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Ranching in western North Dakota, 1887-1920

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RANCHING IN WESTERN NORTH

DAKOTA, 1887-1920

by
Scott R. Neevel

Bachelor of Arts, University of North Dakota, 1974

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

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This thesis submitted by Scott R. Neevel in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota is hereby approved by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done.

Stanley H. Murray
(Chairman)

Thomas W. Howard

Gaudan L. Jensen

This thesis meets the standards for appearance and conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

A. William Johnson
Dean of the Graduate School

Permission

Title Ranching in Western North Dakota, 1887-1920

Department History

Degree Master of Arts

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Signature Scott Neavel

Date June 25, 1980

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Preface-Acknowledgements

Ranching on the Great Plains during the period from the American Civil War through the first part of the twentieth century has been dealt with by several historians, but generally they have presented a broad overview of what occurred throughout the entire western United States. In The Day of the Cattlemen, Ernest Staples Osgood has given a broad view of the western cattle industry during these years. Lewis Atherton is another who has written on the open range years of the latter part of the nineteenth century, and as his title The Cattle Kings suggests, he has concentrated on some of the major individuals involved in western ranching during the open range days. In Cattle Raising on the Plains, 1900-1961, John T. Schlebecker gives an excellent overview of cattle raising in the western states during the years after 1900, but like the other writers Schlebecker goes into no detail on what occurred either on the Northern Plains or in North Dakota. This general region was the last to be utilized as a stock raising area, and although developments there were similar to what Schlebecker describes, it is at the same time a unique area that warrants a more detailed study.

Ranching in western North Dakota during the early 1880's has been covered by other historians, but little has been done with the period from 1886-1887 to the end of World War I. This was an era

marked by recovery, the change from open to closed range, and the change from the old open range methods of stock raising to the widespread acceptance of the more modern methods known as "ranch farming."

Recovery of the stock industry in western North Dakota began immediately following the severe winter season ending in 1887. It did not take many years for the stock business to get back to normal, and ranchers soon exceeded all previous records for both the number of livestock sold and the prices received at market. From 1887 until 1920 was a period of marked financial success for most ranchers. The period of the 1880's may have been more colorful and exciting, as these were the ranching days of Theodore Roosevelt and the Marquis de Mores and what many people view as the "Wild West." These two men and many others, however, did not last very long in the ranching business. Those who continued ranching after 1887 were the real developers and innovators who helped bring in the system of ranching that we know today.

I have ended the paper at 1920, for the new system of "ranch farming" was well established by that date, and the year also marked the end of the truly prosperous period that had run from the years immediately following 1887 until just after World War I. The serious downward market trend did not come until after 1920.

In this thesis I have attempted to show in some detail what occurred on the range west of the Missouri River in North Dakota. Since ranchers from the border areas of Montana and South Dakota also ranged cattle and other stock on North Dakota land during the open

range years from 1887 to 1905, I have also dealt with ranch operations headquartered just across the border in these neighboring states.

I wish to thank Mr. Frank Vyzralek, archivist of the North Dakota State Historical Society, Mr. Dan Rylance, archivist of the North Dakota Room in the Chester Fritz Library at the University of North Dakota, and all the other library staff members who were of assistance during my research stages. I wish to express special thanks to Dr. Stanley Murray of the History Department of the University of North Dakota, who as chairman of my thesis committee and advisor spent much time helping me get this paper into the final stages. I also wish to thank Dr. Thomas Howard and Dr. Gordon Iseminger for their patience and assistance as members of the thesis committee.

ABSTRACT

Several historians have dealt with the topic of ranching in the American West, but generally they have presented a broad overview of what took place over the entire western United States. Those who have dealt with ranching in western North Dakota generally have covered the early 1880s, but they have used the calamitous winter of 1886-1887 as a stopping point.

The period from 1887 on through the first two decades of the twentieth century was an era marked by recovery of the stock industry, the change from open to closed range, and the change from the old open range methods of stock raising to the widespread acceptance of the more modern methods of ranch farming.

In this thesis I have studied this important period of development and change on the range of western North Dakota. To present the ranching scene from 1887 to 1920 in detail, I have relied heavily on the weekly ranch and farm reports in the local press (particularly that of the major regional newspaper, the Dickinson Press), the writings of those persons involved in livestock raising during these years, and state and federal documents dealing with ranches, farms, livestock, crops, and other related statistics.

The resulting information presents an account of the relatively quick recovery of the stock industry from the diaster of 1886-1887.

It also notes an increase in sheep raising and horse raising, the beginnings of ranch farming during the 1890s, the extensive homestead movement that brought the closed range system of ranching into being in western North Dakota, and the establishment of ranch farming as the new system of stock raising in the state.

The ranching history of western North Dakota is shown to be different from that of other western areas. The major difference was that homestead activity was much more extensive in the Missouri Slope region of the state and led to a blending of both crop and stock production. This gave an added boost to the widespread acceptance of ranch farming and more modern methods of stock raising. The closed range system and ranch farming were well established by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century; even the old-timers were ranch farmers by 1920.

CHAPTER I.

Origin of Ranching in Western North Dakota (to 1886-1887).

The development of ranching in western North Dakota during the early 1880's was the conclusion of a northward-expanding cattle industry that had its beginnings on the southern plains at the time of the first explorations and colonization efforts by the Spanish in the American Southwest. Texas was the starting point for this expansion, and the Texas longhorn cattle that predominated the western cattle scene for so many years were descendants of Spanish cattle brought to the Southwest during the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. Some of these cattle escaped onto the vast grasslands where they eventually became wild, wary, and well adapted to the harsh climate and terrain. During the early days of white settlement in Texas, the longhorns remained wild animals that were hunted and killed for meat. Mexican ranchers did herd longhorn cattle before the Texas Revolution of 1836, but the herds were abandoned after the war and during the subsequent border fighting. Some longhorn cattle again were herded as beef cattle by the Texans, but by 1845 the number of animals that ran loose on the southern ranges was estimated at close to 300,000.

New interest in Texas cattle developed when America's preference in meat turned from pork to beef. The early Texas ranchers

generally started out with a small herd of longhorns rounded up off the open range. If the weather cooperated and the markets were good, the size of the operations would grow. The Texas prairie grass was free, and during the 1840's and 1850's the longhorn cattle were available to anyone who wanted to round them up. It was a hard life for these early ranchers, as they had to fight to keep what they had established in terms of herds and range. Both Indian and white marauders were prevalent during these and following years.

As early as the 1840's Texas longhorns were driven northeast to markets including New Orleans, St. Louis, and even cities in Ohio. During the late 1850's, however, Texas cattle spread "Texas" or "Spanish" fever in both Missouri and Kansas. The Texas cattle were carriers of the Spanish fever tick, and although they were more or less immune to the disease, other cattle were not. This problem created a barrier to the movement of Texas cattle for some time, but the outbreak of war in 1861 put an absolute end to the northern movement of cattle. During the Civil War the longhorns were neglected as ranchers and cowboys went off to war. By the outbreak of the war the Texas herds numbered 3.5 million, and these cattle continued to grow in numbers.¹

Meat consumption increased in both the United States and Europe during the post-Civil War years, and the interest in Texas beef again became strong. Although both Kansas and Missouri passed

¹ Ernest Staples Osgood, The Day of the Cattlemen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1929), pp. 27-36.

quarantine laws which regulated the movement of Texas herds, and various other states and territories did likewise during the following years, the barrier to the movement of Texas stock north and to market was really just one of time and direction. In winter the danger of the Spanish fever tick was much less, due to the cold temperatures, and Texas cattle driven north before the first of May were considered safe. Due to the growth of the American and world markets and the meat packing centers in the United States, the western cattle industry was greatly encouraged. By the late 1860's Texas cattlemen were herding longhorns north to railroad shipping centers in Kansas.²

During the years following the Civil War several federal acts made it relatively easy to obtain land in the West. The early ranchers took advantage of these acts in order to set up headquarters and then ranged stock on the public domain. Under the Homestead Act of 1862 a person could take possession of 160 acres of land if a dwelling were built on it within six months of entry and the land was lived on and put to agricultural use for five years. Purchase under the Pre-Emption Law required some act of improvement on the land such as a residence constructed, cultivation of the soil, and the payment of a \$2.00 filing fee before two years and nine months had passed. Under the Timber Culture Act of 1873 an additional 160 acres could be had for plowing ten acres in total,

²Ibid., Lewis Atherton, The Cattle Kings (Bloomington and London; Indiana University Press, 1961, Third Printing 1967), p. 1.

cultivating it, and planting it to trees within eight years time.³ Other land acts of the 1870's, as well as public sales, railroad grants, and soldier's scrip opened vast acres of the American West to settlement.

Barriers to ranching expansion in the West came down rather quickly during or following the war. On the southern plains the great herds of buffalo were slaughtered as hide hunting became big business and thousands joined in this undertaking. As the buffalo was being removed from the scene the rancher came in to take over the land and adapt it to other uses. The Indian population that had been another barrier to frontier expansion also was pushed aside on the southern plains. As their major source of livelihood, the buffalo, disappeared, they were not able to resist the encroachments onto their lands. Ultimately the various tribes were forced onto smaller tracts of land by the United States Army and the federal government. The last major barrier, transportation, was overcome as the railroads expanded their lines throughout the West during the 1870's and 1880's.

By the late 1870's more permanent ranching operations were established in western Kansas, Colorado, and Wyoming. The long cattle drives to the Kansas points also declined, due to settlement of more and more farmers whose opposition to such herds pushed the quarantine line farther west. As ranching and agricultural activity increased on the southern and central plains, new untapped grazing

³Dickinson (N.D.) Press, 10 April 1886, p. 3.

lands were sought as the demand for beef continued to increase. This expansion of the cattle industry continued northward into what is now eastern Montana and the western Dakotas.

The northern plains region, the last of the Great Plains to be established as a cattle producing country, had several advantages over the southern plains cattle ranges, and these were easily recognized by the first ranchers in what is now western North Dakota. These northern ranges had better grass, in that it was more nutritious and better cattle forage, and in the fall of the year the grasses "cured" on the stem and were considered by most ranchers to be as good as any hay. The water situation was also better in the north, as these northern grasslands had small creeks and rivers which were recharged by generally adequate precipitation in the form of rain and snow. In the cooler northern climate there were fewer insect pests and parasites to affect beef production, and the more moderate temperatures were more conducive to weight gain on the beef steers.

The three major barriers to settlement and ranching--the buffalo, various Indian tribes, and lack of transportation facilities-- were dealt with on the northern plains in much the same way as they had been in the south a few years earlier. As the southern buffalo herds had disappeared, due to the hide business and increased stock and agricultural activity, so too went the northern herds. The hide business moved north and by 1883 the buffalo was about gone from the northern ranges. The Indian tribes

that inhabited the region were pushed aside by the white man, and those who resisted these encroachments were subdued by the United States Army. By 1880 the northern plains tribes posed no threat to white settlement and frontier expansion. The last major barrier, lack of transportation, also was overcome at about the same time. The economic panic of 1873 had stopped the construction of the Northern Pacific Railroad at Bismarck, but by 1879 the company was reorganized and started to move west again. The tracks reached the Montana line in 1881 and the Pacific coast by 1883. The Great Northern Railroad reached the Montana line southwest of Williston in 1887.

Although in 1880 there were no cattlemen operating in what would become western North Dakota, this situation changed quickly. Many of the first cattlemen to set up operations on the western North Dakota range first viewed the area while on hunting trips. Most of these individuals were wealthy gentlemen from the eastern United States, but a few had been operating in the general area for years as market hunters and trappers. The big Texas cattle outfits also were quick to set up large ranch operations in these untapped northern grasslands.

One of the first cattle outfits to set up in western North Dakota was the Custer Trail Company. It was organized by Howard Eaton of Pittsburgh and A. C. Huidekoper of Meadville, Pennsylvania. Both of these men had come to the Little Missouri River country on hunting trips and decided to get into the cattle business in 1882,

locating the Custer Trail Ranch five miles south of present day Medora in Billings County. A. C. Huidekoper had a verbal agreement with Howard Eaton and his three brothers whereby Huidekoper was to provide the money for the purchase of the livestock and supplies and the Eatons were to carry out the actual work involved. Both parties were to divide the profits equally.

Initially Howard Eaton bought about one thousand head of cattle, mostly cows from Minnesota which cost about \$16.00 per head. A. C. Huidekoper later bought and shipped a carload of full-blooded shorthorn bulls to the ranch along with some full-blooded cows. Most of the early ranchers homesteaded 160 acres and then grazed their cattle on public lands at no expense. Some purchased railroad land giving them control over additional acreage. In 1882, A. C. Huidekoper purchased 23,000 acres of railroad land in Township 136 North, Range 102 West, in Billings County at \$2.00 per acre. This purchase gave Mr. Huidekoper a six-mile frontage on the Little Missouri River.⁴

In 1884, A. C. Huidekoper started the Little Missouri Horse Company near Black Butte. His horse brand, HT, would soon become well known throughout the United States. Howard Eaton continued on with the Custer Trail Ranch and over the years it became a "dude ranch" catering to people from the East who came west looking for adventure.

⁴A. C. Huidekoper, My Experience and Investment in the Bad Lands of Dakota and Some of the Men I Met There (Baltimore: Wirth Brothers, 1947), pp. 6, 23 (hereafter cited Huidekoper, My Experience and Investment).

Another ranch financed with capital from the eastern United States during the 1880's was the Riverside Ranch Company near Mandan in Morton County. Its principal stockholders were Mr. Hollenbeck, Mr. Stone, and Mr. Wright, all of Saginaw, Michigan. John S. Green came to Mandan from Vermont to act as manager of this ranch which initially ran about 2,000 cattle and 500 horses. Mr. Green later became involved in his own ranching and stock buying enterprise and would become the Secretary of the North Dakota Stock Growers Association, a position he held for several years.⁵

Joseph Meyer was from the other group of men who became involved in cattle ranching. He had come west at the age of sixteen and while working in a Denver blacksmith shop had become interested in the northern plains. After earning enough money, he bought a wagon and equipment for operating as a buffalo hunter and fur trapper and worked his way north until 1882 when he went on his last buffalo hunt in the Grand River country of North Dakota. By 1883 the buffalo were gone except for a few stragglers, and Meyer, with a man named Frank Tracey, decided to start a ranch. They located their small ranch twelve miles up Davis Creek from the Custer Trail Ranch, and Meyer's partner went to Minnesota and obtained

⁵Clipping from Mandan (N. Dak.) Pioneer, 4 January 1929, North Dakota Stock Growers Records, 1886-1894, State Historical Society of North Dakota Archives, Bismarck; interview of Lewis F. Crawford with William C. Badger, 6 April 1922, p. 2, handwritten manuscript, State Historical Society of North Dakota Archives, Bismarck.

seventy-five head of cattle with which he returned in August of 1883. Mr. Meyer was able to continue in his old market-hunting profession for a short time, hunting out of a camp ten miles south of his ranch. He supplied deer, some antelope, and an occasional mountain sheep to the railroad crews in the vicinity.

Joseph Meyer did not think very highly of some of the Easterners who were involved in this early ranching, especially those who were absentee ranch owners. Meyer's neighbors, the Eatons, catered to wealthy Easterners who came west looking for adventure, and the Custer Trail Ranch outfitted hunting and horseback trips into the Badlands. Howard and Alden Eaton operated the ranch while Willis and Charles Eaton remained in the East and only came to the ranch for occasional visits like the other eastern "dudes." Joseph Meyer wrote that the "Eaton outfit except for Howard and Alden were a joke and I refused to be a party to anything that made either Willis or Charles a member of the party."⁶

By 1883 some of the more well-known personalities began to arrive in what would be western North Dakota. In the fall of 1883, twenty-five year old Theodore Roosevelt was in the North Dakota Badlands on a hunting trip and decided to get into the cattle business. He obtained the Maltese Cross Ranch, seven miles south of Medora, and the Elkhorn Ranch thirty-five miles north of the same town.

⁶ Joseph C. Meyer, Papers, typed manuscript-"The Last of the Buffalo Hide Hunters," pp. 1-6; handwritten manuscript-"The First Dude Ranch, Howard Eaton and Three Bros.", pp. 2, 5, 7, both manuscripts are located in the Orin G. Libby Manuscript Collection, Chester Fritz Library, The University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, North Dakota.

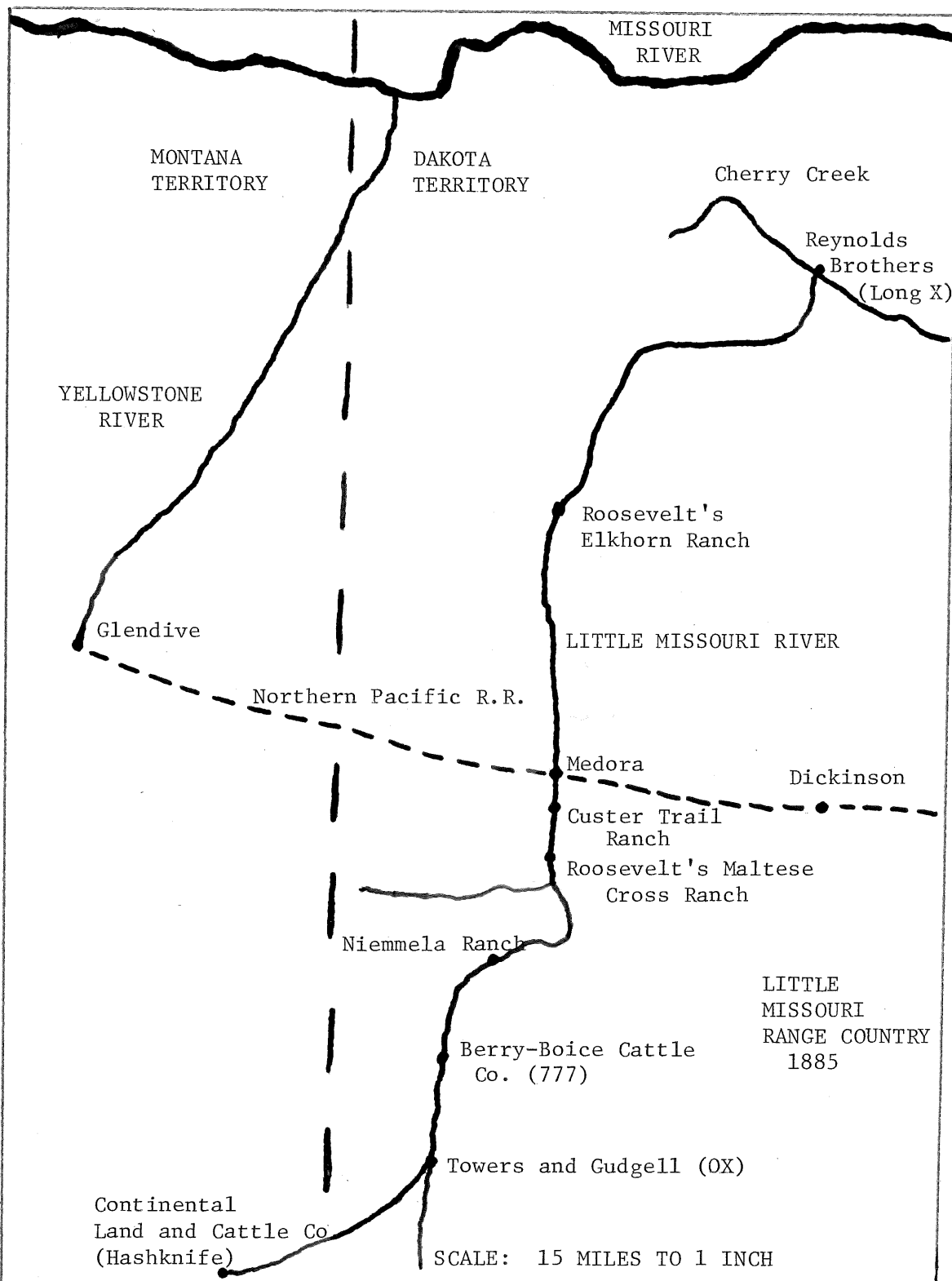
Roosevelt was a squatter and did not hold title to either of these ranches, although he invested heavily in his enterprise. The town of Medora itself was founded in April of 1883 by the Frenchman Marquis de Mores who became one of the more colorful and controversial figures of the western North Dakota cattle industry. Another foreigner, Sir John Ponder of London, owned the Niemmela Ranch which was managed by Gregor Lang and located about eight miles below the home of the Berry-Boice Cattle Company in Billings County.⁷

In 1883 and 1884 the big Texas cattle outfits came to the Missouri Slope country of western North Dakota. The Towers and Gudgell (OX brand) began in 1883 and located its headquarters one mile up the Little Beaver from its entrance into the Little Missouri where the western edge of Marmarth, North Dakota is presently located. The OX outfit was probably the largest cattle company in Billings County until after the winter of 1886-1887.⁸

The Berry-Boice Cattle Company, better known by its brand as the "Three Sevens" (777), also started in 1883. Operating on the Little Missouri River, it had its headquarters about thirty miles

⁷ Donald Welsh, "Pierre Wibaux, Bad Lands Rancher" (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Missouri, 1955), p. 27 (hereafter cited as Welsh, "Pierre Wibaux").

⁸ Lewis F. Crawford, Ranching Days in Dakota and Custer's Black Hills Expedition of 1874 (Baltimore: Wirth Brothers, 1950), p. 37 (hereafter cited as Crawford, Ranching Days in Dakota); Welsh, "Pierre Wibaux," p. 26.



SOURCE: "Pierre Wibaux, Bad Lands Rancher," (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis by Donald Welsh), University of Missouri, 1955.

north of present day Marmarth, North Dakota. On Elk Creek some sixteen miles north of Sentinel Butte the "Three Sevens" had a horse camp which used the PK brand. Owners of this cattle company were D. B. Berry of Kansas City and Henry C. Boice of Byles, Arizona. This was the second largest cattle outfit in Billings County as of 1885.⁹

Another outfit that operated in western North Dakota headquartered just west of the present day North Dakota-Montana border in Custer County Montana. This was the Continental Land and Cattle Company, better known as the Hashknife Outfit, which was owned by W. E. Hughes and John N. Simpson. Finally the Long X Ranch, one more Texas outfit, was owned by the Reynolds brothers of Albany and Fort Worth, Texas. This ranch was located on Cherry Creek in McKenzie County, North Dakota and began operation in 1884.¹⁰

Ranchers in this early period operated in two ways in obtaining stock for the range. They either drove herds of cattle north from Texas or some other state to the south, or they shipped cattle in by the Northern Pacific Railroad from states to the east of North Dakota, primarily Minnesota and Iowa.¹¹ These latter cattle were called by such names as "pilgrims," "states cattle," "barnyard cattle," or "Eastern cattle," and were of a higher grade than the

⁹Welsh, "Pierre Wibaux," p. 26.

¹⁰Elwyn B. Robinson, History of North Dakota (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 188; Welsh, "Pierre Wibaux," p. 28.

¹¹Robinson, History of North Dakota, p. 188; Osgood, The Day of the Cattlemen, pp. 92-94.

Texas stock. All of the large outfits handled the Texas stock and brought large herds north over the trail each summer from the southern ranges. The smaller ranch operators generally handled the "Eastern cattle."

During the boom years of the early and mid-1880's the Texas outfits ran quite sizeable herds. For example, the Towers and Gudgell (OX) ran 15,000 head, the Berry-Boice Cattle Company (777) had 30,000, and the Continental Land and Cattle Company ran 60,000 head.¹² Of these numbers the Texas longhorn predominated. The longhorns were:

of light carcass with long legs, sloping ribs, thin loins and rumps, and a disproportionately large belly. In color they were nondescript, yellow, red, dun and black, often with a grey iron stripe along the back. Their meat was coarse and stringey /sic/ "teasingly tough." They were almost as wild as the buffalo that they supplanted on the plains, for behind them were generations of untamed ancestors.¹³

The longhorns were hardy cattle, able to fend for themselves under adverse conditions. They had adapted well to the range environment over the many decades that they had roamed free. Even so, Joseph Meyer commented that "Texas cattle trailed into our north cattle ranges were on the way from March to October and were poor and foot sore when turned loose."¹⁴ These Texas cattle were

¹²Robinson, History of North Dakota, p. 188.

¹³Osgood, The Day of the Cattlemen, p. 27.

¹⁴Joseph C. Meyer, Papers, handwritten manuscript- "The American Bison Called Buffalo," p. 5, The Orin G. Libby Manuscript Collection, Chester Fritz Library, The University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, North Dakota.

purchased cheaply and the Chicago market paid good prices for them after they had spent two or three years on the northern range.

The "Eastern" or "pilgrim" cattle, on the other hand, were shipped west by rail generally from Minnesota and Iowa. Most often these were young breeding stock or stock steers that had been well fed on grass and the corn of the farming areas from which they had come. These were a much higher grade of cattle than the Texas longhorn and cost more to purchase. They produced more and better quality meat and therefore brought higher prices when they were ready to be shipped to the Eastern market centers. The major problem with the "pilgrim" cattle was that they were not as hardy as the longhorns and were not able to fend for themselves very well under adverse range conditions.

It is estimated that from 1882 to 1884, as many cattle were shipped west to the northern cattle range as were shipped east to market. In 1885, Theodore Roosevelt observed that:

Some Eastern men, seeing the extent of the grazing country, brought stock out by the railroad, and the short-horned beasts became almost as plenty /sic/ as the wilder-looking southern steers. At the present time, indeed, the cattle of these northern ranges show more short-horn than long-horn blood.¹⁵

In this early period of open range ranching in western North Dakota, a rancher generally purchased or homesteaded a quarter section of land as a base of operations and then grazed his cattle

¹⁵Theodore Roosevelt, Hunting Trips of a Ranchman (New York and London: The Knickerbocker Press, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1886), p. 3.

on the hundreds of thousands of acres of the public domain. A rancher could start a herd at low cost by running Texas cattle, and only a few hands were needed to handle several thousand steers. The demand for meat in the metropolitan centers of this country, as well as an increased foreign demand, brought beef prices up and profits were there to be made.

The boom period of open range ranching began in general on the Great Plains in 1880, and in western North Dakota the years from 1883 to 1885 were marked by speculation and profitmaking, Wallis Huidekoper, cattleman and cousin of A. C. Huidekoper, wrote:

Starting in 1883 the cattle turned loose yearly increased in volume, some outfits driving as many as three or four trail herds annually as well as many Minnesota dogies coming into Dakota land, Enthusiasm was running wild, the cattle bonanza was on, with the high water mark occurring in the years of 1883-4-5 and which fortunately were favorable years for general range operations. The financial attraction of running on free grass two and three year old steers costing around \$20 laid down and seeing your money doubled in two years, was something not to be overlooked.¹⁶

Neither the capitalists in the eastern United States nor foreign investors could pass up on such an opportunity.

The arrival of relatively cheap American beef in Europe, and the stories of the profits to be made in the production of beef in the western United States, resulted in a good deal of foreign investment. Virtually all of this came from the British Isles,

¹⁶Wallis Huidekoper, "Drifting back /sic/ Seventy Years in the Cow Business," p. 1, typewritten manuscript in the Huidekoper Family Papers, State Historical Society of North Dakota Archives, Bismarck (hereafter cited as Huidekoper, "Drifting back /sic/ Seventy Years").

with Scotland supplying the most capital. Edinburgh became the European center for speculation in western American beef, and some of this activity took place in western North Dakota. The Niemmela Ranch in Billings County was owned by Sir John Ponder of London and managed by Scotch-Irish Gregor Lang. The Matador Land and Cattle Company of Dundee, Scotland would at a later time establish a large range in western South Dakota.

Other foreign investors in the general area were from France. They included the Marquis de Mores at Medora in western North Dakota and Pierre Wibaux just across the North Dakota-Montana border near the town bearing his name. The investment of capital from the eastern United States was represented by the ranching interests of the Eatons, Huidekopers, Roosevelt, and the Riverside Ranch Company.

During the early years, cattle prices remained good. The cattle market of the 1880's reached its peak during 1882 with beef steers worth \$9.35 per hundredweight. One year later, however, the market had dropped to about \$4.25 per hundredweight. These North Dakota ranchers may not have been able to cash in on the peak prices during these first years, since most of them were not well established or marketing cattle by 1882. Even so, \$4.25 per hundredweight in 1883 might still mean a profit of as much as one hundred per cent.¹⁷ Southern steers herded north as yearlings would be kept on the northern grass for two or three

¹⁷Ibid.

years before they were sold and such steers would weigh two hundred pounds or more than similar cattle kept on the southern ranges. Expenses for raising a steer on the open range were virtually nothing, so lower prices did not hurt the producer so much.¹⁸

All of the speculation and investment in the open range of western North Dakota led to problems, especially in the winter of 1886-1887. Cattle poured onto the ranges of western North Dakota from both the south and east during the early 1880's, and even though the supply of grass seemed endless, it was not. Furthermore, livestock roaming freely for great distances created problems for those stockmen who were trying to breed better quality stock. On the open range interbreeding occurred between cattle of low and high grades, and stockmen who had good quality stock lost money when lower grade cattle mixed with their herds.

The weather did not cooperate in 1886 as the summer was hot and very dry. As often happened during such a year, there was a large grasshopper infestation. All of this hurt the summer grazing, and in the fall the range conditions were very poor. With the fall came the prairie fires, and other parts of the range were lost due to the dryness of the vegetation. The winter weather put the final touches on the already bad picture. Wallis Huidekoper noted that the "winter came six weeks early with blizzards in mid-November, unusual cold, deep snow. An arctic record breaker of extreme severity, 100 days of crusted snow and cattle dying by the

¹⁸Crawford, Ranching Days in Dakota, p.17.

thousands."¹⁹

Such weather conditions were far from normal, for winters in western North Dakota, especially the southwestern quarter, are generally the mildest to be found in the state. Temperatures are usually warmer and snowfall is much less heavy than in other areas of North Dakota. Normally, cattle would have good grazing all winter long if the snow did not get too deep and crusted over. In the Badlands country the broken and rough terrain was ideal for providing shelter for the stock during a storm, and on the open range the cattle could drift with their backs to the wind and find cover in a brushy coulee out of the wind. The Texas longhorns were adept at moving with a storm and "rustling" or looking for food. The eastern "pilgrim" cattle, however, had a tendency to stand around in the winter and wait to be fed as was the practice in the farm regions of Minnesota and Iowa from which these animals had come. The open range of western North Dakota was not like Minnesota and Iowa, and the ranchers there did not as yet bother with making hay and supplying additional feed for their stock. The lack of such activity by the ranchers during the severe winter period of 1886-1887 added greatly to the high cattle loss.

In April of 1887, the Dickinson Press reported that cattle losses were less than had earlier been supposed and were around twenty per cent instead of the fifty to sixty per cent that had been predicted earlier. The hardest hit according to this report, were the southern cattle that had been driven up late in the season

¹⁹Huidekoper, "Drifting back [sic] Seventy Years," p. 1.

and had arrived in poor condition.²⁰ This report was incorrect, for losses were later estimated at about seventy-five per cent, with some small ranchers losing an even higher percentage. Both the longhorn and "pilgrim" cattle suffered greatly during the winter. For example:

Wall Osterhaut who was located about twenty miles north of Medora, had 50 head in the fall but only seven remained in the spring, all of their tails missing and some with their horns frozen off. The Little Missouri Cattle Company, a small firm with headquarters about 25 miles south of Medora, lost 90 per cent of its cattle.²¹

The winter of 1886-1887 brought a sense of grim reality back to the northern cattle range after the earlier period of relative easy going. It was now clear that the weather would not always be so cooperative, and the potential for disaster was something to be taken more seriously. The open range system of ranching, however, was far from dead in western North Dakota. After assessing the situation, some individuals made adjustments, while others continued on as before. These continued ranching activities and the development and change in the stock industry of western North Dakota between 1887 and 1920 are described in the remaining chapters of this study.

²⁰ Dickinson Press, 2 April 1887, p. 3.

²¹ Welsh, "Pierre Wibaux," p. 100.

CHAPTER II

The Open Range Period, 1887-1905

The immediate effects of the 1886-1887 weather conditions were the tremendous loss of cattle and the financial loss that this meant to the stockmen. This severe setback to the area's stock industry, while not long in duration, did bring a sense of caution back to the range and a reevaluation by some in the industry. Although no major changes occurred overnight, new directions were taken by some ranchers and the beginnings of a new system of stock raising slowly began to develop on the northern ranges. In western North Dakota this would start during the early 1890's and would become more prevalent as increased settlement of the land took place during the years immediately following 1900. The immediate alternatives in 1887, however, were those of either restocking the range or leaving the business altogether.

The winter of 1886-1887 brought the wild speculation and investment on the northern range to an end. Some Eastern and foreign cattle companies went out of business, while others continued on by scaling down the size of their operations. In western North Dakota the large cattle outfits continued to operate without many changes except in the number of cattle handled. The Reynolds Brothers (Long X), the Berry-Boice Cattle Company (777), the Towers and

Gudgell (OX), and the Continental Land and Cattle Company (the Hashknife outfit) kept bringing herds up from the south for several years following 1887.¹

Wallis Hudekoper, owner of the Deep Creek Cattle Company in Billings County, wrote that following the winter of 1886-1887: "Former optimism turned into pessimism and discouraged owners quit but many well known operators charged off their losses and restocked, making money for good seasons and prosperous years followed."²

Theodore Roosevelt noted in 1888 that: "In the present form, stock raising on the plains is doomed and can hardly outlast the century."³ Roosevelt took this view with regret, as he saw the open range stock raising system as "perhaps the pleasantest, healthiest, and most exciting phase of American existence."⁴

Others had the opposite opinion on the open range system and the men who ran it. In November of 1887 the editor of the Rainy Buttes (New England, N.D.) Sentinel put forth the viewpoint of the "boomer" or those who wanted the area to grow and move in all kinds of economic directions to a better way of life. The Sentinel felt that it would be a "great day" for the west Missouri country when the cattle barons and the range stock business which it deemed unprofitable was changed over to the "modern, humane and more profitable system of farming, where cattle are domesticated and

¹Robinson, History of North Dakota, p. 190.

²Huidekoper, "Drifting back [sic] Seventy Years," p. 1.

³Theodore Roosevelt, Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail, (New York: The Century Company, 1888), p. 24.

⁴Ibid.

reared under an entirely different system."⁵ The Sentinel went on to say "we want less 'bonanza' cattle kings and more intelligent farmers with their families. . ."⁶

The Sentinel, located at New England, North Dakota in Hettinger County had little use for the open range system and its supporters. New England, North Dakota was originally settled by the New England Colony Association for Dakota, and this colonization association settled persons from the New England region of the United States in Hettinger County. Many of the first residents came from Vermont, while others came from Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut. The association's purpose was to aid "worthy families in bettering their condition by locating on the best of free lands."⁷ These New Englanders had come from that kind of stock raising system which the Sentinel was calling for-- that of the small farmer and livestock raiser.

Some stockmen agreed that new approaches or enterprises more suited to the area were needed. One of these was A. C. Huidekoper who had begun the Little Missouri Horse Company prior to the winter of 1886-1887 but had continued to run cattle as well as horses. After the bad winter Mr. Huidekoper took tally of his cattle and horse herds and wrote:

⁵ Rainy Buttes (New England, N.D.) Sentinel, 25 November 1887, p. 1; 18 May 1888, p. 1.

⁶ Ibid., 28 April 1888, p. 1.

⁷ Ibid.

We had about the same number of cattle as when we started. We had years of work for no profit. So I decided to get out of the cattle business, but I liked the life, and found that while the loss of cattle was large, there had been practically little or no loss in horses. . . .⁸

Mr. Huidekoper thereby concentrated on raising fine horses which wore the HT brand, or **HT** as it appeared on the animal. The H in the brand stood for Huidekoper, while the T represented Henry Tarbell who was the first superintendent.

The headquarters for the Little Missouri Horse Company was located on Deep Creek about eight miles north of the Little Missouri River. This company was originally organized by A. C. Huidekoper, Alfred H. Bond, G. Gorham Bond, and Henry Tarbell. Later Earle C. and Albert R. Huidekoper, along with George F. Woodman, had interests in the company. The enterprise had substantial capital and could afford to invest in certain ranch improvements that many others could not. Huidekoper, for example, constructed barns for his earlier venture with the Eatons and the Custer Trail Ranch, and one of these was brought to the headquarters of the Little Missouri Horse Company. This barn was one hundred feet long and forty feet wide, with a large hay loft and both box and single stalls. Huidekoper added a log bunk house, a small house for the foreman, a wagon shed, and a chicken house.⁹ The company also had barns east of Dickinson at Gladstone where some mares and colts were kept during

⁸ Huidekoper, My Experience and Investment, p. 32.

⁹ Ibid., p. 33.

the winter season. Some of the HT grazing land was fenced in and some feeding was carried out during bad weather. The Little Missouri Horse Company carried on a transitional kind of stock raising system for both the public domain open range as well as fenced pastures, barns, and winter feeding were practiced.

A. C. Huidekoper was very much in favor of good stock and started to upgrade a mixed herd of horses. At the time of his association with the Eatons, he had obtained some full-blooded horses as well as shorthorn cattle. One of the horses was a thoroughbred stallion registered under the name "Bound" but which, on arrival in the Badlands of North Dakota, was known as "Gray Wolf." This animal was fifteen hands three inches in height, grey in color, and was used to sire a better grade of colts. Huidekoper wrote:

We commenced with high standards for our foundation stock, I imported 35 Percheron mares from France and six stallions. I bought some pure-bred stallions from Mark Durham of Aakland, Illinois. We bought some Oregon mares to cross with our full blood sire. Sitting Bull's war ponies were captured on the Canadian border and offered for sale. I bought some of these to cross with my thoroughbred stallion. Some of these ponies had bullet holes through their necks received in the Custer fight.¹⁰

Huidekoper was not alone in his determination to build up a high quality herd. There were several men in western North Dakota who followed a more modern and scientific approach to raising livestock and forage crops than did the majority of the area livestock raisers. One of these men was T. S. Underhill, a retired shoe store owner from Williamsport, Pennsylvania. He had become

¹⁰Ibid., p. 34.

interested in both ranching and farming and in 1884 began the Springvale Stock Farm located five miles west of Antelope and thirty miles east of Dickinson in Stark County. By 1888, Mr. Underhill was well established in the area, selling Clydesdale and Norman-Belgian horses, and although his first cattle operation were in Holstein-Friesian dairy cattle, he also added Angus (beef type) cattle to his stock farm in 1888. Underhill became an active force in the promotion of top quality livestock breeds which he had brought west from Pennsylvania, and he was a frequent contributor to the Dickinson Press writing articles on livestock raising, forage crops, and farming.¹¹ Mr. Underhill was familiar with the Eastern stock farming system of stock raising and he attempted to adapt this to the conditions in the West.

In January 1888 the National Livestock Journal commented on the subject of building up the size and quality of livestock herds:

There will probably never be a more favorable time for breeders to improve their herds of cattle than the present. The prices of well bred animals bring them within the reach of all, and those who have heretofore given as a reason for continuing to raise inferior stock, that it required too much capital to do otherwise can no longer argue this. The advantage to be gained by having well bred stock is made especially prominent now, when so many inferior cattle are being marketed at extremely low prices, while the better grades are more saleable at considerably higher figures.¹²

Some western North Dakota ranchers took this advice, but many, primarily the larger outfits with Texas connections, continued to

¹¹Dickinson Press, 5 March 1887, p. 2; 12 May 1888, p. 3.

¹²National Livestock Journal as quoted in Dickinson Press, 7 January 1888, p. 2.

bring up the "southern cattle."

The year 1889 was noted for the great influx of cattle back onto the range of western North Dakota. The large outfits continued to bring up Texas cattle in very large numbers. For example, in April 1889 a group of men from the Long X (Reynolds Bros.) in McKenzie County, and the Diamond C which was managed by W. L. Richards and located in the Killdeer Mountains area, went to Windover, Wyoming where they met a Texas outfit trailing 7,000 head of cattle and 1,600 horses northward. The Long X took 5,000 of the cattle and 1,000 horses for their range, while the Diamond C took 1,500 cattle. The remaining stock went to Howard Eaton of the Custer Trail Ranch.¹³ In 1891 the Berry-Boice Cattle Company (777) likewise trailed up 3,000 head of cattle for their range.¹⁴

Young cattle from Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin were also shipped in great numbers to western North Dakota from 1889 into the early 1890's. In the spring of 1891, for example, it was estimated that 1,500 Minnesota cattle were brought into the Killdeer Mountains area alone.¹⁵ The smaller ranchers generally handled this kind of stock.

By May 1891, it was estimated that there were about 250,000 head of cattle in the range country tributary to Dickinson (this area included most of the range land of present day Stark, Billings,

¹³Ibid., 20 April 1889, p. 3.

¹⁴Ibid., 20 June 1891, p. 3.

¹⁵Ibid.

Golden Valley, Dunn, McKenzie, Slope, and Hettinger counties).¹⁶ The winters from 1888 to 1890 were normal and relatively mild, and some optimism returned to the range. By 1891 the cattle population of western North Dakota was back to about where it had been in 1886. In 1886, 824 carloads of cattle had been shipped to eastern markets from the Dickinson stockyards, the major cattle shipping center of western North Dakota, and in 1891 some 854 carloads of 17,934 head went east to market.¹⁷

Although the cattle market prices of the early 1890's were rather low, large numbers of cattle still were brought into the range land west of the Missouri River. In part this was because the price of Texas stock remained low. The Long X, Diamond C, Berry-Boice Cattle Company, and other large ranches brought large herds north. In June of 1893, for example, the Diamond C turned 2,300 Texan steers out onto their Killdeer Mountain range. The Long X did the same with 2,760 head just north of the Killdeer Mountains at Cherry Creek in McKenzie County. Two other large herds of similar size arrived there later in the summer.¹⁸

In 1893 some North Dakota ranchers brought cattle in from new areas. Dan Zimmerman shipped 1,000 steers in from Oregon for his range north of the Dickinson area, and contrary to its name, the Little Missouri Horse Company brought 1,200 Arizona steers up the trail to its range in Billings County.¹⁹ The Berry-Boice Cattle Company (777)

¹⁶ Ibid., 16 May 1891, p. 3.

¹⁷ Ibid., 5 March 1892, p. 3.

¹⁸ Ibid., 29 June 1893, p. 3.

¹⁹ Ibid.

brought 8,000 head of Texas cattle over the trail to North Dakota in September of 1894, and continued to do this cattle driving north from Texas and Arizona each year throughout most of the 1890's. Each year from 1893 to 1895 this company shipped \$500,000 worth of cattle out of the Dickinson stockyards to eastern market.²⁰

In 1894, the Dickinson stockyards shipped 2,037 carloads of cattle to market, 72 cars of which were transient stock from points to the west of North Dakota.²¹ This was quite an increase over the 824 carloads shipped in 1886, or the 854 cars shipped in 1891. By 1894 the stock industry had not only recovered from the severe setback dealt in 1886-1887, but was now developing on an ever increasing scale.

While cattlemen were making great strides during the early 1890's, some stockmen went in new directions. A. C. Huidekoper and a few others turned to raising draft horses, though the local market for these animals was not yet very large. Horse numbers remained fairly low in the area; Billings County for example, had 3,761 head in 1890, Stark County had 1,171, and Hettinger County had only 81 head.²² The other alternative to cattle was sheep,

²⁰ Ibid., 8 September 1894, p. 3; 3 May 1896, p. 3; Robinson, History of North Dakota, p. 190.

²¹ Dickinson Press, 27 November 1886, p. 3; 5 March 1892, p. 2.

²² U.S., Department of the Interior, Census Office, Report on the Statistics of Agriculture in the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890, p. 342 (hereafter cited as The Eleventh Census; Agriculture, 1890).

and starting in 1889 this animal was brought into western North Dakota in large numbers.

Although all western North Dakota stock raisers did come in conflict with non-residents during the early 1890's, as tens of thousands of sheep from Washington and Oregon were unloaded on the North Dakota range to graze for long periods of time before resuming their trip to market, the local sheep industry was generally welcomed as added growth for the area's economy. The Dickinson Press supported the sheep industry and reported:

We are pleased to see our farmers engaged in sheep raising, as this business is very profitable and brings quick returns. There is wealth in sheep and no country is better adapted to the industry than Stark county and the farmer who has from three to five hundred sheep will always have money. More sheep, horses and cattle means more wealth to the farmer.²³

By 1890 large flocks of sheep were on the scene, primarily in the more typical farming areas of Stark and Morton counties. In that year W. A. Lanterman and Brother, a Morton County wool growing outfit, ordered sacks for a wool clip of 20,000 sheep. This company operated by letting their sheep out on shares to area farmers, as was the practice of most of the large sheep outfits at this time. The firm claimed that their sheep averaged ten pounds of wool per head and the wool from western North Dakota was superior to that from Montana and South Dakota. In South Dakota, it was said, farmers put small flocks in pastures located next to

²³ Dickinson Press, 5 January 1889, p. 3.

plowed land where the wind would blow clouds of dust and dirt that would collect in the fleeces. The wool from Stark and Morton counties was said to be free from all of this dirt,²⁴ and since there were fewer plowed areas near sheep pastures in western North Dakota where grain farming was on a very small scale, this claim may have been valid.

Most of these early sheep flocks consisted of "grade" animals-- those having fifty per cent or more recognized blood from one of the pure breeds. As with any kind of livestock, the better quality or pure-bred animals produced more wool and sold better at market for mutton. Other livestock continued to be upgraded by the stockmen of western North Dakota during these years as well.

While some ranch outfits continued to run "southern" cattle up until the turn of the century, the 1890's were marked by a great deal of stock upgrading. Some stockmen had been raising top quality stock as early as the 1880's, but now registered Shorthorns, Durhams, and Herefords began to replace the "southern" or Texas cattle and the "grade" shorthorns that had been predominant on the range. In March of 1898, for example, O. P. Ziner of Dickinson obtained some Shorthorn, Durham, and Hereford cattle from Canada. One eleven month old calf weighed 915 pounds, and this particular animal was from stock that would ultimately weigh from 1,400 to 1,600 pounds at three years of age. Mr. Ziner soon had twenty bulls for sale and these animals were referred to as the finest

²⁴Ibid., 5 April 1890, p. 3.

west of the Missouri River.²⁵ Jeremiah Crowley of Broncho, North Dakota was another man engaged in the raising of registered Herefords for breeding purposes and for market. Mr. Crowley's ranch, located eighteen miles north of Hebron, became noted for its fine stock. In 1889 Mr. Crowley sold his entire bull crop to buyers in Oregon, and during the same year he imported a bull from Emporia, Kansas at a cost of \$500.00. Another raiser of top Herefords during the late 1890's was E. H. Brewster of Wibaux, Montana.²⁶

Two other breeds of cattle came onto the scene at this time, one being the Aberdeen Angus. A. C. McGillivray of Dickinson and George Harkins of the same vicinity were early raisers of this breed of cattle. During the late 1890's Harkins marketed Angus steers that weighed in at about 1,400 pounds.²⁷ The Sands Brothers of Seim, North Dakota began raising Galloway cattle in 1896, and they may have been the first to have this breed in western North Dakota. Starting in the spring of 1905, W. G. Clark, superintendent of the Little Missouri Horse Company and resident of Gladstone, North Dakota did much to publicize this breed of cattle. The Galloway breed was very old, having originated in the Galloway district of Scotland. This breed was claimed to be very sturdy and

²⁵ Ibid., 12 March 1898, p. 3; 26 March 1898, p. 3.

²⁶ Ibid., 23 December 1899, p. 3.

²⁷ Ibid., 22 April 1899, p. 3; 5 August 1899, p. 3; 2 September 1899, p. 3; 23 December 1899, p. 3.

well suited to the northern plains climate. Galloways were called the "original black hornless breed of Great Britain" and were responsible for the development of several other popular breeds such as the Aberdeen Angus, Red Polled, and the original middle-horned Durham cattle that led to the present day Shorthorns.²⁸

Mr. Clark did well with his Galloway cattle; in March of 1905 he sold one bull and eight heifers to D. Griffith, a rancher from Calgary, Alberta for \$1,500. Mr. Griffith was starting a Galloway herd at that time and felt that Clark had some of the best animals available. By 1905, Galloway cattle were well established on some Texas and Colorado ranches and their future in the western United States appeared good.²⁹ Of all the breeds available- Shorthorn, Hereford, Angus, Galloway, Durham- the Hereford was to become the most popular.

Horses also were being upgraded during this period. The Little Missouri Horse Company led the way in the raising of large draft-type animals and dealt mainly in the Percheron breed, although some Shire stock was also kept by the HT. By the late 1890's and early 1900's some 5,000 head of the best of these two breeds were located on the HT range in Billings County, North Dakota. After the turn of the century, other persons got into the horse raising business. H. C. Quinion and T. F. Roberts became well known for their draft-type horses that were similar to those raised by the

²⁸ Ibid., 4 March 1905, p. 4; 11 March 1905, p. 2; 18 March 1905, p. 2; 25 March 1905, p. 2.

²⁹ Ibid.

HT.³⁰ The Percheron breed was the most popular with these other ranchers, with lesser numbers of Shire, Norman-Belgian, and Clydesdale horses raised. The typical range horse used for working cattle was always in good supply, and the individual ranchers raised their own if they had large numbers of cattle to work. These horses were a mixed breeding of range mustang and some other breed of riding stock. Horses of this kind never sold for very much money, nothing near the price of what was received for good draft-type animals.

In numbers of animals raised, the state of North Dakota ranked low compared to some of the other western states where stock raising was virtually the sole livelihood. North Dakota however, ranked very high in the numbers of horses raised. This may have reflected the numbers of horses which were needed for the large scale farming operations of eastern North Dakota.³¹ The number of domestic animals on farms and ranches in the Missouri Slope country of western North Dakota was high compared to the size of the area involved. In Billings County (which in 1900 was larger than it is at present and included what is now Billings, Slope, and Golden Valley counties) for example, there were 15,196 cattle, 7,741 horses, and,

³⁰ Ibid., 2 February 1901, p. 3; 9 February 1901, p. 3; 16 March 1901, p. 3; 15 April 1901, p. 2; 18 May 1901, p. 3; 15 June 1901, p. 2; 1 July 1901, p. 2; 8 July 1901, p. 4.

³¹ U.S., Department of the Interior, Census Office, Twelfth Census of the United States; 1900, vol. 5, Agriculture, pt. 1, pp. 110-112, 287, 423, 456, 466.

showing the importance of the new sheep industry to the southwestern part of the state, there were 91,151 head of sheep. In Stark County there were 53,037 cattle and 16,015 head of horses in 1900.³² The local demand for draft horses would greatly increase in western North Dakota during the first decade of the twentieth century when increased settlement of the land took place.

A trickle of homesteaders began to arrive in western North Dakota during the late 1890's, but the great influx of settlers did not come until after 1900. In 1890 North Dakota had 27,111 farms, which included the small amount of land owned by the Missouri Slope country ranchers. The average size of these landholdings statewide was 277 acres, but the average amount of land owned by farm or ranch operators in western North Dakota was less than this state average, due to their use of public lands for grazing. The ranchers of western North Dakota generally owned only the homesteaded land on which their headquarters buildings stood. For example, the average size of the twenty-one farms in Hettinger County was 167 acres. In Stark County, of the 269 landholdings, the average was 160 acres.³³

By the late 1890's some ranchers in western North Dakota began to realize that the time was close at hand when land would not be so readily available. One example of this occurred in the spring

³² Ibid.

³³

The Eleventh Census: Agriculture, 1890, pp. 126, 160, 170, 178, 196, 239, 256, 261, 265, 273, 279, 296, 301, 305, 315, 337, 342, 346, 354.

of 1897 when T. S. Underhill, a rancher from Antelope, acted as agent for the Northern Pacific Railroad and sold 36,000 acres of land to ranchers in the Antelope area of eastern Stark County.³⁴ Increased homesteading in western North Dakota changed the Census figures considerably between 1890 and 1900. By 1900, the number of farms in North Dakota had risen to 45,332, an increase of about sixty per cent over 1890. Billings County which had very few individual landholders in 1890, now had 163 with the average acreage of 540.8 acres. Stark County now reported 846 farms with an average size of 618.9 acres.³⁵ This was about triple the number of farms for Stark County over the 1890 figure, and was a little more than triple the average acreage.

During the first few years of the twentieth century various land companies were formed in western North Dakota and homestead activity began in earnest. The largest company organized for the sale of land was the Missouri Slope Land and Investment Company. The company's officers included two well known stock raisers from the Dickinson area, A. C. McGillivray, the president of the company, and L. A. Simpson, the secretary. Other officers were H. A. Hunter, vice-president and Eastern manager, and A. L. Martin, treasurer. This company invested primarily in Billings County land and sold

³⁴Dickinson Press, June 1897.

³⁵U.S., Department of the Interior, Census Office, Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900, vol. 5, Agriculture, pt. 1, pp. 110-112, 287, 423, 456, 466.

large tracts there as early as 1901. In December of that year, the company sold some fifty-five sections of land, with all but four sections going to stockmen around Sentinel Butte, and the latter four sections purchased by Minnesota residents.³⁶

Speculation in western North Dakota lands began in 1901, as capitalists from states to the east of North Dakota became very interested in opportunities for making profits in these unsettled grasslands. Some of this Eastern capital came from men like William H. Brown, of Devils Lake and Chicago, who purchased some 60,000 acres in Morton County in 1901. Mr. Achorn of Boston, Massachusetts who purchased 6,664 acres in Billings County in 1902, or the Chicago syndicate headed by C. H. McHugh (A. C. McGillivray's brother-in-law) which purchased 45,000 acres in Billings County in 1903.³⁷ Another colonization syndicate headed by Mr. McMahan of St. Paul and Mr. McCrossin of Wisconsin, purchased 40,000 acres of land from the Missouri Slope Land and Investment Company.³⁸ In western North Dakota the Northern Pacific Railroad also had much land which was of prime interest to new settlers.

Early in 1902, North Dakota had 16,000,000 acres open for homestead entry. In March of that year the Northern Pacific began landseeker excursions and brought prospective buyers up from

³⁶ Dickinson Press, 14 December 1901, p. 3; 21 December 1901, p. 2.

³⁷ Ibid., 14 December 1901, p. 3; 21 December 1901, p. 2; 8 March 1902, pp. 2-3; 31 May 1902, p. 3; 2 August 1902, p. 3; 24 January 1903, p. 3.

³⁸ Ibid., 15 January 1902, p. 2; 22 February 1902, p. 3; 8 March 1902, p. 2; 3 May 1903, p. 3.

St. Paul on the first and third Tuesdays of each month. By 1903 the movement of settlers into western North Dakota was heavy and the Northern Pacific charged two dollars for the landseekers to come west and then, after staking a claim, to return for their families.³⁹

The Missouri Slope Land and Investment Company may have been the first to begin selling lands in western North Dakota during the early 1900's, but there were a few other companies that soon began operation. One of these, the Rainy Buttes Land Company, owned the railroad lands in ten townships on the Cannonball River as early as 1901 and predicted that a large number of Mid-westerners would soon come to western North Dakota looking for land. This prediction proved correct, for much activity in area land sales occurred between 1901 and 1905.⁴⁰ One other land company that was prominent at this time was called the Cannonball River Land Company. It was formed by J. T. Standing of Corwith, Iowa and M. W. Hutchinson, John Satterlund, and E. F. Allen, all of Dickinson. This company, like the Missouri Slope Land and Investment Company, had its land located in Billings County, some 44,000 acres.⁴¹ These various land companies competed with each other in acquiring customers, and the Missouri Slope Land and Investment Company even had its own railroad car in service to take landseekers out into

³⁹ Ibid., 14 December 1901, p. 3; 21 December 1901, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 12 April 1902, p. 4; 26 April 1902, p. 2.

Billings County.⁴²

These land companies as well as the local press publicized the area in glowing terms in order to attract new settlers. The Bismarck Tribune described the areas as a:

vast undulating prairie with nothing to relieve the eye save here and there an abruptly rising towering knoll, closely resembling the ancient pyramids of the plains of Egypt, it possesses world wide celebrity as the most richly grassed portion of the western hemisphere.⁴³

The Missouri Slope Land and Investment Company also had much to say about the Missouri Slope country of western North Dakota:

There is no better place to locate for ranching or farming. Rich virgin soil, abundance of pure water easily and cheaply obtained running streams and springs, country recently surveyed and placed on the market. Government lands being rapidly taken up. Magnificent quality of lignite coal in large deposits. Company will give free fuel for domestic use to its purchasers for three years.⁴⁴

This land company also had a banner on its railroad car in 1902 that proclaimed: "We are bound for Billings County the flax belt of North Dakota."⁴⁵ Such statements concerning the agricultural suitability of much of the Missouri Slope land may not have been correct, but many people apparently took such "boosting" language to heart.

Along with such advertising came the fact that the people who

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Bismarck Tribune as quoted in Dickinson Press, 8 March 1902, p. 4.

⁴⁴Dickinson Press, 8 March 1902, p. 4.

⁴⁵Ibid., 12 April 1902, p. 4; 26 April 1902, p. 2.

went out onto the land also liked what they saw, for land sales and homestead activity boomed during the years from 1901 to 1905. For example, during the last week of April 1902 alone, two hundred homestead entries were filed on Missouri Slope land. In May of the same year the Missouri Slope Land and Investment Company had prospective customers out nearly every day and in one week's time sold twenty-seven sections of land for from \$6.50 to \$7.00 per acre. This increase in land values was considerable, since land in the same general area had sold for only \$2.00 per acre in 1882 when the first cattle outfits had begun operation.⁴⁶

By early 1904 there were still 8,500,000 acres of land available for homesteading in the fourteen-county Bismarck land district.⁴⁷ Even with so much land left, problems began to develop with crowding on the open range. The problems created by the widespread settling of the land are what brought the open range system to an end, and will be covered in detail in Chapter V of this study.

With this increased settlement of the land in western North Dakota came an increase in the use of the more modern system of stock raising known as "ranch farming." As the name suggests, this involved the raising of some crops as well as livestock. This system had been practiced by a few individuals in western North Dakota as early as the late 1880's and consisted of handling smaller

⁴⁶ Ibid., 2 August 1902, p. 3; Huidekoper, My Experience and Investment, pp. 6, 23.

⁴⁷ Dickinson Press, 6 February 1904, p. 2.

numbers of higher quality livestock along with more up-to-date ways of caring for the animals. This meant the stockmen would have to invest in some farming equipment in order to put up hay and grow fodder crops like corn, oats, millet, and various domestic grasses which were being introduced to the western grasslands during the last years of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth century. Methods for supplying steady sources of water and shelter for livestock were also important, and wells, windmills, irrigation canals, silos, and stock shelters became increasingly popular over the years.

Ranch framing was first practiced by the smaller ranch operators. These men ran fewer head of cattle on their land and had to make the smaller acreage and fewer head of livestock pay off as best as possible. This meant that the land owned or controlled for grazing had to produce fodder crops. During the late 1890's the practice of feeding cattle during severe periods of the winter was recommended by various livestock experts from the agricultural schools in North Dakota and Minnesota. Local ranchers who conducted these feeding activities also helped publicize the benefits of such work in the local press. Professor Thomas Shaw of Minnesota was one of the experts in this field and was a popular speaker at the meetings of the Livestock Association of North Dakota held in 1898 and 1899. Professor Shaw urged stockmen to raise corn and Austrian brome grass, this latter plant being introduced as a good grass for the drier areas.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Ibid., 23 April 1898, p. 3; 21 January 1899, p. 3; 18 February 1899, p. 3; 22 April 1899, p. 3; 14 August 1899, p. 3.

Information concerning new crops, breeds of cattle, or anything involving ranching or farming was carried by local newspapers, especially the Dickinson Press. During the 1890's and early 1900's the Press ran a weekly column that contained items of interest to stockmen on both a national and local level. It also reported on what various local ranchers were doing in their ranch operations. The information available had an effect on the more progressive minded in the stock industry, but most of these ranch farming methods were not standard procedure for most of the ranchers in the western states as yet. Many ranchers still viewed livestock feeding as only an emergency activity to be carried out only during the most severe periods of the winter. The winter season of 1886-1887 had left an impression on stockmen as to what could happen, but the memory of that disaster may have faded during the following ten years when generally good weather conditions prevailed.

During the winter season of 1896-1897, however, a new reminder came to pass and the work done by some ranchers during the summer in raising fodder crops and making hay was taken much more seriously. Ranchers who had spent time in these farming activities were much better able to bring their herds through February and March when grazing was still impossible. By 1905, as large numbers of small ranchers became the norm in western North Dakota, such ranch farming practices were necessary for successful stock raising operations. The settlement of the new comers and the shift from open range to closed range ranch farming will be covered in detail

in Chapter V.

Immediately after the winter of 1886-1887 the market situation was not very promising, but this changed rather quickly. The average market price was only around one dollar per hundred-weight, whereas it had been \$4.25 during the boom year of 1883. The low prices were only temporary, however, for by 1888 the top market price was back up to \$3.85 per hundredweight.⁴⁹ During the 1890's the market remained good and those ranchers who stayed in the cattle business after 1886-1887 found the enterprise could be very profitable.

By 1891 the prices paid for beef cattle were as good as they had ever been. For example, Wallis Huidekoper, owner of the Deep Creek Cattle Company located near the HT in Billings County, purchased some southern cattle for around twenty dollars per head. By marketing time they weighed from 950 to 1,000 pounds and sold for from \$3.85 to \$4.25 per hundredweight at Chicago, or roughly forty dollars per head. After this herd was marketed, the Deep Creek Cattle Company handled a higher grade of southern cattle that initially cost \$22.00 to \$24.00 per head and also Oregon steers that were the offspring of Shorthorn cows and Hereford bulls and cost \$30.00 per head. The better quality steers sold for from \$4.50 to \$5.00 per hundredweight in August of 1891, with averages for this type of stock bringing from \$60.00 to \$70.00 per

⁴⁹ Osgood, The Day of the Cattlemen, p. 105; Dickinson Press, 7 January 1888, p. 2.

head based on weights from 1,200 to 1,400 pounds.⁵⁰

By 1893, economic depression had hit the United States. In the fall southern cattle weighing from 940 to 1,123 pounds brought only \$2.60 to \$2.90 per hundredweight, while the better quality animals brought from \$3.10 to \$3.60. By the fall of 1894, the market had picked up and cattle averaging around 1,100 pounds sold for \$3.60 per hundredweight, and those at 1,230 pounds brought \$3.80.⁵¹ The cattle market held up well during 1895 and 1896, with better quality stock bringing from \$4.10 to \$4.85 per hundredweight at Chicago.⁵² Steers from the corn belt states generally topped the market, and on February 8, 1897 seventeen corn fed steers brought \$5.15 per hundredweight at the Chicago stockyards.⁵³

The Chicago stockyards was the market center where virtually all the western North Dakota ranchers shipped their cattle during the open range years and well into the twentieth century, while a few sold some stock at St. Paul during the First World War. The Berry-Boice Cattle Company (777 brand) tried a marketing experiment in 1897 in order to better compete with the corn fed stock from the Midwest. The 777 handled mostly New Mexico and Arizona stock

⁵⁰Huidekoper, "Drifting back /sic/ Seventy Years," p. 2; Dickinson Press, 29 August 1891, p. 3.

⁵¹Dickinson Press, 15 September 1894, p. 3.

⁵²Ibid., 17 August 1895, p. 2; 21 September 1895, p. 3; 26 August 1896, p. 3.

⁵³Ibid., 13 February 1897, p. 2; 20 February 1897, p. 2.

of the Texas longhorn type with a small amount of upgrading noted in the cattle. The 777 departed from the pattern of shipping to Chicago for a short time when they shipped 265 head of Arizona steers to Kansas where they were fed and readied for the Kansas City market. When marketed they averaged 1,341 pounds and brought \$3.90 per hundredweight.⁵⁴ In September of 1897 the 777 tried the market at Omaha as well and received \$3.85.⁵⁵ The Chicago market remained the price leader for the 777 received \$4.10 per hundredweight there for some Texas stock that averaged 1,076 pounds.⁵⁶

The fall market season of 1897 was also successful for the ranchers, with one lot of steers from western North Dakota that averaged 1,183 pounds bringing \$4.50 per hundredweight. Others received from \$4.15 to \$4.25 per hundredweight for the better quality animals weighing in between 1,133 and 1,193 pounds. Heifers and cows that averaged only 897 pounds brought as high as \$3.87½. Prices on cattle were about one dollar per hundredweight higher on the average than the previous year.⁵⁷

The cattle market continued good through 1898. Ranchers received from \$4.10 to \$4.50 per hundredweight for cattle weighing from 1,060 to 1,205 pounds. By late August the market moved up, due in part to the increased demand for beef by the United States

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid., 28 August 1897, p. 2; 11 September 1897, p. 3.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

Army and Navy after hostilities between Spain and this country began in April. The higher grade, heavier weight steers were in good demand. Cattle weighing from 1,088 to 1,413 pounds brought from \$4.40 to \$4.90 per hundredweight. Texas cattle were even selling well during this period. The Little Missouri Horse Company, for example, received \$4.00 per hundredweight for some Texans weighing in at an average of 1,188 pounds.⁵⁸

The fall market season of 1899 was basically a replay of the previous year. All types of cattle brought good prices at Chicago. Southern cattle from the Missouri Slope country of western North Dakota brought as much as \$4.60 per hundredweight for animals weighing around 1,100 pounds. Top quality steers weighing from 1,250 to 1,450 pounds brought from \$5.00 to \$5.15 per hundredweight. George Harkins of the Dickinson area received \$5.40 per hundredweight for some 1,400 pound Aberdeen Angus cattle that had been grass fed on the range. This meant a gross price of \$75.00 each, or \$68.00 net price per head at the Chicago stockyards. These Harkins cattle were exported to Europe after the sale, an unusual case for grass fed range steers.⁵⁹ Range cattle seldom met the export weight requirements, but cattle such as those owned by Mr. Harkins were becoming more common on the western ranges and could compete with the corn-fed stock of the East.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 6 August 1898, p. 2, 20 August 1898, p. 3; 27 August 1898, p. 3; 10 September 1898, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 26 August 1899, p. 3; 2 September 1899, p. 3.

Other cattle even larger than this 1,400 pound weight were shipped from western North Dakota, but they did not bring such a high price. In late September, for example, A. F. Nolly of Buford, North Dakota had forty-four head averaging 1,559 pounds sell for \$5.20 per hundredweight at the St. Paul market and twelve head averaging 1,744 brought the same price. During 1899, several western North Dakota ranchers received from \$5.20 to \$5.35 per hundredweight for their stock.⁶⁰

By the late summer of 1900 some cattle buyers from Iowa came to the Dickinson area and expected to buy cattle rather cheaply, having heard that the area people were faced with a poor crop and bad grazing conditions. These buyers found, however, that the stockmen were in no hurry to sell unless they received good prices. There was no real problem for the Missouri Slope ranchers because the Chicago market was paying well enough at this time. Steers weighing from 1,014 to 1,297 pounds brought \$4.50 to \$4.70 per hundredweight, and cows and heifers weighing from 910 to 1,151 pounds sold for \$3.25 to \$4.35. By the end of August good rains came and the grazing situation for the coming fall and winter was improved and \$4.91 to \$5.10 were the top prices paid to area ranchers.⁶¹

The 1901 market season continued the general upward trend that had begun in the late 1890's. Steers in the 1,300 to 1,500 pound

⁶⁰ Ibid., 23 September 1899, p. 3; 30 September 1899, p. 3.

⁶¹ Ibid., 4 August 1900, pp. 2-3; 11 August 1900, p. 3; 18 August 1900, p. 2; 25 August 1900, p. 2; 15 September 1900, p. 3; 29 September 1900, p. 3.

class were marketed by more and more western North Dakota ranchers, and prices ranging from \$5.50 to \$5.60 per hundredweight were paid. Wallis Huidekoper, for example, marketed some grass fed steers averaging 1,333 pounds and received \$5.50 per hundredweight for a gross price of \$73.32, or \$68.50 net per head. H. H. Smith of New England, North Dakota sold some Polled Angus that averaged 1,461 pounds for \$5.60 per hundredweight, or a gross price of \$81.82 or about \$76.00 net. George Harkins sold some four-year-old range Hereford and Shorthorn steers averaging 1,476 pounds for \$5.75 per hundredweight that gave him a gross price of \$84.87 per head, or about \$79.00 net. Not since 1891 had cattle from western North Dakota sold for such prices.⁶² The total number of cattle shipped to market from Stark County in 1901 was 662 carloads or some 15,888 head bringing a total of \$714,960.⁶³

The market season of 1902 was even better as record-breaking prices were paid for all types of stock. The top prices were still paid for cattle from the corn belt states. Some top Shorthorn cattle from Illinois weighing an average of 1,595 pounds brought \$8.90 per hundredweight. Still, ranchers from western North Dakota came very close to these record prices. Ed Durrent of the Dickinson area, for example, received \$7.00 per hundredweight for some three-year-old steers that averaged 1,209 pounds that gave

⁶² Ibid., 31 August 1901, p. 2; 7 September 1901, p. 3; 14 September 1901, p. 2; 21 September 1901, p. 3; 5 October 1901, p. 3; 12 October 1901, p. 2; 19 October 1901, p. 2.

⁶³ Ibid., 4 January 1902, p. 2.

him a gross price per head of \$91.00. J. B. Stoddard of Sentinel Butte had some very large steers averaging 1,660 pounds bring \$6.50 per hundredweight for a gross price of \$107.90 per head, or a little over \$100.00 net. George Harkins' cattle continued to be near the top as he received \$7.40 per hundredweight for some three-year-old grass fed steers averaging 1,423 pounds that amounted to \$105.30 per head. During the fall season of 1902, average weight steers generally brought from \$5.25 to \$5.50 per cwt.⁶⁴

After 1902 the cattle market went on a downward trend for a short time. The fall market season of 1903 found the market down by about one to two dollars per hundredweight. In 1903, 13,754 head of beef cattle were shipped east to market from Stark and Billings counties.⁶⁵

In May of 1904, cattle prices remained low, at levels similar to those of the 1903 marketing season. By June, however, prices went up, and in three weeks time had gone up ninety cents per hundredweight. A lot of Eastern feed lot cattle had been marketed in the early part of the year, and this was looked upon as a favorable situation by western ranchers for there would be few Eastern cattle with which to compete during the heavy demand fall

⁶⁴ Ibid., 2 August 1902, p. 2; 9 August 1902, p. 4; 16 August 1902, p. 4; 23 August 1902, p. 4; 18 October 1902, p. 2.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 15 August 1903, p. 3; 10 October 1903, p. 2; 17 October 1903, p. 3; 7 November 1903, p. 2; 6 February 1904, p. 2.

market season.⁶⁶ By August the cattle market looked as good as had been expected due to the low numbers of cattle in the East, and the prices paid were a big improvement over those of 1903. Beef cattle were now being sold for \$6.00 to \$6.25 per hundredweight, with some stock selling as high as \$6.65 per cwt. This was two dollars per hundredweight higher than the market of the previous fall. Few medium weight steers brought less than \$5.25 per hundredweight. These price levels did not continue for long, unfortunately, and by October had gone down on the average of \$1.50 to \$2.00 per hundredweight, with cattle then worth from \$3.00 to \$4.65.⁶⁷

Along with the low prices in October of 1904 came a new problem for the ranchers. For the first time there was a shortage of cattle cars. Stockmen in Stark County alone had orders in for from 150 to 200 cars, but the railroad was behind schedule. This shortage was due primarily to an earlier strike among the workers at the Chicago stockyards. The strike had ended in the fall and the backlog of cattle shipments had put the railroad behind for some time. Ranchers in western North Dakota had brought their cattle to the railroad points, in order to ship them east, but found that the cattle cars were not arriving. Money was lost by these ranchers, for the cattle were getting poor feed while waiting for the stock cars to arrive and as a result lost weight each day that shipment was delayed. The delays lasted for as long as a few days to two weeks,

⁶⁶ Ibid., 14 May 1904, p. 2; 11 June 1904, p. 2.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 13 August 1904, p. 2; 20 August 1904, p. 2; 1 October 1904, p. 2; 15 October 1904, p. 2; 22 October 1904, p. 3.

during which time the market also dropped and even more money was lost. The lack of cattle cars continued to be a problem throughout the month of October. Even though cattle prices were low during the fall of 1904, eventually some 9,000 head more were shipped to market from western North Dakota than during the previous year.⁶⁸

The fall market season of 1905 was similar to that of 1904 and cattle sold for from \$3.00 to \$4.50 per hundredweight, with an occasional animal or bunch bringing from \$5.00 to \$5.60. Most animals, however, averaged around the \$4.00 mark.⁶⁹ Thus as the final years of the open range system came to a close, the cattle market offered no major profit to those who may have sold out and left the ranching business.

The cattle market from 1887 to 1905 was in general good, and no major financial setbacks were incurred by the ranchers of western North Dakota. Any downward trends were for relatively short periods of time and the several very good years made up for the low price periods. Expenses for raising beef on the open range were next to nothing. On the southern, Texas-type stock, profits of around one hundred per cent were not uncommon during the better years, while profits of one hundred to one hundred fifty per cent were made on the top quality, full-blooded cattle. Even during the worst market season a small profit might be made.

⁶⁸ Ibid., Ibid., 28 January 1905, p. 2.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 19 August 1905, p. 2; 16 September 1905, p. 6; 30 September 1905, p. 6; 14 October 1905, p. 6; 21 October 1905, p. 6.

Ranchers who handled horses and sheep during the open range years also did well. The late 1880's and early 1890's were years when large numbers of sheep were put onto the ranges of western North Dakota, and the market for wool was good from 1888 to 1899, although there were fluctuations in price. The wool market was down during the first couple of years after the turn of the century, and in 1901 wool brought only 11½ cents per pound and mutton animals around \$3.10 per head. During earlier years wool might have brought close to twenty cents per pound and mutton sheep around \$4.00 per head. Even though the market trend was downward in 1901, 17,325 sheep were shipped to market and wool shipments from Stark County amounted to 1,500,000 pounds.⁷⁰

The year 1902 was a little better for sheepmen, and although mutton sheep were still at the \$3.00 per head mark, wool was up to 14 cents per pound and 2,000,000 pounds were shipped out of Stark County.⁷¹ The market season of 1903 was not much different from the preceding year, some 50,160 sheep being shipped east from Stark County railroad points, and 2,500,000 pounds of wool at 15 cents per pound moved east.⁷² The market situation in 1904 was better for sheep raisers, but shipments were down by fifty per cent from western North Dakota due to the bad winter conditions of 1903 and losses in

⁷⁰Ibid., 4 January 1902, p. 4.

⁷¹Ibid., 10 January 1903, p. 2; 2 May 1903, p. 2; 4 July 1903, p. 3.

⁷²Ibid., 15 August 1903, p. 3; 10 October 1903, p. 2; 17 October 1903, p. 3; 7 November 1903, p. 2; 6 February 1904, p. 2.

many flocks. Mutton sheep were up to \$3.50 per head by the end of the open range period.⁷³

Locally, the demand for top grade horses was not very great during the 1880's and through most of the 1890's. Most ranchers who had fairly large cattle operations also ran their own range horses for use in working the beef cattle. Farmers had not yet arrived on the scene in western North Dakota in any real numbers as yet and the demand for good work teams was limited. During these years there were only a few western North Dakota ranchers who raised horses of the draft-type (Belgian, Percheron, Shire, Clydesdale). By 1899 the situation began to change and the horse market was doing well with a greatly increased demand for the draft breeds. H. C. Quinion, a horse rancher from the Dickinson vicinity, was one man who turned to horse raising during the late 1890's and sold several draft horses in the Valley City, North Dakota area for one hundred dollars per head.⁷⁴

Horse sales in 1900 and 1901 generally were to local parties, but the Little Missouri Horse Company had buyers coming in from many places. In February of 1901, for example, buyers came to the HT from Indiana, Missouri, and Canada. About eighteen carloads were sold during that month, or roughly some 350 to 360 horses. During one week in March, 136 head of HT horses went to buyers from the eastern United States. During the period of a year the HT sold 870 head of

⁷³Ibid., 28 January 1905, p. 2.

⁷⁴Ibid., 19 August 1899, p. 3.

horses for around one hundred dollars each. Along with the HT, other area horse ranchers did business with out-of-state parties, and horses went to Iowa, Kentucky, and Wyoming. Quite a few animals went to the mines at Butte and the lumber works at Missoula, Montana. Montana ranchers reportedly had sold 100,000 horses 1901, with many of these going to the British for use in South Africa. Because of these sales in Montana, good horses in that state were scarce and buyers looked for needed stock in North Dakota.⁷⁵ The number of horses shipped east to market from Stark County in 1901 was 116 carloads or some 2,784 head, with an average price per head of fifty dollars.⁷⁶ The horse market was down slightly in 1901 but it went up gradually during the next couple of years as the local demand increased due to increased settlement and farming activity.

In 1902, the average price for horses shipped east from western North Dakota was sixty dollars per head and included all types and breeds of horses from the best quality draft animals to the not-so-well bred range-type horses. Some individual bunches brought very high prices, and the HT ranch made some sales at extremely high prices. In May of 1902, for example, the Little Missouri Horse Company sold a two-year-old Percheron stallion for one thousand dollars. The more usual sales were made by H. C.

⁷⁵Ibid., 2 February 1901, p. 3; 9 February 1901, p. 3; 16 March 1901, p. 3; 18 May 1901, p. 3; 15 June 1901, p. 2.

⁷⁶Ibid., 4 January 1902, p. 2.

Quinion, who received from \$35.00 to \$75.00 per head for saddle horses, and \$150.00 for one 1,700 pound draft horse.⁷⁷

The large farms of eastern North Dakota also were a good market for the large draft-animals raised by the Missouri Slope ranchers. In 1904, H. C. Quinion sold some draft horses weighing an average of 1,400 pounds for \$125.00 per head to Thomas Fowler of Casselton, North Dakota. Mr. Fowler also bought a carload of Percheron and Shire geldings from the Little Missouri Horse Company for \$2,500 or about \$125.00 per head. The Fowler farm was ten sections in size and many large horses were needed to work the land. Many of the horses purchased by the Fowler Farm Company, some two to three hundred each year, were handled and worked at the farm for one year and then sold to parties in the Winnipeg area.⁷⁸

The horse market was on an upward trend during the years 1903 to 1905. Many farmers and small ranchers were homesteading in western North Dakota and needed draft-type stock for their operations. The demand for good horses on Red River Valley wheat farms also brought buyers from that area to the range of western North Dakota in search of stock. Horse buyers from many states and the prairie provinces of Canada paid around \$125.00 per head to horse ranchers of the Missouri Slope.⁷⁹ The horse market boomed during the years following 1905 and this period will be covered in later chapters.

⁷⁷Ibid., 10 January 1903, p. 2; 2 May 1903, p. 2; 4 July 1903, p. 3.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid., 15 April 1905, p. 2; 1 July 1905, p. 2; 8 July 1905, p. 4.

While the market situation caused no major financial setbacks for the ranchers of western North Dakota during the open range years, other elements present on the range were of a more serious consequence to the stock industry. These elements of the grassland environment caused various problems for the open range ranchers and will be detailed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III

Natural Problems on the Open Range, 1887-1905

During the open range years several problems faced the ranchers of western North Dakota in varying degrees. The most serious of these were all part of the natural grassland environment and affected the livestock either directly or indirectly through the grazing conditions. These were not problems caused by human activity and therefore were much harder to deal with. Wild animals, disease, and severe weather were involved.

During the open range years of 1887-1905, predatory animals were the number one problem for the stockmen of western North Dakota. There were several species of predatory animals in western North Dakota and they were a threat to the cattle industry in varying degrees.

The grizzly bear inhabited the Badlands and the Little Missouri River country up until about 1899, but while there were several noted stock-killing grizzlies in some of the Rocky Mountain states during these years, the bears were never much of a problem for western North Dakota ranchers. There were only a few reports of stock killed by grizzly bears and one occurred in August of 1893. On horseback, rancher George Frye and another man gave chase to a grizzly estimated as weighing from eight hundred to nine hundred pounds. The men did not have a gun with them and the bear kept to the brush

along the Little Missouri River avoiding attempts to rope it. Other reports of grizzlies were made by hunters who happened to take the animals during the years of 1894, 1895, and 1897 along the Little Missouri River and on the Long X and Diamond C ranches. The bears inhabited a relatively small area and were never very numerous nor a major threat to the area's stock industry.¹

Another large predator, the mountain lion, was found in western North Dakota during the 1887-1905 period, but like the grizzly it never was very numerous and tended to stay away from areas of human activity. Mountain lions were found in about the same area as the grizzly--in the Badlands, along the Little Missouri River and other wooded streams, and in the Killdeer Mountains. All of these areas were remote with few human trespassers. When mountain lions did strike domestic herds they tended to concentrate on horseflesh, but as Theodore Roosevelt noted as early as the 1880's, this big cat was pretty rare in the area and was no major threat to the livestock industry.²

Both the coyote and the bobcat were capable of killing sheep and calves, but only the coyote was numerous and bold enough to cause serious problems. During the open range period the coyote was the second most serious predatory threat, and it was a major problem for sheepmen.

The number one predator of all livestock during the open range

¹Dickinson Press, 19 August 1893, p. 2; 15 December 1894, p. 3; 30 November 1895, p. 3; 12 June 1897, p. 3; 19 June 1897, p. 3.

²Roosevelt, Hunting Trips of a Ranchman, p. 26.

years was the wolf. Known primarily as the gray wolf in western North Dakota, this animal was also called the Great Plains wolf, the buffalo wolf in prairie country, and the lobo wolf in the southwestern United States. This animal was generally larger than the eastern timber wolf, and these prairie wolves commonly weighed up to one hundred and seventy-five pounds or more. These were the same animals that had followed and preyed upon the great herds of buffalo in earlier years, and since the buffalo had been replaced by the beef steer these wolves simply switched their feeding habits, finding the cattle easier prey.

Gray wolves generally traveled in packs of from ten to as many as forty animals and attacked isolated groups of stock. But on occasion they would strike very near human habitation. Wolves would spend as much as a day "worrying" or tiring out their prey and usually took only the choicest individuals. Roosevelt described the scene of a typical wolf kill as told by the tracks in the snow of western North Dakota. On this occasion a large steer had put up a fight before going down before two attacking wolves. In typical fashion one wolf attacked the steer from the front and drew its attention while the second wolf attacked the animal from behind tearing at the steer's hamstrings and flanks. The wolves would keep up this team effort until they had succeeded in breaking the steer down. The steer, now unable to move since its hind legs were torn and useless, was at the mercy of the predators.³ Often the

³Theodore Roosevelt, Outdoor Pastimes of an American Hunter (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), pp. 130-131 (hereafter cited as Roosevelt, Outdoor Pastimes).

wolves would start feeding on the disabled animal while it was still alive. This fact, along with the financial loss the rancher incurred every time a steer was lost, made it rather easy for the stock raisers to hate these predators. The first animal killed might or might not be consumed, depending on the victim's size and the wolf pack's appetite. According to the old Badlands ranchers, a wolf pack would kill one animal to eat and then kill others for practice in the art of killing. There are documented cases of so-called "renegade" wolves that killed hundreds and even thousands of cattle and other livestock on the ranges of the western United States, killing them not for food but simply, it would seem, out of a destructive and malicious intent. Wolves unlike many predatory animals, did not usually return to a previous kill but would kill a fresh animal when they were hungry.⁴

The war against wolves, and for all practical purposes it was considered a war by most stockmen, went on for many years. Wolves were considered vermin to be killed whenever the opportunity presented itself. Every method of killing wolves was tried and encouraged. As early as 1883 the Montana territorial legislature put a one dollar bounty on wolves, and between 1883 and 1886 some five thousand wolf pelts were brought in.⁵

Most wolves were killed by professional hunters or trappers,

⁴Roger A. Caras, The Custer Wolf, Biography of an American Renegade (Boston-Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1966), p. 149; Welsh, "Pierre Wibaux," pp. 149-150.

⁵Welsh, "Pierre Wibaux," pp. 149-150.

but on occasion cowhands on the range managed to account for the predators. Contrary to popular belief, cowboys did not often carry firearms while working cattle. A rifle scabbard on a horse would tend to disrupt the balance of a quick manuevering cow horse and could get in the way during roping. Sidearms were not usually worn either; revolvers were more likely to be worn for "show" purposes when the cowhands went into town. This lack of firearms on the range was of no great consequence, for few wolves were ever seen by riders or a shot at one presented. Those that were spotted by cowhands were those that were surprised as they were feeding on a fresh kill or flushed from a hiding place by accident. Most of these wolves had full stomachs, could not run very fast, and were relatively easy to run down on horseback. For these occasions a cowhand did not really need a firearm but used the cowboy's number one tool, the rope, to finish the job.

One such incident occurred in December of 1888 when three Hashknife cowboys came upon several wolves that had just killed a couple calves near the Little Missouri River. The men gave chase and lassoed three of the wolves, dragging them behind their horses until they believed the predators were dead. This was the standard procedure for dispatching roped wolves and was usually successful, but in this particular case there were complications. Two of the animals were skinned without trouble, but the third "dead" wolf came to life during the process, jumped up and grabbed one man's thigh in its jaws and kept its hold until the other two cowhands came to

the man's rescue.⁶

In eastern Montana wolves increased in numbers during the late 1880's and early 1890's. The same situation was experienced in western North Dakota, and stockmen there soon were very concerned over losses to wolves. In March of 1892, a petition to the Stark County commissioners asked that a bounty be declared on wolves. This attempt was unsuccessful at that time, but in January of 1893, the Billings County commissioners, meeting in Medora, received a petition from forty stockmen. After a long review and debate the commissioners resolved that a \$2.50 bounty would be paid on every wolf killed within the county when its pelt was presented to the county auditor.⁷

During 1893 heavy cattle losses were incurred on both the eastern Montana-western North Dakota ranges. In April, at the annual meeting of the Montana Stockgrowers Association, a resolution was passed whereby each member pledged to support the employment of a man who was to do nothing but poison wolves every June and November.⁸ In September of 1893, the editor of the Dickinson Press gave his view on the problem:

Wolves are killing a good many cattle and colts back on the ranges, and something ought to be done to prevent it. The state pays a bounty of \$2 on wolf scalps and if the bounty could be raised in some way

⁶Dickinson Press, 29 December 1888, p. 3.

⁷Welsh, "Pierre Wibaux," p. 251; Dickinson Press, 5 March 1892, p. 2; 21 January 1893, p. 2.

⁸Welsh, "Pierre Wibaux," p. 252.

to about \$5, giving perhaps a liberal reward to the party killing the greatest number, it would be an incentive to hunters to go to work and exterminate the wolves. Montana people living this side of the Yellowstone would, no doubt, join heartily in work of this kind.⁹

The years of 1894-1895 were very bad for the stockmen of western North Dakota and eastern Montana due to the wolf predation. In the spring of 1894, for example, Pierre Wibaux, the prominent eastern Montana cattleman, reported that he should have branded 3,000 calves that spring but would be lucky to have 300 due to wolves.¹⁰ In December of 1894, wolves in western North Dakota were reported as "bothering the range stock a great deal."¹¹ Theodore Roosevelt and others noted that from 1894 to 1896 the wolves were very numerous and more daring in their attacks on livestock.¹²

In the fall of 1895, Pierre Wibaux (W or W Bar brand), the Towers and Gudgell (OX), and the Berry-Boice Cattle Company (777) combined to place men in the field against the wolf menace and offered a \$5.00 bounty on every adult and \$2.50 for every young animal. Trapping, poisoning, and hunting with firearms had failed to reduce the wolf population to any great degree, so various breeds

⁹Dickinson Press, 9 September 1893, p. 2.

¹⁰Welsh, "Pierre Wibaux," p. 253.

¹¹Dickinson Press, 22 December 1894, p. 3.

¹²Roosevelt, Outdoor Pastimes, p. 125; Dickinson Press, 2 February 1895, p. 2.

of dogs were acquired and used to run down and kill the predators.¹³ The use of hounds proved to be the most effective method of wolf control during the 1890's and early years of the 1900's.

As early as 1893, some area ranchers had begun to bring various "wolfhounds" to the range in order to tackle the predator problem. Andy Robinson had one of the first wolfhounds in the Dickinson area, but reports as to the dog's ability were varied.¹⁴ Generally no one dog was any match for a big wolf in cunning and fighting ability. A wolf is very large and powerful for its weight, and some of these predators weighed up to or even more than 175 pounds. Needless to say, some of the first dogs tried at the wolf killing business did not last very long. A carefully selected hound pack, working as a team with a man on a good hunting horse, could get the job done.

One of the most effective of the wolf hunting packs during the 1890's was owned by Pierre Wibaux. Originally hired as a cowhand, Ed Massingale was converted to wolf hunter by Mr. Wibaux in 1895. All types of hunting dog breeds were brought together at the W ranch and crossbred in an attempt to get a suitable dog. For speed and coursing ability, Wibaux acquired Russian wolfhounds, Irish wolfhounds, Scottish deerhounds, and Greyhounds, as these breeds had been used for chasing, catching, and killing wolves and larger game in Europe since

¹³ Welsh, "Pierre Wibaux," p. 254.

¹⁴ Dickinson Press, 30 December 1893, p. 3; 6 January 1894, p. 3.

medieval times. To produce dogs of even larger size and strength, Great Danes and Mastiffs were added. Lastly, for their scenting ability, Foxhounds were included in this mixed breeding.¹⁵ Theodore Roosevelt acknowledged the effectiveness of this hound pack but noted the mixture of the bloodlines. He wrote that it was "not a good looking pack, but it was thoroughly fit for its work. The only two requisites were that the dogs should run fast and fight gamely."¹⁶ Mr. Massingale was supplied with a camp outfit, dog wagons, and the best of the W horses. He hunted year round, taking half of his fifty dogs out into the countryside while the rest were left at ranch headquarters and taken out as fresh animals or replacements were needed. In actual hunting, from five to seven dogs were used at one time.¹⁷

The largest numbers of wolves were taken in the spring when the adult wolves were denning up and caring for pups. Ed Massingale and the W wolfing pack, while operating on the neighboring PK ranch, took fifty-six wolf pups in one week during the spring of 1896. In May it was reported that Massingale and the hound pack had killed from eighty-five to ninety wolves during a thirty day period. This kind of effective control did much to free the Wibaux and neighboring range from wolf predation.¹⁸

¹⁵Welsh, "Pierre Wibaux," pp. 254-255.

¹⁶Roosevelt, Outdoor Pastimes, pp. 130-131.

¹⁷Welsh, "Pierre Wibaux," pp. 254-255.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 256; Dickinson Press, 23 May 1896, p. 3; J. H. Reid, "Killers to Respect," Canadian Cattleman, September 1949, p. 46.

Killing wolf pups at den sites would not be looked upon favorably by most persons today, but the situation and attitude were much different during the 1890's. Roosevelt wrote that there "was no pretense of giving the game fair play. The wolves were killed as vermin, not for sport."¹⁹ All kinds of methods were used by stockmen, including poison and the burning of sulphur and other noxious chemicals at den sites to kill the pups.

The large ranch outfits were, of course, better able to afford the expense of maintaining a large pack of hounds and a hunting outfit. One very large hunting outfit was owned by the Standard Cattle Company in South Dakota. That ranch reportedly had around one hundred dogs and a full time wolf hunter. This outfit had several Russian wolfhounds, one of them having cost \$500.00. These dogs were said to have done a good job once they gained some experience at their task.²⁰ The Towers and Gudgeon (OX), headquartered near Wibaux, Montana, operated two wolfing outfits, one which used steel traps and the other hounds. During the winter of 1896-1897, their cowhands killed two hundred wolves on the range in the border area of eastern Montana-western North Dakota and the company paid them one thousand dollars. The Berry-Boice Cattle Company also encouraged their employees to spend time during the winter in pursuit of wolves, and it paid a bounty to its men for any of the animals that

¹⁹ Roosevelt, Outdoor Pastimes, p. 125; Reid, "Killers to Respect," p. 9.

²⁰ Dickinson Press, 26 December 1896, p. 3.

were taken. The cowhand who had a knowledge of trapping could make a fair amount of extra cash during the winter months when the cattle work was slack, for state and sometimes county bounty money could be collected as well as that paid out by some of the larger cattle companies.²¹

Several of the smaller ranchers also successfully operated packs of hounds during the late 1890's and early 1900's. Mr. H. Bradamier of Stark County, for example, took six wolves during a six hour hunt in the late winter of 1899. After a day's rest the hounds were taken out again and four wolves were killed on that day. This was an extraordinary feat for only two days of hunting. Fred Paduch of Taylor also kept a pack of wolfhounds on his ranch and had no stock losses during the winter of 1898-1899.²²

Two other wolf hunters of note from the Missouri Slope country were C. H. Merry and T. F. Roberts. Mr. Merry owned between fifteen and twenty thousand sheep which were divided up into four or five flocks and located on different ranches, and he did a great deal of traveling across the prairie, going to and from these places. Mr. Merry had a portable dog cage on the back of his buckboard that could hold four or five dogs. Wolves would often lie near roads and watch horse teams go by, and this weakness proved fatal when it was Merry's team that they watched. When a wolf was spotted, Merry, without stopping, could pull a cord to let the hounds

²¹Ibid., 21 August 1897, p. 3.

²²Ibid., 7 January 1899, p. 2; 18 February 1899, p. 3.

out to give chase. Mr. Merry's dogs seldom failed to catch their quarry and often overtook it within one mile's run. In September of 1900, Merry's dogs dispatched four wolves while on the way to the sheep ranches south of Dickinson.²³

T. F. Roberts, one-time HT foreman, Billings County commissioner, and rancher, was also an active wolf hunter during the early 1900's. In 1901, he acquired five "wolfdogs" from Joe Lenneville, a rancher located fifty miles north of Dickinson. Roberts traced Lenneville three-3 year old geldings that were worth about twenty dollars each for these dogs. These hounds had previously taken thirty-two wolves on Mr. Lenneville's ranch, and since he was not bothered by wolves any more he decided to sell his dogs. There were three Greyhounds, one Scottish deerhound, and a Great Dane-Mastiff cross. The Dickinson livery stable owner gave Roberts another Greyhound that had been left there, so he had six dogs in all. The four Greyhounds and the Scottish deerhound had the speed to catch the prey, and the large crossbred dog, although slower, had plenty of size and strength to finish the job when it arrived on the scene.²⁴

The ranchers hunted wolves in order to free the range of the predators, but others hunted them because it could be a money making activity. During the 1890's stockmen petitioned the county

²³Ibid., 4 March 1899, p. 3; 8 September 1900, p. 3.

²⁴T. F. Roberts, "Pioneer Life in Western North Dakota," North Dakota History, vol. 15, p. 4 (October 1948): 239-251.

governments of western North Dakota for bounties to be paid on predatory animals. Billings County always led the pro-bounty forces and offered \$2.50 for every wolf or coyote killed within that county's boundaries and brought into the county auditor. By 1893, the state also paid a \$2.00 bounty.²⁵ During the years from 1893 to 1905 the state bounty varied as new laws were passed or repealed. By 1897 the state and Billings County both offered a \$3.00 bounty for both wolves and coyotes.²⁶

The North Dakota wolf bounty certificates were transferable, so merchants or other parties could take them as payment for goods, usually allowing a little less than face value since the certificates were not paid until the state taxes were collected and the revenue made available.²⁷ The funding for the wolf bounty would soon become a major problem in North Dakota as well as in other northern ranching states.

For the fiscal year ending October 1, 1897, Billings County, North Dakota paid out its \$3.00 bounty on 1,500 wolves and coyotes, with about eighty per cent of the money paid for the larger predators.²⁸ Charges of fraud concerning the collection of bounty in Billings County were made in 1895 and again in 1898 when some residents claimed that people from Montana were bringing dead wolves

²⁵Dickinson Press, 5 March 1892, p. 2; 21 January 1893, p. 2; 9 September 1893, p. 2.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 6 March 1897, p. 3; 3 April 1897, p. 2.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 1 May 1897, p. 2; 10 July 1897, p. 3.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 9 October 1897, p. 3.

in from that state in order to collect the state and county bounty in North Dakota. The bounty law required that the person presenting a pelt had to sign an affidavit declaring that the animal had been killed within the county and a stated period of time, and in absence of proof to the contrary the bounty would be paid. In 1895, Billings County auditor, Edgar S. Foley, asked for any proof that false affidavits had been made, but no one came forth with any. Likewise in 1898 Billings County commissioner T. F. Roberts believed that wolf and coyote pelts had been brought in from the adjoining county in Montana where no bounty was paid, but this could not be proven and the county fund in Billings County was quickly depleted.²⁹

In January of 1898, the State Auditor published notice that all wolf bounty certificate holders were to forward the certificates to the State Auditor's office where they would be numbered and paid in their registration order. It was soon realized that the wolf bounty levy, collected for purposes of redeeming the wolf bounty certificates, was going to be insufficient. The amount raised for the purpose was around \$15,000, while the number of certificates issued required payment of between \$20,000 and \$30,000. By December of 1898, the problem was even greater with 15,000 wolves presented for a bounty payment between \$40,000 and \$50,000.³⁰

The wolf bounty levy of 1897 had been funded by a tax of one-tenth of a mill on property value in the state, and the editor of the Dickinson Press voiced the sentiment held by many persons

²⁹Ibid., 16 February 1895, p. 2; Roberts, "Pioneer Life," pp. 248-249.

³⁰Dickinson Press, 28 January 1899, p. 2.

concerning a wolf bounty fund. The Press felt that those engaged in wolf hunting would be less eager to continue in that endeavor if the bounty certificates continued to be transferred and sold at a discount due to the funding situation.³¹ Pelt prices on wolves and coyotes were generally low during most of the 1890's and early 1900's, so the bounty was really the only incentive for hunting and trapping.

By 1899 a rift developed between eastern and western North Dakota over the bounty issue. Eastern North Dakota was primarily flat, more thickly-settled farming country and was not good wolf habitat. There were few wolf predation problems east of the Missouri River, but the situation was the opposite west of the river. The Missouri Slope country was almost totally an open range stock raising area, with very sparse population and rough, broken terrain. This area was prime wolf habitat and stock predation was considerable. Eastern North Dakota was taxed for the wolf bounty, but many persons there, especially in the Red River Valley, did not want to support a wolf bounty bill and pay a tax levy for the support of a program they believed did not benefit them.

In January of 1899, the Dickinson Press angrily noted an article in the Fargo Call that had claimed the wolf hunters were careful not to kill female wolves so as to insure a good wolf population every year and a "new crop" of bounty money. The Press stated that no stockmen or person interested in the economic situation of western

³¹Ibid., 28 January 1899, p. 2; 11 February 1899, p. 2.

North Dakota would do such a thing, and it charged that the Call had been irresponsible for printing such a story.³²

Losses on the range continued to be heavy. L. A. Simpson, a rancher from the Dickinson area estimated that he had lost seventy-five horses and colts to wolves during the year.³³ The bounty bill discussed during the 1899 legislature drew much comment from western North Dakota residents. In February, the Bismarck Tribune printed a letter from George F. Parker, a prominent Billings County rancher, to Representative Lish of Dickinson; it was typical of the stockmen's sentiments. Mr. Parker stated that a wolf bounty was imperative, and he urged Mr. Lish to support such legislation. Mr. Parker went on to say that the number of cattle killed in western North Dakota was "alarming and a serious drawback to the stock industry."³⁴ Parker himself had lost five hundred dollars worth of stock (about twelve head) during the previous five months. The Tribune went on to say that the:

stockmen claim that the legislature does not object to passing laws protecting the taxpayers by appointing oil inspectors, bank examiners, weight inspectors, health inspectors, and other inspectors, including game and fire wardens, but when they are asked to protect the chief industry of the state a deaf ear is turned to their pleadings for protection.³⁵

The Tribune voiced the major argument used by the western ranchers in defense of a bounty system. This came from the State

³²Ibid., 28 January 1899, p. 2.

³³Ibid., p. 5.

³⁴Bismarck Tribune as quoted in Dickinson Press, 11 February 1899, p. 2.

³⁵Ibid.

Auditor's report of 1897 on the assessment of all personal property. The assessed valuation of all such property was placed at \$20,500,000 and the Equalizing Board raised this to \$22,000,000. Of this amount the stock assessment was placed at \$13,500,000.³⁶ The argument was put forth that since stockmen paid the bulk of the personal property tax, it was not unfair to have a bounty law in order to protect this business that was so important to state revenues.

Others wrote to the Tribune advocating a state bounty. One man cited the National Stock Growers Association meeting in Denver where members had recommended a general movement in the western stock states toward the destruction of wolves, before the wolves destroyed the industry. The Tribune claimed that the mayor of Fargo had not given proper support to the bounty measure in an interview with the Fargo Forum where he had reportedly said that the eastern part of the state should have protection not from wolves but from the indebtedness that was being created by the bounty system.³⁷

Ben Corbin, a veteran wolf hunter from Emmons County, just to the east of the Missouri River, spoke before the North Dakota House in February of 1899 on the bounty issue. He asked the group the question: "Does it pay the stockmen better to save \$3 or \$4 in extra taxes each year for a wolf bounty and lose \$20 or \$30

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

worth of stock to the wolves?"³⁸ Mr. Corbin went on to say that it took a pound of beef a day to feed each wolf, and he estimated that there were about 100,000 of the animals within North Dakota. This estimate of the wolf population may not have been very far off, for 15,000 wolves were killed in the state during 1897 - 1898 alone.³⁹

Debate over the amount of the wolf bounty levy continued during the early months of 1899, and the mill levy for that purpose was dropped from one-half to two-tenths of a mill. The stockmen of western North Dakota were not pleased and argued that the eastern part of the state, with its greater population, got nearly all of the state's \$420,000 appropriation. They claimed that the wolf bounty for western North Dakota was only fair.⁴⁰

The wolf bounty controversy and the predation problem continued into the twentieth century. Wolf numbers were especially high in certain localities. In January of 1900, for example, two Stark County trappers brought in 379 wolf and coyote pelts they had taken during the previous three months. During the summer of the same year, John H. Hager, a Morton County rancher, lost fifteen out of one hundred colts foaled. Mr. Hager felt that a joint stock protective association was needed to pay a ten dollar bounty on

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Dickinson Press, 25 February 1899, p. 2; 4 March 1899, p. 2.

every wolf taken in the area. This idea did have supporters, but such organizations did not come into being until a few years later. George F. Parker of Billings County believed that the county and state efforts had failed to rid the range of the predators, and he wanted to see national legislation passed to deal with the problem.⁴¹ The federal government did conduct predator control work a few years in the future but this took place on the federal grazing lands of the western states.⁴²

For the time being, the stockmen of western North Dakota had to depend on the state and county bounty systems for relief from predatory animals; yet the funding and payment of the bounty certificates remained a problem. Bounty certificates were from one to two years behind in payment.⁴³

The battle between eastern and western North Dakota continued. The Fargo Forum kept up the argument that the residents of the Red River Valley had no interest in extermination of wolves, and the Bismarck Tribune countered that if the newspapers of the Red River Valley talked about the injustice of the bounty tax, it was only fair that the press of western North Dakota argue that the university and agricultural taxes were unjust to that part of the state where there were no universities and little agriculture.⁴⁴ The Dickinson

⁴¹Ibid., 20 January 1900, p. 2.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Fargo Forum and Bismarck Tribune as quoted in Dickinson Press, 2 February 1901, p. 2.

Press also kept up the editorial fight for a bounty bill, and the legislators from western North Dakota struggled to keep such legislation alive. Eastern North Dakotans sent petitions to the state capital opposing a bounty tax, and the Press believed that people from west of the Missouri River should go to Bismarck and explain the situation to the "Valley" legislators. Western North Dakotans felt that the people from the eastern part of the state did not realize just how destructive the wolves were to the stock interests west of the Missouri River.⁴⁵

In 1901 the bounty levy was reduced from one-half to three-tenths of a mill and then only made it through a Senate committee by a vote of fourteen to thirteen. Later the mill rate was dropped to two-tenths and then was passed in the full Senate largely due to the efforts of Senator Simpson of Dickinson. The opposition from the eastern lawmakers had been very strong. Senator Murphy of Grand Forks had wanted to postpone the bill indefinitely, as he claimed it imposed a heavy tax on his county which received no benefit. Senator Wolbert of Cass County thought that the bill was vicious, for Cass County was paying at a rate of one hundred dollars for every wolf killed there. Even with such opposition in the North Dakota Senate, the bill had passed by a vote of twenty to eleven. One month later, however, the House killed the bill by a vote of thirty to twenty-four.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Dickinson Press, 23 February 1901, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 16 February 1901, p. ; 2 March 1901, p. 2; 9 March 1901, p. 2.

All was not lost for the Missouri Slope ranchers, for although the new bounty bill did not pass, the bill to repeal the old law did not pass either. As a result the county auditors still had to issue bounty certificates, even though no appropriation had been made for such payments. The Dickinson Press believed that since the old bounty law had not been repealed and bounty certificates were still being issued that the next session of the legislature would be "honor bound to make appropriation to redeem them."⁴⁷

Reports of stock losses to wolves continued through 1902, and in 1903 Senator Simpson again introduced a bounty bill in the North Dakota legislature. This bill was strongly supported by stockmen from the Missouri Slope area, and it came at a time when the large ranch outfits of eastern Montana were waging war against wolves, paying their own bounties, and even grubstaking professional wolf hunters in order to keep them on the range.⁴⁸

Senator Simpson's bounty bill of 1903 provided for a three dollar bounty on every adult wolf and coyote and one dollar for every pup. This bill required that the skin and skull of every predator killed be presented to the county auditor within ninety days. An affidavit was then filled out declaring that the animal had been killed in the county where the bounty was being collected, and it was signed by the hunter and two resident taxpayers of the county who vouched for the hunter's identity. The ears of the animal

⁴⁷ Ibid., Ibid., 9 March 1901, p. 2.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 24 January 1903, pp. 2-4.

were then punched with a one inch diameter hole in order to prevent it from being bountied again. Punishments for signing false affidavits, forging, or counterfeiting bounty certificates, and patching punched pelts were set out in the bill and ranged from a five hundred dollar fine to five years imprisonment.⁴⁹ This bill was changed later and provided for a two-and-a-half dollar bounty on all wolves and coyotes. This bill passed and Senator Simpson became a very popular man in western North Dakota.

With this new success in bounty appropriations, some Billings County residents asked that the county offer a bounty as well. An election was held on May 26 to determine whether a levy would be supported to offer a two-and-a-half dollar bounty; the vote was overwhelmingly in favor of the measure.⁵⁰

By 1904 and 1905, fur prices were higher than they had been, and more money could be made at wolf hunting. State and county bounties could be collected and the pelts then sold to fur buyers. C. E. Everett of Yule, North Dakota, for example, relied on steel traps and poison in his operation, and collected a total of five dollars state and Billings County bounty on each of seventy-five wolves he brought to Medora in December of 1904, and February of 1905. Some wolf pelts were now worth as much as ten dollars, while the average price was around four dollars.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 14 February 1903, p. 2; 7 March 1903, p. 2; 25 April 1903, p. 2; 30 May 1903, p. 3.

⁵¹ Ibid., 11 February 1905, p. 3.

By 1905, the major wolf concentrations and predation problems were more confined to smaller wilderness areas like the Killdeer Mountains and other isolated localities.⁵² Wolves remained a problem for some ranchers in western North Dakota, but the heavy losses over the entire Missouri Slope country declined after 1905. The final days of the wolf on the western North Dakota range will be covered in later chapters of this study.

Although the wolf caused the greatest number of livestock deaths during the open range years, other problems associated with the range environment were also present. During these years, various livestock diseases ranked second as a threat to the overall stock industry of western North Dakota. The losses caused in terms of stock deaths were not nearly as high as the number killed by predators; but communicable disease brought about a need for widespread action. In some cases nearly every stockman of western North Dakota was directly involved, and the financial burden involved in fighting a disease could be very high.

The major disease problems during the open range years involved the cattle herds. During most of these years there were no quarantine laws concerning Texas cattle, even though thousands of these animals were driven north into western North Dakota to stock the ranges of the larger ranches. This practice continued well into the late 1890's, and some area residents viewed the Texas cattle and the Texas fever associated with them as a danger to the region's

⁵²Ibid., 1 April 1905, p. 2.

cattle industry.

In 1892, for example, the Dickinson Press ran an editorial calling for a North Dakota quarantine law.⁵³ Nothing happened on this front until 1897 when the legislature passed a bill requiring stock inspection. This law required the inspection by the district veterinarian of any stock brought into the state. Fees were charged for the inspection and the stock owner had to pay five cents for each sheep, fifteen cents for each beef animal, and one dollar for each horse or mule brought into the state. The veterinarian also was paid ten cents per mile to and from the inspection site. One-half of the money collected went into the state general fund, while the other half went to the general fund of the county where the inspection took place. The veterinarian was also required to inspect cattle enclosures and railroad cars used in the transportation of stock "at reasonable periods". Stock coming in from outside the state could avoid all of this inspection and expense if the owners could produce a health certificate from the state of the herd's origin.⁵⁴

Many stockmen complained about this inspection law once it went into effect, but apparently they had little to say about it while it was in the legislative process. The Dickinson Press noted that the new veterinary law was "a revelation to some of the stockmen who have not been paying much attention to the legislation

⁵³Ibid., 24 December 1892, p. 2.

⁵⁴Ibid., 8 May 1897, p. 2.

of the 5th legislative assembly."⁵⁵ Most western North Dakota stockmen brought new stock in from the southern plains or from states to the east of North Dakota each year during the 1887 to 1905 period and felt the inspection rates were unreasonable.

Soon after this inspection law went into effect in 1897, however, Texas fever was no longer a problem. In 1897, scientists of the federal government began experimenting with cattle dipping in order to kill the ticks. In May of 1898, two thousand cattle were dipped at Fort Worth, Texas, divided into bunches and sent to different states. Twenty head of northern cattle were put in each bunch, and the animals were watched for seventy-five days. No fever developed in these test herds, so all quarantine laws were removed against the southern (Texas) cattle provided they had been dipped under supervision of the Bureau of Animal Industry. The Bureau found that crude mineral oil was effective against the Spanish fever tick and this was used almost exclusively from 1903 to 1911.

The first major livestock disease in western North Dakota was blackleg in cattle, and this problem continued for quite some time. Blackleg is an infectious cattle disease that causes the infected animal's legs to swell; it generally was fatal to the upgraded stock of this period. No stock losses from blackleg were reported from 1887 to 1897, and to what extent the disease was present is uncertain.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

First mention of the disease in western North Dakota came in April of 1897, when the Towers and Gudgell (OX) outfit reported a few losses to this cause.⁵⁶ After 1897 the disease became more widespread and much more of a problem.

Dr. Charles Ferrier, a Jamestown, North Dakota veterinarian, stated that the germ causing the disease usually was taken into the animal's body through its food but that it also could get into the system through scratches or sores in the skin. Dr. Ferrier noted that these germs could live for a number of years and that grass over the grave of an infected animal could even transmit the disease for several years. Dr. Ferrier stressed the danger of not disposing of dead cattle properly by citing a case where carcasses were dumped into a stream not far from the Dickinson area; this spread the infection for miles.⁵⁷

By the late 1890's a blackleg vaccine was in use in France, Germany, and some parts of the United States, with successful results, but only on an experimental basis. Dr. Ferrier likewise conducted experimental inoculations for stockmen in the Dickinson area for a nominal fee as early as June 1897.⁵⁸ State Veterinarian Hinebaugh then selected Ferrier to carry out an experiment with the blackleg vaccine on one hundred head of cattle in Dickinson. Fifty of these animals were six months old, while the rest were about

⁵⁶ Ibid., 27 April 1897, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 19 June 1897, p. 2.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

eighteen months of age. These cattle were vaccinated once, and then again ten days later, and the results were considered a success.⁵⁹

Some ranchers in Wyoming and Montana received publicity for their "home remedies" with which they allegedly prevented and even cured blackleg, and some of these methods were rather bizarre and inhumane.⁶⁰ It was rather ridiculous for ranchers to resort to these strange home remedies, however, for they could get free blackleg vaccine from the federal government under an experimental program. The federal government simply required that every cattleman who used the vaccine write Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson and give him information on the results. Although in 1900 the vaccine manufacturers and drug companies petitioned the government to stop this free vaccine program, the Dickinson Press urged all ranchers to cooperate with Secretary Wilson's project and also to write Senators Hansborough and McCumber or Representative Spaulding in support of the program.⁶¹ This free vaccine program was also supported at the ninth annual meeting of the Livestock Association of North Dakota held in Dickinson on April 16, 1900.⁶² By 1901, however, the free vaccine policy ended, and from then on the various drug companies made profits on the sale of vaccine to ranchers. In May of 1901, for example, the Baisch Drug Company

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid., 9 April 1898, p. 3.

⁶¹Ibid., 22 April 1899, p. 3; 3 February 1900, p. 2; 7 April 1900, p. 3.

⁶²Ibid.

advertised blackleg vaccinating outfits for three dollars or a cost of about fifteen cents per animal.⁶³

By 1903 the disease was on the decline and it caused only a few cattle losses during the next couple of years. By 1905 it was no longer a problem in western North Dakota. As blackleg was brought under control, another cattle disease became prevalent and soon reached a scale much larger than any disease occurring in western North Dakota prior to 1902. This was cattle scab or scabies.

Commonly referred to as mange, cattle scab is a contagious disease caused when mites burrow under the animal's skin and deposit eggs that result in intense discomfort and itching. Cattle in such condition lose weight and under certain circumstances can die. The scab problem in North Dakota was tracked down to an eastern North Dakota stockman who had shipped some bulls in from the herd of a well-known Minnesota breeder. These cattle had been shipped in a railroad car that had previously contained some Montana and Texas cattle with scabies, and the car had not been disinfected.⁶⁴

Cattle scab was first noted north of the Missouri River in 1902, and the result was a quarantine law pertaining to cattle coming in from scab-infested areas. William Mackin, district veterinarian for the Dickinson area warned stockmen to be alert so that no

⁶³Ibid., 11 May 1901, p. 3.

⁶⁴Ibid., 23 January 1904, p. 2; 30 January 1904, p. 3.

outsider brought infected cattle into the area. The disease was feared by the ranchers of the Missouri Slope country for it had never been present in that area.⁶⁵ The situation changed quickly, and by September of 1903 cattle scab was present.

The first evidence of the disease came when nine carloads of cattle belonging to the Beisigl brothers, after having been shipped from Glen Ullin to Chicago, were condemned as being infected with scabies. These animals had originally come to the Beisigl range from Canada and ranchers in the vicinity of the Beisigl's feared that other herds would also be infected.⁶⁶ The Glen Ullin stockyards were locked up and men watched for new evidence of the disease. If the disease was present, regulations would go into effect requiring the dipping of all cattle and would be operative until the disease was eradicated from the ranges of western North Dakota.

Unfortunately, the ranchers' worries were realized and by December of 1903 cattle dipping had begun. One of the first dipping vats was constructed in the Cannonball River country at a cost of between three and four hundred dollars. I. P. Baker was the first to dip there, and several of the larger cattle outfits were also in the process of constructing dipping facilities.⁶⁷

⁶⁵Ibid., 2 August 1902, p. 2.

⁶⁶Ibid., 5 September 1903, p. 2.

⁶⁷Ibid., 12 December 1903, p. 2; 19 December 1903, p. 2.

Stockmen petitioned Governor White to appoint ten livestock inspectors whose duty would be to assess the extent of the scabies problem. The initial plan was for these men to inspect the herds during the winter and then begin dipping operations in the spring. In January of 1904, Governor White appointed special veterinary inspectors and named J. E. Phelan, P. J. Pellisier, George M. Frye, C. F. Higgins, E. Deffebach, J. E. McCoul, and George Hettenbaugh, all well-known stockmen from the Missouri Slope country. These men covered Stark and Billings counties and the unorganized territory of the Missouri Slope.⁶⁸

In a newspaper interview, Governor White announced that the federal government would take charge of the scabies eradication effort, and he commented that few people realized the scope of the undertaking.⁶⁹ It was a massive effort and this scabies problem remained the top stock news item throughout 1904. The governor was wrong however, when he happily announced that the federal government would take over the operation. The federal government did supply personnel to supervise the dipping and the inspection of cattle, but funding or running the operations were left to the state and local governments.⁷⁰

During February and March of 1904, the stock inspectors covered their districts and found cases of scab in Stark County, along the

⁶⁸ Ibid., 26 December 1903, p. 2; 9 January 1904, p. 2.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 30 January 1904, p. 3.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Missouri River, and in the Cherry Creek vicinity.⁷¹ In April, stockmen met in Dickinson to draw up plans for dealing with the scab outbreak. Federal representatives were present at this meeting and gave suggestions. Dr. S. S. Hickox of Salt Lake City, special agent for the Bureau of Animal Industry in charge of the Northwestern states, was present, and, along with Dr. Tracey, State Veterinarian, he presented a federal order dealing with regulations concerning stock shipments, quarantines, and dipping operations. Cattle with scab could be shipped for slaughter by railroad if they were kept separate from other cattle at the stockyards. Infected cattle could not be shipped out of an area in order to graze or restock ranges unless they were dipped as prescribed by federal regulations. The federal government stressed the importance of using the recommended dips, as some stockmen in eastern Montana and Williams County, North Dakota had used a patent dip on between forty and fifty thousand cattle earlier in the year and the chemicals did not work. The federal government recommended a lime and sulphur mixture of twenty-one pounds of sulphur and sixteen-and-three-quarter pounds of lime to one hundred gallons of water. Two dippings were recommended, ten to twelve days apart. The Bureau of Animal Industry was experimenting in Texas with a crude oil dip, but this had not yet been adopted for cases of scabies.⁷²

⁷¹Ibid., 20 February 1904, p. 2; March 1904, p. 2.

⁷²Ibid., 2 April 1904, p. 3.

Dipping vats were constructed throughout the Missouri Slope country during the spring and summer of 1904. There were four dipping facilities in Billings County. These were located out on the range west of Yule, northeast of the HT ranch, near McQuillan, and at the head of the Green River.⁷³ There were two dipping stations in each of the unorganized counties-- Hettinger, Bowman, Dunn, Wallace, Allred, and McKenzie.⁷⁴ In the unorganized territory of western North Dakota, the state furnished everything but the labor involved in the actual dipping, and a fee of ten cents per head of cattle was charged. In the organized counties the fees charged ranged from fifteen to thirty cents per head.⁷⁵

A typical dipping station consisted of corrals, chutes, and a dipping tank. Those built in Billings County were constructed of fourteen strands of galvanized wire braced every two feet, and the chutes were seven feet high and made of two-by-eight plank.⁷⁶ All cattle were dipped once and if they then showed any signs of the disease they were dipped again within ten days.

The cost of getting the dipping operations going in North Dakota was estimated at one hundred thousand dollars, with the unorganized counties requiring about fifteen thousand dollars alone. The county commissioners were in charge of operations in the organized counties, and federal officers supervised the actual dipping and issued receipts

⁷³Ibid., 20 April 1904, p. 3.

⁷⁴Ibid., 24 May 1904, p. 2; 18 June 1904, p. 2.

⁷⁵Ibid.; Ibid., 30 July 1904, p. 3.

⁷⁶Ibid., 30 April 1904, p. 3.

to be accepted by federal inspectors as clean bills of health for fall marketed cattle.⁷⁷ No cattle could be brought into North Dakota unless they had been dipped within ten days of their entry and the owner could prove this fact by presenting a certificate issued by an inspector of the United States Department of Agriculture.⁷⁸ By the end of June 1904 the dipping east of the Missouri River was nearly completed, and Dr. Tracey of the North Dakota Veterinarian's Office had ten men from the federal government helping him.⁷⁹

Montana and South Dakota had scabies problems as well, and this was of great importance to western North Dakota ranchers due to the geographic closeness of those states and the nature of the free roaming open range herds. Both of these neighboring states were rather slow in recognizing the seriousness of the situation. Dr. Hickox of the Bureau of Animal Industry had stirred up the Montana ranchers with an order from the Secretary of Agriculture that required the dipping of all cattle shipped out of that state. The Montana stockmen held a meeting concerning this order and they selected a committee to take their grievance to Washington and get the order rescinded. Dr. Hickox had conducted an investigation of the Montana cattle herds resulting in the order from Secretary Wilson. Dr. Hickox's report stated that scab was prevalent in all but four Montana counties and these were not just a few isolated

⁷⁷ Ibid., 18 June 1904, p. 2.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 14 May 1904, p. 4.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 18 June 1904, p. 2; 2 July 1904, p. 2.

cases. Hickox had little sympathy for the protest by the Montana ranchers and he stated:

The order has stirred up the cattlemen, but they had warning. Last spring I told them of the conditions and my understanding was that they would take measures to eradicate the disease, but I found they took the warning coolly.⁸⁰

On the other hand, Dr. Hickox was very pleased with the way the North Dakota ranchers had acted concerning scabies. Hickox stated that in North Dakota the cattlemen "took hold of the matter in a prompt and intelligent manner, and the result is that by August over 300,000 head of cattle will have been dipped twice."⁸¹ Hickox believed that if the Montana ranchers had acted in a proper manner the disease could be cleaned up there within two years.⁸² Montana stockmen finally admitted there was "some" scab in that state but they were at a loss as what to do about it even as late as September 1904.⁸³

South Dakota had a similar problem with the disease and a lack of desire to do much about it. J. E. McCoul, one of the North Dakota stock inspectors, noted that some of the South Dakota ranch outfits--the CY, CM, and the Mill Iron--had made arrangements to dip their cattle at the tanks in Bowman County, North Dakota. McCoul was

⁸⁰ Ibid., 2 July 104, p. 2.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 24 September 1904, p. 2.

in charge of the tanks there and as of September 1904, some sixteen to seventeen thousand head of cattle had been dipped in that county. McCoul and others felt that both Montana and South Dakota had been trying to keep the facts hidden as to the extent of the disease in those states, but with investigations by federal veterinarians this was not possible.⁸⁴ The eradication of the disease in all three states was necessary due to the nature of the open range system operating in the western North Dakota-eastern Montana-northwestern South Dakota area. State border lines made no difference to wandering cattle herds or their owners, and the disease could be easily spread from one state to another. Since North Dakota was taking appropriate action, it was imperative that its neighbors did likewise.

Cattle dipping remained the top priority of western North Dakota ranchers during the summer and into the fall of 1904, as large numbers of cattle were moved through the various dipping stations. Stockmen in the vicinity of Seim, North Dakota, for example, dipped 9,892 head of cattle while 21,440 head were dipped at Eland and Gladstone in Stark County. Some stockmen believed that dipping later in the year would be more effective, since frost would tend to kill the scab mites present on the brush and grass, so some dipping stations remained open well into October.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Ibid., 17 September 1904, p. 2.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 24 September 1904, p. 2; 1 October 1904, p. 2.

Federal inspectors were not required to go into the country for inspection but were to be present to inspect herds at the railroad cattle pens. Such inspectors were located at Dickinson, Bismarck, and Mandan in North Dakota, and at Glendive, Montana.⁸⁶ The federal government recommended that in order to get what was termed "perfect" inspection, state and local inspectors should check the animals out in the field and then the federal officers would look at them again when they arrived at the railroad centers ready for shipment east to market. This would give the federal government a check on the local inspectors to make sure they were not passing cattle that were not clean.⁸⁷ In order to implement such inspection, Governor Sarles appointed Frank P. Stone and John Goodall, both prominent stockmen, to join the ranks of the other state inspectors.⁸⁸

For the first time in the history of the Dakotas and Montana; cattle on the various Indian reservations were rounded up and inspected. Surprisingly, of the 12,320 cattle on the Berthold and the 35,597 head on the Standing Rock reservations in North Dakota, none were found to be infected.⁸⁹

As of April 1905, there were still cases of scab reported in the southeastern part of North Dakota, as well as along the North

⁸⁶ Ibid., 20 August 1904, p. 2.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 1 April 1905, p. 2; 6 May 1905, p. 2.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 4 February 1905, p. 3; 18 March 1905, p. 2.

⁸⁹ Ibid., Ibid., 1 July 1905, p. 2.

Dakota-Montana border. By the latter part of 1905, scabies in the state was well on its way to being eradicated and the results of the massive dipping program could be seen. The total eradication of the disease would not come for a few years after 1905, but by the end of 1905 the problem was greatly reduced and the number of infected animals was relatively small and isolated in certain localities.

The third most serious problem facing the stock industry during the open range years was the weather, or, more precisely, weather extremes and the resulting consequences for the livestock herds. The general weather conditions were not too unfavorable for livestock during the open range period of 1887 to 1905, but there were a few setbacks for stock raisers.

The winter of 1887-1888 was very favorable and was helpful in boosting confidence after the severe losses of 1886-1887. In fact, from 1888 to 1892, the range conditions were very good in terms of mild winter weather and good grass production during the growing season. Stock losses during the winter seasons through 1892 were light and conditions could be characterized as was the 1890-1891 winter, as being "mild with very little snow."⁹⁰ In 1892 severe storms hit parts of South Dakota and eastern North Dakota but did not affect the country west of the Missouri River. In March of that year a man from southern Minnesota commented that some three-year-old steers on the Cedar River range in southwestern North Dakota were in better condition than some three-year-old steers in Minnesota that had been fed corn since the fall. Others from southwestern

⁹⁰ Ibid., 30 January 1892, p. 3.

North Dakota gave similar reports on the condition of the herds.⁹¹

The winter of 1892-1893 was a little more severe than the five preceding it, but stock losses generally were not higher than normal. In February of 1893, a rancher in the Belfield area estimated the loss in cattle would be normal for a winter season; not over five per cent, and T. S. Underhill believed the loss on his stock farm near Antelope would not exceed three per cent. Similar losses were also reported in March from Hettinger County and along the Grand River. In a few areas the losses were higher but none were believed to be over fifteen per cent.⁹²

During March of 1894, a snowstorm hit western North Dakota, and ranchers in the Medora area called the snowfall "the heaviest that has ever been seen in a single storm."⁹³ The stock losses were, however, small.⁹⁴ The winter of 1894-1895 continued the trend of mild weather and light winterkill of livestock.

Although conditions had been reasonably good for stock production in western North Dakota from 1888 to 1896, as far as the weather was concerned, the situation changed abruptly during the winter of 1896-1897. The winter reminded many persons of the 1886-1887 season, arriving early with heavy snow. By early December the snow was very heavy in the Killdeer Mountains and along the Cannonball

⁹¹ Ibid., 30 January 1892, p. 3.

⁹² Ibid., 11 February 1893, p. 3; 25 February 1893, p. 3; 4 March 1893, p. 3; 11 March 1893, p. 3.

⁹³ Ibid., 7 April 1894, p. 2.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 5 May 1894, p. 3.

River.⁹⁵ O. S. Chase, a sheep rancher from the Cannonball country, went to a neighboring ranch only ten miles down the river, but due to the snow depth it took him a full day to reach his destination.⁹⁶ The snow not only made travel difficult but it made grazing impossible. The Berry-Boice Cattle Company (777) could not get to parts of their range in the Belfield area in order to care for weakened and dying cattle.⁹⁷ Due to the unusually deep snow, a larger number of ranchers were forced to feed hay. By March the situation was becoming critical as hay supplies dwindled. In the Taylor area some ranchers were both feeding hay and buying oats in order to save their cattle.⁹⁸

It was obvious that the stock loss would be much higher than any year since 1886-1887.⁹⁹ As was often the case, early reports were at extremes, either claiming high or low losses. One western North Dakota rancher, Ed Foley, believed that the early reports were for the most part "exaggerated and that the losses among steers will not be heavy, although cows have suffered and many of them perished."¹⁰⁰ Foley went on to say that in the Badlands the range cattle had "been protected and the snow had not been as heavy

⁹⁵ Ibid., April and May 1895.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 18 December 1896, p. 3.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 13 March 1897, p. 2.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 27 March 1897, p. 2.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 13 March 1897, p. 2.

as in other parts of the state and as a consequence cattle are in better shape there."¹⁰¹ Mr. Foley believed that although some dead cattle would be found, the loss would not approach that of 1886-1887; and he was correct.

The winter of 1896-1897 was a long one, however, and as ranchers began to run out of hay by early March, many began to realize the importance of spending time during the summer months haying. The estimates of the numbers of livestock lost during the winter of 1896-1897 varied, for those ranchers who left their stock to "rustle" for grass or browse on the range lost a much higher percentage than those who had supplemental feed to give their herds.

One Cannonball River sheepman who had supplemental feed and lost fifty-eight out of two thousand head considered this "no more than the natural loss"¹⁰² on a flock this size. H. C. Christenson had forty to fifty tons of hay left in March and lost only six head out of a herd of two hundred-thirty cattle.¹⁰³ Alfred White, a Badlands rancher, estimated the losses there would be about ten per cent, and T. F. Roberts, foreman of the Little Missouri Horse Company in Billings County concurred with this figure. Joseph Meyer, however, fed no hay to his cattle on the range and lost about sixty per cent. Sheep losses were generally from eight to twelve per cent and were

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 3 April 1897, p. 2.

not considered extreme.¹⁰⁴ Losses in general were higher than any year since 1886-1887, but they did not approach the winter kill of that season itself.

The four winters following 1896-1897 were again very mild in western North Dakota, and area livestock had a relatively easy time wintering. The next severe storm did not come until March of 1902 and it covered eastern Montana and all of North Dakota. During the three days of March 14-16, the temperature stayed around the zero mark and from five to six inches of snow fell. At Bismarck the wind was recorded at forty-eight miles per hour, and at Dickinson forty miles per hour. A few persons were caught out in the storm but no lives were lost. The Dickinson Press called the storm the worst in fourteen years.¹⁰⁵

This storm caught most area ranchers off guard, for the previous week had been very spring-like and most of the snow had already gone. The storm came up gradually, however, and this allowed some ranchers time to move their livestock to shelter. Losses were heaviest among those herds and flocks that had been moved out onto the prairie a few days prior to the storm and could not be brought back to sheltered areas in time.

Sheep flocks were the hardest hit. In the Sentinel Butte vicinity Dan Zimmermann had a flock of 3,700 sheep scatter badly

¹⁰⁴ Joseph C. Meyer, Papers, newspaper article entitled "The Winter of 1886-7 and 1896-7 and After," p. 1; The Orin G. Libby Manuscript Collection, Chester Fritz Library, The University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, North Dakota; Dickinson Press, 10 April 1897, p. 3; 17 April 1897, p. 3.

¹⁰⁵ Dickinson Press, 22 March 1902, pp. 2-4; 29 March 1902, p. 4.

during the storm and about half of them died. Just across the border in Montana 2,000 of a 4,600 head flock owned by the Billings, Montana banker perished near Wibaux. The Parker Brothers, owners of 4,000 sheep ranging twelve to fifteen miles southwest of New England, lost about fifty per cent.¹⁰⁶

The Dickinson Press gathered information for two weeks following the storm and reported the losses of about sixty ranch outfits. Sheep ranchers had by far the highest losses. Even in cases where sheep were herded to sheds, they crowded together, piled up, and some smothered to death. Cattle generally did well where they had some kind of protection from the wind. Ranchers like O. P. Ziner, A. C. McGillivray, and C. E. Trask were able to put their cattle in good sheds and feed them hay or hay and millet during the length of the storm. Those who had fenced range were able to round up their stock and move them to shelter. On the unfenced range, cattle drifted for miles during the storm and many died. It took several days for ranchers to find stock out on the open range after such a storm. The majority of ranchers, however, came through with surprisingly small stock losses. Even when stock sheds were not available, most ranchers ranged their herds and flocks near rivers and streams and the animals moved into the wooded and brushy cover along these watercourses in order to get some protection from the weather. All told, the loss was estimated at from eight to ten per cent in sheep and four to five per cent in cattle.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

The next winter, 1903-1904, was a long and fairly hard one. On December 2-3 a severe storm started the winter season early, as had been the case during both 1886-1887 and 1896-1897. From six to eight inches of snow fell during this storm, driven by high northwesterly winds, and on December 4 the temperature was three degrees below zero. The Dickinson Press believed that some stock loss was to be expected after this storm, but no reports followed. The main concern at the time was with the scabies problem in cattle, and loss to a winter storm was considered a smaller problem not deserving as much print as the massive disease outbreak. In March of 1904, stock inspector E. Deffebach had been over much of the countryside in his scabies investigation and believed that the winter losses due to the bad weather and grazing conditions would not be as high as most people thought.¹⁰⁸

Following 1903-1904 came a period of relatively mild winters. Some individual ranchers who did not have supplemental feed on hand as winter approached continued to lose animals if grazing was restricted due to adverse weather conditions for any length of time.

The three major problems which have been detailed in this chapter--wolves, disease, and severe weather conditions--were still present as the open range came to an end in 1905. They would continue to plague the livestock industry in various degrees as the closed range became a reality in western North Dakota.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 5 December 1903, p. 2; 5 March 1904, p. 2; 12 March 1904, p. 2.

CHAPTER IV

Problems on the Open Range Caused by Human Activities.

1887-1905

The other major problems of the open range stock industry--prairie fires and rustling--were not natural elements of the grassland environment as were wolves, disease, and extreme weather conditions, but were the result of human actions. Prairie fires might be caused by lightning or spontaneous combustion during extremely dry conditions, but for the most part they were caused by human carelessness. Rustling, of course, was practiced by a small criminal element present on the range.

During the open range period of 1887 to 1905, prairie fires burned over vast stretches of the range in western North Dakota and much graze was lost for various periods of time. The exact cause of most fires generally was unknown. Lightning started a few fires, but for the most part these fires were started by the carelessburning of stubble fields, road ditches, and trash, or by sparks thrown by threshing machines or passing locomotives. Carelessness with fire was a major threat when range conditions were dry and the wind was blowing--a fairly common situation during most fall seasons.

As early as 1887 the penalty for lighting a prairie fire was rather severe. The law read:

if any person or persons shall set or cause to be set on fire any woods, marsh, or prairie, or any grass or stubble lands, such person or persons shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and upon conviction thereof be fined a sum of not more than \$1,000, and not less than \$10, and imprisonment in the county jail a period not longer than six months, one or both, at the discretion of the court, and shall be liable to civil action to any persons damaged by such fire, to the amount of such damage.¹

This law was seldom used, however, for during the open range years proof of a fire's cause was not easily established.

The 1889 Code of North Dakota provided an incentive for landowners to take preventive measures in regard to fire. Under Section 2401, a tract a quarter section or more with a fireguard thirty feet wide plowed around it, and the plowed strip kept free of weeds and grass from September 15 to May 10 of each year, would exempt the strip of land from taxation. The owner could still grow a crop on the fireguard strip between the dates specified.²

Prairie fires were very common during the late 1880's and the 1890's. During the first week of April 1889, for example, west of Dickinson there occurred a fire that was called "the most destructive and extensive that has visited this section in several years."³ This fire allegedly was started by sparks thrown from a passing locomotive and both range grass and property were destroyed. Thomas Oukrop Sr., a farmer, lost his buildings, five horses, seven

¹ Dickinson Press, 1 October 1887, p. 3.

² Ibid., 12 October 1889, p. 3.

³ Ibid., 13 April 1889, p. 3.

cattle, hay, feed, grain, saddle and harnesses, all together worth an estimated \$1,000 to \$1,200. Two other men, Emil Novak and Anton Burda, lost their barns and hay to the blaze. The fire continued to spread during the night and reached A. C. McGillivray's ranch where it burned down his seventy-by-thirty foot horse barn and destroyed twenty tons of hay. D. C. Rowe lost his stables, buggy, machinery, provisions, and one hundred tons of hay. The fire continued north to the Killdeer Mountains, a distance of forty miles, and to the eastern border of Stark County. Several stockmen had to look for new temporary range when the fire was over.⁴ During the year of 1889, Stark County alone suffered \$30,000 damage from prairie fires.⁵

Fireguards were the only real protection to be had during these years and they were used rather extensively. The Northern Pacific Railroad cooperated with the North Dakota Stock Growers Association in preparing fireguards along the right of way. These fireguards had to be built to the specifications of a committee appointed by the stock association and the Board of County Commissioners. The firebreak work conducted by the Northern Pacific was quite an undertaking, considering the mileage of track involved. The specifications for this job required:

the plowing of six furrows not less than twelve inches wide on each side of the right of way of the railroad between Mandan, North Dakota and Glendive, Montana /about 184 miles distance/. Said furrows to be plowed not less than three hundred feet from the center of

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 19 August 1890, p. 3.

the main track, except where any land adjacent to the railroad is plowed and under cultivation, and in this case these furrows are to be plowed not more than two hundred feet from the center of the main tracks. It is also expressly agreed that the fire breaks are to be made continuous. That is, where there is vegetation existing that cannot be plowed to advantage, a strip not less than six feet wide must be broken and have the vegetation destroyed by pick and shovel or similar tools.⁶

On several occasions during the 1890's and early 1900's, townspeople were required to fight approaching flames. One such instance occurred in late September and early October of 1890 when prairie fires burned for a week in Stark and adjoining counties. Strong winds pushed the flames through the thick dry grass until a fire fifty miles long was formed. Only the widest fireguards were able to stop this fire's progress.⁷

In May of 1892, Stark County stockmen hired John Goodall to plow a fireguard from:

Rocky ridge /sic/ south to the southeast side of the Chalk Buttes also from Rocky ridge /sic/ south, passing along the west of Rainy buttes /sic/, to Cedar creek /sic/ at a point about two miles above the E6 crossing and one north from Rocky ridge /sic/ to Davis Creek. Three furrows will be made. At the proper time the strip will be burned out, which will make an absolute check against the crossing of fire. In all about 70 miles. This guard will be made south and north of the Northern Pacific road, beginning at a point in the vicinity

⁶Northern Pacific Railroad Division Superintendent to John S. Green, Secretary of the North Dakota Stock Growers Association, 28 May 1891, North Dakota Stock Growers Association Records, 1886-1894, State Historical Society of North Dakota Archives, Bismarck; Dickinson Press, 14 May 1892, p. 3.

⁷Dickinson Press, 4 October 1890, p. 3; 11 October 1890, p. 3; 19 September 1891, p. 3; 9 April 1892, p. 2.

of Belfield, a similar guard of four furrows will be run through the divide between the Little and Big Missouri rivers to the Jeffries horse camp. It is talked, too, that a guard will be put in from some point on the Knife to the Bad Lands. This would make something like 100 miles of fireguard north of the track.⁸

In June of 1893 the Berry-Boice Cattle Company (777) had a fireguard broken on their range southwest of Dickinson. Frank Heffron did this work with sixteen horses and plowed from two hundred to two hundred-fifty miles. Mr. Heffron also plowed a fireguard on his own range from the Cannonball River to Cedar Creek, and other ranchers in that area did similar work.⁹

Morton County had in use what was termed a "firebreak machine" invented by C. E. Rice of Mandan. This machine was described as:

a gasoline reservoir attached to an iron pipe about five feet long. The pipe terminates in a frame of smaller pipe, shaped something like a gridiron and covered with sheet iron. The gasoline runs from the can down the pipe, and generates a gas in the prongs of the frame, which, when the machine is drawn over the ground ignites grass very quickly if it is dry enough to burn. Behind the machine are three iron discs, each several feet long. They confine the fire to the space burned; and prevent its spreading. Behind the last disc is dragged a wet cattle hide loaded with earth. This effectively puts out any scattering fire that may be left, and a man follows in the rear of all to extinguish any burning manure or weeds. The machine is drawn by three horses. The cost of gasoline will run 10 to 40 cents a mile according to the condition of the grass. The commissioners have purchased an outfit, which costs \$115. . .¹⁰

⁸Ibid., 14 May 1892, p. 3.

⁹Ibid., 3 June 1899, p. 3.

¹⁰Ibid., 12 September 1891, p. 3.

Out on the range there were few tools handy, so ranchers developed their own crude but effective ways of dealing with fires. Once a fire broke out a firebreak could quickly be plowed around property if time allowed. Plows, however, were seldom available out on the range miles from the nearest ranch or farm house. In a situation like this a "steer drag" was used. First a steer would be killed and skinned. Then the fresh green hide was attached to ropes and pulled by cowhands riding parallel to one another. The hide would be dragged over burning grass in order to extinguish the flames. For most of the smaller range fires only two or three steers might be killed for steer drags, but on larger fires several steers might be killed for this purpose. In August of 1893, twelve steers were killed on the range of the A.H.A. ranch in the Killdeer Mountains area in order to fight a fire.¹¹

Although 1889 and 1890 had been years with great numbers of prairie fires, 1891 and 1892 were not nearly as bad. In 1893, however, there were many fires and large areas were burned. Fires occurred from July through the fall and covered areas near South Heart, west of Dickinson, in the Killdeer Mountains, near Lehigh, and in the Belfield area. Even though there were several fires few ranchers were actually short of range for the coming winter.¹²

Prairie fire damage was very small from 1894 until September of 1895. In the fall of 1895 some problems occurred in certain

¹¹ Ibid., 2 August 1890, p. 3; 29 July 1893, p. 3; 12 August 1893, p. 3; 19 August 1893, p. 3.

¹² Ibid., 29 July 1893, p. 3; 12 August 1893, p. 3; 19 August 1893, p. 3; 16 September 1893, p. 3; 23 September 1893, pp. 2-3.

localities. In October there were numerous fires in the Antelope area of Stark County. T. S. Underhill had about fifty head of cattle burned in one of these fires, with some killed outright by the flames and others so badly burned on their front legs that they had to be destroyed later. Mr. Underhill also lost fifteen tons of hay and considerable range to the fire.¹³

Fire damage was not extensive during 1896, but in 1897 there were several fires and quite a bit of range damage. In 1897 a local inventor got an opportunity to try out his new fire fighting tool. In late February of that year, George F. Woodman, manager of the Little Missouri Horse Company, announced that he had developed a patent fire drag. This drag supposedly could be packed on a horse and taken to a fire quickly--"without the inconvenience of a gun, an ax and a beef,"¹⁴ needed to make a steer drag. This new drag was called "a beef and labor saving apparatus."¹⁵

Mr. Woodman's development was to be exhibited at the sixth annual meeting of the Livestock Association of North Dakota in Dickinson in April 1897, but the shipment of the drag from the New York factory where it was being made was delayed. A short time later a fire near Dickinson allowed Woodman a chance to give his product a trial run before a number of persons and they were impressed with what they observed.¹⁶ The Woodman fire drag was used in the same

¹³Ibid., 14 September 1895, p. 3.

¹⁴Ibid., 27 February 1897, p. 2.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., 24 April 1897, p. 2; 1 May 1897, p. 3.

manner as the steer drags and consisted of:

a big sheet of asbestos cloth about 8x10 feet braced with heavy chains. This is dragged across the burning grass by the cowboys. . . The asbestos will not burn and. . . covers the embers and prevents their scattering.¹⁷

The Woodman fire drag became quite popular on the cattle ranges during 1897 to 1899. Even though there were no extensive fires during these years, several smaller fires occurred. In September of 1897 a fire burned on both sides of the Cannonball River in the New England area and several ranchers lost winter range to the flames. In August of 1897 the Towers and Gudgell (OX) outfit killed twenty steers near Wibaux and used the hides as drags in fighting a fire. It also had one of the Woodman products in use. Other well-known ranchers and cattle outfits used Woodman drags during the fall of 1897. George M. Frye from the Dickinson area, the A.H.A. outfit, H. C. Christensen, and W. L. Richards, all from the Killdeer Mountains area, were satisfied users of this asbestos drag.¹⁸ Dan Zimmerman was a satisfied customer as well, and used one of the Woodman drags during 1899.¹⁹

The increased settlement of the land which began around 1900 and continued throughout the early years of the twentieth century brought with it an increased danger to the grasslands of western North Dakota. The increased human activity increased the chances of

¹⁷Ibid., 24 April 1897, p. 2; 1 May 1897, p. 3.

¹⁸Ibid., 21 August 1897, p. 3; 4 September 1897, p. 2; 18 September 1897, p. 3.

¹⁹Ibid., 9 September 1899, p. 3.

accidental fires. The summer of 1900 was very dry, for they believed the drought would help slow down the land speculation going on and cut down on the immigration to the state by those who wanted "something for nothing."²⁰ The dry conditions made it hazardous for any fire-involved activity and two fires along the Knife River destroyed a great deal of hay and range. Heavy rains then lessened the fire danger, and no major problem developed during the fall.²¹

Conflicts occasionally developed after 1900 as more people crowded onto the land and as some persons turned to acts of arson. Transients sometimes set fires on land owned by persons they felt had not treated them properly.²² In May of 1900 a Knife River rancher offered a one hundred dollar reward for information on the parties who had set fire to his range twice during a two week period.²³

No major range damage occurred from 1900 through most of 1902, but in September of 1902 a major fire broke out south of the Cannonball River and spread toward the Cedar River country where it destroyed the winter range of several ranchers. At about the same time a fire near the Grand River destroyed a great deal of hay. Shortly after the first fire on the Cannonball River range, another one burned the grass that was left in the same general area.²⁴

Although most of these prairie fires occurred during the fall

²⁰Ibid., 21 July 1900, p. 2

²¹Ibid., 5 May 1900, p. 2.

²²Ibid., 5 May 1900, p. 2.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., 13 September 1902, p. 3; 27 September 1902, p. 4.

of the year, they could occur whenever lack of precipitation created dry conditions on the range. Prairie fires during a dry spring or when there was no snow during the winter were not uncommon. On January 6, 1903, there was an absence of snow in much of the country west of the Missouri River and a large fire broke out, allegedly started by a farmer who was careless with his pipe while out working. This fire burned a strip thirty miles long and destroyed grassland and hay, burned seven hundred sheep, injured some horses, and killed a few cattle.²⁵ Other fires occurred in May, August, September, and October from the Belfield area south to New England, and some ranchers had to look for new winter quarters. Some of the residents of the Missouri Slope country blamed the fires in May on landseekers who were coming into the area.²⁶

The year of 1904 was relatively free from prairie fire but there were several in 1905. In March of 1905, the Dickinson Press commented on the problem:

The spring of the year is the time to look after the fire guards and to see that all necessary breaking for this purpose is done early while the land is easily plowed. So many people put off this important work until it is too late and suffer severe loss from the disastrous prairie fires. There is no excuse for ranchers and farmers getting burned out every fall as many do.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., 17 January 1903, p. 3.

²⁶ Ibid., 16 May 1903, p. 2.

²⁷ Ibid., 25 March 1905, p. 5.

The area did not have to wait until fall, for a fire occurred during the same week that the above editorial was written. This fire allegedly started on the outskirts of Dickinson and traveled north-east where several stockmen had range burned over and one man's daughter had her clothes catch fire but escaped serious injury.²⁸

By 1905, many settlers had arrived in western North Dakota to try their luck at farming or raising livestock. Many of these people were from states to the east of North Dakota and were inexperienced as to the fire danger, while others were simply careless. The first conviction under the so-called Prairie Fire Law occurred in western North Dakota in 1905. In October of that year Michael Haas was charged with negligently letting a fire get out of control on his farm south of Richardton and doing considerable damage to his neighbor's property. Haas claimed that his wife had set the fire without his consent, but the jury did not believe this and found Haas guilty. The jury, however, recommended a light sentence and the defendant was given the minimum fine of ten dollars. The Assistant States Attorney remarked that it was not so much his intention to punish Mr. Haas as it was to make an example of the case so people might be more careful and not let fires get outside their guards.²⁹

As the open range period ended, the danger of prairie fires was greater than ever before. Increased settlement of the range

²⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

²⁹ Ibid., 28 October 1905, p. 3.

areas brought more agricultural land use, threshing, farm burning, and the like, all of which created a greater potential for disaster. Great range and property damage would continue and some real human tragedies would occur. The fire problem during these years will be detailed in later chapters.

The other major problem faced by the ranchers of western North Dakota during the open range years was that of cattle and horse rustling. Although this problem was not as great a threat to the area's stock industry as the other problems detailed in this paper, it did cause a financial loss for some ranchers who lost quite high numbers of stock. It was always a potential threat to all ranchers in an area where rustlers were allowed to operate.

Rustling began as soon as the first herds were put on the western North Dakota ranges, and during these early years of the stock industry law enforcement was ineffective or nonexistent. Therefore, some ranchers took the law into their own hands in order to rid their range of stock thieves. This vigilante movement of 1884 in the eastern Montana-western North Dakota area came under the leadership of Granville Stuart and other Montana ranchers who went from Montana into North Dakota where they proceeded to hang or shoot rustlers who operated out of camps on that side of the border. As a result of this vigilante action, rustling diminished until the end of the decade.³⁰

While rustling was not much of a problem during the late 1880's,

³⁰ Ibid., 15 August 1888, p. 3.

many ranchers were angered by the stock killing done by Indians from the Fort Berthold and Standing Rock reservations. The Indians were allowed to go off the reservations to hunt, but by the late 1880's the buffalo and most other large game was gone or reduced to very small numbers. The Indian hunters then often killed range steers for their meat. The Dickinson Press joined ranchers in calling for the federal government to keep the Indians on the reservation. There were very bitter feelings over this issue, and the Press had a very low opinion of the Indians involved. The comments by the Press represented the general attitude among the white residents of the area:

This thing of protecting the reservations from the encroachment by whites and allowing the lazy loafers to come off the reservation and burn the country over besides plundering the ranches is little more than people can stand without protesting. A number of ranches on the Little Missouri have suffered from the depredations of the red skins and many are getting tired of it and if the government is anxious to avoid trouble it had better keep the Indians at home.³¹

In November of 1889, ranchers in the Little Missouri country south of Medora were confronted by a band of about three hundred Sioux. The stockmen telegraphed Washington and requested that the "red skins"³² be ordered back to the reservation. The Dickinson Press declared that the Indians were "killing cattle and slaughtering antelope in large numbers."³³ The Press went on to say that it was "a

³¹Ibid., 7 September 1889, p. 3.

³²Ibid., 9 November 1889, p. 3.

³³Ibid.

great injustice for the government to allow these worthless creatures so much freedom."³⁴ After the "Ghost Dance" movement in 1890 was brought to a tragic end in South Dakota, the hunting bands of Indians traveling off the reservations in western North Dakota declined, and the loss of beef was now generally confined to the work of white rustlers.

With increased numbers of stock on the range of western North Dakota during the 1890's, as ranchers rebuilt their herds to all-time high numbers following the setback of 1886-1887, came a great increase in livestock theft. And as the problem grew in scope, North Dakota stockmen became involved in programs to help combat this situation. In 1892 the North Dakota Stock Growers Association contracted with the Montana Board of Stock Commissioners for stock inspection at the Eastern market terminals. The state of Montana had a system of stock inspectors well established by this time, and now members of the North Dakota association would receive the benefits of stock inspection as did members of the Montana organization. Non-members of the North Dakota association could get inspection by paying a certain fee per head of cattle.³⁵

This stock inspection was carried out by officers who had been appointed by the Montana Board of Stock Commissioners and consisted of checking the livestock brands at the Eastern markets. The cattle shipper was checked to make sure he had proper authority to be

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., 30 July 1892, p. 3.

handling the animals of the particular brand in his possession. The stock inspectors checked the animals at market and relied on the brand books compiled by the state stock associations. In this way they could track down strays that occasionally got mixed in with someone's herd, and the money could be sent to the rightful owner. Now and then these differently branded cattle were in someone's shipment not by mistake but by criminal means.³⁶

Inspectors for the Montana livestock association were widely located in several states. At the top market center of Chicago was Chief Inspector H. G. Stouder and assistants E. W. Copps and H. W. Cupples. At St. Paul was Chief Inspector H. E. Bourdette and assistant R. P. Heren, R. H. Richard was located at Omaha, Jesse Garland at the Standing Rock Agency, and J. D. Hamilton was at Sioux City, Iowa. Mort Aberly and William D. Smith were stock inspectors who operated in the state of Montana. Smith was the best known inspector for he carried out his duties in Montana and western North Dakota and spent much time on the range in pursuit of rustlers.³⁷

³⁶

North Dakota Stock Association Records, Letter from W. G. Preuitt, Secretary of the Montana Board of Stock Commissioners, to John S. Green, Secretary of the North Dakota Stock Growers Association, dated 9 August 1893; letter from W. G. Preuitt to John S. Green, dated 11 July 1893; letter from W. G. Preuitt to John S. Green, dated 10 July 1893; State Historical Society of North Dakota Archives, Bismarck.

³⁷

Ibid., Letter from W. G. Preuitt to John S. Green, dated 9 August 1893; Letters from W. D. Smith to John S. Green, dated 3 September 1892; 4 October 1892.

William Smith had the most dangerous job of the various stock inspectors, for he operated out on the range and often met rustlers face-to-face without the help of other law enforcement officers. Mr. Smith was very active in bringing horse and cattle thieves to justice during the late 1890's and early 1900's, and he had to rely on his shooting ability on more than one occasion.³⁸ In 1896, for example, Inspector Smith was exonerated after killing a rustler who had resisted arrest. The Miles City Journal commented that:

Cattle rustling has grown to such an extent that all those who recognize the right of private property must wish to see it stamped out. As the most desperate men in the Northwest are engaged in the enterprise an officer who seeks to make arrests of criminals must be prepared to act, and act effectively, as a second's time extended to the criminal adept with a pistol may sacrifice an officer whose protection under the law is not respected by the cattle thief. The evidence in the case shows that officer Smith did not act a moment too soon and it is a credit to his efficiency as an officer that he was prepared to act promptly as he did. "Bad men" have about seen their day in Montana and when they do appear it is a credit to the law that there are officers who can cope with them.³⁹

The "bad men" spoken of were rather common in both eastern Montana and western North Dakota during the 1890's and the early 1900's, and there were several organized gangs of rustlers who operated on both sides of the boundary line. In July of 1893, for

³⁸Ibid., Letter from W. G. Preuitt to John S. Green, dated 9 August 1893; Letters from W. D. Smith to John S. Green, dated 3 September 1892; 4 October 1892.

³⁹Miles City (Montana) Journal as quoted in Dickinson Press 1 February 1896, p. 3.

example, three men--J. M. White, Frank White, and Al Moore--were arrested at Sentinel Butte, North Dakota while driving twenty stolen horses. These men had gathered the horses for a month in the Red Lodge, Montana area and spent nine days traveling east into North Dakota where they were arrested. The men's intention had been to sell the horses in North Dakota.⁴⁰

Some of these gangs did a little bit of everything--rustling, livestock killing, and stealing anything that was available. One such gang operated in western North Dakota during the late 1890's. Sam Payne, described as "a typical frontier tough," had come up from Texas and was arrested in 1898 on a charge of stealing a horse from Charles Baldwin, a Montana rancher. Sam Payne had belonged to a gang headquartered at the home of "Sandy" Hart on the south side of the Missouri River across from the town of Grinnel in Stark County. Mr. Hart had allegedly made his place available to various outlaws and horse thieves, and had himself been arrested on charges of horse theft and cattle killing. Hart never went to the state penitentiary on these charges, due to insufficient evidence, but he spent thirteen months out of three years in the Dickinson jail. During the winter of 1896-1897, this gang at Hart's place killed many cattle on the Williams County side of the Missouri River. The heads and paunches of many of these animals were found in the brush and coulees near the Hart cabin.⁴¹ Sam Payne and this gang allegedly

⁴⁰Dickinson Press, 29 July 1893, p. 3.

⁴¹Ibid.

raised a great deal of havoc in Williams County and were believed to have poisoned dogs, stolen poultry, and made off with several hundred pounds of oats. Mr. Payne had also been accused of stealing a saddle horse from an area man and to have cheated a widow out of her small herd of cattle. Payne's downfall came when he was arrested while on his way back to Grinnel from a horse stealing episode in Montana.⁴²

These gangs of rustlers used many tactics in order to get rid of stolen stock. One method was brand changing, and this was easily accomplished on certain brands or those carelessly done. In July of 1893, R. L. Spayde, a cattle dealer from Spencer, Iowa, wrote John S. Green, secretary of the North Dakota Stock Growers Association about such a case. Mr. Spayde had received a steer he believed had originally been a DC brand but had been worked over by rustlers. Mr. Spayde wrote:

The DC cattle are poorly branded and appear thus ~~DC~~ on the animal. On the steer in question the DC part was thus ~~DC~~ and extended thus ~~HS~~. You see the DC part is heavily burnt and at least a year older than the extended HS. You will notice that the HS part is much lighter lines /sic/ also lighter burnt than the DC part. Also that the underside of the S is out of proportion.⁴³

By 1900, other methods were occasionally used in stealing cattle and other stock. Forging papers involved in cattle and horse

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³R. L. Spayde to John S. Green, 15 July 1893, North Dakota Stock Growers Association Records, 1886-1894, State Historical Society of North Dakota Archives, Bismarck.

shipments became a fairly common practice among the more sophisticated rustlers, as did other types of fraud and deceit.⁴⁴

Although local law enforcement officers seemed to become more aggressive in finding and arresting rustlers from about 1894 on, the problem actually increased during the late 1890's and into the first part of the next century. This was no doubt due to the high prices being paid for cattle during these years as well as the increased demand for horses both locally and in other states. In March of 1901, the Bismarck Tribune commented:

Thefts of horses are becoming so common and are conducted upon such a grand scale out in the western part of the state that stockmen there want some legislation that will render it more difficult for thieves to gather up horses by the carload and ship them off to another state and sell them. In the past few months daring thieves had gathered horses off the range by carloads and shipped them off to other states for sale. It is stated that a law constituting the sheriff of each county a stock inspector, who should examine the brands of animals shipped out for sale to see that the shipper ships none but his own, would tend to prevent this wholesale thieving. There are two men arrested and held for trial in Billings County charged with having made away with several carloads of horses, and Sheriff Goodall of Dickinson had gone to Iowa after a third man who made away with a carload of horses several weeks ago.⁴⁵

The legislation involved in the preceding editorial was North Dakota Senate Bill 208, sponsored by Senator Simpson of Dickinson. This law was designed to prevent theft, particularly the fraudulent

⁴⁴Dickinson Press, 24 September 1892, p. 2; 29 December 1900, p. 3; 5 January 1901, p. 3; 16 March 1901, p. 3; 23 March 1901, p. 2.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 3.

shipment of stock. This bill required that all carloads of stock had to be inspected before being shipped to market, and designated the various county sheriffs as stock inspectors. Under Senate Bill 208, the stock inspectors were to keep records including brands, a description of the stock, the owner's name, and the name of the person in charge of the various shipments. When the inspectors were satisfied that the person involved was the owner or had the lawful right to ship, they would issue a shipping permit. It was unlawful to ship without notifying the inspector and the railroad company was not to ship unless a permit was presented. The stock inspectors were entitled to collect fees for this inspection at ten cents per head for horses and five cents for cattle. The inspector would also have a lien upon the stock for these fees and was to receive ten cents per mile to and from the place of inspection. This bill made it a misdemeanor to ship stock without a permit and was punishable by a fine ranging from fifty to two hundred dollars or imprisonment in the county jail from thirty days to six months, or both fine and imprisonment.⁴⁶

The terms of the proposed legislation might seem a rather demanding additional workload for the county sheriffs, but the fall market season was the primary shipping time and lasted only two or three months. The crime problem in western North Dakota was such that the main law enforcement task involved livestock thefts or illegal stock killings, so such work under this bill was not really

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 3.

out of line with the county sheriffs normal duties. In April of 1901 Senate Bill 208 was passed and in effect war was declared on rustlers. Such actions were necessary for the early 1900's were the rustler's heyday in western North Dakota.⁴⁷

There were a number of cattle and horse thefts in the Missouri Slope country during the spring of 1901, and a group of stockmen met in Dickinson to organize the Protective Livestock Association. Strangely enough, these stockmen opposed the new inspection law, apparently because of the fees charged. The stockmen wanted inspection and better theft prevention, but at the same time they were unwilling to pay the price for these benefits. Those stockmen who belonged to the North Dakota Livestock Growers Association had the benefit of inspection at the various Eastern market centers through the contract with the Montana association, and they were not happy with the idea of paying for the local inspection. The real problem with stolen stock, of course, was not so much at the Eastern market centers but on the ranges of western North Dakota. In order to make any inroads against rustling action had to be taken locally and this is what Bill 208 attempted to do. The stockmen who would benefit most from this law were the majority, for most did not belong to the state association. The grumbling on the issue died down, however, and the law was given a chance to operate. Since livestock theft had become a widespread problem by 1901, more extreme measures were needed.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Ibid., 29 June 1901, p. 2.

⁴⁸Ibid.

Several rustling cases received a great deal of publicity during the early 1900's and gave examples of the wide variety of persons involved in this criminal activity. One of these cases occurred in 1901 when a group of lawmen under the leadership of Stark County Sheriff John Goodall put one rustling operation out of business.

Sheriff Goodall of Dickinson did a great deal in the battle against rustling in western North Dakota, and in the spring of 1901 he led a large campaign against some of the rustler's bases in western North Dakota and eastern Montana. The problem of stock theft had reached large proportions on both sides of the border and the Dickinson Press noted the situation on the Montana side of the line:

At Chouteau, Montana, the authorities are said to have evidence which will convict parties guilty of having stolen thousands of horses. In the past, at least for several years, little attention has been paid to thieving of this nature, but this spring there seems to be a disposition all around to hunt down the horse and cattle thieves who have been operating so extensively of late.⁴⁹

In March of 1901, Sheriff Goodall traveled from Dickinson to Clear Lake, Iowa in search of Walter Barnett, who was wanted on a charge of horse stealing. Mr. Barnett allegedly had loaded a railroad car with stolen horses during the night at Sentinel Butte, North Dakota and then shipped them to Iowa. Barnett was like many of the cowboys in western North Dakota, having come up from Texas five years earlier with a Towers and Gudgell (OX) herd. He had been building a ranch with his brothers A. V. and Bob some sixty miles

⁴⁹ Ibid., 30 March 1901, p. 2.

north of Sentinel Butte and was alleged to have been a close acquaintance of Jack McCarthey, alias Jim McPeak, a notorious horse thief. Sheriff Goodall returned from Iowa with Barnett and a trial was held. The state, through expert testimony, showed that Barnett's bill of sale had been written and signed in the same handwriting. For this forgery Barnett received four years at hard labor in the state penitentiary at Bismarck.⁵⁰ Although Barnett went to prison, his friend Jim McPeak was brought to justice the hard way.

In April of 1901, Sheriff Goodall became the livestock inspector for Stark County under the new inspection law, and law enforcement officers in both western North Dakota and eastern Montana went to work in earnest against suspected rustler strongholds. This activity began when Deputy Sheriff Wynn of Wibaux, Montana notified Sheriff Goodall that Bill Clark, a former W cowboy wanted for rustling, could easily be captured. Deputy Wynn proceeded to the Nichols Brothers ranch, seventy miles south of Wibaux, as Clark was rumored to be there. When Deputy Wynn arrived at the ranch he was overpowered by the Nichols brothers and held prisoner for several hours as Bill Clark made his escape.⁵¹ For the time being, the Nichols brothers and Bill Clark were not arrested or pursued by lawmen as they concentrated on another outlaw.

This other badman was Jim McPeak for who there had been several warrants out during the preceding years. McPeak had acquired a

⁵⁰Ibid., 2 March 1901, p. 2; 9 March 1901, p. 3; 30 March 1901, p. 2; 6 April 1901, p. 3; 13 April 1901, p. 2.

⁵¹Ibid., 20 April 1901, p. 3.

reputation in western North Dakota where he had once worked. In Stark County he had "terrorized the people of Richardton by one of his shooting acts, and wherever known was looked upon as a bad and desperate man."⁵² The Dickinson Press reported the story of McPeak's downfall in the colorful language of the times:

McPeak Killed. Victory for Sheriff Goodall and His Daring Deputies Who Winged the Desperado and Brought his Body to the City in a Box---Died with his Boots on and an Oath on his Lips. . . Early last week Sheriff Goodall started out with eight warrants for the arrest of men supposed to be guilty of stealing, or aiding in stealing cattle and horses. The following well known people accompanied Sheriff Goodall on his daring mission: Sheriff Kennedy of Dawson County Montana, Sheriff J. W. Follis of Billings county, Stock Inspector Billy Smith W. D. Smith of Miles City, Deputy J. M. Uhlman, manager of the Morning Star Cattle Co., this county, Deputy J. Brown of Billings county, and Deputies Ed. Stone and Billy Chaloner, of Dickinson. Including Sheriff Goodall the party consisted of 9, and a more determined or daring posse of men never started out to chase down criminals. They are all good shots, used to the prairies and Bad Lands, and well knew when they left home that they were taking their lives in their hands in chasing down such desperate characters as Jack McCarthey, alias Jim McPeak, who had openly boasted that he would kill any man or men who should attempt to arrest him.⁵³

McPeak lived up to his word and resisted arrest but he was outnumbered and outgunned. The lawmen had gone sixty miles northeast of Wibaux, Montana to the Leakey, McDonald and Clark ranch, located in Billings County, North Dakota some three miles from the Montana line. There J. R. McDonald was arrested on a cattle stealing charge and the law officers waited for the return of McPeak, since this ranch

⁵²Ibid., 13 April 1901, p. 3.

⁵³Ibid.

was alleged to be his headquarters.⁵⁴

Later in the day a rider came into sight and moved to within forty yards of the ranch buildings. The rider was recognized as McPeak by the lawmen at the same time that the outlaw realized he was moving into a trap. McPeak spurred his horse away from the ranch and was ordered to stop by Sheriff Goodall. McPeak failed to stop and the lawmen began firing their Winchester rifles as McPeak was one hundred yards away. The outlaw's horse was hit some twelve to fifteen times and McPeak was likewise hit in the back below his left shoulder with the bullet exiting his chest. Even seriously wounded, McPeak lived up to his reputation and did not give up easily--trying to use his own Winchester rifle as Sheriff Goodall grabbed him. Unable to use his rifle, McPeak then tried to pull his revolver but failed with that as well. The infamous Jim McPeak was then taken to the ranch house, was rolled up "in a blanket where he lived for ten hours, cursing and swearing and charging McDonald never to give up anything."⁵⁵

At McPeak's camp seven miles from the Leakey, McDonald and Clark ranch, the posse found some of Walter Barnett's property, along with nine horses with worked over brands belonging to a Glendive attorney.⁵⁶ Several other arrests were made including that of H. C. Chappel, a prominent Wibaux cattleman, who was charged

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid., 20 April 1901, p. 3; 27 April 1901, p. 3.

with buying and reselling stolen stock. John Leakey, an old Towers and Gudgeon (OX) hand, and Johnnie Jones, a Berry-Boice (777) employee, also were arrested. Bill Clark, the rustler whose capture started this whole campaign, was taken by a Montana Deputy, but as before, he managed to escape before Sheriff Goodall could take custody.⁵⁷ Sheriff Goodall and a posse then made a visit to the Nichols Brothers ranch and arrested the owners for their earlier assault on Deputy Wynn and the aiding of Bill Clark.⁵⁸

While the law enforcement officers were of top quality, the jail facilities in which the lawbreakers were held often left much to be desired. Sheriff Goodall often had his jail full of prisoners and some made successful escapes. The rustler McDonald nearly got away but was discovered in time by lawmen. Somehow McDonald had acquired a twenty pound crowbar and a pick iron while in jail, and it was apparent that someone on the outside wanted to get McDonald out.⁵⁹ A couple of weeks after McDonald's escape attempt, a burglar dug out through a jail wall with a file and a small piece of iron in about "an hour or two's time."⁶⁰

One of the most publicized of the rustling cases of the open range years began in September of 1901 and continued on in various stages until 1906. This case began in September of 1901 when two riders came into the headquarters of the Deep Creek Cattle Company

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 20 July 1901, p. 2.

located next to the Little Missouri Horse Company (HT) in Billings County. The two men rested and reshoed their horses at the Deep Creek ranch and enjoyed the hospitality of the owner Wallis Huidekoper. When they left the Deep Creek ranch they traveled across the HT range and stole one hundred twenty Percheron horses owned by Wallis' cousin A. C. Huidekoper.⁶¹

The two thieves, "Stuttering Dick Hale," a Wyoming "Hole in the Wall" outlaw, and Arthur Cheneworth, made it forty-five miles with the stolen horses before they were forced to abandon the animals and flee when they were discovered by two cowboys from the CY outfit which was owned by the Carey family of Wyoming and ranged stock in that state as well as in Montana and the Dakotas. Hale made his way to Wyoming and then to Canada and the Klondike where he was killed in a shooting incident. Cheneworth went to Wyoming and then Montana where he was arrested in a dance hall by Stock Inspector William Smith who then turned him over to the North Dakota authorities.⁶²

Cheneworth was a rather unusual rustler, having been raised in a wealthy Boston family and educated in that city as well as in Europe where his father was a member of the diplomatic corps. Arthur Cheneworth had come west to look for adventure and began by learning the cowhand's trade in Wyoming. Later he clerked in a store, tried to steal a flock of sheep, and finally joined up with a couple of horse

⁶¹Wallis Huidekoper, "A Gentlemen Horse Thief," typewritten manuscript, Huidekoper Family Papers, State Historical Society of North Dakota Archives, Bismarck.

⁶²Dickinson Press, 18 January 1902, p. 3.

thieves who frequented the "Hole in the Wall" country of Wyoming.⁶³

Cheneworth was charged with the theft of the one hundred twenty HT horses valued at \$36,000, but his mild and friendly manner deceived many people. While he was in the Dickinson jail he showed the artistic ability that he had developed while studying in Europe and drew a picture depicting a winter scene in which wolves were threatening a horse and colt. Such behavior made most people react favorably to him, and the Dickinson Press commented that the "defendant is a young man of good appearance, and does not in any way look like a bad man."⁶⁴ Cheneworth was transferred to the Billings County jail to await trial and due to his good behavior and manner was allowed a great deal of freedom by the jailer at that lockup. Needless-to-say, in January of 1902, Cheneworth escaped from the jail in Medora and left a note thanking the jailer for his kind treatment and declaring that he would die before letting himself be recaptured.⁶⁵

Cheneworth's escape angered many people in the area who had not been so favorably disposed toward the accused thief from the beginning. The escape also made the Billings County lawmen look rather foolish. The Mandan Pioneer was particularly incensed by the course of events and supplied the following comments:

It has been much the fashion of late in this state for men charged with grave crimes to be allowed to escape from the jails in which they are confined. . . A man

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid.

charged with stealing over \$30,000 worth of horses in the extreme western part of the state, skipped out of jail, leaving a note of regret for the jailer to peruse. He has never more been heard from. Most escapes occur because of the too great leniency on the part of the jail officials. The prisoners by their smooth conduct, convince the officials, whose duty it is to see that they are kept in jail, that they would under no circumstances violate the confidence that is placed in them. They are allowed to go down town, to go horseback riding, to do chores around their place of confinement, and when the opportune moment comes, they are missing. These escapes are decidedly demoralizing to the cause of justice and call for a less soft hearted method of caring for the prisoners by the sheriffs and their deputies.⁶⁶

Arthur Cheneworth was busy for the next three and one-half years and was arrested in Fossil, Oregon for horse-stealing in 1904. He escaped from the jail there by using his artistic talent to rig up a dummy in his cell cot complete with a face painted on it.⁶⁷ He was recaptured in October of 1905 at Casper, Wyoming with seventeen stolen horses in his possession. Cheneworth by then was wanted on charges in the states of Wyoming, Montana, Oregon, and North Dakota. North Dakota had the first chance to put Cheneworth on trial for the theft of the HT stock some four years earlier and he was extradicted to North Dakota from Wyoming.⁶⁸

The Dickinson Press now had a much lower opinion of Cheneworth and the trial was given a great deal of coverage from April through June of 1906. Arthur Cheneworth's mother was on hand for the trial.

⁶⁶Mandan Pioneer as quoted in Dickinson Press, 18 January 1902, p. 3.

⁶⁷Dickinson Press, 23 June 1906, p. 3.

⁶⁸Ibid., 21 April 1906, p. 7; 23 June 1906, p. 3.

and told a story of great tragedy concerning Arthur and his father. Mrs. Cheneworth's tale covered her husband's career as a soldier and diplomat and the insanity that supposedly ran in his family. She also told of Arthur's alleged nervous breakdown while at Harvard, his fiance's death, and according to her, his present condition of insanity. Dr. D. L. Moore, superintendant of the State Hospital at Jamestown, stated that based on the mother's testimony and Cheneworth's mental condition, he believed Arthur "was insane in 1901, ever since and is now."⁶⁹ Cheneworth was then ordered to the State Hospital and the controversy continued.⁷⁰

Stock Inspector Smith of Montana tried to get Cheneworth returned to that state on rustling charges, but had little success once the insanity verdict was announced.⁷¹ The Dickinson Press felt that Arthur Cheneworth was far from insane. The headline read:

Cheneweth /sic/ Gets Out Easy Through Untiring Efforts of his Mother. It is not unlikely that Cheneweth's /sic/ stay in Jamestown will be short and that he will soon find his way to Massachusetts. Arthur Cheneweth's /sic/ record of stock stealing in North Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming covers a period of five or six years at least, and the inconsistent part in view of the Burleigh County insanity board, is that he always managed to get hold of valuable bands of horses like the HT stock. He says he stole a fine band of Wyoming sheep some years ago. The case has cost Billings county a good many thousands of dollars, and a great many people in both Stark and Billings counties who know something of Cheneweth's /sic/ operations,

⁶⁹ Ibid., 20 May 1906, p. 4.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

are of the opinion that his spells of insanity come on only after he has been caught in the throes of the law.⁷²

Under North Dakota law, when judged insane, patients could be taken to the state from which they had originally come. The Press noted that "this would be practically setting Cheneweth /sic/ free, as he is probably as sane as anybody."⁷³ Mrs. Cheneworth asked the court to allow her to take her son home and promised that he would never return to the West. This request was granted and the state of Montana and the Huidekoper family were not very pleased by this turn of events. Wallis Huidekoper believed that the odds had been in the defendant's favor throughout the trial as the jury of farmers had little sympathy for a big ranching outfit like the HT. Wallis Huidekoper related in later years that one of the cowboy witnesses at the trial had written:

She was really a smart old gal and made those Jim Crow lawyers look like thirty cents. They had a bunch of chin whiskered farmers on the jury that had never heard of any one having so many horses and figured it was no sin to take a few of them. When the mother got through telling her story the jury was crying like they lost their whole crop by hail and were tickled to death to turn the son over to her care if ma could get him back to Boston without the boy stealing something more.⁷⁴

Wallis Huidekoper was at least glad to see Arthur Cheneworth go back East and never return to steal stock on the western ranges.⁷⁵

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 23 June 1906, p. 3.

⁷⁴ Huidekoper, "A Gentlemen Horse Thief," p. 2.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

While the McPeak and Cheneworth cases received the most publicity during the early 1900's, one other case was followed with a great deal of interest as well. In October of 1905 a major rustling operation was uncovered in northeastern Montana and northwestern North Dakota. George Case, an ex-foreman for the South Dakota Day and Cresswell (Turkey Track) outfit, supposedly had been the principal agent in Montana for a gang of horse thieves who had stolen more than one thousand head of horses in Valley County, Montana during 1905. The North Dakota connection came to light when Stock Inspectors Hall and Teal killed a rustler near Malta, Montana. This man was alleged to have been carrying a letter that implicated certain North Dakota residents.⁷⁶

Two of those implicated were Arthur E. McGahey, the illegal saloon operator from Williston, and H. W. Denny, the mayor of Williston and banker in that city as well as in Minot. Governor Poole of Montana requested that Governor Sarles of North Dakota hand Denny over on charges of having received stolen horses and conspiring to steal stock from ranches in Valley County, Montana. Mr. Denny fought all of the legal action with his attorney, John Burke of Devils Lake, but he was convicted in North Dakota on the charge of receiving stolen horses. Denny was sentenced to three years in the state penitentiary at Bismarck.⁷⁷

⁷⁶Dickinson Press, 28 October 1905, p. 6; 25 November 1905, p. 1; 9 December 1905, p. 6; 23 December 1905, p. 6; 17 October 1905, p. 10.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Denny had been convicted largely on the evidence of the letter allegedly taken from the dead rustler, but this letter had been lost before it could be introduced at the trial. Witnesses had testified to the letter's existence and contents, but the North Dakota Supreme Court later ruled that under the circumstances such evidence should not have been allowed. In 1908, therefore, Mr. Denny was granted a new trial and the previous conviction was reversed.⁷⁸ Whether Denny had been involved in this horse stealing operation is questionable, but the state of Montana was of the opinion that he was one of the principals of the organization. Such cases involving large interstate rustling gangs were much less common by the year 1905 as the open range days came to an end.

The penalties for cattle and horse rustling during the years from 1887 to 1905 were not as severe as one might expect considering the vigilante style justice of the early 1880's. The bulk of the trials involving stock theft, however, came after 1900. Most of these trials lasted only for a few days, but some did last for weeks, and in the case of Arthur Cheneworth, it was about three months before the court business was finished.

The longest sentence received for rustling in North Dakota during the 1887-1905 period was four years in the state penitentiary at Bismarck.⁷⁹ Examples of more common sentences for stock theft were noted in February of 1903 when three men were sentenced for horse

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid., 1887-1905.

stealing by the judge at the District Court in Dickinson:

Paul Danilson, 18 years of age, from Mercer County, got two years and six months for horse stealing. William Stewart, 32 years old, for horse stealing, two years and three months, Jas. Clayton, 36 years old, Texas man, two years and nine months for horse stealing.⁸⁰

Cattle killers were looked upon in the same light as rustlers and were sometimes viewed as being worse than those who stole stock. Probably the most severe sentence, considering the circumstances of the case, went to a cattle killer. This case involved the killing of one of Pierre Wibaux's W steers by some woodcutters who had run out of food. The man who committed this act received three years at hard labor.⁸¹ Pierre Wibaux and most other ranchers had little sympathy for anyone who killed their stock and made no exceptions regarding prosecution.

After 1900, as more people began to settle on range land in western North Dakota, the incidence of stock killing rose greatly. Much of this was done by irate farmers who shot trespassing livestock when it got into their crops. Some stock killing was also done by those who had some malicious intent against a particular rancher, or by those who butchered someone else's beef steers for their own use or for sale. The law at this time set the penalty for stock killing at a minimum of one year and a maximum of five years in the state penitentiary.⁸² Most sentences for this crime were from one to

⁸⁰ Ibid., 21 February 1903, p. 3.

⁸¹ Ibid., 24 September 1898, p. 3.

⁸² Ibid., 28 April 1906, p. 8.

two years in length.⁸³

During the open range years most rustlers did not put up a fight when confronted by law officers; generally they gave up quietly and served their time. Others made their way around the country and were often on the loose for considerable periods of time before they were captured in some other state. Vic Dorsey, known as the "South Dakota outlaw," was such a man, and he was sentenced to three and one-half years in the North Dakota penitentiary for the theft of seven horses. It was believed that when all of his trials for rustling were over that he would be faced with from ten to fifteen years behind bars.⁸⁴

Sheriff Goodall of Stark County traveled to Iowa, Nebraska, and Idaho to pick up those who were wanted for crimes committed in western North Dakota. Those cowhands who had turned rustler and had previous ties with the state of Texas often made their way south when lawmen closed in on them. Others went to Montana, Wyoming, and Washington when they fled arrest in western North Dakota, while a few went north into Canada. Most rustlers did not escape justice for very long, as they usually continued their criminal activities in these other places.

It is hard to estimate the financial loss caused by rustling during the open range period. During the late 1890's and early 1900's, both the cattle and horse markets were strong. Some ranchers never

⁸³ Ibid., 24 October 1903, p. 2; 28 April 1906, p. 8.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 29 December 1906, p. 2.

lost any stock to thieves, while others lost a considerable number over the years. Since rustling gangs were mobile and could move onto any rancher's range, round up stock, and herd it to a more remote hiding place under their control, they were a potential threat to the entire stock industry of the Missouri Slope country.

Rustling was at its worst from 1901 to 1905 when the demand for top quality draft horses was very high. These horses were then worth up to three hundred dollars per head and with top quality Herefords worth up to one hundred dollars, it did not take the loss of very many to mean a severe financial setback for the rancher. The seriousness of the situation was shown by passage of North Dakota Senate Bill No. 208 in 1901 and the rather extreme inspection measures provided in an attempt to curtail the illegal activities involving stock shipments and sales.

Stock theft would still be a problem for the ranchers after 1905, but by then the rustling generally involved the illegal sale of meat on the local level. Increased settlement brought "ranch farming" with its smaller ranches, fenced range, and smaller herds, all of which made rustling more difficult. The shift to closed range ranch farming will be covered in the following chapter.

CHAPTER V

The Shift to Ranch Farming (End of Open Range)

Between 1900 and 1910 great changes took place on the western North Dakota range. Settlement of the land had begun to increase from 1890 to 1900, but the massive settlement of the entire Missouri Slope area came after 1900. This homestead activity between 1900 and 1910 was the disrupting force that brought the open range system of stock raising to an end.

By early 1902, some area ranchers began to complain about the crowding on the range west of the Missouri River. Small farmers and ranchers were buying tracts of land between established ranches, thus disrupting the old-time grazing patterns, and Jeff McDonald, a long time Missouri Slope rancher, believed that these newcomers did not realize how much land was needed for stock raising. For five years McDonald had operated his ranch within a few miles of the Berry-Boice Cattle Company (777), one of the largest ranch outfits in western North Dakota, and he claimed he never had any trouble with them compared to what he experienced with one of the new settlers. The old-time ranchers like McDonald, did not like this new competition for the range grass and supported the proposed federal leasing bills, for large grazing acreages could still be controlled by the lessee who had the capital available. The new settlers believed that the leasing bills were only an attempt by the

large ranchers to keep the old open range system alive. The Mandan Pioneer took issue with McDonald's point of view and declared that farmers and small ranchers had as much right to the land as anyone. The time was close at hand when this latter viewpoint would prevail and land would generally have to be purchased and owned by the one who grazed cattle on it.¹

With the local press in support of the new settlers and with more people arriving all the time, the well-established ranch outfits were forced to buy land or face the danger of being pushed off the grasslands. In April of 1902, for example, the Northwestern Ranching Company bought two additional townships of land to bring a twenty-four mile strip along the Cedar River under its control.²

Wallis Huidekoper, owner of the Deep Creek Cattle Company in Billings County, wrote that by 1900:

the country was settling up, smaller ranches being established and controlled through purchases of railroad grant lands and the placing of soldiers script /sic/ on water resources, homesteaders taking up claims and even farmers seeking acreage.³

Wallis' cousin A. C. Huidekoper had about as much land as any rancher and decided to stick it out. He purchased railroad lands totalling 63,360 acres and leased 5,000 additional acres of school

¹ Mandan Pioneer as quoted in Dickinson Press, 25 January 1902, p. 4; 8 February 1902, p. 2.

² Dickinson Press, 12 April 1902, p. 3.

³ Wallis Huidekoper, "Land of the Dacotahs," p. 29, typewritten manuscript, Huidekoper Family Papers, State Historical Society of North Dakota Archives, Bismarck.

lands by 1902. The railroad land that was purchased was in alternate sections located through the public domain, so Huidekoper like most ranchers under the open range system of stock raising had established actual grazing control over the sections of public lands that were between the plots of land he actually owned. In this way Huidekoper had grazing control over about 140,000 acres of grassland.⁴

Even though he owned a great deal of land, the time was very near when Mr. Huidekoper could see no use in continuing his operations with his landholdings split up as they were as settlers moved in and located homestead ranches and farms on the alternate sections of the public lands that he had once controlled. For example, by the summer of 1904, the Little Missouri Horse Company took down the fences on much of its original range and put them up around the six townships the company actually owned. The fence had come down because the federal government declared that Huidekoper and others could not fence grazing land that was part of the public domain.⁵ A. C. Huidekoper later wrote about the situation on the Missouri Slope during these years and related that:

in late summer of 1904 it was most apparent that the country was settling up which foretold the doom of large operations on the open range. The Milwaukee Railroad was surveying their new line through the

⁴A. C. Huidekoper, My Experience and Investment, p. 33.

⁵Dickinson Press, 9 July 1904, p. 2.

center of the company's range, homesteaders were taking rawhide possession of open lands, there was a real estate boom and worst of all, the Federal Land Department had assumed a most arbitrary policy regarding the mix-up occasioned through private ownership of the alternate sections of railroad grants lands.⁶

In 1904 and 1905 the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad began laying tracks into southwestern North Dakota and located homestead farmers on its right of way in the heart of open range country. By this time many of the old-time ranchers had sold out and the open range system had been dealt a death blow.

In 1905 A. C. Huidekoper sold the HT ranch to the Pabst family, thus ending his ranching venture of some twenty-three years. Wallis Huidekoper sold 11,520 acres of grazing land to Eastern capitalists in 1906. This land in Bowman County had become so crowded by the new settlers that it had become impossible to continue grazing under the old ways. The Huidekopers did well on their land sales for they had purchased the land originally for a low price compared to what they received in 1905-1906. Wallis received \$75,000 for his acreage that had only cost him seventy-five cents per acre. He then bought 12,000 acres and 1,000 Shorthorns in Montana, some 350 miles from his ranch in North Dakota and continued ranching in that state and on a small scale on his Deep Creek ranch in North Dakota.⁷ Few stockmen, however, could sell all or part of their ranches and move elsewhere to start over again.

⁶ Huidekoper, My Experience and Investment, p. 33.

⁷ Dickinson Press, 17 November 1906, p. 1; 8 December 1906, p. 1.

Most of the ranchers who were forced out of business by all of the homestead activity were not bitter toward the newcomers, but they were upset with the federal government. A. C. Huidekoper wrote that he:

never had a bad word with a neighbor homesteader. I was a friend and helper to all. I state this to show that the indictment made against me for illegal fencing did not come from those who lived next to me, or who knew me, but was brought by an ignorant administration agent in Washington, who condemned without knowledge: . . .⁸

Huidekoper did agree that the influx of settlers was for the overall good of the area, as important rural developments followed that included new and smaller counties, road building, inland post offices, and many new towns.⁹ Many of the larger ranchers, however, did not look favorably upon the demands for rural improvements and did not support the general movement for this progress, as they had little use for schools or county and township governments, all of which required higher taxes. The homestead farmers and ranchers and the residents of the newly plotted towns were present in large enough numbers to form a majority at the ballot box in favor of these programs no matter the extent of the protest from the old-time ranchers.

The majority of the new settlers initially turned to farming on their homestead claims. Those who came to western North Dakota during the first years of the settlement boom took the more suitable

⁸ Huidekoper, My Experience and Investment, p. 57.

⁹ Ibid.

agricultural lands, so the first attempts at crop raising did rather well, encouraging others to try farming. The weather was generally cooperative during these years as well, and the number of farms increased steadily during the first decade of the twentieth century (see Table 1).

The average size of farms decreased during the years between 1900 and 1910. In 1900, the farms in Billings County averaged 540.8 acres in size, while those in Stark County averaged 618.9 acres.¹⁰ In 1910, however, the average size of a Billings County farm was down to 291.8 acres, and in Stark County it was 371.2 acres. Farms in other western North Dakota counties were similar in size, with the average acres per farm in Adams County at 231.8, in Bowman 237.1, in Dunn 289.5, in Hettinger 269.9, and in McKenzie County 197.6 acres.¹¹ These figures show that as more people became landholders the average size of landholdings decreased.

As settlement increased during the years from 1900 to 1910, cattle numbers generally decreased. The only increase came in dairy cattle as they became popular with farmers in some counties. Billings County was the one exception in the number of beef cattle, and herds there increased by about 10,000 head over the ten-year period. Stark County was more typical as cattle numbers decreased by about 55,000 during the 1900 to 1910 period.¹² The decrease in

¹⁰ Department of the Interior, Census Office, Twelfth Census of United States: 1900, Vol. V, Agriculture, Part I, pp. 110, 112.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910, Vol. 3, Agriculture, pp. 284-288.

¹² Ibid.

TABLE 1

THE INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF MISSOURI
SLOPE FARMS FROM 1900 TO 1910

County	<u>Number of farms each year</u>							
	<u>1900</u>	<u>1903</u>	<u>1904</u>	<u>1905</u>	<u>1906</u>	<u>1907</u>	<u>1909</u>	<u>1910</u>
Adams	-	-	-	-	-	1,486	1,591	1,344
Billings	163	20	87	215	250	100	1,078	1,708
Bowman	-	-	-	-	-	110	506	942
Burleigh	565	760	973	765	852	751	1,239	1,416
Dunn	-	-	-	-	-	-	857	1,461
Hettinger	-	-	-	-	-	1,013	1,250	1,326
McKenzie	-	-	-	153	205	586	700	1,406
McLean	-	1,633	1,736	2,141	2,637	2,784	3,750	. . . ^a
Mercer	-	327	327	407	541	638	1,015	. . . ^a
Morton	-	1,040	790	904	1,422	1,127	2,015	3,984
Stark	846	357	379	385	375	405	1,400	1,456
Williams	-	-	-	-	-	1,489	2,777	. . . ^a

SOURCE: U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1900, vol. 1, pt. 1, Agriculture, pp. 631-635; Eighth and Ninth Biennial Reports of the Commissioner of Agriculture and Labor to the Governor of North Dakota, for the Term Ending June 30, 1906, p. 23; Tenth Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture and Labor to the Governor of North Dakota, for the Term Ending June 30, 1908, p. 23; Eleventh Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture and Labor to the Governor of North Dakota, for the Term Ending June 30, 1910, p. 18.

^a Complete figures are not provided by the Census or Biennial Reports.

cattle numbers in most of western North Dakota occurred as grazing land was, to a large extent, put into crop production by the homestead farmers. In Stark County a great percentage of the land was suitable for crop production and cattle raising declined for several years. In contrast, in Billings County a large number of homesteaders took over what had been open range grazing land that was soon found to be poor for crop raising, so the settlers turned to stock raising after initial failures in farming. Much of the land in western North Dakota was suitable for farming, and since the weather cooperated, many of these early homestead farmers were successful. This success did much to encourage more settlement and seemed to support the wonderful claims about agricultural suitability of the area that had been made by the various land companies and the local press.

The decrease in general livestock numbers corresponds to the increased acreage put into wheat and other crops. Although other cereal crops were tried, wheat remained the main crop planted by the farmers. The acreage of wheat planted in the Missouri Slope country increased greatly between 1900 and 1910 (see Table 2).

TABLE 2

WHEAT PLANTED AND HARVESTED IN MISSOURI
SLOPE COUNTIES, 1900 AND 1910

<u>County</u>	<u>(1900)</u>		<u>(1910)</u>	
	<u>Acres Planted</u>	<u>Bushels Harvested</u>	<u>Acres Planted</u>	<u>Bushels Harvested</u>
Adams	-	-	19,336	358,068
Billings	3	50	37,725	738,878

TABLE 2--Continued

WHEAT PLANTED AND HARVESTED IN MISSOURI
SLOPE COUNTIES, 1900 AND 1910

County	(1900)		(1910)	
	Acres Planted	Bushels Harvested	Acres Planted	Bushels Harvested
Bowman	-	-	8,853	186,428
Burleigh	24,056	298,290	70,672	768,475
Dunn	-	-	32,695	571,874
Hettinger	14,772	189,090	56,768	1,027,449
McLean	-	-	182,422	2,137,657
McKenzie	-	-	25,613	502,815
Stark	36,718	458,180	84,352	1,436,712
Williams	76	1,800	127,202	2,295,868

SOURCE: U.S., Department of the Interior, Census Office, Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900, vol. 5, Agriculture, pt. 1, p. 178, U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910, vol. 3, Agriculture, pp. 294-298, U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920, vol. 6, Agriculture, pt. 1, pp. 636-640.

From 1900 to 1910 the harvest yields for wheat ranged from about twelve to twenty-four bushels per acre, which was good for this period in agricultural history. These yields were made on land that received only fifteen inches of precipitation during an average year.

In hopes of improving upon this rather marginal amount of rainfall, farmers turned to schemes for irrigation throughout western North Dakota. Senator Hansborough introduced a bill giving

the federal government control over reservoirs and irrigation ditches on the range areas of the western United States. It was believed at this time that North Dakota would benefit greatly from small reservoirs created from the Missouri and Little Missouri rivers. The initial plans indicated that this water would be used primarily to irrigate alfalfa and forage crops and be of most benefit to livestock raisers, but all local people were optimistic about what this water could mean for the growth of western North Dakota.

The main problem in both North and South Dakota was the lack of water to put into irrigation systems, since the streams involved were generally small. Under the Hansborough Bill, money from the sale of public lands in a state would be expended in that particular state for irrigation. This sounded good to the residents of North Dakota, for as of June 1903, the total in the federal irrigation fund was \$7,530,338 and North Dakota's share of this amounted to \$1,227,496.¹³ Projects considered in the state included the Yellowstone River in the northwestern part of the state and various streams in Stark and Billings counties, some 500,000 acres in all.¹⁴

By May of 1904, the Missouri River and its tributaries in North Dakota were supplying water for systems irrigating 9,444 acres on eighty-three farms. The total amount spent on irrigation construction had been \$40,375 for fifty-seven miles of canals and

¹³Dickinson Press, 12 July 1902, p. 4; 30 August 1902, p. 2; 20 June 1903, p. 3.

¹⁴Ibid., 22 July 1905, p. 6.

ditches; this averaged \$4.28 per acre irrigated. Mr. T. S. Underhill of Antelope in Stark County was one of those using irrigation, and he was the North Dakota vice-president for the National Irrigation Association.¹⁵

During the summer of 1904, E. F. Chandler, State Irrigation Engineer, spent several weeks looking into irrigation possibilities on the Cannonball, Knife, Green, and Heart rivers. J. A. French of the United States Bureau of Reclamation studied the possibility of pumping water into holding reservoirs at higher elevations so that it could then run downhill to the local ranches on the Little Missouri River in Billings and Bowman counties.¹⁶ Professor Chandler believed that there were many good reservoir sites on the Cannonball River and that many tracts could be irrigated. He did admit, however, that the number of such irrigated tracts would be fewer than earlier believed. Chandler felt that the best opportunity was on the Knife River where it was believed that several tracts of around 10,000 acres each could be irrigated.¹⁷ The plan called for the building of canals that would supply water for irrigating alfalfa. The publicity given such plans and studies was considerable. The Mandan Pioneer felt that the federal government would be in favor of any of these irrigation proposals, since President Roosevelt was familiar with conditions in the West. Some persons believed that

¹⁵ Ibid., 14 May 1904, p. 2; 28 May 1904, p. 2.

¹⁶ Ibid., 6 August 1904, p. 2; 20 August 1904, p. 3.

¹⁷ Ibid., 3 September 1904, p. 4; 10 September 1904, pp. 3-4; 1 October 1904, p. 2; 8 October 1904, p. 4.

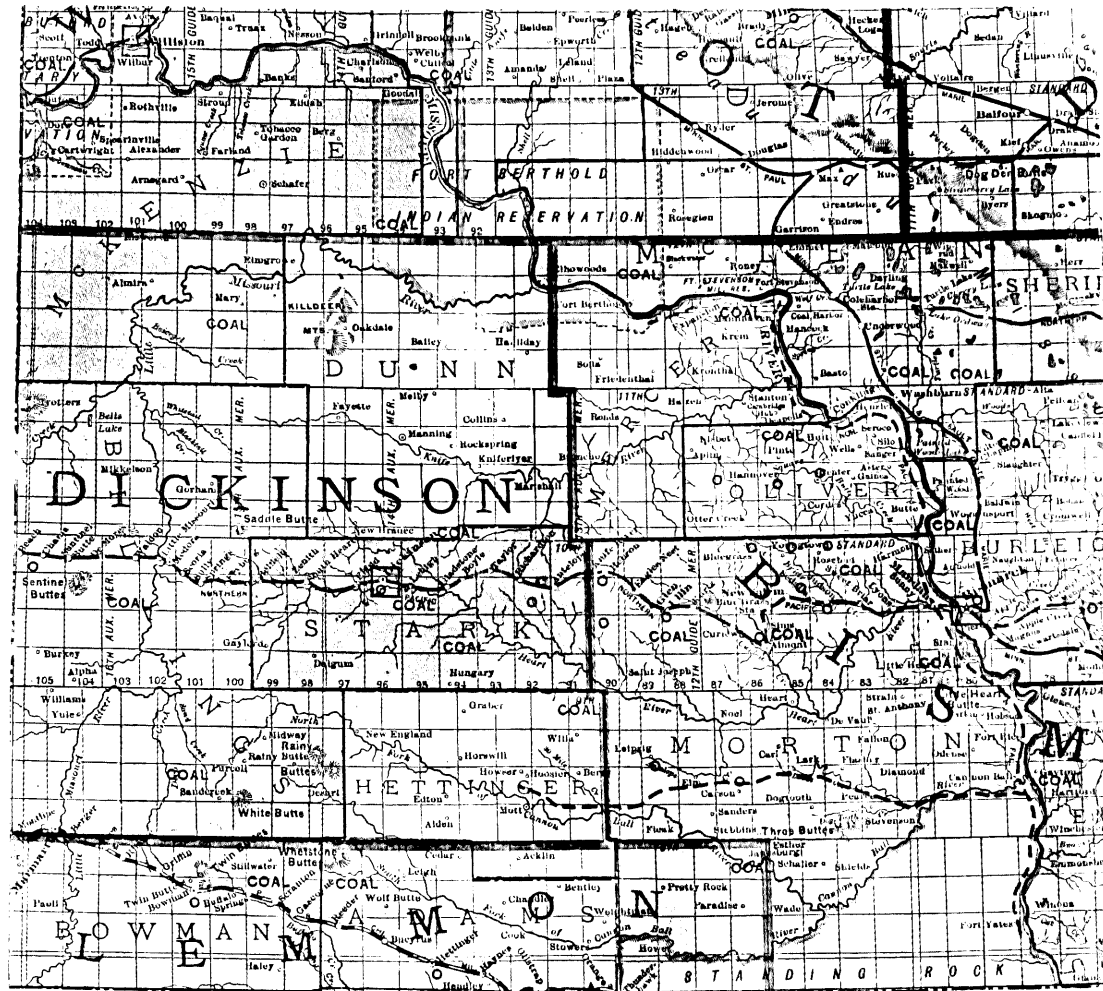
lignite coal would be burned to run the irrigation pumps, while others thought that windmills would be used as the power source.¹⁸ Little progress was made concerning all of the plans and proposals for irrigation and by late 1904 and early 1905, interest in irrigation declined and lay dormant for about four years.

Talk of widespread irrigation, as well as the initial success of many farmers in western North Dakota, helped to keep settlement on the increase. The settlement of the Missouri Slope country of western North Dakota during the first decade of the twentieth century brought tremendous growth to the area within a relatively short period of time. The thousands of homesteaders not only increased the population of the area greatly, but also provided the economic base of support for increased business activity that included railroad expansion and dozens of new towns (see New Business Map of North Dakota, 1909, p. 149). Heavy settlement continued during 1905 to 1908, especially in the southwest quarter of the state. During 1907, several new towns were plotted along the Milwaukee railroad extension. These included Mott in Hettinger County, Hettinger in Adams County, and Stillwater in Bowman County.¹⁹ The increased demand for farm and ranch land brought many problems to the range.

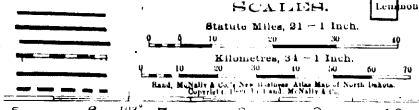
¹⁸ Mandan Pioneer as quoted in Dickinson Press, 3 September 1904, p. 4; 10 September 1904, pp. 3-4; 1 October 1904, p. 2; 8 October 1904, p. 4.

¹⁹ Dickinson Press, 13 April 1906, p. 1; 16 November 1907, p. 7.

SOURCE: New Business Map of North Dakota, Rand McNally and Company, 1909.



GREAT NORTHERN RAILWAY.
 NORTHERN PACIFIC RAILWAY.
 MINN., ST. PAUL & SAULT STE. MARIE R'Y.
 CHICAGO, MILWAUKEE & ST. PAUL R'Y.
 CHICAGO & NORTH-WESTERN RAILWAY.
 MIDLAND CONTINENTAL RAILWAY.
 CREAMERIES. ○ ○



One problem was the cost of land. Prior to 1900, a rancher could own a 160 acre homestead tract and by purchasing alternate sections of railroad land he could gain control over the public lands in between. In this way, large range areas could be controlled at very little cost. Once the homesteading of the public lands began in earnest, the relative few who had controlled the grasslands could not stand up against the onslaught. By 1905 and after, if one wanted to set up ranch operations, it was necessary to buy land. But land values were up considerably. In 1882 this land had been worth from seventy-five cents to two dollars per acre, but by 1905 to 1908 it sold for from six to eleven dollars per acre, with land closest to the railroad going for the higher figures.²⁰ By 1915, such lands were worth around \$32.25 per acre, with some of the older established ranches selling for as high as \$50.00 per acre.²¹

Increased cost became a fact of life for the established ranchers, along with higher taxes to support the improvements that the new settlers demanded, and fencing, or the lack of it, was another problem in western North Dakota. Fencing was not accepted by all ranchers, for the free ranging of livestock was a deeply established tradition. Laws in the area still allowed stock to run at large between December 1 and April 3, and the burden of keeping trespassing stock out of crops was placed primarily on the

²⁰Ibid., 8 March 1902, p. 2; 18 September 1915, p. 6; 20 November 1915, p. 1.

²¹Ibid.

farmer. Farmers were the ones who were supposed to fence out the stock rather than the ranchers fence it in. Farmers did have the right of civil action against the owner of trespassing stock that broke through what constituted a legal fence, as the owner was liable for any damage done to crops or other property.²² But few farmers bothered with fencing in their fields during the first decade of the twentieth century, and as a result, stock killing by irate farmers became a common offense during the years from 1905 to 1914. The problem of trespassing livestock was the one real sore point between farmers and the established ranchers during these years when the open range ended.

The trend toward farming in much of the area caused problems for those ranchers who leased grazing land as well. Some very large ranch outfits had run cattle on the Indian reservation lands over the years, but attitudes changed there also. The Indians were attempting crop raising, like the homesteaders, and they were unhappy with the range cattle damage to their crops. In 1911, J. E. Phelan, who had run cattle on the Fort Berthold Reservation for many years, was not given a new lease. Likewise in 1914, D. B. Zimmerman, a long-time rancher who ranged cattle on the Standing Rock and Cheyenne Reservations in both North and South Dakota, was not given a new lease because the Sioux were angry over crop damage done by his cattle. Zimmerman then had to remove several thousand head of stock and ship them to other areas. He was much better equipped to handle

²²Ibid., 13 April 1907, p. 1; 16 November 1907, p. 7.

such a major change, however, for he also had ranches in Wyoming, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Mexico.²³

Many of the large, old-time ranchers went out of business between 1905 and 1914. They had little choice but to accept the reality of the closed range. It meant that they either had to leave the stock raising business or scale down their operations and follow the more modern methods known as "ranch farming." Still, as these ranchers changed their ways, so did many of the homestead farmers.

For some time before the heavy settlement years, ranch farming had been practiced by the various local stock farms and some of the smaller ranchers. As early as the late 1890's some of the smaller farmers in western North Dakota realized that it was wise to combine wheat growing with livestock raising. This shift to a more diversified operation became more pronounced as the years passed. As crowding of the land took place during the early 1900's, and smaller acreages became the norm as thousands of homestead farmers and ranchers competed for land with the large established ranchers, change in the system of stock raising was accelerated.

By 1903, the influx of new homesteaders was shown by the addition of two thousand new stock brands to the state list. The Dickinson Press described the changing situation on the local range:

early conditions are passing and that new and more permanent conditions exist--which means increased prosperity to the state. The "little fellows" are here to stay. The big cattlemen no longer turn their tens of

²³ Ibid., 6 May 1911, p. 8; 31 October 1914, p. 3.

thousands of cattle out to shift for themselves but are putting them out in small bunches where they receive care. The small ranchers build permanent homes, largely breed their own cattle--high grade--put up hay, improve their lands and patronize home merchants. Each new brand means added wealth to the country.²⁴

Thomas Fisher was one of these early small ranch farmers. Mr. Fisher had a cattle ranch twenty miles northwest of Dickinson and during a prolonged cold spell in February of 1899 fed hay to his cattle every day. In March of 1900, Fisher wintered some two hundred cattle, and since he had farmed sixty acres the previous summer and raised over one hundred tons of oats and millet, he was well prepared for any adverse weather conditions. Mr. Fisher did not look at cattle feeding as something done only during winter emergency conditions, for he also fed his cows and calves during the spring to help them build up strength.²⁵

The local press gave much publicity to ranch farming methods, and since livestock experts were popular speakers at meetings of stockmen during these years, information concerning fodder crops and better stock was available. Fodder crops such as corn, oats, millet, alfalfa, Austrian brome grass, and others all were recommended for part of a rancher's acreage. As crowding of the land occurred during the early 1900's, and smaller acreages became the major kind of operation, ranchers had to make the land produce as

²⁴Ibid., 7 February 1903, p. 2.

²⁵Ibid., 18 February 1899, p. 3; 31 March 1900, p. 3.

much feed as possible and make smaller and better quality herds pay. This required feeding during the winter, stock shelters, and alternate water sources--all were needed to help off-set periods when the weather was uncooperative.

By 1905, the small rancher was solidly established and the open range system was over. As a result of the new emphasis on modern ranching methods, State Senator Simpson of Dickinson introduced a bill providing for a branch agricultural and grass experiment station at Dickinson. This station was to be under the supervision of the director of the experiment station at Fargo. The bill passed and the new station was established west of Dickinson. Professor Lawrence Root Waldron, a graduate of the North Dakota Agricultural College and the University of Michigan, became the superintendent of the station. From the start, Professor Waldron did a great deal to publicize the station's work and made public a great amount of information on fodder crops, farming methods, cattle breeds, trees, weeds, insects, and seed.²⁶

Ranch farming became the best alternative to farming when poor crop seasons occurred in western North Dakota at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1910 dry conditions prevailed and crop yields in southwestern North Dakota ranged from four to twelve bushels per acre for wheat and two to six bushels for flax, about a one hundred per cent decline over previous years.

²⁶ Ibid., 28 January 1905, p. 2; 11 March 1905, p. 2; 29 April 1905, p. 2; 6 May 1905, p. 2; 22 July 1905, p. 1; 29 July 1905, p. 8; 5 August 1905, p. 5.

Many homestead farmers sold out and left Billings, Adams, Slope, and Bowman counties. Those who stayed behind had to adjust their operations more toward livestock production. Edwin Kirk of eastern Adams County had seeded 290 acres of grain in 1910 and 1911 but had harvested nothing. Mr. Kirk did not give up, but he realized that crop raising could not be depended upon as an entirely safe means of livelihood in that area. As a result, he put one thousand sheep on his land. These animals brought a good price at the Chicago market at this time, and Mr. Kirk received from four to five dollars per hundredweight for his mutton animals that weighed from ninety to one hundred and twenty pounds.²⁷

Mr. Kirk noted that overcrowding faced both the homesteaders and the large ranchers alike. Farmers who shifted to stockraising had too little land for profitable operations, as two or three hundred acres initially purchased for crop raising were not enough for a successful stock enterprise. This lack of acreage became less of a problem as some settlers sold out and others bought their land in order to expand.

While more farmers changed their operations to incorporate livestock, more of the old-time ranchers also adapted to the closed range situation and "ranch farming." By 1910, alfalfa was permanently established throughout the state and was widely used as feed along with other crops. One of the old-time ranchers who adopted ranch farming methods was S. Engelhartson of Belfield, North

²⁷Ibid., 16 December 1911, p. 1.

Dakota. Mr. Engelhartson had been ranching since 1894 and was forced to scale down the size of his operations due to the closing of the range. By 1911, Engelhartson kept about one hundred head of cattle that were of a much better quality than those he had ranged in the early days. Much better care was taken of these animals as they were fed oats, rye, and millet that had been raised on the ranch. On an operation like this there were no winter losses, and Mr. Engelhartson received top prices for his stock.²⁸ One of the first above-ground silos was built by W. L. Richards on the Diamond C ranch, located forty miles south of Dickinson in the Killdeer Mountains. Richards had converted to ranch farming and had one hundred of his 3,840 acres planted to crops. The silo on the ranch was twenty feet in diameter and thirty feet high with a concrete pit. During the winter of 1913-1914, some two hundred head of cattle had been fed for ninety days on silage and hay. Such an operation involved about twenty pounds of silage per head per day and a total of one hundred tons of hay during the period.²⁹

Those ranchers who remained in the stock business during this transition period from the open to the closed range had very good markets for their animals. For the first time, due to the heavy settlement, horses were in great demand on the local level, as well as in other mid-western and plains states. As a reflection of this

²⁸ Ibid., 4 November 1911, p. 1.

²⁹ Ibid., 16 May 1914, p. 1.

demand, in April of 1907 the Dickinson Horse Sales Company was organized with Pete Pellisier of Dickinson manager, J. M. Watson of New Salem treasurer, and J. F. Munson of Wahpeton the secretary and auctioneer. All of these men had a great deal of experience in the horse business, having raised or sold horses for many years. With this new company, Dickinson became a major horse sales center and overshadowed the Miles City, Montana sales for the next couple of years. Sheds, corrals, an auction ring, and a roofed grandstand were built by the Dickinson company and for its first sale in June of 1907, five thousand advertising posters were mailed out at a cost of one thousand dollars. The company charged stockmen three dollars per head commission fee; that fee paid for the horses' feed and water while at the company's stockyards.³⁰

The first sale was considered a big success, as two thousand persons attended the four-day event and about two thousand head of horses were sold. Horse buyers came to the sale from St. Paul, Chicago, Omaha, Kansas City, Waterloo, and St. Louis and paid prices ranging from \$25.00 to \$480.00 per head. The average price paid for all stock offered at the sale was about \$70.00, and some ranchers had brought in as many as two hundred and fifty head.³¹

At the next sale, in July, there were fifty buyers from the states of Nebraska, Iowa, Michigan, Illinois, Minnesota, and the Dakotas. The top price paid was \$160.00.³² At the August 20 to 23

³⁰ Ibid., 6 April 1907, p. ; 4 May 1907, p. 4; 8 June 1907, p. 1.

³¹ Ibid., 22 June 1907, p. 1.

³² Ibid., 27 July 1907, p. 1.

sale, some 3,000 horses were sold.³³ Another sale was held on September 9 and 10, but the weather and roads were bad and many herds did not make it in on time. The stock on hand, however, sold quickly, and in the first five hours some forty-three carloads, or about 860 head of horses, were sold.³⁴ At the sale on September 23 and 24 a barbecue was held and about one thousand persons were in attendance. One thousand horses were sold and a roping and bronco busting exhibition was held. William McCarty, a local rancher, Richard Scivner, a champion South Dakota rider, and Arthur Cutter, a top rider for the Dickinson Horse Sales Company, all rode the bucking horses brought in from seven states. There was no winner in this contest for no rider was thrown.³⁵ The last sale of the 1907 season was held on October 28 and 29, and the total from the year's sales amounted to \$400,000. At the last sale the entertainment consisted of three wrestling matches featuring three local men and one from South Dakota.³⁶

The first sale of 1908 was held March 30 and 31, with medium weight draft teams selling for from \$125.00 to \$390.00 and single animals for from \$35.00 to \$165.00. W. G. Clark received the highest price, obtaining \$705.00 for one of the HT Percheron stallions. Only

³³ Ibid., 3 August 1907, p. 3; 10 August 1907, p. 6; 24 August 1907, p. 1.

³⁴ Ibid., 14 September 1907, p. 1.

³⁵ Ibid., 28 September 1907, p. 1.

³⁶ Ibid., 5 October 1907, pp. 3-4; 19 October 1907, p. 3; 21 November 1907, p. 1.

three hundred and fifty animals were sold during the two-day sale, as the weather was cold and stormy. An example of the hazards of herding stock during the spring break-up occurred when William McCarty started out for Dickinson with a bunch of range horses and had to cross the Little Missouri River. In crossing, the horses broke through the thin ice and two drowned. McCarty also broke through and narrowly escaped drowning as well.³⁷ In early June, however, the weather was more conducive to herding and some seven hundred head were sold. Heavy draft horses were in good demand and \$40,000 changed hands. Prices at this sale ranged from \$80.00 to \$130.00 per head.³⁸

Another boost for the local horse raisers came during June of 1908 when the United States government purchased horses for the Indians on the Standing Rock reservation. A. H. Arnett, W. L. Richards, George M. Frye, W. S. Parkin, and William C. Badger were awarded a contract to supply 1,252 broken mares that were to be between three and five years of age and average 1,100 pounds each. Six other area men and the Dickinson Horse Sales Company were sub-contractors and supplied from 70 to 200 horses each. The contract amounted to \$150,000 and was the first time a reservation horse contract had been awarded to parties from western North Dakota. Before this contract, people from the eastern United States had always received this business.³⁹

³⁷Ibid., 25 March 1908, p. 4.

³⁸Ibid., 4 April 1908, p. 1; 6 June 1908, p. 8; 27 June 1908, p. 1.

³⁹Ibid., 13 June 1908, p. 8; 12 June 1908, p. 1.

At the July sale in Dickinson, only six hundred head of horses were sold, and by the spring of 1909 the local horse market was beginning to decline.⁴⁰ On March 11-12, only two hundred head were sold and about half of these went to farmers in the Stark, Hettinger, and Dunn county areas.⁴¹ In June about two hundred head were offered but not all were sold.⁴² At the July sale a ranch mess wagon was set up on the Dickinson streets and camp style meals were served. William McCarty gave a "wild west" exhibition of roping and riding. At this sale the horse sales company sold a carload of horses to Colonel Hernandez of Havana, Cuba for use as cavalry mounts. Some local people thought that the area would become a major source for buyers from the Cuban military, but this did not happen.⁴³

In late July of 1909, the Dickinson Horse Sales Company purchased the Bird Ranch and 340 head of Shire horses for \$34,000. The plan was for the company to use the ranch as a holding and feeding area for stock that would be bought in the future.⁴⁴ By 1910, however, the local demand for horses had declined so much that no more of these big sales events were held. The demand remained low

⁴⁰ Ibid., 4 July 1908, p. 1.

⁴¹ Ibid., 6 March 1909, p. 2; 13 March 1909, p. 6; 3 April 1909, p. 1.

⁴² Ibid., 29 May 1909, p. 2; 5 June 1909, p. 2.

⁴³ Ibid., 10 July 1909, p. 1.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 41 July 1909, p. 1.

until 1914 when European buyers came into the area looking for military stock. After the Dickinson Horse Sales Company stopped doing business in 1910, for the next four years the Miles City, Montana Horse Sales Company again became the major horse market center on the northern plains.⁴⁵

Cattle raisers also did well during the 1906 to 1914 period. Beef consumption per capita in the United States decreased slowly during these years, going from 78.9 pounds per period in 1906 to 67.8 pounds in 1914, but the average price of range cattle rose from \$4.40 per hundredweight in 1906 to \$5.40 per hundredweight in 1910. From 1911 to 1914 the average market price generally increased or stayed about the same as cattle numbers declined. The average prices went to \$5.65 per hundredweight in 1911, \$7.60 in 1912, \$7.40 in 1913, and \$7.65 in 1914.⁴⁶

While ranchers had good markets during the 1906 to 1914 period, they still had to contend with several problems. Predators, although more localized, were still killing livestock. In August of 1906, for example, T. F. Roberts again lost colts to wolves, so he acquired another hound pack and began wolf hunting.⁴⁷ By 1907 and 1908 reports of wolves taken in western North Dakota greatly decreased. Coyotes were now the main predator, and they became quite numerous as

⁴⁵ Ibid., 3 May 1913, p. 7; 21 June 1913, p. 1.

⁴⁶ John T. Schlebecker, Cattle Raising on the Plains, 1900-1961 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), pp. 20, 30, 52 (hereafter cited as Schlebecker, Cattle Raising).

⁴⁷ Dickinson Press, 11 August 1906, p. 6.

the wolf began to disappear. The remaining wolves were extremely cautious and were not easily caught and killed.

In the fall of 1907 C. E. Everett trapped twenty-four coyotes in one month on his ranch in Billings County and collected the state bounty of \$2.50 plus the Billings County bounty of the same amount on each of these animals.⁴⁸ In March of 1909, Mat Cleason of Wades in Morton County brought in eighty-nine coyotes but only two wolves.⁴⁹ The lack of wolf pelts shows the animal's decline as well as the wariness of those left in the area.

By 1909, the last wolf stronghold was in the Killdeer Mountains region of Dunn County and to the west in McKenzie County. In May of 1909, ranchers and farmers from the Oakdale vicinity of Dunn County held a meeting and discussed the possibility of raising a fund "to exterminate the grey wolf pest which is causing so much trouble."⁵⁰ In June another meeting was held on this problem and it was proposed that an association and fund be set up with stockmen contributing five cents per head of cattle and ten cents per horse. This sum of money would then be given to an elected treasurer who would pay from \$25.00 to \$50.00 for every adult wolf and \$10.00 for every wolf pup killed within the boundary established by the association.⁵¹ Action similar to this had been taken a few years earlier by some eastern Montana ranchers and had proven effective

⁴⁸Ibid., 19 October 1907, p. 6.

⁴⁹Ibid., 13 March 1909, p. 8.

⁵⁰Ibid., 8 May 1909, p. 8.

⁵¹Ibid., 5 June 1909, p. 1.

in getting more people interested in pursuing wolves on the range.

In February of 1910, C. E. Everett noted that wolves were scarce in the Badlands south of the Northern Pacific tracks but they were still causing trouble to the north of the railroad.⁵² Losses to wolves continued in the Killdeer Mountains area, especially south of there near the town of Fayette.⁵³ In October of 1910, McKenzie County offered a \$15.00 bounty on wolves and inspectors were appointed around the county to certify wolf pelts brought in for the bounty payments.⁵⁴

In 1911 there were reports from eastern Montana that both wolves and coyotes were increasing in numbers and causing major stock losses. The bounty fund in that state was running out, and the hunters and trappers lost interest in going after the predators since the bounty certificates were far behind in payment.⁵⁵ The fight over the bounty continued in North Dakota with the Billings County commissioners leading the fight to preserve the bounty system. The Marmarth Mail urged all taxpayers to write their senators and representatives to make sure that they supported the bounty law.

The Mail stated that:

Fargo and Grand Forks are only too glad to have the western counties pay their share towards the support of their state fair and other pet institutions, but they want to crawl out of the wolf bounty tax, because they have no wolves. We have no fairs but have

⁵² Ibid., 12 February 1910, p. 5.

⁵³ Ibid., 26 March 1910, p. 10.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 22 October 1910, p. 8.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 14 January 1911, p. 8.

to pay just the same, likewise the eastern part of the state should pay the wolf bounty.⁵⁶

In June of 1911 the Billings County commission met and a bounty was paid on seventy-four coyotes but only one wolf.⁵⁷ In Montana there were still some problem areas and \$1,824 was paid out for wolves and coyotes, the highest amount for one month in several years.⁵⁸ In North Dakota the Billings County Commission was still worried about the wolf problem and in March of 1912 declared:

Whereas wolves and coyotes have become so numerous in Billings county that they have become a menace to the welfare of said Billings county, that said board of county commissioners in and for Billings county will pay a bounty of \$2 on each coyote, provided that a bounty of only \$2 will be paid on wolf pups.⁵⁸

While the wolf problem was still being debated, another predator drew interest in southwestern North Dakota. This was a bird, the magpie, normally a carrion eater. At times, however, these birds could not wait until an animal was dead and they would peck at weakened livestock, aggravating sores or wounds already present or inflict damage of their own. In February of 1912 magpies took a toll on weakened cattle in the Badlands and along the Little Missouri River. Two or three of the birds would perch on the back of a steer where the animal could not reach and peck at the skin until it broke. The birds worked at the wound in relays until the

⁵⁶ Marmarth (Marmarth, N.D.) Mail as quoted in Dickinson Press, 11 February 1911, p. 10.

⁵⁷ Dickinson Press, 10 June 1911, p. 4.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 7 March 1912, p. 7.

steer collapsed after a long period of suffering.⁶⁰

Sheep sheared in the spring often had cuts on them and the magpies also focused their attention on these wounds. The birds would peck at the sheep until the wounds became infected, and the sheep would eventually die. The same thing was done to horses and cattle during the late winter and early spring when their backs contained grubs. Cattle wintered on poor feed or browse sometimes had protruding piles that the magpies would pick at until the victim would lie down and then die from the painful wounds or associated complications.⁶¹

There was really no effective way to stop this kind of attack on stock, although some of the old-timers blamed this magpie problem of 1912 and 1913 on the fact that there was little poisoning of carcasses or the placing of poisoned baits on the range. The old-timers claimed that magpies had been a problem during the 1880's but poisoning had done away with many of the problem birds.

Predatory animals were just one of the problems as the closed range became a reality. Disease also caused some problems for the western North Dakota stock industry. Cattle scab continued and the final efforts to eradicate the disease were made. In September of 1906, J. E. McCoul was appointed field livestock inspector with his

⁶⁰ Billings County (Medora, N.D.) Herald, 23 February 1912, p. 5.

⁶¹ Joseph C. Meyer, Papers, handwritten manuscript, "Our Pretty Chattering Mischievous Destructive Magpies Who do More Damage than All of our Coyotes," The Orin G. Libby Manuscript Collection, Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, North Dakota, p. 1.

headquarters in Dickinson, and the federal government had G. E. Thomas as a regular inspector in the city as well.⁶² In October of 1907, the State Livestock Sanitary Board in Bismarck reported there were still 15,000 cattle infected or exposed to the disease. Of this number 11,000 had been dipped in crude oil and the rest in the old lime and sulphur mixture.⁶³ A few sheep and horses were found with scabies, but they were quickly taken care of.⁶⁴

In May of 1909, the Livestock Sanitary Board met and decided to take what it termed "radical steps" to eradicate the disease in western North Dakota. The infected area was to be divided into three divisions, with the state and federal government cooperating in this undertaking. The state took charge of Dunn and McKenzie counties, while the federal government ran the program of inspection and dipping in Oliver, Morton, Mercer, Hettinger, Bowman, and Billings counties, and on the Fort Berthold and Standing Rock reservations.⁶⁵

By August 1909 there were only 4,000 cattle that could still be classified as exposed to the disease, and none of these had shown signs of actual infection. Of this number, three herds were located on the Missouri River and two were in Morton County near Leipzig. These 4,000 cattle were kept under strict quarantine, and by October 1910, Dr. Tracey, now the federal inspector at Bismarck, reported that cattle scab had been entirely eradicated in North Dakota. There

⁶²Dickinson Press, 8 September 1906, p. 6; 14 September 1907, p. 6.

⁶³Ibid., 12 October 1907, p. 7.

⁶⁴Ibid., 12 October 1907, p. 7; 6 June 1907, p. 6.

⁶⁵Ibid., 8 May 1909, p. 8.

was also little scab in Montana or South Dakota at this time, so the danger of another outbreak spreading across state lines was slight.⁶⁶ The closed range did much to lessen the problem of stock disease, since fencing kept individual herds more isolated and lessened the chance of disease being spread over vast areas by wide-ranging herds.

A major disease of horses was also present at a time when the demand for good horses was very high. Glanders, a highly contagious disease of equines and some other mammals, was first noted in western North Dakota horses in 1902 at about the same time as the scabies outbreak occurred. The disease, caused by a bacterium, creates lesions and forms ulcers in mucous membranes, the skin, various organs, and lymph nodes. A total of seven horses were destroyed by a veterinarian in June and September of 1902 on a farm near Dickinson and a ranch three miles north of Richardton. The disease did not, however, appear to any great extent until 1906.⁶⁷ Then for a five-month period prior to October 1907, 464 horses were condemned and 950 quarantined.⁶⁸ Dr. W. F. Crews, the State Veterinarian, Dr. H. Anderson, the Deputy State Veterinarian, and Dr. Butler of the United States Inspection Service, conducted tests on horses in area livery stables during the latter part of 1908. Horses were tested four times for the disease, and when glanders was indicated the animal was condemned, shot, and

⁶⁶ Ibid., 7 August 1909, p. 1; 22 October 1910, p. 6.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 18 August 1906, p. 2.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 12 October 1907, p. 7.

buried. Livery brains were then thoroughly disinfected.⁶⁹

During 1908 and 1909, Dr. H. Anderson carried on the bulk of the glanders testing and checked horses near Beach, Sentinel Butte, Glen Ullin, Almont, Hebron, Taylor, and in the Killdeer Mountains.⁷⁰ By August of 1909 it seemed that the disease had become more severe. Some persons tried to hide the fact that they had diseased horses; and on at least one occasion the duly-authorized horse destroyer was threatened with bodily harm when he went to kill a horse that Dr. Anderson had condemned.⁷¹ Area stockmen, however, usually cooperated with the veterinarian's orders.

The state of North Dakota paid one-half the value of the horses that were killed, provided that the procedure was in compliance with state law. No horse, however, could be valued at more than one hundred dollars.⁷² Once a horse was condemned by a state veterinarian, the local justice had to fill out several papers, appoint appraisers, and see that the animal was killed and disposed of properly. The papers involved were filled out in duplicate, with one set kept at the local court and the other sent to the State Auditor.⁷³

In early April 1909, State Auditor Brightbill notified the press that glandered horse payments were to be sent out. The legislature

⁶⁹ Ibid., 28 December 1907, p. 6.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 4 January 1908, p. 6; 25 January 1908, p. 6; 9 May 1908, p. 7; 11 July 1908, p. 10; 1 August 1908, p. 6.

⁷¹ Ibid., 1 August 1908, p. 6; 28 November 1908, p. 6.

⁷² Ibid., 1 August 1908, p. 6.

⁷³ Ibid., 29 August 1908, p. 6.

had appropriated \$80,000 for this purpose, and by April 1909, about \$67,000 in claims had been filed. The appraised value of these animals had been \$127,000. It appeared that the total claims filed would soon exceed the appropriation, but all valid and certified claims were honored. In Stark County there were from twenty-five to thirty claims amounting to about \$1,500 in appraised value, so under state law the owners would receive half or \$750,00.⁷⁴ By July nearly all of the claims had been paid and the money was nearly used up. When it was gone any new claims had to wait for a new legislative appropriation.⁷⁵

Glanders remained on the scene for several years, and in 1913 a North Dakota man contracted the disease and died within two weeks.⁷⁶ A few cases in horses were reported until 1917, but the worst years were from 1906 to 1910. Hundreds of animals were destroyed and the financial loss was substantial. Many of the horses killed were worth three times the one hundred dollars allowed.

While disease affected the stock of horse ranchers during the 1906 to 1914 period, stock raisers also were concerned with the prairie fire danger. With the heavy settlement of the land and the increase in farming activity, there was a much greater potential for fire. Much more damage was done by fires now, since there were many more farm and ranch buildings present.

⁷⁴Ibid., 10 April 1909, p. 1; 24 April 1909, p. 1.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid., 27 September 1913, p. 6.

A prairie fire called the worst in seventeen years raged along the Cedar River range in November of 1906. The fire began below East Rainy and Chalk Buttes and was ten miles wide shortly after it started. It traveled southeasterly and destroyed many homesteader's claim houses and property. One of these settlers, William Tews, lost his range, barn, eight calves, grain, hay, a wagon, harness, some horses, and was himself burned in fighting the fire. His sod house was the only thing saved. Many others who lost their teams, chickens, hogs, hay, and buildings were left destitute.⁷⁷ There were more fires in the Missouri Slope country during 1907, with more destruction of range and buildings, but little problem was caused in 1908.⁷⁸ Beginning in April in Dunn and Hettinger counties were several fires in 1909. One of these started when a farmer tried to burn a straw stack.⁷⁹ In the fall, numerous fires burned near Dickinson, New England, and Rhame; all caused large-scale damage to hay and winter range, as well as to grain, barns, and houses.⁸⁰

There were many fires in the area in 1910. During April, a passing locomotive was blamed for starting some of them. In Burleigh County a threshing machine crossing the prairie started a fire and the owner was jailed. The new grass was not up yet, and

⁷⁷Ibid., 3 November 1906, p. 6; 10 November 1906, p. 6.

⁷⁸Ibid., 17 April 1909, pp. 3-6.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid., 6 November 1909, pp. 1, 10; 13 November 1909, p. 10.

the old dry grass burned quickly when fanned by high winds. Fires occurred near Rhame, Bowman, Bucyrus, Hettinger, New Salem, and Stillwater, with farmers losing a great deal of property and stock.⁸¹ The Dickinson Press remarked that a "great many homesteaders will be left almost destitute from the great plague, as it were, which was almost record breaking in its disastrous results."⁸²

Prairie fires had rarely caused human fatalities prior to the early 1900's, but lives were lost once the inexperienced settlers moved into the area. During earlier years the ranchers had problems with fires, but they usually managed to save their buildings and deal rather effectively with the problem. The new homesteaders, however, were unskilled in dealing with such occurrences and they suffered quite heavily. This suffering was especially tragic in March 1910 when a homesteader's twenty-three year old wife perished in a fire as she, her mother, and younger brother fled toward a creek as the flames approached their house north of Taylor. This family had come to North Dakota from Wisconsin only a year prior to the tragedy.⁸³ The Dickinson Press commented that:

Comparatively few lives are lost by prairie fires in this country nowadays, and the victims seem to be the new comers or people who do not understand the means of safety that can be resorted to on such occasions.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Ibid., 2 April 1910, p. 1.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 18 March 1910, p. 1.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 2 April 1910, p. 6.

Fires had become a very serious problem and North Dakota's first criminal action against a farmer for burning a straw stack out of season came in September of 1911. State law permitted such activity only during July and August and required that a fifty foot firebreak be plowed around any stack burned.⁸⁵ After this case, not much fire activity occurred until 1914.

In general, the weather from 1906 to 1914 caused no major problems for stock raising. Early in 1907 there were reports that stock losses would be high, but these were challenged by persons who had seen large areas of the range and spoke from firsthand knowledge. In February, J. E. Phelan traveled one hundred miles and observed little stock loss or bad range conditions.⁸⁶ Dr. Tracey, inspector for the United States Bureau of Animal Industry, returned from a trip through North Dakota and southern Montana and stated that the stories of heavy losses were "much exaggerated."⁸⁷ Dr. Tracey reported that the:

stock in the greater part of the range district of North Dakota is in splendid condition, and in that part of Montana which is tributary to the Northern Pacific railroad it is in excellent condition. The reports of heavy losses have been much exaggerated. The stock-raisers in northwestern North Dakota and northeastern Montana between Minot and Glasgow along the Great Northern were the worst sufferers and they are in bad shape, but west of there conditions are much improved. In the Bad Lands west of Dickinson the cattle are in splendid shape, and the sheep raisers along the Northern

⁸⁵ Ibid., 2 April 1910, p. 1.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 2 February 1907, p. 6.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 2 March 1907, p. 6.

Pacific have sustained practically no loss.⁸⁸

In March of 1907, however, the loss in some sheep flocks in the Oakdale area of Dunn County was put at nearly twenty per cent. This was higher than normal for a winter period, but the losses were restricted to this one locality.⁸⁹

The next weather problem did not come until May of 1909. On May 19 and 20 a late spring storm brought a mixture of rain and snow, and the temperature fell to twenty-nine degrees with a cold northeasterly wind. Many sheepmen had moved to their summer camps on the range and were not prepared to save young lambs or old ewes. Some young colts, calves, and thin cattle were also lost in this storm. The storm was much worse to the west of the border in Montana where up to twenty-two inches of snow fell.⁹⁰

From 1909 to 1910 the weather was very cooperative. There was enough rain over most of the range country of western North Dakota during the growing season and the winter conditions were not severe. The winter of 1911 began early, however, and by November 23 the temperature was -8 degrees in Dickinson where there were from five to six inches of snow on the ground. Some area residents were afraid that these conditions foreshadowed a situation similar to that of 1886 and 1896, but the cattle fared well during the winter and by May only

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 23 February 1907, p. 1.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 23 February 1908, p. 6; 30 May 1908, p. 4.

a small loss was reported.⁹¹ By 1911 the use of feed during the winter was much more commonplace and was a major factor in the decreased winterkill of stock.

The winter of 1912-1913 brought a few problems to local areas, and it was noted that there had been a heavier than normal loss among range horses in the Badlands where some ranchers estimated their loss as high as thirty per cent. Rain in the fall had taken much of the nutrition out of the grass, and heavy snow in late October packed the grass close to the ground. Later in the winter there was no snow and the stock had problems getting enough water for the streams were frozen over. The lack of water caused some young cattle and horses to die. Added to all of this was a high incidence of lice and worms that further weakened the animals. Fortunately, these conditions were restricted to the Badlands and most herds wintered well. There were no widespread problems with weather conditions after this until well beyond 1914.⁹²

The one other problem for ranchers involved the killing or stealing of livestock. Incidences of stock killing increased greatly during the first decade of the twentieth century as homestead farmers became angered by trespassing livestock. In 1907, for example, Joseph C. Meyer, a Billings County rancher, had trouble with persons shooting his cattle and a man was arrested for the

⁹¹ Ibid., 25 November 1911, p. 4; 11 May 1912, p. 8.

⁹² Ibid., 11 January 1913, p. 8; Billings County Herald, 30 May 1913, p. 5.

crime.⁹³ In Billings County the stock interests still predominated and it was believed that crops rather than cattle should be fenced. The stock killers were looked upon as a low sort, and local people thought it was fitting when an Adams County farmer, believing the animals belonged to a neighboring ranch, shot and killed his own horses that had broken through a fence and were feeding in a grain field.⁹⁴ In November of 1908 several stray horses were shot in Hettinger County and a Mott man was charged with the crime. The Dickinson Press stated that:

The farmers and ranchers are thoroughly aroused over the affair. A man who would shoot down a dumb animal that happened to wander across his farm is certainly capable of a more atrocious crime and should not be allowed to go at random in any law abiding community.⁹⁵

By 1909 and 1910 the incidence of stock killing declined, due largely to the increased fencing activity on the range.

As stock killing declined, stock theft increased. Ranchers in McKenzie County were dissatisfied with the conviction rate of rustlers there, and in 1909 they decided to inflict bodily punishment on anyone caught in the act. In February of 1909, Jay and Archie Granteer, McKenzie County ranchers, caught a horse thief red-handed and whipped him before sending him on his way minus the stolen stock. The local press viewed the Granteer's action as very appropriate.⁹⁶

⁹³ Dickinson Press, 31 August 1907, p. 7.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 31 August 1907, p. 7; all issues September 1907.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 28 November 1908, p. 2.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 6 February 1909, p. 1.

At the same time, the Billings Livestock Protective Association voted to pay a \$500.00 reward for information leading to the conviction of anyone who stole or killed stock belonging to members of that group. A \$100.00 reward was also offered for information leading to the conviction of anyone who sold beef and failed to show the hide of the animal and therefore the various brands or marks proving ownership.⁹⁷

From 1909 through 1914 a series of rustling cases showed the wide range of persons who were involved in this crime. One rather inept horse thief made two attempts before he finally escaped custody, but he was captured by a posse of men traveling by horseback and automobile. He surrendered after a shot was fired and came out from his hiding place not knowing that he had not been seen but that the shot had been fired at a stray dog.⁹⁸ In another case, a Civil War veteran over seventy years of age was sentenced to a year in the state penitentiary for stealing some calves near Medora.⁹⁹ One young half-breed from eastern Montana stole seven horses at Marmarth, North Dakota, and since he had no firearms on his person at the time of arrest, and no prior record, the judge gave him a "lenient" sentence of three years in the state penitentiary.¹⁰⁰

Some rustlers showed ingenuity in their methods, as did C. N.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 27 February 1909, p. 8.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 26 June 1909, p. 1.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 7 August 1909, p. 1; 4 September 1909, p. 1.

Pettigrew in 1909 when he had a carload of horses inspected at the Lemmon, South Dakota stockyards just south of the North Dakota line. After dark Pettigrew turned these animals out and replaced them with stolen horses that were then shipped to several localities and unsuspecting buyers.¹⁰¹ Generally, rustlers relied on their old tricks of changing brands or trying to alter the appearance of the stock in some way. On horses the mane and tail might be clipped, and on occasion a horse or steer might be worked over so severely with a branding iron as to result in the animal's death.¹⁰²

It was common practice for the larger rustling operations to steal stock in one state and sell it in another. In April of 1913, for example, Marshal H. G. Cotton arrested John Beard, a rancher from the New England area, and Roy White, White had been stealing horses in South Dakota and Mr. Beard had been selling them to farmers in Bowman and Billings counties. Before the case was over, stolen horses from Montana were also involved.¹⁰³

From 1913 on, more and more of the rustling operations involved stealing and butchering cattle. In October of 1913, Sheriff Barnett of Bowman County and Sheriff Brown of Stark County captured Mike Chernishow and a young boy after the lawmen had trailed the two for nearly one hundred miles. The two suspects had moved a herd of sixty

¹⁰¹Ibid., 28 August 1909, p. 7.

¹⁰²Ibid., 14 December 1912, p. 9.

¹⁰³Ibid., 19 April 1913, p. 8; 17 May 1913, p. 8.

¹⁰⁴Fryburg (Fryburg, N.D.) Pioneer, 16 October 1913, p. 1; 23 October 1913, p. 1.

cattle from a ranch in Stark County and were captured at a vacant ranch house seven miles south of Garfield, North Dakota. The boy, from Minnesota, was later released as he had no knowledge of any criminal activity and had simply been hired by Chernishow as a stock hand. Chernishow, however, had a previous record and had served a year in the state penitentiary in Bismarck for horse theft. Chernishow was on parole from the penitentiary at Deer Lodge, Montana at the time of his arrest at Garfield, having been paroled on a two-year sentence for horse stealing. He had been operating a dressed beef business in Dickinson, with his meat supply coming from stolen cattle.¹⁰⁴ By 1914 most rustling operations involved the stealing, butchering, and selling of beef by those who claimed to be operating legitimate meat markets.

As the war years approached, the various traditional range problems were still present but not nearly as much as had been the case during the open range days. The biggest worry for most ranchers now was the weather and how it affected grazing conditions and the market situation. When war came the market for beef and other livestock and related products was such that the ranching country of the West cashed in on the biggest economic boom yet experienced.

CHAPTER VI

The Period of World War I, 1914-1918

During World War I the stockmen of western North Dakota enjoyed unprecedented prosperity. The war helped the cattle industry greatly by creating a heavy demand for beef both at home and abroad, but the greatest impact in western North Dakota was the tremendous demand for military horses first by foreign governments and later by the United States government.

The war in Europe was of a magnitude that had never been experienced before. New weapons were used for the first time and the cost in human and animal life was extremely high. Each of the warring nations needed hundreds of thousands of horses for hauling supplies and artillery, and cavalry units were still used in much of the fighting. These military horses were lost in great numbers when they had to face the advanced weaponry of the twentieth century: the bolt action magazine rifle, the machine gun, and massed artillery. It was claimed that during the early months of the war, cavalry horses lasted about five days on the battlefield.¹

It was estimated that the German Army required some 770,000 horses for the mobilization of its forces, while the French needed about 250,000 animals. As of October 1914, about 1,000,000 horses

¹Dickinson Press, 10 October 1914, p. 1.

were being used by the armies of Europe.² Large numbers of horses were raised in the United States and foreign governments looked to this country, especially to the western states, for battlefield replacements. As early as the first part of October 1914, Colonel J. D. Davis and C. C. Medbury came to Dickinson from New York in search of army type stock. These men were agents for the Canadian government which saw to it that these animals reached England. The Dickinson Press stated that Colonel Davis and Mr. Medbury were "not supposed to know what the Canadian people do with the horses after they have passed the border line."³ These men wanted sound horses weighing 1,000 to 1,200 pounds to be used as cavalry mounts. They tried to purchase these animals for a little under one hundred dollars per head but had difficulty since the horses had to be delivered at the Canadian border. This last requirement was the real stumbling block, for the ranchers of western North Dakota did not appreciate the extra bother and expense required since the price offered for the stock was rather low. After two weeks these two gentlemen went back to New York empty handed.⁴

It then became common practice for foreign representatives to contract with well-known local horse raisers and stock buyers who would then search the area for the type of horses required. In late October, R. D. Currier and S. Hunt, two western North Dakota

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 17 October 1914, p. 3.

⁴ Ibid., 17 October 1914, p. 3; 24 October 1914, p. 1.

businessmen, arranged with Ed Partridge, a Dickinson area horse rancher and buyer, to obtain stock in the Missouri Slope country. These men had purchased stock in Montana and the Medora area and they scheduled horse inspections at Glen Ullin, Hebron, Richardton, Halliday, Sentinel Butte, and Dickinson. When these inspection trips were over in November, four carloads or roughly one hundred horses had been secured at prices ranging from \$75.00 to \$100.00 per head. These animals were driven into the various inspection sites and, when accepted, were loaded on railroad cars for shipment out of the area. The horses obtained were mares and geldings from five to nine years of age with a minimum height of fifteen hands (five feet).⁵ Foreign buyers were doing similar business in Montana where saddle-broken geldings and mares were taken. Some North Dakota ranchers near the border sold their horses at these Montana sales as well. All colors except light greys and whites were accepted, as these light colored animals were too easily seen and therefore killed on the battlefield.⁶

By December of 1914, French inspectors in St. Paul were receiving horses from Ed Partridge who had paid from \$110.00 to \$135.00 for halter-broken animals. The French had the same size requirements as the English, and they wanted cavalry-type stock weighing 1,000 to 1,200 pounds.⁷ The demand for military horses

⁵ Ibid., 24 October 1914, pp. 1, 4; 7 November 1914, p. 6.

⁶ Ibid., 24 October 1914, p. 7.

⁷ Ibid., 5 December 1914, p. 4; 19 December 1914, p. 6.

continued with the war, and other area businesses also made sales to foreign buyers.

In February of 1915, one local business benefitted from this horse buying boom. The Sentinel Butte Saddlery Company, which was the largest such manufacturer in North Dakota, received a sub-contract from the Studebaker Company which had accepted a \$7,000,000 contract to supply harness and saddles for various European companies. Mr. F. W. Peterson, manager of the Sentinel Butte company, went east to Milwaukee and Chicago and acquired additional leather supplies and another crew of saddle makers in order to meet this contract.⁸

Mr. Ed Partridge remained the number one horse trader in the Missouri Slope country, and he kept the area horse raisers informed on the various inspections held at Miles City, Montana by the English, French, and, by the spring of 1915, the Italians as well. The English then offered good prices for all types of horses, paying \$180.00 for heavy artillery stock, \$160.00 for light artillery stock, and \$145.00 for cavalry mounts. It was noted that one French firm alone wanted 50,000 head.⁹

In April of 1915, Mr. E. Z. Mark, a well-known Minnesota livestock buyer, began obtaining horses in western North Dakota for British and Italian buyers. During April, Mr. Mark obtained about one hundred head from stockmen in Stark County and shipped them to

⁸ Ibid., 27 February 1915, p. 1.

⁹ Ibid., 13 March 1915, p. 1.

the Montana inspection site at Miles City. In May Mr. Mark purchased \$75,000 worth of horses in western North Dakota. This included \$10,000 worth of range horses from Robert Wilcox and Ed Partridge from their range on the Fort Berthold reservation. The biggest single deal involved five to six hundred head from Joe Cain, a Belfield area rancher. These horses were purchased for a price between \$35,000 and \$40,000.¹⁰ Mark obtained ten more carloads (about 200 head) of horses in June in the Belfield area and kept traveling between western North Dakota and Montana in his horse buying-and-selling activity.¹¹

In May of 1915, Lieutenant C. W. Butler of the United States Army arrived in Dickinson and headquartered at the St. Charles Hotel. He hired Charles Defoe, a local rancher, to obtain all the "war" horses he could. Lieutenant Butler, a veterinarian, inspected and judged all horses and took those between four and six years of age weighing between 1,200 and 1,300 pounds. All colors but white were taken as long as the horses were halter-broken. Butler paid from \$160.00 per head and up, but it is not certain whether he purchased these animals for the United States or some foreign government.¹²

Except for the initial buying failure by the Canadian representatives in October of 1914, no foreign agents had held inspections in western North Dakota. Rather they had conducted

¹⁰Ibid., 17 April 1915, pp 2-3; 22 May 1915, p. 1.

¹¹Ibid., 26 June 1915, p. 2.

¹²Ibid., 22 May 1915, p. 8.

such activities in St. Paul and Miles City. This situation changed during the summer of 1915 when the French representatives scheduled inspections at William McCarty's ranch, five miles from Medora, and later at Dickinson. The French wanted mares and geldings from five to ten years of age, fifteen to sixteen and one-half hands high, and if good stock, of any color. The draft-type animal was in demand on this particular trip, but good prices were paid for all types of stock. Heavy artillery horses were bought for \$155.00 per head, light artillery horses for \$140.00, and cavalry mounts for \$120.00.¹³ The acceptance of all colors shows the great need for any and all types of horses in Europe.

The French representatives, Captain Roy of Paris, Dr. Jarmoux the veterinarian, J. R. Mayer of the New York firm of Mayer and Carpenter, and a Dr. Gilmore, were well pleased with horses presented at the Dickinson inspection in July. During the summer of 1915 the French held horse-buying inspections at Glendive, Miles City, Baker, and Wibaux in Montana; at Lemmon and Ekalaka in South Dakota; and at the Custer Trail Ranch, Dickinson, Belfield, Marmarth, and Watford City in North Dakota.¹⁴

By late July of 1915 France was the only foreign country purchasing horses in the three-state area of the Dakotas and Montana. The English were having problems transporting the animals safely across the Atlantic and they had scaled down their purchases for the

¹³Ibid., 3 July 1915, p. 7; 17 July 1915, p. 5.

¹⁴Ibid., 24 July 1915, p. 1.

time being. The lack of activity in horse buying in the western states made some people wonder whether this was a signal that the war was about to end. When the war broke out in 1914, many believed that it would be a short struggle with a few quick and decisive moves bringing victory to one side or the other. By the summer of 1915, however, the war had been going on for almost a year and the adversaries were dug in and at a stalemate. The Yellowstone Monitor at Glendive, Montana voiced the opinion that the decline in horse buying during July of 1915 meant that the war was almost over. The Monitor stated:

the rapidly decreasing purchases of artillery and cavalry horses by both the French and English governments points to an early termination of the present European conflict, is the opinion held by many people who have made a close study of conditions in Europe. This position seems to be corroborated by the fact that both these great nations allied against the German empire have reduced their contracts for horses to an almost negligible figure, while it is known that vast numbers of these animals are being slaughtered daily on the battlefields.¹⁵

The Dickinson Press was more correct when it noted that the war could go on for a year or two, or stop at any time.¹⁶

During August of 1915, the French purchased only a few carloads of horses in western North Dakota. By this time, however, the French government had purchased about 150,000 horses in the United States, with 60,000 of these obtained for them by the New York

¹⁵Ibid., 24 July 1915, p. 1; 31 July 1915, p. 1.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., 14 August 1915, p. 1.

firm of Mayer and Carpenter.¹⁷ The slump in the horse buying activity in western North Dakota only lasted for about a month, as E. Z. Mark then contracted to supply the Italian government with 10,000 head.¹⁸ The French buyers had some trouble in obtaining animals during late August and September, due to bad road and weather conditions, but those who did sell their horses received good prices as the French paid \$170.00 per head for artillery-type draft horses.¹⁹

Horse buying activity continued during 1916 but by mid-year it was on a smaller scale than before. Ed Partridge sold his horse ranch north of Dickinson to Charles Seeman of Mandan and purchased what was called the "largest horse ranch in the world."²⁰ This ranch, owned by two former Dickinson men, Rankin and Gorham, was known as the "Double Square" and covered an area of 130 square miles or 16,900 sections. The range extended over ten million acres of Nevada, Idaho, and Oregon. The land involved mostly leased range, and the deal included 6,000 head of horses. After Mr. Partridge's move to his new ranch headquarters in Nevada he did business with Italian and French buyers at Ogden, Utah.²¹

Foreign governments bought fewer and fewer horses during 1916 and into 1917, but by August of 1917 the United States War Department began to purchase horses for use by the American

¹⁸Ibid., 28 August 1915, pp. 1, 4; 18 September 1915, p. 1.

¹⁹Ibid., 26 February 1916, p. 1.

²⁰Ibid., 15 July 1916, p. 1.

²¹Ibid.

military. The War Department wanted to deal directly with the ranchers as much as possible and to avoid the various contractors. The government wanted the individual stock raisers to receive the high prices being paid, rather than have a contractor pay lower prices to the stockmen and then receive the top government prices for himself. Under the direct sales system, stockmen from a certain area would get together and decide on what animals to offer, set a price, and then notify the remount officer of their district. The remount officer would then send an inspector out to a specified railway point to view the horses.²² The plan to deal directly with stockmen did not work well, however, and in order to get enough horses the contractor was brought into the picture. In the fall of 1917, J. M. Watson of Dickinson was awarded a government contract for horses and he held inspections at Dickinson, Bismarck, and New Salem.²³

The United States Army was very particular as to the kind of horses it would accept. At Grassy Butte, area ranchers showed up with horses but the Army buyers would not accept any of them. Most of the animals were the typical range horses, considered too small and light in weight for most military uses. One stockman had offered two hundred head of horses at Dickinson in November but only sixty-three were accepted. The prices paid for these animals was as good as what the foreign governments had paid and ran from \$145.00 to \$180.00

²² Ibid., 25 August 1917, p. 1.

²³ Ibid., 20 October 1917, p. 1; 27 October 1917, p. 7; 10 November 1917, p. 1.

per head. By late 1917, the United States Army claimed that the average life of a horse on the battlefield was a little over two years, therefore it wanted good quality stock. The general specifications for the stock were similar to those of the foreign buyers. The United States Army wanted horses between five and ten years of age, about fifteen hands in height, 1,000 pounds or more, with no light greys or whites.²⁴

Horse buyers for the United States government came to Dickinson during November and December of 1917, and the English also held inspections during May and July at Beach, North Dakota and Ollie, Montana. By January of 1918, the prices offered were quite good if a rancher had the kind of stock required. Cavalry horses sold for \$165.00 per head, artillery horses of 1,150 to 1,350 pounds sold for \$180.00, and heavy artillery horses weighing from 1,400 to 1,600 brought \$210.00 per head. Mules were in good demand also, with the larger type wheel mules (1,150 to 1,250 pounds) worth \$210.00 per head, and the smaller lead mules (1,000 to 1,150 pounds) bringing \$170.00.²⁵

Not everyone received these prices, for some private contractors bought horses from farmers for around \$100.00 per head rather than the advertised government prices of from \$165.00 to \$210.00. As a result, the government preferred to deal with the small stock raisers directly, for a few unscrupulous dealers were

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 17 November 1917, p. 1; 1 December 1917, p. 7.

making very large profits at the expense of others. Representative Norton of North Dakota was informed of these practices, including charges against the Adams County Sheriff for buying horses at low prices from farmers and selling to the government at high prices. No action could be taken to stop this activity, since no laws were broken, and those who were involved claimed they were just following good business practice of buying at a low price and then selling at a good profit.²⁶

By July of 1918, the horse-buying boom was over as the military demand by the United States and foreign governments ended. The market for horses never regained such an important place in the local economy as tractors were coming into use on farms and automobiles cut into the sales of teams and saddle horses.²⁷ During the summer of 1919, the Northwestern Horse Products Sales Association was organized at Mott in Hettinger County. The members of this association hoped to ship horses to Europe where they believed there was a real need for horse meat and by-products like bones, oils and greases, and hides. There was such a surplus of horses at the local level that small animals were being sold in Montana at this time for only five to ten dollars per head and were used for hog feed. These ranchers believed that the same animals would bring from fifty to seventy-five dollars per head if they were

²⁶Ibid., Golden Valley (Beach, N.D.) Progress, 11 January 1918, p. 1; 17 May 1918, p. 5; 12 July 1918, p. 2.

²⁷Dickinson Press, 1914-1917.

slaughtered and converted into food for human consumption.²⁸

There was, however, little that could help the depressed situation.

The cattle industry also got a major boost during the war years, as American workers enjoyed a high level of employment and prosperity. These workers had more money to spend and could afford to eat better, meaning an increased demand for beef and other meat. In 1914 the average consumption of beef per person was 67.8 pounds, dropping slightly to 62.3 pounds in 1915. By 1918, however, it was up to 75.8 pounds per person.²⁹ In addition, the export market demand was up three and one-half times that of prior years. The war demand increased prices steadily from \$7.65 per hundredweight in 1914 to \$14.50 in 1918.³⁰ At this price a 1,400 pound steer would bring a gross price of around two hundred dollars, twice that received only four years earlier. Those ranchers who managed to remain in the cattle business through the heavy settlement years, as well as the newer small ranch operators, made excellent profits for these were the best markets ever experienced.

Following the war came economic depression beginning in mid-1919. Due to a decreased demand in Europe for American goods, there came increased unemployment in the United States and urban workers cut down on their meat consumption. Beef consumption declined from

²⁸Fryburg (N.D.) Pioneer, 25 July 1919, p. 1.

²⁹Schlebecker, Cattle Raising, pp. 53, 57, 59.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 52, 57, 60.

75.8 pounds per person in 1918 to 66.4 pounds in 1919. Even so, the cattle market remained good during 1919 and 1920.³¹ In 1919, the average price per hundredweight was still high at \$11.25. By 1920 the average price dropped to \$8.00 and the market continued to fall during the 1920's, reaching \$6.00 per hundredweight in 1922, the same that it had been in 1911.³²

Although the economy went from boom to depression between 1915 and 1920, and there was poor farming success in certain localities, for the most part these two problems did not have a major effect on the number of farms and ranch farms in the Missouri Slope country (see Table 3).

TABLE 3
THE NUMBER OF MISSOURI SLOPE FARMS
FROM 1915 TO 1920

<u>County</u>	(1915) <u>No. of farms</u>	(1917) <u>No. of farms</u>	(1920) <u>No. of farms</u>
Adams	868	812	897
Billings	632	661	603
Bowman	850	800	788
Burleigh	1,224	1,340	1,375
Dunn	982	1,362	1,461
Golden Valley	. . . ^a	. . . ^a	777

³¹Ibid., pp. 59-60.

³²Ibid.

TABLE 3-Continued

THE NUMBER OF MISSOURI SLOPE FARMS
FROM 1915 TO 1920

County	(1915) No. of farms	(1917) No. of farms	(1920) No. of farms
Hettinger	971	1,135	1,131
McKenzie	1,806	1,730	2,033
Morton	6,000	1,500	1,910
Slope	853	899	788
Stark	932	1,090	1,301

SOURCE: Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States, Vol. 1., Part I, Agriculture, 1920, pp. 631-635; Fourteenth Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture and Labor to the Governor of North Dakota for the Term Ending June 1916. Fargo: Walker Bros, and Hardy, State Printers, 1916, p. 16; Fifteenth Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture and Labor to the Governor of North Dakota for the Term Ending June 30, 1918, Bismarck: Tribune Co., State Printers, 1918, p. 24.

^aComplete figures are not provided by the Census or Biennial Reports.

The decrease in farm numbers in certain Missouri Slope counties reflects the poor crop success during the years from 1916 to 1920. In 1916 wheat yields were greatly reduced due to blight and rust and amounted to only six or seven bushels per acre in southwestern North Dakota. Flax also averaged only eight to nine bushels. These yields were from two to three times below normal.³³ Drought in 1917 also brought crop failure to many counties, and while temporary

³³ Fifteenth Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture and Labor to the Governor of North Dakota, for the Term Ending June 30, 1918, pp. 25, 28.

relief came during the fall, drought conditions prevailed over most of western North Dakota during 1918 and 1919. Along with the dry conditions came a severe grasshopper problem. The insect pests did much damage in 1918 and the problem grew worse in 1919.³⁴ These conditions forced more farmers to diversify their operations to include more livestock raising, as this activity was not as severely affected by the insects and weather as was crop raising. Cattle numbers in the Missouri Slope country therefore increased during the second decade of the twentieth century (see Table 4).

TABLE 4

THE NUMBER OF CATTLE IN THE MISSOURI
SLOPE COUNTRY, 1910-1920

<u>County</u>	(1910) <u>No. of cattle</u>	(1915) <u>No. of cattle</u>	(1920) <u>No. of cattle</u>
Adams	6,010	20,534	21,170
Billings	30,896	6,645	15,769
Bowman	3,737	9,039	17,809
Hettinger	6,844	. . . ^a	18,426
McKenzie	17,491	. . . ^a	45,681
Stark	15,797	14,141	21,542

SOURCE: U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910, vol. 3, Agriculture, pp. 284-288; U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920, vol. 6, Agriculture, pt. 1, pp. 631-635; Fifteenth Biennial Report of the Commissioner of the Agriculture and Labor to the Governor of North Dakota, for the Term Ending June 30, 1918, p. 105.

^aComplete figures are not provided by the Census or Biennial Reports.

³⁴Fryburg Pioneer, 7 September 1917, p. 1; Golden Valley Progress, 11 July 1919, p. 8; 6 September 1918, p. 1; 6 June 1919, p. 8; 27 June 1919, p. 1

By the First World War the problems that had faced the ranchers in the open range days were about gone. The grasshopper had now replaced the wolf as the number one pest, and the wolf was near extinction in the area. Wolves were still present in the Killdeer Mountains area and very high bounties were paid in order to get rid of the remaining animals. In 1914, for example, each McKenzie County wolf killed brought a total bounty of \$67.50. This included state and county bounties as well as money paid by various stockmen's groups. Stockmen on the Fort Berthold reservation paid the highest amount and the total bounty on wolves killed there was \$132.50. The wolves were not traveling in packs any more but were hunting alone or in pairs.³⁵

In 1911 the state general fund had been short and the bounty fund which seemed to have plenty of money was raided for other purposes. The bounty levy was reduced by the state legislature and the fund fell short during the next couple of years. In 1915 an appropriation of \$50,000 was made to pay off more than 4,000 registered bounty certificates. In 1916 there were no funds left but the State Auditor continued to register and return certificates.³⁶ After July 1, 1917, the state wolf bounty ended when an appropriations bill was vetoed by the governor. The state was still behind with its bounty certificate payment, as the last bounty fund had been \$20,000 and the certificates issued amounted to \$33,000. The

³⁵Dickinson Press, 10 January 1914, p. 8.

³⁶Ibid., 22 April 1916, p. 1.

1919 legislature had to appropriate funds to settle these final certificates.³⁷ By the end of World War I, wolves were extremely scarce and no longer a menace to the stock industry.

Livestock disease created some problems during the war years but no disease outbreaks were very widespread. Glanders was occasionally reported in the area until 1917, and during 1914 and 1915 the disease known as dourine appeared in western North Dakota. Dourine, a contagious disease of horses, was spread during breeding and caused inflammation of the genitals, fever, progressive paralysis, emaciation, and finally death.

In April of 1914, dourine was present in the Oakdale area and federal and state veterinarians tested for it in the general area of the Killdeer Mountains and the Fort Berthold reservation. Animals with the disease were destroyed and the owner was paid up to \$100.00 indemnity from the state. The federal government led the campaign against the disease, as this was a period of time when the demand for American horses was very high due to the war. Blood samples taken by local veterinarians were sent to Washington, D.C. for analysis.³⁸

Several horses on ranches near Fairfield, Quinion, Gorham, and Belfield were found to have the disease. Although the owners valued these thirteen horses at about \$4,000, the indemnity paid them was only \$1,000. By mid-summer more horses were condemned and destroyed

³⁷Ibid., 31 March 1917, p. 1.

³⁸Ibid., 25 April 1914, p. 6; 9 May 1914, p. 6.

on the Fort Berthold reservation.³⁹ The disease did not last very long in North Dakota; the last of it was taken care of by June of 1915.

Cattle in western North Dakota had few disease problems during the war years. Some tuberculosis was found in dairy cattle but no large-scale outbreaks developed.⁴⁰ In 1902, hoof and mouth disease entered the United States through some of the Eastern ports and caused serious trouble in the eastern part of the country for several years. The disease found its way to the northern plains, but it was dealt with quickly and effectively. In December of 1914 a trainload of diseased cattle was destroyed at Glendive, Montana. Since these cattle had been unloaded and fed at Mandan earlier, a crew of men spent three weeks disinfecting the stockyards there. Although three sheep present at the stockyards showed no sign of the disease after quarantine, they were destroyed as a precaution.⁴¹ In 1915 hoof and mouth disease was again found in eastern Montana; and although Montana was under a shipping quarantine from January to June, the disease never spread to other areas.⁴²

As most of the traditional range problems were on the decline, one actually became worse during the war years. The years of 1914 and 1915 were probably the worst ever in terms of the damage done by prairie fires. In March of 1914

³⁹Ibid., 6 June 1914, p. 3.

⁴⁰Ibid., 5 February 1910, p. 6; 12 February 1906, p. 6; 12 March 1910, p. 8; 4 January 1913, p. 6; all issues 1914-1917.

⁴¹Ibid., 5 December 1914, p. 5; 19 December 1914, p. 7.

⁴²Ibid., 17 July 1915, p. 10.

a fire swept for fifty miles through parts of Dunn and Mercer counties destroying much grass and many farm buildings. Five children left home alone on one farm ran from their house as the flames approached. An eight year old girl died and a ten year old boy was badly burned.⁴³ In late October and early November several small fires burned haystacks and buildings, and the Dickinson Press noted that "people are becoming a little lax as has been shown by the number of fires that have been raging in this part of the state."⁴⁴

Only one week later came what was called the "worst prairie fire tragedy in the history of North Dakota."⁴⁵ In this case a threshing machine started a fire sixteen miles southwest of Belfield and within one mile of a schoolhouse. A wind of from thirty to fifty miles per hour pushed the flames and those in the school ran in panic. Some of the students made it to safety, but the teacher and six pupils perished in the fire. Besides the tragic loss of life; this fire burned several farm buildings, haystacks, grain, and thousands of acres of winter range as it burned on for some twenty to thirty miles.⁴⁶

The spring of 1915 was dry and during April there were prairie

⁴³Billings County (Medora, N.D.) Herald, 19 March, p. 1.

⁴⁴Dickinson Press, 7 November 1914, p. 5.

⁴⁵Ibid., 14 November 1914, p. 1.

⁴⁶Ibid.

fires which burned areas several miles long and wide throughout the Missouri Slope region.⁴⁷ McKenzie County States Attorney, George F. Shafer, had the penalties for starting such fires printed in the local press, for most of these fires were the result of carelessness in burning straw stacks, weeds, or stubble fields. It was illegal to do such burning except during July and August, and a fifty-foot firebreak was required by law to be plowed around the area to be burned. The penalty for breaking the burning law was a fine of up to \$1,000 and imprisonment in the county jail for six months. Even an accidental escape of such a fire from within a fireguard could render one liable for any damage it might do.⁴⁸

The fall of 1915 continued warm, windy, and dry. Such weather was welcomed by area farmers who had thousands of acres of late grain to harvest, but conditions were ideal for major outbreaks of fire. The North Dakota Developmental League Press Bureau at Grand Forks had information printed in local newspapers regarding prairie fires and the precautions that could be taken when a fire approached.⁴⁹ Such information was mostly for the benefit of the newer homesteaders, as many of them were at a loss as how to deal with this problem. Such information and the publicity concerning fires must have done some good, for prairie fires became less of a problem during the years following 1915.⁵⁰

⁴⁷Golden Valley Progress, 23 April 1915, pp. 2, 8.

⁴⁸Ibid., 24 April 1915, p. 1.

⁴⁹Fryburg Pioneer, 16 September 1915, p. 8.

⁵⁰Dickinson Press, 14 October 1916, p. 1.

By the end of the First World War the traditional range problems were not of such a grave consequence as they once had been. Most stockmen now practiced ranch farming and had supplemental feed for their livestock going into the winter season, as well as some kind of stock shelter available.⁵¹ More modern methods of taking care of smaller but better herds were practiced by ranchers, and stock raising had evolved into cooperation with nature and the grassland environment rather than a struggle to simply take from the land what was there. Ranch farming was an enhancement of the resources available and the use of newly developed domestic grasses, fodder crops, and improved stock to increase productivity and the quality of beef. The war years had shown that ranching and food production were as important to the United States and the rest of the world as any other industry; as such ranching needed to modernize and grow in new ways.

⁵¹ Ibid., 12 February 1916, p. 1; 10 February 1917, p. 1; Crawford, Ranching Days in Dakota, p. 57.

CHAPTER VII

Summary and Conclusion

The history of ranching in western North Dakota from open to closed range is different in many ways as compared to what occurred in other western states. The Northern Plains region which includes western North Dakota was the last area of the American West to be developed by the stock industry. The first ranching efforts in the Missouri Slope country of North Dakota resulted from a northward expanding cattle industry along with ranching ventures set up by persons from the eastern part of the United States. During the open range years, most ranches operated in the same way, namely letting the stock fend for itself on the range. This worked rather well during times when the weather conditions cooperated and supplied adequate grazing and water year round. Such a system failed badly when precipitation and grass production were less than normal during the growing season and heavy precipitation in the form of snow and severe cold prevailed during the winter months. During such a period very few ranchers could operate without losing a fair number of livestock.

The open range system failed during the summer and fall of 1886 and into the winter season that ended in the spring of 1887. The good luck of the previous three or four years had run out. The speculation

and uncontrolled growth of the cattle industry was checked by the weather and a more cautious attitude returned to the range for a few years.

Following the winter of 1886-1887 recovery of the cattle industry and ranching in general took place rather rapidly. Very large numbers of cattle from both the southern plains and mid-western states were brought to western North Dakota. Recovery was complete by 1891, and by 1894 beef production had expanded by about two hundred and fifty percent over the production levels of the mid-1880's. Most ranchers did not change their stock raising methods following 1886-1887 but kept on much as before for several years. Widespread change on the range land did not come until after 1900.

Those ranchers who turned to other livestock following 1887 had varying degrees of success. Sheep raising remained fairly stable from 1889 throughout the period, and wool became a major product of the Missouri Slope. Horse ranchers were fewer in numbers than the others, and very few ranchers raised only horses. The horse market was very strong from 1907 to 1910 and again from 1914 to 1918, but except for these seven years, only a few large ranchers could make such operations pay over most of the 1887 to 1920 period. Horse raising never became a major alternative to cattle for the majority of stockmen, and sheep remained more associated with farming interests. Cattle ranching remained the major activity throughout the open range years and through the closed range ranch farming period.

The old-time Texas cattlemen helped establish open range grazing in western North Dakota and helped tame this new ranching frontier. At the same time the men from the eastern United States brought their stock farming background and knowledge to the plains. Ranches with ties to the eastern United States were the first to follow the more scientific and modern stock raising methods. The development of ranching as it is today in western North Dakota owes a great deal to men from eastern states like Pennsylvania and Vermont. These men brought top quality stock to the area and used a modified Eastern stock farming system as early as the late 1880's. The open range system prevailed for many years and the stock farming of the East was modified and combined with the open range system of the West. This blending of East and West is largely responsible for the gradual development of ranch farming that took place over the open range period. The influx of homestead farmers and ranchers to the area completed the process.

Over the years, western North Dakota was affected more than most other western states by farmers who were present in large numbers at a relatively early period. The eastern part of the state was farming country and the sparsely settled lands of the Missouri Slope were not far from the more heavily settled areas of Upper-Midwestern states like Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa. Thousands of persons came from these areas to western North Dakota in search of new opportunities. By the early 1900's many farmers were running diversified operations like those found in their home states; these involved both crops and livestock.

The heavy settlement of the area from 1900 to 1905, by those who took up homesteads for farming purposes, was the major cause for ranchers to either sell out or adopt ranch farming as the only alternative to a closed range system. In other western states this type of influx did not play as great a part in bringing change in the ranching system. Most of the other western states were much less suited for anything but livestock at this time. In these areas it was competition for grazing land by cattle ranchers against the inroads of smaller ranchers and sheepmen.

In western North Dakota violent conflict between competing groups was never a problem. During the late 1880's and the 1890's there was no major crowding of the range and all ranchers got along rather well including both cattle and sheep raisers. During the first decade of the twentieth century there was conflict between the established ranchers and the new homestead farmers and small ranchers. Unlike other western states where big ranch outfits tried to drive out the small number of homestead farmers present, in western North Dakota large numbers of homestead farmers drove out the lesser numbers of open range ranchers and forced the others to accept new ways and scale down the size of their operations.

Trespassing livestock was the major problem between farming and stock interests as the range was closed, and the killing of wandering cattle and horses became a common occurrence in the Missouri Slope between 1905 and 1914. This killing was a criminal offense and several farmers were tried and convicted. The crowding of the area

increased tensions but the court system settled most of these shooting incidents. The great change that took place in the ownership and usage of land was relatively peaceful.

Acceptance of ranch farming methods by 1905 was quite widespread. By the first World War, ranch farming was predominant. This was mandatory due to smaller ranches, smaller but better quality herds, and the need for better methods to handle this livestock and produce as much feed as possible on the available land.

The open range days were a colorful period, but they were plagued by problems. Many of the traditional range problems were made worse because of the uncontrolled nature of the open range grazing. When disease broke out it was easily spread from one herd to another as they ranged over long distances and mixed together. After the open range ended and the fencing of grazing land became widespread, disease was much less of a problem, as herds could more easily be kept isolated. Closed range fencing also was of great advantage to those ranchers who were breeding quality stock, for they now did not have the problem of poorer quality stock mixing and breeding with their better herds. The fenced range and smaller, more closely watched herds also made rustling more difficult.

The years from 1900 to 1905 were difficult ones for the ranchers of western North Dakota. Most of the traditional range problems were at their worst during these years. Wolf predation, disease in cattle (scabies), and rustling all were very serious at that time

and put a heavy financial burden on many ranchers, although generally good market prices prevailed. Added to these open range problems was the heavy settlement by homestead farmers during this same period that resulted in the end of the open range system of stock raising. These five years from 1900 to 1905 were most likely the hardest faced by the old-time ranchers, for their way of doing business was rapidly changed and they could do little to resist. Some ranchers in western North Dakota tried to keep operating without fences after 1905, but except in counties where ranching interests remained dominant (Billings County, for example), the bulk of public opinion was against them.

By 1914 the closed range ranch farming system was being followed by even the oldest of the large open range ranchers. An example of one of these ranchers who stayed in business throughout the earlier open range period into the closed range era was W. L. Richards of the Diamond C ranch located forty miles north of Dickinson in the Killdeer Mountains. Having been involved in the ranching business since the late 1880's, Richards had trailed Texas cattle north for the Diamond C range well into the 1890's, operating in traditional open range fashion like the old Texas related Towers and Gudgell (OX), Berry-Boice Cattle Company (777), Reynolds Brothers (Long X), and the Continental Land and Cattle Company (Hashknife outfit). During the late 1880's and 1890's the Diamond C had a few thousand head of cattle on the vast open range each year. By 1913-1914, the Diamond C owned 3,480 acres of land with one hundred acres in crops, had one of the first above-ground

silos in western North Dakota, and had two hundred twenty head of cattle that were fed silage and hay during the winter.

Those old-timers who remained, and the newer settlers involved in ranching during the years of the First World War, took advantage of the best cattle markets ever. Most of the early period ranchers of western North Dakota had not been able to take advantage of the high beef prices of 1882 (\$9.35 per cwt.), for they were not marketing cattle until the 1883 to 1885 period when prices were around four dollars per hundredweight. Even at such a price a one hundred percent profit could be made. In 1887 the average price was down to around one dollar per hundredweight, but beef prices gradually increased over the years. Profits of one hundred to one hundred fifty percent were common during the open range years of 1888 to 1905, with prices running from \$2.60 to \$7.00 per hundredweight. At the beginning of the First World War the top beef price was \$7.65 per hundredweight, but by 1918, \$14.50 was being paid to stockmen. Beef prices remained high even as depression came after the war, for ranchers received \$11.25 per hundredweight in 1919, and still received \$8.00 in 1920. No major collapse in the cattle market came until after 1920.

North Dakota west of the Missouri River experienced great growing pains during the first decade and a half of the twentieth century as land speculation and massive settlement led to overcrowding on the range land. This dual process created problems not unlike the speculation and the overcrowding situation involving livestock that occurred during the mid-1880's. As happened earlier, the weather

brought the speculation and uncontrolled growth to a halt as crops failed in southwestern North Dakota in 1910 and 1911. Crop failure due to disease, drought, and grasshoppers throughout western North Dakota from 1916 to 1920 likewise helped to shift much of the land usage from farming back to livestock raising or more diversified operations involving both stock and crops.

Theodore Roosevelt wrote in 1888 that "In the present form, stock raising on the plains is doomed and can hardly outlast the century."¹ He took this view regretfully, for he looked upon the open range stock raising system as "perhaps the pleasantest, healthiest, and most exciting phase of American existence."² Roosevelt's prediction in 1888 was accurate, for the open range system in western North Dakota did not last much beyond the end of the nineteenth century, continuing only some five years after 1900.

The open range ranching era symbolized the western frontier: rugged, colorful, wild and with vast open spaces. Great changes took place when the fences went up and homesteads dotted the landscape. Ranching now became less a struggle against the wilderness and more a cooperative effort in working with the land to more effectively manage and enhance the grazing and water resources. The twentieth century ushered in an era of modernization throughout the United States and the western rancher was a part of this trend.

¹Roosevelt, Ranch Life, p. 24.

²Ibid.

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