

LIVES WORTH LIVING, HISTORY WORTH PRESERVING



A BRIEF HISTORY OF WYOMING HOMESTEADING, RANCHING, AND FARMING, 1860—1960

Michael Cassity

PREPARED FOR THE WYOMING STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
PLANNING AND HISTORIC CONTEXT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
WYOMING STATE PARKS & CULTURAL RESOURCES

**ARTS. PARKS.
HISTORY.**

Wyoming State Parks & Cultural Resources

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On previous page: Andy Chambers Homestead,
showing various farm / ranch buildings, Mormon Row,
Teton County. Photograph: Michael Cassity, 2009.

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Printed and bound by University of Oklahoma Printing Services.
Manufactured in the USA.

. . . I do know this, that what I saw in those early pioneer days of Wyoming and what I experienced then seemed as all right and life as good and as worth living as it seems today with all its conveniences and modern inventions.

—Eva Ogden Putnam, discussing her
early years on a homestead and ranch near
Sundance

Eva Ogden Putnam, “Pioneering in Crook
County,” *Annals of Wyoming*, 3 (April 1926):
203-205

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PREFACE

The way we understand the significance of specific historical events and places is by considering them in *context*, by understanding the broader patterns of history of which they were a part. This means that we connect those places and events with what came before, what happened afterwards, and what was going on at other places at the same time. This idea of historic context is important as we seek to understand our past in Wyoming and as we try to understand the physical remains of the past, remnants that we call historic resources. Since the way we deal with those resources when they are impacted by modern developments depends on their historic significance, studies that identify the patterns of history to which they belong can be a powerful tool for the state, for private developers, and for the Wyoming public.

The development of historic context studies is a responsibility of the Planning and Historic Context Development Program in the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office. That office, working with an Advisory Committee on Historic Context Development comprised of specialists from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service; the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management; the U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service, and representation from private industry, has established priorities for investigation and context development and the state legislature has sponsored the preparation of several reports. One

of these investigations focused on the extensive resources across Wyoming relating to the state's history of homesteading, ranching, and farming. The primary result of that study was the preparation of a substantial historic context analysis that examines the contours and complexity of Wyoming agriculture, both socially and economically, from the formative years to 1960, and that study, a much longer document, is available at the State Historic Preservation Office website. This booklet is a companion piece to that study and is designed to make some of the major historic patterns and conclusions available to a wider audience.

The subject of this historical inquiry is both simple and complex at the same time. Most of us are familiar, to some degree, with the history of Wyoming and are aware of the important roles that ranches, farms, and homesteads have played in that history—at least generally. Too often, though, there is a tendency to compartmentalize the past into separate episodes or developments unrelated to each other. And too many times we freeze the Wyoming past at certain moments in time and generalize from those moments to a much broader period as if the processes and forces of history had somehow stopped for a while. But when we narrow our vision to include only specific episodes or periods we also pass over large parts of the past and distort the significance and meaning of those parts highlighted. The settlement and growth of ranches and farms and homesteads in Wyoming cannot be

reduced to just a few episodes without distorting the larger history of which they are a part. It is essential that we understand the past as a complex, evolving set of patterns of history that need exploration. This study attempts to do exactly that. It is not a study of individual ranches and farms, or even of the families associated with them. This study should help, however, as individual families seek to place their own operations into the patterns of history; in that way they may gain an understanding of the broader significance of the farms and ranches they already know so well. Whether the reader lives in the countryside or in the city, the hope is that this study will provide a closer understanding of how the historical patterns involving ranching, farming, and homesteading shaped the Wyoming that we see around us today. It will hopefully thereby also give us a closer appreciation of the resources associated with the past and, not incidentally, a better appreciation of how we got to where we are today. As we move into the future, it is essential that we understand our past.

While this study deals with homesteading, ranching, and farming, those three activities have seldom been as separate from each other as they have sometimes been made to appear. At a minimum, they overlap widely. It is not at all unusual to find ranches in Wyoming history that are also farms, if only in the production of oats for horses and other grains for domestic consumption, and to find farms that are also ranches in that they run a small number of cattle or sheep. Moreover, many ranches and farms often began as homestead claims under one of the various laws opening public land to settlement and the farm and ranch would be referred to as a homestead into the third generation, or more, of the family operating it. In other words, the distinction between farms, ranches, and homesteads winds up being arbitrary and generally confuses the investigation as much as it clarifies it. It is

no surprise that historically the U.S. Census in its ten-year tallies simply lumped all three together and called them farms. Although there are points in history in which the activities associated with homesteading, ranching, and farming are fairly clear and separate, even in opposition, this study does not generally attempt to draw impossible lines between the three which, in the resources they left behind, so often fit together like the braids of a rope in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

The history of Wyoming agriculture is an ongoing history in two ways. First, Wyoming's rural population continues to address the issues and opportunities associated with making a living on the land and this modern effort is as much a part of our history as earlier developments. Second, historians continue to examine this history and are cautious about drawing lines in time abruptly starting or stopping development. That said, however, every study needs to have a general termination point and the date used in this study (and in the longer historic context) is 1960. The current registration form for the National Register of Historic Places requires properties whose historic significance begins or extends beyond a point fifty years in the past to be justified separately as being "of exceptional importance." For several years, discussion has proceeded at different levels to blur this line, and there are substantial reasons to do so, but as of this writing, the registration form requires that fifty-year division and this study does not attempt to formulate an alternative standard.

This booklet is drawn from the larger study and in some ways represents a summary of the main historical narrative presented in that historic context. It uses some of the same examples and conclusions and even some of the same language as it tries to encapsulate some of this history. Accordingly, in the interest of saving space and avoiding duplication,

the reader is directed to the larger study to explore these issues with greater depth and breadth. In addition, while some footnotes were used here to provide sources for specific quotations or other references, the documentation provided in the longer study, including an extensive bibliography, will be much more helpful to the reader who seeks to dig deeper.

Many people have contributed to this study and it is not possible to name them all here. But the Wyoming State Legislature and Governor Dave Freudenthal deserve special recognition and gratitude because of their vision and leadership in funding a historic context study of ranching, farming, and homesteading in Wyoming so that we may better understand

and appropriately manage the state's resources associated with that history. In addition, the Historic Context Advisory Committee, and its member professionals, provided thoughtful perspectives on a multitude of complex issues. From the beginning of the project, Judy Wolf, Chief of Planning and Historic Context Development, has provided guidance and assistance essential to this study. I thank all of these people and agencies, and especially the people of Wyoming who lived this history and who continue to draw upon it as they face the future. Of course, no one who has contributed to the study bears responsibility for any errors of fact or interpretation. That is mine alone.



Tweed Ranch, Beaver Creek, Fremont County, 1903. Note haystacks and large garden. Hand tinted photograph from Stimson Collection, negative 674, Wyoming State Archives.

INTRODUCTION

INTO THE LANDSCAPE, INTO THE PAST

Even newcomers to Wyoming understand quickly that the state has a very special history. History is all around us. There are the museums and historic sites that attract us, there are the signs alongside the road that tell us what happened there, and there are the celebrations of frontier pasts, with varying degrees of authenticity, that are important in many Wyoming communities. But there are other aspects of Wyoming history too, that we see every day, remnants of the past that tell stories that go beyond the textbooks, artifacts that serve as bridges between today and earlier times, and places that are landmarks, not just landmarks on the map, but landmarks in time. Together these landmarks illustrate and make tangible the contours of our history. They even provide a sense of direction, for they tell not only where we have been, but, to the careful observer, suggest where we are going.

Walk along the streets of any town or city and the artifacts of the past are there, although sometimes hidden in the shadows of newer buildings. Drive the countryside and Wyoming's history is there too—a creaking old windmill, an abandoned homesteader's cabin, strange-looking farm implements from years ago that look more like dinosaur bones than tools, an occasional sheepherder monument of rocks stacked and standing tall on a ridge, or a forlorn row of trees stretching into the distance, obviously planted, but not

for a clear purpose. Almost anyplace you go in Wyoming, on a highway, on a two-track road far from pavement, or on a hike in the mountains, do not be surprised if you find remnants of Wyoming history standing in the same places where they were built by earlier generations, where they were important parts of someone's life, where they were used for purposes almost beyond comprehension a century or so later. Sometimes they have nearly blended back into the land from which they came, but those buildings and other remnants usually reflect work and sacrifice, and almost always reveal someone's dreams of the future.

Whether the buildings and structures that punctuate the Wyoming landscape are still in use or were long ago abandoned, they tell a story. Understanding what that story is, however, is not always easy. Rarely can a building's historic significance be appreciated just by looking at its structure and design. Generally we can understand the significance of a historical resource only when we see what came before, and also what came after and the historical value of a building or structure will become clear only when it is connected with others, even with others far away, like fitting together the pieces of a puzzle that have been scattered. Understanding the pieces of the puzzle requires also looking for the larger picture, the larger pattern of which they are a part—or even to which they are an exception. When we look at the

An abandoned ranch on Powder River. Photo: Michael Cassity, 2006.



landscape from this perspective, the buildings and structures there become a meaningful part of Wyoming history.

Wyoming's history is not something frozen in time. It is not just a matter of then and now, old and new. Instead, it is complex, fluid, evolving, and multi-dimensional. A central part of that history, the part associated with homesteading, ranching, and farming, is directly connected to the buildings we see in the Wyoming countryside. For at least a century and a half, some Wyomingites have made their living on the land. Whether they claimed land under the homestead laws, grazed livestock, or mainly grew crops—or all three—life on the land has always been important in defining Wyoming.

This is not just a matter of economics. For agriculture in Wyoming has also provided the basis of a way of life, has offered the hope of independence and freedom in a difficult and uncertain world, and has brought people of different genders, ethnicity, and classes to a place where a new start could be made for new lives. Life on the land has traditionally been something more than and different from working on an assembly line in a factory or selling manufactured goods in a retail business. For the young family settling on a

homestead, for the substantial rancher, for the single woman homesteader, for the immigrant from Eastern Europe, for the workers following the harvest, for the migrant worker and tenant farmer, and for the shepherd who carved a name onto a tree using the marks of another language, the landscape of Wyoming was a land of promise for the future, sometimes a last hope.

Accordingly, for the first half-century or so of Wyoming's existence as an organized territory and state, people flocked onto the land, filing claims and placing their hopes in parcels carved out of the public domain. Farms and ranches emerged and neighborhoods formed with country schools, rural post offices, and sparsely populated communities. The open spaces of the countryside were a beehive of activity when it came time to brand the cattle, cut the hay, put up the grain, and otherwise follow the requirements and rituals of agrarian life. The challenges were many and the going was often difficult. And, as with other journeys in life, not everybody who started the homesteading, farming, or ranching endeavor reached their goal. But many proved up on their land, endured the challenges, and found satisfaction, and the

numbers of farms and ranches continued to increase until the 1920s and 1930s. At that point, though, the curve turned downward, and more people left the land than moved onto it.

Making a living on the land has been hard from the very beginning, and it remains that way. The physical ordeals involved in working crops and livestock and providing for families in a severe climate and demanding topography are clear enough. On top of that, however, there have been other pressures and hardships. It is well known that different people have been at odds with each other and have sometimes made life difficult for each other. Ranchers and farmers, sheep growers and cattle ranchers, Anglos and Hispanics, women and men, large operators and small, and others, have sometimes looked upon each other with suspicion and derision. In some instances, tensions escalated and even became violent. In addition, there have also been the tensions caused by the transformation of agriculture itself: the shift from self-sufficient farming to commercial agriculture, from labor-intensive farms and ranches to mechanized systems, from independent family farms and ranches to specialized and integrated operations attuned to national and global markets. The series of changes that some people view as a parade of progress has for many farmers and ranchers been just one hardship after another. The people who have lived with these tensions and challenges are the people who made the history we are trying to understand and preserve.

In the twentieth century, as machines replaced people, as commercial agriculture replaced self-sufficient, subsistence operations, small farms and ranches were replaced by ever larger units, often owned by someone other than the people who lived and worked on them. The rural population thinned out, the farms and ranches declined in number,



Abandoned granary
on a farm in Star
Valley, near Fairview,
Wyoming. Photo:
Michael Cassity, 2009.

and a growing number of homes and barns emptied of their occupants. Farm and ranch people joined an exodus that continues today, moving to the towns and cities of Wyoming and to the towns and cities of other states. The same people, or their children, who once built houses and barns and corrals and sheds and a host of other structures as part of their life on the land, now were leaving behind those parts of life. Those buildings are often what we see today when we pause to look around. They reflect the two powerful trends—people moving onto the land and then moving off of it—that form the core of the history of Wyoming ranching, farming, and homesteading.

Many of the buildings and structures built years ago are still in use, sometimes by the same families that settled there and developed their homesteads, their farms, their ranches. The history associated with them is often kept alive by the families, and their operations provide visible anchors not just to their neighborhood and community, but to past events and developments. But even those farm and ranch buildings that are just shells of what they once were also hold keys to the past. Although they are empty now, they also were built

at that specific place, at a certain time, by specific people with their own dreams and hopes. The buildings once were busy with people and were shaped to meet their needs, and they still reflect the lives they led. The barns, sheds, corrals, ditches, windmills, and other features that we can still see were once used by someone, day-in, day-out, for years or even decades, for as long as life and circumstances allowed. The fruits of their labor, however, were finally left to the elements when they no longer could sustain their life there. The history represented by these remnants of times past is still filled with the lives of the people who built them and lived in them and used them. History is alive on the Wyoming landscape.

The farm and ranch buildings and structures that remain across Wyoming have their own individual stories, but those stories are also connected together in the patterns of history at the local and state level. Those patterns can be seen in the common origins and development of homesteads, farms, and ranches in various parts of the state. What brought those people to the same area at the same time or at different times? How did they settle it? What was the role of the land laws? They can also be seen in the way their operations evolved, or, for that matter, remained the same in a changing world. Did their livestock practices change? Did they farm differently? What kinds of changes were taking place elsewhere in their own county and in the state? What was the pattern of experiences of women, both alone and in families, of different ethnic groups, and of different classes? The patterns of history can be seen in the way farm and ranch people made decisions about their life, in the way they responded to the storms wrought by nature and to the stresses of farming and ranching in an industrial society, and in the way they persevered through it all. For that matter, the patterns of history can also be seen in the way some had to

leave the land, despite their best intentions, prodigious effort, and resolute determination.

Some of the historic buildings and structures involved in homesteading, ranching, and farming in Wyoming are significant in and of themselves. They may be examples of a particular type of historic building, they may exhibit distinctive methods in their construction, they may show high artistic value, or they may otherwise be distinctive for the way they were built. The vast majority of the farm and ranch buildings, however, are less distinctive in their architecture. But these buildings too may be historically significant because they reflect the patterns of history. The homesteads, farms, and ranches these people developed, and the buildings and structures still on the ground, reflect the patterns of settlement, the changes, and the continuities, in agriculture, the role of conservation, and the changing organization of society. When we research the stories of individual properties, we learn how those buildings fit into the patterns of history.

Some of the ranchers and farmers and homesteaders, such as prominent ranchers like John Kendrick and Frances Warren, left wonderful collections of their papers and these documents help us gain insight into their lives. But they were exceptional and their lives did not represent the daily life of most of their counterparts across the state. In fact, most people left very little in the way of written materials. Their mark was on the land, in the buildings they built, and in the records at the courthouse, newspaper, and library, and their lives have to be pieced together from many scattered sources. The total combination of historical sources, though, when creatively used, can sometimes reveal life more clearly and in more dimensions than an autobiography.

Historians and others sometimes forget that the people who lived in those buildings were not abstractions, and

they were not just statistics or economic units or nameless representatives of categories. And sometimes historians, economists, and others disapprove of and dismiss those people and their endeavors, like the dry farmers or the homesteaders, because of the choices they made and the obstacles they faced. But these people on Wyoming's farms and ranches lived life, their buildings were parts of their lives, and those lives are an essential part of history. And the patterns formed by those lives are ultimately what make the buildings carry a larger meaning. Those lives are worth remembering and understanding, and when we preserve the past, we do both.

In the 1920s, Eva Ogden Putnam gave voice to some of the richness of lives past when she reminded people that just because material comforts were fewer, those earlier lives should not be dismissed or forgotten. Putnam's father homesteaded in Crook County not long after he arrived there in 1882. While she was just a girl, her father started "in the fall of the year on a totally new place with not even a house anywhere near completed, no feed for the cattle, no sheds," While life in the family's new cabin was not sumptuous by any measure, it seems to have had its rewards: "we were happy and content in that simple life, altho I confess it would be very hard to go back to it now. We had health and an unbroken family. We had plenty of good, wholesome food, milk, butter, eggs, cream, and from the first summer a fine garden. We had beef and pork occasionally, and a neighbor, who was a hunter, would go up into the mountains any time we requested, killed and dress a deer (no game laws then), bring it on his pony for the big sum of one dollar." Surely the life of Putnam and many others knew privation and hardship, but their own perspective carries a different tenor: ". . . I do know this, that what I saw in those early pioneer days of Wyoming and



LX Bar Ranch of
Senator John Kendrick,
Campbell County;
Powder River in
background. Photo:
Richard Collier,
Wyoming State
Historic Preservation
Office.

what I experienced then seemed as all right and life as good and as worth living as it seems today with all its conveniences and modern inventions.”¹

These are lives—lives of homesteaders, lives of ranchers, lives of farmers—that were worth living. And the history of which they were a part is worth understanding and preserving.

PART I

A HERITAGE OF HOMESTEADING,

RANCHING, AND FARMING

Almost from the beginning of the time that white people started to displace Native Americans, two different visions of what Wyoming should be guided the actions of the people who were shaping its future. There were, first of all, clearly those people who sought to bring to this area the institutions, values, and systems of the expanding commercial civilization of

the East. Included in that culture were systems of production and exchange associated with markets, commercial opportunities, and a view of the resources of nature as exploitable commodities.

There were others, however, who sought to escape that pattern of social organization and its commercial priorities by venturing into the “wilderness” of the western Great Plains and Rocky Mountains. Mountain men of the fur trade, people like Osborne Russell who traversed Wyoming in every direction, often expressed contempt for the society they left behind

and found a kinship with nature and Native Americans that marked them as refugees from forces that other people called progress. As Russell once commented on matters agricultural, “the rude and untaught savage feasts on better beef and Mutton than the most learned and experienced Agriculturists now,” and the meat of bison, “which are reared upon the food supplied them by Nature,” was, he said, vastly superior to that of domesticated cattle “fed on cultivated grasses and grains.”²

Within a few years, these two views were poised for conflict as people elsewhere began to contemplate the agricultural opportunities of Wyoming, some seeing agriculture as a refuge, a foundation of independence, and others finding in agriculture a lucrative business opportunity. Travelers on the Oregon – California – Mormon Trails that wended their way across the land that would someday become Wyoming noticed the lands and saw that they could be suitable for grazing livestock, and ranches and farms emerged along the trails, usually associated with some kind of trading post or fort. In addition, the development of new trails, like the Bozeman Trail to the north, and the growing military exploration of the area increased pressure for settling the land. The more the land was explored, mapped, and talked about—which it was increasingly in the 1850s and 1860s—the more the pressure grew for the land to be occupied by white

I helped my husband cut logs up on the mountain side and haul them down to Canyon Creek where we built a cabin, about ten miles below the Home Ranch. It was crude, with dirt floor and dirt roof, but it was sure and we looked upon it with the same pride that a monarch might look upon his kingdom.

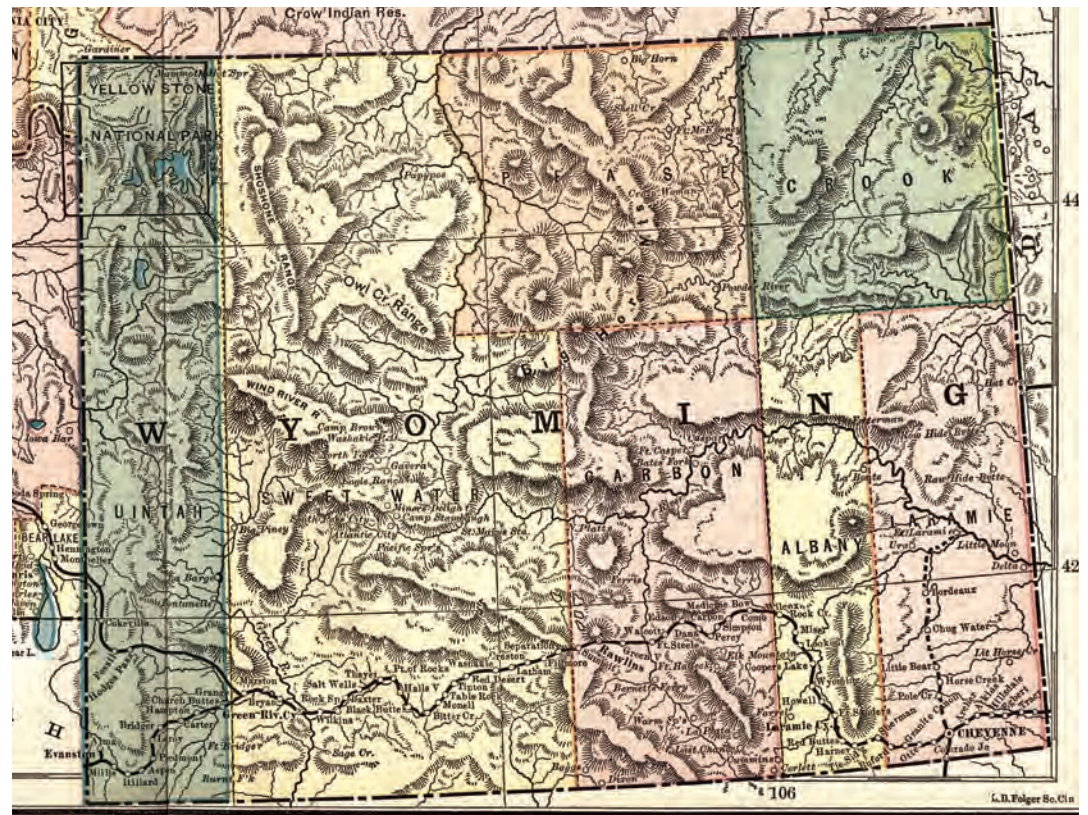
“Life of Martha Waln, Pioneer of Tensleep,” 29, WPA Collections, subject file, 856. The WPA Collections are located in the Wyoming State Archives, Cheyenne.

people. As historian William Goetzmann noted, “waiting in the wings as the all-important silent partners . . . were the settlers who would take full possession of the Continent as a result of these labors in western exploration.”³

THE JEFFERSONIAN HERITAGE

That impulse toward settlement was guided by a set of laws and purposes that goes back to the early years of the nation, to Thomas Jefferson’s political, economic, and social vision of a nation of independent farms. In that agrarian vision, democracy would be protected by families owning small pieces of land on which they might not become rich, but on which they could be self-supporting, on which they would be able to get by. That system of family farms, of self-sufficient subsistence agriculture, was central to the dream of agrarians across the nation, with important exceptions (most notably in the slave South), and the country was overwhelmingly rural and would remain so until well into the twentieth century. Diversified production—livestock, grains, grasses, poultry, and so on—flourished and in many ways the family was the basic unit of production in the economy. A crucial aspect, though, was access to the land. If people could work their own land, they could produce for themselves and then market to others what they did not consume—but primarily the land was for their own subsistence.

Although the framework for distribution of the public domain in the early part of the nineteenth century emphasized selling the land to speculators in order to increase government revenue, public pressure mounted to reform those laws. The movement to make the land more widely available, to give it to the American people, and to fulfill the promise of Jeffersonian democracy gained power as the century wore on. The 1820 Land Act marked a small beginning in that di-



Wyoming Territory, mid-1880s. Detail of map of Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming, from *Cram's Unrivalled Atlas of the World* (Chicago: George F. Cram, 1887); from collection of Michael Cassity.

rection by discouraging speculative land purchases on credit and by lowering the price of land to make it within reach of more people. In 1841 Congress endorsed the practice of pre-emption whereby individuals could settle on unsurveyed land

and then claim it later. The major breakthrough, however, came in 1862 when Congress, in the midst of Civil War, allowed people to claim 160 acres of land if they would live on it and improve it. This law, the Homestead Act of 1862, was augmented in 1873 with the Timber Culture Act, which provided more land if the settlers would plant trees on it, and by the Desert Land Act of 1877, which provided more land if the settlers would irrigate it. Notably, the Homestead Act, which has probably received greatest attention (and criticism), was not used in Wyoming as much as the laws of 1820 (as amended in 1841) and 1877.

As important as the laws were that encouraged homesteading, the dominant force stimulating the initial white settlement of Wyoming was not farming or ranching; it was the railroad. The farmers and ranchers and homesteaders were in the slim minority of the population when the first census tallied the number of Wyomingites in 1870 and the people generally lived in communities along the Union Pacific Railroad. The same year that Congress passed the Homestead Act it also passed the Pacific Railroad Act of 1862, and then two years later modified it, subsidizing the construction of a private railroad across the nation and granting to the Union Pacific large parcels of land in a checkerboard pattern across the future state. Development in Wyoming took place along that line and cities emerged before the surrounding ranches and farms took shape. Changes were coming, though, and the herds of sheep and cattle, initially located in the southwest corner of the territory around Fort Bridger and in the southeast corner east of Cheyenne, began to spread both northward and along the railroad, attracted by the vast public domain that fed not only livestock but all kinds of visions of the future.

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN AND THE BEEF BONANZA

The defining feature shaping Wyoming from the beginning was exactly that public domain. The realization that native grasses would cure in the dry air and provide winter forage and that the plains and mountains could feed large numbers of sheep and cattle, all for free, attracted a swelling tide of people and their herds. The ranches that emerged in the 1860s and 1870s tended to work both sheep and cattle; in the middle of the 1870s there even were more sheep than cattle in the brand new territory. More and more sheep were moved in, herded north from New Mexico, east from Oregon, and west from the Midwest. A multitude of small flocks of sheep, numbering in the hundreds and then several thousand, with a few flocks as large as ten thousand head, were mainly located in the southern part of the territory—near the railroad, essential for shipping the wool. Many of these herds started out “on shares,” a system in which the owner would turn sheep over to another person for care, with the owner receiving half the wool and half the increase in sheep. This system worked, with many of the prominent operations in the Wyoming sheep industry tracing their origins to this kind of arrangement. It worked, though, because of the availability

Cattle and sheep not only live but thrive and get fat during the winters, needing neither shelter nor prepared fodder the year round; the whole cost being in paying men to herd them. Hence, stock-raising and sheep and wool growing, requiring comparatively small outlay, and yielding large profits, will be the leading business in this Territory for years to come.

M. O. Healey of Cheyenne to Frederick Wells, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, July 1, 1874

of free public land. Ultimately, but slowly, the sheep herds moved north into the upper Green River valley, into central Wyoming, into the Powder River Basin, and into the Big Horn Basin. They were not, however, alone.

The free land proved to be an even greater magnet for people interested in raising cattle. In the 1870s and early 1880s the expansion of cattle ranching in Wyoming was nothing short of remarkable, especially in the southeast corner of the territory, and huge numbers of Texas Longhorn cattle were driven each summer to the northern plains. Several features are especially important about this migration of cattle. One is its size, for this movement was truly massive and between 1866 and 1884 more than five million cattle were driven north, a good portion of them going to Wyoming. It constituted, as geographer Terry Jordan observed, “the largest short-term geographical shift of domestic herd animals in the history of the world.”⁴ Another aspect was the system of ranching that migrated with the cattle. The system of ranching that had emerged in Texas was one that had at its core the ranging of cattle, untended, over a broad range on the public domain, with the cattle being looked after only at particular times of the year—in roundups for branding and separating for market. Senator John Kendrick, who had trailed and branded his share of cattle as a young man, later recalled, “Under the original order, no provision whatsoever was made for any kind of cattle. They were simply branded and turned loose and left to take their chances and survive or perish according to the conditions, such as the amount of feed, the weather and the strength and vitality of the animal.”⁵ This was, appropriately, the Texas System of Ranching and it took hold in Wyoming.

This system grew rapidly in Wyoming and a frenzy of cattle raising—the “beef bonanza” it was called—took off. In 1880 the census reported 278,073 domestic cattle in the ter-

ritory and these were mainly in small herds. One survey of ranches in 1880 listed seventy prominent operations, only four of which had more than two thousand head of cattle. The majority (forty-four) had fewer than five hundred head of cattle. A great many more, not included in the list, ran herds of fifty, a hundred, or two hundred head. Five years later, Wyoming had at least 750,000 cattle and perhaps as many as two million. Several ranches had more than a hundred thousand. The biggest ranches bought out the small ones (who sometimes then moved to a more remote part of the territory and started up another small ranch), and became huge. There was a division in the cattle ranches between the large and small, but there was another division too. Some ranch owners saw their occupation as a calling, as a way of life. Others saw it as an investment opportunity with little regard for anything else. This division was another feature of the Texas system as it operated in Wyoming. There were, as it turned out, two Wyomings.

This “beef bonanza” of the 1880s attracted money from all across the nation and even more notably from England and Scotland, and ranches with a hundred thousand head of cattle were managed from boardrooms across the ocean with hired ranch operators who sometimes saw their livestock only at roundup. These investors expected to get rich quickly and easily. The main expense was in purchasing cattle that would

Slowly but surely are the choice range locations being bought up by the whales of the western cattle business, who are fencing the small fry away from the best water supplies. Every week or so some startlingly large sale is reported to one or more of the gigantic livestock corporations which are operating in the ranching regions.

Cheyenne Daily Leader, February 7, 1882

OW Ranch, near Hat Creek, 1883, showing the bunkhouse at recreation time. Photo: Wyoming Stock Growers Association Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.



Moreton Frewen's "Castle" near Powder River. Photo: Moreton Frewen Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

then get fat and reproduce, multiplying their numbers; the cost of land and feed was zero; the cost of hired help was kept low by hiring cowboys on a seasonal basis. It looked to be a sure thing.

Not all was well in this system. Differences in culture and lifestyle, with English lords and barons conspicuously demanding the royal treatment to which they were accustomed, caused considerable tension. Englishmen Moreton and Richard Frewen even built what was termed a castle at which they entertained European nobility and ran an enormous cattle ranch but owned very little, if any, land. More importantly and more broadly, the class differences were huge between the small ranchers with their scattered homesteads and their very different, intensive kinds of operations, on the one hand, and the big ranches that grazed the land over several arcs of the earth's surface. Some grazed their cattle from Sheridan to South Dakota, and from Casper to Nebraska. There were some who regarded the entire territory as their range. With such expansive notions, there was a built-in tendency to over-

stock the range. If the number of acres where cattle could be ranged was infinite, as some apparently believed them to be, then an infinite number of cattle could graze there. But the ranges were not infinite, and, in fact, given that the cattle needed water and would graze generally near water, much of the range remained only lightly used while other parts were heavily, very heavily, grazed—and overgrazed.

Plus, this was a system that may have worked well in the balmy climate of coastal Texas, but Wyoming winters were different from the gulf coast or even central Texas. In 1881 a severe storm caused many Wyoming ranchers to rethink just how well their livestock would be able to endure serious winters, yet the practice continued and the numbers of cattle on the range increased. Finally, a breaking point came during the winter of 1886-1887 as one storm after another hit the northern plains and wrought destruction, suffering, and death among the cattle herds. After the snow and ice thawed in the spring, dead cattle were everywhere to be found, not in ones and twos but in large numbers, huddled together in protected areas, vainly seeking shelter, clumped in creek bottoms, or gathered around a willow bush seeking food. Thousands and thousands lay dead. While some herds were spared, others were almost completely wiped out. As one woman summed it up, “By spring the stench was terrible.”⁶

FALL OF THE CATTLE KINGDOM

The consequences were profound for the ranchers. The biggest ranches succumbed to the combination of herd loss, casual bookkeeping (keeping inventory of their livestock by what the books showed they should have instead of by actual head counts), and large debts that could not be paid. With those forces working against them, they could not continue as they had. The ranches that endured did so only

In those times the calf tally was notched on a shingle, and the check book was the only additional record kept. By reference to his balance or overdraft at the bank, the rancher judged the degree of his success.

1884 Wyoming Stock Growers Association Report, quoted by Lewis Atherton, *The Cattle Kings* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 169.

by making changes. Foremost among these were putting up hay to feed their cattle during the winter, and that meant, in turn, cultivating hay, harvesting it, fencing the pastures to keep neighboring livestock out and to feed only their own livestock, and otherwise paying closer attention to the herds year-round. This meant also smaller herds; between 1890 and 1900 the number of cattle in the state, already reduced because of the storms and the necessary selling of livestock to pay debts, declined by about forty percent. If ranching had been revolutionized in the years before the devastating winter of 1886-1887 (and the winter of 1889-1890 in western Wyoming), it was revolutionized once again following that devastation.

Another trend was the increase in very small operations, small ranches and farms of people using the homestead laws to claim a piece of the Wyoming landscape for themselves and their families. In 1880 there had been 457 farms (a farm being either a crop farm or livestock ranch in the census definition) in the territory; in 1890 there were 3,125 farms and ranches. Settlers were moving in and they were taking up more and more of the land that had previously been grazed by the huge herds of cattle. By 1900 the number had almost doubled again with Wyoming showing 6,095 farms and ranches in the census. Clearly, the countryside was

... The public sentiment of this country is, and always has been, strongly opposed to the disposition of the public lands in large quantities, either to one person or to corporations. The genius of our institutions is in favor of comparatively small holdings, and the result of practical experience under this policy since the first settlement by colonists upon our shores, has caused it to become a cherished feature of our method of disposing of the public lands.

Joseph Nimmo, Jr., *Report in Regard to the Range and Ranch Cattle Business of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1885), 39.

changing. Wyoming was becoming a state of small farmers and ranchers, people who intended to stay.

The increase in the small farmers and ranchers when the cattle kings already felt vulnerable led to the conflict that we know as the Johnson County War. A continuing stream of small ranchers and farmers were taking up the land and water that had been part of the open range. The fences of the small ranchers further challenged the big ranchers. And disputes over ownership of cattle, especially the unbranded calves, created an increasingly tense environment. When some of the large ranchers moved against the small operators in Johnson County with an armed force of “invaders,” that effort failed to either intimidate or eliminate the homesteaders and further weakened the hold of the big ranchers on the Wyoming landscape. Wyoming was a cattle kingdom no more.

FORCES OF MIGRATION AND THE APPEAL OF HOMESTEADING

The migration to the countryside of people eager to claim the land in Wyoming actually ran counter to the dominant trend in the United States. America was rapidly becoming an urban nation. In the East and the Midwest cities were growing rap-

idly and people were leaving the farms to find jobs in the new urban centers. They were not leaving just because of the attraction of the bright lights and opportunities in the city; in the years following the Civil War it was increasingly difficult to stay on the farm. During the Civil War, because of the farm labor shortage, horse- and mule-drawn implements became much more common. Those implements, however, were expensive and, in order to justify the expense, farmers had to purchase additional land to put them to best use. Both of those purchases usually meant borrowing money and mortgaging the farm. Even more basic to the change, those farms also shifted to commercial production, families producing for the market instead of simply producing for their own use. This further meant switching to the most commercially successful crop or livestock, moving in the direction of specialized, single-crop production instead of the diversified crops and livestock they had previously raised.

Those changes were wrenching enough, but there was more. After the farms enlarged their holdings of land and equipment, and did so with greater debts, the monetary system of the United States began to shrink. There were literally fewer and fewer dollars in circulation, despite the fact that the population and economy were both growing. That pattern of deflation, in which each dollar was worth more each year, especially hit hard anybody who had taken out a long-term loan—like the farmers—since they would have to pay back the loans and mortgages in money that was more valuable than the money they had borrowed. As if that weren’t enough, because of advances in technology and shipping, the crops they produced were in greater abundance and also in greater competition with those of other farmers elsewhere. Thus, while farmers had to pay their debts with increasingly valuable money, the prices they received for their crops fell

lower and lower. They suffered from both heavier debt burdens and declining income—a devastating combination. Unable to pay their debts, they were foreclosed or otherwise forced from the farms. Some moved to the city. Some moved to places like Wyoming. There, land could still be homesteaded, acquired without a mortgage. And the hard work making improvements on the land would result in ownership and, in true Jeffersonian fashion, would bring some degree of freedom from the market instead of greater dependence on it. Already pushed around the face of the map by the forces of the market, a homestead of their own would provide an anchor and a refuge.

All over Wyoming homesteaders were staking their claims and building their houses, making their farms and ranches. True to form, they went to the water initially, settling along the drainages first, working their way up the streams higher and higher as the lower lands were taken. Then, once the streams were settled, they used irrigation to bring the water to the benches and flats, diverting the streams into canals to water their lands miles away. By the 1890s and 1900s, whether conceived as scourge (as ranchers often viewed them) or as Jeffersonian agrarians (as they often saw themselves), settlers were virtually everywhere in Wyoming.

Not only were homesteaders moving into Wyoming in larger numbers, they were also moving into areas that were sometimes more remote, or at least less accessible, and sometimes onto land that was more severe in its climate and topography, and they were taking up homes there too. Star Valley, Jackson Hole, the Big Horn Basin—each of these in the 1880s and 1890s saw people moving in, and in each of those areas the movement was often from west to east, and with definite religious bonds, as Mormon migrations from Idaho, both sanctioned and unofficial, focused on unsettled



The use of locally available building materials on a small operation is evident in this US Geological Survey photograph of homesteader Jack Hooten and his cabin, in the Rock Springs USGS quadrangle. Photograph: A. R. Schultz, USGS Photographic Library, Schultz, A. R. 0527 sar00527. Although undated, the image was probably made in 1907 when Schultz made other photographs in this area.

areas of Wyoming. As with many of their predecessors, the families of farmers and small ranchers in this wave of settlement did not plan to get rich growing crops and raising a few head of cattle. But they did plan to be free and independent and largely self-sufficient. They seldom took out mortgages to acquire their new land; they filed on homesteads.

The key to some of this settlement was irrigation and the key to irrigation was the policy instituted by Wyoming Territorial (and then State) Engineer, Elwood Mead. At the core of Mead's policy was the idea that water was a natural resource that belonged to the public, not to private individuals. The public could grant rights ("first in time, first in right") to its use by private individuals and corporations, but ultimately it

Experience has shown that wheat, oats, barley, rye flax, potatoes, sugar beets, turnips, rutabagas, lettuce, peas, carrots, alfalfa, millet, buckwheat and early onions can be raised successfully in the Platte Valley, wherever water can be put on the soil.

Bill Barlow's Budget, February 10, 1892



K 801 A Crew of Sheep Shearers at Work.

This photograph on a postcard mailed from Cheyenne in 1909 shows the prevailing system of shearing by crews in the outdoors. A partially rolled-up canopy is behind the crew to provide protection when needed; the structure in the center holds the bag for the wool. Postcard from Michael Cassity collection.

belonged to the public. This kept water from being entirely monopolized and Mead worked to make it as broadly available to the homesteaders, to the entire public, as possible. Irrigation projects all over the state were developed in the late nineteenth century, ranging from farmers and ranchers digging a ditch with a shovel to corporations developing land and selling parcels to be irrigated by elaborate systems of flumes, ditches, and laterals. By 1897 the Evanston newspaper could say, "We cannot call to mind any of the populated valleys in the county in which canals and ditches do not thread the surface from north to south, and from east to west."⁷ Many of the irrigation companies, however, proved just as unreliable as the promise of rain, and when they encouraged the homesteaders who bought their land to mortgage the properties, the homesteaders were sometimes left holding the bag—a very dry, empty bag.

The development of federal irrigation projects after 1902 on a much larger scale attracted still more homesteaders. They settled (1) in the Big Horn Basin with the construction of dams on the Shoshone River, with the Buffalo Bill Dam the effort's centerpiece, (2) on the North Platte with Pathfinder Dam and also a diversion dam near the Nebraska border, and (3) on a project on the Wind River Reservation using lands that had been taken from the Shoshone and Arapaho Indians after tribal lands had been distributed to individual members. Yet another project, which enlarged Jackson Lake, encouraged homesteading mainly downriver in Idaho where potato fields would be watered by the Snake River.

In addition to the development of irrigation in some places, the expansion of railroads around the turn of the century also stimulated settlement in other parts of Wyoming. The railroad, in fact, transformed large parts of the state by providing access to shipping and connection to markets previously unavailable and in that way encouraged production of cash crops. Livestock had conventionally been driven sometimes two hundred miles or more to the railroad, but that option had not been present for the growers of crops or the producers of wool where long, difficult wagon hauls were the only method. Plus, the railroad would be able to bring in heavy implements for the farms, dimension lumber for the buildings, and windmills to pump the water, and it imported on special "emigrant cars" more and more homesteaders seeking a home of their own, and all of these—machinery, people, water, trains—transformed the Wyoming landscape.

In addition to the homesteaders, another feature was rising on the plains and in the mountains. The census report for 1890 showed Wyoming with 712,520 sheep. Ten years later the census showed a total of 5,099,613 sheep, an increase of 716% in the decade. Sheep growing once again tallied more



animals than cattle ranching in Wyoming, and there was hardly a valley or range that did not see cattle being pushed aside or replaced by sheep. That is important because the practices in the two livestock operations were very much different. Critical to the grazing of sheep and collecting their wool is the necessity of moving them on both a daily and a seasonal basis. Separated into bands of 2,500-3,000 sheep under the protection and guidance of herder and dogs, the sheep would spend the summers in the high mountain country and the winters at lower elevations, often in places difficult for cattle to graze, like the Red Desert with its sage covered plains. During the days, the herder would customarily take the sheep to graze a different area than the day before, moving outward from the camp, where the sheepherder wagon and the sheep would bed down at night, in different directions like the spokes of a wheel. When one grazing area would be fully used, the wagon, herder, and sheep would move on to another location where the pattern would be repeated. Then in the spring, the sheep would gather at central locations to be shorn, dipped, and docked, and lambs would be born before they moved to the high country again.

This constant movement of sheep required substantial land and they often used the public domain—both the land in what was being set aside as national forests in the decades at the turn of the century and in the other lands that were open to homesteading and grazing generally. In addition, there were the outfits called “tramp herders,” people who ran their sheep but did not have a home base where they would graze or shear them; they would simply roam, sometimes in huge herds of tens of thousands of animals, across the countryside, antagonizing homesteaders, cattle ranchers, and other sheep operators wherever they went. Tensions rose along with the number of sheep in the state and, especially in the first decade of the twentieth century, violent episodes erupted between the sheep operators and the cattle ranchers. The use of “deadlines”—lines etched on the ground or defined by topographic features—both resolved some of the tensions, since they would separate cattle from sheep in a given area, and produced conflict, when sheep and herders crossed the line into cattle territory. The consequences of crossing a deadline were sometimes fatal. A rash of incidents in the 1890s and 1900s amounted to a virtual war between cattle and sheep op-

A double postcard captures the impressive size of a single herd of sheep on the move. Even larger herds began to range across Wyoming in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some of them many multiples of this, and some of them “tramp” herds without a range of their own. Postcard from Michael Cassity collection.

Aftermath of the raid on sheep at what became known as the Raid Lake Sheep Massacre in the future Bridger-Teton National Forest in 1902 in which possibly as many as 2,000 sheep were killed. The photograph is from the files of the Supervisor's Office, Bridger-Teton National Forest, Jackson, Wyoming, and is provided for use by Jamie Schoen.



erators. Thousands of sheep were killed, herders and owners were beaten and even murdered, and an atmosphere of terror pervaded the countryside. That violence subsided only after some cowboys in the Big Horn Basin were prosecuted—and convicted—for murder at what was known as the Spring Creek Raid in 1909, and after the imposition of regulations on grazing in the national forests. Those regulations, which required herders to own or lease land they could use when they were not on the forest, substantially reduced tramp herding, at least on the national forests.

Located near Tensleep, this small ranch or farmhouse appears to have been a part of the homesteading wave of the 1890s and 1900s. The date of the photograph is unknown but was prior to 1909. Note the sod roof on the log house. Photograph from collection of Michael Cassity.

A SURGE OF HOMESTEADING

The number, the vitality, the diversification, and the extent of homesteading in Wyoming has often been minimized because of widely held beliefs that Wyoming was never meant to be farmed, only grazed. That general view took several forms including the assumption that the land was too dry for farming, that it could only be productive in sizes far greater than any available to homesteaders, that the various homestead laws were pernicious both for the homesteader and everybody else since they ruined the land, and that those who tried to operate a small farm or ranch were destined to failure, sooner or later. These attitudes can easily be traced back to the large ranchers in the 1880s who saw homesteaders as a menace and they have since become deeply embedded as truisms in the cultures of agribusiness, economists, historians, and land managers.

The historical record, however, is somewhat different



from the prevailing assumptions. These people were not inevitable failures. Homesteading worked. In 1910, Wyoming had 10,987 farms and ranches, of which 89.01%—were operated by their owners. These were not share-croppers, tenant farmers, renters, serfs, or any other group beholden to the owner of the land they tilled; these were people living out the Jeffersonian formula of freehold democracy. While a small number were large operations, the kind that one might expect in a state where ranches at one time were bigger than counties, the overwhelming majority (81%) of these operations were each under 499 acres. In fact, the most common census grouping of farms, measured in terms of acres, were those in the 100-174 acre category. That classification included 3,816 farms, more than a third (35%) of all the farms and ranches in the state. Nearly half of all the farms and ranches in the state, 5,219 of them, were small operations of 174 acres or less. Possibly the most revealing fact is this: of the 9,779 farms owned by their operators in 1910, 7,815, or four out of every five, were absolutely free of any kind of mortgage on their property. Those eighty percent of the farms did not owe a dollar.⁸ This is not a usual attribute of failure. If anything, it suggests that the Jeffersonian dream was being put into practice and was being realized in Wyoming.

The rich smell of the virgin soil being turned over was gratifying to both of [my parents]. It held the hope of an inheritance that few before them had achieved. The dream of one day owning their land made all of the sacrifice and labor worthwhile.

Margaret Dillinger Bowden, 1916: *Wyoming, Here We Come!* (Gillette, Wyoming: privately printed by James H. Bowden and Jessie Outka, 2002), 17.



The farms and ranches were, in other words, decentralized, small, owner-operated, and independent of the lords of finance and, for that matter, independent of the ravaging potential of the market. The vast majority of Wyoming's farms and ranches grew both livestock and a variety of crops, and were diversified so as to produce the materials that the families on the farms needed and used. If there was a surplus, it could be sold on the market to obtain other goods, but selling was a choice, and even a luxury, not a requirement for survival. The formulation in all this is utter simplicity in its conception and is so straightforward and guileless as to appear almost naïve, but it is also a critical element that formed the foundation of economic, social, and political arrangements.

Working cattle in the Big Horn Basin around the turn of the century. Scrapbook photo from collection of Michael Cassity.



A new start for the Lenox family and their dry farm near Rozet, 1919. Postcard from collection of Michael Cassity.

DRY FARMING

One of the conspicuous developments in Wyoming agriculture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the increase in dry farming—the practice of growing crops without irrigation. Although some advocates of dry farming were almost religious in their zeal, and some made claims that “the rain follows the plow,” arguing that the more crops are grown, the more the rain will fall, by the end of the nineteenth century few people actually believed that. On the other hand, the techniques developed to produce crops with minimal rainfall—deep planting, plowing the moisture under after every rain to capture it, letting fields lie fallow every other year or more to accumulate moisture—had proven successful. And this was important too as the stream of immigration into Wyoming continued into the twentieth century. As settlement expanded, the amount of irrigable land dwindled with each claim taken out, and the methods of the dry farmer were applied to the land more and more.

In addition, the land laws changed to allow larger claims so that more land could be left fallow and thus retain more moisture for the crops when they were planted. Wyoming

congressman Frank Mondell, a powerful figure in the U.S. House of Representatives and a leading advocate for dry farming, secured enactment of the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909 (also known as the Dry-Farming Homestead Law) which increased the allowable size of a homestead claim to 320 acres, provided that the claimant cultivate one-fourth of the land, and it stipulated that there be no irrigable land, timber land, or mineral land within the entry.

At the same time, the Agricultural Extension Service, operating out of the University of Wyoming, surveyed those who had been practicing dry farming and shared the results with others around the state, providing essential information without making claims of magically turning deserts into the Garden of Eden.⁹ The farmers responding to this survey reported “that dry farming has been profitable in the locality for the past 19 years;” “there has never been an entire failure in the locality;” “thinks dry farming profitable if one could have 125 acres with proper equipment;” “the locality has been cropped profitably for 20 years.” The experiences varied, but farmers who responded to the survey made an important point: people were practicing dry farming with considerable success. Both at that time and since, the prevailing view has been that dry farming, at least in Wyoming, is inherently unsuccessful, and when successful requires much larger tracts than those available under the law for the support of a family. While it is certain that some who practiced dry farming did not succeed, why they failed can only be speculated; what this survey reveals, though, is that their failures, at any rate, were not due exclusively to the size of their farms or to the inherent folly of dry farming.

So the laws encouraged further settlement and dry farming made up a considerable portion of the growth in the number of farms between 1910 and 1920. Although the Enlarged

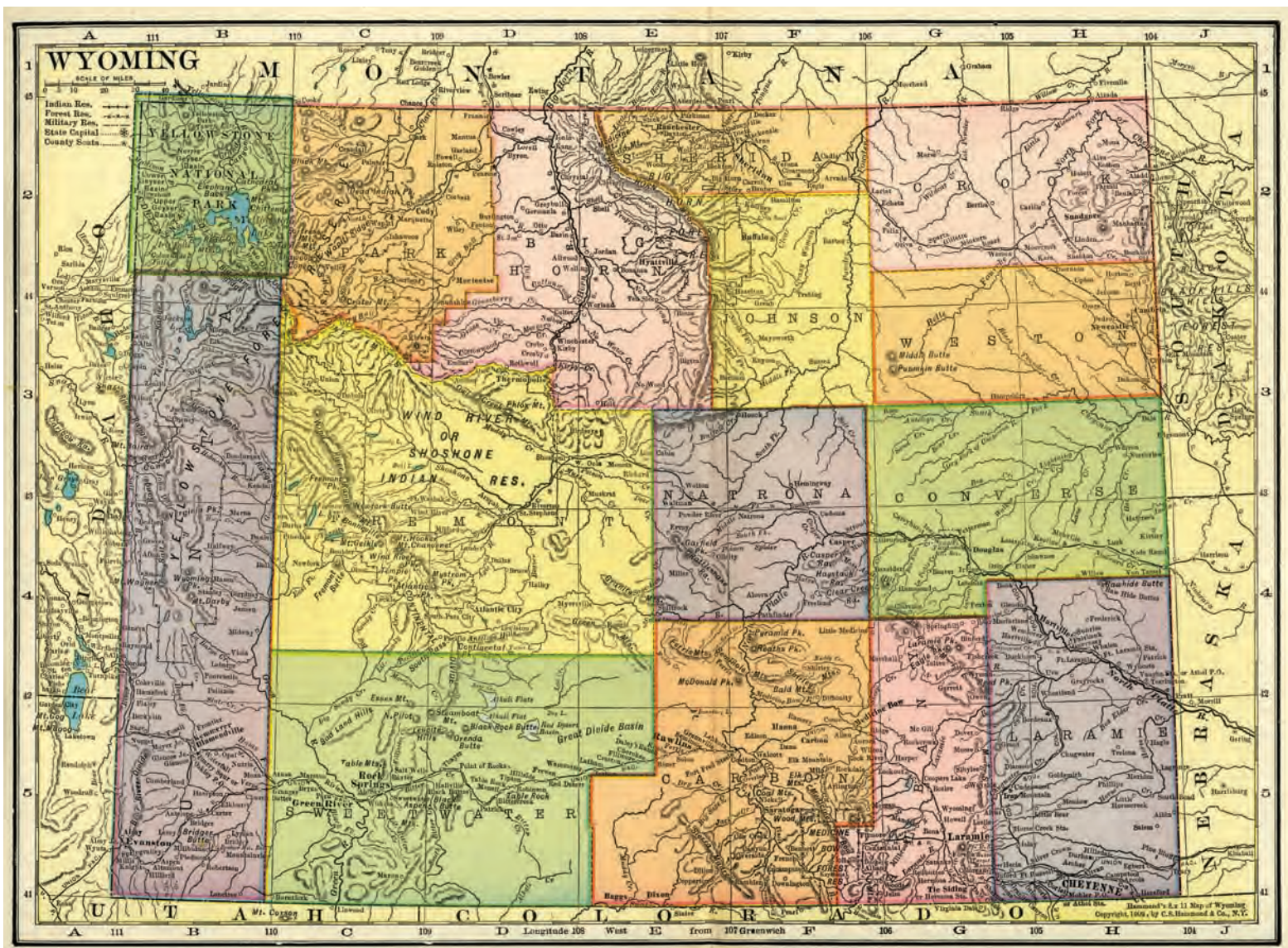
Homestead Act of 1909 made possible larger homestead acreages than before, pressure still mounted in Congress for even bigger claims and for easier terms. In 1912 Congress reduced the five-year residence requirement on the land to three and permitted the homesteader to be away from the farm for five months in each of those three years. In addition, the 1916 Stock Raising Homestead Act allowed homesteads to be established with 640 acres. This land had to be “chiefly valuable for grazing and raising forage crops,” and could not have timber that could be potentially harvested commercially, could not be susceptible to irrigation from known sources of water, had to be reasonably compact, and had to be land where that size was “reasonably required for the support of a family.”¹⁰ Not just the laws were being changed; the changes in the laws encouraged changes on the landscape and more and more settlers took up land, made Wyoming their home, and looked to the future with promise and hope.



Above: A powerful image of the fertility of the area and the future of dry farming in northeast Wyoming, this Stimson image was made at the Agricultural Experiment Station in Weston County. Photo: J. E. Stimson Collection, Wyoming State Archives, negative 2298.

Right: Geraldine Lucas homestead cabin on Cottonwood Creek, now part of Grand Teton National Park. In the 1990s and 2000s the cabin was carefully restored. Photo: Michael Cassity, 2009.





Wyoming, 1909. "Hammond's 8 x 11 Map of Wyoming" (New York: C. S. Hammond & Co., 1909).
 From collection of Michael Cassity.

PART II

TRANSFORMING FARMS AND RANCHES, TRANSFORMING LIVES IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

Many of the ranchers and farmers lived in extremely modest dwellings, sometimes dugouts or humble cabins, and those were not always just temporary quarters until a proper house was built. The building materials were close at hand and the price was right. On the other hand, there were also the large, ornate homes and ranches that in some areas have gained legendary status, but the most common operation was the middling farm / ranch of a few hundred acres or less on which homesteaders grew a small herd of cattle, some hay, some oats and barley, select other crops, some draft horses, ample poultry, a few pigs, and a vegetable garden that could be measured as a fraction of an acre—or acres. And it is important to remember that the size of the house does not determine its historical significance. The small or modest dwellings and ranch buildings of the multitudes were as much a part of the lives, perhaps more even, of those who worked to build the ranches and farms of the region.

The challenges of homesteading, in the broadest sense of developing a farm or ranch, were especially demanding if the homesteaders happened to be women—which a considerable number were. The roles and lives of women in early Wyoming constitute a large subject, filled with complexities and paradoxes, and in some respects those roles and lives varied from homestead to homestead and from person to person.

Only a few generalizations can be offered about the experience of women on the homesteads at that time and research in this subject is constantly being expanded and revised. It is clear, however, that women plainly had special and distinctive burdens because of their gender, including their maternal roles and often isolated lives, at least isolated from other women. It is also clear that women's work on the farm and ranch was part and parcel of a family system of production in which there was plenty of work to be done by everyone in the family. No one was exempt from that work and jobs and chores on the homestead required physical exertion, careful

As a girl back in England I had not been taught to do any house-work, but had always enjoyed the comforts of a modern home, and the shift from England to the Big Horn Basin was one that stands out as I review my life. I was neither a house-keeper, a cook, nor was I trained in the things of life that a mother should know, so you can perhaps imagine my plight as I assumed the responsibilities of wife, house-keeper and mother. My husband and I were very close. We loved each other, but to say the least, I was completely lost, and to make it worse I had grown as a child to love flowers, finery such as dainty curtains, pretty dishes, pictures, etc., as well as pretty clothes for myself. A woman's life at that time in the Basin was a substantial one, but not full and pleasant.

“Life of Martha Waln, Pioneer of Tensleep,” Wyoming State Archives, WPA Collections, subject file 856.

coordination, and a broad sense of responsibility. Everybody working in that system was expected to perform a variety of jobs that often crossed gender lines. There also appears to be a general correlation between subsistence, production-for-home-use agriculture and blurred gender roles on the one hand, and tightened gender roles and commercial agricultural production on the other hand. As the organization and purpose of agricultural production transformed, too did gender roles on the farms and ranches.

As it happened, the organization of labor and production on the farm and ranch, its relationship to markets, the role of technology, the role of gender and ethnicity, and the very purpose of their operations were all subject to stresses and strains in the early twentieth century. The farms were increasing in number, growing like a thriving crop in the field, Wyoming and a few other states still seemingly exempt from the larger national trend where people left the farms in droves and moved to the cities to become part of the urban working class. From 1910 to 1920 the number of farms in Wyoming increased from 10,987 to 15,748—an impressive increase. And still those farms and ranches were small—nearly

Then the place looked like a real farm, fenced, buildings,
the green crop coming up and I looked upon it with pride.

—J. Tom Wall

After you prove up, it's yours and nobody can come along
and tell you to get off.

—Wall's neighbor

From J. Tom Wall, *Crossing Old Trails to New in
North Central Wyoming* (Philadelphia: Dorrance &
Company, 1973), 189.

two-thirds of the farms (64%) were less than 500 acres in size. In 1920 still eighty-five percent of the farms were operated by the people who owned them. There were other trends, however, that suggested that the traditional system of farm organization and operation was being undermined, was being transformed. In 1890, 87% of the owner-operated farms in Wyoming were free of mortgages. This dropped to 80.8% in 1900 but it remained steady at that approximate level, despite the considerable growth in number of farms, and in 1910 still 79.9% of Wyoming's owner-operated farms were free from mortgages. By 1920, however, the percentage had plummeted and only 50.9% of the owner-operated farms in Wyoming could say that they had no mortgage.¹¹ This was a significant turning point in the lives of those people who took out the mortgages, and it was a significant turning point in the history of homesteading.

TECHNOLOGY AND AGRICULTURE

Obviously something deeper was going on than people suddenly deciding to mortgage the farm or ranch. Actually several things were going on. For one, the technology of agriculture was changing dramatically and, in turn, that technology was transforming the rural landscape. Sometimes the technology of agriculture is taken as a given and changes in technology are frequently lined up as a parade of progress in which the burdens of tilling the soil are gradually reduced, the productivity of the farm unit is increased, and all the advantages of modern life are brought to those outside the city. The historical record, however, is more complex. The technology clearly increased productivity, but instead of giving the farmer greater control over the elements of her or his life, the increasingly sophisticated and expensive technology undermined traditional systems and relationships and placed the farm in an increasingly precarious position.

The main implements of farming and ranching at the end of the nineteenth century were hand-held, were inexpensive, and were not much changed from what they had been even in biblical times. But a process of change began in which the implements grew bigger and more expensive, became more specialized, and required different kinds of agriculture. That can be seen in the process of threshing. People would thresh their grain in Wyoming, whether it was wheat for their bread or oats for their horses, with a flail—a simple tool that consisted of something like a short and a long broom handle attached to each other with a leather thong. The thresher would put the bundle of grain on a clean floor in the barn and, swinging the long handle like an axe, would bring the short piece crashing down on the bundle to separate grain from straw. This was a slow process, but it was exactly right for the small acreages of grain planted—several acres, say—and the rhythm and scale of operation was deeply and humanly comprehensible to everybody. It worked. It fit. This was a system of agriculture not suited for large-scale production for the market; it was a system that worked when producing for home consumption.

The simple flail was replaced by two machines—one, the thresher, to perform the actual work of threshing on a large scale, and the second, a mechanical engine to power the thresher. Several kinds of threshing devices emerged. Some were driven by horses walking in a circle, some by horses walking on a treadmill, and others were powered by steam. The steam-powered machines soon replaced the horse-powered threshers and this represented a major transformation of agriculture.

The thresher was a big machine and it performed a crucial part of the harvest process, separating the nutritious grain from the rest of the plant. After the grain had been cut,

The use of the flail. Source: J. T. Trowbridge, “Song of the Flail,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, 49 (September 1874): 501.



Threshing on W. J. Barker’s Ranch, Parkman, Wyoming, 1910 or earlier. This postcard illustrates the new, mechanized threshing process. Wagons bring shocks of grain to the site where the threshing machine is parked at right in the field that has been harvested. The man on the wagon is taking grain bundles from the wagon to put into the machine; the straw and grain are separated by the thresher and the grain is then winnowed by a fan and clean grain is sacked; the straw is piled after it leaves the blower. The machine is powered by a long belt connecting it to the drive wheel of the steam tractor at left. A total of eleven workers are involved in this scene. Postcard (postmarked August 22, 1910 in Ranchester) from the collection of Michael Cassity.



after it had been gathered into bundles, after the bundles had been arranged in stacks called shocks or cocks, they were taken to the thresher; the machine did not journey into the fields but was parked at a convenient point. Wagons would converge, bringing bundle after bundle of wheat or oats or other grain to be handed in daisy-chain fashion to an operator feeding the grain into the machine. The threshing machine would feed the bundles of grain tossed onto a conveyor belt or chain into its innards and separate the straw from the grain; the grain and the chaff—the husks surrounding the kernels of grain—would fall into a different compartment and a fan would blow the chaff and dust away from the grain during the drop so that only the grain itself landed in the bottom. An elevator, or conveyor, would then lift the grain continuously up to be expelled by the machine either into bags or into a stack. The straw would continue separately through the thresher, flailed more, as it were, to be sure that all grain was removed and captured and the straw was blown out of a chute to form a separate stack. The whole process was fast and continuous and the crew operat-

ing the thresher had to work hard and fast to keep up with its ravenous appetite for grain.

That cluster of tasks occupied some of the threshing crew. Others were involved in keeping the machine operating, managing burps in the flow of the crop and transforming it from cut plants into separated grain, straw, and chaff. Still others were positioned at the output to bag the grain and stack the bags. It was, in a sense, an assembly line, and the thresher was, in the same sense, a factory in the field. As with factories, the rhythm and speed of work had changed so that now workers paced their actions in response to the needs and demands of the tool, not the tool responding to the workers' guidance, speed, and needs.

Besides the threshing machine, the other part of the system was the steam-powered traction engine, a powerful engine capable of moving itself as well as powering other equipment, towing the other equipment along behind it. The steam engine would be fired up and its drive wheel connected to the threshing machine by a long canvas belt so that the two machines were usually around forty or fifty feet apart. That distance was necessary to keep the fire for the boiler far from the dried grain. In the future, the steam-powered traction engine would be called simply "tractor," but in the early years the outfits were mainly steam engines that could move. The early steam engines, in fact, resembled more railroad locomotives than they did modern tractors. They were huge, they were loud, and they required two operators, sometimes three, on the engine itself, and always more if the people hauling fuel and water are included. With their enormous weight and their great steel wheels, their tracks were like the tracks of the giant dinosaurs that once roamed Wyoming. As they left a striking imprint on the earth, they left just as indelible an imprint on the minds of those who beheld the ar-

We hear its approach long before we can see it—a distant clank and rumble beyond the crest of the hill. Louder and louder. A massive bulk materializes, black in the thickening twilight, a smoking monster with a fiery glow in its belly; it drags behind it an even massier bulk. . . . The traction engine grunts cautiously down the hill, the separator lurching behind it, and is directed to its berth near the grain stacks. Pails of water from the ditch quench the fire in its belly; a neglected spark could send a whole season's harvest up in flames. The engineman comes to the house for a wash, a late supper and a bed in the bunkhouse. The rest of the crew will report in the morning.

Ted Olson, *Ranch on the Laramie* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 186.

rival of the big machines and on the social order the engines helped to transform.

The mechanical thresher and the steam engine held many consequences for the organization of production, but they especially encouraged expanded production, and especially expanded production of those grains that could be sent to market—in other words, they powerfully promoted the commercialization of agriculture and the shift away from production for use in home consumption to production for market. This was not just an encouragement but an absolute necessity since these were very expensive machines, even expensive to rent (and to pay for the crew), and that expense could only be justified by increased production and increased production of cash crops at that. That further implied the necessity of expanding the acreage so that more could be planted to be harvested. And generally this purchase of land involved acquiring a mortgage. One other consequence of the use of a mechanical thresher and steam engine was the inauguration of a system of transient labor following the harvesters, over time replacing the networks of neighbors helping each other out. Finally, the steam “traction engine” was on its way to becoming the tractor, although that evolution would take several decades to become complete.

If the threshing process sometimes resembled a factory *in* the field, a factory *near* the field or in the towns served by the fields could initiate changes that rippled through the entire countryside. Flour mills routinely encouraged area farmers to put more land into wheat; alfalfa mills similarly provided an enticement for the cultivation of alfalfa so that local crops could be turned into alfalfa meal for livestock feeding. Both appeared in many parts of the state. But it was the sugar beet processing plants that worked a more powerful influence. In the Big Horn Basin, the various irrigation projects had



Steam plow on Unland's farm, Douglas. This steam tractor is the same device that would power threshing machines; here it is breaking sod. The huge machine required two operators on board, both visible in this photograph. Photo: J. E. Stimson Collection, Wyoming State Archives, negative 2925.

opened up land for settlement and farming especially in the northwest part along the Shoshone River, and in the eastern part along the Bighorn River, with those areas farther from streams remaining ranch land. But the farms were small and many. And, despite the financial burdens associated with irrigation assessments, often involving mortgages, they were to a surprising degree oriented to producing for use rather than for the market, managing to scrape together enough to meet their obligations by selling just a little on the market. One account that examined the agriculture of the area reported, “Small farms, diversified crops, and intensive cultivation if great yields were expected, were the chief characteristics of the irrigated area of the Big Horn Basin after all the projects were in operation. A few of the old cattle ranches had placed considerable tracts under cultivation, sometimes as many as a thousand or more acres, but the forty or eighty acre farm unit predominated.”¹² This changed when sugar beets became an important part of the basin's production. Various political, economic, and educational leaders urged



Germans from Russia, the Wostenburg family is shown harvesting sugar beets near Worland. Undated photo by Rico Stine in Dan Healy Photo Collection, Washakie County Museum, Worland. Photo is provided compliments of the Washakie Museum-Worland, Wyoming.

farmers in the areas susceptible to irrigation to take up sugar beets. To produce sugar beets, however, a factory had to be near since the beets could not be shipped long distances or stored where they might freeze. The problem was that a factory would not locate in those areas until sufficient beet production was assured. It was a chicken-or-egg situation, but the impasse was broken by farmers contracting to produce enough beets and the railroad stretched its lines closer and closer. In 1907 Lovell shipped out thirteen cars of beets. In 1916 that community sent to Billings three hundred cars of beets and that appears to have been sufficient to cause the Great Western Sugar Company to build a factory in Lovell the same year. The next year the Utah Wyoming Sugar Company built a factory at Worland.

Along the Bighorn River, the shift to commercial agriculture was substantial and beets became the focus of a single-crop system of production. This held other consequences too, especially in the matter of farm labor. The fields were

larger and the family's own labor was not enough to tend the labor-intensive beets, so outside workers were imported. Historian Charles Lindsay, who made a close study of this process, records, "The first success with beets was achieved by importing German Russians to do the field labor required to grow them. Later on these laborers were replaced by large numbers of Mexicans, who contracted by the acre to thin and cultivate the crop, and were satisfied to realize a living wage on the labors of all members of the family, old and young."¹³ Not only were the fields and farms larger as a result of the shift to commercial sugar beet production, but the labor system changed so that migrant labor became a fixed feature.

The same forces unfolded elsewhere in the state. At Douglas, Wheatland, and Torrington, a major push began in 1915 and 1916 to promote the growth of sugar beets on the irrigated lands there, and once again contracts were signed obligating farmers to plant the beets for five years. Elsewhere, the Holly Sugar Company opened a sugar factory in Sheridan in 1915, and thereupon Levi Leiter, who had taken over the Pratt and Ferris cattle ranch, "leased his operation to the Holly Sugar Company and by means of the tenant system, brought hundreds of families into the Lower Clear Creek Valley for the production of sugar beets."¹⁴ The Ucross Foundation, later a resident on some of that land, is more explicit: "Gradually, the properties were divided into individual tenant farms and leased to many of the Russian-German immigrants who had come west. This tenant 'project' was called the Leiter Estates, and most of the farmers grew sugar beets."¹⁵ This was a single-crop, commercial system of agriculture with an exclusive focus on the market and this was the same pattern evident in the Big Horn Basin. It was also the pattern of the future.

If farming was changing, so too was livestock raising. The open range had largely disappeared by the 1910s and the

Texas system had generally been replaced with something resembling the Midwestern system. Fences criss-crossed the range keeping some cattle in and other cattle out, and ranchers grew tons and tons of hay for the winters ahead and stored it in stacks that were works of art—plumb, straight, and secure. Maintaining fences and ditches, once unthinkable on Wyoming ranches, became a continuing chore and an object of pride as well as of functional significance. Roundups continued, but they were not the huge open-range activities that once prevailed; they would be smaller events and often would take place on private land, even within the corrals adjacent to the barns and ranch houses. Some ranches began to specialize, turning in many instances to dairy cattle, an enterprise that could take handy advantage of new technology for separating cream and also make use of the beet tops from the growing sugar beet operations. Dairy cattle, after all, would not range far and a system of feeding was an integral part of the operation.

The dairy industry was indeed an industry, but wool growing had already taken on industrial contours with the systematic processing of sheep, and it became even more industrial in technology and in organization in the 1910s. Those years were difficult years for the sheep business; during the decade the number of sheep in Wyoming dropped from 5,397,161 to 1,859,775, a decline of two-thirds. Blizzards had exacted a terrible toll on both human and beast in 1911-1912; plus, very much like the 1886-1887 winter had done for the cattle ranchers, the winter kills also forced the owners to sell sheep they had left in order to cover their huge debts. The sheep operators were being thinned just as the herds were. The sheep business became more intensively managed and adopted systems to protect and increase their sheep, such as lambing sheds, and in some instances feeding them corn and alfalfa through the winter, not just in the storms. But these were en-



hancements in the operation that not everybody could afford; if anything, this more “scientific” and industrial organization of sheep and wool production separated the large, well-capitalized operator from the owners of small herds who continued on in the traditional ways.

The major innovation in the sheep industry, though, was the introduction of factory system methods and organization in the shearing process. The design of the seventeen “Australian” shearing sheds constructed in Wyoming in 1915 and 1916 was “merely the highly organized system peculiar to an Eastern factory brought to a Western shearing shed,” according to W. T. Ritch, who actually designed and built them.¹⁶ It was an assembly line in which sheep were prepared for shearing in sweating rooms, channeled into a big shearing room where twenty shearers removed their wool with electric clippers, doing so in a systematic fashion that separated belly wool from the rest, and then the wool was skirted (further separated according to location and fineness), and finally

Branding at 41 Ranch, 1915, near Buffalo. The end of the open range sometimes meant that branding would take place near the ranch headquarters. Photo: Johnson County Library, Local History Collections.

Constructed as a model Australian Shearing Plant at Walcott, the Australian system was soon dropped but the sheds became a critical part of large-scale shearing operations. Source: Stanley H. Hart, *Wool: The Raw Materials of the Woolen and Worsted Industries* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Textile School of the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art, 1917), 107.



the fragments were sorted and baled by hydraulic presses—all in huge sheds organized and arranged to facilitate the processing. These sheds were at the heart of the new system of processing sheep and wool, and they continued to be used for decades afterwards. The system within, the Australian system, however, was quickly dropped when dealers and manufacturers opposed it (since the traditional system of bagging unsorted wool allowed buyers to pay lower prices) and when the closely shorn sheep proved more vulnerable to spring storms. There was, however, no mistaking that the sheep industry was actually an industry—just as much as the industries and factories dominant in other parts of the nation. And in that industry, the owners lived in town and the workers stayed in the countryside, practicing their own herding craft, which was pre-industrial to the extreme, often representing vastly different cultures, especially the Basques and Mexican Americans.

DIVERSITY ON THE HOMESTEAD

That latter point underscores a further element of Wyoming homesteading, ranching, and farming: it was not a monolithic

culture of similar people all sharing the same kinds of lives and experiences. The experiences of African American homesteaders are coming to light increasingly and they show that additional burdens were placed on their shoulders because of the color of their skin. The migrant workers who supplied the labor in the fields were increasingly not the Germans from Russia who initially traveled to Wyoming to work, but Mexican Americans and Japanese Americans. And women who took advantage of the homestead laws, once they were broadened to allow for more than “heads of families,” faced the same challenges of growing crops and livestock as the men did. In addition, however, they had to overcome social and cultural obstacles that men did not, one of which was a lack of support and even resistance from men, which complicated their own struggles. Even Dr. Bessie Rehwinkle, a woman who made her own way in a man’s world when she became a physician, homesteaded near Carpenter and had to go against the advice of her “good father [who] was very unhappy about my plans and tried his utmost to persuade me to change my mind.”¹⁷ And what they found, when they succeeded in one way or another, may have been all that more

meaningful given those circumstances. Elinore Pruitt Stewart, famous for her *Letters of a Woman Homesteader*, widely and eloquently publicized the virtues and rewards of homesteading for women. The fact that Ms. Stewart did not actually prove up on her homestead in Sweetwater County, and acquired her original claim only through careful maneuvering within the technicalities of the law and taking advantage of the opportunities available to different members of a family, suggests both the importance of families in successful homesteading and the complexity sometimes involved in the realization of a dream of independence.¹⁸

AGRICULTURE, HOMESTEADING, AND THE CHALLENGES OF MODERN SOCIETY

Rural life was becoming more complicated, more challenging, and more “modern.” As if the powerful currents of change were not already strong enough to reconfigure the countryside, Wyoming’s farms, ranches, and homesteads received an additional jolt from the forces of war. Although in a crude way war seemed to be good for the domestic economy, and for agriculture in particular, because of the additional demand it created, a closer look reveals serious problems with that picture. World War I not only provided a different economic and social stimulus for changes in farming and ranching in Wyoming but also marked the beginning of a larger transformation of the structure, purpose, and processes of the farms and ranches, and challenged the nature, the meaning, and the future of the homestead. Farm price supports increased income for those crops, like wheat, which the government encouraged to support the war, and Wyoming produced more wheat than ever before—a lot more in fact. This meant taking land out of production of other crops that had been used for home consumption, especially oats, but the op-

portunity was in many cases irresistible and people were, at any rate, only doing what their government asked of them. In addition, the higher prices received as a result of World War I encouraged farmers and ranchers to expand their operations, to purchase additional acreage, to increase their herds, and to invest in machinery. And that required borrowing money and often mortgaging the farm.

Those changes and those obligations were possibly not a major concern at the moment since higher prices and increased production seemed to outweigh other considerations in the short run. But when the war was over, when price supports were dropped, and when those countries that had been at war started producing agricultural goods again, the situation was significantly bleaker. Debts had to be paid but income to pay them dwindled. Plus, there were now industrial farms, giant operations that were owned by banks instead of farmers, that used a dozen or more big tractors at once, that measured their size in the thousands of acres, and that produced exclusively for the market, not for family use, that produced just a single crop (usually wheat), and that were in virtually every sense, factories in the field. The end of the war marked the beginning of a long downward spiral in the nation’s—and in Wyoming’s—farms and ranches that would not end until World War II.

The feeling of being a landowner was a new and an exhilarating experience to me. To be able to say that this fine stretch of land is my own, my very own, does something to one’s ego. It gives one a sense of security, of stability, of belonging, and of being a part of the land itself.

Dr. Bessie Efner Rehwinkle in her autobiography, in Marcia Meredith Hensley, *Staking Her Claim: Women Homesteading the West* (Glendo, Wyoming: High Plains Press, 2008), 171.

However much Wyoming homesteaders and farmers and ranchers saw themselves as independent sovereigns on the land, and many did, sometimes they were connected to the rest of the world in subtle but powerful ways that left them vulnerable to changes in distant places. When war broke out in foreign lands, the prices they paid or received fluctuated accordingly. If they were dependent on those prices, their own lives also altered. If they had taken out loans and the bank had problems because of the system the banks were a part of, then the farmers and ranchers also had problems. A banking crisis somewhere else could create a crisis in even the most remote parts of Wyoming. People's fates in life seemed to have less and less to do with their own hard work or thrift or strong values, unless, of course, they could stand independent of the marketplace and the modern economy in some kind of self-sufficient, subsistence agriculture.

The extent of their involvement and dependence on this new system sometimes came as a shock to people who thought they were doing everything right, people who sacrificed and scrimped and saved to build up their homestead. A fairly typical family near Moorcroft learned the hard way how the modern world worked. Charles Floyd Spencer's parents had immigrated to a homestead near Thornton, lived in a tent, then built a homespun house, and raised their own grains and poultry and livestock and vegetables in the usual diversified, self-sufficient way. They gradually acquired a few more head of cattle and milk cows and some sheep. When World War I came, their son, Charles Floyd Spencer, joined the army and was away for two years; when he returned he was old enough to file on his own homestead, which he did. The family expanded its operation and purchased more sheep. A bank in Moorcroft knew Spencer and knew that he was experienced and reliable and sold him five hundred

"fine young breeding ewes that were due to lamb the first of May." (The bank had acquired these sheep in another action involving their former owner—possibly a sign of events to come.) The price was high, but they were good sheep, soon to increase in number and soon to be shorn too. Besides, the bank would loan the money for the purchase. Spencer's father put up the family homestead as collateral on the mortgage, which was no problem since the initial mortgage that the bank wanted was just a short-term loan for six months; in the fall it would be replaced with a long-term note. In that six-month period, however, the price dropped on livestock and "We were caught along with many others who could not meet the short-term loans." The Moorcroft bank closed when its parent bank in Cheyenne called in its notes, and "dad's homestead, that he had labored on for ten years, and all the sheep in the newly-purchased band, together with their lambs, were turned back to the bank for the cancellation of notes due them."¹⁹ Since Spencer had only recently filed on his own homestead, and did not yet have title to it, it was not covered in the mortgage; he was thus able to keep it. He started over again there, but his parents moved to Washington state, where they too started over again, their Wyoming homestead dream crushed in the juggernaut of the modern system of agriculture and banking.

It is always difficult to define the end of one historical era and the beginning of another since history is never neat and tidy. But sometimes there are events that symbolize the larger changes taking place and the downturn that took place at the end of World War I was probably such an event. In this case, it marked, not on a calendar but on a spectrum of social organization, the demise of individual homesteading and the rise of modern, economically integrated, commercial agriculture.

PART III

LEAVING THE LAND BEHIND

A LEGACY OF AGRICULTURE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The pattern that shaped Wyoming ranches and farms, from the small self-sufficient homestead to the large corporate operation, was one very much familiar to modern observers. Production becomes increasingly specialized, interconnected, synchronized, and organized—not at all independent and local. To put it even more simply, when the farm and ranch became more of a business than it was a way of life or the anchor of an independent existence, a corner had been turned. As it happened, most farms and ranches in the 1920s were still closer to Jeffersonian homesteads than they were to modern business operations, but change was in the air. By the end of the 1920s, three-fourths of all farms and ranches still had no tractor. The vast majority of Wyoming's farms and ranches (12,195 out of 16,011) were operated by their owner—family farms. General farming operations continued to make up a substantial part of the farms and ranches—as opposed to the narrowly specialized groupings. And the number of farms and ranches continued to increase during the 1920s, although not with as much growth as in previous decades. (Almost half the counties in the state showed an increase in numbers of farms and some counties, like Campbell, experienced a virtual land rush in the decade with homesteaders setting up dry farms.) On the other hand, by 1930, the diversified agriculture of the self-sufficient farm, at one time the hallmark of the homestead, no longer repre-

sented the wave of the future. Possibly the clearest indicator of the transformation underway came in the mortgages these operations were trying to pay off. In 1920, the number of owner-operated farms and ranches without mortgages was still a majority, but just barely so—51%. Ten years later that percentage had dropped to 30%. By 1930 the vast majority, even of owner-operated farms and ranches, had taken out mortgages and were paying on them. They were fully entwined with the local, state, and national economy.

There were advantages to that market connection, of course, and with it farmers and ranchers had access to more outlets for their production. The hazard of the market connection was high, though, especially since most of the 1920s was marked by an agricultural depression. After 1924, agricultural income declined while debts contracted earlier had

Homestead entries flourished in the late 1910s and into the early 1920s. Settlers arrived primarily from neighboring states, established homes, and developed a permanent community. They attempted farming with mixed success and failure, and they supplemented their operations with animal husbandry. During the 1920s, a number accomplished their objectives, as is evident in the improvements and subsequent patenting of their homesteads.

William P. Fischer, "Homesteading the Thunder Basin: Teckla, Wyoming, 1917-1938," *Annals of Wyoming*, 71 (Spring 1999): 23.

Wool and mutton prices were falling [1924], and it became harder and harder for my father to pay the bills and meet a payroll. The vagaries of climate in Wyoming, always a gamble for ranchers and farmers, also had its part in our loss of income. The Bigelow Bank in Ogden, where Dad had his savings account, closed its doors. Only a few cents on the dollar was ever recovered from our account and that over a period of years. The final blow came when Dad couldn't meet payments on his bank loan in Evanston, and they foreclosed on the ranch.

I will never forget that day when Dad received the foreclosure notice. He sat on the front porch with his head bowed. Tearfully, he said, "All I know how to do is work with my hands." He was sixty-three years of age, a time nowadays when most people retire. It was a terribly sad day for all of us, when they came to take most of the livestock, wagons, sheep camps and equipment. They took ownership of all our acreage in Utah, and most of the Wyoming land except the original homestead and the ranch buildings, leaving about 10,000 acres in our ownership.

Ruth M. Irwin, "Life on a Wyoming Ranch: Early 20th Century," in Ruth M. Irwin Papers, 1990-1992, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Part 2, 1

to be paid, leaving the farmers and ranchers caught in between with no place to turn except to their local banks for extensions of their loans. But if farmers and ranchers were in trouble during the 1920s, so were the banks. The nation's banking system was in crisis throughout the 1920s and the most vulnerable part of that system was the small banks in the rural communities. Between 1921 and 1929 nearly 6,000 banks failed in the United States, an amount equal to twenty percent of the total. Wyoming lost 101 (out of a total of 153) banks during the 1920s, and only thirty-two banks opened for business in the decade. Sixty-seven communities in Wyoming lost banks during that period. The first few years of the decade saw the banking system contract sharply but the failures of the banks shot up dramatically in 1924. The problem

was that when the farmer's bank was in trouble, so was the farmer. And when the farms and ranches were in trouble, so too was the bank that held their mortgages, but it was usually the bank that got its money from the farms, not the farms winning out over the banks. The numbers are fuzzy at best, but there is no mistaking that foreclosures (and bankruptcies and defaults on contracts, and sales to avoid foreclosure, and surrendering the title to avoid foreclosure) became increasingly common during the 1920s. A migration away from the farms and ranches that people had built up in Wyoming was underway.

The Great Depression that officially began in 1929 with the stock market crash merged with the already serious agricultural depression to make life difficult for Wyoming's farmers and ranchers and to transform their lives in powerful ways. There was the matter of the bank crisis which deepened and almost with each passing day took a greater toll on the farms and ranches. Then there was the crisis in the cities; urban unemployment may seem a world away from life on a ranch or farm in the Green River valley or Laramie Plains or Big Horn Basin, but when workers in the cities lost their jobs, they were not able to buy the groceries—the beef, the lamb, the corn, the wheat—that their families needed, nor could they buy the sweaters and jackets and shoes to keep warm. When consumers in the cities could not afford to buy what Wyoming agriculture produced, Wyoming farmers and ranchers also suffered. Their income fell and they too could not pay their bills, their debts mounted, and their banks wanted their money. As if that were not enough, the drying up of purchasing power in the rest of the nation combined in the early 1930s with another force, a force of nature that dried up the lands that farmers and ranchers used. The years between 1931 and 1936 were dry years—very dry years. Three

years—1933, 1934, and 1936—were terribly dry, even worse than the others. In 1934, Lorena Hickok, dispatched by Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes to provide him a firsthand report on the situation in the West, wrote Ickes from eastern Wyoming, “I saw range that looked as though it had been gone over with a safety razor.”²⁰ Livestock had to be sold since feed and water were scarce. Crops even on irrigated land withered in the field, if they ever started. And then crickets and grasshoppers marched across parts of the state. The farmers and ranchers were in trouble. In 1933, prominent cattle rancher A. L. Brock in Johnson County effectively captured the situation when he observed, “Many of the once well-to-do farmers and stockmen have lost their farms and homes, largely on account of the financial conditions of the country. Many of the stockmen in Wyoming are using more or less borrowed money and owing to the present financial conditions of the country many of them have very little equity left.”²¹

It would seem that the problems facing the ranchers, farmers, and homesteaders in Wyoming were impossible to solve. Working harder, the traditional solution to life’s problems, would not, by itself, turn around a social problem of such huge dimensions. But since the problem had a great deal to do with the organization of society and the operation of national markets and institutions, many people felt that government might be able to make some changes. And a new administration, Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, came into office in 1933 pledged to do exactly that. Then the question became: What kind of changes? Benefitting whom? For what purpose? Those questions are still debated and there is always room for vigorous discussion. But there appears to be a general pattern in the New Deal that can be traced.

Perhaps most central and also most controversial, wheth-

er it was for better or worse, was the New Deal’s emphasis on planning. A centralized planning structure ran counter to the values and philosophies of people who considered themselves rugged individualists, even if precisely the same concentration and centralization of power was at work in the private sector. Henry Wallace, Secretary of Agriculture, and Rexford Tugwell, a key figure in the Department of Agriculture, however, had concluded that the individualism of farmers and ranchers was making their problems worse, that they needed to act collectively to help themselves and each other. At that point, the issue took an interesting turn. According to the planners in the Agriculture Department, the problem of the Depression was one of overproduction; the prices farmers and ranchers received were so low because the markets were glutted, forcing prices to the bottom while the nation wallowed in surplus grains and meats. According to this approach, the way for farmers and ranchers to help themselves was first of all to drop their attacks on big business and to recognize that farming is a business, not a way of life. Secondly, they needed to collectively cut production of their crops and livestock, thus creating an artificial shortage which would cause commodity prices to rise, bringing more money to the producers. All this had to be done *collectively*, the argument ran, since individual farmers and ranchers could not accomplish this by themselves; if some reduced their production others might increase it and cancel out any gains or even take advantage of the sacrifices of the others by profiting from their losses.

There were, of course, critics of this approach and of this whole philosophy. Some, even inside the administration, argued that the problem was not really overproduction, but underconsumption. Farmers and ranchers are in bad shape, these critics maintained, because people in the cities do not

have the income to buy what is being produced on the farms and ranches. The solution from this perspective was to increase employment through government works projects and thereby increase consumption—purchasing power—and also to reduce consumer prices on agricultural products by breaking up the concentrations of food processors and other middlemen through enforcement of the anti-trust laws. This combination would hopefully both lower retail prices and increase farm and ranch income and in that way bring about a more decentralized economy in which individual farmers and ranchers would once again prosper and people in the countryside would share an interest and healthy economy with the people who lived in the cities instead of working against each other.

The programs set forth by the New Deal followed the formulation of the problem as that of overproduction, not underconsumption. Accordingly, the federal government moved to reduce production especially by using the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and the Drought Relief Program in 1933 and 1934 and following years. The AAA provided, among other things, for farmers who

produced specified “basic commodities” to voluntarily agree, in actual contracts, to reduce production in exchange for government payments; the formula was complex but the goal of the payments—ever since known as farm subsidies—was to generate commodity prices closer to what they had been in more prosperous times. This was a long-term reduction program, and it would take a long time to see results, but the problem was also immediate, so the government also sought to thin the livestock herds immediately. Some of the animals purchased by the government were used for relief purposes, but the image of slaughtering cattle, regardless of the number, and letting them rot just so meat prices would go up at a time when people were hungry, endures as one of the most discussed and controversial legacies of the New Deal’s agricultural programs. A similar program reduced acreages of crop production by calling upon farmers to take some of their land out of cultivation. The object of both programs was to reduce production to increase prices on farm and ranch commodities.

The Wyoming Stock Growers Association and others in Wyoming did not care for government administration of the program although the WSGA asked for the government to purchase 7,000 head of cattle per day and its leaders had advocated herd reduction for some time. The chief critics of the program in Wyoming were the small operators with only a few head of cattle or a few acres to take out of production. By using a system that paid subsidies on a per acre or per animal basis, the operators who needed the most help, those with the smallest herds and acreages, received the least.

The issue was framed in similar terms when the government addressed the problem of erosion and overuse of the public domain. The national forests were already regulated and permits were issued for a set number of livestock to

Killing the cattle, . . . and just leaving them lay. . . . When we’d drive in from the Osage field to Osage there would be cattle just lying along the road. Bloating in the sun, their legs stiff and up in the air. They’d pay the ranchers \$20-\$25 and then shoot the cattle and leave them lay there. They wouldn’t let anybody go in and butcher them to use for meat because that would be defeating the purpose of the slaughter of the cattle in the first place. It was to try to make the price go up and reduce the supply.

Mabel Brown recalling herd reduction program of the 1930s. Oral History, OH-412, Mabel Brown interviewed by Phil Roberts, May 9, 1979, Wyoming State Archives.

graze those lands in a way that was supposed to prevent overgrazing. That still left large amounts of public land, lightly administered by the General Land Office, essentially unregulated and thus often overused. The tramp herds of sheep grazed in those areas and land was still available for homesteading. In 1934 Congress wrote into law the Taylor Grazing Act, a measure which created a new agency, the Division of Grazing (later the Grazing Service and then the Bureau of Land Management), to regulate use of that land. This law also reversed course on homesteading; where the laws for nearly a century had become increasingly lenient and encouraging of homesteading, the Taylor Grazing Act eliminated new claims on the public domain except in Alaska and in projects administered by the Bureau of Reclamation. The Wyoming Stock Growers Association had expressed its opposition to the federal regulation of the range, preferring instead that the federal government simply turn over the lands to the states for distribution to private hands. In truth, however, the cattle ranchers and the wool growers, certainly the major operators, found provisions to like in the measure, especially the part ending homesteading.

The activities designed to improve the range brought a variety of government agencies into action generally to make the land more usable for livestock. Thus the government created programs to drill wells, build dams and stock tanks, build corrals on national forests, construct bridges for sheep over streams, build dikes and ditches, clean out springs and seeps and improve them for better access, and put in trails and driveways as well as camping areas for herders and their sheep. The Civilian Conservation Corps provided much of the workforce for these many projects, especially in the Forest Service and the Division of Grazing which had minimal staffing.



Aside from halting homestead claims and rebuilding the range, these programs also attempted to undo what they saw as damage done by homesteading in years past. The homesteader who was once a folk hero for the nation now became vilified, blamed for the erosion and depletion of the grasslands of the Great Plains. In the 1930s, the official view was that the areas of the state where erosion had taken place were extensive and included the area with most farms: "The farm land areas in Wyoming which are considered problem areas are chiefly centered in the eastern half of Wyoming. These areas include portions of Campbell, Weston, Niobrara, Converse, Goshen, Platte and Johnson counties. In most of these areas erosion is prevalent."²² Homesteading had been especially popular in those counties and small farms and ranches dotted the plains. But to withdraw some land from cultivation and promote better farming practices on the remainder and to turn farmland into grazing land involved removing farmers who had been tilling the soil and growing a few head of livestock. Mainly the farms to be removed would be "small, dry-land farms, unsuited for cultivation and too small to pro-

Corrals built by CCC Camp Fremont, a unit attached to the Forest Service Camp, in Sublette County. The corrals were used to count herds grazing on forest land. Camp Fremont was established in 1933 and operated until 1942. Photo: courtesy Museum of the Mountain Man, Sublette County Historical Society, Pine-dale, Wyoming.

6

14.75
12.25
3.50
14.75

RECEIPTS AND EXPENSES

The daily account to be kept on pages 6 to 23 should include all cash transactions of the year that belong to the farm business. All such items as interest on notes and mortgages should go in as regular expenses. At the end of the year all expense and receipt items should be classified and entered on the summary pages 30 and 31. An example of several entries has been inserted in the first few lines of this page.

DATE	ITEM	QUANTITY	PRICE	AMOUNT RECEIVED	AMOUNT PAID
Jan 3	Repairing Harness - Fred Botch				4.00
" 5	John Anderson	2 cows	9500	19000	
" 9	Tom O'Neill, Carpenter work stock shed				4.50
" 9	City Liv. Co. Lumber for stock shed				17.00
1933	(Start your entries below this line)				
Jan 6	2 pigs from Rich				5.95
	Traded Herman load				
	Feed for calf some 4# feed - 1 calf				
	Sold load feed - Herman	26		81.00	
	Bought 17 sacks, 2¢	3/119			.25
	Traded corn (Edie 1600) 1 hog	265			
	Ans 1700				
Mar 7	Traded corn - 1 ton to				
	Bob Reed for calf	310			1 calf
Mar 18	Sold corn to John	1 T		310	2 chicks
	Chris sack of flour (April 5)				
Apr 13	Chris load of corn to pay				
	for binder repairs last fall (1932)				
July 25	Binder repairs 1144 - 60 m			(Chris)	1.50
July	Lorrie Fisher when				
July 10	Beans to Peyton Rollin			2.35	2.35
	490 lbs. @ 3¢ per lb on groc bill			14.70	14.70
July 26	33. Herman owes us			33.10	

Account books were widely distributed to encourage farmers and ranchers to become more business-like and profit-oriented in their operations. Ironically, given the nature and the purpose of the account books, entries in this book from Converse County revealed a significant amount of barter continuing in 1933 (above). Account book from collection of Michael Cassity.

CLOSING THE ACCOUNT

1. Fill in the inventory values for the beginning and end of the year. Subtract one total from the other. If the inventory at the end of the year is greater than at the beginning enter the difference under "increase in inventory." If it is less, enter the difference as "decrease in inventory."
2. Man labor. Total the man hours in the work report and charge at a prevailing rate per hour. A fair rate would be 35 to 40 cents per hour.
3. Horse labor. Total the horse hours, in the work report and charge at the rate of 15 to 20 cents per hour.
4. If truck or auto has been used for poultry, charge it at what you estimate its cost to be. Auto 10 cents per mile. Truck 15 cents per hour.
5. Charge turkeys for use of land and buildings at 10 per cent of their value.
6. Interest. Charge interest at 6 per cent on the average of the two inventories.

The new system of commercial bookkeeping was a world away from the prevailing system used by Wyoming farmers and ranchers. Final accounting procedures for poultry in record book distributed by Agricultural Extension Service. Source: A. F. Vass, *Account Book for Poultry Production and Costs* (Laramie: Wyoming Agricultural Extension Service, 1930), 21

duce a satisfactory living.” The Resettlement Administration planned, as one agent said, to “remove farm families from waste land and transfer them to more productive sites where they can maintain life on an economic basis.”²³

To determine exactly which ones would be removed, the AAA and the Resettlement Administration examined the farms and their accounting ledgers to chart their income and expenses. Those that did not turn a profit, that did not demonstrate an ability to generate capital, were the ones deemed too small to produce a satisfactory living, even though they had been getting by on the land for years. Where farmers and ranchers had traditionally judged their success by their ability to make income meet their cash expenses at the end of the year, the new standard was to set up accounts where all labor was calculated as an expense, even if it was not paid labor, where each building, ditch, and implement was to recoup its costs over a certain number of years, where livestock (and poultry) were assessed rent on the buildings that were used for them, and where a profit had to be shown above all those expenses. Or, more basically, where once the purpose of homesteading had been to provide an independent way of life, where a family would not have to be involved in the market, now the government said turning a profit using modern bookkeeping was a requirement; not only were farms expected to be businesses first and foremost but they were to be businesses that could demonstrate greater returns on investment than the same money could generate when invested in other business opportunities.

Finally, the plan was that the farm families to be removed would then be relocated to other areas, but both nationally and locally it was only a small number who were relocated onto government land. The vast majority received no assistance at all. These people joined a migration from the farms

In the dry-land farming areas of southern Goshen County, the majority of the farmers keep enough cows, hogs, and poultry to supply the family needs, but comparatively few produce livestock or livestock products on a large commercial scale.

Resettlement Administration, “Research Bulletin: Natural and Economic Factors Affecting Rural Rehabilitation in Southeastern Wyoming (as typified by Goshen County),” [1937] 10.

to the city, the same migration that had been underway in the rest of the nation for decades, leaving behind their homes, their barns, their sheds, their improvements. In 1935, the number of farms and ranches in Wyoming reached its all time high—17,487; after that the number began a steady decline until it generally leveled off in the 1970s. As for the farms and ranches that remained, they were not only fewer but bigger. In 1920, the average size of farms and ranches in the state was 749.9 acres. Ten years later, after enduring the agricultural depression of that decade, the average had climbed to 1,469—almost doubling in those hard times. By 1935 the average farm had grown yet again, this time to 1,610 acres, and five years later, in 1940, had grown still more to 1,866 acres. In addition, the farms and ranches were less likely to be operated by their owners than they had been in the past. There had been a time when the prevailing practice was that of an owner family operating the farm or ranch on which they lived, but increasingly the owners lived elsewhere and did not work the land. Plus, an increasing number of farms and ranches were mortgaged and mechanized. Not only were tractors becoming common on the countryside (more than a third of the farms and ranches had a tractor by 1940), but trucks were also increasingly used, replacing cattle drives to market.

Increasing specialization, mechanization, consolidation, and industrial organization characterized the farms and ranches of Wyoming by the end of the 1930s. This also included the trend toward single crop production, with the most obvious examples being wheat and sugar beets. Farm labor changed too, and more of the workers who had labored on farms and ranches were displaced by new machines. These people also joined the growing exodus from the farms and ranches and moving to town. The work force increasingly, especially in the sugar beet fields, was migrant labor and tenant farms—neither of which held much promise for the future for the families involved and neither of which seemed to correspond to the Jeffersonian vision of a freehold, homestead democracy.

Although employment increased and consumption also increased, the Depression lingered in Wyoming and the nation, and on the eve of World War II, the nation's economy still had not climbed back to its 1929 level. When World War II began in Europe in 1939, the impact was felt on Wyoming's farms and ranches almost immediately and this would continue until 1945. That impact generally amounted to increased purchases of Wyoming's agricultural output bringing greater economic returns to the ranchers and farmers; in addition, the labor shortage caused by the war, once the economy reached its wartime footing and the U.S. mobilized its military apparatus, generated additional changes. This combination of forces—more money and fewer workers—brought even greater mechanization of the countryside. This marked a major threshold, in fact, since at the end of the war a majority of Wyoming's farms had tractors. In those parts of the agricultural sector where machines were not yet available, the labor shortage was critical and potentially disastrous for land owners. The government, at the behest of the owners, imported workers from

Mexico—Braceros—temporarily to farm the sugar beet fields. In addition, the Japanese American internees at Heart Mountain Relocation Center were likewise put to work in the fields and so were prisoners of war from Italy and Germany in the eastern part of the state. When the smoke of war lifted, Wyoming was a very much different place.

Wyoming's farms and ranches had been transformed not just by the war but by the Depression, by the droughts, by the new government programs, by the technology, by the shift in demographics, by a combination of social and economic changes the state had never seen before. The farms and ranches were fewer and they were bigger, they were mechanized, and they were commercial operations. There were exceptions, a great many of them, but they were also exceptions to the mainstream of American agriculture now. The self-sufficient homesteads were fewer, and they were anachronisms now in their purpose and organization; the self-sufficient, small agricultural operation was as much in keeping with American agriculture after the war as the dugouts and small cabins that they had often been associated with were—which is to say not at all. Once the hubs of life's circles, they were now relics and artifacts. And the structures were, on the one hand, the complexes of buildings associated with the modern, mechanized, vertically integrated, agribusiness operations that had emerged, and, on the other hand, the surviving, enduring family farms and ranches that struggled as much against the tides of social change as they did against the elements of Wyoming's climate and topography. In between were the other structures, the isolated ranches that had been absorbed by others, the tenant quarters, some of them still in use, and increasingly the abandoned farms and derelict buildings dotting the countryside, reminders of former lives and hopes, symbols of broken dreams.

In the years following the war, a brief and small resurgence of homesteading took place on lands managed by the Bureau of Reclamation. A small number of war veterans won the right in lotteries to homestead two irrigation districts and they moved in and began to farm the Heart Mountain District where the relocation center had been situated, and also the Midvale Irrigation District near Riverton. As always with homesteading, the going was often difficult, the hours were long, the work to be done vast, and the prospect of becoming wealthy negligible, if that. But likewise, as always, these homesteaders brought their dreams of independence with them, dreams as old as the republic, even though those dreams seemed to some sorely out of place in the middle of twentieth-century industrial America.

The truth was, in fact, that agriculture of all kinds was changing in the postwar years, continuing to follow a course toward more scientific, and more centralized, practices requiring greater capital investment, more (and more sophisticated) technology, and larger acreages. The pressures on the farms and ranches were powerful and usually the pressure was to change, to adapt, or to die, as it was often put. These were the years of what became termed the “productivity revolution,” a time after the war when agricultural production climbed dramatically. Crop yields per acre increased significantly, milk yields per dairy cow jumped, and even beef cattle grew bigger and faster. About the only part of the livestock and farming operation that did not see production rise was the sheep industry, and that sector continued to languish.

Some of this increase in production had its source in mechanization. In 1950 the number of tractors in Wyoming exceeded the number of farms and ranches by fifty percent. Plus the tractors were bigger and pulled bigger implements and were joined by combines and other machines; by 1950,



All smiles, the war behind them, and their future ahead of them, Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Sirola in 1951 pondered their new homestead on the Midvale Irrigation District near Riverton. Photo courtesy Riverton Museum.

just five years after the end of the war, fewer than a thousand (980) Wyoming farms and ranches had no tractor and just used horses or mules, whereas 2,281 of them had at least one tractor and *no* horses or mules.²⁴ The dairy operations in the 1950s mostly used vacuum-driven milking machines. Even work in the sugar beet fields became more mechanized. In 1954 center-pivot irrigation made productive land that previously had been beyond reach of water, but, like other inno-

Loading pens and chute, Johnson County—a sign of the increased use of trucks to go onto the range to load cattle instead of herding the cattle on foot to a shipping point. Photo: Michael Cassity, 2006.



vations, this carried a significant price tag. Plus, the postwar technologies were sometimes barely visible, or even invisible, and involved chemicals, additives, and genetic engineering through hybridization, and at the same time were more and more specialized.

TROUBLED TIMES—AGAIN

During the decade and a half following World War II, there were fewer and fewer farms and ranches in the state. In 1940 there had been a total of 15,018 farms in Wyoming but by the end of World War II that number had dropped to 13,076. At the end of the 1950s, in the agricultural census of 1959, the number had fallen to 9,744—a loss of one out of every four farms and ranches in just fourteen years. In addition, the farms and ranches that survived were larger and larger. In 1940 the average farm and ranch size in Wyoming was 1,866.2 acres. That increased substantially during the war so that the average was 2,532.6 acres in 1945. Jump forward fourteen years to the 1959 census and the average farm in Wyoming was 3,715 acres, an increase of almost fifty percent.

The small farms and ranches, the family farms and ranches, were in trouble in the years after World War II, pretty much as they always had been, at least since the 1920s, but the pressures were even more powerful now and the options fewer, short of moving to town to find a job. Those that fared best in the new system, that those continued to show a profit, were the larger operations that continued to get larger. And these were the ones that could borrow more and invest more; these were the ones that were more mechanized, more scientific, and more specialized. And, given the formulas for subsidies which encouraged consolidation and concentration, these were often the operations that received the largest government payments. And generally these were the operations that acquired the properties of their neighbors who could not survive in that system.

Small and middling operations did manage to survive, although the solution for many involved substantial sacrifice. Homesteaders from the very beginning had occasionally resorted to finding temporary work off the ranch to help generate some income to pay for food, seed, tools, and

general provisions while they were trying to prove up, waiting for their first crop, or supplementing the funds they had brought with them. After they were more settled but ran into hard patches they would once again hire out, often bartering labor for something they needed. But these were not routine practices and were looked upon as temporary. In the middle of the twentieth century it became commonplace—almost a standard feature—on family farms for one or more member of the family to find employment elsewhere, often driving to town, to support the family's farming or ranching habit. Increasingly this family member would be the wife and mother while the husband / father worked the fields; such was the modern division of labor. When two generations operated the same ranch or farm, more people worked in town or otherwise found employment off the farm.

In addition, there have been, and remain, others who have retained traditional methods of farming and ranching, who have minimized their dependence on markets, who continue to grow much of their livestock and garden produce for their own table. There remain families in the upper Green River valley, in the Platte River valley, in the Big Horn Basin, in the Powder River Basin, in southwest Wyoming—everywhere in the state—who still put up their hay with a beaverslide and horses, who feed their livestock on frigid February mornings by loading hay on a wagon pulled by stout Percherons, and fork it off to the cattle. There are ranch and farm people all across Wyoming who struggle to have their small herds of livestock pay their bills each year, who herd their animals to summer grazing in the high country and back again in the fall, who know their sheep and cattle individually and who know when one is missing. They watch in dismay as their schools, medical services, and stores migrate to the larger cities along with their neighbors, and they see themselves as part of a

dwindling, but proud, community closely linked to the past despite the compromises that have been necessary to remain on the land. And these people are the ones close to the land, these are the people who, no matter their income level, are closest to the Jeffersonian vision, and who, perhaps, are closest to living their own dreams as a matter of choice and resolve. They follow this traditional way of life, but it is not easy.

Not everybody who wanted to stay on the land has been able to do so. An ongoing stream of people leaving the farms and ranches of Wyoming has been an undeniable feature of life in modern Wyoming. The cowboy state has been losing its cowboys—and its ranchers and farmers and settlers and homesteaders and nesters and herders. In the years after World War II that migration accelerated as each subsequent census until the 1970s showed fewer and fewer farms—and farm families—in the state. This is a national trend, too, and Wyoming is squarely within that pattern. Teresa Jordan in her memoir, *Riding the White Horse Home*, writes about living—and leaving—life on a ranch in the Iron Mountain area. She and her family, finally, moved off the ranch in the 1970s because they could no longer afford to keep it, and the sense of loss was huge, but she put it into a broader context: “When I turned around I had to confront not only the loss of people I loved and land that had defined my family for nearly a century but also a way of life. My family was not alone when we left ranching. We were part of an exodus of around 13 million people who have left the land during my lifetime.”²⁵ When they left the ranch, these people also left a way of life, and usually, but not always, with a sense of regret more than a sense of escape. The homesteads, the ranches, and the farms proved powerful, as Teresa Jordan implies, in the shaping of identities, and the grieving over the various levels of loss has been both deeply personal and profoundly social.

CONCLUSION

LANDMARKS IN TIME

Out of the Past . . .

A popular expression has it that “Wyoming is what America was.” The usual, and probably intended, interpretation of these five words is that Wyoming has escaped the forces of modernization, industrialization, and urbanization, and, further, that Wyoming thereby remains a refuge to those who are uncomfortable with the direction that modern life has taken. This is an appealing vision of the state and much of it derives from Wyoming’s rural character, its popular image as the Cowboy State, its small population, and its vast open spaces that to many seem unmarked by the hand of humans. It is a romantic image and one that many Wyomingites no doubt, at one time or another, and for one reason or another, embrace. But it also is an image that may suggest that the rural and isolated parts of the state remain pretty much as they always have been. As geographers John Jakle and David Wilson observe in a national context, “In an urban world of constant flux, rural America appears to be established, fixed, permanent, anchored—a refuge from modern-day turmoils.” They also note, though, “the vision is an illusion, for changes in rural America are profound.”²⁶

The forces of change shaping Wyoming ranching, farming, and homesteading have indeed been profound. They have been powerful, constant, and subtle. The visible signs of the transformation of agriculture over the past century and a half, what we know as historic resources, can be found from one corner of the state to another, in the mountains and in

the valleys, in the lush irrigated fields, and in the dry lands far from water. Even lands within the national forests and national parks sometimes bear the marks of historical changes associated with settlement and agriculture. Sometimes we become so accustomed to seeing ongoing farm and ranch operations, and also the decaying ranch buildings, the barns and houses that long ago ceased their busy routines, and other marks on the land, that we take them for granted, as if they have always been there and always will be, relics from another time that have little to do with our own lives. But those buildings and structures that once knew busy schedules, and those that still do, often stand on the Wyoming landscape as landmarks in time as well as space.

At first they were landmarks on the road to a beckoning future that their builders saw ahead; when they built their own homes and ranches, they were building the future. As these people lived lives in and around their buildings and structures, and as their lives became the essence of Wyoming history, their homes and ranches reflected the contours of that history, the ups and downs, the bitter and the sweet. So the structures that once marked the pathway to the future now become landmarks from the past, signposts that reveal the values, goals, priorities, and ways of life of earlier generations. In many instances they mark the contours of a way of life that was constantly challenged by powerful social and economic forces, forces that proclaimed progress

through specialization, consolidation, centralization, depersonalization, and the business-like organization of life, but somehow wound up leaving on the margins many who saw farming and ranching and homesteading as ends in themselves rather than as means to a narrower and more quantifiable end. When we look at the historic resources on the Wyoming landscape, we are looking into the past; when we ponder buildings from the past, our vision of the past links up with an earlier vision of the future.

We need not share the commitments to homesteading or farming or ranching that those landmarks often represent, and we should not romanticize the lives that they symbolize, but it is important to understand why the buildings and structures are there—what the vision was behind their creation, how they have changed (and also remained the same) over their years of continued use, and in some cases what the circumstances were behind their being left behind. For those landmarks are not just context-less artifacts, randomly distributed in time and space; they are keys to understanding the past, and thereby also the present. Just as those lives were worth living, the history of those lives is worth preserving.

Although time has not been kind to many of these buildings and structures, there are good, important reasons to hold on to them, to learn from them, and to protect them. Historic preservation carries substantial benefits to the owners of the properties, to the community, to the state, and to all who share in the proud legacy of Wyoming ranching, farming, and homesteading.

The cultural benefits of historic preservation are profound. When we explore Wyoming's ranching, farming, and homestead heritage, we enter the world of cultural icons where symbols and images are key. So much of Wyoming's identity is tied up with that heritage that it is more than a little disturbing to contemplate what Wyoming would be without

those remnants of the past. Many Wyomingites, wherever they live, whatever they do for a living, would agree that the state depends on its rural past for its self-image. When the vestiges of that past are gone, what is left to mark Wyoming as different from other places?

There are also the aesthetic benefits of preserving these old buildings and structures, a benefit that takes only a quick look at modern standardized, modular, and short-life-span buildings to appreciate. Often these old buildings appear to have almost emerged from the landscape, and in the case of so many that were constructed with natural, locally available materials, in a sense they did. When those buildings are used, when they are maintained, the aesthetics of earlier times continue into the present and those aesthetics are sorely needed. The educational benefits of preservation are many and just as a good number of people can remember school field trips to a local farm or ranch to see how those operations worked, such excursions are now critical for providing a sense of history and a sense of direction in social change, offering up lessons about history, about economy, about the environment, about the building crafts, and, for that matter, about the real world in its most authentic sense. And all of this takes place in a local environment where the sense of scale, where the associated names, where the local lore are all comprehensible and relevant. Real issues and real object lessons become less abstract, less remote, and even less sterile when connected with actual places and buildings that can be seen, visited, and touched.

The economic benefits of historic preservation sometimes seem to be missing from the equation because too often the projects that threaten historic resources claim themselves to be the sole carriers of economic gain. But historic preservation translates into tangible benefits easily and those benefits flow to not just a few individuals but to whole neighborhoods or districts, and the benefits are long term, not just flash-in-

Stove from abandoned homestead, Campbell County. Photo: Michael Cassity, 1981.



the-pan windfalls. Aside from the direct savings from rehabilitating historic structures as opposed to replacing them with new ones, there are indirect gains in the enhancement of property values. Moreover, the growth of heritage tourism, an economic factor of increasing importance in the twenty-first century, is demonstrating significant results and doing so in a low-impact way in Wyoming. Finally, it is also evident that a commitment to historic preservation, and an interest in reaping its cultural, economic, educational, and aesthetic rewards, can bring yet one more benefit of larger significance: it can help hold together communities (in the broadest sense of the word) that are often torn, fragmented, and adrift, not with an imposed conformity, but with a mutual respect that comes from preserving something held in common—a heritage. Holding on to the past and seeking to understand past lives that were worth living can, ironically, make lives more worth living today also. The buildings of the past, landmarks in time that they are, can point us in a meaningful direction as we move ahead.

... And Into the Future

As valuable as they are, and as familiar as they sometimes are, the buildings and structures from Wyoming's homesteading and ranching and farming history are not always appreciated and valued. As a result, the remnants of that past are rapidly disappearing. In a tragic spiral, one thing leads to another: without a sound knowledge of the past, our respect for and protection of historic resources diminishes; and without the material resources and reminders of our history, our understanding of the past often becomes less immediate, less connected to the present. How can we break that cycle? How can we hold onto and learn from the past while we proceed into the future?

Preserving the past in a world of constant change is no mean feat. But it is possible. In this case, it requires a broad education effort, focused research into Wyoming agricultural and social history, recognition of the historic resources that we now have, a systematic program to identify and evaluate properties of potential historic significance, and a commitment to preservation.

Education. A solid understanding of the historical patterns associated with this part of the Wyoming past can contribute significantly to the respect, sensitivity, and preservation attention that those resources deserve. Most people in the state are familiar with elements of Wyoming's farming and ranching past, and also, to a lesser extent, homesteading in Wyoming. At the same time, however, much of that understanding is limited to the romantic or nostalgic and often it focuses only on particular episodes of high drama, leaving aside the equally fascinating but less visible matters of daily life and social change. The larger study from which this brief discussion is taken, "Wyoming Will Be Your New

Home . . . : Ranching, Farming, and Homesteading in Wyoming 1860-1960,” is designed to provide a context in which the many historic rural properties can be considered. That study was prepared for use by the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and cooperating agencies but is also available for broader public distribution on the World Wide Web. In addition to the SHPO, the schools of the state, the Wyoming State Historical Society, local museums and libraries, Certified Local Government preservation boards, and a variety of other public agencies involved in dealing with agriculture, public lands, and rural programs around the state all participate in that education effort—directly and indirectly. Probably all of them recognize the importance of understanding the past to guide us for the future, and they are performing critical roles in that regard. Whether the lessons in history they provide are part of a formal plan or not, whether the use of the past they include is accurate or not, these agencies and groups, and others too, are shaping the popular understanding of Wyoming history. It is vital that this be done well.

Research. Anyone who has engaged in serious historical inquiry understands intimately that history is not a static discipline, nor is it a complete body of information where we already know all that we need to know. Rather, the study of history, including Wyoming agriculture, is an infinitely expanding field, where all concepts and categories are subject to revision and reformulation and where new insights, new evidence, and new answers are always possible and always needed. This means that research into Wyoming’s past must be ongoing and the researcher must be willing to reconsider even long settled historical issues. The good news is that the opportunities for research in the history of Wyoming’s farms, ranches, and homesteads are abundant, are exciting, and are, like the ranches themselves, available throughout the state.

Recognition. Recognition goes a long way in encouraging the preservation of Wyoming’s farms and ranches by letting their current owners and operators know that the labor and sacrifice over the generations is appreciated, that the historical roots they nourish today are valued, and that their continued effort in preserving historic resources is a public priority. Wyoming’s Centennial Farm and Ranch Program honors families each year that have owned and operated the same farm or ranch for a hundred years or more. This is not just a recognition of the age of these operations; it is also an explicit recognition of the value of family-owned and operated agriculture, of the role of these farms and ranches in preserving open spaces, and of the importance of retaining this essential element of the small business community of the state. This recognition is an important way of keeping alive important elements of our history as they continue to make history.

Another program, the National Register of Historic Places, also provides recognition to historic properties. The National Register is a federal program, operated by the National Park Service, that constitutes a list of buildings, sites, districts, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, engineering, and culture. The list is constantly expanding and individual properties and groups of properties are nominated, reviewed, and, if they meet the requirements, listed on the register. Being listed is a substantial honor, but it does not bring cash prizes or other tangible rewards, although tax credits are available for those who, following required procedures, rehabilitate certified historic structures (and some others as well) for income-producing purposes. Inclusion on the National Register does not provide automatic protection for historic properties, but resources that are eligible for the National Register and are on federal lands or are impacted by projects that involve federal funds or federal

permitting must be managed in a way that takes into account their historic values.

It is important to remember that not every old ranch or farm is historically significant and eligible for the National Register. Age alone does not make a property significant. Size does not make a property significant. Who owned it does not make a property significant, except in particular cases where a technical justification can be presented that the place is the most appropriate property associated with a significant individual. Instead, the National Register of Historic Places uses a set of standards to determine which properties can be listed. In order for a farm, ranch, or homestead property to be eligible, it has to meet at least one of four criteria:

Criterion A. The property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. Generally, this means that the agricultural property must be associated with historic patterns of social and economic change. A good way to approach this is to ask, Why is a certain property significant? Often, the best way to answer that question is with a more focused inquiry: What does the property reveal about ranching, homesteading, and farming in Wyoming? If a strong answer can be developed to these questions, there is a good chance that it will have significance under Criterion A. The vast majority of farm, ranch, and homesteading properties that are eligible for the National Register will qualify under Criterion A.

Criterion B. The property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past. There are specific farm and ranch properties that were intimately related to an individual's historical significance, not just the place where a significant person lived, and these would qualify under Criterion B.

Criterion C. The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents

the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction. The distinctive architectural features of a building, the artistry and talent of the people who designed or built it, or the engineering elements involved in a farm or ranch structure could make a resource eligible for the National Register under Criterion C. Although many more historic properties will be eligible under Criterion A, the Criterion C properties are important and represent some of the best-known farms and ranches in the state.

Criterion D. The property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history. This criterion has to do with the archaeological potential of a property. In general, a property can be considered eligible under Criterion D if it promises to yield, in a systematic, professional archaeological investigation, specific kinds of information explained in a carefully focused research design. It is not a blank check for digging.

Clearly, not all old properties will rise to the standard of significance presented in these criteria. In addition, to be listed the property must retain its *integrity*—meaning generally it must be authentic and true to its original design and materials; it must be in the same place it was during its historic period; that setting must be consistent with its historic character; the property must convey the feeling of the past period or time; and it must retain the historic association that makes it significant. Although a property does not have to meet all of these standards of integrity, if the property has been impacted by change enough to compromise its ability to convey its historic significance, the property will not be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

In order to facilitate the evaluation of these properties, to determine which of the multitudes of farm, ranch, and home-

steading resources meet the standards of the National Register, the Wyoming SHPO sponsored the development of a historic context study which identifies the processes at work in the transformation of Wyoming agriculture from the 1860s to 1960. This study is designed to help professionals evaluate properties efficiently and consistently, and to determine which properties hold historical significance, and which have the necessary integrity. This is not a matter of guesswork or speculation. There is a common framework for all parties to use as they approach the issues surrounding historic preservation and development.

Preservation. There is more to preservation than protecting buildings from immediate threats. It is important to manage them, to look after them, and to help them retain their historic character and features. Neglect is as fatal as a bulldozer; it just takes longer to destroy the building. Given their sometimes remote locations, given that often the older properties have been made technologically or culturally outmoded, or less used, and given that agricultural properties have often been consolidated and the less-used properties sometimes left to the elements, the challenge is substantial to hold onto these aging properties.

A building that is unused is generally also a building that is not maintained, and a building that is not maintained is a building that falls ready prey to natural elements as well as to other forces of destruction. Often remote, or at least out of sight as well as out of use, they have dropped in priority as new owners, different operators, people with different visions of their role on the landscape become their stewards.

Removal, destruction, renovation, vandalism, weather, wildlife, and sheer neglect have taken a toll on those buildings and structures.

It is thus important to find new uses for old buildings, uses that do not mar them, destroy them, move them around, or change too much the setting in which they have been located these many years. Adaptive reuse calls for creative energies and grand ideas, common sense and uncommon sensitivity, but it also provides a key to holding onto the past, using it productively, and there are many examples of successful adaptation and reuse throughout the state. In those cases, everybody is a winner, including future generations who will seek guidance from the past that we pass on to them.

Wyoming has wonderful historic resources associated with its ranching, farming, and homesteading legacy. Those resources will not remain without careful stewardship by all involved—land owners and operators, public land managers, cultural resource professionals, and everybody who makes use of the rural landscape. At a minimum, the preservation of the ranching, homesteading, and farming resources of Wyoming requires a pro-active program of identification, determination of eligibility or contributing status, and sustained preservation management. None of this preservation will take place without public interest and concern and involvement. That is where we all enter the process of historic preservation. Just as we all share the history of Wyoming farming, ranching, and homesteading, we also all share the prospects for the future. And that means we share the responsibility today of building on the legacy of the past for lives in the future that are just as much worth living.

NOTES

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TIMELINE OF RANCHING, HOMESTEADING, AND FARMING IN WYOMING, 1860–1960

- 1861-1864: Horse and mule-drawn implements become more widespread in nation as a result of Civil War
- 1862: Creation of U.S. Department of Agriculture
- 1862: Homestead Act
- 1862: Pacific Railroad Act of 1862
- 1864: Pacific Railroad Act of 1864
- 1868: Wyoming Territory Authorized by Congress
- 1869: Wyoming Territory organized
- 1869-1870: Durbin brothers begin their sheep operation near Cheyenne

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- 1870: Census shows only 165 people (164 men, 1 woman) occupied in agriculture, out of 6,645 pursuing an occupation in Wyoming Territory
 - 1870: Cheyenne Land Office Opens
 - 1870: Only small herds of cattle and flocks of sheep, mainly in southeast and southwest corners of territory
 - 1870s, 1880s: Southeast corner of Wyoming becomes heavily populated with cattle ranches
 - 1870s, early: Sheep taken into upper Green River valley
 - 1870s: Sulky plow introduced in Midwest, reaches Wyoming gradually afterwards, slowly replacing walking plow
 - 1873: Laramie County Stock Growers Association formed; becomes Wyoming Stock Growers Association
 - 1873: Timber Culture Act
 - 1876: Destruction of sheep flocks in blizzard, some ranchers turn to cattle raising exclusively
 - 1877: Desert Land Act
 - 1877: Evanston Land Office Opens
 - 1877: Laramie Plains the “backbone” of sheep industry in Wyoming Territory
 - Late 1870s to 1886: “Beef bonanza” of open range cattle ranching, especially in eastern Wyoming
 - Late 1870s: Cattle ranches emerge in Powder River Basin
 - 1879: Although Charles Carter brings cattle into Big Horn Basin, cattle ranches are few until 1883
 - 1879: Dan Budd takes cattle into upper Green River valley
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- 1880: Census shows 457 farms / ranches in Wyoming
 - 1880s: Consolidation and incorporation of ranches





- 1880s: Star Valley settled with herding cattle as dominant
- 1881: Blizzard sends a warning of climate limitations on open range ranching
- 1882: About 200,000 sheep on Laramie Plains
- 1882: Sheep from Oregon are driven to Wyoming, part of larger migration
- 1883: Sheep are taken into Powder River Basin
- 1884: Maverick Law enacted, giving Wyoming Stock Growers Association complete control of roundups and the proceeds from sale of mavericks
- 1884: White settlers begin to move into Jackson Hole
- 1886: Officially, 309,997 sheep and 898,121 cattle in territory, but territorial governor estimates two million cattle in Wyoming
- 1886-1887: Severe winter and a series of storms that essentially destroy open range ranching
- 1887: Biggest ranches begin to decline in number, replaced by multiple smaller operations
- 1887: Swan Ranch bankruptcy and reorganization, prominent among many, with others to follow
- 1888: Buffalo Land Office Opens
- 1889: Hanging of Ellen Watson (sometimes called "Cattle Kate") and Jim Averill
- 1889-1890: Killing winter in Green River Valley



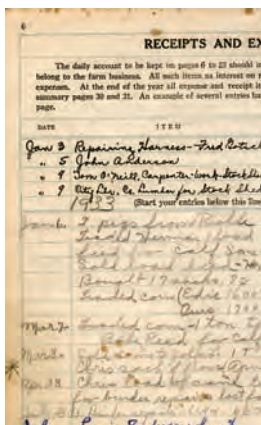
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- 1890: Census shows 3,125 farms / ranches in Wyoming
 - 1890: 87% of owner-operated farms and ranches have no mortgage
 - 1890: Douglas Land Office Opens
 - 1890: Lander Land Office Opens
 - 1890: Wyoming becomes a state
 - 1890s: Increase in number of farms / ranches reflects increase in homesteads and small operations
 - 1890s: Open range ranching increasingly replaced by ranching with fences and with winter feeding
 - 1890-1900: Number of cattle in Wyoming declines by about 40 percent
 - 1890: 712,520 sheep in Wyoming, and the numbers continue to grow
 - 1892: Johnson County War
 - 1893: Mormon migration to Big Horn Basin
 - 1893-1897: Depression in nation
 - 1894: Carey Land Act to encourage irrigation and settlement in western states
 - 1895: Settlement emerges around LaBarge and nearby areas on Green River
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- 1900: Census shows 6,095 farms / ranches in Wyoming
 - 1900: 80.8% of owner-operated farms and ranches in Wyoming have no mortgage
 - 1900: 5,099,613 sheep in Wyoming
 - 1890s, 1900s: Sheep / cattle conflict grows, becomes increasingly violent

- 1900: Dairy farming generally replacing beef cattle in Star Valley
- 1900s: Creation of national forests with the regulation of grazing on forest lands
- 1900s and 1910s: Arrival of steam powered traction engines to run threshing machines and pull plows
- 1902: Basque population emerges in Buffalo and Johnson County; Basques already present in Sweetwater County
- 1902: Newlands Reclamation Act provides funds for irrigation projects in western states
- 1907: Rock Springs Grazing Association formed
- 1909: Enlarged Homestead Act (also known as Dry Farming Homestead Law)
- 1909: Spring Creek Raid, climax of sheep – cattle war
- 1909: Wyoming Extension Service studies and publishes survey on dry farming techniques and success
- 1909: Over six million sheep in Wyoming



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- 1910: Buffalo Bill Dam completed on Shoshone River
 - 1910: Census shows almost 11,000 farms / ranches in Wyoming
 - 1910: 79.9% of Wyoming's owner-operated farms free from mortgages
 - 1910: 5.5 million sheep in Wyoming
 - 1910s: Dairy farms become important in Big Horn Basin
 - 1910s: General ending of open range for cattle
 - 1911-1912: Severe winter for sheep in Wyoming with huge losses and decimation of flocks
 - 1912: Congress reduces five year residence requirement on homesteads to three years
 - 1912: First steam engine enters Star Valley
 - 1914: Elinore Pruitt Stewart, Letters of a Woman Homesteader published, after being published as articles in the Atlantic Monthly, encouraging women to homestead
 - 1914-1918: World War I in Europe creates market for Wyoming agricultural production
 - 1915: Australian shearing shed built at Bitter Creek, the first of 17 such sheds built in Wyoming in 1915 and 1916
 - 1915: Holly Sugar builds plant at Sheridan, encourages single crop production in that area
 - 1916: Beet production increase in World War I (and stimulated by new sugar plants) in turn contributes to growth of migrant labor in beet fields
 - 1916: Construction of beet plant at Lovell stimulates beet production
 - 1916: Lambing sheds and winter feeding of sheep in use near Douglas
 - 1916: Stock Raising Homestead Act
 - 1917: Construction of beet plant at Worland stimulates beet production there
 - 1917-1918: U.S. enters World War I
 - 1918: Farm Loan Act creates Land Banks, helping and encouraging farmers and ranchers to expand their operations
 - 1918: Government calls for farmers to use more machinery to help in war production





- 1918: Large scale commercial, mechanized agriculture emerging with vast farming operations near Sheridan and Lingle
 - 1918-1920: Post World War I agricultural crisis produced by end of wartime demand, removal of price supports, increased debt burdens with a surge of foreclosures
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- 1920: 6.2% of Wyoming farms have a tractor
 - 1920: Average farm / ranch size in Wyoming: 749.9 acres (64% are under 500 acres)
 - 1920: Census shows 15,748 farms and ranches
 - 1920: 50.9% of the owner-operated farms in Wyoming have no mortgage
 - 1920-1921: Banking crisis, "Contraction of 1920-1921"
 - 1920-1924: Great Western Sugar builds colony for migrant workers at Lovell
 - 1920s: Homesteading surge, especially in dry farm areas
 - 1920s: Increasing specialization of farms and ranches: single crop production, dairy farms, wheat farms, dude ranches; each part of agriculture organizes by producer specialization to promote that particular commodity
 - 1920s: Modernization takes hold increasingly on farms and ranches, undermining traditional purpose of agriculture and also ranching and farming practices
 - 1921-1929: About 20% of U.S. banks fail, including 101 of 153 banks in Wyoming; only 32 open during same period
 - 1924: Banks fail in about 30 Wyoming communities
 - 1924: International Harvester introduces Farmall, all purpose gasoline tractor
 - c. 1924-1929: Agricultural Depression of 1920s (merges with Great Depression, does not end until World War II)
 - 1929: Stock market crash, beginning of Great Depression
 - 1929-1933: Over 20% of U.S. commercial banks suspend operations and others merge or are absorbed so that over a third of the banks in the country disappear in a new wave of bank failures
 - 1929-1933: Unemployment in U.S. increases to about 25%; with growing unemployment, demand for Wyoming food and fiber also drops
 - 1926: Dude Ranchers Association formed, reflecting the spin-off of this part of ranching into a separate endeavor
 - 1927: Snake River Land Company (secretly owned by John D. Rockefeller, Jr.), begins to purchase lands in Jackson Hole to be added to Grand Teton National Park
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- 1930: 16,011 farms and ranches in Wyoming
 - 1930: 30% of owner-operated farms free of debt
 - 1930: Average farm / ranch size in Wyoming: 1,469 acres
 - 1930: 3,749 (23%) farms had at least one tractor
 - 1930s: Trucks become more commonplace on farms and ranches

- 1931-1936: Drought of 1930s (especially severe in 1933, 1934, 1936)
 - 1933: Agricultural Adjustment Administration created to raise agricultural commodity prices by creating artificial shortages through subsidies
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- 1933: Civilian Conservation Corps created; pays young men to work in military-style units in national forests, grazing districts, national parks, state parks, and communities, to build livestock facilities, trails, plant forests, and construction recreation facilities
 - 1933-1934: Drought Relief Program seeks to reduce crops and herds
 - 1933-1941: U.S. remains in Depression, although increased government spending and job creation stimulates consumption; Depression does not end until spending on World War II raises Gross National Product to above 1929 level
 - 1934, 1936: Grasshopper infestation
 - 1934: Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace addresses Wyoming Stock Growers Association in Douglas
 - 1934: Taylor Grazing Act becomes law; regulates grazing on public domain, creates Division of Grazing, and ends almost all homesteading
 - 1935: 17,486 farms / ranches in Wyoming, highest number ever
 - 1935: Franklin Roosevelt creates Resettlement Administration to relocate poor farmers and ranchers hurt by economy and AAA
 - 1935: Wyoming Grazing District No. 1 (Worland) organized; first official grazing district in the U.S.
 - 1936: Mormon cricket infestation
 - 1936: Range Improvement Program includes variety of efforts including construction of dams, stock tanks, wells, improvement of springs, and fence building to increase grazing opportunities
 - 1936: Roosevelt appoints Great Plains Drought Area Committee to investigate drought, its origins, and its remedies; Committee tours Great Plains from Texas panhandle to Dakotas, stopping in Gillette and examining situation in Campbell and Johnson counties
 - 1939: World War II begins in Europe
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- 1940: Average farm / ranch size in Wyoming: 1,866 acres
 - 1940: Number of farms / ranches in Wyoming declines to 15,018 (below even the 1920 level)
 - 1940: 5,601 of the state's farms and ranches have a tractor
 - 1940: Average size of Wyoming farms and ranches: 1,866.2 acres
 - 1941: U.S. enters World War II
 - 1941-1945: Labor shortage stimulates increased mechanization of agriculture
 - 1942: Heart Mountain Relocation Center opens for Japanese Americans removed from West Coast
 - 1943-1945: Prisoner of War Camps at various locations, often using former CCC camps, especially in southeastern part of state, house Italian and then German prisoners who are put to work as field labor



- 1943: Bracero Program begins; Mexican nationals are imported to work in fields, including in Wyoming
 - 1943: Franklin Roosevelt executive order creates Grand Teton National Monument, and is protested by ranchers in Jackson Hole and by Wyoming congressional delegation
 - 1945: Heart Mountain Relocation Center closes; Prisoner of War camps close
 - 1945: 13,076 farms and ranches in Wyoming
 - 1945: 7,444 farms and ranches have at least one tractor; for the first time, over half have tractors
 - 1945: Average size of farms and ranches: 2,532.6 acres
 - 1945-1960: General post war period often referred to as “Productivity Revolution” or “Second Agricultural Revolution” because of dramatically increased production through mechanization and scientific agriculture
 - 1945-1960: Increased use of ammonia fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, antibiotics, additives, increased specialization of crops transform agriculture yet again
 - 1945-1960: Serious decline in number of farms and ranches in nation and Wyoming; small farms and ranches in serious trouble
 - 1947-1950: Bureau of Reclamation opens land for homesteading by veterans at Heart Mountain and at Riverton Midvale Irrigation District
 - 1949: Blizzard, or series of storms, wreaks havoc on Wyoming, the most serious winter since 1886-1887; emergency relief effort mobilized by state government; Operation Haylift by U.S. Air Force
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- 1950: 9,250 Wyoming farms and ranches have 15,610 tractors
 - 1954: Development of center pivot irrigation systems
 - 1959: 9,744 farms and ranches in Wyoming
 - 1959: Average size of farms and ranches: 3,715 acres



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