

8 March 2020

John Maddern was one of many fellows that came from Cornwall England to mine in the United States in the late 19th Century. Cornwall was known around the world as the source of expertise in mining. The Cornish were digging tin from the earth all the way back through the Roman era. They developed pumps and other excavation equipment far in advance of the times and the engineering found in the rest of the world. Anywhere hard-rock mining was going on, there was a place for the Cornish miner. And Gilpin County Colorado was no exception when gold was found.

John was born around 1850 in Sancreed, Cornwall. His father, Martin Maddern was a tin miner there. And like many, Martin died in his 40's, probably from the miner's disease, silicosis. John was only 10 years old at the time and the youngest boy of eight children. Widow Elizabeth then had to figure out how to feed and clothe her family and pay the cottage rent. John's three older brothers, who were in their young teen years, were already working in the mines. John would be one of the many children on the mine surface sorting ore.

A decade passed and Elizabeth did not remarry. The tin mining in Cornwall was starting to decline and the economy along with it. John and older brother Dick, still in the family home, helped to support their mother and the remaining unmarried sisters. But work was becoming scarce, along with the family income. So John and Dick did what many Cornish were doing in those years. They emigrated to a foreign land where there were jobs to be had and money perhaps sent home.

Already, older brother James had married and left for Victoria Australia. John and Dick set out for the United States. Since there were many Maddern and Madron cousins in Gilpin County Colorado, the two made their way by ship and stage, over rough seas and rougher mountains, to the booming town of Nevadaville. They were assured of employment since the Mine Captains and managers were most of the time Cousin Jacks willing to take on another Cousin, knowing that they possessed experience with advanced mine engineering and processes.

Not being married, John and Dick probably lived with the other single men in one of the boarding houses or shared a modest cabin. Nevadaville is at a 9000 foot elevation so the air is rarefied and vegetation tough. A far cry from their sea level homeland of heath and flower garden. Did John have time to think about these things?

Miners often went below ground as the sun came up and walked home at shifts end in the dark. Five or six years passed and John did not find a wife or start a family. Was life lonely in that high mountain town? Maybe he was thinking about home and loved ones on that evening in March 1880.

There are things that happen in life for no apparent reason and without warning. Mining is a dangerous occupation today, and even more-so in the past centuries. 12 March 1880 the Fort Collins Express reported, "A terrible accident occurred at the Kent County Mine, in Wooda mining district, on Monday. While the miners were eating dinner in the lower slope, there was a landslide of 100 tons of earth, killing John Maddern and Charles Anguin, and seriously wounding four others."

John is buried in the Bald Mountain Cemetery, a little ways outside of Nevadaville, down a couple of long and winding roads that meander through stands of pines and aspens. In the fall John's grave-site is a place of brilliant colors and posses a sense of peace and serenity. His monument reads, "John Maddern died Mar. 8, 1880 Aged 27 Years."

Photo taken by Lance for Find A Grave memorial 32965735.