

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Development and Patterns of Euro-American Settlement in the White River Badlands (AD 1880s-1960s)**

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# DEVELOPMENT AND PATTERNS OF EURO-AMERICAN SETTLEMENT IN THE WHITE RIVER BADLANDS (AD 1880s-1960s)

### *Introduction*

In general, the patterns of Euro-American settlement and development in the American West are broad and well-documented and describe a linked succession of improvements in terms of access, available transportation, land openings, and other economic opportunities. Throughout the region individual geographic areas developed specific settlement histories that reflect local variations in geography, climate, political conditions, and American Indian relations. In the White River Badlands area, several of these factors combined to create a pattern of Euro-American settlement that was relatively late and scattered, and, in some facets, unusually ephemeral. In many ways, it was a unique and compelling scenario.

Portions of the Northern Plains region (the future states of North and South Dakota) were among the last areas of the contiguous United States to see substantial Euro-American settlement; this despite the fact that Americans were aware of the area prior to the Lewis and Clark expedition from 1804-1806. The reasons for this delay were multiple and varied; the area's harsh climate was a contributing factor, as was its remoteness and relative lack of practical, year-round transportation alternatives. In that portion of the region west of the Missouri River, the difficulties of climate were compounded by aridity and relatively poor soil. Cultural issues also played an extremely significant role, since large portions of the area were designated as reservation lands for the indigenous peoples who had lived in the region for centuries. The American Indian presence provided both a legal barrier to significant Euro-American activity in reservation areas, and resulted in the potential for conflict when such uses did take place.

While the physical and environmental obstacles to Euro-American settlement in the Dakotas remained, some of the social and cultural barriers gradually began to disappear during the last half of the nineteenth century. Railways began penetrating eastern Dakota Territory as early as the 1860s, and substantial Euro-American settlement invariably accompanied the construction of new railroad lines. As settlement increased, it brought with it increased pressure for the opening of additional reservation lands for Euro-American use, and many reservations were reduced in size. Increased Euro-American development of former reservation land was encouraged both by the railroads and by the federal government, which enacted a series of homestead laws to draw settlers to the area with the promise of free land.

All of the above events happened in the White River Badlands, though not until the early twentieth century. While the Black Hills gold rush of the 1870s became the focus of much Euro-American attention, the Badlands area remained part of the Great Sioux

Reservation and was largely bypassed. Late nineteenth-century Euro-American ranching operations likewise largely bypassed the area, and it was not until the first decade of the twentieth century that the situation changed dramatically. The Badlands area was opened to white settlement and use, and two railway lines were immediately built across the region. This brought the Badlands much of the same Euro-American settlement and economic activities that had taken place elsewhere in Dakota during previous decades.

The homestead-era settlement history of much of the western Dakotas is relatively brief, and that is particularly true of the White River Badlands. The climate and soils of most of the region proved to be wholly unsuitable for agriculture, and the tenure of most Euro-American settlers on the land was brief. Most settlers moved away from the region in less than two decades, and land ownership became characterized by a few large, consolidated holdings and sparse settlement. Land not privately owned reverted to federal ownership, such as Buffalo Gap National Grassland or Badlands National Monument.

The remainder of this chapter will discuss this settlement evolution in more detail. The first sections will outline pre-settlement (nineteenth century) Euro-American interest in the region, and the limited activities in the area that ensued. Later sections will explore the opening of the region to Euro-American use, the construction of railroads through the area, and the homestead boom that followed. Finally, this chapter will examine the decline of the homestead economy, and briefly discuss the less-intensive Euro-American uses that followed, and that continue today.

### ***Pre-Settlement Euro-American Activity and Interest in the White River Badlands and Western Dakota (to ca. 1885)***

In broadest terms, Euro-American settlement patterns in the future Midwestern and Western United States were usually predicated on the development of travel corridors through (or to) a previously-unsettled region. The arrival of a substantial level of settlement depends on the viability and durability of the travel corridor on which it is based. In the overall history of the region, travel routes generally functioned in an east-west direction and extended incrementally westward as time passed, but countless vagaries of area geography resulted in local travel patterns that were far more complex and less structured than broader generalizations might imply.

In Dakota Territory, the path of the Missouri River was arguably the most important single geographic feature, and consequently it became a focus of early Euro-American travel and commerce in the region. The Lewis and Clark expedition used the river as their travel route through Dakota from 1804-06, and for the next four decades the river was the primary focus for the limited Euro-American activity in the region. Commercial activities, such as the fur trade, relied on the river as a means of contact with the more-settled east, but the Missouri's short navigation season and frequently changing river channels limited river traffic in the early years and consequently contributed to the limited Euro-American presence in the Dakotas.<sup>1</sup>

By the 1840s, land-based east-west travel through the Great Plains was undertaken by Euro-Americans on a regular basis, but these travel routes (e.g., Oregon Trail and the Overland Trail) were almost exclusively to the south of what would become Dakota Territory. In much of Dakota, the Missouri actually served as a barrier to east-west travel, since it followed a north-south course through the region and crossing it was both a seasonal and a hazardous undertaking. As Dakota lands east of the river began to be settled during the pre-Civil War decade, the river gradually began to be seen as an outer boundary for that settlement. Some Euro-Americans traveled through the region, and the best-known example is the Fort Pierre–Fort Laramie Trail, which saw heaviest use in the 1840s and 1850s. That route passed through the west-central portion of the Badlands, whereas other travel corridors during this period stayed to the east of the area.<sup>2</sup>

The geographical barrier posed by the Missouri River, though, was only one of several reasons why Euro-American settlement in western Dakota was slow to develop. The local geography of the region played a significant role; broken, arid, and relatively infertile, the land was simply less appealing as a target for agricultural settlement. A second factor was the more inhospitable nature of the land still farther west (Wyoming, and eastern Montana), which lessened the impetus for the development of travel routes through the area. Political and cultural issues, however, were far more prominent and immediate. As noted in Chapters 4 and 5, virtually all of southwestern Dakota Territory remained Lakota land into the 1870s; this greatly restricted Euro-American usage of the land, and barred nearly all white settlement. Reservation boundaries shrank gradually in the last decades of the nineteenth century, making western Dakota more accessible to Euro-Americans, but the area's extreme remoteness and other difficulties discouraged substantial white settlement.<sup>3</sup>

The piecemeal cession of Lakota lands in western Dakota began in 1876, when the Black Hills and far western Dakota Territory were removed from the Great Sioux Reservation, largely as a result of the Black Hills gold rush and the resultant influx of whites to the area. This resulted in a situation where Dakota Territory was home to two distinct areas of Euro-American settlement (East River and the Black Hills); the two regions were separated by a political barrier of Indian-controlled land. The White River Badlands formed the heart of this area.

The rapid Euro-American settlement of the Black Hills and far western Dakota in the 1870s indirectly resulted in a greatly increased interest in the White River Badlands area, as well as the land surrounding the Reservation between the Missouri River and the Black Hills. Much of this attention was a consequence of the new demand for travel routes between eastern Dakota and the mining districts of the Black Hills. Perhaps the greatest perceived need was for a railway line traversing southern Dakota Territory from east to west. By the late 1870s, a number of railroads had been completed in Dakota's "East River" region, and there was substantial interest in the construction of a line westward to the Black Hills. The Great Sioux Reservation remained a barrier that stalled construction at the Missouri River. The region's two major railroads—the Chicago & North Western (the North Western), and the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul (the "Milwaukee Road")—were both greatly interested in constructing east-west lines to the Black Hills, and in 1880

both completed routes westward to the Missouri. The North Western's route extended as far as Pierre, and the Milwaukee served Chamberlain, but neither line was able to progress farther west for the remainder of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

The Black Hills region was too important an area to go without a railroad for long, and the 1880s saw the construction of a new east-west line across northern Nebraska followed by an extension northward across the eastern edge of the Black Hills. This line, the Fremont, Elkhorn & Missouri Valley (FE&MV), was an affiliate of the Chicago & North Western; its line from Chadron, Nebraska to Belle Fourche, South Dakota, was completed during 1885 and 1886 and provided western Dakota Territory with its first reliable, year-round transportation connections. For the remainder of the century, the FE&MV was also the nearest railhead for the White River Badlands area.<sup>5</sup>

The lack of an east-west railway route across western Dakota Territory did not, however, imply a complete lack of Euro-American travel across the area, especially in the years during and after the Black Hills gold rush. The most prominent such route was the so-called Fort Pierre–Deadwood Trail, which served as an important freighting route during the first years of the Black Hills boom. (The Trail followed a route significantly to the north of the White River Badlands area.) Because the Trail followed a long route through rugged, unpopulated terrain, the Trail was never widely successful, and it faded into obscurity following the completion of the FE&MV. A second freighting route also operated in the early 1880s from the Milwaukee railhead at Chamberlain to the Black Hills. This trail, which passed directly through the White River Badlands, utilized a roadhouse in the vicinity of present-day Interior. This route largely disappeared after construction of the FE&MV's rail line.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Permanent European Settlement in the White River Badlands: Nineteenth Century Ranching (ca. 1885-1906)***

The influx of Euro-Americans into the Black Hills region during the 1870s and beyond served as an initial catalyst for the beginnings of permanent white settlement in the White River Badlands and surrounding areas. This was particularly true along the western fringes of the Badlands area, which was nearer the Black Hills and—more importantly—the new railway line that served it. While the FE&MV was largely constructed in response to the Black Hills gold rush, its existence helped encourage settlement and economic growth throughout far western Dakota, in areas wholly unaffected by the Deadwood mining boom. For most of the region, that economic growth was manifested in the form of cattle and sheep ranching.

The remote and arid country of the northwestern Great Plains (i.e., what is now the western Dakotas, and Montana and Wyoming east of the Continental Divide) was used by open range ranchers in the decade following the Civil War, and this use expanded greatly in the 1880s and beyond, as Indian hostilities lessened and reservation boundaries were reduced. The area was seen as a good summer range for livestock that were wintered further south, and soon became home to an increasing number of year-round operations, as well. Both seasonal and permanent ranch activities were eased by the arrival of railways to the region, which simplified the movement of livestock. The

construction of the Union Pacific Railroad across Nebraska and southern Wyoming from 1867-1868 was a boon to Great Plains ranching, as was the completion of the Northern Pacific through North Dakota and Montana in 1883. While these lines were of only limited value to the few ranchers who had arrived in the Black Hills area in the 1870s and 1880s, the completion of the FE&MV to Rapid City and Belle Fourche marked the beginning of a ranch boom in the area. For a time in the 1890s, Belle Fourche was the busiest livestock shipment point in the nation.<sup>7</sup>

Prior to the 1889 treaty that removed much of the Badlands country from the Sioux Reservation; Euro-American ranching activity in southwestern Dakota was largely limited to the narrow strip of land between the Black Hills and the old reservation boundary. This area included a mix of rolling hills and bottomlands, country that was well-suited to open-range ranching. A few Euro-Americans began developing small ranches in the area during the late 1870s and early 1880s, settling first in the eastern fringes of the Black Hills. Buffalo Gap, perhaps the best-known town in that area, was well-established by 1880. Later arrivals, encouraged in part by the construction of the railroad, began to slowly spread farther eastward, settling mostly in the low valleys where water and grass were relatively abundant. By 1886, both the Rapid Creek and Spring Creek valleys had sufficient numbers of settlers to warrant the establishment of post offices (at Creston and Folsom, respectively).<sup>8</sup>

In the years before the railroad's arrival, most of the area's early settlers experienced a difficult and arduous life. The lack of transportation options both to and within the region limited both the availability of consumer goods and the accessibility of markets for farm and ranch products. While many of the settlers undoubtedly sold livestock (and some crops) to the retailers of Deadwood and other Black Hills mining towns, a subsistence-based lifestyle predominated. The construction of the FE&MV ameliorated this somewhat, mainly by easing the process of cattle and sheep shipment. Throughout the period, ranching activity predominated; the land's continued remoteness, the arid climate, short growing season, and rough landscape made it less than hospitable to the agricultural homesteaders who were populating the eastern Dakota prairies.<sup>9</sup>

Settlement in the region became more rapid and geographically dispersed following the 1890 opening of much of the White River area to Euro-American use. The years 1890 and 1891 saw the arrival of a significant number of ranch settlers into the newly-available Badlands country. Reminiscence by a South Dakota cowboy named Bruce Siberts observed:

The big pasture west of the Missouri that the Sioux had turned over to Uncle Sam had few ranchers in it when I went there in 1890, but within another year or so there were all kinds of livestock roaming over it.<sup>10</sup>

Most of the settlement occurred along the White River and other major watercourses, again due to the valleys' relatively hospitable terrain and easy availability of at least a limited supply of the ranching essentials: land, grass, and water. In the immediate White River region, settlement was substantial enough that by the mid-1890s a small string of

unplatted hamlets existed in the area, most boasting little more than a post office, a mercantile, and perhaps a schoolhouse. Among these villages was a tiny settlement known as Black. Black was founded in 1890 and renamed Interior in 1894.<sup>11</sup>

By 1895, the number of Euro-Americans who had taken up permanent residence in the White River Badlands probably numbered 100 or more; a significant number of Native Americans also continued to inhabit the area. The vast majority of the area's residents were engaged in ranching, although the lack of land records and other data from the era means that relatively few specifics are known about their livelihoods. Cattle and sheep were probably allowed free-range grazing in the hill country, while the bottomlands were used for hay and subsistence agriculture. Although some land in the Rapid Creek area was put under irrigation, this was not the norm for the region. Cattle and sheep that were not sold locally were driven to the railhead towns of Hermosa and Fairburn for shipment to market. Surviving photographs indicate that houses and other structures were small, vernacular affairs, constructed from hewn local logs. In general, the larger ranching businesses that dominated some areas of the northern plains did not have a significant presence in the Badlands area.<sup>12</sup>

The Euro-American society that had developed within the White River Badlands by the mid-1890s was isolated, subsistence-based, self-sufficient, and relatively stable. In general, these qualities were reflective of other remote ranching areas in the Northwestern Plains, and were, in large measure, based on the region's great isolation. The nearest towns—those of the eastern Black Hills—were limited in their offerings, and required a multi-day journey for most of the settlers. The nearest railways were similarly remote. Euro-American habitation to the north was extraordinarily sparse, and connections to the east were distant and hampered by the unbridged Missouri River. For most area residents, these circumstances probably limited trips beyond the Badlands to a handful of excursions per year—if that.

South of the White River Badlands, a significant Native American presence remained, which provided the Badlands settlers with avenues for social and economic interaction. For most of the area's early white settlers, the Lakota community was a presence in day-to-day life; for some, especially in the area's southern reaches, the Euro-American ranchers were as closely tied to the Lakota community as they were to neighboring white ranchers. For the most part, this was likely seen as a mutually beneficial situation.<sup>13</sup>

Into the first years of the twentieth century, the Euro-American community in the White River Badlands remained small, with little new settlement occurring after the mid-1890s. In part, this was due to a national economic recession at the end of the century, but local factors were of equal importance. The Badlands area remained isolated and difficult to reach, and the land's aridity, geography, and isolation made it relatively unattractive to agricultural settlers. Perhaps most significantly, the open-range economic model that was in place in the area limited the opportunities for population growth. In essence, the land had reached its carrying capacity for the time.

### ***The Arrival and Significance of the Railroads (1885-1907)***

Throughout the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the prairies and Badlands of western Dakota largely remained the domain of open-range cattle and sheep ranchers. Pressure from cattle interests in the 1880s had helped bring about some of the reductions in the size of the Great Sioux Reservation, and few other white settlers chose to compete with the ranchers for the newly-opened land. Throughout much of western Dakota, nineteenth-century homestead activity was limited and often unsuccessful, resulting primarily in scattered, isolated farms in the larger river valleys.<sup>14</sup>

Similar to other areas of the arid, remote Northwestern Plains, the ranch-based settlement and economy in the White River Badlands was destined for upheaval in the first years of the twentieth century. A series of developments, both local and regional in scope, helped drive these changes. The most significant event was the arrival of the railroads.

In eastern South Dakota, as elsewhere in the American Midwest, the last third of the nineteenth century saw an explosive growth in the number of railway lines serving the region. More than any other factor, these new railroads promoted and shaped the patterns of Euro-American settlement in the area. The first railways, entering land that was to become South Dakota, arrived in 1872, on the eastern and southeastern edges of the Territory; by the end of 1870s the eastern quarter of the state was well-served by a web of railway lines, and two routes had been constructed as far west as the Missouri River. The rapid pace of Dakota railway construction continued into the 1880s, and by 1885 South Dakota boasted over 2,400 miles of active railroad lines.

The Missouri River remained a barrier for the railroads, as well as other forms of land transportation, and no tracks bridged the river for the remainder of the century. Two major railroads, strong competitors, grew to dominate the region: the Chicago, Milwaukee, & St. Paul (CM&StP, or “Milwaukee Road”), and the Chicago & North Western (C&NW, or “North Western”). Both railways ultimately blanketed eastern South Dakota with their networks. The Milwaukee, the larger of the two, was renamed “Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific” following completion of its transcontinental line in the early twentieth century.<sup>15</sup>

The situation was markedly different, however, west of the Missouri. No railroad entered the West River region until the FE&MV from Nebraska was constructed in 1885, and the nineteenth century saw only one other major railway construction project in the area: the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy (CB&Q, or “Burlington”) completed a route from Nebraska through the Black Hills to Deadwood in 1891. Outside the Black Hills region, railway service remained essentially nonexistent, stalling the potential for economic growth and settlement.<sup>16</sup>

As the railroads extended across Dakota, they brought with them waves of settlement and dramatic economic transformation, in large part orchestrated by the railways themselves. Extensive railroad advertising and promotional campaigns worked to draw settlers to the regions that were effectively being opened by the construction of new railway lines. These efforts, operating both in the United States and Europe, promoted the availability



of “free” government land along the railways, land that was billed as excellent agricultural country. This farmland could be claimed under the terms of one of several federal homestead laws that were enacted beginning in the 1860s—programs that, essentially, allowed settlers to acquire title to a homestead claim following a period of residence and the completion of specified “improvements.” The lure of this land proved powerful and attracted tens of thousands of new settlers to western Dakota during the 1870s and 1880s. South Dakota’s population mushroomed from 11,776 in 1870 to 98,268 a decade later, and to 263,411 by 1885. The peak of this homestead rush was the period from 1878 to 1887, an era now known as “The Great Dakota Boom.”<sup>17</sup>

The boom years of the early 1880s in Dakota also brought political change to the region. The region’s growing population strengthened Dakota Territory’s case for statehood, and the momentum for statehood grew throughout the decade. Issues relating to the territory’s subdivision were finally resolved in 1889, and on November 2 of that year both North Dakota and South Dakota were admitted to the Union as states. Pierre was selected as the South Dakota capitol, by virtue of its central location and probable role as gateway to the state’s largely unexploited West River region.<sup>18</sup>

The involvement of the railways in the settlement of Dakota was not limited to the promotion of rural homesteading. As part of their choreography of the Great Plains settlement process, railroad companies and their subsidiaries routinely platted and promoted townsites along new lines that were under construction. These towns were developed at regular intervals along the length of a line, typically every seven to ten miles, ensuring that every homesteader would be within an easy day’s ride of a community. Most towns were platted using relatively standard layouts embraced by each individual railway. Though nearly all of the new villages harbored hopes for dramatic growth and prosperity, they usually remained small centers of local trade and civic life, typically boasting only a handful of stores, two or three grain elevators, churches, and a school. Literally hundreds of such towns were established in Dakota during the homestead boom years, making them a defining characteristic of the cultural geography of the region.<sup>19</sup>

In South Dakota, this nineteenth-century homestead boom was wholly confined to the eastern half of the territory, and the boom itself came to a virtual halt after 1887. A combination of local drought, too-rapid expansion, and national economic stagnation ended the Great Dakota Boom, and the expansion of the homestead frontier stalled for almost two decades. The decade of the 1890s saw South Dakota’s population increase by only 5,175, a dramatically different trend from the two preceding decades and one that caused the era to be remembered as “The Great Dakota Bust.”<sup>20</sup>

For the White River Badlands and most of western South Dakota, the primary effect of the Great Dakota Bust was the preservation of the region’s open-range ranch economy. The population growth and economic transformation that had so impacted the eastern half of the state effectively ended on the banks of the Missouri River, and there was only minimal pressure for that circumstance to change. The bust was also evident in the Black Hills where the 1870s gold strikes had brought such frenetic settlement and activity. The

decade of the 1890s saw population losses in both Pennington and Custer Counties. The westward expansion of the Great Dakota Boom clearly awaited the arrival of a changed economic climate.

Favorable economic conditions began to surface in the first years of the twentieth century, presaging a series of dramatic changes to the cultural geography of the Badlands and much of western South Dakota. Nationally, the economic doldrums, precipitated by the Panic of 1893, began to lessen; among other things, the improved business climate allowed western railroads to once again consider the possibilities of further growth. Most of the northern Plains railway companies began exploring possibilities for major route expansions during the 1900s and 1910s and in many cases substantial new construction ensued. As it had in the 1880s, this railway development was accompanied by town-building and extensive promotion of homestead opportunities in the newly accessible areas. Among the region's railroads, the Milwaukee was by far the most aggressive in this regard; between 1906 and 1909 the railroad constructed an entirely new transcontinental line running from northern South Dakota to the Pacific coast. Other railways contemplated similar schemes, while simultaneously searching for smaller-scale growth opportunities in regions already served. South Dakota's West River country was high on the list of areas considered as expansion targets.<sup>21</sup>

Other events also helped generate interest in South Dakota's West River country. These included further reductions in the size of the state's Indian Reservations, as well as the new federal policy of encouraging the breakup of "trust" reservation lands into individual family allotments. While neither of these changes directly impacted the White River Badlands area, they helped increase the public's awareness of the vast areas of largely-unsettled land in the western half of the state.<sup>22</sup>

By 1905, the combination of renewed economic confidence and a greater awareness of the West River country was strong enough to encourage action, and the state's two major railways resumed active planning for new east-west routes to the Black Hills. Both of these lines were destined to directly and significantly impact the White River Badlands area. The route for the new Chicago & North Western line began at the company's railhead in Pierre, and followed the Bad River upstream in a southwesterly direction to a point near the river's headwaters, west of present-day Cottonwood. From there, the line continued in a northwesterly direction before dropping into the Cheyenne River valley near what is now Wasta; after crossing the Cheyenne, the route headed nearly straight west to Rapid City and a connection with the FE&MV (which by then was integrated into the North Western system). While the Chicago and North Western survey bypassed the White River Badlands, which lay to the south, the route was near enough to the area that a substantial increase in local agricultural settlement in the northern Badlands was virtually guaranteed.

In contrast, the route chosen by the Milwaukee Road directly penetrated the heart of the Badlands country. The Milwaukee Road survey began at that company's Chamberlain railhead, proceeded almost due west across the prairies and low hills between the Bad and White rivers. West of what is now Kadoka, the route dipped slightly southward to

avoid the eroded Badlands cliffs, passed near the White River at the village of Interior, and continued west within sight of many of the Badlands' largest buttes. The railway left the Badlands country near the future site of Scenic; the route proceeded in a northwesterly direction, crossed the Cheyenne River, and followed Rapid Creek upstream to Rapid City. Construction of the Milwaukee railway dramatically impacted the cultural geography of the entire White River Badlands.

The first work on the railways' Black Hills lines was undertaken by the Milwaukee, which built westward from Chamberlain to Presho in 1905. Both railroads worked on their Rapid City lines in earnest in 1906; the Milwaukee's construction crews continued westward from Presho, while the North Western built simultaneously from both its Pierre and Rapid City railheads. The Milwaukee's 1906 work brought it to the new town of Murdo, about sixty miles short of Interior and the eastern Badlands. For the North Western, the 1906 construction season saw track completed from Fort Pierre to Philip, and east from Rapid City to Wasta. Both railroads completed their Rapid City lines the following summer, with the Chicago and North Western winning the race by a matter of three weeks. Regular service on the two routes soon began, and—in the style of the Great Dakota Boom—the stage was set for a radical transformation of the White River Badlands country.<sup>23</sup>

### ***The White River Badlands and the Homestead Boom (1906-1918)***

In planning and constructing their new lines to Rapid City, both the Milwaukee and the Chicago and North Western adhered to the time-honored development patterns they had perfected during the settlement boom earlier in the nineteenth century. The railroads paid little attention to the physical geography of the area, or to the fact that local agricultural conditions were difficult, at best. As they had across nearly all of eastern South Dakota, the railway's marketing departments and townsite subsidiaries sprang into action in the White River Badlands with the same energy as the tracklayers themselves had exhibited.

The selection and establishment of townsites was an early and important step. Along the Chicago and North Western, townsites were platted at approximately 10 to 12 mile intervals along nearly the entire length of the Pierre-Rapid City line, a slightly longer spacing than that which accompanied most nineteenth-century railroad expansions. In the Badlands area, the Chicago and North Western towns included Cottonwood, Quinn, Wall, and Wasta, from east to west. Land sales, commercial development, and other activity began at all four towns almost immediately, evidenced in part by the establishment of a post office at Cottonwood in November 1906, and at the other three locations in the first half of 1907.<sup>24</sup>

The Milwaukee developed a townsite program for its Rapid City line that was somewhat more optimistic than that of the Chicago and North Western, but it was more cognizant of the vagaries of local geography. Along the eastern portion of the route, where the land was more arable, new towns were spaced as little as seven miles apart, but the interval between towns increased to ten miles or more in the Badlands and beyond, in apparent recognition that intensive agriculture was less likely to be successful there. The town of Kadoka marked the Milwaukee's eastern approach to the Badlands country; the

succeeding communities along the route included Weta, Interior, Conata, Imlay, Scenic, and Creston. Although the development of the Milwaukee's Badlands-area towns probably lagged behind that of most other small railway communities in the state, all towns along the line quickly grew to the point where they were able to support post offices. Kadoka received a post office in 1906; Scenic's was established in 1907; and Conata and Imlay followed in 1908. The post offices at Creston and Interior had been established earlier in order to serve the region's cattle ranchers; the office at Creston dated from 1886, and the office at Interior, originally established as "Black," dated from 1891. The name Interior was adopted three years later.<sup>25</sup>

The establishment of the new railway townsites was, as always, accompanied by substantial promotion of the towns and their nearby homestead land. Of the two railroads serving the area, the Milwaukee was likely the more aggressive marketer, in part because the Rapid City line was only one of several route expansion projects underway at the time. Both railroads, though, actively encouraged new settlement in the area, and the news of the lines' construction also provided the region with significant free publicity. The attention was such that some homesteaders moved to the area in advance of the railroads, something that had been a relatively rare occurrence in the Badlands during the previous two decades.<sup>26</sup>

Unquestionably, the homesteaders' rushed to the Badlands as swiftly and dramatically as other settlers' had rushed to other newly-accessible regions of Dakota. One way of gauging the pace of growth in the region is the review of county population statistics, though this is somewhat complicated by the frequent shuffling of South Dakota's county boundaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During the period of 1900-1910, the eastern Badlands area was largely in Stanley County, as was the new Chicago & North Western line eastward to Pierre. The eastern portion of the new Milwaukee line was located in Lyman County, while the western Badlands and the tracks of both railroads to Rapid City were located in Pennington County. Table 4 shows the population growth of those counties during the decade:

**Table 4. Population Growth in the Missouri River-Rapid City Corridor, 1900-1910<sup>27</sup>**

County	Population, 1900 census	Population, 1910 census	Change
Lyman	2,632	10,848	+8216 (412 %)
Pennington	5,610	12,453	+6943 (222 %)
Stanley	1,341	14,975	+13,634 (1117 %)
TOTALS	9,583	38,276	+28,693 (399 %)

Though yearly population figures are not available, the vast majority of this growth was directly related to the construction of the Chicago and North Western and Milwaukee railroads through the region. Review of a state census of Stanley County in 1905 showed the county with only 2,649 residents; this suggests that roughly 90% of the period's growth occurred in the last half of the decade.<sup>28</sup>

The population increases brought by the West River homestead boom ultimately resulted in the restructuring of county boundaries and local governments in the region. This process was slightly different in South Dakota than in other Midwestern and Western states, however, due to South Dakota's nineteenth-century penchant for county creation. Numerous "paper counties," without established local governments or substantial Euro-American settlement, had been authorized by the South Dakota legislature prior to the boom years, and the arrival of the region's settlers; consequently, the region's county boundaries needed to be heavily readjusted after the actual settlement took place. In the immediate Badlands area, Pennington County had been created in 1875 following the Black hills gold rush, while Jackson County was established in 1915 after the homestead boom. The portion of Jackson County south of the White River was a paper county named Washabaugh from 1889 until it was annexed into Jackson County in 1979. Much of the South Unit of Badlands National Park is in Shannon County, which remains an unorganized political entity in 2006. (Shannon County is administered by neighboring Fall River County.) Until 1943, the northern portion of Shannon County was designated as Washington County, yet another paper entity.<sup>29</sup>

In the Badlands region, as well as elsewhere along these two railways, the period from 1907-1911 represents the greatest number of homestead arrivals between 1900 and 1955 (Note: Appendix A of this document provides a list of Badlands-area homestead patents between 1900 and 1955). Review of Appendix A indicates that 60 percent of the land patents in the Badlands area occurred between 1907 and 1911. Reminiscence by long-time Badlands resident Leonel Jensen suggests that there were few homesteaders in the area in May 1906, but by that autumn there was a claim on almost every quarter-section (160 acres) of land. This suggests that a high number of homesteaders knew that the railroads were imminent, and they arrived immediately in advance of the tracklayers in hopes of improving their odds of obtaining a relatively good land claim.<sup>30</sup>

Jensen's recollection is bolstered by federal land records for the Badlands country, showing patented homestead entries for a vast majority of the available land in the region. Federal records show that Badlands-area homesteads began receiving patents soon after the turn of the century, with the number increasing rapidly beginning in 1907. Land patents were awarded at a frenetic pace from 1907 through 1915. Review of Appendix A indicates nearly 80 percent of all land patents awarded for the immediate Badlands area were issued during that nine-year period. The dates of these patents suggest that most of the region's agricultural settlement took place during the first decade of the twentieth century. By 1922, both the homestead and land patent processes had progressed to the point where the majority of the land in the immediate badlands area was in private ownership.<sup>31</sup> Clearly, the railroads brought with them a sweeping, almost instantaneous overhaul of land ownership patterns throughout the White River Badlands, bringing an end to the area's brief open-range era and ushering in a new period of small farms and agriculture. Ultimately, this new cultural geography for the Badlands proved to be far less tenable than what preceded it, and as a consequence it proved to be equally brief.

### ***Homestead Life in the Badlands (1906-1918)***

In the last four decades of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century, the federal government enacted a series of incentive programs intended to eventually transfer millions of acres of the western public domain to individual farmers and ranchers. The first and best-known such law was the Homestead Act of 1862, which allowed settlers to claim up to 160 acres of eligible government land, title to which could be obtained following a five-year residency and the completion of specified improvements to the homesteaded land. Over the years, a variety of other homestead opportunities were also made available, most with eased ownership requirements; these were enacted due to the growing realization that land in much of the American West was too arid or infertile to support the intensive agriculture that was needed to make a 160-acre farm viable. Among these programs were the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909 (applied to South Dakota in 1915), which allowed for the acquisition of 320-acre homestead claims; and the Stock-Raising Homestead Act of 1916, which allowed settlers to make 640-acre claims on federally designated non-irrigable grazing lands. In addition, federal legislation in 1912 shortened the homestead residency requirement from five years to three.<sup>32</sup>

Because of the chronological timing of the homestead boom in the White River Badlands, most initial claims in the area were made under the terms of the original 1862 Act, although the later programs also played a role. Many of the Badlands area claims also took advantage of a provision in the Homestead Act called “commutation,” which shortened the residency requirement for ownership in exchange for a cash payment.<sup>33</sup>

Across most of western South Dakota, much of the available homestead land was difficult agricultural country, a circumstance that was particularly true in the Badlands country and one that was recognized almost immediately by most arrivals. Consequently, settlers who worked to establish themselves in the region attempted to obtain land holdings in excess of the maximums allowed by the homestead laws. This practice was generally accomplished by having individual members of nuclear or extended families homestead adjacent claims, which could then be managed and operated as a single unit. (See Chapter 7 of this document for case studies of pioneer homestead families in the Badlands region.)

During the early years of the Badlands homestead era, the life and work of the region’s settlers were typical of the early twentieth-century homesteaders throughout the remote Northwestern Plains. Early settlement activities focused on constructing a shelter, and breaking land for cultivation. Houses and other buildings were almost universally small, vernacular structures. Dugouts and sod buildings were common in some parts of the Badlands because the sparse tree cover in the region made wood difficult to obtain locally. However, as discussed in Chapter 7, some soils in the area were not conducive to the construction of sod houses. Poor-quality lumber did exist on some of the Badlands-area buttes and tableland, and not surprisingly those areas were logged by early settlers.<sup>34</sup> While lumber and other building materials could be shipped in via rail, this was cost prohibitive for many settlers, although items such as building hardware, doors, and windows were often purchased.

The land itself was tilled with horse-drawn equipment and bounded with wire fences. Though wheat was usually considered the standard grain crop of the northwestern plains, corn and a variety of other crops were also attempted. (See Chapter 7 for examples). A handful of very small-scale irrigation efforts were also attempted, though the region's lack of water made these impractical. Small reservoirs for stock watering were more common, and many of the stock ponds on former homestead claims within the Park boundaries may date to this historical period. Hay for the feeding of livestock and horses were an important commodity, and something that could be grown with relative success in some areas. One unique and memorable aspect of the region's homestead era was the practice of constructing large "chutes" on the sides of buttes where hay was produced, allowing the harvested hay to be easily dropped to the valleys below.<sup>35</sup>

The first decade of intensive agricultural activity in the Badlands area was characterized by a profound lack of success, despite several years of relatively encouraging rainfall and good commodity prices. An occasional good year (often the first one) would, for the most part, be followed by a succession of crop failures. One such story, from Interior, is reflective of the hopeful agricultural experimentation during the period, and its results:

To draw even more homesteaders to the Badlands, the Milwaukee Railroad brought out a steam-powered tractor that could pull a six-bottom plow and broke up hundreds of acres of sod. The freshly plowed ground laid fallow for the rest of the summer and absorbed the fall rains and the melt from the winter snow. The first crop of corn thrived on the precious moisture and the nutrients from the decaying prairie grass. "Sod corn" was nature's ruse to lure more settlers to the Badlands. The second crop, lacking both the nutrients and the moisture, withered away when struck by the first hot winds of July. The Badlands had taught the homesteaders yet another lesson.<sup>36</sup>

At its heart, this story is reflective of the hundreds of smaller-scale attempts by homesteaders in the White River Badlands to make a success of their claims. They desperately sought a formula that would allow agriculture to succeed in a region that was wholly unsuited for it. For nearly all settlers, the combination of harsh geography, inadequate agricultural technology and science, and minimal resources meant that their efforts were doomed to fail. By the 1910s, their destiny was already evident to many of the region's new arrivals, and the process of exodus and land consolidation began.

### ***The Badlands Homestead Towns (1906-1940)***

While the story of agricultural settlement in the White River Badlands was founded on the establishment and development of small homestead farms, the region's railway-platted towns were also an integral element of the area's early twentieth-century cultural geography. Individually and collectively, these small communities served as centers of economic, educational, religious, and social life for the Badlands farmers, vital roles in a still isolated and remote country. Dependent for their survival on the success of the surrounding farms, their growth and decline mirrored that of the homesteads themselves, though each grew and faded in a seemingly-different way.

Though each of the Badlands towns was intended to serve as the center of an agricultural community, most of the towns were near-total creations of the railway companies, and the towns owed their existence to these railways. While limited settlement during the open-range era had taken place near some of the future Badlands towns, the ranch communities were tiny and bore little resemblance to a platted town. Even Interior, the largest ranch center in the White River Badlands, was transformed by the arrival of the Milwaukee and owes its existence as a platted townsite to the railroad.<sup>37</sup>

Initial developments at nearly all of the Badlands towns were funded by the railroads, and designed to serve railway operational needs. These facilities included depot buildings, section houses (for track maintenance crews), and rudimentary water supply systems (mainly to provide water for the railroads' steam locomotives). The railway water systems often featured small storage reservoirs, creating something of an oasis in the arid desert-like setting.<sup>38</sup>

Most, but not all, of the towns were formally platted by subsidiary companies of the railroads. Throughout the northern plains, railroads utilized standardized plat designs for their towns, and the townsite layouts used in the White River Badlands all display similar characteristics. Street grids were typically aligned with the railroad right-of-way through the area, with the railroad anchoring one end of the town plat. A single commercial street ran perpendicular to the railway line, meeting the railway line near the location of the depot. Residential streets flanked both sides of the commercial thoroughfare.<sup>39</sup>

Beyond these basic developments and the marketing and sale of townsite lots, the railroads left the development and expansion of their towns to the vagaries of the free market; consequently, the growth or stagnation of a townsite, in large measure, became a reflection of the success or failure of the agricultural land surrounding it. Given the difficult nature of Badlands-area farming, it is therefore not surprising that all of the local townsites struggled, and most faded relatively quickly. Each displayed its own evolutionary pattern, though, based in part on local geography and in part on unique circumstances unrelated to the agricultural economy.

Comparisons between the towns located on the Chicago and North Western line and those along the Milwaukee show noticeable differences in growth and success, reflecting the differing geographies of the two corridors as well as other social and economic factors. For the incorporated communities in the area, population changes over time help show both a town's early success, as well as its pattern of growth and decline. Tables 5 and 6 shows these trends for the area's incorporated communities. Since the area's smaller towns—including Scenic, Conata, and Imlay—were never incorporated; comparable population figures for those communities are not available.



**Table 5. Population Trends of Incorporated Townsites in the White River Badlands Area, 1910-1950.<sup>40</sup>**

Town	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950
Cottonwood	--	121	191	118	102
Interior	--	--	144	182	126
Quinn	--	--	141	189	214
Wall	167	224	326	500	556
Wasta	--	--	--	153	144

**Table 6. Population Trends of Incorporated Townsites in the White River Badlands Area, 1960-2000.<sup>41</sup>**

Town	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Cottonwood	38	16	4	12	6
Interior	179	81	62	67	77
Quinn	162	105	80	72	44
Wall	629	786	770	834	818
Wasta	196	127	99	82	75

Perhaps the most telling conclusion from the above table is the comparison between which towns were included in the census, because they were incorporated, and which towns were not included in the census. All four of the Badlands-area townsites platted along the Chicago and North Western route progressed to the point where they were able to incorporate, and all reached a population of more than 100 people, at least for some extended period of time. In contrast, only one of the six Milwaukee towns in the immediate Badlands vicinity was ever incorporated—and that community (Interior) in some measure actually pre-dated the arrival of the Milwaukee. These data suggest, at least in part, that the Milwaukee corridor was less successful overall than that of the Chicago and North Western. However, as discussed below, other factors also played a role in this disparity in later years, including the establishment of Badlands National Monument (nearer the Milwaukee line), and the improvement of major automobile transportation corridors that partially followed the Chicago and North Western alignment.

Indeed, several of the towns along the Milwaukee line, including some in the heart of the Badlands country, never expanded beyond more than a couple of business buildings and a handful of houses. The town of Conata, for example, at its peak, included only a railroad depot and reservoir; boarding house for railway workers; two stores, two churches, a school, and a dance hall. Perhaps surprisingly, there was no saloon. The population of both the town and its surrounding homesteads was less than 50 at its peak. Interestingly, the town also boasted a small mining business, a one-man operation which converted volcanic ash into “Knife and Fork Metal Polish.”<sup>42</sup>

Among the other Milwaukee towns, Weta, Imlay and Creston all remained largely undeveloped, much like Conata. Interior retained its status as the largest community in the sparsely populated region. Both Interior and Scenic were helped economically by their relative proximity to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. As tourism to the Badlands slowly became more popular, Interior, and to a lesser degree Scenic, began to benefit

from that activity. Ultimately, though, none of the towns along the Milwaukee line could be considered successful.<sup>43</sup>

The Chicago and North Western towns fared better during the early homestead years, and also proved more enduring. This is largely a reflection of the differences in the physical geography of the two routes; the North Western corridor featured somewhat more arable land and, perhaps more importantly, provided easier access to water. As the automobile age dawned, all four towns along the Chicago and North Western found themselves on the route of a major trans-state highway—the so-called “Black & Yellow Trail,” which later became US Highway 14. The town of Wall, by virtue of its central location and position near a major highway intersection, became a major local trade center for eastern Pennington County and Western Haakon County.<sup>44</sup>

### ***The End of the Homestead Era (1918-1940)***

The homestead boom in the White River Badlands followed a path typical of that displayed elsewhere in the Northwestern Plains, both in expansion and in decline. The Badlands homestead era, however, was arguably even less successful than that of other regions in western South Dakota. The difficult geography of the Badlands, with its poor soil, challenging topography, and arid climate, proved unusually inhospitable to homestead-era settlers, resulting in unusually rapid farm consolidation and abandonment. In the later years of the homestead era, an increasing interest in the natural and scenic values of the White River Badlands helped offset the depopulation of the region, as momentum grew for the preservation of the central Badlands as a National Monument.

In general, the boom years for homesteaders in the western Dakotas and eastern Montana extended from the first years of the twentieth century until the end of World War I. The railway corridors between the Missouri River and Rapid City were relatively early recipients of the homesteaders’ attention, since they were among the first twentieth-century lines to be built in the region. As unclaimed land along the Rapid City rail lines became scarce, settlers were drawn into even more remote country; simultaneously, the railroads worked to continue the boom by building still other branch lines into previously-unserved regions. The Milwaukee Road maintained its status as a primary promoter of northern plains homesteading throughout the period, constructing several new lines in the Dakotas and Montana. In contrast, the Chicago and North Western’s Rapid City extension was nearly its last burst of expansion in the West River country.<sup>45</sup>

The unusually poor nature of the land, particularly along the Milwaukee corridor, made the Badlands settlers more susceptible to farm losses caused by climactic variations or other factors. The first drought period of the homestead era hit western South Dakota in 1910 and 1911, and “lines of covered wagons moved out of the White River Valley through Chamberlain during the late summer of 1911.”<sup>46</sup> This marked the beginning of the end for the region’s homestead era, and provided a strong indication that the area was better suited for ranching than agriculture. Regardless, the four-year homestead rush had ended the open-range economy, and transferred most of the White River Badlands region from public to private ownership.

The optimism of the West River homestead boom endured through much of the 1910s, buoyed by years of relatively good rainfall and high crop prices. However, the situation throughout the region changed markedly beginning in 1918. The end of World War I resulted in sharp price declines for many agricultural products, which had been abnormally high due to wartime demand. Simultaneously, much of the Northwestern Plains entered a prolonged drought, making dry-land crop production in the area even more problematic than previously. The combined result was a dramatic and final end to the region's homestead era.<sup>47</sup> Only five percent of the land claims within the immediate Badlands area were patented between 1923 and 1955 (see Appendix A).

Although the patterns of homesteading and land acquisition in the White River Badlands have not been analyzed quantitatively, it is clear that some homesteaders left the region almost immediately after receiving title to their lands. Most others left a few years after that. This exodus of settlers provided an opportunity, for those who chose to stay, to acquire newly-vacated farms and increase their land holdings well beyond the homestead maximums. Most of the small number of new homestead patents awarded during that era were probably also intended to increase the holdings of existing farmers and ranchers. These processes allowed area residents to gradually increase land holdings to a size that would be more economically viable. In many cases, especially in the Milwaukee corridor, these enlarged farms became less dependent on crop production, shifting lands from agriculture to grazing or hayfield use. This proved to be a more sustainable use for the land, and allowed a smaller number of farm workers to manage larger holdings. In essence, the region was returning to its nineteenth-century economic base. That is, a range-based economy that supported a small number of ranch families. The difference was the ranchers now owned the land upon which their cattle grazed.<sup>48</sup>

By increasing public awareness of the Badlands as a natural wonder and scenic attraction, the process of creating a ranch-based economy in the White River Badlands became more complicated. As early as 1909, local individuals were proposing that the Badlands be made a national park, and a 1919 report by the US Forest Service endorsed the idea. By then, however, a significant portion of the proposed national park area was already privately owned, and for a time this became a significant deterrent to the park proposal.<sup>49</sup>

Efforts by South Dakota Senator Peter Norbeck and others to obtain federal recognition and protection for the Badlands continued through the 1920s (see Chapter 9), and the creation of Badlands National Monument was finally authorized (but not established) by an act of Congress in 1929. Coincidentally, this legislation corresponded with the beginning of another period of drought and crop failures, this one encompassing much of the entire Midwest. By the early 1930s the severity of the Midwest's farm crisis was such that federal government intervention was underway on a number of levels; among the programs that had been implemented were ones designed to provide a mechanism for federal acquisition of substandard agricultural land. In 1934, the National Park Service proposed that these programs be utilized in the Badlands to acquire private land in the area for an enlarged Badlands National Monument.<sup>50</sup>

Efforts at land acquisition began almost immediately, and continued throughout the 1930s under the auspices of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). The political process of creating Badlands National Monument was simultaneously underway. Badlands National Monument was finally established by President Franklin Roosevelt on January 25, 1939; the monument included tens of thousands of acres of formerly-private land that had been acquired by the federal government since 1934. Additional private land in the area, primarily to the south of the monument, also came under federal ownership during that period. Land acquired outside the monument ultimately became part of Buffalo Gap National Grassland.<sup>51</sup>

By the end of the 1930s, relatively little survived of the homestead-based economy that had been forged in the Badlands country three decades earlier. Much of the land along the Milwaukee Road corridor had reverted to federal ownership, and the remaining private land was primarily used for cattle ranching. The smallest of the railway towns were dead or dying, and the survivors served a reduced population base and attempted to refocus their commercial attention on the growing Badlands tourist trade. To the north, the region served by the Chicago and North Western fared somewhat better, although changes were readily apparent there, as well. Most of the land remained in private ownership. Farms consolidated and ranching again played a dominant role in the regional economy. With the exception of Wall, the population of the corridor towns was stagnant, soon to begin a long and gradual decline. Tourism and the automobile brought new life to Wall, and the town both endured and grew, making it an anomaly in the historic geography of the twentieth-century Badlands country.

### ***World War II and Beyond (1941-2006)***

While the fifty-year period from 1890 to 1940 was one of dramatic, evolutionary changes in the cultural geography of the White River Badlands, the decades that followed have largely been ones of relative stability. The World War II years caused a temporary halt to Badlands-area tourism, but the war reinvigorated the agricultural economy, and rural economic stability generally continued in the years that followed, in large part because the events of the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s had helped restore a more appropriate economic carrying capacity to the land. Farm and ranch consolidation continued in the years following World War II, but at a noticeably slower rate than in earlier years.

Perhaps the most significant events of the period had to do with transportation. South Dakota's state highway network improved significantly during the 1940s and 1950s. Major east-west roads across the state had been paved prior to World War II, thereby providing automobile access to the Badlands area as well as access to larger population centers, such as Rapid City. This trend continued in the 1950s and 1960s with the paving of South Dakota Highway 44 from Interior to Rapid City, and later with the development of the Interstate 90 corridor north of the Badlands. Automobile travel through the area increased correspondingly, and the town of Wall in particular benefited.

Improved automobile transportation in the area corresponded with a decline in local railroad service. The last passenger trains through the Badlands area (on the North Western) ended in October 1960, regional freight traffic declined, and local freight traffic

became almost nonexistent. The Milwaukee Road declared bankruptcy in 1977, and three years later abandoned much of its remaining South Dakota track, including its Rapid City line. The State of South Dakota then acquired the Rapid City route and numerous other Milwaukee lines in an effort to preserve rail service; while most of the acquired track was later reactivated, the rails west of Kadoka remained moribund until they were finally removed in 1998-99. Meanwhile, the Chicago and North Western's Rapid City line was acquired in 1986 by a new corporation, the Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern Railroad (DM&E). The DM&E continues to operate the Pierre-Rapid City line, but local traffic to or from the Badlands area is minimal.<sup>52</sup>

With the exception of Wall, which survives on highway trade, tourism, and the attraction of the "Wall Drug Store," the towns along the former Chicago and North Western line are also declining in population. Each retains at least some full-time residents amidst a handful of vacant and occupied buildings. Along the former Milwaukee line, the town of Conata has completely disappeared, while the towns of Weta, Imlay, and Creston exist only as individual ranches. Interior and Scenic are both shadows of their former selves.

The process of change is a continual one, and further transformations are almost certain for the Badlands region in generations to come, although it seems unlikely that future events will match the drama of a century ago. The legacy of those events, though, will continue to form the background for the Badlands as we know it today.

### ***Postscript: Homestead-era Cultural Resources***

In general, the era of Euro-American settlement in the White River Badlands was like a whirlwind—frenetic and brief. Befitting this characteristic, the changes wrought by the settlement years were substantial yet ephemeral, and relatively little evidence of this era survives in the Park today. In part, this is due to the nature of the homesteaders' activities. For example, most claims were only lightly developed, with ramshackle, impermanent buildings and few other improvements. The federal land repurchase programs of the 1930s were also a major factor in the paucity of historic sites within the Park because the federal government worked diligently to restore the reacquired land, to the extent possible, to its pre-settlement condition. Homestead buildings were destroyed, fences removed, and roads closed. Thus, the public land in the Badlands region contains few reminders of its agricultural or ranching heritage, though some potential historic resources may remain on private property in the vicinity of the Park.

Because the land within Badlands National Park has not been subjected to a comprehensive cultural resources survey (i.e., less than 90 percent of the Park has been subjected to an archeological survey), it is not possible to compile a meaningful list of homestead-era cultural sites within the Park boundaries. It is believed, however, that no standing buildings or major structures from the pre-NPS era survive in the Park. Likewise, nearly all minor features have been eradicated, though a few survive. Several early stock dams may remain, although the location, integrity, and historic significance of these early ponds have not been evaluated. In addition, at least one homestead-era grave remains in the Park, and the alignments of some former roadways remain evident.

It should be noted that some of the maintained, unpaved roadways in the Park pre-date the arrival of the NPS at the Badlands, and thus may be considered homestead-era resources. The abandoned grade of the Milwaukee Road line to Rapid City passes through a small corner of the Park; the grade is intact for nearly all of its length, and may constitute a National Register-eligible resource. Other possible homestead-era historic sites in the Park are primarily, if exclusively, archeological in nature, and a formal cultural resources survey would be required for their identification. Most of the latter sites would consist of artifact scatters in the rear or side yards at the former locations of homestead buildings. A historic archeological survey, including detailed deed and chain of title research, is recommended for a more complete understanding of the location, extent, and integrity of the Park's homestead-era resources.

Reminders of the ranching and homestead eras in the White River Badlands are far more evident outside the Park, although again no formal survey has been undertaken. Most homestead buildings outside the Park have also disappeared, although a few remain—primarily as components of larger, surviving ranches. A handful of such properties are visible along the Highway 44 corridor heading west from Interior. Other historic resources exist along that roadway, including the old Milwaukee Road railway grade. The small towns along Highway 44 are perhaps the region's most evocative homestead-era reminders. Although Conata exists today only as an archeological site, extant homestead-era buildings remain today at other townsites, and portions of both Interior and Scenic retain a strong period appearance. These towns provide perhaps the best opportunities for preservation of the homestead legacy of the White River Badlands.

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<sup>1</sup> For a summary of the fur-trade era in South Dakota see Chapter 4 of Herbert S. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Philip S. Hall, *Reflections of the Badlands* (Freeman, SD: Pine Hill Press, 1993), 7-9.

<sup>3</sup> Schell, 298-315, includes an overview of the erosion of the Sioux lands in western Dakota. See p. 315 for a map of Indian land cessions during the period.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Hufstetler and Michael Bedeau, *South Dakota's Railroads: An Historic Context* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Preservation Office, 1998), 6-12.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Hufstetler, "Custer County Historic Sites Survey, Phase III: Final Project Report," for the South Dakota State Historical Preservation Center, Vermillion, December 1991, 2-3. For a chronology of railway line construction in South Dakota, see Rick W. Mills, *Railroading in the Land of Infinite Variety: A History of South Dakota's Railroads* (Hermosa, South Dakota: Battle Creek Publishing Company, 1990), 232-234.

<sup>6</sup> Hall, *Reflections of the Badlands*, 35-37; Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 110, 154-5.

<sup>7</sup> Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 242-257.

<sup>8</sup> Hufstetler, "Custer County," 2-6; George H. Phillips, *The Postoffices of South Dakota, 1961-1930* (Crete, Nebraska: J-B Publishing Co., 1975), 14-15, 49-50.

<sup>9</sup> Hufstetler, "Custer County," 2-6; Hall, *Reflections of the Badlands*, 55-74.

<sup>10</sup> Walker D. Wyman, Recorder, *Nothing But Prairie and Sky* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954): 46, quoted in Badlands Natural History Association, "History of Badlands National Monument," (Interior, South Dakota: the Association, 1968).

<sup>11</sup> Hall, *Reflections of the Badlands*, 101-128.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 242-248.

<sup>15</sup> Hufstetler and Bedeau, *South Dakota's Railroads*, 5-12.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., Mills, *Railroading in the Land of Infinite Variety*, 232-234.

- <sup>17</sup> Hufstetler and Bedeau, *South Dakota's Railroads*, 6-8; James Frederic Hamburg, *The Influence of Railroads Upon the Processes and Patterns of Settlement in South Dakota* (New York: Arno Press, 1981), 4.
- <sup>18</sup> Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 215-222.
- <sup>19</sup> For an excellent overview of the railway townsite phenomenon, see John C. Hudson, *Plains Country Towns* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).
- <sup>20</sup> Hufstetler and Bedeau, *South Dakota's Railroads*, 12.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-15.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 242-257.
- <sup>23</sup> Rick Mills, *125 Years of Black Hills Railroad* (Hermosa, South Dakota: Battle Creek Publishing Co., 2004), 78-80.
- <sup>24</sup> Philips, *The Postoffices of South Dakota*, 32, 49-50.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> Hall, *Reflections of the Badlands*, 143-166.
- <sup>27</sup> "South Dakota, Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900 to 1990," <http://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/sd190090.txt> (accessed December 2005).
- <sup>28</sup> Paula M. Nelson, *After the West Was Won: Homesteaders and Town-Builders in Western South Dakota, 1900-1917* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1986), 21.
- <sup>29</sup> For background information on this subject, see "Dakota's Counties," *The Wi-Iyohi: Monthly Bulletin of the South Dakota Historical Society* 13 (June 1959): 2-15.
- <sup>30</sup> Interview, Leonel Jensen, Wall, SD, by Ray H. Mattison, June 2, 1965. Quoted in Badlands Natural History Association, "History of Badlands National Monument."
- <sup>31</sup> Letter, Senator Peter Norbeck to Prof. W.C. Toepelman, University of South Dakota, May 22, 1922. Quoted in Badlands Natural History Association, "History of Badlands National Monument."
- <sup>32</sup> Badlands Natural History Association, "History of Badlands National Monument." Also see Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 170-174.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>34</sup> Hall, *Reflections of the Badlands*, 170.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-181.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 155-156.
- <sup>37</sup> The best period descriptions of the Badlands-area homestead communities are found in Hall, *Reflections of the Badlands*, 143-166. Also see Nelson, *After the West Was Won*, 81-100.
- <sup>38</sup> See, for example, the description of Weta on p. 118 of Jackson-Washabaugh County Historical Society, *Jackson-Washabaugh Counties: 1915-1965* (Kadoka: the Society, 1965). Other communities are similarly described both in this volume, and in *Eastern Pennington County Memories* (Wall, SD: The American Legion Auxiliary, 1965).
- <sup>39</sup> For a description of railway townsite development in the region, see John C. Hudson, "Towns of the Western Railroads," *Great Plains Quarterly* 2 (1982): 41-54.
- <sup>40</sup> "South Dakota Historical Data: Community Population by County, 1890-2000," <http://sdrurallife.sdstate.edu/newcommunity/Historic%20Towns.pdf>.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>42</sup> Hall, *Reflections of the Badlands*, 156-158.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-166.
- <sup>44</sup> For additional background on the development of Wall, see *Eastern Pennington County Memories*, 9-14.
- <sup>45</sup> After the Rapid City lines were completed, the Milwaukee directed its attention north and west, constructing numerous branches off its new transcontinental main line. The North Western's only later west river expansion was a branch to Winner and Wood, in the south-central portion of the state. See Mills, *Railroading in the Land of Infinite Variety*, 232-234.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.
- <sup>47</sup> Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 252-297.
- <sup>48</sup> For a good overview of this period in western South Dakota, see Paula M. Nelson, *The Prairie Winnows Out Its Own* (Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 1996). The work's primary focus, however, is lands to the east of this study area.
- <sup>49</sup> Badlands Natural History Association, "History of Badlands National Monument."
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*
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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Mills, *125 Years of Black Hills Railroading*, 160-201.



