

# The First White Bride of Cerro Gordo

by Friends of Cerro Gordo

For days, the young people of the silver town of Cerro Gordo scoured the mountainsides for what native wildflowers and shrubbery they could find late in the month of August of 1875, so they could fill the American Hotel with their glory. By Wednesday, the 25th, the hall nearly burst with most of the residents of Cerro Gordo, Independence and Darwin. Young women who traveled from the two towns below the hill were allowed to use the private rooms to change into their dresses which matched the most popular fashion of the day. The daughter of Mrs. Margaret Lewis of the hotel, now stood amongst the green background. She wore a fine white dotted Swiss gown adorned with a large blue ribbon sash. She was frightened, yet happy and excited. Her groom and his co-hearts from Camp Independence stood out in their military attire. Soft music played in the background as the very young Lulu Lewis and Al Waplehorst exchanged their vows.

Gala music and dancing went on through daybreak. A painted stagecoach decorated with white ribbon bows waited to whisk the new Mr. & Mrs. Waplehorst and their entire bridal party down the mountain. The 6 horses were spirited and tore down the Yellow Grade Road only to have the harness separate as they were halfway to their destination. There was some speculation that it was not an accident, but a wedding prank, but no one really knew for sure. Regardless, the entire wedding party was stalled in their coach, while the horses galloped back up to the mining town on the top of the hill. Luckily, a Louie Munsinger Brewery wagon came along and rescued everyone. The Judge of Inyo County, the bridesmaids, and other Cerro Gordo notables climbed onto empty beer kegs. The bride and groom followed suit. They made quite a site as they swayed and jolted and giggled down the steep and winding grade.

The first destination was the town of Swansea at the shores of the salty Owens Lake. A tasty lunch awaited the wedding party. From there they went to a reception in Lone Pine where they were greeted by loud guffaws as they showed up on the brewery wagon. Another coach was provided for travel into Independence. They arrived just in time to refresh themselves for the biggest wedding ball and supper that community had ever seen. Two hundred and fifty guests, officers, soldiers, and farmers and wives alike, tipped their glasses of sparkling champagne to the bride and groom.

Lulu and Al Waplehorst eventually settled in Darwin where they ran the Darwin Hotel. In April of 1877, Al Waplehorst met with an early death and was buried in the Camp Independence cemetery. Lulu continued to run the hotel, and raised their young child by herself. She eventually re-married and wrote "The Story of Cerro Gordo" in the 1930's for an Inyo paper. She fondly remembered that the people of the great silver mining town "enjoyed life to the utmost, but when the end came and the plumes of smoke poured no longer from the smelters, they packed up their household goods and left to seek new homes without lamenting – for they were pioneers and trained to take the bitter with the sweet."