

A Biography - George Washington Shaw

by Abby Shaw Pope

He was the son of Dr. John and Margaret Shaw of Cincinnati, Ohio. Born here on April 27th, 1843. Early in life the family moved to Sparta, Illinois - and located on a small farm where, George, Alex and Agnes grew up. George entered the Army of the Civil War - a bearer of the injured - and served until its end - when he returned to work the farm to care for the family and send Alex to medical school. Dr. Shaw lost a leg in an accident and supported his family by making artificial limbs by hand until his death in 1862. Alex Shaw became a leading physician in St. Louis, was President of the St. Louis Medical College and a civic leader. Agnes, the sister, married James Daniels, who designed the St. Louis Water Works. George Shaw married Eliza Menown in St. Louis, June 20, 1871. They had three children, Abby, George and Lida Shaw. George Shaw was interested with his father-in-law in the patent of the first 2-spool sewing machine known as the "Wardwell", which was shown at the Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia in 1876. The machine was on a commercial basis until friction disrupted the company. It was then that George Shaw came to Montana to be auditor for the Alta-Mont. Mining Company at Wickes from Hartford, Connecticut (where the family then lived.) This was in 1880 and he came overland and a year later his family came after a log house had been erected to house them. The family made the trip by boat from St. Louis (the family home of Mrs. Shaw) to St. Paul, then

by rail to Bismark, North Dakota - then by boat up the Missouri River to Fort Benton - and by stage from there to Helena - taking two days and one night of constant travel. (From Fort Benton to Helena.) The children slept - all heads the same way - in the boot of the stage, rolled in buffalo robes - loaned by John X. Beidler. (See photograph of Mr. Beidler on page #11). The trip from St. Louis to Wickes took one month and was full of experiences coming up the Missouri River. Sandbars grounded the boat often and then it had to be pushed off with pinch bars. Buffalo herds swam the river very often dealying passage an hour while they were in transit. Indians from reservations lined the banks of the river and came aboard with their wares to barter with passengers. The varying landscape was a constant cause of wonderment, the high mountains, the crystal water where the fish seemed unafraid. The many kinds of birds that sang, as they plyed their way up the stream in the July sunshine. The warm days and cool night were a wonder too - after the St. Louis heat.

In Helena they stopped at the International Hotel - where Mr. Shaw met them and the mine team took them to Wickes the next day, taking a whole day to go 25 miles. There was a wooden trough for watering horses in front of the hotel and a smaller one for dogs use. Tomato cans were turned upside down on pegs on the trough for human use. In 1882 the Shaw family moved to Helena where Mr. Shaw was an auditor for the First National Bank of which

T.H. Kleinschmidt was President and E. W. Knight, Vice President. Next Mr. Shaw opened a real estate and insurance office in the Pittsburgh Block. He dabbled in mines and bought a strip of ground in the Mauldin Addition - running west from Harrison Avenue and part way up Mount Helena. He had a rock quarry on the side of Mount Helena from which many Helena homes were built; Gov. B. P. Carpenter's home (825 Madison), Dr. Stone's and W. E. Cox's home (615 Power) were some of them. He built his home at 424 Harrison at this time and it remained the family home until 1954. The logs of this house were hauled in from Mullan Tunnel - where they once housed a saloon.

There being no water system in the locality the need of water in the house and those west, built on lots sold by Shaw, was a problem. The Yaw Yaw ditch running around the foot of Mount Helena had an outlet above the Shaw house - the ditch running down by the house (just north of it) and through the school yard across the way. Mr. Shaw put a ram in the ditch in the school yard and forced the water up the hill through the pipes, putting cold water into several homes, which served until Helena had a water system. In 1890 Hugh Menown, father of Mrs. Shaw, came to Montana to visit and was instrumental in starting Mr. Shaw in the manufacture of baking powder, which he sold in cans to stores and in packages to hotels and restaurants. Two years later Mr. Menown came to Montana to make it his home and Shaw's Pancake Flour was a result of his coming.

There had never been a pancake flour made that equaled its reputation - and it cleared \$200.00 a month regularly - as a result of one man's work - with the exception of neighborhood boys who packed pancake flour after school. Mr. Shaw made regular trips to Great Falls, Missoula and Butte taking orders for baking powder and pancake flour. The machinery and many materials still stand on the upper floor of the garage where this factory used to operate.

Mr. Shaw was awarded prizes at the State Fair for his Pancake Flour for the years, 1894, 1903, 1906, 1907, 1909 and 1910. These certificates are at the State Historical Library in Helena.

The original blueprints for the garage where the Pancake Flour was manufactured are also at the State Historical Library.