

FREDERICK INABNIT

Frederick Inabnit was born in Brienz, Switzerland in 1866. His parents moved the family to the



United States when he was three years old, settling first in Indiana. After a few years, they moved to Wisconsin, where he grew up and later taught school for several years.

He came to Montana in 1890 to the now-vanished town of Ubet in the Judith Basin, where he worked at a store. Three years later, he moved to Billings to work in the Yegen Brothers store. He was married to Nellie Keating in 1895 in Lewistown, and they later had two daughters. In 1896, he transferred to the Yegen Brothers' bank as the head cashier until 1911. Inabnit then became the manager of the Wanamaker's Department Store. In 1912, Inabnit ran in his first election and was elected as County Treasurer, and was reelected two years afterwards. He then ran for Clerk of District Court in 1916, and was re-elected for three more terms.

He was remembered as conscientious, and improved records management for case files and associated filings. He knew the status of every active court case off the top of his head. Inabnit, a naturalized citizen himself, was especially helpful to other immigrants applying for naturalization.

But Inabnit's life was not only about public service. His other love was the mountains. He was a nature lover and loved to climb mountains. Starting in 1907, he took several weeks off each summer to explore the Beartooths, which then had no trail system or maps to guide him. The rest of the year, he planned his next excursion, and extolled the beauties of the mountains to others. In those days, there weren't automobiles to get to the mountains, so each trip was a feat of logistics. Christian Yegen then owned the land at East Rosebud, and there was a rough old cabin there. Inabnit took a lumber wagon up a boulder-filled track to get that far on his first trip, though the mice drove them out of the cabin quickly. That first year he and three friends climbed to the peaks of a mountain then called the Snowbanks. After they marveled at the view, they were hit by a hailstorm before having to hike down through several inches of new snow.

For many years, he would gather a party of men each summer, mostly young and adventurous sorts, to explore some new area of the Beartooth range. They encountered dangers and

wildlife, had near-misses and triumphs along the way. Though Inabnit was not with them that day, men of his party were the first to summit Granite Peak. Inabnit loved nothing better than to share his love of the Beartooths with others. He painstakingly created a large relief map by hand, carving and painting the wood to show the peaks of the Beartooth, Absaroka, and Teton mountain ranges and it was the first map of its kind for the area. His map was displayed as he spoke to businessmen, lodge members, schools and was even loaned out for display in Yellowstone Park. It now is displayed in the Museum of the Beartooths in Columbus.

Inabnit was in poor health starting in 1927, but seem to rally in the fall of 1928. He ran for reelection that year, and won by a considerable margin that November. He fell ill again just a few days later and passed away. In his honor, his legion of mountain-climbing friends formed the Fred Inabnit Memorial Association. They successfully petitioned to get the Snowbanks, the peak he climbed in that first trip, renamed. It is now called Mount Inabnit.

(Note: Name written on photograph is misspelled.)

Sources:

- Banfill, William H., *Fred Inabnit, Mountaineer: A Tribute*, Fred Inabnit Memorial Association, 1929
- Billings Gazette, "Fred Inabnit, District Court Clerk, Is Dead", November 11, 1928
- "Biographical Facts of Frederick Inabnit", undated, Collection of Billings Public Library
- "Mount Inabnit", SummitPost.org, <https://www.summitpost.org/mount-inabnit/856692>, retrieved 8/13/21