IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

MULDOON

Number 158 1980

A year after a notable mining rush to Wood River had brought thousands of fortune hunters to search for lead silver there, Jesse Elliott located a Little Wood River prospect which expanded lead production to Muldoon. Following Elliott's discovery in May of 1881, promotion in Philadelphia brought eastern capital to that area early in 1882. Muldoon obtained a post office, February 15, and townsite lots were sold to eager settlers on April 13. By May that incipient city had two tents and a cabin. As soon as a road was completed there early in May, freighters began hauling in a smelter. Twelve tents, housing three stores, three restaurants, and three saloons, marked the progress of civilization in Muldoon as soon as a road was opened. Late in May, Muldoon had a dozen saloons to accommodate a population of almost 500.

Forty men immediately went to work on a smelter for the same Philadelphia company which had opened one in Ketchum a year before. Others dug charcoal pits and built a sawmill. Once equipped with a sawmill, Muldoon gained permanent buildings. Much like Ketchum, Muldoon began as a modern, progressive camp. Their Philadelphia smelter followed Ketchum's plant in having an early electric light plant--an installation which preceded those of Hailey and Boise. Mining commenced by mid-June. After four hundred tons of Fish Creek iron ore arrived to enable smelting to proceed, processing of lead got underway after more than a month's delay. Problems in completing a tram accounted for their late start. Two water jacket furnaces, each capable of smelting forty tons of ore each day, had been brought in from San Francisco's Pacific Iron Works. One, though, would have been enough. So Philadelphia investors went about purchasing more mines to match their smelter capacity. They already had spent almost $75,000 on their smelters and tram system which brought ore down 1,200 feet from their mine to a two-mile road leading to their smelter, which started about September 30.

After a month's smelting, twenty tons of bullion was hauled out to Blackfoot for rail shipment. By spring they had a 3,000-ton reserve, and when lime became available to repair enough charcoal kilns to enable smelting to resume, additional production became possible.

Frontier life in Muldoon had serious drawbacks in 1882. On August 27, after unsuccessful complaints concerning their company boarding house, miners there discarded their Sunday dinner into Muldoon Creek and insisted that a new cook be employed. Their cook was not amused, and company officials responded that no one else could be found to take on that job. Then on September 17 a violent wind blew a lodging house down, leaving that facility totally wrecked. The

owner moved on to Ketchum. In spite of such unpleasant conditions, sixteen men mined there that winter.

In April, 1883, J. W. Ballentine came out from Pittsburgh to organize operations at Muldoon more efficiently. That spring he had twenty charcoal kilns in production there. Then he contracted for a forty-mule pack train to bring eight tons of upper Fish Creek iron ore six miles each day to a wagon road. Freighters hauled his iron another six miles to Muldoon. By August, seven hundred tons of iron and two hundred tons of galena had been packed in for smelting. Low wages held employment down to a small number of miners, largely because little silver was available and lead prices were low enough that operations were marginal at best. By October, Ballentine's cost ratio turned negative. Running out of operating funds, he had to shut down entirely in October. In November he managed to add ten miners to his staff of four; encouraged by finding some carbonate ore rich in silver as well as lead, they undertook a lot of additional development which incidentally provided an ore reserve of more than four hundred tons that winter. By May of 1884, they had blocked out enough low grade values to justify an investment in a fifty-ton concentrator. That spring Ballentine returned to Pennsylvania long enough to obtain a lease, June 1, that would enable him to enlarge his plant and operate Muldoon's mine with a partner.

Returning from Philadelphia in June, Ballentine arranged to have his concentrator fabricated in Hailey in order to save time and obtain better service. With a concentrator to supply his second smelter, he anticipated running at full capacity--a welcome change. Modest development work on other neighboring mines promised additional ore to help make his enterprise a success. None of these operations transpired, though. A year later, after Ballentine's enterprise failed, he arranged to resume his management position for Muldoon's Philadelphia smelter. By October of 1885 he completed a large moving project, hauling all his tram and mining equipment from Muldoon to a more promising North Star lode on the east fork of Wood River. Then in 1886 he went into cattle ranching at Muldoon. His Philadelphia Mining and Smelter Company did not give up altogether, however. They proceeded on December 6, 1886, to patent several Muldoon claims.

A year later, S. S. Wilson revived interest in Muldoon with his Bear Gulch Black Spar mineral discovery. Selling part of his interest for $30,000 to Saint Louis investors, he managed to employ ten miners, January 23, 1888. Experience as a California placer miner from 1849 to 1855, and as a quartz miner since, helped him to promote his new property. By May 1, 1888, he had 300 tons of ore ready to mill and two more carloads ready to ship to a smelter. His ten miners kept on working through 1888, but declining lead-silver prices discouraged an effort to construct a concentrator. Operations were shut down altogether from December 1888, until April, 1889. Although a sawmill was brought in to Muldoon, 1889 proved to be a pretty quiet year there until a vast August forest fire burned out the smelters (which had not operated since 1884 anyway) and houses. Some development work continued in small Muldoon properties that fall. But irregular ore shoots in complex fissure veins made development very difficult. Inability to operate a smelter without a greater variety of ore--which hardly could be imported into an isolated camp like Muldoon-compounded the problem of trying to mine there. Since Muldoon's lead-silver lode

extended for several miles, a number of companies continued to attempt to devise a satisfactory technology for operating there. They failed repeatedly.

Undeterred by disaster, promoters of Muldoon properties kept on trying to mine there. J. E. Smylie's Lake Creek bonanza discovery east of Copper Basin on upper Lost River only nine miles from Muldoon encouraged a mining revival in September, 1891. By the spring of 1892, several Muldoon properties had accumulated some modest ore reserves. Yet they needed a direct road to a smelter in order to try to operate. In spite of that problem, enough Muldoon properties looked good enough in 1892 that William Hyndman took over the Philadelphia mining property there the next year. Frank E. Johnesse tried to promote another group of new Muldoon claims in 1896. By that time, Muldoon was being viewed retrospectively as a famous old producer. Muldoon's greatness, unfortunately, derived from magnificent production that had been anticipated rather than achieved.

Development activity in 1901 and 1902 brought renewed promise to Muldoon. Finally in 1906, about sixty miners revived that unfortunate camp. Then a spectacular catastrophe created some genuine excitement there:

> During the night while no one was working, a great body of water broke into the tunnel, presumably at the face which had just passed a porphyry dike, and the flood continued for about forty hours under enormous pressure. The pressure and volume was such that it washed away the car, tools, shop, and a big dump which had been accumulating for a year, as if by magic. Just below the dump a grove of large fir trees, some of them three feet in diameter, were cut out and uprooted by the escaping flood and tossed aside like straws. It cut a gully down the side of the mountain to bedrock in places thirty feet deep, rolling over and pushing aside boulders of many tons weight in its course. It raised the creek out of its banks for four miles. The water was discolored and muddy like yellowish tailings. After forty hours the flow gradually decreased until at the present time there is a stream about one-and-a-half inches deep flowing out of the mouth of the tunnel. The tunnel is filled with mud and debris that tapers back to the roof at a point about seventy feet in beyond the entrance. Many pieces of what appears to be calcite casing and quartz crystals are mixed with the debris in the tunnel together with pieces of galena and carbonate ore. A spring which was formerly flowing on the surface nearly over this tunnel and which has been drained by it, has commenced to flow again, which leads to the assumption that the underground reservoir is not yet completely drained but simply choked and dammed up and when opened will flow again.
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> A crew of men have been put to work to clean up this tunnel and underground mystery.

Work at Muldoon went right on after this mishap. That month Robert T. Tustin--who kept Muldoon active until 1912--started building cabins for an extensive new operation. Supported by Arizona capital, he started bringing in a new hundred-ton mill the next spring. Lack of a road better than an existing steep grade over from Bellevue held him back: a four-horse team could not haul more than 1,500 pounds up that hill. On May 26, 1908, he got Hailey support for a superior alternate route. Construction began in June, but in August this ambitious project had to be suspended for lack of funds. Five hundred dollars were raised to finish a one-lane road with turnouts, but two hundred dollars more were needed. Eventually Hailey's road was completed in November, just in time to be closed by snow.

Tustin finally went ahead with his mill project without waiting for a better road. In September, 1908, he had fifty or sixty miners and builders employed with a payroll of $7,000 to $8,000 a month. Wages ran four to seven dollars a day. With hydroelectric power, his new mill, tramway, and assay office would be thoroughly modern. New bunkhouses also were necessary to accommodate Tustin's large crew. Another property six miles from Muldoon also was active in September of 1908. A force of eight or ten men built a new camp there that winter.

Although work had to be suspended for a time in January, 1909, because of the winter weather, construction was completed in time for milling to commence that summer. During an initial season, Tustin's hydroelectric mill (driven by a 200-foot head of water that ran 2,700 feet through a 22-inch pipe to a generator) was "producing a very high grade product." By September, Muldoon had stage service to Bellevue (since Hailey's road never was reopened), and Muldoon ranchers and farmers profited considerably by having a local market for their products as well as better access to Wood River. Shutdowns in 1910 and 1911 resulted from problems of operating an unreliable, low-grade mine with a cost-ratio rarely more than borderline at best. Only twenty miners even tried to resume work in 1911. If they did not have to invest eight dollars a ton hauling out their concentrates, they might have had a chance. But late that season, Muldoon's mining machinery and equipment was consigned to a mill between Hailey and Ketchum. In 1912, Tustin decided he would do better trying to revive Bayhorse instead of attempting to restore Muldoon.

With production of only about $200,000 in an initial era (1882-1884) and not a lot added from 1908 to 1910, Muldoon never lived up to an early reputation which depended mainly upon extensive capital investment rather than recovery of lead and silver. Attractive enough to be built up twice, Muldoon's major contribution turned out to be machinery which became available for other mines near Hailey. Muldoon finally emerged as a superlative livestock country after sheep and cattle ranching (which commenced there to supply mining markets) supplanted lead and silver as a major element in Little Wood River's local economy.