



OLD-TIMERS
of
Southeastern California

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by **LESTER REED**

REED

GEORGE BROWN FAMILY

Seldom do we find a person of 79 years still living in the house where he was born as in the case of George Brown at Olancha, California. George Brown was born January 20, 1887, in an adobe home on the beautiful little meadow ranch first deeded to Tom Passmore April 25, 1874. The deed was signed by President U. S. Grant. The adobe home served as the Olancha Post Office from 1870 to 1891. The postmaster was George Brown's grandfather William Walker.

George Brown's father, Alonzo Brown, was born February 5, 1852, at Pitiston, Kennebec County, Maine. He came to California in the forepart of October, 1877, by way of an immigrant train made up of box-cars. Alonzo Brown arrived in Reno, Nevada, from where he moved down into the Olancha area by way of the old dirt roads over which all travel was made by stagecoach, on horseback, or with freight teams.

Alonzo Brown's first job, after arriving in the Olancha area, was to herd sheep that were taken into the mountains for summer grazing. He worked for a time for a man by the name of Bellas who ran goats in the Haiwee area. After going onto the ranch at Olancha, Alonzo Brown had a blacksmith shop where he did repair work for teamsters and others who needed that kind of work done. He irrigated the meadow from which hay was cut and then hauled to mines at Darwin and Cerro Gordo. He at times served as relief driver on the stage between Keeler and Olancha, and at times between Olancha and Little Lake.

George Brown's uncles, Ed and Web Walker, had a place on the ranch at Olancha where they furnished feed for the teams of those who were



Alonzo Brown home at Olancha where George Brown was born and lived near to 80 years. Place was sold in 1966 and the George Brown family moved to Lone Pine. Collection of George Brown family.



Alonzo Brown family of Inyo County. Left to right: Annie Kimbler, half sister to George Brown, Alonzo Brown (father to George), George Brown, the mother, Charlotte Brown, and Laura Brown (sister to George Brown). Collection of George Brown family.

hauling freight from Mojave to Bishop and other points throughout the Owens Valley. They also served meals to passengers on the stage coaches. George Brown tells of his uncles making cattle drives from the Owens Valley to Mojave, and makes special mention of one drove of about 100 big steers being delivered in Mojave at \$20.00 per head.

George Brown's Grandfather (William Walker) bought the Olancho Ranch from Tom Passmore, who was married to one of his daughters. To water the stagecoach teams and the stock of the freighters, the water was pumped by hand. To make the round trip between Bishop and Mojave with the freight teams required about one month's time.

Back in the days before grazing permits were issued to the cattlemen, sheep were grazed in the Templeton, Ramshaw, and other areas of the High Sierras. George Brown's two uncles, Web and Ed Walker, were in charge of government leases to the sheepmen. Among them were the Compton Brothers who let their land holdings go back to the government. At that time, when the mountain area was sheep country, a Spaniard whose name was something like Arragan would pack salt from Saline Valley into the mountain sheep range. He used about eighteen mules in this operation, and carried about three hundred pounds on each mule as far as Olancho where he would drop about half the weight from each mule. Then he would come back to pick up what had been left. Quite different from salt being taken into the mountains by airplane or jeep as the cattlemen sometimes do today!

One of the early-day incidents related to me by George Brown is one concerning some prospectors who moved into the Owens Valley at what is known as Fish Springs. At that time there was still trouble with the

Indians who naturally objected to whiteman's interference. There were two brothers among the prospectors by the name of Bellas and one of them (Horace) claimed that the Indians would give no trouble if left alone. Always when going on prospecting tours for gold one man would be left in camp, and on a certain day Horace Bellas was the man to have his turn. When the other men returned, Horace Bellas was not in sight, but his body was soon found out near the spring.

The prospectors then sent word of the killing to Fort Independence where some soldiers were stationed. Some of the soldiers went to the scene of the killing, and from there took the tracks leading from the place. The tracks led south to the Owens Lake to near where Bartlet now is, and there the soldiers found evidence the tracks they had been following led into the water. Evidently the soldiers located the best they could where the persons they had been trailing were submerged in the water and began firing. After a time there were no signs of activity in the water and bodies of dead Indians were found.

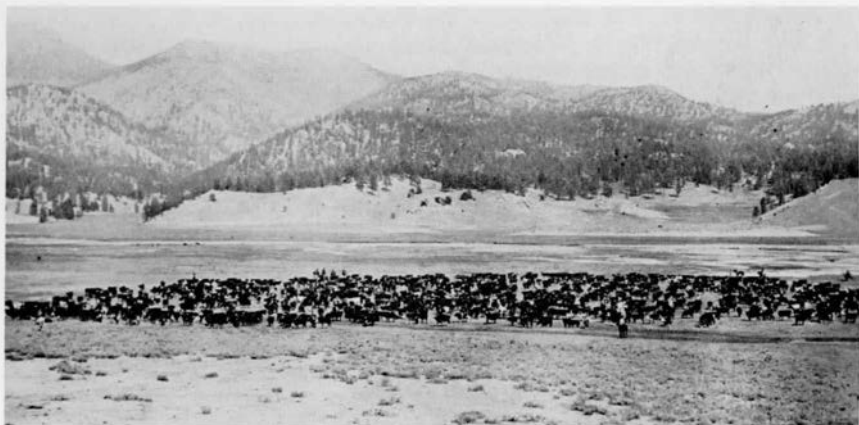
I do not know just how, but it seems that afterward it was learned that one Indian had escaped by the use of a straw of somekind long enough that he could submerge below the surface of the water and none of the soldiers bullets had hit him. This incident was related to George Brown in later years by the brother to Horace Bellas. He told of how about two years after the brother had been killed, and it was known that one Indian had escaped, he was hunting in the vicinity of Haiwee meadows when he came upon the tracks of a barefoot man with two toes missing. This he knew to be the footprints of the Indian involved in the killing of his brother (Horace) so he started cautiously following with a load



Horace (Bart) Bellows, early day goat owner of Inyo County, for whom Alonzo Brown herded goats. Collection of George Brown family.



Web Walker, standing; Ed Walker, seated. Uncles to George Brown. Collection of George and Ada Brown.



Early day roundup in Monache Meadow of High Sierras, Tulare County. Collection of George Brown family.

of buckshot in one barrel of his gun. After a time Bellas saw the Indian not far ahead, and about that time the Indian saw him, so slipped out of sight behind a tree. Bellas, keeping out of sight, slipped up to as near to the tree as he could and waited. He told of how the Indian finally ventured to try to locate him, and then said no more about the incident. However, the Indian with two toes gone from one foot and known to have escaped from the soldiers at Owens Lake, was not seen after that, nor were any footprints with two toes gone seen any more.

Tom Passmore was killed at Lone Pine, California, when in line of duty as sheriff, and attempting to arrest a Mexican who was accused of robbery. This incident occurred inside a saloon, the place was immediately surrounded. One white boy, known not to be involved, was allowed to leave the place. After some shooting, two Mexicans broke from the saloon and managed to make their escape as far as just to the south of Diaz Lake where for years there has been a house and windmill. The two Mexicans were both killed and the bodies not removed until some-time later. This occurred in 1878, only about four years after the lands of the present George Brown Home had been deeded to Tom Passmore.

After the sheepman's day was over in the High Sierras to the west of Olancha, and grazing permits were being issued to the cattlemen, they decided to hold a rodeo in the Monache area where they had horse races, roping and bronc riding. George Brown tells of about two thousand people attending one such affair and all had to travel to the area on horseback and with their pack animals. There were volunteers to serve as cooks, some to serve as dishwashers, there were beeves to be butchered and the meat cared for by hanging out at night in the brisk mountain air and then well wrapped in canvas for the day and kept in a shaded place. There were volunteers to donate beef animals, others volunteered to bring in the wood and keep it chopped for the outdoor kitchens where the cooking was done in Dutch ovens and the huge old camp frying pans.

I have heard George Brown tell of how the horse wranglers, when starting on their mission early in the morning, had to be careful not to ride over someone still in the bedrolls. After breakfast was served and

the horses had been wrangled for the day's activities, some cattle would then be rounded up to a certain place and held there for the roping events. When the ropers were ready, and each contestant was up for his turn, an animal would be parted from the band, and at a time signal, the roper or ropers would take after the animal parted out for their turn. There would be team roping and steer tying for the single roper.

When the bronc riders' time came each man's horse would be taken out to where he was waiting with his saddle. The horse would be eared down by a couple of men while the rider saddled and mounted. There was no whistle to be blown at the end of 8 or 10 seconds. The rider rode until the horse quit bucking or he had been thrown. Often if the horse struggled very much during the process of being saddled, it was pretty well tired by the time the rider was up, and even though the rider was to ride until the horse quit, he did not experience the jolting that the riders of today can experience during the 8 or 10 seconds that can seem like an eternity before the whistle is blown. The horse that comes out of the bucking chute is usually at his best, and the man who keeps the best of them between his knees until the whistle blows has well proven himself to be a bronc rider.

I do not know all the types of horse races they had at these celebrations, but I do know they had short distance cow horse races and stake races. The stake races are where they run to a certain place, then turn and run back to the starting point. To win this type of race requires a horse with good speed that has been trained to be reined. Many are the times I have heard Mark Lacey tell of winning this type of race on a little black horse that was gathered from the wild ones by Bev Hunter. In their events there would be the showing of reined horses.

When George Brown was telling me of these celebrations, I asked who he considered some of the better ropers of that early day, and the first one he mentioned was Dee Gill, then Andrew Glen. Army Jefferson was



First car of George Brown family. Collection of George Brown family.

mentioned as both a good roper and a good rider. Bev Hunter held his place, of course, among the ropers and riders. Another old-timer mentioned was Henry Stokes as being one of the better ropers and all-around good hands with horses and cattle. I never will forget the first time I saw this old-timer in the Monache area. My brother, "Gib," and I were looking for Lacey cattle when we saw someone coming in the distance riding a white horse, and "Gib" remarked, "Yonder comes an old-timer, notice the way he rides with the motion of the horse."

It would be difficult for me to try to describe just what it was that "Gib" meant, but I will have to say that this old-timer and the white horse each seemed to be part of the other, something that is typical only to the old-timers who spent most of their living days in the saddle. If a doctor was needed, many times the old-timer had to ride many miles to get one to ride back with him over the many miles to attend the patient if still alive. A fifty mile or more ride on horseback to deliver an important message was thought of as a necessity for there was no better way of transportation. The old-time cowboy's day was measured by the number of hours required to do a certain job. Then often at the end of the day he would have to go on night guard for at least part of the night.

Of the later date old-timers whom George Brown mentioned as being good ropers were Art Steel, Artie Lubken, Henry Olivas, Pete Olivas, Pete Garner, Wendell and Harold Gill. No doubt there are others whom he did not think of at the time.

When mentioning cattlemen who grazed the High Sierra Country in the summer time he mentioned such names as Hans Meyer, John Lacey Sr. and the Walkers. Other cattlemen were Artie and John Lubken, Silas Reynolds, Edwards, Summers and Butler. Crocker, Charlie Domini, Jens Ness, Bert and Ori Johnson, Powers, Stanley Smith, Miller, and Domingo Dominique, and very likely there were others whom he could not think of at the time.

George Brown married into an old-time family by the name of Cline, and his wife's name is Ada. Her father was Pleasant Cline. He was born at Downie, California, and his parents came from Michigan. For a time Ada Brown's father worked on a ranch at Georges Creek and then the family moved to Independence where she attended school. The Cline family lived in a tent for a time until an excitement developed concerning Humboldt County, so the Cline family's possessions were all sold and they started on their way. Stopping for the night in Bishop at the grandmother's place (on the mother's side of the family) a severe snow came up, causing them to stay over for the winter and live in a tent.

The Cline children attended the Warm Springs School while living in the tent at the grandmother's place, and by the time spring came around, the Humboldt County fever had worn off so Pleasant Cline leased what was known as the McBride Place for two years. From this place the Cline children attended the Riverside School. There were about 13 children attending this school, and all of them riding from their homes on horseback. The McBride place was located between Owens River and Owens Valley Canal, and all around them there was so much going on to interest young people that Ada Cline and her brother Charley did not learn enough to pass their grades. Cattle were being moved, great bands of sheep were passing through the area going to the summer ranges,



A male sheep with double set of horns owned by George Brown. Collection of George Brown family.



Alonzo Brown as early day blacksmith of Olancha. Collection of George Brown family.

and there was their father's trapline in which there could be some furbearers they would miss seeing if they got to school on time.

The school was near what was then known as Dixon Lane, and typical of the time there was a shed and mangers for horses. The second year the Cline children attended this school, they began catching up in their grades. The family had moved into Bishop, but Ada and Charley Cline continued attending the Riverside school, having to ride their horses about four miles. The Clines then moved to Owenyo where the school building was a box-car of the narrow gauge railroad. The eight Cline children all graduated from the eighth grade in the boxcar school at Owenyo, and then attended high school in Lone Pine.

Ada Brown tells about the death of her Uncle Jim Cline when Curley Fletcher, who wrote the Strawberry Roan song, took charge of the funeral services in his own way making it a farewell to a cowboy friend. This of course was pleasing to the Cline family, and instead of the usual organ music, there was a man seated on each side of the casket playing the guitar and singing songs that Curley Fletcher had written. After the music and songs, Curley Fletcher read a poem of his entitled: "SO LONG OLD PAL." The pallbearers were all dressed in their cowboy clothes, and of course, were some of his closer friends.

Wilfred Cline, whom I believe is a cousin to Ada Brown, has made quite a reputation for himself as a bronc rider and owner of one of the better bucking horse strings of California. I have heard persons say that Wilfred has collected some right good bucking horses by making the offer that if he could not ride the horse he would pay twice the price asked, or if he did succeed in keeping the horse between his knees the horse would be his at no cost. I feel quite confident that those who know him as a rider have not taken him up on that kind of offer.

George and Ada Brown have one son and one daughter. The daughter's first name is Lenis, and she is married to a man by the name of Munis. They have three young sons by the names of Danny, Kenny and Mikie. The son, George Jr., graduated from high school in 1954 and Diane Blum became his wife and began to encourage him to go on to school where he is studying to be a teacher in agriculture. My congratulations to George Brown Jr. as being one of those persons who realize that we never become too old to go to school.

George and Ada Brown have a fine collection of Indian arrowheads and have them nicely arranged for display. In their collection of things of special interest to them is a pitcher that was brought to America on the Mayflower that arrived off Cape Cod, Mass., November 9, 1620, with 103 Pilgrims.

Aside from being a lifetime cattleman, and always owning a small band of sheep, George is among the better coyote trappers of his time, and is expert in preparing the pelts for market. He is expert in the braiding of bridle reins and the long romal used by the old-time cowboys. He decorates the reins and romals with as fine a work in the making of what such workmen call buttons as I have ever seen. George is truly a native son of California, and is still living in the house where he was born January 20, 1887.



George Brown of Inyo County old-timers.
Collection of George Brown family.

