



MONTANA  
**GHOST TOWN**  
PRESERVATION SOCIETY

---

preserving history for the next generation

**VOLUME 50**

**NEWSLETTER**

**FALL 2020**



**The town of Cokedale, between Bozeman and Livingston, with the coal mine and string of 130 coke ovens in the background. Ca. 1892**

**Story on page 4**

**Photo courtesy MONTANA HISTORIC SOCIETY**

## Montana Ghost Town Quarterly

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Founded in 1970, the Montana Ghost Town Preservation Society is a 501c3 non-profit organization dedicated to educating the public to the benefits of preserving the historic buildings, sites, and artifacts that make up the living history of Montana.

Opinions expressed in the bylined articles are the authors' and do not necessarily represent the views of the M. G. T. P. S.

### FALL 2020

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## *The Prez Sez*

**BRAD O'GROSKY**

Greetings everyone and I hope it finds you well and without the china virus. We missed the convention last month and I'm sure we all miss seeing each other and hearing stories. Who would have thought that after the country was almost shut down, there was, and still is, rioting in the streets. The record forest fires that are burning with over 2 million acres burned, one could only imagine the fires of 1910 when over 3 million acres burned. Tim Egan wrote the book "The Big Burn" which is a great story of the heroic efforts to fight the fires and the development of the Forest Service. I would recommend it.

Your board has supported the window replacement project at the Morris State Bank in Pony which is now complete. Since the building is on the National Register of Historic Places a plaque will be attached to the building. Since MGTPS supported the project, a plaque stating our involvement will be installed. The plaque has been ordered, and I had hoped I could attach a picture of it but it hasn't arrived yet – see next issue! If you learn of other preservation projects that we could consider supporting, please let us know as that is the purpose of MGTPS.

As this year's postponed convention will be held next year in Kalispell, we are still considering the 2022 convention will be in White Sulphur Springs and we need volunteers to plan and run it. So please consider helping with this as there is always a lot of work, but also a lot of fun.....and we are always looking for new members to serve on the board.

**BRAD**

## *AS I SEE IT*

*from the RAMROD'S CHAIR*

Believe it or not, this is the fiftieth newsletter I have had the fun of putting together for you. If you don't believe me check our website, put together by Cindy our webmaster, and you can read the other 49 I had the pleasure of editing. In those twelve plus years I've had the honor of making the acquaintance of some exceptional historical researcher and writers, too numerous to mention, whilst at the same time honing my own skills at researching and writing.

While I've got your attention, look across the page and you will see that Reflection II, all the articles between Reflections I and when I took over as editor is now available, along with Reflections I (incase you don't have a copy). The original articles are as they appeared in these pages, unedited, but I have added photos mainly archival, but some current, that correspond with the texts. I trust you will enjoy a copy, just in time for Christmas.

**TERRY**

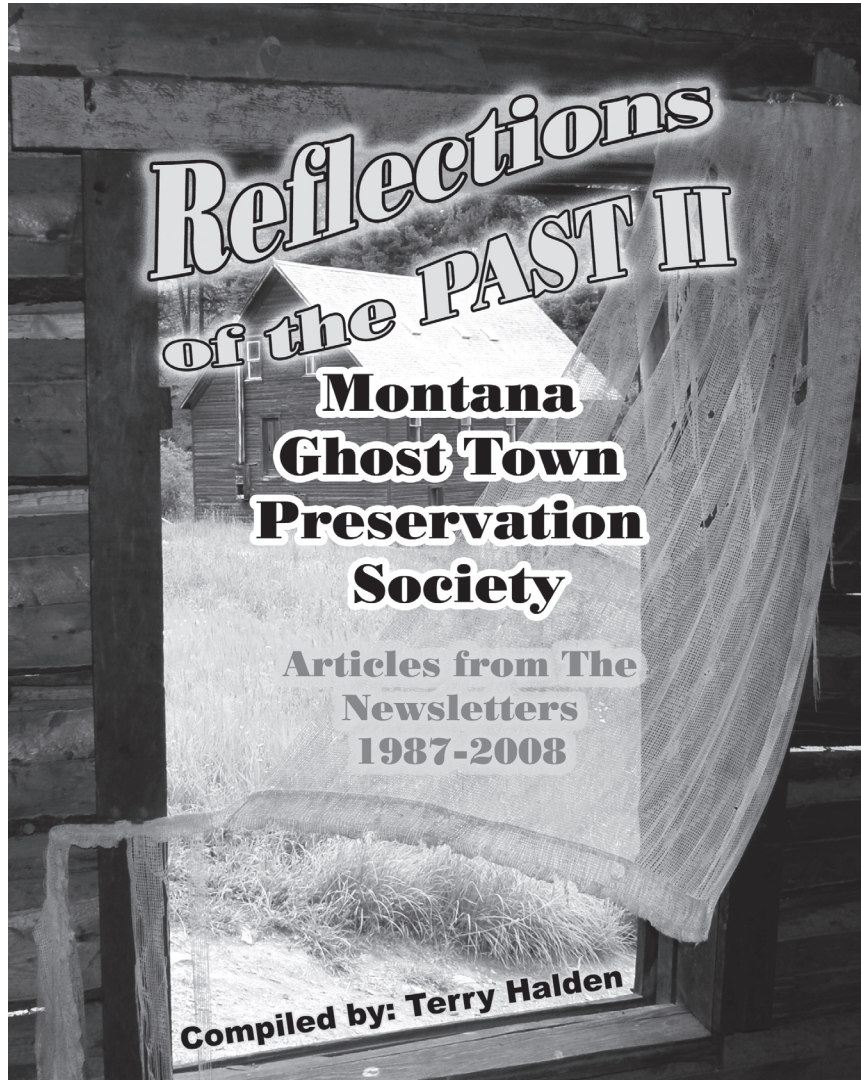
### **New Members**

Membership Chairperson Connie reports the following **New Member** has joined our Association since the last newsletter. **Please make her welcome.**

**Ellen Cantwell** Portland, OR

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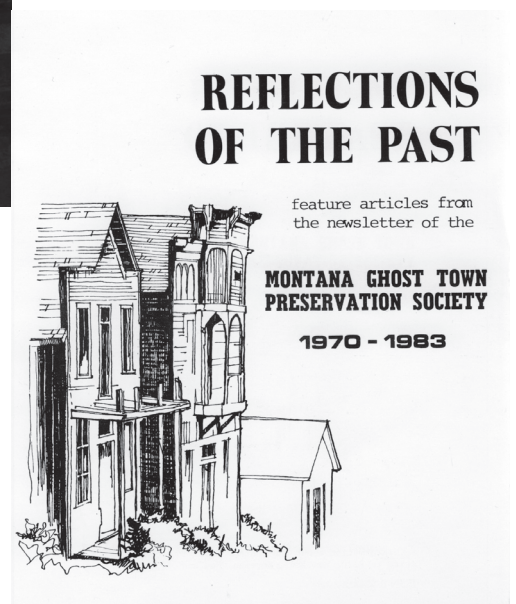
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# COAL & COKE from the TRAIL CREEK DISTRICT

by BRAD OGROSKY

All photos, courtesy GALLATIN HISTORY MUSEUM

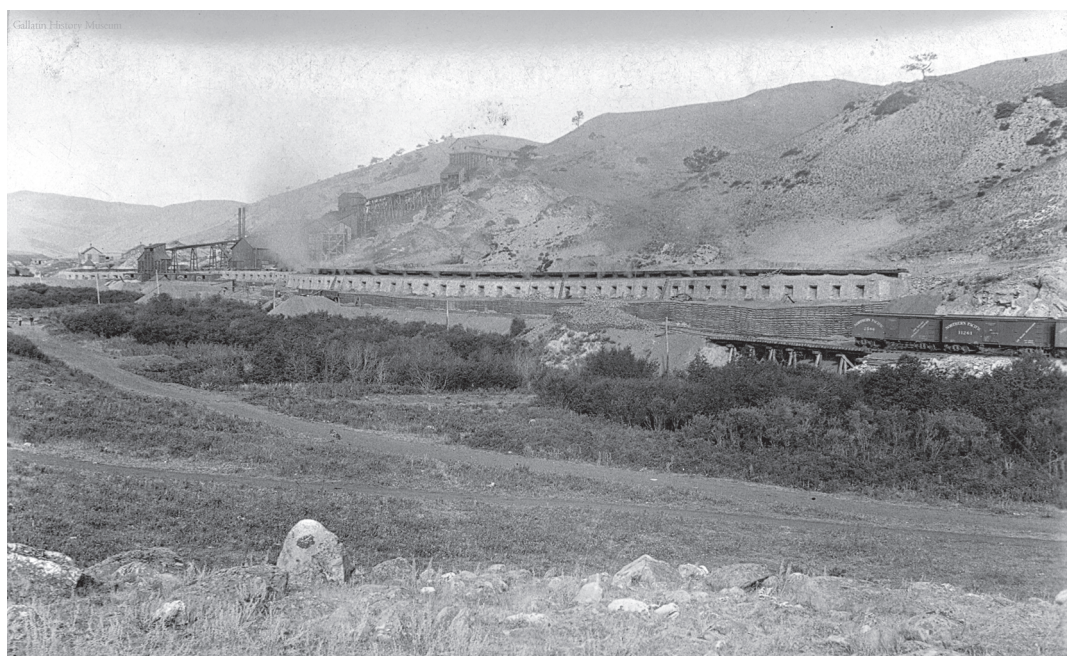
Throughout Montana there are many ghost towns and deserted mines left from the days of gold, silver and copper exploitation. But there was one more mineral that is more easily forgotten, that was found, in the area between Bozeman and Livingston, a black resource...coal. Coal was used for the railroads and after being converted to coke was used in smelters. Two men are credited with finding coal in this area. William H. Williams who came from Wales and in 1882 while working for the Northern Pacific, moved from Wyoming to develop coal properties in the Cokedale area. James Chesnut came from the east and started mining in the Timberline Trail Creek area. Both of them started mining and built the first coke ovens in the area, in the early 1880s. The smelters near Butte, Helena, and Great Falls needed a closer source of coke since they were having to acquire most of it from the east, although there was a coal mine with coke ovens near Wickes, south of Helena where one can see one remaining coke oven and the closed doored coal mine, still today.

Williams built his first coke oven in 1883, east of Cokedale and he then started developing Cokedale. In 1884. He sold the mine and operations to the Livingston Coal and Coke Company who, in 1886, built twelve more ovens at Cokedale, followed by twenty-six more and finally finished with a total of 130 in 1891. This line of ovens extended for over ½ mile and many are still visible today Normally about 100 ovens were in use with the other 30 being repaired. This operation was producing about 100 tons of coke each day. The operation of the mine and coking employed 200 to 350 men. The ovens cooked the coal at a high temperature to drive off the impurities allowing the coke produced to generate much more heat which was just what the smelters needed. Most of the ovens would hold five tons of coal,

which after cooking for three days would yield 2½ tons of coke. Once the ovens had cooked the coal, the oven was broken into on one side to remove the finished product. The opening was then closed up and the top was opened to allow a fresh batch of coal to be filled. Since the oven was still extremely hot, the fresh coal would be ignited without any additional source of fire. Ovens were usually made of fire-brick only, but the ovens at Cokedale were made of sandstone, which could not withstand the tremendous amount of heat generated, so they were lined with fire-bricks

The coal that was mined was used both for the production of coke but also for use by the railroads as fuel for their locomotives. Coal production reached 250 to 300 tons daily. To increase the quality of the coal and coke, washers were constructed to remove impurities from the raw coal. The washers became an important part of the product production

Initially, mules were used to move the coal and coke with the empty cars being pulled up to be loaded and then rolled back down the grade. As the mines and ovens grew, narrow gauge railroads were built to replace the mules. At Cokedale, one set of tracks ran above the ovens and another just below them. This lower set of tracks is now the County road. The coke from the area was taken 11.2 miles north to the Northern Pacific tracks



The string of coke ovens at Cokedale, Ca 1897

of the Turkey Trail Railroad which was built in 1898. After the mines closed in 1905 the tracks were removed in 1918 and shipped to France.



**Loading coke onto the Turkey Trail Railroad, Ca 1899**

As the demand for both coal and coke increased small communities developed near the mines. These communities were Chesnut, Storrs, Timberline, Hoffman, Maxey and Chimney Rock on the Bozeman side and Cokedale on the Livingston side of the mines. Chesnut, founded by James Chesnut in the 1880s still exists at the Trail Creek Road intersection with I 90. although the original buildings remaining have been remodeled so nothing original remains. It was a company town with a peak of about 2000 residents. Looking at it now, one would wonder where to put 2000 people. All the homes were owned by the company and the town included a store, four saloons, a butcher shop, a blacksmith, a post office and a grocery store but no church. Although it was one of the first towns to be electrified.

Timberline and its mine were developed by the Northern Pacific Coal Company about 3 miles south of Chestnut. Initially the town was peaceful with about 300 residents and the mine was producing about 250 tons of coal daily. The town was run by Robert McKee, an employee of the Northern Pacific, who didn't allow any saloons to be built. Instead it had a bank and a school, where Sunday Church Services were conducted. A few years later, McKee was fired and a more lawless element moved in changing the reputation of the town.

Moving south along Trail Creek Road was the town of Storrs. It was built in 1902 by the Anaconda Copper Company. About 800 people lived in this company town, which was electrified, had indoor plumbing a dance hall and a baseball team. Storrs life was short lived as the quality of the coal was dirty and the washer which helped to improve the quality was destroyed in a fire in 1908 and that ended the town of Storrs.

After the mine at Cokedale was sold to the Livingston Coal and Coke Company in 1886, the town really began to develop. By 1889 it had a post office, 2 general stores, a boarding house, a hotel, and 2 meat markets. By 1892 the school had 90 students and the town a population of 500. It also had a band and baseball team.

A fire in 1895 destroyed much of the mining equipment and with the negative effects of the silver panic of 1893, Cokedale struggled to survive. In 1903, the Anaconda Copper Company bought the mine and facilities, helping the town to rebound. But that rebound was short lived as another fire occurred in 1905. In

addition, starting in the early 1900s, changes began to affect the mines. Water entering the deep mines made production slower and eventually causing some of the mines to be closed. Fires in the washers and other buildings housing equipment also took its toll on the mines. The quality of the coal began to decrease with new and better veins became impossible to find. Red Lodge, was now producing higher quality coal and more of it. This was the final blow to the majority of mines in the Bozeman and Livingston area and closed the area down completely.

**BELOW: The store at Timberline Ca 1894**





**The Mountainside mine and Chesnut, Ca 1904**

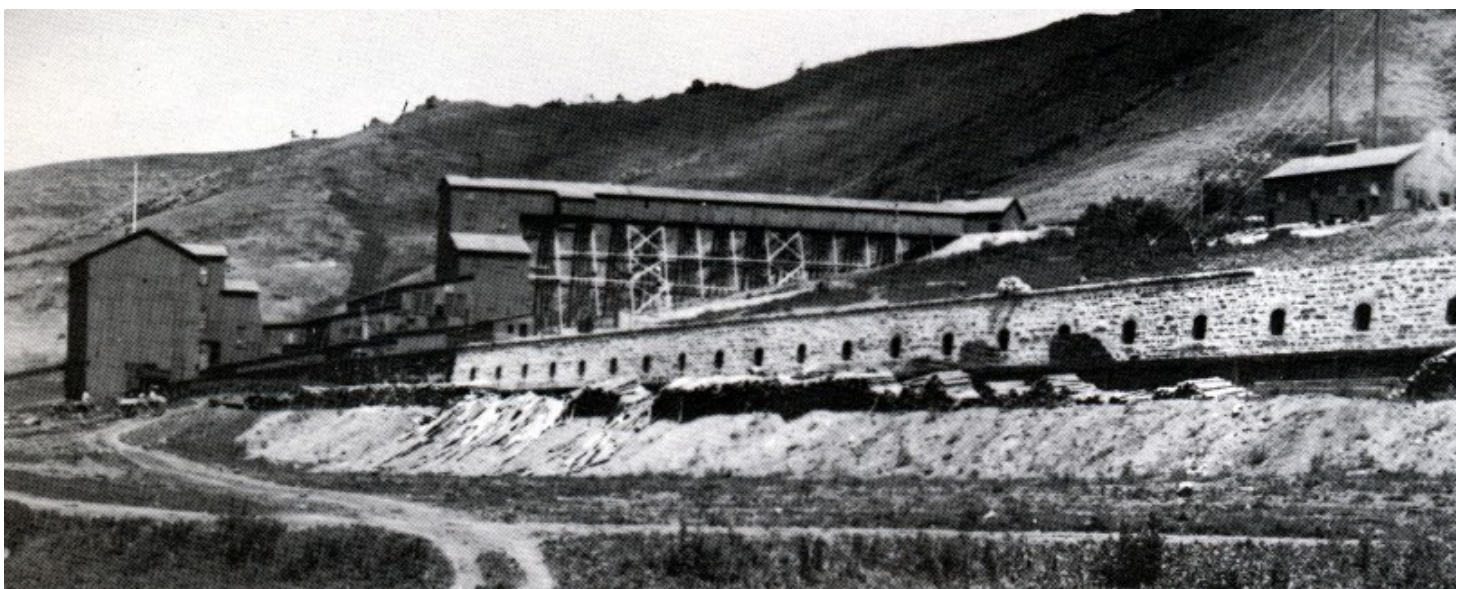
**GALLATIN HISTORY MUSEUM photo**

If you travel east from Bozeman, taking the Trail Creek Road south for a couple of miles it will bring you to the remaining coke ovens on the left side. These are the brick beehive ovens similar to the one at Wickes. It's a very pretty drive which can take you to the Paradise Valley and close to the old town of Emigrant. Driving on I-90 east towards Livingston, you can take an exit to the frontage road on the south and follow the road to Cokedale. Here are different looking ovens, and a lot of them. So take yourself back 120 years and imagine the narrow gauge railroad running on top of the ovens, or close your eyes and you might hear the braying of the mules!



**The Cokedale Brass band, Ca 1896**

**G.H.M photo**



**The Anaconda Copper Co. mine and coke ovens at Storrs Ca. 1903**

**GEORGE CAROLUS photo**

# A BIG PROBLEM

**Editors note:** If you have ever done any research in old newspapers on mines, it is a fact that prospectors, a century or more ago had an annoying habit of copying the name of a mine, when christening their own hole in the ground. It is frustrating to find a previously unknown photo of the “Cumberland” mine in a Helena newspaper, with a description of the mine and its output, but no description as to where the mine is. Is it the ‘Cumberland’ mine in the Castle mining district, or the one near Maiden? This problem existed in 1880 as this clip from the Butte Weekly Miner, of April 06 1880 testifies.

The following remarks from the Engineering and Mining Journal on the subject of naming mines, are pertinent and apply with force to the western mining fields:

Of all people, the Americans are the most servile copyists—exercise the least invention, or even rational selection, in the designations they give to localities. If the philosophy of names received a little more thought, a vast amount of uncertainty and mistake, would be saved. The matter is very far from being one of indifference, or of sentimental interest only. A name is a call word and is nothing if not distinctive.

There are in the United States, 65 Springfields, 60 Washingtons, 80 Jeffersons, with Jackson and other popular favorites in proportion. We have always admired the tact and wisdom of the unknown, genius who, when the people of Summit county, Ohio, insisted on naming their county seat, Summit, deftly turned it into Greek, and, by calling it Akron, gave the town a name of its own. The citizens of that thriving place should raise a monument, to his memory. Unfortunately, after our fashion, the name has been plagiarized, and there are now seven post offices called Akron. But as there are 17 Summits, the inhabitants of the Ohio town still have ample cause for gratitude.

Our purpose just now is to call attention to this subject, in connection with the bestowal of appellations on new mines and mining districts. The present nomenclature is to the last degree confusing. There are “American,” “American Flag,” “Champion,” “Columbia,” “Comstock,” “Centennial,” “California,” “Dolly Varden,” “Eureka,” “North Star,” “Sunset” and “Wheel of Fortune” mines in senseless iteration, and so are fifty other similar titles. We once asked an

otherwise very sensible San Juan miner why he called his location the Bobtail. — “There is a big mine of that name in **Gilpin** county,” He replied; “Maybe this one will turn out like it.” It was strange that he did not perceive that this was the best, possible reason why he should have chosen another designation. If his mine turned out well he would feel it a misfortune to have its record confounded with that of its namesake; besides which, in that case the action would work a double injustice.

When you organize a **new** district, Messrs. Miners, don’t call it “Gold Hill.” There are five important ones of that name already, besides a greatly larger number of less prominence. That is enough; try something else. Don’t call your town “Virginia City”; it was a good name at first, but it has been used up.

Another suggestion. The mining news published in Western newspapers is largely for the benefit of readers at a distance from the localities from where it is gathered. The “Emma” or the “Susie” mine is well known in the office of the newspaper but when the item is read a couple of thousand miles away, the particular Emma or Susie reported upon has become nebulous. Give district or county.

We shall one day, no doubt, have some sort of a bureau of mines in Washington, and we hope one of its regulations will be that two mines of the same name shall not be patented in the same state or territory. The post office department has a similar rule in regard to the names of post offices. Meantime, after calling the attention of miners to the matter, we invoke their charity and good sense not to add to the present confusion by the further multiplication of names, already overused.

# FORT MAGINNIS

(Continued from last newsletter)

by **JERRY HANLEY**



**Troops on parade grounds, Fort Maginnis, mid 1880s**

**Photo: W.H. CULVER**

Three enlisted men's quarters, or barracks, measuring 30 feet wide by 232 feet long were designed for a capacity of two companies in each. A connected kitchen and dining room was located in the rear. The three barracks housed 252 enlisted men in 1884, the largest number ever assembled at the post.

One of the numerous water closets (latrines) located around the fort can be seen in the background between the barracks on the left and the left-most trooper. To the right beyond the nearer barracks one of the numerous water wagons used to supply water around the fort can be seen.

The barracks faced the officers' quarters located 450 feet away on the opposite side of the parade grounds. Other post quarters included housing for noncommissioned officers and staff, civilian employees, and engineers' quarters. The post

commissary maintained a year's supply of rations along with numerous other provisions and supplies within a 25 X 200 foot building with stone basement. Some of the other buildings included a hospital, mortuary, root house, brick powder magazine, bakery, stone guardhouse, stables, teamsters' and mechanics' quarters, library, reading, and schoolroom, gymnasium and chapel, blacksmith, saddler and tinsmith shops, sawmill, and 6 cottages supplied for the post laundresses. Contractors supplied firewood and hay.

Various accounts indicate the troops spent most of their time repairing and cleaning buildings, taking care of the stables, and escorting supply trains. One account states the fort was used as a training grounds for a failed arctic expedition in the mid-1880s. Personnel often complained of boredom.





**Military & civilians posing at Fort Maginnis barracks, CA 1885**

**Photo: W.H.CULVER**

On this unidentified occasion we see officers, troopers, a gentleman, and young boy and girl on the porch and steps of one of the three barracks. The civilians might be family of employees of the fort, of which there were many. Aside from the primary purpose of protecting settlers from roaming Indians, Fort Maginnis elevated aspects of modern civilization in the area. The Post became a social center for all with dances, grand balls, theatre, roller skating, a chapel and services, athletics, a library, and very importantly, communications with the outside world via telegraph. Of course, neighboring Maiden interacted and provided its share of recreational activities to the fort, including the opportunity for soldiers to enjoy the ladies and libations.

Free flowing liquor was not allowed on the military reservation so for a night on the town Fort Maginnis folks might take the Collar Gulch road to Maiden; a route that allowed numerous entertainment possibilities. A couple miles walk or ride from the fort up Collar Gulch and just beyond the reservation

boundary was the Crystal Mountain Saloon located near the Collar mine and mill. Another 3/4 mile walk up and out of Collar Gulch put one at the hamlet of Rustle, M.T. (M.T. indicates Montana Territory—and is not an abbreviation for Montana) and Professor Wyman's, Blue Bird Saloon. Here, not only could libations be had, but one might also enjoy one of the Professor's renowned ventriloquist performances. From Rustle, it was another mile down Cambric Gulch to Warm Spring Creek Gulch and the heart of the bustling town of Maiden with Main and Montana Streets lined with drinking and gambling establishments. Of course there were also opportunities to keep company with 'ladies of the evening.'

New ranches and mining activity flourished in the area and Lewistown was rapidly developing. While it was a blow to locals when the fort was closed in 1890, its 10 years of existence had fulfilled a great service in policing and allowing "the Maginnis Country" (as it was often referred to) to settle and expand in a more modern manner.

**To be continued**

from WINTER 1987

## CENTENNIAL in a GHOST TOWN

by PAT O'CONNEL

I was en route down to the Sioux Falls, South Dakota airport for my return home to Montana when, on the spur of the moment and with an hour to spare. I turned off the county road over to Esmond. That's the town where I first fell in love with a younger man. He was four and the postmaster's son. I was five and starting first grade. (He had a sandbox; I had none.)

Esmond was gone. Gone with the advent of faster motor cars, I suppose. When I'd lived there in 1926 it was a shopping center for a farming community. I'd been fresh off a farm and to me Esmond had seemed like a metropolis having as it did a population of about 150 (maybe that was counting a few of the dogs and chickens that roamed about.) Now it was a ghost town. But it had had a Centennial the year before, and fence posts bearing white signs with black lettering stood in front of where homes and businesses had been. The signs bore the names of some of the owners and renters over the past one hundred years.

Who said, "You can't go back"? I went back. All it takes is a checkbook, a rented car and a plane ticket. I closed my eyes and could see a bunch of little kids, me among them, playing in the middle of the wide expanse of dirt that was Main Street. We'd had no worry about cars — any Model T approaching town could be heard while still a mile away. The drivers of teams and wagons stopped for us to get out of the way. There'd been two grocery stores, the post office, a cafe, movie house, billiard parlor, a bank, and a hotel on the block-long Main Street, and a large school building at the south end of town. And forty or fifty homes. ALL GONE! Nothing to mark where they had stood except these bright white signs!

I left and returned to Montana, but I thought and thought about those signs and the Centennial Celebration that I'd missed out on. So, I began making phone calls.

The first was to the past owner of a newspaper in a nearby town. He gave me the names of a couple who'd participated in the celebration and of a brother and sister with whom the idea had



Esmond, a typical farm community in the 1920's Photo: INTERNET

originated. Their parents and grandparents had owned the Glendenning Hotel. I called them at their farms out of Esmond. Yes, they'd originated the idea and they belonged to the only building still standing and in use — the Church, membership of sixty, Sunday attendance usually twenty. They'd talked about it at Church and to any farmer they met in the Community. They'd gone to the county seat (Desmet), and looked up school enrollments, town and township plats, and land titles. They got addresses of former residents and property owners from farmers in the community and from friends. They Xeroxed off letters and sent them out, announcing tentative plans for a Centennial Celebration the next year, and asking for names and addresses of anyone else who might be interested in such a "WHOOOP-TE-DO." The response was overwhelming.

The Church and the Ladies' Aid became active in the preparation. Interested people each made up three or four of the signs out of scrap lumber, painted them a bright white and lettered them. A farmer with the proper equipment "planted" the fence posts and up went the signs.

The week before the celebration farmers arrived with their tractors and mowed grass and cut down brush after others; had cleaned the area of a hundred years' accumulation of junk. A parking committee was appointed. A town history was printed (they sold 300 of these for \$5.00 apiece). Caps and buttons and pens and pencils were ordered — and later sold. A second letter had gone out before this, announcing the date of the celebration, and asking for reservations for dinner.



**Te Episcopal church and barn, the only two structures left in Esmond today. Photo; INTERNET**

They rented a tent and banquet tables and chairs and hired a cafe in a nearby town to do the catering.

The 26th of May arrived, as did about 1500 or 2000 people, 700 of whom had dinner reservations. There were games for the children , a sixty-unit parade, a school band. There was a slide presentation in the church and old-time pictures hung in the fellowship hall. All about town were larger pieces of memorabilia.

They financed all this with money made on a Church dinner the preceding fall, from admissions, from sale of souvenirs, and from the profit on the Centennial Dinner. It had been a Community effort. It brought the Community closer together. And it had been a happy and exciting time preparing for it. And it had been a big success! Now all that is left are the signs standing in this 20th Century ghost town.

**EDITOR’S NOTE:** As mentioned this article appeared in our WINTER 1987 newsletter. (without photos) and although it is not about a Montana prairie ghost town it is interesting as it illustrates what a dedicated group of former residents of a small town can do to celebrate their heritage. This article is NOT in the Reflections I or Reflections II book - it, like one other article that will appear in a future newsletter, managed to slip through the gap!



## **CONGRATULATIONS.....**

## **.....to JERRY HANLEY**

Jerry, our sole member in Maiden, and regular contributor to this newsletter, was recently selected by the Montana Historical Society to receive their

### **HERITAGE KEEPER’S AWARD**

for exemplary commitment effort in preserving Montana’s historical and cultural heritage.

Kudos from all of us Jerry





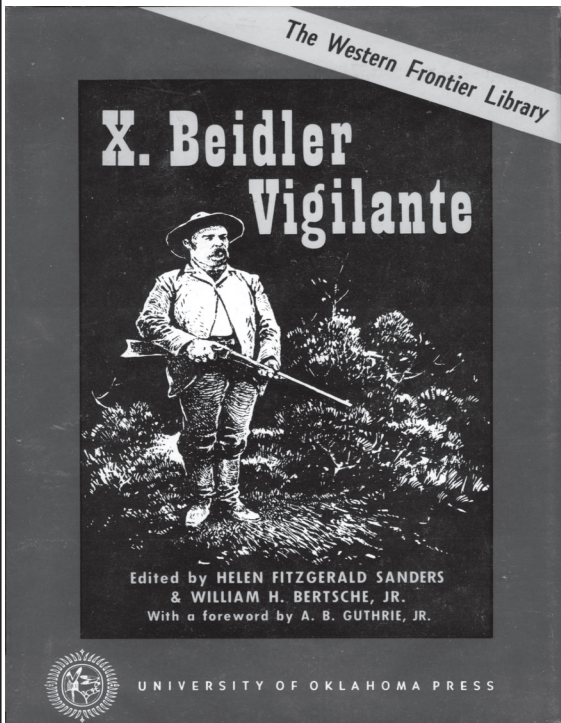
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## REVIEW:

### X. BEIDLER, VIGILANTE

Edited by: **HELEN FITZGERALD SANDERS & WILLIAM H. BERTSCHE JR.**



Whilst doing other research, I came across a news clipping from the October 20, 1887 Helena Herald that stated “*Beidler’s book still slumbers in the rough manuscript form*”. Besides the two known original versions of the Vigilante movement, a new version, by the Vigilante Lion himself? My interest was piqued. Further research revealed the current book under review.

Apparently Beidler had not kept a diary of the events that he was a principal participant, but in 1880 had dictated his reminiscences to James Ponsford, who transcribed them in longhand. The script was difficult to read, not in chronological order, and further complicated by undated newspaper clippings. According to Ms. Fitzgerald Sanders, daughter-in-law of Wilbur F. Sanders, the young attorney (and Vigilante) that persecuted George Ives, it was like putting together a jigsaw puzzle with many pieces missing.

What does emerge is a tantalizing story of vigilante justice that really doesn’t add any new information to the organization that wasn’t already known..

**Terry Halden**