Contents

CHAPTER 1

Patterns of Discovery

1863–1864

"Emigrants are pouring in and the whole country is one bustle of excitement."

—James H. Morley

The Hot Spring Mining District lies in the northeast corner of Madison County, Montana. The district's epicenter, today's tiny settlement of Norris, lies thirty-five miles equidistant from Virginia City, to the southwest, and Bozeman, to the east. Roughly speaking, the district is approximately fourteen miles in length, varying from fourteen to twenty miles in width. On the east an undulating plateau ends abruptly at steep bluffs overlooking the deeply cut canyon of the northward-flowing Madison River. On the south the district looks down a thousand feet to the broad valley of the upper Madison River. The south boundary of the Hot Spring District follows the bed of South Meadow Creek westerly—from its confluence with the

Madison River near McAllister to its headwaters high in the Tobacco Root Mountains. From here the district's western boundary follows the crest of the Tobacco Roots northward. The thickly forested slopes of these mountains are steep; the rounded, treeless summits pronounced. Ward Peak, at 10,267 feet, towers over the district; in the 1860s, before other Montana mountains were found to be of superior elevation, it was ranked as the territory's second highest. Along its west line the district follows this mountainous divide to the Norwegian and South Willow Creek drainages and then proceeds east to Black's Ford on the lower Madison River, the district's lowest at 4,404 feet. Altogether, the district embraces the entirety of four townships and portions of nine others, totaling 267 square miles.

The Hot Spring District's quartz lodes, or hard-rock mines, are located predominately in its rolling hills and plateaus, whereas its placer mines, or gulch workings, are found along two streambeds—Meadow Creek in the south and Norwegian Creek in the north. Between them Hot Spring Creek—named for a much-noted fount just east of Norris and the source of the district's name—cuts an easterly ravine through the plateau before it joins the Madison River at its effluence from the Madison River Canyon.

Geographically, little has changed in the 140 years since the discovery of gold in the Hot Spring District. Of course, modern roads have been constructed and different courses have been adopted. And small settlements exist where none existed before. In the 1860s the district was bordered on the western mountain slopes and gulches by thousands of acres of heavy stands of timber. Although much of this was cut to support mining and ranching, regrowth and management have returned the quantity of timber to virtually its mid-nineteenth-century state. In 1900 the Madison River, which in Montana's territorial period was a large, meandering, many-channeled meadow stream above its formidable canyon, was dammed to create energy for a hydroelectric facility. Six years later the reconstruction and enlargement of the dam inundated several substantial river islands noted frequently in early reports of the settlement and agricultural development of the area. And in 1944 the headwaters of South Meadow Creek were dammed. But other than these reconfigurations of the district's topography, much remains as it was in the 1860s. Nor has its beauty been marred; one still stands in awe, as a contemporary put it, of its "wild" range of mountains, crowned by Ward Peak, its "monarch and sentinel"; of its "leaping and rushing . . . streams of crystal waters," which cut ravines through the plateaus; of its rocky ridges, grassy hills, slopes, and "many fantastic domes and pointed towers stand[ing] often on bases far smaller than their upper parts."[1]

Today, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the district is heavily engaged in the raising of livestock and the growing of grain, with periodic efforts to resuscitate its gold lodes marking it as an area of continued mineral potential. The current population of the Hot Spring District is little larger than it was during the heyday of its existence in the mid-1860s.

TO UNDERSTAND THE 1860S HISTORY OF THE HOT SPRING DISTRICT, ONE MUST APPRECIATE it for more than its quartz milling phase. For the district had been in development for almost two years before the capitalists and their quartz mills came to the area. Indeed, Hot Spring was first inhabited not by prospectors or eastern entrepreneurs but by preemptors of agricultural lands. Although the first Hot Spring District mineral discovery claims on record were made in May 1864, a full year after William Fairweather and Company's fortuitous strike in Alder Gulch, settlement of the valley's agricultural land commenced less than three months following the Alder Gulch discovery, or two years before the arrival of the first quartz-crushing mill. How many of these original preemptors of land came with the sole intention of farming, how many came in expectation of profiting from mining and then switched to farming and ranching, and how many simply claimed land for speculative purposes is difficult to say. For certain, some of these pioneers saw the area as highly suitable for the raising of foodstuffs and fodder essential not only to themselves but also to the welfare of the thousands who inhabited Virginia City and the mining camps around it. As one early settler expressed it: "Mining even in good mining countries is uncertain business. Probably not more than one in fifty of the mining population ever get rich at it. While farming in a good mining country has almost universally proved profitable."[2]

The fact is that many of the men who emigrated to the Montana goldfields had been farmers, and once it became clear that opportunities in mining were not unlimited, a goodly number turned back to their former vocations. The territory's first newspaper, the *Montana Post* (Virginia City), made development of the farming and ranching community one of its earliest editorial priorities. "Montana can never be a home, strictly speaking," its editor, Thomas Dimsdale, wrote, "until it becomes in a great measure self-supporting. . . . In every land there must be a diversion of labor. All cannot be miners."[3]

Quarter-section land preemptions in the Hot Spring District were first made in late August 1863, when Montana was still part of Idaho Territory. A quarter section, a parcel of land 160 acres in size, or one-quarter of a square mile, was the figure set in the 1841 Preemption Act and again in the Home-

stead Act signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln in 1862. The Homestead Act was the culmination of almost seventy-five years of agitation on the behalf of free-land advocates; it gave "any person who is the head of a family, or who has arrived at the age of twenty-one years, and is a citizen of the United States, or who shall have filed his declaration of intention to become such" the privilege of obtaining 160 acres of land free of charge—except for a small filing fee—in return for living on the land for five years, cultivating it, and making certain improvements.[4]

In Montana in 1863 the Homestead Act could be applied only in theory, for the official surveying of land was a requisite for full entitlement. But Montana's settlers had moved in faster than the surveyors had. When the official territorial survey was finally undertaken in 1867–1868, settlers had occupied significant portions of the territory for as much as five years. In reality, these settlers were not in full legal possession of their properties—they were in effect squatters. But to westerners squatters were, as Richard White put it, "noble pioneers."[5] And in Montana the principle applied was to secure possession for the territory's occupants and as much title as could be given prior to governmental surveying and patenting. In short, Montana practice, as in other western territories and states, legalized and protected squatters' rights in the early years of settlement.[6]

In adherence to the provisions of the Homestead Act, preemptions made in the Hot Spring District were for land suitable for agricultural purposes. The Meadow Creek area of the district received attention early, as it possessed good soil, ample water, and excellent stands of timber. That it was a beautiful and fertile valley could not be disputed. As important, its location gave it reasonable access to markets on both sides of the Tobacco Root Mountains. In realization of this, by December 1863 at least six preemptions had been made in the district, all of them on Meadow Creek. The following year—paralleling the discovery of gold, the influx of prospectors, and the formal organization of county government—witnessed intensified movement into the area by seekers of preemptable land. During the summer and early fall of 1864, twenty-one additional preemptions of agricultural land, totaling 3,360 acres, were filed for the Hot Spring District. Most of these were in the Meadow Creek area, but land to the north along Hot Spring and Norwegian creeks was now under cultivation. Other ranches most certainly were established in the Hot Spring District in 1864 but were filed on later—or not at all. At the same time, large parcels of land adjacent to the district, including property east of the Madison River and on both sides of the river south of the district, were also being preempted.[7]

An agricultural stamp was being pressed rapidly upon this formerly wild environment. One emigrant, accompanying a wagon train passing through the Meadow Creek area in early August 1864 after a long trek over Bozeman's Trail, was delighted to hear, for the first time since leaving civilization, the "sound of a [hay] reaper" and to see some fencing and a good garden.[8] A month later, when Richard Owen, accompanying a wagon train from Omaha to Virginia City, camped on Meadow Creek, he described the Hot Spring District as "a mountainous country [with] fine valleys between the mountains." Most of these valleys, he noted, were "occupied by white settlers, mules and oxen."[9] Another member of the same wagon train was equally impressed, citing the presence of ranchmen and the abundance of hay in the Meadow Creek area.[10] Where land was broken by plows, it predominately produced wheat, hay, and vegetables. Dairying and grazing of livestock were equally prominent—and economically feasible—as the mountain valleys remained remarkably clear during the winter, affording a lengthy grazing season despite the elevation and cold. In 1865 and 1866, when large cattle drives brought range livestock into Montana and the Madison River Valley, agriculture became firmly established in the Hot Spring District.

MEN WITH MINING INTERESTS ADDED PROMINENTLY TO THE AREA'S POPULATION IN 1864. These were the peripatetic prospectors who, defying the odds, sought to profit from the discovery of gold. Precisely how many prospectors operated in the Hot Spring District in 1864 is difficult to determine, but by year's end sixty-six different persons had claimed discoveries on ninety-two placer or quartz lodes. Untold others had been in on these discoveries or had labored without success. Numerous others bankrolled and supplied the prospectors from businesses located in and around Virginia City. Still others simply stockpiled lode property for speculative reasons.

Although agricultural labors had been centered mostly in the Meadow Creek area, the activities of mineral seekers stretched all along the eastern slopes of the Tobacco Root Mountains, from Meadow Creek in the south over the plateaus and divide directly north to Hot Spring Creek and its headwaters, culminating in Norwegian and Rattlesnake gulches and in the upper South Willow Creek area. Of the ninety-two lode discovery claims made for the district, twenty were in and around Meadow Creek, thirty were in Revenue Flats and Upper Hot Spring, and forty-one were located in the Norwegian Gulch–Willow Creek area. One bore a geographic description so vague that it is impossible to place. In short, by the end of 1864 the mineral properties of three of the Hot Spring District's principal subdistricts had been prospected:

Meadow Creek, Upper Hot Spring—including Revenue Flats [or Gold Field]—and Norwegian. Only the Lower Hot Spring District remained undeveloped; it would be "discovered" two years later.

What attracted prospectors to the Hot Spring District was its ample and easily accessed and worked surface values. Geologically, prospectors in the 1860s found in the Hot Spring District quartz vein outcroppings at the surface that held so much free gold it could be separated from the gangue (minerals with no economic worth) by mere pick and shovel. What had caused this was the oxidation, or chemical weathering, of the mineralized veins. After emplacement of the granitic Tobacco Root Batholith into the earth's crust and subsequent pulses of hydrothermal mineralization from the slowly cooling magma, millions of years of uplift, glaciation, and erosion gradually exhumed miles of quartz- and mineral-filled rock fractures, or veins. Veins that lay above the water table were exposed to oxygen and rainwater and were heavily weathered. Through time, many of the original mineral constituents were chemically altered and washed down to the water table, leaving quartz, which is almost indissoluble under normal conditions, and gold, which was freed from weathered pyrite (iron sulphides, also known as "fool's gold") and a number of usually economically unimportant accessory minerals. This geological process not only left the gold in a form easier to extract but also resulted in enriched (high-grade) ores because of the downward leaching of much of the gangue.[11]

"This region would be the delight of a geologist," remarked a knowledgeable contemporary observer. William Y. Lovell—probate judge, erstwhile assayer, and investor in Madison County mines—described the country rock as basically granitic in nature and metamorphic in appearance, "cut into irregular blocks by seams as straight and clean as if made by a knife." Most of the Upper Hot Spring District's quartz veins were found in the level fields of the plateaus: "Here they crop out through the yellow bunch grass, showing themselves at one or more points, then sinking below the surface." Nearer the Madison River the whole surface of the district, especially on or near the summits of hills or ridges, was "dotted with snow white quartz, while at the foot of the hills and over the plateaus, can be seen the quartz in place, running in every possible direction."[12]

Lovell found quartz specimens to be charged with "oxides of iron, and copper, as also with bright crystals of iron and copper pyrites, and blue glistening galena." Molybdenum, manganese, and plumbago (lead) headed the list of other ores he identified. The dissemination of these metals was considered a "most favorable feature, being as they are the constant companions of

the precious metals." The oxidation of most of these metals had left gold in the surface quartz in a free state, rendering them susceptible to easy separation. Water was plentiful for use in processing the ores, and the accessibility of the mines was a distinct plus, as wagons could be driven to most of them at any season because they were located east of the mountainous snow zone.[13] Although Lovell was concerned uppermost with profits to be gained through corporate mining, such advantages were boons as well to prospectors and to modestly budgeted mining endeavors. In short, from every appearance, over the years nature had worked to render Hot Spring's surface gold remarkably pure, plentiful, accessible, and easily worked.

The first Hot Spring lode discovery claims on record were the General Lee Lode and the Lawreance Lode, claimed by the Independent Quartz Mining Company on May 17, 1864—slightly more than three weeks following the establishment of the Madison County Clerk and Recorder's Office in Virginia City and just nine days before Montana was given territorial status independent of Idaho.[14] Precisely when these Meadow Creek claims were discovered is unknown, as initially the recorder's office did not require lode discovery claimants to disclose discovery dates. In those early months of development, Madison County's recorders, unquestionably overworked, were often quite lax in enforcing the rules. Although prospectors were obliged to file their claims within ten days if the discovery was located within thirty miles of the county seat—or fifteen days if located farther than thirty miles away—some claims were not legalized for weeks, months, and even entire seasons.

Nevertheless, prospectors were expected to adhere to clearly set procedures governing the preemption of mineral claims. These codes had been established on California precedents, which had been adopted as the mining frontier expanded to Nevada, Colorado, Idaho, and Montana. Prospectors were not only obliged to file their claims before the county recorder within a specified period; they had to bring a sample of ore with them, they had to pay a fee, and they had to swear that they had staked their claims in a precise and clearly marked manner. For quartz lodes this meant driving substantial stakes (usually five inches wide) at each end of the discovery claim; upon each stake was to be "written in legible characters the name of the lode as well as the names of the claimants thereof." For quartz properties, eleven claims in all were authorized for each lode; a discovery claim and five additional claims stretched out on either side of the discovery, each 100 by 200 feet in size. Discoverers were obligated, moreover, to have sunk on the discovery claim, to a depth sufficient to reveal at least "one well defined wall rock," the wall or

side of a vein of ore. The claimant also had to attest that the sample of quartz deposited with the recorder had been "taken out of the discovery claim on said lode by the discoverer."[15]

Finally, the person filing the claim had to pay the recorder for the privilege of filing on the discovery and one additional claim on either side. The recorder then issued to each claimant a certificate of ownership—a possessory right to real estate. So the process of locating a lode and filing on it was no easy matter. Unless a fraudulent claim was being made, one had to have put in earnest work on the site, devoted up to two days of travel to Virginia City and return, and had access to the filing fee, which could total as much as $24.50 if the prospector—at his own expense—had chosen to write in friends and relatives or to pay off debts or obligations to businesses or public officials.

One way to mitigate the requirements was for miners to combine their efforts. Both the General Lee and Lawreance Lode discovery claims were made by a group of men from various states—including Vermont, Georgia, and Illinois—who called themselves the Independent Quartz Mining Company. Both discoveries were placer claims in the Meadow Creek drainage, thus showing prospectors' natural inclination to seek out placer diggings in preference to the harder-to-work hard-rock quartz mining properties. Contrary to common belief, however, placer gold was not found "literally lying at one's feet." After the surface had been skimmed, placer miners had to sink shafts down to bedrock—the rock or solid clay underlying the gulch. Gold, by its superior weight, found its way to this level. It was not unusual for bedrock shafts to reach depths of fifty to sixty feet, and when bedrock had been reached it became necessary to erect hoists or to excavate drain ditches sometimes miles in length to obtain the precious metal.

Once procured, placer gold came in various sizes and shapes. In every case it is relatively pure, mixed in with sand, dirt, gravel, and rock. This gold was separated from its host by simply washing it with water. The most elementary means of recovery was through panning. Under normal circumstances a prospector could wash fifty pans a day. Another crude method of recovery was through use of a rocker, built something like a child's cradle but with cleats (also known as riffles) fixed to the bottom to catch the gold, which, weighing nineteen times more than water, worked its way to the bottom. Placed streamside, a rocker was generally worked by two men; one rocked and applied water, the other provided the dirt.

Both panning and rockering were arduous and slow. Sluicing improved the system significantly. Sometimes hundreds of feet in length, wooden sluices carried considerable water at great force, enabling more miners to process

much larger quantities of dirt and gravel. The length of the sluice increased the number of riffles, thereby increasing the prospects of capturing gold. If the gold was unusually fine, as it was in Madison County, mercury (quicksilver) was poured into the mixture of dirt and water. The mercury amalgamated with the gold it contacted, later to be separated by heating. The mercury could be used repeatedly, since most of it was recoverable upon cooling.[16] Until 1867, when hydraulic mining was introduced to the Hot Spring District, panning, rockering, and sluicing were the placering methods employed at Norwegian Creek and at Washington Bar on Meadow Creek—the sites where Hot Spring's placer gold was located.

As Elliott West has pointed out, however, placer gold represented merely "crumbs brushed from the table," whereas the major objective was the metal's original source.[17] Once the placer mines were fully staked out, miners who had missed out on the initial strikes or who dreamed of finding the "mother lode" headed for higher ground often well removed from the streams and riverbeds. Hard physical toil in itself did not necessarily generate rewards. Quartz lode prospecting was far more complex than placering. The prospector for quartz gold had to understand the geology of the country he was exploring and had to have sufficient knowledge and experience to recognize signs of its mineralization. That prospectors often worked in teams proved the maxim that group effort generated a greater chance of success.

A good prospector possessed very special capabilities. As Otis Young has observed, these might be so highly developed as to enable him to "detect . . . trifling changes in the kind of color of the scrub [brush], or even the speedier melting of light snowfall upon a band of mineralized rock." More commonly, the prospector centered on the kind of mineralization prominent in the district and then sought its indications.[18] In the Hot Spring District this was so-called float rock, gold mineralization that could be found on the surface and that was free of base metals. As one prospector reported, Hot Spring was rich in "free gold," and the outcroppings were heavier and better defined than in any other district known to him.[19] Coloration was also quite specific to Hot Spring ores. White quartz surface rock was conspicuous in its association with Hot Spring gold, and the district's float rock—and other rock contiguous to it—often bore a distinctive reddish orange tint caused by the action of descending waters, a clue that assisted prospectors in locating promising leads.[20]

Having ascertained the presence of gold, the prospector was then compelled to determine the extent and value of his find. Would it pay to develop it? Here he relied on skills long honed in history. "Indeed," Young noted, "his eyes, teeth, nose, saliva, and sense of 'heft' alone could force the rocks to give

up much information. [A] bit of metallic-yellow mineral placed between the teeth gritted noisily if it was anything but native gold. Saliva dabbed upon a pebble or specimen enabled one to peer 'into' it . . . so as to detect the yellow specks of gold." The sense of heft was important, as rock containing gold was heavier than that without it. Color was the most important of all, with the "possession of an 'artistic' eye for shades . . . deemed essential to successful practice."[21]

The prospector then tested the float rock by crushing and panning it. If panning proved unsatisfactory, he was likely to crush a second sample of ore and boil it, applying salt, soda, and a small amount of mercury. If gold existed, it would adhere to the mercury. This pellet would then be roasted over a fire. The mercury would vaporize—leaving behind a bead or button of gold. From this the prospector could estimate, by proportionate means, just how much gold could be obtained from the ore at hand. Although this test was reliable, many prospectors were so adept at gauging colors that they bypassed it, certain that by mere eyeballing they could accurately assess the profitability or nonprofitability of their discovery.[22] Needless to say, a prospector who had acquired these skills—often meaning a miner with previous, particularly California, experience—would be in heavy demand when the capitalists arrived.

Once convinced he was on to something of value, the prospector might simply skim off the surface, taking the exposed ore and going no farther. How many did this in the Hot Spring area will remain unknown. For the most part, Hot Spring's prospectors appear to have gone beyond to examine the lode's values up to six or eight feet below the surface, digging with pick and shovel, perhaps even using dynamite. More often than not, superficial subsurface digging did not pan out, and the prospector was compelled to start the process over at another location. But if the prospector uncovered quartz indicating satisfactory value and if he didn't bound off to locate something even more profitable, he would take samples, pace off his claim boundaries, and set his corner posts. On these he'd attach a location notice and make notes, written or mental, on the relationship of his discovery to area landmarks. Frequently, he would note other discoveries nearby. This process completed, he had so many days to proceed to Virginia City to present his samples, pay his fee, and record his claim at the county recorder's office. Some prospectors might, prior to that and provided they could afford it, have their specimens assayed by a professional. Overwhelmingly, these assays would have been undertaken in Virginia City.

Relatively few prospectors were enamored of development beyond what it took to determine the value of a discovery. Prospecting, not mining, was in

their blood, and few were inclined or had the financial means to undertake a mining operation. If they ran out of grub, they would likely sell their claims for what they could get and go back to prospecting. As often as not, they sat on their discoveries, preempting and holding them as real estate pending the arrival of capital and stamp mills to work them out. This tendency was characterisitic of lode owners in the Hot Spring District and would eventually prove a detriment to the district's success, as it was difficult for capitalists to know if deep digging on these mines would prove profitable, surface indications not always bearing witness to true value.

Prospectors were not the only sort to populate the gulches. The May 27, 1864, claimants of the Lexington Lode up the north fork of Meadow Creek had also preempted a mill site.[23] They were not the first to do so, as previously a party of five men had claimed ground on a branch of Norwegian Creek—including all of its "water, springs, and seepage"—for milling and mining purposes.[24] Shortly, two more mill site claims were made on the south fork of Meadow Creek.[25] All of these early mill preemptions are poorly described and very difficult to place. In any event, no record exists of any of these enterprises materializing. Another did: on August 24, 1864, William H. House recorded his purchase for $1,200 of one-third part of a sawmill site and "all the fixtures thereto belonging to the mill *now being constructed.*"[26]

All told, Madison County records of preemption—agricultural, mineral, and mill—indicate that by the end of 1864 the Hot Spring District had been impacted significantly by human endeavors. Agriculturally, at least twenty-six homesteads had been preempted. Cabins had been erected on many of them. These farmers and ranchers were concentrated in the Meadow Creek area, where more than 3,000 acres had been filed on. These claims extended along the Madison River above its canyon and four miles up the Meadow Creek drainage. Meadow Creek also featured a sawmill, one of the territory's first. Other quarter sections of land had been preempted to the north of Meadow Creek, across the divide, on the upper stretch of Hot Spring Creek, and in Norwegian Gulch.

Although farmers and ranchers were conspicuous in fertile areas, in number they were greatly exceeded in 1864 by those who labored throughout the district as prospectors and developers of gold-bearing soils. Just how many comprised this group is difficult to say, but when the Rev. Learner B. Stateler, a southern Methodist-Episcopalian minister from Kentucky and an unabashed secessionist, chose the Norwegian District in mid-July 1864 in which to establish

his pastorate and, with his family, escape the passions of the Civil War, he did so because the camp not only contained a group of families of similar political and religious persuasion—mostly from Missouri and Iowa—but because Norwegian Creek was the Hot Spring District's most heavily populated camp. By Stateler's estimate some "two-to-three hundred men" had established themselves in Norwegian Creek "taking out gold."[27] These men, working mostly in placer diggings along Norwegian Creek and its tributaries—notably Rattlesnake Gulch—produced four of every nine claims made in the Hot Spring District in 1864. Although population estimates for Upper Hot Spring and Meadow Creek are lacking, taking the Norwegian figures as a base it is likely that at the height of 1864 the Hot Spring District as a whole was worked over by 400 to 600 men—some with wives and families—who prospected, labored in the mines, or scoured out ditches to provide water to diggings.

Some of these were pilgrims, prospecting the district's mineral wealth as they passed through. June through September 1864 witnessed the arrival in Montana of large numbers of wagon trains. "Emigrants are pouring in and the whole country is one bustle of excitement," reported a prospector from Virginia City.[28] Although most emigrants traveled over the southern wagon or northern river routes, four wagon trains in 1864 chose Bozeman's Trail or Bridger's Cutoff, newly blazed trails that left the old road just west of Fort Laramie in Wyoming. These trails proceeded in a northerly direction on either side of the Bighorn Mountains to the Yellowstone River. Reaching Bozeman City in the Gallatin Valley, the wagon trains either traveled west to the Madison River, crossing the river at Black's Ford, or followed the East and West Gallatin Rivers to the three forks of the Missouri River and then came up the Madison Valley and through the Norwegian Gulch area. In either case trains destined for Virginia City by way of Bozeman's Trail had to come right through the Hot Spring District. Since Hot Spring was more than a full day's wagon train journey from the Alder Gulch diggings, the emigrants all seem to have camped in the Hot Spring District—taking a day or two or even more to rest there and in numerous cases to survey its assets.

One of these emigrants was William E. Atchison. Fresh from a remarkably trouble-free passage over Bridger's Cutoff and Bozeman's Trail, Atchison reached the Madison River on July 25, 1864, where his ears were filled with reports of rich discoveries at Norwegian. Atchison noted that fourteen of his fellow travelers left the train to check out prospects there.[29] Another member of the same company, Charles W. Baker, joined ten others in a trip to the placer diggings in Washington Gulch, about six miles west of their camp on the south side of North Meadow Creek. Here Baker's group staked

out claims. The next day Baker and several others left camp for Virginia City. Two days later he came back to the Meadow Creek camp for one more day of prospecting.[30]

Within the month another wagon train bound for Virginia City—with A. A. Townsend as wagon master—camped four days in the Hot Spring area to enable members of the train to prospect. One of the prospectors, Benjamin W. Ryan, visited the Norwegian diggings. "Found quite a number a mining; about 100 claims taken," he jotted in his diary the next morning.[31]

Although some of Hot Spring's lode discoveries were made by members of emigrant trains, most of the prospecting energy came from men who extended their operations to Hot Spring from established mining camps. County preemption and court records provide an example of a team of miners, mostly from Wisconsin and largely from a family named Crawford, who branched off into Hot Spring from their Alder Gulch base in July 1864 and who would become important to the subsequent development of the district.

On May 7, 1864, two of the Crawfords, Andrew and Alexander, joined with P. G. Carter, Henry C. Crowell, Reuben Barringer, and Gilbert B. Weeks to form and incorporate the Virginia City Mining Company.[32] This nucleus was augmented shortly by the addition of Samuel Farrar, Fred F. Myers, J. C. Otto, William Florkee, and five more Crawfords—Henry F. ("Hank"), J. B., Alphonso, J. H., and Daniel W. Although the company had promising properties on Fairweather Bar in Alder Gulch, when its members heard of discoveries in the Hot Spring District, several journeyed over to evaluate the prospects. In July 1864, Andrew Crawford, the company's patriarch, began prospecting, along with Farrar and Myers, on the north side of Hot Spring Creek in its upper canyon above the juncture of that stream and Pony Creek, a smaller feeder from the north. Here they found rich prospects, and, returning to Virginia City, they filed a discovery claim on the Galena Lode, one of the most important discoveries ever made in the Hot Spring District.[33] Over time the Galena would develop into one of the district's steadiest performers, producing good values and enticing periodic interest in its prospects up to the present day.

Shortly after having filed on the Galena, the company, in various combinations of membership, made twelve more discovery claims on the upper reaches of Hot Spring Creek or within two miles to the north of it. Even though the group would subsequently claim the Alameda Lode in Fairweather District—soon one of the county's most celebrated quartz properties—the Crawford Company had found Hot Spring prospects enticing and would eventually shift much of its energy to that district, in the process becoming

involved in the fortunes of the milling enterprises soon to be established there.

Prospectors, of course, were not the only ones to seek interests in mining districts removed from Alder Gulch. The variety of men who banked claims all over the county is remarkable. Government officials were conspicuous among those who sought to profit from discoveries. Neil Howie, U.S. marshal for Madison County, rarely missed such an opportunity, irrespective of his duties. Whether Howie was tending to the law or not, he seemed often to be in the field looking for lodes to stake out or invest in. In mid-June 1864, when Howie was compelled to ride over to Norwegian Gulch to attach some property and make an arrest, he might well have checked in on a claim he had filed earlier on the Grandmother Lode, west of Hot Spring Creek.[34] Howie's deputies, John Featherstun and John X. Beidler, also had claims in Hot Spring.[35] Hardly a sheriff, deputy, or marshal working out of Virginia City during the mid-1860s failed to acquire property in the districts surrounding the county seat, Hot Spring among them.

County and territorial officials observed these developments with eagle eyes and took liberal advantage of their offices to become heavy speculators in mining properties. Some officials, such as county clerks and recorders, received their entire salary in fees—mostly those paid by lode claimants and preemptors of land. By any measure these were fabulous salaries. At $24.50 a lode claim, for example, the clerks and recorders could make many hundreds of dollars a day. Considering that common laborers were fortunate to receive $5 a day for grueling work, clerks and recorders could make that much in minutes. Territorial supreme court justice Ezra Munson's observation that strategically placed recorders could earn salaries exceeding that of the president of the United States was not an exaggeration.[36] Appointment to territorial public office represented one of the most blatant practices of political patronage. When territorial attorney general Edward B. Nealley described the clerk and recorder's office as an "office of great influence and in the present quartz excitement of great value," he was speaking not only of the direct profit to be had for the recorder but also of the ability of the recorder both to obtain claims and to pinpoint good investments for his cronies.[37] Familiarity with a recorder and the continuity of that favorable relationship, once established, could pay handsome dividends.

Most clerks and recorders either pocketed the $24.50 fee or took a lode claim instead of, or for a reduction in, the fee. And as clerks and recorders were privy to mining developments through the claiming process, they understood all too well where the values were and made purchases accordingly.

Colonel Robert M. Hagaman, Madison County's first clerk and recorder, worked this system assiduously. By late October 1864, or six months after having been appointed to office by territorial governor Sidney Edgerton, Hagaman had accumulated more than two miles of claims on sixty-eight lodes in seventeen districts or gulches. Of this footage, 10 percent was located in the Hot Spring District. All of this he put on the New York City market, granting power of attorney to Walter C. Hopkins, a resident of that city and soon to be affiliated with one of Hot Spring's major milling enterprises.[38]

The courts were strongly represented in this group of absentee claimants. On December 5, 1864, when newly appointed territorial chief justice Hezekiah L. Hosmer administered the oath of allegiance to the United States to the twenty-three lawyers desiring to practice in his court, nineteen of the twenty-three—some of whom had been in the territory only a few weeks—held mineral claims in the Hot Spring District.[39] Hosmer soon joined the ranks, obtaining a claim on the Hale Lode, a Norwegian Gulch discovery, the very next month.[40] Hosmer's investments in Montana gold mining enterprises, including those in Hot Spring, eventually became extensive.

Virginia City–area businessmen also took heavy speculative positions in Hot Spring discoveries. Three of the earliest discovery claims in the Hot Spring District were made on Meadow Creek by the Eagle Mining Company.[41] The Eagle Mining Company consisted of ten men, seven of whom made notable contributions to Montana history: George Higgins, Captain Nicholas Wall, John Thomas Conner, Colonel John J. Hull, John A. Creighton, Thomas W. Cover, and Perry W. McAdow. This group contracted with one or more of the other members of the company to do the fieldwork while they provided the financial backing—grubstaking the agent or agents in the field and paying for costs of development, including the fee charged for filing a discovery and ten additional claims. The Eagle Mining Company would be but the precursor of several groups of entrepreneurs that would form for the purpose of profiting from Hot Spring gold mining. Having secured footholds in the district, some of these men—in particular Creighton, a well-known Nebraska freighter, stockman, and telegraph line contractor—would become active developers of the Hot Spring District in 1865.

For all the human energy at work in Hot Spring, most of it was concentrated within a very few months. By late August and September 1864, many emigrants had lost their enthusiasm for the mountains and started for home. When Richard Owen came through the Hot Spring area on his way from Omaha to Virginia City in late August, he observed that Norwegian's miners were leaving daily.[42] The Reverend Stateler also noted that many of the miners

in Norwegian left the region for the winter.[43] When the Territorial Poll Census was taken in November, only twenty-five persons were listed for the Norwegian/South Willow Creek area, a reduction of as much as 90 percent over estimates made in July.[44] The preacher himself moved his family fifteen miles northeast to the Jefferson River Valley where the winter climate was more temperate and snowfall less severe.

Most of the people cited on the Norwegian/South Willow Creek poll list returned to the area the following spring, including the Statelers. And so would others who had worked in the Upper Hot Spring and Meadow Creek areas. The winter of 1864–1865, although limiting the ability of land and mineral holders to develop their preemptions, did not diminish interest in Hot Spring properties. Indeed, the Hot Spring District was on the verge of becoming one of the territory's most touted gold-bearing regions; over the next few years it would experience increased population growth and an explosion of energy, coupled with—and encouraged by—the infusion of eastern capital for the development and improvement of the district's many mines.