

# Cowboy Up: The Life of a Real Cowboy – Glenn Hollingsworth

By Glenn York

Glenn Hollingsworth [of Stephen(7) of James(6) of James(5) of George(4) of Abraham(3) of Thomas(2) of Valentine, Sr(1)] was one of my Great Grand Uncles. He never married or had any known descendants to tell his story so – as his namesake – I decided to do so. Glenn left a very detailed obituary(1) that became the starting point to research and document his life.

Glenn Hollingsworth was born 24 Aug 1867, in Marshall County, Iowa to a Quaker family. He was the sixth of seven children with two brothers and four sisters. His father Stephen Gardner Hollingsworth was a fifth great grandson of Valentine Hollingsworth, Sr, an Irish Quaker who came to North America in 1682, near Newcastle, Delaware. His mother Phebe R. Raley was a third great granddaughter of another Irish Quaker family that came to Pennsylvania in 1732(2).

Phebe's family came to Marshall County from Ohio. Stephen Hollingsworth came by himself from Indiana. They were one of the first couples married in the Western Plains Monthly Meeting 22 Oct 1856. After farming and raising their family in Iowa, Stephen moved his family to Jewell County, Kansas in the 1870s when Glenn was still a young boy. Stephen filed a homestead claim for 80 acres in a new Quaker community near Burr Oak, Kansas.

Little is known about Glenn's life in Kansas, but we can be sure he learned to work on the farm and work with animals. He was living with his parents when he was 18 according to the 1885 state census. We

know he was in Iowa at the time of his brother's wedding in 1887 because his only known photo of him was taken in a Marshalltown, Iowa studio with his older brothers [photo 1].

Glenn's mother Phebe passed away on 12 July 1890. Glenn left home and went to South Dakota sometime in the 1890s. He worked as a teamster and bullwhacker around Custer City and Deadwood moving freight between these communities. One of the big gold rushes in the 1870s was in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Deadwood is known as one of the most famous historic wild west towns in that era.

The Great Plains region stretches from South Texas to Canada and includes parts of ten states. Much of this region is prairie grasslands. Large herds of bison roamed there in the 1800s, but soon after the Civil War hunters killed most of these bison herds. After the decimation of the bison herds there were millions of acres of open grassland throughout the region.

During the Civil War cattle were allowed to roam free in Texas and after the war large herds of longhorn cattle were running wild in Texas. The Civil War created a demand for beef in Chicago and other eastern cities which led to the rise of the cattle industry throughout the Great Plains. Early on cowboys started driving Texas cattle north to railroad terminals in Kansas. As settlers started fencing Kansas land and railroads extended further west, the cattle drives moved to western Kansas, western Nebraska, and Colorado.

(1) Glenn Hollingsworth obituary, Wolf Point Harold-News, Vol 50, no. 42, Page 4, published October 17, 1963 Wolf Point, MT

(2) "Robert Raley, c1715-1805 of Washington County, Pennsylvania and His Descendants", by Elizabeth Zettelman Goelz, privately published 1989

Investors, both foreign and domestic, established large cattle operations to fatten cattle on the prairies of eastern Colorado, Wyoming, and eastern Montana. Cattle were driven north to fatten them on the prairie grasslands of the region. After railroads became more common, the cattle were transported to the grasslands by train.

After a few years in South Dakota, Glenn moved to Miles City, Montana in May 1893. He lived and worked in the Eastern Montana area between the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers over the next 70 years and interacted with at least two large cattle operations during his career.

His first Montana job was working for Guy Whitbeck, wagon boss of the Bow and Arrow outfit, where Glenn stayed for six years. The Bow and Arrow outfit was just north of Miles City on Sunday Creek [photo 2] which runs parallel a few miles north of the Yellowstone River.

Glenn joined the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (I.O.O.F) and in 1898 he and Guy Whitbeck were elected as officers in Custer Lodge No. 13 in Miles City(3) .

In 1899, Glenn moved further north and took a job with the LU outfit on the Little Dry Creek [photo 3] where he worked until 1904.

One of the largest cattle operations in Montana was owned by Conrad Kohrs. Conrad was born 5 Aug 1835 in Denmark. By 1857 he moved to America and became an American citizen. In 1862 he decided to move to Montana to make money in the mining industry. Kohrs was a trained butcher who soon discovered he could make more money feeding miners than mining. He started ranching in 1866 and at one time owned over 50,000 head of cattle and

controlled over 10 million acres of grazing land in 13 sites in Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, and Canada. During his peak Kohrs shipped 10,000 cattle to Chicago each year(4).

Conrad was a leader in the Montana Cattleman's association and later a politician. He was known as the "Cattle King of Montana". Today, Conrad's home ranch in Deer Lodge, Montana is the Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site, a unit of the National Park service(5).

In 1904, Glenn started working for Dave Clair at the CK outfit on Prairie Elk Creek. This was one of Conrad Kohrs' ranches just southwest of Wolf Point on the south side of the Missouri River. After six more years on the open range Glenn became the Wagon Boss.

Glenn had worked open range cattle for 17 years and considered this a record. Many young men worked open range a few years then moved on to other jobs, but he didn't know of anyone who had stayed with it for 17 years.

While working as wagon boss for the CK, Glenn worked with another large cattle operation. In 1876, the Texas Constitution set aside land in exchange for building the Texas state capital. A group of investors took this deal and built the capitol building in exchange for three million acres in the Texas panhandle. They had hopes of developing this land, but soon learned it was better suited for cattle ranching. The XIT ranch was the largest cattle ranch in the United States. As early as 1890, the XIT started leasing an additional two million acres in eastern Montana. They shipped up to 30,000 cattle to Montana to graze on this grassland(6).

(3) "Newly Installed Officers of Custer Lodge", Independent-Record, Helena, Montana, 16 Jan 1895, page 5, viewed on Newspapers.com

(4) "6000 Miles of Fence: Life on the XIT Ranch of Texas", Corda Sloan Duke and Joe Bertram Frantz, University of Texas Press 1961

(5) National Park service <https://www.nps.gov/grko/index.htm> viewed 9/10/2023

(6) "6000 Miles of Fence: Life on the XIT Ranch of Texas", Corda Sloan Duke and Joe Bertram Frantz, University of Texas Press 1961

Each spring they had large roundups in the open range areas. Every stockman with 500 or more head of cattle participated in these roundups. Often there would be 125 to 200 cowboys from multiple outfits working together. An account written by J.K. March of the XIT Ranch specifically mentions working with Glenn Hollingsworth, wagon boss with the CK(7).

In 1910, Glenn became foreman on the CK Ranch a position he held until 1912.

In 1912, Glenn started a relationship with the Henry "Hank" Cusker family that would continue for the rest of his life. Hank Cusker was a top horseman and a cattleman. He was born in Walla Walla County, Washington in 1865 and moved to the Wolf Point, Montana area in 1886. Three younger brothers Frank, Myra, and Sig along with a sister Gertrude soon joined Hank in Montana.

Congress passed the Enlarged Homestead Act in 1909 allowing 320-acre homesteads for dry land farming in several western states including Montana. In 1909 and 1910 homestead claims were filed on over 18 million acres. All five of the Cusker siblings along with some of their spouses completed homestead claims south of Wolf Point, making the Cusker family a large land holder in the area. Descendants still farm some of this land today.

Glenn worked for Hank Cusker about a year then in March 1913 Glenn filed on his own homestead claim of 320 acres about ten miles south of Wolf Point [photo 4]. He built a 16' x 20' house and a 16' x 40' stable on his claim, then cultivated 50 acres to raise wheat, flax, and oats, but with limited success. He completed his claim in 1918. Hank and Myra Cusker filed affidavits to support his claim. He received a patent for the land in June 1919. I visited the homestead site in August 2022 and talked to the current owner of the land. No sign of his improvements have survived.

Glenn continued the homestead until 1925 when he sold his land to Jay Cusker, Hank's son for \$1.00. I learned that the Cusker family had an arrangement with some of the older cowboys who owned land. They would buy the land for \$1.00 and guarantee the cowboy would be taken care of in their old age.

Glenn worked for some other ranchers near Poplar, Montana for the next few years.

Congress modified the homestead act again in 1916 to create the stock-raising homestead act. This was the first time homesteading was allowed to raise livestock without any requirement to cultivate and raise crops. By 1930, two of Glenn's nephews Loren and Lester Ratcliff filed on stock-raising homesteads in central Wyoming. Glenn moved and worked with his nephews for about a year, then took some time off in 1932 to visit family in Kansas, Iowa, and Tennessee before spending the winter with his sister in California.

He returned to Montana in 1933 and moved into a cabin next to Ray "Mick" Cusker's home. Ray was another of Hank's sons. Hank had died in 1929 and his sons Roy and Ray were now running the ranch.

Glenn lived in this cabin for the next 20 years. The cabin had electric lights, but no plumbing or cooking facilities. Glenn had an out house near the cabin and Mick's family prepared his meals. Mick's kids would often take meals to Glenn in his cabin.

In 2022, I had the opportunity to meet one of Mick's daughters who remembers taking meals to Glenn. She told me he was a cowboy to the end. His bed was maintained like his bed roll on the open range. He had his bedding and then had a canvas tarp over the top of the bed.

She also told me a about one of Glenn's pastimes. He would bet other cowboys on who could go farthest on a tree that had fallen in the river. They would then run out on the tree trunk until the current started to

(7) "6000 Miles of Fence: Life on the XIT Ranch of Texas", Corda Sloan Duke and Joe Bertram Frantz, University of Texas Press 1961

pull it away from the shore then attempt to run back before it floated down river.

One of Glenn's hobbies was making diamond willow walking sticks. The willow trees infected with a fungus would grow diamond shaped cankers. Glenn would find these diamond willow sticks along the river, would clean them up to form a walking stick. He would collect rawhide from cattle butchered on the ranch, then cut it into thin strips and tie them to the fence to dry. After breaking a coke bottle, he would use the sharp edge of the glass to scrape the hair and other tissue from the rawhide. Later, he would braid the rawhide to form a hand grip on the top of the walking stick. These

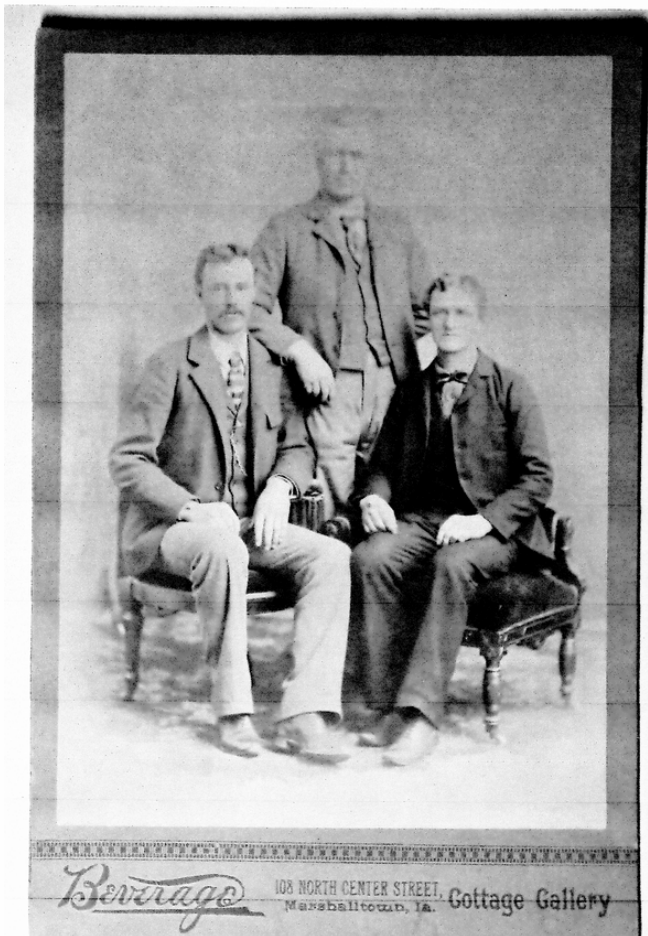
handmade walking sticks were given to friends as special gifts. Mick's daughter inherited two of these walking sticks and provided me with the attached photos(8) [photos 6 and 7]

Glenn Hollingsworth lived in the cabin next to Mick Cusker until 30 Sep 1963 when he got sick and was taken to the Wolf Point Hospital. He died there on 3 Oct 1963 of renal failure(9). He was 96 years old and had worked and lived as a cowboy in Eastern Montana for nearly 70 years. Mick Cusker arranged for Glenn's funeral and burial in the Wolf Point cemetery. Six old cowboys and cattlemen were honorary pallbearers at Glenn funeral.[photo 5]

(8) Discussion with Rita Hardy, daughter of Mick Cusker, in Wolf Point, MT, August 2022

(9) Montana death certificate # 63 430087, 3 Oct 1963

## Photo Gallery



[1] portrait on left: photo taken about 1887 – L-R: Glenn, Thomas, Anson Hollingsworth (family photo - out of copyright)

[2] Open range near Sunday Creek north of Miles City, MT 2022

(photos [2] - [5] taken by Glenn York, August 2022)



photo [3] - Little Dry Creek north of Miles City, MT, 2022

photo [4] - Glenn's Montana Homestead, south of Wolf Point, MT, 2022



photo [5] - Glenn's gravestone in Greenwood Cemetery, Wolf Point, MT, 2022



photo [6] and [7]  
Handmade walking sticks made by Glenn Hollingsworth  
(photos provided courtesy of Rita Hardy)

