



**The Saga of the Worland
Valley's Hanover Canals**

**Water pays off after hunt for oil at
Bonanza goes nowhere**

1893–1908

Lucia McCreery



Red Bank Press

WilliamARichards.com

THE HANOVER CANAL project, one of the successes of the Carey Act irrigation bill, survived and prospered because canny Charles F. Robertson snapped up certain gifts from Providence and overcame obstacles that might have ended his company's prospects.

Robertson first got interested in the Worland valley on an 1893 visit that included a fateful ferry ride. In his latter-day account he doesn't mention the ferryman who pointed him in the right direction, but he makes much of the aridity of the district at that time. It was "the last sound body of land in the arid west. ...its very barrenness and the utter desolation that pervaded the atmosphere fascinated me from the first."¹

That may be true, but a desolate atmosphere isn't something that normally attracts investors. A more concrete motive was supplied by newspapers of the time: One C. F. Robertson of Dix, Nebraska, visited northern Wyoming in the summer of 1893, "to look over the country in the interest of a number of western Nebraska men, some of whom wish to move to this country, and others who are looking for safe and profitable investments," according to the August 10 *Sheridan Post*. The paper said Robertson explored the Tongue River area, near Sheridan, but he also crossed the mountains into the Bighorn Basin.

About six months later Robertson spotted opportunity in legislation introduced by Wyoming's Senator Joseph M. Carey on February 2, 1894. On February 13th he wrote Carey from Omaha on stationery bearing a modest letterhead, "The Big Horn Basin Colonization and Irrigation Society," asking him to send "us" a copy of the bill. No names appear on the letterhead, and the address, applied by a rubber stamp, was a room in a bank building. Robertson doesn't give himself a title, and one wonders who "us" may have been then.²

Six years would pass before "they" could take advantage of the Carey Act. In 1902 a certain water right was brought to his attention, as Robertson coyly put it.³ The prize belonged to John P. Arnott, a Sheridan attorney who happened to have worked on the incorporation of Buffalo Bill Cody's Shoshone Co. Arnott had been traveling back and forth over the mountains to attend court in Basin City, county seat of the new Big Horn County after it was finally organized early in 1897. He acquired a water right on the Bighorn River with a priority date of April 9, 1902, for 35,500 acres.⁴ Arnott named his projected canal after Hanover, Indiana, his home town, and a site had been selected for the headgate. He apparently had got no farther. (In these pages "Bighorn" will be used for the basin, river, and mountains except in quotations from contemporary sources.)

It's unclear how Robertson and Arnott hooked up; both lawyers, they may have met in Sheridan in 1893 and corresponded occasionally. It's possible that Arnott heard about Robertson's interest in a big irrigation project from the man who first gave Robertson the idea: a ferry operator. Alex McDonald ran a ferry service across the Bighorn River at today's Himes, between Basin and Greybull. That the irrigation project was McDonald's idea is revealed in newspaper items about a lawsuit that he filed against the Hanover Company and its trustee, Robertson, in 1905, charging that he was "shut out and deprived of all his interest in a scheme of which he was the chief promoter and originator. Wherefore he sues for \$26,000."⁵ Also involved in the litigation were three "interventors": E. Gillette, C. W. Garbutt—and Arnott. The judge ruled that they were "equally interested with McDonald and entitled to share with him equally the \$20,000 of capital stock originally placed in the hands of the trustee," reported the *Sheridan Post* on December 22. The story explained:

It developed in the trial that the water permit was originally issued to Arnott, but that the scheme was suggested by McDonald. The court said in rendering his decision: The government owned the land to be irrigated, Arnott owned the water right and McDonald had the idea.

The roles of Edward Gillette, a Sheridan surveyor, and C. W. Garbutt, a former Sheridan hotel owner who was superintendent of several Wyoming forest reserves at the time, never found their way into available news stories.

Arnott's water priority was important because the best tract of land in the area was tied up: the 15,000 or so acres claimed by members of the Big Horn Ditch Co., a group of Colorado investors, which had been located and surveyed by William A. Richards.

How *did* Robertson learn about Arnott's water priority? Possibly from Arnott himself. Robertson doesn't say what their agreement was, but it was obviously favorable enough to get him moving. To determine whether a viable ditch could be constructed, a survey would have to be made. Funding for a preliminary survey was obtained through Dr. N. B. Rairden of Omaha, superintendent of Baptist Missions for several western states including Wyoming. Robert E. Coburn of Carroll, Iowa, was also brought in,* and they agreed to sponsor a full survey.¹ By April 1903, Robertson and an Omaha surveyor were in the Bighorn Basin, and the survey was finished the following October.² Then began "the moving of earth in actual ditch building almost at once after the survey was completed, to insure priority of rights to water out of the Big Horn river." And of course the sooner they finished the ditch, the sooner they could begin selling parcels and the water rights that went with them.

Robertson was encouraged by the accomplishments of a group of Germans. In 1888 Charles R. Pfeiffer, a Prussian immigrant, settled on lowlands just downriver from the Colorado tract that were easier to irrigate than most of the land on the Bighorn. Grasses were abundant enough to support livestock until the farmer's own fields could begin producing.** He carved out his ditch on the east side of the river near the mouth of No Wood creek and filed the first water right recorded for the Bighorn River, dated January 1, 1888, for 178 acres.³ Other Germans soon joined him and dug the Fritz ditch (named after Frederic "Fritz" Laudan, the young German who cleared and leveled much of the land) to serve an additional section of land. "They had seen what irrigation could do in Colorado and were determined to have irrigated farms of their own, and they set bravely to the task," Robertson wrote.⁴ They had to level the rough ground and clear it of cottonwoods and underbrush. Their farms would be irrigated by the Fritz ditch, begun sometime after 1894. The headgate, which was farther upstream than Pfeiffer's, drew more water, so the Germans merged the two and obtained water rights for 773 acres as of the official priority date, September 29, 1896.⁵ (These were not Carey Act acres.)

*Coburn was treasurer. When the Hanover Land and Irrigation Co. was incorporated in 1904, its president was William L. Culbertson of Carroll, its vice president the Rev. David T. Pulliam of Loveland, Colorado, its treasurer Coburn and its secretary Robertson.⁶

**Pfeiffer's homestead was configured to cover a number of sloughs created by the river, wrote Bighorn Basin historian Lawrence M. Woods in emails to author, 2013.

"My father knew Charlie Pfeiffer, who was our family's neighbor, and asked him why he didn't choose the level land on the river bank, rather than the sloughs (since he obviously was the only person interested in the neighborhood at the time). Charlie replied that in the first year that he was located there, the sloughs (some of which were dry most of the year, and others still had standing water) were the only source of feed for his horses. If, indeed, he chose the low-lying land, it would, of course have been easier to cover with water from the Pfeiffer ditch.

"Indeed, the Fritz Ditch passes through a good deal of Hanover land on its way to the land appropriated under it, and the Hanover could not complain, because ditch companies have eminent domain once their route has been approved by the state engineer. At least two of the Hanover drains to the river have to pass under the Fritz Ditch (which was there first). Of course, there are examples where small amounts of water are taken from a ditch 'passing through,' but that is only legal with the consent of the ditch involved and 'theoretically' also approved by the state engineer. For the most part, the land the Fritz Ditch passes through is not physically irri-

gable from that ditch, because the ditch is too low, but in any case, the Fritz Ditch water cannot legally be used on that land."

Woods's father, Ben R. Woods, came to Wyoming with his grandmother, Sarah M. Burwell, about 1901. At that time, Abraham Bradfield, who had a homestead cabin on the west side of the river on land (on both sides of the river) adjoining Pfeiffer's, was dying, and Sarah and her daughter, Ida Belle Wood, nursed him until he died, when the two women inherited Bradfield's homestead. Woods said, "My father, who was born in 1893, knew Charlie Pfeiffer very well and I don't know when the conversation I related to you occurred. The Pfeiffer ditch was a long ditch—not as long as the Richards ditch, because it didn't serve as much land—but otherwise there is no conceptual difference between the two. As I noted, when the rest of the Germans came up from Colorado, the ditch to serve their land immediately south of Pfeiffer required moving the headgate further upstream to Township 48. A portion of their land was in Section 16 (a school section) and was acquired from the State of Wyoming (which did not obtain the underlying deed from the U.S. government for a number of years). This German colony came from north Germany, not the Hessian area where most of our Volga Germans lived, and their language was somewhat different, as well. I owned the entire Fritz Ditch before I sold the land some years ago. At one time, the ditch extended nearly to the limits of the town of Manderson, until the 1924 flood cut across an oxbow and left the northernmost land on the west side of the river. Otherwise, the ditch still serves all the land originally filed on."

Robertson wrote that the Germans¹

had by dint of hard work and braving of many hardships, far from railway transportation, developed an agriculture that gave a fairly good cross-section of what the soil and climate might be expected under irrigation to produce.

It wasn't too early to start thinking about a site for a commercial center. There were several possibilities, but the final selection owed much to the blandishments of another visionary, Charles H. "Dad" Worland. Worland was a newcomer to the area: just three years earlier he had filed on a 160-acre homestead on the banks of the Bighorn. It was just across the river from the southern end of the large Big Horn Ditch Company tract. It was a good location for someone going into the hospitality business, being right on the old Bridger Trail to Montana. In the hillside Worland carved out a shelter for himself and a saloon to refresh stage-coach passengers and other travelers.² It was a hole about 24 feet square dug into the north bank of Fifteen Mile Creek, according to Robertson. Cottonwood logs were laid up for a front, with openings for two small windows and a door. The roof consisted of cottonwood logs covered with brush and straw and "topped off" with soil to shed rain.

Upon their arrival that April, the Hanover surveying crew had just set up camp nearby when out of the brush appeared a man mounted bareback on a dun mare. Robertson fondly recalled:³

The man proved to be none other than old "Dad Worland," who, with his old slouch hat and one gallus holding up his none-too-new overalls, look[ed] for all the world like a typical frontiersman of the old Missouri vintage, which in fact he was[. W]hen we had confided to him the secret of our mission he bid us thrice welcome....

Worland had borrowed the small amount of money needed to file on the homestead and obtained backing for his saloon from a man in the town of Basin. He was now looking to make his new home grow and prosper, and along comes Robertson.⁴

From the first day I came into this area I had my "weather eye" out for the right location of a natural trading center. It was not long till Dad Worland took me in tow and it was an easy matter to convince me that the mouth of Fifteen Mile creek was not only the geographical center of the Big Horn Basin, but of the Universe as well.

Dad Worland wasn't alone in the wilderness: a few other pioneers were eking out a living in the vicinity. To serve them, the Worland Post Office was established in May 1902, in Dad's dugout.⁵

ROBERTSON SAYS NOTHING about a venture that didn't pan out: oil. He and two other Nebraska men visited Cody in March 1902; that town's *Wyoming Dispatch* reported that Robertson was "in the county ten years ago and said he then realized its great possibilities, and was pleased to find that it was realizing them."⁶ Oil springs had been discovered near Cody, and claims were being filed. Whether Robertson's party got as far as the Bighorn River district on that trip isn't reported, but the following August items appeared in several Wyoming newspapers announcing the formation of the Big Horn Co-operative Oil Co. Its president was Nebraska Secretary of State George W. Marsh, its secretary was Robertson, and a number of other midwesterners were listed as officers. The stated capitalization was an impressive five million dollars. Robertson and others were reported to have departed for the basin to visit the Bonanza oil district, a few miles southwest of Hyattville.

Surely they would be the ones to tap the slippery treasure that had eluded so many other drills; oil was flowing out of the ground *all by itself* from what *just had to be* an immense underground pool. Pioneers had come across high-grade petroleum seeps in the early 1880s, and used it to lubricate wagon axles, burn in oil lamps, treat skin conditions, and keep

leather boots and harnesses supple in the dry climate. When an oil spring was discovered in 1885, the *Democratic Leader* (Cheyenne) ran a front-page story about it.¹

A petroleum spring with refining apparatus included is what Mr. A. A. Conant and Mr. Thomas Auten, two of our townsmen, have discovered. This wonderful well is situated about 175 miles north of here, just within the line of Johnson county. The oil seeps out for a distance of 150 yards and is almost pure in quality. At any point along the line of seepage a quart bottle can be filled within a minute. As the oil flows over the ground it leaves absolutely no residuum. In all other petroleum wells of this section asphalt is largely left by the process of filtration, but the closest examination failed to detect even its presence in this oil. The article as it comes from its natural refinery is so nearly pure that a quantity of it poured upon a board can be fired with a match. In the language of Mr. Conant, "the whole place looks as if a gigantic oil vessel had just burst there."...[the] surveyor who did papers for them is an experienced locator of oil lands in the Pennsylvania fields, and says that he never saw an oil well until this one. He places the value of the spring at \$100,000 in one year's time. The lucky owners will start back in a few days to begin development work. The spot has already secured the name of the Bonanza Oil spring. For the last year whispers of this new oil field have been going around among the knowing ones. While the spring just discovered is a fortune it is confidently asserted that one larger by far is in the same locality. The oil fields of the Big Horn basin are beginning to show themselves, and they will discount anything yet found in this region.

Excitement over the oil, along with growing settlement of the Nowood country, attracted the area's first merchants the following year. William E. Taylor, a Boston ice dealer, left Beantown in 1886 for what became the town of Bonanza, at the point where Paint Rock creek joins No Wood creek. He opened a store there in 1886, and his brother, Alonzo H., soon joined him, if he wasn't there at the outset. Samuel Hyatt crossed over from Buffalo, where he had run a store since 1884, and started a new business in 1886 farther up the Paint Rock at what became Hyattville.

It took a couple of years for someone to get serious about going after the oil with deep drilling: The Big Horn Land and Petroleum Co. was organized by Winfield S. Collins in 1888.² In anticipation of a strike, William Taylor headed for Buffalo "to make sure of his claim before the land office," reported *The Big Horn Sentinel* on September 22, 1888. Taylor was "rejoicing" over Bonanza's prospects, and "the projectors of the well...say they have every assurance they want from the B. & M. rail road directors that they will put a railroad into that country within fourteen months after a flowing well is struck." The item ended on an anxious note: "The sooner one is struck the better." (The B&M was the Burlington and

All Hail, My Lads

Listen to what I have to say regarding the Big Horn Basin and Frank W. Ganley's Addition to the City of

Bonanza,

A Live Town and rapidly gaining in population and influence.

HOMES IN THE

GARDENS OF THE BIG HORN!

The Finest Agricultural Region West of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers.

*The land where every man may eat in safety
Under his own vine what he plants, and sing
The merry songs of peace to all his neighbors*

The Mecca of Earth's Oil Kings

BONANZA CITY

Is situated in the centre of the Big Horn Basin, on the direct line of the incoming Wyoming Midland Railroad.

Exhaustless Coal Deposits

The Mighty Bonanza Oil Fields are but Twelve Miles from the Big Horn.

Bonanza is situated on the Nowood river at the mouth of Paint Rock

Promotion in *The Rustler*, April 12, 1890.

Published at Bonanza by Joseph De Barthe since June 1889, the *Rustler* was the first newspaper in the Bighorn Basin. Microfilm, UWyo

Missouri River Railroad, which eventually became the Burlington Northern & Santa Fe Railway.)

FIFTEEN YEARS after the first drill was sent in search of this “ocean of oil,” Bonanza was still in search of the big strike that would validate its name. Optimists clung to faith that the big payoff just *had* to be around the corner, among them Robertson’s company. By April 1903 they had purchased the rig of another Bonanza company and were ready to start drilling.¹ The seller needed a bigger rig in order to drill deeper—which turned out to be a cautionary omen. Others kept trying; meanwhile, elsewhere in the basin, copious and reliable sources of oil and gas were soon located, and they became the basin’s most important industry.

At Bonanza the earth refused to yield up its treasure in commercially worthwhile amounts until after 1950, when the Bonanza oil field was discovered.² Production in 1951 was 603,686 barrels, and in 1956 forty wells produced more than five million barrels.³ Oil prices influenced output over the years: high during the oil crisis of the late 70s–early 80s, (about 110,000 barrels annually), to a tenth of that—11,230 barrels—in 2016 following the slump in energy prices. In 2019 it was 2,132 barrels. The cumulative total since the field was discovered is 42,495,521 barrels as of the end of 2019. In 2020 it was zero,⁴ but a different source recorded a whopping two barrels produced in August 2023.⁵ Oil was still seeping out of the ground in Bonanza in 2015, and a video it can be seen on YouTube.

The oil wells lasted longer than the town of Bonanza, of which nothing remains but its hilltop cemetery. Its weathered post office building now stands at Cody.

AS FOR ROBERTSON, his bonanza ended up coming from surface water—and it was no sudden strike. But his canal project nearly went the way of the oil well. The desirable tract patented by investors in the Big Horn Ditch Company was tied up, so it had seemed reasonable to use the higher “bench” ground next to it. This required a correspondingly higher headgate on the opposite side of the Bighorn, about five miles upstream from the one Richards built. A flume had to be built to carry the water across its mother river, and the ditch—today’s Upper Hanover Canal—would be much longer and have more twists and turns than its lower brother.* Despite this difficult undertaking, within a year after their survey the Hanoverians had completed so much of the future Upper canal that Wyoming’s Acting Governor Fenimore Chatterton sent Robertson a letter of congratulations

on the successful construction and operation of a very large portion of the Hanover Canal... Your company has more than kept its agreement with the state in the rapidity with which you have pushed forward construction work. I am pleased to say that you have attained greater success, and with more rapidity, than any of the canal companies who have contracts with the state for the reclamation of arid land tracts, and the State Land Board appreciates your efforts very highly because you have given a splendid practical demonstration of what may be accomplished within the boundaries of our state under the Carey Act, which means as much to the homeseeker and to the development of the rich agricultural possibilities of our State....

The letter was part of a half-page illustrated article about the Hanover project in *The Big Horn County Rustler* in November 1904.⁶ The entire issue promoted the Bighorn Basin, its irrigation projects, and its budding agriculture. The Hanover piece opened with the reminder that “the financial sea [is] strewn with the wrecks” of similar irrigation schemes. The Hanover canal was ambitious and the work difficult, but less so than some others in the works—or still in the hearts and mouths of promoters. A good choice of land must have contributed to its successful completion within a few years. It helped that even though it was

* The Upper Hanover Canal is 35 miles long, 60% longer than the 22 miles of the Lower Hanover, yet it irrigates slightly fewer acres (13,200 vs. 13,865).⁷

uphill from the Richards ditch, the land was flat enough that it “lays almost perfect for the distribution of water over its surface.”

The *Rustler* went on about what makes the area such prime agricultural land today: the rich alluvial soil capable of producing enormous yields of all kinds of grains and grasses, combined with a climate favorable for fall wheat and rye, and corn in July and August. “Vegetables of all kinds grow to an enormous size and various varieties of fruits, wherever tried, seem to be perfectly at home.” Alfalfa was destined to be one of the most profitable crops, making the area even more favorable for stock raising.

Unmentioned is the elephant in the room: the nearest railroad station was 85 miles to the northwest, at Garland. Without trains to carry produce to market, who would buy parcels in the Hanover tract? Yet Robertson’s company plunged ahead with their bold and risky venture.

Another hurdle was the elephant in the heart of the district, the Colorado tract. The Hanover survey found that the area that could be irrigated under their own canal was “very very much smaller than that shown on the map accompanying the original application for permit,”* Robertson wrote. That this was “a very great disappointment” must have been an understatement. “The entire scheme was doomed to failure” unless “the lands lying under the line of the canal known as the Richards ditch could be brought into the picture and consolidated with the Hanover Canal.”¹

But that tract would not be worth developing unless the Richards ditch could be modified for use when water was low as well as high. Not to worry: a site for a new headgate was found that would take in water during the entire growing season; it was just a half-mile upstream from Richards’s headgate.² Hanover might have lost the coveted tract to someone else, however, had it not been for another stroke of luck.

Early in 1904 Robertson was on his way east when he ran into a man who had his eye on the Richards tract after hearing about it from a real-estate agent from Colorado Springs. Robertson changed course and went straight to the Springs to meet with the president of the real-estate company. It turns out they were already cultivating the owners of the parcels. A deal was worked out, and options for virtually the entire tract were speedily acquired. The Hanover Land and Irrigation Company, which grew out of the Hanover Canal Co., was incorporated on July 6 to dig the canal, obtain a water right, and sell the land once it was under irrigation.³ Brought in to run it was David T. Pulliam, a Loveland, Colorado banker, and W. L. Culbertson of Carroll, Iowa. A former Baptist minister, Pulliam was also experienced in farming along with ditch construction and management. Robertson gives Pulliam credit for the ultimate success of the entire Worland irrigated district.⁴

By 1905 many of the parcels had been purchased.⁵ Work began on the Lower Hanover canal in November 1904.⁶ By mid-1905 construction was underway on the two Hanover canals and also the Big Horn and Bluff Canals on the west side of the river. Yet without train service all faced an uncertain future—and the Burlington Railroad, which had built to Garland and Cody in 1902, wasn’t interested.

High-level Burlington executives toured the basin in July and August⁷ but they seemed blind to the potential of its southern section. Never mind that substantial coal deposits had been discovered and that construction of four long canals was underway, canals that would replace all that sagebrush with farm produce that needed to get to market. Robertson himself had guided the visitors over the Hanover lands, at their invitation, and he surely showed them the agricultural miracles on the farms irrigated by the Fritz Ditch and the Tillard and Taylor-Halstead ditches. Truck farmers were prospering by hauling all kinds of produce to settlements in the basin,⁸ and that should have alerted the railroad men that the

*Arnett’s original permit was for a whopping 35,000 acres, which is about what the entire irrigated acreage of the area encompasses. Robertson probably did not expect to use it all.⁹

completion of the larger canals would vastly increase such production. On their way south they visited the large coal deposits near Thermopolis that required only a railroad for full development. But the Burlington's committee was not attracted by these magnets nor by the hot springs at Thermopolis.¹

Robertson clearly relishes telling how he narrowly averted disaster. When the committee did not return to Worland for further talks after visiting other areas in the basin, he feared it would issue an unfavorable report to the Burlington's directors. Robertson headed to Lincoln, Nebraska, to see Charles H. Morrill of the Lincoln Land Company, which was working with the railroad. Morrill had also been involved in the deal that brought the Burlington to Cody. He confirmed Robertson's suspicions: the committee would recommend building south only to Basin and then west up the Greybull River to Otto.²

"Highly agitated and under a nervous strain," as he put it, Robertson hastened to Omaha and met with the Hanover board of directors. A statement listing the reasons the Burlington should build to Worland was sent to the committee via Morrill. They saw the light, and Robertson claims Morrill awakened him with the good news in his sleeping car at Alliance, Nebraska.³ (It's a wonder he wasn't wide awake—stewing, or hatching some other plan.)

Since their "entire enterprise would collapse" without the railroad, the Hanoverians had no choice but to agree to "practically every demand" of the Burlington and the land company. These included prime town lots and a 200-foot right-of-way for the railroad that would have to be taken out of the Colorado tract then being acquired. Robertson wrote that the concessions seemed "almost a confiscatory price to pay," but in the end, both profited handsomely. Just six months after the Burlington reached the new town of Worland, passenger and freight traffic was so heavy that the trains ran behind schedule much of the time. The line was soon extended to haul coal from Gebo (just north of Thermopolis, now a ghost town), and before long it would be built south to Colorado and also east to connect with the Burlington's Nebraska lines.⁴

THE HANOVER DEAL meant that Dad Worland and his "town" would have to move across the river. Thanks to unusually thick ice during the winter of 1905–06, the buildings could be dragged on skids to their new home fairly easily, though Robertson paints a dramatic picture of moving the "camp" and says surveyors platting the town had to work in temperatures of –20 or –30F.⁵

Worland got a newspaper that same winter with the appearance of the first issue of *The Worland Grit* on December 28, 1905. The *Grit* plant would shortly be moved with the other buildings. (See "W. A. Richards and the Bighorn Basin Newsmen" pdf when it's finished.)

The new town was duly incorporated in April and municipal elections held the next month. There was just one nominee for Mayor—Charles F. Robertson. He received all 40 of the votes cast, and Dad Worland was chosen one of the four city councilmen.⁶

The Burlington was scheduled to arrive on July 10. Trains and town both needed to be ready for a major event the following month: the opening to settlement of part of the Shoshone reservation. Thousands would descend on Worland, one of several places where they could register for a chance to claim a plot of land.

Invited to speak on the Fourth of July was a basin pioneer who had moved on to Washington, D.C. William A. Richards, commissioner of the General Land Office, had another land opening to supervise, in Montana. He could not join the festivities, but in his letter of regret he recalled his exploration of the district two decades earlier:⁷

* The Upper Hanover Canal is 35 miles long, 60% longer than the 22 miles of the Lower Hanover, yet it irrigates slightly fewer acres (13,200 vs. 13,865).⁸

I make no pretensions to being a Fourth of July orator, but I might be able to state a few interesting facts relative to the early settlement of Big Horn County, as my intimate association with it, and especially, with the immediate locality in which the celebration will be held, dates back to 1884, when I first stuck a stake upon the flat upon which Worland is situated [presumably during his initial survey for the Big Horn Ditch company]. I have had an abiding faith in the development of that part of Wyoming ever since the October day when I first camped upon the banks of the Big Horn River, and am rejoiced to see that unbounded prosperity is about to reward the efforts of those who have devoted their best efforts to the development of this, the most promising section of our great state.

Just a week later the first Burlington train pulled into Worland, right on schedule. Its whistles of greeting were met with cheers from the crowd. There were speeches by Mayor Robertson and Dad Worland, the golden spike was duly driven to the accompaniment of cannon, firecrackers and anvils, and fireworks capped the celebration.¹

The return of Richards on July 26 did not warrant such hoopla, but he was feted at a banquet given by the Business Men's Club. On his way to supervise the Shoshone land opening he visited his true home, Red Bank ranch, where he had spent so little time since 1889.* With his partner "Bear George" McClellan, Richards came down to Worland over "a trail blazed by himself years ago," as the *Grit* reported.² Editor Tom Daggett enthused about the return of "Big Horn County's most distinguished pioneer." Local and visiting dignitaries attended the banquet, which featured an orchestra from Red Lodge, Montana, and a menu "that would have done credit to any hostelry in the land." When the guest of honor spoke about the early days in the basin, "he proved himself to be the same genial, level-headed, witty spirit as of old, and though tired from his overland trip, kept his hearers laughing and applauding...."

Richards had kept his parcel in the Colorado tract. Some of it was taken for the railroad right of way, but the rest would be "fenced in a short time and crops of different kinds sown," according to the May 3 *Grit*. Referring to the Red Bank Cattle Co.,** formed in 1903, the *Grit* continued, "The ex-governor, with his partners, George B. McClellan and Dr. [Malcolm L.] Harris of Chicago, will make it headquarters for their stock enterprise on an extensive scale."

It would take a few more years for the Hanover canals to be fully operational. The first one got clogged with mud and silt in 1906, and progress was held up because not enough men and teams could be found to clear it. In 1907, high water on the Bighorn washed out the big steel flume across the river—twice—and damaged or took out bridges as it charged north.³

That did not stop the Hanover Land and Irrigation Co. and the Burlington from promoting sales. In November, Hanover ran large ads in the *Grit* and possibly elsewhere trumpeting **GREAT OPPORTUNITIES FOR HOMESEEKERS**. It claimed that in the following season, 65 miles of main canals would be completed and would deliver water to 35,000 acres of farm lands under the Hanover Canal System.*** The entire tract is sugar-beet land (which indeed it was and still is, along with malt barley and other crops). The Burlington was offering special excursion rates to homeseekers.

An adjacent article said, "It's safe to say that next year will see nearly all the available

*He and his family moved to Cheyenne after his appointment as U.S. surveyor general for Wyoming in 1889. They continued to live in the capital after he was elected governor in 1894. When he was appointed assistant commissioner of the General Land Office, they moved to Washington, D.C. in January 1900.

**Contrary to popular belief, it was never the Red Bank Land and Cattle Co.

***Today the Lower and Upper Hanover Canals comprise 57 miles of ditch watering 26,885 acres.⁴

irrigated land in the Big Horn River valley occupied by settlers.” As elsewhere, that didn’t quite happen as the promoters predicted: an ad in February 8, 1912, *Grit* said the Hanover Company still had “several thousand acres available.”

But by mid-1908 both Hanover canals were almost finished, in remarkably fast time. The *Grit*, under an unnamed editor, waxed ecstatic.¹ The new flume was about in, another across the No Water was under construction, and

In the lower Hanover Canal water has been flowing steadily since it was turned in several weeks ago, and its salutary effects on hundreds of acres of growing grain and alfalfa in this vicinity make gladsome the erstwhile drouthy plains. ...

Robertson’s bold enterprise had paid off since that day in 1903 when he visited the area and Dad Worland convinced him it was the center of the universe. Thanks to Robertson, Dad himself—he of the erstwhile riverside dugout—would become proprietor of the “strictly first-class, newly refurbished” Worland Hotel.²

Sources

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1. C. F. Robertson, *Historical Review: History of the Development of the Worland Valley, Washakie County, Wyoming* (Daily News, 1941), 10.

2. Joseph M. Carey papers, American Heritage Center.

3. Robertson, 23.

4. waterplan.state.wy.us/plan/bighorn/techmemos/diversions/bighorn.pdf (hereafter *bighorn.pdf*).

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