



Inducted: 2004

Born in London, Ontario, Charles Saunders became a plant breeder for the Government of Canada. He developed a hard red spring wheat named “Marquis” that was distributed to farmers in Western Canada for planting in the spring of 1910. This wheat had excellent bread baking qualities, was high yielding and early maturity thus enabling it to grow well in vast areas of Canada’s western provinces. By 1920, about 90% of the wheat crops in Canada and much of the U.S.A. spring wheat crop was “Marquis”. Because of the genetics in the variety, it was used as source material in developing other varieties to meet the challenges of new cereal diseases that emerged with the passing of time. In 1934, Dr. Charles Edward Saunders was knighted by King George V for his contributions to agriculture.

**SIR CHARLES EDWARD SAUNDERS
1867-1937**

Charles E. Saunders, youngest of six children was born in London, Ontario in 1867. While attending London Central School and the Collegiate Institute, Charles was regarded as a shy quiet young man with a burning desire to be a musician. He learned horticulture as a boy from his genius father William, a druggist, who owned a farm and put his children to work cross breeding various berries and other products long before agricultural colleges had begun teaching such techniques. Londoner and federal Agricultural Minister, John Carling appointed William as the first director of the “Dominion Experimental Farms” in 1886.

By then, Charles was a student at the University of Toronto and spent his summers working with his brother Percy on one of the experimental farms. Following graduation in 1888, he attended Johns Hopkins University receiving a PhD. in Chemistry in 1891. He taught Chemistry and Geology at Central University in Kentucky before returning home in 1892 to marry Mary Blackwell, who shared his love for music.

Together, they opened a studio in Toronto from where they offered concerts and recitals and taught pupils in singing and flute playing. He also became a newspaper columnist writing about various aspects of music. Unfortunately, this passion could not provide an adequate living. He accepted a position working for the Experimental Farm Services and in 1903 was appointed “Dominion Cerealist”.

The need for earlier maturing wheat for the prairies was critical as the Canadian west was being populated with new farmers and serviced with new railroads. Dr. Saunders attacked the problem with long

hours of work and infinite patience. He started by re-examining the hybrid strains left in dozens of musty bottles made from experiments (some made by him and his brother) dating back to 1892. He grew new strains and made single head selections of the most promising plants. One strain called "Markham" was the result of a cross between Red Fife Hard and Red Fife Calcutta. It showed good yield and good chewing properties. It is noted that Saunders had hit upon the shortcut of chewing seeds to determine their gluten quality and hence the baking quality of the flour that could be made from such wheat. Further refinements and field tests led to a new strain of wheat, which matured 3 to 10 days earlier than Red Fife. Baking tests confirmed its outstanding flour qualities. This strain, named "Marquis" by Saunders, was multiplied and first released to farmers in the spring of 1910. By 1920, because of its popularity with farmers and millers, 90% of the 17 million acres of the wheat grown in the prairies was Marquis.

Dr. Charles Saunders continued his breeding work with other grains including oats, barley, peas, beans and flax. He developed a new hull-less oat variety that he named "Liberty". He wrote and presented many papers to agricultural and scientific groups in Canada, the United States, Britain and France until poor health forced him to resign in 1922. Charles and his wife Mary then moved to Paris where he studied French literature at the Sorbonne for three years before returning to Canada. He continued to lecture on Marquis Wheat and French literature but it was his Marquis Wheat achievement that remained uppermost with the public. In 1925, Canadian farmers independently raised funds to increase his annual pension from \$900 to \$5,000 a year. The combination of increased settlement of the west, rail transportation and **this** variety of wheat, led to the Canadian prairies being called "The Breadbasket of The World". His achievements led to honorary degrees from the universities of Western Ontario and Toronto, being made a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and the first recipient of The Flavelle Medal for Science. In 1934, Charles Saunders was knighted by King George V for his contributions to agriculture. Sir Charles died in Toronto in 1937. Tributes came from around the world. An excerpt from the London Daily Express read:

"He added more wealth to his country than any other man
Marconi gave power. Saunders gave abundance.
Great lives, these!"

Today, by inducting him into our Hall of Fame, we too recognize the great contributions made to Canadian agriculture by London born, Sir Charles Edward Saunders.