

Maureen and Mike

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This transcript represents the nearly verbatim record of an unrehearsed interview. Please bear in mind that you are reading the spoken word rather than the written word.

Oral History Number: 038-004

Speakers: Terrence McGlynn, George Lubick, Rick Gleason

Date of Interview: circa 1975

Project: Ghost Towns of Montana Audio Recordings Collection

[introduction music plays]

Terrence McGlynn: Highland City is a real ghost town. The buildings are few, but the scenery is excellent. The town's remains are only about 25 miles from Butte, in an area where the U.S. Forest Service maintains a lookout on Red Mountain. The town once had nearly 600 buildings and about 3,000 people. It is quiet, a real ghost town.

George Lubick: The remains of Highland City are located partway up a road where the Forest Service maintains a lookout, affording a spectacular view of the entire area. The road is unique—it contains many switchbacks—but the trip is apparently so worthwhile that some 600 visitors enjoyed the view last year. With that kind of traffic, one could not expect to find much left of the town, but it was a most interesting town at one time and its history has been preserved by several people. Mike Bowman, who lived in the area and was a friend of Howard Stratton, the owner of the Stratton Mill and the only permanent resident in the area today, has recorded some of the story of Highland City.

The town was the home of several thousand people during the 1868 season, more than were in Butte at that time. Gold had been discovered as early as 1866 by the Coleman brothers. Estimates of how much gold was removed from the area range from \$3 million to \$15 million. At any rate, it was a substantial amount. The town had 300 residences, 10 saloons, and 5 dance halls, but there is no indication that a church ever existed in Highland City. Today, to quote Mike Bowman, "the town is so ghostly that even the ghosts have fled." A few buildings remain on what was once the main street: they are the brewery and the blacksmith's shop. If one looks closely, he can see a kind of outline of the town because shrubbery has grown where the log cabin foundations rotted into the soil. It is difficult to believe, looking at the few remains of cabins, that there were miners and their families—some 5,000 of them—who came to the area from such places as Alder Gulch, Bannack, Gold Creek, Butte, and other early day camps. The miners were, of course, not alone; there were merchants, liquor dealers, gamblers, dance hall girls, and others. Dances would run as long as two days and two nights and, once scheduled, were seldom canceled. In 1867, a dance was held in spite of a snowstorm: 200 men shoveled a six-mile trail into Highland City.

One story connected with Highland City concerns Jonny Kern, who lived there for 57 years and who found, in 1908, a gold nugget that weighed more than five pounds and was sold for nearly \$1,300. Jonny was supposedly in love with a girl named Lulu, who later became known as "Shotgun Liz." She acquired the name after she emptied a shotgun's contents into a too-amorous admirer. Liz died in 1867 and is buried in the highlands. Jonny was faithful to her memory and tended her grave while he lived. The story goes that Jonny wanted to be buried

beside Liz, but he died during the winter and was found by the Strattons in February of 1923. It's difficult enough to dig into the mountains in the summer; it was out of the question in the winter. Jonny, one of the first to live in Highland City and the last to leave, is buried in Mountain View Cemetery.

Highland City is a most-interesting true ghost town. It is recommended because of what it once was, not for what remains. The area is one of the most beautiful in the entire state, and one can see far from atop the 10,000-foot high lookout atop the mountain. The 14 switchbacks on the way to the lookout provide thrilling and challenging work for any driver. It is today a strong, beautiful area that causes one to feel both humble and proud, and to wonder if the spirit and dedication of the men who lived when Highland City, too, was alive.

[transition music]

TM: From Highland City, one may travel to Pony. Pony is less exciting than Highland City because people live there today, and the touch of civilization is evident. But, it is fun to go where \$15 million worth of gold has been mined, and Pony has an interesting sound.

[transition music]

Rick Gleason: At least two towns and three men have laid claim to the title, "Pony." The first town to carry the name was in Fergus County, and apparently was closed by an inspector for the U.S. Post Office. The distribution system, consisting of a pail or barrel, was not up to standard. The Pony that survives today carries the name of "Pony" Smith, who prospected in that area as early as 1868. Another "Pony," whose last name was Gilbert, ran a saloon in the town. Pony today is a semi-ghost town, with a population of approximately 15 people. The peak population was about 1,000 in 1877. The town survived two stampedes and has produced about \$15 million worth of gold. The town was considered important enough to have a spur line of the Northern Pacific [Railroad] built into it in 1900. Predictions were made as late as 1903 that Pony would be an extensive, permanent gold camp. The expert who predicted such a great future for Pony would not be able to find the evidence of his dream today.

Pony's first quartz mill, built by the Mallorys, was set up in the winter of 1875-76. It was a five stamp, water-powered mill. Five stamps were added for another mill; unfortunately, one of the Mallorys was killed during installation of the additional stamps. The future looked bright, and in 1876, Pony managed to receive a post office. When a stampede to the district came in about 1877, building commenced, and, by 1878, Pony had two hotels, 40 houses, a blacksmith shop, and, of course, a saloon. But, the miners left for other areas, and the population dropped to 100.

In 1900, Pony experienced another boom with the installation of an electric, 100 stamp mill. The mill turned out to be a mistake and was sold later to a wrecking company; most of the mill became sheep sheds. As late as 1927, the Japanese leased the mining property near Pony.

Although they were unsuccessful in their efforts, there was increased activity and, as late as 1948, Pony had a population of 1,000.

[transition music]

RG: Pony, today, is worth seeing, partly because of the mountain location and partly because there remains a kind of mining town flavor that is worth savoring as one looks at the buildings and, maybe, thinks of the little prospector named Pony, who just might be the ghost that remains there in the town.

TM: We leave Pony for the last part of the trip. The word is “go east” into central Montana to Castle, Neihart, and Landusky.

[music plays]

Unknown Speaker: Ghost Towns of Montana was funded by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare through the Center for Continuing Education and Summer Programs at the University of Montana, Dr. Patricia Douglas, director. Ghost Towns of Montana was produced and narrated by Terrence McGlynn, from the Montana College of Mineral Science and Technology in Butte, Montana. Sound mixing by Dave Edelman of Montana Tech and the production staff of the Center for Continuing Education. Songs are traditional American and Irish folk songs, sung by Walt Robertson, Cisco Houston, Pete Seager, and the Almanac Singers. The stories of Elkhorn, Granite, and Marysville were told by Dick Maney with an additional story of Marysville by Joe Boyle, both from Butte. The story of Pioneer, by Dr. Dennis Haley; Rimini, Dr. Charles Wideman; Red Lion, Dave Edelman; Virginia City, Leo Maney; Garnet, Bill Black; Highland City, George Lubick; Pony, Rick Gleason; Castle, Elaine Hardy; Neihart, Dr. Jack Goble; Landusky, Marlys Hansen, all from the Montana College of Mineral Science and Technology.

[End of Recording]