

# The Wagon Tongue

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Volume 18 issue 3

Madison Valley History Association

July 2020

website: [www.madisonvalleyhistoryassociation.org](http://www.madisonvalleyhistoryassociation.org)

Visit MVHA on Facebook: "Madison Valley History Association"

Our mission is to develop a museum to house and preserve collections of artifacts, tapes, photographs and stories of historical importance to the Madison Valley and interpret them through display and education.

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**From the Wagon Seat:** Yes, we are still in lockdown. It looks like from the news and the order of the governor that things are not improving. Madison County numbers are shooting up so now it looks like the MVHA will have to shoot for 2021 to start programs. In the meantime, I hope that everyone is well, wearing your mask and staying safe. This would be a great time to sit down and write your family histories or historical events of the Madison Valley. MVHA can put them in the Wagon Tongue or make them into programs for 2021. Stay safe and look forward to 2021. Your Wagon Master Larry Love **Meadow Creek History by Robert R. Hughes** 100 years Ago and Now. Last issue, April 2020 Chapter three James Alexander McAllister by Dr. Mae Pankey was completed. (Editor's note..if you have misplaced your April and January 2020 issues and want to reread the first three chapters or if you are new to the MVHA you may find these back issues on our website listed above.

## **CHAPTER FOUR, MINING** by R. Hughes

Economic hard times in the 1880s and the early 1900s plus an extended drought caused unrest in the eastern seaboard and middle-west, triggering a migration to the exciting gold fields and homesteading opportunities opening up the West and northwest.

Alder Gulch, just over the hill to the west of Meadow Creek fueled Montana's most exciting placer gold rush, and the Revenue hill with its rich gold mines bordering the Meadow Creek area to the North were attractive destinations for migrating land and gold seekers. Meadow Creek, situated in between those two industrious areas, did not go unnoticed by the ambitious settlers.

The Monitor Mine was famous for having produced some fantastically rich ore during its productive years. One special deposit yielded some ore that assayed six thousand dollars a ton "*The mine superintendent, Roger Knox, sent a sample of this ore to the World's Fair in San Francisco in 1895 and received first prize.* (Source: <http://www.deq.state.mt.us/AbandonedMines/linkdocs/techdocs/117Ctech.asp>).

My Uncle Ed was employed in the Revenue Mine about 1901 or 1902. During rescue operations, after some kind of a blasting accident, he severely smoke damaged his lungs, dying of pneumonia in 1908. My Uncle Bill also worked in various mines on the Revenue Hill, including the Monitor.

Hard rock mining on the Revenue Hill in the early days was not easy, one factor being that the rich ore was close to the surface. Even when available, pneumatic tools could not be used due to the vibration. The drilling had to be done by hand with a short handle, two point hammer called "single jack". A "double jack" was a long handled eight-pound hammer but it could not be used in the stopes and drifts because of low ceilings. The single jack had a leather thong loop which went around your wrist and if you became adept enough, you could release your grip on the handle on the down stroke and whip the head of the hammer down on top of the drill without jarring your hand.

The drills were of tempered steel with hand forged star points. All of the steel for a shift had to be sharpened for the next shift. Miners who learned how to sharpen steel to just the right temper qualified for top pay and a top job. The steel had to be tempered just right so as to not break or flatten. Uncle Bill was an expert, having worked in both the Revenue and the Monitor mines. The drills were of various lengths; short for starting holes which were replaced with longer ones as the hole got deeper. Each time, after hitting the drill, you had to lift the drill with the other hand and turn it slightly in order to break out a clean hole down which dynamite sticks could be tamped. Every once in a while it was necessary to pull the drill out of the hole, clean the hole with a little long handled spoon and pour in a little water in order to keep down the dust and perhaps make the solid rock drill easier.

In 1938 and 1939 Uncle Bill and his son leased the Monitor mine property. The old mines on the hill had been abandoned long enough that the remote owners were glad to lease them to anybody who wanted to try their luck. The price of gold had gone up to 32 dollars an ounce and the hard workers (Continued on pg 2)

**Membership:** New members since April 2020.

MVHA thanks the following for joining.

**Jennifer Anderson**, Bozeman, former member has rejoined. Welcome back Jennifer.

**Membership update** Just check your address label on the envelope and you can easily tell if your membership is paid or which month you are due. Your membership is good for a full year from the month you purchase it and you are not penalized for submitting early. If your 2020 membership is due during July, August, September or if you are past due, you will find a membership renewal form included with this issue. Memberships are \$10.00 for students, \$15.00 for Individual, \$20.00 for Families, \$50.00 for Businesses, \$100.00 for Patrons and \$500 or more for Benefactor. If you are inviting someone to join or if you want to purchase your membership before it is due, just write name, mailing address and type of membership on a slip of paper and mail with membership fee to MVHA at P. O. Box 474, Ennis, MT 59729.

Thank you to all renewing members who have generously submitted your renewal memberships. The MVHA Board of Directors appreciates all memberships that are purchased and your support as this allows them to have funds and membership to continue the work of developing a museum in the Madison Valley and arranging programs for the community.

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**Receiving your Wagon Tongue** Several years ago the MVHA started using non-profit organization postage stamps. The MVHA saves a considerable amount of money since we mail out most of the quarterly newsletters, **The Wagon Tongue**. MVHA did not know that non-profit stamps are not forwarded and if you have a forwarding address during the winter months or any other time, your Wagon Tongue is dumped in the trash. It is not returned to sender and MVHA does not know who you are. Please let the MVHA know by phone to Shirley Love 406-682-5780 or by email to [whitneypranch@wispwest.net](mailto:whitneypranch@wispwest.net) or to MVHA PO Box 474, Ennis, Mt 59729 if you have a forwarding address and the address labels will be updated. Also let MVHA know the approximate date you leave in the fall and the approximate date you will arrive in the spring so the correct address label will be used. **Thank you to those who have already provided this information.**

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(Continued from pg 1) could pick over the old mines, inside and out, sort out good ore, run the waste dump stuff through a screen and send to the smelter. Unemployed cousins like myself and my 2

brothers could come along at their own risk and take their chances on striking it rich. What actually happened was that we barely made groceries if we worked hard and carefully.

The Monitor Mine adjoined the Revenue and Uncle Bill knew that ore had also been left in it, up near the surface. Being near the surface, the rock was all broken up dangerous to work in there because there was no solid ceiling like it would have been farther down. The drifts (tunnels) left by the old timers were only big enough to crawl through on hands and knees. The mining procedure we had used consisted of scraping and picking ore into a sack and dragging it back out to the entrance, carefully. Any unwise bump on the ceiling might bring the whole thing crashing down on your head. This is what they were doing when I joined the crew.

Real trouble developed only a few days later. I had learned enough to identify good ore by that time and had been given a spot of my own to clean out. My brother Ed had another spot, also John and Uncle Bill. Lewis may have been outside sorting ore. All at once we heard this crash and rumble and a cry for help. Uncle Bill was buried. He was pinned down by a big rock. I don't know how John got him out of there but pretty quick he came out, dragging his Dad with him. Bill was a tough old character and refused to go to the doctor. He crippled around for a while with what must have been broken ribs, but he didn't believe in lying around much and soon was back on the active list.

We wanted to get rich, but not that badly, so we picked up our tools and sent what ore we had to the smelter.

*Editor's note: On page 19 of the original manuscript there is a photo of the old Monitor Mine. There is not enough clarity to try to reproduce it for this article. The original manuscript can be found at the Museum Research Room and available after the museum opens again.*

*Chapter Five, Homesteading by R. Hughes continues in the October 2020 issue.*

**Memories of our departed Madison Valley folks.**

The MVHA aspires to have a genealogical record after the passing of all folks who were born and raised in the Madison Valley and anyone who moved here for work, owned a business, or spent considerable time here as each of these folks are part of the historical record of the Madison Valley. Please share your records, stories and other interesting information of those who have passed on to make these records as complete as possible. They will not be forgotten.

**Molly Cummings Minot Cook** passed away on April 2, 2020 at the age of 102 (Continued on pg 3)

(Continued from pg 2) in her Greenwich, CT home. She was born August 5, 1917 in Seattle, WA to Wilbur L. and Marian (Engle) Cummings. Her father had been sent to Seattle as Judge Advocate during WW I. Molly moved with her parents to Greenwich, CT when the war was over. She attended Greenwich Academy, Rosemary Hall in Greenwich, CT and then Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, NY. Her mother taught her to fly and Molly obtained her pilot license at the age of 18 and flew her own plane in many intercollegiate air meets.

In 1939 she married William Minot who was in the Navy and Molly joined the Civil Air Patrol. She taught aerial navigation and communications to the enlisted Air Corps Cadets. After the war, Molly attended classes at the New York School of Interior Design and New York School of Modern Photography. Mr. Minot passed away in 1963 and Molly married Hobert Cook. After Mr. Cook's passing, Molly took over the management of the family cattle ranch in the Madison Valley in Montana. Many of our old-timers will have remembered Marian Cummings and her ranch, the Corral Creek Ranch. MVHA members, John Scully and Larry Love, both worked during their high school years for Molly's mother, Marian, as a "jack of all trades" mowing and trimming her lawn and any other tasks she needed doing. They both can share interesting stories of their time working for Marian.

**Ron Holt** passed away on April 12, 2020 at his home in Oklahoma. He was born in Ennis, MT in 1959 to Earl and Alice Holt. He attended school in Ennis and graduated from Ennis High School in 1978. He graduated from Montana Tech with a degree in Petroleum Engineering. He held many jobs throughout his 32 year career with Schlumberger, an international oilfield service company.

**Kenneth W. Hall** passed away April 22, 2020 in Ennis, MT. Kenneth is remembered by the MVHA for helping form a vision and plan to start a museum for the Madison Valley. A memory of Kenneth will be printed when necessary genealogical information such as birth date and parent names, etc. are determined.

**Rodger Neil "Cub" Kent**, long time MVHA member, passed away on April 23, 2020 in Ennis, MT. He was born on the Kent Ranch at Varney on August 26, 1939 to Rodger Gillespie Kent and Ruth Marie Althouse Kent. Neil's father, Rodger Gillespie Kent was born in Butte, MT August 23, 1908, son of Fred and Esther Gillespie Kent. When Rodger was three years old the family moved to a ranch at Pony, MT. In 1914 the Kents purchased a ranch on Wigwam Creek at Varney, MT and moved there. **3**

Rodger attended school at Varney and went to high school in Butte and Ennis. He graduated from Ennis school in 1930. On Dec. 31, 1933 he married Ruth Althouse and they lived at the Kent ranch at Varney. The Kents had two sons, John Frederick (known as Jack) and Rodger Neil. Rodger and Ruth took over the ranch after the death of Rodger's father, Fred, and continued to raise cattle.

The Kent boys grew up on the ranch. They helped with the cattle and raised bum lambs. The Varney school consolidated with District No 52 at Ennis and both boys attended school in Ennis.

Neil graduated from Ennis High School in 1957 and graduated from Western Montana College in Dillon with a degree in secondary education in June of 1962. During summers Neil worked for the Thexton Ranch, the Beardsley Ranch, the Ennis Fish Hatchery and for the Forest Service. He was drafted into the Army in 1962 and attended an electronics school at Fort Bliss at El Paso, Texas. He spent the most of his time at a missile base at Treynor, Iowa. He returned home in October a little late for obtaining a teaching position. He had an opportunity to take flying lessons and spent 6 months in Helena learning to fly. While trying to decide whether to teach school or continue with the flying, he was offered a position at the First Madison Valley Bank which was newly organized. He took the bank job and has been there since. Neil was a member of the MVHA for 20 years and was treasurer of the Board of directors for many of those years. He was a very valued member. *Kent Family history from Progressive Years Madison County Vol II page 748-749 Rodger and Ruth (Althouse) Kent written by Ruth Kent.*

**Sherry Ruth (Armstrong) Henry** passed away at her home in McAllister on May 10, 2020. Sherry was born to James and Ruth (Baker) Armstrong in Bozeman, MT on January 18, 1950. Her childhood and youth were spent in Seattle, WA where she graduated from Tyee High School in 1968.

Each summer her family would make a trip to Montana and the Madison Valley where her father and mother were raised, to visit family. In 1982, Sherry left Seattle to make her home in the Madison Valley where her family roots were. Shortly after arriving in Montana, she met her future husband, John Henry. They were married on her birthday, January 18, 1987. Sherry is a niece to long time MVHA member, Kate (Armstrong) Robison.

**Ronal Edmond Miller** passed away on May 23, 2020 at the Madison Valley Hospital in Ennis, MT. Ron was born on Jan. 25, 1946 in Groton, SD. When Ron was 14, his family relocated to Everett, WA. *(Memories cont on pg 4)*

(*Memories continued from pg 3*) where Ron attended high school graduating in 1964. After high school he went to school to become a machinist. In 1973 he moved his family to Bozeman and then Belgrade. He began working for Kenyon Noble Lumber Company and began his career of 33 years working his way up to the Roof Truss plant. While working in the lumber yard in Bozeman, he met Judy and they were married in March, 1979. In 1994 Ron and Judy bought property in McAllister, MT and built a house there and moved permanently to McAllister in 2009. During retirement Ron became very active in the community.

**Dorothy (Garrard) Dougherty** passed away on June 5, 2020 at the Madison Valley Manor in Ennis, MT. She was born to Fritz and Vera (Sweetland) Garrard on November 6, 1927 in Havre, MT. She graduated from Park County High School in Livingston, MT in 1945. Dorothy was a Home Economics major attending Montana State College from 1945 to 1948. Dorothy married David Dougherty on June 27, 1948 in Livingston. They lived in Ennis from 1950 to 1960, spent one year in Portland, OR and moved to Seattle, WA where they lived for 25 years. After retiring from the Seattle area, Dorothy and David returned to their home in Ennis that they had kept for all those years.

**John "Randy" Green** passed away on June 12, 2020. He was born in Salamanca, NY on May, 23, 1951 to Bernard and Phyllis (Perry) Green. He completed his education at his birth place and served in the U.S. Army, spending nearly 3 tours with 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam. He started his higher education while in the Army through the University of the Americas and completed Bachelor's and Master's degrees at Colorado University in Boulder, CO. He was in the construction business for many years. His mother-in-law is long time MVHA member, Beverly Claassen.

**Pamela Elizabeth Parsons** passed away on June 13, 2020 in Ennis, MT. She was born on April 3, 1958 in Columbus, OH to Frank and Jeanne Parsons. The family soon moved to Lucketts, VA where Pam and her sister, Barbara enjoyed country life on a small farm. After high school Pam did some modeling and a job at Loudoun Travel lead her to travel and a trip to Paradise, MT in the 1990's. Several Montana vacations later found her a second home in McAllister, MT. Waitressing at the Bear Claw in McAllister was her first Montana job. In 2004, she and a friend took over the West of the Madison in Ennis, MT. After a few years, she went to Connecticut and on to Mesquite, NV. She returned to Montana full time and worked as a bookkeeper for

several business and went full circle ending up at the McAllister Inn, formerly the Bear Claw where she worked until her illness.

**John David Ellingsen** passed away May 15, 2020 in his favorite town, Virginia City, MT. John was born in Great Falls, MT on May 17, 1947. John attended school in Great Falls and graduated from Great Falls High in 1965. He went on to Montana State University in Bozeman, MT in the ROTC program and graduated with Bachelor's degree in industrial arts and a Master's Degree in history. John's memory was best recorded by Nick Gerock of the *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, Dec. 14, 2002.

John Ellingsen remembers the first time he came here in 1952. The hills around town were mostly barren of trees, picked clean over the decades by miners in need of wood. The buildings leaned, wasting away under the Montana sun.

And the town was largely deserted, save for a few old miners who had long since quit working claims.

The 5-year-old Ellingsen revered the Virginia City, founded in 1863 when gold was discovered in Alder Gulch, from the day his mother and John first visited. "That's when I really got hooked on the place," Ellingsen, 55, says. "And I made my mother bring me back every year."

Little did that young boy know that he'd end up spending his life saving Virginia City. For three decades, Ellingsen has preserved the historic buildings in Virginia City and rebuilt Nevada City, another mining town just down the road.

"It's not a job with John," says Randy Kleindorfer, Virginia City operations chief. "It's his life, for sure."

On one of those early trips, Ellingsen and his mother met Charles Bovey, a wealthy Great Falls businessman with a passion for history who first came to Virginia City in 1944, and, like Ellingsen, was enamored with the town's buildings.

But Virginia City was crumbling to the ground. As Bovey looked around town, he discovered a man pillaging the back wall off an old building for firewood. "He said, 'They're only good for firewood anyway and we're helping the town out,'" Ellingsen says of Bovey's encounter. "And he said, 'What do you care? You don't own it so mind your own business.'"

Bovey started buying downtown buildings and the artifacts that came with them, sometimes for back taxes or as little as \$100. That's all they were worth, townspeople agreed, and they were eager to sell.

"The word got around town quick that there was a sucker in town who had a lot of money and liked old buildings," Ellingsen says. Bovey eventually gave Ellingsen keys to the historic buildings, inviting them to look around. He also began (*continued pg 5*)

(continued from pg 4) relocating old buildings from around the West in Nevada City. John was committed to eight years in the Army because of his time in ROTC, but Bovey told Ellingsen to come work for him when he got out of the Army. The Vietnam War wound down, and in 1972 Ellingsen was able to join Bovey.

He has never had another job, never married, never moved away.

In Ellingsen, Bovey found the perfect partner—someone just as passionate about history with the hands-on skills to save and reconstruct buildings.

They set about building Nevada City from buildings salvaged around the West, with the help of a few hired ranch hands.

In Virginia City, Bovey didn't want to build a town, just keep the buildings there from falling down.

Bovey instilled his theory of a "suspended state of deterioration" into Ellingsen, meaning a building's condition should be held in check, but not restored. Walls lean, roofs sag and the wood continues to fade under the sunlight.

"Anybody can build a building that looks old, but to have a real one is something else," Ellingsen says.

What makes Virginia City so special compared to other mining towns, however, are the artifacts, Ellingsen explains. The town has one of the best collections of "new old stock," or old things still in the original box, in the country.

When Bovey found out that a woman had dozens of pairs of old shoes from a Lewistown department store that went broke, he bought them. The coffee house has a violin machine, one of only six in the world, Ellingsen says.

And Ellingsen's favorite building, the McGovern Dry Goods store, still has ladies underwear sitting exactly where it was in the 1940s when the two sister shopkeepers closed the door to go take care of an ailing brother. "It's a true time capsule," he says.

Ellingsen and Bovey didn't just work on buildings. They dove into historic research, looking over newspaper accounts, land records and fire insurance maps. Ellingsen interviewed old timers who had spent their lives in Virginia City, trying to piece together the overall puzzle of the town. They went through mail left behind by shop owners. Letters from distributors

sent to grocery store owner S.R. Buford sometimes had labels for a new line of vegetables. Ellingsen says about one in 1,000 contained a label, but there were enough that they painstakingly fit the labels on cans for the store displays that tourists see today.

Bovey subsidized Virginia City to the tune of \$200,000 a year, a loss he was willing to endure to see the town saved. Then in 1978, Bovey died, leaving the estate to son Ford Bovey, who shared his father's love of history, but got into financial difficulties.

Virginia City faced its end. Creditors wanted their money, and the artifacts drew the attention of auction houses like Sotheby's and Christie's. The buildings, too, caught the eye of a Japanese company and others who wanted to construct an old West town elsewhere. It was Virginia City's darkest hour, Ellingsen says, and the stress wore on him.

"We were faced with the very grave danger that all these artifacts would be auctioned off. ... Ford was hounded almost every day," Ellingsen says.

Ellingsen started a drive in 1989 to get the state to buy Bovey's properties in Virginia City. That first year he got into the Capitol, the next year he talked to a local legislator and by 1995 Rep. Karl Ohs carried a bill that died by a single vote in the House on the last day of the session. It looked like Virginia City's treasures were coming up for sale.

"I got diabetes," Ellingsen says. "The doctors told me it wasn't from eating too much sugar, it was from stress - mainly the stress of what would happen to this place."

Finally, in 1997, the Legislature voted to buy all of Bovey's properties for \$6.5 million, including artifacts and trains.

Ellingsen became an instant bureaucrat, working for the state's Heritage Preservation Commission. Gone were the days of working on the buildings. Although he'd never touched a computer before 1997, today he spends most of his time in front one while directing a crew of 14 who work on buildings.

He also gives tours, spinning tales about the people who made Virginia City famous.

Kleindorfer says tourists often rank Ellingsen's stories as the highlight of their visit to Virginia City.

(continued on pg 6)

**For Your Reading Pleasure**

Jim Bridger Mountain Man a biography by Stanley Vestal This book contains a detailed and insightful biography of Jim Bridger. Author paints a bold and authentic picture of a brave explorer and a richness of the American nation when it was still young. Readers..your editor needs your book ideas in the history category to pass along to the other readers. Please help.

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**Looking Ahead** No MVHA activities planned until further notice.

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**(Memories continued from pg 5)**

“They don’t say the buildings, or the theater,” he says. “I’m sure some people don’t like his humor, but it’s not offensive to anybody, and it’s not boring to anybody.”

Virginia City Curator of Collections Pat Roath is responsible for keeping track of more than 250,000 artifacts. She says she’s amazed Ellingsen alone kept track of so many historic objects all those years. “In some ways I think it was hard for him when we all came here,” she says. “It was his baby.

“It would kill John to move or go anyplace else.”

*Editors note: Pat Roath, former MVHA member, eventually left Virginia City and continued her career at the Museum of the Rockies in Bozeman.*

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**History Tidbit** Words and phrases every day! But do you know how they came into being?

**CURFEW** The word “curfew” comes from a French phrase “couvre” which means “cover the fire”. It was used to describe the time of blowing out all the lamps and candles. It was later adapted into Middle English as “curfeu”, which later became the modern “curfew”. In the early American colonies homes had no real fireplaces so a fire was built in the center of the room. In order to make sure a fire did not get out of control during the night it was required that by an agreed upon time, all fires would be covered with a clay pot called a “curfew”.

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John Ellingsen’s memories brought the history of Virginia City, MT to my thoughts. It is the county seat of Madison County and was the first town incorporated in Montana in 1864. This famous Montana town was first named Varina, in honor of the wife of Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy. But a local judge, G.G.Bissell, refused to write the name in a legal document, declaring he would “be dammed first” a sentiment which would likely have been echoed by many Civil War Veterans in the area, for whom the memory of the conflict was still a fresh and emotional memory. Bissell wrote “Virginia” at the top of the legal document and so the name was established and later it was known as Virginia City.

**MVHA Board of Directors**

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- Meetings and programs held monthly on the **third** Thursday of each month or as scheduled. Watch the *Madisonian*, posters and your email for details of time, place and program. Please call Larry Love 682-5780 for date of board meeting..*The Wagon Tongue* will be published quarterly. Next issue will be October 2020. Articles of historic interest and memories of the departed are welcomed. Your editor needs your history stories!
- Editor: Shirley Love whitneytranch@wisptest.net
- Contributing editors: *Madisonian* Obituaries, *Meadow Creek History* by Robert R.Hughes *Progressive Years* Madison County, Montana Vol II *Rodger and Ruth (Althouse) Kent* pg 748-749 *Bozeman Dailey Chronicle* Nick Gerock Dec. 14, 2002 *John Ellingsen Preserving Virginia City* History Tidbits pg 6 provided by Kevin Brenneke *Names on the Face of Montana* Roberta Carkeek Cheney Virginia City pg 270

**Printing of this Newsletter was generously provided by First Madison Valley Bank**

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In May 1863 six prospectors led by young Bill Fairweather arrived in the hills along the Madison River. Henry Edgar, a member of the party, wrote in his journal, “We crossed the Madison and came up...Wigwam Gulch..camped beside Bald Mountain..killed an elk..remained during the afternoon and overnight to dry and smoke the meat. On May 26, 1863 they had arrived in a gulch. Fairweather and I were to make camp and stand guard...About sundown, Bill went across the creek to picket the horses..saying ‘There’s a bit of bedrock projecting..we better go over and see if we can get enough money to buy a little tobacco.’ So Bill took the pick and shovel and I took a pan and crossed the creek..while I was washing down the dirt, he scratched around in the bedrock with his knife.’I found a scad.’ I called back. ‘If you have one, I have a thousand,’ and so I had. We spent the next morning measuring the ground and staking it off. ‘What shall we call this gulch?’ So I called it Alder Gulch on account of the heavy clump of alders along the creek. This strike caused a gold rush to the gulch and Virginia City sprung up and boomed. The town was laid out in June 1863 and within 8 months there were 500 dwellings, including stores and saloons. By the fall of 1864 there was 18,000 folks in Virginia City. Names on the Face of Montana Roberta Carkeek Cheney pg 270.