

Showing Color

While the Gallatin Valley was famous for its agricultural output during the years that Montana was a territory, many of the valley's farmers were still seeking the mother lode.

Those pioneers that settled Gallatin City had a diverse portfolio, including several that got involved in nearby mining ventures.

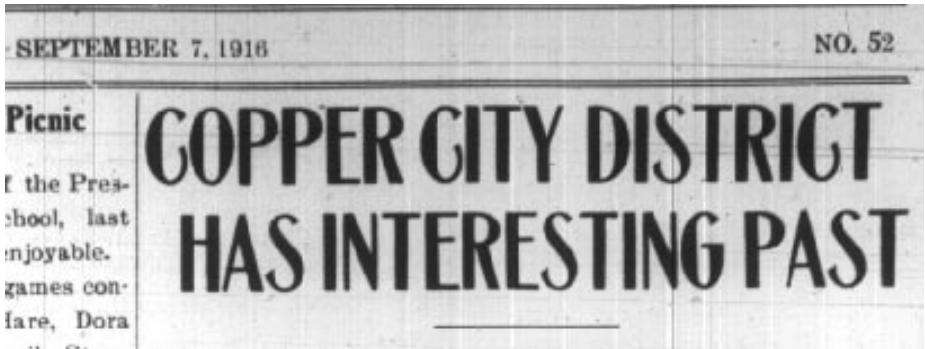
In neighboring Broadwater County, 307 hardrock mining patents have been filed since the 1872 Mining Law, compared to the 33 in Gallatin County. According to the website "Who owns the West" (www.ewg.org), about 13,508 acres of land are or were held by mining concerns. Quartz mines are the most prolific in Broadwater County, but gold, silver, copper and other precious metals have also been mined there. Just a few miles north of Three Forks, not far off Highway 287, is a series of mining patents that were collectively known as Copper City.

As early as 1864, settlers in the area noticed outcroppings in that area that showed "color." One major marker was a boulder of copper quartz six feet high and twenty feet in circumference. Several men went together and filed a claim on the "Green Eagle" mine. Samples of the boulder were assayed and gold was found. At that time Samuel Seaman, an associate of Judge Gallaher, was the only man with mining experience. But it was experience with Utah quartz mines, not Montana quartz mines and the first venture fell through for lack of progress.

J. O. Hopping was the next interested party. His wife wrote an article about Copper City to the Three Forks Herald in 1916 that provides much of the information herein. Hopping bought into the "Green Eagle," moved the boulder and sunk a shaft. The thirteen foot wide lead yielded several cars of high grade copper ore. This caused much excitement and a number of other claims were staked in the area. Claims called the Stella, Electric, Antelope, Butte and Copper Star, Silver, Iron and Crystal Canon were filed by various prospectors around 1883. About this time, Seaman, Hopping, and the Thorne brothers formed the Three Forks Mine and Milling Company, but the panic of 1883 forced them to quit the company.

The Green Eagle group continued digging the shaft and at 35 feet the ore petered out. A crosscut shaft was dug but nothing was found. Hopping continued the vertical shaft down to eighty-two feet but the shaft flooded and the mine was abandoned.

By 1887 Seaman and Hopping were the only remaining partners. They filed another claim, called the Burlington, and started a sloping shaft to intercept the Green Eagle at 65 feet. Just a few feet down, they struck a rich vein of quartz with a good yield of gold. One of their miners, Jack Thorne took a bag of ore over to the Jefferson River and \$4.00 of gold dust was washed out of the bag. \$4.00 in 1887 was a lot of money and



Seaman and Hopping were soon offered \$100,000 for the claim, but turned it down. Unfortunately, they never found the mother lode and Hopping spent a fortune in the attempt. Hopping died of sudden heart attack in 1894 on his way home from a debating society meeting.

Herbert Dunbar, a prosperous farmer and rancher, and Carl Hopping (son of J.O. Hopping) formed the Three Forks Mining Co. in 1906. By 1915-1916 the silver and iron mines in the area had changed hands too, the iron mine being under the control of the English Remittance Colony centered at Old Town.

On December 31, 1915, Frank Dunbar (Herbert's cousin) and Frank Brown were placing timber in a shaft to eventually renew development of the mine when several timbers gave way and plunged the pair to the bottom of the shaft. Brown was killed instantly and it took rescuers four hours to extract Dunbar, who had facial lacerations, broken ribs, and a bruised leg and ankle. Dunbar returned to reopen the mine but, again, the dreams of a rich strike were never realized.

For the last 100 years, interest has waxed and waned, ore values have rose and fallen, investors have been found and lost, and the mines have changed hands. "There's gold in them thar' hills," and there it remains until the next round of investors can be lured by the glint of metallic riches.

