

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

GIBBONSVILLE

Number 387

Commencing as a northern extension of a long series of Lemhi placer discoveries, some Anderson Creek finds in the summer of 1877 proved to be too low grade to gain much attention. But as soon as they were traced to a promising lode in September, an arastra went into production that fall at Gibbonsville. Two more followed in 1878. Enough miners came in to justify opening a post office there, April 8.

Unlike most other lode mining camps, Gibbonsville was developed by the original discoverers. They managed to cover their cost of getting into operation from proceeds of their production. Simply by working their outcrop, they took in enough profit to bring in a ten-stamp mill in 1879. Development funded that way was necessarily slow, but by 1880 Gibbonsville had gained a population of around 175 and attracted enough favorable notice in Butte that substantial British capital was brought in the next year.

With British investment, Gibbonsville took on a more conventional development. By 1882, fifty miners were employed there, although their company got into disrepute by neglecting to pay them. Soon the camp was shut down because of litigation. Aside from that kind of problem, Gibbonsville had important natural advantages as a mining camp. Located near the Continental Divide and close to the Montana boundary, Gibbonsville had a good wagon road through nearby Big Hole to the Utah and Northern Railway. Later, a Northern Pacific branch line from Missoula up the Bitterroot came within thirty-five miles of Gibbonsville. Eventually, the Gilmore and Pittsburg reached Salmon in 1910. By that time Gibbonsville had gone through more than one phase of development, all of which had been more practical because of available transportation facilities.

While lode mining made Gibbonsville into Lemhi County's major gold producer after Leesburg went into eclipse, Dalonega Creek and other nearby streams finally provided significant placer production. Hughes Creek placers followed in 1895, with Minnesota capital to fund their operations. By that time Gibbonsville had become a town of seventy-five to a hundred buildings, with roller mill and three stamp mills, two sawmills, two stores, and six to eight saloons. A thirty-stamp mill brought in there in 1895 ran a little over two years before the company became insolvent in 1898.

Additional capital investment in the summer of 1898 raised the total number of stamp mills to five, and a newspaper--the Gibbonsville Miner--was available to publicize the area. Then, upon reaching greater depth, Gibbonsville's lode turned to sulphide ores which no longer were free milling. So the camp declined abruptly. In September, 1899, George M. Watson noticed that:

Gibbonsville is a thing of the past. There is not enough ore in the camp to run five stamps, everybody is leaving for new fields and the camp is nothing more than deserted houses and shacks.

This misfortune left Gibbonsville inactive for six years.

A later operation renewed mining at Gibbonsville in 1906, and in 1908 a twenty-stamp mill was constructed to handle sulphide ores there. Although almost all production there came from extensive low grade ores, Gibbonsville accounted for about \$1,500,000 in gold up through 1898. Total production of about \$2,000,000 finally made Gibbonsville into one of Idaho's more substantial gold camps.