George Shaw: born 1927-Kalispell, MT; died 1997- VA Hospital in Spokane (was resident of Libby, MT).

THE STORY OF GEORGE SHAW SPRING

By Wendy K. Marquardt

Listening to Dwight Shaw speak about his family's ties to Great Northern Mountain invokes images of a hardscrabble life from the pages of Steinbeck. Dwight's family (his parents Dwight and Margaret, sister Alice and brothers Norman, George, Don and Richard) would camp at the spring every summer along with the extended family of aunts, uncles, and cousins. The Shaw's would clean the spring of the accumulated debris so it would flow freely and provide water for the campers as well as their horses. Dwight's parents would sleep in a homemade camper and the six Shaw children would "rough it" on the ground; their horses serene in a rope corral. Every year they returned to the same spot – never was it occupied by another group. It was though everyone respected an unvoiced request to keep it reserved for the Shaw family.

The family would pick huckleberries – 300 gallons a day sometimes. Everyone that is, except George Shaw, the middle child of the Shaw family, born 1927 in Kalispell, MT. George wasn't very interested in helping his family gather the huckleberries that they would trade for supplies at (Herb & Bertha) Franzen's grocery store on US Hwy 2 (where it crossed Fisher River). Instead he would explore the area and look for "treasure" in the rocks. He found where others had been mining an area above the spring and would return to it again and again. Enamored by the shiny rocks he'd find – galena ore – he'd fill his pockets with his finds. This instilled an interest in rocks, minerals and mining that led him to graduate from the Montana School of Mines in Butte, Montana (now Montana Tech) where he studied metallurgy and chemical extraction.

Over the years, George would continue to explore the Cabinet Mountains and regularly camped at the spring his family frequented when he was a boy. He filed multiple claims throughout the area, always in search of the motherlode. The mine directly above the spring became available in the 1970's and George jumped at the chance to file a claim. Over the years, previous owners had been able to build an outbuilding and equip it with a donkey engine complete with cables cars running between it and the mine. Unfortunately, by the time George obtained the mining rights, scavengers had stripped the shed and all the equipment for the scrap metals. George enlisted his brother Dwight's help and together they worked the mine without benefit of mechanical assistance. They did all work by hand, filling buckets with ore and carrying them down the steep switchback trail to the same campsite by the spring where the dream had begun for George all those years before. They would do the back breaking work until their trucks were full of ore, then make the trip to the smelters in either Helena or Spokane. Even this could be dangerous as Dwight tells of a time his brakes got red hot going down McDonald Pass and George had to get his truck in front and be the stopping power for both heavily laden trucks. When they made it to the smelter, the assayer would analyze the ore. Unfortunately, it was never valued at much more than the costs incurred to dig and smelt it. Despite the fact they never struck it rich, George continue to prospect and mine until his death in 1997 (November 17) spending the majority of his time at the spring on Great Northern. They were hard times, but they were fun times as well. Since George had devoted so much of his life to the area around the spring, it seems fitting that it be named after him.