

OFFBEAT OREGON

Lost soldier's mine: Lost ledge of rocks worth \$8 a pound

BY FINN J.D. JOHN
For The Spokesman

Early in the summer of 1853, deep in the Coquille Mountains of what's now Douglas County, six U.S. soldiers were trudging dispiritedly through a trackless wilderness.

The wilderness wasn't totally trackless, though, because that's what the soldiers were there to do: scout a route through the mountains, from Port Orford to Jacksonville.

The problem was, they were lost. The track they were scouting wasn't going anywhere until they figured out how to get un-lost. And they were almost out of supplies, so if that didn't happen soon, they'd all starve to death.

As evening approached, Lieutenant George Stoneman called a halt. "We may as well camp here for the night," he said.

So the men set about making their camp. Private Manley Martin was sent down to the creek for water while the others — Sergeant Mann and Privates McKenna, Schlisk, and Schnedicker — set about the usual tasks: fire, bivouacs, etc.

Down at the creek, Private Martin was filling the canteens when he saw a glint of yellow in a rock in the streambed. Drawing his saber, he used it to pry the rock loose, and then he picked it up. It was white, with a streak of yellow running through it.

Martin was probably a little disappointed. He probably had hoped the gold gleam came from a nugget in the streambed. The California Gold Rush, which had broken out five years earlier in 1848, was still in full swing, and one of the many bad things about Army life in 1853 was being stationed so close to the diggings, with no opportunity to do anything about it.

It would be good for a joke anyway, he thought, and pocketed the rock and headed back to camp.

"Hey, look at this," he told his comrades when he got there. "I found gold!"

Everyone laughed — everyone but one fellow soldier, who stared at the rock.

"That really is gold," he said. "That's a piece of decomposed quartz with a gold thread through it. Where did you find that?"

Everyone scrambled to his feet, and the soldiers followed Martin back to the creek where he'd filled the canteens. The soldier who recognized the quartz quickly started scouting uphill and upstream from the spot, and after a time found what he was looking for: the ledge of decomposed quartz, a piece of which had broken off and rolled down into the creek and washed down to where Martin had found it. It looked like the real deal — a vast fortune in rich gold ore.

Before they moved on the next day, Lieutenant Stoneman had the men blaze four trees in a square centered on their campsite and carve their names into it. That way, they had a chance of finding the place again, after their enlistments came up and they were released from the Army. Deserting or going AWOL wasn't really an option with Stoneman in the know; the lieutenant was a career Army man and a stickler for regulations. He would later rise through the ranks and retire as a general, later serving as governor of California.

So the men trudged on, hurrying to reach Port Orford before their supplies ran out, dreaming about the fabulous riches that awaited them after the Army released them.

So goes the origin story for one of Southern Oregon's most famous lost-gold-mine stories: The Lost Soldier Mine.

The soldiers, of course, returned to the field as early as they could, but that wasn't very early.

The site was too far into the bush for a weekend trip, so they had to wait until they mustered out of the Army before taking up the search. By the time that happened, all of them had forgotten how to get back to the campsite.

Another soldier, Capt. William Packwood, had also mustered out of the Army at about the same time, intending to join the Gold Rush. Packwood was a good friend of Private Ross McKenna, who told him everything he knew and remembered about the ledge, and it was in Packwood's mind a great deal as he worked on his own claims. But then he hit a worthwhile pocket of gold on one of them, and for several years after that, he was busy enough with his bird-in-the-hand to not have much time to think about the bird-in-the-bush McKenna had told him about.

Years went by. Packwood's claim played out, and he moved to Enchanted Prairie to try his hand at farming. There, one day, he got talking to some prospectors, who said they'd found the soldiers' camp and their blazed trees, but no sign of the ledge.

Intrigued, Packwood set out on the 50-mile trek to the site with a neighbor to try his own luck. Like the prospectors, he found the campsite readily enough; but there was no sign of the ledge.

He and the neighbor hunted for some time, then gave up and headed home to their farms.

That August, Packwood saw a man approaching his cabin. He quickly recognized him: it was his old friend and Army comrade, Manley Martin, whom he hadn't seen since 1853.

Over supper, Martin told Packwood the reason for his visit: He'd heard about Packwood finding the old campsite. The ledge, he said, was not in the campsite; it was several miles away from it. He, Martin, could easily find the ledge, if he could find the campsite; and Packwood knew where the campsite was. Would Packwood like to team up and go make some money?

Yes, Packwood would! But Packwood, unfortunately, had a big mouth, as soldiers often do. So when, in the middle of the two men packing their kit for their journey, a neighbor named Mr. Brown dropped by and asked what they were up



Bureau of Land Management photo

A gold miner works his pan at the Cow Creek Recreational Gold Panning Area.

to, Packwood told him.

Brown then begged to be allowed to come along, and Packwood said that was fine, and off went Brown to pack up his own stuff.

This turned out to be a very expensive mistake

The problem was, it was 1861. Pro-Confederate and pro-Union men had started killing each other in April of that year, and it was now August. Manley Martin was from Kentucky and was a committed Confederate rebel sympathizer; Brown, as it turned out, was a passionate abolitionist and zealous Union man. Packwood had his hands full keeping his two traveling companions from murdering one another. They quarreled and battled all the way to the campsite.

Finally, with what must have been a profound sigh of relief, Packwood brought his belligerent companions into the clearing at the center of the blazed trees, where a skilled woodsman could still plainly discern the five-year-old remnants of the soldiers' encampment.

Martin promptly disappeared into the bush and was gone all day, returning just before dusk. Packwood figured he'd gone to make sure the ledge was still there.

But the following morning, Manley Martin coldly informed his companions that he'd decided not to look for the

ledge, and stalked off in the direction of the Rogue River road.

Packwood was unable to persuade him to stay. Plus, he was sick of the constant bickering. So he let him go. Most likely he expected to find the ledge himself anyway — it could only be within a few dozen yards of the creek, up a steep slope, somewhere upstream from the campsite. Now that he knew it wasn't inside the square of blazed trees, it should be easy to find, right?

But it wasn't

Finally, out of time and out of patience, Packwood and Brown returned to their farms. And a week or two later, Packwood got a letter from Martin.

Martin wrote that he had, as Packwood and Brown had surmised, gone to the ledge on that day, and taken some samples off of it. But he'd gotten so angry with Brown that he didn't want to share his find with him, so he'd decided to come back later. But, he added, when he got the ore samples assayed, they turned out not to be as rich as he'd thought they would be — only \$200 a ton or so. So, he'd decided to skip it.

Whether that was true or not, Packwood never learned. A little later that year, gold was discovered on China Creek out in Eastern Oregon, and Packwood — who knew from experience the importance of

getting to the diggings early — flew to the scene. There, he staked and worked a fruitful claim and became one of the most prominent citizens of the town of Auburn.

It wasn't until 1914 when, as an old man, William Packwood returned to the scene of the soldiers' lost ledge in the Coquille Mountains.

When he arrived, he found that a forest fire had burned through the canyon, destroying the blazed trees and all the landmarks that he'd noted.

Not that it much mattered; it had, after all, been more than 50 years since he'd last been there. It would have been transformed beyond recognition anyway.

In the end, the ledge went undiscovered. So far as is known, somewhere in the mountains near Cow Creek that ledge still peeps through the topsoil, and many local hunters and fishermen over the years have kept an eye out for it on the off-chance of rediscovering it.

And, if Manley Martin's "\$200 a ton" estimate is correct, it would be a fabulously rich mine. \$200 would buy almost 10 ounces of gold in 1861; today, that amount of gold would fetch about \$15,725 — per ton. That's about \$400 in every five-gallon bucket of rocks. Which might have been a fair-to-middling prospect, as mines went, during the height of the California Gold Rush; but it's pretty dazzling today.

(Sources: *Lost Mines and Treasures of the Pacific Northwest and Treasure Hunting Northwest*, two books by Ruby El Hult published by Binford & Mort in 1957 and 1971 respectively; *Gold Dust: Stories of Oregon's Mining Years*, a book written and published by Kerby Jackson in 2011)

■ Finn J.D. John teaches at Oregon State University and writes about odd tidbits of Oregon history. His book, *Heroes and Rascals of Old Oregon*, was recently published by Ouragan House Publishers. To contact him or suggest a topic: finn@offbeatoregon.com or 541-357-2222.

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District # 6 Redmond District # 9 Prineville Pursuant to the By-Laws of the Cooperative, members who live in that district are eligible to run for election. Applications and information for candidates, including district boundaries and eligibility requirements, are available at the Cooperative's office at 2098 NW 6th Street in Redmond Oregon. The application process involves several steps and must be completed and filed at the same cooperative office by 5:00 PM, February 4, 2022

Legal Notice The undersigned has been appointed personal representative of the Estate of Georgia Rogers, Deceased, by the Deschutes County Circuit Court of the State of Oregon, probate number 21PB08869 All persons having claims against the estate are required to present the same with proper vouchers within four (4) months after the date of first publication to the undersigned or they may be barred. Additional information may be obtained from the court records, the undersigned or the attorney. Date first published: December 29, 2021 David Wolf Personal Representative c/o Steven D. Bryant Attorney at Law Bryant Emerson, LLP PO Box 457 Redmond OR 97756

Legal Notice NW Self Storage – January 26, 2022 bidding ends at 9:30am. Bidding begins at 9am January 19, 2022, at www.ibid4storage.com All vehicles in auction listings

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are not included in the sale and will be towed separately: 3925 SW 25th Pl, Redmond: N117 Tina Allen, H153 Sydney Berman, G138 Gary Moore, Q11 Tiffany Dye, 1401 N 6th St, Redmond: 1008 Beth Armstrong, 1113 Steven Holmgren, 0369 & 0373 Mary Hudspeth, 1052 Brian Foster, 0704 Destinee Komp, 0233 Tim Bates, 0626 Josh Archer, 0004 Diane Justus, 0372 Jodi Boyer, 0034 Lori Wymore, 0849 Alvaro Jimenez, 0737 Daniel Stanner, 0028 Kaitlyn Schwenker, 0005 Tracey Root, 1030 B Ave, Terrebonne: 0204 Vanessa Bowen, 539 NW Maple Ave, Redmond: 0003, 0233 & 0234 Frank Massari, 0083 Debra Slade, 0168 Eric Wheat, 0247 Shimon Weiner, 0265 Randi Oliver, 0269 Kathleen Cavett, 0293 Jesse Irwin.

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WORSHIP DIRECTORY

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DEATH NOTICES

<p>Alice M. Sizemore of Redmond March 1, 1926 - December 28, 2021</p> <p>Arrangements: Autumn Funerals, (541)504-9485, www.autumnfunerals.com (please read the full obituary at their website)</p> <p>Services: Recitation of Rosary 10:00 AM, Funeral Mass 10:30 AM, St. Thomas Catholic Church, 1720, NW 19th St., Redmond, Or, interment immediately following Terrebonne Pioneer Cemetery</p> <p>Contributions may be made to: St. Thomas Building fund</p>	<p>Frank Joseph Spiegel, Jr. of Bend November 2, 1924 - December 25, 2021</p> <p>Arrangements: Niswonger-Reynolds Funeral Home is honored to serve the family. 541-382-2471 Please visit the online registry for the family at www.niswonger-reynolds.com</p> <p>Services: Bend Church United Methodist 1680 NW Bond St Bend OR 97701 January 15, at 2:00 pm</p> <p>Contributions may be made to: Central Oregon veteran Outreach or Partners In Care - Hospice</p>
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