

# Early History of Lone Pine, Most Colorful of Owens Valley Towns

No town in the land east of the Sierra Nevada has a more colorful history than that of Lone Pine, known in its early days as the town of the Lone Pine Tree.

A large pine tree once stood at the confluence of Lone Pine and Tuttle Creeks, giving the settlement this name.

The discovery very early of rich mines in the mountains to the east and south of the settlement brought in many Mexicans as well as Chileans, French, German, Swiss, and a sprinkling of other nationalities. While holding to the principles of American Democracy, they seldom bothered to become naturalized, and never overlooked an opportunity to celebrate some important day of their native land.

It appeared the town was always in the midst of a celebration, the most important dates being July 4th, July 14th (Bastille Day), September 16th (Mexican Independence Day); and September 18th (Natal day of Chile).

All celebrations were much the same. On July 4th the "Stars and Stripes" was much more in evidence, and the Declaration of Independence was read, but otherwise, parades, "rooster pulling," drinking, fighting, eating, and that number one event, a "bear and bull fight," made up the events of the day.

Of all events this last named one was the most exciting, and best attended. It was held in a large arena, 100 feet in diameter, circular in structure made of boards and posts to a height of seven or eight feet. Inside this circular area were seats for at least 300 spectators. They were protected from the bear and bull by guard planks two and one-half feet wide and two inches thick. The bear and the bull were chained together so that neither could escape. The fight was to the death, and the people enjoyed it. The inner arena was covered with soft sand to soak up the blood of battle. This event was held toward the end of the day, and was followed by a supper and dance.

Around the circular walls of the arena where the bear and bull fight took place were the flags of all nationalities of Lone Pine as well as the National Emblem. Capedors wearing red jackets and pants, white shirts and black boots and hats, worked in the arena. There was an air of gayety and happiness.

## Dancing Was An Important Social Function In Lone Pine From 1865 to 1880.

Dancing was a great social event in the lives of the people of Lone Pine beginning as early as 1865. This was no doubt due to the many unmarried men at the mines, and the presence of a military post at Camp Independence.

People traveled two and three days to get to a dance. Dancing started early in the evening, stopped for a midnight supper and then continued on until daylight.

If a young couple planned to announce their engagement, it was usually done at a dance, and in a very peculiar manner. The young man brought an egg from which the contents had been drawn or blown out through tiny holes. After the egg became dry it was then filled with gold dust. At some opportune time during the dance, the young man sifted the gold dust over the long tresses of the favored girl, and regardless of the color of her hair, the glistening gold dust brought out all of its beauty. The dance was immediately stopped, the couple surrounded by well-wishers who begged to be told the exact date of the wedding.

## The Boys In The Sky-Blue Pants

The soldiers at Camp Independence often spoke of themselves as the "Boys in the Sky-blue Pants," and they liked nothing better than going to a dance at Lone Pine. During such times they camped at the big Plaza toward the north end of town. This location took in what is now known as the Mt. Whitney Motel and the area to the north of it.

The soldiers in their blue uniforms added color to all events, and had a standing invitation to all dances.

## The Death of Sheriff Passmore

Thomas Passmore who lived in Lone Pine was elected sheriff in 1875 and again in 1878. On the night of February 12, 1878, a fight started in town resulting in the death of an Indian at the hands of a criminal named Palacio, who was known for his expert use of a gun. After the shooting Palacio took refuge in a house owned by Frank Dabeeny, the place being one of ill-repute. This building stood on the corner now occupied by the Indian Trading Post.

Sheriff Passmore had been ill and when aroused from sleep and told of the shooting, was in no condition to get up to investigate the trouble. He was a man, however, who felt duty came first and with a couple of other men went to the Dabeeny house. The front door was locked, and a knock on the door was unanswered. Passmore attempted to force an entrance. Suddenly wild shots came from the inside, several of the bullets passing through the door. Passmore staggered, saying, "Boys, I'm shot." With these words he fell across a large rock at the side of the door, and was dead when the men reached him. **This large rock has been made into a fountain and stands to the west and south of the Trading Post.**

Great excitement followed the shooting of Passmore. Men ran from the various buildings to join in capturing the criminals. Shots were rained into the building. Finally Dabeeny and Palacio ran out only to be cut down by a hail of bullets. Several others in the building were asked to come out, and since it appeared they were guilty of no offense other than consorting with criminals were allowed to go their way although two of them were asked to leave town. They evidently attempted to do this, but their bodies were found lying along the road the next morning.

## Centennial Celebration

As July 4, 1876 drew near, it was decided to celebrate the Centennial of the birth of our Nation in Lone Pine.

President Ulysses S. Grant had asked each County in the United States to hold one big celebration, and since mining was booming around Lone Pine, and more money available in that area, it appeared wise to hold the big event in Lone Pine.

Great preparation took place. The Committees were selected from every area of Inyo County. The President of the Day was Pat Reddy, Esq. of Darwin. The Honorable J. E. Parker of Independence was selected as the Orator of the Day, and so on it went. Many committees were selected from Bishop and Big Pine as well as Cerro Gordo, Panamint City, and Cartago.

As the Fourth drew near every hotel and rooming house in Lone Pine was crowded.  
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Visitors stayed at Independence and other nearby places. Covered wagons were brought to stay in. Beds were placed on porches and even outdoors.

Red, white, and blue Programs had been printed, and at the top of this were the following words: "The Citizens of Lone Pine send Greetings to the Patriotic people of Inyo County, and solicit all to join in Celebrating the Hundredth Anniversary of our Nation's Birthday. Liberty and Union!"

Special invitations were sent to the Governor, Secretary of State, and other noted people. Handbills had been sent to every person in the County.

The Parade was the crowning glory of the celebration and was something to behold. It had six Divisions as follows:

Division One: Mounted Police, the Grand Marshal, Camp Independence Band, Captain MacGowan's Company D, 12th Infantry, the carriages of the officers and committees of the Day.

Division Two: The Mexican Society with their National Colors, and various characters of their history.

Division Three: Chilean Society, their National Colors, and characters from their history.

Division Four: The French Society with their Tri-Color, and characters from History.

Division Five: Other Nationalities such as Swiss, German, and others with their Colors if they had them. They had characters from their history also.

Division Six: Purely American; the Colors again, floats of American Life, characters from history, the Grand Marshal again who had come back for the finale. He was accompanied by his escorts who were wearing as he was, red, white and blue scarves, gold fringe trimmings and trappings on their horses.

This Division also had the citizens in carriages, many floats of groups, and horse-back riders.

The parade formed at the old Plaza and moved south through Lone Pine, circling around and ending up at the Plaza again.

Products of the County were on display at the Mexican Hall, and there were beautiful specimens of minerals from Cerro Gordo, Panamint City and Darwin.

The oration by the Honorable J. E. Parker

of Independence gave the whole history of Inyo County, and ended by calling Inyo County the "Silver County of the Golden State"

There were fireworks in the evening, followed by a Grand Ball, and midnight supper in the Mexican Hall. The music was good, and the tickets to the Ball and Supper were five dollars per couple.

Captain MacGowan and his men had taken a very great part in the celebration. They had arrived at the Plaza on July 3rd. Here they set up camp to be ready for the next day's work. At sunrise on the Fourth, they gave a Federal Salute of thirteen volleys for the Thirteen Original States. At seven o'clock a full dress guard was regularly mounted. At ten o'clock the Company joined the Parade. Immediately after the Parade a Centennial Salute of one hundred Volleys was fired by the Company. At sun down a National Salute of thirty-seven volleys (the number of States in the Union) were fired. It was a great day for Company D, 12th U. S. Infantry.

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