

Many people have left their marks at the crossroads in the Shoshoni area. The first trails made were by the Indians who used the creek at the foot of the Copper Mountains as a campsite as they traveled to the Big Horns to hunt and to fight the Crow Indians. Many were killed in a flash flood, and survivors named it Badwater Creek. You can find rock piles marking the trail along Copper Mountain, and see a path worn over smooth rock. Speculation is great about the meaning of the many petroglyphs. One man explained the symbol he had been tracking along the river indicated the presence of Spaniards in the area and tales of treasure. The petroglyphs are the real treasure. There is supposed to be a draw northeast of Shoshoni where fish fossils can be found, and does anyone remember a fossilized porpoise on display in the Tourist Information Center at Shoshoni during the 1930s?

Those connected with the early fur trade used the same trails. Jim Bridger especially traversed the area for many years beginning in 1822, trapping and helping develop river routes passable to float furs to St. Louis. They learned fast why the Indians weren't using Wind River Canyon. Jim guided U.S. Army exploration groups and soldiers before and after taking wagon trains to the Montana gold fields using a trail up Bridger Creek and through the Big Horn Basin in 1864.

Looking north from Shoshoni, you will see a mountain range divided by the Wind River Canyon. To the west of the canyon is the Owl Creek Mountains with Boysen Peak most prominent near the canyon. Far west, past Washakie Needles and Black Mountain, you will see the Wind River Range. East of Wind River Canyon you are looking at a range that used to be called the Little Rattlesnakes, and Bridger Mountain, until copper was discovered at Depass, and then this range was commonly called Copper Mountain. On Copper Mountain, east of the canyon, you see Stone Mountain, Birdseye Mountain & Depass, and again a small mountain also called Copper Mountain: quite confusing. Bridger Creek separates these mountains from Lysite Mountain in the Big Horns. At least Jim Bridger's name was retained on Bridger Creek and the trail he favored to the Montana gold fields before Chief Red Cloud gained the upper hand and Bridger's trail and the bloody Bozeman trail east of



At The Crossroads

by Lois Herbst

the Big Horns were closed in 1868.

In this year of 1868, the Union Pacific Rail Road reached Cheyenne, and settlement north took place rapidly. The cattle were being moved on to ranges on the Sweetwater in 1871, with cowboys moving these cattle deciding to settle. They soon were over Beaver Rim and grazing toward Copper Mountain. One cowboy on Poison Creek in 1878, later wrote to the school describing the life. H-H brand was referred to as "hard to make a living here."

On April 21, 1904, when an agreement was made with the Shoshone and Arapaho tribes to open a portion of the Wind River Reservation to settlement under the homestead, townsite, coal and mineral land laws, the areas around Shoshoni were being well used for ranching. Lucy Morrison, the Sheep Queen of Wyoming, had settled on Dry Creek on Copper Mountain in 1883. J.B. Okie had also decided to range his flock there the same year. He had arranged for John Signor of Rongis Stage Station on the Sweetwater to move to the Badwater in 1888, as his postmaster at Lost Cabin where Signor also had a stage stop on the creek location. John S. Day also moved from the Sweetwater in 1888, to be range foreman for Okie. John homesteaded on the Badwater and started the *Battle Ax ranch* in 1893. He was soon joined by Doug Fuller, Sr. and Ed Crabb

who staked out Badwater homesteads. Okie's Big Tepee was completed at the new Lost Cabin location and was the center of a large sheep industry before the 1904 treaty to open the reservation for settlement.

There were large herds of cattle being moved into the Big Horn Basin in the late 1870s and soon thereafter, the cowboys turned to homesteading. Settlements sprang up and the outlaw element headed for this area. One of the most famous was Butch Cassidy, who used the Quien Sabe Ranch on Copper Mountain as headquarters before he was arrested for horse stealing, taken to Lander and prosecuted by William Simpson, young attorney and grandfather of Senator Alan Simpson. One member of the Wild Bunch, Elsy Lay, returned to this area and operated a bar in Shoshoni using the name of William McGinnis.

Charles H. King, the Wool King of Wyoming, from Omaha, Nebraska, had been operating mercantile centers in Wyoming since 1885. He was always right ahead of the railroad being built from Omaha, collecting the boom money as the rails were laid west. A partner in all his operations was Deforest Richards, a Civil War carpetbagger, brother of Bartlett Richards of Nebraska cattle infamy. Deforest Richards traveled the boom trail west

with partner C.H. King. Richards was a member of the Wyoming Constitutional Convention, served as mayor of Douglas where King had a store before the rails arrived there, was Commander of the National Guard during the Johnson County Invasion in 1892, and served as governor of Wyoming from January 1899 to April 28, 1903, when he died in office. Richards had been a good influential partner for King in the mercantile and transportation business extending from Douglas to Casper, to Lander, hauling out supplies and returning wool clips to Casper from all points surrounding the site for the new town of Shoshoni on the rail line. King had established supply stores at Arapahoe Agency on the reservation, Meyersville on the Sweetwater, and Wolton, all in the large sheep grazing areas.

The Pioneer Townsite Company platted lots in the summer of 1905. On August 8, 1905, the townsite was dedicated to the public. The first substantial building was the Elkhorn Hotel built by Moses Bright, a veteran of the fur trade and Indian fighting. The first eighty lots sold fast, bringing in \$65,000. Some of the first to arrive at the new townsite were from Lost Cabin such as the A.O. Heyer family who had been working for Okie. The J.W. Cheever family hailed from Cheever Flats in the Big Horns and built the Central Hotel in 1905 on Main Street. The Gudmundsens were traveling in the area, saw lumber on the ground, and were told it was going to be a new town called Kingston. Land patents were issued to Jonathan H. Vallette on April 14, 1906, for three parcels of 120 acres each. The *Shoshone Pathfinder* published in April of 1906, indicates that at that time, Shoshoni was an incorporated town with the ability to offer police protection to land seekers.

The Chicago North Western Rail Road did not extend to Lander when expected, and it was decided that a land office would be located at Shoshoni to register for the drawing. This was protested by Thermopolis and Lander residents who were expecting an influx of 100,000 land seekers to be fed, housed and entertained, as well as conveyed to the ceded land to locate if successful in the homestead drawing held at Lander on August 4, 1906. Lander was sure that the sage and sand of Shoshoni would discourage land seekers before they could see the established farms, homes and lawns of Lander. Many

people did take the return excursion train to Omaha, jeering "sucker" at the arriving trains in Shoshoni.

The Wyoming Central Irrigation Company had proposed a Hilline Canal to irrigate thousands of acres opened on the reservation, but this did not happen, even with the state engineer on the board of directors and an ex-governor as general manager. Many who settled in the Missouri Valley west of Shoshoni returned home but kept their lands to return later. Charles H. King built the King Building to house his First National Bank and a department store. He had a large lumber yard reached by rails of Chicago and North-Western Railway on July 5, 1906. If you said "King", they knew who you were speaking of and his importance to the new town. Many years later, a grandson would be more important, and known as United States President Gerald Ford.

Equally well-known was Asmus Boysen, a native of Denmark who became a millionaire in the real estate business in Iowa and served that state in Congress. Boysen had acquired a large grazing lease on the Wind River Reservation, and before the reservation was opened for settlement, he was allowed by an act of congress to choose 640 acres with clear title in exchange for the cancellation of the lease. Boysen chose the acreage near the mouth of the Wind River Canyon known as the Black Dykes where he planned a dam to furnish power for the Asmus Boysen Mining Co. that he established in Thermopolis on March 22, 1905. The estimate for the dam was \$160,000. The dam was started in 1907 and to be completed by May 15, 1908. The cost eventually reached between two and three million dollars and broke Boysen. He was also plagued by silt problems, and the Burlington Northern and Chicago North Western Railway's court battles to regulate height of the dam to avoid water on the proposed railroad through the Wind River Canyon. Many court battles followed, but the death blow came from the flooding of Badwater Creek in July of 1923, as well as Muddy Creek, Poison Creek, and Muskrat, with the silt halting all power operations.

After the first boom of settlement, many stayed to help the little town struggle through good and bad times. A new school was built and in use by September 1907. The present Community Church had been

built in time for Easter services in 1907. The town was served well by Ed Crabb as a surveyor and city engineer for many years, as well as surveyor for homesteads, rangelands, and state water permits. One of the land commissioners, J.W. Stuchell, served the ranchers by filing endless land entry forms, water applications, insurance forms and taxes. Early families who stayed to build the town included Heyer, Harvey, Smart, Gudmundsen, Jewel, Blackwell, Ireland, Morrison, McCoy, Gabus, Casteel, Long, Garden, Teeters, and many others. Each has an interesting story, and they are being collected as well as the stories of the ranch and farm families that are a part of the history of Shoshoni.

John Clay passed through Shoshoni in March of 1908, shortly after fire had destroyed the east side of Main Street. He wrote of this visit in his publication, *Live Stock Reporter*. "All I saw was a straggling town, half in ruins from fire; but I came away with an inspiration they believe in themselves, and that the world lies at their feet. Looking westward, I could fancy I saw castles in the air...". John Clay was President of the Wyoming Stock Growers Association during the Johnson County invasion. The people of Shoshoni rebuilt after the fire of 1908, with brick. A.O. Heyer said he had the first new building up, soon joined by the Shawver Hotel, and a brick building of Grant Harvey's that also housed a grocery store and later Ireland's Royal Hardware. Business was good in Shoshoni due to the Boysen Dam construction. At the same time, thousands of sheep and cattle were being shipped out of the area with Shoshoni serving as a supply point for raising these animals. The mining industry on Copper Mountain also aided the economy in Shoshoni. The Gold Nugget at Birdseye and the Williams-Luman Copper Mine at Depass were the most developed mines, but many others were being worked. J. Herald Day wrote of the Depass mine tragedy that killed three men, Jo Johns and Bill Horn May 12, 1912, while they were attempting to fix a shaft for better air circulation in the mine, and Tom Smith, who went down to check on them, was also overcome by bad air. During World War I, many served from the Shoshoni area, including Kyle Walker, a cowboy who died and is honored by the Kyle Walker American Legion Auxiliary Unit at Shoshoni.

Many others are honored each Me-

morial Day at Lakeview Cemetery. We can picture the early services described by Iva Harvey when they would march from Shoshoni led by Mr. Skinner, a Civil War veteran. Iva and Mertie Smart would sing for the burials of unknown men killed during the building of the railroad through the canyon.

The First World War also created a demand for food, wool and horses that were in good supply in this area. After the war, 1919, a severe drought was experienced that summer, followed by a bitter cold winter with deep snow. After the war there was less demand for farm and ranch products and the over valued land, and large loans that had been extended during the good times caused the three banks in Shoshoni to fail or be liquidated. Yes, three banks.

It was during this time that the Jesse Clinton Cox family moved to Shoshoni to manage King's lumber yard. Blanch Cox cried when told they were to move to the wild, sinful town. They both worked with the Congregational Community Church.

Also in 1922, work was started on the highway through Wind River Canyon, and completed in July of 1924. J.D. Woodruff gave a speech at the dedication. J.D. was a true pioneer. He was a friend of Chief Washakie and brought the first sheep onto the reservation to graze. When living at Lander, he became angry at the garbage in the irrigation ditches and moved from the town where he had built a mill. He mined on Muddy Creek, near Casper, and then moved to Cheyenne. Later he started a large sheep operation headquartered at Mail Camp, was in on the Buck Camp operation with Madden and Merriam, and when he saw the new town of Shoshoni, he settled in and lived there until his death in 1926. He also was a member of the state legislature. The Woodruff sheep share plan helped many get started in the business. Jess Teeters was in partnership many years with Woodruff when he headquartered at Shoshoni.

The banks failed, but prohibition was keeping the sheriff busy. Raids were made on stills, and even though Shoshoni had a jail, one sheriff saved the city money by shooting several men, possibly as high as seven of them. He had been in another business, changed his name and became deputy sheriff. He served only one term as an elected sheriff. Just too many bodies. Another deputy sheriff shot a man in

one county, came to this county, changed his name and shot another man, a gambler. Back then, people discussed the killings, but a coroner would declare death unavoidable. The restoration of the old jail near our modern post office is a project undertaken as a Wyoming Centennial Lasting Legacy. The legends certainly continue to be told regarding our justice system. We had good sheriffs, too.

It was in 1924, that the westside of Main Street also fell to a disastrous fire. The King building was not affected. Some of these buildings were not replaced. The Shoshoni State Bank was where Price had his barber shop. A director of this bank, Cleve Whitaker, lost his life during the 1923 flood on Muddy Creek, headquarters for his large sheep operation. His wife, Zuma, was buried in Lakeview Cemetery beside him in the summer of 1988. Her funeral was at the Community Church, conducted by her grandchildren and their spouses. A pioneer returned to rest near the town she loved and beside the man she loved.

The flood of 1923 has not been equaled since, and for that we give thanks. Many have written of it, and especially the wife of Martin Baskett who sat and wrote as the drama unfolded.

The Bureau of Reclamation camp at Pavilion furnished work to some from this area. A start had been made on constructing the canal as planned in 1906, and efforts were made to find new settlers for the land. This did not take long, as during the early 1930s, many were suffering drought and depression in Nebraska.

In 1937, a larger school was constructed to accommodate the increased enrollment. They finally had a gym for basketball practice instead of the dirt of the playground. The first class to graduate included Sid Humphreys, who for years operated the Gamble Store in Shoshoni. Mark Harmon was shot down over Germany during WWII and imprisoned. Released at the end of the war, he joined the Bureau of Reclamation and retired from this career to Nampa, Idaho. Thelma Gourley died in Alaska. Edna Herbst Booth is retired from ranching at Hudson. Jean Dewey Ewing is living in Casper. Harry Gourley learned to fly, did so during WWII, and operated a dry cleaning shop in Shoshoni unless Frank Robbins called to say they were rounding up wild horses. The shop closed, and Harry was flying. Frank

Robbins captured the famed Palomino stallion "Desert Dust" on the Red Desert.

The Bureau of Reclamation had a new project for Shoshoni after WWII. It had been decided to build a dam and reservoir up stream from the old Boysen dam. They condemned thousands of acres belonging to ranchers who had homesteaded in 1906. This was known as the "take" area, a very fitting title. Mineral rights were also condemned. The construction provided a new boom for Shoshoni requiring new housing, the Morris-Knudsen addition, and new additions to the school. In addition to the use of the reservoir for irrigation water and power, there has been a Wyoming State Park created to supervise the construction of campgrounds and beaches for swimming, boating facilities, and even rest rooms for fishermen. The drought of 1988, the driest, hottest year in Wyoming's history, should clarify for all, the need for more water storage, especially upstream storage. After the dam construction, the town was quiet with mainly the farm and ranch economy sustaining the district. More acreage had been opened to WWII vets in 1947, taking in Hidden Valley, Cottonwood Bench, North Portal, and farms along Highway 26 from Marlatt Road to the new causeway at Boysen Reservoir. A new energy boom of gas and oil in the 1970s became an energy bust in the 1980s. By now you can see that this is an old story in Shoshoni's history. The resources are still there, and this industry will come back stronger than ever before.

Another old story in Shoshoni is fire. This time it was a big fire on August 4, 1979, that gutted the Derby Bar and Dining Room and the south section of Gambles General Store. With the closing of these businesses, Main Street has never regained the activity it had experienced. Fire codes and insurance costs have made business a tough existence in older town buildings.

Copyright 1988 Lois G. Herbst. Compiled to be sure I didn't forget some aspects of Shoshoni history. Update: The gas discoveries in the Lost Cabin area are far greater than the wealth of the Lost Cabin gold that so many old timers sought. The farm lands on the Riverton Project, especially in the Hidden Valley area are being used by livestock people to raise feed for sheep and cattle.