

John Lehsou (1840-1921)

A German immigrant who established mining claims in the Garnet Mountain Range, a ranch owner, stage line operator, and the postmaster at Beartown.

- **1840-Birth.** John was born in Holstein, Germany.
- **1873-Married.** Dora and her sister were on vacation in Montana visiting their friends, Mr. and Mrs. Morris Bein, who ran a store in Deer Lodge where miners bought supplies. One source indicated that they worked for Konrad Kohrs. John Lehsou and Charles Kroger were invited for dinner to meet the two young girls from Holstein. John married Dora in 1873 and Charles married her sister, Anna, in 1870 in Deerlodge, Montana. John and Dora had two sons, Emil and Henry.
- **1865-Arrived.** John arrived in the United States from Germany. He worked in Iowa and Nebraska for a year then went to work freighting with an outfit that arrived in Montana in 1866. Traveling over the infamous Bozeman cutoff, his train lost three men to hostile Sioux, as well as most of their horses. With what remained they went straight to the Bitter Root, delivering mining tools and groceries. He was working as a teamster for John Owen at that time.
- **1866-Stage Station.** John opened a stage station on the Mullan Trail, near Bearmouth, “up the mouth of the Bear.” It was on Birmingham Flats near a new I-90 rest area. The actual stage station was moved to Rock Creek and reconstructed as today's Ekstrom's Stage Station Restaurant.
- **1870-Beartown.** He settled in Beartown near today's Bearmouth, Montana.
- **1879-First Placer Mining Claim.** In 1879 John partnered with Charles Kroger to file the first placer mining claim in the heart of what would later become Garnet. They constructed numerous dams and dug miles of hillside ditches to bring much-needed water to placer operations in the Garnet Range. John owned a cabin at the mining site but he and his family lived in Beartown for 22 years.
- **1887-First mining claim.** In 1897 John filed the first of many mining claims. His partners included Henry Eppel, John Elfers, and John Donlon. They were all members of the International Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF).
- Recent research suggests that Lehsou and Kroger profited more from the water that ran through their claims than the gold that they dug out of the ground. Lehsou and Kroger owned all the water rights at the top of the mountain. All the other placer miners needed that water down below in order to run their sluice boxes. As water ran out for other miners, Lehsou and Kroger bought up all the mining claims.
- **1888-Postmaster.** John was appointed postmaster in 1888. He served in that position for four years.
- **1892-Ranch.** In 1892 John and Dora bought a large ranch outside of Missoula, Montana (reaching from Grant Creek to today's Missoula City Cemetery) where he established a fruit orchard.
- **1900-Bank.** John became a principal stockholder and Vice President of the Western National Bank.
- **Cemetery land donation.** 20 acres of John's land was transferred to Missoula City Cemetery (for \$1), where his family and three mining partners are buried. Eppel, Elfers, and Donlon were life-long bachelors, and the IOOF saw to their last rites. They have identical IOOF gravestones.
- **1921-Death.** John died on April 27, 1921 in Missoula from myocarditis. He is buried in the Lehsou plot with his wife and sons.
- **1990-Abandoned Property.** In 1990 the Montana Revenue Department's Abandoned Property Bureau discovered a small cardboard box in the bank vault. When the Lehsou heirs opened the box they found a cache of 77 gold nuggets and a vial of gold dust along with a note directing them to keep the gold in the family. The gold was valued at \$10,000.