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PIERRE WIBAUX

CATTLE ^{IN} KING

by

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B.S., Billings Polytechnic Institute, 1941

Presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree of Mas-
ter of Arts.

Montana State University

1950

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PIERRE WIBAUX
1858--1913

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PREFACE

The purpose of this paper is to attempt to discover the true place and importance of Pierre Wibaux in the cattle industry of Eastern Montana and Western North Dakota and to study the methods he used in making a fortune in bonanza ranching on the Little Missouri slope.

A more accurate picture might have been presented had the necessary research been carried on thirty years ago when many of Wibaux's contemporaries were still living. The attempt to secure the facts at this late date has necessitated the tedious reading of hundreds of pages of newspapers covering the years from 1883 to 1913, a study of county records of the same period, an attempt to locate interviews of Wibaux's contemporaries as made by earlier research students, and the task of finding men who knew Wibaux during his years in Montana and securing statements from them in regard to the man and his work, a task which invariably proved to be very pleasant.

For aid in the preparation of this paper I am especially indebted to Mr. Ray H. Mattison, historian of the Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park, for the use of material collected by him, to the State Historical Society of Montana and the North Dakota State Historical Society for making their collections available for my use, to the Dawson County Review Publishing Company and the Glendive

City Library, both of Glendive, Montana, for allowing me to make a complete perusal of their newspaper files, to the county officials of Billings County, North Dakota, and Custer County, Montana, who cooperated to the fullest possible extent in aiding me in the use of their records, to Mr. Wallace Scott of Wibaux, Montana, who made his material available for my use, to Dr. Paul C. Phillips, Professor of History at Montana State University, under whose able guidance this paper was prepared, and to the old timers of Eastern Montana and Western North Dakota who so patiently answered the many questions which I asked while collecting the information used in producing this thesis.

INTRODUCTION

The great cattle industry of the Northwest during the period from 1875 to 1900, often spoken of as the period of the beef bonanza, has furnished subject matter of interest to students of the area for the last half century, but too often the resultant writing has taken on the aspect of the scenario of the western movie, colored with the fantasy of romance made glamorous by its picturesqueness, the only limitation being imposed by the amount of imagination possessed by the writer. Of all the tales which have been told, few have imparted any real knowledge of the business realities which the rancher had to face, the courage necessary to overcome reversals, and the element of chance which pervaded the business of making large scale ranching profitable.

The story of Pierre Wibaux, who became the largest and wealthiest individual cattle owner in America and then went on to become a figure of importance in financial circles, may well be used to illustrate the problems faced and the methods used by the successful rancher in overcoming unfavorable conditions. During his period on the range in Eastern Montana and Western North Dakota many fortunes were wrecked due to inexperience or lack of judgment, while other investments, cared for by men of the calibre of Wibaux, prudent, sagacious, willing to take a gamble if the odds were favorable, were built into fortunes. Probably

this may be best expressed in the words of a newspaper article written at the turn of the century.

"Throughout the range district of the Northwest, no name is more familiar than that of Pierre Wibaux, the millionaire cattle king of Eastern Montana. There was a time in the somewhat recent history of range stock growing in the Northwest when so-called cattle kings were plenty. During the boom enjoyed by the industry in the early '80's, the title was liberally bestowed; somewhat too liberally, as was demonstrated when so many of the bovine royalty went to the wall after the hard winter of 1886-7, but among the few who emerged from the disaster referred to with all standards flying was Pierre Wibaux. 'Wibaux's luck,' they called it, but those acquainted with the man and his methods knew that it was simply a case of rare business judgment coupled with an indomitable will power and the courage of convictions, all attributes of the kind of royalty that in all ages, and under all conditions, has made history."¹

¹ Illustrated and Historical Edition, The Yellowstone Journal, Miles City, Montana, Sept. 27, 1900, p. 39.

CHAPTER I.

PIERRE WIBAUX'S EUROPEAN BACKGROUND

In order that the character of Pierre Wibaux may be better understood, it is necessary to first make some study of the European background from which he came.

Pierre Wibaux was born in Roubaix, France, on January 12, 1858. His parents belonged to families of the highest commercial and industrial distinction in France, having been extensively interested in cotton mills, woolen mills, and dyeing works from the year 1810.¹ As it was intended that he should follow in the footsteps of his father, Pierre was given an excellent education of a literary nature which was followed by technical training to fit him for the manufacturing industry.² He left college at the age of eighteen to enlist in the Dragoons, as was customary with the young men of France at that time, but at the end of a year's service he returned to his home in Roubaix.³

During the next two or three years Pierre travelled widely in Europe and became familiar with the various nations, their languages, and their customs.⁴ Considering his background and the wishes of his family, we may assume

¹ The Glendive (Montana) Independent, June 20, 1896.

² Helen Fitzgerald Sanders, A History of Montana (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1913), V. 2, p. 1251.

³ The Glendive (Montana) Independent, June 20, 1896.

⁴ Ibid.

that he made an investigation of methods employed in the textile industry in those countries which he visited.

On his return it was decided that Pierre should be sent on a two year tour of inspection of the manufacturing districts of England, where he was to study and investigate English methods and machinery. Evidently he had already demonstrated that he was the possessor of an unusually brilliant mind as Pierre was chosen from a family which included at least two other boys.⁵

This mission to England proved in two ways to have a strong bearing on Wibaux's later life: it was there that he met Mary Ellen (Nellie) Cooper, later to become Mrs. Wibaux, and it was also there that he learned from English families who had sons engaged in the cattle business in America of the wonderful opportunities to be found in the range stock industry of the great Northwest.⁶

⁵ By the terms of his will, which is on file in the Custer County Court House, Miles City, Montana, Wibaux made bequests to the sons of two of his brothers, Joseph and Rene Wibaux. There is no evidence available to indicate which was the oldest.

⁶ Background for this point is well provided by Lewis F. Crawford, long time resident of Western North Dakota and Secretary of the North Dakota State Historical Society, a student of the range cattle industry, in his History of North Dakota (Chicago: American Historical Society, Inc., 1931), V. 1, p. 496, as follows:

"While in England he met a number of men who had sons on ranches in America, especially in Texas. It must be remembered that the textile industry in England during the period of the Civil War had been carried on largely from cotton obtained from southern states. When the Union gunboats effectually established a blockade against southern cotton, that part of England which de-

Undoubtedly the picture that was painted for Pierre was of a very rosy hue as it was then thought that the procedure in ranching was merely to turn a herd of cattle loose on the prairie, select from it each year that part of the natural increase which was ready for market, and enjoy the annual income which would be forthcoming from the business with little or no risk involved.

Pierre was naturally of an adventurous temperament, as is well illustrated by his later life, and was ambitious to make his own mark in the world. He was not attracted by the idea of remaining in Roubaix and living off the industry which had been built by his grandfather and father before him. In 1882 he decided to go to the United States and investigate the stories he had heard of how cattle, through the medium of prairie grass, might be turned into gold.

When Pierre announced his plans to his family he

pendent upon the textile mills for their livelihood, felt very hostile toward the Union forces and espoused quite strongly the Confederate cause. When the war closed, Texas was prostrate. Cattle were worth nothing and there was no capital to finance the cattle industry. Many sons of English capitalists, not a few being of noble families, came to Texas to take a venture in the stock business, which accorded very closely with their sporting blood. It was among the fathers of this class in the textile centers that Wibaux got his first desire to come to America. He had heard that the great Northwest country was being opened and that Texas cattle were finding their way thither. He at once developed a strong inclination to go to America and he definitely decided on his return to France not to settle down in the textile industry as his father desired he should."

met with strong opposition on the part of his father who had hoped that Pierre would take his place, along with his brothers, in conducting the textile business which had been in the hands of the family for over seventy years. After persistent and prolonged pleading the father, in a fit of temper, gave him \$10,000 and told him that this sum was the last he would get and that henceforth he would have to shift for himself.⁷

⁷ Ibid., p. 496.

Although Mrs. Sanders, op. cit., p. 1251, states that with his brothers he owned the "immense textile manufacturing business established in Roubaix, France, by their grandfather," there is no evidence to indicate that Wibaux retained an interest in the business, and his will, written on January 8, 1912, fails to mention any property in France. Papers in the files of the Custer County, Montana, Court House include a certificate dated in 1921 which states that Rene Jules Joseph Wibaux was at that time a retired manufacturer and a Knight of the Legion of Honor. He was a brother of Pierre Wibaux.

Another certificate states that Daniel Pierre Edouard Achille Wibaux, Pierre's nephew, was a manufacturer living at Roubaix. His birth certificate shows he was the son of Joseph Albert Wibaux, a manufacturer of Roubaix.

The above would indicate that the firm remained in the hands of the two brothers and their heirs, but there is no evidence to indicate that Pierre Wibaux exercised any control over it.

CHAPTER II.

CHOOSING THE RANCH SITE

It is difficult at this time to secure the facts in regard to Wibaux's actions during the following year, especially as to the circumstances which caused him to locate on Beaver Creek in Eastern Montana.

A study of available evidence indicates that on his arrival in the United States Wibaux went directly to Chicago, where the meat packing industry was then becoming centered. His thoroughness and good judgment suggested that before he began to buy stock for his own range he should know more about the range cattle business--what class of stock was favored most in the market, how to guess accurately on weight and age, and other similar items which would make him a good judge of cattle. This information was derived principally by spending a few weeks in the Chicago stockyards, watching and studying the daily transactions and making mental notes of those facts which would be likely to prove of value later.¹ Wibaux probably also felt that in Chicago there would be an opportunity to listen to the talk of those who had accompanied the cattle shipments to market. From this he might learn of locations

¹ Montana Homeseeker, Helena, Montana, Sept., 1906. This was a magazine published in the first decade of the present century to attract settlers to Montana.

Essentially the same story is told in biographical sketches which appear in The Glendive (Montana) Independent, June 20, 1896, The Yellowstone Journal, Miles City, Montana, Sept. 27, 1900, p. 39, Sanders, op. cit., p. 1251, and Crawford, op. cit., pp. 496-7.

where conditions existed which were favorable to livestock production and which were still open to newcomers to the ranching business.

While in Chicago Wibaux met the Marquis de Mores, also a native of France. The Marquis had been working in his father-in-law's bank in New York City until his imagination caught fire as a result of stories told him by his cousin, Count Fitz-James, who had hunted in the Bad Lands region. De Mores came to Western North Dakota, founded Medora, the future site of his packing plant, and returned to Chicago. Wibaux accompanied De Mores on the Marquis' return to the Bad Lands in either April or May, 1883.²

² Some have claimed that Wibaux came directly to Eastern Montana and chose his ranch site before going to Chicago to study the livestock industry. However there must have been some factor which influenced his choice of that area. The above deduction would give a reason for his selection of the state line area.

It has also been claimed that De Mores and Wibaux did not meet until after they were both living in the valley of the Little Missouri. The opinion expressed above is based on the following:

The Wibaux (Montana) Pioneer, March 28, 1913, states in Wibaux's obituary that he first went to Chicago and spent a period of time around the stockyards and that "After thus acquiring a knowledge which would enable him to judge the qualities of cattle he came west and located on Beaver creek, in Dawson county, . . ."

The Glendive (Montana) Independent, June 20, 1896, states that Wibaux arrived in the Bad Lands region with the Marquis de Mores and, after looking over the area carefully, decided to locate in the Beaver Valley.

Crawford, op. cit., p. 497, wrote that Wibaux first took up residence in Chicago and while there "he met Marquis de Mores, who was planning to engage in the slaughtering

In the Montana Homeseeker Wibaux is quoted as saying,

"When I settled in that country it was only after inspecting almost every part of this section. It was at a time when there were very few settlers, so it was a very easy matter to pick out a good location. I picked out what I considered at that time the finest natural location for a ranch in all of eastern Montana and since then I have travelled over the northwest a good deal and have never found a better one."³

Time demonstrated that Pierre Wibaux made a wise choice when he selected the Beaver Valley as the site for his ranch. Both the topography and the vegetation of this locale favored the livestock industry. The deep draws and coulees of the area offered a place where the cattle could seek protection from the storms which swept the plains. In exceptionally dry years when the creeks ceased to run the spring-fed holes always contained water. Thickets of buffalo berry and chokecherry bushes, ash, plum, box elder, and cottonwood trees, as well as various kinds of brush,

business at Medora. It was this acquaintance that led to Wibaux's coming to North Dakota and Montana. . . ."

This is supported by a letter from A. M. Baird, of Beaver Creek, which appeared in the Glendive (Montana) Times, June 2, 1883, which said, "Our latest arrivals are two distinguished Frenchmen, the Marquis de Mores and friend, . . ."

The issue of the same paper for June 30, 1883, comments that "Grisy & Wibaux propose putting in 10,000 head (of cattle) on Beaver creek."

The information used in regard to the Marquis de Mores is taken from Arnold O. Goplen, "The Career of Marquis De Mores in the Badlands of North Dakota," reprinted from North Dakota History, (Bismarck: State Historical Society of North Dakota, 1946), V. 13, No. 1 and 2, January-April, 1946, pp. 10-11. Mr. Goplen was formerly the Senior Foreman Historian for the National Park Service.

³ Montana Homeseeker, Helena, Montana, Sept. 1906.

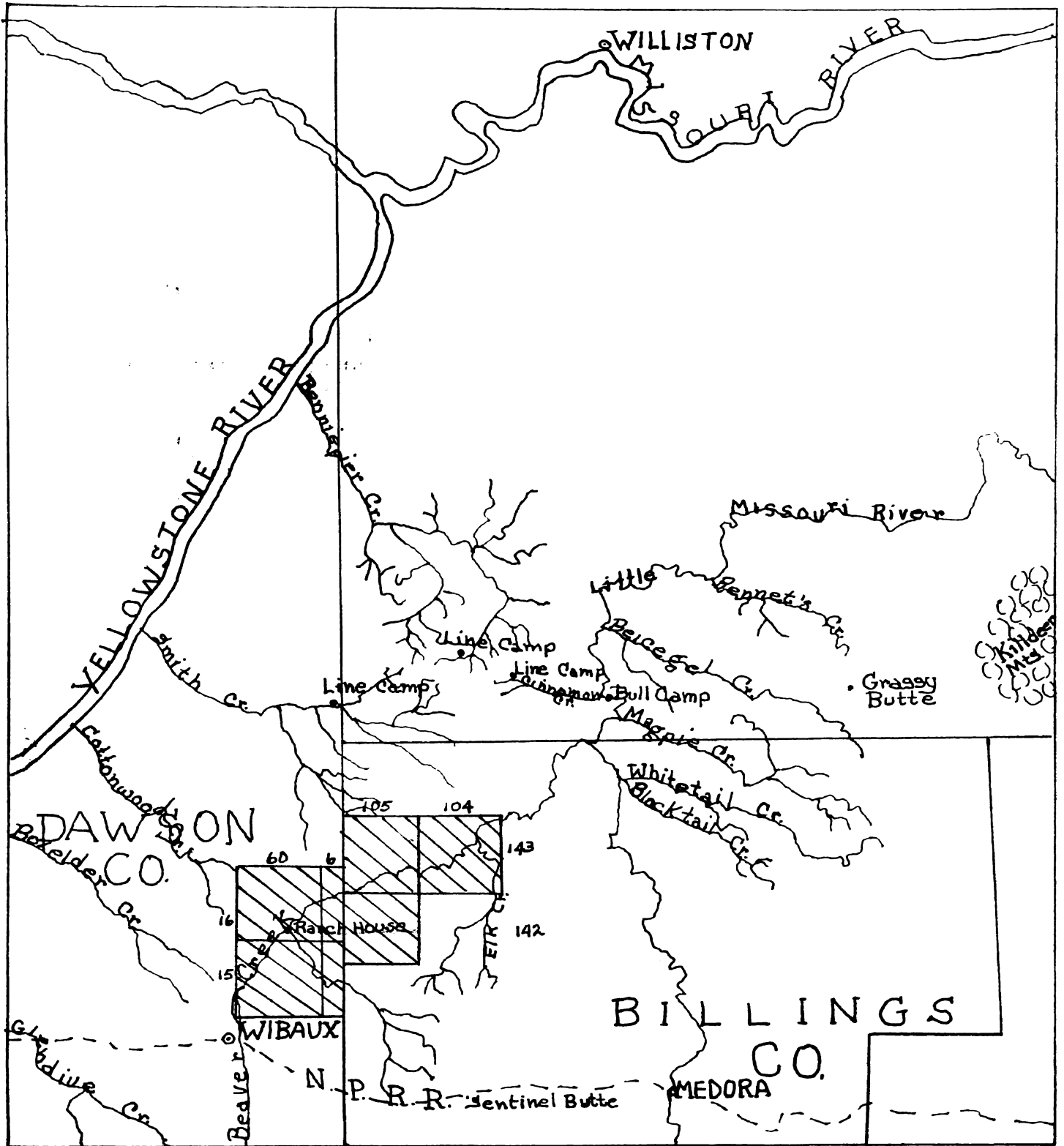
provided a natural shelter for the stock, and sharp buttes helped to break the force of the cold winter winds. Grazing was good during all months of the year as the native prairie grass ripens early and cures while it is still standing, thus retaining its food value so that it is as good as hay when eaten by the cattle in the middle of the winter.

Possibly it is appropriate to insert here a flowery effervescence written by an unnamed biographer of Pierre Wibaux.

"The highest product of the old world civilization having turned his back upon the pleasures of a gay and promising life in the capitals of Europe, surrounded with all that wealth could supply or artistic skill could fashion for his comfort, deliberately chose to live on the wild llanos of America; to burrow in a 'dug-out', to rear and traffic in cattle, to consort with range riders and cow boys. What reck he! the great soul does not sell its greatness--does not ask to dine nicely or sleep warm. He exults in his choice for the freedom it gives, the independence it assures, the spice of adventure it supplies and the hope of fortune it holds out."⁴

⁴ Sanders, op. cit., p. 1251.

Thomas Rush, one of the earliest settlers in the Beaver Valley, stated in an interview with Wallace Scott on June 20, 1936, that he showed Wibaux the location which was chosen for the site of the ranch.



Scale: 1 inch = 15 statute miles.
 Wibaux purchased alternate sections in townships designated by diagonal lines, about half in Billings County, North Dakota, and half in Dawson County, Montana.
 Map shows location of the ranch house, bull camp, and the three line camps, used to keep cattle from drifting too far from home ranch.

CHAPTER III.

FROM DUGOUT TO "WHITE HOUSE"

During his first months on the ranch site Wibaux contented himself with living in a dugout as he desired to spend all his available capital in the expansion of his ranch holdings. The next year, 1884, was to have been marked by the erection of a large dwelling with as many conveniences as it was possible to have on the frontier. But, as all funds were needed in making additions to the herd, a small log cabin with a sod roof was built that spring in place of a mansion.¹

Late in 1883 Wibaux had returned to France, married, and secured the capital necessary to increase his holdings.²

¹ The Yellowstone Journal, Miles City, Montana, Sept. 27, 1900, The Glendive (Montana) Independent, June 20, 1896, and the Montana Homeseeker, Sept., 1906, are all in essential agreement on the above facts.

² The Glendive (Montana) Times, Dec. 8, 1883, states that Mr. Wibaux "has gone to Europe to spend the winter and will bring a bride back with him in the spring."

The same paper, in the issue of March 5, 1884, tells of the wedding.

"Pierre Wibaux, the genial partner of Gus Grisy, was married Thursday of this week, at Dover, England, and will shortly sail with his bride for this country. They expect to reach Beaver, their future place of residence in about six weeks."

The same publication contains the following item in the issue for April 26, 1884:

"Mr. Pierre Wibaux, of the firm of Grisy & Wibaux, is expected here this month, he has been spending the winter in France and England and was gallant enough to win and capture one of England's fairest daughters who will accompany him to this place."

Mr. and Mrs. Wibaux arrived in Montana in May, 1884, and plans were immediately made for starting construction of the new ranch house on Beaver Creek, about twelve miles north of the town of Wibaux, and it was only a short time before the work was begun.³

A reporter from The Glendive Times visited the Grisy & Wibaux ranch in August, 1884, and found that work on the Wibaux house was proceeding quite rapidly. In describing the home he wrote,

"This residence, which is now in the course of construction has stone foundations and a cellar under nearly the whole building. The cellar is divided into several compartments, one of which the Times reporter has an eye on, viz: the wine cellar. This residence is situated in the middle of a grove which at a great outlay has been cut into avenues, leveled up and all the underbrush cleared away, making it exceptionally pleasant. As will be seen by the ground plan the building is quite extensive, and from the plans we saw it will be very handsome in appearance. Mr. Wibaux is using extra exertions to make it in every way as convenient and as comfortable as possible. . . ."⁴

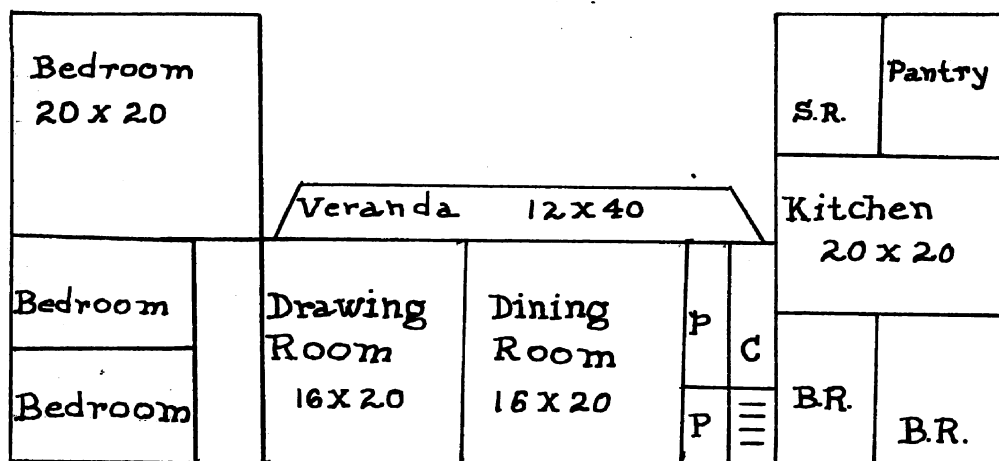
³ The Glendive (Montana) Times, May 31, 1884, contains a news article which states that "Mr. Wibaux will build a \$4,000 house at his ranch ten miles down the Beaver. He also has five French servants who followed him from France, they having arrived this week." Among the latter were Mr. and Mrs. Jules Accart, the former serving as gardener and the latter as lady-in-waiting to Mrs. Wibaux. Their descendants still live in Wibaux County.

The issue for April 19, 1885, shows that work on the house was nearing completion. "Ed Davis secured the contract for painting and papering Pierre Wibaux's mansion in the Beaver valley, and left the first of the week to do the work." Mr. and Mrs. Wibaux probably moved into the completed residence some time in the early summer of 1885.

⁴ The Glendive (Montana) Times, Aug. 30, 1884. The following ground plan is that mentioned in the item

The new home had not been completed by the end of the year and one of the most common stories told of Mr. and Mrs. Wibaux is that of their first Christmas dinner in Montana which was eaten in the little fourteen by sixteen foot log shack.⁵

quoted above.



⁵ This story first appeared in print in The Yellowstone Journal, Miles City, Montana, Sept. 27, 1900, p. 40.

"Here in a room whose muslin ceiling scarcely allowed the broad-shouldered and athletic husband to stand upright, with rats scampering and squealing everywhere and with the melting snow trickling through gaps in the sod roof, the first Christmas dinner was served and eaten by the newly married couple in all the pomp and circumstance of evening dress, Mrs. Wibaux appearing in a strictly modish Paris gown, while Monsieur sat at the other side of the table in faultless black and white. It was an event that is fondly cherished in the memory of the participants, for, while in later years, when the 'big house' did come and there were servants galore and a cellar stocked with the rarest and best of liquors, ceremonial service at meals was the regular order, there was something so widely incongruous in the surroundings

Practically all the ranch buildings at that time were built of logs or sod, but the home built by Wibaux was made of lumber and painted white. Because of this it became widely known as the "White House." The best description of the place as completed is that by Bertha Kuhn, who spent many years of her life in the vicinity.

"The White House was a combination of the colonial and local in type, a long, one-story structure 80 by 36. At the front or north side was the low-roofed porch, characteristic of the ranch house, but usually added with a view to utility only. But this was one of many ranch houses which gave the impression of having been planned and built by one who enjoyed the outside as well as the inside of his home. It is

of this first Christmas dinner, and yet withal the conditions were so happy, that its memory will always be fresh and pleasant to the adventurous celebrants."

A news item in The Glendive (Montana) Times, Nov. 22, 1884, raises a question as to the authenticity of this story.

"Pierre Wibaux informs us that he expects to be established in his new residence in about ten days. He has the finest residence in Dawson county, built in the best possible manner for convenience, elegance and comfort, surrounded by a grove through which avenues have been cut. It is an elegant place in a very fine situation."

Either Mr. Wibaux was overly optimistic, the dinner referred to was that of Thanksgiving or some other holiday, or else the commonly accepted story is not based on fact. Evidence previously presented (footnote 3, page 12) indicates that Wibaux erred in his belief they would be in the White House by December, 1884.

Thomas Lihen, who worked for Wibaux in the 1890's, stated that N. J. Bendon had the contract for building the White House. There is no other available evidence on the subject. There is no question but that it was the best built home and one of the most beautiful to be found in the state line area at that time.

evident that the White House was built primarily for a home. . . .

"The rooms of the White House were large, with high ceilings and elaborately designed woodwork and wall-paper. In the sitting room was a cosy fireplace, and the house also possessed a billiard and wine room for the amusement of cowboys and ranchers from far and near. . . . Water for use in the house and the large lawn in front was piped from the windmill tank by the barn. In the wash room one of the large sandstones peculiar to that region had been very cleverly utilized for a sink. This sink was about four feet long by two and one-half feet wide and six or eight inches thick. The center was carefully hollowed out, and holes drilled for faucets. The result was unique, yet evidently quite practical.

"The White House was the residence of the Wibaux family only. The foreman lived in a house some rods distant, near the road. A high fence added to the seclusion of the Wibaux home which was set far back in the trees on the creek bank."⁶

Nearby was an enclosed garden with a windmill and a tool house. The superintendent's home was about two hundred yards to the rear, and near it were the stables, which were built of stone quarried on the ranch and decorated with buffalo heads picked up on the bench above the valley.⁷ In addition to these buildings there were near at hand a bunk house for the cow hands, a wagon shed, a blacksmith shop,

⁶ Bertha Kuhn, "The W-Bar Ranch on the Missouri Slope," Collections of the State Historical Society (Grand Forks: North Dakota State Historical Society, 1923), Vol. V, pp. 163-4.

The White House was built at such a low elevation that it was often flooded by Beaver Creek during the high water level of the spring run-off. An ice jam in 1900 caused extensive damage to most of the furnishings.

After Wibaux disposed of his holdings in the area the house was unoccupied for several years, and in 1913 it was destroyed by fire.

⁷ A news item in The Glendive (Montana) Times, Sept. 6, 1884, states "Robert Dinsdale came up from Minusville this week. He has the contract for building a stone stable 35 x 67, for Pierre Wibaux."

granaries, a root cellar, corrals, and all the other improvements necessary to a large ranch.⁸

As the ranch house was about twelve miles from Minusville, the present town of Wibaux, and as much of Wibaux's business was transacted in town, sometime in the middle 1880's he had an office building erected in the village with a sleeping room, a large kitchen, and quarters for the caretaker. This place became known as "The Park," largely because of the way in which the yard was landscaped and maintained.

"The grounds surrounding the office building are large, handsomely kept and constantly under improvement. An elevated tank filled by a windmill, supplies all the water needed for irrigation and for the maintenance of two artificial ponds, in one of which, nearest the house, there is a picturesque grotto, formed of immense chunks of many-colored scoria from the bad lands, and in the center of the pool a little Cupid directs the spray of a tiny fountain. A velvety lawn stretches away in all directions, and on two sides of the grounds a continuous arbor, covered with creeping vines, affords the shade and comfort that agrees so well with summer drinks the concomitants of which are readily found in the well stocked cellar."⁹

⁸ A. Buchanan, "Impressions of a Tenderfoot," Montana Homeseeker, Helena, Montana, Sept., 1906.

Nothing remains at the ranch site except the grove and the stone stable which, with the exception of the roof, which has deteriorated rather badly, looks as though it is as strong as when it was built sixty-six years ago. It is still in use.

⁹ The Yellowstone Journal, Miles City, Montana, Sept. 27, 1900, p. 40.

This building, now used as a dwelling, stands south of the depot and between the business section and Beaver Creek. It originally faced north, but in 1903 W. A. Orgain, a Wibaux merchant, purchased the property and moved the building to the rear, swinging one end around so that it now faces west. All traces of the landscaping are now gone,

The White House was virtually unoccupied after 1899. Cyril, the only child born to Pierre and Mary Ellen Wibaux, was educated at home and by tutors until that time. As his parents felt he should be given a thorough business education and then serve a few years in the French army, Mr. Wibaux leased a suite of rooms in a fashionable quarter of Paris which Mrs. Wibaux and Cyril moved into in 1899 and where they were still living in 1913.¹⁰

with the exception of some of the trees. The marble statues, which at one time graced The Park, have become scattered. A search will still reveal a few of them in the town.

Illustrative of Pierre Wibaux's efforts to make the place beautiful are two items from The Glendive (Montana) Independent.

"An aermotor wind mill is being erected in the yard of Pierre Wibaux's office. Trees are also being set out and next spring the place will blossom like a rose." (Nov. 4, 1893.)

"Mr. Wibaux has made many improvements to his handsome resort in this town in the past year. Mr. Wibaux's park promises to be the most pleasing resort between here and St. Paul." (Nov. 4, 1899.)

Gus Sommerfeldt served as caretaker of this property for many years. His descendants still reside in the vicinity of Wibaux.

¹⁰ The Glendive (Montana) Times, Sept. 26, 1885.
 "WIBAUX--On the 23 inst. to Mr. and Mrs. Wibaux of the Beaver Valley, A son."

It has been claimed that Cyril Wibaux was born in France. He was born at the White House, as indicated above. Mrs. Wibaux was cared for by Mrs. Armstrong, a nurse of Bismarck and mother of C. O. Armstrong who was employed as a hand on the W Ranch at the time. (C. O. Armstrong interview.)

File 639--In the Matter of the Estate of Pierre Wibaux, Custer County Court House, Miles City, Montana. Document 19, a Petition for Family Allowance, Feb. 19, 1914,

states that during the life of Wibaux his widow and son had residence in Paris so that the latter might have advantages in education and training not available in Montana. Wibaux insisted the home be maintained in the most select part of Paris, and Mrs. Wibaux had a long term lease on the home. The administrator, C. W. Butler, recommended an allowance of \$1200 monthly for the purpose of continuing the maintenance of this residence, and the court acceded.

N. P. Yaden, in an interview by Wallace Scott, July 21, 1936, stated that Jordan, a land agent, took Pierre Wibaux out to his old ranch about 1909. Wibaux looked around, saw the land cross-fenced and plowed and said, "Please take me back. This looks more like a graveyard than my old home."

THE GRISY-WIBAUX PARTNERSHIP

A chapter in the Wibaux story which has been quite generally forgotten is that dealing with his partnership in the stock business with Gus Grisy, who was also of French origin. Almost the only remaining evidence of this partnership is found in contemporary newspapers and they tell nothing of its origin. Possibly it was formed because of the small amount of capital which Wibaux had when he arrived in the range country. The first indication we have of the partnership is its mention in a news item in The Glendive (Montana) Times: "Grisy & Wibaux propose putting in 10,000 head on Beaver creek."¹

¹ The Glendive (Montana) Times, June 30, 1883. The next issue of the same paper, July 7, 1883, contains the following advertisement:

Take Notice

Notice is hereby given that the undersigned have taken and claimed one range ten miles, and one range twenty-five miles below McClellan station, on Beaver creek.

Grisy & Wibaux

The firm is mentioned again in the issue of July 14, 1883, which states that "Grisy's & Wibaux's brand advertisement appears in our stock column this week. This firm is an extensive one and are grazing a large lot of cattle over on the Beaver."

The stock column of the same issue contains the following:

Grisy & Wibaux



Range--Beaver creek, ten miles from the track to its outlet.

Address--Keith, P. O. Montana.

Brand--same as above on right side.

A reporter for The Glendive Times travelled through the Beaver Valley in the fall of 1883 and wrote, after leaving a neighboring ranch, that

"A ride of three miles through an interesting and excellent portion of the valley brings us to the stock ranch of Grisy & Wibaux. They have a substantial and comfortable ranch building, very large corral and several stacks of hay. We do not think that a better stock range can be found than that selected by these gentlemen. A conversation with these gentlemen elicited their opinion of the country. Men could not be more delighted than they with the country, its topography, its advantages as a stock country, and its remarkable climate. Both blessed the fate that guided them to Montana, and neither expressed the least regret about leaving the sunny climate of France. They left the gayest country in the world to go to the new, the unknown west, and now they emphatically assert that they never felt nor enjoyed life as well as now. Next season they will add 2,000 heifers to their herd and will continue adding stock every year. Mr. Grisy and Mr. Wibaux will both be married this winter and will bring their brides from Europe to reside here. In the spring they will build a large, what in this country, would be considered a palatial residence, in the vicinity of their present headquarters. Aside from the natural advantages of the valley it is specially favored with as intelligent, industrious, social and enterprising class of settlers as can be found in any country."²

During the years of 1883 and 1884 the firm of Grisy and Wibaux apparently prospered and, with expansion in mind, it purchased quite a number of young cattle and some well-bred horses.³

² The Glendive (Montana) Times, Nov. 3, 1883.

³ The following news items from The Glendive (Montana) Times indicate the firm was making a serious effort to enlarge its operations:

"There will be three thousand head of young cattle

In the fall of 1884, however, the partnership was dissolved with Wibaux taking over complete ownership of the ranch and assuming all its current liabilities.⁴

shipped here next month by Grisy & Wibaux, and Rowe, Parker & Co." (April 26, 1884.)

"Ole Berg, Messrs. Grisy & Wibaux's foreman will leave for the east in a few days to take charge of 1,500 head of young cattle they are to drive in here." (May 24, 1884.)

"Messrs. Grisy & Wibaux bought six very fine horses from the Marquis de Mores this week, to be used in the round-up. They also have thirty head of Kentucky horses enroute to this place." (May 31, 1884.)

"Pierre Wibaux, of the firm of Grisy & Wibaux, the Beaver Valley stock graziers, has gone to Sioux City for 1,200 two-year-old steers, and will meet Ole Berg at that point, who has in charge sixty Texas mares and two thoroughbred Kentucky stallions. They claim the finest stallions in the Territory." (July 5, 1884.)

The Glendive (Montana) Independent, Nov. 29, 1884, includes a list of all Dawson County taxpayers who were to pay over \$100 in taxes for the year 1884. The amount due from Grisy & Wibaux was \$826.21, making the firm the fifth largest taxpayer in the county for that year.

⁴ The following appears in the Bad Lands Cow Boy, Medora, North Dakota, Nov. 27, 1884:

Notice

To whom it may concern:

The partnership heretofore existing between Gustave Grisy and Pierre Wibaux, under the firm name of Grisy & Wibaux has been dissolved dating from the 1st day of November, 1884. Pierre Wibaux is now the sole proprietor of the Royal Chambord cattle ranch, situated on Beaver Creek; also the bull ranch situated on the Little Missouri. Pierre Wibaux assumes all the indebtedness of the late firm up to November 1, 1884. All persons having accounts will please present them at their earliest convenience.

PIERRE WIBAUX

Only one source of information has been found which indicates the original cause of ill feeling between the two men. The story is that Mrs. Wibaux rode the mile between residences to visit Mrs. Grisy, who was ill, and tied her horse in the yard in front of the house. Grisy saw the horse, removed it from the yard, and tied it outside. When Mrs. Wibaux was ready to leave she had to go to where her horse was tied as Grisy didn't offer to bring it, nor did he assist her in mounting, even though she was riding a side saddle with short stirrups which made this action very difficult. Wibaux took this as a gross insult and, on meeting Grisy the next day, wanted to fight. When Grisy

Notices which were almost identical appeared in the two Glendive papers early in 1885. The notice in The Glendive (Montana) Independent, March 14, 1885, was as follows:

Notice to Whom it may concern

I am now the sole proprietor of the G anchor W and GW brands, formerly owned by Grisy & Wibaux, on the ranges of Beaver Creek, Montana, and that the home ranch of said brands is at the Dakota ranch of the undersigned.

Pierre Wibaux

The notice in The Glendive (Montana) Times, March 14, 1885, was similar.

Notice

To whom it may concern: I am now the sole proprietor of the G anchor W and GW brands formerly owned by Grisy and Wibaux, on the ranges of Beaver Creek, M. T., and Little Missouri, D. T., and that the home ranch of said brand is at the Dakota ranch of the undersigned.

PIERRE WIBAUX

The editor greeted the latter announcement with a comment of his own, "The notice of Pierre Wibaux in another column, means the moving of sixty thousand dollars worth of property from Dawson county into Dakota to save the item of taxation." The boundaries of Billings County, North Dakota, were defined in 1879, but the county government was not organized until April 12, 1886.

refused he was given a very severe tongue lashing. This difference between the two men widened until a division of the properties appeared to be the only solution.⁵

An examination of the characters of the two men reveals traits which make a congenial partnership appear to be very unlikely. The foregoing pages show the Wibaux background and as the story develops more is seen of him as the thorough, shrewd, hard-working business man who was willing to go out on the range and ride in the dirt and sweat of the round-up. If someone came to Wibaux in search of a job, his prospective employer went out with him and worked beside him and, if the efforts of the applicant were satisfactory, he was placed on the pay roll.

Gus Grisy appears to have been of an entirely different pattern. He had little love for the workingman and probably lacked ambition. He liked to stand on the depot platform with bare head, white suit and shirt, and a gun on each hip, thus impressing the pilgrims on passing trains with the fact that he was a very bad and very tough man.⁶

While Wibaux, during this period, devoted his time and energy to the operation of the ranch, Grisy was developing other interests. In August, 1884, he was appointed

⁵ C. C. Armstrong, "Pierre Wibaux, by C. C. Armstrong Who Knew Him Well," (unpublished manuscript, Montana State University, Missoula, Montana, Collection on Pierre Wibaux.) Armstrong was an employee of the partnership and worked for Wibaux for about four years after its dissolution.

⁶ John Brophy interview. Brophy came into the Beaver Valley in 1882 and knew both Grisy and Wibaux.

postmaster at the village of Mingusville, which had been named for himself and his wife, Minnie.⁷ He also ran a saloon in the building in which the post office was located.⁸ In the same year he decided to take a whirl at politics and became a candidate for State Representative on the Republican ticket. He went before the county nominating convention with the endorsement of the Mingusville committee and secured the nomination, but was badly beaten in the November election.⁹

Grisy remained in the area for a year or two after the partnership was dissolved and operated under the G Anchor brand. He then moved to a ranch near Gladstone, North Dakota, and devoted his time to raising blooded horses. After a very limited period at this he went to England, his wife's former home, and nothing further is known of him.

With Grisy out of the business, Wibaux's greatest encumbrance was gone. He could now run the ranch as he

⁷ The Glendive (Montana) Independent, Aug. 23, 1884.

⁸ Ibid., Dec. 17, 1884.

⁹ This information is contained in The Glendive (Montana) Independent, Sept. 27 and Nov. 8, 1884. The Mingusville committee was composed of A. M. Baird, a prominent stockman, Ole Berg, foreman for Grisy & Wibaux, and Gustave Grisy, so the latter should have secured the endorsement without too much difficulty. In the November election Dawson County, which was traditionally Republican, gave Grisy 183 votes and his Democratic opponent, a Glendive real estate man named Tingle, 404 votes. In the Mingusville precinct the vote was Grisy--25, Tingle--20.

desired, and his shrewd intelligence and the knowledge which he had picked up at first hand on the range and in the Chicago and Sioux City stockyards could be brought into full play. However, he continued to operate on a small scale due to the minimum amount of capital he had available. It was at this time that Wibaux began using W for his brand and the holdings became known as the W Bar Ranch.¹⁰

As Grisy, who was no friend of the workingman, was now out of the way it is likely that conditions for the help and relations between employer and employee began to improve. Both Pierre and Mrs. Wibaux "made a hit with the cow boys for they were the real stuff and consequently always popular."¹¹ Wibaux was admired because he had already spent two years in range riding, purchasing, branding, loading, shipping, and travelling with his cattle until he knew every detail of the business. With improved feeling among the help and with his background of practical experience Pierre Wibaux, as sole owner, was ready to take advantage of the circumstances which resulted from the

¹⁰ The Brand Book of the Montana Stock Growers' Association (Helena: Independent Publishing Company, 1894), p. 131, gives the range of the W Ranch as the area between the Little Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers and north of the Northern Pacific Railroad. All cattle purchased were branded W on the right ribs and the increase was given the same brand on both right and left ribs. The brand used on horses was W, a vented W, which was placed high on the right flank.

¹¹ Lincoln Lang interview. Lang was an early rancher in the Bad Lands whose location was near the lower extremity

winter of 1886-87.

of the W Ranch. Later in the interview Lang stated that "in most ways he (Wibaux) was a fine fellow, being well liked through-out the western cattle country where he was known."

George Osterhaut, who worked for Wibaux as a hand, stated that Wibaux was well liked by his men.

G. O. Armstrong, op. cit., stated that "Wibaux always thought his boys were all right." This feeling is usually reciprocated.

CHAPTER V.

THE W RANCH AND THE WINTER OF 1886-87

The range cattle industry developed very rapidly during the early 1880's. The winters had been mild, prices stayed at a fairly high level, and word had spread widely of the large profits which could be made by grazing cattle on the available free lands. Many of the ranchers already in the area, encouraged by the large profits of previous years, greatly increased the number of cattle on their ranges. From an official estimate of 50,775 cattle in Montana Territory in 1870, the number had grown to 274,316 in 1880, and by 1886 this figure had been raised to 663,716. In the latter year at least 100,000 new cattle were brought into the Territory and these "dogies" from Texas and "pilgrims" from the eastern and mid-western areas had little time in which they could become acclimated to unusually severe changes in the weather.¹

The summer of 1886 was hot and arid from early spring. The round-up did not start until late, because the continued drouth kept the prairies brown. In July the short grass was dry and parched and many of the water holes had already dried up. Unprecedented heat also had its effect on the range. The temperature stood at one hundred to one hundred ten in the shade for days at a time and the accompanying hot winds aided in shriveling the small amount

¹ Merrill G. Burlingame, The Montana Frontier (Helena: State Publishing Company, 1942), p. 283.

of range growth.² But in spite of the unfavorable weather conditions cattle were brought into the eastern part of the state in undiminishing numbers and thrown on the already over-stocked ranges.³

As the cattle were not in good condition at the time of the fall round-up the situation was made even worse. Many stockmen decided to hold all the cattle they possibly could through the winter, and hoped for higher prices and better feed the following year. Their decision was reinforced by a steady decline in the Chicago cattle market. Southwestern cattlemen decided to get out of the business due to the lighter demands for stock cattle, and rushed their herds to market. Cattle sold in the fall of 1886 at the lowest figure in the history of the range--ten to fifteen dollars a head cheaper than in the preceding fall--and there was an abundance of the lower grades on the market due to the heavy turnoff of the weaker stock.⁴

Some of the big Montana cattlemen, in an attempt to forestall disaster, collected their less hardy animals into small herds of one to five hundred and drove them southwestward into the agricultural part of the state where they were let out on shares to small ranchers who had feed to spare.

² Granville Stuart, Forty Years on the Frontier (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1925), v. II, p. 231.

³ Ibid., p. 230.

⁴ Ernest Staples Osgood, The Day of the Cattleman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1929), p. 218.

This step was significant in that it presaged the change in methods which was to take place in the stock industry of the Northwest.⁵

The first severe snowstorm struck the range early in November and was accompanied by below-zero temperatures and a cutting northeast wind. In the latter part of the month a fall of snow came which was so deep that in many places the cattle could not get down to grass. About December 20 the sky cleared, and three weeks of warm, bright weather brought hope to the hearts of the stockmen. This hope flickered out, however, when a new storm began on January 9, 1887, and snow fell steadily for sixteen hours, leaving a fresh deposit of sixteen inches on the level. The higher ground, which was usually swept clear by the winter winds, remained covered with a deep blanket of snow which kept the cattle from the remaining short grass. The weather moderated during the latter part of the month, but the first week in February brought a new series of storms. While these were not so severe, they came at a time when the stock were least able to withstand them.

In March the chinook winds finally came and the snow disappeared quickly. Down the flooded streams came the carcasses of thousands of animals. The dead were stacked high in the coulees which had been piled full of snow and caught the drifting cattle. The remnants wandered about with frozen

⁵ Ibid., p. 219.

ears, tails, feet, and legs. A feeling of revulsion against the whole range system seized some of the cattlemen, of which one of the more prominent wrote,

"A business that had been fascinating to me before, suddenly became distasteful. I wanted no more of it. I never wanted to own again an animal that I could not feed and shelter."⁶

Overstocking the range combined with the unusually severe winter caused a loss of sixty per cent of the cattle of Eastern Montana and Western North Dakota, whereas the normal loss was about five per cent.⁷

Many of Wibaux's neighbors suffered critical losses during this winter. Gregor Lang, whose ranch was near the mouth of the Little Missouri River, lost 80-85 per cent. Hughes & Simpson, who operated in southeastern Montana, reported a loss of 70-80 per cent. The Berry-Boice Cattle Company, which ranged over southwestern North Dakota, suffered a loss of 90 per cent. And the Eaton Brothers, who were a few miles east of Medora, lost about 80 per cent.⁸

⁶ Stuart, op. cit., V. II, p. 221.

Information about the winter of 1886-87 has been drawn from Stuart, op. cit., V. II, pp. 234-37, Osgood, op. cit., pp. 220-21, Burlingame, op. cit., pp. 283-84, and E. C. Abbott, We Pointed Them North (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1939), pp. 206-18.

⁷ Kuhn, op. cit., pp. 158-59.

⁸ William B. Richter, "A Historical Study of Beef Bonanza Ranching in Billings County, Dakota Territory," (unpublished Master's thesis, The University of Montana, Missoula, Montana, 1941), pp. 107-8. Richter secured his information from the following sources: Gregor Lang's from Lincoln Lang's Ranching With Roosevelt, Hughes & Simpson's from an interview with General Marian Sweeney, a cowboy of the firm, Berry-Boice's from their foreman, Bill Follis, and Eaton Brothers' by cooperation of William Eaton.

Farther west in Montana the losses were nearly as severe. Nelson Story, whose cattle ranged in the Gallatin Valley, estimated his losses at seventy-fives per cent. Conrad Kohrs, whose stock ran in the sheltered Deer Lodge Valley, was more fortunate with a fifty per cent loss.⁹ Teddy Blue Abbott, who rode for Granville Stuart on his range east of Lewistown, wrote of the winter,

"Just to show the loss, we had branded by actual count 10,000 D. H. S. calves on the Flatwillow and Maginnis round-up in the spring and fall of '86; this meant, as we estimated, 40,000 cattle. On the spring round-up of '87 not 100 yearlings showed up, and on a rough count there were only 7,000 cattle all told, mostly steers and dry cows, and these were cattle raised on the Montana range. . . . The loss on trail cattle that had just come into the country was ninety per cent. Fully sixty per cent of all cattle in Montana were dead by March 15, 1887; . . ."10

The assessment lists for Montana had shown 663,716 cattle on the range in 1886, but for 1887 the figure had dropped to 471,171.¹¹ This would not give a true picture of the loss as the former figure does not include calves born after the assessment date and cattle shipped or trailed into the Territory during the summer of 1886.

The winter of 1886-87, which has gone into the records as the worst in history, has been indelibly impressed upon the minds of thousands by the remembrance of the gaunt critter standing and facing the elements alone

⁹ Burlingame, op. cit., p. 284.

¹⁰ Abbott, op. cit., p. 217.

¹¹ Burlingame, op. cit., p. 284.

as portrayed in Charles M. Russell's best known charcoal sketch, "The Last of Five Thousand."

There is no authentic record of the activity carried on at the W Ranch until the spring of 1887, and there are conflicting reports regarding its losses during the preceding winter.¹²

Pierre Wibaux had, by the fall of 1886, spent four summers in Montana and North Dakota and now, with complete confidence in the range, the weather, and himself, he felt there was only one more prerequisite before the profits started flowing in freely--capital for the expansion of his holdings. With this in mind he went to France in November,

¹² Crawford, op. cit., p. 497, states "He started then (in 1884 after the split with Grisy) with about 1,000 head of cattle, almost all of which he lost in the hard winter of 1886 and 1887." This information was secured in an interview with W. A. Orgain, who worked for Wibaux from 1888 to 1890. Orgain stated that "Wibaux's original bunch of cattle, about 1,000 head, nearly all died in the winter of 1886-7." (W. A. Orgain interview.)

John Brophy stated in an interview that the W went into the winter with 500 head and lost only ten per cent, as the herd was small and good range was available.

Probably more credence may be put in the latter due to an item in The Glendive (Montana) Times, July 14, 1883. "Grisy & Wibaux, of Beaver, have let the contract for the putting up of 160 tons of hay to Tommy Kean and John Butler, . . ." Even at this date they planned to carry insurance against the weather, at a time when most range stock owners planned to have their cattle pick their living all winter.

During the winter of 1886-87 Brophy lived only about fifteen miles from the W Ranch, while Orgain did not come to Montana until 1888.

It is certain that Wibaux, who spent the winter in France, was not discouraged by reports of his losses or the losses of his neighbors as he returned in the spring equipped with the capital necessary for expansion.

This was the only winter Mrs. Wibaux spent at the White House.

1886, and returned the following April, 1887, equipped with the resources necessary to seize the opportunity of his lifetime.¹³ The stories told of the previous winter did not shake his confidence in the Beaver Valley as an ideal stock producing section and he began at once to purchase all the remnants of former large herds that his capital would allow. Many cattle were bought at a very low price from ranchers who, discouraged and anxious to leave the range area and in many instances with their backs forced to the wall by creditors, sold their surviving stock at sacrifice prices. A great number were also bought of the

¹³ The Weekly Yellowstone Journal and Livestock Reporter, Miles City, Montana, Nov. 6, 1886. "Mr. Wibaux will go to France in a few days. . . ."

The Glendive (Montana) Times, April 23, 1887. "Pierre Wibaux has returned from France. . . ."

In regard to the amount of capital Wibaux brought from France, the statement of Kuhn, op. cit., is most generally told in Eastern Montana and finds support in other articles written about Wibaux.

"He secured a half million in France at the rate of 10 per cent. By the terms of the transaction no interest was to be paid until ten years later, when interest and principal would amount to one million." (p. 161.)

Crawford, op. cit., p. 498, is in fairly close agreement.

"It is said that Wibaux was able to borrow \$400,000 in France by promising to pay back the sum of \$1,000,000 at the end of ten years. The cattle business was profitable and this venture proved an entire success as he was able to repay all of his borrowed money and make considerable for himself."

The Glendive (Montana) Independent, June 20, 1896. "Mr. Wibaux invested the vast sum of \$500,000 in cattle and range improvements before any returns were received. . . ."

All the above indicate Wibaux returned from France with about a half million dollars but none state who the creditors were.

big concerns owned by eastern and foreign interests which had in some cases suffered a ninety per cent loss and whose owners were discouraged and anxious to salvage what they could of their original investments.

Wibaux, as a result of his ranching experience, knew that only the best and strongest cattle had been able to survive the rigors of the winter. He also knew that the range was no longer overstocked. The larger part of the remnants which he purchased was made up of the older steers as they had been able to struggle through the winter when the young steers, the calves, and most of the she stock froze or starved.¹⁴

There is no single complete record of the purchases made by Wibaux, but the procedure he followed can be ascertained by a study of contemporary newspaper accounts and the interviews of men who were living in the area at that time.

In May, 1887, he purchased the Hunter & Evans remnant, estimated at 15,000 head, at an average of \$22, and made a down payment on them.¹⁵ The round-up failed to

¹⁴ Most ranchers did not place their steers on the market until they were four years old. Although some she stock was raised and marketed, the percentage of fatalities was so high and the selling price was enough lower so that many preferred to ship in yearling steers, keep them three years, and market them, the profit coming from the gain in weight during the three years on the range. (Bill Follis interview. Follis was foreman of the 7 7 7 during this period.)

Andrew Larson, who came into Eastern Montana in 1892, states that steers three, four, or older were considered best for marketing.

¹⁵ The Glendive (Montana) Independent, May 28, 1887.

gather enough cattle to take care of the deposit, so he then took enough of their horse stock to cover the balance of the payment. Also in May, 1887, Wibaux purchased the remnant of the Running Water Land & Cattle Company, estimated at 10,000 to 20,000 head, which were located on the Big Dry.¹⁶

In 1888 some stock was purchased from the Hash Knife, of Southeastern Montana,¹⁷ and Wibaux also bought the FUF remnant, of near Forsyth, Montana, turning over to its former owner many of the horses taken in the Hunter & Evans deal. In 1889 he added to his range the stock of the Freuen Cattle Company, which was located in the Powder River country.¹⁸

The article adds, "These cattle have been graded up for the past eight years, and are the best bunch of cattle in eastern Montana."

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Whit Terrell, who came to Eastern Montana in 1881 or 1882, stated that Wibaux bought the remnant at \$17.50 a round with all calves thrown in.

The Armstrong interview states that Wibaux bought all the Hash Knife she stock.

The Orgain interview says simply that "He bought a bunch from the Hash Knife. . . ." Mr. Orgain was working for the Hash Knife at the time and delivered the stock to the W.

The Bill Follis interview says that Wibaux contracted for these remnants before the spring round-up at \$20 per head for all cattle brought in, and that he could have sold all he had that fall at \$30. Instead he sold only the beef cattle, which netted him \$40 to \$45 per head above their cost, and thus paid for the 16,000 head which remained on his range, "so he told me himself he figured he had 16,000 head of cattle free, and with range costing him nothing, he made quite a fortune." The advance in price was the natural result of the heavy stock losses of the preceding winter.

¹⁸ Crawford, op. cit., p. 498, and Orgain interview.

Early in the spring of 1889 a study of conditions convinced Wibaux that the bottom was about to fall out of the horse market, and once more he seized the golden opportunity which presented itself. He sold his entire stock of horses, 630 head including colts, to the Green Mountain Ranching Company of Forsyth, Montana, at \$60 apiece, and in turn bought their entire brand of cattle, amounting to between 3,000 and 5,000 head.¹⁹ Two months later he purchased all the stock of the Powder River Cattle Company, one of the largest English syndicates in America, at \$18.50 a head with calves thrown in. The number of cattle in this purchase was estimated at 10,000 head, and 300 head of saddle horses were included in the deal at the same price.²⁰ Wibaux also purchased the Wrench brand, which was located on the Red Water, of Gunnell, and undoubtedly picked up many other small remnants as rapidly as they became available. By 1890 he had accumulated 40,000 head of cattle and in that year he branded 10,000 calves.²¹

The Wibaux fortune was built as a result of the misfortunes of men and cattle companies which lacked either financial resources or a faith in the range, and therefore disposed of their stock interests as a result of the winter of 1886-87.

¹⁹ The Glendive (Montana) Independent, April 6, 1889, June 20, 1896. Shortly after this deal the horse market fell to a point below \$30 a head.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Orgain interview. Crawford, op. cit., p. 497, states that "His branding in 1890 to 1892 ran 10,000 to 12,000 a year."

CHAPTER VI.

The disastrous losses incurred by most of the stockmen of the range area as a result of the winter of 1886-87 resulted in a shortage of beef supply, and beef cattle prices remained appreciably higher for the following three years.

Nelson Morris, the well known Chicago packer, decided that prices were going to continue to rise and conceived the idea of contracting for a large number of western range cattle for fall delivery. In the summer of 1890 he sent buyers into the range stock area to make purchases on what he thought was a rising market. Wibaux contracted to sell him all his steers which were three years and older, about 8,000 head, at \$45 and dry cows at \$20 a head delivered at the stockyards in Wibaux. Morris paid about \$25,000 down on the contract.¹

Between the summer, when the contract was entered into, and the shipping season, cattle prices slumped rather badly. Morris succeeded in getting some of the sellers to compromise, and others to annul their contracts entirely. He offered Wibaux \$25,000 for his contract, but the offer was rejected.²

When the shipping season arrived Wibaux began to load out cattle under the terms of the contract. Morris

¹ Crawford, op. cit., p. 499, The Glendive (Montana) Independent, June 20, 1896, The Yellowstone Journal, Miles City, Montana, Sept. 27, 1900.

² Orgain interview.

accepted the first 6,800 head and then refused to receive the balance called for in his agreement, as he claimed the stock was not marketable. Wibaux had provided for this contingency by having the cattle viewed both before they were shipped and after their arrival in Chicago by men who were known to be good judges of range stock. He continued to round up and make delivery as provided by the terms of the contract and, as rapidly as the cattle were turned down by Morris, they were sold on the Chicago market for whatever they would bring. As soon as the delivery of all the stock contracted for was completed Wibaux brought suit against Morris for the difference between the price he had agreed to pay for the cattle in Montana and that which they netted on the Chicago market.

The suit which followed was watched very closely by every packer and every cattleman in the country. After five years of litigation, in which the suit was carried from the district court to the appellate court and from the appellate court to the Illinois Supreme Court, Morris was forced to pay Wibaux an amount variously stated as \$62,000 to \$80,000. And in addition Morris had to pay all the expenses involved in the suit.³

³ Crawford, op. cit., p. 499, The Glendive (Montana) Independent, June 20, 1896, The Yellowstone Journal, Miles City, Montana, Sept. 27, 1900, the Orgain interview.

The Dickinson (North Dakota) Press, Oct. 19, 1895,

indicates the sentiment of the range country regarding the suit.

"PIERRE WIBAUX, the largest individual cattle owner in North Dakota, has won a \$75,000 suit against Nelson Morris, the millionaire packer of Chicago. Morris contracted in 1890 to take all cattle of a certain grade at a stated price. When it came time to ship the market was down and Morris refused to accept the cattle. Wibaux is not the kind of man to submit to such doings and has pushed his case to a successful finish."

The Eva MacLean manuscript, Wibaux County, Collection on Pierre Wibaux, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana, gives an interesting sidelight on the suit.

"After retaining legal advisors the ranchman gathered in a passenger car full of cowboys and took them to Chicago, where the suit was to be tried, as witnesses.

"'Have a good time, boys,' he told them, 'spend as much as you like. That company will pay for your entertainment.'

"The boys needed no urging, and when Wibaux won the suit, the packing company was forced to pay an enormous bill for 'expenses' of the witnesses."

W. A. Orgain stated in an interview, "I was a witness in the lawsuit in both the district court and the trial court and was in Chicago for six weeks. Johnny Towers was also a witness."

CHAPTER VII.

WIBAUX AND THE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

A study of the proceedings of the County Commissioners of Billings County, North Dakota, and Dawson County, Montana, reveals that practically all the ranchers, including Theodore Roosevelt, appeared before one of the Boards at some time or other in an attempt to secure a reduction or an abatement in their personal property tax. With the rancher continually buying and selling stock it was difficult for county officials to keep an accurate count on which the assessment might be based. Cattle were often brought into Billings County, as an example, on which a Minnesota county had already placed an assessment and collected the tax for the year. As the cattle were often allowed to roam very freely they were sometimes spotted by the assessor of a neighboring county in his assessment area, and the Billings County owner might be surprised a few weeks later to find a tax notice from Stark County in his mail. Of course it cannot be denied that in many cases cattle were encouraged by their owners to stray into a neighboring county as assessment time approached.

As the W Ranch lay astride the state line and about half its acreage was in Dawson County, Montana, and the

¹ This chapter is based on the county records of Billings County, North Dakota, and notes on the Board of County Commissioners' meetings as they appeared in The Glendive (Montana) Independent, which was the official paper of Dawson County, Montana, during most of the period studied. The county records of Dawson County were not opened so that a study could be made of them.

other half in Billings County, North Dakota, it is not surprising that the name of Pierre Wibaux appears frequently in the proceedings of the county commissioners of both counties. However a study of the records does not appear to bear out the following statement which appeared in a recent thesis:

"Especially were the big outfits guilty of tax evasion, and among these, the most offensive was Pierre Wibaux. The County Commissioner's Records are full of notations of his attempt to evade taxes and to obtain tax abatements."²

This paper further states that Wibaux drove cattle into Billings County in the late fall or early winter and rounded them up and returned them to Fallon County, Montana, in the spring, thus having them out of each county at the time its assessment was made.³ This statement is concluded by saying that the Billings County officials of 1890-91 terminated such action on the part of Pierre Wibaux.

The official minutes of the meetings of the Billings County Commissioners do not seem to support this point of view. On December 12, 1890, the commissioners decided to hold a meeting in the following month to which ranchers dissatisfied with their assessments were invited to come

² William B. Richter, op. cit., p. 30.

³ Ibid. Fallon County had not been created at this time. The writer meant Dawson County.

None of Wibaux's contemporaries made any statement which throws suspicion on Wibaux's honesty. He was always able to secure a compromise favorable to himself when he appeared before the commissioners.

so that the cases might be arbitrated.⁴ As Pierre Wibaux was among those who felt their assessments were too high, it was moved "Also that Wibaux be notified by the auditor of the same meeting and requested to send an arbitrator." Sylvane Ferris, at one time foreman for Theodore Roosevelt, was appointed arbitrator to represent the county.⁵

At the next meeting, which was held January 5, 1891, the following action was taken: "On motion Geo. W Towers was appointed arbitrator to confer with S. M. Ferris and B. Lawles in tax case of Pierre Wibaux."⁶ By the second day following the arbitrators had been able to agree on a solution as the minutes read, "Moved by Woodman seconded and carried that arbitrators estimate of 1500 head of cattle, in case of Pierre Wibaux, be accepted."⁷

That this same Board of Commissioners of Billings County sharply turned down Wibaux's requests for abatements

⁴ Book 1, Minutes of Billings County Commissioners, Billings County, North Dakota, p. 61.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., Jan. 5, 1891, p. 62.

The B. Lawles noted was Ben Lawlis, foreman of the W and Wibaux's arbitrator. The customary procedure in arbitration was for each party to choose an arbitrator and the two thus selected to choose a third party satisfactory to both sides. The wording in the minutes indicates that the Commissioners appointed a third party satisfactory to the other two in this case.

⁷ Ibid., Jan. 7, 1891, p. 63.

would seem to be refuted by the following:

"On motion the application of Pierre Wibaux for the abolition of taxes for the year 1887 and the correction of assessment and abatement of taxes for the year 1890 were signed and recommended the reduction and abatement desired."⁸

The relations between Wibaux and the commissioners of Billings County appear to have been harmonious in general. In 1894 he applied for a reduction of assessment and the application was granted.⁹ In July, 1897, his assessment was increased from 9,600 head of cattle to 12,000 head, but when Wibaux appeared before a later meeting to protest the increase his assessment was dropped to 7,000 head.¹⁰ Again in 1899 the Board increased Wibaux's assessment, this time by 4,500 head, but at a meeting eleven days later the "Board on motion decided, in view of all facts and circumstances in connection with assessment of Pierre Wibaux to accept return as made by Mr. Wibaux. . . ." ¹¹ Again in 1900 the minutes show that "On motion the assessment of Pierre Wibaux was left as returned by him."¹² Evidently the commissioners regarded Wibaux as a man who was trustworthy and whose sworn statement could be accepted as the

⁸ Ibid., Nov. 18, 1891, p. 72.

⁹ Ibid., Jan. 2, 1894, p. 101, and Oct. 1, 1894, p. 115. The minutes for the latter date read, "Application of P. Wibaux for reduction of the tax 1893 came up for action and was on motion recommended."

¹⁰ Ibid., July 8, 1897, p. 168 and July 16, 1897, p. 172.

¹¹ Ibid., July 7, 1899, p. 227 and July 18, 1899, p. 235.

¹² Ibid., July 26, 1900, p. 260.

truth.

In the light of the above it is difficult to understand the proceedings of August and September, 1901, which are best told by the minutes.

"L. A. Simpson appeared before the Board on behalf of Pierre Wibaux asking that an abatement be made in taxes by said county assessed against said Pierre Wibaux for the years 1897, 1898, 1899, and 1900 in the aggregate amounting to \$5245.05--upon property belonging to and claimed by said county to be therein said taxes for the years 1897, and 1898 having been paid--claiming on behalf of Mr. Wibaux that said taxes were excessive in that said property was not thus taxable by said county and requesting that taxes thus assessed for the years 1899 and 1900 be cancelled."¹³

The matter was taken under advisement for further consideration and on the following day the board appointed Commissioner Stoddard to represent the county in making an adjustment of the Wibaux taxes.¹⁴

On September 2 the matter was discussed further with Simpson present to represent Wibaux. The result was the adoption of a resolution which stated the taxes appeared to be excessive and the county treasurer was

"authorized and directed to accept from the said Pierre Wibaux the sum of (605⁰⁰) six hundred five dollars, in full for all demands of said County for taxes of every kind and nature whatsoever for all years prior to and including the current year of 1901 . . . (for) all taxes, interest, and penalties assessed against the said Pierre Wibaux."¹⁵

Wibaux's relations with the Board of County Com-

¹³ Ibid., Aug. 30, 1901, p. 295.

¹⁴ Ibid., Aug. 31, 1901, p. 296.

¹⁵ Ibid., Sept. 2, 1901, p. 297.

missioners of Dawson County, Montana, are very similar to the above. In 1889 the commissioners, meeting as a Board of Equalization, took the following action as recorded in The Glendive Independent:

"On motion the Board reduced the assessment of Pierre Wibaux from 5,000 head of cattle, (\$90,000) revised at previous meeting to 340 head of cattle, of the same being the Oscar Ward and Deering Cattle Company's cattle, Mr. Wibaux having proved to the satisfaction of the Board that the above amount of cattle was all he had in Dawson county."¹⁶

In 1891 the Board of County Commissioners acted as follows:

"On motion the assessment of Pierre Wibaux was reduced as follows:

| | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1000 head cattle @ \$15.00 pr hd | \$15,000 00 |
| 3 stallions @ \$250 | <u>750 00</u> |
| Total reduction | \$15,750 00" ¹⁷ |

Wibaux appeared before the Board of Equalization in August, 1893, but the minutes as published contain no record of any action taken in regard to his properties. However in the July, 1894, term of the District Court Wibaux brought suit against Alex. S. Gillespie, the Dawson County Treasurer, which was taken under advisement until the October term. At that time it was announced that a settlement had been effected through the Board of County Commissioners with Wibaux to pay taxes on 4,500 head of cattle for 1893 and the same for 1894 and the case to be dismissed at the plaintiff's cost.¹⁸ The

¹⁶ The Glendive (Montana) Independent, Oct. 12, 1889.

¹⁷ Ibid., July 25, 1891.

¹⁸ Ibid., Aug. 4 and Nov. 3, 1894.

The commissioners took the following action on November 13, 1894:

"On motion the clerk was instructed to notify the treasurer that the Board has made a rebate on the tax of Pierre Wibaux for the year 1893 from 6000 head of cattle to 4500 head of cattle, and for the year 1894, from 5500 head of cattle to 4500 head of cattle and the treasurer is hereby instructed to receipt for the same, at that rate."¹⁹

In his only other appearance before the Dawson County Commissioners Wibaux presented the petition of the citizens of the town of Wibaux requesting a jail building and a deputy sheriff. The result was that "The petition was granted and the jail will be built in the near future."²⁰ As previous petitions for a jail and a deputy had been either denied or tabled for later action and as a subsequent report shows that a deputy was appointed and a jail was built, it appears that Wibaux did have influence with the commissioners.

The records fail to indicate any ill feeling between Wibaux and the commissioners of either Dawson or Billings County. Like all taxpayers of his day, as well as those of the present time, Wibaux disliked paying taxes which he felt were levied unjustly. And each time he asked for a rebate or an abatement he secured a reduction in his tax, thus indicating that justice must have been at least partially on his side.

During the five year period from 1897 to 1901, when

¹⁹ Ibid., Nov. 17, 1894.

²⁰ Ibid., June 10, 1899.

Wibaux was one of the heaviest taxpayers of Dawson County, there is no record of any attempt on his part to secure a reduction by making a plea to the County Board of Equalization.²¹

A close study of the records makes it difficult to build a case against Pierre Wibaux as one who sought tax reductions and abatements in order to evade his just obligations to the counties in which he owned property.

²¹ Wibaux's personal property tax during this period was as follows:

| Year | Amount of Tax | Rank among taxpayers of Dawson County |
|------|---------------|--|
| 1897 | \$ 2437.99 | 4th |
| 1898 | 3520.39 | 3rd |
| 1899 | 1886.94 | 5th |
| 1900 | 1963.45 | 6th |
| 1901 | 1900.32 | 7th |

The total tax paid for these five years is \$11,709.09.

The above information appears in The Glendive (Montana) Independent, Oct. 2, 1897, Sept. 24, 1898, Sept. 30, 1899, Oct. 20, 1900, and Oct. 12, 1901.

CHAPTER VIII.

WIBAUX AS A PROGRESSIVE RANCHER

A study of the methods used by most of the "beef bonanza" ranchers of Eastern Montana and Western North Dakota proves that Pierre Wibaux was one of the more progressive of the large scale ranchers in his day. The common practice at the time was for the rancher to pick up whatever stock he could, turn them loose on the range, and each fall ship the matured beef to market.¹

Pierre Wibaux studied the fluctuations of the cattle market in an attempt to find the type of cattle in greatest demand and the best time for shipment. He tried to improve the quality of both his cattle and horses by buying the best sires available and, before it was generally recognized that Montana could satisfactorily be used as a breeding country, Wibaux attempted to raise his own calves so that he could avoid the necessity of shipping in all his beef stock. And, at great personal expense, Wibaux carried on a campaign against two natural enemies of the stockman--prairie fires and wolves--and tried to secure the cooperation of neighboring ranchers against them.

The evidence which Wibaux accumulated during his first three years on the range convinced him the better grade of stock was ready for market earlier in the season

¹ That little attention was paid to the types of stock is evidenced by the appearance of thousands of Texas longhorns on the range in the state line area. They were a menace to the small rancher as, having acquired the habit of wandering, they frequently scattered his small herds. In 1883 a bill was passed prohibiting Texas cattle east of the Missouri River. (Kuhn, op. cit., p. 158.)

and was thus able to reach the Chicago stockyards before the heavier shipments caused a severe market decline. With this in mind he showed a decided preference for Shorthorns when making his purchases following the winter of 1886-87.² His most serious effort to improve his stock was in 1897 when he added a group of sires far above the level of the typical range bull.

"The biggest purchase of bulls ever made by any western stockman is being made in Canada by Pierre Wibaux, the wealthy North Dakota and Montana cattleman, who has placed contracts for the purchase of 350 Shorthorn bulls from Canadian breeders, for his western ranches, where he will ship them next spring. . . . His contracts for bulls call for registered stock, with strains recorded in English brand books."³

Pierre Wibaux may thus be given credit for improving the quality of beef produced in the entire area, as later sales of this stock to other ranchers exercised an influence toward grading up Montana range cattle.

That Wibaux realized the value of well bred stock is also illustrated by his purchase in 1899 of over 4,000 head of two-year-old steers at Amarillo from a breeder who used nothing but thoroughbred Hereford bulls.⁴ Although he could have picked up ordinary range cattle at a lower price Wibaux knew that good stock would gain weight faster and bring a higher price per hundred on the market. Wibaux's herds

² Armstrong interview.

³ The Dickinson (North Dakota) Press, Feb. 13, 1897. Crawford, op. cit., p. 498, tells of the same purchase but places the number of bulls at 500.

⁴ The Glendive (Montana) Independent, July 8, 1899.

were predominantly Hereford or Shorthorn at the time his ranching interests were closed out in the Beaver Valley.⁵

Wibaux knew from his observations that if stock could be brought through the winter in good shape they would be ready for the market earlier in the fall. Probably he had observed this while visiting the Chicago or Sioux City stockyards and while purchasing stock in the Central States where winter feeding was the rule. It is known that, during its first summer of operation, the firm of Grisy & Wibaux contracted to have hay put up for winter use, and this was at a time when most ranchers still believed the cattle should shift for themselves the year around.⁶

Wibaux raised the first alfalfa in the Beaver Valley and this was probably the first in Eastern Montana, as the following news item was not answered.

"Will any of our neighbors in the Yellowstone Valley or elsewhere in the county (Dawson) tell us of their experience with the tillage of alfalfa as a hay crop? We know of no one who has tried it in the Beaver Valley excepting Pierre Wibaux, who sowed about forty acres in 1887, and reports several good crops in the early nineties."⁷

As a general rule, however, hay was given only to the bulls so that they would be in an improved condition for the

⁵ Interviews with Thomas Lihen and J. Ross Calvin, an associate in the Calvin Investment Company which bought out the interests of the W Ranch.

⁶ The Glendive (Montana) Times, July 14, 1883.

⁷ The Glendive (Montana) Independent, May 5, 1900. Thomas Rush stated in an interview in 1936 that the first alfalfa field in the community was a twenty acre field at the W Ranch.

breeding season.⁸

That Wibaux's methods paid is demonstrated by the fact that he topped the Chicago market on many occasions. In August, 1888, he sold a consignment of steers averaging 1392 pounds at \$5.00, the highest price paid for any Montana stock sold at that time, while three weeks later he sold three hundred six beeves, averaging 1371 pounds, for \$5.10. For the season of 1888 he shipped 2,300 beeves to market, receiving the highest prices paid for any Montana stock and averaging better prices than any other Montana stockgrower.⁹ In 1889 Wibaux shipped the first train load of Montana beeves to market on July 11, and followed with another train load on July 19. The stock were reported to be in excellent condition for shipment, and Keenan & Son, Chicago commission merchants, stated the former shipment was the first consignment of western cattle to reach the market for the season and were a month ahead of the first shipment of the previous year. The steers in this shipment averaged 1,325 pounds and brought \$3.65. A shipment of Texas steers sold on the same market at prices ranging from \$2.25 to \$3.25 and their average weights were 1,050 to 1,200 pounds.¹⁰ Wibaux topped the market again in 1898 with a consignment of steers

⁸ Thomas Lihen interview.

⁹ The Glendive (Montana) Independent, Aug. 18, Sept. 8, and Nov. 3, 1888.

¹⁰ Ibid., July 13, 20, and 27, 1889.

averaging 1,278 pounds which sold at \$4.65.¹¹

There are few records available regarding the prices for which Wibaux stock was sold, but those which can be found show that his cattle usually sold at the top price or approached it very closely.

Wibaux, unlike most cattlemen, thought Montana ranchers should keep breeding stock and establish facilities to produce their own young rather than rely on the importation of yearling steers to be turned onto the range. He ran mixed cattle from the beginning, and in the nineties had more she stock than anyone else in the area.¹²

While in partnership with Gus Grisy, Wibaux made important moves to improve the quality of the horse stock. In 1884 "six very fine horses" were bought from the Marquis de Mores, and thirty head of Kentucky horses were purchased for use on the ranch.¹³ A month later the firm bought sixty Texas mares and two thorough-bred Kentucky stallions and made the claim that it had the finest stallions in Montana Territory.¹⁴ In the following year two of the mares were valued at over \$1,000 each.¹⁵ It appears that Wibaux was trying to combine the toughness of the Texas cow pony with the beauty and speed of the Kentucky horses.

¹¹ Ibid., Aug. 20, 1898.

¹² Armstrong interview.

¹³ The Glendive (Montana) Times, May 31, 1884.

¹⁴ Ibid., July 5, 1884.

¹⁵ Ibid., April 10, 1885.

Wibaux greatly improved his horse herd, and also gave the ranchers of the Beaver Valley an opportunity to do likewise, with a purchase which was chronicled as follows:

"Another valuable addition has been made to the horse interests of Dawson county by Pierre Wibaux, who has just received six valuable stallions. At their head is an imported Norman, 6 years old and weighing 1900; then follows a thoroughbred Clydesdale and four graded Normans and Clydesdales. This stud has been much needed at Minguaville and the people are fortunate in having Mr. Wibaux take hold of the matter, and thus keep them well up in the front rank."¹⁶

Wibaux seems to have been the first rancher of Eastern Montana to make a serious effort to combat the two great natural enemies of the cattle on the range--wolves and prairie fires.

Wolves, now a curiosity in Eastern Montana, were plentiful in the 1890's and did uncounted damage to the stock raising industry. Pierre Wibaux, knowing that a cooperative effort was necessary to reduce the menace, tried to waken other ranchers by the following notice which was published in The Glendive Independent on October 21, 1893:

"Let me also suggest that unless we want the wolves to drive us out of the country every outfit should afford to buy strychnine at a wholesale price and furnish it free of charge to every settler, hunter and other experienced men wishing to use it next winter. Wolves will travel and in destroying them . . . combined efforts are necessary in order to obtain the desired result."¹⁷

¹⁶ The Glendive (Montana) Independent, May 18, 1889.

¹⁷ Ibid., Oct. 21, 1893.

That wolves were a serious menace is emphasized by an article inserted beneath Wibaux's notice:

Wibaux's efforts were referred to when, in the next year, the same paper reminded its readers that the previous meeting of the Stockgrowers' Association had recommended each round-up employ a man whose sole duty would be to kill wolves.

"One round-up at least fell in line and adopted the idea with great success. We refer to the south-east side round-up, controlled principally by Pierre Wibaux, who has employed two men, and at the time the round-up was camped at Glendive Creek the results were sixty pelts of old ones besides a large number of pups."¹⁸

Wibaux kept a large wolfing outfit of his own on the W which, in later years, aided in decreasing the wolf menace.¹⁹ In addition he paid hunters a bounty of \$5 and \$2.50 respectively for wolf and pup skins.²⁰ If other ranchers had made the effort to fight wolves which was made

"Wolves are becoming more plentiful on the ranges of Dawson county than ever before. From all sides come the news of cattle, horses and sheep being pulled down by wolves who are becoming bold enough to unheed the approach of men on horseback."

¹⁸ Ibid., June 9, 1894. The item adds that Wibaux stated he should have branded at least 3,000 calves but would be lucky to brand 800 for the year due to the destruction by the wolves.

¹⁹ Ibid., Dec. 4, 1897.
 "The W keep the largest wolfing outfit on the range in Montana, having over fifty of the best wolf hounds that are bred in their kennels, who keep the range fairly free from wolves and coyotes."

The Wibaux (Montana) Pioneer-Gazette, Anniversary Edition, August, 1899.

"He (Wibaux) also had a camp at which he stationed a wolfer with about one hundred dogs. The dogs were kept in enclosures or stockades and packs of them run on alternate days."

²⁰ The Glendive (Montana) Independent, June 20, 1896.

by Wibaux many cattle and sheep would have been saved, and the wolf would have disappeared from the plains of Eastern Montana much earlier than it did.

The prevention and control of prairie fires offered as serious a problem to the ranchers as did the wolves. Fires, which might sweep on for days burning all the feed before them, made impossible the survival of large numbers of stock. Destructive blazes occurred in almost every year, but one of the worst was that of August, 1889. The Glendive Independent stated of this,

"Everything indicates that the fires are incendiary in origin and set out for a purpose. At least forty men are at work trying to extinguish the fire, and Pierre Wibaux is hiring all the men he can get at \$2.50 per day. About twenty-five square miles have been burned already, and the end is not yet."²¹

It was estimated that two-thirds of the range in the Beaver Valley was burned over by this fire and stockmen, already a little anxious as to the outcome of the winter, advised anyone seeking a new location not to come into that section.²²

Pierre Wibaux attempted a few years later to secure the cooperation of the ranchers in fighting prairie fires by publication of a notice in The Glendive Independent which called attention to losses suffered previously. He also mentioned a piece of fire-fighting equipment he had devised and which could be purchased locally.

"A good many years in the cattle business has taught

²¹ Ibid., Aug. 10, 1889.

²² Ibid., Nov. 2, 1889.

me that the numerous prairie fires that burn up our ranges during a few months of the year are the greatest drawback to the cattle industry. You are aware that if one of our ranges burns we have either to let our cattle starve or crowd our neighbors. The way ranges are now stocked this means starvation for the cattle and ruin for their owner. It occurs to me that we ought to do everything in our power to protect ourselves and join in the good work. I have for a number of years tried to find some device to put out said fires when started. I have succeeded in constructing a fire drag made of chains that I guarantee to give satisfaction. It is the best thing that has been brought out, it is handy to pack, it is not heavy to drag and will put out fire as fast as two horses can travel.

"Thinking that it will be of mutual benefit to all cattlemen I propose to have a number of these drags made this winter and will deliver them at cost, that is thirty-five (\$35.00) dollars a piece at the depot in Mingusville.

"The old way of slaughtering cattle, besides being unsatisfactory, is very expensive. These drags will pay for themselves the first fire and can be carried in bed wagons on the round-up and scattered all over the range where they can be reached in a short time.

"If you wish to try one send your order and \$35 to Cannon & Orgain, Mingusville, Montana, and a better investment you could not make."²³

Pierre Wibaux is revealed by a study of newspaper accounts and articles written by his contemporaries as a progressive rancher who believed in raising stock cattle when others raised only beef cattle, who put up hay when others depended entirely on the range to keep their stock through the winter, who tried to place finished stock on the market early in the season so that he could beat the falling market induced by later heavy shipments, and who

²³ Ibid., Oct. 21, 1893. One of these drags can still be seen at the old Lihen Ranch, southwest of Wibaux, Montana.

The old method of putting out fires was to kill an animal, split it, tie a rope to the foreleg and another to the hindleg of a half, and have men on horses drag the half a beef over the flames.

fought fires and wolves at his own expense while at the same time he attempted to get others to cooperate in combating these natural enemies of the livestock producer.



PIERRE WIBAUX

from a pencil sketch

in

The Glendive (Montana) Independent

June 20, 1896.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LAST YEARS OF THE W RANCH

The winter of 1886-87, which ruined many of the ranchers of the Great Plains area, was the direct cause of the growth of Wibaux's investment into a small fortune. But had Wibaux been less well fixed financially the winter of 1896-97 might have ruined him as the one a decade before had broken many of his contemporaries.

Convinced that larger profits might be derived from keeping his own stock cattle, rather than from importing young steers to fatten, Wibaux contracted for 10,000 head of Utah cows and calves from Green & Badger in the winter of 1896. Although the first shipment arrived in mid-June, 1897, the final delivery was not completed until in August.¹ The range was in good condition, but the cattle which arrived late were not in shape to face the winter and were not acclimated. To make conditions worse a severe storm hit the range in the latter part of November.² Pierre Wibaux came from the East in December to look over the range and see how his cows and calves that were turned out the

¹ The Dickinson (North Dakota) Press, June 20, 1896.
"Pierre Wibaux received two train loads of cows and calves on the 15th inst. and they are the finest stock that has ever been received at these yards. . . . The above stock is a part of the ten thousand head which Green & Badger are to furnish Mr. Wibaux this season."

The Glendive (Montana) Independent, Aug. 1, 1896.
"Mr. Wibaux is just finishing receiving the ten thousand cattle contracted for last winter."

² Ibid., Jan. 2, 1897.

preceding fall were standing the weather. He reported that the loss was very light considering the weather conditions thus far.³

With the coming of spring the Dickinson Press contained very discouraging news. The Wibaux correspondent for the Miles City Journal was quoted as saying the stock loss was much greater than it had been at any time since 1886-87.⁴ But Pierre Wibaux stated in the same issue:

"On my range the grass crop was excellent last fall and cattle never entered the winter in better condition. November was a bad month, but December and January were all one could desire; in fact, December was the best month on record for a great many years. I personally rode over the range the beginning of January: There were no losses whatever and never did I see cattle in better shape at that time of the year. February was a hard month on cattle, but the amount of snow on my range or farther west never exceeded ten inches on the level. I was in Montana the end of February. A few old cows died that were expected to die anyway. I saw cattle all through the Bad Lands; they were strong and doing well. I went to Miles City and as far as Helena, and the general impression was that the winter so far had been most favorable to stock. I am aware that from the first to the fifteenth of March the weather was unusually cold for that time of the year. Cattle were getting weaker every day and this caused some anxiety among cattlemen. On the 15th, however, we had a change for the better and since then the snow has been melting every day."⁵

³ Ibid.

⁴ Dickinson (North Dakota) Press, March 27, 1897.

⁵ Ibid. The same paper contains the following item of interest:

"The Chicago Inter-Ocean states that Pierre Wibaux put in 250,000 young cattle last fall and that they are all dead. This seems a little ridiculous as Mr. Wibaux probably runs a little less than 100,000 cattle on his range and what he put in last fall was a herd of about

By mid-April the snow was gone and grass was making its appearance rapidly as the result of twelve days of cloudy and showery weather. Everyone had an opinion as to the losses suffered in the cattle herds during the winter, but they varied from twenty to sixty per cent, while estimates on Wibaux's losses ran from ten per cent to "big."⁶

It appears possible that Wibaux's losses in the Utah stock may have been larger than he was willing to admit as during the remainder of the years in which the W operated his tendency was to dispose of the stock and calves and to buy Texas steers.

Wibaux's private secretary and agent, Emil (Jack) Serruys, went to Texas in April, 1899, with the plan of looking over several groups of steers and buying about 10,000 head. In May Wibaux announced his intention to stock up with Texas steers and that he had already arranged

10,000 Utah cows. Undoubtedly the loss in this stock has been very large--perhaps 50 to 70 per cent. It is probable, however, that the loss among his old cattle has not been one-half as great."

⁶ Ibid., April 17, May 1, 1897.

A news item in The Glendive (Montana) Independent, April 10, 1897, states that Wibaux and his foreman, J. E. Lawlis, were in Glendive and reported the W loss would not run over 25 per cent. They had thought earlier it would be over 50 per cent, but careful count had shown the loss to be less than half that. Possibly this was due to the Utah cattle making up only a small proportion of the herd.

Bill Follis, foreman for the 7 7 7, stated that Wibaux "Lost heavily on cattle in 1897-8. The Utah cattle were shipped in late in September, not in such good condition for winter. . . . Wibaux was the only one I knew of who had big losses in the winter of 1897-98." (Mr. Follis was in

for a large herd.⁷ Wibaux went to Texas in June and received delivery of 4,049 two-year-old steers at Amarillo, from where they were shipped to Moorcroft, Wyoming, over the Burlington and then driven to the Dawson County range.⁸

In the fall of 1899 Wibaux sold all his range cows and calves to John B. Holt of Miles City in a sale spoken of as one of the largest in Eastern Montana for years.⁹ And about two months later Jack Serruys was again on his way to Texas where he spent the winter buying cattle for Wibaux.¹⁰ In February he purchased 3,500 head of steers from Reynolds Brothers at \$19 for yearlings and \$23 for two-year-olds with delivery to be made in the spring.¹¹ Due to the fires which had destroyed the range between Smith Creek and the Missouri River and to the bands of transient sheep which had consumed much of the remaining grass, Wibaux announced in June that he would have to sell

error as to the date of this winter as indicated by the stories of the severity of the weather and the shipment of Utah cattle.)

W. A. Ogden agreed that many of the Utah cattle were lost.

⁷ The Glendive (Montana) Independent, April 29 and May 27, 1899.

⁸ Ibid. The Independent states that 1800 of these were branded on the first day after unloading them at Moorcroft, "a record the boys are proud of."

⁹ Ibid., Sept. 16, 1899.

¹⁰ Ibid., Nov. 4, 1899.

¹¹ Ibid., Feb. 24, 1900.

these cattle as soon as they were delivered "as there is no range on this side of the Yellowstone River for them."¹²

It was evidently at this time that Wibaux decided to make use of some of the very thinly occupied range area in the triangle formed by the Missouri, Yellowstone, and Musselshell Rivers as a news item in July states that these steers were trailed from Billings into the Big Dry country.¹³ In the spring of 1901 Wibaux received four more train loads of Texas cattle, probably 4,000 to 5,000 head, in Billings via the Burlington and they, too, were driven to the Dawson County range on the north side of the Yellowstone.¹⁴

At about the same time the W round-up gathered all Wibaux's cattle on the south side of the Yellowstone and held them on Glendive Creek. Weather conditions had slowed the growth of range feed and, unless range conditions improved, Wibaux planned to ship all his stock.¹⁵ In the latter part of June all the she stock and calves were sold to Frank W. Smith, proprietor of the Edge Hill Ranch with headquarters about fifteen miles south of the town of Wibaux, and the following item appeared in The Glendive Independent:

"Pierre Wibaux will close out his cattle interests in the eastern part of Dawson county this season, having disposed of his cows and calves, and all the other cattle will be marketed. Mr. Wibaux will confine his stock

¹² Ibid., June 2, 1900.

¹³ Ibid., July 28, 1900.

¹⁴ Ibid., June 15, 1901.

¹⁵ Ibid., May 18, 1901.

interests to the northwestern part in the future, where he has at present in the neighborhood of 10,000 Texas steers."¹⁶

As he shipped out a large number of cattle in the fall of 1901 and as later newspapers fail to mention any W stock on the range to the south of the Yellowstone, it may be assumed that 1901 marked the end of operation of the W Ranch on the Little Missouri Slope.¹⁷

After closing out in that section Wibaux expanded his herds in the northwestern part of Dawson County, making use of the range on both the Big Dry and Redwater Creek. He made his headquarters on the present site of

¹⁶ Ibid., June 29, 1901.

The next issue makes a correction of this and states that Smith simply became manager of the Wibaux interests, that a large cattle company was being organized which would run more cattle than ever before in the area, that Wibaux would remain the headquarters of the new corporation, and that Pierre Wibaux would retain an interest in the company. Later events indicate the original item was closer to the truth than the correction was.

¹⁷ Items in two other papers bear out this contention.

Dawson County Review, Glendive, Montana, Oct. 3, 1901. "Pierre Wibaux wound up this season's shipment of cattle Friday last, with the exception of a few carloads that he is holding for the late market. This closes the cattle interests of Mr. Wibaux in the immediate vicinity of Wibaux."

The Billings (Montana) Gazette, April 25, 1902, noted that the number of cattle on the ranges of Eastern Montana had increased to a larger number than at any time since the 1880's, but that the day of the large outfit was past and most of the cattle were by that time held by small owners who had only a few hundred head and could corral their herds easily. Pierre Wibaux's outfit, the largest remaining in that part of the state, had been forced to move to the Big Dry where it hoped to be able to remain a few years longer, according to the Gazette, which forecast the fight between sheepmen and settlers over the vacated land would be a hot one but that its end was already in sight.

the town of Circle, and bought a ranch in that immediate vicinity from a Texas outfit owned by Major Seth Mabray.¹⁸ In 1902 he increased his herd by an additional 4,000 to 5,000 Texas cattle which were purchased by Jack Serruys.¹⁹ They must have been disposed of shortly after this because his personal property tax in Dawson County dropped from \$1,900.32 in 1901 to \$106.75 in 1902, and the former figure was never again approached in spite of the fact that he kept possession of a large part of the townsite of Wibaux, which he purchased from Gus Grisy in 1886, until his death.²⁰ The last record of a shipment of W cattle, as found in The Glendive Independent, is dated August 12, 1905, so his cattle holdings were probably closed out in that year.²¹

Wibaux did not own any land in the area south of the Yellowstone, with the exception of his town property and the 160 acres on which the White House was located, until the present century. In 1903, after the land was surveyed, he bought for \$35,597.52 approximately 36,000 acres from the Northwestern Improvement Company, a subsidiary of the Northern Pacific Railroad.²² This land was situated in

¹⁸ Crawford, op. cit., p. 498.

¹⁹ The Glendive (Montana) Independent, April 12, 1902.

²⁰ Ibid., Oct. 12, 1901, Nov. 8, 1902, Glendive (Montana) Times, Jan. 3, 1886.

²¹ The Glendive (Montana) Independent, Aug. 12, 1905.

²² Kuhn, op. cit., p. 160.

a way as to give Wibaux effective control of the Beaver Valley from a point four miles north of Wibaux to a distance of twenty-six miles downstream. In 1904 the ranch was sold to the Calvin Investment Company of Miles City at \$16 per acre, and this firm leased it in 1905 to the Wibaux Ranch Sheep Company, which was composed of eastern and local capitalists who planned to stock the range with large bands of sheep.²³ This firm evidently did not prosper and, on the death of the head of the Calvin Investment Company, the land next passed on to Thomas Mathews of Omaha, Nebraska.²⁴ The property has since been broken up into many holdings of a much smaller acreage.

At its peak, which came in the 1890's, the W probably owned about 65,000 cattle and three hundred saddle horses. In 1890 over 12,000 cattle were shipped. From 10,000 to 12,000 calves were branded yearly in the early 1890's. During this period Wibaux employed at least twenty-five men in the busy season and ten during the winter.²⁵ The W cattle covered a large territory, some of them drifting as far south as Wyoming and west to the Powder River. At

²³ The Glendive (Montana) Independent, March 4, 1905, Montana Homeseeker, Helena, Montana, Sept., 1906.

²⁴ Kuhn, op. cit., p. 165.

²⁵ Kuhn, op. cit., pp. 161-2, Crawford, op. cit., p. 498. C. O. Armstrong was slightly more conservative and placed the maximum number of cattle on the range at one time as 40,000. At the other extreme is George Osterhaut who estimates Wibaux had as many as 200,000 head on the range at one time. Kuhn's figure is probably the more widely accepted.

round-up time reps were sent into those areas and also as far east as Crooked Creek and the Killdeer Mountains, and every one brought back W cattle.²⁶

The closing of the operations of the W Ranch ended one of the most interesting chapters in the history of the range livestock industry in Eastern Montana. Wibaux's developing business interests were undoubtedly a factor in the disposal of the ranch properties, but more important was the flood of homesteaders which surged into Eastern Montana and Western North Dakota in the first decade of this century, and divided the land into geometric patterns by the use of barbed wire.

"Millions of miles of shining metal threads
Cutting the plain in geometric lines,
Climbing aloft among the mountain pines,
I show the way wherever Progress treads.

"I bound the cultivated fields of man,
Divide his cattle from the masterless,
I form a barrier to the wilderness;
I end that which has been since time began.

"My barbed and twisted strands have marked the change
That comes when Nature pays the debt she owes.
I whisper to each heedless wind that blows
The last low dirges of the open range."²⁷

²⁶ C. O. Armstrong interview.

²⁷ Elliott C. Lincoln, A Song of the Wire Fence (Joseph Kinsey Howard, editor, Montana Margins, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946), p. 284.

CHAPTER X.

PIERRE AND MARY ELLEN WIBAUX AS SEEN BY CONTEMPORARIES

Mary Ellen Cooper, better known as Nellie, was the daughter of an aristocratic English family. She may have acquired much of her education in France as she was very proficient in the use of both the French and English languages. She met Pierre Wibaux while he was in England making a study of the textile industry, and they were married at Dover in March, 1884. Shortly after this they came to the Montana ranch where, until the White House was completed, Mrs. Wibaux shared life with her husband in a log cabin which had a sod roof. And when finances proved to be a pressing problem, just before the hard winter of 1886-87, Mrs. Wibaux dismissed her domestic help and did all the work about the house herself, in spite of the fact that she had been used to a life of ease before her marriage.

Although she was probably not beautiful, Mrs. Wibaux had a regal bearing combined with a charm which made everyone wish to be of assistance to her. It is said that the cowboys in their spare time tried to be near her and always stood ready to help her or to fight for her.

Mrs. Wibaux was a fine horsewoman and, as she loved the outdoors, she was certain to be on hand if there was a round-up in the vicinity. There she would ride slowly around the herd and talk to each of the men whether she knew him or not, leaving the impression that she was interested in his own personal welfare.

In appearance Mrs. Wibaux was tall and perfectly proportioned, weighing 160 to 170 pounds. Her complexion was dark, her eyes were black, and her hair is spoken of as being of raven hue. Her chin was square, her lips a trifle full, her teeth perfect, and her nose classically Grecian, while her forehead was massive and somewhat protruding. As she was decidedly Spanish in appearance and spoke the language fluently, the question has arisen as to whether or not she may have had some Spanish ancestors.

Mrs. Wibaux's personality combined an extreme quietness, a fine sense of humor, a large share of common sense, and a great deal of personal charm.

One of the early ranchers of the area struck the Wibaux log cabin unexpectedly while riding up Beaver Creek in the winter of 1884-85 and knocked at the door with the intention of asking about the road. As the door opened and Mrs. Wibaux stood before him he was so amazed that he found it difficult to place his question in words. Later, after he came to know Mrs. Wibaux, they often laughed over the occurrence, and when she once asked why he appeared so upset he told her, "It would surprise almost anybody to find a rose growing in the Bad Lands in the middle of the winter."¹

¹ Most of the above description of Mrs. Wibaux is taken from Lincoln Lang's interview by Hagedorn. Lang was an early rancher in the Bad Lands area. Other information has come from interviews with Henry Smith, a Miles City, Montana, jeweler who came to Montana in 1886, John Flinn, Miles City, Montana, who worked for Wibaux in the State

Pierre Wibaux was also an unusually fine looking person, especially when he was a young man. His height has been estimated at 5' 10" to over 6', his weight as 175 to over 200 pounds. He was exceptionally well built and very athletic in appearance. Probably the varying opinions in regard to his height and weight are due to Wibaux's very well proportioned body. He was proficient in fencing, boxing, and other sports, and he feared no man.² He was exceptionally strong and could lift more than any of his employees.

Wibaux's complexion was medium or a trifle darker, his hair was dark, and he had large, piercing, dark brown eyes. When he first arrived in Montana he wore a mustache which was cared for meticulously--neatly trimmed and pointed at both ends. Later in life he developed a full beard. He was clean and neat in his personal appearance and liked to keep well dressed.

Like most of his countrymen, Wibaux enjoyed his wine and other alcoholic beverages, but he was careful as to whom he drank with and he did not indulge to excess. One of his

National Bank, and John Laughlin, Miles City, Montana, also an employee of the bank.

Mrs. Wibaux and Cyril returned to France, probably about 1915, and nothing is known of them since that time.

² The Marquis de Mores once invited Wibaux to visit him in his Medora chateau and while there asked Wibaux to fence with him. As Wibaux proved too proficient with the foil the Marquis became angry and challenged him to fight with sabres. Action was about to begin when the Marquis stepped into the room and parted the two men. (Armstrong interview.)

favorite forms of diversion was to go from one saloon to another and shake dice for the drinks, while another was to get a group of the hands in the billiard room at the White House, have the servants bring in the drinks, and then introduce the boxing gloves. The Wibaux home was the center of hospitality for the neighboring ranchers and their hands, and in his ranching days Wibaux was well liked and highly regarded by all his associates.

Like his wife, Wibaux also had a sense of humor. Probably one of its crudest forms of expression occurred when one of his brothers came from France to visit him at Wibaux. Before the train bearing the brother arrived Wibaux approached some of the hands with the suggestion to "smoke him up," but there is no record as to whether the brother was initiated to the West in this fashion. Wibaux also had excellent control of his temper and was seldom seen angry.

Unlike Mrs. Wibaux, Pierre considered himself to be a real American. He demonstrated this by taking out his first naturalization papers in Bismarck, North Dakota, shortly after his arrival in the ranch country. He later became a full citizen of the United States. Mrs. Wibaux appears to have preferred Paris and there is no record of any visit to this country by Mrs. Wibaux after her husband's estate was settled.³

³ Wibaux will, office of County Clerk, Custer County Court House, Miles City, Montana, and File in the Matter of the Estate of Pierre Wibaux, No. 639, loc. cit.

Although Wibaux was very careful to figure to the last cent in business transactions he was likely to later spend in entertaining the person with whom he was dealing all he had saved by his previous parsimoniousness. It is said that if he was short of money when he arrived in town Wibaux would borrow, give his companion half regardless of the amount, and never charge for it. C. O. Armstrong told of buying, in partnership with a friend, a team of horses for \$150 with interest at fifteen per cent. When the deal was completed Wibaux tossed his pocketbook to Armstrong and told him to take what he needed. Wibaux was probably generous to the point where generosity becomes a fault, as he never prosecuted anyone who stole cattle from him. It has been said that as a result he started more men in the cattle business than anyone else in Eastern Montana.⁴

That Wibaux was respected by his associates during his ranching days is indicated by the positions he held. At the meeting of stockmen from the east side of the Yellowstone, which was held in Glendive on March 10, 1885, he was elected as one of five delegates to confer with the commit-

⁴ Interviews with Orgain, Osterhaut, Armstrong, Lang, Lihen, Larson, and Lou Grill, editor of the Miles City (Montana) Star.

Sanders, op. cit., p. 1251, gives Wibaux credit for important charitable work in France.

"He is the promoter of the free distribution of pure milk through model farms, the free inspection of children. Through his initiative the good work has spread all over his native land, saving thousands of babies. . . . Ten years ago the French government in appreciation of his good work at home and of his influence abroad made Mr. Wibaux a member of its Legion of Honor.

tees at Medora and Miles City so that the yearly round-ups might be better coordinated.⁵ As the attempted organization of this group failed Wibaux joined the Montana Stockgrowers' Association, attended its meeting at Miles City in 1886, and was chosen a captain of the round-up for District 7, a position which he held until 1893 when he became a member of the executive committee as a representative from Dawson County. After he moved to Miles City he served as a member of the committee from Custer County.⁶

In 1894 Wibaux was suggested as the Populist candidate for state representative from Dawson County and the Glendive paper, Republican in sympathy, commented that "The INDEPENDENT can only say in this connection that if the Republican is beaten in the free for all race Mr. Wibaux will be a creditable winner."⁷ There is no record, however, of Wibaux showing any interest in politics or attending any of the political conventions.

Probably the best testimony to the popularity of Pierre Wibaux was the effort of his neighbors in Eastern Montana to change the name of the town of Mingusville to Wibaux. The first settlement was made in 1881, the year before the Northern Pacific Railroad entered Montana, and was called Keith. When the railroad reached this point its station was named McClellan, although the post office

⁵ The Glendive (Montana) Independent, March 14, 1885.

⁶ Proceedings of the Montana Stockgrowers' Association, Miles City, Montana, April 1-20, 1886, pp. 89-102.

⁷ The Glendive (Montana) Independent, Aug. 4, 1894.

remained Keith. In 1892 the name of the station was changed to Tilly, and so it remained until all evidence of a settlement had disappeared by 1900. These names all applied to an area about one mile east of the present Wibaux depot.

In the meantime a new village had been started about one-fourth mile east of the railroad bridge over Beaver Creek. There was no post office here but the Northern Pacific established a station which was named Beaver. In April, 1884, this name was changed to Mingusville in honor of Min and Gus Grisy, and in August of the same year the post office was moved from Keith to the new town, and Grisy became the first postmaster. At about the same time the depot and the residents of the village moved to the west side of the creek, the area which has become the permanent townsite. But Mingusville was not a popular name. It was too easily corrupted into "Dingusville," suggesting "any old thing," and a few years later, with Min and Gus Grisy gone and forgotten, the citizens began agitation to secure a new name for their town. A petition to the Montana State Legislature was started in 1893, and in a short time over 260 signatures of the residents of Beaver Valley had been secured. Early in 1895 the change in names was recognized by the Post Office Department and the Northern Pacific Railroad, and the town was officially named for the man who had been its greatest benefactor.⁸

⁸ Ibid., Sept. 30, 1893.

"The citizens of Mingusville are petitioning the

Wibaux does not seem to have been as popular in Miles City as he had been in the Beaver Valley. As a rancher he had been well liked because he had learned the business the hard way: by riding in all types of weather, by taking part in the round-up, by making a study of conditions in the Chicago stockyards. He was recognized by his neighbors as an authority on buying, feeding, shipping, and marketing cattle. In Miles City Wibaux was regarded as a newcomer to financial circles whose bank account had been the magic key to admittance. He had had no banking experience.⁹ Those with whom he became closely associated learned to respect and value his opinions and ultimately developed a personal liking for him. Others considered him

Legislature of the State of Montana to have the name of Mingusville changed to that of Wibaux, the founder and townsite owner. Mr. Wibaux is also the largest cattle grower in Dawson county, and is an enterprising man and will do more for the town and surrounding country than any other man could do. The petition of the citizens should be granted without delay."

Ibid., Nov. 4, 1893.

"The petition for changing the name of Mingusville to that of Wibaux, now has over 260 signatures. Every person up and down the Beaver valley have signed it, and all strongly favor the change in name."

Ibid., May 12, 1894.

"The name of the town will be changed to Wibaux as soon as the station is rechristened by the railroad company, which will be soon."

Ibid., Mar. 30, 1895.

"WIBAUX has at last been recognized by both the post office department and the railroad. Thus dies the old town of Mingusville and it will be known no more. . . . The father of the town, Pierre Wibaux . . . can be counted on to do his share to advance the interests of Wibaux."

⁹ Wibaux's investments and financial interests are the subject of a later chapter.

to be a trifle conceited and felt that he didn't care to associate with those outside his special group of friends.¹⁰

One of Wibaux's greatest strengths was his ability to pick capable men and delegate responsibility to them. During his ranching period, which lasted about twenty-three years, Wibaux had only four foremen.¹¹ All were exceptionally capable and Wibaux, who left the range almost every winter, turned the management of the ranch entirely to them during his absence. In the latter 1890's he selected Jack Serruys as his private secretary and sent him to Texas each winter to purchase stock which was later fed on Wibaux's range. C. W. Butler, who had been employed previously at a Glendive bank, was hired by Wibaux in 1899 to serve as cashier at the State National Bank in Miles City.¹² The management of the bank was turned almost completely to him in later years, and Wibaux had such complete confidence in him that Butler was named in the will as administrator of

¹⁰ Interviews with Henry Smith, John Flinn, John Laughlin, Lou Grill, and Archie Harris, Secretary of the Miles City Club, of which Wibaux was a member for many years.

¹¹ The foremen were Ole Berg, 1883-85, Sid Tarbell, 1885-88, C. O. Armstrong, 1888-89, and J. B. (Ben) Lawlis, 1889 to the close of the ranching interests.

Berg quit because of a misunderstanding with the "Stranglers," a vigilance group; Tarbell died of blood poisoning which resulted from a broken arm; and Armstrong quit after a dispute over the removal of some men, Wibaux insisting they should be dropped as they were not needed during the winter months while Armstrong maintained they had worked faithfully during the most difficult season and should be carried to spring. (Armstrong and Orgain interviews.)

¹² The Glendive (Montana) Independent, Dec. 30, 1899.

the Wibaux estate.¹³

Wibaux had a trace of egotism, although this trait did not become prominent until after his removal to Miles City. On one of his visits in Paris he hired a sculptor named Octobre to make a small statue, about three feet in height, of him.¹⁴ This, along with a bust and an enlarged and framed photograph of Wibaux on his favorite horse, occupied a prominent place in the State National Bank where all patrons could see it.¹⁵ Above the entrance to the old bank building can still be seen a large scale model of Wibaux's signature written in his own inimitable manner.

In his will, Wibaux requested that if the people of the town of Wibaux were willing a bronze statue of himself as a cowboy, enlarged to twice his natural size and set upon a suitable pedestal, should be placed upon high ground, facing the site of the old W Ranch, and his ashes should be deposited beneath it.¹⁶

It has been said that Wibaux used his influence and his money to change the name of Mingusville to Wibaux.¹⁷

¹³ John Laughlin interview, the Wibaux will, op. cit.

¹⁴ Letter of C.W. Butler in Collections of Historical Society of Montana, Capitol Building, Helena, Montana.

¹⁵ John Laughlin interview.

¹⁶ Wibaux will, op. cit. The Butler letter, op. cit., states the small statue was sent to Chicago and the enlargement was made by Lorado Taft. The monument is a prominent landmark on the high ground just to the west of Wibaux. The two small figures were willed to nephews, Daniel and Noel Wibaux.

¹⁷ Judge Loud, of the Seventh Judicial District, in

The petitions requesting the change, however, indicate it was made with the approval of the citizens.

The statements of Wibaux's contemporaries indicate complete agreement regarding Wibaux's honesty. There is no record of any shady dealings in which he had a part. His business was conducted entirely in an open manner, and no attempts were made to give anyone the short end of a deal. The general opinion was best expressed by a pioneer who at various times served as sheriff, under sheriff, and county commissioner of Dawson County, "Pierre Wibaux was just too big for any underhanded work."¹⁸

No article written about Pierre Wibaux would be complete without a statement regarding his religious beliefs. Wibaux has usually been thought of as an infidel, primarily because of his request that his body be cremated and also because he never attended church services.

C. W. Butler, who accompanied Wibaux on his trip to Chicago where he went for medical attention in 1913, was told by the hospital staff that Wibaux could not live much longer. On his return to Miles City, Butler succeeded in getting Father O'Carroll, who had been a frequent companion of Wibaux's on horseback rides, to go to Chicago for the purpose of talking to Wibaux about the hereafter. Father

conversation with L. C. Faltermeyer, long time official of Dawson and Wibaux Counties. The Judge stated that Wibaux asked him what it would cost to change the name to Wibaux. On being told it could be done for \$1,000, Wibaux immediately wrote a check. The Judge added that one letter to Senator Carter brought the change in names.

¹⁸ Andrew Larson interview.

O'Carroll, who was sure the trip was hopeless before he went, told the sick man that this life is fleeting while eternity is long, that he might die and should consider his soul. Wibaux's response was that he had not considered those things while living, and he preferred to die as he had lived.¹⁹

Wibaux stated his religious beliefs and his code for living very clearly in his last will and testament.

"I have given the important matters of life and death and their consequences a great deal of thought. If as I believe death is the end of all things for me, I shall be glad to rest, forget and waive all responsibilities. If as I hope there is a hereafter I have no fear as I have tried hard to follow the right path regardless of consequences, and honestly believe I have been just and right according to the best of my knowledge and understanding. If at times I may have unwittingly caused any body trouble I sincerely regret it.

"Life with some object in sight, some purpose to fulfill is good to live, but it is not a joke, it is a very serious matter. As an atom in the universe I have played my part and would not care to live my life over again, however, had I an opportunity to do so, I would try to do better and accomplish greater things.

"When death lays her hand on me I will face her like a man and I hope to entertain no bitter feelings. Then if some part of my being is still conscious when this document comes to light, the best of me will remain with my son, the friends I have dearly loved and my unfinished work."²⁰

The people of Eastern Montana and Western North Dakota were shocked to hear of Pierre Wibaux's death in St. Luke's Hospital, Chicago, Illinois, on March 21, 1913.

¹⁹ W. F. Flinn interview. Flinn was editor of the Miles City (Montana) Star and a close friend of Father O'Carroll.

²⁰ Wibaux will, op. cit.

The words of one of Wibaux's foremen probably best express the sentiment that existed toward Wibaux in the state line area, especially among those who had served as an employee.

"There never was but one Pierre Wibaux and I think that the world was much better by having him live in it and we lost a real man and a perfect gentleman when he left us and there is no other that can fill his place and may his soul rest in peace, his memory will always live with those like myself that knew him as he was."²¹

²¹ Armstrong manuscript, op. cit. This tribute was paid by the foreman who left Wibaux's employ after the dispute over retaining cow hands over the winter months.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WIBAUX WILL AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE ESTATE

Although articles written about Wibaux before his death speak of his property in France, Mexico, California, Texas, the Klondike, and many other areas, the appraisal of his property which was made after his death shows his only real estate outside Montana consisted of the Clover Leaf Mine in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

The largest single item among Wibaux's assets consisted of 958 shares in the State National Bank of Miles City, Montana, which were valued at \$350 each. This bank was organized in 1895 with Wibaux as a member of the Board of Directors and vice president.¹ In 1897 he was elected president of the institution, which at that time had a capital of \$80,000 and average deposits of \$375,000.² In 1902 Wibaux built the Wibaux Block, and the bank was moved from its old home in the Coggshall Block to the beautiful quarters in the new building.³ At the time of his death Wibaux owned 95% of the stock and this, together with the building and the lots on which it was located, was appraised at nearly \$400,000.⁴

¹ Dawson County Review, Glendive, Montana, March 28, 1913.

² The Glendive (Montana) Independent, Feb. 27, 1897.

³ Dawson County Review, Glendive, Montana, March 28, 1913, Miles City, (Montana) Daily Star, Mar. 22, 1913.

⁴ John Flinn interview. Wibaux will, op. cit.

Another piece of property which Wibaux owned was the potentially profitable Clover Leaf Mine at Roubaix, near Deadwood, South Dakota.⁵ Wibaux became interested in this property, which was formerly known as the Uncle Sam Mine, in 1897 and was able to purchase it quite cheaply as its operation had become very expensive and it was not producing much mineral wealth.⁶ Wibaux placed in charge of the mine a man by the name of Troweek, who for eighteen years had managed the Homestake Mines, and as a result the reputation of the Clover Leaf advanced.⁷ The development of the mine showed that gold was present in quantity but a heavy flow of artesian water flooded the underground workings. As a result Wibaux, who felt he was too old to undertake the laborious and costly project of constructing tunnels to drain out the water, decided to seal the mine.⁸ Wibaux's heirs later made an agreement regarding the mine with the Anaconda Mining Company but any attempted operations were evidently unsuccessful, as in 1942 Lawrence County, South Dakota, took tax deed to the property for delinquent taxes and it was sold to Fred M. Reausaw and C. H. Black.⁹

A third major item in the property of Pierre Wibaux

⁵ Roubaix was named in honor of Roubaix, France, the home city of the Wibaux family.

⁶ The Yellowstone Journal, Miles City, Montana, Sept. 27, 1900. Kuhn, op. cit., pp. 165-66.

⁷ The Yellowstone Journal, Miles City, Montana, Sept. 27, 1900.

⁸ John Laughlin interview and Robert Lowry interview.

⁹ Letter from Milton A. Williams, Register of Deeds, Lawrence County, South Dakota, July 11, 1950.

was 4539 shares in the American Bankers Insurance Company of Chicago, valued at \$10 each. Wibaux was one of the heaviest stockholders in this company, a member of its Board of Directors, and a member of the Advisory Board for the state of Montana.¹⁰

The fourth major group of properties as listed by the appraisers consisted of about 225 lots in Wibaux's First Addition to Wibaux and about seventy-four acres of land adjoining this. The value of this land was placed at \$23,655.¹¹

The total value of the Wibaux estate, as appraised by J. B. Collins, W. E. Holt, and Thomas Shore, was \$515,414.94. Between the date of the order admitting the will to probate and appointing the executor, April 22, 1913, and the order of final discharge of the executor, Feb. 2, 1915, over \$100,000 in dividends, interest, and rent was added to the estate. The liabilities amounted to about \$6,200.¹²

Pierre Wibaux's will is a document of about 2,000 words and contains his philosophy of life as well as directions for disposal of his property. The main provisions may be summarized as follows:

First. Wibaux's body was to be cremated and the ashes placed under a bronze statue representing him as a

¹⁰ Sanders, op. cit., p. 1251.

¹¹ File in the Matter of the Estate of Pierre Wibaux, op. cit., Document 12.

¹² Ibid., Documents 16, 27, 33, 38.

cowboy, the statue to be placed in the attitude of looking over the site of the W Ranch.

Second. The executor was to pay all expenses of the last illness and other just debts as soon as sufficient funds were available.

Third. A gift of \$10,000 was made to Miles City for the purchase of land for a public park which was to be maintained at public expense.

Fourth. A gift of \$20,000 was made to C. W. Butler of Miles City as trustee, the money was to be invested and both the principal and interest were to be paid to Wibaux's nephew, Noel Wibaux, on his attaining his twenty-fifth birthday or on his marriage. If he should die previous to receiving the bequest it was to go to his father, Rene Wibaux, or if he should also be dead the money was to revert to the residuary estate.

Fifth. A gift of \$20,000 was made to C. W. Butler on behalf of Daniel Wibaux or, on his death, to his father, Joseph Wibaux, the terms being the same as above.

Sixth. Provision was made for gifts of \$1,000 to \$10,000 to the employees of the State National Bank, providing they were still working for the bank at the time of Wibaux's death.

Seventh and eighth. Gifts of ten shares of stock in the State National Bank were made to C. W. Butler and John E. de Carle, both of Miles City.

Ninth. Wibaux's saddle horse and all the contents of

the stable in Miles City were willed to Father J. J. O'Carroll of Miles City, the horse to be killed in some humane manner if he did not care to keep him.

Tenth. All clothing in the apartments at the rear of the State National Bank were given to Henry Donahue providing he was still in Wibaux's employ at the time of Wibaux's death, but otherwise they were to go to the Salvation Army.

Eleventh. The contents of the wine cellar under the apartment were given to Wibaux's friends in the Bachelor's Mess.¹³

Twelfth. The two nephews, Daniel and Noel Wibaux, were each given a bronze statue of Wibaux as a cowboy.

Thirteenth. All of the personal jewels were willed to Pierre Wibaux's son, Cyril.

Fourteenth. All residue of the estate was to be evenly divided between Mrs. Wibaux and Cyril or, if Mrs. Wibaux should die before Pierre, all was to belong to Cyril.

Fifteenth. C. W. Butler was named executor of the will and all former wills or testamentary dispositions previously made were declared void.¹⁴

The will was made and signed on January 8, 1912, and

¹³ The Bachelor's Mess was the name of the group of men which customarily dined at the Miles City Club.

¹⁴ Wibaux will, op. cit.

Pierre Wibaux died on March 21, 1913, in St. Luke's Hospital, Chicago, Illinois, of carcinoma of the liver.¹⁵

¹⁵ Miles City (Montana) Daily Star, Mar. 22, 1913.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION

Mrs. Wibaux and Cyril arrived in Wibaux, Montana, in April, 1913, the month following Pierre's death, to select a site for the statue designated in the will.¹ Of the two spots under consideration, one on the flat near the Catholic Church and the other on the hill about a half mile west of the town, the latter was chosen.

The monument was erected in 1914 with the nine foot bronze statue depicting Wibaux in cowboy garb, holding his rifle in one hand and field glasses in the other, being placed on a fourteen foot granite base. The lower part of this base is medium gray in color while the top layer of granite is much lighter, almost white.² Situated as it is, on a hill looking northward over that part of the Beaver Valley which was once the home of the W Ranch,

"the wind and storms of coming years will descend with fury from the hills on either side and beat against the statue as if it would wash away from that lonely spot the beautiful work that the trained hand of the sculptor had fashioned. But as a semblance to the man for whom it was erected the character of that granite rock will not be changed by the heat of the noonday sun or the wrath of the howling tempest but likened unto the memory of him it will stand for centuries."³

¹ Wibaux (Montana) Pioneer, April 25, 1913.

² Although the will stated the statue of Wibaux was to be twice life size, the figure as it stands is approximately nine feet..

³ Excerpt from the Beach (North Dakota) Advance as quoted in the Wibaux (Montana) Pioneer, July 10, 1914.

Pierre Wibaux lived in the state line area at a time when hardships and other existing conditions made it possible for only the strongest of men to endure; at a time when civil law was almost unknown; at a time when only the best men won in the struggle for existence. Pierre Wibaux lived to see the dawn of civilization pass over this area as the large territory which was once controlled by the wandering cowboy and the ranch owner for whom he worked passed into the hands of the farmers. He saw towns grow up with schools and churches to replace the earlier villages which could boast only of their general stores and saloons.

Today the Cattle King's statue still stands on the hill a short distance west of the town of Wibaux. A few hundred yards to his rear is the Wibaux Cemetery where many of the pioneers who knew him in his ranching days are taking their well-earned rest. To his left lies rolling land which is broken with fields of small grains separated from each other by barbed wire fences. To his right lies the town which was renamed in his honor, but its streets are now lined with automobiles instead of hitching racks and saddle ponies as they were in Wibaux's day. Plank sidewalks have been replaced by concrete, and the principal streets, from which horses' hooves once raised a cloud of dust, have now been oiled. Kerosene lamps which once lighted the town at night have been replaced with electricity, and neon signs add a splash of color to the business

section when dusk settles over the prairie. The old lignite-burning locomotives which used to labor heavily as they strained to haul a string of loaded freight cars out of the valley and over Beaver Hill have been replaced by sleek diesels which quietly and effortlessly pull a train twice as long over the divide which separates the drainage basin of the Little Missouri River from the Yellowstone. And as he looks ahead, toward the north, out over the valley he loved so well, he sees a stream of automobiles glide by on U. S. Highway 10 which lies about a half mile away. Even the use of the binoculars which he holds would probably never reveal fifty head of cattle at one time with the exception of the shipping season in the fall when small groups of stock are brought to Wibaux to be shipped from the remains of the same yards into which the W stock was driven when it was in marketable condition.

Eastern Montana has undergone a great change since Wibaux sold out his interests in the Beaver Valley. The rancher was crowded out by the homesteader who, due to periods of adverse conditions for profitable farming, has in turn been replaced by the large scale farmer. The fence has divided the open range.

"The passing of Pierre Wibaux removes one of the most conspicuous characters of eastern Montana ranch life. He braved all the hardships of the early day stockman and won his way to the top by hard work and indomitable perseverance. The town which bears his name and the home of the State National Bank in Miles City are monuments of his industry that will always refresh our memory of the greatness of the man."⁴

⁴ Dawson County Review, Glendive, Montana, Mar. 28, 1913.



Stone barn on the W Ranch.
Note chimney on slope of roof.
This is the south end of the barn.
Photographed in August, 1949.



North end of the barn.
Built in 1884, this has been called
the first stone barn
erected in the Northwestern range country.



The town house as it looks today.



"The Park" showing the grove of trees transplanted by Wibaux in 1896.



Wibaux Main Street on a Sunday afternoon.



The Wibaux Block, Miles City, Montana,
built by Pierre Wibaux in 1902
as a home for the State National Bank.



Front view of Wibaux Block.
Note Wibaux's signature above entrance.



A view in Wibaux Park, Miles City, Montana.



Entrance to
Wibaux Block,
Miles City,
Montana.

Wibaux's
signature
is visible
above the
entrance.



Pierre Wibaux's statue on hill west of Wibaux, Montana.
Note cowboy garb, rifle in right hand, binoculars
in left hand, lariat coiled at feet. Statue faces north.

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