

Mining the Headwaters

When one thinks of the Gallatin Valley and its resources, it brings to mind agriculture. After all, many of the people that came to Montana during the gold rush days came not for gold but for land, settling in this area as farmers and ranchers.

But the headwaters area has also had its share of mining activity. The mining history of this area dates back to 1300 BC. Limestone formations dominate the immediate area around the headwaters of the Missouri and it is in those formations that evidence of the earliest known mining activity in the area is found. On the bluffs just north of here, on the west side of the Missouri, the Pelican Lake culture mined for chert. Chert is a category of quartz which includes flint, but is usually of lower quality than flint. On the opposite bank of the Missouri is the company town of Trident, where limestone is mined and used in the manufacture of cement.

But limestone and chert were not the only mineral resources sought in the area. Among the first settlers of Gallatin City were several men that knew an opportunity when they saw it. Dr. Ketchum, Judge Gallaher and Mr. Tate, all men with some mining experience, spotted the signs of color in some rock outcroppings just a few miles northwest of their homes and staked a claim known as the Green Eagle. In 1864, there was not a lot that could be done about getting the copper out. There was no local demand and no easy means to transport or refine ore.

In the 1870's, four Gallatin City men, James Alpin, Frank Akin, Samuel Seaman and John Emmerson revisited the outcroppings and found a boulder of copper quartz about six feet in height and about twenty feet in circumference. The men had samples of the boulder assayed and gold was found in the samples. Samuel Seaman was the only man with experience with quartz mining, but that was in Utah, and he was stymied by the different kind of formations here in Montana.

It wasn't until 1880, when J. O. Hopping became interested, that things began to heat up. Hopping had come to Montana with the gold rush and had had some success in Virginia City. He sold his stake, had moved to the headwaters area in 1864-1865, married a pioneer daughter and started raising stock.

Under his direction several mining shafts were sunk around the area where the boulder had been found. Most failed to find anything significant. Finally, the mining group decided to dig the area directly beneath the boulder. The 13 foot wide shaft yielded several mining car loads of high grade ore, which caused

considerable interest in mining circles and in 1883 the area had several mining companies staking claims.

Hopping's mine was called the Stella, while the newcomers staked out the Electric, the Antelope, Butte, the Copper Star, The Iron Mine, The Silver Mine, and the Crystal Canon mine. Many of the folks working these mines were not professional miners and most were just local entrepreneurs.

One of these entrepreneurs working the silver mine was Asher Paul. In 1880, Paul and his partner, Michael Hanley, purchased 160 acres of land from James and Elizabeth Shedd. This encompassed most of the area known as Bridgeville, where Shedd had his bridges and stagecoach house. A year after the purchase, Shedd's hotel burned down, but was rebuilt by Paul and Hanley. With dreams of creating a viable town around their enterprise, Paul and Hanley filed a town plat in 1882, giving it a new name, Three Forks.

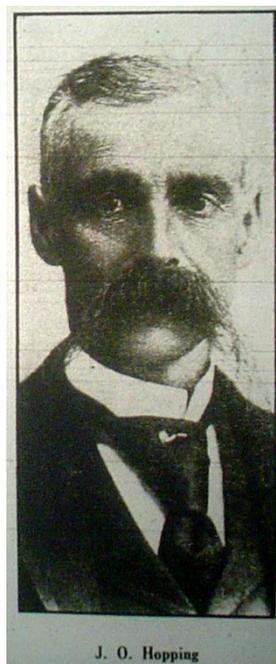
The plat of this town, which we now call Old Town, was rather crude and did not have any provisions for a railroad. (see page 6) But just a month later, an article in the *Avant Courier* by the Three Forks correspondent stated: "Leading officials of the Utah & Northern have lately visited our town and during their stay made arrangements with Paul and Hanley for ground upon which to build their depot and machine shop. . . We shall hear the shrill shriek of the Utah & Northern locomotives before those of the Northern Pacific road are heard on the divide announcing their arrival to the people of Bozeman and the Gallatin valley."

Unfortunately, the Union and Northern did not follow through. On January 15, 1883 the Northern Pacific had reached Livingston, MT. On September 8 of that year, the transcontinental Golden Spike ceremony was held at Gold Creek, MT

By 1884, disappointed by the Union and Northern, Paul and Hanley realized that the toll bridges were not making enough money to recapture their investment. They sold their interests to John Chater and Co. Chater & Co., it seemed, had big plans. They purchased a lot of acreage around Three Forks,

vacated the original plat, and filed a new plat that included land set aside for the Union and Northern Railroad. They began to solicit in England to draw new blood to the area. Three Forks eventually became known as the English Remittance Colony and for four years was the home of young Englishmen sent to America to sow their wild oats. It was, according to local historian Lyle Williams, Montana's original dude ranch.

Back at the Stella mine, the digging of the shaft continued down. At thirty five feet the ore was lost and a crosscut shaft yielding nothing, so the sinking was resumed down to eighty two feet. Encouraging signs of gray copper were encountered, but the miners hit what is known as a freshet, a vein of water if you will, and the shaft was flooded and



J. O. Hopping

Photo taken from the five year anniversary edition of the Three Forks Herald, September 18, 1913.

See page 4 for more about J. O. Hopping.

See page 5 for maps of the Copper City area.

eventually abandoned.

By 1887 only Hopping and Seaman remained active in work in what was now known as Copper City. The men decided to sink an incline shaft from their new Burlington mine to the original Green Eagle shaft. Pockets of fine copper were found, "just enough to keep the hope of striking the main body of ore only a few feet further on." Along the way they struck a streak of composed quartz. One of the miners carried a bag of this quartz to the Jefferson River and four hundred dollars in gold was washed out of the sample. Soon after Seaman and Hopping were offered a hundred thousand dollars for their mines, but they turned it down.

One wonders who made this offer, but whoever it was roused the interest of one of the leading capitalists of the era. In 1889, a flurry of purchases gave ownership of the land surrounding Three Forks to John R. Toole, one of several men close to Marcus Daly and his Anaconda Co. Early in 1889, there was speculation by some residents that not only would a smelter be built near Three Forks, but it would be chosen as the state capitol.

In 1892, Seaman, Hopping and the Thorne brothers consolidated five claims and formed the Three Forks Mining and Milling Company. The financial crisis of 1893 bankrupted the company. But rumors about the Anaconda Co. persisted and an article in a January 1896 issue of the Butte Miner speculated that the 4,000 acres owned by the company around Three Forks would not only be the site of a refinery but a horse ranch for Marcus Daly.

Work on the claims stopped and eventually lapsed and were re-located later by various interests. Samuel Seaman and Carl Hopping picked up the Green Eagle and Burlington claims and, in 1898, with backing from Thomas Dunn and Thomas Spivey began re-developing the claims. By the time Spivey's five thousand dollars was expended one shaft had been sunk to 150 feet, but with nothing to show for it, Spivey withdrew from the company.

In 1905 Herbert G. Dunbar, local farmer, rancher and entrepreneur bought into the enterprise and it was reorganized into the Three Forks Mining Company. There was a lot of activity in the area for the next five years, as the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad purchase land, built a railroad, and founded the new town of Three Forks. But as new town of Three Forks flourished, Copper City declined.

By late 1915 only two groups remained in the Copper City area, the Thorne brothers working the Stella mine and Dunbar - Seaman, working the Dunbar mine. The Dunbar mine was at 430 feet.

On Friday, December 31, 1915, framing in the Dunbar mine gave way, dropping Frank Dunbar and Frank Brown to the bottom of the shaft. When the men at the top discovered the mishap, one was sent to Three Forks for assistant while another was lowered down in a bucket to within 60 feet of the bottom. Frank Dunbar responded to the call, but Brown did not. Carl Hopping and others began tying off loose timbers and when supplies and man power from Three Forks arrived,

that work continued until the shaft was reasonably safe to work in. It took an hour to get to the bottom of the shaft and three hours to get Dunbar back to the top safely. Dunbar had suffered a head injury, broken ribs, and a broken leg and ankle. Local physician Dr. Gaertner dressed his injuries on site and he was taken to Herbert Dunbar's home in Old Town to recover.

Having not found Frank Brown, a call was made to Butte and foreman of the Garnian mine and four expert shaft men arrived at the scene. Within an hour the experts pulled the body of Frank Brown from under a mass of timbers.

While Frank Dunbar returned to work the mine, nothing of significance was garnered from the mine. Today, all of the sheds and makeshift homes of Copper City are gone and most of the scars of the mining operations are faded.

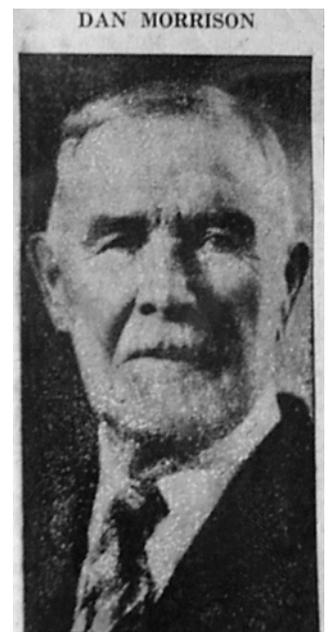
Today the 86.56 acres of mining claims of Copper City in Broadwater County are owned by a single entity. This includes the Copper Queen, Copper King, Stella, Dunbar Georgette, the Pennsylvania Lode mines and the Pennsylvania Mill site. The claims are surrounded by Bureau of Land Management land and there is a road that travels through the Copper City area, appropriately called Copper City Road, which begins on Old Town Road and ends at Highway 287.

Now let's discuss mining on the east bank of the Missouri River. In his journal entry on July 27, 1805, Captain Lewis Meriweather noted as his men rowed up the Missouri River canyon,

"the river was again closely hemmed in by high Clifts of a solid limestone rock which appear to have tumbled or sunk in the same manner of those discribed yesterday. The limestone appears to be of an excellent quality of deep blue colour when fractured and of a light led colour where exposed to the weather. It appears to be of a very fine grain the fracture like that of marble."

Just over one hundred years later in 1907, Donald "Dan" Morrison and several investors began laying mining claims on both sides of the river among those limestone formations. It was the perfect spot for a cement manufacturing facility. A small flat area just north of Lewis Rock, known as Crawford Flats had enough space for the plant and the housing for the men to build and run the plant. The Northern Pacific Railroad was conveniently present so fuels and materials could be shipped in, while product could be shipped out.

So, with backing of investors from Butte, construction began. Among the



BEFORE MY TIME by Patrick Finnegan copyright 2010

first construction projects for the new facility was the building of a railroad siding. John Crowley, a Lower Madison valley rancher and “orchardist” got the job. Crowley had just finished grading the Milwaukee rail bed on the other side of the river. Marcus Crowley, son of John recalls

I remember, as a small boy not yet fourteen, of spending a night in a very crowded bunkhouse and eating breakfast the next morning in a cook shack also crowded. They were the only buildings on the “Crawford Flats” as that little valley was then known where Trident and the big industry are now located.

Before the sidetrack for Trident was finished, there was a bad railroad wreck. In 1908 the whole west was a boom stage and although the freight trains weren’t half as long as they are today there were three times as many of them.

With no side track as yet, the local had to stand on the main line track while unloading the much needed supplies. One day while this was going on a second train came up behind the local, and was flagged down, then soon another freight came and was also flagged, but when the fourth came something went wrong and it smashed into the rear of the third, killing a fireman and scattering all manner of things that were shipped on railroads, including two carloads of hogs that were enroute to the west coast. A few of the hogs were killed and a few injured so badly they had to be destroyed. The rest were scattered in the brush along the Gallatin and all over Crawford bottom.

(From Headwaters Heritage History, 1983, Three Forks Area Historical Society)

The Trident Station became official in June 1909, when a platform was built near the tracks. The Trident Station manager, Norman Smith, had his telegraph and office in the bedroom of one of the first five houses built near the tracks in the company village of Trident. The house was used as the depot as well as the main office for the cement plant. After about two and half years of construction, the plant shipped its first load of Red Devil cement from the Three Forks Portland Cement Company on June 10th, 1910.

After a year of working out of the house, Smith moved into the newly built Trident Depot in June 1911. For the first eight years of its life, the cement plant ran at capacity. The cement was used in the construction of the Holter Dam, and a

small diversion dam on the Sun River as well as the sidewalks of Three Forks. Between 1920 and 1945, cement from the plant was used in the Morony Dam near Great Falls, the Gibson Dam near Augusta, Fork Peck Dam, Grand Coulee Dam and Polson Dam.

In addition to the limestone quarries, the Trident Plant of Holcim operates shale and sand quarries east of the plant.

But the biggest mining reserves in this area may not be something at the top of your mind. It seems to me that gravel is the hottest mining industry these days. If you look at the old USGS maps of this area, gravel pits are strewn across the landscape. One in particular I would like to point out.

The founder of Three Forks, John Q. Adams, worked for Milwaukee Land Company. As such he had the inside scoop on the local real estate market. In addition to the many lots in Three Forks that he personally bought during the lot sale in September 1908, he purchased sizable acreage around the town, some of which was to eventually become part of the Climbing Arrow, or CA Ranch (but that’s a different story). With all of that acreage, John and his brother Charles started a real estate business, Adams Realty Company.

In 1927, the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad’s Olympian was the luxury passenger train and thousands attended the dedication ceremony of the Gallatin Gateway Inn. Anticipating expanding markets, in 1928, the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad purchased 40 acres of land just east of Three Forks. Near a spur of the Gallatin Valley Railroad, the railroad began gravel pit operations. The gravel pits were expanded in 1931.

The land surrounding the first two gravel pits was eventually deeded to the state, managed by the Montana Fish and Game Department. The land around the third pit is owned by the City of Three Forks, and you’ll note that there is an operating gravel pit east of the third pit owned by Pierce Construction.

The gold, copper, limestone, chert and gravel of the Headwaters Area enriched those that dug them out of the ground, but each mine shaft and open pit also enriched the history of the area.



Komitator (grinding mills) sit on the main line at the Trident Plant in September 1908. Photo courtesy of Holcim US – Trident Plant

SIDEBAR More about J. O. Hopping

Taken from the Headwaters Heritage History, Diamond Jubilee Edition Copyright 1983, published by Three Forks Area Historical Society, printed by Artcraft Printers of Butte, Montana, as written by J. O. Hopping's granddaughter.

JACOB OSBORN HOPPING June 28, 1839-February 26, 1894

Born to Eliza and Buckley C. Hopping at Sag Harbor, Long Island, New York. He was the youngest of five. He was educated in the public schools of Burlington, Iowa and the Clinton Academy, New York. At the age of 18 he commenced to learn the moulder's trade at the foundry of Renze and Bradley at Burlington, Iowa, but owing to the failure of the firm, did not finish the trade.

In the spring of 1860 he went to Pikes Peak and with Douty and son and Samuel Sprague started a sawmill at the mouth of the South Boulder Canyon. Here he engaged in the lumber business for one year, then sold his interest in the mill to Douty, after which he went to the Gregory Mines and stayed there until the fall of 1862, when he returned to Iowa.

In 1863 he crossed the plains to Montana - at that time called Nez Perce Country - arriving at Bannock August 5, 1863. He had \$100 in greenbacks, which were of no value at that time. He offered a hotel keeper \$2 for a dinner and was promptly refused.

He made an arrangement with D. A. Andrews that he would go to Bivins, and Andrews would go to Alder. At Bivins he located some claims, and after paying a ridiculously high price for a pick, shovel and sluice boxes, found the claims would not pay. He traded the claims for a shoulder of bacon and went to Alder where he found that Andrews had located claims above the mouth of Granite, opposite what was afterward called Junction City. The miners had organized a district named Junction and Hopping, Neddrie, Stone, Cameron, Andrews and Huntington bored the first prospect hole on Dixie Bar.

The enterprise was an arduous one; Alder at that place is very flat and a survey informed the party that a drainage ditch would have to be cut through 2000 feet of ground, some of which was covered with a dense growth of alders and willows.

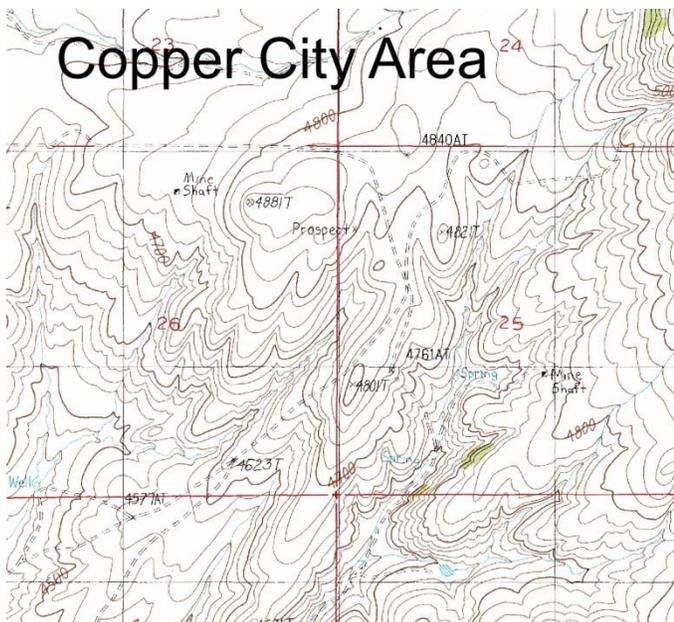
Winter was near at hand. Neither Andrews, Huntington nor Hopping had money, so Huntington and Hopping left Andrews to represent the mine, while they wrestled a grub stake. The winter was a fine one, wages were good, and by building cabins on contract, putting on mud roofs in Virginia City and digging cellars, they soon accumulated enough money to carry them through the winter. They finished the drainage ditch on the first day of June 1864. The mine was not a rich one for those times, and wages were \$6 and \$8 per day, so they sold it. After paying all debts, they found themselves with \$5000 each. After Hopping sold his interest in the mine he moved to Three Forks where he invested in 53 yearlings at \$44 each, and continued buying and selling stock. His ranch

consisted of 500 acres.

He was married to Mary E. Allen October 3, 1866. They had five children: Lydia (Lena), Evangeline (Eva), Carl, Allen and Evan.

In 1880 he became interested in mining and prospecting again, which he followed more or less until he died suddenly of a heart attack, February 26, 1894, when walking home from the schoolhouse where he had attended a debating society meeting. He was also a poet and wrote some very good verses.

Dorothy (Faris) Holton

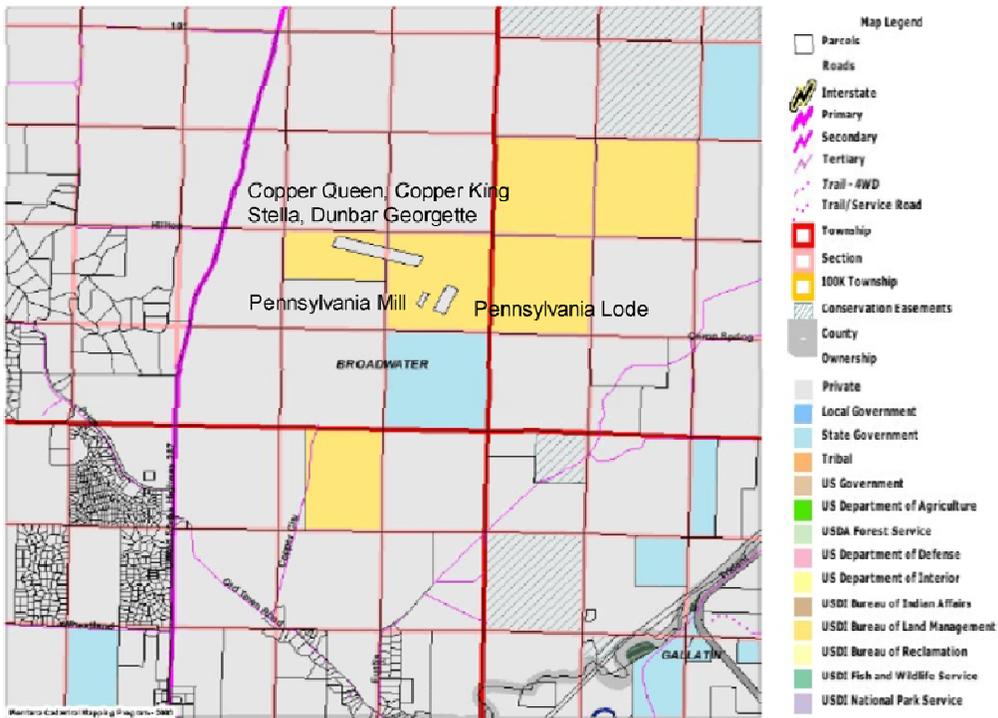


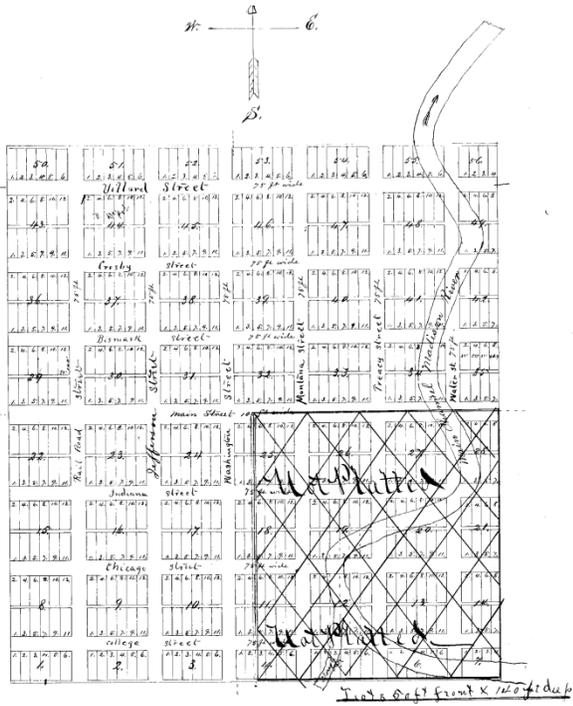
Left: Excerpt from USGS Map of the Three Forks Quadrangle of 1987.

Above: Yahoo Maps of headwaters of the Missouri River area

Bottom: Screen print and annotation of the Montana Cadastral Mapping Project of the Copper City environs, gis.mt.gov

Montana Cadastral Mapping Project





Left: Original plat of Three Forks (Old Town) of 1882.

Below: Second plat of Three Forks (Old Town) of 1884

PLAT OF THE TOWN OF THREE FORKS GALLATIN Co. M.T.
 Being the N.W. and N.E. 1/4 of S.W. 1/4 Section 10 Town 2 N Range 2. E.
 Filed for record October 31st A.D. 1882
 M.M. Black Recorder

