MADISON COUNTY'S LOST PLACER MINES

THERE is scarcely a county in Montana that has not a story of a lost cabin or lost placer diggings. Madison county is no exception to the general rule, and she has several good stories of wonderful finds which were made in the early days, and then all trace of their whereabouts being lost by the death of the men who uncovered great wealth, only to lose it again by unfortunate circumstances.

On the Madison valley, early in the sixties, settled a little old Englishman, who is known far and wide among the old-timers of the state as "English George." His name was George Thorpe, and he died a few years ago from the effects of the grippe and he now sleeps in the cemetery at Virginia City, where, with many another argonaut of the west, he is awaiting the last call from Gabriel's trumpet.

He came to Montana during the gold excitement which followed the discovery of the wonderful placers of Alder gulch, but he claimed to have been on the Yellowstone in the employ of the Hudson Bay company, as a hunter and trapper long before Montana or Idaho had a place on the map.

Gold digging was not to his liking. He had followed the occupation of a hunter and trapper all his life, and the number of years he had lived was problematic. When he first came to Alder gulch it is said that he looked old and seared and when the writer can first remember him he looked as old as he did the year before he died. Shortly after he reached Alder gulch he made his camp on the Madison valley near the mouth of Moran creek and engaged in trapping, fishing and hunting as a means of gaining a livelihood. He did not relish the idea of living alone, so he married a Bannack squaw, secured a few head of pony mares, a few head of cattle and began raising cattle, horses and pappooses. He never cared to work hard at manual labor, would rather hunt in the mountains or trap than eat and this is a story told to the writer of this narrative while on a horse hunting expedition on the upper Madison one night when we were camped out and when it was too cold to stay in bed. It is the story of the lost placer of Madison county and is implicitly believed in by all of the old-timers of that section. He did not want to tell it at all but being pressed to a considerable length, he told it, and as near as I can remember it is as follows:

"It was in the early '70s," he said, "when old Madison John, a Bannack buck, who is a brother to my old woman, came down to the ranch from the Lemhi reservation, late in the fall, and said that one white man had killed another in the West Fork country. The man had been killed with a pick and that implement was still sticking in the skull of the murdered man. The body had been dragged to a washout, and a lot of rocks had been piled upon it. John also said that a dugout had been built near-by, a prospect hole or two sunk, and that a dam had been built just below the spring which gushed from the hillside close by the cabin, and that there was every indication that a lot of gravel had been lately washed out, but that he could not find the place from where the dirt had been taken, but a trail led off into the timber which, if followed, would probably show from where the dirt had come. He had with him a nugget worth probably $15, which he had picked up on a table in the dugout. I asked him how long the man had been dead and he said not to exceed a week as the stench from the corpse was the means of its burial place being discovered.

"I told John to keep quiet about his discovery, not to tell it to any other white man and that he and I would go up there to see if we could find anything worth carrying away. He agreed to do so, and a day or two afterwards we started out together for the place where a crime had probably been committed. At a place on the upper Madison, which is now called "Hide" creek, I had a cabin, and we camped there the first night. We did not start very early the next morning on our journey as a band of elk were grazing within sight of the cabin when we awoke, and we went after them and killed two of them. It took some little time to take care of the meat so the sun was pretty well up when we finally got started. We crossed Cottonwood creek near the Beaver dam and had gone two miles through the heavy timber towards Elk river when I thought I heard a man laugh. I reined up and asked John if he heard anything and he replied that he heard only a squirrel chattering. Hardly had we gone a hundred yards further until we heard it again and it was so wierd and unnatural that it fairly made our flesh creep. At that time we were in a little open park and before we had time to think a second time a man with tangled hair and unkempt beard, with his clothing hanging in tattered rags around him appeared at the farther end of the opening, looking backward as if he was hunted. Seeing us he turned and fled in terror, laughing hysterically all the while.

"Old John took down his lariat rope and started after him. I followed as best I could, but, as I had the pack horses to lead, my progress was much slower. Presently I heard John calling for me to come quick, that he had caught the wild man. I hurried forward and found that John hal lassooed the man and every time he would make a move to escape, John would set spurs to his horse and drag the poor fellow along the ground for a ways. I got off my horse and, while John held the rope good and tight, I tied the captive hand and foot. Then we tried to talk to him. He would not answer us and apparently did not see us but in a broken jargon of cayuse French and pigeon English he raved of 'gold,' and 'Joe' and 'Louise.' I soon saw that the poor fellow was stark, mad and resolved that we would take him to Virginia City, tell a story of finding him in the hills while hunting and return as soon as possible to the diggings that we had started to find. We had been taking an extra pack horse along to pack away anything we might find of value in the dugout and we loaded the crazy man on his back and, taking the back track, we started for Virginia City.

"When we reached Cottonwood creek on our return we were hungry, and resolved to camp and get something to eat and then go to the cabin on Hide creek, where we would camp for the night. We tied the crazy man to a tree, he all the time jabbering in French and occasionally screaming for some one to let go of his throat. We did not pay much attention to him, but let him jabber as he pleased. It did not take long for us to get something to eat. All we had to cook was coffee and bacon, and it was soon cooked and eaten. We then resolved to feed the crazy man, and when we turned to him we were surprised to find that he was unconscious. I held his head and John poured some hot coffee down his throat. Within a few minutes he came to, and to our surprise he had the light of reason in his eyes, though very week. He spoke to me, calling me by name, and asked what brought me in that section of the world.

"At first I did not know the man, but when he told me his name I recognized him as a man with whom I had worked when I was with the Hudson Bay company on the Yellowstone in the '50's. That was the first time I had ever seen him since I had left the employ of the company. His name was Gene Bigelow. I asked him how he came to be in such a deplorable condition, and what he was doing in the woods when we had found him. He did not want to tell his story at all, but I finally got it out of him, and as near as I can recollect it was as follows:

"Early in the summer of that year, he said, he and an older Frenchman named Joe Couche had gone into the West Fork country prospecting. They stumbled on to some exceedingly rich placer ground and had put in the summer working it. There was no water near the place where the big pay was found, and they packed the dirt in willow baskets on their backs for nearly a mile to a spring, near which they had built a dugout and made a dam. Here the gravel was washed in a rocker. The pay streak was near the head of a dry gulch, and it was tapped by means of a drift which skirted the rimrock. The returns from the gravel were big, and as the claim continued to grow richer with each day's development, they resolved to winter there, build a big reservoir so as to catch the snow water in the gulch in which the claim was located, and when spring came they would make a clean-up that would astonish the world. It was their intention to put in the winter in drifting, and pile the gravel on the dump and wash it through sluice boxes in the spring, and not carry any more dirt on their backs. So they went to Virginia City and bought a big bill of goods from O. B. Barber. Not wishing to attract too much attention, they paid for their grub with greenbacks, of which Couchel had a good roll.

"They returned to the diggings with their grub and worked for about six weeks, by which time they had out about 20 pounds of gold dust, which was cached in the dirt floor in the dugout the pay streak appeared to be growing richer every day they developed it.

"'Then,' Bigelow said, 'the devil seemed to get into my head. I wanted all of the money myself. Joe had about $500 in greenbacks of his own, and the devil kept whispering to me to kill Joe, take the money, over $4,000, and go to Montreal and marry the French girl, Louise, I thought so much of.

"'For a long time I would not listen to the devil,' he continued, 'but one day Joe swore at me for thinking so much of Louise and not working any more. We were down by the spring. Joe lay down and drank water out of the spring like a horse. Then the devil whispered, "Kill him now, quick; then take the money and see Louise!" I had my pick in my hand. I drew it back and it came down on Joe's head, burying itself so that the point stuck out on the other side, and he fell into the water dead.

"'Then I dragged him down to a cut bank, rolled him in, and piled great big rocks on him, so that he could not get up and follow me. I dug up the money where we had buried it and started to walk to Virginia City. Before I had walked over five iles a fog came up and I lost my way. I wandered round and round, but could not find my way out of the timber. Oh, how heavy that gold got! When it became too dark to see, I sat down at the roots of a big, fir tree, and, taking off the belt in which I carried the money, I placed it in a cleft in the roots of the tree, and, using it as a pillow, I fell asleep.

"'How long I slept I do not know, but when I opened my eyes I saw Joe standing at my feet. He was bareheaded, and his clothes were covered with blood. In the back of his head the pick was still stickin. He pointed his finger at me and said: "Gene, you murderer, I want my money!" I thought he made a move to grab me, and I sprang to my feet and fled in terror. Before I had gone far it seemed as if he ran after me, and, grabbing me by the throat, he choked me until I knew nothing, and when I came to my senses again you and your Indian friend were pouring the hot coffee down my throat.

"When he got through his story," George continued, "he was very weak and I saw that he would soon go where he had sent his partner. The exposure and starvation was more than he could stand. I tried to get more information out of him as to the location of the cabin and a description of the place where he had hidden the gold under the tree. He would tell but litt'e, only that the gold was in a cleft in the roots of a big, dry red fir tree which stands on the ridge near the head of Cottonwood creek. While he was trying to tell me how to find the mine from the cabin he gave a gasp as if some one was choking him and died with a pitious appeal for Joe to let go of his throat.

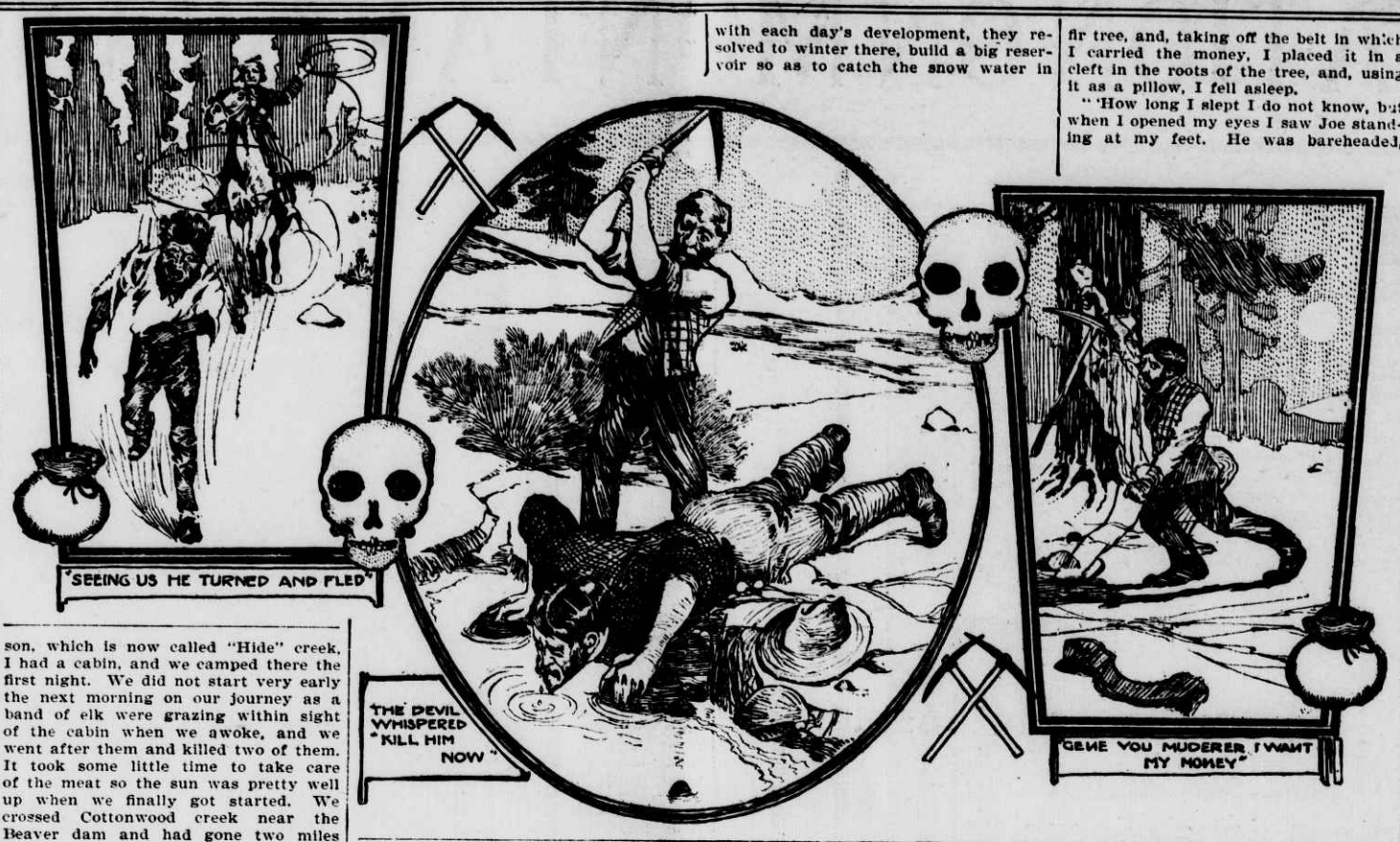
"When we realized that the man was dead, we were in a quandry. If we went to town and told our story we stood a good show of being locked up, for the murder of the man, for to tell the truth, the way we had dragged him around after capturing him did not help to prolong his life any. Besides, once the story of the wondrous find made by these two ill-fated Frenchmen becoming known, there would be a stampede and the country would be overrun with prospectors in less than twenty-four hours after we had told our story. Besides we wanted the first shy at the riches ourselves. So after John and me had talked the matter over in Indian fashion for a while we resolved to bury the man, keep our mouths shut and continue our search for the mine.

"There was a beaver dam just a few hundred feet away from us and the pond above it was nearly dry. The ground was soft and easy digging and here we resolved that the burial would be. We dug a grave a few feet deep and buried the Frenchman almost before the body was cold. And then old John took the axe, and going a few hundred yards up the creek where another beaver dam had been thrown across the creek, he cut it open and within half an hour Gene Bigelow's grave was covered over with several feet of water.

"When we got through with our funeral it was too late to go to our camp of the night before and we decided to stay all night on Cottonwood creek. When we woke up the next morning there was a foot of snow on the ground and it was still snowing. We could not hunt for the cabin during such weather and we decided to go down and search for the mine later in the year. Winter set in early that fall and an opportunity for continuing the search did not present itself. The next year I shot my hand all to pieces and did nothing at all. For two years afterwards old John kept away from the valley and it was nearly four years from the time of the death of the Frenchmen that we started on our second search for the mine. We found the cabin easily, but, search as we may, we could find no trace of the gravel beds from which the gold was taken. Time and again I have searched the hills for some clue as to the location of the mine but never until last fall could I ever gain any. Then, when hunting in a gulch which looked little like a place where pay gravel could be found, I accidentally stumbled on to an old pile of tailings. Some of them were piled up on timbers and in a good state of preservation. I believe the lost placer mine is in that gulch, near the spiling pile, and that the mouth of the drift has been covered up by a slide. You and I will go up there next summer and if we find it we will have our fortunes made."

This is the story of the lost placer of Madison county as it has been told to me. George and I never made the trip to look for the mine. The next spring la grippe became the fashionable disease and George was one of its first victims. He never recovered from its ravages, and, after lingering for a few years, he died. He would never describe the gulch to me, but would always tell of going to hunt for it as soon as he was strong enough.

After he died I hunted for the mine on several occasions, but always with the result of drawing a blank. I had just about concluded that the story was a myth. Now I think different. A few years ago O. B. Barber told of the two Frenchmen coming to his store in Virginia City and buying a bill of goods of him and paying for it in greenbacks. He added that the two men had never been heard from since. A few years ago Harry Thompson picked up the skull of a whiteman on Elk river and it had the back of it mashed off as if it had been done with some blunt instrument. Many of the residents of Madison know of the old cabin in the West Fork, and, taking these links in a chain of evidence, it look as if the story told by old George that night had a foundation of fact.



In the Smoking Car.

"Here's a good one," said the man from Denver. "What's the difference between a pen and a pencil? Give it up? A pen has to be driven, but a pencil has to be lead. See?"

"The automtic bell buoy beats 'em both," murmured a quiet little chap who had got on at Cleveland. "It rights itself."

Grim "Medics."

The medical students of Syracuse University have adopted th following college yell:

"Well man, sick man, dead man—stiff! Dig 'em up, cut 'em up—what's the diff? Humorous, tumorous, blood and gore! Syracuse medicos, 1904!"

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BUTTE, MONTANA

Opening of the Kiowa-Comanche Strip.

ON August 6, acording to the president's recent declaration, the lands of the Comanche, Kiowa and Apache Indians in Oklahoma will be open to settlement by whites. It is quite possible, however, that the opening will be postponed or, at any rate, delayed. Some of the Indians whose lands it is proposed to give to the white men have entered a vigorous protest. They declare the government has violated some of the provisions of the treaty made with them nine years ago. It is rather late for the aborigines to come into court with a claim of this nature, but they have done so and vigorously contested their cause in the courts.

The land in dispute is a tract of more than 2,500,000 acres. According to the treaty, each of the 3,000 Indians on the land is to have a farm of 160 acres situated wherever the aborigine may choose. The government is also to set aside for the Indians one or more tracts, in all 480,000 acres, for grazing purposes, etc., the remainder about 1,900,000 acres, is to be allotted among white settlers according to the homestead act. The method of allotment of this reservation and that of the adjoining Witchita tract is unique and unprecedented.

These reservations are situated in the southern part of Oklahoma. Their population made up almost entirely of Indians, among them being Kiowas, Comanches, Apaches and Caddos. One of the Kiowa head chiefs, Lone Wolf, has been in Washington arguing aginst the proposed opening of the tribal lands. The Kiowas are distinguished among the aborigines of the territory for their intelligence and their readiness to learn. Although when the Kiowas were wild "blanket" Indians they were fierce and stubborn fighters, they are today rapidly turning to the way of civilization. They are the finest looking of the tribes, and many of their women are quite handsome. The Kiowas learn faster than any other Indians, and the whiskey dealers, gamblers and sharks who have accumulated fortunes at the expense of the Cherokees and other tribes of the Indian Territory and Oklahoma have had little pickings from them. They govern themselves under a form of tribal organization. The present great head chief is called Appeahtone and he is one of the most remarkable Indians that have ever lived.

Chief Appeahtone is a polite, polished man. He speaks several languages and is a lawyer of ability. Apart from his dark complexion there is nothing about the head chief of the Kiowas to distinguish him from any other cultured American. He is simply a well dressed, middle- aged gentleman, who is able to converse at ease with Americans of a lighter hue, with Frenchmen or with Germans. He is quite wealthy, and his daughter, known as the Princess Mora, has one fine robe, among others, that is worth $1,000.

Although the other tribes of the reservations soon to be thrown open are not equal, generally speaking, in wealth, culture or civilization to the Kiowas, they possess more of these attributes than is generally known. Among the youn men and women of the tribes are many graduates of Carlisle, Hampton and other Indian sechools, and they are doing good work in lifting their men and women to a higher plane.

The contention of those Indians who oppose the opening of the reservations is that some of the provisions of the treaty made nine years ago have been altered and the compact amended without being resubmitted to the tribes for approval. For one thing, the method of paying the Indians for their lands has been changed. The defenders of the changes contend that they have been made for the best interests of the Indians and with a view to their future prosperity. In any case it seems probable that the tribesmen have slept on their rights and that the matter has passed the point where interference or petition can avail anything.

The government has re-surveyed the land and has made most of the preparations for throwing it open to white settlement. It is also claimed by some that, although a number of the Indians believe that they have been treated unjustly, the majority are not in favor of taking any drastic steps to prevent the opening and will quietly acquiesce in the decision of the government.

Washington authorities are determined that in connection with the opening of this land to white settlement there shall be no rush of boomers. Accordingly it has been determined to give out the land by lot. After fulfilling the requirements of the homestead law as to age, citizenship, etc., the applicant for the land is to draw a number. The land is then to be allotted in 160 acre tracts, according to the numbers drawn, and those with numbers that are too high will not get any land.

The drawing is to be conducted by the government, and absolute honesty is safeguarded by the provisions of the plan. Except that it contains the element of chance, the new method of selling government land at a nominal figure is eminently fair and will do away with the many ugly features of the rush and the endless litigation that has invariably followed it.

Miraculous Cure

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Dr. Williams' Pink Pills for Pale People

"I had been troubled with rheumatism all my life, even when a boy. It attacked me in the legs, arms and shoulders. The pain in the latter was particularly severe. I, of course, took medicine for it, but did not obtain permanent relief. One day about three years ago while reading a newspaper, I saw an advertisement of Dr. Williams' Pink Pills for Pale People and determined to give them a trial. I had taken but three boxes of the p lls when the trouble, which had been my affliction from childhood, entirely disappeared.

"About a year later, I had another attack of rheumatism which was brought on by working in a damp place. I remembered well what Dr. Williams' Pink Pills for Pale People had done for me, so I immediately purchased some. Strangely enough just thr e boxes again cured me, and I have been entirely free from rheumatism ever since. I have told a number of people about Dr. Wil iams' Pink Pills for Pale People, and they have taken them with the most beneficial results.

W. J. DALTON,
Secretary Board of Trade,
Wellsburg, N.Y.

At all druggists or direct from Dr. Williams Medicine Co., Schenectady, N. Y., postpaid on receipt of price, 50 cents per box, six boxes $2.50.