History Of The Helena Gold Mining District 1860-1900

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HISTORY OF
THE HELENA GOLD MINING DISTRICT
1860-1900,
with sketches of the major gold strikes at Gold Creek, Bannack, and Alder Gulch
BY
James W. Hazelton

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Approved by
[Signature]
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INTRODUCTION

Montana was to its founders a synonym of romance and hardship; Montana is to its later generations a land of riches and opportunity uncovered and exploited by the hardy men who braved the state's terrible winters, its hostile Indians, its uncharted wilderness, in search of the riches that were to make Montana the hub of fantastic hordes of gold seekers from the time of the first discoveries in the 1860's until the turn of the century. In these years were the turbulent days of Montana history.

This thesis cannot tell the entire story of those drama-filled forty-odd years. It can tell, in general, with what swiftness the strikes came following the first discovery; the riches that were extracted from the earth during those boom years; it can trace, more specifically, the rise of thriving settlements around the city that was called in 1900, the richest little city in the world, namely Helena, and the subsequent decline and disappearance of those very towns which had grown up so quickly.

Because nothing short of a large volume could set down the complete record of this period, this thesis will attempt to trace the rise and decline of the gold era, to explain some of the reasons for the latter, and to exemplify both by tracing the history of some of the now nearly extinct towns in the Mining district that made Helena "the queen city of the Rockies."

For my material I am indebted to the various histories of Mon-
tana in the Montana Historical library, such as those written by Stout, Raymer, Miller, and Sanders (see bibliography); to that library's collection of clippings on ghost towns and gold mines; to the newspaper files there, and to contemporary writers such as Gilbert, McClure, and McKnight.

In the work, footnotes are used to give credit for information to the source from which it is taken, if the matter is unique or if there is some dispute over the subject. Matter which is common knowledge, or which is to be found in most Montana histories, is not attributed to any source, except when it is felt necessary.
"For them still
Somewhere on the sunny hill,
Or along the winding stream,
Through the willows, flits a dream;
Flits, but shows a smiling face,
Flees, but with so quaint a grace.
None can choose to stay at home,
All must follow, all must roam."

-----ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

More than four centuries ago the first bearded adventurer set foot upon a wild, new world in a frenzied search for gold. And hard upon his trail came sanguine thousands of every race and color who marched and countermarched through incredible high-handed treasure hunts. These were the prospectors, the unheralded, unglamorous men who turned stones and panned earth from South America to the Yukon in Alaska in search of gold.

We little know the fruitless toil every ounce of gold cost the prospector. His life was one of incessant privation, sacrifice, and labor. He dreamed of gold, not so much because he loved it, as because of his controlling but ever deceptive hopes of discovering richer and still richer deposits of the precious metal. Probably the most notable of the prospector's characteristics was that inborn wanderlust which led him from strike to strike, from rich strikes to richer ones, in search of great bonanzas. No matter how well his labor might be requited by devoting it to what he already possessed, he ever dreamed of still more brilliant stores of wealth. In his estimation, what he produced had no value beyond supplying his wants and caprices and supporting him in his delusive dream.

"Thus have these pioneers prospected the whole mountain regions;
and while the many millions of gold produced annually in Montana is the fruit of their work, there is not one in fifty of them who could pay his way back to the states today. Most of them have, at one time or another, been well off, or had a fortune within their grasp; but they waste as fast as they gather, and abandon good claims to gratify the ruling passion to discover better one." (1)

If low in purse, the prospector traversed the mountains on foot. If he were better off, he owned a mule, horse, or jackass, on which he loaded his provisions, his pick and shovel, his pan, and his trusty rifle. The prospector was usually a solitary figure, traveling alone through the river beds and canyon floors, panning as he went on and on in the endless search. The history of gold mining in Montana is the story of some of these prospector who found the object of their searches.

The object of their searches was found in two widely diverse manners. The first and most common, to the prospector at any rate, was placer mining. Placer mining was performed where native gold is found in loose sand and gravel, above or upon the consolidated strata called "bed-rock." Placers are most commonly found in mountain gulches, in sands washed by rivers, and sometimes in the gravels of drift deposits. "All gold, so far as known, was originally deposited in veins imbedded in quartz or other minerals, and that now found in placers has worn out of those veins by the action of the weather, water, and glaciers, and deposited with the decomposed rocks in its present positions in gulches and river beds." 2

"Glaciers were the mills of God which ground out the gold of most
of our placers. They ground slow but they ground on and on through
countless ages, and our placers are their tailings.... Gold is also
found in the sands of streams which have been washed away from the
3 placers where the glaciers deposited it." These were the modes in
which placers were formed.

The other manner of finding gold was in quartz or lode or vein
mining, in other words, going down below the surface and into the
4 "bed-rock" in search of the natural habitat of the gold. The history
of the development of quartz mines in Montana is almost contemporary
with that of the placers. The first known quartz lode, the Dacotah,
5 was discovered near Bannack and located, November 13, 1862. The
quartz had to be taken from the earth, stamped or crushed, and then
washed, in order to separate the gold. Therefore, except in rare
cases, quartz mining was left to companies or groups of individuals
to develop since the ordinary prospector, even if he found the gold-
bearing quartz, would hardly be able to do anything about it.

4. The manner in which veins were often found is told by Barry Storm
in his book, THUNDER GODS GOLD. "The river drains a virgin wilderness
in which gold anywhere will give clue to itself as erosion-borne placer
particles in the riverbed. Follow the river then until you find such
placer gold, and trace it back to its source." P. 29.
5. From "Centennial Address by W. A. Clark," October 11, 1876, HISTORI-
Publishing Co. 1896.
6. "...Prospectors had not the means and perhaps not the inclination
to delve below the grass roots in search of veins; that work remained
for groups of individuals or companies with capital at their command." See Helen Fitzgerald Sanders, A HISTORY OF CITALLA, Vol. I, p. 432.
Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co. 1913.
CHAPTER II. THE FINDING OF GOLD IN MONTANA

In the whole range of human industry there is none which has occasioned so much wild enthusiasm, subjected men to its dominion more thoroughly, brought forth so many rare characteristics of self-sacrifice, or created such sudden wealth as that of gold mining in America. The saga of the Montana gold era is just one chapter of that half of the nineteenth century which included the rush to California in 1849, the Comstock strike in Nevada in 1859, the Black Hills strike in South Dakota in 1880, and which culminated with the rush of them all, to Alaska in 1898.

The first record of the gold and other mineral deposits in Montana dates back to 1739, when the Frenchman Verendrye reported to the French government the resources of the mountains in this then uncharted territory. Incidentally it was in this year that recorded Montana history begins.

Verendrye was a French trader in Canada who, with his three sons, was commissioned by the French to explore western America in search of a route to the Pacific. He never reached his destination, but was probably the first white man to view the backbone of the continent, the snow-capped Rocky Mountains. His services and those of his three sons were invaluable in that their carefully recorded journals served as guides to later explorers and gave the world some knowledge of the richness and vastness of the continent. Although the extent to which he

pierced the mountainous barrier is unknown, one history states that Verendrye went at least as far as the present site of Helena, and gives convincing evidence of the point.

Now more than a century elapsed between the time of Verendrye's recordings and the actual finding of gold. In the meantime the territory that was to become Montana was inhabited only by the hardy trappers of the Hudson Bay Company and the hostile Indians. To one of these trappers, Francois Finlay, known as "Benetsee," a Scotch-Indian, probably belongs the first discovery of gold within the state. Still there is some dispute as to whom the honor should go, for though "Benetsee" probably found it, his prospecting was "necessarily of a very superficial character," in the words of Granville Stuart, who with his brother James, was the second claimant to the title of discoverer. But still, neither did the Stuarts do anything about the traces of gold they found until after Henry Thomas actually sunk a shaft on the banks of Cold Creek and found definite traces of enough gold to cause an uproar which extended nearly around the world and which lasted for more than a quarter of a century. All three of these discoveries took

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5. Sanders, op. cit., p. 105.
place on Gold Creek, five miles west of Garrison, in what is now Powell county.

"Benetsee" had settled in Deer Lodge county in 1850, then proceeded to California where the gold rush was at its peak. Returning to Montana in 1852 with a bad case of "gold fever" he was "inspired with the remarkable resemblance of the gravel and sand bars along Gold Creek, to those he had seen gold washed from in California." He was inexperienced with the art of mining and was handicapped by lack of tools, and consequently succeeded in taking out only a minute amount of gold, but his presentation of this at a trading post started the tale of gold which, in 1858, brought the Stuarts and others to the scenes of his findings. After confirming their hopes that gold was to be found in the area, they returned to civilization because they were hopelessly short of provisions and because Indians were constantly harassing their efforts.

They returned in the fall of 1860, but in the summer which had elapsed, the aforementioned Henry Thomas, whose peculiarities gave him the name of "Gold Tom," had arrived and sunk a shaft thirty feet deep on the creek's shores. His earnings were small due to the difficulties under which he worked, but he stuck to his diggings for seven years before he disappeared. He stayed to see the rise of Montana's first gold camp, Pioneer City, on Gold Creek, where at one time there were as many as four thousand miners camped. The Stuarts stayed to make their fortunes and to become famous names in the later history of the state, not only as actors but as recorders of the great drama that

6. Sanders, op. cit., p. 106
7. See file on ghost towns, State Historical Library.
Montana was the stage for during the remaining part of the nineteenth century.

8. It is strange to note that although Granville Stuart affirms in his earlier works and Montana histories generally agree, that Benetsee did find gold on Gold Creek, in his later writings Stuart outwardly denies that the half-breed found the precious ore. He states that when he arrived on the scene of the discovery he found no evidence of any diggings and that "Benetsee" got possession of the gold from another controversial figure in Montana history by the name of Silverthorne. (cf. Stuart, FORTY YEARS ON THE FRONTIER, p. 133)
CHAPTER III.  THE GREAT MIGRATION

The stampede was on! Word of these strikes quickly spread from coast to coast. Grizzled miners and tenderfeet alike rushed into Montana from other mining districts, from eastern cities, and from all points on the globe, to make their fortunes, and the tinhorn gamblers and bawds, businessmen and swindlers, followed to take it away from them. Within five years, towns of five thousand people dotted the map of the previously uncharted wilderness. Gulches were hurriedly and sometimes superficially prospected. The slightest whisper of a discovery oftentimes led to the total depopulation of a mining camp and the creation of a new settlement. Lawlessness reigned supreme.

The first in a rapid succession of major strikes occurred at Bannack, on Grasshopper Creek near Dillon. On the 28th day of July, 1862, John White, one of a party of Coloradans migrating to the Salmon River (Idaho) diggings, found gold on the future site of the town that was to become for a short time the capital of the territory, with a population containing some of the wildest and most reckless adventurers, whose names and misdeeds figure conspicuously in the early history of Montana. A great number of "fever victims" packed the town in 1863-64, and included among them were the notorious members of the Henry Plummer gang, who were wiped out by the only law early Montana knew, the Vigilantes.

1. For an account of the Bannack strike, see Sanders, op. cit., p. 171-172.
But Bannack was not the center of activity for long; in the spring of 1863, through mere chance, a party of prospectors came upon a gulch that was later claimed to contain "the richest placer diggings ever discovered in the world." The party, led by Bill Fairweather, had been forced into the gulch by marauding Indians. When the news of this strike reached Bannack, the entire city was depopulated within a few days. By 1864, Alder Gulch, where the strike was made and where Virginia City now stands, was a cluster of rambling shacks, cabins, and taverns sheltering over ten thousand miners, who were to take over $85,000,000 worth of gold out of that earth. Montana's territorial capital was moved from Bannack to Virginia City in 1865, and remained there for ten years before it was moved finally to its present site in Helena.

Still with all its wealth, Alder Gulch provided disappointment for many of the gold-seeking horde. Among these were four men, later to be known as the Georgians, - Covan, Crab, Miller, and Stanley, - who found gold in a little creek running down a gulch which they called "Last Chance," and which was to become the main street of the permanent capital of Montana. The Georgians made their strike in the middle of July, 1864, and by the end of that month, a settlement of miners from Bannack, Alder Gulch, and other mining districts had been organized. Unlike the two previous camps (Bannack and Alder Gulch), this one

2. Sanders, op. cit., p. 172
4. Lessen, op. cit., p. 237-241
6. Stout, op. cit., p. 310
became a permanent and thriving settlement, the capital not only of the state, but of a mining district in which was centered most of the gold-mining activity in the state for the rest of the century. In 1867, Colonel A. K. McClure wrote of Helena: "It is but little over two years old, but it boasts a population of seventy-five hundred, and of more solid men, more capital, more handsome and well-filled stores, more fast boys, and frail women, more virtue and vice, more preachers and groggeries, and more go-ahead activeness generally, than any other city in the mountain mining region."  

Immediately following the first strikes, men began to prospect for the upper reaches of the gulch that had yielded so much to the placer miners, in search of the mother vein, and though a very rich lode was found at the head of the gorge, near what is now Unionville, old timers express their doubts that the much hunted mother vein was ever found.

7. McClure, op. cit., p. 385
8. Last Chance gulch branches into two gulches, Oro Fino and Grizzly, just south of Helena.
9. The Whitlock-Union Mine, which by 1876, had yielded over $3,000,000 in gold. (cf. W. A. Clark, CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MONTANA, Vol. II, p. 112). This was one of the first lode or quartz mines in the vicinity.
CHAPTER IV. "THE QUEEN CITY OF THE ROCKIES"

"Nature placed not a single advantage, except gold, at the point where Helena now stands which, in itself, was calculated to induce the building of a city, that is not possessed by a hundred other localities in Montana." As a matter of fact, there was not even enough water for placer mining; it had to be piped in from Ten Mile Creek, some distance west of the city. And yet the fact remains that a city of wealth, substantially and in many cases most elegantly built, which contains a population of over 15,000 prosperous inhabitants, has grown up there.

The question is naturally asked, what produced this result?

The answer may be given by three inter-related reasons: 1. the gold-mining industry there and in the surrounding districts; 2. the railroads, for which Helena was a center; and 3. the livestock industry, whose cattle kings had turned from their search for gold to a new field of wealth.

The advent of the railroads in 1880 probably more than any other fact was the cause of the survival of Helena, for at that time the gold industry was lagging and the population was dwindling. The Utah Northern reached Montana from the south that year, and the Northern Pacific was making rapid strides across the continent. The railroads caused new mines to be opened up, and old ones, which had been useless because of low grade ores, became valuable because of the advent of machinery that could work them and because of the reduced shipping rates for ores.

On July 4, 1883, the Northern Pacific reached Helena amid the cheers

2. Gilbert, loc. cit.
of thousands. "At the hour of 11:50 A.M., the triumphant scene, the consummation of all faith, the evidence of a bright vision, was presented to the wondering gaze in full view and hearing of the vast multitude—a great railroad train of thirty-eight cars loaded with 3,120,000 pounds of bullion" arrived in Helena to firmly establish it as a center of Montana business.

With the Northern Pacific terminus at Helena, importance was added to the city as a distributing point for the territory, and the population added to its wealth.

As regards those miners who settled down from the turbulent and unstable mining life to the more stable cattle industry, little mention will be made here. Suffice it to say that without this and the mining industry, and especially the latter, Helena would never have reached her position of wealth.

3. HELENA DAILY RECORD, July 5, 1883, carries a full account of the coming of the first railroad to Helena (page 3)
CHAPTER V. LATER GOLD STRIKES IN THE HELENA GOLD DISTRICT

The city of Helena owes its existence, not only to the richness of the gulch in which it was built, but to the very numerous rich strikes which were made in the area and to the boom towns which grew up around these strikes and which were dependent on Helena for their existence. So great were these later strikes and so in need of a business center were the resulting settlements that a town grew up in the rich gulch that the Georgians called their "last chance" before that gulch could even be thoroughly prospected, and present day excavations testify to the fact that the earth upon which the capital city is built is still very rich in the yellow ore.

These boom towns have virtually disappeared from the face of the earth, certainly from modern day maps, leaving little trace of the bustle that went on there during that era from 1860 to 1900.

Although the Georgians are given full credit for their discovery in "Last Chance" the country surrounding that gulch was by no means devoid of prospectors. There were men panning gold on Silver Creek northwest of Helena in 1862, and early in that momentous month of

1. The Helena Mining District embraces an area of some 4,000 square miles extending from B. sin and Boulder on the south; Lincoln and York on the North; Ravelsburg on the east, and Deer Lodge on the west. In the seventy-five years after the discovery of Helena (1864-1939) the total production of the district was in excess of $300,000,000. (cf. MONTANA RECORD HERALD, July 12, 1939, sec. 5)

2. The gold found here led in a few months to the first seat of justice in the Helena area, at Silver City, 20 miles northwest of Helena. (cf. Leeson, op. cit., p. 669)
July, 1862, two years before the Helena diggings were found, a man
named Hurlbut discovered the diggings on Big Prickly Pear Creek, where
the town of Montana City sprang up. Homes, taverns, hotels, and stores
were built on this site, ten miles southeast of Helena, which was a thriving
gold camp and even an aspirant for the honor of being the capital of the
state. Over $18,000,000 worth of gold was taken from the placers of the
area. Today there stands not a vestige of the town that once existed.
Every stick of timber has gone, the ground is as though it had never
known the houses of men and except for the record of historical incidents
left by the town in its passing, Montana City is a completely forgotten
camp.

Thirty-five miles east of Helena and six miles from the Missouri
river there is an abandoned placer mining gulch nestled in the Belt
mountains where now stands only a few ruined cabins. In its prime it
was the center of the richest placer gold diggings the world then had
ever known. Immense fortunes were taken from the sands of that famous
gulch.

It was late in December, 1864, that three discharged Confederate

3. Stout, op. cit., p. 190
4. Ibid, p. 766
5. For this early history of the fabulously rich Confederate Gulch, the
writer is indebted to Mary Schreiner, now a resident of Helena, but
formerly an inhabitant and early-day historian of Broadwater county.
Mrs. Schreiner traced the history of the gulch, showed me papers she
herself and others had written on the subject, and also showed me a
collection of clippings which she had amassed in her study of early
Montana history, particularly in this area.
soldiers stumbled onto this steep, narrow canyon on their way from Fort Benton to Last Chance Gulch. These three men, Thompson, Baker, and Dennis, had prospected along the two-hundred mile route, but in vain, when they came upon the canyon. Finding traces at the foot of the gulch, they prospected further up and the traces became stronger and stronger until they came to the spot where it became unbelievably rich. Here they established a settlement. Soon other Confederate soldiers came and the gulch became known to Montana history as Confederate Gulch.

The news of the discovery soon leaked out. Last Chance, Fort Benton, Alder, and other camps were aflame with excitement; the stampede was on again: miners and prospectors in outlying districts stopped their work, grabbed their picks and shovels and joined the mad rush to the new Eldorado. In less than three months there were more than five thousand people in the gulch. The richness of the pay-dirt in the bottom of Confederate Creek was the sensation of the day in Montana camps.

The city that was the center of this great rush became known as Diamond City. In this subdistrict of the Helena Mining area immediately surrounding Confederate Gulch were White's Gulch, Avalanche Gulch, Cave Gulch, and others, including two acres of ground called Montana Bar, whence was taken pans of earth yielding up to $1,000 worth of yellow

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6. Among this group of migrating prospectors was Mrs. Schreiner's father, John Murry, a twenty-two year old prospector from Illinois
gold. Three men, in the mining season of 1866 alone, took out the very sizeable fortune of $900,000 from the bar.

From 1864 to 1868, Diamond City was the capital of the Eastern Montana Mining District, besides being the county seat of Meagher county. In all directions roads were built, and it became the trading center of a large area. A daily stage coach arrived from Helena, which was already becoming the center of its great mining district; pack trains brought the supplies in from Fort Benton, Salt Lake City, and even from as far away as Walla Walla. But a great and inevitable decline came, slower, to be sure than its rise, as the miners drifted down into Broadwater county to take up farming; into the White Sulphur Springs area to engage in stock-raising; or on to new, but rarely richer gold fields. In 1883 it was written: "Diamond City is desolate, deserted, and dreary, beheld in the shred of its departed glory.... There are only four families left of the thousands that have dwelt here, since the glorious days of '65. If the goose that laid the nest full of golden eggs can only be found in the shape of the prolific mother vein of gold-bearing quartz, the days of Diamond's departed glory may return, otherwise it will depart utterly within another season."

The vein was not found and Diamond vanished. Today one could search

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7. Many modern miners scoff at this fabulous figure, but Mrs. Schreiner claims she hear it "from the lips of my own people who were in Diamond at the time," and modern history books (cf. Stout, op. cit., p. 213) substantiate the claim.

8. From a newspaper clipping in the ghost town file at the State Historical Library, written in 1883 by Judge Cornelius Hedges, a prominent Montana historian.
in vain for the once mighty camp that has passed into history as one of Montana's great ghost towns.

Greatly different from the other boom towns in the Helena Mining District, Marysville is still very much in the limelight, having experience several rejuvenations since the turn of the century. Marysville is situated twenty-one miles northwest of Helena in a bowl-shaped basin formed by the sources of Silver Creek, two miles from the continental divide.

Although gold was found on Silver Creek as early as 1862, thus even before the Last Chance discoveries, the history of Marysville is practically synonymous with the history of the DrumLummon Mine, discovered by a penniless Irish immigrant, Thomas Cruse, in 1876.

Cruse came to Silver Creek in 1868, where he engaged in placer mining until he became interested in the source of the gold and began prospecting the slopes of the continental divide for the gold-bearing quartz. Other miners ridiculed him, pointing out the fact that even if he found the lode, he would not have the money to finance the taking of the gold from the earth. But Cruse was determined to find the vein, and after eight years, he finally found the apex of the famous DrumLummon Mine in 1876 and became one of the richest men in the state.

9. The town was named for Mrs. Mary Ralston, and the mine for the parish of DrumLummon, Ireland, where Cruse was born. (cf. Sanders, p. 459)
11. This account is taken from the PAXI COUNTY NEWS, October 5, 1934, in the newspaper file on Marysville, State Historical Library.
through the income from this mine and various other holdings. Cruse bought a bank and was one of the chief financiers of the St. Helena Cathedral in Helena.

In the meantime other mines had grown up around the Cruse diggings which attracted large crowds of miners and even caused a battle between two railroads to see which company would have the right to serve the town. Both the Montana Central and the Northern Pacific built lines, 12 with the latter winning. This line was removed in 1926.

In 1882 Cruse sold the mine to an English company for $1,500,000, and immediately Marysville experienced her boom. Shortly after, it boasted 1500 inhabitants and 3000 men employed in and around the city. Among other things it boasted three churches (the Catholic Church, which still stands, is a source of pride to present-day residents), a brewery, an opera house, numerous taverns, and two newspapers.

Marysville, although its history of rise and decline is not as startling as that of the other settlements mentioned, was one of the richest. In its early history, $57,000,000 worth of gold was taken out, $16,000,000 from the Drummond alone. Nor is it true to speak of Marysville in the same sense as the others, since it never disappeared. It lagged, it is true, but boomed in 1891, 1916, 1934, and again in recent years.

12. The Fergus County Argus, February 10, 1936*  
13. The Marysville Mountaineer, October 26, 1933  
17. Park County News, October 9, 1934*  
*From newspaper file on Marysville, State Historical Library
Nestling among the Rockies at an altitude of 5,260 feet is Wickes, twenty-six miles southwest of Helena and nine miles from Boulder. About 1885 this was a thriving camp of fifteen hundred people. Five dance halls, running day and night, and twenty-two saloons flourished, and fights "were so common that a man would not rise from his seat to see who was fighting. Cards strewn the main street so thickly that for several years a man with a term would clear the street every morning."

Founded in 1877, this became the site of two of the richest mines in the Helena area. In twenty-six years, some $33,000,000 was taken out of the Alta mine, while the Gregory yielded $18,000,000. The total yield of the subdistrict, which included another mining community, Corbin, which was situated four miles over the mountains from Wickes, was $57,000,000, this total ranking it with Marysville and Diamond as the richest cities in the Helena District. The hill on which Wickes is built is honeycombed by at least thirty miles of tunnel.

Wickes had a fire in 1901 which destroyed the greater part of the town, followed by another fire in 1902, after the town had been partially rebuilt. But by that time the decline had moved in and mining had almost ceased there, although there always was, and is hope among the old-timers in the area that the industry will be revived. Today only the remains of the reduction works, which was superceded by the

East Helena smelter, and a few houses, still stand to mark those hell-raising days of the '80s.

Forty-eight miles southeast of Helena lies another rich community, Radersburg, which for years was the county seat of the state's third ranking gold-producing county, Jefferson (although Radersburg is now situated in Broadwater county). This community, although never attaining a great population like most of the other mining camps, was one of the first gold-mining camps in the state.

It was in the year 1866 that John A. Keating, the Blacker brothers, and others discovered placer gold in Cedar gulch near Radersburg. The placer camp became a prominent and popular mining district in a few weeks, the town reaching its greatest population—probably never approaching a thousand—a year later.

Keating, after the gulches became crowded with placer miners, began searching the ledges in the vicinity for the ore-bearing veins, and a few years later, found what he sought for. His mine is still producing, although the lead and silver ore which is now being extracted, exceeds in value the gold ore.

Lack of railroad facilities in Radersburg somewhat hindered this mountain community after the placers had been worked over, and forced the miners to transport their ores over rough mountain roads to Winston, which was on the Northern Pacific line, and which also served as a rail center for Diamond. Had Radersburg ever attained the rail service

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21. Some dispute has arisen over the date of discovery of gold. The Helena Daily Record Herald (July 15, 1873), and Butte Miner (July 16, 1911) say 1866, but R. A. Lodge, a Broadwater historian and relatives of the Blacker brothers think it was 1865. These were my sources for Radersburg.
it desired the town would have seen a far greater boom than it did ex-
perience.

There were more of these towns, some important, others not; some
overnight boom towns, which disappeared as fast as they grew up; others
which remain today, the remnants of that mighty era. One could mention
Rimini, twenty miles west of Helena, in the shadows of the continental
divide. This was the scene of another railroad war between the Great
Northern and the Northern Pacific. The N. P., under the direction of
Colonel C. A. Broadwater, won this battle. Red Mountain, just above
Rimini, was the center of the diggings in this area.

And there was Elkhorn, east of Boulder, where another great rail-
road battle was waged. This was primarily a silver producing camp,
and when silver prices hit rock-bottom in the last part of the century,
the camp died, and along with it went its gold industry—and its railroad.

There was Basin and Clancy—both centers of subdistricts. One
could find in these areas, the crumbling remains of smelters which
were once smouldering with the heat that turned the valuable ores into
more valuable pure gold.

And one could stand in the center of any one of these once-thriving
towns, take off in any direction, and find the reason why there was so
much activity centered in these towns. For they would find every gulch
pierced by shafts and prospect holes; they would find tumble-down, decayed
cabins, which were the homes of the now almost extinct prospectors; those
men who labored tirelessly in search of a bonanza, a mother lode, that
curtis-bearing ledge that would put them on easy street. Were this a his-

History of men, it could tell the stories of the Crus, the Fairweathers, the Keating, and others who found their much sought-after fortunes, and it could speculate on the heartbreak and disappointment of those numerous and luckless miners who spent their lives in a vain search of the elusive strike.

24. Production figures (incomplete) of the region by L.S. Ropes, up to 1922. (cf. Stout, op. cit., p. 766)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mine</th>
<th>Production (in incomplete)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wickes-Corbin</td>
<td>$57,915,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marysville</td>
<td>57,140,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elkhorn</td>
<td>15,315,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basin</td>
<td>6,635,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rimini</td>
<td>6,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unionville</td>
<td>4,110,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winston</td>
<td>3,560,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radersburg</td>
<td>3,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scratch Gravel</td>
<td>992,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clancy</td>
<td>655,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana City</td>
<td>343,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PLACERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mine</th>
<th>Production (in incomplete)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City of Helena</td>
<td>32,625,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana City</td>
<td>18,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marysville</td>
<td>3,200,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*o figures given for Diamond City.

In analyzing these figures, one must remember that the price of gold during the 1860-1900 era was about 30% less than it is today. Also it must be remembered that no record of the actual production could be entirely accurate.
CHAPTER VI. THE FUTURE OF MONTANA AS A GOLD PRODUCER

In the production of precious metals—gold, silver, and copper—Montana is one of the leading states in the Union. This prestige comes now, however, from the enormous yield of copper. One would naturally wonder at the decline of the once-throbbing gold industry.

If one visits any of the once prominent gold mining camps of the state and converses with the old timers therein, he would be impressed by the confidence these men have in the reappearance of the great days of the first gold era. Occasionally someone makes a strike, but news of it brings little or no enthusiasm. Why? Because there are so few of those hardy men left who would pick up their tools and set out on the gold trail, so few of the men like Stuart, White, etc., who made the first gold era what it was.

Today most of the gold being taken from Montana is the result of dredging in the valleys and canyon floors, in other words of mechanized placer mining, but the opening of a gold mine these days is a rare occurrence indeed. More occasionally, an old mine in opened up, and the yield is often fruitful. Examples would be the DrumLummon, and several mines in the Radersburg-Winston area, indicating that many of the old mines are far from being worked out. In the early days countless mines were abandoned before the last ores were extracted. Some of the many reasons were the lack of machinery, which prevented miners from going deep in the earth because of water seepage; the failure to find high grade ore right off (miners could not be content with low grade ore when transportation was so expensive and at such a premium); the aforementioned tendency of the miners to leave their diggings for reportedly
richer ones, and most important, the shortage of capital needed for the extraction of the gold and the transporting of it to stamp mills and smelters. Under this latter heading might be mentioned the railroads, whose absence ruined at least several important mining towns, the best example being Castle in Meagher County, which abounded in low-grade ore, but which was so far from a rail line, that transporting the ore was a money-losing and painstaking task.

Someday the good mines of years ago will be dug into again on a larger scale than before, new mines will be opened up, and the state will have a growth beyond the present dreams of the most optimistic prospector. But it will take work. The gold is not going to come out of the earth because of one's longing for it; it must be gone after.

There are, more than likely, gold veins in Montana far greater than ever yet found. One does not need to travel far from the State Capital to find a gold zone of immense probabilities. And yet there are very few important gold mines in the area today. Will it always be thus? Will these undiscovered, or discovered but unexploited veins go untouched? Some of them are promising fields for the prospector, others again will need capital to expose the hidden treasure. But it is hard to believe that proper development and exploitation will not give to Montana a vestige of those great days between 1860 and 1900, when the state resounded with the clang of the pick against rocks which brought ores to the surface unimaginable in this modern day.

1. "The richest gold beds are hastily and imperfectly hurried over, leaving more in them than is gathered from them, and new prospects or diggings call the heroes of the pick and spade from Alder to Helena, from thence to Deer Lodge,... and so on through the hundreds of placers where the incalculable wealth of the mountains is developed." (A. K. McClure)
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