

# The Daily Examiner.

## The Inyo Earthquake [of March 26<sup>th</sup>]

April 3, 1872

The San Francisco *Examiner*

VISALIA, April 2. – By a gentleman just arrived from Lone Pine we are informed of the following additional particulars concerning the great earthquake of March 26<sup>th</sup>:

Fifty-two buildings were shaken down, forming about three-fourths of the entire town. But seven buildings were left on one side of Main Street and three on the other and they all wooden buildings,

Four more deaths have resulted from injuries received on the night of the 26<sup>th</sup>, making a total of twenty-seven deaths at Lone Pine, one at the Eclipse mine and one at Independence. Thirty-four are seriously injured and many others slightly.

At Fort Independence the hospital was shaken down, but fortunately was unoccupied at the time. The chimneys were all thrown down, crockery broken and small fissures opened in the earth.

No one was badly hurt at Cerro Gordo. Windows were broken, goods pitched from shelves and dashed to pieces and large cracks opened in the ground.

At Swansea the furnaces were all thrown down and every adobe house leveled to the ground, including the principal hotel, but no person was seriously injured.

On Wednesday afternoon, while the survivors at Lone Pine were interring their dead, the cemetery was in a constant tremor with occasional shocks.

While burying one family of five persons, a mother and three children and her cousin, a severe shock occurred, which filled the grave and sank the ground on which stood the funeral cortege some six inches.

Much excitement still exists at Lone Pine. Many are preparing to leave as soon as they have the means.

Four miles south of that town a small lake has entirely disappeared. Owens River has largely decreased in volume since the shake. Where formerly there were two fathoms of water, the stage now fords the stream. A large creek with a swift current has appeared where formerly not a drop of water was to be found.

On Friday morning when our informant left Lone Pine, the shocks were quite frequent, and the last hour he was in Owens River Valley before the stage ascended the mountains, he experienced quite a severe shake.

Two or three slight shocks were felt her last evening, but not severe enough to cause any alarm.

THE LATE EARTHQUAKE



ADDITIONAL PARTICULARS



Statements of Persons from Independence



Accounts to Thursday morning state that the explosions and heavings in Owens River Valley still continued, but not so violently. The most correct estimates place the number of killed at less than thirty, and of wounded at about one hundred. Subscriptions of money, food, etc., for the sufferers are solicited. Colonel Whipple was on his way to San Francisco to enlist sympathy in their behalf.

At Tibbett's ranch, fifteen miles above Independence, about forty acres of ground sunk about seven feet below the surface of the surrounding country. Big Owens Lake has risen four feet since the first shock. Owens River ran over its banks, depositing shoals of fish on shore after it receded. For a distance of three or four miles through Lone Pine the earth cracked. One side remained stationary, while the other sank seven or eight feet leaving a wall of earth extending over three miles in length, where formerly was a level plain. Innumerable cracks were made throughout the valley. Kern and Owens rivers turned and ran up stream for several minutes, leaving their beds dry, and finally returned with largely increased volumes of water.

THE SHOCK AT INDEPENDENCE

Mr. Frank Bell, who was at Independence last Tuesday morning when the great earthquake occurred, gives some particulars of his experience to the Virginia Enterprise. From the first shock until nearly 7 o'clock the earth was never for a moment perfectly quiet and every few minutes heavy shocks of a few seconds duration were occurring. In all there were more than fifty heavy shocks. The first shock cracked and threw down many walls and buildings, but it was the heavy succeeding shocks which leveled everything. The brick Court-house and every brick and adobe house in the town and throughout the whole country were thrown down.



PERILOUS POSITION OF A CHILD

When the first shock occurred, Mr. Harris, of the firm of Harris & Kline, rushed out of his dwelling with his family. After getting out he found one child was missing, and was rushing back to rescue it when the building fell. It was supposed that the child was killed, but upon cutting through the roof and removing a portion of the wreck of the building, it was found and rescued quite unharmed, it would be useless to attempt to describe the consternation which prevailed throughout the town

during the time the shocks were occurring – many supposed the last great day had come. The shocks were accompanied with a great rumbling, and the air was filled with great clouds of dust – indeed, such quantities of dust filled the air that a cloud was formed which was seen by persons residing fifteen or twenty miles to the northward.

#### STREAMS OF FIRE ISSUE FROM THE MOUNTAINS

Fourteen miles this side of Independence, in the Sierra Nevada mountains, is a large mountain called Black Rock, the sides of which are covered with lava, and which is supposed to be an extinct volcano. The settlers informed Mr. Bell that during the time the shocks were most severe, flashes of light were seen to issue from the top of this mountain, and streams of fire ran down the its sides. There are on the side of the mountain three old lava streams, but when the stage passed along no one had yet gone to see if any fresh flow had occurred. Mr. Mallory, formerly of Carson City, stated that he observed flashes of light in other places in the mountains, but he was of the opinion that they were caused by rocks striking together as they rolled down the slopes of the peaks. In places on the stage road there were encountered

#### ROCKS AS LARGE AS TWO-STORY HOUSES

which had rolled down from the mountains. From Independence to Big Pine, a distance of forty-five miles, there is not a square yard of ground that does not show cracks. Near Big Pine they found a crevice across the road sixty feet wide and six feet deep. Off the road, but in plain sight, this crevice was two hundred feet wide and over twenty feet deep, and it could be traced a long distance running north and south, parallel with the Sierra Nevada mountains.

#### LAND RIDGES AND WATER SPOUTS

South of Fish Springs Slough the water was spouted out of the ground in many places, and there were still to be seen large pools when the stage passed. Here, also ridges of ground from eight to ten feet in height were raised up across the road. At Big Pine the heavy dining table, with all it contained, was overturned, and five shocks were experienced while the passengers were eating breakfast. Between Fish Springs and Bishop Creek, where formerly was a desert place, there now gushes forth a stream of water large enough to turn a mill in other places streams and springs are turned topsy-turvy. At Hot Springs, while severe shocks were felt on the surface, the men in the mines (200 feet deep) felt nothing of them. We have been told of many other circumstances in connection with this great earthquake, but have not room to mention them.

#### ACCOUNT OF ANOTHER EYE-WITNESS

Mr. Augustus C. Diggins of Virginia was at Independence at the time of the earthquake. He says that on the day preceding the earthquake very high winds prevailed at Independence and over the whole of the valley, but at night it subsided, and the air became perfectly calm. The first tremor awakened him, but before he could spring from his bed it was demolished and fell to the floor, the center table tumbled over, and the house pitched and rocked like a rowboat in a rough sea. The building was a strong frame one, and was consequently not thrown down. He describes the noise which accompanied the shock as appalling. It seemed as if the mighty mountains skirting the valley were breaking up and rolling into the plains below – the sound was in the air and under their feet, and its reverberations through the tumbling mountains were as terrific as the noise itself. He says the first shock was a compound one, oscillatory and vertical. He ran into the street, and in the clear moonlight saw that every adobe and brick house in the tow was in ruins. The ground heaved and vibrated, and then as the awful sound died in its far off echoes, those who had escaped from their crumbling dwellings, aghast

and almost speechless with terror, hoped the catastrophe was over. But almost instantly, away to the south, down the narrow valley toward Lone Pine, was heard a sharp and thundering explosion as a thousand columbiads fired at once. The people braced themselves for the shock – nearer and nearer came the appalling noise, and as the shock advanced thousands upon thousands of huge rocks tumbled from the crags on either hand and crashed with deafening din into the ravines and upon the edges of the valley below. Then came the noise under their feet, and with it the awful, sickening and terrifying uplift and swing of the earth. The people ran to and fro; some screamed, some prayed, others stood still and watched the course of things with stoical indifference. They soon learned that but one or two persons had been killed there, and yet none knew what the end might be, for the earth vibrated constantly. At short intervals would be heard away off in the direction of Lone Pine and the lake that terrible boom! bang! as if the very mountains themselves were splitting in twain.



Not only did tens of thousands of rocks and boulders rolling down the mountains add to the confusion of the scene, but in the Sierra, on one side of the valley, avalanche after avalanche of snow was sent thundering, booming, almost screaming down from the regions of eternal frost and ice to the gulfs below.

#### VOLCANIC PHENOMENA

People living near Independence, at points where they could see plainly the sides of the mountain on either hand, told him that every succeeding shock they could plainly see in a hundred places at once, bursting from the

rifted rocks great sheets of flame apparently thirty or fifty feet in length, and which would coil and lap about a moment and then disappear. He says these flames could not have been caused by friction of rocks and boulders coming down the mountains, for in his own neighborhood there were plenty of these, but no fire visible. In one place he saw an immense ledge or drift of whitened and broken rocks forced out of the mountains and fall like an immense dump from some mining tunnel down its side.

When daylight came the entire valley south of Independence, and towards Lone Pine, was filled with smoke and dust, and in places, people said, the fumes of sulphur were almost suffocating. The clouds of smoke extended from Fish Springs south as far as the eye could reach.

Numerous springs were dried up instantly and others broke out in other places, while the flow of water from all was greatly increase. In one little stream three or four inches deep, the water was thrown upward to the height of two or three feet over foot-bridges. A man had several rafts moored in the river near Independence laden with lumber, and each was thrown high and dry. Mr. Diggins saw springs of water forced out of the mountains, where before the rocks had been as dry as a powder-house. From the time of the first shock until daylight, the noises and shocks were incessant.

## LEAVING THE COUNTRY

At daybreak several parties and himself took the stage and started from the place for Aurora. Still the shocks continued – some were so heavy that they were felt in the stage by the passengers, and the underground noises were constantly heard. The valley was torn in pieces along the road. In every direction there were fissures, which, however, had been filled in again by the loose soil. Some, however, were long and deep. Often they were obliged to stop, get out of the coach, and hunt for a safe route, where before it had been as smooth as a barn floor. At one place a large section of the valley had subsided about ten feet leaving an abrupt perpendicular bank at the sides. In many places the ground was thrown into ridges and mounds five to six feet high, and in every direction were signs of the destructive agencies that had been at work – all, however, decreasing in number and extent as they traveled north. Cattle and horses were thrown prostrate during the heavier shocks, and their bellowing and neighing were pitiful to hear.

At Blind Springs, where brick buildings were hurled down, men at work 200 and 300 feet under ground felt no shock. The same fact was reported to him at Aurora, where the shock was quite severe. At Black Rocks and Fish Springs the atmosphere was strongly impregnated with sulphur. For seventy-five miles north of Independence not an adobe or brick house was left standing.

## CHARACTER OF BUILDINGS

The adobe and brick buildings in the valley and towns were made quite strong. Some were roofed with lumber and shingles, and some with thatched tules. The frame houses are built strong to withstand the violent winds which prevail there at some seasons.

## AN INCIDENT

A family, consisting of a man, his wife and several children, living in a brick house near Independence, were startled by the shock, and father and mother, seeing that the house was sure to fall, hastened out with all of their children but the babe, which lay in their bed. From the door the mother returned to rescue her darling, but the walls crumbled, and their house was a heap of broken adobes and boards. The mother and all escaped. She ran back through the debris for the body of her babe, and there, on the mattress, with walls of adobe on each side and a board over it, lay the little one, crying, but without so much as a bruise on its whole body.

## FORMER EARTHQUAKES

In 1812 the Mission of San Juan Capistrano, in Los Angeles county, was destroyed by a great shock, which also destroyed the Mission of Purissima, in Santa Barbara county, 170 miles distant. These Missions were built of adobes. The shock occurred on a Sunday, while the people were in church, and at San Juan about forty persons were killed by the falling walls.

In 1857 a shock occurred at Los Angeles. An old man, who was crossing the plaza at the time, was thrown down and so seriously injured that he soon after died. Near Fort Tejon, at a place known as Elizabeth Lake, about 60 miles from Los Angeles, the ground opened, and a gaping crevice two feet wide still remains. A native Californian couple residing in that neighborhood, in an adobe dwelling, were buried in its ruins as it was overthrown by the shock.

Our readers will remember the shock of October, 1868, by which several lives were lost in this San Francisco and in San Leandro