

EARLY DAYS IN OWENS VALLEY

As Told by Chris Carrasco to Clarice T. Uhlmeyer in 1939

Cristobel (Cris) (Uncle of the Cris Carrasco currently living in Lone Pine) was born in San Jose, California on July 30, 1868. In 1870 his father, who had been working at Cerro Gordo for a year, went to San Jose and brought his family to Lone Pine by team. Some families were living at Cerro Gordo at that time, but most men left their families at Lone Pine and came home whenever they could, which was not very often.

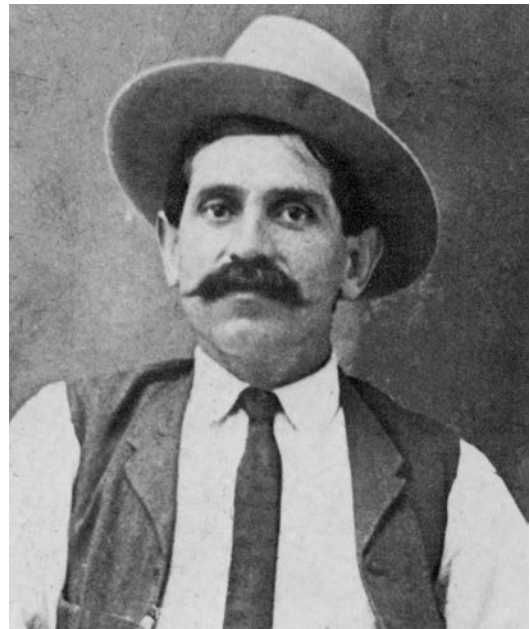
Mr. Carrasco's father had been working for wages as a packer but soon obtained his own string of mules. His job was to carry wood and water on the mules for the town of Cerro Gordo. The wood was obtained in the hills back of the mines. Part of this was used as fuel as it was, but much of it was made into charcoal in pits near there for use in the furnaces. Most of the time all the water that was used had to be carried by mules from springs some distance from the camp - both for domestic purposes and for running the furnaces. This, of course kept mules and men employed constantly. This was mostly contract work. Although wages were not high, as we think of them today, money and work were both plentiful. Times were good. The mines were the principal source of work. Darwin was also a thriving town at this time.

The mining camps were made up of stores, saloons, boarding houses, and dance halls.

The ore from these mining towns was made into bricks of silver and lead. These bricks were transported by team to the lake, across the lake by steamboat, then onto the big freight wagons which carried it to San Pedro. From there it was taken by water to England, where the silver and lead were separated.

The mail for the valley from the south, at that time, came from Caliente by buckboard through Walker Pass, over Mountains Springs Canyon to Darwin, thence to Lone Pine and other valley points. Mr. Carrasco states that in 1881 his father obtained a contract to carry mail from Lone Pine to Olancho and back in one day. This trip was made by pony, and excepting Sundays must go through no matter what kind of weather. Mr. Carrasco strained his back at this work, as he and his brothers, though only boys, took care of this mail route. The long tedious miles on horseback were too much for a growing boy. The round trip was fifty miles.

Hay was the earliest farm crop to develop because of the urgent need with the increasing number of stock used at the mines and in the valley. Meadow hay came first but gradually alfalfa took its place. Van Dyke and Lucas were two early ranchers who raised hay in large quantities just south of Lone Pine. The Indians, who had long since become peaceable were dependable hay hands. Their main settlement was at the mouth of Tuttle Creek Canyon where one still lives, Charlie Glenn. Corn and other grains were grown on a smaller scale than hay and at George's Creek a great many potatoes. The farmers took these to the mining camps and sold them direct to the consumer.



Chris Carrasco in the early 1900's

Of the lumbering industry Mr. Carrasco remembers little, but says that he had always understood that the flume on Cottonwood Creek and the charcoal kilns by Owens Lake were put there because of the increasing scarcity of wood near Cerro Gordo. It is his opinion that these kilns were never successful.

One of the interesting pioneers that Mr. Carrasco recalls was one Dick Richards. He says to take this story or leave it, but Mr. Richards claims to have been a soldier and had come with a troop when they were sent to quell the Indian uprisings. He claims that his troop marched in across the mountain passes on foot all the way from Visalia, and that they endured many hardships on the way. Many places they had to make trail and they had much difficulty in crossing rivers and mountain streams. Most of the time they removed their clothes and swam the icy water.

Another old timer was A. C. Harvey, a pioneer blacksmith. Mr. Harvey sent east for some walnuts which he planted. When they sprouted he gave Mr. Carrasco a number of the small plants. These Mr. Carrasco planted around the home property west of town. They have grown to great height and are a truly beautiful monument to pioneer days.

Captain Keeler, a retired army officer and R. J. Laws are two other history-making people that Mr. Carrasco remembers. There is a town in the valley named after each of these two men. Captain Keeler no doubt knew U.S. Grant. In 1885 when Grant died, Keeler, with a party of men which included Cris Carrasco, his father and Laws, with a few others, climbed to the top of Mt. Whitney and at the hour when Grant was to be buried, fired a salute from its peak. At that time this was a three day trip and there was no trail. Mr. Carrasco was in his early teens. He recalls that they arrived at the top about noon of the third day. His father was well acquainted with this back country and it was because of this knowledge that he and his son were invited on this memorable trip.

Mr. Carrasco knew Charlie Begole well. It was he who laid out the town of Lone Pine and divided it into town lots. Begole's Grove west of town was one of the earliest public picnic places.

Immediately west of town and north of Lone Pine Creek is a black peak of the Alabamas. This is known as Hoodlum's Peak. Mr. Carrasco was a barefoot boy when this point got its name and this is the story. The boys of the town had as one of their main pastimes the game of stick horse. They kept their charging steeds in stables on top of this peak. They would gallop around town a while, then with vivid imagination would return to the peak for fresh horses. One day as they were on their way to the stable for a change of horses they met an old man who remarked, when passing them, "There goes a bunch of hoodlums." The boys took up the name and called their stable grounds "'Hoodlum's Peak." As such it is still known.

No story of these early days would be complete without a reference at least to the earthquake of 1872. Mr. Carrasco was only four years old yet he vividly recalls the great event as it affected his family. He awakened in the morning to find dirt and debris on his bed, and through the ruins of the roof he could see the sky. His brother, who was eight years old, crawled out through a hole and, finding that his mother and sister were pinned to the bed in another part of the house by a fallen rafter, ran to get help. The first man he met was one who had been on a spree, but was completely sobered by the shake. This man returned with him and eased the rafter up so that the two pinned under could crawl out. Neither was hurt. Their house was completely wrecked, so when the father returned from the mine he gathered up pieces of wood, sagebrush and any kind of material that would hold together and put up a temporary dwelling on the property where Mr. Carrasco now lives.

When asked about hunting and fishing of the times he said that of course wildfowl was plentiful on lake and river. The good fish were mostly planted from time to time but the story goes that the carp in the river came there by accident. Someone farther up the valley had a pond in which he kept a few. In high water a dam broke and they escaped into the river, where they thrived.

The town of Lone Pine came by its name from the fact that on a little rise at the mouth of Lone Pine Canyon there stood one enormous pine tree. Mr. Carrasco played under it by the hour as a child. The water from Lone Pine Creek eventually undermined it and a heavy wind felled it. He was only a youngster when this happened and remembers that practically the whole town turned out to see the fate of the "lone pine." Several times during recent years people have undertaken to have another tree planted in its place but so far, in this year of 1939, no one has come to the point of actually doing it.

Mr. Carrasco has served the county in the capacity of coroner for a number of terms. He married Elisa Salizaer in 1899, who was born at the Cerro Gordo in 1878. They have two daughters, Elisa Fear and Dolores Jobin, and three grandsons all living in Lone Pine.

Inyo Register

1885 – A new law in Bishop: No female shall be arrested except for willful injury to a person, character or property