



Focused on What Matters

Lester Schafer and the Schafer family have set their priorities and have been honored for a century of service in the Hereford breed.

by *Christy Couch Lee*

“It all boils down to God, family, country, people and then Herefords,” says Lester Schafer, Buffalo Lake, Minn.

This mentality has driven the Schafer family for more than a century in the Hereford industry – through service, leadership and producing quality Hereford genetics.

For this reason, Lester was honored as a

Century Breeder at the 2017 American Hereford Association (AHA) Hereford Honoree Reception in Kansas City, Mo. The Century Breeder award recognizes Hereford breeders who have stood the test of time and have been dedicated to raising Herefords for 100 years.

The registered Hereford herd Schafer runs was originally started by his grandparents in 1917. Throughout the following century, this family has remained true to their roots.

The beginning

In 1900 Lester’s grandparents, John and Mary Klucas, and their two young sons, Art and Emmet, moved to the current Schafer homestead in Buffalo Lake, Minn., from Blue Earth, Minn.

Two daughters, Frances and Gladys, were born through the next few years, completing the family.

Just 17 years after moving to Buffalo Lake, John and his brother-in-law traveled by train to Garner, Iowa, where John purchased four registered Hereford heifers, thus beginning the Hereford legacy within the family.

Meanwhile, in 1919, John D. and Dora Schafer moved their nine children from Sherburn, Minn., to a farm south of Buffalo Lake – just three miles from



Pictured are brothers Robert and Lester Schafer.



the Klucas farm. Their eldest son, Henry, married Frances Klucas in 1925, and they began farming near the Schafer farm.

One year later their first son, Lester, was born.

Shortly thereafter, Henry was diagnosed with tuberculosis. He moved to the sanitarium near Granite Falls, Minn., and Frances and Lester moved in with the Klucas family. Henry and Frances added one more son, Robert, to the family before Henry died suddenly of a ruptured appendix.

Thus, the Klucas household in the 1930s consisted of John and Mary, son Emmet, and daughter Frances with her two sons, Lester and Robert.

“I learned many life lessons from my grandparents and uncle Emmet,” Lester says. “And when my brother and I started working with cattle and later showing through 4-H, they allowed us to play with the calves and didn’t discourage us from learning as much as we could.”

In 1940 Gladys married Henry’s younger brother, John Arthur Schafer, nicknamed Art. They purchased a farm five miles southwest of the Klucas farm and added four more children to the family in the following years.

Lester graduated from high school in 1944 and worked on the farm until the fall of 1945, when he was drafted into the Army. He served overseas in Germany in the Army of Occupation and, thanks to the G.I. Bill, became the first Schafer to attend college when he enrolled at the University of Minnesota (U of M) in 1947. He graduated with a degree in animal husbandry in 1951.

John Klucas died in 1946 and Art Schafer, shortly afterward.



The foundation in the Hereford breed built 100 years ago continues today for the Schafer family. Pictured (l to r) are the Schafers and their children: John, Carla, Lester, Kathleen and Mary. Not pictured is Laurie.

With the change in family structure, Emmet ran the Klucas farm with help from Robert, who worked at home until he began at U of M in 1949. When Lester returned home, he rented his aunt Gladys’s farm, while sharing labor and equipment with Emmet.

Robert married Carol Nelson in 1952, graduated from college and became a 4-H agent in Nobles County in southwestern Minnesota. Shortly afterward he was hired as an agriculture agent in Lyon County and in 1956 became manager of Schermerhorn Farms in northwestern Minnesota.

Lester married Kathleen Carlson in 1954. Kathleen’s paternal grandparents were Swedish immigrants, who met each other while working in the Spencer, Iowa. They purchased a farm south of Hector in 1897. Her parents, Anton and Opal, purchased a farm just west of the home farm, where they raised dairy cows, hogs and chickens.

Lester and Kathleen became the parents of four children: John, Carla, Laurie and Mary. They also began building their own herd of cows and increased their role in the farming operation. Gladys’s three sons also contributed labor to pay for their 4-H project calves and pigs.

After Mary Klucas and Emmet passed away in the early 1960s, Lester and Kathleen purchased the farm.

Their son, John, graduated from U of M with a degree in animal science, returned home and purchased the Anton Carlson farm in 1979.

Robert and Carol have lived at Mahnomen since 1956. Schermerhorn farms was purchased by John

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T. Oxley in the early '60s, and Bob has managed it ever since. The Schermerhorn/Oxley genetics have been part of the Schafer breeding program since 1958 and have been a significant influence on the Hereford breed. Robert and Carol have five children: Barb, Don, Ron, Mark and Jean. The three sons are still involved in the Hereford industry.

Data driven

In 1960 Lester purchased a scale and began collecting weaning weights on calves. When the

Whole Herd Total Performance Records (TPR™) program was established by the AHA a couple of years later, he was one of the first to enroll. Yearling weights were added to the data within a couple of years, followed by birth weights in 1979 and ultrasound carcass data in 2000. DNA testing has recently been implemented and is becoming an important part of the performance testing program.

“The animal breeding principle, ‘You can’t improve a trait if you don’t measure it,’ has



Schafer family timeline:

- 1900** John and Mary Klucas and their two young sons, Art and Emmet, moved from Blue Earth, Minn.
- 1917** John and his brother-in-law traveled by train to Garner, Iowa, where John purchased four registered Hereford heifers.
- 1919** John D. and Dora Schafer with their nine children moved just south of Buffalo Lake.
- 1925** John D. and Dora's eldest son, Henry, married Frances Klucas, the daughter of John and Mary Klucas.
- 1926** Lester Schafer was born.
- 1930** Robert Schafer was born.
- 1933** Henry Schafer died.
- 1940** Gladys married Henry's youngest brother, Art, and they began managing the Klucas farms.
- 1944** Lester graduated from high school.
- 1945** Lester was drafted into the Army and served in Germany.
- 1946** John Klucas died.
- 1946** John and Mary's son, Emmet, took over the Klucas farms, with the help of Lester and Robert.
- 1947** Art Schafer died.
- 1951** Lester earned a degree in animal husbandry from University of Minnesota (U of M) and began farming with Emmett.
- 1952** Robert graduated from U of M and married Carol Nelson. He began work as a 4-H agent and then an agricultural agent.
- 1954** Lester married Kathleen Carlson.
- 1956** Robert became manager of Schermerhorn Farms.
- 1960** Lester began collecting weaning weights on calves.
- 1962** Lester and Kathleen purchased the Klucas farms.
- 1979** Lester began collecting birth weights.
- 1979** Lester and Kathleen's son, John, graduated from U of M with a degree in animal science and purchased Kathleen's parents' farm, the Anton Carlson farm.
- 1996** Lester was named to the Minnesota Livestock Hall of Fame.
- 2000** Lester began utilizing ultrasound carcass data.
- 2000** The farm achieved century farm status.
- 2000** Lester was named to the Minnesota Hereford Breeders Hall of Fame; Robert was named to the Minnesota Livestock Hall of Fame.
- 2002** Robert was named to the Minnesota Hereford Breeders Hall of Fame.
- 2006** Robert was named to the American Hereford Association (AHA) Hall of Fame.
- 2017** Lester was named to the AHA Hall of Fame.



proved to be true, and steady improvement in all measured traits has been achieved,” Lester says. “The performance records have also proved useful in determining when an optimum level of performance has been attained, and finding genetics to maintain that level of performance. In recent years, linebreeding and inbreeding to top individuals has been employed carefully and where appropriate to build the predictability of the cattle. Outside sires have been added to the program to add specific traits while broadening the herd’s genetic base.”

Education and service

Lester says the importance of education and service was taught from an early age in the family.

“We have all had the desire to just keep learning,” Lester says. “When I was growing up, going to the country school, I read every book in the library. My family created a sense of challenge, and I wanted to learn more about whatever subject I happened to be reading about.”

Without a doubt, this family has continued learning.

“Within the family, there are nine animal husbandry or animal science degrees; three ag journalism degrees; one ag education degree; one home economics degree; and one ag business degree – mostly from U of M, in addition to several degrees in fields other than agriculture,” Lester says. “As well, seven family members have worked for the Cooperative Extension Service.”

Serving the industry and giving back is a top priority for the family, as well.

“We’ve always had the attitude of trying to make things better,” Lester says.

Klucas family members and the Schafers have served in various roles within the Minnesota Hereford Association, the Minnesota Polled Hereford Association, the Minnesota Hereford Breeders, the Minnesota Junior Hereford Association, the Minnesota State Cattlemen’s Association, local cattlemen’s associations, the Minnesota Livestock Breeders Association, the Cattlemen’s Beef Board, the Beef Promotion Operating Committee and the Minnesota Beef Council.

Additionally, they have served within the Farm Bureau, the Agricultural Utilization and Research Institute, economic development committees, pork producers associations, Extension committees, school boards, city councils, 4-H, FFA and churches.

Their service has not gone unnoticed.

Honors

Counted among their highest accomplishments, both Lester and Robert have been enshrined in



One of Lester’s most notable accomplishments was being inducted into the AHA Hall of Fame last year.

the Minnesota Hereford Breeders Hall of Fame and the Minnesota Livestock Hall of Fame.

Robert was named to the AHA Hereford Hall of Fame in 2006 and Lester in 2017.

“I was amazed when Jack Ward called to inform me that I had been named to the AHA Hall of Fame,” Lester says. “I didn’t think I had done anything that special. Or that I deserved it. I know a lot of people who have accomplished a lot more than we have. It gave me a good feeling to know that anyone can be recognized for devoting their time and effort, and for doing the best they can.”

Lester says it also was truly a great honor when Churchill Cattle Co., Manhattan, Mont., purchased LJS Mark Domino 1321.

“Dale Venhuizen chose that bull based on photos and EPDs (expected progeny differences) and decided he was worth promoting,” he says. “We have sold semen on him and his sire, LJS Mark Domino 0945, from ocean to ocean and from north to south. I also must thank my brother, Robert, and nephew, Don Schafer, for furnishing the genetics that went into that bull.”

Future of farm

Today, Lester, Kathleen and John run the daily activities of the farm.

“John does most of the planning these days. With my age as it is, I do as little as I can,” Lester says with a laugh.

As for the future of the operation? Lester says it’s uncertain.

“John doesn’t have any children, and he’s single,” Lester says. “We don’t have anyone in line to continue. But we would very much like to see it continue.”

God, family, country, people and Herefords. The foundation built 100 years ago continues today with the Schafer family. If all goes as hoped, this legacy will continue for years to come. **HW**