

THE UPPER MUSSELSHELL VALLEY: A GRASSROOTS AND BIOREGIONAL HISTORY

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## Graduate School

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Title

THE UPPER MUSSELSHELL VALLEY: A GRASSROOTS AND BIOREGIONAL HISTORY

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The Supervisory Committee certifies that this *disquisition* complies with North Dakota State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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## ABSTRACT

*The Upper Musselshell Valley: A Grassroots and Bioregional History* chronicles the history of central Montana's Upper Musselshell Valley in an attempt to craft a viable history of region. As a corrective measure or alternate explanation that revises not only historical interpretation, but also takes into account who, or what group, is the driving force behind each distinct narrative stream (i.e. grand narrative history--histories penned by professional scholars and academics—or grassroots perspectives, the history of region as told by local dwellers), which stream is or is not authoritative, and how to modify, adjust, or meld the various interpretations in order to arrive at a more judicious, perceptive, and democratic version of history.

The New Regional History is a coalescence of the grand narrative, the grassroots perspective, bioregionalism, and memory studies that is concerned with humankind's interaction with the physical environment, and the succession of cultures within that environment. It examines the use of historical memory in the creation of regional identity in order to expose and explain regional anomalies while providing synthesis and maintaining a stance of critical scholarship. This is much more than a localized case study; it is a novel approach to the history of region that incorporates local and professional scholarship in order craft a much more viable and judicious history of place.

The Upper Musselshell Valley of central Montana provides a strong proving ground for a New Regional History. It is a place rich in regional history and lore, provided by a long tradition of local narrators, while fitting within most of the grand narrative paradigms of Montana and the Great Plains in general. As with most comparable regions within the Great Plains, the Upper Musselshell Valley has never been held up to such a standard.

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First, and foremost, I would like to acknowledge and thank Tom Isern for having me as a graduate student, being a splendid mentor who provided everything he ever promised and much more, and friend. Without his guidance and acceptance, this work never would have come to fruition. Second to Isern, I would like to thank the members of my doctoral committee—Drs. John Helgeland, Mark Harvey, Kim Porter, John Cox, and Kevin Sedivec—for taking the time to read such a large body of text, in such short order, and provide wonderful feedback and suggestions to make it a more scholarly work. Next, and perhaps most importantly, the people of the Upper Musselshell Valley, past and present, but especially those who took time out of their day to set down an oral history with me. Their insights and recollections are invaluable, not only to this endeavor, but also for the identity and memory of future generations of Upper Musselshell Valley dwellers. I would also like to thank my wife, Melissa Lewis, for her support over the course of this work, and my toddler son Jackson, for finally going to sleep and letting me write this.

## PREFACE

The academic history of the Great Plains and of the American West in general tends to be written from a top-down perspective. Historians have primarily focused on large-scale, generalizable interactions that affect the whole of their geographical, environmental, political, economic, or social scope. They deal with locales solely within the framework of case studies; ones that are generalizable to the broader whole and reflect the universality of specific themes. Frederick Jackson Turner gave birth to the study of the American West, as a field of study, and it is a large enough an area for overarching generalizations and academic respectability. However, much as Turner was imprecise in some of his suppositions, so, too, is the field of study which he spawned. The Great Plains as a region of study, with its scholarly beginnings traced to Walter Webb, mimics the American West: it is large enough for generalization, has multiple academic centers devoted to its study, and is worthy of academic note. State histories (in this case harkening back to Montana scholars like K. Ross Toole, Joseph Kinsey Howard, and Michael Malone) also offer broad generality with their own discrete identities and narratives that are often grounded in civic institutions and educational curriculum.

All these styles of history, with broad strokes of inquiry, constitute an overtly wide-ranging form of the discipline, herein referred to as the grand narrative. The general interpretation, written by professional historians and others of the scholarly and literary elite, serves its purpose, that of general interpretation, well but it has flaws: it largely speaks to its own brotherhood, and it lacks specificity, thus omitting important historical developments at the regional level. Its hypotheses certainly may apply to the regional level, but they need to be judged against specific evidence. The grand narrative is neither a monolithic nor a concerted entity. However, it is a cumulative body of historical interpretations, assumptions, and theories

that has accumulated over decades of historiography. The first chapter of *The Upper Musselshell Valley* is devoted to exploring works by Great Plains scholars like Walter Webb, Carl Kraenzel, Paula Nelson or Craig Miner (and many, many others) as not only individual contributors to regional history, but also their extended dialogue under the patronage of academia that creates the grand narrative.

On the other hand regional history, telling how a regional populace views itself, also serves an important purpose: specificity and place. Herein called the grassroots perspective, it is extraordinary in its specificity, perspective, and detail. However, it has its own weaknesses. First and foremost is that it often does not situate itself in relation to the grand narrative; it is almost too specific in its scale. Second, local authors tend to be more concerned with constructing and preserving identity; therefore their accounts tend to rationalize things as they are within their specific region. Expressions of local history are manifest and ubiquitous, especially within the region to which they devote themselves: community and county histories abound, as do local museums, personal memoirs, and localized preservation efforts.

Although the grand narrative and grassroots perspective are crafted by vastly different authors, and for dissimilar reasons, they are not independent entities. They influence each other a great deal, mutually contributing to the collective memory of the region. Both, too, tend to tidy up the past into orderly concepts and materially progressive constructs. Their logic for this is separate, and different; however, academics do so in the interest of general truth while local authors do so in the name of identity (at least to the currently dominant group or culture). Academics seek general truths that gain them academic standing in the quest to study the human experience, while local practitioners search for specific truths that in order to give, and maintain, distinctive identities. Such a concept certainly calls forth Peter Burke and his definition of

schema, which he considered as the tendency to remember a person, or event, in terms of another. Both the grassroots perspective and grand narrative create, recreate, represent, and interpret the past in a vastly different schema. The two approaches certainly interact, and often agree with each other. Such is the case with viewing the hard winters of 1886 and 1893, often referred to as the Great Die Up. Both the grassroots and traditional history of the era claim that the mass death of cattle during those winters was caused by overgrazing.

The two narratives cross paths in the work of such historians as David Glassberg, who clearly shows the link between how people create a collective sense of the past, thus allowing them to better understand their place amongst a specific society and its various successions. In his work *Sense of History*, he argues that people erect monuments in order to create a sense of history. At its most basic, such a drive allows people to understand their past, gives them a sense of belonging to a specific culture, community, region, and nation. In order to do so, memorials are linked to specific places and environments through historical events. A good regional example comes in the form of the small town Harlowton's E57B Electric Train Park (discussed in chapter 10), which harkens to a railroad culture that many town dwellers of the region take as their historical identity while recollections of professional historians broadly sweep the region into the grand narrative while neglecting regional anomalies. In any case, this creates collective memory, a focus of Durkheimian philosopher Maurice Halbwachs.

According to Halbwachs, collective memory is centered within the ways in which people classify themselves, which is a socially constructed perception. According to Halbwachs, collective memory is created by social groups (who determine what is memorable and how it will be remembered), but it is the individual who commit the physical act of remembering. In order for this to happen, the past has to be well grounded and shaped by the concerns of the

present. For example, a large portion of people within the Upper Musselshell identify themselves as a railroad culture and this is evident within their historical memory and identity through the stories that they recall about themselves and the monuments they erect.

Both academic and grassroots histories have their pros and cons, but to make each more coherent and inclusive there needs to be an intermediary of sorts. This is a role that professional historians, possessing a vested interest or connection to a specific region can claim. I attempt to fill such a role in this work. Having grown up both on a large cattle ranch near Two Dot and in the railroad community of Harlowton certainly gives me a vested interest and connection to the Upper Musselshell. From my personal experience I remember trains passing through the small towns of Lennep and Lavina and, much later, the fallout caused by the Milwaukee Roads bankruptcy. I also remember horse-born people moving cattle (which, even then, was becoming anachronistic), an event that often took eight or ten men, and women, two or three days to trail cattle to holding pens where they awaited shipment to market by semi trucks. Like most rural children of the Great Plains, with the realization that the Upper Musselshell held little promise for me aside from familial ties, I left the region when I graduated high school. I joined the military, and then went to college to study History.

While in graduate school, studying the American West, two things made me start to question both the schema of the Upper Musselshell I had grown up with and what I had been taught by traditional scholarship concerning rural places on the Great Plains. The first was a line from Walter Nugent's book *Into the West*, where the author alludes to the fact that after 1919 railroads slowly lost their importance, and ceased being an economic or communal factor in the West. It seemed to me, from my own life experiences, that Nugent was both right and wrong. Broadly, after that time railroads, as he wrote, "did not pave the way West or anywhere else," but



neither did they lose their economic might, community making (or breaking) power, or cultural ties in places like Harlowton, Miles City, or Three Forks, Montana. The second instance occurred in a class where I questioned a professor about this situation. He also declared that railroads in the modern era virtually lost all import within the Great Plains region. His reasoning was that, after the groundbreaking role they played in settling the Great Plains, agriculture became the single most important factor in places like Montana, alongside other extractive pursuits like mining or logging. My past made me doubt his claims as well, the thought in my mind being, “Tell that to thousands of people across central Montana who keenly felt the loss of the Milwaukee Road.”

As it turns out, like Nugent, he was both right and wrong. The discrepancies led me to this work, which I hope exposes anomalies and similarities in both the grand narrative and grassroots account, thus crafting a more inclusive, thoughtful, and useful representation of a specific region’s past, its historical identity and memories, while acting as mediator between the two perceptions. Examining each method, such an intermediary’s goal is to deliver a more constructive history that is grounded and much more inclusive. It must be critical, yet respectful, of both narratives while being captured by neither. The main aim is to critique both narratives, explain why either (or both) are deficient, or correct, in explaining regional constructs and development, and bring new evidence to light for further interpretation. The end product is a New Regional History that substantially improves upon both the regional perspective and grand narrative of Great Plains history.

The Upper Musselshell Valley of central Montana provides a strong proving ground for a New Regional History. It is a place rich in regional history and lore, provided by a long tradition of local narrators, while fitting within most of the grand narrative paradigms of Montana and the

Great Plains in general. As the basis of judgment and identity, places require a grounded, constructive, and inclusive history. As with most comparable regions within the Great Plains, the Upper Musselshell Valley has never been held up to such a standard. Regions, whether the Upper Musselshell Valley of Montana or the Red River Valley of North Dakota are distinctive unto themselves, thus deserving such examinations. Moreover, this specific work is intended to be much more than a history of a small and fractured cluster of central Montana counties; it also serves as a research paradigm for conducting regional history.

Certain terms key to my narrative and analysis require explanation at the outset, as do some methodological constructs and arguments. First, and perhaps most importantly, concerns the term “culture.” Generally, culture is primarily associated with ethnic or racial groups, and is used to convey a sort of political power dynamic. Its use here is in a more regional or occupational context (i.e. ranch or cattle culture, railroad culture, etc.) that encompasses ethnicities, the sociological definition of community (a group with common views, goals, or beliefs), and in an anthropological sense: groups that adapt to various surroundings. The grand narrative, for the purpose of this work, means traditional and professional scholarship from various academic disciplines that present overarching, generalizable, and universal themes dealing with the American West, the Great Plains, or Montana history. The grassroots perspective refers to the views and perceptions of the local dweller (in this case those who live, or once lived, within the Upper Musselshell). It is presented in the form of regional writings, both professional (like newspapers and locally penned historical compendiums) and personal (such as diaries or oral histories). The grassroots perspective frequently reflects the broader ideas of the grand narrative, but often includes key differences and interpretations of historical events. They are, in a sense, the stories region specific people tell about themselves. Collective memory

is the ability of a community, or region, to remember events from a shared and common culture in order to create a historical identity.

Argumentatively, it is important to understand (both within the grand narrative and grassroots perspective) what entities are controlling each narrative, and how this works within the New Regional History. The local narrative, largely culled from collecting oral histories from regional residents, is intended to be a broad demographic sweep that includes both large and small scale ranchers and farmers, both male and female genders, varying age groups (with participant being born anywhere between the late 1910s to the early 1960s), and with varying professions ranging from railroad labor to school teachers. The participants were selected through what is known as a “snowball process.” The interviewer selected a well-known, long-time county resident for the first interview. At the end of the session, the interviewer asked the participant if they knew people who would make a solid contribution and if they met specific criteria (i.e., age, personal experiences, and county residency). Upon completion of the session, the interviewer had a list of ten to twenty new, viable possible participants. This process was completed at each interview to add to a pool of possible participants. There was a concentrated effort to get varying interpretations, whether in the form of oral history or written documents, so as to not be captured by a single demographic, profession, or socioeconomic background, and its specific account. This was done expressly to make the New Regional History as representative of the local populace as possible while avoiding an “elite” or one-sided perspective to dominate the story.

It is important to note that the New Regional History is intended to be a corrective measure or alternate explanation that revises not only historical interpretation, but also takes into account who, or what group, is the driving force behind each narrative, which stream is or is not

authoritative, and how to modify, adjust, or meld the various interpretations in order to arrive at a more judicious, perceptive, and democratic version of history. Additionally, there is a specific research paradigm to be followed for such a task. Structurally, *The Upper Musselshell Valley* follows a distinct framework. Early chapters (Chapters 1 through 3) set the stage, so to speak, and familiarize readers with the grand narrative, the region's ecology, early inhabitants, land use, and provide the basis for a regional identity and history. As it is written, later chapters (Chapters 4-10) gain more structure beginning with a discussion of the general views of history; that is, a breakdown of the grand narrative's suppositions and interpretations of history specific to each chapter's particular topic. Introduced next is the grassroots perspective of the matter at hand, and how it supports, rejects, or intertwines with the grand narrative. The remainder of each chapter is a critical analysis that places both the grand narrative and grassroots perspective under scrutiny. This amalgamation takes culture, physical environment and regional identity into account in order to create synthesis between the two approaches, thus crafting a New Regional History.

The New Regional History is a coalescence of the grand narrative, the grassroots perspective, bioregionalism, and memory studies that is concerned with humankind's interaction with the physical environment, and the succession of cultures within that environment. It examines the use of historical memory in the creation of regional identity in order to expose and explain regional anomalies while providing synthesis and maintaining a stance of critical scholarship. This is much more than a localized case study; it is a novel approach to the history of region that incorporates local and professional scholarship in order craft a much more viable and judicious history of place from a bottom-up perspective.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....iv

PREFACE.....v

LIST OF TABLES.....xiv

LIST OF FIGURES.....xv

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....xvi

CHAPTER 1. TOWARDS A NEW REGIONAL HISTORY.....1

CHAPTER 2. NATIVE AMERICANS AND FUR TRAPPERS.....21

CHAPTER 3. SETTLEMENT FROM THE WEST: EARLY POLITICS  
AND THE MINERS.....43

CHAPTER 4. SETTLEMENT FROM THE WEST: THE STOCKMEN.....63

CHAPTER 5. SETTLEMENT FROM THE WEST: THE TOWN BUILDERS.....86

CHAPTER 6. THE “GOLDEN AGE” OF AGRICULTURE: THE HOMESTEAD  
BOOM AND ITS RAMIFATIONS, 1900-1920.....103

CHAPTER 7. THE NOT SO “GOLDEN AGE” OF AGRICULTURE: THE  
HOMESTEAD BUST IN THE UPPER MUSSELSHELL  
VALLEY, 1917-1940.....135

CHAPTER 8. WORLD WAR II AND THE RETURN TO PROSPERITY .....160

CHAPTER 9. ECONOMIC DOWNTURNS: THE FATE OF THE  
MILWAUKEE ROAD AND THE UPPER MUSSELSHELL  
VALLEY.....186

CHAPTER 10. TOWARD A HISTORICAL IDENTITY: THE UPPER  
MUSSELSHELL VALLEY AND THE PRESENT .....210

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....233

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Palmer Drought Severity Index.....	143
2. Upper Musselshell Valley Cattle and Wheat Production, 1940-1960.....	172
3. Golden Valley, Meagher, and Wheatland County Population 1950 to 2000.....	196
4. Golden Valley, Meagher, and Wheatland County Median Household Income in 2003 Dollars.....	197
5. Harlowton High School Enrollments 1965-1995.....	198
6. Number of Farm/Ranch Operations Reported in the Upper Musselshell, 1959-1987.....	205
7. Upper Musselshell Valley Cultures in Order of Succession.....	230

## LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Cut-away map of the Upper Musselshell Valley.....	3
2. Buffalo Wallow.....	27
3. Large Buffalo Wallows.....	28
4. Tepee Rings North of Two Dot.....	29
5. Tepee Rings North of Two Dot II.....	30
6. <i>It Happened in Montana</i> Cartoon.....	38
7. Castle, ca 1890.....	53
8. The Carroll Trail Today-North of Two Dot.....	57
9. The Carroll Trail Today-North East of Two Dot.....	58
10. Castle, ca 1910.....	60
11. Towns and Ranches within the Upper Musselshell Valley Prior to 1900.....	61
12. Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Rail Line Map.....	95
13. Rail Lines and Town Development in the Early Twentieth Century.....	97
14. Town Evolution in the Upper Musselshell Valley.....	98
15. Wheat Crop on the Haymaker Cap circa 1915.....	120
16. Farming in the Upper Musselshell Valley, ca. 1916.....	141
17. Modern Land Use in the Upper Musselshell Valley.....	217
18. Honey Bee Swarm.....	221
19. The E57B Electric Train Park.....	225
20. <i>And They Called the Land Montana</i> .....	225

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NP.....	Northern Pacific Railroad
C,M,St.P&P.....	Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad or Milwaukee Road
GN.....	Great Northern
MLC.....	Milwaukee Land Company
CCC.....	Civilian Conservation Corps
WPA.....	Works Progress Administration
USSE.....	United States Soil Erosion Service
MIT.....	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
DDT.....	Dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane
WRC.....	Winnecook Ranch Corporation
REA.....	Rural Electrification Administration
BN.....	Burlington Northern
SORE.....	Save Our Railroad Employment
FRA.....	Federal Railroad Administration
ICC.....	Interstate Commerce Commission
ARC.....	Alliance for Rail Competition
CRP.....	Conservation Reserve Program
BLM.....	Bureau of Land Management
AAA.....	Agricultural Adjustment Administration



## CHAPTER 1. TOWARDS A NEW REGIONAL HISTORY

No one could argue that the Upper Musselshell Valley of central Montana lacks a sense of history. The Corps of Discovery passed through the valley's peripheries, and Lewis and Clark named some of its geographic features, such as the Judith River. Hunkpapa Sioux leader Sitting Bull earned the right to wear his first red feather--signifying he was honorably wounded in battle--in the eastern half of the valley during an 1846 skirmish against the Flathead. Crow chieftain Plenty Coups reportedly traveled through the region in the mid-1800s on his way to the Crazy Mountains during a vision quest. The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 ceded the Musselshell to the Assiniboine, Blackfoot, and Crow Indian tribes, a promise broken merely fifteen years later when mineral discoveries brought Anglo-American migration to the valley. The year 1873 saw Brevet Major General George A. Custer's Yellowstone Expedition pass through the western portions of the valley, while ranchers like the Moore brothers wintered cattle in the eastern regions. By the close of the century the Montana Railroad connected the valley to the rest of the state and the nation. A decade later the valley contained a segment of one of the only electrified rail lines, the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul, and Pacific (i.e. the Milwaukee Road), in the country. Although in some respects the Upper Musselshell Valley is the history of Montana in microcosm, meaning that it contains all the aspects of the grand narrative, the region contains numerous facets which distinguish it from the rest of the Treasure State and the grand narrative, and history, as commonly told, of the American West.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert M. Utley, *The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 15-16; quotation from One Bull, "Why Sitting Bull Wears a Red Feather as a Head Ornament," MS, box 104, folder 20, Campbell Collection; Harold Joseph Stearns, "A History of the Upper Musselshell Valley to 1920," M.A. Thesis (University of Montana, 1966), 6, 15, 102; Robert M. Utley, *Cavalier in Buckskin: George Armstrong Custer and the Western Military Frontier* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 123; P.J. Moore, Jr., "Perry J. Moore" in Harlowton Woman's Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers* (Harlowton: Western Printing and Lithography, 1972), 184-85.

Although the Upper Musselshell, as a distinctive locality of the Great Plains, clearly has a story to tell, there is a considerable difference of opinion about how to go about telling the story of such a place. Four factors--the environment, economics, society, and culture--make the Upper Musselshell Valley different from other parts of Montana. *The Upper Musselshell Valley: A Grassroots and Bioregional History* examines the relations between the environment (both natural and manmade) and the various people inhabiting the Upper Musselshell Valley. From an economic standpoint the counties within the valley specialized in two contrasting endeavors: railroading and agriculture. These specialties had long-range impact upon each sub-region's success or decline. From 1900 to 1980 the Montana Railroad and the Milwaukee Road were the primary catalysts of change within a significant part of the Upper Musselshell Valley. Wheatland County relied upon the line culturally, economically, and socially until the Milwaukee Road's final bankruptcy in 1979, while the other sub-regions (Meagher and Golden Valley) did not. On the social, cultural, and environmental level, the inhabitants of the valley have a history which is distinctive and differs from prior interpretations put forth by formal scholarship. In his 1959 work *Montana: An Uncommon Land*, Montana historian K. Ross Toole called for future accounts of Montana history to "deal selectively and interpretively" as too much "ponderous and unselective compilation" has already occurred.<sup>2</sup> This is intended to be the sort of work Toole called for. Overall, the Upper Musselshell Valley (comprising primarily modern-day Meagher, Wheatland, and Golden Valley counties) is a distinctive place within a state well known for its diversity (Figure 1).

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<sup>2</sup> K. Ross Toole, *Montana: An Uncommon Land* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), 4.

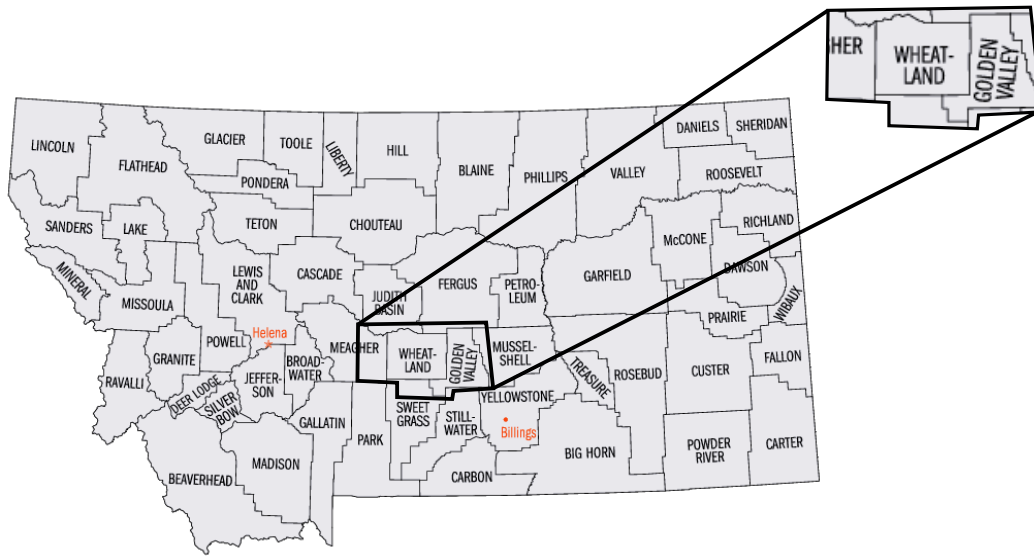


Figure 1. Cut-away map of the Upper Musselshell Valley.

Broad, traditional interpretations of the Great Plains and the American West (referred to herein as the grand narrative) are inadequate when applied to regional locales. A variety of historical perspectives--old and new--provide the basis for this examination. However, the historiography of the Great Plains and the West does provide important keystones of interpretation for practicing such a regional history.

Beginning in 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner’s “The Significance of the American Frontier” laid a foundation for generations of western histories to come. Turner espoused three basic themes. First, he believed the western frontier, with its free land, explains the development of America. The Frontier Thesis, as this statement is called, as a theory designed to refute Herbert Baxter Adams’ germ theory of democracy, claims American character traits, particularly democratic idealism, were derived from the frontier experience. Second, Turner wrote, “So long

as free land exists, the opportunity for competency exists, and economic power secures political power.” Such a safety valve assuaged social discontent by providing a place of opportunity and escape. Last, Turner believed in the aspect of successive frontiers: economic and social developments followed each other in specific stages within overlapping frontier regions. According to Turner and his analysis of the 1890 census, America no longer had a discernable frontier as the West contained more than two people per square mile.<sup>3</sup>

Many scholars have criticized Turner. Economic historian Charles Beard, for instance, complains that Turner neglects slave labor systems, industrialization, and the transportation revolution. Benjamin Wright argues that pioneers were not innovators, but imitators who copied what other settlers before them had done. New Western historians, such as Patty Limerick and Richard White, allege Turner completely misses any discussion of women, Native Americans, or other minorities. Additionally, gold rushes caused western populations to reach more than two people per square mile well ahead of the 1890 census. Despite these biases and problems, Turner does supply the modern scholar with some valuable concepts. In successive frontiers, he provides a usable plot or story line of a people’s history that poses a broad social and economic history of the West. His assumption, as a pre-cursor to Walter Prescott Webb’s theories, that frontier resources and environment shaped the American West is still valid, if incomplete.

Webb, author of the 1931 classic *The Great Plains*, argued a theory grounded in environmental determinism.<sup>4</sup> People migrating to the Great Plains were compelled to adapt eastern institutions and technologies to the level, treeless, and semiarid Great Plains. For example, wooden rail fences were transformed into barbed wire, conventional tillage became dry farming, and the famed Kentucky long rifle became the Colt revolver or the Henry repeating

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<sup>3</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1935), passim.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1931).

rifle. *The Great Plains* has never been out of print, and remains one of the single most influential histories penned about the plains. Webb's work, much like Turner's, has also been greatly criticized. Webb, certainly a product of his time, is selective in his use of evidence, stereotypes Plains Indians, and is racially biased against those of non-Anglo descent. Despite such rancorous problems, his thesis of environmental determinism continues to influence other scholarly writings. Certainly no reputable regional historian in the Great Plains since Webb has failed to credit environment as an important influence.

Rural sociologist Carl Kraenzel, in his 1955 work *The Great Plains in Transition*, differs from Webb as he examines adaptation through the lenses of society and culture. He claims "the nature of the fundamental harmony between climate and civilization" is the basic problem of the plains dweller.<sup>5</sup> Humid area eastern cultural types attempted to perpetuate their economic, political, and social lives within the semiarid plains and failed because they were not flexible enough in their attempt. Kraenzel asserts that American Indians, cattlemen, and regional fauna (like jackrabbits or bison) were well adapted to the region because of their mobility and flexibility and, consequently, flourished on the plains. As the title of his work implies, transition (because of the environment and the nature of rural society) towards consolidation on all levels is a necessity on the Plains. Kraenzel argues that for humid cultures to adapt to the region there has to be a form of dynamic regionalism distinct to the plains that includes government, cooperative movements, improved dry land farming techniques, extensive irrigation and significant modification of all social institutions. So, while Webb extolled the triumph of adaptation, Kraenzel called for a new and continuing wave of it. Regions such as the Musselshell wrestled with all the continuing problems of regional life that Kraenzel observed.

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<sup>5</sup> Carl Kraenzel, *The Great Plains in Transition* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1955), 72.

Turner, Webb, and Kraenzel's works provide *The Upper Musselshell Valley* with the beginning of a viable, coherent people's history. Their themes resonate with the personal experiences of regional residents and their social, cultural, technological, and economic interaction with the environment. Other foundational scholars, Canadian and American, also provide layers of interpretation that are potentially applicable to the history of the Upper Musselshell Valley.

Harold Innis, in *The Fur Trade of Canada*, developed the Staples Theory, asserting that the exploitation of resources affects not only economics, but society and culture as well.<sup>6</sup> The Staples Theory parallels some concepts set forth by economic historian N.S.B. Gras in his Metropolitan-Hinterland Thesis. Gras argues large urban centers (the metropolis) dominate rural areas (the hinterland) through economics. Though the metropolis economically overpowers the hinterland, the arrangement is reciprocal: both rely upon one another in a social and economic sense.<sup>7</sup> In such titles as *Manitoba: A History*, William Lewis Morton examines regional distinctiveness and identity particularly as it was shaped and structured by imperial links with Britain, the ultimate metropolis. He concludes, "Manitobans lived either flatly provincial lives, or insubstantial exotic ones. Only the development of a provincial culture [the region], a regional variant of a larger whole [the metropolis], from the foundations of an established material society could bring the two extremes into balance."<sup>8</sup> In terms of these Canadian historians, then, the Musselshell must have been shaped largely by the needs and desires of some distant metropolis. Other Canadian scholars, such as Jean Burnett and Paul Voisey, study regional economics, society, and culture at a much smaller scale and arrive at some surprising conclusions especially useful to an assessment of the Upper Musselshell Valley.

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<sup>6</sup> Harold Innis, *The Fur Trade of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1927).

<sup>7</sup> N.S.B. Gras, *An Introduction to Economic History* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1922).

<sup>8</sup> Kraenzel, 471.

Jean Burnet interprets the railroad community of Hanna, in Alberta, by stressing themes like class and environment as significant factors in community formation while emphasizing economic concerns. As part of a multi-volume study examining the origin of the Social Credit movement, Burnet wrote *Next Year Country: A Study of Rural Social Organization in Alberta*, examining the Hanna area located along the western reaches of Palliser's Triangle in southeastern Alberta.<sup>9</sup> Deemed the Dry Belt, the Hanna region attracted settlement after 1912 because of an uncharacteristic increase in rainfall and significant promotion by the Canadian Pacific Railroad. After initial success at forming communities, the area was struck by profound depopulation due to a lack of cultural and economic leadership. Although production demands of the Second World War alleviated some socioeconomic problems, the only people to create a successful social organization were German-Russian immigrants, who proved particularly resilient to social and economic hardship. Burnet, contrary to American scholars, shows that "class and clique" were extremely important in community formation.<sup>10</sup> Farmers, railroaders, and upper-class merchants and bankers did not freely interact because of their stations in life. Because they did not associate or communicate openly, the upper echelon failed to provide any form of leadership that would have created a strong, stable, and harmonious society in the face of the economic and environmental devastation of the 1920s and 1930s. The work of Burnett suggests attention be paid to the dynamics of socioeconomic class in the history of the Musselshell.

Voisey, in *Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community*, examines the formation of communities in southern Alberta and includes cultural, metropolitan, frontier, and environmental hypotheses. His history, both synthetic and revisionist, does an excellent job of proving the

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<sup>9</sup> Jean Burnet, *Next Year Country: A Study of Rural Social Organization in Alberta* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 96.

exception to common myths about community formation, contending that homesteaders were not victims of failed settlement policies; rather the real victims were farmers who stayed in the Vulcan area after property values fell. Rural communities were certainly not bucolic, sleepy, stable places concerned with permanent settlement. Small communities were highly mobile and commercial hubs aimed at amassing wealth primarily through land speculation. Furthermore, Voisey found that the greatest depopulation occurred not during the Great Depression, but when property values were still rising significantly enough for homesteaders to prove up and sell at a much higher price. The size of regional farms initially increased not because the system was adverse to smaller operations, but because large farmers coveted more land in order to cultivate more wheat. Voisey also argues that large farms did not fail because of drought, poor prices, or over-extension, but rather because labor requirements made smaller holdings more efficient and profitable in the long run and eliminated the need for large acreage. Voisey includes an illuminating discussion of social entities such as churches and schools, arguing that they offered poor religious and educational benefits, but provided significant, productive social interaction through business contacts, marriage proposals, and recreational pastimes.<sup>11</sup> Overall, the example of Voisey challenges regional scholars to confront received wisdom and look at the local evidence on its own terms. Thus, Canadian scholars bring several valuable interpretations of Great Plains history to this study, as do American authors of exemplary regional studies, such as Paula Nelson.

In two separate works, *After the West Was Won: Homesteaders and Town-Builders in Western South Dakota, 1900-1917* and *The Prairie Wins Out its Own: The West River Country of South Dakota in the Years of Depression and Dust*, Paula Nelson examines the formation of communities in the West River segment of South Dakota after the homestead rush

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Voisey, *Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).



of the late 1800s.<sup>12</sup> In *After the West Was Won* Nelson contends that prior conceptions of homesteading were ruined by drought in 1911. The decline in the belief in opportunity through free land was heavily influenced by three environmental factors: topography, soil composition, and climate. These factors contributed to regional failure and caused surviving homesteaders of the West River country to adjust physically, socially, and psychologically. Because these communities were so isolated and stressed, or as Nelson believes, on the “psychological margins” of broader society, they had to emphasize societal constructs, like civic organizations and events, to create a sense of community and belonging.<sup>13</sup> This led West River folk to redefine success as something other than monetary. *After the West Was Won* is a classic example of the symbiotic nature of the agricultural and urban frontiers and regional attempts to form a social organization that would support individual homesteaders. The drought caused poverty and depopulation (reaching about fifty percent), which, according to Nelson, are the two greatest threats to social organization. In the wake of the drought, economic and cultural success or failure often hinged on a town being a commercial and economic link located along a railway.<sup>14</sup> By the end of 1911 the inhabitants of the West River country re-emerged as an ambitious, hardworking culture not inclined to admit failure or a shortcoming, which is the topic of Nelson’s continuation study entitled *The Prairie Winnows Out its Own*.

In her second book about the West River country, Nelson examines how the region went from “Promised Land to Hinterland” during the Great Depression. The collapse of the agricultural economy after the First World War yielded regional decline amidst national prosperity while increasing a sense of remoteness and isolation in the West River country. The

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<sup>12</sup> Paula M. Nelson, *After the West Was Won: Homesteaders and Town-Builders in Western South Dakota, 1900-1917* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1986); Paula M. Nelson, *The Prairie Winnows Out its Own: The West River Country of South Dakota in the Years of Depression and Dust* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Nelson, *After the West Was Won*, xv.

<sup>14</sup> Nelson, *The Prairie Winnows Out its Own*, 98.

Dirty Thirties surpassed the drought of 1911, and governmental solutions drastically challenged what little remained of pioneer ideals. Even though the federal government informed West River people that dry land farming was untenable for the area, inhabitants continued their attempt to tame the land and create a successful society. The Depression eroded the pioneer ideals of risk-taking, independence, self-reliance, and hard work even though people resisted the thought of government aid as being subversive. It was insulting, and threatening, to the people of the West River country to rely on anybody besides themselves. Nelson's detailed recounting of regional development, leading to a reasoned assessment of the regional character, is exemplary for the practice of regional history.

Historian Craig Miner examines the social and cultural effect that boosting had in late nineteenth century Kansas. In 1986 Miner published *West of Wichita: Settling the High Plains of Kansas*. Through personal accounts he traces the impressions Kansas pioneers recorded as they faced the traditional booms and busts which plague the whole of Great Plains history. His introduction, "On Regional History," gives a strong account of how historians have ventured into regional topics and why such writing is not a "quaint retreat" into the "local color of antiquarianism."<sup>15</sup> His line of thinking parallels that of other historians, like Carol Kamman and Mike Kamman, who emphasize regions and sub-regions, even within a limited amount of time and place, are more historically complex and varied than originally believed.<sup>16</sup> Connecting local history to the grand narrative sometimes leads to distortion (on both regional and national levels) as it "glosses over individual peculiarities" that are of historical import.<sup>17</sup> Throughout *West of*

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<sup>15</sup> Craig C. Miner, *West of Wichita: Settling the High Plains of Kansas* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1986), 1.

<sup>16</sup> Carol Kammen, "Local History--In Search of Common Threads," in *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings on Theory and Practice*, ed. Carol Kammen (London: Altamira Press, 1996), 14; Michael Kammen, "Challenges and Opportunities in Writing State and Local History," in *The Pursuit of Local History*, 130-32, 135-37.

<sup>17</sup> Miner, *West of Wichita*, 4.

*Wichita Miner* focuses on the common person's relationship with extreme climatic conditions and how railroad boosters rearranged migration and economic development so wheat became a regional specialty crop. Boostering had the power to recast rural culture and life, but pioneer ideals and cultural beliefs remained a risky venture in western Kansas—as they would also become in the Musselshell.

So, too, was settling the West River country of South Dakota, according to historian Dorothy Hubbard Schwieder. Schwieder, in *Growing Up with the Town: Family and Community on the Great Plains*, examines her girlhood hometown of Presho, South Dakota.<sup>18</sup> Presho, a classic Milwaukee Road T-town (a settlement where the town's main street runs perpendicular to a rail link or railroad track, thus giving the town a distinctive T like appearance in its platting), was a booming location that perhaps typifies the rural railroad town experience in the early twentieth century from a personal perspective. Schwieder uses familial reminiscences and diaries, oral interviews of long-time residents, and local newspapers to reconstruct what early Preshoite life was like. As did Nelson and Miner, she employs the themes of pioneer ideals, the harsh environment, and commercialism. *Growing Up with the Town*, an admitted self-indulgence of Schwieder's retirement, intertwines the grand narrative with the grassroots perspective to form a masterful recreation of Presho's social, economic, and technological lifestyles and of the rural community in general. Unlike Nelson and Miner, but like Burnet and Voisey, Schwieder concentrates her work within one district, not a collection of communities or half of a state. Her community, Presho, was a Milwaukee creation, as were communities in the Musselshell.

The collected works of Nelson, Miner, and Schwieder provide *The Upper Musselshell Valley: A Grassroots and Bioregional History* with a regional framework focusing on the

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<sup>18</sup> Dorothy Hubbard Schwieder, *Growing Up with the Town: Family and Community on the Great Plains* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002).

anomalies of specific locales glossed over by the grand narrative. Such authors provide a research framework illustrating how historians can craft viable, exciting, and important renditions of the Great Plains experience from oral interviews, local newspapers, and other grassroots sources. They stress that regional residents know the history of their particular region much better than academics relying solely upon traditional forms of interpretation. Scholars working within the confines of Montana history have traditionally neglected this perspective; they generally remain within the broad framework of an all-encompassing, generalized narrative. In doing so they are, as Miner states, creating “not entirely appropriate” images when applied to small geographic regions.<sup>19</sup> Their broad themes, however, merit consideration as to applicability in any particular region.

Montana historians such as K. Ross Toole, Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Lang customarily focus on the extractive industries that plague the state’s past. Toole, in *Twentieth-Century Montana: A State of Extremes*, postulates economic and social decline stems solely from the state’s “few major export industries—all of which depend for stability on national or international markets: forest products, agriculture, mining, and railroading.”<sup>20</sup> Although he includes the transportation and freighting industry, the railroad ranks last and is included as part of the extractive economy of the West. In Toole’s line of thinking, localized rail-based economies are not nearly as important as mining and agriculture.

Malone, Roeder, and Lang, authors of *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, continue where Toole ends his examination.<sup>21</sup> They attribute too much general importance to agriculture and mining, and delve little into the local level. For example, they devote an entire chapter to the

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<sup>19</sup> Miner, *West of Wichita*, 10.

<sup>20</sup> K. Ross Toole, *Twentieth-Century Montana: A State of Extremes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 284.

<sup>21</sup> Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976).

modern Montana economy, in which the authors discuss agriculture, mining, and labor movements, but mention railroads primarily in conjunction with the tourist industry. Malone, in *Montana: A Contemporary Profile*, examines modern Montana closer to the county and regional level, but continues to neglect anomalies occurring at that level.<sup>22</sup>

The grand narrative is useful, but inadequate when applied to some regions. For the most part Montana grew out of extractive industries such as mining, cattle, and forest products. However, in locations like the Upper Musselshell Valley industries like mining and logging had only temporary effect. Agriculture certainly had lasting importance, but not to the exclusive extent that traditional Montana scholars believe. As a tool for comprehending particular circumstances, bioregional history provides a promising approach to understanding the region.

One historian's work in particular, that of the University of Montana's Dan Flores, sketches how and why a form of bioregionalism is important to regional studies. To many historians, Flores admits, this approach (because it applies to a singular localized place) is "limiting, provincial . . . and antiquarian," practiced largely by "untrained, localized authors (cow-chip historians)."<sup>23</sup> Bioregional history, is however, according Flores, the examination of regional history from an environmental, social, and ecological perspective at the microlevel.<sup>24</sup> As such, it relies upon a grassroots style. In the 1994 article, "Place: An Argument for Bioregional History," Flores lays out a paradigm for scholars writing from this approach, asking three fundamental questions: What constitutes the rationale for writing bioregional history, what type of approaches should historians use when writing about place, and what existing works (in history and other disciplines) are valuable to writing histories of place?

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<sup>22</sup> Michael P. Malone, *Montana: A Contemporary Profile* (Helena: American and World Geographic Publishing, 1996).

<sup>23</sup> Dan Flores, "Place: An Argument for Bioregional history," *Environmental History Review* 18 (Winter 1994): 5.

<sup>24</sup> Dan Flores, "Environmental History: An Art of People and Place," *OAH Magazine of History* 10, No. 3 (Spring 1996): 1.

As an explanation, Flores answers his own three basic questions. First, bioregionalism is “rife” with particularism.<sup>25</sup> It can explain why some regions are particularly adamant or confused about their identity. Flores uses the example that “Texas cannot decide whether it is . . . Southern, Western, Southwestern, or just Texan.”<sup>26</sup> Because of this type of particularism, space and culture combine to create a specific place. This dilemma does cause some concern about “provincial bias” for those emotionally tied to a place. Flores assuages this concern admirably by stating that emotional ties often make scholars more critical about their topic, as “most penetrating research . . . (springs) from passion, and places . . . summon that.”<sup>27</sup>

Bioregionalism should begin with environment, geology, landscape, and climate and move on to human interaction and concerns, in order to arrive at cultural analysis. Throughout that process, the concept of “resiliency rather than adaptation” needs to be kept in mind; that the people, or various cultures, themselves provide the means for success.<sup>28</sup> Ultimately, bioregional history should be the story of “sequential cultures occupying the same place” while creating a succession of place and the use of space.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, argues Andrew C. Isenberg, such “encounters (are) both a process of intercultural and ecological exchange and an interaction between people and a place, the nonhuman natural environment.”<sup>30</sup> Combining the grassroots approach, bioregionalism, and historical memory and identity creates a viable, independent, and academic use for regional history.

In addition to following grassroots and bioregional approaches, the new regional history should be supported with memory and identity studies. This is an important aspect as John Fisk,

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>29</sup> Flores, “Place: An Argument for Bioregional history,” 12.

<sup>30</sup> Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1.

author of *Understanding Our Popular Culture*, points out that most professional academics are “painfully unaware of how people outside of their own circles understand and [use] the past.”<sup>31</sup> Additionally, according to Michael Kammen in *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change in the Twentieth Century*, the majority of Americans “take an active role in using and understanding the past . . . [they are not] just passive consumers of histories constructed by others.”<sup>32</sup> Kammen, in *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*, explores collective memory and identity as driving forces in interpreting history. With *Mystic Chords*, Kammen sets out to discover how memory (or tradition as he calls it) has been made and remade throughout American history in order to create a culture with a discernible collective memory.<sup>33</sup> He partially concludes that, at least since 1945, the American experience can be characterized by a “pronounced sense of discontinuity between the past and the present,” which provoked an unmatched eagerness for understanding or reliving past events.<sup>34</sup> Such a drive created a desire, both in a public and commercial sense, to understand the past from the bottom up, from the common perspective of everyday life. Although Kammen dislikes the general “public’s willingness to accept mythical history that is patently unreal,” and condemns oral history and tradition as not being “responsible history,” both are phenomena easily explained by academics like William McNeil and Richard Slotkin.<sup>35</sup>

Mythistory, according to world historian William McNeill, is defined as rival versions of past events that are culture-specific and provide for the creation of collective identities. It makes people believe in, and feel a sense of belonging to specific cultures and unites them in common

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<sup>31</sup> John Fisk, *Understanding Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1989), 158.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 216.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 533.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 129-37, 38.

perceptions and belief structures.<sup>36</sup> In the case of the Upper Musselshell, the cultures involved, at least in modern times, are ones stemming from economic activity: railroading and agriculture. Both have their own perceptions and interpretations of the past. Both cultures suffer from what Slotkin deems counter mythological thinking, in which regional dwellers rely upon nonessential facts to make sense of the past. This serves the purpose of separating a specific group (those living within the Upper Musselshell Valley) from the larger whole (those living outside of region).<sup>37</sup> McNeill's ideas rest upon the earlier writings of philosopher Maurice Halbwachs, who stressed that memories are constructed by social groups and result in a collective memory.<sup>38</sup> Simply put, individuals remember, but social groups determine what is memorable, and how it is remembered, in order to create a social and cultural identity. Different aspects of the past are only re-memorable, or remarkable, according to a certain social group's points of view. Furthermore, peoples or cultures develop shared identity by identifying, exploring, and agreeing upon specific memories and carrying them forward through time. They choose what stories to record about their past selectively, based upon their collective memory.

According to David Thelen the study of memory opens new frontiers of study within the historical discipline as it "creates exciting opportunities" to make new inquiries of conventional topics and source material.<sup>39</sup> Psychologists, with whom Thelen agrees, contend that people construct memories in response to changing circumstances. This being the case, collective memories are crafted and tailored by people who recognize their own past within a group's shared memories, which provides "fresh perspectives on how individuals and groups shaped and

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<sup>36</sup> William H. McNeill, *Mythistory and Other Essays*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) passim.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Slotkin, "Fiction for the Purposes of History," accessed via the word wide web <http://www.commonplace.org/vol-01/no-01/author/>, accessed 13 February 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), passim.

<sup>39</sup> David Thelen, ed. "Memory and American History," *Journal of American History* 75 (March 1989): 1117.



were shaped by larger groups and processes.”<sup>40</sup> This is a concept that fits well with social history because of one of that sub-disciplines most provocative underlying themes: that “people have resisted rapid, alien, and imposed change by creating memories of a past that was unchanging, incorruptible, and harmonious.”<sup>41</sup> Because of this, Thelen concludes (in conjunction Richard Slotkin and William McNeill) that memory studies lead scholars to treat “myths not as disembodied values, but as creations of people with real needs . . . that myths of virgin land, the agrarian past . . . the self made man, and above all, the myth of progress itself might be reinterpreted as the struggle over memory. And myths might be revisited to discover how people reshaped—and ignored—them so they would better connect (or fail to connect) with their private memories.”<sup>42</sup> Such a concept, in part, is set forth by David Wrobel in *Promised Lands*.

*Promised Lands* is a discussion of the creation and perception concerning memories surrounding the American West. Wrobel examines promotional materials and pioneer reminisces as “imaginative efforts to bring places into existence or to hold on to earlier incarnations of places that had since changed,” and to help “them define their place in changing western cultural environments.” As the first pioneers to cross the “Great American Desert,” most believed their journey was the most dangerous and daring. Later journeys were simple and easy in comparison as trails were already blazed through the frontier, towns already created, and cultures already implanted. The reminisces of the first pioneers did much to create modern myths of the west, such as virgin, spare land and the innate cultural heroism and daring progressive attitudes of the Anglo-culture. Throughout the work Wrobel contends, “If western

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 1123.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 1125.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 1127; Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (New York, 1985), 33-45.

mythology does not develop beyond its defining characteristics of white-centeredness and rural-centeredness--if the mythology does not diversify to reflect the region's *demographic makeup* [emphasis added] . . . then how can (we) . . . construct. . . a truly inclusive and representative understanding of contemporary sense of place?" Wrobel concludes his book with the thought that (because of ethnic diversity, geographic distinctiveness, and metropolitan factors) a more locally based approach to histories of the west may be much more appropriate. This would create a more vital and inclusive role in creating multiple western identities.<sup>43</sup>

By combining these approaches (grassroots sources, bioregionalism, and memory studies) a new historical interpretation emerges. It mimics Turner's timeline and theme of successive frontiers (at least to a small degree) to follow the schema of a people's history. Incorporating a form of bioregionalism, the study becomes concerned with humankind's interaction with the land in terms of succession of cultures and their symbiotic dealings with the environment, thus exposing themes and historical happenings that may be neglected by traditional scholarship. Memory studies allow this approach to examine the stories that a certain locale uses to craft its own identity and preserve its own history, often outside of what the grand narrative sets forth. This synthesis of approaches, once applied effectively to a region, may well be called the New Regional History.

Such study, focused on specific regions, does run the risk of problems with sources. Even though they often intertwine with the grand narrative, oral histories and unpublished regional reminiscences are paramount to examining what stories the group chooses to use in order to set forth its own history, primarily because they preserve their own culture, and adapt to changing times. The New Regional History embraces local sources for exactly the reason that

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<sup>43</sup> David M. Wrobel *Promised Lands: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West*. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002) 3, 4, 191.

traditional scholarship dislikes them: because they are concentrated at the local point of view. In doing so, the new regional history creates a form of regional study that takes localized history from the provincial realm of the antiquarian and gives it credibility within academia by illustrating how regional history has deviations and dynamics deserving the attention and interpretation of professional historians. Grassroots bioregional history is an original and current approach to regional history; examining historical memory and the subsequent formation of a regional identity adds another powerful set of intellectual lenses to the study. The new regional history weds the parochialism of local scholars with the generalized results of professional scholarship. Utilizing provincial information conveyed by the grassroots approach and the deep description of bioregionalism, the new regional history is much more than a bucolic, localized case study. It examines the use of historical memory in the creation of regional identity via the reflections of a region's inhabitants. Such an approach democratizes history (thus giving the regional dweller voice in their own history), while exposing and explaining regional anomalies, and examines regional history for the sake of the region, all while retaining the critical posture of scholarship.

By crafting a new regional history, the discipline becomes even more about the human experience, because it is cognizant of the popular perspective, grounded in regional identity, and forged from historical memory. Based largely upon grassroots primary sources (such as oral history collections, newspapers, and personal writings), the new regional history does much to democratize history, for it is about the people of a specific region: it reflects upon the evidence and how people have chosen to relate to the past in order to form a regional identity.

In contemplation of a similar problem in New Zealand, the conceptualization of place-specific histories, Canterbury historian W. James Gardner looked to French historian Emmanuel

Joseph Sieyes. Sieyes rhetorically asked a fundamental question about both national and regional history: “Where shall we find the French nation?” A straightforward answer followed: “Where it is—in the forty thousand communes of France.” Gardner asks a similar question: “Where will you find regional New Zealand?” His answer: “Where it is.”<sup>44</sup> Applied to the history of America’s Great Plains the query may be rephrased to “Where do we find America’s Great Plains?” The answer follows: within the distinct localities that make up the plains of central North America. The Upper Musselshell Valley is a distinct locality, a place that contained many sequential cultures. Each culture interacted with the environment of the valley in order to make it distinctly its own. It is one of those places where we may find the Great Plains—where they are.

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<sup>44</sup> Emmanuel Joseph Sieyes, *What is the Third Estate?* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963); Tom Isern, “W. James Gardner, Canterbury, and the Definition of Region in New Zealand” (Unpublished paper for presentation at the Western Social Sciences Association, Denver, 1998).

## CHAPTER 2. NATIVE AMERICANS AND FUR TRAPPERS

The Upper Musselshell Valley, located within south-central Montana, is bounded by the Little Belt, Castle, and Big Snowy Mountain ranges. The valley forms a vaguely “U”-shaped basin of fertile foothills and grasslands that extend eastward partaking of the common geographic features of the Great Plains — semi-arid, relatively treeless, and somewhat flat. Although the valley’s exact geographic boundaries are debatable and somewhat arbitrary, the lushness of the region’s ecological makeup is extremely important. The Musselshell was utilized by Paleo-Indians, such as those belonging to the Folsom and Yuma cultures, and heavily used by historic tribes, such as the Crow and Blackfoot. Its natural resources were so well known to indigenous Americans that tribes as far away as present-day Idaho and Washington State traveled there to hunt. Prior to Euro-American settlement, the presence of humankind, both Native American and Anglo fur trappers, changed the nature of the landscape very little, while the land influenced people to adapt to its conditions and provided them with their particular lifestyles. Neither Indian tribes nor the mountain man caused significant or lasting change within the Musselshell. As a result, the grassroots narrative does not fully incorporate the American Indian into their story the same way the grand narrative does.

The grand narrative of environmental history portrays land use by lithic peoples in a very different light. Virtually since the publication of William Cronon’s book *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* there has been the supposition that American Indians extensively managed the land via planting and controlled burns. This is a belief bolstered by newer environmental works, like Jack Temple Kirby’s *Mockingbird Song: Ecological Landscapes of the South*. Both stress that American Indians had a profound, yet not detrimental, impact in terms of land usage. Despite the basic land management strategies some

tribes used, both authors also write that changes in the land naturally occur from disease, drought, fires, and normal climactic change, and that poor, or inappropriate and devastating land use was left up to the Anglo cultures that settled within the Americas.<sup>45</sup> Accordingly, ecosystems are never static, even when untouched by humankind. Albeit this is true, Montana tribes, and the majority of Indians using the Upper Musselshell, as shown by history, anthropology, and geology, did not have what could be considered an intense effect on the land.

Within the Great Plains, there needs to be a distinction made between Indians who practiced extensive agriculture like the Mandan or Hidatsa and others, like the Blackfoot or Crow, who did not implement serious farm practices at all.<sup>46</sup> Regional tribes, in fact, wanted the Upper Musselshell (which was very much seen as a breadbasket of sorts) to remain unchanged and as a result had a light touch on the land, its vegetation, and animals. The first cultures that successively used the Upper Musselshell, the American Indian and the fur trapper, had a minimal effect on the valley's land. Indians used the region extensively, but they did not eradicate or deplete its natural stock of consumable animals, and their impact on the valley's resources was minimal. On the other hand, trappers (legendary for wreaking ecological and social havoc) strangely left no adverse effects either. The region attracted them because of its plentiful stores of animals, but heavy tribal use, particularly by the Blackfoot, and the fact that other river systems were better for beaver (which were never a key species within the region) lessened their use of the Upper Musselshell.

The Musselshell River is the valley's major water feature. As a tributary of the Missouri River, the Musselshell runs 292 miles in an eastern direction; its headwaters are located in the

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<sup>45</sup> William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), Jack Temple Kirby, *Mockingbird Song: Ecological Landscapes of the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>46</sup> Preston Holder, *The Hoe and the Horse on the Plains: A Study of Cultural Development among North American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), *passim*.

Castle, Crazy, and Little Belt mountains.<sup>47</sup> The Musselshell River received its English name, according to Prince Maximilian du Wied (a German naturalist and ethnographer who extensively travelled the Great Plains in the early 1830s), from the French word *coquille* (generally meaning shell or husk) because French trappers noticed fresh-water mussels and shell remnants within portions of the river.<sup>48</sup> Spring flood stages usually take place in March and April and during wet years again in May and June. The Musselshell often seems muddy and sluggish in hot years. Such an appearance prompted a regional joke or tale about its often deeply muddy look: A cowboy attempting to cross the Musselshell was “surprised to see a hat floating on top of the mud. He went to pick it up, and found there was a man under the hat. ‘Just a minute,’ said the cowboy, ‘and I’ll help you out.’” The man under the hat replied, “Never Mind, I’m riding a pretty good horse and I think I’ll make it!”<sup>49</sup> The farther east the Musselshell flows, the wider and rougher it becomes. In its journey towards the Missouri River, the Musselshell’s banks range from soft silt to vast undercuts, its water from nearly clear to deeply muddy, and is, at times, bounded by brush, willow and cottonwood trees, honeysuckle, and occasionally wild roses. Aside from the Musselshell and its streams providing moisture, the region receives between ten and twenty-two inches of precipitation, with the average being fourteen to eighteen. Temperatures range from minus fifty to over one hundred degrees Fahrenheit, with an average of sixty-seven degrees.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, as a Level I ecological system (the most general classification of an ecological system), the valley is technically considered part of

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<sup>47</sup> L. F. Gieseke, *Soils of Wheatland County: Soil Reconnaissance of Montana* (Bozeman: Montana State College Agricultural Station, 1943), 8-9.

<sup>48</sup> *Rocky Mountain Husbandman*, 14 January 1904; Place Name Files, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana; Harold Joseph Stearns, “A History of the Upper Musselshell Valley to 1920,” (MA Thesis, University of Montana, 1966), 2.

<sup>49</sup> Georgia Nation Carter, Comp., *Montana Tall Tales*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Western Litho-Print: Billings, 1965), 1.

the Great Plains. This assumption is not entirely correct. The Upper Musselshell is a straddle-plain, containing the features of both the Great Plains and the mountainous West. Closer ecological scrutiny (Levels II and III) reveals the area characterized as a west-central semi-arid prairie and western cordillera. At the most refined stage (Level IV), it is apparent the region comprises many ecosystems, including Judith Basin grassland, un-glaciated Montana high plains, both non-calcareous and limy foothill grasslands, carbonate mountains, limy foothill savannahs, and pine scoria hills.<sup>50</sup> Historians Michael Malone, Richard Roeder, and William Lang in *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, explain Montana's greatly mixed topography as being a "geographically split personality," and the Upper Musselshell fits this description well.<sup>51</sup>

Soil composition of the region is as varied as its topography. The Upper Musselshell Valley contains twenty-nine different loams and two undifferentiated types of soil.<sup>52</sup> The valley's variegated soil makeup is well suited for various types of grasses and forbs, with the grasses being dominant. The land is easiest to cultivate in its northern and southeastern portions because that is where it is the most flat, although modern agriculture is not limited solely to those locations. Natural grasses include blue and hairy grammas, making it an ideal region for animals.<sup>53</sup> Other nutritious short grasses include the protein-and-carbohydrate rich wheat grass and buffalo grass. Trees of the Upper Musselshell consist of the flood and erosion resistant cottonwood and willow, located mainly along the Musselshell River, and Ponderosa and Lodgepole pine decorating the more mountainous regions of the valley.

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<sup>50</sup> Environmental Protection Agency [hereafter EPA] *Ecoregions of North America*, available from the world wide web [http://www.epa.gov/wed/pages/ecoregions/na\\_eco.htm](http://www.epa.gov/wed/pages/ecoregions/na_eco.htm), accessed 12 March 2006; EPA, *Ecoregions of Montana, draft 2*, available from the worldwide web [ftp://ftp.epa.gov/wed/ecoregions/mt/mt\\_front\\_1.pdf](ftp://ftp.epa.gov/wed/ecoregions/mt/mt_front_1.pdf), accessed 12 March 2006.

<sup>51</sup> Malone, Roeder, Lang, *Montana*, 6.

<sup>52</sup> Giesecker, *Soils of Wheatland County*; L.F. Giesecker, *Soils of Golden Valley County: Soil Reconnaissance of Montana* (Bozeman: Montana State College Agricultural Station, 1942), 5; Giesecker, *Soils of Meagher County: Soil Reconnaissance of Montana* (Bozeman: Montana State College Agricultural Station, 1944), 2.

<sup>53</sup> Victor E Shelford, *The Ecology of North America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963), 330-44.



One of the earliest known life forms in the valley, from pre-history, is the *Avaceratops Lammersi*, discovered by paleontologist Eddie Cole in the 1980s. The first of its kind discovered, *Avaceratops* was named after Cole's wife (Ava) and the long-time Lammers ranch family who owns the land where the dinosaur was found. The *Avaceratops* is related to the herbivore *Triceratops*; both lived during the Cretaceous period. Other megafauna of antiquity that lived in the region were the mammoth, the woolly mammoth, and the Ancient Bison (*Bison Antiquus*).

Bison, elk, antelope, mule deer, and other game made the region particularly attractive for humans. Herd sizes for various animals are matters of speculation. For example, in any given era before the late 1800s, estimates for bison populations on the Great Plains range from twenty-seven to thirty million, with erratic highs and lows.<sup>54</sup> This rough approximation does not take into account drought years, harsh winters, or disease. The Upper Missouri region and its secondary streams contained the largest buffalo population in Montana. These massive herds occupied lands between the main branches of the Upper Missouri and the Yellowstone River.<sup>55</sup> This portion of Montana partially consists of the Upper Musselshell Valley, where the buffalo's natural migratory route led them directly through the Musselshell Valley to the Missouri. In the late summer months, bison herds sought large river systems like the Missouri and the Yellowstone, including such tributaries as the Musselshell. During times of drought on the Great Plains such valleys became crowded with animal life, especially bison looking for cooler habitations. Maxmillian du Wied claimed about the region "that wandering Indians are found only occasionally on the banks of the Musselshell, but they are said to be at all times on its

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<sup>54</sup> Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*, 29.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Kelley Schneiders, *Big Sky Rivers: The Yellowstone and the Upper Missouri* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2003), 54-56, 60.

sources.”<sup>56</sup> With the Upper Musselshell being so rich in bison, and other highly desirable fur bearing animals, it is easy to assume that the region faced mass ecological change due to overzealous hide hunters. It was not, and its game population remained fairly stable well into the first wave of Anglo settlement.

Local records confirm prolific regional wildlife levels along the Musselshell. John Mullan, an army official accompanying Isaac Steven’s 1853 railroad survey, wrote about “Innumerable herds of buffalo.”<sup>57</sup> In the summer of 1873 a member of the Northern Pacific Railroad survey wrote, on its journey through the Musselshell Valley, his group was “preceded by thousands of buffalo, and the grass was completely exhausted” by the migration.<sup>58</sup> In 1877 Musselshell pioneer Martin Grande saw a large herd of bison taking “three or four days . . . to file through the pass” located near the headwaters of the Musselshell.<sup>59</sup> Trapper Andrew Garcia, living within the Musselshell south of present-day Judith Gap, and having roamed central Montana since the mid 1870s claimed “the Musselshell country was a beautiful land. A person could stand in the same place and see buffalo, deer and elk, all at the same time without turning his head.”<sup>60</sup> Ralph Berry, the original owner of the Winnecook Ranch, wrote that upon his arrival in the Musselshell, around 1880, “the prairie was alive with buffalo, elk, and antelope—thousands of them,” and “The Musselshell Valley as far as [you] could see was absolutely black with bunches of animals . . . scattered over the valley. Most of the bunches were bison, many

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<sup>56</sup> Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed. *Early Western Travels, XXIII: Maximilian of Wied* (Cleveland: A.H. Clark Co, 1904), 59-67.

<sup>57</sup> United States Congress, *Reports of Exploration and Surveys to Ascertain the Most Practicable and Economic Route From the Mississippi River to the Pacific, 1860*, House Document 56, p. 123; Stearns, “The Upper Musselshell,” 4.

<sup>58</sup> Lawrence A. Frost, ed., *Some Observations on the Yellowstone Expedition of 1873* (Glendale, CA: Arthur H. Clark, 1981), 97.

<sup>59</sup> Stearns, “The Upper Musselshell,” 4-5; quote from interview with Nels Voldseth conducted by Stuart W. Connor and Robert J. Lane, 29 September 1965.

<sup>60</sup> Andrew Garcia, *Tough Trip Through Paradise* (Sausalito: Comstock Editions, Inc., 1987), 62.

were antelope and quite a few were elk . . . the total number of animals was incredible.”<sup>61</sup>

According to Edmund O. Pound, in his regional and family history, *The Little Red Books:*

*Ranching in Montana in the Early Days*, “The country between the Musselshell River and the

Snowy Mountains was full of buffalo.”<sup>62</sup> Remains of buffalo wallows are evident nearly one

hundred sixteen years after the buffalo yielded their natural habitat to cattle (Figures 2 and 3) and are common sights on many ranches.



Figure 2. Buffalo Wallow (note the circular, crater like depression).

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<sup>61</sup> Harold M. Hill, Mary Dole Smith, and M. A. Callant, *Winnecook Ranch on the Musselshell* (The Authors, 1999), 108-109.

<sup>62</sup> Edmund O. Pound, *The Little Red Books: Ranching in Montana in the Early Days* (Harlowton: Upper Musselshell Historical Society, 1998), 14.



Figure 3. Large Buffalo Wallows (two in the foreground, three over the fence line).

Overall, because of its diverse physiography, flora, and fauna, the Upper Musselshell attracted myriad American Indian groups beginning with the Folsom culture dating back about thirteen thousand years. Archeological evidence includes buffalo jump sites (*pishkuns*), pictographs, teepee rings, *wickiups* (semi-permanent constructs made of branches), arrowheads and other projectile points, and at least one atlatl.<sup>63</sup> Specific sites include the Fish Creek and Owl Canyon pictographs, the Winnecook petroglyph, Fortification site, Sentinel rock, and numerous buffalo jumps. The surrounding mountain ranges contain five known *wickiups* and numerous pictograph sites. Projectile points reveal many of these locations were utilized at least four thousand years ago.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Stearns, "The Upper Musselshell Valley," 3.

<sup>64</sup> Harlan Lucas, "Archaeology in Wheatland County," in Harlowton Woman's Club, Comp., *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 287.

The abundant amount of historical artifacts, specifically, projectile points, hide scrapers, and other remnants, within the Upper Musselshell Valley illustrates the importance of the region to prehistoric and historic Indian civilizations. Regional amateur archaeologist Harlan Lucas collected American Indian artifacts and obtained many from sheepherders, amassing a significant collection between the 1950s and 1970s throughout the Upper Musselshell, as did his mentor and friend Rene Labrie. One recent collector, within a span of two years, recovered nearly six hundred museum-quality projectile points, knives, and scrapers. Known tepee ring sites, located north of present-day Two Dot, are plentiful. Within a ten-mile radius there are forty known rings, indicating the location's probable repeated use as winter camps (Figures 4 and 5).<sup>65</sup>



Figure 4. Tepee Rings North of Two Dot.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.



Figure 5. Tepee Rings North of Two Dot II.

One large site contains thirty-eight easily recognizable rings, suggesting a population up to 144 inhabitants. Another location contains a ring twenty feet in diameter. All are located along terrain with decent water supplies and steep hills that could serve as buffalo jumps and sheltering timber belts to protect against the elements and provide fuel. Combined, the essentials of stable water, potential for easy food, fuel, and shelter suggest it was an often-used winter camp.

Many Native Americans utilized the Upper Musselshell, but no tribe ever claimed complete hegemony over the region. As many as ten different tribes used the valley as vital hunting grounds and as a crossroad for intertribal raiding, particularly the Crow and Blackfoot, as the valley is central to their specific portions of Montana. Other tribes include the Shoshone, Assiniboine, Atsina, Salish, and occasional bands of Sioux and Cheyenne. The Nez Perce and Red River Métis also used the region to a minor extent.

The Crow, also known as the Apsaslooke or Absaroka, speak a form of Siouan language and are descended from the Hidatsa people. They migrated to Montana from parts of North Dakota and Minnesota due to the westward expansion of other Native and Anglo-Americans by the mid-1700s. They arrived in Montana a pedestrian tribe with horticulturist roots. It was not until around 1730 that the tribe became a horse culture. By 1743, according to French explorer and trader Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, more widely known as Sieur de la Verendrye, the Crow had a sizable herd, which allowed the French to restock their expedition with fresh mounts.<sup>66</sup> There are two distinct divisions among the Crow: the River Crow (Minesepere or Dung-on-the-River-Banks) and the Mountain Crow. The latter are subsequently broken down into two bands, which constitute the main tribal body—Where the Many Lodges Are (Acaraho) and the Kicked-in-their-Bellies (Erarapi’o). The Mountain Crow generally roamed the Bighorn Mountains and Tongue River, while the River Crow claimed the region from the lower Yellowstone to the confluence of the Missouri.<sup>67</sup> The Upper Musselshell Valley attracted the River Crow as a stable, well-stocked hunting ground, but brought the tribe into closer contact with their greatest threat—the Blackfoot tribes of northern and central Montana.

The Blackfoot confederacy contains three distinct Algonquian based language bands: the Northern and Southern Pikuni (Piegan), the Kainah (Blood), and the Siksika (Blackfoot Proper). As a single tribal affiliation, the three bands formed the strongest indigenous power in the northern Great Plains region.<sup>68</sup> They were probably the first American Indians to settle near the

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<sup>66</sup>Colin G. Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West Before Lewis and Clark* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 303.

<sup>67</sup> Robert H. Lowie, *The Crow Indians* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1935), 3-5; David J. Wishart, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 571-72; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 303; Stearns, “The Upper Musselshell Valley,” 5-6.

<sup>68</sup> John C. Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 5; Theodore Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), xvi, 72, 137.

Rocky Mountains in Alberta and Montana in the early fifteenth century.<sup>69</sup> The Southern Pikuni were the most likely to have utilized the Upper Musselshell Valley. Like the Crow, the Blackfoot arrived as pedestrians.<sup>70</sup> Tribal oral histories report the Blackfoot acquired horses around 1725 when a chief named Shaved Head captured some from the Mountain People (most likely the Shoshone). According to explorer Anthony Henday, by 1754 the Blackfoot had “plenty of fine horses of all colours.”<sup>71</sup> Shortly before Lewis and Clark encountered the Blackfoot in 1806, their limited possession of firearms and large horse herds, combined with a loose alliance with the Atsina, completed their martial power over other Montana tribes.<sup>72</sup>

The Atsina (A’ani or White Clay People), also an Algonquian-based language culture, were first encountered along the Saskatchewan River by trappers in the employ of the Hudson’s Bay Company and the North West Company between 1775 and 1790. As the Atsina traveled farther south onto the Great Plains, pressure from the Cree and Assiniboine obstructed their claim to portions of central Montana in the early eighteenth century. Specifically, the Atsina were located between the Crow and Blackfoot. Their location between the powerful Crow and Blackfoot led the tribe into a loose alliance with the Blackfoot.<sup>73</sup> Aside from the Crow, the Blackfoot and Atsina considered the Shoshone to be among their principal enemies.

The Shoshone (Sosoni, Newe, or People), an Uto-Aztecan speaking group, inhabited an expansive portion of the West. There are two distinct tribal divisions among the Shoshone: the Western and Eastern. The Eastern Shoshone are further divided into two subgroups, which contain the Sage Grass People, located primarily within the Green River and Wind River valleys

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<sup>69</sup> Wishart, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*, 567.

<sup>70</sup> Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 7.

<sup>71</sup> Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 303, quote from Ewers found in *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture*, 16-18.

<sup>72</sup> The Atsina are also known under the misnomer Gros Ventre (Big Bellies) given to them by French explorers and trappers.

<sup>73</sup> Wishart, *The Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*, 573; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 298.



of Wyoming, and the Mountain People, who lived in the Rocky Mountains and Lake Yellowstone region. Mountain Shoshone visited the Upper Musselshell Valley during the early spring and fall to hunt bison.<sup>74</sup> The Shoshone were one of the first tribes of the region to incorporate horses and firearms into their culture. Because of these innovations, the Blackfoot considered them a threat to their territorial domination over other Plains tribes. This resulted in near endemic warfare between the two groups in order to obtain horses, muskets, and individual honor via counting coups. The Upper Musselshell Valley served these pursuits and filled seasonal hunting needs.

The Assiniboine (or Nakota) are Siouan linguistically. They resided in portions of Montana east of the Atsina, and are the last significant Montana-based tribes to utilize the Upper Musselshell. Intertribal and Anglo pressure forced the migration of the Assiniboine to the west and south until they encountered the Missouri River, which they largely considered their territory.<sup>75</sup> Although the tribe lived some distance from the Upper Musselshell, it is certain they utilized the area as a hunting ground, as did the Salish (Flathead). The Salish, unlike most Montana Indians, migrated to the region from the west, formerly residing near the Klamath River in Oregon. According to anthropologist Harry Turney-High, they occupied a “marginal place between the plains and the west” as did plateau people like the Nez Perce. The Salish’s favored hunting ground “was along the Musselshell, and next to the Valley of the Yellowstone.”<sup>76</sup> The Upper Musselshell Valley was so renowned among Plains tribes that many from outside the

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<sup>74</sup> Wishart, *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*, 582, 600; Virginia Trenholm and Maurine Carley, *The Shoshones: Sentinels of the Rockies* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 565; David Rodnick, *The Fort Belknap Assiniboine of Montana: A Study in Cultural Change* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938).

<sup>76</sup> Harry Holbert Turney-High, “The Flathead Indians of Montana,” *American Anthropologist* (supplemental issue) 39 (1937): 11, 97, 117.

region, like the Nez Perce, Cheyenne, Sioux, Kalispell and Red River Metis hunted within the valley.

At the end of the Little Ice Age (ca. 1550 to 1850), formerly depleted buffalo herds replenished themselves, repopulating the Plains, as did the region's human inhabitants. The attainment of horses and more advanced technology changed the environment to a small degree. Horse grazing altered the natural grasses, bringing in new kinds of vegetation and eating large swaths of ground, while firearms allowed for more frequent, easy, and even for Indian tribes, wasteful hunting. However, the American Indian culture of the region changed much more than the environment. Native American tribes, after the acquisition of horses, transformed themselves from semi-sedentary hunters and gatherers into horse nomads who relied heavily upon the bison to sustain their way of life. This alteration caused Plains dwellers' economies and cultures to change significantly and created minor ecological trauma, while fostering more mobile and annual cycles of hunting.<sup>77</sup>

Plains tribes, who acquired the horse during this period, were better equipped than ever to hunt bison. With so many varying native peoples traveling and hunting within the Upper Musselshell region, there was, to a minor extent, an impact upon the ecosystem. Additionally, the switch created an almost total nutritional reliance upon the bison, new dependence upon trade, and an even more decentralized social structure.<sup>78</sup> The transition to buffalo hunting made Great Plains tribes specialize economically, which violated centuries of proven ecological safety nets, such as planting crops and foraging for natural foods. As a result, Plains tribes had to

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<sup>77</sup> Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture*, 272; Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 74.

<sup>78</sup> Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*, 33.

contend with droughts and problematic drops in wildlife populations.<sup>79</sup> Socially, equestrianism caused bands, such as the Hidatsa-Crow, to split. As a result, the Crow moved farther west in order to pursue the nomadic existence of the buffalo hunt. Crow Medicine Woman Pretty Shield stressed that the “Crow could not all live together, [we] scattered . . . so that all might find plenty of meat. The great herds of buffalo were constantly moving, and of course we moved when they did.”<sup>80</sup> However, northern Plains tribes supplemented their diets with chokecherries, wild sunflowers, cactus, and other edible natural plants. Ethnographer Edwin Denig wrote, “fruits and roots are a great resource to a people that depend entirely upon the chase for subsistence.”<sup>81</sup>

Before the advent of the horse and the gun, the first cultures’ use of the valley hardly changed the environment. They hunted, gathered, fished; some even practiced limited forms of agriculture, but there was no large-scale change in the land or within their culture. After the horse and gun became a part of American Indian cultures, there was a larger impact upon the land as the relationship between the biosphere and humankind changed. Horses utilized range that, prior to their arrival on the Great Plains, were grazed primarily by the buffalo. They introduced new biota, and their eating habits had an impact on bison populations. However, bigger changes occurred socially as the horse allowed much more freedom of travel over larger areas, which mimicked the buffalo’s annual movements. Tribes began to range farther and farther abroad, bringing differing tribes into direct contact, which perpetuated a raider-type lifestyle. The interaction between the environment, Native Americans, and the bison created new lifestyles that mimicked the annual cycles of the buffalo. Tribal band size fluctuated when

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<sup>79</sup> “Indians in the Land: A Conversation Between William Cronon and Richard White,” *American Heritage* 37 (August-September 1986): 21; Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*, 62; Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture*, 310.

<sup>80</sup> Frank B. Linderman, *Pretty-Shield: Medicine Woman of the Crows* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 27.

<sup>81</sup> Edwin Thomas Denig, *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri: Sioux, Arikaras, Assiniboines, Crees, Crows*, by John C. Ewers (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 74.

buffalo herd size did; camp movements followed the bison, gathering into larger bands for summer hunts and dispersing during winter in order to find adequate food supplies for horses and people. The new system overexploited the bison and made Plains tribes more vulnerable to advancing white populations in the semi-arid Great Plains grasslands.

The gun, perhaps, is what changed the Indians' interaction with the land the most. With improved power and accuracy, taking larger numbers of bison, and other game animals, was much easier. This led to over-hunting and wasteful practices like killing animals primarily for parts considered delicacies: the hump and tongue. According to many modern scholars, these changes preempted and contributed to declining herd size well before white hide hunters arrived.<sup>82</sup> For example, trader Anthony Henday observed, as did Maxmillian du Wied and Karl Bodmer, many Indians killing buffalo solely for their tongues and leaving the meat to wolves. The interaction between humans and the ecological region, not just the hide trade, played a role in the near extinction of the buffalo. The Upper Musselshell certainly saw some of these environmental changes due to the advent of the horse and gun amongst Indian tribes. However, evidence shows that Indians came to the region well into the mid 1880s to hunt the animals, the traditional time point in which the bison started to disappear en masse. This suggests that the actual environment of the Upper Musselshell changed very little due to Native American usage. The gun also allowed tribes like the Blackfoot to assert their martial skills over others, forcing tribes to move and shift location. For example, in the late 1700s, armed with guns and horses from traders, the Blackfoot pushed the Shoshone farther and farther west, until they controlled lands formerly inhabited by not only the Shoshone, but the Salish and Kootenai as well. The Upper Musselshell was allegedly full of such warlike interaction. A fifty-mile-long stone

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<sup>82</sup> Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*; Dan Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains From 1800 to 1850," *Journal of American History* 78 (September 1991); Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture*, 312.

“fence” crosses the Upper Musselshell Valley from the Snowy Mountains to the Crazy Mountains. According to local historian Harold Joseph Stearns, archeological theories explain the fence as “being a line of demarcation mutually established by the Crows and Blackfoot.”<sup>83</sup> However, only two other sources make such a claim: the pioneer memories of Golden Valley County resident Laura Barta, and the 1941 cartoon history book *It Happened in Montana: The Land of Shining Mountains* (Figure 6).<sup>84</sup> Whereas Lucas and Stearns assert such a construct divided the Crow and Blackfoot, the original cartoon states that it was between the Sioux and Crow. In any case, this assumption is more lore than fact. Such a boundary line, or border, concept never existed for American Indians, and it is highly likely this is not an indigenous construct. If it were indeed a creation of the American Indian tribes living within Montana, the wall’s location would be more conducive to separating the Blackfoot from the Atsina (also known as the Gros Ventre, they were the tribe to most likely have “claimed” the Musselshell Region) who were loosely allied with the Blackfoot. The specific origin of the stone line will probably never be known, but the chances of it being constructed by American Indians are miniscule. The alleged boundary is perhaps remembered best as a metaphor of local history. By the meaning given to it by regional inhabitants, they recognize that their land, long before their own era, was a land of contention. The greater the human pressure on the land and its resources, the greater, also, the conflict of cultures. Otherwise, as far as historical memory of lithic peoples is concerned, little of it remains among the people of the region outside of recent preservation efforts and misguided stories like that of the stone wall.

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<sup>83</sup> Stearns, “The Upper Musselshell Valley,” 5.

<sup>84</sup> Laura Barta, “Early Memories of the Musselshell Valley,” in Albie Gordon, Margaret Lehfeldt, and Mary Morsanny, Comp., from *Dawn in Golden Valley* (Harlowton: Upper Musselshell Museum Archives, 1971), 306; Jim Masterson, *It Happened in Montana: The Land of Shining Mountains V. II*, (Miles City, MT: 1941), 10.

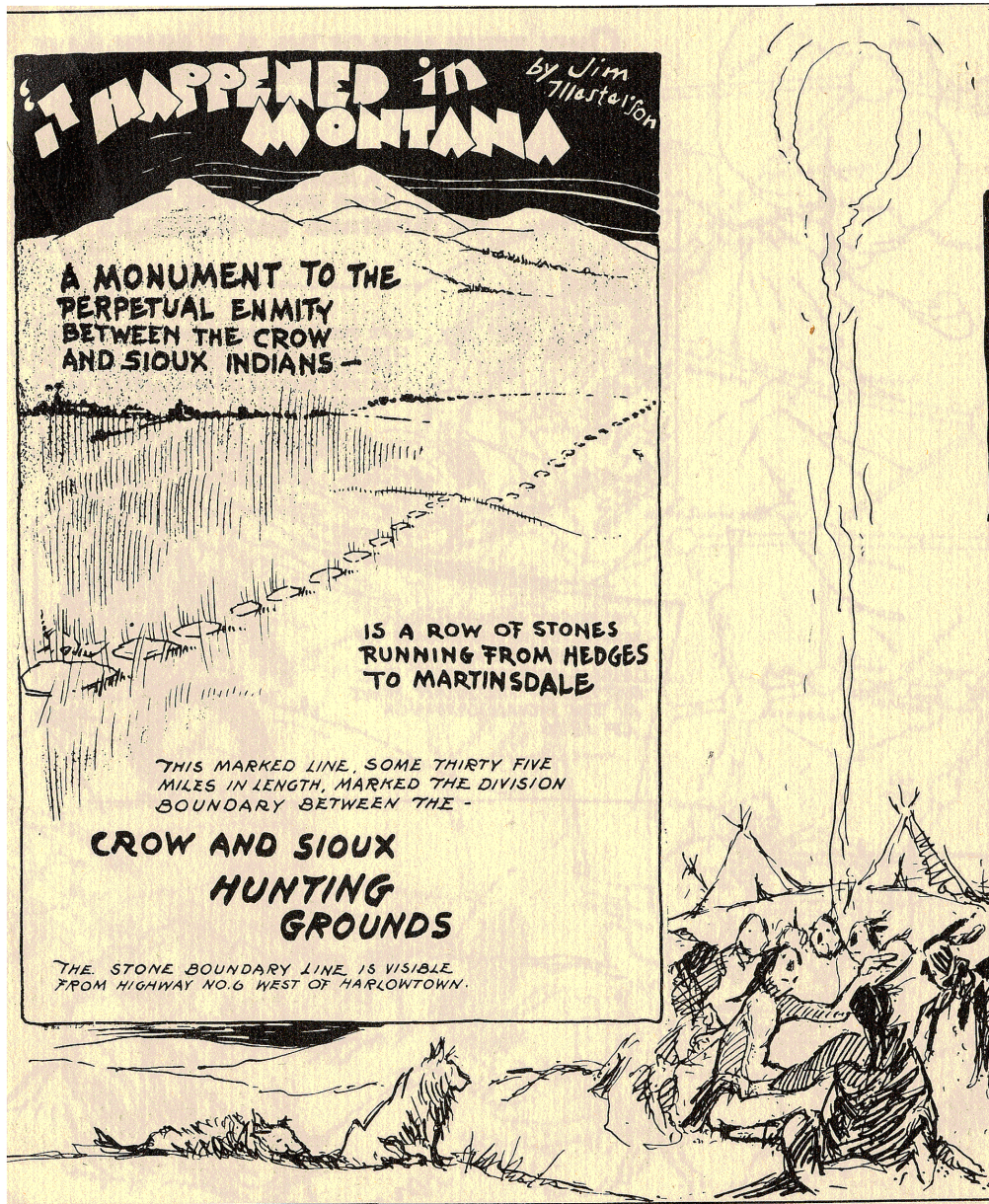


Figure 6. *It Happened in Montana* Cartoon (image courtesy of the Montana Historical Society).

By the early 1800s, white explorers and trappers began to investigate the Upper Musselshell Valley. Local sources claim French trader La Verendrye was the first white man to pass through the region in the 1740s. This account is a misconception. There is no significant evidence to substantiate Verendrye having traveled that far into Montana. In all likelihood, the Frenchman confused the Black Hills with the Rockies in his journal. Verendrye possibly only

traveled as far west as present-day Pierre, South Dakota. However, according to *Origin and History of Harlowton, Montana*, Jesuit records in Montreal, Canada, claim he traveled through the Musselshell Valley and camped within the vicinity of present-day Harlowton before continuing west to the Helena region and then turning north to return to Canada. Not surprisingly, local historians strive to push the date of Euro-American arrival as far back as possible.<sup>85</sup>

The first mention of the Musselshell River, as a tributary of the Missouri, comes from Lewis and Clark in 1805. They bypassed the region, and in doing so, explored only its periphery with side trips such as Clark's journey through the Gallatin Valley and parts of the Yellowstone. The next known mention of the region occurred in the spring of 1830, according to scholar H.C. Dale, when Jedediah Smith crossed "the Yellowstone . . . with Jim Bridger as pilot, [and] cautiously moved his company to the Musselshell and the Judith [rivers]. Beaver were plentiful but danger [from the Blackfoot] imminent."<sup>86</sup>

Fur traders trapped and hunted the Musselshell to a minor extent. The Missouri Fur Company, from its post at Three Forks, used the valley from 1807 to 1820. In the spring of 1830 Jed Smith, along with fellow fur trader Joe Meek, trapped the Upper Musselshell at the behest of William Sublette. Despite minor problems with the Blackfoot, Smith's party caught plenty of beaver.<sup>87</sup> From 1834 to 1838 the Rocky Mountain Fur Company's Blackfoot Brigades trapped and hunted from Three Forks to the Judith Basin. Seventy to eighty men, under the command of Milton Sublette or Lucien Fontenelle, along with guide Jim Bridger, traversed central Montana (including the Musselshell Valley) every September and October for four years. However, the

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<sup>85</sup> *Origin and History of Harlowton*, pamphlet (Harlowton, MT: Harlowton Chamber of Commerce, 1989), 17.

<sup>86</sup> H.C. Dale, ed., *The Ashley-Smith Explorations and the Discovery of a Central Route to Pacific, 1822-1829* (Cleveland, 1918), 287-88.

<sup>87</sup> David J. Wishart, *The Fur Trade of the American West, 1807-1840* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 44, 139-40.

attention trappers afforded the Upper Musselshell was minimal; beaver were plentiful, but so, too were, the Blackfoot.<sup>88</sup> As a result, fur traders in central Montana trapped along large navigable rivers, like the Yellowstone and the Missouri.

Fur traders did not depend upon a single type of ecosystem. Rather, they relied on multiple biospheres to provide them with a living. Because they exploited so many differing ecosystems, their lifestyle was particularly destructive to the physical environment and to Native Americans.<sup>89</sup> Their trapping patterns depleted beaver, causing harm by eliminating the large pools of water beaver created which attracted, and helped maintain, many different Great Plains animals. Trappers' subsistence hunting created direct competition over food sources with Indians, and the mere presence of the trappers altered wildlife migratory patterns. Such interaction by Anglo Americans influenced native cultures a great deal. It hampered their ability to hunt familiar regions, and the influx of trading goods, especially the horse and the gun, caused a significant change in tribal lifestyle. In turn, this affected the ecosystem. Animals began to be over-hunted, for food and trade, while horses helped change the vegetation of the plains to a small degree and their grazing created competition with other large herbivores. Simply put, trappers tended to devastate natural resources and reorder the culture of Plains Indians across the western regions of America. The Musselshell Valley, however, does not fall neatly into this construct, since fur trappers largely worked the lands surrounding the region, not the valley itself. The Musselshell tends to be a shallow river, between twenty and thirty feet wide on average, that often runs the risk of going dry in exceptionally hot years. It had plenty of beaver, as evident from Jed Smith's 1830 passage through the region. However, other rivers in central Montana, particularly the Missouri and the Yellowstone (which surround the smaller Musselshell

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid. 163.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 215.



system), were much more attractive to serious trappers, and a lot less dangerous. Thus it was future Anglo settlers who would find a near pristine landscape in terms of vegetation and fauna.

Andrew Garcia, self-described as a “woolly Texan from Spanish America,” was probably the last trapper and trader to enter the Musselshell Valley, along with his partner, a hard-drinking trapper and buffalo hunter named Beaver Tom. The two men created a small goods emporium located about three days ride south of the Judith Gap in mid-1878, but quickly parted ways due to Beaver Tom’s alcoholism. Beaver Tom knew the country well, as did Garcia, who widely traveled the region with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry. Both recount tales of the valley being troubled by “Blackfeet [sic] and Piegans,” however, even so late in the fur trade era, a man could “profit in the Musselshell Country, and there . . . was plenty of beaver and all kinds of buffalo and wolf.”<sup>90</sup> Additionally, Garcia witnessed the hostility between the Pend’O Reille (or Kalispell), the Shoshone, and the Blackfoot over the gun trade within the Musselshell Valley. He feared for his life on a daily basis because he traded guns to a Blackfoot acquaintance. The exchange was witnessed by several Kalispells’ living near his outpost, who became immediately suspicious and demanded Garcia stop giving guns to “cutthroats and murderers.”<sup>91</sup>

The mere presence of fur outposts and trappers disrupted animal migration patterns and, in turn, disrupted Native American hunting patterns, economics, and social life.<sup>92</sup> Garcia claimed of his own profession, even thirty years after the heyday of the fur trade, that “Most trappers and hunters . . . were as destructive and wasteful as a pair of cougars and did not think anything of shooting a fine . . . (animal) just to take enough for a meal and leave the rest to spoil.”<sup>93</sup> The ecological ramifications of the fur trade, however, played only a minor role in the

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<sup>90</sup> Garcia, *Tough Trip Through Paradise*, 4.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* 123, 163,

<sup>92</sup> Schneiders, *Big Sky Rivers*, 123.

<sup>93</sup> Garcia, *Tough Trip Through Paradise*, 55.

Upper Musselshell region, quite possibly due to their limited and very brief duration. Furbearing mammals in the valley, such as the beaver and bison, almost certainly declined during the fur trade era, but local sources indicate wildlife levels remained abundant until about 1890.

By the end of the 1840s, the fur trade largely expired, and whites were just beginning to enter central Montana. The trappers largely bypassed the Upper Musselshell. In doing so, they left a legacy of minor ecological change but no wholesale degradation in the Upper Musselshell. That was left to future Anglo settlers, such as the miner and stockmen. This was assured by at least two factors: the minimal attention the fur trade paid the Upper Musselshell and the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851, which kept any serious white presence out until the late 1860s when miners encountered the region. Miners and ranchers replaced Native Americans in the Upper Musselshell Valley, creating the first succession of culture in a battle to tame the land and make it economically profitable.

The pre-settlement era of the Upper Musselshell confirms the necessity of being region specific, rather than relying upon the grand narrative applied to the local level. The ecological changes within the Musselshell are related to broader developments and trends, but are not the same. Whereas an Anglo settler in the late nineteenth century may have found a depleted ecoregion (at least in terms of game and original flora) elsewhere on the northern Great Plains, in the Musselshell they would have found game aplenty, and thus have been impressed with the richness of the region and its potential for sustaining life-forms. On the other hand, it seems that very little of the historical memory of Native Americans or that of white trappers persisted into the era of Euro-American settlement. Thus to late comers, regional history largely begins with the advent of white settlement.

### CHAPTER 3. SETTLEMENT FROM THE WEST: EARLY POLITICS AND THE MINERS

Whether from a social, economic, political, or an environmental viewpoint, the topic of mining history has always played an integral role in the history of Montana. However, much as the American Indians and Anglo trappers who interacted with the Upper Musselshell did not significantly alter the land, neither did the early mining culture have a significant and staying effect upon the region. Nevertheless, every succeeding culture in the region would notably alter the land or regional identity. Historical accounts of prospecting in Montana generally emphasize the mass ecological damage that mining and its subsidiary industries created; there is no dearth of literature focusing on the environmental concerns over mining in Montana.

The grand narrative historical record for the state is full of such accounts, particularly for the region around Butte and the northwestern part of the state. For example, the process by which copper is smelted creates terrible byproducts such as acidic sulfur fumes and toxic arsenic fumes. Many people living within early Butte “experienced bleeding from their noses and some vomited in the street.”<sup>94</sup> Additionally, the fumes destroyed most of the vegetation within Butte, and its surrounding hills. It was, in fact, so bad that by 1890, the city published a tally of monthly death rates related to fumes. Furthermore, the tailings of copper production, about eight hundred tons per day, were dumped into Silver Bow Creek; two thousand tons per day were dumped into the Clark Fork River.<sup>95</sup> Dave Stiller, in *Wounding the West*, point outs that Montana mining contaminated more than 12,000 miles of rivers and streams and nearly 180,000

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<sup>94</sup> Donald P. MacMillan, *Smoker Wars: Anaconda Copper, Montana Air Pollution, and the Courts, 1890-1920* (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 2000), 31.

<sup>95</sup> Pat Munday, *Butte Mining, 1864-2005: A Brief Cultural and Environmental History* (Butte: Technical Communications Department, 2005), 2.

acres of reservoirs and lakes.<sup>96</sup> With such focus on the environmental havoc that the Anaconda Mining Company, and other companies, created within the state, it is simple to surmise that wherever there was a mine there was mass ecological damage.

However, such vast damage did not occur within the Upper Musselshell Valley. The mining culture was small, extremely localized, and very short lived within the region. Miners directly altered the ecosystem, particularly around the region of Diamond City, with extractive practices that were destructive, like hydraulic mining. However, this was a fairly restricted effect since mining was only largely practiced in confined areas of the western portion of the valley. The larger and lasting changes came from the indirect effects of mining: towns, roads, people, and the call for mass Anglo settlement.

The new regional history, a combination of both the grassroots and grand narrative, tells a slightly different tale. Because the mining culture was so short lived, with no real effect after 1900 within the Upper Musselshell, there was no massive ecological damage or ramifications from mining activities; nor, was the culture of mining deeply ingrained within the historical memory or identity of the region. However, it had two very important outcomes. First, the mining camps created a need for further settlement and infrastructure, such as roads and towns that could support miners and their needs. Second, mining hastened the need for an agricultural force \ that paved the way for large-scale agricultural production. However, none of this would have been possible without federal interest in the whole of the west, and the resulting treaties with Indian tribes.

The federal presence and treaties with American Indians are important factors for the Upper Musselshell, both of which inadvertently facilitated white occupation of the region.

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<sup>96</sup> Dave Stiller, *Wounding the West: Montana, Mining, and the Environment* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), passim.

Treaties, which situated and divided Indian lands, also set the country on a course toward settlement by Anglos. Montana, like all portions of the American West, nearly always contained either a theoretical or physical federal presence beginning with the Land Ordinance of 1785, which laid the groundwork for the creation of territories and eventual admission of states into the Union from lands that were largely unexplored. This theoretical presence in land that was *terra incognita* goes much farther in its effects than creating future territories and states. The federal attendance to the West also affected indigenous peoples and regional locales via treaties like the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 or legislation such as the Organic Act of 1863 well before Montana attained statehood.

The Upper Musselshell Valley started the era of federal influences firmly under the control of the American Indians who lived there. Its resources attracted Anglo settlement, in the form of miners and stockmen, once the region was explored more thoroughly. The land itself, much as it had American Indian tribes, attracted whites, who unlike the Indians would affect permanent settlement and assertive forms of land use that significantly impacted space and culture. The Upper Musselshell Valley is a place settled from the west. Argonauts and settlers initially overshot the region and established homes nearly two hundred miles west of the valley. The early politics of miners from Bannack and Virginia City, and of the federal government, had a significant impact upon the Upper Musselshell well before Anglos' settled there. Once mineral wealth was discovered, political squabbles became common, effecting both whites and American Indians. The late-1800s were a time of pure contest between cultures, and the environment in which they dwelled.

Before Lewis and Clark's epic reconnaissance of western North America, *terra incognita* acquired the generic moniker of Indian Territory. After Thomas Jefferson's savvy purchase of

an unmapped portion of North America, the newly acquired land was named Louisiana Territory. After Louisiana's admission to the Union, the region that would become Montana remained part of the Missouri Territory. From 1821 to 1854, the remaining portion of the Louisiana Purchase was known as Indian Country. In line with such wording, Indian policy was the foremost federal concern in the region, and in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 was a keystone of policy, and had resounding effects within the Upper Musselshell concerning the rights of the American Indian tribes who utilized the valley.

On September 17, 1851, D. D. Mitchell, superintendent of Indian Affairs, and Indian agent Thomas Fitzpatrick met with Sioux, Crow, Cheyenne, Assiniboine, Arikara, Atsina, and Arapaho leaders to negotiate the first Fort Laramie Treaty. This agreement concerned native tribes living south of the Missouri River, north of Texas and New Mexico, and east of the Rocky Mountains. The treaty terms conferred annuities and hunting rights, while fixing tribal boundaries, in exchange for allowing white settlers' unmolested passage to Oregon and California. Accordingly, article five of the treaty concerned the Upper Musselshell Valley.

The territory of the Assinaboin Nation, commencing at the mouth of Yellowstone River; thence up the Missouri River to the mouth of the Muscle-shell River; thence from the mouth of the Muscle-shell River in a southeasterly direction until it strikes the head-waters of Big Dry Creek; thence down that creek to where it empties into the Yellowstone River, nearly opposite the mouth of Powder River, and thence down the Yellowstone River to the place of beginning.

The territory of the Blackfoot Nation, commencing at the mouth of Muscle-shell River; thence up the Missouri River to its source; thence along the main range of the Rocky Mountains, in a southerly direction, to the head-waters of the northern source of the Yellowstone River; thence down the Yellowstone River to the mouth of Twenty-five Yard Creek; thence across to the head-waters of the Muscle-shell River, and thence down the Muscle-shell River to the place of beginning.

The territory of the Crow Nation, commencing at the mouth of Powder River on the Yellowstone; thence up Powder River to its source; thence along the main range of the Black Hills and Wind River Mountains to the head-waters of the Yellowstone River;

thence down the Yellowstone River to the mouth of Twenty-five Yard Creek; thence to the head waters of the Muscle-shell River; thence down the Muscle-shell River to its mouth; thence to the head-waters of Big Dry Creek, and thence to its mouth.<sup>97</sup>

The terms of the First Fort Laramie Treaty thus entitled native tribes, specifically the Assiniboine, Blackfoot, and Crow, to hunt and dwell within the Upper Musselshell as a place free of white settlers. However, in the words of University of North Dakota scholar Barbara Handy-Marchello, “After the Indians were given the land as their own territory, it was then possible -and legal- for the government to take it away.”<sup>98</sup> Nor did the three tribes have any incentive to keep their terms of the treaty after the mid-1850s. The tribes certainly expected some Anglo traffic, but they did not anticipate the torrential river of settlers who arrived. Moreover, the promised annuities, slated to last fifty years, were reduced to a mere decade. The Gratten Massacre (an avoidable conflict over the killing of a white settler’s cow which resulted in the death of thirty white soldiers under the command of Second Lieutenant John Gratten when a soldier shot Lakota leader Conquering Bear in the back), of 1854 ended any illusions the Plains Indian had that Americans were simply passing through their lands. The Upper Musselshell quickly became one of the contested areas in the slowly emerging Plains Indian Wars.

By the end of 1854, the geographical region of the Musselshell was first located in what was dubbed first Kansas Territory and then Nebraska Territory. In 1861 Nebraska attained statehood and the Musselshell region became part of Dakota Territory. On March 4, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Organic Act that created Idaho Territory. The new territory of Idaho contained three judicial districts. Former Ohio Congressman Sidney Edgerton

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<sup>97</sup>Red Road, Inc., “Treaty of Fort Laramie with Sioux, etc.,” 17 September 1851, *Stats.*, 749. *Treaty of Fort Laramie, 1851*, available from the world wide web [http://www.canku-luta.org/PineRidge/laramie\\_treaty.html](http://www.canku-luta.org/PineRidge/laramie_treaty.html)., accessed 23 June 2006. This is a verbatim reproduction of the original treaty.

<sup>98</sup>Barbara Handy-Marchello, *Women of the Northern Plains* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005), 18.

was installed as the eastern district's judge. Edgerton felt his posting, so far from the territory's seat in Lewiston, was a personal and professional slight by the governor. At the same time, miners from Bannack and Virginia City believed that Idaho, with its location and control so far to the west, could not properly lead or protect the region, and they clamored to become a separate territory with governance east of the Rocky Mountains. The miners and Edgerton, who was personally connected to President Lincoln and to powerful congressmen from his days in office, aligned in their argument for a new territory east of the Rockies and separate from Idaho. Edgerton traveled to the capital to push legislation creating a new territory between the Dakota and Idaho territories. Upon his arrival in Washington, D.C., he found that others, particularly his friend and Ohio Congressman James M. Ashley, were already agitating for such a territory. Ashley advocated calling the proposed territory Montana. Others argued the territory should be named Jefferson or Douglas as an homage to prominent Democrats.<sup>99</sup> Following several weeks of debate, on May 26, 1864, Edgerton and the Bannack/Virginia City miners got their way when Lincoln, after congressional approval, signed another Organic Act creating Montana Territory.

Nine months later, on February 2, 1865, the initial territorial assembly of Montana met and divided the territory into nine counties. The Upper Musselshell valley originally lay in Gallatin County. Over the next two years, however, the region's county status within the territory shifted. Due to legislative confusion, the valley became part of Vivion County (which later changed to Missouri County); and by the second territorial assembly in 1866, the region became part of a new county named Muscleshell. By the third session, Muscleshell County [SIC] was renamed Vivion County for a second time. A final reorganization occurred less than a year later that made the Upper Musselshell valley part of a new county, named Meagher. However, the territorial assembly declared Meagher County's existence invalid. After another

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<sup>99</sup> Malone, Roeder and Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, 96.



year of political squabbling, the assembly nullified its invalid declaration, and Meagher County's creation date remained its original: March 26, 1866. Meagher County was named after the Irish Fenian, Civil War general and acting territorial governor Thomas Francis Meagher and the mining camp Diamond City was named the county seat.<sup>100</sup>

Mineral discoveries made 1864 a benchmark year for the Upper Musselshell Valley. Four men, Pomp Dennis, John Wells, Washington Baker and Jack Thompson discovered gold in Confederate Gulch near Helena. Placer deposits near Diamond City were worked by hand panning or sluice box until 1866 when it became clear other extraction methods were needed to acquire the precious metal. The Boulder Ditch Company formed to use hydraulic mining to extract gold from lower grade tailings. At a cost of eighty thousand dollars, the company created a four-mile long ditch in order to spray hillsides with high-pressure water.<sup>101</sup> As with all large mining discoveries, a town quickly sprang up to support the prospectors in their activities and, of course, mine the miners. In the case of the Upper Musselshell Valley, Diamond City served the purpose.

Diamond City, once known as Baker City (after Washington Baker), populated quickly, numbering about five thousand inhabitants by 1866 (although population estimates vary greatly) and contained all the accoutrements of the mining town, such as liverys, saloons, and brothels. The significant rise in population stemmed from the profitability of regional mines. From 1864 to 1870 the various mines around Diamond City yielded 24,300 ounces of gold. At roughly seventeen dollars an ounce, it was worth a little over four million dollars. Despite such early

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<sup>100</sup> Montana Territorial Legislative Assembly, *Laws, Resolutions, and Memorials*, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 1864-1865, 529; Montana Territorial House, *Journal*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 1866, 12, 14, 57; Montana Territorial Legislative Assembly, *Laws, Resolutions, and Memorials*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 1866, 6; Montana Territorial House, *Journal*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Session, 1866, 77; Montana Territorial Legislative Assembly, *Laws, Resolutions, and Memorials*, 4<sup>th</sup> Session, 1867, 99; Stearns, "History of the Upper Musselshell," 10-11.

<sup>101</sup> Meagher County Historical Society, *Meagher County: An Early-Day Pictorial History, 1867-1967* (White Sulphur Springs: Meagher County News, 1968), 4-5.

profits, Diamond City as an actual settlement lasted a scant twenty-two years. Beginning in 1866, the town's buildings were slowly moved to other settlements, like White Sulphur Springs, due to mineral wealth playing out and environmental concerns, mostly piled tailings, within the town itself.<sup>102</sup>

The second regional mining boom came in July 1866. Employees of the Rocky Mountain Quartz Company discovered copper between the Smith River Valley and the Musselshell Valley, along the north fork of the Musselshell River. This portion of the Musselshell is largely followed by willow trees and many of its banks, due to the rivers flow rate, are undercut. The find was named Copperopolis, and it was the first copper mined in the territory.<sup>103</sup> The ore of Copperopolis was of a high quality known as “cuprite” or “ruby” copper. Within the first nine months of operation, a quarter of a million dollars in mineral wealth was extracted from Copperopolis mines.<sup>104</sup> The diggings quickly progressed from placer deposits to hard rock mining. Ben Kingsbury, owner of the Newland mine, stated “the veins appear to be permanent and increase in value as they are sunk upon.”<sup>105</sup> The mines of Copperopolis encompassed twenty-one patented claims along the north fork of the Musselshell River. The Northern Pacific hard rock mine was the first copper discovered in Montana. In its first year, owners E.J. Hall and partner, packed out five tons of copper ore. The diggings main problem was that it was remote in location and thus difficult to ship from in its early years.

Copperopolis, unlike Diamond City, did not develop into a town overnight. There was only a small stage stop until 1890, after which a small community developed, but was not

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<sup>102</sup> Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass*, 10-14.

<sup>103</sup> *Rocky Mountain Husbandman*, (23 April 1896).

<sup>104</sup> Muriel Sibell Wolle, *Montana Pay Dirt: A Guide to the Mining Camps of the Treasure State* (Denver: Sage Books, 1963), 339.

<sup>105</sup> *Rocky Mountain Magazine*, ( May 1901); 758.

surveyed until 1900.<sup>106</sup> By 1901 it seemed Copperopolis' future as a thriving city was assured, and by all appearances, it certainly seemed so. "Copperopolis," predicted well-known regional rancher G.R. Wilson, "is going to be the greatest mining camp in Montana . . . (it) is already taking on city airs and it will be but a matter of a few months until it will be one of the coming cities of the state."<sup>107</sup> With such noteworthy praise of the camp, there was not much surprise it attracted the attention of mining magnate Marcus Daly, who quickly bought the Northern Pacific, the St. Johns, and the Darling Faction mines. Reportedly, Daly paid fifty thousand dollars for the Northern Pacific claim and strongly believed the three mines were worth a million dollars. However, Daly died several months after the purchase. Daly's successors planned to continue mining operations in Copperopolis, shipping large quantities regularly until copper exportation fell in the year after Daly's death, and the mine's lost profitability. Because further development would be a costly and labor-intensive affair, as would be the transportation of ore without a local railhead, they shut down.<sup>108</sup>

The last significant mining discovery within the Upper Musselshell Valley occurred in 1882. The Castle Mountains, an island mountain range, is as diverse in its make up as the entire Musselshell Valley. Named for the turret like fifty-foot high rock spires along its western slopes, its highest point, Elk Peak, tops out at near 8,600 feet, the Castle Range is studded by Lodgepole and Limber Pine.<sup>109</sup> All told, it was ideal for attracting miners. Hanson Barnes, part-time prospector and full-time postmaster of White Sulphur Springs, discovered some small deposits of lead and silver within the Castle Mountains in 1882. Two years later, he owned several claims. Around the same time, prospector Lafe Hensley was trying to locate the regional source of some

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<sup>106</sup> Unknown author, *A History of Copperopolis (Documented in the Rocky Mountain Magazine in 1901)*, Upper Musselshell Museum Archive.

<sup>107</sup> *Rocky Mountain Magazine*, (April 1901); 678.

<sup>108</sup> *Rocky Mountain Magazine*, (September 1901); 75.

<sup>109</sup> Bill Cunningham, *Wild Montana* (Helena, MT: Falcon Publishing, 1995), 237.

carbonate iron float (an indicator of precious ore deposits) he found. In 1885 Hensley discovered the outcropping he was searching for near the present-day ghost town of Castle, the same region in which Barnes had claims. The Castle claims quickly spiked, and at least fifteen major diggings produced both silver and lead.<sup>110</sup> By 1877 two hundred miners roamed Castle; between 1886 and 1890 1,500 claims were staked by individuals and organized companies like the Castle Mountain Mining & Smelting Company.<sup>111</sup> The mines included adits (horizontal entrance shafts) and more traditional hard rock shaft diggings. The Castle Land Company platted eighty acres for a town site, selling one hundred thousand dollars worth of lots in the first sixty days.<sup>112</sup>

Castle peaked in 1891, the same year it incorporated, and the population neared a thousand people. There were fourteen saloons, four newspapers, three stage lines, nine general stores, and three smelters capable of extracting both silver and lead.<sup>113</sup> Such a place was in dire need of satellite industries, such as livestock raisers and railroads, to support the quickly growing burg. On the surface, it certainly appeared Castle was on its way to being the next Butte (Figure 7). The drop in silver prices, and the ensuing Panic of 1893, all but ended Castle, with only small scale operations continuing off and on until 1919.

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<sup>110</sup> Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass*, 69.

<sup>111</sup> Cheney, *Names on the Face of Montana*, 44.

<sup>112</sup> Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass*, 69.

<sup>113</sup> Muriel Sibell Wolle, *Montana Pay Dirt: A Guide to the Mining Camps of the Treasure State* (Denver: Sage Books, 1963), 340-44.



Figure 7. Castle, ca 1890 (Montana State Historical Society Image).

Regional mines at Diamond City, Copperopolis, and Castle had an important impact within the valley. First, they heralded the dawn of small-scale Anglo settlement as miners rushed from the western portion of the territory to its interior, making it truly a place settled from the west. Such migration, and subsequent immigration and settlement, allowed Montana to enter the union in November of 1889. This displaced Native Americans from a vast and important hunting ground, creating the second succession of place and culture within the Upper Musselshell Valley. Land formerly used by the Indians was now highly invested with white Americans, who hunted, prospected and began to raise livestock in highly desirable hunting grounds (like the Upper Musselshell) all due to the influx of the mining culture. Despite such an impact, there is virtually no historical memory of mining as a lasting cultural effect, and the regional populace does not identify themselves historically as miners. As a result, besides from the occasional mention of the ghost town Castle, mining is not a part of regional identity. Although a small portion of the mining culture overlapped with the stock raising culture of the

late 1880s and 1890s, the mining culture was in serious decline with most of the miners leaving the valley by the mid-1890s.

Second, the environmental impact of mining had only a localized effect in the region. Portions of the landscape, particularly around Diamond City, because of hydraulic mining, were altered significantly. The Diamond City mines, particularly those around Confederate Gulch, were the only diggings to use hydraulic mining, a practice devastating to the environment. High-pressure water, stored at high elevations in tanks, troughs, or ditches, was funneled into hoses that used the water to blast dirt, rock, and debris away with the intention of revealing minerals. In California the process destroyed or seriously altered riparian environments by causing silt build-up, producing massive flooding, and hampering farm irrigation. In Diamond City, the diverted water quickly undermined the majority of the town's buildings, and they had to be relocated. The *Rocky Mountain Gazette* printed that "A small mountain of gravel has 'reared its diminished crest' in front of the Court House . . . [raising] that building Bldg [SIC] twenty feet and still the gravel keeps piling up."<sup>114</sup> Piled tailings were so severe that many houses in Diamond City began to be used as storage for them; one house's chimney was all that could be seen. Other dwellings were raised from the ground so that miners could dig for ore beneath them!<sup>115</sup> There is no evidence of other forms of environmental destruction within the historical record concerning mining in the Upper Musselshell Valley. The biggest impact on the ecoregion stems from the indirect effects that the miners created, such as roads and towns.

The last effect of mining stems from the roads, and later railways, that started to cross the region, and the small towns which arose along such transportation routes. This disrupted wildlife patterns as well as Indian usage and physically altered the landscape. Bison were particularly

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<sup>114</sup> *Rocky Mountain Gazette*, 6 July 1867.

<sup>115</sup> Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass*, 11; Wollé, *Montana Pay Dirt*, 340-44.

affected by Anglo settlement. Although the buffalo population was already in decline, additional over-hunting, harsh winters throughout the 1880s, and the hide trade all but caused an end to the great beasts before 1890. Bannack Indians rid the western Musselshell of bison in 1875. The last free range herd of buffalo within the eastern portion of the valley was hunted by Flathead Indians sometime between late 1881 and early 1885.<sup>116</sup> The encroachment of miners, settlers, stockmen, roads, railways, towns, and the dwindling herds of buffalo threatened the livelihood of Indian tribes utilizing the Upper Musselshell Valley.

Sioux leader Red Cloud, feeling seriously wronged by the breach of the 1851 treaty (particularly at the creation of Forts Reno, Phil Kearny, and C. F. Smith and the Bozeman Trail) led the Sioux to war in northern Wyoming and southern Montana. After the Fetterman Fight (1866) and the Wagon Box Fight (1867), whites in the central portion of the state entered a near panicked state over Indians. The *Helena Weekly Herald* in 1867 reported “A war party of the Blackfeet and Piegans visited the Muscleshell mining district three days since, and run off . . . every hoof of horseflesh in the valley . . . miners were present in the vicinity, but resistance was useless.”<sup>117</sup> Such assaults, and the death of John Bozeman (creator of the Bozeman Trail) at the supposed hands of the Blackfoot, caused acting governor Thomas Meagher to mobilize the Montana Volunteer Forces and build forts within central Montana for protection against the Piegans, Bloods, and Siksika’s. The Montana Volunteer Force fought few Indians, and the only result of the war was the massive debt that the volunteers and the state incurred. Additionally, their foray instilled a deep and lasting fear, sometimes extremely unfounded but at other times appropriate, of American Indians in settler’s minds that was felt for well over a decade.

Migrating Sioux again became a large concern to the white population by 1875 as they halted

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<sup>116</sup> Hill, *Winnecook Ranch on the Musselshell*, 124.

<sup>117</sup> *Helena Weekly Herald*, 14 May 1867.

travel along the Carroll Trail. Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce traveled through the eastern portions of the valley in 1877, causing further panicked cries for government aid within the whole of central Montana and the Upper Musselshell Valley, enhancing the need for both military forts and more distinct, and protectable, roadways.

The Muscle Shell Road [SIC], heralded Virginia City's *Montana Post* newspaper in 1865, would eliminate prior "tardy and expensive" routes to Fort Benton.<sup>118</sup> Within that year, Army Captain R. W. Andrews and a small party set out to survey a viable road from Virginia City to the mouth of the Musselshell. Upon his return, the territorial legislature hired the Missouri River and Rocky Mountain Wagon Road, and Telephone Company to complete the route, doing so by May of 1866, claiming such roads would "do more to establish . . . permanent prosperity than anything that could be devised, short of railroad communication with the East."<sup>119</sup> In 1867 acting Governor Meagher ordered Colonel Neil Howie "down the Muscleshell one hundred miles," from Helena with the intent of creating a military installation to protect regional miners and act as a military supply route.<sup>120</sup> Construction began that August; within three months of its completion, however, the post, named Fort Howie, nine miles east of Copperopolis, was abandoned due to the financial fallout of Governor Meagher's ill-run Indian campaign fought by Montana Volunteer forces.

Despite the brief existence of Fort Howie, such roads and forts were a stimulus to further settle the region. They caused a significant boom in population, the founding of towns in the Upper Musselshell Valley, and ultimately led to much needed railways. Eight years after the completion of the Muscleshell Road, in 1874, Colonel Charles A. Broadwater's Diamond R

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<sup>118</sup> Virginia City *Montana Post*, 11 November 1865.

<sup>119</sup> Virginia City *Montana Post*, 16 December 1865; Stearns, "History of the Upper Musselshell," 13-15.

<sup>120</sup> Stearns, "History of the Upper Musselshell," 18-19. Lee Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass: A History of Meagher County* (Martinsdale: Bozeman Fork Publishing, 1994), 15.



Transportation Company surveyed the Carroll Trail (Figures 8 and 9) under military protection. It replaced the Muscleshell Road as an easier, faster, and more profitable route, and Camp Baker, located between Diamond City and Brewer's Springs (modern White Sulphur Springs) replaced defunct Fort Howie as a bastion of protection within the region.



Figure 8. The Carroll Trail Today-North of Two Dot.



Figure 9. The Carroll Trail Today-North East of Two Dot.

Regional residents, still wound up over Meagher's Indian war, clamored for governmental protection. At the behest of territorial delegate Martin Maginnis, soldiers from Fort Shaw were dispatched to create another fort. Originally named Camp Baker (after Major Eugene M. Baker, the officer in charge of its construction), the fort was located along the Smith River to protect regional inhabitants, especially the miners of Copperopolis and Diamond City. The 13<sup>th</sup> Infantry completed its construction in 1869. In 1871 the fort relocated about eighteen miles from White Sulphur Springs and was renamed Fort Logan in honor of Captain William Logan, who lost his life at the Battle of the Big Hole.<sup>121</sup> It, like Fort Howie, was short-lived and abandoned in 1880.

The Carroll Trail, stretching from Helena to the Judith Basin, served as a good freight and wagon road to the steamboat landing at Carroll, Montana. It crossed nearly every type of

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<sup>121</sup> Roberta Carkeek Cheney, *Names on the Face of Montana*, 98.

terrain along its route. From the mountainous foothills, scored with pine trees, of the Little Belt Mountains near Copperopolis, to the foliage festooned Smith River and north fork of the Musselshell, to the rolling prairie north of Two Dot, Hilger, and Roy, the Carroll Trail certainly could be termed, then and now, a scenic route. Like the Muscle Shell Road, the Carroll Trail was a cheaper course than earlier routes to Fort Benton and also extended the shipping season. Because it bypassed Fort Benton, it was a highly contested endeavor.<sup>122</sup> The road received regular military protection as troops shuttled supplies and mail between Camp Baker and Fort Shaw. The creation of both the Muscleshell Road [SIC] and the Carroll Trail was a response to the regional mining boom, then the ranching influx, which occurred in the late 1860s and 1870s and prompted further settlement.

The grand narrative of Montana mining reports wanton destruction of the environment, massive ecological change, and adverse physiological effects upon human populations. Such rapacious destruction had a long lasting effect upon the historical identity of many Montanans. However, in the case of the Upper Musselshell Valley, there is little remnant of mining as an identity construct. Asides from the ghost town of Castle, most regional residents can not even point out mining's physical effects upon the land outside of the Diamond City region (on the very far western fringe of the region), and it is not a historical identity or memory embraced by modern valley dwellers. Additionally, the mining boom in the Upper Musselshell Valley did not last long. Companies went broke, magnates like Marcus Daly died, and mineral wealth played out. Diamond City all but disappeared by 1883, and Copperopolis closed its mines in 1903. Every major mining operation shut down by 1905. The diggings at Castle, because of the Panic of 1893, almost came to a complete end, although the town itself survived with a handful of

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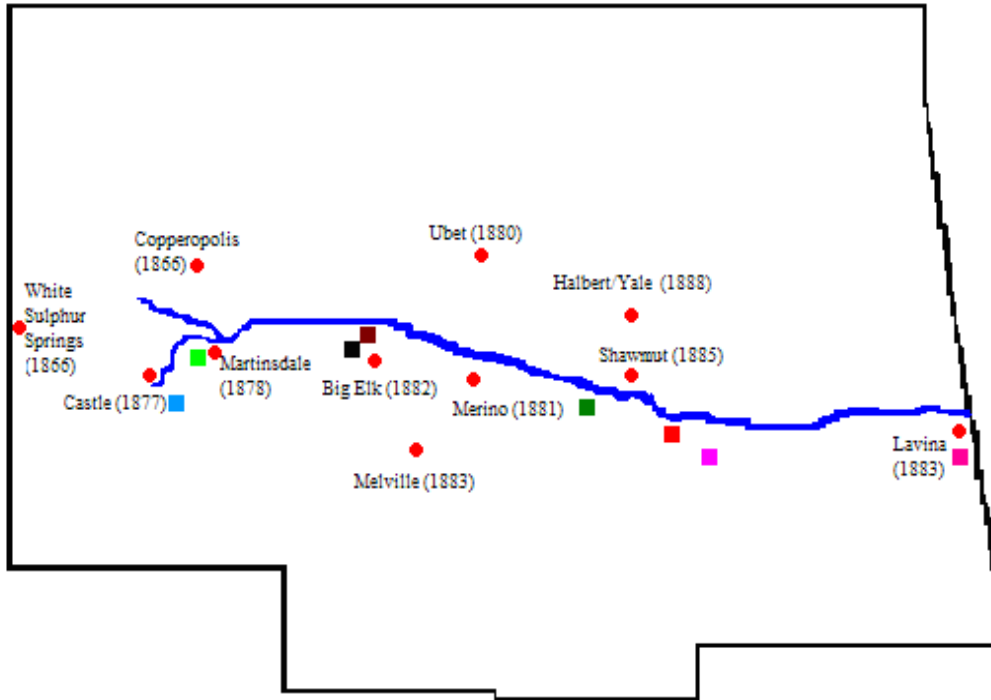
<sup>122</sup> Edmund O. Pound, "The Carroll Trail," in Harlowton Woman's Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 293-294; Steve F. Russell, *The Carroll Trail 1875*, available from the world wide web <http://www.historic-trails.com/H-trails/Carroll-1875/Carroll-Intro.pdf#search=%22Carroll%20Trail%22>, accessed 18 September 2006.

inhabitants. By 1936 just two people lived within what was once the lively mining town of Castle (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Castle, ca 1910 (Montana State Historical Society Image).

The biggest impact mining had within the region stemmed not from mining practices altering the physical landscape, but with the service industries the miners called into existence, starting with roads that also led to the creation of towns. Two such roads, the Muscle Shell Road and the Carroll Trail, provided such advantage within the Upper Musselshell Valley. As a result, by the turn of the century, the Upper Musselshell region was dotted with towns and ranches (Figure 11).



Upper Musselshell Valley Ranches Prior to 1900

- |                                     |                          |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Moore Brothers (1874) ■             | Sims-Garfield (1871)* ■  |
| George R. "Two Dot" Wilson (1877) ■ | 71 Ranch (1871) ■        |
| Winnecook Ranch (1880) ■            | 79 Ranch (1879) ■        |
| Grande/Voldseth (1871) ■            | Charles M. Bair (1884) ■ |
- \*Water rights actually dating to 1862.

Figure 11. Towns and Ranches within the Upper Musselshell Valley Prior to 1900.

The mining culture, aside from playing an active role in the initial settlement of the Upper Musselshell, had an almost negligible role in altering the valley. The ghost town of Castle, now no more than a small collection of buildings, is all that remains of the region's second culture. Unlike in the neighboring Lower Musselshell Valley, with its significant coal beds, mining played no developmental role past 1900, and little of it as a collective social memory remains, making mining a moot point within the valley and further illustrates that the Upper Musselshell region does not fit easily within the mold of Montana's grand narrative. However, the miner and

his indirect ecological effects paved the way for the open range cattle rancher and the sheep raiser, who became the region's driving force during the next era.

## CHAPTER 4. SETTLEMENT FROM THE WEST: THE STOCKMEN

The open-range stock producer replaced the miner as the dominant culture within the Upper Musselshell by the late 1890s. Many cattle ranchers, like William Gordon, were former miners who decided scrabbling among the creek beds and sunken shafts of that profession was not to their taste. Some migrated farther east to terrain that was, because of weather patterns, a bit more hospitable for cattle. Others, such as G. R. Wilson, the Moore brothers, or John T. Murphy, had mercantile ventures or other support jobs which led them into cattle or sheep ranching. In all cases, the environment played a key role in shaping the valley's next dominant culture. Mild weather patterns attracted open range stockmen to the Upper Musselshell, and their initial settlement of the region attracted more settlers, towns, and railroads. Additionally, the fact that miners and their demands had created roads and towns made the region ideal, and more than ready, for settlement.

Indeed, the story of settlement within the Upper Musselshell Valley distinctly differs from that of traditional Montana history. First, the region was initially almost completely bypassed when it came to Anglo settlement. Americans were far more interested in the mineral deposits of the valleys fringe areas. As such, settlers overshot the valley, and only returned later when stock production became the regions primary concern. It was, as one modern regional dweller, stated "truly a place settled from the West."<sup>123</sup> Second, settlement from the west caused the stock of the region to initially be sheep, then, contrary to most cattle industry historians' beliefs, by producers running European style short horn cattle and not longhorns. Sheep, largely forgotten in the annals of academic scholars, are greatly remembered by local dwellers, and the majority of early settlers were sheepmen before they became cattle producers. Such stances

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<sup>123</sup> Richard Stoltz, area resident and Milwaukee Road Engineer Harlowton, 1949-present, interview by author, 28 July 2003, notes in author's possession.

clearly illustrate the divergence of main stream historical thought and the grassroots perception of the regions story. However, where there is divergence from the grand narrative by regional dwellers, there is also some convergence. This is especially true when it comes to the belief that the prodigious cattle losses in the winters of the late 1880s and 1890s were due to overgrazing, a notion that modern scholars have begun to overturn, but the grassroots narrative and traditional historical interpretation stand hand-in-hand.

Taken together, the grand narrative and the grassroots interpretation of regional history reveals a much more telling and sensible record of the Upper Musselshell's past. The New Regional History takes into account that the region was settled from the west, creating some differences in its settlement and agricultural economics. Although many people owned cattle early in the valley's settlement, the largest numbers of stock initially were in sheep. Because the agricultural history of the west is largely dominated by the cattle culture and its distinct narratives, the importance of sheep is often neglected. And, such a mindset inaccurately overpowers historical interpretations, such as a blanket explanation for the Great Die-Up or violent contests, like the Johnson County War, that are misleading or not applicable to the Upper Musselshell. In either case, the New Regional History as applied to the Upper Musselshell shows that overgrazing was not the cause of mass cattle deaths during the winters of 1886-1887 and 1893-1894 or that, since the Upper Musselshell was largely bereft of cattle barons, contests over grazing rights culminating in violence did not happen within the valley. Lastly, the corrective measures of the New Regional History show that weather patterns played a key role in settlement from the West.

The winter of 1871-72 reached sub-zero temperatures, and three feet of snow covered any fodder cattle might find in the Smith River Valley. Miner William Gordon, who had purchased a



herd of cattle in 1869 with gold from his Diamond City claim, was faced with the serious problem of feeding his investment. Gordon happened upon a westbound traveler who informed him the nearby Upper Musselshell Valley had several wind-blown pieces of ground with exposed grass. At the turn of the year, Gordon combined his herd with those of two others, William Smith and William Swett. The three men determined to drive their cattle from the Smith River Valley to the Upper Musselshell for winter forage. They recruited several men to help them move six hundred head of cattle east. After two weeks of hard traveling, they reached their destination and found the relentless winds of the Musselshell had blown huge swaths of grass free of snow. Chinook winds, created when strong down-slope mountainous winds cause air to warm rapidly (often the case east of the Rocky Mountains), not only blew away the snow covering fodder, but also exposed it due to melting.

The small group left their cattle in the Musselshell Valley and returned to the neighboring Smith River Valley. Although the Smith River Valley and the Upper Musselshell are somewhat similar in ecological make-up, the Smith is more mountainous, while the Musselshell's persistent winds uncovered forage for animals. The Upper Musselshell, then relatively unpopulated by people or livestock, was an extremely attractive place for someone willing to specialize in livestock ventures. The men returned the following spring to round up and brand their herds, and found that cattle in the Upper Musselshell had survived much better than those in the Smith River Valley. This prompted Gordon to give up mining and remain in the Upper Musselshell as a full-time open-range cattle rancher. He quickly set up a headquarters, and several other men followed his example in the coming years.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Stearns, "History of the Upper Musselshell," 28; Emma Freeser, "The Musselshell Roundup," in Harlowton Woman's Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 332.

At the same time Gordon was taking his cattle to winter in the Musselshell Valley, others were doing so as well. John Smith, from California, traveled to Montana in 1866 to mine at Last Chance Gulch. Once there, he prospected, hunted for other miners, and farmed. After helping build a cabin (the first along the western portion of the Musselshell River) near present-day Martinsdale, he decided to stay and erect his own cabin four miles west of the small town in 1872. He and his brother, William, traveled to Idaho that year and purchased one hundred head of cattle for their small ranch. Several years later, in concert with a man named Henry McDonald, the Smith brothers returned to Idaho and purchased nine hundred head of sheep. By 1890 the Smith brothers were becoming extremely successful men, partly by forming their ranch into the Smith Brothers Corporation. They capitalized with 250,000 shares of stock, with each share being valued at a dollar. By 1899 their corporate assessment stated the Smith Brothers Corporation consisted of just over 29,000 acres of deeded and contract lands.<sup>125</sup>

The last significant ranch founded prior to 1900 in the western portion of the Upper Musselshell was under the control of the Grande brothers. Norwegian Martin Grande arrived in America in 1866 and immigrated to Montana around 1869, where he worked as a woodcutter and hunter for Fort Logan. As his hunting took him into the Musselshell Valley, after the winter of 1871-72 Martin decided to try his hand at ranching and entered into partnership with the Smith Brothers. Together they traveled to Idaho and purchased two thousand ewes. By 1878 the partnership dissolved, and Martin received a third of the sheep. He located his own headquarters along the south fork of the Musselshell on Comb Butte. The south fork of the Musselshell, with its gravel bars and resulting clear water runs, and banked by brush, is near perfect pasturage for

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<sup>125</sup> Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass*, 312-313.

sheep. Martin then sent for his brother, Anton, who had been mining in the Black Hills.

Together, Martin and Anton entered into a formal partnership called the Grande Brothers.<sup>126</sup>

The Sims-Garfield Ranch was the first ranch in the eastern portion of the valley, possibly being the oldest ranch in the Upper Musselshell Valley. In 1862 John T. Sally filed water and mineral rights in St. Louis for a location two miles east of modern-day Ryegate. By 1882 Sally gave up mining the location and turned to farming and a modest herd of cattle. His long time residency and lone building gave him preemption rights, and he bought the land for two hundred dollars. A year later, fed up with how “overcrowded” the valley was becoming, Sally sold his acreage for a little over twelve hundred dollars and moved to Alaska for more solitude. The land was eventually sold by speculators to Joseph Sims for \$2,166 dollars. Sims and his wife later sold the ranch to the Enterprise Land and Improvement Company, which then sold it to the Chicago, Milwaukee, & St. Paul (Milwaukee Road) and a North Dakota land syndicate known as Wheelock and Wheelock. The railroad and land syndicate broke the land into smaller plots and sold it to homesteaders. German immigrant Victor Schaff bought some of the land in 1910, and other parts of the Sims place went to the Garfield family.<sup>127</sup>

Ranching in the central portion of the Upper Musselshell Valley began in 1872 with the Moore Brothers. John and Perry Moore immigrated to Montana, like many early Treasure state settlers, because of the Civil War. Before the conflict, the Moore family lived in Missouri. Although Missouri remained in the Union, John and Perry joined the Confederate cavalry in North Carolina.<sup>128</sup> Returning to Missouri after the south’s surrender, the brothers found their

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 325.

<sup>127</sup> “Sims-Garfield Ranch is Entered on National Register of Historic Places,” Harlowton *The Times Clarion*, 9 October 1980; National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, United States Department of the Interior-Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, “Sims-Garfield Ranch,” Montana Register of Historic Places, 1979.

<sup>128</sup> Sources attribute the Moore brothers Civil War time as having served with Morgan’s Raiders, Joe Wheeler’s cavalry, or Porter’s cavalry depending upon the narrator. In any event, they served with the cavalry. Eleanor

mother and youngest sibling had left, bound for Montana. They decided to follow and look for their family.

In 1866 John and Perry located their family in Diamond City, and the three brothers operated a sawmill along the Smith River to support the mining industry. Within four years, they developed an interest in cattle and purchased around four hundred head to run in the Smith River Valley. Because of poor winter conditions in 1872, John moved their cattle to the milder, at least in the sense that winds had freed up fodder, Upper Musselshell Valley. At the same time, Perry and Sanford traveled to California with the intention of purchasing sheep. Because of the Franco-Prussian War, wool prices increased, and they sold the sheep before they left California, and instead purchased a herd of horses. The brothers re-united in the Upper Musselshell Valley and split the livestock evenly among themselves. They decided to locate their headquarters along Little Elk Creek south of present-day Two Dot in 1874.<sup>129</sup>

The next prosperous rancher near the Moore Brothers was George R. “Two Dot” Wilson. The son of English immigrants and a New Yorker by birth, Wilson traveled to Virginia City in 1864 and became a successful miner in Alder Gulch. By 1869 he decided to purchase cattle in Salt Lake City to run in Montana. He acquired the nickname “Two Dot” because he branded his cattle with a wagon kingbolt. The bolt left a horizontal brand, consisting of two individual dots, on both of the cow’s hips. Wilson originally settled in the Boulder Valley, but heard the Musselshell Valley provided better pasturage for cattle. As a result, he moved there in 1877 and founded the Two Dot Ranch. Wilson, a frugal man whose business ventures included banking, was so prudent he often paid expensive fare for his wife to travel by stage, but would find a

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McDonald Holliday Moore, “The Moore Family History,” 1968, #2007.45, Montana State historical Society Archives- Moore Family Papers.

<sup>129</sup> Steve Moore, area rancher and businessman, Two Dot, interview by author, 4 August 2003, notes in author’s possession.

cheaper mode of transportation, such as a saddle horse, for himself. A recollection states Wilson was once arrested in Chicago for vagrancy because he looked like a derelict. He was released only when a banker friend vouched that he was not a vagrant.<sup>130</sup>

The late 1870s saw the formation of John T. Murphy's Seventy-Nine Ranch between Shawmut and Lavina in Big Coulee, and other locations throughout the state. Murphy, a Missourian, came to Montana at the age of twenty-one with a wagon load of goods and settled in Virginia City as a merchant. Because of the booming mining economy, he quickly became a wealthy man with business interests that included mining, banking, land speculation, and cattle. By 1879 Murphy, in conjunction with an associate, founded the Seventy-Nine Ranch with a small herd of cattle purchased in Oregon. Because of Murphy's keen business acumen, his ranching interests skyrocketed. By the 1890s, the Seventy-Nine encompassed 800,000 acres around the state (mostly purchased from the Northern Pacific Railroad, with other lands rented from the rail line and the state, and some purchased homesteads) and grazed thousands of cattle on open range.<sup>131</sup>

Another regional ranch that formed because of the Civil War and chain migration was Sam and Ralph Berry's Winnecook spread. A young Quaker from Unity, Maine, named Charles Cook left the East for the West because of his opposition to the war. After living in Confederate Gulch, Cook settled down to a life of ranching. Through correspondence with friends in Maine, he attracted the Berry family to central Montana. Sam and Ralph Berry moved their families to land near White Sulphur Springs, where they heard rumors the Musselshell Valley was open for further settlement. Both believed the Upper Musselshell Valley "a magnificent country, a

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<sup>130</sup> *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 280.

<sup>131</sup> Albie Gordon, "Seventy-Nine Ranch," in Albie Gordon, Margaret Lehfeltd, and Mary Morsanny, Comp., *Dawn in Golden Valley* (Harlowton: Upper Musselshell Museum Archives, 1971), 5-7.

superior climate, a paradise of man and beast . . . the place of fortune.”<sup>132</sup> In 1880 the Berrys’ drove six thousand sheep out of Utah and into the Musselshell Valley to form the Berry Brothers Ranch. By 1884, Ralph Berry was successful enough to boast, “I have nearly 25,000 sheep and still buying. I am the largest sheepman in Montana that is single owner.”<sup>133</sup> The following year a post office was established on the ranch, which started to use the name Winnecook. The name reflected the eastern influences of the family, as the word “Winnecook” was Penobscot Indian for “pleasant water.”<sup>134</sup>

In 1884 Charles M. Bair staked a claim for 320 acres of land near Lavina. This region of the Upper Musselshell, and other portions located north of the river, is dotted with sagebrush and the plant greasewood, a deciduous shrub. As the presence of greasewood denotes, much of the region, spreading north from the river to the foot of the Snowy Mountains, is generally exposed to sunlight and studded with intermittent, shallow arroyos as it elevates towards the mountains. South and southwest of the Musselshell River in this part of the valley, the terrain is benchland. The Big Snowy Mountains, reaching 8,681 feet at Greathouse Peak, considered one of Montana’s island range mountains make up the northern border of the valley. Its southern slopes are covered in subalpine and douglas fir, and ponderosa pine. Portions of the Big Snowy’s that bound the Upper Musselshell are home to various species of deer, bear, occasional elk bands, and at lower elevations, antelope.<sup>135</sup> In either case, both topographic regions are highly conducive to grazing by sheep ranchers like Bair. Unlike many of his ranching counterparts, Bair was not associated with early Montana mining, but with the railroad. Bair came from an Ohio farm family, but decided to take his chances at prosperity elsewhere. When he left the family

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<sup>132</sup> Hill, *Winnecook Ranch on the Musselshell*, v.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> Stillman Berry, “History of the Winnecook Ranch.,” in Harlowton Women’s Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 310.

<sup>135</sup> Cunningham, *Wild Montana*, 268-69.

farm, the only capital he had was seven green apples and fourteen cents.<sup>136</sup> Bair found employment with the Central Michigan Railroad, first as a brakeman and then as a conductor. By 1883 he decided to head west and found new employment with the Northern Pacific (NP) as a conductor living in Helena. He slowly moved into other areas of business while still working for the NP. A year later, Bair staked his Lavina claim to raise sheep, and bought 160 more acres. In 1890 he purchased an additional 5,540 acres, but did not quit his job railroading until 1891, making the decision to devote himself fully to the life of a stockman. In 1893 he sold his Lavina ranch in order to pursue the sheep rancher's life from Billings, while leasing large acreage on the Crow Reservation to run sheep, and developed oil interests in Alaska. Despite his short initial run near Lavina, Bair later returned to the Upper Musselshell Valley as an even more prominent rancher and businessman near Martinsdale.<sup>137</sup> However, men were not the only gender to be attracted to the early cattle culture of the Upper Musselshell.

According to Rachel Herbert, author of "Adapting to the Frontier Environment" woman's involvement within "the earliest stages of the cattle industry demonstrates that women participated in the same business endeavors and faced the same challenges as their male counterparts . . . many women knowingly accepted these insecurities and invested their money and lives in the west."<sup>138</sup> Many such women lived within the confines of the Upper Musselshell Valley, and played a role in Montana cattle culture. Examining a small sample of the homestead entries for central Montana listed by the Bureau of Land Management General Land Office, for the modern counties of Wheatland and Golden Valley, reveals the number of females filing land

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<sup>136</sup> Lee Rostad, *Fourteen Cents & Seven Green Apples: The Life and Times of Charlie Bair* (The Author, 2000), 2.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.* 13-14.

<sup>138</sup> Rachel Herbert, Unpublished Manuscript presented at the 2005 Western Social Science Association Annual Meeting, Calgary, Canada.

claims.<sup>139</sup> The records appraised show there were 1,166 claims filed. Of these claims, two-hundred and twenty seven entries belonged to women. Accordingly, it can safely be stated twenty percent of all homestead claims, within the Upper Musselshell, were filed by females who also received patents for their claims.<sup>140</sup> This exceeds the total state average of female homesteaders set forth by Sarah Carter in *Montana Women Homesteaders* by three percent as, overall, from 1900 to 1921, close to two hundred thousand land patents were issued with women making up seventeen percent of those receiving patents.<sup>141</sup> As one Upper Musselshell pioneer, “Yellowstone Chip” Samuells, once wrote of these women, “Those who proved up on claims alone really separated the women from the girls. They had to be fearless, fighters and ones who could face a Montana blizzard the same as the sturdy men.”<sup>142</sup>

Coupling the BLM land patents with brands recorded within the region, between 1873 and 1910, creates a telling tale about women and the early cattle industry of Montana. Between these years, the Upper Musselshell Valley saw 906 brands recorded; 803 for men, while 103, or about twelve percent, belonged to women.<sup>143</sup> These women represent a wide array of demographics, with ages ranging between six and sixty-seven. Collectively, their average age was thirty-six in 1900. Of the 103 women reporting brands, seventy-three were located in census records revealing that seventy-three percent were married, twelve percent were single, ten

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<sup>139</sup> Due to the large number of records, and the current limitations of the BLM searchable database a sample group of all records, alphabetically from A through D, was generated and used for this study. Additionally, the search was limited to modern day Wheatland and Golden Valley Counties as they principally make up the vast majority of the Upper Musselshell Valley in Central Montana.

<sup>140</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management-General Land Office Automated Records Land Patent Search, Available from the World Wide Web: <http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov/PatentSearch/>.

<sup>141</sup> Sarah Carter, ed., *Montana Women Homesteaders* (Helena: Farcountry Press, 2009), 24.

<sup>142</sup> “The Challenge of Open Spaces,” by Yellowstone Chip Samuells, in *Yesteryears and Pioneers* (Compiled by the Harlowton Woman’s club, Western Printing and Lithography, 1972), 295.

<sup>143</sup> Montana Brands-Enforcement Division Records, 1873-1910, Parts 01-09. Montana Memory Project: Montana’s Digital Library and Archives. Available from the World Wide Web at: <http://cdm15018.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm4/document.php?cisooroot=/p103401coll10&cisoptr=47819&rec=10>. Montana State Historical Society Archives, Helena, Montana. Cite Accessed 1 October 2011.



percent were widowed, and the remainder divorced.<sup>144</sup> Additionally, forty percent filed their own homestead claims, and received patents on them.<sup>145</sup>

Taken together, the seventy-three located in census data characterize a wide array of ethnicity. Twenty-one women were immigrants, mainly representing Germany, England, Ireland, and various Scandinavian origins. Twelve were the direct descendants of European immigrants. The remaining forty women, and their parents, were all Americans by birth. This leads to the conclusion that some immigrants, particularly those of Germanic or Irish descent, were more likely to be involved in working cattle as eighteen percent of women reporting such backgrounds had their own stock. Less likely to be involved were those of English descent as .01 percent claimed brands, as did those of Scandinavian lineage. Those Scottish in origin claimed .05 percent of brands. Only one woman claimed French ancestry.

The census also reveals the wide number of professions represented by women reporting brands. Most never listed an occupation, but their spouse (or the head of the household in which they lived) reported being a farmer, stockgrower, rancher, or some variation of agricultural producer. Twenty of the women claimed urban professions, like schoolteacher or servant, or the male head of their household did. Eight, generally the widowed, reported their own profession as farmer, rancher, or stockproducer. Although both urban and rural women registered brands, the vast majority were rural inhabitants. The distinction is important: those who were city dwellers most likely owned a cow or two for their own dietary consumption or dairy production, while those who lived in the countryside most surely owned herds of cattle aimed toward profit via

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<sup>144</sup> Manuscript Census returns for various towns in the Upper Musselshell Valley Montana, 1880-1910, U.S. Bureau of the Census, accessed via Ancestry Library, ancestry.com.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid; U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management-General Land Office Automated Records Land Patent Search, Available from the World Wide Web: <http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov/PatentSearch/>.

beef sales and their own familial use. For those women who had their own homesteads, this is almost certainly the case. Additionally, this also implies that forty-nine percent of women located using BLM, census, and brand records were intimately involved in all aspects of the cattle industry, including those jobs held by cowboys. Returning to Chip Samuells sparse writings of such ladies: “Many could ride a horse or hitch up a team of broncs as good as any cowboy.”<sup>146</sup>

Regional writings offer scant examination of these nearly unknown women. Locally authored county histories, like the Wheatland County compilation *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, or Meagher County history *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass*, chronicle the lives of only eleven of the seventy-three women located within census records. Most, like Mary Holliday or Glendora Clark, are mentioned solely in passing in short family history vignettes, which generally focused on their husbands. Only one woman, Annie Ahern Carr, had her ranching experiences recounted in depth. After her first husband’s death, she married a man named Carr, but they only lived together for a short time. She filed a homestead claim in 1904 and used old coke ovens, previously erected on the property, as barns. There were four of them that, once converted to sheds, contained four double stalls and a haymow. After filing her claim, she purchased a section of land from the railroad, which adjoined her claim, comprised primarily of a large timothy meadow. The land cost her two dollars and fifty cents an acre. She then had her two sons, John and Tom, file adjacent land claims. This brought her families land holdings up to just over fifteen hundred acres.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> “The Challenge of Open Spaces,” by Yellowstone Chip Samuells, in *Yesteryears and Pioneers* (Compiled by the Harlowton Woman’s club, Western Printing and Lithography, 1972), 295.

<sup>147</sup> Lee Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass: A History of Meagher County* (Martinsdale, MT: Bozeman Fork Publishing, 1994), 196.

The early stock producers of the Upper Musselshell had a much more complex and ecologically influential relationship with the ecology of the region than did their predecessors the miners. Their vast herds of cattle, sheep, and horses replaced, and displaced, much of the early native wildlife as the open range quickly filled with people and domestic stock. By 1882, a decade after the first ranchers came to the Upper Musselshell; the Territory of Montana contained 287,000 head of cattle, 67,800 horses, and 362,700 sheep. A year after attaining statehood Montana counted 975,000 cattle, 347,000 horses, and over six million head of sheep, becoming the sixth largest sheep producer in the United States.<sup>148</sup> By 1897, according to the State Board of Equalization, the Upper Musselshell Valley provided habitation for 21,544 cattle and 323,675 head of sheep.<sup>149</sup>

Such extensive pastoralism had a great affect on the ecology and life-ways of the valley, particularly concerning the bison and the American Indians who used the Upper Musselshell. By 1890 large roaming herds of buffalo neared extinction as over-hunting by Indians, early white sporting men, and finally, white hide hunters nearly ended the large ungulate's existence. Some local dwellers, like Edmund O. Pound, incorrectly assert that the bison "had to be shot to remove them from and clear the range for more profitable use, or to manage the Indians by starving them . . ." <sup>150</sup> With such vast amounts of animals, domestic and wild, within the confines of Meagher County many people, then and now, speculate the region was probably overgrazed.

Overgrazing, many old-timers and past academics claim, contributed greatly to stock loss during the winters of 1886-87 and 1893-94. Too many cattle and sheep scythed off the abundance of buffalo grass, blue gramma, and wheatgrass. For example, in 1886-87, the Winnecook reported a loss of eighty percent of its cattle herd and 1,400 sheep, but the massive

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<sup>148</sup> Malone, Roeder, and Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, 157.

<sup>149</sup> State Board of Equalization of the State of Montana, *8<sup>th</sup> Annual Report, 1897*.

<sup>150</sup> Pound *The Little Red Books*, 86.

setback did not last long. By 1894, the Berrys' had increased their sheep flock to 25,000 head. However, regional stockman experienced a livestock loss of twenty-five percent that winter.<sup>151</sup>

The harsh winter caused most of the damage; overgrazing probably did not play a significant part in the Great Die-up. Simply put, harsh winters kill animals. Accordingly, some sources, such as Pound's recollections unknowingly support this position, as he recalled about the winter of 1894 that:

. . . after an unusually dry summer with sparse and brittle grass and short water, it caught all classes of stock in poor conditions. Animals in many localities had to be moved off summer range early . . . For three solid weeks it never got any warmer than twenty below and back down to fifty . . . The fittest animals survive, and the industry today ponders other and better methods of reducing another surplus.<sup>152</sup>

Other sources, such as Great Falls newspaper man Joseph Kinsey Howard's book *Montana: High, Wide, and Handsome*, also unknowingly sustain that overgrazing had little to do with such harsh losses. Howard attributes not only the winter conditions of 1886-87 to the Great Die-up, but also fencing. "Cattle which prior to that winter," wrote Howard, "had drifted with the storms and had sometimes reached range blown free of snow, piled up against the new fences and starved or froze to death." Overall, the prospect that the Upper Musselshell, consisting of over 2.1 million acres, was overgrazed in the late 1880s or 1890s is not a reasonable argument, as there were less than ten cattle per square mile within the region at that time.<sup>153</sup>

The Great Plains, before the mid-1860s, supported roughly 28 million bison. Cattle population on the Great Plains did not reach such levels until 1992. Anglo settlement changed the ecology of the plains by replacing those bison with 2.4 million head of cattle by late 1880. In

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<sup>151</sup> Hill, *Winnecook Ranch on the Musselshell*, 23.

<sup>152</sup> *Bercail Pioneer Stories* (Harlowton: Upper Musselshell Historical Society, 1986).

<sup>153</sup> Joseph Kinsey Howard, *Montana: High, Wide, and Handsome* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1943), 109; Geoff Cunfer, *On the Great Plains: Agriculture and Environment* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005), 55.

theory, according to environmental historian Geoff Cunfer, the entire Great Plains could feed 17 million head of cattle. Cattle assumed the ecological niche left by the bison, and there were fewer bovines, so the construct that the region was overgrazed is a fairly untenable argument.<sup>154</sup>

Pounds' recollection of the bison being purposely exterminated, or the widespread general belief the region was overgrazed, are prime examples of how collective memory has been inaccurately imposed within the grand narrative. There is no evidence which suggests the region was overgrazed (or the bison being specifically targeted for extermination for that matter) to the extent that most stock producers lost upwards of twenty-five percent of their herds. Most likely the Great Die-up was a result of the misuse of livestock, not the misuse of environment.

However, both local sources and academic theories traditionally, and wrongly, make the claim for overgrazing and there is some appeal, though no verification, for such a argument.

Primarily, the blame for such massive winter death could be attributed to Mother Nature and lack of husbandry, not lack of fodder. Likewise, the assumption that there was simply not enough food for stock was used to pacify large cattle barons toward such massive loss of capital as, if the range was not supplying enough food, then the actual stock raisers and cowboys could not be faulted for poor management of stock.

As Cunfer argues, perhaps the most important ecological factor on the Great Plains was the large herbivore—particularly bison and cattle—and he argues that non-existent forage was not the problem. Thirteen thousand years ago *Bison bison* (the modern buffalo) and the now extinct *Bison latifus* arrived on the plains, and within a thousand years the Great Plains fed millions of the herbivores. Being an invasive species, they decimated the plains bunch grasses, such as *Stipa*, which had previously provided sustenance to North America's herbivores. As a result short grasses, such as grama and buffalo grass became the dominant grasses of the plains,

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid. 48-51.

and remain so in most of the prairie west. For over ten thousand years the bison and short grasses evolved together, which was more than enough time for plant life to adapt to mass grazing. Thus Cunfer concluded that “the plains are well suited to survive and thrive in the presence of bison or domestic cattle.”<sup>155</sup>

Most plains grasses, in truth, evolved enough in the face of mass grazing so that they “thrive and expand even in the presence of sustained grazing.” For example, long grazable grasses contain high amounts of silicates, making them hard to digest, or sprout sharp thorns that deter grazers. Additionally, the vast majority reproduce vegetatively (meaning that, although they produce seeds, they also spread via running underground root systems). This fact, that their root systems are below ground, also allows for quick recovery in the face of trauma like grazing, fire, or trampling. Hence, they are well suited to survive mass, sustained grazing. Despite this, grazing changes grassland ecology in three ways: it shifts plant assemblage; alters pasturage diversity; and affects the amount of vegetative soil cover. As Cunfer points out, “whether the grazer is a bison or cow makes little difference.”<sup>156</sup>

Cattle, like most herbivores, graze selectively—their preferred forage being known as decreasers, which decline when grazed. This allows for increasers—those plants chosen second or third for consumption—to grow nearly unopposed. This causes a shift from pasturage being composed of tall and mid-tall grasses, allowing for short grasses, like buffalo grass or gramma, eventually to take over the area being grazed. These types of short grasses, especially buffalo grass, are particularly resistant to extinction from grazing, all the while limiting plant diversity. Thus, grazing shifts the assemblage of plants, and plant diversity, to be favorable toward grazing. Since grazing enhances short grasses, it also limits soil erosion. Formerly, most scholarship

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 37, 39.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 40.

harped that mass grazing was ecologically unsound as it contributed to soil erosion (the supposition being that as the grass was consumed it exposed bare dirt). Cunfer's work, on the other hand, furthers the argument that the Great Plains were not overgrazed.<sup>157</sup> By the turn of the century, however ranchers faced a new concept that they perceived to threaten their ability to graze cattle: the forest reserve.

By 1904, the federal government was felt as much more than a force for fighting Indians. The federal government, with much foresight and concern for the future of the West, started creating vast amounts of forest reserves. In the Upper Musselshell this began with the Little Belts. Reaching 9,175 feet at a place named Big Baldy, the Little Belt range is covered in coniferous forest and speckled with grassy meadows. At its higher elevations, the dominant trees are the lodgepole and whitebark pines, while the lower reaches grow ponderosa pine and Douglas fir. The major fauna of the region include mule and white tail deer, vast herds of elk, and various species of bears. Portions of the Judith River cut through the Little Belts, giving home to rainbow and cutthroat trout, and crafting canyons faced with limestone. Its verdant meadows are nearly perfect range for grazing, prompting the editor of the *Meagher Republican* to write, "Those who have suffered so keenly by the creation of the Belt reserve will look with additional discomfiture on the creation of the Castle and Crazy mountain reserves. It absolutely jeopardizes every stock interest in Meagher County . . . as if the sacred soil of Meagher would be one great forest reserve."<sup>158</sup> Forest reserves initially limited what range the stockmen used under the open range system.

According to the grand narrative, conservation historian Samuel Hays, early forestry in the region, like the cattle industry, was linked to the mining camps. Lumber outfits chopped

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 40-44.

<sup>158</sup> *Meagher Republican*, 18 March 1904.

down trees wherever they could, and this mostly occurred on public lands after Montana gained territorial status. There was no physical federal presence to stop them, and lumber was needed to support mining endeavors and the construction of railroads. For example, a single mine in Butte consumed forty thousand board feet of timber per day while the NP used nearly three thousand ties per mile of track laid.<sup>159</sup> The state's forests were seen as highly consumable resources to both loggers and ranchers, not as a renewable resource. First, it could be harvested for lumber while being grazed and then used as either farmland or grazing pastures after being logged. The General Land Law Revision Act of 1891 allowed the president the authority to create, via proclamation, forest reserves from public domain. In the Upper Musselshell, these regions had been used for grazing and timber. In a timber reserve, neither activity could legally be pursued.<sup>160</sup> Most cattlemen and lumbermen felt they had just as much right to utilize the public domain as anyone else, and for whatever reason they wanted.

The Progressive Conservation Movement, lasting from around 1890 until 1920, is steeped with conundrums, and the movement, according to Hays, has traditionally been “cast in the framework of a moral struggle between the virtuous ‘people,’ and the evil ‘interests.’” However, the virtuous people, primarily those residing within the urban eastern expanses of the nation, never raised an outcry against logging or grazing, nor did they target private corporations as the “evil.” Big business supported the conservation movement just as often as the “virtuous” people opposed it.<sup>161</sup> The initial stock raisers relied upon the open range to make their living and much of that land was federally owned. Summer grazing was typically in more mountainous terrain, while cattle were moved to lower elevations for winter feeding. With very little capital

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<sup>159</sup> Gareth C. Moon, *A History of Montana State Forestry* (Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 1991), 4.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.* 15.

<sup>161</sup> Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement 1890-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 1.



and no land, a producer could create a steady revenue stream. Such a situation was very inviting to investors and led to the rise of the cattle barons (many of whom were located in far off lands like England or Scotland). In the aftermath of the Civil War, and with the invention of refrigerated rail cars coupled with more demand for beef, the industry grew by leaps and bounds and “free” grass was the subject of intense interest. So much, in fact, that there came to be an outcry for forest management from cattle barons (who sought nothing more than a monopoly on “free” grass), who wanted to hedge smaller producers out of their grazing areas. Federal scientists joined the cattle barons call for management, as there was the unfounded belief that the open lands were rapidly deteriorating under the weight of so many cattle grazing the public domain. This coincided with the harsh winter of 1886, and the industry, at least for large corporate interests like the cattle barons, began to seemingly decline.<sup>162</sup>

The delayed effects of the Homestead Act and with the General Land Law Revision Act of 1891, cattlemen started to believe that the homesteader was beginning to be a serious threat, as the available low country range was being parceled out to would-be farmers, and that the mountainous summer grazing tracts were being taken away when they were converted to forest reserves. They intensely lobbied for some form of lease system in which they could still graze the public domain. This led to conflict between homesteaders, sheepmen, and cattle producers that sometimes, like the Johnson County War in Wyoming, culminated in gunfights and murder. By 1905, stock producers got their wish, and the Forest Service instituted a grazing permit system for Montana’s public lands that was quickly followed by a grazing fee. There were three types of permits: class A, B, and C. Class A permits were for lands adjacent to a ranch’s property, while Class B permits were for those who owned home property not adjacent to the permit’s bounded land. Class C permits were for transient herders who had no land base. Fees

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 49-55.

ranged from twenty-five to thirty-five cents per head for cattle and horses, while sheep fees were five to eight cents per head. The fee was used to improve public lands, which often constituted land encompassed by a grazing permit, by creating roads, campsites, and stock watering locations, and to provide for the protection of livestock grazing public land.

Aside from the instituted grazing permits and fees, the Upper Musselshell does not follow the usual trajectory of the grand narrative of the West. There were no dangerous life-threatening confrontations between cattle producers, sheep raisers, and homesteaders. Additionally, there was only one large cattle company with corporate interests, on a similar scale to the cattle barons, within the region: John T. Murhpy's 79 Ranch, also known as the Montana Cattle Company. The only other close cattle barons were Granville Stuart, north of the Upper Musselshell, and the N-F Ranch (owned by an English firm) in the Lower Musselshell Valley. Most of the valley's stock producers were small to mid-size operations that were either partnerships or family owned companies. Recovery from harsh conditions, like those of the winters of 1886 and 1893, was fairly rapid. The Great Die-up, in part, caused large operators to sell their stock in order to avoid bankruptcy. Small producers picked up replacement cattle at low prices, enlarging their herds while the cattle barons were liquidating theirs. Mild winters followed both 1886 and 1893 which allowed for a healthy calf crop. Mild snows were also followed by heavy rains which restored grasses in what was perceived as a now "understocked" range. In both cases, the winter kills meant less cattle to sell, making a higher market demand with higher prices for beef. Such conditions gave way to the rise of the small to middle size rancher, many of whom trebled their hay crop to face harsh winters better, and many diversified, if they had not been a mixed producer to begin with, into, once again, owning some sheep.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Malone, Roeder, and Lang, *Montana*, 149-157.

According to early day sheep expert Edward Wentworth, author of *America's Sheep Trails: History and Personalities*, sheep “rarely failed to be identified with the great moves that brought civilization to the wilderness. Sheep accompanied Conquistador and Puritan, miner and soldier, merchant and farmer, into each new region, and provided the raw materials that attracted trails, markets, woolen mills, packing houses, and finally highways and trucks.”<sup>164</sup> However, the grand narrative of Montana often misses the importance of sheep, and that is a notion which does not hold true with the grassroots history of the Upper Musselshell Valley. Montana in general has a much storied history linked to sheep. Beginning with the “Sheep-Eater” Indians – Utes, Bannocks, Comanche’s, Paiutes, Shoshone, and the now extinct Tukuarikas—many tribes, particularly those closest to the Rocky Mountains, hunted Bighorn sheep.<sup>165</sup> Some stories, unsupported by mission records, claim that Father Ravalli brought sheep with him to help found St. Mary’s mission in 1847. Several other sources, also untenable, assert that sheep had a presence throughout the 1850s. More concretely, by the early 1860s sheep were driven to mining camps and immediately made into mutton for food. However, by the late 1860s sheep farming had taken hold in Montana when Jesuits drove three hundred head to St. Peter’s Mission for long term use, and the 1870 census shows that Montana contained 4,212 sheep.<sup>166</sup>

The Upper Musselshell Valley contained two permanent flocks of note by 1877 when the Smith Brothers, in concert with Martin Grande, drove 2,000 ewes from Boise, Idaho, to their ranch near modern Martinsdale. After Grande dissolved partnership with the Smiths, and at the time of his death, he owned 12,000 head of sheep. Starting with Cotswolds and Merinos, he

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<sup>164</sup> Edward N. Wentworth, *America's Sheep Trails: History and Personalities* (Ames: The Iowa State College Press, 1948), viii.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid*, 294-296

eventually switched to pure bred Ramboiullets.<sup>167</sup> Within a year of the Smith/Grande partnership Meagher County, encompassing all of the Upper Musselshell at this time, was home to fifty thousand sheep.<sup>168</sup> Sheep became such a driving factor that one of the regions first significantly sized towns, Harlowton, was originally named Merino after that popular breed of sheep. Lennep rancher Phil Rostad stated about early livestock operations that most cattlemen were sheepmen first, until their land was paid for, then they became cattle producers. Moore Brothers descendant Steve Moore related that his forefathers once had six sheep bands, totaling over 10,000 head grazing the mountain ranges.<sup>169</sup> Martinsdale entrepreneur Charles Bair, owning over three hundred thousand sheep scattered all over central Montana, once sent a train load of wool to market that took nearly fifty boxcars to fill.<sup>170</sup> All told, the story of sheep as a driving force of early Montana (and ebbing and flowing in import over the years, often becoming more important than cattle during hard times) is a factor that the grand narrative glosses over, one that the grassroots version of history strongly remembers.

Another important factor that makes a grassroots and bioregional examination of the Upper Musselshell Valley much more of a sophisticated story than the grand narrative lies within the storied cattle industry. There is the assumption, largely set forth by early cattle histories like E.E. Dale's *The Range Cattle Industry* or Ernest Osgood's *The Day of the Cattleman*, that all of the cattle coming to the Great Plains region were of the Texas Longhorn variety. Although this was often the case elsewhere, it was not so within the Upper Musselshell Valley. John T. Murphy had some longhorns on the 79 Ranch, but the majority of the valley's cattle were of the

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 300; Rostad, *Mountains of Gold*, 325.

<sup>168</sup> Wentworth, *America's Sheep Trails*, 296.

<sup>169</sup> P.J. Moore, Jr., "Perry J. Moore," in Harlowton Woman's Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 185; Steve Moore interview. Phil Rostad, area resident, and rancher, Lennep, interview by author, August 2006, tape Recording and notes in author's possession.

<sup>170</sup> P.J. Moore, Jr., "Perry J. Moore," in Harlowton Woman's Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 185; Steve Moore interview.

<sup>170</sup> Lee Rostad interview.

shorthorn variety. They arrived in Upper Musselshell not from Texas, but partially from immigrant draft stock, and mostly from trade cities, like Boise, and other points west of the Rocky Mountains.<sup>171</sup>

Overall, the activities of stockmen of the late 1880s also caused changes in the landscape. Cattle and sheep replaced the vast herds of buffalo that roamed the Upper Musselshell. Due to the valley's strong characteristics as good livestock range, more and more ranchers moved into the area, replacing the bands of American Indians who had used the land. The rancher's demands for convenient services attracted more settlement and man-made infrastructure, making mining towns and their adjacent claims no longer the sole areas of Anglo settlement. The experiences of stockmen in the Upper Musselshell are a good example of how regional history, examined from the grassroots, may contrast starkly with that of the traditional grand narrative. Additionally it shows that grassroots history often incorrectly mimics traditional scholarship on the Great Plains. Both local histories and the grand narrative stress that the Great Die-up was due to overgrazing, when such claims really have no basis in concrete fact and some modern environmental scholars, like Cunfer, soundly refute such claims. Strong scholarship, firmly rooted with both local history, and academic history exposes such anomalies and offers a much more grounded, comprehensive, and applicable form of regional history that is of use to both regional dweller and scholar.

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<sup>171</sup> Albie Gordon, "Seventy-Nine Ranch," in Gordon, Lehfeltdt, and Morsanny, *Dawn in Golden Valley*, 7-9.

## CHAPTER 5. SETTLEMENT FROM THE WEST: THE TOWN BUILDERS

The enterprises of mining and stock-raising created a great demand for services. Both ushered in waves of settlement by those willing to found towns as mail stops and service centers. The initial settlements were often small, consisting of a post office and a handful of service-oriented business until transportation routes, from wagon and stage roads to railroads, prompted increased settlement. However, in short order towns like White Sulphur Springs, Ubet, and Two Dot relocated, renamed themselves, and grew frantically, vying to be the economic or cultural epicenter of the Upper Musselshell Valley. As geographer John C. Hudson writes, in *Plains Country Towns*, of small towns in turn-of-the-century North Dakota, there was a scramble, and steep economic competition, for towns to be located along rail lines. Those that failed at meeting such a requirement, the “inland” towns as Hudson describes them, generally vanished. Some went quickly, while others could languish on for decades.<sup>172</sup> Many towns almost seemingly appeared overnight: first to aid the miner, then the stock producer, and finally, as rail links. In any case, their creation forever changed the valley’s cultures and landscape. Not only did towns relocate, there was strong competition between them to serve as the region’s main service centers. Additionally, their creation often heralded cultural, economic, and environmental change on a large scale.

Grand narrative Montana history has a tendency to focus on how mining, then railroading, was the engine of settlement within Montana. Although this is largely the case, it does neglect some factors; specifically the role stock producer’s played in town building and the eventual demise, or relocation, of most initial towns. The grassroots version of regional history accepts the main factors of town creation as mining and railroading, but also emphasizes the part

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<sup>172</sup> John C. Hudson, *Plains Country Towns*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), passim.

played by early ranchers and the relocation of inland towns. Blended together, they reveal that, although miners and railroaders were behind mass settlement, so too were stockmen.

The New Regional History examines how and why settlement and town building was hedged by a large group of people that was not limited to railroaders and miners, but ranchers and farmers had a much vested interest in creating urban spaces as well. This certainly caused major changes to the landscape and had a fairly large ecological effect upon the regions topography, and natural flora and fauna. Additionally, such revisions take into account that small time entrepreneurs like Richard Harlow, could and did have profound affect and influence in the creation of region. The towns that were called in being by people like Harlow or George Wilson were commercial objects and certainly not sleepy, bucolic hamlets unconcerned with larger worldly developments.

The first, and seemingly one of the most stable, of these settlements was created in 1870 when Virginian James Scott Brewer settled in the Smith River Valley by building a house at Trinity Springs. Following the advice of Flathead Indians (who utilized the springs for medicinal purposes), he relocated to another nearby group of hot springs which contained white sulphur deposits near the Smith River. Once there, Brewer erected a bathhouse, and a loose collection of sod-roofed cabins served as a hotel. He named the place Brewer's Springs.<sup>173</sup> In 1871 Major R. C. Walker joined Brewer and purchased a half interest in Brewer's Springs, and a small settlement sprang up. At the behest of the post office department, they replaced the name Brewer's Springs with White Sulphur Springs, and in 1880, the new town supplanted Diamond City as the Meagher county seat and quickly became a noted resort for the medicinal properties

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<sup>173</sup> Roberta Carkeek Cheney, *Names on the Face of Montana*, 287; Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass*, 42-43.

of its natural springs.<sup>174</sup> According to the 1880 census, the town of White Sulphur Springs reportedly had sixty-one people living within its limits. Twelve percent of the population identified their vocation with hotel work; the only profession listing a higher percentage of the population was town-dwelling laborers and farmhands, which accounted for twenty-two percent of the population. Clearly White Sulphur Springs was independent of a mining influence at its founding, with being a health spa its main economic staple until the turn of the century.<sup>175</sup> However, according to Taylor Gordon (a member of White Sulphur's sole black family) by 1903 the town was a mining mecca "at its height of success. All of the (regional) mines were running double shift, [sic] Copper Ropelius being the nearest, and working about a thousand men." White Sulphur Springs was home to eight saloons (all with gambling parlors in the back), numerous stores, a post office, four busy brothels, and an opium den owned by a Chinese launderer, called Charley the Chinaman, and a Chinese laundry. However, the last houses of impropriety were closed down due to the efforts of a Swedish immigrant named Isaac Irkson.<sup>176</sup>

The years from 1876 to 1882 saw the creation of many more regional towns not dependent upon the mining industry. In 1876 Upper Musselshell pioneer Frank Gaugler built a store and hotel near the confluence of the north and south forks of the Musselshell River to serve ranchers and travelers using the Carroll Road. A year later Gaugler was joined by another trader named Richard Clendenin. The small settlement was quickly dubbed Gauglersville. By 1885 the slowly growing town, which contained hotels, saloons, a livery, and a pool hall, was renamed

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<sup>174</sup> Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass*, 43.

<sup>175</sup> Manuscript Census returns for White Sulphur Springs, Montana, 1880, U.S. Bureau of the Census, accessed via Ancestry Library, ancestry.com.

<sup>176</sup> Taylor Gordon, *Born to Be* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 11, 22-23, 35-36, 60. Gordon is almost certainly referencing Copperopolis when he writes of Copper Ropelius.



Martinsdale, after territorial delegate Major Martin Maginnis.<sup>177</sup> Initially Martinsdale, before relocating in 1899, was a service town for local agriculture. The 1900 federal census bears this out, as sixty-four percent of people living within the small township identified their professions with vocations ranging from shepherd to farm labor to ranch foreman.<sup>178</sup>

In 1880 the town of Ubet was formed by A. R. Barrows and quickly became one of the territory's best-known stage stations.<sup>179</sup> Located on the northern center fringe of the Upper Musselshell, Barrows' original intent was to build a sawmill to service settlers within the Judith Basin and the northern portion of the Upper Musselshell Valley. Ubet quickly came to have a two-story hotel, a smithy, a saloon, and a stable. According to John Barrows, A. R. Barrows' son, the simple name Ubet was "unique and short; it had the disadvantage of being undignified, but it served." The name stemmed from a humorous incident that happened to A. R. When asked if he would like a post office at the stage stop, Barrows quickly replied "You Bet." Because of his fast response, the town's name became Ubet.<sup>180</sup> Like Martinsdale, Ubet was an agricultural town; twenty-two percent of the total population were either cattle or sheep producers.<sup>181</sup> A year later the town of Merino, named after Merino sheep (a popular breed among regional sheep raisers), was founded. Merino, with its small stage stop, general store, and saloon was a stopping point along the stage route between the Judith Basin and the town of Big Timber.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> White Sulphur *Meagher County News*, 30 December 1953; Cheney, *Names on the Face of Montana*, 114, 177. The town is also known as "Old Martinsdale" because it relocated to a new location in order to better serve the Milwaukee Road.

<sup>178</sup> Manuscript Census returns for Martinsdale, Montana, 1900, U.S. Bureau of the Census, accessed via Ancestry Library, ancestry.com.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.* 273.

<sup>180</sup> John R. Barrows, *Ubet* (Caldwell: Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1936), 135; Cheney, *Names on the Face of Montana*, 273; Stearns, "History of the Upper Musselshell," 61.

<sup>181</sup> Manuscript Census returns for Ubet, Montana, 1900, US Bureau of the Census, accessed via Ancestry Library, ancestry.com.

<sup>182</sup> Cheney, *Names on the Face of Montana*, 183.

Big Elk, named after the large herds of elk that roamed the region, formed in 1882 and can be considered one of the region's first railroad towns. Located near present-day Two Dot, the slowly emerging community contained a livery, store, blacksmith, post office, stage stop, and, by 1892, a school that served the area.<sup>183</sup> The main vocation of Big Elk residents consisted of railroad laborers and rail line carpenters.<sup>184</sup> Lavina, on the eastern edge of the Upper Musselshell Valley, started as a stage stop on the Billings to Lewistown route in 1882. Walter Burke, the stage line superintendent, named the town after a former love interest.<sup>185</sup> Shawmut, the next regional town of import, was established in 1885 and started as a post office located at the O.K. Bar Ranch. Postmaster Francis E. Shaw, originally a Bostonian, named the settlement after several locations within Boston that sported the name Shawmut (which was also the Indian name for the original New England township of Boston).<sup>186</sup> The last town dating before 1900 was named Halbert. Like many regional towns, Halbert had its origins as an isolated post office. Will and Tom Halbert settled in the area as ranchers, and quickly branched into a stage stop and post office. Halbert was a ranch town, with twenty-eight percent of the total population devoted to various forms of stock production.<sup>187</sup> By 1888 the Halbert brothers sold their holdings to Wyllys Hedges, who renamed the post office after his college alma mater, Yale University.<sup>188</sup>

By 1900 the Upper Musselshell Valley was checkered with towns. A dwindling few supported the mining trade, while others aiding cattle and sheep ranchers, and farmers, were becoming more and more prevalent. Most gathered a modest population decently stocked with

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<sup>183</sup> Cheney, *Names on the Face of Montana*, 21; Mary McFarland White, "Two Dot," in Harlowton Woman's Club, Comp., *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 339; Grace Meyers, "Big Elk School," in Harlowton Woman's Club, Comp., *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 361.

<sup>184</sup> Manuscript Census returns for Big Elk, Montana, 1900, U.S. Bureau of the Census, accessed via Ancestry Library, ancestry.com.

<sup>185</sup> "Lavina, the White City" Roundup *Record-Tribune*, 6 Nov 1958.

<sup>186</sup> *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 355.

<sup>187</sup> Manuscript Census returns for Halbert, Montana, 1900, U.S. Bureau of the Census, accessed via Ancestry Library, ancestry.com.

<sup>188</sup> Doris Barclay Taylor, "Hedgesville," in Harlowton Woman's Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 344.

amenities and services useful to the various farms and ranch habitants. However, one of the first “railroad” towns, Big Elk, foreshadowed what the future would entail for many regional settlements.

The miners, ranchers, and townspeople of the Upper Musselshell clamored for a rail link early in their development. The mining town of Castle was the first to tout the impending arrival of railroad tracks. The editor of the Castle newspaper, G. Birnie, wrote, “with a railroad this place [Castle] is destined to become a large place . . . A railroad would enable the small mine owners to ship their own product . . . [and] their revenues would actively prosecute the developments of their mines . . . instead of numbering its population at fifteen hundred, [Castle] would count its population by the thousands.”<sup>189</sup> The *Meagher County News* claimed, “The deposits of Castle are the Greatest in the World--THE LEADVILLE OF MONTANA,” and continually argued a railroad would be the height of commerce and civilization and “grand opportunities [would] be given to Railroad Corporations” willing to build into the region.<sup>190</sup> Three lines that had a significant impact within the valley answered the call: Jim Hill’s Great Northern (GN) Railway, Richard A. Harlow’s Montana Railroad Company, and the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Rail Road.<sup>191</sup>

James J. Hill created the Great Northern Railway Company with the intent of owning a line that reached the Pacific Ocean. GN tracks entered Montana from the east in 1887, and by 1892, exited the state bound for their termination point in Everett, Washington. Hill quickly purchased, or built, spur lines throughout the state. One such offshoot, designed to connect Great Falls with Billings, crossed through the Upper Musselshell Valley in 1908-09 and passed by the small town of Yale (formerly known as Halbert). With Hill’s record of accomplishments,

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<sup>189</sup> G. Birnie, *Castle* (Museum of the Upper Musselshell Archive, 1930).

<sup>190</sup> White Sulphur *Meagher County News* 18 April 1890.

<sup>191</sup> Hereafter referred to as the Milwaukee Road.

it would be easy to conclude his line had a significant impact upon the region. However, when compared to a fledgling Helena-owned line, Hill's line had lesser influence along the Musselshell Valley.<sup>192</sup>

Illinois lawyer Richard Austin Harlow relocated to Montana in 1886, hoping the western air would revive his ailing health, and settled in Helena to practice law. Observing the booming trade patterns of the capital, it did not take long for Harlow to branch into other business ventures, particularly railroading. Since the mining town of Castle was a mere sixty miles from Helena, Harlow decided a rail line from Helena to Castle would be a profitable endeavor and would greatly enhance the region. By 1890 Harlow incorporated the Valley Railroad, but his first company failed shortly after its creation. Despite his initial company's bankruptcy, by 1891 Harlow had a route surveyed. One year later, the Montana Midland Railroad, Harlow's second company focused on railroad ventures, incorporated with Harlow as its president.<sup>193</sup> He received strong support from Helena, White Sulphur, and Castle as the three towns hoped to revive the mining boom of the 1880s. They believed a rail line that supplied easy and cheap routes for ore would give the region an economic boost. Two factors, the Panic of 1893 and the harsh winter of 1893-94, quickly halted Harlow's second attempt at building a profitable line. Undaunted, Harlow pressed forward along with other regional entrepreneurs who still believed a rail line would boost not only the failing mining economy of Castle but also the economic climate of the entire area in general.<sup>194</sup>

Harlow reorganized his venture again in mid-1894 and created the Montana Railroad Company in concert with other Helena businessmen. This time Harlow served as president and

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<sup>192</sup> Michael P. Malone, *James J. Hill: Empire Builder of the Northwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 117-119.

<sup>193</sup> Bill Wilkerson, *The Montana Railroad Company Better Known as "The Jawbone Railroad"* (Harlowton: Times Clarion Press, 1994), 3.

<sup>194</sup> *Progressive Men of the State of Montana* (Chicago: A.W. Bowen & Company, 1902), 198-99.

chief financial officer.<sup>195</sup> By mid-1895, the Montana Railroad began construction at the head of Sixteen Mile Canyon and Castle Junction. Harlow made clever bargains and dubious promises to finance the Montana Railroad. The contractors who built the line settled by accepting payment, not in cash, but in the form of notes secured by bonds. The Cumberland Mining Company agreed to exchange seven thousand tons of ore for bonds on Harlow's line, while the East Helena Smelting Company arranged to pay the railroad \$150,000 cash for the Cumberland Mining Company's ore. In addition, the Northern Pacific Railroad contributed rails, stock, and spikes in exchange for notes secured by bonds.<sup>196</sup> Finally, many of Harlow's workers agreed to take time checks, minus a payment for room and board, as payments. Because of Harlow's fast talk and shrewd exchanges, his line earned the moniker "The Jawbone Railroad." By November of 1896, the Jawbone reached the Leadboro cut-off, less than a mile from the town of Castle. However, the line did not cause the economic boom its backers anticipated. High ore processing charges, freight costs for goods and shipping, and smelting expenses alienated Castle's miners. Mostly, the line's construction should have made such services cheaper; however, it never saved them the money it promised.<sup>197</sup> Additionally, before Harlow could fully link his line with Castle, political and economic changes, particularly the havoc created by the Panic of 1893, caused the tenuous mining camp to all but disappear and cease mining operations.

Harlow decided regional agricultural shipping could possibly make up for the loss of mineral freight.<sup>198</sup> Even this enterprise was fraught with financial peril. Harlow built much of his line on steep grades, and many trains had to be hauled piecemeal up large hills. In the winter, drifting snow caused additional problems. Many people joked that sheep growers could

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<sup>195</sup> Wilkerson, *The Montana Railroad*, 4.

<sup>196</sup> Stearns, "History of the Upper Musselshell," 89.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.* 92

<sup>198</sup> *Progressive Men of the State of Montana*, 198-99.

transport wool on wagons to Billings and beat the sheepmen who relied on the Jawbone to market by a week.<sup>199</sup> By 1899 Harlow extended the line from the Leadboro cutoff to the town of Martinsdale. Urged on by the promise of wool shipments, Harlow decided to build into the central portion of the valley to the town of Merino. By 1900 he achieved that goal. Many towns, such as Lewistown, Billings, and Forsyth, all speculated the eventual eastern terminus of the line would be their own cities. Lewistown correctly predicted the Montana Railroad Company would lay tracks into the fertile Judith Basin, as Harlow, in 1903, announced that he would build to Lewistown. In less than a decade, Harlow managed to build a successful rail route through the Musselshell Valley, although his finances were still poor. The Montana Railroad was under mortgage to Jim Hill.<sup>200</sup>

One Midwestern carrier, the Chicago, Milwaukee, & St. Paul, realized, in order to compete with the Great Northern and the Northern Pacific, it had to lay tracks westward to a port city. Renamed the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific (the Milwaukee Road), the company started laying track out of Glenham, South Dakota, in 1906. Its aim was to build through the Musselshell Valley, so Milwaukee track would lie between the NP and GN. The major obstacle was Harlow's Jawbone Railroad and his mortgage to Hill. Harlow leased his track to the Milwaukee Road.<sup>201</sup> Harlow then used the lease money to pay off Hill's mortgage, and sold his line to the Milwaukee in 1910.<sup>202</sup> Portions of the valley, according to resident Edmund Pound, now found themselves "a division point on the great, if financially shaky, Milwaukee system (Figure 12)."<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Edmund O. Pound, "Jawbone Railroad," in Harlowton Woman's Club, from *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 315.

<sup>200</sup> Malone, Roeder, and Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, 183-84; Malone, *James J. Hill*, 232.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., Jim Scribbins, *The Milwaukee Road, 1928-1985* (Forest Park, Illinois: Heimburger House Publishing Company, 2001), passim.

<sup>202</sup> Malone, *James J. Hill*, 232; Wilkerson, *The Montana Railroad*, 4.

<sup>203</sup> Edmund O. Pound, "Jawbone Railroad," in Harlowton Woman's Club, from *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 316.

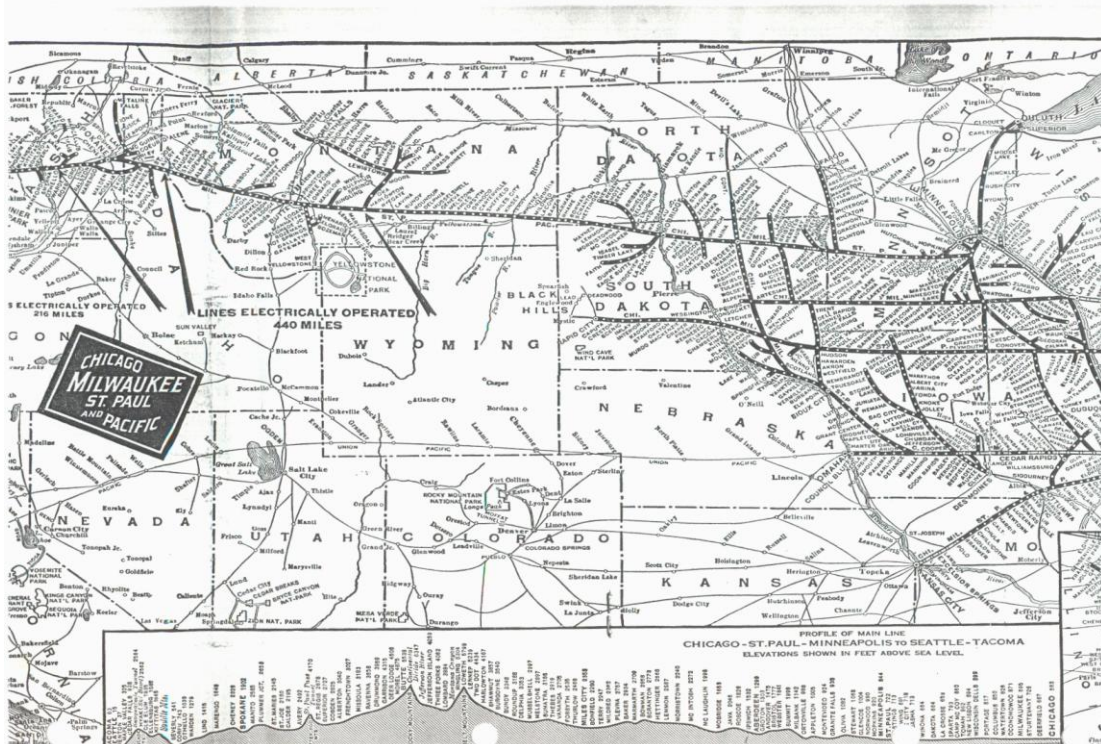


Figure 12. Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Rail Line Map.<sup>204</sup>

The Milwaukee Road, Great Northern, and the Jawbone had a significant impact on regional life. New towns such as Ryegate, Judith Gap, and Lennep were created, while others, such as Merino, Yale, and Big Elk, relocated and renamed themselves, to be closer to the rails and their vital links to outside markets, goods, and easy travel. For example, Martinsdale relocated from “old” Martinsdale to “new” Martinsdale, where the Milwaukee Land Company platted a new town site adjacent to the Jawbone tracks in 1899. The small burg of Lennep, west of Martinsdale, sprang up overnight along the Jawbone’s tracks to serve as a small stop. Big Elk relocated several miles, and was renamed Two Dot after George R. Wilson, who donated a portion of his ranch land for a town site, after which the *Rocky Mountain Husbandman* stated,

<sup>204</sup>The Milwaukee Road: Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific, train schedule, September 24, 1950, Harlowton, MT.

“The embryo city of Two Dot is laying its foundation.”<sup>205</sup> Many of Big Elk’s buildings were jacked up on skids in winter and dragged to the new location; others were built by Wilson at the newly founded town. Prior to the Jawbone reaching Two Dot, stock was trailed either to Big Timber or Miles City.<sup>206</sup> “Old” Martinsdale was dismantled building by building, loaded onto lumber wagons, and moved two miles to where the new town site was platted. The buildings were then unloaded and reassembled. Both towns moved to be better located along the Jawbone.

The same year that Big Elk transformed itself into Two Dot, the Jawbone reached Merino, which also moved to find space along the tracks. Merino renamed itself Harlowton after Richard Harlow. Within four days of laying the final track into Harlowton, the *Meagher Republican* wrote “a miniature city [sprang] into existence . . .”<sup>207</sup> Because there was such a flurry of activity, including the erection of building and the arrival of settlers, within the three towns, the *Rocky Mountain Husbandman* predicted there would be a struggle over the “ascendancy [of] the embryo cities.”<sup>208</sup> The Montana Railroad later reached Ubet in 1904; however, the GN had already laid tracks through the region and founded the town of Judith Gap in 1908 when it purchased 1,500 acres of land for a town site to support the line.<sup>209</sup>

According to the *Rocky Mountain Husbandman*, the Judith Gap region comprised “fine farming lands . . . and it lays most beautifully, being almost flat . . . [so that] in a few years [it] will be transformed from their [sic] wild state into fields of winter wheat.”<sup>210</sup> Located in a small space

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<sup>205</sup> White Sulphur Springs *Rocky Mountain Husbandman*, 15 March 1900.

<sup>206</sup> Steve McCarter, *Guide to the Milwaukee Road in Montana* (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1992), 53, 55.; Melody White interview by Author, 4 August 2003; Robert Baxter, “Two Dot” in Harlowton Woman’s Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 357.

<sup>207</sup> White Sulphur Springs *Meagher Republican*, 9 September 1900.

<sup>208</sup> White Sulphur Springs *Rocky Mountain Husbandman*, 5 April 1900.

<sup>209</sup> Harlowton Woman’s Club, Comp., 347 and 349.

<sup>210</sup> Norman Voldseth, Comp., *Rocky Mountain Husbandman: Jottings by our Traveling Man Stage Rides and Passing Mention of Flocks, Herds, Bands, and Herd Owners Along the Way and other Stories of Early-Day Central Montana*. (Helena: Rocky Mountain Husbandman Weekly Newspaper, 1877-1903), 19.



between the Big Snowy and Little Belt, Judith Gap served as an important grain-shipping center and was the easiest way to travel to the basin of the Judith Mountains.

The Milwaukee platted a town between Shawmut and Lavina in 1908. Founders named the town Rygate after a field of rye that was observed through a large gate by railroad work crews. The last town affected by railroad arrival was the small settlement of Yale. As the GN was laying tracks for its Billings to Great Falls spur, Hill's line passed through the small ranch of Wylls Hedges and built a tiny depot, a water plant and tank, and stockyards. As a result, Yale relocated and became Hedgesville.<sup>211</sup> By 1910 the manmade landscape of the region was notably different than it had been a mere ten years earlier (Figures 13 and 14).

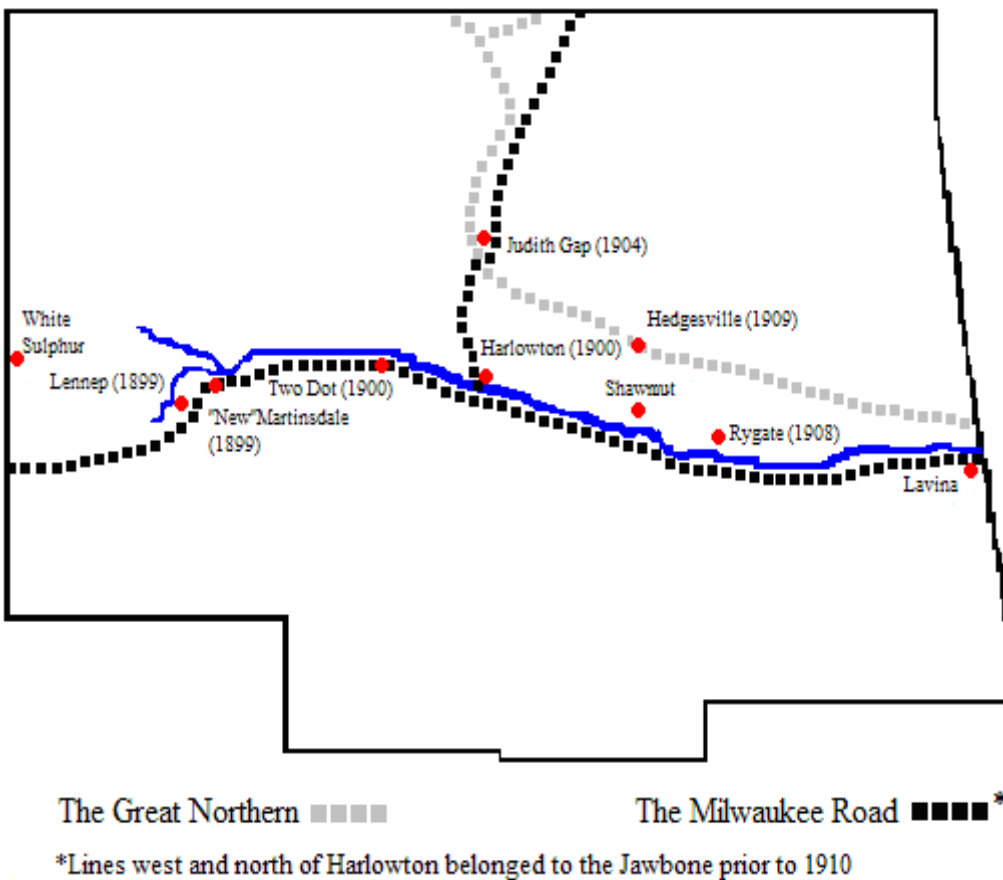


Figure 13. Rail Lines and Town Development in the Early Twentieth Century.

<sup>211</sup> Doris Barclay Taylor, "Hedgesville," in Harlowton Woman's Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 344.

### Town Evolution in the Upper Musselshell Valley

Name (Year Founded)	Second Name (Year Founded)	Third Name (Year Founded)
Diamond City (1866)	NA	NA
Copperopolis (1890)	NA	NA
Castle (1891)	NA	NA
Brewer's Springs (1870)	White Sulphur Springs (1875)	NA
Gauglersville (1876)	"Old" Martinsdale(1885)	Martinsdale (1899)
Ubet (1880)	NA	NA
Merino (1881)	Harlowton (1900)	NA
Big Elk (1882)	Two Dot (1900)	NA
Lavina (1882)	NA	NA
Halbert (1885)	Yale (1888)	Hedgesville (1908)
Lennep (1899)	NA	NA
Ryegate (1908)	NA	NA
Judith Gap (1908)	NA	NA
Shawmut (1909)	NA	NA
Barber (1909)	NA	NA

\*Not all Upper Musselshell Valley towns/settlements named are represented in this work.

Figure 14. Town Evolution in the Upper Musselshell Valley.

The physical landscape of the valley started to change drastically as more people settled within the region. For example, the Milwaukee Road, in an effort to avoid building excess, and expensive, bridges and curves, altered the channel of the Musselshell a staggering eighty-seven times, thus damaging and distorting the natural environment.<sup>212</sup> In addition to railroad tracks, buildings of every persuasion, from churches to hotels, roundhouses and granaries, appeared on horizon lines, accompanied by planted trees and other friendly vegetation. A system of worn

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<sup>212</sup> Pound, *The Little Red Books*, 45.

trails between towns started to appear throughout the prairie, which later would serve as the basis for modern roadways. Mounded and packed earth served as the bed for railroad tracks, and was often accompanied by telegraph poles throughout the region.

With the coming of the railroads, the very nature of many Upper Musselshell Valley towns began to change. For example, Harlowton (formerly titled Merino, a livestock town, renamed after Helena railroad entrepreneur Richard Harlow) was already a minor railroad town in 1900, reporting 901 inhabitants, with fifteen percent of the town working directly for the railroad, and another estimated twenty-one percent working within satellite industries like boarding houses, eateries, and saloons. In sum, thirty-six percent of the town's dwellers identified themselves in some way with the railroad and only thirteen percent identified themselves as being farmers, ranchers, agricultural laborers or affiliate trades. In examining the 1910 census clearly shows that Harlowton went from a minor rail center to a much larger one, with a stable population of 937, twenty-eight percent of urban dwellers worked for the line, and twenty-four percent satellite industries. With fifty-two percent of residents working for the railroad, and fifteen percent claiming agricultural trades it was also becoming much more of an urban center, with more plumbers and contractors, millers and bakers, electricians and mechanics, telephone and telegraph operators, lawyers and teachers than the previous decade. With lesser numbers of livery workers, blacksmiths, and teamsters it is apparent that the railroad was subsuming the cattleman as the mainstay of the central portion of the valley within the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>213</sup>

The townspeople of the Upper Musselshell had a symbiotic relationship with the countryside that was bound with that of the stock-producer and railroader. Their fortunes and

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<sup>213</sup> Manuscript Census returns for Harlowton, Montana, 1900,U.S. Bureau of the Census, accessed via Ancestry Library, [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com).; Manuscript Census returns for Harlowton, Montana, 1910,U.S. Bureau of the Census, accessed via Ancestry Library, [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com).

livelihoods were tied together. Without the ranchers and sheepmen of the valley, towns would have failed at most commercial ventures. Without the consumer buyer, provided by agriculturists, there would be no need of towns and the goods and services they provided. The townsfolk certainly had a rougher relationship with the environment than their rural customers. It can only be assumed that their garbage pits, sewage, and water use all had an effect on the valley's ecosystem, an effect that was largely ignored and undocumented.

Perhaps the most stunning aspect of the creation of towns stems from their commercialization. Since they served as miniature gateways to larger areas of commerce, like Chicago or Minneapolis, it was essential that they be located along a rail line. This not only facilitated the shipping of produce, like cattle and wool, but also guaranteed that they would be commercially viable hubs by being able to provide their local consumers with goods at reasonable and competitive prices. Towns that remained "inland," meaning that they were not located along a railroad's tracks, eventually slipped into decline and disappeared altogether or as was the case with many Upper Musselshell towns, relocated in order to be along the tracks and renamed themselves.<sup>214</sup>

From the mid-1800s to the early 1900s the Upper Musselshell faced significant change from miners, stockmen, and the various railroads that built through the valley. The initial short-lived influx came from the miners of Diamond City, Copperopolis, and Castle. The Upper Musselshell called them in with the promise of silver, gold, and copper. As soon as the ore of the Belt and Castle Mountains played out, ranchers took the miner's dominant cultural and economic place within the Upper Musselshell. The open range stockmen, present during the mining boom, had been a small portion of the valley's initial settlement, but they remained after mineral activity weakened. The natural environment lured the stockmen into the eastern portions

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<sup>214</sup> Hudson, *Plains Country Towns*, passim.

of the Musselshell with lush grass, good water, and uncannily mild winters. The stockmen, and the miners, made the first long-term impact within the region. They called for roads, more towns, and rail lines. When the mining industry virtually ended in the early 1890s, railroading became the driving force for Anglo settlement. Ranchers, like G.R. Wilson, who already lived with the valley, gave towns the commercial support (and the sometimes needed land tracts for towns) that settlements needed. Although the majority of change came with the railroader, the ranchers influence on early towns, cannot be ignored.

Professional historians stress that Montana towns were first created by miners and railroaders. Of particular import was the railroad town as it brought about fast, mass settlement. This caused new towns to be quickly founded, old ones to relocate or flounder and fail (the inland town concept). They neglect that the stock producer had some things to do with settlement, particularly in laying the groundwork and need for towns and speculation in towns. For example, when George “Two Dot” Wilson donated land plats for the town of Two Dot, he certainly had an interest in its benefits to his ranching endeavors. Additionally, professional historians claim that after the Great War, the importance of railroads began to taper off in influence throughout the west.

The grassroots story of settlement is much more complete to include the miner, stockman, and railroad influences, but still endorses the import of railroads above all, keeping in line with that of grand narrative. However, they divest themselves of the grand narrative when it comes to railroads becoming less important as time progressed. As is the case with Harlowton, the railroad caused an ongoing boom in industry, population, and cultural affiliation that is still seen today throughout the valley. To most, the railroad was of prime significance within the area from its very introduction to the region. However, history needs to acknowledge that the people

already in place, the agriculturist, laid the groundwork for the need of towns, and often their locations, at least until tracks were laid through the region. Many, like “Two Dot” Wilson, probably had major interests in seeing the lines built near, or even through, their land. Additionally, to many of these places, the railroad was an essential provider socially, economically, ecologically, environmentally and culturally, for the better part of a century. With their advent regional railroads towns moved their locations, stage lines, like the Carroll Road, declined, and the landscape of the valley changed with each successive wave of settlement. The ecology of the region changed the most. Bison all but disappeared, replaced by sheep, cattle, and horses, while the grasses and forbs of the region changed as well. As a product of all these factors, the open range cattle rancher inadvertently paved the way for the next succession of place and culture within the Upper Musselshell Valley, as pioneering stockman Frederick I. Bower later wrote, “After the railroads began building into the area, it was evident that a flood of homesteaders would appropriate the whole grazing area.”<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Frederick I. Bower, “Frederick I. Bower,” in *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 25-26.

## CHAPTER 6. THE “GOLDEN AGE” OF AGRICULTURE: THE HOMESTEAD BOOM AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS, 1900-1920

The early 1900s were a significant time of change within the Upper Musselshell Valley and all of Montana. Large scale settlement of the region began shortly after the Great Northern and the Milwaukee Road passed through the area. Both lines’ promotional campaigns attracted large numbers of homesteaders, also known as honyockers (a derisive eastern European word roughly meaning outsider) bent upon farming the region. In 1910 the Great Falls land offices serving north-central Montana, including portions of the Upper Musselshell, processed 1,500 homestead filings, and the Great Northern Railroad sent over 1,000 emigrant cars to the region. The state’s population rose from 243,329 in 1900 to 376,053 by the end of the decade. By 1918 it reached 769,590, while the number of farms increased from 13,370 to 26,214.<sup>216</sup> Between seventy and eighty thousand honyockers immigrated to the state as the federal government encouraged westward migration at the turn of the century through legislation like the Desert Land Act of 1877 and the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909.<sup>217</sup> Meagher County, which encompassed the greater part of the valley, split into several different counties because of the Leighton Act (a piece of legislation that allowed counties to sub-divide as they saw fit) and the ever-increasing demands of homesteaders for more localized governments. Once the region divided into several counties, the economics and culture of the newly formed regions changed as well. Most new counties depended upon an economic staple determined at the time of their creation. Prior to the homestead era the valley initially specialized in mining, which was quickly supplanted by open range ranching. Once the region divided into three counties (Meagher, Wheatland, and Golden Valley) economic specialization changed dramatically. Meagher

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<sup>216</sup> Malone, Roeder and Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, 241-42.

<sup>217</sup> Toole, *Montana: A State of Extremes*, 59.

County, after its brief foray into mining in the late 1800s, remained married to an agricultural base (ranching and farming), as did Golden Valley County in the eastern portion of the valley. Wheatland County, comprising the central portion of the Upper Musselshell, benefited from both agriculture and railroading; the Milwaukee Road, however, certainly had the upper rung of the economic ladder.

The perceptions of homesteading in the Upper Musselshell Valley are the same for both the academic and the regional inhabitant: that it was an enterprise certainly doomed to fail. Settlers were lured, through railroad promoters and town boosters, to regions where it would be nearly impossible for a farm culture to take root. The land was too dry, the weather too sporadic, and it was a place much better suited to stock production than active farming. Consider noted Montana journalist and chronicler Joseph Kinsey Howard's writing, which represents both the grand narrative and the grassroots perspective: "Out of the tragic homestead experiment . . . an experiment with natural resources and with human lives . . . [all that remains is] the derelict privy, the boarded-up schoolhouse, the dust drifted, weed-grown road, and the rotting, rusted fence were left to tell the tale of the '20's [SIC] Montana's disastrous decade."<sup>218</sup> In addition, both sectors try and compartmentalize homesteading in the Upper Musselshell; however, the academic tends to obscure anomalies (specifically that it was possible to prosper) while the grassroots interpretation tends to sectionalize into the beliefs that homesteading was obviously doomed to fail, and that stock raising was a foreordained and proper use of the land.

Whereas the grand narrative and the grassroots perspective present a dichotomous viewpoint of the homesteading era, the New Regional History reevaluates homesteading within the Upper Musselshell Valley. In Particular, it was quite possible for settlers to prosper despite crumbling economic markets and markedly worsening crop growing conditions. Additionally,

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<sup>218</sup> Howard, *Montana: High, Wide, and Handsome*, 207-209.



the story of homesteading failure on the Great Plains needs to be examined from its own distinct timeframe; it was not until much later, historically, that it was perceived as a doomed enterprise. The people who did homestead saw this as a distinct, golden, and unprecedented opportunity. Because of that zeitgeist, settlers came in droves to the Upper Musselshell and ethnically, although overshadowed by those with Nordic backgrounds, there was a small amount of racial diversity within the valley. Last, the influx of homesteaders created a vast political division that sundered the region into three distinct counties.

Farming settlement of the Upper Musselshell Valley, like many western regions, was promoted by the railroad. In 1903, shortly after Harlow completed his line into Lewistown, the *Butte Miner* printed a two-page spread designed to promote the Upper Musselshell Valley and the adjacent Judith Basin with titles such as “MONTANA RAILROAD OPENS UP AN INLAND EMPIRE,” “TRIBUTARY COUNTRY DEVELOPING RAPIDLY,” and “A THOUSAND OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEN AND MONEY ARE AWAITING YOUR COMING.” Smaller articles emphasized, “The richest mining, agriculture and stock raising section in the whole country—the great inland empire that has practically lain dormant since the beginning of time—has just been thrown open to the world . . .”<sup>219</sup> The Milwaukee followed suit with its own booster campaign issuing tracts like *Montana: Its Resources and Opportunities* to attract potential homesteaders to dry land farming. The Milwaukee Road spent fifty thousand dollars on pamphlets to attract homesteaders to the Upper Musselshell.<sup>220</sup> Milwaukee Road Immigration Agent George B. Haynes announced to the people of Harlowton, “This section of

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<sup>219</sup> *Butte Miner*, November 1, 1903.

<sup>220</sup> Harlowton *Musselshell News*, August 1908; Stearns, “History of the Upper Musselshell,” 138.

the country needs more farmers, dairymen, and stockmen. The new towns need more merchants, businessmen, and professional men. There are opportunities for all.”<sup>221</sup>

While the Milwaukee brought an influx of easterners to the Upper Musselshell, the NP carried more immigrants, especially Norwegians.<sup>222</sup> Such promotions were so successful they prompted the *Big Timber Pioneer* to print such headlines as “HOMESEEKERS BY THOUSANDS: IMMIGRANTS CROWD ALL TRAINS FROM THE EAST.”<sup>223</sup> In the neighboring town of Harlowton the editor of the *Musselshell News*, Arthur F. Weston, wrote the valley was a “land of great promise . . . [that] will some day be agricultural land if . . . various schemes of colonization . . . materialize.”<sup>224</sup> In addition to railroads attracting people, regional towns formed booster clubs to promote the valley’s settlement. Such organizations purchased ads in Montana newspapers and within other states, such as North Dakota. Several club representatives were dispatched to Washington, D.C., to argue for the creation of more government land offices, stating, in the words of the *Musselshell News*, “What we need . . . is a few hundred practical farmers to settle up our agricultural lands.”<sup>225</sup> Weston lauded such attempts in his paper by writing, “Meagher County . . . (is) getting into the line of progress . . . The great and fertile valley of the Musselshell will be found keeping up with the spirit of onward agriculture, and it will be hundreds of homes to farmers, who will thrive and wax fat upon the harvests wrested from its rich areas.”<sup>226</sup>

Aside from publications, which included maps, pictures, and personal accounts from successful homesteaders, both railroads and town boosters also relied upon scientists to attract

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<sup>221</sup> Harlowton *Musselshell News*, 20 February 1908; Stearns, “History of the Upper Musselshell,” 148.

<sup>222</sup> Jim Sargent, *Too Poor to Move, But Always Rich: A Century on Montana Land* (Self Published, 2002), 9-10.

<sup>223</sup> *Big Timber Pioneer*, 13 April 1911.

<sup>224</sup> Harlowton *Musselshell News*, 26 July 1905.

<sup>225</sup> Harlowton *Musselshell News*, 16 April 1907.

<sup>226</sup> Harlowton *Musselshell News*, 12 September 1907.

potential dry land farmers.<sup>227</sup> Two notable examples within the Upper Musselshell were Drs. W.X. Suddeth and Thomas Shaw. Their intent was to assure potential settlers the region was well suited for farming. Suddeth, a dentist from Broadview, Montana, planned on bringing a colony of Iowa farmers to a location near Lavina to experiment with dry land farming. The *Musselshell News* predicted if Suddeth was successful near Lavina, there was not any reason dry land farming methods would not work in the central portion of the valley.<sup>228</sup> Soil scientist Thomas Shaw, working for both the Milwaukee Road and the GN, traveled to Harlowton in 1908 to conduct soil tests and affirm the land's suitability for farming. He stated, quite convincingly, in the *Musselshell News* there was "no reason why this land, the larger portion of which is open to entry as homestead land, may not be successfully farmed without irrigation." He insisted that the soil was fertile enough to raise winter wheat, rye, durum, splotz, and alfalfa.<sup>229</sup>

Land speculators and colonization companies quickly began to purchase large tracts of lands, both public and private, for future sale to farmers migrating to central Montana. Specific companies important to the Upper Musselshell included the Milwaukee Land Company (MLC), the Penwell Ranch Company, the McQuitty Land Company, the O.K. Land and Trust, the Minnesota-Montana Land Company, and the Montana-Holland Colonization Company. In 1909 the MLC purchased twenty thousand acres around Harlowton specifically for resale to potential settlers. The company used the tract *Montana: Its Resources and Opportunities* to advertise the land and quickly set up a "specimen house" near Harlowton depot to highlight area agricultural products.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Hargreaves, *Dry Farming in the Northern Great Plains*, 33-35.

<sup>228</sup> Harlowton *Musselshell News*, 8 August 1907; Merrill G. Burlingame and Edward J. Bell, Jr., *The Montana Cooperative Extension Service: A History 1893-1974* (Bozeman: Montana State University, 1984), 23.

<sup>229</sup> Harlowton *Musselshell News*, 18 September 1908.

<sup>230</sup> Bill Wilkerson, *Lines West Memories* (Harlowton: Times-Clarion Printing, 1992), 23.

The Helena-based Penwell Ranch Company purchased its first holdings in the Upper Musselshell from Ralph Berry and his partner Melzer Stevens. Berry and Stevens decided to incorporate the Winnecook Ranch as the Winnecook Land and Livestock Company in 1906 and sell shares in the fledgling company. They contacted Lewis Penwell, manager of the Penwell Ranch Company, to help incorporate seventeen thousand acres.<sup>231</sup> In a separate endeavor, two years later Penwell obtained fifteen thousand more acres from the Basin Livestock Ranch. Penwell then acquired two more ranches and used the additional acreage to create the Giltinan-Penwell Ranch Company and the McQuitty Land Company.<sup>232</sup> Their intent was to sell the acreage to homesteaders, other land syndicates, and groups interested in further colonization.<sup>233</sup>

The Giltinan-Penwell Ranch Company, as a corporate entity, lasted little over a year before it reorganized as the Montana-Holland Colonization Company with the specific goal of attracting Dutch settlers.<sup>234</sup> To further this endeavor the company contracted with a Catholic priest, Father Van Heuval (who was posted in the Judith Basin), to travel back to his native land near the Belgian border and boost the Hedgesville region to old acquaintances. His work brought five families and several bachelors to homestead in the Upper Musselshell.<sup>235</sup> Eastern-based land corporations, such as the O.K. Land and Trust Company and the Musselshell Valley Land Improvement Company, followed regional land syndicates in the attempt to settle the eastern portion of Meagher County. The Musselshell Valley Land Improvement Company officers resided in such far off places as Chicago, Illinois, and Madison, Wisconsin. Their offices in Madison were for the express purpose of selling land in the Upper Musselshell.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Hill, *Ranch on the Musselshell*, 51.

<sup>232</sup> Stearns, "History of the Upper Musselshell," 133.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid. 126-27.

<sup>234</sup> Irene and Arch Willems, "Dutch Coulee," in Gordon, Lehfeldt, and Morsanny, *Dawn in Golden Valley*, 123-24; Stearns, "History of the Upper Musselshell," 134.

<sup>235</sup> Stearns, "History of the Upper Musselshell," 134.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid. 155-56.

One land syndicate, the Minnesota-Montana Land Company, inadvertently founded the small town of Barber. Henry Bartz and N. C. Eklund formed the company in Minneapolis with the goal of promoting settlement along the Milwaukee Road. The two men acquired a parcel of land in the Upper Musselshell and founded a town they named Shawmut. The Milwaukee Road, always eager to self-promote, built a small depot and offered to purchase the land. Eklund and Bartz turned down the line's offer. Both were strongly against the consumption of liquor, and feared the railroad would establish a saloon in Shawmut. The Milwaukee, irked at not being able to acquire the land, dismantled the depot in the night and transported it to a new location (near modern-day Shawmut) that already had a post office. Accordingly, Eklund and Bartz's settlement was left without a name. Bartz, believing the situation was ridiculous, stated the Milwaukee had given the town a "clean shave" of its presence. He and Eklund renamed the place Barber as a sarcastic way to poke fun at the railroad and the actual town of Shawmut relocated several miles away.<sup>237</sup>

With all the attention focused on the valley by railroad boosters, town promoters, and land syndicates, it is no surprise they were extremely successful in their efforts at attracting settlers. Homesteader Adah Bakken Lane believed "(it was) propaganda that brought us here. Stories of cheap land, big wheat crops and the likes."<sup>238</sup> Others, such as Alice Lennon Lamers Seiersen, a child at the time of her family's emigration to the valley, recalled that the Milwaukee Road urged "people to take homesteads in Montana . . . we boarded a Milwaukee special train taking prospective homesteaders west."<sup>239</sup> Leland P. Cade, also the progeny of early regional

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<sup>237</sup> Don Eklund, area rancher, Shawmut, August 2006, tape recording and notes in author's possession; Linda Eklund, area rancher and teacher Shawmut, August 2006, tape recording and notes in author's possession; Elmer Eklund, "The Eklund Story," in Gordon, Lehfeldt, and Morsanny, *Dawn in Golden Valley*, 16, 21-22.

<sup>238</sup> Adah Bakken Lane, "Propaganda Brought Us," in Gordon, Lehfeldt, and Morsanny, *Dawn in Golden Valley*, 44.

<sup>239</sup> Alice Lennon Lamers Seiersen, "Homesteading in Montana," in Gordon, Lehfeldt, and Morsanny, *Dawn in Golden Valley*, 53.

homesteaders, related his father only meant to stop and visit a cousin in Lavina on a train trip that was supposed to culminate in moving to California. Claude and Joseph Cade, two cousins from Viroqua, Wisconsin, were greeted in Lavina in April of 1911 by a locator calling, "Ride out into the country with me. You'll see some of the best land you have ever seen. This country is filling up fast. You don't want to be left out." After hearing more of the locator's pitch, Cade thought "California? Homestead? A quarter section of land in three years . . . my parents worked a lifetime to own that much land. They say this is good land." A little over four years later, Joseph Cade found himself with a patent for a quarter section of land, which "By Wisconsin standards . . . was a lifetime accomplishment in a few short years."<sup>240</sup> With regional newspapers like the *Ryegate Weekly Reporter* printing headlines like "220 CARS OF GRAIN SHIPPED THIS FALL: from local elevators aggregating 250,000 bushels," it was apparent the various boosters accomplished their goal of attracting farmers to the Upper Musselshell Valley.<sup>241</sup>

The homestead rush to the valley, like most of the other land grabs of the era, caused a significant boom in population. In 1900, the population of Meagher County was a little over 2,500 people; a decade later, it reached nearly 4,200. The heaviest settlement was in the eastern region, around the towns of Judith Gap, Hedgesville, Ryegate, Lavina, and Harlowton. In the eastern portion of the valley the population rose from 901 to 2,264. The western expanses, near White Sulphur Springs, increased from 1,625 to 1,926 inhabitants.<sup>242</sup> The *Harlowton News* reported, "All the towns in the entire Musselshell Valley are receiving daily cars of immigrants." The same article states Lavina received ten train cars of prospective settlers; Ryegate accepted

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<sup>240</sup> Leland P. Cade, *Well, I Guess I Was Just Lucky* (Billings: Benchmark Printers and Bookbinders, 1992), 23, 27, 28.

<sup>241</sup> *Ryegate Weekly Reporter*, 16 December 1915.

<sup>242</sup> Stearns, "History of the Upper Musselshell," 154; Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass*, 106.

five, the small town of Barber three, and “a large number in Harlowton.”<sup>243</sup> By June of 1910 the Milwaukee Road dropped 284 immigrant cars along its Montana stops, equating nearly six thousand families, and totaling over 28,000 people.<sup>244</sup> Many settled within the Upper Musselshell Valley. Ethnically, this created an assortment of cultures within the region.

The majority of Upper Musselshell Valley farmers were of Nordic descent, particularly Norwegian. However, demographically speaking, there were many varying people within the region including African Americans, Mexicans, and small communities of Japanese within Harlowton and Hedgesville, and a smattering of Germans and Scots. Taylor Gordon, descended from African Zulus, and his family called White Sulphur Springs home, while Carrie Lawson, a black madam, called Harlowton home.<sup>245</sup> Juan Salazar, better known in the region as Mexican John, rode north to the Musselshell Valley from the Gallatin Valley, and raised cattle between Harlowton and Two Dot. The machine shop at the Hedgesville Great Northern depot employed several Japanese machinists. Harlowton was home to numerous Japanese families--the Satakes, Munetas, Yamamotos, and Oyes--and bachelors George Akagi, M. Takahashi, and Joe Naruse. All told, there were about thirty Issei and Nisei Japanese living in a housing district, known as Jap Town, near the Harlowton Milwaukee Road Depot.<sup>246</sup>

Aside from bringing various ethnicities to the region, the homesteading era also brought a varied economy. Some wanted to try their hand at dry land farming or ranching; others

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<sup>243</sup> *Harlowton News*, 18 March 1910.

<sup>244</sup> *Harlowton News*, 17 June 1910; Stearns, “History of the Upper Musselshell,” 161.

<sup>245</sup> Gordon, *Born to Be* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), passim; Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Gras*, 46; Lawrence P. Harrington, “The Sidney P. Harrington Story,” in Harlowton Woman’s Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 111; Jeannette Foster Taylor, “Coming of the Railroads,” in Harlowton Woman’s Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 296.

<sup>246</sup> Henry Muneta, “Early Japanese Residents of Harlowton,” in Harlowton Woman’s Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 299; Henry Muneta, area resident, Harlowton, 1923-present, interview by author, 30 July 2003, tape recording in author’s possession; Richard Stoltz, area resident and Milwaukee Road Engineer Harlowton, 1949-present, interview by author, 28 July 2003, notes in author’s possession.

experimented with urban businesses like hotels, laundries, and dry goods. In broad terms, homesteading aided in creating varying types of economies within the region. In the western portion of the valley, the sheep and cattle ranching culture was firmly entrenched, although beleaguered by would-be farmers. In the central section of the Upper Musselshell, there was mixed farming and ranching and a fledgling (but steadily growing) railroad culture. The eastern expanses, like their western counterparts, remained firmly tied to agriculture. With more and more people flocking to the Upper Musselshell, the political demands of the newly arrived immigrants caused the once expansive Meagher County to split, and by 1920, the valley was sundered into three separate counties.

The earliest arguments surrounding the division of the Upper Musselshell started over a 1902 proposal to build a county high school in White Sulphur Springs. People living around the central portion of Meagher County quickly pointed out the majority of the county's population now resided around the Harlowton area, which was a more central location in which to educate the region's children. White Sulphur Springs residents counter-argued they were the county seat, so the county high school should be located within their town. The situation was heated, and Harlowton advocates argued the county seat should be moved to their town because they had the larger percentage of population, a railroad, a bigger tax base, and a more central location, and that smaller counties were better equipped to fund and maintain roads. The issue was eventually resolved with a vote against locating the school in White Sulphur Springs; however, Harlowton interests continued to agitate moving the county seat, as did the town of Two Dot. By 1910 the Harlo Commercial Club (Harlo being the shortened name of the town commonly used within the



valley) actively sought to move the county seat, citing the same arguments used during the dispute over the county high school.<sup>247</sup>

In 1911 Harlowton residents switched tactics: instead of arguing they should be the county seat, they decided they should be a separate county altogether. Proposed names for such a county included Richland, Wheatland, and Merino. They quickly gathered enough petitioners to declare the creation of Merino County. Because they did not properly introduce a bill to the state legislature, the would-be Merino County fell flat.<sup>248</sup> Ira Leighton, who sponsored the Leighton Act in 1911, saved their push for division.

The Leighton Act gave Montana counties the right to subdivide based upon a given area's petition to do so. This spurred Harlowton "divisionists" onward. They advocated for the creation of Merino County the following year, but failed again. In 1913, once again, they petitioned for splitting from Meagher County, this time under the name of Wheatland County, after the abundant wheat fields of the time, and were more successful. The Wheatland County Bill (formally part of Senate Bill 145) passed both the Montana House and Senate. However, Governor Sam Stewart vetoed the bill when it reached his desk, and the Leighton Act was amended to contain more stringent criteria.<sup>249</sup> After so many failed attempts at creating their own county, Harlowton boosters again sought to change the county seat from White Sulphur Springs to Harlowton. They once again failed to do so later that same year via an amendment to the Leighton Act that included establishment of new counties in areas that garnered a petition claiming fifty-one percent alternative votes.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Stearns, "History of the Upper Musselshell," 197-98, 200-201, 210.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid. 212.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid. 218-39.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid. 239-40

After another failed attempt to split in early 1915, Two Dot rancher E.C. Baxter and Harlowton lawyer Warren E. Jones were voted into office: Jones as a state Senator and Baxter as a Representative. In 1917 Baxter and Jones proposed another Wheatland County bill. Jones, as a county representative, introduced it to the State Senate as Senate Bill 58. After passing the state House and Senate, the bill found itself in front of Governor Stewart, who neither approved nor vetoed the bill. It sat on his desk for five days and automatically passed into law. However, Stewart was not yet done with his opposition to county divisions. He ordered the Montana Attorney General, S.C. Ford, to examine the constitutionality of prior legislation that created Carter County under the Leighton Act. If the courts ruled Carter an unconstitutional creation, Wheatland County would be assumed to be the same. However, the state supreme court decided that Carter County was a constitutional creation, and by default, so, too, was Wheatland County, which came into being formally on May 15, 1917, with the date retroacted to March 1.<sup>251</sup>

The same year Baxter and Jones originally submitted their attempt at creating Wheatland County, the people of Ryegate tried to detach themselves from Musselshell County, within the eastern portion of the valley. The Leighton Act had been repealed, so Ryegate “divisionists” could not rely on a petition by the people to split from Musselshell County. However, they could use the McCone County Division Law passed by the sixteenth legislative session of Montana in 1919. When the McCone Law was being threatened with repeal, Ryegate boosters sent a ten-man delegation to Helena to oppose the repeal and keep the community apprised of the situation. The law was not repealed, and they ushered legislation to create Golden Valley County, so

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid. 250-61.

named for its rich soil content and numerous streams (and with the hope that such a name would attract more people), in January of 1920.<sup>252</sup>

Following the foundation of the new county, Virginia native Jess Garfield was elected sheriff. During his second term in office, according to local sources, a “demented farmer by the name of Lampson . . . shot him with a shotgun loaded with slugs.” Garfield’s wife, Ruth Lane, fulfilled the remainder of his term as county sheriff, becoming the first woman sheriff in the state of Montana. She served in that capacity for two years. Ruth Lane Garfield was not reelected, but the new sheriff did appoint her undersheriff of Golden Valley County.<sup>253</sup>

The homestead era and county busting had a great impact upon regional towns, especially the communities of Two Dot, Harlowton, Judith Gap, and Hedgesville. Two Dot became a well known shipping point after the arrival of the Milwaukee Road, which was, according to lifetime resident Joe Sedgewick, “the only reason that Two Dot was there.” The Two Dot depot was surrounded by extensive stockyards, including two large pens, scales, six corrals, and two loading docks.<sup>254</sup> In addition, the town contained a saloon, bank, livery, jeweler, lumberyard, and a newspaper titled the *Two Dot News*.<sup>255</sup> It never grew into a larger urban center, because it was struck by a series of drastic fires in 1914, 1918, and 1920. Local sources indicate one fire was an accident caused by two local boys, who were branding gophers like they were cattle. One gopher was unintentionally set afire; its panicked flight started a grass fire that burned down part of Two Dot.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Unknown Author, “Brief Historical Sketch of Formation of Golden Valley County,” in Gordon, Lehfeltd, and Morsanny, *Dawn in Golden Valley*, 302.

<sup>253</sup> Ruth Lane Garfield Jacobs. “First Sheriff of Golden Valley County,” and “First Woman Sheriff in Montana,” in Gordon, Lehfeltd, and Morsanny, *Dawn in Golden Valley*, 108-109.

<sup>254</sup> Kathy Sedgewick, area rancher Two Dot, interview by author, August 2006, tape recording and notes in author’s possession; Joe Sedgewick, area rancher Two Dot, interview by author, August 2006, tape recording and notes in author’s possession.

<sup>255</sup> Robert Baxter, “Two Dot,” in Harlowton Woman’s Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 357-360.

<sup>256</sup> Kathy Sedgewick interview; Joe Sedgewick interview.

During this time, the town of Harlowton grew by leaps and bounds. The initial successes of dry land farmers prompted a Grafton, North Dakota, firm to build a flourmill. The town quickly contained a water system, electric lights, three banks, a brickyard, and a red light district.<sup>257</sup> Within several years Harlowton grew even larger, attracting two doctors, a dentist, several lawyers, the Rocky Mountain Telephone Company, automobile garages, and a cigar store.<sup>258</sup> The community grew so large it prompted the *Harlowton Press* to say, quite hopefully, “It doesn’t require the gift of prophecy to forecast the fact within five years Harlowton will be as big as Lewistown, as well as being the most active railway center in the state of Montana.”<sup>259</sup> Although the town never attained the same size as Lewistown, it did become one of the most important railroad towns in the state.

The two towns affected most by the homestead boom were certainly Judith Gap and Hedgesville. Because of the Great Northern, Judith Gap grew at a frantic pace. By the crest of the boom Judith Gap contained seven saloons, numerous hotels and rooming houses, real estate offices, three barbers, two tack stores, two twenty-four hour restaurants, and three transportation firms. The GN built a depot, along with mechanic shops, in the town and staffed it with two hundred and fifty men, including skilled Japanese machinists, and erected a grain elevator.<sup>260</sup> “Judith Gap has a future,” wrote the *Musselshell News*, “and it is sure to be a town of note, at no distant date . . . [considering] the ideal location, the surrounding country and the expensive and substantial character of work the railroad has put in.”<sup>261</sup> Judith Gap was only rivaled in its success by the town of Hedgesville.

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<sup>257</sup> Stearns, “History of the Upper Musselshell,” 158.

<sup>258</sup> *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 341-343.

<sup>259</sup> *Harlowton Press*, 17 June 1916; Stearns, “History of the Upper Musselshell,” 189.

<sup>260</sup> Amil (Pete) Olson and Amy Mendenhall, “Early Day Judith Gap,” in Harlowton Woman’s Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 347-349.

<sup>261</sup> Harlowton *Musselshell News*, 11 September 1908; Stearns, “History of the Upper Musselshell,” 131.

By 1910, fairly early in the regional homestead boom, Hedgesville contained a bank, three general stores, saloons, two lumber yards, two real estate offices, a library, a cobbler (who also made tack and harness), and the Montana Telephone Company.<sup>262</sup> Other ventures included a refinery for crude oil and a Hart-Parr tractor dealership.<sup>263</sup> The town newspaper, the *Hedges Herald*, declared, “Hedgesville has the greatest future of any town along the Great Northern Railroad, the largest tributary farming country and the best climate in the State. If you want a home or business that will make you rich, you will be most heartily welcome.”<sup>264</sup>

Community activism and involvement, given the example of county busting advocates, town boosters of the time, and the exponential growth of towns, was widespread. All regional communities had various forms of civic organizations that aided in creating a sense of community and belonging. Clubs, such as the Masons or the Stockman’s Association, served more important functions than meeting fraternally or to further agricultural endeavors. They created camaraderie and entertainment venues, and acted, much like regional newspapers, to spread news. Additionally, civic organizations provided meeting grounds for families and friends, business deals and ventures, and job opportunities. There were two social organizations within the Upper Musselshell Valley that stood out: town sponsored baseball teams, which were widespread in the early homestead era, and the Ku Klux Klan, also ubiquitous, but short-lived during the downward spiral of mass settlement. Other social organizations included the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, the Nonpartisan League, the Good Roads Club, the Farm Bureau, and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Doris Barclay Taylor, “Hedgesville,” in Harlowton Woman’s Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 344.

<sup>263</sup> Dan DeBuff, area Farmer and Rancher Shawmut, interview by author, August 2006, tape recording and notes in author’s possession.

<sup>264</sup> *Hedges Herald* 19 October 1909.

<sup>265</sup> The IWW was also derisively called the “I Won’t Work” movement by many regional dwellers.

The town baseball teams of the Upper Musselshell Valley provided an extremely important and well-liked pastime. Major towns, such as White Sulphur Springs, Harlowton, Two Dot, and Hedgesville, all had teams who met on a regular basis to play. Games were a family affair; people packed into automobiles or horse drawn buggies, even traveled by saddle horse, to attend. It was such a popular sport that the Milwaukee Road offered cheap travel to different towns for games. Its special train could accommodate seventy-five people, and the cost of the ride was one dollar in 1905.<sup>266</sup>

By the mid-teens, dry land farmers, who generally practiced a mixed agriculture lifestyle, replaced the open range sheep and cattle ranchers as the dominant culture in the region. Some solely farmed, while others ran a few head of cattle or sheep, occasional hogs, and various types of fowl. Dry land farmers had a much different relationship with the land than did the ranchers of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Of all the myriad of people who had called the Upper Musselshell home, they changed the land to suit their needs the most.

The small town of Ryegate serves as a strong example of why so many people came to the region, what happened to the physical landscape, and why town boosting was so successful. From its very origins, Ryegate had a strong filial sense of being a farm community. The pamphlet *We are Satisfied*, published by the *Ryegate Weekly Reporter*, stressed the region could easily be dry-farmed. Charles Snyder, one of the small community's pioneers, stated the valley's "ideal climate and . . . rainfall of more than twenty inches" was ideal for winter wheat and rye. Additionally, land prices were good, "ranging up to \$40.00 per acre, [with] good land [that could] still be purchased for a considerable sum less" in 1914. Other regional farmers touted corn, extolled the virtues of massive vegetable gardens (where it "was not a curiosity to

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<sup>266</sup> Doris Barclay Taylor, "Hedgesville," in Harlowton Woman's Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 346; Stearns, "History of the Upper Musselshell," 152.

see a five pound potato or a forty pound cabbage . . . of the table variety”), oats, and barley. Alfalfa was praised as well, claims being it “is easily grown here; is the least expensive crop and is superior to all crops in food content for livestock.” Farmer and livestock raiser Loren Lay planted alfalfa, and within one hundred days it had a root system five feet long. To which Lay exclaimed, “this happens to be what they call ‘dry farming’.” Overall, the decades prior to the late 1920s were good to Golden Valley County. It was “Man’s Opportunity Land,” a region where many claimed “nowhere in the broad expanse of the continent is there better opportunity for those who desire to follow the avocation of farming . . . the soil in the great Musselshell Valley . . . is deep, and farm experts tell us that it will take many years before any deprecation will be noticeable and it will produce large crops as the years go by.” Many years did pass since *We Are Satisfied* made that claim, and the “deprecation” hit. With the exception of two drought years, it was a mere twelve years of good farming.<sup>267</sup>

After 1915 the entire Upper Musselshell Valley was blessed by uncommon wetness and great market values for crops. Average recorded rainfall reached twenty-six inches in the years before 1917, ten inches greater than usual. Farmers received eighty-eight cents a bushel for wheat in October of 1913, and some local growers were getting phenomenal wheat yields. One man planted forty acres of wheat, and at harvest time, he averaged sixty-three bushels to the acre (Figure 15).<sup>268</sup> Such massive yields created a strong regional land market during the early teens. According to the Montana Bureau of Agriculture, improved dry land sold at between twenty and thirty-five dollars an acre, irrigated land for fifty to seventy-five dollars an acre. By the end of

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<sup>267</sup> *Ryegate Weekly Reporter, We Are Satisfied*, (Ryegate: Montana, 1914), passim.

<sup>268</sup> Stearns, “History of the Upper Musselshell,” 161-166.

the homestead boom, around 1917, the valley contained over one thousand farms. At the beginning of the influx, around 1905, there were a mere four hundred.<sup>269</sup>



Figure 15. Wheat Crop on the Haymaker Cap circa 1915.

It is little surprise that families relocated with aplomb to the Upper Musselshell Valley. Altman Lammers, a native of Warsingsfen, Germany, landed in Baltimore in 1892 moved to a farm in South Dakota. Altman met and married a neighbor girl, Esther Lammers, in 1908. For several years, they kept hearing about free land in Montana, where several acquaintances had already homesteaded. In 1910 he and some family members went on a land seeker's excursion to Hedgesville, and was shown a homestead relinquishment of 160 acres, which he promptly purchased. Having to return for his family, he hired a new neighbor to plow the fields in his absence. Around April of 1911 Lammers loaded an emigrant car with three horses, three cows, a

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<sup>269</sup> Montana Bureau of Agriculture, Labor and Industry, *Montana: Resources and Opportunities, 1917* (Unknown Publisher), 126.



sow, a crate of chickens, farm machinery, tools, a wagon, and a buggy; the load totaled nearly 38,000 pounds of freight. His wife and two small sons, Oliver and Arthur, arrived later.

According to Esther's recollections, "her first view of the 'homestead' brought a few tears, however commitments had been made, [and] were somewhat irreversible."<sup>270</sup>

After the Lammers family arrived, they began to prove up at a rapid pace. By 1916 the Lammers claim consisted of a new barn, a new house, a chicken coop, a hay barn and cow shed, a calf and hog barn, the original homestead shack (used to store feed and grain), a milking barn, and a root cellar. Water was hauled from either Nihill, a nearby settlement, or a neighbor's claim, as the first well the family dug was unfit for human consumption. Their third well, reaching about fourteen feet deep, provided good drinking water but was a distant walk: two trips to the well and back totaled about a quarter of a mile. Altman traveled to the Snowy Mountains, nearly fifteen miles away, to gather wood for fuel and building material. Buffalo chips were used for fuel "on occasion."<sup>271</sup> Altman originally made such trips, but by the time Oliver was ten, he decided his sons could make the journey after they finished milking cows. In 1915, one of the finest years for crop production before 1919, Altman purchased a McCormick IHC binder for \$180.00.<sup>272</sup> The family soon acquired eighty additional acres from a relinquishment; their total acreage stood at 240. By 1920 the family moved to a new homestead Altman purchased for one hundred dollars. He then arranged to lease 550 acres from the NP, and purchased them outright for three dollars an acre in the early 1940s.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Oliver A. Lammers, "Moments to Remember: Biographics by Oliver A. Lammers 1996" (unpublished document, Harlowton, Upper Musselshell Valley Museum Archives, 1996), 2-4; Arthur Lammers, area rancher Careless Creek Ranch, interview by author, August 2006, tape recording and notes in author's possession.

<sup>271</sup> Lammers, *Moments to Remember*, 6, 5.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid. 8.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid. 13-15; Arthur Lammers interview.

About the same time Altman and Esther Lammers were settling near Hedgesville, the Kent family homesteaded near Shawmut in 1909. Emmett and Edna Kent were among the first initial homestead rushers settling between modern Shawmut and Ryegate. Edna, dearly missing her family, wrote her sister Irilla Taber of Connelsville, Missouri, asking that she homestead an adjacent claim. Irilla's husband, a coal miner named William, was happy to acquiesce. The Tabers arrived in Cushman by train in 1911, took a stagecoach east to Lavina, and boarded a second train westbound for Shawmut. That spring they filed a claim for 160 acres next to the Kents' homestead and built a 14-by-14 foot one-room house.<sup>274</sup>

Irilla and her two sons, Eugene and Emil, resided at the homestead while William stayed in Roundup, mining coal, to earn extra capital. In 1913 William plowed his homestead, which according to his son's recollection "had a lot of sagebrush . . . he had to plow it up, pile it, and burn it," with a walking plow and a span of mules. Irilla recalled "there were times when dad [William] would be so tired he could hardly sit to the table and eat and then would go dig post holes til [sic] dark . . . It was damned hard work."<sup>275</sup> In 1915 William diversified by purchasing fifteen head of cattle; a year later he expanded with land leased from the state and farmed with a mail order Sears and Roebuck riding plow. With the new plow, he "could make two and half acres a day," and got "it all worked down and seeded it to wheat and had a good crop."<sup>276</sup> The Taber children helped by running machinery like headers. Trusted with much responsibility, one of the three boys would drive a header (a harvesting machine that cut only the heads of grain rather than binding bundles) across a wheat field. Another boy arranged the grain as it was

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<sup>274</sup> George Taber, *The Life History of George Taber*" (unpublished manuscript in author's possession); Eugene Taber, Jr., area farmer and rancher Shawmut, interview by author, August 2006, tape recording and notes in author's possession; Fred Taber, area farmer and rancher Shawmut, interview by author, August 2006, tape recording and notes in authors possession.

<sup>275</sup> Eugene Taber, Sr., "*Life Story of Eugene E. Taber*" (unpublished manuscript in author's possession); Eugene Taber interview; Fred Taber interview.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*

elevated into a header barge, and the other sibling unloaded the barge between runs. The Taber family enjoyed several good years of dry land farming that allowed them, by 1920, to build a new house, barn, and milk house.

Joseph Cade filed a claim in 1911 in the Tuffley Bench area near Lavina. In the spring of 1912, Cade began his first year of farming. Unlike most, he “Hired a steam engine to do some plowing. Cost \$4 an acre . . . plowed 8 acres a day, used a disc plow 5 foot [sic]. Used horses to break some more land [sic],” and seeded twenty acres of winter wheat and ten acres of oats.<sup>277</sup> That winter, Cade returned to his native Wisconsin and purchased some stock and machinery he shipped back to Montana on an emigrant car. The following spring he planted an additional forty acres, but the crop was too short to harvest with a binder, so Cade and a confederate purchased McCormick-Deering header. Together they earned extra income using the header to help neighbors harvest grain.<sup>278</sup> He achieved a twenty-five acre crop that year, and by 1914, nearly doubled his yield on sixty-five acres of seeded land.

The spring of 1915 produced an abundance of moisture, and Cade’s wheat crop reflected the fortunate environment. He later stated, “I raised wheat that went for as much as 45 bushels to the acre,” and “That was something on land that we thought we got for nothing.”<sup>279</sup> The spectacular harvest allowed him to purchase additional land adjacent his original claim. His improvements and achievements allowed him to prove up his homestead claim that year. His quick success certainly illustrated that dry land farming, under the right conditions, could be profitable. The region’s cattle and sheep producers fared just as well at this time, but did face some reorganization pertaining to land use.

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<sup>277</sup> Cade, *Well, I Guess I Was Just Lucky*, 34.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.* 36-37.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.* 41.

Turn of the century ranching in the Upper Musselshell faced one most significant change: the end of the open range. The Moore Brothers of Two Dot stopped running cattle and horses around 1883 and turned to sheep.<sup>280</sup> According to long-time regional rancher Phil Rostad, such switches were common as “cattlemen were often sheepmen until the ranch was paid for. Then they went back to cattle.”<sup>281</sup> At one time the Moore’s had six bands of sheep, totaling around 10,000 head, grazing within the Belt Mountains. Neighbor George “Two Dot” Wilson’s ranch fell on hard times. Wilson died in 1907 due to complications from diabetes and a stroke; his wife followed him in 1909 from cancer. Portions of the Two Dot Ranch changed hands numerous times.<sup>282</sup>

In 1913 Missourian Gilbert (Gib) McFarland, who worked off and on for Wilson, and his brother George, after having purchased the Big Elk Hotel, blacksmith shop, and saloon, decided to form a partnership and work cattle. The McFarland brothers, in concert with Gib’s wife Leona (Laney) Kavanaugh, eventually came to own portions of the Two Dot Ranch. A poker game in White Sulphur Springs, in which Gib allegedly “broke the bank,” allowed the McFarland brothers to start purchasing vast tracts of land.<sup>283</sup> New Yorker E.C. Baxter, formerly of Castle, and three other men purchased a large tract near Two Dot. Together they formed Two Dot Land

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<sup>280</sup> P.J. Moore, Jr., “Perry J. Moore,” in Harlowton Woman’s Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 185; Steve Moore interview.

<sup>281</sup> Phil Rostad, area resident, and rancher, Lennep, interview by author, August 2006, tape Recording and notes in author’s possession.

<sup>282</sup> Moore, “Perry J. Moore,” in Harlowton Woman’s Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 185; John Whelan, *Jewell W. Harper/Two Dot, MT* (Harlowton: Upper Musselshell Museum Archive unpublished document).

<sup>283</sup> Mary McFarland White, “The McFarland Brothers--George and Gilbert,” in Harlowton Woman’s Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 175-176; Melody White interview; Family legend tells the story of Gib winning such a large amount of money that a local bank went under to cover his winnings. They still have the chips in their possession.

and Livestock. Baxter bought out his partners over the next several years and, along with William E. Jones, was instrumental in forming Wheatland County.<sup>284</sup>

Ranches in the eastern portion of the Upper Musselshell faced similar conditions at the turn of the twentieth century. John T. Murphy's Seventy-Nine Ranch neared 800,000 acres all over Montana, counted 40,000 head of cattle, and employed nearly a hundred cowboys. As the homesteaders reduced the area of free range available, Murphy turned to the sheep business and his cattle herd dropped to 10,000. Although the ranch ran nearly 70,000 sheep, they never entirely replaced cattle and horses. By 1911 the Seventy-Nine moved the majority of its cattle to more available range in the Big Dry. Murphy eventually sold the remaining lands that made up the Seventy-Nine, and he died in his home in Helena in 1914.<sup>285</sup>

The Winnecook Ranch became a partnership between Ralph Berry (two-thirds owner) and Melzer Stevens (one-third). Together Berry and Stevens' controlled range stretched from the Musselshell to the Snowy's, including pasturable lands near the top of the mountains, extending nearly twenty miles. However, their deeded lands encompassed a mere 16,000 acres, with a livestock count of 40,000 sheep and one thousand head of cattle. By 1906 the Winnecook incorporated under the lead of Lewis Penwell. Ralph Berry contracted sepsis from an ear infection, slipped into a diabetic coma, and died in June of 1911. Evie, Ralph's wife, inherited his shares of the company (over fifty percent of the company's stock) and held a fifty-thousand-dollar mortgage on the land.<sup>286</sup> Penwell, one of the remaining stockholders, advocated selling the Winnecook for a quick profit. His agitation earned Evie and her son, Stillman's, enmity. Penwell, according to Stillman's correspondence with his mother, created "feelings against him

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<sup>284</sup> Jessie Moore, "Robert N. Jones and William E. Jones," in Harlowton Woman's Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 141-42; William Jones, area rancher Harlowton, interview by author, August 2006, tape recording and notes in authors possession.

<sup>285</sup> Albie Gordon, "Seventy-Nine Ranch," in Gordon, Lehfeldt, and Morsanny, *Dawn in Golden Valley*, 7-9.

<sup>286</sup> Hill, *Winnecook Ranch on the Musselshell*, 26-29.

at all sides [referring to other shareholders dislike of Penwell] . . . [he] amounts to nothing as far as we are concerned.<sup>287</sup> Stillman, a renowned conchologist holding a doctorate in marine biology from Stanford, became the corporation's president in 1917.<sup>288</sup>

In the western portions of the valley the Smith Brothers Corporation faced difficult times. When William died, his brother tried unsuccessfully to sell the family land. He bought his brother's shares and became the guardian of his children. In 1904 William's offspring reacquired their father's shares of the company and received a large portion of the land. They sold their holdings, in 1928, to Wisconsin farmer S.A. Ingersoll for \$250,000 and his Wisconsin farm. Within a couple of years Ingersoll's land holdings totaled 78,000 acres of land, with 72,000 acres deeded. His livestock totaled 12,000 ewes, between three and four hundred bucks (rams), over 4,500 yearling lambs, about forty head of cattle, and nearly one hundred hogs.<sup>289</sup>

Another significant ranch was founded in the western portion of the valley around the turn of the century. Olaf Rostad, from Trondhjem, Norway, joined his brother George in Big Timber. In 1895, Olaf purchased a homestead and established a small ranch along the Bozeman Fork a short distance from the South Fork of the Musselshell. In 1902 he married fellow Norwegian immigrant Marie Olsen. As the mining camp of Castle was becoming depopulated, the couple purchased a home and furnishings from the mining town. They moved the items, including a log house, to their ranch. Rostad began ranching with a small herd of cattle and, in 1903, added 2,100 sheep to his livestock pool. Lacking enough range to run sheep for long, he

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid. 32.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid. 32, 41.

<sup>289</sup> Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass*, 313-14.

sold them two years later and bought more cattle. Over the next two decades, he increased his land holdings and re-entered the sheep business.<sup>290</sup>

Rostad neighbor Martin Grande served as a school trustee, a Meagher County commissioner, a founder (and president) of the Stockman's Bank in Martinsdale, and aided in creating the Montana Wool Growers Association in 1895. Prior to the homestead era, Grande had 12,000 sheep and 400 head of cattle. With settlers snapping up nearly all the available and formerly free range, he reduced his livestock to what could be raised on 17,000 acres of deeded land. By all accounts, Grande was a "far-sighted and enterprising" man who purchased a sawmill and a threshing machine to further his income. Adopted daughter Mina and her husband Nels Voldseth inherited portions of Grande's ranch, consisting of nearly 14,000 acres of prime ranch land.<sup>291</sup>

In 1905 Charles M. Bair, formerly of Lavina and Billings, returned to the Upper Musselshell and helped form the Martinsdale Land and Livestock Company specializing in sheep.<sup>292</sup> In 1910 Bair shipped to Boston merchants a load of wool that encompassed an entire train of forty-seven cars. The 1.5 million pounds of wool sold for over twenty-four cents a pound, netting nearly half a million dollars.<sup>293</sup> By 1915, Bair bought out his partners and reorganized the company. Nineteen years later, his ranch included 60,000 acres of deeded land, over 23,000 sheep and "some" cattle, a payroll that listed nearly a hundred men, and enough horses to operate substantial hay fields. The depression caused Bair to cut his numbers some;

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<sup>290</sup> Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass*, 304-05; Lee Rostad interview; Phil Rostad, area resident and rancher Lennep, interview by author, August 2006, tape recording and notes in author's possession.

<sup>291</sup> Norman Voldseth, area rancher Lennep, interview by author, August 2006, tape recording and notes in authors possession; Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass*, 326-27; Lee Rostad interview; Phil Rostad interview.

<sup>292</sup> Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass*, 200.

<sup>293</sup> Rostad *Fourteen Cents & Seven Green Apples*, 65.

however, being a perceptive businessman with Alaskan oil interests, he emerged from the 1930s with his ranch and its prodigious numbers intact.<sup>294</sup>

The land patents filed by homesteaders Taber, Cade, Birdsall, and Lammers are telling documents of the ecological ramifications that the Upper Musselshell faced during his period. William Taber filed his claim on 160 acres in 1911, amounting to a total cost of twenty-two dollars and received his patent three years later. Within a span of three years, Taber significantly altered the landscape within the bounds of his homestead. Starting was a slow affair; the first year Taber only plowed two acres and planted a significant vegetable garden to feed his family. The next year was better when he plowed seventeen acres and seeded it to wheat and attained a ten-ton yield. In 1914 he plowed seventy acres, planting thirty to wheat (growing 600 bushels), twenty-three to flax (receiving 115 bushels), and twelve to oats (netting 125 bushels). Five acres were reserved for corn and miscellaneous vegetables. He left 30 acres unplowed (only 100 of his 160 acres was deemed cultivatable) for grazing lands for both cattle and horses. As far as improvements, the Taber family did well, spending \$910.00 on building a house, a chicken coup, barn, root house, and digging a viable well. Additionally, he fenced fifty-five acres of his claim. Using the Enlarged Homestead Act (under this act, additional claims could be filed on a second 160 acres and the prove up from any prior, adjacent claims counted towards the new claim), he accrued another 160 acres.<sup>295</sup>

Joe Cade also filed his claim in 1911 on 160 acres of cultivatable land. Accordingly in 1913 he planted a thirty-five acre crop. The next year he almost doubled his crops, planting sixty-five acres. By 1915, the year he received his patent, Cade planted eighty acres of unspecified crops, and left the other half of his land unplowed for grazing. He built a house,

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<sup>294</sup> Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grassy*, 200-01.

<sup>295</sup> "William Taber Land Patent 1914," Land Entry Files, Bx. 15098, National Archives, Washington, D.C.



barn, a machine shed, two granaries, and dug a well. Additionally, he had his entire claim fenced and cross-fenced. His total improvements totaled \$1200.00. Cade's early years were not without problems, though, as a court battle over who owned the land ensued when the Northern Pacific Railroad tried to claim that the land was originally theirs under grant and not the federal government's. In the end, Cade won the suit and his 1911 residency rights were upheld.<sup>296</sup>

William Birdsall filed an eighty-acre claim in 1911, with seventy-four of the acres cultivatable. Over the first year, Birdsall planted thirty-eight acres of flax, and thirteen acres of wheat. The remainder he had plowed, but left it fallow for planting that coming spring. He built a small house, adjacent barn and fenced the property. Foreshadowing his future problems with drought, Birdsall had his original claim amended to being under the Desert Land Act as it required significant irrigation works. By doing so, Birdsall was allowed to file a second claim, this one for one hundred acres all of which was cultivatable. By 1916 he planted thirty-nine and a half acres to wheat and left the remainder for grazing animals. He made massive improvements to his new claim: first listing \$120 worth of fence, followed by a \$400 house, a \$250 barn, a chicken house, and digging a 126 foot deep well. Additionally, he hired someone to plow his acreage for him at a cost of \$75. His total improvements amounted to \$1210.<sup>297</sup>

German-born Altman Lammers also made massive changes to his homestead according to the official land patents. Filing in 1910, it took Lammers a short four years to receive ownership of his first claim. Like many of his homesteading colleagues, he started slowly with a one-acre vegetable garden the first year. In 1912 he had a self-reported "poor crop" on seventeen acres of flax. Reporting a "fair crop" the following year, Lammers planted seventeen acres of flax, ten acres of wheat, and five of oats. By 1914, he planted an additional 18 acres of

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<sup>296</sup> "Joseph Cade Land Patent, 1915," Land Entry Files, Bx. 17272, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>297</sup> "William Birdsall Land Patent, 1913," Land Entry Files, Bx. 11736, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; "William Birdsall Land Patent, 1916," Land Entry Files, Bx. 11736, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

oats, five acres of wheat, one and a half acres of potatoes, and left seventeen acres in summer fallow. In that time frame Lammers also fenced and cross-fenced the entire claim, built a house, barn, granary, and hen house, and dug a well at the estimated cost of \$500. Two years later, under the Enlarged Homestead Act, he filed a second claim on eighty additional acres, of which half was cultivatable. He fenced the claim and listed having put ten acres of eighty into wheat.<sup>298</sup>

These four homesteaders –Taber, Cade, Birdsall, and Lammers— give a prime example of how the settlers began to significantly alter the landscape of the valley. Together the four men, a fraction of the total people filing homestead claims in the Upper Musselshell, received nine hundred acres of land. Of that nine hundred acres, only sixty-three percent (567 acres) of it was farmable. They put a total of 385 acres, fully sixty-eight percent of such lands, into some stage of cultivation within four years of their initial filing. They grazed thirty-eight percent of their total claims. Either way, they all intentionally (and unintentionally) markedly altered 728, or eighty percent, of their total acreage received. As a whole the thousands of people who either filed land claims, or outright purchased land, ended up changing the face of the region with their cultivation, grazing, and buildings which significantly altered the natural environment of the valley more so than any other culture. For example, the influx of homesteaders, due to hunting and cultivation, pushed much of the wildlife in the valley region of the Upper Musselshell into the more mountainous regions.<sup>299</sup>

Socially, before the Great Depression the valley was marked by the advent of the Great War and the Flu Pandemic of 1918, to which numerous regional residents succumbed. World War One in the Upper Musselshell saw many of the valley’s young men volunteer their lives and time to defend Europe from German aggression. The central portion of the valley was singled

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<sup>298</sup> “Altmann Lammers Land Patent 1914,” Land Entry Files, Bx.14712, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; “Altmann Lammers Land Patent, 1919,” Land Entry Files, Bx. 23498, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>299</sup> Gene Tierney, *The Cry of the Hunted* (Harlowton: The Times Clarion, 1990), 15.

out for its participation in Liberty Loan Drives. According to the *Harlowton Times*, Wheatland County was “the first in the United States to subscribe its quota to the Second Liberty Loan Drive, and the third county to go over the top in the Fourth Liberty Loan campaign . . . [and] had the distinction of standing first in the nation in per capita subscriptions to the Fourth . . . The percentage of Judith Gap [participation] was 95 per cent.”<sup>300</sup> As a reward for such involvement, the government named a war freighter, a 9,600-ton steamship, the *Wheatland, Montana*. Nineteen-year-old Juanita Cook, of Judith Gap, was chosen to christen the vessel in Seattle, Washington, on August 4, 1919.<sup>301</sup> She was accompanied by a small delegation consisting of W.N. Smith, W.C. Husband, and George Haynes, and Mrs. C.R. Stone acted as her chaperone. In her diaries, Cook recalled a humorous incident at the christening ceremony. The Master of Ceremonies presented Cook by stating, “It gives me great pleasure to introduce you to Miss Cook’s husband.” A scandalized Cook reportedly stood and replied, “Mr. Husband is an attorney who is the chairman of the United War Work. He and his lovely wife live in Harlowton.”<sup>302</sup> After World War One ended, regional residents returned their interests to a form of freighting they knew much better than maritime shipping: railroading.

The Milwaukee Road and the homestead boom made many regional towns into the standard railroad T-town, allowing the agriculturist to bring products to an easily assessable rail center. Milwaukee tie gangs laid track from the east to the west traveling through such towns as Ryegate and Harlowton. The main street of the two towns was laid perpendicular to the railroad tracks, creating a T shape. This was an intentional move to fit the team-haul principle in which a

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<sup>300</sup> *Harlowton Times*

<sup>301</sup> Juanita Webb, “Christening the Battleship ‘Wheatland’,” in Harlowton Woman’s Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 295.

<sup>302</sup> Mabel O. Haynes, Comp., “*History of the Garneill-Judith Gap area of Central Montana*” Juanita Cook Diary Entry, August 4, 1919. (Unpublished document, Upper Musselshell Museum Archive, 1993), D-29.

team of horses or mules could haul a load of wheat about five miles per day.<sup>303</sup> Any farther, and the farmer would be forced into spending the night in town. As a result, many towns sprang up about ten miles apart, allowing farmers and ranchers to make a trip to the rail station a single-day affair. Such towns also served as important service centers. As more and more technological innovations, such as the automobile, occurred, the T-town slowly became obsolete. The Milwaukee Road made one such innovation itself.

In a bold attempt to upgrade its competitive status with the GN and BN, and as the result of a ruinous mountain fire, the Milwaukee decided to electrify the line in 1915. Electrification was a strong, profitable venture for the Milwaukee Road: it cost twelve million dollars for construction and an additional three million for equipment upgrades. The move away from coal- and steam- powered engines was a calculated one that greatly enhanced the line. Milwaukee tracks were quickly lined, from Harlowton to Avery, Idaho, with power substations at close to twenty-mile intervals and with catenary wires and poles to power electric engines. Moving to electric lines also made the Milwaukee much more reliable. Electric engines were smoke and soot free, and eliminated the need to stop for coal or water. Coal and steam powered engines were difficult to move during the cold months, often causing significant delays as they could not generate enough power to move, and electric engines always out-pulled steam and coal driven trains. Financially, electrification benefited the Milwaukee a great deal. It saved on brake maintenance, and when traveling on down hill slopes created more electricity (through a process called regeneration). The excess electricity regeneration produced was pumped back into the power substations for future use or for sale to power companies like General Electric. Not having to stop for coal eliminated additional expenses and aided in the lines transit times. With its move to electrification, the Milwaukee Road became one of the most productive and reliable

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<sup>303</sup> Hudson, *Plains Country Towns*, 89-93.

lines in the West. Additionally, the railroad solidified its hold on the upper wrung of the economic ladder within Wheatland County.

Both the historian and regional dweller view this era of history as a sad precursor of what was to come: mass homesteading failure. It was a tragic mistake that both sectors try and tidy up a great deal. For example, historians cite that the government and people were warned by some experts not to homestead, however, this does cover up the fact that some did so and prospered a great deal. The grassroots perception is that farming was obviously going to fail in central Montana due to its weather variables and physiographic make-up, hence it was much more suited toward settlers who wanted to be stock producers. Both concepts leave out not only the people who settled there at the time, but are also theories set up well after the homesteading era came to a close. At the time, homesteading was a great opportunity to create a new life on free land, or even use homestead claims as a form of investment meant only to be sold for profit for those that never intended to stay within the valley. Additionally both sides leave out the fact that, much like Joe Cade or Altman Lammers, it was quite possible to prosper. They neglect that those who failed did so because they refused to diversify into other ventures and that many other regional people, particularly those willing to buy land from failed homesteaders or sheriff's sales like the McFarland Brothers, acquired land en masse further contributing to their success within the region. This means that many people did not flee, but consolidated their holdings. With these concepts in mind a new, rationalized pattern emerges: homesteading was a venture investment that allowed many people to profit both in terms of land holdings and capital, not just a tragic mistake. Additionally, it allows for an examination of the anomalies that traditional history leaves out; such as the importance of regional rail lines, like the Milwaukee Road, passing through homesteaded lands allowing for an examination of regional cultures. For example, as the

Milwaukee improved its reliability as a shipper, it also caused many regional inhabitants to rely upon it for security and income. This is especially true of Wheatland County and the town of Harlowton in particular. Such a large portion of Wheatland County's population relied upon the railroad that it created a fifth succession of place and culture within the Upper Musselshell. The western sub-region of Meagher County retained an agricultural base, as did its eastern counterpart Golden Valley County. The Wheatland County sub-region became splintered between being an agricultural culture and a railroad culture. The importance of farming and ranching receded as the economic mainstay of the central portion of the valley, partly due to the economic conditions that struck Montana in 1919.

CHAPTER 7. THE NOT SO “GOLDEN AGE” OF AGRICULTURE: THE HOMESTEAD  
BUST IN THE UPPER MUSSELHELL VALLEY, 1917-1940

Whereas the 1910s and early teens were a time of high prosperity in the Upper Musselshell, the late teens were not. Due to precipitation returning to normal levels, then turning to drought by 1919, homesteader after homesteader faced failure. Crops died at enormous rates, prices fell, and many faced foreclosure. Already in the late teens the Upper Musselshell Valley (and the state of Montana in general) had entered into a depression. Commodity prices fell drastically after World War I, massive droughts occurred, and the honyockers of the early 1900s fled the region in droves. By the early 1920s Montana’s farmers reached an unprecedented 175,000,000 dollar indebtedness, bankruptcy rates reached the highest in the nation, and farm values plummeted by half. The homesteading boom in the Upper Musselshell Valley collapsed. Despite this, Montana still contained over half a million inhabitants and nearly sixty thousand farms and ranches.<sup>304</sup> An estimated sixty-thousand Honyockers left during the 1920s because of poor farming conditions, as the sour economy and social conditions of the Great Depression came early to Montana.<sup>305</sup> Under scrutiny, it is apparent that this region of Montana does not follow the traditional history and narrative of the Great Depression.

Just as historians like Joseph Kinsey Howard wrote of homesteading’s predestined failure, grassroots history also espouses apocryphal legends that support such a claim while stressing that ranching was foreordained. For example, region resident, rancher, and author Spike Van Cleve, in his memoir titled *40 Years’ Gatherin’s* summed up the regional zeitgeist toward the era nicely by writing, “The homesteaders came, starved out—though it took some of them about thirty years to do it—and once again we are a stock country. Grass is our crop, and

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid. 242.

<sup>305</sup> Toole, *Montana: State of Extremes*, 87.

we convert it to beef or mutton, just as for thousands of years it was converted into wild meat for the Indians.”<sup>306</sup> Times were hard, but not as hard as the 1920s. Ranches were significantly overpopulated as too many drylander’s were planting wheat in lands not suitable to farming. Simply put, there were too many farmers and ranchers working too small areas of range. There were certainly many foreclosures, but successful farmers and ranchers gathered more and more land into their fold than ever before. Both versions of history do much to tidy up the past to explain the present; however, this is a much more complicated story. People overestimated the capacity for the land to support traditional farming.

What follows, according the New Regional History, really was not mass failure, but massive adjustments to all facets of their lives. Because the majority of the Great Plains is swept up within a cattle born narrative, as shown by such sources as county agent records for the Upper Musselshell, it certainly seems that homesteading was doomed. Additionally, this time frame saw massive and intentional ecological change from dry land farming that had long range effects not only on the environment, but also within the region’s culture. Last, as a corrective measure, it is important to point at that the region was already encompassed by sour economics and poor weather well ahead of the Great Depression. Because of such socioeconomic conditions, the Upper Musselshell contained a chapter of the Ku Klux Klan, what was generally an urban institution within the confines of Montana history. Despite such adverse conditions, some people still immigrated to the region and prospered, after struggling to gain a foothold in the drought conditions. Others adapted their lifestyles; changing the crops and livestock they produced to retain their homes. Most farmers discovered that the form of dry land farming they practiced was harmful not only to them, but also to the physical landscape as well. Those who remained consolidated and enlarged their land holdings while branching into varied agricultural

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<sup>306</sup> Spike Van Cleve, *40 Years’ Gatherin’s* (Kansas City: The Lowell Press, 1977), xv.



ventures and means of income. The stories of many of these homesteaders reflect such adjustments and hard labors, as do they attempt to reinforce the grassroots and traditional scholarly interpretations of history.

Camille and Marie DeBuff, northern neighbors to the Tabers in Shawmut, came at the tail end of the homestead boom in 1916. Originally from Belgium, the DeBuffs had settled earlier in North Dakota and Minnesota. They traveled, with their children, on the Milwaukee Road to land near Shawmut. Camille never filed a homestead claim; instead he purchased between a quarter and half-section of land and settled down to farm (on a small scale) and raise dairy cattle and pigs. Neighboring homesteaders, desperate to leave at this time, were eager to get rid of land and often traded acreage for goods; their abandoned livestock and machinery littered the region. Those who stayed, like Camille's family, were more than willing to use abandoned equipment. Like other small, resilient farmers, he slowly acquired more land, which totaled nearly 3,000 acres by 1935; many of the people who remained took advantage of rock bottom land prices, and simple old fashioned trading for goods and services, to increase their land holdings. In Camille's case it was the work of the DeBuff children allowed the family to do, and attain, things other families could not. For example, when Camille had trouble paying taxes, he would find employment off the farm and Marie and the children would work the land and livestock. By 1927 Camille and his family turned their attention to general farming. The family's hard work, adaptation, and resilience paid great dividends.<sup>307</sup> Other settlers were not so lucky.

William F. Birdsall and his family, originally from Iowa, homesteaded near the town of Harlowton in 1911. His family arrived before him on a passenger train. William arrived two days later via an emigrant car containing their worldly possessions. They spent their first winter

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<sup>307</sup> Julia DeBuff, "The Camile DeBuff Family," in Harlowton Woman's Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*; Dan DeBuff interview.

in a rented house in Harlowton, and William found employment as a carpenter for the Milwaukee Road. The family moved to their claim that summer, and William continued working for the railroad; his wife Rosella and the children stayed at the homestead to fulfill residency requirements. William would come out on weekends and haul water for his family, on a stoneboat from a spring located a mile from the house, and tend to proving up.

The first couple of years were profitable for the Birdsalls. In 1915 they had a bumper crop, as did many regional farmers, which averaged forty-five bushels of wheat per acre and fifty-five bushels of oats; prosperous enough to buy a relinquishment of eighty acres. After several good years the family purchased an additional fifty-one acres from the railroad, and their farm consisted of 291 acres. Another homesteader offered to purchase their land for forty dollars an acre. They considered the proposition, and given the bountiful harvests of the mid-teens, counter-offered and asked for forty-five dollars. After such good years, they figured the land had to be worth at least that much money.

After 1917 the family faced crop failure after crop failure. They tenaciously held onto the claim, believing drought conditions would recede and their earlier prosperity would return. Lee Birdsall remembered, “neighbor after neighbor moved away, many with little more than the clothes on their backs. Sheriff sales [sic] were frequent, with farm machinery and household goods going for almost nothing.”<sup>308</sup> By 1919 the Birdsall boys decided instead of attending school, they would stay on the farm to help salvage their home, land, and livelihood. In 1925 the family moved to Billings seeking outside employment to pay creditors and keep the farm. The family returned that spring and seeded a crop, but it was destroyed by drought and hail. By harvest time, the Birdsalls received notice of foreclosure proceedings. “Everything of value was

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<sup>308</sup> Rev. C. Lee Birdsall, “Pioneer Experiences of the WM. F. Birdsall Family,” in Harlowton Woman’s Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 323.

sold,” recalled Lee, “but we received none of the proceeds. Thus we left Wheatland County in the fall of 1925 practically destitute.”<sup>309</sup>

Victor Schaff and his family, owners of portions of the now historic Sims-Garfield Ranch, faced problems similar to those of the Birdsalls, who lived about thirty-five miles away. The first decade was prosperous, and the large family worked the land well enough to be able to branch into selling Percheron horses all over the United States. However, Schaff’s dream of abundant farming ended in 1923 when the land was foreclosed by the Federal Land Bank of Spokane and sold at public auction for \$11,521. The seller bought it and rented it to two men who later purchased the land for a single dollar. However, unlike the Birdsalls, the Schaffs maintained their life near Ryegate.<sup>310</sup> They did so primarily because of their large and extended family.

The Schaff’s rented a place near the town of Belmont (close to modern Lavina), saved what little income they could gather and began to lease state lands while buying acreage for as little as fifty cents an acre from tax sales. They made their own clothes for the most part, and produced all of their own food. As the decade progressed, the Schaff’s were again struck by misfortune due to water--their well went dry and they had no hay reserves for their stock. The family faced the proposition of losing a second parcel of land in less than ten years time. However, as a family they decided to face their problems and try and save the ranch. Some family members worked on the Dead Man’s Basin irrigation project for income, while the majority of the family found work in the sugar beet fields of Laurel. Together, they scrimped and

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> *Harlowton Times Clarion*, “Sims-Garfield Ranch is Entered on National Register of Historic Places,” 9 October 1980; Gordon and Leheldt, *Dawn in Golden Valley*, 326-328.

saved through the hard times and eventually came out with a “nice big spread . . . in Golden Valley County.”<sup>311</sup>

Dry land farming, and those who practiced it, affected the natural environment of the Upper Musselshell more than any prior culture, as mass homesteading significantly interacted with natural fauna and flora. The presence of the dry-land farmer caused the valley’s wildlife to migrate to higher elevations. The mule deer and elk that roamed the region during the late 1800s avoided human habitation by drifting into the surrounding mountain ranges, and their once abundant levels declined. Some animals remained to forage the newly introduced crops of the homesteader and took refuge along the Musselshell itself, but the majority retreated to the Snowy, Belt, and Crazy Mountains. They would later serve as a much needed form of sustenance to homesteaders who remained with the region. Additionally, the valley contained small herds of mustangs before the homesteading era. The dry land farmer’s fences and ropes eliminated the modest number of wild horses that called the Musselshell Valley home.<sup>312</sup> Stock producer’s barbed wire, in its many variations, cordoned off the majority of private land in the region beginning en masse in the late teens and struck the final deathblow to the open range system.

The most important environmental and physiographic changes stemmed from the dry lander’s incessant cultivation. The practice of dry land farming is dependant upon stopping the capillary action of water in the soil, which supplies water to plants. Water surrounds the soil particles, and varying types of soil retain more water. The various forms of loam in the Upper Musselshell Valley seem to be perfect for moisture management through dry farming, despite W.B. Hazen describing the Musselshell Country as having only one acre in a hundred being

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Arthur Lammers interview.

fertile with the remainder being “sterile” and that Montana “must not be homesteaded.”<sup>313</sup> The goal of dry-land farming was to keep water in the soil. Deep plowing was followed by sub-surface packing to retard evaporation by creating dust mulch to cover the top layer of soil (Figure 16).<sup>314</sup>



Figure 16. Farming in the Upper Musselshell Valley, ca. 1916 (K. Ross Toole Archive-University of Montana).

The physical process of the farmer’s labor, using implements like the turning plow, disk plow, spike and spring tooth harrows, disk harrows, and field cultivators, consisted of a deep and thorough plowing in the fall followed by cultivation to form dust mulch. A clean summer fallowing was practiced every other year if there was low rainfall or every third or fourth year if

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<sup>313</sup> W.B. Hazen “The Great Middle Region of the United States, and its Limited Space of Arable Land,” *North American Review*, 120 (January 1875): 12.

<sup>314</sup> Webb, *The Great Plains*, 370-71.

there was abundant precipitation.<sup>315</sup> There was no concept of crop rotation or other practices that would aid in soil retention.<sup>316</sup> According to soil experts, like L.F. Giesecker, during this time regional agriculture problems were due more to problems of economic (i.e. poor market value) than to drought conditions or problems of soil fertility.<sup>317</sup>

It soon became apparent to farmers, especially after 1919, that Milwaukee Road promotional material was skewed. The thirty bushels of wheat considered to be common in Milwaukee tracts was true only in the uncommonly wet years of 1916 and 1917.<sup>318</sup> The late 1920s saw several strategies to combat soil erosion within Montana. Implements like duckfoot cultivators and rod weeders were used to create clod mulch to stop erosion, but met with limited success.<sup>319</sup> During the late 1920s agriculture seemed to resurge for a short time. The drought receded a small degree, and land prices increased. From 1927 to 1928, an acre of improved farm land rose in value from \$23.30 to \$24.20; cultivatable dry land went from \$16.80 to \$17.90; and grazable land values grew from \$6.40 to \$6.80 per acre.<sup>320</sup> However, because the land was always under some form of cultivation, there was significant erosion due to the loss of soil moisture and the stolid winds of the Upper Musselshell Valley that, according to the Palmer Drought Severity Index, caused a major drought for more than half of the 1930s (Table 1).<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> John A. Widtsoe, *Dry Farming*, available from the world wide web

<http://www.soilandhealth.org/01aglibrary/010102/01010200frame.html> accessed 13 December 2006.

<sup>316</sup> Fred A. Shannon, *The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture, 1860-1897* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1945), 169.

<sup>317</sup> Mary Wilma M. Hargreaves, *Dry Farming in the Northern Great Plains* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 11, 25, 47.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid*, 73.

<sup>319</sup> Malone, Roeder, and Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, 315.

<sup>320</sup> Hargreaves, *Dry Farming in the Northern Great Plains*, 35.

<sup>321</sup> University of Nebraska-Lincoln. "*The Dust Bowl in the Plains*," available from the world wide web <http://snr.unl.edu/metr351-03/jnothwehr/causes.html>, accessed 08 December 2006.

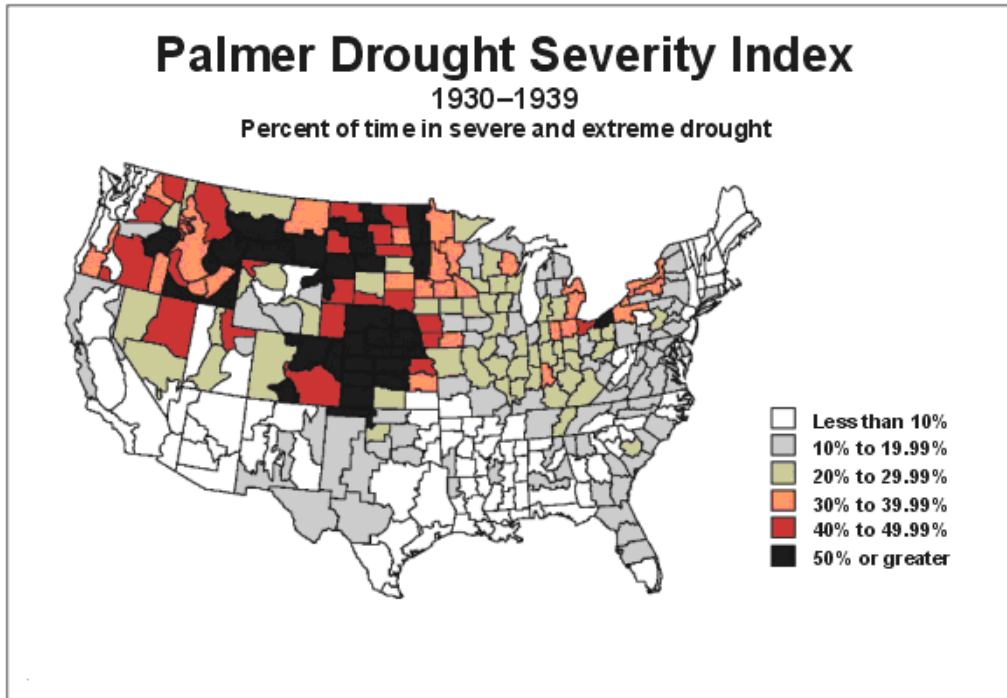


Table 1. Palmer Drought Severity Index.

The drought and the high winds of the Upper Musselshell caused the U.S. Soil Erosion Service (USSE) to declare central Montana a prime example of severe erosion. Of the ninety-three million acres the USSE surveyed within Montana, 59.6 million faced serious soil erosion problems, and nearly 4.5 million acres were becoming severally eroded.<sup>322</sup> Such an environmental catastrophe degraded soil productivity. However, within the Upper Musselshell valley, soil erosion never reached the same scale as it did elsewhere within Montana or the Great Plains. Local histories provide only one example of regional dust-storms, which comes from the DeBuff family, who was once subjected to a dust-storm that left sand drifts, between five and six feet deep, on their land and mounded over many fence lines.<sup>323</sup>

<sup>322</sup> United States Soil Erosion Service, “*Wind Erosion By State, 1939*,” available from the world wide web [http://www.law.yale.edu/documents/pdf/tables\\_figures.pdf](http://www.law.yale.edu/documents/pdf/tables_figures.pdf), accessed 08 December 2006.

<sup>323</sup> Julia DeBuff, “The Camile DeBuff Family,” in Harlowton Woman’s Club, *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 63; Dan DeBuff interview.

The massive drought was coupled with a marked decrease in the value of wheat crops. In 1928 Montana produced 48,104,000 bushels of wheat valued at \$61,881,000. In 1929, due to drought, the wheat yield in the state fell to 40,688,000 bushels valued at \$38,741,000. The following year was even worse. Montana raised 33,698,000 bushels valued at a mere \$16,332,000 or about 48 cents per bushel. Less than three years later, the price fell to 30 cents per bushel.<sup>324</sup> From 1929 to 1934 the crop lands of Wheatland County decreased by 100,000 acres.<sup>325</sup> Because of such conditions, Golden Valley County formally requested state and federal relief in 1931. The following year, Wheatland County (the last remaining county in central Montana not on relief) followed suit and requested relief via the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and the American Red Cross.<sup>326</sup>

Although the dust storms did not reach the magnitude of those in the southern Great Plains, they did occur locally. Additionally, the constant working of the land damaged the flora of the region. The once knee-high wild grasses slowly receded in scope to merely bordering fields and streams. Farmers replaced much of the blue and hairy gramma grasses with various types of wheat or alfalfa. To further the war against erosion, farmers in the 1930s turned away from the clod mulch method and started to use the less aesthetically pleasing “trashy mulch” to cut down wind erosion. They also started to mimic Canadian growers by implementing methods like strip cropping, shelterbelts, and contour farming. Additionally, many started to use drought resistant forms of wheat, like Yogo or Ceres.<sup>327</sup>

Poor economic and social conditions (such as the decline in mining, timber, and agriculture and the state-wide depression) after the First World War led to extreme forms of

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<sup>324</sup> Hargreaves, *Dry Farming in the Northern Great Plains*, 72.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.* 74.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.* 87.

<sup>327</sup> Malone, Roeder, and Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, 315.



activism. This led inhabitants of the Upper Musselshell Valley to form Klan Number 29, Realm of Montana, Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, around 1923. Based in Harlowton, Klan 29 had one hundred and ninety-three members. Membership cards indicate their ranks contained dentists, railroaders, draymen, one County Clerk and Recorder, and one County Treasurer. Their “realm” encompassed land as far west as the town of Ringling, south from Judith Gap, north from Melville, and east from Lavina. The peculiarity of such an organization springing up within the region should be noted as the Klan tends to be a more urban centered institution, especially in Montana with its history in cities such as Butte, and its members tend to be laborers, professionals, and very political. However, the Klan was short-lived, lasting a mere five years. With such a large depression on, it was hard for most to scrape up the monthly dues that belonging to the group cost.<sup>328</sup>

In 1920 Wheatland County produced \$721,074 worth of agricultural goods. By 1930 crop values fell to \$474,962. A decade later, prices had fallen to \$213,474, more than two-thirds below the values of the Golden Age of Agriculture.<sup>329</sup> Between 1934 and 1936, precipitation reached only seven inches, less than half of the average. The moisture problem was compounded by high temperatures that increased evaporation drastically, and the resulting drought was horrible. Before 1919, Montana farms averaged twenty-five bushels of wheat per acre; after that year they averaged 2.4 bushels an acre. In August 1920 a bushel sold for \$2.40; two months later the price dropped to \$1.25.<sup>330</sup> Within the Upper Musselshell Valley, in 1919 Meagher County planted ten thousand acres of wheat and received a yield of 2.7 bushels per

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<sup>328</sup> “Knights Of The Ku Klux Klan.” Wheatland Klan, No. 29 (Harlowton, Mont.) 1923-1928 Knights Of The Ku Klux Klan. Wheatland Klan No. 29 (Harlowton, Mont.), Montana State Historical Archive, #SC 2223.

<sup>329</sup> University of Virginia. *Historical Census*, available from the world wide web <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/>, accessed 4 June 2003.

<sup>330</sup> Malone, Roeder and Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, 281.

acre, Golden Valley planted 74,800 acres and earned a return of 8.3 bushels per acre, while Wheatland planted 69,000 acres, which produced 1.5 bushels per acre. The following year was little better. Meagher farmers planted 13,500 acres and received 14.9 bushels per acre, Golden Valley planted 67,300 acres with a yield of 4.7 bushels per acre, and Wheatland County seeded 43,200 acres and averaged 13.9 bushels per acre. However, by 1930, the situation for wheat farmers was desperate. That year Meagher planted a mere 4,700 acres and received a return of 6.1 bushels per acre. Golden Valley planted 33,500 acres and received 4.5 bushels per acre, and Wheatland County planted 23,100 acres of wheat, yielding only 4.8 bushels per acre.<sup>331</sup> The prosperity of the early teens was certainly overshadowed by the Great Depression.

The winter of 1932-33 was the low point of the Great Depression throughout the United States. Unemployment rates reached twenty-five percent, and the nation's financial system faced near collapse. In Montana wheat worth one hundred dollars in 1920 was only valued \$19.32. Cattle in 1929 sold for a little over nine dollars per hundred weight, and three years later they were worth only \$3.34. Sheep prices fared no better, being worth \$8.14 per hundred weight before 1930, but \$3.12 in 1934.<sup>332</sup> In 1930 aggregate farm values in Montana were \$527,610,002, and average farm values were \$11,109. A decade later, aggregate values fell to \$350,178,461, and average values dropped to \$8,373.<sup>333</sup>

Government programs gave relief and created some stable employment in the region. Throughout the Great Depression federal spending in Montana exceeded 380 million dollars, and the state was loaned more than 140 million under New Deal programs. This amounted to \$710.00 per person in federal aid and \$264.00 per person in federal loans, making Montana the

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<sup>331</sup> United States Department of Agriculture-National Agriculture Statistics Service quick facts "Wheat Production-All Types, 1917-1930," available from the world wide web [http://www.nass.usda.gov/QuickStats/PullData\\_US\\_CNTY.jsp](http://www.nass.usda.gov/QuickStats/PullData_US_CNTY.jsp), accessed 23 January 2008.

<sup>332</sup> Malone, *Montana: A Contemporary Profile*, 292-93.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.* 293.

second state in the nation for per capita New Deal spending.<sup>334</sup> Programs like the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA), the Farm Credit Administration (FCA), the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) became common topics of conversation within the valley. Such agencies saw that some semblance of parity for commodities like wheat was achieved and that, by 1940, 1.5 million acres of Montana land was reseeded to restore rangelands. Additionally, the alphabet soup programs of the New Deal created some modest forms of work relief for regional people. However, they also aided in dropping the population of the valley to a small extent as many young men entered the CCC or the Works Progress Administration (WPA) never returned home. Many of the region's young men went to work on the Fort Peck Reservoir, while others aided in the creation of Deadman's Basin in the 1930s. One of the more important New Deal developments to the Upper Musselshell Valley was the State Water Conservation Board, which created water storage projects like Deadman's Basin and Martinsdale Reservoir.<sup>335</sup> The Reconstruction Finance Corporation paid \$135,000 for labor on Deadman's Basin, while the WPA spent 1.2 million to create the supplemental irrigation system that would provide 20,000 acres of irrigation for three counties. Completed in 1941, it was turned over to the State Water Conservation Board to control irrigation along the lower Musselshell River.<sup>336</sup>

The Great Depression in the Upper Musselshell saw many formerly successful farmers, small-scale ranchers, and businessmen of the homestead era uprooted to travel farther west or returned to where they came from to search for better livelihoods and familial security.

Harlowton resident and former Game Warden Gene Tierney, in his Montana memoir *Cry of the*

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<sup>334</sup> Malone, Roeder, and Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, 296.

<sup>335</sup> *Harlowton Times*, March 1941, 1; *Harlowton Times*, 29 February 1940, 1; *Harlowton Times*, March 1940.

<sup>336</sup> Malone and Etulain, *The American West: A Twentieth Century History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 92.

*Hunted*, writes, “Times were tough and the weak and timid were no longer around. They didn’t die, they just vanished.”<sup>337</sup> Another longtime regional resident, Ed Delgarno, recollected that he and his father came upon an abandoned homestead whose residents had apparently left before dinnertime, because the kitchen table was set in anticipation of a meal.<sup>338</sup> All told the state of Montana lost seventy-five thousand people during the Great Depression.<sup>339</sup> Wheatland County, in 1920, had a population of 5,619. Two decades later, the population dropped by forty-one percent to 3,286 people. Meagher County ended the teens with 2,272 inhabitants. By 1940, that county’s population dropped by a total of thirty five people, the modest decrease possibly due to the fact that the majority of landed people there were not honyockers, but cattle and sheep producers already with significant acreage. Golden Valley, in 1930, contained 2,126 people; by 1940, its population fell to 1,607, a loss of twenty-four percent.<sup>340</sup> Golden Valley alone, in 1933, had twenty-nine homesteaders who lost land due to back taxes, resulting in sheriff’s sales; the going rate for such land ranged from fifty cents to two dollars and fifty cents per acre.<sup>341</sup> The *Ryegate Weekly Reporter* headlined, “Golden Valley Sells a Much Larger Percentage Than Neighboring Counties.”<sup>342</sup> Most were farmers who could not pay their mortgages and taxes. Homesteaders who stayed often relied heavily upon hunting wild game and gardening to supplement their diets. Game animals were fairly abundant at the time, although homesteading had pushed the majority of the valley’s deer and antelope into the more mountainous areas of the

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<sup>337</sup> Gene Tierney, *The Cry of the Hunted* (Harlowton: The Times Clarion, 1990), 3.

<sup>338</sup> Edwin L. Delgarno, Sr., area resident and rancher Harlowton, interview by author, 20 July 2003, notes in author’s possession.

<sup>339</sup> Malone and Etulain, *The American West*, 19.

<sup>340</sup> Bureau of the Census. *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940: Population Volume II: Characteristics of the Population: Sex, Age, Race, Nativity, Citizenship, Country of Birth of Foreign-Born White, School Attendance, Education, Employment Status, Class of Worker, Major Occupation Group, and Industry Group: Part 4: Minnesota-New Mexico* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1943).

<sup>341</sup> This figure intentionally reflects the population of 1930 rather than 1920 as Golden Valley did not exist until late that year, hence its population was counted within Musselshell County, and no specific county census data for it before 1930.

<sup>342</sup> Cade, *Well, I Guess I Was Just Lucky*, 99-100.

Upper Musselshell. Abandoned claims and deserted cropland served as great breeding grounds, provided decent feed, and allowed the game population to rise. Tierney further comments, from his role in law enforcement, that Wheatland County and its environs were full of trappers, miners, loggers, “regular town businesses [sic] . . . bootleggers, rumrunners, moonshiners [sic] and unlawful tobacco processors” and numerous traveling salesmen.<sup>343</sup> One such bootlegger was Jess R. Sterling of Ryegate.

Sterling traveled to Montana from Oregon in 1900, arriving via train to Big Timber. He walked northward working on various ranches until he arrived in Harlowton and filed a homestead claim intending to raise horses. Like other homesteaders, he worked at gathering more land. In 1916 he started a small coal mine, and his horse herd, developed from stock throughout the nation, reached 700 head. Some of his horses, known as “slicks,” were acquired from stock which failing homesteaders abandoned. Sterling diversified his ranching with moonshining during prohibition. Many people claimed his distillations were “the best corn whiskey in the state,” and, by all accounts, people even enjoyed Sterling’s whiskey in the state house in the capital of Helena. Local lore and family legend asserts Sterling once had a truck loaded for a whiskey delivery when revenue agents showed up at his house. Without missing a beat, he allegedly invited them to dinner. During the meal Sterling’s hired hands, posing as neighbors who were also sharing the meal, finished eating early and excused themselves from the table. They boarded the whiskey-laden truck, drove off, and hid the entire shipment.<sup>344</sup> Many area residents recall Sterling made his gates large enough for older vintage vehicles to pass through, but small enough that late-model cars could not get by the posts. This prevented

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<sup>343</sup> Tierney, *The Cry of the Hunted*, 15.

<sup>344</sup> Stella and Jessie Sterling Zeier, “Jess R. Sterling,” from *Dawn in Golden Valley*, 132.

revenue agents from entering his property unless they were on foot.<sup>345</sup> The time of the traditional dry-land farming homesteader was certainly over.

Both the Homestead Era and the Great Depression were times of great change within the Upper Musselshell Valley. The open range was fenced off, ranches became smaller, and would be dry-land farmers arrived in hordes from all over the world. Their farming endeavors changed the land by replacing the natural prairie with sellable crops. Chasing the profits of the mid-teens, farmers practiced intensive farming methods that caused significant soil erosion and depletion and disrupted the natural wildlife and ecosystem as never before. The mass homesteading ended in 1919 and the rout of the dry-lander was on due to economic conditions and drought. There was just as much loss in the 1920s than there was in the 1930s.

Traditional scholarship revolving around homestead failure paints a bleak picture. People came west at the behest of lying promoters, railroad and otherwise, expecting to make money, become land owners, and craft a new life for themselves. When the weather changed, and the Great Depression struck, they lost everything they had worked for. This belief is, perhaps, skewed. For example, the Birdsalls lost everything by the mid-1920s despite all the work they had done on their farm, so did twenty-nine of Joseph Cade's neighbors. Their stories reflect the traditional narrative of homestead failure. Many other tales, such as the Taber and DeBuff family stories, do not reflect the traditional narrative. The DeBuff's, late comers in the homestead era, worked hard and persevered, attaining more land. The Tabers by 1920 (a year into the flight of the honkyocker) were prosperous enough to expand not only their land, but also their buildings. By the end of World War II, Joe Cade was virtually debt free. This is not to say that the era of homestead failure was not hard on these families, only the perception that the fault

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<sup>345</sup> Eugene Taber, Jr., interview; Fred Taber interview; Dan DeBuff interview.

of homestead failure lies in scheming promoters, poor weather, and sour economies in the 1930s, is not necessarily accurate. Indeed, some prospered a great deal.

Additionally, what of homesteaders who sold their land for more money than it cost them to file their claim? They were land speculators, and technically homesteaders, who did not flee when times got lean, but when land values improved enough to make a profit. Other such scenarios include local cattle ranchers having their hired hands file homestead claims, near the ranch headquarters, and then buying the hand's claim, or waiting until they were foreclosed upon, to add to their ranches acreage. Accompanying such tactics were ranchers who filed additional claims, used the land for grazing without ever improving upon it, with the intention of using it solely as free pasturage for the allotted prove up time. Clearly, not all homesteaders who left their land did so because of failure. The logical conclusion is that, while many people were highly invested in their claims, many settlers were not.

County extension records from the Upper Musselshell paint contrasting ideas about regional homesteading in the 1920s and 1930s. General state agent Blaine Ferguson, in 1922 (less than five years after the homestead collapse), wrote that central Montana's variable rainfall made irrigation a necessity. Furthermore, the heavy loams of the region were perfect for irrigated agriculture.<sup>346</sup> Colleague John C. Bowers stated in 1914, the state's biggest problem "revolved around settlement and development of agricultural resources." However, homesteaders brought a humid region's farm philosophies and practices to Montana with them. Furthermore, and contrary to what extension agents were assuming, fifty percent were tradesmen with no farming skills or backgrounds, who were "anxious to get some land in the last great West."<sup>347</sup> In a sense,

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<sup>346</sup> Montana County Extension Records, 1922 "Annual Irrigation Report," by Blaine Ferguson (Box 84:2, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collection-Montana State University-Bozeman), 2.

<sup>347</sup> Montana County Extension Records, 1939 "An Historical Review and Appraisal," by John C. Bower, (Box 79:4, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collection-Montana Montana State University-Bozeman), 3.

there was too much land, and too few farmers. When the farmers came, they were not really farmers, but inexperienced dray laborers and shopkeepers. Each part of the Upper Musselshell Valley experienced, and responded, to this problem differently.

Wheatland County faced a serious and ongoing gopher and grasshopper problem throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and troubles with the extension service itself (causing limited activity on the agent's part). Meanwhile, difficult credit conditions in 1920 prompted the belief that the livestock population was between less than half, and one-third, of the number of animals the county could support. Extension agent A.D. Anderson strongly suggested there was a need to increase both sheep and cattle herd sizes. The following year farmers, at the behest of extension services, introduced Kharkov winter wheat and Marquis spring wheat, in addition to planting alfalfa and sweet clover on limited acreage, and ranchers formed a fledgling grazing association that put forty-four thousand acres into communal grazing.<sup>348</sup>

Early extension work within the county was problematic, according to agent A.D. Anderson, because regional dwellers had "a tendency toward clannishness, where people are not in the habit of . . ." relying on outsiders. Thus extensive extension work was difficult and worked primarily within the realm of much needed pest control. As a result county agent work was discontinued by a massive majority vote within Wheatland County. Anderson claimed that "the ballot was evidently not intended to give the county agent work a chance to survive."<sup>349</sup> Most likely extension was terminated for two reasons: indifference by agricultural producers and county funds being earmarked for other usage. It is well documented that county extension during this era was a difficult proposition due to funding, and agricultural producer's apathy

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<sup>348</sup> Montana County Extension Records, 1920 "Annual Report-Wheatland County," by A.D. Anderson (Box 66:7, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collection-Montana State University-Bozeman), 7-11 workbook, 7.

<sup>349</sup> Montana County Extension Records, 1922 "Annual Report-Wheatland County," by A.D. Anderson (Box 66:9, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collection-Montana State University-Bozeman), 1-2.



toward agents, especially to ones who were unknown to the local populace. Tax payer associations in eleven Montana counties started to cancel extension programs during the early thirties, and the total number of county agents within the state dropped from thirty-three to twenty-eight.<sup>350</sup>

Extension work recommenced over a decade later, in 1934, under the auspices of new agent K.P. Jones, primarily for drought relief in the form of the AAAs Cattle and Sheep Purchase Program.<sup>351</sup> Wheatland County was designated a primary drought region within Montana, and to alleviate stressed feed stores, the federal government purchased 1,606 head of cattle valued at \$23,836.00 from 145 ranchers. Emergency sheep purchases totaled 15,034 head of sheep from sixty-three producers, totaling \$30,068. Over ten thousand of the sheep were killed, being “condemned as unfit for shipment.”<sup>352</sup> Even with such large purchases, the county contained eighty-five thousand sheep and fifteen thousand head of cattle, making the sub-region terribly overstocked and short ten thousand tons of hay for winter feed.<sup>353</sup> In 1922 agent Anderson claimed the region was woefully under-stocked with animals. Less than twelve years later, according to agent Jones, it was extremely overstocked. This, perhaps, represents the differences in county agent personal beliefs and goals towards the various regions of Montana’s agricultural production to which they were posted. In 1920 there were 781 farms and ranches in Wheatland County; by 1934 there were only 575, a loss of twenty-six percent in less than a decade and a half. Farm and ranch numbers decreased, but the remaining farms and ranches increased in

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<sup>350</sup> Gladys Baker, *The County Agent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 59; Merrill G. Burlingame and Edward Bell, Jr., *The Montana Cooperative Extension Service: A History 1893-1974* (Bozeman: Montana State University, 1984), 103.

<sup>351</sup> Montana County Extension Records, 1934 “Annual Report-Wheatland County,” by K.P. Jones (Box 66:10, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collection-Montana State University-Bozeman), 1-3.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.* 7-10.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.* 14, emergency supplement workbook-3

acreage and stock numbers.<sup>354</sup> Contrary to this, there were 575 farms and ranches in 1934 and 297 in 1935.<sup>355</sup> This is a drop of forty-eight percent, more in a single year than in the prior decade. Again, the remaining farms and ranches got larger, but this took place as a matter of refreshment, as livestock was liquidated. The decreasing number of farms and ranches, at both time points, indicates more people sold out when the land market was good in the 1920s, and continued to do so in the 1930s, but that government livestock liquidation greatly accelerated the process.

Census data also supports that, for example, from 1920 to 1930 Wheatland County lost thirty-three percent of its population, or about thirteen people per square mile. Meagher County lost thirteen percent of its people, which was about one person per square mile. From 1930 to 1940, Wheatland County lost thirteen percent of its population while Meagher County actually increased by thirty-five residents.<sup>356</sup> On the surface, it is easy to believe, especially in the light of narratives like Joe Cade's, that most were foreclosures (and some were) or government purchases under the various land purchase programs. This is not the case concerning government purchasing programs. Wheatland County landowners listed 162,269 acres for sale to the government. However, the government only optioned 19,000 acres. However, they never bought a single acre under the land purchase program because the region was designated a secondary area of concern by the federal government, resulting in discontinuation of the program

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<sup>354</sup> Montana County Extension Records, 1920 "Annual Report-Wheatland County," by A.D. Anderson (Box 66:7, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collection-Montana State University-Bozeman), workbook 8; Montana County Extension Records, 1935 "Annual Report-Wheatland County," by K.P. Jones (Box 66:10, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collection-Montana State University-Bozeman), 6 workbook.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid; Montana County Extension Records, 1934 "Annual Report," by K.P. Jones (Box 66:10, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collection-Montana State University-Bozeman), workbook-3.

<sup>356</sup> University of Virginia. *Historical Census*, available from the world wide web <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/>, accessed 4 June 2003.

within Wheatland County.<sup>357</sup> Despite this, according to Jones, 1935 was still “one of the poorest agricultural years . . . ever experienced in the county . . . the drought has been continuous since 1929 . . . (and) many of the ranges have been overgrazed for the past several years.”<sup>358</sup> In any case, just as the Great Die Up was blamed on overgrazing, it seems that county agents were blaming poor weather conditions on cattle and sheep grazing when the real culprit, just as in the 1880s and 1890s, was not overgrazing, but weather and husbandry, and economics.

In the mid-1930s, Meagher County faced much the same problems as Wheatland County.<sup>359</sup> Drought conditions led many ranchers within Meagher to participate in the Livestock Purchase Program hoping to alleviate short feed conditions. Under the program twenty-nine ranchers sold 532 cattle for \$8,108 dollars while sheep producers sold 12,207 head for \$24,414.<sup>360</sup> Extension agent H.D. Hunt stressed the county faced a serious feed shortage as “antagonism has developed between stockmen and farmers as hay is shipped out of the county while a shortage of hay exists in the county . . . to the detriment in the long-run of both parties.” Farmers preferred to sell their hay crops to outsiders, and Hunt estimated the county was short nearly twenty-five hundred tons of hay.<sup>361</sup>

Like Wheatland County, extension programs in Golden Valley County had been discontinued for some time before being reinstated in 1934. Rodent control and the livestock purchase program were the focal points of extension work within Golden Valley. Big Coulee faced a serious pest problem, over two hundred thousand pounds of grasshopper poison and two

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<sup>357</sup> Montana County Extension Records, 1935 “Annual Report-Wheatland County,” by K.P. Jones (Box 66:10, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collection-Montana State University-Bozeman), 7.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.* 49.

<sup>359</sup> Since only portions of Meagher County reside within the Upper Musselshell and the County Extension Reports are vague as to specific locations within the county, any critical discussion of Meagher will be confined to only what information can be confirmable to residing within the Upper Musselshell Valley.

<sup>360</sup> Montana County Extension Records, 1934 “Annual Report-Meagher County,” by H.D. Hunt (Box 38:11, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collection-Montana State University-Bozeman), 21.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.* 8.

thousand bushels of gopher poison were spread throughout the county, with the majority of the toxins being utilized within that region of the county. The Livestock Purchase Program bought 3,353 cattle for over fifty thousand dollars, and 4,674 sheep for just under thirty thousand dollars.<sup>362</sup>

However, the extension agent's biggest concern was that "everything possible should be done toward removing the dry-land wheat farmer and making . . . Golden Valley . . . (into) a livestock" region.<sup>363</sup> Agent F.B. Peterson, citing that in the last nineteen years there had only been two successful wheat crops, advocated returning the range to livestock producers. One of his main points was that when Deadmans Basin was complete, its irrigation water could provide enough feed for ranches along both the Musselshell River and the region's benchlands. Peterson also believed, after the farmer was done away with, the number of ranches would have to be reduced, because he found that "at the time [meaning the early 1900s] . . . the stockman were making good returns from their operations . . . [when there] were only about 35 [SIC] ranches in Golden Valley County . . . [indicating that it is] overpopulated."<sup>364</sup> He stressed that under the poor conditions of 1934, at least 3,500 head of cattle needed to be culled from the range. Peterson also acknowledged "after the wheat farmer is removed, it will be a problem of getting these old plowed-up fields back into grass again," indicating that there had been significant ecological damage to the region from dry land farm methods.<sup>365</sup>

However, Peterson's opinions and programs of work are certainly a representation of the class interests endemic of early extension work. As historian Gladys Baker showed in her work

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<sup>362</sup> Montana County Extension Records, 1934 "Annual Report-Golden Valley County," by F.B. Peterson (Box 27:27, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collection-Montana State University-Bozeman), 25-33. This record contains data for both Golden Valley and Musselshell Counties.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid. 4

<sup>364</sup> Ibid. 23.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid. 4.

*The County Agent*, researched during the height of this era, because county agents were responsible to local political units first and foremost, they were most likely unduly influenced by county boards and that “The necessity of pleasing economic and political leaders because of dependence upon county appropriations as well as the natural tendency to conform to social and economic patterns has resulted in service by the county agent primarily for the more prosperous . . .”<sup>366</sup> Therefore, the County Commissioners for Golden Valley County throughout the 1930s—Glenn A. Reed, J.C. Jensen, and Albert Ice—almost certainly play a role in Peterson’s clear approval of ranching. Reed, formerly of Kansas, came to Montana with his spouse in 1918 to manage the Farmers Equity Store in the small town of Rothiemay. By 1919 Reed started to farm wheat with his wife’s family. After massive and repeated crop failure throughout the 1920s, Reed ceased farming and started to raise sheep and turkeys. “The only way we could have stayed in the county after so many crop failures,” according to Mrs. Margaret Reed, “was because of the sheep.” Reed must have been a prodigious sheep man as his land holdings, as Mrs. Reed once wrote “. . . at one time accommodated 17 [SIC] families.” Reed served on the county board from 1928 to 1936.<sup>367</sup> Colleague J.C. Jensen served on the county board from 1924 to 1944. Jensen was a butcher by trade, having immigrated to the town of Lavina in Golden Valley County in 1911, where he opened a very successful butcher shop. Jensen eventually purchased a track of land, additionally both he and his wife also filed homestead claims to start wheat farming. The terrible climatic conditions of the 1920s made this a short-lived venture, and Jensen switched gears into sheep ranching when he made a large purchase of

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<sup>366</sup> Gladys Baker, *The County Agent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939) xiv-xv.

<sup>367</sup> Margaret Reed, “The Fraser-Reed Early Life on the Rothiemay Flat,” in Albie Gordon, Margaret Lehfeldt, and Mary Morsanny, Comp., from *Dawn in Golden Valley* (Harlowton: Upper Musselshell Museum Archives, 1971), 219-221.

“a thousand yearlings ewes [sic].”<sup>368</sup> Albert Ice emigrated from Illinois to Washington State, when in 1915 a family member’s misfortune called him to Ryegate. Ice decided to stay in Golden Valley and rented some land south of Ryegate in Big Coulee to farm wheat. Four years later, he was appointed to the county board, where he served for nearly twenty years. In addition to his farming venture in Big Coulee, Ice entered into partnership with two other men to form a sheep ranching company. The three men bought “several sections of land” together. Ice eventually bought out his partner’s shares to own the entire company.<sup>369</sup>

The character and aspirations of the three Golden Valley Commissioners is telling. All three farmed wheat until the drought and heat of the 1920s forced them into sheep raising. They all had large land holdings, with the desire to get more land and livestock. It is easy to surmise that, after failing at farming (something all three had firmly ingrained within their backgrounds) and, after attaining fairly sizable grazing areas, they were bent on getting more acreage for sheep, while reinforcing regional ranching with federal aid and funds. Such a powerbase question would explain why the bulk of Peterson’s efforts initially went toward stock production rather than cropping. With the board stocked with disgruntled former farmers turned big ranchers, appropriating funds to support cattle and sheep ventures may have been the only route open to extension service at the time.

The interaction of people populating the Upper Musselshell Valley with the land changed drastically in the first forty years of the twentieth century. People took silver, gold, and other precious minerals from the land until such riches were scarce. The open range cattle rancher harvested the grass of the valley, and the dry-land farmer exploited the soil for prosperous crops.

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<sup>368</sup> James C. Jensen, “Memoirs of James C. and Anna J. Jensen,” in Albie Gordon, Margaret Lehfelddt, and Mary Morsanny, Comp., from *Dawn in Golden Valley* (Harlowton: Upper Musselshell Museum Archives, 1971), 162-164.

<sup>369</sup> Madge Ice Vander Voort, “The Ice History,” in Albie Gordon, Margaret Lehfelddt, and Mary Morsanny, Comp., from *Dawn in Golden Valley* (Harlowton: Upper Musselshell Museum Archives, 1971), 162-164.

Each of the three cultures (mining, ranching, and dry land farming) learned that taking too much advantage of the region's natural resources, in the form of overt extraction without replenishment or rest for the natural environment, spelled their own doom.

The collapse of the homestead in central Montana is a much more complex story than professional historians and chroniclers, such as Joseph Howard, and regional writers, like Spike Van Cleve, or the apocryphal grassroots narrative profess. Times were hard in the region, as is reflected in local narratives and extension reports, but it was possible for many people to prosper during this time period. As such, the thought of mass failure is a questionable proposition; however, the concept of mass adjustment to lifestyle, economics, and land use is not such an uncertain conception. Many people consolidated land holdings, or like the Schaff's, struggled and fought adversity time and time again to maintain their lifestyle and eventually persevered through hard work. However, the struggle did not leave them unmarked: crop and livestock patterns changed, expectations of agricultural yields were altered, and regional culture shifted back towards cattle and sheep raising. As a corollary to this, the land adapted a large degree to humankind's presence by accepting new flora and fauna, such as wheat and cultivatable hay crops, that humankind introduced but not on the scale that was expected in the mid to late teens. However, in doing so, the dry land farmer nearly burned the land out from mass production. As a result, the rancher and mixed-farmer retained their place over the farmer within the culture of the Upper Musselshell Valley. The massive influx of settlers was too much for the land, even before the Great Depression ravaged the majority of the Great Plains dweller and America's entrance into a second global conflict lifted poor conditions.

## CHAPTER 8. WORLD WAR II AND THE RETURN TO PROSPERITY

World War II, along with the following two decades, was a time of great change again for the Upper Musselshell Valley. The teens and twenties had been based almost solely on extracting resources, such as wheat, from the land in order to realize the pioneer dream of individuality, land ownership, and profit. The physical environment of the valley was not well suited to dry farming limited to 160-acre homestead claims; dust storms and drought hastened consolidation. Coupled with the financial woes of the 1930s, farmers and ranchers readjusted pioneer conceptions; people not resilient enough abandoned the Upper Musselshell, while those who remained adapted not only physically and economically, but also mentally and culturally as well. Modern Great Plains scholars, such as R. Douglas Hurt, in *The Great Plains During World War II*, or Montana historians like Michael Malone, with *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, tend to discuss this era in terms of economics, politics, race and gender, and increased agricultural production. For example, grand narratives, such as Hurt's aforementioned work, stress Montana's moderate isolationist stance in the years before the war. Next the grand narrative focuses on the burgeoning labor shortage caused by men enlisting in the armed services and the resulting use of the Bracero Program. In the case of Montana focus shifts to the influx of betabeleros workers, then toward the mistrust of imprisoned Japanese Americans and German prisoners of war in the state's labor force, and the rise of women in the work place. War labor industry's are all prominent factors in such works, and fairly generalizable to the whole of the Great Plains. Others, like Malone's broad work *Montana*, tend to focus on the state's rising agricultural production due to good weather and prices during the war years, Montana's limited role in war industries, and the massive population exodus by native Montanans to places like Spokane and Seattle for work with such wartime companies as Boeing. The brunt of this well



known state specific grand narrative focuses on Montana's turbulent political front, particularly around the political fall from grace of Burton K. Wheeler. Even the storied 163<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division of the Montana National Guard is only given brief mention in Malone's work.<sup>370</sup>

The grassroots perspective views the World War II era in much the same light. However, absent in the Upper Musselshell are factors like Bracero program workers and POW labor. Where the grassroots version of history does differ most from the grand narrative is in the emphasis, and remembrance, of the individual men and women who took up arms against Germany and Imperial Japan. Nonetheless, much in evidence is the sudden lack of a male workforce, the rise of female labor, population loss, and fortunate weather and crop prices.

The New Regional History of this era partially follows that of the grand narrative and grassroots perspective: agricultural advancements like pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers and mass mechanization led to the slow disappearance of the bunk house. However, that is where the similarities end, especially in concepts like the Bracero Program or other labor force solutions during the Second World War. Localized populations within the Upper Musselshell have an extremely vibrant historical memory of the regional men and women who were involved in fighting World War II. As a corollary to this, is evident that local populations had a worldly impact and participated in such historical endeavors as the Manhattan Project, military desegregation, and advancing sciences.

Farmers' and ranchers' interaction with the land evolved a great deal from the 1920s to the close of the 1940s. The horrible conditions during the late teens, the 1920s, and the Great Depression caused agriculturists to move away from solely extracting products from the land. Most realized prior methods, such as intensive tillage, were detrimental to not only the land

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<sup>370</sup> R. Douglas Hurt, *The Great Plains in World War II* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), passim; Malone, Roeder, and Lang, *Montana*, passim.

itself, but also their livelihood and well-being. Gone were the days when the valley's natural resources could be harvested without cessation. By the late 1930s, farmers started to repair the damage done during the prior decade and a half by using land conservation strategies and expanding acreage. Many diversified into secondary agricultural pursuits, like dairy cattle, to make the lean times a bit more bearable. Technological innovations, like rubber-tired tractors (as opposed to steel-rimmed wheels) and later insecticides and herbicides, limited the need for hired help and aided in making farms and ranches more profitable as the number of farmers and ranchers decreased. Farmers entered the 1940s with a healthy new respect for the land and with more concrete knowledge of its capabilities. Dry land farming was still practiced by farmers who remained, but with the land's welfare in mind along with making more than a subsistence level of living. There were fewer farms at the end of World War II than the end of the Great War, and those that remained contained much larger acreage. This was due to the exodus of the honyocker, and by those remaining purchasing lands from neighbors who no longer wanted to pursue farming. The war years saw a number of transformations in agriculture; not all of them were in ownership or in the switch from sheep to cattle.

More precipitation, coupled with wartime demands, created a boom for the valley's farm and ranch products. By 1941 crops returned to the same level they were at in 1927; by 1942 crop yields rivaled those of the late teens. By 1943 (the best year Montana saw for agriculture until the 1960s) crop values reached \$188 million dollars while livestock products cleared \$134 million dollars in value. From 1940 to 1948, the net cash increase for Montana agricultural products increased 188 percent while the number of ranches and farms decreased.<sup>371</sup>

Although social constructs evolved slowly, humankind's relationship with the environment evolved quickly due to increased mechanization and scientific advances. Ranches

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<sup>371</sup> Malone, Roeder, and Lange, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, 308-09.

regained size, and farm production reached new and unprecedented levels within the region. New governmental programs, like the soil bank or water conservation districts, which were spawned throughout the 1950s and 1960s, caused agriculturists to re-evaluate their relationship with the land. Such programs received mixed reception within the valley, as some regions actually increased the amount of land under cultivation, and cattle production in all counties increased almost exponentially. Agricultural advances, World War II and the significant rise of production levels after the war, and evolving societal values created a changing regional culture. Regional participation in World War II, whether that be of a personal nature like military service or general trends like female labor or labor shortages, ensured such adjustments.

During the Second World War a significant number of Upper Musselshell dwellers enlisted in the armed forces and many men and women served in groundbreaking military occupation specialties or units. The United States Navy claimed two, Norman Voldseth and Roger Sears, who were part of the innovative technology or tactics that developed during the Second World War. Voldseth, who grew up on a ranch near Lennep, graduated with a civil engineering degree from Washington State College in 1940 and found employment with the Anaconda Copper Mining Company. After Pearl Harbor, because of his engineering background, he accepted a commission as a naval ensign and radar technician. After training at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he reported for duty with DD-583, the *USS Hall*, a Fletcher class destroyer. The *Hall* earned a staggering eight battle stars for its service in the Pacific, where Voldseth had a hand in pioneering and refining the use of radar.<sup>372</sup>

Wisconsin native and Martinsdale resident Roger Sears also joined the Navy when the war started. When he completed training, Sears was assigned to Norfolk, Virginia, but

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<sup>372</sup> Norman Voldseth interview.

volunteered for a new unit called Under Water Demolitions Teams (UDT). Turbulent fighting in the Pacific caused Navy and Marine Corps commanders to realize outdated maps and poor aerial photographs could not fully prepare beachheads for mass amphibious landings. The UDT concept formed to provide beachhead reconnaissance; remove and plant harbor mines, and conduct hydrographic surveys. UDT “Frogmen,” as they were nicknamed, swam into enemy territory to perform such demanding and dangerous tasks. Following UDT training in Hawaii, Sears practiced his military crafts in the initial invasion of Okinawa. UDT members such as Sears became the founding fathers of the Navy’s modern Sea, Air, and Land (SEAL) special operations units.<sup>373</sup>

One naval disaster that occurred during the Second World War was of particular concern to the Upper Musselshell Valley. A German submarine sank the World War I vessel christened by Juanita Cook, the *Wheatland, Montana*. Unbeknownst to regional residents the *Wheatland* was renamed the *Lihue* after the Great War, becoming a freighter and merchant vessel. She was in the Caribbean in February of 1942 when torpedoed. The *Lihue*’s naval gunners fired back, sinking the sub. It was one of the first, and few, freighters credited with sinking a German U-boat. The *Lihue* sank two days later as a result of the shelling, but all of her crew survived.<sup>374</sup>

The land conflicts of the war also saw significant involvement from the Upper Musselshell Valley. The National Guard unit located in Harlowton, Company D, 163<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, mobilized for the war. August of 1940 found D Company at its annual summer training maneuvers at Fort Lewis, Washington. The next month D Company was inducted into the federal service for a period of one year along with the rest of the 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division (ID)

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<sup>373</sup> Roger Sears, area resident-Martinsdale, interview by author, August 2006, tape recording and notes in author’s possession.

<sup>374</sup>Harlowton *Times Clarion*, 31 March 1977; Haynes, Comp. “*History of the Garneill-Judith Gap Area of Central Montana*”; Juanita Cook Diary Entry, August 4, 1919, (unpublished document, Upper Musselshell Museum Archive, 1993), D-31.

stationed at Camp Murray in Washington state. Their first task was digging gun emplacements along the Strait of Juan De Fuca, never realizing that after December 7, 1941, they would be manning the same coastal defense system, bracing for a supposed invasion of the United States by the Imperial Army of Japan. They were relieved of these positions in February by forces of the regular army's 3<sup>rd</sup> Division and their mobilization orders amended for the duration of the conflict.<sup>375</sup>

After the 41<sup>st</sup> ID reorganized, many mistakenly assumed they would be heading for Europe. Since the 41<sup>st</sup> was already on the west coast, and there was a sense of panic in the Pacific, Harlowton National Guard members boarded the *RMS Queen Elizabeth* bound for Australia. By December of 1942, Upper Musselshell Valley men like Ward Beley, Hugh Reynolds, and Edgar Langston found themselves aboard a troop transport, sailing first for Port Moresby in anticipation of Japanese raids against Australia, then for the jungles of New Guinea.<sup>376</sup> After facing heavy fighting at places like Sanananda, Aitape, Wakde and Biak Islands, and the invasion of the Phillipines, and landing in Hiro, Japan, the 163<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment mustered out of federal service by the end of 1945, and many of the remaining members of D Company returned to the Upper Musselshell.

Not only did the Anglo members of the valley fight in World War II, one of its Japanese residents did as well. Henry Muneta, a Nisei Japanese American, was born in his father's home in Harlowton as one of five children. After facing the racism that occurred after Pearl Harbor (which certainly confused the young Muneta who was, after all, a hometown product), he was drafted into the all-Japanese 442<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, under the command of mostly white

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<sup>375</sup> Hugh Z. Reynolds, *History of World War II: The 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division and My Service in the 163<sup>rd</sup> Regiment*, unpublished memoir in authors possession.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

officers.<sup>377</sup> The 442<sup>nd</sup> ID originated from an army reserve unit based in Hawaii, composed primarily of men of Asian descent. The unit adopted the Hawaiian craps slang “go for broke” as their unit motto, something they did with much aplomb. Highly decorated, the 442<sup>nd</sup> earned twenty-one Congressional Medals of Honor (with twenty being awarded fifty-five years after the Second World War), fifty-two Distinguished Service Crosses, five hundred and sixty Silver Stars, four thousand Bronze Stars, and 9,486 Purple Hearts. One Japanese enlisted man even earned a battlefield commission. The “Go For Broke Boys,” as they were known, suffered a casualty rate of 314 percent (a figure that includes the original members of the 442<sup>nd</sup> and all replacement troops the unit absorbed throughout the war and accounts for multiple awards).<sup>378</sup> Not allowed to fight in the Pacific Theater, the 442<sup>nd</sup> traversed the length of the European front, fighting battles in Italy and France, where over half of its original members were either killed or wounded in combat. Muneta took shrapnel wounds to his legs while serving in Italy, earning one of the nearly ten thousand Purple Hearts awarded to the unit. Because of their heroic actions, resolve, loyalty, and patriotism, the 442<sup>nd</sup> became one of the many reasons President Harry Truman ordered the desegregation of the armed forces.<sup>379</sup> After the war Muneta returned to Harlowton, where he raised a family.

Some civilians from the Upper Musselshell Valley also contributed their skill and expertise to the war effort. World War I Veteran Merrill Deem Edson, an employee of the Milwaukee Road, was “loaned” to the Manhattan Project as the superintendant for the area railroad. He attended many meetings with head of the project, General Leslie R. Groves, and a man he only knew as Mr. Farmer, whom he assumed was another railroad manager as they

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<sup>377</sup> Henry Muneta interview.

<sup>378</sup> Global Security Organization. “100th Battalion, 442nd Infantry,” available from the world wide web <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/army/100-442in.htm>., accessed 5 December 2006.

<sup>379</sup> Henry Muneta interview.

frequently discussed rail design problems. At the end of the war, Edson discovered that Mr. Farmer was in reality Enrico Fermi, the Italian physicist whose efforts vastly added to the creation of the atomic bomb. Edson performed his duties so well that he received a personal citation from Secretary of War Henry Stimson and a Bronze A Medal for his service.<sup>380</sup>

The Upper Musselshell had one defense industry, besides agriculture, that stood out: the Milwaukee Road. Between ten and fifteen troop trains passed through the region almost every day. The trains let soldiers disembark at places like Two Dot or Harlowton to rest, practice close order drill, and procure food, aiding the economy of the two towns.<sup>381</sup> The Milwaukee also had a profound impact on two regional population groups: women and Japanese Americans. Most of the Japanese employed by the Milwaukee worked in the Harlowton roundhouse. Hearing the news of Pearl Harbor, and fearing sabotage attempts, the resident manager fired all Japanese employees. Others thought this a hasty move and a great injustice. A section manager hired them all back as section hands for the Milwaukee.<sup>382</sup> Some regional residents never realized the Japanese had been terminated and then re-hired, only that they had been moved to a job that would prevent them from having the opportunity to sabotage the roundhouse. This was an unfounded belief, because it would have been much easier to harm the war effort of the railroad by having access to the rails.<sup>383</sup>

Women had long played an under-recognized role in agriculture and rural communities. When the men of the region enlisted for the war effort, the valley created its own versions of Rosie the Riveter, as women filled occupational vacancies on the Milwaukee Road left by male employees. Most staffed the local roundhouse, watered trains, or did light labor. This service

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<sup>380</sup> Dorothy Edson, "Merrill Deem Edson 1893-1967," in *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 74-75.

<sup>381</sup> Richard Stoltz interview.

<sup>382</sup> Henry Muneta interview.

<sup>383</sup> Richard Stoltz interview.

was important as it offered new opportunities for the valley's women to work outside of traditional feminine spheres such as education.<sup>384</sup>

Living in the Upper Musselshell Valley in the 1940s was not as difficult as the prior decade, but it was rough on most people. The shift from the Great Depression lifestyle to that of Second World War rationing was not a big change, as most families were already accustomed to the hardships of the 1930s. However, the war had large social and economic ramifications. Recycling and rationing became norms. Individuals traveled to the county courthouse and applied for ration books. Evelyn Fiske Lord Kraft, the daughter of a dryland farm family near Shawmut, wrote, "In order to make it work some months we had to borrow from one family member's stamps to provide for another one [family member] with a greater need."<sup>385</sup> The rationing of consumable resources, such as gas, rubber, and oil, was especially hard on those living in rural areas.<sup>386</sup> Harlowton civic organizations, such as the Boys and Girls Club and the Women's Auxiliary, shifted activities away from community service and towards national defense endeavors such as bandage rolling.<sup>387</sup>

Despite the hardships of the time, Harlowton resident Richard Stoltz recalls his childhood as a "Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn" experience, as people did without material things and made the best of the situation.<sup>388</sup> The experience for older boys was much different. Ed Delgarno, a high school senior when the war began, remembers the dread of graduation as most young men "received a diploma in one hand, and a rifle in the other."<sup>389</sup> It was apparent to most people, even before December 7, 1941, America would be in the war. Over a year before America

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<sup>384</sup> Effie Winsky, interview by author, 4 August 2003; Richard Stoltz interview; Nancy Capser interview by author, 24 June 2003.

<sup>385</sup> Evelyn Fiske Lord Kraft, *We Lived for Next Year: Reminiscings of a Dryland Farm Girl From the Early 1900s Through 1998* (Harlowton: Times Clarion, 1998), 73.

<sup>386</sup> *Harlowton Times*, May 1942,

<sup>387</sup> *Harlowton Times*, 11 January 1940.

<sup>388</sup> Richard Stoltz interview.

<sup>389</sup> Edwin L. Delgarno, Sr., interview.



entered the fight, in October of 1940, three hundred and sixty men within Wheatland County registered for the draft or outright enlisted in the armed services.<sup>390</sup> The western portion of the valley, Meagher County, enlisted nearly three hundred more men. The region's young women, like Mabel Nelson and Nettie Mae Binnie, also participated in the war effort by enlisting in the navy WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) or in the army as WACS (Women's Army Corps).<sup>391</sup>

Prior to the war, farm machinery evolved a great deal. The internal combustion engine's power capabilities replaced horse drawn equipment as did rubber tires (as opposed to steel) on rear driven tractors; both of which made the equipment even more efficient throughout the 1930s. Lastly, power take off (PTO) shafts allowed a wider range of attachments powered specifically by the tractor. In their infancy in the early twentieth century, the PTO evolved rapidly from being an aftermarket accessory for a tractor to a standardized necessity. Concurrent with PTO innovations were hydraulic systems that allowed attached implements to be easily manipulated from a tractor. There were some equipment shortages during the war, most specifically with rubber tires and fuel, but special allotments were given to agricultural producers. The biggest change came from losing hired hands to the war effort, which had a profound effect on the region's agriculture. First, the loss of able bodied men to the military caused increased mechanization to become inevitable and a necessity.<sup>392</sup>

Accompanying mechanical advancements that improved agricultural yields after the war was the use of the pesticide dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane, or DDT, on livestock and the use of chemical herbicides, like 2-4D, and fertilizers. DDT's insecticidal abilities were discovered in

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<sup>390</sup> *Harlowton Times*, 24 October 1940.

<sup>391</sup> Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass*, 119.

<sup>392</sup> Robert C. Williams, *Fordson, Farmall, and Poppin' Johnny: A History of the Farm Tractor and Its Impact on America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 63-64, 112.

the late 1930s. Because of its effectiveness, it was used as a military pesticide during World War II, generally to fight insects that spread malaria, typhus, and other diseases, but was quickly adapted for use as a livestock pesticide. The pesticide worked well on a large range of insects, did not break down into residual form within the environment, and was insoluble in water. Best of all, it was a cheap way to prevent livestock loss.

By the 1940s, ticks (the major cause of splenic fever) were controlled well through various pesticide cattle dips. However, other parasites, like the screwworm grub and ox warbles (often just called warbles), were a large concern to cattle producers. Nationally, the late 1940s, producers estimated that nearly one third of all beef cattle slaughtered were infected with warbles (from heel fly eggs), causing a loss of twelve million pounds of meat and tallow per year. DDT sprays noticeably cut such large losses, but never fully eradicated the problem.<sup>393</sup> DDT worked so well as a livestock pesticide, its sales reached over 110 million dollars in 1951. A little over a decade later, biologist Rachel Carson published the book *Silent Spring* connecting the widespread use of DDT in America to cancer in humans, and the destruction of avian life. Her book is seen as one of the formative events of the environmentalist movement. After the use of DDT was outlawed, many producers switched to a systemic form of parasite control by using phenothiazine.<sup>394</sup> It was safer for the environment, and was nearly as effective as DDT.

The unregulated use of pesticides was accompanied by the use of herbicides. The herbicide 2-4D also became popular during the mid-1940s, for the first time, and saw widespread use after World War II. The first year it was available, 1946, 2-4D consumption was 631,000 pounds. The next season, over five million pounds sold. 2-4D killed broadleaf weeds extremely well, while leaving food crops like corn and wheat untouched, and saw limited use in the Upper

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<sup>393</sup> John T. Schlebecker, *Cattle Raising on the Plains, 1900-1961* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), 198.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.* 218.

Musselshell.<sup>395</sup> The advent of 2-4D, which was eighty-percent effective as a weed controller, killing even sagebrush, allowed producers to offer more feed to their cattle. During the early 1940s, the use of alfalfa as a cattle feed increased because it was a drought resistant, soil building legume. Coupled with crested wheat grass, which was later replaced in many regions by Siberian Wheatgrass, grazing became an even more important aspect of cattle production.<sup>396</sup>

Mechanical advancements in farm equipment and the use of chemical pesticides and herbicides led to a marked increase in agricultural production levels within the Upper Musselshell Valley, a trend that continued well after the Second World War. Between 1939 and 1949, the value of all crops sold from the valley increased twenty-five percent.<sup>397</sup> The number of cattle raised within the valley increased from 48,800 in 1940 to 90,300 in 1950, an increase of forty-six percent. Within the next decade, cattle herds increased thirty-three percent more, totaling out at 103,700 bovines within the valley. Wheat production increased a great deal, but upon a relatively stable amount of acreage until the 1960s. In 1940, the Upper Musselshell produced 254,700 bushels of wheat. By 1950, the region increased its wheat harvest fifty-seven percent to 584,300. A decade later, the valley harvested twelve percent less wheat, 515,400 bushels, but on twenty-percent less acreage (Table 2). Land use intensified, primarily for cattle production. Farmed acreage remained relatively stable in terms of planted acres, but yields more than doubled from 1940 to 1960.<sup>398</sup> There was initially a shift away from crops and towards

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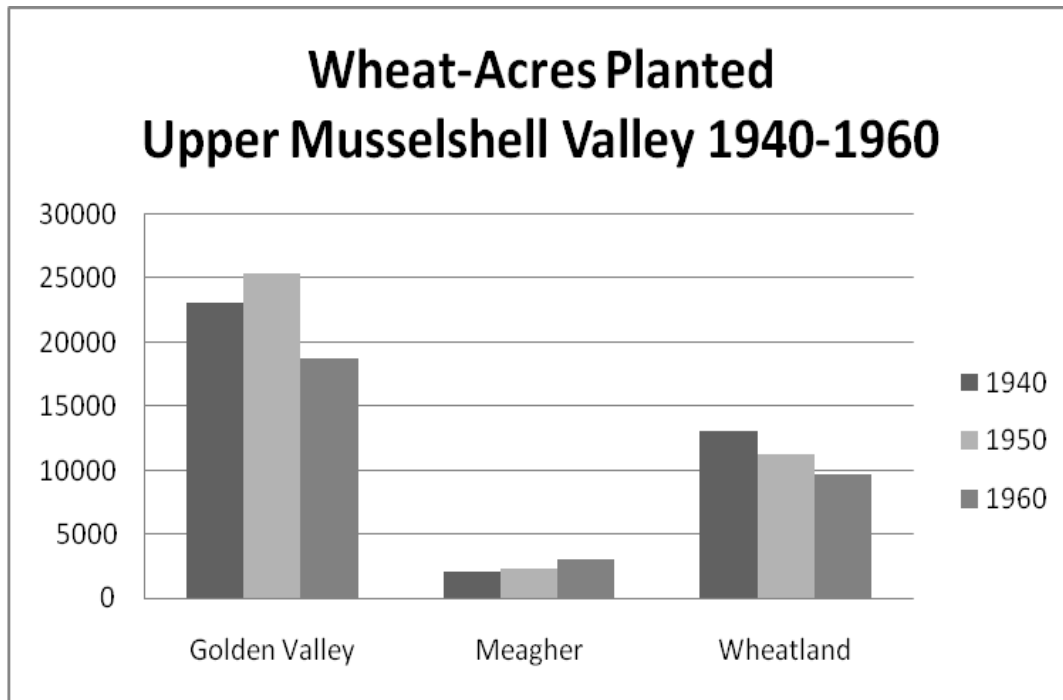
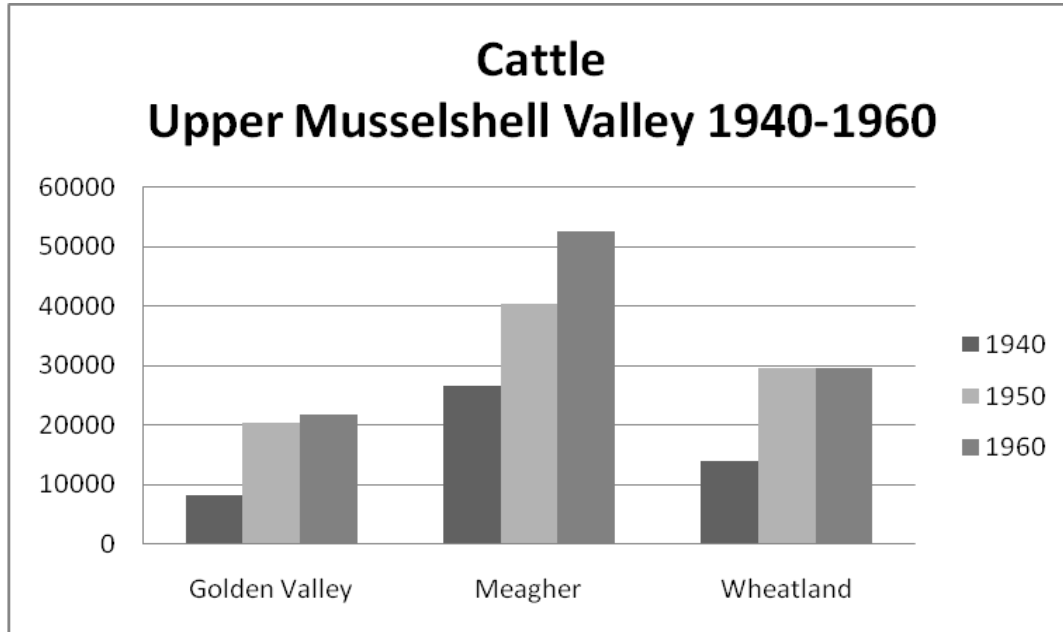
<sup>395</sup> Bill Ganzel, "Farming in the 1940s," available from the world wide web [http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/pests\\_02.html](http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/pests_02.html), accessed 19 November 2007.

<sup>396</sup> Schlebecker, *Cattle Raising on the Plains*, 199, 211.

<sup>397</sup> University of Virginia Library Fisher Library, "Historic Census Data-Value of all Crops Sold," available from the world wide web <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/>, accessed 19 November 2007.

<sup>398</sup> USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service - Quick Stats "Montana County Data – Crops," available from the world wide web [http://www.nass.usda.gov/QuickStats/PullData\\_US\\_CNTY.jsp](http://www.nass.usda.gov/QuickStats/PullData_US_CNTY.jsp), accessed 19 November 2007. USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service - Quick Stats "Montana County Data - Livestock," available from the world wide web: [http://www.nass.usda.gov/QuickStats/PullData\\_US\\_CNTY.jsp](http://www.nass.usda.gov/QuickStats/PullData_US_CNTY.jsp), accessed 19 November 2007.

livestock production, but by the mid 1960s crop levels also increased, especially within Wheatland County.



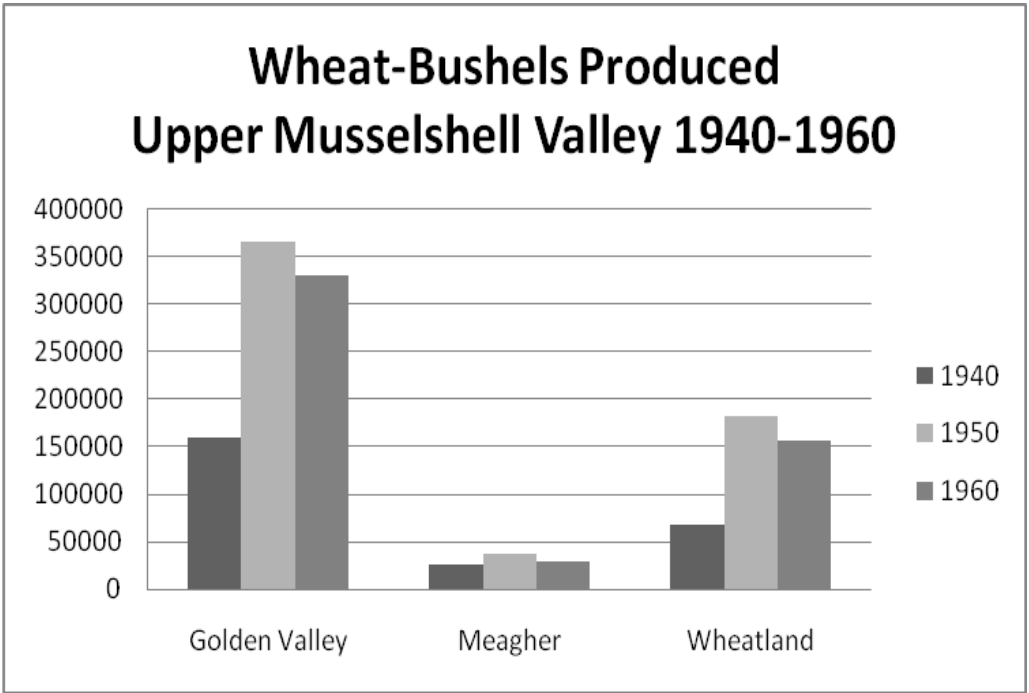
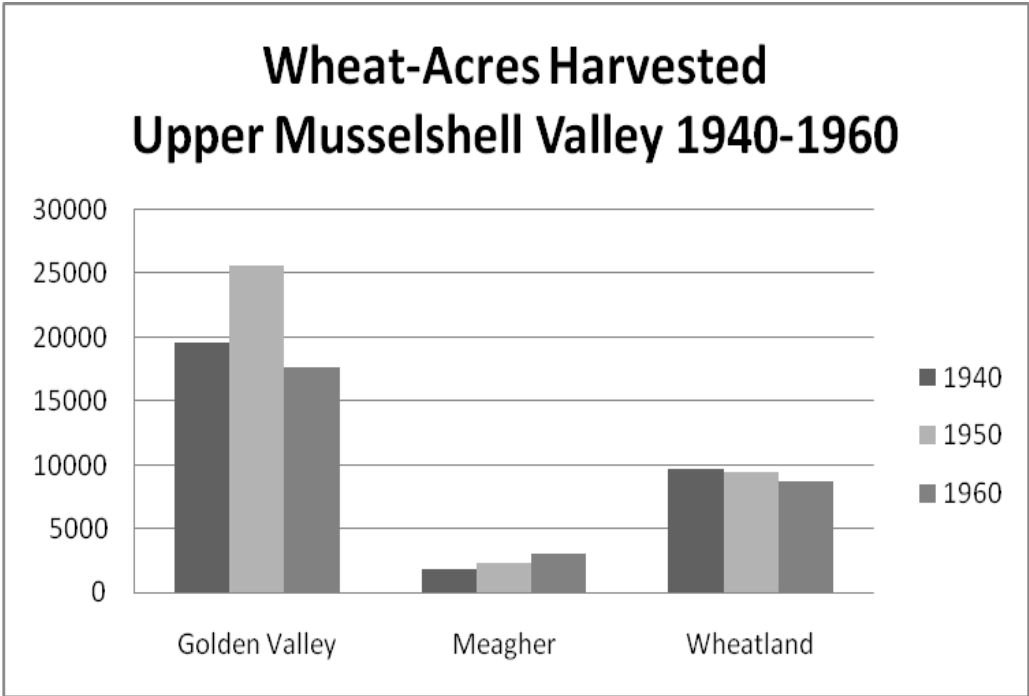


Table 2. Upper Musselshell Valley Cattle and Wheat Production, 1940-1960.

Following the Second World War, the drive to expand agricultural production resulted in large surpluses in the 1950s, due in part to the use technological innovations like the center pivot, which started to be used in the region. Coming mostly from manufacturers in Nebraska, the center pivot has several advantages over traditional flood irrigation. It allows for a uniform application of water to crops, saves labor, allows fertilizers to be applied easier, has a long lifespan, and consumes little energy. However, the cost of implementing center pivots still prevents many farmers and ranchers from implementing their use.

Excess crops lowered prices at market and significantly reduced farm income. To combat the problem, congress enacted the Soil Bank Act. Formally known as the Agricultural Act of 1956, it created an acreage reserve program (often deemed the forerunner of the modern Conservation Reserve Program). Farmers and ranchers received, on average, twelve dollars per acre they took out of production. The program worked fairly well because it guaranteed a risk free income for farm families, reduced the crop surplus, aided in conserving water and soil, and helped restore wildlife habitat.

By 1960, the Upper Musselshell region started, with the exception of Meagher County, to take a significant amount of acreage out of production. Even with fewer acres of wheat planted, and less area grazed by cattle, production levels continued to rise. However, since 1950 prices continued to decline, and cyclical droughts caused some problems for agriculture, but the valley's producers continued to harvest large crops. Consequently, the region slipped into a localized depression. For example, at this time, farmer and rancher August Winsky, and his wife Effie, sold a boxcar of potatoes that did not produce enough profit to cover the freight cost. To receive government subsidies for their loss of income, they had to reduce the amount of crops

produced. To do so, the Winsky's dyed potatoes black, so they appeared rotten, and threw them away.<sup>399</sup>

Some government entities, particularly the Bureau of Land Management, had little to do with agriculture within the Upper Musselshell Valley compared to other regions of the west. Their concerns for Montana land, topping eight million acres, accounted for less than twenty-five percent of the states acreage. However, the BLM did spur interest in soil and water conservation districts. Other federal offices, such as the USDA Forest Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service (formerly the ASCS), and the Farm Service Administration played a much larger role within the regions livestock and cropping institutions.

The Forest Service, managing the Lewis and Clark National Forest, focused on the mountain regions of the valley (the Little Belts, the Crazies, and the Snowy Mountain Ranges), especially concerning livestock grazing. Starting in 1905 the Forest Service had instituted a grazing permit system, quickly followed by a grazing fee system attached to the permits designed to create revenue to maintain and improve the public's forested regions. The original system created three types of permits called class A, B, and C. Class A permits were for lands adjacent to a ranch's property, while Class B permits were for those who owned home property not adjacent to the permit's bounded land. Class C permits were for transient herders who had no land base. Fees ranged from twenty-five to thirty-five cents per head for cattle and horses, while sheep fees were five to eight cents per head. The fee was used to improve public lands, which often constituted land encompassed by a grazing permit, by creating roads, campsites, and stock watering locations, and to provide for the protection of livestock grazing public land.

This system was altered significantly in the mid-1900s.<sup>400</sup> The Grange-Thye Act of 1950 established the use of grazing fees specifically for rangeland improvement and instituted the ten-

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<sup>399</sup> August Winsky interview; Effie Winsky interview.

year permit system, and many ranchers using federal public lands found stability within the government grazing systems. However, grazers faced serious complaints from the public concerning their usage rights, and subsequent confusion over what constituted public land in the public's mind. The USDA Forest Service, overseeing the Lewis and Clark Forest, controlled portions of public land utilized by ranchers. Grazing permits were acquired, based on base property standards, for lands adjacent or within the vicinity of a rancher's land holdings. The fee structure, based on animal units per month (AUM), created revenue for improving, managing, and preserving public lands. Grazing permits could equal, but not exceed, a grazer's base landholdings.<sup>401</sup> Starting around 1935, soil conservation districts and grazing districts became (and remained) popular. The Upper Musselshell Conservation district formed in 1950, with the intent of helping farmers and ranchers with soil conservation and weed control.

After V-E Day and V-J Day and the return of many area service members, the valley slowly returned to its social and economic roots. Women returned to the domestic sphere or traditional feminine occupations. Though most employable women of the valley during this time concede they could have worked if they wanted, it was not socially acceptable. Most women were expected to relinquish jobs, such as those at the Harlowton roundhouse, to men returning from the war. This was not the case with many women who lost their spouses combating Germany or Imperial Japan. Nellie Schuchard, whose husband was killed in France, supported six children by herself. She did so by working several jobs outside of the home.<sup>402</sup>

There was a marked increase in employed women, concentrated in certain professions, even after the war ended. Many found they liked the freedom working outside the domestic

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<sup>400</sup> William D. Rowley, *U.S. Forest Service Grazing and Rangelands: A History* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1985), 60-62.

<sup>401</sup> Erin Fryer, rangeland management specialist USDA forest service, telephone interview with author, 20 February 2008, notes in author's possession.

<sup>402</sup> Lucille Cameron, interview by author, 17 July 2003.



sphere afforded. The growing population meant labor demands could be filled by females, such as nursing or education, without violating social norms.<sup>403</sup> Regional teachers Theo Beley and Effie Winsky taught until they married. After their nuptials, the local school board forced them to resign, because the male-dominated institution believed “one bread winner is enough.” Such notions diminished by the end of the 1950s, when college trained teachers in rural areas became scarce, and both women were hired back.<sup>404</sup>

The farms and ranches of the Upper Musselshell also underwent familial and social change during and after the Second World War. Labor shortages caused farmers and ranchers to rely more and more upon family labor and mechanization. This produced serious changes to regional agriculture both as working businesses and family owned farms or ranches. Eugene Taber graduated from high school in 1929, received fifty “old ewes,” and ran a small flock on the family ranch near Shawmut that his father had homesteaded. By the end of World War II, Eugene, Sr., sold his 1,500 head herd of sheep: the labor shortage from the war was severe, and Taber’s small family could not tend them alone. Before the war, the family had employed Basque shepherders. When the war started, they were deported to southern France or northern Spain.<sup>405</sup> William Taber retired in 1953 and sold the ranch and his remaining livestock to Eugene, Sr.<sup>406</sup>

The Tabers’ neighbor to the north, Camille DeBuff, passed away in 1935. His five sons worked at various ranches to pay for the family farm. By 1945 Gerard DeBuff started to farm on his own in the Judith Basin near the Danvers-Denton area, but eventually purchased a former

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<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

<sup>404</sup> Clarene Dysart, interview by author, 4 August 2003; Theo Beley, area resident, 1955-present, area teacher (1955-1995), interview by author, 4 August 2003; Effie Winsky interview.

<sup>405</sup> Taber, *The Life History of George Taber*; Eugene Taber, Jr., interview; Fred Taber interview.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

homestead claim totaling about three-quarters a section of land near Hedgesville and settled down to farm with an old tractor he purchased.<sup>407</sup>

Lavina area homesteader Joseph Cade survived the depression and war years. During that time he continued to plant crops while adding more milk cows to his herd to subsidize farming losses. Cade recalled, “We knew things would improve. I wasn’t going to quit. People moving gave us a lot of additional range. That is what really saved the day.” With neighbor after neighbor abandoning land, and few people buying it at auction, those who ran cattle or horses used abandoned land for grazing. Cade increased his land holding, owned and leased, to a little over 3,200 acres. With the advent of World War II, he nearly stopped farming altogether, phased out his horse herd and milk cows to switch primarily to beef production. The war years brought good enough prices that Cade was essentially debt-free by the end of the war. After thirty-seven years of farming and ranching in Golden Valley County, Cade went into semi-retirement and leased his land to one of his sons.<sup>408</sup>

Nearly thirty miles west of the Cades the Winnecook Ranch Corporation (WRC) halved its mortgage by 1941, and increased its sheep flock to 10,000 head, plus 189 head of cattle and 103 horses. The corporation’s general manager wrote, “Prospects are bright for the future and livestock is all in prime condition. With a fair break in selling we should show good headway in the next few years.”<sup>409</sup> I. Thayer Stevens, son of Ralph Berry’s original partner, became the WRC’s general manager in 1943. Stevens started the corporation’s move away from sheep and into cattle by 1947. A year later, when the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) arrived

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<sup>407</sup> Dan DeBuff interview.

<sup>408</sup> Cade, *Well, I Guess I Was Just Lucky*, 163.

<sup>409</sup> Hill, *Winnecook Ranch on the Musselshell*, 73.

(putting the Winnecook on public power), the ranch was listed for sale at what amounted to eight dollars per acre, totaling \$312,000.<sup>410</sup>

The ranches near Two Dot, in the central portion of the valley, faced problems similar to the rest of the region. The Moore Ranch, because of labor problems due to the war, disbanded its once significant bands of sheep, as did Two Dot Land and Livestock. To replace sheep, both moved into the less labor-intensive cattle business.<sup>411</sup> The McFarland brothers still operated their ranch as a partnership and picked up more land through bank foreclosures.<sup>412</sup> Farther to the west, the Smith Brothers' Sheep Company and the Bair Ranch continued to run. Pioneer sheep man Charlie Bair sold some land during the early stages of the Second World War. He died in 1943, at the age of 85, due to heart ailments. Bair's well known philanthropy and good nature were honored at his funeral: he had fifty pallbearers.<sup>413</sup> Lennep neighbors of Bair, Nels and Mina Voldseth, retired at the end of the war, when their son Norman was released from duty with United States Navy, and sold the ranch to Norman and his two brothers. Together the three renamed the ranch the Voldseth Brothers/TG Ranch and increased land holdings to 25,000 deeded acres.<sup>414</sup> Long-time rancher Olaf Rostad retired in 1949 and sold two-thirds of his ranch to his sons, Orville and Carl. The two brothers acquired the third share from their sister and continued to buy and trade land to increase the size and capabilities of the family operation.<sup>415</sup> During the late 1950s the Upper Musselshell returned to mild prosperity. Agriculture boomed in Meagher and Golden Valley counties, and railroading remained clearly visible as a competing economic staple within Wheatland County.

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<sup>410</sup> Ibid 74, 79.

<sup>411</sup> Steve Moore interview.

<sup>412</sup> Melody White interview.

<sup>413</sup> Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass*, 314, 211; Rostad, *Fourteen Cents & Seven Green Apples*, 115, 1.

<sup>414</sup> Norman Voldseth interview; Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass*, 329.

<sup>415</sup> Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass*, 305.

Socially, the 1960s were a time of great upheaval for most places within the United States. With the Vietnam War swiftly changing American society and culture, the Upper Musselshell Valley remained relatively stable. Regional resident and former state senator Ward Beley served on the draft board, and although people tried to get out of serving, “everybody that was eligible” faced the draft.<sup>416</sup> The conflict came home in 1968 when PFC Larry Smith, from Meagher County, and PFC Howard Nelson, of Wheatland County, were both killed in action.<sup>417</sup>

The counter culture which accompanied the Vietnam era never really took hold within the valley. The local attitude, school dress codes, and the fact most people of the draft age had to work (precluding them from having the idle time to participate in anti-establishment activities) hampered the movement from taking root. Although transient “hippies” masquerading as cowboys wandered into the valley, most “were run off” by more conservative members of society.<sup>418</sup> Although a small amount of animosity toward the counter-culture certainly existed, most people were too busy making a living, or attending to school and sports in the case of teenagers, to have the leisure time needed to participate. The region faced little social turmoil of the time, nor was ranching or farming affected by changing societal paradigms all that much.

Eugene Taber, Sr., expanded his ranch near Shawmut throughout the 1950s and 1960s by purchasing land from unsatisfied farm neighbors and through leases. The blockbuster year was 1959, when steers sold for .29 cents per pound: he loaded five railcars in Shawmut with cattle. By the close of the 1960s, both of Eugene’s sons, Eugene, Jr. and Fred, were working their own cattle on family land.<sup>419</sup> After 1945, Gerard DeBuff, like many regional farmers, diversified his

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<sup>416</sup> Ward Beley, interview by author, 4 August 2003.

<sup>417</sup> *Harlowton Times* 16 May 1968; Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass*, 127.

<sup>418</sup> Ward Beley interview; William Dysart interview by author, 31 July 2003; Clarene Dysart interview.

<sup>419</sup> Taber, *The Life History of George Taber*; Eugene Taber, Jr., interview; Fred Taber interview.

operation to include milk cows and Angus cattle. In 1965, his son Dan started running the land.<sup>420</sup>

In the central portions of the valley, near Two Dot, the Moore Ranch continued to run cattle under Perry Moore's son, Perry Jim Moore III.<sup>421</sup> The growing McFarland Ranch came under the control of George and Gib's children, Wilbur and Mary McFarland White, their daughter Mary Dern, and son Gilbert McFarland White.<sup>422</sup> Warren Jones, of Two Dot Land and Livestock, began a pattern of innovation on his ranch by using an airplane to keep endeavors running smoothly. One of Warren's sons, William "Bill" Jones, recalls the family plane once made several trips to Billings in a single day to acquire needed machine parts.<sup>423</sup>

Within the eastern portion of the valley, and after his son decided not to renew his lease, Joe Cade fully retired, selling his remaining horses and cattle. He maintained his lifelong relationship with the land around Tuffley Bench by leasing his property for perennial grazing, with the provision he maintained the fences and water supply.<sup>424</sup> The WRC continued raising cattle under the management of Thayer Stevens and showed enough profit to pay an eight percent dividend to shareholders in the late 1960s.<sup>425</sup>

In the western ranches of the valley, in 1959, George and Norman Voldseth purchased their brother Edward's shares of the family ranch and began to operate independently of each other. By 1971 Norman increased his own holdings to 18,000 deeded acres to run 1,100 head of

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<sup>420</sup> Dan DeBuff interview.

<sup>421</sup> Steve Moore interview; P.J. Moore, "Perry J. Moore," in Harlowton Woman's Club, from *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 185.

<sup>422</sup> Melody White interview; Gilbert by Mary McFarland White, "The McFarland Brother-George," in Harlowton Woman's Club, from *Yesteryears and Pioneers*, 176.

<sup>423</sup> William Jones interview.

<sup>424</sup> Cade, *Well, I Guess I Was Just Lucky*, 192-97.

<sup>425</sup> Hill, *Winnecook Ranch on the Musselshell*, 80.

Angus cattle.<sup>426</sup> Their close neighbors, Orville and Carl Rostad, turned over the management of their Bozeman Fork Ranch to newly married Phillip and Lee (Birkett) Rostad.<sup>427</sup>

One of the more interesting developments occurred at the Smith Brothers Sheep Company, owned by S.A. Ingersoll. In 1951 Ingersoll sold the 78,000-acre property for an undisclosed sum. The company name changed to the 71 Ranch (after the Smith Brothers' original brand) and was reportedly the largest contiguous deeded property in Montana. Four years later a Helena lawyer, and brother of stateswoman Jeanette Rankin, Wellington D. Rankin, purchased the 71 Ranch. His overall goal, many local people claim, was to be able to travel from Helena to Billings without ever leaving his own ranch land.<sup>428</sup> By all sources, Rankin was a shrewd and ruthless businessman. He often traded legal services for land to ranchers and farmers in need of a lawyer, but lacked the finances to pay such a legal representative. Rankin's efforts and methods paid huge dividends; was one of the largest independent landholders of his time and it was rumored his land holdings comprised about a million acres. Rankin died in 1966 and his widow, Louise, assumed control. She remarried a year later, joining herself and Jack Galt in matrimony.<sup>429</sup> Another sizable operation in Meagher County, the Bair Ranch, also grew in size. After Charles Bair passed away, daughters Marguerite and Alberta purchased more land throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s. Their deeded land rose in acreage to about 50,000 acres.<sup>430</sup>

By the end of the 1960s, Upper Musselshell Valley agriculture was vastly different than it had been in previous decades. A virtually unneeded workforce returned after the Second World War and many ranches switched from raising sheep to less labor intensive cattle. Mechanization

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<sup>426</sup> Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass*, 329.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid. 305-06.

<sup>428</sup> Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass*, 314; Lee Rostad interview; Phil Rostad interview.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid. 201.

played an even more important role within the regions agriculture. For example, the move from muscle to mechanization caused the already meager need for labor to dwindle more than ever. Employing four or five hired hands became impractical when a farmer or rancher could upgrade his machinery and hire two or three laborers. This may have made sense for individual operators, but it also caused a decline in the regional economy by eliminating some of the need for hired hands.

Not only did agriculture feel the effects of modernization during this time, the Milwaukee Road also felt the sting of advancing agriculture technology. By the 1960s the entire railroad industry in the United States slipped into decline, particularly concerning the shipping of agricultural products. With long haul trucking becoming more popular amongst farmers and ranchers, railroads lost their monopoly on shipping. Agriculturists could pay a trucking company, or invest in their own trucks, to ship goods to minor gateway cities like Billings. This increased their revenue to a small degree, but was inconvenient. Some continued to ship cattle on the Milwaukee because it was more suitable to their land's location to trail cattle by saddle horse, or small cattle trucks, to places like Two Dot. The same reasoning applied to many farmers as well. It was simply more time saving and fitting to load grain on a small truck and make several small trips to a Milwaukee Road grain silo than it was to pay a long haul carrier other than the railroad.

The postwar decades saw a significant transformation in the agricultural use of the Upper Musselshell Valley. As the uses of the valley changed, so did humankind's relationship with the land. The region's agriculturists moved away from the mass extraction methods of their pioneer parents. Chemical and mechanical innovations, even with the use of reserve programs and more government regulation of public lands, created a situation that greatly increased production while

using more careful range management strategies. Going hand in hand with this trend was the slow death of the bunkhouse. Farmers and ranchers no longer needed to employ cowboys or farmhands. The grand narrative, spanning from the 1940s to the 1960s, tends to lose the personal element of history. Their broad strokes approach focuses on changing politics as it effected labor through things like the bracero program, and bickering partisan politics; the lack of wartime industries (asides from immigrant and POW labor on beet farms), and that women began to fill the labor roles vacated by men during the war, and the gradual depopulation of the Great Plains as a whole. The grassroots history of the region tracks the grand narrative to an extent. However, there is a much lesser emphasis on political turmoil and population loss. Where the main differences lay is in the nuances of labor and the remembrance of specific people, particularly their war veterans, both male and female. Braceros did not fill the role of lost labor in the Upper Musselshell; women did so on ranches, within the auspices of the Milwaukee Road (arguably the only wartime industry that the region had asides from food production). However, in a similar vein to the grand narrative, the grassroots perspective focuses on advancing agricultural practices/technologies and how they affected population and production trends. However, both approaches miss two things. First, the role and impact the regional dweller, like Henry Muneta or Merrell Deem Edson, served on the global scene is lost to both perspectives. Although both played minor roles, Muneta in the eventual desegregation of the armed forces and Edson in the Manhattan Project, both had a role in world changing events. Second, and most importantly, both perspectives miss the massive depopulation such places faced in the three decades after World War II. The grand narrative certainly acknowledges that the Great Plains was slowly starting to dwindle in population, but does not seem to assess that some places emptied out much faster than others. On the other hand, the grassroots perspective concerning



mass exodus does not fall into this time frame of collective memory. On the surface it seems that times were flush for the Upper Musselshell Valley even though Golden Valley County lost forty two percent of its population from 1940 to 1960, Meagher lost a scanty five percent, and Wheatland County lost twenty three percent of its population.<sup>431</sup> The grassroots perspective leaves the blame for depopulation on the demise of the Milwaukee Road, and future eras of history. By the 1970s, Meagher County was doing well with agriculture, as was Golden Valley County; however, Wheatland County was rapidly declining in population and influence as its fortunes, or lack thereof, were tied to the Milwaukee Road.

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<sup>431</sup> Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940: Population Volume II: Characteristics of the Population: Sex, Age, Race, Nativity, Citizenship, Country of Birth of Foreign-Born White, School Attendance, Education, Employment Status, Class of Worker, Major Occupation Group, and Industry Group: Part 4: Minnesota-New Mexico* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1943); Bureau of the Census, *A Report of the Seventeenth Decennial Census of the United States: Census of Population: 1950. Volume II: Characteristics of the Population Number of Inhabitants, General and Detailed Characteristics of the Population Part 26 Montana* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1952); Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States. Census of Population: 1960. Volume I: Characteristics of the Population: Number of inhabitants, General Population Characteristics, General Social and Economic Characteristics, and Detailed Characteristics Part 28 Montana* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1961); Bureau of the Census, *General Social and Economic Characteristics Montana. 1970 Census of Population* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1972); Bureau of the Census, *A Statistical Abstract Supplement. County and City Data Book 1983: States, Counties, Cities of 25,000 or more, places of 2,500 or More* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1983); Bureau of the Census, *Supplementary Report: Advance Estimates of Social, Economic, and Housing Characteristics Montana: Counties and Selected Places. 1980 Census of Population and Housing* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1980). After this citation will appear as Bureau of the Census.

## CHAPTER 9. ECONOMIC DOWNTURNS: THE FATE OF THE MILWAUKEE ROAD AND THE UPPER MUSSELSHELL VALLEY

The 1970s and 1980s were a period of profound adjustment for a major portion of the Musselshell Valley as the Milwaukee Road began to flounder and, then, outright fail. The line's bankruptcy was not initially felt socially and economically as other temporary industries, such as Commonwealth Power Lines, moved through the region. When those industries completed their work within central Montana, the loss of the railroad hit home, especially in Wheatland County, as depopulation, poverty, and shifting cultural identity challenged the county. Although this caused massive decline within the central portion of the valley, the other two counties in the region, Golden Valley and Meagher counties, were virtually unaffected by the loss. Their economies, population, and identities remained stable within the realm of agriculture. Despite this, changing technologies and innovations made the time difficult for even those unaffected by the loss of a major regional industry. Overall, the bankruptcy of the Milwaukee Road ended the culture of railroading within the Upper Musselshell Valley, causing a sixth succession of place and culture within the region as a shift back toward the traditional agricultural industry occurred by the close of the 1980s. This progression had massive ramifications for Wheatland County people's very identity was challenged. Despite the closure, the farming and ranching cultures of the region remained unaffected, causing distinct tension within the entire valley.

The grand narrative interpretation of the 1970s and 1980s remains vague, and somewhat static. For example, Malone, Roeder, and Lange's history of the state, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, focuses on the cyclical booms and busts of the state's agriculture. The early 1970s saw decent rainfall, begetting good wheat crops to be sold to the Soviet Union. However, the 1980s saw great drought and drops in commodity prices. Metal mining declined significantly,

but other extractive industries, particularly lumber, oil, and coal arose as a replacement. On the political front, the liberalism of the 1970s was overturned by the conservative nature of the 1980s. Despite this, concludes *Montana* “agriculture lies at the heart of Montana’s economy.” Malone revisits his broad scope of Montana history with *Montana: A Contemporary Profile* and breaks the state down into more specific regions in his inquiry, albeit briefly. His main goal is to provide a “snapshot” of modern Montana as whole from the perspective what the states regions have in common. What results is a strong work on Montana history, but one that focuses larger themes like society, politics, and matters of extractive economics.

Broader historical works within the grand narrative, of which there are few dealing with the contemporary Great Plains, tend to be a blend of social and political history as is the case with Doug Hurt’s *The Big Empty: The Great Plains in the Twentieth Century*.<sup>432</sup> Chapter’s and sections dealing with the 1970s and 1980s focus on large, generalizable constructs that effect huge portions of the Great Plains such as the declining Oglalla Aquifer, oil, natural gas and coal mining, and the meatpacking industry. Accompanying these topics are matters of race and gender in relationship to industry and society. Politically, Hurt examines the slow decline in the importance of agriculture in national politics. However, he does capitalize on two themes that are strongly present in local and regional histories, that “the once-booming railroad towns [have] become geographical relics of the past,” and that “urban counties become increasingly urban and rural counties become increasingly rural,” all while interstate highways created a new rash of what John Hudson termed in-land towns. All three concepts are not missed within the grassroots narrative, but seem to be almost overstated, especially concerning railroading.<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> Malone, *Montana: A Contemporary Profile*; R. Douglas Hurt, *The Big Empty: The Great Plains in the Twentieth Century* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011).

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid*, 214-15.

The grassroots perspective of regional history is much more worldly and detailed than the grand narrative but fails to see the importance of farming and ranching within the confines of regional culture. Their focus is almost solely upon self-perceived woes caused by the bankruptcy of the Milwaukee Road; woes that already existed, but were only compounded to a great degree by the loss of the railroad. They spotlight far away entities like the Chicago Milwaukee Corporation or Chilean copper to explain local developments; and, due to the nature and scope of the Milwaukee Road's failure, firmly entrench themselves into the political and economic scene of the state, nation, and world. As a result, the importance and relativity of agriculture receded into the background despite the fact that it was, perhaps, the only stable thing within the Upper Musselshell Valley at the time.

Where agriculture is concerned, according to the New Regional History, changes in familial farm and ranch ownership illustrate much more stability than deviation. The biggest revision that needs to be made comes from the nature of railroading. The closure of the Milwaukee Road had virtually no effect upon regional agriculture as most producers had already started shipping goods via other routes. The grassroots perspective scapegoats the Milwaukee Road to an extent by attributing regional socioeconomic decline to the lines bankruptcy. However, despite the fact the local dwellers perception of the railroad is accurate (i.e. the Milwaukee Road did not care about its employees and made terrible business decisions when it came to the relevancy and import of its human resources) they neglect that the line, as a corporate entity, did what capitalistic business ventures do when faced with poor cash flow: make massive cutbacks. Additionally, the grassroots perspective seems to ignore the fact that regional decline, according to numerous historical sources, began well before the Milwaukee Road declared bankruptcy. Nevertheless, the loss of such an important economic and cultural

corner post made the region drastically reevaluate its historical identity and culture. In any case, the loss of Milwaukee is a powerful and saddening tale for the Upper Musselshell.

The importance of American rail lines reached its high water mark between 1866 and 1916. After 1919, in the words of historian Walter Nugent, railroads “no longer paved the way west or anywhere else” and slipped into decline.<sup>434</sup> This became evident after World War II when cheaply powered and affordable automobiles replaced passenger services and long haul trucking eliminated needs for bulk rail freight. Along with emerging highway systems, these factors caused rail travel to decrease by half in the latter part of the twentieth century. The railroads of America concentrated on bulk freight to make up lost passenger fares.<sup>435</sup> The Milwaukee Road, after filing for bankruptcy during the depression, was run as a trusteeship until the end of the Second World War. After the war, the line returned to its former position as a strong carrier in the Midwest and the northwest. With the cost of labor high for operating steam engines and the technological improvements during the war concerning combustion engines, the Milwaukee Road decided to dieselize the majority of its locomotives and maintained the electrified lines that ran through the Upper Musselshell. By the late 1950s, the Milwaukee no longer used steam-powered engines. By the mid-1970s, according to local accounts, the Milwaukee faced bigger problems than losing its regional shipping monopoly and made a series of puzzling decisions that compounded competition problems with the Burlington Northern and other regional shippers.

First, according to the grassroots narrative, the parent company focused on other subsidiary companies which drew resources away from the railroad throughout the late 1960s and 1970s. Entities like the Milwaukee Land Company (MLC) used company funds to pursue

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<sup>434</sup> Walter Nugent, *Into the West: The Story of its People* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 2001), 182.

<sup>435</sup> Malone and Etulain, *The American West*, 232-33.

business goals outside of the railroad. Instead, the attempt at diversification pushed funds into the Chicago Milwaukee Corporation, the Milwaukee Road parent company, and neglected using revenue to improve trackage and better the line's competitive status.<sup>436</sup> For example as rail cars got longer and heavier, the short curves in the Milwaukee's trackage needed lengthening to prevent cars from tipping over on curves. As a result, the Milwaukee started to remove the super-elevation within its tracks. Super-elevation is raising the outside rail elevation above that of the inner rail on a curve, similar to banking a curve on a highway. The centrifugal force is counteracted by super-elevating the track so the combined affects of the centrifugal force and the train weight produces a resultant force that is equally distributed on both rails. When this occurs, the curve is balanced and an equilibrium speed is achieved to keep cars on the rails. Additionally, the majority of the line's bridges needed major repairs.<sup>437</sup> Deferred maintenance caused at least one derailment a month by 1977. The Milwaukee's maintenance problems caused shippers to route their goods through competitors.

The Arab oil embargo of the 1970s caused the cost of operation for diesel trains to soar, while the cost of electricity remained low.<sup>438</sup> In spite of this, complete dieselization of the Milwaukee began in 1974, as management claimed converting to diesel locomotives could save the company. This might have been true if the line had remained steam powered instead of switching to electricity at the beginning of the twentieth century. By the end of 1977, the Milwaukee filed for reorganization under the Federal Bankruptcy Act. The company initially received fifty million dollars in government funds to help with track restoration in the hope that it would save the line. However, it was estimated by Transportation, Incorporated, of Bozeman

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<sup>436</sup> Harlowton *Times Clarion*, 31 August 1978.

<sup>437</sup> Donald G. Lode, Sr., area resident and railroader for the Milwaukee Road and Burlington Northern, 1974-2004, Harlowton, interview by author, 20 July 2003, tape recording in author's possession.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.*

(an engineering firm contracted to study the feasibility of continuing Milwaukee operations), that they needed at least \$182 million dollars to completely rehabilitate their ballast and ties throughout Montana.<sup>439</sup>

The reorganization prompted near panic in Wheatland County, despite the fact the *Lewistown News-Argus* claimed population and job opportunities were growing steadily in the central portion of the state.<sup>440</sup> The mayor of Harlowton, Oscar Biegel, received a letter from the corporate offices of the Milwaukee claiming “financial assistance under the Emergency Rail Service Act of 1970 . . . (will) continue diesel locomotive running maintenance” in towns like Harlowton.<sup>441</sup> Less than a week later, the Milwaukee issued a statement that it was phasing out Harlowton-based engineers.<sup>442</sup>

Six months later the Milwaukee began its planned decrease of engineers, and portions of its tracks located near Lewistown were condemned. The following month, August, citing the need for at least \$130 million in funds, the company announced plans to end operation of lines west of St. Paul, Minnesota.<sup>443</sup> Amidst massive protest, Montana Congressman Ron Marlenee stated, “The Milwaukee is essential to the continued life of this community (Harlowton). If the Milwaukee abandons Montana, Harlowton will be the most adversely affected of any town in the state. We must take every step possible to prevent that from happening.” Marlenee proposed a tax cut and \$135 million dollars in loans to keep the line operational.<sup>444</sup>

During the first quarter of 1979, the Milwaukee reinforced the prospect it would be closing down operations west of St. Paul. In February, it announced the abandonment of

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<sup>439</sup> Harlowton *Times Clarion* 31 August 1978; Transportation, Inc. Bozeman, MT, 31 August 1978.

<sup>440</sup> “Population and Job Opportunities Grow,” *Times Clarion* (Harlowton, MT) 9 February 1978.

<sup>441</sup> “Railroad to do Inspection,” Harlowton *Times Clarion* 9 February 1978.

<sup>442</sup> “Milwaukee to Phase out Harlo Based Engineers,” Harlowton *Times Clarion*, 7 February 1978.

<sup>443</sup> “The Milwaukee Railroad Says ‘We’re Going to Roll Up the Tracks,’” Harlowton *Times Clarion*, 10 August 1978.

<sup>444</sup> “Marlenee Says Milwaukee is Essential; Tax Break Not Enough,” Harlowton *Times Clarion*, 26 October 1978.

stockyards at Lavina and several other places outside of the region. People employed on the western lines formed an organization, Save Our Railroad Employment (SORE), to combat the demise of the Milwaukee. SORE, made up of Milwaukee employees, wanted to purchase the western lines to preserve their jobs. That same month, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) granted the ailing company 5.1 million dollars, of which one million was specifically designated for use in Montana.<sup>445</sup> Senator Max Baucus entered the fight for the Milwaukee to stay open, stressing the line's future was vital to Montana, citing that the company's seven hundred Montana employees, collecting five million dollars in annual pay, have "a very personal stake in the future of the line. The railroad is the cornerstone of several Montana communities-- Miles City, Harlowton . . . complete abandonment would have a devastating effect on those towns."<sup>446</sup> At virtually the same time Baucus joined the fray, the Milwaukee opposed any role for SORE in the bankruptcy proceedings.

By April of 1979 the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) and Congressman Marlenee investigated the Milwaukee work slow down as "de facto abandonment," because shippers complained their goods were not receiving adequate attention by the Milwaukee and were often rerouted to other carriers.<sup>447</sup> SORE stepped up its activity, further advocating purchasing the line as "an irreplaceable national asset and the only railroad with the capacity to ship 20 million tons of coal . . . to Japan." The organization's attorney, Fred Simpson, argued the Milwaukee was worth 400 million dollars more than its total debt; therefore it was worth salvaging.<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>445</sup> Harlowton *Times Clarion*, 1 February 1979.

<sup>446</sup> "Milwaukee's Future Vital to Montana," Harlowton *Times Clarion*, 8 March 1979.

<sup>447</sup> "ICC Looking at Milwaukee," Harlowton *Times Clarion*, 19 April 1979.

<sup>448</sup> "Committee Concerned About Railroad Situation," Harlowton *Times Clarion*, 19 April 1979.



Amidst bitter bickering over the line's operations, Milwaukee employees grumbled en masse about mismanagement, claiming corporate decisions created major cash problems. For example, management fired, retired, or demoted the majority of senior sales representatives. The resulting loss of sales contacts resulted in a net loss of forty-five to sixty million dollars a year. Deferred maintenance caused four million dollars of avoidable loss per month and caused customers to use other lines. Additionally, employees argued the Milwaukee increased management jobs by ninety-two percent by creating positions for four new vice presidents, twenty assistant vice presidents, and seventy-one other unneeded managerial jobs; conversely, it reduced field sales and service personnel positions by nearly thirty-three percent. Last, management was intentionally diverting shippers to other carriers.<sup>449</sup> These measures were creating a huge money pit that caused the Milwaukee to enter reorganization hearings. By May, SORE developed a purchase plan, and the FRA granted the Milwaukee twenty million dollars to continue operating.<sup>450</sup> Despite this, management planned to halt operations until a federal judge ordered the line to continue running while the ICC conducted hearings about the viability of the company.<sup>451</sup> *Great Falls Tribune* newspaper headlines screamed titles like "If the Milwaukee goes, so will Harlowton" and "Milwaukee leaves no joy in Harlowton."<sup>452</sup>

At 10:59 PM on October 30, the Milwaukee halted its western operations. The condition lasted nearly a week while the two houses of congress argued over whether or not to advance the corporation further funding. After they reached a compromise, and President Jimmy Carter signed the appropriate legislation, the Harlowton newspaper, *The Times Clarion*, trumpeted the

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<sup>449</sup> "Employee Argues Mismanagement," Harlowton *Times Clarion*, 19 May 1979.

<sup>450</sup> "\$20 Million Available to Help Milwaukee," Harlowton *Times Clarion*, 3 May 1979.

<sup>451</sup> Harlowton *Times Clarion*, 23 August 1979.

<sup>452</sup> *Great Falls Tribune*, October 11 1979; Nov 2, 1979.

headline, “MILWAUKEE RAILROAD BEGINS TO RUN AGAIN!”<sup>453</sup> Despite local optimism, the ICC rejected all employee plans to purchase the line, citing they would need at least \$500 million dollars to do so. The ICC supported the decision that “as of now [3 January 1980] the Lines [sic] west of Miles City will be abandoned . . .”<sup>454</sup> The Department of Transportation then provided fifty million dollars (with thirty specifically for operating expenses) to maintain operation of the western lines through February.<sup>455</sup> By the middle of March, with an ICC decision of 6-0 rejecting proposed reorganization plans, the Milwaukee Road officially closed its western lines, “leaving the community of Harlowton . . . walking on a tight wire,” according to the local newspaper the *Times Clarion*.<sup>456</sup> At the time of the closure, Roadmaster David Sorenson felt that the Milwaukee “didn’t care much about employees at that time.”<sup>457</sup>

Such a terrible economic blow had a profound effect on the region’s culture and historical identity, as the Milwaukee stopped serving as a vital export link to outside markets. The closure created massive depopulation, loss of income and businesses, and poverty. As the Milwaukee Road’s tracks were being sold to Japanese corporations to make razor blades, an estimated 1,000 jobs, both railroad employment and satellite industries, ranging from tie gangs and engineers to bartenders, were lost in Wheatland County.<sup>458</sup> The loss of the 1.5 million dollar annual payroll from the coffers of the Milwaukee devastated the economy of the county. Those left unemployed by the railroad either relocated or were forced into different occupations. The *Great Falls Tribune* claimed satellite industries lost thirty-five percent of their patrons, property values fell by twenty-five percent, and the tax base plummeted, causing a decrease in police, fire

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<sup>453</sup> “Milwaukee Railroad Begins to Run Again,” Harlowton *Times Clarion*, 8 November 1979.

<sup>454</sup> “ICC Says ‘No Go!’” Harlowton *Times Clarion*, 3 January 1980.

<sup>455</sup> “50 Million More for Milwaukee Operations,” Harlowton *Times Clarion*, 10 January 1980.

<sup>456</sup> Harlowton *Times Clarion*, 27 March 1980.

<sup>457</sup> Dave Sorenson, area businessman Harlowton, interview by author, August 2006, ape recording and notes in authors possession

<sup>458</sup> Donald G. Lode, Sr., interview.

department, and utility department funding and activity.<sup>459</sup> The Harlowton Police Department disbanded because of funding losses, and the county sheriff took over all law enforcement activities. Because of the bankruptcy of the Milwaukee Road, and its aftermath, at least fifty-nine businesses in Harlowton closed their doors for good.<sup>460</sup> Harlowton lost nearly forty percent of its population as a result of the Milwaukee's closure, as nearly a thousand people dependant upon the Milwaukee, directly or indirectly, left the town. Families consisting of second and third-generation Milwaukee employees left in droves.

Upon its founding in 1917 Wheatland County contained 5,619 people. By the end of the 1990s the county population had fallen more than fifty percent to 2,259 (Table 3).<sup>461</sup> Many regional dwellers assume that the biggest drop in population occurred in the decades after the Milwaukee Road went bankrupt. This is not the case. The biggest drop in population occurred between 1940 and 1970, with Golden Valley's population dropping by forty-two percent (676 people), Meagher County lost five percent of its population (115 people), and Wheatland County lost twenty three percent of its inhabitants (757 people). Between 1970 and 2000, Golden Valley's population only dropped five percent (by 47 people), Meagher lost eleven percent of its

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<sup>459</sup> *Great Falls Tribune* 11, October 1979, 2 and November 1979.

<sup>460</sup> Lucille Cameron interview; Richard Stoltz interview; Donald G. Lode, Sr., interview.

<sup>461</sup> Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940: Population Volume II: Characteristics of the Population: Sex, Age, Race, Nativity, Citizenship, Country of Birth of Foreign-Born White, School Attendance, Education, Employment Status, Class of Worker, Major Occupation Group, and Industry Group: Part 4: Minnesota-New Mexico* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1943); Bureau of the Census, *A Report of the Seventeenth Decennial Census of the United States: Census of Population: 1950. Volume II: Characteristics of the Population Number of Inhabitants, General and Detailed Characteristics of the Population Part 26 Montana* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1952); Bureau of the Census, *The Eighteenth Decennial Census of the United States. Census of Population: 1960. Volume I: Characteristics of the Population: Number of inhabitants, General Population Characteristics, General Social and Economic Characteristics, and Detailed Characteristics Part 28 Montana* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1961); Bureau of the Census, *General Social and Economic Characteristics Montana. 1970 Census of Population* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1972); Bureau of the Census. *A Statistical Abstract Supplement. County and City Data Book 1983: States, Counties, Cities of 25,000 or more, places of 2,500 or More* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1983); Bureau of the Census. *Supplementary Report: Advance Estimates of Social, Economic, and Housing Characteristics Montana: Counties and Selected Places. 1980 Census of Population and Housing* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1980). After this citation will appear as Bureau of the Census.

population (231 people). Wheatland County, showing the loss of the Milwaukee lost the most population within the Upper Musselshell, with fourteen percent (361 people) left the region. In conjunction with depopulation, and the loss of three million dollars of railroad income, Wheatland County's median household income, in terms of 2003 dollars, fell from \$70,000 to \$24,492 (Table 4).<sup>462</sup>

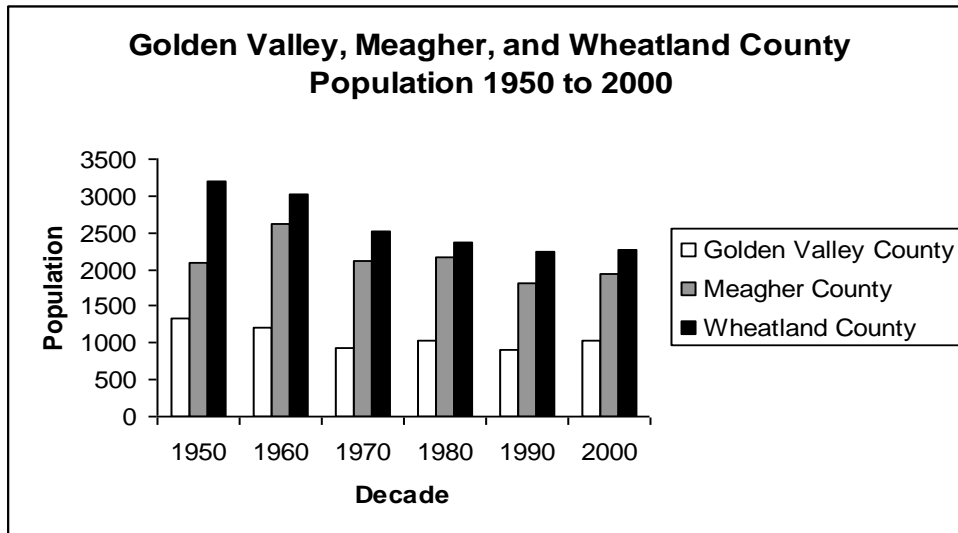


Table 3. Golden Valley, Meagher, and Wheatland County Population 1950 to 2000.

<sup>462</sup> All incomes throughout this work are presented in terms of 2003 dollars; Bureau of the Census.

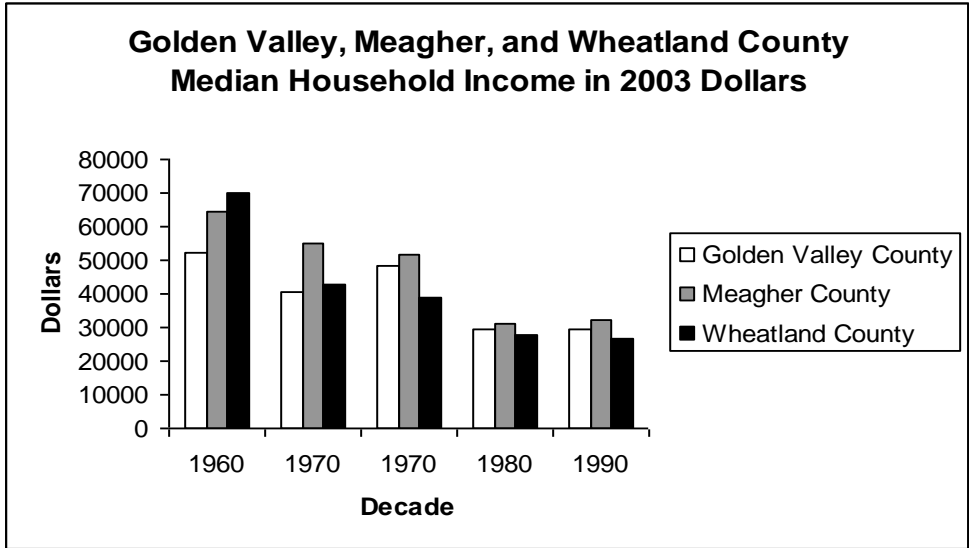


Table 4. Golden Valley, Meagher, and Wheatland County Median Household Income in 2003 Dollars.

Meagher and Golden Valley Counties were also harmed by the economic downturn of the late 1970s and 1980s, but their situation was not as dire as that of Wheatland County. For example, Meagher County had a population of 2,622 in 1920 when the county-busting era ended. By 2000, that county contained 1,932. This was a loss of less than twenty-five percent. The largest drop in population occurred from 1920 to 1950. Upon its incorporation, Golden Valley had a population of 2,126. By 2000, the population had fallen by fifty percent, with the greatest population loss during the World War II era. Median household income fell by less than fifty percent as well.<sup>463</sup>

The Harlowton school system faced significant problems because of the bankruptcy. According to local educators Clarene Dysart and Theo Beley, class sizes dropped by half. Hillcrest Elementary School, until the time the railroad left, employed two first-grade teachers to instruct forty-five students in two separate classrooms. After the bankruptcy, only one was

<sup>463</sup> Northwest Area Foundation, "Income and Poverty – Median Household Income 1990," available from the world wide web <http://www.indicators.nwaf.org/showregionone.asp?newwindow=true&fips=3000>, accessed 30 December 2003.

needed. By the time Theo Beley retired in 1995, her first-grade classroom often contained less than sixteen students.<sup>464</sup> Harlowton Public High School dropped from a class B to class C school in its athletic classification. Because of the drop in enrollments, by the early 1990s popular sports such as wrestling and girl’s golf were eliminated, as were some lifetime recreational based skill classes (Table 5).

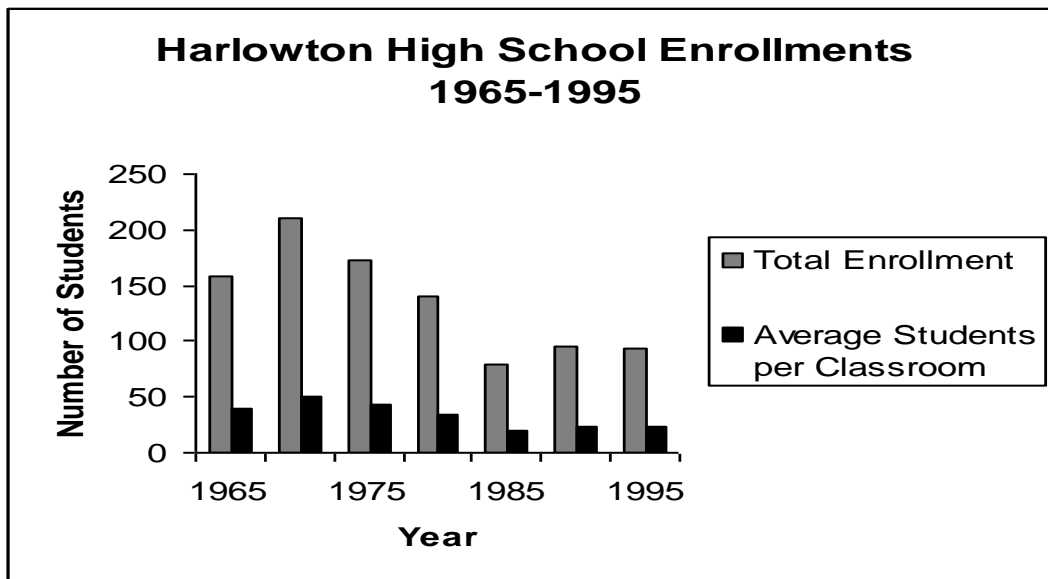


Table 5. Harlowton High School Enrollments 1965-1995.<sup>465</sup>

The economic effects of the Milwaukee Road’s bankruptcy were temporarily cushioned within Wheatland County as Commonwealth Power Lines passed through the region, building a new system of electrical poles and lines, demographically and economically replacing a small

<sup>464</sup> Clarene Dysart interview; Theo Beley interview.

<sup>465</sup> State of Montana, *Superintendent of Public Instruction Biennial Report*, December 1, 1962; *Twentieth Biennial Report of the Montana State Board of Equalization*, July 1, 1960-June 30, 1962; *Twenty-Fourth Biennial Report of the Montana State Board of Equalization*, July 1, 1968-June 30, 1970; *Twenty-Fifth Biennial Report of the Montana State Board of Equalization*, Jul 1, 1970-June 30, 1972; *Annual Report of Superintendent of Public Instruction Dolores Colburg*, June 30, 1972; “High School District Final Budget Reports, 1985-1995,” Courtesy of District School Clerk Charlotte Miller and Superintendent Andy Begger.

proportion of railroaders lost, which assuaged some of the effects the Milwaukee foreclosure caused. However, by 1985, the closure of the railroad had a significant impact.

The bankruptcy of the Milwaukee Road was, and remains, a matter of debate between regional residents and the corporation. The Milwaukee Road contends the company was no longer a profitable and effective transcontinental line. The merger of the Great Northern and Northern Pacific into the Burlington Northern created a monopoly that the Milwaukee could not contend against. Because of the merger, the Milwaukee's freight traffic receded enough that it could not maintain its tracks, its equipment, or such vast numbers of employees. The Department of Transportation and the FRA supported that opinion with their *Traffic Effects Study: The Viability of the Western Lines of the Milwaukee*. According to FRA research, which took into account the 1.9 million carloads of regional traffic projected through 1985, the Milwaukee "went through bankruptcy and reorganization in 1928 and again in 1945. From 1975 through 1977 over \$50 million in operating losses were incurred . . . [they filed] bankruptcy for a third time in 1977 . . . [petitioning] to abandon fully 75 percent of the railroad."<sup>466</sup> The report concluded:

. . . the infusion of funds would not transform the Western lines into a viable segment of the Milwaukee Road. Over the last ten years, the Milwaukee's freight volume has been stagnant, while the regions economy and competing carriers traffic has grown . . . much of the Milwaukee traffic is carried at a loss . . . the carrier would not be able to compete effectively for much of the existing traffic.<sup>467</sup>

With the Milwaukee's net losses between 1969 and 1977 totaling \$111.2 million dollars, full rehabilitation (with federal assistance) would cost an additional \$115 million dollars. Because of the financial strain created by other carriers, the Milwaukee simply could not retain its market

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<sup>466</sup> Department of Transportation, Federal Railroad Administration-DOT-FR-8072, *Traffic Effects Study: The Viability of the Western Lines of the Milwaukee* (Washington, D.C., 1979), 1.

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

share of freighting, and consequently its physical plant and equipment deteriorated, resulting in bankruptcy.

Local sources stress that entities like the Chicago Milwaukee Corporation (CMC) or the Milwaukee Land Corporation were subsidiaries that obstructed the line's income (the CMC, which became operational 1972, was in fact a holding company that was proposed to the Milwaukee Road's stockholders specifically to become the railroads parent company when it purchased an overwhelming number of the lines stock that year).<sup>468</sup> However, railroaders viewed it as a subsidiary company that should not have operated outside the interest of the Milwaukee Road. Such subsidiary companies neglected using any revenue to balance the line's failing freight profits, and improve the line's tracks and equipment, or enhance its competitive status. They did exactly the opposite of what they were designed to accomplish. This led to deferred maintenance, which according to sources like *The Milwaukee Road Electrification*, caused shippers to route goods through competitors as "schedules became nonexistent and transit times soared."<sup>469</sup> Dieselization of the line made no sense, as the Arab oil Embargo of 1973 made petroleum-based fuels extremely uneconomical. Remaining a partially electrified line would have saved money, according to regional residents and former railroaders like Richard Stoltz, August Winsky, and Don Lode. Corporate management wrongly believed converting to diesel locomotives could save the company from bankruptcy. The last mistake management made was being lured away from electrification by the price of copper.<sup>470</sup> Milwaukee management intended to sell its copper catenary wires on the open market for a tidy sum to offset the cost of

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<sup>468</sup> Scribbins, *The Milwaukee Road*, 167.

<sup>469</sup> *The Milwaukee Road Electrification*, available from the world wide web [http://www.scn.org?cedar\\_Butte/milw-elec.html](http://www.scn.org?cedar_Butte/milw-elec.html), accessed 14 October 2003.

<sup>470</sup> Richard Stoltz interview; August Winsky interview; Donald G. Lode, Sr., interview.



dieselization, believing its catenary wires (copper wires connected to the train along its electrified route) were worth around ten million dollars.

In the early 1970s, copper was a commodity largely controlled by Chilean interests. Chile's president, Salvador Allende, started to nationalize Chile's natural resources. As a result, American corporations, like Anaconda Copper and Kennecott, had to yield 80 million dollars a year in profit to CODELCO (the state-owned copper company of Chile).<sup>471</sup> The Anaconda Copper Company declared a net loss of \$357.3 million dollars in 1971 alone.<sup>472</sup> An American-supported coup placed Augusto Pinochet in power as military dictator of Chile. Pinochet, under the economic guidance of the "Chicago Boys" (so named because they studied at the University of Chicago) applied a neo-liberal economic model to Chile in the mid-1970s that included selling off state owned companies to private Chilean interests, lowering taxes and tariffs, and "freeing prices."<sup>473</sup>

CODELCO dumped copper into the world market at prices lower than market level, and so the entire pricing structure of the industry changed "from one being set by the producer to one set by the major copper futures market," according to economists like Jacob Steelman. As a result, the price of copper dropped by as much as ten cents a pound.<sup>474</sup> The Milwaukee Road received only five million dollars for its catenary wires, not the anticipated ten million.

According to *Milwaukee Road: Electrification* this was "a pittance against the 39 [sic] million it would cost" to replace electric locomotives with diesel engines. By June of 1974 the Milwaukee

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<sup>471</sup> Centro de Estudios Nacionales de Desarrollo Alternativo (CENDA), *Sovereign Ground Rent Policy for Developing Countries, in the XXI Century.*, available from the world wide web [http://cep.cl/Cenda/proyectos/Canada/Proyecto\\_Cananda\\_Min.doc](http://cep.cl/Cenda/proyectos/Canada/Proyecto_Cananda_Min.doc), accessed 25 September 2003.

<sup>472</sup> Malone, Roeder and Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, 325.

<sup>473</sup> Stephenie Rosenfeld, "The Myth of the Chilean Miracle," available from the world wide web [Http://multinationalmonitor.org/hyper/issues/1994/08/mm0894\\_12.html](http://multinationalmonitor.org/hyper/issues/1994/08/mm0894_12.html), accessed 25 September 2003.

<sup>474</sup> Jacob Steelman, "Protectionism Didn't Help Copper," available from the world wide web <http://mises.org/fullstory.asp?control=1290>, accessed 25 September 2003.

terminated all electric operations, forcing the central portion of the Upper Musselshell back to its agricultural roots.<sup>475</sup>

During the present-day era, what once showed variation-regional ranches and farms again changing in familial ownership-illustrates much more continuity than deviation. As ranches and farms stay within family hands over the generations, a much stronger attachment to the land, and its needs, occurs; resulting in stronger cultural ties to identity. Near Ryegate, Eugene and Fred Taber continued their operation south of Shawmut, while Dan DeBuff continued to farm north of the small town. Lavina farmer Joe Cade, one of the last regional pioneer homesteaders, passed away.

The Winnecook Ranch Corporation (WRC) board replaced Thayer Stevens as manager with Gordon Pop, under the tutelage of regional rancher Warren “Buck” Jones, for a trial period. Popp’s later tenure as manager was overshadowed by allegations of embezzlement and mismanagement of ranch land, equipment, and material as personal property, an all too common occurrence among large ranch corporations. WRC finances quickly came to shambles as ranch debt greatly exceeded income. Popp was dismissed, in October of 1985, tried, and convicted of felony theft. A civil suit followed, with the WRC seeking to recoup the loss of 239 cattle, 210 ewes, nearly 1,500, lambs and over \$85,000 dollars in missing tools and equipment.<sup>476</sup> Corporation president Stillman Berry died during the Popp scandal. Having no close heirs, Berry left the controlling stock of the corporation to the Goodly Heritage Foundation. Because of IRS regulations, the main body of his estate became the property of his trust’s three major

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<sup>475</sup>“The Milwaukee Road Electrification,” available from the world wide web [http://www.scn.org?cedar\\_Butte/milw-elec.html](http://www.scn.org?cedar_Butte/milw-elec.html), accessed 14 October 2003.

<sup>476</sup>Hill, *Winnecook Ranch on the Musselshell*, 83-84.

beneficiaries: Redlands Community Hospital, the A.K. Smiley Library, and Stanford University.<sup>477</sup>

West of Ryegate, in Wheatland and Meagher counties, Perry Moore's son, Steve, took over the Moore Ranch near Two Dot. The McFarland/White Ranch began to be operated by Wilbur and Mary White's son, Mac, and his wife Melody. Norman Voldseth bought his brothers' TG ranch, and leased the majority of his holdings to family members. Louise Galt's son, Errol, started leasing the 71 Ranch in 1980 to raise cattle and hay. Marguerite Bair passed away in 1976, and the Bair ranch came to be solely run by Alberta Bair. The continuity of ownership, as a family construct, runs deep and is an important part of community and identity within the valley's agricultural industries. However, it does create both strengths and weaknesses. Many have become Limited Liability Company (LLC) or S Corporations in order to protect their family and land. For example, an LLC allows for multiple partners to limit their personal liability for debts and lawsuits, but allows for pass through taxation, while S Corporations income and losses are passed to the corporations shareholders who can claim either in their individual taxes. In short, each offers a form of monetary protection to members and shareholders. They can also freely gift a certain amount of shares yearly, thus passing down holdings while avoiding stiff inheritance taxes. Additionally, this continuity, in some cases spanning a century, creates a grand sense of community from well known and trusted neighbors. Most farmers and ranchers are more than willing to help out a neighbor in a variety of hard times thus creating a form of communal cohesion. The continuity of ownership does also have some weaknesses. Many farmers and ranchers do not want their children to have the same life that they did. It is a difficult vocation, often with little monetary or recreational returns and parents do not want their offspring to work so hard for so little. As a result, they sell their family land

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<sup>477</sup> Hill. 46-48.

gaining an easier retirement for themselves and a nest egg for their children. Others just simply get tired of being “next year people.”

Aside from small changes in ownership, mostly via family held and granted leases, the major impact on agriculture in the Upper Musselshell Valley came from technological improvements in the 1970s and 1980s. The large-scale advance of farm and ranch technology in the 1970s had a profound impact on agriculture, as did transportation. Improved swathers and the advent of the large round baler somewhat harmed the region’s economy by almost entirely eliminating the need for the bunkhouse by the mid 1980s.<sup>478</sup> Ranches no longer needed a virtual army of hired hands to cut and bale hay, or to feed livestock. For example, Two Dot Land and Livestock employed eight to ten cowhands in the 1960s. By the 1980s, only five were needed. By the turn of the century, only one full time employee was on the company’s books. The same can be said of other large ranches.<sup>479</sup> Near Lennep, rancher Norman Voldseth, prior to World War II, used a crew of twenty three men to harvest an average of twelve tons of hay; by the end of the millennia Voldseth only needed four or five, largely seasonal, hired hands to cut between five and six thousand tons. Haymaker Ranch, north of Two Dot, employed three full time hands in the late 1970s, and provided for their families housing. By the close of the 1980s, the thirty-thousand acre ranch employed one full-time manager, while the actual acreage was leased to another regional ranch corporation for sheep and cattle pasturage. Despite farms and ranches losing their human population, they remained fairly stable. According to the USDA Census of Agriculture, there were a total of 441 farms and ranches in the Upper Musselshell Valley. By 1987 there were 424, a loss of four percent in the number of farms and ranches. At the county

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<sup>478</sup> Melody White interview.

<sup>479</sup> William Jones interview.

level, as seen farm and ranch numbers were eclectic in their fluctuations; however, the overall trend was that of loss (Table 6).<sup>480</sup>

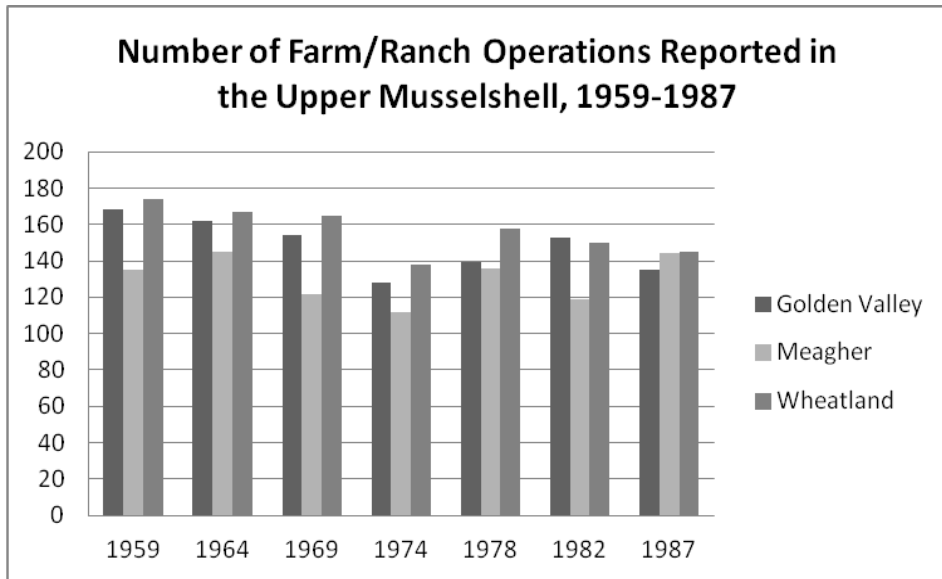


Table 6. Number of Farm/Ranch Operations Reported in the Upper Musselshell, 1959-1987.

Transportation trends also changed a great deal along with technology. By the early 1970s the majority of farmers and ranchers started to use long haul trucking to ship their products. This was much cheaper than paying the freight charges of the Milwaukee Road, which slipped into massive decline by the mid-1970s, following national trends in shipping. As such, the many regional farmers and ranchers' stopped shipping on the Milwaukee. It was cheaper to hire long haul truckers, or invest in their own trucks, to ship cattle to market or deposit grain at a local elevator.

<sup>480</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, Census of Agriculture-County Level Data. Available from the world wide web at: <http://agcensus.Mannlib.Cornell.edu/agcensus/getvolumeD>. USDA Census of Agriculture Historical Archive. Cite accessed 24 September 2011.

Another transformation in agriculture occurred in 1978 with the passage of the Public Rangeland Improvement Act. No longer charging by the acre, the BLM switched to animal units per month (AUM) in terms of fees. For example, each AUM (consisting of either a cow/calf pair or five sheep) was charged for the use of BLM land, on a ten-year permit. Permits are given to those who have base property, often called the home ranch, at least equal to the acreage of their lease. This prevents a property owner being solely dependant upon the government for animal range. The system changed slightly under the Reagan administration in 1986. AUMs were still used, but they no longer had a set fee, but an evolving one that changes from year to year.<sup>481</sup> The BLM never really had a huge impact upon the Upper Musselshell. For example Wheatland County contains 914,000 acres of land, of which the BLM only controls 1,195 acres. Golden Valley County encompasses about 753,000 acres, of which BLM lands only account for 7,844 acres. Meagher County had a land mass of roughly 1.5 million acres and the parts of Meagher County residing within the Upper Musselshell contains of about 2,449 acres of BLM land.

The Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service was replaced by the Natural Resource Conservation Service, overseen by the USDA in 1994. One of its main functions, in addition to conservation efforts, in concert with the Farm Service Agency is the administration of the Conservation Reserve Program established in 1985. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is designed to provide farmers and ranchers with technical and monetary assistance in addressing soil erosion, water loss, and other natural concerns in a way that is cost effective and beneficial to the land. The program has reduced soil erosion, and stream and lake sedimentation; enhanced or repaired water quality, and forest and wetland resources; and improved the flora and

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<sup>481</sup> Gregg Albright, Public Affairs Specialist-Billings, MT, Bureau of Land Management, 22 January 2008, phone interview by author.

fauna in many Great Plains regions.<sup>482</sup> Under the CRP, former croplands are seeded to grass, mostly native. The CRP of the USDA provides subsidies to farmers and ranchers for allowing a certain amount of their acreage to remain un-grazed in order to protect rangeland from erosion by allowing natural vegetation to grow. Currently there are 40,107 acres of private land (about 6.5% in the district) in the program, which pays producers an average of about thirty-three dollars an acre, to enroll their land for up to ten years.<sup>483</sup>

Despite the importance of such federal and state legislation, the biggest evolution to the Upper Musselshell came not from agricultural trends, but from the realm of railroading. Local railroaders believe neglectful subsidiary companies, deferred maintenance of equipment, trackage, and real estate, derailments, simple greed, mismanagement, and Chilean copper caused the bankruptcy. Don Baker, author of *The Montana Railroad*, alleges virtually “all physical evidence of the railroad vanished.”<sup>484</sup> This is not entirely true, considering the economic and social fallout the bankruptcy caused in the central portion of the Upper Musselshell Valley.

The closure of the Milwaukee also had definite environmental effects. First, the abandoned track beds left a huge swath of earth beds and embankments throughout the region. Ingenious farmers and ranchers quickly claimed viable portions of the former tracks as access roads that were already created. However, the route was scattered with discarded electrical insulators, railroad spikes, occasional ties, power and communication poles, and in some cases abandoned power sub-stations and their remnants. Next, they left some bridges scattered throughout the route, but ranchers, farmers, and towns quickly claimed those as crossings. Milwaukee right of ways, due to the nature of the original contracts with area landowners,

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<sup>482</sup> USDA-NRCS “Conservation Reserve Program-10 Counties’ CRP land open,” available from the world wide web <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/crp/>, accessed may 22, 2001.

<sup>483</sup> Cheryl Miller, Comp., “Land Use of Private (non-public) acres in Wheatland County, Montana, 2007,” Natural Resource Conservation Service, document in author’s possession.

<sup>484</sup> Baker, *The Montana Railroad*, 63.

mostly reverted to their original owners. The Milwaukee certainly did not leave a clean house when it uprooted. However, it did leave a lasting cultural legacy within the region. As for the physical living environment of humankind, town structure started to shift drastically. The basic T-towns created along the Milwaukee Road faced a shift in commerce and class structure. No longer were towns beholden to the railroad socially or economically.

The grassroots narrative is essentially correct in its interpretation of how the Milwaukee Road abandoned the region. However, it seems that the railroad is being made into a scapegoat within this interpretation, and for a broader purpose: to explain regional decline. First, this is a case of general versus specific cause. The populace wants to explain, in specific terms and concrete ways, how and why their region declined. The easy answer is in its biggest industry: the Milwaukee Road and its bankruptcy. Their explanation, although very accurate of how the Milwaukee handled itself at the time, and subsequent exasperation at the line is, to an extent, flawed in that they miss the corporation's capitalistic viewpoint. Basic corporate strategy is to make money via their subsidiaries and divisions; each has to be functionally profitable. When they cease being profitable, the parent company's reaction is to isolate them, possibly stem problems that hemorrhage cash and avoid bankruptcy; failing that they liquidate and disband with the goal being to protect profits not people. The Chicago Milwaukee Corporation, although it was its own worst enemy and largely created its own problems, followed this doctrine.

Second, blaming the Milwaukee Road for regional downturn is inaccurate. It is apparent from census data (see Tables 3 and 4) that the region was already well into a cycle of decline well before the Milwaukee Road's declaration of bankruptcy. The decline, which is nearly impossible to place within a specific framework for causation, is steady and does not linger or hinge upon the failure of the railroad. Additionally, while the mid-portion of the valley was



highly affected by the closure, other parts of the region were not. The loss of the Milwaukee in the Upper Musselshell lessened in importance as it emanated outward, like Von Thunen economic circles, from the railroad center of Harlowton. For example, according to Lennep rancher Norman Voldseth, the railroad “leaving did not make a lot of difference . . . [we had] already switched to trucks.”<sup>485</sup> North of Shawmut, farmer Dan DeBuff stressed the loss only meant rail freight was limited to one line (the Burlington Northern); it did not matter which railroad carried his freight.<sup>486</sup> Cattle ranchers Don and Linda Eklund, used to trains killing cattle (upwards to twenty-eight head in a single night), were similarly unaffected by the loss. However, it did cause the community of Harlowton, according to many ranchers like Eklund, to revert to “an agriculture town, when people did not want to be.”<sup>487</sup> The railroad culture of the Upper Musselshell all but disappeared, with the exception of several families who attained employment with the Burlington Northern and were willing to commute long distances on a weekly basis. By the middle of the 1980s the struggling agriculture market and the loss of the Milwaukee Road caused significant challenges for the people of the Upper Musselshell Valley. Farming and ranching re-emerged as the dominant culture of the region, but faced dire economic times and a regional identity in flux.

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<sup>485</sup> Norman Voldseth interview.

<sup>486</sup> Dan DeBuff interview.

<sup>487</sup> Don Eklund interview; Linda Eklund interview.

## CHAPTER 10. TOWARD A HISTORICAL IDENTITY: THE UPPER MUSSELHELL VALLEY AND THE PRESENT

As far back as 1885, historians wrote of the Upper Musselshell, “Many . . . who in the early days made their home in [the Upper Musselshell] have advanced in measure with the country; but the majority . . . failed to win the wealth which their labors merited [and] have gone over to unknown range to seek recognition and reward [from] beyond the grave.”<sup>488</sup> Such a coarse description of the region still has the ring of truth to it. The Upper Musselshell Valley faced a serious crisis throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s. Economically speaking, the region fell on hard times. By 1999, according to the Northwest Area Foundation, Meagher County ranked thirty-two out of the fifty-six Montana counties in income; Golden Valley weighed in at forty-three; and Wheatland County, still recovering from the loss of the Milwaukee Road, ranked second to last on the state’s income and poverty scale.<sup>489</sup>

Although that is a bleak assessment of the region’s economy on the surface, the area made astounding progress by reverting to the farming and ranching cultures of the early 1900s. As a corollary, the region’s towns changed, as did regional agriculture. Currently, industry is growing, especially in Wheatland County where wind farms, minor factories, and diversification have helped alleviate poor economics. These changes have necessitated a re-evaluation of space, culture, and historical memory and identity, a topic historian David Wrobel, in his work *Promised Lands: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West*, investigated within pioneer settlers. Wrobel writes that pioneers sought to “bring places into existence or to hold on to earlier incarnations of places that had since changed.” They did so in order to define

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<sup>488</sup> Unknown authors. *History of Montana. 1739-1885* (Chicago: Warner, Beers, & Company, 1885), 823.

<sup>489</sup> Northwest Area Foundation, “Income and Poverty – Median Household Income 1990,” available from the world wide web <http://www.indicators.nwaf.org/showregionone.asp?newwindow=true&fips=3000>, accessed 30 December 2003.

themselves within a rapidly changing cultural environment by laying down their mythic narrative early in their history through a localized meta-narrative. Subsequent descendants, and new comers, strive to stay in touch with this narrative in order to try and sustain their own historical memory and identity. This, in and of itself causes a form of identity crisis. For example, the Upper Musselshell, like many western, rural places, is starting to migrate, at least to a certain degree, away from their traditional identities, but its modern day recollections (such as the grassroots perspective) and monuments harkens back to the mythic, original narrative in order to recreate and preserve historical memory and identity, even if it creates dissonance in the modern era. This is the case with the Upper Musselshell.

Modern farmers, concentrating solely on growing crops, are becoming rare in the Upper Musselshell Valley. During the post-World War II decades, most diversified into a farming-ranching hybrid or concentrated upon stock operations, no longer relying on a wheat crop. Between freight cost, variable weather conditions, and limited acreage, specializing in a single type of crop can be a risky affair, especially throughout the 1990s when the region faced a prevailing drought. Due to modern equipment, techniques, and science, those who do farm on a large enough acreage (generally more than two sections) are fairly successful, at least in wet years. The largest amount of change came from improved mechanization in the form of tractors, swathers, and the large round baler. For example, ranchers like Norman Voldseth often harvested about twelve tons of hay in the 1930s with a crew of about twenty men. By the late 1990s they could cut and bale five to six thousand tons with a crew of about five people, depending upon moisture and allotted irrigation water.<sup>490</sup> Between modern swathers and the round baler, there is no longer a need for large seasonal labor crews or the bunkhouse.

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<sup>490</sup> Norman Voldseth interview.

Others, like 71 Rancher Errol Galt, utilize center pivots that irrigate with one-third of the water used by traditional flood irrigation, significantly lowering water waste and fertilizer runoff.<sup>491</sup> Such measures have greatly increased production while stemming over-watering that often resulted in alkali “ponds” of overly salted soil. Also known as irrigation induced-salinization, this ecological effect occurs when water seepage, or groundwater saturation, raises the water table and brings both the water and the soil’s natural salinity to the surface, resulting in a crust of alkali that threatens both crops and livestock.<sup>492</sup> However, soil salinity is not cause for major concern within the region. Soil erosion is still a concern, but because of modern fertilizer, continuous cropping, and no-till farming, erosion is no longer a significant factor.<sup>493</sup> By working the soil once per year, or eliminating summer fallow, soil loss is arrested to a large degree.<sup>494</sup>

Other technological advances, such as artificial insemination, genetics, and electronic ear tag identification, often separate large farms and ranches from smaller operations, as such technological matters can make it difficult for small operators to compete economically while making university degrees in fields like agricultural mechanics, soil technologies, animal husbandry, or business almost essential.<sup>495</sup> Technological advancements have also significantly changed the market from being buyer-oriented to seller-driven. Many ranches now have to

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<sup>491</sup> Errol Galt, area rancher Martinsdale, interview by author, August 2006, tape recording and notes in author’s possession; Melody White interview.

<sup>492</sup> “The Basics of Salinity and Sodicity Effects on Soil Properties: Information for the General Public,” Adapted by Krista E. Pearson from a paper by Nikos J. Warrence, Krista E. Pearson, and James W. Bauder (2003). Montana State University, Available from the World Wide Web at:  
[http://waterquality.montana.edu/docs/methane/basics\\_highlight.shtml](http://waterquality.montana.edu/docs/methane/basics_highlight.shtml)

<sup>493</sup> Dan DeBuff interview.

<sup>494</sup> Tom Robertson, area farmer and former BN Employee Harlowton, interview by author, August 2006, tape recording and notes in author’s possession.

<sup>495</sup> Mark Dale Miller interview; Richard Moe, Area Rancher 1947-Present and Wheatland County Commissioner, 1994-Present Richard Moe Ranch, interview by author, 4 August 2003, notes in author’s possession; Steve Moore interview.

actively advertise their stock for export to urban centers like Nebraska and Chicago, and some even sell stock via live internet feeds.<sup>496</sup>

Despite being more productive and technologically sophisticated than ever, the farmers of the Upper Musselshell still face serious marketing problems similar to the old Grange fights of the late 1800s. The Burlington Northern, the only bulk freight shipper for the region, can charge exorbitant rates for wheat in the product's journey to the Pacific Rim. Regional farmers stress that such monopolistic practices are a burden to their lifestyle. Many actively participate in organizations like ARC (Alliance for Rail Competition) in an attempt to create a better, competitive rail system for their freight. This, states Shawmut farmer Dan DeBuff, creates a situation in which farmers now "suffer in comfort." They may have tractors with air conditioning and GPS systems, but their fundamental problems, marketing and pricing, remain the same. Such situations are generally weathered with a sense of humor.<sup>497</sup> Harlowton farmer Tom Robertson, not denigrating his spouse but acknowledging her contributions to the family's lifestyle, jokes he "almost had to get my wife a second job."<sup>498</sup> Such jocular attitudes towards their plight as farm families are as much a part of maintaining a sense of cultural pride, identity, and solidarity as the symbolism of the tractor or wheat stalk.

Upper Musselshell ranches faced some changes aside from technology in the decades just prior to the millennium, particularly in land management and business practices. The WRC was sold in the early 1990s to the Mormon Church's Farm Management Company after large sections were placed in various conservation programs designed to preserve segments of the region's

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<sup>496</sup> Yerger, Kenneth, Jr., Area Rancher, 1980-Present Harlowton, interview by author, 20 July 2003, tapes recording author's possession.

<sup>497</sup> Dan DeBuff interview.

<sup>498</sup> Tom Robertson interview.

natural flora and fauna.<sup>499</sup> The Bair ranch passed into trust with the death of Alberta Bair. The Bair Mansion, located near Martinsdale, is now a museum that holds significant art and artifact collections. However, throughout the early 2000s its continued existence became a much-contested matter by regional inhabitants and the trust which ran the museum. Citing Alberta's trust agreement, the board argued that, mostly due to the museum's remote location and possible lack of fire and physical protection, and Bair's supposed wish for the museum to only be open for five years, that its extensive art and artifact collections (containing items ranging from Crow Indian leader Plenty Coups to Charlie Russell paintings) wanted to sell or relocate many items to larger museums and private collectors. The museum's art collection is worth an estimated ten million dollars. Opposition, initially spearheaded by regional residents Richard Moe, Lee Rostad, Jaimee Dogget, and Peter Marchi filed suit to keep the collection, and museum intact, and located near Martinsdale.<sup>500</sup> The board closed the museum in 2005, and the suit went to the Montana Supreme Court. Three years later, the court ruled that the board had breached the trust by improperly preparing the physical location (the Bair family home) and ordered that a new board be formed. After extensive renovations, the museum re-opened in 2011.<sup>501</sup>

As the region's farmers and ranchers kept a careful vigil over their lands, their relationship with the land evolved a large degree in modern times. Many agriculturists in the Upper Musselshell have embraced a much more holistic view of their interaction with the environment in which they dwell and view the lifestyle in a much different light than their predecessors. Most, no longer looking for a fast return of capital, are embracing their lifestyle and consider themselves to be the "original conservationists"—the welfare of the their land,

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<sup>499</sup> Hill, *Winnecook Ranch on the Musselshell*, 106.

<sup>500</sup> "Trustees Opt to Shut Down Bair Family Museum," *Billings Gazette*, Billings, MT, 4 February 2005.

<sup>501</sup> "New Museum in Martinsdale Preserves Bari Family Legacy," *Billings Gazette*, Billings, Mt, 7 June 2011.

livestock, and lifestyle come first.<sup>502</sup> To achieve such high standards can be difficult. Methods to incorporate this attitude range from smaller pasturage (creating more opportunities for land management) and shipping sooner in the season, limited hay production, electric fences, and cell-based grazing.

Ranchers have implemented such methods as shipping cattle in late July or early August as opposed to October. Such a measure gives pasturage a hiatus from livestock, lessening the chance of over-grazing and allowing the land to replenish itself on its own terms. Still others have taken a leap of faith by limiting the acreage they hay, allowing such land to be grazed instead, a move that is often more economical in a fiscal and logistical sense.<sup>503</sup> Some ranches use electric fences, as opposed to traditional barbed wire, although, they are much more costly when used as cross-fencing. They tend to keep predators out better than a traditional fence, but more importantly they provide the rancher with more flexible control of their animals. They can be moved to form “new” pasturage and facilitate rotational grazing. Although, younger stock unaccustomed to electric fences can, and do, rush fences and break through them, the electric fence does allow for better attempts at range management. Electric fences can be moved to fine-tune range management and grazing or keep deer out of grain fields or haystacks.

Cell-based grazing, really in its infancy within the region, is when ranchers build their stock enclosures around a central hub, generally being a large stock tank that includes a pen. Fencing is spanned out from the central stock tank, creating several distinct “cells” within a given range of pastureland. When the grasses of a cell are depleted, simply leaving a gate (located near the stock tank) open allows cattle to migrate to the next cell (because they naturally frequent the stock tank, which contains over three hundred gallons of water). The proximity of

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<sup>502</sup> Errol Galt interview.

<sup>503</sup> William Jones interview.

pens near the tank allows the rancher to cut out sick cattle much easier. Such a measure serves two main purposes. First, it significantly cuts down on labor. Ranchers do not need to trail stock with ATV's, motorcycle, or saddle horse, to new pasturage or for doctoring. Second, it allows for intensive grazing land management by allowing for the natural environment to grow, be grazed, and then recover, with the main goal of being to arrest desertification, under grazing, overgrazing, and natural recovery. Originally, such grazing methods, cellular or otherwise, are advocated by former Rhodesian game officer and politician Allan Savory, who wanted to arrest land degradation in northern Rhodesia. His observations of natural animal migrations and grasses has been termed the Savory Grazing Method (SGM) or, as Savory prefers, Holistic Resource Management and can be applied to virtually any natural environment not just livestock lands. Collectively within the Upper Musselshell, these types of range practices result in a more reasonable relationship with the land.<sup>504</sup>

Some farms and ranches have become accustomed to diversifying into other financial endeavors to support and maintain an agricultural lifestyle. With modern farm and ranch prices fluctuating and subsequent problems with global infections, like mad cow disease, farmers and ranchers in the valley have found alternative means with which to pay for their land and investments. Diversification in the Upper Musselshell includes guided hunting, fishing, backpacking, dude ranching, and leasing land to larger, more profitable ranches. For example, the thirty-thousand acre Haymaker Ranch, owned by a Texas businessman, has been under lease to the locally based Miller Brothers Ranch to provide extra acreage for cattle and sheep. South of Two Dot, the McFarland/White Ranch owns and operates the Crazy Mountain Lodge on their cattle ranch while offering guided hunting.

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<sup>504</sup> Allan Savory, "The Savory Grazing Method or Holistic Resource Management," *Rangelands*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (August, 1983), 155-159. Allan Savory and Stanley D. Parsons, "The Savory Grazing Method," *Rangelands*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (December 1980), 234-237.



Since the late 1990s water and weather have become a serious concern within the valley. Years of drought, beginning in the late 1990s and ending around 2004, prompted many ranchers to purchase hay from Canada and the Dakotas' and farmers have often faced crop failure due to lack of moisture. Many believe man-made irrigation projects, like Deadman's Basin and the Martinsdale reservoir, will never again reach their full water capacity. Despite drought conditions, which still continue to a great degree, the land itself has largely resumed its original use: grassland grazed by large ungulates (Figure 17).

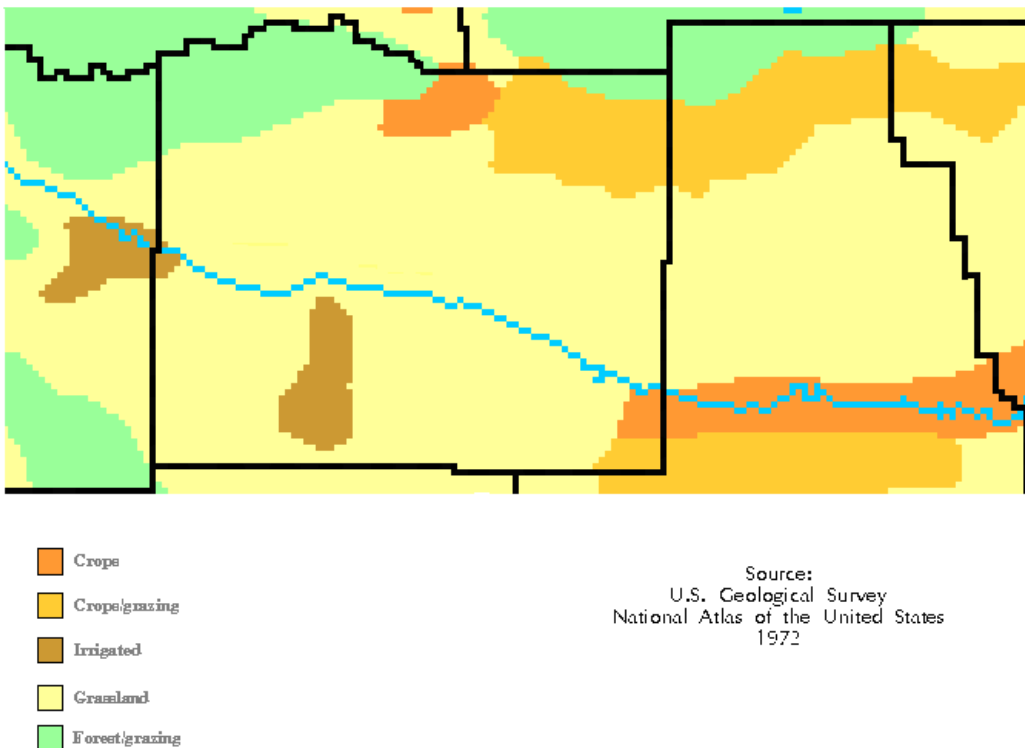


Figure 17. Modern Land Use in the Upper Musselshell Valley.<sup>505</sup>

Such stressed conditions caused the Upper Musselshell Water User's Association to form in the early 1990s to work out a water rotation schedule with the Deadman's Basin Water User's

<sup>505</sup> US Geological Survey, available from the world wide web <http://nris.state.mt.us/gis/gisdata/lib/downloads/lu23.gif>, accessed 15 October 2007.

Association. The continuing drought prompted enforcement of stored water rations, and users along the Musselshell faced monitoring from newly installed water commissioners and the creation of the Musselshell River Enforcement Project to create irrigation controls that, for the most part, seem equitable.<sup>506</sup>

Despite drought conditions, agriculture has returned to the top of the economic and social ladder in the Upper Musselshell. In fact, the whole of Montana in the post-World War II timeframe has returned to the traditional agricultural commodities: wheat, sheep, and beef. Montana historian Michael Malone writes that farmers and ranchers who do not specialize in one or the other are “isolated, small, or in decline.”<sup>507</sup> There has been some diversification into products like seed potatoes or apiaries; however, they will never trump the importance, economically and culturally, of wheat and beef. Furthermore, according to Malone, if Montana wants to remain an important producer of agricultural products, “it will have to invest in basic and applied research, such as molecular biology and marketing” and delve into secondary economic markets, such as small-scale agriculture-based factories, technology-based firms, and tourism.<sup>508</sup>

By 1990 most major towns within the Upper Musselshell are located along tourist roads to Yellowstone and Glacier national parks and the Lewis and Clark National Forest, downhill skiing, and big game hunting. With such a fine location along such routes, tourism plays an ever-growing economic role in many area businesses.<sup>509</sup> Secondary tourism from sightseers and sportsmen benefits many regional businesses by helping stabilize the economy. As modern

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<sup>506</sup> Cheryl Miller, Comp., “Upper Musselshell Conservation District: A Brief History of the Upper Musselshell: Appendix E,” Natural Resource Conservation Service, document in author’s possession.

<sup>507</sup> Malone, Roeder, and Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, 320.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.* 322.

<sup>509</sup> Floyd Hertz, area resident and businessman, 1968-2005 Harlowton, interview by author, 23 July 2003, notes in author’s possession

conveniences provide more recreation time, tourists traversing the valley to destinations like Yellowstone Park provide a strong seasonal cash flow for regional businesses. For example, White Sulphur Springs has a large commercial lodging industry based on big game hunting, fishing, and skiing.

Modern Montana's need to diversify has also attracted small-scale factory ventures such as a Cream of the West factory, commercial beef operations, apiaries, and wind farms to the Upper Musselshell. Cream of the West began producing grain-based cereals for human consumption in Billings in 1915. A Broadview family bought it in 1987. Farmers Dan DeBuff (Shawmut) and Howard Robertson (Judith Gap), along with ranchers Richard and Alicia Moe and Steve Moore (Two Dot), Keith Hill (Harlowton), and two local businessmen, Tom Keating and Tom Horan, formed Cereal West, LLC, and purchased Cream of the West in 2001 to, according to partner Dan DeBuff, "breathe new life into and bring new jobs to their community." Such a venture benefits not only the company founders but also the community of Harlowton, where the factory relocated to make such products as porridges and pancake mix. In a *Billings Gazette* article DeBuff noted locating the business in Harlowton has "given the whole community a positive attitude--having a business come in rather than losing another one."<sup>510</sup> Although the factory employs a small number of people, it is a step in recreating a thriving rural economy.<sup>511</sup>

A second factory-based business, Steve E. Park Apiaries, also resides within the town of Harlowton. Originally owned by Lawrence Budge, the apiary started as a small operation located in Two Dot. After an extremely prosperous honey season, Budge bought land and built a new warehouse in Harlowton in 1963. In 1985 Budge retired and sold his business to Steve Park

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<sup>510</sup> *Billings Gazette* "Cream of the West heads North," 14 Jan 2003.

<sup>511</sup> Richard Moe interview; Steve Moore interview; Dan DeBuff interview.

and Clay Going.<sup>512</sup> The region attracted Park and Going, both originally from Palo Cedro, California, because changing urban demographics in California began to eliminate bee yards, and they wanted to capitalize on honey production. Park eventually bought Going's interests in the Harlowton apiary.<sup>513</sup>

Park's apiary is a significant contributor to Wheatland County, employing between fifteen and fifty-two people, including three to nine full-time and seasonal apiarists. At one time in the 1990s, his interests and registered bee yards encompassed the regions around White Sulphur Springs, Lewistown, Harlowton, and Hardin. Presently, after some adjustments and sales, Park and his resident manager, Dean Thompson, concentrate their efforts primarily within the Upper Musselshell Valley and around the Fairview-Wibaux area in eastern Montana. The environmental effects of beekeeping within the region are a boon to most farmers. Honeybees' efforts at gathering nectar often serve to pollinate different types of crops, greatly aiding in the reproduction of seed plants, such as alfalfa and sweet clover (Figure 18).

About half of the apiary's employees are migrant laborers, most of whom come from around the Guadalajara region of Mexico. Many have inspired chain migration that affects both northern California and central Montana, and in keeping with migration trends, earn money in the United States to support extended families in Mexico. Most return to Mexico after years of employment in America. The apiary has a large local effect. Park's Montana payroll averages over \$190,000 a year; most returns to the local economy. In a town with a population of around one thousand, that is a significant return. The business procures the majority of its equipment, from diesel fuel to nails, in Harlowton.<sup>514</sup>

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<sup>512</sup> Dean Thompson, interview by author, 24 June 2003; Steven Park, interview by Author, 15 July 2003.

<sup>513</sup> Steven Park interview.

<sup>514</sup> Dean Thompson interview.



Figure 18. Honey Bee Swarm (Photo Courtesy of Dean Thompson).

A third endeavor that prompts recovery in the Upper Musselshell is wind farming. Beginning in 2001, Windpark Solutions of Big Sandy, Montana, proposed to erect nearly one hundred wind turbines on public and private land located between Harlowton and Judith Gap. By September of 2004, the business firm Invenergy purchased the project, and along with the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation and the Montana Land Board, created a lease to construct ninety 262-foot tall turbines on Judith Gap school trust lands and private lands. Thirteen of the turbines are located on school land in return for a one-time twenty-thousand dollar installation fee and projected annual revenues for Judith Gap School district of between thirty-five and fifty thousand dollars. Dividends for turbines located in private land are undisclosed. The wind farm, at peak performance, creates 180 mega-watts of electricity. Additionally, the project initially provides numerous jobs, ranging from biologists to skilled laborers and technicians to maintain and study Montana's first large scale attempt at wind

farming. All told, the wind farm is a large boon to the Judith Gap school district, and provides for small-scale employment. The project has led to numerous other proposals for similar geographic areas within Montana to take advantage of high winds as a replenishable natural resource. With the Judith Gap wind farm proving successful, there have been proposals for other regional wind farms around the Martinsdale and Two Dot areas. Long-term impact is modest on a regional level, as after the wind farms are built, few people are needed to ensure their operation. However, they do make property values rise, creating tax revenues while guaranteeing farms and ranches that contain contracted wind turbines an extra means of income.<sup>515</sup>

A digital business, Elk River Systems, under the ownership of Mike Yinger, arrived in Harlowton in the early 2000s. The company provides perforated paper and associated software for events tickets. In addition to its Harlowton location, the company has offices in the nearby city of Bozeman and employs between fifteen and twenty people whose job descriptions range from customer service to software programming. Yinger started the business as a cottage industry in 1997 before moving his location to Harlowton. Within a short time, Elk River Systems has become one of the larger private sector employers within the Upper Musselshell.<sup>516</sup> Such businesses, revolving around internet sales and computer programming, are one means that could ensure economic stability within regions formerly known for agricultural products: a fact that seems to threaten the regions historical memory and identity.

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<sup>515</sup> Montana Department of Natural Resources, "Wind Farm," available from the world wide web [http://www.judithgap.com/wind\\_farm.htm](http://www.judithgap.com/wind_farm.htm), accessed 15 September 2006; Montana Department of Natural Resources, "Judith Gap Wind Farm" Montana's 'Gap' in Wind Production," available from the world wide web [http://dnrc.mt.gov/trust/wind/judith\\_gap.asp](http://dnrc.mt.gov/trust/wind/judith_gap.asp), accessed 15 September 2006.

<sup>516</sup> Tiffany Smart, former assistant clerk and recorder-Wheatland County and Elk River Systems employee Harlowton, interview by author, August 2006, tape recording and notes in author's possession.

The agriculture and railroad cultures are firmly tied to the physical geography of the locale, and both are deeply entrenched within the historical memory and identity of the Upper Musselshell. Agriculture, dating back to the late 1800s, is the main source of income for both practitioners and business owners with the region, creating a tangible and important tie to the land. Railroading, the dominant form of culture within the region for the majority of the 1900s, had the same tie to the region, and although the tie was severed, it remains a part of the regions identity. The two cultures, often at odds with each other but tied to one another, are both a social construct of collective memory for the regional dweller. Such a quixotic blending and shifting of cultures creates an identity in flux for many regional dwellers which is apparent in regional symbols and monuments. Scholars like Brian S. Osborn, in such works as “Landscapes, Memory, Monuments, and Commemoration,” stress that historical identity is a construct under constant revision “according to a presentist agenda” in which “symbolic meanings . . . evolve to reinforce people’s identification . . . therefore place nurtures identity.”<sup>517</sup> As such, people continually recreate themselves as “homogenous units.” To understand humankind’s attachment to a particular locale, scholars must understand that specific locale’s conventions for recreating the past through regional mythistory, monuments, and narratives.

David Glassberg, historian and author of *Sense of History*, examines how people who erect monuments interact with such memorials to create a sense of history. Crafting a sense of history serves important functions, most fundamental of which is how such creations “allow us to understand our place in a succession of [the] past . . . locates us [meaning the memorial’s creators and admirers] in society. . . [and serve to create] a sense of with whom we belong . . .

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<sup>517</sup> Brian S. Osborne, “Landscapes, Memory, Monuments, Commemoration’ Putting Identity in its Place,” available via the world wide web at [canada.metropolis.net/events/ethnocultural/publications/putinden.pdf](http://canada.metropolis.net/events/ethnocultural/publications/putinden.pdf), accessed 27 February 2007;

[within] the larger community, region, and nation.”<sup>518</sup> As a result monuments and memorials are intertwined with specific places, attached to their environment through historical associations with past events. This creates collective memory, a focus of Durkheimian philosopher Maurice Halbwachs. According to Halbwachs, collective memory is centered within the ways in which people classify themselves, which is a socially constructed perception. To be socially constructed, the past has to be well grounded and is shaped by the concerns of the present.<sup>519</sup> This is evident in the choice of the region’s communal monuments, which according to memory historian Kirk Savage, serve to “prod” collective memory to reconstruct the past.<sup>520</sup> In the case of the Upper Musselshell, contemporary inhabitants subscribe generally to a sense of history from either agriculture or railroading.

Two specific monuments, the Milwaukee Road E57B Electric Train Park and a homesteading statue titled *And They Called the Land Montana* (Figures 18 and 19), both within the community of Harlowton, provide much insight into the valley’s cultural evolution and changing identity. Accordingly, as shown by scholar David Lowenthal, such heritage growth and concern “reflects traumas of loss and change and fear of a menacing future.”<sup>521</sup> Both of these monuments came to fruition in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the loss of the Milwaukee Road was felt the most by the region.

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<sup>518</sup> David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 7.

<sup>519</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 20-24.

<sup>520</sup> Kirk Savage, “History, Memory and Monuments: An Overview of the Scholarly Literature on Commemoration,” available from the world wide web <http://www.nps.gov/history/history/resedu/savage.htm>, accessed 28 February 2007.

<sup>521</sup> David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, (New York: Free Press, 1996), 10-11.





Figure 19. The E57B Electric Train Park.



Figure 20. *And They Called the Land Montana.*

How people use public space, according to memory scholars like Kevin Lynch, creates the “spatial coordinates of identity.”<sup>522</sup> Objects like monuments evoke memories to create cultural and historical identity. There is a reciprocal relationship between space, place, and identity; “Places . . . have biographies . . . stories acquire part of their . . . historical relevance if they are rooted in the concrete details of locales and the landscape . . .”<sup>523</sup> From such concepts of spatial usage and historical memory, the past is often a social construct of a region’s institutions (e.g. public displays such as monuments). Under these contexts the E57B Electric Train Park and artist Mike Capser’s pioneer rendering *And They Called the Land Montana* have ubiquitous meaning within the Upper Musselshell Valley, and specific meaning within the community of Harlowton.

The E57B Electric Train Park, located at the junction of Highway 12 and Central Avenue, calls particularly to the large number of railroaders, retired and still active, living within the community of Harlowton. Donated to the city of Harlowton in 1974, the engine resided in Chief Joseph Park until it was given its own space on Main Street in 1987. The E57B serves not only as a curiosity for tourists but also as a showpiece for what was once a significant railroad community; it also has the intent to preserve the historical past of the community. Massive in scale, the E57B firmly ties the town to the time of Richard Harlow and the prosperous eras when the line served as a communal and social backbone. Secondary to the E57B monument is the ongoing restoration and renovation of the local roundhouse. Nor is it surprising that the local high school sports team is named the Engineers. Each is a continual reminder of Wheatland County’s historical identity as railroaders.

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<sup>522</sup> Osborne; quotation from Kevin Lynch, *What Time is this Place* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972)

<sup>523</sup> Charles Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths, and Monuments* (London: Berg Press, 1994), 33

Mike Capser's sculpture *And They Called the Land Montana* serves much the same purpose, but focuses upon the entire valley's agricultural heritage. Commissioned in 1989, as part of Harlowton's Montana centennial celebration, the posture of the statue's figures is as important as its function to historical identity: the determined look upon the male figure's face; the crook of the female's arm to shield her seeking eyes from the sun as she surveys, with a look of trepidation, a new and foreign land; the easy child figure seems ready for adventure. Each stance calls to an adventuresome, or distressed, spirit that is the embodiment of the Homestead Era. Many of the farmers and ranchers of the region can easily relate to Capser's work, which also serves to preserve and cement regional identity with agricultural endeavors. Taken together the monuments illustrate that regional identity is in continual flux, under presentist revisions, and creating discord between the various cultural heritages that have inhabited the Upper Musselshell.

The stories told by the people of the Upper Musselshell Valley serve much the same purpose as their monuments. They let the populace of a given locale define themselves in relation to the land and their culture. The railroad culture has a history that is uniquely its own and differs from traditional histories of Montana. For example, former railroad employees tell their own tale about the demise of the Milwaukee Road. It is a form of counter-mythological thinking that occurs when a communal group relies upon nonessential facts to make sense of the past, which serves the purpose of separating a specific group from the larger whole.<sup>524</sup> In methodological terms, the separation reveals unique historical information and localized interpretations that create a valid history of identity, culture, and society often neglected (or outright ignored) in traditional forms of history. For example, the extent to which railroading

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<sup>524</sup> Richard Slotkin, "Fiction for the Purposes of History," available from the word wide web <http://www.common-place.org/vol-01/no-01/author/>, accessed 13 February 2006.

served as the basis of society and economy within parts of Montana is glossed over by the grand narrative history of the state. The grassroots interpretation acknowledges historical memory and identity. As a result, second and third-generation railroaders within Wheatland County have to reconstruct their own past, on their own terms. Unfortunately, the reconstruction leaves little room for a future without the social and economic ties of the Milwaukee Road, which altered the region forever both economically and culturally.

Rural historians, like John Hudson, have noted that economic trends in small-town western America have caused significant decline in the importance of “Main Street.” The traditional T-town, created by railroads to serve as a convenient economic link, no longer serves the business patterns and economic ebb and flow that the geography of capital followed in the early 1900s. By the mid 1980s, shortly after the Milwaukee Road closed its western lines, within most of the towns of the Upper Musselshell, Main Street, as an all-important business arena, has removed itself to a better location. For example, within Harlowton (the biggest town in the region) Central Avenue (what is considered their main street), according to the many local merchants, no longer runs perpendicular to the abandoned Milwaukee Road tracks. Instead, Highway 12 serves the purpose of Main Street. The majority of successful businesses in Harlowton, and White Sulphur Springs, reside alongside or near the highway. Many shop owners attribute success and survival to their locations, which are better able to serve tourists and other travelers passing through the region.<sup>525</sup> Although the economic trend along the main thoroughfare is not as strong as it was several decades ago, it has maintained various social aspects to a large degree by housing restaurants, museums, theaters, and taverns.

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<sup>525</sup> Tom Bennett, area business man and Wheatland County commissioner, 1963-present Harlowton, interview by author, 21 July 2003, notes in author’s possession; Floyd Hertz interview; Harry Klock, area business owner, rancher, and State Legislature District Representative, interview by author, August 2006, tape recording and notes in author’s possession; Dave Sorenson interview; Richard Stoltz interview; William Jones interview.

The economic pattern of decline of traditional main streets is evident in other towns within the Upper Musselshell. Many small settlements, like Ryegate, Two Dot, and Martinsdale, once had a significant presence but have dwindled in population since the 1950s and are slowly vanishing. For example Martinsdale, although always consisting of a meager population, was once a rail stop that offered such amenities as a hotel, school house, grocery store, bar, and service station. In modern times its remaining businesses are the Mint Bar, a small gas station, and a single restaurant. The small town is now mostly a tourist destination with attractions like the Bair Museum and fishing access. Two Dot has fared no better in the current era. Its remaining services are the Two Dot Bar, which has changed ownership frequently (often being closed for long periods of time), and a US Post Office. Other settlements, like Barber and Hedgesville, are ghost towns.

The contemporary world certainly transformed the Upper Musselshell economically, socially, and culturally. People who remained or relocated to the Upper Musselshell in the 1980s did so mostly because they wanted a small-scale rural lifestyle.<sup>526</sup> According to scholar Paul Starrs, author of *Let the Cowboy Ride*, modern agricultural regions need to be approached not as arguments of economic salvagability, but rather in terms of “cultural continuity, an issue in the management of cultural resources . . . at stake is the continuation or abolition of western cultures.”<sup>527</sup> All of the cultures that have inhabited the Upper Musselshell forged a significant bond with the region, in which humankind and the land formed a sort of symbiotic relationship. Additionally, the interaction created distinct regional identities, especially throughout the 1900s. However, each cultural identity, whether railroader, rancher, or honyocker, was continually

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<sup>526</sup> Kenneth Yerger interview; Debbie Yerger, area rancher Harlowton, interview by author, 20 July 2003.

<sup>527</sup> Paul F. Starrs, *Let the Cowboy Ride: Cattle Ranching in the American West* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 81.

threatened by socioeconomic and environmental problems through the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Table 7).

<b>Upper Musselshell Valley Cultures in Order of Succession</b>	
1	Native American Tribes (pre-contact to ca1885)
2	Miners (1864 to 1905)
3	Open Range Stock Producers (ca 1860 to ca 1905)
4	The Homesteaders (ca1900 to1934)
5	The Railroaders (1890 to 1980)
6	Modern Ranching or Mixed Farming (ca 1934 to present)

Table 7. Upper Musselshell Valley Cultures in Order of Succession.

Ten differing tribal units used the Upper Musselshell to sustain their life ways as the land, because of its large game population. The first culture interacted with the land in a symbiotic way, and no single tribal group called the valley home. Anglos were drawn to the location, at least the eastern and western fringe areas, by the promise of metallurgical or mineral wealth. Because of their settlement, human use of the valley, and regional culture, took an abrupt turn. The second culture, the Anglo miner, replaced American Indians. The miner, whether by sluice box or sinking shafts into the mountains, had a different relationship with the Upper Musselshell Valley. Extraction and the pursuit of mineral wealth were their watchwords. Despite the vast differences between the first and second culture to inhabit the Upper Musselshell, the valley had as much to do with creating each culture’s regional identity as did humankind’s intrinsic background and motivation.

When the ore of the region was depleted, humans adapted to what the valley offered from its physical environment. Instead of scratching in the ground for gold or copper, humans used the grasses and springs of the area to harvest beef and wool. Once again, the physical makeup of

the Upper Musselshell bent culture to adapt to it, this time in an endeavor the land was suited for, and the third culture molded and shaped the region to meet its own ends. The rancher ended the adverse effects the miner had upon the land, but played a large role in creating a new culture, but one still founded upon commercial ventures.

The honyocker, and those who pursued dryland farming, forever altered the ecosystem of the Upper Musselshell. The fourth culture believed the region well suited for farming and failed to realize the climate was not well-matched toward that undertaking and within fifteen years the cultural identity of the region firmly attached itself to agricultural pursuits. Despite the farm culture of the time, railroaders also laid permanent tracks into the soul of the region. Like their farming colleagues, they, too, altered the region. Together the two cultures changed the natural flora and fauna of the region ceaselessly. The fifth and sixth culture, that of the rail, ranch, and mixed farm, returned to some semblance of the give and take relationship the first culture, the American Indian, enjoyed with the Upper Musselshell. The two co-existed within the region, growing, changing, and adapting with the natural environment. However, this also split regional culture and identity into two factions, creating a relatively unique localized relationship within the history of Montana that deviates from the state's traditional history of mining or agriculture. There is a distinct memory of railroad culture still thriving within the central portion of the valley twenty-five years after trains stopped using Harlowton as a commercial hub. It remained in place, but within a fluctuating sense of history and culture, which challenged the cultural fabric of the region. Milwaukee dispatch poles, askew and tottering, follow portions of highway 294 through parts of Meagher County, surrounded by massive fields of alfalfa, grazing cattle herds, and diminishing bands of sheep. Grain elevators still tower over the town of Ryegate in Golden Valley County, next to cattle and grain fields. In Wheatland County the local roundhouse still

stands, and observers can see one of the last electrified train engines, the E57B electric locomotive. They can also observe, less than a mile from the monument to the railroader, that livestock and farmlands still even now surround the former railroad center. Each railroad feature stands as a mute, begrudging witness to railroad culture where cattle and grain made more sense.



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