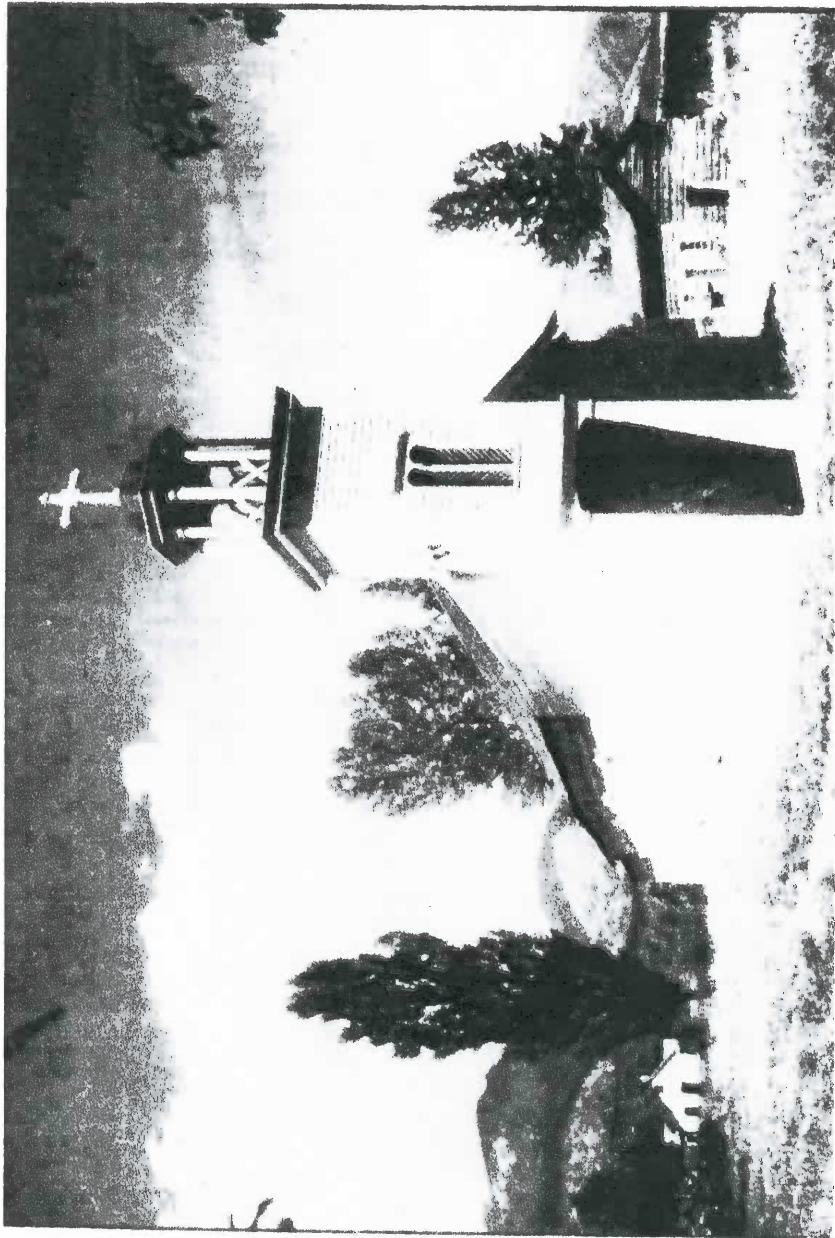


HELL GATE'S DEATH RATE

WHEN the afternoon sun illumines the entrance to Hell Gate canyon, the scene is remarkably beautiful. This canyon is one of the natural gateways through the mountains; its walls rise abruptly from the level floor, their lines softened by their covering of trees; all day these blankets of pine and fir and tamarack lie dark and somber upon their steep-pitched resting places; the dense green is almost black in the shadow of Mount Sentinel. But when the afternoon sun turns its searchlight into the canyon's opening, it reveals new beauties; new lines spring into sight; new details become visible and the green-black forest takes on a multitude of hues, blending beautifully into a perfect chromatic scheme. Beholding this transformation, the visitor in this scene wonders regarding the derivation of the forbidding name of this canyon entrance. In an earlier story I have told how the name originated; it was not the appearance of this gateway which suggested the appellation; it came from the bloody Indian history which was written there. But as the beholder gazes at the enrancingly beautiful scene which spreads before him as he looks into the canyon, he regrets that it does not bear a designation more in keeping with its rare beauty.

And so it is with the valley which derived its former name from this canyon entrance. Singularly beautiful is this basin, hemmed in by inspiring mountains, watered by charming streams and decked with great stretches of meadow and rolling prairie. "Hell Gate ronde," it was called by the early settlers, and it retained this name until the growth of Missoula forced a change in the nomenclature, giving a name not dissimilar in its derivation and original significance, but certainly more musical in sound. It is truly a beautiful valley which reaches from the canyon's mouth, where the waters of the Rattlesnake and the Missoula mingle, away to where the Bitter Root ripples along in the shadow of Lolo mountain and westward to where the blue waters of Nine Mile flow over their golden sands to add to the tide of the greater stream which runs on to the ocean. But this valley used to be known as the Hell Gate and that, also, was the



St. Mary's Mission

—Photograph by Showel

name which was borne by the first town builded upon its gentle slope.

Fair it is now—this valley—and fair it was to look upon when the white men first beheld it. Each of the early visitors to this region wrote eloquently of the charm of this basin. Each described its beauty, dwelling upon the loveliness of its streams, the grandeur of its mountain walls and the fertility of its fields. It was here that the Selish chiefs met in council with Governor Stevens; it was here that old Chief Victor stood and claimed the valley as the center of his tribal domain. Here camped the Selish tribes on their way eastward to the buffalo grounds—camped for barter and for rest. Here they camped on their way back, for recuperation if worsted and for celebration if victorious in their eastern sorties. It had been a favorite meeting place for the kindred tribes. It was the center of their hereditary domain. Unimpressible we are wont to regard the Indian, but we find that he always chose his camping places where beauty of surroundings appeals to us now—and it must have appealed to him, unconsciously, perhaps, but strongly nevertheless.

But if there is much in the appearance of this valley that makes the name seem incongruous, there is much in the history of the old town of Hell Gate that makes it seem singularly appropriate, even as the Indian history of the old trail up the canyon made the name fit there. Hell Gate was founded as a white settlement in 1860. It retained its identity until 1865. During its existence its maximum population was 14—the average was 12—but in the months that it was doing business there were no less than nine men who died there with their boots on. For them, surely, it was the entrance to Hades, though the growl of Cerberus took the form of the bark of a Colt's army gun.

There is not much left to mark the site of the first town in this valley. Two or three of its buildings remain; they are out-houses now of a prosperous ranch. There is no trace of its single street. A guide is necessary to locate the buildings. Four mounds were there until a few years ago, which marked the resting places of the last of the victims of the righteous wrath of the Montana Vigilantes. But now even these have disappeared before the leveling influence of the wheat-farmer's plow. Unless you know the corner of the old rail fence in which they were planted, you cannot locate now the place where these offenders against pioneer law were hustled when they were cut down from their impromptu gallows.

It was in August, 1860, that Frank L. Worden and Christopher P. Higgins, partners under the firm name of Worden & Company, armed with a sutler's license to trade with the Indians, came from Walla Walla with a pack train bearing a stock of merchandise and established the town of Hell Gate. They had

intended to locate near Fort Owen in the Bitter Root, but they found that the government was then engaged in establishing an agency at Jocko—the present reservation headquarters. They didn't like to go to either of the Indian headquarters for fear of losing the business of the other, so they settled upon the location at Hell Gate, midway between the two. And so the little town was started.

Judge Frank H. Woody, who had been in the employ of Worden at Walla Walla, came with the outfit from the coast and participated in the establishment of the town. The first store was opened in a tent. It was August and the tent was comfortable enough; but immediate preparations had to be made for the approaching winter and the partners began to skirmish about for logs for building material.

Prospecting about the country, they found David Pattee living with Captain Grant on what is now the county road, two miles west of Missoula's present location. Pattee had got out and hewed a set of cottonwood logs for building a house for himself. The logs were framed for a building 16 feet by 18 and they were bought on the spot, Pattee agreeing to deliver them at the place where was erected the first building in Hell Gate.

Pattee fulfilled the terms of his contract and Woody and a Frenchman—Narcisse Sanpar—erected the building, making the roof of poles covered with sods. That building yet stands near the county road to Frenchtown. It was the first store or trading post built within the present limits of the county of Missoula. In fact, it was the first mercantile establishment in western Montana, except the post at Fort Owen, near what is now Stevensville, and the old Hudson Bay company post, where Angus McDonald had headquarters on Post creek, six miles the other side of St. Ignatius mission.

When Hell Gate was founded, it was in the territory of Washington. Afterward, it was in Idaho; later, it was in the territory of Montana. It had a lively set of changes as to post-office address, but it remained stationary as to location.

This little log cabin was the only structure erected that year. In 1861, Worden & Company built another store and W. B. S. Higgins erected a building which was used as a residence. In the autumn of 1861, P. J. Bolte built a little house which he used as a saloon. In 1863 there was a blacksmith shop added to the collection of houses; Judge Woody thinks it was built by Henry Buckhouse; his is the only information which is available. In 1864, Woodward & Clements brought in a stock of merchandise and started an opposition store. That same summer J. P. Shockley built a house which was used as a boarding house. This constituted the entire architectural strength of the town of Hell Gate.

But, though the town was small, it was active. There was

something doing there all the time. I have heard from Judge Woody and others of those who were of the Hell Gate population and from them I have learned a good many interesting incidents of the life in this pioneer town. There is good material for a "trail" story in the early merchandising experiences of these days. But this story will deal with the remarkable death rate of the town of Hell Gate.

It should not be inferred that the climate of Hell Gate ronde was not salubrious; there was no malaria in the air; there were no bacilli in the streams; there were no lurking germs to prey upon the pioneers. Death did not lurk in any of these insidious forms in Hell Gate. The dark angel's work was all done in the open.

Bolte's saloon, opened in 1861, didn't last very long. Bolte went out of business the following year. This furnishes reasonable evidence that John Barleycorn had comparatively little to do with the death rate which is the really remarkable feature of the history of Hell Gate. When Bolte closed his bar, there was no saloon in Hell Gate for more than a year. In 1863 a stranger came to town, giving the name of Cyrus Skinner. He bought a stock of booze and opened a saloon in the old Bolte building. His place became the loafing place of some tough-looking characters who followed him to the town and was never a popular resort. He kept his establishment going, however, until one dark night in January, 1864, when he went out of business suddenly and his going started the boom in Hell Gate's death rate.

On this dark night, aforesaid, the quiet of Hell Gate was disturbed by the sound of galloping hoofs. There was an arrival in town. It was a party which was made up of a delegation of Vigilantes from Virginia City. The arrival was unheralded, but the visitors lost no time in introducing themselves and in stating their business. When they had presented their credentials and had held a brief parley, Cyrus Skinner and two of his loitering companions, Alex Carter and Johnnie Cooper, were dangling from a pole which had been fastened into a log corral in the lower part of town. Continuing their rapid ride across the valley and up the trail into the Coriaca defile, the Vigilantes stopped at the O'Keeffe ranch and located Bob Zachery, who was brought to Hell Gate and hanged there alongside the others, Baron O'Keeffe having entered violent protests against an execution on his ranch. This was the last Vigilante execution in Montana.

A couple of months later, in March, Hell Gate's death rate received another boost. This time the affair was a home production. The Hell Gate people and the farmers in the valley had become alarmed by the actions of a couple of young Indians who were known to have killed a prospector named Ward in the canyon near where the town of Clinton now stands. They had

become offensive and had attacked a Frenchman in the Coriacan defile. They were boldly insolent and were threatening an uprising of the reds. The settlers around Hell Gate dispatched Milton W. Tipton, a farmer living near Frenchtown, to Alder gulch with an appeal to the miners at Virginia City for assistance. The Indians soon learned of this move and it became their turn to be alarmed. They knew it meant trouble if the miners came down to fight. The chief of the Pend d'Oreilles was the father of the chief offender and, upon the demand of his people, he delivered his son to the Hell Gate people. The young Indian was brought in, tied and disgraced. The Hell Gate men led him to the pole which had served as gallows for the road agents and the old corral was once more decorated with a dangling human form. Hell Gate's death list had reached a total of five.

In the autumn of 1864, a man named Crow, who had been loafing about the village with no apparent means of support, was shot and killed by Matt Craft at the tent which was Craft's home, about a quarter of a mile above the Worden store. Craft claimed that Crow had come to the tent and had insulted Mrs. Craft. This statement was accepted. There were no officers of the law in the country and nothing was done to the shooter. The death list totaled six.

The visit of the Vigilantes had closed Hell Gate's saloon and it was not reopened until the fall of 1864, when William Cook stocked the old building with liquors and conducted a place which became a popular resort for men who were traveling back and forth between Fort Owen and Jocko. Everybody played poker in those days and there was almost always a game in progress at Cook's place. One afternoon two Irishmen had come to Cook's and had played cards until nearly dark. They became involved in a quarrel over the settlement of their game. A matter of \$2.50 was the issue and they left the saloon wrangling about it.

There were no electric lights in Hell Gate. The illumination of the rough interior came from a big fireplace in one side of the room and from candles stuck about. On the night of the day that the Irishmen, McLaughlin and Doran, had quarreled over their cards, there were some of the Hell Gate men seated at a table in front of the fireplace, playing a friendly game, when the two returned—they were quarreling. That night added two more names to the list of Hell Gate's dead. One of the men who sat at the little table has told me this story of the spectacular events of that evening:

"We were playing at a little table near the fireplace, from which we got most of our light. We had also a candle on the table. Doran had walked over to our side of the room and stood with his back to the fire. McLaughlin, who had been an employe at the Jocko agency, was sitting on a whisky barrel, leaning

against a brandy keg. He had evidently apprehended trouble, for he had borrowed a big navy pistol from Captain Higgins. He wore an old blue army overcoat and, though we didn't know it, had the gun in his lap under the cape of the coat.

"The men came into Cook's quarreling and they continued their argument. They were not talking very loud, but seemed very much in earnest. Standing in front of the fire, Doran reached for his hip under his coat, evidently to draw his pistol. McLaughlin leaped to his feet, exclaiming, 'I've a pistol as well as yez.' He threw back the cape of his coat. There were two flashes at the same instant. All the candles were extinguished and the close of the tragedy was enacted in the fitful light from the fireplace.

"At the table, we jumped up. The men were firing across the way to the front door and we couldn't get out that way. But we wanted mighty bad to get out. There was a thin board partition across the back of the room, separating Cook's living quarters from the saloon. Through this we dashed. I was in the lead. We upset a sheetiron stove which was in the living room; we scared Cook's halfbreed wife and her baby and they screamed; the discharge of the pistols sounded like artillery—it was the greatest confusion I ever knew.

"Reaching the back door, the others pressed so hard against me that I couldn't swing the door. While I was struggling with it, Cook came out and said 'I can open it. Go tell Captain Higgins I am shot.' I hurried to the store. Higgins returned with me and we met two men supporting Cook, who was hardly able to move. The shooting was all over. McLaughlin had fired but one shot. Doran had continued his bombardment until he was out of ammunition. He had fled and there was darkness and silence when we returned with our burden.

"Cook was laid upon the counter and an examination showed that a bullet had passed through his body, entering above the left hip and lodging right under the skin on the side. Captain Higgins used a razor to extract the bullet, but that was about all we could do. There was no doctor and no means of cleaning the wound. We placed poor Cook in his bed and he died Thursday. Everything we could do was done for him. Father Grassi came up from Frenchtown to see him, but said the shot had pierced the bowels and it was a hopeless case. Cook was buried near the little church which Father Grassi had built just below Hell Gate."

This made the death list eight. McLaughlin had died almost immediately; when found he had crawled to the back room in Cook's and was breathing his last. Doran fled across the river on the ice and made his way to Stevensville. There was a supposed justice of the peace there, Roop by name, and there was the mere form of a hearing before him. Despite the testimony

of John Chatfield, who was one of the party playing cards in Cook's when the shooting occurred, Doran was released. He went over to Madison county then. Oldtimers report having seen him in Stevensville and Hamilton this summer. To one of them at least he mentioned his identity and referred to Hell Gate incidents.

The last chapter in the mortuary record of Hell Gate was written in the early spring of 1865, when J. P. Shockley deliberately shot himself with a pistol at his own home, which has been mentioned as the last house built in the town. His death made the total list number nine, which was a fairly good record for a town of 14 people in two years. There were no other deaths in the town. Its people were strong and healthy. Those of them who died, died quickly and without the preliminary of being sick.

There is, as far as I can find, no trace of the little burying ground of Hell Gate. There were five bodies placed in it—the victims of the Vigilantes having been buried in a field apart from the others. When I first visited the site of old Hell Gate and for a good many years after, there were mounds visible where the burials had been made. But time has worn these level and there is nothing left to show that the scythe slashed vigorously for a little while in the days when Hell Gate died with its boots on.

October 28, 1911.

EARLY DAY FARMING

IF WE could get the intimate story of the little things which the pioneers of Montana did—the story of their home lives—we would have the very best history of this state which could be written. If we could know of all the little troubles they had in getting their farms started; if we could get a picture of the difficulties which beset them every day, what a clear insight we would have into the tremendous task they accomplished. We would entertain a higher respect for the trailblazers, even, than that which we hold now. For it is the little things which count. A great opportunity is passing in Montana in the failure to obtain this intimate history while it is possible to get it. Soon the last of the pioneers will be laid at rest in his long sleep and, as he is placed in the narrow bed beneath the shadow of the grand old mountains which we all love so sincerely and which were the witnesses of his deeds long years ago, there will be buried with him the record of many things which we should know.

I have heard from the lips of these Montana pioneers tales which surpass in dramatic interest and thrilling detail any fiction that I have ever read. I have wished for the time in which to give them permanence—this in the absence of a more worthy chronicler and merely that they might be preserved in some definite form. In this series of Sunday stories in *The Missoulian*, under the collective heading, "Following Old Trails," I have sought to put into permanent form some of these stories as they have come to me in the course of a good many years of reportorial work among the men who made this state. In every corner of Montana, there is some man or woman who can contribute to the historical record of the state. If a systematic effort were made to collect these stories, Montana's history would be recorded in a fashion which would be of lasting benefit to the Montanans yet unborn and which would make Montana's record incomparably a valuable contribution to the record of the commonwealths of the Union.

We are accustomed to think of the Montanans of 1865 as miners only. We do not consider that, even then, there were men here who were farming. The story of Martin Barrett of Beaver-