



P.O. Box 904, Forsyth, MT 59327 406-346-1876 CusterCountry.com Email: Custer@Rangeweb.net

Jim Schaefer, Executive Director

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Happy 100th Birthdays.

The year 1908 was an important year for Custer Country. It was then that the towns of Roundup, Laurel and Baker were formed. The folks who pioneered the area were drawn here by publicity campaigns from Milwaukee Road and Great Northern Railroads. Promises of "70 bushel barley, abundant rainfall and free land" brought thousands of immigrants from Europe to a place where they could own more land than they could ever have imagined in their home countries.

Unfortunately, many of the promises were greatly exaggerated. To make matters worse, the harsh winters and drought conditions at the time caused many hopeful immigrants to leave discouraged and broken. While some pioneers were able to sell their claims for pennies per acre, many left their homesteads to be taken over by those settlers who had enough money to buy them from the banks.

The hardy folks who stayed, however, learned to live with the sometimes harsh conditions the area threw at them. They went on to create the prosperous farms and cattle ranches that have been passed down from father to son to this day.

The cattle and grain, including barley, oats and wheat, are some of the finest available and help contribute to Montana's world-wide reputation for top-quality agriculture. The spring wheat from the area is in demand throughout the United States, Japan, the Middle East and other countries because of its high gluten and protein levels. Cakes, breads, pizza and pie crusts are made even better due to the quality of the grains produced here.

Baker is best known for its production of oil and natural gas. Oil was first discovered in the area in 1948 and still produces millions of barrels of heavy crude and billions of cubic feet of natural gas each year. Some of the most modern and

innovative deep-drilling methods have been pioneered or perfected in the area, with some wells going as deep as 10,000 feet. Farmers and ranchers in the Baker area also produce their fair share of agricultural products. Medicine Rocks State Park is just 35 miles south of Baker and features wind- and rain-carved sandstone formations that hold special significance for Indian tribes in the region.

Roundup, the county seat of Musselshell County, is situated along the Musselshell River in the shadow of the Bull Mountains. The bustling town of 2000 residents was named because the valley in which it lies is an ideal place to round up cattle. In 1989, Roundup was the starting point for what was called the "Great Montana Centennial Cattle Drive," to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Montana's statehood. The event included 3000 cattle, 3500 horses, 3000 riders and 300 wagons as the participants traversed the 50 miles of rugged country to Billings over six grueling days. The sight of the wagons, cattle and horses as they made their way to Billings is an image that will live forever in the memories of the tens of thousands of spectators who watched the spectacle along the route. The town's residents are engaged in farming, ranching and energy development. The area is rich in high-quality coal deposits and natural gas fields.

Laurel is located just 15 miles west of Billings, Montana's largest city, and provides many of the same amenities offered by its neighbor to the east. The city is known as "The Crossroads to Yellowstone," since it is situated at the junction of I-90 and Hwy 212. Yellowstone National Park lies just 80 miles south of this city, which is also home to one of the state's largest fireworks displays on the Fourth of July and boasts a not-to-be-missed Christmas lights display each holiday season. The town is on the Nez Perce Trail. The tribe fought and won a battle against the U.S. military at the Canyon Cree Battle Site, 7 miles north of Laurel, where an interpretive shelter tells the story of the battle.

The three cities are each looking forward to another 100 years of progress as they celebrate the past and look to the future.