

SUPERINTENDENT WEIR'S STONE HOUSE  
by John N. DeHaas, Jr.

Granite, now a ghost town four miles from Philipsburg, was once known nationally and in Europe as the "Silver Queen City of the World." Silver was first discovered in the general area in 1865 by Hector Horton...a discovery that led to the establishment of the Hope mine and the Township of Philipsburg; county seat of Granite County.

On July 14, 1875, the Granite Mountain Lode claim was recorded by James W. Estell, Eli O. Holland, and Dr. Jesiah M. Merrell, an assayer at the Hope mine. By 1880, the deeds of the Granite Mountain Lode claim had all been acquired by Charles D. McClure, superintendent of the Hope Mine. He formed a company to develop the claim and eventually received financial backing by St. Louis, Missouri investors.

After two years and \$130,000, the mine had yielded little to justify further investment, but in November of 1882, a rich silver bonanza shoot was made. Between the years 1882 and 1892 some twenty million dollars in silver and gold was produced by the Granite Mountain Mining Co.

The once-struggling mining camp boomed. The census of 1892 indicated that between 2,500 and 3,000 people lived on top of the mountain in Granite, and a like number lived in surrounding mining camps and mill sites. In the summer of 1888, the Granite Miners Union was formed. The Union built an impressive three story "Miners Union Hall" which had a huge auditorium-dance hall on the second floor. The dedication ball was held in the Hall on December 31, 1890, during the heyday of the town of Granite.

Thomas A. Weir, general manager of the A.Y. & Minnie at Leadville, Colorado, was hired by the Granite Mountain Mining Company and brought to Granite in December of 1888. He was born in Colia, a suburb of Cambridge, New York, on February 14, 1855, the son of John Weir, a wheelwright. Thomas attended Union College, Schenectady, N.Y., where he studied Civil Engineering and graduated at the head of his class in 1876. While in college he was a member of the Theological Society and Sigma Tau. His strong religious beliefs were to carry over into his professional life, he had been a Presbyterian Elder in Leadville, Colorado.

Thomas Weir was responsible for initiating many reforms in the operation of the mine and mill in Granite. At the time of his arrival in Granite, the men worked seven days a week. He ordered his foreman to place the operation on a six-day week. It is reported that the foreman protested that he could not possibly direct operations to ensure a profit for the investors on

this basis. Weir answered that he has a foreman in Leadville who was able to show a handsome profit on a six day work week and asked if he should send for him. The foreman quickly assured Superintendent Weir that he was sure he could do likewise.

This was one of the many changes in the operation at Granite. The Granite Mountain Star newspaper reported that on June 22, 1889, Weir had ordered the fumigation of the bunkhouse and a general cleanup; new bunks and bedding replaced the worst ones to avoid further sickness among miners. He also had a "drying room" constructed for the men at the shaft house and insisted that they change into dry clothes before venturing outside in weather that often reached 30° to 40° below zero.

The death rate from pneumonia was extremely high in the winter months. Weir also had a multi-story hospital built in the center of town. This frame building is still standing but probably will not survive another winter.

The Granite Mountain Mining Company had a fine stone house built for their superintendents in the 1880's...the residence is usually called the "Superintendent Weir Residence" because of Weir's long association with the Company. Reports of 1889 indicate the building standing then, as now, on Magnolia Avenue. This home was the only masonry building in town other than the mill foundation and bank vault until the Miners Union Hall was erected in 1889.

Being of more permanent materials than the wooden buildings of the town, it has survived to this time. The plan of the first floor includes a small centrally located vestibule on the west or front facade and a living room, dining room, kitchen with a food vault or "refrigerator" and a bedroom. The second floor was enclosed within the steep gable roof having two dormers on the west and a larger dormer centrally located on the east which served as a doorway from the upper road behind the building. There was no interior staircase between the two floors. The upper level served as an office for the mining operation.

This simple building has several unique features. The thick stone walls of native granite were furred out on the inside with 2x4's and covered internally with lath and plaster. The ceiling of the first floor was also plastered. Remains of several decorative wallpapers are evident even today. The doors are gone, the windows long ago broken out. The windows have stone sills and arched heads of brick. On the north there is a single half-circular window in the gable while a tall narrow rectangular door or window lights the gable of the south wall. The roof was covered with wood shingles.

The building has been vandalized over the years and the roof had caved in. The efforts of the Montana Ghost Town Preservation Society to build a new roof insures that the building will continue to stand, hopefully for many future generations to enjoy.

Granite died in 1893 with the Great Silver Panic of that year, though it has stirred feebly at intervals when economic conditions have changed. Much of the town has disappeared. Bottle diggers, artists, souvenir hunters and vandals have reduced the town to a few buildings and stone foundations. Yet it is still an impressive sight, this ghost town clinging to the top of Granite Mountain, a reminder of the mining era in the state of Montana.

