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Lemhi County as I Saw It

(By A. H. Allen.)

Nestled by the mighty peaks of the Rocky Mountains, like a jewel in the hold of an impregnable safe box lies the beautiful and wealth laden valleys of the Lemhi and the Salmon river. It is a peculiar fact that nature has shown such a feeling of secrecy in placing her wonder spots of fertility, but it is true, nevertheless.

I had heard a great deal about this region of fertile soil and tremendous crops. I set out with the idea that I would find conditions which would discount the stories I had heard by fifty per cent. Instead of having to discount these stories, I find that I am now a Lemhi County booster myself and am afraid to tell the whole truth, as I saw it, for the reason that my readers would be inclined to discount my statements in these columns.

Therefore I want to declare my good intentions before I commence. I am going to tell my readers just what I saw. I am not going to overdraw my conclusions and I am not going to foretell anything which I am not sure will be accomplished in the near future.

It is easy to be misunderstood when you are writing about any western community, because the opportunities are so great as to seem almost mere speculations of a speculative mind. I want you to believe every word of this poorly written story, so I am going to discount what I saw and ask you to journey to this land of opportunities and see how much I have belittled the truth.

It was in 1865 that Lemhi county was discovered to the world. In that year a band of enterprising prospectors penetrated the wilderness of mountains and arrived at this spot. They were not in search of land to grow crops on. Like the mighty horde of prospectors who traveled west in the early sixties, they were in search of gold. Gold was the cry and the dream of this band.

For months and months they wandered up and down the creeks of the Rocky Mountains, and had almost given up hope of finding their pay streak when they came upon Leesburg, where they struck a pay streak which made them wealthy, located the Lemhi country as a placer country and brought a population of 10,000 people to that region within one year. Of the original party of five, only one survives, B. F. Sharkey, who now resides in Lemhi county, and is a prosperous and wealthy farmer.

With the rush of gold seekers came the rush of business men and the town of Salmon was located within the same year. For several years the creeks and bars along the Salmon and Lemhi rivers were placer mined in the crudest manner and the operators took a sum estimated at from twenty-five to thirty million dollars from the earth in the shining yellow dust which, then as now, was the one agency which means prosperity and contentment to most of us and for which all of us are striving.

Like all placer camps, the Lemhi region was soon exhausted so that the crude methods could not be made to pay and the prospectors drifted

on to locate other placer camps, to take the yellow dust from the earth, get drunk and carouse, work out that ground and again drift on and on.

But the mineral possibilities as a quartz mining proposition were appealing. Outcroppings were found on every side, and thousands stayed to search for the mother lode, from which the gold in the pay streaks was supposed to have originated. Their search was not in vain and several prospects were discovered which turned into producing lead and silver properties and which were profitable properties during the high silver regime.

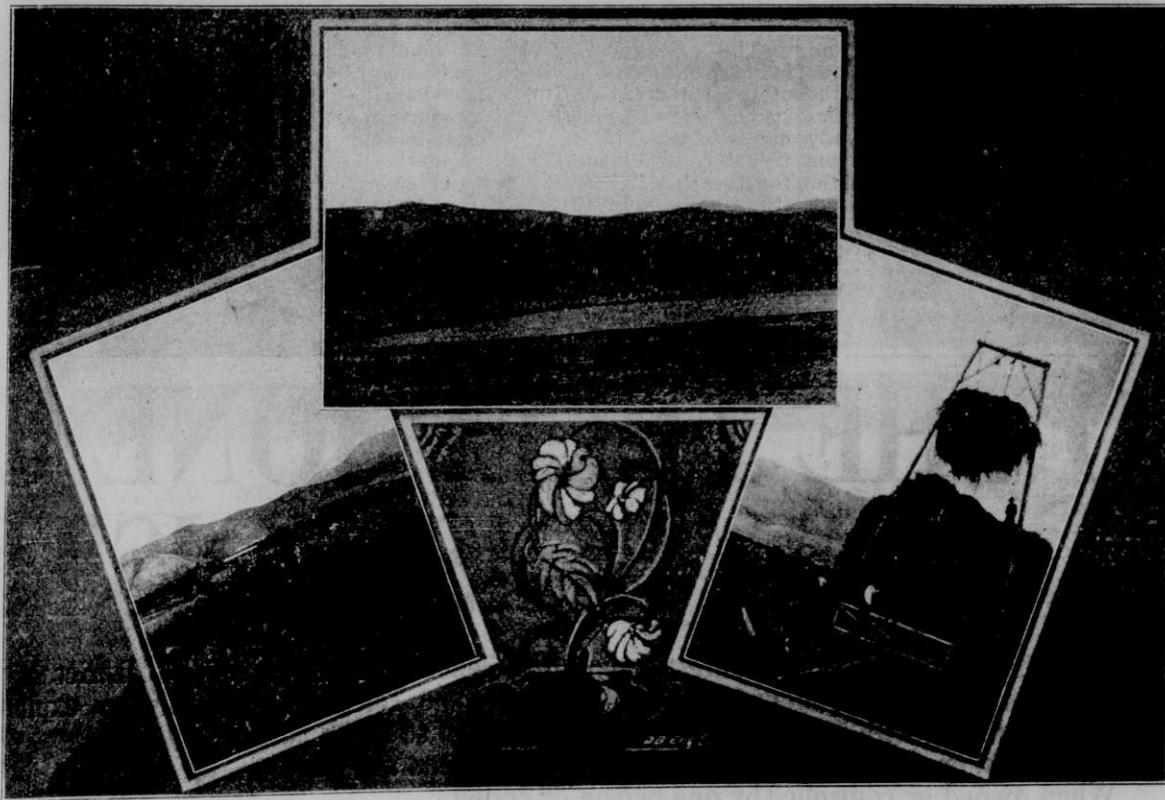
read that every westerner describes his particular section as a Garden of Eden, so I am going to forbear. However, I really thought I had entered a spot likened to that place when I came down off the Continental Divide and entered the Lemhi valley.

In the early farming days of the Lemhi country it was apparent that the ranchers would have to grow produce that would walk to market, so they took up the raising of cattle and made their county the greatest cattle producing county in the west. It is said that up to five years ago there were more head of cattle per capita in Lemhi county than in any other section of the west. They had an unlimited range of the finest grasses and were able to raise the-

with the spurs and the branding iron in the valleys of the Lemhi and the Salmon.

Extensive irrigation projects were undertaken and carried to a successful conclusion. New land was broken up every year and the acreage in grain, fruit and hay steadily increased. Today for miles up and down the rivers from Salmon City are well developed farms, where the owners are taking from the ground, with very little labor, a life of ease and happiness.

During all these years Lemhi county was some 100 miles distant from the railroad and every thing was freighted in or out in wagons over the Rocky Mountains. In 1908 the Pittsburg & Gilmore railroad built in from Armstead, Mont., and con-



SCENES IN THE RICH FARMING DISTRICTS OF LEMHI COUNTY

All this time the supplies for the camps were brought in on the backs of mules and horses from hundreds of miles away and the cost of living was tremendously high. The people inclined to agriculture slowly and commenced to raise enough food-stuffs to partly supply the demand. Those first prospector-farmers discovered a natural resource which will be of vital importance to the future of Lemhi county than her mines ever have been or ever will be. They discovered the fertility of the soil and as a result laid the seed which has made the valleys of the Salmon and Lemhi veritable snow-places. I meant to end that sentence by saying they made the valleys of the Lemhi and the Salmon veritable gardens of Eden, but I have recently

mentious quantities of the finest forage for winter feeding in the valleys, and it was only natural that cattle raising should flourish.

The average American does not like to see his neighbor grow rich. It is our temperament, so other people came into the valleys of the Lemhi and the Salmon and took up land. These men were more grasping than the cattlemen, and they saw the real possibilities of the land. They saw that it had a great future as a wheat growing section, saw that it raised the finest apples in the country and that it yielded immense crops of the finest timothy hay and they commenced to buy up the holdings of the cattlemen. So in this way the man with the hoe and the irrigating shovel succeeded the man

connected Lemhi county with the outside world.

The Pittsburg & Gilmore railroad is 100.3 miles long and was built at a cost of over two million dollars. It runs from Armstead, Mont., where it connects with the Oregon Short Line, to Salmon City, Idaho. In this short distance of 100 miles it crossed the Continental Divide and it has one of the best continental passes in the west. Without a doubt the Pittsburg & Gilmore railroad is now financed by the Hill railroad system, who were seeking a southern passing of the divide, and who intend to invade the Harriman territory, California. This theory is borne out by the fact that the Pittsburg & Gilmore has already commenced active construction from Armstead to Twin