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J. MARION MORE: IDAHO MINING PIONEER (1830-1868)

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Originally John N. Moore, he moved from his initial home in Anderson County, Tennessee (northwest of Knoxville) to a Locust Creek farm (west of Linneus) in Linn County, Missouri, where his father was a prominent Southern Methodist. His parents, Joseph C. Moore (May 1, 1791-May 19, 1873) and Jane Pate, were married in August 1829 in Knox County. Their eldest son, John, headed west to California as a gold rush emigrant at about age 20. Settling in Mariposa, he became an undersheriff to Thomas Early. After a little less than a decade in California, an embarrassing fracas induced him to head north to Washington, where he disguised himself as J. Marion More. From then on, he went to great care to conceal his original identity as John N. Moore, although many of his old Mariposa friends continued to remember him that way.

Favorable Oro Fino reports attracted a flood of adventurers from nearby Oregon and Washington, and by early 1861, the mineral district boasted enough population to warrant the formation of a new county in the eastern reaches of Washington Territory. That fall Walla Walla County and the miners sent J. Marion More to the Washington legislature as a Council member to watch over their interests, and he lived up to his responsibilities by trying to push through a memorial urging division of Washington Territory along the north-south Cascade range of mountains. Olympia and Walla Walla representatives favored More's proposal, but Vancouver interests succeeded in defeating it. More returned to Walla Walla with little to show for his legislative efforts.

Moses Splawn and More's close friend, D. H. Fogus, in the summer of 1862, were attracted to eastern Oregon where tales of the fabulous "Blue Bucket" mines had placed these mythical workings. Splawn's party merged with a group of seven miners of the leadership of George Grimes. Indian reports of bright metal near Boise River took the Splawn-Grimes prospectors across Snake River and up into the Boise Hills. On August 2, D. H. Fogus panned fifteen cents worth of floury gold near what is now Centerville and thus located the beginning of the Boise Basin mines. More followed up that discovery, leading a party that founded Idaho City, October 7, 1862, and stayed long enough to locate some paying claims. Then he headed for Olympia to serve his second term as Washington Council member from Walla Walla and Shoshone counties. Again he urged the legislature to memorialize Congress to establish a new mining territory east of the Cascades, but again his efforts were defeated. However, western Washington interests feared that the booming mining district would soon take political control away from Puget Sound and arranged for creation of Idaho Territory on March 4, 1863.

That same year More was back in southern Idaho, expanding his Boise Basin operations and building up capital. By the time the fabulous new Owyhee quartz mines were located that summer, More had made his fortune in the Basin and was ready to assume the role of mining financier. With his old friend Fogus, More invested heavily in the Owyhee mines. By the spring of 1864, the two partners had bought up controlling interest in two promising quartz properties: the Morning Star and the Oro Fino. Throughout that summer the More and Fogus mines employed twenty to thirty miners blocking out ore and preparing for large-scale recovery operations as soon as a ten-stamp mill was shipped in and put into production. That task was completed in October at a cost of \$70,000, and the initial investment paid off handsomely. Within a month, More and Fogus had shipped over \$60,000 in silver bricks to Portland. By 1865, the More and Fogus properties had recovered about \$1 million, and the partners were drawing plans to bring in another larger and more elaborate mill.

Development work had justified faith in large-scale production up to 1865, but after that date the More and Fogus venture seemed less certain. Moreover, Fogus was investing strongly on the side in other properties, and by the summer of 1866, the partners' debts began to outstrip the mill proceeds. No longer able to pay their bills, More and Fogus instituted bankruptcy proceedings on August 14, 1866. The largest mining concern in the Owyhees had failed. That event touched off a general Owyhee depression which threatened the total collapse of hard rock mining in that vicinity. Yet the skepticism soon faded. By the spring of 1867, the Oro Fino and Morning Star mines were back into production after a miners cooperative purchased the property from the More and Fogus receivers.

J. Marion More, in the meantime, had recovered financially enough to assume an interest in Ida-Elmore properties on top of War Eagle Mountain, and participated effectively in negotiating with the rival Golden Chariot interests--who were located on an outcrop of the same vein--to settle a bitter mining war over ownership of the ledge. The war had pretty much ended by the beginning of April of 1868, but hard feelings persisted on both sides. Stimulated by a round of drinks with his Idaho-Elmore friends a few days after the end of the conflict, More was unfortunate enough to meet up with Sam Lockhart, a Golden Chariot strike-breaker, in front of the Idaho Hotel on the afternoon of April first. Heated words flew back and forth. Lockhart defended his honor with his pistol, and shot More in the chest as the latter was about to strike with a stick. More died three hours later. At his funeral in Idaho City a few days later, a thousand old friends gathered at his grave to mourn the death of one of Idaho's more famous mining pioneers.

See Idaho Yesterdays, Vol. 29/4, "War on the Mountain," by Dale M. Gray, for a more complete description of the Owyhee War.

Information provided by Guila Ford.

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