

## Radersburg

Speaker: Harla Gillespie

Presented at the Broadwater County Museum 2017 Open House

Good afternoon. My name is Harla Gillespie. I wish to thank the Broadwater Museum, Linda Huth, and the board of Directors for the invitation to speak for the opening of the museum and the featuring of Radersburg, Mt., their focus for the season of 2017. I will speak today of information I have collected over the years and wish to share with you.

In 1867 “GOLD” was discovered in the area of what is now Radersburg, MT. It soon became a “boom town” with a population of over 2000 residents – in 1865 Radersburg was the second largest mining town in Montana. The civil war had just ended and the country was in the midst of recovery. Many people were looking for work including Rebel soldiers who came here to work in the mines along with others, all anxious to “strike it big”. Radersburg sprang up as a town with bars, hotels, livery stables, grocery stores, bake shops, furniture builders, blacksmith shop, cigar and tobacco store, butcher shop, doctor and dentist offices and, most importantly, the stage shop. This stage line ran from Fort Benton to Virginia City. Fort Benton was the Missouri River Port which brought supplies per wagon companies and passengers traveling west. Teamsters drove the wagons of freight while Concord Coaches carried the mail. Wells Fargo carried passengers. A government contract was let to carry mail from Bozeman (the port of the Bozeman Trail) to Radersburg in 1865.

The young boys of Radersburg would ride out to meet the stages and race them to town. One day a man got off the stage at a local hotel (which could have been the Central Hotel, Culver House or Metropolitan). The boys loved to visit with people there and this man was a distinguished looking man in a frock coat and a big black hat. The man asked the boys about the valley, the town and the mountains. He stayed the night and caught the stage out the next day. Little did the boys know they had been visiting with one of the Presidents of the United States – Ulysess S. Grant.

Mr. Ruban Rader, who was born in Roanoake, Virginia came to Radersburg in 1863, a young man of 19 years old. He acquired many acres of land and deeded 40 acres (which was surveyed by the sun and moon) for the township of Radersburg, Mt. He used a horse drawn scraper to level land for a court house. In 1865 when Jefferson County was formed from the Territory of Montana, to the State of Montana, he became the first County Commissioner. He married and raised a family here and his house can still be seen north of Radersburg on private land. Some of the Rader family is supposed to be present at our Celebration of the town in July (2017). They have visited before and enjoyed them.

A black man by the name of Charles Grove came to Radersburg one year by stage. He was a promoter of claims and mines, buying and selling. He was known as a fancy dresser and always had a couple of beautiful ladies, dressed to the nines, on his arm. That winter Charley was found frozen after a blizzard between the Keating Mine and Radersburg. He had been salting mines illegally as was soon found out and “taken care of” by someone he had cheated. “Gold” does strange things sometimes.

With the growing population, land around the town and in the valley was purchased and large ranches were developed. Herds of cows and horses ranged where possible. The land was arid with plenty of cactus and sage brush. Later it was developed and dams were built and it was irrigated. \$50,000 was invested in ditch property which supplied local ditches with water from Crow Creek. The workers were well paid at \$15.00 a day. Many companies were started and changed hands many times. A canal was formed from Crow Creek swamps which carried 5,000 inches of water. Some was used for cattle; some was used for placer mining which was pressure washing the dirt and gravel for gold. Many of these workers were Chinese. I acquired this information from "Our Traveling Correspondent" a daily independent newspaper in 1874.

There was a large underground mine called the Keating southwest of Radersburg. A community formed there called Keatingville. It consisted mostly of boarding houses, a bar and, of course, "Red Light Houses" with available women. Two of these homes were later moved to Radersburg. They are used today – but not for the same purpose. Most of the men rented beds in the boarding houses in shifts – the next used it for the next shift. Some of the women I knew later in Radersburg were cooks and laundry washing women in Keatingville.

Another part of Radersburg was lower town mostly built by Crow Creek Stampeders in 1866-67. The stage line served them also. Located about at the old Earl Webb ranch. As the community of Radersburg developed and became more organized there was a Sheriff elected and a Law Office. Some serving were Bill Bowley, Col. A.G. George and a Lawyer, Cpt. George Cowan. The Cowan family was known for their visit to Yellowstone Park by horse and buggy where they were captured by Chief Joseph during his flight from the US Calvary. They were later

released unharmed. Many books have been written on the subject. I met a Cowan descendant 10 years ago as he was looking for information on that subject. Later he wrote a book about it which I have in my library.

Several traveling Preachers spoke at the Court House. According to the Daily Independent; no Preacher lower than a Bishop has been able to draw a paying audience. The people of Radersburg needed a Church – so in 1871 Edwin James Stanley, a deacon in the Western Conference of the Methodist Church, was appointed to the Radersburg district. He traveled 1000 miles by train and 450 miles by horse back in order to preach his first sermon in November 1871. Rev L.B. Steller was pastor for a time. He came to Montana on a wagon train led by Jim Bridger in 1873. Brother Van Orsdel became current rider Preacher in 1911. A basement was excavated and a roof was put on at the present sight of the old Methodist Church. Many stories were told of him and I will give you my favorite:

One hot summer afternoon Brother Van had been preaching at the local Church for several hours. His horse was tied to the hitching post out in front of the Church. A local merchant had Brother Van arrested for cruelty to animals. Brother Van acted on his own defense and won the trial. The Judge requested that Brother Van suggest an appropriate sentence for the prosecutor (when a prosecutor lost they were usually penalized). Brother Van suggested that the prosecutor attend Church at least once a month for the rest of his life wearing Sunday go to meeting clothes. He did – for the rest of his life!

Other people attended their Church at the Court House. Presbyterian, Lutheran and Catholic services. A literary society presented pageants

and drama readings with lights and costumes on Saturday evenings. After Sunday worship riding clubs would have trail rides a big community meal afterwards.

A ranger station was established replacing Glendale Butte Station on Crow Creek and appeared on maps in 1926. It operated at that time and the Ranger lived in the house across the street. The building still exists in Radersburg. Some Rangers were Medford, UI Horn, Kingsley, Harris and Fallman.

The Masonic Lodge was one of the first organizations. Montana Hope Lodge was established in Sept. 1868. They had 12 members. Lodge No. 15 A.F and A.M ancient Free Masons was Chartered in 1870. In August of 1870 a Grand Mason Ball was held at the Court House. It was attended by many – some were prominent Helena members. As stated in the Daily Herald: According to all accounts, Radersburg has been a lively town during the past week. Dr. Frank, who returned from there last evening says the hotels (The Culver House and Metropolitan) have been filled to their utmost capacity, since Monday last. In fact the place has been literally besieged and taken by storm. The meeting of the Grand Lodge of A.F. and A.M. and the Jefferson County District Court will, in a measure, account for the extraordinary business and bustle of that town during the past week.

The Lodge moved to Boulder due to the war. The Rebecca Lodge took over the upstairs room. I was a member of the Rebecca's in 1971-1974. Then it became inactive and move to Three Forks, Montana. The original room is still there. The original wall paper is still upstairs of the Lodge which is the 2<sup>nd</sup> oldest in the U.S – as I have been told.

The war raged on and many mines closed due to the fact they couldn't get parts for the pumps and machinery. The population dropped and the buildings became empty. Work was hard to find. The railroad was now in the county – which had become Broadwater County. There were projects started by the government on dams and roads. The school and the Church remained. Some of the houses built in this time were kits from Montgomery Ward or Sears. There is still one standing in Radersburg that I know of. It was also dry in the 1930s and some ranches were sold. Some people in Radersburg had businesses in Townsend. The Radersburg School closed in 1966 and the children attended school in Toston until the Toston school closed and the children started attending school in Townsend.

One of the bars (The Night Owl) stayed open. It became a popular stopping place. The local children when done with school went other places for work and their future.

During the 1930s baseball was a popular sport. There was fierce competition between the towns and their teams. Games were played most Saturdays. Radersburg had a player, Harry Duff, who ended up playing for the Chicago White Sox in 1922-1926.

My Husband and I came to Radersburg in 1971. We built a house there and our 3 children went to school in Townsend. Radersburg had a gas pump, a store, a post office and a bar. Fishermen and hunters frequented the area as they still do. Snowmobiling was a big draw. Local clubs got together for their winter rides in the mountains behind town. Today the forest closes on Dec 1<sup>st</sup> and opens on May 1<sup>st</sup> of each year.

Art Sitton and Jack Rauls used to haul iron ore from the iron ore mine west of Radersburg to Ideal Cement in Trident. The main road from Toston to Radersburg is now paved. Snow plows keep the road open in the winter for the school bus. Road crews service the roads in our area – some times. We came to a beautiful, well kept small town which has grown around us with many new homes and cabins where cattle once roamed. West of Radersburg is a place for motorcycles to play. It is provided by the BLM. There is still a lot of speculation of the big work “GOLD” and sometimes some activity in the area, but it soon disappears. Many truck and camp trailers go through town when the forest is open.

In 2009, 8 years ago, the RHPI was formed to save some of the buildings in Radersburg. We have the school house up and running with a public meeting room and a small museum. We are still in the progress of many projects throughout our town to preserve some of its history. Our meetings are the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sat of the month: 1 PM in the winter and 7 PM in the summer. You are welcome to come and join us, we can always use the extra hands. We extend an invitation from the town of Radersburg for the 150<sup>th</sup> year Celebration on July 29-30, 2017. Watch for posters with more information.

Thank-you for the opportunity to speak here today. I will be around if you have any questions. Please visit the Musuem and see there the many wonderful displays and other projects of Radersburg. There is much to see!