

A HISTORY OF SAND COULEE, MONTANA 1880 THROUGH 1900

by

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of

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ABSTRACT

Sand Coulee is now a bedroom community for Great Falls, laying twelve miles east and south of the larger city. Both town and city had their start at almost exactly the same time during the early 1880s. Sand Coulee was well known throughout the territory because of the tremendous coal field that J. J. Hill exploited to fuel his Great Northern Railway that connected the Twin Cities of Minnesota with the Pacific Northwest. The biggest repository of Sand Coulee history is a small history written by Ruby Giannini titled *A History of Sand Coulee* and a book titled *The Gulch Area History* written by a committee of area residents. The *Gulch Area History* is a genealogy of the area. These two books are the only ones specifically written about Sand Coulee and neither includes documentation. This thesis is heavily documented so that those who disagree with this history or its conclusions will be able to compare sources.

Because of Sand Coulee's coal mining importance, its history resides in many newspapers, magazines, official state reports and history books. The footnotes and bibliography of this thesis give the historian a sense for the wide range of material available in bits and scraps about Sand Coulee. This thesis covers areas that are relatively unexplored in Sand Coulee's history, but there is still a lot of history to be written about Sand Coulee.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I am a native of Sand Coulee and Tracy, Montana, a town located one mile north of Sand Coulee. My great grandfather, James Oliver, emigrated to Sand Coulee from Scotland in 1887. His wife Elizabeth emigrated from England in 1890. James and Elizabeth homesteaded a mile above Sand Coulee, taking title to their land on December 10, 1897. James supplemented the farm income by being a coal miner as did many agricultural men of the area. James and Elizabeth are buried in the Sand Coulee cemetery. My grandfather Elmer Erickson, who married Isabelle Oliver, the daughter of James and Elizabeth, was a coal miner as was my father, James Erickson. This is a common pedigree for many Sand Coulee people.

I attended my first four years of school in the 1910 addition to the original Sand Coulee school house built in 1888. I attended the fifth through eighth grades in the two-room school building built in 1918, just a few feet east of the 1888 structure. The two-room building was originally erected to house the seventh and eighth grades but when I went to school the fifth and sixth grades resided in the north classroom while seventh and eighth grades were taught in the south classroom. Neither building stands today. My high school class was the last class to graduate (1956) from the old high school, located in Centerville between Sand Coulee and Stockett, where the school held its first class in 1919. That building no longer stands. Many of the people I went to school with are descendants of the people who lived in Sand Coulee prior to 1900.

There are only two books specifically about the Sand Coulee area. The first book, written by my grade school teacher Mrs. Ruby Giannini, is titled *A History of Sand Coulee* and was published in 1985. The second book, *The Gulch Area History*, is the result of a community effort led by Marvene Raunig, published in 1990. *The Gulch Area History* is a genealogy of Sand Coulee and Stockett, Sand Coulee's sister city six miles to the south. The book also includes the genealogy of people from Tracy, Number Seven, Centerville and the surrounding area.

Two more books exist about communities in close proximity to Sand Coulee. Those communities are Eden and Belt. The Eden book is titled *A Century in the Foot Hills, 1876 to 1976, A History of the Eden Area* and is basically a genealogy of the Eden country. The work, completed by a committee chaired by Mrs. Joe (Betty) Maurer, was published in 1976. The Belt book is titled *Belt Valley History*, published in 1979. Ethel Castner Kennedy researched the book and Eva Stober wrote the text for the book. The Belt book covers the period from 1877-1979 and is also a genealogy of that area. Both the Belt and Eden books contain many of the same names that are found in the Giannini book and the *Gulch Area History*. The four books are in a sense a history of an extended family that immigrated to this area at about the same time, from many American states and foreign countries, to mine coal in Sand Coulee and Belt and to farm and ranch the area.

I have several purposes in writing this history. First of all I view it as a thank you to all the people who came to Sand Coulee generations ago. This history is also a thank you to all the people I have known over many years and the people who presently live in

Sand Coulee and the surrounding area. I salute them all for the heritage and culture they represent and for being such an important part of my life.

I will endeavor to concentrate on subjects not extensively covered in the books mentioned above rather than rehash the history they represent. Those earlier books are an important record that is indispensable to the area history. They are also irreplaceable because much of the history in those books was garnered from personal recollections of old timers who have passed away.

Another purpose of this work is to act as a benchmark for people who may write the area history in the future. I am referring to the fact that the existing histories are not footnoted or extensively documented. In my work I use comprehensive documentation, perhaps to a fault. My research is at odds with a few statements in the existing histories, but I cannot compare what my research shows with those conflicting statements because documentation does not exist in the earlier histories that would allow source comparisons. There is little in disagreement but disagreements do exist. That should not detract from the previous histories, nor should it add to my history, but documentation is valuable for scholars who write and study history. Although promising not to rehash the area history, I must present a short introductory history of the area, drawing on those earlier books and other sources, for those readers unfamiliar with the area.



Figure 1. Map of Sand Coulee

Sand Coulee's Role in Industrializing the West

Before the latter part of the 1800s people looked at Montana as part of a vast expanse to endure while traveling to a different destination. By the late 19th century an industrialist, capitalist society started developing Montana and Sand Coulee became part of that undertaking.

But before exploring that story it is enlightening to visit William Cronon's book, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. Cronon argues that great cities settled

the west by extending their influence into western hinterlands, bringing new peripheral lands into their capitalist orbit. Cronon called these great cities gateway cities. He claims that a gateway status could only be temporary, “bound to the forces of market expansion, environmental degradation, and self induced competition that first created and then destroyed the gateway’s utility to the urban-rural system as a whole.”¹ Cronon also maintains that gateway cities combined their resources with railroads to open so large a hinterland that it encouraged western migration to produce other gateway cities such as Minneapolis, Omaha, Kansas City and Denver.

Sand Coulee’s gateway city was Minneapolis/St. Paul, where James J. Hill dreamed of extending his Great Northern all the way to the Pacific. Minneapolis used the railroad, just as Chicago had, to extend its influence west, but its orientation was slightly different. Hill’s railroad would create a bridge to the northwest coast, Seattle in particular, a smaller gateway city exploiting its hinterland to the east, to meet the westward expansion of Minneapolis’ hinterland.

Because of Hill, Sand Coulee would stir from its peaceful, agricultural foundation into a roaring coal mining camp, with a work force drawn from many American states and countries of the world. The west repeatedly accomplished its industrialization with foreign labor and Sand Coulee would do the same. As David Igler states in his book, *Industrial Cowboys, Miller and Lux And The Transformation Of The Far West, 1850-1920*, the central issue in industrializing the far west was, “who held the right and power

¹ William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis, Chicago and the Great West* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992), 377.

to engineer the landscape.”² His thesis certainly fits Sand Coulee; industrial giant James J. Hill engineered its landscape in an enormous way. Sand Coulee became a performer in industrializing the west when it started mining coal in the 1880s. Its black rock helped to power locomotives over the Rocky Mountains to the west coast and to smelt and refine Anaconda Copper Mining Company ore in Anaconda and Great Falls, Montana.

Sand Coulee, even though a small town in a vast frontier space, followed closely a pattern observed in resource extraction sites all over the west. That pattern included resource discovery, quickly importing labor (much of it foreign) to engineer the landscape and extract the resources, a period of boom and bust, and finally abandonment and a legacy of environmental problems. These resource extraction sites paid an enormous price for their part in industrializing the west, as the Sand Coulee episode in western mining history makes evident.

The people who came to Sand Coulee were far different from the early prospectors and miners who came to Montana to get rich with a gold strike. The miners who came to Sand Coulee were there for wages, not for get rich schemes. They left their homes in foreign lands in search of a better life for their families. The American born miners came to Sand Coulee from other states for the same reasons. Many American born came to Sand Coulee to farm and provide services for the miners. Because Sand Coulee residents were miners and homesteaders, rather than prospectors and adventurers, they brought their families with them.

² David Iglar, *Industrial Cowboys Miller and Lux And The Transformation of the Far West* (University of California Press: 2001), 5.

Sand Coulee, though coal was reportedly found in 1881, did not become a town with a Post Office until 1884. Civilizing events soon followed. A vibrant cultural energy matched the tremendous industrial energy that initiated the coal mining. The transient and diverse population must have put tremendous strain on those building a society conducive to raising families in safety and tranquility. Because many of the Sand Coulee pioneers were family people they quickly built institutions, such as churches and schools, to protect and nurture family life. The Methodist Church first held services in a one-room brick school house in 1888. Brother Van Orsdel was involved in raising money for the United Methodist church building which was erected in 1891.³ A four room brick school house was built in 1888.⁴ The community leaders did have help in their quest when retail systems arrived almost intact from the east and provided stability. The politics of the American born followed them to the small coal camp, as did the politics of the foreign born as we shall see in a later chapter about the Finnish people. Politics helped provide stability because it provided familiarity and a tie with the past that was important to a developing community. Many fraternal organizations followed both the American and native born to their new home. The fact that there were many families and women in camp helped to eliminate much of the disorder and instability found in earlier, predominately male gold camps such as Virginia City.

None of the new people, American or foreign born wanted to give up the culture they brought with them. It is fascinating to observe how the cultures survived and were mixed among this vibrant population. There are still instances of this in the community,

³ Doris Whithorn, compiler, *Bicentennial Tapestry of the Yellowstone Conference, 1784-1894* (Livingston: Livingston Enterprise, 1994), 58.

⁴ Ruby Giannini, *A History of Sand Coulee* (Sand Coulee: self published, 1985), 49.

such as the “pigs in the blanket” feast held annually at the Catholic center in Centerville. Much of the early cultural activity is documented in articles in the *Great Falls Tribune*, *Great Falls Leader* and the *Belt Valley Times*.

Native People of Sand Coulee

The Blackfeet claimed the Sand Coulee area before the settler came. Other Native Americans claimed the land before them. The plains immediately north of the region accommodated vast expanses of buffalo according to many historical accounts, including that of Lewis and Clark. The Sand Coulee Creek drainage offered a luxurious place to situate a camp while hunting buffalo. The creek runs through a large valley that drains the Little Belt Mountains into the Missouri River not far above Great Falls. Cottonwood and willow lined the stream banks, providing more than enough fuel for cooking fires. It is known that the Indians camped in the area because many tipi rings lay along the stream bank and people interested in such things have picked up numerous Indian tools. But, the farmers plowed under the tipi rings and the native tools as they sat on their machines working the rich soil. In 1886 the *Great Falls Tribune* reported that Jonathan Goon of Sand Coulee, while prospecting for water on his ranch, “ran across a partially crumpled specimen of the Indian basket work eight feet below the surface.⁵ The work indicated wonderful skill in the fine straw braiding for which the aborigines are so well known.” Mr. Goon speculated the basket was a primitive burial shroud for a small child. The *Tribune* ends the article with a typical statement for that time, “No one can observe the mute histories of extinct races without feelings of deep regret that so little can be learned

⁵ *Great Falls Tribune*, July 24, 1886.

about these children of nature. But we should rather have their history than themselves with us at the present time.”

The Blackfeet may have wondered about the black outcroppings that appeared in various hill sides, but they could not know that sleeping under the land lay a giant forest, embalmed hundreds of millions of years ago. That embalmed plant life had turned into a black, shining, organic sedimentary rock that white men needed to industrialize the west.⁶ By the end of the 19th century the Blackfeet knew their land would fill with settlers and the railroad would dissect their land in many places, and that they would be powerless to resist the loss of their land. Their sadness must have been overwhelming. After the arrival of settlers and coal miners, the next Indian visitors to Sand Coulee would come as small, straggling bands of beggars. Just five years after the Indians defeated Custer coal was first mined in Sand Coulee.⁷

Homesteaders

This thesis is not about homesteaders but they must be briefly included because they were such an important part of Sand Coulee’s beginning. For those interested, Giannini gives a more detailed picture.

In 1881, a group of Iowa farmers somehow heard of land available in a distant place just south of the great falls of the Missouri, Montana Territory. They gathered what

⁶ Peter James, *The Future of Coal* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1982), 2.

⁷ The Eden community book, *A Century in the Foothill Eden Area, 1876 to 1976* gives an excellent account of the early Native Americans who lived in the Sand Coulee, Stockett, Belt and Eden country. Marcia Staigmiller wrote the piece that she titled “Grass Roots, Indians In The Foot Hills.” If one wants more information about the natives who inhabited the Sand Coulee area before the whites came I would recommend her account.

they needed and loaded it onto the railroad. The rail bed ended at Corinne, Utah and the farmers now had to make the rest of the journey the hard way, by foot and wagon. When they got to Sand Coulee they unloaded their possessions and put up tents to live in until they could erect something more substantial. Sand Coulee was thus established before Great Falls.⁸

Sand Coulee resides is a short coulee, not much more than a mile long and a quarter mile wide that opens into the broad valley of Sand Coulee Creek. Sand Coulee's first name was Giffen, named after one of the settlers, Nat McGiffen. Later McGiffen moved to different land and the name of the small, agriculture settlement took the name of Sand Coulee because of the sand roses that grew in the coulee. Sand Coulee became a place on the map when its first post office officially opened on July 10, 1884.⁹

One of the settlers discovered coal in 1881, although it did not take much hunting because the coal outcropped in places just above the coulee floor. A man named Nelson may have opened the first major mine.¹⁰ The people used the coal for home consumption and freighted it to Great Falls for the same purpose. News of the coal discovery spread and eastern men with big money and big ideas began to get interested.

⁸ Roberta Carkeek, *Names on the Face of Montana* (Missoula: University of Montana Publications, 1971).

⁹ Cascade County Historical Society, *Cascade County Album* (Great Falls: Advanced Litho Printing, 1999), 119.

¹⁰ George Morris McArthur, *Acid Mine Waste Pollution Abatement Sand Coulee Creek, Montana* (Montana State University, December 1970, Masters Thesis), p. 10. – I consider this information unreliable. The table listing Nelson as the first mine opened also lists the Cottonwood mine as opening in 1890, which is not correct. See page 189 of this thesis.

The Railroad

James J. Hill made a hunting trip to Montana in 1884 at the invitation of Paris Gibson and Charles A. Broadwater. Paris Gibson, the founder of Great Falls and a St. Paul friend of Hill, envisioned Hill's railroad as the key to fulfilling Gibson's plans for growing Great Falls. Broadwater, a Montana pioneer and banker from Helena, had a gregarious personality and soon became a good friend of Hill.¹¹

Hill needed to know if the Sand Coulee coal field contained enough energy to drive his trains westward on a sustained basis. He also needed to know if the quality of coal would be sufficient to fire his locomotive boilers across the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Northwest coast. In the summer of 1884 Professor J. S. Newberry, from the prestigious Columbia University School of Mines in New York, was hired to assess the Sand Coulee coalfield. Hill had Newberry's thirteen-page report by October and he was excited about the coalfield.¹² The coal field would more than do the job in both quantity and quality. All seemed ready for a boisterous future for Sand Coulee. Broadwater, using insider information gained by his association with Hill, and perhaps at Hill's request, paid \$13,000 in cash for 1,300 acres of coal land around Sand Coulee in 1886.¹³

In 1887 Hill's construction crews started west from Minot, Dakota Territory, with his Manitoba Railroad. The rail bed lengthened with record breaking speed. The railroad set a record of 643 miles of continuous track laid in one summer.¹⁴ It reached Great Falls

¹¹ Albro Martin, *James J. Hill and the Opening of the Northwest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 335.

¹² *Ibid.*, 337.

¹³ *Great Falls Tribune*, February 20, 1886.

¹⁴ Martin, *James J. Hill and the Opening of the Northwest*, 346.

in 1887 and pushed on to Helena, with the ultimate goal of Butte and the possibility of rich hauling contracts with the Anaconda Copper Mining Company. Hill also knew he needed to build track from Great Falls to Sand Coulee to transport coal to fuel his railroad. He completed the Sand Coulee spur in July of 1888.¹⁵ Now, Hill needed miners.

The Mining People

As of 1900 people from thirty states came to Sand Coulee to mine coal or provide goods and services to the miners. They also arrived from twenty-one different countries from all over the world.¹⁶ They gathered in the small coulee and began digging horizontal tunnels into the hills. Company houses and boarding houses soon replaced tents. The company store and other company buildings appeared almost immediately. Saloons, of which there were seventeen at one time or another, pool halls, non-company stores and various other enterprises quickly sprouted. The miners had their occupation in common but not their language. Because of language and cultural barriers, they partitioned the coulee to live with their own kind. The top or south end of the coulee was known as Shack Town where many of the poor lived, Middletown, or Finn Town housed the Finns, and many people of other nationalities settled in the Downtown area which also housed the business section.

Sand Coulee was often referred to as “the melting pot.” The people tried as hard as they could not to lose their identity in the pot by building such edifices as the Finn Hall and Slav Hall, to socialize with their own kind. Even in the mines they fought against the

¹⁵ Cascade County Historical Society, *Cascade County Album*, 116.

¹⁶ United States Manuscript Census, 1900.

melting pot. The coalfield claimed many mines, enabling the mine owners to segregate miners by country of origin, which also increased mine safety because of augmented communication ability in the dangerous mine environment.

Many different languages were used to start the day. Boys kept the stoves stoked with coal and took out the ashes. Each house had an ash pile, out the back door or front door. Often, the boys spread the ashes on walkways or roads to combat the mud caused by rain or snow. A girl's chores centered on helping her mother. The same opus of languages floated on the evening air as mothers called their children in for the evening. This description fits my childhood with the exception there were not as many languages spoken as there were in 1900.

Homes, businesses, the ubiquitous mine tipples, slack dumps (piles of coal mine waste) and railroad tracks crowded into this small, steep coulee. Good water was scarce in the community. Wells had to be dug by hand, often terminating in a dry hole. Women and children shared water hauling for domestic use. Because houses frequently perched on hillsides, water often had to be hauled uphill. Houses had barrels at each corner, sometimes dug into the ground, to catch rain water from the roof to ease the water shortage. My childhood home used such barrels until my father hand dug a cistern. The rain water made good bathing water and seemed especially good for washing hair. Children took a weekly bath in a round, tin tub. Usually the oldest child got to take a bath with fresh water and younger siblings bathed in the same precious, increasingly dirty water. In many ways people of my generation lived much as people did in 1900 in Sand Coulee. We heated with coal and had the ever-present ash piles, etc.

Before building a house the outhouse was often constructed with no thought or concern, other than where to conveniently place it on the tiny plot it would share with the house. My family enjoyed our first indoor bathroom when I was in the eighth grade. A proper garbage dump did not exist in Sand Coulee because it was too difficult to haul garbage to a central location. The creek that ran the entire length of the town became the garbage dump. This small stream, the color of rust because of the acid mine water, became simply the “rusty ditch.” Every so often the creek would flood and flush the garbage down stream, much to the chagrin of the people receiving this gift from their upstream neighbors. Mining Coulee which branched out to the east near the head end of Sand Coulee, was later used as the community garbage dump until modern steel garbage bins were installed at Stockett in the early 1970s.¹⁷ Coal dust invaded lungs, skin, houses and landscape. Coal dust penetrated every part of a house and to this day if one remodels one of the original houses, coal dust will often fly with each stroke of the hammer. The miners inhaled the coal dust as they worked and many developed breathing problems. According to Virginia Albertini, “Many men died of the coal miner’s disease, black lung disease.”¹⁸ The miners would come home each night with faces black as coal. They washed off the coal dust with water their families hauled. I recall both my grandfather and father coming home with black faces and coal dust covered clothing.

The early miners lived in dread of hearing the signal for a mine accident, and there were many. These mines did not have dangerous gas in them and miners thought

¹⁷ Strangely enough, I was the Chairman of the County Commission Committee that was responsible for installing the modern containers that replaced the garbage dumps around the county. The new containers were strongly opposed at the time, my job and life were actually threatened.

¹⁸ Marvene Raunig, Chairperson and Organizer, *The Gulch Area History* (Great Falls: Advanced Litho Printing, 1990), 8.

them relatively safe, but many fatal accidents still happened. People living in the coulee encountered a hard life compared to that of their industrial masters ensconced in eastern mansions, far from the coal dust, water hauling, outhouses, diphtheria and mining accidents.

Mining

Mining, in the 1880s, was a primitive endeavor compared to the massive machinery and power now used in the mines. When, ages ago, coal formed, it rested on some type of material the miners called the mine floor. An overburden (in this instance 325-450 feet thick) formed the mine ceiling.¹⁹ Coal is exclusive and will be found isolated from the material around it. The trick to mining involves extracting the seam of coal while not disturbing the mine roof. The miner must know his craft. He must act carefully not to cause a cave in, killing miners, costing money, and perhaps ruining the mine.

The first miners used picks, shovels, hammers, axes, drills, levels and many other hand tools. Each miner wore a cap with a carbide lamp. He carried a miner's lunch pail, oval in shape, made of aluminum that had two compartments. The bottom compartment contained a liquid and the top compartment contained his lunch.

Sand Coulee coal, the object of all this massive activity, ranked as sub bituminous B to high volatile C bituminous. The coal contained 2 to 3 percent sulfur, in the form of pyrite nodules or "sulfur balls" which must be excluded from the coal because of their explosiveness. The sulfur balls ranged in size from a pin head to about four inches in

¹⁹ McArthur, *Acid Mine Waste Pollution*, 33.

diameter.²⁰ They were heavy and made excellent throwing material, adding immeasurable pleasure to young boy's rock throwing propensities. Sub-bituminous B coal produces 10,500 BTUs per pound of coal. High volatile C bituminous coal produces 12,000 Btu per pound of coal.²¹ All the original plant material of C bituminous has been transformed, giving it a high calorific value. This makes it the most useful and widely produced class of coal.²²

The Aftermath

In 1944 and 1945 the Great Northern substantially increased its diesel locomotive inventory.²³ By the mid 50s the conversion to diesel was complete. However, before diesel replaced coal as the Great Northern railroad energy source, industrial coal mining in Sand Coulee came to an end. All that the capitalists built in the coulee became a liability and they left Sand Coulee with callous disregard.

Stream beds, water wells, basements, agricultural land and down stream users suffered from acid mine water coming from the Sand Coulee mines.²⁴ Acid mine water occurs when iron disulfides are exposed to oxygen and water. The extensive Sand Coulee underground mining permitted oxygen, sulfur and water to mix in the mines, and as a result, the area experienced far-reaching acid mine water drainage problems. The mines disgorged the water in varying amounts that polluted all it came in contact with. People,

²⁰ Ibid, p. 32.

²¹ James, *Future of Coal*, p. 3.

²² Ibid., p. 4.

²³ Ralph W. Hidy, *The Great Northern Railway a History* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1988), 222.

²⁴ Hydrometrics of Helena, *Montana, Comprehensive Reclamation and Engineering Plan, Sand Coulee Montana-Cascade County Montana 1983*, 60.

drilling deeper wells to avoid the contamination, created another avenue for the polluted water to get into the aquifer. The effects of acid mine water waste are among our nation's most serious pollution problems. "About 25 miles of Sand Coulee Creek and its tributaries suffered severely from acid mine drainage."²⁵ "Streams polluted with acid mine drainage which pass through populated areas often receive additional pollutants."²⁶ That became devastatingly clear in the case of Sand Coulee, where residents used the "rusty ditch" to dump their garbage and added to their sanitation problems.

The Sand Coulee Creek drainage encompasses about 190 square miles. In the past the creek's poisoned water entered the intake for the Great Falls water treatment plant. Sand Coulee creek flows into the Missouri River about 3 miles above the plant intake and according to operators the polluted water flowed on top of river ice, reaching the intake during extended cold periods.²⁷

People eventually became concerned about their environment and started cleaning it up. The State of Montana, through the Montana Abandoned Mine Reclamation Bureau, created in 1980, began to address sites like Sand Coulee. In the 1980s the Sand Coulee problem was studied by private engineering firms contracting with the state. The solution, in many instances, involved closing the entrances to the mine tunnels. The state completed the entrance closing in the 1990s. In some instances that seemed to work quite well but in others the water held back in the mine tunnels now trickles out and these leaks will probably worsen as time passes.

²⁵ McArthur, *Acid Mine Waste Pollution*, x. of abstract.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

Sand Coulee is an enlightening example of what happened to many western industrialist hinterlands during the last half of the 19th century. Trying to repair western environmental damage is immensely expensive. The responsible companies bore little, if any, of the cost and in the end the taxpayer will put up the money, as they have in Sand Coulee. Descendants of the industrial giants that re-engineered the west probably have no picture in their mind of the immense environmental damage their great grandfathers caused. The drive to transform the landscape for power and riches still continues. Companies are currently trying to exploit the land and dodge the environmental consequences. We are presently trying to protect the Blackfoot River from cyanide leach gold mining. We keep fighting the environmental battle in such places as Butte, Landusky, Maiden and Sand Coulee, just to name a few places in Montana.

Hopefully, someday we will learn the lesson with which Cronon ends *Nature's Metropolis*. He states each town or city is nature's metropolis and each piece of countryside its rural hinterland. According to Cronon, "We can only take them together and, in making the journey between them, find a way of life that does justice to them both."²⁸ We are not there yet. Acid mine water is still discharging into the "rusty ditch" within the confines of Sand Coulee. Like many other places in the west, Sand Coulee was used to industrialize the west and was left broken and poisoned.

Conclusion

This study contains four chapters. Chapter One is an analysis of the 1900 census that provides a better understanding of the people who lived in Sand Coulee from its

Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 385.

inception through 1900. The 1890 census raw data was burned so all that exists are the summaries. The 1890 census shows 873 people residing in the Sand Coulee census district which also contained other small towns in the area, while the 1900 census shows 2,950 people residing in the Sand Coulee district which also included all the small towns in the area, as well as Stockett. The 1910 census has 2,570 people residing in the census area with Stockett and Sand Coulee separated into different districts. Stockett contained 1,600 residents and Sand Coulee 970. The 1920 census lists 2,877 people with Stockett and Sand Coulee again being lumped into the same district.

Chapter Two is an essay about the Finnish people and how they lived and contributed to the coal camp. I think this is completely relevant to the area history and I wish I could have done that for every immigrant group that came to Sand Coulee. When I started analyzing the census I made the decision to go into detail about the immigrant group with the highest population in the camp. I had no idea what ethnic group that would be but rather hoped it might be the Scots because my great grandfather emigrated from Scotland. It turned out that the Finnish people contributed the most immigrants to Sand Coulee, and thus the chapter about their presence in the coal camp. The Finnish immigrants numbered 241, closely followed by 237 Austrian immigrants. I was tempted to include a longer look at the Austrians but decided to hold to my original premise.

Chapter Three discusses the health and living conditions of the camp. Sand Coulee was a polluted place and disease played a tragic part in its history. Very little has been written about this subject even though it is a vital and heartrending part of Sand

Coulee history. Actually, the health of the camp and the mining accidents and deaths are one of the most compelling parts of Sand Coulee history.

Chapter four is about the actual job of mining in the coulee and the resulting accidents and deaths that occurred. Surprisingly, not much has been written about mining and mine accidents in Sand Coulee during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century. The most extensive description of mining in the area is the personal, written recollections of Bob Wilson, a long time resident of Stockett who later moved to the west coast. The history of Sand Coulee mining must also include some of Stockett's history. Stockett ended up larger than Sand Coulee and was instrumental in the decline of Sand Coulee. By 1900 the big Sand Coulee mining operation moved to Stockett leaving Sand Coulee to continue its mining with small operators furnishing domestic coal to a large area around Great Falls, although the ACM, in later years, had a substantial mine in the coulee.

Because I want this to be a benchmark history for future writers and scholars of Sand Coulee history, I have compiled several tables that list such things as mine deaths, buildings, census figures, and the sources from which these lists were compiled. My sincere wish is that my work will be informative and enjoyed by Sand Coulee's current and future residents. There is still much history to be written about the locale and I hope this history will prove valuable to future historians as previous works were to my own.

CHAPTER 2

ANALYSIS OF 1900 CENSUS

In spite of idiosyncrasies of individual settlements, nearly all residents of coal towns shared some common modes of thought, habits, prejudices, value aspirations and experiences. – Crandall Shifflett, Historian²⁹

Problems With Census Analysis

The 1900 census for the Sand Coulee area lists 2,950 people but the format of the census makes it impossible to separate the number of people who lived in Sand Coulee from the people who lived in Tracy, Number Seven, Centerville, Stockett and the surrounding area. However, the Sand Coulee statistics on ethnicity, sex, age, etc., would not be remarkably different from the census area because many of the people from Sand Coulee moved to Stockett when those mines became the center of coal production, and the area's small towns were partially bedroom communities for Sand Coulee and thus are not extraordinarily different in ethnic makeup, etc. from Sand Coulee.

Physical Description of Sand Coulee

The space people inhabit is a major determinant of how they live with each other. It is instructive to be aware of Sand Coulee space in order to understand how people in the coal camp interacted with each other. Legroom determined many things for Sand Coulee. This short coulee, with limited floor area, is dissected by a small creek that came to be known as the "Rusty Ditch." George Morris McArthur, in his masters thesis

²⁹ Rick J. Clyne, *Coal People* (Canada: Colorado Historical Society, 1999), 42.

concerning mine waste in the locale, called the creek, “No Name Creek”.³⁰ Steep hillsides and rim rock, 50 to 100 feet high at the coulee entrance, limited useable space and pushed activity downward toward gentler slopes and onto the coulee floor. Another space limiting factor is the anatomy of a coulee; the more one travels toward the head of a coulee the more space becomes restricted. Sand Coulee was the only town in the immediate coal field that was severely constricted by geography. Too, the propensity of the people to live close to their mines and businesses aggravated the shortage of room. Tracy, Number Seven and Centerville, all offered more usable space for a coal camp. Stockett was also “bound up” by terrain but not as severely as Sand Coulee. Stockett residents boasted about not having to climb hills to visit neighbors as did those living in Sand Coulee.³¹

By using an estimate of the dimensions of the coulee at quarter of a mile wide by a mile long, the room available for living and working can be roughly calculated and compared to the organized residential space of Great Falls. Sand Coulee, in area, is approximately the size of sixty-four Great Falls city blocks, or an eight square block area. In those sixty-four blocks a maximum of 896 city residences can be built. The 1896-97 *Great Falls City Directory* included a separate section for Sand Coulee and claims 2000 people lived in the camp. In Sand Coulee there were approximately 408 homes at the start of 1900. This figure is roughly calculated by using the census which shows the average family size to be 4.9 people. Using the 1896-97 *Great Falls City Directory* figure of 2000 people living in Sand Coulee one can divide 2000 by 4.9 and arrive at 408 homes. The

³⁰ McArthur, *Acid Mine Waste Pollution*, 16.

³¹ *Belt Valley Times*, September 30, 1897.

census actually shows 595 separate residences in the census area but when the surrounding area is subtracted from the total separate residences, 408 houses seems a reasonable estimate for Sand Coulee. Stockett was not a factor during 1896-1897.

According to the 1896-97 *City Directory* the Sand Coulee space also included fifty-three buildings comprised of saloons, restaurants, boarding houses, commercial buildings and public buildings. In all of Sand Coulee’s history saloons were the most numerous of businesses. A total of seventeen saloons adorned the coulee at one time or another. The 1896-97 *City Directory* names only nine saloons, still enough to keep the miners happy. Churches and some public buildings, along with some livery stables and ice houses, also resided within the confines of the coulee but are not mentioned in the *Directory*.

Table 1. Business Listings 1896-97 City Directory, Owners Noted to the Right
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SALOONS

Cosmopolitan Saloon	Sarzin and Eade
Mint Saloon	John Christopher
Miners Beer Hall	Johnson and Danko
Free Silver Saloon	Mattson & Keko
No. 1 Saloon, Ole Ruikka and Company Saloon	Ruikka and Maikka
Olson and Company Saloon	Andrew Martinson
Sand Coulee Beer Hall	Charles Krause
St. Louis Beer Hall	Emil Olson
Silver Dollar Saloon	

LODGING

Cascade House	George Pappernick
Evans Boarding House	Mrs. Lizzie Evans
Johnson Boarding House	Mrs. Emily Johnson
Keegan Boarding House	Hugh Keegan
Kenmore House	R.S. Ball
Our House	L.R. Howard
Park Hotel	Kate Mattili
Wirtala Boardinghouse	Susan Wirtala

COMMERCIAL PROPERTIES

Contractor and Builder	Frank Robbins
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Table 1 Continued

COMMERCIAL PROPERTIES

The Gem Barbershop	Folinsbee & Pappernick
Anthony & Brown Livery	James Anthony & George W. Brown
Bank of Sand Coulee	Henry Welch President, Nat McGiffen, vice president, J.G. Anthony,
Cashier	
Dressmaker	Miss Mary Bar
Bartholomew & King	brick makers
Sand Coulee Coal Company Store	
Black Diamond Coal Company	J.J. Dougherty & Charles Lochray
Bon Ton Restaurant	Mrs. Christina Stevenson
Dressmaker	Mrs. G.W. Clapper
Company Doctor's Office	
Dean Mine	Samuel Dean
Dental Parlor	L.H. Thurston, DDS
H.J. Clark	H.G. Durgon
Blacksmith	John Johnson
Dressmaker	Mrs. Alex H. Johnson
Pioneer Drug Store	Dr. D.B. McCann
Wholesale Butcher	Abner and Nat McGiffen
Laundress	Mrs. Martha Maloney
Middletown Meat Company	Semi & Carlson
Shacktown Notion Store	Mrs. Hugh Miller
Post Office Store	T.A. Gillespie
The Red Barn Livery	Thomas Wheeler
Roalswick Clothing House	Andrew Roalswick
Sand Coulee Lumber Yard	L.A. Robbins
Sand Coulee Bakery	August Winke
Sand Coulee Carriage Company	J.G. Anthony
Sand Coulee Coal Company	Samuel Hill
Sand Coulee Library Association	Anthony Morton
Sand Coulee Laundry	Fred Sundermeir
Scandinavian Library Association	Charles Ordahl
Shacktown Grocery	Martin Meldrup
Union Hall Association	James Pearson
Middletown Notion Store	John M. Young

In addition to the 408 homes and fifty-three business establishments the coulee contained several mines. Mines are not small establishments as far as space is concerned. Mines need tipples, a wooden structure for loading coal from the mine mouth into railroad cars. Some mines had to build a short rail bed, level with the mine mouth to their tipple.

The Great Northern Company mine covered a lot of space with a steam generating plant large enough to contain four smoke stacks. A picture of this mine is found in *The Gulch Area History*.³² While this mine was the largest in the coal camp it gives the viewer a picture of how massive one coal mine could be. The smaller mines, although not occupying as much space, operated using the same principles with the exception of steam power. The Largent mine, Dean mine, Lakeside Coal Company, Gerber mine, the National Coal Mine in Kate's Coulee and the Nelson mine, all within the confines of Sand Coulee, covered considerable ground.³³ Mining in quantity was not a small operation, and Sand Coulee mined in quantity.

According to the large maps found in the 1983 study done by Hydrometrics of Helena for the Abandoned Mine Bureau, Department of State Lands in Helena, the western hillside of Sand Coulee contained twelve mine entrances or adits. This does not count the three entrances found in Kate's Coulee, a small coulee branching off to the west from the main coulee, nor those in the upper coulee named Shacktown. The eastern hillside of the coulee contained eight adits, not counting the mines in Shacktown or Mining Coulee. These twenty adits include only that part of Sand Coulee starting at the foot of Shacktown hill and ending where the Number Seven cutoff road joins the Sand Coulee highway, a distance of approximately one mile. This inventory does not include the largest mine of all, the Company mine found in Mining Coulee, which for all practical purposes is part of Sand Coulee and provided most of the jobs and activity that took place in the coulee. Eleven mine waste dumps on the western hillside of the coulee,

³² Raunig, *The Gulch Area History*, 13.

³³ A picture of the Nelson mine can be found on page 40 of *A History of Sand Coulee*.

none of them large in size, and twelve mine waste dumps on the eastern hillside of the coulee, competed for precious space. Three of the dumps on the east side were significant, the largest being approximately 1,000 feet long.³⁴ It is not possible to tell, without extensive research, when mines were in operation but several mines most likely operated in 1900.

In addition to the houses, businesses, public buildings, mines, mine waste dumps, and the Rusty Ditch, the rail bed ran through the entire length of the town and into Shacktown to service the company mine. An empty train, often consisting of over a hundred cars, came to Sand Coulee at least once a week and was loaded at various stops in the coulee. The locomotives had to be switched to make the return trip to Great Falls so the coal could be distributed to various markets. When the transportation of coal from the mines is added to the profusion of coulee activity a picture of an active ant hill begins to form. The crowded coulee was also a busy coulee.

Early pictures of Sand Coulee show a community that appears to be built helter-skelter with evidence of coal mining everywhere. The mines, tipples and waste dumps depended on placement wherever the coal presented itself, without regard to order. But in a strange way order was also present. The main street of town hinted at organization as did other streets on the level coulee floor. Seventy-six company houses, all a story and a half of similar pattern and neatly painted, ran through the middle of town in a tidy row, adding to the orderliness of the coulee.³⁵ The rail bed with its parallel rails also presented

³⁴ The information on the mine waste dumps is also taken from the Hydrometrics maps.

³⁵ *Great Falls Tribune*, June 4, 1891.

an aura of organization. The pictures however, without fail, show a coulee drastically torn up and disturbed by coal mining.

Coal dust, generated by mining, and dust caused by the coal sliding down the tipples into rail cars, produced daily damage to the already stressed lungs of miners and to the population in general. Hundreds of coal fires in the homes expelled smoke into the air. Businesses and the big mine burned large quantities of coal placing even more smoke into the environment. The trains used coal to fire their boilers and they added coal smoke and steam into the mix. It was not a healthy place by today's standards. The miners endured the biggest health risk. Their underground shifts brought them into constant contact with coal dust and made their faces as black as the coal they mined. The blasting, picking, shoveling, loading, all made their life one of relentlessly breathing the black, killing dust. Miners, if they mined for any length of time, developed black lung or miner's lung or miner's disease or the less descriptive official designation, silicosis, all names for the same life-diminishing malady that often killed them. Into this milieu people from all over America and many parts of the world came to live and work.

Communication within the Coulee

The people living in Sand Coulee in 1900 relinquish many of their secrets through an analysis of the census. People from twenty-one foreign countries lived in the Sand Coulee census area, creating language barriers, but the impediment was not as severe as might first be imagined. Of the total census area population of 2,950, 1,705 were American born. The English speaking countries of Australia, Canada, England, Ireland,

New Zealand, Scotland and Wales contributed another 482 English speaking people bringing the total population of native English speakers to 2,187. When the seven English speaking countries are subtracted from the twenty-one foreign countries represented in the census, only fourteen different languages were actually represented. Of the remaining 763 immigrants from non-English speaking countries, 486 spoke English, leaving 277 people who conversed only in their native language. Of those who could not speak English 149 were Finnish, 105 Austrian, seven Hungarian, four Norwegian, three Italian, three German, two Poles, two Belgian and a native born couple from Michigan. The man and wife from Michigan, in their thirties, both had Finnish parents. Apparently they had lived in a Finnish community where it was not necessary to speak English.

Even though approximately one in five foreign born could not speak English they were a literate group of people. Literacy is defined as being able to read and write a language. Although many of the foreign born may not have been able to read or write English, 83 percent of them could read and write their own language. An analysis of the literacy of the camp shows the following: of the foreign born from non- English speaking countries 136 people are listed as illiterate. Of the 136, sixteen could read but not write while 120 could not read or write. Of the 136 illiterate immigrants, seventy came from Austria, and twenty-one came from Finland while other countries contributed various numbers to this category. Of the English speaking countries who contributed illiterate people to Sand Coulee, England supplied the most, twelve in number. The native born contributed twelve people to the group. Again, it was not the uneducated illiterate that flocked to the coal field.

People weakened the language barrier by associating with others in the same situation. The company mitigated communal communication problems by hiring people of the same language to work together in the dangerous mines for safety reasons. The community also created ethnic establishments such as the Finn saloon and the Swedish saloon, and hired people in business establishments who could speak native tongues. The different foreign ethnic groups often established organizations that worked to teach their people English and other subjects to help them integrate into American society. However, the effect of the foreign born on the community was greater than the census figures indicate. Of the 1,705 native born Americans 1,083 had a foreign-born father and 965 had a foreign-born mother.

Table 2. Analysis of Foreign Born – 1900 Census

<u>Country</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
Australia	1	0	1
Austria	151	86	237
Belgium	3	2	5
Canada	76	71	147
Denmark	2	0	2
England	97	66	163
Finland	161	80	241
France	3	3	6
Germany	70	35	105
Hungary	12	6	18
Ireland	20	11	31
Italy	8	1	9
New Zealand	1	0	1
Norway	44	14	58
Poland	6	3	9
Russia	2	2	4
Scotland	72	52	124
Serbia	1	0	1
Sweden	49	16	65
Switzerland	2	1	3
Wales	<u>11</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>15</u>
Totals	792	453	1245

Table 3. Native Born by State of Origin – 1900 Census

<u>State</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>State</u>	<u>Number</u>
Alabama	4	Nebraska	9
Arkansas	3	New Mexico	1
California	10	New York	52
Colorado	13	North Dakota	16
Connecticut	1	Ohio	78
Georgia	1	Oklahoma	3
Illinois	135	Oregon	1
Indiana	24	Pennsylvania	155
Iowa	105	South Dakota	12
Kansas	25	South Carolina	1
Kentucky	8	Tennessee	5
Main	1	Texas	4
Maryland	4	Utah	2
Massachusetts	7	Vermont	1
Michigan	63	Virginia	10
Minnesota	102	Washington	7
Mississippi	7	West Virginia	13
Missouri	64	Wisconsin	45
Montana	698	Wyoming	<u>15</u>
		Total	1,705

Age Analysis

The young dominated the census area. Only fifty people over the age of sixty resided in the area out of a population of 2950. Just eighteen people were above the age of 65 and eight people topped the age of 70. Of the population 39.5%, or 1166 were under the age of fifteen. It is true that the average age of the native born was 15.26 years compared to the average age of the foreign born at 30.3 years, but this is a distorted figure reflecting the fact that immigrants were having children in America.

People, between the ages of nineteen and forty-five numbered 1389 and comprised 47% of the population. The males in this group numbered 907 or sixty-five percent. The total adult male working population aged nineteen and over equaled 1056. This meant that most of the working age males fell into the nineteen to forty-five age

bracket. Agriculture employed 335 of the 1056 males so in reality only 721 males remained to mine and transport the coal and run the businesses that supported the coal industry.,

The census universe of single people, eighteen years of age and older, numbered 512. Of those 451 were males and sixty one females for a ratio of 7.4 males per female, or a 88 percent male and 12 percent female breakdown. The native born singles numbered 217, 182 males and thirty-five females. Foreign born singles numbered 295 persons, 269 male and twenty-six female. Following are the major contributing foreign countries of single people: Finland contributed 58 males and seven females, Austria forty-two males and two females, Sweden thirty-three males and two females, England thirty males and five females. Of the single males 129 were associated with agriculture. The census listed most of the single agricultural men as farmers but the category also included several farm laborers. When agricultural people are subtracted from the 512 total single people, 383 are left residing in the towns. It is certain, however, that all the single people living within and without the confines of Sand Coulee had access to each other because they lived in close proximity to each other.

When the sixty-one single females are subtracted from the 451 single males, 390 single males are left with no prospect of marriage within the census area. Those 390 single males, mingling with approximately 530 married women, must have created sexual tension within the camp. Even so there was no formal prostitution in Sand Coulee, but according to old timer Bill Medvec, Tracy had a house of prostitution. There was an arrest of two prostitutes in Sand Coulee, who set up house across from the school in

1895.³⁶ It is not known if they were arrested because of prostitution or because they chose to ply their trade across from the school. The two prostitutes, Lottie Sharp and Mary Roe received a thirty-day jail sentence. They served none of their sentences because they left town. Prostitution was also hinted at in Shacktown. The residents petitioned the County Commissioners to eradicate a “resort which is obnoxious to all who have a sound morality and particularly to those parents who have children growing up in the midst of such an example of iniquity and crime.”³⁷ The petitioners wanted immoral women to at least be prohibited from flaunting their wares before the eyes of school children. These complaints did not get levied against other saloons, only against the Shacktown establishment, No. 1 Saloon, owned by Ole Ruikka. Ole’s saloon seems to have been a continual bone of contention with the camp moralists. Sand Coulee had plenty of moralists preaching against loose living, especially drinking. The small mining camp had numerous social institutions such as several churches and fraternal organizations that could exert enough social pressure to keep the single men in check as far as their behavior was concerned. Too, in all the research that supports this thesis, there was only one case of attempted rape reported in Sand Coulee. It resulted in dismissal of the rape charge because the judge considered the cowboy involved too drunk to understand what he was doing. The drunken cowboy was fined costs associated with his arrest and released.³⁸

³⁶ *Great Falls Tribune*, August 14, 1895.

³⁷ *Belt Valley Times*, April 22, 1897.

³⁸ *Tribune*, September 19, 1987.

Table 4. Age Categories - 1900 Census

<u>AGE CATEGORY</u>	<u>MALE</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
4 & under	254	275	529
5-6	103	87	190
7-14	215	232	447
15-18	94	75	169
19-25	202	158	360
26-35	429	213	642
36-45	276	111	387
46-55	91	48	139
56-60	26	11	37
61-65	20	12	32
66-70	7	3	10
71+	<u>5</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>8</u>
TOTALS	1,722	1,228	2,950

Heads of Household

The census area includes 203 native-born heads of household and 390 foreign-born heads of household. It is surprising that more foreign born were heads of household than native born. Of the native-born heads of household, 76.4% owned their home. Of the foreign born heads of household 89.5% owned their home. This again is not what one would expect. How long the foreign-born heads of household were in America may be pertinent to their home ownership. Most of them were not new comers to America and may have saved enough money to buy a home in a new location in their adopted country.

The Scottish heads of household were in America for an average of 19.1 years, the English 17.6 years, the Canadians 15.76 years, the Austrians 11.1 years and the Finns 10.4 years. As a whole the Finns were the newest immigrants. All other foreign-born heads of households, not listed above, lived in America for a longer period, 21.17 years.

The time the immigrants resided in America, counting their time in Sand Coulee, was considerable and lent itself toward ownership of property. This must also have helped the stability of the camp because time spent in a culture means more familiarity with the language and what is expected by that culture.

A few single heads of household lived in the census area. There were forty-three native-born single heads of household. Of those, six were females. Two of the females taught school, one made dresses, one sixty-seven year old practiced nursing, one ran a boarding house and no occupation was given for the sixth female. Foreign-born single heads of household numbered thirty-six, with six of those being female. Only one single Finn, boarding house owner Susan Wirtala, headed a household, which is startling because sixty-five single Finnish people lived in camp. Single Finns mostly lived in boarding houses with a few of them engaged in some form of agriculture and living on the farm. The Austrians contributed three single heads of household and one of them, Mary Lucotch, was raising three sons. The English contributed seven single heads of household, one of them a forty-five year old laundress. The Scots had six single heads of household, two of them female, one a sixty-four year old laundress and one a fifty-six year old dressmaker raising three children. The other foreign countries contributed nineteen single heads of house, one a forty-six year old female with no occupation given. Of the sixty-one single females, native and foreign-born, only twelve kept their own household. Most of the adult single females lived at home with their parents or as domestic servants in a family household. Few females found themselves totally free to interact with the males or freely make decisions about their lives.

School Age Children

The census takers noted if a child currently attended school by writing in the “Occupation, Trade, Or Profession” column of the census form that a child was “at school.” At this time high school was not available to the young people of Sand Coulee. The census listed 215 males and 232 females, or 447 school age children, seven to fourteen years of age. Of those children only 185 were in school on June 1, 1900, the date of record for the census, even though the 1883 Montana lawmakers mandated compulsory school attendance. The opportunity to attend public school existed for twelve years prior to the 1900 census, so lack of familiarity with public education could not be the basis for the children’s poor attendance. Home schooling would not seem to be an explanation of why students stayed away from school. Many of the immigrant families would not have been capable of teaching their children what they needed to learn to assimilate into American culture.

Compulsory school attendance was problematic for the residents of Sand Coulee and in 1895 the school board wrestled with the problem. The school board sent a circular to the general public appealing for ideas of how boys working in the mines might attend school without working hardship on the parents who needed their income in providing for the family. The board urged that, “the people get together some evening and discuss the school situation.”³⁹ Asking the boys to work and go to school would be akin to an adult working all day and attending college in the evening. It is also logical to argue that girls stayed home to help the family in the struggle for survival.

³⁹ *Belt Valley Times*, October 3, 1895.

School attendance on June 1st may have suffered for several other reasons. The law said that school must be held at least twelve weeks each year but most schools held about five months of school, so a child had five months in which to fulfill the compulsory twelve weeks of school.⁴⁰ Children could attend school in the middle of the school term with no beginning or ending in the curriculum. This must have been trying on both teachers and students, especially for subjects like reading and math. The need for school at this point in history was rather abstract as far as helping children make a living in adult life. Often parents found it easier to pull their children from school rather than find reasons to maintain their education.

Immigrants in Sand Coulee did not seem enamored of public education. Although the Finns comprised the most numerous immigrant population, only two of their children attended school on June 1st. Austrians encompassed the second largest immigrant group, yet not one of their children could be found in school on the crucial date of June 1st. It is worthy of note that the Austrians were the most illiterate group of immigrants, 175 of them could not read and write. Only thirty-three immigrant children attended school. The native-born sent their children to school in greater numbers but school attendance was far from universal. Sixty-eight native-born males and eighty-four native born females attended the class room on June 1st. Even though accepted tradition seems to place more value on educating males at that time, they did not attend school in the numbers that the females did, perhaps because the males were earning money for their families.

⁴⁰ *Great Falls Tribune*, January 7, 1890.

Males as young as eleven and twelve years of age worked in the mines. Twelve year old George Smith worked the coal mines as a trapper. George did not attend school. George's father immigrated to America from England in 1886, before George was born. Trappers performed a vital job in the mines by opening and closing doors to control air pressure. It was important to close certain shafts in the mine to keep the air properly circulating. Particular hinged doors had to be opened and closed after traffic of any kind passed through them in order to insure that men in all parts of the mine had air. If the wrong door remained open or closed the lack of air circulation could be serious. This was a job easily performed by children.

It is realistic to imagine that young boys also worked in other mine related jobs and worked at jobs the business community offered outside the mines. It is also reasonable to assume that many girls stayed home from school to help their mothers with house work, especially in large families and in families that had boarders. Of the households that kept boarders only five girls attended school. Keeping boarders was common in Sand Coulee. A total of 88 households or 14.8% of households had at least one boarder, and many had more than ten boarders in their home.

School attendance did improve over time. School attendance, in the 1920s, increased to 500, with Stockett supplying 200 hundred students and Sand Coulee 300 students.⁴¹

⁴¹ Raunig, *The Gulch Area History*, 94.

Table 5. Children in School, 1900 census
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	Male	Female	Total
<u>Foreign Born</u>			
Canada	5	11	16
England	1	5	6
Finland	1	1	2
Norway	1	1	2
Scotland	2	0	2
Sweden	2	0	2
France	0	1	1
Germany	0	1	1
Wales	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	13	20	33
<u>Native Born</u>			
	<u>68</u>	<u>84</u>	<u>152</u>
Total	81	104	185

Miners

Five hundred and three men in the 1900 census claimed to be miners. This sum includes only those who mined, not trappers or teamsters, etc. Miners came to Sand Coulee from eighteen foreign countries. Only three foreign countries of the twenty-one represented in Sand Coulee did not contribute miners. Those countries were Australia, Belgium and New Zealand. Totally 427 foreign born worked as miners. Foreign born miners represented 84.9% of the total miners working in the coulee. When thinking about activities the miners engaged in, such as deductions from pay checks for various civic reasons, etc; it should be remembered that only 15.1% of the miners were native born. This speaks to both the wisdom and generosity of the foreign born people.

Again Austria and Finland vied for the biggest representation. In this instance Austria contributed 139 miners and Finland 134. Together the two countries contributed 273 miners or 54.2% of the total. American-born miners contributed only seventy-six.

Nineteen states were represented among the native-born miners. Illinois contributed nineteen miners and Pennsylvania eighteen. Pennsylvania, an important coal mining state, contributed 155 people to Sand Coulee but contributed only 15 miners to Sand Coulee. Perhaps the Pennsylvania people had learned how to make money from the coal industry without being miners. Ohio, the next largest group, sent 8 miners to Sand Coulee. Of the English speaking foreign-born Scotland contributed thirty-nine miners and England thirty-three. The big surprise is that the Irish only contributed three miners. Norway with eighteen miners and Sweden with seventeen miners represented most of the non Finnish Scandinavian countries.

The youngest miner, a fifteen year old, came from Canada. One boy, age twelve, was listed as a miner from Finland but was most likely a trapper. One sixteen year old miner came from Scotland and three other sixteen year olds were native born. Three seventeen year olds were also miners, one from England, one from Wales and the other was native born. The youngest group of miners who came from a country were the native born at an even twenty-eight years of age. The next youngest group of miners came from Finland at 28.97 years of age. Surprisingly the Austrians averaged an even thirty-one years of age. The thirty-nine Scotsman had the highest average age at 37.21 years. Only five miners fell into the fifty and above age category. The oldest was a sixty-four year old who hailed from England. The average age of all miners was 31.24 years of age. As one would expect the mine workforce was a young one.

Burley, muscular young men with black faces poured from the mine at quitting time. They were almost unrecognizable from the white faced, clean men who entered the

mine at the start of their shift. They spent a major part of their waking life underground in a physically demanding job but somehow they always found energy to live life as everyone else did.

Table 6. Coal Miners by Country of Origin – 1900 Census

<u>Country</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Average Age</u>
Austria	139	31.0
Finland	134	28.97
Scotland	39	37.21
England	33	32.78
Norway	18	29.26
Sweden	17	31.76
Germany	10	33.0
Hungary	7	35.33
Italy	7	37.0
Wales	6	29.66
Canada	5	29.88
Ireland	3	35.5
Poland	3	31.0
France	2	25.0
Denmark	1	34.0
Russia	1	38.0
Servia	1	28.0
Switzerland	<u>1</u>	<u>42.5</u>
Total	427	31.24

Table 7. Coal Miners by State of Origin – 1900 Census

<u>State</u>	<u>Number</u>
Illinois	19
Pennsylvania	18
Ohio	8
Iowa	7
New York	5
Indiana	4
Kentucky	2
Wisconsin	2
California	1
Colorado	1
Maryland	1
Michigan	1
Minnesota	1
Mississippi	1
Montana	1
S. Dakota	1

Table 1 Continued

<u>State</u>	<u>Number</u>
Tennessee	1
Texas	1
Wyoming	1
Total	<u>76</u>
Foreign coal miners	427
Native coal miners	<u>76</u>
Total coal miners	503

Table 8. Working Age Male and Occupations - 1900 Census

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Number</u>
15-19	94
19-25	202
26-35	429
36-45	276
45-55	91
56-60	26
61-65	20
66-70	7
71 +	<u>5</u>
Total	1150
<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Number</u>
<u>Mining</u>	
Miners	503
Other	<u>71</u>
Total	574
<u>Agriculture</u>	
Owners	238
Workers	<u>97</u>
Total	335
<u>Non Mining</u>	
Total	241
Total Jobs	1,150

Table 9. Non-Miner Jobs Connected to Mining, 1900 Census

<u>Job</u>	<u>Country or State</u>	<u>Number in Job</u>
Stationary Fireman	England	8
	Illinois	3
	Norway	3
	Ireland	2
	Scotland	2
	Michigan	2
	Minnesota	1
	Canada	1
	Finland	1
	Sweden	1
	Pennsylvania	<u>1</u>
	Total	25
Stationary Engineer	England	5
	Illinois	2
	Scotland	1
	Ireland	1
	Sweden	1
	Pennsylvania	<u>1</u>
	Total	11
Trapper	England	2
	Minnesota	2
	Washington	1
	Finland	1
	Scotland	1
	Illinois	<u>3</u>
	Total	10
Mine Driver	Iowa	2
	Indiana	1
	Wales	1
	Ohio	1
	England	<u>1</u>
Total	6	

Table 9 Continued

<u>Job</u>	<u>Country or State</u>	<u>Number in Jobs</u>
Coal Mine Owner	Switzerland	1
	Scotland	1
	Pennsylvania	<u>1</u>
	Total	3
Civil Engineer	Wisconsin	1
	Pennsylvania	<u>1</u>
	Total	2
Mine Oilers	Canada	1
	Ohio	<u>1</u>
	Total	2
Company Stable	New York	1
Boss Company Hostler	Missouri	1
Runs Pumps	Illinois	1
Weigh master	Scotland	1
Coal Inspector	Illinois	1
Superintendent of Coal Mines	Ohio	1
Paymaster	Scotland	1
Manager Company	Pennsylvania	1
Store Brakeman Yards	Pennsylvania	1
Clerk Company	Germany	1
Store Boss of Coal	Illinois	1
Washer Boss Outside	Illinois	1
Laborers		
Total Jobs		71

Boarding Establishments

Boarding houses are important because so many people lived in them and a plethora of information can be gleaned from those inhabitants. The census listed eighty-eight homes keeping one or more boarders. It is useful to make a distinction between the large boarding houses (establishments requiring more than a family home to accommodate the boarders) and the families that kept boarders in their home to supplement their income. The smaller boarding concerns will be called boarding homes and the larger ones boarding houses. The census did not name the boarding houses but simply listed the proprietor as the head of household and the boarders under the proprietor.

The Eden book, *A Century in the Foothills*, has a picture of Our House boardinghouse, in Sand Coulee, with the note that the picture was taken in 1898.⁴² Our House was one of three Company boarding houses in the area and was operated by the Howard family.⁴³ The *Great Falls City Directory* of 1896-97 lists L.R. Howard as the proprietor of Our House. Apparently, even though the Company owned boarding houses, they leased them to proprietors.

Lizzie Evans is listed in the *1896-97 Great Falls City Directory* as a boarding house keeper. She is listed in the 1900 census as divorced, age thirty-nine, with three children to support. She is also listed as a dressmaker so she may have sold her boarding house before the census was taken or she may have performed both jobs. She charged

⁴² Betty Maurer, Chairman of Eden Historical Committee, *A Century in the Foothills* (Fairfield: Fairfield Times, 1976), 241.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 240

boarders \$5.50 per week according to a *Belt Valley Times* advertisement. The \$5.50 per week that Lizzie charged her boarders seems fairly standard. In Grass Valley, a California gold camp, Reverend Putnam paid \$45 per month board and room for himself and his wife.⁴⁴ This was only \$1 per month more than Mrs. Evans charged her Sand Coulee boarders. Reverend Putnam asserted the boarding house cost three times the rent paid for a large, well furnished home. The Grass Valley situation, although in a different state and at a slightly earlier age, gives some indication of what a woman's work was worth.

Mrs. Pappernick's New Boarding House sold meals to the public for twenty-five cents. The New Boarding House stood next door to the Our House.⁴⁵ In 1897 another large boarding house, the Company's Kenmore, burned to the ground in thirty minutes.⁴⁶ The Kenmore was a long established boarding house. The *Great Falls Tribune* mentioned it as early as 1889. The destruction of the Kenmore must have caused quite a housing ripple throughout the community.

Of the eighty-eight places where people could board, twenty-three kept five or more boarders. The following material is an analysis of those boarding houses and homes. The census taker, Carey Kellison, a single man from Indiana and a first grade teacher in Sand Coulee, lived in the largest boarding house, operated but not owned by John Heber.⁴⁷ Renting the boarding house rather than owning it may be an indication

⁴⁴ Ralph Mann, *After the Gold Rush, Grass Valley and Nevada, California 1849-1879* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1982), 109.

⁴⁵ *Belt Valley Times*, February 25, 1897.

⁴⁶ *Belt Valley Times*, February 18, 1897.

⁴⁷ Kellison was mentioned in the Cascade County Superintendent of Schools Journal as having his first grade certificate renewed.

that the Company owned the establishment, especially since it housed twenty-six boarders. Mr. Heber emigrated from Germany in 1857. Kellison did a natural thing; he started his census work with the people he lived among. Mr. Heber is the first person listed in the census and the boarding house is the first place visited by Kellison. In addition to the boarders, Mr. Heber, his wife, daughter and two servants lived in the house. The servant from Hungary immigrated in 1896 and was a waiter. The servant from England immigrated in 1892 and worked as a chambermaid. A chambermaid is defined as a maid who makes beds and does general cleaning of bedrooms. All of the boarders, except one man from Austria, spoke English. Four of the boarders were listed as married but their wives did not live with them. Fifteen of the boarders were immigrants. The rest of the boarders were from various states, including one rather rare Californian. The Heber residents represent several occupations but mining is the profession of eleven of them. Unlike many other boarding houses, there seems to be little in common among the boarders, except their unusual ability, as far as boarding houses were concerned, to speak English. Of the thirty-one people living in the house only the Austrian could not speak English.

Emma Mattson ran the second largest boarding house in Sand Coulee while her husband Andrew worked as a day laborer. Both of them were from Finland. He emigrated in 1888 and she in 1878 as a two-year-old baby. In 1900 Andrew was thirty-five years of age and she, twenty-four. They married in 1892. Their family included two daughters and a son, all born in Montana. The family also included two servants from Finland. One servant worked as a dishwasher, immigrating in 1895. The other servant worked as a

chambermaid, immigrating in 1899. The census listed the chambermaid as being unemployed for six out of the past twelve months. Of the twenty-five Mattson boarders, all but one were Scandinavian. Twelve of the boarders were from Norway, seven from Finland, five from Sweden and one from Ohio. All, except a painter and a day laborer, worked at different jobs in the mines. Four men from Norway and two from Finland could not speak English. All the foreign boarders could read and write their own language. Nine of the men immigrated in the past three years. Perhaps the recent immigrants came in response to Stockett opening its mine. Recent immigration among the 1900 population was common, especially among the Finns.

Of the twenty-three boarding houses and homes, with five or more boarders, twelve contained boarders exclusive to one country. There were six Finnish, four Austrian, one Hungarian and one Italian boarding establishment that fall into this category. All told fifty-six Finns lived in all- Finnish boarding houses or homes. Annie Kauppi ran the largest all Finnish boarding house. Her husband mined coal. They both emigrated from Finland, he in 1886 and she in 1897. He was thirty-three and she twenty-four. They married in 1899 and had a four month old son. Both were literate and spoke English. The Kauppis owned their boarding house. They had a nineteen year old female servant named Anna Loof, who emigrated from Finland in 1899 and she could not yet speak English. The boarding house contained fifteen boarders; all, except two, immigrated to America in the 1890s. One of the two earlier immigrants came to America in 1887 and the other in 1884. Twelve of them could not speak English although eleven of them had been in America for over five years. Even the earliest immigrant who came

in 1884 could not speak English. They were all coal miners. Nine of them had been unemployed for one to six months. The house contained four married men; all had wed within the past year. Three of the four married men immigrated in 1898. Did all the men know each other? Did they participate in arranged marriages or did they know the women before leaving Finland? Where were their spouses, were they back in Finland or somewhere in America? Where had they married? The speculation can be endless. It would definitely be interesting to find out what actually transpired. Three of the four married men spent some months unemployed during the past year.

Susan Wirtala's business represents another instance of an all Finnish boarding house.⁴⁸ Susan emigrated from Finland in 1889. She was single and thirty-two years of age. She owned the boarding house and her twenty-five year old brother Matt lived with her. Susan also housed an eighteen year old servant, named Mary, who emigrated from Finland in 1899. The servant was literate and spoke English. All eight boarders mined coal and three of them experienced unemployment in the past twelve months. Four of the eight boarders were married, with three of them marrying in the past year. The youngest of the recently married men was twenty-five while the oldest was fifty-one. Again, why did the men marry within the past year, especially the fifty-one year old? In the all Finnish Lundell boarding house, six of the seven Finnish boarders were married. The six recently married boarders came to America within the past year. Their wives did not live with them. Were the wives in Finland waiting for their husbands to send for them? Could the men be from the same area, immigrating as a group? The all Finnish boarding houses presented many interesting situations.

⁴⁸ I went through twelve years of school with one of Susan's relatives, Art Wirtala.

The two largest all-Austrian boarding enterprises each held six boarders. Peter Frank, a bachelor, thirty-nine years of age owned one of them. He immigrated to America in 1884. Five of his six boarders immigrated in 1899. Did they know each other and immigrate together? They were all miners and five of them could not speak English. All of them were married but none of their wives lived with them. All of them were fully employed miners.

Lizzie Kolensais ran the other all Austrian boarding home, while her husband John mined coal. They were both from Austria. He immigrated in 1892 and she in 1898. He spoke English, she did not. All the boarders and John were fully employed miners. One of the boarders, Andy Powell (not an Austrian sounding name) was twenty-four and his wife Mary was nineteen. The Powells present one of the rare instances of a man and wife living together in a boarding house. He immigrated in 1895 and she in 1898. They married within the previous year. Did Andy send for her? When he immigrated he was nineteen and she seventeen. When and where did they meet? As in so many instances concerning immigrants we will never know the answers to our questions.

The all Italian boarding home was run by Sastle Pistori while her husband August mined coal. He was forty-eight and she fifty. They had married thirty years ago, one of the longest marriages in the camp. He emigrated from Italy in 1887 and she followed in 1890. They both spoke English and had one son, aged nine. They owned their boarding home. Their five boarders ranged in age from twenty-three to forty-eight. Three of them did not speak English. One of the boarders, Mr. Fradiana immigrated in 1893 but could not speak English. All of them were miners and fully employed. Two of them were

married but their wives did not live with them. Both of them were married within the past year. The same questions that are asked of the Finns and their recent marriages can of course be asked about the newly married Italians.

Bertha Dunko ran the all Hungarian boarding home and her husband John mined coal. They were both from Hungary. He immigrated in 1896 and she in 1898. He was thirty and she was twenty-four. The census notes them as married for seven years so they were married before they emigrated. Their family included a six year old son born in Hungary and a one year old daughter born in Montana. They were both literate in Hungarian but could not speak English. The Dunkos rented their boarding home. Their five boarders ranged in age from thirty to fifty. Mr. Sejeny, the fifty year old, was married for thirty-three years. His wife did not live with him. He immigrated to America in 1890; perhaps he was one of those immigrants who abandoned their family in the old country. Mr. Sejeny could not read or write Hungarian and though he had been in America for ten years he could not speak English. All five boarders were married for various lengths of time and none of their wives lived with them. The immigration years for the men ranged from 1890 to 1900. Two of them emigrated in 1900. Four of them could not speak English and all were miners. None of them enjoyed full employment, experiencing unemployment from one to three months.

It is easy to visualize what a safe haven boarding houses and homes offered. It is natural to seek people from one's own country when in a strange land for many reasons. The language is mutual, the customs are mutual, the politics and society are mutual, along with many small nuances that people from other countries would not understand.

One can picture a meal with only one nationality seated at the table. It should have been a welcome time where they could all speak one language and talk of one culture. They might share letters and newspapers from home. Local and national politics concerning their home country must have been a part of the conversation. Grumbling about their adopted county and comparing it negatively with their home country might safely be indulged in. It is hard to imagine, for instance, an Italian in a mixed boarding house complaining about America. He would soon be told he could return to Italy if he did not like it in America. Complaining about work and bosses in safety could relieve a lot of stress for the men. They might kid each other about women and drinking. The meals together gave them a comradeship they could get no where else in the coal camps. These gatherings mitigated the loneliness of being in a strange land with the probable prospect of never returning to their native home. According to Carl Ross in his book *The Finn Factor*, “the Finnish rooming or boarding house, whether a commercial enterprise, cooperative, or simply a family with a boarder, was also a place where single men found not only food and shelter, but many of the values normally vested in the family groups and circle of friends.”⁴⁹ Mary Murphy offers a different view of boarding houses in her excellent Butte history. According to Murphy, “Men who worked all day in the dark underground were reluctant to retire to small, inhospitable sleeping rooms. A County Board of Health study demonstrated that the physical environment of some working-class saloons was far healthier than that of men’s boarding houses.”⁵⁰ Sand Coulee was many

⁴⁹ Carl Ross, *The Finn Factor in American Labor and Culture and Society* (New York: Parta Printers, Inc., 1997), 19.

⁵⁰ Mary Murphy, *Mining Cultures, Men, Women and Leisure in Butte, 1914-41*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 50.

times smaller than Butte and more peer pressure would have prevailed to provide decent service in Sand Coulee. However I am sure that some of the Sand Coulee boarding situations mirrored those of Butte. Murphy's scenario would also help explain why all Sand Coulee homes and businesses, excepting saloons, were subject to quarantine during the diphtheria epidemic.⁵¹

Occupation also defined another group of boarders. Working men, without wives at their side, clearly boarded where they were most comfortable. The most obvious grouping by occupation occurred in the home owned by Michael and Sarah Kommeas. Michael came from Minnesota while Sarah emigrated from Ireland. Sara was thirty and Michael twenty-eight. They were married in 1893 and had two sons and two daughters. Michael farmed and Sarah had no occupation listed. All seven boarders living with them were railroad laborers. Two were native born from New York and Michigan. The rest of the men were foreign born, coming from Canada, Ireland, Austria, Finland and Germany. They were all single, ranging in age from thirty-two to forty-eight. They were all literate and all spoke English. The earliest date of immigration for the men occurred in 1869 and the most recent date of immigration transpired in 1890. There seemed little in common among them, except their occupation. Grouping by occupation, especially a non-mining occupation makes sense. Occupational grouping provided them a common ground for evening conversation and bar-room camaraderie. The boarding houses and homes contained many men of the same occupations but not to the extent that the Kommeas boarding house did. Did the Kommeas operate a boarding house or a boarding home? The census does not give us that information. One logical explanation for the situation

⁵¹ *Belt Valley Times*, December 19, 1895.

involves the boarders sharing rooms. Feeding the men would involve a tremendous amount of work and logistical planning for an already busy farm wife.

Women dominated the boarding home way of making money. A few women owned and ran boarding houses but many more women assisted their families by taking boarders into their homes. Providing boarding services was vital to the camp and an important source of family income. Farm women also contributed to family income. It is easy to visualize a family cash flow for much of the year coming from eggs, milk, cream and butter that the women provided from the farm.

There were also other jobs, although few, that the women worked at to provide money for their own livelihood or for the family. The following information is taken from the *Great Falls City Directory* of 1896-97. The directory had a section exclusive to Sand Coulee. Although not census material the directory fills out a fuller picture of what women did to earn money. The directory listed four women as teachers, and four women as dress makers. Three women owned their own boarding house and one woman owned a hotel. One woman owned a millinery shop and one a notions shop. Another woman owned a restaurant and another woman was listed as a laundress. Totally, the directory listed sixteen women as being engaged in a profession or as owners of businesses.

Keeping boarders was a respectful way for women to earn money. Keeping boarders did not alter their standing in coal camp society. However, the family had to be somewhat careful of who they allowed to board with them because of the children. One boarder of ill intent could cause all sorts of problems with the children. There was hardly anytime that the family was alone as a nuclear unit and the possibility of children being

harmfully influenced by a boarder, who had such ready access to them, had to be considered.

An additional concern pertained to the man and wife who boarded the young men and women of the camp and employed servants to help them with the boarding work. Women had to be especially concerned about their husband's relationship with the young servant girls who helped ease their work. Husbands had to be concerned about their wives and the young, single, or separated married men for the same reasons. In one example W. P. Bingham was arrested in Missoula and charged with adultery resulting from an affair in Sand Coulee. Bingham boarded with the Jones and managed to win Mrs. Jones' affections. On January 28, 1890 the couple ran off to Missoula. Bingham already had a wife and children in Wisconsin. He was the son of the former Lt. Governor of Wisconsin. A charge of adultery against Bingham was filed by Mr. Jones. While Mr. Jones practiced his trade of blacksmithing, his wife practiced infidelity.⁵²

Another analysis arises concerning the occupation of the heads of households who kept servants. Did boarding house/home keepers employ more servants than non boarding enterprise people? The people of Sand Coulee employed forty-one servants, twenty eight female and thirteen male. Twenty-three servants lived in seventeen regular homes while eighteen servants lived in fourteen different boarding houses or homes. Native-born Americans made up the largest group of servants with fourteen while Finland contributed the next largest group with twelve. The servants averaged 21.6 years of age with the oldest servant being forty-six and the youngest thirteen. Nine of the foreign born servants had entered America in the past twelve months. The average time

⁵² *Great Falls Tribune*, March 12, 1890.

of all foreign born servants in America was seven years. All but eleven foreign servants, nine Finns and two Norwegians, spoke English. The occupation of the non boarding heads of house who kept servants included a billiard hall owner, a physician, hostler, business owner, restaurant owner, brewery teamster, merchant, coal mine owner, coal miner and thirteen farmers. This contrasts markedly with the occupation of the fourteen heads of household for boarding homes/houses that kept servants. Seven of those were miners, while the rest practiced some type of manual labor.

Other bits of information can be gleaned from looking at the census for the boarding houses. Women ran most of the boarding houses and homes, supplementing, or perhaps surpassing their husband's mine income. Susan Wirtala was the only single boarding home keeper. With all the common immigration dates it seems probable that several men living in the homes immigrated together. Almost all of the married men did not live with their wives and the census tells us nothing of their wives and children. A pattern can be discerned when looking at the heads of household. In many instances the husband preceded the wife in coming to this country, sometimes by many years. In some cases the couples had children born in their home country as well as in America.

The boarding houses and homes provided a vital service to Sand Coulee. It is hard to imagine the town and mines operating without them. The Company did furnish boarding houses for their employees but it was the small homes and large non-company boarding houses that took up the slack and provided human warmth and a sense of belonging in a strange land.

Miscellaneous Census Facts

One of the rarest categories in the 1900 census was divorce. Divorce conferred upon a person, especially if female, a hint of unsavory character. Asking people to assign themselves to the category of divorce probably caused some to answer dishonestly because of the stigma, but at least five people in the coulee answered this question in the affirmative. Divorce, because of its rarity, meant most in the coulee knew who the divorced people were. There were few secrets in Sand Coulee. Boarding house keeper Susan Wirtala fit in the divorced category. Susan was a business woman, undoubtedly hard working and in all probability completely moral. The census did not note when or where her divorce took place. Another distinction, although one that held no stigma, denoted widows and widowers. Thirty-six single people, twelve native born and twenty-four foreign-born, lived with memories of a dead mate. Some of these men and women became good friends for life but never married.

A true anomaly in the Sand Coulee census lists two black men (the only non-whites in Sand Coulee), thirty-seven year old Arthur Stewart and fifty-three year old John Carter. Arthur and John boarded with Mr. Malchorn whose profession is listed as bartender. Both blacks are listed as fully employed showmen. Perhaps they worked in the saloon where Mr. Malchorn worked, or in one of the halls such as the Library Hall or the Finn Hall. Carter was from California while Stewart was from Iowa. Carter was single

and Steward was married. Ironically, Eugene Willis, a black, located the first Sand Coulee coal mining claim in 1884.⁵³

The honor of being the longest married couple went to Hugh and Margaret Keegan. They celebrated their 41st anniversary during the census year. Hugh, sixty-four years of age, emigrated from Ireland to America in 1866. Margaret, sixty-nine years of age, emigrated from Canada in 1869. The census lists Hugh Sr. as the head of household and they were supported by their children. Their twenty-five year old son Hugh Jr., a fully employed miner, was probably the main support for this extended family. Living with Hugh and Margaret was their thirty-one year old daughter Martha King, who immigrated with her mother, as a baby in 1869. Martha's thirty-five year old husband Louis, listed as a cowboy, also lived in the household. Martha and Louis married in 1893. The son-in-law had not worked for eight of the last twelve months. A nine-year-old grandson, William Fitzgerald, born in Illinois, also lived with the family. William may be the child of one of the dead children of Margaret and Hugh. William was attending school.

Another honor of great distinction goes to William and Little Quigg (her actual name on the census). They had the largest family, ten living children and two deceased children. William, forty-three, emigrated from Canada in 1880. Little, thirty years of age, hailed from Pennsylvania. Seven of their ten living children were sons. They ranged from fifteen to one year of age. The Quiggs were listed as being married for eighteen years. Mrs. Quigg married very early, being only thirteen at the time of marriage. Three of the

⁵³ S.V. Frohlicher-Researcher, *Stone Age to Space Age in 100 Years* (Great Falls: Cascade County Historical Society, 1981), 40.

children were born in Pennsylvania and four in Canada. The eight-year-old, the three-year-old and the one-year-old were Montana born. The Quiggs seemed to journey back and forth to birth some of their children in Canada because the Canadian born children were not consecutively born. The family had one set of twins seven years of age. Their thirteen-year-old daughter was listed as their servant. Only the twelve-year-old daughter attended school. The father could neither read nor write but the rest of the family was literate so the family did have some interest in education. The father and the fifteen-year-old son were coal miners. The father had experienced two months of unemployment in the last twelve months.

People over seventy represented a small segment of the area population; still it is enlightening to spend some time with a few of them. Seventy-two-year-old William Hewitt emigrated from England in 1882. He was a fully employed carpenter. William's sixty-one-year-old wife Margaret emigrated from Canada in 1884. William and Margaret, married for thirty-six years, had eight children with only five of them living at the time of the census. Their fifteen-year-old daughter, born in Michigan, lived with them. A twenty year old Scottish servant, Jane Allan, also lived with them. Mrs. Hewitt kept seven boarders and was listed in the census as "Keeps Boarders." Another English immigrant, seventy-six year old Robert Cooley, immigrated to America in 1850. Robert's sixty year old wife Maria, born in Scotland, immigrated in 1854. Their twenty four old son, Robert Junior, and their twenty year old daughter Emma, both claimed Illinois as their place of birth. Their sixteen year old son George listed Iowa as his birth place. Robert Senior worked as a fully employed day laborer and both sons worked as fully employed coal

miners. George was one of the youngest miners, although there were a few others of his age working in the mine. The census lists no occupation for the daughter. The entire family lived together.

One of the two oldest people in the census area, eighty year old Adolph Saal, emigrated from Germany in 1870. Adolph lived with his forty-two year old daughter Clara, who immigrated ahead of her father by three years. Clara's husband, James Murray, thirty nine, emigrated from Canada in 1878. The Murray's, married thirteen years, were blessed with four living children, having lost two children. Three of the children aged, seven, six and one, lived with the Murrays. They also had one child who did not live with them. The Murrays were farmers.

The oldest native born resident, seventy five year old Caroline Hoag, came from New York. Her mother and father were also New Yorkers. Caroline lived with Edgar and Millie Cornell who were also from New York. There is no way to tell if Mrs. Cornell is Caroline's daughter, but that would be one of the more logical assumptions. Edgar was forty and Millie thirty-eight. The Cornells, married for twelve years, had three living children and one deceased child. They had a thirteen year old son and an eleven year old daughter living with them. The Cornells were not married when the thirteen year old son was born. Both children were in school. As in the case of the Murrays, one child was not living with their parents. Mr. Cornell too, was a farmer.

A current day Sand Coulee resident, looking back to 1900, would find several things much the same as they are now. Many of the names in the 1900 census can be found in the 2000 census and will be found in 2010 census. The coulee is still white with

few, if any, non-white people currently living there. The present population is much older and the sexes more equalized than the 1900 population. The pleasant music of many different languages is gone. The coulee is less crowded with fewer houses and no business, not even a bar. The school children are all gathered in Centerville and there are fewer of them. The ubiquitous activity of mining no longer fills the coulee with noise and coal dust. It was a grand, rowdy place.

Conclusion

Sand Coulee's population was not markedly different from Stockett, Belt or Red Lodge. In fact all four coal mining towns are remarkably the same when their history is reconstructed. The ethnic makeup showed many similarities as did their occupations, institutions, triumphs and fears. It would not be surprising to find that other Montana coal mining towns were also similar. Clyne's *Coal People*, about Colorado's coal towns tells a similar story. The biggest difference among the Montana towns was their physical setting. Sand Coulee was more physically cramped than the others and this caused special problems for it.

Sand Coulee embraced people from many countries and this made it an enormously varied place as far as culture was concerned. The many immigrants who came to Sand Coulee produced a rich heritage for the people who live in Sand Coulee today or claim it as their home, even though they might not currently live there. My generation is the last generation that shared a somewhat similar living condition with the way old Sand Coulee lived. It is almost as though we got caught in a time warp. The

people who now live in the coulee are as modern as people found anywhere in Montana. But they are also a little different because they have the recent past of many countries shaping them even to this day.

The coulee, at the time of the 1900 census, had many single people and a predominately male population. But somehow most of the single people got married. When local marriage partners were taken, other small towns, such as Belt, Neihart, Cascade, Simms, Fort Shaw and Ulm provided suitors. And there was always Great Falls to draw from. Though many single people came to Sand Coulee, not many of them died single. In a sense Sand Coulee grew to encompass all of Cascade County and the same could be said of the other small towns in the county.

People sent their children to school but not in great numbers. In 1900 it was shocking, by today's standards, how many children did not attend school. It is also surprising how few foreign-born children attended school. At that time the school was not the center of the community. The original school shared community attention with many other institutions. In fact the school was probably one of the less influential institutions during this time in history as evidenced by school attendance. Today the Centerville schools are definitely the focal point of the community and have only a few churches with which to share their influence. The first school was unique in one sense, as is the current school at Centerville. The school is the only public institution of self government in all of the Sand Coulee and the surrounding area's history. That self identity was and is jealously guarded. Being a school board member brought a sense of importance to the

person holding one of the board positions as it still does.⁵⁴ Current consolidation of small schools has a long history of debate with little action taking place. Sports are always pointed to as the culprit in preventing consolidation. But perhaps as strong, or an even stronger reason small schools do not consolidate is that the precious right of local self governance would be lost, and with it something that is both tangibly and intangibly unique to the community.

Boarding establishments played an immense role in early Sand Coulee. Boarding homes and houses offered more than just a place to eat and sleep. They integrated the community in some instances and in other instances they offered a segregated existence for people until people were ready to become full community members. It is no exaggeration to say that the coulee could not have functioned without the boarding establishments. The boarding establishments focused the business of living and provided other business a chance to distribute goods and services in a centralized way. The coulee was busy mining and any energy that could be conserved in supporting the miners was welcome. Boarding establishments brought stabilization to the business community as well as to the miners who utilized them.

The miners were an amazing group of people. The census population contained 2,950 people and 503 of them told census taker Carey Kellison they were miners. The rest of the population, with the exception of a few people in agriculture, earned their living from the sweat of these courageous men who went underground each day to work in an extremely dangerous environment. The adult male population, consisting of men over the age of eighteen, numbered 1,056. Half the adult men in the coulee mined. The

⁵⁴ Both my father and uncle served on the local school board.

miners were a generous lot, sharing their wages with the community to build churches and other community buildings. They were far more generous than the company they worked for. The miners also shared their paychecks with individuals who got hurt in the mine and needed help. It must be remembered that many of the miners were single and foreign. These single and foreign miners supported education at every turn. No one could accuse the men of not being interested in and supportive of education. Any money provided to the schools, other than a per-student reimbursement from the county, had to be approved by a vote. It was not until the school in Stockett began to ask for additional money that the voters denied funds to the school and that may have been due to rivalry between the two camps.⁵⁵

Much more could have been drawn from the census than I have done. This chapter could have been twice as long but to many this may be the dullest chapter. I considered doing more analysis of individual immigrant groups but decided against it on the grounds of reader interest. I enjoyed writing the census chapter the most because some real surprises greeted me. Up until now I always thought there were more Irish in Sand Coulee at the time this history covers. The Irish must have been great promoters of their race and culture. The number of miners greatly surprised me, I thought there would have been more of them. In fact there was little in the census that did not surprise me. I am much wiser about the place I call home.

⁵⁵ *Great Falls Tribune*, May 25, 1899. The voters refused a bond of \$3,000 to build more classrooms for the Stockett School. Only men could vote at this time.

CHAPTER 3

FINNISH IMMIGRANTS IN SAND COULEE

The history of the Finnish Americans is the story of ordinary men and women, beginning with the immigrants from Finland who brought with them a unique cultural heritage, strong aspirations to an ethnic identity, passionate political convictions, and a determination to become Americans upon terms that would assure the maximum fulfillment of their personal heroes, dreams, and ambitions.⁵⁶

Emigration

Each emigrant cluster has its own story. In Sand Coulee the Finnish people were the most numerous group of emigrants and the settlers who most recently left their homeland. It takes powerful reasons to forsake an ancient mother country for what is so unfamiliar in a land of curious customs and strange people across an ocean. What the Finns did in the coal camp to ease their immigrant pain and make their life more bearable immensely influenced the day- to-day life of all who lived in the coulee.

Sweden ruled Finland for five centuries. The pandemonium Napoleon created in Europe precipitated a clash between Sweden and Russia. Finland then came under the jurisdiction of Russia from 1809 until 1917 when Finland gained its independence. Many Finns left their home land because of the Russification imposed on them. But even more important, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, Finland's core social problem concerned the dilemma of its landless poor. New farming methods permitted large land owners to hire labor rather than rent to tenants.⁵⁷ For the displaced tenants their only choice was to seek employment in the cities or to immigrate to another country. A

⁵⁶ Carl Ross, *The Finn Factor* (New Mills, Minnesota: Parta Printers, 1977), 7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

surplus labor force gathered in the cities and the cities funneled an ever larger stream of immigrants to America. The emigration from Finland became of escalating significance in the 1890s and reached its apex after 1900.⁵⁸ The Finns were part of the Europeans who came to the U.S. to fill the need for labor in America's developing industrial revolution. Seventy thousand Finns immigrated to America between 1885 and 1900.⁵⁹ This fifteen year period coincided with the break up of the old Finnish system. Compared to others, Finns were a relatively small immigrant group with little more than 300,000 eventually immigrating to America.⁶⁰ A noteworthy number of these emigrants came to Montana to do hard rock mining in Butte and coal mining in Sand Coulee, Belt, Red Lodge and other Montana mining towns.

Emigration was not looked upon favorably by the Finnish establishment. In 1891 a Finnish bishop "declared that emigration drained needed labor from agricultural areas. He said that no one had to leave Finland to find land; beside departure violated the Biblical injunction to remain and work in one's native country."⁶¹ Finnish church officials discouraged emigration as early as 1873 when the Finnish Senate counseled the State Church to warn against emigration.⁶² The church claimed that Finnish men committed bigamy in America and forgot their "American Widows" (as the Finns termed the women left behind in Finland) and children who became a burden to the Finnish state. The church also declared that wives left behind in Finland surrendered to sin and the

⁵⁸ Ibid., 42.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁰ Ibid., vii.

⁶¹ A. William Høglund, *Finnish Immigrants in America, 1880-1920* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), 11.

⁶² Ibid., 12.

children became disobedient because of the absence of a father.⁶³ There seemed to be little appreciation of the abilities of the women to control their children and refrain from adultery. The church saw complete ruin for the families of those who immigrated to America.

Two Finns, Akseli Jarnefelt and Matti Tarkkinen, during the 1890s, after a journey to America, wrote anti-American pamphlets when they returned to Finland. They said America was a Finnish burial ground because immigrants interred their finest culture there. They maintained Finns used American freedom as an excuse to reject their religious and national ties. Jarnefelt and Tarkkinen declared the worst result of American lack of restraint was drunkenness. "In their view Finnish miners and other workers, suffered from hard work, low pay, shameful diseases and many accidents."⁶⁴ Yet, much the same could be said about conditions in Finland. Mankind is not careful about the conditions poor people live in. Finns emigrated because of Russian harassment, including induction into the Russian army, famine, low wages and unequal land distribution in their home country.

The Finns were stubborn about preserving their culture in their new homeland. When the Finns reached America the first thing they did was seek each other. As they moved about in search of work they dispersed to areas already peopled by Finns. Almost all the immigrating Finns joined either relatives or friends where ever they lived. They settled in a rough band of northern states stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific. By 1900 thirteen states held most of them. The census of that year showed Michigan,

⁶³ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

Minnesota, Massachusetts, New York, Washington, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Illinois, California, Oregon, Montana and New Jersey claimed 55,744 Finns. Within each state certain towns and cities attracted them. Sand Coulee, Belt, Butte and Red Lodge had significant percentages of Finns in their population. Even before arriving in these Montana towns the Finns built a closeness, as did other ethnic groups. They mutually experienced the anguish of leaving home and entering a new country. They shared the familiarity of traveling more than 2,000 miles from the eastern seaboard of America to Montana, giving them a common view of the immense geography of their adopted home. They felt the dread of the dangerous coal mine and its newness as an occupation for they were mostly people of the land.

To cope with their immigrant experience Finns quickly erected an infrastructure to maintain their culture in the communities in which they settled, including Finn Halls, Finn churches, Finn temperance movements, Finn bands, Finn saloons, Finn boarding houses, Finn libraries, a Finn bath, and varied educational opportunities for their people.⁶⁵ Sand Coulee had them all. These institutions were intended to serve as a second home, especially for the single males and to give them an alternative to saloons. The basic question facing all immigrant groups focused on how much culture they could sustain and how much culture would be lost no matter what they did. The Finns wanted to join the American dream and enjoy its benefits but they also wanted to do so on their terms.

⁶⁵ The Finn bath still stands. I used to attend the Finn bath, along with friends, while attending high-school. The cost was a quarter.

While a vast majority of Finns worked in the mines there were a few exceptions. A small number of Finns became business persons in the Coulee. Susan Wirtala, as did other Finnish people, owned a boarding house. There was a Finn Saloon (actual name of the saloon) in the main coulee and Ole Ruikka ran a bar in Shacktown (located in the upper coulee) that continually thwarted the ladies guarding camp morality. What few Finnish businesses that did exist, first and foremost, served the Finnish community. Hence, Susan Wirtala's boarding house catered only to Finnish miners, the Finn Saloon and Ole Ruikka's saloon most likely had Finns as a majority of their customers. Nationally immigrant editors, starting in 1898, began to gather their own statistics on Finnish workers. A correspondent in Red Lodge, Montana, a coal mining town very similar to Sand Coulee, discovered "that coal mining was the chief means of support for 263 men, 124 women and 114 youth under eighteen years of age and that only seven Finns were in business."⁶⁶

The Finnish language, difficult and much different from the English language, tended to keep the Finns isolated. This may have helped them develop their associative life and maintain their national identity. Some of the Finns living in America for over a decade could not speak English; they did not have to. They could live in a Finnish boarding house or with a Finnish family. They could work in a mine with Finnish co-workers and drink in a Finnish saloon. They could read Finnish newspapers from home in the Finnish library and the Finn Hall provided a wealth of social activity and educational opportunity. They could go to a Finn night school and listen to a Finnish brass band and take part in Finnish sports activities. They could attend a Finnish church. For those not

⁶⁶ Høglund, *Finnish Immigrants in America*, 61.

interested in the advantages of learning English, opportunity to avoid doing so seemed unlimited. And finally they could be buried by the Finnish Lutheran Church.

The Finns were quite aware of the need to provide all these activities to keep their culture, to some extent, intact. They had the prudence and intellectual fortitude to provide their own cultural opportunities separate from the rest of the community, although anyone was welcome to join them. They did it “their way.” While they had little interest in helping other immigrant groups advance, asserting it took all their energy to provide for themselves, their example did serve to lift other immigrant assemblages. With infinite eagerness the Finns sought mental growth and believed that developing an educated mind was what helped them the most.

Nationally the Finns, starting in the 1890s, set up schools to train personnel for their many organizations. The societies needed people with word skills, people who could do “secretarial work, write reports and keep financial accounts. Bookkeeping and arithmetic became important subjects.”⁶⁷ Too, formal study seemed a way of finding employment in business and professional occupations. The Sand Coulee Finns did not want to be left behind. Charles Kangas started a Sand Coulee night school in 1896, to teach Finnish people reading, writing, spelling and English grammar.⁶⁸ The societies also created discussion groups, as did the Sand Coulee Finns, to promote the art of public speaking.

Suddenly in America, as a pastor observed, immigrants learned to pursue vigorously different ideas leading in all directions. It was as though they had cast off the restraints of wardship and awakened to new aspirations. Another observer agreed that in America

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁶⁸ *Belt Valley Times*, July 2, 1896.

immigrants often learned for the first time to take part in associations enthusiastically because they had few such opportunities in Finland.⁶⁹

Gymnastic and athletic activities became increasingly important, many organized by temperance groups. As long as ample numbers of single men expressed an interest in gymnastics, athletics prospered. Wrestling seemed to appeal especially to the Finns. The American catch-as-catch-can was frowned upon by the Finns. They preferred the Greco-Roman style where opponents could only grab each other above the waist.⁷⁰ Sand Coulee also had its Finnish wrestling club.

Work

Direct solicitation of Finnish workers did happen but it was rare. Friends and relatives already in America were the main source of Finnish recruitment for America's industrial machine. The Finns immigrated to America despite the harsh picture painted by elites in Finland. People back home in Finland commonly asked their friends and relatives for information about America and often for a ticket to the new world. Upon arrival at Ellis Island the Finns generally headed for localities dominated by a major industry ravenous for unskilled labor, such as the Sand Coulee coal field. They were agricultural people, not miners and had only their labor, not mining skills, to offer. Prior to 1890 the preponderance of mine workers were from England and Wales, men trained

⁶⁹ Høglund, *Finnish Immigrants in America*, 53.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 98

as miners. After that date many men not trained in mining, such as the eastern and southern Europeans came to America to labor for its industrial masters.⁷¹

Late immigration handicapped the Sand Coulee Finns in their upward struggle toward a better life. When they arrived, earlier immigrants moved up into more desirable jobs. Bottom rung jobs, like trammers, who filled the coal cars in the rooms and pushed them to the main tracks that led outside to the tipples, were the jobs a lot of Finns started at. They hoped to work their way up to the top job of a machine operator. Within the coal mines a hierarchy of jobs existed and this pecking order was tied to skills and wages. The best jobs belonged to the earlier arrivals who included the Scots, English, and Swedes. The supervisory jobs almost inevitably went to men from English speaking countries. The 1900 census shows only one Finn employed at a higher job than a miner in the Sand Coulee mines.

When Finnish immigrants found work they immediately notified friends and relatives in America and Finland of the working environment they encountered. The newly employed served as an information bank, enabling the Finnish community elsewhere to learn about jobs and working conditions through their own channels.⁷² They advised each other about moving from one community to another and often warned people not to travel to places of unemployment.⁷³ The Finnish workforce was mobile and the birth of children often revealed the different states where the Finns worked. An example, one of many from the 1900 census, concerns the family of Isaac and Mary Maki. Their first child was born in Finland. Their next two sons were born in Wyoming

⁷¹ Rick J. Clyne, *Coal People*, 43.

⁷² Høglund, *Finnish Immigrants in America*, 60.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

and their next two sons in Montana. Isaac, Mary and their oldest son immigrated to America in 1891 and it is probable they went straight to Wyoming to mine coal. Many Finnish immigrants worked in Minnesota, Michigan and Pennsylvania before coming to Montana.

The Company

There is no doubt about who controlled life in Sand Coulee, the company did. All started and ended with the company. The Finns who came in the late 19th century were stubborn non-conformists and clung desperately to their culture. They often clashed frightfully with the industrial mining culture as it was practiced in Montana and other mining areas of the west. Butte serves as an example of this clash. In Butte the vice president of the Anaconda Mining Company fired nearly four hundred Finns en masse “since Finlanders were known trouble makers and his firm did not want many of them working and causing friction with the Irish and Cornish.”⁷⁴ If a Company could control the Finns it could control anyone. The Sand Coulee Coal Company treated all ethnic groups more or less the same, but because of the reputation of the Finns I have decided to place the Company section in this chapter rather than at some other point in the thesis, as a means of showing how the company controlled its miners.

The “Company Boss” or mine superintendent is almost as infamous as the company store but in actuality the boss exerted more influence over miners than the store or the corporate owners. Even though the mine boss had direct control over the mines and selected who he wanted to work within the mines, the Sand Coulee miners were often

⁷⁴ Ibid., 63.

tough opponents to the superintendent's interest, going on strike and demanding meetings to discuss grievances. The miners, many of them Finns, were not docile slaves to the company.

However, it seems doubtful that the Sand Coulee Coal Company and its several superintendents exercised all the control they could because in the coulee mine superintendents were generally held in high esteem. A good example of how a Company Superintendent got along with the miners and the citizens in general is Henry Burrell, the Scotsman who did much to develop the company mine into a top operation. The town's people elected Burrell to several positions of community authority, including being elected captain of the football team. The team occupied an esteemed place in the community, as do modern sports teams, and the team returned community pride by being well captained and recognized in the area and beyond. When Burrell felt it time to leave Sand Coulee, in September of 1896, each Company employee contributed toward gifts for him and his family. The miners affectionately called him "Old Rough and Ready."⁷⁵ Burrell held the esteem of most, and at all times and under all circumstances dealt candidly and fairly with his employees and employer. He often championed the cause of his men to the ultimate benefit and satisfaction of all.⁷⁶ During the strike in 1890 Burrell handled both the men and Hill in a commendable and fair way. An international mining expert, Mr. Tibbey, praised Burrell for having the best managed coal mine in the northwest.⁷⁷ Burrell, as manager of the entire Company operation also served as the town manager, perhaps not always well, but he certainly knew how to run a mine and lead

⁷⁵ *Belt Valley Times*, September 12, 1895.

⁷⁶ *Belt Valley Times*, October 1, 1896.

⁷⁷ *Great Falls Tribune*, October 14, 1894.

men. This may account for some of the leeway accorded Burrell when the town became sick, partly due to his lack of leadership in managing the town's sanitation.

Sand Coulee did not experience the overbearing Company administration that some western mining towns practiced. Red Lodge endured a far more rigid Company paternalism than Sand Coulee did. In Red Lodge the Northern Pacific constructed the following rules.

“The following RULES and REGULATIONS are for the government of employees of the Northern Pacific Coal Company, at Timberline, Montana and must be strictly adhered to.⁷⁸ These same rules also govern all employees at any other mines operated by the N.P. Coal Co. so far as the local conditions will permit, and will be in full force on and after September 15, 1885.

WAGES, ETC.

- 1) The wages of employees at the mines shall be set and regulated by the Superintendent, and the amount due in any one month will be paid on the 25th of the month following.⁷⁹
- 2) Orders will be given employees on the Company's store and butcher shop for work actually done, for any amount not exceeding the amount actually owing at the time the order is asked for. But no orders will be issued in any month for wages earned in another month, nor will any orders be issued on the first three days of the month.

⁷⁸ Timberline, Montana, located in Bozeman Pass, had a post office from January 19, 1895 to April 22, 1898. The town was a Northern Pacific coal mining town that at one time supported a population of three hundred families.

⁷⁹ This rule alone was a boon to the Company store. A person could work almost two months without pay and thus need credit at the store.

STORE PATRONAGE, ETC:

3) As the Company has gone to the expense and trouble of establishing a store, butcher shop and saloon for the accommodation and convenience of its employees, and as its employees derive their living from the Company, all employees will be expected to patronize these places to the exclusion of all other similar establishments or peddlers.

SOBRIETY, REGULARITY, ETC:

4) Employees will be expected to be sober and orderly at all times. No drunken rows or carousing will be tolerated.

5) All employees must be at work promptly at the time designated by the Superintendent or Foreman, and remain at work the full allotted time, whether they are paid by the day or by the ton.

HOUSE REGULATIONS:

6) Each employee renting a house from the Company will be required to sign a lease before taking possession of it.

7) No one will be allowed to erect a house on the company's ground without first having obtained permission from the Superintendent and signing a lease therefore.

8) Every householder will be required to keep his house in good order, and will be charged for any damage done beyond the ordinary wear and tear.

9) He will be required to keep his house neat and clean, both inside and out.

10) Dirty water, slops, ashes or any other substance which will tend to bring about disease or ill health, must be put in a suitable well, to be made for that purpose by the householder. It is strictly forbidden to throw such filth on the ground around the house or on the road in front of it.

11) In case any employee who rents a house is discharged, or of his own accord leaves the Company's employ, he will be required to surrender possession of his house within ten days from the date on which he ceases to be employed. Settlement of his wages or amount due him will not be made until he has moved out of his house.

ANIMALS:

12) No one will be allowed to keep pigs without carefully penning them up. If allowed to run at large, they will be put in pound and a charge made before they will be given back to the owner.

13) No one will be allowed to keep a vicious dog.

STRIKES, LABOR SOCIETIES, ETC.:

14) Any employee joining any secret labor organization or in any way taking part in any strike, or for any cause refusing to perform work assigned to him at any time, unless satisfactory excuse for same is made to the Superintendent or Foreman; or who shall be under the influence of intoxicating liquors while at work, or who shall be incapacitated for work by the use of liquor, will at once be discharged; and under no circumstances will anyone so discharged be re-employed.

HOSPITAL REGULATIONS:

15) Single men will be required to pay one dollar per month, and married men one dollar and a half per month, toward the hospital fund.

16) This amount will procure for single men and married men and their families, medical attendance and medicines for all ordinary diseases and accidents occurring on the property of the Company, or while engaged in working for them: but will not include venereal diseases, child-birth, or treatment of any chronic diseases contracted previous to coming into camp, or any accidents which are clearly due to negligence or carelessness on the part of the patient.

17) Fees for child-birth shall be fifteen dollars.

18) Fees for gonorrhoea shall be fifteen dollars in ordinary cases, and in cases requiring the use of instruments, the charge shall be according to the work done.

19) The charges for visits for all cases not included as above, shall be one dollar and fifty cents; and in all such cases there shall be a moderate charge for medicine.

20) The hospital fund will not pay board or furnish anything except attendance and medicines.

21) The full amount will be collected from each man each month, whether he works a full month or only a part of a month.

22) Employees of the Company, who intend to call the Company's physician in cases of child-birth, are requested to notify him a month in advance, so that he can

keep a record of the case and not be absent from the camp when his services are required.

23) In case of a violation of any of these rules by any employee, for the first offense it will be at the option of the Superintendent whether the party offending shall pay a fine of five dollars or be laid off from his work for one week.

24) For the second offense the employee offending will be discharged.

These rules will be in full force after date. Ignorance of them will not be accepted as an excuse for their violation. Approved September 15th 1885.”⁸⁰

I could find no company rules for Sand Coulee in the research I conducted. In the case of Sand Coulee, certain company rules, such as those of Red Lodge, which discussed public health, would have been of immense benefit to the community. Company rules may well have acted as a quasi-government for Sand Coulee which might have prevented much of the misery the camp experienced, especially in the 1895-1897 diphtheria epidemic. Company rules, such as the Northern Pacific brought together in Red Lodge, could have been used to keep the camp clean and save lives. Sand Coulee’s lack of government, while beneficial at times was also detrimental.

Enforced rules such as the above would have made Sand Coulee a much different living experience. If Company rules did exist for Sand Coulee they did not receive any backing from the Company. It seems implausible the Company would go to the trouble of formulating such rules and then ignore them. If, on the other hand anyone knows of such rules I would appreciate a copy.

⁸⁰ Shirley Zupan and Harry J. Owens, *Red Lodge, Saga of a Western Area* (Billings: Frontier Press, Inc., 1979), 137.

The early coal camps depended on the company superintendent to run a tight ship. A good superintendent, for example, might enforce high standards of sanitation and ensure that home repairs on company homes remained current and general upkeep of the camp maintained. If camp upkeep constituted the only measurement of a good Superintendent then Henry Burrell failed in Sand Coulee. To many superintendents the town represented a diversion. In truth production measured the success of a superintendent and a well run town was probably the exception.⁸¹ In defense of Burrell it was hard to run a tight ship without Company rules.

The company store served several functions. Because it operated on the coupon system newly arrived miners had access to what they needed before they earned a paycheck.⁸² The Company gave them enough coupons to buy necessities and then deducted the coupons from their first paycheck. For people who arrived with no savings, this was one of the good things about the company store. In December of 1897 the Sand Coulee Coal Company payroll amounted to \$50,000, with \$14,000 being paid in coupons, or 28 percent of the pay roll.⁸³ This seems in line with other company stores in the Western states. John C. Osgood, the president of Victor-American Fuel Company, a mining company in the Colorado coal fields, claimed in 1914 that Company Store “sales at anytime has not exceeded 25 per cent of the payroll, so that it does not look like we are forcing our men to make all their purchases at our stores.”⁸⁴ It seems reasonable to attribute a similar condition to Sand Coulee. The coupon system allowed the company

⁸¹ Clyne, *Coal People*, 19.

⁸² *Great Falls Tribune*, June 4, 1891.

⁸³ *Belt Valley Times*, January 20, 1898.

⁸⁴ Clyne, *Coal People*, 23.

great leverage in the miner's lives. The Sand Coulee Coal Company did, however, allow competition with the company store. Sand Coulee boasted more than one butcher shop, several grocery stores, a dry goods store, and other types of stores and several saloons to compete for the 72 percent of the miner's dollar not encumbered by the coupon system. Nevertheless 28 percent of a miner's paycheck was in the form of coupons to be spent in the company store. It seems doubtful, according to Rick Clyne, author of *Coal People*, that the Company store gouged people with exorbitant prices. One benefit of the Company store that no one seems to have written about, but may have been of great benefit to some families, concerns the coupon system. The wife of a drunken husband may have found coupons a means of salvation to feed her family. The Company store could actually have provided food for the children rather than allowing the husband to drink all his wages in the saloon. The Store gave the Company considerable control over the town. The reputation of the company store, made so notorious in Ernie Ford's song, had its roots in truth. Sand Coulee also experienced deep dependence on the company for housing. Though many people owned their own homes the Company owned the land and charged the homeowners rent. The Company also owned the land public buildings occupied. These conditions promoted considerable subservience in a community like Sand Coulee.

When the company moved its business to Stockett it ran that town in a more restrictive way. Perhaps it felt Sand Coulee had too much freedom. For example, in Stockett the company would not rent land to anyone dispensing alcohol so saloons congregated north of the town limits in a place called the "bad lands." But the miners

needed their alcohol. Rather than congregating in a “badlands saloon” some fathers sent their children to the saloons to buy a pail of beer. Stockett also restricted competition with its company store.

The Company, at times, also took action to keep the Finns “in their place” because they were the source of cheap unskilled labor for the mines. This was dramatically illustrated in Sand Coulee when the Finns undertook a Finnish mining operation called the Sampo Coal Mining Company of Sand Coulee, Montana. They sold stock in the company in the 1890s that on paper offered a good profit to investors. However, the Sand Coulee Coal Company was not about to tolerate a mine that had the potential of becoming quite large and drawing away cheap Finn labor. The Company owned the Great Northern Railroad that served the Sand Coulee mines. The Railroad refused to carry Sampo coal at competitive rates and drove the Finns out of business.⁸⁵ Hill must have singled out Sampo coal for especially high freight rates because other mines in Sand Coulee could afford the freight rate and stay in business. The same fate happened to another Finnish coal mine in Hanna, Wyoming. Once again the industrial giants used raw power to thwart competition that would surely have benefited the working men and their families. J.J. Hill may have been a hands-on owner, and at times may have made a showing of being a man of the people, but when the chips were down he was as cold blooded as any industrialist.

Even Finnish women were controlled by the company to a certain extent. Single Finnish women were prized domestic workers but were paid wretched wages. Work, other than providing domestic services to single men, was found in the homes of

⁸⁵ Ross, *The Finn Factor*, 89.

company officials or other well-to-do families often dependent on the company for their income. The young women working in these homes had to be careful; one bad word from an employer could finish their domestic career. Yes, the Company had plenty of power in Sand Coulee.

The Finn Hall and Finnish Library

Lacking the moral restraints of home life, young Finish immigrants found various new parents in organizations which provided discipline and recreation.”⁸⁶ Two of these organizations, the Finn Hall and Finn Library existed in Sand Coulee.⁸⁷

The Finn Hall was an incredible axis of Finnish life. Weddings, baptisms, funerals, meetings, dances, concerts, and parties took place in the hall. Folk music and temperance activities also provided the Finns with positive “after work” hours. Drama and poetry nurtured their cultural needs. All communal events of the Finns seemed to take place in their hall.

Libraries also advanced the cultural and educational life of the Finns. In fact the entire camp seemed hungry for education and advancement of learning. Three libraries, the Finnish, Scandinavian and English served Sand Coulee, according the *Great Falls City Directory of 1897*. The Finnish quest for self education was to a certain extent fulfilled through their lending library, which distributed fiction books written in, or

⁸⁶ Høglund, *Finnish Immigrants in America, 1880-1920*, 103.

⁸⁷ According to Giannini in her book *A History of Sand Coulee* (p. 13) the original Finn Hall stood against the hillside opposite Wirtala’s Finn Store. In the early 50’s Severino Giannini purchased the building and moved it to the location of the present Post Office, built in 1971. Roller-skating and dances were held in the large, rectangular, high ceilinged building until it was torn down. I spent many furious and enjoyable evenings roller-skating in this building. My research would not reveal the location of the Finnish Library.

translated into the Finnish language. The library also stocked its shelves with economic, language, sociology and history books. The library disseminated copies of Finnish newspapers printed in other American communities or in Finland. The Finns were enamored of newspapers, particularly a hand written paper called the *Fist Paper*, designed to be read aloud for entertainment and education in evening meetings. In my research there was no mention of a *Fist Paper* in Sand Coulee or Belt but it would be reasonable to assume that both camps had them. By reading newspapers of all types the Finns furthered their pursuit of cultivating their mind. Formal oratory helped them educate themselves and discuss current events touching their lives. To test their knowledge gained from reading and deliberation, Finns debated each other in official settings. The Finns loved the strength of the spoken and printed word.⁸⁸

The Finns were the best organized among the Sand Coulee immigrants, as they were in most communities where they settled. Their organizations helped them remain an interconnected people. Other immigrant groups envied them, such as the Slovenians, who built a hall in Sand Coulee and began to emulate the Finns to help their people. The Sand Coulee Finns also had their church, their temperance organization and their Knights of Kaleva.

The Church and Temperance Movement

The Finns found an entirely new situation in America concerning the church. America tolerated no state church as did Finland. American people were free to organize their religion as they wished; no one could coerce support of churches in America. Many

⁸⁸ Høglund, *Finnish Immigrants in America*, 39.

considered immigration to America as a release from the Lutheran church authority they knew in Finland.

In western mining regions employers often helped immigrants build religious and temperance organizations by giving them funds and by allowing subscriptions among the miners.⁸⁹ “In Sand Coulee, in 1895, the first Finnish Lutheran congregation met in the temperance hall until local miners authorized the mining company to deduct twenty-five cents each per month from their pay to build the church.”⁹⁰ There is a natural affinity between the church and the Temperance movement. However, the Finnish Lutheran Church was eclipsed by the Temperance movement, partially because the church had several problems that blocked its effectiveness during much of the 1890s. People had been severely oppressed by the state church in Finland. People who were on the edge of survival in Finland still had to pay their tithes which further impoverished them. Many immigrants viewed the release from a state church as an advantage they did not want to endanger in anyway.

The clergy that immigrated to America were indignant that the church was responsible for supporting them, thus starting their American experience on a negative note. The newly immigrated Finns viewed the ministers with suspicion and mistrust. The distrust of the church in America was so great that a Finnish Lutheran Church movement in 1889, with national leadership, was vigorously opposed because the resistance feared that a Finnish state church with tithes and authority over secular affairs might arise. The 1889 movement proved successful even though it was patterned after the state church in

⁸⁹ Høglund, *Finnish Immigrants in America, 1880-1920*, 37.

⁹⁰ Ross, *The Finn Factor*, 28.

Finland. By 1900 the movement, or Finish American Evangelical Lutheran Church, could claim forty-nine congregations throughout America.⁹¹

The lenient control of home and church in America allowed the Finns to decide how to spend their free time. The freedom to find so much leisure activity away from home stunned them. For men saloons soon became the chief centers of socializing outside the home. The reputation of the American Finns was not always the best. They were called the “wild Finns,” good laborers but trouble makers. Finnish historian Jarnefelt-Rauanheimo, the first chronicler of the Finnish immigrant experience wrote,

They carried on a raw life in the saloons where they caroused and spent their wages. In all the Finnish settlements this has been the first stage of development. Evidence to corroborate this observation is abundant in historical writing about Finns in America, but the emphasis has been on expressing moral indignation against hard drinking.⁹²

The Finns seemed to have a proclivity for alcohol. They fought with each other as well as the people outside their ethnic community. In Sand Coulee, according to the local newspapers, they fought each other far more than non Finnish people. Knife fights especially seemed to break out among young Finns when they consumed alcohol beyond the point of sobriety.

The coulee stories of hard drinking, fighting with fists and knives are many, but may have been exaggerated by the temperance movement in Sand Coulee. Temperance lecturers quickly saw the connection between intemperance and the need of family life for single people.⁹³ Many Finnish immigrants were single males. In Sand Coulee the Finns numbered 241 residents, with single Finns contributing fifty eight males and seven females to the group. The single males, with so few Finnish females, and a language

⁹¹ Ibid, 28-29

⁹² Ibid, 18.

⁹³ Høglund, *Finnish Immigrants in America*, 1880-1890, 88.

dilemma in approaching non-Finnish females, provided plentiful work for the Finnish community to provide the young men a substitute to the saloon and the lack of the civilizing effect of sweethearts. Married men frequenting the saloons also disturbed the women and the non-drinking men. Nationally, Finnish poets began to write about the pitfalls the youthful men encountered. One poet told of a young man who went to church but by evening had lost his way and entered a saloon. The poet said the young man had come to America to find gold but instead found whiskey which killed him. When his mother in Finland heard of his death it killed her.⁹⁴ Thus, America was responsible for two Finnish deaths. However the temperance faction exerted a healthy influence and helped keep the Finnish people together by the force of its pressure. By 1888 so many temperance organizations sprang up on the national level that the Finns created the Finnish National Temperance Brotherhood as a central organization.⁹⁵ Sand Coulee's Finnish National Temperance Brotherhood based its rituals on the Good Templar model. The meetings were accessible to members only and opened and closed with prayer. Mutual support, such as a fifty dollar burial benefit, acted as an incentive to join the movement. One favorite socializing method of the Brotherhood involved the basket social which gave the single Finns a chance to mix as well as married people.⁹⁶

In America and Sand Coulee the temperance movement became an important molder of Finnish society. The movement surpassed the churches in the Finnish communities and became one of the cradles of immigrant Finnish culture.⁹⁷ Temperance

⁹⁴ Ibid, 34.

⁹⁵ *Belt Valley Times*, April 30, 1896.

⁹⁶ Such a basket social is mentioned in the *Belt Valley Times* of January 16, 1896.

⁹⁷ Ross, *The Finn Factor*, 23.

societies intimately controlled their members by insisting upon abstinence, no cursing, gambling or dancing. They also admonished members to live morally and not display depravity. The Brotherhood was most successful in outlawing dancing which in their eyes damaged the reputation of, and shattered the chastity of young women. However, autonomous societies often endorsed dancing, even in a saloon, if the dance could raise money for some philanthropic cause.⁹⁸ The ability to report on men falling off the wagon gave the women of the camp authority over those taking the pledge. That much power in a matter so personal can spawn a certain amount of ill will. The tattletale is never without enemies. It is almost certain that reporting someone breaking the pledge caused quarrels and vows of revenge among the fractious Finns. Many fell off the wagon and sorrowfully renewed their promise, only to fall again.⁹⁹

Knights of Kaleva

Johannes Oxelstein, a Finnish university-educated surveyor, immigrated to Tower, Minnesota in 1887 at the age of twenty-two. He worked in mines, but he did not want a career in mining so he moved, with his young bride Sofia, to Belt, Montana to join his brother and engage in business. After arriving in Belt, Johannes changed his name to the American sounding Stone as his younger brother Alex had already done. John was bothered by the weak ties the Finnish community exhibited toward each other and how poorly they lived in Belt. Stone, a man of strong nationalist Finnish feeling decided to do something to help his people. He started the Knights of Kaleva, patterned after

⁹⁸ Høglund, *Finnish Immigrants in America 1880-1920*, 96.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

fraternities such as the Odd Fellows, to safeguard Finnish culture and offer an option to the Finnish proclivity for frequenting saloons. In light of this it seems ironic that he would Americanize his name. This indicates how strongly America influenced immigrants.

Stone sought help from his friends to start the fraternity. Surprisingly, establishing the fraternity met with strong opposition. Stone established the Knights of Kaleva in May, 1898 and it grew at an astonishing pace.¹⁰⁰ Stone suggested several names for the fraternity: Boys of Kaleva, Heroes of Kaleva and Knights of Kaleva. The group finally settled on Knights of Kaleva. Belt named its groundbreaking Lodge the Pellervoinen Lodge Number 1.¹⁰¹ The group held their first meeting in the Odd Fellows Hall. The organization of the group went easily at this point because Stone had worked for two years previous to the organizing meeting to construct a set of rules necessary to establish the organization. The membership concentrated on teaching the “Finnishness” of being Finnish. The founders imagined their organization as a secret fraternal order, restricted to the elite of the Finnish community. It encouraged the charitable and public spirited interests of Finnish Americans and endeavored to exercise authority among them in whatever direction the fraternity thought fitting. The brotherhood wanted to maintain and nurture what the national Kalevala meant to the Finnish people.

The Kalevala was published in 1835, giving the Finns their first literature written in their own language rather than in the Swedish language. The Kalevala was taken from the oral tradition of the Finns. The Kalevala runes (Finnish or Old Norse poems) were

¹⁰⁰ Alfons Ukkonen, *A History of the Kaleva Knighthood and the Knights of Kaleva* (Beaverton, Ontario: Aspasia Books, 1998), 8.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

chanted to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument, the kantale. Perhaps this helped keep the oral poems in a pure form before Elias Lonnrot collected them and put them on paper. Finnish traditions, mores, taboos, common sense and common origins, in written form now gave the Finns a feeling of nationalism based on their own language, heritage and literature. When confronted with new situations the Finnish immigrants drew on the Kalevala much as Christians consulted the Bible. The newly formed Knights of Kaleva group used the Kalevala to teach its members and community to go back to its roots, back to the Kalevala. The Belt Lodge used the Kalevala Saga in a series of object lessons to be learned by each member. The Lodge quickly became a national movement among Finnish communities. That the Knights of Kalevala could so quickly spread from an isolated community in Montana to Finnish communities nation-wide and in Canada, demonstrates how closely connected the Finnish population was in North America. The Knights also organized in Finland but that Lodge did not last long. Nationally, the Knights of Kaleva still honor Lonnrot each year on February 28th.

The Knights naturally attracted the more conservative Finnish community and business leaders. The movement came to be regarded as a business fraternal order. Thus another segment of Finnish Society developed its own unique organization. One of the ways the Knights of Kaleva was put to use, and that demonstrated how the movement spread, happened in Hanna, Wyoming. The Finns there used the secret society, just as the Masons did in Virginia City to form the vigilantes, to begin quietly organizing a union until it was considered safe to convene a union meeting in a saloon.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Ross, *The Finn Factor*, 97.

On July 30, 1898 the Belt Lodge received a letter from a group of seven men in Sand Coulee wanting to apply for membership in the Belt Lodge. Belt proved too far away (sixteen miles) for the miners to travel for regular meetings. People often traveled between the two coal camps but the Sand Coulee men interested in the Knights of Kalevala made their living mining and usually did not have their own horses. The Belt Lodge accepted their membership and suggested names for the Sand Coulee Lodge. Another letter from Sand Coulee was read in the Belt Lodge on December 24, 1898. The letter informed the Belt Knights of Kaleva that the Sand Coulee Lodge would be named Pellervoinen Lodge Number 2. This was too much incest for the Belt fraternity so they wrote back to Sand Coulee suggesting they select another name from the Kalevala and include "Number Two" after the name, thus the second Knights of Kaleva lodge was established in Sand Coulee. The Sand Coulee group decided to name their Lodge, Ilmarinen Lodge Number Two.

The Sand Coulee group called special meetings to accommodate other Finnish men wanting to join the Lodge. All seemed well with the fledgling organization but trouble soon molested them. In February 1899 the lodge elected five jurors to arbitrate a quarrel between two members. The jury mustered little compassion for either of them and expelled them from the lodge for six months. The Finns were a quarrelsome bunch in all they did and the Knights of Kaleva experienced enough turmoil to prove ruinous to the Sand Coulee Lodge. Members began showing up drunk so they passed a resolution that prohibited drunken attendance at meetings. This rule became the law of the lodge in April, 1899. In response to the fighting, the lodge decided to move to Stockett in March

1900, which proved a good shift. But complaints and retribution continued to occur. Too, mine production began decreasing in 1901 and hindered operations of the lodge. Finally in 1910 the lodge ended its twelve year history of turbulence by disbanding. Ilmarinen Lodge Number Two, born in Sand Coulee, died in Stockett and became a part of history that was little remembered as time passed.

The Knights of Kaleva formed the first lodge in Belt in 1898. Sand Coulee formed the second lodge, also in 1898. Hancock, Michigan formed the third lodge in 1899, while Butte formed the fourth lodge in 1900. In 1900, the fifth lodge was founded in Red Lodge, another Montana coal mining town. In February of 1900, both Belt and Sand Coulee sent representatives to help form the Red Lodge Knights of Kaleva.¹⁰³ Red Lodge also founded the first Ladies of Kalevala in 1904. Red Lodge now has the only active group in Montana.

Politics

Paternalism raises the question of whether political independence is possible in a company town. "Experience in the Colorado coal camps proves that all the safeguards yet devised for the free exercise of the popular will are futile to prevent political domination when corporations or individuals control absolutely the industrial and economic life of the community." In places where a Company built and ran the town it had to provide a myriad of services. But, inexorably when a company got caught up in all these areas it gained a great deal of control over the inhabitants. Paternalism helped sustain a stable work force, but paternalism also meant power for the Company. Jobs, food, clothing and

¹⁰³ Alfons Ukkonen, *A History of the Kaleva*, 48-49

housing could be denied a miner if an issue became important enough to the Company to exercise such brute force. In many instances the Finns went against the Company they worked for, the political grain of their occupation and of the time and place in which they lived. Both James Hill and Marcus Daly belonged to the Democratic Party, but the Sand Coulee and Belt Finns exercised their independence by being Republican. Many Sand Coulee readers of this thesis will be surprised to learn that the Finns, nationwide, campaigned and voted for Republicans at this time. Finnish newspapers in America supported Republicans and many of those papers circulated in the coal camps of Sand Coulee and Belt. Before 1920 Finnish Americans nationally campaigned mainly for Republicans. As early as 1888, Finnish immigrants formed Republican clubs.

The Finns perceived the Republicans as representing economic individualism which appealed to immigrants anxious to get ahead in business and as professionals. Being part of an often anxious, unskilled labor force, they responded politically to the economy. Grover Cleveland's second administration included a brawny recession that began in 1893 and the Finns refused to forgive Democrats for the burden of unemployment and instead accepted the "full dinner pail" argument of the Republicans. Shortly before President William McKinley's inauguration in 1897, one of the original immigrant workingman's papers said McKinley's election ended the "Democrat era."¹⁰⁴ From the 1890s onward Finnish newspaper writers made sure their readers did not fail to connect the Democrats with unemployment.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 117.

The *Great Falls Tribune* rabidly, comically and at times, hysterically supported the Democratic Party. Perhaps the best example of the Tribune's Democratic advocacy was their frenzied article of October 29, 1900. The lengthy article proclaimed that Great Falls would become a second Anaconda and that if a Republican Legislature should be chosen the Amalgamated (a new name for the ACM) would establish a company store in Great Falls it would destroy all existing competitors. The piece claimed conditions which existed at Belt would be repeated in Great Falls.

Often the coal camp's vote thwarted the *Tribune's* Democratic advocacy. The *Tribune's* lack of influence in the nearby coal camps was partly due to the large Republican Finnish population residing in the camps. The *Great Falls Tribune* continually voiced strong pro-democratic rhetoric while vilifying Republicans at every opportunity. The locally owned *Belt Valley Times* was much more even handed, possibly because of their large local Finnish population.

One illustration of the *Tribune's* Democratic support and the Finn's Republican opposition concerns two prominent Montana historical figures, Marcus Daly and politically ambitious William Clark. Clark ran for Territorial delegate to Congress in 1888. At this point the Daly-Clark quarrel was simmering but not yet at the boiling point. Clark expected Daly's support but when the votes were counted a comparatively unfamiliar Republican lawyer, Thomas H. Carter, became Montana's delegate to D.C. Carter swept every district in which Daly had any sway, including Belt.¹⁰⁶ This vote locked Daly and Clark into a no holds barred struggle.

¹⁰⁶ Joseph Kinsey Howard, *Montana, High, Wide, and Handsome* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 60.

In the meantime on November 6, 1888 a special two coach train and baggage car had traveled from Great Falls to Sand Coulee to promote the Democratic cause and Clark for Montana's territorial delegate. Music played and large bon fires lit up the coulee. Democratic advocates from Great Falls and many of Sand Coulee's people assembled in a large hall to listen to the speakers. Many of the original residents of the coulee were Democrats. As an example, one of the earliest, James Anthony was elected chairman of the event. The Honorable T.E. Collins, a prominent statewide Democrat, spoke of the tidal wave of populism rolling over Montana. Sand Coulee voter analysis, on several occasions, suggest an even split between Populists and the Republican Finns. Collins claimed Clark was responsible for the high wages of the Butte miners that enabled them to live well. Paris Gibson also spoke and said he felt Clark would be given a sizeable majority in the county. Gibson took a shot at Carter by saying he was a weak man and that efforts on Carter's behalf would "avail nothing."¹⁰⁷ The people who came from foreign lands were asked by another speaker, "not to be misled by the word 'Republican'. There is a broader and nobler watch word of freedom and the guarantor of liberty-that word is democrat." At the end of the evening one hundred Democrats boarded the train and regally headed back to Great Falls. The Finns enjoyed a good time at the rally but many of them voted Republican. To a certain extent Sand Coulee was influenced by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company because Hill's railroad shipped immense amounts of coal to smelt Daly's copper. Belt voted fifty-one to sixteen for the Republican Carter while Sand Coulee gave thirty-five votes to Carter and forty-three votes to Clark. The rally and the *Tribune* coverage gave Clark an eight vote victory in Sand Coulee. Despite

¹⁰⁷ *Great Falls Tribune*, November 7, 1888.

the complete rancor from the *Tribune* toward Republicans, Carter carried the county by 200 votes.

How many Republican votes were Finnish is impossible to determine, but given the Democratic fervor of the *Tribune* and most of the elites of Sand Coulee, it is reasonable to argue that many of the Republican votes came from the Finnish people. It seems difficult to argue otherwise in view of the Finnish Republican posture on the national level. A side note to the election is that Dr. A. G. Ladd, who practiced in Sand Coulee, and was a local rancher, ran as a Republican for the office of Coroner and received 39 votes while his Democratic opponent received 38 votes.

Conclusion

The Finns left their country when it could no longer provide them a living or security because of the transition from an agricultural country to one drastically changed by the industrial revolution. They also left their homeland because they wanted to live in freedom from Russian control and the arrogance of their Russian masters. The immigrating Finns were not a people of skills that allowed them entry into American trades. They were country people for the most part and all they had to trade for a living came from their muscles and work ethic. They ended up where hard manual labor was in demand and this often meant mining. They kept in touch after reaching their new country and wherever opportunity for work arose they traveled there, most often joining friends and relatives. When the Sand Coulee Coal Company mine first started operating it needed laborers and the Finnish grapevine soon provided those laborers.

The Finns congregated in the coulee and immediately started building institutions that would substitute for the family life they left in the old country. Many of the Finns immigrating to Sand Coulee were single men and in need of what Finnish culture had to offer in order to live in a way acceptable to the Finnish families they lived amongst. The Finnish community in Sand Coulee quickly set up a Lutheran church and a night school to help quench the Finnish thirst for education. Discussion groups and a Finnish library also helped many occupy their time that otherwise would have been spent in a saloon. The Finn Hall housed their cultural activities and married, baptized and buried them. The Finns were musical and organized a brass band to satisfy their love for music. The Finns also placed a high value on athletics and founded a wrestling club. The Finnish leaders aggressively tackled Sand Coulee society in a positive way, much more so than other immigrant groups. The Finns of Sand Coulee and other Montana towns followed the national American Finnish community to an astonishingly degree. The entire American Finnish experience was similar because it was driven by the same emotional and cultural needs and their appetite for communal intercourse with each other. Their positive influence on the rough, tough coal mining town of Sand Coulee cannot be over estimated.

Work also provided a stabilizing force in Finnish life. Sand Coulee's main job was to feed coal to the Great Northern railroad. Because of this steady market Sand Coulee did not suffer as much from market fluctuations as some towns did who depended on one source for employment. The Company also ran the town in a tolerant way that suited the Finns. But the miners, and thus the Finns, always knew where their livelihood came from. They knew if they crossed a certain line they could face loss of housing, of

being able to access the company store, and ultimately loss of their job. The Sand Coulee Finns pushed the envelope but kept their community under control and avoided the heartbreak of total confrontation with authority their brothers experienced in many other western mining camps.

CHAPTER 4

DIPHThERIA, TYPHOID AND CHOLERA IN SAND COULEE

Behind disease, there is always something else. More precisely, disease is always and at the same time itself and something different. Collective disease is the part and the whole, the origin and the outcome, the fact and the symbol, inextricably mixed together. Chantal Beauchamp¹⁰⁸

Simply listing events, such as who died from disease tells us very little other than the names of those who died and how many died.¹⁰⁹ As an example, presenting a list of presidents would not tell us much other than the names of the presidents and how many there were. The list would not tell of the hardship endured by the populace and soldiers during the Revolutionary War or of the elegant guidance Washington exercised during the first presidency of this nation. The reader of the list would not know that during Lincoln's presidency the country fought a great civil war and almost lost itself. Lists give little context to appropriately interpret them. Lists serve a purpose and do impart information but so much more happens than simply listing things. As Chantal Beauchamp wrote, "Collectively disease is the part and the whole." In the case of disease in Sand Coulee, the part and whole included the history of medicine in Montana and Cascade County and the way authorities responded to disease.

¹⁰⁸ Catherine J. Kudlick, *Cholera in Post-Revolutionary Paris* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1996), 11.

¹⁰⁹ Terra Ziporyn, *Disease in the Popular American Press* (New York, West Port, London: Greenwood Press, 1988), 143.

History of Medicine in Montana

The Native Americans practiced medicine long before the Europeans came to what is now Montana. Indian medicine, in many ways was as good as white medicine and at least the Indians knew the history of those who cared for them in sickness and ministered to them when injured by horse and war. The early gold miners in Montana could not always vouch for the credentials of those who took care of their health needs. To those who impartially evaluate Indian and white medicine, it is clear that many Indian cures were as successful as those approved by European doctors, if not more so. The Indian use of herbs and natural, organic compounds worked in many instances. As an example willow was the Indian aspirin and they used it for the same purpose the 21st century mother does. Our aspirin is now chemically manufactured but it originally came from willow bark. There are many other examples of the successful use of organic medicine by the Indians. An Indian remedy involving the rattle of a snake was recommended by an attending Indian as Sacagawea agonized her way through the difficult birth of her son Pompey. The suggested remedy quickly produced the desired results for whatever reason. The Lewis and Clark expedition exchanged medical treatment with Indians all along their route. The Indians were not blindly dedicated to their medical practitioners and traded goods with the expedition for medical services. The first “real doctors” came to Montana as members of military expeditions. A good example is the Mullan expedition that explored the famous Mullan Road, connecting the Columbia River to the Missouri River including linking Helena to Sun River, near Great Falls, and then onto Fort Benton and the paddle steamers that coupled Montana with the

east. Captain Mullan's brother, John was hired as the expedition doctor and performed his duties well, keeping the men under his brother's command fit for duty. Other military expeditions also brought doctors with them to serve the soldiers.

The gold fields of western Montana brought the first invasion of doctors but they were a fraudulent bunch, often claiming education and training they did not have. Some practiced medicine with enough bluff to get them through even though they had little idea of what their profession entailed. Many of the gold field doctors practiced medicine for money to tide them over while searching for gold.

As Montana prospered beyond a gold camp society, agricultural and ranching pioneers began to move into the territory. With them civilization slowly moved into the territory and brought government with it. Some reputable doctors saw the need to regulate their profession by licensing doctors. These honest doctors began pushing for a medical association and for a state licensing agency. The move started in Madison County where the medical profession was in most disarray. On January 29, 1879 Virginia City doctors met in Helena and formed a Territorial Medical Association.¹¹⁰

The most important problem of territorial medicine involved identifying the competent doctors from the imposters. Some doctors could produce no credentials while some did possess credentials but from medical schools that turned out doctors much as current diploma mills turn out various degrees.¹¹¹ A decade later, in January 1889, the association, at a meeting in Helena, decided to prepare a bill to regulate medical practice. The Association appointed a committee, consisting of two doctors and a judge, to write a

¹¹⁰ Paul C. Phillips, *Medicine in the Making of Montana* (Missoula: Montana State University Press, 1962), 405.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 403.

bill for passage by the territorial legislature, directing Governor Preston H. Leslie to appoint a board of seven physicians to examine medical diplomas and pass upon the credentials of men coming to Montana to practice medicine.¹¹² The *Helena Herald* supported the proposed bill by commenting that, “The whole business of these quacks is downright robbery, charging high fees for services and medicine that do more harm than good.”¹¹³ Members of the association persistently lobbied law makers and on March 6, 1889 the bill became law.

Governor Leslie quickly appointed the authorized Board of Medical Examiners. All members were prominent physicians, including Doctor Ernest Crutcher of Great Falls. The board’s first meeting was held on April 28, 1889. The board immediately decided performing abortion was a disqualification for certification, even if the Doctor graduated from the best of schools. The Medical Practices Act of 1889, from its beginning, helped reduce the number of quacks in Montana.

History of Medicine in Cascade County and Sand Coulee

The medical history of Cascade County and Sand Coulee is intertwined with the railroad that Hill built to Great Falls in 1887. Eight of the early Great Falls doctors were associated with the railroad. Of those eight, five were surgeons. The Great Northern doctors were mainly surgeons hired to repair bodies broken by rail and mine accidents. This may have had some bearing on the diseases that later ravished Sand Coulee. It is possible that medical doctors, rather than surgeons, might have been better equipped to

¹¹² Ibid., 406.

¹¹³ *Helena Herald*, January 17, 1889.

handle disease. The early Sand Coulee doctors were also railroad doctors, elected by the miners union so their families could receive medical care.¹¹⁴ The doctors received their salary from the miners who had monthly amounts deducted from their pay checks to retain the doctor's services. The doctors would also take non-union patients for a flat fee. Doctors who practiced in Sand Coulee before 1900 included, among others, Doctor Alfred G. Ladd, Doctor William Gelsthorpe, Doctor Daniel B. McCann, Doctor DeVere, Doctor Morrow and Doctor Dwight. *Medicine in the Making of Montana* by Paul C. Phillips lists the early doctors of Cascade County and gives a biography for many of them.

Dr. Alfred G. Ladd purchased a ranch near Sand Coulee in 1882 and practiced medicine among the ranchers for a year before he went to Great Falls to practice medicine and surgery. Dr. Ladd was a founder of the Great Falls General hospital in 1891. He graduated from the medical department of the University of Maine in 1878.¹¹⁵ The personal papers of Henry Burrell, general manager of the Sand Coulee Coal Company, contain a bill from Dr. Ladd for services rendered to Burrell's family.¹¹⁶

Dr. William H. Gelsthorpe was born in 1859 in West Virginia. His education included study at the Western Reserve University and graduation from the Cleveland College of Physicians and Surgeons. Doctor Gelsthorpe arrived in Glendive, Montana in September of 1884. In 1885 he returned to Cleveland for more post graduate work and returned to Montana in December of that year as a surgeon for the Northern Pacific Railroad. In 1888 he became the physician for the Sand Coulee Coal Company at the age

¹¹⁴ Phillips, *Medicine in the Making of Montana*, 363.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 354.

¹¹⁶ Henry Burrell Papers, Montana Historical Society

of twenty-nine. The *Great Falls Tribune* of April 11, 1891 mentions both Dr. Gelsthorpe and Doctor Ladd as two of the four doctors responsible for erecting the General Hospital in Great Falls in 1891. Doctor Gelsthorpe was a member of the Montana Medical Association, acting as its first vice-president. While practicing in Sand Coulee in 1889 he became ill and unable to practice medicine. The winter of 1889 saw much sickness in the camp so Doctor DeVere of Helena substituted for Doctor Gelsthorpe.¹¹⁷ Doctor Gelsthorpe was a well qualified physician, as were most of the Sand Coulee physicians at this time. The work of the Montana Medical Association was paying off.

The qualifications of Dr. DeVere are not known but mention is made of him in relationship to Sand Coulee in the *Great Falls Tribune* of December 18, 1889. The *Tribune* states, "A number of people are sick and Dr. DeVere is kept busy. Two cases of pneumonia and one of typhoid are reported. The gas generated by the blasting powder seems to settle in certain drifts and men who work in these places are troubled with headache and a cough. This will be remedied as soon as the machinery can be put in place."

Doctor Daniel B. McCann was one of the gold rush doctors. The *Missoula Pioneer* of November 10, 1870 reported that Dr. McCann discovered a valuable bar in eastern Idaho near the Montana border. Dr. McCann started the first drugstore in Neihart in 1890 and in 1892 moved to Great Falls to again engage in the drugstore business and practice medicine. He later moved to Sand Coulee to do the same. In 1897 the Montana

¹¹⁷ Phillips, *Medicine in the Making of Montana* , 363.

Medical Association sponsored Dr. McCann for the position of agent for the Blackfeet reservation.¹¹⁸

Dr. Dwight acted as the assistant company physician in Sand Coulee but he moved to Stockett in 1898 so the people at the new camp would not have to notify the doctor in Sand Coulee and then wait for his arrival. In case of serious sickness or accident time could be crucial. Sand Coulee also had access to competent doctors in Great Falls. Company towns were lucky in one way; they often had good medical care compared to what could be secured in general.

Though doctors practiced in Sand Coulee and the surrounding area in the 1880s hospitals did not exist. People did not look at hospitals as a place to get well but as a place to die or be warehoused. Only at the turn of the century did hospitals start to gain the public perception as a place to get well. The Sisters of Charity started construction on the Columbus Hospital in Great Falls in 1893. Construction was completed in 1894. The Sisters then purchased the General Hospital and combined the two. The Sisters of Charity saw a need for training the people working in their hospital and established the first nurse's training school in Montana.¹¹⁹ The Deaconess Hospital came into existence, through the Methodists, in 1898 and provided another excellent medical resource.

Public Health

Most epoch making 19th century bacteriological investigation occurred in Europe. Men such as Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch proved specific microorganisms were

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 365.

¹¹⁹ Ibid , 181.

responsible for specific infectious diseases. By 1900 most of the medical community viewed each disease as distinct with separate causes and precise treatments. However, not until the second decade of the twentieth century did the majority of the medical community fully understand the implications of the new germ theory and immunological discoveries.¹²⁰ The germ theory suggested aiming prevention at specific germs and specific individuals rather than general filth.¹²¹ The germ theory slowly changed how public health officials viewed and battled disease. Public health measures, until the late nineteenth century, were primarily concerned with controlling disease by alleviating filth. Such diagnosis blamed the patient and the way they lived rather than the disease.¹²²

Early diagnosis and swift action are necessary to prevent epidemics and neither prevailed in fighting disease in Sand Coulee. Sand Coulee never incorporated and therefore lacked a governmental administrative body that could act for the good of the community. When a population becomes too dense it develops into a rich target for disease and the quick spread of disease. The degradation of an environment can also lead to disease of epidemic proportions as happened in Sand Coulee during its 1895-97 diphtheria epidemic. It is impossible to determine how many cases of cholera, typhoid and diphtheria occurred during that time. The papers would list a house as quarantined but would make no mention of how many people lived in the house. But thirty-eight incidents of diphtheria can be gleaned from the *Tribune* and *Belt Valley Times*, resulting in three deaths. Three cases of typhoid can be determined from the papers with one death resulting from the disease. Two incidents of cholera are mentioned, both resulting in

¹²⁰ Ziporyn, *Disease in the Popular American Press*, 12.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹²² Kudlick, *Cholera in Post-Revolutionary*, 33.

death. It is certain that many more incidents and deaths occurred from all three diseases but health records are not available to make a good determination of the number of victims and deaths. The crisis created by the 1895-97 diphtheria epidemic in Sand Coulee made the services of government indispensable in combating the epidemic. The populace could organize fraternal and other associations but could not successfully move to clean the town. Gathering into fraternal organizations involved people of like mind whereas a project that cut across all groups may have been too extensive for a fraternity to handle. The citizenry could not enforce sanitation rules because they lacked authority to enforce regulations of any kind. They could not go into a person's house and insist the family clean its premises. They could not quarantine the houses that harbored contagious disease, nor could they close down the school. The county government reluctantly entered the situation and took limited steps to promote itself as the guardian of public health and gained a foothold it would never relinquish. Places like Sand Coulee and Belt may have been more agreeable to regulation because of their experience with the diphtheria epidemic. But, if it were not for the diphtheria, cholera and typhoid attacks, public health measures, which included entry into private homes, would have met fierce resistance. People did not look favorably upon government intervention. A premature order to clean up Sand Coulee would have resulted in resentment of the citizens as well as the business owners and the Company. If the Commissioners had strictly enforced keeping the "Rusty Ditch" clean the people would surely have disobeyed. Only when disease became a tangible threat did the people demand help from authorities. Not until the very early 1900s did Montana start to pressure state government to form a state health

board and develop public health programs.¹²³ The State of Montana would not legislate a board of health to look after the public welfare by enforcing sanitation laws and initiating quarantines until 1901. The separate counties retained such authority prior to that time and not all counties acted quickly enough to reduce disease and death caused by disease. When all was said and done the Cascade County Commissioners filled a vacuum. The County Commissioners always needed money and they acted slowly in most cases because lack of money demanded caution. Too, expenditure on health care was often resented because keeping a home clean and free of disease was considered an individual responsibility. In Sand Coulee some lives could have been saved with quicker action, especially among the young. The press also entered the fray by becoming the way information passed back and forth between those suffering from disease and those fighting the contagion.

The authorities and doctors dealing with the Sand Coulee diphtheria epidemic of 1895-1897 relied heavily upon the old philosophy of the filth school, which emphasized personal hygiene, not only to combat diphtheria, but to also treat cholera and typhoid. Immigrants were especially targeted for this kind of treatment even though many of them came from a much cleaner environment in their native homes and considered Sand Coulee especially dirty.¹²⁴ Adding to the problem, immigrants brought their own folk medicine and treasured treatments with them. The innovative medicinal ways of their new home country met with resistance from those who practiced the medicine of their old

¹²³ Volney Steele, M.D. *Bleed, Blister and Purge* (Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 2005), 255.

¹²⁴ Ziporyn, *Disease in the Popular American Press*, 85.

country villages, passed down from generation to generation.¹²⁵ A few folk remedies follow: wood ashes or cobwebs to staunch bleeding, brandy and red pepper for cholera, mold scraped from cheese or bread for open sores, carrying garlic on a string around the neck for several ailments, salve of kerosene mixed with beef tallow for chapped hands.¹²⁶

Vaccination was not yet a universal way of combating disease. Not until 1895 did a vaccine appear for diphtheria. However the public did not immediately accept vaccination due to some false claims for vaccines and problems with various vaccines. Evidence from medical texts and journals indicates that the debate about the efficiency of vaccines continued in medical circles until about 1905 and well after, continuing even until today. The use of vaccines did not enjoy an easy birth. Muddying the waters at the end of the nineteenth century people expressed anxiety about the animal experimentation used to produce a better understanding of the disease and to produce vaccines. Critics labeled vaccines as “unholy, useless and even dangerous.”¹²⁷ An interesting side note is that between 1870 and 1900 antivivisectionist and anti-vaccination believers persuaded some legislatures to forbid vivisection and compulsory vaccination. The people in favor of vaccination claimed that the benefits of research and vaccinations should end any concerns about animal sacrifice and took great pains to assure the general public that the horses they used in experiments received humane treatment.¹²⁸ After acceptance of the vaccine concept it took a few more years for vaccine to be distributed to rural areas.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Steele, M.D., *Bleed, Blister and Purge*, 8.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹²⁷ Ziporyn, *Disease in the Popular American Press*, 45.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 45-46

¹²⁹ Volney Steele, M.D. *Bleed, Blister and Purge*, 259

Vaccination was discussed in the case of diphtheria in Sand Coulee but the idea never went beyond the discussion stage because the idea was ahead of its time.

Sand Coulee's fight against its diphtheria epidemic and the ever present typhoid and cholera took place at precisely the time when medicine was going through the transition of viewing health as a matter of eliminating filth and advocating the new germ theory. At times both theories were combined for successful treatment of disease. The doctors and authorities never seemed to be entirely on the same page but they got the job done.

Description and Treatment of Typhoid, Cholera and Diphtheria

Diphtheria is a highly contagious disease. It can easily be passed by an infected person through sneezing or coughing or other human-to-human contact. The prevention of diphtheria depends almost completely on immunization. Infected people can be contagious for up to four weeks. Not all carriers display symptoms of diphtheria. After exposure it usually takes two to four days to become infected but a carrier can also infect people through six days. If the disease progresses beyond a throat infection, diphtheria toxins spread through the bloodstream and can threaten one's life by affecting organs such as the heart and kidneys. Children under five and adults over sixty are at greater risk. People living in clean conditions are less at risk than others. Early on diphtheria can be mistaken for a bad sore throat. Common symptoms include a fever and swollen neck glands. The toxins produced by the diphtheria bacteria often cause a thick fuzzy coating in the nose and throat. The coating is gray or black and can make breathing and

swallowing difficult. The lack of the coating may indicate that the infection is something other than diphtheria. Treatment for diphtheria during the late 1800s included keeping the throat clean by irrigation with a one percent solution of common salt and a two-and-half percent solution of common baking soda.¹³⁰

Diphtheria, also called “croup” thrived in children. A single case of diphtheria could start an epidemic and prior to vaccine the only way to prevent the spread of the disease involved quarantine, which caused considerable hardship among those quarantined. Quarantine rules were stringently enforced, often with a guard posted outside the house. The entire household was confined with no outside contact permitted. Nurses and doctors who entered a home followed a strict protocol. Anything removed from the home received a thorough disinfecting wash. Food preparation and bodily fluid removal were carefully done according to an exacting set of rules.¹³¹ There was a certain stigma attached to being quarantined and after the quarantine was lifted the participants suffered a certain amount of shunning until the disease clearly no longer infected the family.

Because diphtheria created a membrane-like obstruction to the throat a child could easily be asphyxiated. Tracheotomy was not rare when dealing with diphtheria. Tracheotomy was difficult surgery and a slip of the knife could be fatal. Often the doctor had to enlist the help of a family member:

The assistant, usually the mother or father, sat at the head of the table and held the child's head back as far as possible. With the patient in position, the doctor made a longitudinal incision over the midline of the windpipe and through the cartilaginous fibrous wall of the trachea. The gush of inflowing air into the lungs of a cyanotic child must have been a glorious sound to the family and the doctor. But the surgeon wasn't done yet.

¹³⁰ Ziporyn, *Disease in the Popular American Press* , 48.

¹³¹ Steele, M.D. *Bleed, Blister and Purge* , 255.

Very often, bloody mucus, pus, and pieces of the diphtheria membrane continued to partially obstruct the windpipe and the tracheotomy stoma. This material had to be removed, and there was only one way to do it. The doctor sucked the material into his mouth and spat it out. This crude method of aspiration had the advantage of giving the doctor an excuse to wash out his mouth with whiskey.¹³²

Any child with a sore throat terrorized their parents during the diphtheria epidemic in Sand Coulee. Even identifying the disease, which was not always a simple matter, provided little comfort because treatment was not a sure cure. Doctors at this time estimated the mortality rate from true diphtheria in New York City in the 1890s to be 27%. The same mortality rate probably held true in Sand Coulee.¹³³

Typhoid fever epidemics also flared up from time to time in early western mining towns. Typhoid is a bacterial infection. Only in 1882 did typhoid bacteria get discovered as well as the fact that it was spread by contaminated water, food and drink. Early symptoms include fever and abdominal pain. As the disease develops diarrhea becomes prominent. A rash peculiar to typhoid may appear in some cases. The rash's rose spots are about one-quarter inch in diameter. These spots appear most often on the chest and stomach. A few people can become carriers of the disease through their feces, as in the case of the famous Typhoid Mary in New York. Other symptoms are bloody stools, and severe headache.

Complications of the disease include severe intestinal bleeding, intestinal perforation, peritonitis and kidney failure. Peritonitis is an inflammation of the membrane lining of the abdominal cavity due to bacterial infection. Preventive measures include proper disposal of waste and safety of the water and food supply. People working with

¹³² Ibid., 186.

¹³³ Ziporyn, *Disease in the Popular American Press*, 41.

food in any way must be free of typhoid. Typhoid victims, laid low via diarrhea, often spread the disease because bodily waste is not taken care of in complete sanitation. If the person struck by typhoid was the woman of the house chances of her spreading the disease by poor hand washing presented a special problem for the family. If the children were stricken the mother had to clean up after them and her chance of infection became increased.

Water often became polluted by sewage leaking into the water supply. In the days when wells provided the main source of water in Sand Coulee and where outhouses occupied every family lot, the source of contamination of the water supply was easy to identify. People living in boarding houses should have been very wary of how their food preparers practiced hygiene while working in the kitchen, serving food and washing dishes. Restaurants were also places where great care needed to be exercised in serving people food and drink. Many young, single people lived in Sand Coulee and had to depend on their landlords to provide the clean environment needed to prevent the spread of diseases. Typhoid continued to be a problem into the twentieth century in Sand Coulee. Centralized water systems helped immensely in curbing the disease. Today, Sand Coulee still relies on individual septic systems rather than a centralized sewer system but the town does have a centralized water system, organized in the 1960s.

Cholera and typhoid are epidemiologically similar. Cholera is one of the quickest killers known. Cholera stirred fear and revulsion because it is such a swift and lethal assassin. Because it strikes the digestive tract, the only way to catch cholera is by ingesting it directly into the mouth by hands, water or food. Water is the main source of

cholera infection. Cholera can lie dormant in water for a long time. Public wells are sources of large scale outbreaks of cholera. The bacteria survives up to two weeks in feces, a week in clothing or bed linens, up to three weeks in butter and milk and several days in fruits and vegetables that have been rinsed with contaminated water.¹³⁴ Cholera is usually not transmitted through normal human to human contact. The usual route of infection is human feces contaminating the food and water supply. Bathing and washing dishes in contaminated water can also spread the disease. Cholera is an acute infectious disease of the intestines, characterized by sudden, severe stomach cramps, vomiting and acute diarrhea. The death rate in the late 1890s was 50 to 55%.¹³⁵ Cholera causes massive loss of bodily fluids and victims often become dehydrated until death occurs. Cholera is the most deadly of the dysentery diseases. A victim could be healthy in the morning and dead by night fall.

Living Conditions in Sand Coulee

Early Western mining towns are not famous for their municipal planning, or their public health concerns. The towns grew in response to what the miners took from the ground. The miners crowded around the extraction site as closely as possible because they had no cars, trolley cars, or public transportation to take them to and from work. Mining towns, often over crowded like Sand Coulee, displayed filthy streets. One of the things people noticed on a first visit to Sand Coulee was how dirty the camp appeared. As the population in western mining towns grew disease became a part of life and could, at

¹³⁴ Kudlick, *Cholera in Post-Revolutionary Paris*, 14.

¹³⁵ Ralph Taylor, *The New American Encyclopedia* (Boston and New York : Illustrated Books Inc., 1938)

times be classified as epidemics. Sand Coulee earned the epidemic label for its diphtheria outbreak of 1895-97.

The west had a lot of room to dump unwanted things. This may not have been true in Sand Coulee but the culture of dumping permeated the western psyche. There was a lot of dumping in Sand Coulee from garbage to large dumps of mine waste. Dump what you don't want in the Rusty Ditch, it will wash down stream. Dump the slop out the back door; it will sink into the ground without leaving too much residue. Dump the offal in the "Rusty Ditch" or in the back yard where the birds or dogs, cats, or pigs will eat it, there really isn't much else that can be done with it, seemed to be the way people thought. Flies had gourmet pickings in Sand Coulee. Garbage and offal could not escape the attention of the house fly and summer swarms of flies carried bacteria to every part of the coulee, including houses, grocery shops, butcher shops and boarding houses.

Sand Coulee people experienced two conditions that handicapped their quality of life and ability to live in some semblance of cleanliness. The coulee had little water and little space for mining let alone for a town. It cannot be over emphasized how these two physical conditions negatively influenced life in the coulee. The people were not dirty; it was the place where they lived that grievously handicapped their attempts at keeping a clean family and a clean home. Keeping a house clean in Sand Coulee was a constant battle against muck, general grime, and the ever present coal dust.

The people remained remarkably docile about their living conditions. Disease and the mine caused many deaths in the coulee yet the people seemed to endure their plight as though it happened to all communities (and to certain extent it did) and should not be

viewed as something they could control, when in fact they could have. During the late 1890s people were not used to looking toward government to solve problems.

The daily living conditions Sand Coulee experienced did not promote a healthy life. A central sewer system did not exist and still does not. Each family disposed of bodily waste as best they could, mostly via an outhouse. A central water system did not exist. Water came from a family or communal well or spring, often contaminated by an outhouse, built too near the water source. Water did not conveniently run from a faucet for household use but was dipped from a bucket, usually placed somewhere in the kitchen. Using a communal dipper certainly did little for healthful living and would spread the germs of any family member experiencing sickness. Washing hands most often took place in a tin wash basin and people habitually used the same water because of the extreme water shortage. When the water became too dirty for others to utilize the last user dumped it into a slop bucket whose contents ended up out the back door, down the outdoor toilet hole, or into the alley. When the kitchen sink became a household fixture the kitchen water wastes then found their way into a cesspool, dug in the back yard to share the space with the outhouse and water well if one existed. People did not have the good anti-bacterial soap that we use today and just washing hands could spread germs. Children attending school had only enough water to drink. The water had to be hauled to school and it resided in a crock that the children drank from. Washing hands after using the outdoor bathroom behind the school simply could not be done properly because of the

lack of water. This may have caused the school to be a reservoir of diphtheria, as was suggested by the *Belt Valley Times*, during the epidemic of 1895-97.¹³⁶

Garbage either was incinerated in the coal burning kitchen stove or in a barrel that families placed in the alley for such purposes. Burning garbage added a foul smell to the already contaminated coulee air. Garbage that people burned consisted of meat scraps, vegetable scraps, and other solids. People then dumped their filled burn barrel into the Rusty Ditch. Garbage did not get dumped in the outhouse; digging new outhouse holes demanded considerable labor. If one lived by the Rusty Ditch the slop pail could be carried across the street and dumped in the ditch for the contaminated mine water to contend with, or for a future big rain storm to flush the mess down stream so it became someone else's problem. In June 1885 a cloud burst swept through the Coulee. Five feet of water, in some places, swept the coulee floor clean. Luckily little damage took place.¹³⁷ There probably is no person who has lived in Sand Coulee for a number of years who has not seen the coulee flushed out by a cloud burst, or prolonged rain or quickly melting snow.

Garbage started to pile up in the coulee as more and more people came to work the mines. The big influx of people occurred when the Company mine opened in 1887. The Company did nothing to alleviate the problem and the County officials did a lot of talking about sanitary conditions in Sand Coulee, along with some mention of Belt. At least Belt had a wide valley to occupy and a substantial creek running through its midst to cleanse the town. But Belt also managed to pollute its cleansing creek to the point where

¹³⁶During school I did not have an indoor bathroom until I was a freshman in Centerville High.

¹³⁷*Great Falls Tribune*, June 18, 1885.

typhoid was a constant concern. As late as 1922 Belt residents felt that sewage in the creek was contaminating their drinking wells and officers placed placards along the creek banks warning people about drinking from the creek.¹³⁸

Manure could be found everywhere. Sand Coulee had a dog manure problem, and a chicken manure problem, and a pig manure problem, and a cow manure problem and horse and mule manure problem. Mules and horses distributed goods to the stores in the coulee and transported residents wherever they wanted to go. Wherever the horse and mule went their manure went. Individual families often had a shed for their horse. Horses and mules did a major part of the work in the early mines and stables for the company and general public and added their manure and stench and fly breeding places to the coulee. Cows roamed free. Young boys rounded up the family cows for the morning and evening milking.¹³⁹ The cows dropped their manure everywhere. Pigs also roamed freely, perhaps eating as much garbage as they contributed in manure. Dogs were ubiquitous.

The Company built as many as 76 houses in the coulee that had no place to put garbage. The company did little about sanitary needs, until forced to. When the county got involved the Company put garbage boxes by their houses. A lax mine superintendent had its advantages but also its disadvantages. The people in the coulee started looking for someone to blame for their condition and to help alleviate their misery and the loss of their precious children. Where was the benevolent J.J. Hill when they needed him most? Company rules such as the Union Pacific forced on Red Lodge would have been of great

¹³⁸ Eva Lesell Stober and Ethel Castner Kennedy, *Belt Valley History* (Great Falls: Advanced Litho Printing 1979), 120.

¹³⁹ As a child I recall Eddie Lucotch searching for the family cows for the evening milking. Whenever he caught me and Billy Kuvula together he would make us fight each other.

help in this instance. Rules nine, ten, twelve and twenty-three (found starting on page 76 of this thesis) would have been especially helpful.

Company mining camps were stingy with their amenities. As late as 1920 a sample of 811 coal mining homes, across the nation found, “that just over 20% had running water, only 3% had bath tubs or showers, and less than 4% had flush toilets: outhouses were the norm in almost 61% of company towns.” The same report stated, “but hundreds of such marplots (outhouses) within an area of a few acres will well-nigh submerge all other assets of home and community livability, to say nothing of imperiling the health of every person who lives or labors within reach of the privy emanations.”¹⁴⁰

Sand Coulee was too small and crowded to experience much of the class segregation and blame that often took place during epidemics. The so called “lower class” such as the non-English speaking immigrants experienced some class blame but not as much as it would have if it had been a big city with distinct districts.¹⁴¹ It would seem that as closely as the immigrant groups kept in touch they would have said, “don’t come here it is a sick camp” but it seems they did not warn others to stay away. This may be an indication that what was going on in Sand Coulee was not all that unusual. It would have been in the interest of the Company to have a healthy camp. If it became known as a sick camp it would be hard to get miners. But still the Company did not take a pro-active status in camp sanitation.

¹⁴⁰ Clyne, *Coal People*, 28.

¹⁴¹ Kudlick, *Cholera in Post-Revolutionary Paris*, 59.

Chronology of Disease Incidents in Sand Coulee

Sand Coulee, from the start of its rapid expansion when the Sand Coulee Coal Company went into production and started filling up the coulee, experienced problems with sanitation and disease. As early as 1890 Sand Coulee lost a valuable miner, Andrew Velebir, due to sanitary conditions. Velebir, a driller in the coal fields of Czechoslovakia, became an expert in the newly invented pneumatic drill. However, Sand Coulee did not use the technology at this time. In 1890 Andrew and his family moved to Sand Coulee and he worked in the Company mine. The Velebirs stayed in Sand Coulee for only a short time because their five year old son died from dysentery caused by impure water. Perhaps the son contracted typhoid or cholera. Because of the unsanitary living conditions the Velebirs moved to Belt because they felt Belt provided a healthier living environment.¹⁴² Young Velebir's death must have been only one among others for the same reasons. The Company should have been concerned about losing a valuable miner such as Velebir with his skill in a new technology, but the Company seemed little concerned about the lives of their employees. The company did not possess an enlightened attitude and thus worse times were in store for its miners and their families.

As early as July of 1893 residents of Sand Coulee, in a plea to authorities, voiced their concerns about the coulee being in an appalling sanitary condition. They also expressed concern that "there would be a deathly swoop of epidemic in the near future" in their town. They accused the authorities of being long on legislation but short on

¹⁴² Eva Lesell Stober and Ethel Castner Kennedy, *Belt Valley History* ,1.

action. At this time small pox concerned them and they asked the proper authorities to investigate the sanitary condition of the camp, but nothing happened.¹⁴³

In early August of 1895 the people of Sand Coulee handed the County Commissioners a petition asking for help in improving the sanitary circumstances of the camp. The petition claimed the condition of the camp to be very bad. The town's people wanted the Commissioners to appoint two physicians to act with Dr. Gelsthorpe and Morrow, as well as the Board of Health to talk over the matter. The commissioners deferred action on the petition until their regular meeting in September.

A long article in the August 22, 1895 *Belt Valley Times*, written by a resident of Sand Coulee, discussed who should bear the cost of fighting the disease. The year before the county road crew had attempted to clean up some of the mess but people interested in good roads strenuously objected to using the road crew for such a purpose. Others felt the Sand Coulee Coal Company should bear the burden. Still others thought the county should pay the entire expense. A small minority warily suggested that the people should assume at least part of the burden. The person writing the article felt the fairest way of paying for the cleanup should include all three, the Company, the county and the people. The correspondent felt the people should pay the least. Although some of the people in camp blamed the county commissioners others placed more blame on the Sand Coulee Coal Company, severely criticizing the Company for not running the camp in a more hands on fashion. Yet if the Company had run the camp with as strong a hand as other companies ran their towns, the people would have rebelled. The people angry with the company about sanitary conditions of the camp rightly claimed the company practically

¹⁴³ *Great Falls Tribune*, July 28, 1893.

owned the camp and to an extent should exercise a general guardianship over the people, if not specifically over their health and sanitary conditions. The people complained that the company contributed liberally to pay the salary of a police officer whose duty was to stamp out “vicious habits” and keep the people on the path of “moral rectitude.” The reporter may have been referring to the earlier arrest of prostitutes Sharp and Roe. The citizenry claimed the company should put as much money into camp sanitation as it did in guarding their morals. Apparently there was some resistance or ill feeling toward deputy Sheriff Sires and he probably knew of such sentiments. The citizens of the camp, if the tone of the article can be relied upon, must have thought the town was run a little too much in favor of weeding out petty crime and moral transgression while ignoring the more important matter of camp sanitation. It must be remembered that Sheriff Sires was responsible for administrative actions to combat the diphtheria threat and that he complained his job was hampered by a lack of authority. Sheriff Sires may have stepped on some toes while doing his duty. Perhaps using Sheriff Sires is how the company covertly controlled the camp because they paid a good share of his salary. This may have been the nub of the ill feeling toward Sires. The writer predictably echoes the thought that “cleanliness is next to Godliness” and that “filth begets crime.” Further expression of displeasure against Sheriff Sires suggested that if cleaning up the camp reduced crime the Company could withdraw the money contributed to the Deputy Sheriff’s salary and apply that money toward making the camp a healthy and contented place to live. The article is not attributed to anyone.

Catherine Kudlick in her study *Cholera in Post-Revolutionary Paris* claimed that disease provided a convenient rhetorical device to illustrate the battle between the right and left and also allowed the expression of political discontent.¹⁴⁴ Her analysis proved very prescient in the debate about disease in Sand Coulee. The writer of the August 22nd article makes the age old political threat toward the public officials by noting that the populists in camp were using the sanitation issue to further their political aspirations. Sand Coulee was always considered the stronghold of Populism in the County. The article writer maintains that the Populists had so far been quiet and unobtrusive yet the issues were being discussed in the camp and people were being influenced by the Populist use of sanitation as a political issue. The author offers a political evaluation by urging the country politicians to consider the fact that five years ago the camp was solidly Republican. Just as Kudlick maintained would happen, the author then attacks the right while applauding the left for certain conditions in Sand Coulee. Sarcastically the author notes that under the Republican banner the working men could spend their leisure time loafing in saloons and then go to bed. But now, because of the Democrats, Sand Coulee enjoyed three well attended libraries in three different languages in three separate buildings paid for by the working men via subscriptions, or withdrawal of money from their pay check regardless of their political views. The article is closed by inferring that the Republican whiskey miners put on quite a show and created “hilarious moments” around pay day on the 12th of every month while the Democrats were making headway in preventing pay day drinking by offering all sorts of civilized options made possible by taxing the miners (including Republicans) for their schemes. In reality the Democrats

¹⁴⁴ Kudlick, *Cholera in Post-Revolutionary Paris*, 44.

were probably few in number. Most of the coulee people were either Populists or Republicans.

The county commissioners considered the matter of cleaning up the camp in September of 1895 but the board's majority opposed further expenditure on behalf of the cleanup. Commissioner Hay became a hero to the coulee by supporting its request for help. At the same time coulee residents were urged to burn their garbage rather than throw it in the gutter.¹⁴⁵ This statement alone tells the historian that garbage often found its way into undesirable places. However, Sand Coulee possessed no gutters except the ever abused Rusty Ditch. The Commissioners finally acted in early October 1895. They directed road supervisor L.C. McCoy to notify the inhabitants of 'Shacktown' to clear all filth and garbage from their premises and to place a county notice stating such on all fences and stables.¹⁴⁶ The Commission may have started with Shacktown because it was the "poor" section of town and could not easily oppose its edict. Shacktown was also the part of Sand Coulee that experienced the least desirable living environment because the big Company mine was located there with four stacks from its steam power plant belching coal smoke into the air. Perhaps the Commissioners started with the least powerful as a warning to the more powerful that indeed change would soon come. This theory gains some support by the fact the commissioners made it clear that action requested of Shacktown did not apply to Company owned housing. However, Company Superintendent Burrell issued orders to those renting Company houses that they must

¹⁴⁵ *Belt Valley Times*, September 12, 1895.

¹⁴⁶ *Great Falls Leader*, October 9, 1895.

keep it clean around their homes.¹⁴⁷ The common pattern of sticking it to the little guy, as a warning to others, seems to be the modus operandi employed by the Commissioners. It is often the safest way to proceed for politicians

The Commissioners struck again in late October by ordering the clean up of Main Street. The most likely scenario, when all is considered, is that the Commissioners wanted the entire town cleaned up, not just Shacktown and Main Street. The Commissioners furthermore ordered Road Superintendent McCoy to use his team to haul garbage to another location but the location was not named.¹⁴⁸ The Commissioners did not ask the Company to help with clean up costs. In fact in all their actions the Commissioners seemed overly considerate of the Company.

During early November 1895, Sam Dean moved his family to Great Falls to escape the diphtheria laden atmosphere of Sand Coulee.¹⁴⁹ It seems safe to speculate that several other elites moved their families elsewhere. Of course the miners whom everyone exploited could not afford to move their families. If they wanted to move their children out of danger they had to find work somewhere else. At this time the six-year-old daughter of Jacob Johnson died in Shacktown of diphtheria.¹⁵⁰

The community met at the Library on November 23rd to discuss eradicating and preventing further disease in the camp. Those attending the meeting adopted a relief fund. They also took steps for a day and night guard to be posted at each quarantined house. Apparently the quarantines were not being voluntarily observed. J.G. Anthony and

¹⁴⁷ *Great Falls Leader*, October 9, 1895.

¹⁴⁸ *Belt Valley Times*, August 29, 1895.

¹⁴⁹ *Belt Valley Times*, November 14, 1895.

¹⁵⁰ *Belt Valley Times*, November 14, 1895.

Reverend Craven were appointed to confer with the Board of Health in Great Falls. Anthony and Craven represented their community well. The Board of Health granted all their requests.¹⁵¹

Before the end of November 1895 the four-year-old daughter and eight-year-old son of the Oscar Henderson family died of diphtheria. Other members of the stricken family were noted as showing signs of improvement.¹⁵² How devastating the loss of two children in one family would be. Yet the parents in the coulee seemed to accept all that happened in a resigned state without outright rebellion against the authorities who did as little as possible to protect them.

In January of 1896 Dr. Crutcher, a prominent physician in Great Falls entered into a debate with other doctors as to whether diphtheria had really struck Great Falls and by association, Sand Coulee. Dr. Crutcher made the statement that he never saw a case of diphtheria in Montana. The *Tribune*, in an article dated June 14, 1896, commented on the prominence of Dr. Crutcher by stating, "There are few men in the northwest who have taken higher honors than Dr. Crutcher." Because of Crutcher's prominence, Governor Leslie appointed him to the first State Board of Examiners in 1889. The debate proved extremely disconcerting to the authorities fighting the disease. The *Tribune* noted that during the winter several cases of diphtheria, or what the doctors believed to be diphtheria, made quarantine necessary for several families. Now Dr. Crutcher said it was not diphtheria but a counterfeit diphtheria and that no death had occurred from this false disease. An accurate diagnosis of diphtheria could make the difference in being

¹⁵¹ *Belt Valley Times*, December 5, 1895.

¹⁵² *Belt Valley Times*, November 11, 1895.

quarantined or not being quarantined. Quarantine brought extreme hardship to a family and being able to accurately diagnose the disease was of tremendous importance. Should the disease be treated as present or should preventive measures be taken to keep it out of the County? The choice presented two different courses of action. The *Tribune* ended the article, “Unless some authoritative solution to the problem is reached people will be justified in refusing to submit to imprisonment, even though it is in their own castles.” Authorities wanted to believe Crutcher but common sense said, no. Some physicians supported Dr. Crutcher and others did not. Dr. Crutcher maintained that he treated many patients suffering from a disease that closely resembled diphtheria and that it took special knowledge that seemingly only he had, to distinguish between the two. Apparently Dr. Crutcher’s special knowledge was not subscribed to by the authorities in charge of fighting diphtheria because they continued along the line that diphtheria did indeed reside in the county. Death is hard to ignore.

By the end of November the deaths in Sand Coulee put pressure on the Commissioners to act more resolutely against the calamity taking place. The Commissioners met on November 29, 1895 as a Board of Health and passed stringent sanitary regulations for the entire county, but as they noted, “more especially for Sand Coulee at the present time.” The *Great Falls Leader* reported that the measure might protect the people from Sand Coulee against the ravages of diphtheria but that the regulations were not to conflict with any sanitary set of laws existing in Great Falls. Only Sand Coulee, Belt and other small towns in the county needed to strictly comply with the rules to prevent the spread of all contagious disease. The rules provided for the

renovation and complete cleaning of places that the rules applied to.¹⁵³ The school trustees also met at the end of November to close the school until January 1, 1896. They agreed to accept the teacher's recommendation for full pay for November and half pay for December.¹⁵⁴

The Board of Health passed epidemic rules on November 29th at a special session.¹⁵⁵ The rules had to be the paramount topic of conversation in Sand Coulee and Belt. Furthermore, the rules would be more than a paper tiger, strictly enforced and with a violation punishable by a fine of up to \$500. Or so they hoped. Dr. Albert Longeway acted as the ex-officio chairman of the Board and also acted as the county health officer. Dr. Longeway, a French Canadian, was a public-minded person during his long medical career in Cascade County. He arrived in Great Falls in 1887. He immediately contracted with the county to minister to the poor for \$365 per year. The next year he contracted with the County to add food and clothing for \$1,095 per year. In 1890 he secured an appointment as physician and surgeon to the Great Northern Railroad. He effectively worked for a State Board of Health that became a reality in 1901. In 1900 Longeway became president of the Montana Medical Association. He died in Great Falls in September of 1933. Longeway played a paramount part in bringing the Sand Coulee diphtheria epidemic under control.

The County Board of Health rules required:

- 1) All privies and cesspools shall be more than 50 feet from any well or spring and shall be cleaned and disinfected when ever ordered by Doctor Longeway.

¹⁵³ *Great Falls Leader*, November 29, 1895.

¹⁵⁴ *Belt Valley Times*, December 5, 1895.

¹⁵⁵ *Belt Valley Times.*, December 5, 1895.

- 2) No house offal (the viscera and trimmings of a butchered animal removed in dressing) or dead animals of any kind shall be exposed and all cellars must be cleaned when ordered.¹⁵⁶
- 3) All keepers of hotels or restaurants shall provide a properly covered receptacle for swill and offal, which shall be emptied weekly.¹⁵⁷
- 4) All stables must be kept clean and free of manure.
- 5) No hogs shall be kept within 200 feet of any dwelling or source of drinking water.
- 6) If a person is ascertained to have attended school when infected with diphtheria, measles, scarlet fever, membranous croup (diphtheria), whooping cough or small pox the health officer must immediately close the room where such persons attended and direct the application of proper disinfectant and may close all schools in the district immediately.
- 7) All physicians must report contagious diseases within 12 hours and it shall be the duty of the health officer on being notified to repair to the place or places where such contagious diseases exist and use due precautions to prevent the spread of the disease. He must prevent all contact with the neighbors and allow no unnecessary persons to attend funerals.

¹⁵⁶ This rule illuminates some interesting aspects of the epidemic, its causes and proposed cures. The fact that cellars received special mention meant that contaminants somehow entered basements, perhaps by overflowing slop buckets under the sink. Permission to enter cellars now meant authorities could enter a private home. Public officials needed to promote a healthy home or all the medical knowledge in the world would not help stamp out disease. Public officials had to be allowed into the home. Because offal was mentioned a gruesome picture of cow and pig offal lying around the back yard, covered with flies, can be imagined.

¹⁵⁷ In those days meat did not come neatly packaged in plastic. The hotels and restaurants would buy a quarter of beef and cut up the meat on the premises. Apparently they could have been more careful with the offal.

8) Any person violating these rules shall be punished by a fine not exceeding \$500 or six months imprisonment or both such fine or imprisonment.

The rules present the picture of an entirely filthy camp that desperately needed cleaning in order to combat a tough, resistant trio of diseases, typhoid, cholera and diphtheria. The officials also decreed that the public could not gather in Sand Coulee, except in saloons. Perhaps the officials thought liquor killed the germs but more likely a rebellion by the miners could not be risked. There is no record that the prohibitionists protested this blatant favoring of whiskey soaked establishments.¹⁵⁸

The board ordered 500 placards containing the rules and had them posted throughout the county. By the time the placards were printed, Dr. Longeway had already proceeded to impose a firm quarantine. Longeway made it clear that anyone violating the rules would be forcefully prosecuted. Deputy Sheriff Sires, the enforcing officer, said he had done his utmost to prevent the spread of disease but he did not have the authority to stop “foreigners from visiting each other and otherwise violating all rules for the maintenance of camp health.”¹⁵⁹ His statement placed the entire blame on the defenseless foreigners.

The commissioners instructed the clerk to send copies of the rules to the twenty-two ministers and two undertakers who worked in the county. The board also wanted copies of the rules sent to the twenty-two physicians and the two midwives practicing in the county. The commissioners demanded that every post master must place a placard of the newly adopted regulations on their premises. All county officers traveling on county

¹⁵⁸ *Belt Valley Times*, December 19, 1895.

¹⁵⁹ *Belt Valley Times*, December 5, 1895.

business carried these placards with them to be placed in prominent spaces. At this point in time the county knew of only three cases of diphtheria in Sand Coulee and two in Great Falls. Sand Coulee assumed the blame for the two Great Falls cases because two visitors to the Albert house in Great Falls were coulee residents. No other place in the county seemed to contain diphtheria.¹⁶⁰

Miss Emma Larsen, an occupant of the quarantined house of Mrs. Johnson could not resist the invitation of Charles Rosaine to take a ride to Great Falls on the 19th of December. When the couple returned to Sand Coulee Deputy Sheriff Sires soon had them under his control and the reluctant Charles found himself in the office of Judge Ball. Ball fined Rosaine five dollars and costs for trifling with the safety of the entire community, and it might be added, Great Falls. Miss Larsen, though placed under arrest, had her hearing scheduled for a later date.¹⁶¹ At her hearing Miss Larsen received a fine of ten dollars and the cost associated with her case.¹⁶² Miss Larson received a higher fine presumably because she actually broke the quarantine, while Mr. Rosaine did not. At the same time Rosaine and Larsen received their just penalties, good news made things less repressive in the coulee. The quarantine card was removed from the residence of G.W. Clapper and the house received a through fumigation.¹⁶³ Any positive news helped lesson the dreary winter with its never ending negative news.

During the first half of January, 1896 the county commissioners notified the Sand Coulee School Board that the school quarantine had been lifted. At this time the

¹⁶⁰ *Great Falls Tribune*, December 5, 1895.

¹⁶¹ *Belt Valley Times*, December 26, 1895.

¹⁶² *Belt Valley Times*, January 2, 1896.

¹⁶³ *Belt Valley Times*, January 2, 1896.

authorities also removed the cards from the homes of John Gillan, W.D. Luther, Mrs. Mahoney and William Dickinson.¹⁶⁴ It seemed that the sanitary regulations framed by the county commissioners might be working. Great Falls reported no cases and a only a few cases could be found throughout the county.¹⁶⁵ There seemed to be grounds for hoping the terrible disease might be in the process of being wiped out.

County health officer Dr. Longeway visited Sand Coulee in the first half of January to evaluate firsthand the condition of the camp. He deferred allowing the school to open until another week passed because diphtheria still haunted the coulee.¹⁶⁶ Longeway did not wait a full week before refusing to let the school open.¹⁶⁷

In February of 1896 vaccination became a topic of discussion. Those who never had diphtheria could be inoculated and the school could open went the reasoning of some. Someone claimed the cost of injection would be only \$1.50 per child. No one knew if the vaccine could be purchased and vaccination did not enjoy universal favor because of problems associated with it. The idea was ahead of its time. The subject soon became a suggestion not taken and soon forgotten.¹⁶⁸

Optimism at every bit of good news soon gave way to the reality that disease and death still stalked the camp. Judge R.S. Ball, while conducting business in Great Falls, told a *Great Falls Leader* reporter that the coulee had at least a dozen ongoing cases. He also said that houses remained under quarantine but that the guards were released. The reporter then asked if the school would be re-opened with so many cases of diphtheria.

¹⁶⁴ *Belt Valley Times*, January 9, 1896.

¹⁶⁵ *Great Falls Leader*, January 11, 1896.

¹⁶⁶ *Belt Valley Times*, January 16, 1896.

¹⁶⁷ *Great Falls Tribune*, January 21, 1896.

¹⁶⁸ *Belt Valley Times*, February 6, 1896.

Ball said that the local school board could open the school if they wished to but he could not say what the board would do. He did comment that it would appear unwise to open the school with a dozen active diphtheria cases and thus leave the town unguarded. Ball, a judge, and thus knowledgeable about law, actually asserted that the school board possessed sole authority to re-open the school no matter what the circumstances.¹⁶⁹ If this is true then the school board could go against other authorities and prevail. Local control was very important in those days and may explain some of the actions of the commissioners. Quarantining a school and closing it down are not legally the same thing. Regardless of all the turmoil Health Officer Longeway removed the quarantine from the Sand Coulee school house but it would be over a month before the school reopened.¹⁷⁰

The *Great Falls Leader* on February 12, 1896 published an interesting article. The *Leader* said diphtheria was still working its way into new places and that Belt currently had nine cases and Sand Coulee five. It also noted that people passed between each of these towns and Great Falls every day of the week. The article claimed that, "it is well known that considerable carelessness exists among the inhabitants of Belt and Sand Coulee in regard to this contagious disease and if diphtheria doesn't become alarming in these towns it will be something remarkable." All blame is laid at the doorstep of Sand Coulee and Belt. This statement ties into the statement by Sheriff Sires about not being able to control the foreigners' travel and thus the disease. That the epidemic (according to the *Leader*) had yet to become alarming leaves one wondering what the current state of affairs should be called and what level of disease would be considered alarming.

¹⁶⁹ *Great Falls Leader*, February 7, 1896.

¹⁷⁰ *Belt Valley Times*, February 13, 1896.

The question surfaced about Sand Coulee being more contagious than Belt or Great Falls. The *Times* stated the Sand Coulee school presumably acted as the storeroom for the disease and that to unlock the door would be like unlocking Pandora's Box.¹⁷¹ The Belt school had already been in session for some time so the Sand Coulee school seemed to be what worried everyone. Belt had a definite stake in what Sand Coulee decided about opening its school because the passage of people back and forth between the two towns could re-infect or bring more disease to Belt. Despite how neighboring towns felt about the Sand Coulee school re-opening, the local school board met on the 10th of March and voted unanimously to re-open the school. The board passed a motion to notify the teachers to report for duty on the 12th. The board also voted to prohibit those houses currently quarantined from sending their children to school until ten days after the quarantine had been lifted. The board did declare that as far as they knew no cases of diphtheria, scarlet fever or measles existed in the camp. Miss Alice Moore, the fourth grade teacher, who spent the period of the school closing with her parents, reported for duty on the 11th. Miss Gertrude Stebbins, who escaped to Helena during the epidemic, returned on the tenth.¹⁷²

On the 12th of March the school re-opened and attendance increased rapidly. Authorities asked parents to make every effort to get their children back in school. The authorities also enlisted the teachers in the effort to get all children in school.¹⁷³ How like authorities to try and get things back to normal to illustrate that their decision making was correct and supported. If I were a parent at the time in question I certainly would have

¹⁷¹ *Belt Valley Times*, March 12, 1896.

¹⁷² *Belt Valley Times*, March 19, 1896.

¹⁷³ *Belt Valley Times*, March 19, 1896.

delayed my child's start back to school until it became apparent the school provided a safe space for children.

The diphtheria epidemic seemed to be over, but the ever present threat of typhoid struck the little daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Meins in March.¹⁷⁴ Mothers could never feel totally safe about their families. If disease did not get their young children, mine accidents killed their older children and husbands.

Pigs and dogs again became newsworthy. Some people, without pigs, or whose pigs resided in an enclosure, began to advocate that pigs must be rounded up. Dogs also fell into the category of nuisance animals. Evidently the rules promulgated by the County Board of Health did not meet with universal approval from coulee residents. Those advocating against the plethora of pigs and dogs probably felt it had been a long hard fight to get the coulee cleaned up, if it ever was, and they wanted to make sure their effort produced permanent results.¹⁷⁵ Typifying the problem, Mr. Ed Nunn, while riding his horse past the depot, was annoyed by several dogs biting at his horse's head and heels. He was required to shoot some of the dogs to rid him of the pestering animals. Many people applauded the work of Mr. Nunn and he was publicly commended for his action. However, James Fairfull felt differently about the fate of his dog at the hand of Nunn and upon meeting Nunn on Main Street words passed between them. The argument resulted in a fight. They battled for twenty minutes before being separated. Both men suffered bruising and bleeding but neither received permanent damage.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ *Belt Valley Times*, March 26, 1896.

¹⁷⁵ *Belt Valley Times*, May 14, 1896.

¹⁷⁶ *Great Falls Tribune*, February 3, 1898.

As June 1896 passed its half way point, phrenologist Professor P. Priest lectured at the Scandinavian Hall to a small but enthusiastic audience. The town's people should have secured Priest's service earlier and asked him to feel the bumps of their heads to learn who diphtheria would likely strike and who could continue on their merry way. Those susceptible to the disease could have been immediately, permanently quarantined and saved the community much toil and trouble. When in full battle "leave no stone unturned" should have been the town's motto.¹⁷⁷

Near the end of July 1896, Mr. Bemis, the Business Manager of the *Belt Valley Times*, visited the coulee. He said he found himself better pleased with this visit than with his first visit because the streets, alleys and yards had received a through cleaning in the spring. Bemis declared that cleanliness of the camp was consistently one of the first things noticed by visitors. If this is true then prior to the spring cleaning the filthy condition of the camp must have been one of the first things noticed when entering the camp. Mr. Bemis praised the county commissioners for their part in the improved conditions, and Company Manager Burrell for providing garbage boxes placed at the rear of Company houses.¹⁷⁸ The company, although providing little help in the crisis, received praise for what little they did do. Power is power.

But, once again optimism prevailed upon good news rather than cold hard fact. Less than a week after the Bemis visit the houses of Joseph Ricci and Milton Harbaugh received quarantine cards for diphtheria. Too, the ever present cholera showed its

¹⁷⁷ *Belt Valley Times*, June 25, 1896.

¹⁷⁸ *Belt Valley Times*, July 28, 1896.

presence by taking the infant daughter of Mr. and Mrs. White.¹⁷⁹ Before the month ended Mr. and Mrs. Timothy Garrity also lost their twenty-month-old daughter to cholera. The Garrity child's remains found an eternal place in the Sand Coulee cemetery.¹⁸⁰

The coulee enjoyed a short respite from diphtheria but the disease returned with a vengeance. The first week of December 1896 greeted two new cases, making a current total of twelve cases in all. The Stone's four-year-old child died at this time from the disease but the disease did appear less virulent and yielded more easily to medical treatment according to some observers.¹⁸¹ In the early part of February 1897 the coulee people thought the disease "was completely eradicated."¹⁸² But the disease kept its dread alive and on February 15, 1897 the four-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. George Nicholson died of heart failure because of heart damage caused by diphtheria toxin. Thus the Methodist Church buried yet another baby and the Reverend Craven officiated at yet another funeral for an infant. The nightmare would not seem to end.¹⁸³

Again, hope that the disease no longer resided in the camp became obliterated in March when an adult, master mechanic Sewell, caught diphtheria.¹⁸⁴ After Sewell's contact with the disease, it abated enough for physicians to declare in May that the camp enjoyed better health than at anytime during the past eighteen month epidemic.¹⁸⁵ But disease in the coulee proved stubborn and in September 1897 Miss Julia Djune became

¹⁷⁹ *Belt Valley Times*, August 6, 1896.

¹⁸⁰ *Belt Valley Times*, August 20, 1896.

¹⁸¹ *Great Falls Leader*, December 5, 1896.

¹⁸² *Belt Valley Times*, February 4, 1897.

¹⁸³ *Belt Valley Times*, February 25, 1897.

¹⁸⁴ *Belt Valley Times*, March 11, 1897.

¹⁸⁵ *Belt Valley Times*, May 6, 1897.

very ill with typhoid fever but fought through the disease and recovered.¹⁸⁶ December 1897 actually saw the last case of diphtheria of the 1890s with Mrs. Pat Keegan's recovery from the disease.¹⁸⁷

Cases of typhoid and cholera continued off and on but could not be called an epidemic. In August of 1898, Mrs. Severt Wick, after three weeks of suffering from typhoid fever, "peacefully crossed the dark river." Mrs. Wick did not see her 24th birthday. She came to Sand Coulee when she was eighteen, from Kerkhoven, Minnesota. She married Wick at twenty years of age and had two girls. She was described as a person with a sweet and loving disposition, making friends with all who met her. The Methodist church buried yet another young person and its building could not accommodate all who attended the funeral. The local Knights of Pythias, of which she was a member, turned out as a body to say goodbye to her.¹⁸⁸ In mining towns it was often the widow left with her wrecked family, but in a few cases, such as this, the husband had to deal with two infant children without a wife.

The last case of disease I could find in the time frame of 1880 through 1900 happened in December of 1900. The Logan brothers returned to the coulee from the university at Helena to spend their vacation with brother Wilbur and found him sick with typhoid.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ *Belt Valley Times*, September 23, 1897.

¹⁸⁷ *Belt Valley Times*, December 16, 1897.

¹⁸⁸ *Belt Valley Times*, September 1, 1898

¹⁸⁹ *Belt Valley Times*, December 28, 1900

Conclusion

I hope I have not conveyed the impression that the people who lived in Sand Coulee were dirty people. In fact they were extraordinarily clean considering the handicaps they faced in keeping home and family spotless. Water is a prerequisite to cleanliness and Sand Coulee had little of that. The limited space the coulee people lived in also made it hard to keep things spotless and in order. But the women of Sand Coulee kept immaculate households. I cannot remember any of my friends living in any but sparkling, clean homes.

The real issue was a place to dump unwanted things and the means to transport the unwanted things to dumping sites. Farms and ranches had space and their own individual dumpsite at the head of a coulee where it was out of sight. If all the garbage dumps in those coulees were transported to one place it would have created a huge mound of unwanted things. Space and transportation were insurmountable obstacles to a disease free environment in the coulee.

Sand Coulee came into existence at a critical time in the history of medicine and stepped into the space between the old and new way of practicing medicine. This greatly affected how the medical profession dealt with Sand Coulee's diphtheria epidemic in 1895-97. Medicine during the last part of the 19th century saw the new germ theory replacing the old filth theory. Bringing modern medicine into existence was not easy or instantaneous. Many of the medicinal practices, medicines and technology we now take for granted came into being as late as the 1940s and 50s. When new ideas take over from the old there is always a period of confusion and a gap exists while the old and new sort

themselves out. Vaccination is a good example. The only way diphtheria can be prevented is through vaccination. Though vaccination may or may not have been available to Sand Coulee during its diphtheria epidemic, the vaccine did exist. Vaccination was in fact discussed briefly but got lost in the middle ground between the old way and new way of practicing medicine.

Public Health took on a new look, in many ways, in Montana at the end of the 19th century. That a public health officer could go uninvited into a private home, if need be, was not universally accepted and would have been resisted in Sand Coulee without the incidents of disease in the camp. The power county government acquired in fighting the disease could be termed quite startling. People had a deep suspicion of government on the Montana frontier. Montana was a frontier territory and then a state at the time of this history. County government filled a vacuum in confronting disease in the coulee and its influence never, from that point on, diminished in the lives of the coulee people.

The Sand Coulee Coal Company could have exercised authority over the camp's sanitary condition if they had wanted to. In basically ignoring the situation the Company in a de-facto sense, allowed government to get its nose under the tent and into Company affairs. In retrospect the Company may have realized it gave government entrance into its business and the health and safety issues its mining initiated. This too may have been one of the reasons why the Company moved to Stockett, it was easier to start over than to retrofit their Sand Coulee mine, to accommodate government.

Diphtheria, typhoid fever and cholera plagued Sand Coulee until the end of 1800s. Typhoid and cholera continued to be a problem even after the turn of the century. All

three diseases were killers and did take several lives in the coal camp. Treatment of typhoid and cholera proved tough going because of the way bodily waste had to be disposed of in the cramped space the coulee offered. During the late 1800s the town really had no good practical choices in eradicating these two diseases.

The situation could have been much worse. Sand Coulee and Cascade County had good doctors, due in great part to the Great Northern Railroad. Many of the early doctors in Cascade County and Sand Coulee practiced part of their medical careers as railroad doctors. Without the quality of the doctors, Sand Coulee's experience with their trio of diseases could have been more tragic than it was. I think the populace of Sand Coulee was remarkably stoic in the battle to save their children from the disease killers. In the end this may have been the best approach. The foreign people, as it was, elicited negative press in containing the diseases. Fighting this false charge could have been traumatic to the community. Why were the foreign born any guiltier of mobility between the coulee and Belt and Great Falls than the native born? It seems hard to logically defend the position of blaming only the foreigners for keeping the disease alive by travel among the towns. The Sand Coulee school was thought to be the repository of diphtheria during the 1895-96 epidemic. If this were true no one seemed to notice there were far more native born than foreign born children in the school. Once again the old country patience and wisdom proved beneficial to the community. But in the end all seemed to muddle through the mess with remarkably little recrimination among the people, the Company and the County Government.

CHAPTER 5

MINING, ACCIDENTS AND DEATH IN THE MINES

Coal towns were populated largely with immigrants. The omnipotent corporate presence, the ubiquitous danger of mining was America to many of them, what America was all about. They had no normal picture of American life.¹⁹⁰

Organization

I have broken this chapter into five different sections, demand, production, mining, mine accidents and Stockett. Although the main focus of the chapter concerns the mine deaths, primarily in the Company mine, I felt it necessary to write about demand because without demand coal would not have been mined, and consequent mine accidents and deaths would not have occurred. I also included Stockett in the chapter because the birth and growth of Stockett was the end of the Sand Coulee Coal Company's dominance in Sand Coulee. As Stockett increased, Sand Coulee decreased

Demand

Through much of the nineteenth century coal supplied only local domestic needs for American communities fortunate enough to be located where coal could be easily gathered by small scale mining. The massive use of coal only became necessary when the industrial revolution hit America. Nations like Great Britain, Germany and the United States became industrial giants because they had coal to smelt their ore.

¹⁹⁰ Clyne, *Coal People*, 42.

Sand Coulee mined coal for two principal reasons. Small independent operators mined coal mostly for the winter heating of area businesses and households. During summer months independent mines often laid off some of their workforce. The big company mine primarily fed the Great Northern locomotives. It was operated by the Sand Coulee Coal Company, a subsidiary of the Great Northern railroad. The Company mine far out produced all the independent mines combined. Luck also brought Sand Coulee coal within close proximity to the “richest hill” on earth in Butte. Besides supplying the Great Northern Railroad the mine supplied coal to the Anaconda Company smelters and to smelters in Great Falls. Sand Coulee nicely fit Great Northern needs, offering competitive advantages over its rival Belt. Sand Coulee was closer to the Great Northern yard in Great Falls and presented an easier grade to pull than Belt offered.

Fuel is one of the most important factors in the smelting industry. Cheap fuel posed a major problem for Montana’s smelting industry. The extensive Sand Coulee coal field solved this problem. The coal field presented enormous opportunity for the future of a large part of Montana. People were so enamored of the possibilities for Sand Coulee that they predicted in a few years Sand Coulee would have 20,000 people¹⁹¹. The coal field was not a “minor” actor in a second rate play about Montana’s potential, it was one of the stars. The railroad from Great Falls to Sand Coulee, completed in late April of 1888, spurred the development of Sand Coulee and its mines. Prior to completion of the railroad the coulee experienced exploratory development so that “big” mining would be prepared to go full tilt when the steel rails made the coal from Sand Coulee more affordable to Montana industrialists than their current sources.

¹⁹¹ *Great Falls Tribune*, May 14, 1885.

In February 1888 speculation had Sand Coulee, within months, shipping 2000 tons of coal daily when the rail line to Butte, Rimini and Marysville became complete. Great Falls also had smelting works in progress. As soon as the rail bed reached the big mine Sand Coulee would be on its way toward its fifteen minutes of fame. Helena gushed that Sand Coulee coal had solved the problem of cheap fuel for Helena in general. Helena looked forward to dumping its supplier in Rock Springs, Wyoming for what had to be cheaper, and perhaps better coal from Sand Coulee. Sand Coulee coal contained fixed carbon at 70%. The Rock Springs coal of Wyoming contained only 55% of carbon and the Rock Fork coal from 50-55%.¹⁹² In fact the coal would be so much cheaper it would take the breath away from those living in Helena, so it was claimed. Helena also noted that the Montana Central, using the coal for the last three or four days of February, 1888 proved the coal worked just as well as Rock Springs coal which required a 1,400 mile roundtrip to Helena vs. a 200 mile round trip for the Sand Coulee coal.¹⁹³ The building of the spur from Great Falls to Sand Coulee generated much anticipation by all who desperately needed the closer and cheaper source of energy.

While waiting for the Sand Coulee spur to assure them of the quantity of coal they needed entrepreneurs kept testing the coal and its quality by finding uses for it in a variety of ways. Sand Coulee coal powered David Hilger's steamship, the *Rose of Helena*, on a round trip from the Hilger ranch at Gates of the Mountains to Great Falls, a distance of 112 miles. The captain of the boat, like a kid with a new toy, took the boat up Half-breed rapids twice. The steamship made ten miles an hour on the down stream trip

¹⁹² *Great Falls Tribune*, March 31, 1888.

¹⁹³ *Great Falls Tribune*, February 29, 1888.

and four miles per hour on the return trip. The steamship quickly turned into an excursion business but would go no lower than Half-breed rapids near Hardy.¹⁹⁴ This reminds one of the current excursion boats that run from Hilger's ranch to the Gates of the Mountains and return. The coulee coal worked "first rate." The Helena Gas and Light Company became excited about coulee coal. The company imported coal to generate gas for its lights from Crested Butte, Colorado at a price of fifteen dollars per ton delivered.¹⁹⁵ The Gas and Light Company did not know what price the Sand Coulee coal would be but they knew it had to be cheaper because of the travel distance involved. The prosperous mining camp of Phillipsburg also cast an eye toward Sand Coulee to supply its coal and coke for smelting purposes.¹⁹⁶

Upon completion of the rail spur to Sand Coulee in July, 1888, Hill quickly moved to divest himself of his coal source in Iowa. Within a year Sand Coulee supplied over 40% of the coal burned by Great Northern engines.¹⁹⁷ Hill also shipped coal to Butte for half the price previously paid by the Butte smelters. The ACM in Butte had been paying \$22 per ton for Pennsylvania coal. Hill delivered his coal for half that price.¹⁹⁸ According to Montana State University historian Michael Malone this gave birth to the "long and happy marriage between the fast-growing Anaconda and the Hill railroads."¹⁹⁹ At last a large part of Montana could better compete with smelters anywhere in the country.

¹⁹⁴ *Great Falls Tribune*, May 21, 1887.

¹⁹⁵ *Great Falls Tribune*, October 29, 1887.

¹⁹⁶ *Great Falls Tribune*, December 31, 1887.

¹⁹⁷ Michael P. Malone, *James J. Hill, Empire Builder of the Northwest*, (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 125.

¹⁹⁸ *Great Falls Tribune* February 6, 1888.

¹⁹⁹ Malone, *James J. Hill, Empire Builder of the Northwest*, 126.

Production

The coal field at Sand Coulee had a thickness of six to nine feet of clean coal.²⁰⁰ The overall field varied in depth from four to twenty-nine feet. The coal originally had been a lake-like or marsh-like deposit, formed from decayed roots of aquatic plants. Before being compressed by huge quantities of blown-in sand this deposit must have been of enormous thickness. It takes a hundred feet of vegetation to make one foot of coal. The coal the Company mined originally came from a marsh 600-900 feet in depth.

The demand for Sand Coulee coal did not need salesmen or a public relations campaign to drum up customers. As soon as the coal could be transported via rail customers stood in line to buy it. The railroad reached Sand Coulee in July of 1888, six months after it reached Great Falls from Minot. Just before the spur reached Sand Coulee its coal powered the heaviest train yet to run the new track from Great Falls to Helena.²⁰¹ Helena wanted the coal so badly it could not wait for the spur and paid for the hand work involved in receiving the coal. Wagons transported the coal from Sand Coulee to Great Falls where laborers shoveled it into the engine tender and waiting rail cars. Businessmen used the coal in every way possible. Each new test confirmed that the coal south of Great Falls could be depended upon. The coal almost seemed a new plaything for men with money or access to money. As soon as the railroad hit Sand Coulee the camp started its growth in earnest.

A rapid expansion in the coulee began in 1889. By the spring of 1889 the Company started construction of fifteen more houses for their rapidly growing workforce

²⁰⁰ *Great Falls Tribune*, February 18, 1888.

²⁰¹ *Great Falls Tribune*, March 2, 1888.

of 200 men.²⁰² By the end of April the mine sent 50 cars of coal north to Great Falls, the largest shipment to date.²⁰³

But trouble appeared early in the year, a harbinger of how the Sand Coulee Coal Company would arrogantly operate during its tenure in Sand Coulee. Without notice the Company informed the entire night shift their services were no longer required. The Company then told the night shift employees that a few of them would return to the night shift and others would be discharged from the day shift. By this method the Company manager could retain the best men. The men deemed not “the best” must have been extremely disappointed and seething with anger. The Company gave no reason for laying off the men. The community supposed, but did not know for sure, that the output of 400 tons per day could not be disposed of by the Company during the summer months because the Company also supplied coal for domestic use that dropped off with the cessation of winter heating. About 150 men remained at work and the sixty discharged men left camp.²⁰⁴ The out-of-work men must have been ambassadors of ill will toward Sand Coulee as they dispersed to other mining jobs throughout the west. But their treatment mirrored the times when the captains of industry felt little compunction to consider anything but their own needs.

In June, 1889 an editorial party of the *Great Falls Tribune*, at the invitation of the Company, visited the mine and went underground with manager Anderson as their guide. Already the mining produced an underground city the *Tribune* described as immense with streets and avenues. Dr. Brown, a veteran geologist and a member of the Indiana State

²⁰² *Great Falls Tribune*, February 14, 1889.

²⁰³ *Great Falls Tribune*, April 3, 1889.

²⁰⁴ *Great Falls Tribune*, April 16, 1889.

Board of Geology, also touring with the party, pronounced the coal excellent with no better bituminous coal available anywhere. J.J. Hill also accompanied the party and during the afternoon the party examined the town and talked to Mr. Hill.²⁰⁵ The company displayed no anxiety about hosting visitors underground. At future times similar trips would be made by officials who then acted as ambassadors for the Company.

In November of 1889, because of a strike in Rock Springs, Wyoming, coal became scarce for many reduction companies in Montana. People wondered if those companies might turn toward Sand Coulee as their coal supplier. In short order that question was answered when the Boston and Montana Company, smelting ore in Great Falls, ordered 500 tons of Sand Coulee coal. Sand Coulee immediately shipped 150 tons of coal over the Montana Central, or Great Northern track, to Great Falls. The Anaconda Company also quickly sent in a smaller order. The coulee, working on short notice for the new demand for their coal, promptly filled the orders. The short notice service of the mining company and the Montana Central actually served as a good recommendation for both because it proved the company could furnish the coal, and the railroad could furnish the needed cars and organize the trains on short notice.²⁰⁶ The extra trains roaring from the mine mouth in Sand Coulee, past Tracy and through the Sand Coulee Creek drainage, past farms and ranches, toward Great Falls, certainly provided a topic of conversation. The engines, powered by coulee coal, puffing out immense amounts of black smoke and letting off steam presented a picture of the power and technology of the industrial revolution taking place in America. It seemed poignant though, that the scene involved

²⁰⁵ *Great Falls Tribune*, June 15, 1889.

²⁰⁶ *Great Falls Tribune*, November 20, 1889.

Sand Coulee miners gaining at the expense of Rock Springs miners. In the future Lethbridge, Canada would threaten to gain at Sand Coulee's expense because of a strike in the coulee.

Sand Coulee kept booming and setting records in payroll and production. The November 1889 payroll reached \$23,000 for the 300 men now employed by the Company.²⁰⁷ In December the miners produced 1,000 to 1,200 tons of coal daily but could not keep up with the demand. At this point in time the mines produced coal for the Montana Central/Great Northern railroad and nearly the entire system of the Manitoba/Great Northern. The mines also supplied coal for several Montana smelting works, including the Parrot at Butte, and then Anaconda added to the strain by ordering 250 tons of lump coal on a daily basis. New mine manager Henry Burrell said if the Company would give him the men, mine and rail cars he would fill all the orders that could pour in.²⁰⁸ Notice that Burrell put the men first.

The Sand Coulee Coal Company grew so fast during this period that they signed a contract for twenty-five additional houses that rented for \$8 per month.²⁰⁹ The houses ordered would stand two stories in height and be modern and comfortable in style.²¹⁰ That year set the tone for several years in Sand Coulee. January 1890 produced the largest payroll up to that time. The total amounted to nearly \$35,000. By the end of the year all systems grew at a tremendous rate. The demand for coal produced a demand for

²⁰⁷ *Great Falls Tribune*, December 4, 1889.

²⁰⁸ *Great Falls Tribune*, December 11, 1889.

²⁰⁹ *Great Falls Tribune*, June 4, 1891.

²¹⁰ *Great Falls Tribune*, December 21, 1889.

more men, more mine and rail cars, more company housing and more goods and services provided by the company store and other merchants in town.

However, as so often happened, bitter was mixed with the sweet when part of the mine shut down and ninety men found themselves laid off in February 1890. The Company informed the men that the layoff would be of short duration because the Company needed to prospect for some coal in the mine and that the prospecting would quickly be completed.²¹¹ More trouble would soon plunge the coulee into deeper turmoil. A strike hit the coulee on March 20, 1890. The strike, which lasted for six months, progressed with fits and starts toward a complete cessation of work in the mine. Six months is a long time for an unsettled labor dispute and very damaging to both sides. The Company had many orders to fill and as time dragged by the strike put the Company in a precarious position. However coal could be secured from other sources, especially Belt, which lay approximately twelve miles further from Great Falls than Sand Coulee did. Belt was an Anaconda operation and Hill and Daly were friends as well as business associates.

The mine workers belonged to no organization or trade union that could provide guidance in such matters as a strike. But the strikers may not have been totally without organized support. Fraternities served as the glue that held individual groups together. Companies viewed fraternities with a suspicious eye during times of labor unrest.²¹² Fraternities claimed to be apolitical but they offered solidarity during times of labor disputes. Allegedly fraternities had rules to protect numbers from harm but the rules

²¹¹ *Great Falls Tribune*, February 15, 1890.

²¹² Rick J. Clyne, *Coal People*, 74.

could often be artfully worded to serve the true purpose of discouraging strike breaking.²¹³

About 100 non-miners went on strike while fifty men refused to do so. The striking men wanted an increase of 50 cents per day or \$3.50, for work in the mine and \$3.00 for general work outside the mine. Miners were under contract so they did not strike but they could not productively work without the other workers so they also had an interest in what happened. The strikers appointed a committee of ten to try and get all people working at the mine to support the strike. One man, not made of the “right stuff” went to Great Falls, claiming fear of bodily harm as his reason for travel. What a great way to get attention and free drinks in the saloons of the larger town. After all he had first hand knowledge of the Sand Coulee strike.

For some reason the Company telegraph wires just happened to be down. Perhaps the Company felt that no news escaping to the outside, generating sympathy for the strikers, would be to their advantage. So, on March 21st the *Tribune* sent a courier to the coulee to gather information on the strike. At 4 p.m. the courier reported back that the strikers had held two meetings on the prairie. Later that day the strike apparently ended, only to resume again at a later time. The telegraph mysteriously began working and a telegram reached the *Tribune* informing the paper that, “the strike is over and all is quiet.”²¹⁴ The Company owned and maintained the telegraph line and its timely breakdown and back to duty status seems suspicious. The Company always had a way to manage important events.

²¹³ Ibid., 75.

²¹⁴ *Great Falls Tribune*, March 21, 1890.

April found the mine producing 700 tons of coal per day.²¹⁵ Three hundred and fifty men now worked in the mine.²¹⁶ They worked hard to meet the large increase in demand. The Great Northern alone more than doubled its daily requirement of coal and most of its entire rail system used Sand Coulee Coal. During the first week of July conductor Moore sent a train of 65 cars, carrying about 1,300 tons of coal, to Great Falls to be dispersed to several different locations.²¹⁷

The Anaconda Company still used some Rock Springs coal in its operation, paying \$6 to \$7 per ton. Suddenly Lethbridge, Canada sought to deliver its coal, at half the Rock Springs price, to the Anaconda Company via its narrow gauge railroad that had recently arrived in Great Falls from Canada. The Lethbridge company claimed Sand Coulee provided good steam coal while the Lethbridge coal provided better smelting coal.²¹⁸ It would seem the Lethbridge threat had more to do with the Sand Coulee strike than the quality of coal. Sand Coulee, without blinking an eye, replaced Rock Springs coal when those miners struck. Now it was possible Lethbridge might do the same to them.

The strike sporadically continued, even though it was earlier thought to have ended the day after it began in March. On August 19, 1890 the *Great Falls Tribune* reported that the “contract” miners struck and appointed Robert Anderson, John Neeman and Anthony Morton (a future legislator) to provide leadership to the strikers. The committee circulated a placard advising miners not to come to Sand Coulee. This must

²¹⁵ *Great Falls Tribune*, April 15, 1890.

²¹⁶ *Great Falls Tribune*, May 6, 1890.

²¹⁷ *Great Falls Tribune*, July 2, 1890.

²¹⁸ *Great Falls Tribune*, August 13, 1890.

have disturbed the Company, with the demand for its coal at a fever pitch. The contract miners asked for \$1.25 per ton but the Company said it could offer no more than \$1.²¹⁹

On August 21, 1890 the miners, under the guidance of a Butte organizer, formed a union and the miners resolved to hold out. That got the Company's attention and Burrell requested a meeting to be held that evening. Apparently the meeting did not resolve the dispute.²²⁰ Three days after the Butte organizers helped Sand Coulee form its union, the Company asked all employees to clear out of the mine. Some men said they would work but they feared the strikers. The officials in charge of keeping the peace swore in deputies on the day before the Company set for closing the mine. Many times the government did the dirty work for Western mining companies against strikers. However no need for deputies arose.²²¹

On the 8th of September, Henry Burrell, manager of the Company operation, held another meeting to try and get the men back to work. After a heated discussion, Burrell said he felt his attendance to be counter productive and that some miners might not speak their mind in his presence. Burrell left and the men elected a chairman and a secretary. They also appointed a committee and asked Burrell to act as an arbitrator in the matter. This act alone tells of the high esteem the men accorded Burrell. Burrell replied that acting as an arbitrator went far beyond his jurisdiction but if the miners would go back to work at the rate of pay Burrell offered, he would contact Hill and ask Hill if he would consider arbitration. Burrell said that if Hill concurred, the miners and company officials

²¹⁹ *Great Falls Tribune*, August 19, 1890.

²²⁰ *Great Falls Tribune*, August 22, 1890.

²²¹ *Great Falls Tribune*, August 24, 1890.

could appoint a board of arbitration and whatever that board set as a fair wage he would pay.

The men discussed Burrell's offer and decided they would not go to work until they were assured Hill would agree to arbitration. The miners told Burrell of their decision. At 8 p.m. the same day Burrell called another meeting and told the miners it would be to their advantage to consider his first offer and go back to work. Burrell had wired Hill and found out he was in New York. Hill must have responded negatively toward whatever Burrell suggested. The matter proved important enough for Hill to return to St. Paul and order Burrell to meet him there. Burrell informed the miners of his summons to Saint Paul and he told the miners he would get all concessions for them he could. Burrell's reputation among the men was excellent, probably because he acted in good faith with them at all times. The men seemed divided as to whether they should go back to work before settlement of the issue of arbitration. The miners agreed to a secret vote and turned down Burrell's proposal by a vote of 26 to 18. At this point it seemed assured that the mines would be shut down until the miners knew Hill would accept arbitration and that they knew the price they would receive for their labor. The miners now set their own arbitration rules. According to their formula the miners would select two men and the Company would select two men. The four men would choose a fifth person. The miners also wanted it made very clear they would return to work as soon as Hill agreed to fairly arbitrate the matter and they would abide by the result of that arbitration.²²² Burrell took a tremendous risk in promising the miners he would do the best for them he could. Burrell was at risk during the entire strike because Hill was

²²² *Great Falls Tribune*, September 12, 1890.

headstrong and difficult. As an example, in 1896, a Butte business acquaintance of Burrell, Oscar White, responded to Burrell's telling him that Stockett would be replacing Burrell and that he (White) should contact Stockett to keep his Sand Coulee trade. In a September 28, 1896 reply, White responded, "Dear Henry, I shall be glad to meet Mr. Stockett. I will do all possible to hold Sand Coulee trade. If your friend has nerve he many hold his own with Hill – but it is no picnic in sight for him with everything at its best."²²³

Before the end of September 1890 the strike ended.²²⁴ By the first week of October the mine sent ten cars of coal to Great Falls, the first shipment since the miners resumed work.²²⁵ Eight months later by the middle of 1891 the mines again reached pre-strike production levels. The Company at this point employed four hundred men, more than they ever had. Their monthly payroll varied from \$25,000 to \$35,000 per month. W. E. Roberts, Secretary of the Sand Coulee Coal Company, interviewed in Saint Paul in July of 1891, was enthusiastic despite the strike aftermath. He claimed to have secured contracts that amounted to a million dollars annually. He further talked of improvements made in the mine to increase production. He noted that one of the two mine entrances used an undercutting machine that worked beautifully. He also said they had a new (steam generated) electric hauling plant that would replace the mine mules and light the mine with electricity. However, mine mules would still haul coal from the rooms to the

²²³ From Burrell's personal papers at the Montana Historical Library in Helena.

²²⁴ My research revealed no terms of the strike settlement.

²²⁵ *Great Falls Tribune*, October 3, 1890.

main track. He boasted that the mine was as modern and well equipped as any mine in the northwest, if not in the country.²²⁶

In the spring of 1894 another strike crippled production, only this time the miners in Sand Coulee were not the strikers. The Great Northern employees from St. Paul to the coast struck, shutting down all commerce carried on by the railroad. Around the 14th of April the Sand Coulee engine blew out its steam to await developments. The strike did not carry on too long. However, on July 3, 1894, a Great Northern grievance committee met with Hill to complain that the terms of the recent agreement were being broken. They threatened to tie up the railroad unless the previously negotiated terms were enforced. Their threat ended the affair and Hill kept his agreement.²²⁷

In early August another strike hit the coal field, this time at Belt. The industrialists must have been anxious and perturbed at their workforce. On Friday, August 24, 1894 the train brought to Belt the executive committee of the Trades and Labor assembly of Great Falls and W.J. Weeks of the Western Federation of Miners. Two members of the Sand Coulee Union, to act as arbitrators for the non contract workers, also arrived. The strike had been going on for nearly three weeks. The community must have tired of the strike because the *Belt Valley Times* reported, “last Friday’s train brought to Belt the most precious cargo that has ever reached this locality,” referring to the union officials arriving to help the Belt miners. The strike concerned enlarged mine cars with no corresponding increase in wages. The miners discovered that new cars from Great Falls measured three

²²⁶ *Great Falls Tribune*, July 18, 1891.

²²⁷ *Great Falls Tribune*, July 3, 1894.

inches longer than the old cars and since men were paid by the number of cars they filled they struck.

The ACM considered closing down the mine, including the Company Store. The Company was not bluffing. The Company planned to shut down the pumps that kept the mine water under control.²²⁸ It would have been very expensive for the Company to re-start the mine; just pumping out the water would have been a major undertaking. The miners undoubtedly knew the ACM intended to shut the mine down, and returned to work shortly after August 30, 1894. Perhaps the union movement did not feel it advisable to meet the Company head on without knowing the metal of their new members. The miners asked for \$1 for all cars longer than seven feet rather than the ninety cents they received. Apparently the non-contract miners and the ACM split the difference and settled on ninety-five cents. Sand Coulee and Belt suffered a certain disadvantage by being so close together. If one camp pushed their parent company too hard that company could access coal from the other camp. At any rate Belt miners got paid for their extra work, although not as much as they wanted. The increase in wages was probably fair in a sense. A three inch longer car did not warrant a ten per cent increase in wages. But more importantly Belt now had a union that actually supported them and gave them bargaining power. It is my theory that the close proximity of the towns forced the miners to stick to basic issues like wages and not confront matters such as mine safety, which in many ways presented a more serious threat to the Companies.²²⁹ The Western Federation of Miners now represented the hard rock miners in Butte and the coal miners in Sand

²²⁸ *Belt Valley Times*, August 30, 1894.

²²⁹ In the several articles in the *Tribune* and *Belt Valley Times*, concerning labor unrest in both camps, no mention was made of any issues other than pay.

Coulee and Belt. They also represented the hard rock miners at Neihart. The Western Federation of Miners was born out of the Coeur d' Alene, Idaho miners strike in 1892. The mine owners, using federal troops, ruthlessly crushed that strike.²³⁰ In May of 1893 labor delegates throughout the west met in Butte to form the Western Federation of Miners. The Butte Miners Union (which helped Sand Coulee organize its Union during its strike) became Local Number One in the Federation. The WFM gained a reputation for violence because of actions in Idaho, Utah and Colorado. But in Montana the Federation got along quite well with mine owners as long as Marcus Daly ran the Anaconda Company.²³¹ In the not too distant future the WFM would stop representing coal miners and go exclusively with the hard rock miners. When this happened the Sand Coulee and Belt miners asked to be represented by the United Mine Workers.

The Company kept increasing its production and on the morning of December 13, 1893, Sand Coulee shipped 106 cars of coal, the largest train sent out of the coulee at that time.²³² Each car carried twenty tons, the complete train 2,120 tons. Each mine car dumped a ton and a half of coal into a rail car which meant that 1,413 mine cars were dumped into the train. People viewing the mine often compared it to an underground city. A more detailed comparison to an underground city would reveal the following: a 106 car train carried the rough equivalent volume of fourteen and one half 1,300 square foot houses. Two trains now ran daily. If the afternoon train also consisted of 106 cars the volume of twenty-nine 1,300 square foot houses left the coulee that December day.

²³⁰ Bonnie Christensen, *Red Lodge and the Mythic West*, (University Press of Kansas, 2002), 44.

²³¹ Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, (Seattle. London: University of Washington Press, 1976), 207.

²³² *Great Falls Tribune*, December 14, 1893.

Another way to look at the enormity of the mining operation concerns underground acres mined. According to the Swallow report the Sand Coulee coal field would produce (at a depth of one foot) 1,803 tons of coal per acre.²³³ An acre with a six foot bed of coal would produce 6,085 tons of burnable coal after a twenty-five percent waste factor is deducted. A six-foot seam was the most economical to mine and I will use that depth for the Company mine because it is likely they mined where it was the most economical to do so. By the end of 1897 the Company had shipped 2,500,000 tons of coal in its less than ten years of existence.²³⁴ At that point the Company would have mined 410 contiguous underground acres at a 6 foot depth. In addition to the 410 acres the mine included the two main tunnels, side tunnels and walls of coal left to support the room walls, etc. It was a vast underground enterprise. I think it safe to argue that the mine took up far more room underground than 410 acres before it ceased its mining operation. It is also estimated that the mine contained forty-two miles of underground track, adding to the underground area of the mine. Only by making such comparisons can the immensity of the Company operation be appreciated.

According to the State's Sixth Annual Mine Inspectors Report issued in December 1894 the Sand Coulee mine, located at Sand Coulee, owned and operated by the Sand Coulee Coal Company, was officered by Henry Burrell as superintendent and manager and David Lindsey as pit boss. One hundred and thirty five miners and ninety top men regularly worked the mine. The mine operated directly on the veins by drifting from the surface. Two thousand five hundred tons of semi-bituminous coal left the mine

²³³ G.C. Swallow, M.E., (Montana's first Inspector of Mines) *Coal Mines of Sand Coulee*, Helena, Mt. March 21, 1889, 5.

²³⁴ *Belt Valley Times*, September 9, 1897.

daily, but the mine had a daily capacity of 4,000 tons. There were two exits, and ventilation was furnished by two fans. Over 44 cubic feet of air per minute was furnished to each man. No explosive gasses had yet been discovered.²³⁵ When the report took up matters more personal to the miners they became incensed. Their relationship with the inspectors was an uneasy one. In the *Great Falls Tribune* of February 14, 1895 the miners made a scathing reply to report. The Inspectors Report contained sloppy reporting at best, with incorrect dates and incorrectly spelled names. However, the miner's dislike for the report went far beyond criticism of a few mangled facts. The miners sarcastically said they learned that two accidents, both fatal, had occurred in the mine and that this gave them comfort that they were not insane or delusional because they thought they paid out hundreds of dollars annually for the support of their, "maimed and crippled brothers, and supporting the families of those who sacrificed their lives for bread for their babies; it is a horrible dream." Actually three men had died during the period covered by the report. Several other men had been injured and crippled. The article takes issue with the fact that the report says there were just two killed and none crippled. The writer claimed that must be the truth of the matter because the inspector made it his business to know. However, the article asks how the Inspector became so well informed on the daily affairs of the miners lives because no one ever saw him visit the camp. The Union was now considering advocating a boycott on all state inspectors to put a "stop to their meddling and prying into the private affairs of honest folk." Apparently the Union did not consider the Inspectors as allies who could perhaps help them secure safer working conditions. What seemed to anger them the most involved the report saying that 135 men worked in

²³⁵ *Report of Inspector of Mines for State of Montana December 1894.*

the mine daily putting out 2500 tons of coal. The miners said this told everyone what their daily wage was. By doing the math with the miner's pay at \$1 per ton mined, one would conclude the miners received \$18.50 a day which was ridiculous. The report under recorded the numbers of miners at work in the mines, thus inflating their wages. The miners concluded their polemic against the Mine Inspectors Report by saying they had intended to keep their wages secret and it did not seem fair for the inspector to let the cat out of the bag.

In October of 1894 more praise came to Burrell. Mr. Tibbey, a recognized mine expert of the British Isles and America said the Sand Coulee mines enjoyed the best management he had seen in the northwest and that he was acquainted with most of them. He attributed it to the capacity and knowledge of Burrell.²³⁶ In September of 1895 the *Belt Valley Times* paid an especially nice tribute to Burrell. *The Times* bragged that Burrell could put out a greater tonnage than any single coal mine on earth. The *Times* claimed they set a watch to the Sand Coulee operation and that a heavily loaded freight car took three minutes to load and that a hundred car train could be loaded in five hours. The *Times* rightly said this could only be done where there was harmony and push. The *Times* then compared Burrell to President Zachary Taylor, nicknamed "Old Rough and Ready."²³⁷ Evidently Burrell's men used the same name for him. It is obvious the Company and the miners were lucky to have Burrell at this time of explosive growth. A fair man who knows his business will generally be respected by all who come in contact

²³⁶ *Great Falls Tribune*, October 14, 1894.

²³⁷ *Belt Valley Times*, September 12, 1895.

with him. The miners felt a sense of pride in reading the accolades placed upon Burrell. Praise for Burrell also praised them.

Coal production in Montana increased every year from 1887. During 1893 extensive improvements were made at Sand Coulee. Mining machines were introduced there and the output of Cascade County increased over 100% from 242,120 tons in 1892 to 516,460 tons in 1893. In 1894 Cascade County increased its production three times the total increase for the rest of the state. The state increased its coal production 62% from 1894 to 1895. In 1896 only five mines produced 1,138,590 tons of coal in the county, while the rest of the state produced only 509, 292 tons. The county mines, including those at Belt, worked an average of 269 days and the average number of employees in the county was 1,491, out of a statewide total of 2,337 employees.²³⁸ In 1897 the average price for a ton of coal stood at \$1.76 per ton. At least for the years 1896-1900 Cascade County produced over half the state's coal. In 1898 the county produced 993,161 tons of the state's total production of 1,450,421 tons. In 1899 the county produced 893,605 tons of the state's total production of 1,408,771. In 1900 the county produced 791,764 tons of the state's total of 1,442,569.²³⁹ With the research I conducted, breaking out the amount Sand Coulee mined could not be determined.

Sand Coulee coal was a factor in Hill building his railroad to the west coast, and building it where he did. The decision proved to be a good one. Production at Sand Coulee demonstrated what leadership, money, great management and good miners could accomplish. Hill and Burrell understood that keeping abreast of technology meant more

²³⁸ *Great Falls Tribune*, October 27, 1898, Article quoted from Report of United States Geological Survey for 1897. Published October 1898.

²³⁹ *Report of the Inspector of Mines of the State of Montana*, January 1, 1905.

production and more profit. Burrell must be credited with a lot of success of the mine. His honesty with the men and his relationship with Hill kept labor strife to a minimum. Even with the militant Western Federation of Miners as their union the Sand Coulee mines enjoyed relative freedom from strife, much more so than their counterparts in other western mining towns. Hill was a tough, rough man and many disliked dealing with him, but Burrell seems to have managed that quite well. It is hard to picture Burrell as a “yes” man when he enjoyed, to a great extent, the miners good will and respect.

Mining

Mining in the coal field at Sand Coulee started with horizontal tunnels bored about 150-200 feet below the coulee rim.²⁴⁰ Most of the Sand Coulee tunnels fell within a few feet of having the same entry elevation because the coal seam lay in a horizontal deposit, formed from an ancient lake or marsh bed. The seam varied from four feet to over twenty nine feet in depth.²⁴¹ Because the coal seam allowed the miner to stand for most of his work, the depth of the seam played a major part in the comfort of the miner’s work.

The big Company mine used what is called the room and pillar method of mining. Two parallel tunnels were dug, separated by a fifty-foot wall of coal. The wall, called a pillar, supported the roof. The two parallel tunnels allowed air circulation in the mine. The main tunnels also housed the main tracks for the mine. Side entries, cut at right angles from the main tunnels, led into rooms. The rooms averaged about thirty five feet

²⁴⁰ *Coal Mines of Sand Coulee*, G.C. Swallow, M.E. Helena, Mt. March 21, 1889, 1.

²⁴¹ *Great Falls Tribune*, February 18, 1888.

in width, separated by coal walls or pillars, about fifteen-feet wide. The mining progressed in this way into the coal seam. Cross cuts between the main tunnels and the rooms allowed air circulation. The crosscuts had to be closed at different times to direct airflow in the mine. Young boys, called trappers, took care of opening and closing the doors often made only of canvas, but also of regular, permanent hinged plank doors.²⁴² The early mine used a fire set at the foot of a vertical shaft that reached the surface, to ventilate the mine by drawing air through the mine much like a chimney would.

The pillar and room system saved labor because less effort was required to shore up the mine roof than with timbers. Mining by leaving a wall of coal in place meant fewer wood supports were needed in a country with little timber close by. The timbers that found their way into the mine were cut at Logging Creek, many of them by a man named Sam Dodd.²⁴³ However a lot of coal is contained in the pillars and the walls between rooms. When a mine is being shut down, mining the pillars and room walls is the last step. When the Sand Coulee Coal Company started this process in 1898 in their Sand Coulee mine everyone knew the mine would eventually be closed.

Looking straight down on the operation the two main tunnels look like major streets going through a town while the rooms appear like city blocks and the support walls similar to streets. The main tunnels, and rooms on either side, keep progressing into the coal seam. The rooms had tracks that led to the main track where the coal cars were hooked up to coal cars from other rooms. The string of cars, or the “trip” as the miners called it, made its way outside to the tipples and dumped its coal into the rail cars. The

²⁴² Ethel Castner Kennedy & Eva Lesell Stober, *Belt Valley History 1877-1978*, 33.

²⁴³ *Great Falls Tribune*, February 14, 1895.

tipples were built of strong timbers and the floor of the chute had a steel plating to reduce wear on the chute. The chute would not last long without the metal flooring. In June of 1891, Henry Burrell, manager of the Sand Coulee Coal Company, invited a *Great Falls Tribune* reporter to view the mine. The reporter noted the mine entrance was seven feet high. The electric haulage system had not been installed at this time, although the equipment for such a system would be purchased during the next month.²⁴⁴ A mule team pulled the car that Burrell and the reporter used to enter the mine. The reporter described his impressions as follows: rooms opened out along the main tunnels. The miners left a wall of coal between the rooms. Two or three men worked in a room. The machines to make the undercut were not in universal use at this time and the reporter saw miners lying on their sides to undercut the coal face to the usual depth of five feet.²⁴⁵ The reporter wrote that the coal face was then drilled in the middle and on ends of the undercut and powder was tamped into each hole. The powder, when ignited, blasted about four or five tons of coal into the undercut. The miners then laid a track into the room from the main track. Miners loaded coal into mine cars that carried about 3,000 pounds of coal. Mules hauled the coal from the chamber to the main track where it was hooked to a string of other cars to make the “trip” outside. When the electric haulage system was installed the cars would speed along the tracks at twenty to thirty-five miles per hour to the tipple where they were dumped into railroad cars. The company used a machine called a scatterer which greatly facilitated the loading of railroad cars. The steam scatterer, placed

²⁴⁴ *Great Falls Tribune*, July 18, 1891.

²⁴⁵ In October 1888 a new Legg undercutting machine made its first appearance in the mine. The Company bought two of the machines and they proved very satisfactory. The machines increased production by 66% over miners undercutting coal by hand.²⁴⁵ The machine, run by compressed air, made a lot of noise.

in the middle of the car, by its rapid evolutions, threw coal to the opposite ends of the cars as fast as it left the chute. When a full force was working, about 1,200 tons were mined daily. The miners were paid \$1 per ton of mined coal and made about \$4-\$5 per day. The reporter mentioned that he could see the minute light from the carbide lamps worn on the miner's caps, timidly shining through the darkness.²⁴⁶ Underground was harsh. Even the new machinery did not really ease the work; it only provided more coal for the company. Sand Coulee miners were lucky because their coal seam offered three distinct advantages. The coal seam was thick enough to stand while working. The miners did not have to contend with deadly mine gas and they worked under a relatively stable roof, or so they claimed.

By 1893 the big mine tunnel burrowed into the hill for about a mile and a quarter. A rope haulage system now propelled mine cars along the main tracks. The system was of the latest and best design available and believed to be the first in the United States. Powerful engines pulled from fifty to seventy cars out of the mine at a trip. Most of the mining was done by the Harrison Pick machine, worked by compressed air, and said to be the best. The mine now contained about 30 miles of underground track.²⁴⁷

Mining involved dirty, dangerous work. Miners worked ten or twelve hours a day, six days a week. Their safety was threatened at all times. Injuries are listed in almost every issue of the *Great Falls Tribune* and the *Belt Valley Times* that had articles dealing with Sand Coulee. The miner always faced the prospect of being burned, crushed or sometimes blown apart. The miners worked with blasting powder to bring the coal down.

²⁴⁶ *Great Falls Tribune*, June 4, 1891.

²⁴⁷ *Anaconda Standard*, January 19, 1893.

The shock of the blast bounced off the roof and shock waves hit the coal walls and pillars used to support the mine roof. The effect of blasting tended to weaken the entire milieu in which the miner worked. In addition to the blasting the miners worked with huge animals, horses and mules that could and did kill miners on occasion. Besides the undercutting, drilling and blasting, they worked amongst strings of coal cars, either hauling coal out or returning empty or loaded with men coming into the mine to work. The cable on the main track that propelled the coal cars presented a constant threat of terrible injury or death. One thing most people do not take into account is that the work in the mines took place in minimal lighting. The carbide lamp the miner wore on his hat provided poor light for safely working in such dangerous conditions

The company seemed unwilling to provide a safe work environment. The Company left safety in the hands of the men and their foremen but the company did little if any physical changing of its operation to accommodate safety. As the inspector of mines lamented, “if the company would truly take an interest in safety many injuries and death could have been prevented.” The same could have been said of the men.

The miner’s immediate family, friends and saloon offered him the only way to cope with the pressure of dangerous work. The miners protected their families by intimidating those who threatened them. An example, but not the only one, appeared in the *Great Falls Tribune* in April of 1889. The paper noted that a wife beater lived amongst the residents but that he had been notified to “desist or suffer the consequences of his brutish treatment of his wife.”²⁴⁸ The miners and their families endured enough pressure and they would not tolerate overt stress caused by their own. Miners resorted to

²⁴⁸ *Great Falls Tribune*, April 16, 1889.

the saloon to help deal with the stress of mining. Depriving a miner of his saloon would have been unthinkable. The bars were the only establishments allowed to stay open during the diphtheria epidemic in Sand Coulee. Some mine operators found it impossible to keep a workforce unless they allowed saloons on company property. Saloons also helped the men cope with the on again off again nature of their work. The often interrupted demand for coal left the miner unemployed for varying amounts to time.

Accidents and Death

To gain a full appreciation of Sand Coulee it had to be heard as well as seen. The blasting and accompanying sounds coming from the mine, the grinding of steel wheels on steel rails, the rumble of coal dropping from the tippie into waiting cars, the rhythm of the steam engines working the coulee and then pulling the coal northward, gave auditory evidence of the industrial importance of this small Montana town. But the steam whistle provided Sand Coulee's most vivid industrial identity. The coulee had a steam whistle just like any large industrial city. The whistle signaled the beginning and ending of a shift. The whistle informed boarding houses when to have supper, not dinner as it is now known, ready. The farmers within hearing of the whistle could keep track of what was going on in the coal camp and when to head to the house for supper. Often, if times were slow, a double whistle in the evening let the community know there would be work the next day. The whistle, a great communication tool, could be heard for miles. When Stockett first tried its whistle in 1898, Sand Coulee residents thought it was their whistle

with a new sound.²⁴⁹ The whistle comforted the town because it was familiar, something they could depend on.

But the whistle also struck fear into hearts when it blew off schedule. Those above ground knew an accident, fatal or otherwise, had occurred in the mine. Everyone in town, including the children, turned heads toward the mine, desperately wanting to know who was injured or killed. Each morning women said goodbye to their men folk, knowing they might never see them again. Danger constantly stalked the camp and brought the people into a communal tolerance of each other across all barriers, including ethnic barriers. Death brought the community together and produced a bond among the people that was strong, at least for a while. Women derived some comfort from each other and a sense of sisterhood because the waiting to know what happened drew them together. Too, most dangerous professions develop a sense of brotherhood and the enormous peril of coal mining forged an underground bond among the men, regardless of nationality or other differences. Miners knew that the best way to survive was to look out for each other. In the mine death drew them together just as it did their families. Topside they might separate but underground they were a brotherhood.

In either instance, injury or death, a family might have their means of survival instantly erased. If a fatality occurred those dependent on the deceased were most likely to have to move, or the wife remarry in a hurry, or do other desperate things to survive. A quick remarriage saved many a family in coal mining towns. Women's work in the camp did not grow on trees and death benefits proved meager if available at all. Workers Compensation did not become a part of the workingman's life until well after the turn of

²⁴⁹ *Belt Valley Times*, April 14, 1898.

the century. The only compensation came from the union and fraternal organizations. Insurance played little if any part in the injury or death of miners until after the turn of the century.

The grimmest evidence that Sand Coulee mined for its living could be found in funeral marches to the cemetery (a mile away) as various fraternal lodges buried their folk after a church service. Most families in the coulee lost a member to the mines. Working under the contract system pushed miners to disregard safety in order to produce more coal and money for their family and saloon. The consequence was frequently injury or death. The mine also marked its victims in other ways. The miners were mostly vital, young men. But accidents crippled, maimed, and marked many of them for life.²⁵⁰ Men had black powder embedded in their hands and faces from being too close to a blast, and many had respiratory problems from underground mining. Any miner who spent a considerable part of his life underground suffered from lung damage. The miner could not get away from the coal dust in the mine or at home or anywhere else in the coulee.

If an accident caused injury rather than death the company provided a doctor. Company doctors also treated the miners, families. In the coal industry health care was funded through a prepayment plan that deducted a standard amount each month from a miner's check. The fee most likely did not include care for venereal disease. Clyne, in his book *Coal People*, writes that in the Colorado mines the monthly fee of \$1.00 for single men and \$1.50 for married men did not include injury due to fighting or venereal

²⁵⁰ My father lost an index finger in a mine accident. It was considered inconsequential but still the mine took part of his body.

disease.²⁵¹ Rule eighteen of the Northern Pacific in Red Lodge, states an extra fifteen dollars, or more, would be charged for the treatment of gonorrhea.²⁵² It is most likely Sand Coulee had similar rules for medical care.

Before 1914 common law protected the mine owners from accountability for accidents and deaths within their mines or on their premises. The first concept was “assumption of risk” which held that when a miner accepted a job he accepted all the risk inherent in the work. Even if the coal company presented a totally unsafe work environment, the injured miner, or the family, had no recourse to compensation. The second concept was the “fellow servant” rule which meant that a worker who took a job accepted the risk caused by slipshod fellow workers. The third common law model, “contributory negligence” proved the most devastating to the miners and their families. It basically guaranteed that the operators would not be held legally responsible for any accidents.²⁵³ This concept meant an injured worker had to prove not only negligence on the part of an operator, but also that there had been no negligence at all on the worker’s part. It was almost impossible for a miner, or his survivors to meet such a burden of proof in accidents that destroyed the evidence of their own causes.

Accidents and deaths were generally recorded in five ways, by the coroner, the *Mine Inspector’s Report*, the *Great Falls Tribune*, *Great Falls Leader*, and the *Belt Valley Times*. I am sure that even among all these sources not all Sand Coulee mine deaths got recorded. Official state reports often showed discrepancies. The state reports often did not agree with the newspapers on the date of death or the spelling of the name

²⁵¹ Rick J. Clyne, *Coal People*, 53.

²⁵² Shirley Zupan and Harry J. Owens, Editors, *Red Lodge, Saga of a Western Area*, 138.

²⁵³ Rick J. Clyne, *Coal People*, 66.

of the deceased. The newspapers did not always agree with each other. The reporting, especially the official state reporting, was very sloppy. No single entity noted all the mine deaths.

Many of the accidents, although not resulting in death, debilitated the miner to a severe degree. As an example, in January 1890 a man named Vestlin was crushed, but the full extent of his injuries could not be ascertained by the *Tribune*.²⁵⁴ The first death whistle blew on February 16, 1891. On that date Robert Lind became the first accidental fatality in the Company mine. Mrs. Lind's prayers were not answered as she most likely stood with a group of other women in the morning on the day of the accident. Robert Lind died from a fall of coal, the most common cause of mine death. He had been working in the early morning when a large piece of the slate roof fell and buried him. Help came quickly but by the time his co-workers removed the fallen roof from his body he no longer had life in him. The other miners said more people could easily have been hurt and killed, but Lind had no companions working with him when he died. Lind died at approximately thirty-two years of age, leaving a wife and two small children²⁵⁵. The best Mrs. Lind could hope for would be help with the funeral expenses if her husband belonged to a lodge and charity from friends. The death whistle did not blow for another year. On February 13, 1892 John Oberenier met his death when slate from the roof fell on him.²⁵⁶ Although miners felt the mine roof to be fairly stable and safe, at least compared to other mines, slate falling from the roof had now taken two men. There is no record of Oberenier leaving a family behind.

²⁵⁴ *Great Falls Tribune*, January 17, 1890.

²⁵⁵ *Great Falls Tribune*, February 17, 1891.

²⁵⁶ *Mine Inspectors Report* Issued December 1892.

Death waited two more years before the spring of 1894 claimed two more miners. The coulee may have grown a little complacent about mine deaths. However, they got a reminder when John E. Johnson was killed February 28, 1894 by a blast in the mine.²⁵⁷ On March 19, 1894 a man named Thompson had his leg crushed in the mine. Two days later, he died. One can only imagine the agony Thompson suffered in those days.²⁵⁸

On September 6, 1894 a gruesome death overtook Andrew Harry. A fall of coal injured Harry on September 3rd and fellow workman assisted him to his residence.²⁵⁹ If in fact the men did “assist” Harry to his home he must have been somewhat mobile and conscious. It is possible, according to the report, that Harry did not receive medical assistance. Why did Harry not get taken to Great Falls? Perhaps he refused treatment. Harry died at his residence on the morning of the 6th. To us, in our time, Harry’s treatment seems very callous and perhaps it was even for his time.

December 1894 saw two more mine deaths. On December 3, 1894 a fall of coal killed Andrew Hora who worked for the Sand Coulee Coal and Coke Company. The Mine Inspectors Report lists Hora as an Italian. One wonders why the Reports intermittently listed the nationality of deceased miners. Perhaps, for reasons unknown the state was tracking accidents by native born or by foreign born. The second December death took place on the 22nd. Charles Stone died from a cave of slate. The report listed Stone as an American.²⁶⁰ The mine roof, for being considered safe, seemed to be killing

²⁵⁷ *Mine Inspectors Report*, Issued December 1894.

²⁵⁸ *Great Falls Tribune*, March 25, 1894.

²⁵⁹ *Mine Inspectors Report*, Issued December 1894.

²⁶⁰ *Mine Inspectors Report*, issued December 1, 1895.

quite a few men. The Christmas month did not bring joy to the acquaintances of the two men. Their deaths must have cast a pall over the camp. Who would be next?

Death took a holiday for nine months until October 5, 1895. A mule kicked John Sebanak, a Slovenian, at about noon that Friday. He died at 5 p.m. the next day. An acute inflammation attacked Sebanak. The doctors valiantly tried to save him but could not.²⁶¹ The Reverend Luther conducted services at the Methodist Church. John Sebanak was interred under the auspices of the Sand Coulee Miners union at 3 p.m. Sunday.²⁶² Hospital advocates used Sebanak's death as an entree to push for a local hospital. They said that with a local hospital anyone badly hurt could be taken care of in the vicinity rather than by killing them with a trip to Great Falls.²⁶³ Sebanak's death fit their reasoning well. His death resulted in moving the reality of a local hospital forward. The miners resolved to build it and accepted plans drawn up by George White of Sand Coulee. In October of 1895 bids opened for the actual building.²⁶⁴ Sebanak's death also emphasized the sloppy reporting of the Mine Inspector. His report claimed Sobolic, name misspelled, died on October 3, 1895.²⁶⁵ The *Leader* and the *Times* each spelled Sebanak's name differently as well.

On December 31, 1895 Emel Freeman suffered an accident that mangled and broke his right leg near the ankle, to the extent that he could no longer work as miner or a laborer. The accident happened when an engineer and his assistant caused the mine roof to cave in when they attached string to the roof to assist them in surveying. The aide

²⁶¹ *Great Falls Leader*, October 9, 1895.

²⁶² *Belt Valley Times*, October 10, 1895.

²⁶³ *Belt Valley Times*, October 9, 1895.

²⁶⁴ *Belt Valley Times*, October 31, 1895.

²⁶⁵ *Report of Inspector of Mines*, December 1, 1895.

warned Freeman and his fellow miner to leave until he gave them the all clear. The helper thought both men had left but Freeman apparently re-entered the danger zone. The assistant then pulled down some slate so he could attach a screw in the mine roof. This caused the roof to fall, burying Freeman in a partly standing position almost to his neck. Freeman sued the Company in the District Court of Cascade County with Judge J.B. Leslie presiding. Freeman sued for \$5,000 in damages. The Judge ruled against Freeman on a technicality that seemed so ridiculous it appears Judge Leslie may have been a very special friend of the Company. Freeman's lawyers A.C. Gormley and H.S. Greene appealed to the Montana Supreme Court on March 18, 1901. By April 1, 1901, in very short order, the Supreme Court made its decision. The Court ruled against the Company and reversed the District Court for denying a new trial to Freeman. The Supreme Court said Judge Leslie gave instructions to the jury that proved to be erroneous and prejudicial to Freeman. The Supreme Court said Judge Leslie's improper instructions applied to instructions 1, 5 and 6. The Supreme Court said Judge Leslie had so erroneously instructed the jury as to practically prevent any consideration by the jury of Freeman's case. Mr. Justice Milburn delivered the opinion for the court.²⁶⁶ The Freeman suite was the first against the Sand Coulee Coal Company by a miner, according to my research.

An especially horrifying accident happened to little Billy Johnson. Billy received his injury on the morning of March 12, 1896 while riding into the mine on a trip. It is most likely he worked as a trapper. Billy's coat caught on one of the cars and he got

²⁶⁶ Supreme Court of Montana, Freeman, Appellant, v. Sand Coulee Coal Company, Respondent. No. 1,285, decided April 1, 1901.

dragged for a considerable distance. After the accident Johnson was as well as could be expected considering his ordeal.²⁶⁷ Little Billy's age was not given.

The death whistle waited another three months before claiming Mat Kangas in June of 1896. A huge piece of roof slate struck him on the head and cracked his "skull from ear to ear." Kangas, age 35, immigrated to America from Finland in 1888 and traveled to Sand Coulee five years later. Kangas played with the Finnish brass band and belonged to the Miner's Union. Kangas never married and had no relatives in America.²⁶⁸

In July 1896 the coulee had a new topic of conversation that gave them some respite from the on going diphtheria epidemic and the depressing mine deaths that seemed to happen with more frequency. William McKinley, running for President, visited the camp on July 31. It must have been a curious visit because he refused all political questions. McKinley, a Republican, was opposed by the populist William Jennings Bryant. McKinley knew of Sand Coulee's image as the "father of populism" in Cascade County and apparently decided that political discourse under those circumstances would not serve him well.²⁶⁹ Perhaps McKinley just wanted to see a large coal mine and Company town in operation. McKinley won a decisive victory in the fall election. However, Montana gave Bryan a huge majority by voting 42,190 to 9,998 in his favor.

On August 6th Joe Sieman received injuries that seemed, in all probability fatal according to the *Times*. Again a fall of rock from the roof caused the injury to his back

²⁶⁷ *Belt Valley Times*, March 19, 1896.

²⁶⁸ *Belt Valley Times*, June 14, 1896.

²⁶⁹ *Belt Valley Times*, August 6, 1896.

and foot. Some men carried him to his home in Middletown, to receive care from the Company physicians, although he later died.²⁷⁰

A big change in leadership of the community and the coal Company occurred on October 1, 1896. Louis Stockett, a long time mining expert for the Great Northern Railroad, assumed management of the Sand Coulee Coal Company, succeeding Henry Burrell. Stockett, a graduate of the Scranton School of Mines met with general acceptance as manager of the Company. After six years of managing the Company mine Henry Burrell received a tremendous send off as he and his family left Sand Coulee for his new job with the American Developing and Mining Company in Gibbonsville, Idaho.²⁷¹ Every employee of the Sand Coulee Coal Company contributed toward “handsome presents” to Burrell. The celebrants told Burrell they held him in high regard as a boss, because he at all times dealt honestly and fairly with them and their employer J.J. Hill. They also told Burrell they appreciated his mediation skills that often led to his backing them and always led to the satisfaction of all concerned. There was not a hall in town large enough to house the sendoff so it became an outside affair, with people assembling in front of the Library Hall. Master of Ceremonies, Mr. Sewell, expressing regret at Burrell’s departure, told Burrell that he and his family enjoyed the respect and esteem of every inhabitant of the coulee. The farewell to Burrell and family included a grand ball. Burrell left Idaho and ended up in Joliet, Montana managing that mine. He kept in touch with Sand Coulee and assured the Sand Coulee people that their friends

²⁷⁰ *Belt Valley Times*, August 13, 1896.

²⁷¹ *Belt Valley Times*, October 1, 1896.

who followed him to Joliet were well and doing nicely.²⁷² Those who cast their lot with Burrell and moved to Joliet with him probably made a good choice. Burrell led men easily and well.

Stockett did not have to wait long before dealing with his first mine death. The death whistle blew just six weeks after he became manager of the Company. The miners leaving their shift were horrified to learn the little son of August Pistoires, Paul, had been struck by the trip and killed. Two people witnessed Paul's death. While standing near by they said the boy, a mine trapper, made an attempt to jump one of the cars as the trip passed. He was told not to do it but replied, "that's all right, I can jump her." On his next jump he was thrown against the roof and fell head first, close to the track, where the axel of the following car crushed his head. The miners customarily boarded the moving trip when no authorities were present. An accident of this type had long been predicted. Pistoires died at age fifteen. Funeral services occurred at the Catholic Church and young Pistoires, buried under the auspices of the Miners Union, found his final resting place in the Sand Coulee cemetery.²⁷³ His death brought an end to the 1896 deaths.

Of course not all accidents proved fatal. But many of them could have, and probably should have, killed miners. An example is Thomas Brown, a Finn, whose skull was fractured by a fall of coal in the mine the first week of the New Year.. He did not die but his life could easily have ended.²⁷⁴ However, it did not take long for 1987 to claim its

²⁷² *Belt Valley Times*, February 10, 1898.

²⁷³ *Belt Valley Times*, November 12, 1896.

²⁷⁴ *Belt Valley Times*, January 7, 1897.

first death. On January 11, 1897 John Ingram died from mine injuries. No account is given of how his death occurred.²⁷⁵

Before spring turned to summer the most gruesome of all the mine deaths occurred. On the 9th of March, thirty-three year old Gust Johnson was literally torn apart. Johnson worked as a brakeman in the Company yards. While crossing the main line, presumably to drop a car from the slack washer, the Number Ten engine struck him. Several small boys, standing near the accident, told the adults that Johnson, because of the steam escaping from the main shovel, could not see the engine approaching. The boys said Johnson even looked toward the engine before stepping onto the track. This illustrates how much noise attended mining. It seems hard to understand that a person could not hear an approaching steam engine just before stepping in front of it. The engine dragged Johnson for a hundred yards. His remains were gathered up and taken to the city jail to await a coroner's jury. As always the jury returned a verdict of death by accident. Johnson came from Gullabo, Sweden and never married. He immigrated to America in 1886 and had been employed by the Company for about four years. The family in Sweden consisted of his father and several brothers and sisters. Johnson had a first cousin in Sand Coulee named Albert Benson. People described Johnson as temperate and industrious with many warm friends. He saved several thousand dollars he deposited in a bank in Sweden.²⁷⁶ At a miners rate of pay saving several thousand dollars spoke of great frugality. Again the Methodist Church, with Reverend Craven officiating, buried another miner.

²⁷⁵ Mine Inspectors Report, Issued December 1, 1897, 8.

²⁷⁶ *Belt Valley Times*, March 11, 1897.

In just two months the death whistle blew off schedule, somberly informing the coulee something had happened in the mine. On May 10, 1897 seventeen year-old Joseph Smollock was killed by a steel cable tail rope. Smollock, working as a coupler, met death instantly at about 11:30 a.m. It appeared that someone unexpectedly gave a stop signal to the engineer and the rope, on a curve, whipped back and forth, striking Smollock and knocking him against the mine rib. The Company telephoned coroner Brady (first name not available) in Great Falls, who could not come, but deputized Mel Helsing to act in his stead. Helsing impaneled a jury Monday afternoon.²⁷⁷ When they adjourned at 10 pm. they brought in a verdict that some unknown person gave the stop signal for malicious purposes and caused Smollock's death. The verdict absolved the company of blame or responsibility because the common mine law stated the miner assumed all responsibility for another person's unsafe actions. But mine inspector Hunter gave no decision in the death because of the way Louis Stockett and the Company handled it. Hunter's finding, to date, was the only one that did not, in writing, specifically absolve the Company. The Company offered a \$50 reward for information leading to a conviction of those who gave the signal.²⁷⁸ Human life was not worth much, in this case \$50. Due to several unusual circumstances concerning the accident, Smollock's parents filed a law suit over the death. The case came up on Friday September 10, 1897, but was not heard because the defense filed for a demurer, and it was granted by the court.²⁷⁹

The mine began chewing up men at an even faster rate. On June 14, 1897 Matt Vistula met with a serious accident caused by a trip of cars on his way to work in the

²⁷⁷ *Belt Valley Times*, May 13, 1897.

²⁷⁸ *Mine Inspectors Report*, Issued December 1, 1897. 54.

²⁷⁹ *Belt Valley Times*, September 16, 1897.

mine. The trip became a run-away and Vistula jumped from his car and struck a timber. He rebounded from the timber back into the trip which pinned him against the mine rib. Vistula broke both jaws and tore a “great” hole in his neck, along with other injuries. The paper listed him as critical but there is no mention of his dying at a later date.²⁸⁰

The death whistle was busy in 1897. Jacob Kajala incurred instant, fatal injuries and his partner received serious injury at about 10 p.m. on June 15, 1897. Kajala, an undercut machine operator was struck by a 1,500 pound fall of coal. The undercut machine, although safer than hand undercutting, still presented risk. The inquest found that Kajala undercut the coal about fifteen feet. His partner told Kajala he should put in a prop but Kajala thought the coal would hold until they were through and declined to do so. Just a few moments after their conversation coal fell across Kajala’s arms and chest. Kajala, a twenty-three year old native of Finland, had worked in the mines around Sand Coulee for about two years. He had many warm friends, as most of the miners did, especially among their work mates. The Finnish National Brotherhood buried him in the Sand Coulee cemetery after a funeral service at the Finnish Lutheran church.²⁸¹

An unusual event occurred in the case of Kajala, in favor of the Company. Manager Stockett telegraphed the Mine Inspectors Office on Wednesday morning, the day after the accident. However, owing to some mysterious delay the telegram did not get sent until two p.m. on Thursday. The next day, Friday, State Deputy Mine Inspector Frank Hunter arrived in Sand Coulee. Hunter went to the spot where the fatality occurred but he could not conduct an investigation because the fall had been removed and work

²⁸⁰ *Belt Valley Times*, June 24, 1897.

²⁸¹ *Belt Valley Times*, June 24, 1897.

resumed at the accident site. The Company claimed they resumed work because the Coroners jury justly returned a verdict exonerating the Company from any blame. The Company's action, in this instance, speaks of hiding something from the Inspector and it also showed complete disregard and disrespect for Mine Inspectors in general. Perhaps the sarcastic outburst of the miners against the Seventh Annual Mine Inspectors Report in the February 14, 1895 edition of the *Great Falls Tribune* was bearing bitter fruit. If the miners felt that way about the Inspectors then the Company had little to fear in acting as they did in this case. Hunter declared he could render no decision under the circumstances and notified Stockett that in the future the accident site had to remain as is until he or another inspector arrived. This accident also illustrates sloppy reporting by all concerned. The *Seventh Annual Mine Inspector's Report*, issued December 1, 1897 claimed that Kajala died on July 1st. The same report correctly said the death occurred on Tuesday, June 15, 1897. The *Belt Valley Times* incorrectly reported the death occurred on Tuesday, the 16th of June. The 16th of June occurred on Wednesday, not Tuesday. Kajala's name was also spelled differently, depending on who reported. Accuracy did not concern the news media or state agencies at this period in our history. The inaccuracies in the Kajala story were not uncommon.

On July 2, 1897 Martin Nopens and Mary Waleitt, both of Sand Coulee, were married in the parsonage of the Methodist Church in Great Falls.²⁸² Little did Mary know that she would soon be a widow, that the mine whistle would sound for her beloved Martin in the near future. Presumably Mary knew the danger her husband faced in the

²⁸² *Belt Valley Times*, July 8, 1897.

mine but it is hard to believe that such a thing could happen to our own loved ones. She did not have all that long to learn otherwise. But others were to die before Martin.

The death whistle blew on the morning of July 14, 1897 for J.M. King. At about 8 a.m. Wednesday morning he met his death while attempting to cross the track near the steam shovel house. While crossing the track an engine struck him, throwing him under the drive wheels and dragging him about twenty-five yards. This is eerily similar to the Gust Johnson accident on the ninth of March of the previous year, at almost exactly the same spot. Surely, after Johnson's death the Company knew of the potential for accidents at that site. King's body was badly mutilated and he died about ten minutes after the accident. Of course, the Coroners jury found his death to be caused by his own actions and exonerated the Company from blame. The Company should have printed a form that simply said, "Not the Company's fault" with a space to be signed by members of the Coroner's jury. King had lived in the area for over twenty years and earned a reputation of being a sober, industrious man with many friends. At the time of his death, at age forty two, he left a wife and two children. The July 15th issue of the *Belt Valley Times* said that King left his family well provided for because of his membership of good standing in Tent #23 of the Knights of the Maccabees. Apparently, the fraternal organization provided good benefits for its members. The Miners Union would also have provided some help to the newly bereaved family. The family asked the K.O.T.M. to provide the funeral services, conducted by Reverend Craven at the Methodist Church. The family also opted to bury their father and husband in the Sand Coulee cemetery.²⁸³

²⁸³ *Belt Valley Times*, July 15, 1897.

Gus Freeman next gave his full measure to the mine on August 23, 1897. Freeman, while driving his mules down a grade in the mine, hit a curve at the bottom of the grade where a trip of empty cars stood on another track. Freeman rode on the head car of his trip and it jumped the track at the curve and ran into the cars of the empty trip, crushing him terribly. It can be presumed the mules were also injured or killed. Freeman lived for half an hour after his accident. Freeman immigrated to America while a child and resided in the coulee for seven years. Freeman died at twenty-eight years of age.²⁸⁴

Sand Coulee never had an accident on the scale of the 1943 Smith Mine disaster near Red Lodge, Montana. That disaster claimed seventy-four lives.²⁸⁵ However, the possibility of a catastrophe exists in any mine of any size at any time. On Sunday evening September 19, 1897 at about 7 p.m. a loud rumbling noise filled the coulee. Only “experienced listeners” knew that a portion of the mine roof was caving in. The cave-in occurred where most of the work in the mine was taking place. The cave-in could have been a large scale disaster if it had occurred at anytime but a Sunday evening. The miners judged it the most extensive cave in ever known in the mine. The cave-in threw thirty-eight men out of work. Pure luck played a part in the lack of injury and death on a large scale. To add to the bad news of the cave-in, Hill, as his special train left the coulee the day before the cave-in, announced as a parting gift that he would sell company houses for \$100.²⁸⁶ Hill gave no reason for his announcement and intense speculation filled the coulee as to his intent. Everyone experienced anxiety over the coulee’s future.

²⁸⁴ *Belt Valley Times*, August 26, 1897.

²⁸⁵ Shirley Zupan and Harry J. Owens, *Red Lodge, Saga of a Western Area*, 135.

²⁸⁶ *Belt Valley Times*, September 23, 1897.

Twenty-seven year old Samuel Mansberger's death added to the gloom of the coulee. Mansberger received his injury on September 15, 1897 from a cave-in. He passed away at home on Sunday morning, the 26th at 9:30.²⁸⁷ Doctors Morrow and Scott called Dr. Gordon, of Great Falls, to assist them with the case. Morrow and Scott did not think Mansberger would survive the night but a strong constitution, along with the great care given him by the three doctors enabled him to live for the next eleven days. Mansberger's pain caused unconsciousness for most of the time, although he experienced periods of alertness. The coulee kept a vigil for eleven days over Mansberger, adding to the tension in the coulee. Mansberger, from Pennsylvania, thankfully had no wife or children. Mansberger lived in Sand Coulee for several years and the people unanimously esteemed him. It seems all dead miners enjoyed the warmest of relationships with their fellow citizens. "Only the good die young" or "never speak ill of a dead person" may have universally softened coulee attitudes to those sacrificed to the Company at such young ages. Mansberger belonged to the Knights of Pythias, the Odd Fellows and the Miners Union. These organizations cooperated in conducting a funeral service in his home. A silent procession accompanied Mansberger to his final place of rest, a mile away, in the Sand Coulee cemetery.²⁸⁸ It makes the modern reader angry that so many deaths occurred, often accompanied by excruciating pain as in Mansberger's case, and that no one, especially the miners and their Union and the Company, would do anything to stop the obviously unacceptable working conditions in the mine.

²⁸⁷ *Great Falls Tribune*, September 28, 1897.

²⁸⁸ *Belt Valley Times*, September 30, 1897.

Shortly after Mansberger's death John Kurzilla died on October 13, 1897. Kurzilla met his fate by a fall of coal. He worked an undercutting machine and he probably died while making an undercut. The *Mine Inspector's Report* mixed up the dates, giving the 9th and 13th as dates of death. In reading the report it seemed Kurzilla received his injury on October 9th and died on October 13th. The Mine Inspectors continued their sloppy reporting.

1897 would not end without the death whistle claiming one more victim. The mine seemed insatiable in its thirst for the young. Youthful trip rider Richard Murray met his death almost instantly on November 2, 1897 while making a *flying hitch*. In order to make a flying hitch the speed of the trip had to be reduced to give the rope slack. As soon as the rope slackened it was the trip rider's responsibility to pull the pin connecting the rope to the train on the trip. For some reason young Murray could not pull the pin and the trip went into the wall with terrible force, crushing the young rider. Murray worked in the mine for a number of years and the community extended its sympathy to the grieving parents and family.²⁸⁹ Nine miners died in 1897, the same year that it became apparent the Company would move its operation to Stockett. Starting with June, six consecutive months witnessed a mine death. 1897 witnessed five more fatalities than any other year. The speculation for such a deadly year must be connected to the transfer of the Company operation to Stockett.

The occurrence of so many deaths began to make the Mine Inspectors more accusatory in their reports. The Ninth Annual Report Issued on December 1, 1897 by Inspector John Byrne and Deputy Inspector Frank Hunter, contained harsh words for

²⁸⁹ *Belt Valley Times*, November 11, 1897.

mine operators. Hunter was the inspector who refused to give the company a clean slate when the Company prematurely cleaned up the death site of miner Kajala. The report said that the fatalities and injuries inflicted on miners could have been avoided by sound judgment and more caution. The report claimed that nearly half the fatalities and practically all the non-fatal accidents in mines around the state occurred from a fall of coal or roof rocks. The report condemns the large coal companies. It states that if human life were given first consideration by the large companies, fatalities could be reduced. The report claimed that an earnest effort made by the companies, with the resources at hand, could cut mine deaths. These were strong words coming from a state agency that in recent years seemed hesitant to offend the large companies. The Sand Coulee Coal Company and Hill must have been somewhat shaken by the report. Perhaps the Mine Inspector's office now had men made of stronger stuff.

January and February of 1898 recorded no death in the mines, but on March 8, 1898, Mary Waleitt Nopens again enters the picture. The newlywed heard a whistle blow on that date and anxiously waited for news of who had been injured or killed in the mine. She learned that the whistle blew for her husband Martin. Nopens, age twenty seven, received an injury that was due largely to his own error. In many accidents the miners did act imprudently and caused their own misfortune. Nopens fired a shot and began mining when he heard the coal crack. The shot had extended further into the coal face than he intended. Before Nopens could escape, although he tried to, about a ton of coal, shaken loose by his blast, fell on him. The Inspectors report noted the coal caught him in a

stooping position, rupturing him so badly that survival did not seem possible.²⁹⁰ Again Dr. Morrow and Scott asked Dr. Gordon for help. The Doctors performed a successful operation on Nopens but felt recovery offered little hope.²⁹¹ Martin Nopens died on April 22, 1898 and was buried, after services in the Methodist Church, on April 24, 1898.²⁹²

Andrew Aro, lying in a Columbus hospital bed, suffering from a broken thigh and hip from a mine accident on April 20, 1898 became the next to play the waiting game with death. Aro worked in the mine for only two days before his accident.²⁹³ Aro, while pulling down loose coal with his partners, got caught by a large fall of coal. The coal had recently been shot and Aro, shoveling on the bottom, knocked out a support keeping the coal in place. Aro lingered until Sunday, May 1st. His funeral took place in Great Falls the next day. The *Belt Valley Times* commented that accidents in the Sand Coulee mine seemed to be increasing.²⁹⁴ The increasing danger of working in the mine coincided with the Company abandoning Sand Coulee and moving to Stockett. The Company seemed in a hurry to make the move although they expressed no reason for their rush. Perhaps the company was sending its best miners to Stockett and leaving its more expendable, inexperienced miners to finish the work necessary to close down Sand Coulee.

The death whistle blew for Jacob Bomala on July 8, 1898. At about 11:15 am Bomala met death by a fall of roof slate. Bomala, engaged in pillar mining, the last step in abandoning a mine, received a warning from his partner that the blast Bomala planned to make would recover little coal and would shoot out supporting timbers. Bomala

²⁹⁰ *Mine Inspectors Report* for period ending November 30, 1898, p. 28.

²⁹¹ *Belt Valley Times*, March 17, 1898.

²⁹² *Belt Valley Times*, April 28, 1898.

²⁹³ *Great Falls Tribune*, April 23, 1898.

²⁹⁴ *Belt Valley Times*, May 5, 1898.

ignored his partner's warning. The partner went to another part of the mine and Bomala made his blast. It loosened the roof and a large piece of rock fell, completely burying him. Again, acting Coroner Mel Helsing summoned a jury to the jail and they went to view the body. The jury then went into the mine to view the accident site. They returned to the jail at three p.m. where they held the inquest. The jury said Bomala died by his own negligence, which the facts supported. Bomala had been in camp for five years and was generally regarded as a careful miner. He left a wife and two children, one of which had been born only a month earlier.²⁹⁵

The last two deaths in the period of this history happened in the last two months of 1898. On November 5, 1898 the death whistle blew for eighteen year old Robert Fairfull, son of Thomas Fairfull. Robert received fatal injuries in the mine by a fall of coal which crushed his skull and inflicted a deep wound in the forepart of his neck. The Sand Coulee Methodist Church played its part in burying another miner, Reverend E.C. Cunningham officiating. After the service the remains were taken to Great Falls for burial.²⁹⁶ The second death occurred in December of 1898. For the first time the Company did not host the death. Lawrence Manilla met his death in the Black Diamond mine, owned by two prominent persons, J. J. Doherty and Charles Lochry. Manilla failed to properly install a support and a fall of coal crushed him. The mine received no blame for the death.²⁹⁷ Even the independent mines could depend on that verdict.

²⁹⁵ *Belt Valley Times*, July 14, 1898.

²⁹⁶ *Belt Valley Times*, November 11, 1898.

²⁹⁷ *Belt Valley Times*, December 22, 1898.

Table 10. Mine Deaths in Sand Coulee by Date and Source

<u>1891</u>		
Robert Lind	February 16, 1891	<i>Great Falls Tribune</i> - February 17, 1891
<u>1892</u>		
John Oberernier	February 13, 1892 December 1, 1892	Fourth Annual Report of Inspector of Mines,
<u>1894</u>		
John Johnson	February 28, 1894	Sixth Annual Mine Inspectors Report Issued December 1, 1894
Thompson	March 21, 1894	<i>Great Falls Tribune</i> - March 25, 1894
Andrew Harry	September 6, 1894	Sixth Annual Mine Inspectors Report Issued December 1, 1894
Andrew Hora	December 3, 1894	Seventh Annual Mine Inspectors Report Issued December 1, 1895
Charles Stone	December 22, 1894	Seventh Annual Mine Inspectors Report Issued December 1, 1895
<u>1895</u>		
John Sebanak	October 5, 1895	<i>Great Falls Tribune</i> - October 9, 1895
<u>1896</u>		
Matt Kangas	June 1896	<i>Belt Valley Times</i> - June 14, 1896
Joe Sieman	August, 1896	<i>Belt Valley Times</i> - August 13, 1896
Paul Pistoires	November 7, 1896	<i>Belt Valley Times</i> - November 12, 1896
<u>1897</u>		
John Ingham	January 11, 1897	Ninth Annual Mine Inspectors Report Issued Issued December 1, 1897
Gust Johnson	March 9, 1897	<i>Belt Valley Times</i> - March 11, 1897
Joseph Smollock	May 10, 1897	<i>Belt Valley Times</i> - May 13, 1897
Jacob Kajala	June 22, 1897	<i>Belt Valley Times</i> - June 24, 1897
J. M. King	July 7, 1897	<i>Belt Valley Times</i> - July 15, 1897
Gust Freeman	August 23, 1897	<i>Belt Valley Times</i> - August 26, 1897
Samuel Mansberger	September 28, 1897	<i>Great Falls Tribune</i> - September 28, 1897
John Kurzilla	October 13, 1897	Ninth Annual Mine Inspectors Report Issued December 1897
Richard Murray	November 2, 1897	<i>Belt Valley Times</i> - November 11, 1897
<u>1898</u>		
Andrew Aro	April 20, 1898	<i>Belt Valley Times</i> - May 5, 1898
Martin Nopens	April 22, 1898	<i>Belt Valley Times</i> - April 28, 1898
Jacob Bomala	July 8, 1898	<i>Belt Valley Times</i> - July 14, 1898
Robert Fairfull	November 5, 1898	<i>Belt Valley Times</i> - November 17, 1898

Stockett

In writing Sand Coulee history Stockett must also be discussed because the more Stockett gained the more Sand Coulee lost. In October, 1897 sixty men started grading the rail bed for the Cottonwood (Stockett) branch of the Great Northern railroad.²⁹⁸ Ten years after the Great Northern extended its railroad from Great Falls to Sand Coulee in 1888; it extended its railroad from the Lewis Junction, near Tracy, to Stockett. This was the beginning of the end of Sand Coulee's dominance of the area. The mine in Stockett was officially put into operation on June 2, 1898.²⁹⁹ The Great Northern claimed the move was an economic matter. They maintained the underground haulage of up to two miles made the Sand Coulee operation uneconomical. It is my theory that the length of underground haulage was not the real or only reason the Great Northern moved to Stockett and organized another subsidiary named the Cottonwood Coal Company. But before defending my theory it helps to understand the transition of the Company operation from Sand Coulee to Stockett.

The production from the Sand Coulee mines on December 22, 1896 reached its highest output of coal in the history of the camp up to that time. Two thousand seven hundred tons of coal, requiring 170 rail cars, headed north toward Great Falls on that date. In this year and month of record setting coal production the Sand Coulee Coal Company sent men to Cottonwood Coulee (Stockett) to drive an exploration drift, or tunnel, into a hillside. The Company, if the drift proved that Cottonwood Coulee could

²⁹⁸ *Belt Valley Times*, October 21, 1897.

²⁹⁹ *Belt Valley Times*, June 9, 1898.

produce good coal, in quantity, intended to start a large-scale operation there.³⁰⁰ At least some people in Sand Coulee must have felt a small shudder of apprehension at this news. They may have wondered why the Company felt it necessary to explore for coal elsewhere when they could produce it in record breaking quantity in the coulee. Stockett exploration was really the beginning of the end for large-scale Great Northern coal production in Sand Coulee. The decision to move was probably made in 1895. In January 1897 the Sand Coulee Coal Company started building several houses at their newly located coal mine, to house the coal prospectors. This suggests how committed the Company was to Stockett. Within the same month of January the Sand Coulee mine operated only thirteen days and the Company sent another drilling team to Stockett.³⁰¹ At the end of February machinery began migrating from Sand Coulee to Stockett.

The Company planned to connect the new mine with the Sand Coulee mine by an underground tunnel. They could then move the coal from the new mine into the tunnels of the Sand Coulee mine and into the rail cars at Sand Coulee.³⁰² This probably was planned as a stop gap measure until a rail bed could be extended to Stockett. It is hard to believe this would have been the Company's plan for permanently moving coal to market. In February Sand Coulee experienced its quietest payday in quite sometime. The payroll covered only about seven days and consisted of only half the January payday.³⁰³

On the lighter side of life a *Tribune* article in the May 1, 1897 edition stated that 800 Irish girls had immigrated to New York and would be distributed around the country.

³⁰⁰ *Belt Valley Times*, December 24, 1896.

³⁰¹ *Belt Valley Times*, February 4, 1897.

³⁰² *Great Falls Tribune*, March 4, 1897.

³⁰³ *Belt Valley Times*, February 18, 1897.

Sand Coulee bachelors immediately applied for fifty of them. The sudden interest in marriage could not save their jobs however. The Company on that same day discharged all unmarried men employed in the hand mining department. The Company claimed to have more miners than they needed and the latest discharge was just part of a general layoff taking place over the last eighteen months. Some of the people became vocal in very pointed terms, disapproving of how the Company treated them and the town in general. Still others defended the Company, saying they had a right to do whatever they needed to run a profitable business. Company advocates pointed out that married employees contributed more toward the Company store and that married people occupied company houses. The fifty single men suddenly out of work either left camp or remained because of promised jobs in Stockett as that mine developed. Already the move from Sand Coulee to the Stockett mine was causing disruption and pain among the Sand Coulee populace.

In May of 1897 the Honorable Anthony Morton, a Sand Coulee miner recently elected to the Legislature, gave a surprisingly different account of events in Sand Coulee. Morton, in Great Falls, on his way to attend the Western Federation of Miners convention in Salt Lake, reported to the *Tribune* that all was well in the coulee. He claimed the Sand Coulee miners had worked constantly for the past three or four months, except on Sundays. He also informed the *Tribune* that about 400 men worked in the mine and that recently a few single men had been laid off but would be soon re-employed. He then mouthed the Company line, claiming that the Sand Coulee mines still had plenty of coal

but that the workings were over two miles from the mine mouth and thus the coal could not be hauled that distance and still make a profit.³⁰⁴

The first two weeks of May 1897 seemed a time of battling reality. The Sand Coulee people became indignant about the circulating report that the Company mine was exhausted. The rumor got into print and created problems and annoyance for the coulee. Fighting rumors is hard business. The rumors of course traced back to the fact that the Company became more and more interested in its new mine at Stockett and less and less interested in its mine at Sand Coulee. The coulee defended its position by claiming that the community had many years of good mining ahead at the present rate of mining which was more extensive than ever. They noted the largest payroll for a year, about \$32,000 (after coupon deduction) now floated among the citizens of Sand Coulee. They felt, or at least stated, the coulee faced bright and encouraging days ahead.³⁰⁵ The Company probably mined at the rate they did to stockpile coal for the loss of production while bringing their new mine on line. The Company must have marveled at the coulee's refusal to take its head out of the sand. Did Company officials "in the know" have any of guilt over their refusal to share the "real" information concerning the coulees future? Probably not, the Company seemed to have no compunction about manipulating Sand Coulee people.

The Company kept pushing its moving plans in various ways. The Company ordered its blacksmiths to refit all the mine car axels on seven hundred cars, taking

³⁰⁴ *Great Falls Tribune*, May 7, 1897.

³⁰⁵ *Great Falls Tribune*, May 14, 1897.

advantage of the down time caused by the move.³⁰⁶ In September 1897 the mine worked twenty-two days and all seemed fairly normal production wise. But eight Company houses passed into the hands of former renters and fourteen men worked at the Stockett mine.

In October the Sand Coulee Coal company started building a large boarding house at Stockett. At the end of the month sixty men worked grading the branch line to Stockett and all available horse teams in the vicinity now worked on the rail bed.³⁰⁷ The farmers must have been quite happy to hire themselves and their teams out to the coal company. Current students at the Centerville schools can look at the west edge of their school parking lot and see the old rail bed the horse teams built. It must be hard for them to comprehend that horse teams pulling two handled scoops, or Fresnos, were capable of doing such immense work.

Sam Hill, president of the Sand Coulee Coal Company and son-in-law of James J. Hill, visited in his private car in the middle of November. No one seems to have thought to ask him any questions about what future plans the company had for Sand Coulee.³⁰⁸

In November 1897 the steel gang had to stop because of a heavy rock cut three miles from Stockett. The grading however continued on the other side of the rock cut and completion of the cut took place on the 23rd of November. By this time the Cottonwood Coal Company had laid all the stone piers necessary to build the trestle from the mine mouth to the railroad track. Too, a big hotel, larger than any building in Sand Coulee, would soon be completed. In December the Cottonwood branch could boast of one mile

³⁰⁶ *Belt Valley Times*, May 27, 1897.

³⁰⁷ *Belt Valley Times*, October 28, 1897.

³⁰⁸ *Belt Valley Times*, November 18, 1897.

of surfaced road bed, ready for rails. A crew of sixty men now worked on completing the line.³⁰⁹

Eighteen Ninety Eight would be a year of great gain for Stockett and a corresponding loss for Sand Coulee. The Company stated it would transport houses from Sand Coulee to Stockett, if the house did not exceed the capacity of the rail cars, for a mere \$25. The moving rate did not cover the loading and unloading of the house.³¹⁰ During the last week of January the Sand Coulee mine shut down in order to remove one of the large scales to ship to Stockett. In the first week of February 1898 the trestle work at Stockett was completed and the carpenters who built the trestle headed east for their homes in other states, many probably from Minnesota. The Montana Central, or Great Northern Railroad, issued new timecards for the first time listing the Cottonwood operation as Stockett and the new spur departure point as the Lewis Junction.³¹¹ Hill imported a construction crew from St. Paul to build a Company telegraph from Sand Coulee to Stockett. They also strung telephone wire on the Company poles and by February 17, 1898 the Company could send telephone messages between the two towns.³¹²

: In April the mules from the Sand Coulee mine started being transported to the Stockett mine. Even though electricity moved the cars along the main tracks mules still pulled the cars from the rooms to the main tracks. Removing the mules from Sand Coulee constituted an unmistakable sign that the Company no longer intended to operate the

³⁰⁹ *Belt Valley Times*, December 16, 1897.

³¹⁰ *Great Falls Tribune*, February 3, 1898.

³¹¹ *Belt Valley Times*, February 7, 1898.

³¹² *Belt Valley Times*, February 24, 1898.

mine far into the future.³¹³ April also saw the transfer of more machinery to Stockett. Four Harrison mining machines and six pit cars found a new home in Stockett. On April 13th steam “was gotten up” at Stockett and at two in the afternoon the Stockett whistle blew for the first time. The Sand Coulee people heard the whistle so distinctly they thought it their own whistle with a new sound. From now on they would have a reminder several times a day of their misfortune.³¹⁴

At the end of May in 1898 the Sand Coulee mine shut down for two days, the first time the mine had shut down for two working days in succession since the previous August. The Company said the closure resulted from an over supply of coal. On the 27th of May, J.J. Hill visited the new camp at Stockett and left pleased at what he saw. He did not visit Sand Coulee to see how his decision to move the coal operation to Stockett was distressing the coulee residents.³¹⁵ Hill mostly looked forwarded and seldom backward. The fact that people often got hurt by his decisions seemed to have little effect on him.

On Thursday, June 2, 1898 the mines at Stockett officially began operation. On that day three mine cars were dumped into a rail car and on the next day three rail cars were loaded and shipped down the new spur line to Great Falls³¹⁶ But in September the Montana Central sent 138 cars to the Sand Coulee mine, the largest amount of cars to be sent there in months.³¹⁷ In October 1898 the Sand Coulee payroll amounted to \$31,000, the largest in two years. The *Times* threw a bone to the Sand Coulee people by

³¹³ *Belt Valley Times*, April 7, 1898.

³¹⁴ *Belt Valley Times*, April 14, 1898.

³¹⁵ *Belt Valley times*, June 2, 1898.

³¹⁶ *Belt Valley Times*, June 9, 1898.

³¹⁷ *Great Falls Tribune*, September 15, 1898.

proclaiming that people who thought Sand Coulee on the decline would be surprised to learn of this large payroll.³¹⁸ Sand Coulee seemed to die hard.

The request for coal kept increasing and in December the company started using a Mastodon engine to meet the demand of coal being shipped from both mines.³¹⁹ The Mastodon was built by the Central Pacific Railroad in 1892 at the Sacramento Locomotive Works. The engine, essentially a freight locomotive, weighed 105,850 pounds. The cylinder was nineteen inches across with a thirty-inch stroke. The engine never gained great popularity. Huge trains now headed north from Stockett and Sand Coulee. During the month of November the two camps combined to break the record for production from the area.³²⁰

In July of 1899, the Company moved its office building from Sand Coulee to Stockett. A telephone line now connected the Company store in Sand Coulee with the Company store in Stockett, enabling a better flow of communication for local orders. The Company also announced plans to abandon the depot in Sand Coulee around the first of August 1899. The function of the former depot would now be carried on in a “new commodious” structure in Stockett.³²¹ The machine shop had already been moved to Stockett. The dismantling of Sand Coulee would take time but it moved steadily forward. Stockett now claimed its place as the king of the Great Northern coal operation in the Great Falls area.

³¹⁸ *Belt Valley Times*, November 18, 1898.

³¹⁹ *Belt Valley Times*, December 1, 1898.

³²⁰ *Belt Valley Times*, December 8, 1898.

³²¹ *Great Falls Tribune*, July 25, 1899.

Conclusion

My theory is that the Company did not move its operation to Stockett because a two mile underground haulage made the Sand Coulee mine unable to make a profit. First of all the coulee contained several mines that could have been purchased by the Company. In 1889 G.C. Swallow, M.E., Montana's first mine inspector, made a report of the estimated coal in the Largent, Humphrey, Dean and Culbertson & McKean mines. These mines were only a few of the mines in the Sand Coulee area. The Largent mine covered 720 acres with 640 acres overlaying the coal bed. The property would yield 6,925,830 tons of coal with 6,000,000 tons usable after the deduction of waste. This mine alone offered the Company more coal than it had mined to date and would have kept the Company in coal for a number of years. Swallow commented that a six foot coal depth can be worked more economically than any other thickness. The bed in this mine averaged a little over six feet. He said that "very few coal mines are so favorably located for economical work and cheap transportation to market." The Humphrey mine consisted of 130 acres overlying the coal bed. The mine would yield 1,941,276 tons of coal with 1,230,957 tons available for market after waste was accounted for. Of the Humphrey mine Swallow maintained it would be hard to locate a coal bed that could be worked with more mine safety and less expense than the Humphrey mine. The Dean mine consisted of 107 acres of the coal bed. After waste the mine would produce 1,082,160 tons of marketable coal. On the Dean mine he commented that the working tunnel was less than one half mile from the rail bed. In addition to that the mine could be opened even closer to the track. The Culbertson and McKean mine possessed 340 acres of coal bed. After

waste this mine would provide 4,000,000 tons of coal. The Culbertson & McKean mine already possessed a 250 foot tunnel that had been run into the property with some chambers worked out. He commented that the mine's coal seam was high enough to dump cars directly over screens into wagons or rail cars. He also commented that coal cars would come out of the mine with very little effort. Just these four mines would have yielded 12,313,117 tons of marketable coal, far more coal than the Company had mined or would mine for many years, if ever. The point is that that there was sufficient coal easily mined and already basically on Company track.

The physical location of Sand Coulee certainly did not lend itself to a mining operation on the scale that developed in the coulee. If one were to compete for a prize for finding the least desirable place, handicapped by its location, to situate a large mine, Sand Coulee might have been selected. The Stockett operation, although also cramped, did offer considerably more room than Sand Coulee. One wonders why the Company chose either site. The interesting thing is that the coal operation could have been easily located in a physical setting much more conducive to mining. The small towns in the area, Tracy, Number Seven and Centerville presented a more suitable location than either Sand Coulee or Stockett. With these locations available it makes little sense to move an industry as capital intensive and as large as mining, miles away while coal existed close by in almost inexhaustible quantities. The Company, in moving to Stockett, had to build seven miles of track to its new mine. The Company had to build a new infrastructure to support its mining operation and it had to build another town. By moving to Stockett, the Company now had to haul one hundred per cent of its coal six miles further than it did in

Sand Coulee. Further more it was prepared at one time to connect, underground, its Stockett operation with its Sand Coulee operation so it could ship its coal via its facilities at Sand Coulee, thus increasing its underground haulage by a considerable distance.³²²

Did the planners take into account the gamble that a new part of the coal field might have some type of geological impediment to mining, which in fact proved to be the case in Stockett? It turned out the Stockett operation required the largest haulage plant, installed by the Litchfield Car and Machine Company, west of the Mississippi, to haul the mine cars up a 20% grade. This constituted a major disadvantage for the Stockett mine and an expensive one over the long haul.³²³

During the diphtheria epidemic in Sand Coulee the role of government strengthened in the coal camp. The company may have become alarmed at the prospect of the government looking more closely at their affairs in other areas. The Company mine was a careless, tragic place to work and government began to notice that its deadly accident rate was much higher than other mines in the coal field, including Belt. The Company may have foreseen potential problems in this area and thought it easier to start over with a new mine more amenable to safety. Another non-economic reason the Company may have wanted to move to Stockett was control of the Company operation. The Company could correct mistakes by a move to a new location. As an example the Company did not allow liquor within the confines of Stockett. The Company also took a much more protective stance toward the Company store, by not allowing the competition it tolerated in Sand Coulee. Too, the move would permit the Company to weed out its

³²² *Great Falls Tribune*, March 4, 1897.

³²³ *Belt Valley Times*, June 9, 1898.

work force. Anyone who harbored overly strong union sentiments, or who had a reputation of not putting in a full days work or who had crossed the Company in some way could be removed from the work force.

Why did the Company move from Sand Coulee and build an entirely new infrastructure for their mining operation? I suggest the simple answer is water. Stockett had water. None of the other locations had sufficient water. The mine in Sand Coulee experienced continual problems with its boilers because of alkali in the water. Sand Coulee water was so corrosive that the Company actually hauled water from Stockett to the Sand Coulee mine. The local preacher said milk, even cream, was cheaper than water in his house.³²⁴ Stockett water contained little alkali and thus one of the Company's Sand Coulee problems, a big one, would vanish. Stockett provided ample water for the steam driven machinery needed to make immense amounts of coal at the mine mouth ready for market. Steam power requires a tremendous amount of water and only Stockett provided the quantity and especially the quality of water needed for such purposes. On April 5, 1898 the water from Cottonwood Coulee was turned on, supplying the mine, the railroad and the town's people, if they would bear the expense of connecting a pipe to their home. The transport of water from up the coulee to where it was used by the mine required 6,400 feet of four inch pipe. Sand Coulee mining polluted the creek running through Sand Coulee beyond being useful for either human or industrial use. Stockett had good water in the quantity and quality needed by the large industrial operation of big time coal mining. It must always be remembered that the Sand Coulee and the Stockett mines were not inconsequential operations. The only reason great enough to incur the tremendous

³²⁴ *Belt Valley Times*, November 14, 1895.

expense of building an extra seven miles of track and moving the entire operation, along with the town, is the water factor. I would think this same line of reasoning was discussed across kitchen tables in more than one home and that miners in more than one saloon discussed the situation in terms I have outlined. The Company may have put forth the underground haulage distance because it offered a simple, understandable reason that was difficult to argue against. How could an ordinary miner dispute what was profitable or unprofitable for a giant corporation?

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The immense Sand Coulee coal field, covering tens of thousands of acres, was basically exploited by two men, J. J. Hill and Marcus Daly. These two men took great riches from the ground and grudgingly shared this wealth with miners and others engaged in the mining process. The Sand Coulee story also includes two other of Montana's most prominent historical figures, Colonel Broadwater, a Helena banker, and Paris Gibson, the founder of Great Falls. Sand Coulee was a company town controlled by the Great Northern. It was a western industrial town with the attributes of many early industrial towns. The town displayed all the dirt and grime that other industrial towns suffered. It bustled with activity and it exported its wealth. It may have seemed to many miners that the more they worked and went into debt the more Hill and his cronies enjoyed the incredible growth of money and corporate wealth, an apt observation of Company towns of this era.

Sand Coulee was also extremely lucky that Hill hired Henry Burrell, early on, as his mine superintendent. Burrell had a way of fairness and intelligence that helped mold the early community. Burrell earned the allegiance of his men because he always practiced fairness and honesty and very importantly he could get along with the difficult Hill. It is my contention that Sand Coulee's history would have been considerably more fractious without Burrell's leadership. He presented a central figure that all could respect and depend upon, even though he worked for the "big boss."

Both Hill and Burrell understood the need to keep up with technology. Hill provided the capital for the technology and Burrell provided the expertise to put it into production. Burrell managed to circumvent troubles over introducing technology. The new machinery, when introduced, caused little if any animosity among the miners. Mining at this time went through a great revolution in production and the Sand Coulee Coal Company kept abreast of it all. The huge mine and coal factory, at the head of the coulee in Shacktown, would have been one of the most up-to-date and modern in any setting in America. In that sense the miners worked for a good employer. Sure, the mine laws totally favored the company and the “big mine” killed and injured many miners. From 1891 through 1900, at least twenty-four miners met death and countless others suffered accidents of varying degrees of violence. Sand Coulee mines were far more dangerous than Belt. Compared to Sand Coulee, the Belt mines, including the ACM mine, were safe. The Sand Coulee Company mine was a killer. But, Sand Coulee did not experience the catastrophic incidents that killed multiple miners in one calamitous accident. The Company probably meddled in community affairs more than it should have at times. Sand Coulee also had its lengthy strike but came out of it without fatally poisoning the miner’s relationship with the Company, primarily because of Burrell. It must also be said that Hill could not be called the classic absentee owner. He or Company officials often visited Sand Coulee, probably more often than the miners and community wanted. However, the Sand Coulee Coal Company could have been a much worse employer in many respects.

The people who came to mine the coal were first of all white. They were young, with many single men and few single women among them. The workforce was noticeably foreign and transient. The people may have been transitory but their belief system was solid. Too, there is a certain benefit to a transitory population. New people can replace community leaders, either within their own ethnic group or within the total society, providing an opportunity for ambitious people. Ambitious people can cause a lot of trouble without an orderly avenue for advancement. Another stabilizing strength was that they believed in the American dream. A disproportionate amount of the elite in the mine hierarchy came from Scotland. J.J. Hill, Burrell and mine foreman David Lindsay claimed Scottish ancestry. English speaking people also dominated the commerce that flourished in Sand Coulee. The business people served as an elite that helped steady the town. Most of the trades people previously owned businesses in other states and knew how society functioned. Too, boosterism demanded that people not display their differences to the extent that promotion of the town would be harmed. Sand Coulee boosterism was amazing. According to the boosters the camp was practically the leading city of the world. The claims made by the boosters were outlandish but they also knew they were sitting on an outlandish amount of coal. Boosterism gave the people a sense of pride and importance.

The foreign population maintained constant communication with the outside world, especially the Finnish people. The immigrant community kept in close contact with their home country and with their ethnic communities in America. They knew where to look for work and which communities to avoid, because they were on strike or not

hiring for various other reasons. The community as a whole participated in national politics rather than local politics. Politics consumed much of their life through their social clubs, fraternities, debating societies, etc. As an example the Sand Coulee Literary Society suffered from the political interests of the young men who expressed so much interest in politics that the society's mission seemed threatened.¹

Jobs for women were exceedingly scarce but they created their own money earning as best they could. Most of the school teachers, but not all, came from their ranks. School teacher Miss Ina Craven, daughter of the Methodist minister in Sand Coulee, was elected as the County Superintendent of Schools. Several women provided domestic services through dress and hat making shops. Women also earned money by owning restaurants and boarding houses and taking in boarders and running boarding houses. Single women often worked as domestic servants. Actually, Sand Coulee women did quite well in relationship to the time they lived in.

Room is always a factor in how people socialize and Sand Coulee people lived in crowded surroundings. The closer people live to each other the more communal pressure is generated and the more civilizing institutions are needed to keep the people in some semblance of order. Too, the more diverse the population the more diverse the institutions must be. The coulee institutions represented the heart of the community. They were fostered by the middle class of each ethnic group and they granted identity and respectability to their people. If one did a study of this group of people it is highly probable that many of today's Sand Coulee citizens claim this middle class as ancestors. I know in my small high school class of twelve people this would definitely be true. The

¹ *Belt Valley Times*, November 28, 1895.

ethnic groups compromised with each other while keeping as much of their own culture as possible. The reality of life in Sand Coulee demanded that they modify their past and find middle ground where it was practical. Each group came with its own culture and in large part succeeded in living by their culture without sacrificing what was essential to it. The immigrant people in Sand Coulee, especially the English speaking foreigners, and the Finnish people, realized that they had to build a climate of self discipline and respect and the best way to do that involved schools, churches, fraternities and social clubs.

The various ethnic groups sought moral orthodoxy as a firewall to protect family values. They knew that once their group agreed on a shared vision all would fall into place, even the young single men. The women, the merchants and ministers led the movement toward associations. The real work of integrating the community lay with the institutions. The communities established complex organizations in a startlingly short amount of time and they built them from the ground up. Churches, fraternities, social clubs and schools all provided role models for the camp. I also believe that boarding houses could be considered an institution and did more than their share of taming the camp. The moralists, often viewed as trouble makers, brought in the temperance movement but they also compromised. The moralists did not march into saloons with axes or torches. They hated the saloons but they knew the saloon also provided a needed ingredient. The middle class, of all groups, did its job exceedingly well.

Two characteristics distinguish Sand Coulee as they did in other mining towns of the period. Ethnicity stood out loud and clear. The many different spoken languages testified to that. The different ethnic groups were so strong that it did not seem out of

place for an immigrant, a resident of Sand Coulee for many years, to know no language but their own. The other characteristic that played out in many sad scenes was the injury and death always present in the mine. Even the children knew what death was because it affected their lives in such a brutal way. Today ethnic allegiance still lives on in the people who now reside in the community. The danger of the mines also lives on in reminiscent tales told by old timers at family gatherings. Now Sand Coulee is a peaceful hamlet. Many do not know of its exciting, powerful and dynamic past. Sand Coulee, once so important to the industrializing of the west now sits quietly in a unique setting in a small coulee with high sandstone cliffs. The early people saw so much agony, so much turmoil, so much fun and so much love of life, experienced by so many people from many parts of the world. In several ways Sand Coulee was an ugly place to live. Disease was a monster that they contended with on a daily basis. Disease took many children, and just as I am sure not all mine deaths were accounted for in this history, I am sure not all deaths from disease are accounted for.

But in a lot of ways Sand Coulee was a great place to live. Countless people who came to Sand Coulee, be it from abroad or from another part of American soil, came because it offered a better opportunity than where they were from. People stayed in Sand Coulee because they thought it as good as any other place and better than most.

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