

Thomas Cover



Gallatin History Museum

**Cover, Thomas Wells**, prospector, frontiersman (Mar. 31, 1831-Sept. 22, 1884). B. at Westminster, Maryland, his last name is often mistakenly spelled Coover. At the age of 4 his parents took him to Richland County, Ohio, and later he attended a business academy at Mt. Vernon, Ohio. Around 1850 he went west, reporting he had spent two years in Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas, then frontier areas before returning to Ohio where he remained briefly. About 1854 he set out again, engaged in the lumbering business in Minnesota, arrived in Colorado during the gold rush there, visited Pinos Altos, New Mexico, and by one report went on to Chihuahua City, Mexico, before returning to Colorado. In early 1862 he led a party of 26 hopefuls to eastern Idaho; finding they could not take wagons overland to the Idaho gold camps from where they were, the party, or some of it entered southwestern Montana by Lemhi Pass, Cover visiting Goldcreek, Deer Lodge and in the summer of 1862 arriving at the new gold camp of Bannack, a community he helped to lay out. In the spring of 1863 he was one of a party of six others which included Lou Simmons, Bill Fairweather, Henry Edgar and Barney Hughes intending to join the James Stuart exploration group visiting the Yellowstone and tributary streams. The small group never quite caught up with the larger, but was captured by Crows, humiliated to some extent and at length turned back with a warning not to advance farther into Indian country. On the way back on May 26 they struck gold at Alder Gulch, the richest placer ever discovered in the history of the world, although the six did not profit spectacularly from it. Cover reported that he was prominent among the vigilantes who hanged Henry Plummer, Boone Helm and more than a score of others in early 1864. A bit later he and Perry (Bud) McAdow established the first sawmill near Virginia City, Montana; after a few months they sold out and moved up to the Gallatin Valley where they established the first commercial grist mill in Montana at the present site of Bozeman. This was a highly successful business, selling all the grain they could grind at Virginia City, Helena, and to military posts along the Bighorn River, Fort C.F. Smith and others. In April 1867 Cover and John M. Bozeman, his friend, headed toward C.F. Smith to see about flour contracts. They crossed the Yellowstone and at the mouth of Cady Coulee, about 14

miles east of the present Livingston, Montana, were accosted by five Blackfoot Indians. In the resulting affray Bozeman was killed and Cover wounded. The next year Cover, by now married, moved to Los Angeles, California where he joined Louis Prevost in a silk industry project, but the death of Prevost who had the expertise for the operation caused its abandonment. Cover became one of the founders of Riverside, California, and prominent in development of the navel orange empire which commenced there. He became interested in the legend of the Pegleg Smith gold discovery on the desert southeast of Riverside and financed or took part in five expeditions to relocate it. He interviewed everyone he found with information upon the subject, even traveling to Yuma, Arizona, to interview Dr. Albert E. De Corse who had an especially probable insight into the existence of the lode. Cover had a few narrow escapes on the desert from one exigency or another. On his final trip he left his partner, Wilson Russell, on September 22, 1884, to hike across the Borrego Badlands and meet him on the other side, but he never reappeared. A \$1,000 reward offered by his widow for information as to what had become of him was never paid, but it served as a bait for countless expeditions in search of his remains by veteran desert travelers and expert trailers. The supposition was strong in some quarters that he had been killed by one or more of the Helm brothers, cousins of the notorious Boone Helm, who were reported to have known Cover in Montana and to be aware of his activities on "their" desert hunting for the Pegleg, but no murder was ever proven and no one ever was charged with doing away with Cover. Reports that he had been seen at various times over subsequent years in other lands were generally discounted. A 1902 report that bones had been recovered by a surveying party along with a ring in which his name was engraved was rejected by his family; a report that a deputy sheriff, Charles L. Wright had recovered charred bones of Cover was rejected by a court. Thus there remains no proof whatever as to his fate although the probability is that he met his death within a few miles of where he disappeared, and that foul play was involved, since the body never was found although assiduously searched for by skilled desert frontiersmen. Cover had fathered two daughters, one of whom married

subsequently. His wife, the former Mary E. Hess, was born November 14, 1835, in Ohio and died January 30, 1913, at Alameda, California.

Dan L. Thrapp, *Poor Tom Cover*, manuscript in preparation.

**Covington, Leonard**, army officer (Oct. 30, 1768-Nov. 14, 1813). B. at Aquasco, Maryland, he was commissioned a cornet of the Light Dragoons March 14, 1792, a lieutenant October 25, joined the army of Anthony Wayne and became a captain July 11, 1794. Covington "greatly distinguished himself" at the Battle of Fallen Timbers August 20, 1794, leading a cavalry charge in which he personally killed two prominent warriors with his sabre. He resigned from the army September 12, 1795, pursued agricultural interests and served as a Representative in Congress. He was commissioned a lieutenant colonel of Light Dragoons January 9, 1809, and colonel February 15, 1809, commanding Fort Adams in Wilkinson County, Mississippi, in 1810; later Covington took possession of Baton Rouge and a portion of West Florida. He was transferred to the northern frontier in 1813, became a Brigadier General August 1, 1813, and was wounded mortally in the Battle of Chryslers Field November 11, dying at French Mills, New York. He was buried at Sackets Harbor, New York, the place of burial now known as Mount Covington.

BDAC; Heitman; J.F.H. Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province. . . with Biographical Notice of Eminent Citizens*. Jackson, Miss., Power & Barksdale, Pubrs., 1880.

**Cowan, Emma Carpenter**, pioneer (c. 1854-Dec. 20, 1938). As a girl of 10 she was brought to Alder Gulch, Montana, from "the East," the family settling for a year at Virginia City. In 1873 she first visited the geysers of Yellowstone National Park; in 1875 she married George F. Cowan, moved to Radersburg, Montana, and in 1877 with her husband and others including her sister, Ida, 13 and brother, Frank, took a vacation trip to Yellowstone where they were come upon by Chief Joseph's Nez Perce on the long trek from Idaho toward Canada. Her husband was shot, mortally as she supposed, and she and her relatives and some others of the party were captured, but not mistreated. She sat at a campfire by Joseph: "The chief sat by the fire, sombre and

From "Encyclopedia of Frontier Biography"

by Dan L. Thrapp

# COVER LOST LIFE HUNTING FOR GOLD

MINER, DYING, TELLS GALLATIN  
PIONEER OF SOURCE OF  
MUCH WEALTH

*Philadelphia Mail 1/5/40*  
Starts Across Desert and Perishes; Re-  
mains Identified by a Ring; Fate of  
John Bozeman Recalled by Gallatin  
Pioneers.

The tragic death of Thomas Cover, who founded the first flour mill in the Gallatin valley, and the killing of John Bozeman, for whom the city of Bozeman was named, was graphically told a number of years ago to the Pioneer Society of the Gallatin, by Mrs. W. J. Beall, historian of the society, who had lived in Bozeman for over 60 years at the time of her address.

In her address Mrs. Beall mentioned many of the early day pioneers of the Gallatin valley—according to the Indians, "The Valley of Flowers"—among them John M. Bozeman, after whom the city is named; Daniel M. Rouse, William W. Anderson, W. J. Beall, John S. Mendenhall, Frank F. Fridley, W. J. Davies, Squire Fitz and others. Speaking of John M. Bozeman, she said in part:

"Mr. Bozeman was born in the state of Georgia. He was by nature a pioneer, restless, brave and resourceful, had no conception of fear, was without culture or education, but brave to a fault. It was due to this fact that he lost his life. In the spring of 1867 he and Thomas Cover started for a trip to Fort C. F. Smith, which had been established on the Big Horn in the fall of 1866. Two or three days later they met a small party of Blackfeet Indians who appeared to be friendly, but they treacherously shot and killed Bozeman and wounded Cover, who returned to the city a few days later. Bozeman was killed April 19, 1867. Thus ended the life of a brave pioneer for whom this city is named."

Regarding the tragic end of another of the Gallatin valley's pioneers, Thomas Cover, who started the first flour mill in that section and who later went to California, the speaker said:

"While Cover was in Riverside, Calif., an old miner came into the town one day to die. Cover visited him, and just before the old man breathed his last he told Cover how he had discovered the wonderful Peg Leg gold mine, which is supposed from tradition to have been the mine from which the Aztecs drew their wealth. The tradition was well known to Cover and to every other miner in California, and he knew that the man who found it would be fabulously rich. So, taking a friend named Russell with him, he

started to cross the great desert, known as the Carisco bad lands, and by following the old miner's instructions, to find the wonderful mine.

"When they got to the edge of the desert the arrangement was made that Russell would drive around, which would take about six hours, and Cover would walk across. That was the last seen of Cover alive. Russell arrived at the place they were to meet, but Cover was not there. Searching parties tried in vain for months to find him.

Identified by Ring

"Seventeen years later a surveying party working for the United States

government came across the skeleton of a man buried in a few inches of sand. The sight was not unfamiliar to them, but their attention was attracted to a ring on one of the fingers, bearing a Masonic emblem, and when they made a careful examination they found the name, "Thomas Cover," in the ring. One member of the party had heard of the strange disappearance of Thomas Cover, and at his instance the bones were carefully collected and taken to Riverside and were given in charge of Mrs. Cover, who arranged for a decent burial. The Peg Leg mine is still 'lost,' despite the fact that Death Valley, in which it is supposed to be located, is now a show place, with railroads, autos, hotels and even cities within its confines."

# First Flour Mill Built in Year 1864

The first flour mill in Gallatin county, and said to be the first in the territory to make flour for commercial purposes, was built by Cover and McAdow, in the fall of 1864 and the spring of 1865, on ground a short distance northeast of the present city limits of Bozeman. It was ready for business in the fall of 1865. P. W. and W. B. McAdow later bought the interest of Thomas Cover, and the McAdow brothers continued the mill until 1879, when P. W. McAdow went down on the Yellowstone and located on a ranch, establishing the town of Coulson, now part of Billings. W. B. McAdow kept the mill operating until 1883. When the north line of the Milwaukee railroad was built from Bozeman in 1912, the old mill was torn down, as the right-of-way of this passed through the mill site. The first electric light plant used this old mill for a few years.

## Mill Stones Preserved

The mill stones from this historic mill lay on the ground near the former residence of Mr. and Mrs. W. B. McAdow for several years, but were moved in the spring of 1931, through the efforts of the Board of Public Recreation of Bozeman, to another historic spot, in the southwest corner of Beall park, city recreation center, four blocks north of Main street. They were placed on a foundation of logs preserved from the former home of pioneers, Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Beall. These mill stones, one weighing approximately 1000 pounds, and the other 1365 pounds, were purchased by Cover and McAdow in St. Louis, Mo., and were shipped by steamboat to Fort Benton, Montana, and were brought overland from Fort Benton to Bozeman with mule teams and wagons by Cover and McAdow with the assistance of Frank Rich. 8/11/54

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## Other Pioneer Mills

The second flour mill in the valley, erected at Springhill about 20 miles north of Bozeman in 1867-68, was known as the Union Mills, started by three Penwell brothers, who conducted the mill for several years. The mill was later owned and operated by J. F. Roll. It had not been operated for several years, and during the winter of 1930, it was destroyed by fire from some unknown cause. Geo. D. Thomas who had settled with his family near what was then the town of Hamilton, not far from the present city of Manhattan in 1864, moved to Gallatin City in 1871, and took charge of the Madison mills, erected the previous year. He installed new machinery, changed the name to Empire Mills, and manufactured famous brands of flour for several years.

## Later Flour Mills

Nelson Story, an early Montana pioneer, built a flouring mill in 1882 at mouth of Bridger canyon, a few miles north of Bozeman, and with the help of his sons Nelson Story Jr. and T. Byron Story conducted the business several years, then sold to the Bozeman Milling company which company is continuing the business. The Gallatin Valley Milling company operates at Belgrade, and the Bon Ton Flour mill was built in 1932 in Bozeman. 8/11/54

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THOMAS COVER

Mrs. W. J. Beall in an address to the Sons and Daughters of Gallatin Pioneers, February 22, 1923, "Historian was Early Pioneer," printed in the Bozeman Chronicle, February 23, 1923 says of Cover:

"Thomas Cover was one of the discoverers of Alder Gulch, on May 23, 1863. After he made a fortune there, he came to Bozeman and was the senior member of the firm of Cover and McAdow, who built the first flour mill in the valley or in the Territory. The mill and residence were built on the hill east of the city, where the Milwaukee railroad built the north line extension of the Gallatin Valley road, and at this time the mill was torn down....

"In the fall of 1865, Mr. Cover went east, and in the spring of 1866, he returned with a bride, formerly Miss Hess from Columbus, Ohio. She was a cultured lovable woman, who in the years of her residence here won the hearts of all who met her. It was my privilege to know Mr. and Mrs. Cover well. It was in their hospitable home that our beloved Bishop Tuttle was welcomed at his first visitation in our city, in July, 1868, when there were but seven women in the city. Mrs. Cover was a communicant of the Episcopal Church."

(Article in the E. Lina Anderson Houston Scrapbook in MSU Library Special Collections)

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From articles in newspaper clippings on which neither date nor title is indicated, in Mrs. W. J. Beall's Scrapbook in MSU Library Special Collections.

"Social Life in Early Days," Mrs. W. J. Beall's address to the Gallatin Pioneers," February 21, 1925 (probably from the Courier)

"On New Years' Day, 1867, a dinner party was given by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Cover to many of their friends. One song, "Listen to the Mocking Bird," very popular in those days, was especially interesting on this occasion, as Mrs. Cotney stood in the hall and imitated a mocking bird as the chorus was sung "Listen to the Mocking Bird." Other musical numbers were enjoyed."

Thomas Cover contributed \$100 to the Methodist Church building fund. The gift was dated August 9, 1866. There were only two other gifts of \$100. John Bozeman contributed \$25.00. (In Mrs. Beall's Scrapbook)

(Merrill G. Burlingame)

Tom Cover

JOHN BOZEMAN

Livingston Enterprise

Oct. 27, 1884

TOM COVER'S FATE

Thomas W. Cover was one of the pioneers of Gallatin county of Montana, and was for many years a resident of Bozeman.

He was the sole companion of John Bozeman when in 1867 that brave pioneer was killed by Indians a few miles east of Livingston.

Mr. Cover himself suffered a slight wound at the time, but escaped death and carried the news of Bozeman's death to the people of the town that bears his name. Now it appears that he himself has met a sad fate. Of late years he has been living in southern California with his family. A few weeks ago he went with another man on a prospecting tour on the Colorado desert. The two men separated and agreed to meet on a certain rendezvous. Cover, at last accounts, had never been seen again. His companion returned and organized a party to search for him, and the result is not known. It is thought improbable that he will be found alive as he had neither food or water to sustain him many days in the desert.

A reward of \$1000 is offered for the recovery of the body of T. W. Cover, an old time Montanan who was supposed to have been lost on the Colorado desert while prospecting on the 22nd of September last.

# DEATH OF MRS. MARY E. COVER

Feb 1 - 1913

Mrs. Mary E. Cover, a former resident of Bozeman, widow of Thomas Cover, died during the past winter in Alameda, Cal., the news being brought to this city by Mr. and Mrs. Sanford Ruffner, who gave a clipping from the Oakland Tribune to Mrs. W. J. Beall, an intimate friend of Mr. and Mrs. Cover, when they resided in Bozeman, during pioneer days. This clipping in reference to the death of Mrs. Cover, gives an interesting story about the lost Peg Leg mine in the Death valley in California, with the statement that Mrs. Cover probably knew more about the lost mine than any other woman.

Six expeditions, five of them personally accompanied by Cover, were financed by him, and in the last one, he lost his life, probably while wandering about in the desert bad lands, after being separated from his companions. At that time, Thomas Cover and his family made their home in Riverside, California, where he gained what he thought was reliable information about the lost mine, from an old miner that was dying. The miner told Cover how he had discovered the wonderful Peg Leg mine, which from numerous traditions were supposed to be the mine from which the Aztecs drew their wealth of gold. The mine got its name from the fact that an old sailor, who had a wooden leg, claimed to have discovered the mine.

According to the Indian traditions, only one man at a time is allowed to

of Montana in 1865, the mill was recently torn down by the Milwaukee railroad in building the north line extension of the Gallatin valley railroad.

The house where the Cover family lived, still stands on the hill northeast of Bozeman. Mr. Cover went "back to the states," and brought his bride here in 1860, and they lived here until the spring of 1869, when they went to California, settling first at Los Angeles, and later at Riverside, Cal. When they left Montana, Mr. Cover sold his interests in the mill to the McAdow brothers, who conducted the mill for a number of years, at the same site.

Tom Cover was a charter member of Gallatin lodge, A. F. and A. M., and will be remembered by some of the present members of that lodge. He and his wife will be remembered by many of the Gallatin County pioneers. His name is identified with the history of this city in another way, as he was with John M. Bozeman, for whom the city is named, when Bozeman was killed by the Indians April 19, 1867.

## PEG LEG MINE PROVES DESERT WILL-O'-THE-WISP



ordered a theory more horrible than the commonly accepted one of death from thirst. This official loudly advanced the opinion that the Helm brothers, former bad men from Montana and known enemies of Cover, had captured him, staked him in the desert and roasted him to death, later burying the half-burned bones.

Wright sued for the \$1000 reward and the grewsome sack of charred bones were an exhibit in the case. That bad blood existed between the Helm brothers and Cover is probably true, for Cover was head of the Montana vigilantes, known as the 101 committee, which hung the elder Helm brother and ran the other four out of Montana.

The four remaining brothers settled at Yuma and soon became obsessed with the Peg Leg mine fever. They openly admitted they were waiting for someone to find the mine. They proposed to trail all searchers and be on hand when the quest ended successfully in order to claim a portion of the find. The Helms were half-breeds, mixed white and Cherokee blood running in their veins. Despite the assertions of Deputy Sheriff Wright that the Helms had murdered Cover and that a warrant was out for one of the brothers on a murder charge, no prosecution was ever directed toward any of the Helms in connection with Cover's disappearance.

Cover's search for the lost Peg Leg mine was probably the most thorough of the hundreds of searches made before and since for the alleged fabulous outcropping ledge on a hill where broken quartz rich with gold covered the sand of the desert.

### A MONTANA PIONEER.

Cover was a Montana pioneer, miner, plainsman and Indian fighter before he came to California. 44 years ago and settled first at Los Angeles and then at Riverside. He brought with him from Montana \$75,000, his interest in the famous Alder Gulch placer mines, of which he was one of the locators, and which paid \$75,000,000 in golden harvest before being exhausted. Cover invested his money in orange lands and other Riverside holdings.

The old pioneer spirit was not dimmed by the transition from the rough and ready Montana life to the peaceful vocation of introducing and raising the Riverside or Washington navel orange in Southern California. Despite his mid-age and ample fortune, Cover became obsessed with the desire to find the lost mine. Before his first attempt he interviewed white men, Indians, half-breeds and all others whom he thought might have a possible clew to the whereabouts of the mine.

### DESERT EXPEDITIONS.

One expedition was sent out without Cover but he accompanied the other five expeditions he formed and financed. He probably knew Death valley better than anyone else at the time of his death, yet the desert made of him another victim of its pitiless heat and violence.

Cover had two misadventures in his earlier trips which must have thoroughly settled into his mind the hazards he

counted 30 years before. The party's stock was stolen on the way and Peg Leg, a "crochety" old man, quit and turned back, his followers naturally being compelled to do likewise.

Other traditions of the mine credit Indians with knowing its location. Still another tradition credits an Irishman with suddenly appearing in San Francisco with quartz worth thousands of dollars and deposit tags for \$120,000 more.

The Irishman did form an expedition and start into the desert. Nothing was ever heard from the Irishman's party, unless a collection of bleached human bones found not long after in the desert, were the remains of the party.

Dr. De Courcy, who moved from Los Angeles to Yuma, "next door to B-B," to be at the gateway of the supposed route to the Peg Leg mine, claimed to have been told of the mine by its discoverer who arrived in Los Angeles a sick man and was treated by De Courcy. The physician claimed that the sick man paid him \$2000 in gold nuggets for medical attendance.

De Courcy alleged that he and the man were to go into the desert to the mine when the miner suddenly died. It was from De Courcy that Cover secured much of the information he gleaned regarding the mine, and from whom he secured a small piece of quartz supposed to be from the Peg Leg's Smith lost storehouse of gold. In later days the Peg Leg mine came into prominence when Death Valley Scotty blossomed on the gaping world with a pocketful of coin which he said he made out of his wonderful mine.

Scotty dazzled the world for awhile until the sound rules of reason accounted for his wealth in the minds of most people, as money received by backers in Scotty's mining schemes. The Peg Leg mine is still lost, despite the fact that Death valley is now a show place, with railroads, autos, hotels and even cities within its confines.

### THE MYSTERY CLEARED UP.

The Remains of Thomas Cover Completely Identified by a Gold Masonic Ring on one of the Fingers of the Bleached Skeleton, on which was clearly Engraved the Name

Mary E. Cover. 1901

The following from the Galcon (Ohio) County Leader gives further details in regard to the finding of the remains of Thomas Cover, a former prominent pioneer resident of this city and county, and who left his home at Riverside, California, about seventeen years ago, in search of the traditional Peg Leg gold mine, and was never heard of after entering and endeavoring to cross the Southern California desert, known as the Carisco Bad Lands:

According to the Indian traditions, only one man at a time is allowed to know the location of this course of fabulous wealth, and he is not allowed to touch any of it for his own use, or if he does, he will die a terrible death. The old miner who told Cover the story, said the location was told him by an old Indian, who was dying of a horrible disease, because he had taken some of the free gold from the mine. The old miner claimed that he had taken some of the gold, a few weeks before he was stricken with this fatal illness, and according to the tradition, he could reveal the secret to one white man, when he believed he was dying.

It is a number of years since Thomas Cover's death, and it was reported at

one time that his bones were found in the sands of the desert, and identified by a Masonic ring found on his finger, the name "Thomas Cover" being engraved on the inside. This story, however, seems to have been discredited by the Cover family, and in the story of Mrs. Cover's death, it is stated that no trace of the lost man was ever found, though his wife, at the time he disappeared offered a reward of \$1,000 for the return of his body. The Peg Leg mine is still lost, despite the fact that Death valley, in which it was supposed to be located, is now a show place, with railroads, automobiles, hotels and even cities in its confines.

Attention has been called to this story, because of the recent death of Mrs. Cover, and because the family at one time resided in Bozeman. Mr. Cover was one of the discoverers of Alder Gulch, and the senior member of the firm of Cover and McAdow, that built the first grist mill in the territory



THOMAS W. COVER.

ALAMEDA, Feb. 1, 1912. Mrs. Mary E. Cover, who was buried this morning, the funeral services being held at the home of her daughter, Mrs. F. C. Gould, 2245 Clinton avenue, probably knew more about the lost Peg Leg mine in Death valley, than any other woman. Six expeditions, five of them personally accompanied by her husband, Thomas Cover, were financed by the Cover exchequer to search for the mine.

In the last trip Cover lost his life. Whether he perished miserably from thirst while separated from a companion, or was killed by men reputed to be his enemies, is still unsettled. His body was never found. Death from thirst while wandering lost in the desert badlands is the most probable solution of the tragedy.

The shifting desert sand was probably blown over his body by the desert winds. For weeks and months friends and hired searchers worked over a vast expanse of the desert. No trace of the lost man was found save the unsuccessful effort of Deputy Sheriff C. L. Right and Thomas West of Orange to claim the \$1000 reward offered by Mrs. Cover for the recovery of her husband's body, which was discredited by the missing man's family and friends.

Wright and West exhibited a sackful of charred human bones which they claimed to have sifted out of the desert sand in the section of the desert where Cover was last seen. The deputy sheriff

anyone else at the time of his death, yet the desert made of him another victim of its pitiless heat and violence.

Cover had two misadventures in his earlier trips which must have thoroughly drilled into his mind the hazards he ran. He became separated from his party on one occasion and wandered in haphazard manner for 20 hours before finding his friends. On this occasion his canteen of water and a few crackers in his pocket saved his life. On the second occasion he sprained an ankle while miles from his party. When searchers found him he had crawled 10 miles over the desert, dragging his disabled ankle.

#### LAST FATEFUL TRIP.

The last and most fateful journey was made with W. B. Russell who was with Cover on three of the earlier expeditions. The two left Riverside in August, 1884. Near Borrego springs Cover left Russell and the team to take a short cut across a desert ridge while Russell drove the team around Borrego mountain. Cover went through or into the badlands on his short cut. Russell was delayed three hours by the upsetting of his wagon with the consequent loss of most of his water and supplies. When he reached the rendezvous agreed upon there was no sign of Cover.

Russell waited for several hours but had to go to El Toro and to an Indian village beyond for water and supplies. At El Toro he surrendered his \$300 watch to an Indian to induce the Indian to start immediately to search Borrego mountain for Cover. Russell had left at the rendezvous a package of food and water in case Cover reached the place. The Indian searched but found no trace of the missing man. Russell also returned to make further search, his added team covering 90 miles of desert in the round trip for water and food. The package of food Russell had left for Cover was found but no trace of the missing man, beyond his early trail where he had left the wagon and struck across the badlands hills.

#### STORY OF PEG LEG SMITH.

It was in 1830 that Peg Leg Smith, with a party of 50 men, left St. Louis to hunt, trap and explore in the southwest. They are supposed to have crossed the California desert and Peg Leg Smith is reputed to have found the hill with its outcropping ledge and its carpet of gold-studded broken quartz. This party is said to have been unaware that the find was gold and merely preserved the bits of quartz as curiosities.

Peg Leg Smith is said to have come on to San Francisco. In 1848 when Marshall discovered gold in California, Peg Leg Smith had his specimens passed upon. In 1850 he organized a party and tried to find the rich hill he had en-

ter search of the traditional Peg Leg gold mine, and was never heard of after entering and endeavoring to cross the Southern California desert, known as the Carisco Bad Lands.

"There are a great many people hereabouts who will remember Thomas Cover. He was reared near Johnsville and forty-five years ago made his first trip to California. His life was an eventful one. He had many fights with the Indians and was the man who built the first grist mill in Montana, and many times had to bar the doors and windows to keep the redskins away. He was one of three men who laid out the site of Riverside, California, where he and his brother, Perry D. Cover, settled and owned large orange groves.

"Cover made his last trip to California with his brother and George Crim and Herman Zeller of this city. While he was living in Riverside, an old miner came into the town one day to die. Cover visited him and just before breathing his last the old man told Cover about how he had discovered the wonderful Peg Leg gold mine, which is supposed from tradition to have been the mine from which the Aztecs drew their wealth. The tradition was well known to Cover as to every other miner in California and he knew that the man who found it would be fabulously wealthy. So taking a friend named William Russell with him, he started out to cross the great desert known as the Carisco Bad Lands, and by following the old miner's instructions, find the wonderful mine.

"When they got to the edge of the desert the arrangement was made that Russell should drive around, which would take about six hours, while Cover walked across. That was the last seen of Cover alive. Russell arrived at the appointed place of meeting but Cover was not there. He returned to Riverside and organized a searching party and for months they looked for any trace of him but in vain. That was seventeen years ago.



## SYNOPSIS

Thomas Wells Cover was an empire builder in California, and before that a figure of uncommon luck and power in Montana's violent beginnings. In both regions his was a life of wild adventure and enormous success, but the triumphs led inexorably to a hideous, if mystery-shrouded finale on the California desert. For over a century his demise has been the subject of legend, supported by precious few facts. In this book a lucidly-argued and carefully-researched solution at last penetrates the riddle.

Cover seemed born to success. He matured in Ohio and as quickly as he was old enough, went West. He became a logger in Minnesota, journeyed to Colorado and north to Montana where rumors of gold abounded.

With five others as hopeful as himself Cover embarked upon an Odyssean prospecting tour. They were captured by Crows and after adventures hairy enough even for souls as hardy as they, were released with their scalps but little else, adrift in the wilderness. So they struck gold! Not just an ordinary pocket, but the richest placer strike in the history of the world! Three billion dollars (at current prices) have been taken out of their 16-mile gulch.

Cover and the others sold out. He commenced the initial sawmill, became a wheat farmer and owned the first commercial grist mill in Montana, sold flour wherever he could, and found the markets immensely rewarding. Seeking fresh outlets he and John Bozeman, who had pioneered the famed Bozeman Trail from the Platte north to the gold camps, were jumped by Blackfeet. Bozeman was killed, Cover wounded. But he escaped again.

He quit Montana and went to southern California. He was a pioneer in a major silk industry promotion. He became a founder of Riverside, and an originator of the navel orange empire which exists to this day. Everything he touched had something of Midas about it. So he would retire into a life of wealth and ease, right?

Not so.

Cover had made one mistake.

In Montana he had been a key figure in the Vigilante movement that rid the gold camps of desperadoes. Tom himself was instrumental in the execution of Boone Helm, the most notorious badman of the day. But Helm's story did not end when the hangman's noose snapped his grimy neck.

He had cousins, like him of Missouri-Kentucky origin, clannish, suspicious, vengeful. They were run out of Montana by Cover and his kind. They never forgot it. Nor did they forget cousin Boone and his awful fate.

When Cover became enamored of the enduring myth of Pegleg Smith's Lost Gold deposit, somewhere on the desert south of his Riverside home, he engaged the problem with all the methodical stubbornness he had shown in everything else.

- Over -

Synopsis - 2 -

and he disappeared, a century ago, on that pitiless  
California desert.

Whatever became of him?

This book provides a thoroughly-researched,  
logical answer. It determines that Tom Cover  
perished through vengeance -- the hatred which was all  
that remained of his arch-antagonist of a time  
gone by. But it was enough to do him in.

# # #

“The great Gallatin valley,” he began, modestly, “is the only valley of any great extent that possesses all the qualities and facilities for agricultural operations within the entire range of the Rocky Mountains. Its length is from forty to forty-five miles and its average width fifteen to thirty. The Gallatin River runs through the centre, the Madison is on the western side, and the Little, or Eastern Gallatin on the eastern” while countless streams, brooks, springs and freshets poured forth their pure cold water for stock, domestic use and irrigation. “The grass is luxuriant; the soil rich and productive, and the climate salubrious. . . , the winters are as mild as those of the Middle States [and] the land is more productive for all small grains. . . and the growing season is sufficiently long to mature the earlier kinds of corn. Vegetables such as potatoes, turnips, pumpkins, squashes, melons, onions, beans, peas and other garden produce are equal to those grown in the States.” He concluded:

“In point of fact Gallatin valley is the oasis of the mountains. The scenery cannot be excelled, the surrounding peaks are separated only by. . . beautiful rivulets, crowned with the ever green foliage. . . . Wild fruits of all kinds are in abundance. Game is plentiful, such as buffalo, elk, bear, deer, antelope and mountain sheep, while the streams abound with beaver, otter, mink, geese, ducks and fish.” A paradise indeed!

On July 7, 1864 the village of “Montana” had been laid out “on a handsome and level piece of land in what is called the upper valley,” where the Bozeman cutoff or route to the eastern states crossed the Little Gallatin. The town would be renamed shortly for the “tall, good natured, good looking Georgian, with easy habits, whose benign countenance may be seen any day of the week, shedding its refulgence upon all who meet him in the streets. Here he is

always to be found, and who was the first man coming across the plains to stop at this point with goods," and as Bozeman the city is known today.<sup>17</sup> John Bozeman promised town lots to builders, Tom Cover and Bud McAdow and others. He knew Cover well and was acquainted with McAdow. He was aware they were restless in Alder Gulch and urged them to establish a grist mill in "his" valley, for so he considered it by now. Bozeman gave Tom a handful of wheat someone had raised there. Cover examined it carefully, from his Ohio years recognizing excellent grain: good, plump kernels, none shriveled, free of any kind of fungus. About equal in size, hard, red in color and he knew they would leaven well, make superb bread. The yield in the valley, Bozeman assured him was up to sixty bushels an acre, a figure Cover listened to, smiling, discounting a bit for boosterism. But it was good wheat. Any farmer could see that. And in fair seasons yields no doubt would be impressive.

Cover and McAdow were interested in John's invitation and so Bozeman confidently predicted that by the middle of next year, 1865, there would be a grist mill in the Gallatin Valley. He was not to be disappointed.<sup>18</sup>

Indian troubles were ever a possibility on this remote frontier, with Blackfeet, Sioux and Crows unsubdued, war and raiding parties out all the time and the white population so scant as to be scarcely visible in most places.

Early in September, 1864, the newspaper reported that there was a minor clash along the Gallatin involving some whites from Virginia City who "wantonly killed" two Indians, taking their horses with the object, the paper surmised, of provoking "further hostilities on the part of

<sup>17</sup>*Montana Post*, April 27, 1867.

<sup>18</sup>Merrill G. Burlingame, *The Montana Frontier*, Helena, State Publishing Company, 1942, 342-43; *Montana Post*, September 17, 1864.

comfort. Men have not bached in it," a further blessing!<sup>2</sup>

The *Post* scoldingly called "the attention of authorities to the highly improper practice of galloping horses through the streets of our town. A very small brain fired with tangle leg, esconced behind a low forehead, and a very big pair of spurs, are usually the most noticeable articles of the rider's outfit." When the journal turned its fire from hanging desperadoes to the inconvenience of dodging running horses it became obvious that things had mightily tamed down. But Tom Cover never paid attention to such. He was busy.

Arranging for his mill and farm machinery to follow, he made his way to the eastern end of the Gallatin Valley, about seventy miles northeast of Virginia City along the route traversed by today's Montana State highways 287 and 84. There, the *Post* reported on August 5, Cover was engaged in erecting "a splendid grist mill on the East Gallatin, about one-half a mile from the town of Bozeman. The building is framed, sided up, shingled and will soon be painted. It would be a credit to any country. The dimensions . . . are: Length, fifty-four feet; breadth, thirty-six feet; height, fifty-five feet. It is a three and a half story structure."<sup>3</sup> In addition he had put in 150 acres of grain, being "a thoroughly energetic man, and we augur a great success for him." The mill machinery had passed through Virginia City August 1 and probably was at the site already, while the few farmers settled in the valley also were busily cultivating large acreages of what had been virgin prairie. On September 16 the newspaper added that Cover and Bud McAdow were rapidly completing their mill, the machinery was installed and they were dressing the burrs,

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<sup>2</sup>*Overland Days to Montana in 1865: The Diary of Sarah Raymond*. . . , ed. by Raymond H. and Mary Lund Settle, Glendale, California, Arthur H. Clark Company, 1971, 173-74.

<sup>3</sup>The mill, located east of modern Bozeman a few blocks north of Main Street, was torn down when the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul railroad built its north line in Gallatin History Museum



THE COVER FLOUR MILL AT BOZEMAN  
Built in 1865 by Tom Cover and Perry (Bud) McAdow.  
Courtesy, Montana Historical Society

or buhrstones, the huge grinders used in manufacturing flour. The partners had skilled help. Henry H. Mood, a 37-year-old New Jersey-born professional miller was hired to provide his expertise and to manage the operation. Mood had reached Bannack April 18, 1863, and Cover and McAdow, who had long known him, were mighty glad to have him on the payroll. Initial capacity for the plant, which was expected soon to begin operations, was 1,000 sacks of flour a week.

“Next season this will be doubled,” the paper predicted confidently, “and in both cases the stones will be worked to their full power. Starvation is, therefore, ‘played out,’ and beef straight a thing of the past.” It estimated there would be 25,000 bushels of wheat harvested in the valley and an additional 15,000 elsewhere within range of the mill. The Gallatin Valley had about 320,000 arable acres, so produc-

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1912. Bud and his brother, William B. McAdow ran the mill after Tom Cover pulled out in 1868. In 1879 Perry sold his interest to William, who operated the enterprise until 1883.

would be a jugular bringing in people from everywhere in the States — and all would funnel, tired and hungry, through Bozeman City past the doors of Tom Cover's and Bud McAdow's flour mill. Their location could scarcely be improved upon.

Coach lines however preferred to run from Virginia City to Bannack and thence to Salt Lake City, meeting there the main transcontinental route. Late in November Cover stopped at the *Post's* office to meet his editor friend, Thomas Dimsdale and talk over his latest plans, or some of them. Dimsdale wrote that this "enterprising pioneer [has become] one of the first among the public-spirited and . . . our present thriving city owes much to him. One of our principal streets received its name from him." He became among the first "to prove the susceptibility of the Gallatin Valley of cultivation. . . . Such gentlemen as Mr. Cover are the kind to lead in expanding empire." Now, Dimsdale added, Cover was enroute east to purchase machinery "for a second grist mill," which the newspaper said he planned to erect on the West Gallatin River.<sup>10</sup> Tom seems not to have divulged his primary reason for going east this winter of 1865-66; living alone had played out, for him. He knew someone willing to participate in his adventurous life, or as much of it as a 19th century woman could share. He was pretty well settled, and headed up a thriving business. It was time to get married.

He wasted no time. Cover never did. He reached Ohio about the middle of December and would spend Christmas with his people, no doubt dividing his time with the family of Daniel Hess. On Saturday, December 30 Mary Hess and Tom Cover obtained a marriage license and Sunday,

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<sup>10</sup>December 2, 1865. The editor was slightly confused on this point, since Cover intended to purchase equipment to modernize his mill, rather than erect a second one, which he never did.

New Year's Eve, they were united in matrimony at Columbus, Ohio, by Mary's father, who signed the document, "Elder Daniel Hess,"<sup>11</sup> suggesting that he might have been a minister as well as a jurist. Almost immediately the couple left for a honeymoon in the east. They were in New York in February, Tom calling at the brokerage house of Tufts, Conner & Hagaman at 117 Broadway. No doubt they dropped down to Washington where Cover's old Bannack partner Sam McLean now was Territorial Delegate to Congress; he served from January 6, 1865 until March 3, 1867 — and probably never returned to Montana, spending the rest of his life in Virginia. Described by one Montana newspaper as "without great mental activity, he was nevertheless a genial, kindly man, with a noble impulse."<sup>12</sup> He would have been lavish in his praise of the Territory for the benefit of Mrs. Cover, an impressionable bride of only a few weeks.

Late in March the Covers reached St. Louis on the return trip. Tom thought it would be more pleasant, and less of a traumatic shock no doubt, for Mary to approach her new home via a leisurely cruise on a riverboat. In addition, he again had a lot of machinery to transport and it would be cheaper to send it by boat than across the plains. Reapers brought up the Missouri would sell for about \$500. A thresher might represent considerable outlay, but at 25 cents a bushel for harvesting wheat it would quickly pay for itself.<sup>13</sup> Thus they had determined to go up the Missouri, 2,317 miles from St. Louis to Fort Benton, and from there overland the 200 miles or so to Bozeman. The journey would require about two and one-half months.

Mary must have been impressed with her first view of

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<sup>11</sup>Copy of marriage certificate provided by the Ohio Historical Society.

<sup>12</sup>*Helena Daily Herald*, May 29, 1879.

<sup>13</sup>Merrill G. Burlingame, *The Montana Frontier*, 342.