

# ROOTED IN THE SILVER VALLEY: THE PAPESH FAMILY LEGACY



## A Journey Begins

W.W. Papesh's story does not begin in Kellogg, but across the ocean. In 1880, his parents brought their six children from Tabor, Austria, near Prague, to the United States. He was just three years old. The voyage was rough—most passengers were sick from the constant rolling of the ship—but he would later remember it differently. While others struggled, he seemed content, eating heartily and taking it all in, too young to understand the uncertainty that surrounded them.

They settled on farmland near Glencoe, Minnesota, where life was defined by labor, sacrifice, and survival. His father, a carpenter, built their first home by hand, a simple cabin rising out of newly cleared land. The logs had to be hauled to a mill in Canaska, where one-third was taken as payment. It was not a finished home, but it was theirs. As the years passed and the family grew, his father added a small upstairs for the boys.

The land itself demanded everything they had. Trees were cut, stumps pulled, and soil turned by hand. A vegetable garden took root. A tobacco patch followed. Ashes from wood shavings were scattered across the ground as fertilizer, and slowly, through effort more than luck, the earth began to give something back.

Chickens scratched in the yard. Geese wandered freely. Cows provided milk, and his mother, clever and endlessly industrious, used goose down to sew feather beds and pillows, soft places to rest at the end of long days.

Childhood came with hard lessons. At four years old, W.W. learned quickly that geese were not to be trusted. What began as curiosity ended with him on the ground, his face bruised and sore after an encounter with an angry gander. After that, he kept his distance.

His parents did not push for schooling; they couldn't afford to. Work came first. Survival came first. Education, when it happened at all, had to fit around everything else. And yet, something was forming. Not in a classroom, but in the rhythm of work, in the expectation to contribute, and in the quiet understanding that if he was going to make something of his life, he would have to build it himself.



W.W. Papesh with his meat peddling wagon, standing with Lloyd McDougal.

Captured during the early years of his business, this image reflects the long days and determination required to build a customer base across the growing communities of Kellogg and Wardner.

## Finding His Trade

A local butcher, George Shugart, visited often. Young Wencel (W.W. Papesh) would sometimes go along with him, helping interpret for Bohemian settlers in the area. That was where it began.

*"From that time on, I knew that the meat business was for me."*

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## Finding His Trade (Continued)

At sixteen, he went to work for Shugart, earning \$8 a month and his board. The job was not limited to cutting meat. He cared for the horses and cows, chopped wood when needed, and did whatever the day required. It was the kind of work where you learned by doing, and by watching closely.

When Shugart sold his business, W.W. moved on to work for Mr. Haberstad. For a time, he lived in the local fire station and served as a volunteer fireman. The equipment was simple, a hand-pulled fire cart that required four men in front and three behind, and the work could be as unpredictable as it was demanding.

Working for Haberstad, he was sent out to purchase cattle, something he had little experience with. He returned feeling proud of his selections, only to discover after a long, wet journey home that the animals were thin and poorly conditioned. The lesson was sharp, and he soon moved on.

His next position, in 1898, was with Frank Hipp, a Swiss-German butcher whom he would later describe as the best he had ever seen. Hipp was a master of the trade; skilled, disciplined, and exacting. At first, Hipp was not impressed. *"I thought Shugart was going to send me a man,"* he remarked, looking over the 140 pound sixteen-year-old who stood before him. But W.W. was determined to prove himself.

There were long days mixing sausage by hand, sleeves rolled back, adding water and seasoning a little at a time. There were late nights slaughtering animals and preserving meat carefully against spoilage. Every step mattered, and nothing was wasted.

There were also risks. One day, while assisting with slaughter, a co-worker's knife slipped and cut deeply into his arm. He rode on horseback to a doctor, who stitched the wound without anesthetic.

Through it all, he continued to learn, not just the trade itself, but the business behind it. He weighed livestock, calculated costs, and began to understand the importance of accuracy and recordkeeping. When encouraged to improve his arithmetic, he took it seriously, studying whenever he could.

These were not easy years. But they were shaping something important; skill, confidence, and a growing sense that he was capable of building something of his own.

## A Defining Decision

In February 1899, he received a telegram offering work in Wardner, Idaho. It was more than a job, it was a chance. By then, he had learned the trade, saved what he could, and begun to understand the kind of life he wanted to build. But accepting the offer meant leaving everything familiar behind.

Before he left, he rode forty miles on horseback to say goodbye to his parents. His mother did not try to hide her worry. *"Don't go,"* she told him.

His father, as he often did, said less, but meant just as much. *"We probably won't see you again."*

*"Whatever you do, I want you to make good."*

That was all. He chose to go. The journey west was not a simple one. Traveling by train through Omaha toward Missoula, he was already far from home when a missed stop left him behind at a depot. With time to wait and little money to spare, he found temporary work at a local meat market, doing what he knew best, cutting and preparing meat until he could continue on.

At last, he reached Kellogg. From there, he was told to make his way to Wardner. It did not sound far. H

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## A Defining Decision (Continued)

decided to walk. What he did not realize was just how far it was to the top of Wardner hill. Carrying his belongings, he made his way along unfamiliar ground, the distance stretching upward longer than expected. By the time he arrived, he was tired, but he had made it.

On February 28, 1899, he went to work for the Mahoney Brothers.

He had left home with little more than a trade, a willingness to work, and his father's words in his mind. From that moment on, everything he built would begin there.

## Opportunity in Uncertain Times

Within weeks of his arrival, W.W. Papesh found himself in the middle of something he had never seen before. While unloading smoked meat at the Union Pacific depot in Wallace, a train came down from Burke carrying a group of men—some masked, all agitated. Their energy was unmistakable. Something was wrong.

Coming from a small town in Minnesota, he didn't understand what was unfolding. He turned to Dan Mahoney and asked what was happening. Mahoney's answer was simple and direct: Best to go about your work, and keep your mouth shut. He took the advice.

Not long after, those same tensions erupted into violence. The Bunker Hill mill at Kellogg was destroyed, one of the most dramatic events of the 1899 labor conflicts in the Coeur d'Alene mining district. For many, it was a time of fear and uncertainty. For W.W., it became something else.

In the aftermath, one of the men running a peddling wagon out of Burke quit his position. Mahoney turned to him. He was young. He was new. And he was a stranger in the country. That was exactly why he was chosen. W.W. was given charge of the wagon, with clear instructions: sell to every house, collect cash only, and keep careful account of every pound of meat.

It was more than a job, it was responsibility. Each morning, he loaded the wagon. Each day, he traveled from house to house, across rough roads and scattered settlements. He weighed and sold the meat, handled the money, and returned with both accounts and unsold goods carefully recorded. There was no room for error.

*"This gave me the business training and confidence that I needed..."*

It was the first time he was fully trusted, not just to work, but to manage. What began as a response to unrest became an opportunity. And in that moment, moving between homes, learning the rhythm of customers, understanding supply and demand, something larger began to take shape.

## Growing with the Community

After years of saving, including long, exhausting stretches working in boarding houses, W.W. Papesh had managed to put aside \$610.

It was not a large sum, but it was enough.

In 1902, he returned to Wardner and entered into partnership with A.E. Cowles, purchasing an interest in a small meat shop. It wasn't much to look at; basic equipment, limited storage, and little in the way of modern convenience, but to him, it represented something far greater.

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## Growing with the Community (Continued)

It was his start. The conditions were difficult from the beginning. There was no dependable refrigeration. Meat could not be kept fresh for more than a short time, especially in the warmer months. Every decision, when to buy, how much to cut, where to sell, had to be made carefully with little room for error.

The work was constant. He rose at two o'clock each morning, often in the dark and cold, to begin the day. Horses had to be fed. Supplies had to be gathered. On summer mornings, he traveled to meet the Mahoney wagon at the Osburn schoolhouse before dawn, bringing back fresh meat to prepare for the day's sales.

From there, the pace did not slow.

He cut and prepared the meat, then took to the road, peddling from house to house across Kellogg and the surrounding areas. The roads were rough, the distances long, and the customers scattered. Each sale mattered.

There was little time for rest. When he could, he slept on an army cot placed above the icebox, close to the only place in the shop that stayed cool enough to preserve the meat. Sleep came in short stretches, whenever the work allowed it.

Money was tight. He and Cowles took out only a few dollars a week to live on, putting everything else back into the business, building slowly, carefully, and with purpose. It was demanding work, and there were no guarantees. But something was changing.

*"It was tough going, but we kept gaining..."*

Day by day, customer by customer, the business grew. What had begun as a risk was becoming something steady, something that could last.



This early shop reflects the transition from a small partnership venture to a growing enterprise, where long hours, careful handling, and determination began to build a lasting business in the Silver Valley.

## Innovation and Expansion

As Kellogg grew, so did W.W. Papesh's business, and his influence.

What had begun as long days on the road and a small shop in Wardner was steadily becoming something more permanent. The mining camps were giving way to a town. Buildings replaced tents. Streets began to take shape. And with that growth came opportunity, for those willing to see it.

Papesh was one of them.

He expanded his meat operations, building a customer base that reached across Kellogg, Wardner, and the surrounding communities. What had once depended on a wagon and scattered deliveries began to center around established locations and steady trade.

At the same time, he began investing in the future of the town itself. He purchased property along McKinley Avenue, recognizing its potential as the center of Kellogg's business district. Over time, those

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## Innovation and Expansion (Continued)

investments would help shape what became the heart of the city's commercial life.

Beyond the storefronts, he looked outward. He developed land in Silver King and Smeltonville, helping to create places where families could live close to their work. Lots were offered on terms people could afford, making it possible for many to build homes of their own, something that had once seemed out of reach.

He was not simply doing business in Kellogg. He was helping build it. The work was different now. It was no longer just about making a living. It was about shaping a place.

In 1909, he helped organize the First State Bank of Kellogg, serving first as vice president and later as president for many years. The bank became an important foundation for the town, supporting both businesses and families as Kellogg continued to grow.

As the town developed, basic infrastructure became essential. Papesh, in a joint effort with the Bunker Hill, played a role in advancing some of Kellogg's earliest improvements, including the development of sewer and street systems; projects that helped transform the area from a rough mining settlement into a more stable and livable community.

At the same time, his life at home was taking shape. He and wife Grace had returned to Kellogg after their marriage in 1906, beginning their life together in a town that was still growing around them. Their first home stood on McKinley Avenue, close to both his work and the center of the developing community.

Their family grew there. Their first daughter, Beulah Elizabeth, was born in 1907. A son followed in 1909, though he lived only a short time. Another son, George, was born in 1912, and their youngest daughter, Doris, in 1915. Like many families of that time, their lives were marked by both joy and loss, woven quietly into the rhythm of daily life.

Papesh served on the city council for many years, contributing to decisions that shaped the town's future. He also supported local institutions, including the YMCA, churches, and civic organizations, recognizing that a strong community required more than industry alone.

By then, his work could be seen throughout Kellogg.

In its streets.

In its homes.

In the steady growth of a town becoming something permanent.

He had made good - just as his father had asked.

By 1912, the steady work of earlier years had begun to take visible form. The Papesh Meat Company moved into a new, modern facility on McKinley Avenue; larger, more efficient, and equipped with improved refrigeration and updated equipment. For the first time, the daily struggle to preserve meat through heat and time began to ease. The work was still demanding, but it was no longer uncertain in the same way.

Inside the shop, everything reflected a higher standard. Clean counters. Organized displays. Careful handling. Nothing was left to chance.

*"We knew that the meat market must be kept clean... Customers liked this..."*

It was more than appearance, it was trust. Customers could see the difference, and they returned because of it. With that success came something new: the ability to look beyond a single business.

Papesh began expanding into other ventures, carefully at first, then with growing confidence.

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## Innovation and Expansion (Continued)

He invested in real estate, purchasing and developing property in areas that would become central to Kellogg's growth. He entered the insurance business, helping protect the homes and buildings that were rising across the valley. He took on the Chevrolet agency, recognizing the coming shift from horse and wagon to motor vehicles. And, like many in the region, he explored opportunities in mining, including involvement with the Jack Waite mine.

Not every venture succeeded. Markets changed. Prices dropped. Conditions shifted. But he did not stand still.

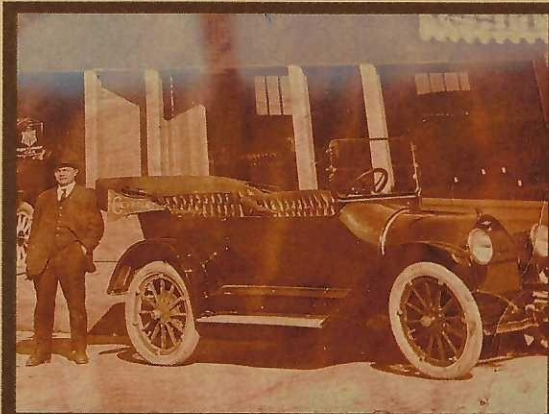
Each effort, successful or not, added to his understanding of business, of risk, and of the community he was helping to build. He adapted, adjusted, and continued forward with the same steady determination that had carried him from the beginning.



Interior of Papesh's meat market, likely early 1912.  
W.W. Papesh stands at left.

This image reflects a fully established operation—uniformed staff, organized displays, and branded goods—marking the transition from frontier enterprise to community institution.

## A Builder of the Community



W.W. Papish with his Chevrolet automobile, circa early 1910s.

This image marks a turning point from the early days of horse-drawn delivery to the growing influence of automobiles in the Silver Valley, an evolution Papish was quick to recognize and embrace.

In the years that followed, Papesh remained actively involved in both business and community life.

By the mid-1930s, he had taken over the active management of the Papesh Chevrolet Company, continuing to adapt as Kellogg moved further into the modern age. Alongside this work, he devoted time to his real estate holdings, maintaining a strong presence in the ongoing development of the community.

But for Papesh, staying busy was never simply about business.

He took pride in being involved, managing multiple ventures while continuing to support others along the way. Whether through his work, his investments, or his civic involvement, he remained committed to helping Kellogg grow.

Even after decades of effort, his outlook remained unchanged.

He believed in the future of the town, and expected to keep doing his part to make Kellogg a better place to live. As the

years passed, Papish's work was no longer carried forward by him alone.

His son, George W. Papesh, had begun working alongside him, learning the business in much the same way, through daily work, responsibility, and close attention to detail. Together, they represented both continuity and change, as the next generation stepped into a business that had been built through years of effort and determination.

# A Living Legacy

More than a century ago, a young immigrant arrived in Wardner with little more than determination and a willingness to work.

Today, his legacy lives on.

In the streets and buildings of Kellogg. In the institutions he helped build. And in the family that continues to give back to the community he believed in.

*"Life has been good to me, and I want to continue to pay it back."*

And in many ways, that work continues.

On June 19, 1963, W.W. Papesh passed away at the age of 85.

He was remembered as many things:

A pioneer businessman

A community leader

And a steadfast supporter of the Silver Valley.

But those who knew him best remembered something more.

Known simply as "Pap," he remained active until the end, deeply connected to the Valley he had spent a lifetime helping to build.



Behind the counter at the Cash Market, located at 306 Main Street in Kellogg, stand Jeff Brown and George Papesh, son of early pioneer W.W. Papesh. This photograph, taken in 1927, offers a vivid glimpse into the daily life of a growing mining community.

This photograph not only captures a moment in Kellogg's commercial past, it also reflects the enduring legacy of a family whose roots run deep in the valley. It is one of the few photos of George Papesh, W.W. Papesh's son and Bill Papesh's father.

## Carrying the Legacy Forward

For Bill Papesh, the story of the Silver Valley is not something he learned, it is something he lived.

Born and raised in Kellogg, he grew up surrounded by the legacy of his grandfather, W.W. Papesh, whose work helped shape the community in its earliest years. That legacy was shaped not only by accomplishment, but by loss.

In 1942, Bill's father, George W. Papesh, was hit by a car near the Bremerton Navy base and died at the age of 29. A lifelong Kellogg resident, George had served in the Navy during World War II and was an active member of the Elks Lodge and Kiwanis Club. He left behind his pregnant wife, Hedvie.

Bill was born just two months later.

In 1948, Hedvie married Clarence Lenhart, a loving man who instantly took on the role of Bill's father. An additional three children were born from this union: Deidre, and two sons, Craig and Marc. Marc was tragically hit by an automobile at the age of three.

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## Carrying the Legacy Forward (Continued)



Grace, Beulah, Doris, George, W.W. Papesh. "The Papesh Family"

Likely 1925. The formal studio portrait reflects both the era style and the growing success of W.W. Papesh and his family during Kellogg's boom years.

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In addition to Clarence's steady presence, W.W. Papesh played a central role in Bill's early life.

The connection between grandfather and grandson became an important one, rooted in shared time, quiet example, and the values that had guided W.W.'s own life. Though not taught through formal lessons, those values, hard work, integrity, and a deep commitment to community, left a lasting impression.

Bill carried those roots with him.

After graduating from the University of Montana in 1965, he began a career in finance, eventually becoming president of the Composite Group of Funds. Over the years, he became a respected leader in the investment industry, helping guide the financial futures of thousands of individuals.

Yet despite his professional success, Bill remained closely tied to the Inland Northwest.

He often spoke of his grandfather with respect, recognizing the example of hard work, careful stewardship, and long-term thinking that had shaped both a business and a community. That influence carried forward in his own approach, grounded in responsibility and a belief in steady, thoughtful growth.

Today, that same spirit continues through the Papesh family's support of the Shoshone County Mining & Smelting Museum.

Their contributions help preserve the history of the Silver Valley, ensuring that the stories of those who built it remain part of the community for generations to come.



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