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Liberty's Last Post Office: A Story of a Gold Mining Camp in Washington State

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Liberty’s Last Post Office

A Story of a Gold Mining Camp in Washington State

The Four Nicholson Brothers, Al, Bill, Tom and Clarence, Were Part of the Liberty Story for Sixty Years

Includes 65 Photographs and a Name Index of Over 400 People in the Swauk Area of Washington State

Wesley C. Engstrom
2016
Wesley C Engstrom. I first came to the historic gold mining camp of Liberty in 1971 when I purchased Mamie Caldwell’s old house in Liberty intending to use it as a weekend home-base while prospecting for gold. I did not have much interest in Liberty history at the time. That changed in 1986 when I married Ralph and Henrietta Fackler’s daughter, Carole. Carole was born in Liberty and her mother was the town historian. In 1993 I retired from Boeing after 33 years and Carole and I moved into Mamie’s old house while building a brand new “old” house on the hill where the Liberty school once stood. After completing the house Liberty history became my passion. I started with the material my mother-in-law, Henrietta Fackler, had researched and have been collecting stories and pictures of Liberty ever since.

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Clarence and Thomas Nicholson started the store and post office in 1934 and continued to operate it until Clarence died in 1950. It was the last business in the Liberty gold mining camp and its demise was the beginning of a decline in the the camp. A decline that was reversed in 1974 when the camp became an historic site.
Photo courtesy of Patti Nicholson.
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Introduction

There was once a large center of activity in the Swauk Basin of upper Kittitas County. The place is called Liberty. Liberty was once the most action packed place in Kittitas County. At least it was for a while after gold was discovered in Swauk Creek. Like many gold camps the place boomed and ebbed over the years. Unlike some other places it never quite went completely bust. It came close, and fortunately for some it didn’t. It still exists today as a living ghost town.

The Liberty story has been told before in various ways. This telling of the story revolves around the end of Liberty’s role as an active mining community and its close call with complete destruction. It is about four Nicholson brothers and their store, the last post office in Liberty, and the people who later saved the mining camp as a historic site to show the next generation what came before.

My thanks to Fred Krueger for preserving Liberty history in the form of oral interviews of old time miners and for his encouragement to write history in my own way. That is, to simply preserve history, not to rewrite it. Thanks also to Pattie Nicholson, Robert Nicholson’s wife, and Warren Leyde, Freida Nicholson’s nephew, for graciously sharing family documents and pictures that made this story possible.
Liberty’s Location. The gold mining camp of Liberty is located in Washington State in Kittitas County on the south side of the Wenatchee Mountain Range. The Wenatchee Mountain Range is an east-west trending range that extends from the north-south Cascade Mountain Range to the Columbia River on the east. The summit of the Wenatchee Range defines the north boundary of Kittitas County. The Liberty mining camp is located in a basin drained by Swauk Creek and is the center of a small gold deposit with types of gold unique in Washington state—large nuggets and crystalline wire specimens. The large nuggets occur in the ancient channels of Swauk and Williams Creeks, the crystalline gold occurs mainly on Flag Mountain. The first Liberty mining camp was at the junction of the Swauk and Williams Creek, the second camp (Meaghersville) was two miles east on Williams Creek at the base of Flag Mountain. Map by Wes Engstrom
Four Brothers and A Boy In Liberty

Welcome to Liberty, Washington as it Once Was—1940s. The Nicholson store, post office, gas station and garage is on the left and the community hall on the right. Flag Mountain is on the right above the community hall and Table Mountain, covered with snow, is in the background. The two garage buildings on the left still stand, the gas station building is gone. The community hall is also gone and a new community hall now stands on the site.  Photo courtesy of Patti Nicholson.

It was a beautiful warm day in July, 1951 in Liberty Washington. Bobby Nicholson was finished working for the day with his uncle, Al Nicholson. They had just torn down another uncle’s garage, salvaging the metal roofing and lumber. Clarence Nicholson died June 2nd the year before, also on a clear, sunny day like many a day Bobby experienced while growing up in Liberty. His father and three uncles were an important part of Liberty’s history, although he didn’t really know or care that much about history as a child. Liberty was simply paradise for a young boy. There were mountains for exploring, fish for catching, game for hunting, horses for riding, snow for skiing and old miners for telling stories. Stories about finding fabulous pockets of gold, having great Fourth of July celebrations and going to the Saturday night dances at the community hall. These things were coming to an end in Liberty. The closing of the post office, part of which he was now tearing down, signaled the end of the glory days for Liberty and the beginning of a living ghost town.
Four Nicholson Brothers Follow An Uncle to Liberty

Four sons were born to Jacob Allen Nicholson and Katherine Dunning: John Allen in Wisconsin in 1875, William George in Olympia, Washington in 1878, Thomas Addis in Olympia, Washington in 1880 and Clarence Emmet in California in 1884. All four became part of Liberty’s history, one for his entire adult life, another briefly and two for most of their lives.

The four followed their Mother’s brother, Pat Dunning, to the Swauk area beginning in 1896. Pat Dunning filed squatters’ rights on 160 acres five miles north of Liberty and John Allen Nicholson filed on 160 acres next to him. This was before the land was surveyed and before the Wenatchee National Forest was created in 1907. Pat Dunning’s 160 acre homestead reverted to the County and then to the Forest Service when

Bobby Nicholson’s Father and Uncles in 1888. The four Nicholson brothers, Thomas at the table, William standing on the left, John Allen on the right and Clarence sitting, were part of the Liberty, Washington gold camp from 1896 until 1961. Beginning in 1896 they each in turn followed their uncle, Pat Dunning, to Liberty to seek their fortune. They never found a fortune but were part of the Liberty community for sixty years. Thomas was Bobby’s father and Bobby was the only descendant of the four brothers and hence was a favorite of them all. It was paradise for such a boy growing up in Liberty. Nicholson family photos of Bobby illustrate how the mining camp once was. Photo taken by the Rogers studio in Olympia, Washington and provided by Patti Nicholson, Bobby Nicholson’s widow.
the taxes were not paid. John Allen Nicholson managed to pay his taxes during the Great Depression, and his wife was able to sell the property after he died in 1961. The property is now known as “Liberty Mountain,” a community on 69 lots for vacation homes.

William (Bill) George Nicholson came to the Swauk area, married a local girl from Swauk Prairie and then, when gold endeavors in Liberty didn’t pan out, moved to Kelso, Washington where he was a longshoreman for his life.

Thomas (Tom) Addison Nicholson came to Liberty and tried his hand at gold mining. He then went to Ellensburg where he operated a garage before returning to Liberty in 1934 to join his brother Clarence in a store, post office, service station and garage business.

Clarence Emmet Nicholson also tried his hand in mining activities in Liberty before moving to Ellensburg. He returned to Liberty in 1934 to open a store and post office which he grew by adding a garage and service station. The business was the center of Liberty’s social fabric until 1951.

Bobby’s Grandmother, Katherine (Dunning) Nicholson. Katherine Dunning married Jacob Allen Nicholson, a marine engineer, and was the mother of the four Nicholson brothers who played a role in Liberty’s history. Her brother, Pat Dunning, was an early pioneer in the Swauk district and her four sons followed him to the Swauk. After Katherine’s death, Jacob married again and had four additional children, none of which came to Liberty.  

Photo courtesy of Patti Nicholson.
Pat Dunning and the four Nicholson brothers where well thought of in the Swauk and in Kittitas County as attested by an article in the Cle Elum Echo newspaper of March 12, 1912 as follows:

Pat Dunning, one of the well known citizens of the camp, died at the home of his brother in Port Angeles, Wash., last week. Mr. Dunning was among the early settlers of the Swauk basin taking up a squatters right to 160 acres of land. On account of poor health the last few years he has been compelled to reside in a lower altitude. Mrs. Dunning is now residing in Seattle having removed there some months ago for medical treatment. Mr. Dunning was an uncle of the Nicholson brothers who are well and favorably known throughout the county. In their sad affliction the bereaved relatives have the sincere sympathy of their many friends.

Bobby’s Uncle, Al Nicholson—Early 1900’s. John Allen (Al) Nicholson filed for a homestead next to his Uncle, Pat Dunning, three miles north of Liberty. He also ran a small dairy operation on a mining claim on what is now the heliport at Liberty. Besides being a farmer, miner and logger he was active in community affairs of Liberty, being on the school board, and a director of the community hall. He also ran a logging operation on his homestead. Al was a very good amateur photographer and many of his negatives have survived and are used in this story. From an Al Nicholson negative in the Wes Engstrom collection.

John Allen Nicholson

John Allen Nicholson went by the name of “Al” most of the time. He did not come to Liberty looking for gold, he came instead looking for a farm. He and his uncle, Pat Dunning, each claimed a 160 acre homestead at the head of Lions Gulch in 1902. Al was a jack-of-all-trades. Over his lifetime he was a carpenter, a miner, a blacksmith, a farmer, a Forest Service guard and a very good amateur photographer. In addition to his homestead claim, Al filed a mining claim in 1916 on what is now the Liberty heliport where he drove a tunnel in 150 feet from what is now the campground, then dropped 10-15 feet and continued on another 100 feet or so. He built a house and barn on the claim and ran a small dairy operation there. Al was involved in all community affairs and in 1931 at the age of
54 was elected to the school board even though being a bachelor with no children. Then he met Frieda.

Frieda Anderson wasn’t looking for a husband, just a job, when she accepted an offer from the school board to teach at the Liberty school for the balance of the 1931/32 school year after Catherine Ranetta left in mid-term. Frieda had quit her job teaching in the Peshastin area and needed another job. Nor did she expect that one of the school board members who hired her would be an eligible bachelor of many talents.

Frieda apparently liked what she found in Liberty as she signed on for another year teaching at the Liberty school. Her family helped her fix up a small cabin that sat where the Liberty historic marker now sits, which would have been next to the “Wildcat Dance Hall.” In November of 1933 she and Al married and she moved into his house on the mining claim on the heliport where they raised hay and a few dairy cows. He was 58 and she was 42.

Al kept a diary all of his adult life. The diaries were of the one or two sentences per day type, and he was very frugal in his entries. For instance, his account of his marriage to Frieda was simply the following:

November 24, 1933: White frost in the morning. Rained in the afternoon. Changeable in the afternoon. Frieda and I went to Yakima and got married. Mathew Leyde and his wife went with us. I went in the ditch by Cooper’s place coming home and wreaked the car. Joe Anderson brought us out home.

Al was awarded patent (title) to the 160 acre
homestead at the head of Lions Gulch in 1915. He raised some cattle on the property and had a sawmill set up to harvest the trees in the 1940’s. It proved difficult to live on the homestead and most of the time he lived in the new house he had built on the mining claim at the heliport. After Al died in 1961, Frieda sold the homestead. Later the 160 acre homestead was sold to Dee Eberhart and his brother Al. They, in turn, created the 69 lot, Liberty Mountain recreation area we have today.

The Cle Elum Miner Echo newspaper of August 17, 1934 describes Al Nicholson’s occupation as such:

**Story Of The Ranches**

**J. A. Nicholson Borders Line Of Ranch To Mine.**

On the borderline between the farm and the mine, you will find miner-rancher J. A. Nicholson in Swauk valley near Liberty.

Born in Wisconsin, his parents came to Olympia in 1876 when he was nine months old. He recalls his father telling that they passed thru Cheyenne Wyoming, when Custer and his Seventh cavalry were in the town enroute to meet the Indians and their doom. His father told how a guard stood on the rear platform of the train armed with a rifle and on the lookout for skulking Indians. The Union Pacific ended at Sacramento and a boat was taken from there to Olympia, Wash. Nicholson’s father was a marine engineer and his grandfather a sea captain on the Atlantic.

When 21, Nicholson crossed the Snoqualmie pass on horseback headed for the Swauk. That was the same year that Bryan first ran for president (1897). The old toll gates for the pass were still standing at the time. Two years later he filed on a Swauk Homestead but did not prove up for 13 years because the minute he proved up he had to begin paying taxes. In 1916 he filed on his present location as a mining claim of 20 acres. Nicholson keeps two cows and raises hay and garden stuff, and when he feels so inclined pans a little gold.

**Southwest Corner of the Swauk Cemetery in the Spring.** Nature’s flowers outnumber plastic flowers in the spring. Bobby’s uncle, William (Bill) Nicholson married Mary Jane Evans, the daughter of an early pioneer on Swauk Prairie. Most of the graves in the southwest corner of the Swauk Cemetery are Evans family members. In 1884 Mary Jane’s aunt, Mary Malinda Evans, was the first burial in Swauk Cemetery. Mary Malinda Evans’ grave marker, a rock painted white, is in the foreground with a sealed glass jar with papers in it probably with writing about Mary Melinda.  

*Photo by Wes Engstrom*
Young John A. Nicholson attended school in San Francisco and the South Bay School and later the Olympia Academy. In 1889, while living in Port Townsend, the Nicholson boys lost their mother and went to live with their parents. Bobby’s uncle, Bill Nicholson, married Barthea Adeline Evans’ sister, Mary Jane Evans, in 1909. Mary Jane was conceived on the wagon trip to Washington and was born in Enumclaw in 1883 before her parents moved to Swauk Prairie to be with the rest of the Evans family and where she was courted by Bill Nicholson. 

The Ellensburg Record newspaper of June 23, 1961 carries Al’s obituary under the following headline:

J. A. Nicholson Called by Death

John Allen Nicholson, a pioneer resident of the Kittitas Valley died Wednesday, June 22 at his home on Swauk Creek.

Nicholson was born in Chippewa Falls, Wisc., Nov. 15, 1875, and came to the Territory of Washington the next year with his parents and members of his mother’s family. The family settled in Thurston county, near Olympia. His father, Jacob Allen Nicholson, was one of the early marine engineers of the Puget Sound area and in foreign waters.

The Bert Fletcher and Billy Turner Bar in Yakima. Billy Turner on the left and Bert Fletcher on the right, in suits, built a bar in Meaghersville (Liberty) in 1896. They operated it there for three years and then moved the fixtures to Yakima where they opened the bar shown in the above picture. While in Liberty, Bert married Barthea Elizabeth Evans and Billy married her cousin, Barthea Adeline Evans. Both cousins came to Swauk Prairie as children on the wagon train with their parents. Bobby’s uncle, Bill Nicholson, married Barthea Adeline Evans’ sister, Mary Jane Evans, in 1909. Mary Jane was conceived on the wagon trip to Washington and was born in Enumclaw in 1883 before her parents moved to Swauk Prairie to be with the rest of the Evans family and where she was courted by Bill Nicholson. 

Photo courtesy of Mary Lou Dills, granddaughter of Bert Fletcher.
Bobby With Mother and Father. Thomas and Alma Nicholson with son, Bobby, and his pet lamb on Al Nicholson’s farm on the mining claim in Liberty. Bobby’s love for Liberty began even before he moved there.  
Photo Courtesy of Patti Nicholson.

Bobby on a Horse. Bobby Nicholson on a horse on his uncle’s, Al Nicholson’s, place in Liberty. Liberty was heaven for a young boy. Although in the 1930s there were not many children in Liberty, there was no end to fun pass times for a boy who loved the outdoors. In 1934 Bobby’s parents moved to Liberty and joined his uncle, Clarence Nicholson, in running the post office and store which they expanded into a garage and service station business also. Bobby’s father, Thomas Nicholson, was the mechanic and his mother, Alma Nicholson, was the postmistress. Hence Bobby was in the middle of the action in downtown Liberty.  
Photo courtesy of Pattie Nicholson.

Bobby Learning to Handle Horses. Thomas Nicholson is teaching his son, Bobby, how to handle horses on Al Nicholson’s farm in the early 1930s.  
Photo courtesy of Patti Nicholson.

Photo courtesy of Pattie Nicholson.
worked in the forests prior to the Forest Service official status, continuing his service under Mr. Kerstetter and Mr. Blankenship, early Forest Service rangers. He built mining mills up Mill Gulch and Cougar Gulch. With his horses he worked on the Blewett Pass highway. He later worked with the Puget Sound Power & Light company and helped construct the plant here in Ellensburg. He helped in the building of the Highline and ran the hoist at Jonesville during World War I.

On Nov. 24, 1933, Nicholson married Frieda E. Anderson in Yakima. He developed and operated a mining claim near Liberty and the Nicholsons have made their home there for many years. He was a member off the Fraternal Order of Eagles at Cle Elum and was a charter member of the Moose Lodge in Ellensburg.

Nicholson kept in touch, through letters, with his friends in South Bay throughout his life. He was a student of history and a great reader and often expressed the opinion that he had lived in the era he would most have desired to know, that of the pioneers.

On Nov. 24, 1933, Nicholson married Frieda E. Anderson in Yakima. He developed and operated a mining claim near Liberty and the Nicholsons have made their home there for many years. He was a member off the Fraternal Order of Eagles at Cle Elum and was a charter member of the Moose Lodge in Ellensburg.

Nicholson is survived by his wife, Frieda E. Nicholson, a half sister, Mrs. Florence Higgins, of San Francisco, a half brother, Ira Nicholson, of Puyallup and a nephew, Robert Nicholson, of Cle Elum.

Funeral services will be held at the Evenson Chapel Saturday, June 24 at 2 p.m. with the Rev. William R. Van Ness officiating. Burial will be in the IOOF cemetery in Ellensburg.

After Al died, Jack Kirsch acquired the house on the mining claim and moved it a quarter mile onto his adjacent property where it is still being lived in today.

Besides leaving the 160 acre homestead on “Liberty Mountain,” Al left his diaries and negatives of his photos. His nephew, Warren Leyde, donated the negatives and the Nicholson family donated his diaries to be preserved for future historians.

**William George Nicholson**

William George “Bill” Nicholson was interested in mining while in Liberty and also had time to court and marry into one of the pioneer Swauk families. Mary Jane Evans was one of the Evans family that originally settled in the Swauk Prairie in 1882. The Evans family story is typical of many of the first pioneers of the Swauk. The story is provided by Mary Jane Evans’ cousin, Mary Lou Dills.

**Snow is for Skiing.** Robert Nicholson, Louise Jones and Patty Platt try their hand at skiing in the 1940s. The location could be in Liberty although the building in the background is not identified. **Photo courtesy of Pattie Nicholson.**
The story of how Mary Jane Evans came to the Swauk started years before with roots in the American Civil War, a war that generated antagonisms and hatreds that caused people to leave their established homes to find new opportunities. For some reason, perhaps because the neighbors harbored antagonism towards Jesse James Evans, Mary's grandfather, for being on the wrong side in the Civil War or being married to an Indian, Jesse felt he needed to move. Missouri was torn apart by the Civil War. It was deeply divided with half the population supporting the south and half the north. Missouri had come close to being the 13th Confederate State and was the scene of many savage battles that left the country, especially the Ozarks where the Evans lived, a destitute area for years. For whatever reason Jesse decided he needed a change. By 1882, at age 67, he had his preparations made and affairs settled. He gathered up his family and moved West, intending to settle in Puget Sound, Washington Territory. Mary Jane's parents made it to the Puget Sound area but did not like the climate and immediately returned to Kittitas County where the rest of the family had stopped. Instead of settling in Puget Sound, Mary Jane's grandfather and his family settled on Swauk Prairie, among the very first settlers to do so.

Evans’ Family Journey

According to the Evans’ family history, Jesse James Evans, besides being a tiller of the soil, was a school teacher and also served in Captain Stone's Calvary Co. A, of the Ozark County, Missouri, Home Guards from

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**Bobby Nicholson and Friends.** Bobby is with his dog “Whimpie” and two unidentified small friends about 1939. Whimpie was devoted to Bobby and was known to everyone in Liberty. Whimpie even made the local Cle Elum newspaper as a result of that devotion.  

*Photo courtesy of Pattie Nicholson.*

**Clarence Nicholson.** Clarence Nicholson married Gladys Forbes and they lived in Ellensburg. Gladys died in 1929 and in 1933 Clarence opened a store and post office in Liberty. He spent the rest of his life in Liberty and died there in 1950.  

*Photo courtesy of Pattie Nicholson.*
July 1861 to October 18, 1861. While he was away from home during the war, soldiers or bushwhackers, came to his house and found that his wife, Bartema, was hiding a man that had been wounded in a battle near the home. They ransacked the house and set it on fire. They told Bartema she could leave the house, but could not take anything with her. She started with only her Bible but they made her take it back and throw it in the fire. She and the children and Synthia Welch, who was staying with them, all spent the night in the blacksmith shop, with only their night clothes and no shoes. The weather was cold. The bushwhackers also stole their chickens and they tied the wounded man behind their horses and dragged him up the road. No one knows what happened to him.

Jesse James Evans was born July 22, 1815 in Murphy, Cherokee County, North Carolina and married Bartema Welch, a half-Cherokee Indian, in Putnam, Indiana on August 7, 1837. They went to Hammond, Missouri, and proved up on a homestead in 1850. Jesse and Bartema had ten children, seven of whom lived. Bartema died in 1879.

In April of 1882, Jesse James Evans together with three of his children and their families started traveling to Washington Territory. The families were: Simeon James Evans, his wife

First Nicholson Post Office. Clarence Nicholson obtained an abandoned log building with a use permit from the Forest Service in 1933. He added the enclosure on the front porch and opened a store. Then he became the postmaster in 1935 and had the post office in the store. However, he failed a physical examination by the postal authorities because of a bad heart and had to give up the postmaster position. His sister-in-law, Alma Nicholson, then applied for the position and became the postmistress for the next 14 years until her death in 1949. Clarence’s brother, Thomas Nicholson, along with his wife, Alma, and son, Bobby, moved in with Clarence and expanded the building and living quarters. Photo courtesy of Pattie Nicholson.
Mary Malinda and their children Bartema Elizabeth, age 9, Sarah Elda, 4, and Robert Huston, 2; Simeon’s sister, Nancy Adeline, and her husband Marion Jasper Evans, with their son, William J., age 3, and expecting a child, and Simeon’s brother James Alfred Evans, his wife, Martha Ann, with two children, Bartema Adeline, age 4, and Jessie Mansfield, age 2.

Jessie James Evans, being a blacksmith, made his own wagon of white oak with trees from his farm, which he cut, curved, and fashioned with his own hands. His son, James Alfred M., also had a homemade wagon. It was in such poor condition that some of the family tried to keep him from starting out in it, but he refused to listen.

The Oregon Trail

These together with others made up a train of eight wagons. They started west over the Old Oregon Trail, went through Independence, Missouri, then Nebraska, crossed the Platt River, fording it with their mule teams and wagons. Sometimes they had to put the wagons on logs and float them across the river. At these times, Simeon would tie a rope around his waist and on the mules so he could lead or pull them across. They averaged about twenty miles a day. The way was not an easy one, nor was it free from danger. At night they would circle the wagons, making camp. This would protect them from thieves and Indians.

They had small Dutch ovens to bake their bread in; the cooking was done on an open fire. Martha Ann would fry bacon and fix potatoes and then biscuits in the oven. She would cook about three pans full to last all day. She had sourdough starter in a stone jar in the back of the wagon that she covered with three layers of paper and a cloth tied securely over it to keep the dust out. She would take out some starter for biscuits and add flour, water and sugar to replenish the starter for the next day.

They took some groceries with them such as ham and bacon and they bought milk and butter from farmers on the trail. At times they were able to buy a fat hen for a dime.

Second Nicholson Post Office. The original log building has had a front addition added for the store and post office. It would appear there was a lot of sitting around the old stoves to keep warm. Notice the two chimneys and snow melted off the roof. The old log building must have had two stoves inside to keep the cold out. The new addition seems to have been much better insulated, or didn’t have a fire going in it yet, judging by the amount of snow on the roof. An Al Nicholson Negative in the Wes Engstrom collection.
Mary Jane remembered her father, James Alfred M. Evans, tell of a storm that was coming up, and as they had no place to tie the mules, they held on to their halter ropes from under the wagon where they had taken shelter. But soon hailstones as big as hen’s eggs began falling, the mules could not endure it any longer and they jerked free and ran away. They hunted for the mules for half of the next day. Imagine being stranded in the middle of nowhere with no mules. Mary Jane said if the mules had been tied to the wagon, there wouldn’t have been much left of the wagons.

They had little trouble with the Indians, giving them food to eat so they would not harm them. However, one time after they had stopped for the night, but had not unhitched the mules from the wagons, the Indians were hiding and gave a big yell which scared them causing the mules to run with the wagon. Inside the wagon were James Alfred M.’s children, Bartema Adeline, age 4, and Jessie Mansfield, age 2. The men got on their horses and caught the wagon. No one was hurt nor any damage done. They breathed a prayer of relief.

The children had whooping cough on the trail and the sun was hot. Sometimes they had to wait a storm out before they could go on, or they would have to go back to shelter if a big storm was coming. Several people had to walk along picking up wood or buffalo chips to build cooking fires. At places they had to purchase water for themselves and the animals at a cost of 10 cents per gallon. They would hobble the mules and turn them loose to feed at night, the men taking turns watching them to keep the thieves or Indians from stealing them. Life on the trail was a challenge and not for the faint of heart.

**Indians Were Dissuaded**

One night, when the wagon train had stopped to camp, an Indian came down from the woods and asked the men how many white people were with them. He did this to see if there were too many for them to attack them.
James Alfred M. Evans scooped up a handful of sand and poured it out and asked the Indian if he could count the grains of sand. He told the Indian that there were as many white people as the grains of sand. The Indian agreed not to do them any harm. Jim probably knew better how to deal with the Indians than anyone for his mother was Indian.

The wagon train traveled through the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains, followed the Big Horn to Wind River, crossed its beautiful valley and reached Green River. They crossed over the Continental Divide into the Snake River Drainage, a tributary of the Columbia River. This was the historic gateway to the Oregon Country, a route discovered by Robert Stuart and used by many legendary mountain men, or “the beaver hunters.”

The Evans family traversed the crescent of the Snake River plains from east to west, more than 300 miles, leaving it at Fort Boise on the western edge, where the turbulent river turns north and forms a natural boundary with what is now Oregon and part of Washington. This part of the Oregon Trail crossed some of the roughest country the wagon train had yet encountered. Eventually they reached the lovely valley of the Grand River, thence crossing the Blue Mountains, and reaching the Umatilla River, a tributary of the Columbia River. After reaching Pendleton, Oregon, the Oregon Trail took them to the Columbia River and the small town of Arlington, with Portland another 200 miles west.

When they got to the mouth of the Snake River, where it empties into the Columbia River, they went down to Portland, Oregon, crossed at Vancouver, Washington and came up the Washington side, following a trail, crossing the Simcoe Mountains which took them to Fort Simcoe, then to Union Gap where the wagon’s wheels were repaired and the mules shod. Then it was onto Ellensburgh, just a trading post at the time formerly called “Robbers Roost.”

**Thomas Evens Born In Thorp**

Jessie James Evans and Marion Jasper Evens stopped at Thorp because Marion’s wife, Nancy Adeline, was about to give birth to a son, Thomas, who was born October 1882. Simeon James Evans, and James Alfred M. Evans continued on to the west side of the Cascade Mountains. It took five weeks to cut a trail to cross the mountains. [The wagon road across Snoqualmie Pass was not made easily passable for wagons until 1883.] They went on to Enumclaw and it was there that a daughter, Mary Jane, was born to James Alfred M. Evans and Martha Ann, on April 24, 1883. [Martha Ann had conceived while on the trail probably in Idaho.]

Simeon and Alfred quickly decided that they did not like the climate on the west side as it was too wet and they told Jessie James and Marion Jasper Evens to stay in Thorp and look for land there. They came back to the Kittitas Valley the next spring as soon as Snoqualmie pass was free of snow in 1883 and Jessie James Evans, Simeon James Evans, James Alfred M. Evans and Marion Jasper Evens all settled on adjoining places on Swauk Prairie on unsurveyed land. They were later, after the land was surveyed, able to file for homesteads or purchase their land from the Northern Pacific Railroad.

**Mary Malinda Evans’ Journey Ends in Swauk Cemetery**

Mary Jane’s aunt, Mary Malinda (McDonald) Evans, who also came to Swauk Prairie in 1883 was the first to be buried, with her unborn child, in what would become Swauk Cemetery. The family placed a large stone to mark her grave and, with no way to inscribe the stone, her name was written on a piece of paper and placed in a glass jar by the stone. Years later a crude concrete marker with her name was also placed on the grave. The family still tends to her grave along with the other graves of Evans family members who have joined her in death on what has now become a forested hillside.

Mary Jane’s journey to the Swauk was truly that of a pioneer of the old type being one of the last overland treks by oxen to the west. The railroad was soon to make the Oregon Trail a relic of the past.

Bill Nicholson became involved in the Cougar Mining Company as were his brothers, Thomas and Clarence. An article in the January 26, 1923 issue of the Cle Elum Miner-Echo newspaper reports:

Mrs. Bill Nicholson and Mrs. Alfred Evans have been spending the past week at the old Cougar camp, where Mr. Nicholson and Mr. John Morrison are opening up the old Cougar mine.

The mining endeavor apparently was not successful as Bill Nicholson and Mary Jane moved to Kelso, Washington and lived there the rest of their lives. Bill worked as a longshoreman in Kelso. Bill died in 1953 and Mary Jane twenty years later at age 90 in 1973.
Thomas Addis Nicholson

Thomas Addis “Tom” Nicholson first joined his brothers in Liberty and became involved in gold mining. The Cle Elum Echo newspaper of October 9, 1909 reports that:

Al and Tom Nicholson are at the A. Y. P. Expo. this week.

And on May 25, 1912 the Cle Elum Echo reported:

W. A. Robertson, of Dedham, Mass., arrived in camp last week to attend to the annual meeting for the election of directors of the Cougar Mining and Milling Company. W. A. Robertson, R. A. Barry, J. A. Flodin, Thos. Nicholson and James Rice were elected as directors for the ensuing year. These men have evidenced their confidence in the stability of the value of Swauk ores by the erection a fine modern ten stamp mill, and we are advised that active operations will be resumed in the course of a few weeks when necessary arrangements have been completed.

The mining endeavors did not turn out and Thomas moved to Ellensburg where he met and married Alma Circle and where in 1927 Robert H. (Bobby) Nicholson was born. Tom ran the Nicholson Auto Company while in Ellensburg and in 1934 gave it up and moved to Liberty to help his brother, Clarence, run a service station, store and post office.

Tom, Alma and Bobby lived together with Clarence and they enlarged the initial building, which was primarily a post office, into a store, gas station, and auto repair garage. Alma ran the post office while Tom and Clarence took care of the garage and service station. The business was the Unloading a Safe for the Post Office in Liberty. The Liberty Post Office sign appears to be the same one that was on the store in old Liberty in 1912. Perhaps it was government property and went to whoever was appointed postmaster at the time. The post office closed in 1951 after Clarence died in 1950 and the newly appointed postmistress could not make a deal with the Nicholsons for the building nor with the Forest Service for the use permit. Liberty’s mailing address then changed to a rural route out of Cle Elum and the center of Liberty’s social life disappeared. People had to go to the Arrowsmith’s store in Lauderdale for necessities like gas and groceries.  Photo courtesy of Pattie Nicholson.
center of activity in Liberty for over 20 years, a place people came to buy essential supplies and sit around the big stove to exchange gossip and tell stories about the past. Some of the stories ended up in local newspapers. The Cle Elum Miner-Echo of July 21, 1939 carried the following story.

**Dog Won’t Starve Now; Goes With Liberty Trio.**

Clarence, Tom and Bobby Nicholson cast off their mooring lines last Saturday and headed their road craft for Longview. Object: a visit for “Bobby” with his uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. William Nicholson, and for the two calves that also went along astern, in a trailer, to a new home with the fine herd owned by the hosts.

“Wimpie,” Bobby’s pet dog, signed on for the duration of the voyage, at the going rate of three bones per day. The pooch took with him a credential certifying that he is Mayor of the town’s dogs and is entitled to immunity from dog catchers. “He is also to be granted the customary privileges granted visiting notables,” according to the document.

(The last time “Bobby” went visiting, “Wimpie” almost starved for he refused to eat until his little master returned. This time, “Wimpie” was included in the party.)

The Liberty school was closed in 1939 and the Liberty and Swauk Prairie schools consolidated with the Cle Elum School District. The children were then bussed to Cle Elum. In 1942 Tom was the school bus driver. He would take the children into Cle Elum in the morning, work in the Cle Elum Feed store during the day and then bring the children home in the evening. Tom died of a heart attack when working at the feed store on December 2, 1942.

**Nicholson’s Garage Building.** The garage building was built before the store and post office was expanded to include gas pumps. It was also built before electricity which came to Liberty in January of 1940. However, Clarence Nicholson was an electrician, a trade he learned in the Navy, and they had their own “Delco” generator and were wired for electricity before the Public Utility District arrived. All they had to do was change the wiring to accept the new “juice.” It would appear from the three wires in the picture that they had three-phase power from their generator and only needed to change the wiring to accept two-phase power from the P. U. D.  

*Photo from an Al Nicholson negative in the Wes Engstrom collection.*
The Cle Elum Echo newspaper of December 4, 1942 carried his obituary. His life story.

**TOM NICHOLSON STRICKEN BY HEART ATTACK**

**Overexertion Causes Death of Cle Elum School Bus Operator**

Funeral services will be held Saturday, 3 p.m. at the Honeycutt chapel, Ellensburg, for Thomas A. “Tom” Nicholson, 62, well known Liberty resident, who died suddenly while working at the Cle Elum Feed Store Wednesday. His death was due to an acute coronary thrombosis.

The Ellensburg Elks lodge of which he was a life member, will be in charge.

He had made his regular bus run that morning bringing in the grade and high school students to Cle Elum.

Between the morning and afternoon runs he helped out at the Bruce Feed store and at 10 a.m. that morning he came in to say that his bus stalled in the snow a block from the store. After resting for a few minutes he returned and probably overexerted himself shoveling out a path for the bus, returning to the store an hour and a half later.

He was stricken without warning as he started to get a sack of feed for Starling Graybeal of Easton, a store customer, at 1 p.m. Mrs. Bruce summoned a physician who arrived immediately and pronounced death due to a heart attack.

Tom Nicholson was born in Olympia, Wash., November 6, 1880 and operated the Nicholson Auto Company at Ellensburg before moving

**Nicholson’s Service Station.** Tom Nicholson, Alma Nicholson, Paul Limon, Clarence Nicholson, Jerry Limon (big boy) and an unknown small boy stand in front of Nicholson’s Service Station in Liberty. There was an air compressor run by a belt from an overhead shaft powered by another belt from an electric motor. The heavy metal storage tank for the air was on an upper level built over the front doors. There was also a small room for a forge and a blacksmith shop in the back corner of the building. The building still stands today.

*Photo courtesy of Pattie Nicholson.*
felt he needed to see more of the world. As soon as he was old enough, he joined The United States Marine Service and became a deckhand, then in 1946 he joined the Army for a two year enlistment. His mother, Alma, died in 1949. The carefree days of growing up in Liberty were now a thing of the past. However, the forest and the freedoms of Liberty had exerted there spell on him. He spent the rest of his life working in the woods as a logger.

Robert Nicholson died in Cle Elum in 1993. He had been part of Liberty's history, although at the time probably did not think of the significant contribution his father and uncles and aunts had made to Liberty's past.

Clarence Emmet Nicholson

Clarence Emmet (Nick) Nicholson, the youngest of the Nicholson brothers, married a Swauk pioneer, Gladys Forbes, and then moved to Liberty eight years ago, where he and his wife operated Nicholson service station and the Liberty store-post office, and owned gold mining properties.

During the past year and a half he has been driver of the school bus.

On December 31, 1919 he married Alma Ray at Ellensburg, who with a son, Bob, 15, survives him.

Surviving also are his step mother, Mrs. Maggie Nicholson, living in Port Angeles, Wash., three brothers, Clarence and J. A. Nicholson, living at Liberty and William at Kelso. Also a half-brother, Ivan, Klamath Falls, another half-brother, Orin, and a half sister, Mrs. Flora Vandermeer, both of San Francisco.

Robert Nicholson was 15 at the time his father died and now he had to grow up fast. He had his mother, Alma, and uncles, Clarence and Al and aunt Frieda to help him, all living in Liberty. He was living in paradise, of course, but nevertheless felt he needed to see more of the world. As soon as he was old enough, he joined The United States Marine Service and became a deckhand, then in 1946 he joined the Army for a two year enlistment. His mother, Alma, died in 1949. The carefree days of growing up in Liberty were now a thing of the past. However, the forest and the freedoms of Liberty had exerted there spell on him. He spent the rest of his life working in the woods as a logger. Robert Nicholson died in Cle Elum in 1993. He had been part of Liberty's history, although at the time probably did not think of the significant contribution his father and uncles and aunts had made to Liberty's past.

Clarence Emmet Nicholson

Clarence Emmet (Nick) Nicholson, the youngest of the Nicholson brothers, married a Swauk pioneer, Gladys Forbes, and then moved
Logging With a Tractor Near Liberty. A 1926 Fordson crawler tractor with one very large log. The tracked version of the Fordson tractor was a factory option available for a short time in 1926–27. It must have been a challenge to go down hill with the set-up above. At least they had 27 horsepower available to handle the log, not four horsepower as in the previous photo. Al Nicholson logged his homestead three miles north of Liberty in the 1930s and 1940s. According to Al Eberhart, who later bought the property, he had a sawmill set up on the site using a natural pond as a log holding pond. From an Al Nicholson negative in the Wes Engstrom collection.

to Ellensburg where he was a mechanic and an electrician at a time when automobiles and electricity were just coming into their own.

In 1909 Clarence and Gladys had a son who only lived seven days. A shame as Bobby would have had a cousin. As it was, Bobby was the only child of the four Nicholson brothers.

In the June 15, 1912 issue of the Cle Elum Echo newspaper an article illustrates the multi-capabilities typical of all the Nicholson brothers.

Clarence Nicholson, expert electrician, of Ellensburg, has been employed the past few weeks by the Cougar Mining Company to adjust the electric machinery in their new ten-stamp mill.

There were no electric power lines to Liberty at the time, so the mining company had to generate their own electricity to run the mill. Not as simple as plugging something into an electric outlet.

The Cle Elum Echo newspaper of March 24, 1916 had an interesting account about the difficulties the first automobiles had in Kittitas County.

CHEVROLET FIRST FROM ELLENSBURG.
Despite Terrible Road Conditions New Car Negotiates Trip—Pictures Show the Battle.

L. E. Rissler, of the Kahler Drug store is the possessor of the first car to make the trip in 1916 from Ellensburg to Cle Elum. The car is a new one to Cle Elum, being one of the first
shipments of Chevrolets to arrive in Kittitas county. The car arrived here Sunday evening.

While the car came through in excellent condition, the driver, C. E. Nicholson, who was accompanied by L. H. Wheeler, is not anxious to repeat the trip under identical conditions. It was terrible, according to the account they gave and the evidence they possessed in the form of pictures taken during the journey.

In many places it was necessary to ford streams where the bridges had been washed out, while over Swauk Prairie the sea of mud and snow made the going impossible. It being necessary at times to use horses to move the car, and even then to assist the quadrupeds with shovels.

On the Dry Creek road it was found that the greatest damage had been done by washouts, while on McGinnis hill and Horse canyon snow and mud combined to retard speeding. In places there as on Virden hill the snow varied from a few inches to two feet in depth. Dunford hill was likewise coated with a fine surface for skiing but not for autoing.

After reaching the Ballard ranch the road was found fairly passable and the car made fast time for the remainder of the journey. Mr. Nicholson found an eager reception awaiting him from Mr. Rissler who after examining the car declared that it had stood the grueling test without a scratch.

During the week many Cle Elum men have given the new car the once over and expressed surprise that it came through the trip in such excellent condition. It is believed that no car in Kittitas county ever experienced a more exacting drive.

Gladys died in 1929, and then in 1934 Clarence obtained a permit from the Forest
Al Nicholson’s Homestead Today. After Al Nicholson died his widow, Frieda, sold the homestead. Shortly after that Al and Dee Eberhart bought the property. They in turn subdivided the 160 acres into 69 lots and sold them to people wishing an off-the-grid (no electricity) second home. Besides Liberty Mountain, the four Nicholson brothers, Al, Bill, Tom and Clarence are remembered for their contribution to a slowly fading gold mining camp. Most of that legacy exists only as memories of those who once were part of the that community, a slowly disappearing group as the old-timers die. The old store and post office buildings are now gone. However, Al Nicholson left 300 negatives of pictures he had taken plus fifty years of a daily diary he kept. Those are preserved for future generations to see and read. Photo by Wes Engstrom.

Service to build a store on abandoned land in Liberty. He applied to the postal authorities for and was granted the post office, but during his physical it was discovered he had a heart problem and couldn’t be a postmaster. It was then that his brother, Thomas, and sister-in-law, Alma, with Bobby, moved to Liberty to help Clarence. Alma became the postmaster. The business was enlarged to include a service station and auto garage. In 1938 the service station sold Richfield gas and in 1939 they switched to Texaco pumps.

The arrangement with Alma as postmaster and Clarence and Thomas as the mechanics, continued until Alma died in 1949. Clarence then became the postmaster again. Apparently, post office regulations no longer required the postmaster to pass a physical examination.

Clarence died quietly in his bed in Liberty on June 2, 1950. Al Nicholson in his usual brief diary entry recorded the event.

June 1, 1950: Clear, sunny and warm all day. Went to Cle Elum for some medicine for Clarence in the forenoon and took Frieda up to take care of the mail. She staid all day and called Dr. Rogolans in the evening. We are going to stay with him this evening and all night.
June 2, 1950: Clear and sunny and very warm all day. Clarence died this morning. Bob Nicholson, Harry Forbes and I went to Cle Elum and Ellensburg to make arrangements for the funeral.

A new postmaster was appointed but she was unable to negotiate an agreement with the Nicholsons for the use of the building or with the Forest Service for transfer of the special use permit and the post office was closed. Al and Bobby Nicholson began salvaging as much of the building material as they could, hauling it to Al’s mining claim. The gas station, store, home and two auto repair garages reverted to the Forest Service and sat empty until a mining company filed a mining claim on the property and took possession of the buildings and used them as part of their operation. That is, they used the two garage buildings but tore down the gas station, store and home building. The two garages still exist today as part of an historic district.

The closing of the post office signaled the end of an era and the beginning of a new phase of Liberty’s history. Now the mail was delivered on a rural route from Cle Elum and groceries needed to be purchased from the Arrowsmith store at Lauderdale. The old timers had no place to gather and tell their stories. Stories told about a mining camp that once was the center of social activity in the upper Kittitas County had no stove to sit around to tell those stories. The camp was now only a ghost of its former self.

At one time the camp was the economic and social center of the upper county. It started in 1873 as a mining camp two miles to the west.
Liberty as it exists today had its start with the discovery of gold in the Swauk Creek near Liberty in 1873. The discovery occurred only four years after the first settlers came to Kittitas valley, and the gold strike contributed greatly to the development and history of Kittitas County. Gold meant immediate cash to ranchers and farmers with as yet no economic way to sell produce. There was only a wagon road south to Walla Walla or the Dalles.

**Gold Created Liberty.** A Gold Nugget Worth $1,120 in 1901. The nugget was taken from the Henton-McCauley mine, the Elliott, near Meaghersville in 1901. At the time the price of pure gold was set at $24 an ounce and the going price for Liberty nuggets was $16 an ounce. This implies that Liberty gold nuggets were 16/24 or 66 percent pure gold. Therefore the nugget must have weighed 70 ounces. At today’s value of $1,100 per ounce, it would be valued at $51,300. It was a significant find. It also represents a reason the old mining camp of “Meaghersville” came to be called “Liberty” as it is today which is the rest of the story.

The mining camp that started at the discovery site was called the “Swauk” camp in the Swauk Mining District. About 1880 a second camp was started two miles east on Williams Creek when a large placer gold deposit was found there. It was called “Williams Creek” camp in the Swauk Mining District. Both names were descriptive of their locations but neither name stuck. The Williams Creek camp became Meaghersville after Thomas Meagher, who discovered the large gold deposit, opened a store for the miners. Then in 1892 the “Swauk” camp name was changed to the “Liberty” camp when a post office was established there.

By 1912 the center of gold mining activity in the Swauk Mining District had shifted to Meaghersville. The “Liberty” post office was moved to Meaghersville, building, name, sign and all. The old “Liberty” mining camp disappeared and Meaghersville came to be called “Liberty” after the Liberty Post Office. The name has stuck to this day.

A school was started in the mining camp as well as a community hall that was to benefit the school. The school was typical of a rural one-room school and the hall became famous for the Saturday night dances that were held there. The hall made the mining camp the social center of the upper county and is fondly remembered by many in the county.

Swauk Prairie was adjacent to the Swauk Mining District and was settled at the same time. Naturally, there was bound to be connections.
made between families in the two communities. Bill Nicholson made one such connection.

There was a third mining camp that also developed at the same time as the Liberty camp. It was across the Wenatchee Mountain Range on the Peshastin River above Ingalls Creek and was called the “Peshastin” mining camp. The name was changed to Blewett later after a post office by that name was opened there. Not only did miners gravitate between the camps but they built a wagon road that endures to this day.

All of this was already history when Bobby Nicholson moved to Liberty in 1934. Although Bobby probably didn’t realize it, the discovery of gold had caused much excitement in Kittitas Valley when it happened and contributed greatly to the development of Ellensburg and Cle Elum.

**Gold Discovered in Swauk Creek**

The Swauk Mining District was formed in 1873 after gold was discovered in Swauk Creek. The discovery was at a gravel bar a few hundred yards north of the present Liberty Road turnoff from Highway 97. There are many stories about the event. The earliest accounts were in the form of letters to the editor of the Walla Walla Union, the closest newspaper published at the time of discovery. Seattle, of course, was closer but there wasn’t any road over the mountains yet. All trade with the Kittitas valley was from the south, much of which came through Walla Walla. At the time Kittitas valley was part of Yakima county as Kittitas county wasn’t formed until 1883.
OCT. 18, 1873

DISCOVERY OF GOLD MINES

Quite an excitement in Yakima County from our regular correspondent.

Kittitas Valley W. T. Oct. 18, 1873.

I write you in a hurry to let you know that important gold discoveries have been made in the mountains north of Kittitas on a small creek called the Smock. Ten men made the discovery some three weeks since. They kept the thing secret until a few days ago. An Indian messenger was dispatched to Mr. Bull for him to come forthwith — that they had struck a good thing. Mr. Bull got the news in the evening, and started in two hours, it was dark when he left. Persons left at all hours of the night. Seventy persons were on the ground in less than two days.

The specimens I saw were coarse, weighing respectively, 1/2 ounce, $5.20 and $4.37. I saw about $70 of the precious stuff at the store of Shoudy and Dennis. There will be 2,000 men here in less than two days. The news has gone over to Seattle several days since. Mr. Stubbs, who is at work in the interest of the Walla Walla and Seattle railroad, left a few days ago. No person has time to talk railroad now.

I do not want to be understood that the gold is all coarse like the nuggets I have mentioned, but some of the chunks are clear gold, and some have quartz in them, but these weighed in my presence are almost entirely free from quartz. Everybody has left—all my neighbors have gone, married and unmarried.

There is no doubt of the existence of gold in paying quantities. The discovery party sent down some $300. Gold is coming down and goods are going up—in a double sense.

I write you this at two o’clock in the morning. Will leave in a couple of hours. All work has ceased in a measure. The all absorbing topic is the new mines which are distant only about twenty-five miles—good trail all the way. A good wagon road can soon be made into the mines. The stream upon which they are situated enters the west of the valley, and joins the Yakima some twelve miles above here.

I have never witnessed a greater excitement. The house of Shoudy have claims. One of the latter has been up and returned and the other left immediately on his return.

You can tell your friend that I think the mines will pay, but there cannot be much done before next spring. The snow falls pretty deep there, and the nights, the boys say, are cool now.

An ounce piece has been taken out. I did not see it, but persons who did tell me so. I have seen several men who have been up and returned. They have twenty days to represent their claims in. The discovery party passed their laws and got everything set before they proclaimed the news. Joe Davis and two of the Goodwin boys are of the number.

I am of the opinion that this will lead to a thorough prospecting of the adjacent country, and will lead to more important discoveries in the Cascade Mountains. The Smock affords plenty of water for mining purposes. I did not learn how deep it is to the bedrock, but my impression is the diggings are shallow and easily worked. It is my firm belief that it is a good camp. I will know more about it in a few days. You will hear from me again.

D.J.S.

The gold discovery story becomes more complete as time goes by. The most authentic version appears in a book published 30 years after the event.


During 1873 occurred an event of great moment in the settlement of the future Kittitas county, namely, the discovery of gold in the Swauk region. As early as 1867 a prospecting party, of which N. Thomas Goodwin, Benton Goodwin and Edward Towner were members, had passed through this country, and while following one of the many Indian trails, namely, that leading to the Peshastin district, had made a discovery, the importance of which they did not realize at the time. While camped for their midday meal near Swauk creek, Benton Goodwin busied himself in panning one of the bars of the stream. He was ignorant of the appearance of native gold, but suspecting that some yellow particles he found in the bottom of his pan might be the precious metal, he showed them to Towner, the only experienced prospector in the party. The latter pronounced the find gold. His statements were received with considerable doubt by the party in general, which passed on, having first jocularly named the place where the gold was found Discovery bar.

During the ensuing two or three years the region was prospected occasionally, but no one
found enough gold to warrant the establishment of a camp. In the fall of 1873, however, a party of men met with better success than had any of their predecessors. In this fortunate company were Newton Thomas Goodwin and Benton Goodwin, who had been in the party that made the discovery six years previous, also W. H. Beck, George Mycock, whose name was later changed by the legislature to Starr, and a young Kentuckian named D. Y. Borden. The men were very much dispirited, having been unsuccessful in their quest of fortune and being exhausted and nearly out of provisions, but Benton and N. T. Goodwin accepted the proposal of the Kentuckian to prospect Swauk creek. Benton Goodwin soon discovered a small nugget. He called the others to him, who soon found a pot hole in the center of the stream. To dig down to bedrock was the work of but a short time, as there was nothing in the cavity but wash gravel. From a panful of dirt taken out of the bottom of the hole, Borden washed a small nugget worth about fifteen cents. The rest of the men were summoned. Leaving their sizzling supper to take care of itself, they set to work panning the gravel from the pot hole, and within an hour they had over five dollars’ worth of coarse dust and nuggets, one of the latter weighing a dollar.

Next day the party divided its forces, Starr and Beck going below and the rest above the camp. Those who ascended the creek found a spot where, as evidenced by the protruding hydraulic mining was used on Swauk Creek and here on Williams Creek with limited success. Most of the gold was on bedrock, not in the overburden, and by the time the miners worked there way down to bedrock in the old channel there was no place for the large boulder to go and the operations became flooded out. Thomas Meagher and Charles Bigney, however, were successful miners under this same hill by digging tunnels down to bedrock and following (drifting) the cracks and crevices, recovering the nuggets that had lodged there.  

Hydraulic Mining for Gold Near Meaghersville—1899. This hydraulic operation was on the south side of Williams Creek just east of Meaghersville when Otto Pautzke, a pioneer photographer from Ellensburg, took this photo in July of 1899. Hydraulic mining was used on Swauk Creek and here on Williams Creek with limited success. Most of the gold was on bedrock, not in the overburden, and by the time the miners worked there way down to bedrock in the old channel there was no place for the large boulder to go and the operations became flooded out. Thomas Meagher and Charles Bigney, however, were successful miners under this same hill by digging tunnels down to bedrock and following (drifting) the cracks and crevices, recovering the nuggets that had lodged there.  

A Pautzke photo in the Wes Engstrom collection.
roots of a large fir tree, the bedrock was close to the surface. Digging here, Borden took out a nugget weighing over an ounce, and worth about $16. He also found gravel that yielded thirty to forty cents to the pan.

News of the discovery soon precipitated a rush of miners and others and ere long there were many hundreds on the ground. That fall the Swauk creek mining district was organized with D. Y. Borden as the first recorder. It was agreed that claims should be 200 feet long and from rimrock to rimrock. Soon the creek was located from its mouth, five miles below Discovery bar, to the forks fifteen miles up the stream, but the miners were unable to find gold in paying quantities except on and in the immediate vicinity of the bar. As a result most of the people left as speedily as they had come, and that winter less than fifty were there. These consisted of the Discovery Company (then increased to twelve by the addition of John P. Beck, G. W. Goodwin, Al. Churchill, David Munn, James and Samuel Bates and another), and three other companies, namely Walter A. Bull & company, on Starr bar, a French association led by Joseph Superneau, operating on Williams creek, and a co-operative company at the mouth of that stream. The Williams creek miners met with little success that winter.

Sluicing For Gold Near Meaghersville—1899. This flume was on Boulder Creek, a tributary of Williams Creek, just above Meaghersville, in July 1899. The method used is similar to the original operations on Swauk Creek at Discovery Bar in the 1870s, 80s and 90s. The flume carried water through a sluice box where dirt and gravel was shoveled into and then washed away, leaving the gold caught in riffles on the bottom of the sluice. The ground where this flume was built appears to already have been washed and the gold recovered. The spot is near where a bedrock outcrop shows near the surface and probably yielded good gold. The 70 ounce Henton-McCauley nugget came from a bedrock tunnel 20 feet below the surface just downstream from this operation. The writing on the box on the left of the flume says: West Coast Grocery Co. Tacoma, Wash.

A Patuzke photo in the Wes Engstrom collection.
though subsequently some rich ground was discovered there. Indeed the explorations and operations of the first three years failed to bring to light the wealth of the region, except on Discovery bar, where, in the spring of 1874, sluices were built of whipsawed lumber and where an ounce a day to the man was averaged that season. But the next year the lead played out and in 1876 the mines were abandoned. In the late ‘seventies, activity was renewed in the Swauk district: lost leads were discovered; the region became a prominent producer and ever since it has continued to yield considerable quantities of gold. Many who were attracted to the country by the first discoveries remained to assist in the development of Kittitas county’s latent resources, so the finding of the yellow metal may be considered one of the most important events of the early days, not alone in its direct but in its indirect effects.

Gustaf Nilson’s Log Cabin as the Chic Cafe—1920s. Gus Nilson opened a post office in this building in 1892. He wanted to call it the Swauk post office but could not because there was already a post office in Washington State named Sauk. Postal authorities figured there would be confusion between the two names. Gus ended up calling it the Liberty post office. Over time, that changed the name of the Swauk mining camp to the Liberty mining camp and later, the post office also changed the Meaghersville mining camp name to Liberty. Beside being the first post office, the building was also the first school in 1895 and later it was the first Forest Service Ranger station. When the Sunset Highway was created in 1915, it went right in front of the building before turning left and going up over Blewett Pass. In the 1920s the building was used as a cafe and sold groceries, oil, gasoline and tires. The Chic Cafe was the last standing building in old Liberty. It burned in the 1960s.

Photo courtesy of Fred Krueger, photographer unknown.
Two Mining Camps Evolve in the District

There were only two mining camps within the Swauk Mining District and they both were named Liberty, not at the same time but in sequence. One still exists and the other is just a memory. The first mining camp was in the area where gold was first discovered on Swauk Creek. That is the area where the present Liberty Road connects with Highway 97. It was called Swauk. In April of 1892 a Post Office was established which the locals wanted to call the Swauk Post Office. However, the postal authorities did not approve the name because there already was a Sauk Post Office on the Sauk River and it would be confusing to also have a Swauk Post Office. The story goes that the postmaster, “Bull” Nelson (Gustaf Nilson), had invited some miners into the new post office and told them, “You’re at liberty here boys, so set down, lay down or do as you please.” Later, when the postal inspector asked for a name different from Swauk, the boys suggested “Liberty.” Thus Liberty, the name of their camp, represents freedom and miners like freedom.
The second mining camp was on Williams Creek about two miles east of the first camp. By 1895 most of the activity had moved to this camp called Meaghersville. (It was pronounced “Mearsville.”) In July of 1912 the post office was also moved to Meaghersville and instead of changing the name of the post office, the name of the camp gradually changed to Liberty. From old photographs it appears the “Liberty Post Office” sign was simply taken off the building in old Liberty and put on a store in Meaghersville. (It is possible that the entire building may have been moved, post office and all.) There wasn’t any formal paper filed anywhere changing the name. Only a change of location was filed with the Post Office Department changing the location of the post office but not changing its name. Map makers have been confused ever since, and some state maps still show Liberty on Highway 97 and Meaghersville where present Liberty is.

Over time, the post office moved to at least five different stores in Meaghersville (Liberty) and in 1951 it was closed. Mail is now handled through the Cle Elum Post Office. The history of the Liberty post office is documented in the book Postmarked Washington by Guy Reed Ramsey published by The Wenatchee World newspaper in 1973. The history is as follows:

**Liberty**

Location: Two locations are known for the gold-mining village of Liberty, the earliest of which was at the point where Williams Creek enters Swauk Creek (NE/SE Section 10, T20N, R17E). This is where the traveler while crossing Blewett Pass from the west arrives at a ranger station 11 miles beyond Cle Elum. There is no evidence of the former village which started with Gustaf Nelson’s log cabin. It stood a short
distance up Williams Creek (NW/NW Section 11). The later site is that of Meaghersville located 2 miles up Williams Creek (NW Section 1).

A mail stage rumbled over a road between Cle Elum and the old post office of Blewett three time a week, a road that was more a trail than a road. There was no real road until about 1914. Charles F. Lauderdale, the village storekeeper, went by his middle name Frank. The store was a stage station. Mr. Lauderdale also had a store at the mines located at a place on Williams Creek which acquired the name of Meaghersville, from Thomas Meagher who worked the first gold claim there. Mr. Lauderdale took mail up there from the Liberty post office but he closed that store when he sold the Liberty store to Thomas P. Carson. The hills all about were literally crawling with prospectors; there must have been a hundred mines most of them placer operated. Mr. Carson was in charge of a large hydraulic operation. He sold the Liberty store to John A. Flodin about the time when the daily mail delivery started. Mr. Flodin sold to Jacob Livingston.

The Liberty post office was moved to its second location when William D. Ford, storekeeper at Meaghersville, became postmaster. It was transferred to the old Lauderdale’s Meaghersville store by Mrs. Lillian D. Ford when she assumed the duties of postmaster. At that time the only provision for payment for postmaster duties was the amount represented by the stamps cancelled. Clarence E. Nicholson was running a store in Meaghersville at the time and applied for and secured the post office but when given a physical examination he was found to have a

Charles E W Bigney the “Gambler”—1890’s. Charles Bigney, sometimes called “the gambler,” was a very successful miner in Liberty. He had a claim, the Bigney, close to the Discovery claim and across Williams Creek from Liberty. His claim was one of the best in the Meaghersville area, yielding many of the largest nuggets in Washington state. He may also have been the driving force in creating a mining townsite. Papers filed with his mining claim patent application include entries that appear to show him convincing people to move from his mining claim to the townsite so he could file an application for patent without someone filing an objection. He and Thomas Meagher received patent (title) to their claims in 1897.
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heart ailment so his wife [sister-in-law] took the office. At her death Mr. Nicholson operated the office until Mrs. Wanda Snyder was appointed. It was reported that a postal inspector attempted to place a new arrival in the postmastership but John Nicholson, brother of Clarence, would not relinquish the store building without proper recompense. The new party would not make financial arrangements so the inspector locked the post office from the store. John Nicholson, who was handling the affairs of his deceased brother, related that he found the lock broken and the whole building and contents being used without his permission. The inspector was informed of this condition whereupon the order was given to discontinue the post office.

Postmasters: Established April 22, 1892, Gustaf Nelson; Charles Frank Lauderdale, October 22, 1894; Thomas P. Carson, December 23, 1898; John A. Flodin, April 9, 1903; Jacob Livingston, August 22, 1906; William D. Ford, July 24, 1912; Mrs. Elizabeth J. Powers (nee Lambert, Mrs. Joseph Powers), March 2, 1915; Mrs. Lillian D. Ford, January 16, 1917, (wed, June 17, 1927, Mrs. Lillian D. Johnson); George F. Caldwell, November 23, 1928; Clarence E. Nicholson, March 1, 1935; Mrs. Alma L. Nicholson (nee Circle, Mrs. Clarence E. Nicholson [Mrs. Thomas Nicholson], October 12, 1935; Clarence E. Nicholson, January 17, 1949; Mrs. Wanda F. Snyder (Mrs. Merle Snyder), June 3, 1950; discontinued March 31, 1951 mail to Cle Elum.

Meaghersville (Liberty) Looking West—1905. This picture from the east end of the camp was taken about 1905, after the school was built but before the front porch was added. The school house sat on the hill overlooking the town while the community hall sat below it on the main road about in the middle of the photo. The two-story building in the foreground was the Liberty hotel. It is still standing; the school and community hall are not. The picture shows houses laid out on both sides of the main road with property lines defined by fences, all indications that a mining townsite had been laid out as provided for under mining law. A mining townsite created an area set aside for dwellings, protected from being mined, with title to the land being given to the owners of lots within the townsite. Unfortunately, the paper creating the townsite was never filed with government land managers. At least the paper cannot be found now. People did buy and sell their properties in the townsite as if such a paper had been filed.

Most of the structures in Old Liberty were destroyed when the highway was improved in the late 1930’s. The last structure, the Chic Cafe, was the original Liberty post office building and it burned in 1962. Now no trace of the old camp remains.

Photo from Wes Engstrom collection, photographer was probably Al Nicholson.
A Mining Camp with a School Spirit

After the initial boom, the Swauk Mining District settled down and became a family type of camp. Children and schools and community activities were important. Just as both mining camps had the Liberty Post Office at one time, they also each had the Liberty school house. In addition, two different school districts were formed for Liberty. In June of 1893 Gustaf Nilson penned the petition to the Kittitas County Superintendent of Schools to form a new school district. The proposed school district boundaries were the same as the Swauk Mining District, the entire drainage basin of Swauk Creek above First Creek. At the time there were eleven children of school age living in the district and thirty-two lawful petitioners signing the petition. The Superintendent of Schools granted the petition and formed School District #43 for the Liberty school. Now things get strange. The Liberty School District was created twice.

Liberty’s School—1914. Adrian L. Kerstetter, attended his first three years in school at the Liberty School beginning in 1916. He said this picture was taken in 1914. It appears there were eleven students and the teacher present the day the picture was taken. The porch was added sometime after 1906 and the school was given a coat of paint. It must have been one of the best looking buildings in the camp at the time. Most other buildings, except for the Monahan house, were unpainted. The last classes were in 1939, after which Liberty School District #44 was merged into District 104, the Cle Elum School. The school building was then rented to Harry Kirwin for a few years for one dollar a year. He and his wife lived in it as their home. After he left in 1942, it sat empty until 1947. In 1944 the Board of Directors of the community hall decided it was getting too rotten and tore it down. They then bought the old school house building in 1947 for one dollar and moved it down to replace the community hall. And there it stood until the turbulent 1960s. An Adrian L Kerstetter photo in the Wes Engstrom collection.
On July 22, 1893 a petition was submitted to form a new school district along the Yakima River by dividing School District #9. That petition was also granted and School District #44 created. However, W. D. Kilmore of School District #9 appealed to the County Board of Commissioners claiming citizens of School District #9, the Ballard School, would be harmed by the creation of the new district. (The old Ballard school building became the Swauk-Teanaway Grange building.) The County Commissioners upheld the appeal and ordered the Superintendent to vacate his order creating School District #44. He did so on November 11, 1893.

In the meantime on September 2, 1893 the Superintendent appointed A. F. York, W. H. Ford, and Chas. Wilson directors and F. C. Lauderdale clerk of School District 43, the Liberty School. Then on October 1, 1894 another petition is received by the Superintendent to form a new school district in the Green Canyon area and he forms School District #43 again. No mention of what happened to the first School District #43, the Liberty School. Then Liberty residents submit another petition to form a School District. In December 1894 the following entries are made in the Superintendent's journal.

Dec. 15 (1894)
Received a petition praying for the formation of a new school district at Liberty.

I wrote notices of meeting to investigate all matters pertaining to the formation of said school district and sent them to Mr. J. C. Doyle

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**The Second Attempt Establishes a School District**

Store and Post Office in Meaghersville (Liberty)—1914. This may be the store and post office that was moved from the old Liberty camp, two miles down the road, in 1912. The automobile appears to be a 1910 Thomas Flyer similar to one owned by John A. Gellatly of Wenatchee who was the first to drive a car over Colockum pass. In 1914 William D. Ford was the postmaster and the official Liberty Post Office sign appears above the “Groceries” sign on his store. The Liberty Post Office and sign was moved to three other locations in Meaghersville (Liberty) before being transferred to Clarence Nicholson’s first store building in 1935. The building in the photo no longer exists. *Photo from the Wes Engstrom collection.*
to be posted as required by law, and appointed Saturday, Jan. 12, 1895 as the day for the investigation of said petition.

Jan 12 (1895)

Whereas, in compliance with a petition praying for the formation of a School Dist. in the County of Kittitas, State of Washington which petition was filed in my office on the 15 of December, 1894, a meeting to investigate all matters pertaining thereunto was held at Ellensburgh on the 12th day of January, 1895, of which meeting due notice was given as required by law; and, it appearing from said investigation that the prayers of the petitioners should be granted, Now, therefore, I, Geo. M. Jenkins, Supt. of County Schools in and for said County do hereby grant said petition and form said School District and designate it “School District 44 Kittitas County, Washington,” and prescribe for it the following boundaries, viz:

Commencing at the confluence of Swauk Creek and First Creek; thence due west to the summit of the divide between Swauk Creek and the Wenatchee Mountains; thence eastward along said summit, to the sec. line between secs. 4 & 5 in T. 21 N., R. 18 E. W. M.; thence south along said sec. line to a point due east of the mouth of said First Creek; thence west to the place of beginning.

The Superintendent had created two School Districts numbered 43 and two School Districts numbered 44. The second School District #44 was probably formed because the first no longer existed, but the second School District #43 was formed with no mention of what happened to the

Humphrey Monahan’s House in Meaghersville—1904. Humphrey Monahan bought the house from Bert Fletcher (Bill Nicholson’s wife, Mary Jane’s, brother-in-law’s partner) in 1901 for $75.00 and lived in Liberty until 1909 when he and family moved to Cowiche, Washington. The house was next to the property where Clarence Nicholson opened his store in 1934. It may be that Bill Nicholson and his wife rented the house from the Monahans when they lived in Liberty before moving to Kelso, Washington. The Monahans were still paying county taxes on the property in 1922 and the house was still standing, although in disrepair, in the 1950s. The house no longer exists. The new Liberty school building under construction is in the background. Photo courtesy of Kathleen (Monahan) Nebout, photographer unknown.
first. All the County Superintendent of Schools actions forming school districts were clearly and carefully recorded in the Superintendent’s Journal, a diary-like document preserved in the Washington State Archives Central Branch in Ellensburg. Maybe someday some other documentation will turn up to explain the strange goings-on.

Children of school age living in the district when the first petition was made in June 1893 were: John L. Brain, Meary Adams, Jenit Adams, Johnny Pilcher, Willie A. Ford, Bertha Ford, Edwin Gilstrap, Bertie Hansen, John H. Hansen, Merti E. Hansen and Masten Meagher.


Children of school age living in the district when the second petition was made in December 1894 were: Axil Swanson, Willie Mintze, Mrs.
Miners Having Fun in Old Liberty—1900’s. A fine example of an early log cabin in the Swauk Mining District. The building was a two story log structure used at various times as a boarding house, stage stop and store. The sign indicates it had Bell telephone service available. The building was destroyed when Highway 97 was improved in the 1930s. The photo shows miners were not always serious and did enjoy a good time even when laughing it up for a photographer while making music on a broom. That enjoyment of music, dancing and entertainment usually centered in the miner’s community hall two miles east in the Meaghersville mining camp.  *Al Nicholson Photo in the Fred Krueger collection.*

N. P. Kelley, Bertie Wilson, Onah Wilson, Arthur Wilson, Grace Bigney, Janet Adams, Bertha Hanson, Johnnie Hanson, Ellie Hanson, Johnnie Brain, Willie Doyle, Bert Kerstetter, Earl Kerstetter, Bertha Ford, Willie Ford, Martin Meagher and Mary Flodin.

The people signing the second petition were: J. C. Doyle, John Wilson, N. P. Kelley, J. A. Wilson, C. F. Lauderdale, B. P. Brain, L. Whitmore and B. F. Kerstetter.

Miners Build a School House

Classes were first held in old Liberty in Gus Nilson’s log building which was also the post office. Later it became the Ranger Station and then the Chic Cafe.

In 1905 a new frame building was completed in Meaghersville (present Liberty) and the Liberty School moved from old Liberty to Meaghersville. Classes were held there until 1939. A petition was filed on August 20, 1935 to transfer School District #9, Ballard Hill, School District #15, Virden/McCallum and School District #44, Liberty, to School District #30 Cle Elum. The school in Liberty was closed in June of 1939.

The children remaining in the three districts in 1935 when the petition was made were: Genevieve Scherette, LaVerne Scherette, Clyde Danko, Doris Danko, Donald Hartman, Kenneth Hartman, Dorthy Forbes, Katherine
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Forbes, Johnnie Forbes, Bino Bonnetti, Blanche Bonnetti, Evelyn Hartman, Pete Carroll, Albena Carrolla, A. Beno Carolla, Julia Carolla and Angie Carolla.

The people signing the petition were: Mr. & Mrs. Joe Ley, Mr. & Mrs. H. E. Forbes, Mrs. G. Carollo, Mr. & Mrs. J. Danko, Anton Carollo and August Hartman.

Liberty school children were now bused to Cle Elum. In 1942 Thomas Nicholson was the bus driver when he died of a heart attack after taking the children to school in Cle Elum.

Liberty’s Fourth of July Celebration—1916. The entire County was invited to a two day celebration in Liberty in 1916. From the photo it appears a large number of them came with cars decorated appropriately and everyone dressed to the nines. The miners did know how to have fun. The first day was filled with tours of mining operations, old time games and dancing at the “Wildcat Dance Hall.” The dance lasted until 4 a.m. when a case of dynamite was set off on Kingfisher Ridge to announce breakfast was being served and the Fourth of July celebration begins. The second day, the Fourth, was filled with speeches, games, contests and again a dance in the community hall only this time with “imported” music. The Fourth of July celebration is still special for Liberty homeowners and their friends.  

A Pautske photo in the Wes Engstrom collection.

Liberty’s Dance Hall Rocks

Liberty is as well known for its dance hall as it is known for its gold. Many Kittitas county marriages are linked to romances started when couples met at Liberty dances. The phenomenon continued clear into the 1940s when the original community hall was torn down.

The community hall was built by the miners and completed in 1895. It was large for the time, about 24 x 48 with a kitchen annex, by far the largest building in Meaghersville. How
the building was paid for was not explained in
the local papers, only that the community hall
was completed in time for the Fourth of July
celebration in 1895.

Charles Bigney and Thomas Meagher probably
supplied the money as part of their effort to get
miners off their claims so they could apply for
patent (title) to the claims, the Bigney and the
Discovery, two of the best claims in the district.
Both claims are right next to the camp. Bigney
and Meagher were probably also back of the
creation of the mining townsite that became
Meaghersville. Lots were laid out and either sold
or given to miners to get them to move their
houses off the two claims so there wouldn’t be
any objections when they filed for patent on the
claims. Unfortunately, they apparently never
filed the townsite claim with any authority, an
oversight that almost cost Liberty its existence a
hundred years later. Miners bought and sold the
lots in the townsite for the next hundred years
believing they lived on a legal mining townsite.

The Liberty community hall became the social
center for all of the upper county for the next forty
years with Saturday night dances the highlight.
The hall was clearly a community enterprise
maintained and operated for the benefit of the
community, especially School District 44, the
Liberty School District. An undated copy of the
rules and regulations for the board of directors
reads as follows:

Rule and regulations governing the Board
of Directors of community property at Liberty,
Kittitas County, Washington, and providing for
the election of said Board of Directors, their
term of service and duties.

Article 1. The Board of Directors shall
consist of three members, elected annually, on
the last Saturday in December, by members of
community Swauk Mining District, Kittitas
County, Washington. Said Board shall meet
and organize within a week after their election,
choosing from their membership a Chairman,
Secretary and Treasurer.

Article 2. Should a vacancy occur in the
Board the remaining members are authorized
to call a special election to fill such vacancy,
within ten days notice thereafter.

Article 3. The Board of Directors shall serve
without pay, but they shall have free entrance to
any and all entertainments given in community
hall.

Article 4. The Board of Directors shall
have full charge of community property, at
Liberty, which consists of one public hall,
one piano and piano stool, fourteen records,
Danish outfit, two stoves, four chairs, and such
other property as the community, from time
to time, may add thereto, but in no case shall
the Board of Directors allow such community
property to pass out of said community unless
duly authorized to do so at a meeting of the
community, duly advertised.

Article 5. The Board of Directors are hereby
empowered to hire such help as they shall deem
necessary for the proper maintenance of said
community property.

Article 6. The Board of Directors are
hereby forbidden to conduct a booth, or to
grant to others to conduct a booth, for the
sale of confectionery, cigars, ice cream, soft
drinks, or any and all other delicacies within
said community hall; District School No. 44 is
exempted from the provisions of this article.

Article 7. The use of said community hall
shall be free to all school entertainments and
religious services whatsoever, and all other
entertainments, not conducted under the
auspices of the Board of Directors, shall be
charged a minimum of twenty-five per cent
(25%) on gross receipts; provided that no
charge shall ever be made for use of hall for
election purposes.

One of the few meeting minutes of the
Board of Directors for the community hall that
survived was recorded by Clarence Nicholson on
December 31, 1932.

Liberty Community Hall, Dec. 31st 1932.

Election of directors for following year,
1933

Meeting called to order at 9:30 p. m. by
Andy Lechman, Chairman.

Frank Minegan, Secretary.

Minutes of last meeting discussed but not
read as no record of same could be found.

Reading of financial report read, moved and
seconded that same be excepted. Total cash
accounted for $81.07, disbursements $81.04.

Nomination of candidates for directors for
year 1933. Those nominated as follows: Fred
Seablorer, 9 votes; Harry Forbes, 8 votes; Clarence Nicholson, 19 votes; Frank Minegan, 24 votes; Geo. Jude, 9 votes; Al Jordin, 18 votes; Bart Fielding, 6 votes.

Nominations closed and balloted as per above results. Nicholson, Minegan and Jordin being elected to serve for the year 1933.

Some discussion regarding voting age limit making it possible for minors from 18 years up eligible to vote. Apparently out of order as the matter was dropped.

Being no further business, meeting adjourned, followed by a New Years Party.

C. E. Nicholson for Frank Minegan.

A memorable celebration and dance in the community hall was the Fourth of July celebration in 1916. The entire county was invited to the two-day event, and most of them came. The invitation was published in the June 30, 1916 issue of the Cle Elum Echo newspaper.
Tug-of-War in Liberty—1916. The Fourth of July celebration in Liberty in 1916 included a men’s tug-of-war. Everyone, men, women and children, dressed in their best for the occasion, including a hat, even though it was a bright sunny July 4th day. The participants in the tug-of-war took off their jackets, but not their hats for the contest. The tug-of-war took place cross-wise in the street in front of the Powers store. The Liberty School building is on the hill in the background just to the left of the store. Mamie Caldwell’s house is on the left in the photo. Her house still stands, the other structures in the picture no longer exist. Both the store and the Caldwell house were Liberty Post Offices at one time. *A Pautske print in the Wes Engstrom collection.*

LIBERTY ON THE FOURTH.

Liberty, the lively little mining center of the Swauk is planning for a two days’ celebration next week in honor of the nation’s birthday. Quite a pretentious program has been arranged, considering the means at the disposal of the committees in charge. Everybody will be welcomed and as the roads are in excellent condition now it is expected that many auto parties will hike for the tall timber Monday and there enjoy an old fashioned time in a district unsurpassed for natural scenery and hospitality.

The program as planned includes the following schedule of events on the two days, Monday, July 3rd and Tuesday the 4th:

July 3rd. Mining Day. Visiting mines. Quartz, placer and hydraulic mines will be in full operation. Guides will be furnished free on application to the reception committee.

State of Washington Mining Co. will throw open the doors of their mill to the public between the hours of 10 and 12 a. m. showing a modern stamp mill in operation. People visiting the stamp mill will also have the opportunity of seeing an old time Arrastre at work, showing the old and modern method of crushing ore.

Old time games and dancing at the dance hall from 1 p. m. to 7:30 p. m. Grand ball from 8:30 to 4:00 a. m.

July 4th. (Any special news will be wired to Liberty and bulletined on the grounds during the day.)

Salute from Kingfisher mountain at 4:00 a. m.; Mining operations on the ground during the day, 9:00 a. m., catching greased pig; 9:30 a. m., climbing greased pole; 10 a. m., bronco busting; 11 a. m., Independence Day address, Mr. Newton Hinton.
Visiting a Stamp Mill in Liberty—1916. The open invitation for all to come to Liberty for the Fourth of July celebration included an invitation to visit a stamp mill and also an old time arrastra, thus showing the old and modern method of crushing ore. The buggy load of visitors shown in the photo was probably going to the Cougar Mining and Milling Company stamp mill at the junction of Billy Goat Gulch and Cougar Gulch. At various times three of the Nicholson brothers, William, Thomas and Clarence, were involved with the mine or mill. Unfortunately, even though well funded, the operation did not produce enough gold to pay dividends to the stockholders. Only a few large concrete foundation blocks remain today.  

Athletics: From 1 to 5 p.m.: 100 yard dash for men; 50 yard race for boys; 50 yard race for girls; 3 legged race for boys; sack race for boys; wheelbarrow race for men; egg race for women; potato race for women; cigar race; running jump and standing jump; shot putting; pie eating contest for boys; horse races; tug of war; women’s nail driving contest; double and single hand drilling contests.

Hall games and dancing will be in full swing all afternoon of the 4th until 7:30, followed by a Grand Ball in the evening. Imported music will be furnished.

The story is that the “salute from Kingfisher Mountain” at 4 a.m. was a case of dynamite detonated on the ridge between Liberty and Harkness Gulch to the south. The miners had underestimated the effect of a full case of dynamite. The explosion rattled windows for miles around as the sound reflected back and forth in the Swauk Basin. Liberty sits in a bowl with mountains on all sides. By all accounts over 500 cars were counted coming to the event and everyone had a great time at the two-day celebration. Many came back afterwards for the Saturday night dances in the hall.

The original hall was torn down in the mid-1940s and replaced by the school house building. The Liberty school district combined with the Cle Elum district in 1939 and Liberty children were then bused to Cle Elum. The Liberty community hall Board of Directors bought the school building from the school district for one dollar and moved it down the hill to the site of the original community hall. It was used as the community hall until the mid-1960s when it was burned down.
Long Time Resident Remembers How It Was

There are few old-timers still living who can remember how it was in Liberty in the “old days.” There was one person, however, who came to Liberty as a bride who did write down her thoughts about the place before she died.

LIBERTY IN 1938

By Henrietta Fackler

My first acquaintance with the town of Liberty occurred in August of 1938. I was 18 years old at the time when I visited there with my husband, Ralph Fackler, soon after our marriage on August 2, 1938. We were on a honeymoon tour of the state of Washington and Liberty was one of our agenda listings.

My husband was eager to introduce me to the historic gold mining town of Liberty and the friends he had made there on earlier visits.

The town was situated 25 miles north of Ellensburg lying just 2 miles off the Blewett Pass highway. After leaving Yakima this was the route we followed and, as we turned off the highway onto the Liberty road, I was caught up into my husband’s enthusiasm and could hardly wait for my first glimpse of the town. At last! There it was! The antiquated remains of a once thriving gold mining town. Houses with weathered board and batten exteriors altered in color to a dark brown or dull golden yellow lined the roadway on both sides and among them were four log cabins. There was still a United States Post Office, community hall, gas station and store in existence. There were hardly any modern conveniences in the town. Most people had wells and used a pitcher pump to draw their water. The citizens used coal oil lamps, gas lanterns or candles to light their homes. I felt as though we had passed through some kind of time lapse ending up here in this quaint small village.

Ralph suggested that we stop at the home of Lela and Ollie Jordin who he had enjoyed visiting with at various times. The Jordins greeted us cordially and, after we had chatted for a time, they encouraged us to spend the night with them and attend a dance to be held in the community hall.

The four of us danced until the wee hours of the morning. We met many other of the townspeople at the dance who were interesting and cordial. We hoped that we would have the opportunity to get better acquainted with them in time.

We slept the night in the upstairs bedroom of the Jordin home and were delighted of the opportunity to sleep on a genuine feather mattress.

The Jordin house, during the 1890’s, served as the town boarding house, and was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Needham.

Ollie had mined in the Swauk along with his brothers Amos, Clarence and Al at an earlier time, but left the area and settled in Spokane, Washington, and there he met and married his wife, Lela, and went to work for Washington Water and Power Company.

Ollie had a premonition the 16th of September in 1932, which was also his birthday, to return once again to Liberty and join his brothers on a prospecting venture.

While out prospecting on Swauk Creek Ollie by chance ran into Roy Lilne who offered to sell his worthless claim on Flag mountain. Lilne had salted his claim and the unsuspecting Ollie paid him $200 down and was given another three days to cough up $500. Where to get another $500 was going to be a problem for Ollie. Then he recalled that before leaving Spokane, his boss had told him that he would be willing to go in as a partner and loan the necessary capital should he happen to come on to something that looked promising. Ollie wired him immediately asking for a loan of $500, but was turned down.

Ollie Jordin worked that so-called mine for about three weeks, he was down to his last four bits, when he struck it rich. Mrs. Jordin, when Ollie struck pay dirt, wasn’t one bit surprised because she had the feeling that he would.

The Ellensburg Capital came out with this quote at the time of Ollie’s find: “Ollie Jordin uncovered the richest gold in the Swauk area in more than a quarter of a century. In less than two hours, in a pocket two feet long and eighteen inches wide, the man took out twenty-six one to four pound avoirdupois pure gold nuggets estimated at $10,000 and took it to the Cle Elum bank. The gold is heavy wire gold so pure it needs no refining. In addition Mr. Jordin placed in the vault many fruit jars filled with gold not so pure and three hundred pounds of gold ore. Armed guards are protecting the property night and day.”
Dredging for Gold on Swauk Creek—1926. The photo shows the dredge upstream from the present Liberty Cafe and on the east side of Highway 97 opposite the State Highway sand pile. The operation was heavily promoted by Frank Bryant with many stockholders from the west side of the state. A dredge from Sumpter, Oregon, was brought in and assembled on a new barge. The plan was to dredge the old channel all the way to Liberty and beyond. Unfortunately, the dredge was stranded by a rock ledge just north of this location when it turned to go up Williams Creek. The dredge was not designed to work on hard bedrock and the buckets digging up the gravel were destroyed. The dredge was abandoned and, although much gold was recovered, the stockholders did not receive a dividend. The mechanical parts of the dredge were sold and shipped to Folsom, California. The barge is still rotting in its last pond.

An Asahel Curtis photo (negative number 50180) courtesy of the Washington State Historical Society.

What Ollie actually took out that day was $5000 in chunks and in an overall period of time he took out from $70,000 to $80,000 worth of gold.

Ollie repeatedly told the story of his big strike and laughingly recounted how on the day after his big strike he walked up to Roy Lilne with chunks of gold in both hands and told him that he had picked all the lemons out of the mine he had sold him. According to Ollie, old Lilne liked to had a fit.

Latter that same year Ollie and Lela and one of their daughters and her husband drove to Chicago in a brand new red car to take in the Worlds Fair.

The Nicholson Family Connects With the Evans Family

This gets complicated so read carefully. Bartema Adeline Evans, the daughter of James Alfred Evans, and a sister to Mary Jane Evans, married Billy Turner in 1898. Bill Nicholson married Mary Jane Evans in 1909. Bartema Adeline’s cousin, Bartema Elizabeth Evans, the daughter of Mary Malinda and Simeon Evans, married Bert Fletcher in 1897. Billy Turner and
Bert Fletcher were partners in a saloon in Liberty in 1897. The first home for Bartema Elizabeth and Bert Fletcher was in Meaghersville, in the house they sold to Humphrey Monahan in 1901. It was next to Nicholson’s store and post office. The Monahans left Meaghersville in 1909 and may have rented the house to Bill and Mary Jane Nicholson after that.

The saloon no longer exists and an article published in the local Ellensburg paper in 1940 preserves its history.

ELLENSBURG DAILY RECORD
January 18, 1940

LIBERTY
by Harry A. Kirwin.

A landmark in Liberty, well known to old timers, is being torn down, and I have been asked to tell the story as I pieced it together from the lips of the few who remember the days when Liberty was a live town, instead of a ghost town.

The old house was built about the time Grover Cleveland was running for president, and the records say that this was about the year 1896. The house stood originally where Gus Ziegel’s home now stands, and the first owners were Billy Turner and Bert Fletcher, of Seattle. They both have now gone to their rewards. Turner is remembered as a hack driver in the coast city, when horses were the only means of locomotion.

Coming to Liberty, which was a prosperous town then, they opened up a saloon that did a thriving business for about three years. Then they left and took their fixtures and bar with them to open up another saloon, in Yakima.

Turner died there and Fletcher went to a place near Wapato and started a fruit orchard, about the year 1910. He had with him his wife, whom he married in Liberty. Her last name was Evans, and she lived in the house that is now next to the service station. She is believed to be still alive and living near Wapato.

The old house is remembered for its gambling tables and many a big poker game was held in the back room.

There was no prohibition in those days and whiskey, wines and beer were available every day in the week. The owners tended bar and were well liked by the miners who spent their money freely. They managed to keep their place in an orderly manner and no rough stuff was permitted. It is interesting to note, incidentally, that there never has been a killing in Liberty.

There were plenty of miners in Liberty then and the hills were dotted everywhere with mining operations and the men made good money.

The only lights then were kerosene lamps for gasoline lamps had not been invented yet. Candles were much used then, too. Everyone seemed to be working, mostly for themselves, as old timers remember.

The old building was about 20 feet wide and 50 feet long, and it had a peak roof, and an attic 12 feet high was over the saloon. The building had one large room that served as the barroom, and in back there were several small rooms used as an office, storage space, gambling room, kitchen and a bedroom. The bar itself, was about 20 feet long, and there were plenty of mirrors on the walls. Most of the business was for spot cash.

When Turner and Fletcher departed with their bar furnishings, the saloon was closed for a long time. Then a Monahan family lived in it, and two boys of theirs are remembered by name—they were Jimmy and Johnny. Then a Mrs. King occupied the place and served lunches to the dancers who drifted over form Liberty hall, a block away. She also boarded miners.

Then Amos Jordin bought the place for $90.00 and moved in with his petite wife, Ina, and remodeled it inside to make it more habitable. In the meantime, the old house had been moved across the road and put in its present location. Amos moved in about the year 1903.

Billy Anderson, who is demolishing the house, informed us that the lumber used is still in good condition and in a state of good preservation. The lumber was cut by a sawmill operated by John Bloomquist, the father of Dolph, Charley and Frank, and an uncle of Amos by marriage. The sawmill was put up about the year 1895, where the Vining place is now. He then took it down eight or 10 years later and moved it to the Swauk, where Dolph’s house is now. It burned down about the year 1916 [1921], and was never rebuilt.

Two children were born in the house to Mr. and Mrs. Jordin and one also died.

Fire visited the house six time at least, but Liberty’s bucket brigade, sometimes armed with snow shovels, always fought them successfully.

Many prominent mining men have stopped at the old house and many important deals were made under its hospitable roof.
When the Jordins suffered that last fire, a few weeks ago, they decided to move next door, and demolish the house.

Many events run through the minds of the owners today as they view the end of their former home. They remember the year 1916, for instance, when the snow came down to a depth of six feet, and a tunnel was dug through the great bank from their door to the road so that they could get in and out.

Mr. and Mrs. John Powles, parents of Mrs. Jordin, once occupied the old house, and they, too, gave suppers to the dancers of yesteryear.

And so another landmark tying Liberty to the past disappears.

Harry Kirwin, the author of the above article, was another of the many colorful characters that somehow find their way to Liberty. He was born August 3, 1891 in New York and had only completed the seventh grade when he was orphaned at the age of 13. Rather than go into an orphanage, he signed on as deck hand on a ship going to South America. He jumped ship in Argentina and spent 16 years working where
he could. He became a photographer, a reporter, a translator (fluent in Spanish, French, Italian, German and Portuguese) and a paper publisher before returning to New York where he worked as a reporter and photographer. He traveled to Seattle with the promise of a job. The job fell through and he worked for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer and a newspaper in Spokane before going back to sea.

While at sea, he was injured and ended up coming to Liberty in 1939 to recuperate. He had married Marguerite C. McConihe whose father, L. F. McConihe, had set up the first mill in Williams Creek. Kirwin had no money and managed to survive by writing for both the Cle Elum Miner Echo and Ellensburg Record newspapers, taking and selling photographs and receiving a lot of charity from friends and neighbors.

Harry and Marguerite rented the empty school house building from the School Board for a dollar a year. They insulated the building by tacking cardboard boxes on the walls and pouring sawdust in the attic. Later they moved into the Ben Killson houses for a short time.

When World War II broke out, the Kirwins left Liberty and he became a captain's yeoman and ship's photographer aboard the Rescuer, a salvage ship manned by a civilian crew under control of the Navy. He was recommended for a hero's medal from the Soviet Union for saving the life of a seaman aboard a Soviet freighter the Rescuer was attempting to salvage.

Later Kirwin wrote and took pictures for the Marine Digest magazine and wrote a history picture book, “This Was Seafaring.” He was admitted as a special student at the University of Washington after passing entrance examinations and in 1948, just before his 57th birthday, he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree. He then went on to get a Master's Degree and teaching certificate. He died in Seattle at age 96 with no surviving family and no money. A lost soul with no one to remember him.

His soul is welcome to come back to Liberty.

A Miners Wagon Road Changes State’s Plans

Early prospectors used pack animals to carry their supplies; but when they discovered a deposit that deserved development, larger equipment was needed and required improving the pack animal trails into wagon roads. The miners had to do this themselves as local governments did not have money to do it. The miners’ wagon road between the Swauk and the Peshastin mines has turned into a major cross mountain highway heavily used today.

An Indian Trail Becomes a Wagon Road

Prospectors who discovered gold in Swauk Creek in 1867 and again in 1873 were prospecting farther to the north and were returning to Yakima after unsuccessfully looking for gold in the Peshastin and Mt. Stewart range. Gold was discovered on Peshastin Creek above Ingalls Creek at about the time the Swauk deposits were found. There were no wagon roads at the time; prospectors were using Indian trails and pack animals. At first, pack trains were used to haul necessary supplies for developing the mines, but wagon roads were needed when the Peshastin Camp began major development in the 1890’s.

In 1892 the Blewett Mining Company bought a majority interest in the Peshastin mines and needed to haul heavy equipment to the site to build a stamp mill. The equipment could not be hauled from Wenatchee, because the Peshastin River ran through a gorge that was too narrow for wagons to get through. The heavy material would have to be hauled from the Liberty side of the Wenatchee Mountain Range. Kittitas county commissioners declined to help build the wagon road, so the miners built it themselves.

Blewett organized miners to build the wagon road. He supplied materials and miners donated their time and labor to convert an Indian trail into a wagon road. Records do not indicate what name Indians gave to the pass, perhaps it was just the Wenatchee pass. They followed the old
Indian trail with a series of short switch backs up the steeper parts of Park Creek and down Peshastin Creek.

When the United States Geological Service created the first official map of the area, they named the pass “Blewett” after the company that built and maintained the road. Blewett also opened a post office in the mining camp, and the “Peshastin” mining camp came to be called the “Blewett” mining camp on the Blewett Pass wagon road. The wagon road itself also received a prestigious name for a while. It became the “Sunset Highway.”

A Wagon Road Becomes a State Highway

In 1915 Washington State was converting wagon roads to automobile roads. The “Sunset Highway” was to connect Seattle and Spokane. It was planned to go over Snoqualmie Pass to Ellensburg then north over Colockum Pass to Wenatchee and over the Columbia River at Wenatchee and on to Spokane. The road needed to go to Wenatchee because the only bridge over the Columbia was at Wenatchee.

Kittitas County Commissioners had already paid for a survey over Colockum Pass when Cle Elum interests objected as they wanted the
The Sunset Highway in the Beginning—1920’s. Above, the Sunset Highway at the entrance to the Wenatchee National Forest. On the right, the Sunset highway as it went by the stamp mill at the old Blewett gold mining camp on the Peshastin. The title “Sunset Highway” sounds very grand. However on the ground, at first, the Sunset highway didn’t look much different than a good wagon road. The above entrance to the Wenatchee Nation Forest would have stood where old Liberty was on Swauk Creek and the view of the old Blewett stamp mill shows how the highway first looked. It was a single lane road with turn outs and it wasn’t until the mid 1920’s that the road was made into a two lane road. In the late 1930’s the road past old Liberty was completely realigned and it wiped out most of the buildings in old Liberty. After the World War II the road on the Peshastin side was also realigned and it wiped out all the buildings in the old Blewett camp except for the stamp mill. There is a plaque at the site of the old Blewett camp indicating a mining camp once existed there. There is nothing at the old Liberty camp site.

*Both photos by Al Nicholson in the Fred Krueger collection.*
road to go over Blewett Pass. After all there was already a wagon road built there by the miners. The Commissioners agreed to pay for another survey only this time over Blewett Pass. However, they specified a seven percent grade, the same as the wagon road. Such a grade was too steep for automobiles of that day. Cle Elum interests were incensed and raised money for another survey over Blewett Pass, only this time on a five percent grade. The matter was settled when A. J. Sylvester, the Forest Service Ranger, offered to contribute $1000 toward the cost of the road if it went over the five percent grade on Blewett Pass. Discussion ended. Work began.

The miners’ wagon road over the Wenatchee Mountain Range now became the “Sunset Highway,” the main automobile road between Seattle and Spokane. Even the five percent grade road was a challenge with its many curves, no guardrails and a narrow one lane. The incredibly sharp hairpin curve on the new road was named “Echo Point,” not because you can hear an echo there, but because the Cle Elum Echo newspaper was instrumental in organizing Cle Elum interests to pay for the survey. The “Sunset Highway” name

Sawmill at Mountain Home on the Sunset Highway—Before 1921. The J. W. Wall sawmill at the mouth of Park (Pass) Creek with the Nemeyer/Triplett (Mountain Home) homestead in the background. The mill was bought by Hugh Counts in 1920 and burned in 1921. In the early 1890’s August Sasse had the homestead and it was the end of the wagon road, there was only a pack trail over the pass to the Peshastin mines. The homestead was called Mountain Home and was a stage stop on the old wagon road. By the time this photo was taken the wagon road had been improved and was called the Sunset Highway. In the photo there is a car on the Sunset Highway just to the left of sawmill. When the highway was reroute in the 1950s to go over Swauk Pass the new road went right over the millsite. Mountain Home was located where the Old Blewett highway leaves Highway 97 at Hurley Creek. Nothing exists there now except for a kiosk just off the old highway with pictures of the old buildings that had existed at that site. An Al Nicholson photo in the Wes Engstrom collection.
didn't last.

When a bridge was built over the Columbia River at Vantage in 1927, the “Sunset Highway” was rerouted through Ellensburg over the bridge and then on directly to Spokane. The road over Blewett Pass was still the only road over the Wenatchee Mountains and was heavily used. It was widened to two lanes in the 1920s; however, it was still an exciting experience to drive over with its sharp curves, steep hillsides, lack of guard rails and narrow width. Eventually that changed.

In the 1950s the highway was rerouted over Swauk Pass 4 ½ miles east of Blewett Pass. The pass was 31 feet higher (4102 ft. versus 4071 ft.) but the grade was much less and the curves much gentler. When the road was first moved, the pass was named Swauk Pass, for a while.

Travelers over the Wenatchee Mountain Range were so accustomed to calling the old Liberty-Blewett road the “Blewett Pass highway” and the summit “Blewett Pass” that they continued to do so. Eventually, the State Highway Department conceded and renamed “Swauk Pass” as “Blewett Pass” and the original pass as “Old Blewett Pass.”

What started out as a miners’ wagon road in the 1890s is now a major state highway, SR 97. Thus the legacy of the old Swauk and Blewett miners lives on in the name given to the pass over the Wenatchee Mountain Range and a highway that is now the main north-south route on the east side of the Cascade Mountain Range.

**Miners’ Legacy Mostly Disappears**

Swauk miners contributed greatly to the early development of Kittitas county. A contribution that is mostly forgotten and the evidence of its existence mostly erased. The old Liberty camp on Swauk creek is gone, not even a sign to remind people it once existed. The miners’ old wagon road over the Wenatchee Mountain Range has been reclaimed by the forest without even a trail to show where it once was. The last post office, store and service station are gone as is the community hall, school and a third of the buildings in the townsite. What remains, however, speaks well for a few dedicated people for saving what is left.

Only part of the mining camp of Liberty on Williams Creek remains to remind people of what once was. The last post office, store and service station are gone as is the community hall, school and a third of the buildings in the townsite. What remains, however, speaks well for a few dedicated people for saving what is left.

The handful of residents in the Liberty camp were severely threatened twice, first by a mining company that attempted to evict them, burn their houses down and then mine the property. Then the Forest Service attempted to eliminate the townsite and make a camp ground in its place. It was only with the help of hundreds of Kittitas county people that the residents were able to preserve what was left of Liberty.
In the 1960s a large mining operation attempted to evict the residents of Liberty and mine the townsite itself. The residents resisted forcibly and the case ended up in the State Supreme Court before it was settled in favor of the residents. During the dispute a number of buildings, including the community hall and the old post office, were destroyed.

In the 1970s the Forest Service attempted to evict the residents claiming they were squatters on federal land. The residents believed they were in a legally created mining townsite and searched diligently to find the paper setting it aside as a townsite. The paper was never found, but enough documentation was found to create a Liberty Historic District. The case was finally settled by having the United States Congress passing a special law allowing the residents to obtain title to their property. In the end after ten years of conflict, the residents gained clear title to their land by buying it from the government.
The Liberty Historic District was formed in 1974 and includes a larger area than just the present townsite. The west end of the Historic District was dropped from the townsite application because Virgil Hiner of Gold Placers Inc. and Irwin Benish, both of whom had mining claims on the property, did not want to be involved in applying for title to the property. It was ten years after the dispute started in 1970 and six years after the Historic District was formed that the townsite property owners finally obtained clear title to their property. The administration of the portion of the Historic District not included in the townsite is the responsibility of the Forest Service. Although nothing has been done by them, it is still possible that a historic Liberty mining interpretive center could be created in the future in the buildings used by the Nicholson brothers, Clarence and Thomas, for their garage. They still stand. During a dispute with a mining company over ownership of a mining claim, the Nicholson post office building was destroyed as was the community hall. A new community hall has been built, but the post office building is just an empty space where the school bus turns around.

Drawing courtesy of US Library of Congress (Historical American Building Survey No WA-163—Liberty Historic District (1981)).
On March 29, 1963, the Golden Thunderbird Mining Company (later the name was changed to Gold Placers Inc.), with Virgil Hiner as general manager bought the holdings of Nugget Properties, Inc. There were patented and unpatented claims included in the sale. These claims were situated along Williams and Boulder Creeks beginning near Deer Gulch. Among the unpatented claims was the New Discovery, and it was occupied by the Liberty townsite. Gold miners and families had began to settle along Williams Creek in 1883. By 1890 the surface of the New Discovery was measured out into town lots and residences and business buildings were constructed. This settlement was recognized as a town called Meaghersville.
Trouble for the town residents and property owners began to surface soon after the sale of the mining properties. Virgil Hiner tacked up notices on all the town buildings which stated: “In compliance with Forest Service regulations prohibiting the use of unpatented mining claims for cabin and home sites, this structure must be moved from this claim immediately.”

He also drove through the town and using a loud speaker demanded that the people vacate the claim because it now belonged to the Thunderbird Mining Company. The mining company and the residents alike appealed to the Forest Service for help, but they adopted a hands off policy. Personnel of the mining company continued to display a belligerent attitude toward the townspeople and it soon became apparent they would use any means at their command to assert what they believed to be their right of ownership to the Liberty townsite, the New Discovery claim.

In the meantime the company began work on the Bigney claim that lay adjacent to the Liberty townsite. Noise from their machinery droned incessantly through the pine studded valley and the great iron jaws of their equipment tore viciously into the overburden of the Bigney. As they worked they heaped huge piles of tailings and debris onto a portion of the town, and rocks and dirt soon begin to slide into the clear mountain waters of Williams Creek.

When the townspeople of Liberty made no effort to vacate their properties, Virgil Hiner and his cohorts burned down the town hall and a log cabin that at an earlier time served the community as a United States Post Office. The residents were highly incensed by this hostile act and mourned the loss of these historical buildings. It was learned later in time that
District Ranger Warren Drake was in favor of the burning.

The buildings were burned during the day, while the men were away at work. The women in town were intimidated by this aggressive action and were at a loss as to what they should do. One of the women climbed the hillside and helplessly watched the act of desecration, while her tears coursed down both sides of her cheeks.

The town hall was a former school house built in 1904 and attended by children of the district up until 1939, when Liberty School District 44 was consolidated with the Cle Elum School District. From that time until present the children have attended Cle Elum and Roslyn schools, and are transported there by bus.

When the school house was vacated the residents bought the building from County School Officials and converted it into the town hall. This was done as a replacement of the original hall built in 1892 and was torn down in 1944, because it had deteriorated to such a degree that town citizens felt it was no longer safe to use.

Counting Gold From Liberty—1966. The Gold Placers mining company recovered a large amount of gold from their operation in Liberty, the exact amount is unknown. A newspaper reported the gold shown in the photo as twenty pounds but didn’t say how many days work it represented. After the company was stopped with a rifle from mining the Liberty townsite, the residents took the case to court with Jack McSherry of Cle Elum as their attorney. The case eventually ended up in the Washington State Supreme Court which ruled in favor of the residents. The townsite on the New Discovery claim could not be mined. The mining company continued mining on their patented mining claim property up stream to Boulder Creek, but the overburden got so deep they had to quit. They went broke. Even though they had recovered much gold, it wasn’t enough to pay the stockholders any dividends. The stockholders lost their investment.  

Photo in the Wes Engstrom collection.
The community halls had always been the central gathering place for the people in the town and the whole of the surrounding community, and was used for multi-purposes, such as, Swauk Mining District miners’ meeting; Church and Sunday School services; weddings and receptions, bridal and baby showers; Saturday night dances, where gold nuggets were given away as door prizes; a poling place for the Swauk Precinct from 1892 until 1961; the Women’s Literary Society organized in 1904; and occasionally a theatrical presentation performed by traveling actors groups.

Hiner’s animosity toward the people grew in intensity and he continued with any means at hand to try and drive them out of their homes. His next venture was an attempt to divert all of Williams Creek into the town ditch. Fearing that the town would be washed out by this action, two of the town’s women made an effort to stop Hiner and his co-workers. Elsie Hale held a rifle on the culprits, while Henrietta Fackler contacted the local State Game Department Warden to alert him of the infraction of state game laws about to take place. The warden soon arrived upon the scene and advised Hiner of the regulations of the game department that did not allow hydraulic projects such as, diverting a creek from its natural stream bed. He further stated, “That if Hiner attempted to continue with the violation he would be arrested on the spot.”

The next move made by Hiner to intimidate the townspeople was an attempt to cross the creek for the purpose of dumping huge loads of tailings separated as residue from the gold ore into the middle of the town. On the day this was to take place, Graham Thorne, a resident and World War II veteran, patrolled the creek bank carrying a rifle that he was prepared to use if the occasion should arise. Fortunately, the game warden arrived in time to settle the matter (while protecting the creek waters from the trucks that would have driven through the creek).

It was not long before a serious assault occurred. Clarence Jordin Jr. was attacked by Virgil Hiner and his brother while working in his yard. Clarence Jordin Jr. said he was hit on the head by one of the men’s pocket knife. There also was a third man present with the Hiner brothers. Jordin’s stepfather came to his defense, and between the two of them they fought off the onslaught perpetrated by the Hiner brothers and their friend. Jordin sued the Hiner brothers. He won the court decision and received a rather sizable sum to compensate for his injuries.

After the assault on Clarence Jordin Jr., several of the miners started packing their guns. The County Sheriff became fearful that there would be a loss of life and made the remark that the Liberty area was a powder keg ready to explode.

Hiner began to complain that he was unable to carry on with his legitimate mining operations because of the Liberty occupants. He blamed the Forest Service for its refusal to prosecute what he felt was trespassers upon the land. He soon filed suit against the Liberty homeowners in an effort to evict them.

The Liberty residents hired Jack McSherry, a Cle Elum attorney, to defend them in the Kittitas County Superior Court. The decision made by Judge Cole was in favor of the residents and based on the testimony of Amos Jordin, a long time resident in Liberty, that in an earlier time it was first named New Yakima, then Meaghersville. He testified to assisting Thomas Meagher and one David Long in surveying and dividing up the townsite into 100 foot frontage lots in the year 1885.

Virgil Hiner and company immediately filed an appeal to the State Supreme Court, but to no avail. The State Supreme Court handed down a decision in favor of the residents on August 10, 1967.

Jack McSherry set a precedent case in securing the decision in favor of the Liberty residents. Ordinarily, cases concerning mining properties are held in the federal courts. The decision was based on the precept of estoppel and laches, with the explanation that various mining claimants spent years of acquiescence and silence while the Liberty inhabitants continued to live on the property they regarded as their own. However, the Judge had stated: “As against the United States, residents are squatters or mere occupiers of the land. It will avail them nothing to show that the buildings were built 10, 20, 50 or even 80 years ago, for no one can acquire by holding adversely to the United States.”

Hiner and company did make one last appeal to the United States Supreme Court, but because of lack of support from the Forest Service and the length of time it would take to get their case before the court, more than likely discouraged them and they withdrew their appeal.
Forest Service Challenges Liberty’s Existence

Liberty has had a long running feud with the Forest Service beginning when the Wenatchee Forest was formed in 1907. The miners didn’t like the Forest Service telling them what to do after they had occupied the land for thirty years, and the Forest Service didn’t think most of the people in the camp were really miners but instead where squatting on Federal land. The standoff came to a head in 1971 when the Forest Service attempted to evict the residents of Liberty and turn the site into a campground. The conflict was finally resolved in 1980 by an act of Congress allowing the present residents to purchase their property from the Federal government. The mining camp of Liberty, which once had 200 to 300 miners spread over many square miles, is now precisely defined as 15.94 acres with 19 lots plus one community lot. It is on the state and national historical registers as a place where the independent miners’ traditions still exist. Miners are still working in the surrounding hills in search of that elusive gold. Again, it is Henrietta Fackler describing the conflict that began in 1971. Henrietta was the leader of the group of residents who stood up to the mining company and the Forest Service and is credited with saving Liberty.

According to 1872 mining laws, which were based on the peculiar customs, usages and laws of the mining districts, which dates back to ancient time, miners within a plotted mining district could stake a mining townsite claim and hold it by occupation of the property to the time of patent, and there was no stipulation as to a specific time the patent should be applied for.

On the other hand, a mining claim is held by the claimant for an indefinite time by completing $100.00 worth of assessment work each year.

In the case of the Liberty Townsite claim, it was staked and platted long before the Forest Service was ever established. There were two streets within the town. One was named Main...

Article courtesy of the New York Times.
Street and ran from west to east through the middle of the town. The other street was called Swauk Avenue and began at the town hall crossing Main Street and stopping at the school house on the north side hill.

In January of 1971, members of the Ellensburg Ranger District, United States Forest Service, appeared in Liberty unexpectedly one day. They brought with them restrictive use-permits (an instrument allowing the residents to continue to live there under rigid terms conforming to Forest Service policy), and told the people that they had no alternative but to accept the use-permits or face eventual eviction from their homes. These agents of the Forest Service said, “You people in our opinion are considered to be squatters residing upon public lands, but because of your long tenure upon the land we have decided to try to resolve your occupancy problem by means of a use-permit.”

The people felt that the use permit was merely a sham offering and its only purpose was to coerce them into relinquishing all legal rights to their property. They refused to accept the permits, because they felt they had legal rights and title to their properties.

The people knew that their historic mining town would be destroyed by fire if they were
evicted, because Andrew Wright, Supervisor, Wenatchee National Forest, told them so. He said they planned to create a campground on the site. From that day forward American flags flew day and night over the Liberty townsite; a constant reminder of the imminent danger that threatened the town and its citizens. The people rallied from the initial shock of the Forest Service proposal, and began to explore all available resources and possible support that would be of benefit to them.

Attorney Jack McSherry was engaged to represent the Liberty residents and property owners. Jack McSherry had been a champion of the people for over 25 years. He outlined a plan of action for the people to take under consideration. He said, “Taking a government bureau into court and expecting to win is like butting your head against a stone wall.” He continued, “The better way to handle the situation would be to gain public interest and support by airing the problem through the news media and seeking political help.”

Letters were mailed to state and federal legislators and local and state newspapers, TV stations, and radio stations were contacted. The people were overwhelmed by the response from the news media. The news items were eventually picked up and aired by the Associated Press, New York Times and French National News. Repeat TV specials were shown throughout the United States. Some of the local television

Rebuilding Liberty’s Community Hall—2006. A new community building was built on the spot where the previous two community halls stood. It is a community gathering place as well a place to display historical pictures of Liberty’s past. It is designed to resemble the old Liberty school except for the large folding doors to accommodate a water wagon with pump which was the first fire fighting equipment for the community. It is being built entirely by donations of money, labor and materials by Liberty community people, not just the homeowners in Liberty. The siren was donated by a Whatcom County Fire Department and does work. It can be used to alert residents of an emergency but is usually only used to announce the start of a Fourth of July parade. Photo by Wes Engstrom
stations that helped were: KOMO Channel 4 and KING Channel 5 in Seattle and KAPP TV and KIMA TV in Yakima. Local newspapers involved were: Grange News, Seattle PI, Tacoma Tribune, Daily Record, Northern Upper County Tribune, Yakima Herald and Wenatchee Daily World.

Petitions were circulated throughout Kittitas County and Washington State describing the perilous situation the Liberty citizens were faced with and the necessary support they must engender in order to save their homes and historic townsite. Many signatures of those offering support were collected by means of the petitions, and later in time, were included in the packet of legal documents sent to U.S. Representative Mike McCormack and Senators Henry M. Jackson and Warren G. Magnuson.

The Liberty Coalition was organized as a non-profit corporation and proved to be a formidable force in the on-going controversy with the Forest Service. The Liberty Coalition held monthly meetings within the town. They were attended by local officials, members of the State Parks and Recreation Board, Vista representatives, local historians, concerned citizens, old timers having once lived in Liberty, and state and federal legislators and congressmen. Coalition members carried on a low key campaign and never hesitated to invite the local forest ranger to their meetings and kept him informed of activities relating to the Liberty crisis.

Preparing for Fourth of July Parade—2014. Fire District #7 is using two ladder trucks to make a welcome arch for the Fourth of July parade in Liberty in 2014. When Liberty was annexed to Fire District #7 in 2009 the community hall was offered to them for one dollar a year if they, in return, kept a fire engine in the hall for the protection of the community. They agreed and not only put one but put two vehicles, a brush truck and a pumper truck, in the hall. The fire station is maned by volunteers from the community. When the hall is needed for a community event, the trucks are moved out and the tables set up. In addition the hall is open at all times for visitors to come in and view the historical pictures displayed in the hall. Although there aren’t many old miners left in Liberty, the new residents take the Fourth of July seriously and have fun celebrating the birth of our nation, the nation with Liberty and freedom for all.  

Photo by Wes Engstrom.
Vista representatives, Tom and Julie Ahern, joined the coalition members and lent invaluable assistance to the cause. They helped to organize Liberty research materials, designed and printed “Save Liberty” bumper stickers, and printed brochures (material written and researched by Henrietta Fackler). The brochures called attention to the struggle the Liberty people were involved in to save their properties. Inserted within the brochures were cards addressed to Legislators appealing to them to help save Liberty townsite. Later it was learned that hundreds of these cards found their way into the offices of Representative Mike McCormack, Senators Henry M. Jackson and Warren G. Magnuson via the recipients of the brochures.

Tom Ahern wrote the application to the State Parks and Recreation Board for the placement of Liberty on the national roll of historic places. Dr. Earl Glauert and Henrietta Fackler furnished advice and material for the application.

Wes Engstrom and Ralph Fackler built a booth that was taken to the Ellensburg fair grounds for the purpose of passing out brochures and “Save Liberty” bumper stickers. It was well worth their efforts. Much support was realized from it.

Early-on a team was organized to research records concerning the townsite and the predecessors who settled the area. Members of the team were Clara Barker, Connie Guse, Joyce Osgoodby, Joyce Engstrom, Evelyn Hawton and Henrietta Fackler. Although beginners in the field of research, records
researched by this team later proved to be most helpful in establishing the people’s legal right of ownership to their property.

The residents revived the early custom of holding a Fourth of July celebration. Many interested people came from throughout the county and state to partake of a pot-luck picnic and to join the celebrations. There was fun for all; horse shoe pitching, gold panning contests, exhibitions by the Legendary Gun Fighters (a group who donated their services to the Liberty campaign), three legged races, bingo and pie auctions. The auctions and bingo games helped finance the campaign to further the cause, and the guests upon leaving were resolved to join in the efforts to save Liberty.

Things seemed to be going well for the campaign to save the town and properties when the Forest Service issued an ultimatum—Sign use-permits or move out! Immediately, telephone calls and telegrams went into the legislators.

At the advice of their attorney the residents barred themselves inside their houses. They suspected that U.S. Marshalls might appear at any time to evict them.

Friends and old timers in the area received word of the eviction notice and were all fired up,
ready to come to Liberty and build barricades on the road and defend them with rifles. The people refused the offer not wanting to place these good friends in jeopardy.

At the last minute legislators intervened and told the Forest Service to back off and give the people ample time to research the records they needed to establish the legal claim to their properties.

**The Forest Service Decides To Help**

The Forest Service gave the residents a number of extensions and in the end helped the residents get clear title to their property. The paper establishing a mining townsite was never found. Enough information was found, however, to create the Liberty Historic District. When that happened, the Forest Service decided the best way to resolve the conflict was to have the residents submit a new application for a townsite under the 1866 townsite laws. The Forest Service helped the residents submit such an application. Symbolically, it was submitted on July 4, 1976, the day of the United States Bicentennial Celebration. Things were looking good for the

**Liberty Still Produces Nuggets by the Handful—1980’s.** Liberty is famous for its very large gold nuggets. The largest nuggets in the state came from here. The ones in the photo are from the old Bigney claim across Williams Creek from Liberty. Many of the old claims are still being worked on a smaller scale by individuals. You would think that after 140 years, all the gold would have been found. Not true. For various reasons there are still places that never were mined and still hold treasures waiting to be found. No one has found a “mother lode” yet that would support a large scale operation and make many people rich. Perhaps you can be the one who finds it.  

*Photo from the Wes Engstrom collection.*
residents.

However, that fall the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 was passed by Congress and became law. It repealed homestead and townsite laws, including the 1866 law the Liberty residents had filed under. The new law did not have a provision for creating a new townsite on federal land. After all, no one had filed for a townsite under the law for many years. It looked like Liberty residents had won the battle with the Forest Service but lost the war with the United States Government.

The Forest Service came to the rescue again and suggested a special interest bill be passed by Congress saying Liberty could be an exception to the new law. There was a provision in the new law

**Liberty’s Gold Specimens Have Spread Around the World—2006.** This particular specimen came from Clarence Jordin’s mine on Flag Mountain, the Ace of Diamonds. The Marcear brothers, Al and Ted, recovered a 120 lb pocket of crystalline gold from the mine in 1956. The specimen shown above was acquired by F. John Barlow who had the largest private mineral collection in the United States. The catalog of his specimens had this to say about it. “This famous specimen, weighing 99.64 g, consists of inter-grown bright wires and brilliant arborescent crystals. It is one of the two finest golds recovered from this classic American locality. Barlow acquired the specimen from Ernest Butler, who handled the best pieces recovered from the mine. The piece was pictured on the cover of Lapidary Journal, September, 1971.” After Barlow died, his mineral collection was sold. The Rice Northwest Museum of Rocks and Minerals in Hillsboro, Oregon, acquired the specimen along with other specimens from the Swauk area. They now have the largest collection of Liberty crystalline gold anywhere. There is a specimen from this same Ace of Diamonds pocket in the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D. C. as well as in mineral collections around the world. Crystalline wire gold is still being found around Liberty.

*Photo courtesy the Rice Museum, Hillsboro, Oregon.*
that provided for the transfer of federal land to a
town that needed to expand but was completely
surrounded by federal land. That didn’t exactly
apply to Liberty as the townsite didn’t legally
exist; hence there was no political entity for the
United States government to transfer the land to.
The proposed special interest bill provided that
in this case the land could be transferred to the
Kittitas County Board of Commissioners. The
Commissioners, in turn, could transfer the land
to the residents.

Again, the residents used all the political
influence they could muster to get the entire
Washington State delegation in Congress to
support the bill. It worked. The bill was passed
by Congress and signed by President Jimmy
Carter in 1978. Victory at last. However, that
celebration was short lived also.

Two Additional Roadblocks
Materialize

Two additional obstacles surfaced that would
have to be overcome. First, there is a Washington
State law that says property cannot be disposed of
by County Commissioners except at auction to
the highest bidder. The second law, The Federal
Historical Preservation Act, says property of
historical significance cannot be disposed of by
the Federal government without the approval of
the Historical Preservation Commission.

The first roadblock was removed by getting a
special interest bill passed by the Washington
State Legislature and signed by Governor Dixie
Lee Ray. It sounds easy to say, but it never
would have happened without a special effort
by Senator Frank “Tub” Hanson, a friend of
Liberty. The session in 1980 was supposed to
be “bare bones” with no special interest bills.
Senator Hanson managed to pull it off anyway
and Liberty became an exception to the State law.

The concern of the Office of Historical
Preservation took more intricate negotiations
but was finally resolved by proposing a county
zoning ordinance to preserve the character of the
Liberty Historic District. Back to lobbying. This
time lobbying the County Commissioners and as

a result the “Liberty Historical Zone” was added
to the county zoning code. Any new structure
would have the old-time look with board-and-
batten or log exteriors, plain galvanized roofing,
wood windows, no paint and wooden fences.

When the historic district was created, it was
not the architecture that was stressed as important
to preserve but instead the independent spirit of
a mining community. It was based on the Liberty
sign—“You Have Just Visited The Living Remains
Of A Ghost Town.” The spirit of the miner is still
here. You just can’t see a spirit, you have to feel it.
The county zoning would assure that the look of
a ghost town would also be preserved. The spirits
of the old miners are happy to have a familiar
place to hang out.

Again, the residents celebrated—and again, the
celebration was short lived.

Liberty Becomes More Costly

The next roadblock showed up when the Forest
Service appraiser came to place a “fair market
value” on the Liberty property. The original 1866
townsite laws provided for the federal land to be
sold for a townsite at $2.50 an acre. The Federal
Land Policy and Management Act of 1976
specified land to be sold at fair market value.
Unfortunately, the special interest bill passed by
Congress was silent on the subject of price. The
appraiser decided fair market value was $2,500
per acre, the going price of recreation land at the
time.

The residents hadn’t expected to pay that
much for land they already owned. Another
special interest bill was considered, one that
would specify a more reasonable price. However,
Senator Jackson had died and a new slate of
representatives was in office. It would be another
huge effort to solicit political support for another
special interest bill. More importantly, what
looked easy to the politically naïve residents the
first time was now recognized as a truly heroic,
or lucky, effort. A special interest bill was truly
“special” and not easy to do. It was decided to
pay the United States government their asking
price. However, one small concession was won.
The original appraised price included the county road. The residents told the Forest Service that if they had to buy the county road, they were going to erect a toll gate and recoup their money. The county road was removed from the deal.

Raising the money was not easy because some residents simply did not have it. However, friends and family did come through for those in need and $39,650 was deposited with the County Board of Commissioners and the title transfer process started. In December 1981 the residents finally received clear title to their property.

The struggle for clear title would not have been successful if it weren’t for the widespread feeling of “community” that county residents felt for Liberty. People who had lived here and people who had gone to school in Liberty were amongst the most helpful supporters. There were also the large number of people who identified with Liberty, because they had mined or played or gone to dances in Liberty over the years. One person played a pivotal role in the struggle.

Henrietta Fackler Was a Leader

Henrietta was the driving force in having Liberty declared a historical site on both the state and national registers of historic places. She also spearheaded getting a special interest bill passed by Congress granting Liberty residents clear title to their property. In addition she pushed for a special interest bill passed by the Washington State Legislature and special historic zoning passed by the Kittitas County Commission before the title was finally given to the Liberty residents for their property.

Henrietta had never finished high school and...
knew the campaign to save Liberty would require skills she did not have. At age 50 she obtained a GED and enrolled in Central Washington University where she learned to do historical research and where she enjoyed helping Prof. Earl Glauert by researching gold mining for his book “Kittitas Frontiersmen.” Henrietta became a skilled researcher and writer.

Henrietta also realized the struggle to save Liberty required political skills she had not developed. She entered into politics in 1972, and served as chairperson for the Kittitas County Democratic Central Committee for two separate terms. Her newly acquired political skills proved very effective.

Henrietta attended grade school in Ellensburg and then moved to Yakima where she met her husband, Ralph Fackler. They were married in 1938 and their son, Allen, was born the following year. After living in Yakima a few years, they moved to Liberty where their daughter, Carole, was born. Henrietta said they chose Liberty for their home because of her husband. He fell in love with the outdoors and became a logger for the rest of his life.

She was known fondly as “Henry” to her relatives and “Rusty” to her friends because of her beautiful red hair.

Henrietta had a brilliant mind and it was a cruel turn of fate that she should be afflicted with Alzheimer’s disease and had to spend the last nine years of her life in a rest home. She died in 2006. She was a loving mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, who did not hesitate to stand behind her beliefs.

One of Henrietta’s favorite people in Liberty was Ollie Jordin who was one of Liberty’s best tall tale tellers.

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A Miner’s Tall Tale Still Mystifies

We began this story with a description of the last Liberty post office, a place where the miners gathered and exchanged tall tales. One of those tall tales was good enough to make the local papers. It is a story by Ollie Jordin about his fifty million year old frogs. It is fitting that we end this book with that tale, a tale that is still debated as to whether or not it is factual or an opportunistic situation a tall tale teller used to create a good story.

Ollie Jordin was one of Liberty’s better miners. At least he caught the public's attention with his large pocket of gold taken out in 1931 and his trip to the Chicago Worlds Fair using the proceeds. Ollie was also known as a great story teller and a teller of tall tales. One never knew when he was pulling your leg or was telling the truth. One story I was sure he was pulling my leg with was about the fifty million year old frogs that came to life after he dug them out of his mine on Flag Mountain. It was only after I ran across a front page article in the Ellensburg Evening Record that I realized he was telling a real tale. At least, if it wasn't true, he had a lot of people fooled.

In March of 2009 Vern Jordin, Ollie Jordin’s nephew, visited Liberty and in the course of the discussion Ollie Jordin’s frog story came up. Vern says he saw the frogs himself. They were small, about the size of one’s thumbnail and they could croak really loud. The frogs in this story at least were real. And as I said, the story was good enough that it was reported in the papers. Who knows? Maybe there are more prehistoric frogs to be found in Liberty.

This is Ollie’s frog tale as it was reported in the Ellensburg Record newspaper:

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This is Ollie’s frog tale as it was reported in the Ellensburg Record newspaper:
HALF-DOZEN FROGS, BLASTED OUT OF SOLID ROCK IN JORDAN GOLD MINE IN SWAUK, CROAK MERRILY, PUZZLE SCIENTISTS

Initial Investigation of Remarkable Discovery Indicates They May Have Been Entombed for Ages

Live frogs—50,000,000 years old?

Blasted out of solid rock, deep in the bowels of a Swauk hill above Liberty: just “two handfuls of slimy, muddy substance.”

The spark of life—dormant perhaps since the Eocene age, 50 million years ago—fanned into flame. Hours before a single noticeable twitch of a cold, snow white body. A gradual “warming up” and more signs of returning life. Hours and days until the last of the little creatures finally “came to.”

That’s the story of six frogs Ollie Jordan and C. E. Brown took from a tunnel in the Jordan gold mine on February 4. Two weeks ago and now all six of them show every sign of being normal frogs, with complete restoration of all their frog characteristics.

They breath, jump, eat, see and more important—they croak. They jump higher than most frogs their size and croak loud enough to keep you awake nights.

Await Investigation

Whether the frogs have lived since the rocks were formed ages ago, or crept into a crevice to
hibernate was the question awaiting scientists’ investigation today.

And if the facts regarding the find stand up under strictest probing. It is agreed that the discovery will attract attention the world over as the most important of its kind in that particular field of science.

Jordan and Brown discovered the frogs while blasting mineralized shale rock 190 feet in from the entrance to the tunnel. The point is 75 feet from the surface of the hill directly above. The men had worked all day preparing the blast. At 4:30 that afternoon they touched off the dynamite. Half an hour later they entered the tunnel to clean out the loose rock. Then they discovered the frogs.

“My God, look at the gold.” one of the men exclaimed as the small white object glistened in the dim-lit tunnel. Eager fingers clutched at the mass. Shocked by the touch of the cold, apparently dead frogs, they withdrew their hands. Silently they examined the mass more closely.

“They’re frogs.” both stammered. “We haven’t had a drink today have we?” they asked each other after they recovered from their first shock of the unusual experience. They agreed that they hadn’t, and went to work to give the slithering objects attention.

They placed them on a rock in the tunnel for about half an hour. Jordan said. Then they brought them to the tunnel opening, where they placed them near a warm stove. After 90 minutes Jordan noticed one of the frogs moved his head slightly. An hour and a half had elapsed since the dynamite blast had opened up their place of hibernation.

Thrilled by the sudden realization and firm belief that they were looking at the oldest living things ever seen by man, the men placed the seemingly lifeless forms in a pail and started for the Jordan home in Liberty.

“Cook these for supper tonight,” Mrs. Jordan says her husband told her as he handed her the pail. She opened it and almost “passed out.” “I don’t like frogs anyway, and these, well, I just can’t say how I felt.” She relates.

Revive in Warmth

The warmth of the Jordan home was all that was necessary to completely revive the frogs. They showed signs of life slowly and gradually. It was two days, though, before the last of the six finally decided that fifty million years was enough hibernation. He joined the other five among Mrs. Jordan’s flowers, picking a nice branch for a perch.

Yesterday afternoon, Col. E. K. Brown, who heard about the strange discovery from the Jordans on Wednesday, took Prof. George F. Beck, head of the science department at the Central Washington College of Education; Ed Wilson, local amateur photographer, and a Record reporter to the Jordan home to get first hand information on the unbelievable incident. The Jordans and Brown told their story, and offered the frogs as evidence. Convinced that the men actually did “blast them out of hard rock.” Beck was impressed, admitted the possibility and went to work checking the details as science would demand before accepting the facts as truth.

Like Seeing Angels

“This is just like seeing angels.” Beck remarked after he took one look at the six lively “prehistoric” specimens. “We might all be convinced that they certainly did come from the mineralized shale. Thus definitely establishing them as of the Eocene age, but it’s going to be a hard task to prove that to skeptic scientists.” he added.

It is possible that frogs lived in the early Eocene age, Beck said. These six probably finished a midnight serenade along the shore of some lake or swamp, and as the fall season was almost over, they picked themselves a nice slimy spot to dig in for the winter.

Of course winters weren’t very cold or long in those days, because palm leaf fossils found in the same deposit indicate that this country was then in the tropics. Nevertheless frogs must hibernate and these six certainly did.

Along about spring high water must have washed a lot of mud down to the edge of the swamp or lake where the frogs were taking their winter’s nap and before they could dig out they were completely buried. Then there were other disturbance on the earth’s surface and after millions of years the spot was completely covered.

The frogs were then perfectly sealed in the tomb, until Jordan and his hired man got busy with their dynamite.

Did Live In Other Ages

Beck said that frogs did live during the Eocene age, according to the teachings of science. There have been other instances where frogs have been unearthed under similar circumstances. Science, however, does not accept the discoveries as facts, and you can’t find accounts of the two or three such incidents in the textbooks or writings of eminent scientists.
However, Beck will attempt to check all the details of the discovery. First he will get in touch with an expert on frogs and find out what kind these are. If they should happen to be a species of amphibians now found in the tropics, Jordan’s frogs are certainly 50,000,000 years old.

Those who visited the Jordan’s frogs were impressed by the sincerity of the men who made the find. According to their story it was impossible for the frogs to get into the mine in any way, other than that outlined. There are no openings from the mine tunnel to the surface of the hill above.

**Tunnel is New**

Work on the tunnel started in November, after frogs had hibernated for the winter. The last 25 feet of the tunnel was run during the past 25 days, Jordan said, and certainly there were no frogs looking for a place to “dig in” for the winter during that period. This further removes the possibility that the frogs were present day inhabitants of the district.

Both of the men are certain that they “blasted them out of the rock.” They didn’t save the “pocket” in which the slimy mass was sealed, but know what kind of substance it was, and gave a good description of it. Jordan said he believed he could find some of the exact shale on the dump at the entrance to the tunnel.

The miners stated that the frogs were not visible when they worked the tunnel before the blast. They said they drilled one hole for a “shot” only about 18 inches from where they found the pocket containing the frogs after the blast. They were emphatic in their statement that had the pocket been there before the blast they would have seen it and the frogs in it.

Beck intends visiting the mine at an early date, and carefully examining the rock formation in the tunnel and other details of the discovery. It may be possible to prove to other scientists the facts in the case, and in this event the discovery would be the first authentic one of its kind.

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**Welcome to a Living Ghost Town—2016.** This view of Liberty was taken from close to the spot the original view of Liberty was taken that is shown in the first part of this book. Flag Mountain is in the background on the right with Table Mountain in white beyond that. The Nicholson garage buildings are on the left, the next structure being the Liberty arrastra, where the Humphrey Monahan house once sat. Mamie Caldwell’s house is in the center of the photo, the new Liberty community and fire hall is on the right. The buildings may have changed but the spirit remains the same. Liberty and freedom is what America is all about.  

*Photo by Wes Engstrom.*
Four of the frogs, are about two inches long, and the other two are about one inch long. Their legs are the usual length of frogs of that size. They are a peculiar looking species. One unusual thing about them is that they seem to change color. When placed in a white box they all turned gray. On a dark living room rug they took on a darker hue.

Beck brought two of them to Ellensburg with him for further study and observation. Miss B. Bussetti, zoology instructor at the high school, examined the frogs last night and said they were different from any she had ever seen, she thought. She was not certain, however, that they were not of the species now found in that district.

The tunnel in which the frogs were discovered is near the one in which Jordan found $14,000 worth of “wire” gold in one pocket in October, 1931. Jordan and his mine gained fame as the result of this discovery, but if the frogs are the genuine 50,000,000 year-old frogs they are thought to be, fame and fortune as the result of their discovery will dwarf his old strike, it is believed.

Another Discovery

At least one other similar discovery has been reported in this district. In October, 1928, workers unearthed a frog while excavating for the bridge across the High Line canal north of Thorp.

This frog was found in sandy hardpan, and was dug up by a workman who saw its head protruding along side a small rock. The apparently dead frog was placed in the sun and came to life after a few minutes. It lived about an hour.

Paul Jones, divisional engineer, was the authority for the statement that the frog probably was several years old. It was found about 10 feet below the surface. He said he could not explain how it got there or what had kept it alive.

After it died, the body shrunk to about half its size, and took on a mummified appearance. It was displayed in a window on Pearl street for some time and then turned over to a local biologist.

Shortly before the discovery of this frog, another one was receiving a lot of publicity, after it had been taken out of a cornerstone in a building in Texas. It was said that the Texas frog was known to have actually lived 30 years imprisoned in the cornerstone.

The odd part of the newspaper story is the fact I could not find a follow-up to it. It seems strange the readers would not demand a follow-up to such a fantastic front page story. I did check with the Central Washington University where Prof. Beck was a well known educator and the person credited with identifying petrified Ginkgo wood and creating the Ginkgo State Park. Unfortunately, his papers are no longer at the University so I couldn’t uncover what he may have written on the subject of frogs.

Ollie also told his frog story to Fred Krueger on an audio tape made in 1972. The story as told in 1972 was as follows:

Fred: What about the frogs you found while mining one time?

Ollie: Well, I blasted one day in that mine, and I was back in...if it was straight down it would have been about 100 feet (below the
surface), and I was into solid rock for 150 feet. I shot and I went in, and I seen this kind of a slimy stuff—ya know, a whole bunch of it. So I looked at it and looked at it, and I went and got a can. I picked this up with my hand and put it in the can. And out about ten feet in from the mouth of my tunnel was a stove ‘cause I was workin’ in the winter. When we eat our lunch we had a fire in there and it was nice and warm. I had a hole cut up through the earth for the pipe to go through. Well, I put the can behind the stove in a bucket, and after we eat our lunch we went back to work. At night we build a fire to warm up before we come down, and I looked down and I thought I seen somethin’ movin’ there—just a little. I said to the fella workin’ for me, “That’s funny lookin’ wire gold, but I’ll take it down anyhow”.

I took it down and put it in this big barrel we used to keep flour in, and forgot about it for pretty near a month. One night about midnight I heard somethin’ goin’ chrip-chup, chip-chup, and I wondered ‘for gosh sakes what is that’. Leila said it was frogs’a croakin’. We got up and there was nine little frogs in there. Little bits’a fellers—looked just like flies. In the mornin’ in the light I noticed what color they was. They had turned gold color. Finally E. K. Brown come up, and he thought they was funny lookin’. He went to Ellensburg and got a zoologist from the college there, and he come up and looked ‘em over. So we went up to the mine, and there was snow on the ground. He was tryin’ to find the rock where I found ‘em in, but I dumped it over the dump. It was all broke up, so we never did find any. He figured those frogs had been in there from three to four thousand years old. Don’t know how he figured. He said the eggs been laid there in an age ago pond, and ‘a upheaval come along and covered ‘em all up. It just happened it didn’t mash any of ‘em, and they laid there without air, and when they had air they come to life again. That’s the way he explained it.

Then I give three of the frogs to a man from Seattle, and his three died ‘cause he tried to feed ‘em feed—ya know. These frogs would not eat anything unless it was alive. You couldn’t feed ‘em nothin’ dead. I’d get ‘em flies, and they’d swallow them big black ants—ya know. They get their belly full and you could see the ants move, and the frogs’d jump once in a while—it didn’t kill ‘em. They’d go out and eat, and when they wanted back in they’d come to the door and start to hollerin’ and I’d open the door, and they’d make a run for their kettle there where they stayed. And they eat somethin’ in the dirt. I don’t know if it was little bugs or what. Well, I had ‘em here, and I had a fire.

There was 75 men fightin’ that fire with a bucket brigade. And, the Forest Service come up and asked me if I had it insured. Yeah, but it just run out while we was puttin’ it out. It took ‘em about ten-minutes for ‘em to get here with their chemicals to put it out. And somebody carrin’ the stuff back out grabbed this and up set it, and after it was all over I looked and two of ‘em in here mashed flat, and the big one was in here and he was mashed-killed all three of ‘em. The day before I was offered $300 a piece for ‘em. I wouldn’t sell ‘em at all-end of the frogs. That was about 1938.

It is unfortunate that Ollie’s house caught fire and in the excitement of putting out the fire all the frogs were stepped on and killed. Who knows, if that hadn’t happened maybe Liberty would be famous as the Jurassic Park of prehistoric frogs.

So much for a miner’s tall tale. Like many tall tales it leaves a question unanswered. Were the frogs truly in a state of suspension for millions of years? No one knows. The rest of the story has not yet been told.

A Living Ghost Town Remains

Liberty today doesn’t look like it did when it was an active mining camp. It is too neat. No mining equipment of various kinds in the yards. Lawns that look like they should be in downtown Bellevue, not in a mining camp. Some of old mining shacks have been replaced by new houses. Yet, when the great-great-great-grandchildren of the pioneer prospectors drive through town, they sense the spirit of the old place. Perhaps the pictures in this story will preserve a glimpse of what the place really looked like a hundred and thirty years ago for them.

The place does have the spirit of the old miner. It can be felt, ghosts and all. It is a living ghost town.

Enjoy History
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