

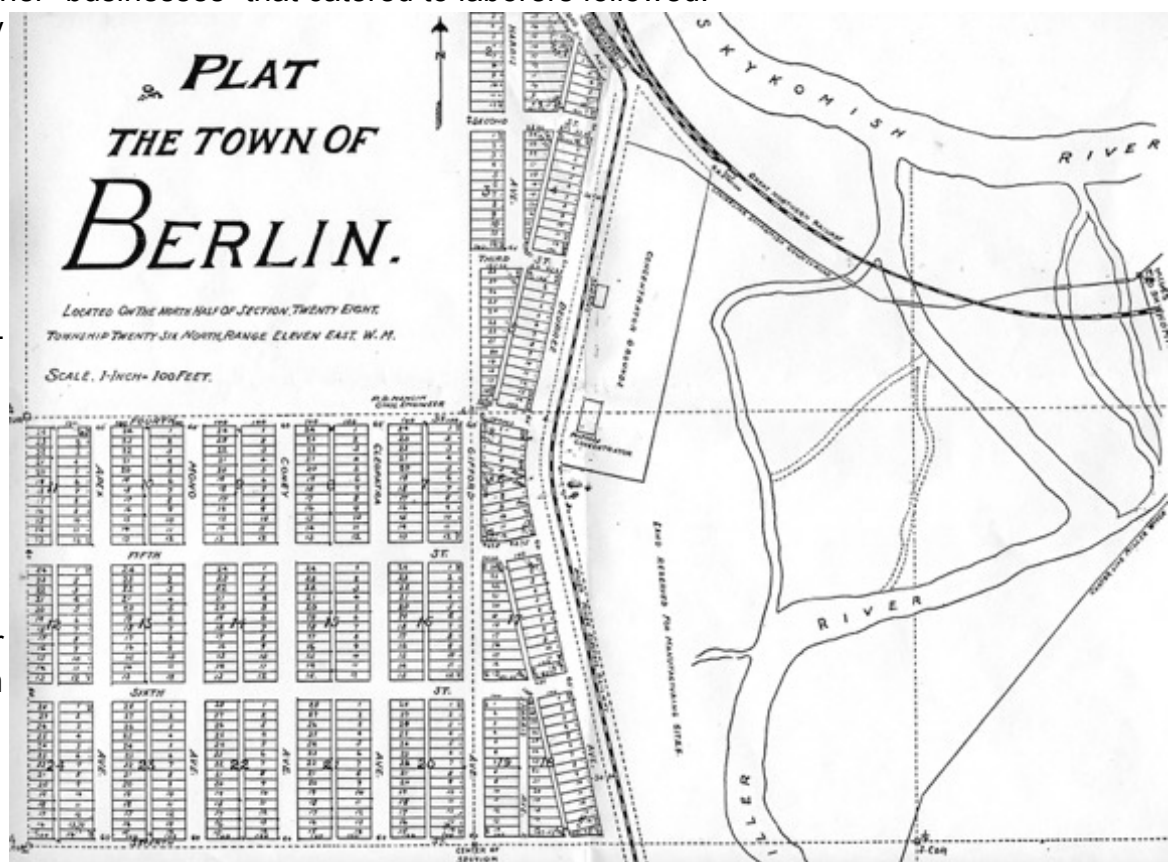
Until the Great War --

## Miller River was Berlin

In general early "towns" in Skykomish Valley sprouted somewhat organically along the route of Great Northern Railway and grew haphazardly thereafter with buildings and services arriving as needs dictated. The majority began as labor camps with a bunkhouse, or maybe bunk tents, and dining facilities, followed quickly by a store and often a sawmill, since lumber was always needed for buildings, cross ties, and trestles. In some cases it likely happened more or less simultaneously. Other "businesses" that catered to laborers followed.

As a planned city Berlin was a significant exception. It became Miller River during "The Great War," (which didn't become WWI until there was a WWII) when things German were decidedly unpopular, but in its early years Berlin seemed to offer great promise.

Located two miles west of Skykomish where Miller River flows into the Sky, a 1900 plat map filed for Berlin offered more than 500 home site lots with named avenues and streets laid out in a grid pattern. An area was designated for an ore concentration facility, and "land reserved for manufacturing sites."



Compared to all those largely side-hill communities that sprouted like patches of fireweed or foxgloves along the GN tracks, this was flat ground and real estate speculation of some sophistication. Four of the avenues were named Apex, Mono, Coney, and Cleopatra, the names of nearby mining claims. Coney and Cleopatra were mining "groups."

Why wouldn't any enterprising person want to get in on such a deal? Page III of the Intro, even before the Preface, which comes before an additional 200 pages of hype printed in *Mining in the Pacific Northwest* by L. K. Hodges published by Seattle Post-Intelligencer in 1897, presents this glowing report about Money Creek, a mere three miles up the hill from Berlin:

...The Gold Mountain Mining Company's property consists of eight full-sized claims, namely: Grand Central, Bonanza Queen, Paymaster, Crown Point, San Francisco, Red Jacket, Bald Eagle and Happy-Go-Lucky.

All these claims are situated on Money Creek, King County, Washington, within about three miles of the Great Northern Railroad and only fifty-two miles by rail from a smelter. They have large bodies of iron and copper sulphide ore carrying gold, which can be made to pay dividends by a small expenditure for development. Regarding Money Creek the Washington Mining Journal says:

"This district is in the western slope of the Cascade Mountains, in King County, State of Washington, and is easily accessible. Skykomish, on the Great Northern Railway, is the nearest railway station. If there were no other mines in the State of Washington it could still claim distinction as a mining state on the strength of Money Creek alone. The large disclosures of ore in the locality exceed those of Treadwell, in Alaska. The bodies of ore on the Bonanza Queen and Paymaster are believed to be inexhaustible. The Gold Mountain Mining Company is the owner of both claims, and with its new and complete equipment of machinery and a force of competent workmen will record a large output during the present year."

A limited amount of treasury stock for sale.

Write for prospectus and price of stock.

When the "disclosures of ore... exceed those of Treadwell, in Alaska," one ought to pay attention. Per Wikipedia, the Treadwell gold mine was in its time "the largest hard rock gold mine in the world, employing more than 2000 people." In 1889, John Treadwell sold his stake at Treadwell for \$1.5 million.

To be kind, the reality of the Money Creek finds was outrageously oversold. Of the eight "full-sized claims" mentioned above, not one produced enough to be listed among more than 1,000 mines in *The Gold Seekers... A 200 Year History of Mining in Washington, Idaho, Montana, and Lower British Columbia*, by Pauline Battien in 1989. The Apex mine, one of the named streets on the Berlin plat map, is listed however, and will be discussed later. One may assume the other three named mines failed to produce enough ore to be worthy of note.



In 1906 Berlin was destroyed by a forest fire started by a spark from a locomotive. In her book *Stevens Pass*, JoAnn Roe says the population may have been as large as 500 in 1900, and "burned were a mine concentrator, a sawmill, a shingle mill, a lath mill, two grocery stores, two hotels, an assay office, a confectionery, five saloons, and 30 houses. She also writes that GNRy reimbursed most residents for their losses, but most did not rebuild. It seems very likely the reason Berlin was not immediately rebuilt, the way Index and Skykomish were after their fires in the same decade, was because already there was strong indication the early promise of mining would be not fulfilled.

Various mining operations continued along Miller River and Money Creek, a few maybe even made money, but overall like elsewhere in Skykomish Valley, far more money got poured into the ground than was ever recovered as return on investment.

A favorite story told often and ascribed to several different mining operations is the one where a mining company was facing bankruptcy and a large payroll deficit, and got paid for a delivery of ore that would cover a significant portion of their debt. Instead of paying debts and workers, they paid a dividend to stockholders, immediately generating thousands of dollars in new stock sales, keeping them liquid awhile longer. Perhaps it happened more than once. Whatever the motives, it is clear some of the most productive "mining" done in Skykomish Valley was in the pockets of investors back east.

It was reported in 1901 the Apex Mine produced \$80,000 worth of gold, and subsequently \$100,000 1901 dollars were invested in development and a transportation system, but when a locomotive was finally acquired and put on the track, it spun out and derailed on the first trip where it laid a decade or two before being cut up for scrap.

Among the more colorful mine "businessmen" was W.J. Priestley who operated the Apex throughout the 1920's. Photos imply he lived well, drove big cars, and courted stylish women.

His daughter Helen, the cute blonde in the photo, remembers the family garage in Miller River was always filled with ore being "concentrated" before being shipped to the smelter in Tacoma. Each day a single white horse would pull a small ore car up the tracks then be left to



wander back to Miller River on his own. The car would be filled with selected ore and would "coast" back to Miller River. When a boxcar was filled with ore it was sent to the smelter.

It is generally accepted there is still gold in the arsenic, but it is embedded with arsenic and to date no one appears to have learned how to economically separate it. It is believed a bit of the arsenic at the Superfund clean-up site at the Asarco smelter in Tacoma came from Money Creek.

Miller River's most prominent citizen was Millard Fillmore Smith, postmaster. For decades he operated Miller River Inn as a destination resort offering "packages" to guests many of whom came by special weekend tourist trains to enjoy the outdoors and amenities of the area.

As a community Miller River shuffled along with a store, a gas station, and enough families to support a one-room schoolhouse that closed 1933. A few families still live there, and of late property has been sold to skiers and weekenders, and the occasional cabin is being built.



This web account by Warren Carlson is an expanded version of an article originally published in *The Index Wall*.