A Contested Landscape Story Map: Campbell Farming Corporation and the Crow Indian Reservation in Big Horn County, Montana

**Introduction**

This project explores a complex landscape of Big Horn County, Montana, created by events surrounding the formation of the Crow Indian Reservation, Campbell Farming Corporation (CFC), and other key actors vying for control of land in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The authors argue that this is a contested landscape, which "evolves when differing environmental ethics and cultural identities collide in places with deep meaning" (Bialek 2001, pp). Government documents from this time period and CFC records reveal a place where the landscape actively incorporated the struggles over it (Mitchell 2009). Dr. Holcomb and Ms. Long created an Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) story map that visually illustrates some of this struggle through photographs, CFC records, and other information. Dr. Holcomb also conducted an oral history interview with a man, Alex Ullifman, who knew Thomas D. Campbell, founder of the farming operation, and whose family now owns former Campbell lands.

**Materials and Methods**

This project has several dimensions, including an oral history interview with a man from Hardin, MT, who knew Thomas D. Campbell and whose father worked for Campbell Farming Corporation and became friends with Mr. Campbell. Dr. Holcomb used a Marantz professional recorder to record the interview with Mr. Ullifman in the summer of 2015. Alex Long transcribed the audio file. Dr. Holcomb also copied select records of Campbell Farming Corporation at the Montana State Historical Society Research Center. We analyzed these documents for evidence of a contested landscape and added some to a digital story map hosted on the ESRI website. Dr. Holcomb also obtained Campbell Farming Corporation photographs from the Big Horn County Historical Museum in Hardin, MT and added them to the story map.

**Camp 4 Headquarters**

This is a more recent photograph of the headquarters at Camp 4. Dr. Holcomb harvested wheat here several times when he worked for a custom harvesting crew from Sterling, Kansas.

CFC employed as many as 250 people.

**Meatline in the Camp 4 cookhouse.**

Janet Miller, Jane Slattery and cook, Emma Petos, stand in the Camp 4 kitchen where Petos prepared meals for the men working at Camp 4.

**References**

Information and materials for this project are from Campbell Farming Corporation records archived at the Montana State Historical Society in Helena, MT, the Big Horn County Historical Museum in Hardin, Montana, an oral history interview with Mr. Alex Ullifman of Hardin, MT, and a variety of government documents. The authors and websites which references will be provided if requested. Dr. Holcomb's personal knowledge and associations with the Big Horn County, MT comes from many summers of work with Schmidt-Isenberg, a custom harvesting operation from Sterling, KS.

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**Thomas Campbell and mechanized agriculture**

Mechanization allowed CFC to farm great swaths of what were once smaller parcels of Indian land but manpower was still needed to complete many tasks. To the right workers thrash wheat to separate the grain from the straw. Huge supplies of labor were needed for shocking and threshing in the era before combine harvesters were developed and CFC hired independent contractors to supply crews. Below steam tractors pull plows to break sod on the Crow Reservation in 1918.

http://www.montanahistory.org/harvest_activities/maps.html

**Opening Indian lands for agricultural production during World War I**

"These enormous areas of dry lands (about 50,000 acres) have not yet been touched, nor have the other enormous areas farther west, almost directly out of Billings, yet within the Crow Reservation. There are places on these western areas where the plows can be driven six miles without a turn, and many where they can go three and four miles without a turn. The handling of these areas will be part of the 1919 task in readiness for the sowing of winter wheat in September, 1919." — Report on an investigation of land available for farming, obtained from the Campbell Farming Corporation records archived at the Montana State Historical Society in Helena, MT.

Checkerboarding

"Indian lands that were allocated as a result of the General Allotment Act of 1887... were sold or transferred to non-Indian parties but retained within reservation boundaries. Checkerboarding seriously impairs the ability of Indian nations or individuals to use land to their own advantage..." Indian Land Tenure Foundation https://www.iltf.org/land-tenure/checkerboarding

"Department of the Interior, United States Indian Service...1920... Lease No. 1234 from Takes Quick... Allotment No 1005... cancelled... already been leased to the Sheridan Sugar company by lease 509-28 and approved under date of February 2, 1918... Sheridan Sugar Company, Irrigation Office, E.G.L. Dist. Farmer."

**Legacy of CFC**

Campbell Farming Corporation (CFC) records and other documents do indeed demonstrate a contested landscape in Big Horn County and illustrate the lasting legacy of Mr. Campbell in the area. One document shows the competition between CFC and a sugar beet company to lease farmland owned by Crow Indians. Many other documents concerning land leases confirm this, as well as the power farming and sugar beet operations had to control the leasing arrangements. The legacy of CFC is also illustrated in documents about the farm's role in hiring a rainmaking company in the 1950s and bringing Mexican immigrant labor and custom harvesting operations to the area for harvest work. Other documents demonstrate Mr. Campbell's contribution to introducing large-scale mechanized agriculture to Montana and the Soviet Union, as he made trips to the Soviet Union to advise them on agriculture. Dignitaries from the Soviet Union also visited CFC in later decades, thus revealing the importance of the farm as a model of mechanized American agriculture. The oral history interview added information to this legacy as Mr. Ullifman shared memories of his father tending the farm with Soviet dignitaries.

**Conclusions**

Thomas D. Campbell was an entrepreneur and leader in agriculture, government, and the military. He initiated plans to increase wheat production in the U.S. during World War I by opening Indian reservation lands to agriculture with financing from J.P. Morgan. Campbell Farming Corporation ceased its operations and sold its properties in 1987 but left a legacy on the Big Horn County and Crow Indian Reservation lands and on American agriculture. The Big Horn County Historical Museum in Hardin has 4 Camp buildings and machinery on display, while the area's land use and ownership patterns still have the imprint of Campbell's introduction of large-scale agriculture almost one hundred years after its formation. Dr. Holcomb plans to continue this project by finishing the story map for use by the Big Horn County Historical Museum and as part of a book about the custom harvesting in the Great Plains.