

Cowboy Up: The Life of a real Cowboy

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This presentation is about developing a narrative life story about an interesting ancestor. This project started a few years ago when I attended the Montana State Genealogical Society annual conference. And someone asked me about my ancestral connections to Montana. The only one I knew about was my Great grandmother's younger brother, Glenn Hollingsworth, who I knew had been a cowboy in Montana. But that was about all I knew about him. I had seen transcripts of his obituary but had never really studied it.

I had access to a transcript of the obituary, so I reviewed it and visited the Range Rider's Museum in Miles City, MT. There I was able to explore some of the history of the range lands in Eastern Montana in the early 20th century. I also found a photo of one of Glenn Hollingsworth's early bosses. I also picked up a few books about early cowboys and cattle ranching in Eastern Montana. Over the next few years, I analyzed Glenn's obituary and started researching more about his life.

Glenn never married and has no known descendants. He did leave a very detailed obituary that became a starting point for my research.

In August 2022, I spent a week in Montana visiting museums and places Glenn worked. I also had an opportunity to meet with a woman that knew Glenn when she was a child.

This presentation is a reconstruction of Glenn Hollingsworth's life based on his obituary and additional research. Much of this is based on researching Glenn's Friends, Associates, and Neighbors (FAN Club) and social history researching the cattle industry in Montana during his cowboy years.

Obituary published in the Wolf Point Herald-News Oct 17, 1963 (Transcribed by Glenn York)

Hollingsworth, Early Ranch Hand Dead at 96

Funeral services were held at Clayton Memorial Chapel, Wolf Point on Oct 5, for Glenn Hollingsworth, Wolf Point. Burial was in Greenwood Cemetery.

Mr. Hollingsworth died Oct 3 at Trinity Hospital, Wolf Point. He was 96 years of age.

Honorary pallbearers were Orin Miller, George Conklin, Dave Anderson, Flag Davis, Jim Terry and Myna Cusker.

Mr. Hollingsworth was born August 24, 1867, in Marshalltown, Iowa, next to the youngest of seven children of Stephen and Phoebe Hollingsworth. Three brothers and four sisters all preceded him in death.

The family moved from Iowa to Kansas when he was a small boy. His parents took up a homestead there. Leaving home at an early age, he went to the Black Hills, S. Dak., where he worked as a teamster and bull wacker around Custer City and Deadwood.

From there he went to Colorado and came to Miles City in May 1893. He went to work punching cows for Guy Whitbeck, wagon Boss of the Bow and Arrow outfit on Sunday Creek north of Miles City. He worked there for six years and moved on to work for the LU on Little Dry. He went to work for Dave Clair with the CK outfit on Prairie Elk about 1904 or 1905, where he became a wagon boss until he quit the range work in 1910.

He was foreman at the CK ranch for two years before starting to work for Hank Cusker, Wolf Point in 1912. He filed on a homestead on West Fork of Sand Creek where he ranched until 1925. He then went to work for Jim Montgomery at the 14 Ranch on Redwater, south of Poplar. When they sold their cattle to Frye and Co., Poplar, Mr. Hollingsworth took a job riding line fence for them at one of their camps on Box Elder Creek, 20 miles north of Poplar. When Fryes shipped out their cattle, he went to split Rock, Wyo., and spent about a year with two nephews, Lester and Loren Ratcliff. From there he took a trip back to his old home and visited all his relatives in Iowa, Kansas and Tennessee. He wound up in California where he spent the winter with a sister.

In 1933, Mr. Hollingsworth returned to Montana and moved into Mick Cusker's bunk house where has lived since. He was never married and leaves a host of nieces and nephews in Iowa, Kansas and Tennessee. He worked on the open ranges of Montana for 17 years, which he considered a record, as most men didn't stay at it that long.

He was admitted to Trinity Hospital on Sept 30 and died on Oct 3.

Lessons to be learned

1. Don't let your discoveries be lost – Through our research we have learned a lot about our ancestors, but many of our ancestors' stories will be lost if we don't write them down and get them published. What will happen to those stories after our death? Will someone else have to rediscover them from research? If we share these stories they can be preserved for future generations.
2. Go beyond the basics - Birth, death, marriage, and residence information provides a structure, but to really understand our ancestors we need to research additional information to understand their life. What were the conditions like where and when they lived? Who did they associate with? What did they do during their life?
3. Use your ancestor's FAN Club - Researching "FAN club" can help us learn about our ancestor's life. Maybe your ancestor didn't leave much of a record, but others may have documented their interactions with your ancestor.
4. Study the social history of the time and place where your ancestor lived. Others may have left records that will help you understand the life they lived and the conditions they experienced.
5. Write while researching – Write a paragraph or two about information you find about your ancestor while researching. These notes can be edited and rearranged in your final product.
6. Tell the story – If you don't feel you are a writer, tell the story to others. You can record and transcribe the story after you have told it and then edit to leave a written copy to be preserved.
7. Don't wait – If the story is not written down it may be lost after you pass. Write it down and get it published. You can come back and add to the story or improve it as you learn more but get something written down now so it will not be lost.

Further study

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