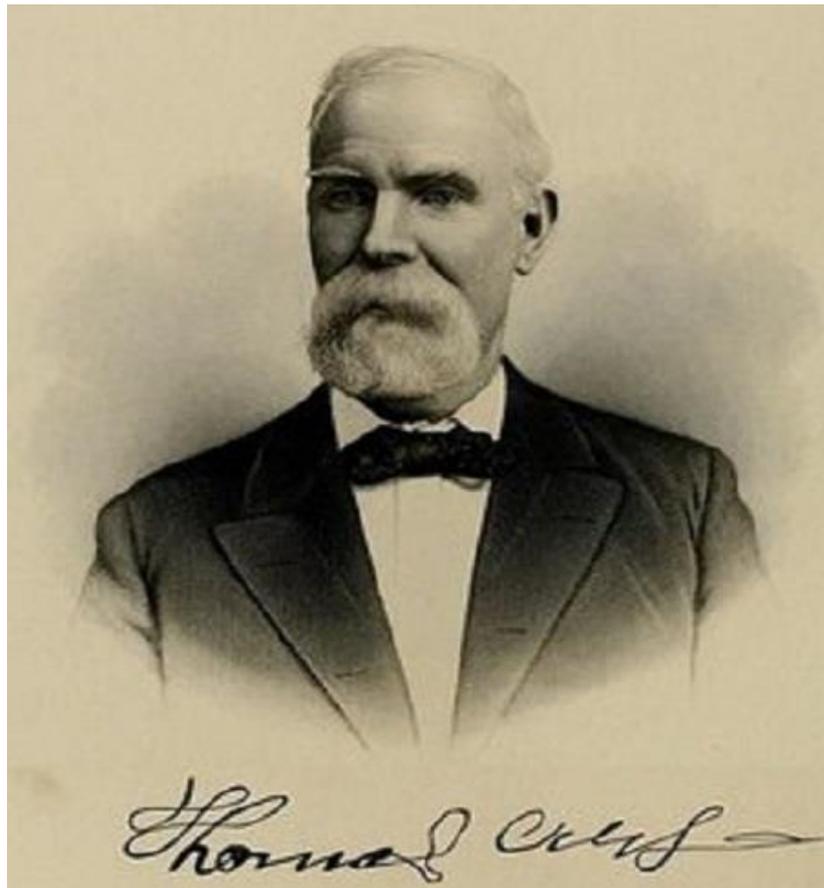


# Thomas Cruse: Early Montana Prospector, Mine Owner, and Entrepreneur

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JOHN H. SANDY

Joaquin Miller, author of *An Illustrated History of the State of Montana*, described Thomas Cruse as a man who “has the highest confidence and good will of his fellow citizens. He is a man of too much solid sense to be injured by his prosperity, and he understands making a laudable and judicious use of the things of this world which it has been his good fortune to acquire.” Further, Miller would go on to say, he [Cruse] is “a devout member of the Catholic Church.”



*Thomas J. Cruse, early Montana pioneer. A man of honor and good will while caring for family and friends. Photo courtesy Montana Historical Society.*

**Thomas Cruse**

Born, March 18, 1836, County Cavan, Ireland

Died, December 20, 1914, Helena, Montana, U.S.A.

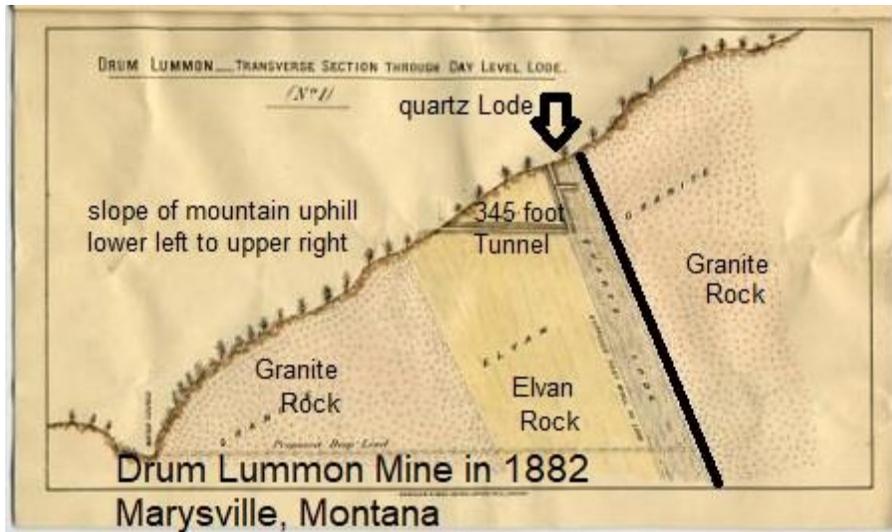
- Prospector
- Mine Owner
- Banker
- Rancher
- Philanthropist

From the time Cruse arrived in Helena in 1867 until he discovered a rich gold bearing vein in 1876, he made a living digging for gold along Silver Creek and other nearby lands. Some gold was found, but only enough to meet regular daily expenses. Such was the life of most prospectors who worked placer deposits in the valleys and mountains around Helena.

From his earlier prospecting experience in other parts of the West, Cruse knew that the gold found in streams and valleys at lower elevations came from higher up in the mountains. He noticed that gold found in the sands and gravels of Silver Creek near Helena was associated with the mineral quartz. Find a vein rich in quartz, then gold was in reach.

With this clue in mind, Cruse searched the mountains above Silver Creek to find a mineralized zone rich in quartz. After toiling many months in the field, he found the source of the gold, the Mother Lode. On July 9, 1879, he filed a patented mining claim for a 20.25-acre parcel located northwest of Helena in T12N, R6W, S36, Lewis & Clark County, and opened a gold mine. Cruse named the mine Drumlummon, after his home parish in Ireland.

As often the case, words passing over the Atlantic from the old country undergo a change in spelling. In Ireland, Cruse's home parish is spelled as one word, Drumlummom. Back in Helena in 1879, the recorder at the office of mining claims wrote down the name as spoken, two words, Drum Lummon. But in years to follow, common usage became one word, Drumlummon.



*Transverse Section of Drum Lummon Mine (slightly edited). Surface of mountain runs from lower left to upper right. Quartz Lode was rich in gold and silver. Cruse dug a 345-foot tunnel to reach the quartz lode. Illustration from a report for the Montana Company, Limited. Courtesy Montana Historical Society.*

DRUM LUMMON.			
ESTIMATED COST AND RETURNS, from April 1st, 1880, to end of August, 1882.			
Period 29 months.			
September, 29th, 1882.			
Total Cost as summarised by Mr. Cruse this date ... ..	\$72,547	66	\$2,575 monthly.
Purchase and erection of mill, 5 heads, Engine, Boiler, &c.	\$10,000		
Reforted Bullion sold as per Statement ... ..	\$144,539	09	
Bullion slag at Helena estimated ... ..	5,000	00	
			149,539 09
Estimated Balance of Profit ... ..	\$76,991	43	
			<u>£16,039</u>

*Cost and profit from Drum Lummon Mine, April 1880 to August 1882. Mine owned by Thomas Cruse. Illustration from a report for the Montana Company, Limited. Courtesy Montana Historical Society.*

Over a few years, the Drumlummon Mine yielded a bonanza of gold and silver worth millions of dollars. In 1883, six years after the discovery, Thomas Cruse sold the mine to a company formed by investors in England for \$900,000 in cash, plus 100,000 shares of stock valued at \$600,000. In total, Mr. Cruse received \$1,500,000 from the sale. The amount of \$1,500,000.00 calculated in current value is \$41,655,737.00.

From ownership of shares in the company, Cruse earned additional cash from profits generated by the mine. And even more cash from the sale of shares. The sale of the Drumlummon Mine made Cruse a very rich man, with more wealth than anyone can imagine for back in those days.

In the mind of an old prospector the urge to gain profit from gold mining never fades. In the years following sale of the Drumlummon Mine, Thomas Cruse's interest in gold mining continued. From 1883 to 1907, he acquired several more patented mining claims mostly in the vicinity of Marysville. In 1883, he filed a claim for the North Star Lode (17.93 acres); in 1889 a claim for the Tommy Lode (19.82 acres); and in 1896, a claim for the Bald Mountain Lode (40.29 Acres). Still more claims were filed at other times.

Extracting gold and silver from ores is an imperfect process. Some precious metals from the Drumlummon Mine ended up in the tailings. Thomas Cruse wanted a solution, and he searched for ways to improve the process. On October 17, 1898, he submitted a patent application to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office with a title "Method of Extracting Gold and Silver From Their Ores." On April 3, 1900, the application was approved. Cruse was awarded Patent No. 646808. While not educated as such, Cruse had the talent of a mining engineer.

In 1887, a few years after selling the Drumlummon Mine, Mr. Cruse launched The Thomas Cruse Savings Bank in Helena. By all accounts, the bank was a very successful enterprise, even surviving the nation's financial crises of 1893 when the price of silver collapsed, and the economy descended into ruin.

**The Thomas Cruse Savings**  
July 12 1892 **BANK, OF HELENA.**  
Incorporated Under the Laws of Montana.  
PAID IN CAPITAL, \$100,000.  
THOMAS CRUSE, - - - President  
FRANK H. CRUSE, - - - Vice-President  
WM. J. COOKE, - - - Asst. Treas. and Sec.  
WM. J. SWEENEY, - - - Treasurer.  
Trustees:  
Thomas Cruse, Frank H. Cruse,  
Wm. J. Cooke, John Fagan, Wm. J. Sweeney.  
Allows 4 per cent. interest on Savings Deposits, compounded January and July.  
Transacts a general banking business. Draws exchange on the principal cities of the United States and Europe.  
Deals in county and city bonds, and makes loans on real estate mortgages.  
Office hours from 10 a. m. to 4 p. m. Also on Saturday and Monday evenings from 7 to 8 o'clock.

*Ad for The Thomas Cruse Savings Bank placed in 1892 in Helena Independent a historical newspaper in Helena, Mont. Shows bank officers, interest rate offered on savings, bank hours.*

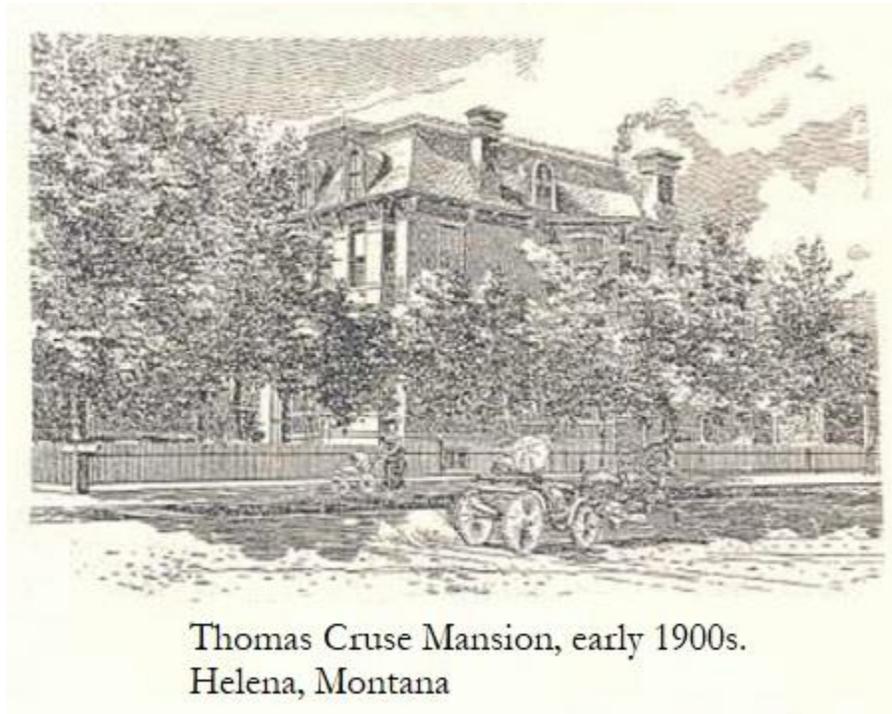
Cruse understood economics well. He diversified his holdings. In addition to banking, in 1885, he acquired the N Bar Ranch near Lewistown. With thousands of acres of grazing land, the ranch supported a huge herd of cattle and many sheep. He also tried his hand at drilling for oil in the foothills of the Beartooth Mountains in Carbon County. Nine (9) dry holes were drilled in 1889-1890, before giving up on the venture.



*Thomas Cruse (seated on right) on a visit to N Bar Ranch near Lewistown.  
Photo by John White, circa 1898. Photo courtesy Montana Historical Society.*

Mr. Cruse lived in a mansion at 328 N. Benton Avenue in Helena. In 1900, Cruse shared his home with a few relatives along with hired help. In addition to his daughter Mary Margaret, age 13, the household included, Mary A. Cruse (niece), Frank H. Cruse (nephew), William J. Cruse (nephew), Mabel Lockman (maid), Rose B. Sheehey (governess), John Niehuser (servant), Robert H. Holmes (coachman), and Sam Toy (cook). Mr. Toy was a native of China.

By 1910, Mr. Cruse was alone in the mansion, except for the presence of two servants, Emma Olson and Anna Olson, ages 28 and 35, both born in Minnesota and of Norwegian ancestry, who attended to his daily needs.



*Thomas Cruse's Mansion, 328 North Benton Ave., Helena, Mont.  
The mansion was demolished in 1963. Photo courtesy Montana Historical Society.*

Beyond his amazing prospecting ability and business acumen, Thomas Cruse is probably best remembered for philanthropy. Indeed, the Catholic Church of western Montana was a huge beneficiary of Cruse's generosity.

The Cathedral of Saint Helena, constructed during the years 1908-1914 in Helena, Montana, owes its existence in large part to Thomas Cruse. During a time when money was scarce in Montana, Mr. Cruse gave \$5,674,960.00 (measured in today's value) to the Diocese of Helena for site acquisition, building the exterior, and finishing and furnishing the interior.



*Cathedral of Saint Helena, Helena, Mont. Construction 1908-1914.  
In 1913, Thomas Cruse donated \$3,139,194.00 (current value of money)  
to the Diocese of Helena to finish and furnish the interior of the Cathedral.  
His total donation was \$5,674,960.00 (current value of money). Photo courtesy  
Megan Lane Photography, Helena, Mont. Megan Lane Photography dot com.*

No major endeavor is complete without some drama. In January 1909, Bishop Carroll announced that a party who wished to remain anonymous had come forward with a pledge of \$100,000 to help build the Cathedral. To win this prize, members of the Helena community had to match with another \$100,000 on or before Easter Sunday 1909. A fund drive to reach the match was successful. Many non-Catholics gave.

The name of the anonymous donor of the first \$100,000 was never revealed. It's reasonable to speculate that the first \$100,000 (current value, \$2,881,500.00) was another act of generosity by Thomas Cruse. This was likely the case as others in the Diocese of Helena at that time did not have a sum so large to donate.

On more than one occasion, Bishop Carroll publicly gave thanks to Mr. Cruse and others. The magnificent gothic Cathedral of Saint Helena still stands tall and proud, reaching toward Heaven in the sky above Helena.

On a personal side, a slice of Thomas Cruse's life reads as a tragedy. In 1886, after less than one year of marriage his wife, Margaret (Carter) Cruse, age 25, died. Years later, his only child Mary Margaret Cruse died at the young age of 26 in 1913.

As the years passed and a new century began, Cruse started to think of about his mortality. He had accomplished much in life, and he wanted his memory to live on in Helena, the community he helped to build and loved, after his passing.

By 1910, he had reached the age of 74. The window of his life was closing. In 1913, he contracted with Link & Haire Architects of Billings and Butte to design a magnificent family mausoleum to be placed in Resurrection Cemetery in Helena. After the design of the mausoleum was completed on August 5, 1913, construction began. In a few months, the new mausoleum was completed.

With construction finished, Cruse placed the remains of his wife (Margaret) and daughter (Mary) in the family mausoleum, both disinterred from Saint Mary's Catholic Cemetery, a pioneer cemetery, on Townsend Avenue. Wife and daughter would rest in eternal peace in the elaborate monument Cruse had just built in Resurrection Cemetery.

As if by Divine design, Thomas Cruse died on December 20, 1914, at age 78, a little more than a year after his daughter Mary died. The Cathedral of Saint Helena, built with many cash donations from Mr. Cruse, was formally dedicated by Bishop Carroll, a few days later, on Christmas Day, December 25, 1914. On the following day, December 26, a funeral Mass was held at the Cathedral for the departed Thomas Cruse. Cruse would now follow his wife and daughter on their journey to Heaven.



*Thomas Cruse Family Mausoleum, Resurrection Cemetery, Helena, Mont.  
Constructed of marble and rising 43 feet above ground level, the mausoleum is a fitting symbol for a family's great life, lived during early days in the Montana wilderness.  
Photo courtesy Thomas Van West.*

### **A Timeline of the Life of Thomas Cruse**

1856 emigrates from Ireland to American, age 20, time spent in New York

1863 moves to California and spends some time in Nevada and Idaho

1866 arrives in Virginia City, Mont.

1867 arrives in Helena, Mont.

1876 makes discovery of rich gold deposit in mountains northwest of Helena Mont., near present day Marysville

1879 files patented mining claim (Drum Lummon Lode) on July 9, 20.25 acres Lewis & Clark County northwest of Helena, Mont.

1882 reaches agreement with Joint Stock Association, London, to sell the Drum Lummon Mine for \$900,000 in cash and as a part of the deal Cruse received 100,000 shares in stock valued at \$600,000. The sale, finalized in February 1883, gave Cruse a total of \$1,500,000.00 (current value, \$41,655,737.00).

1885 buys N Bar Ranch southeast of Lewistown, Mont.

1886 buys a mansion from T.C. Power located at 328 N. Benton Ave., Helena, Mont.

1886 marries Margaret Carter at Cathedral of the Sacred Hearts, Helena, Mont., on March 2

1886 daughter Mary Margaret Cruse born on December 17

1886 wife Margaret (Carter) Cruse dies on December 27, age 25

1887 founded The Thomas Cruse Savings Bank, Helena, Mont.

1889 drills for oil in the foothills of the Beartooth Mountains in Carbon County, Mont.

1905 donates \$25,000 (current value, \$720,135.00) to buy site for new Cathedral of Saint Helena

1909 donates \$28,000 (current value, \$806,820.00) to Building Committee Fund for Cathedral of Saint Helena

1911 donates \$27,000 (current value, \$750,246.00) to build one spire for the Cathedral of Saint Helena

1913 sells N Bar Ranch

1913 Mary Margaret Cruse, daughter, dies on November 22, age 26

1913 donates \$119,850 (current value, \$3,139,194.00) to finish interior of the Cathedral of Saint Helena

1914 donates \$10,000 (current value, \$258,565.00) for 15 bells for Cathedral of Saint Helena, inscribed "in memory of Mary Margaret Cruse by her father, Thomas."

1914 Thomas Cruse dies on December 20, age 78 (U.S. Census data and other publications indicate age 78, but official Certificate of Death, Lewis & Clark County, Mont. records death at age 80)

1914 Thomas Cruse funeral Mass, Cathedral of Saint Helena, on December 26

1914 Thomas Cruse interred, Thomas Cruse Family Mausoleum, Resurrection Cemetery, Helena, Mont.

1963 Thomas Cruse Mansion at 328 N. Benton Ave, Helena, Mont., demolished.

### **Helena Community Recognition**

- Cruse Park, Helena, Mont., named for Thomas Cruse
- Cruse Avenue, Helena, Mont., named for Thomas Cruse



*21<sup>st</sup> Century photo of Marysville, Montana. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Chad Thompson. Courtesy U.S. Air Force, Malmstrom Air Force Base, Great Falls, Mont.*

Today Marysville, Montana is a ghost town. Still a few people live in the area and commercial activity is part of the community.

### **Suggest Readings**

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### **Thomas Cruse Papers**

An abundance of primary research materials on Thomas Cruse (*The Thomas Cruse papers, 1841-1956*) are found in the Montana Historical Society Museum in Helena. Description of the Cruse papers by the Museum's catalogers:

This collection (1841-1956) consists of incoming correspondence; legal and financial records; maps; reports; and miscellany. Records for Cruse's various enterprises are divided into nine subgroups including the Thomas Cruse Savings Bank; Thomas Cruse Estate; Thomas Cruse Mining and Development Company; etc. This collection contains incoming and outgoing correspondence, financial records, legal documents, reports, and miscellany dealing with Cruse's various activities (1882-1914), including the Thomas Cruse Savings Bank and the N Bar Ranch. The collection also documents the Thomas Cruse Estate and the Thomas Cruse Mining and Development Company, which was formed from many of the Cruse holdings. Other subgroups represent key individuals active in the various Cruse organizations: Fred T. Cruse, Mamie T. Cruse, Richard Cruse, William J. Cruse, William Scallon, and William J. Sweeney. The collection documents mining activity in Montana (1879-1956), Montana banking (1887-1916), and Montana cattle and sheep ranching (1890-1913).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Sandy, author of this article, is former head of Rodgers Library for Science and Engineering, The University of Alabama. While a resident of Helena, Montana (1991-1994), he explored the Helena Valley and surrounding mountains.

