

Sir Gilbert Chandler: an institution in the Victorian dairy industry

Many in the dairy industry are graduates of the Gilbert Chandler Institute of Dairy Technology at Werribee. On the eve of the Institute's 70th anniversary, Margaret Langdon finds out more about the man behind the name.

By all accounts, Sir Gilbert Chandler (1903-1974) was a remarkable man. He made a mark in politics, horticulture, conservation and Australian Rules football. He also spent 38 years in the Victorian Parliament, serving as the Minister for Agriculture from 1955 until his retirement in 1973.

Sir Gilbert Chandler



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Under Gilbert Chandler's leadership, the Victorian primary industry made significant advances in the fields of animal husbandry, research into animal and plant diseases, and the economic management of farms.

Family history

Gilbert Chandler was born into a hard-working, pioneering family. His grandfather, **William Chandler**, was an early settler in the Dandenong Ranges area of Victoria. William and his wife, **Kate**, purchased 16 hectares at The Basin in 1872, where they began growing vegetables, flowers and fruit. In a four-roomed hut, they began rearing eight sons and three daughters.

Gilbert's father, **Alfred Chandler**, a nurseryman, served as a councillor in the shire of Ferntree Gully between 1901 and 1935, and was elected shire president four times. He campaigned to have roads improved and the railway extended to the area he had named Boronia after one of the plants he specialised in growing at his nursery.

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The eldest child of Alfred and **Marie Intermann**, Gilbert was educated at Scotch College in Melbourne and then joined his father as a partner at Everson Nursery. 'Gib' married **Thelma Alice Coon** in 1930, and they had two sons.

Political career

Like his father, Gilbert Chandler served on the Ferntree Gully Shire Council, as well as in the Victorian Legislative Council. In 1935 he was elected to the Victorian Parliament, where he spent the next 38 years. In 1955, he became Minister for Agriculture, a position he held for many years.

Gilbert Chandler was universally respected and liked for his honesty, straight-forward manner and friendliness. Fellow politicians have describes him as "one of Victoria's greatest statesmen", "a saintly man", "one of nature's gentlemen" and "a minister who cared equally for all farmers".

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Community contribution

The list of community organisations in which Gilbert Chandler was involved is extraordinary. It included the William Angliss Hospital, the St John’s Ambulance Brigade, the Ferntree Gully National Park, the Churchill National Park, the Boronia Progress Association, the Multiple Sclerosis Society, the Red Cross and several football and sporting clubs. He was a trustee of the Melbourne Cricket Ground and a member of the organising committee for the Melbourne Olympic Games in 1956.

A keen sportsman, Gilbert played Australian Rules football for Hawthorn in the Victorian Football League in 1928-29. He also played district cricket for Richmond from 1927 to 1933. Gilbert’s love of sport lasted a lifetime. Keen to encourage the younger generation, he was patron of the Knox Little Athletics Centre from its foundation in 1968 until his death in 1974.

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The Institute’s official opening was held outdoors. Present at the opening were the Premier of Victoria, Sir **Henry Bolte**, the Australian Dairy Institute President, **Joe Ford**, and Gilbert Chandler himself, then Minister for Agriculture.

Mr Godbold wrote, “At the peak of the ceremony Sir Gilbert was half way through a lengthy speech warning of impending losses to the EEC [European Economic Community] when storm clouds bunched black and threatening. A light drizzle commenced. Sir Henry fidgeted impatiently on the dais with one eye cocked at the clouds. He beckoned to Ford, who was sitting just a few feet away. As Ford leaned solicitously toward the Premier, Bolte thundered in a ‘stage whisper’: ‘If Sir Gilbert doesn’t dry up soon, we’re all going to get a wet ass!’”

In 1958, Gilbert Chandler was appointed Companion to the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George, and in 1972 he was knighted. He died in 1974 at the William Angliss Hospital in Ferntree Gully, where he had served for 35 years as foundation president. At his State funeral, one minister described him as “a man of quiet strength who was one with the people”. ■



Gilbert Chandler at the presentations for the Knox Little Athletics’ 1968/69 season. This prize was for the Under 10 Boys 800m. The winner was his grandson, Dean Chandler.

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