A RANCHLAND GENEALOGY

LAND, LIVESTOCK AND COMMUNITY IN THE UPPER YELLOWSTONE VALLEY, 1866-2004

by

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A Ranchland Genealogy: Land, Livestock, and Community in the Upper Yellowstone Valley, 1866-2004

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ABSTRACT

Two dominant trends characterize the ranching enterprise in the Mountain West during the twentieth century: the long-term continuity of ranching practices, families, and cultural habits on the one hand, and the volatility of the powerful structures that shape ranching, including economics, the environment, and political and social dynamics, on the other. This study describes the history of livestock production in the Upper Yellowstone Valley of Park County, Montana, focusing on business practices, land tenure patterns, ranch work and the environment, and on ranchers' relationships with wildlife. I found that land ownership change and economic volatility have characterized the ranch landscape since the late nineteenth century. From the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries, continuity on the ranch landscapes of the Upper Yellowstone benefited from an interlocking constellation of cultural narratives and material and financial practices that enabled ranchers to react to and accommodate change. A focus on the potential for economic prosperity, frugality and self-sacrifice, and neighbor-to-neighbor cooperation helped to sustain roughly three generations of ranchers in the Upper Yellowstone Valley despite ongoing financial and material hardships and regular land ownership change. However, three factors converged in the second half of the twentieth century to undermine the systems that had previously operated to encourage continuity: the mechanization of ranch operations, the post-war recreation boom, and the expansion of a wildlife conservation imperative beyond the boundaries of Yellowstone National Park.

The small family farm is one of the last places—they are getting rarer every day—where men and women, girls and boys, can answer that call to be an artist, to learn to give love to the work of their hands. ... [F]rom the exercise of this responsibility, this giving of love to the work of the hands, the farmer, the farm, the consumer, and the nation stand to gain in the most practical ways: they gain the means of life; they gain the goodness of food; they gain longevity and dependability of the sources of food, both natural and cultural. The proper answer to the spiritual calling becomes, in turn, the proper fulfillment of physical need.

-Wendell Berry
"A Defense of the Family Farm"

Dedicated to my family

with love and respect

for the ways in which

together we answered

the call to artistry.

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In Bozeman, the distinctions between friends, community, and family blurred into a wonderful community that tolerated the many ways in which this project made me crazy.

My mother, Joan Harlowe, went well beyond the call of duty to make my graduate degree possible. This project can never do adequate justice to her commitment to my success, but I hope she will think it it is a start.

Mark Haggerty had the most difficult task of living with me while I worked on a project. He often found himself with a dissertation-created Gollum on his hands, making his indefatigable support is all the more remarkable. I am truly blessed to share my life with a person as intelligent, kind and committed as Mark is.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The family farm has become a rare species, nearly extinct. ... With hardly more than 1 percent of the people living and working on American family farms today, democracy surely cannot depend on them for its health...

-Richard S. Kirkendall[1]

[S]urely the American West deserves an enduring, stable, and community-centered economy that keeps alive and well the feel, smell, sensibilities, eccentricities, delights, and discussions of those places.

-Paul Starrs[2]

In the spring of 2004, the Bullis Creek Ranch in southwestern Montana's Paradise Valley had been for sale for several years. To acquire it, a buyer would have to offer something near the hefty price tag of $22 million, or about $2,300 per acre. A figure double what the current owners paid to buy the ranch in 1997, the price tag indicates the desirability of ranch properties like Bullis Creek Ranch at the outset of the twenty-first century. The property's desirability lies both in its symbolic value as well as its amenities, but has little to do with its economic viability as a livestock operation. Located about fifty miles north of Yellowstone National Park, Bullis Creek Ranch is a territory unto itself. Its boundaries encompass over 9,000 acres of deeded land. The ranch's boundaries integrate private and public land in such a way that the ranch owner has exclusive access, if not functional control over, the tens of thousands of acres that comprise the drainage of Bullis Creek, a tributary to the Yellowstone River. This massive territory features an abundance of stunning scenery. The ranch extends from the open, grassy floor of the Paradise Valley thirty miles westward to the

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[1] Richard S. Kirkendall, "A History of the Family Farm," in *Is There a Moral Obligation to Save the Family Farm?*, ed. Gary Comstock (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1987), 97.

[2] Paul F. Starrs, *Let the Cowboy Ride: Cattle Ranching and the American West* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 251.

broad shoulders of the rocky ridge that separates the catchments of the Gallatin and Yellowstone rivers. Hundreds of elk spend the better part of their year on or near the ranch, shuttling between the high ridges of the Gallatin Range, protective aspen stands, and the open meadows as the seasons change.

The kind of buyer who might consider acquiring such a property is someone looking for a property "that feels like a national park." In contrast to a national park, however, Bullis Creek Ranch offers luxury: no aching backs from sleeping in tents here, no RV campground ruckus. The Bullis Creek "ranch house" is a new, 9,000 square-foot custom home crafted in British Columbia from old-growth conifers, disassembled, and shipped piece by piece to Montana. Banks of picture windows give the home a commanding view of the Absaroka Mountains across the valley from the ranch.[3] Furthermore, the promise of exclusivity also distinguishes the experience of owning a ranch property like Bullis Creek from the experience of visiting Yellowstone or Grand Teton National Parks. Because the ranch is the sole private property within a remote drainage located off the beaten tourist path, its configuration and location promise the ranch owner dominion over a large swath of country rich with scenery and wildlife. Bullis Creek Ranch is so large and self-contained that the owners can easily ignore the technical reality that they are obligated to share with the public that owns the wildlife along with much of the land that are together the heart of the property's majesty.

In addition to so much comfort and scenic and natural grandeur, with their purchase, the buyers will take ownership of a parcel of the history of ranching in the Rocky Mountain West. Buildings and structures as well as grasses and watercourses document the ranch's evolution from a cabin hastily erected beside the Yellowstone River in 1880 to its present incarnation as one of the West's most prized pieces of real

[3] Fay Ranches Inc., *Bullis Creek Ranch Listing*(2004, accessed 06/02/04); available from http://www.fayranches.com/Props/Bullis_Creek.htm.

estate.[4] The ranch's story comprises the histories of individuals, families, the land, community, and markets. Part of the ranch's history that the ranch's buyer will not own, however, is the Bullis Creek brand. The 125 year-old symbol followed the Brawner family—occupants of the ranch from 1919 to 1997—to their new ranch in Nebraska after they sold the Bullis Creek property. In practice, there are two Bullis Creek ranches today: the majestic property of the Upper Yellowstone, advertised in the glossy publications of luxury real estate rags (some locals refer to such publications as "ranch porn"), and the fourth-generation Brawner family operation that now breeds and sells its Red Angus bulls on a ranch in the Sand Hills of the Central Great Plains under the business name Bullis Creek Ranch.

Bullis Creek ranch exists in still a third incarnation. It is a distinct cultural territory in which land, history, and the unfolding future of the West converge. The ranch is a single entity that embodies a number of the themes and processes that have defined Western history, agricultural history, and environmental history. The genesis of the ranch entails a history of Euroamerican discovery and settlement that insisted on the dispossession and displacement of native peoples and on a profound reconfiguration of the environment. The economic and social histories of Bullis Creek Ranch also exemplify the dynamic of alternating episodes of financial success and failure that characterizes the history of ranching in North America. In addition, the evolution of the ranch's boundaries offers a case study in the frequent incompatibility of the political economy of land ownership in America and the nation's agrarian heritage. The property's business history demonstrates the difficulty of negotiating tensions between the goals and expectations of individuals and families and changing economic and cultural forces. The ranch landscape of Bullis Creek reflects the ways in which attempts to manipulate natural processes to produce

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[4] George J. Allen homesteaded between the mouth of Bullis Creek and the Yellowstone River in 1880. See Chapter II.

valuable commodities resulted in unintended consequences—in this case, one unintended consequence was the fact that the ranch's lush grasslands attracted a large elk population that competed with domestic livestock. Lastly, the elk "problem" on Bullis Creek Ranch demonstrates a dilemma that is heightened in this valley on the border of Yellowstone National Park but common on many mountain landscapes in the West: the difficult relationships between private and public interests in the zone where North America's most cherished wildlife sanctuary meets private enterprise.

The Bullis Creek Ranch is just one of many such exemplary properties located in the ranching landscape documented in this study: the Upper Yellowstone Valley. Not one but several interconnected valleys define the region of the Upper Yellowstone, which covers a swath of close to one million acres of public and private land between the town of Gardiner on Yellowstone National Park's northern boundary and the outskirts of the town of Livingston to the north. Located fully within the boundaries of Park County, Montana, the Upper Yellowstone's largest discrete landscapes and geographic anchors include the Gardiner Basin on the park's immediate boundary and the forty-mile-long, twenty-mile-wide Paradise Valley, both on the Yellowstone River. Tributary creek landscapes also feature prominently in my work, including the Cinnabar Basin, the Tom Miner Basin, Trail Creek Pass, and many smaller drainages that connect to the Yellowstone. (See Figure 1).

The focus of this study proceeds from my observation of a seeming incongruity between two dominant characteristics in the ranching enterprise in the Mountain West: the long-term continuity of ranching practices, families, and cultural habits on the one hand, and the volatility of the powerful structures that shape ranching, including economics, the environment, and political and social dynamics on the other. The surprising continuity that ties together over a century of the history of the ranchlands of the Upper Yellowstone—the longevity of three generations of

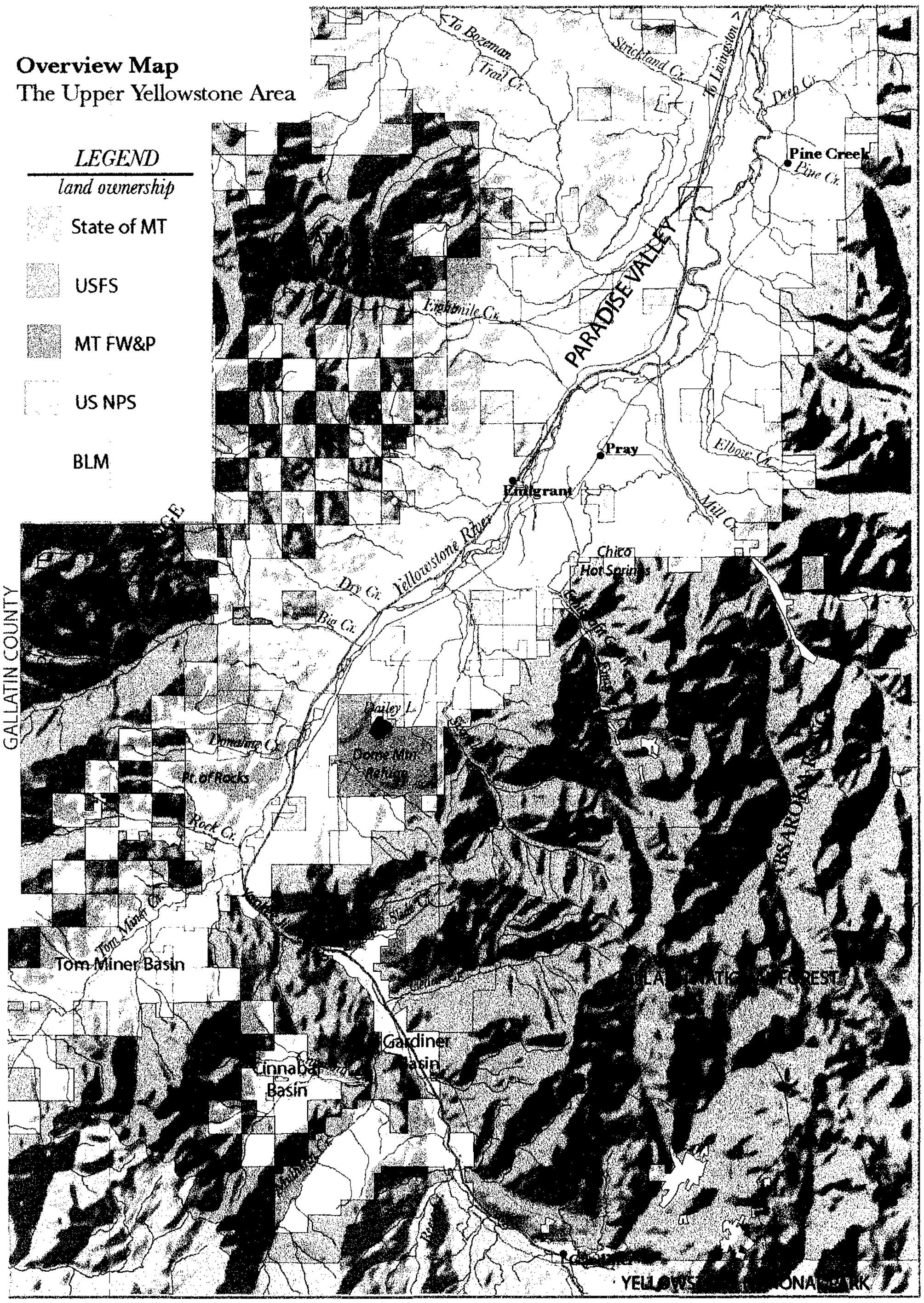

Figure 1.1. Map of the Upper Yellowstone Area

Brawners on the Bullis Creek Ranch between 1919 and 1994 despite severe financial and environmental challenges—gives rise to the question that drives this study: How did ranchers in the Upper Yellowstone area forge a narrative of continuity despite their position in an environment marked by volatility and change? In my application of it, the phrase, narrative of continuity, refers to a synthesis of cultural, economic and material practices that enabled livestock production to define a cultural and physical landscape for more than a century.

In responding to this query about the continuity of a land use and a socio-economic system, I am motivated in particular by a set of interrelated problems that stem both from the history of mountain ranching as well as its present drama—a transition in which wealthy absentee owners focused on the consumption and conservation of amenities are replacing resident livestock producers as the dominant land owners in many ranch landscapes.[5] Over the past three decades, sales involving the kinds of price tags and values like those attributed to the Bullis Creek Ranch in 2004 have become the norm in the Upper Yellowstone and throughout many of the West's scenic and amenity-rich areas, along with extensive conversion of ranchlands into residential subdivisions. These events signify the end of a key period in the Anglo-American history of the Upper Yellowstone and much of the Mountain West: more than a century of virtual dominance by a single, often overpowering land use—livestock ranching. The majority of livestock production in the high-elevation valleys of the West like the Upper Yellowstone was conducted on a family-scale economic model. Families worked together to provide the bulk of the labor on ranches, especially after the national crisis in agricultural markets of the 1920s eliminated many of the large, semi-corporate ranches in the Mountain West. Among the important environmental and political implications suggested by this turning point

[5] Hannah Gosnell, Julia H. Haggerty, and William R. Travis, "Ranchland Dynamics in 10 Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem Counties: Implications for Conservation," *Society & Natural Resources, in review* (2005).

is a dilemma involving changes in class and community relations on the rural landscape, both as real and perceived phenomena.

Observers of the changing ranch landscape of the Rocky Mountain West wonder what kind of society will be possible in a rural environment in which absentee landlords, representatives of the most elite stratum of American society, own the land in large holdings.[6] A rancher from the Upper Yellowstone chalked up the changes he saw on the landscape to his own, somewhat fatalistic understanding of the political economy of ranchland ownership in the Greater Yellowstone area. "I think of it this way," he reflected. "In most civilizations, the gentry owns land. In the United States you have the common people owning land. And I think by the nature of the human being, ...[the land will inevitably] get back [into the hands of] the gentry."[7] He was one of many ranchers who employed phrases such as feudal, gentry, aristocracy, and peasant in the course of a series of over fifty interviews I did with ranchers as a participant in an applied, conservation-oriented research project on ranchlands in the Greater Yellowstone area between 2001 and 2003; economic stratification among residents of the ranching landscape is a common contemporary anxiety for many ranchers.[8]

Concerns about class and land tenure are often intertwined with another anxiety about the emerging ranch landscape of the New West. Many residents of ranching communities mourn the passing of cooperative practices that helped to create a sense of shared identity and interdependence among residents. Describing

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[6] Individuals who have purchased ranches in the Paradise Valley in the 1980s and 1990s included upper-level executives from corporations like Home Depot, Cargill, and Bank of America as well as heirs to fortunes like the Sargents of Boston, and the Charles Stewart Mott legacy.

[7] Bruce and Connie Malcolm, interview by author, tape recording, Malcolm family residence, Big Creek, Park County, Montana, December 14, 2002.

[8] Gosnell.

changes in the rural community of Ridgeway, Colorado, during the late 1980s and 1990s, where he himself came as an urban refugee in the early 1970s, Peter Decker writes:

> Residents are less intimate than they were in the mid-1970s [when Decker arrived]. It wasn't all that long ago that residents traded their labor with each other out of personal friendship and a shared sense of community responsibility. No one kept an accounting of how much labor was given and how much was received because no one was willing to equate or reduce personal relationships to a definitive value; not because it couldn't be done...but because it was inappropriate, even rude, to attempt such a calculation. Everyone knew that labor and assistance were mutually shared, in good times and bad. [9]

This sentiment surfaced in almost every interview I conducted with ranchers in the Upper Yellowstone and elsewhere in the Greater Yellowstone Area. As a historian influenced by the work of the "New Western Historians" like Richard White and Patricia Nelson Limerick, I naturally respond skeptically to concerns about a supposed loss of "better"—more cooperative, more egalitarian, more integrated—communities, wondering whether such places ever existed. And thus a large part of this project involves documenting ranching practices and seeking out evidence of the ways that ranchers' economic and material choices encouraged or discouraged interdependence within the ranching community. Yet my project here is not really about coming to a conclusion about the existence of interdependence in the past. As an exemplar of the ways that communities interpret the distant past in response to and in order to make sense of contemporary change, I believe that one of the critical questions about the Upper Yellowstone is why and how it is that a particular notion of community—whether or not it existed—became such a key component in local memory. Among those who stayed in the ranching community of

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[9] Peter R. Decker, *Old Fences, New Neighbors* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998), 147. In the GYE, conservationists have to date been the observers most closely attuned to these changes in ownership, as they are particularly interested in reaping potential benefits in the protection of wildlife and other environmental amenities through the presence of new ranch owners.

the Upper Yellowstone Valley, how did particular perceptions of community evolve and what purposes did they serve?

These questions and their setting in the Upper Yellowstone Valley have both generic and unique features. The contemporary trend toward absentee, amenity-oriented ranch ownership is in fact an unusual and perplexing variation on one of the trajectories of modern agriculture—consolidation. In terms of the U.S. at large, a series of social, land use, and economic policies that guarantee inexpensive food for domestic consumers has converged to create massive consolidation on the agricultural landscape over the past seventy-five years, with the effect that corporations control most of the agricultural land and its profits today. Critics attack the agribusiness system of American farming from many angles, but a common critique about land-ownership patterns hinges on a premise which has proven powerfully resilient despite its lack of congruity with historical developments. The promise is this: that the spirit and promise of the democratic ideal of the United States are best served by a rural landscape featuring yeoman farmers. The evolution of Populist politics in the twentieth-century is an admittedly complex and problematic cultural history, but many of the fundamental grievances about the modern agribusiness model link directly to historic arguments about the importance of a land-owning, farm-based rural populace to the nation's political and economic well-being.[10]

The distinction, however, between the critique of the aristocratic nature of contemporary ranchland ownership patterns and the critiques of corporate land ownership leveled at circumstances in other places in the American agricultural

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[10] Marty Strange, *Family Farming: A New Economic Vision* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press & Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1988). This wording is not to suggest that discrepancies between agrarian ideals and practical realities of land ownership and farming are anything new or unique to agribusiness but rather to note that many critics see agribusiness as the final blow in a long battle. On the cultural history of Populism, see Catherine McNicol Stock, *Rural Radicals: Righteous Rage in the American Grain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

landscape reveals a key difference between the ranching landscapes of the Rocky Mountain West and America's farmlands.[11] In the Rockies, the luxuries and values associated with conservation and amenity consumption—along with a strong dose of the desire to profit in land speculation—drive land-ownership patterns, not the motivations related to controlling agricultural profits that have led to corporate dominance of the nation's prime agricultural lands in the Midwest. The contemporary dilemma facing the Mountain West's ranchlands involves so much more than the economic history of agriculture. The histories of the livestock industry, conservation, tourism, and culture in the Mountain West intersect in this current ranchland dynamic at the same time that a particular set of cultural practices involving history and narrative influence the popular experience of it. There could be no better place to examine such an intersection and its historical permutations than on the border of Yellowstone National Park, in the ranchlands of the Upper Yellowstone River.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

My inquiry into the history of ranching in the Upper Yellowstone hinges on questions that are original in their configuration and situation, but closely linked to fundamental concerns in Western history, environmental history, and agricultural history. My work builds upon a strong foundation established in the scholarly literature that approaches, from a variety of disciplinary and stylistic perspectives, issues related to the economic, environmental and cultural history of ranching; economic marginality and adaptation in family-scale agriculture; the unintended consequences of human efforts to make nature more productive as well as

[11] Wendell Berry, "A Defense of the Family Farm," in *Is There a Moral Obligation to Save the Family Farm?*, ed. Gary Comstock (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1987), Jim Hightower, "The Case for the Family Farm," in *Is There a Moral Obligation to Save the Family Farm?*, ed. Gary Comstock (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1987).

collaboration and conflict in the use of shared resources; the problem of land ownership; and the notion of periodicity in Western history.

Most scholarly treatments of ranching have tended to focus on its economic, political and more recently, ecological aspects. The early history of ranching in the West, namely the open range period from the 1840s into the 1880s with its excesses and abuses, provides the topic for many of the classic works on ranching.[12] The subsequent transition in the fundamental economic model of livestock production, "from free grass to fences" (to borrow the title of an important history of Montana's livestock industry), has also been well-studied from both economic and political perspectives. As for developments on the ranching landscape after the transition from the open range model was complete, there has been much less interest on the part of historians.

Much of the recent scholarship about ranching positions ranchers as a distinct group, often embattled against common foes, be they homesteaders, public lands managers, and environmentalists. This perspective naturally focuses almost exclusively on public land, the primary site of conflicts between ranchers and other groups.[13] Since the 1970s, increasing numbers of writers have found themselves

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[12] C. Everett Dale, *The Range Cattle Industry: Ranching on the Great Pains from 1865 to 1925* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1930), Robert H. Fletcher, *From Free Grass to Fences: The Montana Cattle Range Story* (New York: University Publishers Inc. for the Montana Historical Society, 1960), Maurice Frink, *When Grass Was King : Contributions to the Western Range Cattle Industry Study* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 1956), Ernest Staples Osgood, *The Day of the Cattleman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929), Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Plains* (Boston: Ginn, 1931).

[13] There is no shortage of scholarship on the issue of public grazing: studies have been published in law, history, and political science, which is not to mention the social science and scientific literature that considers public lands grazing in entirely different terms. Within the work in the humanities there are a range of perspectives represented from the defenders of public grazing, including: Gary D. Libecap, *Locking up the Range: Federal Land Controls and Grazing*, ed. Pacific Institute for Public Policy Research (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Pub. Co., 1981). On the other end of the spectrum are the critics and would-be reformers of public lands grazing, who were led early their charge by important popular work of Bernard De Voto in his Harper's Magazine columns of the 1940s and 1950s. His work was recently assembled in an edited collection: Bernard DeVoto, *The Western Paradox: A Conservation Reader*,

intrigued by the longevity of ranching and have considered their subject from perspectives that include but are not limited to public lands concerns. Like many of the works published about public lands grazing, consideration of the endurance of ranching as an economic and cultural feature of Western landscapes often leads to advocacy. In contrast to the many scholars who have made compelling cases for reforming public grazing policies, these texts are often motivated by concerns about the potential loss of ranching from the fabric of the American West. When Wallace Stegner visited the ranchers of the West Rosebud territory just east of the Paradise Valley in his 1984 essay, "Crow Country," he observed admiringly that "eternal vigilance is the price of [ranching's] continuity."[14] Although Stegner often groused about ranchers in his other writings, in the context to a visit to a family ranch facing an uncertain future because of mining and the problems of intergenerational inheritance, he was an admirer of the determination of ranchers. His tone anticipates a line from geographer and ranching admirer Paul Starrs's wide-ranging consideration of cattle ranching's history and future in the American West, *Let the Cowboy Ride*:

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ed. Douglas Brinkley and Patricia Nelson Limerick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). Subsequent important studies include Debra L. Donahue, *The Western Range Revisited: Removing Livestock from Public Lands to Conserve Native Biodiversity* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), Karl Hess, *Visions Upon the Land : Man and Nature on the Western Range* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1992), Lynn Jacobs, *Waste of the West : Public Lands Ranching* (Tucson, Ariz.: Lynn Jacobs, 1991). Another approach comes from a more analytic perspective represented in works like Wesley Calef, *Private Grazing and the Public Lands: Studies of the Local Management of the Taylor Grazing Act* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), Phillip O. Foss, *Politics and Grass; the Administration of Grazing on the Public Domain* (New York,: Greenwood Press, 1969), Karen Ruth Merill, "Private Spaces on Public Lands: Constructing State Sovereignty of the Western Range, 1900 - 1934." (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1994), Karen R. Merrill, *Public Lands and Political Meaning: Ranchers, the Government, and the Property between Them* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), William D. Rowley, *U.S. Forest Service Grazing and Rangelands: A History*, 1st -- ed. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1985).

[14] Wallace Stegner and Page Stegner, "Crow Country," in *American Places* (Moscow, Idaho: University of Idaho Press, 1983), 121.

> That extensive ranching in the American West persists is a testament to the psychological, intellectual, and cultural power of ranchers themselves, who, starting more than a hundred years ago, turned a political battle over land into an elaborate tug of war over ideology and imagery, where the prize was a continuation of a way of life.[15]

Starrs' perspective is both scholarly and personal—Starrs worked on ranches before he made them the subject of his doctoral research in geography. Indeed, few scholars who have spent time among ranchers in the course of their research escape becoming enchanted with the aesthetics and personalities of the cultural landscape of ranching—enchantment that often compels them to the conclusion that the loss of ranching in the West would be regrettable.[16]

Starrs' statement accurately describes a critical aspect of the modern history of ranching, the roles that cultural identities assigned to ranching and to ranchers themselves have played in mediating the relationships between ranchers and their political opposition. I would argue that this theme extends beyond the political realm to the economic realm; ranchers have drawn upon ideology and imagery to wage a battle that was perhaps even more challenging than their various political wrangles. The battle that has been most significant to ranchers since the 1920s has been a battle of will against the economic forces that have eroded the viability of livestock production as a livelihood. Particularly during the second half of the twentieth century, the endurance of ranching as a land use and a lifestyle, the prize that Starrs

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[15] Starrs, 43.

[16] This viewpoint also influences recent applied studies: Dan Dagget and Jay Dusard, *Beyond the Rangeland Conflict: Toward a West That Works* (Flagstaff, (Ariz.): Grand Canyon Trust Good Stewards Project, 1998). See also Richard L. Knight, Wendell C. Gilgert, and Ed Marston, eds., *Ranching Beyond the 100th Meridian: Culture, Ecology, and Economics* (Washington, D. C.: Island Press, 2002). Co-editor Ed Marston describes the volume's tone rather curiously, writing, "This is a loving book, but not a sentimental book."

mentions, hinged almost entirely on the abilities of ranchers to convince, not just their foes, but themselves that their ranching "way of life" was a cause worth fighting for.

Much of the non-academic literature written on the subject of ranchers directly engages this dilemma. Many memoirists caught up in the struggle to continue their identities and lives as ranchers sometimes produce work so intent on celebrating the virtues of ranching and ranchers that the writing can seem cliché, unconvincing in its lack of self-reflection. Yet there are ranching memoirs that attribute to ranchers, ranching families and communities, and ranch work their full complement of complexities and contradictions. Honest texts like Teresa Jordan's *Riding the White Horse Home,* Ivan Doig's *This House of Sky*, William Kittredge's *Hole in Sky*, and Judy Blunt's *Breaking Clean* describe the experiences of growing up and working on ranches.[17] Memoirs like these make it clear that the importance of ranching in the West has its roots in a far broader territory than that of the cattle drive or the battles over the public domain. Memoirs center not on battles to protect access to public land grazing but on struggles to survive economic marginality, on family relations—especially as affected by land ownership, on interactions with neighbors and community, and on the powerful influence of the physical environment. Making these themes the framework for my study of a ranching community, I draw on the following literature.

[17] In addition, these texts have tremendous value as primary sources because they detail unique practices that will become invisible to time unless they are recorded, like the social details of working in a family corporation that Blunt records so vividly or the daily chores of a sheep rancher that Doig chronicles. Importantly, each of the narratives hinges in part on the author's departure from ranching.Judy Blunt, *Breaking Clean* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), Ivan Doig, *This House of Sky,* Ivan Doig, *This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind,* 1st -- ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), Teresa Jordan, *Riding the White Horse Home: A Western Family Album*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), William Kittredge, *Hole in the Sky: A Memoir* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992). Another important book that accomplishes that discusses the twentieth century ranching landscape honestly and compellingly is Verlyn Klinkenborg, *Making Hay* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986).

Family-scale Agriculture and Economic Marginality

Surviving economic marginality is a familiar theme in studies of family-scale agriculture. [18] In addition to the synthetic works that provide a broad overview of changes in American systems of food production,[19] several works in agricultural history and rural sociology prove especially relevant to my study. Anthropologist Jane Adams's 1994 study of the transition from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century in rural southern Illinois captures some of the same dynamics that shaped the development of agriculture in the Upper Yellowstone despite the tremendous differences in the region. In the mountains, barnyard products sol in town like eggs and cream gave ranching families access to cash in much the same way as they did in Adams's history. Increasing dependency on borrowed capital and more wholesale commitment to commodity markets encouraged ranching families to abandon self-sufficient practices in the Upper Yellowstone, mirroring developments in southern Illinois in the mid-twentieth century.[20] The following chapters document the fact that economic marginality was a common circumstance on the ranching landscape of the Upper Yellowstone region over the whole of its history. While there were certainly periods that briefly made prosperity possible, there were many more periods that

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[18] The disciplines that organize their thoughts around structures of human organization like the family or village—namely sociology and anthropology—have perhaps the longest history of direct engagement with the fundamental theme running throughout the vast body of literature from many disciplines that examines family-scale agriculture. That is, how family-scale agriculturalists have persistence of and threats to the continuity of family-scale agriculture. Mark Friedberger, *Farm Families and Change in Twentieth-Century America* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), Robert M. Netting, *Smallholders, Householders: Farm Families and the Ecology of Intensive, Sustainable Agriculture* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993).

[19] David. Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1995), John Opie, *The Law of the Land : Two Hundred Years of American Farmland Policy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987).

[20] Jane Adams, *The Transformation of Rural Life: Southern Illinois, 1890-1990* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 105.

brought financial struggle to ranchers. Also, at any given point, the ranching landscape was populated by ranchers at different stages in their careers and in different financial positions.[21]

The stormy nature of the appearance, disappearance and reappearance of market opportunities for ranchers created an economic environment in the Upper Yellowstone that favored cautious adaptability over the long haul. There were ranching fortunes made in horses, land sales, in sheep, and in cows at a few moments in time, but those fortunes were often just as quickly lost as they had been won. When they could, the losers in such scenarios often picked up and started from scratch all over again—this was true of many operators who went broke in the sheep industry and switched to cattle almost as a matter of course. At the same time, the local ranching culture was characterized by a conventionalism that put a high priority on continuity and maintaining ranching practices almost unchanged. Economic uncertainty created a curious juxtaposition between traditionalism and entrepreneurship in the culture of ranching. This contrast shows up in other studies of agricultural communities, with the best example being Alexander Campbell McGregor's expansive history of his family's ranching enterprises on the Oregon-Washington border, *Counting Sheep: from Open Range to Agribusiness on the Columbia Plateau.* McGregor traces the development of a family-owned ranching business through several incarnations and makes a strong case for the importance of diversification and adaptability in the long-term success of the McGregor enterprise.[22]

[21] See also: Hal S. Barron, *Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North, 1870-1930*, Studies in Rural Culture. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), Peter G. Boag, "Ashwood on Trout Creek: A Study in Change and Continuity in Central Oregon," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 91, no. 2 (1990), Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), Peter K. Simpson, *The Community of Cattlemen: A Social History of the Cattle Industry in Southeastern Oregon, 1869-1912* (Moscow, ID: Idaho Research Foundation, 1987).

[22] Alexander Campbell McGregor, *Counting Sheep: From Open Range to Agribusiness on the Columbia Plateau* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1982).

One important factor that does not show up in ranch histories focused primarily on the ranch's obvious business practices is the importance of women's contributions to the survival of family-scale agriculture. In this regard, the women ranchers of the Upper Yellowstone are somewhat like the many women documented in other studies who contributed equally with their husbands to the economic project of building a farm or ranch in addition to taking on many of the conventionally female responsibilities of feeding and caring for their families.[23] I attempt to show in this study how central women's work was on the ranch and in particular the vital role it played in ensuring the adaptability and flexibility described above as having been so necessary to ranch continuity.

Families, Communities, and Land Tenure

An issue that has defined both the experience and scholarship of family-scale agriculture is the question of ownership and long-term patterns in land tenure. Ownership—ownership of cattle, of water, and especially of land, has constituted the core of ranching enterprises for most of the industry's history. It is no mistake that many ranches in the West include the phrase "land and livestock" in the names of their businesses. William Kittredge's powerful memoir of his experiences on a large family-owned and operated ranch in southeastern Oregon hinges on the emotional tensions that a family legacy in land and cattle created for him and his family. He describes his grandfather as a man who became so possessed by the idea of ownership

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[23] Adams, Margaret Alston, *Women on the Land: The Hidden Heart of Rural Australia* (Kensington, Australia: University of New South Wales Press, 1995), Charlotte van de Noorst, *Making Ends Meet: Farm Women's Work in Manitoba* (Winnepeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 2002). Frieda Knobloch ambitiously engaged agriculture in the pre-World War II West broadly writ in her book *The Culture of Wilderness.* In it, she describes ways in which agricultural practices and knowledge reinforced inequitable power relationships embedded in the colonization of the West, such as those governing the interactions between settler-farmers and Native Americans or men and women in farming families. Frieda Knobloch, *The Culture of Wilderness: Agriculture as Colonization in the American West* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

that he not only lost perspective, but his respect for life. As an old man, the grandfather demanded that he be driven to a spot on the ranch where he could shoot magpies by the dozens—an act rendered desperate and senseless in Kittredge's telling of it. His grandfather's explanation for why he blew away the magpies as a cherished ritual was simply "because they're mine."[24] Kittredge's assessment of the role of ownership in his own family's dynamics is stark: "Having learned to understand love as property," he writes, "we were all absolutely divided at the end."[25] Ownership was not only a function of, but also key mediator in, many of the forces that have influenced ranchers' circumstances.

In the United States, agricultural land tenure is bound up with some of the most central and problematic themes in American history, namely, the presumptive link between equitable, and widespread, patterns of land ownership and democracy. Patricia Nelson Limerick's analysis of the complexities of national ideals about land ownership and society is just one of the many significant contributions of her synthetic work *The Legacy of Conquest.*[26] Limerick insists that history account for the reality that land disposition hinged on evacuating native people throughout the United States and certainly in the 19th and 20th century American West. She also provides a compelling argument to the effect that profit and property have a long history of engagement in Western as well as American history. Indeed, she argues that any position that sees speculation as somehow uniquely "un-American" or different from the norm is ripe for reconsideration.

When applied to the ranchers in this study, Limerick's approach to the motivations for land ownership in the West could result in an assessment of ranchers

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[24] Kittredge, 65.

[25] Ibid., 68.

[26] Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987).

as aspiring members of a bourgeois class fully attuned to exploiting the benefits promised by the commodification of land. As my research shows—and other studies have noted, ranchers often acted as land investors as well as livestock producers.[27] In some senses, then, this study affirms Limerick's position—that speculation has long been a central feature of western ranchland ownership. I hope to show that ranchers sometimes occupied different places in the political economy at the same time and sometimes shifted from one perspective to another depending on personal circumstances. Ranchers could be speculators at the same time that they had genuine ambitions as agricultural producers. Yet at the same time I hope to address the complex constellation of factors beyond profit motives that featured in the ways ranchers approached land tenure. In fact, I will argue that one of the central tensions facing ranchers in the twentieth century was the division between land values and the value of livestock. I also believe that class differences that existed within the ranching community of the Upper Yellowstone Valley have importance in helping to refine how historians assess the political economy of ranching.

Those scholars who approach land tenure as an agricultural phenomenon are frequently concerned with the size of land holdings and their implications for social, economic, and environmental sustainability. The well-documented national trend in agriculture is the expansion of productivity and the consolidation of agricultural land holdings, and since the 1980s, the expansion of corporate control over agricultural production. Between 1945 to 1988, the number of farmers nation-wide declined while farmland under corporate control increased dramatically—phenomena that trouble many sociologists and other observers of the contemporary agricultural landscape. Observing this trend, demographer Gene Wunderlich argues that the "change in the structural relationship between farming and land ownership implies potential changes in who bears risk, makes production and investment decisions,

[27] Gene M. Gressley, *Bankers and Cattlemen* (New York: Knopf, 1966).

protects the environment and supports the community."[28] A key theme in this dissertation is that even more than farming, and in different ways, consolidation has persisted as a key motif in patterns of mountain ranchland ownership since the 1860s. The prevalence of this trend in light of Wunderlich's statement is one of the reasons it is important to examine the relationship between consolidation and community stewardship in ranching.

As a key variable shaping land tenure patterns, another crucial element in agricultural history is the transmission of land—through sale as well as inheritance. Sonya Salamon's intriguing ethnographic and sociological study of two communities in the Midwest documented the important, and often overlooked, influence of cultural traditions on land ownership patterns.[29] Documenting how the land ownership patterns in several communities reflected the influence of varying priorities among different ethnic groups (Irish, Scots-English, German); Salamon makes a strong case that the effects of cultural systems are meaningful, they are the other forces that shape land tenure beyond economy, oil prices, global market forces, etc. Salamon identifies two value systems that in her project operate separately: one, the German ideal, a yeomen ideology about land, in which land is "a sacred trust not easily parted with," and the other the Yankee entrepreneur land vision, which treats land as a commodity whose "symbolic value is inherently financial." I suggest that land tenure in the Upper Yellowstone Valley reflected an inherent ambivalence about these positions, that even

[28] Gene Wunderlich, "The Land Question: Are There Answers?," *Rural Sociology* 58, no. 4 (1993): 549. This observation is a provocative one in the American West, where ranchers have often been portrayed as the "special interest" likely to overlook the environment in the interest of personal gain.

[29] Sonya Salamon, *Prairie Patrimony: Family, Farming and Community in the Midwest*, ed. Jack Temple Kirby, Studies in Rural Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 204-205.

within families, there was ongoing negotiation of the boundaries and intersections among these viewpoints—land as legacy or land as commodity.[30]

Changing economics make it difficult to assess the degree to which ranchers overall have reached consensus on whether their ranch property is an investment, "a social security policy," or a legacy. Many ranchers attempt to operate in ways that minimize the chances that they will have to make the distinction among the three perspectives. The following anecdote about a highly unusual rancher I met sheds some light on the contradictions inherent in the ways that ranchers approach land ownership. It is a case that is instructive because it is so different from the norm. In 2002, I interviewed rancher Ellis Boyd on his ranch in Madison County, Montana. That property was Boyd's fourth location in about twenty-five years. He started out in the Shields Valley ranching on shares. (The Shields Valley is in northern Park County north of the Yellowstone). He eventually had enough cash (or credit) to buy a little piece of ground, then a few bigger pieces, and came to have a small, but valuable ranch in his late thirties. From that point on, Ellis Boyd has been trading up, only staying on a ranch long enough to get it running to its fullest capacity before he cashes out and uses his increased equity to enlarge his herd and buy a place just a little bit bigger. Some would use his experience in moving to Meeteetsee, Wyoming as a case study in the dangers of ranch-hopping. Shocked by a sudden change in altitude, his cattle contracted brisket when they arrived in Meeteetsee. Boyd's operation suffered serious losses. However, the land was valuable enough that he was able to sell his ranch there and relocate to an area with a climate for which his animals are better suited. While he appears to have a far more cavalier attitude toward location than most ranchers, Boyd clearly is in touch with the idea of forming an attachment to

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[30] Kelly Kindscher and Nancy Scott, "Land Ownership and Tenure of the Largest Land Parcels in the Flint Hills of Kansas, USA," *Natural Areas Journal* 17, no. 2 (1997), Fred Yoder, "Rethinking Midwestern Farm Tenure: A Cultural Perspective," *Agricultural History* 71, no. 4 (1997).

place. He has an ideal of the right place where he plans to "settle down" (Boyd is in his 50s and has a young family). In 2002, he put his ranch in Madison County on the market with hopes of selling it in order to make his final relocation to his ideal ranching landscape.[31]

Despite the fact that Boyd's story represents an uncommon success in an era marked by the failure of ranches to expand or to survive, ranchers often refer to active buyers and sellers like him disdainfully as "horse traders." To many ranchers, the horse trader figure is the person without allegiance to anything beyond profit. He buys and sells at the maximum return. There is implicit in the criticism of Boyd's approach a high level of conventionality and risk aversion. Furthermore, the rejection of the horse trader model also reflects an implicit belief in the importance of two things. The first is that a central feature of being a rancher is making a long-term commitment to a place and a community. The second is a hazy notion about it being wrong to bring land speculation into the economic equation of ranch viability, that such an approach represents a kind of betrayal of ranching culture. This may be a product of the modern reality in which conventional livestock operations are quickly being replaced by subdivisions and ranches managed according to un-conventional strategies, two developments that make it more difficult for conventional operators to persist in livestock production.[32]

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[31] Ellis Boyd, interview with author, Boyd Ranch, Alder, Montana, March, 2002.

[32] More recently, legal scholar Eric Freyfogle has led an intellectual effort to revitalize the concept that the right to own private property was designed as a tool to ensure social order and as such, embodies a social contract. Freyfogle's position is that the popular notion of private property rights as permitting the land owner to do anything she or he wants disregards the very purpose of private property rights in the first place, e.g. that they were designed a tools to manage community. That land ownership patterns shape how individuals experience community is so obvious it perhaps goes without saying, but also so important that it must be laid out as a cornerstone. The history of ranching in the Upper Yellowstone—particularly given the landscape's location on the boundary of Yellowstone National Park—offers a prime opportunity to explore the complex terrain encompassing ideas about individual and communal "rights" to property and resources. Eric Freyfogle, *The Land We Share: Private Property and the Common Good* (Washington, D. C.: Island Press, 2003).

Community and Landscape Studies

To a person, the ranchers I interviewed in the Greater Yellowstone Area were willing to voice disappointment with another change in their reality: the loss of neighboring. Long-time ranchers remember a time when they were dependent on their neighbors, both socially and practically, through practices that have disappeared from the contemporary landscape. Shared labor often created the excuse for shared recreation. As patterns of ranch work changed, the excuse—and perhaps moreover the sense of interdependence that made socializing possible for otherwise stoic, independent people—evaporated.

However, it is difficult to find in the academic literature specifically on ranching a solid base of analysis about the importance of community as a practical and social resource. Such studies have far more often been the quarry of rural sociologists focused on farming communities and the dedicated corps of social historians who worked diligently to recreate communities and explore how their sense of shared identity changed over time. My approach finds its foundation in the pioneering work of scholars like John Mack Faragher and Ralph Mann.[33] My concept of a narrative of continuity also builds on a growing body of literature in social and environmental history that examines not only how people shaped their environment, but how—as individuals and as communities—they created interpretive narratives historical change.

The processes of establishing agricultural communities in the nineteenth century American West provides a wealth of case studies for this process because "settlement" so often involved dramatic and rapid change in the environment. Richard White's study, *Land Use, Environment, and Social Change*, constitutes the

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[33] John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), Ralph Mann, *After the Gold Rush: Society in Grass Valley and Nevada City, California, 1849-1870* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1982).

foundation of this area of environmental history.[34] His conceptual conclusions—that environmental change was a complex process involving not just human actions and intention but also unintended and uncontrollable natural processes while cultural perspectives both shaped and were shaped by the direction of environmental change—have been adapted and expanded in a number of subsequent environmental history projects that have focused on a particular landscapes.

My long-term study of a ranching community benefits in particular from studies inspired by White's model that have probed more deeply the interaction between community narrative and environmental change.[35] Dean May's comparative study of three frontier communities in the 19th century (in Oregon, Utah and Idaho) focused on how existing values and cultural systems fared when settlers imported new landscapes and circumstances. He found that the community that had the greatest financial success as measured in terms of its participation in modern markets had also the greatest dissolution of community- and family-oriented values that had driven its founders to the West in the first place.[36]

As an example of how twentieth century ranchers saw the importance of community, consider Judy Blunt's recent memoir. *Breaking Clean* is a stark picture indeed of Blunt's experiences as a daughter and young ranch wife on a ranch in

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[34] Richard White, *Land Use, Environment, and Social Change: The Shaping of Island County, Washington* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980).

[35] Other important ecological histories of place include: Barbara Allen, *Homesteading the High Desert* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), Jeffery Alan Creque, "An Ecological History of Tintic Valley" (PhD, Utah State University, 1996), William Eno DeBuys, *River of Traps: A Village Life* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), Francis Moul, "Prairie Grass Dividing: The Land, Life, and People of Sioux County, Nebraska" (Ph.D., University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1998), David Philip Smethurst, "Transforming the High Country: Absentee Ownership and Environmental Change in the Central Sierra Nevada" (Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley, 1997).

[36] Dean L. May, *Three Frontiers: Family, Land, and Society in the American West, 1850-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 279-281.

eastern Montana in the 1960s and 1970s. Much of her prose seethes with rage and pain at the constraints that ranching imposed on her sharp mind and independent spirit. Nonetheless, one of her memoir's most vivid passages offers a moving example of what neighboring can mean. Blunt writes of an emergency trip to the hospital when her infant daughter's fever soared to 106 degrees farenheit—a trip to the doctor delayed until the last, most extreme moment because of the fifty miles of engorged, practically impassable clay roads that separated Blunt and her family from town. The journey was indeed harrowing, but the attention of her neighbors helped the Blunts through their terror.

> We made it to the benchlands, out of the Breaks, when I saw the first light. Word had gotten out. Off to the right, a mile, two miles from the road, headlights bucked over the sod to the top of a rise where the driver could see us coming and watch us pass. The lights blinked once, like a nod. Good luck. Safe journey.
>
> ...
>
> When we pulled out, spinning, finding our footing, two pickups fell in behind us, watching our back all the way to the highway.[37]

Readers cannot accuse Blunt of buying into the romance of the cowboy or sentimentality about ranching culture; nonetheless, even her realistic observations remark upon the value of neighboring. The sense that no one is watching their backs legitimately grieves many contemporary ranchers. This study attempts to document how and why some of the practices associated with neighboring ended. I show that it was primarily technological change rather than demographic forces that precipitated the end of the communal approach to particular ranch chores that were the backbone of neighboring. However, the demographic changes that have profoundly changed the socio-economic character of the ranching landscape since the 1970s has had a tremendous influence over how ranchers have perceived and responded to the loss of

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[37] Blunt, 273-274.

neighboring. The role that collective memories play in interpretations of how neighboring functioned and changed, then, become important features in this history.

Peter Boag's sensitive exploration of the land use ethics and aesthetics of natives and newcomers in a tributary area of the Willamette Valley, *Environment and Experience*, concludes with an intriguing observation on the ways that the natural environment—and the changes that settlers effected within it—shaped the identities of settlers. Boag describes a process of lamenting what is lost when the "settlement" of the Willamette Valley has been assured by the industrialization of the landscape.[38] Many of the narratives upon which my analysis depends involve this kind of backward look into history and often, a similar sentimentality. In this sense, Boag's work shares a common framework with recent work by environmental historian Lynne Heasley. Her dissertation in forestry used GIS data to re-evaluate popular narratives about the causes and outcomes of land ownership and land use change over time.[39] Heasley's intuition that the influence of particular local landscape patterns on ideological debates over property rights have much to teach historians reinforces the argument for "ground up" landscape studies like this one. In a recent conference paper, Heasley took her engagement with local narrative further, arguing that colloquial expressions of landscape aesthetic should not only be taken seriously, but that they also reflected sophisticated syntheses of utilitarian and romantic understandings of a home landscape.[40]

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[38] Peter G. Boag, *Environment and Experience: Settlement Culture in 19th Century Oregon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 154-161.

[39] Lynne Heasley, "Shifting Boundaries on a Wisconsin Landscape: Can G.I.S. Help Historians Tell a Complicated Story?," *Human Ecology* 31, no. 2 (2003).

[40] Lynne Heasley, "A Workable Beauty: Aesthetics and Sense of Place in the Rural Midwest," conference paper, American Society for Environmental History Annual Meeting, Victoria, B.C., March, 2004.

Heasley's work is also relevant because it focuses changes in land use and demographics in a rural community during the period 1930s to the 1990s. Many landscape and community-centered environmental histories document what might be called the first stage in the modern history of agriculture in the American West and the kind of momentous and rapid changes wrought by plowing land for the first time, importing seeds and livestock, digging irrigation canals, and plugging into regional and national transportation and market systems. Like Heasley, I am interested in better understanding transitions in land use that occurred in the mid- to late-twentieth century and their impact on a rural place.

Beginnings and Endings in the American West

As the anecdote about the Bullis Creek ranch that begins this chapter suggests, the Upper Yellowstone Valley turned a new corner in its history at the close of the twentieth century. Today, ranches like the Bullis Creek property attract absentee owners whose vast personal incomes have little to do with agriculture or livestock production. Simultaneously neighboring ranches are being carved into residential subdivisions in which retirees, urban refugees, and other poster children of the economy of the "New" West live out their dreams. Sometime in the course of the development of these trends over the last thirty years, it seems that the sun set on the era of family-scale livestock ranching in the Upper Yellowstone Valley. Those ranches in the area that remain in the hands of families with long tenures do not provide a living for their owners through livestock production. Those ranch owners who depend on the ranch for an income generate that income through land sales, fly fishing, guiding, or other forms of tourism. Many use work in other industries and other places to subsidize their family legacy in ranching. Thus, this dissertation is in part a description of the beginning and end of one episode in the region's history.

In my conclusion, I take up the complexity of this contemporary moment, which is at once a turning point, but like so much of Western history, also a segment in a longer "unbroken" historical narrative. My hope is that this study will offer some new evidence and analysis that speaks to the degree to which changes on the contemporary ranching landscape represent a "break" from the past and if so, how to assess that discontinuity. In particular, I have also approached my analysis with a sense that the family-level scale of mountain ranching means that its history has much to offer the ongoing national dialogue about the history of the family farm—one that tends to center on the Midwest to the exclusion of other family-scale agricultural enterprises. Agricultural historian Richard Kirkendall wrote in the late 1980s that "The family farm has become a rare species, nearly extinct." He continued with a reminder to farm advocates that they needed to develop a new rationale for family farm advocacy. The link between democracy and Jeffersonian agrarianism had to be given up, he wrote. "...With hardly more than 1 percent of the people living and working on American family farms today, democracy surely cannot depend on them for its health..." One response to Kirkendall's mandate is ranch scholar Paul Starrs' argument that "[S]urely the American West deserves an enduring, stable, and community-centered economy that keeps alive and well the feel, smell, sensibilities, eccentricities, delights, and discussions of those places." My conclusions take up Starrs' notion of sustaining the aesthetics and "eccentricities" of the ranching landscape, and offers some historically-derived conclusions about what such a preservation effort might involve.

SOURCES

To develop a portrait of a landscape over the period of nearly a century and a half demands a selective approach to sources. While thousands of details have eluded me, either because of time constraints or holes in the historical record, the history of Park County has been well shepherded by its residents. As such, much of it proved to be highly accessible. My approach was to embrace the place and its local voices. Thus, local expertise played a central role in my research. The oral histories and informal interviews I conducted with ranchers and other local informants provided both a wealth of detailed information about ranching operations and local history and insights into the ways that ranching families think about their own history and how they construct their own narratives. My oral history strategy focused on depth rather than breadth. I conducted long-format interviews with members of eleven ranching families from the area, tape recorded the interviews, and transcribed them.[41] In all, the interviews generated more than fifty hours of audio tape and when fully transcribed, will produced 250 pages of transcripts. The transcriptions will be donated to the local museum when they have been fully polished. In addition, I conducted a number of additional background interviews with locals from Park County.

Another vital local source for this study is the immense volume that the Park County Historical Society compiled around the occasion of the county's centennial anniversary, *History of Park County, Montana.* A group of volunteers devoted themselves over a four-year period to compiling the memories and histories of hundreds of Park County residents between 1980 and 1984. The result is an endlessly valuable resource for locals as well as visitors like me. Like the oral histories and interviews I made myself, the hundreds of family histories compiled in *History of Park County* offered both fact and fiction: rich historical details as well as a sense of the cultural structures and values that guide the way that the communities of Park County interpret their history.

By far the bulk of my research hours was spent in the Park County Courthouse making an exhaustive survey of land ownership records in order to compile a complete land tenure history of the Upper Yellowstone. I entered data for the area stretching south from Emigrant to the boundary of Yellowstone National Park into a GIS. The purpose of the spatial database was to develop a line of inquiry about the historical rates and volume of ownership change. To my knowledge, mine is the first study to establish baseline information about the how much land was bought

[41] A list of interviews and the questions used is included in the Appendix.

and sold in a specific ranching landscape in the American West over a substantial time span (1936-1996). Land records, including mortgages, miscellaneous records, and warranty deeds also enabled me to pursue my "ranchland genealogy" in which I traced the evolution and devolution of holdings of several prominent ranch families.

I also benefited from access to the wonderfully eclectic collection at the local archive, the Pioneer Gateway Museum. I feel tremendously fortunate to have been given access to the "archives"—two dusty boxes in a garage in Three Forks—of the Park County Ranchers' Marketing Association. Newspapers, specifically the *Park County News* and the *Livingston Enterprise,* and secondary literature such as census data and the bulletins of Montana State College's Agricultural Experiment Station helped round out my knowledge about the area.

Chapter Outline

Chapter II provides a historical and geographic overview of the ranching landscape in the Upper Yellowstone from the 1870s to the late 1990s. Each of the following three chapters centers on one of the fundamental influences to which ranchers responded over the course of this history. The chapters draw selectively from the broader history laid out in Chapter II to illustrate themes in the evolution and deployment of tools designed to create continuity and their implications for community. Chapter III documents the ways in which ranchers responded to market conditions for land and livestock, the cornerstones of the ranching enterprise. In Chapter IV, I explore the relationship between land tenure and ranch continuity, considering the perspective of ranching communities as well as individuals and families. Chapter V explores some of the constraints and opportunities presented by the environment of the Upper Yellowstone and how ranchers negotiated dilemmas like geographic isolation and inconsistencies in the availability of water. Chapter VI explores an issue that highlights some of the unique dilemmas inherent to ranching on the border of a nature preserve: the presence of wild elk in the ranching landscape.

Ranchers perceive elk as an ecological problem at the same time that elk represent important economic and cultural resources. In addition, power relations between ranchers and the public, ranchers and public land managers, and ranchers and their neighbors manifest their contours in elk management. Because of the multiple ways that ranchers experience them, elk provide a useful device for incorporating the meanings and implications of ranchers' approaches to the economy, land tenure, and the environment into a complex form that more closely reflects the integrated character of the ranching landscape.

CHAPTER II

FINDING PARADISE

The winter of 1866 marks the beginning of livestock production in the Upper Yellowstone Valley. In that season, Nelson Story, an entrepreneur and key player in the establishment of mining, farming, and ranching in Southwestern Montana, turned out to graze in the valley part of the herd of one thousand Texas longhorns he had just driven north from Texas. Story's cattle were hardly the first sign of Anglo influence in the valley; prospectors and miners-turned-squatters had already spent several winters in the valley by 1866. One local story holds that wheat was first harvested in 1865, a full year before the arrival of Story's cattle.[1] The arrival of the Story herd was a significant milestone nonetheless. Over the next one hundred years, ranching was the dominant land use in the Upper Yellowstone, though dudes and tourists, loggers and miners, hunters and their guides, and farmers also used and shaped the landscape during that period.

The specific character of livestock production has undergone a number of transformations since the 1860s. Cattle were the first domestic livestock to graze the valley's ranges, though large herds of horses followed soon after. In the late nineteenth century, horses, cattle, and sheep were all common on the rangelands of the Upper Yellowstone. Declining demand for horses for use in the stage services associated with Yellowstone National Park contributed to a reshuffling of livestock numbers on the range in the early twentieth century. The departure of large numbers of horses from the range was followed by the dramatic arrival of vast sheep herds: sheep production experienced a short but intense history in the region of the Upper Yellowstone between the 1890s and the 1950s. During the same period, the ranching landscape featured numerous commercial dairies—a local industry that also declined precipitously in the second half of the twentieth century. Dude ranching evolved from

[1]Park County Historical Society, *History of Park County Montana, 1984,* ed. Doris Whithorn (Taylor Publishing Company, 1984), 455.

the practice of guiding hunters in Yellowstone National Park in the late nineteenth century. Its heyday began in the early twentieth century and ended during the Depression, although dudes returned to the range after World War II and continue to play a part in the local ranching economy. Horses, sheep, dairy cows—even mink and "domestic" elk—have all had their moments as the livestock of choice on ranches of the Upper Yellowstone since the 1860s. Cattle, however, ultimately had the most consistent presence of any commercial livestock in the region.

Ranchers experienced highly volatile markets in land as well as livestock over the course of the first century of ranching in the Upper Yellowstone. Over the long sweep of history, the value of livestock has declined while the value of land has increased, especially over the past forty years. Despite the generally negative trajectory of livestock markets, ranchers remained focused on positioning themselves to exploit the upswings in the market when they did occur. At a few key points in history, brief booms in cattle and sheep prices transpired. Over the course of the first century of ranching in the Upper Yellowstone region, what might be called a balance between success and ruin was achieved on the ranching landscape, a balance that resulted in the unquestioned dominance of ranching as a land use and a defining feature of the local community and economy. Increasing interest in recreation and leisure in the post-World War II period, however, introduced competition with ranching. Beginning in the 1970s, recreational land uses altered the nature of local real estate markets, introducing a shift from land values based on livestock production to land values based on recreational amenities. Over the last thirty years, land development and other recreation-oriented business and land use trends have steadily eroded the dominance of ranching as the preeminent land use in the local landscape.

This chapter provides the reader with historical and geographic orientation to the Upper Yellowstone region. In addition to the landscape, the chapter considers several of the defining events of the late nineteenth century in the region, including the early establishment of ranching in the area and the intertwined processes of dispossessing the area's native inhabitants and disposing of the "public domain," and the establishment of Yellowstone National Park. Lastly, the chapter features a very general overview of milestones in demographic and land use trends that shaped the ranchlands of the Upper Yellowstone in the twentieth century.

ORIGINS

When he made his fabled journey to Texas, Nelson Story was thirty-one years old. A native of Ohio, Story had been making his way as a freighter and miner in the gold camps of the Rockies since the 1850s. Story hit pay dirt in Montana's Alder Gulch in the winter of 1866. After cashing in his bullion in Virginia City, Story immediately left the territory on an errand. His destination: Texas. At the stock yards of Fort Worth, Story spent half of his fabulous bonanza earnings on one thousand longhorn cattle at the cost of ten dollars a head. Story rallied a crew of twenty men to help him drive the animals northward across the Great Plains back to the Montana. He based his investment on the logic that the mining camps in the territory's booming gold fields, filled with hard working men and women desperate for easy, reliable sources of protein, would provide an excellent market for beef. He had perhaps witnessed successful examples of this kind of enterprise in other gold fields in the Rockies. Story completed the overland voyage from Texas to Montana less than a year after he left Alder Gulch.

As Story and his band reached the Yellowstone River near its junction with the Big Horn in the fall of 1866, winter was approaching quickly. Nothing in the genetic material or experiences of the cows and bulls accustomed to life among the mesquite and bunchgrasses of the central Southwest could have prepared the animals for the climate that awaited them. Story headed immediately to cash in some of his cattle in Virginia City, though he opted to turn out the rest of his herd on open range for the winter.[2] Those cattle that avoided the path to the abattoirs of Virginia City were left in a large, open valley straddling forty miles of the Yellowstone River, not far from the wondrous hot springs and geysers of the high plateau country that are the heart of Yellowstone National Park. Framed at either end by constricted canyons and walled on its long sides by tall mountain ranges—the Absarokas to the east and the Gallatins to the West—the large valley was a sort of a natural, albeit vast, corral. Some years later, the valley received its modern name, the Paradise Valley.

What may have struck Story as one continuous mountain valley is in fact two distinct geological zones. From the present-day park boundary to somewhere in the vicinity of present day Emigrant (about halfway up the valley), the Yellowstone River and its tributaries link together a series of basins forged by glaciers. The evidence of glacial forces are plain in these basins where swift creeks make their way through winding planes of grass- and sage-covered meadows that quickly surrender to the finger-like hillocks that reach up toward the forest mountain slopes above. Shovelfuls of basin dirt turn up gravel and stones cast away by the melting glaciers. The Gardiner and Cinnabar Basins lie at the immediate edge of the Yellowstone Plateau and upstream of a narrow slice through a major granite layer that marks the head of the Paradise Valley, Yankee Jim Canyon. The spectacular Tom Miner Basin, in the heart of the Gallatin Range, is the last of the major glacial basins. It drops steeply into the Yellowstone valley just beyond Yankee Jim Canyon.

After the river has traveled ten or fifteen miles beyond Yankee Jim, the visual effects of sheering glacial forces yield to more recent processes of erosion and sedimentation. North of present day Emigrant, the valley widens and takes the form of a vast flood plain. At the base of the many side streams that drain into the valley lie sprawling fans of sediment carried off the mountain slopes by water. The deposits of gravel and stones can be hundreds of feet thick with level, tabletop surfaces—hence

[2] Merrill G. Burlingame, *The Montana Frontier*, 1980 Reprint ed. (Bozeman, MT: Big Sky Books, Montana State University, 1942). See also Phyllis Smith, *Bozeman and the Gallatin Valley: A History* (Helena, MT: TwoDot, 1996).

some of the larger fans are called flats. The most prominent is the Mill Creek Flat which lies at the end of a creek that winds its way down from far up into the Absaroka range on the east side of the valley. The Yellowstone River has been constantly maneuvering new routes through this evolving flood plain for tens of thousands of years. Where the river meets porous deposits of alluvial sediment bluffs with faces resembling perfect slices of sheet cake rise straight out of the water to heights of fifty or more feet above the river. Elsewhere, the river spreads out across the wide open basin, often breaking out into a tapestry of braided strands separated by ephemeral islands of cobblestones, earth, and debris.[3] The plainest legacy of both local geological dramas is rocks, which are everywhere in the valley's earth.

Its rocky soils notwithstanding, the valley had many features that appealed to Story. A climate of extremes characterizes the Upper Yellowstone area, juxtaposing dry, hot summers with severe winters. Settlers later called the valley in question the Paradise Valley because it seemed to buck this trend—in particular it offered relatively hospitable winter conditions. Geothermal springs, most notably those at the base of a massive cone called Emigrant Peak on the east side of the valley, steamed up hot water regardless of how cold the winds blew. Cattle could find season-long drinking water not just at the Yellowstone River, but in the spring creeks that welled up from the valley floor, flowing at a near-constant temperature around fifty degrees Fahrenheit.[4] Protected tributary creeks offered ample shelter from severe weather, while frequent winds swept the valley floor clear of snow, freeing up winter forage. In some places, the valley's grassy bottomlands stretched for more than eight miles from forest edge to forest edge.[5]

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[3] State of Montana Engineer's Office, *Water Resources Survey, Park County, Mt. Part I: History of Land and Water Use on Irrigation Areas.* (Helena, MT, 1951), 8-10.

[4] Helen and Edwin with Arch Wagner. Nelson, *Growing up in Paradise: A History of Nelson's Spring Creek Ranch* (Glen Allen, VA: Clairmont Publishing, 1998), xi.

[5] The climate of the Northern Range, at the southernmost extent of the Upper Yellowstone region which I am describing has been well-studied and provides some clues about the Upper Yellowstone as a whole. The Little Ice Age is thought to have been in effect in the Northern

In 1866, the valley was close enough to the Bozeman Trail and burgeoning settlements at Fort Ellis and Bozeman to be convenient, but it was nonetheless adequately remote to serve as a safe spot for Story to cache his valuable investment. The non-Native presence in the area was sparse. Prospectors had beat Story to the Upper Yellowstone; the first gold discovery reportedly dated to 1862.[6] By 1866, individual prospectors prowled the creeks and mountain slopes above the present-day town of Gardiner and there was a small, dwindling tent city—the 1864 boomtown of Yellowstone City—in Emigrant Gulch, about halfway down the Paradise Valley. Prospecting had been preceded by the travels of explorers and mountain men earlier in the nineteenth century, and thus the wondrous geysers and canyons of the Yellowstone Plateau had caught the attention of people from far and wide by the 1860s.

Indeed, the valley had attracted regular migrations of people and animals for thousands of years—though it had never been any group's permanent home for long, according to archaeological records.[7] For centuries, bison, elk, and deer moved onto the foothills and valley bottoms along the Yellowstone River in winter to avoid severe

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Rockies region between 1350 and 1870. Yellowstone National Park was established at the end of that period and the region has been showing signs of adjusting to a warmer, drier climate pattern since then. These adjustments have been the source of considerable controversy, particularly in regards to public debates about rangeland health and fire frequency and intensity in Yellowstone National Park. A chart of changing drought severity levels in Yellowstone suggests that it has been common for the climate to swing from year to year from extremely dry to less dry. Drought severity readings peaked in 1902, 1919, 1935, 1958, and in 1988. The year of 1988 experienced extensive natural fires in Yellowstone National Park and is thought to have been the most extensive fire year since 1700. Yellowstone National Park, *Yellowstone's Northern Range: Complexity & Change in a Wildland Ecosystem* (Mammoth Hot Springs: National Park Service, 1997), 16-20.

[6] Park County Historical Society, *History of Park County Montana, 1984*, ed. Doris Whithorn (Taylor Publishing Company, 1984), 41.

[7] The area in the mid-18th century has been described as a war zone "source" area for wildlife by conservation biologists. They argue that Yellowstone had especially rich wildlife densities in part because the region fell at the edges of two or more native groups that often contested the boundaries of one another's hunting territories. Paul S. Martin and Christine R. Szuter, "War Zones and Game Sinks in Lewis and Clark's West," *Conservation Biology* 13, no. 1 (1999).

conditions on the high Yellowstone plateau.[8] In the mid-nineteenth century the area had acquired particular significance to the Crow people, who found themselves struggling to navigate what one historian aptly calls "life in a tightening circle."[9] The Crow faced hostilities of the Sioux and Blackfeet elsewhere in the Upper Missouri River basin as well as Anglo-European encroachment on their lands.[10] Crow leaders had identified the Yellowstone River as the western and northern boundaries of the territory they claimed—and which the U.S. agreed to stay out of in an 1851 treaty. Crow presence on the landscape of the Upper Yellowstone figures prominently in the history of the 1860s and 1870s; their resistance to intrusions by European-Americans posed continued problems for the miners at Emigrant Gulch.[11]

The arrival of the Story herd signaled a crucial tipping point in the history of the Upper Yellowstone. Unlike the explorers and itinerant trappers who preceded them, the Euro-Americans arriving in the Montana territory in the 1860s planned to stay around—or at least they did not plan to go back to where they came from.[12] When the mines failed to work out, many prospectors adopted the life of farming and

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[8] This observation is controversial in light of the perennial debate over the role of the Yellowstone valley in the Northern Range. Douglas B. Houston, *The Northern Yellowstone Elk: Ecology and Management* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1982), Committee on Ungulate Management National Research Council, *Ecological Dynamics on Yellowstone's Northern Range* (Washington, D. C.: National Academies Press, 2002).

[9] Frederick E. Hoxie, *Parading through History: The Making of the Crow Nation in America, 1805-1935*, ed. Neal Salisbury Frederick Hoxie, Cambridge Studies in North American Indian History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). 89-100.

[10] Two centuries of upheaval on the Plains proceeded this final stage of contestation and conflict. See Ibid.

[11] Paul Armstrong remembered this: "The Bottler Brothers came to the valley in 1869. They were going to take up the place of the 'Big Spring', and camped there that night. The next day they could see the Crow Indians (on the reservation on the east side of the Yellowstone) gathering on the high bluff. Bottlers got leary of the Indians and along towards night they saw a delegation of the Indians go up the river and another went down the river. When night came they pulled out and left for Chico, were they thought it would be safer." Carolyn and Viola Wood. Alverson, "Interview with Paul Armstrong," (Yellowstone Gateway Museum Library Files, Livingston, Montana.: 1959).

[12] Apparently the Gallatin Valley attracted so many Civil War confederate soldiers it was called Little Missouri. Park County Historical Society, 436.

homesteading, often because they had no food or money to take them elsewhere. The mines inspired a spillover in the Upper Yellowstone, such that 1865 marked the beginning of "official" farming and ranching in the area.[13] When the federal government opted to endorse the hunger and ambitions of its white citizens rather than honoring treaties with Indian nations, the pendulum swung in Montana, as it did throughout the West in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the case of the settlement of the Upper Yellowstone by whites, the federal government first coerced the Crow to give up the Paradise Valley for protection at a new agency at Mission Creek, east of the great bend of the Yellowstone River which is the site of present-day Livingston.[14] Soon, Nelson Story was selling beef (raised on what was still legally Crow land) to feed the Crow at the Mission Creek agency. In 1875, the federal government forced the Crow to relocate to the Stillwater Valley, fifty or more miles to the southeast.

It was during this same era of government-endorsed expansion of white settlements that Congress designated Yellowstone National Park as off-limits to settlement and extraction. The park was officially set aside in 1872, and Congress assigned a woefully small corps of Army troops to manage it. The 1870s was thus a decade of historical ironies: while the War Department took on the job of relocating and dispossessing Indians in order to make way for white settlement, Congress simultaneously undertook the curtailment of white settlement and exploitation of the region through the establishment of Yellowstone National Park. The contradictory nature of these government activities was surely not lost to such inhabitants of the

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[13] That would be Ben Strickland and friend's single wheat field on the Crow Reserve. Farming as a year-round, landed proposition began officially in 1867.

[14] According to Hoxie, in 1871, the U.S. agent at Mission Creek Agency reported that some 1,400 River Crows were receiving supplies there. In 1873, fifty lodges reportedly wintered at the Mission Creek Agency. Other Crow opted to remain north of the Yellowstone River. to spend the winter at the agency, while perhaps another 100 families stayed away, also remaining north of the Yellowstone. Hoxie, 100.

Upper Yellowstone as the prospectors and hunters who found their opportunities constrained by the designation of the park's boundaries.[15] While the park did impose limits on what would be possible within and, in some cases, outside its boundaries, its immediate impact in the 1870s was to encourage rather than discourage outside interest in the Upper Yellowstone and the development of its resources.

Prior to the construction of the cross-continental Northern Pacific Railroad (NPRR) in 1882 and its extension to Yellowstone's boundary in 1883, however, the Upper Yellowstone region was exceedingly remote from the perspective of non-native migrants to the area. Strong resistance from Native Americans to encroachment on the central and northern Plains prompted most travelers to head north toward Montana from Utah, heading into present day Idaho and northward to what were then the centers of settlement in Montana, Bannack and Virginia City.[16] After negotiating the Gravelly and Madison mountain ranges, pilgrims to Yellowstone then traveled down the Gallatin River to Fort Ellis, erected in 1866 to offer settlers of the Gallatin Valley protection from Indian resistance. From Fort Ellis, the route traveled up to the crest of Gallatin Mountain range before following the long, gentle drainage of Trail Creek down into the Paradise Valley. [17] Trail Creek meets the Yellowstone River in the Lower Paradise Valley, shortly before the Yellowstone enters the canyon below Wineglass Mountain. From Fort Ellis, it was a two- or three-day journey to Mammoth Hot Springs, which typically served as the first stop on a tour of Yellowstone's wonders. That a number of homesteads, farms and ranches were

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[15] See Karl Jacoby, "The State of Nature: Country Folk, Conservationists, and Criminals at Yellowstone National Park, 1872-1908," in *The Countryside in the Age of the Modern State: Political Histories of Rural America*, ed. Catherine McNicol Stock and Robert D. Johnston (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001).

[16] The Bozeman Trail provided a cutoff through Wyoming and southwestern Montana, but it was operational for just a few years before John Bozeman lost his life on it; it remained unused until the late 1870s.

[17] Most of these trails were established and well-used by native groups. They were not "pioneered" by whites. See Aubrey Haines, *The Yellowstone Story: A History of Our First National Park, Vol. I*, 96.

established in Upper Yellowstone in the 1870s despite the region's near total isolation from established Anglo-European communities suggests how hungry emigrants were to own land in the mountain West. Travelers typically broke their journeys up to take advantage of settlements established in the mid-1860s, including the Strickland Ranch at the base of Trail Creek, the Bottler Ranch near Emigrant Gulch, and the Henderson place at the mouth of Yankee Jim Canyon.[18]

The completion of the NPRR lessened the region's isolation in the 1880s, at least for tourists and explorers able to voyage by train. Most homesteaders traveled overland in the 1880s. Official surveys of land continued to lag behind the determined efforts of newcomers to take ownership of lands of the Upper Yellowstone. Early settlers made do with the terms of the Preemption Act, declaring their claims to parcels in the Land Office in Bozeman. Some chose to prove up on claims according to the terms of the Homestead Act while others chose to pay for the land. In 1877, brothers Frederick and Phillip Bottler received the first official patents to land in the Upper Yellowstone. Under the terms of the 1820 land law (3 Stat. 566), they purchased two adjoining parcels of 158.35 and 145.53 acres respectively on the banks of the Yellowstone River across from the mouth of Six Mile Creek.[19] The two pieces of paper awarded to the Bottler brothers marked the official commencement of the process of disposing to white newcomers the land that had so recently been promised to the Crow people.

In general, ranches in the Upper Yellowstone consisted and still consist primarily of deeded land originally acquired in 160-, 320-, and 640-acre units through the Homestead laws or purchased from the NPRR. The role played by leased public land varies by location, with many ranches holding long-time leases to graze their herds on state and Forest land. However, due to the limited supply of public forage, it

[18] Ibid.

[19] BLM land records, serial number MTMTAA043768 (Frederick Bottler); serial number MT MT AA043769 (Phillip Bottler) (accessed online 06/28/04); available from http://www.glorecords.blm.gov.

was not uncommon for ranches to utilize primarily deeded private land. (Most of the adjacent National Forest is densely forested and very steep and thus offers a short supply of rangeland, especially for cattle: sheep are better able to exploit mountain meadows on ridgelines.) There are many mining patents in the area, but the majority are located in high-elevation drainages and typically have not been subsumed within the boundaries of ranches.

Ferdinand Hayden led geological surveys of the Yellowstone area in 1871, 1872 and 1878. Detailed surveying of the sort that produced maps of use to land offices got underway in the1880s but was regularly hampered by limited funding.[20] The delay in the survey meant that many early claims to land were preemptive squatters' rights, many of which were registered in "declaration of ranche" documents that described claims in terms such as: "'beginning at the mouth of Reese Creek, upon its south side at its junction with the Yellowstone, thence running along the bank of said Yellowstone southerly half a mile, thence west a half a mile...'"[21] Full (as in officially titled) disposition of land did not get underway until the completion of surveys in the early 1880s, by which point the valley had already witnessed the arrival of one thousand longhorn cattle in 1866, the influx of hundreds of miners in Emigrant Gulch, Jardine and Bear Gulch, and Trail Creek as well as a handful of individuals and families intent on building permanent settlements and owning land, and the eviction of native inhabitants. Once surveys had been completed, claimants reframed their land descriptions according to the cadastral system. The cadastral system was problematic in itself in the Upper Yellowstone area—surveyors had trouble getting the land to cooperate with their rectangular schema. It was necessary to create a whole series of exceptional lots around the Yellowstone River.

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[20] Aubrey Haines, *The Yellowstone Story: A History of Our First National Park*, Revised Edition, 1996. ed., vol. II (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1977), 438.

[21] Quoted in L. H. Whittlesey, "'They're Going to Build a Railroad!: Cinnabar, Stephens Creek, and the Game Ranch Addition to Yellowstone National Park, 1995," Unpublished Manuscript in Author's Possession, p. 2.

Figure 2.1 addresses the early geography of land disposition in the Upper Yellowstone area. Land patents, colored by the date they were granted, provide evidence that geography factored significantly in the early establishment of homesteads and ranches. The darkest squares on the map show patents recorded before 1900. The dates of patents are not necessarily reflective of the date that settlements were established: the first deeded patents went to the Bottler brothers in 1877, a decade after their arrival. Thus, the flurry of homestead patents dating from in the 1880s contains a significant number of claims by individuals who had arrived in the 1870s.

The map makes it clear that settlement was initially clustered, predictably, in well-watered, low elevation areas and also in the proximity of mining discoveries. Places where it was safe to ford the Yellowstone River were also probably important factors in the geographic pattern, as bridges would be once they were constructed. Patents from the 1880s and 1890s are clustered around cores of existing settlement, many of them on the southernmost end of the Paradise Valley and closest to the Bozeman Trail and the Gallatin Valley; others sit near Emigrant and the Park boundary—locations that had been pioneered by miners and hunters. Those who chose the sites on the lower end of the valley no doubt had in mind the convenience of being close to Livingston. Emigrant was a logical overnight stopping point for travelers to the Park and a cluster of small buildings quickly grew up around the Bottler place. Those who went to the Gardiner Basin likely anticipated the benefits of owning land near the Park. Secondarily, settlers chose flat land intersected with tributaries to the Yellowstone, especially in the lower Paradise Valley near Elbow Creek, Suce Creek, and Pine Creek.

Figure 2.1. Map of Dates of Land Patents to Individuals
Source: BLM GCDB data and GLO Land Patent Records available from http://www.glorecords.blm.gov.

As the checkerboard pattern of Figure 2.1 indicates, the NPRR received control over roughly half of the private land in the Valley. The total extent of the accessible (e.g., not mountainous) land east to west in the valley lay well within the twenty miles in either direction from the tracks of the Park Branch which the law had established as the extent of the railroad land grants in the West. A local source notes that the railroad land in the Upper Yellowstone was listed for sale in 1893 at $1 to $10 per acre.[22] However, the official transfer of deeds to land in the Upper Yellowstone area from the U.S. government to the NPRR occurred haltingly, at dates ranging from 1864 to 1913. Nonetheless railroad land played an important part in the composition of ranches—not surprisingly, given that it was half of the private land in the area. Importantly, though, because railroad land became officially available later than public domain parcels, water rights were typically associated with deeded land obtained by purchase or claim from the federal government, not railroad land. The net result was that in most places, railroad land functioned primarily to expand a ranch's acreage, but typically not its water rights or productivity (in terms of winter feed).

Purchases of railroad land extended from the 1890s into the 1950s, effectively transferring the majority of railroad land not located on timbered, high mountain slopes into private ownership. Several acts of consolidation transferred much of the railroad land within the boundaries of the Gallatin National Forest in the southern reaches of the Upper Yellowstone drainage into public ownership in the 1970s. More recently, a major land exchange consolidated Forest Service holdings while allowing NPRR's timber company, Plum Creek Timber to sell land in the Big Sky area for development, eliminated remaining railroad in-holdings on the east slope of the Gallatin Range.

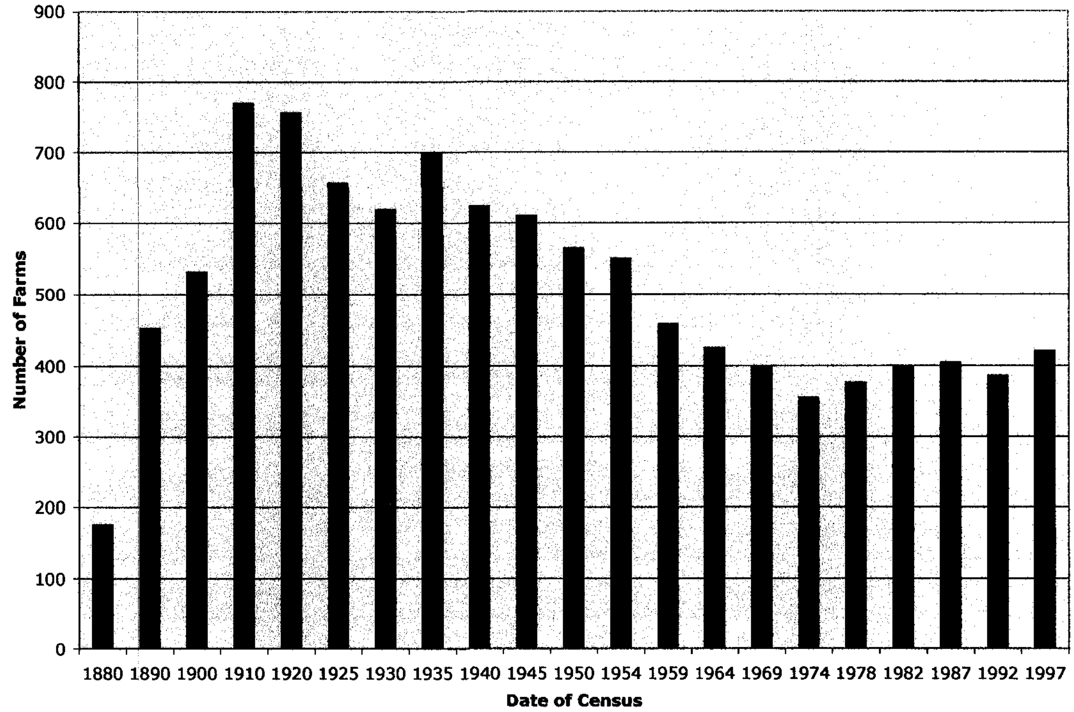
The boundaries of public land were also important in the disposition period of ranch establishment. Clearly, the designation of the boundaries of Yellowstone

[22] Society, 46.

National Park in 1872 was the most important milestone in the area. Concerns about the integrity of the park's boundaries relative to wildlife habitat prompted a major effort to expand the park's northern boundary in the 1920s. This culminated in the "Game Ranch" and "Gallatin Addition" that were completed between 1926 and 1934. (The two additions are visible on the Overview Map as the two irregular triangles on the Park's northern boundary. The Game Ranch addition is the more easterly of the two.) The Gallatin National Forest was established in 1899, containing 45,000 acres in the Gallatin Range. Lands in the Absaroka Range were soon added, with the basic boundaries of the forest set in place by 1910. The State of Montana was entitled to sections 16 and 36 in every township. In addition, at certain times the state has been an active land-owning presence in the valley, acquiring land in the name of wildlife conservation and leasing school sections. Notable are the state-run fish hatchery established in 1919 on land donated by then Lieutenant Governor Nelson Story, Jr. at Emigrant and the substantial Dome Mountain Wildlife Management Area, established in the 1990s and operated by the State of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.[23] The Bureau of Land Management has only a minimal presence in southwestern Montana, and this is certainly true in the Upper Yellowstone area where the BLM owns just under 6,000 acres of land. This is an artifact of settlement patterns in response to the geographic characteristics of the Upper Yellowstone—in 1934, there was little in the way of unsettled, unclaimed land left in the Upper Yellowstone. The end of the twentieth century witnessed a renewed effort to expand the boundaries of public land through the acquisition of ranch properties located in areas determined by the public land agencies to constitute critical wildlife habitat.

[23] A summary of the early history of the Emigrant Fish Hatchery can be found in: State of Montana Engineer's Office, 19.

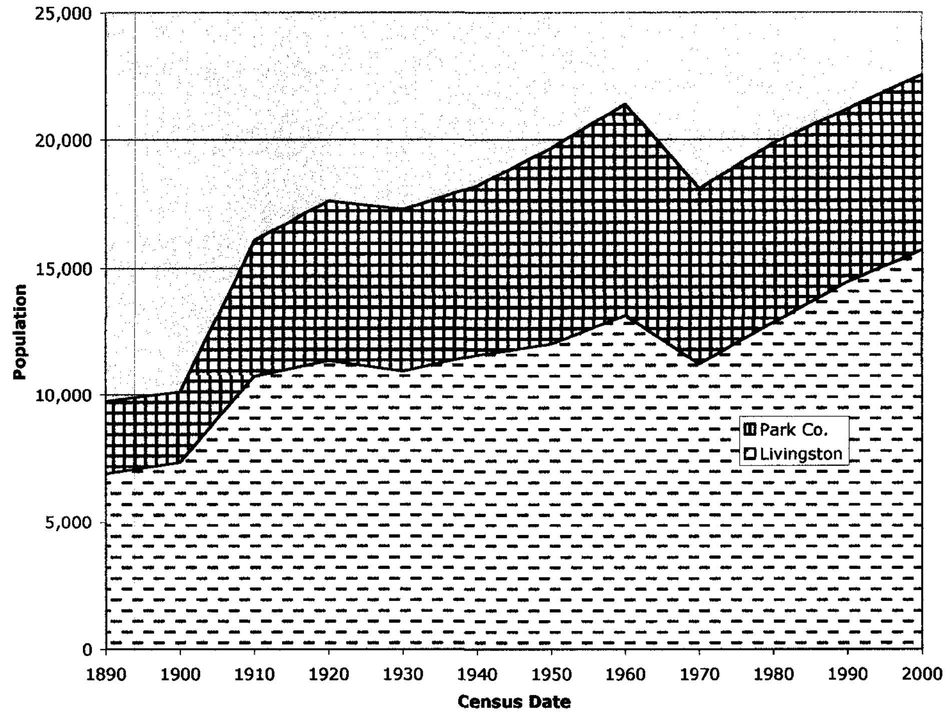
Figure 2.2 shows agricultural census data on the number of farms in Park County. The chart reveals a pattern of early, rapid growth of small farms followed by a period of consolidation that resulted in fewer farms and a recent period of apparent stabilization in the number of farm operators. In 1870, the agricultural census counted 175 farms in the whole of Gallatin County, which included present-day Park County. Homesteading and settlement proceeded determinedly between the 1880s and early 1900s. In 1910, the number of farms in Park County was 770. At the same time that homesteaders were arriving in regular numbers to try their hand in farming and ranching, those who came before them were benefiting from the profitable combination of inexpensive land and good livestock prices. Some ranches expanded significantly during this period. Beginning with the severe agricultural depression that hit nationwide and especially hard in Montana in the 1920s, farm numbers were in a continual state of decline for much of the twentieth century. The 1970s were the nadir of ranch viability; the decade witnessed a combination of inflation and poor prices that led to significant ranch turnover before the recreational value of land changed real estate dynamics. In the 1980s and 1990s the number of farms appeared to stabilize; however, statistics can be deceiving. Many "farms" represented part-time or hobby pursuits. Of the 420 operations counted in the 1997 census, only 256, slightly more than half, reported farming (including ranching) as their primary occupation.



Source: USDA Agricultural Census, County Level Series.

Figure 2.2. Number of Farms in Park County, 1880-1997.

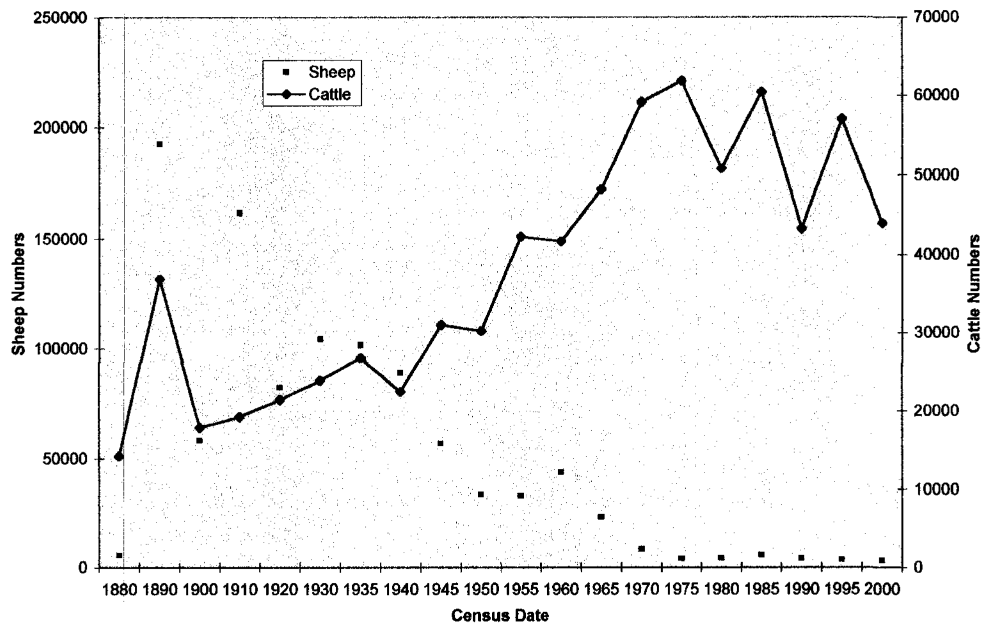
Population data for all of Park County from 1890 to the present, illustrated in Figure 2.3, show slightly different patterns. Population growth has remained fairly constant even while the number of farm and ranch operators had declined. More than half of the county's residents have typically lived within the boundaries of the town of Livingston, where the NPRR was an important employer until the 1960s. The second wave of homesteading that occurred between 1900 and 1920 caused the county's population to double during that time. Overall, the county has experienced only two decades with net population loss, the 1920s and the 1960s. The loss of population in the 1920s was related to an adjustment in agricultural populations following the ill-fated dry-land homesteading boom of the early 1900s and may also have been related to downturns in other parts of the agricultural economy. Population decline in the 1960s may have been caused by mergers and cutbacks that affected the NPRR. The company merged twice with other railroad conglomerates, first with the Great Northern in 1961 and again in 1970 becoming the Burlington Northern. The last passenger train traveled to Gardiner in 1965 on the Park Branch Railroad. The Park Branch tracks were officially abandoned in 1975. Since the 1970s, the population of Park County has grown significantly in keeping with trends in amenity-rich areas of the Rocky Mountain West.



Source: Montana Census and Economic Information Center, Decennial Census Data. Accessed online from Montana CEIC, http://ceic.commerce.state.mt.us/historicalpopdata.htm, 6/28/04.

Figure 2.3. Population Trends in Park County and the city of Livingston

The number of livestock in Park County has responded to volatile market dynamics. Between 1880 and 1890, the census recorded a dramatic increase in cattle numbers—the number jumped from over 14,000 to nearly 37,000 animals in a ten year period. The number of sheep in the county experienced a similar increase during that decade. By 1900, however, a decline nearly equal in volume to the increase between 1880 and 1890 had shifted both the number of sheep and the number of cattle. The 1910s were boom years for cattle growers, but were followed by difficult cycles in the 1920s and 1930s.[24] The period with the largest continual increase in cattle numbers occurred between the 1940s and the 1970s. This had to do with economic forces that encouraged operators to produce more and more livestock as well as with the decline in sheep numbers during that time.[25] Since the 1970s, cattle numbers have oscillated from decade to decade in response to price shifts, but overall, the trend is downward.



Source: USDA Agricultural Census, County-Level Series.

Figure 2.4. Cattle and Sheep in Park County, 1880-1997.

[24] The annual livestock report in the *Park County News* noted that more cattle had been shipped out (herds liquidated) because of the need to "meet obligations" and price instability in 1924 than in any other year except 1918-1919. *Park County News,* January 28, 1912.

[25] Extension station researcher Mont Saunderson documented interrelatedness in sheep and cattle numbers (e.g. sheep numbers were high when cattle prices and cattle numbers were low and vice versa) in the period from 1900 to 1934. Mont H. Saunderson, *A Study of the Trends of Montana Livestock Numbers, Prices, and Profits* (Bozeman, Montana: Montana State College Agricultural Experiment Station, 1936), Bulletin No. 329.

There has been considerable dynamism in the types of cattle breeds on Park County's ranch landscape. The first significant herd of livestock in the Paradise Valley were Story's Texas longhorns, but practices switched to favor shorthorns sometime shortly thereafter. A major reason for the substitution was the quarantine of Texas cattle in the 1890s due to ongoing problems with Texas fever.[26] In addition, shorthorns derived from English stock and so tended to fare well in cold-weather climates. The next cattle trend arrived near the turn of the century with Hereford cattle. Herefords, sturdy animals well-adapted to mountain range conditions, were the animal of choice for the first half of the twentieth century. As early as the 1940s and 1950s, however, some ranchers began to experiment with Angus cattle. Angus gradually replaced Herefords, though most ranchers bred the Angus into their herd over time rather than starting fresh, so truly the dominant breed had been Hereford-Angus crosses for some time. Late in the 1970s and 1980s the so-called "exotic" breeds like Charolais, Simmental, and Chiana showed up in some herds. They too were typically mixed in with existing herds making extensive hybridity the norm in the late twentieth century.[27]

Table 1, based on records from a local cattle marketing association, indicate some of the trends in breed distribution over time. This table does not include all of the cattle producers in Park County, but is a representative sample of the trends in the popularity of different breeds of cattle.

Brochure Date	Hereford	Angus	Hereford-Angus X	Others
1955	2,059	340		200
1961	2,650	650	105	
1970	1,914	1,175	768	329
1974	550	466	1,031	663
1983		400	994	535
1990		90	306	775

Source: PCRMA brochures, selected years 1955-1990, courtesy of PCRMA.

Table 2.1. Breeds of Cattle Listed for Sale in Park County, 1955-1990

[26] Jimmy M. Skaggs, *The Cattle Trailing Industry* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1973).

[27] On cattle breeding generally, see Sherm Ewing, *The Ranch: A Modern History of the North American Cattle Industry* (Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 1995).

Livestock numbers provide a window for observing the general strategies that ranchers pursued in relation to changing market conditions. Their choices were also influenced by local landscape factors and had correspondingly specific local implications. A detailed study of livestock stocking rates and the patterns of livestock use on the landscape conducted in the nearby Madison Valley hints at some of the patterns that may have been at work in the Upper Yellowstone. According to William Wyckoof and Katherine Hansen's 1991 article in *Environmental History Review,* in the Madison Valley, there were distinct patterns of pasture use that coincided with changing market, social, and cultural conditions in the area between the 1860s and 1980s. Wyckoff and Hansen described five historical periods characterized by distinct grazing regimes. In the pre-settlement period, the few livestock owners in the region observed haphazard seasonal movements and animals were widely dispersed. Between 1870 and 1889, or the "early settlement" period, ranchers used both base properties and the as-yet open public domain. Essentially, operators considered anything unfenced fair game, so to speak, and typically moved their cattle from the lower elevation riparian lands into higher ground in the foothills or upper valley in the summer.

After 1890, much of the private land in the valley had been claimed and forest reserves, off-limits to further disposition, had been designated. This "rapid settlement period," although it included the important early attempts to manage public grazing resources on the National Forest (after 1906) featured the greatest abuses of public rangeland in the area's history. That is because the numbers of livestock, particularly sheep, grew quickly and often outstripped the productive capacity of the area, which the authors point out could vary from year to year depending on climate. Wyckoff and Hansen suggest that the valley bottom and benchlands, some of which remained in the public domain, suffered the most from overgrazing.

After the drought emergencies that contributed to the final withdrawal of public lands 1934 and until 1960, a period of adjustment witnessed stricter management of public grazing lands, a consolidation of ranch operations, and a cumulative decline in livestock numbers—all to the benefit of valley and forest rangelands of the Madison Valley, which began a recovery from the abuses of the rapid settlement period. The authors point out that "many areas that had been annually grazed by sheep for decades saw either greatly decreased use, no domestic livestock grazing, or a conversion to cattle. These areas included publicly-controlled mountain meadows (summer grazing), joint private/publicly-managed foothill settings (spring and fall grazing), and privately-held bottomland and benchland parcels (spring, winter, and fall grazing)."[28]

Generally speaking, settlement and development in the Upper Yellowstone area mirrors the set of trends identified by Wyckoff and Hansen in the Madison Valley. An important difference in the link between demographics and ranching practices, however, is the strong influence of Yellowstone National Park in the Upper Yellowstone region. The Park created alternative markets for an array of ranch produce that went beyond sheep and cattle to include horses, garden produce, dairy products, and hunting and dude services. As long as these alternative markets existed, smaller ranchers could go without access to the public domain—access they might have been denied because of exclusive tactics by networks of large operators. The evolution of base ranches both near to and remote from the Park in fact shows some of the ways that the pasture use patterns varied in the Upper Yellowstone drainage from the pattern documented in the Madison Valley.

Indeed, other livestock that could be commonly found on ranches in the Upper Yellowstone Valley over the course of its history include horses, dairy cows, hogs, and chickens. Horses were a major product in the Upper Yellowstone during

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[28] William and Katherine Hansen Wyckoff, "Settlement, Livestock Grazing and Environmental Change in Southwest Montana, 1860-1990," *Environmental History Review* 15, no. 4 (1991): 62.

the era of stage-drawn wagon tours of Yellowstone National Park, which lasted from the 1880s into the 1910s. In the instance of the first agricultural census of Park County in 1880, census takers recorded 4,171 horses. By 1920, that number had increased to 8,802. The volume of horses reflected the homesteading boom of the 1900s and 1910s as well as the strong park-driven tourism economy of the same period. In 1921, the local paper, *The Park County News*, reacted to the arrival of the automobile skeptically. "Perhaps the day will come when horses on the farm are as scarce as the proverbial 'hen's teeth,'" opined the editors, "but it has not yet arrived and the chances are it will not arrive in our day, if it ever does."[29] Time proved the paper wrong. Declining steadily after the 1920s, the number of horses in 1950 was 3,608. Just four years later, tractors had replaced so many horses that the number was 2,304. The lowest number of horses ever counted in Park County by the agricultural census occurred in 1974, when just 1,232 horses were on farms and ranches. Since the advent of a recreational economy, however, the number has rebounded. In 1992, there were 209 farms with 2,004 horses between them–five years later, there were 2,987 horses on 264 farms.[30]

Poultry and milk cows were tightly tied to a domestic barter economy in which ranchers "traded" eggs and dairy products in town in order to earn cash to buy groceries and other sundries. That said, commercial dairying represented a significant portion of the "ranching" underway in the Upper Yellowstone in the 1920s and 1930s while domestic consumption of farm products was also commonly practiced.[31] In

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[29] The editors held that horses were a necessity while the auto was luxury, writing of the farmer that "when it came to bringing his grain, butchered stock, milk, cream, poultry, eggs, and other produce to town or to the railroad freight depot, or to bring new farm machinery, oil and supplies back home, he found his horses and wagons indispensable." *Park County News*, October 7 1921.

[30] Census Office U.S. Department of Interior, *Agriculture in the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890.* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1895).

[31] Partly in response to a substantial depression in other sectors of the farm economy (which may also have driven more people to the city and produced more consumers of store-bought dairy products) there was an increase statewide in milk cows from 173,000 in 1923 to 194,000 in 1924, valued at about $53/head. The annual special agricultural section in the

1900, the agricultural census reported that there were 1,887 milk cows on 386 of its 532 farms. By 1920, the number had shot up to 4,512 cows on 756 of the county's 777 farms. Declining slightly during the Depression, in the 1940s milk cows were still omnipresent. 502 of 623 farms owned a total of 3,084 milk cows county-wide in 1940.[32] Egg production reflected a similar trend, cresting in 1940 at 304,511 dozen eggs and declining slowly in subsequent decades until the 1970s when most farms and ranches gave up the practice of raising chickens altogether. In 1987 there were only 1,948 chickens in the entire county compared to an average of about 30,000 between 1910 and 1950.[33]

Land Ownership Patterns

The broad contours of land ownership patterns in the Upper Yellowstone over the course of the history of ranching involve three processes. The first process, disposition, began with the work of translating a vast territory into the rectilinear, segmented logic of the cadastral survey. Once divided on paper into 40-acre tracts, the landscape could be disposed both to settlers, the railroad, and public agencies, all of whom took ownership of parcels ranging in size from 40 to 640 acres, all of them square or nearly so. (One exception is Yellowstone National Park, most of which was never surveyed and whose boundaries reflect hydrological features in some instances and the cadastral survey in others.) Disposition encouraged growth in the number of land owners between 1860 and the 1920s—the number of farms in Park County

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1924 *Park County News* noted an "increase in milk cows in evidence in most counties...while more milk cows are being imported and raised, farmers are also milking a greater proportion of the cows they have on hand." "Annual Livestock Report," *Park County News*, January 28, 1924, 12.

[32] Data from this census year note that of a total 1,553,366 gallons of milk produced in the county, 298,179 gallons of milk were sold off the farm along with 255,615 gallons of cream.

[33] It is difficult to compare chicken and egg production because the census kept changing the data it published.

reached its all-time high between 1910 and 1920, and the Upper Yellowstone mirrored this trend.

The second fundamental factor in land ownership patterns was the consolidation of private holdings. Consolidation was underway virtually from the get-go, as most ranchers required more than a homestead parcel to support a viable ranch operation. Consolidation emerged as a definitive force after the decline in homesteading in the 1910s. Whether through the process of neighbors buying out neighbors or the Park Service and Forest Service expanding their holdings, between the 1920s and the 1970s, the average size of individual land holdings and the total number of land owners decreased. The third process, the fragmentation of land holdings, was underway during the same period—which could seem counterintuitive until one recognizes that the life history of a ranch could involve episodes of fragmentation as well as aggregation. This would be the case when an individual rancher divided a large estate among several children, for example. Fragmentation accelerated dramatically with the advent of wholesale subdivision of large ranch property into small residential parcels in the 1970s. On the contemporary landscape, both processes are under way, fueled by a high demand for rural property—the deep pockets and privacy concerns of wealthy ranch buyers are contributing to the further aggregation of large ranches into even large ranches while the continued demand for smaller parcels results in ongoing subdivision of land.

The series of maps in Figures 2.5a through 2.5d show land ownership patterns in 1906, 1923, 1966, and 2002.[34] Sections in public ownership and those owned by

[34] The arbitrary quality of the dates derives from the availability of three historic maps obtained in Park County archives. I obtained contemporary parcel and land ownership data from the Department of Revenue in 2002. The historic maps date to 1906, 1923, and 1966. The origins of the earlier maps are unclear, though the 1923 map was signed by C. J. Sackett, Engineer. The 1966 map was created by the local conservation district in response to rumors of a large-scale water development project in the Upper Yellowstone. The veracity of the historical maps represents somewhat of a problem. My impression in comparing them to land records is that the 1906 and 1966 maps were probably intended to reflect who was ranching in particular locations at those times. The 1923 map appears possibly to be somewhat more accurate in terms of actual land ownership as I suspect it may show lien-holders rather than

the railroad are not mapped; the parcels consist only of land owned by individuals and local corporations. One obvious feature of the maps for 1906, 1923, and 1966 is the expansion of the private land estate as a result of the disposition of public land and acquisition of railroad holding by individuals.[35]

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operators for some properties. These important problems notwithstanding, they provide some kind of a region-wide picture of land ownership patterns. Later in the chapter I used a related mapping effort, conducted at a finer resolution to explore dynamics of ownership change. These are maps I created using a combination of the GCDB survey lines, existing parcels, and extensive documentation of land sales in the clerk and recorder's office. They are thus as reliable as they can be, based on title records held by the county.

[35] Interestingly, a comparison of Map 2.5c and 2.5d, land ownership in 1966 and 2002, show a decline in the private land estate. That decline is the combined function of a major campaign to consolidate public ownership of key wildlife habitat in the 1990s and a major land exchange between the U.S. forest Service and the Plum Creek Timber company (the massive timber company spun off from the NPRR in the 1960s).

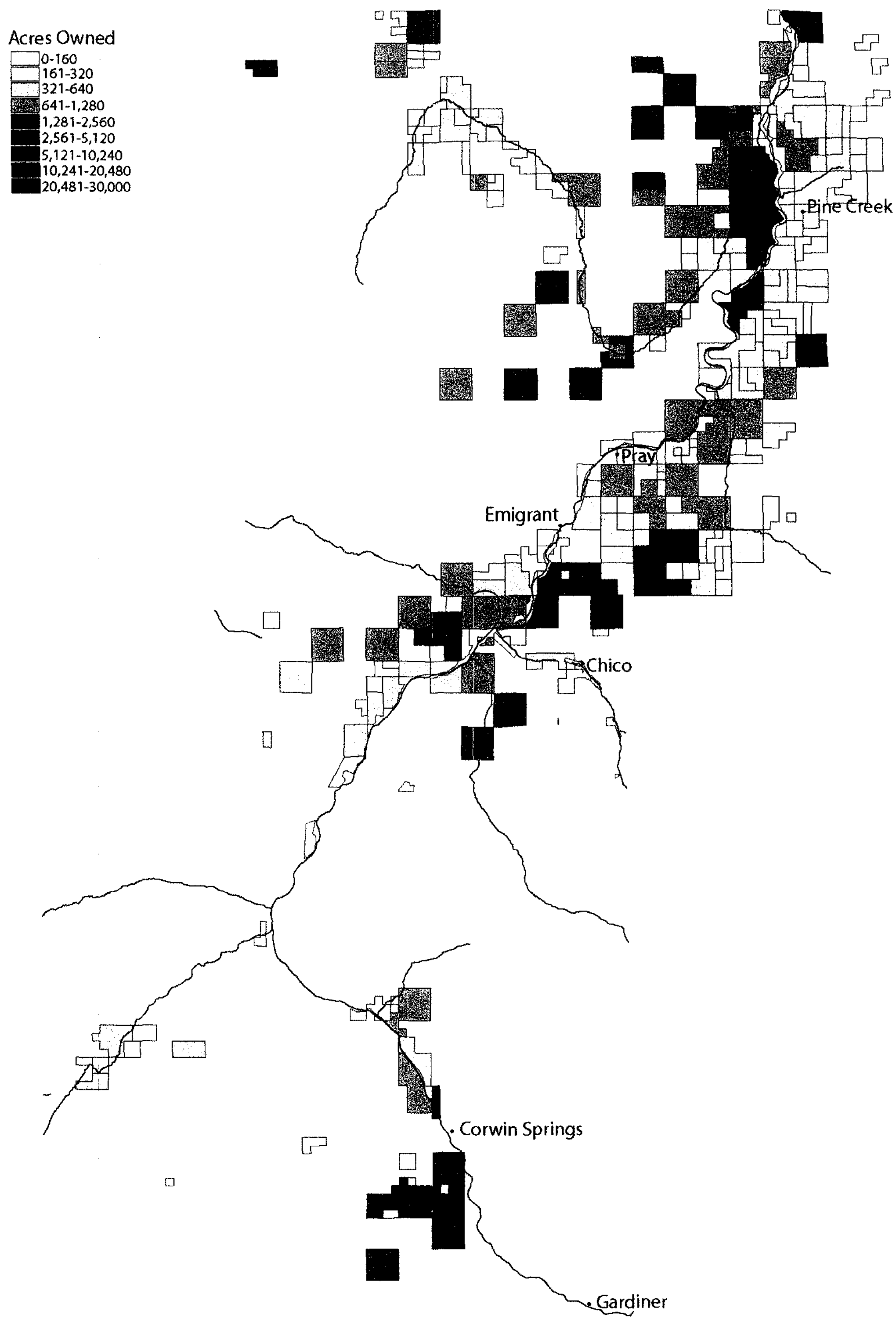


Figure 2.5a. Size of Private Holdings, 1906

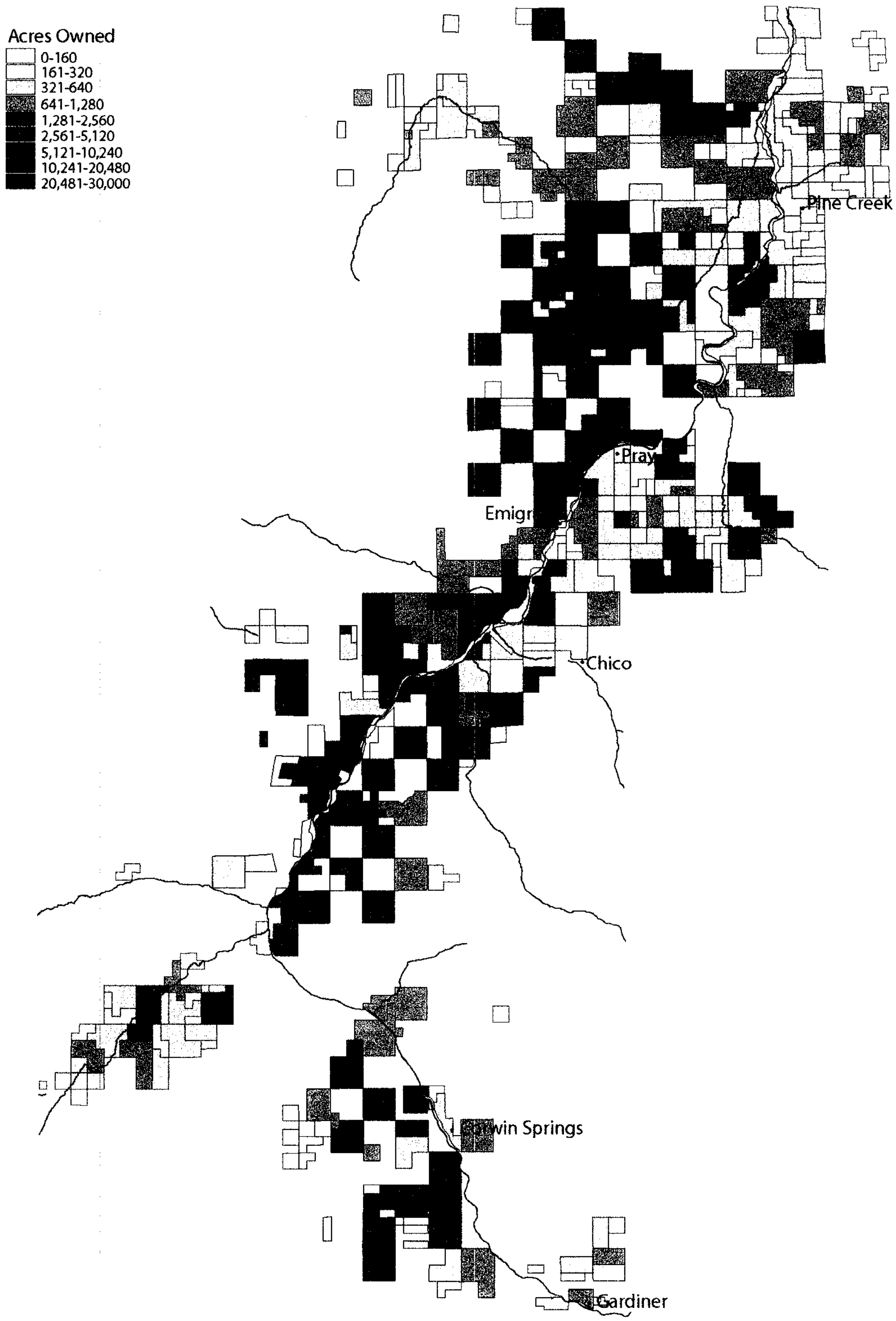


Figure 2.5b. Size of Private Holdings, 1922

Figure 2.5c. Size of Private Holdings, 1966

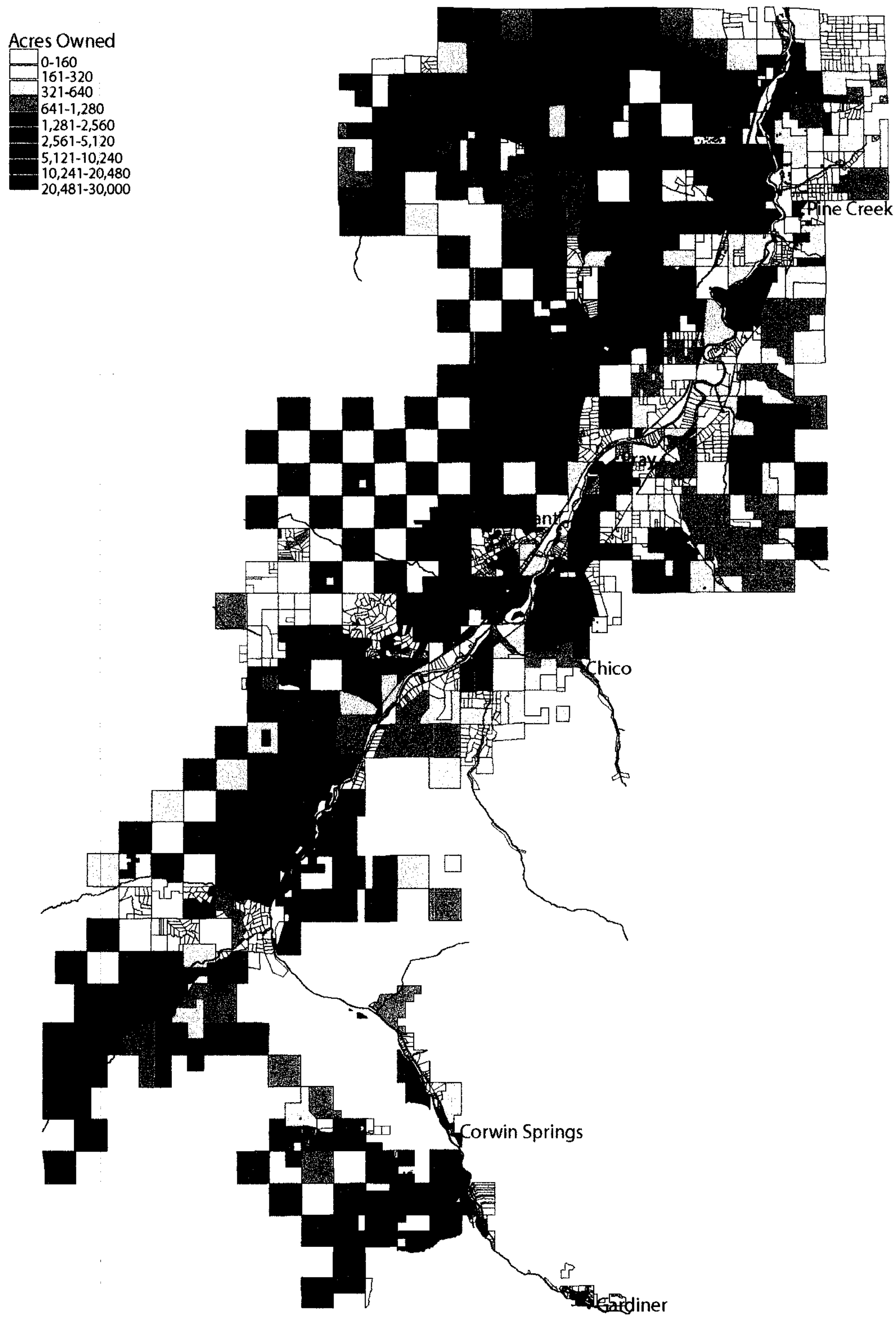
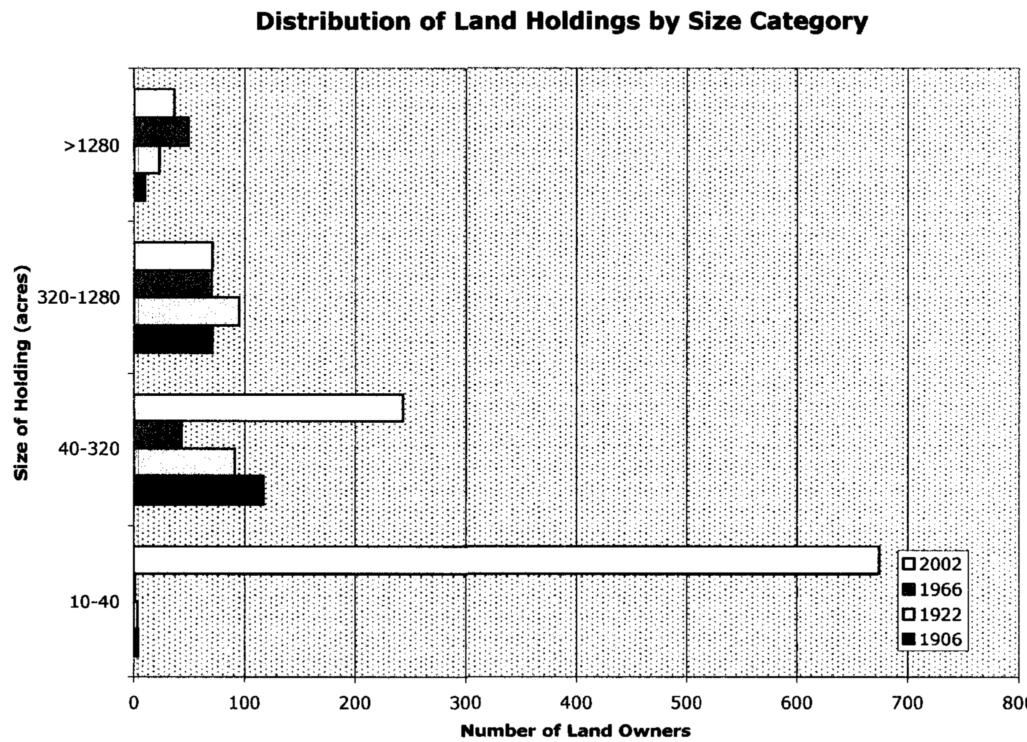


Figure 2.5d. Size of Private Holdings, 2002

Gradations of the color red in the four maps relate to the amount of land held by a given land owner. The maps a general trend of continually advancing of consolidation in land holdings during the period between 1906 and 1966. Figure 2.6, the chart below, provides another way of observing this trend. In particular, it shows a regular decline in the number of land holders who owned between 40 and 320 acres from 1906 to 1966. Correspondingly, the number of land owners in the 320- to 1280-acre size category expanded between 1906 and 1923, though it dropped between 1923 and 1966. One explanation for this decline from 1923 to 1966 may be the doubling of the number of landowners holding more than 1280 acres in the period from 1923 to 1966.



Source: 2002 CAMA/NRIS parcel info, 1906, 1922, and 1966 maps from Park County.

Figure 2.6. Distribution of Land Holdings in Four Size Categories.

Table 2.2, below, shows this information in a different format. Consider the percentage of the population involved in mid- and large-scale land ownership over time. While close to half of the landowners were located on mid-sized properties (320 to 1280 acres) in 1923 and 1966, that number fell by more than half between 1966 and 2002. In addition, while 1966 demonstrated the greatest amount of land consolidation, with eight percent of the land in holding larger than 1,280 acres, as time moved on, the stratification among size categories of ownership was exacerbated. In 2002, only four percent of landowners owned more than 1,280 acres, compared to thirty percent in that category in 1966, evidence of the dramatic land tenure changes wrought in the post-1970 period. For the area's largest ranches that escaped subdivision, the trend was toward even more consolidation leaving fewer individuals comprising the large-land owning sector.

	1906		1923		1966		2002	
Size of holding (acres)	Pop.	Land	Pop.	Land	Pop.	Land	Pop.	Land
10-40	2%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	66%	6%
40-320	58%	24%	43%	9%	26%	3%	24%	11%
320-1280	35%	49%	45%	43%	43%	17%	7%	18%
>1280	5%	27%	11%	49%	30%	80%	4%	64%

Table 2.2. Consolidation Trends as Percentage of Landowner Population and Total Land.

Additionally, Figure 2.6 and Table 2.2 both show the dramatic effect of subdivisions on ownership patterns between 1966 and 2002. The development of rural subdivisions in the Gardiner Basin and up and down Paradise Valley accounts for the explosion of land owners in the Upper Yellowstone between 1966 and 2002. The great majority of new rural land owners landed on parcels smaller than 40 acres.[36] Many others acquired small ranches or parts of ranches, hence the reversal of the trend in the number of land owners in the 40- to 320-acre category after 1966 from decline to increase. The choices of new landowners are visible in the failure of the numbers of landowners in the two largest size categories to grow.

[36] In order to keep the comparison with earlier land ownership maps viable, I did not include parcels smaller than 10 acres, excluding all of the valley's townspeople as well as some of the most dense subdivisions.

Current Pattern

Using a GIS to assess land ownership records in 2002 in the Upper Yellowstone area, I studied roughly 511,000 acres of land between the Park boundary and the southern reaches of the Eightmile and Elbow Creek drainages. A total of 142,213 acres are in private ownership, distributed among 1,256 land owners.[37] In this case, the data include residents of towns like Emigrant and Gardiner

Looking at the amount of land in the hands of large ranch owners, the degree of consolidation seems especially striking. The seven landowners who each own more than five thousand acres of private land control more than forty-five percent of the total private land in the area. The eighteen landowners who own between 1,000 and 5,000 acres of land control 23% of the total private land. Thus, twenty five landowners (about two percent of all of the land owners) control over 80,000 acres, or 78% of the private land.

The remaining 22% of the private land area that is claimed in units smaller than 1,000 acres belongs to the 98% of the landowners. Named subdivisions or towns are home to 658 of these landowners (though this does not include the many other landowners whose property is small lots designed through certificate of survey or unnamed subdivisions). Of all of the land owners, 702, or 56% of the total, own lots that are in the one-half to twenty-acre size category. Just 14% of the landowners claim a lot that is smaller in size than one-half acre.

All together, during its first seventy-five years, ranching in the Upper Yellowstone encompassed a diversity of activities that developed in response to changing local and national markets. The post-World War II period differed significantly from the years leading up to it because it featured relatively little diversity among ranch operations and until recently, a tendency toward consistency in

[37] Parcel data were obtained from the MT Natural Resource Information System on 7/27/2003 and were last updated 12/2002. Errors in these totals include a known 2,000 acre-area in T6SR9E that has not been digitized. I used name and mailing address to differentiate among land owners.

ranching practices between generations. While a few dairy operations hung on into the late twentieth century, by and large, after World War II ranching in the Upper Yellowstone referred only to cow-calf production and came less and less to feature farming and gardening oriented toward self-sufficiency as part of regular ranch work. In the fields, ranchers invested in labor-saving machinery that made them more productive, while the sizable investments demanded by such upgrades tended to diminish their cash flow. They began to approach cattle production more scientifically after the 1950s, relying more and more on performance testing and other forms of quantifying the productivity of individual genetic strains.

Despite the many efforts by ranchers to become more productive, the economic viability of livestock production at the scale possible in the Upper Yellowstone—together with family-scale agriculture nation-wide—entered into a serious decline after 1960.[38] At the same time, the popularity of the West as a recreation and tourism destination surged. The Paradise Valley and Gardiner Basin witnessed the arrival of wealthy investors who sought to own a ranch and enjoy, but not live, on a ranch. The valley became a "discovered" paradise once again, only now the name referred to scenery and recreational opportunities, not to the mild winters that are easy on livestock. Together, these forces provided a powerful incentive for full-time ranchers to sell their land and relocate their operations, or for retired ranchers to liquidate their estates. Skyrocketing land values put land acquisition from livestock proceeds completely out of reach. An individual's ability to harness labor and technology mattered far less than his access to capital.

The turnover in ranches that began in the 1960s with a few sales of large properties to absentee owners accelerated in the 1970s and 1980s. During this period, many buyers were speculators and developers. The resulting conversion of ranchland into small residential parcels greatly altered the land use character of the Upper

[38] Sara D. Short, *Characteristics and Production Costs of U. S. Cow-Calf Operations* (Washington, D. C.: USDA Economic Research Service, 2001), 974-3.

Yellowstone area. At the onset of the 1990s, ranches remained a prominent feature on the landscape, but most shared fences with the forty-, twenty- and five-acre lots of sprawling rural subdivisions. In the 1990s, an acceleration in the interest in large ranch properties by absentee, amenity-oriented buyers shifted the local real estate dynamics somewhat—creating competition with developers and speculators for the purchase of existing ranches. The 1990s witnessed the addition of a handful of new absentee owners on some of the area's largest ranches while housing developments continued to diminish the overall standing of ranching in the land use mix. The handful of ranch owners whose tenure predates 1970 and who remain in the Upper Yellowstone area—and who lack substantial outside sources of capital—subsidize their operations with non-cattle income, earned on or off the ranch.[39]

Nelson Story's descendants are still ranching in the Upper Yellowstone on land acquired by Nelson Story's son in 1917. (Though he utilized pasture in the Upper Yellowstone Valley, Nelson Story actually based his ranch operations in the nearby Gallatin Valley.) It is possible that the black Angus that currently live on the Story Ranch carry in their genes some hint of a connection to the longhorns that were the first cattle that grazed in the Upper Yellowstone in 1866. In fact, much of the modern Story Ranch can be read as a collection of memorabilia and artifacts that help to describe the evolution of ranching in the Upper Yellowstone. Peter Story, retired state senator and rancher and Nelson Story's great-grandson, maintains a large collection of restored surreys, wagons, and early automobiles from the days when the Story family lived "liberally" in grand style—luxuries that evaporated two generations ago. The mounted head of a greyhound that decorates the wall above Peter Story's desk makes a slightly more macabre but altogether vivid reference to the past; the dog was used by Story's grandfather to rid the ranch of wolves and coyotes. Jeep trails used to transport hunters to high-elevation meadows and stocked fish

[39] Economic Research Service United States Department of Agriculture, *Commodity Costs and Returns Studies, 1987, 1992, and 1997*(1997, accessed 10/31 2003); available from http://www.ers.usda.gov/Data/CostsAndReturns/testpick.htm.

ponds bespeak the turn toward a recreational economy made by the Story family in the 1980s. The pages that follow concern the whole sweep of time between Nelson Story's first use of the Upper Yellowstone as pasture and the Story Ranch of the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER III

PENCILING OUT: THE BUSINESS OF RANCHING

> *Ours was a deeply two-hearted way of life, tied on the one hand to the country and its isolations and seasons and animals, and on the other to town and money and numbers.*
>
> -William Kittredge[1]

In 1881, Robert E. Strahorn, a booster affiliated with the Great Northern Railroad, traveled to the Yellowstone region and Montana to make a survey of its economic potential. He identified ranching as a route that newcomers to Montana might take to great fortune and success. He expressed his confidence about ranching with no shortage of exuberance:

> The ranchman of Montana ... is an honorable, thrifty and independent nobleman, with prosperous crops, and always a hundred or more cattle or horses upon his range to swell his bank account. He frequently has a well selected library, and he can in some instances show you a thousand-dollar piano, and very often some other musical instrument of value. He hires his labor at from $30 to $45 per month, lives liberally, markets his products, watches his brands and round-up.[2]

While Strahorn's obligations to sell railroad fares undoubtedly colored his impressions, it was indeed true that for those who timed their entry into ranching properly, the late 1860s and 1870s provided tremendous opportunities to profit in livestock ownership. Nelson Story amassed an impressive fortune during this period in ranching as well as other enterprises. He rose quickly to an elite class whose aristocratic trappings, like the lavish mansion Story built on Bozeman's Main Street in the 1880s, comported with Strahorn's depiction of the gentrified life of the rancher.[3]

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[1] William Kittredge, *Hole in the Sky: A Memoir* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 195.

[2] Strahorn, Robert, Excerpt from *Montana and Yellowstone National Park*, published 1881. Quoted in Merrill G. Burlingame, *The Montana Frontier*, 1980 Reprint ed. (Bozeman, MT: Big Sky Books, Montana State University, 1942). 346.

[3] Phyllis Smith, *Bozeman and the Gallatin Valley: A History* (Helena, MT: TwoDot, 1996). 142.

In 1892 Story reportedly sold "13,000 head of cattle, ...one of the largest transactions in livestock recorded in the history of northwest ranching."[4] In the 1880s and for many decades afterwards, Story's successes—shown by his mansion, the street named for him, his extensive land holdings, and celebrations of his accomplishments in newspapers and history texts—embodied the promise of ranching in the Upper Yellowstone and southwestern Montana. While Story was unique in the extent of his success, he was not alone in practicing an economic model based on profiting from the availability of "free" grass and ripe markets.

Because Story's success hinged on a particular combination of circumstances, however, his model of ranching was difficult to replicate. It became increasingly unachievable as the years progressed. While some ranchers in the Paradise Valley and nearby areas successfully built up large ranch operations in the late nineteenth century, many of their contemporaries and successors were much less fortunate. In reality, the promise of achieving prodigious fortunes like Story's evaporated almost as soon as it had appeared. The major depressions that visited the agricultural economy as if on a generational schedule—first in the 1890s and again in the 1920s and 1930s all but insured that ranching would never again deliver the kind of life described by boosters like Strahorn and lived by Nelson Story. Indeed, for seventy-five years following Story's introduction of cattle to the Upper Yellowstone, ranchers encountered an economic environment whose primary characteristic was volatility: livestock markets showed a tendency to bust as often as they boomed. Throughout those years, however, most ranchers proved reluctant to abandon livestock production. Even as they were forced to turn to other ways of making a living, most ranchers maintained a livestock operation as if to keep the door open in case the promise of the 1860s and 1870s reemerged. Images of success celebrated almost

[4] *Progressive Men of the State of Montana*, (Chicago: A. G. Bowen & Co, 1900), 1257.

ritualistically in local and regional popular culture buoyed their optimistic faith in the economic opportunities of livestock production.

Since the 1950s, livestock markets have been less volatile than they were between the 1870s and 1930s, but unfortunately, their greatest consistency has been in the gradual erosion of profits for producers. In the second half of the twentieth century—as in previous periods of economic difficulty—those ranchers who managed to survive were willing to exploit non-traditional avenues of supporting themselves. Reflecting a change from past decades, however, as non-traditional sources of income became evermore routine and important, some ranchers found it difficult to rationalize the level of commitment and dependence on livestock sales that previous generations maintained. During the last three decades of the twentieth century, ranchers found that the strategies that had worked to maintain previous generations were insufficient in the face of radical changes in the local economy. This discovery prompted an important cultural shift in the ways that the ranchers who remained in the area conceptualized and achieved success. Familial continuity—just keeping the ranch in the family—assumed a heightened importance in this recent period, at the same time that many ranchers made significant adjustments to their operational practices.

This chapter explores the ways ranchers of the Upper Yellowstone weathered unpredictable, often hostile economic circumstances both when livestock production was—for better or for worse—the primary source of income from the 1870s through the 1960s; and since the 1970s, when ranching has been a relatively small component of the local economy. A detailed overview of the national and regional economic trends in livestock markets opens the chapter, followed by a description of the specific strategies that ranchers deployed in response to economic hurdles. I argue that as a result of circumstance as well as rancher's ingenuity, many of the strategies that helped ranchers maintain their viability in the early period of ranch establishment continued to be serviceable in the 1950s and 1960s, even as ranching changed significantly. More recently, however, the ongoing recreation boom first sparked in the 1970s has so affected the local economy that existing, well-worn business practices have proven less useful to ranchers in recent years and ranchers have reformed their operations and cultural practices in this new context.

Two themes that run throughout this chapter link into the larger project of documenting the evolution in the meaning and practice of ranching as it defined the local cultural and physical landscape. Throughout the chapter, I point out the interplay between strategies for economic survival and the ways that ranchers understood and practiced interdependence at a local level. I attempt to show how historical dynamics mitigated the effectiveness of particular economic strategies and by extension changed the ways that the members of the ranching community perceived their relationships to their neighbors. In addition, I argue that memory and a sense of obligation to particular narratives of the past played a powerful role in the ways that ranchers perceived their economic circumstances. I am particularly interested in how ranchers developed versions of local and family histories that reinvented what were ostensibly narratives of declension into exemplars of continuity and progress. The ability to effect this narrative conversion of circumstance has enabled livestock production to persist in its dominance in the cultural landscape of ranching even while it has utterly failed as an economic rationale. However, the chapter's conclusion, which focuses on the decade of the 1990s, suggests that this resolution is a tenuous one, and one that appears to be increasingly compromised by economic developments on the local landscape.

Overview: Market Trends

The success or failure of ranchers in the Upper Yellowstone historically hinged on striking a balance between two factors: their costs of operation and the prices at which they sold their products. Early livestock ranchers in the Great Plains and foothills of the Rocky Mountains featured few operational costs because ranchers utilized open range grazing practices, allowing their cattle to fend for themselves and thereby eliminating most costs beyond the labor associated with the oversight of the animals (which was very minimal for cattle) and the cost of investing in cattle or sheep in the first place. The open range system proved to be unsustainable because it overlooked critical environmental and climatic factors.[5] Nonetheless the open range period, from the 1860s to the 1880s, enabled some operators to amass substantial fortunes—many of which were lost in the disastrous winter of 1887. As base ranching, namely the system of ranching involving growing winter feed on deeded land and utilizing a delineated area (public land, private land, or some combination of the two) as pasture, took over in the Mountain West after 1887, the primary operating costs on most ranches were the cost of land and livestock. On larger cattle ranches and sheep ranches the cost of hired labor was an additional important cost. Labor shortages as well as spikes in the value of land thus had significant effects on the viability of ranch operations in addition to markets. As the nature of ranch work evolved to incorporate increasingly sophisticated farming and animal husbandry techniques, operating costs have increased substantially. However, since the 1920s—when the problem of agricultural overproduction emerged as a chronic ailment of the U. S. agricultural economy, the ranch operator has seldom been able to pass the cost of producing livestock onto consumers or even cattle and sheep buyers.

Three major milestones mark the history of cattle production and sales in southwestern Montana. The first was the shift from local to national markets prompted by the completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad in 1883. Prior to that date, local markets such as mining camps, military installations, and Indian agencies played a central role in the ranching economy of the Upper Yellowstone and

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[5] See Robert H. Fletcher, *From Free Grass to Fences: The Montana Cattle Range Story* (New York: University Publishers Inc. for the Montana Historical Society, 1960).

neighboring regions. In the 1860s and 1870s, individuals competed for access to exclusive contracts to supply such local markets. Producers were highly vulnerable to local developments such as the relocation of a military base or Indian agency, circumstances that made cattle growers restless for the arrival of the railroad, which they hoped would provide greater stability in marketing options.[6] From the 1880s onward, Montana cattle were sold primarily in national markets. Of course, as William Cronon explains so clearly in *Nature's Metropolis*, the arrival of the railroad was hardly a guarantee of economic security for livestock producers.[7] Ranchers traded the eccentricities of local markets for the vagaries of national commodities markets as well as the pains of dealing with a vendor—the NPRR—which had no competitors. Because of the dominance of the Northern Pacific Railroad in Montana, the stockyards in Chicago received the majority of cattle shipped from the state's ranches. Livestock operators had little choice but to focus on national markets. The number of animals produced in southwestern Montana exceeded the demand from local markets soon after the genesis of livestock raising in the territory.[8]

[6] These dilemmas led Nelson Story and other early entrepreneurs to mount the Yellowstone Wagon Road and Prospecting Expedition headed from Bozeman to Billings through the country of the Yellowstone River claimed by Crow, Cheyenne, and Sioux people in 1875. The expedition resulted in the death of many Sioux people, but no obvious improvement in the marketing opportunities for local producers. Smith., 135-136.

[7] William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991).

[8] In 1890, the earliest date for which county-level population data are available, cattle in Park County outnumbered people by 6 to 1. At that ratio, every man, woman and child in the county would need to buy and consume 1500 pounds of beef per year, a figure that would set each person to eating roughly four pounds of beef a day. This is a fanciful calculation to be sure, and one that oversimplifies the definition of local markets. It nonetheless makes it patently clear that cattle had to be an export crop. Montana Census and Economic Information Center, accessed online, and Department of Interior, Census Office. Report on the Statistics of Agriculture in the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890. Washington D.C.: GPO, 1895.

Another important development concerned the age at which cattle were sold. Prior to the 1920s, ranchers throughout Montana primarily marketed adult cattle destined directly for slaughter. A typical steer or dry cow sent to slaughter was four or five years old. As the practice of feeding and fattening young cattle on grain took hold in the Midwest in the 1920s, cattle from the mountain states began to lose ground at market. The rangier cattle of the Mountain West claimed less at sales than corn-fed animals that had spent part of their life in a feedlot. In order to remain competitive, many ranches converted their operation to cow-calf production in the 1930s, meaning that they sold an annual crop of calves to farmers in the Midwest rather than selling mature cattle directly to the slaughterhouses. The shift to cow-calf production affected many aspects of ranch operations. From the perspective of the bottom line, ranchers and ranch economists hoped for benefits from a regular yearly turnover in their product as well as from reducing the costs and risks involved in relying on a single crop of animals harvested every few years. By reorienting their sales toward feeders, however, ranchers took on an entirely new form of risk.[9] After the 1930s, the forces affecting feeders—the cost of grain and corn production—gained a role in dictating the prices that ranchers received, linking the fortunes of cow-calf producers to what emerged after World War II as one of the most complex, heavily regulated sectors of American agriculture.

The development of trucking after World War II as an alternative to railroad shipments constitutes the third critical milestone in the development of cattle sales in Montana and its Upper Yellowstone region. Agricultural researchers at the Montana State College Experiment Station noted in 1946 an increase in the use of auction

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[9] P. S. Eckert and P. L. Slagsvold, *Montana Cattle Shipments: Sources, Destinations, and Character of Montana's Cattle Shipments* (Bozeman, MT: Montana State College Agricultural Experiment Station, 1938), Bulleting No. 329., 9.

yards by cattle producers.[10] Rather than shipping cattle to national markets, like Chicago, in the 1940s producers began to sell at regional auctions saving the freight costs of dealing with the railroad. Buyers at auction yards consisted of feeders from the Midwest or buyers who would resell the cattle to feeders elsewhere. Trucking also prompted the spread of the practice of "order buying," conducted at auctions but more typically at the ranch itself, in which a middleman would negotiate a contract with the rancher on behalf of a buyer, earning a commission for himself. A lack of competition among order buyers created a difficult situation for ranchers in the 1950s and 1960s as they found themselves at the mercy of a handful of individuals whom ranchers felt could essentially set prices, which was a valid concern. In recent years, ranchers have witnessed the development of alternatives such as the internet-based live video auction which exposes a rancher's product to the entire world; however, a fundamental circumstance has not changed. Since the advent of national-scale cattle sales, ranchers have long participated in an economic system in which—like many producers of raw materials—they were separated from the ultimate consumer of their product by many intermediary steps, processes, and costs.

The sheep industry experienced fewer major changes in the ways that producers marketed animals. It did not witness the switch from local to national market orientations because it emerged as an industry after the arrival of the railroad. From the beginning of large-scale sheep ranching in Montana, wool and lamb were transported on the railroad and sold at national markets. Sheep ranchers always harvested an annual lamb crop as well; they never made such a radical shift in production as cattlemen did when they switched from selling adult cattle to selling calves.[11]

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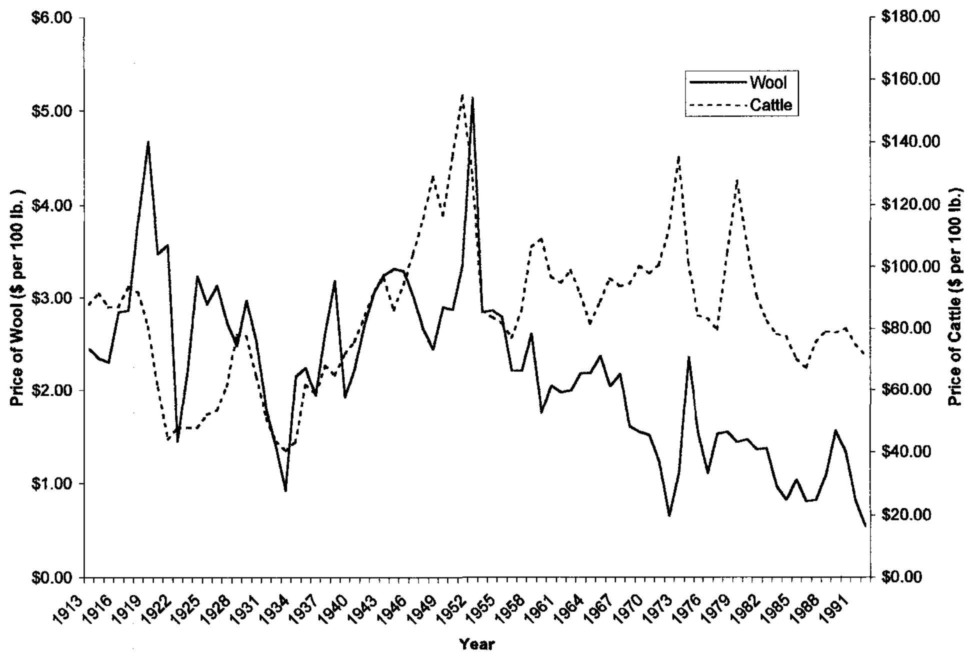
[10] Harold F. Hollands and Allen Clark, *Livestock Auction Markets in Montana* (Bozeman, MT: Montana State College Agricultural Experiment Station, 1948), Bulletin No. 451.

[11] Mont H. Saunderson, *Western Stock Ranching* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1950).

Yet sheep and cattle ranchers both experienced markets that were characterized by volatility and by long-term decline in the twentieth century, although the specific timing of market cycles differed by industry. In 1936, ranch economist Mont Saunderson published a study of commercial livestock trends for the whole state of Montana during the period 1890 to 1935. His study noted that "farm and ranch prices and market prices of the principal classes of Montana livestock and livestock products have fluctuated widely over a period of years." Describing the trends, Saunderson specifically identified three periods when cattle values were consistently increasing: from 1897 to 1904, from 1912 to 1919, and between 1922 and 1929. During the intervening years, there were episodes of dramatic decreases in prices, particularly in 1920 and 1921 and again in 1930 and the early years of the Depression.[12] Describing the value of wool, Saunderson observed that values were relatively low between 1890 and 1905, but had experienced radical surges in value between 1917 and 1919 and again between 1923 and 1928. As with cattle prices, however, for every boom in sheep prices there were corresponding downward adjustments, the most dramatic of which occurred between 1919 and 1922, while the loss in value between 1929 and 1932 was also severe.[13]

[12] Mont H. Saunderson, *A Study of the Trends of Montana Livestock Numbers, Prices, and Profits* (Bozeman, Montana: Montana State College Agricultural Experiment Station, 1936), Bulletin No. 329.

[13] Alexander McGregor's comprehensive history of his family's ranching enterprise in southeastern Washington describes sheep markets in great detail. He observes that sheep ranchers who found themselves in heavy debt in the 1919 post-war depression were much more likely to fail than those who had expanded earlier or were not significantly leveraged. He also notes that "even established outfits found their costs inflated and their markets uncertain in 1919 and 1920." A variety of factors related to production "indicated that the days of inexpensive sheep raising had ended." A significant difference between the McGregor operation and operations in southwest Montana is that early on—at the same time that they experienced and profited from the sheep and wool boom of the 1905-1920 period—the McGregors developed a substantial wheat farming enterprise, as they were located in the breadbasket area of the Palouse region. That diversification was a key to their expansion to be one of the largest agribusinesses in the Northwest for most of the twentieth century. Alexander Campbell McGregor, *Counting Sheep: From Open Range to Agribusiness on the Columbia Plateau* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1982), 152.



Source: National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Figure 3.1. National Average Prices for Cattle and Wool, 1913-1991 (adjusted for inflation to 1992 dollar)

While the strong domestic economy after World War II helped ranchers recover from the Depression, markets continued to behave unpredictably in subsequent decades. Figure 1 charts the average national prices for wool and cattle between 1913 and 1991. Using the 1992 dollar as the standard, the values have been adjusted for inflation based on the Consumer Price Index.[14] What the chart shows is a stark economic reality for the industry of cow-calf and sheep producers for most of the twentieth century. In 1992, cattle claimed less in adjusted dollar value at market than in 1913, despite the fact that producers had assumed exponentially higher costs during the latter period. The value of one hundred pounds of wool in 1991 was even more radically depressed relative to its 1913 status, having dropped from $2.45 to 85 cents.

[14] I used the consumer price index calculator available through the NASA web site. http://www.jsc.nasa.gov/bu2/inflateCPI.html

In the meantime, both industries experienced a series of booms and busts and corresponding cycles of prosperity and struggle, reproducing the variability in ranchers' economic circumstances documented in Saunderson's study of the 1890 to 1935 period. Both World War II and to a greater extent the Korean War (which created a demand for wool for military uniforms) positively influenced wool prices. 1952 produced the best value for sheep producers in the history of the industry, with wool selling for 97 cents per pound, or $5.17 in 1992 dollars. Subsequently, the value of wool has continued to decline, although the 1970s and 1980s produced short-lived price increases. The early 1950s created a fabulous boom for cattle ranchers, as a result of the return of consumers to the grocery stores and dinner tables as the economy improved after the end of World War II. As with sheep, cattle reached their all-time high value in the 1950s, commanding $28.70 per hundredweight in 1951, more than triple the 1941 value of $8.82. Once again, however, bust followed boom, and the price of cattle slid in the late 1950s to about half of its 1951 value (in 1992 dollars). Since 1960, the price of cattle has stalled, hovering around an average value about $85 cwt (1992 dollars), however the industry did experience several notable peaks. The first two occurred in the 1970s—from 1970 to 1973 and between 1977 and 1979. The third increase took place in between 1986 and 1988.

Saunderson's study also documented the relationship between the cost of operation and income from livestock between 1890 and 1933. His study hinged on the obvious assumption that prices mattered to ranchers only relative to the costs of operation. Therein the economist identified in the period 1890 to 1933 the fundamental dilemma for ranchers throughout the twentieth century. In his words, "[t]here are three periods ... when it has not been generally possible to reduce operating costs rapidly enough to avoid losses."[15] Saunderson's observations continued to ring true in the decades after the 1940s: increases in costs outpaced

[15] Saunderson, *A Study of the Trends of Montana Livestock Numbers, Prices, and Profits*, 19.

income gains, heightening the exposure of ranchers to dramatic market fluctuations.[16] In 1960, the average farming and ranching family in Montana spent more than three times as much as their counterparts in 1940 had on farm machinery. The costs of family living increased at a similar rate.[17] The amount of money that families spent on interest payments decreased between the 1930s and 1940s thanks to the advent of federally-brokered loans introduced as part of the New Deal. However, as families expanded their machinery and other costs, they borrowed more heavily. Interest payments increased exponentially during the 1960s and 1970s, doubling between 1960 and 1965, then doubling again in the years between 1965 and 1975.[18]

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[16] Chief among Saunderson's concerns was the tendency for ranchers to invest borrowed capital in land when markets were strong only to find themselves penalized by high interest rates when markets were poor. The introduction of federally-guaranteed, low-interest loans helped to alleviate the risks associated with borrowing money to expand land. However, other costs increased to fill whatever void was created by the reduction of interest rates.

[17] The specific categories from which the cumulative value for "family living" is derived include "food and tobacco, auto and auto supplies, clothing and dry goods, building materials, furniture and furnishing, and household operation." Census of Agriculture.

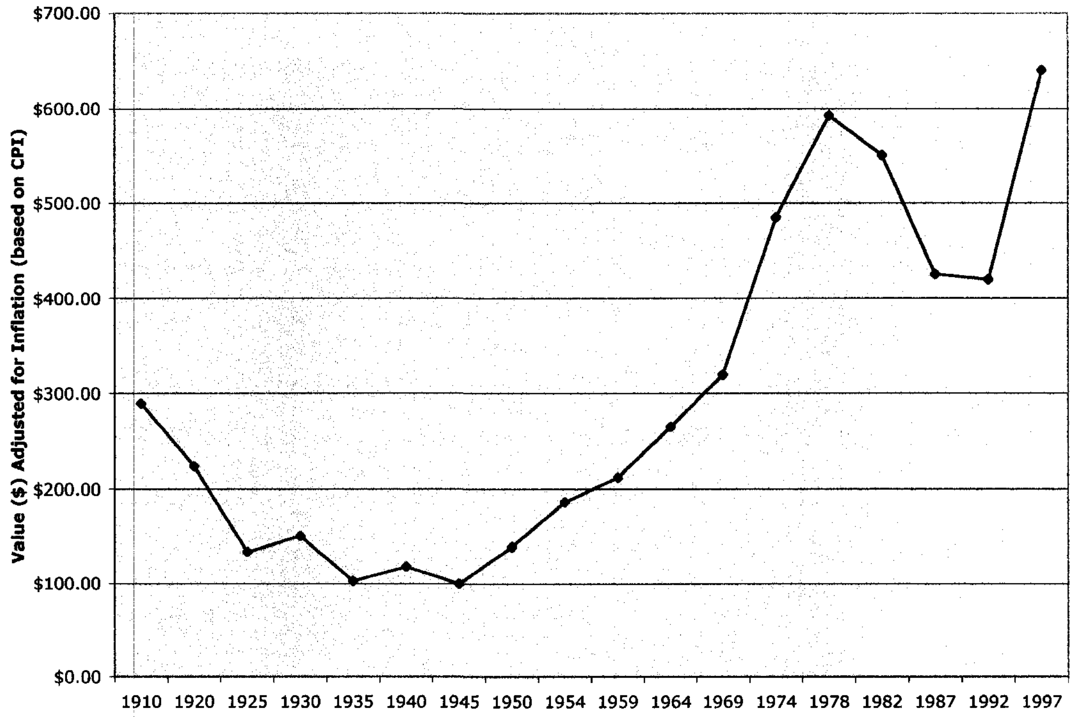
[18] From Maurice C. Taylor, *Prices Received and Prices Paid by Montana Farmers and Ranchers, 1959-1968* (Bozeman, MT: Montana State College Agricultural Experiment Station, 1970), Bulletin No. 636, Revised, Maurice C. Taylor, P.J. Creer, and Lyman Wallin, *Prices Received by Montana Farmers and Ranchers, 1910-1952* (Bozeman, MT: Montana State College Agricultural Experiment Station, 1954), Bulletin No. 503, Maurice C. Taylor, R. I. Creer, and Lyman Wallin, *Prices Received and Prices Paid by Montana Farmers and Ranchers, 1952-1954* (Bozeman, MT: Montana State College Agricultural Experiment Station, 1955), Maurice C. Taylor, Daniel L. Herbert, and K. Rudy Suta, *Prices Received and Prices Paid by Montana Farmers and Ranchers, 1964-1974* (Bozeman, MT: Montana State College Agricultural Experiment Station, 1975), Bulletin No. 636.

Year	Feed	Motor vehicles	Farm machinery	Interest	All Family Living
1935	52.5	52.5	58	249	56.5
1940	43	57	61.25	140	55.25
1945	46	52	62	80	73
1950	97	110	116	125	105
1955	--	--	--	--	--
1960	92	150	164	355	126
1965	87	167	184	704	133
1970	88	182	219	1208	156
1974	191	245	340	1472	223

Sources: Various indexes to prices paid and received by Montana farmers and ranchers published by the Montana State Agricultural Extension. From Maurice C. Taylor, *Indexes of Prices Paid by Montana Farmers and Ranchers* (Bozeman, MT: Montana State College, 1953), Bulletin 492, Taylor, *Prices Received and Prices Paid by Montana Farmers and Ranchers, 1959-1968,* Taylor, Creer, and Wallin, *Prices Received by Montana Farmers and Ranchers, 1910-1952,* Taylor Herbert, and Suta, *Prices Received and Prices Paid by Montana Farmers and Ranchers, 1964-1974.*

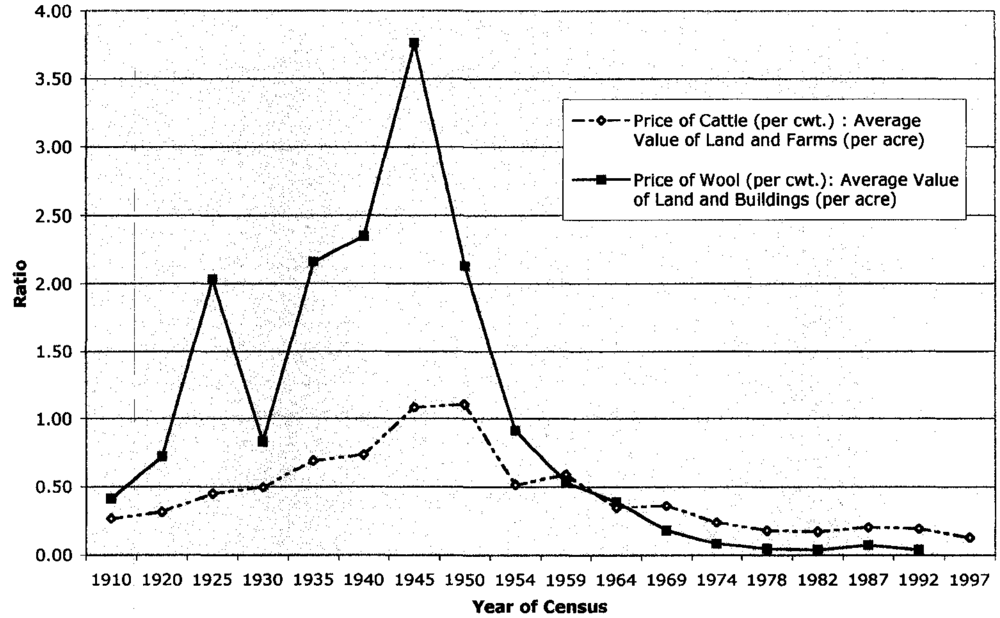
Table 3.1. Index to Prices Paid by Montana Farmers and Ranchers, 1935 to 1974 (1947-1949=100)

Both as a cost and as a measure of the value of a ranch owners' investment, land values provide an important window into the changing economic fortunes of ranchers in the Upper Yellowstone. The federal Agricultural Census has published data describing the average per acre value of farms, including land, buildings and equipment, since 1880. The county-level data reveal periods of boom and bust in land values, some of which correlate with livestock prices, while some periods reflect dynamics in other markets (namely real estate). In 1880, when speculation accompanied the anticipation of the railroad, Gallatin County boasted a $16 per acre value of land and farms. Ten years later, the figure in Park County (which was carved out of Gallatin County in 1887) was $9.37 per acre. Values declined again between 1890 and 1900, but after that, the homesteading boom of the period 1905 to 1910 pushed prices up again, from $6.42 per acre to $16.04 per acre. The following two figures consider the bulk of the twentieth century, illustrating first the changing value of land and buildings alone (Figure 3.2) and second the per acre worth of farms and buildings relative to the prices of beef and wool (Figure 3.3). (Both charts show inflation adjusted values based on 1997 dollars.)



Source: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, "Prices Received by Farmers: Historic Prices & Indexes, 1908-1992.

Figure 3.2. Average Values Land & Buildings per Acre, Park County, 1910-1997.



Source: USDA - National Agricultural Statistics Service, "Prices Rec'd by Farmers: Historic Prices & Indexes 1908-1992."

Figure 3.3. Ratios of Value: Cattle and Wool Prices and Value of Land and Buildings, Park County

Figure 3.2 charts the average value of land and buildings on ranches and farms in Park County as a per acre value. Ranch and farm values in Park County declined after the end of the 1900s homesteading boom, reaching an all time low in 1945. Values ascended steadily during the late forties through the 1960s and skyrocketed in the early 1970s, evidence of a period of major speculation fueled both by trends in the agricultural markets and the recreational land markets. A period of adjustment followed, with farms and losing value until the 1990s, when a second period of investment-oriented buying occurred.

Figure 3.3 considers land values in relation to livestock prices, charting the changing ratio between the per acre value of farms and buildings and the average national prices of beef and wool. Figure 3.3 illustrates clearly the shifting horizon of economic possibilities that greeted different generations of ranchers in Park County.

The financial history of the Bullis Creeek Ranch under three generations of ownership by the Brawner family between 1919 to 1997 provides another illustration of this dynamic.

Robert Brawner purchased the ranch in 1919 from George Allen, who established the ranch from a homestead claim in 1881. Allen developed the property from a few hundred to several thousand acres during his tenure. In 1919, markets were good; Robert Brawner's negotiations with George Allen took into consideration Branwer's success in the sheep industry. He and his sons operated a ranch on Mission Creek west of Livingston. While the specific terms of the 1919 agreement are unclear, mortgage records from 1927, when the deal finally made it to paper, suggest that Brawner had agreed to pay a high price for the Allen place.[19] In 1927, two separate loan agreements show that Brawner mortgaged the property to George Allen's widow and son as well as to a Montana life insurance company for a total of $50,000.[20]

When the inflated 1919 price tag of the Allen ranch encountered the collapse of the sheep industry in the late 1920s and 1930s, Robert and Herbert Brawner became classic examples of the financial crunch that Mont Saunderson described in his 1936 study. In 1935, Robert Brawner relinquished the Allen property in a sheriff's sale to Prudential Life Insurance, one of his creditors. The price tag was just $16,225.29, a fraction of the value of Brawner's 1927 mortgage obligations on the property and evidence of a massive depreciation in value. However, the Brawners continued to operate and live on the ranch until Herbert's sister Nancy, who was

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[19] The sources that document the sale in 1919 are both family records and the local newspaper. If Brawner and Allen had a "gentlemen's agreement" it is not surprising that the deed transfer was not pursued formally until 1927, when it first shows up in the county land records. See Brawner family biography in Park County Historical Society, *History of Park County Montana, 1984*, ed. Doris Whithorn (Taylor Publishing Company, 1984). "Biggest Ranch Deal Swung in Long Time," *Park County News*, March 14, 1919, 12.

[20] Quentin and Anita Brawner, interview with author, tape recording, Brawner residence, Deep Creek, Park County, Montana, October 12, 2004.

married to a railroad employee and lived and worked on the ranch, could buy it back from Prudential in 1947, borrowing just $10,000 from the Federal Land Bank at low interest with an extended repayment period to do so. Herbert Brawner was a full-time veterinarian throughout his tenure as a ranch operator.[21] His profession may have helped him in the financial arrangement he made with Nancy in 1952 to buy the ranch from her on time, making yearly payments for fifteen years toward a total price of $33,000. The inter-sibling loan was interest-free and Herbert paid it off in 1961, six years ahead of schedule. Herbert became full-owner of the ranch after operating it for forty-two years, just two years before his death. Similarly, when Herbert's son Quentin took over the deed to the ranch, he had been working on the ranch for over thirty years. Wisely perhaps, Quentin Brawner seized on the deflated land values of the 1980s to make his move. He borrowed $185,000 from the Federal Land Bank in 1986, a figure which is only slightly more than what his father borrowed in 1951 when inflation is factored in to the equation.[22] Like his father, Quentin repaid his loan ahead of schedule. Paradoxically, he was able to do so only because he sold the ranch, cashing in on the recreational real estate boom of the 1990s. The sale was partly motivated by Quentin's recognition that the dramatic rise in the ranch's value would

[21] Brawner ranch mortgage and deed records include the following from Park County Clerk and Recorder Land Records, Park County Courthouse, Livingston, Montana: George J. Allen to Robert O. Brawner, 3/23/1927: Warranty Deed Book 58, Page 446; Robert O. Brawner to Montana Life Insurance, 11/23/1927, Mortgage Book 21, Page 253-4, renewed to Prudential Life Insurance 1/31/30, Mortgage Book 22, Page 312; Robert O. Brawner to Carrie Anderson and Elbert Allen, 11/23/27 and 1/31/30, Mortgage Book 21, Page 255 and Book 22, Page 315; Robert O. Brawner to Prudential Life Insurance by Sheriff's sale, 2/14/1935, Warranty Deed Book 63, Page 617; Nancy Ferrell to Federal Land Bank, 10/22/1947, Mortgage Book 30, Page 385; Herbert and Myrtle Brawner to Nancy Ferrell, 3/4/1955, Mortgage Book 40, Page 262. Neither of the two 1930s show recordings as released (which is probably accurate given that the lenders pursued foreclosure).

[22] According to the CPI calculator, the inflation index between 1951 and 1986 is 4.287. This means that Quentin Brawner borrowed $43,153.72 in 1951 dollars.

create problems for his son if Quentin were to gift or sell him the property.[23] After the sale of the ranch in 1997 to Ed Woodlee for the fabulous sum of $4.8 million, the Brawner family expanded their ranching operation in a new location, central Nebraska's Sandhills.

The Brawners' story shows just how much changed within and between generations of ranch operations in the Upper Yellowstone in the twentieth century. It also highlights both the grave difficulties and the wild windfalls that ranchers encountered in different episodes in the region's history. While boom years sometimes presented problems for operators, it was the busts that most challenged the continuity of ranching. During periods of heightened financial strain like the homesteading era and the Depression, and whenever young ranching families attempted to get started in ranching, ranchers found themselves drawing on a set of business practices that they hoped would allow them to be competitive in the livestock business.

STRUGGLING TO STAY COMPETITIVE

Ranchers like O. T. Armstrong, George Allen, L. H. Van Dyke, and Samuel Nesbit established large ranching enterprises through the savvy acquisition of land and well-timed expansion of their livestock herds during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Such models created a powerful and obvious logic—that ownership of land and livestock was the best opportunity to create individual wealth in the Upper Yellowstone region. Although ranchers suffered year-to-year changes in fortune, their circumstances in general appeared to be more solid than truck farmers or miners and more widely reproducible than the geographically-constrained tourist-oriented businesses like stage coaches and guest houses. When markets were good, it seemed

[23] The Brawners' "elk problem"—e.g. encounters with a rapidly increasing elk population on the ranch—was an equally important factor in their decision to relocate. Robert Brawner was also enthusiastic about ranching in the Sandhills for other reasons, one of which was that he was not fond of irrigating! Brawner interview.

that livestock were virtual savings accounts, paying their owners a healthy yearly dividend. The more land one owned, the more livestock one could raise, and the bigger the return each fall. The success of ranchers like Armstrong and Allen, however, hinged—like Nelson Story's success before—on a favorable balance between operating costs and livestock prices. As productive land, the most expensive investment in a ranch inventory, decreased in its availability with the onslaught of homesteaders at the opening of the twentieth century, would-be 'liberally-living" ranchmen (and women) found that economic opportunities in ranching had narrowed considerably within the course of ten or twenty years.

The many homesteaders who patented or purchased claims in the years between 1890 and 1920, after the preliminary land rush in the 1870s and 1880s, struggled hard to profit from their land. Many perceived livestock as the most likely chance to take advantage of an economy that they could see had been quite rewarding to their neighbors. Some of the people who came to ranching at the turn of the century were miners left with nothing to do but homestead when the mines and coke ovens in the Gardiner Basin and on Bozeman Pass shut down in the 1910s. Such individuals typically had no capital with which to acquire livestock. Unlike their predecessors, they faced stiff competition both at the market and for resources like pasture and water. Though they progressed through the land and livestock model at a much slower pace, they nonetheless pursued it relentlessly.[24]

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[24] Some faced more limited opportunities in terms of the productivity and viability of the land they purchased, like Joe Stands who opted to settle in what came to be known in the Stands Basin in 1893. The Stands Basin sits high above the valley floor of the Yellowstone and features arid and cold conditions and limited flat ground for irrigation. Stands, who had worked as a cook and a prospector, purchased a railroad section with a partner for $1.25. In 1907, he had 60 head of horses that provided his livelihood, a sign of some success. However, unlike some of his predecessors, Stands did not enlarge his operation significantly in subsequent years. In 1949, the land he sold to his son was limited to his original 640 acres. Doris and Bill Whithorn, *60 Miles of Photo History: Upper Yellowstone Valley* (Livingston, MT: The Park County News, 1966).

Family biographies from the period suggest that livestock constituted a cherished opportunity to participate in a cash economy. Joseph Papesh was an Austrian-born miner who worked in coal mines at Chimney Rock then for the NPRR before moving to a small ranch near Gardiner in 1923. The property he bought was small and rustic—the children crossed the Yellowstone River by cable to go to school—and the family barely scraped by in the 1920s. The family's contribution to the *History of Park County* reads, "During the first five years that they lived on the ranch, the family made their living by raising vegetables and peddling them around Gardiner with a team and a buggy. In 1928, Mr. Papesh was able to lease a section of land from the RR company, so then he went in for cattle, and quit peddling vegetables."[25] The Papesh's telling of their story makes it clear that the acquisition of cattle represented a real landmark in the family's economic horizon. Their step up depended on access to land.

The acquisition of land and cattle represented a similar milestone in the narrative of the early days on the Day Ranch on Deep Creek, settled by Olive and Claude Day in the 1910s. The family biography notes that "The Days made their 180 acres pay by diversifying, as most farmers did then. There were cattle, a small band of sheep, pigs, horses, chickens, turkeys, hay , grain, an orchard, and a garden. The big money crop was seed peas when there was enough rain and water." That farming-oriented model was similar to the "vegetable peddling" that the Papeshes tried at first. Like the Papeshes, land made a difference to the Days. Olive and Claude Day experienced an improvement in their circumstances when "they bought an adjoining section of school land ... that gave them more pasture for more cattle."[26]

In subsequent decades, young families getting started as ranchers often found themselves in circumstances that were not so different from those of their parents and

[25] Park County Historical Society. 373.

[26] Ibid. 286.

grandparents. While their material realities were never so stark as those which homesteaders experienced, newly independent ranchers in the 1950s and 1960s found that their participation in livestock production could just as easily be limited by their lack of access to land and capital as in previous generations.

Finding Access to Capital and Land: Financing and Tenancy

Lack of capital represented a fundamental obstacle for young ranchers and homesteaders who wished to pursue the land and livestock model of their predecessors, especially as productive land became increasingly difficult to acquire. Determined ranchers developed ways of circumventing their lack of capital by borrowing it or by renting land. Financing and tenancy have operated as ranching business strategies from the 1870s into the present. The particulars of financing and tenancy have nonetheless changed in important ways over the course of that history.

Prior to the 1940s, borrowing was a common way of gaining access to land and capital and it typically involved short-term loans made by local sources.[27] Summary information from mortgage records involving members of seven ranching families from the Upper Yellowstone region between the period 1895 and 1945 is presented in Table 2. Some ranchers went further out on a limb to acquire land than others. Samuel Nesbit, who eventually owned over 12,000 acres in the Paradise Valley, never borrowed any money, nor did Charles B. Scott, a large land owner in the Tom Miner Basin. (More specifically, they at least never entered into formal mortgage agreements documented in local records.) In contrast, Both Nesbit's and Scott's sons did borrow against their property. Alexander Stewart and his sons

[27] This trend is well-documented in A. C. McGregor's history of his family's large ranching and farming enterprise in southeastern Washington. He describes two ranchers who established themselves by starting out as sheepherders working on shares and borrowing from established local ranchers. "The 18 percent interest rate was standard in Montana, Colorado, and Wyoming, and several other areas at this time [the early 1880s]. The high rates reflected the chronic shortage of money and the high risk, as well as the high expectations, of agriculture in newly settled regions." McGregor, 31.

borrowed just $5,000 in the course of developing a ranch enterprise that included over 10,000 deeded acres in the 1940s. Edward Merrell, James Murphy, and Malcolm Story borrowed substantial funds during between 1905 and 1925, and debts followed these ranchers into the Depression.

	1885-1905		1905-1925		1925-1945	
	Lent	Borrowed	Lent	Borrowed	Lent*	Borrowed
Armstrong			$47,500.00		$20,766.50	
Merrell				$13,149.00		$9,500.00
Murphy				$44,118.00		$22,000.00
Nesbit	$2,066.00	$1,000.00	$7,027.70	$1,500.00	$65,320.50	
Scott			$11,850.00			$4,460.00
Stewart				$5,000.00		
Story	$43,631.00		$35,000.00	$75,257.36		$36,000.00

Family details for the time period shown are as follows: Armstrong: 2 generations, 3 ranches; Merrell, 2 generations, 1 ranch; Murphy: 2 generations, 1 ranch; Nesbit: 2 generations, 1 ranch; Scott: 2 generations, 1 ranch; Scott: 2 generations, 1 ranch; Stewart: 2 generations, 1 ranch; Story: 3 generations, 1 ranch.
*Money lent totals include extensions of previous loans.

Source: Park County Land Records. The following list describes the location of mortgage records in the Park County Land Records. Each pair of numbers joined by a colon signifies Mortgage Book:Page and the text in front describes the surname of the individual (all are known to be relatives) serving as Grantor or Grantee. Armstrong as Grantees: 24: 119; 21: 200; 22: 146; 12: 487; 21: 312; 20: 315; 11: 454; 22: 210; 22: 377; 11: 258; 12: 403; 19: 29; 19: 173; 11: 242; 12: 456; 11: 241; 11: 286; 19: 349; 11: 260; 11: 301; 23: 101; 24: 343; 23: 372; 24: 360; 22: 379; 27: 31. Merrell as Grantors: 11: 485; 14: 306; 15: 266; 19: 607; 20: 392; 20: 652; 23: 81; 26: 339. Murphy as Grantors: 3: 103; 3: 164; 25: 334; 17: 540; 43: 121; 41: 95; 39: 163; 53: 9; 8: 427; 19: 285; 19: 316; 20: 300; 34: 323. Nesbit as Grantees: 27: 265; 19: 137; 24: 558; 27: 12; 27: 11; 23: 218; 27: 266; 23: 455; 28: 550; 9: 268; 24: 86; 24: 157; 25: 295; 8: 409; 10: 1; 24: 290; 24: 557; 25: 368; 8: 410; 10: 46; 24: 152; 24: 609; 25: 373; 24: 171; 24: 325; 8: 274; 8: 225; 19: 505; 20: 583; 21: 692; 24: 153; 8: 545; 18: 226; 21: 391; 24: 424. Nesbit as Grantors: 8: 225; 9: 268; 19: 505. Scott (Charles W.) as Grantor: 27: 231; 28: 475; 34: 351; 37: 543. Scott as Grantees: 27: 231; 12: 119; 18: 249; 18: 251. Story as Grantees: 17: 549; 5: 315; 5: 368; 3: 43; 4: 537; 3: 140; 19: 285. Story as Grantors: 18: 531; 18: 533; 19: 183; 19: 261; 21: 293; 27: 135; 27: 137; 11: 258; 11: 259; 16: 306. Park County Land Records.

Table 3.2. Money Lent and Borrowed through Mortgages by 7 Ranching Families in the Upper Yellowstone, 1885-1945.

As Table 3.2 suggests, borrowing and lending among local ranchers were common practices prior to the Great Depression. Public and institutional financing sources were not available to ranchers so they maneuvered around this obstacle by pursuing local sources of capital. Many of the established ranchers who got their start during the early homesteading period played important roles as lenders to individuals who established ranches between the 1890s and the 1920s. Nelson Story lent over $43,000 between 1880 and 1910. Between 1905 to 1925, established landowners O.

T. Armstrong, Nelson Story and his son, T. B., as well as Samuel Nesbit, lent over $60,000 among some twenty individuals during these years. In most cases, the lender was simply acting as a financier of a land sale to which he was a third party (as opposed to self-financing a land sale in which the lender was the grantor, a practice that persisted in some transactions into the 1980s). Importantly, a key feature of these mortgages was that they were short in duration. Individuals typically signed a note that was intended to last for anywhere from 8 months to several years. Running as high as fifteen percent per year, interest rates were not exactly generous and there was a clear financial benefit to the lender. On the other hand, the arrangement bound lender and borrower together in a mutual interest in the borrower's success. During major economic slumps, lender and borrower alike could find themselves in difficult straits. When Samuel Nesbit died in the late 1920s, his wife, Annie Nesbit, inherited a series of debts that ultimately went unredeemed. Implicit in most local lending arrangements was the assumption that the dependency that linked the economic fortunes of neighbors together so immediately was a temporary phenomenon.[28]

A related set of strategies sought to circumvent the lack of access to capital and land (and by extension to the land and livestock model) through tenancy arrangements. This approach was commonly used by young ranchers who grew up on ranches that were too small to support two adult generations simultaneously. Rental arrangements were a particularly prevalent phenomenon during the 1920s and 1930s. Ranching on shares involved managing a ranch for an owner in return for the manager's right to use the property to house and feed his own livestock. In the

[28] Partnerships were a related strategy for ranchers to gain access to capital in the absence of institutional lenders. When Charlie Murphy sought financing to convert his sheep operation into a dude ranch (and to buy out local partners in the process) in 1929, he turned to an executive of Price Waterhouse who provided him with the $45,000 he needed. James Murphy, "Interview by Author," (2004). In fact, the Ox Yoke continued to rely on private financing over the course of the next forty or so years. James Murphy, interview by author, tape recording, Ox Yoke Ranch, Emigrant, Montana, May 23, 2004. See also James Murphy, "Sagebrush Charlie," (Self-published Manuscript, copy in author's possession: 2004).

right circumstances, an individual could accumulate a small herd of cattle or sheep while he tended the landowner's herds. At the very least, the manager had the potential to generate credit through the arrangement, as the experiences of Alexander Malcolm indicate.

Sandy—also known as Scotty Malcolm in reference to his Scottish ancestry—was born in the Paradise Valley. His parents emigrated to Melville, Montana from Scotland in the 1890s, on the trail of the booming sheep industry there and eventually landed on the banks of the Yellowstone River near Emigrant. The senior Malcolms never owned land, but leased a place on the Yellowstone River, where they raised a large family—somewhere between fourteen to seventeen children, depending on the report.[29] When Sandy, the firstborn, considered marriage, he could hardly expect to add his own family's demands to his parents' struggling enterprise.

The local doctor who had a practice based at the hospital at Chico Hot Springs, owned a nearby ranch, which for obvious reasons, he did not manage himself. Dr. Townsend hired Sandy Malcolm to manage his ranch in 1925, rewarding him by granting him shares in the herd.[30] Sandy developed Townsend's herd during five years he worked at the Townsend Ranch, the same years that witnessed the explosive inflation of values on Wall Street. In 1929, Malcolm made two trips on the Northern Pacific Railroad from Emigrant to Chicago to look after Townsend's cattle

[29] Conflicting accounts about the size of Helen and Alec Malcolm's brood lie side by side in the family biographies in the *History of Park County*. Sandy's biography notes that he had fourteen brothers and sisters, nine of whom survived. His brother Stanley's biography states that Stanley was the fifteenth child of seventeen and that there were ten children at home during his childhood. *History of Park County*, 312.

[30] One account suggests that Sandy received a cut of the herd as wages, while another suggests that Sandy simply had the option to run his own herd. In essence, though, theirs was a common arrangement that persists today, though ranch managers today receive a salary in addition to the chance to feed some of their cows on the ranch. Sandy's son Bruce was not sure if "Doc" paid Sandy any wages; he suspected not. Bruce Malcolm, interview by author, tape recording, Malcolm Ranch, Emigrant, Montana, December 14, 2002. See also *History of Park County*, 312.

on their way to sale. On the first trip, he sold the cattle at the Chicago Stockyards for record prices, prices so good that he and Townsend opted to send the rest of their herd back for a second try at the bull market. By the time he made it back to Chicago, though, the market had crashed and Malcolm and Townsend hardly broke even on the freight costs. Still, Sandy Malcolm's otherwise prudent entrepreneurship in the late 1920s paid off when a local financier judged him a solid investment and lent him the money to buy a 750-acre ranch on Mill Creek in 1931.

However, most tenancy arrangements failed to deliver the kind of upward mobility that Sandy experienced on the Townsend Ranch. This was largely because most landlords were less generous in the terms of their rental agreements than Doctor Townsend and because extreme market expansions like that of the late 1920s were few and far between. The experiences of the Sidney Busby family makes it clear that tenancy could be a lifelong arrangement that ultimately failed to give the tenant access to the ranks of land and livestock owners. Sidney Busby, who emigrated to Mill Creek Flat with his family from Wisconsin at age 6 in 1893, married Gertrude Roup, the daughter of a miner turned homesteader from the Trail Creek area, in 1912. For the first two years of their marriage, the Busbys rented a property they called the Frank Strickland place. In 1914, they attempted to homestead on dry land north of Big Timber, but failed, and returned in 1919 to live on Gertrude's parents' ranch. By this time, they had five children. Shortly thereafter, they moved to the Wiggins Ranch and a few years later back to the Frank Strickland property, followed shortly by a move to a ranch owned by the Sayers family, where they spent two years. When they moved to the Dunn ranch, sometime in the late-1920s, they had seven children. After another move to a nearby ranch, Sidney took a job in the railroad yards in Livingston. But when a doctor recommended that the family move to a location at high elevation to relieve the symptoms of a sick child, Sidney and Gertrude rented a small ranch in Six Mile Basin. Their longest tenure at a ranch followed when they returned to Gertrude's parents' ranch prompted by Gertrude's father's illness: they stayed there six years. When Gertrude's mother sold the ranch after her husband's death, Sidney moved his family to another ranch, then another, and then another. Sidney died in 1947, just two years after his last move, having worked on eleven properties in the course of his eighty-seven years of life, but never owning any land.[31]

The size of the Busby family no doubt exacerbated their difficulties. However, the basic outline of their story is not uncommon. Thomas Skillman left his home in the Shields Valley at age 20 and worked at odds jobs on ranches as well as for the railroad for four years. He married in 1926 and rented a small ranch. "By that time," Skillman reported in his autobiographical sketch in the *History of Park County,* "I owned a team of horses and three milk cows." In 1928, he rented a larger ranch, enabling him to buy beef calves, which he raised on skim milk. When the owner asked them to move they had been there five years and had thirty cows. They rented yet another ranch, on which the Skillmans "milked cows and raised some beef and got out of debt." In 1937, they moved to a different ranch and "didn't have much income." In 1941, Skillman had to move because the owner chose to rent the property to a family member. Skillman was left to pursue odd jobs for the next few years. It was not until 1946, when federal loans were made widely available to small-scale operators, that Skillman was able to get a loan to buy his parents' small ranch, which he operated for 25 years.[32] The timing is significant: local sources of third-party financing basically evaporated after the 1920s, as profit margins decreased and with them the willingness of ranch operators to take on the additional risk of lending to

[31] Park County Historical Society, 127. For all that the hardships that this moving around must have meant for the Busbys and their ten children, the existing family biographies leave no hint that the family's economic circumstances made the Busbys miserable. In fact, one daughter wrote of her parents that they never turned "bums" away without a meal and that "they were the most wonderful parents and the happiest in the world." Park County Historical Society, 126.

[32] Park County Historical Society. 435.

small-scale ranchers. The concept of mutual help had its limits, established by the reliability of the investment opportunity. Without access to credit, Skillman was unable to secure a permanent place from which to stage his entry into the land and livestock industry. His mobility left him at the margins of the market, despite his obvious determination and strong work ethic.

Skillman achieved permanence in part because of the shift from the dominance of local to institutional sources of credit in the financing arrangements of ranches that occurred between 1935 and the early 1940s as a result of New Deal policies. Just as the availability of loan money allowed Skillman to buy out his parents and escape the traps of tenancy, the shift in financing trends effected widespread changes in land tenure patterns and in the economic circumstances of many individual operators. A notable outcome was a decline in tenancy as the route of young people into ranching.

As they had for Skillman, the arrival of Farmers Home Administration (FHA) loans in the 1940s changed the horizons for many small operators dramatically. In an oral history interview, local rancher Eril Merrell described her recollection of the difficulties her parents—Ruth and Radbourne Jones—faced. The scenario she describes makes it plain what an FHA loan meant to those who had been tenants.

> When I was in the third grade [circa 1920], I lived [on a leased ranch]... Mother always wanted... to go back [to land her father had homesteaded in Arizona], so they sold everything they had. Dad bought a new car and my Dad had a Model T touring car and he tore it down and built a house deal on it. It had a bed and walls that went up so high and they had a tent that they put up in the night and that's where we slept at night. And they camped out.
>
> Anyways, that's how we went to Arizona and we spent a winter in Arizona. And times weren't very good and my folks picked cotton to make money to get back to Montana. And we arrived here in March and I went to fifth grade at the North Side school, 5th grade. And then we were in Livingston a few years and then they rented the Armstrong place at the bottom of the hill. We were there quite a few years.

> And then I got married and they bought a ranch on the river. …
>
> You know this FHA, Farmers Home Administration, they signed up for that. And they got the money, they bought 40 head of beef cows and about 14 head of dairy cows and of course pigs and all that sort of stuff—they had everything. And they milked cows and sold cream, that's what we lived on and built up the beef herd. Well they had quite a nice herd.[33]

As Eril Merrell's daughter and son-in-law, Connie and Bruce Malcolm, put it, the Jones's were like "ping pong balls" in the 1920s and 1930s—"there was [not] a place in the valley they didn't live on"—before they had access to low-interest, long-term financing in the form of the FHA loans that allowed them to invest in land which they could inhabit for the long term.[34]

As long as land values stayed tied to agricultural production at some level, from the late 1940s into the 1960s, federal farm financing effectively recreated some of the prerequisites for the kind of success with the land and livestock model that ranchers like Armstrong and Allen had experienced, namely access to affordable land. The nature of the financing arrangements that provided that vital access to capital were quite different, however, as local third-party lending ceased as a common practice. And just as the ranchers in the 1890s who escaped the confines of local markets when railroads that gave them access to national livestock markets encountered a new set of opportunities and constraints inherent in that transformation of their economic geography, so too did young ranchers turn from local to national sources in the 1940s when they began to borrow money from the federal government. It is tempting to speculate on the effect that this transformation of the scale of dependency had on the ways that ranchers understood "community," but the available sources are mute on the subject.

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[33] Erill Merrell with Bruce and Connie Malcolm, interview by author, tape recording, Merrell residence on Pine Creek, Park County, Montana, September 23, 2003.

[34] Bruce and Connie Malcolm, interview by author, tape recording, Malcolm Ranch, Emigrant, Montana, December 14, 2002.

With the availability of federal loans, the crises in livestock production of the 1920s and 1930s could be relegated to distant memory while young ranchers reenacted some of the rituals of establishing a ranch established by their homesteading parents or grandparents. Aspiring ranchers who did not own land could acquire enough property on which to start a ranch, and they could even buy a start-up herd of livestock, using FHA money. Managing the other operating costs that were a regular feature of ranches during the mid-twentieth century was another story. During the immediate post-World War II period, many ranchers drew on strategies that they learned from their parents and grandparents in order to try to keep their operating costs in line with their potential profits.

Managing Operating Costs through Frugality

While the demand for capital and land meant that ranchers had to reach out to neighbors and later to the federal government for assistance, when it came to their day-to-day operations, they could exert more independence. Frugality, exemplified in ranchers' self-sufficiency in food production and cooperation with neighbors to share labor costs, represented a core practice and a core value that maintained ranchers for over one hundred years.

Self-sufficiency in food was a key tool for ranchers to reduce their costs from the 1860s and into the 1960s. Homesteaders in particular had little choice but to do for themselves, whether the year was 1867 or 1907. They typically arrived in the area with few reserves, and their properties were simply too small to make it possible to support a family on livestock alone. They worried not just about producing a crop for market and proving up their homestead claims, but about the source of each and every meal. As the memories and histories of the earliest settlers suggest, during the settlement period of the 1870s and early 1880s, necessity was the proverbial mother of invention. There simply were no markets at which to purchase fresh produce or dairy products, and the few staples such as bacon or flour that made it by wagon from distant production centers sold for outlandish prices (presumably to miners).[35] By the 1890s, commerce in Livingston and Gardiner bustled; the towns featured grocers, butchers, and farmers' markets that catered to those who did not grow food for themselves like the troops stationed in Yellowstone National Park, miners, and employees of the NPRR. A small store in Emigrant sold a few items. Still, even with the integration of cars into local transportation systems in the 1910s and 1920s, a trip to town to shop was neither convenient nor economically feasible for most rural families.[36] Well into the 1950s and 1960s, valley producers attempted to sell at least as much as they bought at local stores.

Olive and Claude Day, the homesteaders who were described above as having benefited from the opportunity to acquire land and a cow, took up their small homestead on Deep Creek sometime around 1910. From 1910 to 1940, they slowly built up a ranch, struggling to get ahead, or in the 1930s even just to stay afloat. Throughout their years on the ranch, self-sufficiency was vital to solvency, according to their family biography. "The farm furnished most of their food. Fruits and vegetables were canned; hams were cured and stored in the wheat in the granary; chickens furnished meat and eggs; and the cows not only gave them milk, cream, and butter, but the cream was separated and sold to buy those things they couldn't raise."[37] (The biographer, writing in 1984, interestingly managed to venerate both the Days for their frugality and the farm for its providence!) Such labor-intensive practices of canning and storing food and trading for staples were common on ranches in the Upper Yellowstone well into the 1960s.

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[35] Ben Strickland reportedly sold wheat for $12/bushel in 1865. Michael A. Leeson, *History of Montana, 1739-1885.* (Warner, Beers, 1885), 645.

[36] As one member of the Briggs family, ranchers and homesteaders on Mill Creek Flat, remembered: "It was a long day for Eunice in a Model T Ford to go to Livingston with cream and whatever else to sell, then back home on the old road zigzagging up the Yellowstone river." Park County Historical Society. 116.

[37] Ibid., 286.

Ranchers operating on slim margins seldom consumed beef prior to the 1960s and 1970s. Cattle and sheep were cash crops and ranchers assiduously avoided making any dents in their yearly paycheck. Instead, many ranches raised hogs as a source of meat. As Florence Lyall recalled of her childhood in the 1910s and 1920s, "Usually my father would find someone to go halves with us on a beef, but our chief meat in those days was pork. Every fall he killed eight hogs--they were all smoked. The meat was put in a barrel of brine with brown sugar and salt—the brine had to be strong enough to float an egg. After the brine, they were put in the smokehouse..."[38] Not surprisingly, ranchers attempted to maintain a complete circle of self-sufficiency by not purchasing feed for farm animals. Alvin Stands recalled hoeing the corn patch on the family's remote homestead in the Six Mile Basin in the 1920s; the corn provided feed for the family's hogs.[39]

Delicious as it might be, most ranching families did not have to work on a unchanging diet of bacon and pork. As long as the area offered plentiful sources of wild game, the decision not to consume their own livestock was straightforward for most ranchers and did not involve serious dietary sacrifices. As the Strickland family biography explained, "Sam Strickland didn't see any sense in using domestic animals for food as long as he had shells for his 30-06."[40] In an interview, rancher Tom Gray recalled that his family always had elk in the freezer in the second half of the twentieth century as well.[41] In the memoir *Growing up in Paradise*, Edwin Nelson offers this (perhaps somewhat fanciful) picture of procuring food from nature:

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[38] Ibid., 308.

[39] Ibid., 446.

[40] Ibid., 280.

[41] David and Rose Rigler, interview by author, tape recording, Rigler residence, Pray, Montana, February 24, 2003.

> I knew the creek [a spring creek on the Yellowstone River] pretty well ... because every now and then my mother would say, 'Well, it's about time to have a baked trout.' So I'd grab the pitchfork and slip over to the spring creek and spear usually a ten or twelve pounder.
>
> ...When I fished, it was for food and I had my own ways of catching them.[42]

Nelson's recollection provides evidence that as an occasional menu item, trout from local rivers and creeks were also a logical approach to enhancing the self-sufficiency of a ranching operation.

Frugal, self-reliant practices continued long after the severe privations of the homesteading era and the Depression had ended. Like many daughters leaving their parents' ranch for their husband's family's place, when Rose Pierce married the rancher next door, David Rigler, in 1955, she came prepared to take on the cash-earning and cash-saving chores established during her grandparents' era. She had the skills to run a small farm that produced pork, eggs, butter, and cream both for domestic consumption and for sale. To the Rigler ranch Pierce moved a black cat, a milk cow, and a small herd of Hereford cows which she had built up from a single roan cow that her father let her have when she was a young girl. She also willingly took responsibility for maintaining the small "farm herd" of sheep that proved to have sentimental as well as practical value to the Riglers. Rose enjoyed working with sheep and the Riglers found that a small sale of sheep occasionally provided a counterbalance to dips in the cattle market.[43]

Rose Rigler was typical in terms of the preparation—both in terms of skills and real material goods—she brought to her marriage in the 1950s. Marrying a rancher in most cases meant committing not just to sharing a home, but to

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[42] Helen and Edwin Nelson and Arch Wagner, *Growing up in Paradise: A History of Nelson's Spring Creek Ranch* (Glen Allen, VA: Clairmont Publishing, 1998), 6.: 6.

[43] Rigler interview.

collaborating in a demanding family business. Ranching families did their best to prepare their daughters. As Lorayne Stermitz's (née Plaggemeyer) "dowry" of 25 chickens at the time of her 1963 wedding to a Cinnabar Basin rancher suggests, these activities were alive and well into the early post-war period. When the Riglers' neighbor, James Warfield, married in 1951, his wife, Margery, took on many of the chores associated with running the farm part of the ranch as a matter of course. This included chores associated with caring for (and harvesting the products of) two milk cows, two pigs, and sixty-five chickens.

As the examples of the kinds of dowries that families made available to their daughters indicate, the labor-intensive and frugal practices that helped ranchers achieve some measure of self-sufficiency were well-supported by a shared system of cultural values that helped to normalize privation and self-sacrifice. A vernacular culture that praised self-sacrifice and encouraged the acceptance of material discomfort played an important role in maintaining ranchers' confidence in the land and livestock system, not to mention in themselves. These values also gave ranchers a strategy to accept the ways that the economic structure of the market made them vulnerable—an act of resignation that was necessary given the difficulty of protesting or resisting the large-scale economic forces they faced.

Much of the specific and often unpleasant work associated with making a ranch self-sufficient in food fell to women. While men and women both worked hard, many narratives from both women and men about experiences in ranch work emphasize the tedium and drudgery involved in work like making cream and butter, tending chickens, cooking for work crews, and harvesting and preserving crops. Often women assumed these tasks in addition to working with cattle and in the fields. When asked about how she and her husband divided their labor, Margery Warfield—who married in 1951—answered with a laugh: "I don't know that there was any [division of labor], except that he divided it at the door. We both worked out and he didn't work in."[44] A familial and communal system of values that rewarded self-sacrifice was vital to enabling women to rationalize the hard work that ranch life demanded of them. Though this value system also applied to men, it can be argued that it was more significant to women (who may have needed more external reinforcements to explain the hard work they faced every morning). Their indoor duties gave women less time than men to enjoy the non-monetary rewards that are often associated with ranching like riding horseback and working outdoors underneath a blue sky and a dramatic mountain backdrop. While women could often be found digging irrigation ditches, helping to harvest hay, and tending to cattle births in the middle of the night, few men were likely to be found scrubbing dishes or churning butter.

The plainly honest, and regrettably unfinished manuscript of rancher Sarah Blakeslee provides a window into what ranch chores meant to some women.[45] When Blakeslee moved to the ranch from a comfortable home in Livingston because her husband's sheep business was in financial crisis, she experienced a rude awakening. Mrs. Blakeslee, a mother of six children ranging in age from teens to early twenties, was accustomed to life in town. In her memoir, she explains, "I knew nothing of the

[44] Margery Warfield and Alan Redfield, "Interview by Author," (2003).

[45] Despite having arrived in Livingston in 1902 virtually penniless, Harry Douglas Blakeslee (Sarah Blakeslee's future husband), together with his brother, Glen, were successful business owners within a decade. In 1915, the two brothers went separate ways, Glen taking the store and Harry taking over the two sheep ranches that the Blakeslees had added to their portfolio. In 1916, Sarah and Harry had six children. Records suggest that Sarah and her children stayed in Livingston—all of the children went to school there—while Harry traveled back and forth from the ranch near Emigrant. It is unclear whether it was the first depression in wool prices (1919-1923) or the second (1931 to 1935) that prompted their financial crisis. Sometime during the 1920s or 1930s, however, Sarah's comfortable life in Livingston came to an end. In the period of a few months, Blakeslee writes, "there were changes--no maid, no new clothes, no entertaining, no return to college for [daughter] Gene that fall." Sarah Crosby Blakeslee, "Hosts of Ghosts, No date," p. 48, Park County Gateway Museum Library, Livingston, MT. In fact, Sarah and her children found themselves giving up the comforts of their Livingston home for the ranch, where they took up year-round residence. Newspaper reports note that one of Blakeslee's daughters was spending the week-end in town in 1924, suggesting that they may have been living at the ranch as early as that. "Local News," *Park County News*, Dec. 12, 1924, 12.

ranching or the country. Very little about cooking. To get along with the slight comforts—the inconveniences would certainly take more pioneer spirit than I felt was left in me this late in life."[46] Her isolation from ranch work was due to the fact that she married a rancher who had exploited the World War I sheep industry boom with great success. Sarah and her children lived comfortably in town while her husband commuted from Livingston to run the ranch near Emigrant during the week. All that changed in the course of the Depression, though.

Blakeslee's memoir focuses on her adjustment to ranch life. Though she came to love many aspects of living on a ranch, she did not mince words about the demands of self-sufficiency. Among her many responsibilities, Mrs. Blakeslee oversaw the constant work involved in filling the larder and keeping family and hired hands fed. She milked cows and turned their milk into butter and cream; she maintained a kitchen garden and did the endless canning and jarring necessary to preserve its products; she cooked and cleaned. Her comments about her garden are clear evidence of the impression ranch work made of her: "I really think that if I were farming, I'd keep the best [produce] as compensation for the hard, hard work of producing," she grumbled. "The money paid for a farmer's produce ... is in no way a compensation for the confinement and the drudgery."[47] And while her observations are refreshingly candid, the whole of Blakeslee's memoir can in fact be read as exercise in self-validation according to a value structure that celebrated her sacrifices. The manuscript was left unfinished, but its direction suggests that the author had in mind a denouement in which she conquers the hurdles in the kitchen and barnyard and learns to love life on the ranch. With that maneuver, Blakeslee establishes herself as a model ranch wife within the confines of the local cultural norms at the same time

[46] Blakeslee, p. 4. Though her specific date of birth is not available, Blakeslee's children were born in the decade of the 1900s, suggesting she may have been in her late forties or early fifties in the early 1930s when she moved to the ranch.

[47] Ibid., p. 11.

that she expresses her surprise at this turn of events to her readers, in some ways stepping out of the local culture—or at least recognizing that other lifestyles and value systems existed.

A parallel, and completed, example of this narrative structure is Alma McDonald's "fictional autobiography" about her adjustment to ranch life in the 1920s. McDonald's narrative takes place in Sweet Grass County, the next county east of Park County. A New York sophisticate, McDonald met her husband, Bill McDonald, while she was touring in light opera in Helena, Montana. Bill McDonald was a Princeton graduate who had left the East to own and operate a large cattle ranch. Ranch life was a major adjustment for Alma McDonald. Her memoir features a regular refrain that "ranches are hard on milk cows and women." Despite her successful mastery of all of the many daunting tasks of a woman rancher, Alma struggles to embrace ranch life, in large part because she resented having little decision-making power outside the kitchen. After a dramatic departure, Alma returns to the ranch when her pregnancy helps her and her husband find common ground. One of the clear messages of the memoir is that a woman rancher's happiness hinges on accepting the strictures of gender roles on ranches, including the heavy and tedious work burden assigned to ranch wives.[48]

Evidence of the values by which ranch women made sense of their circumstances surfaces in many of the short autobiographical sketches of ranching families entered in the *History of Park County*. For example, a contemporary rancher in Park County described her mother-in-law with a clear tone of respect for her many accomplishments and stoicism. When asked if she took time off when she gave birth to two babies, the mother-in-law (and long-time rancher) replied, "'Oh, maybe a week or two.'" The account goes to note that "she was a very hard worker and, as all the

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[48] Alma P. McDonald, *Love and Three Squares a Day in Montana* (New York: Exposition Press, 1964).

farm women did, she ran the old rough tractor, milked the cows, picked rocks and more rocks and anything else that needed to be done."[49] According to such constructions of the past, by definition a "strong" ranch woman would unquestioningly tackle any chore that presented itself, indoors or out, including delivering babies and raising children.

Language and practices that assigned positive values to self-sacrifice and accommodation served an economic function by limiting what ranchers expected of the ranching economy in terms of material success and personal autonomy. Because maintaining the ranch remained the motivational center of these practices, incorporating self-sacrifice and self-sufficiency into the practices and ideology of ranching served to maintain the fundamental economic context in which ranchers operated. Local and familial narratives about the expected duties and attitude of ranch women, for example, linked culture and economy together inextricably. In fact these narratives constituted critical bulwarks to practices that could at times seem irrational or at the very least incredibly demanding.

Minimizing Risk: Not Borrowing and Off-ranch work

Another basic business strategy that emphasized self-reliance was to avoid financial risk as much as possible by limiting dependence on lenders. This was especially prevalent among those ranchers who had emigrated from Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and was sometimes replicated by their children. Ole and Matilda Melin, Swedish immigrants who were married in Wisconsin but moved to the Mill Creek area in the early 1880s, frequently disagreed about debt. Matilda insisted on protecting their meager resources by refusing to borrow against the small homestead (on which they raised nine children under particularly austere conditions). Ole apparently was more willing to turn to borrowing

[49] Park County Historical Society, 176.

as a way to survive. As a Melin descendant wrote in the *History of Park County*, despite constant deprivation and struggle, Matilda Melin refused to "consent to putting a mortgage on the place because they could never pay it off."[50]

While many ranchers ultimately adopted financing as a route to continuing in ranching later in the twentieth century, some of their neighbors refused to take on such a liability. Jim Stermitz, a rancher from Cinnabar Basin who took over from his father and uncle in the 1960s, described his attitude toward borrowing in an interview. "I mean other people took mortgages on their places…, [it] was pretty common in those days [1960s and 1970s]. A lot of my classmates leveraged their places to buy more land. It was not in my upbringing to do so." Stermitz's grandfather was an Austrian immigrant who came to work in the coal mines near Yellowstone in 1892. Grandfather Stermitz's experiences in Austria and as a struggling immigrant made him especially appreciative of the sanctity of owning land unencumbered by debt.[51] However, Jim Stermitz comments about not borrowing money were presented in the context of why he and his wife didn't expand their ranch during a period in which many ranchers did. Expansion was considered a way to remain competitive in markets that privileged scale. Not expanding, in Jim's opinion, made their ranch less competitive. However, Stermitz felt justified in his decision because of his strong loyalty to his family's economic traditions.

Self-reliance could sometimes mean looking beyond the ranch for means of survival. For much of the early twentieth century, working off the ranch was a common practice. Off-ranch work both helped to insure against the vagaries of livestock markets at the same time that it could help families increase the scale of the participation in those very same markets, by providing cash necessary to acquire more

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[50] Ibid., 330.

[51] James and Lorayne Stermitz, interview by author, tape recording, Stermitz Ranch, Cinnabar Basin, Park County, Montana, September 22, 2003.

land or animals. Because off-ranch work limited the amount of labor available on the ranch to manage the family and conduct ranch work, it presented problems in terms of how quickly the ranch could grow. Still, off-ranch work surfaces as the rule rather than the exception during the whole of the twentieth-century history of ranching in the Upper Yellowstone. Ranchers typically approached off-ranch work as temporary and considered it a way to supplement their primary occupation of ranching. Relying on non-ranching sources for economic sustenance was a form of dependency that the value systems that informed economic choices treated ambivalently. For some off-ranch work was a necessary evil, for others a pleasant diversion, and for still others it was simply a neutral fact of life.

Women were more likely to leave the ranch to work than men. Many women worked as school teachers early in their marriages, typically resigning to stay home when their children were school-age. Some returned to school teaching or driving the school bus when their children had grown. This kind of employment pattern offered a ranch assistance in key times, when young ranchers were just getting started and later in the ranch's history which was often a period when the ranch was supporting two or more families. Other women made part-time work a lifelong habit. Local resorts and dude ranches provided some work opportunities for ranch wives and daughters. Margaret Allen, a rancher from Elbow Creek who married in 1911, raised two children, worked on the ranch, and held a job at Chico Hot Springs for ten years and in Livingston for J.C. Penney for seven years.[52] Peter Story's wife Eileen held several part-time and full-time jobs during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s that were essential to helping the family stay afloat including working for the census and the local radio station.[53] By the 1970s and 1980s, the majority of women ranchers worked off the

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[52] Park County Historical Society, 75.

[53] Peter Story, interview by author, tape recording, Story Ranch, Emigrant, Montana, December 5, 2002.

ranch as much as they could and men also increasingly turned to off-ranch work for supplemental income.

Historically, part-time work available to men was seasonal and tended to involve manual labor. Interestingly, it was federal agencies, which modern day ranchers often tend to think of as antithetical to ranching interests, that provided much of the off-ranch work opportunities for men during the first half of the twentieth century. Work on public lands often drew upon the specific skills that ranchers had. For example, Yellowstone National Park depended on local labor to harvest hay cultivated in the park to feed wildlife. Many young men from ranching families remembered working on hay crews at the Park's "Buffalo Ranch" in the Lamar Valley in the 1920s and 1930s. Sandy Malcolm was able to survive the 1930s as a struggling new rancher because he served as a packer for the United States Geological Survey for several summers. In the second half of the twentieth century, as federal land management increasingly hinged on trained experts while seasonal work became more oriented toward forestry and recreation, the potential to combine a career as a rancher and part-time work for public land agencies diminished in the second half of the twentieth century. The sons (and much more rarely the daughters) of ranching families who stayed in the area but not on their family's ranch, however, sometimes ended up as full-time professionals with the agencies.

In practicing self-sufficient techniques of farming or avoiding the risk of borrowing, ranchers indicated a strong preference for independence—a cultural orientation that was strong from the homesteading period through the immediate post-World War II years. Throughout this period, when ranchers left the ranch to work, they did so on a temporary basis and saw the work as a way to make their ranch stronger. A similar motivation regarding the continuity of the ranch prompted ranchers to adopt economic strategies which show that when pressed, ranching communities could also conceive of different attitudes toward interdependence.

Managing Operating Costs through Cooperation

Many aspects of ranch work demanded cooperation, from moving cattle to harvesting crops. Threshing grains, for example, demanded expensive labor and machinery that few operators could afford to procure on their own. From the late nineteenth century into the 1950s, threshing was a semi-cooperative event for many ranchers. It was "semi"- cooperative in the sense that ownership of the threshing machine was not communal. Typically the owner provided his services in some kind of contract, but it was cooperative in that ranchers worked on each other's ranches throughout the harvest. Joe Papesh described threshing activities in the Gardiner Basin this way: "In the fall, threshing started, beginning at Riglars [sic], then to the Foss place on Cedar Creek, across the river to Roy Armstrong's, and Paul Hoppe's, back across the river again to Dan Bigelow's place near Gardiner, down to Tony Stermitz and ending at the Papeshes, the complete cycle."[54] Margery Warfield provides another point of view:

> In those days (the 1950s)...everyone came around and did threshing at each other's places. Everybody brought their team [of horses] and their hired man and we had one threshing machine in the country [the Upper Mill Creek area] I think. Just the local five or six places. .... It went on for probably two weeks.[55]

In lieu of individual ownership of machinery, ranchers adopted a communal system to distribute the costs associated with threshing among their neighbors. This was a strategy for continuity because it enabled ranchers to circumvent the high costs of labor and machinery. Cooperative threshing and harvesting worked well for over fifty years from the early 1900s through the 1950s. It very clearly created opportunities for

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[54] Park County Historical Society, 373.

[55] Margery Warfield with Alan Redfield, interview by author, Warfield Ranch, Davis Creek, Park County, Montana, June 10, 2003.

community-building because ranchers worked together—and typically celebrated the harvest together as well. Chapter Four describes labor sharing in more detail.

Leveraging Community Resources for Market Position: the PCRMA

When faced with developments in livestock markets during the post-World War II period that threatened to marginalize small-scale producers of Park County, ranchers turned again to a cooperative approach. In the 1950s, many of the ranchers who operated on what they called "family" size ranches—they had cattle herds that numbered fifty animals or so—faced a difficult situation when they went to sell their cows in the fall. The cattle that ranchers sold were destined for farms in the Midwest where they typically spent the winter and part of the following year eating corn and grain until the farmers sold them for slaughter. These farmers who bought calves from the mountain areas of the West to raise on their Midwestern farms were and are called farmer-feeders.

Ranchers did not however sell directly to the farmer-feeders who were going to take over their cows. Instead, they either sold their cows at auction or on their farm; either way the buyer was usually an individual known as an order buyer. The order buyer represented the farmer feeders in the Midwest, and bought "on order" for them. The buyer bore the cost of freighting the cattle from Montana to Iowa or Illinois and sought to minimize transportation costs. This created an incentive to buy cattle in groups that filled a train car or truck trailer to exact capacity. By the 1950s, there were only two order buyers working Park County and surrounding areas. Those two, in the absence of competition, essentially set the price for cattle each fall; there was no way that ranchers could exploit competition among buyers to get better prices. The fact that ranchers in Park County typically maintained herds of cattle that numbered less than the set train car or trailer load put them even more at the mercy of the order buyer, who determined how he would fill his cars.[56]

In 1954, ranchers in Park County banded together in a new association, hoping to negotiate a better position relative to the market. Together with the local extension agent, Lenix Badger, they created the Park County Ranchers Marketing Association (PCRMA). The association purposefully circumvented the problems of competition and scale by going straight to the farmer-feeders. The association appointed its own order buyer, Lenix Badger, and he worked hard to sell his services, as well as the livestock of Park County, to the buyers from the Midwest. For their part, Midwestern buyers saw the appeal of working with the association because they paid a smaller contract fee than when they worked with a self-interested order buyer. In addition, the cattle from Montana's mountain areas had an established reputation as healthy and vigorous animals who did well in feedlots. The association worked hard to continue to cultivate that reputation to create demand for Park County cattle specifically.

The primary projects of the association were to market each rancher's cattle to the buyers and to orchestrate shipping cattle. Cattle were marketed by way of a detailed brochure listing each ranch's offerings that was sent out in early summer. Buyers could browse the pages to identify a producer who had animals that fit their requirements, in terms of preference as well as logistical demands. The buyer would then work with Badger to negotiate a contract to purchase the animals listed in the brochure. By early October, before the animals were shipped to stockyards, ranchers who had contracts knew where their cattle were headed and the price per pound they would receive, in contrast to the risk of selling at auction.

[56] Arnold, Robert, and Shirley Hoyem, interview by author, tape recording, Hoyem Ranch, Wilsall, Montana, May 22, 2004. (Arnold Hoyem is the current president of the PCRMA.)

During the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, the PCRMA served a vital function in assisting small producers practically at the same time that it helped ranchers to recognize their mutual interests and to focus on positive aspects of their lives and livelihoods in the midst of worrisome economic changes. The rancher-members gathered once a year for an annual business meeting followed by dinner and dancing. Speakers' notes from the dinners indicate that the spirit at the annual meeting was hopeful as the dinner speeches covered such topics as specific actions that the PCRMA was taking on behalf of its rancher members.[57] Letters from the association to its members often expressed confidence that markets would improve from year to year.[58]

More importantly, the PCRMA joined ranchers together in ways that challenged existing boundaries based on the economic primacy of the individual unit. The yearly brochures that listed what they had to offer are an example of the ways that PCRMA undermined the individualistic orientation that the economic culture of ranching fostered among ranchers. For all that ranchers cooperated in labor sharing with their neighbors and had traditions even of loaning money to neighbors, local custom nonetheless put a high priority on protecting the economic privacy of ranch operators. There is an adage in ranching communities that one never asks a rancher how many cows he owns. The question is culturally offensive because it translates into a direct inquiry into a rancher's individual wealth. And so while the simple paper brochures printed by the PCRMA might not seem like much more than the paper minutiae of a business, in fact, these listings represented a major development in the ways that ranchers interacted. In the brochures, ranchers could read how many animals their neighbors were selling. As years passed and the brochures accumulated,

[57] Brad Palmer, "Dinner Speech Notes, 1978," Park County Ranchers Marketing Association Records, Three Forks, MT.

[58] For example, see Lenix Badger, "Annual Recruiting Letter, 1968," Park County Ranchers Marketing Association Records, Three Forks, MT.

ranchers developed long-term perspectives on the evolving details of individual operations. Prompted by a heightened sense of vulnerability to national market forces, when the small-scale operators of Park County joined together in a new association as an economic strategy, they also in fact entered into a new era in their community, one that made individual financial circumstances more public.

STRUGGLING JUST TO STAY

The recreation boom of the 1970s that affected many regions of the Rocky Mountain West created significant changes in the local economy of the Upper Yellowstone, changes that altered the effectiveness of existing economic approaches to ranching. Speculators and developers responded to a perceived demand for recreational property by buying up ranches at a rapid clip, inflating land values beyond their worth in terms of agricultural productivity, and creating a real estate boom that occurred while livestock markets continued to show poor results. Ranchers were not immune from the nation-wide agricultural crisis of the late 1970s and 1980s, fueled by overproduction, high energy costs, and high inflation rates. The 1970s witnessed the greatest period of agglomeration of ranch holdings in the area's history as the ranks of working ranchers suffered major attrition.[59]

The strategies that functioned to maintain previous generations of ranchers during periods of economic difficulty hinged in large part on the commitment of ranchers to the promise of the model of land and livestock. While ranchers during the 1950s may not have entertained visions of liberal living at the scale that Robert Strahorn promised in the 1880s, they reasonably believed that through hard work, frugality, self-sacrifice, and luck, they could pay off their loans ahead of schedule and create a comfortable and secure home for their children who would have the opportunity to start their own ranches if they wanted. In the forties and fifties new

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[59] Hannah Gosnell and others, *Ranchland Dynamics in Park County, Montana* (Center of the American West, 2003).

sources of funding enabled many young ranching families to start out on a small ranch enabling them in some ways to imagine that by reproducing of values and practices that had enabled their parents and grandparents to weather difficult times, they too would experience not only continuity but the opportunity to expand and develop their operations. The relevance of strategies like cooperation and frugality persisted as long as ranchers' hopes did. As the livestock economy continued to stagnate after the 1960s, however, optimism about the viability of ranches in Park County waned considerably. The economic developments that indicated a point of no return for the local ranching economy—skyrocketing land values, soaring interest rates, and low commodities prices—occurred simultaneously with important cultural shifts within rural communities across the nation. Beginning in the 1950s, ranching families were increasingly exposed to outside influences that suggested that there was inherent worth in lifestyles arranged around values other than self-sacrifice. Movies, television, contact with tourists, and experiences at college and work helped to weaken the significance of many of the values and practices that had sustained ranchers economically for one hundred years at the same time that economic developments rendered existing practices increasingly irrelevant.

The experiences of Bruce and Connie Malcolm, ranchers from the Paradise Valley who married in 1973, provide a case study of the transformation of ranching economics—and the economic culture of ranchers—over the past three decades. Bruce Malcolm was born in 1936, the son of Sandy and Bessie Malcolm. When his two sons matured, Sandy Malcolm expanded his operation significantly to make room for them—with their help, acquiring additional land and cattle through lease and purchase. In the 1950s, the family took over a ranch in the Tom Miner Basin, high above the valley of the Yellowstone at the far southern end of the Paradise Valley. In the 1960s after his father's death, Bruce and his brother ranched in partnership with his mother. At that time, as Bruce recalled, his future as a rancher looked manageable:

> You know in the 60s, if you worked at it, you could make it work. Even if cattle prices got low, you know, you could make things work. If you paid attention at home, didn't party a lot, watched what you were doing, you could make it work. You could even pay a little interest. If things got tough, you know, you worked a little off the ranch to help out.[60]

In other words, Bruce Malcolm still had hope that he could make it as a conventional "land and livestock" rancher in the 1960s.

By the 1960s, there were only a few families ranching in Tom Miner Basin, including the Malcolms and Eril and Ellery Merrell who had four daughters ranging in age from their teens to their mid-twenties. The Merrells' youngest daughter, Connie, had long been active in the family's ranch operation. When she went to Bozeman to attend college in the early 1970s, she assumed she would return to the ranch after completing her degree. However, in 1972, with three years of college under her belt, she decided she did not want to be away from ranching anymore and came back to marry Bruce.

Two years after they were married, in 1974, the B-Bar Ranch, the largest ranch in the Tom Miner Basin, was listed for sale. The seller was a corporation from Texas that purchased the ranch as a corporate retreat and investment. The corporation owned it for only a year before running into cash flow problems, reportedly because of the oil crisis of the early 1970s. The Malcolms and the Merrells recognized a logical opportunity for expansion of their family enterprises and formed a partnership with their only remaining ranching neighbor in the Tom Miner Basins, the Andersons, to purchase the B-Bar. They paid just over $3 million to acquire the 12,000-acre property, a value that Bruce and Connie describe as falling in the "high end" of agricultural land values for that time. Of the price Bruce said, "I don't know if

[60] Malcolm interview.

it was reasonable or not," and Connie added, "It was the stability of the other three places that made it feasible to do it." The partners leveraged their own ranch properties—paid off in full in the case of the Andersons and Merrells—in order to finance their purchase. The financing put a heavy load on the ranch, but the ranchers based their practices on what they learned during the 1960s: that if you worked hard, you could make it. The plan was for Bruce and Connie to live on the B-Bar while Bruce's brother and his family lived on the place at Mill Creek, allowing the two couples to more than double their capacity, "to make the ranch [operation] supportable for both families."

The timing of the venture turned out to be disastrous. The following passages are excerpts from an interview in which Bruce and Connie told the story of what happened after they made the momentous decision to invest in the B-Bar:

> Bruce Malcom (BM): When we bought the place, steer calves were 65 cents. That was in March. In October, steer calves were 32 cents. 1974. And in 1975, on the 20th of March, it started to snow. This may not seem strange to you. But then it snowed for 42 days straight, without any sun.
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> Connie Malcom (CM): Without sun.
>
> BM: Some nights you might see stars, but no sun. The snow went from about twenty inches deep to over 4 foot by the 5th of May. By the 1st of May normally you should be getting some green grass. We had over four foot of snow. The first of May in Tom Miner the only posts you could see were the corner posts.
>
> CM: We got plowed out on the first of May and you could stand on the plow and touch the electrical lines.
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> BM: We had a V6 Cat[61] that we got with the place. ...[t]he snow was so hard, I could drive on top of the snow with the cat—so I just went up and windrowed a road up to [the haystack]. I got up to the stack and I plowed in there, and I think the gate's about here [gesturing with his hands]. When the snow melted, there were cat tracks on top of the railroad ties that were the gate posts!

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[61] A heavy-duty tractor.

> What happened to us in that tough spring, we lost one-third of the calves and ten percent of the cows.
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> Between [price of] the calves going from 65 to 32 [cents] and the tough winter that we were almost $1m in debt with 600 cows. So that meant that in 1977 we had to sell some land to pay down some debt to stay afloat. So that's what we did.[62]

The Merrells, Andersons, and Malcolms dissolved their partnership in the aftermath of that devastating winter. Each of the families held on to their original holdings in Tom Miner, while a large portion of the B-Bar properties were sold to a wealthy out-of-state heiress who has converted it to a private retreat and part-time guest ranch. Bruce and his brother divided their properties fifty-fifty, leaving Bruce and Connie with the Tom Miner properties while his brother continued to ranch the Mill Creek base ranch.

In a short time, the opportunities of the 1960s to succeed by "working hard" appeared to have evaporated, replaced by a radically different set of economic constraints and opportunities. Immediately after losing the B-Bar, the Malcolms employed the model that had worked for young ranching couples before them, leasing a ranch on Big Creek in order to have a base. But that was not enough. The B-Bar experience had introduced Bruce to the potential of augmenting a ranch income through outfitting. In the 1970s, the family began an outfitting business, because, Connie said, "there was absolutely no way we could make it ranching. We needed to subsidize our income." They were naturals; both are good-natured, friendly people who knew how to provide safe and fun adventures for their clients. They came to think of it as the best decision they made as ranchers, both because of its economic value and because of the experiences it created for their children to meet people from different backgrounds.[63] (Outfitting also allowed their children opportunities to earn

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[62] Malcolm interview.

[63] Specifically, they both answered the question, "What is the best decision you have made in the course of ranching as a family?" in the following ways. Bruce said, "I think going into the outfitting may not have been the best but it had the largest impact in terms of economic

money as young adults on the ranch rather than having to work in town.) During the course of their outfitting business, the Malcolms stuck with ranching. They lived at the Malcolm property in Tom Miner but conducted many of the ranch operations on the place they leased on Big Creek. The situation made sense financially for awhile, but it frustrated Connie, who resented being separated from the day-to-day ranch operations. In 1986, they purchased the ranch they had been leasing on Big Creek and built a home there. They made use of a hunting lease on a neighbor's much larger adjoining ranch to expand their outfitting business.

As the Malcolms' two children approached adulthood and expressed interest in participating in the family business, Bruce and Connie found themselves confronting the challenge of how to create opportunities for them. Unlike the situation that Bruce's father encountered when his sons entered into the family business in the 1950s, the land values in the Yellowstone area prevented the Malcolms from considering expanding the ranch locally to accommodate their children. In fact, in order to create opportunity for their children, they sold their property in the Tom Miner Basin in the late 1990s. Its high amenity value allowed the Malcolms to purchase a ranch in Carbon County, Montana, about two hundred miles south and east of the Upper Yellowstone area. Their daughter (unmarried at the time of the interview) lives on the new ranch property and operates it independently while the Malcolms share their property on the Yellowstone with their son and his young family. The sale spelled an end for the family's outfitting business, particularly because the neighboring ranch on Big Creek which Bruce had leased ceased to be

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impact." Connie responded, "You know I think that going into the outfitting was the best because it broadened our children—have met people that are so different … I mean we have met people who are high up in the government, people who … make a heck of a lot more money than we do, we've met really good common people from all over the nation. And it gave our kids such a broad perspective and it gave us a broad perspective." Ibid.

available to him when it sold to a wealthy absentee owner who does not allow hunting. The Malcolms continue to ranch and Connie has expanded her business in breeding performance horses. However, these endeavors do not pay enough to support the family. Bruce Malcolm ran for and was elected to the state legislature in 2002. A part-time job in Montana, serving in the state house not only provides ranchers a way to affect policy, but can also provide valuable supplemental income that complements a rancher's schedule. Though the work takes Bruce away from the ranch, the legislature in Montana meets only every other spring and Connie and her adult son are more than capable of compensating for Bruce's absence during those spring months.

Reinventing the Ranch and the Meaning of Success

Embedded in this narrative of the economics of the Malcolm family operation are examples of the ways in which the continuity of ranching in the Upper Yellowstone in the face of the recreation boom has demanded that ranchers reframe their business strategies and the value systems that inform them. For the Malcolms, surviving the 1970s meant reframing their expectations about how their ranch could support them (indeed accepting that they would have to support their ranch in many ways) and adopting an unconventional set of business strategies. Practically speaking, experiences like those of Malcolms in the 1970s made it very clear that income from livestock was insufficient to cover the high cost of owning land in the Upper Yellowstone. Continuity in ranch ownership since the 1970s hinged on diversification of the operation or on non-ranching income or some combination of the two.

Diversification, in fact, has a long history in the Upper Yellowstone, but it demanded a reframing of the way that ranchers considered the value of their lives and livelihood in the post-1970 period for two reasons.[64] First, diversification took on a

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[64] Diversification in fact has a long history in the Upper Yellowstone. One of the area's best-known dude ranches, the Ox Yoke on Big Creek, emerged from the ashes of a bankrupt

primary role in the ranching economy on the heels of two decades of significant entrenchment of the land and livestock model of ranch operation. While many of the frugal practices that originated during the homesteading period and the depression years of the 1920s and 1930s carried forward into the immediate post-World War II period, ranchers in the 1950s and 1960s were insulated from extreme hardship by generous lending policies and stable land markets. That insulation reinvigorated a communal vision of the economic landscape that focused exclusively on cattle ranching: even when markets were difficult, ranchers counted on their ability to work hard and band together (as in the case of the PCRMA) to see them through to economic success in livestock production. The 1970s were a rude awakening from this reassuring perspective. Second, because work that had little to do with livestock production, even if it occurred on the ranch, took on the primary burden of sustaining local ranching families, ranchers faced an identity crisis of sorts.

Helen Nelson described the evolution of their ranching economic practices in her memoir, writing, "The first twenty years we raised kids, chickens, turkeys, hogs, sheep and cattle. The second twenty years we had fish, fishermen, and cattle. We're now into our third twenty years with grandkids, fish, fishermen, cattle, and hotel guests. You do have to diversify if you're going to make a living off of the land out here."[65] Nelson's words raise an important question about the extent to which ranchers were willing to take economic reinventions. Her repetition of the word cattle

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sheep operation in the 1920s. Charlie Murphy, determined to stay in the area and an enthusiastic entertainer, recognized that dudes would like to consume the land up Sheep Creek just as much as sheep—and they would pay for the privilege! He reinvented himself as a dude rancher within the course of a season. Murphy, "Sagebrush Charlie." A similar approach was employed by people who rejected traditional ranch products—horses, cattle and sheep—in favor of altogether different sorts of livestock production. The switch to dairy farms was a widespread phenomenon in the context of the agricultural depressions of the 1920s and the Great Depression. More unusual were operational transformations like the mink farm on the Depuy ranch during the 1920s and the trout farm and processing plant that the Nelsons operated during the 1970s. Park County Historical Society, 169.

[65] Nelson and Wagner, 11.

as a feature of each iteration of their ranch business model has tremendous significance. It describes the central role that the act of producing a livestock crop plays in the reasons why ranchers persist. Although the popular persona of the rancher allows little room to discuss the pleasures that most ranchers receive from work of animal husbandry, that work nonetheless provides many ranchers with the satisfaction that makes many of their economic sacrifices worthwhile.[66] Bruce and Connie Malcolm reconfigured their ranch operation at considerable expense in large part because "Connie didn't get to calve any cows, didn't get to be around any cows at all."[67] For Connie, being removed from the pleasures of overseeing the spring calving and caring for calves and cows over the course of their day to day existence was intolerable.

James Stermitz, a rancher in the Cinnabar Basin, taught school in Gardiner in order to keep his family ranch going (not incidentally, he went into teaching in 1975, the year of the snowstorm that buried the Malcolms in the Tom Miner Basin.) In his description, teaching was a more profitable and rewarding way to use the skills he cultivated in ranching:

> I can still remember our superintendent came out and offered to help us [during the severe winter of 1975], he says "Jim, if I could make a suggestion, if as good you are and as caring you are with calves, I can only imagine what kind of teacher you'd make." That kind of put a thought pattern in my head and I thought well maybe I'd rather teach little kids than little calves.[68]

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66 Another important issue at work here is the way that other economic strategies replaced one type of vulnerability with another. Changes in the ways that people traveled had severe consequences for dude ranches after the 1920s, for example. The famous O.T.O. dude ranch near Gardiner was never reopened to guests after the 1930s. Experiments like mink farms and fish plants proved to be trends that had little longevity.

67 Malcolm interview.

68 Stermitz interview.

Although Stermitz is obviously not an example of a rancher who refused to give up the joy (and pain) of calving, his memory of this as a turning point and the observations made by the superintendent nonetheless speak to the profound value of animal husbandry to ranching communities.

The high priority that many ranch operators who come from ranching backgrounds put on animal husbandry is totally disproportionate to the economic performance of the livestock trade. That contradiction does not go unnoticed by ranchers. Even though the Murphy family had a far longer history as dude ranchers than as livestock producers, when Jim Murphy sold the Ox Yoke guest ranch in the 1970s, he chose to keep a small herd of cattle. He was motivated in part by a reluctance to relinquish his position in a long-standing feud with the Forest Service over the management of a forest grazing allotment (he continued to graze his herd on the leased land in summertime). The conflict with the Forest Service fizzled out over the years, but Murphy and his son, who works full-time for the National Park Service, still own a small herd of cattle. According to Jim, the reason is purely sentimental.[69] Clearly, the marginalization of livestock from economic centrality of the local landscape which occurred throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s poses enormous emotional problems for ranchers. In pursuing alternative economic strategies to continue as owners of ranch land, ranchers have had to relinquish their primary focus on livestock production and the pleasures and identity attached to that focus. In response, many ranchers who have taken up work off the ranch utilize their income to subsidize their ranching operation, such is their commitment to and pleasure in the act of raising livestock.

In four separate oral history interviews, ranchers from the Upper Yellowstone explicitly stated that their ranches had not penciled out as independent economic enterprises for several decades. Yet all are multi-generational ranchers, committed to

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[69] Murphy interview.

maintaining livestock in their operations. Such commitments in the face of seemingly incontrovertible evidence of ranching's imminent doom demands a particularly agile value system. Over the course of the past thirty years, those ranchers who have remained in the Upper Yellowstone have developed a value system that enables them to rationalize—to their satisfaction, anyway—their seemingly irrational economic behavior.[70] Their system subordinates the relevance of financial solvency to such values as the tradition, continuity and familial obligation. Thus, the period from the 1970s to the present has witnessed a reinvention of success in which optimism about the possibility for future success in the land and livestock system has been replaced with a backward-looking commitment to maintaining elements of the past when such optimism was possible.

One strategy that creatively reinvents economic success involves a narrative about productivity. Historically, improvements in productivity such as enhancing the nutritive quality of hayfields helped ranchers earn more money. Ranch operators continued to take pride in and focus on improvements in ranch operations, even when such efforts had little potential to accrue benefits to the operator. When Lester and Eula Mitchell's children described their dairy ranch near Pine Creek in 1984, they reflected on how far it had come since their parents started it in 1945.

> When the ranch was bought it was mostly an unbroken parcel of native grass barren of trees, ditches or any improvements. The ranch today produces many tons of quality alfalfa, has two sets of modern buildings, several shelter belts, a sprinkler system and much more, all a testimony to the years of work spent carving a productive ranch from the sometimes unyielding property.

In 1984, the Mitchells were not thriving financially. Rather than focusing on the declining economic viability of the family ranch, however, the Mitchell biography

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[70] Some ranchers are quite frank about the paradoxes of their position. Arnie Hoyem, a rancher from the Shields Valley, said, "I'm not sure it [the ranching economy] was ever that great. You just get started with it; you grow up and like it." Hoyem interview.

instead creates a narrative of progress by focusing on the improved productive capacity of the ranch.

The quotation's reference to "years of work" embodies a second element in the cultural systems that negotiated the ongoing decline in the economic viability of ranching over the past thirty years. There is a strong refrain in the voices of ranchers of the Upper Yellowstone during this period that promotes a sense of privilege and obligation, much of it contingent on the suffering of relatives and ancestors. One family biography described a ranch owner who died in 1939 after a battle with Hodgkin's disease. The biography suggests that his noble suffering in the last years of life left a legacy of obligation for his children. "He worked right up until the last," the passage reads, "never complaining, because he wanted to continue living on the ranch where his children could grow up and have a good life."[71] Words like these, penned in 1984, are evidence of the profound psychological burden assigned to heirs on the ranching landscape in the difficult years of the 1970s and 1980s. In a period when livestock ranching appeared to offer the least opportunity for young people, representatives of older generations touted the values of what was being lost, and by implication, sacrificed by attrition in the ranching community.

Another striking example of the strong influence of perceived historical legacies comes in the following account written by Nina Killorn as the biographical entry about her grandparents, Ben and Nancy Strickland, for the *History of Park County*. The short essay is written as though to invoke a timeless quality, but it describes the homesteading period of the 1870s and 1880s, when the Stricklands established their ranch in the Lower Paradise Valley.

> After four years … [Ben and Nancy and Nancy's family] returned to Paradise Valley where most of them lived the rest of their lives. At that time all the land east of the Yellowstone River was in Indian reservation so they chose land across

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[71] Park County Historical Society, 476.

> the valley. They turned their stock loose on the rich mountain meadows where they soon grew fat and glossy. ...
>
> Somehow they built their shelter and set about making a living from the land. If the wild grassland were to become productive it would have to be done by themselves. After all the weary miles they had come to make a new home, they had to begin with nothing but the good earth. ... At first there were a few neighbors. Schools or roads or church or bridges across the Yellowstone would have to come later.
>
> Our ancestors created a problem for themselves when they kept going so far into the wilderness. It would be many years before railroad could ever reach this far. They would have to depend on their own ingenuity to provide their basic needs. But with health and hard work they built their shelter, planted their crops and established their herds of cattle. ...
>
> How fortunate for us that they kept going until they reached this vacation wonderland and that they had the fortitude to stay here and the vision to see beyond the years to our time. ...[72]

Killorn's choices in this family biography are extremely important. Her narrative effectively contradicts the obvious interpretation of the transition of the Paradise Valley from wilderness to "vacation wonderland": that ranching was neither a part of the valley's past nor its future. The explanation of this circumstance was plainly economic. While the Stricklands had the good fortune of arriving when land was more or less free and they had access to excellent markets for livestock, subsequent generations faced increasingly constricted economic horizons. But rather than focus on that vein of history, Killorn focuses on the differences in the immediate physical and material comforts that distinguish the homestead generation from the present. In contrast to the homesteaders who "struggled to meet their own basic needs," Killorn describes her environment as a "vacation wonderland" that implies a life of relative luxury. With this focus, Killorn constructs a narrative that gives contemporary ranchers a privileged position in contrast to the predecessors who suffered tremendous

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[72] Ibid., 455.

material deprivation. This line of reasoning obscures the critical difference between homesteaders and Killorn's 1984 audience: the opportunities inherent in their futures. Homesteaders who took up ranching in the 1870s had advantages that young people starting out 100 years later sorely lacked. There is in this narrative construction an important strategy for continuity, one based in reminding young ranchers both of their fortune to live in a beautiful place and of their obligation to honor the hard work of their ancestors.

Looking Back

The strategies that served ranchers prior to the 1970s—reducing operating costs through frugality and cooperative cost-sharing, creatively gaining access to land and capital, even perpetuating a culture of self-sacrifice—shifted substantially in function and application in the decades of the recreational boom. No matter how wisely a rancher approached the livestock market, he or she could never balance the explosive gap between land values based on recreational demand and the stagnant agricultural markets of the late twentieth century. While high land values created opportunities for ranchers to pay off debt through sale, they interrupted ranch continuity by making it virtually impossible for ranchers to transfer ranch operation to their children. The particulars of land tenure, including this bitter paradox of the post-1970 era, are discussed in detail in the following chapter.

One of the key implications of changing economics since the 1970s involves the changes that economic transitions affected in the ways that the members of the ranching community interacted. Historically, many economic strategies leveraged the shared resources of ranchers to reduce individual economic vulnerability and to overcome financial limits to productivity. This is not to say that ranchers behaved with altruism as their primary motivation; economic strategies that involved sharing and leveraging resources typically had pay-offs to the individual as well as to the group. However, they nonetheless encouraged ranchers to understand themselves as part of community with mutual interests. The decades since 1960 have introduced technological and large-scale economic changes that have reduced the incentive for ranchers to cooperate or to think of themselves as part of an interdependent community. These developments feature prominently in Chapter V.

In his memoir *Hole in the Sky*, which is very much concerned with the developments in the economics of ranching after World War II, William Kittredge describes ranching as "two-hearted," divided in its loyalties "on the one hand to the country and its isolations and seasons and animals, and on the other to town and money and numbers." The development in the ways that ranchers in the Upper Yellowstone responded to economic opportunities and constraints suggests that this polarity may be overstated. In fact, the business of ranching tended to push toward a convergence of those two spheres Kittredge would separate. Economic survival often hinged on overcoming isolation or individualism and working as a part of a group, whether it was sharing labor with neighbors, combining efforts to market cattle, or sharing the chores of everyday life on the family ranch. Furthermore, the experiences of ranchers after World War II suggest that money, numbers, and animals alike were all part of the equation that ranchers considered at the end of the day. Penciling out included not just staying in business, but keeping on in the ranch chores and work that were most pleasurable. As the animal husbandry element of ranching has faded into the background of the modern ranching landscape, the crisis for ranchers is at once economic and cultural. Penciling out, it seems was never one thing more than the other.

CHAPTER IV

FAMILIES, NEIGHBORS, AND LAND OWNERSHIP: A RANCHLAND GENEALOGY

In its most basic elements and its economic logic, livestock ranching centers on a fundamental narrative of reproduction—a motif that carries over into other aspects of the ranching landscape. According to the history that serves as the creation story of ranching in the Upper Yellowstone Valley for the local community, Nelson Story herded his chattel to a virgin land and turned them out (those who were not destined for the abattoir, that is) in the meadows of the Upper Yellowstone to multiply and make him rich. The reproduction of the family ranch—establishing the next generation of ranchers to carry on the herd and the family's local legacy—was no less a signature feature of ranching culture in the Upper Yellowstone, particularly in the twentieth century. Multigenerational tenure helped to mitigate against the disruptions to community and land use practices threatened by ownership change. However, ranchers who desired to create a land and livestock legacy for their children faced an uphill battle for most of the twentieth century in the Upper Yellowstone. Closely linked to the volatile economics described in Chapter III, the history of land ownership in the Upper Yellowstone reflects the reality that change was a defining feature of the ranching landscape, albeit a feature with which ranchers were often at odds.

This chapter opens with a detailed description of land ownership in the Upper Yellowstone over the course of the region's ranching history. This analysis describes processes of fragmentation and consolidation that shaped the patterns of ownership on the ranching landscape over time. As Chapter II illustrates, market forces and environmental conditions made consolidation the dominant motif in the pattern of ranch ownership for the first century of ranching in the Upper Yellowstone. However, from the 1900s through the 1960s, there was a kind of balance at work between the forces of consolidation and fragmentation. The staggering of the lifecycles of ranchers and their operations meant that as some ranches were building up and expanding their holdings, others were being divided among siblings or parceled out among neighbors. The emerging land ownership patterns show a kind of kaleidoscopic recycling of property over time, with the basic units—original homesteads and ranches established at the turn of the century—swapped among ranches over time. The advent of a strong market demand for recreational and residential parcels of land, and the resulting subdivision of ranchland, encouraged this "recycling" dynamic to dwindle sometime in the 1970s.

Land tenure strategies employed by ranching families naturally constitute a critical influence on the ownership patterns described in Part I. Thus the chapter moves on in Part II to describe the constraints and opportunities that shaped land tenure strategies for family-owned and operated ranches. I employ a reproductive metaphor here, arguing that under ideal circumstances, the family ranch ensured its continuity from one generation to the next. Under ideal, resource-rich conditions, ranchers could underwrite establishing multiple children on independent ranches, guaranteeing not only the replication of the home ranch but expansion of the family's presence in the landscape. Most commonly, however, ranchers in the Upper Yellowstone faced marginal economic circumstances that created significant constraints on "reproducing" the ranching family. The passage of a ranch to subsequent generations typically involved personal sacrifice and adaptive land tenure practices (which were sometimes one and the same). While multigenerational tenure was a definitive and significant feature of the ranching landscape of the Upper Yellowstone, it was difficult, even impossible, to achieve on many ranches. In fact, as the detailed descriptions of specific examples of ranch agglomeration and fragmentation offered in Part I suggest, turnover of ranch properties was a regular event in the Upper Yellowstone.

Part III of this chapter focuses on ownership change. Findings from a detailed, GIS-assisted study describe the rates and character of all land ownership change in three sub-areas of the Upper Yellowstone Valley between 1936 and 2002. A case study of the Tom Miner Basin follows, offering an analysis of how ranchers adjusted to ownership change that introduced new land-owners into their ranching "neighborhoods." I argue that the ability of the ranching community to create a sense of continuity in a context of almost routine ownership change was predicated on a system that obligated ranch operators to honor their predecessors. Voicing respect for the legacy of previous ranchers—and ranching traditions generally—was accomplished through the performance of basic forms of work and leisure that had defined the ranch under previous ownerships. Ranchers examined their new neighbors to determine whether their practices maintained or threatened the integrity of a ranching tradition. When new ranchers mimicked existing behaviors and goals, it was easy for the ranching community to incorporate new land owners into their midst. When ranch owners symbolically challenged the lineage of local ranching traditions by adopting new practices or failing to conform to expectations, the potential for continuity between old and new land owners broke down.

These strategies that ranchers developed in response to such challenges provide evidence of the ways that the continuity imperative affected individual opportunities. Like the practices that helped ranchers make sense of economic uncertainty, rituals that emphasized links to the past and obligations to steward a land use legacy were vital tools that helped ranching communities self-repair when death and ranch sales threaten to unravel the strands of the collective ranch culture. The pages that follow describe the creation of a set of ideas and practices that positioned ranch owners as interchangeable parts in a process of preserving ranch identity through the replication and reproduction of ranching operations.

Ranchland Ownership Patterns

Chapter II described a dominant process of consolidation of ranch holdings at work in the Upper Yellowstone over the course of the twentieth century until the introduction of extensive residential development began to fragment land ownership patterns in the 1970s. Here I consider the ways that ranchers participated in the shaping of land ownership patterns, both in putting ranches together and in splitting ranches up.

Success in ranching invariably hinged on acquiring more land than the small 40- or 160-acre parcels that homesteaders often first acquired. A few ranches were built wholly from homestead patents and land acquired from the railroad. Most were developed by adding on neighboring homestead parcels in addition to acquiring inexpensive railroad land. Fluctuations in the ranching economy, together with individual circumstances, strongly affected the rate and spatial extent—not to mention the viability—of ranch consolidations. While some "places"—e.g. compositions of land holdings—remained intact after they were originally assembled, others—often the very large agglomerations of holdings—had a house-of-cards quality and could prove fragile as time passed.

Consolidation & Agglomeration 1880s-1910s

After a period of early settlement in the 1870s in which the Upper Yellowstone remained remote, contested by Native American people, and otherwise difficult to settle, a period of rapid population growth and settlement ensued. During this period, some homesteaders successfully constructed veritable ranch empires in the course of ten or twenty years. Other settlers, especially latecomers who missed out on chances to acquire the best land and best water rights, struggled to maintain even the very smallest properties. Following are several examples of successful ranch building projects.

George J. Allen first started a ranch in the Paradise Valley in 1880. Allen had been a freighter in the Colorado and Montana gold fields in the 1860s and subsequently worked hauling lumber from Helena to Fort Benton. From Fort Benton he returned to his native Henry County, Missouri, and spent the intervening fifteen or so years there, during which time he married Betty Fisher. The marriage produced a son, Elbert, who was an infant in 1880. Allen's first parcel of land was a 160-acre homestead that he received patent to in 1888. He added an adjoining parcel to the west within several years, also through a 160-acre homestead entry. In the 1890s, he acquired 960 acres from the Northern Pacific Railroad, one section and one half-section located on Bullis Creek. A major expansion of the ranch's deeded property occurred in 1904 when Allen purchased three sections from the NPRR. The sections were located high on the Wineglass Mountain; the purchase likely represented the formal acquisition of grazing land that Allen was in the habit of using already. The final addition to the property that was made under George Allen's tenure was a 40-acre homestead patent on land adjoining the base ranch, issued to son Elbert in 1919. That year, Allen retired and put his operation on the market. Of nine children born to George and Betty, only two survived to adulthood: Elbert became a lawyer and daughter Carrie married—neither took over the ranch.[1] The sale inventory included 3,200 deeded acres and leases to an additional 2,000 acres, 500 head of cattle, senior water rights on Bullis Creek, 150 tons of hay and 5000 pounds of grain.[2]

Other operators, including O. T. Armstrong, whose heirs are today among the Paradise Valley's largest land owners, focused on purchases of both inexpensive

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[1] I did not find evidence of the cause of this dramatic ratio. The staff of the Park County Clerk and Recorder's office resisted making death records available and as this was a relatively tangential inquiry, I did not push the matter.

[2] Land acquisitions are recorded in the Park County Clerk and Recorder's Office, Warranty Deed records: 13:33; 22:144; 27:274; 24:409; 52:17; 33:584 (all listed in book:page format, in books not on microfilm). Information on leases from "Big Land Deals are made in Park County," *Park County News*, May 16, 1919, 1.

railroad land and neighboring ranches to add to his original 160-acre holding during the same period. Armstrong emigrated to Montana from Missouri in 1877 on the urging of his brother-in-law, John Lovely, who had done some school teaching in Bozeman and had settled on a homestead patent on the Yellowstone River. Armstrong's wife and two toddlers accompanied him on overland journey from Missouri to Montana via Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, and Virginia City. The party arrived in the Paradise Valley in July of 1878. The Armstrongs abandoned Missouri because of a flood that claimed their farm operation, so they were starting from scratch in the Paradise Valley. Nonetheless, the Armstrongs had sufficient savings to purchase one-quarter of a railroad section adjacent to Lovely's parcel for $1.50 per acre. In 1880, the family built a cabin there. During the 1880s, O. T. Armstrong leased a nearby ranch that was owned by the King brothers, a merchant and doctor from Illinois who visited the property for hunting and fishing.[3] The lease arrangement must have worked out to Armstrong's advantage because sometime in the 1890s he was able to purchase the seven hundred-acre ranch to augment his original four hundred-acre spread.[4] This property was the home ranch for an enterprise that continued to expand over the next fifty years.

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[3] The King brothers were not alone in setting a trend of recreational ranch ownership. Bennett Van Horne owned a parcel on the Yellowstone near Emigrant in the 1880s, which he used as a fishing property. (See next note.)

[4] O.T.'s son Paul described the establishment of this property in a 1958 interview. "Soon after, Major Pease came in and settled the place. He had a squatter's right. There were always so many finshin [sic] the clear waters of Spring Creek and the Indians could always get food there so they didn't like it when the saw the whites settling beside it. Brisbin bought the place from Major Pease and he sold it to some wealthy men back east--Dr. King and then, in turn sold the place to my father Mr. Armstrong in 1901. My folks, the original home place, is where Allyn O'hair lives now." Carolyn and Viola Wood. Alverson, "Interview with Paul Armstrong," (Yellowstone Gateway Museum Library Files, Livingston, Montana.: 1959). See also McDonald, John, "Armstrong's Creek" from *Sports Illustrated,* April 7, 1958, reprinted in *The Park County News,* Livingston, MT, Page 3-Section 2, Thursday April 24, 1958. McDonald summarizes the history with a bit more information. "In 1886, two sportsmen, James and Win H. H. (Doc) King of Jacksonville, Ill., bought the ranch for a hunting and fishing lodge. James was a merchant, Doc was a surgeon. A rancher, O. T. Armstrong, who had come from Missouri in 1878, rented the ranch from the King brothers and worked it while the

As Armstrong's success indicates, successful ranches did not necessarily involve purchasing or proving up on a patent from the federal government. The fixed amount of land available to claim through homestead laws limited the volume of ranches that could be established through the Homestead Act. In addition, settlement quickly expanded to claim most of the viable arable ranch land and, equally important, water rights in the 1880s and 1890s. Public land boundaries settled into place shortly thereafter. "Putting a ranch together" for those who arrived in the 1890s and afterward increasingly involved the acquisition of private land, rather than starting with a homestead claim. Expanding or even establishing a ranch typically involved purchasing an existing ranch or homestead claim, frequently one as small as a single patent (160 or 320 acres), and building up an enterprise based on land and water rights established by somebody else. There was logic in the choice of a ranch that had already been established; having ditches dug, fields plowed, fences built freed up the rancher to focus more directly on raising cattle.

In contrast, financial circumstances limited the land acquisitions made by some contemporaries of O.T. Armstrong and George Allen to a much smaller scale. These operators might piece together one or two homestead parcels to create a ranch that might support a small herd of 25 mother cows or on which they could pursue a mixture of truck farming, ranching, and other economic activities.

Some of the most explosive growth of ranches occurred between 1900 and 1920. A primary cause was the development of massive sheep and cattle empires in an era when prices for both showed continual increases. Some of the largest holdings were built on local consumption and marketing of meat. In addition, during the 1880s and the 1910s, turnover in homestead sections and small parcels was brisk as settlement predictably resulted in both success and discontent. This created

sportsmen brought hunting and fishing parties from the East. In the 1890s Armstrong bought out the King brothers, and put their land together with his own 400 acres and so made the 1,500-acre ranch of today."

opportunities both for newcomers and for existing ranchers seeking to expand their operations. Many ranchers whose livestock operations generated the necessary capital to acquire the properties involved in such turnover built up sizable holdings fairly quickly.

For example, L. H. Van Dyck, who operated a company with the same name, held an exclusive contract to supply the park with meat. The decline in market hunting in the 1890s surely helped his business by creating additional demand for beef. The business prospered enough to merit the creation of a siding on the Park Branch called Deever.[5] Van Dyck did receive a patent to a 189-acre homestead patent on the Yellowstone River in 1907, but the majority of his properties were lands acquired from the railroad and individuals. Throughout the period from 1890 to 1910, Van Dyck made purchases of land, buying up working farms and ranches as well as undeveloped railroad sections. Yellowstone National Park historian Lee Whittlesey has written that, in 1917, Van Dyck owned over 7,000 acres in the Gardiner Basin and ran a meat processing business that grossed $100,000 a year. Van Dyck's holdings included the original A. W. Chadbourn Ranch, all of the lands owned by the Mountain Coal and Coke Company in association with the coal mines at Horr and Aldridge (six or seven sections), smaller properties acquired from Cinnabar settlers Hugo Hoppe and Washington Northrup, and several railroad sections he purchased in 1901 and 1919.[6] In 1919, Van Dyck sold his holdings to Walter Hill for $200,000, an investor and heir to the Northern Pacific Railroad

[5] Whittlesey notes that the date is unknown, but that the siding is on a 1933 USFS map. L. H. Whittlesey, "'They're Going to Build a Railroad!: Cinnabar, Stephens Creek, and the Game Ranch Addition to Yellowstone National Park, 1995," Unpublished Manuscript in Author's Possession. 32.

[6] Whittlesey, 33.

fortune amassed by his father James Hill. Van Dyck pursued other business ventures in Livingston and was a prominent figure in local government for many years.[7]

Ranch building 1920s-1950s

The first half of the twentieth century also witnessed the more gradual growth of other ranch operations that did not have the added bonus of a direct retail operation. Many were ranches established as homesteads before 1910 that were in their second generation operation by sons or daughters of the original ranch owner. Growth came most commonly in the form of acquisitions of large blocks of railroad land as well as through the acquisition of neighboring homesteads. Inexpensive railroad land continued to play a central role in ranch expansion into the 1950s. The Sam Dailey Ranch, the Karnes ranch, the Stewart ranch, and the D'Ewart Ranch—all substantial operations by the 1950s—all provide examples of second-generation ranch operations that expanded their holdings during this period.

Ebenezer Dailey, emigrated from Iowa to prospect in the Upper Yellowstone in 1866 with his wife and five children in 1866: three sons and two daughters. After the family suffered through two wretched years in Yellowstone City, Ebenezer turned to farming and ranching, locating two strategically positioned homestead entries on the west side of the Yellowstone, in the vicinity of the Bottler ranches, in the 1870s. His first, a 160-acre parcel, adjoined Dry Creek near its confluence with the Yellowstone and the second, 286 acres on the Yellowstone on the north side of the mouth of Donahue Creek. Railroad acquisitions in the 1880s and 1890s allowed Ebenezer to extend his holdings onto the mouth of Big Creek. As sons Isaac Newton (Newt) and Sam Dailey established homesteads on the Yellowstone adjoining their father's holdings, the Daileys effectively controlled most of the irrigable land west of the Yellowstone between Big Creek and the Point of Rocks—a distance of about 6

[7] Van Dyck to Hill-McClellan. Warranty Deeds, Book 57, Page 255. Park County Clerk and Recorder and Whittlesey, 32-33.

miles. The Daileys filed water rights in 1873, 1882, and 1893, giving them priority use on Big Creek, Donahoo (spelled Donahue on contemporary maps) Creek and West Creek.[8]

When Sam Dailey, born in 1857 in Iowa, set out to ranch independently in the 1890s, he purchased his father's holdings at Donahue and Big Creek, about 635 acres. Dailey's brother Andrew J. Dailey was actively expanding his ranch on the east side of the river near Dailey Lake during the same period. Newt Dailey ranched in the area for a period, but left sometime around 1912.[9] Between 1900 and 1928, Sam Dailey was active in acquiring ranch property, appearing as a grantee of property in twenty-two deeds. Some acquisitions represented additions to his ranch, others appear to have been speculative ventures elsewhere in the area that resulted in a quick resale, and several involved properties that were shuffled among the three Dailey brothers.

When Sam Dailey died at age 71 in 1928, his real estate holdings consisted of 3,511.26 acres.[10] In addition to the land Sam Dailey purchased from Ebenezer, he also ranched on land acquired from the railroad and on other homestead parcels. In 1912, Sam Dailey purchased Otto Loeper's holdings, the two separate homesteads—Charles Hoff's and Phil Bottler's—that adjoined Ebenezer's original holdings on Dry Creek. Between 1902 and 1928, Sam Dailey himself purchased 2,783.26 acres from the NPRR. His acquisitions included small, strategically located parcels, like 160 acres straddling Big Creek, just upstream of the 155 acres that Ebenezer had purchased at the mouth of Big Creek and the Yellowstone. Other

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[8] See Miscellaneous records 2:31, 2:33, 7:124, Park County Land Records.

[9] Ebenezer Dailey's obituary from 1915 noted that Newt was a resident of Absarokee (a town in Stillwater County, Montana). *Livingston Enterprise*, June 28, 1915. Newt Dailey appeared to struggle more than his brothers did financially. In 1927, property he owned in the Six Mile Creek area west of the Yellowstone River was auctioned in a sheriff's sale. See Miscellaneous Record 17: 231, Park County Land Records. He died in a Livingston hotel room in 1929. *Livingston Enterprise*, March 30, 1929.

[10] Death record number 2671, Park County Clerk and Recorder.

acquisitions were section-sized, and were likely pasture sections. All but one were located on creeks, indicating that Dailey had little use for land that could not be irrigated or at least provide drinking water for livestock.[11] Importantly, Dailey never borrowed money to buy land, at least not according to the official records. In fact, the records suggest that he acted as a financier to seven local ranchers during the period 1904 to 1920, one of whom was his brother Andrew.[12]

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[11] Specifically, Samuel Dailey's estate included the following parcels: T7SR7E: section 4: lots 5-8, SW4NE4 (125 ac.), granted by Homestead Entry patent to Sam Dailey 12/14/1889 [verified through GLO database] *This piece adjoined Ebenezer Dailey's original homestead.* T6SR7E: section 23: lots 1,2,3, W2NE4 (155 ac.) purchased from Ebenezer Dailey 7/4/1897 [26:8] *NPRR land.;* T6SR7E: section 13, all west of river (320 ac.), purchased from Ebenezer Dailey 7/4/1897 [21:608] *NPRR land.;* T6SR7E: section 14: SE4; purchased from Ebenezer Dailey (160 ac.) 7/4/1897 [21:619] *Homestead parcel by Ebenezer Dailey, 1882.;* T6SR7E: sec 24: lot 1 (2 ac.) purchased from Mary Lay 11/29/1898 [22:164] *Homesteaded by Mary Lay, 1892.;* T6SR7E: section 25: all (640 ac.) purchased from the NPRR 9/8/1902 [30:538]; T6SR7E: section 17 (640 ac.) purchased from the NPRR 2/27/1907 for $1,200.00 [35:289]; T6SR7E: section 34: all W of River (286 ac.), purchased from son Charles Dailey, who had acquired it from Sam's brother, Newt, 1/3/1913 [5:40] *Ebenezer Dailey homestead section, 1889.;* T6SR7E: section 14: N2. (320 ac.) purchased from Otto Loeper 3/13/1912 [51:327] *This included two 20-acre sections patented to Philip Bottler in 1882 and 1890 as well as two parcels of 40 and 80 acres patented to Charles Hoff in 1904 and 1908.;* T6SR7E: section 15: NE4 (160 ac.) entered contract with NPRR 1918 for $800, acquired posthumously to heirs of Sam Dailey 7/2/1928. [59:246]; T6SR7E: section 33: all (640 ac.) purchased from the NPRR 6/30/1920 for $1,314.45 [53:499]; T6SR7E: section 23: parcel in NW4 N of Big Creek (60 ac.) no record of acquisition. *NPRR land originally.;* T7SR7E: section 3: lot 3 (3.26 ac.) purchased from NPRR 6/17/1924 for $136.00.

[12] Borrowers included the following individuals and families:

Frazier, Thomas: 1904 gets a mortgage from Sam for 6S7E sxn 27 596 a w/ water rights. This is renewed in 1905 and released in 1908. A railroad section. Mortgage records, 3: 340.

Hancocks/Gosnell: William Hancock homesteaded sxn 26 160 acres in 4S9E sxn 26 SW4 1899, gets SW4 of sxn 22 in 1908. Pearl Hancock homesteads a 40 on SE4SW4 sxn 24 3S9E. Josiah Gosnell homesteaded in 1901 on 3S9E sxn23(SE4NE,NE4SE4)/24 (NW4SW4,SW4SW4). 1907 Pearl Hancock to Sam Dailey, 3S9Esxn24: SE4SW4 [37:316]. 1907 Lucinda Gosnell to Sam Dailey, 3S9Esxn 23: NE4SE4, SE4NE4; sxn 24: W2SW4 [37:318]; 1910 Sam Dailey to Alta Hancock, 3S9E: sxn24: SE3SW4, 3S9E:sxn24:W2SW4, sxn 23: NE4SE4, SE4NE4 [51:92]. Selling her the Gosnell piece along with what she had mortgaged to him. 1911 Alta Hancock to Sam Dailey, 3S9E sxn 23: NE4SE4, SE4NE4; sxn 24: W2SW4 [51:93];1916 Sam Dailey to Alta Hancock, 3S9E sxn24: W2SW4, SE4SW4; sxn 23:NE4SE4, SE4NE4.

Alex Stewart established a Desert Claim homestead of 85 acres at the junction of Rock Creek and the Yellowstone River in 1907. A Scottish immigrant who first came to the Upper Yellowstone to work in the mines at Aldridge, Stewart was married with five young sons. Sometime in the early 1920s, James and Robert, the two youngest sons, developed homestead claims on 640 acres further up Rock Creek, receiving official title in 1934. The Stewarts continued to add land steadily after that for about twenty years. Among the important additions that the Stewarts were able to

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Kenniston, Angeline: Neighbors on Big Creek but also have land near Emigrant at the base of Pole Gulch—may also have been sawmill land. 1909 Sam Dailey to A. Kenniston, 5S8E: sxn 28, S2SW4, w/ lots in Livingston and water rights. This is land that appears to have been homesteaded by Angeline Kenniston's father Charles Smith in 1894, and is on the1906 map in name of Angeline Smith.

In 1920 and 1921, Kenniston grants Dailey through mortgage deed [19:301, 19:506]. This grant is assigned to Alfred. The estate of Sam Dailey includes two notes from Angeline Kenniston, one for $16,500 and another for $1,360 both at 8% and dated 1927. Ultimately reverts back to Alfred Dailey. Dailey patents the rest of section 28 (not Emigrant) in 1939, gets another part in a bank sale in 1932 [62: 626, 62: 633] Alfred is named in two sheriff's sales as a defendant in 1935 and 1937, sales that also involve E.B. & Angeline Kenniston.

Loeper, Otto. Sam Dailey sells him a piece to Otto and Albert Loeper in 1910: 240 acres w/ water rights. Otto grants it back to him in 1912.

Wilson, Frank: Sells to Sam Daily 1908 [37:316] 5S9E sxn 28: E2SE4; sxn33:E2NE4, SW4NE4. Sam Dailey sells same to Frank Wilson 1/22/1913 [50:311]. This is a ranch high up on Mill Creek Flat.

Norman, Millard sells land in Tom Miner Basin to Sam Dailey in 1909. 8S6E sxn 10: NW4 [the section he homesteaded in 1905], sxn 9:E2NE4, sxn 3: W2E2E2E2. [42:26] In 1914, Sam Dailey sells this land to Andrew J. Dailey [42:26] In 1920, Andrew Dailey grants to Millard Norman: T8SR6E: sec 10: NW1/4 (160 acres); sec 9: E1/2NE1/4; sec 3: W1/2, W1/2E1/2, W1/2E1/2E1/2; reserving a lot sin SE part of section 3 conveyed to Andrew J. Pfohl of 10 acres and part of sec 3 sold to Alex F. Martin of 23 acres.

McDonald Placer (Chico), from Wm Knowles in 1908, to Wm Knowles in 1918 [48: 351]

May also have been in the habit of lending his brother Andrew money. He and Andrew exchanged rights to 7S7E sxn 11 in 1909 and then back in 1914. Andrew had a son who lived with his mother in Bozeman and a daughter.

make to the ranch were purchases of railroad land as well as land associated with existing ranches. In 1931, Alex Stewart purchased a 400-acre spread originating with the Bert Tuggle homestead—the notes from the deed suggest that the property was encumbered with a mortgage. This acquisition won them an important 170 inches of water from Big Creek, though the priority date was late: 1899. Nonetheless, water was important to latecomers like the Stewart family. In 1941, Alex Stewart purchased close to 2,000 acres of land from the NPRR. Robert and James took over the ranch in 1943. Thereafter, they added more land. In 1954, they purchased another 1,400 acres from the NPRR. The next year, they purchased 158 acres from James and Emma Cutler, the piece that was on the other side of the Pfohl piece from them. A few years later in 1958, they made their final major purchase: 1,585 acres from Edwin Harvat, a sheep rancher based near Livingston who was closing up shop.

The Karnes Ranch, which the Story family added to their holdings in 1973, was established the early 1890s. In 1894, Maggie J. Karnes purchased property from Newt Dailey. Her husband, Albert F. Karnes, received two homestead patents in 1905 and 1906, for 160-acre sections in adjoining section 31. The location of these patents, close to Emigrant and near Fridley Creek, suggests that the Karnes's may have been sitting on them for awhile before actually getting the patents. Albert died sometime in the decade of the 1900s. Land records indicate that they had three sons, Francis M. Karnes, Ira Karnes and William Karnes. Francis Karnes put together a small ranch in the Big Creek area (about two sections) between the 1900s and 1930s. In 1954, his property passed from Kate Karnes, who was possibly a widow or daughter, and became part of the Gilbert Ragsdale Ranch.[13] Ira, William and Maggie appear to have ranched in partnership into the 1920s. By the 1940s, William A. Karnes was the sole proprietor of the Karnes ranch—at the time of Maggie's death sometime in the 1950s, Ira, living in Whitehall, granted William quit claim to his

[13] Warranty Deed Book 82, Page 47. Park County Clerk and Recorder.

claim to one-third of the estate. William Karnes' marriage to Olive Foley produced five children (or at least five are included in the settlement of William's estate in the late 1960s). While the family record is not especially clear, the land ownership record showing the growth of the William and Olive Karnes ranch is. William Karnes began to purchase land actively in the 1940s with a 1944 contract to purchase 5,107.8 acres for $6,080 from the NPRR. The purchase included 8 sections in T5SR7E, high up on Fridley Creek.[14] In 1947 Karnes purchased another nearby railroad section.[15] In 1951, Karnes purchased 100 acres from Malcolm Story that delivered 80 miner's inches from Fridley Creek.[16] These purchases made the Karnes ranches one of the most spatially extensive properties in the Upper Paradise Valley in the mid-twentieth century.

The D'Ewart family, who struggled greatly in the period between 1917 and 1925 with the crash of the sheep market and the death of patriarch Robert D'Ewart, emerged from the 1940s battered but successful. The growth of the ranch was more difficult and thus less expansive than in the cases of the Dailey, Karnes or Stewart ranches and so shows another face of ranch development during this period. In 1941, Henry D'Ewart moved to split the ranch he operated with his widowed mother, Carrie D'Ewart. She took over the dairy operation while Henry developed a beef cattle operation. In 1947, Carrie D'Ewart made her daughter Thelma a partner in the family's dairy business. Together, they made three acquisitions during the 1950s: they purchased two sections from Henry in 1951 on Dome Mtn[17]; they purchased the William Hurworth homestead from a land company that had foreclosed on it for

[14] Warranty Deed Book 73, 488. Park County Clerk and Recorder.

[15] Warranty Deed Book 73, Page 488.

[16] Warranty Deed Book 71, Page 439.

[17] Warranty Deed Book 86, Page 246.

delinquent taxes[18]; and they purchased another parcel from the Hurworth family in 1955. Thelma and Carrie managed a dairy as partners until the early 1960s.

A critical feature of this period of ranch building is the dominance of local ranchers in the cohort of ranch buyers. Not surprisingly, given the weakness of livestock markets for much of the period from 1920 through 1945, ranching in the Upper Yellowstone failed to attract many recruits from outside the region or from non-ranching backgrounds. This development has particular significance because the dominance of locals as ranch buyers and the success of many second-generation ranchers during these years encouraged ranchers to see intergenerational succession as a normal part of the ranching economy and landscape. It may also have fed a proprietary attitude among local ranchers towards the land and the ranching community because there was little competition for the lands of the Upper Yellowstone.[19]

Ranch agglomeration 1960-2000

After the 1950s, opportunities to buy up small homesteads and railroad sections became increasingly rare. Many of the ranch expansions that occurred after 1960 involved an additional level of agglomeration, that is the merging of ranches that were already themselves sizable compilations of smaller parcels. Because of its extensive scale, ranch agglomeration in this period dramatically expanded the average size of land holdings at the same time the number of ranch operators declined significantly.

[18] Warranty Deed Book 86, Page 429.

[19] There were, however, important exceptions to this rule of the lack of competition, namely Yellowstone National Park Superintendent Horace Albright's ambitious plan to expand the park's northern boundary. His accomplishments toward this end were supported by the fact that land was cheap due to the lack of competition for it. See Chapter VI.

A common trend during the period was the tendency for a new, absentee land-owner with greater access to capital than most local ranchers to go on a large, but ultimately short-lived, ranch buying spree. These spates of rapid purchases typically created enormous holdings, though they rarely led to long-term tenure by a single ranch operator.

Frank Goodyear, of the Goodyear tire company and a resident of Pennsylvania, made his first purchase in the area with the acquisition of two adjoining properties, the Bailey Place, which was about 1,000 acres, and the bulk of the Stewart Brothers Ranch about 9,000 acres in 1964.[20] Two years later, Goodyear added the Pfohl place north of Rock Creek, about 2,000 acres.[21] These purchases gave Goodyear control over practically an entire swath of land from the south side of Big Creek to Rock Creek, but that apparently, was not enough. Goodyear sold the property in 1966 for unknown reasons.[22] Goodyear's contemporaries included Joyce

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[20] Warranty Deeds, Book 11, Page 645 and 649. Park County Clerk and Recorder.

[21] Warranty Deeds, Book 104, Page 521-525; Book 111, Page 290. Park County Clerk and Recorder.

[22] It is tempting to speculate that Goodyear found himself overextended by all of his acquisitions. Many out-of-state ranch buyers during the 1960s and 1970s expected the ranches they owned to be profitable investments, either based on operational cash flow or through their ability to shelter tax losses. Their motivations responded to the kind of logic captured in the how-to guides by the inestimable Howard L. Oppenheimer in the 1970s. The titles included *Cowboy Arithmetic: Cattle as an Investment*, *Cowboy Litigation: Cattle and the Income Tax*, and *Cowboy Economics: Rural Land as an Investment*. In the latter volume, Oppenheimer summed up the ranchland investment trend in the West this way:

> With stocks at an all-time high, government bonds in a state of depression, and inflation noises from all sides, ranch and farm brokers throughout the nation are seeing a sudden rising tide of investment demand for agricultural and grazing land. For the first time in recent history this demand is coming not from the man who wants a country hobby or a weekend place for his children to ride horseback but from sophisticated investors who have been in dozens of kinds of businesses and have ridden all types of securities up and down the various business cycles of the past 30 years.

The book included a lengthy section entitled, "Analysis and Management Techniques for Absentee Owners." Harold L. Oppenheimer, *Cowboy Economics: Rural Land as an Investment* (Danville, Ill.: Interstate Printers & Publishers, 1966).

W. Hornady and Marvel A. Hornady, owners of the Hornady Manufacturing Company of Grand Island, Nebraska, one of the nation's leading ammunitions manufacturers. The Hornadys acquired both the enormous Sam Nesbit Ranch and the John Darroch Ranch between 1969 and 1970, but soon sold their holdings to a speculator-developer in 1972.

The geography of ranch agglomerations during this period suggests that many out-of-state buyers were seeking what Goodyear created, but soon rejected: control over a large, geographically defined area. This motivation has continued to affect ownership patterns into the present. For example, when Quentin Brawner sold the original George Allen ranch in 1992, the buyer, a speculator from Texas, quickly went to work to create a truly exclusive ranch property by acquiring adjacent parcels, nearly doubling the ranch in size. Through this strategy, the buyer was able to legitimately advertise the property as *the* Bullis Creek Ranch, because its 18,000 acres included almost all of the private land on Bullis Creek. Similarly, when the former CEO of Home Depot set about acquiring what had been the Ox Yoke Dude Ranch in the late 1990s, he was concerned about development on adjoining parcels. He made his contract to purchase the dude ranch contingent on his success in also purchasing a parcel that had been carved out of it in the 1970s. He has subsequently acquired any adjacent property that has become available.[23]

In a few cases, local ranchers participated in ranch agglomeration after 1960, though they were in the minority. The Floyd and Hazel Peterson family, who arrived in the 1940s, acquired the Goodyear holdings when they came on the market in 1966. Already owners of the large Townsend Ranch near Dailey Lake, this purchase made the Petersons—for about ten years—one of the largest ranches in the entire county. Their holdings amounted to over 20,000 acres. Peter Story finalized the purchase of the Karnes Ranch in 1973, doubling the size of his operation to make it roughly

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[23] James Murphy, "Interview by Author," (2004).

12,000 acres of deeded land.[24] One of the most ambitious ranch agglomeration schemes included the purchase of the B-Bar Ranch by the three families that remained in Tom Miner Basin in 1974 described in Chapter III. Having pooled their land and resources, the families, incorporated as Mile Hi Ranches, controlled 12,000 acres in Tom Miner Basin for the three years that the corporation existed. No local ranchers made large ranch purchases after about 1985. The high cost of land and the risk of experiencing the kind of fiasco incurred in Tom Miner Basin were the reasons why.

Breaking ranches up

At the same time that much of the ranching landscape reflected a long-term pattern of consolidation, some ranches stayed small, while agglomerations of holdings were sometimes split back up into constituent parts, or in other cases, divided along lines differing from those of the original constituent parts, re-scrambling fence lines and property boundaries. Prior to the 1960s and 1970s, there were two factors that could lead to the breaking apart of a ranch property. Bankruptcy was one. Bankruptcy-related dissolution of properties was rare, however, as lenders often opted to sell ranches intact. Those that were divided were often enormous ranch holdings that included several units that were run as discrete operations. For example, when financial disaster prompted to Walter Hill liquidate in 1929, he had holdings because spread across Park County. Hill's large Trestle Ranch in the Gardiner Basin was sold separately from other properties, as a single unit. The far more common event that led to the division of a ranch was retirement or death of a ranch owner and the subsequent distribution of his or her holdings among those heirs who chose to stay in ranching. The development of a recreation- and amenity-oriented ranch real estate market in the late 1960s and 1970s introduced entirely new dynamics. After this

[24] Warranty Deeds, Roll 8 Page 785, Park County Land Records.

point, a variety of land-owner motives that had little to do with the operational viability of a livestock ranch affected how ranches were put together and taken apart.

The Sam Dailey ranch holdings offer a good case study of the recycling processes of addition and partitioning that sometimes occurred in the course of generational succession on family-owned ranch operations. As described above, Sam Dailey built up a sizable ranch enterprise during his 40-year tenure as a rancher and land owner.[25] His holdings included roughly 1,000 acres that he purchased from his father, Ebenezer, who had put his holdings together through railroad purchases and homestead parcels. In addition, Sam Dailey's holdings included a significant portion of railroad land he purchased himself as well as his own exercise in ranch re-aggregation, the 286-acre homestead parcel that had passed from Ebenezer to Sam's brother Newt, which Sam acquired from his son, Charles, in 1913. All four of Sam's sons, Harvey, Charles, Arthur, and Alfred, pursued ranching in the Big Creek area, each acquiring some part of Sam Dailey's holdings. When Sam Dailey died, his estate included 3,511.26 acres as well as liberty bonds, Certificates of Deposit, half-interest in the firm, Samuel Dailey and Sons, which owned an undisclosed inventory of farm machinery, implements, cattle, hogs, and horses, notes for debts from two of his neighbors, and several contracts for sale of land. The estate was valued at $7,832.68 after expenditures and was assessed a state inheritance tax of $1,565.29[26]

The histories of Samuel Dailey's sons suggest that their generation represents an important transition in the nature of family ranching. When they began as ranchers, each of Dailey's four sons had opportunities to acquire land through a combination of inheritance and inexpensive purchases. They had greatly varied success. Three of them were able to expand their ranch operations through land

[25] See later in chapter for explanation of buying parents out.

[26] Deed of Distribution, Estate of Sam Dailey, 5/28/1929. Miscellaneous records, Book 17 Page 469, Park County Clerk and Recorder. One of the assets listed is: 1/2 interest in partnership in the firm of Sam Dailey and Sons, a partnership of Sam, Alfred and Arthur.

acquisition during their tenures as ranchers. However, they experienced far more financial instability than their father. By the time the sons retired, the likelihood of another generation of Daileys succeeding them to create a third generation of Dailey ranchers had diminished greatly.

Harvey Dailey was the oldest son, born in 1885. In 1914, he married Vere Pritchard, the daughter of a local minister who, with his wife, operated a ranch north of the Daileys'.[27] Harvey and his wife Vere operated a ranch on Goldmeyer Creek from 1914 until 1951. The ranch included 320 acres of land that Harvey received from Sam Dailey's estate in 1928 as well as about 800 acres of land obtained from Vere Dailey's family, the Pritchards.[28] Harvey and Vere had a small ranch and appear to have encountered their most serious financial difficulties at the end of the 1930s. Harvey obtained loans for amounts ranging from $1,500 to $2,700 from the local bank, the First National, in 1939, 1940, 1941, and 1948. The loans were all repaid within a few years. The Daileys made one purchase of railroad land in 1950, buying 712 acres for $3,552.75.[29] In 1950, the Daileys were ready to retire. Their son lived in Seattle and their daughter was married to a resident of another part of the county, so they put their ranch on the market. Selling the ranch appears not to have been easy, as the first contract they signed in 1951 fell through.[30] In 1953, a local rancher bought the ranch and the Daileys moved to the town of Clyde Park to be

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[27] Park County Historical Society, *History of Park County Montana, 1984*, ed. Doris Whithorn (Taylor Publishing Company, 1984), 392.

[28] See Warranty records, U. S. Patent to Vere: 46:557, Katie (for Sam Dailey estate) to Harvey: 60:411, May Pritchard to Vere Dailey: 47: 68 and 47:340, Raymond Pritchard to Vere Dailey 63:77. Mortgage records, 26:244, 26: 526, 27:86, 27:251, 30:637. They also obtained an official deed to 200 inches of water from Raymond Pritchard in 1947. The transfer was perhaps made in an effort to tidy up documents prior to selling the ranch. Warranty records, 74:503. Park County Land Records.

[29] NPRR to Harvey Dailey, Warranty records, 82:3.

[30] See Jack and Roberta Hinman to Harvey Dailey, Quit Claim Deed, recorded 3/10/1951. Warranty records, 83:48.

near their daughter.[31] Harvey died tragically of a self-inflicted, but accidental rifle wound in 1957 at the age of 72. Vere passed away in 1966.[32]

Charles Dailey was the second oldest, born in 1889. He served in World War I and left the Valley for some years after the war. When his father died in 1928, the local newspaper noted that Charles was a resident of Fresno, California and he was also not noted as a partner in the company, Sam Dailey and Sons, described in the probate documents of Sam Dailey estate.[33] Soon after Samuel Dailey's death, however, Charles, Alfred, and Arthur took over their father's ranch operation in some kind of partnership. Although the details are made hazy by limited sources, land records indicate that all three of these siblings were indebted at some point in the 1930s to James O'Connor. Charles satisfied his mortgage obligations to O'Connor in 1940, but appears to have had other financial difficulties. In 1940, Charles Dailey entered into a mortgage agreement with an individual named Bertha Cremer, who lent him $9,000 against the value of the family ranch at seven-percent interest per year. In April of 1941, Charles Dailey further leveraged his holdings in order to pay a debt at the local grain elevator of $460. Charles Dailey lived alone on his ranch and did not expand his holdings during his tenure as the operator. He shot himself with his hunting rifle one week before Christmas in 1941. He was fifty-two years old.[34]

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[31] Dailey, Harvey to Larson, Leon, Warranty records, 87:231.

[32] Harvey Dailey's death was reported in the *Livingston Enterprise* on November 16, 1957. Vere Dailey's death was recorded in Death Index, number 7411, Park County Clerk and Recorder.

[33] Sam Dailey's obituary was published in the *Livingston Enterprise* on Sunday, April 15, 1928. His probate inventory, recorded 5/28/1929, is located in Miscellaneous records 17:470, Park County Land Records.

[34] Mortgage records Dailey-Cremer, 26:552, Dailey-Livingston Milling & Elevator, 27:86. Warranty record 69:140 shows a Quit Claim of interest from James O'Connor for satisfaction of mortgage, recorded 11/23/1940, but there are no other mortgage records. *Park County News* reported Charlie Dailey's death on December 18, 1941.

Charles's death apparently prompted Alfred and Arthur to formally divvy up the holdings of the family ranch, although the three brothers had likely been operating independently of one another during the 1930s. Arthur ended up on the main ranch, although Alfred received title to the Samuel Dailey homestead on Big Creek in 1930 after his father's death. Arthur and Alfred went in together on several purchases of railroad land in the 1930s, but in each case split or consolidated the title within a few years.[35] Arthur made two purchases of railroad land independently in 1928 and 1933, buying 960 acres for a little less than $4,000.[36] There are no records that indicate that Arthur ever borrowed money to finance his land acquisitions or ranch operation. Arthur was married to Mildred F. Dailey, according to land records, but it is not clear whether or not they had any children. His death was not recorded by the local paper nor in the county death index, so he probably moved away after selling the ranch in 1944. His brother Harvey's obituary (1957) noted that Arthur had preceeded him in death. To purchase the Sam Dailey ranch, Claude Hookham borrowed $61,500 from his former employer, Dr. George Windsor, who owned a large ranch north of Livingston.[37]

Alfred, born in 1893, was the most enterprising of the Dailey brothers in the sense that he made the greatest effort to branch out from the family holdings (an effort that may have been foisted upon him by family politics, especially because he was the youngest). In addition to title to the Sam Dailey homestead on Big Creek, Alfred was fortunate to inherit from his father's estate interest in a mortgage granted by Angeline

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[35] Warranty records as follows: In 1934, Arthur and Alfred bought 640 acres (7S7E: sec 5) from NPRR for $2,630,75 [63:269]. Arthur granted his share in the E2 to Alfred in 1935 [64:306]. They then granted 320 acres of the west half of section 5 to Opal Violet Tate, who was perhaps a lender, in 1934 [63:441]. Opal Tate granted half of the west half, the SW 1/4 back to Arthur in 1939 [68:158]. Park County Land Records.

[36] Warranty records, 67:473 and 71:11. Park County Land Records.

[37] Dailey, Arthur to Hookham, Claude, Warranty records, 72:258. Hookham, Claude to G. A. Windsor, Mortgage records 28:189. Park County Land Records.

Kenniston to Sam Dailey for a parcel of land near Emigrant. The mortgage went into default and the land reverted to Alfred, who divided his operations between land in the Big Creek-Donahue Creek area and Emigrant. In 1930, Alfred purchased 320 acres from a homesteader.[38] In 1932, he purchased more land near Emigrant from the First National Bank, presumably land the bank owned because of a mortgage default.[39] He continued to buy land from homesteaders and the Northern Pacific in the 1930s and 1940s, growing his land holdings to over 3,800 acres. Like his brother, Alfred did not borrow money to finance his land acquisitions. Whether or not Alfred and his wife Ethel had more than one child is unclear, but they included only their son Harold, born in 1918, in the ranch's future. In 1941, Alfred deeded 20 acres of land to Harold, and the two apparently began a partnership.

For his part, Harold Dailey also made an effort to develop his own land holdings. During the 1940s, Harold Dailey bought two sections of land from the NPRR for a total of just under $5,000.[40] He purchased another 480 acres from the Pritchard family in 1949 and took title to additional lands from his father in 1950, along with important water rights in the Yellowstone River.[41] His father's gift occurred coincidentally with Alfred's decision to retire during the 1950s. In 1955, Alfred purchased a lot in Livingston and in 1959, John and Oneita Broderick purchased 3,867 acres from Alfred for $77,354.40. Alfred died suddenly after shoveling his walk in 1965 at age 72. It is unclear why Harold and his wife moved to Absarokee in 1952, though the financial circumstances of trying to provide for his

[38] See Sam Dailey estate probate. Zimmerman, Alfred to Alfred Dailey, Warranty records 60:560.

[39] First National Bank to Alfred Dailey, Warranty records, 62:224.

[40] NPRR to Dailey, Harold, Warranty records 72:626 and 89:343. Park County Land Records.

[41] See Warranty records, Ray Pritchard to Harold Dailey, 79:268 and Alfred Dailey to Harold Dailey, 80:546.

seven children may have been one concern. The move obviously meant that Harold did not take over his father's ranch operation. Harold sold his land in three units between 1951 and 1967. In 1965, however, Harold and his eldest son, James R. Dailey, returned from the Red Lodge area and attempted to create a fifth-generation Dailey legacy with the purchase of the ranch that had been assembled by another local rancher from parts of the Pritchard and Harvey Dailey property during the 1950s. Their venture was short-lived, however. James and Harold sold after just two years. In 1970, Harold was killed in a freak accident while fixing fence on the ranch north of Livingston where he was working as a ranch hand. He was 51. His obituary noted that James R. Dailey was living in Butte.

Although one of Harold's daughters married a rancher from the Paradise Valley, James and Harold's departure in 1965 from the land ownership records signaled the end of an era. There would not be again continuous, multigenerational ownership of land in the Dailey name after 1967. The events involving the Sam Dailey ranch and its constituent parts within the Dailey family history and particularly afterwards show a typical degree of fluidity in ranchland ownership.[42] Parcels of land were assembled for one rancher's purposes into a single property which was later disassembled to divide among siblings who assembled their own agglomerations. Those new ranches might later be sold as whole units or discretely, with the various parts likely to be reconfigured as part of a different assemblage of properties. The effect is of a puzzle whose pieces can be fit together in a number of different combinations that each reveals a different image or composition on the surface. Indeed, the buyers in the 1940s and 1950s like Gilbert Ragsdale, Harry Payne and

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[42] Sam Dailey was unique in his ability to leave each of his sons a legacy of a ranch; most ranchers were not nearly so well-endowed. However, the very scanty evidence that exists indicates that when the sons inherited the ranch properties, the time had passed when ranches that size could support a family. Charlie's suicide may have been encouraged by financial difficulties (he had a large mortgage on the property) and Harvey finished life as a ranch hand.

Joe Petrich who acquired different parts of the Sam Dailey ranch were practicing a version of the model that Sam Dailey employed when he put his holdings together at the turn of the century. From the 1880s into the 1960s, ranch division and ranch agglomeration were often complementary processes.

The advent of a recreational ranch real estate market in the 1960s and 1970s disrupted the potential for balance between ranch agglomeration and fragmentation. The subsequent histories of the lands associated with the Dailey family holdings show that there were two primary factors that developed in the 1970s to tip the balance between agglomeration and fragmentation. The first was subdivision of ranch land for residential development, a trend that took individual ranch parcels out of the mix altogether. Once a parcel was divided and distributed among a number of owners, even if they did not build roads and homes and other obstacles to using the land for ranching and even if ranchers could afford to pay the residential value of land, the sheer complexity of the ownership regime made reassembling pieces into a viable ranch unit highly unlikely. The land that James and Harold Dailey purchased together swapped hands a stunning five times between 1967 and 1982 before it was finally carved up into an extensive subdivision of 40-acre parcels. An important feature of the spate of buying and selling that affected some of the Dailey brothers' legacy during the period from the 1950s through 1970s is the fact that buyers were increasingly heavily leveraged to buy land. Unlike the Dailey brothers (at least three of them) who typically borrowed in small amounts that they could pay off, ranchers who bought land after 1960 took on substantial debt burdens.

Donahue Creek, Big Creek, and Dry Creek have been reconfigured, as much as is possible, into discrete, contiguous blocks. Where there were six or seven intermingled ranch properties in the 1950s, there are now four ranches. All but one of the land owners are people for whom mortgages and debt are simply not concerns. Big Creek features the Mountain Sky Guest Ranch (formerly the Ox Yoke), owned by Arthur Blank, former CEO of Home Depot, as well as the smaller Malcolm Ranch, the only locally owned and operated ranch in the area; the large West Creek Ranch, which belongs to Carl Webb, a former vice-president of Bank One in California straddles Donahue Creek; and the land between the Point of Rocks and Rock Creek lies within the boundaries of the R&D Ranch, owned by Robert Smith, chairman of the Charles E. Smith Commercial Real Estate Company, the largest real estate development company in the Washington D. C. area.[43] Over the past two decades, each of the three absentee owners in the area has pursued real estate transactions geared toward "straightening fence lines"—e.g., ensuring that their holdings were contiguous and without inholdings—for maximum privacy and resale value.

Families & Land Tenure

Whether they arrived in the 1920s, 1950s, or 1990s, newcomers to the Upper Yellowstone had opportunities to buy ranches because the families that owned and operated them put them on the market. What prompted ranches to go out of family hands? Just as cows produced a healthy calf crop only under the best combination of weather, forage and care, the family ranch model was contingent on good fortune as well as the availability of resources: those resources that nourished a livestock herd also nourished a rancher's wallet (provided markets were good, of course). From the perspective of the children raised on a ranch, the success of a ranch could be measured by the ranch's ability to support them as adults with families. The life experiences of adult ranch sons (and very rarely daughters) responded to the timing and nature of the transfer of the family ranch: when and how the opportunity arose to raise a support oneself and one's family on the family ranch, and *if* that opportunity arose at all. In addition, the commitment and interest of ranching children both

[43] www.cescre.com; Robert Smith recently gave the University of Maryland $15 million. Now the school is called the Robert Smith School of Business.

affected and was affected by the quality of intergenerational transfers. In the absence of willing heirs to work and maintain the ranch, the family ranch reached the end of the line.

The history of ranch ownership in the Upper Yellowstone suggests that three scenarios were possible within the spectrum of intergenerational ranch transfers. When inexpensive land and strong cattle markets created circumstances of abundance, ranch operators were sometimes able to help their children make a fully independent start when their children reached adulthood: the ranch's reproductive cycle in such cases, was synchronized with family generational cycles. This dynamic was limited to the early stage of ranch development. More often in the history of ranching in the Upper Yellowstone, ranch operators encountered a situation in which the ranch's resources were insufficient to meet the demands of aspiring heirs to the operation. In other situations, most commonly in times of severe depression in livestock prices, families sold their ranches. Out-of-family sales occurred most often because of the absence of interested heirs or due to the limits of the ranch property, two difficulties that were often impossible to separate.

Scenario one

The scenarios of ranch building and ranch transfers described earlier in the chapter speak to a gradual narrowing of opportunities for intergenerational transfer over time. Between the 1880s and 1910s, ranchers had the greatest opportunity to exploit land and livestock markets to develop large holdings that could be divided among several adult children. Such was the case for O. T. Armstrong, who helped four of his children assume ranch operations in Park County when they sought their independence.[44] Similarly, John Harvat's three sons were all able to take part in the

[44]Park County Historical Society, 87.

Harvat Sheep Company empire in a partnership established when John Harvat died in 1916.[45]

Some who ranched at a more modest scale in the early nineteenth century than Armstrong or Harvat were also able to help their children make a start on their own ranches. Joseph Stermitz, the coal-miner turned homesteader whose family lived in a dirt-roofed dug-out during their first few years on the ranch, committed himself to helping his children get established. As his grandson James Stermitz recalled, Joseph Stermitz "didn't keep all the land he bought; he helped others. He set up his other children with ranches around the area."[46] Similarly, R. B. Smith had few advantages when he undertook ranch life in the Paradise Valley in 1901. Starting out as a new immigrant to the area in 1901 with a wife, three young children, and only a few household belongings, Smith borrowed the money to purchase a small ranch in April of 1902. As Smith's efforts and good management yielded good results, he could afford to add two additional parcels of land. He built a large frame house in 1917, the same year he traveled to Salt Lake City to buy a purebred Hampshire sheep to improve his herd. Smith's three sons all entered into ranching in 1930; two brothers took over the original place and the eldest moved on to another ranch purchased with the family's help.[47]

Scenario two

The description of the growth of ranches during the period 1920 and 1950 in Part One suggests that some local ranching families were able to create opportunities

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[45] John Harvat was quoted as saying, "The future conduct of the business must eventually fall to the boys, and now, while I am here to advise them is a good time to shift the burden to their younger shoulders and to let their active minds assume the responsibilities." *Livingston Enterprise*, 1916 quoted in Ibid., 240-241.

[46] James and Lorayne Stermitz, "Interview by Author.," (2003).

[47] Park County Historical Society, 439.

for the second generation in this era. The opportunities, however, were rarely on the scale experienced by families like the first and second generations of early arrivals like the Armstrong, Dailey, Harvat, and Strickland families. The 1930s and 1940s featured widespread adoption of father-son partnerships and extensive out-migration of many children born on ranches. It thus illustrates the adaptation of land tenure and family ranch operational strategies to the economic limits of the ranching landscape. In responding to constraints such as those posed by the Depression era, ranching families drew upon two types of strategies to achieve intergenerational longevity. Families developed intergenerational land transfer strategies fitted to the economic limits of the operation, such as delaying the deeding of the ranch from father to son until the father's retirement. This time period engendered in the local ranching culture a strong focus on self-sacrifice as a necessary trait of ranch family members. Community and family rituals also primed ranch children to understand ranch preservation and duplication as critical responsibilities, even though that often meant inequitable treatment for some family members, especially daughters.

Sam Dailey's relationship with his sons represents an excellent case study in the ways that land transfer trends responded to the economic constraints that developed during the 1920s. During the 1910s, Sam Dailey created a business with two of his sons, Alfred and Arthur. They called themselves Dailey and Sons. Together the partnership held assets including farm machinery, implements, cattle, hogs, and horses, along with much of the land Sam Dailey amassed as a partner with his father and as an individual. Sam Dailey maintained a controlling half-interest in Dailey and Sons, giving Alfred and Arthur a quarter interest in the family business each. It is difficult to know how successfully this model was in enabling Alfred and Arthur Dailey to support their families, but it is perhaps revealing of some strain on the system that the two became independent operators after Samuel's death in 1928.

Alfred, Arthur, and their brother Charlie, were all in their forties before they became independent land owners.

In fact, being in their forties, the Dailey brothers were comparatively young to become independent ranch owners. In many families, the transfer of the deed to the ranch was delayed until the father was ready to retire or until his death, in which case the son was himself an elderly man when he acquired the ranch. The delay of transfer did not necessarily reflect a hostility on the part of the father toward the son, but could in fact be an indication that the family was doing every thing in its power to help the ranch survive the present so that the son might have a future.

The Pierce family (of whom Rose Rigler is a descendant) came to the Paradise Valley because they sought to help their sons get a leg up in ranching. As Rose described it, the story unfolded this way:

> My folks ranched north of Two Dot [central Montana]. And then when my older brother got married, the place wasn't really probably large enough for two families, so my Dad decided "oh, he was going to retire" and was way too young. He worked for about three years on the Milwaukee Railroad. And then Charles got married and he wanted to ranch, so my folks started looking for a place and they bought the place on Mill Creek (Robinson). Everybody would go there. Older brother—John—stayed in Two Dot. Then the Mill Creek place was not large enough for two families and Alvin, so then they bought the Broderick place and after Alvin got married in '53, he went on to construction.[48]

In the first event, Rose's father offered to move off the ranch to make room for his sons. Ultimately he had difficulty giving up ranching; he could not escape the power of the ranching enterprise to captivate individuals. Their decision to come to a larger ranch in the Paradise Valley essentially delayed but did not obviate the dilemmas involved in attempting to create opportunities for three sons (John, Charles, and Alvin). Rose did not count herself in the cohort of children for whom the ranch would

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[48] David and Rose Rigler, "Interview by Author," (2003).

provide. She married the rancher next door and for her wedding received a small dowry in cattle.

Father-son collaboration extended to financing. When economic circumstances were especially harsh, having access to a father's line of credit could mean the difference between a son becoming a rancher or not. This was true for Bruce Malcolm and his brother in the 1950s. Describing how he and his brother got started as young men, he said:

> I guess we had the home ranch [which they operated in partnership with their father] and then my brother and I had built on that, along with my folks' support. The thing we got mostly from my dad was a credit rating, we could borrow money to buy ranches ... just because he said it was okay. . . . He didn't have any collateral particularly, but he knew the bankers enough.[49]

In lieu of deeded land or cash assets, Alexander Malcolm could offer them a valuable resource: his personalized business relationships that guaranteed his sons access to capital. Developing a good credit rating, in other words, could be seen as a practice that improved circumstances not just for individuals, but for the ranch as a timeless unit.

An important development that emerged in the mid-twentieth century involved the phenomenon of sons actually purchasing a ranch from their fathers on time, a practice that came to be known as family "installment sales" (installment sales could also describe owner-financed sales among non-relatives, but the term was most commonly used to describe a son purchasing a ranch from his father.) The impetus for purchasing a ranch was the passage of an inheritance tax in Montana in 1921. The tax could be onerous for ranching families. When Sam Dailey died, his estate was valued at $7,832.68 after widow Katie paid off outstanding expenses totaling $8,711.07 including an inheritance tax payment to the State of Montana of

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[49] Bruce and Connie Malcolm, "Interview by Author," (2002).

$1,647.64.[50] By transferring the title of a ranch to a son through sale, families avoided paying inheritance taxes on land transfers through wills (also known as the "death tax"). In 1979, the Montana State Legislature approved an amendment that created an exemption to the estate tax for lineal descendants, obviating the need for ranchers to maneuver around state estate tax laws. However, the practice of sons buying their fathers out over time was so widespread that it stuck around both as a practice and more importantly as a gauge of success.

Since the 1970s, the primary obstacle for transferring ranches is their inability to provide a livelihood for the next generation. But inheritance taxes had the potential to be highly problematic for ranching families that did not take an aggressive, sophisticated approach to estate planning. Those who do have preferred family partnerships. By forming family partnerships, families can divest themselves as individuals of land and divide the ranches' assets into shares that can be given to children gradually. This model does not offer children especially robust opportunities to borrow against the ranch, but it does help them avoid the penalties of trying to cover inheritance taxes in an environment of highly inflated land values. The Warfields adopted this system, incorporating and gifting shares of the ranch to their children over the thirty years between 1960 and 1990.[51]

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50 Deed of Distribution, Samuel Dailey estate, dated 5/28/1929. Park County Land Records, Miscellaneous Book 17: Page 470.

51 Margery Warfield and Alan Redfield, "Interview by Author," (2003). The latest iteration of avoiding devastating inheritances taxes is the conservation easement. It bears mentioning, however, that the basic trend in tax law at both the federal and state levels since the 1970s has been toward eliminating any additional burdens on agricultural families. There are so many exemptions and other tax-avoidance strategies that estate tax laws should not prevent families from transferring agricultural land to successive generations. The problems arise in scenarios in which ranchers consult uninformed professionals, and when there are numerous siblings involved who all wish to receive their fare share of the high value of a ranch property. Local tax attorney Brian Close provided some of this perspective. Brian Close, "Interview by Author," (Bozeman, MT: 2004).

How have the children of ranching families responded to the burden and opportunity embodied in the family ranch? Lived experience as well as literal narrative encouraged children who grew up on ranches to understand the continuity of the ranch to be at once their legacy and their obligation. This concept was reinforced through a discourse that glorified the ranch as the site of ideal childhoods and real, manly work. The immediate effects of living and working in a highly scenic, resource rich environment no doubt provided another set of influences that encouraged children born on ranches to see their continuity as their privilege and responsibility.

Margery Warfield recollected the 1950s as a period when ranches offered a promise of a lifetime of hard work, uncertain economic circumstances, and relatively little in terms of cash value of land.

> ...the people that I can think of, there were some that wanted to be on the ranch and a lot that just plain didn't. They wanted to get the heck off. If they had one that wanted to stay, it was maybe more the exception than the rule. Because it wasn't a happy time. So much of it was really difficult and there was no time left over and there was no money left over, and it was a pretty confining thing. And it surely wasn't everybody's cup of tea. And that surely doesn't mean that everybody was wrong.

Warfield's vision of the past makes it clear that what it meant to inherit a ranch has long been largely defined by the economic circumstances of ranching.

However, for many ranchers, these roots of notions of obligations to a family legacy run profoundly deep. When they are encouraged in a context of scarcity, they create a disturbing juxtaposition between reality and expectations. Virginia Anderson pointed out the fundamental incompatibility of myth and reality in regards to children and ranching in this plain statement: "Part of the romance of ranching comes from the fact that it is truly a great place to raise children. But," she added, "then they are a stuck when the discover that they can't make a go of it in ranching."[52] Stuck, but the fact remains that many second- and third-generation ranch operators did attempt to stay on their family ranches in the Upper Yellowstone

In another example of the expectations governing adult children's relationships to their parents' ranches, men who left the family place to earn money outside of ranching were expected to return to the ranch if it got into trouble. Ray Durgan's personal story shows how one generation's troubles could affect another's: he hired out as a young man to work on neighboring ranches, but when he saw that the family was struggling, he "gave up hiring out and worked for no wages to help his folks keep the farm."[53] There was certainly some degree of self-interest in these practices—if parents were deeply in debt then clearly they had little by way of inheritance to leave their children. However, the motivations were more complex and involved obligations as well as opportunities.

These imperatives supported a system that often asked the children of ranches to sacrifice their own plans and ambitions in the name of the ranch's succession. In the Darroch family, the sacrifice included relinquishing an educational dream, a dream that proved to have twenty years of staying power. In 1922, John Isaac Darroch assumed control of the large sheep ranch established by his father, John Malcolm Darroch, in the 1890s. When John Isaac Darroch died in 1946, his son, John Isaac Darroch, Jr. was two years through college at Montana State College. He left college to return to the family ranch because, the family biography noted, "he was needed to help the family." He and his mother struggled to operate the ranch for almost twenty years, but his mother gave up in 1965. John immediately returned to Bozeman to complete his college education. Completing his bachelor's degree in his fifties, he went on to pursue the calling he discovered as a young sheepherder

[52] Virginia Anderson, "Interview by Author," (Miner Basin, MT: 2004).

[53] Park County Historical Society, 176. 176.

searching for arrowheads, archaeology. Tragically, he was killed in a car accident, but when he died, his family explained, "he was doing the work he loved." Darroch's determination to return to school and pursue a career off the ranch suggests that coming home to carry out the promise of a third generation on the Darroch ranch was probably a major personal sacrifice.

Peter Story's arrival on the Story ranch provides another example of a son returning to the ranch despite having other goals. Currently, Story children represent the fourth generation of Storys on the ranch that grew out of Nelson Story's original fortunes. However, by the time that Peter's father Malcolm, who was operating family businesses in California as a young man, contemplated assuming his uncle's ranch in the Paradise Valley, the Storys' circumstances had changed significantly. T. B. Story could only offer Malcolm the Story name, a large volume of machinery and animals and a large mortgage. Although Malcolm managed to maintain the ranch over his career, Peter himself thought about careers other than ranching. He had served in the Navy and confesses that he would have loved to become a career naval officer. There were in fact some voices in the family encouraging him to break away from the ranch. When he brought his bride-to-be Eileen home to meet his family, his great-uncle Walter made himself famous in family legend by shaking his spoon at her and saying, "don't let him go back to Montana, he won't ever have a pot to piss in."[54] Nonetheless, the imperative to maintain the Story lineage on the Montana properties was non-negotiable. Peter said that although he had hay fever and was allergic to horses, when his father asked in the late 1950s, he came back to the ranch because the family "loved the area and didn't want to sell" his family's properties. When asked what his parents expected of him, James Stermitz commented unequivocally that his father expected "me to come back to the ranch."[55]

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[54] Peter Story, "Interview by Author," (2002).

[55] Stermitz.

In cases in which sons needed some incentive to return to the ranch in the absence of having full ownership and control, fathers often paid their son a salary. The salary enabled the son to support a family and perhaps to understand himself as an independent operator without having to assume the immediate burden of buying out his father. Malcolm Story initially paid Peter Story a salary and also rearranged ranch operations so that Peter could operate fairly independently.

The daughters of ranchers were also saddled with a set of expectations about their obligation to participate in the reproduction of that family ranch. Well into the middle of the twentieth century, families typically operated according to a code that was seldom voiced but frequently executed: daughters were expected to abdicate any interest in the family ranch to their brothers. Lorayne Stermitz grew up near Big Timber and recalled, "Well because I was a girl, it was never any expectation that I would go back, stay on the ranch. I grew up in a home where ... you handed down the ranch to your oldest son. And I wasn't that, [so] it didn't make any difference [if I wanted to stay on the family place or not]."[56] Looking at the records of ranch inheritance, there are very few examples of women inheriting or owning land in their own right. For example, when married men died, their estates typically conveyed their property to their wives and children in common. In some cases, the wives received a life estate in the property, but no practical control as a land owner. The property went directly to the sons. When Alexander Stewart passed away, his sons—adults with families of their own already accustomed to operating the ranch—became owners of his estate while his wife was granted a life estate. The probate record stipulated that Margaret Stewart was entitled "to have, use, and enjoy" the property and that she had "the right to use only rents, income, profits therefrom." Had she wanted to sell the property, however, she would not have had

[56] James and Lorayne Stermitz, "Interview by Author.," (2002).

any rights to it.[57] However, many ranch mothers of adult sons held on to the little power they did have: that over their daughters-in-law. Eril Merrell recalled that her husband and his mother (a widow) wielded control over all of the major ranch decision-making. "You see I didn't have anything to do with it [decisions about land acquisition]. Ellery and his mother managed everything."[58]

In many cases, the heirs to a ranch juggled their individual and familial circumstances and made personal sacrifices to enable them to assist in the process of ranch reproduction. This often involved the designated ranch heir leaving the ranch to work until that time when the ranch could offer him some kind of position. This was especially common during the 1930s and has recently become common again. Margery Warfield's father grew up on a ranch in the Trail Creek area but failed to see good possibilities for him there. He left and took a job with the sheriff's department in the 1930s. However, when his sister's husband died, the opportunity arose for Peterson to take over her cattle on the family land, which he did.[59] Tom Durgan also supported himself for some years before he joined his father who was nearing retirement. Durgan and his father operated as partners for thirteen years until his father's death allowed Tom Durgan to take over the ranch in 1955. He raised eight children on the ranch, undoubtedly creating a complex inheritance situation of his own.[60]

More recently, parents have created a system for ensuring ranch continuity by forcing their children to generate self-supporting work off the ranch at the same time

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[57] Decree Showing Termination of Life Estate. Miscellaneous Records Book 39, page 164, Filed 3/6/1961. Park County Clerk and Recorder's Office. Park County Court House, Livingston, MT.

[58] Eril Merrell and Bruce and Connie Malcolm, "Interview by Author," (2003).

[59] Warfield and Redfield.

[60] Park County Historical Society, 175-176.

that they imbue them with a sense of obligation to their legacy—seeing the ranch into its *next* generation. James and Lorayne Stermitz's interactions with their children, who are in their thirties at this writing, provides a window into this process. The following statements by Jim Stermitz embody their complex approach to their children's future in ranching:

> By the time our kids were growing up, we pretty much discouraged them from coming back to ranching. We told our oldest daughter she could major in anything she wanted, we just hoped she didn't marry some rancher from some far off place like Ekelaka. And she married a rancher from Ekelaka! She's a math teacher. He's a real swell fellow, couldn't have picked one better myself.
>
> My son is [working for the NPS] mainly because I said that if he came back to this area I said he'd have to have a job before he got here. So he majored first in horticulture then in landscape architecture. So he has a full-time job in Yellowstone Park as a landscape architect. But he lives on the place down here. One of his goals in life is to be able to get back on the ranch.

Despite what looks from the outside like a hard-nosed approach to discouraging their children from ranching, the Stermitzes are nonetheless heavily invested in their children's interest in ranching. The portrayal of their daughter's marriage to the rancher from Ekelaka (a town in eastern Montana that is often used by Montanans as a proxy for the middle of nowhere) as disaster converted to success in some ways serves as a metaphor for what they hope might be possible for the continuity of ranching on their own place.[61]

In best case scenarios, the leverage of conjoined minds, labor, and resources through partnerships (both father-son and inter-sibling) ultimately made it possible for the ranch to calve off individual ranch units thus embodying the ideal model of not just reproduction but duplication. The three Rigler brothers (out of six originally

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[61] Of course, practices that encouraged sons to work off the ranch as young adults would have long been familiar to ranch daughters who chose not to marry in early adulthood. In contrast to their brothers, their father's ranch offered no opportunity for a later return. Stermitz, "Interview by Author.."

involved in the ranch) who survived to middle age were able to create a large enough ranching operation that their heirs could divide it into two discrete units. Unfortunately, for some families the stresses involved in cooperating with brothers and sisters-in-law often encouraged the division of the ranch into independent units before the ranch's assets could truly support multiple independent ventures. For example, when Thelma D'Ewart Gray's brother Henry insisted on dividing the assets of the partnership between him, Thelma, and their mother Carrie, Thelma and her husband were forced to borrow money to buy out the brother. They were fortunately able to pay it off, but not without personal costs.[62] Similarly, when Bruce Malcolm and his brother Phillip went their separate ways after "it kind of became apparent that [they] ... didn't have the same philosophy about life," Bruce and Connie Malcolm were left in the vulnerable position of not having any winter range for their cattle.[63]

While cultural aspects of primogeniture existed, such as the expectation that daughters would leave the ranch, the prevalence of sibling partnerships clearly demonstrates a commitment by ranching families to maintaining equitable division of their estate. Furthermore, estate records show that ranchers often attempted to provide non-ranching heirs with a portion of their estate. Daughters were often "given" the opportunity to go to college in lieu of a share in the ranch operation. A common dilemma for contemporary ranchers rooted in this convention is the obligation to buy out his heirs at the time that he becomes owner of the ranch. The more valuable the land associated with the ranch and by extension, the estate, the harder it is for them to negotiate the final transfer of the deed into their hands.

More recently, high land values in the Paradise Valley have introduced a new round of abundance, although the challenging market environment for livestock production has altered the possibilities significantly from what existed in the early

[62] Thomas Gray, "Interview by Author," (2003).

[63] Malcolm.

twentieth century. Children can neither afford to buy out their parents nor in many cases, manage to both pay estate taxes and buy out their siblings. However, in cases like the Malcolm family, ranchers have leveraged the value of their land to set their children up on their own ranches. Bruce and Connie Malcolm used the sale of high-amenity land in the Tom Miner Basin in the mid-1990s to purchase a ranch in south central Montana that has far greater productive capacity than the parcel they sold. They established their daughter there, motivated by a commitment to providing each of their children "viable" operations in their early adulthood (see Chapter III).[64]

In the event that there were no children on hand to take over the ranch, or in a few cases in which ranchers decided to relocate or sell the ranch while they were still able to ranch, ranches went on the market. The many ranch sales that occurred between 1950 and 1975 involved second or first generation ranch owners selling because they had no children or because their children did not stay around to take over the ranch.

Ownership Change

Recognizing the importance of this third scenario—the ranch sale—the section that follows summarizes trends in ownership change based on a detailed review of all land transactions in three areas within the Upper Yellowstone region. I offer the findings from a limited-scope analysis of the extent and volume of ownership change at different decades between 1936 and 2002. Following is a brief synopsis of the trends in the circumstances—place of birth, background, ranching goals, and other aspects—of buyers and sellers of ranch properties over the broad sweep of the valley's history.

The quantitative findings generated through this analysis suggest that ownership change was historically a relatively common phenomena on the ranching

[64] Ibid.

landscape—a fact that may seem surprising in light of tendency to think of ranch landscapes as a place of timeless tradition. In order to assess the amount of land that changed hands over time, I delineated three sub-areas of the Upper Yellowstone and created a complete record of ownership change based on deed records. The time demands involved in compiling accurate sales databases limited the geographical and temporal scope of this analysis. The areas include the Gardiner Basin, the area west of the Yellowstone that includes the Rock Creek and Big Creek drainages, and two townships around the Emigrant area, including both sides of the Yellowstone with Mill Creek Flat and part of the Fridley Creek drainage. Currently, I have complete datasets for sales and in-family transmissions of ranch land for each decade from 1936 to the present—at least as complete as I can get, noting that I found definite errors in the clerk records. My dataset did not include the sales of parcels in subdivisions (because I was primarily interested in ownership change of *ranch* land) and so greatly underestimate the total volume of land sales after 1970. I chose 1936 as a start date primarily because the county plat maps date back to sometime in the 1930s. In addition, the 1930s mark the end of the period when many people were acquiring land through homestead patents. Though locals continued to buy land from the NPRR in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, the disposition of public land ended in 1934, meaning that I could safely assume that I was dealing with a relatively fixed amount of private land.

The cumulative volume of land changing hands among the three areas is shown in Figure 4.1—this is a tally of all sales, including land that sold more than once, and so is a summary of sales activity. The amount of land changing hands in the each of the three study areas is shown here as an average (white diamonds). On average a total of 16,939 acres changed hands in each location in each decade—based on the study area size (Mill Creek/Emigrant-53,821 acres; Big Creek-51,105; Gardiner Basin-75,767) that means that an average of 31, 33, or 22% of the land area changed hands each decade. The error bars show the high and low numbers in terms of actual volume changing hands in each drainage. The high degree of variability from the average serves as a reminder of the potential for local variability. In the decade from 1966 to 1975, for example, the Emigrant area experienced sales and transfers totaling 44,669 acres while the total volume of land transfers in the same period in the Big Creek area was only 16,612 acres. The most active periods in all three locations were the two decades between 1955 and 1975. For example, Joe Petrich's assembled ranch holdings on Dry Creek changed hands no less than four times during the period 1965 to 1972.[65]

The apparent downward trend shown for the period 1976 to 2002 derives in part from the removal of significant portions of ranch inventory through the creation of subdivisions (especially after 1985 in the Big Creek and Mill Creek areas) as well as from a "settling-down" of the ranch real estate market after the hectic years of the 1960s and early 1970s.

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[65] Joe Petrich's assembled pieces of the Harvey Dailey and Pritchard operations went on to experience a remarkable series of ownership changes after Petrich put the property together in the 1950s. In 1963, Petrich sold the property to Robert Christie and Anne C. Walker, with Gardiner and Great Falls addresses, respectively. The Christies, having formed the Dry Creek Ranch Corporation (I suspect, but cannot confirm) in 1965, turned the property over to Harold Dailey, who signed for the ranch along with his son James in 1965. They in turn resold the property in 1967 to Millard Farrington, of Harlowton. Farrington sold the property in 1972 to Arlo Sutton, a Colorado-based developer in 1972. After a decade as part of the large holdings of Sutton's corporation, Yellowstone Ranch and Recreation Inc., the Pritchard-Harvey Dailey-Joe Petrich-Christie-Farrington Ranch was acquired by the Church Universal and Triumphant in 1982. The church subdivided all of the 2,200 acre ranch and invited its members there. They called it Glastonbury South and divided it nearly 100 lots. The Church no longer plays a management role in the property, but is a landowner of a number of holdings. Other holdings have been further subdivided. The various ownership changes occurring after Joe Petrich purchased the property are contained in the following Roll:Page references, Park County Land Records on Microfilm. R3:967, R3:971, R3:975, R3:977, R3:981; R39:587, R40:490.

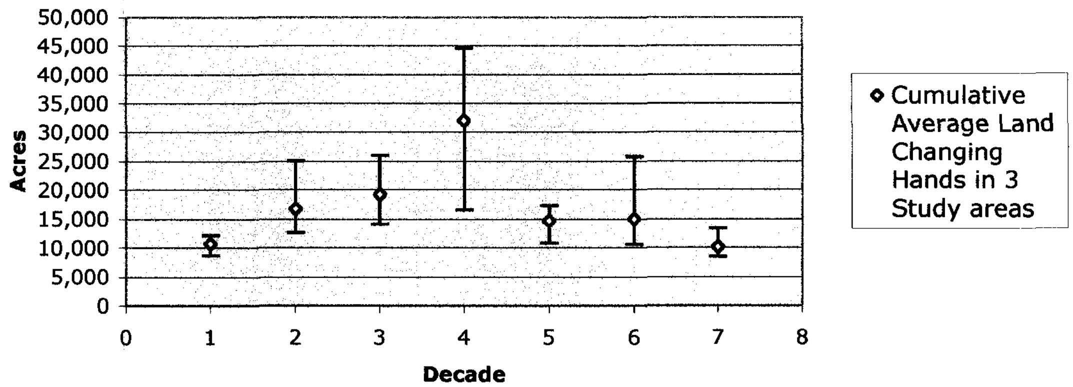
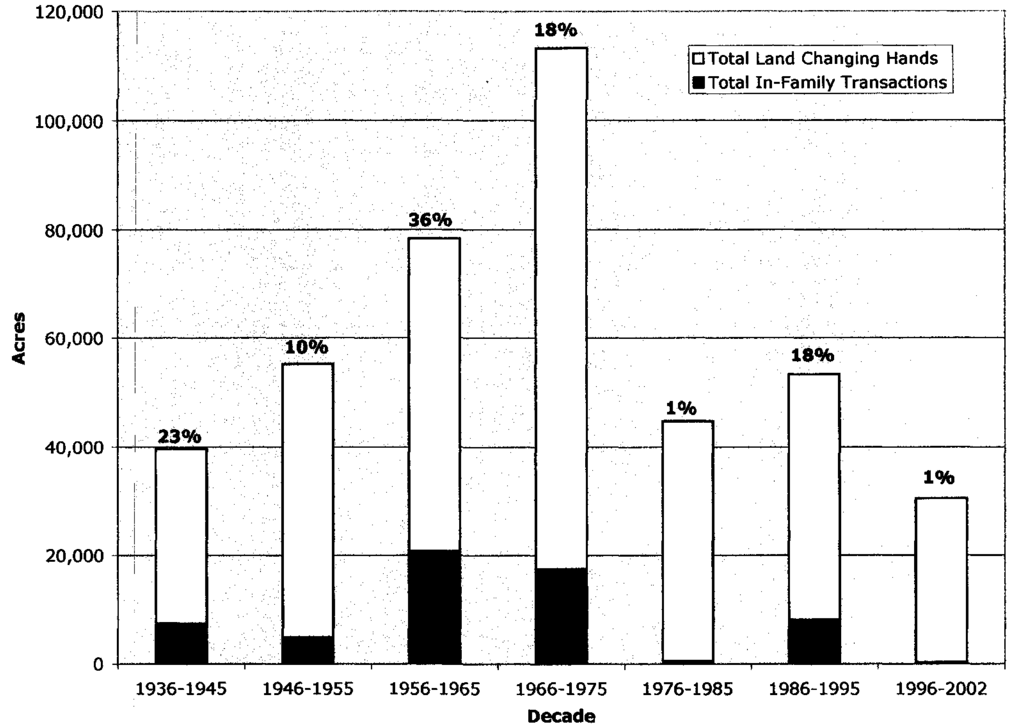


Figure 4.1 Cumulative Average of Acres Changing Hands Showing Range among Study Areas, 1936-2002

The spatial extent of land sales, shown in Figure 4.2, responds to a slightly different question. Rather than asking how many acres in total sold or changed hands, the extent of sales describes how many acres changed hands one time or more during a given decade. Unlike a tally of volume, the extent of sales in terms of land area does not include repeat sales. The extent of sales also showed considerable variation across decades. In Corwin Springs, where the average extent of land changing hands by decade for the entire period was 15% of the total land area, the extent of land that changed hands ranged from 6,425 acres in 1986 to 1995 to 16,021 acres in the period between 1976 and 1985. Those values represent a low of eight percent and a high of twenty-one percent of the land area changing hands. In Mill Creek, the decadal average was 23%, while the extent of land sales and transfers ranged from a low in the 1996-2002 period of 5,236 acres (10% of the land area) to a high in the 1966-1975 period of 23,125 acres (43% of the land in the area). Big Creek showed the greatest consistency in the extent of land turnover, with an average decadal figure of 25% and variations among decades ranging from 8,577 acre between 1936 and 1945 (17% of the land area) to 18,457 acres between 1986 and 1995, 35% of the land area.



Bars show the volume of acres changing hands, in total, and within families either through sale or inheritance. The numbers show the percent of the volume of sales involving in-family transactions. Note: land changing hands does not include subdivided land.
Source: 3 local maps and the Park County Clerk and Recorder Deed Record information.

Figure 4.1. Cumulative Ownership Change in Mill Creek/Emigrant, Big Creek, and Corwin Springs study locations.

In conclusion, on average, between one in four and one in six acres was likely to change hands in a decade.[66] The columns in Figure 2 suggest some periodicity in the rate of ownership change, which has to do with the links between the lifecycle of a family and the lifecycle of a ranch—as a family or several families reach retirement in the same decade, a large volume of land changed hands. The black rectangles in the columns in Figure 2 show how that dynamic changed over time: in the 1950s, 36% of the land changing hands was within families, while that number has shown a trend of

[66] In these calculations, I am using a measure of total land area that includes public and private land. This is because of the potential for land to move between these two categories over the course of time, for example in the disposition of public land or the acquisition of private land by public land agencies.

decline more recently: in the 1970s and 1990s, there were virtually no in-family transfers of land. As this important finding suggests, describing who was buying and selling land helps to explain how evolving land ownership patterns shaped cultural patterns on the landscape.

Buyers & sellers

Prior to the 1950s, grantors of land typically belonged to three groups: the federal government, the NPRR and individuals. While the U.S. was still in the business of disposing of the public domain, homestead claims were popular items. The Upper Yellowstone area featured only a handful of parcels of unclaimed land in 1934 when the federal government officially terminated the homestead acts. Consequently the BLM has a minimal presence in the area. As the experiences of the Daileys, Stewarts, and Karnes show, many ranchers relied on the purchase of inexpensive land from the railroad to swell their portfolios of deeded land. Railroad purchases continued to be recorded into the 1950s, though the majority of the prime pasture and arable land that was originally granted to the railroad had been disposed of by the 1930s. Individual homestead owners selling land during the period might be selling a small homestead because they were either fed up with it, too old to manage it anymore, or for other case-specific reasons. In addition, during the period from about 1895 and the 1910s, it was not uncommon for large landowners to sell small pieces of land to homesteaders.

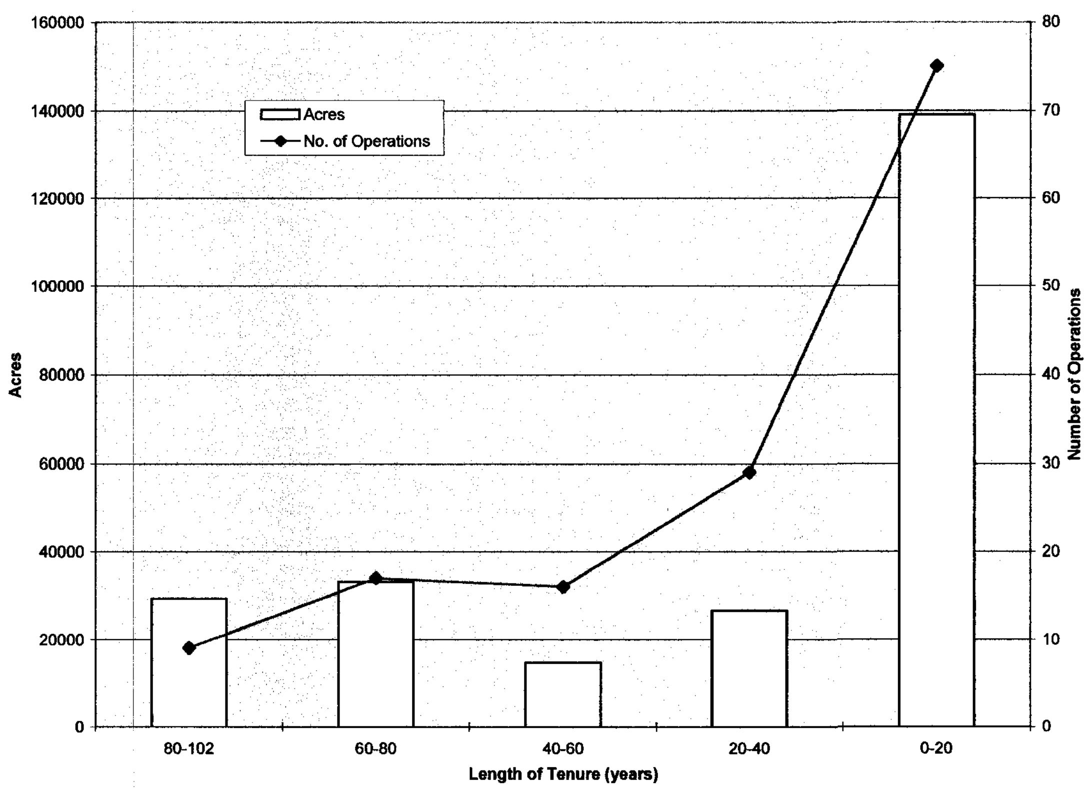
Grantees in the pre-World War II period are somewhat harder to type. Between the 1870s and 1900s, grantees were often newcomers to the area. Many of the early settlers in the area who came as families intending to farm and ranch (as opposed to prospecting or other endeavors) appear to have come from the Midwest, with Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois contributing a fair share of migrants. Many of them had farming backgrounds and some experience with livestock. Others—including young men who came as individuals and families—tended to be drawn first to other industries: railroad building, prospecting, or later, working in the coal mines. From the 1910s to the 1930s, grantees were more likely to be long-time residents of the Upper Yellowstone; frequently, land went into the hands of the second generation of families that arrived in the area between 1870 and 1900. Throughout this period, a handful of buyers who came to the area with large amounts of capital had an impact in particular parts of the landscape. Some were wealthy businessmen whose objectives centered on hunting and fishing, others were tycoons intent on increasing their fortunes through large-scale livestock ranching. However, local capital—such as that generated from vertically-integrated ranch-butcher business—more commonly funded the acquisitions behind the creation of "land and livestock" empires such as that of Samuel Nesbit or John Darroch.

World War II had a powerful churning effect on ownership patterns. The war itself was so disruptive that it created a comfort with mobility among young families that might not have existed in the 1920s and 1930s. This applied to emigrants and migrants: sons of local ranchers went abroad and discovered a world away from the ranch, in the process depriving their family of a successor on the ranch, while young people in other parts of the country discovered the appeal of ranching in the Upper Yellowstone. In addition, expanded government financing for agricultural land purchases encouraged young people to buy farms and ranches. In the 1940s through the early 1960s, immigrants from other parts of the country constituted a large portion of the ranch buyers in the area. Some were descendents of ranching families from the northern Great Plains and eastern Montana seeking to relocate to the scenic and well-watered Upper Yellowstone; others were young, urban easterners seeking a lifestyle change. By and large, they purchased the ranches of retiring ranchers, many of whom were the second-generation sons and daughters of the area's earliest Euro-American settlers and homesteaders. More often than not, buyers from the 1940s onward bought ranch units that represented some degree of agglomeration.

Importantly, the bulk of buyers during this era intended to live and raise families on the ranches they bought.[67]

These trends in ranch ownership change created a sizable cohort of ranch operators in the 1950s and early 1960s who were new to the area. Figure 4.3, made from an analysis of the tenure of all of the landowners listed in a 1966 map of the Upper Yellowstone, illustrates the dominance of newcomers in the 1960s. By far the majority of operations as well as the majority of acres in the area were owned by individuals with fewer than 20 years of tenure on the property in 1966. Interestingly, the chart shows that there were many more acres and operations owned by individuals with tenure of 60 or more years than there were by individuals with 40 to 60 years of tenure. This speaks to the increased difficulties of starting—and maintaining—after 1906, as opposed to before when inexpensive land and water were more readily available.

[67] This statement is supported by the longevity of these newcomers well into the late twentieth century. The newcomers included the Andersons, Ellisons, Hookhams, Petersons, Schuerens, and Warfields.



Note: The chart refers to the length of time that some part of a ranch property had been in the hands of the owner or one of his relatives in 1966. This chart does not account for long-time residents who moved around, but is focused on tenure on a given property.

Figure 4.3. Length of tenure of 1966 land owners.

Subsequent decades, the 1960s and 1970s, introduced a new dynamic into ranch buying. These years witnessed the conversion what had been an unusual, though not unheard of, trend among the grantees of ranch purchases—absentee, recreation-oriented ranch ownership—into a booming trend. Ranch buyers differed in their approach to ranch tenure from those in the 1940s and 1950s who typically planned to own and operate a ranch full-time. In the 1960s and 1970s, buyer typically came from one of three categories. One set of buyers consisted of large-scale ranchers, often from other parts of Montana, who were expanding their operations. The second set included land speculators who sought to capitalize on opportunities to buy up ranches and subdivide them into residential properties or to sell newly-configured up ranches and subdivide them into residential properties or to sell newly-configured ranches to recreation-oriented buyers. Lastly, some buyers in the 1960s and 1970s were absentee owners who sought to own a ranch as a recreation destination. This group of buyers included individuals who had strong interests in investment potential and in livestock ranching as well as buyers seeking a long-term relationship with a place who may or may not have been particularly interested in profit or even cattle for that matter. Of all of these types of buyers, the first two groups tended to have very short tenures in the area. Particularly in the period between 1968 and 1980, it was not uncommon for buyers to own a ranch for fewer than five years. Many ranches turned over three or four times. Thus, the cohort of grantors during this period included many of the same people who were grantors, although it also included retiring ranchers. Fence lines changed dramatically as a result of the changing focus of ranch owners. From large, integrated ranch properties, developers would carve out and sell off the desirable riverfront or forest-edge lands in small parcels, leaving large swaths of foothills pasture on the market in larger blocks. Intermingled parcels were swapped among owners to "straighten fence lines," that is to create consolidated, exclusive large ranch holdings. Recreational interest in the area continued to grow in the 1980s and 1990s and, with it, land values. As prices reached unheard of levels, the group of sellers expanded in these recent decades to include full-time ranchers who were in the middle of their careers, in addition to ranchers facing retirement, speculators, developers, and short-time absentee owners. Since the 1960s, the average tenure of absentee owners of substantial ranch properties—say those of 1,200 or more acres—has proven to be far shorter than the tenure of full-time operators who owned such properties before them.

In sum, land ownership change is not an unfamiliar part of the ranching landscape; however, the link between ownership change and the introduction of new land owners whose priorities and backgrounds differed greatly from previous ranch owners is a phenomenon that evolved after World War II. The following example of a discrete landscape, the Tom Miner Basin, provides a detailed study of the implications of turnover for ranching communities during different episodes of ownership change. In it, I describe how Basin ranchers drew upon their own construction of the vernacular landscape and upon land use practices to generate a narrative that accommodated change at the same time that it emphasized continuity. However, the Tom Miner Basin example also shows the limits of these strategies in the context of recent ownership changes.

OWNERSHIP CHANGE AND COMMUNITY, THE TOM MINER BASIN EXAMPLE

Tom Miner Basin sits several hundred feet above the floor of the Yellowstone Valley just south of Yankee Jim Canyon. A discrete geographic area that demonstrates many patterns familiar to the rest of the Upper Yellowstone, the Tom Miner Basin provides a clear window on the processes that ranchers employed to fit ownership change to the contours of their expectations of ranch continuity. Topography rendered the area highly remote during the late nineteenth century and the high elevation basin originally served as summer pasture for ranchers based elsewhere and for open range ranchers.[68] Beginning in the 1880s, Tom Miner (locals typically dropped the "Basin" from the name) was eventually settled by resident ranchers, and subsequently witnessed the arrival and departures of dozens of ranchers and ranching families over the course of the period between 1879 and the present.

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[68] Sam Dailey was an important figure in the establishment of Tom Miner Basin—the Merrell brothers Edward and Oscar reportedly went to work haying for Sam Dailey in 1890 after their wagon train to the Big Hole fell apart. "When winter came, Mr. Dailey sent them to Tom Miner Basin for the winter, telling them there was lots of wood and game. They lived in a cabin on Dailey cattle range." Park County Historical Society., 333. In an interview, the Merrell family suggested that the brothers spent the winter cutting timber for fencing for Dailey in exchange for the right to establish a squatter's claim in the Basin.

Tom Miner Basin experienced several discrete episodes of ownership change. Because the particular economic and demographic circumstances of each episode differ, when taken as individual examples, these periods offer examples of the different approaches that ranchers developed to attempt to convert change in ownership into stability in cultural narrative and community. The episodes include the initial retreat from homesteading in the 1930s, the arrival of several new land owners from non-ranching backgrounds after World War II, and the transition from a full-time working landscape to a mainly absentee-owned, recreationally-oriented landscape during the last late 1970s through the 1990s. What the different strategies had in common was the prominent role of conventional livestock ranching as a non-negotiable factor of membership in community.

The first series of ownership changes succeeded a period of enthusiastic homesteading that took place in the early 1910s and 1920s. The number of homesteaders who took up land in the Basin during this period likely had more to do with making the most of what was available than with enthusiasm per se: remote mountain valleys like Tom Miner represented the last pockets of public domain in the 1910s and 1920s. In fact, many homesteaders found the difficulties of life and work in a remote valley at 7,500 feet above sea level insurmountable and abandoned their claims within a few years of staking them. Some of the neighbors who stayed took advantage of the opportunity to expand their operations or straighten fence lines. Departures from other ranches created opportunities for tenants who determinedly eked out precarious existences in the basin during the 1930s and 1940s. When Eril Bottler Jones married Ellery Merrell in 1936, she moved to his family ranch in Tom Miner Basin. She recalls that there were "a lot of people" living in the Basin year-round at that time, on ranches that "made a living."[69]

[69] Merrell and Malcolm.

In describing the landscape of the Tom Miner Basin that she encountered as a new bride, Merrell practiced one of the strategies that ranchers have long used to mitigate the assaults on collective local identities inherent in ranch turnover. To combat the potential alienation associated with the replacement of familiar neighbors with new names and faces, ranchers maintain connections to previous landowners through place names. The names of previous occupants of land serve to identify landmarks as well as particular land parcels long after they have been claimed by newcomers. In an oral history interview conducted with Eril Merrell and her daughter and son-in-law, Bruce and Connie Malcolm, these ranchers demonstrated the close link in their minds between family legacies and topography. Looking over a map of the area, Merrell made comments like, "the Link Place, Bill Simonson had that," "Ned Jackson owned the Morrison Place," and "Quisenberry's lived down on the Lauer Place." In the same interview, Merrell's daughter and son-in-law referred in the present tense to specific places in the landscape like the "Lower Norman meadow" despite the fact that Alex Norman sold his ranch in 1940s. When Eril Merrell discussed a set of land transactions involving buying out the neighbors and expanding the Merrell ranch, the preservative functions of this technique become immediately apparent. "Right in the middle of the Ring meadow, we owned 80 acres . . . We traded that to Wards [a neighbor] for the big mountain and the canyon on the Sharp place. That put that place altogether, the Sharp place and Link place and made it one square."[70] In addition to serving as practical devices to delineate a landscape in great detail and to maintain distinctions among otherwise unnamed units of the landscape in an era of consolidation, references that render previous—and absent—occupants of the land as timeless serve an important cultural function. Through the inscription of their predecessors in place names, ranchers maintain a continual vernacular landscape whose details resist the disruptions arising from

[70] Ibid.

ongoing permutations in ownership and land use patterns. At the same time, the naming conventions of ranch owners served to enshrine the process of ownership change by reminding new land owners of pre-existing circumstances on their properties.

While the size of the ranching community in Tom Miner Basin continued to shrink during the 1930s, it was in the 1940s and 1950s that a new trend in ownership change emerged. During this period, ranches in the Basin—several of which had become quite large by buying out their neighbors—attracted a new buyer when they went on the market. Specifically, the buyers were "refugees" of upper-class upbringings who sought a new lifestyle and experience as full-time ranchers. The out-of-state buyers were William Ward, heir to the flour fortune of the Ward Bakery chain of New York and Chicago, and Andrew Anderson who came from a wealthy family in Wisconsin. Ward purchased the ranch that Charles Scott had put together in the 1910s and 1920s from Scott's widow in 1941. Anderson, who had first ranched briefly at Mill Creek, acquired a large ranch from Ned Jackson in 1955.[71] In addition, Paradise Valley native Alex "Scotty" Malcolm purchased the Justine and Johnny Martin place in 1951 to use as summer pasture for his boxed-in operation on Mill Creek.

The Malcolms were well-known to the residents of Tom Miner Basin because they had been leasing land in the area for several years. Ward and Anderson, on the other hand, were unknown quantities—newcomers to ranching and the area alike. One of the most important gauges that local ranchers applied to ranch turnover was the extent to which specific ranching practices remained unaltered in the course of a change in ownership. When they remained intact, ranch practices like pasture use irrigation provided a continuity on the landscape that diminished the importance of the individual owner's length of tenure. Neighbors could observe the continuity of

[71] Anderson.

land use practices in part just through observation; it is not hard for attentive passers-by behind the wheel of a car to learn where and when a rancher is haying. In addition, word traveled fast from the hired hand to the neighbor next door when the subject was the size of the hay yield that summer: the ranching valleys of the Upper Yellowstone were no exception to the rule that rural small towns are fertile soil for rumors. Furthermore, the landscape provided connections that made one rancher acutely aware of another's habits, especially when it came to water flowing through communal ditches.

When he took over the Ned Jackson ranch, Andrew Anderson adopted behaviors that reassured his neighbors. According to his wife Virginia, the neophyte rancher spent a summer in the Basin working side-by-side with Ned Jackson before he moved his family up to their new property. By working with Jackson, Anderson not only gained valuable training in ranching but he also demonstrated his willingness to adopt the practices of his predecessor.[72] For the Merrell family, who neighbored Ned Jackson and then the Andersons, there were important distinctions between old-timer and newcomer nonetheless. Both Virginia Anderson and Eril Merrell noted that Ellery Merrell was occasionally frustrated with Andrew Anderson's irrigation practices which Merrell deemed regrettably under-zealous. As Eril put it, "Andy, he didn't irrigate like Ned did, Ned irrigated all the way up into the section one on the bench." (While the lessening of irrigation intensity might have created slightly more water for Merrell to use, it also affected the timing of water availability; the more intensively an upstream user flood irrigated in mountain meadows like those of Tom Miner, the longer the water—which came in a rush every spring headed as fast as it

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[72] Ibid.

could to lower elevation—was available.[73]) When it came to the Wards on the B-Bar Ranch, the Merrells and Malcolms were even less forgiving in their assessments.[74]

The working part of the ranch operation was also an important point of connection between old-timers and newcomers. Ranchers could justify class differences and different upbringings as long as new land owners ran cattle. For example, Jim Stermitz of the Cinnabar Basin—who worked off the ranch to keep it operating and in the family for most of his adult life—commented, "We've always had millionaires around." But, he noted, that juxtaposition didn't affect them as long as the millionaires ran cattle—and he mentioned Bill Ward as an example.[75] The focus on cattle undoubtedly reflects the immediate benefits of sharing a fence with someone with common land use goals, but more importantly it provides an easy-to-meet standard by which long-time ranch owners can accommodate new neighbors into their understanding of the value and purpose of community. When landowners meet this basic gauge, their perceived ability to disrupt the continuity of the ranching collective evaporates.

Even if ranchers like the Merrells felt they had legitimate reasons to grouse about their new neighbors, there were also meaningful incentives to integrate new comers in isolated landscapes like Tom Miner Basin. Newspapers assisted in this task by de-mystifying new ranchers and normalizing them for their local readers. In addition, the challenges of work and daily life in ranching communities worked to bind people together in a network of interdependence regardless of the length of their tenure.

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[73] The use and function of irrigation ditches is discussed at more length in Chapter 4.

[74] In general, their opinion was that because of the Wards had outside sources of income, they lacked the basic motivation to sustain the ranch at peak performance and "let it run down." Bruce and Connie Malcolm, "Interview by Author," (2003).

[75] Stermitz, "Interview by Author.."

When the *Park County News* reported the sale of the Charles Scott ranch to the Ward family, the editors did feature the term "New Yorkers" prominently in the headline. On the other hand, the article went out of its way to portray the Wards as legitimate heirs to the local ranching tradition. For example, the article testified to the Wards' "association" with the Valley Ranch in Wyoming, a prominent dude ranch. While a dude ranch differed significantly from a commercial livestock ranch, they let the difference slide. In the paper's estimation the Wards' experiences at the Valley Ranch endowed them "with a cow country background that will give them a full stride in the management of the Miner basin ranch." The fact that Dan Bigelow, Mrs. Scott's brother and the previous occupant of the ranch would stay on to assist in operations provided another, perhaps more convincing measure of reassurance about the Wards' commitment to continuity of local traditions. The article concluded that "The livestock industry and the people of Park county will welcome the newcomers."[76]

Later on, newspapers incorporated the new ranch owners as regular features in the local columns that reported on the social rhythms of rural places. As far as the local news reporters were concerned, the new owners were indistinguishable in their behaviors—enjoying visits from neighbors, making weekly shopping trips to town, and participating in bridge clubs. Despite the obvious and important differences in their financial circumstances, new owners in the 1950s and 1960s like the Wards, Andersons, and Warfield brothers, had similar habits and daily lives to their neighbors. These similarities diminished the significance of financial differences (especially in a culture in which finances were kept intensely private). In the 1960s, the social pages kept track of life around Emigrant and Pray, a community that by that time included multi-generation ranchers, new ranchers, a few wealthy amenity owners, and owners of tourist-oriented business. As described in the local news, the

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[76] "Scott Ranch at Miner Sold to New Yorkers," *Park County News*, June 12 1941, 1.

gatherings appeared to make no distinction among the residents based on their length of tenure, class or wealth.[77]

Far more important than bridge games, the social interdependence that was a simple fact of life for year-round residents of Tom Miner Basin was a powerful equalizing force. All but a few ranchers in the 1950s and 1960s lived in Tom Miner year-round. Winter snows often prevented travel out of the Basin for days at a time. When Bill Ward was injured in a car accident, Mrs. Minnie Merrell took in the Ward's infant son George and looked after him during the six weeks that Mrs. Ward visited her husband in the hospital at Chico. In fact, the Wards, the Andersons, and the Merrells all had children near in age. Eril Merrell remembers babysitting for her daughter along with the Anderson's son. In addition to sharing a common interest in operating livestock ranches, the families could easily recognize their similarities through their children.[78]

The attitude of the newcomers mattered, too. When asked how she interacted with local ranchers as a newcomer, Virginia Anderson—who was often asked if she was English when she first moved to the area because her diction reflects her refined upbringing, responded, "Well, I just liked them, you know I was at that age when you just like anyone who comes along. When you're young you just expect to make friends wherever you are. ... Without thinking much about it, you talked about things that fit in with their [life]. You didn't go in and say, 'Well, have you read any good books lately?'" Although arguably somewhat patronizing, Anderson's accommodating

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[77] For example, in the winter of 1965 Mrs. George Miller reported that "Mrs. Bill Whithorn entertained the Pray club Wednesday. Following the luncheon the afternoon was spent playing cards with prizes going to Mrs. John Broderick and Mrs. Otto Brown. Others enjoying the party were Mrs. Don Blakeslee, Mrs. Elmer Armstrong, Mrs. Dave Rigler, Mrs. A. C. Schueren, Mrs. Pearl Kenny, and Mrs. George Miller." Mrs. George Miller, "Emigrant-Pray," *The Park County News*, Thursday, January 28 1965.

[78] Merrell and Malcolm.

attitude no doubt influenced her neighbors' ability to accept her into their community.[79]

Ranch buyers in the Tom Miner Basin proved harder to assimilate in the context of the post-1970 recreation economy. As in all of the Upper Yellowstone, the 1960s and 1970s ushered in a tumultuous period in ranch ownership in Tom Miner Basin, one marked by the arrival of absentee owners and land developers and speculators. Chapter III described the tumultuous events involving the Malcolm, Anderson, and Merrell families and the B-Bar Ranch. When the partnership dissolved in 1976, the partners liquidated some or all of their holdings. The Merrells sold their share of the ranch to an out-of-state land investor and part-time rancher, James Hubbard, in 1976. The Malcolms kept a small section and opened an outfitting business there in addition to continuing to summer cattle on it. The Andersons sold most of the B-Bar to Maryanne Mott Meynet, heiress to the Charles Stewart Mott fortune, in 1978. Today the Tom Miner Basin is primarily a recreational ranching landscape. James Hubbard operates a fishing and hunting lodge on the Merrell Ranch while the B-Bar is operated as a guest ranch in winter and used as a private retreat for the Mott-Warsh family and guests in summer. The Martin Place and the part of the Scott Ranch known as the Lupher Place are owned by absentee owners. The Anderson family continues to live on their ranch and raise livestock, but Andy and Virginia's son who now runs the ranch also has a full-time job in town.

The changing demographics of land owners in the Tom Miner Basin since 1970 mimics developments throughout the Upper Yellowstone. As non-resident land

[79] Interestingly, at the same time that Virginia Anderson adapted herself to the social circumstances of the Tom Miner Basin, she was also able (when the roads were clear) to keep up with a group of friends who were more representative of her own class and background. She recalled that in the 1950s and 1960s, "there also was a group of good friends in the valley, they were all the same kind of émigrés from college and the war and formed a little town and country bridge club. So once a month the husbands would take over the children and we'd go ... so we had friends that were like ourselves that way." Anderson.

owners, new buyers like Mott and Hubbard cannot participate in Basin's social life in the kinds of regular, spontaneous ways that foster a sense of interdependence. More importantly, the land use practices of new owners challenge many of the fundamental premises upon which local ranching culture has been built. In Virginia Anderson's assessment, the difference rests on whether the ranch is a hobby or a full-time job. "New people, it doesn't matter how nice they are, it's all different because it's just a part of their lives. They're not here because they like hard work," she commented. Anderson pointed out those attitudinal differences in the ways that new owners have developed their properties, building large houses that strike her as ostentatious, for example. When she described her late husband's approach to ranching, her words implied a contrast to new neighbors in Tom Miner: "he believed strongly in not altering things and in not building new buildings, in not having a lot of buildings. And not having any more fences than you needed to and not having anything for show…"[80]

The following conversation among two generations of the Merrell family—Eril Merrell and her daughter and son-in-law, Bruce and Connie Malcolm—provides a striking example of the values and perceptions that full-time ranchers have about their own pasts and about the present. The subject is water distribution in the Tom Miner Basin, where Eril ranched all her adult life and Bruce and Connie both ranched for about twenty-five years as adults (until they sold out in the 1990s).

> Author (JHH): Did changes in ranching practices change the way that [the] water system worked?
>
> Bruce Malcolm (BM): Two things that I saw. One, Wards didn't aggressively irrigate and so there was more tapering off [decrease in water quantity earlier in the season].

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[80] Ibid.

Eril Merrell (EM): And that went all the way down as they changed hands. Andy, he didn't irrigate like Ned did, Ned irrigated all the way up into section 1 on the bench.

I know that we irrigated on everything that water would run on.

JHH: How could someone that assumes a ranch later on irrigate less aggressively and still make it?

BM: Well in the case of Wards, they didn't make a go. They thought they had enough outside income to support their lifestyle and the ranch was not so important to them.

EM: And the same way with Andersons. And the new guy who's got the Pfohl place.

JHH: So you saw more tapering off in water, what effects did that have?

BM: Well I don't know that those folks who really wanted to be irrigating, those folks didn't have much competition for the water. When they got a little competition for the water, they just quit.

EM: When they had to clean the ditches they quit!

Connie Malcolm (CM): It boils down to physical labor.

EM: That's right.

BM: You know I don't think there's too much problem.

EM: No shortage of water.

JHH: Because you had so much snow in the past?

CM: Which isn't true anymore.

EM: Well, the meadows just grew up into trash. Just look at [what was once] our place, it's unproductive as a ranch.

BM: At least unproductive in the original concept of it.

JHH: So by the time Connie was a kid, for example, there was a real clear difference in terms of who was irrigating really aggressively...

BM: Yes. Started in the fifties.

CM: Well, you know, you've got to take a look [at where people came from]. Andy didn't come from a ranching background, so he had to learn it.

EM: They quit the bench because it was too hard to irrigate.

CM: Or they didn't understand. Where does the lack of understanding of the true principles of agriculture come from?

EM: Well, if you irrigate properly, it's a lot of work, I don't care.

This lengthy bit of conversation is included here in its entirety because it provides such a rich example of the value systems that had been cultivated in the Upper Yellowstone in the first several generations of ranch operations there—and of the ways that the lifestyles and philosophies of landowners who arrived after World War II challenged established values. Much of the explanation for why things changed in Tom Miner Basin between the mid-70s and the present rests on an assessment that the newcomers to the area did not understand "true principles of agriculture," which, according to these ranchers, boils down to the willingness to work hard with the goal of maximizing production.[81]

The nearby Cinnabar Basin experienced similar trends during the 1970s. Presently, just two families with multi-generational tenure are left, neighboring three ranch properties that are owned by absentee, amenity-oriented owners. One of their neighbors was Leonard Sargent, of the moneyed Boston Sargents, who first acquired a ranch in the Cinnabar Basin in 1963. Sargent could be described as the first "conservation buyer" in the region. He instructed his managers to steward his property with an eye on letting it serve as an extension of wildlife habitat for the animals traveling beyond Yellowstone Park and the National Forest. He placed one of the Nature Conservancy's very first conservation easements in the state of Montana

[81] Yet in this perspective as well as in Bruce's comment that the Merrell ranch isn't productive "in the original concept" of ranch productivity is also evidence of an interest or a recognition that a new era has developed—perhaps not worse just different.

on the property.[82] Jim and Lorayne Stermitz portray new owners in a similar light to Anderson's description, though their voices are somewhat more strident. Lorayne described an unfolding of new ownership trends this way:

> And the first millionaires, billionaires who came in, they weren't here a lot but they had ranch managers who were attuned to the ranching community and who made a definite impact in the community as a whole. And they didn't try to spend a lot of time changing the social-economic family units. And then when the other ones started coming in, at first they ran their ranches as ranching operations and they had managers that were attuned to the community, but they themselves wanted to change the community. They had real social impacts that did a lot to change it. [83]

Continuing, Stermitz explained that the "social impacts" had in large part to do with the Sargents' attitude toward nearby public land. "The wilderness part," she noted bitterly, "they wanted the wilderness part." "The wilderness part" refers to a proposal, which has been buffeted by political winds on an ongoing basis since the 1970s, to create a designated wilderness area on the Gallatin National Forest just south of the Cinnabar Basin. The Stermitzes, whose animosity toward the federal government has multi-generational roots, deeply resented the active support voiced by the Sargents for the proposed wilderness plan. To the Stermitzes, the Sargents' support for the wilderness area was a frontal assault on their "rights" as ranchers. Even when ranch owners "ran their ranches as ranches," when they embraced unfamiliar goals such as wilderness designation for nearby national forest lands, they betrayed their responsibilities to helping to reproduce the ranching system—at least from the perspective of old-timers like the Stermitzes.

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[82] Interview with Lil Erickson, Livingston, MT, November, 2002.

[83] Stermitz, "Interview by Author.."

CONCLUSION

Economic forces and demographic changes produced important historical changes in the spatial patterns of land tenure in the Upper Yellowstone. While the area saw extensive homesteading of small parcels, the material demands and economic circumstances of livestock production encouraged consolidation of land holdings by ranchers. From the 1880s onward, successful ranchers took advantage of opportunities to expand their operations through the acquisition of other ranches whenever possible. For much of the twentieth century, however, family cycles and intergenerational transfers of ranches had the potential to check, though by no means reverse, the trend toward consolidation. The limited resources of buyers as well as the need to distribute holdings equitably among children sometimes encouraged the break up of large ranch holdings. After the 1960s, however, when the ranchlands of the Upper Yellowstone took on new values associated with their recreational and scenic qualities, the dynamics between these forces of aggregation and fragmentation shifted significantly. While many ranch properties were subdivided into smaller residential parcels, others were consolidated into large, contiguous holdings by absentee owners concerned far more with privacy and scenery than with livestock production. While the late nineteenth through mid-twentieth centuries produced a landscape pattern that mixed small, medium, and large ranch holdings, the post-1960s period has been characterized by the development of a striking pattern in which very large holdings are surrounded by extensive small lots subdivisions, with virtually no medium-sized properties in the mix.

The human experiences of these changing spatial patterns were grounded in what I call the genealogy of the ranch landscape of the Upper Yellowstone. By genealogy I mean the changing ownership history of the land and the use of history as a critical element in a lineal, family- and community-generated tradition. I argue here that in the Upper Yellowstone, the ranchland genealogy reflects two fundamental dynamics: on the one hand, a powerful interest on the part of ranchers and the ranching community to ensure the transfer of family ranch operations from one generation of owner-operators to the next, and on the other hand, an economic environment that encouraged ownership change and discouraged the intergenerational transfer of ranch properties. For one, the economics of livestock production favored consolidation of land holdings from the nineteenth century onward, making it difficult for young ranchers to get succeed on small parcels if the family estate was divided. In addition, livestock markets were rarely strong enough to justify major investments in land: ranchers for whom land was a significant expense were likely to have extremely marginal economic opportunities. Thus there were significant dis-incentives and fundamental obstacles facing children raised on ranches who contemplated staying on as partners in the family business. These problems increased significantly after the 1960s, when recreational land markets drove the price of land increasingly higher.

Despite these mounting obstacles to its actualization, intergenerational transfer of land was and is deeply embedded in collective identity of ranchers in the Upper Yellowstone. My discussion of ownership change shows how, in the event of the sales ensuing when ranches did not stay in the family, ranchers turned to the land and land use practices associated with livestock production as a site upon which to build a collective identity and a sense of continuity. However, this chapter leaves important questions about this embeddedness of ideas about continuity, family and community unanswered, for example, just what it was in ranch work and life that was so compelling for the children who made tremendous sacrifices to come back in order to avoid selling the family ranch. Or, perhaps more commonly, what it was about ranch life and work that encouraged parents to perpetuate a narrative about obligation and legacy that was essentially coercive of their children. Thus the nature of work and day-to-day experiences of ranching, which I suggest here were increasingly influential in land tenure decisions, merit exploration. These are the subjects of Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

IT'S A FINE THING TO HAVE A FURNACE: THE CHANGING NATURE OF RANCHING

In 1964, the Livingston Chamber of Commerce presented its second annual Conservation award to Mrs. Thelma D'Ewart Gray, a rancher from the Paradise Valley. The award recognized recent activity in the water development program on the Gray Ranch, namely the "reengineering" and enlargement of one reservoir and the construction of two additional storage ponds. The new improvements, developed with the help of the local Soil Conservation District, promised to double the irrigation capacity of the Gray Ranch, according to Mrs. Gray's comments in a newspaper article documenting the award event. According to the same article, the Chamber of Commerce chose Gray's enhanced water storage project as a symbol of progress and economic development in Park County, believing that better water storage would lead to increased hay production, improved livestock production, and economic prosperity on ranches. The Chamber's choice signifies the way the local business community not surprisingly defined conservation according to a utilitarian doctrine of extracting and planning for the maximum productivity from natural resources.

Local photographer Bill Whithorn photographed Thelma and her husband, Tom, at the ranch for the *Park County News*. Thelma Gray received the award in her name alone because her husband worked full-time for the National Park Service. The article quipped that Mr. Gray, who was not originally from a ranching background, left "the job of running the ranch to his wife." [1] A picture of the couple ran along with several large photographs of the water projects themselves in the newspaper article. (The feature reflected Whithorn's enthusiasm for photography, featuring a full page of photographs with just a few paragraphs of text.) Together, the text and the photograph—and the stories running between the lines—hint at the central role that

[1] "Ranch Wins Conservation Award," *Park County News*, February 18, 1964.

environment and geography played in shaping Thelma D'Ewart Gray's experiences in ranching and in her social experiences. In ranching, nature provided the raw materials necessary for the ranch: pasture and water, but in its particular configuration on the D'Ewart Gray ranch, nature was also a limiting factor in the operation of the ranch. Thelma Gray grew up on the ranch that her parents homesteaded in the early 1900s. She went into partnership with her mother, a widow, in 1942, when her mother's twenty-year partnership with her son (Thelma's brother) dissolved because he had married and sought to go out on his own. Though the D'Ewart ranch was operated primarily as a dairy from the 1920s through the 1950s, Thelma purchased beef cattle in 1945 and slowly developed a beef herd over time. In 1958, she turned to beef production full-time, retiring her local milk delivery routes. For the twenty years that Thelma had been in charge of the ranch, the operation suffered from a lack of water. Because her ranch had inadequate irrigation resources relative to the volume of animals required to make a living on the property, Thelma Gray regularly purchased hay. Being forced to purchase hay represented a significant burden to Gray. According to the newspaper report, "she dreamed of the day when the ranch could produce its own [hay], perhaps have a surplus to sell." Gray (along with the Soil Conservation District) trusted that increased water storage represented the solution to this dilemma.

In her social life, the Paradise Valley environment, coupled with her family's economic circumstances, also demanded creativity and adaptation from Thelma Gray. The family's dire economic circumstances (her father died unexpectedly in 1922 and her mother struggled to make mortgage payments) likely created few opportunities for Thelma to leave the ranch; isolation was a profound reality. According to an interview conducted by the author in 2003, Tom Gray met Thelma accidentally when he stumbled onto her family's ranch at the end of a high country snowshoeing expedition in which he was conducting game surveys for the Forest

Service. The year was 1936. Tom Gray remembered seeing a figure walking toward him with a large white bundle under its arm. Thelma had rescued an injured swan and was carrying it up the road toward the ranch house. According to Tom, his first words to her included the observation, "You're awful lousy" (lice from the swan were all over her jacket). When Tom Gray described this memory, he depicted Thelma D'Ewart as so much a part of the ranch that she was one of its features.[2] The ranch depended on Thelma's presence. Because it was a dairy, the demands on Thelma's time were especially onerous. The ranch provided Thelma a home, but it also kept her hostage in some ways. Tom and Thelma's was a long courtship, complicated by the difficulties of visiting from such remote locations (the D'Ewart Ranch is about twenty miles from Gardiner, where Tom lived) and by the occurrence of World War II. The couple took advantage of any opportunity to court, including signing on to help out with the tough work of the hay harvest in Yellowstone National Park just so that they could be around one another. Tom and Thelma did not marry until 1942 and spent the first four years of their marriage apart while Tom served in the military overseas and Thelma remained at home to help her mother on the ranch.

These few examples from Thelma D'Ewart Gray's lifetime on her ranch at Dome Mountain suggest that for all its providence as a "paradise" for livestock production, the environment of the Upper Yellowstone also posed problems for ranchers. Some of the qualities of the environment that seemed especially out of tune with ranchers' needs and expectations were dilemmas common to many rural landscapes: isolation, physical danger, the vagaries of weather, and inconsistencies in the availability of resources, in this case, range and water. Technology played a central role in defining the terms on which ranchers negotiated environmental limits and opportunities both in livestock operations as well as in daily life. The greater the leverage that tools offered ranchers in relationship to the work of ranching as well as

[2] Thomas Gray, interview by author, tape recording, Livingston, MT, September 5, 2003.

daily life in a mountain environment, the more ranchers were able to produce in terms of livestock as well as their own creature comforts.

Like many new tools, technological innovations also created unintended consequences. The intensification of hay production and irrigation, for example, created complex environmental ripple effects that ranchers continue to wrestle with today.[3] The consequences of the transformation of ranching through technology over the course of the twentieth century represented another persistent dilemma. The displacement of extreme physical hardship from the forefront of ranch life and work challenged the foundations of a collective culture based on the endurance of hardship and direct experience of the natural environment—aspects of ranching that persisted in the face of technological innovations, but in diminished forms. In addition, technological change tended to minimize the interdependency among neighbors, creating a historical paradox characterized by a trade-off between increased "success" in the act of livestock production and decreased enjoyment of some of the fundamental qualities of ranch life. This paradox is especially acute in contemporary times, but in fact has roots reaching back to the mid-twentieth century as this chapter will show.

This chapter takes up the environmental relationships in the ranch landscape in three parts, examining first the realities of the material and physical experiences of ranchers in their work and daily life during the whole time period in which ranching has existed in the Upper Yellowstone. Part one documents the ways that ranchers attempted to overcome the relative deprivation and isolation of ranch living in the

[3] This goes along with the better known irony of increased productivity in American agriculture—e.g. farmers became so productive they made themselves obsolete. This was a concern in the 1950s, as evidenced in the statements of the researchers assembled to discuss "The Economics of Livestock Production" in 1958 in Pullman, Washington. Gordon R. Sitton, "Livestock in the Agricultural Adjustment of the Western Region," in *Farm Management in the West: Problems in Resource Use. The Economics of Livestock Production.*, ed. Farm Management Research Committee of the Western Agricultural Economics Research Council (Pullman, WA: 1958).

years prior to the 1950s. The second part of the chapter analyzes the evolving dynamics of two fundamental aspects of livestock production, irrigation and haying. Part three explores the unintended consequences for both the physical and the cultural environments on ranches that were engendered from technological change, and how ranchers responded to those consequences.

ENDURING HARDSHIPS

The scattered recollections of settlers and other pieces of the historical record suggest that there were few material comforts on the valley's first ranches, whether they were first undertaken in the 1870s or the 1910s. In the early years of establishing a ranch, work focused on erecting shelter and growing food. While ranchers needed also to invest in the fundamental work of building ranch infrastructure—fences and water diversions—in reality, finding housing and food for the human residents of the ranch were the most important tasks facing most homesteaders. The obstacles that made these essential projects difficult often preoccupied homesteaders for many years. Few settlers of the Upper Yellowstone came with the necessary resources in hand to buy building materials or hire labor. Work was a constant and results could be slow to come. In the meantime, parents lived and children were born and raised in extremely humble conditions. While some families prospered more quickly than others or had more flexibility in their living arrangements while they worked at establishing ranches (a few ranchers who brought capital to invest in ranching could afford to live in town and not on the ranch, for example), it was a common experience for early ranchers to live in crude cabins for some period of time when they started out.

Explorer Charles Cook was a member of the Folsom expedition that surveyed of the Yellowstone region in 1869. In early fall, the party traveled from Bozeman over the Yellowstone Trail into the Paradise Valley en route to the geyser basins of the Yellowstone Plateau. On September 11, 1869, Cook's party pulled up at the cabin belonging to Phil and Fred Bottler, brothers who had set up a homestead on the west banks of the Yellowstone not far from Emigrant Gulch. In his diary, Cook made the following sneering description of the Bottler stead:

> [A] casual survey of the premises convinced us that whomever had taken up their abode here belonged to a class frequently found upon our frontiers that take life easy. A cabin without any chinking between the logs with a roof through which every passing shower would filter for hours after it had ceased raining, satisfied their wants for a domicile. A small stack of wheat to which a dozen head of cattle had free access had recently been harvested from an unfenced field of forty acres or more, will supply them with the staff of life provided it is not all destroyed before they find time to thresh it. A pile of antelope and elk hides proved that they depend upon the rifle for meat.[4]

This may be the earliest description of the homestead origins of ranches in the Upper Yellowstone region. Cook had not had the personal experience of homesteading: had he, it is likely he would been more sympathetic to the Bottlers and more understanding of the difficulties inherent in building even the crudest domicile when available tools were limited to axes and saws. Nor would he have been likely to be so dismissive of the Bottlers' wheat harvest, had he understood that seed in 1869 Montana had been freighted by wagon or saddle bag from other territories altogether, or that the ground consisted of truly unrepentant soils dense with rocks. And the comment that the Bottlers "depend upon the rifle for meat" seems partly misguided in light of the fact that the Bottlers had a small herd of cattle. In fact, the Bottlers depended on the rifle for money as much as for meat—they were some of the earliest market hunters in the area, and many of the carcasses secured by their work provided the mining camp at Yellowstone City with food.

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[4] Aubrey Haines, ed., *The Valley of the Upper Yellowstone: An Exploration of the Headwaters of the Yellowstone River in the Year 1869 as Recorded by Charles W. Cook, David E. Folsom, and William Peterson* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965). 15. In fact, it would be unwise to overstate the notion of Bottlers as farmers. Among their claims to fame is the slaughter of 2,000 elk in the winter of 1871. Aubrey L. Haines, *The Yellowstone Story: A History of Our First National Park*, Revised Edition ed., vol. I (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1965; reprint, 1996).

In fact, an alternative reading of the sight that Cook encountered might construe the Bottlers as successful negotiators of the hostilities of a wild environment. Whatever the limits of their farming aesthetic, the Bottlers were not going hungry and their wheat crop would free them from the burdens of purchasing wheat at the exorbitant prices being asked in town. While they were clearly exploiting their environment, they were also at least temporarily content to live on frontier terms.

The time and expense of home building proved to be substantial obstacles facing homesteader-ranchers in the time period between the 1870s and the 1920s. Consider the experience of Eunice and Ancel Briggs. Though the Briggs arrived more than twenty years later than the first wave of intrepid rancher-settlers, the fundamental technology of homesteading in 1903 differed little from the 1870s. Upon moving into the sod-roofed cabin on the claim they had acquired from another settler, Eunice scurried around cleaning up. That evening, she and Ancel invited her sister and her sister's family to a housewarming dinner. While they were eating, the roof fell in on them and "spoiled the day."[5] Such circumstances were very common on homestead ranches from the 1870s through the 1920s when families occupied crude cabins for years while they saved up the money and time to construct a larger, more comfortable home. Coal miner-turned-homesteader Joseph Stermitz housed his wife and four children in a "dirt roofed dugout"—fortunately with better luck than the Briggses in the building's stability—for ten years until he could scavenge lumber from the Aldridge hospital in order to build a simple log and lumber house.[6] A recollection from the Ole Melin family, homesteaders who arrived on Elbow Creek in 1885 speaks both to the roughness of early shelters and the slow rate at which most homes were improved. The family—two parents and two children in 1885, to which eight more

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[5] Park County Historical Society, *History of Park County Montana, 1984*, ed. Doris Whithorn (Taylor Publishing Company, 1984), 116.

[6] Ibid., 450.

children were added over the years—started out on the homestead in a one-room log cabin with a dirt roof. The room was furnished with a homemade table, straw-ticked mattresses, benches, one dresser, and two chairs. The 1889 expansion of the homestead consisted of a one-room addition to the cabin, "built of stones and plastered over. They collected a heavy coating of ice in the winter time, which made pools of water on the floor when it melted."[7] The inadequacies of sod roofs, dirt floors and bare stone walls made the improvement of living spaces a central priority in the establishment of ranches, but dire circumstances often delayed progress.

Given the optimistic promises that attracted many settler families to the Upper Yellowstone, the difficulties of establishing a ranch and the ruggedness of the climate and landscape may have struck many of the settler families as especially painful realities. One way that local boosters attempted to distract newcomers from the pain involved in early life on a homestead was the daily trade in public narratives that showed success triumphing over privation. Even before the heavy-hitting boosterism associated with railroad development infiltrated popular culture in the 1880s, local voices chorused a routine refrain of success. In September of 1871, the *Bozeman Avant Courier* made note of the progress underway on the Bottler brothers' homestead. Far from being evidence of that degenerate class of people "frequently found upon our frontiers that take life easy," the Bottler homestead was described as a virtual model farm: "Mr. Bottler's ranch had turned out remarkably well this season and gives us assurance of the superior quality of the soil in that valley for agricultural purposes. Mr. B. had about 85 acres of ground under cultivation and the yield of wheat will average about 45 bu. to the acre. He also raised a splendid crop of potatoes and other vegetables."[8] Homesteaders shivering in drafty log cabins worrying about their sod

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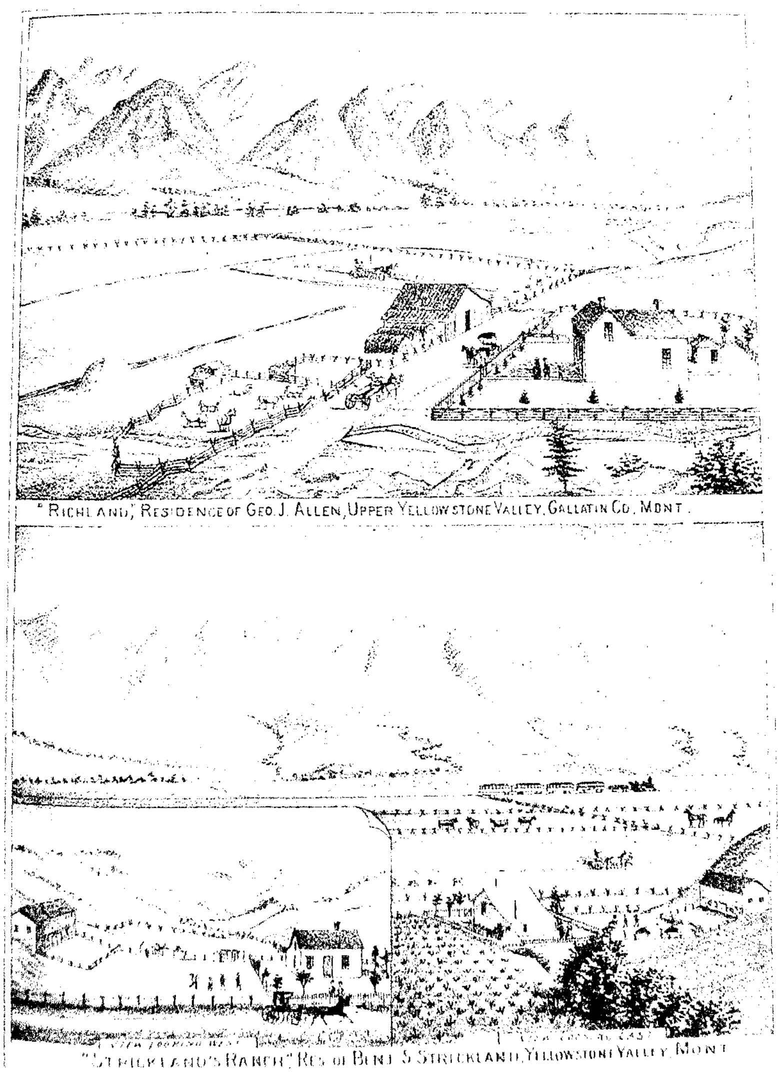
[7] Ibid., 330.

[8] Quoted in Doris and Bill Whithorn, *60 Miles of Photo History: Upper Yellowstone Valley* (Livingston, MT: The Park County News, 1966). No page numbers. The Bottler brothers' ultimately set up homesteads on either side of the Yellowstone River near Emigrant, but

roofs collapsing could take solace in examples of the rapid acceleration from misery to productivity such as that of the Bottlers'.

A more complete testimony to the potential of settling a ranch was produced in 1885. The direction that homesteader-ranchers were headed—or hoped to be—is captured in drawings made in the subscription history entitled *A History of Montana 1739-1885.* The book's wordy subtitle, "A history of its discovery and settlement, social and commercial progress, mines and miners, agriculture and stock-growing, churches, schools and societies, Indians and Indian wars, vigilantes, courts of justice, newspaper press, navigation, railroads and statistics, with histories of counties, cities, villages and mining camps," gives a sense of its comprehensive and optimistic approach to the history of settling Montana territory. Descriptions of towns and outposts, key events and influential individuals are illustrated with charcoal and ink drawings of exemplary ranches, farms, and businesses. The Gallatin County chapter (Park County was not carved out of Gallatin County in 1887) features two representative studies from the Upper Yellowstone Valley—illustrations of George J. Allen's ranch on the west banks of the Yellowstone near Bullis Creek, and Ben Strickland's property on Trail Creek near its confluence with the Yellowstone River.

shared their earliest cabin. Reportedly one brother focused more on hunting and the other on farming, this may be why the article refers to just one "Mr. B."



Source: Michael Leeson, *History of Montana.*

Figure 5.1. Leeson's Drawings

The drawings offer insights into the structural choices early farmers and ranchers made as they established farms and ranches. Both properties were situated at the edge of the valley, close to a tributary creek flowing from the mountains toward the main branch of the Yellowstone. Such sites offered ample flat ground for cultivation, access to water as well as timber, natural shelter, and distance from the floodplain of the Yellowstone River. Allen chose to locate his property directly on Bullis Creek; building a road and simple bridges directly over the creek and also situating a stock pen on its banks. The early homesteaders planted a wheat crop first to produce flour for themselves. The illustration of Allen's property also depicts a series of irrigation ditches stemming from Bullis Creek, flooding the main pasture or field. Houses are placed near to the creeks, presumably facilitating the use of water for domestic purposes. The portraits capture the height of harvest: two-horse teams pull mowers in spirals around fields of wheat—leaving piles of stalks ready for threshing, some of which have been stacked into bushels already. Both properties also featured barns built of hewn boards (rather than logs) that the artist rendered equal in size or larger than the houses themselves, suggesting that both farmers put a high priority on shelter for animals and crop storage. Strickland built his barn into the side of a hill using a stone foundation to enclose a first floor shelter for the animals underneath the main floor, a wooden, framed structure designed to store hay—barn architecture he may have imported from the east.[9] Jackleg fence surrounds a series of corrals and pastures, including in both cases a small holding pasture near the house—perhaps the true barnyard where a chicken coop and hog pen might be found.[10]

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[9] Michael A. Leeson, *History of Montana, 1739-1885.* (Warner, Beers, 1885), 644.

[10] Fence-building was a constant preoccupation throughout the Upper Yellowstone area well into the first decades of the twentieth century. The forests of the region were dense with small sawmills and informal timbering operations. The railroad was a large consumer of wood—homesteaders who located near the forest edge often "cut ties" as a way to support themselves in the 1880s and 1890s. In addition, sawmills produced lumber for building. Ranch fences were likely the third most important destination of timber cut form the slopes of the Gallatin and Absaroka ranges, after railroads and buildings (the booming coal industry may have offset demands for wood as a heating material). The Merrell brothers, who were stranded in the Yellowstone when their wagon broke down en route to the Big Hole valley in 1890, obtained preemptive rights to a piece of land in Tom Miner Basin from established rancher Sam Dailey by agreeing to fence a section of land (640 acres) for Dailey. According to the family stories, the fencing project was a monumental effort. Not only did the brothers cut and haul lumber from the forest slopes, but they had to improvise construction materials. The Merrell brothers went to the dump in Mammoth inside Yellowstone National Park to scavenge for wire which they used in lieu of nails and spikes (too expensive). They hauled the wire back up to Tom Miner Basin to wire the four-mile-long jackleg fence together. Eril Merrell with Bruce and Connie Malcolm, interview by author, Merrell residence, Park County, Montana, September 23, 2003.

Beyond their help in providing a glimpse of the composition of early ranch properties, the drawings also characterize the ritual of public celebration of individual success.[11] Like any investor who wants to be reassured by news of the success of similar schemes, newly-arrived migrants to Montana could look to the "official" stories that celebrated the prosperous lifestyles that some homesteaders accomplished and be reminded of a positive future. The illustrations call to mind a gentrified rural atmosphere, indicating that the some properties had come a long way in the decade since Cooke had been so repulsed by the Bottler brothers' stead with its primitive cabins and piles of wild game carcasses. In fact, George J. Allen, his wife, and infant son had first inhabited a log cabin next to the Yellowstone River. By 1885, though, Allen and Ben Strickland had both erected two-story clapboard farm houses and enclosed them behind elegant, upright fences.[12] In the drawings, plantings of young trees decorate the yards. The artist took care to include animated stick figures that dispel any sense of isolation—children play in the Strickland barnyard, horse-drawn wagons and surreys transport visitors, and callers approach the door of the Allen home. A train rambles by in the background of the image of the Strickland property, a reminder that the property was linked into a national transportation network. The drawings of the Allen and Strickland ranches offered testimony to the potential to overcome many of the challenges associated with establishing ranches in the Paradise Valley including isolation and an environment that was not, in its original configuration—rocky, windy, and cold—especially hospitable to agriculture.

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[11] It is difficult to say how accurate the drawings are, but I had the opportunity to cross-reference the photograph with a 1907 photograph in the Brawner family's possession and was impressed by the accuracy of the George Allen drawing.

[12] George J. Allen purchased a small piece of land in 1880 and then added homestead and railroad parcels to it, eventually claiming 3,200 acres. Allen and his family first inhabited a cabin "located between the river and the road to Yellowstone," but later built the two-story wooden house featured in the Leeson drawing. Park County Historical Society, *History of Park County Montana, 1984*, ed. Doris Whithorn (Taylor Publishing Company, 1984), 69.

Given the austerity of most homesteads, it is not hard to understand why the successful completion of ranch houses was a milestone event for all of the settler families. And it was a hard-won success for most of them: it took R. B. Smith fifteen years on his homestead, from 1902 to 1917, to gather the resources necessary to construct a true house. "The original home was a two room log house with no trees or water," according to the family biography. "'Twenty years later the property was a showplace, named 'Yellowstone View Ranch'" and featured a "large frame house," constructed in 1917 (when sheep prices were good, not incidentally.)[13] Other ranchers added two-story, clapboard homes when they could, or continued to improve the original log cabins. Joseph Stermitz's grandson, now in his sixties, raised his family and still lives in the same log and lumber home his grandfather built from scavenged materials in 1910.

In addition to improving actual buildings, ranchers attempted to harness wind and water energy to create home-based energy sources. Innovations such as "light plants" and water wheels provided power to individual farms. Ancel Briggs operated a ranch on a small property on Mill Creek between 1903 and 1959. During that period, Ancel was remembered as someone who "figured out what was needed and then made it work." He devised a wind-powered system that powered electric lighting and a milking machine. In addition, together with a neighbor, Ancel implemented a local phone system, connecting 32 families on Mill Creek Flat.[14]

In addition to the rude circumstances on many homesteads, the distances separating the communities and individual ranches of the Paradise Valley represented serious challenges to many early ranchers who disliked the loneliness of life on ranches and homesteads. The high mountain basins represented particularly extreme cases of isolation. When "Little Gus" Smitzer, a miner from Aldridge who tried his

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[13] Ibid., 439.

[14] Ibid., 169.

hand at "batching it" on a small homestead claim in the remote Cinnabar Basin sold his ranch, he reported to his neighbors that the isolation was driving him crazy. According to a local history, "he became despondent and one day went up to [a neighbor] and announced: 'I've spent time in a penitentiary and it's no worse than this!'"[15] In winter (a season that could last six months in some areas), deep snow made travel particularly difficult in high-elevation drainages. As Margaret Bailey recalled of her childhood in the Cinnabar Basin in the 1910s, "In winter the snow was so deep that skis and horse-drawn sleighs were the only means to get to the neighbors."[16] Months could go by during which the residents of homestead-ranches traveled only as far as the nearest neighbor.

Travel—whether for visiting or to go to town—has long been one of the most dangerous aspects of ranch life. Travel involving horses either under saddle or draft was particularly dangerous. As Jim Stermitz noted, even the most docile horses had a flight response that could be provoked unexpectedly. He described his last pair of Belgians this way: "They were just the gentlest old horses you could imagine, but they'd spook and ... a Belgian is a pretty good sized horse and they'd pull you all over with the lines, with both my dad and I holding the lines. We had some wrecks!"[17] The outcomes of horse wrecks ranged from harmless to devastating. In 1930, newlyweds Jane and Seamon Nelson used their team of work horses to move their household from one ranch to another. Despite the fact that the wagon loaded down with all of their furniture, including a new enamel cookstove, the team ran away. There was no way for the Nelsons to stop the horses until the team finally tangled itself in a willow thicket some distance away. Amazingly, the wagon and its contents remained intact

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[15] Ibid., 98.

[16] Ibid., 92.

[17] James Stermitz, interview by author, Stermitz Ranch, Cinnabar Basin, Park County, Montana, December 16, 2002.

and the episode could be remembered later with a laugh.[18] A significantly less humorous wreck involved Emigrant-area rancher, Dillon Ellison. Ellison suffered a broken back when the team driving his dump rake team spooked, with each horse opting for opposite sides of an oncoming telephone pole. Ellison spent six months in a body cast. Showing their respect for danger as well as a sense of pride in having survived serious injury, the Ellisons later noted that "after it healed, his back was better than before the break."[19] For the Bassett family of the Corwin Springs area, an accident that seemed relatively inconsequential when it occurred actually had a tragic outcome. On a winter visit to family sometime in the early 1900s, the Bassetts' buggy lurched when one of the horses slipped on ice. Mrs. Bassett fell out of the wagon onto the frozen ground, hitting her head, but did not appear injured. However, at the visit, Mrs. Bassett behaved strangely and was reportedly "never in good mental health" after the wreck.[20]

When settlers had to mix horses and water, the potential for catastrophe increased exponentially. At once the lifeblood of ranching enterprises, the Yellowstone River was also a dangerous force. The Bassett family included two brothers who lived on opposite sides of the Yellowstone River. As one local historian has written, "To visit each other or to trade work, they [the two Bassett brothers] had to cross the river at a ford just above the present Corwin Bridge." On one crossing at high water, Fred Bassett allowed the foal belonging to one of his teams of horses to follow along with the wagon as it was too young to be left alone. Inexperienced and

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[18] Park County Historical Society, 77.

[19] Ibid., 184. See also the Fred Bassett biography, page 97; Bassett's brother-in-law died in an accident involving a runaway team on a hay rake. Accidents involving riding horseback and simply handling horses were also common. There are several accounts in *A History of Park County* of ranch families that lost sons or husbands to head injuries sustained while riding saddle horses.

[20] Ibid.

frightened, the colt leapt into the gap ahead of the wagon, only to become stuck under the wagon tongue. Bassett bravely inched out onto the wagon tongue to push the colt free to save it from drowning. [21] Spring floods regularly resulted in the collapse of bridges in the early twentieth century. John Martin, along with several other ranchers driving empty wagons home from a trip to town to sell wool, experienced calamity in an attempt to cross the swollen Yellowstone at the bridge at nearby Springdale, east of Livingston. Flood waters had damaged the bridge, but the wagon drivers could not see that until the first of three wagons attempted to cross. As the bridge gave out, the occupants of the other two wagons stood by helplessly watching the four horses, trapped in their harnesses, drown while the people who had been aboard the wagon clung to pieces of the disintegrated bridge. They floated all the way to Big Timber (a distance of more than fifteen miles) before they could be fished out of the rushing waters.[22]

The memoirs of homestead families also include tragic descriptions of losing children to drowning or exposure. The Ole Melin family who lost their daughter Amanda, age three and a half, to the river while living on a homestead on an island in the middle of the Yellowstone River in 1883 or 1884.[23] Such kinds of experiences gave ranchers a healthy respect for the river. James Stermitz took a stern tone when asked why he had never ventured out on the nearby Yellowstone River for "fun." He said he knew of too many drowning stories to want to risk tangling with the river.[24]

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[21] Park County Historical Society, 97.

[22] Ibid., 318.

[23] Ibid., 330.

[24] Stermitz interview. This way of knowing the river—as unpredictable and dangerous—contrasted significantly with the recreationists who have come to the Upper Yellowstone in great numbers since the 1960s to partake in the river's dangers (along with its fishing).

One response to the hazards of travel was to seek out ways to make it safer and more comfortable. Ole Melin, a Swedish immigrant who homesteaded near Elbow Creek with his wife and nine children, tried to ameliorate the conditions of travel through the purchase of a wagon with shock-absorbing springs to replace the old wagon he had been using. His desperation at the circumstances of his travel is revealed in his daughter's memory of the sacrifices that Melin made in order to have a new wagon:

> In 1889 we also acquired a spring wagon, which Ole in desperation had gone into debt for as he could no longer endure the 3-hour trek to Livingston to exchange eggs and butter for groceries in the bitter cold in a lumber wagon. This occasioned many a bitter scene between our parents. Before they got it paid for they had to sell some choice heifers at half their value to stay [sic] off threats of 'repossession' if payment of $100 was not met.[25]

Local historian Hank Rate captured some of the exigencies facing residents of Cinnabar Basin in a description of the area including in the *History of Park County*. In the late nineteenth century, the Cinnabar was particularly inaccessible because of a canyon on lower Mulherin Creek separating Cinnabar Creek from the valley floor of the Gardiner Basin. As Rate writes, "To take a wheeled vehicle up to the Basin, one had to go from Electric up Spring Creek to Aldridge; then down to Mol Heron [or Mulherin] on the upper side of the Gantz Place . . . " and so on, up, down and across several creeks before arriving at the mouth of the Cinnabar Basin. In 1911 and 1912, the county hired a local crew to blast a road through the canyon on lower Mulherin Creek, simplifying part of the journey into the Cinnabar considerably.[26]

The difficulties of travel affected the social lives of ranchers in the decades before the spread of the automobile. Early homesteaders often alternated between

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[25] Park County Historical Society, 330. The Melin family biography states that in addition to Amanda, the child who drowned in the Yellowstone, Mrs. Melin gave birth to eight more children.

[26] Ibid., 97.

time on the homestead and time with a neighbor or family member. Those who lived full time on their ranches expected to stay on the ranch for long periods at a time, an attitude that persisted well into the mid-twentieth century. Adults could manage to work around not being able to travel to town regularly, but the situation created problems when it came to educating children. Rural school houses were defining features of the ranching landscape for much of the region's history. Groups of neighbors typically banded together to ensure that their young children could attend school near their homes. But when it came to high school, local resources did not suffice: families chose between Livingston or Gardiner for high school. Traveling to high school from places like the Tom Miner Basin or the Emigrant area—or the Shields Valley north of the Yellowstone—involved distances of twenty miles or more. From the 1890s into the 1950s, it was not uncommon for ranching families to maintain a home in town, with the husband commuting out to the ranch weekly while women and children lived in town for the entire school year.[27]

When families could not afford the luxury of two households, children boarded in town with other families in order to attend school, or lived alone in rented quarters. The memories of Carolyn Alverson, born in 1914 and raised in the Shields Valley provides a picture of what this entailed for families that lacked the financial resources to spare the mother's presence on the ranch or to pay for boarding.

> In my freshman year, 1928, Nina (Strickland) Killorn [a neighbor] and I boarded with Grace Lucas. When my brother ... was ready for high school, we "batched." My step-father ... would take us to our cold shack on Monday mornings and come after us on Friday to take us home to the ranch. It seems to me that it was always cold . . . when we left the ranch on Daisy Dean Creek ... one Monday morning it was 54 below.[28]

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[27] The Hamilton family, who ranched on Goat Mountain outside of Livingston also lived in town: "In 1914, the family purchased a home on Sixth and Calendar Streets in Livingston so that the children could attend the local schools." Ibid., 233. Wealthy sheep rancher John Harvat built a fine house on Yellowstone Street for his sons to attend school in Livingston. Park County Historical Society, 240.

[28] Park County Historical Society, 81.

In Alverson's description, the simple act of going to school encompassed many of the challenges of living in a rural ranching community before World War II: loneliness, extreme weather, and childhoods with little time for play. The Allen family, ranchers from the Elbow Creek area, were forced to part with all five of their children for a period during the 1930s. As Chester Allen recalled, "Beings [sic] as there was no school bus operating between Livingston and Emigrant and Georgie [the oldest sister] was living and attending college in Bozeman—this is how it came to be that Barney, Bernard, Naoma and Chet graduated from Gallatin County High School." Sending the children off as a group to live in town was often the most practical way for families to handle the challenge of getting their children to high school before rural bus service was available or automobile travel was practical.[29]

Socializing was so important that people braved incredible difficulties to make it happen. And when they did make it off the ranch to go "visiting," they were often reluctant to turn back. Dances lasted late into the night. As a rancher from Hunters Hot Springs recalled, "time was always found to enjoy friends and social affairs." He described visiting neighbors for friendly card games and attending dances at the local school house. In his mind, these practices were strongly associated with the kind of camaraderie that dire circumstances created. "The Great Depression was in its depths [during his childhood] and people worked together and faced their mutual problems. They were neighbors in the truest sense of the word."[30] The difficulties of travel subjected romance to a particular set of constraints—many young couples took their romance where they could get it. Charlie Mikolich, whose Austrian parents took up a ranch in the Gardiner Basin after the mines closed at Aldridge, courted the woman who became his wife by horseback. He later observed that "it was real convenient and

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[29] Ibid., 78.

[30] Ibid., 373.

nice to have a horse that rode double."[31] A willingness to accommodate nature's terms is also revealed in the courtship history of Olga and Ed Held. Ed and Olga planned a date for one week after their first meeting at a rural school house dance on Valentine's Day in 1929, but "because of snow storms and bad roads, they put the date off until April." All that waiting encouraged a fast courtship: the couple married that June.[32]

From the early years of settlement and into the 1930s, ranchers' lives were deeply affected by the physical hardships and isolation that life in the Upper Yellowstone entailed. The severity of forces like winter storms or the difficulties of travel were so intense that ranchers had little choice but to reconcile themselves to lives limited by such realities. Thus, ranchers who lived through the homesteading period and episodic economic depressions came to understand hardship as a defining feature of their life, even if they often wished it would go away. They understood that the continuity of their occupations depended on tolerating adversity because they had few tools or resources available to change their circumstances and developed strategies, such as the self-sufficiency described in Chapter III, as adaptations. Such adaptive strategies continued to be effective into the 1940s, when challenges presented by World War II such as labor shortages and rationing, exposed ranching families to another episode of privation. Strategies that served homestead-era and depression-era ranchers were passed on to their children, with frugality being a hallmark not just of those in the midst of the depression but of those who could remember it.

Even after automobile travel became more commonplace after World War II, ranchers were often isolated because trips to town were nonetheless expensive and time-consuming. Describing the 1950s, Margery Warfield observed, "in those days, going to town was a big deal. We didn't go dashing around commuting like you do

[31] Ibid., 335.

[32] Ibid., 268.

now. We went to town maybe once every ten days. We did not go anywhere every day. ... I worked here and that was that."[33]

For those who came new to the Yellowstone in the 1940s and 1950s, including ranchers from other areas as well as upper middle-class urban refugees seeking a new lifestyle as ranchers, the lack of infrastructure, isolation, and physical rawness of the Upper Yellowstone provided a taste of the homesteading experience. When the Ellison family, a ranching family that relocated from eastern Montana, purchased the Pritchard ranch in 1941, they were struck by the primitive qualities of domestic life there. Despite the fact that the Pritchards had an affluent ranching enterprise in the 1910s and 1920s, their home had no electricity and no indoor plumbing; the Ellisons "carried water from the Yellowstone River and cooked and heated with wood."[34] Virginia and Andrew Anderson, wealthy émigrés from Wisconsin, understood that life on the ranch they bought in Tom Miner Basin would certainly be remote, but were attracted to it as an adventure. The adventure was part of the reason to be there; Andrew Anderson had been a POW in World War II and when he returned from the war, he was impatient with the upper middle class life of his upbringing. In Virginia Anderson's words, they accepted and welcomed the opportunity to live like homesteaders:

> We fed with a team [of horses] and we'd get stuck and we'd park the car down at the road and carry in the groceries and park a car all the way at the bottom of the hill once in awhile and be snowed in, we didn't expect anything different. We thought it was an adventure, which I think is a sort of very patronizing word for something that's hard lines for somebody else. We had a wood stove and well, we just didn't expect to go to town very much and expected to dig ourselves out...[35]

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[33] Margery Warfield with Alan Redfield, interview by author, Warfield Ranch, Davis Creek, Park County, Montana, June 10, 2003.

[34] Park County Historical Society, 184.

[35] Virginia Anderson, interview by author, Anderson Ranch, Tom Miner Basin, Park County, Montana, May 3, 2004.

While their experiences may have suggested poverty and desperation to homesteading families like the Joe Stermitz family, who waited years to have enough wood to escape their sod-roofed cabin, the Andersons welcomed the chance to live a rustic and physically-demanding existence. As Chapter 3 explained, the Andersons' willingness to live in this manner, which was part of their general approach to ranching, encouraged their neighbors—who may have wanted, but could not afford more creature comforts—to overlook the differences in their economic circumstances in the interest of neighboring.

The cohort of young ranchers who took up places in the 1940s and 1950s employed familiar tools in negotiating those challenges that they encountered in their geography and environment. There was still no substitute for companionship as a way to make life on ranches less lonesome, for example. Claude Hookham, a newcomer to the area in the 1940s, later described the tight-knit community that developed on Big Creek during that decade:

> Jim and Ruth Stewart were our closest neighbors and Gilbert, Marie, and John Ragsdale lived up Big Creek and a little further. Harvey Daileys and Harry Paynes lived on the other side of us. There was a schoolhouse on our property but no school. ...We hardly got settled in our new house when Ruth Stewart organized a house warming party for us. We played Five Hundred and had delightful time. Later we had birthday parties in which everyone was surprised if they didn't have one.[36]

In another twist on old practices, the Andersons sent their children out of Tom Miner Basin for high school, only in their case it was to preparatory schools on the East Coast, not Gardiner High School.

Yet over time, technological advances made it easier for ranchers less enchanted with privation to out-maneuver some of the limits and dangers of living in remote locations. The 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s introduced technological

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36 Park County Historical Society, 254.

improvements at a breakneck pace. Many ranch homes acquired phones, electricity, cars, and appliances in a span of ten or fifteen years, and even the families with the most limited finances found it hard to resist. The Warfields logged a hillside on their property in order to buy a dishwasher in the early 1960s. James Stermitz, grandson of Joe Stermitz, was able to shuttle back and forth from his home in the Cinnabar Basin up the road through Mulherin canyon in a late model Chrysler when he attended high school in Gardiner in the 1950s. He even had time to play basketball and paid for the gas money his commute required by selling in town eggs produced on the family ranch.[37] When asked about the most important advances in technology on the ranch, Margery Warfield said, "I'd have to say the tractor outside. And I'd have to say, oh my, the dishwasher comes pretty close." Later in the interview, Warfield added the propane furnace, also acquired in the 1960s, to her list of indispensable improvements, "That was wonderful because we used to have to chop all that wood and get coal. Yeah, I'd have to put the furnace at the top and the dishwasher second. I could handle everything else. ...it's lovely to push that button when you know it's going to be a little cold. It's a fine thing to have a furnace."[38] While some ranchers continued to live in the small houses constructed during the homesteading period, others set about building more modern homes during the 1950s and 1960s. Arnold and Eleanor Schueren invested Mr. Schueren's fortune from the invention of a meat slicing machine into a ranch near Emigrant in 1946 and promptly set about building a new home. The home featured cherry and oak paneling and was the first electrically-heated home constructed in Montana.[39]

Such improvements transformed ranches in profound ways, though the level of adaptation of novel tools and appliances varied among ranches. The ability to drive

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[37] Stermitz interview.

[38] Warfield interview.

[39] Park County Historical Society, 417.

a car into town to catch a baseball game without missing chores, the possibility of forsaking tasks like shoveling coal and the opportunity to ring up a neighbor on the phone rather than traveling over to see them meant that ranch life had the potential to be less physically demanding, more comfortable, and less isolating. These developments may have encouraged a change in the retirement patterns of ranchers. Historically, many ranchers bought a small house in Livingston for their final years. During the 1960s and 1970s, it became equally common for ranchers to retire to a house on a small lot in rural subdivisions in the Paradise Valley. Clearly, developments like telephones and dishwashers were welcome additions to ranch life; they made it easier for ranchers to do their work and live their lives. On the other hand, they were tools that changed the terms on which ranchers interacted with their environment and as such they created a different cultural context for human-environment interactions. Similar developments affected the work of livestock production.

NEGOTIATING THE LIMITS OF RANGE AND WATER

Like the geographic and physical realities of life on ranches in the Upper Yellowstone, technology played a central role in mitigating the relationship between ranchers and the two natural resources at the heart of mountain ranch operations: water and grass. In the earliest model of ranching in the West, open range grazing, ranchers accepted nature's terms—mimicking the model of range use in practice by native ungulates, a model that depended on water only for drinking. But ranchers were unwilling to accept nature's terms if it meant widespread winterkill in harsh winters, as it sometimes did for elk. The "base ranch" system of raising hay to feed cattle in winter developed to insure that cattle would not starve during the region's severe winters. Its development led to a new era in the relationship between ranchers and the environment, one that involved significantly more manipulation of natural processes than did open range grazing. While the environmental implications of the adoption of the base ranch system in the late nineteenth century were profound, the extent to which ranchers could exploit nature to their own ends was limited by the capacities of horses and men, and later steam, for the first fifty years of ranching. Prior to the advent of gas-powered machinery, the limits on what ranchers could do were significant. Hard labor, cooperative efforts, and even frequent frustration had to be incorporated into their understanding of the nature of ranch work. The widespread adoption of labor-saving machinery in the post-World War II period shifted the dynamic between humans and the environment in ranching landscapes, empowering ranchers as individuals while lessening their interdependence (and simultaneously heightening their dependence on fossil fuels). Many aspects of agricultural practices reflected an increasing ability on the part of ranchers to control the environmental elements of livestock production. The use of water to raise hay is one agricultural practice whose history in the Upper Yellowstone shows most clearly how ranchers' improved "control" over nature entailed paradoxical developments, including the loss of cherished cultural traditions as well as the emergence of unforeseen environmental problems.

The development of the base ranch

After 1866 and throughout the 1870s, Nelson Story practiced seasonal open range ranching, moving his cattle from his base ranch in the Gallatin Valley, where cattle were wintered, to the Upper Yellowstone in the summer. His approach clearly assumed that nature would provide for his success. Rather than build fences, he relied on the natural barriers like mountains and canyons to keep his livestock in a contained area; rather than grow hay, he counted on the native grasses of the valley's meadows and foothills to provide winter forage. The river and spring creeks provided ample drinking water for the animals. This approach appears initially to have served Story well. Ever the supporter of local business, the *Bozeman Avant Courier* happily reported his success on several occasions. In October of 1871, the *Courier* printed news that "The Yellowstone Valley will be covered with stock this coming winter. Mr. Nelson Story will winter his herds in that valley."[40] In 1873, the paper noted that "Nelson Story sent over to the Yellowstone Valley yet another herd of cattle to winter on the nutritious grass of that valley."[41] However, the opportunities for such sanguine reporting proved limited, as nature and circumstance offered up significant obstacles to the open range system.

There were several factors that coalesced to make the base ranch model the system of choice in the Paradise Valley. The arrival of the railroad in the early 1880s had significant implications for "free rangers" like Story and Henderson. First, the train tracks and the trains themselves presented a hazard to animals not safely enclosed behind fences. A diary of an early settler in the Gardiner Basin notes that a neighbor, James Henderson, "wanted to sell out because the railroad would run too close to his cattle ranch for safety for the herds he ran on the open range."[42] Second, and more importantly, the land speculation and development that went hand in hand with the development of the NPRR delivered a wave of immigration that continued well into the early 1900s. Story and his peers found themselves having to contend with the newcomers who meant to make the Paradise Valley and the Gardiner Basin into neighborhoods of farms and ranches, criss-crossed with fences that complicated the notion of "open" range. Lastly, the practical matter of the cold winters of the Yellowstone region challenged the logic of leaving animals untended and without supplemental feed in the winter. In December of 1871, the *Bozeman Avant Courier*

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[40]Quoted in Whithorn. No page number.

[41] Quoted in Ibid. No page number. Later, probably in the late 1880s, Nelson Story partnered with a valley landowner, William Lee, in a horse ranch that catered to the cavalry at Fort Mammoth. Park County Historical Society, 452.

[42] Hugo Hoppe manuscript, reproduced in Ida McPherren, *Imprints on Pioneer Trails* and quoted in L. H. Whittlesey, "'They're Going to Build a Railroad!: Cinnabar, Stephens Creek, and the Game Ranch Addition to Yellowstone National Park, 1995," Unpublished Manuscript in Author's Possession, p. 7.

reassured its readers that Story's "stock survived the heavy storm in good condition." However, just a few weeks later the editors were stuck trying to make lemonade out of lemons, reporting that "out of his large herd of horses, numbering between 700 and 800, [Story] will lose probably not over 60 head" on January 4, 1872.[43] The epic winter of 1887 solidified the case against open range grazing. According to great-grandson Peter Story, Nelson Story sold most of his cattle after the disaster of the winter of 1887, sticking to horses and sheep after that.[44]

Much has been made of the transition in the ranching industry from the open range to the base ranch system. For a brief period from the 1860s to 1887, ranching on the Northern Great Plains and the fringes of the Mountain West hinged on the premise that cattle could survive unassisted on the "open range"—the natural prairies, grasslands, and parks that blanketed the vast expanses between the hundredth meridian and the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Fortunes were made by buying cattle cheaply in Texas, trailing them to the Plains to graze on "free" grass, and then selling them at railheads at a profit. Other cattlemen, like Nelson Story, purchased animals in Texas but catered to local markets of mining boom towns and Indian agencies rather than to the stockyards in Omaha or Kansas City. When the legendary winter of 1887 came on the heels of a year of drought, cattle froze and starved to death. Financially ruined, cattle owners throughout the region changed their tune about the virtues of open range grazing. From their recognition of the need

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[43] Quoted in Whithorn. No page numbers.

[44] Peter Story, interview by author, Story Ranch, Emigrant, Montana, December 5, 2002. In a reference that is not supported with a citation, historian Robert H. Fletcher states that Nelson Story estimated his losses at 66.6%. Robert H. Fletcher, *From Free Grass to Fences: The Montana Cattle Range Story* (New York: University Publishers Inc. for the Montana Historical Society, 1960), 90.

to provide winter shelter and forage for the animals, the story goes, the base ranch system was born.[45]

The spread of the base ranch system had profound implications for the allocation of that natural resource most intimately linked to human existence in the West, water. The Yellowstone and its tributaries were no longer important only as perennial sources of water to keep stock alive, but from the 1870s onward, they served the critical function of keeping crops alive and growing. In order to harvest a successful crop of winter feed, a ranch needed to contain not just arable ground (flat and hopefully somewhat productive), but a rancher also needed to own the water needed to make that ground productive. Without water, the home place was of value little more than the paper deed that came with it.

Predictably, claims to water were made simultaneously with, and often in anticipation of, claims to land. And water went fast. This was certainly true of Big Creek, located about halfway between Emigrant and Yankee Jim Canyon. Ebenezer Dailey established his homestead near the mouth of the creek in 1872. Current water rights records indicate that the creek provides about 10,000 acre feet per year for irrigation purposes. The largest irrigation claim on the creek is also the most senior—established in 1873 for 2,830 acre feet per year. By 1885, more than half of the creek had been claimed, close to 6,000 acre-feet of water. And between 1886 and 1902, another 2,378 acre-feet were claimed.[46] The rapidity with which the earliest settlers appropriated the various tributaries of the Yellowstone meant that individuals

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[45] In fact, the factors influencing the catastrophic collapse of many livestock operations in the late 1880s have been shown to be more complex, as in Harmon Mothershead's study of the large Scottish-owned Swan Cattle Company of southern Wyoming. On that ranch, a combination of factors contributed to financial disaster in 1887. Harmon Ross Mothershead, *The Swan Land and Cattle Company, Ltd.* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971).

[46] State of Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Water Rights Database. Accessed online (5/19/2004) and also through CD-ROM provided by Bozeman Office.

establishing ranches in the 1890s and later were left holding the proverbial short straws. Long before the inventory of public domain and railroad parcels was depleted, the supply of meaningful water rights began to evaporate. When Samuel Nesbit chose to relocate his ranch family to "a better location" in the late 1890s, one of his motivations was to improve the seniority of his water rights. He left his homestead on Elbow Creek for the James Farrell place, a 360-acre ranch located on the other side of the Yellowstone near the confluence of Trail Creek. Importantly, the purchase included an 1872 water right to 150 miner's inches of water—this may have been the critical difference between the Nesbit place on Elbow Creek and the Farrell place. Because Nesbit was a relative latecomer to Elbow Creek, he ended up with low-priority, unreliable water rights there.[47]

That conflicts over water began to grow ugly during the early days of settlement has been well-documented as a central feature of the history of the American West.[48] The Upper Yellowstone was no exception, although the area was well-watered relative to many other areas of the West. Conflicts over water—and the prior appropriation dictum of western water law—created acute situations in which individual and communal interests were at cross purposes within the ranching community. During the settlement period, most people turned to the courts to settle water disputes. The majority of the tributary streams to the Yellowstone were adjudicated very early on—before 1910, indicating just how important water rights were to early homesteaders and how often they created conflict.

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[47] Park County Historical Society, 361-362.

[48] Mark Fiege, *Irrigated Eden: The Making of an Agricultural Landscape in the American West* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), Nancy Langston, *Where Land and Water Meet*, ed. William Cronon, Weyerhauser Environmental Books (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire : Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

Until the 1960s, ranchers in the Upper Yellowstone utilized flood irrigation systems, a practice that required well-honed skills and that also highlighted the extent of connectedness among neighboring ranches. Flood irrigation, as it was historically practiced and as it is still practiced, involves diverting water from its source through a series of hand-dug canals in order to spread water across a meadow as widely as possible. Gravity moves the water through a web of canals dug by the irrigator. The irrigator determines the timing of the water to different parts of his or her fields by opening and closing off ditches, historically with small canvas dams and often simply with dirt. When an irrigator has covered his or her fields, he returns the water to the main ditch and makes it available to downstream users. Downstream users could in fact have senior water rights to upstream users, but in a flood irrigation system, the upstream user had to remove water from the canal "first" because of the gravity-dependence of the whole system. The potential for conflicts over water along the tributaries of the Yellowstone in the Paradise Valley and nearby locations was serious.

Some parts of the Upper Yellowstone did not turn to ditch riders to oversee water use, and in those places ranchers depended on each other's honesty and fair-dealing to negotiate water availability. The loose honor system guiding the use of water inevitably created social conflict, but ranchers proved capable of functioning as a community nonetheless. Tom Gray remembered disagreeing with his neighbors, the Riglers, for all of the years that he and his wife Thelma operated Dome Mountain Ranch—they experienced fifty years of being seasonally at odds with their neighbors.[49] Virginia Anderson noted that their neighbor Ellery Merrell kept a close eye on how the Andersons used water, since they shared a ditch.[50] Margery Warfield remember that Bill Moore (the owner who preceded Margery and James on their

[49] Gray interview.

[50] Specifically, she said that "when the Merrells lived next door, Ellery knew everything and was very demanding. Because their water came through ours." Anderson interview.

ranch) and his neighbor Leander Melin "used to do some funny business [squabbling] over the fence" on the subject of irrigation ditches.[51]

Over time, most ranchers developed ways of mitigating the potential for extreme clashes with their neighbors, however. After all, neighbors provided many important resources, social as well as practical. Water disputes were incorporated into the acceptable body of social interactions through the use of humor and a unique form of selective memory that was seasonally operative. When Margery Warfield described the "funny business" between Melin and Moore, for example, she downplayed its significance. "You know," she recalled, "It was almost friendly fighting, they'd just steal each other's water they knew they wanted to finish up a field. And then they'd give it back, I think everybody knew what was going on and they didn't ever really get bad about it."[52] Similarly, Tom Gray relied on the proverbial observation common among ranchers that the Grays and Riglers fought every summer and were friendly every winter.[53]

Systems like this did not end conflicts over water, but they helped create the most manageable situation possible in light of the legal, social, and environmental constraints governing water availability. There was a strong incentive not to rock the boat as neighbors depended on each other's cooperation not just in water but in other aspects of ranch work and life. In part because of this interdependence and also because of the basic reality that there were limits to what was possible, irrigation systems showed remarkable stability from the 1870s into the 1960s and 1970s.

The water distribution systems established during the early homesteading period proved as durable as the water rights that were decreed during the same period. In 1951, the Office of the State Water Engineer published a series of reports

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[51] Warfield interview.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Gray interview.

on the water resources of each county in Montana. The reports were created in order to establish an accurate record of water use practices and in particular, of the extent of irrigation practices. The State Water Board hoped to use the information to evaluate opportunities for water development and to attract federal money to develop large water storage and delivery systems. By documenting all of the water rights in each drainage and surveying the amount of irrigable land versus the amount of land in irrigation, water engineers hoped to identify areas with a surplus of water and irrigable land with underdeveloped irrigation infrastructure. In the course of developing these comprehensive reports, researchers analyzed aerial photographs, land ownership records, and made field surveys in order to map literally every single irrigation ditch in the state. The result is an invaluable record—still in use in many water resources offices—of the state's irrigation infrastructure in 1951. An example from the reports, describes a map of Township 9 South, 7 East, comprising the Cinnabar Basin and a stretch of the Yellowstone River near Yankee Jim Canyon. The names of the ditches such as Heist, Koncilya, Bailey, and Bassett-McDonald that the mapmakers captured in 1951 recall the work of early homesteaders in the area: Solomon Heist, Anton Koncilya, Joseph Bailey, Fred Bassett, and John McDonald all dug their ditches in the decades of the 1890s and 1900s, ditches that continued to be the main arteries of irrigation systems in 1951.

While a rancher might ostensibly be able to augment his irrigating capacity by purchasing more senior water rights or honing his (and sometimes her) skills as an irrigator, the location of the base ranch relative to the water source was an important factor that could limit or enhance ranch viability. It was also a factor that proved very difficult to overcome. While the open, potentially arable lands of the Paradise Valley—and to a lesser extent of the Gardiner Basin—stretch for miles from either side of the Yellowstone River, getting water to flow up and out of the Yellowstone and across them was not a simple matter. Most settlers depended on the tributaries to the Yellowstone River for irrigation water.

While the scale, elevation and location of tributaries mitigated the scope of such obstacles for irrigators of side creeks, location was still a critical factor. The Chico Ranch, owned and operated by the Pierce family for roughly thirty years beginning in the late 1950s, faced this sort of dilemma. The ranch was situated on a high bench above the Mill Creek and Emigrant Creek drainages. The water rights associated with the ranch came from both creeks; however, the point of diversion on Mill Creek was several miles away and though Emigrant Creek was near the ranch's southern boundary, it was some distance from the best land for haying. This created a significant engineering challenge to get water to the fields.

Until the 1970s, the Pierce family limited their irrigation to water from Emigrant Creek. As David Rigler (who was the Pierce's next door neighbor) said, choices about what and how to irrigate were based on "where you could get the water to irrigate." Specifically, he meant that you could only grow hay in sites to which you could move water—even flat meadows were unsuitable if they were too far uphill from the source of irrigation water. This was the case with the Mill Creek water to which the Pierces had a legal right. In addition, David pointed out, "in those days you flood irrigated so you tried to get places that had good soil and not too rocky..." Flood irrigation, running water through a series of ditches, depended on having soil that drained in a manner that maximized the uniform distribution and absorption of ditch throughout a field. Soils that were too porous or too dense made the equal distribution of water that much more difficult. In addition to adding to difficulties in plowing and cultivating land, rocks made ditch-digging that much more difficult—some of the most boulder-filled fields were probably just not worth the effort. The Pierce operation faced the dilemma of moving water a very long distance from the ditch off Emigrant Creek to the fields on the ranch, located miles away across Mill Creek Flat. Their hay fields were located at the north end of their ranch and they also irrigated a smaller area. The longer the transportation ditch, especially in the days before cement-lined ditches, the greater the potential for the soil along the ditch to reabsorb the water. This put those at the end of long ditches at the short end of the stick, as they were receiving much less irrigation water than was diverted in their name. The Pierces had significant problems with water loss. Until new technology was available to them to store and move water, the capacity of their ranch was hampered by its unfortunate location.

The hard work of irrigating was accompanied by equally demanding tasks associated with cutting and storing the hay crop that irrigation water helped to produce. Winter feed was the limiting factor on the size of many ranches, giving ranches a strong incentive to cultivate hay with particular vigor. The more hay they could raise, the more cattle they could support, and hopefully, the greater their earnings each fall. From the 1880s through the present, haying has the most demanding task on a ranch, requiring substantial inputs of labor over a concentrated period, thanks in part to the short growing season in the Upper Yellowstone. Technically, all of the work involved in irrigation was part of the process of growing hay, but "haying" refers to that part of the process that involves harvesting and storing the grass crop. From the late nineteenth century into the 1940s and 1950s, horses were the primary source of power driving the simple, but effective machines used to mow, rake, move, and stack or bale hay.[54] Humans did the rest.

Young people frequently spent part of their summers as hired hands on local "hay crews," groups of workers assembled on ranches to help with the tasks of harvesting and storing hay. For some, hay crew was a welcome chance to socialize: it

[54] There are reports of pre-1940s machines like steam-powered tractors, but they appear to have been primarily used in threshing. Peter Story claimed in an interview that his father, Malcolm Story, acquired the first gas-powered baling machine in the Paradise Valley sometime in the 1950s. Story interview.

gave Tom Gray and Thelma D'Ewart a chance at courtship. For Mary Bridgman, hay camp—conducted at a remote site from the family ranch in the Shields Valley—was an exciting break from the routine and monotony of life on the base ranch.[55] Hay crews on large ranches could have a dozen or more laborers. The appearance of additional workers created an additional burden for ranch women who cooked three substantial meals for the work crews. As Bonnie O'Hair Francis recalled of her 1950s childhood on the O'Hair ranch that "We had a lot of men to cook for in the summer. The haying and the irrigating took a lot of manpower. The folks always had a lot of kids working for them."[56] During the period of significant ranch expansion of the 1890s through the 1940s, manual labor was a definitive force in hay harvesting.

Technological advances that first appeared in the late 1920s and became widespread on ranches after World War II provided a series of ways that ranchers could irrigate and harvest hay more efficiently. The technologies that enabled ranchers to transform their irrigation systems were long-distance canals, reservoirs and sprinklers. [57] On the hay field, the appearance of gas-powered tractors and whole

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[55] Park County Historical Society, 115.

[56] Ibid., 200.

[57] Canals have a long history in the Upper Yellowstone. Those who wished to access the bountiful waters of the Yellowstone faced monumental engineering projects. The construction of the Park Branch canal, a ditch carrying Yellowstone River water to ranches in the Brisbane area, was one such project. Constructed in 1893, the original ditch was about 11 or 16 (depending on the report) miles long, stretching from a point just south of Emigrant north toward the junction of Trail Creek and the Yellowstone River. By starting this far upstream from their properties, the ditch users could use gravity to spread the waters of the Yellowstone onto land located higher than the river surface. According to one account, the canal took four years to build and was delayed by the Panic of 1893. Whithorn, no page number. The users claimed a kingly 5,000 miners' inches of water, enough—according a 1951 report—to have irrigated 4,508 acres and potentially an additional 1,561 acres. State of Montana Engineer's Office, *Water Resources Survey, Park County, Mt. Part I: History of Land and Water Use on Irrigation Areas.* (Helena, MT, 1951), 39. The development of the canal, which was improved in 1937, involved overcoming the geographic separation of the upper and lower stretches of the Paradise Valley. South of Emigrant, the Paradise Valley opens up to reveal a wide, flat basin. But in order to water those grounds, situated some distance above the river proper, it was

series of p-t-o (power-train-overdrive) implements and attachments drastically altered the labor demands associated with haying.

The Rigler Ranch on Mill Creek—operated by the Rigler Family from 1922 to 1998—provides an example of the kinds of changes that irrigation improvements implied. In David Rigler's opinion, irrigation infrastructure is the most important aspect of the ranch's configuration. The Rigler Ranch has three water sources, Davis Creek, Davis Creek Spring, and Mill Creek. Historically, a junior share in Davis Creek Spring filled a cistern on the Ayres place that was used for domestic water and to fill stock tanks. Rights from Davis Creek were used to water the upper ranch and water from Mill Creek to water the lower ranch. In the opinions of two generations of Riglers, the ranch's water system was imperfect as long as the method and timing of water delivery was out of synch with the ranch's water needs—both for watering livestock and irrigating fields. Through a number of projects and the major project of the Mill Creek pipeline, completed in 1993, David and Rose Rigler reengineered the water delivery system on their ranch. Ultimately, they combined all their water rights into a single system of pipes, gas-powered pumps, and storage reservoirs. Some of the resulting benefits included having reliable water delivered to stock tanks on the upper part of the ranch, water storage for late season irrigation, and most importantly, water storage for the implementation of sprinkler irrigation.

It might be hard to appreciate why David recalled so happily that after the development of one pipeline project, "year round, you could put it [water] in whatever tank you wanted to." However, his relief is understandable in light of his wife Rose's reference to what had been a daily—sometimes twice-daily—winter chore

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necessary for ranchers to build their ditches up in the steeper, higher ground of Emigrant and above. To construct the ditch, the canal company depended on the cooperation of their neighbors, over whose land their ditch traveled. Ultimately, the ditch claimed 144 acres of surface area.

of chopping ice out of stock tanks with an axe to keep the water drinkable.[58] Equally important, the ranch's water development facilitated the use of rest-rotation system of pasture utilization on the ranch by eliminating barriers to keeping stock in particular areas.

The replacement of flood irrigation by sprinklers, first wheel line and later center pivot systems, began in the 1960s and has been an ongoing process since. The universal assessment by ranchers I interviewed was positive, as pivot irrigation allowed most operators to boost their yields significantly. Alan Redfield, who succeeded James Warfield as the operator of James and Margery's ranch, testified not only to the improved yields from more efficient distribution of water, but from the increases of the amount of land in cultivation. Under sprinklers which he added gradually between 1985 and 2002, Redfield gained 20 acres of hay ground. Now he has "maxed out" the available ground for irrigation. Similarly, David Rigler experienced a doubling in hay and pasture yields from the adoption of pivot irrigation and pumping in the late 1980s.[59] Sprinkler irrigation made it possible for ranchers to produce alfalfa, a highly nutritious winter feed. However, pivots and wheel line sprinklers depend on flat terrain: in the Upper Yellowstone there are ranches located in areas that cannot support sprinkler lines. Jim Stermitz observed of his operation in the Cinnabar Basin: "We've always used flood irrigation. We have an alpine type situation, the meadows aren't flat and the meadows don't lend themselves to wheel-

[58] This memory is confirmed by her sister-in-law, ElDonna Pierce, who operated the Chico Ranch with her husband Charlie between 1948 and 1970. "Most of those years were hard," she recalled. "Our water supply came from the Chico Hot water ditch. January was always a tough month. We had axes and shovels out nearly every day trying to get water to the livestock." Park County Historical Society, 387.

[59] David and Rose Rigler, interview by author, Rigler residence, Pray, Montana, February 24, 2003.

line operations."[60] High in Tom Miner Basin, pivots proved to be similarly impractical.[61]

Radical changes in the methods and machines involved in haying preceded the widespread adoption of sprinklers and reservoirs. Most ranchers acquired their first gasoline-powered tractors in the 1940s or 1950s. The first tractors were typically used in mowing, the hardest work that horses did. Edwin Nelson recalled that haying with horses in the 1930s and 1940s, he could typically mow 10 acres of hay in one day. His first tractor, a 1946 John Deere, boosted that to 25 acres per day.[62] Ranchers experimented with the mechanization of other aspects of haying—most of them made the complete transition to a completely tractor-driven operation slowly, over a period of fifteen or twenty years. Horses were commonly used to operate buck rakes into the 1950s, but Ellery Merrell purchased an old pick up from a neighbor in the Tom Miner basin and devised a truck-powered buck rake.[63] Hay could be baled or stacked loose in haystacks depending on how far and how often a rancher would need to move the hay over the course of the winter. Some ranches were still stacking loose hay in the 1970s. Helen and Edwin Nelson pointed out that stacking by hand had its limitations in their location—the winds that ripped through the valley sometimes blew their entire load off the wagon, forcing them to stop and pitch all the hay back on top again.[64]

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[60] Stermitz interview.

[61] Bruce and Connie Malcolm, interview by author, Malcolm Ranch, Park County, Montana, December 14, 2002.

[62] Helen and Edwin Nelson and Arch Wagner, *Growing up in Paradise: A History of Nelson's Spring Creek Ranch* (Glen Allen, VA: Clairmont Publishing, 1998), 5.

[63] Malcolm interview.

[64] Nelson and Wagner. 16.

Tractors represented significant investments for ranchers. Small ranchers in particular would have found the cost prohibitive. Ultimately, though, the mechanization of haying had a logic that was too seductive for most to resist—a dramatic reduction in labor and time costs. As Margery Warfield put it, "We got a tractor and my goodness things went fast!" Helen Nelson described the process in more detail in her memoir:

> We eventually graduated from piling loose hay to baling it. One person drove the tractor and two people would sit on the baler, one on each side. As the hay came through to the proper length, one person would push the wires through and the other would tie them together. It was a hot and dusty job but usually went okay. Things got pretty wild in a hurry because if you couldn't poke and tie wires fast enough, you could end up with a two hundred pound bale...

The labor-saving aspects of haying machinery continued to multiply over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, reducing haying to something that a pair of workers could execute, as Helen Nelson describes:

> We later went ... to a new John Deere 14-T twine tie and I got to be the baler driver. I went to the field every morning, taking the four kids with me. They would play in a mud puddle on the edge of the field as I went round and round. As we got a little more modern, we invested in a wagon that picked up the bales in the field and stacked them.

Most recently, the Nelsons acquired "the big John Deere round baler. It makes 1200 pound bales and ended the manual labor. Now everything is done by machine and we tool around in an air conditioned tractor with the radio on."[65] Between the 1940s and the 1980s, the number of people required for a haying job effectively went from many to one or two, although of course many operations leveraged their time and labor savings to expand their haying operation onto more ground.

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[65] Ibid., 17-18.

For close to a century, the fundamental practices farm work demanded on mountain ranches remained unchanged. Individuals directed water across the land assisted—and limited—by shovels and gravity. Cutting and storing hay were projects that involved the recruitment of extensive off-ranch help as well as the use of horse and horse-powered machinery. As tractors, canals, sprinklers and other advanced tools became available to Upper Yellowstone ranchers, the nature of basic farming tasks changed. New machinery promised to make individual operators more productive, a promise that helped ranchers justify the cost increases. At one level, in terms of increases in hay yields, tractors and mechanized irrigation fulfilled this promises. On another level, though, the changes in the nature of farm work and of rural infrastructure created new dilemmas for ranchers.

The Problems with Technology

Accelerated, machine-assisted hay production had widespread implications. One of the changes that proved most striking for ranchers was the gradual elimination of working horses from ranches. There were both aesthetic and prosaic reasons to lament the move from single to double-digit horse power. Horses were easier to start in winter then their petroleum-dependent replacements and usually cheaper to operate. Many ranchers continued to use a team of horses to feed cattle in winter into the 1980s, a chore that involved driving a large load of hay out into a snowy pasture and spreading it out to give all the cows a chance at it. A climate cycle that yielded relatively mild winters along with improvements to automotive technology encouraged most ranchers to relinquish their horses during the 1980s and 1990s in favor of pick-up trucks or tractors.

Not only were horses more practical for certain tasks, but draft horses embodied both aesthetic and emotional aspects of ranch life that some ranchers found hard to part with. Alan Redfield, a third-generation rancher from eastern Montana who married into a ranch on Mill Creek, reintroduced draft horses to his operation in

1985. "I always wanted a team of horses, ever since I was this big," he remembered. "On the farm when I was growing up, my grandfather had horses and I always remembered them..." The Redfields used their team to feed in winter for about fifteen years. They even went as far as adapting their hydraulic-operated round bale feeder to their horse-drawn equipment. However, as Redfield neared middle-age and began to notice the wear and tear on his body, he re-discovered the benefits of tractor power. He opted not to replace his elderly team with new horses a few years ago. He noted wistfully, "I miss the big bob sled—cruising across the hay fields in the snow, there's nothing like a bob sled."[66] On the other hand, he appreciates the convenience of diesel-powered machinery. His sentiments are echoed in the recollections of Marion (Sid) McElwee, who worked as a hand on the Van Dyke Ranch in the Shields Valley most of his life. Sid's tenure on the ranch was interrupted by World War II and when he returned, he observed significant changes. "It was easier working here now," he later wrote, "with the new hay loader and bull dozer to move the snow and the other machinery." Still, McElwee held onto the values and aesthetics he knew from before the war; "to me, nothing took the place of a good saddle horse for punching cows."[67]

Another dilemma associated with improved irrigation and hay production was overproduction of a sort. Improved irrigation practices created a circumstance in the 1960s and 1970s in which access to summer pasture, rather than winter feed, emerged as the factor most likely to limit the productivity of individual ranches. That circumstance amplified the already strong demand for private pasture, as the Upper Yellowstone area had a limited supply of grazing opportunities due to the rugged topography of nearby National Forests. When James Warfield assumed operation of the Bill Moore ranch in the late 1940s, the nascent tractor "revolution" allowed him

[66] Warfield interview.

[67] Park County Historical Society, 324.

to greatly increase the ranch's productivity over a period of a decade. Located far up Mill Creek on a section of rugged foothill ground, the ranch presented few grazing opportunities. Thus, if Warfield wanted to take advantage of his increased productivity by growing his herd, he was forced to locate additional summer pasture beyond that comprised by his property. He and his family leased pasture for twenty years, chasing down what was available through local networks. In the early 1970s, they opted to purchase a large private pasture section on Mission Creek, on the north flanks of the Absarokas.[68] Another result of improved irrigation productivity was the conversion of some hay meadows into pasture.[69]

Irrigation improvements even changed what kinds of grasses ranchers cultivated—slower-maturing species were more appropriate prior to the 1950s when ranchers might take six or eight weeks to get their mowing done. Fast-growing species that offer today's ranchers a chance to reap a productive second cutting of hay posed the risk of becoming rank and going to seed before the rancher working with horses had a chance to cut the hay.[70] Thus, the hay meadows on the base ranch were

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[68] Warfield interview.

[69] Developments in irrigation efficiency affecting the configuration of ranches led to some changes in ownership patterns and related changes in land use. For example, the Tom Miner Basin witnessed a decrease in the amount of ground under active irrigation as a result of the consolidation of ranches as well as the acquisition of former year-round homesteads by ranchers based elsewhere in the valley in search of summer pasture. Some observers feel that changes in irrigation have affected water availability, similar to circumstances that I have documented elsewhere. Julia H. Haggerty and others, *Ranchland Dynamics in Beaverhead County, Mt* (Boulder, CO: Center of the American West, 2003). Intensive early season irrigation, especially in high elevation valleys, can serve to delay run-off, creating mid-summer flow in mid-elevation areas. When irrigation ceases in high elevation areas, low elevation water availability patterns can change. Bruce and Connie Malcolm, "Interview by Author," (2003). Hydrologists confirm the potential for this to occur although the Upper Yellowstone has not been studied.

[70] Warfield interview.

literally transformed by the advent of the tractor, down to the very seeds from which the hay grew.[71]

Activity in the hay fields changed significantly with the advent of new machinery after World War II. The massive haying parties that were required to bring in a harvest prior to the 1940s gave way to family-scale haying operations, augmented at most by just a few temporary hands. Haying was just one of the tasks that neighbors once did together that have since been transformed by labor-saving machinery. In addition to haying, neighbors in the Upper Yellowstone often cooperated to thresh grain, to move livestock on horseback, to ship cattle to market by truck, and to brand. Branding, threshing, shipping were all difficult tasks that ranchers nonetheless looked forward to because it offered the chance to spend a day with neighbors and relatives. The work always ended in a festive meal—a hefty chore for the women cooking it, but one with a tradeoff that made it appealing to many ranch women. The loss of "neighboring"—the culture of shared work and interdependence—is one of the changes on the modern ranch landscape that contemporary ranchers most regret. Vestiges of the neighboring tradition remained in the 1980s and 1990s, in events like church dinners, cattlewomen's meetings, and even

[71] The canal systems that promised such efficient movement of water have had a consequence that most ranchers in the Paradise Valley in the early twentieth century could hardly have imagined would turn out to be deeply important to some of them. The long-term use of irrigation canals that reroute many of the tributary streams of the Yellowstone, together with the efficiency of pivot irrigation that leaves little in the way of run-off to return to streams, has so altered local streams that there has been a significant loss of habitat for trout spawning. As fishing has emerged to play both an important auxiliary and in some cases a central role in the continuity of many of the region's ranches, some ranchers recognize the importance of rehabilitating former waterways. A collaborative project between the State of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, Trout Unlimited, and the Murphy family that is currently underway will reconnect Fridley Creek with the Yellowstone after close to a century of separation. James Murphy, interview by author, Murphy Ranch, Emigrant, Montana, May 23, 2004.

for some, in moving cattle, but many of the key linkages between the work of livestock production and neighboring have eroded.

In addition to contributing to the loss of neighboring, the realm of machinery introduced a new cultural dynamic that involved men, particularly fathers and sons. Many ranchers who came of age during the advent of tractors and motorized farm machinery cultivated mechanical skills, perhaps in lieu of horse-training or other "pre-modern" skills. Several ranchers indicated to me that this was something that clearly differentiated their work experiences from their fathers'. Jim Stermitz described it this way:

> I guess I didn't feel that I had any trouble using the machinery because my Dad was a rank and file horse person and he didn't really understand machinery, my uncle understood it not at all, so a lot of the things that I developed, and at a very early age, ten or eleven years old, I built a power buck rake, and I started bucking hay out of the field on that because it was faster and I just felt ... it was a novelty for me to have a piece of machinery, whereas my dad would use it, but when he got in a tight spot, he'd revert back to the horses. I guess I was more of the machinery person.[72]

Bruce Malcolm remembered his father in a similar vein. "My dad couldn't help us with the machinery, he didn't understand it," Bruce stated. "He hayed and fed with horses, he ran a tractor, but if the tractor broke down, he didn't understand that."[73] Stermitz's and Malcolm's comments illustrate the depth of the implications of transition from animal to machine power for ranchers. Not only did the ranchers of the 1950s and 1960s feel a greater sense of security with machines, but they recognized that they operated in a fundamentally different landscape of work than their fathers did. Malcolm's young adult son, who is interested in staying on the ranch, obtained a degree in diesel mechanics, demonstrating how important the ability to repair and operate machinery now is on ranches.

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[72] Stermitz interview.

[73] Malcolm interview.

And yet, contemporary ranchers cannot help but recognize that in the age of mechanized pumps, electric-driven sprinklers, and combine tractors, their own physical labor and ability to conquer hardship play a less significant role in their ability to succeed. This recognition poses an immediate threat to an identity based on hard work forged in the first century of ranching. Ranchers responded to this troubling realization in the late twentieth century with the same suite of narrative strategies used to justify their commitment to the failed economic model which I described in Chapter III.[74]

Narratives of ranching developed in the period from the late 1970s through the 1990s glorified the hard work of the early days, often conveniently omitting while also accepting the real hardship that such work meant for men, women and children. Some ranchers also draw negative conclusions when they compare young ranchers to their predecessors. Asked to describe some of the severe winters that she and her husband, Ellery Merrell, experienced in Tom Miner Basin between the 1940s and 1970s, Eril Merrell offered this recollection, "In some winters, Ellery would drive, he had a Jeep pick-up, he'd drive it as far as the Smith place, put on his snowshoes, and snow shoe into the upper place to feed the cattle and the horses up there. Put on another load of hay, pitch it on by hand, and snowshoe home." As if to emphasize how at home they had been with the ruggedness of ranch life—and how perhaps how much more accommodating they were of it than later generations, she added, "We thought nothing of it. Really."[75]

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[74] Some ranchers attempted to bridge the gap between old and new, both in practice and in their imaginations. For example, the Darroch family noted that "John and Elizabeth [ranching between the late 1940s and 1960s] saw the changes come to their ranch from a horse and hay rake to the more modern Ford Tractor and Farmhand loaders. They continued to run sheep as did John's parents. They summered their sheep in the mountains after herding over 1000 head from the ranch to the head of Big Creek the trip taking two full days." Park County Historical Society, 164.

[75] Merrell interview.

Some ranchers I interviewed expressed strong feelings about changes in irrigation practices that reflect a similar frustration with younger generations. All but a few of the most remote, mountainous ranches in the Upper Yellowstone now employ either gravity-fed wheel line or center-pivot sprinklers. Sprinkler systems do not run themselves; however, they hardly require the kind of cumulative knowledge and skills that were necessary in flood irrigation. In fact, historically, one of the best compliments that one rancher could pay another was to describe him or her as a "good irrigator." To be a good irrigator means to be thorough and attentive to the project of spreading water across fields. For many ranchers who learned to irrigate before the adoption of sprinkler systems, it meant being willing to hover, shovel in hand, over an irrigated field for entire days—from early morning until evening. When ranchers do not see anyone in a neighboring field for days at a time—even if the pivot sprinkler is running efficiently and the crop looks good—they often cannot help but feel that that something is missing, that the operator is somehow remiss for being absent from the fields.[76] This recalls the conversation excerpted in the end of Chapter III in which Eril Merrell says with finality, "Well, if you irrigate property, it's a lot of work, I don't care." In the context of the conversation, Merrell statement suggested that the heirs of ranches as well as new owners who purchased ranches for the lifestyle were incapable of or unwilling to do the "hard work" that makes a good ranch a good ranch. Ruefully, she also observed, "the meadows just grew up into trash [when they were not irrigated]. Just look at [what was once] our place, it's unproductive as a ranch."[77] Observations like these delineate a boundary that aims in part to distinguish

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[76] The value placed in skill in irrigating is connected to a larger set of beliefs about the purpose of ranching. Irrigation helped to make a ranch more productive: as Chapter III suggested, increased productivity was considered a point of pride even if the economics of ranching failed to reward it.

[77] James and Lorayne Stermitz also discussed the ruination of meadows through the cessation of irrigation on Cutler Flats, part of the Royal Teton Land Exchange. Interestingly, this is something that one Forest Service official agreed with.

between genuine ranchers and impostors, a distinction that became increasingly significant to ranchers in the last three decades of the twentieth century. The importance of the distinction between real ranchers and hobbyists rested, for the ranchers, in their approach to work and ranch operations. This focus obscured the overriding issue of class differences—the main reason why new ranch owners could approach work differently from their predecessors. In addition, distinctions that venerate historical practices like manual flood irrigation were useful ways for ranchers to remedy a troubling disjuncture between their effort and their success. In the later decades of the twentieth century ranchers could not help but notice that they did not work as physically hard or in as much danger and discomfort as did their predecessors and yet their economic survival and the continuity of their ranches was as much if not more in jeopardy.

Popular culture increasingly echoed this sense of loss throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Films, literature, and photography built a cult of ranching based in part on a depiction of ranchers as participants in a primitive lifestyle with inherent value gained from being close to nature and working hard. A photograph that shows the escalation of this vision of ranching just at the time when ranch work was in fact becoming less hard was taken on the Nelson ranch sometime in the 1960s.[78] The Nelsons, demonstrating a practical approach to problem solving, hybridized old and new technology to deal with winter during this decade. That is, they often left their truck at the end of their driveway in winter rather than trying to keep the road passable and free of snow, which had a tendency to drift in as soon as the road was cleared. They used a hay wagon and a team of horses to make the trip down the driveway to the truck in heavy snows and so often left the horses and wagon "parked" at the end of their lane, the horses tied to the gate. A photographer from the *Livingston Enterprise* came along the road one day to find the Nelson children,

[78] Currently in process of receiving negative to photography from *Livingston Enterprise.*

recently discharged from the school bus, standing with the hay wagon with their dogs and a pet deer, waiting for their parents to return from town to drive the wagon back to the house. The picture made its way into syndication through the Associated Press wire and attracted interest from all over the country. Helen Nelson described the aftermath from the publication of the picture this way:

> Some of the folks who saw the news clip felt so sorry for us that they actually sent us money with the hope that we could build a place so that our children and our animals wouldn't have to be out in the cold. I guess they just didn't understand we were happy as clams. After all, winter in Montana is just winter in Montana.[79]

Winter in Montana was also an event that could delay marriages, produce severe head injuries, even claim people to exposure. The evocative strength of the image for national audiences reminded the ranchers of Paradise Valley that their lifestyle represented something unique in an urbanized, modern society.[80]

As recreational consumption of land increased in the 1970s and 1980s, it became easier for ranchers to find value in the "primitive" qualities of their work and lifestyle. Even if pivots and air-conditioned combines made ranching easier—and by extension made ranchers less virtuous than their parents and grandparents, ranchers were bolstered by the emergence of an economy focused on the consumption of many of the qualities that came "free" with ranching. Ranchers had only to look at all of the professionals buying up small lots to visit on vacations or paying for horseback trips into the mountains as proof of the inherent value of their lifestyle. At the same time, the value of their land increased significantly, offering them a kind of security that was not available to previous generations of ranchers. Paradoxically, that security hinged on selling the ranch, or in some cases on cultivating non-ranching sources of income

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79 Nelson and Wagner, 19.

80 The Nelsons' lifestyle did present problems for some letter-writers such as a woman from New York who wouldn't if the Nelsons couldn't build a barn for the horses, reminding them that "it gets very cold in Montana in the winter" as if they did not know that. Letter in Nelson family scrapbook.

from the ranch, and thus relinquishing the special claim that ranchers had to a more rugged, more "real" life than other Americans.

When the Park County Marketing Association invited a group of potential clients to tour the region in 1975, the visitors expressed exactly this kind of admiration for ranching. Early in the fall, the Sioux City Cattle Feeders Association from Sioux City, Iowa made a week-end pilgrimage to Park County. The group was made up of about thirty "farmer-feeders," corn and grain farmers who purchased young cattle every fall planning to fatten them up on their crops and sell them in the spring before the next growing season. The Sioux City feeders often purchased cattle from Park County, because of the county's reputation for producing healthy, easy-to-fatten calves. Most of the travelers had never been to Montana; it is likely that few had ventured far from the Corn Belt. The farmers enjoyed their visit to the Big Sky Resort and other local attractions, but what truly impressed them were the ranches. Captions written by one of the participants on the tour below the photographs illustrating an article in the association's weekly paper capture the effect that the Montana ranch landscape had on these visitors. The photos showed an old barn, a split rail corral, and a rancher sitting astride a horse. One caption read, "The ranches out in Montana reflected the slower pace of life they [the ranchers of Park County] lead. The old-time corrals were unlike anything we normally see around here and were made with split timber and rails...." The captions continued, "Many of the ranchers went through a lot of trouble to round up their calves and herd them close to the road so that those on the trip could take a close look at them. In many cases, this was done by guys on horses. In rugged Montana country, there are many areas where a four wheel drive can't replace a trusty steed."[81]

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[81] Untitled article in *Farmers' Cattle Log,* Orange City Iowa, 1:4 (Mon., Sept. 22, 1975): 6. Accessed in Park County Ranchers' Marketing Association records.

The feeders' impressions that ranchers led a slower paced life in which they could persist in rustic ways are understandable, though romanticized. One of the most appealing aspects of the contemporary ranch landscape of the Mountain West is the visual harmony between the spectacular natural scenery and the simplicity of the human footprint upon it. The plainness and humility that so often characterize ranch buildings and structures appear to complement the surrounding river courses, foot hills, and mountain backdrops. This aesthetic often reinforces a tendency to see cow-calf operations in remote mountain valleys as the "last best" forms of American agriculture. Ranches are in this construction not just material links to a romanticized vision of the early twentieth-century West, but also places that have so far escaped the grasp of industrialized agriculture.[82] (In comparison to other forms of agriculture in the Mountain West, and in terms of the land use practices associated with raising livestock on mountain ranches, it can be argued that ranches are less industrialized.[83]) The geographic situation of ranching landscapes on the interstices between developed towns and public lands—lands perceived, rightly and wrongly, as "pristine"—adds to their charm.

Even though many ranchers use massive center pivot sprinklers or have built hulking machine shops from corrugated aluminum, the determined sentimentalist can still find plenty of reminders of the olden days when they scan contemporary ranches. Wavy fence posts cut from juniper trees, hand-dug irrigation ditches lined with willow

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[82] Contemporary literature about ranching does much to promote this image, even in cases of what Leo Marx might call "complex" pastoralism. Examples include Mark Spragg, *Where the Rivers Change Direction*, Wallace Stegner's essay "Crow Country" about the Heyneman Ranch on the Rosebud in the collection *American Places*. In addition, Michael Pollan's 2002 article, "Power Steer" noted that the "cow-calf" ranch embodied the stage of beef production "least changed by the modern industrialization of meat." Michael Pollan, "Power Steer," *New York Times*, March 31 2002.

[83] For example sugar beet production and potato farming involve much more intensive, anonymous machinery, a far more serious alteration of natural processes and monoculture far more destructive of native systems than a hay field or even the act of cattle grazing.

and cottonwood trees, buildings constructed of rough-hewn logs or river rock, plainly-dressed ranchers accompanied by earnest working dogs, mazes of utilitarian roadside corrals and chutes, even cows and calves grazing beneath huge cottonwoods create a pastoral image hard to find elsewhere in rural America. It is not surprising then that viewers like the Iowa farmer-feeders might interpret a ranch as something more honest, more natural than modern agricultural landscapes such as the soy and corn fields of the Midwest that are navigated by giant combine tractors. The sense of changelessness, that ranches are a portal into the past, is central to this assessment.

Truly, the continuity of practices and belief systems that originated in the 1890s and early 1900s on contemporary mountain ranches is remarkable. However, ranch operations have hardly persisted as static mimeographs of the past in the face of a rapidly changing present. Over the course of the twentieth century, ranches amalgamated old and new ideas that reflect not only the strong influence of custom, but also of environmental, technological, cultural, political, and economic constraint and opportunity. Much of the literature analyzing the environmental history of the twentieth century American West instructs its readers that most actions that promised humans increased leverage in their relationship to nature typically yielded unintended consequences. The experiences of the ranchers of the Upper Yellowstone with technology were no exception to this principle. While new tools and practices yielded rapid advances in productivity, they threatened to undermine many of the cultural assumptions and practices from which ranchers drew psychological strength. Ranchers believed that they and their lifestyle were defined and made respectable by work that demanded stoicism, strength, and simplicity. The strategies that ranchers developed in response to these threats reflect a profound commitment to preserving the basic context of ranching—and in some cases, remarkable creative interpretations of past and present trends in ways that enable that preservation effort.

The next chapter considers the elk for which the Yellowstone region is famous. The elk—nationally-beloved, highly managed, and wild—provide a focus through which to continue this evaluation of how transformations of work and nature changed ways that ranchers perceived themselves and their relationships to other ranchers. More than any other force, elk pushed ranchers to recognize that their neighbors included not only other ranchers but also the National Park Service. Truly, because of Yellowstone's popularity, the ranchers of the Upper Yellowstone sometimes found themselves in neighbor-like interactions with large sectors of the American public. Elk created an impetus for ranchers to recognize the changing value and nature of their work as livestock producers both in terms of their ability to make money and in terms of their ability to win approval from the public.

CHAPTER VI

ABSENTEE OWNERS AND RESIDENT ELK: RANCHERS AND THEIR NEIGHBORS, 1965 TO 2004

"[Y]ou can't manage elk. You can manage cattle." –Jim Stermitz

While the marvels of the geyser basins and geological features of Yellowstone National Park provided much of the initial inspiration behind the park's designation in 1872, elk have a long and complex history as a centerpiece in the Yellowstone's portfolio of natural—and national—treasures. From the perspective of ranchers, who experienced elk in a different context than did tourists, hunters, and wildlife viewers, elk constituted something other than an obvious treasure. While ranchers appreciated elk in certain contexts, they also saw them as nuisances that interfered with livestock production. This was especially true when elk wandered out of Yellowstone National Park and surrounding national forests and onto the ranching landscape.

At a fundamental ecological level, elk presented a problem for ranchers because the domestic livestock that ranchers introduced—sheep, cattle, and horses—occupy similar ecological niches in the Upper Yellowstone to those demanded by elk. Paradoxically, the more that ranchers improved the landscape for domestic livestock by planting more nutritious and palatable plant varieties and creating a reliable store of winter feed, the more the landscape appealed to elk. In addition, the position of elk as a rare and valuable national resource drew ranchers into the complex history of the science and policy of elk conservation. The interactions between ranchers and elk were therefore complicated by powerful forces: the inherently complex ecological interactions linking climate, plant dynamics, and grazing as well as the difficulties posed by ongoing changes in social attitudes about elk and the ever-changing management scenarios such attitudinal shifts produced—not to mention the complex biological consequences of management practices. Elk were also immediate manifestations of the relationship between ranchers and Yellowstone National Park, its mission, and the agents charged with carrying out its mission, a relationship loaded with complex ideological and practical concerns.

The relationship between ranchers and elk metaphorically embodies many of the critical dynamics affecting the history of livestock production in the Upper Yellowstone Valley after World War II. The unpredictable qualities of the behavior of wild elk echoed the convolution of post-World War II agricultural markets. In addition, the diminishing, although by no means depleted force of ranchers' influence over public land management after the 1970s mimicked the relative powerlessness of ranchers to remedy their position in livestock markets during the same period. Also, like the ranch lands to which they flocked in great number, elk constituted a new economic opportunity for ranchers in the post-1970 era.[1] However, elk were no less a paradox than the booming recreational land market; to many ranchers, choosing to integrate elk into their ranch business symbolized a rejection of their ranching heritage.

Like the elk management strategies employed by wildlife and land managers, ranchers' interactions with elk differed depending on the scarcity or abundance of elk herds. By dint of historical circumstance, elk population trends during the early establishment of ranching in the Upper Yellowstone were such that ranchers understood elk to be a part of Yellowstone National Park, but not necessarily as

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[1] In some ways, the history of elk in the ranching economy parallel the important development of a major on-ranch fly fishing industry in the Upper Yellowstone Valley. Several of the valley's ranches incorporated fee-access fly fishing in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, choices that proved to have significant pay-offs for the ranchers. However, the ability to host fly fisherman was rather more geographically limited than the ability to guide hunters (only a few of the ranches had the specific stream resources that fishermen have been willing to pay to access). Furthermore, elk represent a somewhat more immediate case of conflicts between ranching and the alternative income (although recently conflicts have begun to emerge over how to balance the water needs of fish with the irrigation demands of hay production.) See Helen and Edwin Nelson and Arch Wagner, *Growing up in Paradise: A History of Nelson's Spring Creek Ranch* (Glen Allen, VA: Clairmont Publishing, 1998).

belonging in or to the lands beyond the Park's boundaries. Ranchers relied on this precedent of geographic logic in their negotiations with the inherent tensions of neighboring an international nature preserve. The park could exist, in other words, without challenging the primacy of rancher's rights to utilize other lands in the Upper Yellowstone as they wished. Even in the presence of un-ignorable elk numbers beyond the boundaries of the Park in the early twentieth century, most ranchers persisted in a view that granted ranching, rather than elk, dominance in the hierarchy of valid "users" of the range. When the forces in favor of increasing elk numbers—political as well as ecological—proved more powerful than ranchers' resistance in the second half of the twentieth century, such a position became increasingly untenable. Many ranchers ultimately adapted their ranching business and operational strategies in ways that integrated elk into the ranching landscape, albeit in very limited ways. Problematically, even such nominally adaptive strategies shared a fundamental problem with those strategies that rejected the presence of elk altogether: incompatibility with the fluctuations that characterize elk population trends (resulting both from non-human, natural influences as well as human affects on natural processes). The demands for economic dependability—whether ranchers focused on growing livestock or on guiding hunters—made it profoundly difficult to preserve a notion of the compatibility of ranching as it had historically been defined and the goals of Yellowstone National Park and surrounding public lands, especially as the management of public lands increasingly attempted to replicate the variability of natural systems.

The incompatibility of economic demands on nature with the irregularity and flux of natural systems is a familiar theme in environmental history.[2] While it is clearly

[2] For just a few examples of many, see Mark Fiege, *Irrigated Eden: The Making of an Agricultural Landscape in the American West* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), Susan D. Jones, "Becoming a Pest: Prairie Dog Ecology in the Human Economy in the Euroamerican West," *Environmental History* 4, no. 4 (1999), Nancy Langston, *Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares : The Paradox of Old Growth in the Inland West* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), Nancy

at the heart of the complex interactions between ranchers and elk, it is not the only instructive aspect of this complex feature of the history the Upper Yellowstone. The "elk problem," as ranchers have called it, also illustrates the problems of continuity and community that are at the heart of my study. Elk—because of the inherent complexity of the biological system they belong to but also because of their importance to a variety of different communities of interest—offer a particularly dynamic and difficult problematic in a discussion of the tension between individuals, communities, and notions of historical continuity.

The pages that follow provide first a general overview of the population dynamics of elk in the Upper Yellowstone while also noting the ongoing scientific debate about how elk population dynamics should be interpreted. The bulk of the chapter goes on to consider two ways in which ranchers attempted to maintain a sense of the compatibility of ranching and the Yellowstone region as elk habitat: first through attempts to fix boundaries between elk and ranches and by integrating elk into the ranching landscape when boundaries separating wildlife and ranching proved impossible to maintain. The chapter then moves to a discussion of the tendency for the complex biological and political circumstances governing elk management to destabilize the positions that ranchers have attempted to take relative to elk. In the end, my analysis of how the dynamics of rancher-elk interactions have affected and reflected visions of community in the Upper Yellowstone links this chapter to the greater project.

EPISODES OF ELK SCARCITY AND ABUNDANCE

The Upper Yellowstone region features extensive elk habitat—upland grasslands that provide accessible winter forage and high-elevation meadows and forests that provide summer forage as well as calving habitat. Prior to the advent of

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Langston, *Where Land and Water Meet*, ed. William Cronon, Weyerhauser Environmental Books (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003).

extensive hunting pressure during the mining and settlement booms of the 1860s and 1870s, elk populations probably existed throughout the Upper Yellowstone area.[3] However, market hunting greatly reduced elk numbers, both in the hinterlands of the Upper Yellowstone region and throughout the Rockies. Although poaching presented a significant dilemma for park managers, elk persisted within the boundaries of Yellowstone National Park.[4] By the 1900s, there was widespread concern about the potential for the extinction of Rocky Mountain elk from the American West. Yellowstone National Park developed into a focus of national conservation efforts because it was the last stronghold of this imperiled species.

Park management focused on protecting elk (along with bison, antelope, and bighorn sheep at all costs) as early as the 1880s. The movement that historian Aubrey Haines aptly named the "Yellowstone Crusade" gained particular momentum during the Progressive Era. Under the determined guidance of Superintendent Horace Albright, the National Park Service won the support of Congress to embark on a serious campaign to expand the park's boundaries to include more winter habitat for elk (as well as antelope and bison) during the 1920s. Much of the energy and focus of National Park Service personnel in Yellowstone National Park have been consumed with elk ever since.

Because of their national significance as well as the challenges that managers have encountered in their stewardship, the elk that spend part of the year in either

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[3] See Paul S. Martin and Christine R. Szuter, "War Zones and Game Sinks in Lewis and Clark's West," *Conservation Biology* 13, no. 1 (1999).

[4] Indeed, Aubrey Haines argues that park managers and observers became so captivated by a fear of elk decline that they had trouble registering the fact that as elk populations increased as a result of their protection, they could potentially become more vulnerable. The Lacey Act, 1894, marked the official institutionalization of a policy of enforcing a no-hunting policy in Yellowstone National Park. Haines suggests that Theodore Roosevelt was the first to recognize the potential for elk to increase naturally (in the absence of predators and with the assistance of feeding) so quickly as to be a danger to themselves. Aubrey L. Haines, *The Yellowstone Story: A History of Our First National Park*, Revised Edition, 1996. ed., vol. II (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1977), 60-77.

Yellowstone or Grand Teton National Parks have been exhaustively studied and analyzed. In particular, much attention has been focused on the population of elk that use an area known as the Northern Elk Winter Range (subsequently referred to as the Northern Range), namely the low-elevation lands lying along and above the Yellowstone River between the Lamar Valley in Yellowstone National Park and the Dome Mountain hills in the north. The elk of the so-called Northern Herd experienced steady increases in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. After a period of focusing exclusively on encouraging the elk population to grow between the 1890s and 1910s, managers became concerned about instability in the large population they had helped to create. Managers along with many members of the national public were not comfortable watching elk starve during severe winters. In addition, concern that elk population of the Northern Range had exceeded the "carrying capacity" of the range developed in the 1910s. From the 1920s into the 1950s, managers operated from a perspective based on this concern and the fear that overgrazing would so degrade the range as to threaten the long-term viability of an elk population in Yellowstone. The debates about overgrazing and the relationships between population dynamics and climate were fraught with conflict and disagreement. They have been scrutinized as examples of intractable dilemmas in recent years.[5] In the 1990s, a congressionally-mandated National Academy of Sciences report attempted to resolve the questions about the carrying capacity and management of the Northern Range. The report was inconclusive about how to gauge whether the Northern Range was overgrazed. However, the panelists agreed on the need to conduct further inquiry into climate patterns, fire, hydrology, and ungulate biology.[6]

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[5] Daniel Tyers, "The Condition of the Northern Range in Yellowstone National Park: A Discussion of the Controversy" (M. A. Thesis, Montana State University, 1981).

[6] Committee on Ungulate Management National Research Council, *Ecological Dynamics on Yellowstone's Northern Range* (Washington, D. C.: National Academies Press, 2002).

A compromise, if not a consensus, reached between Park officials and State of Montana wildlife managers that elk numbers should be limited to the general region of the Park and its immediate boundaries gave hunters opportunities to harvest elk in significant quantities on the Park's borders from the 1920s through the 1940s. In the 1950s, wildlife managers employed an even more aggressive stance motivated by widespread criticism that elk had outstripped the carrying capacity of the Northern Range. The fact that local ranchers greatly objected to elk leaving the park and traveling onto private ranch land in winter encouraged such an active approach to elk management. To curb the herd's expansion, the program utilized public hunting on the boundaries of the park as well as direct initiatives including the practice of culling animals in the park directly.[7] Taking the population control imperative to an extreme that seems outlandish in hindsight, the 1960s program called Operation Elk Lift trapped elk that were "lingering" in the park, refusing to make themselves available to hunters, and shipped them by helicopter to the other side of the so-called "firing line" that divides Park Service and Forest Service land.[8] As a result of these programs, elk from the Northern Yellowstone herds rarely had the chance to travel far beyond the Park's boundaries onto private land. With the exception of the ranches at the immediate boundary of the Park in the Gardiner Basin, the ranchlands Upper Yellowstone region rarely received elk from the late nineteenth century up until the 1960s.[9]

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[7] Note that there were issues around hunting at the firing line in the 1920s, and the late hunt that Albright found reprehensible. Aubrey Haines reports that in 1955, 6,535 elk were killed from the Northern herd, of which 1,974 were direct kills by rangers. Haines.

[8] J. J. Craighead, G. Atwell, and B. W. O'Gara, "Elk Migrations in and near Yellowstone National Park," *Wildlife Monographs* 29 (1972).

[9] Beyond the Northern Range, for example throughout the Gallatin and Absaroka Ranges and the low-elevation land adjacent to key elk summer habitat there, it is less clear what happened with elk populations because there is much less secondary literature on the subject. However, I hypothesize that in the absence of active protection by the Park in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, elk populations beyond the Northern Range did not rebound well from their near-extermination in the market hunting period. One reason is that

Beginning in the 1960s, however, land management practices that affected elk began to change in ways that had significance for the whole of the Upper Yellowstone region. Aldo Leopold's son Starker oversaw an investigation of Park Service wildlife management that focused in large part on the "elk problem" in Yellowstone and Grand Teton. The study's findings were published in a report to Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall in 1963. Widely known as the Leopold Report, the document exposed the great lengths that Park managers were going to keep the elk population in check.[10] Widespread publicity of the nature of the late hunt in the Gardiner Basin—hunters killed as many as 1,000 elk in a single winter day during the heyday of the late hunt in the 1950s—and of the Park's controversial culling programs in the 1960s prompted public outcry. Together these forces encouraged the Park to implement a new approach to wildlife management based on the principle of "Natural Regulation." The naural regulation perspective discouraged active intervention by managers into wildlife population dynamics. In the case of the Northern Range, in which conflicts with private land owners outside the park remained a management issue, the shift toward a natural regulation policy resulted in a program which continued to depend on hunting to control elk numbers but did not interfere directly in elk movements across the firing line. The program was also designed to accept swings in the number of elk from year to year resulting from climatic variability and other natural forces. The emphasis on controlling elk numbers

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extensive grazing by domestic livestock on summer meadows—the national forests of southwestern Montana were dense with sheep as well as with cattle between the 1890s and the 1940s—limited opportunities for elk regeneration. Similarly, extensive agricultural cultivation of low-elevation uplands and riparian areas restricted elk access to winter habitat.

[10] A. Starker Leopold and others, *Wildlife Management in the National Parks*(National Park Service, 1963, accessed August 17 2004); available from http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/leopold/leopold.htm. For an overview of the report's impact see P. Schullery, *Searching for Yellowstone: Ecology and Wonder in the Last Wilderness* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), Yellowstone National Park, *Yellowstone's Northern Range: Complexity & Change in a Wildland Ecosystem* (Mammoth Hot Springs: National Park Service, 1997).

was also substantially decreased. In response to favorable weather conditions, elk numbers increased dramatically on the Northern Range during the 1970s and 1980s.

At the same time, management by the U.S. Forest Service and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks practices encouraged elk to move beyond the Northern Range. Extensive clear-cutting opened elk habitat in some forest lands (although road building created expanded opportunities for hunter harvest) and new approaches to grazing management of National Forest allotments were intended to leave more forage for elk. Local land managers believe that changes in U.S. Forest Service management helped elk populations rebound on public lands in southwestern Montana beyond the Park.[11] More importantly, the state Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks responded to public criticism of the hunting practices at the Northern Range "firing line" with a moratorium on the late winter hunt in 1968. The late hunt was reintroduced on a much more limited basis in 1976 and has been offered by the department in subsequent years as needed (in response to hunter success and the department's targets for elk numbers).[12] It was likely due to a combination of these management practices together with climatic factors that ranchers in the Paradise Valley and surrounding areas began to encounter elk on their ranches during the 1960s and early 1970s.

Still, ranchers remember elk as occasional visitors during the first years of their return to the region, until the winter of 1988-1989 produced a landmark ecological event in the Upper Yellowstone. Prompted by severe winter snows that followed the

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[11] The district range conservationist for the Gardiner District described in detail the rest-rotation program the Forest Service adopted in the Upper Paradise Valley in an interview. Pat Hoppe, interview by author, Gardiner, MT, February 21, 2003.

[12] T. Lemke, "Winter Range Expansion by the Northern Yellowstone Elk Herd," *Intermountain Journal of Science* 4 (1998). The removal of elk through the late hunt varied from year to year. There was no hunt offered in the winter of 1976-1977, just 31 animals harvested in 1978-1979, while nearly 2,500 were harvested in both the winter of 1988-1989 and 1996-1997. See page 4.

extensive wildfires that burned over 300,000 hectares of Yellowstone National Park in the summer of 1988, 7,000 elk from Yellowstone's Northern Range traveled beyond the Park boundary all the way to the north slopes of Dome Mountain. In that voyage, the elk executed a migration whose historic existence and future potential had been the subject of long-running debate.[13] The migration to Dome Mountain was a symbol of a sea change in the relationship between ranchers and elk. Although it was specific to the Northern Range and particular circumstances that year, the migration to Dome Mountain was part of a widespread "re-colonization" of past habitat by elk. Having been a source of wonder and amusement in the early years of their reappearance, elk soon became a major hassle for ranchers throughout the Upper Yellowstone and in fact, much of Montana.

The extremity of the events surrounding the Dome Mountain migration of 1988 in turn precipitated a shift in management in the early 1990s. Targeted hunter management by the Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, including increased harvest during the late hunt, contributed to a decline in the number of elk on the Northern Range during the late 1990s. The focus on curbing the population size has continued into the present. A land acquisition program designed to create adequate publicly-owned winter habitat for migrating animals complemented management efforts to reduce conflicts with ranchers in the 1990s.[14]

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[13] Douglas B. Houston, *The Northern Yellowstone Elk: Ecology and Management* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1982). Lemke: 7.

[14] Alarm among some ranchers and local residents about the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone National Park has colored the ways that current management is understood. Wolves, rather than management objectives, are often blamed for changes in elk population numbers and composition in a general narrative of unwanted, government-enforced scarcity. Hoppe. Robert Garrott, MSU Professor of Ecology, interview by author and M. Brelsford, January 12, 2004.

Local Elk Data

Montana's Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks has been collecting data on elk population trends since the 1950s. Because of budgetary constraints and personnel changes, the department did not always adhere to strict protocol or regularity in executing its annual aerial survey of the Upper Yellowstone in which elk are observed and counted in winter (when the elk are easiest to locate and count.) Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks divides the Upper Yellowstone hydrographic area into three hunting districts, the agency's functional management units. The boundaries of the management units have been redrawn on occasion, but generally speaking much of the Northern Range that is outside of Yellowstone National Park falls within the boundaries of Hunting District 313, located south of the Yellowstone River between the Yellowstone River between Yankee Jim Canyon and the Park's boundary. However, the Royal Teton Ranch and the four ranches remaining in the Cinnabar Basin have been designated as part of Hunting Distict 314 since 1992.[15] Table 1 shows the current percentage of private ownership of winter and summer range in each hunting district, based on a Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation GIS data layer defining winter and summer elk ranges. The ownership composition within these districts changed significantly in the 1990s when public purchases and trades of private land consolidated public ownership of the Northern Range outside of Yellowstone National Park (affecting Hunting District 314 and Hunting District 313) as well as in the Gallatin National Forest west of the Yellowstone (affecting Hunting District 314). The key lesson to draw from the table is that cumulatively, private land constitutes about half of the elk winter range in the Upper Yellowstone and nearly one-third of the elk summer range. Therefore, when

[15] In 1992, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks extended the boundaries of HD 314 from Mol Heron Creek to the Yellowstone National Park boundary, in response to the acquisition of Royal Teton lands.

elk populations increased in number during the period from the 1960s through the 1990s, their biological needs and environment predicted that they would also increase their use of private land.

	HD 313: N'ern Range		HD 314: W. Paradise		HD 317: E. Paradise	
Winter Habitat	49,264 ac.		83,266 ac.		27,335 ac.	
Private	8,724 ac.	18%	59,299 ac.	71%	12,554 ac.	46%
Summer Habitat	72,942 ac.		215,056 ac.		186,058 ac.	
Private	6,927 ac.	9%	97,411 ac.	45%	25,948 ac.	14%

Source: MT NRIS, Dept of FW&P data.

Table 6.1. Private Land's Share of Winter and Summer Elk Habitat in Three Hunting Districts

Elk numbers have generally been increasing throughout southwest Montana over the past forty years. This was certainly true of the elk wintering in the Northern Range; the population experienced continual increases for more than twenty years after the Park Service adopted its natural regulation policy.[16] The trend was even more striking beyond the Northern Range, for example in Hunting District 314, which stretches along the west side of the Yellowstone River from Little Pine Creek (near Emigrant) to the Tom Miner Basin. In March of 1966, the department conducted an aerial survey of Hunting District 314. The biologists in the plane counted 148 elk on the ground. In 1967, participants in a January flight observed 337 animals in the same area.[17] In 1985, 2,139 elk were registered in winter aerial survey Hunting District 314.[18] The Department noted that this was a new record high. The number of elk observed in the winter aerial survey increased to 3,570 in 2003. Similarly, the winter count in Hunting District 317 doubled between 1991 and 2003.

[16] Yellowstone National Park.

[17] Montana Department of Fish and Game, *Big Game Surveys and Investigations--Elk Surveys and Investigations* (1967), 37.

[18] Montana Department of Fish and Game, *Big Game Survey and Inventory, Region Three* (1986), 7.

In contrast, since the mid-1990s, annual elk counts on the Northern Range have reflected management goals of reducing elk wintering in this area from the 1997 high of over 19,000. In areas where management has not focused on or has failed to successfully achieve reduction, the 1990s witnessed continued increases in winter survey counts. According to Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks data, about 7,000 elk wintered in 2003 in the Upper Yellowstone beyond the Park boundary. The elk occupied a mix of National Forest, state-owned, and private land. Over 2,000 of the elk were counted in or near the Dome Mountain Wildlife Management Area, owned and managed by Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. Based on their location, these elk are considered to belong to Yellowstone National Park's Northern Herd, which disperses into summer range within the park's boundaries following snowmelt. As for elk beyond the boundaries of the Northern Range, their migratory habits have not been well-documented.

Literature on Migration and the Role of the Paradise Valley

The importance of the Paradise Valley to elk that summer in and around Yellowstone National Park has been a controversial issue for as long as the management of Northern Range has been a controversial issue—at least since the 1920s. The argument that the Paradise Valley originally provided winter habitat for animals that summered in the Park helped to justify the original critiques of elk winter use of the Northern Range as an unnatural, man-made problem contributing to overgrazing and other types of environmental degradation in the Park.[19] Conversely, Houston's assessment that elk historically *did not* utilize the Paradise Valley helped to support the Park's natural regulation policy and its stipulation that it was normal for

[19] Tyers.

large numbers of elk to winter on Northern Range in the Park and in the Gardiner Basin.[20]

An informal survey of the opinion of contemporary experts and of published scientific literature suggests that the dynamism of elk population trends in the past four decades has made it difficult to draw firm conclusions about the specific temporal and spatial aspects of elk movements in the Upper Yellowstone area. The lacunae in expert understanding of how and why elk change migratory behavior and or "re-colonize" habitat are especially relevant in the Upper Yellowstone area where many long-term ranch operators perceive a trend of increasing numbers of "resident" or non-migratory elk. The distinction between migratory and non-migratory elk is significant because if and when elk were to take up "residence" in a given area, ranchers would be likely to encounter them more often than if the elk were migratory. This is why—in the opinion of ranchers—elk presence on private land has been increasing not only in winter, but also in spring and fall over the past twenty years. Experts I consulted agreed that it would be difficult to attribute migratory and non-migratory behaviors to all of the many different groups of elk that wintered in the Upper Yellowstone drainage between 1960 and 2004.[21] The scientific community is reluctant to confirm local opinion about this important aspect of elk behavior in the absence of data they consider reliable.

Their reluctance stems in part from the fluidity of knowledge about elk behavior. For instance, studies of the Northern Range elk have regularly undermined conventional scientific knowledge about elk behavior. In his Master's thesis research conducted in the late 1980s, one biologist found that 3 of the 12 radio-collared elk in his study traveled from the northernmost extent (Six Mile Creek area) of the winter

[20] Houston suggested that elk that moved beyond Dome Mountain would have encountered natural barriers—other groups of wintering elk. Houston, 64.

[21] Garrott. Tom Lemke, MT Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, interview by author and Monica Brelsford, Livingston, MT, January 13, 2004.

range to the southernmost extents of the summer range (south of Yellowstone Lake) in a single season, challenging the existing assumption that such a long-distance trek was uncommon.[22] For all that elk demonstrate "traditionalism" in their choices of migration routes, their documented migration behavior has proven to be somewhat plastic—it seems that elk can be distracted from their traditional behavior by pull factors (the emergence of a new, reliable food source or a safe refuge) and push factors (overpopulation, forage constraints, hunting and predation). Herd "constancy" is generally considered to be low, especially in migratory elk, supporting the possibility of bleeding between the boundaries of elk groups. As one summary put it, mixing occurs between non-migratory and migratory elk and "the causes and consequences of such changes in migratory habits of individual elk are not understood."[23]

To summarize what the literature and recent trends in elk numbers and movement in the Upper Yellowstone suggest about the ecological parameters of interactions between elk and ranchers: ranchers have experienced distinct historical episodes in the presence of elk on the ranching landscape. The developments that distinguish those periods have both environmental and anthropogenic origins. The elk population occupying the Northern Range within Yellowstone National Park remained robust during the early twentieth century, but it is unclear how many elk were present in other habitat locations in the Upper Yellowstone. Ranchers reported elk on private land during this time, but most of the complaints are limited to the

[22] Vore, John M. "Movements and Distribution of some Northern Yellowstone elk," M.S. Thesis, Montana State University (1990). See also Lemke, Tom. "Winter Range Expansion by the Northern Yellowstone Elk Herd" *Intermountain Journal of Science* (1993): 31-37. In addition, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks personnel confirm that elk currently leave Dome Mountain to cross the Yellowstone River and Highway 89 near Carbella—the agency's current thinking is that these are northern herd animals that go west across the river temporarily and then re-cross the river to head southeast toward summer range. If this is true, then it opens up the possibility that so-called "park" elk may be mixing with or helping to repopulate areas beyond the existing boundary of the Northern Range.

[23] Irby, Larry R. "Migration" in Thomas, J. W. and Toweill, D. E., *The North American Elk* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institute Press), 495.

Gardiner Basin because elk did not migrate far beyond the immediate park boundary, possibly because of hunting pressure and possibly due to climatic influences (or both).[24] Though studies were not conducted in the same level of detail in places beyond the Northern Range, ranchers from other parts of the Upper Yellowstone also report that elk were scarce prior to the 1980s. Elk reappeared on the private landscape in significant numbers in the 1980s, both in the remarkable migration of Northern Range animals to Dome Mountain in 1988-1989 and elsewhere in low-elevation drainages. Whether the reappearance of elk was due to herd size or changed migration patterns is unclear. The literature suggests that changing land management practices governing hunting and the cultivation of hay have the potential to alter elk behavior in significant ways, but to date the best explanations about the specific links between human history and elk ecology in the Upper Yellowstone are grounded in educated guesswork.[25]

RANCHERS' RESPONSES TO ELK ABUNDANCE

The ongoing presence of elk on private lands on the boundaries of Yellowstone National Park as well as episodes of elk increase on ranchlands elsewhere in the Upper Yellowstone after 1960 created dilemmas for ranchers in a number of ways. Primarily, elk interfered with the successful execution of ranching practices. Elk worked against ranchers and ranching when they broke through irrigation dams and

[24] I did not explore this in depth; anecdotal evidence suggests that the push to criticize the park for overgrazing may have had some local and regional support from ranchers who desired to see fewer elk numbers.

[25] The most important studies and individuals informing this summary are: M. Burcham, Edge, W.D., Marcum, C.L., "Elk Use of Private Land Refuges," *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 27, no. 3 (1999), Craighead, Houston, Lemke, T. Lemke, *Office Memorandum on 2003 Elk Survey H.D. 314* (Montana Dept. of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, 2003), T. Lemke, "Interview by Author and Monica Brelsford," (2004), M. J.; Henderson Thompson, R.E., "Elk Habituation as a Credibility Challenge for Wildlife Professionals," *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 26, no. 3 (1998).

fences or foraged in the fields and haystacks ranchers designated for their livestock. Ranchers, rarely having as much control over their environment as they might of liked, felt victimized by this competition from elk. The very term "game depredation," though it did not originate in the Upper Yellowstone, is in itself evidence of the rhetorical devices at work in constructing the relationship between agriculturalists and wildlife. Game depredation refers to unwanted foraging by elk (and other wildlife) in ranchers' hay stores and pastures. The term depredation, imbued with connotations of ransacking and pillaging, seems more than a little ironic in its description of human-wildlife relationship in which elk have historically been prey, not predators.

Secondly, the public land management initiatives associated with protecting elk not only heightened rancher's exposure to elk interference in their agriculture pursuits, but made it hard for ranchers to ignore the reality that an entity with powerful constituents—the National Park Service and to a lesser extent, the U. S. Forest Service—were proceeding in ways that conflicted with ranchers' objectives. Ranchers responded to the problems they had with elk along two tacks: either they resisted elk, attempting to enforce clear distinctions between a landscape designated for wildlife and a place designated for domestic animals; or, they incorporated elk into the ranching landscape. Both approaches were imperfect for the same reason: they did not create a space for elk to be the stochastic forces that they ultimately proved to be.

Boundaries

The most obvious way for ranchers to resist the encroachment of elk—and by extension the presence of the Park Service—onto the landscape they understood to be the province of domestic animals was to attempt to enforce distinct boundaries between the landscape of ranching and the landscape of elk. Enforcement took the form of both passive methods such as fencing and active strategies like hazing.

The most obvious means to create a boundary between elk and the ranch was the use of fencing to keep elk out of pastures and hay stacks. In their ongoing war with the Park Service about the presence of elk on their land adjoining Yellowstone National Park in the 1920s and 1930s, ranchers Joseph Stermitz and Bert Armstrong requested that the Park Service erect a "game-proof fence" to protect their properties from the "elk, antelope, deer, and coyotes that ate their haystacks."[26] The park refused their request, citing cost, though the agency's plans to acquire the Stermitz and Armstrong properties likely discouraged them from taking Stermitz and Armstrong too seriously. The agency might also have cited impracticality: elk have long been notorious for their disregard for all but the most menacing of fences. That fact notwithstanding, many ranchers actually built fences around their haystacks. In the 1980s and 1990s, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks reacted to game damage complaints with a program that paid cooperating ranchers for their fencing supplies while ranchers supplied the labor to erect the fences. The fences constructed through this program were substantial and ranchers reported that they helped protect their hay stacks to some degree.[27]

Hazing was another alternative to which ranchers turned to enforce the boundaries between cattle and elk. Ranchers often attempted to drive elk out of their fields by harassing them. Paul Hoppe operated a guiding service in the Gardiner area in the 1920s. His ranch on Stephens Creek supported his horses as well as some cattle. In addition to hiring men to guard the hay stacks for the course of the winter, Hoppe

[26] L. H. Whittlesey, "'They're Going to Build a Railroad!: Cinnabar, Stephens Creek, and the Game Ranch Addition to Yellowstone National Park, 1995," Unpublished Manuscript in Author's Possession, p. 50.

[27] Virginia Anderson, interview by author, Anderson ranch, Tom Miner Basin, Park County, Montana, May, 2004, Thomas Gray, interview by author, tape recording, Gray residence, Livingston, Montana, September 5, 2003, Quentin and Anita Brawner, interview by author, tape recording, Brawner residence, Deep Creek, Park County, Montana, October 12, 2004, Margery Warfield with Alan Redfield, Warfield Ranch, Mill Creek, Park County, Montana, June 10, 2003, Lemke interview.

attempted to deter the elk with the use of lanterns at night. The deterrent was apparently marginally effective: reportedly, it was not uncommon to see elk wandering through the streets of Gardiner with lanterns hanging from their antlers.[28] Hazing continued as a somewhat futile, albeit regular practice in the early years of the return of elk to parts of the Upper Yellowstone Valley beyond the Gardiner Basin. Tom Gray reported that he and his neighbors tried to spook the elk off the Dome Mountain ranch with gunshots, but that the elk always found a way into their haystacks nonetheless.[29]

Allowing the public onto ranches to harvest elk during hunting season represented the most immediate way to challenge the intrusion of elk onto productive ranchland. It is difficult to know the degree to which public access to ranchland for hunting purposes was a concern in the period before the 1980s without knowing much about early patterns of elk distribution. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, ranchers commonly allowed anyone who asked onto the ranch to hunt. Eril Merrill put it this way: "We used to let people hunt on us." When the author asked if the hunters could harvest "anything they wanted" (meaning male or female elk) on the Merrell place, Merrell replied dryly, "Well [yes] except for cows!"[30] Tom Gray also recalled giving permission to anyone who asked. The way he saw hunting, he said, was as "just one less critter taking the range away from the cattle."[31]

Allowing public hunting put ranchers in the somewhat unique position of making their private property open to the public, a situation that created a bond with

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[28] Park County Historical Society, *History of Park County Montana, 1984*, ed. Doris Whithorn (Taylor Publishing Company, 1984).

[29] Gray.

[30] Eril Merrell with Bruce and Connie Malcolm, Merrell residence, Pine Creek, Park County, Montana, September 23, 2003.

[31] Gray.

the public hunters. Sometimes those bonds were actively understood and appreciated.[32] Margery Warfield suggested that in her memory of the 1960s and 1970s, hunters who asked to hunt on their ranch consisted primarily of "railroaders," the employees of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Railroad employees constituted a significant portion of Livingston's working class.[33] The Warfields and others understood the important role that elk and deer played in the household budgets of townspeople.[34] Public hunting had the benefit of minimizing isolation and some ranchers formed long-term friendships with the hunters who used their land. As Ellery Merrell described, the friendship could unfold serendipitously:

> That's how we met Carmichaels [a family of hunters with whom the Merrills had a long relationship]. We didn't take them out [on a guided hunt]. They come hunting and there wasn't anywhere for them to camp. Ellery was cleaning the

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[32] Local support for hunters—and its complexity—is one of the subjects of Karl Jacoby's work on Yellowstone. See specifically Karl Jacoby, "The State of Nature: Country Folk, Conservationists, and Criminals at Yellowstone National Park, 1872-1908," in *The Countryside in the Age of the Modern State: Political Histories of Rural America*, ed. Catherine McNicol Stock and Robert D. Johnston (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001). Jacoby suggests that some locals were supportive of hunting (poaching) in Yellowstone inasmuch as they understood that poor people depended on it for a living.

[33] Warfield and Redfield.

[34] Although the following description of an elk hunting by father and son Lewis and Bill Lathers, both NPRR employees involves public land, it nonetheless gives a sense of how local people approached the elk of Yellowstone (as well as of the conditions at the border of the park during hunting season):

> Sometime in the 1930s or 40s: "Lewis and Bill [son and father] went up to Gardiner, put on chains, and went on up to Jardine, around the mountain, in two feet of snow to Decker's [Deckard's] flat. This was called the firing line where the hunters went to meet the elk as they came out of Yellowstone Park. At daylight the elk would be on Decker's flat and hunters all around. Eight AM was shooting time and bullets would be flying all around. Bill ducked behind a rock but Dad Lewis stood up and had a cigarette shot out of his mouth. They got three elk and Dad and mother made mince meat and canned the rest as they did not have freezers at that time. They ate a lot of wild meat and fish and would give meat and fish to friends. Dad never wasted meat or anything else.

Park County Historical Society, 295.

> Miner Creek ditch. He had George Ward's Cat. These people stopped, they wanted someplace to hunt. And Ellery says well you just stay here for a few minutes and told him that I'd be there and I'd open the gates for them (we had the gates locked). So they went up to the sawmill and camped. Ever since then they come to our place every year. [35]

The relationship between the Merrells and the Carmichaels was not unusual. Ranchers appreciated having hunters who kept the elk presence in check, whose company they enjoyed and whom they could trust not to disrupt or damage the ranch operation. For their part, hunters enjoyed what was sometimes exclusive, free access to good hunting areas.

At other times and for other ranchers, the presence of the public on ranches presented problems. Sarah Blakeslee remembered hunting seasons in the 1930s as a "bad dream time." Even though "everybody ... went hunting in season," Blakeslee objected because, in her words, "I like to help things live."[36] Rancher Virginia Anderson did not have problems with the act of hunting, but rather with the actions of hunters. She complained, as many ranchers do, that hunters left gates open, and that they often would return to the Anderson's house after their hunt asking for help to retrieve their elk out by vehicle—a situation that led to at least one broken axle in the Anderson operation.[37] One rancher described a neighbor who turned hunters away because he simply did not want to deal with people.[38]

One technique that ranchers have employed to resolve the potential problems associated with hunters was to carefully limit hunting access to people who suited specific criteria. Through careful selection of people they allowed onto their ranches,

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[35] Merrell.

[36] Sarah Crosby Blakeslee, "Hosts of Ghosts, No date," p. 56, Park County Gateway Museum Library, Livingston, MT.

[37] Anderson.

[38] Bruce and Connie Malcolm, interview by author, tape recording, Malcolm Ranch, Big Creek, Park County, Montana, December 14, 2002.

ranchers made judgments about the proper reasons and way to hunt. Ranchers identified with local people who needed meat and who conducted what is known in hunting circles as "fair chase."[39] In her memoir, Sarah Blakeslee noted that "the hunters who went out our way did real hunting where the hunted was given some chance to escape."[40] Margery Warfield stated that "the people who hunt here [on the Warfield Ranch] are meat hunters." To clarify she explained, "They're not after trophies [mature bulls], they're happy enough to have a cow."[41]

However, the situation has changed in recent years—local meat hunters are no longer met with tolerance or sympathy. Ranchers complain that since the early 1980s, meat hunters were more likely to want it "easy." By easy, ranchers mean that hunters wanted to drive on the ranch, tended to leave behind beer cans and other messes, and forgot to close gates. As Jim Stermitz put it, "Local meat hunters are messy. You can't let people hunt unsupervised."[42] As a result, ranchers increasingly limited hunting access to friends and family in the 1980s and 1990s. The changing relationship between ranchers and public hunters—as a combined function of changing demographics in the region, motor vehicle technology, and changes in

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[39] This was often consciously mentioned in contrast to what went on at the "firing line" on the boundary of Yellowstone National Park—a famously raucous "slaughter." Fair chase generally entails refraining from practices that give hunters what other hunters agree is an unfair advantage over the hunted. Practices like baiting animals or hunting them in a circumstance in which they have no way to escape fall into the category of what is not considered "fair chase."

[40] Blakeslee.

[41] Warfield and Redfield.

[42] James and Lorayne Stermitz, interview by author, tape recording, Stermitz Ranch, Cinnabar Basin, Park County, Montana, December 22, 2003. The veracity of these claims is truly hard to judge, but the perception among ranchers that the culture of public hunting has changed significantly is unquestionable.

hunting culture—diminished the willingness of ranchers to utilize public hunting as a solution to their problems with elk.[43]

Public land acquisition and ranchers' resistance

The importance of low-elevation land to elk during winter quickly became clear to the public servants charged with mandates of restoring and maintaining elk populations in the Upper Yellowstone in the early twentieth century. The private tracts that lay within the general region of Northern Range, especially those on the border of Yellowstone National Park and within the heart of elk migration routes represented coveted objects to wildlife managers and their constituents, namely conservationists and hunters. Two extreme cycles of coupled drought and severe winters—first in the late 1910s and again in the late 1980s—fueled major campaigns to acquire private land in the Gardiner Basin to add to the public domain. The ways that ranchers responded to these campaigns to convert ranchland into public land reveal a diversity of perspectives and circumstances, shaped in large part by individual economic realities during each period.

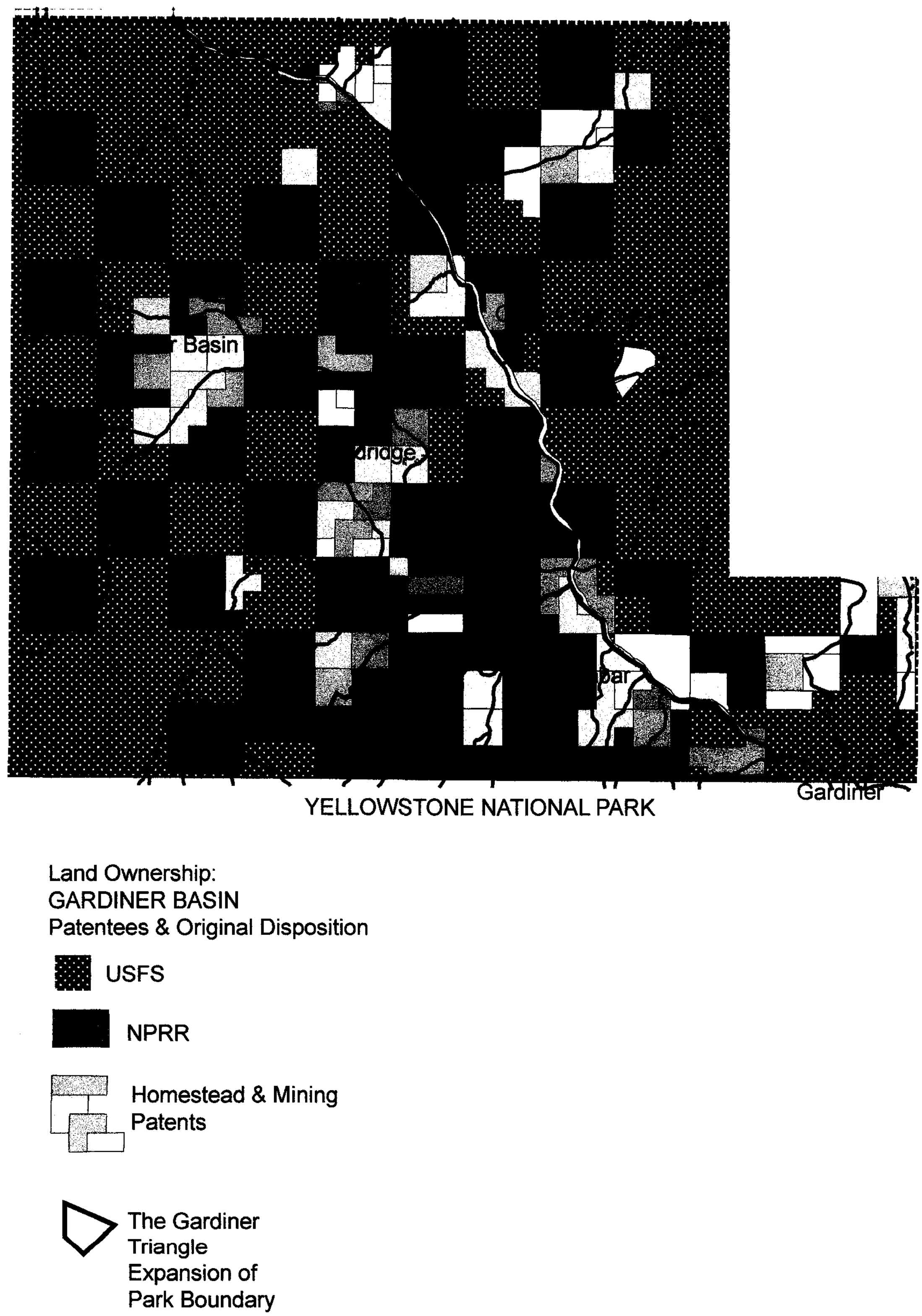
In the 1920s and 1930s, when the National Park Service undertook a plan to expand the boundaries of the Park, ranchers in the Gardiner Basin faced a particularly acute episode not only of elk abundance but of government intervention in the name of elk preservation. There could be no more direct an assault on the notion that ranching belonged on the border of the park than a Park Service plan to subsume ranches within the boundaries of the Park. In fact, the plan was not to eliminate the ranches, but to use them to "raise" elk in ways not unlike domestic livestock had been supported in previous tenures. Agriculture continued on the

[43] This attitudinal shift merits more attention and elaboration. A question that emerges in my mind is whether ranchers have overemphasized the annoyance of public hunters in order to justify their shift to fee hunting.

ranches that the park did acquire for several decades—it was just that wild rather than domestic ungulates consumed the hay and grass grown on them.

Lee Whittlesey has conducted a careful examination of the Park's expansion activities in the 1920s and 1930s.[44] The acquisition program ultimately added a triangular shaped portion to the Park's northern border just to the north and west of Gardiner and hence the addition's name, the Gardiner Triangle. According to his manuscript on the history of the Gardiner Basin, the goal of the "Game Ranch" program was to acquire as much ranchland between the existing Park boundary and the Yellowstone River as possible. Ideally, Superintendent Albright hoped to own all of the land south of the Yellowstone River in the Gardiner Basin as far west as Yankee Jim Canyon. The area, which included the mines at Horr and Aldridge, attracted extensive homesteading. By the 1920s, there were a few farms and ranches located in each of the three major tributary creek drainages in the area as well as along the banks of the Yellowstone. The general outlines of land disposition are shown in Figure 6.1 and offer a sense of the contours of private land ownership in the Gardiner Basin. The color red indicates the land granted to the NPRR, much of which was transferred to private individuals.

[44] Whittlesey. See specifically "The Struggle over Preserving it Forever," pages 35-58.



Map by author.
Source: BLM GLO records.

Figure 6.1. Map of Gardiner Triangle

The intention of the Game Ranch acquisition program was to create more winter range for elk as well as for antelope and deer. Elk were in the habit of utilizing much of the low elevation land which runs in wide flats on the southern banks of the Yellowstone River. Albright crafted an ingenious coalition of private and public support for his acquisition plans. He was authorized to extend the park by several acts of congress but also harnessed the interests of a group of New York-based investors to jointly fund the acquisition of ranchland from private parties. The Game Ranch Company, as the consortium of investors was called, helped to secure funds for land acquisition and in some cases acted as an intermediary, taking title to the land from private owners and then transferring it to the U. S. A. Albright's agenda was no doubt fortified by the difficult circumstances facing many ranch owners in the 1920s and early 1930s. Some small ranchers in the Gardiner Basin faced severe hardship and were glad for the opportunity to cash out on their investments. The poor national economy in the 1930s deprived the program of funding and so ultimately put a stop to plans to expand the park. Before then, Albright successfully acquired what is now known as the Gardiner Triangle before 1932, though he fell short of his goal to extend the park all the way to Yankee Jim Canyon.

One reaction to the programs of land expansion was to fight them on political terms. In 1919, the Park County News ran a dramatic headline that read: "Paradise Valley Stockmen after Scalp of Senate Bill." The bill the headline referred to was a proposal, Senate Bill 2182, sponsored by U. S. Senator Knute Nelson of Minnesota, to restrict livestock access on the national forest on the park's immediate northern boundary.[45] The paper made the strong objections of ranchers to any attempts to curtail livestock production on public land clear:

> at the present time 56 prominent and representative farmers and stockmen throughout the Paradise Valley present an undivided front against the autocratic

[45] "Paradise Valley Stockmen after Scalp of Senate Bill," *Park County News* 1919.

> attempt of the forestry department to curtail the production of stock under the guise and cloak of game protection, which merely protects all game and fish against the depredation of sportsmen, but does not protect the ranchers against the depredations of game...[46]

The strident language in the column exemplifies the logic that ranchers drew upon to assert their primacy as users of the range. Referring to an "autocratic" forestry department, the article played right into the hands of locals who were caught up in their own battles over the right to hunt elk for subsistence. The fight also drew a line in the sand behind which the ranching community could rally as one, with a clear enemy to define them.

A decade later, in response to Horace Albright's plan for the Game Ranch addition, objecting ranchers drew on their considerable political connections to work against the park's plan. According to Lee Whittlesey's interpretation of events, Armstong, Stermitz, and another disgruntled rancher, Albert Hoppe, "drummed up other local antagonism" trying, for example, to incite the Gardiner Commercial Club. In addition, they petitioned legislators to promote state and federal legislation to thwart the Park's efforts, including attempting to convince Montana congressman James O'Conner to introduce a bill in the U. S. House of Representatives to cede all of Yellowstone National Park back to the state of Montana.[47]

At an individual level, some ranchers resisted Albright's vision of re-purposing the ranchlands of the Gardiner Triangle by flat out refusing to sell to the Park. Lee Whittlesey's history of the Gardiner Addition provides detailed descriptions of the many complicating factors that influenced what he calls "The war over the Stermitz and Armstrong Ranches."[48] As contributions to the creation of a narrative about the

46 Ibid.

47 Whittlesey. 50-51.

48 Ibid.

compatibility of elk preservation and ranching, the actions taken by Anton Stermitz and Roy Armstrong stand out as clear rejections of the Park's program to reinvent the ranchlands of the Gardiner Triangle as permanent elk habitat.

For Stermitz, the issue was immediate and personal. The tract of land that Albright coveted was a 100-acre parcel that his father, Joseph Stermitz, had acquired in a handshake agreement with his neighbor, Joseph Rife, in 1924. As Whittlesey has documented, the Stermitzes were "not interested in selling" when Albright approached them in 1925. Unlike other ranchers who were down on their luck and grateful for the chance to cash out on what was ostensibly a windfall, Tony Stermitz was a newlywed who hoped to make a life as a farmer on the property. His father Joseph had "bought the place for him" and Tony intended to pay his father back on installments. [49]

For Roy Armstrong's part, the issue was ideological as well as practical. Armstrong had been a vocal opponent to the interference of Park and Forest Service agendas on ranching practices for many years. He was on his way to being one of the most powerful ranchers in the Upper Yellowstone in the 1930s. He ultimately purchased the Trestle Ranch in 1943 and became on of the Upper Yellowstone Valley's largest land owners.[50] The 165-acre parcel Armstrong owned on the new park boundary, while coveted by Albright, was possibly less important to Armstrong functionally than as a matter of principle. On the other hand, in the lawsuits that followed the Park's resort to condemnation through eminent domain in the late 1930s, Armstrong described his motivations this way, according to Whittlesey's study:

> Armstrong would never sell the part of his land which was inside the 1932 park boundary because 1) the more private land between his property and the park that was placed in government ownership the more accessible his property would

[49] Ibid.

[50] See Warranty records, 71:77, Park County Land Records.

> be to animal depredations, and 2) he considered the part of his land inside the park which straddled Reese Creek important to his main property because of its water and shelter usages.[51]

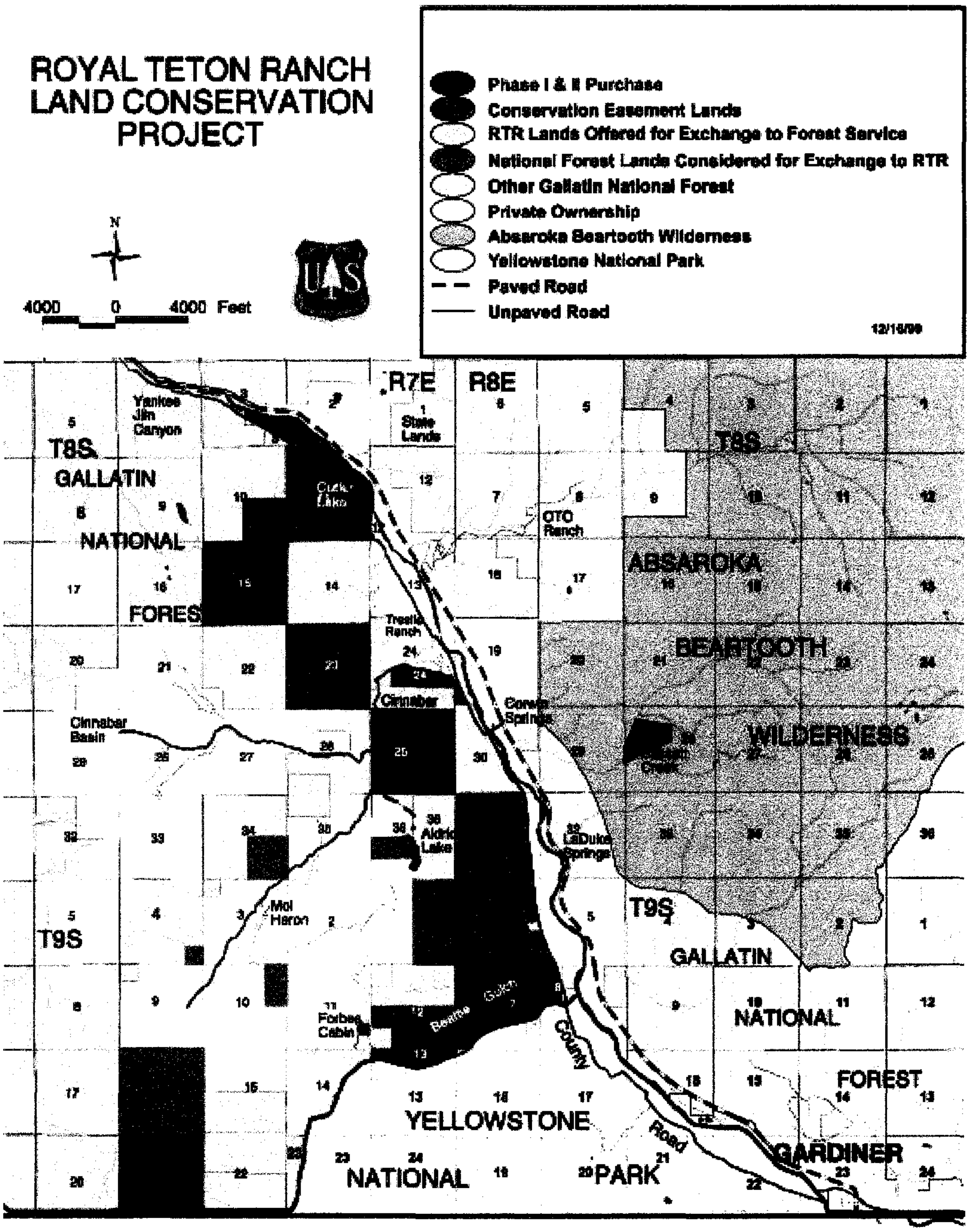
Armstrong stood firm on the issue of selling his 160-acre tract to the NPS in a clear, if futile, act to defy a challenge to the right of ranchers to conduct livestock operations on the border of Yellowstone National Park.

While developments such as transfers of isolated railroad parcels from the NPRR and to the U.S. Forest Service during the 1970s continued to expand public land holdings in the Gardiner Basin haphazardly, land acquisition on the scale practiced in the 1920s did not occur until the dramatic winter elk migration of 1988-1989 created new momentum for an expansion effort. Assisted by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation which served a role much like that of the Game Ranch company in the 1920s, the U. S. Forest Service negotiated to acquire two large properties in the Gardiner Basin during the 1990s. These were the OTO Ranch on Cedar Creek and part of the large Trestle Ranch. Figure 6.2 illustrates the Royal Teton Ranch land acquisition project and also notes the location of the OTO. By the time that these projects developed as ideas, the nature of the ranching landscape in the Gardiner Basin had changed significantly. The non-resident owners of the OTO Dude Ranch were ready to move on and thus sold to the Elk Foundation willingly. Subsequently, the Church Universal Triumphant, a New Age religious organization that had used its members' generous tithing to purchase several large ranches in the area, had fallen on hard times. Then the CUT's spiritual leader, Elizabeth Clare Prophet, developed Alzheimer's disease, the already waning empire went into full retreat. But the mid-1990s, the organization was ready to sell land in order to stave off

[51] Whittlesey.

ongoing financial losses.[52]

[52] Scott McMillion, "Church Universal and Triumphant Offers Land for Sale," *Bozeman Daily Chroncile*, May 20, 1998, Scott McMillion, "Prophet Family Struggles with Problems Right at Home," *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, March 16, 1998, Matthew L. Wald, "Federal Land Deal Protects Yellowstone Herd and Geysers," *New York Times* 1999. The purchase of the OTO Ranch was focused on elk habitat. The acquisition of the lands of the Royal Teton Ranch were motivated primarily to avoid conflicts with bison.



Source: USFS.

Figure 6.2. Map of Royal Teton Ranch Land Conservation Project

Rejecting the Place of Elk

When elk numbers on private lands beyond the Gardiner Basin began to rise in the 1970s and 1980s, ranchers continued to sound off publicly and to their elected officials about the elk problem, but they faced a different political climate than that operating in the early twentieth century. Public support for the preservation of Montana's natural amenities, including its wildlife, was high. The state constitution, rewritten in 1972 and widely hailed to be one of the most explicitly pro-environment of any state constitution, reflected the mood in the state.[53] In the period of elk re-emergence after the 1960s, ranchers turned to more creative approaches to maintaining the presumed compatibility of ranching and the park. One strategy was to construct personal ranch-based narrative in which elk were a new, irregular phenomenon, something visited upon ranchers rather than something inherent to the landscape.

Many ranchers have carefully-tended memories of the first time they saw an elk on or near their property. When Eril Merrell recollected the arrival of elk in the lower Tom Miner Basin, she described the setting in detail. "I can remember that Ellery went down to milk the cow one morning," she said. "Sue [one of the Merrell's daughters] had company that week-end. Ellery came back to get the kids to show them the elk on the Rowe place, a bunch of elk. And that was the first time I can remember seeing them in the early spring."[54] Many other recollections of ranchers mimic this pattern in both specificity and content; ranchers were awed and pleased at

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[53] The preamble reads, "We the people of Montana grateful to God for the quiet beauty of our state, the grandeur of our mountains, the vastness of our rolling plains, and desiring to improve the quality of life, equality of opportunity and to secure the blessings of liberty for this and future generations do ordain and establish this constitution." Montana State Constitution. Accessed online 8/17/04, http://leg.state.mt.us/css/mtcode_const/const.asp.

[54] Merrell.

their first encounter with elk. Seeing elk was just one of the ways that ranchers could experience their life as offering a special connection to nature.

On the other hand, as elk increased quickly many ranchers quickly began to feel less welcoming toward elk on their property. Virginia Anderson described an image of her husband reverently taking out his binoculars to observe the first elk on their property. She promptly juxtaposed that image with a description of how she and her husband soon came to see the elk as "vermin."[55] She gave voice to a common experience for many ranchers through that anecdote. The transformation of elk, from rare treasures to vermin, challenged ranchers' notions about the role of elk on the ranching landscape. Making sense of the transformation hinged in part on emphasizing that there had been a life "before" elk. By explaining elk as a new phenomenon, ranchers could begin to question their appropriateness on the landscape. Jim Stermitz put it this way:

> Elk is sort of a new factor in our lives here. We never had elk here. My Dad loved to hunt and if we had an elk stray through here and he saw the tracks, he'd pursue it I mean he's gone... fifteen twenty miles away to pursue an elk that went through. We just started getting elk in the last twenty years.[56]

In this short statement, Stermitz affirmed his place as a steward of elk while simultaneously distancing himself from the current elk situation. Such a juxtaposition allows the current number and distribution of elk to be portrayed as not only unexpected but unnatural, and but also to make ranchers the passive victims of a set of forces acted upon them.

A set of observations about more recent changes in elk behavior furthers this sense of ranchers as passive victims. Specifically, some ranchers I interviewed pointed out that elk were acceptable as long as their presence was a seasonal, temporary

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[55] Anderson.

[56] Stermitz.

phenomenon, but that now that the valley has attracted "resident" elk populations do not migrate long distances, the elk problem has escalated to new levels. This perspective is articulated in the following response that Margery Warfield made when she explained current elk management strategies on her ranch.

> Well the reason we are using the elk fence [a special high-tensile electric fence that is eight feet high] is because we can't keep them out of our hay meadow right now. If it was just the historic use when they come in say late September, October, and November, that doesn't bother us because they get run out with hunting pressure and things like that.[57]

Warfield's statement makes a distinction between some historic point in time when elk intrusions on their ranch were acceptable and the present, when elk stay visit the ranch at the wrong time and stay too long from her perspective. Despite ongoing challenges to the strategies that ranchers used to resolve the dissonance between the presence of elk and their wish that they would go away, many ranchers persisted in thinking of elk as alien or unnatural to the ranching landscape.

Accepting Elk

Alternatively, ranchers discovered ways to accept elk as part of the landscape, even to benefit from their presence. Elk provided a valuable resource both as a source of food, as a source of pleasure, and as a link to valuable non-ranching income. Like the strategies associated with attempting to separate elk from the ranching landscape, however, the practices that accepted elk into the ranching framework did so with particular contingencies. Elk had to be economically useful, they were not meant to behave in unpredictable ways, and they should not invite the intrusion of government into the affairs of ranchers in any way that conflicted with what ranchers wanted.

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[57] Warfield and Redfield.

(The government was welcome to assist ranchers with their elk problem, but only at the ranchers' invitation.)

Elk as food

Memories of residents of Park County, ranchers and non-ranchers alike, are packed full of experiences of elk. Nina Killorn's description of her father's approach to feeding the family provides an example:

> There was little or no case on hand for anyone, but on the ranch there was an abundance of dairy foods, fresh and canned vegetables, honey and wild game. Sam Strickland didn't see any sense in using domestic animals for food as long as he had shells for his 30-06. His family had lived on wild game before there were any game laws and they resented laws from the beginning. Old timers took satisfaction in showing their contempt for game laws, especially during the Depression.[58]

Killorn's plain words make it clear that ranchers actively incorporated elk into their ranching experience as food. She also clearly indicates that this position had little use for the conservation of elk, or anything that came between the ranchers and his or her right to harvest elk when he or she wanted. Tom Gray recalled that during his time on the ranch from the 1940s to the 1980s, "the freezer was always full with game," including deer as well as elk.[59] In circumstances when freezers were not available, ranchers commonly canned elk and deer for later consumption. Jim Stermitz's description of his father's willingness to pursue elk long distances, quoted above, speaks to how valuable elk were to ranchers as a food source.

Beyond just liking to eat elk, ranchers also found that almost despite themselves, they admired elk as part of the natural world upon which they depended. This was perhaps easiest in the case of orphaned calves, which ranchers occasionally

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58 Park County Historical Society, 453.

59 Gray.

adopted as pets. (The sight of an orphaned deer or elk calf may have triggered an almost instinctual response in ranchers, who were well-accustomed to rescuing orphaned cattle.) Sarah Blakeslee described an experience with an orphaned elk in her memoir.

> On this particular evening, there was a bit of excitement when the herder came down with the sheep with a young elk in the midst of the band, feeding along with the band as though he belonged. The herder said he had heard shooting above him the day before and wherever the marksman was, he had hit his mark--this baby's mother. Someone just couldn't wait for the hunting season. That was not far off and [the hunter] had evidently not cared whether or not he killed a mother with a calf.[60]

The Blakeslees repaired the damage done by the hunter by caring for the calf in the barnyard for several weeks. The elk jumped the fence and left the ranch before it could be too much of a nuisance.

In their dealings with elk on their ranches, ranchers displayed a remarkably adeptness in alternating between two seemingly contradictory perspectives about elk. Just after Tom Gray described the ways that he and his neighbors attempted to haze elk off the ranch, he let on that the elk "always" found breaks in the fence. At the same time, he mentioned that he chose not to get too frustrated by the elk. "I figured what the heck? They have to eat too." He added, "They got their share."[61] In this interpretation of the rights of elk to have their "share," Gray indicates a willingness to accept elk as part of the ranching landscape despite having confessed also to trying to get rid of them.

An excerpt of dialogue between Eril Merrell and her daughter, Connie Malcolm, on the subject of elk that winter near the Malcolms' ranch demonstrates a similar blend of both frustration with and affection for elk:

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[60] Blakeslee.

[61] Gray.

BM: And in the bad winters, they drifted on down to the Yellowstone, down toward Big Creek.

EM: You guys had them bad. Are they down yet?

CM: Oh the bull is keeping us awake at night. He's talking.

In this interaction, Eril Merrell expresses a kind of sympathy for the predicament facing the Malcolms of having too many bothersome elk. While Connie's response acknowledges this trouble, it also contains evidence of her appreciation and close observations of elk. Attributing human qualities to the bull elk, the "talker" as it were, divests the animal of his wild, unmanageable qualities. In separate conversation, Connie Malcolm provided further evidence of her appreciation for elk, despite their intrusions into ranch operations:

> How an elk go through electric fences is really quite interesting, because they'll pick the lowest spot, or the weakest spot, and they'll mill there and they'll mill and they'll mill and they'll mill and pretty soon the milling gets farther and farther away from the fence and they're all in mass and they'll just hit it. ... it's very interesting. They know what they're doing. The whole herd takes it as one.

Malcolm's close reading of elk behavior hinges on a perspective that allows her to make room for elk in her vision of ranching. Always close observers of their environment, ranchers like Malcolm found themselves able to admire the very same wild ingenuity that made elk so difficult to live with.

And for some ranchers such admiration translated into outspoken commitment to preserving elk. Thomas Sidebotham, who no doubt had financial reasons to cooperate with Horace Albright's plan to expand the park, made the following statement to the National Park Service in negotiations to sell his ranch. Whittlesey writes that "Thomas Sidebotham ... had decided 'you [Albright] are right because it won't be but a short time until he deer, antelope, and elk will be extinct if you don't do something.'"[62]

Not everyone who advocated protecting the elk showed a similar level of respect for the National Park Service. In the rugged winter of 1919, the editors of the *Park County News* positioned themselves in contrast to the National Park Service in the following acerbic observation:

> It is reported that the authorities are going to feed about 1000 elk, down the Yellowstone River below the Yankee Jim Canyon. We are glad indeed to know that the poor elk are at last to have some attention and not left entirely to starve, as this is the first effort in this vicinity to prevent a big loss which is bound to occur if they are left to rustle for themselves, as there is nothing for them to eat worth mentioning, except a little buck brush and the calves would be the greatest sufferers.[63]

These lines can be read as a kind of preemptive strike that undermines the authority of game managers, including representatives of the state as well as of the National Park Service. The paper's righteous tone implies that locals, not agency officials, were the best stewards for the elk.

By carving a place for themselves as stewards and close observers of elk, ranchers not only reconciled their frustrations with elk with their instinctive appreciation for them as creatures of nature, but they also positioned themselves as the most appropriate and informed party to make decisions about how to manage the elk. This allowed ranchers to create a distinction between a system in which ranchers defined what should happen on the landscape and one in which non-ranching land managers did.

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[62] Letter to Albright quoted in Whittlesey.

[63] "Local News (Miner Notes)," *Park County News*, Jan. 6 1919.

Making Elk Pay

A more direct way to incorporate elk into the ranch was to make them part of the ranching economy. Most commonly, ranchers created an auxiliary economy of elk hunting and outfitting. As I argued in Chapter II, alternative incomes—like guiding hunters—often helped to reinforce the ranchers' perceived primary goal, to gain access to land and livestock. However, in more extreme cases, some ranches abandoned livestock production altogether—typically when they saw little choice but to do so.

Hunting-based tourism played a particularly important role in the ranching community of the Gardiner Basin during the early twentieth century. (There were fewer guiding opportunities elsewhere in the Upper Yellowstone as elk were not found in great number beyond the Gardiner Basin.) For example, when Cecilia Rigler's husband, Paul, died unexpectedly just after the couple had purchased a ranch in the Gardiner Basin, the widow found herself facing a $2,500 mortgage and needing to care for six sons. According to the family biography, during the 1920s and 1930s, the Riglers boarded hunters and provided transportation to them to and from Corwin Springs train station. They used a hay wagon to haul the elk to the train station and sometimes they used as many as four horses to pull the wagon because it was so loaded down with elk. The hunters were charged $5.00 a night for board, $5.00 to haul the elk and $5.00 for transportation to and from the train station.[64] The Riglers were able to expand their ranch significantly, in part because of the solvency offered through the hunting operation.

Records collected by the National Park Service in the course of appraising the properties involved in the Gardiner Triangle expansion provide further evidence of the use of hunting to bolster ranching occupations. The Stermitz family reportedly

[64] Park County Historical Society.

earned $1500 ranching annually and another $450 boarding hunters.[65] Similarly, the Mozely ranch provided outfitting and lodging to hunters and generated between $200 and $1500 per year, "depending on hunting conditions."[66] The Rigler ranch remained committed to outfitting and hunting throughout the twentieth century and still offers these services today. Income from outfitting was a significant source of support and explains in large part the continuity of the Rigler ranch over these many years.

Increasing elk numbers and wider distribution made it possible for many ranches elsewhere in the Upper Yellowstone to develop a side income in guiding hunters after the 1970s. For many, the development of a system was a process of trial and error. Because the land owners I interviewed changed their hunter management strategies on a regular basis, it is difficult to describe specific developments and strategies (no one I interviewed could tell me, for example, how many hunters had used their land in a given year for example). However, the basic pattern in managing elk and hunters was as follows. Many ranchers initially gave hunting permission to anyone who asked, operating on the logic that a hunted elk was "one less critter taking the range away from the cattle."[67] However, few ranchers stayed open to the public for long. One reason was difficulties of managing hunters. Ranchers found that some hunters disregarded their requests not to drive on the ranch, to close gates, or to harvest only cow elk.

Equally important was the fact that the market for exclusive, guided hunting developed to the point that few of the large ranches in the area could rationally afford to continue to allow members of the public on their ranch to hunt. Most of the local large ranches owned by traditional operators either initiated their own outfitting

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[65] Whittlesey. 53.

[66] Ibid. 42.

[67] Gray.

operations or entered into lease agreements with outfitters in the period 1985-1995. However, as paying clients typically wanted to hunt bulls, outfitting did little to control the size of elk herds and by extension to mitigate damage from elk to ranchers' crops. In response to increasing elk numbers and damage complaints from ranchers, the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks initiated a program to facilitate public hunter access to private ranches in a special late season cow hunt designed not to conflict with the outfitting season. The program existed for three hunting seasons in the early 1990s and included between six and nine ranches in Hunting District 314. The program dissolved when several of the participating ranches changed hands.[68]

Within the Northern Range proper, very few ranches ever featured public hunting access. The largest and perhaps most pivotal of these properties, the Trestle (now Royal Teton) Ranch, has been in absentee or non-traditional ownership for the majority of its existence. Neither the Kostbades, owners from 1956 to 1967, nor Malcolm Forbes who owned the ranch from 1967 to 1982, nor the current owners, the Church Universal and Triumphant, ever permitted public hunting on the ranch. Instead, they followed the more common trend of treating the wildlife on the ranch as an opportunity for income. Forbes operated an exclusive hunting outfitting operation himself and the CUT leases its ground to a private outfitter as well. The transition to outfitting is illustrated in the accompanying illustration (Figure 6.3).

[68] Lemke interview.

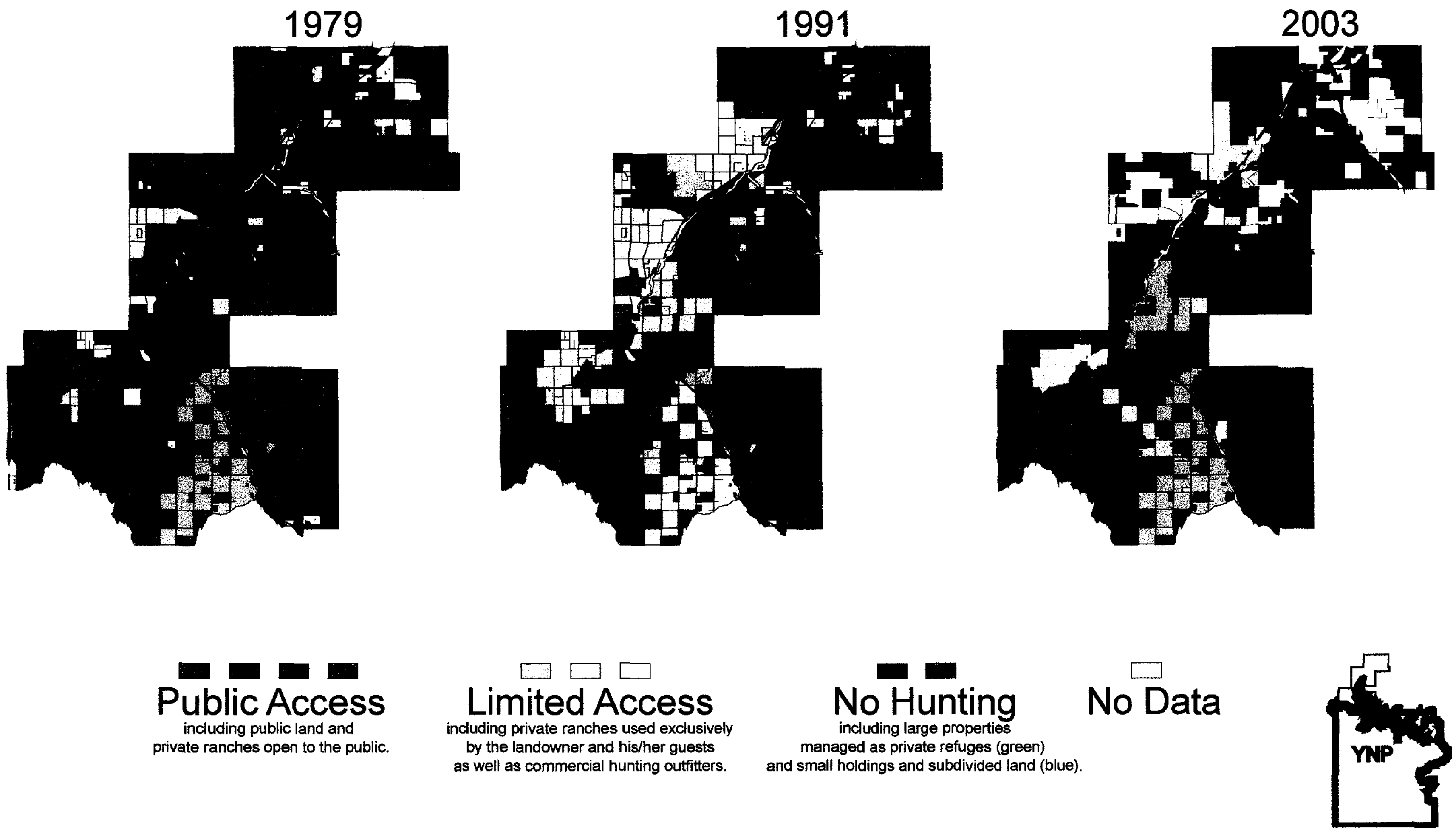

Figure 6.3. Changing Hunting Access in the Upper Yellowstone, 1979-2003

Other ranchers essentially capitulated to elk in ways that included resigning themselves to operating with diminished productivity or by abandoning conventional livestock production altogether. The Andersons of Tom Miner Basin, for example, initially attempted to haze elk away from the haystacks, but found that hazing was ineffective, so they adopted new hay storage practices that include moving the hay close to the barn where elk could not get at it.[69] In a particularly striking case of capitulation, James Stermitz recently opted to give up cattle production together, partly due to health concerns but in large part due to his reluctance to continue in resistance to encroachment by elk. He described the problem this way: "We had elk this years that calved in our fields, so up until the first of July we had elk in our fields, so they didn't leave me much to hay. So that's part of the reason we've changed our operation as we have to a hunting operation." In a related comment he noted resignedly, "The elk have really changed our ranching patterns up here. ... And you can't manage elk. You can manage cattle."[70]

Decisions like Stermitz's were not made easily by ranchers. Outfitting in particular represented a significant change in the ways that ranchers approached not only their work in the case of full-time outfitting, but also changes in the ways that ranch owners interacted with the community. Leasing a ranch to an outfitter or opening an outfitting business represented a final turn away from a sense of community interdependence that linked ranchers to their neighbors and to their more distant neighbors, such as the townspeople of Bozeman and Livingston who had put meat in their freezer by hunting on private ranches in the Upper Yellowstone during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

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[69] Anderson.

[70] Stermitz.

INTRACTABLE DILEMMAS

Despite their facility with many of the complex aspects of maintaining a boundary between ranching and elk, and even in spite of the sometimes drastic measures that ranchers made to incorporate elk into their definitions of the ranching landscapes, the elk issue resisted simple solutions. During the last two decades of the twentieth century, ranchers lost ground for two reasons. Outfitting posed a whole set of problems that are at once cultural and practical. Rather than providing a long-term way to merge the goals of elk preservation with ranching, it created additional resource conflicts and exposed ranchers to difficulties associated with the ecological dynamism of wildlife populations. Responding to this dilemma demanded that ranchers reform their understanding of the proper place and number of elk. In addition, the creation of a new model of ranch ownership and management focused on preserving elk and consuming them as an amenity in their natural state posed an additional challenge to conventional ideas about the appropriate places for elk in the ranching landscape.

A problem that cropped up early in the transition to an elk-dependent ranching economy was that guided hunting is a poor solution to the problem of elk hassles on livestock ranches. While outfitting provided a welcome source of non-livestock income, it simultaneously had a negative impact on the ranch operation. Some traditional ranchers involved in outfitting responded to this dilemma in the early 1990s by making adjustments to their operations. For example, Bruce Malcolm insisted that his paying clients participate in game management. "A lot of the non-resident hunters who wanted a big bull, I would tell them they'd have to apply for a cow tag. It's their turn." Through these strategies, he said, "we usually killed more cows than bulls."[71] In addition, as mentioned earlier, for a short while in the early 1990s, the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and private land owners

[71] Merrell.

cooperated in a special late hunt designed to create public hunting opportunities on ranches that were off-limits during the regular season and to cull cows at the same time.[72]

The inability for outfitting to provide effective herd management created the spillover effect that some ranches experienced when their neighbors took up outfitting. The Brawner family ranch on Trail Creek, now the Bullis Creek Ranch, used to allow public hunting. When their neighbors, the O'Hairs on 35,000 acres, closed their access and started an outfitting business, the Brawners experienced a dramatic increase in the number of elk using their property. The Brawners attempted to split their ranch, offering a self-service rental hunting cabin in one exclusive area and leaving the rest of the ranch open for public access. Ultimately, though, the Brawners felt that their ranch had essentially become an elk ranch. The fees from guided hunting were good, but they were not able to operate the ranch to focus on cattle production. They sold the ranch to an absentee owners in 1997 and relocated to the Nebraska Sandhills where they could ranch in an elk-free environment.[73]

A similarly complex problem involves the effect of wolf reintroduction—what some call the final piece in the puzzle of the creation of a "natural" system on the Northern Range—on the stability of the outfitting business. Some outfitters feel that reintroduction of wolves has made outfitting unstable, as have management practices on the Northern Range. The scientific community is extremely reluctant to validate vernacular interpretations of elk-wolf dynamics, but according to the Malcolms, "what happens is that when wolves move into an area, the wildlife moves out. So if you're hunting an area [outfitters permits are valid only in specific locations] and the wolves move in, you have nothing to hunt."[74]

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[72] Lemke.

[73] Duane Colmey, veterinarian, interview by author, Livingston, MT, May 22, 2004, Lemke, Brawner.

[74] Malcolm.

Ranchers largely responded to the problems with elk numbers in the 1980s and 1990s with strategies that showed, again, a belief that coexistence with elk was possible as long as elk stayed in their place. Bruce Malcolm suggested that the solution to the dilemma of wolves disrupting outfitting was to have a hunting season on wolves. By controlling the influence of wolves on the location of elk, wildlife managers could guarantee outfitters access to the elk on which they depend. Again, the scenario posits elk as a fixed entity, quite unlike the dynamic vision that contemporary ecologically-oriented management has for them. Their production- and management-oriented view of nature encouraged ranchers to reject much of the science of elk management.

Amenity ranching

"Amenity buyers" created another problem for ranchers in the 1980s and 1990s. For many individuals who purchased ranches between 1970 and 2000, the primary goal of the ranch was to attract wildlife. An individual named Scotty Chapman who purchased rural land north of Gardiner articulated the position of wildlife-friendly land owners very clearly. "Our property, bordering the park and the river and being very close to national forest land is key access [for elk trying to migrate out of the park to seasonal feeding grounds]. We don't allow hunting on our land and despite occasional violations of our wishes, the elk and deer seem to understand their status here."[75] In Chapman's vision, the purpose of ranchland ownership was to facilitate the "natural management" projects of the Park and Forest Service, or put another way, to encourage elk to the privately-owned landscape on their own terms. One amenity rancher in the Cinnabar Basin was locally famous because he did not allow hunting and "fed the elk" by irrigating and cultivating hay that he did not harvest.[76] This kind of behavior, often called "harboring," creates

[75] Park County Historical Society.

[76] Stermitz.

problems for neighbors. Elk concentrate on one side of the fence and ultimately end up in their hay fields and hay stacks on the other. Many neighbors of "elk safe harbors" feel that the elk know the day that hunting season ends: that is the day that elk spill off the refuge of the neighbors land and migrate into the ranchers' hay fields. Changes in ownership removed two of the five large ranches west of the Yellowstone River from participation in the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks late hunt program on private land. The problem of elk spilling over from "harbors" continued to plague the livestock-oriented neighbors of amenity ranches in the area after the program ceased.[77]

The dilemmas outlined above represent some of the most intractable problems in current natural resource management. For ranchers opposed to the presence of elk in the ranching landscape, the general turn of events since the 1960s has been negative. Not surprisingly then, ranchers have adopted an attitude of resignation. In order to make sense of this resignation—a tactical move that essentially forfeits a multi-decade struggle—ranchers draw on two themes. They describe themselves as powerless against nature and as helpless victims of arbitrary government policy. The conclusions that Bruce and Connie Malcolm drew about their helplessness are conveyed in the excerpt of a conversation that follows:

JH: So what kind of things do you have to do differently than someone who does not have an elk issue?

CM: I think everyone in this valley has an elk issue. There's a lot you can't do. There's a lot you just have to write off as the cost of doing business.

BM: You can manage elk a little bit but you can't fight them.

JH: So would you say the cost is the missed opportunities?

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[77] Lemke.

BM: It takes a change in the overall life attitude. We have these things that we can't do anything about. So we have to learn to accept them. If you don't accept them and you fight with them, then the stress is so bad, that ranching is no longer fun or no longer healthy. You have to deal with stress in your life no matter what you do.

CM: I think everybody has trials that you just accept and you do it. If you're in a big city you have to hire minorities. So this is our trial. It's just the way it is.[78]

The Malcolms' comments contain a number of important themes regarding the forced move to accepting elk. Connie Malcolm's comment that "everyone it this valley has an elk issue" posits a collective understanding of elk as a nuisance, as an impediment to ranching. This is despite the fact that the Malcolm's neighbors are all absentee ranch owners who actively manage land to protect elk. When Bruce sighs that "you can manage elk a little bit but you can't fight them" he cedes victory to nature's power. Lastly, in a rather remarkable rhetorical move, Connie Malcolm concludes her comments about accepting life and focusing on avoiding unhealthy stress by drawing parallels between her situation and that of urban business owners (of whose problems she has a regrettably bigoted view) in the most general sense.

Comments on the subject of the victimization of ranchers by federal agents made by ranchers in the Upper Yellowstone have a tone and conceptual framework familiar to most students of the Western history. Of living in the Upper Yellowstone, Bruce Malcolm observed, "It comes with wolves, but it comes with people. It comes with bison. We have these issues and we don't have the answer. We don't have a lot of influence over the answer."[79] Striking a somewhat less forgiving note, the Stermitzes described their perceptions of living on the border of public land this way:

LS: You can't do anything with your land that they won't permit you to do because we're surrounded by Forest Service [land].

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[78] Malcolm.

[79] Bruce and Connie Malcolm, "Interview by Author," (2003).

JS: And Yellowstone Park is one of our neighbors that dictates a lot of how we operate here. The expanding elk herd for one, the bison herd that they are a source for—and we're a sump for— is a prime example, there's very little you can do about it. We've have bison on our land here five or six different times. It always ... we had heifers and cattle and we had to round up our cattle and test them, because of the brucellosis. We have hunts here sanctioned by at first the state.

LS: Which was a real learning experience with news media, let me tell you! When CNN drives into your field and onto your land and you don't even know you're there, you educate yourself pretty fast on how to handle news media, you bet.

JS: The F&W service [MT Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks] told us one time that they had some hunters for the buffalo that were on our place and they were going to bring them up to hunt. And he says, "how do you want to manage this?" And I says, naïve as I was, "I guess I'll go out with you and I'll show you were they are..." He says I'm not sure you know what you're getting into. And in 5 minutes we had 200 people out there.

LS: Cars, one after the other...

JS: We had news media, we had the Boston Globe, we had... a circus. We're at the point, we're at the crossroads here between Yellowstone Park and private land. Farther down the valley they've been less affected, but they will be affected, they are affected now, with the elk impact and the wolf impact.

LS: All those issues that we face, basically the ranchers within the valley will face in 5 years, and the people in eastern Montana are going to face in 10. And that's been pretty much a history of all of this area.[80]

Amazingly, even with all of Jim Stermitz's sense of frustration and outrage at the Park's influence on his ranching practice, he is unwilling to extend the same kind of aggression toward his neighbor who feeds the elk, arguably a practice that does more immediate damage to Stermitz. Even though he believes that his neighbor who fed the elk "ruined his ranching business," he added that he "respected his right to do

[80] Stermiz.

that." His statement is a striking example of the ways that private property ethics affect notions of community-based interdependence.

CONCLUSION

During the first century of the park's history, the state and federal land managers charged with the project of conserving the treasured Yellowstone elk pursued a management plan that shared characteristics with the approach that ranchers took to managing domestic livestock. Through deliberate management decisions, elk were constrained within the boundaries of public land, limited in their movements just like cattle and sheep. When they could managers obtained extra pasture for growing elk populations, not unlike a rancher seeking added ground upon which to base an expansion of his cattle herd. Land managers from the National Park Service, U. S. Forest Service, and the Montana Department of Fish and Game even faced criticism about overgrazing of the range lands under their supervision. They engaged in hay production and winter feeding of elk (as well as deer and bison). Elk responded to human efforts to manage them with about as much tractability as the nature that ranchers wished they could command. Like ranchers who sought but rarely found harmony between natural and market forces, the land and wildlife managers who worked on elk conservation encountered a system with a fundamental level of unpredictability.

However, in the second half of the twentieth century the science and culture of wildlife management underwent a shift that brought an abrupt end to the similarities in the ways that wildlife managers and ranchers approached their work. While ranchers turned toward technologies that promised them greater ability to simplify and better control natural systems, wildlife managers adopted a new philosophy of wildlife management that embraced unpredictability and complexity in natural systems. These developments created a dynamic for ranchers beyond the Gardiner Basin, a place where elk had long been a regular presence (and nuisance for some).

When ranchers first encountered elk in the 1960s, they attempted to resist them. Their interest in keeping elk off of their land led them to welcome members of the public onto their ranches to hunt for free, in some cases engendering long friendships. However, over time, elk presented an economic opportunity for some ranches to engage in diversification. The ranches that incorporated elk into their financial strategies by developing private hunting outfitting or leasing exclusive access to their ranches to outfitters often did so at some expense to their livestock operation. Rather than creating a solution to the problem of elk depredation of ranch crops and pastures, outfitting encouraged the problem. This awkward circumstance was exacerbated by the development of an amenity- and wildlife-oriented ranch management ethos among new ranch owners in the 1980s and 1990s. Such owners do not allow public hunting and some do not allow any hunting at all. The few livestock-oriented operations that remain in the Upper Yellowstone Valley face continued problems from elk that utilize the safe harbors of amenity-oriented ranch operations during hunting season and spread out to neighboring properties when the season ends.

Ranchers made sense of elk first by attempting to restrict their legitimacy to certain parts of the landscape. When politics and nature conspired to make this cognitive construction an impossibility, ranchers adopted new positions towards elk. But even the position that allowed elk to be an economic part of the ranch was limited in its ability to recognize the inherent dynamism in wildlife populations. The reintroduction of the wolf in the early 1990s made this problem even more acute. In response, some ranchers abandoned the Upper Yellowstone region all together. Others resigned themselves to living with elk, which sometimes meant giving up livestock production. It is up to the ecologists to determine whether one can accurately state that elk have replaced cattle in an ecological sense. In a cultural sense, however, the process of substitution seems to be well-advanced.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The family will have understood the ways in which it and the farm empower and limit one another. That is the value of longevity in landholding. In the long term, knowledge and affection accumulate, and knowledge and affection pay. They do not just pay the family in goods and money, but they pay the family and the whole country in health and satisfaction.

-Wendell Berry[1]

According to his descendents, Robert O. Brawner took up ranching in the Upper Yellowstone area on a lark. The eldest of his four sons, William Henry Brawner, had followed his wanderlust from the family home in Delavan, Illinois to Montana in 1902. When Robert received Henry's news of the opportunities to ranch in the West in 1903, he traveled out to Park County and helped Henry buy a ranch on Mission Creek, east of Livingston. Robert returned immediately to his farm in Illinois, but watched restlessly as another son and then a daughter followed Henry to Montana. In 1912, Robert Brawner, no longer a young man, decided that he wanted to go where the excitement was. Reportedly, he awoke one morning announced to his wife that he was going to be a rancher in Montana. His wife refused to leave the security of their home farm in Illinois, which was paid in full and operating successfully. Brawner went nonetheless and his remaining three children followed. The decade of the 1910s was a profitable one for sheep ranchers, and the Brawner family expanded their ranching operations correspondingly. Robert purchased the Allen Ranch in the Paradise Valley in 1919 and one of his sons rented a place nearby. The 1920s, on the other hand, witnessed a dramatic reversal of fortunes in the sheep

[1] Wendell Berry, "A Defense of the Family Farm," in *Is There a Moral Obligation to Save the Family Farm?*, ed. Gary Comstock (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1987), 349.

ranching industry, confirming Mrs. Brawner's fears. The agricultural depression prompted three of the Brawner sons to leave Park County. Two headed to California

When Robert's grandson and great-grandson Quentin and Robert Brawner put the family ranch on Bullis Creek in the Paradise Valley on the market in 1997, they ended an eighty-year-old legacy. Over time, four generations of Brawners had cultivated the knowledge of and affection for the land that Wendell Berry describes as one of the unique values of family-scale agricultural enterprises in the quotation above. Evidence of the value of the Brawners' accumulated knowledge of their ranch emerged in the immediate aftermath of its sale. The new ranch owner leased the ranch pastures to a neighboring rancher unfamiliar with the particulars of the Bullis Creek Ranch. After the rancher turned his cattle out to pasture, a number of them soon died of larkspur poisoning. Native to the Upper Yellowstone, the larkspur plant presents a deadly, but avoidable threat to domestic livestock. Because larkspur are toxic only when they bloom in spring and early summer, ranchers who know the location of larkspur on their ranch can manage the rotation of cattle through ranch pastures accordingly. As Quentin Brawner put it, "Larkspur is a problem on that ranch, but it can be managed."[2] The neighboring rancher, however, had lost too many cows to want to renew his lease on the Bullis Creek Ranch.

Evidence of the Brawners' affection for the Bullis Creek Ranch can be found in the home that Quentin and his wife Anita built across the valley on a small parcel of land. The walls of their house are decorated floor to ceiling with countless memorabilia from the ranch: photographs, paintings, even old tools. Without much prompting, the Brawners will produce stacks of family photo albums that document the milestones of their ranching experiences. There are pages and pages of photos

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[2] Quentin and Anita Brawner, interview by author, tape recording, Brawner family residence, Deep Creek, Park County, Montana, October 5, 2004.

from round ups and branding along with brochures and prizes from cattle shows and sales.

The family even captured some of the events surrounding their departure from Bullis Creek Ranch in pictures. The individual who purchased the ranch in 1997 made his purchase contingent on an agreement that the Brawners arrange the demolition of some of the older buildings on the place, particularly a cluster of low-slung sheds built in one of the ranch's high meadow. Relics from the ranch's sheep raising days with no obvious contemporary purpose, the buildings offended the new owner's aesthetic vision for his ranch retreat. Surprised that they were unable to find anyone interested in the attractive barn boards, the ever-pragmatic Brawners refused to pay someone to do the demolition and clean-up work for them. The family gathered in the meadow in the spring of 1997, their bags packed and their livestock already on the road to their new home in Nebraska. Anita snapped photos as the family bulldozed the barns to the ground and then set the lumber afire. Determined not to let the massive bonfire give their last days on the ranch a mawkish air, Anita Brawner asked her daughter-in-law to cut a handful of willow switches. Anita placed a hot dog on the end of each stick and handed them out to her family to cook over the fire. She still giggles when she looks at the pictures from their impromptu barbeque.

This study documented the distant as well as the recent past of the Brawner family ranch operations and the many other ranch properties in the Upper Yellowstone Valley. It focused on the persistence of livestock ranching over a period of one hundred and twenty years despite the fact that periods of economic depression outnumbered episodes of economic gain for livestock producers over the long haul. In documenting the strategies that ranchers used to achieve continuity and to overcome the many hardships they encountered, the study demonstrated the linkages between ranchers' approaches to business, land tenure, work, and nature and the ways that they understood and participated in community. Memory and the use of historical narrative proved to be vital and dynamic strategies in the ways that the ranchers of the Upper Yellowstone region responded to changing horizons.

ECONOMIC CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

Ranchers benefited from an interlocking constellation of cultural narratives and material and financial practices that enabled them to react to and accommodate change. The period during which these narratives and practices were most effective lasted from the 1890s through the 1950s. In particular, a focus on the potential for economic prosperity, frugality and self-sacrifice, and neighbor-to-neighbor cooperation were attributes of the culture of the ranch landscape that helped to sustain roughly three generations of ranchers in the Upper Yellowstone Valley.

A strong emphasis on the value of self-sufficiency and self-sacrifice within ranching families and communities encouraged the frugality that was necessary to help ranches endure ongoing economic difficulties. Strategies that helped ranchers survive the lean homesteading period continued to serve subsequent generations, from the depression years of the 1920s through the 1940s when young families were starting out on ranches with very few resources. Women and men alike took on burdens for the good of the family ranch, while women typically had the greatest diversity of responsibilities including off-ranch work, family and child care, all of the indoor work and farm work like raising eggs and making cream, as well as helping with outside work like haying or calving. Within families, the importance of preserving the ranch as a family asset at all costs encouraged individuals to sacrifice their personal autonomy and individual ambitions. Fathers and sons developed strategies to manage transferring the ranch that attempted to maximize the contributions of both parties while minimizing sacrifices made by either generation. Ranches were highly unlikely to survive more than two rounds of intergenerational transfer, however, either because there were too many heirs or because there were none at all.

Technological change affected ranch work and in turn the ways that ranchers experienced their social as well as ecological contexts in the decades following World War II. Particularly in regard to inside chores, ranch women of the twentieth century witnessed a dramatic change in the rhythm and quality of their work as a result of electrification and the adoption of household appliances. If such improvements indoors created a surplus of time for ranch women, ranch women of the post-World War II era were hardly more leisured than their mothers and grandmothers. Rather, because of the difficulties in meeting the economic costs of ranching, women's responsibilities expanded to fill any space in their schedules created by labor-saving domestic tools.

Additionally, the empowerment of the individual with the help of new machinery diminished the relevance of group cooperation in ranch work. Opportunities for ranchers to combine work with social pleasures slowly evaporated in the second half of the twentieth century, eroding the bonds among neighbors on the ranching landscape. In addition, for all of their many important functional benefits, technological advances nonetheless introduced a level of disconnection between ranchers and domestic as well as wild nature: diesel engines replaced horses as ranchers' companions in the fields while pumps and sprinklers enabled irrigators to ignore the subtleties of local hydrological cycles. As a consequence, many ranchers reacted to mechanization of ranch work with a mixture of pride and regret. While new tools and practices yielded rapid advances in agricultural productivity, they also undermined many of the cultural assumptions and practices from which ranchers drew psychological strength.

In addition to diminishing the practical need for shared labor, changing economic circumstances in the second half of the twentieth century introduced other changes in the ways that ranchers experienced the practice of "neighboring." While economic status profoundly influenced the ways that individuals experienced the ranching landscape—affecting whether ranchers were cold, poorly nourished or chronically in debt, for example—the demands of the local landscape and of ranch work created reasons for ranchers to prevent economic differences from dividing the community. Historically, the link between old-timers and newcomers was strengthened—albeit in complicated ways—by the integration of economic interests through neighbor-to-neighbor financing. The combined impact of the Depression and the subsequent introduction of low-interest, long-term government loans to farmers and ranchers eradicated the practice of lending to neighbors, weakening their mutual investment in one another's success.

Subsequently, the introduction of new land uses and new ways of valuing land in the post-1970 period created additional challenges to existing strategies of practicing and understanding ranch continuity. Developments in the local economy during that period made it impossible for ranchers to ignore the fact that the opportunities for livestock to support the continuity of the family ranch—never truly secure historically—were non-existent. The development of alternative markets for ranch products in the Upper Yellowstone—land for subdivisions, scenery to be sold to millionaire business magnates, opportunities to hunt elk or fish for trout—were truly paradoxical for ranchers. They enabled the continuity of multi-generational family tenure on ranches at the same time that they divested that tenure of the features that historically provided the incentive for ranchers to persist in ranching. One response from ranchers was to recreate the imperative behind multigenerational tenure: reproduction of the family became essentially a preservative act on many ranches rather than a generative process. Some families, like the Brawners for example, have leveraged the value of their land on the Upper Yellowstone to create opportunities for their children to relocate a conventional ranch operation elsewhere. Others have generated other incomes and understand that their livestock are now functionally not more than a hobby, although as a gesture to sentiment and as evidence of what ranchers refuse to give up, livestock take on even greater significance.

Put more broadly, economic changes over the course of the post-World War II period altered the function of memory, forcing ranchers to reinvent the ways that they used stories and ideas about the past. Narratives involving the economic success of first and second-generation ranchers provided both emotional and material inspiration for other ranchers struggling to get started or to achieve success in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Over the course of the mid to late twentieth century, rather than providing evidence of the good economic prospects of livestock production that ranchers hoped might return one day, the past evolved into a rationalization for perpetuating a lifestyle and industry that was not supported in economic cost-benefit analyses.

LAND TENURE, COMMUNITY, AND CONTINUITY

My study of land tenure documented the fact that turn-over of land was a defining rather than an exceptional feature of the ranching landscape. Using a GIS to examine the spatial dynamics of land turnover, I established both the consistency and extent of turn-over patterns. Chapter II demonstrated that while there was a general trend of consolidation of land ownership from the homesteading period through the 1960s, during that period there was a corresponding pattern of dis-aggregation and reconfiguration of holdings that occurred when ranches were sold or transferred within families. (One limitation of this study is that it did not explore the important land use implications of what I called in this study the "recycling" of ranch parts. As high-elevation year-round ranches were incorporated into larger ranches more heterogeneous in their composition, for example, there may have been important local environmental effects that resulted from corresponding changes in land uses. This is an important area for future consideration.)

A case study of the Tom Miner Basin demonstrated that ranching communities focused on continuity land use practices in order to deal with the in- and out-migration of ranch owners due to changes in land ownership. By continuing to structurally reproduce the ranch—by carrying forward the irrigation practices or haying strategies of previous owners, or by integrating a smaller ranch into a larger operation—ranch buyers contributed to the local momentum of livestock production and thus to the sense of historically-defined interconnectedness among residents of the ranching landscape. The focus on traditions in land uses and ranching practices also enabled ranchers to look beyond potentially divisive differences among neighbors. Keeping livestock at the center of the local collective culture was more than a nostalgic act: it was an important device in evening out class differences within the ranching community.

This study's preoccupation with community is predicated on the circumstances shaping the Upper Yellowstone's present and future realities, namely the sales like that which ended the Brawners' multi-generational tenure in the Upper Yellowstone Valley in the 1990s. Many of the historical trajectories captured in this study culminate in the turning point that separated the kinds of land uses, economics, and community interactions that preceded the 1960s and 1970s, from those that that the area has witnessed in the years since 1970. The 1960s through the early 1980s were a period during which the industrialization of agricultural production and recreation boom combined to radically transform ranching in the Upper Yellowstone Valley. Beginning in the 1970s, most of the people who purchased ranches in the Upper Yellowstone Valley imported values and approaches to land management that differed significantly from those of local ranchers. Indeed, the act of demolishing the old sheep sheds on the Brawner Ranch could rightly be taken as a powerful symbol of a regime change in contemporary ranch ownership patterns in the Mountain West. In the end, this narrative helps to explain why the changes in ranch ownership that have occurred in the Mountain West during the past two decades signify a real turning point in Western history—a moment that is at once an ending, a beginning, and a return. As the preceding discussion about technological and economic dynamics makes clear, recent land tenure dynamics are not the sole causal forces behind the changes in the ways that ranchers operated and functioned as a community. However, transitions in land tenure and land use exacerbated the processes that were already at work in eroding the fundamental structures that historically sustained the family ranch, including the specific relationships that livestock production enabled between ranchers and nature—including domestic and wild nature—and between ranchers and their neighbors.

While it was not the primary focus of my research and thus not the primary focus of this study, the relationship between ranchers and livestock—especially cattle—ultimately proves to have profound significance in the history of the Upper Yellowstone. I believe that more than any other appealing factor of ranch life, ranchers were sustained by the opportunity to work with cattle. There were exceptions, naturally. Enthusiasm for irrigation was also a critical element in enabling ranchers to enjoy their work experiences and for some it was the most rewarding work.[3] And there were clearly many who found the rewards of working with cattle insufficient compensation for the struggles of ranch life. They left, leaving behind families that were self-selected as animal husbandry enthusiasts.

With cattle at the center of the meaning of ranching, what makes this particular history of continuity and change even more compelling is the shared border between the ranchlands of the Upper Yellowstone Valley and the nature preserve which is Yellowstone National Park and the designated wilderness areas on national forest lands that surround the park. As Chapter VI indicated, the past three decades

[3] Anita Brawner described her father-in-law as deeply fascinated by irrigation. He liked to ride an old horse bareback among the fields, fussing over each ditch and dam. "Playing with water," she laughed, "it's just boys playing with water." Brawner interview.

offer strong evidence of the difficulties of integrating livestock production with "natural" processes such as wildlife migrations and predator-prey interactions. Expanding the vitality of Yellowstone's wild systems had consequences for ranchers because it compromised their ability to define themselves livestock producers. Taking on outfitting, for example, typically means accepting elk "damage" to parts of the ranch that were historically intended, as far as ranchers were concerned, for domestic animals.

The arrival of a new cohort of land owners focused not on livestock production but on the consumption of the landscape's amenities, including a ranchland aesthetic, wildlife, and mountain scenery, amplified the difficulties for livestock producers in both practical as well as emotional ways. Ranchers experienced some of the disjuncture that Nathan Sayre describes in his examination of the ranching, urbanization, and conservation activities in southeastern Arizona:

> Ordinary life is dominated by work, coordinated by the clock, and characterized by the opposite. Only now there must be no sign of any commodity production whatsoever; all traces of human labor must be swept or wished away. Where industrial capitalism romanticized pastoralism as a kind of noble, primitive work, the "New West" economy valorizes recreation, leisure, and places dedicated to "nonconsumptive" consumption. It is as though, having decoupled the economy from natural processes of rainfall and vegetation growth, suburban life conjures a desire for unpeopled, "pristine" Nature outside of the cities. It is here that the conflict between ranchers and the refuge is most absolute. For ranchers, the distinction between work and leisure does not apply. Their place of work is also their home, where they relax and socialize; their days are not divided into fixed hours of labor and idle hours of recreation. For them, nature is a site and source of production, not its compensatory opposite.[4]

I would refine this accurate assessment by adding that what it means for nature to be a "site and source of production" for ranchers is for nature to support livestock—even when the economic realities of ranching privilege other definitions of nature's

[4] Nathan Sayre, *Ranching, Endangered Species, and Urbanization in the Southwest: Species of Capital* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002), 229.

function. In contrast to the bureaucratic act of preserving nature that Sayres analyzes, an important issue that arises in the Upper Yellowstone is the relationship of private land ownership to the conservation efforts underway in the Greater Yellowstone. The re-occupation of the Upper Yellowstone Valley and indeed throughout southwest Montana by elk was encouraged first by the commodification of the experience of hunting elk (outfitting) and second by the commodification of the experience of owning elk habitat, whether with the goal of hunting or just watching elk (amenity buying). When new land owners manage their land with the primary goal of encouraging elk to visit and even reside on their property, they have effectively reverse the fundamental assumptions that governed land use for over a century in the Upper Yellowstone Valley. Rather than serving as habitat for domestic creatures, the ranch now serves as habitat for wild animals. This shift undermines the essence of livestock production and the rules of animal husbandry and as such symbolizes the end of an era.

The acquisition of ranches in the Upper Yellowstone Valley by the wealthiest Americans, individuals who identify both economic and emotional benefits in the act of restoration of a "wild" landscape and in the process erasing many of the impacts of livestock production, can also be understood as a kind of a return in historical terms. Wealthy, non-resident ranch owners constituted the first major cohort of livestock ranchers in the West: the industrialists and financiers that are the subject of Gene Gressley's *Bankers and Cattlemen*.[5] In this sense, the re-acquisition of Western ranchlands by those in control of the nation's greatest fortunes represents a return to a historic pattern. In fact, the notion of the compatibility of an interest in ranching and an interest in conservation dates back to the turn of the twentieth century, with Theodore Roosevelt standing out as a clear example of an individual who combined both passions. From this angle, the bulk of the twentieth century history of ranching

[5] Gene M. Gressley, *Bankers and Cattlemen* (New York: Knopf, 1966).

stands out as a remarkable era, because it was one during which livestock ranches were owned and operated by families who were for the most part not wealthy (because, unlike their predecessors and successors, they did not have sources of substantial non-ranch incomes) and had little interest in the conservation of wildlife.

In sum, the demise of the family ranch in the amenity-rich mountain valleys of the American West like the Upper Yellowstone was set into motion by changes within the ranching industry and in the post-World War II decades and was later accelerated by exogenous forces. While ranching persisted on the landscape despite serious affronts to its continuity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the sources of its continuity ceased to function in the second half of the twentieth century. In assessing the reasons for this break-down, as this dissertation ultimately did, it becomes clear that the continuity of ranching hinged on a particular configuration of a dominant land use (livestock production), cultural practices associated with ranch operations and finances, and the interactions of ranchers with their physical environment that evolved to support livestock production. When contemporary observers respond to changes in the ranching landscape, they will benefit from recognizing the unique contingencies that historically enabled and later disrupted the continuity of family-scale ranching.

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C.J. Hackett, Map of Park County (Land Ownership), 1923

Park County Soil Conservation District, Map of Park County (Land Ownership), 1966

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Duane Colmey, Veterinarian

Robert Garrott, MSU Professor of Ecology

Patrick Hoppe, Range Conservationist, USFS Gardiner District

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APPENDIX 1: ORAL HISTORY QUESTIONS

Family History:

1. How long has your family been in this area? Where did the first settlers in your family come from? Were they ranchers? How did they learn how to ranch?

2. What was it like to grow up in Emigrant? Did you raise children here? How did growing up on a rural property shape them?

3. How did you decide to become ranchers? How did you learn? Did you and do you engage in other livelihoods?

4. What were your parents' expectations for you in regards to this property? How are they different from those that you have for your children?

Agricultural History:

1. Describe your approach to making a living from this ranch. How do you define success in your operation?

2. How is your approach different from previous operations on this property? What do you do differently from your parents and grandparents?

3. Describes the steps you have taken toward achieving success in your ranch operation. What specific investments, changes and strategies did you implement? Were they successful?

4. What jobs have to be done as a part of running this operation? Who did them and have these responsibilities changed over time? Did you hire outside labor? If so, whom, and how did this work

5. In your opinion, what is the best piece of farm/ranch equipment? The most significant innovation?

6. Can you describe a typical calving season day when you were a young child? Today? A typical haying day then and now? A typical fall sale day (when you were a child v. today)?

7. What is the hardest thing about being a ranch operator? Has that thing changed?

8. What makes ranching in the Paradise Valley different from other ranching areas in the northern Rockies?

<u>Property History:</u>

1. How long have you resided on your property? Was the property in your family prior to your ownership? If not, do you know your property was managed prior to your ownership?

2. How have the property boundaries changed over time?

3. Do you use the same roads and pathways that your parents/grandparents, etc. used? Why or why not?

4. Has the property in your vicinity changed hands often? How have such events affected you?

5. Where does your water come from? Can you briefly explain the history of that water right? Is there conflict over water in this area?

6. Have you noticed a change in the yearly availability of water? In springs? In the ditches?

7. What kinds of irrigation and water delivery infrastructure have you implemented?

8. What does it mean to have the Yellowstone River as a neighbor?

Living near public lands and Yellowstone Park

1. What wildlife species frequents your property?

2. Have you noticed changes in wildlife population during your years here, such as a rise or decline in elk population? To what would you attribute that rise/decline?

3. What does it mean to be so close to Yellowstone National Park? How has it changed your ranch operations?

Conclusion

1. Have I asked the right questions? If I asked these questions of 15 of your neighbors would I get a good picture of what is involved in making a ranch work and how that has changed over the past 50 years? What would you add?