Lombard

Lombard was a small, very isolated town located on the eastern edge of Broadwater County about a mile north of where Sixteen Mile Creek meets the Missouri River. The town was walled in by natural rock cliffs and was inaccessible except by railroad and horseback (and presumably on foot) until a road was constructed about 1930. Ironically, the town paid road taxes from the time of its founding in 1895!

The town was at the intersection of two railroads, the Montana Railroad and the Northern Pacific Railroad. It was the western terminus of the Montana Railroad (nicknamed the Jawbone Railroad) built by Richard Harlow. It was nicknamed the Jawbone Railroad due to "the persistent wagging of the jawbone of its promoter". In 1910 the Montana Railroad was acquired by the Milwaukee and St. Paul railroad.

Lombard was famous for the Lombard Hotel built by the Montana Railroad. Many people traveling to Maudlow for dances liked to stop in Lombard overnight and enjoy a great meal at Billy Kie's restaurant located in the hotel.

Billy Kie was a Chinese immigrant who made a fortune as the hotel and restaurant operator. After making his fortune, Billy returned to China and invested his fortune in the wrong political party – he was subsequently beheaded!

In 1925 a severe earthquake occurred centered above the town on Lombard Hill. The effects of the earthquake were felt for a 50 mile radius and the town was totally cut off from the rest of world while nearby residents pondered if the town was buried.

The movie "Danger Lights" was filmed in and around Lombard and in Miles City. According to Danger Lights Wikipedia article "The plot concerns railroading on the [Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad](#) (Milwaukee Road), and the movie was largely filmed along that railroad's lines in [Montana](#).". The movie starred Jean Arthur and James Farley.

The Townsend Star of Sept 3, 1931 said "Jean Arthur was the only actress in a movie troupe of 100 men." And "One of the locomotives used in the picture was said to be the largest and fastest passenger engine in the world.".

The population of Lombard slowly declined throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The post office (which opened in 1896) closed in 1957. By the time the Milwaukee Railroad was abandoned in 1980 the town was totally deserted.

The Montana Railroad was conceived and built through the efforts of Richard Harlow. In the 1880's, mining in the Castle Mountains was a major industry. Castle Town on the southern end of the Castle Mountains had a population of around 2000 people.

Harlow wanted to connect the mining district to the Northern Pacific Railroad at the mouth of Sixteen Mile Creek. He raised money and built the railroad section by section, but never did reach Castle Town – it came to

Leadboro just south of Castle Town. Unfortunately, by the time the Montana Railroad reached Leadboro the mining boom was over and Castle Town had dwindled from 2000 people to about 20 families.

Harlow then continued the railroad to Martinsdale to take advantage of the huge wool trade built by Charlie Bair. Eventually the railroad continued on to Merino (later renamed to Harlowton) and to Lewistown.

In 1910 the Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad purchased the Montana Railroad. According to the Montana Pay Dirt, after the sale "Harlow paid all his debts...and redeemed every warrant … before he died."

The information in this article came from the Broadwater Bygones, and from Wikipedia articles about Lombard, The Montana Railroad and the movie "Danger Lights". The Broadwater Bygones is available at the Broadwater County Museum. Visit the Broadwater County Museum to learn more about Lombard and Broadwater County History.

Lombard and the Milwaukee RailRoad (Jawbone Railroad) Circa 1907