



Nothing But Hereford

Ridder Hereford Ranch celebrates 100 years in the business.

by Sara Gugelmeyer

In early 20th century western Nebraska, Paul, the youngest of Theodore and Elizabeth Ridder's 12 children, was left at home to look after the family Hereford seedstock operation by himself. His dad told Paul, who was in high school at the time, that some customers were going to come by to purchase some bulls.

Since
1907

Paul was concerned, "How should I price them," he asked. But his father just winked and said, "You figure it out." Paul thought he was kidding, but his father told him he had to learn the business.

That was the start of the second generation of Ridder Hereford Ranch. Paul and one of his brothers,

Alvis, eventually took over the ranch and the rest is history — 100 years of Hereford history, that is.

Paul's son John and his wife, Mary, now operate Ridder Hereford Ranch, which is celebrating 100 years in the Hereford business thanks, in part, to the hard work of John's grandparents.

Ridder Hereford history

In 1907 Theodore and Elizabeth headed west, but unlike the cliché implies, they only moved from eastern Nebraska to central Nebraska. Still, it was far from an easy move, as they could take only what they could carry and pack into the wagon, and they drove their cattle and horses. John explains that they settled near Callaway, Neb., which is where he continues to ranch today.

The Ridders started with commercial cattle of mixed origin but soon saw the advantages in the Hereford business. John says, "There were several Hereford breeders there in the area, and they were pretty good cattle. And so my granddad made the switch in 1908. That first bull he bought was named Rector, a May 1908 son of Astor.

"They used the bulls they raised by him in their commercial herd, and we're not sure exactly when they went registered," he says. The early lessons Paul learned from his father and older siblings paid off when he and Alvis took over the ranch after he returned from serving in the Navy during World War II.

But first, Paul met Marianne at the social security office in North Platte. "He was a pilot and he wanted to fly himself instead of flying on the troop plane,"



John and Mary with the fourth generation of Ridder Hereford Ranch: (left to right) Mary, Liz, John, Erin, Ellen, Tricia, Dan and Joe.



Paul stands with his sold 1952 carload of bulls at the National Western Stock Show.

Marianne explains. "So he had to come in and get that approved, and I filled out the forms for him."

Shortly after they met in the social security office, Paul called Marianne and asked for a date. In 1945 they were married, and the couple moved to Iowa and then Texas while Paul was a Navy flight instructor.

Next generation

When the war ended, Paul and Marianne moved to the ranch. "That was quite a change for me," she says. She had never lived on a ranch before, and the house wasn't exactly brand new, she says. But she acclimated and still lives on the ranch today.

The couple had four children of which John is the eldest, born in 1947. He has two sisters, Christine and Marilyn, and a brother, Greg.

In 1951 Paul began traveling to Denver for the National Western Stock Show to exhibit bulls in the carload show, which would become a family tradition the Ridders continue today. Also about that time, Paul began consigning a few bulls to sales in the area.

John graduated from Colorado State University with an animal science degree in 1971 and returned to the ranch. Then his father was killed in a farm accident in 1972, and he took over operation of the ranch. The Ridders began hosting production sales in 1975, which they continue today.

In 1977 Greg returned to the ranch after graduating college as well. "I bought him a Hereford heifer up at Holden's; she was bred to a John VenHuizen bull. She raised us a Denver champion in '82," John says.

The two brothers worked side by side until 1985, when Greg went back to school to earn his master's degree in engineering.

John and Mary met while she was working for the Nebraska Stock Growers' Association, and they married in 1982. Mary came from a farming background and has a degree in English literature.



The vast expanse of good grass and plentiful water is what drew Theodore and Elizabeth to the Sandhills.

She worked for many years as a newsperson, contributing to newspaper, online, and radio and television broadcast outlets. She has also written two books, "In Benton" and "Roots of Change: Nebraska's New Agriculture." They have six children: Joe, Dan, Erin, Liz, Ellen and Tricia, all of whom have helped on the ranch.

Many changes

The Ridders have continued to raise Herefords all these years, but John says many things have changed since his grandfather started in the business. "The way we sell bulls today is different than we used to. We used to sell them on the ranch and now we have production sales. Also performance records, carcass testing, ultrasound and feedlot data are changes."

Nowadays, Ridder Hereford Ranch calves about 200 cows every year, all of which are purebred. The Ridders sell about 75-80 bulls and 40-50 yearling heifers every year at their annual sale in February.

One thing that has been a constant for the Ridders for generations is taking carloads to Denver, but even that is not the

same as it once was. John says, "When Dad took a carload of bulls out to Denver and I was a little boy, he would call home every second or third day and I would ask him how many bulls he sold, and he said he would sell them all before he came home. That was kind of the object of going to Denver back in the old days. Today, there's still cattle in the yards for sale, but a lot of people will take them out and use that for advertising to entice people to come back to their sale."

John knows that all his customers can't make it to Denver and hates to offer bulls for sale there for that reason. "We feel

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John and Greg raised this 1982 Denver champion bull, Metric, out of a heifer John gave Greg, which he purchased from Holdens.



Ridders purchased Ribstone 157K, renowned carcass sire and 12-trait leader, in 2002.

we've got a real strong customer base, so we decided to catalog all of our Denver cattle and sell them at home."

Reminiscing, John continues, "Back in the old times, we'd ride out on the train and go out to the show,



The ranch has been exhibiting bulls at the National Western Stock Show for six decades.

and you'd just meet so many different people out there when you were in junior high or so, and see those same people. It was a real interesting way to know your fellow breeders and commercial customers, and

you'd always meet so many new and different people every year and keep in contact with those people as long as they were in business, and that was one of the strong draws. A lot of old timers just keep going back and keep those ties and keep the standing with those people that they know and do business with.

Ridder Hereford Ranch Timeline

- 1907** – Theodore and Elizabeth Ridder move to central Nebraska.
- 1908** – Ridders purchase first Hereford bull: Rector.
- 1945** – Paul and Marianne marry. Paul returns to ranch, then partners with brother Alvis.
- 1951** – Paul takes first carload to Denver.
- 1971** – John graduates from Colorado State University with animal science degree.
- 1972** – Paul is killed in farm accident; John begins managing ranch.
- 1973** – First Line 1 bulls are purchased from Cooper and Holden.
- 1975** – First production sale is hosted at the ranch.
- 1982** – Ridders exhibit grand champion bull, Metric, in Denver. John and Mary marry.
- 1987** – First Canadian bull is purchased.
- 1995** – Ridders buy high-selling bull in Calgary sale.
- 2002** – Ribstone 157K, renowned carcass sire and 12-trait leader, is purchased.
- 2004** – Ranch begins ultrasounding all yearlings.
- 2007** – Ridder family celebrates 100 years ranching at Callaway.
- 2009** – Ridders are honored by AHA as Century Breeders.

True Hereford

In a time when many areas of the country have gone black-crazy, John says his region has stayed true to Herefords. "Most of our customers are within 200 miles, and I've still got 19 customers that breed Hereford to Hereford, and some people find that hard to believe."

John says most of his customers are buying Hereford bulls to use on black-hided cows but those that are straight Hereford do it because it works.

"They've never deviated. Most of them have been in business 80 years plus. They had really good cattle and they always bought good fresh genetics from us and other good breeders in this area, and they've kept their cattle good. They've always had the quality and size and performance. And today, with the demand for those really good straight Hereford females, people will drive a long way to find those cattle.

"Hard work breeds its own result," John says, and his family has worked hard to stay in the Hereford business for 100 years. John says he owes his parents and grandparents. "Without them, without parents and grandparents that have that 'stick to it' attitude, I wouldn't have made it this far," he says. "We've just never had the urge to raise anything but Herefords." **HW**

