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Montana Eden | Land use and change in the Bitterroot Valley, pre-history to 1930

Edward Duke Richey
The University of Montana

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Montana Eden
Land Use and Change in the Bitterroot Valley
Pre-history to 1930

By
E. Duke Richey

B.A. The University of the South, 1990
M.S. University of Montana, 1998

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Approved by

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The Bitterroot Valley (Ravalli County) of Montana was the original home of the Salish or Flathead Indians. The Salish spent part of their year in the valley hunting elk and deer or picking berries and the rest of the year on the plains to the east and south hunting bison. Only rarely did bison enter the Missoula or Bitterroot Valleys and when they did, they were killed immediately. Once the Salish obtained horses from the Shoshone around 1730, they increasingly altered the landscape of the valley. The Salish may have maintained, with the use of fire and grazing, as much as 60,000 acres of open grasslands. Their horses were known as some of the finest horses in the region. Magnificent herds led to increased warfare. By the 1830’s, several Iroquois who lived among the Salish encouraged the people to seek Catholic missionaries. In 1840 a Jesuit mission, St. Mary’s, was established in the valley.

By 1850 the mission closed and was bought by an Anglo trader named John Owen, who established a trading post. By the mining booms of the 1860’s, the Bitterroot Valley was known as the agricultural center for the region. Throughout the 1870’s, 1880’s, and into the 1890’s, the valley experienced slow, yet steady growth. This development was spurred by several factors, namely the expansion of Montana’s mining industry, which needed food products and massive amounts of timber.

In the first decade of the twentieth-century much of the Bitterroot Valley was subdivided into 5 and 10 acre orchard plots in an attempt to sell the place as an irrigated, money-making, Edenic place for summer retreat. When these ventures failed, the size of farms and ranches increased in the valley, and consequently fewer people controlled a majority of the valleys lands. Eventually, these large landholdings were economical failures. By the 1990’s the lands were subdivided again as the valley’s population grew while farms and ranches declined.
Acknowledgments

I'd first like to thank Tom Roy from Environmental Studies. Since I didn't say this in my acknowledgments for my EVST thesis, I'm going to do it here, because I can. Throughout my entire graduate student experience Tom has been someone I always knew was on my team, both professionally and personally. Two-thirds of the way through my time in Missoula, I was diagnosed with cancer. Tom was the first person other than my wife, Sarah, that I told. He was immediately on the phone with local doctors, helping arrange appointments, etc. One weekend before my treatments started, he drove us on a spirited journey to his cabin near Glacier, telling his famous stories the entire way, while looking over his shoulder into the backseat, and passing cars all at the same time. It was vintage Tom, and neither Sarah nor I will ever forget it. I will be extremely fortunate to cross paths with another educator and another human being like Tom Roy again in my career.

I also owe a huge amount of thanks to Dan Flores. With reason, Dan's classes are some of the hardest classes to get into at the University of Montana. It took me over a year to squeeze into one, and when I finally did, I decided after the third week to pursue a masters in History with a focus on Dan's fields: environmental history and the American West. At first, I had the harebrained idea to write my M.A. thesis on a completely different subject than what I had written about for the M.S. Dan, who has the great ability to simplify things, had a better idea. "Why don't you just write about the Bitterroot, but cover the early years? You can cover that other topic later." Among many reasons to give thanks, I thank you Dan for keeping my life simple.

Thanks also go to Bill Farr for graciously agreeing to sit on my committee late in the process; to the Washington Foundation Award for Historical Excellence; to Dave Walter at the Montana Historical Society; and to all the friendly folks in Hamilton at the Bitterroot Valley Historical Society. Thanks to Mike and Erin for the books, for letting me stay at your house, use your car, and drink your beer and coffee. More than anything, thanks for the laughs. Fiesta todos los tiempos.

Finally, thanks again to Mom and Dad, Barbara and Keeling, Sarah, and the History Department at the University of Colorado, all of whom encouraged me to defer for a year.
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Introduction

In 1998 I wrote and defended a masters thesis for Environmental Studies titled “Subdividing Eden” that examined land use history in the Bitterroot Valley from 1930 to the present. That topic worked wonderfully for an academic program that encourages its students to address environmental issues, then enter the world with ideas on how to help solve those same problems. It was my argument that patterns of land tenure and use beginning in the years just prior to the Depression set up a scenario ripe for land subdivision by the early 1960’s. Through the 1970’s and into the present, a lack of planning and zoning regulations have led to builders and developers working in a manner, that at times can be described as both reckless and irresponsible. Today, water issues and public health concerns are nearly forgotten as major environmental problems. Most Bitterrooters focus on wildlife issues, namely the loss of winter range habitat for elk.

In writing that story I placed myself in the role of an environmental activist telling a story about how a place had been damaged and offering an obvious solution with a call for future planning. Even though this thesis is for the History department, I still see my role similarly. Does this mean I have thrown objectivity out the window and made things up? No. I am hopeful that the story I tell can lead to some understandings of how the past informs the present, because I believe that an understanding of how a place got where it is can help give clarity to where it is going. My only solution here is the one that every historian gives us: study the past and learn from it.

The title for “Subdividing Eden” stemmed from the fact that, historically, it appeared that the valley had always been offered up as an Edenic place to work and live. I wrote that the Bitterroot today was a perfect modern example of the Edenic fallacy that writers from Wallace Stegner to Patricia Limerick had examined in their works about the
West. What I have learned in writing this work is that the Bitterroot as an Edenic ideal has been around a very long time. Although Lewis and Clark did not see the place as Arcadia, other early visitors to the valley saw what was, for them, the perfect place to raise livestock and grow crops. The Valley was a Montana Eden, and some of its early Anglo visitors described the place as such. By the turn-of-the-century, others had seen the valley as an ideal place to sell land. Nearly half of the valley was subdivided and marketed as an orchard paradise. This paradise was dependent on efficient irrigation systems and hard work, both of which a number of the orchards and farms lacked. By the 1920's and into the 1930's, many of the subdivided lands in the valley were either bought by the farmers and ranchers who remained, or they were reverted to the county as idle lands with unpaid property tax.

The story of land use in the Bitterroot Valley shows that patterns of land use over time fundamentally changed the landscape and human culture of the place. Throughout the history of the valley, as one type of land use paved the way for the next round of changes, the cumulative effects became more profound. The result today is a landscape that is not only the product of these changes, but a new version of a long and similar story about change, failure, adaptation and more change.

The stories I have told in both this thesis and its predecessor are quite predictable to anyone who has studied Western American history. We all know that the region has changed and is changing. Both of my theses deal with the idea of change as related to land use. It is my intention to show that the details of how the Bitterroot Valley has evolved over time will add greater richness to the understanding of why change in the West often goes toward unmanaged, as opposed to managed, or planned growth.

Any analysis of historical change in the West begins with its native peoples. This story is no exception. The Bitterroot Valley Salish changed the nature of the place where they lived. In addition, simple natural processes played a role in shaping the history of land use in the valley. The soils left by the geologic mountain forming processes, as well as
climactic patterns, gave the place certain advantages and disadvantages for particular ways of living. It is with these natural processes and Montana’s earliest peoples that the story begins.
One:

Strong Horses and Fire

The earliest evidence of humans in what is today Montana indicates that Paleo-Indians of the Clovis period were in the central part of the state about 12,000 years ago. These people hunted mammoth and long-homed bison, animals that thrived on the grasses of the open plains south of White Sulphur Springs and east of the Crazy Mountains. It was a relationship built upon needs. The animals needed grasses, the hunters needed meat, skins, sinew and bone. There was no reason for these prehistoric animals or the people who lived by them to venture west into the more expansive mountains and valleys beyond the Continental Divide. At that time, in ranges such as the Bitterroot west of the divide, glaciation and flooding were carving a new landscape that was of no use to plains animals or the individuals who subsisted on those animals. A lack of archeological evidence supports the theory that neither Clovis people nor the mammoth and long-homed bison ever entered the Bitterroot Valley.

As the climate warmed, the Clovis people and the animals they hunted disappeared from Montana altogether. With increased warmth, the glaciated, flooded environment in the mountains and valleys gave way to an ecology quite similar to the more arid landscape and vegetation patterns that exist in western Montana today.¹ This was certainly the case in the Bitterroot Valley.

A change in climate brought only minor changes to the element of human life in the valley. It would be another 7,000 years before any humans wandered into the Bitterroot, and these wanderers were by no means large in number. In fact, there are few physical artifacts, such as tools and bones, that have been found to indicate the presence of anything

more than a small scattering of human individuals in the valley at anytime prior to the eighteenth-century.

Rock art is one piece of evidence that indicates a transient human presence in the Bitterroot a good deal earlier than the eighteenth century. It is well documented that humans were living along Birch Creek, just south and west from the Big Hole, by 8,000-8,500 years ago. These people left chipped spear heads known to archeologists as Bitterroot points. One rock art site in the Bitterroot Valley shows a woman, a dog, and a man who is holding a spear. It appears that the woman is guiding another small animal into the range of the hunter. This motif, which archeologists feel is indicative of Columbian Plateau rock art work, has led some scholars to speculate that the paintings date as far back as at least 2,000 years ago, prior to the introduction of the bow into the region. Of course, the panel could be much older. Other rock art, all of which is clustered in the southern end of the valley near the passes at Skalkaho and Lost Trail, show shield-bearing human figures like those found on the Snake River Plains and in the Great Basin. These panels indicate that there was a Shoshonean presence in the valley at a later time. Overall, rock art in the Bitterroot reveals that there was never a large human presence in the valley prior to the 1700’s.

It is likely that the drawings that do exist were the work of transients rather than long term valley inhabitants. Perhaps the panels were etched by people who found the valley’s relative inaccessibility beneficial for hiding from enemies. The protective advantages of an isolated, hard to reach place is something all animals, including humans, understand well. At times seclusion is paramount for survival, and it is inarguable that seclusion was more easily attained in sheltered mountain valleys than it was on the open Great Plains, or in the Lemhi Valley, accessible from the Snake.

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There is another explanation for the scarcity of humans in the Bitterroot that is less questionable than other theories. Considering that the Big Hole to the southeast, the Snake River Plains to the south and southwest, and the Great Plains to the east provided easier access to immensely abundant game in the Northwest, the lack of evidence that there was considerable prehistoric inhabitation in the Bitterroot Valley makes perfect sense. This argument is reinforced by one simple fact. When I speak of “game filled” areas, I am essentially making reference to one animal: the bison. Although bear, pronghorn, and other animals populated the grasslands in large numbers, the bison was the creature that drove the whole ecological equation for many native cultures. Native Plains Indians depended completely on bison. To a smaller extent, non-plains Indian cultures, such as the fish eating peoples west of the mountains in Idaho and Washington, depended on the animal as well. The Salishan tribes along the Columbia River, for example, walked east toward the bison grounds every year on The Road to the Buffalo that took them through the heart of the Bitterroot Valley. The bison hunt was an important part of the year for these Plateau Indians. The links that connected the American Indian tribes of the West with the bison need not be explored in depth again here. Suffice it to say that numerous scholars have shown that changes in bison populations, for a number of reasons, went hand in hand with cultural, social, and spiritual changes in native cultures.²

The important connection between Indian people in the Bitterroot and bison is that any people spending large amounts of time in the valley, at any time, were living largely without bison unless they ventured east or south out of the valley. As well, some bison were west of the valley in earlier times. Archeological and historical evidence show that bison once populated parts of Eastern Washington and Oregon, but these herds, never large, were reduced to virtual extinction by 1500. Bison were also south of the Bitterroot in Idaho. As late as 1823 Alexander Ross claimed to have seen 10,000 of the animals in the

upper Salmon River drainage, and some travelers in the region encountered bison around Fort Hall in the 1840’s.\(^5\) Bison in the Bitterroot were anomalous quirks. I will show later in this chapter that both the archeological and historical records support this argument. The reason is clear. The bison that did enter the valley were killed immediately.

Mountain bison usually found good forage in places that were much easier to reach than the Bitterroot. The human land use history of the Bitterroot Valley, from prehistoric times, through Salish settlement around 1730, to the legislated Salish removal in 1891, is tied inexorably with the fact that there were rarely any bison in the valley. It is not by chance that there is less evidence in the Bitterroot of a human presence in prehistoric times than in other places in present day Montana. Prior to the 1730’s the humans who were in Montana lived on the plains with the bison. According to the Salish, when they finally moved to the valley they gave up a bison-centered lifestyle they had enjoyed on the plains for generations. Many Salish actions following their settlement in the valley were made in an attempt to better their hopes of hunting the bison with greater success. These moves included their development of excellent horse herds (and therefore their use of fire in the valley), as well as their eventual recruitment of Jesuit priests to come live in their midst. This latter action, of course, brought significant changes. The first Europeans and Euro-Americans other than the priests to settle in Montana did so in the Bitterroot Valley. The lack of bison, to a significant degree, made this settlement possible. If bison had been in the valley, it is likely that the white settlers would have had to put up a serious fight for the lands that they settled with relative ease. Finally, without bison, the horses raised by the Salish, and the cattle brought later to the Bitterroot by the Jesuits and Euro-American settlers, were able to thrive without much competition for the valley’s grasses.\(^6\)


For a long time, there was enough room on the plains for multiple bison hunting peoples. But any history has its winners and losers. With time, competition between tribes on the plains made it hard for everyone to continue living in bison country. The Bitterroot became a place where the Salish (the name the tribe prefers to the commonly used “Flathead”) came to live in forfeiture of the predominantly full time plains livelihood their people had enjoyed after leaving the Plateau. The Bitterroot was without bison herds, and until their enemies obtained horses, the valley was a safe enclave for the Salish from the Blackfeet and Shoshone. Although it is not completely known when the Salish moved to the plains, then back to the mountains, one thing is clear. Once the Salish moved to the Bitterroot Valley, they had to adapt, or re-adapt, a lifestyle that depended less fully on the bison. This was especially true prior to their obtaining horses, because the mountains demanded a different way of living. The plants, animals, and weather were different than that of the Great Plains.

As the first human beings passed through the valley, whether in hiding or on hunting excursions, vision quests, or other journeys of discovery over the last two millennium, they undoubtedly saw plants that resembled many that we see today. Perhaps these people brought plants with them that we see today.

The flora that have inhabited the valley in recent geologic times are a direct result of many factors, including soil types, climate, seed dispersal mechanisms, and successional patterns. An understanding of the valley’s plants and trees, their historical uses, and the changes they have undergone can teach us something about human life in the valley throughout history. For example, the once abundant Bitterroot flower (*Lewisia rediviva*), for which the valley is named, is most often found in ecotones with well drained soils of gravels and sands. It is believed that the plant originated and spread from the Sierra Nevada of California toward the north and east as the climate became warmer and drier since the retreat of the last glaciers. Since the bitterroot occurs in scattered and seemingly random
spots across the western mountains of North America, the question of how the plant reached Montana and its namesake valley from the west is a matter of speculation. Many believe that the seeds were wind or bird dispersed or that today's sites are relics of what used to be a plant with more widespread boundaries. All of these explanations are possible factors in the distribution of the plant into the Bitterroot Valley, yet another possibility is intriguing. Since the bitterroot can be dried and then re-rooted under ideal conditions, it is possible that the root can be carried long distances by humans, then dropped or discarded before re-rooting. The Upper Kootenais have a story that explains the existence of the Bitterroot in northwestern Montana through such a method. Perhaps rock artists, the painter of the spear man, or others brought bitterroots along on their journeys toward the plains from west on the Columbian Plateau. With an ideal habitat of well drained soils, roots that were left behind could have spread readily.\(^7\)

Other current Bitterroot Valley vegetation became established in the more arid climate following the retreat of glaciers and the porous soils left in their wake. Vegetation patterns between glaciation varied between tundra types and spruce forests that grew to the edge of the ice.\(^8\) In the first 5,000 years following the beginning of the last glacial retreat, it has been shown that members of the 200 million year old \textit{Pinus}\ genus were in the valley. Primary succession of lichens and other soil building plants had prepared the way for the establishment of coniferous forests. As the glaciers retreated, pines advanced from the south. Some theories suggest that pine seeds had been dormant in the permafrost underneath glaciers through the successive advances and retreats. As the region grew warmer these seeds germinated. Ponderosa pine (\textit{Pinus ponderosa}), with its ability to send a deep tap root through dry soils and resist drought, is ideally suited to thrive in environments similar to the one that began taking its present shape in the Bitterroot Valley.

\(^7\) Jerry DeSanto. \textit{Bitterroot: The Montana State Flower}. Babb, Montana: LERE Press, 1993: 41-56. According to DeSanto, the Salish called the valley “Spitlemen”, which translates to “place of the Bitterroot” (p.1).

thousands of years ago. Sediment cores extracted from a bog at Lost Trail Pass, in the southern end of the valley, indicate that lodgepole pine (Pinus contorta) was a significant vegetation type in the forests surrounding the valley as early as 7,000 years ago.

The same study made another important discovery. In the twelve thousand years since glacial retreat began, there was a marked increase in airborne charcoal deposits starting about 2,000 years ago. This correlates roughly with the earliest indication of man passing through the valley in larger numbers. One scientist thought that the increased charcoal deposits were explained by a rise in low intensity fires. His suggestion was that lightning fires could not account for the increase. The fires must have been aboriginal. Perhaps the spear thrower artist left more of a mark on the Bitterroot Valley than a painted panel on one rock. Although it is speculative, a correlation such as this in the archeological timeline is worth pondering. The most important question of course, is why? Why would early people passing through the Bitterroot set the land ablaze? There is no easy answer to this question, but some scholars have made convincing arguments as to why early people employed fire as a tool in their environments. Stephen Pyne has pointed out that the bones of animals that are linked with early human archeological sites are the bones of animals that browsed grasslands. Since grasslands are perpetuated by fire, the link between human use of fire and human subsistence on grassland animals becomes clear. "It is difficult," Pyne wrote, "to fabricate swamps, forests, and tundras, but with only a torch one can create and maintain successful grasslands, savannahs, or forests so open as to feature many of the flora and fauna of true prairies." In the case of the Bitterroot Valley, early fire such as that discovered by Mehringer in the bogs at Lost Trail, would have kept stands of the fire tolerant lodgepole and ponderosa open and park-like. Trapper David Thompson was in western Montana in 1810

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and mentioned in a journal entry that he was building a canoe. Thompson was challenged to find good boat-building wood, because all of the trees had been dried out by fire and their boards were therefore inflexible. He had to look for one single tree “uninjured by fire, of which we made our canoe.” Such fires would have also prevented the forests from advancing across the valley floor and enveloping the entire glacial outwash of the valley into a forested environment. Open areas had many advantages, for instance it was easier to see approaching enemies in a field than it was in a forest. Smoke might also be used as a defense mechanism when trying to hide from enemies or ambush them. Early observers noted also that the Salish set fires to communicate with one another, or used fire in rituals. In 1806 near Lolo Pass, William Clark described how a few Salish set fire to some trees, an act which reminded him of a fireworks display. “The nativs,” Clark wrote, “told us that their object in Setting those trees on fire was to bring fair weather for our journey.” Fires also regenerated grasses in the valley, attracting elk, deer, and sheep, as well as a rare bison making its way across the mountains.

Fire was not the only environmental factor in the creation of the shortgrass prairies and open hillsides in the Bitterroot. The Valley is part of a steppe type ecoregion, meaning that evaporation usually exceeds precipitation. The vegetational result of this is a landscape characterized by short grasses, scattered shrubs, and soils with poorly developed herbaceous layers. This steppe environment is most apparent on the eastside dry bench lands. Two thousand years ago, the vegetation that was perpetuated by fire and the forces driving the steppe type ecology were more than likely the same species that the first white settlers found in the valley in the nineteenth century: bluebunch wheatgrasses, rough and

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Idaho fescues, green and Columbia needlegrasses, and sagebrush and rabbitbrush.\textsuperscript{17} Jennings argued that grasses since the retreat of the last glaciers have not changed. There may have been a territorial fluctuation, he said, but it involved a change in quantity, not grass types. Jennings based his argument on the fact that similar faunal species existed into the modern era as existed in the region over the past thousands of years.\textsuperscript{18}

The Salish lived differently in the valley than on the Plains. The simple reason is that there were very few, if any, bison that made their way across the mountains and into the valley. There are several pieces of evidence that support the notion of bison populations in the valley as being insignificant. First, and perhaps most importantly, the Salish went east to hunt bison every year. Even if there had been bison herds in or near the valley, the herds were incomparable in abundance to the herds to the south or on the Great Plains. Otherwise, the Salish had little economical reason to continue going south and east for their annual hunts. Second, archeological evidence in the valley has found almost no sign of the bison. Digs in other areas have regularly unearthed massive piles of bison bones, but sites in the Bitterroot show little or no evidence of the animal. Although Dr. Suckley of the Stevens Survey noted that there were bison skulls littered around the valley in the 1850's, there is no indication that the skulls were notably abundant.\textsuperscript{19} One rock art site shows drawings of two animals that are probably bison, but Ward points out that these depictions of bison don't necessarily represent any presence of the animal in the valley. As in Paleolithic Europe, she says, animals depicted in rock art often indicate "the hope for hunting magic" and not an actual presence conclusive with physical archeological evidence.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Bitterroot Valley Resource Conservation and Development Project (BVRCD). Work Plan. BVRCD (Hamilton, 1966): 11.
\end{itemize}
evidence. In light of this concept one wonders if early burning in the valley was done as an attempt at attracting bison. Granted, fire would have attracted other game, namely elk, but there is no evidence that fire or anything else attracted bison in large numbers to the Bitterroot Valley. Finally, a close reading of the historical documents related to the Bitterroot indicate that bison were not prevalent in the valley, if present at all. The mention of bison by explorers, trappers, or early settlers to the Bitterroot usually indicate that the animals were predominantly on the plains to the east and the south and that hunters went to those areas to kill them. In 1833 Nathaniel Wyeth traveled through the Missoula Valley and noted that, although an occasional bison did enter the area, the animals were killed immediately at Hell Gate. One scholar has argued that this immediate killing of any bison that entered the area prevented the animal’s spread across the mountain valleys.

It has become fairly clear that 10,000 years ago human subsistence strategies on the plains and in the mountain valleys of North America were quite different from one another. On the plains the bison and pronghorn were the primary food animals hunted by early man. In the mountains, many people ate fish, namely salmon and whitefish. Big horn sheep and deer provided the most abundant non-fish meat source. It should not be assumed that some groups hunted only one type of game or another. The rock art in the Bitterroot Valley is a window into the concept of transhumance, by which populations acquire food across a wide region, through a variety of means, at different times of the year. Some of the rock art work is believed to have been done by people passing through the valley from the south and west. These were people with varied diets and varied hunter-gatherer strategies that

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20 Ward, “Prehistory of the Bitterroot Valley,” p. 73.
21 C.S. Kingston, in his article “Buffalo in the Pacific Northwest” in The Washington Historical Quarterly, Vol. XXIII, No. 3 (July 1932), says on page 168 that bison did come into the Bitterroot Valley area to graze. He quotes Nathaniel Wyeth, who wrote in his journal that the “Buffalo have come here and even farther, but they are killed at once and do not get wonted here.”

were adapted to a number of environments across several ecotones. The hunter-gatherers were not the type of people who would survive for very long living in one place, unless that one place happened to be the bison-rich Great Plains.

The people who would become the Bitterroot Salish were, by several thousand years ago, the eastern-most of a number of closely related Salish-speaking peoples. The blood lines reached from the coasts of the Pacific Northwest to what is now the interior of Idaho’s panhandle, and into the Bitterroot Valley. All of the Salish had originally lived together in British Columbia before splitting into various bands and migrating south. Although some moved to the coasts and some to the interior mountains and valleys, the people remained remarkably similar in many ways. Through yearly mutual hunts, intermarriages, and frequent trade, their languages remained nearly the same for thousands of years. The closeness of the various Salish bands was rooted in protection measures against hostile Athabascan bands to the north. The enemies had penetrated Salish areas not long after the groups had split. After more than six hundred years of fighting hostile advancements, the Salish split into smaller factions. According to John Fahey, by about a thousand years ago the eastern-most Salish had moved into the valleys of western Montana. It is believed that this band, the ancestors of the Bitterroot Salish, spent much of their time in the Three Forks area. It is probable, though, that some members of the tribe spent time each year gathering roots, hunting, or passing through the Bitterroot Valley on their way back west to fish with their cousins in the Lochsa country beyond Lolo pass. At any rate, the Bitterroot Valley was a well-known area to the eastern band of the Salish and may have been considered as part of a larger homeland despite the fact that the people did nothing more than pass through the valley for short amounts of time.

All indications are that the Salish did not consider the Bitterroot Valley their permanent home until sometime early in the eighteenth-century. According to tribal lore, the

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shift toward a permanent presence in the valley took place once the Salish’s ability to hunt buffalo on the plains was challenged by the Blackfeet and other tribes after the latter had acquired guns. In contrast, some historians believe that the Bitterroot was the home of the Salish as far back as their leaving the Columbian Plateau. These scholars believe that the extensive excursions onto the plains didn’t occur until the Salish acquired horses in the middle of the eighteenth-century. The accounts argue that some bison hunting occurred on the plains prior to this time, but that it was carried out on a sporadic basis. The theory follows the idea that the majority of bison hunted by the Salish were stragglers that had wandered into the mountain valleys. Carling Malouf was one of the scholars who believed the Salish were always mountain people. He pointed out that most Salish myths involve animals such as coyote, beaver, otter, blue jays, salmon, and owls, and that there was very little mention, if any, of bison. He felt that the myths, since they were usually passed down generation to generation, were one indication that the Salish may have had a history in the Bitterroot area that was more deeply rooted than their history on the plains.\(^{24}\) I will not argue the merits of each theory, because, frankly, none is convincing either way. Fahey seems to have come to the same conclusion in his study of the tribe. They had moved around so much, and had changed their modes of existence so rapidly in the few hundred years prior to the arrival of Lewis and Clark, that Fahey said the record was confusing because the Salish were confused about their own story. “When white men,” he wrote, “asked the Flatheads to tell about old times, however, the Indians could not assess their experience because of the constant process of alteration. They had been buffeted in a manner mysterious and beyond recounting.”\(^{25}\)

Besides the fact that it may be impossible, in some ways it is irrelevant to argue at what point the Salish made the Bitterroot their home. From the unknown time the Salish came to the valley, until their removal north to the Flathead Valley at the end of the


nineteenth-century, the Salish were essentially a hunting and gathering people. They traveled often between the plains to the east and south below them, or to the mountains west. It was important that they had close ties with other Salishan people, because traditional alliances gave the Salish protection and trade advantages that helped them survive. The alliances assured that the Salishan home region, or economic range, covered a wide area, and that the Salish were intimately familiar with much of western Montana and eastern Idaho. They roamed a large country, spending long periods of time in an assortment of habitats depending on the season. The Bitterroot was simply the place the Salish spent the most number of days in a given year.

In the lean winter months the Salish lived on what meat, roots, and berries they were able to accumulate and prepare earlier in the year. In addition, winter was a time when whitefish fishing increased in importance. Salish names for the times of year that correlate with our heart of winter, the months of January and February, are translated as “The Wandering,” and “Three Bands Spread All Over.” Assuming these descriptive words pre-date the arrival of the horse, it is easy to picture a winter lifestyle involving a spartan, foraging, existence for the Salish. Many lodges would have stayed along the Bitterroot river, ranging up and down the valley, while others may have left the valley altogether. Many Salish went to the fringe of the bison rich plains for the winter bison hunt, while others spent the season across the mountains in salmon country.

Each year, as winter began to melt away, the Salish along the Bitterroot River, deep in the Lochsa country, or out on the plains, noticed birds beginning to fly north. March was called “The Goose Flight” for this reason. The annual migration of geese signaled that it was the time of the year to prepare for their own migration. Through April (“The Lovemaking” month) and into May (“Bitterroot” month), the Salish gathered slowly into the center of the valley, near what is today the town of Stevensville. For the next several

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26 Malouf, “Economy and Land Use By the Indians of Western Montana, U.S.A,” p. 34.
moon cycles, the Bitterroot Valley would be more of a permanent residence for the Salish than at any other time of year. They gathered bitterroots, wild carrots, camas, and then serviceberries and huckleberries throughout the summer. A sense of community was reinforced through a variety of tribal land use practices and ceremonial traditions.28

The most important of the traditions was the First Roots Ceremony, which involved the gathering of the bitterroot. The plant usually didn’t flower until June, by which time the root was too bitter to eat, so the ceremony occurred in May. In gathering, Salish women looked for buds and basal leaves, then used a paddle-shaped wooden stick or a scooped sheep horn to dig the root from the ground. After digging a small trench around the plant and extracting the entire root, it was shaken over the hole. Then a piece of the root was broken off and re-buried with the leaves and other parts of the unused plant. Since the bitterroot will develop new root systems and flower after being replanted, this method of harvest insured that supplies of the root were replenished each year.29 While the women dug, men gambled or went hunting. One female Salish informant told Malouf that an ideal spot for bitterroots would be a place where the root was abundant, and where the men could have a good time playing their games. After the first roots of the season were dug and piled in front of the chief’s lodge, the chief chose a woman to lead the ceremony of praise and thanksgiving for the harvest. This was an appropriate measure since men usually didn’t dig roots. The ceremony involved the entire tribe. Encircled around the first day’s pile, with their backs to the roots, the Salish faced the sun, raised their right hands, and were then led by the chosen woman in a chant of acknowledgment to the sun that the people were thankful to be fed.30

After being peeled, the roots were dried in the open or boiled and steamed before being eaten. Meriwether Lewis, perhaps tired of his all-meat diet, tasted boiled bitterroot before entering the valley. Informed by Indians that the root did not grow in the Salmon

28 Ibid.
29 DeSanto, Bitterroot: The Montana State Flower, p.5.
River area, Lewis was curious. “They became,” he said of the root, “perfectly soft by boiling, but had a very bitter taste, which was naucious to my pallate, and I transferred them to the Indians who had eat them heartily.”

Camas root was also an important food in the diet of the Salish. During the summer months camas flowers, as Fahey claimed, covered fields to the north and west of the Bitterroot Valley in such heavy blankets of blue that the fields resembled lakes. Their roots were usually dug in July, and like the Bitterroot, could be stored for long periods of time. In the 1847 narrative of the years he spent trapping in the Rockies, Thompson mentioned that he was in possession of camas roots that he had obtained in 1811. After thirty-six years, Thompson said his friend the late Lord Metcalf ate two of the roots and pronounced that they tasted like bread.

Once camas roots were gathered, they were baked in a pit or steamed before consumption. Unlike the starchy bitterroot, camas were sweet and could be pounded into flour, then made into bread. They could also be steamed with a moss that grew in pine trees. This was done in a pit oven that was dug into the ground and filled with wet grasses and hot rocks.

In addition to the mosses or lichens found on trees, in the summer the Salish often ate cone nuts and parts of the cambium layer from pines or other trees. A special tool was used to debark the trees and strip the gummy, edible layer. Once removed, the bark was placed in the lap and the inside layer was scraped off with the rib bone of a deer or with a knife. This inner layer was often dried, then pounded into cakes.

Service-berry and huckleberry picking in the late summer and fall was an important part of the Salish food economy. The seventh month was known as “Service Berry”

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33 Thompson, Travels, p. 262.
34 Fahey, The Flathead Indians, p.12.
month. The Salish also picked black-haw berries, wild strawberries, choke-cherries, and red raspberries. Once picked, berries were put into a basket, then carried to a leather bag that had been left in a shady spot under a tree. Later, bags full of berries were dumped on a hide at the lodge and dried in the sun. Finally, the berries were pulverized and stored away. Unlike the Blackfeet and other plains tribes, the Salish did not make a pemmican cake of dried and mixed meat and berries. Instead, they dried meat and berries into separate cakes and mixed them together only when cooking.

While the women moved in small groups amidst the berry bushes of a lodge’s traditional picking grounds, the men hunted deer and other game along the fringes of the area. The summer and fall deer, elk, and sheep hunts were the most important hunts of the year in the valley; therefore, the animals were the most consistent targets for hunters’ arrows. Deer were often hunted by large groups which trapped a number of animals by surrounding them and killing them with arrows. In 1810 Thompson came across a group of 22 Salish men who had killed eight deer by this method. Deer could also be hunted in other ways without any weaponry. De Smet mentioned in the 1840’s that an Indian told him that killing deer in deep snow was easy. Once the animal became bogged down, the hunter simply jumped on the animal’s back and broke its neck. The man claimed to have killed eight deer with that technique. Elk and sheep were other animals that the Salish could hunt with relative ease. Although grouse, rabbits, beaver, porcupine, and other small animals were important, Malouf states that deer were the most important animal in the Bitterroot Salish diet. Moose and elk were prized for their meat, but deer and mountain sheep were important because their skins were soft, and therefore tannable with stone and

39 Thompson, Travels, p. 315.
bone knives. Tannable skins made nice clothing, as well as bags for carrying water, roots, and berries.

Indian hunting methods are important in any study that examines Native American land use strategies. Animals were hunted in a number of places using different methods. Burning the valley’s grasses, for example, was one way to lure ungulates into the lower elevations. As animals grazed new grass sprouts, they were vulnerable to hunters. Grasses were not the only thing Indians burned deliberately. P.M. Engle noted in 1860 that he had seen a Salish man burning moss that hung from a pine tree. “By burning this moss,” Engle noted, “the deer are obligated to descend into the valley for food, and thus, they (the Indians) have a chance to kill them.” Once in an open area, whether a burned field, or a pine stand, deer and elk were ambushed by two or three men and driven toward a spot where others lay in wait. As bow technology advanced individual hunting increased.

Turney-High claimed that the Salish bow, a “composite, laminated, reinforced one made of strips of mountain sheep horn boiled until soft and fitted together” was one of the most superior hunting tools on the American continent. With flint arrowheads, fastened to hard-wood serviceberry shafts, Salish archery skills advanced considerably throughout the years prior to the horse. In the pre-horse years, when the occasional bison wandered into the area, Salish hunters and their strong bows were able to pick off individual animals by stalking them afoot.

Human land use and subsistence practices in the valley were varied. The Salish, and other people who may have preceded them in the valley before the horse, were gatherer-hunters. Bitterroot and camas were of great importance to the diets of these people. Mosses, lichens, pine bark, pine nuts, and an assortment of berries were other common foods. Other than the occasionally transplanted bitterroot, the Salish did not practice anything resembling agriculture. Their tools for hunting were flint-tipped arrows

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41 Barrett, “Indians and Fire,” p. 19
and sheep-horn bows used to kill moose, elk, deer, sheep, goat, and in earlier times the less frequent caribou, pronghorn, or bison. Perhaps the greatest tool of the earliest Bitterrooters was fire. Fire retained open and grassy areas that were rich in wheatgrasses, fescues, and needlegrasses that supported a number of browsing animals.

The most important question in an analysis of land use change in the Bitterroot Valley prior to Euro-American settlement concerns the appearance and impact of the horse. Although the Salish were able to survive in the Bitterroot Valley prior to the horse, it seems evident that once the horse was an available tool mosses, pine bark, and even deer became less desirable foods as the bison hunt took on greater importance. Whether the Great Plains bison hunt was a new lifestyle adaptation (as Malouf argued) or was a re-emergent lifestyle (as the Salish claim) is not as important as the fact that the bison hunt was made more successful because of the horse.

One interesting question to ponder is this: did the Salish acquire the horse as a last resort to survival? If neighboring tribes had horses before the Salish, and we know that the Shoshone did, the Salish may have been less free to hunt in a wide region around the valley. Animals within the valley may have been over-hunted. When Lewis and Clark visited the valley at the beginning of the nineteenth-century, they were challenged to find game there. If it was the case that the Salish were trapped and hungry in the valley because of mounted enemies in the region around them, stealing horses may have been understood as necessary for survival.

Salish legend has it that they stole their first horses from the Shoshone in about 1730, although Malouf reasons that some Shoshone visited the valley and spread horses into the country peacefully. The Shoshone had obtained the horse between 1670 and 1690 as the distribution of the animal continued its advance northward from the area around

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Santa Fe. By the time of Lewis and Clark, the Salish verb for “going to war” was translated literally as “stealing horses.” The tribe’s own history states clearly that they were in a state of “considerable upheaval by 1805” due to near constant warfare. By all accounts the Salish were successful in battle and in raising good mounts. When the Corps first met up with them in the southern end of the valley in 1805, they ran into a group of 80 men and about 320 women and children. These 33 lodges possessed “at least 500 horses” according to Clark. Lewis later estimated that the tribe had “20 to a hundred head” of horses per man. The numbers obviously conflict since this would have given the first group 1,600 horses at minimum. The exact number is hard to calculate, but when one considers that the 33 lodges in the southern end of the valley was not the entire Salish nation, the total number of horses may have been well more than 1,000 head. Clark said that the horses were “ellegant,” and Lewis called the Bitterroot “Horse Valley.” Seventy-five years after stealing part of a Shoshone herd, the Salish were wealthy in horses and were considered to raise some of the finest mounts in the region. These fine horse herds allowed the Salish to begin spending a large part of their year hunting buffalo on the Plains. Whether the hunt involved a return to a former home region, or was a technology-advanced initial invasion is not as important as the outcome. The horse gave the Salish the ability to travel quickly, kill large numbers of animals, and carry meat and hides back to the valley. This progress led the Salish to become increasingly dependent on the horse and the bison.

The Salish enhanced their hunter-gatherer abilities after obtaining the animal in a way that can best be described as revolutionary. The migratory nature of the tribe was altered, and as the people became livestock oriented and dependent they stayed on the plains hunting bison for longer periods. After acquiring horses, the Salish became more

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49 Ibid., p. 236.
likely to be engaged in battles that were increasingly linked with protecting their own horses, even though they stole other tribes' horses. These three actions (the shift toward horse stewardship, horse dependent hunting practices, and the increase in frequency of warfare) combined with the presence of a group of Catholic Iroquois trappers in the valley by 1820, led directly to the greatest social and cultural changes the Salish were to experience until the end of the nineteenth-century. The changes led the Salish to seek out the strong religious "medicine" of Jesuit missionaries (or black robes) less than one hundred years after first laying eyes on horses. The action of seeking Jesuits was precipitated by the vulnerability that came with having something others wanted, and the Salish had some of the best horses in the country.

By 1830 it was estimated that the Salish and Nez Perce horse herds averaged 50 head per lodge, which was more than ten times as many horses as their Blackfeet and Blood rivals on the Plains. The Blackfeet were very aware of the situation. Their young warriors made regular pilgrimages to steal from the superior Salish herds in the Bitterroot. The writings of early trappers and missionaries to the region are full of references to the Salish and Blackfeet rivalry that was driven by the mutual desire for horses. Ross mentions that while holed up in his "Valley of Troubles" in 1824, he heard from a Nez Perce chief that 135 Salish horses had been stolen by the Blackfeet. 51 Twenty years later, Father Nicolas Point reported similar tales. He told of two Salish/Blackfeet peace treaties, one in 1841 and another in 1844, that were ruined when horses were stolen in the midst of negotiations. Following the 1844 conference, Point wrote:

Blackfeet stole five horses from our camp the night following Chetlesmelakax's visit, that is on the night of March 19-20. Bullets felled one thief, but the horses were lost, driven off by

50 Ibid., p. 234.
the robbers. This sad event increased the suspicion of both nations, and after this date thefts increased, and even murders, which had not occurred during the past four years, became commonplace between the two peoples.52

In spite of the Jesuit efforts at peace, the stealing and murder that went along with having horses became a part of every day life for the Salish in the Bitterroot Valley. As late as 1852, trader John Owen witnessed the scalping of another white man by a Blackfeet warrior within plain view of his fort near present day Stevensville.53 The warrior had been in search of horses. The next year a Blackfeet told territorial Governor Stevens that whenever he came across a Salish horse he stole it because it was sure to be a good, sturdy and long-winded horse.54 As Turney-High said, “The coming of the horse wrought such a change in Flathead life, particularly in the military hunting complex, that its psychological effects are hard to overestimate.”55 The Blackfeet were not the only side capable of violence in this struggle for horse and bison livelihood that now covered much of the entire state of present day Montana. One old Salish man told a story in 1903 that gives unique credence to the idea that the horse and bison equation had changed the hunter gatherer into the militaristic horseman referred to by Turney-High. “Many years ago,” said the man,

we used to fight our enemies towards the Three Forks and other places where there were lots of buffalo. I thought I was a great man so if I saw an enemy with a good costume or clothes I would go after him and take everything from him. One time I killed a Blackfoot. As he laid there I scalped him, and pulled off his britch cloth. I cut off his penis and threw it to the other boys.56

The stories present a viciousness that emphasizes the importance of horses to the Salish and their enemies. Although rivalries undoubtedly pre-dated the horse, it is clear that social and cultural changes were linked to a new type of warfare that was driven by a new economy. It was a rapid shift. The economy changed to one that was more heavily supported by bison and the number one bison tool, the horse. The changes that happened with land use and culture in the Bitterroot Valley and among the Salish were due to the fact that Salish horses, including those of the allied Nez Perce, were superior to any horses in the region.

The important question, then, is why were the Salish herds superior? First, and perhaps most importantly, Bitterroot winters were milder than winters on the Great Plains. John Ewers noted that an examination of Dakota winter counts showed no less than four winters (1826-7, 1852-3, 1865-66, and 1880-81) over a fifty year period when the Teton lost a large number of horses. He speculated that the Blackfeet, who were considerably farther north, may have lost as many horses or more those same winters. Although Ross’ memoir indicates that the winter of 1823-4 saw heavy snow accumulations in the southern end of the Bitterroot, there is no known record of conditions in the valley for the winter of 1826-7 that can be compared to Ewers’ data. It may be presumed, though, judging by the 1830 counts presented earlier, that the ten fold difference in horse numbers between Blackfeet and Salish/Nez Perce lodges at that time can be attributed to the fact that horses in the Bitterroot and other mountain valleys survived some winters when horses on the Plains did not.57

The second reason Salish herds were superior is that they most likely employed the Spanish gelding techniques that were superior to the techniques used by other tribes. After having ridden horses castrated by the Nez Perce, Lewis and Clark felt that the Nez Perce’s employment of this Spanish method was the best they had ever seen anywhere. The horses

recovered quickly and suffered very little in the process. Since the Nez Perce and Salish hunted together each year, it is highly likely that the Salish used the same method of gelding.\(^5\)

The third reason for Salish horse superiority is that the Salish used fire to replenish a large expanse of valley grasses that were relatively contained and protected. In 1810, Thompson described an area believed to be the Bitterroot Valley. He found a river “flowing through a hilly country, clothed with good short grass and open woods of cypress and firs, with aspens in the low ground.”\(^5\) Much later, in 1860, road builder John Mullan noted the result of what was undoubtedly an old practice in the valley. Mullan wrote that the grass “had been burnt by the Indians along the Bitter Root river...” Although part of their motive may have been to improve hunting in the valley, aid visibility, or ease the pathways for travel, elderly Salish informants interviewed in the late 1970’s said that fires were definitely lit with the purpose of improving forage for horses. Two pieces of evidence can’t be denied: the valley retained open grasslands and open pine stands, and the Salish horse herds were magnificently abundant.\(^6\)

Finally, another factor in the superiority of Salish herds is that Bitterroot horse herds, unlike horses on the plains, rarely had to compete with bison for forage. During a harsh winter on the plains, what grass existed was split between Indian horse herds and much larger herds of bison. This was not the case in the Bitterroot Valley.

Environmental changes in the valley following the arrival of the horse, as well as the lifestyle changes that went along with the growth of horse herds between 1730 and the 1850’s, must have been noticeable to all of the Salish. From, at minimum, 500 horses in 1805, the Salish herds grew as mush as 700 percent over a fifty year period. By 1857, both John Owen and Indian Agent Lansdale estimated that the Salish had 4,000 head of


\(^{59}\) Thompson, *Travels*, p. 315.
horses, or ten horses per person.\textsuperscript{61} Management of herds of this magnitude was a sizable task. Given that range management usually assigns horses a grazing quotient of 1.25 acres a month, Salishan herds at mid-century would have required approximately 60,000 acres to remain at annual carrying capacity.\textsuperscript{62} It is important to note that there were many more horses and cattle in the valley in 1857 than those owned by the Salish. By that year, a considerable number of whites were living in the valley as well. Regardless, without burning and grazing a good portion of the valley, bottom lands used for grazing in 1857 would have been invaded by woody plants. The remainder of the lands, especially the south-facing benchlands on the eastern side of the valley, are extremely arid and would have been open anyway. Regardless, the open bench lands would also have been burned in order to beat back sagebrush and rabbitbrushes and to replenish grasses.

In addition to environmental changes, cultural changes came about due to the Salish horse herds. Long held hunting and gathering practices were altered, because much of the tribe spent the winter in the plains hunting bison. In autumn, when women had traditionally picked berries and men had hunted deer and elk, the capable members of the tribe headed east. Meanwhile, the elderly and others that stayed behind moved into the cottonwoods and aspens by the river with the hope of staying hidden from any Blackfeet entering the valley.

The Salish were usually joined in their excursions on the Road to the Buffalo by relatives from the Nez Perce and Pend d'Orielle tribes. When Lewis and Clark first met them at Ross’s Hole in September, 1805, some 400 Salish were on their way into the Big Hole country then to the Three Forks area to meet the Shoshone Indians. Bison were the only reason the Salish went to the Three Forks area. By spring, before the bitterroots

\textsuperscript{60} Barrett, “Indians and Fire,” p.18.


\textsuperscript{62} Dan Flores. “Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800-1850.” \textit{The Journal of American History} (September 1991): 470. Explanation of the math: \(4,000 \times 1.25 = 5,000\) acres per month, which equals \(60,000\) acres per year.
flowered, the Salish were usually back in the valley. They dug their roots and ate dried bison meat. Some went over the mountains on horseback for the spring salmon runs, while others geared up for a mid-summer bison hunt. With horses, mobility had increased, and the number of Salish in the valley at any one time decreased significantly. In the eyes of Europeans and Euro-Americans who would move to the valley later, this mobility and transient lifestyle was a significant justification for land grabs. The Salish were only there part of the year, so they had no clear title or right to the land.63

As Salish horses became more and more well known and prized, the Blackfeet threat to the Salish became more real. War became a major part of Salish culture. On the backs of horses, hunter gatherers had become warriors. Horse superiority and the Blackfeet threat was important because both led directly to changes that would eventually see the Salish removed from the Bitterroot within 150 years after obtaining the horse. The changes involved Europeans and their religion, modes of land use, and ideas of land tenure.

The patterns of human subsistence and human induced change in the valley before the arrival of Jesuit Father Pierre-Jean DeSmet is important for several reasons. First, in order to survive, Indians had to alter the land of the valley in which they spent a good part of their year. Through the use of fire and the cultivation of horses, the Salish maintained a landscape that was ideal for pasturing sheep and cattle. By the 1850’s they may have kept open as much as 120,000 acres for the grazing of their horses. The acreage could have been greater or less, but the historical record makes clear that white men to the valley saw what appeared to them to be ideal grazing lands. These were lands that would not have seemed nearly as ideal to Euro-Americans if the Salish had not been burning and grazing them for generations. Some of the valley bottoms where the Salish grazed horses in the 1800’s had been opened by hunters prior to the tribe’s acquisition of horses. Nevertheless,

Europeans saw something they liked in these open fields of grasses. David Thompson's description of his February, 1812 visit to the area is telling.

In February with an Indian and a man I examined the country to the southeastward [to the site of Missoula, Montana]. It was hilly, with sufficient woods of aspen, cypress, and some pines and furs, with cedar in places, having several brooks of good water [and] will become a fine country for raising sheep, cattle, and horses.64

Alexander Ross seems to have reaped the benefits of the grassy country prior to the existence of sheep and cattle. In 1823, while encamped at the northern end of the valley with a large trapping party, Ross' camp hunters killed 4 wild horses, 27 elk, and 32 deer.65 In 1854 Isaac Stevens described his approach into the Bitterroot from the Missoula area: "Our course thence to the Bitter Root river was mostly through an open wooded country, in some cases very well grassed, the whole of the country arable, and the hills gently sloping, the country not being as broken as one would have anticipated."66 Finally, Lt. John Mullan, writing again in 1860, said that he had taken forage grasses with him into the Bitterroot but had not needed them because he found plenty of grass there. Mullan went on to describe lands above the Bitterroot River as "covered with pines, without underbrush, and well grassed" before making an interesting observation.

I believe it to be an ordination of providence that as the buffalo that now blacken the western plains by their millions of shaggy coats disappear with the red man, whose sustenance they now are, their place will be supplied by the silvery fleeces of millions

64 Thompson, Travels, p. 321.
66 Stevens, "Reports of Explorations," p. 205.

As horse-related warfare increased, the Salish eventually had two real options for economic survival. They could continue the precarious fighting that went hand-in-hand with their horse and bison lifestyle, hoping for the best, or they could leave the valley in search of help. They chose both, opting to search for the good and protective medicine that the magic black robes might bring them. This was a magic they needed both at home with their horses in the valley, and out on the Plains with the beloved bison.
Like other historical events involving Native Americans of the West, many of the changes that came to the Salish in the Bitterroot Valley by the mid-nineteenth century were linked with important historical events far to the east. By the end of the eighteenth-century, Indians in the former colonies were being driven farther and farther west as the new nation expanded beyond the eastern mountains and across the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys.

The majority of the people making up the Iroquois nations, for example, had been pushed from New York state across the border and into Canada as early as 1700. One hundred years later trapper David Thompson met with Piegan chiefs on the Great Plains to discuss a few matters of business. Thompson asked if some of his Iroquois friends might move into the wooded hills between the Piegans and their enemies to the west, defined clearly by the chiefs as “Flat Heads, who were constantly hovering about there to steal horses or to dispatch any small weak party they might chance to fall in with.” The Iroquois, Thompson explained, had been living on lands incapable of supporting them. A once proud and fierce people, by the time Thompson met with the Piegans, the Iroquois’ ancestral home, and even their newly settled lands in Quebec, were covered with farms and villages, or cities. A move into the far western mountains, Thompson proceeded, could help not only the Iroquois, but might benefit the Piegans as well. An Iroquois presence, the trapper bargained, would act as a safety buffer between the Piegan and the Flathead. Thompson, although he did not explain it to the Piegan, would also benefit once the Iroquois set traps and commenced their beaver-pelt harvests along the streams flowing out of those

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mountains. The Iroquois would be trading their pelts to him. The Piegans agreed, and Thompson passed out tobacco and rum in celebration.69

John Ewers states that around this same time there was a migration west of up to 100 Iroquois, many of whom were soon defeated on the Plains. Ewers’ explanation for the defeat was that once the Iroquois arrived, they angered the Blackfeet and the Gros Ventres with their acculturated airs of superiority. The plains tribes took offense. Some of the Iroquois undoubtedly went back east, while others pushed on for the western mountains. By 1810, Thompson mentioned that he had hired six Iroquois men to help him build canoes at Saleesh House, near present day Thompson Falls, Montana. These were the first documented Iroquois in the lands occupied by the Salish.70

Between 1812 and 1820 Ignace Lamoos and twenty-four other Iroquois set out from their homeland in the vicinity of Montreal.71 Whether or not Ignace or other members of his group had been associated with Thompson or other white trappers previously in western Montana is unknown, but it is likely that they were. It is certainly plausible Ignace and his fellow travelers were decidedly aware of what lay out beyond the western horizon. They may have been guided to the Bitterroot by Iroquois trappers who had already lived among the Salish. It is also likely that many of these Iroquois brought beaver traps with them.

As Ignace and the others headed west they carried not only an understanding of the fur trade, but they also brought with them a knowledge of a world very different than anything the Salish could have imagined in 1820. The Iroquois men who settled in the Bitterroot had seen with their own eyes a floodtide of Europeans invade their homeland. Those Europeans and Euro-Americans brought with them new diseases, an unsurpassed

69 Thompson, Travels, 223.


71 Buckley, Nicolas Point, p. 89.
military zeal, paper treaties, and the idea of Indian reservations. Most importantly for the Iroquois, and therefore the Salish, the floodtide had carried plows, seeds, and Bibles. The changes brought by whites and their ways to Iroquois life had been dramatic and divisive. Although many Iroquois had been Christianized as early as the seventeenth century, others resisted defiantly the white man’s call to worship. Red Jacket, a Seneca chief, led a movement that saw all Christian missionaries expelled from Seneca reserves by 1824. Red Jacket’s group was known as the “pagan party.”

In 1820, around the time Ignace and the other Iroquois arrived in the Bitterroot Valley, the Salish were living much as they had been since the arrival of the horse approximately 100 years earlier. In the spring and summer they lived in the valley, gathering roots and berries, hunting local game, and grazing their horses on extensive open fields of native grasses that they maintained with fire. By late fall they were on the plains, where they spent the winters hunting bison. By 1820 the Salish had possessed guns for at least 11 years. In 1809 Thompson traded them 20 guns and several hundred iron arrowheads. Until his trade, Thompson noted that only four Kootenays, of all the Indians west of the mountains, had any weapons other than

a few rude lances, and flintheaded arrows. Good bowmen as they are, these arrowheads broke against a shield of tough bison hide, or even against thick leather [they] could do no harm; their only aim was the face. These [weapons] they were now to exchange for guns, ammunition, and iron-headed arrows, and thus be on equality with their enemies, for they were fully their equals in courage...

Thompson went on to make another important observation.

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73 Ewers, “Gustavus Sohon’s Portraits,” p. 16.
All those who could procure guns soon became good shots, which the Piegan Indians, their enemies, in the next battle severely felt; for they are not such good shots, except a few. They are accustomed to fire at the bison from horseback, within a few feet of the animal; it gives them no practice at long shots at small marks. On the contrary, the Indians on the west side of the mountains are accustomed to fire at the small antelope [deer] to the distance of 120 yards, which is a great advantage in battle, where every one marks out his man.74

Details about the Iroquois who moved to the Bitterroot Valley are few, but several facts are clear. First, Ignace and the others were not the kind of Iroquois who would have followed Red Jacket and his pagan party had they remained in the east. The Bitterroot Iroquois were Catholic, and they taught the Salish about that particular brand of Christianity: the Lord’s Prayer, making the sign of the cross, baptism, and observing Sunday as a day of rest.75 Their teachings were based on an understanding of a Catholicism they had personally experienced in their homeland, an understanding that had certainly developed into its own peculiar form. They spoke of memorized prayer, Jesus’ death on the cross, and the need for confession, yet they also described the priests in ways that made the black robes sound otherworldly. The Jesuits were strange and powerful men in those black robes, white men without facial hair who forsook the pleasures of the flesh and remained unmarried. These dark, wool-draped men were the priests, leaders of the religion’s intriguing symbolic ceremonies. The descriptions given them by the Iroquois undoubtedly made the men sound like gods. Whether or not it was based on a misunderstanding of their own or confusion on the part of the Salish, the Iroquois were describing something for which the Salish had been waiting a very long time. The black

74 Thompson, Travels, p. 261.
robed men sounded like good medicine that could be helpful, especially in time of war. There is no way that the Salish had any idea of the scope and magnitude of the Catholic church. Chief Victor once told DeSmet that if Pope Gregory XVI ever felt threatened, he should pitch his tents in the Bitterroot and the Salish would protect him. DeSmet shared this story with Gregory on a visit to Rome in 1843. The Pope smiled upon hearing the offer.76

The idea of white men having special powers was not a concept reserved especially for priests. The Salish word used for some of the first whites who came among them was "seme," which is their expression for astonishment. Forbis quotes Angus McDonald, an old trapper, as saying that an "Indian account of the coming of the first white man to the Spokan country states that 'the Indians got word that a number of wonderful strangers were coming to the places where they were, and the simple Indians thought that if these wonderful Frenchmen came they would die no more, etc.'"77 DeSmet was once asked by the Crow how many white men there were. He pointed across the plains and told them to count the blades of grass, then told the Indians of moving lodges (train cars), fire canoes (steamboats) and men flying through the air in hot air balloons.78 How could the Indians not be astonished? In addition to what they heard, the Salish couldn’t help but see. They often credited a material object to the supernatural. Lewis and Clark gave one Salish chief a mirror, which he thought was a device used to see one’s soul. The chief would allow others the use of the mirror so that they could see their soul (really their faces) and thus be purified.79 When whites gave them guns, the Salish relished the ability to govern or dictate the supernatural power they saw in the guns.80 It is understandable that they believed

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75 Ewers, “Gustavus Sohon’s Portraits,” p. 56.
76 Chittendon and Richardson, Life, Letters and Travels of Father Pierre-Jean DeSmet, p. 1341.
78 Chittendon and Richardson, Life, Letters and Travels, p. 117.
79 The Discovery Writers, Lewis & Clark In The Bitterroot, p. 81.
80 David Thompson, on page 289, wrote that "a very old Indian told me [that] when a young man he made a heavy war club, with which he felt himself confident of victory; they formed a large war party against the
Catholicism to be their pathway to even greater supernatural abilities. Catholicism was something new and strange, and perhaps it could allow them to travel in fire canoes or moving lodges. Euro-Americans, consciously or unconsciously, often played this Salish misunderstanding, or confusion, to their own advantage. Representatives of the United States government among the Salish in the Bitterroot Valley, from Lewis and Clark in 1805, through James Garfield in 1872 (prior to his own presidency), referred to respective Presidents Jefferson and Grant as the Great Father, or the Great White Father. The Salish referred to the president in their own language as “Amotkan,” which was their word for creator.  

Prior to their hearing about Catholicism, the Salish had been described by Lewis and Clark and others as honest, peaceful, and trustworthy people. They were often noted as being, in the opinions of white explorers and trappers, some of the most well-tempered and mild-mannered Indians in the West. Some of their perceived ethical and moral behaviors had to do with what one scholar called “a fear of supernatural reactions to ill conduct” that had been a part of their world view prior to any understanding of Christianity. This idea of good and evil can be seen in Salish myths, but whether or not it is a concept that truly predates any knowledge of Christianity is hard to prove. It is possible that myths with Christian-like values took shape after the Iroquois came among the Salish. At any rate, it is inarguable that, upon arrival of the Jesuit missionaries, the Salish were receptive to Catholic concepts. The Iroquois had already taught their adopted people many traditions of the church. Nathaniel Wyeth noted in 1833-4 that the Salish observed Sunday as a day of rest, and that the people gathered to hear the teachings of their elders. “The

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Piegans, and hoped for success, when for the first time their enemies had two guns and every shot killed a man.’ We could not stand this, and thought they brought bad spirits with [them]. We all fled and hid ourselves in the mountains; we were not allowed to remain quiet, and constant war parties now harassed us, destroyed the men, women and children of our camps, and took away our horses and mules, for we had no defense until you crossed the mountains and brought us fire arms. Now we no longer hide ourselves but have regained much of our country, hunt the bisons for food and clothing, and have good leather tents.”

service,” Ewers writes, “was interspersed with singing and dancing in a great circle after the fashion of the older, native prophet dance.” Wyeth observed that following their services, the Indians spent the remainder of their day of rest engaged in horse racing and other types of gambling.® Just days after DeSmet first met up with the Salish in July, 1840, he described a mass of thanksgiving he performed at Red Rock Pass.

The altar was made of willows; my blanket made an altar cloth, and all the lodge was adorned with images and wildflowers; the Indians... took assiduous part with the greatest modesty, attention and devotion, and since various nations were among them, they chanted the praises of God in the Flathead, Nez Perce and Iroquois languages. The Canadians, my Fleming [de Velder] and I sang chants in French, English, and Latin.®

The second important fact that remains clear regarding the Bitterroot Iroquois is that they undoubtedly taught the Salish European ideas other than religion. Although there is no direct evidence that agriculture was practiced by any of the Iroquois in the Bitterroot Valley prior to the establishment of the mission, it is possible that some small scale gardening was done. It can’t be discounted that Ignace Lamoose and the other Iroquois had lived in long established agricultural communities in the east. The Iroquois were considered to be an agricultural people, raising plots of corn, beans, pumpkins, melons, and orchard fruits around their villages. Their farming was supplemented by hunting.® Ignace and the others most likely explained to the Salish that Iroquois people cultivated crops, and whites were generally settled people who grew much of their food on what had been Iroquois lands. Once agriculture was introduced to the valley on a significant scale, the Salish became divided into two factions. One group consisted of those Salish who continued a rather

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83 Ewers, The Horse in Blackfoot Culture, p. 18.
traditional hunting and gathering lifestyle. This group was led by Chief Victor, a Salish leader. The other group was made up of those who chose to live in the valley on a more full time basis and farm. In 1853, when a railroad survey group came into the valley for the first time, it was noted that Iroquois were tending chickens, cattle, and crops of wheat and potatoes, and the Salish were off on a bison hunt. The farming Iroquois were led by a man known as Iroquois Peter, whom Gustavus Sohon described in 1854 as “the most industrious Indian in the valley, (who) cultivates a small farm raising wheat, oats, potatoes, etc. and owns a large band of cattle.”

None of this is to say that the Bitterroot Iroquois were not interested in bison or the transient, nomadic lifestyle of the Salish. Ross mentions again and again in his memoir that the Iroquois traveling with him in the early spring of 1823 seemed determined to abandon his beaver trapping project in favor of joining the Salish, who had probably just returned to the valley from their winter hunt. Once in the Bitterroot, Ross wrote that the Iroquois:

wished to go off, saying they would make good hunts in the recesses of these Alpine ridges; but I knew them too well to be duped by their artifices. They would have either sneaked back or lurked among the Flatheads and gone with them not to hunt the beaver nor pay their debts, for that never troubled them, but to feast on buffalo.

As early as 1831 a Salish and Iroquois delegation arrived in St. Louis seeking priests. They traveled there with American Fur Company trappers Andrew Drips and Lucien Fontanelle, but they left empty-handed of black robes. By 1835, Ignace Lamoose, by then known as Old Ignace, arrived in St. Louis with his two half-Salish sons Charles and Francis. They had been sent from the Bitterroot, again, to bring back black robes.

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86 Ewers, “Gustavus Sohon’s Portraits,” p. 3.
87 Ibid., p. 58.
Apparently, Old Ignace had planned to seek out Jesuits in his Canadian homeland but chose instead to try once more in St. Louis. Upon arrival Charles and Francis were baptized in the chapel at St. Louis University, yet no priests returned with them. In 1837, a third Salish delegation set out for St. Louis from the trapper’s rendezvous at Green River, but all of the Indians in the group were killed by a party of Sioux not far from Fort Laramie along the North Platte River. The white trappers in the party were spared. 90

Why the Iroquois who lived among the Salish chose to lead a group of Indians east in order to bring priests to the valley is up to conjecture. Perhaps Ignace and some of the others were simply devout Christians who longed for guidance. They may have felt a need to witness, or introduce their adopted tribe to something they believed in wholeheartedly. As well, it is possible the Iroquois felt pressure from the Blackfeet and, like the Salish they had helped indoctrinate, felt the black robe medicine would give them power against the enemy. Clearly, the Salish received the brunt of the burden when it came to Blackfeet incursions into the mountains. 91

Not only does this information indicate that the Salish and their Iroquois brethren were intensely motivated to have a priest among them, but it also underlines the fact that the Salish were intimate and well connected to the men representing the various fur companies. St. Louis was the center of the fur trade and every trapper in the West was acutely aware of how to travel there and back. It is documented that a number of trappers spent long periods of time among the Salish working in and around the Bitterroot. Thompson claimed that there were about 25 trappers in the mountains west of the Missouri in 1809 but that there had originally been hundreds. It was a dangerous life and many had been killed. 92 As will be seen later, some trappers eventually settled in the valley. Although there is no way to

90 Killoren, "Come, Blackrobe", p. 50.
91 Ibid., p. 54-6.
92 On page 317 Thompson quoted a Salish man speaking to other mountain Indian tribal chiefs at a council considering peace with the Piegans. “You all know,” the man said, “we are the frontier tribe, the enemies must break through or elude us, before they can attack you, it is our horses they steal, and our men that are slain in battle far more than any other people…”
93 Thompson, Travels, p. 286.
know exactly how heavily the Bitterroot’s beaver population was killed off, one can easily imagine the impact simply by reading the accounts of various trappers. In 1812 Thompson delivered five and a half tons of beaver pelts to Montreal from Salish house, which would have been the trading post for Bitterroot trappers. Alexander Ross marched through the valley in 1823 with 55 male trappers (including a number of Iroquois), and 89 women and children. His group had 212 beaver traps, 392 horses, and 75 guns. He mentioned trapping just twelve beaver while moving quickly through the valley on his way to the Snake River country, but his party’s sheer numbers indicate how business-like trapping really was. The solitary and rugged mountain man existed, but he was generally part of a larger operation that had huge economic and political overtones. Ross’ Hudson’s Bay Company was British, and the Brits certainly had strong motivation to trap as many beaver as possible in places such as the Bitterroot Valley. It is well known that over-trapping was actually British policy. Around the same time Ross marched his troops through the Bitterroot toward Idaho, the English Governor, wrote David Wishart, “described the Snake River as ‘a rich preserve of Beaver...which for political reasons we should endeavor to destroy as soon as possible.’ The British wanted to garner the furs before the Americans arrived in force. This would create a ‘fur desert,’ a buffer zone to protect the Pacific Northwest from American penetration.” Thompson described a meeting around 1811 with some Indians who he said “had for several years been hostile to the trappers who destroyed the beaver on their lands...”

By the 1820’s whole ecosystems were changed as beaver were trapped heavily across the Rockies. Tributary creeks that had flowed slowly and clearly through log and willow beaver dams now ran fast and muddy into larger rivers. One scholar has estimated that the Hudson’s Bay Company obliterated as many as 6,000 beaver ponds in the region by the 1840’s, leading to “profound desertification across much of the region over time as

93 Spaulding, The Fur Hunters of the Far West, p. 209-15
beaver dams failed and were not replaced."\textsuperscript{96} Thompson described a spring run-off in 1810 near the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Salish trading house in which the river rose two feet per day. The rapid water that the trapper described sounded like a phenomenon the likes of which he had never seen. The fact that he and his men had wiped out most of the beaver in the area probably contributed to the high water level.\textsuperscript{97} By 1824, according to Jennifer Ott, Peter Ogden passed through the Bitterroot Valley and wrote that the country around him had once been abundant with beaver, but was now "‘ruined.’"\textsuperscript{98}

Higher elevation wetlands, created by backed up beaver dams, were once pockets rich in a variety of game species. These mountain wetlands dried up across the West. In ranges such as the Bitterroot, long time inhabitants must have noticed the changes to the landscape that went hand in hand with large scale beaver trapping. Most scholars agree that the beaver populations in the Rockies were almost completely decimated by 1839. The only thing that saved the animal from near extinction was that fashion changed with silk top-hats becoming popular while beaver hats became passé, and that the beaver naturally has quick population recovery.\textsuperscript{99} Beaver depletion provides one other possibility as to why the Iroquois decided to seek out Jesuits. Perhaps the Iroquois felt that black robe medicine was necessary for their own future well being now that their livelihood had been trapped almost to extinction. When DeSmet finally headed west toward the Salish in 1840, he stopped at the Green River for what would be the last of the infamous rowdy events known as the rendezvous. One trapper described Green River that year succinctly: "‘times were certainly hard--no beaver, and everything dull.’"\textsuperscript{100}

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\textsuperscript{95} Thompson, \textit{Travels}, p. 321.
\textsuperscript{97} Thompson, \textit{Travels}, p. 287.
\textsuperscript{98} Ott, "Clearing the Country," p. 54.
\textsuperscript{99} Wishart, \textit{The Fur Trade}, p. 212.
\textsuperscript{100} Killoren, "Come Blackrobe," p. 60.
The first documented non-trapper, non-explorer whites to come into contact with the Salish in their home region were Protestant missionaries. In 1835 Rev. Samuel Parker and Dr. Marcus Whitman came west in response to the repeated Salish call for black robes at St. Louis. They met with the Salish chief Insula and several Nez Perce at Green River, but Insula was not interested in what the men had to say. “He observed that that they wore neither black gowns nor crosses, that they married, and did not have the great prayer, and that therefore these were not the priests of whom the Iroquois had told him.” The Salish wanted the symbolic richness that came wrapped in the package of Catholicism.

In 1839 a fourth delegation of Indians from the valley canoed down the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers to St. Louis and made another plea for black robes. This time they saw Father DeSmet, who returned with them in the spring. During this journey DeSmet passed through the paltry rendezvous at Green River, where the lack of beaver pelts indicated the end of the first phase of the fur trade. Shortly after he met the Salish on the western side of the Tetons, DeSmet got a glimpse of the bison, an animal that was to be at the center of the second phase of the fur trade. Near the Three Forks of the Missouri, driven with a fervor derived from the presence of the long-awaited black robe, 400 Salish, Nez Perce, and Iroquois horsemen spent three hours killing more than 500 bison. DeSmet never made it to the Bitterroot Valley on his first trip, remaining in the Three Forks area the entire time while the Salish hunted. An important observation that he noted was the presence of about 800 “Flathead.” Although it is unclear whether DeSmet included all Salishan people on the hunt (i.e. Nez Perce, Pend O’reilles) in this number, other observations were more clarified. DeSmet observed that the nation had been greatly reduced by Blackfeet incursions, that the Salish desired to settle permanently on Salish lands in order to avoid enemies. “They are awaiting,” he wrote, “the return of our missionaries to execute this praiseworthy design. To cultivate the soil and live as good and

103 Chittendon and Richardson, Life, Letters, and Travels, p. 194.
fervent Christians, such, 'they say, 'is the object of our desires.'” By the end of August DeSmet was on his way back to St. Louis, where he spent the fall and winter preparing for a return journey.104

The Jesuits were determined to create the type of mission in the Rockies that their order had established successfully in Paraguay. The South American system had been based on Paul’s missionary tactics among the Corinthians. Paul believed that the people of Corinth should not be expected to “observe strictly Judaic practices and rituals.” Therefore, the Jesuit’s philosophy in Paraguay had been to allow the natives to assimilate some aspects of their own culture into their new Christian way of life. It allowed, as Killoren put it, for “new expressions of Christianity.” In theory, it was a realistic and practical approach. The central idea was that a group might better understand the gospel if it was taught within their own familiar cultural context and in their own language.

After spending part of the winter reviewing Luigi Muratori’s book, *A Relation of the Reductions of Paraguay*, DeSmet came to the conclusion that there was one key element upon which the success of the Salish mission hinged. The Paraguay missions had been isolated far beyond the interference of outsiders. The Jesuits made a deliberate effort to be as far away from European settlement as possible. As one scholar put it, it made theocracy more attainable. Just as their brethren had done in Paraguay, DeSmet and his fellow Jesuits felt that their mission would need to remain free of the influence of white settlers in order to have success.105 Once among the Salish the Jesuits would need to find a place where they might establish a secluded, even guarded mission. If the Salish were to be fully Christianized, they had to be isolated as much as possible from the outside world that DeSmet knew was approaching them. After his arrival in the Bitterroot in 1841, DeSmet reiterated the idea that the conversion would require “Flight from all contaminating influence; not only from the corruption of the age, but from what the gospel calls the

104 Ibid., p. 992.
world. Caution against all immediate intercourse with the whites, even with the workmen, whom necessity compels us to employ..."

Western Montana in 1840 was not as cut off from European influences as the lands of the Guarani Indians of Paraguay when the Jesuits arrived there in 1610. When DeSmet and his party of eight (Fathers Point, Mengarini, lay Brothers Claessens, Specht, and Huet, and three laborers) finally set out from St. Louis in 1841 to live among the Salish, they traveled much of the way with a party of fifteen other people. All of their companions were heading west for a variety of reasons and some were veterans of western trails. The Jesuits’ four month journey was through country that had already been traveled extensively by trappers, explorers, and other missionaries. It is debatable whether or not the black robes would have made it to western Montana without their traveling companions, men who were the type of intruding white settlers the priests wished to keep from the Salish. The Fathers were led across rivers and ravines, sheltered from tornadoes, and fed by the hunters in their party. Although the Jesuits were tough men, it is clear that as a whole they were not experienced enough to travel independently from St. Louis to Montana in 1841. DeSmet wrote that Mengarini and Point were tossed from their horses at least a dozen times, and that one occasion he himself was flipped over the head of his horse while running at full gallop.

Before DeSmet left the Salish on his first trip, he asked them to consider a place where a permanent mission might be established once he returned. The tribe narrowed their choice to two places—one in the Missoula Valley and the other in the Bitterroot. After DeSmet’s 1841 party connected with the Indians at Fort Hall, they traveled north and eventually passed through Hell’s Gate and into the Missoula area. Seeing the vulnerabilities of this area, Point said that the fathers found that the first place “did not meet their

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106 Buckley, Nicolas Point, p. 203-4.
107 Ibid., p. 194.
108 In his journals, Point says that one of Father Mengarini’s favorite pastimes along the trail was shooting rattlesnakes for his amusement.
satisfactions.” Point gave several reasons for choosing the Bitterroot Valley for the Jesuit mission. First, Hell’s Gate was the very point where the Blackfeet passed through the mountains. The priests undoubtedly knew this and had little desire to subject themselves to constant harassment and distraction. Instead, they liked the fact that the Bitterroot was “guarded by a mountain range against the incursions of the Blackfeet...” Second, the Missoula Valley is wide open and subject to high winds, its hills covered only sporadically with patches of trees. The Bitterroot, on the other hand, was “defended against the rigors of the northern winds by another chain of mountains covered at the base with forests which would furnish firewood and the timber needed for building purposes.”

The second choice was a more perfect fit to the fathers’ needs. Thirty miles south of Hell’s Gate, near what is today the town of Stevensville, the spot was well within the Bitterroot Valley. It was situated on the east side of the big river, between two small exit tributaries of what would later be named the Burnt Fork of the Bitterroot River. The place that was christened St. Mary’s Reduction appeared to be well situated for defense against both weather and human enemies. It was a mission with plenty of heavily wooded slopes nearby and a view. The Bitterroot mountains to the west of provided what appeared to be a rock wall holding back the universe around them, a visual reminder to the Jesuits that the success of St. Mary’s Reduction depended on isolation. After arriving in the valley DeSmet made clear in a letter what qualities he liked most about the location of the mission: the land was fertile and was surrounded by high mountains.

The first thing the missionaries built in the valley was a large cross. It was the emblem of their purpose, and they built their village around it, ever mindful of the importance carried by such a symbolic power at the center of the mission. Point drafted the original plans for the mission based on his own reading of Muratori. Within five weeks the mission was constructed. Like the reductions in Paraguay, it would be a village, the center

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of which would be the church and cross. The priests’ house and the school would adjoin
the church and would be surrounded by dwelling houses for the Indians, workshops, and
storage buildings. The farm land would be on the outskirts of the village.\(^{112}\) This plan was
important to the priests because they felt that the physical layout of the mission was key to
their success. A tightly knit village centered around the church was as old as Christendom,
and one can be assured that the fathers, all Europeans, were personally familiar with this
plan. “To facilitate the attainment of the end in view,” DeSmet wrote regarding their goal of
Christianizing and civilizing the Salish, “we have chosen the place of the first missionary
station, formed the plan of the village, made a division of the lands, determined the form of
the various buildings, etc.”\(^ {113}\)

An early sketch by Point, titled “St. Mary’s Among the Flatheads,” shows a busy,
yet orderly place littered with building foundations, materials, men cutting wood, Indian
lodges, log buildings, and determined workers darting back and forth behind drawn carts
or with axes in hand. There are two noteworthy things about the picture, the earliest portrait
of European styled settlement in Montana. First, in the foreground stand three men. Two
are clearly priests in their black robes, and it can be assumed that they are DeSmet and
Mengarini since Point was the artist. The third man appears to be a chief, with long hair
underneath a top hat that may have been procured at Green River or from other white
traders to the region. The priests are pointing toward the progress as the chief listens.
Although Mengarini mentioned in a diary entry that he had joined in the building of the
church and provided physical labor at one time, Point’s painting presents the vision of a
place where the priests are overseers to others’ work.\(^ {114}\) “St. Mary’s Among the
Flatheads,” with the priests watching the others build their mission, reinforces the
stereotypical notion that Jesuit missions had a certain element of theocratic rule. This idea is
also seen in the journals of DeSmet. While “I am writing these lines,” he commented


\(^ {112}\) Laveille, *The Life of Father DeSmet, S.J.*, p. 128.

\(^ {113}\) Buckley, *Nicolas Point*, p. 204.
shortly after arrival in the valley, “I hear the joyful voices of the carpenters, re-echoing the blows on the smith’s anvil, and I see them engaged in raising the house of prayer.” While others worked, DeSmet watched, listened, and journaled.\textsuperscript{115}

Another interesting aspect of the picture is the placement of the large wooden cross. Set outside the fenced area surrounding the church, the cross, center piece of the village, was in the open end of a U shaped corral. The cross’ holy ground was surrounded by village livestock. DeSmet mentioned that during the initial construction phase, the Indians cut between 2,000 and 3,000 stakes, or boards, for the construction of the church alone. Although Point’s sketch is obviously not to scale, it is apparent that at least this much wood would have been used for the two fences surrounding the church and cross. Fences were clearly a part of the village plan that the Jesuits saw as necessary to success in the Rockies, for there were a total of four fenced areas within the village core itself.\textsuperscript{116} Fences held livestock and kept livestock from gardens. Fences protected two types of property.

DeSmet’s priorities became obvious while construction was underway at St. Mary’s. He felt that full Christian conversion involved giving the Indians what he claimed that they had professed to want during his first visit: “to cultivate the soil” so as to “live as good and fervent Christians.”\textsuperscript{117} In October, after no more than a few weeks in the Bitterroot Valley, he set out with several Salish for Fort Colville, 600 miles away in what is today the state of Washington. At Colville DeSmet hoped to procure livestock and seeds that would help the village and the Salish establish themselves as an agricultural community. DeSmet’s journey across the mountains to Washington presents a dilemma rich with irony and importance. Fort Colville, the Hudson’s Bay Company’s chief inland outpost at the time, was one of the nearest white settlements to the Bitterroot Valley.

Although DeSmet felt that St. Mary’s prosperity as a Catholic reduction depended on

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., p. 205.
\textsuperscript{115} Chittendon and Richardson, Life, Letters, and Travels, p. 317.
\textsuperscript{116} A copy of Point’s painting can be found in Dan Flores’ article “Jesus and Animus Beneath the Bitterroots,” in Big Sky Journal, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1998: 32.
\textsuperscript{117} Chittendon and Richardson, Life, Letters, and Travels, p. 992.
isolation from whites, the other ingredients to the mission's recipe for success depended entirely on places such as Ft. Colville. If the Salish were to be farmers, settled in one place, they were going to need the accouterments of Euro-styled agriculture that Hudson's Bay forts and other white enclaves offered. It appears nowhere in his writings that DeSmet found the relationship between St. Mary's and Colville as bothersome philosophically. What he found at Colville was a beneficial supply source for the seeds and cattle that would be the foundation of St. Mary's agricultural existence. It was a practical, albeit hypocritical, move on the part of DeSmet. Lack of supplies would be a thorn in the side of the missions for years. As late as 1846, DeSmet noted that the Indians in the vicinity of the Sacred Heart, or Coeur d'Alene mission, needed agriculture to unite them and keep them from wandering but that much was needed to accomplish this, including "seeds of various kinds" and "agricultural implements."\textsuperscript{118}

DeSmet returned to the Bitterroot on December 8 with several bushels of oats, wheat, and potatoes, as well as a small number of cattle. Apparently, neither the priests' seed crops nor his cattle impressed the Salish enough to make them spend the winter in the valley. On December 29, three weeks after DeSmet's return to the mission, forty lodges of Salish left for the bison plains. While DeSmet, Mengarini, and the others remained in the valley and were holed up with the seeds that would be sown in the spring, Nicholas Point traveled east with the hunters.\textsuperscript{119}

Point was miserably cold and hungry on the bison grounds, and this was to be expected. The plains in winter are harsh, and a number of the Salish that year succumbed to snow blindness and other frailties related to the cold. On at least one occasion Point became hypothermic and was saved only when the Indians managed to warm him by placing him next to a large fire. The dim outlook of an unsuccessful hunt (which meant starvation) was the other problem that terrible winter, and indeed, it looked for some time as if the Salish

\textsuperscript{118} Chittendon and Richardson, \textit{Life, Letters, and Travels}, p. 567.
\textsuperscript{119} Buckley, \textit{Nicolas Point}, p. 206.
were not going to kill a single animal. When it could get no worse, Point said that the Salish went onto the plains and came upon and killed 155 bison only by the grace of God. It was an act that reminded him of Peter casting his net into the ocean and pulling up 153 fish.  

According to Mengarini, Point returned from the bison hunt a delusional wreck. It had been an experience like nothing Point had ever faced and it had tested him to the core. For the trials he had experienced, it is safe to say that Point became less idealistic than the others. He had been threatened and challenged by the Salish way of life on the plains. He had experienced the lifestyle of the nomad while DeSmet and Mengarini were in cabins at the mission village with the old and the young, imagining a Paraguay in the Rockies. As his own brother wrote years later, Father Point owed much of his safety that winter to the simple fact that he was able to draw—an ability that the materially-fascinated Indians found curious. One such instance where Point may have felt threatened occurred after the Salish captured a Piegan. Point begged for the man’s release and his wish was granted, but the Salish were upset that the Father had meddled in their wartime affairs and they told him as much. The experience gave Point a perspective about the Salish idea of warfare that the men at the mission had yet to experience first hand. 

In regards to the weather, things were not much better at St. Mary’s the winter of 1841-2 than they had been on the plains. The visions of a mild-weathered, protected paradise in the Bitterroot Valley were shattered before Point had left for the hunt. A gale-winded storm passed through the valley, ripped trees to the ground, carried away tents, and broke the church’s windows. The storm passed, but it was a harbinger of the winter to come. On the long, dark nights, Mengarini took to sleeping outside. He found that the fallen dew froze and provided an extra layer of insulation that one could not get in the cold indoors under a cabin’s roof. Remembering the weather many years later, he said that it

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had been so bad as to be nearly indescribable. The thought of his first winter in the Bitterroot chilled Father Mengarini for the rest of his life.124

The records do not indicate whether or not any of the livestock DeSmet had brought from Ft. Colville died during the winter of 1842, but it is possible that a need for cattle led DeSmet on his next journey to another Hudson’s Bay post. Once spring came, Point and the hunting lodges returned from the plains, Brother Claessens plowed and planted an enclosed piece of land next to the village, and DeSmet headed out for Ft. Vancouver. It is quite easily imagined, as Laveille reported, that the Indians thought Claessens’ planting seeds to be a folly since he had plowed up horse pasture and buried seeds that were good to eat. “When things began to sprout in the spring,” Laveille wrote, “the Flatheads remained whole days at a time perched upon the fence to see if what was told them would come true. Shouts of joy greeted the first blades that appeared above the ground.”125

The first potato sprouts probably appeared about the time Point returned to the plains for the summer hunts in the third week of July. Although the birth of agriculture in the valley had undoubtedly impressed many of the Salish, they were still pulled east by the call of the bison with an almost magnetic force. No matter how magical Brother Claessens’ sprouting crops nor how fat the livestock penned in the shadow of the mission’s cross, the Salish in July of 1842 still had one thing on their minds: bison. Father Point seems to have been the only Jesuit to have come to this realization. In less than one year after the establishment of St. Mary’s, Point knew that a Paraguay styled reduction would not work as long as the Salish continued to live a nomadic bison-centered economy. The nomad lifestyle insured two things: long absences from St. Marys and war. Although DeSmet had spent the majority of a summer hunt with the Salish in the Three Forks area in 1840, Point had seen the bison hunt for what it really was: the most important aspect of Salish life, new

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122 Laveille, The Life of Father DeSmet, S.J., p. 129.
124 Buckley, Nicolas Point, p. 206.
125 Laveille, The Life of Father DeSmet, S.J., p. 149.
found Catholicism included. By the second week of the summer hunt, DeSmet had returned from Vancouver. He visited St. Mary's for just a few days, then joined Point and the Indian hunters on the plains. DeSmet was en route to St. Louis and Europe, where he planned to raise money and gather missionaries for a return trip to the Northwest. Out on the bison grounds, Point told DeSmet what was on his mind. Unless the Blackfeet were Christianized there would be no success in the region for any tribes, Salish included. Points' biographer summed up the younger priests' thoughts: The Blackfeet's "incessant warfare had a dilatory effect on the conversion of their neighbors east and west, and at the same time this warfare prevented the evolution of an economic and political climate that would foster and sustain Paraguay-type reductions." Point asked DeSmet to send him on a mission to the Blackfeet, but DeSmet said no. He had other plans for Point.

After the summer hunt, Point and Brother Huet were sent to live among the Coeur d'Alenes, where they started the Sacred Heart mission. DeSmet was determined to establish a replica of Paraguay in the Rockies, and this required placing numerous missions throughout the mountains. The problem with this tactic was that it spread an already thin operation nearly threadbare. DeSmet was gone and Point and Huet were in Idaho from November 1842 to September 1843. Then, Point was back on the winter bison hunt in 1844. The missionaries at St. Marys (Mengarini, Claessens and Specht) obviously had there hands full putting in the crops and managing the remaining logistical and spiritual aspects of the mission. But their objective of establishing a place that thrived on farming had a certain level of success. By the spring of 1844, their third planting season in the Bitterroot, the missionaries harvested more than 900 bushels of potatoes. "I have seen," DeSmet wrote after returning that year with a new priest named Anthony Ravalli, "several

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126 Ewers wrote on p. 27 in "Gustavus Sohon's Portraits" that "Probably no one expressed more concisely the simple objectives of primitive Flathead life than did Father Mengarini, for many years their missionary, who wrote: 'Generally the prayers of our Indians consisted in asking to live a long time, to kill plenty of animals and enemies, and to steal the greatest number of (the enemies') horses possible.'"

potatoes the size of a man’s head. The astonishment of the good Indians was raised to the highest pitch when the monstrous roots were taken out of the ground.”

By 1846 there were obvious physical and cultural changes in the Bitterroot Valley and in the Salish way of life. After five years in the valley, the Jesuits’ gardens were blooming and their buildings were sound. That Easter DeSmet, who had returned again to the valley after an absence of eighteen months, wrote about a great feast that included “potatoes, parsnips, turnips, beets, beans, peas, and a great variety of meats,” which was washed down by a non-alcoholic drink (as good as the pale beers of Europe according to the priest) made of barley and native roots. The priests grew numerous vegetables and planted an orchard that produced enough fruit to fill a storage room. Point wrote that 1845 had produced a rich harvest, but that 1846 “promised a superabundance.” There were 40 head of cattle, and a herd of hogs. From the looks of things, DeSmet predicted that the valley’s grasses were capable of supporting thousands of cattle, but he did see problem areas. He wrote:

St. Mary’s, or Bitter Root Valley, is one of the finest in the mountains, presenting, throughout its whole extent of about 200 miles, numerous grazing, but few arable tracts of land. Irrigation, either by natural or artificial means, is absolutely necessary to the cultivation of the soil, in consequence of the long summer drought that prevails in this region, commencing in April and ending only in October.

The founding priest indicated that the two rivulets on either side of the village, streams running from Burnt Fork into the Bitterroot, were “now almost useless” but might “with little labor, be made to irrigate the fields, gardens, and orchards of the village.” The priests eventually developed an irrigation system. Years later John Owen would mention in

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a journal entry that he had spent the day repairing the old dams built by the missionaries. The dams were four miles from the fort, or old mission, and turned "the whole of Burnt Fork this way," according to Owen.¹³¹

By 1846 Father Ravalli constructed a mill that housed two fifteen inch grindstones brought from Belgium by DeSmet and a saw made from an old wagon wheel. The sawmill made a significant difference in life at St. Marys. With quickly sawed boards the Jesuits built a new church and 12 new Indian dwelling houses that year. In addition, flour was more available. Prior to the mill the missionaries were forced to boil their wheat or pound it with a rock before making bread.¹³² With the water powered mill, the village had the capacity to grind 10-12 bushels of wheat a day.¹³³ In 1846 the mission was beginning to reach a point where feeding and housing larger amounts of people was conceivable.

This milestone could not have come at a better time. In 1845 DeSmet wrote that in his opinion the bison were becoming more scarce and that it was a matter of time before the bison hunt failed the Salish altogether.¹³⁴ In the summer hunt of 1846 his prediction began to ring true. Point said that fewer Salish went on the hunts that year due to two reasons. First, two good crop years at the mission had kept the Salish well fed, encouraging more people to stay in the valley and tend fields. Second, depletion of the bison resulted in more restricted hunting grounds due to hostile tribes being forced into closer contact. Point traveled through the Three Forks area that year and crossed and re-crossed numerous trenches, battlements, and earthworks that indicated heavy warfare on the bison grounds.¹³⁵

It was a time of change, but some things remained the same. The embittered rivalry with the Blackfeet never ended, and although the priests tried to bring the two tribes

¹³³ Chittendon and Richardson, Life, Letters, and Travels, p. 570.
¹³⁴ Forbis, "Religious Acculturation of the Flathead Indians of Montana," p. 64.
together, something always went wrong. On one occasion a Blackfoot chief and his son were baptized in the Bitterroot Valley. The chief smoked the pipe with the Salish, then retired to bed. That night, a Blackfoot warrior, not of the treaty group, was shot while attempting to steal horses. Father Point mentioned another time when nine different groups of Blackfeet stole 20 horses in a three week span from within the enclosed paddock in the shadow of the mission cross.\textsuperscript{136}

It is likely that by 1846 the Iroquois-farmer/ Salish-bison hunter dichotomy began to take the shape that it established by 1853 when the railroad survey visited the valley. In addition, during the 1846 bison hunt the priests began to lose the power they had enjoyed since DeSmet’s initial meeting with the tribe six years earlier. That fall, when the Salish returned from the summer hunt, the priests received a lackluster greeting. Father Ravalli wrote:

\textit{...we were not a little astonished when on their approaching the reduction last fall...their camp, which was broken up in various bands, took different courses. Part of the Indians were unwilling or afraid to come up to their village, while the others on entering took up again their old-time barbarous yells, which we had not heard since we came among them. They gave a chilly salute to the missionaries and then drew off with their lodges far from the latter nor did they show themselves to the priest except rarely and then only to smoke in his cabin. They sold us grudgingly a little dry meat and that of the worst quality. We heard a little later that on Father DeSmet’s departure from their hunting camp to descend the Missouri they had given themselves up to their old war dances, to savage obscenity and to shameless excesses of the flesh.}

\textsuperscript{135} Buckley, \textit{Nicolas Point}, p. 275-81.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., p. 250-65.
There have been several explanations as to why the Salish were upset. One scholar thought that the Indians did not like Mengarini, who was usually left in charge of the mission when DeSmet was away, which was most of the time. Mengarini was not a very giving person and was apparently very businesslike in his dealings with the Indians. He also mentioned how the priests’ discouragement of polygamy frustrated the Salish men. Both explanations are valid, but something larger than Mengarini’s personality, larger even than marriage customs, had created the problems Ravalli experienced.

On his way east that fall, DeSmet had managed to bring together 2,000 Salish, Nez Perce, Piegans, Bloods, Gros Ventres and Blackfeet for an open air mass. He prayed that all might be joined in peace. At the time of the ceremony, all indications are that it was a success. But later, that joint mass would be seen as an important event in the minds of the Salish. DeSmet had given the enemy the Catholic medicine, shifting the spiritual balance of power. As other evidence supports, bison populations in 1846 were depleted to the point that warfare on the plains reached a bitter apex. The Salish would have been very sensitive to what they saw as the passing of advantageous power through DeSmet’s prayers and baptisms among the Blackfeet. The symbolic gesture toward the enemy, combined with a noticeable decline in success on the hunt, would have likely led the Salish to believe that their new God was on another team. The Salish would have certainly been upset, even angry upon re-entering the Bitterroot Valley and hearing the whine of the new sawmill, then seeing from afar the fields of potatoes, smoke rising from the new cabins’ chimneys, and the mission cross by the corral full of cattle.

Over the next three years, the new way of life in the valley continued to develop. Some Indians became more settled as farmers, while others attempted to continue the life of their ancestors dwelling in portable lodges back and forth between the mountains and plains. Salish population for this time is difficult to estimate, as they are in any community of people who come and go with the regularity of the Salish. DeSmet said that there were

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about 800 Salish in 1840. Five years later he claimed that there were about 550, and in 1853, the Stevens survey estimated 350 people, mostly women and children. This obviously reflects a downward trend that would lead to the assumption that warfare and disease were exacting a toll on the tribe. Adding to the confusion, Point commented in 1846 that one of the most remarkable temporal benefits for these Flatheads has been the increase in their population. What are the reasons for this consoling fact? I believe we can credit the following causes: greater respect and gentleness toward women; better care for children; more freedom in the choice of spouses; better care and more solicitude for the sick; fewer wars, but when wars are unavoidable, the undeniable fact that heaven protects the Christians.

Other important changes took place throughout the West and in the valley during this time. Since Lewis and Clark European and Euro-American men employed as trappers and explorers passed through the northwest region and lived in and near the Bitterroot. After the arrival of Jesuits and the establishment of St. Mary’s, there was more white traffic in the home range of the Salish than ever before. As a result of the war with Mexico that ended in 1848, the United States obtained land stretching from Texas to Oregon. Even before the war, there were wagon loads of emigrants heading for the new lands. In 1841 a group of 70 people left Independence, Missouri on a route that would become known as the Oregon Trail. Two years later, after John C. Fremont had explained the trail in detail in a published report, a wagon train of 1,000 people and 5,000 head of oxen and cattle

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139 Buckley, *Nicolas Point*, p. 274.
traveled its length. By 1847, it was estimated that the trail carried up to 5,000 people annually.  

In 1846 the superintendent of Indian affairs at St. Louis heard complaints from Plains tribes that white people were destroying large numbers of bison. The superintendent, Thomas Harvey, called for roads and military protection for emigrants on their way to the mountains. ""When the buffalo becomes scarce,"" Harvey wrote to Washington, ""the stock and persons of the emigrants will hardly be safe...especially when they [the Indians] look upon the emigrants as the cause of the scarcity of their source of subsistence.""  

The importance of the western emigrants in regards to land use in the Bitterroot Valley is two-fold. First, with the increased hunting pressure on the bison that was brought about by larger number of whites in the region, the bison-centered lifestyle of the Salish was challenged. With fewer bison, the Salish who lived in the valley and didn’t farm were living in poverty. In addition, an increased number of emigrants to Oregon meant that the travelers would need supplies. Traders began working along the trail. A number of men began a business in trading fresh cattle for the tired and foot sore animals heading west with emigrants on the trail. Two tired animals would be traded for one fresh animal, thus the herds possessed by the traders grew rapidly. White men such as Joseph Lompre, William Rogers, and John Jacobs and mixed-bloods Gabriel Prudhomme and Ben and Jim Simonds who had trapped in and explored the Rockies for years, were suddenly bringing hundreds of head of weary cattle from as far away as the Thomas Fork in Wyoming into the Bitterroot. The cattle were given healing rest while being fattened on the valley’s grasses. These men knew that the Bitterroot offered several advantages, including relatively mild winters, good grazing, decent protection from the Blackfeet, and with the Salish, an Indian population that was relatively easy to get along with.

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141 Killoren, ""Come Blackrobe,"" p. 116.
The tensions that had developed between the Jesuits and the bison hunters increased as people began bringing larger numbers of cattle into the valley. The changes the Salish had witnessed on the bison hunt in 1846 were only magnified as whites came into the Bitterroot with their cattle and horses. By the late 1840's, the actions of the Salish majority "constituted a bloodless revolt against the planned socio-economic program inaugurated by Father DeSmet." They probably saw larger numbers of whites and their livestock as an extension of what the Jesuits began with their own cattle and fences. By 1849, Father Ravalli falsely claimed that all was well. "At present," he wrote, "the Indians are well affected toward our holy religion and toward us," but clearly, that was wishful thinking. By the end of the next year the mission was sold to a white trader. Before the lease was signed, Ravalli bared the truth: "The majority gave up 'private prayer' and vented insult and injury every day upon the missionary. Though we were making sacrifices for their sick, even so far as to deprive ourselves of a morsel of bread, they refused to sell us necessary provisions while under our very eyes they sold to an agent of the Hudson Bay Company." In a letter to DeSmet, his Roman Superior Rootham eventually summed up the failure of the mission quite well:

It seems that the idea of renewing the miracles of Paraguáy amid those mountains was a Utopia. In the first place, we could not hope for the means which our Fathers received from the Crowns of Spain and Portugal. Then, it was impossible to keep the whites at a distance; then, too, the nature of the land is quite different and one cannot hope to wean the bulk of the savages from their nomadic life during a great part of the year...I declare, my dear Father, I don’t see how one can have any success at all.

142 Ewers, "Gustavus Sohon’s Portraits," p. 22.
Upon receiving the above letter, DeSmet must have been heartbroken. What had started with such promise had deteriorated into disaster in only ten years. When the Jesuits left the valley, the buildings and fenced lots of the mission were the new property of an industrious white man named John Owen, a fact that must have made their departure much more painful for the priests. One of their original goals had been to keep whites out of the valley, but the nature of the place combined with national events beyond their control had made that dream impossible. DeSmet's pronouncements that the valley was excellent cattle land now had the opportunity to be tested. As the traditional hunting grounds of bison were depleted on the plains, both by Indians and whites, a shifting pattern of land use in the Bitterroot Valley was one of the results. Europeans and Euro-Americans were moving west in large numbers, and as the bison disappeared, the Salish were forced to face the fact that a different type of land use in Montana and the Bitterroot Valley was their new reality.¹⁴⁵

In 1849, the year Father Ravalli shamelessly tried to convince himself that everything at St. Mary’s was well, the United States Army began establishing forts along the Oregon Trail. The forts were for the protection of an increasingly large number of emigrants moving west. This government action made it inevitable that white people were going to effect more change than they already had among the native populations throughout the Plains and Northwest. The protection of the trail and the large number of people and animals who moved over it were events of national and international importance that would create immense changes in the ecological and cultural history of the West, including the Bitterroot Valley. On May 10th, Lieutenant Colonel William Loring left Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas with a regiment of mounted riflemen and traveled west on the trail. Along the way he dropped men at Forts Kearney, Laramie, and what came to be known as Cantonment Loring outside the old Hudson’s Bay Company’s Ft. Hall in Idaho. By October, Loring made it to Vancouver, after stationing men the length of the road. As one historian put it, “in precautionary fashion the military arm of the United States had been extended across the Great Plains.”

One of the 600 men who moved west with Loring was a Pennsylvanian named John Owen. Owen joined the regiment as a sutler, or supply man, and traveled as far as Cantonment Loring, six miles above Fort Hall. No one knows for certain how Owen first heard about the Bitterroot Valley. It is likely that some of the old trappers turned trail traders, such as Lompre, Rogers, Prudhomme, Jacobs, or the Simonds, found themselves at Cantonment Loring on a regular basis. They undoubtedly mentioned the beautiful valley’s grasses, as well as its strategic location. It was there, they told Owen, that their cattle healed and fattened. It is documented that Lompre, Rogers, Jacobs and Owen all

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enjoyed a sip of rum or whiskey, so it is easy to imagine the four of them sitting around a table and having a drink, discussing one of the things that men on the frontier discussed in 1849 and 1850—the opportunities for someone willing to take calculated risks. By the end of 1850, Owen resigned his position with the military and went to the Bitterroot with Prudhomme, who in years past acted as an interpreter for the missionaries. Perhaps Prudhomme knew as well as anyone that the Fathers wanted out, and he may have been the person to convince Owen finally to have a look. It has been suggested that another reason Owen wanted to leave Loring was that the family of his wife, a Shoshone woman named Nancy, was considering all of his property as their own and that he was losing money.

At any rate, on November 5, Owen bought the mission from the Jesuits for $250.

In the nine years since DeSmet, Mengarini, and Point established the first Jesuit mission in the Rockies, the Bitterroot Valley changed drastically. It went from part-time home of the Salish, a place where great horse herds thrived on open grasses in what Meriwether Lewis called “Horse Valley,” to being a Euro-styled settlement with fenced livestock pens, fields of crops, saw and grist mills, a church, storehouses, and more. Now, the St. Mary’s infrastructure, buildings and cultivated plots whose original purpose was to establish firmly a secluded and utopian Paraguay-styled Catholic mission, was at the center of Montana’s first real estate deal. Although a handful of whites in the valley and in the region had already effected change in the Bitterroot, the transition from St. Mary’s to Fort Owen was made complete in a matter of seconds. When the Jesuits sold the mission to Owen, capitalism replaced Catholicism as the new objective of the place. The road to

147 Owen’s ledger entries for Jacobs, for example, in the winter of 1850-1, show that he bought several decks of cards and a bottle of brandy every day for two or three days in a row on more than one occasion. Owen often mentions nipping at whiskey, or attending a celebration in which the host was gracious enough to provide a libation.

148 Dillon Examiner, May 1, 1935. In Fort Owen folder, vertical files case, Bitterroot Valley Historical Society, Hamilton, MT

149 Weisel, Men and Trade, p. xxi.
greater Euro-American settlement and more rapid transition was laid out like a carpet weaved with inevitable change.

Owen sensed the certainty of greater change and his buying of the mission indicates as much. He ran his trading post and farm as a business, and for the most part he was successful for many years. Still, in the historical record of the West, a character such as Owen is seen as something much more romantic than early businessman. Owen was different. He lived between the era of the Hudson’s Bay trappers, the coming of the gold miners, and the big government expeditions of railroad surveyors and road builders. In short, Owen was in the valley for the business opportunity, but he was likely just as interested in the frontier lifestyle that the Bitterroot Valley of 1850 provided an average man from Philadelphia. The transitionary times in which he lived are exemplified throughout Owens’ early journals. In the spring of 1852, for example, his entries over a three day span are curt, yet telling of the Indian and Euro-American cultures Owen moved in and between:

Wednesday, April 14: Ploughing
Thursday, April 15: Do Bear Dance
Friday, April 16: Sowing Oats

Like many of his Anglo predecessors and contemporaries on the frontier, Owen married an Indian woman. At times he was referred to by his Salish name I-mool-tzen, which translated as bison horn cup, because his goatee beard resembled such a cup. In the valley his home was known as Fort Owen, and his official title was Major Owen, not because of any earned military rank, but because it was common in that time to refer to the head man at a frontier trading post as “Major.” In the Bitterroot Valley of the 1850’s John Owen lived a life that was unique to his environment and his place at that particular

151 Ibid., p. 11.
152 Weisel, Men and Trade, p. xxi.
time. Father Palladino, who moved to the valley once the Jesuits re-established a mission among the Salish in the 1860’s, minced no words in his description of the Major’s station in life when he said that John Owen lived like a king at his fort.153 Dunbar paints a scene that, although not necessarily regal, does seem romantic:

...there still remains the mental picture of Owen sitting in his library at night, while the rest of the Fort people were deep in slumber. With his pipe in hand; his dog at his feet; his glass of grog at his elbow; and Lingard’s History of England propped on the table before him; he studied the story of a history that was past, oblivious of the mighty history that he himself was shaping.154

The shaping of the Bitterroot Valley after the purchase of the mission in late 1850 involved many other people and events besides Owen and his trading, but it is inarguable that the Fort was the center of attention for a wide geographical area. In small numbers, men began moving to the valley because it offered decent range and farming lands. Another inarguable advantage was that Fort Owen gave the valley a centered sense of security, not to mention a place to procure some of life’s necessary and not so necessary supplies.

Owen’s ledgers indicate that he did very little trading at the fort until the fall of 1851, nearly a year after his purchase. What he did in the year prior is not documented, although it is known that by summer he was gathering goods at both Ft. Hall and at the Dalles in Oregon. In each of those places he must have boasted of the Bitterroot. Here again one can imagine the frontier conversation topic: opportunity. Owen knew well that any propaganda he might spread about the valley would benefit his own trade. Immigrants to the valley might also help guarantee his own safety. Whatever he said must have

154 Ibid., p. 13.
sounded good. At Ft. Hall and at the Dalles, Owen met men who followed him back to the Bitterroot.

At Ft. Hall Owen met Thomas Harris, a 23 year old who had recently arrived from Kentucky after a trip across the Plains. Owen must have liked Harris immediately, been desperate for help, or both, because he hired the green immigrant on the spot to come to the Bitterroot and be the Fort’s salaried farmer. It was a precipitative move for the young Harris, but it would eventually pay off. Decades after he became Montana’s first full-time Anglo farmer, Harris would be one of the most successful men in the Territory. The man Owen lured from the Dalles was another southerner, a Tennessean by the name of Caleb Irvine. Irvine was a Mexican War veteran and had been a lieutenant under Loring. He and Owen had probably met along the trail of duty two years earlier, and may have been friends. The evidence would support that they were: during Owen’s visit to the Dalles, Irvine advanced Owen $600, resigned his officer’s post in the army, and headed east to the Bitterroot Valley toward a new life as civilian.155

There is no way of knowing exactly how many head of livestock were grazing in the Bitterroot as a result of the trail trade in 1851 when Owen, Harris, and Irvine began to establish themselves in the valley. The Salish had 4,000 horses and 1,000 cattle six years later, some which had undoubtedly come into their hands via trade either directly on the Oregon Trail or with men who worked that trade and had come to the Bitterroot. 156 One can only guess at the number of livestock owned and managed by the Indians, as well as the non-Indian people, in the valley in the six years leading to 1857 because the number would have fluctuated. To begin with, one must speculate about how many trail traders, regardless of ethnicity, were in the valley at any time prior to the 1860 Washington territorial population census. According to Owen’s journals in the years before the Steven’s survey of 1853-4, we know for certain that there were at least eighteen men who fit the

155 Weisel, Men and Trade, p. 39-54.
156 Weisel says on page xxvii that some of the animals the Salish acquired via the trail trade were blooded stock that greatly enhanced their existent herds.
profile of a trail trader. This group of men included whites, Indian/Anglo mixed-bloods, and two "Mexicans." Their common denominator was that they were transient by nature (some of them in and out of the valley intermittently over the next decade) and that they were in the Bitterroot in years that saw heavy traffic on the Oregon Trail. At the same time Owen estimated the Salish population between the Bitterroot and Flathead Lake, a population that included many widows and daughters, to be about 350.157 Mullan explained the population estimate thus:

Their numbers have been so greatly diminished the last few years, by being murdered by the Blackfeet, that at the present there remains but a handful of the noblest of the Indian tribes of North America to tell the tale of woe, misery, and misfortune, that they have suffered at the hands of the Blackfeet, these hell-hounds of the mountains.158

Other than Owen's estimate and Mullan's comments, observations made by those living in and visiting the Bitterroot in the first few years following the establishment of the fort were vague as to exact numbers of people or livestock in the valley. Stevens' description of the valley in September of 1853 included that it was "naturally covered with luxuriant grass, supplying inexhaustible pasture, over which already several thousand cattle and horses were roaming and were scarcely noticed in the vast area."159 On the same survey, Mullan mentioned again that there were "several thousand head of cattle" in the valley, while Dr. Suckley was even less detailed, saying only that the Salish had "quite a large number of cattle."160 No one mentions exactly how many cattle there were, much less how many head were owned by a particular group. By the use of the word "several" it

158 Ibid., p. 467.
159 Ibid., p. 169.
might be assumed that there were at least 2,000 head and as many as 3,000 cattle, or three times what Owen would inventory four years later once the trail trade began to level off. Such an estimate, albeit conservative, is speculative at best. There is little speculation, though, that 2,000 or more cattle, combined with already large horse herds, would have noticeably impacted the valley’s environment.

There are a few scenarios as to how the cattle herds may have been managed. Trail traders such as Shields, for example, could have brought livestock to the valley from places like the Thomas Fork, then taken those same animals back in the late spring and summer. Another possibility is that Shields and others were driving cattle back and forth between various points on the trail while the Indians in the valley actually managed and claimed ownership of the entire valley herd—the stock of recuperating animals. If this were the case, there may have been some Salish, or Iroquois/Salish, who took charge of the cattle once they arrived. They would have traded spring cow credit to the trail men for winter goods that the men had brought from the forts along the road. In the spring those men would collect the number of cattle owed to them, then head down the trail toward the road forts. Other Indians would have been working in the capacity of trader, too. Weisel notes that in the spring of 1854, Irvine was on a trading expedition to the emigrant road with a group of Pend d’Oreilles when they were attacked by a party of Blackfeet who stole fifty horses. One more possibility among many is that the same type of barter situation between trail traders and the valley herders was handled by an Anglo valley resident like Irvine, or by a number of Indian and white men alike.

It is my sense that the valley livestock trade was controlled by the Salish, simply because Mullan and the others always referred to the livestock in the valley as Salish cattle and horses. In 1854 Mullan spent $430 on beef, all of it purchased from Indians. In

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addition to this evidence, the whites who wintered in the valley are documented to have been trading along the road in the summer. The scant evidence points to the idea that the herds were managed by Indians while the trail trade was carried out by a number of different groups and individuals. If this were the case, it was a unique partnership, but a feasible one considering the Salish’s experience with horses and their ability to get along with and work with whites.

The Indians who managed the herds would likely have been more withdrawn from traditional Salish life than ever before. The Stevens survey mentioned that there were sixteen houses in the “Flathead village” around the Fort, and Owen mentions on more than one occasion that the boys from the village were sent out to round up stray cattle. The herd managing, village dwelling Indians probably absorbed new ways of living, but it is doubtful that any of the village Salish stopped going to the Plains for the bison hunts. The Salish-related people in the valley most likely embraced the changing culture and economy of the Bitterroot Valley, but their assimilation had its limits. In July, 1857 Owen wrote in his diary that upon the return of the Salish from the bison hunt, they rounded up their cattle and marked their calves.

The changing culture in the valley involved different kinds of people. The first few years of operation at Ft. Owen saw a number of mixed-bloods in residence, splitting rails, constructing walls, or doing other odd jobs around the place. The Indians in the valley would not have been surprised by the presence of these men, because mixed-bloods had made up a large part of the Salish population for generations. They also would not have given much notice to the man known as Henry, a Shoshone Indian hired by Owen to guard the Fort’s horses. Although the Shoshone were sometime enemies, they were also, at times, partners on the hunt. At any rate, individual Indians from other nations had been moving among the Salish forever. Two Hispanics (whether they were Mexican nationals,
Tejanos, New Mexicans, or Californios is not known), William Romero and Emanuel Martin, had been trappers prior to their work in livestock trade and as adobe makers for Owen. They probably were in and out of the valley for a number of years. But Owen, Irvine and Harris, three Anglo-Americans who came to the valley to settle, were a new type of white man in the eyes of the Salish. Before these men, whites were either the messengers of God carrying supernatural powers, transient explorers, or trappers. The three new white men were different, for they walked around with a sense of purpose and permanence that involved neither God, furs, nor maps. Irvine was interested in livestock, Harris enjoyed farming, and Owen benefited from each through trading.

In 1852 Harris' abilities as a farmer were noticeable. That year, in addition to the wheat, oats, and potatoes that had been the valley's agricultural staples since the missionaries' first garden, the Fort's fields produced cabbage, onion, parsnips, corn, turnips, and green peas. One of Owens' favorite meals was bacon and cabbage, an indication that pork was also readily available.

The air of permanence carried by the white men in establishing their stamp on the land was regularly threatened. In September of 1852 Owen hired a California bound emigrant named John Dodson to work around the Fort. After days of helping Martin make adobes, Dodson mentioned in his diary that five horses had been stolen from the Fort by some Blackfeet. Three days later Owen and Harris put the young man to work hauling hay. On his second day in the fields Dodson was struck down in cold blood, and Owen was forced to make the final entry in the dead man's journal. "The poor fellow," Owen wrote, "was killed and scalped by the Blackfeet in sight of the Fort." Blackfeet incursions had long been a problem to people in the valley, and the location of a sparsely

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165 Owen's decision to build with adobe was probably influenced most by the adobe design at Ft. Hall, where the southwestern style had worked well against the elements in an environment similar to the Bitterroot. Forts Laramie and Benton were made of adobe also. A drawing of Ft. Hall can be seen on page 384 of Lamar.
populated and barely fortified white trading post changed nothing. It may have made matters worse, for now there was more for the enemy to steal or kill. Suckley would note a few years later that the Blackfeet didn’t steal cattle "as they do horses, but kill them out of malice."

The Blackfeet threat, combined with a slow trade year totaling just $517, led Owen to pack up and leave only two full seasons into his endeavor. He and Harris left behind crops in the field and a remarkably comfortable, yet partially completed adobe fort. It must have been a sad and frightful departure for both men. But serendipity in the small world of the Northwest in the middle of the nineteenth-century soon had them back in the valley. During their retreat west from the valley in 1853, Owen and Harris ran headlong into a government military survey team in the Spokane area. The troops, led by Lt. Rufus Saxton, were headed east, examining the country for a northern railroad route to the Pacific. They informed Owen that their plan had been to meet up with an east bound team and winter in the Bitterroot Valley. It was a remarkable indication of fate for Owen and his trading post, a sign that the missionaries would have called an act of God. In fact, it was an act of Congress. Owen was relieved that he could return to the Fort, his investment, with what amounted to a full military escort. With the United States Army in the valley, the Blackfeet might behave.

Up until this point any connection with the valley to the outside world was a loose one on a faintly drawn perimeter. The Bitterroot Valley had been a part of the far perimeter of the United States into the late 1840’s. Lewis and Clark passed through quickly and relatively quietly after a long journey from the States’ most western outpost in St. Louis. They were essentially searching for a route to the Pacific ocean. The trappers, mostly based out of St. Louis, were after furs. The missionaries, from St. Louis as well, were interested

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169 Weisel, *Men and Trade*, p. xxv.
in bringing souls to heaven. Owen, the latest white man to appear on the scene came to the valley from west of St. Louis in newly settled Kansas. After passing through a series of new settlements along the way, he ended up in the valley in search of personal wealth that depended largely on his staying put. Historian Peter Boag has discussed the concept of personal gain and how it affected change in the same era in Oregon's Willamette Valley. He says:

One way they (the settlers) viewed the environment was with a desire for personal gain. This attitude invited into the Willamette Valley new plants, animals, and methods of altering the land, and especially the influence of expanding regional, national, and world markets—markets that demanded agricultural and natural resources. As Willamette residents participated in these markets, the Willamette environment experienced increasing and intensified change.171

In 1853, the Bitterroot Valley was no longer on the periphery, but caught in between a fast moving line of settlement from the east toward a billowing West Coast, where places like Boag's Willamette Valley in Oregon were becoming heavily populated. In less than fifty years after Lewis and Clark traipsed through the Bitterroot, the U.S. Army was in the valley to explore the best possible route for a machine that would carry people and goods from coast to coast. When the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad reached the Mississippi River in 1854, a train reaching the Pacific was still a dream. Nevertheless, the

170 The Steven's railroad survey makes it clear on page 109 that Owen had abandoned the fort and was headed to Oregon because of the Blackfeet threat.
1853 arrival of the Stevens railroad survey in the Bitterroot was a momentous event in the history of the valley.\textsuperscript{172}

Many historians have looked at how technological changes have affected particular environments and/or native peoples within those environments. In this study we have already seen how the use of fire, the introduction of the horse, the use of guns, and small scale Euro-styled agriculture brought changes to the Salish and the landscape they called home by 1850. The train would eventually bring incredible changes to the Bitterroot, too, but that would be another 38 years.\textsuperscript{173} In 1853, when Owen turned back toward his Fort with a military escort, we must consider that the slightest possibility of a train was of major importance to the story of change that was unfolding in the Bitterroot Valley.

The importance of the railroad survey itself was visible to Owen immediately. Not only had the very existence of the Stevens party kept him from losing all that he had invested in the mission, but a government-supported survey meant business for Fort Owen and the valley’s developing livestock and agricultural interests. After the party from the east, led by Lt. John Mullan, met Saxton’s men in the valley, Mullan established a winter camp for his men. Cantonment Stevens was about eleven miles south of Fort Owen near the mouth of Willow Creek. After Stevens visited the encampment he said that Mullan did a fine job placing the winter quarters “at a point where there was excellent grass, wood, and water, and where, in consequence of it being a little removed from the Indian camps, he could better regulate the intercourse of his men with them.”\textsuperscript{174} Stevens met with the Salish, and after telling them that “The Great Father wishes you to raise more wheat and potatoes, and to collect more meat and skins, that you may not suffer from want,” he explained to them that Mullan was to winter in the valley with 10-15 men who would not "disturb" them.\textsuperscript{175}

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\textsuperscript{172} Lamar, The New Encyclopedia, p. 937
\textsuperscript{173} The Northern Pacific reached Victor in 1888.
\textsuperscript{174} Weisel, Men and Trade, p. 73.
\textsuperscript{175} Stevens, “Reports of Explorations,” p. 125.
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There were fifteen men stationed at Cantonment Stevens besides Mullan. They built a storage house and three log buildings for housing. The quarters were humble, yet still included nails, a stove and stovepipe, and windows, all of which were purchased at Fort Owen. By the tenth of February, Mullan bought $863.22 in supplies from Owen and would purchase another $694 75 by mid-July before moving on toward Fort Benton.\footnote{Weisel, Men and Trade, p. 74-6.}

The Stevens men lived almost entirely that winter on beef, and there was enough of it so that each person was rationed four pounds per day. "The Flathead cattle," Mullan wrote, "keep in good order throughout the winter, and no difficulty was found in purchasing beeves at reasonable rates." Four-hundred and thirty dollars of the $694 75 worth of purchases in July, 1854 were spent for beef. All of these cattle were bought from Indians who gained credit at the Fort through their sales. It can be assumed that Mullan bought beef from the Salish throughout the winter without Owen's intervention as intermediary, but by summer the Indians were away hunting bison, so Owen managed the sale of beef for them.

The Stevens survey party did several things that influenced change in the valley. First, and most importantly, the party allowed Owen to return to the fort. A military presence, although only 16 men, was a well armed protective force for a place that had been under near constant harassment by the Blackfeet the year before. Second, with 16 men needing housing, food, and other supplies, Fort Owen did a strong trade business after a year in which it nearly went out of business. Owen's total sales for 1854 were $2,050 more than the previous year. Although Mullan and the other members of the survey team accounted for most of the increase, Weisel says that there were some trail traders who wintered their livestock in the Bitterroot because they felt safer with the military there.

Third, though short-lived, Cantonment Stevens offered more infrastructure for the slowly establishing Euro-American presence in the valley. Any visitors to the valley who saw the sprawling adobe walls of Fort Owen and the fenced army encampment, with a banner pole flying the American flag, must have been impressed. Once Mullan pulled out, the
Cantonment became the headquarters for a newly appointed Indian Agent. Finally, the men of the Steven’s survey had a positive experience in the Bitterroot Valley and a few of them stayed in the valley and region, or else left to return later. Included among these individuals were Thomas Adams, Fred Burr, and C.P. Higgins.178

These men found in the landscape of the Bitterroot Valley the things that they wanted to find. They saw, in what they might have called the “primitive nature” of the valley, a landscape that was immediately usable. What they probably did not realize was that the land that seemed so readily available for cattle had been altered for generations by Indian fire and horse grazing. It was not a land that God had made ideal for herds of cattle in its original state. To Euro-American newcomers coming from the east, though, the Bitterroot in 1854 defined naturally good land. It was open and had tall grasses. In its vestigial state the valley looked like the farmland of the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys looked but only after many months or years of hard work felling timber, burning brush, and rooting out stumps. The descriptions by Mullan and Stevens made it clear that they felt that what they saw was, as Stevens put it, “well adapted to agriculture” immediately.179

Mullan wrote to Stevens upon reaching Cantonment Stevens and described “the Bitter Root valley as one of the most charming spots he ever beheld; as, in truth, a paradise.”180 Specific things both noticed: “several thousand head of cattle,” “fine grazing fields,” and “rich and luxuriant grass.”181 There was also soil that was “rich, dark loam, mingled with sand and gravel,” as well as established fields of “wheat, oats, and potatoes.”182 Saxton’s description of the Hell Gate area (the eastern end of the Missoula Valley) just north of the Bitterroot may be the most hopeful, if not slightly embellished, account of all:

177 Stevens, “Reports of Explorations,” p. 182.
178 Weisel, Men and Trade, p. xxvii.
179 Stevens, “Reports of Explorations,” p. 169
180 Ibid., p. 187.
181 Ibid., p. 316.
The sun does not shine on a better spot on earth, and I found that my previous ideas of the Rocky mountain range were, as far as this section is concerned, entirely erroneous....Instead of a vast pile of rocks and mountains almost impassable, I found a fine country, well watered by streams of clear, cold water, and interspersed with meadows covered with the most luxurious grass.

There is no doubt that it was beautiful country and that the landscape was open at the time and ideal for grazing horses and cattle, but whether or not there was “no better spot on earth” is debatable. Although some level of rhetoric can be expected, the repeated use of the words “rich” and “luxurious” or “luxuriant” clearly express that the men of the survey thought the valley was naturally superior. 183 Nowhere does anyone say “after hundreds of years burning the valley, the grasses were luxurious because of Indian fire. Furthermore, there was little encroachment of weedy and brushy plants on the wide valley floor because fire and horses through the decades had helped maintain the prairie type landscape over much of the valley.” As Boag pointed out in his study of the Willamette, the environment that the “natives had been instrumental in shaping, modified the culture Euro-Americans brought with them from other western frontiers and also influenced their vision of the valley’s possibilities.” 184

In addition to the modified environment shaped by the Salish, there are two other things that influenced the vision of the Bitterroot Valley as described by Stevens, Mullan, and the other members of the survey. The first influence was politics. Stevens was the governor of Washington Territory, which included the Bitterroot Valley during the survey. It goes without saying that he realized the importance of land being good along the possible northern railroad route. If places such as the Bitterroot Valley sounded even remotely Edenic, there was a better chance that the nation’s railroad to the Pacific might follow a

182 Ibid., p. 169.
183 Ibid., p. 110.
northern route through Washington Territory. The third thing that shaped their view was an unseasonably warm climate in the early winter of 1853. Although the winter would turn harsh in January, Mullan refused to dwell on any aspect of the winter other than the mildness of the early months. On December 3rd he was at Ross' Hole and instead of seeing the deep snows that Ross had seen in the spring of 1824, Mullan saw six inch tall green grasses and referred to "perpetual spring" conditions. Later, in the Three Forks area, he found "Well-wooded streams, fertile bottoms, mild climate, even late in December, and uncounted herds of game grazing at every point..." Years later Mullan would speculate that the milder Bitterroot temperatures were caused by the warming of air as it passed over the hot springs along the crest of the mountains to the west of the valley. On his return to the Bitterroot on Jan. 10, Mullan walked through 4-6 inch deep snows in Hell Gate, but in the Bitterroot he found that there was no snow.

It is true that winter in the Bitterroot Valley can have long pockets of mild temperatures and no precipitation, but the survey certainly downplayed the more typical Rocky Mountain winter conditions once they were encountered. Stevens used one sentence to describe crossing the Bitterroots in three feet of snow, and on another occasion said "It is extraordinary how easy of passage the mountains are of this latitude." Yet we know from the narratives of Ross and Lewis and Clark that an undertaking such as crossing the Bitterroots in waist deep snows could be hellish.

Other descriptions by Stevens raise eyebrows, as well. "From its lower end, at the junction of the Hell-Gate," he wrote, "it is believed that the Bitter Root River is, or can be made, navigable for small steamers for long distances, at least, thus affording an easy outlet to its products in the natural direction." Another time he wrote: "It must not be understood from the term Hell-Gate that here is a narrow passage with perpendicular

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184 Boag, Environment and Experience, p. 143.
185 Stevens, "Reports of Explorations," p. 169.
186 Ibid., p. 171
188 Stevens, "Reports of Explorations," p. 128.
bluffs; on the contrary, it is a wide, open, and easy pass, in no case being less than half a mile wide, and the banks not subject to overflow at all.” For anyone who has ever walked through the narrow Hell Gate Canyon, with its steep, rocky walls, it is clear that Stevens was more than slightly misleading in this description. Interestingly, on the page following the above passage, in which Stevens attempted to say that traveling through the area was no problem, there is a drawing from January, 1854 that makes river crossings in the area look almost impossible. In the picture horses are busted through the ice and one is floundering in a hole all on his own. There are cracks and fractures in the ice going out from the wailing horse in all directions as he struggles. Another horse is slipping and sliding, while yet another poor horse has stuck his head through the ice, as if to get a sip of water, and is being whipped by his rider. The caption of the picture says simply that it is a sketch of a winter crossing. The river crossing from the drawing looks anything but simple and easy. In fact, it looks horrific.¹⁸⁹

At times that winter the conditions were in fact horrible. The mean winter temperature at Cantonment Stevens in 1854 was 24.9 degrees Fahrenheit—not exactly balmy. On January 19 it was a chilling - 29, and there were ten other days that month with temperatures below zero. The stove in Mullan’s cabin must have been wonderful because he never once mentioned being cold.¹⁹⁰ Ironically, while working on another project in the region the winter of 1862, Mullan was forced to hole up for most of the winter. He and his men, many of whom were frost bitten, nearly froze to death before succumbing to scurvy.¹⁹¹ That same winter of 1862 Owen wrote that the whole plain of the Bitterroot “is covered with about a foot of hard Crusted Snow.”¹⁹²

The men of the survey saw what they wanted to see, and they saw potential. Fred Burr saw several possibilities for his own personal gain in the valley. Initially, he stayed in

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 244-5.
¹⁹¹ Weisel, Men and Trade, p. 70.
the Bitterroot in the employment of Adams, whom Stevens had appointed special agent to the Salish once the survey was completed. Burr's job was to help start a farm around the Cantonment, which became Adams' headquarters. Stevens, who knew well that for absolute success the Salish would have to be kept under control, appropriated $5,600 for an Indian agency. This was to include Adams' and Burr's salaries (Burr probably also worked as an interpreter), as well as ten ploughs, blacksmith's tools, and seed. By the end of the summer, after crops were sown and growing, Owen hired Burr to help with trading trips. Soon, Burr formed a partnership with Harris for fattening cattle in the valley and selling them on the Trail. Burr served as an example of what was possible in the valley. After marrying an Indian woman, he settled a piece of land about ten miles south of Fort Owen at the mouth of a creek now known as Fred Burr Creek. By 1856 he drove 400 head of cattle from the south and brought them to the Bitterroot. He eventually sold the cattle back south in Salt Lake City.

In the summer of 1855 the changes that were initiated by the railroad survey reached a milestone. It was reported that already some of the few whites in the Bitterroot wanted the Indians gone so that there would be no disputes about land and the direction toward which land use in the valley was moving. It seems plausible that grumbling did occur. Although years later, in 1860, Owen himself wrote in his diary: "Indians are stealing right and left. Pend d'Oreilles, Nez Perces & Flatheads, all stealing." Several days later he added "Annoyed very much by Indian visitors, I will not be sorry when they leave the valley." That summer of 1855 Stevens started back over the probable railroad route and held a series of councils with Indians throughout the Northwest. It certainly seemed like an attempt to assure the availability of land for Euro-American settlers and the trains that were to follow. In July he met with the Salish, Upper Pend d'Oreille, and Kutenai just north of the Bitterroot in a place known as Council Grove. A drawing by Sohon shows

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193 Stevens, "Reports of Explorations," p. 471.
194 Weisel, Men and Trade, p. 81-7.
perhaps two hundred Indians surrounding a table where four or five men are seated. There is an American flag gently flapping in the breeze, background noise to the deal that was laid before the tribal leaders. In short, the government wanted the Indians on one large reservation. The way it was presented, the benefits of this idea seemed to outweigh the negatives. For their part the Salish agreed to consider moving from the Bitterroot on only one condition. If the Great White Father (the president) studied the land and felt that the Jocko, or Flathead Valley (where the Jesuits had recently re-established a mission) was better than the Bitterroot, they would remove to the latter. If the president decided that the Bitterroot was better, then they would stay in their homeland and the white men would leave. By the time Owen was Indian Agent in 1857 he wrote that “The Flathead Indians say that we are dogs. They say that two years ago they made a treaty with their great friend Gov. Stevens and have never heard anything since.”\(^{196}\) It would be two more years before the agreement was ratified by Congress, and another dozen years (without an official survey and examination of the lands) before President Grant simply issued an executive order that the Salish leave the Bitterroot.\(^{197}\)

In 1856 the number of Euro-Americans living in the Bitterroot steadily increased and trade was strong. By 1857 Owen sold $4,936 worth of goods, and there was enough demand that the Fort employed a school teacher.\(^{198}\) Around this time a curious thing began to happen as an increasingly large number of the Salish became sick. In May, 1856, Owen recorded in his journal that there was “another” death in camp, bringing the total to six in less than a month. “It will not be long,” he wrote, “when nothing but the name will remain.” In June, he reported again that there was a rumor of more deaths among the Indians off picking camas.\(^{199}\) In December, 1857 Owen noted that many of the Nez Perce


\(^{196}\) MHS, *Not in Precious Metals*, p. 23.

\(^{197}\) An excellent account of the Council Grove Treaty of 1855, including the drawing described above, can be found on pages 24-7 in Ewers’ article “Gustavus Sohon’s Portraits.”

\(^{198}\) Weisel, *Men and Trade*, p. xxx.

in the valley had contracted small pox from the Crows on the Missouri. What caused the outbreak of killing sicknesses among the Indians in the Bitterroot earlier that year may have been related. The cause is unknown, but one must wonder if the growing white population of the valley played a role in such a drastic biological change.

There were other biological changes in the valley that summer that, although not as drastic as human death, were nevertheless important. As of June Owen and Harris had 150 cabbage plants in the ground and planted rhubarb, timothy, flax, watermelons, citron, pumpkins, squash, and other melons for the first time. Owen mentioned, too, that he had planted osage orange as an experiment, perhaps along a fencerow in the hopes of creating a shrubby barrier with the plant's pointed barbs. Later that month the new Indian Agents for the Jocko, a white man and woman (apparently the first Euro-American woman in the Valley) named Miller passed by the Fort and Owen received some garden seed, which he planted immediately. Slowly, small scale ecological change was taking place. As more new plant species were being introduced into the Bitterroot, Owen took note about what grew well and what did not.

The paradise that Mullan and Stevens managed to see in the few months they had spent in the valley was not always visible to Owen, Harris, Burr, Adams, and the others who by 1856 had lived in the valley for years on end. They knew the truth behind Bitterroot weather: that winter might be relatively warm at times, but it was just as possible that summer could be cold. The mild winter temperatures glowingly referred to in the Stevens survey seem almost deceitful when compared to Owen's journal entry for June, 1856, when he sadly reports a killing frost that seemed to have killed his entire potato crop. Then adding insult to injury, a month later in mid-July, Owen reported the necessity of burning a fire in his office fireplace as he looked out on grape vines, corn, and beans that

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200 Ibid., p. 189.
201 Ibid., p. 131.
202 Ibid., p. 132-33.
were “badly cut” by yet another summer frost. By August, what little crops had survived were suffering from very little rain. A summer that started with killing frost and unexplainable Indian deaths was finishing with drought. In January Owen wrote that it was thirty degrees below zero and that ice had caused the Burnt Fork to back up. The fort was nearly inundated with cold and icy water.

Throughout the next few years people continued to move into the Bitterroot Valley despite what seemed to be a summer growing season that was short and unpredictable. In 1857 cattle trader Neil McArthur hired some young men to clear the timber out of the Council Grove area that had been the site of the 1855 treaty with the Salish. After logging off eight acres, the men broke the ground and sowed it to wheat, all of which was killed by heavy frost in August.

Willamette Valley historian Peter Boag made yet another good point when he said that many people who came to the West in the 19th century saw more on first glance than agricultural possibilities. Mullan mentioned that he saw “excellent mill-sites along the numerous streams flowing from the mountains,” and that the valley was “capable of supporting a dense population.”

Mullan was a native of Annapolis, Maryland. A product of the industrial era, he studied engineering at West Point, so it makes sense that he saw landscape in terms of technological possibility. In fact, for the valley to support dense populations it would require a certain level of industry. By the late 1850’s the importance of a good mill was evident to Owen. If farmers were growing wheat without sufficient milling capabilities, their efforts were essentially worthless. In 1857 Owen hired David Pattee, whom he had met earlier at Fort Colville, to start the work of rebuilding the saw and grist mills at a contracted price of $1,800. By spring both were running well and in April

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203 Ibid., p. 132-7.
204 Ibid., p. 153.
Pattee ground 16 bushels into 1,000 pounds of flour.\[^{208}\] The new streamlined mill brought even more change to the valley's landscape. Men now saw potential profit in land that had earlier been wooded. It was fitting that with the mill up and running in January, 1857, trail trader McArthur hired men to clear the timber off the Council Grove site. On the very ground where the Salish had first been formally asked to leave the valley, a cattle herder began to diversify his business. The up-grade in the Fort Owen mill made both timber and wheat more easily convertible to cash.

Although the improvements at the Fort Owen mill were eventful, the years between 1857 and 1860 are remembered in the history of the Bitterroot Valley and Montana for more than the changes brought by David Pattee's ability to grind wheat or saw wood. Three things happened. First, in May of 1857 James and Granville Stuart discovered gold at Benetsee Creek (soon to be known as Gold Creek) near Dear Lodge, about sixty miles northeast of the Bitterroot Valley. Second, the first steamboat arrived at Ft. Benton. Third, John Mullan, now a Captain in the Army, passed again through the region overseeing construction of a great northwest military road linking Ft. Benton with Walla Walla, Washington. All three of these events are tied together inextricably in the telling of a story that involves land use change in the Bitterroot Valley. Combined, the three events resulted in changes that would usher the valley into an era of unprecedented growth. Once the gold mines were worked on a large scale, immigrants could unload at Ft. Benton and travel Mullan’s Road to any points west. In the Bitterroot, farmers could use the road to carry vegetables, beef, and flour east to the ready markets at the mines.

Until 1860 Fort Owen had been the center of the universe for a radius of hundreds of miles. The fort had never been attacked and life there was mostly carefree. It is well documented that Owen had an extensive library, and a 1950’s excavation of the site unearthed wooden sidewalks, cutlery, and pieces of a little girl’s doll. All of this indicates

that life at Fort Owen was a sort of refined version of rough, a sense that is bolstered by Owen's own descriptions of parties where everyone was entertained by a one armed fiddler. By 1860 the two bastions on either side of the main gate, built originally for defense of the place, were used for storage of hay and grains or irons that were to be used in the blacksmith shop. In some ways the year 1860 marked final arrival for Owen. As an Indian Agent he saw hope in more Salish putting in crops, regardless of the fact that in May Harris noted that all of the Indian wheat looked sickly. In addition, his business was good. In the first half of the year the Fort did a record $6,566 in sales, much of it related to the construction of Mullan's road. Finally, population in the valley was at an all time high. The 1860 Washington territorial census counted 261 people. This included only people of partial European descent (whites or mixed-bloods), and their spouses and children regardless of race. In other words, the Indian wives of John Owen and Fred Burr were included because they were married to white men. The census also listed the occupations of men. There were 17 farmers, 6 farm laborers, 2 herders, 11 common laborers, 2 carpenters, and a number of others including but not limited to men employed as expressman, clerk, miller, tinsmith, and cattle dealer. Seventeen mixed-bloods listed their occupation as either hunter or trapper. John Owen was listed as Indian Agent.

The first half of 1860 had been a wonderful time for Owen, but the second half of the year would begin yet another turning point for him and the valley he had called home for ten years. In July, as if to foreshadow the months to come, one of his horses was badly bitten by a wolf. In August he mentioned that some Indians had moved up by the fort,


\[210\] MHS, Not in Precious Metals, p. 92.

\[211\] Extract of 1860 Washington Territory Census, indexed by Margery H. Bell, Katherine Schaffer, and Dennis Richards. 1860 Census, vertical files, Bitterroot Valley Historical Society, Hamilton, MT.
"which is not very agreeable." For an Indian Agent, who made his living trading, to say this meant only one thing: Owen knew that the Indians were upset about something. Possibly they became exasperated by seeing members of Mullan’s road crew, or more likely, miners on their way to the Gold Creek area. Finally, in October, Stevens survey veteran C.P. Higgins returned to the Bitterroot Valley and showed up at the fort firing a howitzer from the back of his wagon. It was as if he had something to proclaim. Shortly thereafter Higgins and a man named Frank Worden opened a store north of the valley in Hell Gate. The store would eventually exact a huge toll on John Owen’s Bitterroot Valley trade. The reason was simple. Mullan’s road would go through Hell Gate and not through the Bitterroot Valley. By 1866, four years after it was finished, 20,000 people and a million dollars in freight traveled the road.

The winter of 1862 was one of the low points for Owen in the valley. Not only had Higgins noticeably begun to hurt his trade business, but the weather that year wore heavily. Between November 15 and late February, Owen constantly burned wood in his bedroom fireplace at the fort. It was the winter he described the valley as covered in a foot of hard, crusted snow, one patch of which was more irritating than others. On the 24th of February he noted that he had fallen on the ice and had severely twisted his knee. While Owen was laid up in bed, life at the fort and in the valley began to circle painfully down a drain of unprecedented affliction. In an amazing summation of the winter’s hardship, Owen wrote on the last day of the month that

Robinson the schoolmaster was Yesterday Morning Set adrift for taking improper liberties with the little daughter of Mr. Harris... Poor destitute Indians hanging around for provisions. Reports still coming in of Cattle dying in the Snow too weak to relieve themselves or get to the few bare places along the

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213 Weisel, Men and Trade, p. xxx.
214 Ibid., p. 72.
foot of the Mt. ... Presented Thos. W. Harris with a flagoon of good old Usquebaugh to Enliven his drooping spirits. “If I loose My Stock he Says he will be no better off than he was when he Came here Some Six Years Ago.”

By the spring Owen wrote that Robinson’s body had been found in the river, Harris was indeed as poor as he was six years earlier, and the Salish returned from the bison hunt with little meat, and fewer men and horses than they left with the beginning of the hunt. That same spring of 1862 the number of people infiltrating the region began to be noted in the journals of Harris and Owen. On June 28 Owen reported that word of mouth was that 350 people arrived on a steamer at Ft. Benton, and on July 23 he wrote:

Gold Gold Nothing is talked of but Gold When will it End.
The prospect of the Farmer is flattering Wheat $5.00 pr Bushel potatoes 3.00 pr Bu Beef Never less than 10 c pr lb & frequently 15c Even 20c.

In August Harris mentioned that miners were passing through the Bitterroot on their way to Deer Lodge and Elk City. Less than a year later he would write that people were saying the road to Bannack City was lined with miners coming from “the states,” Salt Lake City, and Colorado’s Pike’s Peak. By December Owen knew what was coming. “This Valley,” he wrote, “although in Violation of the treaty will Soon be Settled up. The Indians are already alarmed about it.” A week later, writing with a frustrated urgency he had likely not felt since leaving the valley back in 1853, he noted in his journal that he tried to explain to Chief Victor and some of the other Salish to give up the bison hunt and take up farming before it was too late. “But they are Indians & Indians they will Ever remain,” he said, “To Christianize, Civilize & Educate the Indian is a farce long since Exploded. The Dept.

216 Ibid., p. 251-53.
217 Ibid., p. 258.
Washington know No More about the Management of the Ind tribe than the Inds do about the cause of the Present War.\(^\text{219}\)

Owen was correct in at least two things he said. People were moving into the valley and many of the Indians were increasingly upset at the rapid changes spinning about them. Some of them may have stolen livestock. One afternoon in 1860 Harris noticed that Victor, the Salish chief, was driving an interesting mix of cattle. At least one of Harris' own cows, branded with his obvious marking, was nursing a newborn calf that had been hastily branded by Victor. "The cow," Harris wrote, "has my brand plane [sic] on the hip."\(^\text{220}\) If the Salish were in fact stealing cattle, the reason was fairly clear. In March, 1863, Owen wrote that messengers came to the Fort and informed him that the Salish were "on the Yellowstone in a starving condition. No Buffalo."\(^\text{221}\) By summer it must have appeared to the Salish that things couldn't get much worse. Not only was the region filling with men in search of gold, and not only was their valley being overrun by farmers, but it was becoming well nigh impossible to find bison in the places they had always found them. In July, Owen wrote that Harris found that two of his cows were badly cut on their back legs with "Some sharp instrument." Owen made a guess as to the explanation: "Drunken Indians probably."\(^\text{222}\) Whether or not this is true is unknown, but the Salish were upset. Victor would eventually make a plea to the territorial governor to

stop the whites from building themselves houses in our land guaranteed us by Treaty. We are almost given to despondency seeing every day new houses started up, and farms taken by whites in our land. We got this spring some ploughs from [the] Government, and we are all busy, and in great earnest to make ourselves fields; but after a

\(^{218}\) MHS, Not in Precious Metals, p. 92-3.  
\(^{222}\) Ibid., p. 291.
little while there will be no more room for us in our own country, if you do not stop the whites... 223

The simple fact of the matter was that there was money to be made raising cattle and growing food for the mining markets, so white people were going to come to the Bitterroot Valley come hell or high water. The inflated prices Owen mentioned above were only the beginning. Wheat that sold for $8 per hundred in the Bitterroot went for $98 per hundred in the mining camps, while eggs cost two dollars a dozen, and butter and salt usually priced out at $1.15 and $1.50 per pound, respectively. 224 According to Owen, Harris would eventually make $4,000 working a hundred acre farm. 225 In late September, 1863, the mill was grinding 40 bushels of wheat daily, and Harris went to the mining camps with two wagon loads of vegetables and ten head of cattle. Success in the valley, though, was not guaranteed. Owen’s own farm at the Fort suffered, because Harris, still in the employ of the Fort, was selling vegetables from his own farm that he established on Three Mile Creek. “I fear,” Owen wrote, “that the Fort Owen interest has been Neglected in the promotion of 3 Mile Creek.” 226 Changes were happening as a burgeoning farm economy developed in the valley. Harris left the employ of Owen for his own deal. By October Owen rented the Fort’s farm to a newcomer named Fowler. 227

Meanwhile, Harris’ success continued. In the mid-summer of 1865 he mentioned that he was thankful that his crops remained good when everyone else’s fields were ruined by grasshoppers. In May, 1866 he set out 1,400 cabbage plants, plus forty or fifty tomato plants. By June he wrote that two travelers proclaimed his crops “the best in the country.” Harris’ success was due in large part to his ability to hire help and utilize new tools that

223 MHS, Not in Precious Metals, p. 56-7
226 Ibid., Vol.1, p. 292.
other less established farmers in the valley might not be capable of procuring. A month after his farm was labeled the best, Harris wrote that he and his hired help spent the entire day “killing crickets.” “To night,” he went on, “I have 2 rollers running to try & kill them while they are laying in piles.” After much hard effort, bolstered by his use of two large metal rollers pulled behind teams of horses, Harris succeeded. In September he made a brusque note that 155 bushels of potatoes were harvested and stored away.\(^2\)

Not everyone had the success of Thomas Harris. The Nicol family, for example, spent their first winter of 1864-5 in the Bitterroot in utter hardship. “The family,” relative Will Cave wrote years later, “found their promised land anything but one flowing with milk and honey that winter of 1864-5. Flour was not to be had. However, they did procure potatoes and some beef. There was plenty of wild game and fish.” Mr. Nicol wrote about his experiences in 1894. The first winter they found no flour, but “We found plenty of potatoes for sale at $6 per bushel, with the assurance that we could take them at that price or let them alone. The crop was raised wholly, I might say, by Indians, half-breeds and squaw-men, with perhaps two or three exceptions.” Times were hard enough that winter that six or eight families became discouraged and left the valley after living months on potatoes alone.\(^3\)

The Nicols were determined to make it. That winter two of the men in the family went to Bannack and bought a plow from a blacksmith for $60, two bushels of wheat for $8 a bushel, and two from another for $10 a bushel, “making $36 for our four bushels and we were glad to get it at those prices.” Ten bushels of potatoes bought for $60 was the extent of their seed. That spring and summer the grasshoppers were awful. Owen described it by saying “The whole plain is as bare of grass as though it had been burnt off.”\(^4\) “To illustrate,” Nicol told, “I was walking along the road one day and had a switch

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\(^3\) MHS, *Not in Precious Metals,* p. 93-4.


in my hand about four feet long, and struck it down full length, killing 56 hoppers with the stroke.” He went on:

it was evident that if we didn’t get water soon, we would not get our seed back. We failed on two ditches, but the third we got water through on the 22nd day of June, and after all our work, (not saying anything about our prayers) the hoppers went over our field, leaving it as bare as the road.\textsuperscript{231}

It would be the next August, almost two years after coming to the Bitterroot Valley, that the Nicol family had a taste of agricultural success. The grasshoppers came late that year and they were able to grow some produce that was good enough to take to the mining camp at Bannack. They had 1,022 pounds of vegetables such as beets, potatoes, turnips and cabbages. After selling the produce at 20-30 cents a pound they cleared 300 dollars.\textsuperscript{232} In April, 1867 the \textit{Helena Herald} summed up what was happening and what was hoped for in the region: “‘Thus are our mineral and farming interests stimulating and developing each other... We can see the stars of new states peering, and will soon hear the locomotive all the way between the great rivers.’”\textsuperscript{233}

In 1866 a Bitterroot farmer named Edward Corron went down to Fort Owen from his farm higher up on Burnt Fork Creek. Corron, who started out making adobes at Fort Owen in 1858, told his old boss that he was getting out of the farming business. In his opinion the mining markets were saturated with produce, and with all the competition, prices had sunk too low. Farming was no longer a profitable venture.\textsuperscript{234} Owen probably nodded his head in agreement. That same year the Chaffin family returned to the Bitterroot

\textsuperscript{232} Ibid., p. 386.
\textsuperscript{234} Weisel, \textit{Men and Trade}, p. 182.
after a short foray into the previously mentioned Willamette Valley in Oregon, claiming that in the year and half they were gone there had been many changes. "Fort Owen," one of the family members wrote, "had changed its name to Stevensville and the country was becoming rapidly settled." In January, 1866 Owen himself wrote "Bitter Root is filling up--Another Stranger." For the Major, it was becoming old hat to see foreigners on the valley's roads. In addition, Owen's business dried up. Besides the competition in Missoula from Worden and Higgins, many of the farmers who emptied wagon loads of produce in the mining camps returned with wagons full of merchandisable goods. To Carron and him it must have felt quite odd to be on the financial edge of things, in addition to not knowing everyone in the valley. At one time the Fort had been the center of attention, both economically and culturally, for the entire region. The white men who lived there had known nearly every other white man for hundreds of miles. Owen had lived like a king. Now, Carron and Owen struggled to be important forces in the Bitterroot Valley that they helped change so much.

When they finished their conversation that day and walked in opposite directions, both Owen and Carron undoubtedly carried a feeling that the Salish felt before them: the idea that strangers were changing everything in the Bitterroot Valley. The irony here, of course, is that for the Salish, men like Carron were strangers too--farmers who came among them and did strange things with cows, plows, and seed. For Carron and Owen, the newcomers to the Bitterroot in 1866 were making it impossible to have the kind of life they once enjoyed. It was a lifestyle based on the idea that there was plenty to go around for everybody--plenty of tall grass, plenty of wood, plenty of deer and ducks, and plenty of unclaimed streams. After several harsh winters preceded growing seasons ruined by grasshoppers, the once Edenic valley seemed plagued.

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In environmental history, players like Carron and Owen almost never see the irony of their own situations, and are therefore unaware of the impact of their actions and how those actions fit into the grand ecological scheme of things. That's what irony is in any type of literature—the contrast between what the characters think the truth is and what the truth really is all about. Typically, the Carrons and Owens' in the history of Western America see their end reality in regards to land use without any relation to their role in how the story began. Simply put, they don’t see how their role in changing their environment got them into the situation where we find them in the historical record. This irony is always more sad than humorous, because the end result involves changed, usually degraded landscapes that are inhabited mostly by two types of people—those who are bitter and those who, for the time being, like what the older residents see as degraded. By 1869, the year Carron left Burnt Fork Creek for good, he likely became as bitter as the root of the valley he left. That same year Owen, approaching a nervous breakdown that would have him hospitalized in Helena within a year, made his final journal entry. “Farmers all busy fencing,” he wrote. “Preparation for large crops.”

Four:
Mines, Railroads, and Trees

John Mullan understood all along that his so-called military road would be more useful to settlers than it would ever be to the army. As one of the earliest engineers to visit the valley, Mullan knew well that wagon roads and the train tracks that would eventually follow them were more powerful weapons than guns in seizing control of the West from its native peoples. An unabashed proponent of conquering the country by any means necessary, Mullan wrote his report on the construction of the road so that it read like a how-to-manual. In fact, in 1865 he published a book called *Miners and Travelers Guide to Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado via the Missouri and Columbia Rivers*, much of which was copied verbatim from his 1863 government report. Mullan's detailed instructions in the report were plentiful. Included were notes on what to bring: Mexican or Californian saddles "with machiers and tapideros, hair girth, double grey saddle blanket, and strong snaffle bit," and "kettles to fit one in the other, tin plates and cups." He gave advice on everything from fixing loose wagon wheels: "cauk them with old gunny sacks," to the handling of livestock: "Never maltreat them, but govern them as you would a woman, with kindness, affection, and caresses, and you will be repaid by their docility and easy management."

A reading of the report today gives one a sure sense of the way Mullan thought. Discussing the subject of bringing sheep into places such as the Bitterroot Valley, he wrote that "The wolves now exist in places as an impediment to much attention being given the subject, but travel and settlement will soon destroy them." Mullan was stating in no uncertain terms that sheep would prosper partly because settlers would abolish native predatory animals in favor of imported domestic livestock. As pointed out in the previous

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chapter, wolves certainly existed in the Bitterroot in the 1860's. Owen mentioned in 1860 that one of his horses was badly bitten by a wolf, and in March, 1865 he wrote that many of his colts and two year olds had been “destroyed” by wolves.\(^{240}\) Although there is no sign in the historical record that wolves killed sheep during the first farming boom of the late 1850's and 1860's, it is highly likely that they did. Sheep were smaller, slower, and easier to take down than horses. They would have been favorite prey of wolves carousing the valley floor and side canyons of the Bitterroot. In 1857, not long after gold was discovered at Benetsee Creek, Thomas Harris brought the first domestic sheep into the valley from Walla Walla.\(^{241}\) As his herds grew, Harris approached coyotes, wolves, and other predators as he approached grasshoppers that dreadful summer of 1866. Wolves were a nuisance. Instead of using a rolling machine as he did with the pesky insects, Harris resorted to poison. On November 1 of that same year his diary entry was concise: “this evening I put out more Stricnine.”\(^{242}\)

Harris’ use of poison as a tool to control particular animal populations in the Bitterroot Valley coincided with a five year period that saw the human population of the area continue to rise. By 1870 and the first Montana Territory census, the Bitterroot Valley had a population of 314 people. Again, this only included white men and women, their Indian spouses, and any white or mixed-blood offspring.\(^{243}\) The number 314 seems small, but the important point is that it represented a 20 percent increase since the previous census. This meant that there were some new farmers on the scene. In 1869, three years after Carron approached Owen with complaints of a saturated market, Missoula County, which

\(^{239}\) Ibid., p. 44.
\(^{242}\) MHS, *Not in Precious Metals*, p. 94.
\(^{243}\) Excerpts from Montana Territory Census, 1870. In 1870 Census file, vertical files, Bitterroot Valley Historical Society, Hamilton, MT.
included the Bitterroot Valley at that point, had a total crop value of more than $140,000 that included 60,056 bushels of oats and wheat, and 12,152 bushels of potatoes.  

The valley was becoming a busier place as Euro-American population and political power increased in proportion to the amount of land converted to agriculture. The desire for a valley free of Indians (spouses of white men not included, of course) grew toward an unavoidable climax. During the Civil War years, the survey that was promised to Victor and the Salish in the treaty of 1855 was very low on the list of the federal government’s priorities. Robert E. Lee, Nathan Bedford Forrest, and Stonewall Jackson were greater concerns. By November, 1871, the survey was still not conducted, yet President Grant called for the Salish in the Bitterroot to vacate the valley and head north to the Jocko. By the following summer Congress ordered the first official land survey, then approved a measure that would allow $50,000 generated from Bitterroot Valley land sales to be repatriation money for the Salish. When 58 Indians still refused to leave the valley, the government sent Republican congressman and future president James Garfield to negotiate. At the time Garfield was being investigated for his role in the Credit Mobilier scandal. The events that transpired in the Bitterroot fairly typified his and the Grant administration’s corruptness. What took place was not a negotiation as much as it was an outright fraud. When Charlot refused to sign the agreement, Garfield simply faked the Salish chief’s X mark on the paper. This forgery, carried out by the most important American political figure to visit the valley, had important consequences. As Peter Ronan put it in 1890:

The publication of the Garfield agreement with Charlot’s signature mark affixed to it created the impression that all trouble was over with the Indians, and a large white

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245 Ronan, History of the Flathead Indians, p. 63.
emigration poured into the Bitter Root valley. The result is that the Indians who adhered to Charlot are yet in the valley, miserably poor, with one or two exceptions, surrounded by whites who are anxious for their removal, and the young men, with no restraint upon them, lounging around the saloons in Stevensville and utterly worthless.  

Such an outcome may have been part of Garfield’s plan from the start. In his diary from the trip to Montana, he makes very little reference to the Salish, except to imply that their religion should be the American government rather than Jesuit Catholicism. His racist, anti-papal, yet patriotic tone in the journal is that of a man who is less interested in the job of negotiation and more interested in enjoying himself while working with the region’s whites to accomplish their goals as well as his own. It is in this respect that Garfield’s writings are most useful. He gives a glimpse of the white settlers that, combined with the knowledge that his meeting with the Salish was a scam, is at once telling of the kind of less-than-serious and less-than-judicious man that Garfield was. At the same time, his writings provide a glimpse true to the atmosphere of Montana and the nation at that time. In describing the man that drove him from Fort Benton along the Mullan road, Garfield says, “He was very drunk and therefore was exceedingly brilliant as a driver.” As intriguing a statement as this is, it is Garfield’s discussion of the Euro-American wishes in the county that makes his diary even more informative as a piece of the historical record for the Bitterroot Valley in the early 1870’s. “From the conversation,” he wrote, “of citizens who visited me at Missoula, it soon became apparent that the chief anxiety of the settlers of the valley was to secure the establishment of a military post, and that the market which would thus be afforded

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247 Ronan, *History of the Flathead Indians*, p. 64.
This passage indicates several things, namely that the valley economy in 1872 had declined as Corron had predicted to Owen six years earlier. Garfield’s description also leaves no doubt that the people of the region were looking for the government to help bail them out of hard times by providing a military base as another market for agricultural goods. Just as the federally-backed Steven’s railroad survey and the Mullan road building crews stimulated the economy of the Bitterroot in the previous two decades, valley residents in the years after the initial placer mining boom started down the other side of an economic plateau that they enjoyed for years. Now that they were on the other side of the plateau, Bitterroot farmers and ranchers knew that their economic travails could be alleviated to a significant degree by government intervention. They saw national government involvement in the region as a rapid cure to financial stagnation. In 1877 Fort Missoula was established just beyond the northern end of the Bitterroot Valley. Important as it was to the valley’s economy, there were other developments in the late 1870’s in Montana Territory that were of greater significance to the people, economy, and ecology of the Bitterroot Valley. These developments were centered around the coming railroad and the hard rock mining for silver that commenced in the Butte area by the mid-1870’s. This was important, because changes in land use in the Bitterroot Valley were unequivocally tied to the railroad and the mines in Butte.

Placer mining had effected ecological change in the Bitterroot and surrounding areas by the 1870’s in a noticeable way. Garfield, who had written upon his return east that he knew his Pullman was approaching Cleveland when he smelled burning petroleum, understood how a landscape could be changed by industrial growth. While in western Montana, he wrote that the Clark Fork river had “been permanently ruined by the miners;
and has been for three years as muddy as the Missouri. Before the discovery of gold, it was as clear and pure as any mountain stream could well be." It can be assumed, since Garfield never visited the region before his 1872 trip, that he gleaned his information from people who saw the river prior to mining.\(^ {249} \) In addition to the dirtied water of the Clark Fork, it is likely that the Bitterroot River was also muddy. In a letter to the editor of the Virginia City Montana Post in late 1865, a person identified as J.F. wrote that a recent trip among the farmlands of western Montana was disconcerting, as he saw many examples of poor farming techniques. Although J.F. does not say whether or not he was in the Bitterroot, there is a good chance that he was. In 1865 the Bitterroot Valley was the largest agricultural area in western Montana. J.F. wrote that he saw:

land sown to wheat, that had water running through it in furrows about forty rods apart. The soil was loose and sandy; and, from two to three feet each side of the furrows the wheat appeared to do well; while at least three fourths of the whole field were dried up, and produced nothing—consequently one quarter of the land, properly irrigated, would have produced as much wheat as the whole, thereby saving three quarters of the fencing, plowing, harrowing, and seed, (all very expensive in this country). I saw another field in roots so wet that it was impossible to walk over it. This soil was a black, vegetable loam; and so completely drowned out that it did not yield enough to pay for the seed.\(^ {250} \)

It was this drowned out soil, tilled and loosened, that floated in fields, then eventually found its way into creeks and rivers.

\(^ {249} \) Ibid., p. 10-12.
Muddy creeks and rivers were just one obvious sign of environmental change in the 1870's. The hard rock mining operations that were being developed across Montana needed massive amounts of timber to support mine shafts and to fire smelters. This was of great importance for the well-wooded Bitterroot Valley. Many of the changes in timber use that took place in and around the valley over the next several decades were directly linked to the mining or smelting operations in Butte and Anaconda. The timber and mining industries combined with the railroad in an interconnected relationship that made for some startling alterations in Montana's landscape.

The first significantly large amounts of timber were cut in the Bitterroot Valley in the 1860's after Owen built his mill. Although the Jesuits constructed a mill in 1845, the amount of wood cut at that time was for their own limited housing and for general repairs to the church and other mission village buildings. Owen, on the other hand, was supplying sawed wood to many of the valley's newcomers. In 1864 Higgins, Worden, and Pattee opened a mill on Rattlesnake Creek in Missoula that was capable of cutting 2,000 board feet per day. This prompted Owen to expand his own operation in 1865. Like all larger trees harvested from the valley floor, the boards used in the improvements of the Ft. Owen mill would have originated either along the Bitterroot River or beyond its western bank where the forests covered the sloping foothills of the mountains. More than 30,000 feet of timber were used in Owen's improvements, with most of the individual trees measuring at least 30 inches in diameter. Such figures help one picture the amount of wood necessary for the average farmer to build a home, barn, and other structures. Although many valley settlers initially built rough log buildings, Owen's business ledgers indicate that a considerable amount of wood was sawed.251

By 1870 there were four sawmills in Missoula County, two of which were in the Bitterroot Valley. These mills were more than likely situated on Sweathouse and Mill

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Creeks. By this point Owen's mill on Burnt Fork Creek closed. Two sawmills in the valley would have stayed fairly busy providing lumber for the slowly growing region, but logging in 1870 was by no means a big industry for the Bitterroot Valley. At that point the magnitude of Bitterroot logging was small. Unlike the farming that was fueled by demand for flour and produce at the mines, logging in the Bitterroot in 1870 was a type of land use that existed almost solely to meet the needs of the small local community. Although there was a fairly large mining operation on Cedar Creek, west of Missoula near where the town of Superior is today, timber cutting and milling did not increase in the Bitterroot Valley as a result. In 1870 there were a total of nine people employed by the county's four sawmills, so it is probable that half that number, four or five people at most, worked the Bitterroot's two water-powered saws. In 1870 growing wheat was still much more profitable than cutting down and sawing pine trees. The value of milled flour in the county that year was worth $159,000 more than the value of milled timber.

In 1875 an Irishman named Marcus Daly moved from Salt Lake City to Butte as part owner and manager of a silver claim there called the Alice. Daly's legend in the annals of Montana history is unsurpassed, and with reason. In a state where the history of land use and political and social history have always been close to the same, a man such as Daly, who at one time controlled large chunks of Montana's mineral, agricultural, and forest resources, is going to be evaluated by historians with as much scrutiny as can be mustered. But historians have had a hard time with Daly because he left them little to examine. An enigmatic man, Daly figured numbers on his shirt sleeves in pencil so that few papers were left lying around for curious eyes. Upon his death, one newspaper said that "The golden chapter in the life of Mr. Daly is the one that never can be written." This was

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253 Coon, "The Economic Development of Missoula, Montana," p. 411. According to the 1870 census there were 1,486 people employed at the Cedar Creek mines, a short lived venture whose greatest
more true than the newspaper writer might have guessed. The day Daly died most of his papers and correspondence were immediately burned. 254

All hope, though, should not be lost. Even without loads of papers, Daly’s legacy is still apparent in Montana, because most of his history could not be burned, buried, or otherwise suppressed. The work of Marcus Daly is visible yet on the hillsides of Butte and Anaconda, in the Milltown reservoir at Bonner, and across the valley floor and forests of the Bitterroot Valley.

In addition to the fact that it was the year Daly came to Montana, there is another reason that 1875 is a good place to start for evaluating the changes in the history of Bitterroot Valley land use through the latter part of the nineteenth century. It was in that year that logging in the valley began the metamorphosis from small scale local to larger regional operations. In a preview of what was to come, timbers left the valley that summer for the first time. A sawmill owner used the Bitterroot River to float 25,000 board feet of wood to Missoula for the construction of a county fair grounds. 255 Fair grounds were the type of thing a county with high expectations and hopes might build. In that year Missoula County and the Bitterroot Valley had reason to believe that the hard days that followed the placer mining let down three years earlier were behind them. One historian has pointed out that by 1876 freight wagons full of produce were once again lining the valley’s roads, headed north then east in the direction of the mines. In addition, 2,500 head of surplus Bitterroot Valley livestock were sold for $30,000 that year. Although agricultural output steadily increased, demand could not be met. In a letter to the editor of the Missoulian in

importance for this story may be that some of the miners remained in the area to become farmers after the claims played out.


1878, a Phillipsburg miner wrote to request that the paper “induce your farmers to relieve our distress” by sending wagon loads of eggs, chickens, and “Bitter Root hams.”

In 1879 the total value of all of the county’s crops had increased 18 percent to $165,179 from ten years earlier. Furthermore, the next year a census showed that between 1870 and 1880 the amount of land in farms had risen from 15,827 to 41,969 acres, while the number of horses and beef cattle grazing the county’s grasses had tripled. The number of swine (4,313) and sheep (1,476) had increased almost 400 percent and 850 percent, respectively. Population in the Missoula and Bitterroot Valleys increased as well. In the previous census the mines at Cedar Creek accounted for 58 percent of the county’s population. Although total population actually dropped with the closing of the mine, the 2,537 people in Missoula County in 1880 reflected a realistic number of people who were working in the agricultural and, increasingly, the timber driven communities that dotted the county map. By 1880 the landscape of the Bitterroot Valley floor would have closely resembled that of eastern valleys. Various shades of green were squared off, and fields of wheat, potatoes, and other crops fit together in mosaic patches. Strung between the fields closest to the creeks, or along the river, were clumps of cottonwood, aspen, red willow, and ponderosa pine. Moving with purpose across the entire quilt were the settlers. They were on horseback, driving cattle, pigs, and sheep before them.

It was also in 1875 that Helena banker and future Territorial Governor Samuel Hauser began seeking funds to extend the Northern Pacific railroad into Montana. Three years earlier the road had reached a stopping point in South Dakota. As the town of Bismarck grew at rails end, the Northern Pacific went bankrupt. Hauser and other Montanans, who were promised a railroad reaching across their lands and to the Pacific by 1876, were desperate to get on with construction. They knew that their mines and the industries that supported those mines could not grow without the ability to quickly and efficiently move workers, agricultural products, timbers, machinery, and ore throughout

256 Ibid., p. 50.
the state and across the country. In 1878 the financial problems with the Northern Pacific were worked out, and by late 1879 construction started again on the road. In 1880 Utah & Northern tracks reached Dillon, opening up a fast route from the states to the Big Hole and on into the Bitterroot Valley. By March, 1882 the Missoulian noted changes in the Bitterroot. "All of the flat lands," the paper reported, "between Missoula and Stevensville, barren of houses one or two years ago, now show signs of civilization and thrift." The next month the paper announced that the "lower portion of Bitter Root Valley lands are pretty well taken up." Later in the same year the paper estimated that upwards of fifteen to thirty ranches were being established in parts of the valley every month. Many of these "ranches," especially those on the west side of the valley, were in thickly-covered timber lands that were bought for $1.25 an acre through the Preemption Act of 1841, or claimed via the 1862 Homestead Act. In some of these cases, farmers would clear the trees and begin running cattle, sheep, and pigs, but on a large number of the claims the tree covered plots were soon, if not immediately, sold to a corporation or other large landholder eager to control whole blocks of forested land. This type of land transfer certainly occurred with use of the 1878 Timber and Stone Act. The law was supposed to allow individual settlers the chance to utilize timber and stone resources for domestic purposes. The claims were to be made on 160 acres of non-cultivable public domain land. In reality the Timber and Stone Act ended up being at times both joke and a scandal, as it was almost impossible to enforce. The same thing happened with the Forest Homestead Act, which was supposed to allow people the opportunity to homestead agricultural areas within forested mountain environments. Timber companies, usually subsidiary holdings of mines, hired "dummy" entrymen to make claims for their corporations. That this happened in the Bitterroot Valley was predictable, given the forest resource, the proximity of the mines, and the common knowledge that the railroad would soon make large scale lumbering operations possible.

259 See page 1114 in Lamar for a succinct explanation of the Timber and Stone Act of 1878.
When William Clark was a senator representing Montana after statehood in 1889, he was charged with conspiracy to gain control of 21,000 acres of timber lands in Missoula and Powell Counties. His agents, including a Missoula merchant named Eddy, were charged with obtaining the services of at least 80 of these dummy entrymen.\(^{260}\)

The coming of the railroad made larger scale lumbering operations necessary. In August, 1881, Eddy, Hammond & Co. signed a lucrative deal that made them the timber suppliers for the construction of the Northern Pacific railroad between Lake Pend Oreille and the mountains west of Helena. The amount of wood needed on that much track was somewhere in the neighborhood of 21 million board feet, all of which was harvested from the forests of western Montana. At least two sawmills operated in the Bitterroot as subcontracted sites for Eddy, Hammond.\(^{261}\) One of the mills, owned by farmer W.E. Bass, was the first steam powered sawmill in the valley. Two boilers were fed by a flume in Carlton Creek. It has been reported that this mill furnished nearly all the ties for the Northern Pacific roadbed fifty miles east and west from Missoula.\(^{262}\) If this were true, that would mean that at minimum Bass would have provided 350,000 six-foot long railroad ties, all of which were likely floated down the Bitterroot River. Whether this claim is valid or not, Bass and his sawmill undoubtedly cut a sizable amount of timber with the steam powered mill. The mills were movable, so when one easily accessible creek was cut over, the mill usually moved to a new location. Some creeks were named during this era. A local history claimed that at most sites "sawdust was disposed of by putting it in the creek" after being hauled there by a wheel barrow. This would explain how Sawdust Creek got its name.\(^{263}\)

By August, 1882 the railroad grade had been laid through Hell Gate Canyon, yet there were still no rails to bring trains into Missoula. Meanwhile, track was being put down

\(^{261}\) Phillip, "Anatomy of a Pestilence," p. 82.
west of town at a rapid rate. While 6,000 Chinese and 1,700 others toiled in the summer sun, it appeared that the meeting point of the east and west bound lines would certainly happen in western Montana. One year later, in June, 1883, rails were put down west to east along the northern end of Higgins Avenue as all of Missoula watched. The *Missoulian* reported that someone in the crowd bought several cases of Schlitz beer, likely from Worden's store, to refresh the hardworking men who were hammering down the heavy rails. In September, when the ceremonial final spike was driven near the Little Blackfoot River, former President Grant, who only eleven years earlier attempted to vanquish the Salish from the Bitterroot, was in attendance. The coming of the train was a huge milestone for the country and it would make life in the Bitterroot Valley and all of Montana very different than it had been just months earlier. With the train, one could leave Missoula at 9 a.m. and be in Portland the next evening at dinner. Grant's decree was unable to accomplish the final removal of the Salish from the valley in the 1870's, but the railroad handled the task with ease. By bringing in more and more settlers to the region, the train allowed Euro-Americans quick access to what was left of the Salish lands.264

The year after the last spike was driven, the government stepped up its attempts to entice Charlot and his small band to leave the Bitterroot. They took the chief to Washington on the new train. Neither the train trip, nor the U.S. Capital, nor the White House changed Charlot's mind. He said that he had only gone to Washington to ask the Great Father for permission to stay in the Bitterroot Valley.265 The next year, in 1885, Newton J. Tillman moved onto land on the east side of the Bitterroot and south of Eight Mile Creek. Some Salish were living on the land and dug caves into the creek bank in order to store winter food and provisions. Tillman started the foundation for his house. One day he came to work and there were some logs with charcoal drawings on them. Although he never recounted exactly what the drawings were, Tillman got the message. With those drawings

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263 Ibid.
the Indians told Tillman not to build there, so he stopped construction. The Indians stayed on his property for several more years. Within the next decade, though, and regardless of their defiant attitude, a Euro-American population explosion encouraged by the railroads would force Charlot and most of the remaining Salish to leave the valley.  

Earlier in the year of 1883 when the east-west train first whistled across the Montana countryside, Daly’s Anaconda mine in Butte mostly played out of silver. Daly was not worried. In the process of discovering that his silver veins were thinning he found copper deposits in the Anaconda mine that looked like fat red rails criss-crossing the rock. Realizing that copper was going to be in demand for telegraph lines and other electricity related technologies, Daly did three things. First, he found the funding to buy as many claims surrounding the Anaconda that he could get. Next, he started construction of a large copper smelter in the Deer Lodge Valley. Finally, he made sure that easy access to timber would never limit his ability to run all of the facilities for his Anaconda Mining and Smelting Company.

As mentioned earlier, Daly’s need for access to timber would play heavily in the history of land use in the Bitterroot Valley. When their contract with the Northern Pacific ran out in the summer of 1882, the men behind Eddy, Hammond & Co. joined with Washington Dunn, who also happened to be the construction engineer for the Rocky Mountain Division of the Northern Pacific, to form another company. The final partner in the new firm, incorporated as the Montana Improvement Company (MIC), was Marcus Daly. The Northern Pacific railroad owned one share of stock more than half the total shares, so technically it controlled the new company. The key element to the deal was that the railroad would give the MIC a lower freight rate than other shippers. Regardless of the Northern Pacific’s influence, Daly’s presence as a founder of the MIC was felt from the

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266 Some Bitterroot Memories, p. 17
267 In 1880 Daly sold his interest in the Alice and bought the Anaconda.
268 The company would not become the Anaconda Copper Mining Co., or ACM, until 1895.
The mission of the MIC was simple: to provide timber for the railroad spurs that would run off the mainline (through places such as the Bitterroot Valley), and to provide wood resources for Daly's mines and smelter once the timber supplies in the Butte and Anaconda areas were exhausted.

By 1885, extensive cutting by the MIC forced the Department of Interior to charge the company with "widespread depredations on public timber," while Congress considered repealing the Timber and Stone Act, the major vehicle the company was using to access public timber. Martin McGinnis, Montana's delegate to Congress at the time, expressed the views of his backers when he said of the Act that "certainly Congress never intended to overturn the ordinary process of civilized society in the Territories and make every man his own woodchopper or lumber maker." In other words, McGinnis argued that the Timber and Stone Act was really designed for the timber companies so that they could cut wood for individual settlers. Hauser and Daly were even more blunt in their analysis of how such a move by Congress would personally affect them. In a letter to the territorial delegate, they wrote:

We understand there is a move to stop cutting timber on public lands. If successful, it will stop all the principle mines in the Territory and throw out of employment thousands of people...we know this would be disastrous.

Regardless of their arguments, by 1891 the government and many of the farmers of the valley had enough. With the cutting of the valley's forests, increased water run-off and soil erosion were noticeable to the men attempting to grow crops downstream. Wilson Barber Harlan led a group of Bitterrooters in petitioning the General Land Office for controls on timber cutting in the valley. In that year, in large part due to what occurred in

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271 Ibid., p. 7
the Bitterroot and the rest of Montana, Congress passed the General Land Law Revision Act that gave the President the authority to create Forest Reserves. Later, in 1897, Grover Cleveland used the law to create the Bitter Root Forest Reserve.

Harlan’s and others’ petitioning for just such a reserve of timber should not imply that every Bitterrooter was pleased with the government’s control of the forests, nor that 1897’s backers would still support reserves in 1907. “Hampered by a forest reserve system,” one local editorial said ten years later, “that encroaches upon his very back yard, exacts fees for the privilege of grazing his stock, and places him under the supervision of petty officials, while gathering his firewood, confronted by an exorbitant and ever-increasing price for lumber,

which he must use to build a home, made possible by the prohibitive tariff, scheduled in the interest of the timber trust, forced to pay a license if he catches a mess of trout or shoots a duck, plundered by the trusts that control the output of his clothing and groceries, ye Bitterroot rancher must indeed be a cheerful rooster to appreciate the blessings of Republican legislation that has been showered upon ye.”

Throughout the early eighties, the population and productive capacity of the Bitterroot Valley continued to increase. In 1883 each acre planted to wheat yielded 20-25 bushels, while oats were at 35-40 bushels, and potato crops produced more than 12,000 pounds per acre. In addition, farmers were growing apples and other orchard fruits in increasingly larger numbers. The railhead in Missoula opened markets for farm products in Butte, and Bitterroot Valley farmers were responding with aggressive irrigation techniques, fencing, and new crops. In addition to the Butte markets, smaller mines in the mountains around the valley were also developed. The Curlew, Pleasant View, and Elizabeth silver

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273 Moon, A History of Montana State Forestry, p. 15.
claims, up Big Creek near Victor, saw the most intensive mining in the valley’s history. But between their founding in 1881 and closing around 1890, the mines’ greatest productivity was at the Curlew, where seventy-five men worked two ten hour shifts to produce twenty tons of concentrated ore each week. The impacts this mining had on the surrounding forests were significant enough to mention. Photographs of the mine show piles of logs and eroded hillsides. Although a diversion flume of water from Big Creek was used to power the concentrating mill, wood was used to support the mine shafts as they advanced further into the hillsides.  

These mining operations in the Bitterroot were minuscule compared to the activity in Butte, but the mines were most significant in helping to bolster farm output and create new communities. With an irony that borders on the unbelievable, the story of the town of Victor offers a colorful account of the founding of one of these new valley communities. In 1882 the founders of the town, which was situated several miles below the Curlew mine in the middle of the valley, applied for the post office name of Garfield, Montana Territory. Their intention was to honor the recently assassinated President Garfield. When that name was rejected by the postal service, they went with their second choice: Victor. Victor was the father of Charlot, whose signature Garfield had forged ten years earlier.

By 1885 the forests around Butte and Anaconda were completely cut-over, which prompted the MIC to build a mill at Bonner, just east of Missoula. Soon, the company commenced cutting large amounts of timber along the Blackfoot River and up Rattlesnake Canyon. In July of that year, the mill was churning out up to 50,000 board feet a day for the mines. At this point the Bitterroot forests were still largely intact for two reasons. First, in the mid-eighties there was a plentiful supply of standing timber close to the Bonner mill that was easy to reach. Second, although the forests of the Bitterroot made loggers and

275 From Western News, Dec. 5, 1906, as quoted in Kerlee, p. 25.
276 Langton, The Victor Story, p. 55-59
278 Ibid., p. 88.
mill owners salivate, there was no easy way to get the cut timber out of the valley. This would not change until the building of the Missoula & Bitterroot Valley Railroad.

Before railroad construction started up the valley, real estate speculation reached an unprecedented level of activity. Newspaper accounts from the era mention plots of land being bought and sold at a rate that made it clear that a small group of resourceful men were buying sizable chunks of the Bitterroot Valley as the railroad approached. Lumber businessman Eddy, for example, had other, less well known friends and associates, purchase ranch land for him. He undoubtedly felt that property values would escalate once the train passed beneath the shadow of the Bitterroots. Marcus Daly operated in a similar manner, sending his brother-in-law and other Anaconda employees to buy up ranches in the valley that were deeded to him later.279 The town of Hamilton was platted in 1890 by James W. Hamilton on behalf of Daly on four continuous west side homesteads. Three years earlier Daly bought the first of the many farms that would eventually be at the center of a 22,000 acre ranch near the new town. His Stock Farm raised champion horses and livestock and employed hundreds of people. With the building of a large sawmill and dam on the north end of town, Hamilton became another Daly and Anaconda company town, where home lots were sold to employees.280 The railroad helped connected men like Eddy, Daly, and others create new opportunities for making themselves and their families more money.

One of these opportunities obviously involved timber. Construction of the branch line into the Bitterroot Valley was fast, as track was put down on cross-ties cut first from along the river, then from the hillsides sloping east from the Bitterroots. The railroad company was chartered in January, 1887, and in less than one year the first smoking engine chugged into Victor. Around this time a farmer in the valley named Daniel Benson noted that the railroad seemed to follow the logging operations down the valley, one advancing south before the other. This was no figment of Benson’s imagination, nor was it

279 Ibid., p. 69.
an accident.²⁸¹ An 1888 newspaper article reported that 25-32 carloads of lumber and produce left the Bitterroot Valley every day for Butte. That year the Bitterroot Valley cut and exported at least a million feet of timber a week, while the year’s total board foot cut for Missoula County reached ninety million.²⁸² Almost all of this timber was going to the Anaconda Company. In 1888 the company used 40,000 board feet of timber a day, while the smelter went through about 300,000 cords, or $1,500,000 worth of wood annually.²⁸³

In the Bitterroot Valley the first trees cut were those closest to the creeks and rivers. John McKinney, who came to the north end of the Bitterroot from Virginia in 1890, remembered watching loggers float trees to the Anaconda sawmill in the young town of Hamilton. The trees, cut along the east and west forks of the Bitterroot, were ponderosa pines (Pinus ponderosa). “In them days,” McKinney said, “they only cut the biggest, finest trees, and those near the river.”²⁸⁴ McKinney’s recollection of massive cuts among the old growth pines along the river made sense. Trees near the river were easier to get to the mill, although sometimes the loggers had to be creative in figuring out ways to bring the gargantuan pines to the ground, then to the water. In 1897 loggers John Hayes and Al Biddiscombe cut a ponderosa that was so large the men were forced to use gun powder to blow the tree into transportable pieces. The pieces were then rolled into the Bitter Root River for the drive down to Hamilton. The lowest limbs on this powder blasted tree, which the sawyers estimated to be 500 years old based on tree rings, were eighty feet off the ground.²⁸⁵

The cutting of the oldest and biggest trees along the river coincided with unparalleled industrial growth for the Bitterroot Valley and Missoula County. Most of this growth centered around the sawmills. Between 1880 and 1890, the number of wage earners increased by 596 people (an increase of more than 1,800 percent), while total

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²⁸⁰ Bitter Root Stock Farm file, vertical files, Bitterroot Valley Historical Society, Hamilton, MT
²⁸¹ BRVHS, Bitterroot Trails, p. 433
²⁸⁴ John McKinney file, SC 34, Montana State Historical Society, Helena.
wages earned had grown by $376,848 (almost 3,000 percent). In addition, in those ten years the value of all products stemming from the county’s industries had risen 771 percent to more than one million dollars a year. It was a time of remarkable change that was ushered in almost instantaneously with the railroad and its ability to transport wood products to the growing areas of the new state. In 1891 there were twenty sawmills in the Bitterroot that supplied six sash and door factories and 31 wholesale and retail lumber yards. By the beginning of the last decade of the nineteenth-century, the wood products and lumber industry had a very noticeable presence in the Bitterroot Valley.

The easy timber in the Bitterroot was taken out by the late 1880’s. By the time the train came to Darby in 1892, whatever timber was hard to reach earlier was removed with precision. Nearly everything was gone by the turn of the century. By 1904, the whine of the Hamilton mills was quieted when the Bonner Mill east of Missoula expanded and logging operations moved farther up the Blackfoot River. Extensive logging in the Bitterroot Valley was ended for forty years. The legacy of such rapacious action on the land would just begin to make its mark, though, for the very headwaters of the Bitterroot River, lifeblood for valley farmers, had undergone important changes. As trees were floated down the Bitterroot River, soil stability went down the river with them. In addition, the logging operations left what they didn’t want scattered and piled along the ground. The piles of felled trees and underbrush were unplanned mounds of fuel for forest fire. As McKinney put it: “The loggers wasn’t asked to pile their brush, or clean up underbrush, or anything, and there was lots of dangerous forest fires. There was mighty little attention paid to fire protection.” The year 1910 indicated that McKinney was correct. Fires were

289 McKinney file.
so thick in the surrounding mountains in August that on some days people in the valley were using headlamps to see during mid-afternoon.290

The effects logging had on the valley were staggering, not only in the amount of soil loss and erosion, but also to wildlife. The historical record provides clues that point to a series of fluctuations in wildlife populations in the valley as early as 1805. The period following the logging operations at the end of the nineteenth-century appear to be a high point in fluctuating bell curves of abundance and scarcity. Lewis and Clark found relatively little game in the valley and were under the impression that the Indians there had little food other than berries and roots.291 Things were not much different by the time DeSmet arrived. Neither the Jesuits nor Owen describe the valley as a game-filled paradise. Salish hunters were constantly leaving the valley in search of meat. Then a curious thing happened. Settlers who came to the valley in the days after the gold rush began describing abundance. Fred Edwards, a freighter to the Gibbonsville mining camp in Idaho during the 1890’s, said that the Ross’ Hole area in the upper valley contained herds of hundreds of elk, and that there were thousands of deer. Moose, he remembered, were “in every swamp and in the brush” of the valley.292 Another settler, born in Stevensville in 1880, recalled a scene from her childhood that is an abrupt reminder that the lower end of the valley, for some time, used to be quite different. There were bears all over the place, she said. They were “in the timber near the river and they would come at night and kill the little pigs, calves, and even milch cows.” On one occasion, five of the “brown bears” were killed in


291 See Moulton, p. 187-91. Clark’s entry for September 4, 1805, mentions the Corps’ first meeting with the Salish, who were “friendly but nothing but berries to eate.” After eating more berries and roots the next morning (the 5th), Clark mentions no more food until the next day, when he wrote “nothing to eat but berries, our flour out, and but little corn, the hunters killed but two pheasants only...” Finally, after entering descriptions of the valley as a stony land full of prickly pear, Clark bagged a “prairie fowl” near what is today Stevensville, while another member of the party killed a deer. It was not until camped at Lolo Creek, when they killed four deer, four ducks, and three birds that the men ate well, as they had been accustomed traveling across the Plains.

one night and their skins were hung on the main street of Stevensville. The repugnant smell of the skins was enough to send teams of horses rearing and turning downwind.\textsuperscript{293}

There are several possible explanations for an increased animal presence in the valley at the close of the nineteenth-century. First, the intensive logging in the 1880-90's may have been significant in driving some animals into the lower parts of the valley. Ponderosa pines are fire resistant, and without fire suppression, usually maintain an understory of shrubs in which wildlife thrive. Moose, for example, love red-osier dogwood (\textit{Cornus stolonifera}), as do beaver, elk and deer. Black bear, deer, and elk also find western snowberry (\textit{Symphoricarpos occidentalis}), another understory species in the habitat type, palatable. If the pine is logged off, the understory species will be replaced with species of less palatable plants such as sagebrush and rabbitbrushes, interspersed with impenetrable brambles of snowberry and other species.\textsuperscript{294} In addition to the vegetational changes that took place around the valley as pine was logged, undesirable scrap trees were left in piles, creating a landscape more difficult for ungulates to browse. Under less than ideal circumstances in the higher elevations, animals moved toward the food. By the turn of the century, the best food sources were increasingly in the valley's bottom lands. Fields of oats and wheat were excellent energy sources, drawing increased herds of elk and deer into the vicinity of valley farms. Easily accessible food sources may have helped populations expand. In addition, smaller, slower farmyard animals like pigs and chickens were easy prey for bear, cats, and other predators, which had perhaps found quick Salish horses more difficult to kill.

With increased human populations also came an increase in hunters. Photographs from the period show two and three men with five and six white-tail deer hanging from trees by their hind legs. In 1900 each person could legally kill six deer a year in the valley.\textsuperscript{295}

Bitterroot forests, yet lack of enforcement meant that one could take more. At any rate, hunting pressures kept a check on populations, perhaps decreasing herd sizes. Such pressure, combined with the catastrophic fires of 1910 when the forests around the valley were scorched, must have caused populations to plummet. By 1912, elk numbers were so low in the Bitterroot that truckloads of the animals were shipped to the valley from Yellowstone National Park in order to replenish the area’s herds.295

As large teams of Chinese men dug, scraped, and piled earthen levees for the railroad bed pushing south through the stumps of the valley, the farmers and ranchers of the Bitterroot built dams, or scraped, dug, and piled earth along the sides of irrigation ditches. As hugely increased numbers of livestock impacted the ground’s ability to hold water, and as entire watersheds full of trees were removed wholesale, more muddy water than ever before went down the valley’s creeks and the Bitterroot River. Water rights tell the story of the importance of how what little water remained was put to use by a select few. On August 1, 1870, Alice Herman was decreed 120 inches of water out of One Horse Creek. By May 15, 1901 sixteen lesser water rights had been filed and claimed there. Part of the reason reservoirs and irrigation canals were built was that people felt water was going to waste without storage.296 Sometimes disputes over water appropriation turned neighbor against neighbor. One diary from the era had this entry: “Went to the head of the ditch to see what was the matter. Found (Bob) Nelson had turned the water out on his land. Do not like that way of doing things.”297 Another farmer said in an interview that people

296 Some Bitterroot Memories, p. 13. The Soil Conservation Service’s 1951 soil survey for the Bitterroot Valley pointed out on page 8 that “water appropriations on the west-side creeks generally exceed the supply. Only those who hold the very earliest water rights get enough water for the full season. In average or dry years, those who have late appropriations are generally cut off by July 1st, and by July 15th or August 1st only the holders of the earliest two or three water rights on each creek are receiving water.”
fought over water all summer, and that a few shovel handles were broken in the process. Peter O’Hare Dam up Bass Canyon is one example of a storage facility built by valley farmers in the late nineteenth-century. In 1897 O’Hare and several neighbors, feeling that their lands were not getting enough water, formed a company and sold stock to raise capital to build a reservoir. The next year the men used their own livestock to construct an 8’ x 175’ dam on Bass Creek high above the valley. The dam stored more than 800 acre feet of water, and served its users until 1915, when 14 more feet of wall were added onto the top of the dam. This later dam stood until the 1950’s when it was enlarged again to hold more than 8,000 acre feet. By 1887 there were a number of irrigation companies, set up similarly to cooperatives, that existed solely to provide water for the farms that now covered the valley floor and extended onto the drier bench lands on the eastern side of the valley. These ditches, including the Surprise Ditch and the Ward-Galloway Ditch, ran mostly from the side creeks and brought water to fields of crops that comprised increasingly larger amounts of hay and apples. In the spring of 1887, following a hard winter, there were 33,000 sheep in the valley needing hay. There were a considerable number of apple trees, too, perhaps as many as 10,000. Both the hay fields and the orchard fruits needed larger amounts of water than traditional methods of irrigation had been able to provide. By 1890 Missoula County had more than 22,000 irrigated acres, and it was becoming apparent that the successful Bitterroot farming and ranching operations were becoming more and more dependent on new technologies. In a long letter to his sister and brother-in-law in Germany, immigrant Joseph Wagner wrote in 1886 regarding his life as a Bitterroot Valley farmer. The letter is full of references to the fact that machines and animals do the majority of the work on farms. Wagner certainly displays the attitude that technology is an answer to farm drudgery. “On the 22nd of November,” Wagner wrote, “

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299 Some Bitterroot Memories, p. 4.
was forty years old, although we don’t age here as we do in Germany because we don’t work so hard by hand. We work our field with horses.” He went on:

The potatoes you plant and the horses come with a shovel plow and then the work is over until you dig them. The grain we plant different here too. You plow the ground and then you sow it but not by hand. The machine that sows the grain puts it in the ground and then you are through until the harvest. When the grain is ripe then you hitch up the horses to the machine and you cut it and bind it in one operation... We work a whole lot easier here than by you. I dont work in a week as much as you do in a day. I take it real slow but the horses have to go. If one of them dies then you throw the harness on another one. You dont pay as much attention to a croaked horse than you do to a chicken. The horses havent much value here.³⁰²

In the last sentence above, Wagner was of course referring to the monetary value of horses. Good work horses in 1886 sold for $10-12 a head because they were plentiful, not because they were useless.³⁰³ At the end of the nineteenth century, horses were indispensable on both farms in the country and on city streets. Horses pulled plows in fields and drew carriages and wagons in the towns. It was important to the Bitterroot Valley that horses in Missoula and Butte, in addition to other livestock in the valley, ate prodigious amounts of hay. By 1889 Missoula County had more than 8,000 acres planted in cereals such as wheat and oats, and another 19,327 acres planted to hay. The next year the county boasted 6,018 horses, more than 15,000 beef and dairy cattle, and 38,204 sheep. These numbers represented ten year increases since 1880 of 64 percent for horses,

³⁰³ Ibid.
128 percent for cattle, and amazingly, 2,488 percent for sheep. All of this happened on 757 farms (546 more farms than 1880) that covered 155,823 acres, or 113,854 more acres than 1880.304

The impact of sheep on a landscape is well known. They crop grasses closer to the ground than do cattle, often turning whole fields and hillsides into slick excuses for rangeland that has almost no ability to retain moisture. One scholar described the impact of sheep in the Madison Valley of Montana during a later era as the act that set up "conditions for disaster" when fescue and wheatgrasses were replaced with rabbitbrush, grama grasses, and sagebrush.305 This same ecological phenomenon certainly happened in the Bitterroot, where ranchers in 1890 were no different than their counterparts across the West. They saw sheep as a money making opportunity, regardless of the fact that they were noticeably changers of landscape. Sheep ranching was indeed very profitable until protective tariffs on wool were abolished for three years beginning in 1894.306 By that point, Bitterrooters were involved in another get rich quick scheme that will be discussed in the following chapter.

A good number of the new 113,854 Bitterroot Valley farm acres in 1890 were owned by Marcus Daly. His influence in the valley was significant. By 1893, the year Ravalli County was created and became independent from Missoula County, Daly had acquired 22,000 acres and incorporated the entire mass into the Bitterroot Stock Farm. With the showplace ranch and other holdings, Daly paid 1/6 of all property tax in the new county. He also put money into the Bitterroot in other ways. The town of Hamilton was, like Anaconda before it, another one of his pet projects. He made sure that there was a fine hotel, a dairy, mills, and other businesses any respectable town might need. He also ensured that Hamilton became the county seat. As a valley resident remembered, "With the coming of Marcus Daly and establishment of the Stock Farm, everything changed as if by

magic. Much of this magic came in the form of an irrigation canal known as the Big Ditch. Daly was one of the people who initiated the drive to bring large scale irrigation to the eastern bench lands of the valley, spending $300,000 of his own money on the Big Ditch in the process. The Ditch ran from Lake Como on the far southwestern end of the valley through the middle of Daly's property and along the dry eastern bench lands. Upon Daly's death in 1900, one valley farmer wrote a letter to the *Ravalli County Democrat* that indicates Daly's influence on the valley was well understood by his contemporaries:

Mr. Daly was the great transformer of the Bitter Root valley. I cannot enter into details. It is only by comparing the condition of our valley now with what it was when Mr. Daly came to it, that we can realize the surprising changes that have taken place since that time. To a far greater extent than anyone else in our valley he has made the “desert to blossom as the rose.” I cannot undertake to catalogue the improvements he has made; they are too numerous; most of them are admirable. Nothing in the way of needed improvements seemed too large or too costly for him to undertake. His splendid ditches alone will remain a monument to his memory for generations to come.

By the turn of the century and Daly's death those irrigation ditches, specifically the Big Ditch, would create the illusion that the Bitterroot Valley was an Eden capable of supporting apple trees that bore no forbidden fruit. But like many great characters in the metaphorically rich parables of the American West, the Bitterroot apple tree and the boom that chased it were plagued from the start. The Big Ditch, what I have elsewhere called the

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307 Untitled reminiscence. Bitterroot Stock Farm file, vertical files, Bitterroot Valley Historical Society, Hamilton, MT.
serpentine snake in the garden, clarified for the bitten valley residents that a Montana Eden is a whole different version of paradise.
In 1890 the number of Salish and related Indians living in the Bitterroot Valley was at most 342 people. That same year the population of Missoula County reached more than 14,000. In the last decade of the century, the outnumbered Indians lived day to day by any means necessary. For a large majority of them, this meant that they camped part of the year on land owned by Euro-Americans like Newton Tillman, and accepted federal handouts of food and money. Although Indian Agent Peter Ronan was stationed in the Jocko, he convinced the government to allow him to assist Charlot's band of poverty stricken Bitterroot Salish. They were a people who, in just fifty years, saw changes to their homeland and their way of life that, although somewhat quantifiable, are mostly incomprehensible today. Ronan knew that the band would either move to the Jocko or die in the Bitterroot Valley without an acre of their own. Eventually, the band realized this as well, and they chose to leave the valley and live. John Fahey may have summed up their situation best when he wrote that upon final removal to the reservation in 1891 the Salish "passed through a Bitterroot Valley no longer Indian, but crossed by telegraph wires, dotted with brick buildings, its streams bridged by steel and timber, and its lands closed by wire and fencing."  

The year the Indians rode north to the Jocko was a watershed year for the Euro-American in the Bitterroot Valley. For most whites, the long-awaited departure of the last Salish meant final victory for their own way of life. Just months prior to the departure, one resident of Victor had made it clear how some felt about the issue. "We will welcome the day," the man wrote, "when the red-faced, non-producing Indian shall be seen no more in our vicinity, but instead, the honest horny handed homesteader, making our farming land

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blossom as the rose." Indeed, it was a symbolic event in the valley’s history when the Salish finally relinquished their lands. By the end of 1891, half of the original public domain in Missoula County was claimed.

Chief Charlot was heartbroken, bitter, and left feeling severely betrayed by the forced removal, yet he was left little alternative. When he finally gave in, Charlot said that the land the government offered in the Flathead Valley would suffice. “All I want,” he announced with resignation, “is ground for my grave. We will go there.” He went, and it is likely that he would not have returned to the valley if not for yet another demand made by the whites in the Bitterroot. In 1911, after some twenty years in exile from the homeland of his ancestors, Charlot was asked to make a return visit. His arrival was marked with neither salutes nor apologies. In fact, by that point, many Bitterrooters had probably never heard of him. Charlot was invited to the valley for one reason. He was needed as a witness in a legal case involving a water rights dispute. After he testified, the old chief went back to the Jocko and apparently never again returned to the valley of his birth.

In 1893 Ravalli County was formed from Missoula County. At that time there were fewer than five thousand people living in the valley, but by the turn of the new century the Bitterroot had 7,822 residents. It was a sizable population that was at least a partial by-product of the county’s growing number of irrigated acres. As ditches, canals, and trestles began to criss-cross the valley floor, holders of lesser water rights and farmers on the drier benchlands were able to produce some crops where there was most recently only pine forests or dryland-scrub. Where there was large amounts of uncultivable land, irrigation provided room for expansion. Irrigation also gave hope. New settlers to the valley saw dusty plots glisten with potential once those plots were dissected with ditches. In 1890 all

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312 Langton, *The Victor Story*, p. 54
of Missoula County had a trifle more than 22,000 irrigated acres, but by 1900 the Bitterroot Valley alone boasted 67,249 acres of irrigated land. Irrigation was to change nature and put water where it was not supposed to be. Throughout the 1890’s, ditch development ran neck and neck with logging as the valley’s major preoccupation. Wooden flumes full of water, running across fields on stilts, were helping the “horny handed homesteader” make the farming fields of the valley, at least in a few places, “blossom as the rose.”

The drive to improve and increase irrigation systems was motivated by the simple belief that more water helped farmers produce more crops. Bigger irrigation systems were also a result of more open lands than ever before at the close of the nineteenth-century in the Bitterroot Valley. As timber was removed from the landscape, it appeared that there were suddenly new lands waiting to be turned into farms and gardens. All that was needed was water. At the time, grains fed to livestock were the most important crops grown in the valley. While the county’s 891 farms produced a crop value (of products not fed to livestock) that amounted to more than $900,000, livestock were worth almost $1.5 million. By 1900 Ravalli County ranchers had 6,713 horses and 22,461 head of cattle. Coon claimed that there were more than 60,000 sheep. Livestock were clearly an important aspect of agriculture in the valley and the hoofed animals needed to be well fed. In addition to other feeds and grasses such as barley, rye, clover, and alfalfa, farmers in 1900 grew 400,150 bushels of oats to feed the valley’s stock. The crops fed to these animals, although not given a value in the census, were some of the most important products of the valley. Growing one’s own livestock feed was key to every successful farming and ranching operation in the Bitterroot.

Increasingly throughout the 90’s, it became apparent that some Bitterrooters felt that much of the valley’s future success would ride on the production of orchard fruits. Wilson Harlan believed apples were the valley’s future. In 1892 he founded the Western

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Montana Fruit Growers Association, and the next year Stevensville hosted the Pacific Northwest Fruit Fair. It will be remembered that Harlan led a group of valley farmers in 1891 in petitioning the General Land Office for controls on timber cutting in the valley. It is possible that he felt an out of control timber industry would ruin orcharding and fruit growing, both enterprises in which he wholeheartedly believed. In reality, the timber business played a major role in ushering in this new and important era of land use in the valley. The land clearing that resulted from the cutting of timber opened the door for unprecedented real estate sales in the Bitterroot Valley. Apple orchards in a pastoral setting became the focal point and driving force behind the sales pitch that drove the boom.

Apple trees were first planted in the valley in 1866 by Thomas Harris, but the first attempt at orcharding as a business occurred two years later. In 1868 William N. Smith planted $100 worth of apple trees on his homestead. After a rough winter, it was reported that the only thing remaining from his small orchard was one lone sickly tree and a bank note for $100 bearing three percent interest every month. Throughout the 60’s and 70’s fruit cultivation played a minor role in commercial agriculture in the Bitterroot Valley. Some farms undoubtedly had apple trees and plots planted with other small fruits, but they were foods grown predominantly for the family table instead of the packing crate. By the 1880 agricultural census just over 1,000 acres were used for growing fruit in all of Missoula County. One local history stated that up to the 90’s most of the fruits grown were small fruits like strawberries, and that it was not until later that people became more interested in fruit trees such as cherries and apples. In 1890 trees were counted in the census instead

317 U.S. Agricultural Census, 1900. Vol. V, part I. Farms, Livestock, and Animal Products. Washington: U.S. Census Office, 1902. See also Coon, p. 387-92. Note that Coon’s numbers don’t match the census numbers. In 1900, for example, she listed the county as having 19,133 horses, and 10,041 cattle.
320 Zeisler, “The History of Irrigation and the Orchard Industry In the Bitterroot Valley,” p. 22; and Langton, The Victor Story, p. 64.
321 Some Bitterroot Memories, p. 8.
of acreage planted with fruits. That year Ravalli County had 11,226 orchard trees. Ten years later, as more of the valley’s forests were removed and irrigation systems were developed, valley farmers became convinced that the Bitterroot was a great place to grow apples. At the turn of the century, Ravalli County alone had 302,360 apple trees and another 19,000 or more trees bearing other marketable fruits.\textsuperscript{322} It was no coincidence that these increases in tree numbers came as real estate developers discovered that the valley was a wonderful place to sell land. By 1900 twenty-five percent of all lands in the Bitterroot Valley had been subdivided into orchard plots of ten acres or less.\textsuperscript{323}

The years around the turn of the century were ones of great activity and economic vigor in the valley. The Ravalli County Assessor noted in 1896 that there were eight mills that produced 72 million feet of lumber. Logging in the valley had reached an all time high, and as noted earlier, the removal of much of this timber paved the way for the increase in large scale orchard plantings.\textsuperscript{324} One valley resident reminiscenced that when his father retired from the Northern Pacific Railroad and moved to the Bitterroot with his life savings, most of the apple orchards in the valley had been planted on cleared timber lands. A 1907 report said that the “largest area in orchards is now on the west side of the Bitter Root river and is mostly cut-over pine land.”\textsuperscript{325} These cut-over lands would play an important role in the transition to apples for years to come. In 1912 a newspaper article mentioned that the “logged off lands between the town and the foot of the Bitter Root mountains are being planted with fruit trees.”\textsuperscript{326} Arthur Stone, a writer for the Missoulian, wrote around the same time that “There are orchards now where there was forest”...and that

\begin{footnotes}
\item[324] Phillip, “Anatomy of a Pestilence,” p. 149.
\item[326] Some Bitterroot Memories, first quote p. 2, and p.64.
\end{footnotes}
and orchards lie away up on the hillsides and are extending their line of advance each month. The boom of the dynamite as it blasts the stumps from the old woodland is heard regularly. The pall of the smoke from the fires which are clearing the brushland is the banner of the advancing line of cultivation. The spirit of progress is everywhere at work.\textsuperscript{327}

Most of the apple trees in 1900 were infant trees planted on lands that were not and would never be settled. In 1895 local orchardist Sam Dinsmore formed the Bitterroot Orchard Company with the dual purpose of creating a grand irrigation canal and selling land. The idea was that people would buy a plot of valley land with established rows of apple trees, all watered by lateral ditches off of a large main irrigation canal known as the Big Ditch. The key to the success of the project was the ditch, and Dinsmore was convinced it would work. He guaranteed that the canal would deliver the equivalent of thirty inches of rain a year.\textsuperscript{328} Dinsmore’s plan must have looked great on paper, for his first major backer was Daly, a man not easily mistaken when it came to spending money to make money. Daly, who was excited that the irrigation ditch would run through his own property, wrote a check for $300,000. By 1896 Dinsmore’s company had 40,000 apple trees in the ground and had started mapping the ditch that was to bring water from Lake Como nearly ninety miles to the most northern eastside benches beyond Daly’s Stock Farm. Eventually, the company would have problems raising the remainder of the 3.5 million dollars projected for the Big Ditch. There was little government help, nor did land sales take off as hoped. In 1905 the company went bankrupt, but Dinsmore did not give up. He went to Chicago in search of financiers.

What happened next is a wonderful example of salesmanship and marketing of a place just when the timing was right. At the turn of the century and through the teens, many

\textsuperscript{327} Stone, \textit{Following Old Trails}, p. 19-20.

\textsuperscript{328} Zeisler, “The History of Irrigation and the Orchard Industry In the Bitterroot Valley,” p. 47.
Americans in industrial centers were seeking country escapes and the lifestyles found in Chatauquan-styled assemblies. Some sought full fledged moves to the open landscapes of the hinterlands. All that Dinsmore originally proposed to do was create well irrigated orchards, but with time and failure, the valley was eventually marketed and sold as a place with that fabled country escape element for which many well off Americans were searching. With new financial backers and a new company re-incorporated in 1906 as the Bitter Root Valley Irrigation Company (BRVICo.), the goals of development in the Bitterroot Valley changed.\(^3^{29}\) This is an important point for two reasons. First, the new company would eventually own all but a minuscule amount of the eastside benchlands—an amount of land that made up roughly one-third of the entire county. Second, forty-five percent of every land subdivision that took place in the Bitterroot Valley prior to 1973 occurred in the seven years between 1907 and 1914. It was during those seven years that Dinsmore's new company was most active. In short, the BRVICo. led the way in the speculative subdivision of the Bitterroot Valley.\(^3^{30}\)

The BRVICo.'s plan of development was from the start different than anything Dinsmore ever imagined. The Bitterroot Valley was to be a place for summer escape. Not only would buyers have fresh air to breathe during their relaxing Montana visits, they could enjoy themselves more by knowing that they were making a profit on the side growing apples. A buyer had two options. One could manage a small orchard of their own, yet another, more likely option, would be to live in a clustered community and own a separate orchard tract managed by a permanent staff. It was a community orchard and an orchard community, so to speak. The first such community was planned in 1907 for a logged off plot of land below Lake Como. The name of the community was University Heights. According to a headline in the \textit{Western News} the Heights was to have members from university faculties (namely the University of Chicago), in addition to famous authors and """Other Noted Men of (the) Effete East."" The whole project took on a decidedly Chicago

\(^3^{29}\) Ibid., p. 35-43.
flavor when the company hired that city’s well known architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, to design the clubhouse and cabins. Wright’s role as architect reinforced the point that University Heights was to be a recreational place. Most Bitterroot Valley farmers did not hire respected big city architects to design their homes. Many people bought the concept and bought property. One noted scholar wrote that he invested to gain wealth while enjoying a beautiful place. “‘The scenery was magnificent,’” he wrote, “‘there were trout in the Bitterroot River; trails through the mountains...I can only describe the whole effect as intoxicating. I was ready to abandon literature for orcharding.’” There were others who felt similarly. Land sales at University Heights went well enough that the BRVICo. hired Wright in 1909 to plan the entire town of Bitter Root near Three Mile Creek northeast of Stevensville. His first attempt at city planning, Bitter Root was based on the same communal orchard idea as University Heights, yet the development was even more utopic. Wright’s vision and genius were evident in the plan. Drawing with a proposed electric rail line from Missoula in mind, Wright’s plan for the town included a two-level road whereby trains ran in a subway type tunnel underneath the Eastside Highway. As one scholar noted: in 1909 “Wright estimated more clearly than his contemporaries the practical impact that automobiles and rail traffic would have on cities.”

Other companies saw the plans and reasonable successes of the BRVICo. and wanted a piece of the Bitterroot boom. In 1908 the Daly family split up 8,000 acres into 20 acre tracts, claiming in one of their advertisements that the “‘Earth here is so kind that just tickle her with a hoe and she laughs with a harvest.’” In 1911 the Northern Pacific Railway advertised some of its Bitterroot lands in a pamphlet titled “Farming and Growing in the Bitter Root Valley—Montana.” The most notable part of the advertisement had nothing to do with agriculture. Over the caption “Golfing is a Favorite Bitter Root

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330 Ibid., p. 68.
332 Zeisler, “The History of Irrigation and the Orchard Industry In the Bitterroot Valley,” p. 76.
Recreation” was the photograph of several men, all holding golf clubs, standing in what appeared to be a field of hay.\(^{335}\) The O.W. Kerr & Co., a large Minneapolis based real estate firm, also got in on the act, buying an area of cut-over Anaconda Co. land and smaller private parcels between Sawtooth and Lost Horse Creeks.\(^{336}\) In 1909 the company published a promotional booklet titled “Charlos Heights Orchards: A Safe Investment, A Perfect Home, An Ideal Summer Residence.” Their proposition was simple: for sale were 10 acre tracts containing approximately 800 trees each. The price was $4,000. The payment scheme was $1,600 down, with a balance of $600 a year at six percent interest. Kerr & Co. also sold 5 acre tracts with 400 trees at $2,050. This land could be bought with $850 cash down and a $300 yearly balance at six percent. Charlos Heights was not as fancy as the BRVICo. Wright planned communities, but it still aimed for the same type person. “All around you,” the booklet announced, “are people who are the ‘salt of the earth,’--the kind that a man is proud to be introduced to,--the presidents of colleges, college graduates, others without this advantage, but interesting people who have helped to make history.” The promotional held nothing back when it came to exaggeration, claiming variously that apple sales in the valley would soon reach 120 million dollars annually (twice the yearly output of minerals from the entire state), that there were 40 more years worth of timber in the Bitterroot, and that there were not, and had never been, any worms or “grain pests” in the valley. Perhaps their finest boast was that their proposition was especially attractive because “we do not depend upon dams, flumes, syphons or other engineering construction. We take the water out of the natural creeks by means of a simple ditch.” Banking on the argument that a simple ditch was not any sort of engineered construction, the boast concluded by saying that with “an inexhaustible supply of water and the simplest and safest irrigating system, there is no danger of a crop failure from shortage of water.”\(^{337}\)

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\(^{335}\) “Farming and Growing in the Bitter Root Valley--Montana.” Northern Pacific Railway, 1911: 3.


The truth of the matter was that the greatest architects in the world could not prevent
the eventual apple crop failure in the Bitterroot Valley. Regardless of the impressively
planned orchard communities and irrigation engineering, there was a paucity of water. As
one study years later would put it (with all seriousness), "With the exception of rainfall" the
valley's "climate is very favorable for the growing of staple crops and for livestock
grazing." The exception to rainfall was especially noteworthy when attempting to imbue
hundreds of thousands of trees stretching from one end of the valley to the other. Little
precipitation meant that irrigation systems had to work very well. The major problem with
orcharding in the valley was that the irrigation ditches were terribly inefficient. A study in
1900 found that the Republican Canal in Ravalli County lost up to 34.33 cubic feet per
second in certain sections. While some areas of the valley suffered from lack of water,
other areas were nearly ruined by the flooding that occurred due to seepage from leaky
flumes and ditches. "These water courses," it was written, "located one above another, on
the sloping bench of the Bitter Root river, complicate the problem of seepage water.
Already some of the farms, and especially the orchard tracts, are depreciating in value,
owing to an excess of seepage water from the higher benches." Finally, another reason
for large scale apple crop failure was that trees were not always well cared for. A 1907
Agricultural Experiment Station study of orchards in the valley made it clear that many
orchards were being ruined due to infertile and unwatered ground around the trees. The
report stated concisely that there was a "comparatively large acreage in orchards which is
neglected." The best orchards, it was noted, were fertilized with animal manures or
cover crops of clover and peas, then watered 15 to 20 times a year. Certainly, part of the

338 Montana Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 220, "An Economic Analysis of Production
339 Montana Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 29, "The Quantity of Water Used in Irrigation and
the Seepage Loss from Canals," Bozeman, MT, November, 1900: 35.
340 Ibid., p. 22.
341 "The report stated on page 88 that 70 percent of the orchards in the valley received "no fertilizers
whatsoever."
342 Montana Agricultural College Experiment Station, Bulletin 66, p.71.
343 Ibid., p. 91.
neglect problem had to do with the absence of many orchard owners from the valley. Those entrusted to care for their trees may as well have been absent. The same bulletin showed photographs of poorly arranged orchards, with trees planted closely together and the ground totally uncultivated or fertilized. It is likely that many of these trees were on lands bought by the BRVICo. and sold to Chicagoans and others.

In 1910 there were 371,493 orchard trees in Ravalli County, and although acreage classified as irrigated had increased by more than 26,000 acres since the previous census, many of the trees plated on that acreage were not well maintained. Still, that year the valley produced 280,670 more bushels of apples than it had ten years before. The apple boom was peaking in both land development and apple production. But things were about to change. In 1912, 1913, and 1914 one half of the apple trees in a Victor area test site were killed by what the superintendent of the state's horticultural branch station called a "severe blight epidemic." Some investors found that the promoters' boasts of the valley being pest free were words that were at best fallible. To others, the selling of the Bitterroot Valley had been less a crate of apples and relaxation than it was a barrel of lies. "We came," one apple boom settler wrote, "and were generally taken."

Part of the reason investors were so easily convinced that the Bitterroot Valley was a great place to grow apples was that most of them knew absolutely nothing about agriculture in general, orcharding in particular, or the climactic realities of the West. In fact, many employees of the BRVICo., especially the salesmen, suffered the same lack of knowledge as their clients. That was certainly the case with Francis Powell. In 1910, not long after their graduations from Amherst and Smith, Powell and his young wife Mildred set out across the country from Connecticut for Montana. Francis accepted a job as the sales superintendent for University Heights. The year prior to their arrival was one of the best growing seasons on record (16.58 inches of precipitation at Hamilton as opposed to

the 11.29 mean), and the 1910 census indicated plentiful yields across the valley, including the aforementioned bumper crop of apples.\textsuperscript{347} The optimism of the time was apparent in the letters Mildred wrote back home to her father, who after his son-in-law’s sales pitch, invested in the BRVICo. Mildred told of hard work, long hours, and little to do at night but sleep. “Just imagine,” she wrote in one letter, “if you can (?) your society daughter retiring by daylight.” Her father returned letters that hint not only at his own social status, but to the fact that he was not so sure about University Heights as a sound investment.

“Governor Waller” [Thomas M., governor of Connecticut, 1883-1885],” he mentioned, “asks me very often about the prospects of all our investments in the ranch, but I am unable to tell him much.” By 1913 the prospects were looking weak. That year Mildred told of a friend who had lost his 40 acres due to an inability to pay taxes. The next year, the BRVICo. filed for bankruptcy, and as one local writer put it, the climate then did “its worst to add to the boom’s unhappy end,” as 1916 marked the first of three of the valley’s driest years on record.\textsuperscript{348} By 1920, the people who remained in the valley fought for their rights as landowners in the BRVICo. court settlements and organized the Bitter Root Irrigation District. By that point, Francis Powell’s vocation remained the same, although his customers for land sales changed. Powell, who served without pay as an irrigation district commissioner, worked for his salary through a Hamilton real estate firm. His task was to help apple boom land owners sell their properties. He printed a brochure titled “The Farm Unit Plan For the Disposal of Bitter Root Valley Lands.”\textsuperscript{349} Lands that just a few years before were advertised as a wise investment were by 1920 seen as something needing disposal. Jess Harris was in the same business as Francis Powell in acting as “Agent for

\textsuperscript{346} Some Bitterroot Memories, p. 12
\textsuperscript{348} A chart in Bulletin 220 shows that the winters of 1914-15, 1915-16, and 1916-7 had 14, 20, and 16 days in which below-zero temperatures were reported at Hamilton. The average number of days reported between 1898-99 and 1921-22 was 9.1 days with a temperature below-zero.
owners, on a commission basis," attempting to sell orchard tracts for absentee clients. In a correspondence on the letter head of his Harris Colonization Co., he wrote in 1922 that

A difficulty here has been, that the lands are owned mostly in small tracts (10 and 20 acres of orchard), requiring consolidating to get proper sized units and then lacking in land for general purposes, dairy cows, etc., and unwillingness of the owners to cooperate in any move to assist in getting settlers onto the lands. Another thing, the "wood tick" proposition is made use of effectively against us.\(^{350}\)

In his litany of excuses, Harris failed to mention that many of the apple orchard plots were on dry benches that were bad orcharding lands in the first place. The benchlands were lands that, in the words of the writers of one 1929 study, were “difficult to irrigate,” and so circumstantially poor that “we do not wonder at the abandonment of much of the land and the failure of many of the settlers. We rather marvel at the number who stayed and are adjusting themselves to their environment.”\(^{351}\) Harris’ comment about the wood tick referred to the relatively long history in the valley of a disproportionate number of cases involving spotted fever. As early as 1902, two University of Minnesota researchers came to the valley to study the disease. In 1906, the well known Dr. Howard Ricketts began research in the valley that eventually led to the discovery of a vaccine for spotted fever, as well as the founding of the federally funded Rocky Mountain Laboratory.\(^{352}\) Harris was not the first real estate man in the Bitterroot Valley to complain about the presence of the tick “proposition.” The BRVICO. did not want the tick lab because they were afraid it would scare investors. “In 1912,” according to a local history, “even Governor Norris

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\(^{350}\) Harris Colonization Co. file, Bitterroot Valley Historical Society, vertical files, Hamilton, MT.

\(^{351}\) Montana Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 220, p. 15.

\(^{352}\) The Bitterroot Valley spotted fever story is covered extensively in the Phillips manuscript, as well as in Pierce C. Mullen’s “Bitterroot Enigma: Howard Taylor Ricketts and the Early Struggle Against Spotted Fever.” Montana: The Magazine of Western History (Winter 1982).
advised against giving any publicity to the spotted fever program "because it would affect real estate values."

By the teens and into the twenties it was apparent that the focus on real estate values by apple boomers had immensely affected the land use patterns of the Bitterroot. As Johnson put it, the orchard era "exploitation was detrimental to the normal development of the valley." Inflated land prices and scores of abandoned acreage, both of which were fueled by the lure for quick profits, led the valley into an economic depression that lasted until the second World War. For some of those who remained, life in the Bitterroot was a daily struggle. In his book, *Twentieth-Century Montana: A State of Extremes*, K. Ross Toole gives a telling glimpse of the state of one Bitterroot farmer after the apple boom and during the World War I years. In 1918 Victor Brown sat before the Ravalli County Liberty Loan Council that was formed to question the loyalty of men and women who like himself had not contributed to the patriotic Liberty drives. These drives were serious business, with local newspaper ads saying that "A bond shirker is an enemy to humanity and liberty, a traitor and a disgrace to his country." In an example of what Toole called "appalling evidence of the grossest invasions of privacy on a massive scale," Brown was asked whether he planned to buy War Savings Stamps or contribute to the War Service League. After answering that he would be happy to when he was able, a member of the council said "In other words you don't feel you are able to do it until you pay all your debts." Browns reply:

Not all our debts; we deny ourselves a great many things we would like to have. We are living in a wreck of a house. The improvements on that place are in bad condition.

Council: In other words you are looking toward your own comfort all the time?"
Brown’s trip before the Council speaks volumes about Ravalli County in 1918. In addition to the fact that patriotism and war fervor brought members of a relatively small community to question one another publicly, it is quite clear that small farmers were suffering financial hardships at a time when war surpluses brought many of the nation’s farmers a mediocre level of prosperity.

The transcript Toole gives of this County Council interrogation provides an interesting piece of contradictory evidence to the company literature from the era that praised the merits of agriculture in the same Bitterroot Valley. Promotional literature painted a picture of the valley that sounded nothing like Victor Brown’s home of hardship, poverty, embarrassment, and hand to mouth survival. The apple boom promoters’ ability to attract gullible men and women was most likely the reason men like Victor Brown were suffering. The crash of the apple companies created a local depression at a time when Bitterroot farmers should have been able to capitalize on war prices. As one contemporary critic put it: “The census of 1920 shows agriculture at the height of prosperity for most sections of the country, but the part of the Bitter Root Valley which was affected by the orchard boom was already in a period of readjustment.”

In 1920, Carlton resident Verda Smith wrote a couple of letters to friend Bertha Stiles in Spokane that make one thing clear: the hardships suffered by Victor Brown two years before were shared by others, and the problems were rooted in the land. Smith’s tone implies that the person she is writing is familiar with places and people in the valley, indicating that Stiles may be an example of one of the many who left the valley for a steady job in Spokane, Seattle, and other regional cities between the world wars. Most importantly, though, Smith’s letter belies problems of a greater nature, and they are problems that explain as succinctly as anything, how the Bitterroot Valley got where it is

355 Montana Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 220, p. 15-16.
today. Verda Smith writes about her family’s inability to pay high property taxes on poor agricultural lands that are “mostly a sand bar--not good pasture.” “We have all had problems,” Smith writes, “since the Befreund ranches sold about three years ago for $37 an acre. Now they insist that all the bottoms should be worth that. We own the ‘Miles McCarty’ place down there and they have it down this year for $4,000. There are no improvements and it would be impossible to sell it for $2,500.” Then, as if to reemphasize the theme of hardship, Smith finishes by writing that “Little Lief King got a finger chopped off by Bud and the ax, but the Dr. sewed it on and they are trying to save it.” Two and half months later, Smith put it to Stiles bluntly: “We are sure going to the dogs.” Then, in January of 1921, Smith gives a view of the future of the Bitterroot. “You asked about the Whites,” Smith writes. “They bought the Dumford place, had it plotted and planted in tracts and have all but 40 acres sold to eastern parties. None have come to live on there yet”.357 The Whites would be one of the earliest of many valley families to see subdivision as the answer to their problems, for unlike little Lief King’s finger, no doctor could perform a miracle in fixing the damage done to the farmer’s hand by any taxman’s ax. Selling out would eventually prove a better option than starvation for a number of Bitterroot Valley farmers.

As some farmers sold out, others bought land. Between 1910 and 1925 the total number of farms in the valley decreased, but average farm size increased. This correlated perfectly with changes in land use. By the time the extension service printed a document in 1930 on how best to remove scarecrow-like orchard trees, apples had given way to dairy cows as the valley’s number one agricultural hope. In 1925, the valley harvested 231,984 less bushels of apples than it had during the previous census. Meanwhile, during the same period, sheep numbers declined and pounds of wool produced dropped 41 percent, while

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356 For an explanation of dominant migration fields in the West, see John R. Borchert’s America’s Northern Heartland: An Economic and Historical Geography of the Upper Midwest. Minneapolis: Univ of Minn. Press, 1987. 110.
the total number of cattle grew. Notably, the valley’s dairy cattle herds grew 51 percent and
the number of gallons milked in the valley increased by more than 3.1 million gallons.
Such shifts favored larger farms. In the decade between 1925 and 1935, the number of
cattle in the valley increased again by another 10,664 head as the average farm size grew to
more than 200 acres. More importantly than the increase in average size was the fact that 81
percent of the valley’s farms in 1935 were smaller than the average, and a full third of the
valley’s total acreage during the heart of the depression was in just 34 farms of 1,000 acres
or more.358

In the forty years between 1890 and 1930 the future of the Bitterroot Valley was
defined. Land that had been free range public domain was, by the turn-of-the-century,
denuded of nearly all its timber, then sliced with a long leaky tube of engineered water in
the name of subdivision and real estate land sales. Although the apple boom died and gave
way to an increasingly larger number of farms concentrating on dairy cows and their
products, the orchard legacy remained. Between 1919 and 1926 almost one-fifth of the
valley’s farm lands were sold through mortgage foreclosures or tax title sales. The
increasingly larger farms were growing by swallowing these lands.

357 Excerpts of the correspondence between Smith and Stiles can be found in the local history More
Bitterroot Memories, 1930-1976: A Bicentennial Publication of the Florence Community, 1976: pp. 64-
66.
Six:
The Whatever Conversion

The farms that grew by adding foreclosed and defaulted apple orchard lands are today the subdivided, cul-de-saced neighborhoods of the Bitterroot Valley. The 5 and 10 acre orchard plots were eventually added to dairy and beef cattle farms. Throughout the 1940’s and into the 1950’s these farms prospered. By 1945, livestock sales in the Bitterroot were over $2 million, or 44 percent of all farm products sold in the valley. By 1954, the 50,000 cattle in the valley helped generate sales of livestock and livestock products worth $4.5 million, or 69 percent of all farm sales. The nation was eating more beef than ever before, and Bitterrooters enjoyed two of the most prosperous decades in the valley’s history. When the bottom fell out of the beef market in the early sixties, all the extra land that was gobbled up after the apple boom crash became expensive to maintain without cattle running on it. Many ranchers began to do what the market demanded. They sold their lands to real estate companies, who then subdivided the land and sold it again. And again, and again. “The apple orchard boom,” County Planner Tim Schwecke said in a 1997 interview, “has shaped land use patterns significantly. We have thousands and thousands of these ten acre tracts all over the place and they can be bought and sold. Over time, these tracts get bought up—converted to hay, whatever.”

The “whatever” was, of course, the eventual subdivision and sprawl that is evident today across the valley floor, side canyons, and bench lands of Ravalli County. The growth in the Bitterroot provides a scenario that was repeated all over the West, occurring in some places with more rapidity and greater magnitude than others. Hamilton, Stevensville, or Victor, for example, still seem quite untouched compared with Broomfield, Westminster, Littleton, or the other Denver suburbs that have sprouted like plywood.

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mushrooms across the old ranches where the Plains dead end at the Rockies, but the Bitterroot Valley has been touched.

The first year that the valley's farms quit increasing in total acreage was 1964. That year, the percentage of land classified as farmland was three-tenths less than it had been in the previous census. Somewhere in the valley, three-tenths of what had been farmland was now something else. This one percent drop would seem like nothing against what happened over the next thirty years. Between 1964 and 1992 the total acreage of farmland in the valley would drop 53 percent as the lands that once were planted with apples, then grazed with cattle, became sites for new homes. During the same period, population in the valley doubled, so that changes in land use meant large scale social and cultural changes. By 1980, the number of jobs in retail trade in the valley surpassed every other category of employment, including the nearly equal sections of agriculture and transportation. For the first time in the valley's history, there were more people selling commodities for a living than there were people growing food. By 1990, the number of people working in retail would outnumber agriculture by six hundred jobs. Furthermore, employment in finance, insurance, and real estate increased more than four hundred percent in the two decades leading up to 1990. By that year, there were more than twice as many men and women handling money, or selling insurance and property in Ravalli County than there were people working in the woods or in mills. It can be assumed that most of these jobs were in the real estate business. At any rate, the extractive industry seemed to be running a white flag up the economic flagpole. During the same period, population grew seventy-four percent, and the average dollar value of land increased by more than a thousand dollars an acre. Clearly, from an economic point of view, the Bitterroot Valley in 1990 was a different place than it had been as early as the 1960's. 

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Subdivision development on what had been the open spaces (albeit fenced) of agricultural lands or abandoned orchard scrub on the benches also affected wildlife. Since twenty acre plots were not subject to review, they were more feasible to the developer than smaller plots; therefore, housing was often more spread out than it was clustered. This left fewer buffer zones between people, their fences, their dogs, and the elk and deer that had used much of the lower elevated lands for winter range. This "systematic division," biologist Ted Berkhouse writes, "of large parcels of land into mini-ranchettes might be more problematic to wildlife than other uses." He cites a study done in Lolo, where it was found that white-tail deer, mule deer, and elk were displaced and pushed into higher elevations by the development of the Rodeo Ranchettes subdivision.\textsuperscript{362} Meanwhile, money generated by the sale of hunting licenses, funds that were originally intended to reimburse farmers for crops eaten by wildlife, was being used to field complaints about wildlife--complaints made by people living in Montana's new subdivisions. One official from the department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, explained that he simply did not have the personnel to respond to all the complaints of deer that were eating people's tulips or emptying their dog's food bowl out on the back porch.\textsuperscript{363}

The purpose of this paper has been to tell a small part of the story of how the Bitterroot Valley today has been shaped by changes in land use patterns over time. The experience of writing this story has made me very aware that histories of places are very much like nature: everything is connected to everything else. When the Salish began burning the valley's grasses for their horse herds, they had no idea that white men would one day see those open spaces as ideal grazing lands for Oregon Trail cattle. Throughout


\textsuperscript{363} Sherry Devlin, "Losing Ground: Wildlife suffers dramatically as humans move 'back to nature.'" \textit{Missoulian}, June 14, 1992: E1.
the next sixty years the same type connections were evident, as one type of land use beget another: cattle and grains, logging and apples, irrigation and exploitation, defaulted lands and the larger ranches, through today’s subdivision and explosion of growth.

As these changes in land use occurred, there were also changes in the valley’s social makeup and culture. The Bitterroot Valley is a remarkable stage across which many different people have marched, from the Salish, to Lewis and Clark, to the mixed blood French and Iroquois fur trappers, the Italian and Belgian Jesuit priests, through John Owen and the thousands and thousands of Europeans and Americans who followed his lead as farmers and ranchers. Today, the social clime has changed again in a long history of an evolving landscape and an evolving people. Many people born and raised in the Bitterroot, the current manifestation of a valley native, feel as embittered as John Owen and Edward Carron in 1866, or as the Salish in 1891 when they were driven from the valley.

To reiterate, the story of land use in the Bitterroot Valley shows that patterns of land use over time changed the valley’s landscape the way humans lived there. Throughout the valley’s history one type of land use paved the way for the next round of changes. The result today is a landscape and culture that is a new version of a long and similar story about change, adaptation and more change.

What the future holds for the Bitterroot Valley is unknown, but one thing is fairly clear. The valley will likely continue growing to a point whereby the past of the place is less obvious than it once was. As fields and hillsides are covered with homes and streets, the land itself takes on new characters and new meanings. Were fields of cows or apple trees better than today’s golf courses and second homes? That is a question that has been asked and will inevitably be asked again. It has not been my intention to answer this question. Rather, I am hopeful that my thesis about the various modes of land use leading to changes will help others realize the interconnected consequences that occur between people in places over time.
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