

REUBEN “Reub” COOK SPEAR

By Beveridge Ross Spear

It was said in early days that "Reub" Spear had more tunnels and shafts quarried by his hands, between Owens Valley and Bull Frog, Nevada, than any other pioneer.

He was average size, weighing about 170 pounds. His hair and long mustache were dark, his eyes bright gray. He was friendly, kind and accommodating. His word and bond were equal, his strength and endurance remarkable, his home peaceful, free from tobacco and liquor. From early till late he worked incessantly, fired by a righteous ambition. This tremendous drive eventually broke his constitution. He died at 73.

Reuben Cook Spear born in England, December 27, 1852, arrived in Lone Pine in 1874, age 22. His father, John Spear was a popular Free Methodist Minister.

Reub became the partner of A. C. (Curt) Harvey who owned a blacksmith and wagon shop on the corner now occupied by Joseph's Market. Later Reub acquired the entire business. He had plenty of work, but he was not satisfied. His heart was in the mines.

R. C. Spear had mining interests in Nevada, and mined silver around Panamint Valley, including the Lane Mine. At one time he had interests in Darwin. He owned the Black Diamond, the north extension of Cerro Gordo.

Reub worked with his brother-in-law, W. L. Hunter, at the rich Belmont silver mine in east Cerro Gordo, and did considerable work in Swansea on silver claims.

Backed financially by a New Yorker, Spear did most of the early work on the Long John mine eight miles east of Lone Pine on the old Hunter trail.

The last shipment of ore that Reub made came from the Long John Mine, in 1917, where he started out many years earlier. After this shipment the mine was sold for \$3000.00. It's now patented and owned by Jack Walker of Trona.

Reub owned the gold claims on the southern slope of New York Butte which later became Camp Burgess. He named them The Xray Group. Kate T. Wells, a later owner, called them Old Ironsides.

Influenced by W. L. Hunter, Reub worked for years on copper claims in the Ubehebe district. After the death of Hunter, in 1902, Spear acquired the Ulida Mine originally owned by Hunter. Reub succeeded in influencing a Utah company to take over. They soon discovered that the exciting, rich outcroppings of copper didn't have roots so they left the district.



Reuben Cook Spear in 1888.
36 years old, year of his marriage

Later Reub and his son Beveridge worked promising out-croppings a few miles above the Ulida tunnel. A shipment of ore gleaned from the surface was packed nine miles by mule, moving one ton a day. It was hauled 45 miles by wagon over a rough, primitive, pioneer road to Keeler. From here it went by rail to the smelter. Its copper content ran about 28-30% with a little gold and silver. This was in 1912, Reub's last work in Ubehebe. To my knowledge this was the only ore ever shipped from this district.

Reub and his younger brother, Frederick, did much work on the Mt. Whitney gold mine three miles north of Lone Pine in the Alabama Hills. They persuaded a company to build a stamp mill. They had no coal, cordwood or oil to heat the steam boiler. They dragged a railroad rail over a large acreage of land owned by Ben Totten, son-in-law of A. C. Harvey. Sagebrush was gathered by pitchfork on a hay rack, then tossed into the fire box. Bob Harry of Lone Pine did the sweating.



Present Joseph's Market corner, from the rear, about 1882.

1. Zaun Ice House
2. Wagon Shed
3. Blacksmith Shop
4. R. C. Spear Home
5. A. C. Harvey family

The mill was a success, but the company made a serious geological mistake in driving an exploratory tunnel, so they quit. Originally the ore from this mine was packed to Lone Pine Creek, where it was processed by an arrastra powered by a water wheel. The arrastra was located on the eastern foot of Hoodlum's Peak. This hill is on your right as you enter the canyon.

At the turn of the century boys with shotguns, rifles, and six-shooters gathered on this hill to play war. The cracking of guns was fast and furious as the two "armies" scrambled up and down the hill, shouting curses at each other. I was in more than one of these skirmishes. The marvel is that no one was killed. We used live ammunition. But all understood that everyone should shoot over the head. This dangerous sport, with a lot more noisy activity week by week by week coined the title for the hill, Hoodlum's Peak.

Influenced by his brother-in-law, Reub entered the gold mine in Beveridge. In time he and his brother Frederick acquired the Big Horn property. They worked it successfully processing the ore by the old Spanish arrastra-method instituted earlier by Hunter.

The ore easily ran \$100 per ton free gold, possibly more. The gold price then was \$18 to \$20 per troy ounce. In this bicentennial year 1976 gold is about \$130 per troy ounce, six times the old price.

The three circular vats each ground out a ton of ore every 24 hours. Four flat rocks, two to three hundred pounds each, were pulled round and round by a steam engine. This gradually pulverized the ore in each arrastra. This freed the gold for amalgamation.

The quicksilver sprinkled, several times a day, into the swirling vats united with the gold, carrying it to the bottom. It lodged between the flat rocks of the arrastra floor.

Each arrastra was flushed daily, running the mud through sluice boxes, then over amalgamated copper plates. This double precaution trapped any gold leaving the pit or arrastra.

When all ore had been run, the three bottoms were taken up and cleaned of all amalgam. This was retorted, separating the mercury from the gold. Then the gold was melted and poured into molds. The summer's run after a winter's mining brought anywhere from three to six thousand dollars.

In 1913 the brothers exchanged properties. Reub took the Cerro Gordo interests, and Frederick took the Beveridge gold mine.

The discovery of high grade zinc in the Cerro Gordo mine by L. D. Gordon in 1911 brought another boom to the old camp. Identical ore and values were found in the Black Diamond, relocated as the Lead Queen, but now known as the Silver Spear mine.

With the discovery of ore bodies in the Lead Queen shaft, regular car load shipments were made. Zinc averaged 39 to 42%, Lead ran 35 to 56% carrying about an ounce of silver for each per cent of lead content. Gold averaged \$1.50 to \$3.50 per ton, and about 1% copper. Reub and his son shipped the best of all ore down to the 150 foot level.

At this point L. D. Gordon took a lease with an option to buy. The lease required a 1000 foot tunnel to be driven on the north end of this Royal Group of Claims. Gordon shipped 40 tons of fine ore from the Lead Queen shaft. He drove the tunnel at an obtuse angle and never reached the fault zone. He quit.

After the death of R. C. Spear in 1926, J. Percy Hart of Los Angeles obtained a lease and bond on the Royal Group. He worked along in a small way for 15 years. He never mastered sufficient capital to do any extensive work. He gutted the mine of all available ore, and ended up thousands of dollars in debt to the owners. They gave Hart another chance.

He organized the Silver Spear Company into a Nevada Stock Company. At that date old Cerro Gordo was again defunct. This new company bought in all of Cerro Gordo. That included power lines, tramway to Keeler, heavy duty machinery, and all patented claims. The price was twelve thousand dollars back taxes.

Hart next interested a group, financed by an oil company. Wilfred C. Rigg of Beverly Hills, California initiated the deal. Rigg spent about three years diamond drilling the underground workings of the Union mine from the 200 foot level down to the 700. This thorough prospecting cost more than a quarter million dollars. Rigg discovered no new ore body. With this failure, and the general decline of mineral mining across the country, the Silver Spear company went under. This property is now owned by Jack and Barbara Smith of Keeler.

Going back in history to August 1903, Reub, his brother Frederick, Ernest L. Cross (Co-discoverer of Bull Frog; Son-in-law to A. C. Harvey) and F. G. Harvey, photographer, son of A. C. Harvey, laid out the proposed new trail up Lone Pine Canyon to the summit of Mt. Whitney.

Returning with a good report, \$700 was raised in Lone Pine. A crew of 14 was organized, with Reub in charge. The trail was completed to the dizzy divide within three miles of the Whitney's summit. With all funds exhausted the crew returned to town.

The people of Inyo County rallied. A second group headed by G. F. Marsh took up where Spear left off. After suffering bitter cold, storm, and hardship the trail was completed July 17, 1904.

In 1904, between mining and blacksmithing Reub brought a man down that had been killed by lightning on Whitney's summit. Placing the body between boards and securing it on a mule he arrived in Lone Pine. Then he soldered the metal casket making it air tight for shipment. This work was done in a building owned by the pioneer merchant, Charles Meysan. That building is now replaced by the Lone Pine Hotel on Main Street.

People ask, "Who dug that tunnel under Lone Pine Creek at the mouth of the canyon, on the south side of the little yellow hill?"

The answer is Reub Spear. "Why?" people curiously ask. It was located as a water tunnel to tap the underground flow on the canyon's bedrock. The drift was about 250 feet long when it emerged in the gravel, 30 or 40 feet below the stream-bed of the creek. Water was about to flow; Reub, at the point of success.

But laws had been passed in Sacramento years earlier controlling all underground water. Los Angeles served the papers and Reub quit.

While the salt tram was being surveyed, Beveridge carried the men back and forth over the Inyos by pack train until the tramway was well under construction.

When the Forest Service, under Roscoe Parkinson, installed telephone connections in the Sierras, Reub and his son packed and distributed the wire from Monatche to Beach Meadows; from the Tunnel to Kern River.

Reub occasionally piloted groups of tourists into the Sierras. Animals rented for one dollar a day and the packer worked for three. During the Burgess boom his mules packed all heavy freight to the New York Butte Camp for a cent a pound. When the Santa Rosa mine leased ground to "Cloriders" Reub's mules carried their ore down to the road. Belin Brichaga was the faithful, dependable packer during those years.

Reub Spear made several small fortunes in mining, but put it all back into the ground.

He served as county supervisor about 1916, but refused to run for a second term.

He leaves a pioneer's record behind of a careful integrity, honest thrift, and a long string of diggings across a hot and weary desert.