

Golden memories -- by Web Ruble Jr., Fairview, Ore., October, 2002, on the occasion of a special open house to celebrate Golden's placement on the National Register of Historic Places.

or: "survival stories my Golden father and others told me"



My father, Webster Martin Ruble (1900-1971), who for most of his adult life lived in cool Aberdeen, Wash., always had warm feelings about his early days in Golden although he never returned there much after the family sold the mine in 1911 and moved away in 1912.

He also lived part of his early years in Ashland which he also dearly loved. Our family has made many visits to Ashland.

One day in about 1948 when my father, mother and I were traveling U.S. 99 back to Washington in our 1937 Chevrolet rust bucket from a trip to California we stopped in Wolf Creek for gasoline.

At my urging we asked the man at the service station about Golden, whether a road still went there, and in what condition the road might be. Our old beater, you see, was no mountain goat and was chugging on its last pistons. And my mother, a city girl, never liked to get off the arterial concrete. She had a thing about leaving the well-beaten trail for remote places. She feared getting stranded in some redoubt and being at the mercy of God knows who.

Nevertheless, at my urging we inquired. My father and I thought we might take a quick boogie up to Golden so he could show it to me. I more than just about anything wanted to do that -- to see Golden because my father revered it so and because he often in moments of nostalgia talked about life there. I was almost begging him.

Well, the man at the service station was an old Greek. He came out saying, "Golden? Ya! Zee's still dere but eeet eeez all wrecks!" Now my father knew that Forsythe and perhaps subsequent owners of the mine and claim lessees reportedly had been excavating beneath the town, and he figured consequently there wouldn't be much left to see. Moreover, my mother was growing increasingly impatient, as she wanted to get going back to Portland. So after a quick consultation, my father and I scrapped that golden opportunity (pun intended) to visit that Midas camp of family history.

It turned out to be a big mistake because we never made a visit to Golden. We always planned to go there together. It was the one thing I really wanted to do. And I think so did he. With him along, he could show me so much more than perhaps anyone else could. Years later -- by this time I was an adult and living in Eastern Washington -- we vowed to take a week or weekend and do Golden. Well, I moved to the Portland area (closer) but he died before we got to it.

We had had opportunities but never took 'em. If there is one thing I learned from this it is when opportunity calls answer it, because Lord only knows you may never come this way again.

My father died April 30, 1971. A year or so later I went to Golden for the first time by myself. Oh my! I found quite a bit of the town still there. It didn't look too much like what I had anticipated (I really don't know now what I had expected), but I loved it.

My father had told me it was about six miles up a road out of Wolf Creek. I was surprised to find it within four miles. However, I know the road along Coyote Creek has been re-aligned in some areas, graded, changed and straightened over the years.

Anyway, since that day in 1972 or 1973 I have been by Wolf Creek and Golden many times and I am thrilled that in the intervening years the good folk of Wolf Creek, Grants Pass, Rogue River, and others from all over Josephine and Jackson counties have seen to it that at least part of Golden stayed in tact and revere its history and significance.

Moreover, I am thrilled that it is now on the National Register of Historic Places. Let's celebrate.



My father, Webster Martin Ruble, had a time-honored pocket watch that with reverence he would haul out at about 8 p.m., informing me that it was bedtime.

Sometimes I thought I resented that watch. However, somehow I realized it was a family heirloom and therefore I, too, revered it. My father cherished that watch because it was about the only item he had that had been his father's. He said it was something by which he could remember his father – the prime mover of the Ruble-McIntosh clan that founded and populated Golden from the middle 1880s to the early 1910s.

William Newton Ruble – who was sent by his father near Salem down to Golden to operate the Ruble mine –expanded the mine that his father opened, founded and built the town, and with his brother Walter invented the Ruble Rock Elevator and Separator which revolutionized the placer gold-mining industry of the time.

However, William Newton Ruble -- a man of endless work -- wore a dozen occupational hats as he led the tasks and people of the town that strung along the north bank of Coyote Creek just west of the Rubles' lower mine. William N. Ruble did practically everything as did leaders of so many other pioneer families.

Story tellers have often referred to the last part of the 19th Century and the first years of the 20th as a kinder, gentler era. They've called it the good old days when things were less hurried and people had time to enjoy one another.

But according to my father, his father found little time to do anything but work. A less-hurried time? Are our historic analyses mush? According to my father, there simply didn't seem to be enough hours in the day to get things done. There was precious little time to do much visiting.

William Newton Ruble, you see, was more than a mine operator. He also was an inventor, carpenter, farmer, maintenance man, ordained minister, school teacher, and even a naturopath doctor.

In short, William Newton Ruble had that grit of inexhaustible pioneer spirit. He never seemed to rest.

Webster Martin Ruble -- who was born there in Golden in 1900, the next to the last of eight children -- told me stories of how his father was the last one to retire at night. The whole family -- most of the time nine or ten living tight in that house -- would go to bed and his father would still be up doing chores and preparing things for the next day.

His father then would follow by being the first one up in the morning. Webster Ruble said he would awake in the morning to hear his father playing the church organ and singing hymns. It was wonderful, he said.



William Newton Ruble was always busy and it nearly drove to distraction his wife -- Sarah Jane Ruble, Webster's mother. Sarah Ruble had the care of all of the children -- my father, his six older sisters, and his younger brother, Willis. And, of course, in pioneer times that meant cleaning, washing, cooking, feeding, more cooking, mending and darning and more mending, while caring for the large household plus some other relatives who from time to time drifted in and out.

Despite his mother's heavy burden, Webster Ruble said it irritated her that her husband never was able to slow down and retire for the evening. There was always something that had to be done no matter how late it was. And he would do it.

His father, Webster said, was tireless.



Now, I've said my grandfather, William Newton Ruble, was always so busy with tasks keeping the family and gold mine going that they had almost no time for visiting.

Well, they did do some visiting.

My father, Webster Martin Ruble (first son of William Newton Ruble), told me that while he was growing up in Golden between 1900 and 1912, there were three gold mining towns in the precipitous hills of Jackson County (part of it later became Josephine County) that were within a day's travel of one another: Golden, Greenback, and Placer.

My father said that occasionally my grandfather – the owner and operator of the mine at Golden – would load the family into the horse-hauled wagon and they’d travel “over the mountain” to Greenback for some kind of whoopee. Today we’d probably call it a barn dance or ice cream social without the ice cream.

And once in a great while they’d go “the other way over the mountain” to Placer for the same purpose.

Some of my father’s stories are now hazy but I do believe that he said that once in a great while they would have a baseball game (softball?) between Golden and Greenback. It was quite a deal – mining town honor and all of that.

However, from what he said nobody would take such sporting events very seriously. It was just recreation. Most of the concern was socializing, sharing and surviving.



My father, Webster Martin Ruble, said the family was forever moving back and forth between Golden and Ashland.

He said he never knew why.

My mother, Mary Crombie Ruble who had lots of heart-to-heart conversations with her mother-in-law, once told me that she knew why.

Sarah Jane Ruble, my grandmother and my father’s mother, just had to have a civilization break from the poverty-like, rugged, rock-pike-tough, rural living at Golden and sought not respite from chores but rather escape from Golden’s dust and colossal inconvenience. She and her husband also thought the children would get better schooling in Ashland. That’s why she and the family would move into Ashland for the major parts of some years.

Ashland at the time was probably the second largest town anywhere near Golden or Wolf Creek and it had a fair number of amenities. The largest town probably was Jacksonville which was the seat of Jackson County. Though the seat of new Josephine County, Grants Pass was still pretty small. Medford was small-- still the middle ford of Bear Creek. .

No – it was not a case of living the summer in Golden and the winter in Ashland. The timing of the moving was more irregular than that. Sometimes, my father said, he would be in school in Ashland, and sometimes in Golden.



My father's younger brother, Willis, was born in Ashland. His oldest sister, Bertha, died in Ashland of tuberculosis when my father was 6 years old. She is buried in the old southeast section of the cemetery there.

He said the only memory he had of his oldest sister is that she lived in a tent there on the family property in Ashland. Moreover, because of the disease's contagious nature, nobody was allowed to go near her, including Bertha's daughter, Inez. Webster Ruble said he'd catch a glimpse of his sister from time to time but the person who tended Bertha was his mother.

The way of treating tuberculosis in those days was for the infected to live as much as he or she could in the clear open air. That's why the tent. She lived outdoors in that tent when the weather was good and it was most of the time when she was so severely ill. When she died at the age of 23 her husband Fred C. Root and daughter Inez moved away and my father never saw either one again, although he would get letters years later from Inez from remote places in Nevada.

It probably was determined that it was best for Bertha to get that required open air in Ashland, and not in Golden which had more dust and was far from any medical doctor. William Newton Ruble was a naturopath but tuberculosis, of course, was beyond his expertise as well as beyond that of most medical doctors.

That was the reason for living in Ashland part of that year (1906). However, my father said they lived lots of other times in Ashland for short and sometimes longer spells. He loved Ashland but his heart was in Golden.



My father loved Medford-like hot weather. He liked it best when he could feel the ground searing his feet through the soles of his shoes.

One time when I was about 15 – that would put it in about 1949 – I experienced his insane-appearing desire for skin-scorching weather first hand.

We were living on the coast of Washington (Aberdeen), which sulked and squatted at bayside under a Tillamook-type cloudbank. It rained much of the year. It had lots of high fog and gray skies, but few sunny days and almost none that were truly hot.

Well, one day that summer, it got into the high 90s there. 'twas a rare circumstance on those tideflats largely populated by Scandinavians and old country Finns who emigrated from countries of similar climate.

The mercury reached 98 or so – just below 100.

My father came home from work, peeled down to his undershirt – or was it just a thin white shirt? – grabbed a chair from the house, carried it out into the middle of the back yard, and placed it right there in the blazing sun. Then he proceeded to sit there and bake.

I went into the house telling my mother that dad had finally flipped – that he had teetered over the brink -- because he was sitting right there getting scorched and smiling while everyone else in town was complaining, trying to keep to the shadows, and frantically trying to find a way to get cool.

My mother said, “haven’t you figured it out yet? Your dad was born and raised in Southern Oregon and until this moment hasn’t been warm since he left!”



The gold vein at Golden began to run out in 1911 or so and my grandfather, William Newton Ruble, no doubt after consultation with his father the owner, the McIntoshes and others, decided to sell it and move on.

Most of my father’s sisters – all of them older – by this time had either married or moved away. So the Rubles sold the mine in 1911 to a man named Forsythe who located what was left of the vein and began mining in underneath the town.

The Rubles moved into Eugene in 1912. The proceeds from the sale went to my great grandfather William Ruble – the father of William Newton Ruble – who had invested in the mine. He, in turn, gave it all to the church, which I think was the Christian Church.

This left my grandfather and his entire family relatively penniless. They started life over again in Eugene. William Newton Ruble, my grandfather, was a naturopath and tried to make a living that way.

However, earning enough was tough, especially at first, and then again after my grandfather died. My father, Webster Ruble, said that the family at one point was very poor and lived in relatively dismal circumstances on the poor side of Eugene.

One day, my father said, his father, William N. Ruble, got a letter from a man who had bought his patent on the Ruble elevator, had some equipment for it, and asked my grandfather to come over to Idaho, set it up, and show them how to operate it. My guess is the man agreed to pay my grandfather’s way, but I don’t know.

Well, what I do know what my father told me: that it was tough getting into Yellowjacket, Idaho, which even today remains a forested Tibet deep in the Idaho Primitive Area. William Newton Ruble at the time was probably not in the best of health. He died there in Yellowjacket.

Some say he was murdered for his money. My father often asked, “what money? His father and the whole immediate family were next to destitute. My father later figured that his father died of appendicitis. There was no doctor within 50 miles of Yellowjacket. He just got sick and died.

My father was 16 at the time and living in Eugene. He said the most vivid thing that lingered in his memory was the terrible time folks had getting his father's body home. It was awful, he said. People had to snow shoe in and out and it took a long time.

Family members since have speculated that the Ruble elevator was both a financial blessing and a disaster for the family. It brought the family accelerated mining success, money from increased mining profits and elevator sales, and a sense of well being. Its popularity also resulted in perhaps a pre-mature death for my grandfather at the age of 58.



Moving to Eugene was tough, Webster Ruble said, after selling the mine in Golden. His grandfather, William Ruble who invested in mining claims on Coyote Creek in 1878, gave the sale proceeds to the church.

This put my father, and his father, William Newton Ruble, and the family in a position of starting life over again in Eugene.

However, it may have been a blessing and camouflaged windfall in my father's case. Eugene was the home of the University of Oregon. My father who spent his high school days in Eugene – and World War I in Fort Vancouver – returned to Eugene to help support his mother who became widowed while Webster was in high school. Webster thought, what the heck, why not pursue a college degree while I'm here?

He did so and in 1923 became the first one in his family to graduate from college.



After the Golden mine was sold and after his father died on a trip to Idaho to install a Ruble elevator, Webster Ruble attended high school in Eugene.

But he said he didn't graduate because the United States entered World War I and he along with dozens of others in the Eugene area were plunked into the Student Army Training Corps – a forerunner to what later became ROTC – at the university. He said it actually was a programmatic lash-up between Eugene High and the University.

After several months of training in muddy trenches there in Eugene, my father and SATC cohorts were all shipped to Columbia Barracks (Fort Vancouver in Washington) for more training and staging for Europe. Those Eugene boys and most of the others at Columbia Barracks became part of the Rainbow Division that went to France. They were the cannon fodder that turned the tide of the "Great War to End All Wars".

However, many including my father got caught in the world-wide flu epidemic of 1918 that swept through Columbia Barracks (Fort Vancouver) like a forest fire. My father survived the flu okay but also needed a hernia operation. He was put on hold and thus missed the unit's shipment to France. That unit got all shot to pieces, returned, and its

survivors discharged while my father languished at Vancouver, still waiting for his hernia operation.

He never got it. Soon after the Armistice he said he was discharged and returned to Eugene.

Even though he never made it to the front, Webster Ruble thus was considered a World War I veteran. He qualified for a military headstone when he died, but that's why the 2x1-foot- 4 ½-inch-thick granite headstone – placed in ceremony at the church graveyard at Golden – bears only the name of Student Army Training Corps.



Webster Martin Ruble, who was born Jan. 19, 1900, in Golden, and was reared there until the Ruble family sold the mine in 1911, said it was a big event to put someone aboard the train or retrieve them from same.

Apparently the train didn't stop in Wolf Creek in those days, because my father said meeting the train always meant a trip to Glendale.

My father, Webster Ruble, said that it was an all-day trip to put someone and their baggage aboard the train in Glendale and to make the trip back home.

He said his father would sometimes take him along. My father said he loved it because it was an exciting adventure and it gave him some time with his father. The trip was made in horse and wagon. He said they would go the six miles (my father insisted that it was six miles in those days) to Wolf Creek and then the five miles or so up the stage road to Glendale.

The train usually was on time. However, several times they'd have to wait. Everyone would stand on the platform and crane their necks peering down the curved track for the arriving train. He said the scene was almost comic – even to a little tyke that he was at the time.

Then when the pufferbelly finally heaved into the station and train rumbled to a stop, it was to the traditional ooohs and aahs from the excited waiting throng.



The Ruble and the McIntosh families were intertwined, having traveled the Oregon and California trails together from Missouri.

They came via the southern route of the Oregon Trail – a branch off the California Trail – into southern Oregon. Stories have circulated that they landed some properties in southern Oregon before settling in the Eola Hills west of Salem – Polk County..

When they came west they were hymn-singing Campbellites, forerunners of the Christian Church denomination.

The Rubles and McIntoshes, though probably of different ethnic backgrounds, somehow became connected somewhere in Missouri or Pennsylvania . . . records aren't clear on this.

Be that as it may, they were very connected when they came west and they both took root in Polk County and later in Golden. They stayed intertwined. At least two daughters of William Newton Ruble, who ran the mine at Golden, married McIntoshes.

LaVerne Ruble (1890-1972) married Raymond McIntosh and Bethel Ruble (1895-1980) married Harold McIntosh. LaVerne and Ray had four children. Bethel, it is worth noting, was a beauty, married twice, but had no children. Though she never went beyond high school, she was a financial genius. She became a millionairess by investing money in oil stocks back before many people did that.

She and her first husband, Harold McIntosh, ran the Wolf Creek Tavern (now inn) from 1914 to 1916. They later divorced. Harold McIntosh stayed in the Wolf Creek-Golden area. Bethel moved to Eugene and later married William Clubb who was the Eugene city engineer. She operated a gift store in downtown Eugene for many years, closing it in 1944. When she died in 1980 her house in Eugene was full of expensive, high-quality merchandise left over from her store.

Harold McIntosh for most of his life lived up the north hill behind Golden in a one-room tarpaper shack and grew garlic as a cash crop. He became one of the family's philosophers, saying there is no better place in the world than the mining country of Jackson-Josephine counties.

He once told Web Ruble, Jr., "I left here (Golden) once. Didn't like it so I came back!"