**Essays on Mount Crosby - Ab Swenson Photographer**

To be a good photographer, I think a man (by which I mean a man or a woman) must be a sort of reverse historian. Whereas the historian looks back and tries to form a clear picture, the good photographer captures the worthy moment and sends it forward to tell the story.

A child or a grandchild, or an interested onlooker, will someday receive it and hopefully "get the picture". It helps, of course, if there was something worthy to take a picture of, and if the photographer is the sort of person that can frame a scene.

Albert (Ab) Swenson was such a man, and he lived at Mount Crosby in the time I call its heyday - the first few decades of last century when steam and rail, and ropeways and weirs, and houses and dams, and water treatment all came to town. What worthy subjects for Albert who, fortunately for us, won a fine camera in a rifle shooting competition at Moore and taught himself the none-too-easy skill of photography on glass plate negatives.

Few things are more different than a glass plate camera and a modern digital one. The capture of each glass plate negative was an exercise in thoroughness, the camera heavy and difficult to port, and everything else a lot slower (including the shutter speed). To take a photograph on an old plate camera, the camera is taken with its tripod to the scene and, beneath the classic velvet hood, the photographer opens the shutter and focuses the image onto a ground glass plate (upside down as it happens). The shutter is closed and the ground glass plate exchanged for the true negative - that's what the photographer is doing under there. Then, the photographer decides on the aperture and shutter speed and opens it to the scene (the light from the scene visits the silver halide on the glass plate and changes it in a way that can later be made permanent - the process known as development and fixing).

In some very early cameras the photographer needed to develop and fix the negative at the site, but I think Albert's camera (being thoroughly modern) allowed him to hold the negatives for later development. It may sound primitive, but there is an astonishing amount of detail on a properly taken glass plate negative (perhaps 6 inches x 4 inches) - it's detail at level that even today's best digital cameras cannot match (though they are colourful and quick and portable - and that's why I want one).

Albert took about forty "keepers" over the better part of two decades and each of them is notable for its careful framing and attention to detail. They are the very image of our old town.

Col Hester