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The First Days of Marblemount

By Dick Buller

Marblemount is a small town a half-mile upriver from the mouth of the Cascade River. A couple of hotels, two stores and three beer parlors scattered over a mile of state highway comprises Marblemount today but in 1890 fifteen hundred miners made it, in the words of several astute boosters – “The Coming Leadville of the Pacific”. For in the Cascade valley near Gilberts’ cabin hundreds of prospectors hacked at outcroppings of Galena ore and silver and lead.

The Boston mine was sold for a half-million dollars in cash, others for hundreds of thousands as everybody was going to strike it rich and retire. But alas, silver was devalued overnight and the boom broke. Overnight, also, the town of Marblemount was a deserted village.

People with homesteads, who could not leave until they proved up on them and sold them to the timber companies, stayed on hoping soon to return to God’s country, as they called the down river land.

My brother, Carl Buller, had left Sedro-Woolley in the spring of 1890 and in a two-day hike over Indian trails, reached the claim of George Engles, on which the town of Marblemount now stands. He asked George where he could live to get a government claim.

George said: “There is a Norwegian squatting near my claim, but he can’t hold it, so go up the river a mile and locate there.” So

George did and his was the last claim located at the time. Everything else had been taken as far up as Goddell Creek.

Coming back to Sedro-Woolley Carl, Mother and I took the “Indiana,” a stern-wheeler, up-river but it only went to Birdsvew leaving us on the river bank. Next week the “Henry Brady”, another boat, picked us up and went as far as Rocky Riffle and again we were put ashore just two miles from what later on was Marblemount.

Following on old Indian trail with what belongings we could carry we came out on the river bank where a large pile of groceries were covered with a tarpaulin. A man with a pair of scales set up under a canvas fly was already doing a land office business in supplying the miners. About fifty feet down river a shake building with walls and roof but no floor had a plank laid across two whiskey barrels and was in operation as a saloon.

My mother asked Frank Stewart, the “store-keeper” what was going on. He told her that someday this would be a large city. “What we need most now is a hotel,” he said. Mother replied, “I am a hotel operator.”

Stewart called over George Engles, introduced mother, whose first question was “Where can I build?” A small clear spot fifty feet from the saloon on the river bank looked like a good spot. Engels told her, “There is 16 acres here, take your choice – but I would

suggest that little opening in the timber.”

Morgan Davis and Alec Adkins came across the river in a canoe shortly afterward with a lot of marble samples and said they had found a mountain of it. Mother suggested that if this was so, we should call the new town “Marblemount”. All agree the name was perfect.

The next step was to send to the postal department for the necessary stamps and so forth, plus the appointment as postmaster. These came thru in time but no mail carrier was appointed to bring the mail up from Sedro-Woolley. As there was only the trail and the river boats part way, you would see a man in a big sombrero or a tall stove pipe hat walk into the hotel, take off the hat and remove a packet of letters. This was the latest mail from outside.

Later mail began to arrive by canoe and that fall a man on horseback got the mail contract for regular service.