HISTORIC LEGENDS OF INYO COUNTY

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HISTORIC LEGENDS OF INYO COUNTY

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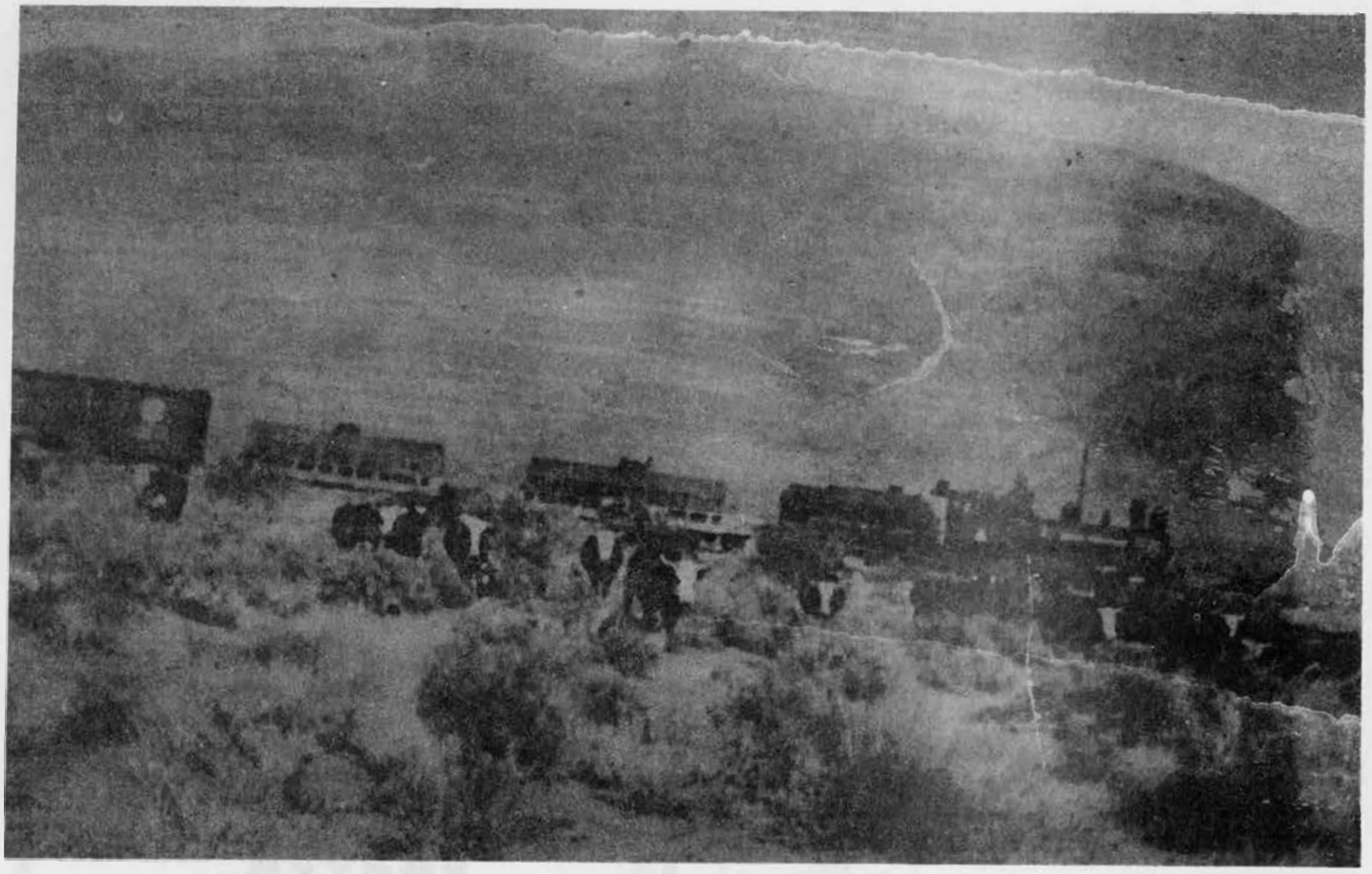


Train coming down the Owens Valley. This may have been the "Slim Princess."
--Courtesy Bishop Museum at Laws.

The Round Valley School was built in the 1860's when the Indian War was raging. This photo was taken in 1900.
--Courtesy Bishop Museum at Laws.

THE OWENS VALLEY INDIAN WAR

The first whites to visit the Owens Valley were basically prospectors looking for gold or other minerals. However, as the mining fever declined amongst some of the visitors they began to note the richness of the Valley as far as cattle raising was concerned. This coupled with a growth of population around Cerro Gordo and Aurora soon brought ranchers to the area.

The first herd to be brought in was jointly owned by the McGee and Summers families of Tulare Valley. They drove over Walker Pass in the Spring of 1861 and reported that for a hundred miles there was not a house or white person to be seen.

They did however encounter some Indians who had the mistaken idea the land belonged to them and wanted payment for the grazing rights. This idea was vetoed and after the Paiute's attempted to stampede some cattle shots were fired and the Indians retired from the scene.

Later that same year Henry Van Sickle, A. Van Fleet and W.S. Bailey brought herds into Long Valley. Van Fleet established residence near Laws, not far from Bishop, Van Fleet drifted down to a spot near present day Independence and no one seems to know where Bailey ever went to.

In July of that same year Samuel A. Bishop, for whom the town was named, came with his wife, several herders and others, and founded a ranch on Bishop Creek, very near the present town.

He did not stay there long for in 1866 he is recorded as being a resident of, and elected to the Board of Supervisors of Kern County.

In the Fall of that year other settlers arrived and the head man of the Paiutes decided the place was getting overcrowded and suggested some of them leave.

The newcomers tended to disagree and so some of the younger braves started taking pot shots at them. A few whites took heed of this message and did depart but the majority not only hung on but started to enlarge their holdings. Barton and Alney McGee brought in a herd of 1,500 cattle, arriving at Lone Pine in November of 1861 and finding four inches of snow on the ground. They decided to put up a cabin there and for the next 54 days it either snowed or rained so that the snow depth was soon over two feet.

The number of cattle now ranging through the valley caused the Indians to view this as a gift from heaven and now, instead of running the ranchers out, they began to dine on the cattle.

Now the white man took exception. A cowboy named Al Thompson saw an Indian driving off a steer and shot him dead. The Paiutes didn't cotton to this and soon thereafter they cornered another herder by the name of "Yank" Crossen and eliminated him from the tax rolls. This all occured near Bishop where the redmen had a large camp.

The retaliation shook up the ranchers to no small extent and they called for a summit meeting. Chief George of the Paiutes said that the score was even and why not let it lie at that. A treaty was drawn up and signed by all the chiefs, except Joaquin Jim who

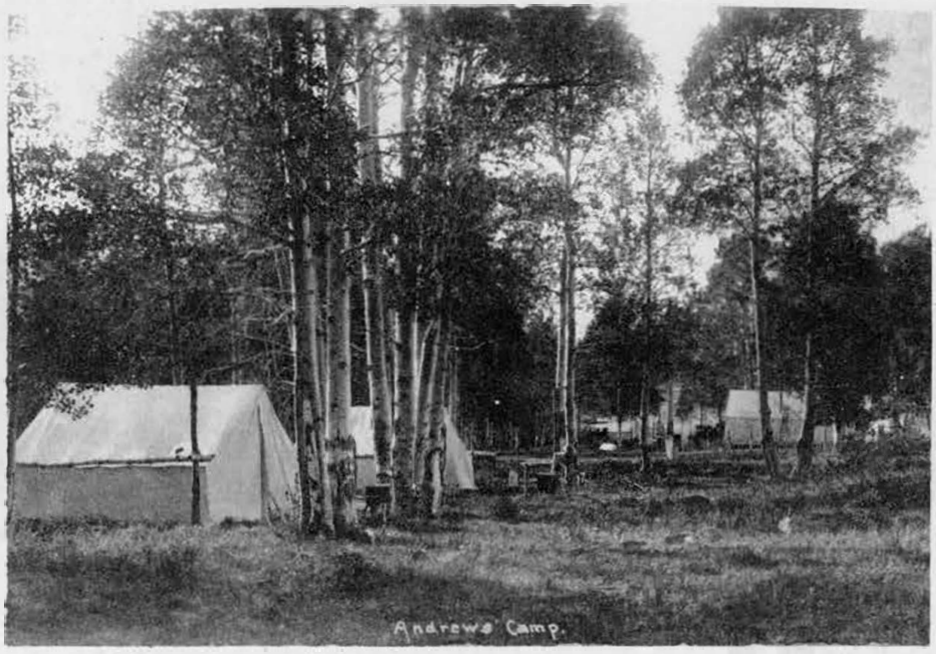
was boss man of the tribes in southern Mono.

One day the McGee Brothers and a man named Jesse Summers were getting a herd together to drive to Aurora when Jim and some of his braves showed up. They acted as though they didn't care if there was a treaty or not; they probably didn't and so scared the three men they forgot about the cattle and departed the scene.

But they quickly made the round of the ranches and inferred that they had been attacked. Fifteen men were rounded up and gathered at the San Francis Ranch, near Bishop. The Indians also showed up and said they were peaceful. However, as they danced a war dance around the cabin all night the ranchers weren't too sure of their sincerity.

Nothing happened that night and the men, the next day, rounded up the cattle and started to drive them towards Keough's Hot Springs. The Indians decided to help, except they started driving towards their camp. They got away with about 200 head and three men were sent out to get them back. A party of about 50 Paiutes intercepted them and suggested they forget all about the cows and the punchers hastily complied. After that the Indians watched the drive down the valley but did not attempt to remove any more animals.

A few days later nine ranchers and their hands met four Indians shooing some cows along and started a discussion. Angry words led to violence and when the smoke cleared away Allen Van Fleet had an arrow in his side and Tom Hubbard had one in his arm. But all the redskins had bit the dust and the score now stood five for the whites and only one for the Indians.



Andrews Camp on Bishop Creek, year unknown.
--Courtesy Bishop Museum at Laws.

The white men gathered at a place called Putman's and organized an "army" of forty-two armed men should the Paiute seek revenge. They did, attacking the cabin of a lone prospector named E.S. Taylor. He fought them off for two days, killing ten, before they set his roof on fire. This forced him out and then filled him with enough arrows to pass for a porcupine.

The ranchers now sent a party of men down to the Alabama Hills where there was an Indian encampment. Probably this tribe didn't even know about what was going on up north but they soon found out. When they sat down to breakfast the white men opened fire and claimed they killed between 40 and 50 of them. It was later disclosed that the true count was about eleven. However, Tom Hubbard, who seemed to be prone to these things, got another arrow in his arm.

The Indians now came to the conclusion that the whites wanted to play for real and they began to summon the clans: They came from all over eastern California and most of Nevada. In no time at all they had some 2,000 warriors on the scene. A goodly amount of their guns and ammo came from the Aurora firm of Wingate and Chon who refused to sell any to the ranchers. They were slightly miffed because they had been cheated in a beef buying transaction by the drovers.

A Visalia storekeeper had also been hoaxed in a cattle deal and he too provided supplies for the redmen. A plea to Aurora for help in the matter of manpower brought eighteen men. They were commanded by a former army officer, a Captain John J. Kellogg.

While Kellogg's group was headed south another party was organized at Lone Pine, of about 33 men, and they moved north. At Big Pine they discovered the bodies of two white men who had been killed.

As the two parties drew near each other they mistook the other for hostiles and damn near started a shoot-out before they got their identities straight.

Once combined they then rode up the valley to Bishop Creek where the war party of over 1,000 braves awaited them. To make a long story very short, they charged the foe and were promptly knocked fanny over tea kettle back the way they came. Mayfield, the leader of the Lone Pine party prepared to depart the area, on Van Fleet's horse, having been asked to hold it while the latter alit to help a wounded companion. Van Fleet put an end to this notion when he informed Mayfield that he would put a bullet in a most embarassing part of his body.

Kellogg now took command and got the men back to a ditch where they reversed roles and became the attacked instead of the attackers. Things came to a stalemate there and after dark the men made their way back to Big Pine. They lost three men dead as against the Indians losses of eleven.

One of the reasons the Indians didn't make a clean sweep was that they had very few guns - and then there was also the chance they were so busy laughing at the white mans' antics they couldn't aim straight. N.F. Scott, the sheriff of Mono County, decided to light his pipe and look over the

trench at the same time. Scratch one sheriff. Somebody else got the idea of spreading the powder out in the ditch so they could get at it easier and someone else dropped a match in it. Is it any wonder why the Indians doubled up in paroxysms and laughter?

After this battle was over there were so many accounts of it that the only thing known for sure is that it was about two miles west of Bishop.

The army now got into the act as did the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Warren Wasson was the Indian agent for Nevada and this included Inyo County then. He arrived at Owens Lake at the same time that Lt. Col. George S. Evans, and 73 men, got there. Wasson was all for taking peace but Evans, who was probably pitching for a full bird, insisted they be chastised. He rode north at the head of his command, met Mayfield's party headed south and encouraged 45 of them to return to the fray.

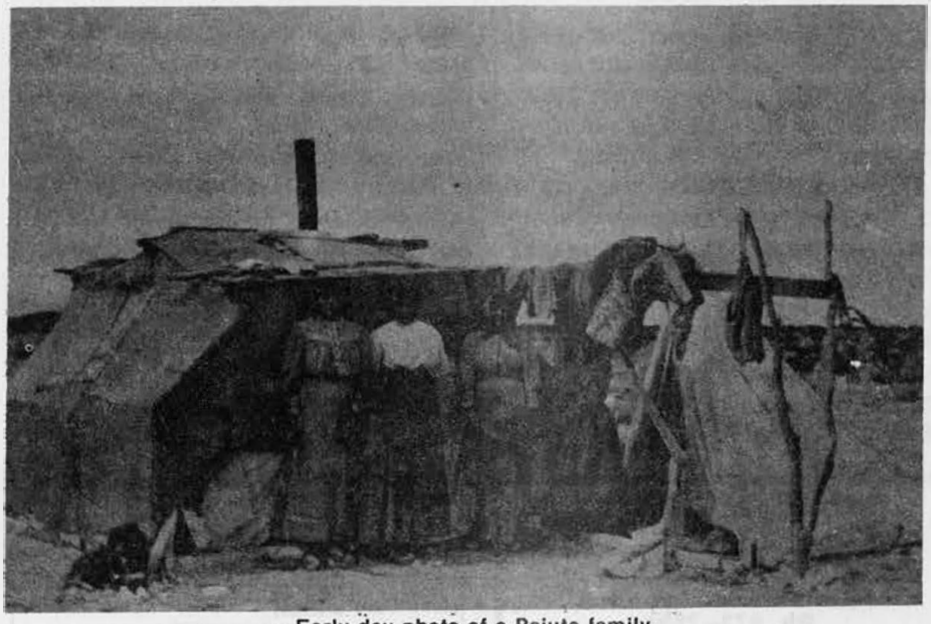
They reached the mouth of a canyon, in which the Indians were believed to be hiding, just as a snowstorm blew up. Evans charged bravely into the canyon and found it empty.

The next day when the weather cleared up Evans went back into the canyon. They didn't see any Paiutes but they were there. A volley knocked Sgt. McKenzie, Corporal Harris and Trooper Gillespie out of action, killing McKenzie and Gillespie. The cavalry got the Hell out of there faster than they went in.

They dismounted and re-organized the attack a half mile out of the ravine. This time they tried it on foot and suffered more casualties. One of these was Mayfield who was first wounded and then killed while being hauled away.

Evans now started a general retreat all the way back to the Owens Valley. Before they had gone a mile and a half they saw the Indians lighting campfires where the soldiers had just been.

He sent a dispatch to his headquarters stating that he had met overwhelming odds in battle and suggested that everyone be evacuated from the valley. Later Wasson said there were not more than 25 Indians in the fight, a rear guard left behind to protect the retreat of the women and children.



Early day photo of a Paiute family.

The settlers were rounded up and headed south, all except the McGee family who said they had no quarrel with the Indians. Later they met some and they had no trouble.

Someone got the brainy idea of mining Van Fleet's old house at Independence with kegs of powder so that if and when the Indians came there would be a huge booby trap awaiting them. The Indians watched the procedure from the hillside and when their white brothers left they came down, unhooked the wires and took off with the powder.

In May of 1862, the Paiutes had total control of the Owens Valley. Three or four small wagon trains were hit and a number of palefaces eliminated. They were mostly settlers or supply trains headed for the mines at Cerro Gordo and as an Indian later reported, "If they had not resisted nobody would have been hurt." The Indians were basically after supplies, guns and horses.

However, this brought about widespread reports in the newspapers of massacres and a doze souls, including General Andres Pico, who dated back to the days of Mexican rule, offered to raise and lead armies to the relief of the valley. As there were no

white people living there, except the McGees, one wonders what they meant by "relief." Governor Leland Stanford turned all offers down and turned the whole matter over to the military.

The army headed north again under Col. Evans. This time he had enough men to insure his full colonelcy. On the 4th of July, they pitched camp on the banks of Oak Creek, east of Independence. It was formerly dubbed Camp Independence. Houses were erected for the officers and headquarters while the soldiers dug caves in the banks for shelter.

The next few months were spent chasing Indians here and there without catching any, except for one lonely brave who was shot near the foot of Owens Lake. Shortly after that the Indians caught a man named Cox and then turned him loose with a message to Evans explaining all they wanted was peace.

While this was going on Wasson had been in conference with Governor Stanford, General Wright and J.H.P. Wentworth, the general Indian agent for southern California. It was agreed that Wasson would get the Indians to gather at Independence and Wentworth would come with presents and talk peace terms. A big fandango was held, the treaty was agreed upon, basically being "If you don't shoot at me, I won't shoot at you." This was the same one Wasson wanted to put into effect before the trouble started.

Everything went along fine for a while but then Joaquin Jim started feeling his oats again. He began raiding outlying mining cabins and knocking off a freight wagon here and there. Chief George, the real head man, was being held hostage at Independence. When he heard of these incidents he began to fear for his own safety. In March, 1863, he went AWOL, gathered up his women and children and started up the valley to get out of the way of any action. As far as he was concerned this was strictly Joaquin Jim's show, and he wanted no part of it.

More miners were hit and more travelers killed. Old Jim was having himself a time and beginning to attract the young bloods of the other Paiute tribes.

Fort Independence began to gather more troops including Company E of the Tuolumne County Volunteers. They had expected to go into action in the Civil War, but instead had been pushed from post to post throughout the west until they refused to go anywhere anymore. They were ordered to Benecia to be dishonorably discharged when Stanford intervened and suggested they go to Independence. This they agreed on as it gave a hint of action.

On April the 9th the army finally moved into the field, Captain Roper, 120 soldiers and 35 civilians. A running fight took place along the shores of Owens Lake in which sixteen Indians were killed and Lieutenant Doughty accidentally shot his own horse in the head. It must be recognized that the Indians were so poorly armed they could only fire their guns by pounding stones into the barrels in lieu of bullets.

Another detachment of troops marched up into the Kern River Valley where they surrounded and massacred an entire village of Kern Indians who were not only not Paiutes, hadn't taken part in anything, but didn't even like the Paiutes. This body was Company D of the Second California Cavalry commanded by Captain Moses A. McLaughlin. They then marched back to Fort Independence where McLouglin, as senior captain, took over command.

After that various field patrols chased around shooting at all and every Indian in sight. They did burn Joaquin Jim's camp but didn't catch up to him.

Word was sent out to the Indians to come in and surrender. One batch of eleven was headed that way under escort of one trooper, when they were attacked by drunken miners near Olanche, and nine of them killed. One of the culprits was arrested and sent to Fort Tejon but turned loose a few months later.

At last, over 900 men, women and children were rounded up along with their leader, Chief George, and sent to San Sebastian Reservation near Fort Tejon. Most of these were peaceful Indians who wanted no part of the war.

In the meantime Joaquin Jim ran wild in the northern end of the valley, the area known as Long Valley. The army left a white flag as a sign they wanted to talk peace. When they returned for their answer the flag was gone and Jim's war banner was in its place.

The war continued on until almost 1870 with Joaquin Jim and his warriors raiding here and there. The cavalry chased him and for once there were no peaceful Indians to shoot. They had all been killed or carted away. Only the real hostiles remained.

At last Joaquin Jim tired of the fun and retired to his camp. He later died of overeating, having made true his pledge that he would never be taken prisoner.

At best the final toll of the war was 60 whites dead and about 200 Indians. This is guess work for even today the bones of some lonely prospector are found, an arrowhead showing how he met his end.

Fort Independence was maintained as an army post until July of 1877, when it was abandoned. Only the caves and the old cemetery now remain.

Fifty-two mule teams were used to haul supplies for the aqueduct.
--Courtesy L.A. Light and Power.

THE OWENS VALLEY WATER WAR

A resident of the Owens Valley is once reported to have said, in anger and disgust:

"What in Hell do the people of Los Angeles want with all our water. Few of them drink it and even less bathe in it."

His words expressed the anger and frustration of the residents of the valley at the tactics employed by a group of promoters in gaining the rights to the waters of the Owens River, an anger and frustration still existing in part to this very day in Inyo County.

The political maneuvers that preceded the acquistion of this water would take up too many pages to discuss and were highly complex to say the least. They demonstrated the very acme of political cabal that involved some of the highest officers in the United States government. One commentator said'; "These ranchers (in the Owens Valley) were naive, unsophisticated people; that is, they had faith in the Federal Government."

The whole thing probably started in the summer of 1905 when one Fred Eaton came to the Valley and viewed the gushing waters of the river and the placid waters of the lake as an excellent source of water for the arid, virtually useless lands of the San Fernando Valley. At the time the ranchers had been confering with

J.P. Lippincourt of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation on the feasibility of building dams to maintain a steady supply of water in the valley. They already had their own irrigation system. It turned out later that "ol Lip", being an ambitious American, was drawing a paycheck both from the Federal government and from the City of Los Angeles.

He is accused of recommending to the boys in Washington that the water would be put to better use by L.A. than it ever would by the Owens Valley lads.In this he was supported by Gifford Pinchol, then the chief Forester of the fledging U.S. Forest Service. Giff had the ear of Teddy Roosevelt who cried "bully" and "delighted" everytime the ranger suggested something. What the Forest Service had to do with the Valley is unknown as there were not enough trees to start a campfire much less a forest fire in the entire valley. But Pinchot must have had something in mind for, in 1910, when Taft was president he was fired as Chief Forester and little was heard of him after that.

There are other versions of the "great steal". Some say that Eaton represented himself as being an employee of Lippincourt who told the ranchers they could either sell or have their water rights taken away and so they sold; another version says that the ranchers wanted to sell but keep the water too; and a third explanation is that the canals and ditches were jointly maintained, that one rancher would sell and his neighbor could no longer afford to keep the ditch up and so turned it over to the big city boys. Whatever the final outcome was there is no doubt but that the whole mess was one of guile, graft and political maneuvering by a bunch of big city realtors who wanted to market the lands of the San Fernando Valley and needed water to do so.

The years went by in court fights, state and congressional acts and other legislative and judicial rig-a-ma-role that gained nothing, but cost the ranchers a pretty penny. Finally, they got fed up with it all and decided to take more direct action.

It may have started when W.F. Hines, president of the Big Tree Company, was headed for Bishop and another of the innumerable meetings to discuss the matter. He was riding along the canal that watered his rangeland when he came upon a group of L.A. city employees cutting a new course for the river, in a location that would remove all the water from his ditch. He promptly rode back to the ranchhouse, got a party of armed cowboys and came back to put an end to the nonsense. The workmen, deciding against arguing with rifles, fled the scene. This was now 1922.

Then the city boys dynamited a dam installed by the Forest Service and although that branch of the government protested heatedly, the protests died on some desk in Washington. There was too much skullduggery between L.A. and Capital politicos by this time. Encouraged, the L.A. crews then started tearing out dams wherever they found them, regardless of ownership, and diverting the water into their own canal.

The first sign of retaliation was on May 21, 1924 when a charge of dynamite was set off against the aqueduct, a short distance north of Lone Pine. A lone watchman there took one look at them and said the job wasn't worth it. He hurried down to tender his resignation while the water from the canal was turned back into the river bed.

The City officials promptly ran screaming to the sheriff who dropped by and took down the names of the marauders, interspersing the rollcall with comments of "How's Martha, Sam?" "Hello' Joe, how's the new baby?"

The L.A. Light and Power lads appealed to Superior Court Dehy who issued a restraining order, then recalled it. By this time half of the Valley was up on the spillway joining in the fun. They stayed there for four days. Los Angeles employees who showed up were greeted politely and then told to get lost.

An appeal was made to Governor Friend Richardson asking for help, stating that a situation of anarchy prevailed, and give good old L.A. a hand. In those days Southern California couldn't muster the votes if can today and the Governor ignored the request. He did send State Engineer W.F. McClure down to look into the situation and he received so many different reports on what happened, and what was happening, that he didn't know what was going on.

The newspapers of the State, in those days of independent, fighting journalism, joined in the fight

which soon shaped up with the press of Los Angeles lined up against the other papers of California and half the West.

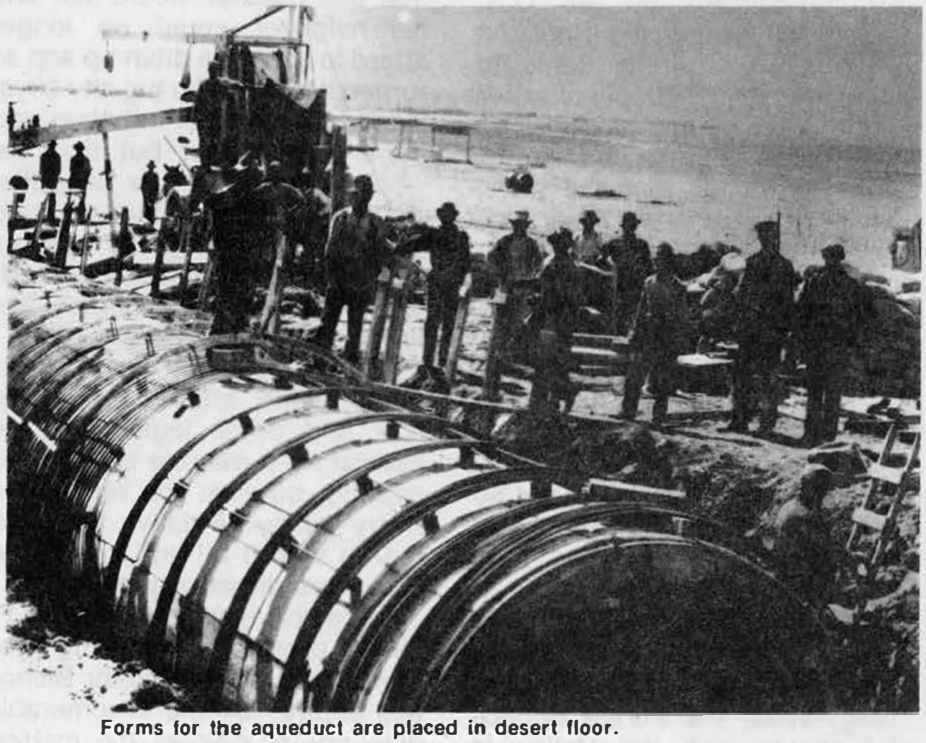
Well meaning, peaceful parties now intervened and once again the whole situation went back to endless meetings and court sessions. While everything was being properly debated all over again, the war raged on.

Los Angeles Light and Power dug a couple of wells in the Bishop area and localites promptly set off blasts in the wells. It was claimed the City was trying to get $2,500,000 in property for $141,000 -- this being their offer of payment for the land where they drilled the wells.

The Owens Valley Herald screamed so loudly about this "high handed robbery" that L.A. tried to get the State Legislature to impose a gag rule and shut the paper up. That didn't get very far either. The Herald then dared them to file libel suits but, in a star chamber meeting, the water boys decided that wasn't a very good idea either.

On May 12, 1926 another blast blew up the aqueduct near Lone Pine. This was too much for State Assemblyman Dan E. Williams. He introduced a resolution stating that Los Angeles had "adopted a policy of ruthless destruction in the Owens Valley, and to restore it to its original agricultural status. The resolution was adopted by a vote of 43 to 34. Governor Young however adopted a do nothing policy. The conflict raged on.

During June and July of 1927 six blasts rocked the canyon at the southern end of Inyo County and carried away 450 feet of the canal.



Forms for the aqueduct are placed in desert floor.
--Courtesy L.A. Light and Power.

Los Angeles now began to station armed guards along the canal, and also along the state highway. These latter stopped cars whenever they felt like it and forced drivers and passengers to submit to search. Some refused such illegal indignities and great old donnybrooks ranged along Highway 395 before that practice was halted.

These armed guards had little effect on the bombings. It was even said that some of them set off blasts themselves just to keep the job going.

Then came a horde of detectives who started snooping into the lives of all the residents of the Valley. They couldn't even visit Los Angeles without having their rooms searched. Six arrests were made but the Inyo courts promptly threw the cases out.

On top of all this came financial disaster. The Inyo County Bank, in a desperate effort to help the ranchers, reported they had a credit of $190,000 with the Wells Fargo Bank in San Francisco. It turned out to be more like $11,000 and the bank examiners dropped in for a visit.

On August 4, 1927 the following notice was posted in all the banks in the county.

"We find it necessary to close our banks in the Owens Valley. This result has been brought about by the past four years of

destructive work carried on by the City of Los Angeles."

The owners of the bank, W.W. and M.Q. Watterson were charged with thirty-six counts, and because the true background of the case was barred from the courtroom as "irrevelent" they were found guilty and sent to prison. In addition to the failure of the banks a large number of industries in the Valley also went down the drain. Los Angeles had scored a stunning, sweeping victory.

Families, disheartened, began to move away, selling their lands to the enemy for whatever they could get. Some hung on, fighting through the courts, trying to get a fair price for their lands; or for destruction so done to them. Cases continued to go through the courts up until the early thirties.

Much of the resentment still exists amongst the older families in the Valley and vast, scenic Owens Lake, where once steamboats crossed, lies empty -- a reminder of when unscruplous real estate promoters aided and abetted by devious politicians battled the people of Owens Valley and won, so they could peddle the desert lands of the San Fernando Valley.

Christmas morning in Bishop in 1912.
--Courtesy Bishop Museum at Laws.

KEOUGH HOT SPRINGS

Once this was the gay social center for Inyoites who came many miles to swim in the 127 degree water, to dance beneath the Japanese lanterns on the spacious dance pavilion, to dine, or to swim in the pool. But this was in the days when seven miles represented a couple of hours trip from Bishop. The motor car came into being and the crowds went farther afield. Now, Keough Hot Springs, like many other hot springs in the state are enjoying a re-birth as people are beginning to re-discover the healing and soothing enjoyment of bathing in the warm mineral waters.

The Indians were the first to recognize these values, long before the white man was to come and they still come to bathe in the creek.

In 1917 Mike Milovich built the pool and steam room for a Mr. Keough who owned the ranch at that time. The ranchhouse adjacent to the pool, burned later and the grim pillars of its demise stick stiffly into the sky. Who Keough was, and when he came there, has been undetermined apart from the fact that he did once own a ranch there.

Main Street of Bishop in 1900.

--Courtesy Bishop Museum at Laws.

BISHOP

Indian expert Fredrick Webb Hodge once wrote that the Paiute Indians were a peaceful and friendly people...except during a period in the 1860's when they came into violent collision with emigrants.

That collision, a terrifying and bloody siege lasting almost six years, threatened for a while the existence of one of the most colorful California cities east of the Sierra Nevada.

Other roadblocks stood in Bishop's path. In the beginning settlers avoided the marshland where the community was located because of talk of ague and malaria.

Earthquakes rattled the town. There was a monumental battle over water.

It was on August 22, 1861, that Samuel Addison Bishop, together with his wife, three white men and several Indian herders arrived at the site of old Bishop Creek. With them was a herd of between 500 and 600 cattle and 50 horses. History does not note the route the party took in their fifty-one day crossing from Fort Tejon at the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley, but the desert trek in summer must have been a difficult excursion.

Bishop and his wife viewed the wind-brushed tall grass and the backdrop of the Sierra Nevada on one side of the green and golden valley and the lofty White Mountains on the opposite and pronounced it a fair land. They put up a pair of pine slab cabins and called the place home.

The first white men in the Owens Valley, according to historians, were Captain Joe Walker, who made the crossing in 1833, and mountain man Jedediah Smith who passed through even earlier, possibly in 1826. According to mountain man, Bill Byrnes, Smith's party spotted the rich gold placers of Mono Gulch during their 1826 crossing. Cord Norst was to make his rich strike at the site of Monoville in 1859.

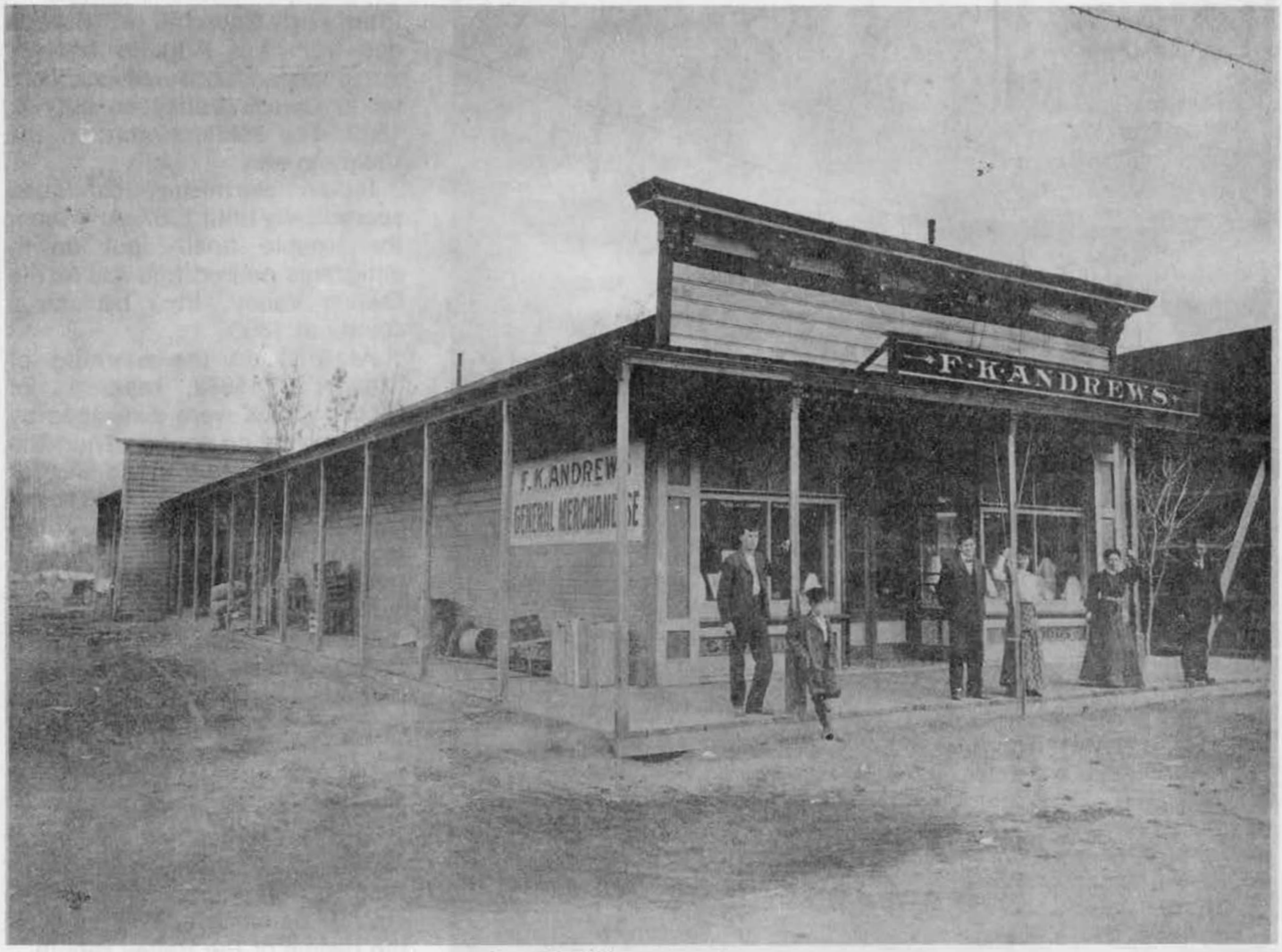
Miners who had been drawn to the Mother Lode a few years before, recrossed the mountains via any available pass or trail. Besides Bodie and Aurora, there were the Owens Valley camps of Owensville, San Carlos and Bend City.

Bishop called his cattle spread in Owens Valley the San Francis Ranch. Later it became known as Bishop Creek and a post office was established there in 1870. In time the town was moved three miles to the north and the name of the community was shortened to Bishop.

Owensville, located on the east bank of the Owens River about four miles northeast of Bishop, started to fade by 1864. The buildings were torn down and floated down the river to Independence and Lone Pine. By 1871 it had all but vanished.

San Carlos, also on the east bank of the Owens River, is marked today only by rubble.

Bend City, another Owens Valley mining camp, has vanished. With it have gone Galena and Graham City - "now so completely buried in oblivion that even their sites cannot be learned by the enquirer" - and Chrysopolis.



The old F.K. Andrews Store in Bishop, year unknown.
--Courtesy Bishop Museum at Laws.

That the mining camps flourished at all in the early 1860's is a testimony to the miners' determination.

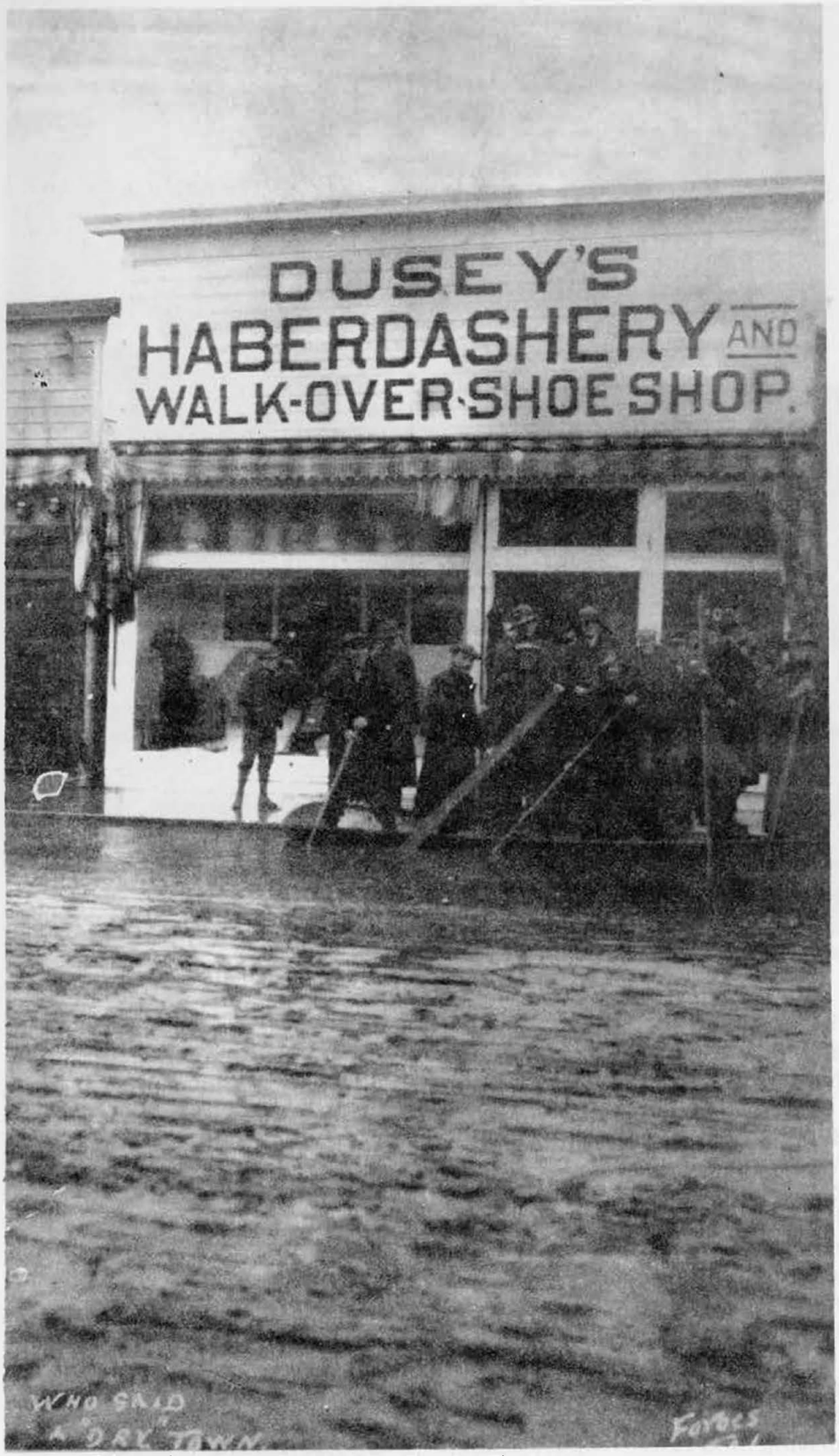
The Indian conflict may have started because of the rugged winter of 1861-1862. There were cattle in the Valley then. And the winter was the worst on record. Alney McGee, a pioneer stockman, noted that there was a fifty-four day period that winter during which it rained or snowed every day. The Owens River was a mile wide in places, half water and half ice. Snow swallowed the high country.

The Indians found their natural supplies of food cut off. In the Valley were thousands of head of cattle and the Indians were hungry. What happened was only natural. After all, the Indians regarded the stockmen, the miners, all the emigrants, as intruders.

The cattlemen put up with the rustling until one day a herder caught a Paiute in the act of driving off a cow. The herder shot the Indian and scalped him. Retaliation came within hours. The Indians captured and killed a white man passing through the country.

The settlers in the Bishop area were alarmed. A parley with the Paiute's Chief George was held at San Francis Ranch in January, 1862. The meeting was peaceful. Hand shakes were exchanged. A document was signed. Two months later the conflict with the Indians fanned into full fury.

On April 6, the first few troops



Dusey's Haberdashery in Bishop, year unknown.
--Courtesy Bishop Museum at Laws

from Fort Churchill in Nevada and from Los Angeles arrived. Fort Independence was established in Owens Valley on July 4, 1862. The soldiers were in the Valley to stay.

Indian skirmishes continued sporadically until 1867. And then, the trouble finally put down, emigrants poured into the fertile Owens Valley. Inyo became a county in 1866.

At 2:30 on the morning of March 26, 1872, residents of Bishop Creek were awakened by a low rumbling sound. Then the ground began to tremble and for the next three minutes the Owens Valley was subjected to one of the most severe earthquakes in the history of California.

Near Lone Pine a crack twelve miles long opened in the earth. Lone Pine's adobe buildings crumbled, twenty-four inhabitants were killed. The course of the Owens River was changed. Dust hung over the Bishop Creek area for two days. Observers at Camp Independence recorded 200 separate shocks during the first fifteeen hours.

With patience and good faith the people of the Valley rebuilt.

The settlers raised cattle and sheep, farmed, hauled wood down from the giant White Mountains, kept bees. Time passed and they prospered.

In the spring of 1880 the Carson and Colorado Railway was founded, an adjunct of the Virginia and Truckee line. Down from Mound House, near Virginia City, the tracks crawled, out past the desert camps of Candelaria and Mina. The line reached the summit near the station of Mt. Montgomery during the winter of 1882, ran out to Keeler at the southern corner of the Owens Valley in the fall of 1883. It was 300 miles of narrow-gauge track through a lonely land. In 1960 the last seventy-mile section of track, between Keeler and Laws, was torn up. The Slim Princess, as the railroad was known, is now a memory. The last pieces of rolling stock stand on an abandoned siding at Laws.

Bishop Theatre, year unknown.

--Courtesy Bishop Museum at Laws.

The Commanding Officers' home is now located in the town of Independence.

Fort Independence

The year was 1862. America's attention was focused on a great and terrible conflict; places such as Bull Run, Shiloh, and Antietam were in the spotlight. Overshadowed was a small but fierce struggle raging in an almost unknown valley in eastern California. Owens Valley, it was called, named some two decades previously for Richard Owens, one of Fremont's trusted lieutenants.

Owens Valley in the 1860's was a primitive land. To the west, the jagged, snow-capped peaks of the Sierra Nevada formed a towering barrier to Pacific storms and caused it to be, as Mary Austin later called it, a "Land of Little Rain." Twenty miles east, the rounded, tawny ridges of the Whites and the Inyos, rising almost as high, formed the eastern rampart of this great natural trench. The rocky, moisture-starved valley floor was mostly a sea of sage, supplemented here and there by tall cottonwoods and willows alongside streams gushing down from Sierra glaciers. Down the middle flowed the lazy, meandering Owens River, emptying its spent waters into the vast, shallow alkali sink of Owens Lake.

In spite of its barrenness, Owens Valley was for many decades the home of a hardy, peaceful people known as the Paiutes. These valley Indians lived a relatively simple life centered around a perennial search for food. They hunted deer in the mountains, fished the cold, sparkling streams, and gathered pine nuts every summer from forests in the nearby high country. Early white visitors to the valley reported these Paiutes friendly, and there were few incidents of friction between the Indians and the white man before 1860.

The white man's frenzied hunt for mineral riches finally changed the valley's peaceful pattern. It started with the discovery in 1859 of the fabulous Comstock Lode on the east side of the Sierra near Lake Tahoe. The eastern flank of the great range suddenly appeared to offer untold riches to those who would diligently hunt them. Thousands of hopefuls who had only recently crossed the Sierra to the Mother Lode country feverishly retraced their tracks back across the mountains. Other rich strikes soon followed near Mono Lake, and the boom towns of Bodie and Aurora blazed into the Owens Valley country.

Early in 1860 Dr. Darwin French left the San Joaquin Valley town of Visalia in search of the legendary Gunsight Mine. According to stories circulating at the time, a lone prospector had picked up a chunk of metal to make himself a gunsight; it proved to be pure silver. Rumors placed the silver lode in the desert mountains somewhere east of Owens Valley. French never found the Gunsight Mine; instead he discovered rich silver ledges in the Coso Range southeast of Owens Lake. Coso zoomed into prominence, and miners by the hundreds stormed into the area. Soon other prospectors, finding the Cosos all staked out, set up claims in the Inyo Mountains east of Owens Valley. To feed the hungry miners, cattle were driven into the valley, and white settlers soon followed. The peaceful, undisturbed valley sanctuary of the Paiutes was no more, and a clash became imminent.

The clash began late in 1861, when a cowherd shot an Indian taking a horse and the Paiutes retaliated by killing a white settler. Warfare in Owens Valley became general during the early months of 1862. By May the Indians, more numerous than the whites, controlled most of the valley. Miners and settlers fleeing the region asked the army for help.

The "caves" where the soldiers were housed at Fort Independence.

In March, 1862, a small detachment of California Volunteers, under Lt. Colonel George S. Evans, entered the troubled valley from the south. After rescuing a small group of settlers besieged at Putnam's Fort, a strongly-built stone house and trading post near what later became the town of Independence, Evans continued north to the vicinity of Bishop Creek. Finding the Paiutes well entrenched in strong natural positions above the creek, Evans realized that an attempt to dislodge them would be suicidal. As the expedition was not equipped for an extensive campaign, he was obliged to retire from the valley.

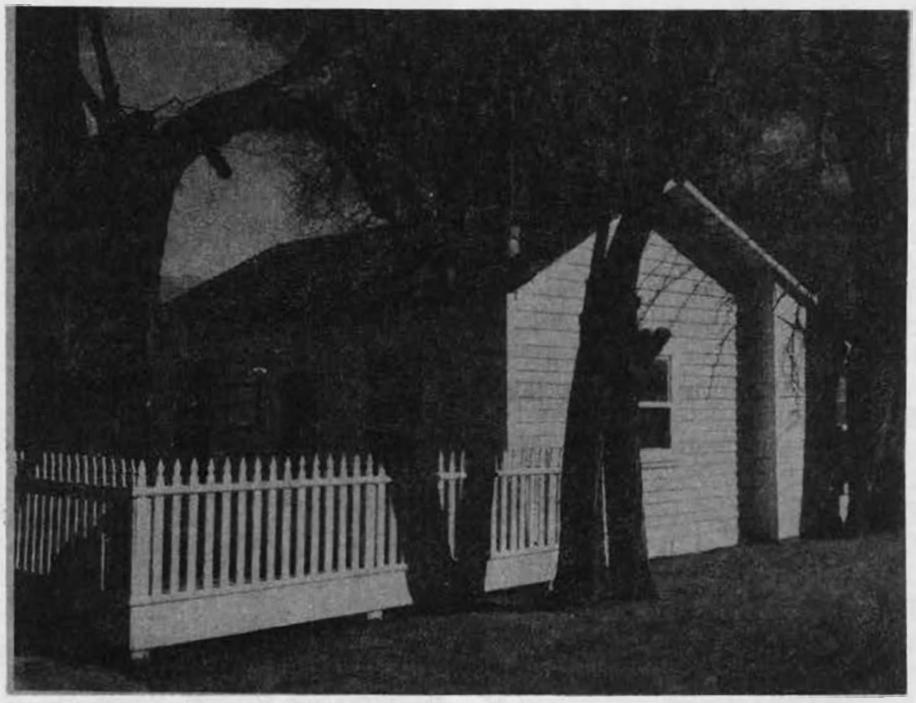
On June 11, Colonel Evans again left Los Angeles for Owens Valley, this time with a large, well-equipped force. He commanded 200 men of the Second Cavalry, California Volunteers, and brought along a train of forty-six wagons carrying supplies for two months. Their destination was Pine Creek, where Evans planned to establish a base camp for his campaign to subdue the Valley Paiutes. The party reached Putnam's Fort at daylight, June 26th. They found nothing but ruins; the Indians had burned everything but the stone walls and carried away everything of value.

Evans rested a few days, then resumed the march north. But the journey was now more difficult. From far above the valley, torrents churned downward from

the rapidly melting snowpacks of the Sierra crest. The resultant swelling of the Owens River and its many tributaries made it very difficult to get men and equipment across the larger water courses.

On July 4th, Evans and his men reached Oak Creek, about four miles north of the present town of Independence. Finding the creek a raging torrent, Evans decided to make his camp at a clearing above the south bank of the stream, twenty miles short of his original Pine Creek destination. Thus was born Camp Independence, named for the day on which it was founded.

This original Camp Independence would hardly have passed for a military post. The few buildings hurriedly constructed were of a distinct rudimentary nature, and many of the soldiers found shelter by digging caves in the walls of a large ravine nearby.



This is the oldest house in Independence, built in 1863 by Thomas Edwards.

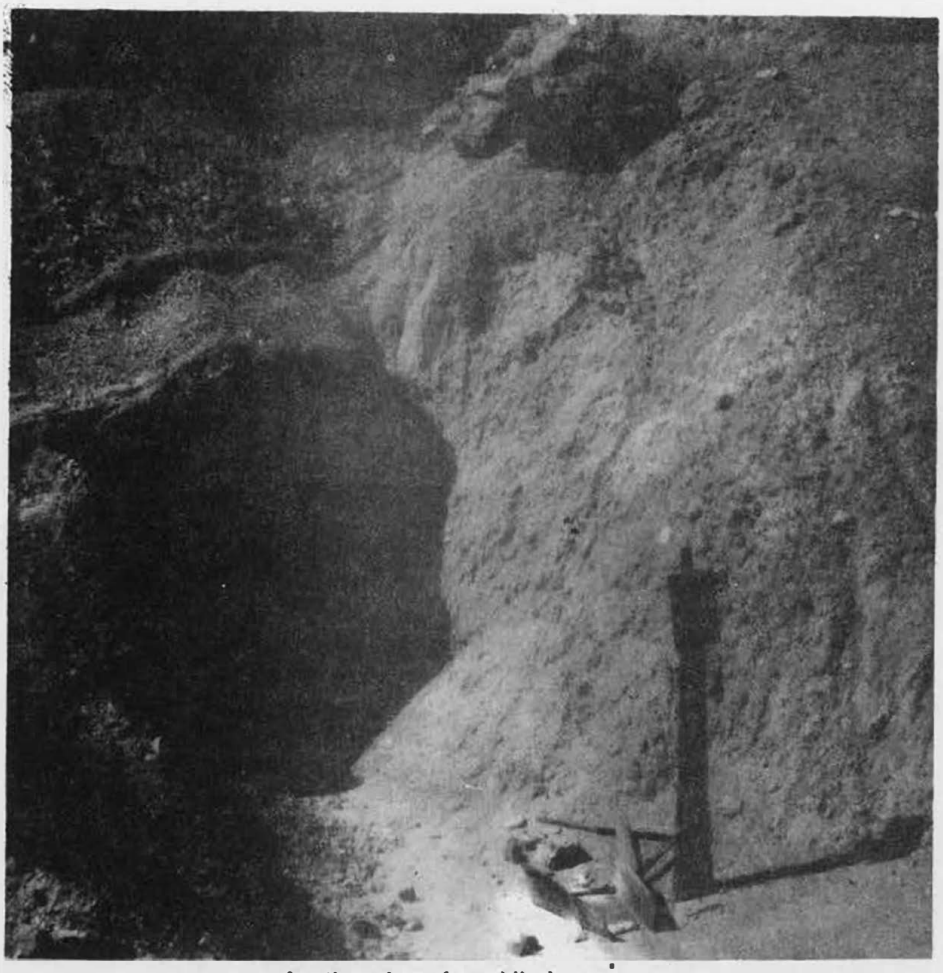
The first year of the post's existence was a harried one. The Paiutes were a stubborn and crafty enemy, and the campaign to wrestle from them control of the valley was long and difficult. Led by skillful chieftains such as Captain George (commemorated by today's George's Creek), Joaquin Jim, and Chief Butcherknife, the Indians continued to ambush white settlers and evade the best efforts of the army to subdue them. Two particularly fierce battles were fought in the lava beds just south of present-day Big Pine and along the banks of Cottonwood Creek, near Owens Lake. Both sides suffered numerous casualties, and the struggle went on.

In the fall of 1862 a site was selected for the permanent Camp Independence on the north side of Oak Creek about three hundred yards upstream from the first location. This spot was selected primarily because it was free of obstacles behind which Indians might lurk in ambush. Work was hurried on adobe buildings to serve as the permanent quarters, but unfortunately the camp was not completed before cold weather arrived. The first freezing nights were experienced in October, and by December, with dark, billowy clouds carrying snow flurries down from the Sierra crest, the men were suffering. A supply train from Los Angeles arrived just in time to save the post. That bitter winter of '62-'63 was the worst that the men would endure during the fifteen-year history of Camp Independence.

Victory over the Paiutes finally came in May, 1863. Old Captain George entered Camp Independence under a flag of truce and asked for peace. After being promised good treatment, 900 Indians gave up the hopeless campaign of attrition and warily trudged into the camp. In July, while the American Civil War was reaching its great climax at Gettysburg, orders were received to remove the Indians from Owens Valley to a reservation at San Sebastian, near Fort Tejon. The unhappy captives were escorted to San Sebastian later that month. In the ensuing months, some of them grew tired of their forced quarters, escaped, and returned to their former valley homes.

The restoration of relative peace in Owens Valley brought in a stream of new settlers. Mining activities in the desert ranges adjacent to the valley increased. The small garrison at Camp Independence found itself increasingly inactive. Finally, in early 1864, the post was ordered abandoned, much to the distress of settlers who still feared the few hundred Paiutes still in the valley.

It soon became evident that there was a basis for the uneasiness of the settlers. As more whites moved into the valley, the Indians became increasingly restless. Several attacks on white settlers occurred, highlighted on the last day of 1864 by the brutal murder of Mary McGuire and her six-year old son at their Haiwee Meadows Ranch, six miles south of Owens Lake. The following May, bowing to pressure from valley settlers, the Army reactivated Camp Independence, sending in three companies of infrantry and one of



Another view of a soldier's cave.

cavalry. From this time until its final abandonment in 1877, Camp Independence was continually garrisoned.

With the army back in Owens Valley, most of the remaining Paiutes resumed their peaceful ways. A handful, however, never were able to adjust to the coming of the white man. It took two years to subdue these last rebellious elements. The last engagement was fought at Rainy Springs, near the Coso mines, in March, 1867. With this defeat, the Paiutes ended their long struggle. The five year Paiute Rebellion had cost the white man 60 lives.

During the first five years of existence, the Camp Independence garrison was almost totally occupied with protecting white settlers from marauding Indians. With the Indian problem resolved, the remaining ten years of the post's existence settled down to the drab, almost uneventful life that characterized so many of the western military posts. Nevertheless, throughout its fifteen year span of life, Camp Independence had a definite influence on the pattern of valley settlement.

Disaster struck Owens Valley on March 26, 1872. A severe earthquake at 2:30 in the morning leveled several of the valley towns and badly damaged the adobe and wood buildings at Camp Independence. Rebuilding of the post began promptly. The army set aside $30,000 (a goodly figure in those days) for reconstruction of the camp, and this sum was used to put up substantail frame buildings. When the rebuilding was completed, the camp put on a grand open house, entertaining the entire valley.

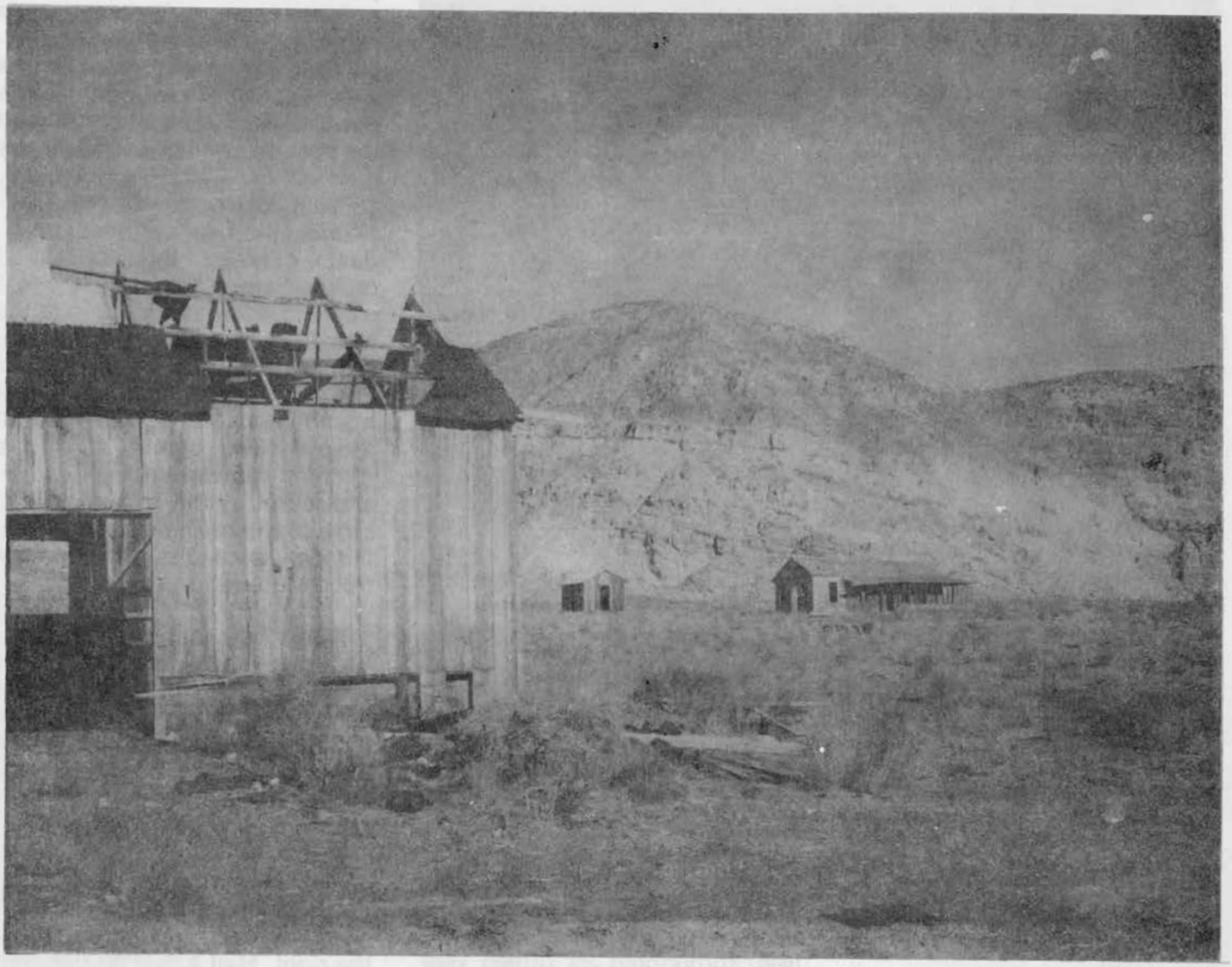
By the late '70's, it became obvious that Owens Valley no longer needed a military post. The Indians had long been pacified, and Inyo County law enforcement officers were capable of handling civil disturbances. For several years orders were expected that would close down Camp Independence, and the post was well prepared for the eventuality. Finally, on July 9, 1877, Captain Alexander MacGowan, the final camp commandant, received the anticipated order. Before sunrise the next morning, in what was perhaps the fastest close-down of a military post in history of the west, the garrison began the long, hot march south to the railroad at Mojave. The departure of the soldiers was viewed with sorrow and regret by the valley settlers, some of whom lined the streets of Independence at dawn to bid the troops farewell.

After the camp was abandoned, the land was opened to settlers. The buildings were demolished to furnish lumber for the towns and farms of the valley. The old military post gradually fell into decay, finally disappearing from view entirely.

Today, travelers driving north on US Highway 395, two miles north of Independence, pass a narrow paved road veering off to the right. Half a mile on this road is a large historical marker indicating the sage-covered site of Old Camp Independence. Nearby, a few shallow, badly eroded caves are visible, the sole reminders of this proud military post that once guarded the valley.

Historian Helen S. Giffen has written a fitting epilogue to old Camp Independence:

> "No longer the bugle call echoes through the valley, the ghost of Camp Independence walks no more. Its site lies forlorn and deserted save for a ragged cabin or two in the shadow of the cottonwoods. The life of the pioneer is over, and so is that of the camp which was established in the shadow of the Sierra in the valley of the Owens River."



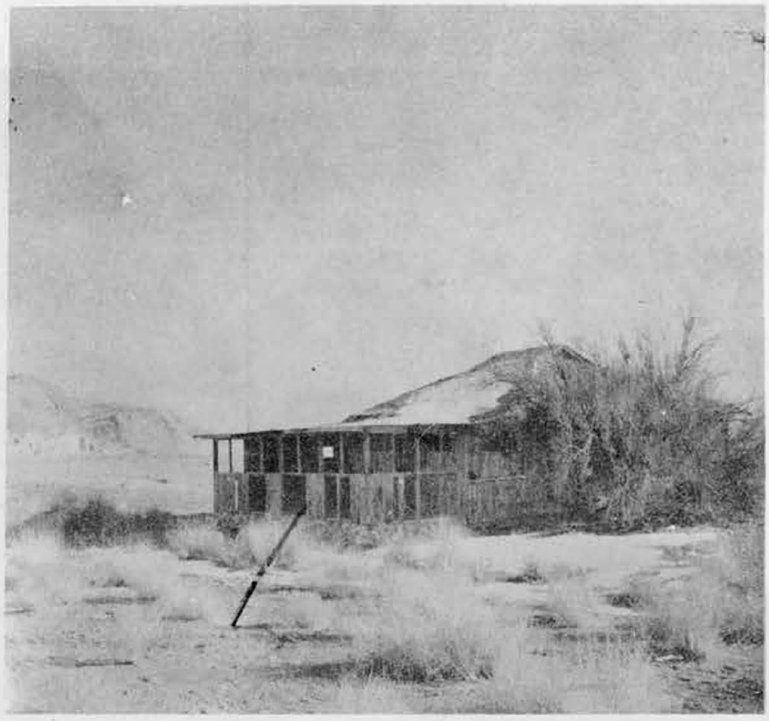
Remains of Swansea, the town next to Keeler.

TAMING OF A TOWN

Deputy Marshal Dan Thomas looked up from checking over a few "wanted" posters. The rattling of the windows and the flapping noise on the roof made by a loose sheet of galvanized tin meant the wind was coming up. "I must get up there and nail that darn tin one of these days," Dan thought. He gazed out the window and watched a large tumbleweed slowly roll by to join others in the corner of the wire fence where a pile of bottles and rusty cans where half buried in the sand. From his little shack he could look out over the Owens Valley and the I.D. Soda Works where he had worked for a couple of weeks when he first hit town.

Dan had been appointed deputy marshal of Keeler, California, around 1918 when two other deputies had been run out of town by some of the local hoodlums. Dan made it very clear to the county sheriff that he would take the job only if he were given a free hand to clean up Keeler in his own way. And that's the way it was done. In order to learn what really was going on he had taken a job for two weeks at the Soda Works as a common laborer and had mixed with the boys. None of them had suspected he was an undercover officer.

One day he heard of a wild party some of the boys were going to pull off the next pay day. They planned to bring in a few girls from Mojave and a few cases of whiskey and tear the town wide open. It was then that Dan thought he would show his hand.



Abandoned house on desert near Keeler.

so the next day at lunch time he showed the boys his badge and credentials. He advised the boys not to pull anything rough for he would hate to have to take any of them in; if they wanted to have a wild party, there were plenty of empty shacks out on the desert and away from town. Dan explained he had been hired to calm down Keeler and that was just what he was going to do.

Yes, things were a little slow now that he had everthing under control. But it was not always that way. Sitting there in his little office, he thought over some of the unpleasant tasks he had had to do. He remembered an undesirable by the name of Carrol Whity, who just wouldn't work or pay his bills and had some of the merchants buffaloed. An all-around no-good bully, he had been up before the justice of the peace so many times the justice was fed up with him. He turned to Dan and said, "Just what shall we do with him?"

"I'll tell you what I am going to do with him," Dan said. "I'm going to give him until sundown to clear out of town or I will come after him and he will wish he had left."

Whity spoke up when he realized he was at the end of his rope. "If you will let me stay in town, I'll get a job, work hard and keep out of trouble."

"If you really mean that, they need help over at the Soda Works on the west side of the Owens Lake," Dan suggested. "You get a job and keep out of trouble and we'll get along just fine."

Whity did go over and go to work; in fact, he worked for a whole year to the day. Then he drew his pay and returned to Keeler, where he got on a bender and told his old drinking pals that he had come back to shoot Dan Thomas. Some friends of the marshal relayed his threats, so Dan thought he would call on Whity and have a talk with him to find out if he really wanted a shoot-out or if it was just whiskey talk. Whity had moved into a little shack at the edge of town.

As Dan started over to Whity's, someone sent word to Sheriff Logan to come over right away for there was going to be a shoot-out. As Dan neared the cabin, the front door was partly open and he was sure he had seen Whity peak out, but as he came closer the door shut. He knew Whity was inside so Dan called out that he wanted to talk with him. The only answer he got was five slugs through the door. Dan was standing to the side of the door or he would have swallowed a dose of lead. Whity was using a ten-shot automatic.

While Whity concentrated on the front of the house, Dan slipped around to the back door which was partly open. Dan kicked it wide and told Whity to drop his gun. Instead, Whity wheeled around to get off a shot but Dan dropped him in his tracks. Whity fired as he fell but, being off balance, the lead struck the wall a foot over Dan's head. The shooting had stopped when

Sheriff Logan pulled up. He found Dan standing over Whity who lay there on the floor.

"What a foolish waste of life," Dan said sadly. "All I wanted to do was talk some sense into him."

"Don't feel bad about it," Logan replied. "I'd have done the same thing if I'd been in your spot. Just let him lay, and get some of his friends to come to bury him. No use to hold an inquest."

The sensible people of Keeler knew that Dan did what he had to do and that was all there was to it, but the hardcases in town looked at it in a different light. To them the law was always in the wrong, and there were some threats on Dan's life. One night soon after Whity was buried, Dan started to go through the batwing doors of the China Hotel. The bar was on the ground floor and it had been one of Whity's hangouts. Quite a few of his drinking pals were there that night. One big fellow, half again as big as Dan, shouted, "Get out of here! You're not wanted!"

"Get out of my way," the marshal answered. "I'm coming in."

The big boy took a swing at Dan, but Dan ducked and drew his .44 and smacked the big fellow alongside his head. He fell to the floor with a little trickle of blood running down his face. Dan turned to the rest of the barflies and toughs and asked, "Do any of the rest of you want to put me out?"

But aside from a few nasty looks, they all went back to their drinking.

Dan had two small sons. Joe Yow, the Chinese storekeeper, had a little girl. There was also a little Indian boy in Keeler and where you would see one, you would see all four of them. One Christmas time, Dan drove out into the mountains and found a small juniper. The kids strung popcorn and tinsel of different colors and fixed up some Christmas tree candles. They put cotton at the base of the tree for snow, and Joe Yow furnished candy and lichee nuts for the party. He and Dan were very good friends. On Christmas Eve, while all the children whom Dan's two boys had invited were having the time of their young lives, the marshal just happened to look toward the window and see a man's face peering in. Dan slipped out the kitchen door and came up behind him.

"What are you up to?" he asked.

"I mean no harm," said the man as he turned around. And to Dan's surprise it was the big man he had pistol-whipped at the bar. "You know, Marshal," he said, "I would like to apologize to you for making a fool of myself that

Old railroad station at Keeler.

night at the hotel. I was drinking or I would have never acted that way. Tonight I was just passing your house on my way to town and saw the Christmas tree and the kids through the window, and I just had to come closer to watch them. I have always been lonesome on Christmas Eve, with no place to go but out with a bunch of drunks. I never knew who my dad was, and my ma was a saloon girl. So long as I can remember I've been in mining camps. I've been on my own since I was ten years old."

"Well," Dan suggested, "why don't you come in and join our party?"

The man said nothing for a minute, then, "I'll be right back. I have to go on to town first."

Dan went back in and joined the party and in about half an hour the man showed up with toys and a few boxes of candy and placed them under the tree. Well, the party was a big success and when the children all went home, the big fellow shook Dan's hand and thanked him. On departing, he volunteered, "If you ever need me to help quiet down somebody, just call and I'll come running." After that he and the marshal were good friends.

Keeler had a population of 8,000 of which 500 were Chinese. Most of them worked in the mines, but some had stores, laundries, and restaurants, and one operated a hotel. Joe Yow had a large dugout under his store where the Chinamen gambled. Fan-tan was one of their favorite games. If a fight started they never called the law, they settled their own disputes. That was just fine with Dan.

As the marshal sat in his little office that day, reminiscing and looking out the window across the dry soda flats, he was brought back from his thoughts by a knock on his door.

"Come in, it's unlocked," he called and in walked Sheriff Logan.

The big man sat down and fanned himself with his hat. "That wind is sure hot," he remarked.

"Sure is," agreed Dan. "I've just been watching little dust devils doing their skip dance down there on the dry lake bed. I'll bet a real strong wind is in the making before the day is over."

Sheriff Logan listened to the roof rattle. "When you going to nail down that loose tin on your roof?"

"I can't get up there now, the wind would blow the ladder over. And you know the old saying - when the wind isn't blowing, I don't think of it," replied Dan.

"Well, Sheriff, what do I owe the honor of your visit to? You just didn't drop in to tell me the roof rattled. Or do you have some poor old bootlegger in mind for me to pick up?"

"You're wrong on both counts," said Logan. "I've had quite a few complaints of sacks of gold ore being stolen over in Shepherds Canyon."

Every small mine owner over there hauled or packed his sacks of ore to the main road where they were picked up once a week and brought to Keeler, then shipped on the narrow gauge to Sparks, Nevada. From there the ore was hauled on the regular run to Salt Lake City to be processed.

"It seems each time the freight wagon picks up the ore, a sack here and there is missing," Logan said. "The miners claim that they are never hit at the same place twice in a row so they can't stay there and watch their sacks of ore. They have to keep on working to keep bacon and beans on the table. I'd like to have you ride over there with me and see what we can find out."

The next day they rode over the mountains to Shepherds Canyon to have a talk with the miners, all of whom told the same story. One time they would lose one sack and then another time a couple of sacks. All seemed to think it had to be one of themselves who was doing the stealing - changing it to other sacks and shipping it with their own ore.

The two officers had nothing to go on and were just about to call it a day when they spotted a lone miner's cabin up the canyon. "Let's see if we can find out anything up at that shack," Sheriff Logan said. So they drove up to it. At the front door a miner was looking them over as they got out of the sheriff's car. The miner seemed a little nervous.

As they walked toward the door, he called out, "What brings you up here, Sheriff?"

"Why," said Logan, "I've

come to pick up the fellow that's been stealing the ore down in the canyon."

The miner didn't say a word. He just stepped behind the door and pulled a .44 from the holster that hung on the wall. He put the gun to his head and pulled the trigger. At the report of the gun, both officers drew and rushed to the door - but all they found was the miner on the floor, gasping for his last breath.

"Well," mused Logan, "this about wraps up the case. He must have thought we had him dead to rights and he didn't want to face a miner's jury. Poor devil, all he had to do was answer a few questions and he would still be alive, but I guess he just panicked."

After they put the corpse in the back of their Ford, they looked around to see if they could find out anything about him. They searched the cabin and mine shaft but found nothing - not even any stolen ore sacks. All they discovered were three silver dollars on the body and none of the other miners in the canyon even knew his name or where he came from. He had stayed to himself and never mixed with the others. So the officers took the body back to Keeler for burial at the county's expense. Somewhere around his cabin he must have hidden his money, for his death put a stop to the ore stealing. They had found the right man all right.

One day Death Valley Scotty stopped by Dan's office to notify him that an old miner had passed away in his cabin over in what is now the ghost town of Ballarat in Panamint Valley. The only name he was ever known by was just "Judge." Old Judge was a good friend of Dan's from back in the days when Ballarat was a good mining town.

Scotty said, "I stopped by to say hello to Judge and I found him dead in his bunk. Don't know how long he has been dead but he is puffed up and smells to high heaven."

At this time Dan was acting as coroner as well as deputy marshal. Scotty said on leaving, "I surely don't envy you your job."

Dan put a shovel, pick, and a piece of canvas in his car and took off for Ballarat. When he arrived at Judge's cabin it was really hot. As he opened the door, the odor just about floored him but he went in and opened up the windows and the back door. Then he went outside and waited for the air to clear a little. As the cabin only had a dirt floor, Dan decided to dig a shallow grave and roll Judge into it. He dug it alongside the bunk and spread part of the canvas in the bottom. Then he took the pick and rolled the old boy from the bunk. The other half of the canvas was pulled over him and dirt shoveled in. It seems like a rough way to bury a friend, but there was no choice.

Dan went outside for some fresh air. When the air cleared up a bit he returned to the cabin and looked through Judge's effects but could find nothing to indicate he had kinfolks. While looking around, however, Dan found a pile of trash in one corner. Under it was a can full to the top with five, ten and twenty dollar gold pieces. Dan went outside and counted them, and there was exactly $2,000 it that can. The money was turned over to the sheriff's office and in turn he delivered it over to the state, as no one showed up to claim it. Some of the boys told Dan he should have kept the gold for himself but Dan shook his head. "I might be a lot of things, but one thing I'm not - I wouldn't steal a dead man's gold."

Dan said the first time he knew the old man, Judge and his partner were hard rock miners and lived in this same cabin in which he died. The two partners got the idea they would save up their money and start a saloon in their cabin. It would beat mining all to pieces. So they worked long and hard and saved every cent they could. Judge had a little money to begin with, and when they figured they had enough capital they rented a four-horse team, wagon and trailer and drove to San Pedro for a load of whiskey, wine, and beer. All during the long trip there and back they didn't drink a drop on the road until they pulled up to the saddleback where the Argus and Slate range of mountains meet. There they could see Ballarat about six miles down on the desert floor. It was then that Judge pulled the team off to the side of the road, turned to his partner and said, "There's good old Ballarat down there, where

we are going to become rich. Let's pull a cork and drink to our success."

"I'll drink to that," replied his partner.

So one toast called for another until the bottle was empty and the long shadows of Slate Mountain were slowly creeping toward the town below.

"I reckon we'd better be moving along," Judge said.

Judge was handling the ribbons; he eased the brake, cracked the whip, and away they went down the long mountain grade. He was having the time of his life popping the whip and letting out yells that would do a Comanche Indian credit. But Judge soon realized he was in trouble. At the rate of speed he was going the brakes wouldn't hold the wagon and the single-trees were hitting the teams' legs. On a curve the right wheels went over the bank, and the wagon and trailer piled up in the head of the canyon, pulling the teams with them. The partners jumped and were only bruised up but the load of booze was just about a total loss. This sobered up the partners quick and they were trying to untangle the teams when a long-line freight wagon came by. The freighter and his helper gave them a hand and got the teams on the road. Then Judge looked through the mess and found a few cases that were not broken. He and his partner loaded them on the freighter's wagon, tied the two teams behind, and took off for Ballarat.

Knowing their business venture was a flop, they invited the freighter and his helper and a bunch of their miner friends to a free booze party which lasted for a couple of days. Then it took Judge and his cabin-mate a day or two to sober up before they were ready to go back to work in the mines.

When Dan took over Keeler, it was called a dry town. They had what was known as local option. The people of each town could go to the polls, and if a majority voted dry, she went dry. This was before national prohibition covered the whole country.

Keeler was full of bootleggers and every bar sold drinks on the side. Dan knew what was going on but he also knew that the men who worked the mines for long shifts needed some fun and relaxation. Unless they got rough and started fights, he just looked the other way. But the sporting girls - that was a different matter. The straight-laced women of the town had let Dan know the girls had to go. I think some of them were just a little jealous, and worried about their own menfolks.

Dan served notice on the girls to leave town, but just before each payday at the mines, a few of them would show up on the stage from Mojave. Then Dan was sure to get orders from the good sisters to get rid of them. The marshal would call on the girls and tell them they could stay over the weekend but be sure to be on the stage come Monday morning. He never had any trouble with any of them. One good thing could be said about the sporting element - bartenders, gamblers and girls - whenever a collection was taken up for a worthy cause, some widow and children whose father had been killed in a mine or a gunfight, you could always figure on these people putting gold coins in the hat while the so-called better half of the town would put in a few silver dollars.

Dan delt with both classes as he saw fit and kept the town under control. Another thing he tried to handle with common sense was the Chinese trouble. He let them settle their own disputes, for that was the way they wanted it. One day storekeeper Joe Yow asked Dan to call the doctor from Big Pine across the valley to see if he could do anything for an old Chinaman staying at Joe's place, as all the herbs he had taken didn't seem to do any good. After the doctor looked him over, he told Dan and Joe Yow there was nothing he could do. It would be only a matter of a day or two before he would die.

After the doctor left, Joe Yow said to Dan, "Poor old man, vely much suffer long time now. I think poor old man he die tonight, no more suffer."

Dan didn't think much of it at the time but the next day he met Joe Yow on the street and asked him how the patient was feeling. Joe Yow only smiled and said, "Oh, he die last night, like I say. No more suffer."

Dan kept his thoughts to himself. Maybe the old Chinaman did die of his ailment or maybe Joe Yow kindly helped him along - who knows?

One day Dan's phone rang two long rings and one short. That was his call. On the other end of the line was the Cerro-Gordo Mine owner, Mr. Gordon. He told Dan one of his men had fallen down a mine shaft and hit the bottom about 400 feet below. He was just a pile of broken bones

and what should Gordon do with the body? As long as it lay in the mine, none of the miners would go to work down there.

"Put him in a pine box," Dan said, "and bring him over to my office. We can lay him on the two saw-horses in my vacant back room and cover him with soap powder to keep him from smelling until we can hold an inquest."

The miners are a superstitious lot, especially the Chinese. Dan and a friend were sitting in the marshal's office which joined the room that held the corpse. As the evening was warm, Dan had both office windows slightly open for a breeze. At each there was a window shade which had a string with a metal ring attached to let the shade up and down. As the breeze filtered through, it caused the metal ring to hit the glass and make a little tapping noise which seemed to be coming from the room the corpse was in. What made it more weird, the tapping sounded like a miner driving a drill way down in a shaft.

"If I didn't know what that was I believe I'd take off," Dan's friend said. "It sure sounds spooky to me."

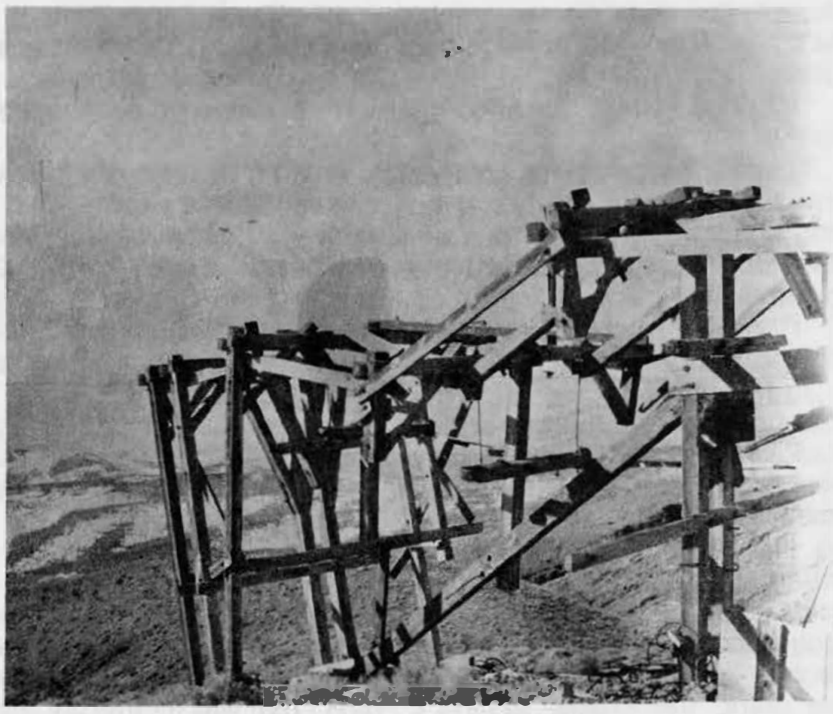
"Say," Dan laughed. "I'll tell you how we can have some fun. You go over to the hotel bar and spread the word around that ever since I put the dead miner in my shack, it's been haunted. A tapping noise comes from the pine box he's in like the miner was hammering on a drill."

Before long, quite a crowd gathered in front of the marshal's office. Dan opened the door and put his finger to his lips for them to be real quiet. Then he motioned for them to come in. A few entered but the majority stayed outside; if they had to run they didn't want anything in their way. One little Irishman, who went by the name of Pat, had a few drinks under his belt and barged right in like he was going to take over, ghost or no ghost.

"Where's the haunt at?" he yelled. "I'm not afraid of the devil or man!"

Dan took him over to the door leading into the dark room where the corpse was laid out. Pat listened. He stood there a minute before a breeze blew through the room; then the metal rings began their tap, tap, tap.

"Saints be praised!" cried Pat as he crossed himself. "He's driving a drill in shaft number nine! Out of me way!" and he burst through the crowd, taking Dan's screen door off at the hinges. The miners on the outside took off with the Irishman and all headed back to the bar. When Pat downed a double whiskey and calmed a bit, he swore he had heard the dead miner hammering on a drill. And no one disputed his word - not even Dan.



Salt Tram of the Saline Valley and Swansea.

Cerro Gordo today as seen from the air. Hotel is at right center.

The town that built Los Angeles

CERRO GORDO

At an elevation of 9,217 feet in the Inyo Range of the Sierra Nevadas of California spreads out a small shelf on the side of Cerro Gordo Mt. On this little shelf, overlooking Owens Lake, the town of "Fat Hill" Cerro Gordo came into being.

Today Cerro Gordo is a ghost town located at the end of a road that offers a real challenge to a modern car. In fact even a horse finds it rough going and the people who know their mountains will recommend a good mule for the trip.

The view from the shelf edge looks down upon Owens Lake and its valley gives one a feeling of emptyness. Three things are missing from the landscape. No longer do the three foot gauge rails of the Carson & Colorado Railroad crawl across the desert flatland to end in Keeler as they once did. Known to railroad buffs as the Slim Princess this railroad from Mound House, Nevada reached Keeler, California, Aug. 1, 1883. Upon completion it's owner Darius Mills came out from New York to see his railroad for the first time. Behind a puffing little engine his narrow guage coach trundled for two long, dreary dusty days until end of track was reached at the base of Fat Hill.

When asked, "Well Sir, What do you think of the road?" Banker Darius Mills of New York City fixed the questioner with a gun barrel look and uttered one of the classic statements of railroad lore. "Sir, we either built it 300 miles too long or 300 years too soon."

The last section of trackage of this little line was abandoned April 30, 1960. The Slim Princess is now just a memory.

Another view of Cerro Gordo.

The lake bed of Owens Lake is still there but the shimmering water and its little steamers plying back and forth are gone. Only a dry salt incrusted swamp remains. The waters are taken away to quench the thirst of Los Angeles.

The once pround towers of the cable tramway no longer march from the lake's edge across the desert to climb up the mountain side for six miles to the mines on the shelf on the side of Fat Hill.

However these things were not there in 1865 when Pablo Flores, Juan Ochon and another miner found a mineralized out-cropping and built a veso to smelt their first ore samples. The vesos were crude rock furnaces at best, but in the 60's prospecting was also crude.

Pablo watched the blue-gray ore being smelted. This time it had to be pay day. It had not been an easy climb up from the lake. At 9,000 feet the air around Cerro Gordo was cool. Unless Pablo made his strike soon there would be no gay nights during the Summer in Los Angeles far to the south, when it was too hot to prospect the desert mountains.

At last the first run from the veso began to flow. It oozed out and filled the hole dug to receive it. The three men waited. The gob of ore cooled. Then by crude means it was determined that the ore of Fat Hill was rich. It would run nearly four hundred dollars a ton.

Before anything else could be done the ritual of discovery had to be performed. Each man swore, with the Virgin as his witness, that the secret of Fat Hill would be their own. No word would pass their lips.

Like all promised vows to eternal silence the vow to all that is holy was violated and before Pablo and his friends could realize the fullness of their treasures in the pleasure palaces of Los Angeles the secret leaked out. As in so many cases the answer could be stated simply. "But I only told my cousin."

By the end of 1866 the population of Cerro Gordo reached 700 people. The rush for silver was on. From wherever rainbow chasers come they came to answer the call to riches.

At Owens Lake the miners paused to clean up, wash and cool off beside the quiet waters after days of travel across the desert. The climb to the top of the hill did not end in a miners paradise. At that elevation a harsh cold life awaited. Blizzards and extreme cold spells were all too common in the Winter.

Building costs were high. Freight rates boomed and a steady stream of wagons powered by 10 to 16 mules bumped and creaked across the desert brush lands following the never ending ruts. These ruts left Los Angeles 200 miles and 18 days away by way of 6th Street to the San

Fernando Valley. The first real climb came at Cahuenga Pass. Going out this road was rough, but coming in to Los Angeles it was sheer misery. At Cahuenga the west bound wagons had to be doubled over the pass. The lead wagon was cut off from the trailer and dragged to the top and blocked. The team was taken back and the second wagon brought up. The two wagons were hooked up and braked down the other side of the hill. From the foot of Cahuenga the ruts wound through the Soledad Hills to Red Rock Canyon with its weirdly flaming walls. From the rocks the ruts headed out across the Mojave Desert until the shadow of the towering Sierras was reached and then they turned north following along a route very close to the present Highway 6 to Owens Lake.

The first bullion shipment from Cerro Gordo arrived in Los Angeles in 1868. The rich load of bullion did not stay in Los Angeles, but it did generate a lot of excitement as it was unloaded. The treasure was destined for San Francisco where it would be smelted and refined. The silver would be separated from the lead and sent to the U.S. Mint.

From Los Angeles the rich shipment was sent by train to Wilmington over the rails of the Los Angeles and San Pedro R.R. This little railroad was no great shakes as a transportation system and its little engine the "Gabriel" had to work at its job of moving cars along the bumpy roadbed. Stages made the trip to the harbor 31 minutes quicker, but the train was cheaper. At the end of the track the shipment was unloaded again and loaded onto lighters and taken out to be reloaded on ships of the coastal trade. In time it did reach the mint, and in time it did become coinage.

Before bullion trains could leave the Fat Hill the ore had to be mined. Claims were staked out all over the hillside. Some claims were worked for ore and some were worked for quick profits. More worked the market than worked for ore. Over 75 claims were patented in and about the little bench on the side of the hill.

One of the "better" parts of the road to Cerro Gordo.

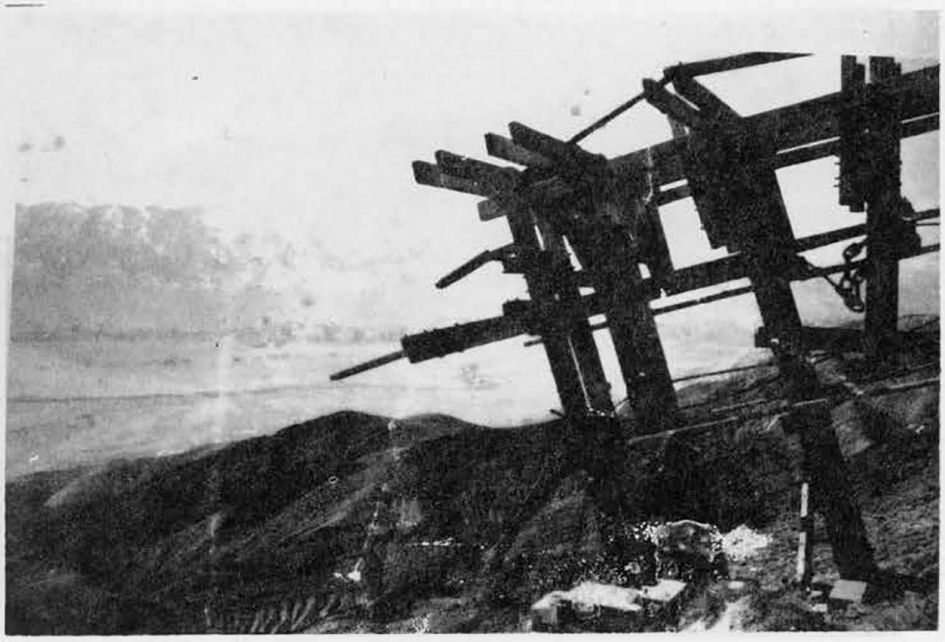
What happened to Pablo Flores? History does not say but it is hoped that he did have his gay days in Los Angeles.

In the first wave of adventurers to the hill came a man by the name of Mortimer W. Belshaw. Though a wanderer of gold and silver camps Mr. Belshaw was not destined to labor with a pick and shovel. New York was his home, but gold and silver were his dream. His shrewd eyes quickly recognized where the treasure was located. While others dug for ore and pushed shafts into the mountain walls Mr. Belshaw bought up all the galena deposits he could locate. As a mining engineer he knew the lead content was vital in the silver smelting process.

The trail from Keeler to the shelf on the side of the hill was a real beast killer. For the shack lined street on the edge of the lake the road headed straight across the desert and then up. On the way up it was a steep twisting tortuous climb.

Belshaw saw this trail road as a situation that needed his engineering skill. With the aid of the other mine owners he surveyed and built a road through the wagon-narrow valleys and along the ledges that hemmed in the canyons. In a very short time the Belshaw Toll Road was open for service. On the first day that the road was ready for traffic the other miners found out just how shrewd the builder was. Because when he said, "Toll Road," he meant Toll Road. From the first day he charged toll on every wagon that used his road. This included the wagons of those who helped him build it.

With the road in operation Belshaw went to work on the hill. A pipe line brought in water from the only adequate springs. A smelter was built on his Union Mine property. Bullion bars shaped like loaves of bread weighing from 90 to 110 lbs. Each were shipped out by the wagon load. The charcoal smelters were reducing four tons of bullion a day. Bullion that came from ore assaying as high as $750 a ton. By adding a water jacket to the smelter the production jumped to ten tons a day. By 1868 he was producing silver-lead bullion at a rate that was faster than it had ever been produced in the U.S. before.



All that remains of the tramway down the mountain.

To speed up production a second smelter was built at Swansee, about two miles north of Keeler. These two smelters reduced 500 tons of ore a month.

One of the worst sections of road on the entire trip to Los Angeles was the stretch of sand around the south end of Owens Lake. Here the sand had been churned to a powder that was hub deep. To solve this team killing horror two steamers were built to haul the bullion across the wide lake.

The "Bessie Brady" and "Mollie Stevens" were soon hauling bullion bars across the lake faster than the freighters could take them away. At one time 30,000 ingots were stacked along the beach at Cartago. The guards used the bullion as bricks to build crude cabins for protection against the weather. The little steamers were delivering bullion at the rate of 15 tons a day.

Even though the smelters were turning out treasure at an unheard of rate the days of success for Belshaw on Fat Hill were numbered. A three act play that would tell of the death of Cerro Gordo as a fortune producer was about to begin.

Act One would find a rival group who would harass the original developer with suits. Act Two would feature the slow death scene as the ore body began to play out. Act Three would feature the horrors of the villian "Fire" who would sweep through the camp. The final curtain would close on Mortimer W. Belshaw's Cerro Gordo adventure in Oct. 1879 as a mule team carried the last load of bullion down from Fat Hill.

Left behind were legends and tragedy. Legends say that both ships that plied the lake lost a load of silver bars that was supposed to have slipped its lashings on the "Bessie Brady" and to have splashed overboard never to be recovered. At midlake the "Mollie Stevens" was reported to have casually capsized and scattered its tons of treasure across the lake bottom. Those are nice stories and they help to make it seem worth while to search the old lake bed. If the stories are true then these electronic gadgets are not as good as some people say that they are.

China Stope bears witness to the tragic life in the mines. Mining at the 200 foot level 29 celestials toiled. Either by ignorance or by skimpiness on the company's part they neglected to timber where they should have. No one came out after the cave-in. The dust settled, the roar quieted, and the unnumbered stope at the 200 foot level became known as "China Stope". The other shafts went deeper and deeper in search of ore.

By 1881 Cerro Gordo was a ghost camp. State Geologist W.A. Goodyear visited the camp in 1888 and made a thorough study of the area. After exploring the labrinth of tunnels and testing his samples thoroughly he wrote in his report. "It is strange that this mine, the richest in Inyo County, should be deserted." Stranger still was the fact that this statement printed in a public document was read by many and was ignored by all.

Thirty years after Belshaw departed from "Fat Hill" and left his Union Mining Co. a pile of burned out rubble Mr. Louis D. Gordon began exploring the area. During the year 1911 Gordon began a very thorough survey of the mines. Silver and galena he found in reasonable amounts, but he also found something else--zinc. Zinc had always been present, but the miners in the early boom days were silver and gold hunters. Zinc was just an unnecessary by-product to them. By 1900 zinc was becoming an industrial metal to be reckoned with and Gordon saw in it a fortune.

The year 1914 saw Cerro Gordo booming again. It was not the booming of yesteryear that included brawling, shooting and hell raising. It was the booming of a well organized mining venture. Mr. Louis D. Gordon was not a man to be fooled with. When he took over a project a man worked and earned his pay. Gordon also spent money on his operations. Electric power poles paraded across the desert floor and up and over the hills.

At a cost of $250,000 a six mile long tramway extended up from Keeler.

Forty tons of ore was the tram's capacity. The pull of gravity caused the loaded buckets to slide down hill pulling the empty ones up. A large brake drum at Cerrc Gordo with its three brake bands controlled the speed. A huge electric motor gave the added shove to keep things moving. Special buckets could be switched on or off the cable at either end of the line. Quite a series of special buckets were designed to perform special services. There were barrels to carry heavy grease and oil. One special rig was built with a chain and ratcheted device to carry heavy pieces of equipment from the rail head.

That the tramway had its "dog days" is evidenced by the long lengths of cable coiled around the big boulders on the canyon floor.

It is said that some of the more hardy souls rode the empty buckets up the six miles from Keeler. It could be done, as the buckets were large enough, but what a ride it must have been! For the first two miles the line progressed from tower to tower as straight as an arrow. However from the first ridge the tramway was away and across the sky. At places the buckets clanked along over 800 feet above the canyon floor. The only stipulation said to be required by the company was that each passenger carry a canteen of water. This precaution was just in case the cable stopped for a few hours under the boiling desert sun.

Another view of the Tramway.

That Mr. Gordon knew how to run a big project and make it pay is evidenced by newspaper stores that reported that the bulk of the United States zinc output came from Cerro Gordo.

In 1916 Gordon leased the Swansea Chief mine and bought the Wright properties for $3,000. He was a man to do business with on a large scale and had a sense of humor. A day letter dated Laws, Calif. Oct. 12, 1916 to J.C. Climo at Keeler will illustrate his dry sense of humor. It read:

"Loading slag in stock cars is mighty bad practice. Two stock cars out of Keeler this morning loaded with slag. Inform Billinger we have no contract to ballast this roadbed."

Gordon's Cerro Gordo Mines Co. also had its labor troubles. A contract with Murray and Ready on Towne Street in Los Angeles was the source of hired help at first. A study of telegrams received at the mines from Murray & Ready offer the following items----------

10-14-16

"Have flunkey. Will leave Sunday night."

11-14-16

"Have good flunky, can you use him."

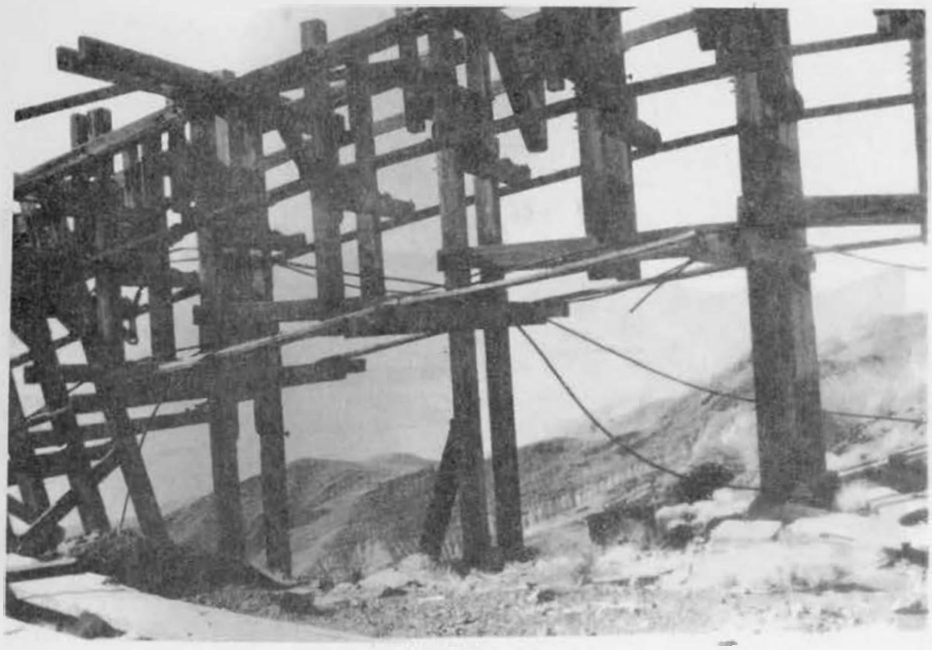
1-18-17

"One minor left our Frisco office before we could stop him, please find place for him."

"Coming down from "Fat Hill" Murray & Ready received such orders at."

12-31-16

"Send new cook at once. Murphy going tomorrow Jones



The Tramway.

will fill place until new cook arrives."

However by the end of 1917 the job was too much for one organization to handle and the Big Four Employment Agency, Hummell Brothers Pacific Audit 7 System Co. were called on to fill orders for laborers.

When there was not a shortage of men to plague Gordon there was the ever present railroad car shortage. Ore out of the mines had quite an adventuresome trip. Down the mountain side went the ore buckets which dumpedd into the narrow gauge cars of the Carson & Colorado R.R., and hauled off to Owenyo. At Owenyo the narrow gauge cars dumped their loads into standard gauge cars of the Southern Pacific R.R., and from there it traveled to its final destination.

A telegram from T.F. Rowlands to L.D. Gordon dated 10-3-17 sums up the situation.

Ogden, Utah 10-3-17
L.D. Gordon
Keeler, Calif.

Now that we are well supplied with men Mina and Owenyo to transfer cars promptly, I feel confident can keep you supplied with cars Keeler, with some regularity. On the other hand you understand how very hard pressed railroads are at this time for equipment as well as help. Under circumstaces cannot possibly promise always have cars you require but will do very best I can by you.

T.F. Rowlands

On Dec. 23, 1916 the Christmas spirit was settling over Cerro Gordo. Men were preparing to get out. Early in the afternoon snow began to fall. By noon Christmas Day the heaviest snow fall in years settled over the hill. A high wind whipped through the canyons and over the ridges. The power lines were soon on the ground. Snow drifted over the tram towers in places and the camp was out of coal.

A message from Keeler tells the story.

Keeler, Calif. Noon Dec. 25, 1916
James C Cline
1430 West 49 St. Los Angeles

Heaviest snow-fall in years accompanied by high wind. Power off and telephone lines on ground in several places. Out of coal at mine. Car coal arrives Keeler yesterday. Will get supply to mine as soon as can run tram. Wind still blowing fiercely with heavy snow still falling. This telegram to Keeler by special messenger -- will do everything possible to get things in running order again. Merry Xmas.

H.G. Rose

There was coal at Keeler but until the tram was working the coal would stay there and Cerro Gordo would be a cold place to spend Christmas.

As the snow and wind quieted down H.G. Rose made a survey of the facilities. He found nine of the steel towers that carried the power lines blown over. He put men to work getting the phone lines into operation and put in a call for six good miners and six muckers. By Thursday his crew had the lines in and the tram moving supplies up the hill again.

To show that things were booming at the mine J.R. Davis made the following report on ore conditions. "Six inches of ore at the 150 foot level assayed $288, twenty inches $3,000. Hillman reports today that vein has widened out and was richer than when I was there Saturday. Looks like important find."

Twenty railroad cars a day were being loaded and the empty ore buckets took back supplies. But it was not all smooth going. That trouble was beginning is evidenced in the following message from L.D. Gordon in San Francisco to J.C. Climo in Keeler.

San Francisco 25-16
J.C. Climo Keeler, Calif.

Send at once responsible party to Springs at Pumping Station with instructions to remain there continuous and to hold possession of Springs against any and all trespassers and to use any means necessary to do this. Party should be furnished with provisions and bed and should remain at Springs until you receive further notice from me.

L.D. Gordon

Mr. Louis D. Gordon may have been an eastern city man, but he knew the way to protect his property and rights in the truly western manner. Water in a desert mining camp is a commodity that ranks next to gold. A spring is a thing to be held at all costs. The "Fat Hillers" arrived and took possession and promptly discouraged any and all trespassers. But this was the year 1917 and things had changed greatly since 1866-80 era when Belshaw took what he wanted and kept it. The enemy now did not play the game according to the rules of "Mr. Colt and Winchester."

A woman by the name of Simons was the enemy. She did not answer the call of the west by hiring a crew of gun slicks to go down and secure her share of the sparkling H2o. Instead she was very lady-like and secured a simple court order. A court order that said in substance, "You Sir, turn over 50 gallons of water per day to this poor woman and make it snappy."

That the court order was disquieting to Mr. Gordon is evidenced in his telegram to J.C. Climo on March 9, 1917.

Restraining order is as Marmby states. Furnish specified amount of water tomorrow and Sunday and wire me fully exact condition Saturday night and injury done to us by furnishing specified amount of water. Use Bedford McNeil Code.

L.D. Gordon

Now Mr. J.C. Climo was not a man to be pushed around. He had possession of the spring, and he gave the specified 50 gallons each day. However he kept his men at the spring and not one drop over 50 gallons was drained off.

Looking down towards Owens Valley.

Gordon also knew the temper of Climo and sent him a brief note that said, "I know how you feel but furnish water in accordance with court order or we will be in contempt of court. I am getting very busy and luck will change soon."

Eventually the order was cut to thirty gallons and later Gordon got full control of the spring and its water, but another battle was brewing. The stock market was causing anxiety. The big squeeze was on. The Cerro Gordo zinc boom was being felt in the east. Big money men studied the reports and they liked what they read.

Cerro Gordo itself was a going concern. The population was nowhere near the 3,000 mark of 1871, but it was livable town. An ice plant with a ten ton capacity was installed. Good houses were built, and conditions were better than good for the men. An electric hoist was installed and safety precaustions were enforced.

With the close of the First World War Gordon was being pressed by outside interests who wanted to gain control of the operations on Fat Hill. Some indication of his trouble is revealed in a telegram sent July 1.

Tonopah, Nev. July 1, 1919
J.C. Climo
Keeler, Cal.

Tried to get you on phone last evening and this morning. Suppose you have heard of the bunch we were handed. However, we fully believe that is not in the cards for that kind of stuff to eventually win. Have Lidell Survey Blue Jay and adjoining claims, Mountain Crag, Pagan, Ragged Edge, Safe Guard, Safety First and Newsboy Groups. Will write regarding.

L.D. Gordon

Gordon was out to increase production and get money to fight with. It is possible that he overextended himself and could not raise enough money to fight because the American Smelting & Refining Company became the owners of Cerro Gordo.

The new owners went at "Fat Hill" with vengeance. It was as though they wanted to get all the ore out and away before they too were frozen out by some one else. In 1929 the new company reported the following yield from

A view from the summit.

the mines. 3,000,000 pounds of lead, 290,420 ounces of silver, 786 ounces of gold, along with an unspecified quantity of zinc, and a bit of tungsten.

The east was once more to determine the fate of Cerro Gordo. By the mid-thirties the Big Depression was on. Money was scarce and the price of minerals tumbled. Gold held firm, but silver, zinc and lead were far from profit earners.

For the second time in 67 years Cerro Gordo was a ghost town. Weeds grew in the streets, houses sagged, and power lines fell. The tram was dead. Its empty buckets were stilled in their march across the sky. They screamed squealing defiance to the world with each gust of wind.

A Mojave mining man in 1939 tried to revive the town and mine but his efforts only stirred the dust in the streets for a brief spell.

Then during World War II Cerro Gordo came to life again. The boom began when the Silver Spear Mining Co. took over. Miners were in the town again. The ore cars were moving on the upper tailings pile. Deep in Fat Hill the sound of powder exploding on the 900 foot level could be heard. The tram was not running but Belshaw's road was rewarded and big trucks were hauling out the ore.

Over in Lone Pine Fred Fisher who was the last foreman to boss the mine crews had this to say. "Personally I think Cerro Gordo will make a comeback, just as she always does. Matter of fact, I don't think the main ore body has been found. It lies along a fault. In spite of all they've taken out, I don't think they've hit the jack-pot yet."

Out of Cerro Gordo $20,000,000 worth of silver, lead and zinc flowed to industry. This twenty million dollars worth of wealth left behind 27 miles of tunnels and levels that go down to 900 feet. Truly it was a Fat Hill.

It was not zinc or lead this time but tungsten.

Cerro Gordo's third and most modest boom era began and ended the same year. Once more the hill was dead, but no desert man would admit it.

Where the Valley famous sheepherder bread is made.

OWNER OF MINING TOWN SAW VALUE OF ENTERING POLITICAL LIFE

Mortimer W. Belshaw was a mining engineer highly skilled in his profession and possessed of a fine set of mutton-chop whiskers, a handsome countenance, engaging personality and sharp wits.

Audacious as well as shrewd, it was seldom that a dollar on which his acquisitive gaze had been fastened ever eluded him.

In 1867, he journeyed to Cerro Gordo, a struggling silver camp far up in the Inyo Mountains above Owens Valley. Remote and accessible only by tortuous and treacherous trail, it had known desultory mining since 1865. There was plenty of rich ore, but the extreme difficulty of transporting it to a mill blocked Cerro Gordo's development.

Until, that is, the arrival of Mort Belshaw.

He took a look around, saw promise in the Union Mine and bought it.

He hired a small army of men, furnished them with shovels and picks, and before long the frightening trail had become a narrow, rocky but usable road, over which Belshaw with great effort hauled in machinery for a smelter.

Choosing a strategic location where there was no way of bypassing it, Belshaw erected a toll-gate, and money began to flow in from patrons of his road even before the treasure of the Union was tapped.

Belshaw laid claim to the only worthwhile spring in the vicinity, piped the water into camp and soon was realizing a tidy profit from that. Cerro Gordo boomed and Belshaw acquired its two busiest saloons, a mercantile establishment, a hotel and a livery stable.

His smelter began to turn out bars of silver bullion, and Belshaw contracted with a mule-team freighter to haul them 240 miles to San Pedro, the nearest point from which they could be shipped to the mint in San Francisco.

Cerro Gordo, which can be translated into "Fat Hill," was a ribald, misbehaved town from the start, the haunt of outlaws, crooked gamblers and swindlers, theives and thugs, and never in its short life was it thoroughly tamed.

It also was the habitat of many men of much wealth, and the richest of them all was Mort Belshaw.

But though his Union Mine earned millions for him, and his saloons, hotel and water system paid him generously, the toll road remained his most cherished enterprise.

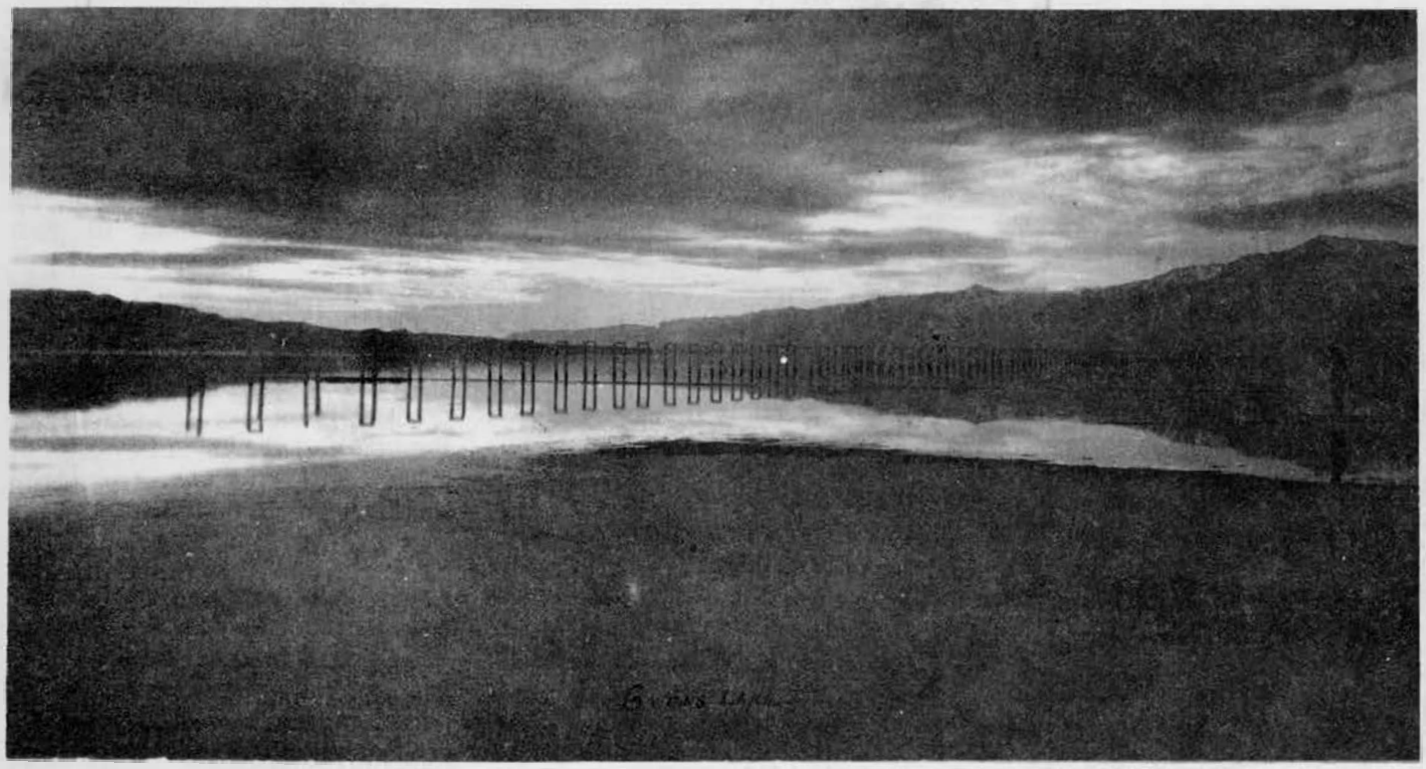
And so it is understandable that Mort should be more than a little displeased when, one day, he learned that the Inyo County Board of Supervisors had, by a 2-1 vote, approved a franchise for a competing road.

He gave this unexpected development some thought, and then set in motion a campaign to circumvent those brash enough to challenge the master of Cerro Gordo.

In time and money, it was expensive, but the end justified the cost.

A few months later the supervisors called for a review of the vexatious franchise. Then, again by a 2-1 vote, it was summarily revoked.

For one of the two board members who earlier opposed Mort had lost out in his bid for re-election and his successor was a more friendly supervisor - Belshaw himself.



An old photograph of Owens Lake, probably taken about the turn of the century.

THE LOST BULLION SHIP

Winter had come to Inyo County, California. Bleak clouds stood above the Sierras and all mining activity for the year 1882 would be suspended soon.

A small steamer, laden with 83-pound bars of silver-lead bullion, plowed southwesterly across Owens Lake, arcing toward Cartago. As the sun dropped behind the gleaming Sierras, a cold wind whipped the blue-green water into gray manes of alkaline foam. The wind strengthened by the minute until the stubby little ship was fighting for survival against a 40-knot northwester square on her starboard.

Yard by yard, she was driven inexorably toward the shallow sand wastes below the Coso Range where the waves broke on sandy reefs and shallows. As the last daylight faded from the Inyo Mountains behind, the frantic crew felt a terrible rumbling crash in the hold as a pile of massive bars slid loose from its packings and tumbled across the slanted floor.

The vessel never recovered her balance. She spun slowly, throwing her crew into the water, went over on her side, and slid to the bottom amid sounds of wind, waves, hissing steam. Neither the vessel nor its cargo of silver bullion was ever recovered.

This legend of the lost bullion ship has been tucked away in the memories of local residents for over 80 years. Ask anyone in Lone Pine, Olancha, or what is left of Keeler and they will tell you the same story.

Owens Lake had dried up in the 1930's from a combination of natural and man-made effects. Anyone with a half-analytical mind, could trace the regular route of this vessel across the lake on a large-scale map, calculate the effects of a stiff side wind, and arrive at a small circle on the map within which a search could be concentrated.

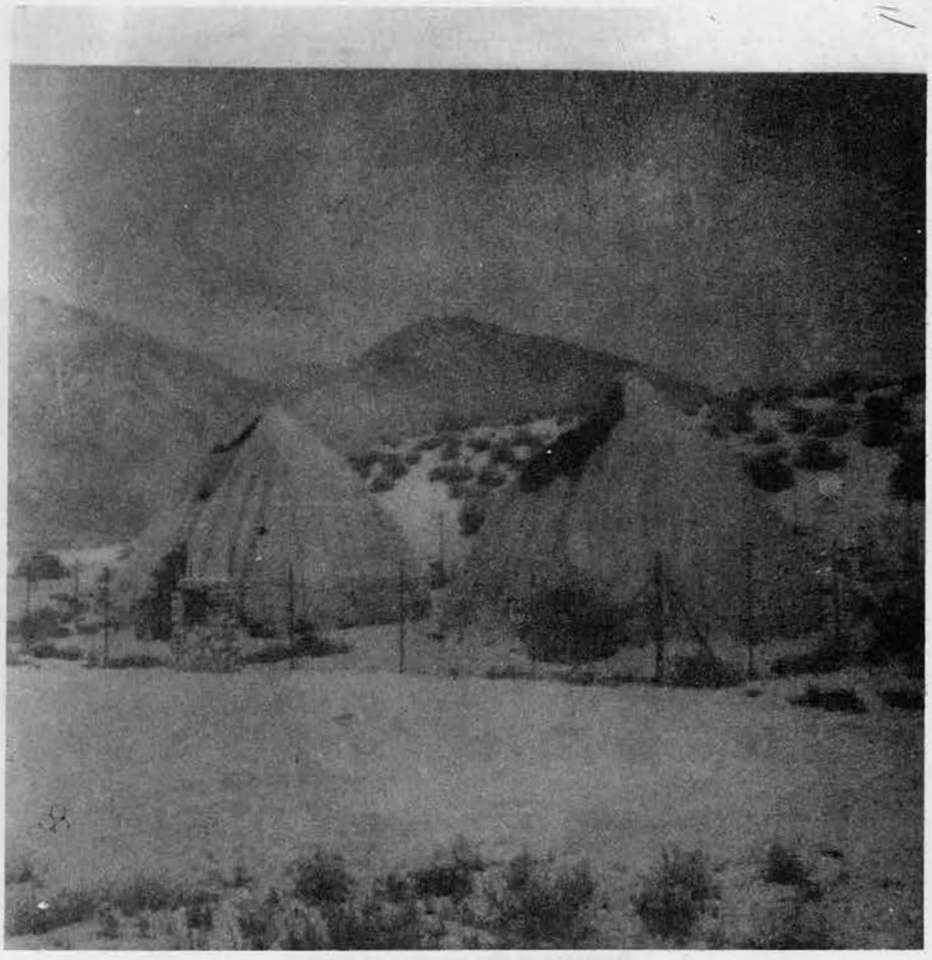
Steam ships were introduced into California lakes in 1864, when the Governor Blaisdel was launched on Lake Tahoe to carry lumber for the mines. When mine owners and burgeoning communities nearby realized how much could be saved in freight costs, steamer transport spread rapidly throughout such lakes as Meadow, Owens, Donner, Mono, Walker, Klamath, Pyramid and Honey. Besides saving money, the steamers cut wagon and mule-train times to shreds and carried bulky equipment which would have been out of the question for teamsters on narrow, rugged trails. Owens Lake was

the third waterway in California to adopt steamers, and the year was 1872.

At the time, the entire Owens Valley was a hive of activity. The immensely rich Cerro Gordo mining district in the Inyo Mountains on the east poured forth silver-lead ore from a dozen mines. On the narrow flats below - at the edge of the lake - the new Swansea smelting plant was producing about 150 83-pound bars of bullion per three-shift day from each of two furnaces; 25,000 pounds every 24 hours. Tunnel props and furnace charcoal to extend the mines and kilns across the lake in the Cottonwood Creek vicinity. Ranching and farming sprawled out across the lush meadows of Olancha on the south, and followed the 300,000-acre Owens River Valley on the north as far as Bishop.

The only crux was transportation. It took teams of 12 mules five days to move a standard six-ton load of bullion from the Swansea smelting plant across the sandy wastelands to the transhipment point at Olancha. The same delays beset the ranchers, produce growers, lumber mills and charcoal makers. Although scores of small freight outfits were continuously on the move around the lake, you can see on looking back that steam-powered water transport was inevitable.

On July 4, 1872 at 10:30 a.m., a small girl smashed a bottle of wine over the bow of Owens Lake's first steamer, and shyly voiced the ritualistic, "I christen this ship the Bessie Brady." The place was Ferguson's Landing, named for entrepreneur D.H. Ferguson; the little girl was Bessie Brady, daughter of James Brady who was superintendent of the Owens Lake Silver-Lead Company at Swansea. Brady and Ferguson between them had just invested over $10,000 in the newly-christened ship, in addition to which Ferguson had built a wharf and warehouse at the landing to which he had given his name.



Beehive kilns near Cartago.

The Bessie Brady was 85 feet long, had a 16-foot beam, a six-foot deep hold, and a relatively shallow draft. Records show she was powered by a 20 hp. 10 x 10 inch steam engine built at San Francisco by Pacific Foundry. The 52-inch screw was directly geared to the single piston. Through some error, the huge propeller was partially out of the water when Bessie Brady settled into her element. Most likely explanation is that the suppliers in San Francisco were unaware of Bessie's unusually shallow draft for a vessel of her displacement.

One June 27, the vessel made her pre-maiden voyage across the lake to Cartago, carrying 700 ingots (about 30 tons) of silver bullion to waiting Los Angeles-bound wagons. Satisfied by this trial sailing, Brady and Ferguson laid on everything from champagne to fire-works for the official July 4, christening, and took about 130 Independence Day celebrants on a trip around the lake to prove that water transportation was faster, cheaper, and infinitely easier. After the champagne corks and bunting had been cleared away, several weeks' final work was done on the superstructure.

From the beginning, the steamer was a complete success. With a speed of seven knots, she was able to make a straight run from Swansea to Cartago in under three hours, carrying passengers and 70 tons of bullion. The freight cost was less than half what one wagon team charged for a 6-ton load; in other words, about 1/25th the cost of land transport!

In September 1873, mine owner M.W. Belshaw bought out James Brady's interest in the

Remains of the smelter at Keeler.

Bessie Brady and built a wharf about six miles south of Swansea, where the Yellow Grade tramway came down to his smelters from the distant mines in the Cerro Gordo district. By 1876, a Southern Pacific Railroad line had been pushed north from Los Angeles to Mojave, so that the only slow section in the ingot shipping pattern was the wagon trail from Cartago to Mojave. Under the impetus of this speed-up in transport, activity in the Cerro Gordo mines rose to a fever pitch, while Bessie Brady bustled from wharf to wharf, day in and day out.

It was at this point - about March 1877 - that she was joined by a second steamer. Col. Stevens' operations had grown to such an extent that he incorporated as the Inyo Lumber & Coal Company, and promptly ordered his own ship. And so the keel for a new steamer was laid near the mouth of Cottonwood Creek. The vessel was smaller than Bessie Brady so that the hull was completed and launched by mid-May of 1877.

Two days after the new hull was launched, an incident occured which is almost certainly the genesis of the Lost Bullion Ship treasure story. A heavy wind came up during the night, after workmen had left the undecked hull floating quietly at its moorings. Under the combined effects of an expectionally heavy rain storm and waves breaking full against its side, the new hull gradually filled with water and sank by the wharf. Owens Lake obviously had the pioneering spirit of helping out a distressed neighbor, for the hull was raised within two days mainly through the help of Bessie Brady's steam-powered tackle!

When finally ready to sail, the new ship was fitted with a powerful engine said to have come from the former U.S.S. Pensacola. She was christened the Mollie Stevens, after the colonel's daughter, and made her first trans-lake run early in June 1877, carrying timber for the Union Consolidated Mine at Cerro Gordo.

For a short time after that, both ships lived busy lives, but the beginning of the end for Cerro Gordo's lavish day appeared when silver prices slumped around the world and charcoal prices skyrocketed under the effects of dwindling timber supplies in the region. By the end of 1878, Mollie Stevens was swinging idly at her Cottonwood Creek moorings and the quietness of depression settled over this great basin. Almost exactly a year later, the ageing Bessie Brady was hauled ashore at Ferguson's Landing and stripped of her machinery.

The Dow Motel as it appeared in 1937.

One last burst of activity came to Cerro Gordo before the district passed into California mining history. As the Bessie Brady was being dismantled, Capt. J.M. Keeler came to the valley and bought out all major mining operations on behalf of some eastern financiers. A new townsite and mill location - to be called Keeler - were laid in on March 1, 1880. Within a year, a 10-stamp mill was in operation at Keeler for the new Owens Lake Mining & Milling Company. In a magnificent attempt at integrating the entire district, Keeler purchased Col. Stevens' lumber and coal business across the lake at Cottonwood Creek. The Mollie Stevens was promptly put to work hauling 150,000 feet of lumber to the resuscitated shafts at Cerro Gordo, and the lake echoed once more to the sounds of steam power.

So far as is known, the Mollie Stevens never carried any bullion shipments. The new stamp mills were so efficient that only the most highly refined bullion was produced. These high-grade bars could be economically shipped from Keeler to Mojave by fast stage, so that the older economies of slow wagon versus fast steamer no longer held.

The extent to which this once great mining district had declined was clearly indicated by the fact that Keeler's newly-organized Owens Lake Mining & Milling - encompassing all former mining companies in the area - only put out $6,000 worth of silver per week, a far cry from the boom days when the Swansea smelter were pouring about $37,000 worth of bullion every six days.

Both steamers fell victim to the last desperate efforts to keep the mines going. Keeler, finding the Mollie Stevens less efficient than the records showed Bessie Brady to have been, purchased the latter and had her towed to his town. There she was completely overhauled and refitted, while the Mollie Stevens was beached and cannibalized to provide the engine, boiler and auxiliary equipment.

Bessie Brady was almost ready to be re-launched on a hot, hazy May afternoon in 1882, when some malignant spark hit the near-explosive mixture of fumes from oil, caulking compound, paint and tar which filled the below-decks spaces. Within seconds, she was a bonfire. Within an hour, nothing remained but the hot, carbonized skeleton of a dumpy little ship so many had loved.

Barely a year later the southern terminal of the once-aggressive Carson & Colorado Railroad was operating in Keeler. The arrival of the trains signalled the end for the concept of water transportation - or so it seemed - and the Owens Lake steamer era passed into oblivion.

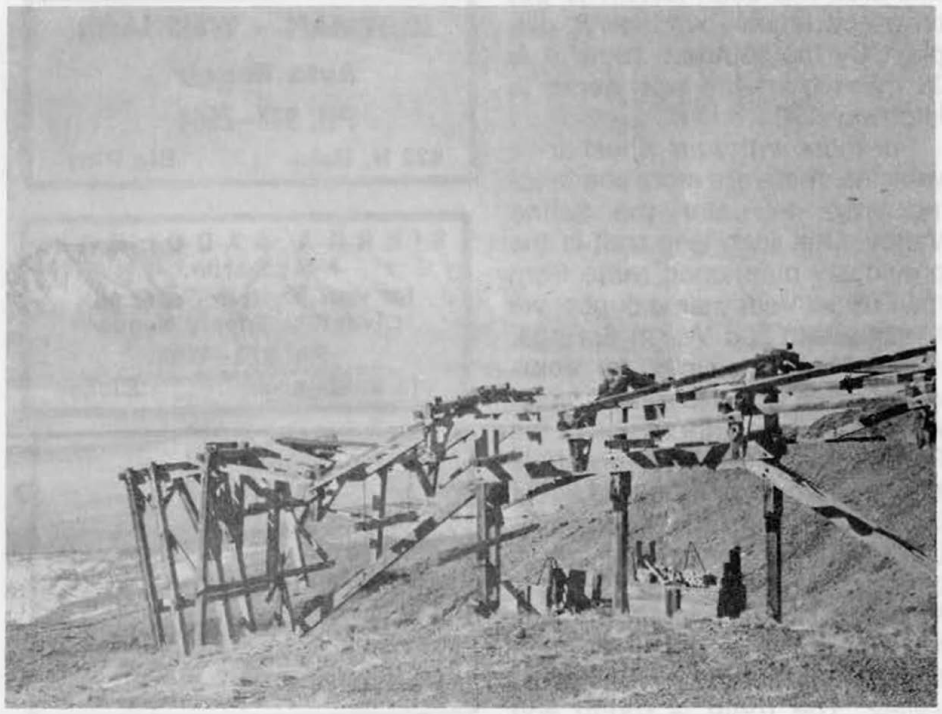
Indian markings tell of a long ago population.

THE SALINE VALLEY

There is a huge depression in the middle of California's Inyo County which has much to offer the desert enthusiast and weekend explorer. Known as the Saline Valley, this cavity in the earth's crust covers several hundred square miles. Despite its immense size, the area is overlooked by the general public. There are no paved roads or communities in the region, so apparently cartographers feel there is nothing of interest there!

History does not state when white men first entered the valley, but whatever the date, the area was occupied centuries before. The Indians who roamed these barren hills came to the valley in the Winter months for it was relatively warm. Another attraction was the salt, a commodity which had considerable trade value with other aborigines living on the west side of the Sierras.

Evidence of early Indian occupation can be found in many places throughout the valley. One large campsite was on the alluvial fan at the mouth of Hunter Canyon. There were more than two dozen stone "house rings" on the flat, with another half dozen on the hill just to the south. Old-timers tell of counting 75 or more. Even today, the observant visitor may find beads from a squaw's necklace or obsidian arrowheads. Look for Gossip Rock, a huge limestone boulder



Remains of the salt tram.

where the women of the tribe would sit grinding mesquite beans and pinyon nuts.

Other ancient sites in the valley are marked by piles of obsidian chips. At such places partially finished arrowheads are frequently found. While most of these Indians lived in flimsy structures made of brush, rock hogans were occasionally made. One remote site contains two such dwellings, one collapsed and the other in almost perfect condition. A pinyon branch used to support the roof could undoubtedly be used to date the structure.

History books first mention the salt deposits of the Saline Valley as early as 1864. Miners rushed into the valley in the 1880's - but it was gold they were seeking, not salt. When they didn't find the precious metal, they moved on. It was 1903 before anyone attempted to profit from the vast salt deposits. Although there was a railroad in the Owens Valley only 12 miles away, 10,668-foot New York Butte was in the way.

The Saline Valley Salt Company found it too expensive to haul the salt out by wagon so they engaged the Trenton Iron Company to build a 13½ mile tramline over the Inyo Mountains. Construction started on September 1, 1911, and the first bucket loads of salt reached the Owen Lake railhead on July 2, 1913. For seven years an endless chain of buckets transported "The World's Purest Salt" at a rate of 20 tone-per-hour.

Mining was rather simple. Natural springs fed water onto the 1,500-acre salt flat during the winter months. The brine solution was impounded in shallow ponds behind a series of dikes. The summer sun would evaporate the water leaving a residue of salt crystals. This harvest was gathered continuously until 1918, and then intermittently until 1930. Today, you can still find a network of dikes and various ruins around the salt lake. Even the tramline with sections is still largely intact.

Just north of the salt lake an unmarked, but frequently used road, starts north and somewhat east to a series of warm springs. It is a dusty eight miles to Lower Warm Springs, but a side trip well worth the effort. Here mineral water bubbles out of the ground at a delightful 112 degrees. Over the years visitors have lined the main pool with concrete creating a primitive, but excellent spa. Mesquite trees surround the springs offering many fine shaded and secluded campsites. Practically anytime between mid-October and mid-April is a good time to camp here. Except on weekends, you are likely to have the springs to yourself.

While most prudent drivers will not take a standard passenger car beyond Lower Warm Spring, the road does go on. Those with pickups can continue up the wash another mile to Palm Spring, so named for a single palm which was planted here. The route beyond here becomes increasingly difficult and is recommended only for dune buggies or four-wheel drive vehicles.

Two and a quarter miles above Palm Spring is Upper Warm Spring. The campsites here are usually uncrowded. The rough jeep trail continues northward through very desolate country. Eventually, with some difficulty, you can cross a pass and come out at the sand dunes in Eureka Valley. This route is definitely not recommended for the inexperienced or a party in just one vehicle.

There are four ways you can drive into the Saline Valley, but only two are passable to the family passenger car. Relatively good graded roads enter the valley from the north and south.

From the north take State 168 east from Big Pine. This road forks at 2.4 miles and again after another 14 miles. Keep right both times. The road is well marked with signs. This route passes through Marble Canyon with its picturesque old cabins and headframes. The canyon was once busy with miners working the dry gravel for its placer gold. The road briefly enters the pinyon forest as it reaches a high point of 7,300 feet.

As the road descends Whippoorwill Canyon there are a few shady spots where snow may linger during the winter months. Generally, however, this is an all year road. The road gradually drops to the valley floor passing a number of abandoned talc mines to the right. An area of small dunes is passed on the left and finally you will reach the salt lake. By this route it is 58 miles from the salt works back to Big Pine, the nearest point of civilization. Of that distance, 44 miles are over dirt roads.

The southern road into the valley leaves State 190 at a point 31 miles east of Olancha (4 miles east of the Darwin turnoff). Again, the road is well marked with prominent signs. The road, paved at first, heads north through Joshua Tree forests of Santa Rosa and Lee Flats. As the road climbs to a highpoint of 6,200 feet, there are some scenic views south into Panamint Valley.

At the head of Grapevine Canyon the road forks. Take the left fork going down the canyon. Wild burros are often seen grazing on the hillsides in this area. They are undoubtedly attracted by several springs found in the region. Once out of the canyon and on the alluvial fan, it is still some 16 miles to the salt works. In the spring, if moisture conditions have been just right, this area has been known to put on a spectacular wildflower display. By the southern route it is 38 miles from the salt works to Highway 190.

For those with four-wheel drive vehicles, there are more challenging ways to enter the Saline Valley. One such jeep trail is the previously mentioned route from the Eureka Valley sand dunes, via Marble Bath and Warm Springs. Another trail, strictly for four-wheel drive vehicles, starts westward from the southern end of the Racetrack Valley. The turnoff is at the bottom of the hill, just before reaching the Lippencott Lead Mine. When winter snows block the road over Hunter Mountain, this is the only through passage from the Death Valley area directly to the Saline Valley. The route is rough and steep, but relatively short.

No matter what route you choose, you should carry sufficient food, water and extra gasoline. There are no facilities of any kind in or near the Saline Valley. Summer temperatures frequently reach 120 degrees on the valley floor, so the area should be avoided between June and August. Even in this age when men are walking on the moon, the desert can be as hard and as cruel as it was in the days of '49.

THERE ONCE WAS A TOWN CALLED

TWENTY THREE SKIDOO

Two prospectors were crossing Death Valley in 1905 when they were caught in an unusual fog - one of the few ever recorded in the area - and were forced to make camp until they could once again see the trail.

Harry Ramsey and his partner "One Eye" Thompson were enroute from Rhyolite, Nevada to the new gold strike area of Harrisburg when they made camp on the south side of the Tucki Mountains.

While waiting for the fog to lift Ramsey did a little prospecting and found ore which started a gold rush and the founding of Skidoo and a short, but violent history.

After their discovery Ramsey and Thompson staked claims. Later Ramsey sold his claim to Bob Montgomery, a major holder of mining interests in Rhyolite, for $60,000. When financier Charles Schwaub took an interest in the area, Skidoo was made.

Fortune seekers came from all directions. The fact there were no roads or trails made little difference. The population filtered in over the rocks and through the ravines.

The town took shape. It had a newspaper, The Skidoo News, a bank and the inevitable saloons. The town boasted three restaurants, hardware, and general stores. Roads were nil but the Skidoovians had a telephone line. Mines in the area were approaching a total yield of $3,000,000 in gold and silver.

Essentials for living had to be hauled 10 miles. Water was piped 23 miles from Telescope Peak. This 23-mile water pipe may have been the reason for the town's name, due to the popular cliche of the era, "Twenty-three Skidoo."

More interesting than any other aspect of the town were the personalities like one Joe "Hooch" Simpson. His middle name indicated his favorite pastime.

Hooch blew in from Keeler where he had killed a man, just prior to shooting up a saloon in Independence. He apparently reasoned that going straight was far superior to crime so went into partnership with Fred Oakes, building the Gold Seal Saloon.

But Hooch didn't stay sober or legitimate long. One day in a drunken stupor he ambled across the street to the bank. The bank was part of Jim Arnold's Skidoo Trading Company. Hooch demanded at gunpoint all the cash in the place. Jim laughed and grabbed the gun from the drunk. Adding insult to injury, Jim hid Joe's gun.

Joe's pride was hurt. It didn't take him long to find his weapon, wander back to the bank, and shoot Jim Arnold. Hearing the shots, several townsfolk rushed in to apprehend Hooch. Joe was chained to a barroom table. Drinks made the rounds of all, including Hooch. But later that night when Jim Arnold died, public opinion changed. The consensus was to hang Hooch immediately - which they did without hesitation.

The verdict and punishment were so fast the photographers from the city arrived too late. Obliging citizens hastily restrung Joe from the same telephone pole so pictures could be taken.

Sam Hooper worked for Jim Arnold in his combination store and bank as a store helper and bank clerk. He gambled and lost so decided to dip into the bank funds to pay his debts. To do this he decided to stage a mock holdup with himself the victim.

The bank clock consistently ran one hour fast, which irritated Hooper no end. Such was the case when he left the bank that afternoon. After dark he returned, cleaned out the safe, and left town to hide the loot. While on the road Sam ran into George Murrel and exchanged greetings.

Returning to town, Sam went to the bank, strewed papers all over, and set the clock back an hour. Firing a shot into it and the desk, he took a dive to the floor from the desk top.

When he was found everything went as planned, until George Murrel turned up. It seemed that Arnold had corrected the clock also. The clock had stopped one hour earlier than Sam had planned, exactly at the time Murrel saw him. He confessed and was run out of town.

Skidoo lasted only a few years and today few buildings remain of the once roaring and violent town - the town known as the "place where they hung the same man twice."

All that is left of Greenwater.

NO WATER IN GREENWATER

Greenwater Valley, in the southeast corner of Death Valley National Monument, may not have been the most treacherous, but it was certainly the most desolate spot in California back in the 1890's.

A lonely prospector, H.G. Betts, treking through a high valley on the east side of the Black Mountains, ventured near such alluring place names as Coffin Canyon and Funeral Peak. Where the valley narrows to make its descent toward Shoshone, and from a spring where green water erupted, Betts discovered copper. It was 1898.

Betts had foresight enough to see a town to be, and dubbed it Ramsey. The name didn't stick as the town was later renamed Greenwater after its namesake meager water supply.

Arthur Kunze came to the valley in 1904 to stake claims. While Kunze and Betts were filing, they found that they weren't the first. Locations had been staked as early as 1884, but like Doctor Trotter, who filed a gold and silver claim here in 1894, the area was too inaccessible so the claims were abandoned.

At the turn of the century, Greenwater began taking the shape of a boom town. More than 2,500 claims had been staked in a 20-mile area. The ore assayed as high as 18% in copper. With the influx of large investors from the

East, who journeyed to Greenwater by way of Rhyolite, over $4,125,000 changed hands in the purchase of claims.

Greenwater was by far the most distant of the desert outposts, so transportation came at a premium. The quickest route was via the Las Vegas and Tonopah Railroad which deposited its passengers 46 miles from Greenwater. The Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad was available also but made their delivery 70 miles away.

Where the Tonopah and Tidewater stopped, an enterprising gentleman made his car available. He chartered passengers for the two-day trip to Greenwater at $200 per head. In 1906 one hundred people a day tramped into Greenwater. This influx prompted plans for a railroad, but the brain stage was as far as the railroad went.

Greenwater boasted a prominent list of investors: Charles Schwaub, of Carnagie Steel, John Hays Hammond, John Brock, of the Tonopah Mining Company and part owner of the Tonopah and Goldfield Railroad, Augustes Heinze, T.L. Oddie, Borax Smith, and Patsy Clark, who bought out Fred Birney and Phil Creaser's Copper Blue Ledge holdings.

All the prominent citizens weren't investors in mining. There were Lil Lang, Mother Agnes, and Tiger Lil from Rhyolite, who owned the three main saloons in the town. Tiger Lil was highly thought of among the business people.

There were the infamous also. Bad Man Madison came in from the Owens Valley. He was so feared the deputy in town took leave of the area. South of town, at the base of a mound of dirt and rock, are three graves. They are marked only by three paper-thin and weather-battered markers.

One of the graves is that of a man named Kelly who fell 1,300 feet to the bottom of a shaft. The second is a man named Chisholm. It seems Chisholm went into a bar tended by Bill Waters. He drank

Gateway to the past? This was left behind when town died.

up, turned and walked out. Waters called to him for payment. Chisholm refused and lost his head by a shot from Water's gun. There was no such thing as a debtor in Greenwater.

Billy the printer rests in the third grave. Billy worked for the Greenwater Times, and was extremely well liked by the townsfolk. He had two vices though, drink and cards. His death was the result of the d.t.s.

Everyone was shaken at the loss. Billy was first taken to a vacant house and laid on a tarp. A coffin was built from the customary pine and lined with black cloth. On the sides were placed dresser handles.

Something was missing still when Billy was rested in the box. Tiger Lil provided the finishing touch. Placing his hands over his chest, Lil slipped a fan of five aces between his fingers. Billy was then laid to rest.

The population never grew to the anticipated 75,000; it barely reached its peak at 5,000. However, in foresight of a thriving metropolis, the city fathers maintained a Main Street 90 feet wide, with lesser streets being a measley 60 feet. In the beginning, lots sold for anywhere from $500 to $2,000 each. On the lots squatted mostly tent buildings. Lumber was $165 for 1,000 feet.

Other commodities, which had to traverse the barren waste, came at a premium also. Water brought $7.50 to $15 per barrel, hay sold for $7 a bale, gas at $1 per gallon, and ice was hauled from Las Vegas at $10 per hundred pounds. During the cold winters, coal sold for $100 a ton.

A rarity for most towns is their own magazine. Greenwater had

Relics of Greenwater.

one, the Death Valley Chuckwalla, and a newspaper, the Greenwater Times. Nowhere in the state was gambling legal, but at Greenwater it was. The boys didn't fool around either, they used $20 gold pieces for chips.

In 1906 the inevitable happened. The mines had run out at the 200-foot level. By 1907 all but the largest companies gave up and pulled out. Even they finally departed. Greenwater was a skeleton of wooden frames and torn canvas. Soon scavengers from Shoshone came in and hauled away every piece of existing lumber. Today, only rusty tin cans, sage brush, and three lonely, forgotten. and rotting graves mark the once boisterous town of Greenwater.

RAMIE'S LOST BONANZA

Old prospector with his "Nellies and Neddies."

The Death Valley country has, for over a century and a half, seen countless rainbow-chasers prowling its hundreds of miles of savage, waterless terrain. These bonanza-seekers continue, even today, to search hopefully for the many mirages which legends keep alive.

Today, however, the picturesque "burro-men" of old have all but vanished. In their stead a new breed has appeared. These are the four-wheel drive hopefuls whose vehicles can almost do what the burrow once did. At least, that is what they will tell you!

Just week-end probers ourselves, we have worn out two fully-equipped campers and are now on our third. Have we found any of those fabulous lost gold deposits? Well, not yet. But we're almost sure we have come close to some of them.

One early spring day several years ago we dropped in for a visit with Alfred Giraud, a retired sheepherder pushing eighty, who made his home in Bishop, California. We had heard of a gold-rich deposit that had been found, and lost, in the desolate, barren Saline Valley region during the early part of the century, and had discovered that Alfred Giraud knew much of the story.

Since we planned a trip into Saline Valley, we hoped for more definite clues, for Saline Valley itself is a 23 - odd - miles long trough that is almost completely isolated. It is ringed by the massive Inyo Mountains to the west, the Last Chance Range to the northeast, and separated from Death Valley on the east and south by the majestic Panamints.

For years, so Giraud told us, old Alex Ramie, a one-time compatriot of his from the French Alps, roamed the Death Valley country. Prior to coming to Death Valley itself, Ramie had had the astounding luck to discover and fritter away not one but two fortunes in his lifetime.

The 1880's found Ramie searching for another fabulous strike in the desert bonanza country of Panamint. An expert in his chosen field, he was hoping to repeat the strikes he had made - and lost - in Virginia city, Nevada.

Alex Ramie was an ex-Legionnaire who had been stationed in Africa. Rough, tough and able, and at loose ends, the booming gold camps of Virginia City beckoned to this adventurer.

Somehow, he managed to lease some promising property. Weeks of hard labor with a pick and shovel were rewarded. He struck it rich! Ramie took out a fortune of around $30,000. Unfortunately, his sudden wealth went to his head via the good-time, easy-spending road. Gregarious and convivial, Ramie discovered that he was a fine fellow, hailed by all.

But one morning Alex Ramie awoke with a splitting head and empty pockets. His fickle friends had vanished. The doughty Frenchman drew in his belt and went to work once more. This time it took longer for the rich streak to appear, for Dame Fortune had other favorites. But at last Ramie found a rich pay lode. He almost broke his back digging himself back into the chips.

Luckier than most, it appears, the Frenchman uncovered another rich vein. But this time he was cagier in the choice of convival pals.

Now once again Ramie had himself a long bust. The honky-tonks and saloons of the day welcomed him back with opened arms. This time too, with considerably less grabbed hands to help themselves to Ramie's largesse, his money lasted longer, though he drank and entertained the admiring company as before.

Inevitably, Alex Ramie was to awake once more to find himself broke. He had now lost two fortunes, and he took sober stock. He was a fool.

This situation did not appeal to the independent Frenchman. Disgusted with himself and Virginia City, he wandered towards the desert country where fortunes might still be made. He wound up eventually in the Death Valley country where he was to prospect for years, finding only enough color to keep himself in bacon and beans.

Ramie had his burros for company, and he liked the wandering Indians who thought him as crazy as the other whites who spent so much time digging in the hills for the yellow and white metals instead of grubbing for all-important food. But these nomads took a liking to Ramie, too. They told him of many a hidden spring in the barren lands, and the now old man stored the precious information carefully away.

Ramie wandered farther and farther afield, his burros carrying his precious food and water. Now a man with such varied experience in desolate country should be the last to meet disaster head-on. Yet Alex Ramie not only met it - he invited it!

He had decided to cross the Last Chance Range which sprawls north and west of Death Valley's upper tip. Around the southern end of this forbidden range Ramie found promising formations. He knew water could be found down in Saline Valley, far to the west, and so he kept on prospecting, hoping for a bonanza to see him through his old age. Each shovelful, he felt sure, was the one that would uncover the rich vein. Finally, he knew he could delay departure no longer. He was low on water; he was forced to ration his burros severely.

But when he awoke on the morning of departure, disaster stared him in the face. His burros had broken free and stampeded! Without his burros the old man knew death would be his constant companion. He shuffled along, laden with only the essentials - food and what water he had left in his small canteens - he cursed his selfish burros for leaving him.

The miles crawled, for Ramie's feet became worse as he tried to cross the notorious badlands. Doggedly he plodded on, his face to the south and west, for in that direction lay water. He passed somewhere between Dry Mountain and Ubehede Peak, finally drinking the last of his precious water. He remembered his Indian friends telling him of a deep canyon where water ran down and collected at the mouth, sinking below the sand but trapped by the hardpan underneath. If he could reach the water traps he could rest and fill his canteens. Perhaps he might even find his recalcitrant burros there!

Ramie tried to hurry despite his crippled feet. Finally, toward dusk, he made it. Frantically, without pausing to rest, he fell on his knees and dug. One foot. Two feet. Three feet. He struck hardpan. He stared incredulous-

ly, for he had not struck water. Desparing now, he was really in a fix. He should have guessed. It had been drier than usual the last couple of years. With no rain in this arid of all arid regions, how could there be any water?

There was nothing for him to do but to try and travel through the night, while it was cooler, and hope to reach water before he played out. Then he remembered the hot pools somewhere to the northwest of his position. Though unpalatable, it was water! The Indians used it for medicinal purposes. So he changed his course.

Ramie went stumbling off. His mind was becoming hazy as he plodded and fell over the rough, boulder-strewn terrain. His feet and legs were fiery stumps of pain, and his throat so dry he could not swallow. His tongue, monstrous it seemed, filled his mouth.

Some time during the night, he must have regained his senses and tried to move on before fainting again. His next recollection was opening his eyes to find waving palms around him, clumps of arrowweed, and willows. His feet, though swollen to three times their normal size, felt blissful. They were soaking in a hot pool!

Ramie discovered he owed his life to his Indian friends. They had heard his cracked voice laughing, singing and calling, and recognized him for their friend. After the bucks had brought him to the pools, one of the squaws had taken charge and nursed him as well as she was able to. He ate pounded mesquite beans and lizards. He saw his clothes piled beside him.

As the Frenchman convalesced, fed and cared for by his Indian friends, he noticed, off to one side of a low hill some distance away, a hogan constructed of piled stone slabs and mesquite limbs.

Dressed in his old clothes, Ramie went through his pockets. The Indians had touched nothing. Then his exploring fingers touched rock. Wondering, Ramie drew the rock from his pocket and was on the point of chunking the samples away when something stopped him. Instinct made him examine them first. He stared, then almost shouted, but caution made him swallow the exclamation. Even Indians were realizing that gold bought food and liquor and pretties. So he tucked the gold-rich rock back in his pocket. Several smaller chunks had broken off; he saw that they, too, were lousy-rich. So he settled back, eyes closed, trying to remember just where, in his recent travels, he had picked them up.

The Indians told him they had seen burro tracks heading for the Inyo Mountains to the west, nine miles away across the glaring, sun-baked playa that was Saline dry lake. It would be quite a trek across this waterless waste, for Ramie had no water container. Somewhere, he had thrown away his canteens, and the Indians could not spare the one pot they possessed. They parted, with Ramie heading west.

Weakened by his recent ordeal, Ramie found he could not travel fast. But this time he was rescued by a young French sheepherder. The sheepherder was Alfred Giraud.

Later, old Ramie showed his young friend his gold-flecked rocks. He suggested they go back some time in the future and hunt for the lode. He was sure he could find it. But Giraud refused.

Alex Ramie's trek across the desert had taken more out of him than he had guessed. When he knew he could never go back to that terrible country, he called his young friend to his sickbed, giving him the precious specimens and as clear directions as he could manage considering the state he had been in when he picked them up.

A half century or so later, however, and retired from sheepherding, the aged Giraud finally became interested in his gold-rich rock. He took it to an assayer, and was astounded to discover that it was half-gold. Now, fifty years too late, Giraud tried to find Ramie's lode. He picked up a clue here and a clue there. He heard of an old Chilean living down in the Kern River region who had been in Saline Valley. The Chilean had a story to tell about a gold-rich specimen.

Considerably infirm, the Chilean told Giraud where he had found his specimen. They compared rocks, and Giraud was astounded to note that they were identical! Yes, the Chilean said, he had found his float in the vicinity of Ubehebe - somewhere along the slopes west and southward.

We have made two trips into Saline thus far. Once in the late spring and once in the deep winter, ploughing our way down the trackless, twisting, snowy hairpin roads that wound down the steep mountains into the valley. Only 1,000 feet in altitude, Saline Valley is warm in winter and blazing hot in summer. A few cool springs lie hidden in mountain canyons. A good, ice-cold stream flows in Hunter Canyon, at the foot of the Inyos.

Did we ever find Ramie's gold ledge? Well, not yet. But maybe soon!

Remains of a desert prospector - Shorty Harris' grave in Death Valley.

SHORTY HARRIS

There are some men who never achieve greatness by the accepted standards. They neither do a great right nor a great wrong, yet they live in immortality. Such a man was Shorty Harris. His grave, not far from Badwater in Death Valley, is marked by a stone monument with a bronze tablet. Part of the inscription reads, "Here lies Shorty Harris, a single blanket jackass prospector."

He was simply a grizzled, short (5 feet tall) man who traipsed the canyons of Death Valley in search of gold. But Shorty did have a special kind of claim to fame. He gave a colorful history to Death Valley. He found - and lost - the most gold mines. He was the shortest man and yet told the tallest tales. He was the most generous and the kindest. And he made more millionaires out of other men than any old-time prospector.

A sheriff who knew him well said, "Shorty Harris has put more towns on the map and more taxable property on the assessors' books than any other prospector." And at his funeral, he had the largest crowd that had ever assembled in Death Valley. He has had more books, short stories, plays and commentaries written about him than any other man of that era.

Born in Rhode Island in 1857, he was named Frank Harris but was called "Shorty" because of his stature. He ran away from home at the age of 14 and was in his 20's by the time he reached Death Valley. But already he had a reputation as wild as the land he would soon come to tramp. When he would reach a new town, whatever money he happened to have would be spent in one evening. Saloon girls got new dresses, everyone got free drinks and bums got lavish handouts.

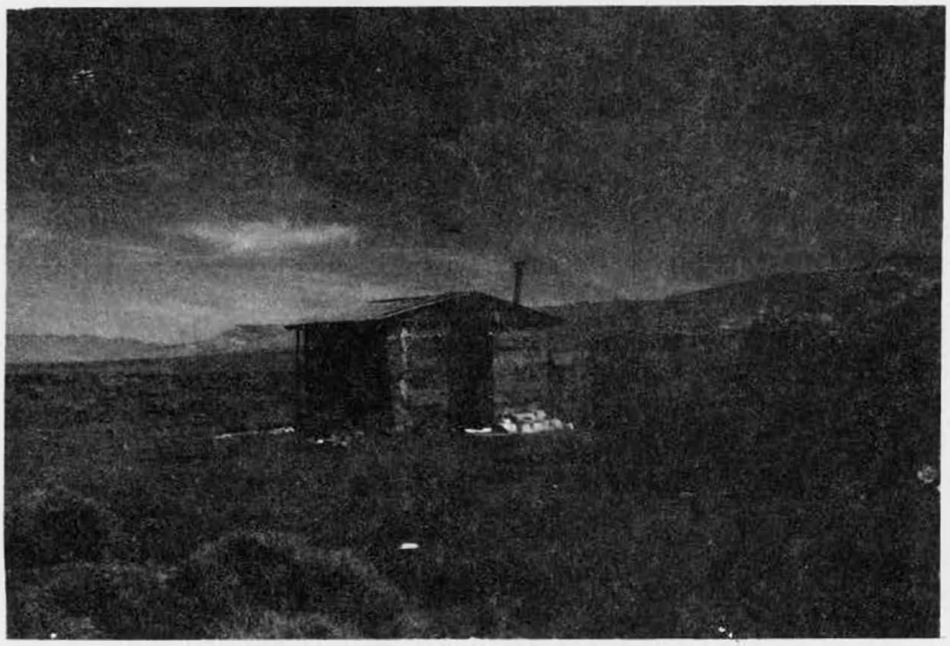
But his one big passion was for prospecting, and although he managed to find some gold on most of his trips into the canyons of Death Valley, he was always looking for a "lallapalooza."

Finally, on St. Patrick's Day in 1892, he made his first big strike. It was in the Panamint Mountains - and it was a "lallapalooza!"

Shorty's ecstasy was boundless but short-lived. He just wasn't content to stop. His great and burning desire was always to find gold, not to mine it. So he sold his St. Patrick's mine for $7,000 and went hog wild spending the money.

He was flat broke within a few weeks, and with pick and shovel, he started out again. This time, he made the greatest strike of his life by finding a mine in the hills of Nevada. The mine (which he named the Bullfrog) became one of the sensations of the Southwest and led to the quick birth of the town of Rhyolite.

Shorty immediately bought a barrel of liquor, drove a row of nails around the barrel, hung tin dippers on the nails and invited the whole town to quench its thirst. Millionaires mushroomed overnight in Rhyolite, but Shorty was not one of them. He sold his mine for $800, and all he would say was that he sold out when he was full of "O Be Joyful." His



Ruins of Ballarat, once a habitat of Shorty Harris.

friends were shocked - yet a fortune blown like a bubble meant absolutely nothing to Shorty Harris. Within a year he found the mine that started the town of Harrisburg. He made $10,000 on that venture.

He was now known as the man who could walk to gold. People began to believe he had a secret inner sense and that he could stroll through a canyon with his eyes closed and tell in a flash if there was gold. Men began to follow him, surrepitously at first, and finally openly. And Shorty loved it. He went from mining town to mining town, enjoying his fame and the adulation offered him.

In Ballarat he fell in love with Miss Bessie Hart. It has been said that she was over six feet tall and weighed 210 pounds. But when he proposed, Bessie said, "Shorty, I love ya, but you're just too little for this big job." Shorty answered, "I reckon so," and continued to make the rounds of the saloons and to talk and fib and brag and spend. And again, he went broke.

But since that was the usual for Shorty, he just got another burro, a pick and a shovel, and started all over again. And although he never made a big strike again like Rhyolite or Harrisburg, he always managed to find gold. It was never recorded just how many mines Shorty found, but it is an accepted fact that it was more than any other prospector.

His reputation for finding gold was closely seconded by that of being the most monumental and genial "tall-story teller" in the desert country. He loved telling the one about his burro who was suffering so much from a toothache that he went out and found a ledge of pure gold. The burro gnawed away at it until he filled his aching tooth better than any dentist could have done.

And one of Shorty's best answers to city slickers who asked about "lonesomeness" when traveling alone in the desert was, "oh, I just take a deck of cards - cause no matter where I am, if I set down to play a game of solitaire I know dang well some blasted kibitzer will come along."

One of his best tales was how he once got a grubstake. A woman on a ranch outside the town of Pioche gave him a dollar to get rid of some kittens for her. Shorty couldn't kill anything, much less a bunch of helpless kittens, so he carried them back to town.

It so happened the town had a large number of rats, so he sold the kittens for $10 each. One customer didn't have $10, so he gave Shorty a goat. Shorty sold the goat to an old prospector for $50 - and when the goat pulled the cork out of a bottle of whiskey with his teeth and drank heartily, the prospector swore the goat was his old sidekick reincarnated and he gave Shorty an extra $100 as a reward for finding him. So Shorty

had his grubstake. He always said, "A grubstake, like gold, is where you find it."

Shorty was called an eternal optimist, yet his outlook was more than just optimism - it was as if life to him was just one long playday. He would say, "When I go out, everytime my foot touches the ground I think 'before the sun goes down I'll be worth $10,000,-000."

"But you never get it," someone always said.

And Shorty would stare at the offender with a sort of "you're-too-dumb" look, and say, "Who in hell wants $10,000,000? It's the game, man, the game."

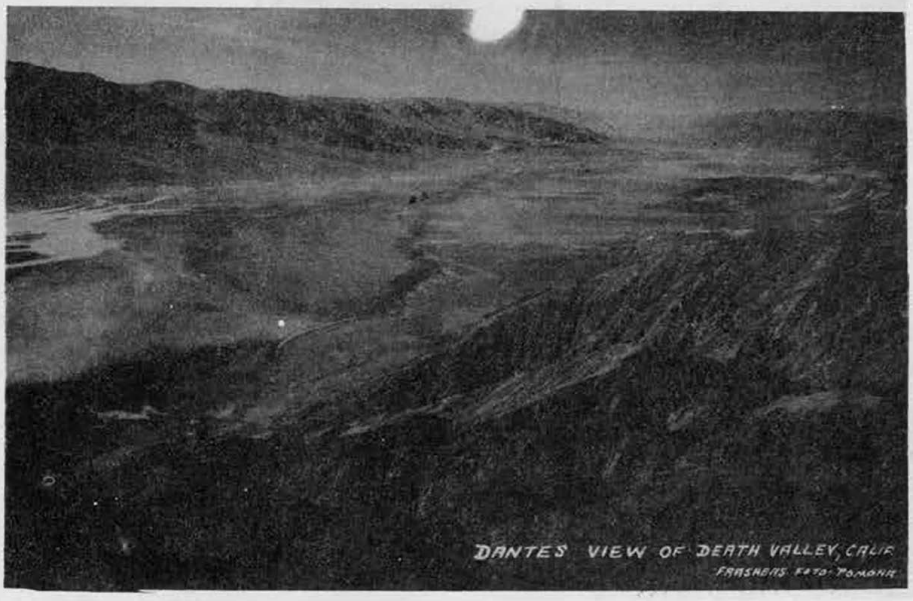
Perhaps that outlook was what gave him the reputation in later years of being a man "too tough to die." In his mind, he never gave up. When he was in his 70's and living in a small shack in Ballarat with old underwear stuffing broken panes and a bare splintered floor, he would sit in his rickety rocker and say, "I'm losing $5,000,000 a day by sitting here."

They say that before he died in 1934 at the age of 73, he asked that he be buried standing up as his body would be on its two feet for eternity and not flat on its back as the desert had laid all other men. Whether this is true or not, he certainly was not put to rest like most other desert men.

At his funeral, friends came from miles around and from all walks of life. The rich and the famous stood beside old-time prospectors. There were husky miners, silent Indians and weeping saloon girls.

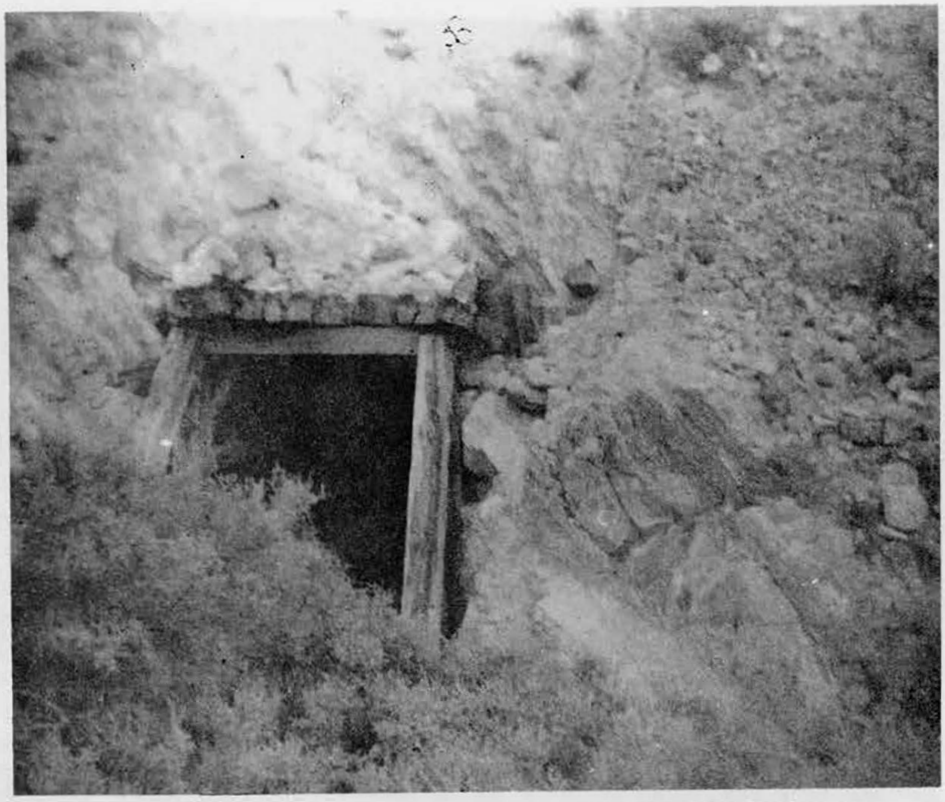
Maybe the real reason why Shorty Harris will live in immortality can best be said by the words of his good friend, William Caruthers.

"He (Shorty) simply followed a jackass into far horizons, and by leaving a smile at every waterhole, a pleasant memory on every trail, attained a fame which will last as long as the annals of Death Valley."



View of Death Valley

JACK STEWART'S LOST LEDGE



Abandoned mines, such as this, are found throughout the desert.

There are few topics that desert dwellers would rather talk about, or city folk would rather listen to, than the stories of lost gold mines in the desert.

Jack Stewart, who died in Darwin in 1947, was one of the last of the single-blanket jackass prospectors and he told the story of a time when he had been prospecting in the northern end of Death Valley, this being in about the year 1897. He was not far from where Death Valley Scotty's castle now is.

His supplies began to run low and he headed for Olancha, taking a trail which led through Stovepipe Wells. As he drew near the latter the sky began to cloud up and he knew he was in for a rainstorm, and a rainstorm on the desert can be a fearsome thing.

He was, at the time, working close to the base of the Panamints when the cloudburst hit but was fortunate enough to find some high ground in the shelter of some cliffs. As it was, he was thoroughly soaked and unhappy by morning.

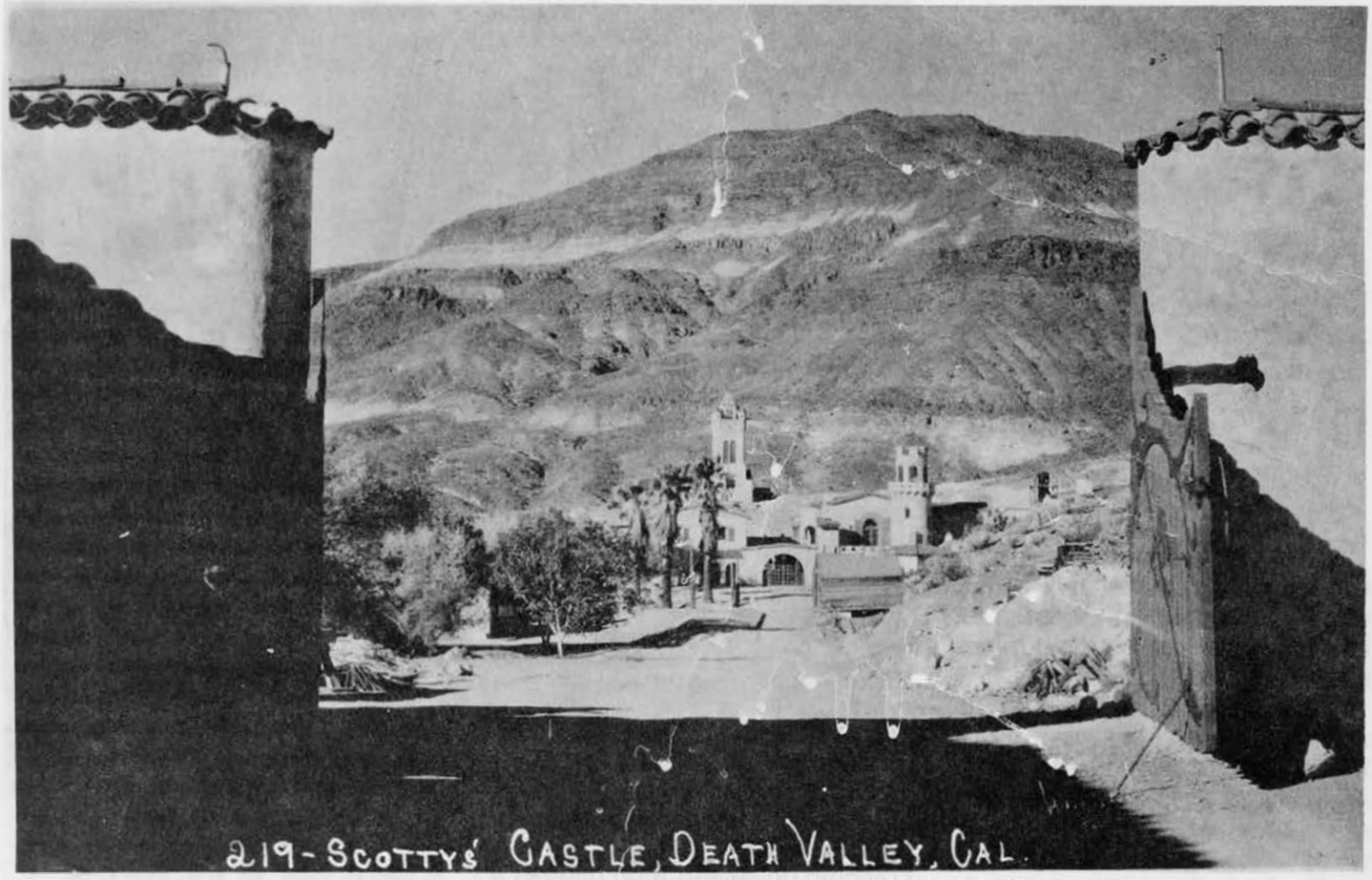
But the storm did one thing. There was a lot of water still standing in pools and he was able to find his way to the wells. So he decided instead to explore the Panamints and maybe find a new way over the top which would eliminate a lot of future walking.

He was working his way up the canyon when he found his path blocked by a slide of rock and earth. The storm had brought this crashing down and then had cut a channel through the slide. And there he saw piece after piece of quartz literally shot through with gold.

Stewart pocketed some of the gold but he couldn't stay to properly work the canyon. Although he had water his food supply was low and he continued on to Olancha intending to go back.

But one thing or another interfered with his plans, as so often happens with prospectors, and it wasn't until 1902 that he headed back that way. He set up a camp near to the place as he could remember, and he did find some outcropping of gold, but nothing like the richness of the quartz he had stumbled on before.

Then his supplies ran low again and once more he returned outside. Once more he planned to return and once more his plans were interfered with by "something else" and so at last he died, never going back again, but knowing that he had seen one of the richest gold strikes in the desert, still undiscovered to this day.



Death Valley Scotty's Castle was the basis for many desert "tall stories."

Don't You Believe It

There is a breed of man in the desert communities who delights in telling the city people stories often classified as "whoppers." Perhaps they would have long since given up their seats on the benches before the Tecopa and Shoshone general stores and such other suitable locations if those gullible city folk did not sometimes fall for these yarns.

And it would be a sad thing indeed if there were not still some of these "desert rats" around, for the yarns they spin are truly masterpieces in themselves.

However, as this is a historical type publication and therefore its contents must be based on fact rather than fiction. Thereforth we shall relate those stories which we consider the most plausible.

One prospector was asked about a place called Echo Canyon and he replied that that place had a delayed echo. Said he didn't notice it until one day he was cussing out his burro and four hours later the echo came back. This irritated the burro who thought he was being cussed out again for no good reason and he kicked the prospector. However, the old miner put the echo to good use. Every morning when he started out he yelled "quitting time" and just four hours late, to the minute, the words came back to tell him to stop work for lunch.

Another old timer tells about a road they built to a mine. The way was so studded with boulders that the burros jumped over them like jackrabbits. There wasn't any use in removing the boulders for the holes became bigger obstacles. The main problem was with the canned beans. They got so shook up by the burro's jumping the rocks that they thought they were Mexican jumping beans and when a can was opened the men had to swat them down with flyswatters.

One miner tells of the time he was working in a tunnel off a dry wash when he heard a roaring noise. He knew it was a flood coming and that he didn't have time to get out before he would be drowned. So he started throwing sacks of cement at the entrance to the shaft and his burro, who also knew what was coming, began kicking them into place. Together they managed to keep three inches above the water until they had the mouth of the mine cemented tight. Then they had to wait three days until the desert sun dried out the cement and they could shovel the powder out

"Seldom Seen Slim" was the spinner of many tall tales.

of the way.

This latter is supposed to have happened near Tecopa, but it never really got hot there, not like it did in Death Valley. There was a prospector who had to cover his stove with wet blankets to keep it from melting. And a good thing he did for a few days later a cold wind came in over the Panamints, the temperature dropped to 100 and he had to keep a fire going to keep from freezing to death.

A lot of old prospectors will tell you that the burro was the smartest thing alive, but it had nothing on the packrat. One miner, alone on the desert, discovered that if he left two biscuits on a rock at night, the next morning there would be two gold nuggets in their place. This worked fine as all he had to do was cook up a batch of biscuits every day and loaf the rest of the time. The only trouble was he ran out of baking powder and the next day he left two soggy excuses for biscuits. The packrat took them but left some "Fool's Gold" in their place. He knew he couldn't put anything over that particular packrat so he went to town to get some more baking powder. But then he never could find that same packrat again.

Some people say that rattlesnake meat is good to eat, and if so then one old miner near Shoshone certainly missed making his pile -- although he did all right as it was. He first of all got the idea that the desert would be a good place to raise chickens. Especially as all he had to do was buy the eggs and let the sun act as an incubator. It was a good idea except that the snakes got wind of this and they came in at night and ate the eggs. So he put a fence around a new batch and made a hole just big enough for a snake to slip through. Once it had swallowed the egg it couldn't get back out. The next morning and every morning after that, he had a fine collection of snakes in his chicken yard. These he skinned and made belts out of, and sold the belts to the tourists thereby making far more money than he would have from the chickens. But he never knew about canning the meat or he really would have cleaned up.

He wouldn't have made money out of the chickens anyway for another fellow tried the same idea only he started with one hen. Feed was too expensive to haul in

from Barstow, so he began feeding it sawdust, on the premise that anything as stupid as a hen wouldn't know the difference. It apparently didn't for it thrived on this diet, but when it had its first brood, five of them had wooden legs and the others were wood peckers.

The heat on the desert is not bad when it's dry but once in a while they get a humid spell. There was a time at the Shoshone store when someone opened the ice box, the cold air hit the humid air in the store and they had a cloudburst right over the meat counter.

Distances on the desert can be very deceiving and sometimes a cityite will get fooled into thinking fifty miles away is only about five. One tourist had heard about this, but didn't put much stock into it until one day he was out on the desert and met a prospector who was deaf as a rock. The miner was standing looking out over the canyon when the tourist came up behind him and asked him how to get back to the road. The old man didn't know anyone was around and so he didn't turn, or answer the question. The tourist asked it twice and then went back to his car in disgust. Later, in Shoshone, he admitted that distances were deceiving. He said he'd have sworn that prospector was not five feet from him.

Of course, once in a while the tables got turned as one miner found out when he went to the city and got a little pitzellated in a bar. The next morning he came to in a hotel and found the place full of "furriners" wearing red fezzes. He worried then about how much he had consumed and how far he had wandered and thought it best to get out of there. So he crawled out a back window where he met two of them head on. He cautiously asked if they could speak English and one said he knew a few words. So the old miner said he wanted to know how he could get back to the United States.

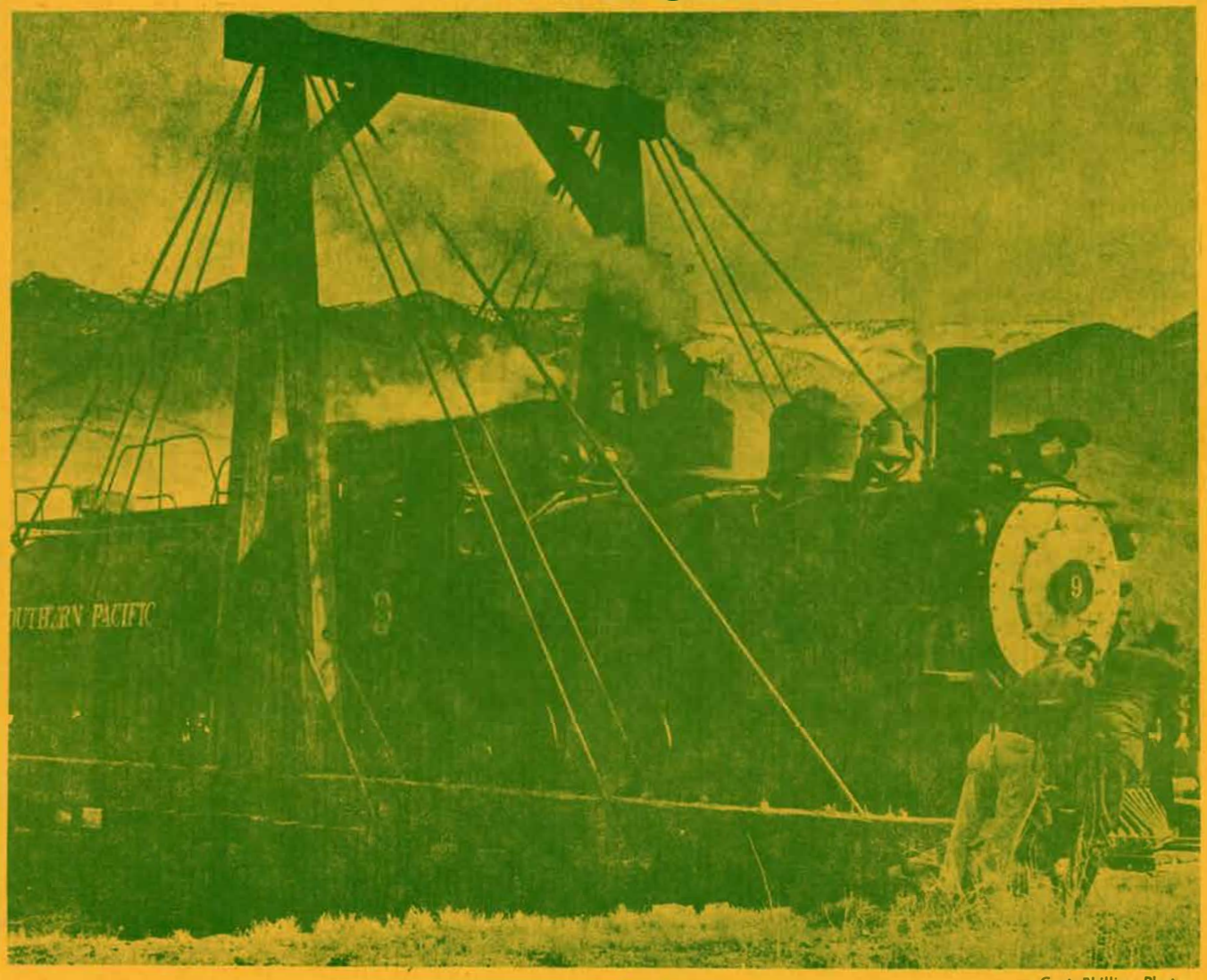
The man said it was very difficult, but he would help him if he would agree to wear a blindfold, for if he were found without a passport he would be severely punished. He agreed so they tied his bandana over his eyes and put him on a bus. When the driver took it off he was in Baker and the first person he met when he got off the bus was another old friend.

"Joe," the friend exclaimed, "You sure had a ball for yourself in the city. I saw you setting up drinks and selling claims right and left at the Shriners convention."

Now some of these stories might be a little hard to swallow, but we want to assure you that each and everyone is the truth and if you don't believe it you can just go ask Deke Lowe, Harry Adams, or Frank Curtis.

Deke Lowe, of Tecopa, shown here is noted for his collecting of "desert stories." He is often found keeping one ear to the ground.

LAWS RAILROAD MUSEUM and HISTORICAL SITE



—Curt Phillips Photo.

In 1960 the famous old Slim Princess made her last run through Owens Valley. A number of years later through the efforts of Mrs. Lois Cleman, the late Senator Chas. Brown and a number of other preservation-minded persons approximately 12 acres of land at Laws and the railroad facilities were given as a gift to the county of Inyo. Later the Bishop Museum and Historical Society was formed and a permanent home was established at Laws to restore and preserve the historical railroad station. What started out first to be just a railroad museum has grown into a popular show case reminiscent of practically every phase of pioneer life in the Owens Valley. There are now four buildings which house relics and mementoes of days gone by. The museum complex was made possible through the concerted efforts of the county of Inyo, the City of Bishop and the museum society.

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