

Pony

*And that is why the post office called Pony, Montana,
is now in Madison County instead of Fergus County*

There are "one-horse towns" in Montana, but there are also two "Pony" towns—one in Fergus County, one in Madison County.

The first to be established was in Fergus County. The town was named for Pony McPhartland, who owned a trading post. Inside the trading post was the post office, which Pony ran, not for profit, but for the convenience of the people in the area. It's reported that on average he made only about \$6 a year in commission selling stamps.

The *Hardin Tribune Herald* of February 13, 1937, recreated an incident that had earlier erased the Fergus County town from the maps and postal registers:

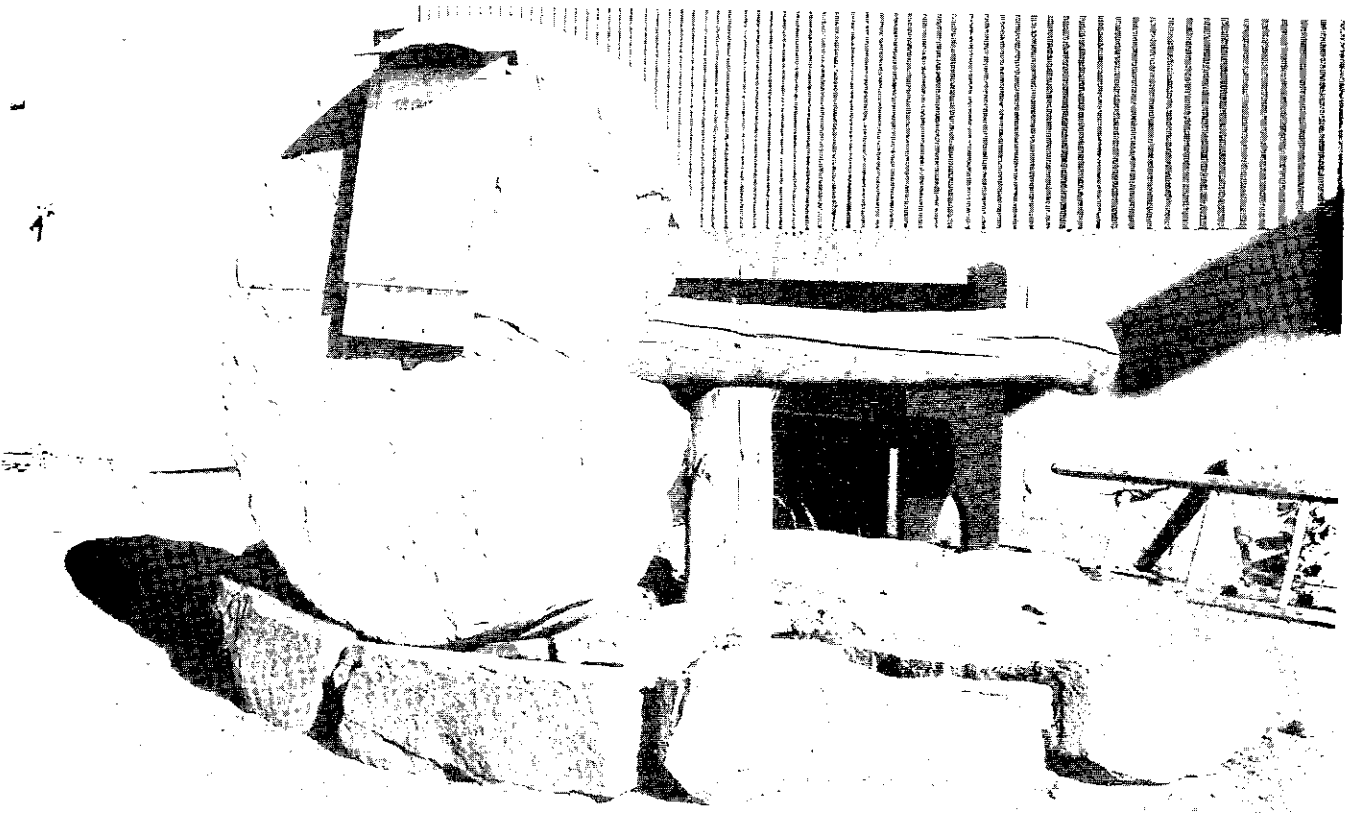
One day a stranger rode up in front of the store, alighted from his cayuse and tied it to the hitch pole.

Pony [McPhartland], seated on a bench just outside the door, greeted the newcomer with the simple hospitality of the west. The fellow immediately developed an attitude of inquisitiveness, however, that jarred upon Pony's sensibilities.

"Where's the Post Office?" he asked abruptly. "That's it," said Pony, pointing to a five-gallon kerosene can with the top cut out of it that stood on a shelf just inside the door.

Just then a resident of the neighborhood rode up, dismounted, dropped the reins of his horse, and with a brief greeting to Pony and the stranger, stepped through

A Chilean mill, which was probably developed from the arrastre. It consists of a single stone roller running on a stone pavement, powered by horse or waterwheel. Ore is ground on a Chilean mill until it is fine enough to add mercury, then it is ground again, until panning indicates that all the free gold is amalgamated. This mill is on display at the World Museum of Mining in Butte.





Morris State Bank in Pony, Madison County, Montana.

the door and helped himself to the contents of the can.

He examined each letter attentively. . . . He ran on through the pile of letters, showing an intimate knowledge of the affairs of everyone to whom a missive was addressed, and even reading all of the postal cards.

When he finished he mounted his bronco and rode away. Neither Pony nor the stranger knew whether he had found anything for himself or whether he had taken the mail with him. It was customary for whoever got there first to take the mail to everyone who lived along the route when he started for home, without saying anything about it.

Pony, of course, knew that.

By this time the stranger probably suspected it.

Pony said afterwards he could see the man swelling up by little until he looked like he "was agoin' tuh bust."

Pony must have been doing a little swelling himself, judging from the conversation which followed.

"I am a United States postal inspector," said the stranger, trembling with rage, "and I want to know if that

is the way you conduct the business of this United States Post Office."

Pony stared at him in silence. Then he arose, also in silence. The stranger arose also.

Pony, without a word, lifted the "United States Post Office" from its resting place on the shelf, and walked to the creek a few yards from the door.

"That," he said, "is the way I conduct the business of this United States Post Office, you and the United States Post Office can both go to hh."

With that he dropped the can, caught it on the toe of his boot and kicked it across the creek, scattering its contents far and wide.

And that is why the Post Office called Pony, in Montana, is now in Madison County, instead of in Fergus County, for that was the end of Pony McPhartland's Post Office.¹

Madison County's Pony was founded by Tecumseh Smith and called "Pony" because he was such a "little runt."

Pony, who had staked out a claim earlier, came back to the gulch—which was to be named after him—with a partner in 1868. In 1875 a miner swung a pick through some wild strawberry plants and discovered a vein called the Strawberry.

As the stamp mills sprang up and began their noisy operation, Pony Smith's feet began to itch for quieter, perhaps richer, camps. He left, and before long the cost-profit squeeze took its toll and the mines closed down.

Today, remains of the Elling and Morris mills perch above Pony, while below, the 160 or so residents try to keep their town from dying completely.² Sandwiched between the mines and the active part of town are a bar and empty stores. Of interest is the Morris State Bank, which used to serve as the Mines Sales Leasing Agency of the district. It's a well-preserved structure with picturesque teller's cages, colonnaded stone entrance, and lettering still clinging to unbroken windows.

Only time will dictate whether the second town will perish along with the first named Pony.

Many of the tales heard in Pony revolve around Marshal William B. Landon, rock-chiseller par excellence. One of the marshal's enduring works can be found near the town of Potosi, where he scrawled "One Mile to Hell." Near the city dump is another Landon masterpiece consisting of strange letters, Landon's initials, a Maltese

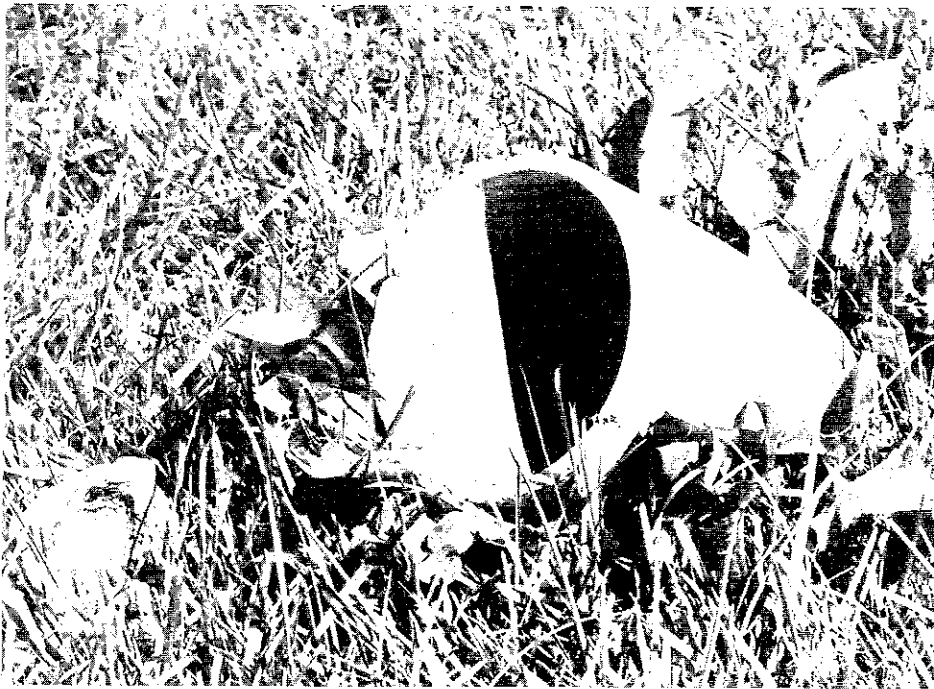
cross, and the date of 1921. Rumor has it around Pony that the marshal did it all as a joke, thinking some of the more gullible would think it was a secret treasure map.

Marshal Landon even carved his own tombstone.

Near Pony is Red Bluff, which prior to 1864 was a stage stop. In 1864 a two-story stone miner's boarding-house was built and used until the turn of the century, at which time it was converted into a residence. Later it was used as a hotel, and currently is home of the Red Bluff Research Station of Montana State University.

The research station, a cemetery, a mine tunnel, and a few cabins mark what was once a town of perhaps 1,000.

Pony does have one main lure for tourists: Potosi Hot Springs. Potosi is a small resort, with four creek-side cabins, gourmet dining, a spa, and, of course, hot springs. It will be interesting to see what, if anything, changes in Pony with the addition of its new neighbor. The developers of the Yellowstone Club, a millionaire-only development that bills itself as the world's only private ski and golf club, located in Big Sky, Montana, recently purchased the 8,000-acre Hollowtop Ranch, just outside Pony. People around Pony are watching and waiting, since the Yellowstone Club isn't tipping its hand so far. "We haven't committed to anything but we're not going to preclude anything either," said Bill Sumpter, vice president of the Yellowstone Club. "I haven't really decided one way or the other."³



Two indispensable tools in assaying: a bone ash cupel . . . and a crucible.