

Forest City and the Tragedy at American Fork Canyon

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From His Photography Documentation for the Lehi Archives of American Fork Canyon

Forest City is a ghost town and is located in the Valley of Dutchman Flat in the upper part of American Fork Canyon. A silver mining town just over the mountain from Alta. Forest City was inhabited about 1871-1880. The town grew up around the smelter that was built to process ore from the canyon's mines. Little is left of Forest City today. This foundation of the smelter and of some houses are still visible.

The cemetery at Graveyard flat was preserved for some time, but people have driven snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles over it and have even torn down the picket fence surrounding it. As of 2004, only a wooden sign remained. On National Public Lands Day in September 2012, Forest Service employees and volunteers from local four wheeling clubs gathered at Graveyard Flat, built a new sturdier fence around the graveyard and replaced the old wooden sign.

Tragedy at American Fork Canyon

The winter of 1905-06 brought exceptionally heavy snowfall. Western newspapers began to carry daily reports of death and destruction caused by avalanches in high mining camps. George Tyng, and his son Francis, felt reasonably safe as they had built their camp among the pines away from known snowslide patterns. Soon after Christmas, Francis left to attend college at Stanford, while his father remained to manage the mine.

In Victoria, Texas, on January 15, 1906, Elena Tyng wrote to her husband:
“Your last letter of December 29, brought the good news that you would leave for home no later than January 10. Here it is the 15th and and no telegram

or letter from you. I have come to the conclusion that you are either snowbound or too sick to write..."

"I am glad you did not come this last week, for we have had the worst spell of cold rainy weather this winter... I know it is dreadful long and tiresome journey to take to just to see me. But I have made my mind up that once I get to the mine you will have hard work getting rid of me. I shall not be away from you if I can have any say about it."

It was almost as if Elena had an intuitive premonition of impending tragedy when she wrote her last letter to George Tyng- a letter he never read.

Shortly after noon, on January 19, 1906, Tyng was working on papers in his office, a little lean-to some distance from the rest of the camp. Suddenly a tremendous cascade of snow swept over the building, smashing it down on top of him and burying him under fifteen feet of packed snow.

The entire crew at the mine, hurried out to search for their employer. As darkness fell, they found Tyng's body, badly bruised, with a pencil still clasped between his frozen fingers. A nail from the falling roof beam had penetrated his skull and killed him instantly.

Several men carried the body to a cabin. As they entered, the strong wind ripped the door from the hinges. Fearing that wolves would mutilate the corpse if they left, the tired miners stood guard all night while stinging snow blew in on them from outside.

Early the next morning, the miners built a crude sleigh to carry the corpse down to American Fork Canyon. Two of the miners who had left the lease to nullify relatives, spread the news and a rescue party started up the canyon to meet the exhausted miners coming down.

Citizens of the communities were shocked and grieved to learn of the

tragedy. Tyng was loved by his miners not only because of the extra high wages he paid but also because of his sincere interest in their families and homes. He encouraged the miners to buy homes and use their wages for the good of their families. He had raised the mortgage of more than one man in danger of losing his home.

Tyng's will was read after his sons, George McAlpine and Francis, arrived in American Fork. Everyone was surprised to learn that Tyng had requested to be buried on a little knoll on Kalamazoo Flat where he had often remarked "What grander monument should a person wish than to be surrounded by the beautiful hills and scenery.

A private service was held on Friday January 26, and a public service was held in the Presbyterian Church chapel the following Sunday. George McAlpine wrote to his mother that his father's face was "calm and smiling; he looks as if he were asleep in the midst of a beautiful dream."

Tyng's body was carried back up the canyon and buried on January 30, on the shoulder of Miller Hill, one quarter mile east of the mine. Later a white picket fence was built around the grave.

On April 2, 1989, W. Dan Proctor of Pleasant Grove, Utah wrote to Charles Tyng of Sante Fe, New Mexico. Charles is the son of Francis and the grandson of George. Proctor, claim owner and claim lease holder of a large portion of the American Fork Mining District, has opened and mined (1980 and 1983) the Silver Bell Mine, which is less than a mile from where George Tyng is buried on Miller Hill.

At least once a year, Proctor has made repairs to Tyng's grave. He describes the location as "a very beautiful spot with some of the best alpine scenery Utah has to offer." Proctor plans to write a book about Tyng's life, because of his respect for the place and the stories he has heard about the man buried there.