



A Century of Quality Stock

Bayers Hereford Ranch has carried a tradition of quality for a century — both in the cattle and in the people raised on the land.

by *Christy Couch Lee*

Nestled in the Ruby Valley of Montana, known for both beauty and tough winters hard on cattle, horses and cattlemen, you will find the oldest continuously running registered Hereford ranch in the state. It is also home to the newest American Hereford Association (AHA) Century Breeder — Bayers Hereford Ranch.

Since 1918 the Bayers family have devoted their lives to raising quality Hereford genetics on this land. And, as third-generation Jill Bayers Hotchkiss says, Herefords are simply in their blood.

“We all have a passion for Herefords and it certainly carries on,” she says. “They are a wonderful breed of cattle, and the people are the best. Many of my friends are Hereford breeders and it is like a big extended family.”

Jill’s sister, Kathy Bayers, agrees.

“From the time I can remember, our lives revolved around Herefords — from the yearling bull pen right across the road from our house growing up, to fitting cattle in the barn, to surviving an annual sale and watching the dedication my grandparents and parents had to the breed and the land,” she says. “Love of the breed has never left me, and involvement with Herefords formed who I am. I still melt at the picture of a cow and newborn Hereford calf.”

This devotion to the Hereford breed and its people is what led this family ranch, based in Twin Bridges, Mont., to be recognized as a Century Breeder during the AHA Hereford Honorees Reception Oct. 26, 2018, in Kansas City, Mo.

That love of the breed — along with dedication, drive and commitment — has been woven throughout the generations of Bayers family ranching.

Go west, young man

A native of Forest City, Iowa, Art Bayers grew up on the family cattle operation and farm. In 1908 he ventured to Lavina, Mont., to play baseball and to work in the town’s new bank. Naturally, as the area’s homestead agent, he homesteaded land and began to raise Hereford cattle.

The following year, he met Elizabeth Dwyer, who had moved to the area from Illinois and homesteaded land with her sister. In 1912 Art and Elizabeth were married. Six years later, they purchased polled Herefords from Henry Kuhlman of Nebraska, and, thus, Bayers Hereford Ranch was born.

The couple eventually moved their family to a ranch near Twin Bridges. The ranch contained a beautiful three-story round barn made famous for raising



Pictured (l to r) are: Marc and Jill (Bayers) Hotchkiss; Britt Bayers; Mona and Mark Stenson; Kathy Bayers; Byron Bayers and grandson Jack; Rich and Mary Ann Bayers; and Lindsay, Mia and James Hruby.

Montana's only Kentucky Derby winner, Spokane. It also became a central part of the Bayers' family operation, hosting more than 50 annual bull sales. From this round barn, the family marketed cattle and genetics into 38 states and three foreign countries.

At one time Bayers Hereford Ranch included three locations in Montana and produced more than 25,000 registered Herefords. Registrations at their peak totaled about 800 per year, and for nearly a decade, the Bayers' cattle sales were listed in the top 10 in the nation.

In 1930 the youngest of six children, Byron, was born. The only son in the family, Byron spent much of his childhood at his father's side.

In 1953 Byron married Pauline Oberg, and they raised three children — Rich, Kathy and Jill — who were all actively involved in the ranch through the 1980s.

When Art passed away in 1960, Byron and Pauline purchased the operation from other family members and continued the family tradition of excellence.

Rich and his wife, Mary Ann, lived and worked on the ranch until 1986, when Rich began working in the ag division of Dow® Chemical Co. Kathy also had a long career in the agrochemical industry with Hoechst AG, Gowan® and FMC Corporation. And in 1997 Jill and her husband, Marc Hotchkiss, along with Byron and Pauline, established the publication *Hereford America*, which is now owned by Jill and Marc.

Byron sold much of the herd in 1990 after a lease and some key employees were lost but eventually built back a herd of about 100 polled and horned cows. Ehlke Herefords of Townsend, Mont., bought the majority of this second herd a few years ago. But, again, Byron hung onto a few head and rebuilt.

Sadly, Pauline passed away in 2015 at the age of 84, and Byron passed away in July 2018 at the age of 88. However, Rich notes, their legacy carries on in the many life lessons his parents instilled.

"I learned that whatever you do in life, go into it with your whole heart and energy," he says. "I also learned to treat all people the way you would want to be treated, and always laugh when you can."



Art and Elizabeth Bayers and their children (l to r): Beach, Jeanne, Helen, Byron, Bertha and Wanda.



Jill, Kathy, Pauline, Byron and Rich Bayers at Flathead Lake, Mont., where they celebrated Byron and Pauline's 50th wedding anniversary.

Resiliency was a key life lesson for Kathy.

"I learned what it means to have true fortitude in the face of hardship, dedication to a goal and service to a community," she says. "I also learned the importance of family and, most of all, faith in God. Additionally, I learned life should be fun, but failures will occur, and they must not define you or hold you back. Just hold your head up and try again."

Focus on genetics

Art and Byron were known for their focus on pedigrees, quality genetics and progress. Recognized by cattle producers as a leader in the industry, Art utilized both horned and polled Hereford genetics.

continued on page 30...



The old round barn near Twin Bridges, Mont., was just as famous for raising registered Hereford bulls as it was for raising Montana's only Kentucky Derby winner. Now owned by Hamilton Ranch, the barn has been restored and is used as an event center. The Bayers family held their 100th ranch anniversary celebration there in July 2018.

“Art was well respected in his ability to develop herd bulls and replacement females that could carry a herd,” Pat Goggins, a family friend and auctioneer for the Bayers for nearly 50 years, once said. “He helped a lot of Hereford breeders get a herd bull or replacement heifers, and he would finance them and do what he had to do to keep them in business. I respect that sort of leadership role.”

Like his dad, Byron also had the uncanny ability to develop herd bulls and replacement females. The father-son duo utilized data from performance testing programs to provide information to their customers, and they maintained a focus on quality and carcass genetics. Many of their bull customers were with them for many years, some for more than 50 years.

“When we think about it, the goal for every cattle producer is to produce a live calf and take that calf to market profitably,” Byron once said. “If a producer can’t do that, he or she isn’t going to do very well.”

Although Byron placed great emphasis on data, he knew true quality came from the basics.

“In my lifetime, things have changed considerably in the industry,” he once said of performance data and DNA testing. “I hope these tools never completely erase the fundamentals of cattle production.”

Jill agrees with the fundamentals her dad instilled in her.

“I still select cattle by looks first, but the performance, pedigree and DNA have to fit in with the phenotype,” she says. “I agree with Dad and hope the tools don’t replace good, solid cattle production.”

The Bayers’ leading foundation herd sires included Choice Domino, Onward and Prince Diamond. In 1942, their Evan Mischief was named the first Nebraska Cornhusker Futurity champion.

Eventually, the family sold Evan Mischief to former Oklahoma Governor Roy Turner. The first \$10,000 bull to sell at auction was sired by Evan Mischief, as was a \$50,000 bull that sold in 1972 – the highest-priced bull to sell at auction at that time.

Other outstanding descendants of Evan Mischief were RC Dan Mischief 19th, the first Midland Bull Test champion; Evan Return, Montana Winter Fair champion; Evan Centurian; Evan Dominator; Evan Innovator; Evan Mischief 88; and Mischief 77



Diamond Mischief 3rd set a record in 1946 as Montana’s first \$10,000 bull at the Tri-State Hereford Futurity.

— all of which became foundation sires for several other Hereford herds.

When it comes to the breed, Rich says every generation of Bayers has believed in Herefords.

“The Hereford breed, to me, is the benchmark for everything that is right in the cattle and meat industries,” he says. “From docility, economy, hardiness and gain ability, all the way to the taste and flavor at the table, Hereford cattle have all the attributes you want to see.”

Devoted to the breed

Not only do the Bayers take great pride in quality Hereford genetics, but the family also believes in the value of giving back to the breed. Serving the Hereford industry has been a longtime passion for the Bayers family.

Byron served on the AHA Board of Directors in the 1970s and was elected president in 1976. Additionally, he was the Montana Hereford Association (MHA) president for three separate terms.

He traveled the globe as a Hereford representative, attending World Hereford Conferences in Canada and Uruguay and went to Hungary as an AHA consultant in selecting Herefords. In 2009 he received the Canadian Hereford Ambassador Award, and in 2017 Byron was inducted into the AHA Hall of Fame. He was also named the MHA’s Man of the Year.



One of the top pairs at the ranch near Twin Bridges a few years ago.



Current herd bull Mohican Hytek 422C was purchased from Mohican West in Laurel, Mont., and is used in the current Bayers breeding program.

Byron's entire life was spent promoting the Hereford breed. To him there simply was no comparison.

"The Hereford breed has been — and will continue to be — a buttress of the cattle industry," he once said.

Rich feels fortunate to have been raised in the Hereford industry.

"I learned so much about hard work, what it takes to be successful in business and how to interact with and treat people," he says.

Kathy agrees, noting her parents and their involvement in the Hereford breed will leave a legacy of dedication, caring and fortitude.

"Particularly, I hope they're remembered for their loyalty to the people and efforts in their lives, as well as their commitment to each other," she says.

"Dad was often outspoken about what he thought was right. He took hits for that, but was undeterred by its downside. No matter whether you agreed with him or not, he did what he thought was right. Mom was unfailingly supportive and caring, and a tireless and often unrecognized worker behind the scenes. Their determination is not often seen outside the agricultural industries."

More to come

Those fundamentals have shaped the future of Bayers Hereford Ranch. Today, the family's registered cattle are raised at Friedt Herefords in Mott, N.D.

"Our commercial herd is still at the ranch in Twin Bridges, and they are run on shares with local rancher Lony Shaw," Jill says, adding, "We would like to have a small- to medium-sized herd of high-quality cattle, selected from the best genetics in the area in which we



Byron Bayers was inducted into the AHA Hall of Fame in 2017 at the AHA Annual Meeting. Pictured (l to r) are: Terri Barber, 2017 AHA president; Mary Ann, Rich, Byron and Kathy Bayers; Jill (Bayers) and Marc Hotchkiss; and AHA Board member Jim Bellis.

travel. I look forward to having a Hereford herd we and other family members can enjoy for many years."

As for the family being recognized as an AHA Century Breeder? Jill says it's tough to find the words.

"It is overwhelming, gratifying and humbling, all at the same time, to receive this honor for our family," she says. "The generations before us put their blood, sweat and tears into our herd and promotion of Hereford cattle. Last year, my dad was inducted into the AHA Hall of Fame, and this year we were recognized for 100 years in the Hereford business. It's such an honor. I'm glad he was able to participate last year, and he knew about the 100-year honor before his passing."

Jill believes Bayers Hereford Ranch is poised and ready to continue as a source of high-quality, registered stock. And based on the genetics within Bayers Hereford Ranch — both in people and in cattle — this legacy will most certainly continue for generations to come. **HW**

Bayers Hereford Ranch: 100 years in the making

- 1908** Art Bayers moves from his birthplace in Forest City, Iowa, to Lavina, Mont.
- 1912** Art marries Elizabeth Dwyer.
- 1918** Art and Elizabeth establish Bayers Hereford Ranch in Lavina.
- 1930** Byron Bayers, the youngest of Art and Elizabeth's six children, is born.
- Mid-1930s** Bayers Hereford Ranch moves near Twin Rivers, Mont.
- 1942** Bayers' Evan Mischief is the first Nebraska Cornhusker Futurity Champion.
- 1945** Byron Bayers becomes a member of the American Hereford Association (AHA).
- 1953** Byron marries Pauline Oberg.
- 1958** Byron serves as Montana Hereford Association (MHA) president.
- 1960** Byron serves as MHA president for a second term.
- 1960** Art passes away.
- 1970** Byron serves his third term as MHA president.
- 1976** Byron serves as AHA president.
- 1976** MHA convention is dedicated to Byron.
- 1978** Byron receives University of Montana's Distinguished Alumni Award.
- 1979** Byron is named Chevron's Agricultural Spokesman of the Year.
- 1981** Byron is inducted into the Montana State Fair Pioneer Hall of Fame.
- 1981** Byron receives the Friend of Higher Education Award given by the Montana Legislature during its 47th Legislative Session.
- 1990** Much of Bayers Hereford Ranch disperses but eventually builds back to a herd of about 100 polled and horned cows.
- 1992** Pauline is named Montana Hereford Woman of the Year.
- 1996** Byron and Pauline, along with daughter, Jill, and her husband, Marc, establish *Hereford America* magazine.
- 2008** Byron receives the Canadian Hereford Ambassador Award.
- 2015** Pauline passes away at the age of 84.
- 2017** Byron is named to the AHA Hall of Fame.
- 2018** Byron passes away at the age of 88.
- 2018** Byron and Pauline's children — Kathy Bayers; Rich Bayers and his wife, Mary Ann; and Jill and Marc Hotchkiss — take over Bayers Hereford Ranch. **HW**