

# Four score and ten...

...plus one.

By B. K. Monroe

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Came a request to this scribe for a story about Lewis E. Downing, better known to us all as "Lewis". When I relate that Lewis was born in the Hamilton area that was served by a pioneer postoffice named Skalkaho, August 19, 1887, you will know he not only passed the traditional "three-score-and-ten" mark in years, but is nearly a year past the four-score-and-ten milepost.

As to his birthplace, Lewis first saw the light of day on homesteaded land on the west side of the Bitter Root River and rimmed on its own west border by a grand, natural wall called by the U.S. Forest Service in these later years- "Downing Mountain." When Lewis' parents came from the far east to the Bitter Root and settled at the foot of the mountain, there was no snow-slide sculptured "Y" trailing down its face and there was no "H" etched with rocks and whitewash near the foot, work of Hamilton High School students in fairly recent times. It was just an ancient link in the Bitter Root Chain of the Rockies.

There was no town of Hamilton when George S. Downing and his young wife, Mary Frances became homesteaders on the meadows that bordered Sawtooth Creek, a stormy rush of mountain spring water that emptied into the river. And at first there were no bridges across the wide river. Teams forded with wagons in 1887. Yet that was the way most of the pioneering folks learned to get around in the new, rugged Bitter Root.

As for schools, settlements bred one-room district schools and in time there was the Sawtooth School where the three Downing children, William, Ada and Lewis got their early education.

William died at the age of 18, but Ada and Lewis grew up in Sawtooth Canyon and later in the town of Hamilton where elementary and high school education eventually came after the town got into stride.

Not knowing all the stops Lewis made in his pursuit of higher education and eventually business college and University graduation as a pharmacist, but certain that he was ever diligent in striving toward a profession, this long-time friend knows that "Lewie" must have made the grade right along. He had practical training working in the first drug store established in Hamilton by Dr. George McGrath, as errand boy and clerk and he has told me of going to business school in Butte as a youth.

When after his years of studying Lewis graduated as a pharmacist, the Downing Drug Store as it was first known - and oldtimers still say "Drug" instead of Downing's Pharmacy, was established on Main Street in the present location of the Range Cafe. Lewis Downing had by that time won a gracious Butte girl as his wife. She was Florence Loughran and a professional nurse who came to Hamilton to serve in the first little makeshift hospitals and was matron for a time.

A daughter Elizabeth and a son William were

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