



Redd-Blooded Civilization

How one family has nourished the seeds of civility, progress, and faith in the rugged high desert of Utahrado.

Words & photos by Marjorie Haun.

In 1914 men from San Juan County and Moab united to purchase the Cunningham and Carpenter Cattle Company and organized the La Sal Livestock Company. Lemuel Hardison Redd Jr. was one of the owners of the new company, and his son Charles became the manager. Since that time, the history of La Sal and the Charles Redd family have been intertwined.”

These lines from “La Sal Reflections: A Redd Family Journal” trace the roots of the Redd family ranching business in southeastern Utah. A tough tangle of Mormon pioneer stock, cowboys, politicians, and intellectuals, generations of Redds have advanced a peculiar form of civilization in this patch of Colorado Plateau.

Settling the San Juan Country

The history of white people in southeastern

Utah goes back to 1776 and a contingent of Spanish explorers led by Rev. Escalante and Rev. Dominguez. In 1855, a group of Mormons under the direction of Brigham Young tried to establish the Elk Mountain Mission in what is now known as Moab. The area where the Colorado River flows past stark red cliffs had fertile bottomlands, but roving Utes, uninterested in religion and suspicious of the Mormons’ intentions, attacked the colony and killed several settlers. The Mormons abandoned the area and it would be another 23 years before they would try again.

About 10 years after the Mormons left, a man named Hayden led a surveying party into the sandstone canyons and laccolithic mountains to create maps of the region. A gifted geologist, metallurgist, and explorer, Hayden found ore and mineral deposits and his maps were soon exploited by hopeful mining outfits. It was Hayden who named

Paradox for the paradoxical path the Dolores River cuts across the middle of its long red and purple rock-rimmed valley. He also found salt beds in the compact mountain range that straddles the Utah-Colorado border. The Indian guides who accompanied the Escalante and Dominguez band knew about the abundance of salt, and so the Spaniards dubbed them “Sierra La Sal.” The southern and eastern flanks of the La Sal Mountains are still home to members of the Redd family, whose roots were planted there during the final decades of the 19th century.

The first generation of Redds were Mormon converts who migrated to the Salt Lake Valley from Tennessee in 1850. Lemuel Hardison Redd Sr. and his son, Lemuel Hardison Redd Jr., were called by leaders of the Mormon Church in 1879 to “settle the San Juan” with a group of pioneers numbering about 250. They were part of the band

that made the treacherous crossing into Bluff through the Hole in the Rock, a shortcut which they hoped would circumvent volatile Utes and Piutes. But the shorter route had troubles aplenty. It took the first party six weeks to blast and chisel a sufficiently wide trail through the narrow gap so they could get their wagons, livestock and children to the banks of the Colorado River below. Lore says that blind horses were chosen to lead the first wagon down through the crevasse because they wouldn't balk at the perilous slope before them.

Muhamel Hardison (L.H.) Redd, with his wife and one child, settled in Bluff where he would become county assessor and serve in the state Legislature. He also served in the positions of bishop and stake president in the Mormon Church. In 1889, Charles Redd was born.

Charles Redd

Charles (Charlie) Redd is as much of a legend as one man can be in the high desert of southeastern Utah. After growing up in Bluff, Charlie moved north to La Sal to manage the cattle company formed by his father and partners. Although L.H. held the largest share in La Sal Livestock, choosing Charlie to oversee the outfit had nothing to do with nepotism and everything to do with temperament. There was no one else as trusted as Charlie to do the job. La Sal Livestock eventually became Redd Ranches and Charlie was successful in making numerous grazing and livestock acquisitions, including sheep and cattle. He is widely credited with keeping the livestock business solvent through the grim days of the Great Depression. He was bluntly honest with the banks and didn't overpromise what he could produce. His honesty and flexibility—at one time he raised turkeys—helped him survive the hard times that sank many other ranchers in the region.

As much an innovator as he was a rancher, Charlie applied superior cattle breeding science to his bulls, and started breeding and selling high-quality seed stock around 1920. His curiosity and drive to improve the land literally changed the very landscape in and around La Sal. In the early 1940s he traveled to Canada where he obtained some “crested

wheatgrass” seed that had been imported from Siberia. Charlie took it back home and planted the seed in his garden spot. He then harvested the grass, replanted it and grew some more until the two pounds of seed was

used up. With a sizable harvest of mature crested wheatgrass, Charlie plowed the sagebrush under and planted 250,000 acres of it. To this day, the lush grass grows in tidy tufts amidst the sagebrush and gamble oak of the mountain slopes. Cows, horses, elk and mule deer

love the stuff, and even if grazed to the roots, it always comes back thick and green in the spring. Charlie's son, Paul, says: “We didn't have good spring range until we started

“There's something about the people who are on the land, working it...their sacrifice and generosity,” Hardy says. “Nature in farming is unforgiving and you pay a price; that price is vigilance.”

in the region considered it an honor to have known Charlie Redd.

The Sage of La Sal

Eighty-two-year-old Hardy (Charles Hardison Jr.) is the eldest of Charlie's children and the patriarch of the La Sal operations. An intellectual with a taste for the philosophies of Edmund Burke and John Locke, he is a reservoir of family history, local lore, and discernment. He downplays the stature of himself and his family legacy, saying: “Like many ranchers, we're not always good managers. Sometimes we're lazy or don't have the best judgment. Just as in any family or business or organization, we're all less than perfect.”

His austere candidness is congenital. Hardy quotes a truism of his dad's: “I'm not honest because I'm a perfect man but because it's a practical thing. If I'm dishonest, it's to my disadvantage.” But one cannot underestimate the role this brand of sober humility



Paul Redd oversees operations in Paradox, but his daughter, Jennifer, is the muscle behind it all. A mother, wife, and expert cowwoman, Jennifer breeds the specialty high-altitude bulls for which the Redd Ranches annual bull sale is famous. Opposite: The striking Paradox Valley sprawls eastward from the La Sal Mountains towards Colorado's San Juan range. It's not just paradoxical for a river running the wrong way; the valley is both fertile yet desolate, civilized yet wild.

planting crested wheatgrass on sagebrush land. It let us sustain our numbers where our neighbors had to reduce their livestock.”

As a mostly agreeable man, Charlie rarely lost his temper. However, according to his son Hardy, he once let loose in a letter to a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) supervisor in Moab, who he concluded was not honest with him about his grazing rights. Hardy says: “One of the things that made Dad the angriest was when he felt like somebody was shuckin' him; was being dishonest. Then he could be pretty harsh.” But such episodes were uncommon, and generations of people

plays in a successful ranching business where punishing conditions leave little room for error. “There's something about the people who are on the land, working it...their sacrifice and generosity,” Hardy adds. “Nature in farming is unforgiving and you pay a price; that price is vigilance.”

He shares a story illustrating his dad's kindly side. “Dad was the chairman of a local committee of ranchers that met in Monticello. Six or seven fellows showed up to make their pitches about where their grazing would be allotted and how much stock they could run. Dad came in late and said hello to every-

one and he noticed there was a man in the corner being ignored by the others. Some believe he may have rustled cows at one time. But Dad just sensed that he didn't feel good about himself and needed some encouragement, so he asked him how he was and how his family was doing. He was willing to give the guy a second chance. By the time the meeting was over, that man stood about a foot taller and was able to walk out with his head held high."



Patriarch Hardy Redd sits in his office in the century-old ranch house in La Sal. A philosophical and analytical man, Hardy is also a reservoir of local history and lore. RIGHT: Checking the lots pre-bidding. BELOW: Redd's heifers crowd a watering hole in Paradox. Lower in elevation than La Sal, Paradox is also searingly hot in the summer, but water sources from the La Sal Mountains and cottonwood trees lining the creeks and irrigation ditches make it tolerable for man and beast alike.

Hardy is effusive about his family. His wife, Sunny, wanted 12 children, but with eight biological kids, he was content. Nevertheless, they decided to adopt two newborn Native American twins, a brother and sister. The boy died tragically in a swimming pool when he was five, but the daughter, Beverly, still lives in La Sal with her husband and runs a successful cattle ranch of her own.

Hardy's son, Charles, runs the farm and pasturing operations in La Sal, and Charles' younger brother, Lowry, runs the range operation covering thousands of acres throughout San Juan County. Hardy describes Lowry's ranging as a form of "transhumance," wherein he drives the cattle in a nomadic seasonal pattern, from summer range in the mountains to winter range in the high desert and all good foraging in between.

Suspicious of journalistic hyperbole, Hardy minimizes his own exceptionalism as well as that of the Redd clan in general. But it's just that kind of self-effacing realism that has kept Redd Ranches alive for over a century.

The Potentate of Paradox

A few years younger than Hardy, Paul Redd was born in 1941. With his wife, Diana, at his side, he oversees the Redd Ranches' Paradox operations. Practical and sturdy, Paul

carries on his dad's bull breeding business and runs 600 cow-calf pairs with his daughter, Jennifer. Paul's son Steven is diversified, owning restaurants and an insurance business, but he also holds 400,000 acres in western Nevada allotments. David, Paul's oldest son, breeds quarter horses and runs a hunt-



ing outfitter business in Monticello.

Sitting at the mouth of a canyon on the west end of the valley, Paul's ranch house is cloistered within copses of cottonwood and elm trees, with a striking view of pastures, green fields, and Paradox's brilliantly striped sandstone cliffs beyond. Significantly lower in altitude than La Sal, Paradox has its challenges. Summer days can be extremely hot, but unlike La Sal, it has abundant natural water sources. Most of the cows are driven up into the mountains during the hot months. Paul has Forest Service, BLM and private allotments that make up his summer range.



While nature always tests a rancher, social movements and government policies test him more. When asked about how ranching has changed in the last decades, Paul explains: “We’re trying to do the same thing with less labor. One of the reasons we gave up sheep in the 1960s was a lack of good herders. And we’re having to deal with a heavier hand from the BLM and Forest Service. There are a lot of environmentalists who keep them uncomfortable. If the agencies don’t do anything the environmentalists are happy, but if they want to do a reseeding project, for example, they are scared to death.”

The growing outdoor recreation industry is also leaving its mark. “Now we share the land with a lot more tourists and environmentalists,” Paul explains. “There was a Forest Service guy down here from New York City who must have believed the forests are for recreation only. He actually asked his staff, ‘Why do we need cows?’”

Although Paul is a believer in multiple use of public lands, ATVs and other off-roaders present unique challenges. “We have a whole bunch of ATV trails on our allotments,” he says, “and they’re a nightmare when you’re driving cattle. You have to learn to deal with it.”

Paul is the presiding authority over Paradox Redd Ranches, but Jennifer, his petite and pretty blond-haired daughter, is the driving force. She technically owns the livestock and stays on to run the operation. Jennifer also owns all the bulls, the central players in the storied Redd Ranches Bull Sale.

Redd Ranches Bull Sale

Charlie Redd made a serious business of selling bulls almost 100 years ago. The annual auction goes back almost as far and has always attracted serious buyers from the Four Corners region and beyond. It’s a tight operation, and now employs a professional auction team to oversee the lively bidding. Four generations of Redds, relatives, neighbors and friends come together in an event that is part family barbeque, part high-dollar livestock sale, and 100 percent celebration. The annual bull sale is a demanding, joyful, all-hands-on-deck family affair.

The 2018 edition took place on April 14. Nearly 200 yearlings were on the block:



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Black and Red Angus, Hereford and composite bulls, with most bred for high-altitude vigor and fast growth rates. The auctioneers ran the bulls through at about a minute apiece, and they sold for an average of \$4,000. The other ranch operations benefit from the money the bulls bring in.

According to Paul, 2018 was a successful sale, providing Redd Ranches with a much-needed cushion where drought and fickle markets can sink the best cattlemen.

is revealed. A peculiar breed of civilization has been formed by the Redds and countless others who have farmed, ranched, and probed the region, apprehending its material mysteries and fettering its water and soil and vegetation. Where wilderness and elements are savage, in Redd country there is a quiet order evidenced by the slow succession of seasons, and transhumant cycles of birth and death, bounty and quiescence. The backbone of this peculiar civilization is a combination of faith, independence, endurance, and discipline.



Professional auctioneers make short work of the annual Redd Ranches Bull Sale. This year, nearly 200 yearlings bred for high-altitude tolerance were sold in a span of less than four hours. A money-making proposition, the Bull Sale is also a cherished celebration of family, community, and the ranching life.

A Peculiar Civilization of Endurance, Family and Faith

It’s impossible to weave the Redd family tapestry without many strong, golden threads of faith. L.H.’s obedience to his church’s call to settle San Juan County was just the beginning. Charlie Redd served a Mormon mission in the Pacific Northwest from 1911 to 1912. Hardy and Paul served missions in Uruguay and Scotland, respectively, and many in the successive generations have followed suit. At the Redds’ core is the ethos of God, family, freedom, and industriousness. A large and diverse bunch, they are guided by a sense of stewardship over their loved ones and the livestock and lands with which they have been blessed.

At first glance one could conclude that the territory comprising Redd country is a wild place, commanded by escarpments,

recondite canyons, desert plains, wind, sun and space. But upon closer scrutiny the undeniable truth

One of Hardy Redd’s favorite quotes from Edmund Burke (1791) sums it up best: “Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites...society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere, and the less of it there is within, the more there is without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their [choosing not to internally control their] passions forge[s] their fetters.” ■

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