FFA) organization.

1949 – A.R. Schlickau and Sons, as it was called at the time, bought HC Larry Domino 50th. He was a very popular bull, but when it was discovered he was a dwarf gene carrier, the entire herd carrying that breeding line was culled. The Schlickaus never had a dwarf calf.

1951 and 1955 – Quonset buildings were constructed at the farm for improved cattle processing and sale ring facilities.

1954 – George, with the help of Reno County Extension agent, set up a total performance records program.

1959 – George helped organize the Kansas Junior Hereford Association, which was the precursor to the American Junior Hereford Association.

1967 – Harry's son John showed the reserve champion Hereford steer in the 4-H division of the American Royal.

April 1967 – Albert passed away, and his estate and cattle were sold. George and Harry and their families continued the business.

1969 – SH Miss Tex Onward 8820, bred and raised by George, won the Grand Champion Hereford Female banner at the National Western Stock Show, Fort Worth Stock Show, Texas State Fair, Oklahoma State Fair and Kansas State Fair.

1969 – George was elected to the AHA Board of Directors.

1971 – Tex Real Onward 178 won Grand Champion Bull in Denver and other accolades around the country. He earned a Super Register of Merit Sire, only the 15th bull in the breed to receive that award, which is based on points for progeny winnings and carcass merit.

1975 – George served as AHA President.

1970s and 1980s – Schlickaus won several awards. George was inducted into K-State's Block & Bridle Hall of Fame; his portrait hangs on the wall of Weber Hall on campus as part of the Gallery of Outstanding Livestock Breeders. Schlickau Herefords won Kansas Hereford Association Breeder of the Year award and was a Beef Improvement Federation producer of the year nominee.

1980 – Schlickaus began using synchronization technology. As part of a research program with K-State, they were one of the first to use Lutalyse.

1981 – Lois was elected president of the American Hereford Auxiliary, making George and Lois the first husband-wife pair to have served as president of their respective Hereford organizations.

1983 – George and his family became the sole operators of Schlickau Herefords when Harry and John split off their portion of the business.

1985 – Lois was chosen one of the first-ever Outstanding Hereford Woman of the Year Award winners.

1988 – Lois was elected as president of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, the first woman ever. She served two terms.

1991 – Kansas Junior Livestock Show was dedicated to George and Lois.

1998 – Schlickau's 55th annual production sale was the last. The business switched to private treaty sales.

August 2005 – After a long battle with a debilitating disease, George passed away.

Fall 2005 – George's son James officially took over the operation, though he'd been in charge since George's illness had left him unable to continue. James implemented a state-of-the-art rotational grazing system and was recognized with the Reno County Conservation Award for its implementation.

2013 – James and Charlene initiated a sorted semen and synchronization protocol.





James with a group of cows during the Kansas Hereford Association tour.



One of the Schlickaus' good herd sires — DBH L1 Domino 098 — that was purchased from Ken Baker and Sons Ranch, Rapid City, S.D.

of cattle and to the changing marketplace. "We used to sell 80 bulls and 40 females in the production sale and that was our ratio for a long, long time," James explains. "I think especially in the last decade we've seen a lot more demand for females. I think the Hereford breed in general has grown in popularity. Not only the registered guys are fully aware of it but now on the commercial side we're seeing a great deal more interest in Hereford genetics."

The Schlickaus have certainly built a reputation. James says, "We've been doing this for such a long period of time. I think the people that knew my dad, knew he was really passionate about the Hereford business and improvement of the Hereford

breed. Customer service is such an important element of what we do. We want to make sure we take care of every need."

James' mother, Lois, explains that George appreciated James taking over the operation when he became ill. They have three other children, Bruce, Nancy and Susan. The youngest boy, James, was already helping on the farm part-time in between other town jobs, raising a family and earning his Master of Business Administration degree.

"I am very proud of James," Lois explains. He's done a great job and is continuing on with the cattle, and I know he's being very selective with his breeding program and trying new things. I am very pleased to have him take it on to the next generation."



Ashton enjoys showing home-raised heifers.

Philanthropy

While raising cattle was his main focus, George certainly left his mark on the Hereford breed through leadership and service, as well. In 1951 the Schlickaus stepped up to help when the stock show at Wichita didn't have a venue. At the last minute, they invited the 4-Hers to their ranch for the judging contest. Neighbors brought in sheep and hogs, and the K-State judging team did the officiating. After that first year, the Schlickaus continued to host the event for 44 years.

George served many years on the Kansas Hereford Association board, and during one of his terms as president, he helped organize the junior association. He said "a group of kids cornered me at the (Kansas Junior Livestock Show in Wichita in 1959) and asked what they could do to help. So we put our heads together that night in the hotel and the organization (Kansas Junior Hereford Association) was born."

Then in October 1965, the American Junior Hereford Association was formed — the first junior group of any beef breed. George stepped right up and served as the advisor for the group for six years.

There are many, many activities the Schlickaus helped with over the years. For example, in 1961 Kansas celebrated its centennial. Schlickau Herefords provided a team of Hereford bulls to pull a covered wagon in several parades.

George served on a national level as well. He was elected to the AHA Board of Directors in 1969 and was president in 1975. In addition to helping start the TPR program, he represented the breed as a cattle ambassador to Brazil. It was there that he observed how the breeders tipped the animals' horns instead of using horn weights. George tried it on his own cattle and encouraged others to do the same. The easier method made horn weights obsolete nationwide.

He traveled abroad and many people from foreign countries came to Haven to visit him. The family hosted people from 27 different countries.

Lois was not one to sit idle; in addition to being the farm's bookkeeper and a consummate hostess, she has volunteered her time generously. Lois was elected to the American Hereford Auxiliary in 1981, making her and George the first-ever husband and wife to serve as Board president and auxiliary president. Lois received the Outstanding Hereford Woman Award in 1985. She also served in many other agricultural women's groups and continues to do so today at 80 years young.

"I think a person needs to be active and giving in their life,"

Lois explains. "When you can, you should contribute to your community, to your state, your nation or your organization. When you can do that, it makes you a better person, and you are giving back something to all those people who have helped you. I enjoy it and I feel I am spending my time doing something worthwhile."

Looking ahead

"We're very proud of our past," Lois says, "and the cattle have been good to us, but we're looking forward to the future. And that's what James is doing. George would be very, very pleased to know that James is continuing to do such a fine job."

James and Charlene are looking forward as well. They are raising their three children — Ashton, Caitlin and Cooper — on the ranch. In addition, James is part of a mentoring program with the local community college which gives students in the ag program a chance to come work on the farm.

"It's like an internship," Charlene explains. "It allows the students to learn from James, and in some cases, he's learned from them too. It's a win-win situation."

Ashton, Caitlin and Cooper are involved in 4-H, a program Charlene says is very rewarding. "One of the things that they all three really enjoy is taking show calves to the county fair," she explains. "But I'll never forget the first time Ashton walked into the showring. She was 7, and I had never seen a smile on that kid's face so big. It reminded me so much of her granddad. He had a bigger-than-life smile especially when it came to his cattle. She had that same smile flash across her face when she walked in. It gave me chills."

James says, "It's a family affair, and it always has been. I am excited about the direction we are going with the support of my wife and kids. I think the longevity of this operation is because first you have to have a good product. Then you've got to treat people right."

Lois adds, "I think (being a century breeder) is a testament to the family's hard work, honesty and integrity. This family has always been concerned about satisfying the customer's needs and requirements and always standing behind the product."

When it comes right down to it, though, it's because of a love for the breed. Charlene says, "Being married into the family and seeing it evolve over the years, this family's passion for the Hereford breed has always been very obvious to me." **HW**