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Thomas Cruse: Forgotten Man Of Montana; A Study In Three Dimensions Of A Creative Personality Hidden In The Bedrock Of The Treasure State

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THOMAS CRUSE: FORGOTTEN MAN OF MONTANA

A Study in Three Dimensions of a Creative Personality Hidden in the Bedrock of the Treasure State

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of "Magna Cum Laude" Recognition to the Department of History

By

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by

[Signature]

Date May 1, 1959
PREFACE

Rarely today is the name of Thomas Cruse mentioned in historical works on the "Treasure State." Yet, in his own era there were those who believed that he would leave his mark in history. The compilers of the work, _Progressive Men of the State of Montana_ (circa 1900), went so far as to say: "It is impossible to estimate the value of a man like Colonel Cruse to the community in which he lives, for the reason that his services are beyond computation." Joaquin Miller (_An Illustrated History of the State of Montana, 1894_), and Helen Sanders (_A History of Montana, 1913_), also recognized this; in each work can be found a short biography of Cruse.

Very recently some renewed interest in this man has arisen. The periodical, _Montana, The Magazine of Western History_ (Spring, 1959), for instance, has a short article on his early career as a miner. But, in general, the life of this man has remained untouched.

This study is meant to be an historical reconsideration and re-evaluation of the life and career of an obscure millionaire of Montana's past. Some have made bold to assert that history has not done justice to Thomas Cruse. I choose to maintain a more cautious silence and let the facts herein presented speak for themselves.
The approach used in this thesis is "three-dimensional;" that is, the subject matter is presented in the light of Thomas Cruse: the man, the man of affairs, and the man of charity.

The material utilized has come from various sources. Among these, the most informative have proved to be the books mentioned above, newspaper items and feature articles, and personal letters and interviews.

The list of "Sources Cited" needs a word of explanation. For the sake of the reader's convenience, the most important news items and feature articles found in The Helena Independent, are listed separately. The remaining items referred to can be found in the variously dated papers catalogued collectively under: The Helena Independent.

An appendix has been included after the conclusion, in which photographs pertinent to the thesis may be found.

Those persons who, by their advice and help, played an important part in the completion of this thesis, I wish to acknowledge with deep gratitude. To Rev. James White, who suggested the subject of this thesis; to Rev. John McCarthy, who, by his advice and help, was invaluable in its composition; to Miss Virginia Walton and the staff at the Montana Historical Library, whose help and patience made the research possible; and to my wife, Marianne, who painstakingly typed the final draft, I owe a special note of gratitude.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The future of Montana, with her vast plains and rugged mountains, was partially decided in the emerald valleys and hills of Ireland by the birth of Thomas Cruse. Before the end of his eventful life, this Irish-born lad had become a significant figure in the history of the development of Montana. In the realm of personality and character, in the field of business, and in the practice of philanthropy the contributions he made were important and at the same time unique. To illustrate just how important and how unique is the purpose of this thesis.

However, before taking up the question of Thomas Cruse the man, the man of affairs, and the man of charity, a look must be taken at his life. This is necessary in order to obtain an over-all view of his activities from the time of his birth in Ireland, to that of his death in Montana.

Thomas Cruse was born in March, 1836, in County Cavan, Ireland, "of sterling Irish stock, possessed of that alert and vigorous mentality so characteristic of that race."\(^1\) It is alleged that he, as a young lad, was educated in the

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private schools of his native country. However, this education was either very short or highly unsuccessful, because years later, though a success as a business man, he could neither read nor write, and was forced to sign many official deeds with a simple X. Eventually, he did acquire the knack of signing his own name.

In 1856, the young Cruse began the long journey that ultimately brought him to Montana. Like many of the other men of his race around the mid-nineteenth century, he struck out for the "land of opportunity" and probably disembarked at New York City, though there is a possibility that he landed at Boston. Regardless of where he touched land, he soon found employment in the former city, and there he remained, working at odd jobs, until 1863.

In that year the lure of the West caught hold of him, and soon he ventured forth on the second leg of the journey destined to bring him to Montana. Whether he traveled by ship, crossing only the Isthmus of Panama by

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land,¹ or by stage-coach across the plains,² is again not important. He did reach San Francisco, and for the next three years he divided his time among the gold fields of the present states of California, Idaho, and Nevada.³

One decade after leaving Ireland, Cruse's wanderings ceased, for in the year 1866 he entered the territory of Montana, which was to be his home until his death many years later. His first attempt at prospecting upon his arrival was at Virginia City.⁴ Like many other prospectors at the time, however, he found that all that glitters is not gold, and he soon moved on, hoping to find better diggings.

His next recorded stop was at Helena on the night of July 3, 1867, which he "spent on the streets, as he could not find even a shelter under which to spread his blankets."⁵ Two days later he was back at work again, this time prospecting in Trinity Gulch, a few miles north of Helena.⁶ Although unsuccessful here also, he was gradually working closer to that pot of gold which, in the not too distant future, was to make him one of the rich men of Montana.

About this time Cruse ran into William Brown, an

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¹ Hedges, Progressive Men, p. 40.
² Harrison, Prominent and Progressive Americans, p. 74.
³ Hedges, loc. cit.
⁴ Miller, An Illustrated History, p. 416.
⁵ "Cruse," Newspaper Reference Work.
ancient old prospector who had been working the Silver Creek and Trinity Gulch areas for many years. Brown took a liking to the Irishman and offered him one of his placer claims. Cruse accepted and remained there for some time, as the claim rewarded his daily efforts with an average day's pay. It was while working this claim that he noticed pieces of gold quartz cropping up ever so often in his pan. When he confronted Brown with the possibility of the mother lode's being somewhere near, the latter shrugged it off, stating that he was strictly a placer miner. But this did not long deter the now determined Cruse, and soon he began the search. From time to time he would return to the placer and work out enough gold to buy a few days provisions; then he would renew his efforts.¹

Cruse's conviction that the gold was there and his persistence in hunting for it were finally rewarded. On May 19, 1875, evidently certain that he was on the right track, he recorded his claim, calling it the "Drumlummon,"² after a parish in his native county in Ireland.³ It is not certain whether or not he had actually uncovered the vein which was to make him famous at this time as the date usually given for the discovery of the mine is April of the

¹ "William Brown Kept Tom Cruse in Money to seek Old Drum Lummon," Cruse newspaper clipping file, Montana Historical Library, Helena.
² Joseph Oker, "Tenacious 'Old Irishman' proved Silver's Best Prospector," The Helena Independent, April 14, 1940, p. 9.
³ Hedges, Progressive Men, p. 40.
following year. Assuming that he had located the vein when he recorded the claim, the reason for the difference in dates may be that Cruse left the state for a short period immediately following his discovery and began developing the claim after his return. But a reason which seems more plausible, still assuming he had uncovered the vein in 1875, is that he carefully hid the results of his discovery until such time as he was ready to work the mine. In sinking his discovery shaft he had encountered water. To solve this problem he began the arduous task of constructing a tunnel into the side of the mountain. Because the finished product was over 200 ft. long and was cut out of ground which is largely composed of granite, it probably took him at least a year to finish it. At the same time, Cruse apparently kept his purpose well veiled, as even his old placer partner, Brown, seemed to think him "kind of odd," and tried to dissuade him from continuing the tunnel.

1. Miller, _An Illustrated History_, p. 416.
4. Ibid.
Many other prospectors were curious enough to sneak samples from the tunnel, but the results only seemed to confirm Brown's convictions, for they were always "of no value."¹ Thus, no one during the time that Cruse was digging his tunnel was aware of what discovery he had made, or of what goal he was relentlessly pursuing, if the above sources are factual. It is very possible that he was not credited with finding the vein until his tunnel was completed and the gold and silver were there for all to see.

Cruse's next move was to procure the means to mill the ore. Although it is a little difficult to determine just how he went about this, the following explanation seems to offer the best answer:

Having no money himself, Cruse had to look elsewhere for the solution to his problem. The answer came late in the year 1878, when William Mayger, returning to Marysville from Butte, signed a contract with him "for 2,000 tons of ore to be delivered on the dump of the Drum Lummon mine."² To mill this ore, he erected a five stamp mill, "the first silver amalgamation mill built in the county of Lewis and Clarke."³ After richer ore was uncovered, however, the two men had difficulty over the amount of royalties Mayger should receive, and, as a result

² Miller, An Illustrated History, p. 349.
³ Ibid.
Cruse borrowed $10,000 from Nate Vestal and bought the mill.  
This was in 1880.  

By this time the settlement across the creek had begun to prosper. The lure of gold and the possibility of employment at Cruse's mill were the biggest factors in this expansion, and, before too long, the scattered camps of the miners gave way to more permanent residences. Cruse himself was responsible for the naming of the town, calling it Marysville after Mrs. Frank Ralston, the former Mary Craig. As one of the first white women in the settlement, Mrs. Ralston operated a boarding house at which Cruse often ate. The town, still small at this time, continued to grow, and at one time during the decade 1885-1895, boasted a population of Circa 5,000.

For the next two years the Marysville Irishman was sole owner and operator of the Drumlummon mine. When he did relinquish this position in 1882, his retirement was chiefly due to the efforts of Henry Bratnober, a respectable mining engineer, and of a lawyer by the name of Colonel Sam Word. Bratnober had been given a free hand by a group of capitalists in England to purchase any mine which he thought

was worth the risk, and this is just what he proceeded to do.\(^1\) Hearing of the Drumulummon, he investigated, and was so pleased with what he saw that he immediately made Cruse an offer for the mine.\(^2\) The owner refused, however, and the dejected Bratnober had begun the long trip back East, when he happened to run into Word, one of the leading attorneys in the West at the time. After a short discussion with Bratnober, Word decided to try his hand in the matter, and he immediately got in contact with T.J. Lowry, the Helena attorney who handled all of Cruse's affairs. Very shortly, Lowry summoned the pair to Helena, and, after a short discussion, an agreement was reached.\(^3\) On November 11, 1882, Cruse agreed to the transfer of the mine to be made at some time before February 11, 1883, to the London Mercantile Association, the corporate name of the organization Bratnober represented.\(^4\) In return, Cruse received $625,000, to be payed in bi-monthly installments, and $875,000 in paid-up and non-assessable stock in whatever company was organized to work the mine.\(^5\) This stock was very valuable in the years to come, as the Drumulummon turned out to be all that Bratnober had anticipated.

Having succeeded at mining, Cruse now decided to

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
try his hand at ranching. Here again, his start was a very modest one, as the first piece of land he bought comprised only 160 acres.¹ This tract of land, obtained from W. C. Childs in 1885, was located about three miles east of "where the north fork of Flatwillow Creek leaves the timbered hills of the Snowy Mountains in central Montana."² Gradually he bought other plots of land, and, in 1889, purchased the cattle and the brand of the Niobrara Cattle Company, from which his ranch received the name, "N Bar".³ Until the disastrous winter of 1886-1887, this company, operated by Jesse Hasten, had been one of the largest outfits in eastern Montana, and, when Cruse bought him out, still owned between 5,000 and 6,000 head of stock cattle, together with 50 head of horses.⁴

In 1907, the aging Irishman seems to have been ready to let the ranch go as David Hilger, Wilford Johnson of Lewistown, and a few of their associates secured an option on the ranch lands and the sheep which Cruse owned at the time.⁵ Apparently, their plans did not materialize, because Cruse retained control of the ranch for another six

¹. Milburn, see above, p. 2, n. 3.
². Ibid.
³. Ibid.
⁴. "Tommy Cruse in the Cattle Business," The Rising Sun, Sun River, May 15, 1889, p. 1, c. 2, (For the cattle Cruse paid $19.75 a head with the calves thrown in, and for the horses, he paid $30 a head.)
During this period, he did have at least one chance to sell out, but he refused; in 1909, he turned down a $400,000 offer by Lewis Penwell of Helena.  

Only four years later, however, he changed his mind and for $350,000 he sold out completely. The land which he owned by this time comprised 18,000 acres, and had on it 800 head of cattle and 150 head of horses. Included among the buyers were the Holter brothers from Helena and Austin Warr of Lewistown.

Soon after he had entered the ranching business, three events occurred in Cruse's life which were of the utmost importance to him. The first was his marriage on the morning of March 2, 1886. In what the Helena Weekly Independent described as "the most brilliant ceremony that has ever occurred in the city of Helena," he and Miss Margaret Carter were joined in Holy Matrimony by Bishop John B. Brondel in the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart at Helena. Friends of the couple jammed the Cathedral and thronged to the reception afterwards at the Cosmopolitan

1. Scrapbook of newspaper clippings, Chancery Archives, Diocese of Helena, XII, p. 49.
2. Ibid.
3. Milburn, see above, p. 2, n. 3.
Hotel, which was "in every detail...the grandest ever given in Helena and worthy of its millionaire projector."\(^1\)

The year was rapidly drawing to a close when the final two events occurred in rapid succession. On December 16, the Irish miner's heart was again filled with joy, for on that day he became the proud father of a tiny daughter.\(^2\) Tragedy, however, was lurking just around the corner. A scant eleven days later, his wife died, leaving him alone with his infant daughter.\(^3\) Thus, in sorrow and grief ended the year which had held such promise in the life of Cruse.

Apparently not the type of man to let misfortune get him down, Cruse presently busied himself with another project. On May 28, 1887, he concluded a deal for a lot on the Dunphy block on which he planned to build a new deposit bank. For the property, which was 56 ft. wide on main street and 212 ft. in depth, Cruse paid the sum of $39,520.\(^4\) The "Thomas Cruse Savings Bank," for which this land was purchased, had been organized over two months earlier, on March 21, 1887, with a paid capital of $100,000. Of this tidy little sum, Cruse put up $65,000, C.L. Dahler $20,000, and T.H. Carter, E.J. Carter, and John B. Wilson, $5,000.

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The bank commenced business under territorial charter on September 1, 1887. As will be seen in the third chapter this bank was one of the most stable banks in Helena until its dissolution in 1915.

Within the next couple of years, the Colonel, a name he came to be known by in Helena, evidently moved into the house at 328 N. Benton Avenue which still stands today. The Helena City Directory first lists this address as his residence in 1889, though there is some evidence that he bought the house as early as 1886 as a home for his new bride. However, Cruse had planned some alterations and repairs for the house, and so the newly wedded couple probably stayed at the Cosmopolitan Hotel until such time as the work was to be completed. After the death of his wife, with the incentive for moving gone, the Colonel delayed changing his residence for some time, possibly until his niece Mary came to stay with him to look after his infant daughter, Mary Margaret.

The next decade seems to have been a relatively

3. Harrison, Prominent and Progressive Americans, p. 76.
4. 1889, p. 152.
6. Ibid.
quiet one in the Cruse household. Aside from an occasional trip to his ranch, operated chiefly by his relatives at this time, the business at the bank, and now and then a social gathering put on by his niece, the era seemed to have been one of quiet serenity for the Colonel. The fight over the site for the Capitol of Montana in 1894 temporarily interrupted this calm, and the ensuing victory for Helena was an occasion for a town-wide celebration at the Cruse house, at which time the Colonel is asserted to have said, "We're sittin' on top of the 'haep' now!" Things soon slacked off, however, and for the next few years he remained content to apply himself to the business at hand.

As 1898 rolled around, the Colonel again stepped into the limelight. On April 28, of that year, the Helena Weekly Herald ran an article praising Cruse for his purchase of the entire issue of Capitol bonds at the price of $350,000. The full significance of this transaction is not seen at once, and will be discussed in a later chapter. Before the news about the Capitol bonds had completely subsided, Cruse was knee deep in another new undertaking. Convinced that there was oil to be had for the taking in Carbon County, he organized a crew of men, and, on August 22, 1898, began work on the first oil well.

1. Milburn, see above, p. 2, n. 3.
3. Ibid.
ever drilled in Montana. For the next twelve years he persisted despite numerous difficulties, inadequate machinery, and devastating fires. Though oil was struck on several occasions, it was never brought to the surface in paying quantities, and when he finally quit, his ambition still had not been realized.

While his crew was unsuccessfully trying to draw oil from the ground of Carbon County, the Colonel was entangling himself in another fortune-consuming project, but, for the first time, in one from which he hoped for no material returns. Bishop Carroll of the Diocese of Helena, desiring to build a new cathedral, approached the old Irishman for the funds necessary to get the plan underway. In response to his request, Cruse donated $25,000 on November 8, 1905, for the purchase of the land where the proposed Cathedral was to be located. But this was only the beginning. Before he died in 1914, the Colonel had given between $200,000 and $250,000 for the erection of this new House of God. With this kind of help, work steadily progressed, and on Christmas day, 1914, the new Cathedral was dedicated. The man who had financed half of

1. "First Oil Explorations in Montana were directed by the Late Col. Thos. Cruse; Helena Co. drilling on Historic Ground," The Helena Independent, March 20, 1921, p. 8.
2. Ibid.
4. Ibid., ad passim.
the cost was not there for the momentous occasion; he had quietly passed away five days before.¹

Cruse's death had not come as a complete surprise. The health of the now elderly man had been gradually failing ever since his daughter had died in November of the previous year.² Then, on a trip to Marysville, about five weeks previous to his death, he had contracted a cold, and, in his old and weakened state, he had rapidly declined.³

At 2:30 in the afternoon of December 20, 1914, in the midst of many friends, Helena's Irishman departed this world.⁴ Very appropriately, his funeral Mass, sung in the new Cathedral one week later, was the first to be held in the magnificent new edifice he had helped to erect.⁵ Immediately after the Mass, his body was taken to Resurrection cemetery and there was placed in the huge mausoleum beside the bodies of his wife and daughter.⁶

Despite the munificent donations which Thomas Cruse had made to the Cathedral building fund and the expensive oil venture in which he had long engaged the estate which he left behind was valued at $1,500,000.⁷ In accordance

2. Chancery Archives, XII, p. 139.
4. Ibid.
5. O'Kennedy, see above, p. 2, n. 2.
with his last will and testament, dated January 6, 1914, this entire amount was divided among his fifteen living relations, after the payment of all outstanding debts.¹

Thus ends the life of Thomas Cruse, but not the memory of his exploits. To understand the man, and to be able to evaluate his importance in forming Montana's history, a closer look must be taken at the man himself, his significance in the world of business, and the lasting effects of his charity. These are the topics of the next three chapters.

¹. "Cruse Will is Filed," The Helena Independent, December 29, 1914, p. 1, c. 3.
Before attempting to evaluate the accomplishments of Thomas Cruse, some conclusion concerning the kind of man he was should be reached. To do this, one must take into consideration a wide variety of things. However, only the Colonel's more obvious characteristics will be taken up in this chapter, as well as those major factors in his early life which most influenced the pattern of his later life.

The most important of the background factors to be discussed fall under the headings, socio-economic, educational, and religious. These will first be delved into, as they are fundamental in explaining the development of Cruse's personality and character.

Ireland, during the period in which Cruse was born and raised, was anything but a land of freedom and happiness. Political oppression, overpopulation, and famines, made the lot of the Irish a very difficult one. In an attempt to escape these conditions, many of them began immigrating into the United States. With one such group, as we have seen

before, came the twenty-year-old Cruse. But things did not change immediately for this young immigrant even in this "land of freedom and opportunity." For the next twenty years, he had little money and probably less security. But he continued to travel and continued to search, until, finally, on a mountain in Montana, he discovered the mine that made him rich.

Apparently, Tommy Cruse never forgot completely the lean years he had spent before his momentous discovery. Although he eventually became noted as a friend of the needy and a great philanthropist, Cruse was never an indiscriminate giver. Having known the anxieties of rank poverty himself, he was willing to share his wealth with the less fortunate, but at the same time was careful not to give to the undeserving or the greedy. Thus Cruse would never give to an unknown solicitor until he first received a favorable report from some trusted friend.

Another factor that influenced his conduct in later life was his education, or, more correctly, his lack of it. Although he got along passingly well without it, his inability to read or write perhaps was a slight cause of annoyance to him. Some evidence for this is contained in a letter to the author from Father John O'Kennedy, a Catholic

1. Sweeney, see above, p. 12, n. 5.
2. Chancery Archives, XIII, p. 64.
3. Ibid.
priest who knew the old Irishman personally. Concerning the Colonel's education, Father O'Kennedy has the following to say:

Tommy Cruse was an old-country Irishman without any education. He could neither read nor write. He carried a prayerbook to Mass, but, pretending to read it, he held it upside down. His writing ability didn't go beyond the signing of his name.1

This deficiency may have had much to do with the hostile attitude he later seems to have developed toward education.

Again quoting Father O'Kennedy:

Had the old man a college education he would have been a wonder. Not having it he didn't see the need of it for others. Bishop Carroll couldn't get a nickel out of him for the college he was building. His reply to the Bishop was "I won't give you one red cent for your college. It will only be turning out a lot of wise 'gazeboes'. I have spent half my life trying to keep these people from taking my money from me."2

Perhaps Cruse did not realize the need for education, and then again perhaps he did. It is very difficult to bring oneself to believe that he could see no value in it whatsoever, when he himself took to church the prayer book, which he could not read. And if he actually was unwilling to help the cause of education at this time, the reason probably stemmed from his own feelings of inadequacy along this line, not simply from a failure to see a need for education. Also, he might have been embittered towards it because of unscrupulous attempts of educated men to

1. See above, p. 2, n. 2.
2. Ibid.
take his money from him. Regardless of the motive, his actions at this time and probably throughout his entire life, were tempered by his outlook on education.

The final, and the most important element in the early formation of the man named Thomas Cruse was his religious background. Born of Roman Catholic parents, he inherited a love for the Church which nothing ever changed.\(^1\) At this point it is enlightening to see what Bishop Carroll had to say about the Colonel at the latter's funeral Mass.

Coming to the subject of religion in Cruse's life, the Bishop stated:

> In the early days of this camp, when many miners spent their Sundays digging for gold or carousing in the dives that then abounded, he could be seen making his way on foot or on horseback to the log cabin where the missionary priest was to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Later, when fortune smiled down upon him, his carriage or his automobile was always before the little Cathedral on the hill, and he was always in his pew before divine service commenced. His devout assistance at the Mass and his earnest attention during the sermon were a source of edification to both clergy and laity.\(^2\)

Add to this devotion the generous donations Cruse made to the material well-being of his Church, and the result is a rare combination that is found in few men in the history of Montana. Of course, his motives for donating the money might be questioned, but as mentioned before, Cruse was not

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2. Ibid.
an indiscriminate giver: he gave only to causes which he thought worthy. Then too, the possibility that he gave it chiefly for the personal glory it would bring him seems completely out of accord with his over-all character.

Following this brief glance at the socio-economic, the educational, and the religious factors in his background, a look must be taken at the general personality and character of Cruse. Since the distinction between these two concepts is not very concise even among scholars, and since they are so closely associated,¹ no attempt will be made in this study to differentiate them, or to classify the various elements under one heading or the other.

To begin with, Cruse evidently was a man blessed with a sound body and good health. Nowhere has the author encountered any mention of his suffering from a serious illness. His death was attributed to the effects of a cold, but grief, also, played an important role, as the demise of his daughter in 1913 had marked the beginning of a decline in the "robust constitution" which had carried him through his many trials.² His faithful attention to his businesses right up to a few weeks before his death,³ as well as his vigorous life before he became rich, gives testimony to his

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3. Ibid.
physical fitness. Indeed, it does not seem possible, otherwise, that he could have accomplished what he did.

That Cruse was a man of determination cannot be denied. It was the driving force behind his long days of futile searching for the vein that became the Drumlummon, in the lonely and dreary days he spent digging his tunnel by hand,1 and in the fruitless and expensive years during which he persisted in his search for oil in Carbon County. In all these ventures, a less determined man might have quit, but not the Colonel. He persevered, and he was rewarded except in the oil fields, where his advancing age and failing health forced him to quit.2

Hand in hand with this determination was an element of conviction. Only a firm belief on his part that there was gold in Drumlummon hill explains his determination to find it. The same applies to his search for oil in Carbon County. Again, his faithful adherence to, and practice of his native religion implies that his actions were based on principles and convictions, not on passing whims. In politics, the same seems to be true. Apparently convinced that the Democratic party had the most to offer to a man in his position, he became and remained an ardent Democrat for the rest of his life.3 On the other hand, his hostile

attitude towards education seems to be an exception, because his reasons, regardless of what they were, could not have been well founded. But, on the contrary, it really helps to demonstrate the argument, as he apparently changed his attitude later, and immediately began acting accordingly.\(^1\)

In general, then, it might be said that once Cruse made up his mind, he relentlessly followed a course of action congruous with his decision.

At this point, it is necessary to consider the man in terms of intelligence and soundness of judgment. As a businessman, Cruse seemed to have been possessed of very good judgment. A success as a miner, as a rancher, and as a banker, and on the right track, though unrewarded, in his search for oil,\(^2\) Cruse made a fortune in the same fields in which other men, rich and poor, had struggled in vein and died in poverty. Though it is true that mines like the Drummond were not very numerous, nevertheless, the vein that made Cruse rich had been there for years before he entered the picture. At least three other men had some suspicion of its existence prior to Cruse's discovery,\(^3\) but, for one reason or another, all three failed to profit from their knowledge.\(^4\) Also, it seems logical to deduce

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2. O'Kennedy, see above, p. 2, n. 2.
4. "Omaha Newspaper Tells Story of Late Colonel Cruse's Life," The Helena Independent, January 8, 1915, p. 5, c. 5; 6, 7; Oker, The Helena Independent, April 14, 1910, p. 9; Miller, An Illustrated History, p. 349.
that many other placer miners had noticed the same type of quartz in their pans that started Cruse on his search, but only the Colonel placed enough significance in it to uncover the vein.

The same is true in his ranching and banking. During the same era in which many ranches were ruined by drought, over-grazing, and squatters, Cruse's ranch prospered;\(^1\) and while two depressions closed the doors of several Montana banks, the "Thomas Cruse Savings Bank" remained open and solvent.\(^2\) This consistent success where others often failed cannot be traced entirely either to luck or to his financial resources; it must, therefore, lie partially in his native intelligence.

However, his stand on education continues to present a problem. As has been seen in discussing his background, it probably came from his own personal feelings and not from a failure to see a value in, and a need for, education. But, as previously stated, he evidently changed his attitude, as later he was credited with "a heavy contribution to St. Charles college",\(^3\) and also one to Montana Wesleyan University, a Methodist institution in Helena for some time.\(^4\) If these sources are accurate and Cruse did change his mind it seems reasonable to conclude,

\(^1\) Milburn, see above, p. 2, n. 3.
\(^2\) O'Kennedy, p. 2, n. 2.
\(^3\) Chancery Archives, XI, p. 71.
\(^4\) The Helena Independent, December 21, 1914, p. 8.
that his original attitude was a somewhat irrational one. However, it also indicated that he was one who could modify his opinion, admitting he was wrong, once he saw that he was in error. This also is a sign of good judgment.

Another quality for which Cruse was noted was his integrity.\(^1\) This is something which was sorely lacking in many another of Montana's rich men of the time, but it is to Cruse's credit that all who write of him considered him to be an honest and upright man. Nevertheless, he was not one to pass up driving a sharp bargain whenever it was possible. Already we have seen that Mayger sold out to him over a dispute concerning royalties, and for a price that was very insignificant when compared to the value of the mine. Vestal, the man who loaned him the money to buy the mine, also found him a hard man to do business with. Because of the "extremely sharp bargain" Cruse drove with him, Vestal received merely "a moderate return on the money he had 'invested.'"\(^2\) But in neither case could Cruse be accused of dishonesty. The men he dealt with simply were not aware of the value of the project in which they were temporarily engaged.

Loyalty is another virtue which pervades Cruse's life. He never forgot his old friends, even after he

\(^1\) Sanders, History of Montana, II p. 982.
became rich, and often he went out of his way to help them. His companionship with Brown, his old placer-mining associate, continued long after Cruse struck it rich. Repeatedly, he offered to "stake" Brown, but the old prospector always refused, preferring independence and poverty. The Colonel soon found another way to help the reluctant miner though. After Cruse opened his bank, Brown started selling his gold to him, and was invariably overpaid for it. When Brown finally discovered what was happening, he was a little incensed and is supposed to have hurled at his stealthy benefactor the following invective:

Tommy Cruse, I want to speak my mind to you. I believe you have been giving me all the best in it in buying my gold. You have no right to do this. No man can give me money. I hate to mess up your face, but I have a big mind to do it.

However, nothing serious came out of the episode, and the two remained close friends. Never did the Colonel go to Marysville without seeing the old miner, and often-times he would slip down to Brown's cabin, and offer to help him cook a "square meal."

Another incident, this time not involving a friend, sheds additional light on Cruse's person. While developing his mine, he had been advised to borrow some money from a certain moneylender in Helena. This the Colonel decided

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
to do, but on confronting the moneylender with the idea, he was greeted with a "fine line of free advice, coupled with the moneylender's assurance that he would rather throw paper money into the furnace of his satanic majesty than loan it to such a shiftless fellow."¹

Years later, one of the early visitors to the new "Thomas Cruse Savings Bank" was this same moneylender. Their fortunes had been reversed, and the Colonel, upon being asked for a loan, rose to the occasion by escorting the man to the door, leaving with him, in the emphatic language of the West, the assurance that he too "would rather throw his money into the furnaces of his satanic majesty than loan it to such a shiftless fellow...."²

However, Cruse apparently did not make a practice of remembering old grievances. Bishop Carroll, at the Colonel's funeral, had the following to say on this topic:

A man in Mr. Cruse's position and environment must naturally have enemies, and a man of his character is naturally inclined to resent injuries. To trample upon personal feelings and to forgive those who injure us is hard on flesh and blood. But by the power of Divine Grace, Thomas Cruse rose above himself, and one of his last addresses was: "forgive and forget."³

Loyal to his friends, Cruse was no less loyal to his Church, his city, and his state. It has been seen

¹ "Omaha Newspaper Tells Story of Cruse's Life," The Helena Independent, January 8, 1915, p. 5, c. 5, 6, 7.
² Ibid.
³ "Cruse laid to Rest," The Helena Independent, December 27, 1914, p. 6, c. 2.
before, that he supported the building of the new Cathedral; that he backed Helena in the Capitol fight of 1894; and that he purchased the entire issue of Capitol bonds. By serving the interests of Montana in these and other ways, Thomas Cruse deserves recognition merited by few other tycoons of his day. Helen Sanders elaborates on this in her *History of Montana*:

Colonel Thomas Cruse is a Montanan all the time, and in this respect is a rarity among men who have wrested great fortunes from the rugged mountains and smiling valleys of the Treasure State. He elects to remain where he made his fortune, and to use it in the development of more wealth for the benefit of his fellowman. Twenty-five thousand dollars a year is a conservative estimate of the amount of money annually expended by Colonel Cruse in the exploration and development of mines. In his home city, Helena, he is identified with every vital and living thing looking to the advancement of social and religious progress. His contributions to religious institutions alone within the past few years have amounted to more than half a million dollars, and he was by far the greatest contributor toward the beautiful new Cathedral in his home city.1

The Colonel also seems to have been a very likable person. Many men who had worked at his mill in Marysville thought enough of him as an employer to make the occupational change from miner to ranch hand and the geographical transfer from Marysville to Flatwillow Creek in order to accept a job on Cruse's new ranch.2

The presence of the immense crowd of mourners at his funeral, including old prospectors, businessmen, and

1. II, p. 981.
2. Milburn, see above, p. 2, n. 3.
people from all other walks of life, is likewise an indication
of his popularity.¹

Helena's bankers in particular showed respect and
good will for their former associate by closing the doors
of their banks during the two hours of his funeral.² From
everywhere came "many expressions of genuine regret...from
men and women in every walk of life.³

Before concluding this section the following
excerpts taken from paragraphs describing the Colonel may
prove both enlightening and interesting.

The first, written by Joseph Oker for The Helena
Independent, is a picturesque description of the Colonel:

During his years on Silver Creek he was an
enigma, as stocial as the Sphinx. A descendent
to the plebian class in his native Ireland it seems
that the years of oppression of his ancestors
entered his soul and was expressed in his rugged
and sombre exterior. He seemed to feel the
hardships of the many crushing years. No partners
aided in his undertakings, he was the Lone Ranger
of stern resolution. But he had vision, confidence
and determination. Singlehanded he drove his tunnel
through the massive granite, into the treasure
house his vision anticipated. There in the dark
and dismal chambers with walls wet as if with the
sweat of human agony he toiled with pick and gad
to wrench the precious metals from the miserly
clutch of the rocks. But subsequent events brought
his greatest griefs. Endowed with a good measure
of native business acumen, he managed his enlarged
affairs with remarkable sagacity. But the simple

¹ "Cruse Laid to Rest," The Helena Independent,
December 27, 1914, p. 6, c. 2.
² "Banks to Close During Funeral," The Helena Independent,
December 24, 1914, p. 6, c. 3.
³ "Colonel Cruse Buried Saturday," The Helena Independent,
December 22, 1914, p. 10, c. 2.
life he lived so many years, no doubt were his happiest, for sudden wealth surely brings sudden and strange responsibilities. 1

Another, taken from Progressive Men of the State of Montana, extols Cruse as follows:

In the annals of Montana, from the early pioneer epoch, there has been perhaps identified with her history no more distinctly unique and individual character than Thomas Cruse. His life has been marked by consecutive toil and endeavor, by modesty and unpretentiousness and crowned with success unusual to man. It has been a life of hard work, self-reliance, and integrity, and its success has been worthily achieved. It has also been a life of kindliness and charity, and thus has borne its concomitant helpfulness. 2

Finally, in her History of Montana, Helen Sander's has the following to say about the Colonel:

It is impossible to estimate the value of a man like Colonel Cruse to the community in which he lives, for the reason that his services are beyond computation. Coming to Montana in his young manhood, he has poured out without stint his energy and ability in the development of his state. . . .

His life history is an inspiration to all aspiring young men, and will long be referred to as an example well worth following, for the brilliant success achieved from advantages that were not as good as the average. 3

The few facts described in this chapter are intended to provide the broad outline of a character which in many ways bears study and imitation. In following the call to a career, Thomas Cruse saw his personal life

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1. April 14, 1940, p. 9.
take on an importance which was unique of its kind.
For the Colonel was not only a credit to himself, but
to the religion in which he believed, the community in
which he lived, and the businesses in which he was
engaged. With this in mind, the focal point of this
discussion now turns to chapter three, in which Cruse
is studied in the light of his business ventures.
CHAPTER III

THOMAS CRUSE: THE MAN OF AFFAIRS

Having seen briefly the different occupations in which Thomas Cruse became involved before his death, we are now faced with the problem of pointing out their significance. To do this, and thus to demonstrate Cruse's importance as a business man, or as a man of affairs, is the concern of this chapter.

First of all, the Colonel's career as a miner involves much more than has been previously mentioned. For one thing, the existence of Marysville is chiefly the result of the success which this Irish immigrant had in finding and in opening up the Drumlummon mine. This assertion is substantiated by the fact that the once thriving community of approximately 5,000 persons has now become nearly a ghost town. No better reason for this phenomenal transition can be given than the closing of the Drumlummon. Of course, it might be argued that the other mines and other factors in the vicinity also were important in the growth and decline of the settlement. This is true, to a certain extent. But the prosperity of the Drumlummon was by far the most significant element in this process, as it was both the closest mine to the town, and by far the most valuable. Consequently, it was during the years 1885-
1895, when the Drumlummon reached its peak by producing $20,000,000 worth of ore,¹ that the population of the town was at its highest.² The subsequent decline in the amount of gold and silver produced by the mine, as well as the diminishing price of silver,³ was accompanied by a similar decline in the population of the town, and by 1899 many of the residents who had not already left were on their way out.⁴ Thus, the prosperity of the mine that had once belonged to Cruse became a barometer by which the well-being of the town could be determined. And to the people who lived there this made it of the utmost importance.

Going back just a bit, the sale of the mine itself was quite an important event in the area. Since Cruse himself could never have developed it as rapidly as did the Montana Company, because of his lack of finances, many Montanans looked on the transaction with favorable eyes. Shortly after the deal was made, the company set aside $500,000 for the sole purpose of developing the mine. In

3. In 1893, Congress on the recommendation of President Cleveland had repealed the Sherman Silver Purchase Act which reduced the market for silver. This action along with the Panic of that year, had disastrous effects on the price of silver. For further information see: John D. Hicks, The American Nation, 3d ed.; Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1955, pp. 231, 232.
an article on the sale, the Helena Weekly Herald considered this as well as the profits Montanans would realize once the mine began operating, as possibly the "beginning of the harvest in Montana." "In a sense it was, for in years to come Montana's railroads, freighters, merchants, wholesalers, retailers, and miners, plus the county and the state, all shared in the wealth yielded by the mine. The profit produced was no insignificant sum either, as before its doors were closed the mine had yielded around $50,000,000 in gold and silver ore.

That only a relatively small amount of this sum remained in Montana was to be expected, as the owners of the mine were never residents of the State, except of course Cruse himself. However, the fact that another $8,000,000 also enriched the out-of-state owners, and not Montanans, was the result only of action the state itself had unwittingly taken. The whole thing started because Silver Creek was the water source for the outfits working the Drumlummon, and also the carrier of the tailings from the mills. Because such a great quantity of this waste material was being dumped in the creek, Montana, shortly after becoming a state, adopted a new law which "provided that all

3. As defined by Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary: "Refuse material separated as residue in the preparation of various products, as in...treating ores."
tailings from quartz mills and placer mines be impounded to prevent flooding the agricultural lands below."1 As a result, the Montana Company had to buy the small chicken farms and worked-out placer ground for $80,000, a price they considered exorbitant.2 However, when the cyanide method of treatment of ores was developed, a million tons of these tailings were treated, averaging eight dollars a ton.3 So the "investment" they made with much reluctance was as fortunate for them in the long run as it was unfortunate for the farmer owners of the land.

The exploitation of the produce of the mine did not end with the cyanide process, however. Around 1940, a dredge was set up down the creek from the mine, and soon began to take out what Joseph Oker described as "another fortune."4

Another reason why the sale was important to the people in the area is that they had high hopes it would stimulate the development of other mines. Because of the risk involved, financiers were reluctant to invest their money in these mines, and the resulting lack of capital had made development of them practically impossible.5

It didn't take long to prove that these hopes were

2. Ibid.
4. Oker, loc. cit.
well founded. The claims that sprang up around the
Drumlummon bore the name of many an eastern speculator;
the developments which began on them and on strikes already
made were financed by many of the same.¹

On a more limited scale, all the men who helped
conclude the sale also profited immensely. The Froid
Tribune in a special article on the transaction made the
following statement:

Bratnober got a big commission. Jeff Lowry was
handsomely remunerated. Sam Word's share went
into big figures. Hugh McCuaid drew down a
goodly sum and a chum of his named Chadburne,
was also one of the beneficiaries.²

Although the Drumlummon was the only mine mentioned
in connection with Cruse in chapter I, it was not by far the
only one with which he was associated. At one time or
another between 1885-1914, he either operated or owned the
following mines: the Cruse and Bald Mountain gold and Silver
mines located in the Marysville district; the Franklin mine,
a gold producer which, until he developed it, had "lain idle
for forty years;"³ the West Belmont mines, which he also
developed;⁴ and, finally, the Scratch Gravel mine in the

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¹ J.T. Pardee and F.C. Schrader, Metalliferous Deposits
of the Greater Helena Mining Region of Montana, Washington:
² "When Cruse Sold the Drumlummon," July 6, 1923, p. 2.
³ "Cruse Dies at his Residence," The Helena Independent,
December 21, 1914, p. 8, c. 2.
Scratchgravel hills,\(^1\) which he began developing only a year before his death.\(^2\)

As a miner, then, it can be safely asserted that Colonel Thomas Cruse played a valuable role in Montana's mineral development. Not only did he personally discover one of the state's big gold and silver mines, but he also played an important part in developing several others.

Turning next to Cruse as a rancher a few interesting and important things must be noted. First of all, starting out with only 160 acres, he was able to build, in less than thirty years, one of the largest and most noted cattle and sheep ranches of the period.\(^3\) At one time Cruse is said to have owned 35,000 head of sheep and 10,000 head of cattle.\(^4\) His sheep holdings were claimed to be "second to those of no man in Montana and his wool clip each year was among the big ones of the Northwest."\(^5\)

That the Colonel's financial resources were very important in the expansion of this ranch, cannot be denied, for without an ample supply of money he could never have gotten the ranch started. Also, it enabled him to "hold his wool when the market was not good, and the result was that

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1. These hills occupy an area "about 3 miles wide and 4 miles long from North to South that begins about 2 miles north of Helena."; Pardee, The Greater Helena Mining Region, p. 35.
3. Chancery Archives, XII, p. 49.
4. Milburn, see above, p. 2, n. 3.
5. Chancery Archives, XIII, p. 64.
he made a great deal of money out of the business."\(^1\)

However, money was not the sole reason for the success of the ranch. Many were the large ranch owners in Montana who were ruined by the freezing winters, the choking droughts, the advancing homesteaders and the panics which plagued the Northwest at that time.\(^2\) Yet, the "N Bar" grew tremendously despite all obstacles. One explanation for this, besides his great wealth, might be the efficiency with which Cruse apparently operated the ranch. This is indicated in the way he kept it up as seen in "the improvements and the high grade of equipment, everything being first class,"\(^3\) which characterized the "N Bar."

Although Cruse did not run the ranch himself, he definitely exerted a control over the operations. Jack Milburn points this out by mentioning a little quirk that Cruse had in preferring ox teams to horses as means of towing freight wagons. In Milburn's own words:

Mr. Cruse insisted on using ox teams as much as possible.... An old man once told me that he drove oxen here in the 90's and that Cruse insisted on his using four at all times.\(^4\)

Also, the "N Bar" was somewhat unique in at least one other respect, again due to Cruse's ideas on how things should be done. Although he did utilize the traditional

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1. Chancery Archives, XIII, p. 64.
4. See above, p. 2, n. 3.
method of the "cattle drive" for moving cattle, he also employed another method which was used only sparingly by ranchers in Montana. This method as explained by Anna Zellick in her answer to how cattle were brought into the state is as follows:

In at least one instance cattle were shipped part way by railroad. This was in 1885 when Charles Anceny, a Bozeman cattleman, and T.C. Cruse of the N-Bar Ranch shipped 2,000 head of cattle from Washington and Oregon on the Northern Pacific Railroad. The cattle were unloaded at Billings and from there trailed to the N-Bar ranch on Flatwillow Creek.1

After the N Bar had expanded to its maximum size, the supplies needed to keep it going often reached staggering quantities. In a letter to the author from Walter Lehman of Lewistown, this fact stands out very forcefully. At one point in the letter he states:

Back in 1905 our family ran a large general store here in Lewistown and we sold the N Bar the largest bill of goods ever sold in a single order to a Montana ranch. It ran something over $6,000.00 and items on it were 3 cars of salt, 200 sacks of flour, 100 sacks of sugar, 50 cases of baking powder and 100 sacks of ham and bacon.2

Lewistown was not the only town the N Bar traded with. In fact, until the Milwaukee Road had completed the railroad line between Grasrange and Lewistown circa 1904, the latter town saw very little of the Colonel's outfit.3

2. See above, p. 10, n. 4.
3. Ibid.
Up to this time most of the ranch's trade was done at Billings. Once a year the wool crop was hauled there and the same teams returned, loaded with supplies. In addition to the groceries purchased, much food was raised on the ranch, and sheep and cattle were butchered as needed.

As has been seen before, Cruse eventually sold the N Bar, but not until he had left a permanent mark on the surrounding area. This ranch, which was very important in the development of Fergus County, still flourishes today under the able management of G.R. Milburn, who at present, is the President of the American National Cattleman's Association.

Before closing this section on Cruse as a rancher, one might also mention that at least one source credits him with having owned at one time another big ranch in Gallatin county. Whether or not this is true, (and it seems very possible that it is true if one compares his ranching activities to his mining activities), is difficult to determine due to lack of source material. The only conclusion to be reached is that if Cruse did own such a ranch, it was neither as large as nor as well known as the

1. Milburn, see above, p. 2, n. 3.
2. Ibid.
4. Lehman, see above, p. 10, n. 4.
N Bar, and therefore not as important.

The time lapse between the beginnings of the N Bar and the establishment of the "Thomas Cruse Savings Bank" was a short one, as has already been seen. Incorporated March 21, 1887,¹ this bank was supposedly the first savings bank of its kind ever organized in Montana.² And despite Cruse's lack of a formal education, his bank became known for its success and stability. In his work, An Illustrated History of the State of Montana, published in 1894, Miller stated that it was "one of Montana's most solid financial institutions," as well as "one of the most prosperous... of its kind..."³ This attribute of solidity, or stability, the bank retained until its purchase by and consolidation with the "Montana Trust and Savings Bank," shortly after the Colonel's death.⁴ It survived the panic of 1893; and according to Father J. O'Kennedy:

In the 1907 depression when there was a run on the Helena banks, his was the only one that people had complete confidence in. He used to take them in and show them the pile of gold he was holding and which was more than sufficient to guarantee them the safety of their deposits.⁵

To say that the bank remained as prosperous as it was at the time of Miller's statement, however, would not

¹ "New Savings Bank," The Helena Daily Herald, March 22, 1887, p. 3, c. 3.
² Miller, An Illustrated History, p. 417.
³ Ibid.
⁵ See above, p. 2, n. 2.
be correct. Business slowly declined in the last two decades of its existence. Nevertheless, this was not necessarily due to a lack of trust in the institution on the part of the people. The chief reason probably lies in the fact that Helena, by December 31, 1914, had the grand total of five banks in operation. With this kind of competition, it was nothing unusual to lose business now and then. Instead, the fact that the bank was still operating at the time of Cruse's death gives testimony to his native business ability.

A quotation from the Helena Weekly Herald of April 28, 1898, aptly introduces the next incident in the life of Thomas Cruse: the man of affairs. On this day the resident of Helena upon opening his copy of the paper might have read the following:

The name of Thomas Cruse has received another claim to fame in addition to the distinction that came from locating and selling the great Drum Lummon mine. The future history of Montana will not be very complete if it fails to devote a liberal amount of space to Mr. Cruse. In a spirit of liberality and foresight perhaps never displayed on such a large scale in the state's history by any one of our citizens he has agreed to take the entire issue of the capitol bonds at par thereby assuring the speedy completion of the new state

house.1

But the significant thing about the Colonel's action in this case was not simply the size of the issue, which amounted to $350,000.2 What made it outstanding, was the fact that the state commission, appointed in March, 1897, by Governor Robert B. Smith to supervise the planning for the proposed new capitol building,3 was unable to dispose of the bonds.4 Eastern buyers were hesitant to purchase them because they believed that the security backing the issue was "not for the present sufficient to pay the interest."5 After Cruse had agreed to the transaction, however, these same buyers apparently concluded that they had passed up a good thing.6 And if this was their thinking, they were perfectly correct, because Cruse received every cent of interest and principal which the agreement called for, and, as a result, made a great deal of money.7 But this does not detract from the fact that Cruse was willing to take an immense risk where others were not. Behind this willingness can lie only one of two things: either Cruse was an intensely loyal and patriotic Montanan, or he had a business insight which many others lacked. In either case,

2. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
the conclusion drawn can only be of credit to him.

The final subject in this chapter is concerned with Cruse's long and futile attempt to add to his successes as a miner, a rancher, a banker, and a financier, by operating a producing oil well. With this in mind, the Colonel attacked the ground of Carbon County with the same "bulldog" determination that had carried him through the granite rock of Drumlummon hill to the gold and silver beyond. For he was convinced that oil was there, and he was determined that he would find it. This spirit of conviction and determination stands out in every line of the following quotation taken again from Father O'Kennedy's letter:

He seemed to have a sixth sense for discovering minerals. He was the first man to drill for oil in Montana and did this years before any one dreamt there was oil in the State.... His equipment was naturally very inadequate. Some U.S. geologists happened along and asked what he was doing. When he told them, they advised him to drill closer to the mountains. Tommy didn't appreciate the advice and told them so. He was paying for the drilling and this was the location he had selected and this was where he was staying.1

And stay he did. From August 22, 1898, until late in the year 1911, Cruse's drill stabbed into the hard and sometimes rocky ground. But all in vain, for the oil he anticipated was never brought to the surface in a profitable way.2

But the important thing is that the oil was there.

1. See above, p. 2, n. 2.
A little further on in his letter, Father O'Kennedy states that, "I have been told oil has since been discovered not too far from where he had set up his rig." And had Cruse been able to continue his efforts for another few years, he might well have been Montana's first oil baron, as Carbon County today is one of the top oil producing counties in the State.\footnote{Montana, A State Guide Book, pp. 30, 85.} As it was, he started the ball rolling, and for this reason alone he deserves what The Helena Independent of March 20, 1921, said of him in an article featuring his search for oil:

The historian, if he be a real historian, will hark back a quarter of a century, and engross the name of the late Colonel Thomas Cruse, pioneer prospector, mine operator, millionaire, banker, and financier, on the tablets as the first oil operator and discoverer of "liquid gold" in this commonwealth.\footnote{"First Oil Explorations Directed by Cruse," p. 8.}

But in engrossing his name on the "tablets" as the "first oil operator," the "real historian" must not overlook the significance of the other titles given to Cruse above. His endeavors as a "pioneer prospector, mine operator, millionaire, banker, financier," and rancher, also merited for him a share of lasting fame.
CHAPTER IV

THOMAS CRUSE: THE MAN OF CHARITY

Of the several large and imposing structures in the capital city of Montana, the Roman Catholic Cathedral of St. Helena has stood supreme for the last half century. Towering high over the surrounding city, this Gothic masterpiece is the greatest single tribute to the man whose charity made its erection possible. Because of the vital role played by the Colonel, a few of the highlights concerning its construction will be mentioned here.¹

Before doing so, however, it should be noted that the benovolence of the Colonel was by no means limited to this one instance. Several other institutions and agencies, as well as private individuals were likewise objects of his charity. However, these matters will be left until later in the chapter, since the Cathedral, of all the beneficiaries, was by far the most fortunate.

Although the finished Cathedral was a product solely of John P. Carroll's years as Bishop of the Helena Diocese, the idea of such a structure was not his alone. The first Bishop of the Diocese, John B. Brondel, had voiced

¹ A detailed account of the erection of the Cathedral has been written by the Rt. Rev. Victor Day in his book, The Cathedral of St. Helena.
his desire to build a new house of God just shortly after the turn of the century.\(^1\) According to Msgr. Day, the Most Reverend Alexander Christie, "Archbishop of Oregon City and Metropolitan of the ecclesiastical province of Oregon" also had similar ideas. Following Bishop Brondel's death, Archbishop Christie had come to Helena for the installation of the new Bishop, John P. Carroll. Towards evening of the same day of the ceremony, the two had discussed the diocese's need of a larger cathedral, and later the Archbishop "introduced Colonel Thomas Cruse to Bishop Carroll and suggested to the Colonel that he help the young Bishop to build the new Cathedral."\(^2\)

Bishop Carroll soon began making plans for the materialization of this perennial desire. After some discussion with the Colonel, the Bishop picked what he thought to be the best site for the proposed new building. Soon after, as we have seen before, the first positive step in the project was taken, when Cruse donated the $25,000.00 required for the purchase of the site.

Within the next two years, the undertaking gradually gained momentum, chiefly because of two things. The first was the appointment of a "Building Committee and Advisory Board" by the Bishop as an aid to him in carrying out the work the planning would entail. This group consisted

\(^1\) Day, Cathedral of St. Helena, pp. 1, 2.
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 2.
of many notable men, including Cruse, and became a very important factor in the construction of the Cathedral.  

The second was a donation in two installments by Peter Larson, "the well-known, 'mining man, lumber king and railroad contractor.'" These generous offerings, amounting to $50,000, were the first significant ones given to the building fund, as such, and actually marked the beginning of work on the building.

The next problem was the selection of the style of architecture to be used. After some discussion between the Bishop and the members of the building committee, it was decided that a Gothic type structure would be as beautiful as, and perhaps more inspirational than, a Byzantine or Roman type. Very quickly, other minor questions were settled, the architect was selected, the contract was let, and all was made ready for the commencement of the work.

Meanwhile the building committee was making definite plans for the raising of funds. Different methods were discussed and the best agreed upon, with most of the parish cooperating in the decisions made. Despite the fact that no new record donations were made at this time, the faithful contributions of the congregation caused the fund to increase steadily in size.

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2. Ibid., p. 9.
3. Ibid., pp. 18-25.
4. Ibid., pp. 15-17, 31-34.
5. Ibid., pp. 25-30.
Approximately three years after Cruse had purchased a site for the Cathedral, the cornerstone was laid amidst a large and enthusiastic crowd of Church nobility, priests, and people. Congratulatory letters were received from far and near, the most notable ones coming from the Holy Father, and from the President of the United States. Archbishop Christie and others voiced their congratulations to the people of the Helena Diocese for the work they were doing. Bishop Carroll spoke briefly of what the future held in store; then concluded the ceremony with his blessing.\(^1\)

For the next three months, there was little progress to note around the construction area. Then, in the first week of 1909, Bishop Carroll made an announcement which enkindled anew the hopes of all involved in the cathedral project. An anonymous donor had promised to contribute the grand sum of $100,000 to the building fund, provided the people of Helena would pledge a like sum on or before the following Easter. With overflowing enthusiasm, the Building Committee created the "One-Hundred-Thousand-Dollar Club," and prepared to launch an all-out campaign to raise the money.\(^2\)

As Easter Sunday loomed nearer, suspense began to increase. Anywhere in town people could be heard speculating excitedly as to whether or not the golden opportunity was going to slip away unrealised. The Building Committee worked

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1. Day, Cathedral of St. Helena, pp. 34-44.
2. Ibid., pp. 44-49.
frantically to get the necessary pledges, even to the extent of asking non-Catholics for contributions. But as the crucial day drew nearer, it was apparent that the race was being lost. On Holy Saturday Msgr. Day reluctantly reported that the "One-Hundred-Thousand-Dollar Club" was still $28,000 short of its goal.¹

At this point, with time so short and the goal so near, Bishop Carroll determined to visit Colonel Cruse to beseech him to supply the difference. While he was unsuccessfully looking for the Colonel at his residence, however, Tommy had taken it upon himself to drop in at the rectory in order to inquire how much of the required sum was lacking. Upon receiving the answer from Msgr. Day, he immediately agreed to pay the $28,000.²

Easter Sunday, the following day, was one of the most joyful ever celebrated in Helena. The announcement of the Colonel's timely donation was made by Bishop Carroll after the celebration of the Pontifical High Mass. According to Day:

When Mr. Cruse emerged from the Cathedral at the conclusion of the Pontifical Mass..., his countenance beaming with purest joy and wreathed with smiles, the members of the congregation gave him a well-deserved ovation—which he remembered with gladness to his dying day.³

With the addition of $200,000 to the Cathedral

1. Day, Cathedral of St. Helena, p. 49.
2. Ibid., p. 50.
3. Ibid., p. 51.
Building Fund, work on the Church was renewed with an increased vitality. This pace was maintained until 1911, at which time actual work on the structure was temporarily halted in order that plans for the belfries and spires might be completed. Once the decision was reached, the problem of securing the necessary capital had to be solved, and for this purpose a "Belfries and Spires Club" was organized.\footnote{Day, Cathedral of Saint Helena, p. 63.} Despite strenuous effort on the part of Bishop and other staunch supporters of the club, subscriptions were secured only with the greatest difficulty. By September, enough money had been pledged to build one spire, but only on condition that enough would be raised to complete the other. The whole situation was beginning to look hopeless.

All was not lost. Colonel Cruse again loosened his purse strings and turned over $27,000 to the Bishop: the necessary sum for the construction of the other spire.\footnote{Ibid., p. 66.} With Cruse's timely help, another crisis had passed.

As the months wore on, the exterior of the Cathedral began taking a definite shape. Since the plans for the outside were completed, the Building Committee turned its attention to the question of equipping the interior of the Church. Another special club was organized, and for the third time since the project had begun the Committee launched an all-out drive for funds. However, contributions and
pledges were getting harder and harder to obtain, and, after four months of effort, the "Interior Club," was able to report only $5,128.00 in its treasury (a paltry sum when compared to the $100,000 needed for the work). Even the stoutest hearts began to lose hope at this point, for all knew that the exterior of the Cathedral would be only an empty shell without the completion of the interior.

There was still one man able and willing to help. Colonel Cruse, saddened by the death of his daughter in November, 1913, picked Christmas of the same year as the day on which to present his greatest gift to the Cathedral.

According to Msgr. Day:

On Christmas Day our Most Rev. Bishop brought "good tidings of great joy," not only to the members of the Cathedral congregation but to all the people of the City and the Diocese of Helena and the State of Montana, by the announcement that Colonel Thomas Cruse had pledged the munificent sum of $100,000.00 towards the interior work of the Cathedral, in memory of his departed daughter, Mary Margaret.

Like wildfire the news of this donation spread. Congratulations poured in from near and far, and on New Year's Day, the Bishop read the following cablegram from the Holy Father:

Helena, Mont., U.S. of A.

Rome, December 30, (1913)

2. Ibid., p. 73.
To the Rt. Rev. John Patrick Carroll,
Bishop of Helena,

"The Holy Father at the beginning of the New Year begs God to pour out the abundance of his Heavenly gifts upon Thomas Cruse who on Christmas Day so generously remembered the Cathedral of St. Helena and upon his niece who promised that splendid organ, and he most lovingly imparts to them the Apostolic benediction. Likewise, he prays for the eternal repose of her in whose memory both gifts were bestowed.

RALPHAAEL CAANDINAL MERRY DEL VAL."

With this sum in reserve, and other special contributions, including a $10,000 set of chimes later furnished by the Colonel, a beautiful interior for the Cathedral was all but assured.

Upon contemplation of the matter just presented, there can be no doubt that the charity of Thomas Cruse made the Cathedral which stands in Helena today possible. That a new Cathedral would even have been started in his time without his help is difficult for one to believe. But it is much more difficult to imagine a Cathedral like the one that stands in Helena today, had not Colonel Cruse given so graciously of his money. The sum-total of his contributions accounted for over half of the expense incurred in constructing the building.

1. Day, Cathedral of Saint Helena, pp. 74 (An hour after Cruse's donation was announced, his niece, Mrs. H.M. Rae, had pledged $15,000 with which to purchase a pipe organ for the Cathedral.)
2. Ibid., p. 83.
In the light of this tremendous gift, one point is often overlooked: Cruse was personally responsible for another $125,000 over and above what he himself directly gave. Without his promise to pay for the erection of one of the spires, the conditional pledges for the other one very probably would never have been fulfilled. Likewise his timely supplement to the One-Hundred-Thousand-Dollar Club was all that saved for the Cathedral the $100,000 promised by the anonymous donor.

With mention of this anonymous donor, another thought might come to mind. What chances are there that Cruse himself was this unnamed benefactor? In answer to this question, it can only be said that, of all the men residing in Helena at that time, Cruse was perhaps the only one who had both the means to make such a contribution, and the method for keeping it quiet. Since he owned his own bank, he could have transferred a sum of money of this size, either in a lump sum or in smaller amounts, with possibly no one being the wiser. But any other Helena resident, in fact, any other Montana resident, would have found this almost impossible. Then, too, there were few rich men in Montana at this time who would even have considered giving it anonymously. About the only conclusion that can safely be made, therefore, is that, if the mystery man was a resident of Montana, then the chances of that man being the Colonel are at least 50-50.
Other institutions likewise benefited from Tommy Cruse's Charity. Besides the contributions he apparently made to Carroll College and to Montana Wesleyan University, he gave liberally to the Y.M.C.A. building fund and frequently assisted the Y.W.C.A. in a financial way.

In response to the plea, "We need it," from the Committee pushing the $300,000 fund for the building of a hotel, Cruse is said to have simply asked what amount was required. Upon receiving the reply, he filled in the amount, affixed his signature, and handed the check to them.¹

Cruse also is accredited with supporting the Helena Baseball Team. In 1913, the Helena Team, though long on playing experience, was short on cash, and found it impossible to raise the $500 necessary for readmission into the Union Association. However, Cruse came to the rescue, and insured Helena her share of baseball thrills, by footing the entire fee.²

Very little is known about definite instances in which Cruse helped individual persons. Other than the high price he paid for Brown's gold, the author has come across only one other occasion on which Cruse is supposed to have helped someone in particular. This involved a young man and his hoped-to-be-bride, both of whom Cruse was acquainted

¹. Chancery Archives, XI, p. 71; (The Hotel in question seems to have been the Placer), "Cruse Dies at his Residence," The Helena Independent, December 21, 1914, p. 6, c. 2.
². Ibid.
with. The two had planned to get married, but, because of lack of funds, were unable to proceed with their plans. When the Colonel heard of this, he immediately looked up the young man, gave him $500, and paid all the expenses of his marriage.¹

Thus, once again, is seen the unique personality of Colonel Thomas Cruse. Ever aware of the needs of the people of his community, he gave without hesitation when the situation called for it. For this one reason alone, Thomas Cruse proved his worth.

¹ Sweeney, see above, p. 12, n. 5.
CONCLUSION

The treasure stores of nature are yet far from exhaustion: many a lucky find still awaits the man who is brave enough to take a chance and patient enough to see it through. As Thomas Cruse was sinking his tunnel deeper and deeper into the side of Drumlummon hill, he was at the same time constructing a great career. But in doing so, he tunneled his way out of the public eye and the public understanding.

It is not an exaggeration to say that a treasure lies hidden in the life and works of Thomas Cruse: a hidden store as yet undiscovered by a painstaking biographer. One day such a one will happen upon nuggets such as have been unearthed in the present study, and, enticed to follow up the lead, will bring to light one of the richest historical personalities in Montana's history. He will find therein one of the foundation stones of Montana's body politic. He will find therein a pioneer of development and finance whose work lies embedded in the present economic structure of Montana. He will find therein the patron of religion who, like Constantine of old, left behind him magnificent basilicas. He will find therein a heart made constantly more mellow by the sufferings which he bore in imitation of his crucified Saviour. Perhaps, as it would seem, the
accomplishments he left behind are so solid and strong that the ornament of public applause would detract from the picture of his life. But the life of Thomas Cruse contains a wealth of instruction for the beginner at living life successfully. The completion of his biography by some fortunate prospector in historical subjects may well begin a yet greater phase in the life of the Forgotten Man of Montana.
A picture of the old Drumlummon mill built by the Montana Company.

The town of Marysville, Montana, February, 1959.
Montana's First Oil Rig

ERECTED BY COL. THOMAS CRUSE ON BUTCHER CREEK, CARBON COUNTY, IN 1898—THE FIGURE WITH AN AXE IS "BLACK SAM" TAGGART, THEN IN CHARGE OF THE DRILL CREW
Left to Right: Stone, John Freezer, and Thomas Cruse, owner of the N Bar ranch.
Reproduced from a photo by John White, circa 1898,
(Cruse picture file, Montana Historical Library).
The Capitol building in Helena, Montana, for the construction of which Cruse bought the $350,000 worth of bonds.

Photo taken in 1959. This building formerly housed the "Thomas Cruse Savings Bank." It is located at 36 N. Main.
The Cathedral for the Diocese of Helena before the present Cathedral of Saint Helena was erected. (Reprinted from The Register, Western Mont. Ed., Section 2, April 26, 1959.)
328 N. Benton. This house was the former Cruse residence.
Photo taken in 1959.

The huge mausoleum in Resurrection Cemetery in which the Cruse family is buried.
Photo taken in 1959.

CARROLL COLLEGE LIBRARY
HELENA, MONTANA


"First Oil Explorations in Montana were directed by the Late Col. Thos. Cruse; Helena Co. drilling on Historic Ground," The Helena Independent, March 20, 1921.


Grassrange, Montana. Personal letter from G.R. Milburn, Manager, N Bar ranch, March 10, 1959


Helena City Directory. 1886-1887.

______. 1889.


_______. Scrapbook of newspaper clippings in Chancery Archives, Diocese of Helena, XI; XII; XIII.

_______. Scrapbook of newspaper clippings in possession of Mrs. William C. Sweeney.

Helena Weekly Herald. February 15, 1883; June 2, 1887; April 28, 1893.


"Marysville Named for Her Mother," The Montana Record-Herald, May 18, 1929.


Oker, Joseph. "Tenacious 'Old Irishman' proved Silver's Best Prospector," The Helena Independent, April 14, 1940.


*The Helena Independent*. December 16, 1886; December 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 29, 1914; January 8, 26, 1915; November 6, 1938.

*The Helena Weekly Herald*. November 16, 1882; March 4, December 30, 1886.


"William Brown kept Tom Cruse in Money to seek Old Drumlummon," Cruse newspaper clipping file, Montana Historical Library, Helena.