

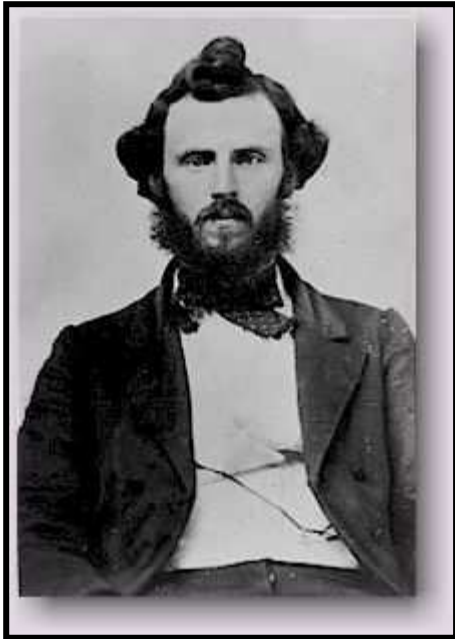
## Guardians Recognize Historic Family Ranches

By Echo Renner

**Hyattville, Wyoming** –The Guardians of the Range recognized Historic Family Ranches during the National Day of the American Cowboy and 100<sup>th</sup> Annual Hyattville Old Timer’s Day in Hyattville on Saturday, July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

They acknowledged seven ranches owned and operated by the same family for at least 100 years within the area the Guardians serve – the Big Horn Basin, Big Horn Mountains, and surrounding communities.

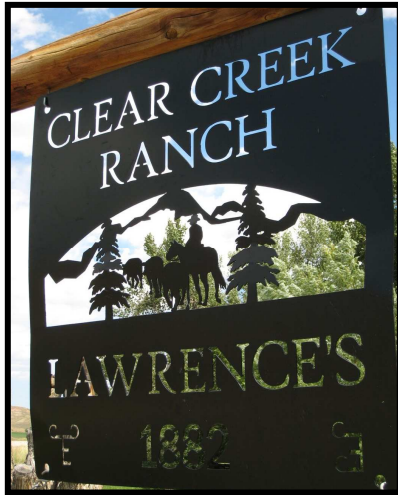
Recipients included the Mullins Family Ranch at Manderson, Clear Creek Ranch at Buffalo, Paint Rock Angus Ranch at Hyattville, Larsen Ranch at Meeteetse, 91 Ranch at Cody, Bennion Ranch at Meeteetse, and Diamond Tail Ranch at Shell.



### **Paint Rock Angus Ranch, Inc. of Hyattville**

Before homesteading near Hyattville in 1886, Asa Shinn Mercer lead a fascinating life as a surveyor, and served as president of a university and as Commissioner of Immigration for the Washington Territory. In the 1860’s, with public support and private funding, he enlisted “New England school marms” to venture west for marriage in an area with a nine-to-one ratio of men to women. The ladies became known as “Mercer Girls,” and were the subject of the ABC TV show *Here Come the Brides* aired in 1968 –’70. Mercer married one of the young ladies himself, and raised a family. He worked as the editor of newspapers in Oregon, Texas, and Wyoming, where, he saw the Wyoming Stock Growers Association’s treatment of cattle rustlers as underhanded, and wrote scathing accounts of events unfolding on the range. When he revealed his view of events in the book, *The Banditti of the Plains*, the cattlemen boycotted his paper. His newspaper offices were burned, and copies of the

book disappeared. Mercer escaped to the Big Horn Basin to homestead, raise cattle and hay. Original ranch building include the house, blacksmith shop, bunkhouse, and draft horse barn. Today the ranch is owned and managed by Asa Mercer’s grandson, Tom, and wife, Mary, and great grandson, Martin, and wife, Kelli, who raise registered and commercial Black and Red Angus cattle. (photo of Asa Shinn Mercer)



### **Clear Creek Ranch of Buffalo**

Ed Lawrence was foreman of the Murphy Cattle Company, and after the Johnson County War, he purchased the ranch. While riding to Buffalo, Ed and his son met the attorney riding out to tell them the Murphy brothers had agreed to their offer, but would only accept cash. Ed Lawrence reached into his pocket and pulled out a wad of bills, but fearing a hold up, the attorney refused to accept the cash in the open. The trio traveled into town, where, at the Van Dyke Clothing Store, Ed paid for the ranch, and the attorney issued him a receipt for payment in full. Today the cattle ranch is owned and managed by Chuck and Dottie Lawrence, who celebrated 64 years of marriage on July 25, and their family. The ranch includes the original ranch house built in 1891, and a homestead cabin. (courtesy photo)



### **Bennion Ranch of Meetetse**

John Edward Bennion was seeking more land than was available in Utah in 1898, and came to the Big Horn Basin to investigate, after hearing reports of good soil and abundant grass. He homesteaded on the Wood River and built a two-room cabin before returning to Utah for the winter. The following spring, the Bennion family journeyed to Wyoming with a wagon train of five wagons, two buggies, six milk cows, five horses, and 19 people. Part of the family later moved to Canada, having a skirmish with the Indians on the way, and later to Oregon, before returning to Wyoming. Today, the Bennion Ranch is owned and operated by John Edward Bennion's great grandson, Clifton Bennion, his wife, Wanda, and their family. (courtesy photo of Sonny Bennion, 1918)

### **The Mullins Family Ranch of Manderson**

In 1899, Richard Mullins, a Nebraska craftsman and engineer designed and built the Jordan Flour Mill in Jordan, Wyoming, a small community about four miles east of present-day Manderson. Mullins built the mill using native materials and no nails. Upon completion of the project in 1900, his employers could not pay him the promised amount, but instead offered him land. Richard and his young family settled in the area, where they have continued to farm and ranch for 109 years. Richard and Elizabeth's grandson, Cecil Mullins, now owns and operates the ranch, raising cattle, sheep, swine, and hay, and is working to keep it operational for future generations of the Mullins family.

### **91 Ranch of Cody**

In 1903, Louis Graham Phelps purchased the 91 Ranch, originally started in 1891 by “Dad” Pearce. Phelps acquired the Z-T, Pitchfork, Pickett, Ashworth, and other ranches, operating his cattle empire under the name Pitchfork Ranch. After Phelps’ death, and the death of his son, Eugene, the 91 passed to Eugene’s widow, Helen Phelps. The ranch is now owned by Helen’s daughter, Elizabeth “Betty” (Phelps) Thomas Mills and her daughter, Helen Hassan, and family. The ranch continues as a working cattle ranch despite heavy bear and wolf predation, and an extensive elk herd that resides on the ranch much of the year. The Thomas-Hassan families raise Black Angus cattle and alfalfa hay.



### **Diamond Tail Ranch of Shell**

After an unsuccessful attempt at staking a claim in the Oklahoma Land Rush, sea captain’s son, Arthur Flitner, purchased 160 acres near Shell, and the diamond tail brand, in 1906. The family lived in a log house built during the 1890’s, while raising cattle and crops, and owning the grain elevator and several other businesses in Greybull. Their son, Howard, later expanded the ranch and served in the Wyoming legislature. Howard’s son, Stan, and wife, Mary, and their son, Tim, and wife, Jamie, now own and operate the cattle and horse ranch, and an outfitting business.

(courtesy photo of John, Pat, Howard, Maureen, Stan, and David Flitner)



### **Larsen Ranch of Meeteetse**

At the age of 13, Henry Larsen left his Wisconsin home and headed west. He worked his way through Nebraska and South Dakota before crossing the Big Horn Mountains in 1896. He worked on a couple of Wyoming ranches, and did discovery work on mineral claims in the gold mining town of Kirwin. He homesteaded, sold the homestead, and in 1909, Henry married and purchased land on Wood River, which became the foundation of the Larsen Ranch. He continued to purchase old homesteads, and even filed on an additional homestead on Middle Creek in 1924. The ranch passed to Henry and Helen

Larsen’s sons, Curtis and Ralph, and daughter, Ethel. Today, Ralph’s descendants and Curtis still own and manage the family ranch, raising Black Angus cattle, hay, and grass. (H. Curtis Larsen, Ethel Larsen Moody, Ralph Larsen - photo courtesy Echo Renner)

Guardians member, and retired Thermopolis area rancher, Frank M. Rhodes initiated the Guardians' Historic Family Ranch Award program.

“Wyoming’s family ranches, and federally managed grazing lands, are vanishing at a disturbing rate,” says Echo Renner, Co-Chair of the Guardians of the Range National Day of the American Cowboy committee, and coordinator of the Guardians’ Historic Family Ranch Award program. “The Guardians work tirelessly to keep these ranches operating within the family over time, so it makes sense that we recognize time-tested family ranches who have reached this historic milestone.” She adds, “Ranching is part of our rich history, and a part of our future.”

“Ranchers produce livestock and crops for human and animal consumption, contributing to the economy of the Cowboy State and this great nation, as well as feed people all over the world. Ranching and livestock production is a way of life, but more importantly, we provide a safe and healthy food supply for billions of people world-wide,” Renner comments.

“Most people eat beef and lamb, but they don’t realize beef and sheep by-products are in items we use everyday, like soaps and deodorants, toothpaste and cosmetics, pet food, dry wall and paint, photo film, printing ink and high gloss for magazines. Beef by-products are even used in asphalt and automobile tires, industrial cleaners and fertilizers, yogurt and Jello, as well as clothing, insulin, and a wide range of pharmaceuticals. Sheep by-products – aside from meat and wool - include tennis balls and tennis racquet strings, baseballs, yarn, upholstery, footwear, carpet, felt, woolen products – even chewing gum.”

She adds, “Ranchers also maintain open spaces, and provide food, water, and shelter for wild-life – things most folks take for granted. As ranches are sold, weeds and subdivisions cover the landscape, diminishing precious wildlife habitat.”

The Guardians of the Range are a non-profit organization dedicated to keeping ranchers on their grazing permits managed by the Cody and Worland Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Resource Management Areas, and the Shoshone and Bighorn National Forests.

For more information, contact Echo Renner at 307-868-9232 or [echo00@tctwest.net](mailto:echo00@tctwest.net), or log onto [www.guardiansoftherange.org](http://www.guardiansoftherange.org).