

# Sam Lewis Journal

In the early 1800s there lived in the town of Bethany, Missouri, a family by the name of Ramer, who ran the hotel there. There were three girls in the family. Dr. John Lewis, my grandfather, married one (Jennie). An engineer who built railroads, Sam Ballard, married one (Amanda), and a man named Steven Mendinhall married one (Isabell). He did contract work with teams.

In the city of Otumwa, Iowa there was a family named Turner. The father, my grandfather, was a railroad conductor, his son a railroad engineer. There were three girls in that family. A business man named Charley Harris, married one (Eva), and Dr. Lewis' son, Charlie Lewis, my father, married one (Estella). The third girl never married and remained with her mother until she died.

How these romances started I do not know, but after I was born, the son of Charles William Lewis and Estella Turner Lewis, I got to know all of them. My name is Sam Newman Lewis, named for my grandfather and Uncle Sam Ballard. I was born in Gailsburg, Illinois on July 31, 1893.

The Santa Fe Railroad wanted to put a line from Pecos, Texas up through New Mexico, along the Pecos River to Amarillo, Texas and Sam Ballard was sent there to

do the job. He gave Steve Mendinhall a contract to do some of the grading and my father a job with the surveying crew. In 1895 my father moved his family to Eddy, New Mexico. I was only two years old so I don't remember that part of the trip, but they remained there until 1912. The town of Eddy was renamed, Carlsbad, in 1899.



Eddy County, New Mexico - 1894

I remember it was a rather primitive place. No electricity, no telephones, no water service, no sewerage. A water tank wagon came around and sold water by the bucket. Every household had some whiskey barrels to hold their water supply. Cattle, horses, and burros grazed the open range and everyone had to fence their gardens and fields to keep the stock out.

'Most everyone had chickens and a milk cow and horses to ride and drive, as that was the only way of transportation. When I was five years old, I was started in school and had to ride a horse two miles to get there. The teacher would help me on, to go home, and I don't remember ever falling, though, I did sometimes have trouble getting the horse to go where I wanted to go.



Courthouse in Bethany, Missouri - 1876



Iowa Coal Palace in Otumwa, Iowa - 1890

My brother, Charles William Lewis, Jr. was born there March 17, 1898 and my sister, Isabell, named for Isabell Mendinhall, was born in Carlsbad also, May 21, 1900.

My father worked at many different things after the railroad was built. Being color blind, he could not work on the railroad. He was deputy sheriff under Cisero Stuart until my mother nearly had a nervous breakdown. It was a pretty rough place with saloons and gambling, and so soon after the Lincoln County War, there were a lot of hard feelings between different

people. Fights and shootings were common. He was appointed Health Inspector and a commission business and had shearing pens and a dipping vat for sheep. Then a newcomer, also named Lewis, but no relation, decided to build a freezing plant to make ice for the town, a new idea that most people were dubious about. My father worked on building the plant and was one of the engineers to run it for a while, until a public utility company was formed to provide electricity for the town. They built a dam across the river at a place about six miles below the town and my father filed a homestead near the dam. We moved down there and he was engaged as one of the operators of the power plant.

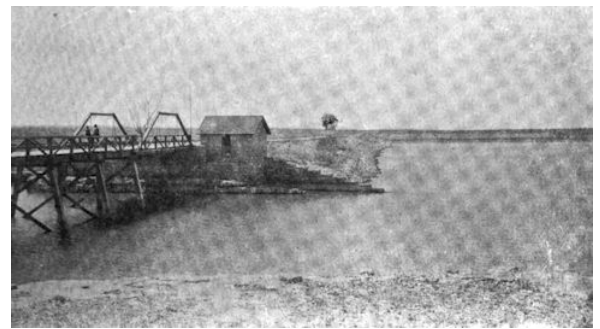
That job was too confining as the shifts were 12 hours long and alternated one month on during the daytime and the next month, all night. There were no automatic controls and the operator had to be right on the job to watch the gauges and control the power all the time. He soon quit that job and let me take it. The job paid \$60.00 per month, which was more than I could get at any other job. Farm workers were paid \$1.50 per day. A day was 12 hours. Cowboys got \$1.00 and food per day and were actually on duty 24 hours.

We kids were allowed to grow up on a pretty free rein and we spent our free time mostly hunting rabbits and fishing in the summer time and hunting ducks and quail during the winter and going to school. Until I started getting jobs at 12 years of age, we lived like little Indians about half wild, and leaned to swim, ride, and shoot, and got into mischief like kids do.

When I was 14 years old, I went with another boy my age, with a wagon and team over to Alamogordo, which was about 150 miles from Carlsbad and across the Sacramento Mountains. We went up the Pinneasco River to Cloudcroft, on top of the mountains, where we were to get some potatoes out of storage to sell, to get money for our expenses. When we got to Cloudcroft we found the potatoes had been stolen and only a small number of seed potatoes were left. These were not saleable but were eatable so we took them and went on down to Alamogordo where we were to pick up a load of furniture and five head of two year old Hambleton colts that had been left there when the family had moved to Carlsbad the year before. I had a rifle and we were able to supplement our potatoes with rabbit but we had no money to buy any other food so we hurried all we could. It took us a couple of days to get the colts broke to lead and to rest our team for the return trip. The first day, going up to Cloudcroft, one of our team horses showed sign of being sick and got worse each day, so we had to leave



United States Reclamation Service  
kitchen, mess hall, Avalon Dam,  
Carlsbad, New Mexico - 1904



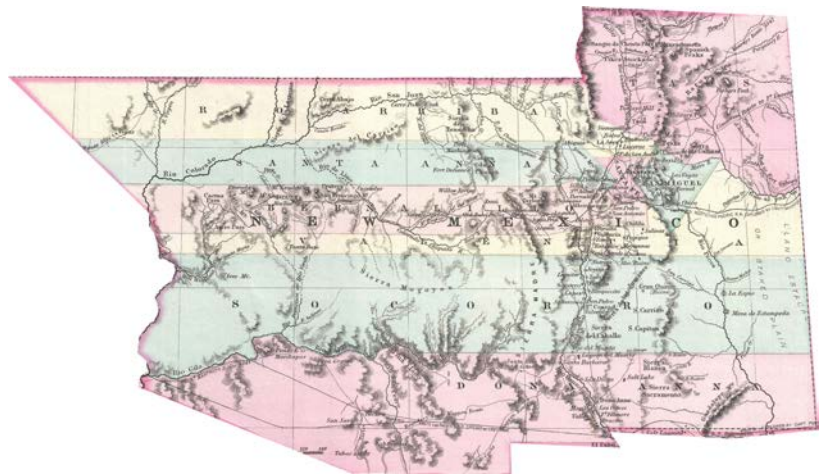
Avalon Dam, Carlsbad, New Mexico

him on the road and use the colts a few hours each, every day, to hold up the wagon tongue and let the other horse do most of the pulling, as it was mostly down hill all the way home. The wagon wheels began giving us trouble and had to be worked on often and all in all, delayed our travel so that we were days longer getting home.

When I got home, I got a job on a farm that had a ranch out on the plains east of Carlsbad and they raised sheep. They sent me and another man to take about 2,000 sheep to this ranch. My job was to drive the camp wagon and move the camp from water hole to water hole and to help the other fellow all I could with driving the sheep. Cattlemen had a few water holes along the way but wouldn't let us water sheep at these places so it helped us when it rained and made ponds and puddles for us. It took us three weeks. There was no timber so we had to use cow chips and light brush, when we could find some, to make our cook fire. The rain didn't help us at that, for wet cow chips don't burn very good. We had saddle horses to ride so didn't have much walking to do, except to find our horses each morning as they had to be left loose each night to graze. It was a pretty rough three weeks and I was glad to get it over. It took me two days to ride home.

I was glad to take over my dad's job of running the power house, but that power house job was so confining and tedious that I soon wanted to get away from it.

When rains caused the river to flood and washed the dam out I was glad to get a job as a teamster with a survey party that was outfitting in Carlsbad, to do a survey on the mesa at the south end of the Sacramento Mountains and we had to go over the Guadalupe Mountains to get there. I drove a span of big mules to the wagon, loaded with camp gear and Tom Jones drove the buckboard with a team of horses that carried the surveyors. Tom was one of a large family of 9 boys and 1 girl, who were early settlers in the Pecos Valley. He was supposed to be the first white child born in New Mexico Territory. All were cattlemen and top cowboys, but Tom went on this trip as cook. It took us three days to get to the VanWinkle water hole, where we were to camp, to start the survey. There were no wells or springs and the only water was caught from rains, by building dams across gullies to catch runoff and hold it in ponds. VanWinkle and Oliver Lee were the only cattlemen grazing cattle in that country and didn't much like the idea of having homesteaders settling in the area. I've often wondered how those homesteaders made out. It was a three day round trip for me to go to Orogrande, which was our nearest supply point, just a supply town on the Union Pacific Railroad south of Alamogordo, where miners and ranchers could get their mail and groceries, and there were not many of these either, because there was a few water wells. These tanks that caught rain runoff got pretty bad sometimes when rains didn't come often and with cattle water in at them. Before we moved from the VanWinkle tank we were using a cloth to strain our water and cow water cocktails were getting hard to swallow.



New Mexico Territory - 1855



We were out on that job for three months. Wood was hard to find there, too, as the mesa was a grass covered place without brush or trees, but I found where some wood had washed down from the mountains and was able to keep the cook supplied. I really enjoyed that job in spite of the isolation, or maybe because of it. The next camp even farther out and we had to haul our water but we got it from one of the homesteader's places. It was cleaner because he didn't have a stock watering at his pond.



Bowie, Arizona

When I got home from that job an old family friend offered me a job. He had bought a place in Bowie, Arizona, so I took him up on it. That was the summer of 1911. Mexico was having trouble those days, changing presidents every few days and were giving the United States trouble along the border.

I worked for my friend through that winter and the next spring I went up to Safford and worked for a while on a farm at Solomonville. Everybody around there were Mormon, and other Mormons, run out of Mexico, were coming in. I got a job to work at a sawmill in the Graham Mountains, so 20 miles out of Safford and went up there for the summer. That was great. The most enjoyable work I ever had yet, and the pay was \$2.50 per day. There were deer in those woods and we got one once in a while for fresh meat. I took boards from the saw, wheeled sawdust out in a wheelbarrow and dragged logs in from out in the woods with a team. It was beautiful and wonderful and I loved it.

I had always dreamed of having a place of my own and was hoping to find a homestead in the mountains. Then I got word that my father was planning to leave New Mexico and go to California to work in the oil fields for his brother-in-law, Charley Harris, the man who married mother's sister. He had formed a company and was in the oil business right in Los Angeles.

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And often drove 24 hours. Nearly every day was 14 to 16 hours long and it finally got the best of me. 30 cents per hour, no sick pay, no days off for Sundays or holidays was just too much. Besides, I had long since decided there were too many people in Southern California. It offered no chance to get the home I was still dreaming of, so I quit, bought me a couple of horses, one to ride and the other to pack my bed, and headed north to get away from the crowded conditions of the Los Angeles area. That was July 1914.

I followed the road to Owens Valley, where the new Los Angeles aqueduct headed from, to bring water to the city. I knew nothing about the country I was going into. When I got to Little Lake, Inyo County, the man who ran the station there offered me a job breaking horses and after that job was done, a well driller needed a man who could run a gas engine to help him drill a well in Rose Spring Valley, and after the well was done a cowman, who had a range for his cattle in Indian Wells Valley and the Argus Mountains, gave me a job looking after his cattle. His name was John Calloway and his range was on the east side of the valley which is now in the China Lake Naval Ordinance Base, but that came about years later, when we got into World War Number 2. I worked for him for two years and still had not found the place where I could homestead and make my home.

I liked Rose Spring Valley and there was a place against the Sierra Nevada Mountains where a small spring came out and formed a small meadow that looked good to me. It was held by an old man who, I felt sure, would give up before long and I offered to buy his relinquishment, and he took me up on the offer. Then the realization of the job I had cut out really dawned. I had no money and no idea how I could make any, so I borrowed some. Enough to fence my place and buy some cows and I put up a tent to live in until I could build a house. The year was 1916 and we were headed for war. World War Number 1, and I was in line for the draft. I put it off as long as I dared and then joined the Navy. I thought that would be better than the trenches.



Sam Lewis & Sam Lewis Jr.

I had met a dear little girl whose father had homesteaded at Inyokern and we put off getting married until the war would be over. Bill Bramlette had bought Little Lake and I had been working for him and he promised to look after my homestead and cattle as best he could while I was away. The Navy assigned me to Port Guard duty in San Francisco so I never got to go to sea.

When the war was over I came home, got married to Olive Truax on December 22, 1918 and we took up life on the homestead, and I worked at anything I could get, from doing County work on roads to team work for mine claims, to riding for cattlemen and doing farm work or fence building and packing. We had droughty years and depressions after the war was ended, and it soon became evident I couldn't make it with cattle but I saw I could make it with horses. I could work horses in packing people to the mountains for fishing, and camping through the summer time. So I sold the cattle and bought some horses and set up to run a packing business.



Sam Lewis' "High Lonesome Ranch" in Owens Valley

It took years to build cabins and fence pastures and raise and train horses for that business, years during which I built my home and raised a family while making friends of the finest sort of people; sportsmen who loved the mountains and all outdoors, and my wife was my greatest asset. We had six children born to us. Lucille came January 29, 1920 at the Methodist Hospital in Los Angeles. The doctor

was late getting there and I had to assist the nurses deliver her.

Estella was born in the same hospital July 11, 1921,  
Sam Jr. was born in Pasadena on May 15, 1924,  
Helen came November 13, 1926 in Pasadena,  
Richard - October 31, 1933 in Pasadena,  
Barbara - September 16, 1935 in Pasadena.

I was not present at the birth of the last four, being too busy at home. All were perfect, healthy, beautiful, and each worth their weight in gold, but six was enough. They each were a big help as they grew up and they are still a great help to make life worth living. They are all living and each have families.

Olive died January 17, 1966 and is buried in Lone Pine, California. All the children had married and moved to homes of their own by that time and I had become too crippled to carry on the work any longer. The old High Lonesome Ranch was really lonely and I had to get out.



Sam Lewis cabin at Dutch John Flat

Ruth Thaxton and I got married at my daughter, Lucille's home in Globe, Arizona, December 15, 1968. I sold my ranch and we moved into Ruth's home in LaVerne, California in April 1971. I had lived at that ranch 55 years and had built it all myself. A two story house of 7 big rooms with gas heat and running water and our own electric power plant, a little orchard, a nice cactus garden and rose arbor over the drive by the house, and shade trees and a barn and corrals and a few grapes. I had my home but couldn't keep it!

Ruth was in much the same condition that I was in. She had her home clear of debt but her husband had died of a lingering illness that had left her without much money and she was too sick to work much and worried to exhaustion. With our combined income and ability we have managed to put her home in good shape and live quite comfortable and, barring some unforeseen bad luck or accident, we should be able to finish out our lives without being a burden on our children or society. It gives us a good feeling and we are happy. I think this is just about as near to heaven as I will ever get.

Some folks think my life has been a wonderful experience. In some ways it has been, wonderful, but not spectacular. When I think back on some experiences, I think it has been remarkable that I am still alive. Like the time when I was about 12 years old, I shot a duck that fell into the river above the dam. I jumped into a boat to row out after it. The river was high and the current was about to carry the duck over the dam when I got to it, and we were so close that I couldn't get back and we went over, boat and me in it. I was thrown out and could have been hurt. No one saw it happen. I could swim but could have been drowned in the fast current but I wasn't hurt and managed to retrieve the boat about a half-mile down stream. Only God knows how many times I came near death, for all my life has been active and I did dangerous work. Like when working in the oil field, one day the rigging broke loose in the top of a derrick where we were pulling a well and fell the one hundred feet to land at my feet. It knocked my hat off and brushed my body so close that it tore my shirt but didn't hurt me. And there was the time when five of us workers were overcome by gas down in a pit. One of the men died but the rest of us recovered in the hospital. Then there was the time when the tractor I was using to push dirt over a cliff went over with the dirt, a 20-foot drop. No one saw that either but when I was found some three hours later, I was lying on the ground, the tractor was upside down and they took me the 50 miles to the hospital, where I came to the next day. I had five ribs and my back broken and a concussion, which may be what ails me now, but I lived. There were all those many, many times when horses have fallen with me or kicked at me with deadly intent but only missed me by fraction of inches or didn't actually kill me, just

hurt, and made me think that I was going to die, and the time my horse tried to throw me over a sheer cliff by bucking right to the edge where one more step would have hurled us both to our deaths, then whirled around and bucked a few yards the other direction and repeated the trip back to the edge of the cliff. Then there was the time, after I came down here to LaVerne, when I got hit by a gravel truck on the highway. My car was smashed and my passenger got his collarbone broken, but it didn't hurt me. I could go on and on but that should be enough to show how remarkable my life has been. Yesterday while sitting in an easy chair on the patio a big avocado fell from the tree and landed beside my ear on the chair. It was big and hard and fell from the top of the tree but didn't hit me. Where are we safe? Why don't we get hurt more than we do? You tell me!

There have been lots of good times and a lot of fun in my life too. I have known lots of fine people and been able to call them friends. I'm proud of that and glad of the opportunity I have had.

## Pastime

One wouldn't think there would be much time to spend playing while trying to build a home on the desert from scratch and with nothing to build with, at the start and there wasn't, but each year Lone Pine, our nearest town forty miles north of my homestead, put on a celebration for a couple of days which they called the Lone Pine Stampede. It was a rodeo and carnival and parade that drew in the whole country just for fun and a good time. One year my youngest daughter, Barbara, was chosen for Queen and in the parade I was given first prize as the Best Horseman (that was really because of my horse) and my youngest son, Richard, and his sister, Helen, were name Best Couple and my oldest son, Sam, Jr., and his girl were chosen 2<sup>nd</sup> Best Couple. They were also riding matched horses. So when I was asked to serve as Grand Marshal of the parade the next year, I felt highly honored and bought myself a new hat and a fancy shirt and fed my horse an extra ration of grain and took on the job. When the day arrived, it dawned cloudy and when the parade started it began to rain, and rained harder as the parade went on, until the end of the parade when the clouds broke and rain stopped and the contestants had a fine time for the rodeo! That rain was needed for the country and was welcomed, but when Mother Nature dumped all that water on me at my finest hour, I figured it was a sign for me to stop showing off. I've been wearing my working clothes ever since. I sit on the sidelines and let the young folks celebrate.

Some folks think they are master of their own fate. I never did think I was over smart. The only way I ever could learn anything was from experience. Experience is a tough teacher but a blamed fool can learn by no other means. As I look back over the years (I'm now 88 years old) it seems to me my life can be compared to a chip of wood upon the sea of life, blown around by the winds of chance and carried along on the currents of changing times, floating because it was natural to do so. I got into the cattle business too late for free and open range, and got into the packing business in a desperate effort to make a go of my homesteading and it turned out to be a fine business for me. It was a lot of hard work for me. It was a lot of hard work for me and my family, especially my wife. We had to work hard and do without a lot of things that some people feel they have to have to make life worth living, but we met the finest class of people in the nicest way possible, on an equal footing, doing for them without being servants. People came to us for vacation trips. People that were from all walks of life, professional people, teachers, lawyers, doctors, business people and farmers and politicians. People who were successful and were not out to haggle over cost or to get something for nothing. At one time I had five presidents in the mountains with five different parties all at one time. Bert Maule with his family (wife, son and daughter) was president of Brentwood Country Club; Fred Smith a lawyer was president of Jonathan Club of Los Angeles and was in on a fishing vacation with friends; F.K. Colby, president of Barker Bros. store in Los Angeles was hunting deer with his brother-in-law. Norman A. Bailey president of the California Lawyers Association, fishing and hunting with a group of friends, and so it went, year after year for 55 years, sometimes packing as many as a hundred and fifty people one year on trips to the mountains, many of them regulars, who came back year after year some twenty five and thirty years and became real close friends, some for three generations. But this is a changing world and Father Time doesn't overlook any of us and we just can't keep on doing hard work forever. Where we used to have to ride a horse to get to those pretty meadows and could make camp any place you would choose, there now are roads and you must camp in prepared camp grounds and among so many people that you might as well stay in the city. There is no privacy or fishing or game to hunt. Even the scenery is changed by logging off the timber. Of



course the air up in the mountains is still clear and clean desert air, pine scented and people go to vacation in it.

My children are planning a re-union to be held in Lone Pine this year (1981) and all the folks will be there. It will be a chance to get acquainted with my own, some of whom I have never met and I am looking forward to it.