



In the early 1900s ostrich feathers fetched hefty sums for use in women's hats. A plume could sell for \$30, and farmers reportedly received as much as \$17 per pound during poor economic years. [Dr. Alexander J. Chandler](#) first saw the large birds around 1902 at the [Cawston Ostrich Farm](#), a short rail ride from his Los Angeles home.

Chandler soon purchased a herd of ostriches, bringing them to his ranch in Mesa. By 1906, he was buying local herds with a plan to become the valley's largest ostrich owner. Chandler sold feathers to the Cawston Ostrich Farm, and bred birds for sale to other ostrich farmers.

Chandler founded his town in 1912, and soon moved his ostrich herd to vacant land behind the [San Marcos Hotel](#). Winter visitors flocked to the pens to see the large birds.

During World War I, fashions changed and the price of ostrich feathers plummeted. Surprisingly, ostriches were susceptible to Spanish Flu, and the ensuing epidemic wiped out Chandler's ostriches. Dr. Chandler nonetheless kept a large collection of feathers in the San Marcos basement, believing that the feather industry would make a comeback. A 1931 *LA Times* article featured the annual spectacle of the feathers being aired out.

In 1986, organizers of the first Ostrich Festival decided to name the festival after the birds as a nod to Chandler's unique ostrich heritage.