

William and Lucina Bowe Ranch
County Road 44,
0.1 mile Northeast of Big Hole River Bridge
Melrose Vicinity
Silver Bow County
Montana

HABS No. MT-104

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MONT
47-MEL.V,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Rocky Mountain System Support Office
National Park Service
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225-0287

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WILLIAM AND LUCINA BOWE RANCH

HABS No. MT-104

I. INTRODUCTION

Location: The William and Lucina Bowe Ranch is on the east side of the lower Big Hole River Valley in southwest Montana. It lies in Silver Bow County about 0.1 mile south of the community of Melrose and 30 miles north of Dillon. County Road 40 passes through the property and crosses the river approximately 0.1 mile to the southwest.

Quad: Melrose

UTM: Zone: 12; Easting 368630; Northing 5053830

Date of Construction: ca. 1875-1991

Present Owners: Dale and Rosanna Carpenter
P.O. Box 26
Melrose, MT 59740

Present Use: Cattle Ranch

Significance: The William and Lucina Bowe Ranch is significant for its important association with the historic development of the lower Big Hole Valley. It was one of the first ranches established during the region's period of initial settlement in 1870s, and has continued to function as a cattle ranch to the present day. In addition, it is associated with the early transportation history of southwest Montana, having been a stage station and hotel along wagon roads between various mining camps.

The William and Lucina Bowe Ranch also serves as a well-preserved example of a ranch complex from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most of the 22 buildings and structures at the ranch were constructed between 1875 and the 1930s, and are highly reflective of the design, materials and construction technologies common to the period. Nearly half of them are of log construction, representing one of the more outstanding collections of historic log buildings found in the region. The site derives further significance for its association with William and Lucina Bowe, pioneers of the lower Big Hole Valley and two of the founders of the nearby community of Melrose.

II. HISTORY

A. INTRODUCTION

The William and Lucina Bowe Ranch is in the Rocky Mountain region of southwest Montana (figure 1). It lies east of the Continental Divide in the lower valley of the Big Hole River. This section of the valley averages about 1 to 1½ miles in width, and is bound by the Pioneer Mountains on the west and the Highland Mountains on the east. Lands in the area are largely devoted to agricultural purposes, although the east side of the lower valley also accommodates corridors for the Union Pacific Railroad, old State Highway 91, and Interstate Highway 15. The lower valley's largest community is the unincorporated town of Melrose, situated along the railroad line and just below the Pioneer Mountain's historic mining district of Bryant. The city of Butte lies about 35 miles north-northeast of Melrose, and Dillon is about 30 miles to the south. In the lower valley, the Big Hole River generally flows to the south. About 17 miles downstream of Melrose, it curves to the east and eventually empties into the Beaverhead River, a tributary of the Jefferson River--one of the three headwater streams of the Missouri River.

B. SETTLEMENT OF THE LOWER BIG HOLE VALLEY

Discoveries of rich placer gold in southwest Montana during the early 1860s stimulated the first significant influx of Euro Americans to the lower Big Hole Valley. Due to the relatively level nature of its topography, the lower valley quickly became one of the preferred wagon routes for freighters and miners traveling between Fort Benton--the head of navigation on the Missouri River--and the gold fields at Virginia City and Bannack. The region's role as an important travel route was further enhanced in 1869 when the Union Pacific Railroad completed America's first continental railroad, establishing a new railhead less than 400 miles away at Corinne, Utah.¹ Almost immediately, a thriving stage and freighting industry developed between Corinne and the mining camps of southwest Montana. Included in this network was a road running between Idaho and Helena, via the lower Big Hole.²

The level of activity in the lower Big Hole Valley increased in the early 1870s, as Montana's mining boom extended to the front range of the Pioneer Mountains. Finds of placer gold in the gravels of Trapper Creek followed by strikes of rich silver-lead ores precipitated a rush of miners into the region. Mining camps were quickly established and the Byrant mining district took form. In 1875, the district saw the construction of its first ore reduction facility, a small smelter erected near the community of Glendale on Trapper Creek. Soon after that, the Hecla Mining Company took over the major silver mines in the district, and began work on substantial new ore reduction facilities at Glendale. By the early 1880s, the population of the town totaled over 1,500 individuals, mostly Hecla Mining Company employees and their families.³

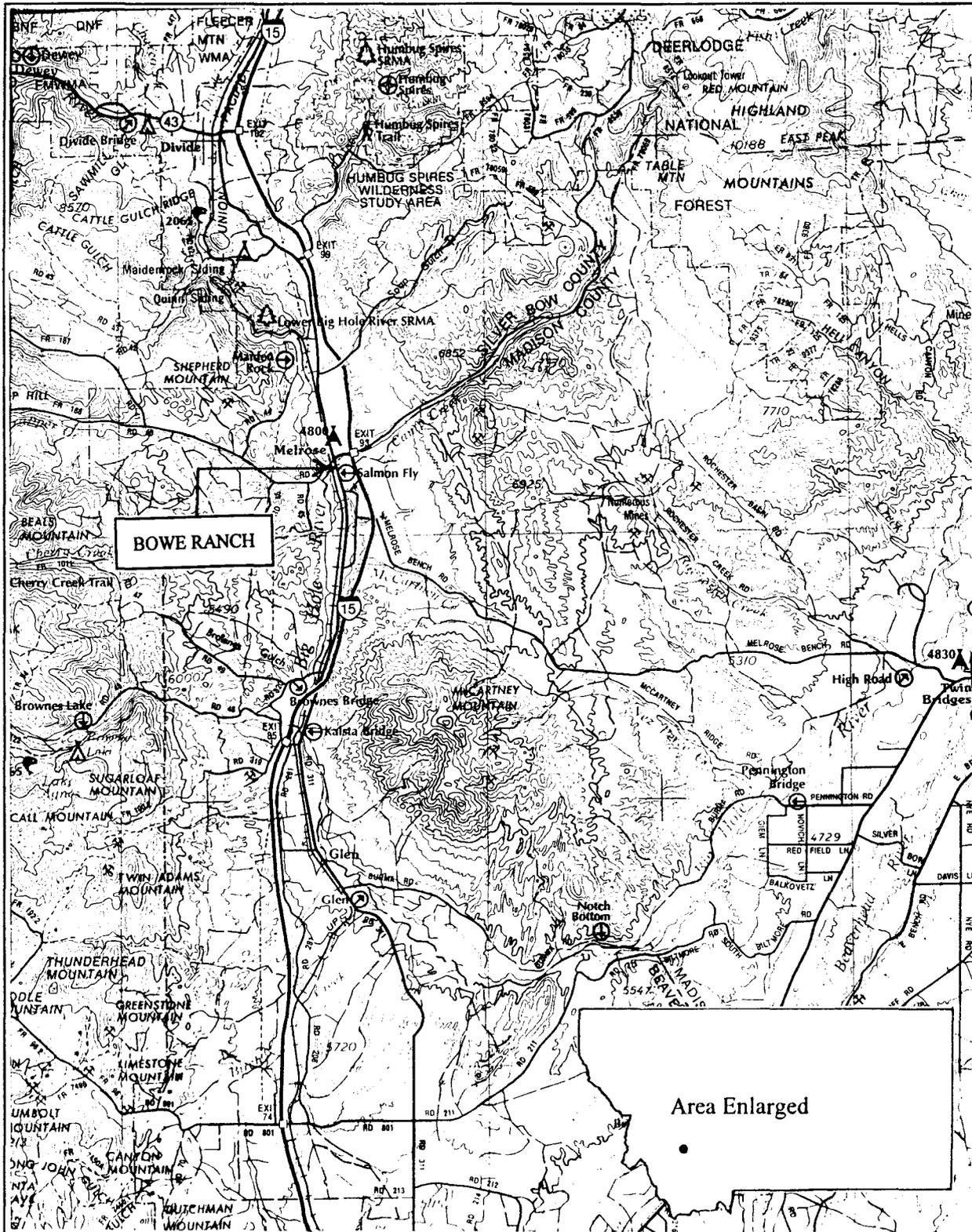


Figure 1. Location map for the Bowe Ranch, scale 1:250,000.

The demand for fresh meat in the nearby mining camps soon attracted cattlemen and their livestock to the lower Big Hole Valley's grasslands.⁴ While most early ranchers likely only used the area for winter range, by the early 1870s a few had settled there and established permanent ranches. Valley residents at that time would have only held squatter's rights to their land. This situation changed in the mid- to late 1870s, when much of the area was surveyed by the federal government and opened to formal homestead entry.⁵ Typically of ranching areas throughout the West, most valley residents quickly augmented their homestead claims by arranging for family members or friends to homestead contiguous parcels of land. Still others took advantage of the Desert Land Act of 1877, which allowed individuals to claim up to 640 acres for a nominal fee if they could prove evidence of irrigation for cultivation within a period of three years.⁶ Such activities enabled ranchers to gain title to the large blocks of land necessary to maintain economically-viable operations.

As the mineral and agricultural development of the lower Big Hole Valley progressed during the 1870s and 1880s, other events solidified its role as a major transportation corridor for southwest Montana. The continued growth of its mining industry made Montana Territory an attractive destination for the rapidly-expanding railway companies of the era, several of which were busily planning routes into the region. The earliest of these was the Utah & Northern, a narrow-gauge subsidiary of the powerful Union Pacific. Utah & Northern's tracks entered southwest Montana via Monida Pass in 1880, roughly paralleling the route of the Corrine-Virginia City road used by wagon-freighting companies. In the following year, the railroad line was extended through the lower Big Hole Valley and into Butte. The arrival of railroad service dramatically increased the accessibility of the lower valley and stimulated its continued economic development, providing a readily-available and economic means by which minerals, livestock, and other goods could be shipped to distant markets.⁷

The Utah & Northern also fostered the first community development in the lower valley, as it established a station near the mouth of Trapper Creek to service the Bryant mining district. In anticipation of this development, land owners in the area platted the townsite of Melrose in June 1881.⁸ Within a short time, the fledgling town boasted a population of 300 to 400, and its services included a post office, blacksmith shop, and several markets and hotels.⁹

As the early 1900s brought the end of the boom at the Bryant mining district, cattle raising clearly became the mainstay of the local economy. By then, ranchers in the lower valley had settled into an operational routine that remains intact to the present day. Most worked to develop irrigated hay fields on their valley holdings during the late spring and summer, as their cattle ranged on public lands in the nearby Pioneer or Highland Mountains. Each fall they harvested their fields, stacked the hay, and herded their cattle back into the valley. There, the cattle were pastured for the winter and fed from a rancher's reserve of hay.¹⁰

The lower Big Hole Valley has essentially retained a rural character, although its role as a major transportation corridor for southwest Montana continued to evolve in the twentieth century. During the early part of the century, State Highway 91 was developed through the valley. The route was incorporated into the federal system of interstate highways in the 1950s. Completed through the lower valley during the 1970s and 1980s, Interstate Highway 15 eventually traversed between Montana's border with Idaho and the Montana-Canada boundary, linking several major communities in the state such as Dillon, Butte, Helena and Great Falls.¹¹ In the meantime, the railroad has remained an integral component of the Union Pacific's massive intercontinental system.

C. WILLIAM AND LUCINA BOWE RANCH

The origin of the William and Lucina Bowe Ranch dates to the 1870s, the initial period of settlement in the lower Big Hole Valley. William Bowe reportedly established himself in the lower valley in 1873. About two years later, in Spring 1875 he bought out two squatters, acquiring one of the most attractive sites in the lower Big Hole not only because of its good grasses and proximity to the river but due to its strategic location near the juncture of the main freighting roads through the valley and the road to the Bryant mining district. Bowe built a small log cabin on his land that same fall. Soon after that, the ranch became a stage station on the Idaho-Helena road, and Bowe began offering hotel accommodations to travelers. When a surveyor for the federal government's General Land Office (GLO) mapped the area in the fall of 1876, he found a "Mrs. Fleecer" residing in the cabin at the Bowe Ranch site (figure 2). In late December of that same year, William Bowe and Lucina Fleecer became husband and wife.¹²

Like many of Montana pioneers, both William Bowe and Lucina Fleecer Bowe were lured to the Rocky Mountain West by the prospect of gold. Born in Ireland in 1844 but raised from an early age in Connecticut, William Bowe wintered in Denver before joining the rush to the gold fields of southwest Montana in spring 1864. He initially tried his luck at Virginia City, but soon moved on. Over the next few years, Bowe attempted mining at various camps in the region with little success. After abandoning his mining career, he worked as freighter until settling in the lower Big Hole Valley.¹³ A native of Ohio, Lucina Fleecer (born in 1837) also came to Virginia City in 1864, arriving by wagon train with her first husband, Adam Fleecer. After a short time, the Fleecers headed deeper into Montana Territory and settled in the German Gulch mining region north of the Big Hole, where Adam operated a stage station. Lucina eventually left German Gulch and obtained a divorce from Fleecer "on account of his dissipated habits."¹⁴ The Fleecer's two adult sons and two young daughters came to reside with their mother at the Bowe Ranch.¹⁵

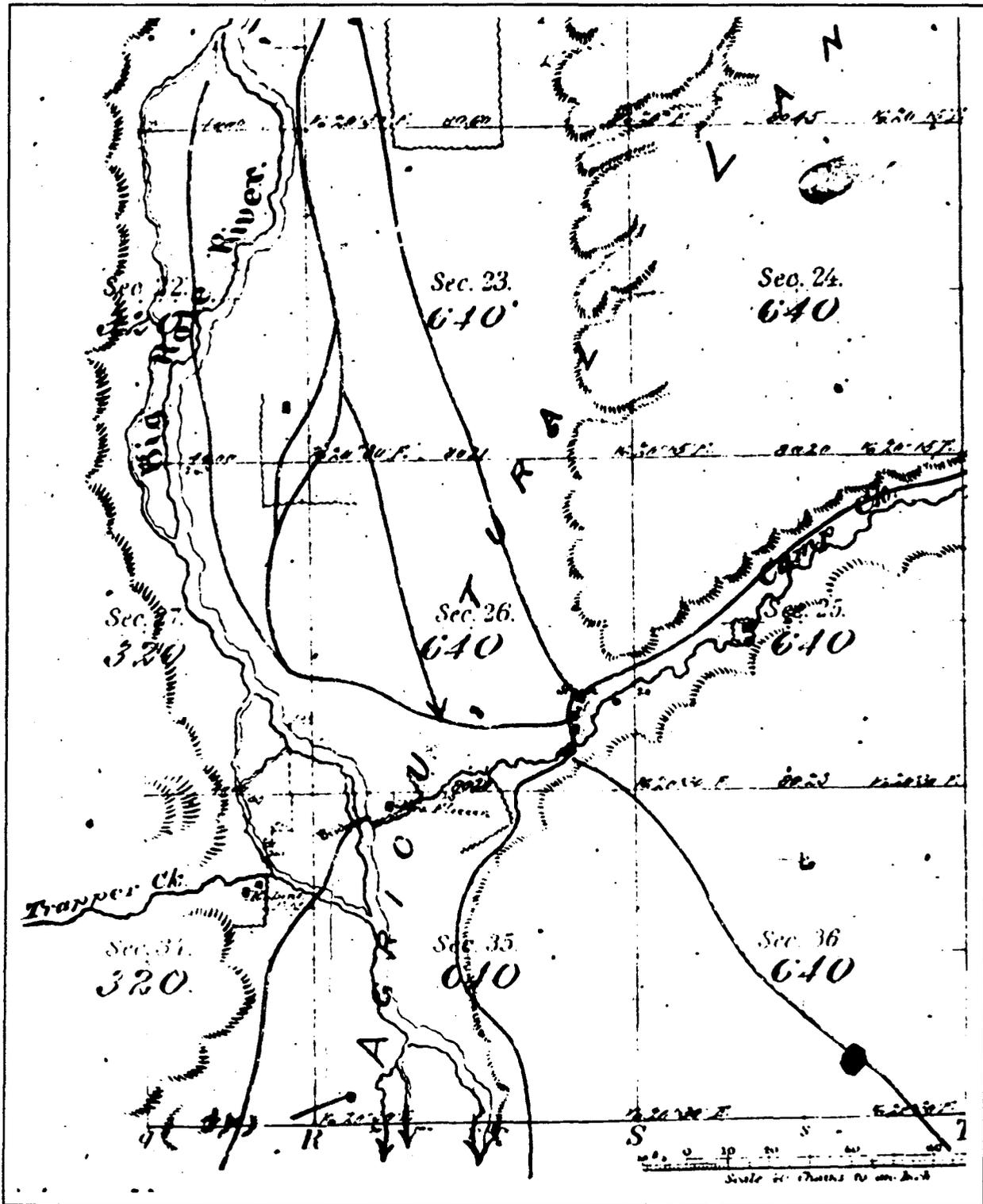


Figure 2. 1876 GLO Plat of T2S R9W showing cabin at the Bowe Ranch site in the NW¼ of Section 35.

William and Lucina Bowe worked to expand and improve their ranch in the lower Big Hole for several years. After filing on 160 acres in early 1878, William Bowe declared a desert land claim on 80 additional acres in the immediate area later that same year. Over the next few years, Bowe developed irrigated hay fields on the desert lands, excavating two ditches to carry water from the Big Hole River to the property.¹⁶ By the early 1890s, the total amount of land owned by the Bowes amounted to nearly 400 acres.¹⁷ For at least a few years, Lucina's sons worked on the ranch along with several hired hands. A son-in-law joined the family's operation by the early 1890s.¹⁸

Besides raising cattle, the Bowes continued to run a hotel. Additions were said to have been made to the facility in 1880, enabling the couple "to entertain comfortably all who stop[ped there]." About this time, Bowe purchased a house and moved it piece by piece to the ranch. The dwelling reportedly not only served as the family's home but also formed "a part of the hotel building."¹⁹

Meanwhile, the Bowes played an integral role in the development of the community of Melrose. As the Union Pacific Railroad aggressively built its line up the lower valley, the Bowes along with their neighbors, platted the townsite on the north side of the Bowe Ranch in early June 1881.²⁰ Just two days after the town was platted, the Bowes sold a 185-foot wide strip of right-of-way through their property to the railroad.²¹ They likely also began selling property in town, receiving between \$25 and \$80 per lot.²² Several years later, in 1896 the Bowes platted the "Bowe Addition" to Melrose on property they owned adjacent to the community.²³

The ranch remained in the Bowe Family into the early 1900s. After the death of Lucina in the late 1890s, William Bowe and his son-in-law continued to operate the cattle ranch, but likely shut down the hotel.²⁴ Bowe died after a short illness on February 13, 1903. At that time, he owned 400 acres, 130 cattle, 20 horses and farm equipment worth \$400.²⁵ Because debts against Bowe's estate exceeded the appraised value of the property, in April 1904, the District Court Judge in Butte ordered the sale of the ranch at public auction. The judge's ruling described the property as consisting of "two stock sheds, one granary, and one machine house." It also included about two acres of hay with the balance in pasture.²⁶

In May 1904, William T. Dodgson acquired the Bowe Ranch for \$9,000. William and Maude Dodgson arrived in Montana shortly after they were married in 1890. By the early 1900s, their family included four children. Maude's mother, Jane Bryant, also lived with them by 1910. After nearly 15 years of ownership, the Dodgsons sold the ranch to Patrick and Ora Connor in 1919.²⁷ The Connors financed the purchase by obtaining a mortgage in the amount of \$26,000.²⁸ The significantly higher value placed on the ranch would seem to indicate that the Dodgsons had made some improvements to the property.

The Connors moved their family of seven children to the ranch by 1920, but their operation soon fell on hard times.²⁹ After they failed to pay on their mortgage loan for a period of almost 4½ years, the mortgager sued and the District Court Judge ruled that the ranch be sold at public action in August 1926.³⁰ The mortgager purchased the ranch but soon leased it to the Connor's eldest son, 18-year-old Tom, while apparently searching for a buyer. Even though ownership of the property changed hands several times, Tom Connor continued to lease the ranch before he eventually bought the property outright sometime after 1937. He operated the ranch until 1974, establishing a 55-year long period of residency by his family.³¹

Dale and Rosanna Carpenter purchased the ranch from Tom Connor in 1974. Dale, a member of a long-time ranching family in the hills north of Butte, and his wife Rosanna, also from the Butte area, have operated the ranch since that time. One of their sons helps handle their cattle business. Dale also restores old wagons, and Rosanna maintains a workshop where she sculpts logs into animal figures.³²

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE WILLIAM AND LUCINA BOWE RANCH

The William and Lucina Bowe Ranch is along the east side of the lower Big Hole River about 0.1 mile southwest of Melrose (figure 3). County Road 40 enters the ranch from the northeast and makes a wide curve toward the west, passing through the property before crossing the river. The surrounding area consists of flat bottomlands primarily used for irrigated hay fields or pasture. A system of irrigation ditches on the north side of the ranch still bears the name "Bowe" on the current topographic map (see figure 3).

The ranch is comprised of 22 buildings and structures (figure 4). These resources include the house, three cabins and a collection of barns and other outbuildings primarily related to agricultural activities. All but six of them are historic resources, likely built between the 1875 and the 1930s. Over half of the ranch's historic building stock are of log construction.

The layout of the ranch has evolved around two groups of log buildings near the county road. One group consists of two log cabins (MT-104-L and M) and a log root cellar (MT-104-N) north of the road. This area represents the approximate location of a building shown on the 1876 GLO map (see figure 2), suggesting that one of cabins was the dwelling constructed by Bowe in the fall of 1875. The other cabin and the root cellar appear to have been built just a short time later, likely by the early 1880s. The second group of log buildings includes a calving barn (MT-104-T) and horse barn (MT-104-V) along the south side of the road. Both of these barns also date to the late 1870s or early 1880s.

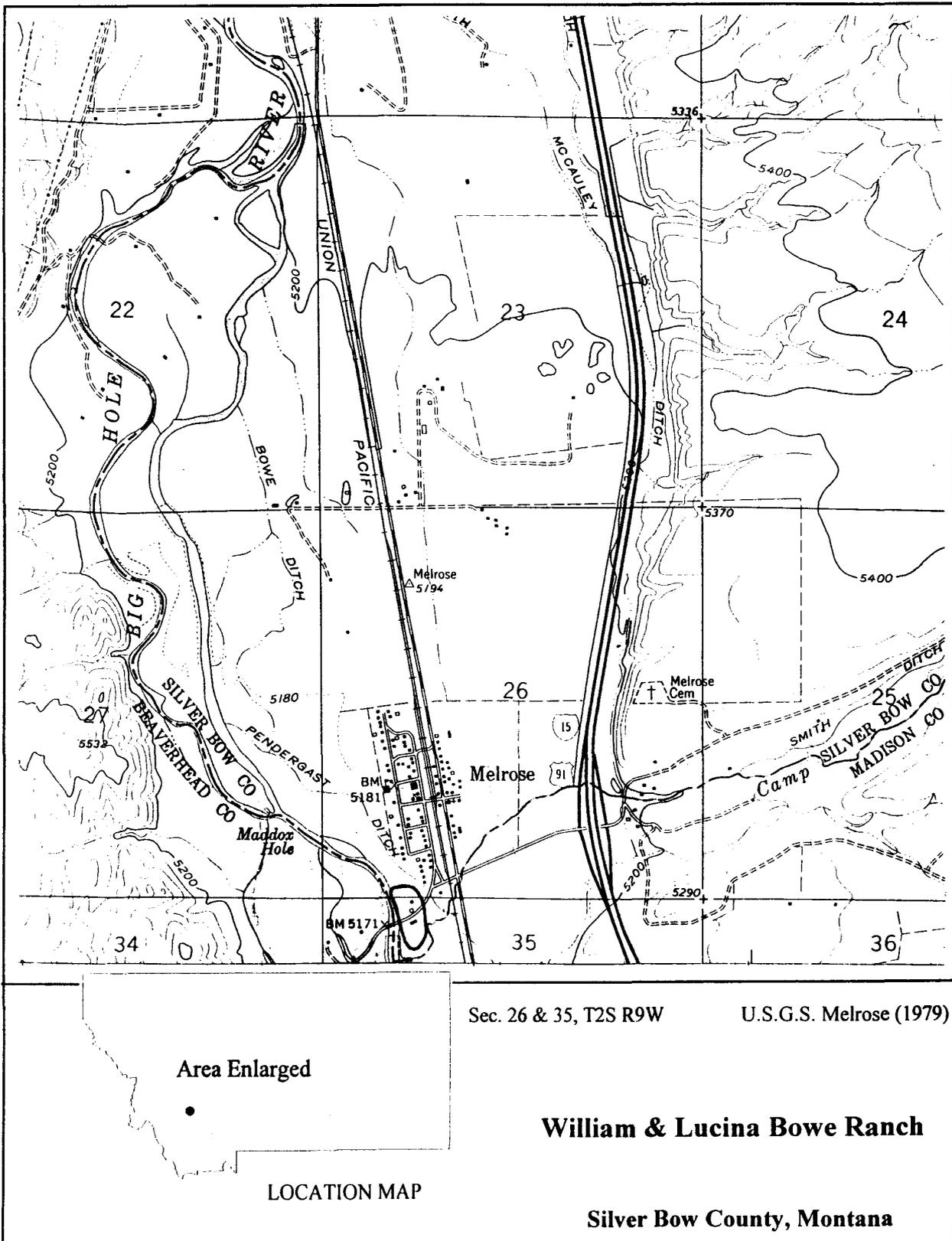


Figure 3. Area map for the Bowe Ranch, scale 1:24,000.

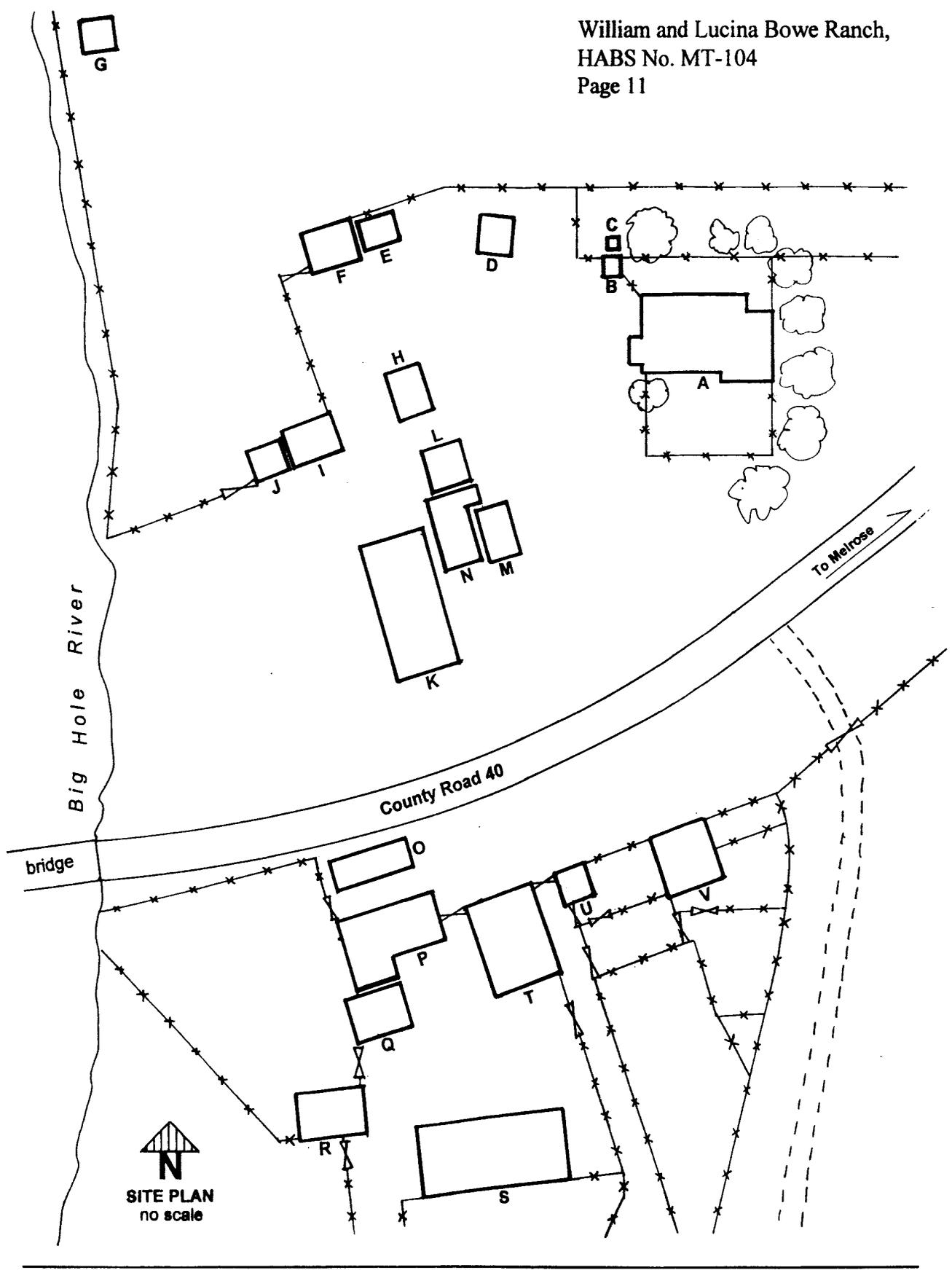


Figure 4. Site plan for the Bowe Ranch.

The historic division between the residential buildings and the livestock structures is still evident at the ranch today (see figure 4). The house stands north of the road at the far northeast corner of the site. Behind the house and on the same side of the road are the cabins, granary, and several other buildings such as sheds and a garage. At the same time, the area south of the road remains in use for the care and maintenance of livestock. It includes a large corral complex and a mixture of historic and modern livestock barns and sheds.

III. FUTURE OF THE PROPERTY

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) plans to realign County Road 40 in conjunction with a project to replace the bridge that carries said road over the Big Hole River. Some buildings at the Bowe Ranch will either be relocated or demolished to accommodate the road realignment. MDOT has sponsored Historic American Building Record (HABS) documentation of the site to mitigate the adverse effects.

IV. ENDNOTES

1. Patricia M. Ingram, *Historic Transportation Routes Through Southwestern Montana* (Boulder, CO: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 1976) 8 -15; Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder and William L. Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976, revised 1991), 64-78, 175; Robert G. Athearn, "Railroad to a Far Off Country: The Utah & Northern," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* (Autumn 1968), 4.

2. Ingram, *Historic Transportation Routes Through Southwestern Montana*, 37, 51.

3. For historic overviews of the Bryant Mining District see: Muriel Sibell Wolle, *Montana Pay Dirt: A Guide to the Mining Camps of the Treasure State* (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1963), 188-192; GCM Services, Inc., "Bryant District: Technical Version," prepared for Montana Department of State Lands, 1995; Carroll Van West, *A Traveler's Companion to Montana History* (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1986), 207-208.

4. For overviews of early cattle ranching in southwest Montana see: Ingram, *Historic Transportation Routes Through Southwestern Montana*, 18-19, and Malone, Roeder and Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, 146-150.

5. The township in which the Bowe Ranch is located was surveyed by the federal government in the fall of 1876, see: General Land Office (GLO), Plat of "T2S R9W," surveyed Sept. 29-Oct. 3, 1876, on file Montana State Office, Bureau of Land Management, Billings.

6. Malone, Roeder and Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, 164.

7. Ibid., 175; Athearn, "Railroad to a Far Off Country," 4-23; Stanley R. Davidson and Rex C. Myers, "Terminus Town: Founding of Dillon," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* (Autumn 1980), 16-28.

8. Davison and Myers, "Terminus Town," 23; Silver Bow County Tax Assessor, Plat Book 3, p.4.

9. Athearn, "Railroad to a Far Off Country," 21; Stuart Lessen, *History of Montana, 1739-1885* (Chicago: Warner, Beers & Company, 1885), 950.

10. This historic pattern of operation has been documented in the nearby Grasshopper Valley, see: Mitzi Rossillon and Mark Hufstetler, "Wise River-Polaris Road: Additional Cultural Resource Inventory and Evaluation" (Butte: Renewable Technologies, Inc., 1996), 21. It is still the typical practice in the lower Big Hole Valley, according to Rosanna Carpenter; interview with Mary McCormick, March 1998.

11. Marilyn Wyss, *Roads to Romance: The Origins and Development of the Road and Trail System in Montana* (Helena: Montana Dept. of Transportation, 1992), 41-43; Secondary Roads and Statistics Bureau, *1993 Montana Federal Aid Road Log* (Helena: Montana Dept. of Transportation, 1994), 2-3.

12. Joaquin Miller, "William Bowe," in *An Illustrated History of the State of Montana* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1894), 643; GLO, Plat of "T2S R9W;" Ingram, *Historic Transportation Routes Through Southwestern Montana*, 51. In Miller's account, Lucina Fleecer Bowe's first name is given as "Lucia" and her surname by her first husband is spelled "Flescser." However, the United Census for 1880 shows her first name to be Lucina and list her children as having the surname of Fleecer. The 1876 GLO map has the name "Mrs. Fleecer" written next to the cabin shown at the site of the Bowe Ranch (see figure 2). About 12 miles up the lower Valley from the Bowe Ranch there is a prominent peak on the front range of the Pioneers known as Fleecer Mountain (see figure 1). It perhaps was named in Lucina's honor.

13. William Bowe, "Final Proof Under the Desert Land Act of March 3, 1877: Deposition of Applicant," November 1881, on file, General Land Office Records Group, National Archives, Washington, D.C; Miller, "William Bowe," 643-644.

14. Miller, "William Bowe," 644.

15. United States Census, 1880.

16. "Final Proof Under the Desert Land Act," William Bowe.

17. Silver Bow County Clerk and Recorder, Patent Book B, p. 272.

18. United States Census, 1880; Miller, "William Bowe," 643-644.

19. Miller, "William Bowe," 643.

20. Silver Bow County Tax Assessor, Plat Book 3, p. 4.

21. Silver Bow County Clerk and Recorder, Deed Book B, p. 314.

22. Athearn, "Railroad to a Far Off Country," 21.
23. Silver Bow County Tax Assessor, Plat Book 8, p. 8.
24. United States Census, 1900.
25. "William Bowe Left Considerable Coin," *Dillon Examiner*, 15 February 1903.
26. Silver Bow County Clerk of the Court, Probate Record No. 1624.
27. United States Census, 1910; Silver Bow County Clerk and Recorder, Miscellaneous Book J, p. 96; Deed Book 62, p. 464; Deed Book 143, p. 429.
28. Silver Bow County Clerk and Recorder, Mortgage Book 61, p. 65.
29. United States Census, 1920.
30. Silver Bow County Clerk of the Court, Miscellaneous File No. 20844; Complaint No. 29120; Judgement Book 28, p. 103.
31. Silver Bow County Clerk and Recorder, Sheriff's Certificate No. 934; Mortgage Book 77, p. 22; Lease Book E, p. 336; Deed Book 169, p. 351, p. 354; Deed Book 176, p. 482; Dale Carpenter, interview with Jon Axline, March 1996.
32. Dale and Rosanna Carpenter, interviews with Mary McCormick, June 1997.

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- Carpenter, Dale and Rosanna. Interviews with Mary McCormick, June 1997 and March 1998.
- Davidson, Stanley R., and Rex C. Myers. "Terminus Town: Founding of Dillon." *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* (Autumn 1980).
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Rossillon, Mitzi and Mark Hufstetler. "Wise River-Polaris Road: Additional Cultural Resource Inventory and Evaluation." Butte: Renewable Technologies, Inc., 1996.

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