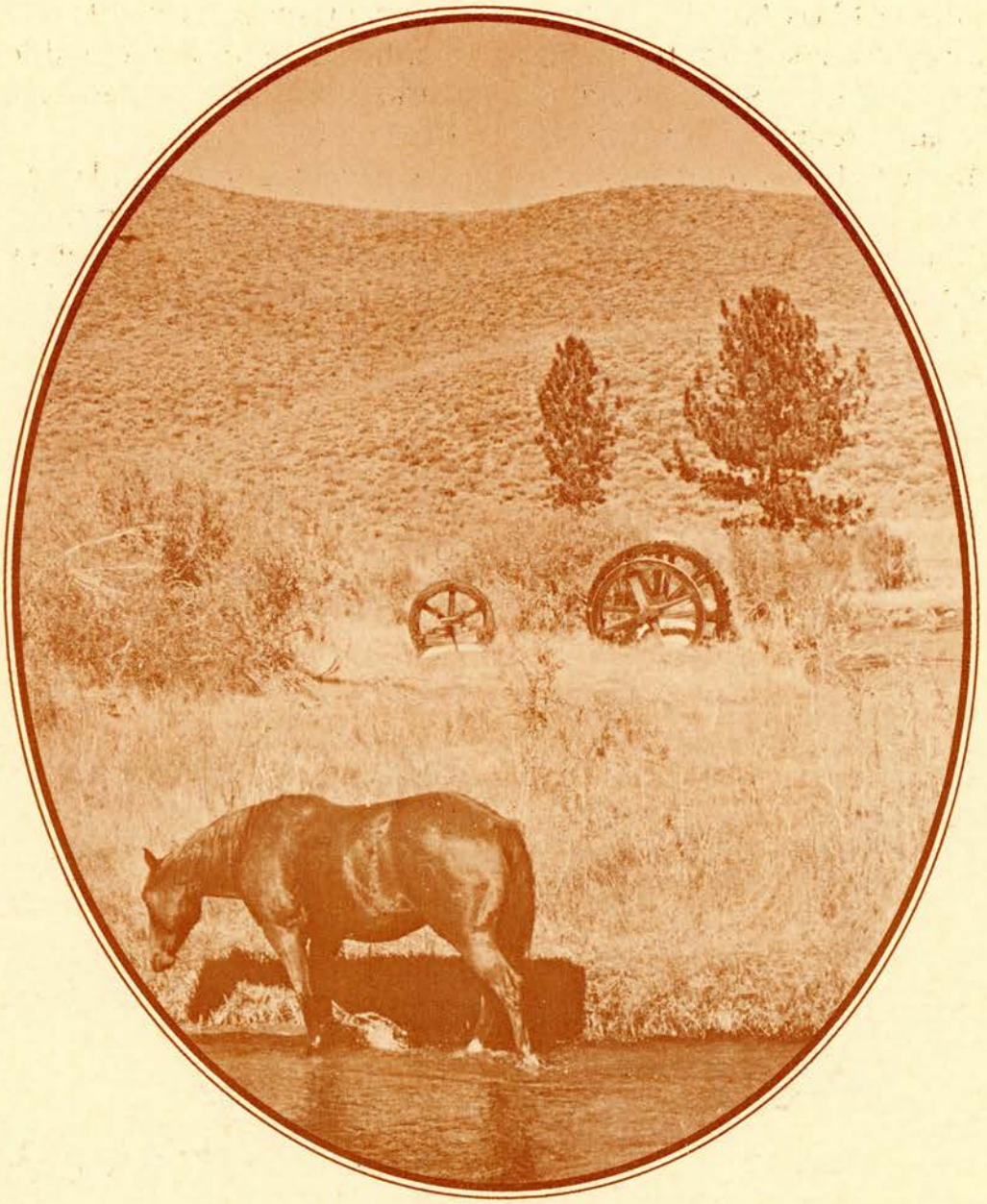
THE ALBUM

Times & Tales of Inyo-Mono



Arcularius Ranch

Inside: Cerro Gordo Photo Essay

The Eastern Sierra
Land of Many Uses

Most of Los Angeles water supply comes from the melted snows of the eastern Sierra—the same region that is one of America's finest recreational areas.

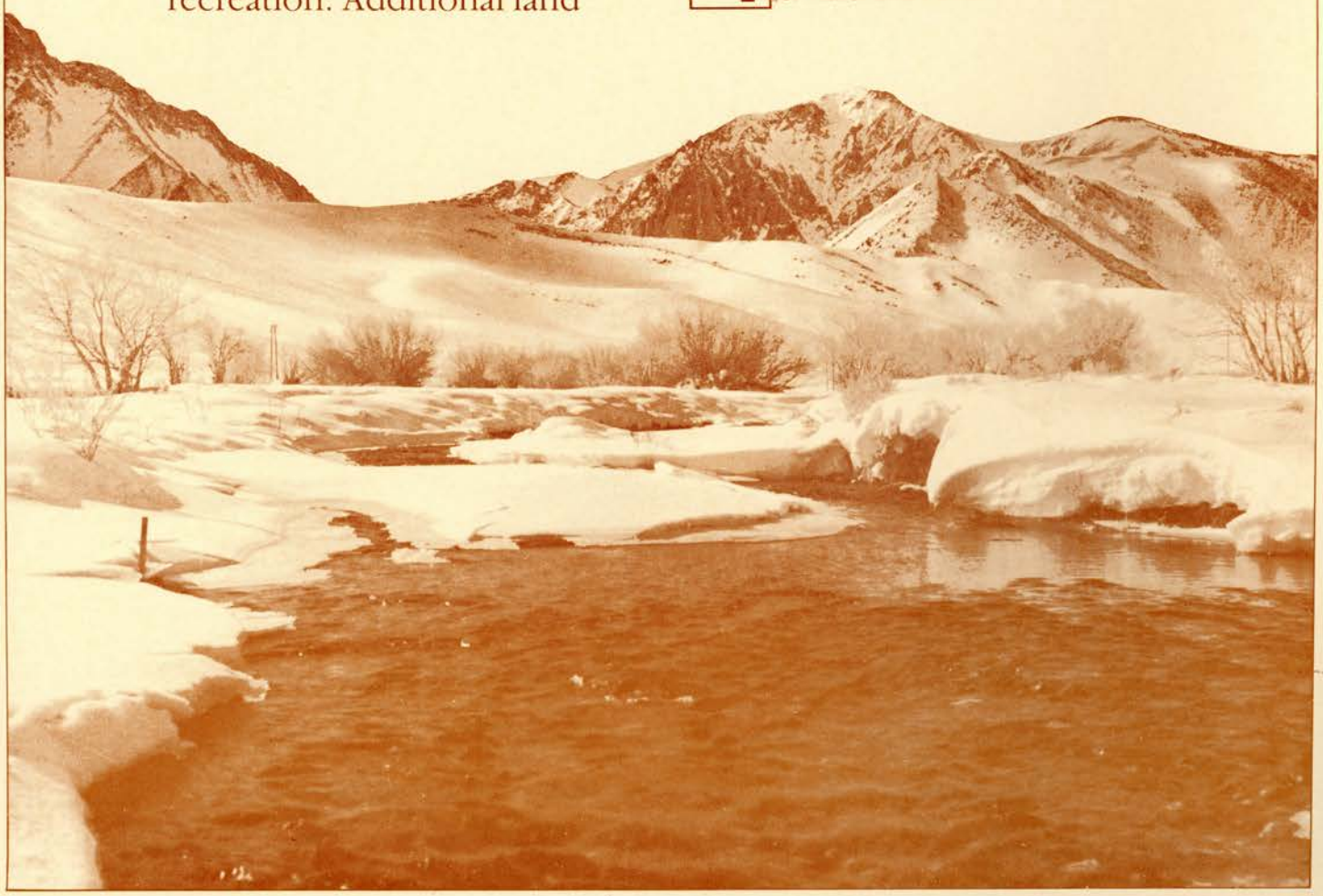
The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power works with Inyo and Mono counties to maintain the eastern Sierra as a vacationer's paradise.

Most of our leased lands remain open for hunting, fishing and other forms of recreation. Additional land has been made available to public agencies for roadside parks, campgrounds and fish hatcheries.

Crowley and Grant Lake Reservoirs have become famous for fishing as well as for boating and water skiing.

We are doing our best to make sure that the eastern Sierra has something for everyone and remains that special vacation spot.

DWP Los Angeles Department of Water and Power



THE ALBUM, Times and Tales of Inyo-Mono,

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IN THIS ISSUE

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Cover photo: Arcularius Ranch, Mono County, by Bill Husa

THE ALBUM, Times and Tales of Inyo-Mono, is a collection of stories, history, and natural history of Inyo County and Mono County, in Eastern California.

Letters, comments, and contributions are welcome; contributions should be accompanied by photos, documents, sketches, or maps.

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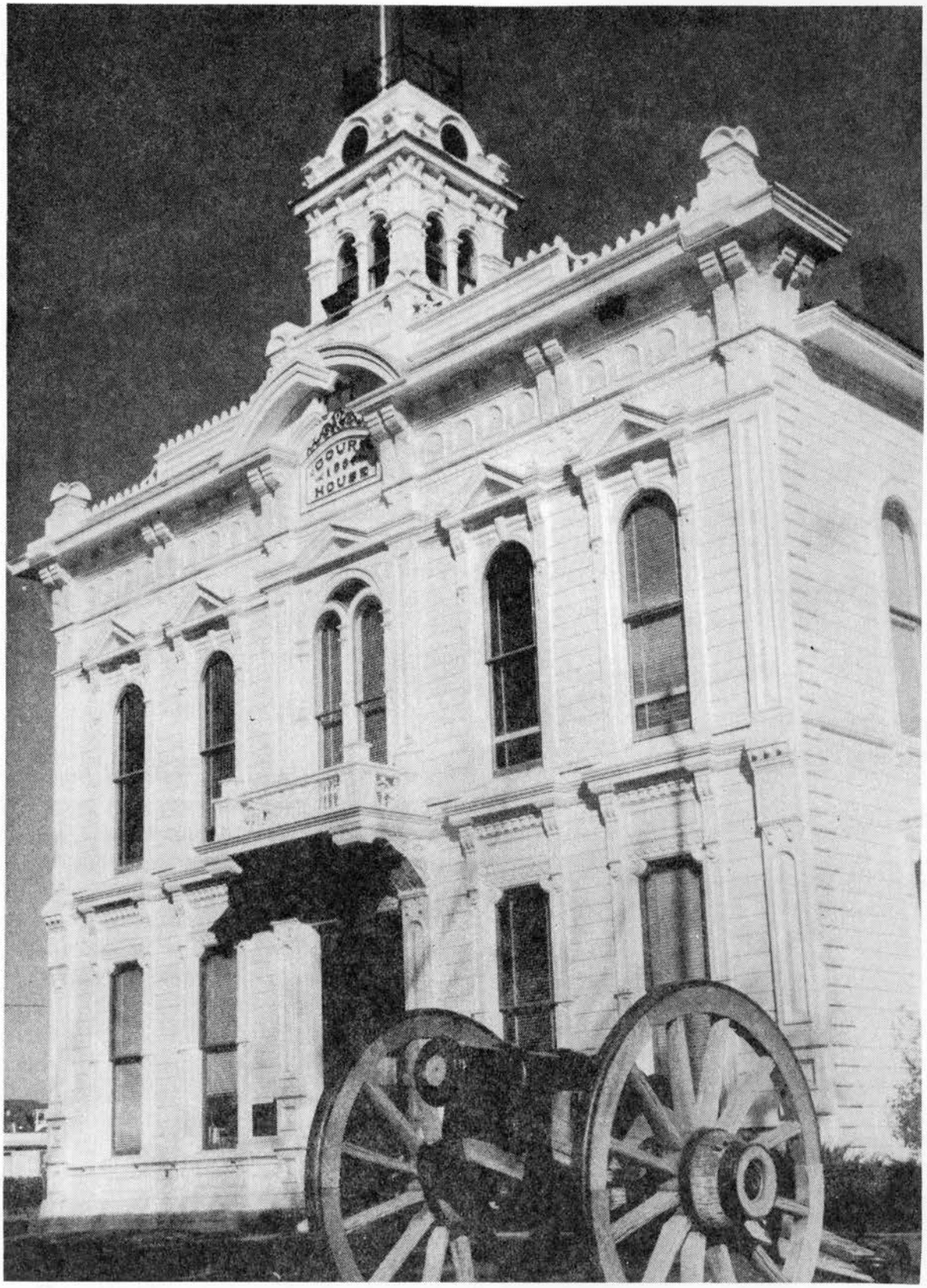
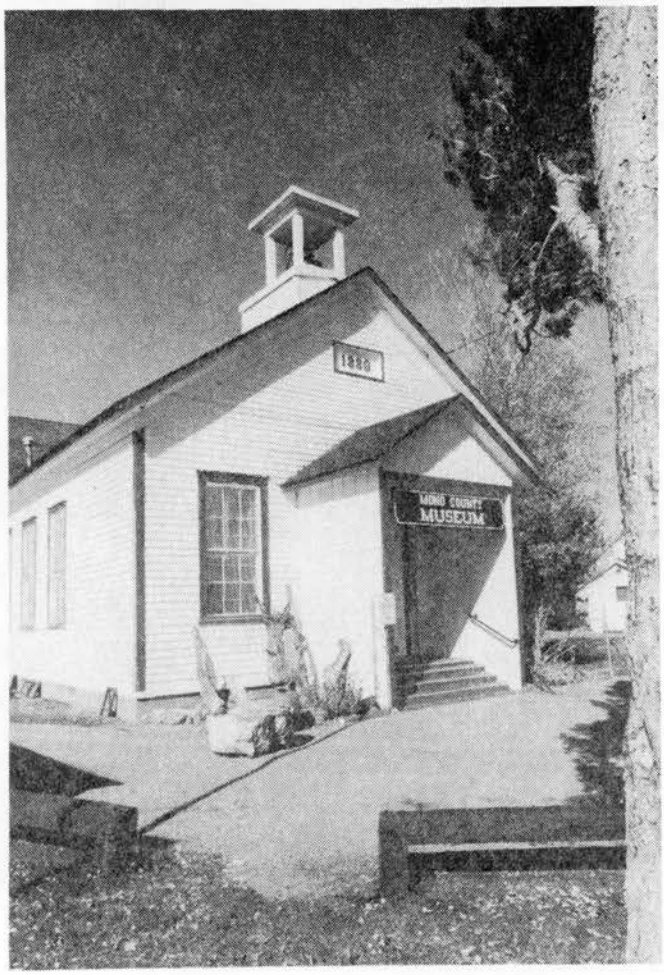


Mono County Courthouse: Built in 1881

This high doored, tall windowed Courthouse building is filled with floors, stairs and bannisters of mellow old wood. The daily business of running a county still occupies the rooms of the stately Courthouse. On the southeast corner of the Courthouse is a post to protect the building from close-cutting wagons and buggies.

Louise and Bill Kelsey Photos



Museum: formerly the Bridgeport Schoolhouse, the Museum boasts one of the finest collections of Paiute baskets in the Eastern Sierra.

Towle House: the distinctive three-chimney house is still occupied by the descendants of an early Bridgeport family.

HISTORIC BRIDGEPORT

By Louise Kelsey

An informative historic monument seven miles south of Bridgeport on Highway 395 marks the site of the placer settlement of Dogtown. Monoville, Aurora, and Bodie, along with Dogtown, conjure up fantasies of the gold-rush days in the 1850s and 60s.

Bridgeport is a living settlement from the old west. But forget the idea of a ghost town. This village gets its vitality from its position as the seat of Mono County government.

Driving north from the Dogtown placer diggings, along Dogtown Creek and beside the Bodie Hills, the road turns a corner and the Point Ranch changes the mood from gold mining to the present day. Big Meadows is now a ranching area.

Cattle graze in the huge, high meadows of Bridgeport valley. Buckhorn Canyon and the Matterhorn in the Sawtooth Ridge are a startling change from the rangelands of the Texas Panhandle and the Plains states.

The first glimpse of Bridgeport, as it nestles in front of the protective hulk of the Sweetwater Range, gives a feeling of a tiny town in some remote and isolated land. A town 10 times its size would give the same feeling. The majestic surrounding country could dwarf a moderate metropolis.

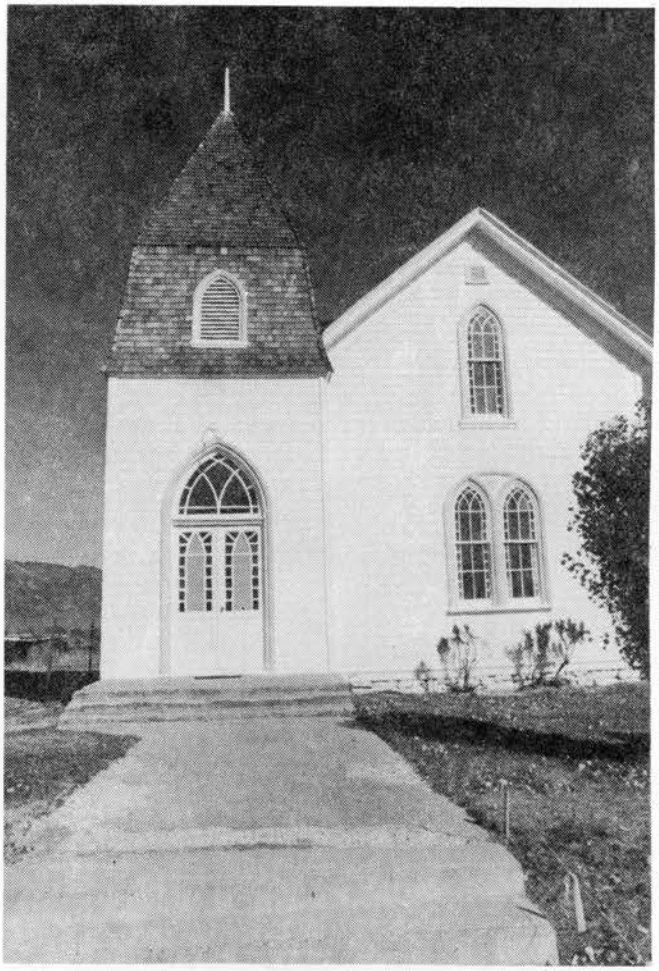
Across the East Walker River at the south edge of town is the Towle House. Its three distinctive brick chimneys are set off by spanking-white paint and a charming picket fence. Furniture on the front porch seems to invite guests to spend a quiet afternoon talking about a more tranquil lifestyle.

The small house, graced by an autumn decked tree and a tired picket fence, is a favorite stop for photographers and from the sidewalk the two moods of the house are curiously apparent.

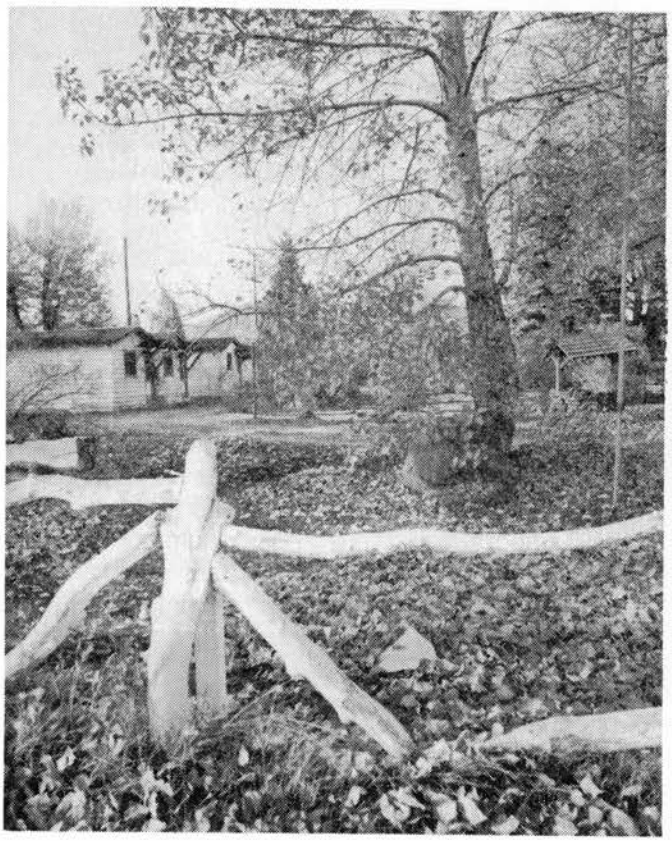
Mono County was created in 1861. The county seat was at Aurora. An election in 1863 resulted in the move of the seat to Bridgeport. The present courthouse, splendidly victorian, was completed in April, 1881. Its New England flavor and the old cannon on its carefully groomed lawn create a wonderful setting for the annual Fourth of July oratory and celebration. The county business of Mono is still conducted in the stately rooms with lofty ceilings and age-darkened floors.

The Mono County Jail was built in 1883. The building is of natural stone that cost $5,750 in gold coin. The building

Jail: built 1883
Built of natural stone, the small size of the jail attests to the low crime incident of the county.

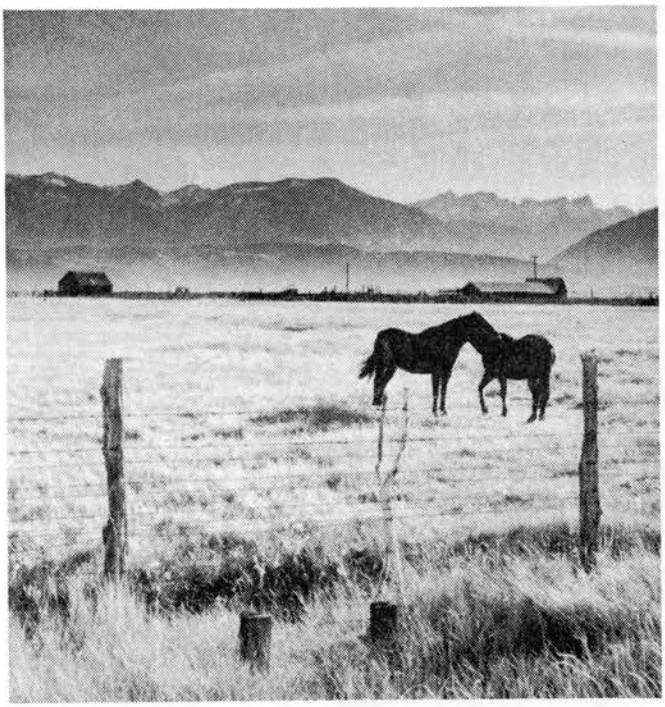


Bridgeport Community Church



Slick's Court: west of the Courthouse is a delightful collection of log bungalows.

Victorian Hotel



Elliot Ranch stock and out buildings

material was mined locally and built by A.J. Severe. Severe also built and owned the Brick Saloon, which was next to the Courthouse . . . which suggests a story in itself. The old jail was replaced by the modern facility in 1964.

The Mono County Museum stands on the grounds of a charming park. The building was formerly the Bridgeport schoolhouse and the bell in its belltower called many students to class who still reside in this pleasant community.

On the grounds of the park are pieces of farm equipment and an old stamp mill. They are refreshingly unfenced for close inspection by visitors and oldtimers who enjoy an afternoon in the sun.

The Bridgeport Community Church building was originally the store of L.E. Wedertz. It was moved to the present site in 1901, at which time the steeple was added.

Back on Main Street, Slick's Court, on the site of the old Bryant's Hall, is a delightful collection of log bungalows. In 1880 A.F. Bryant donated a lot for the construction of the courthouse, and in 1884 he erected a large public hall on the northwest corner of Main and School streets. In 1936 the building was moved to Emigrant Street and in 1946 it was torn down.

On Main Street, across from Slick's Court is the Victorian Bridgeport Inn. It is furnished with many antiques which make a night's stay a mini-visit into past graciousness. The back of the hotel is as interesting as the front. The second story railing and the old farm wagon, grass-grown to the ground, suggests how closely Bridgeport lives with its past.

If you follow present Highway 395 north out of Bridgeport you will miss one of the beautifully maintained ranch houses of Big Meadow. In old Bridgeport, wagons and horses turned north at the courthouse and followed School

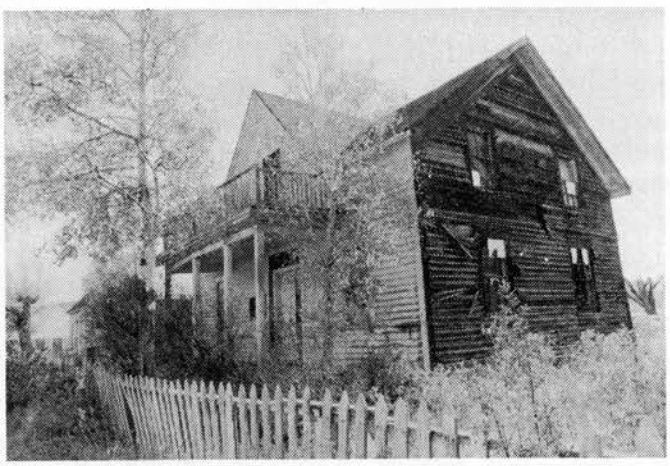
Day Ranch, north edge of town

Street to Emigrant, then west in a straight line to the Elliot ranch house. Follow the same course and you will pass the Day Ranch. The white slab fences are typical of many ranch fences in the Eastern Sierra. With the lumber mills in the area supplying the local needs, slab fences were as practical here as split-rails were in heavily forested lands.

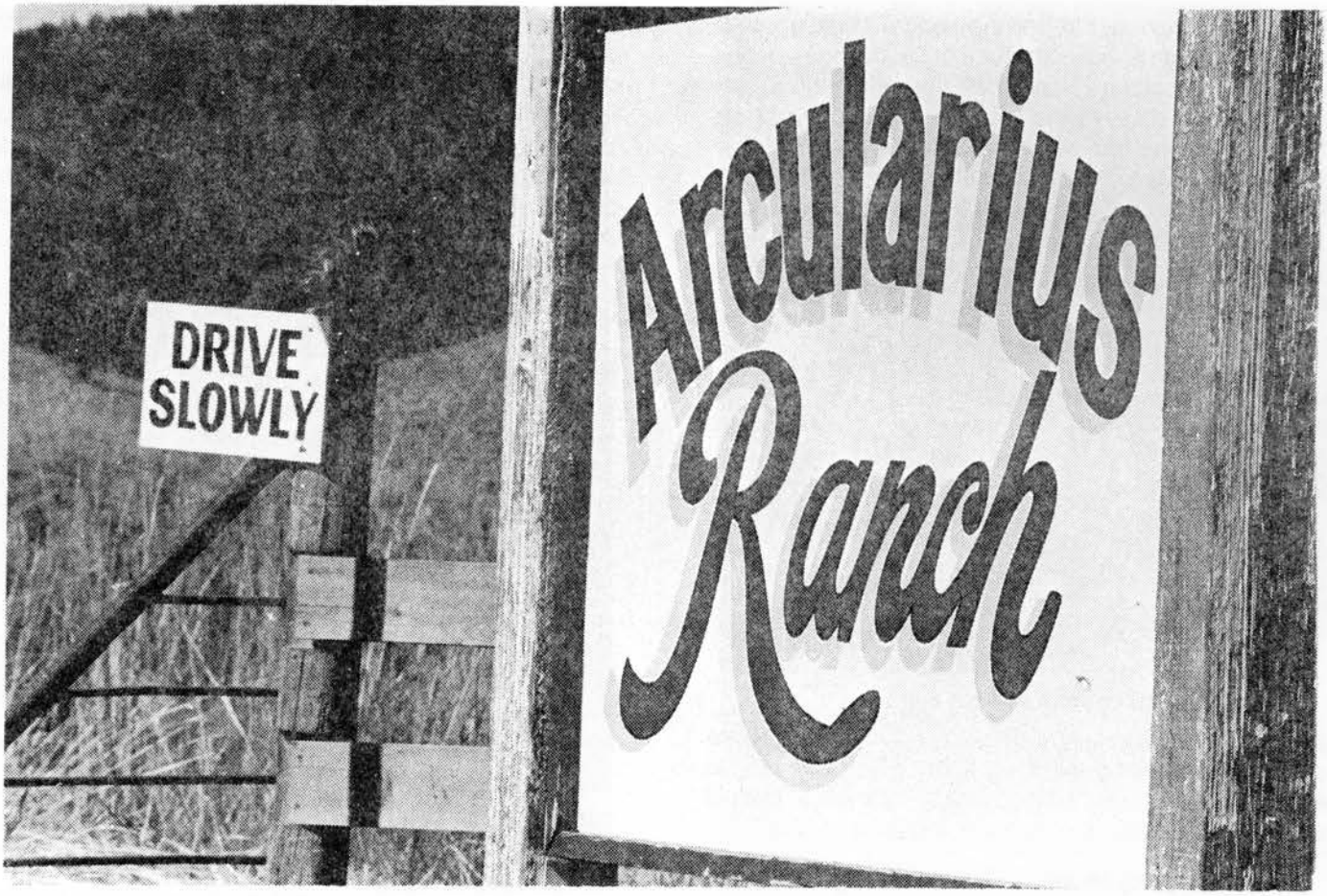
North of the Day Ranch and back on present Highway 395, a number of ditches that lace the valley, cross under the road. This network is water from the Sierra that flows into Bridgeport Lake.

Beyond the west end of town at the section-line turn of 395 is the Elliot ranch house. While the home has been known by the name of its different owners, the original resident was one of Bridgeport's pioneer families.

Instead of heading north to Nevada, if you will turn around and visit the Mono County Library in the Courthouse Annex, you will be courteously assisted with any search you may want to make into the stories of this lovely old town. In fact, many of the people you pass on the streets are proud of their heritage and gracious enough to share some of their interesting stories with visitors.



A little house with two faces. Did someone run out of whitewash after the front was painted.



By Barbara Moore

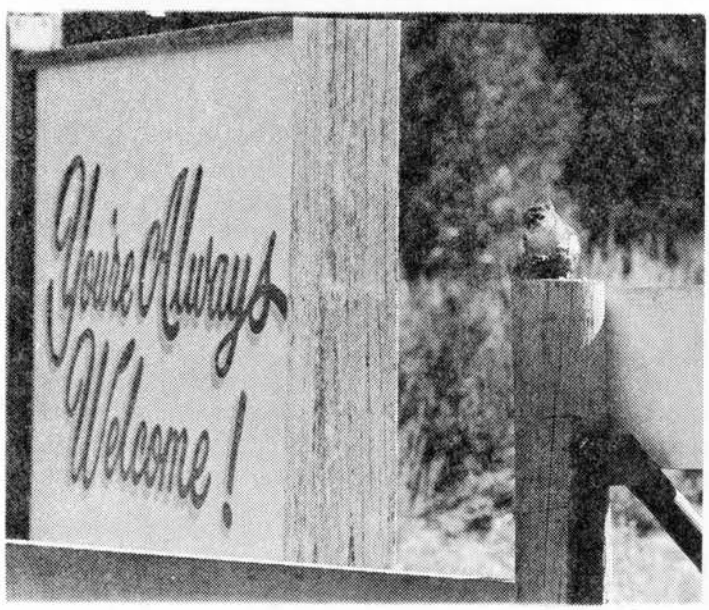
Of Greek heritage, the Arcularius family dates back to Mono County's earliest days. John's great-grandfather was a 20-mule skinner in Bodie where John's grandfather, the founder of the ranch on the Owens River, was born. In 1876 the family left Bodie and homesteaded in Round Valley near Bishop.

The ranch, purchased primarily for use as a cattle and sheep ranch in 1919, became a fishing ranch about the same time. John's grandfather rewarded the patrons of his general store in Bishop by offering them a week of fishing if they bought $5.00 worth of groceries.

The original tent cabins evolved into more substantial structures in the 1920s, followed by the building in 1936 of the knotty-pine paneled main building, housing the general store and community room. The spacious rooms filled with relics from the past, photo albums, books and games for rainy days, a handsome player piano, pool table, VCR, and an enticing stone fireplace, reflect the Arcularius hospitality.

Along the four miles to the ranch from Highway 395, stately Jeffrey pines lining both sides of the road give way to a sage covered meadow, a panorama framed by Bald Mountain and the Glass Mountains. In this pastoral setting, the Owens River weaves its way through the meadow where the white painted buildings of the Arcularius Ranch, accented by red roofs and trim, hug the bank.

The source of the Upper Owens River is a series of springs of varying sizes that flow out of the rocks near Big Springs Campground. Almost halfway along the five-mile river stretch owned by the ranch, the Los Angeles tunnels dump water from Grant Lake to join the meandering river as it continues on to Crowley Lake.



Bill Husa Photos

Build a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door are words that John Arcularius, third generation owner of the Arcularius Ranch, lives by. Although nature has generously blessed the location of this 68 year old hideaway near the headwaters of the Owens River, it is John's attention and philosophy that give the ranch its very special appeal that brings guests back year after year. One of their regulars hasn't missed a visit in 62 years, and one family is now into its fourth generation of Arcularius vacations.

Most guests come from Southern California, although some are from as far away as South Africa. They range in age from three weeks to 87 years old and represent all walks of life. Although a few could probably buy the ranch, the majority save diligently all year for the privilege of a few days or weeks at this corner of Sierra solitude.

Whether a paying guest or a drop-in customer, or just curious, the genial tone at the Arcularius Ranch is set the moment you set foot into the general store.

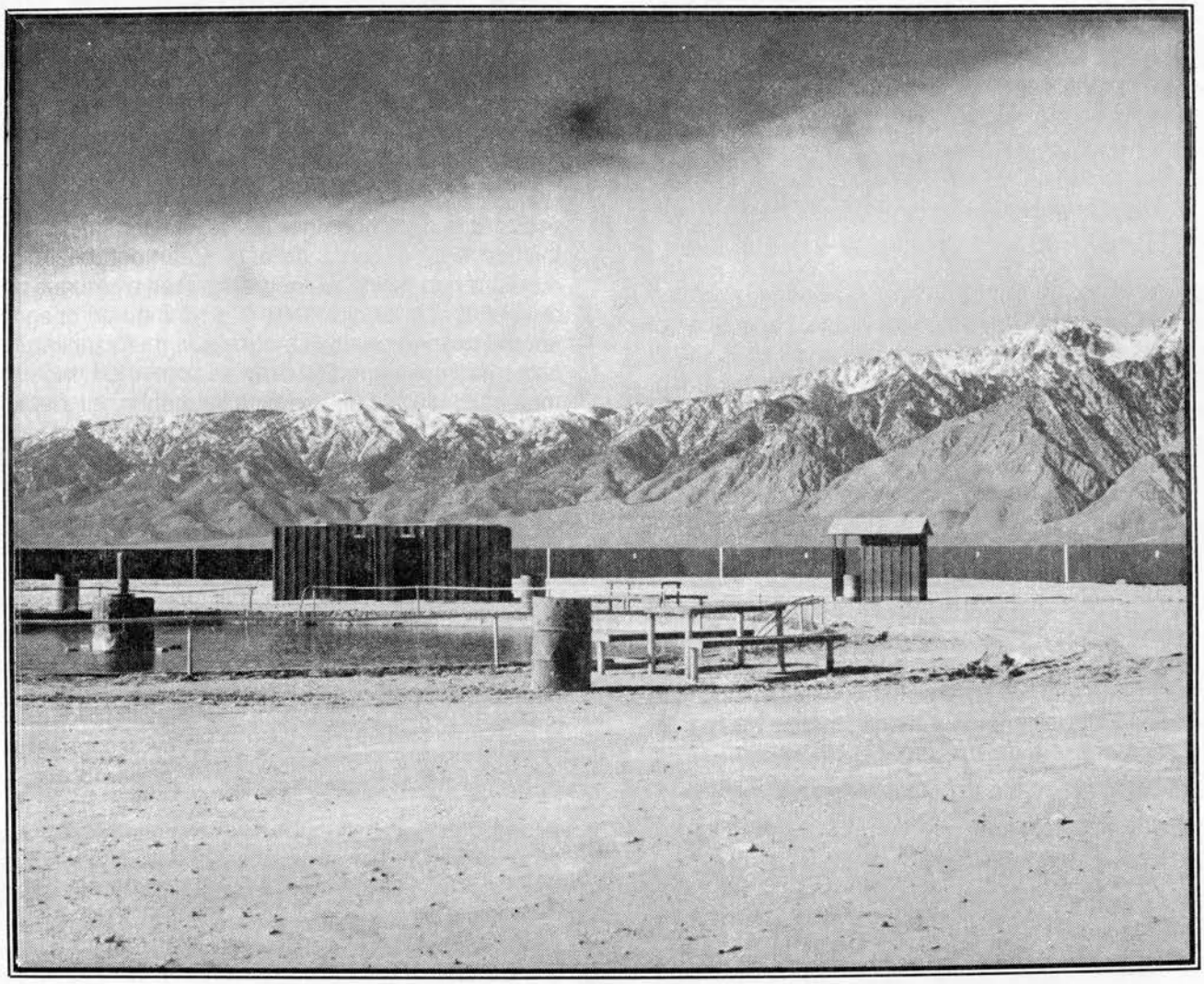
John is a cattleman, not a fisherman, but he knows and understands nature, and he knows what the dedicated fisherman wants. Uppermost is value for dollars received. This creed results in 100 percent occupancy of his fifteen cabins during the six-month season, and a waiting list many times longer than the reservation list.

The fly-fishing Arcularius guest is a breed apart from the hordes of bait fishermen who swarm over lakes and streams on opening day. Those who seek the solitude and beauty of the "Arc" also appreciate the fragility of nature and if one were to discard even a toothpick, it would probably mean banishment to some crowded place where beer cans, bait containers, and disposable diapers litter the shores.

Except for a few concrete relics left from the building of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power tunnels 40 years ago, nowhere along the privately owned five miles of twisting and turning river is anything out of place. The area is pristine beauty at its best with 100 or so head of cattle lazily munching nearby as contented as the fishermen who stalk the meandering banks for the trout hiding in the shadows. Everywhere, the harmony of nature and man is evident.

The all-time record catch, a 15-pounder, is displayed in the general store along with a gallery of photos, old bottles and even birds' nests.

There is only one drawback to a visit to the "Arc." If you aren't a guest of the ranch, you can't fish, but you can enjoy the hospitality and beauty of this special place, with the old bubble-type gas pump outside the general store, and cracker barrels and friendly folks standing around to visit inside.



Tom Ross Photo

A Dirge For

Dirty Sock

By Marguerite Sowaal

A small campfire burned near the bubbling spring. Wood was scarce and the old Indian fed it carefully while she washed in the *uduin'ba.* Sky the color of a robin's egg canopied the blue-pink lake in a valley guarded by snow-covered ridges. A subtle sound startled her and she paused, looking skyward. It was only a hawk circling the valley floor. She had been warned, and although she had never seen him, medicine men told of evil spirits that came to the valley with the White Man. There had been a great sickness and many died.

The pastoral scene portrayed is what the area around Owens Lake was like before the white settlers began to proliferate in the valley a hundred and thirty years ago.

The *uduin'ba* (Shoshoni for hot spring) at the extreme southeast side of Owens Lake about four and one-half miles northeast of Olancha is now called Dirty Sock. Of all the strange place names in Inyo County, California, Dirty Sock is likely to win honors as inspiring the most curiosity. Why it was named that depends on which old-timer is telling the story. Some say that the early prospectors, stopping at the seep for their semi-annual bath, laundry, and "cure," washed their clothes in the spring and draped them over the brush to dry. The socks, forgotten in the pool, disintegrated. Others say, and this is more likely, that the volcanic sulfur odor surrounding the pool inspired the name. In either case, Dirty Sock suffers its malodorous name to the present day. It also reeks of misfortune.

Like most mineral water locations there is a slight odor of chemicals, but from past descriptions it appears the smell is far less offensive than it used to be. Owens Lake, just north of Dirty Sock, and just about as pungent, is a source of important non-metallic minerals including sodium carbonate, borax, and postassium salts. These minerals were, and to a lesser extent, are, being extracted commercially. The pink color often seen on Owens Lake is caused by bacteria. Under suitable conditions (brine and sunlight), the bacteria multiply, thus deepening the pink color.

Geologists say that Owens Lake, Indian Wells Valley, Searles Lake, Panamint Valley and Death Valley were all, at one time, a part of an immense drainage system, almost two hundred feet above the present valley floor. Also they estimate that at sometime approximately 4,000 years ago, the Owens River and Owens Lake became separated from the rest of the system, and Owens Lake thus became a closed basin, with no outlet to the sea, in which the salts now being produced began to accumulate.

After the influx of white settlers in the 1860s, despite Indian troubles and the customary difficulties of travel, communications, and obtaining supplies, some locations were made on the lake for obtaining salt and soda. Since then a number of plants at various times and using various processes, have operated on the lake.

The first early explorers found the Indians in the area friendly and were charmed by their customs. Unfortunately, when the settlers began to move in, taking the land they wanted without regard for the Indian living patterns, trouble started. Battles raged around Dirty Sock when the white man attempted to interfere in the Indian's rituals, especially those of killing medicine men whose ceremonies failed to cure the tribe's great sickness. The United States government was asked to intervene and in 1859 sent a party headed by Captain J. Davidson, of the 1st Dragoons, to investigate the region and allegations that the Indians were stealing horses. Captain Davidson found the Native Americans to be helpful, friendly and in dire need of food. He suggested the establishment of an Indian reservation for the safety of both Indian and White. The government declined to do anything, and the skirmishes continued through the following years when mines opened in Coso and Cerro Gordo.

A drastic change occurred in the composition and nature of Owens Lake and surrounding area during the period between 1913 and 1923, when the City of Los Angeles built an aqueduct and diverted the flow of the Owens River. The lake began to dry up because, in this arid land, evaporation is considerably greater than precipitation. By 1923, the lake had reached a relatively stationary condition, consisting of a salt bed (from one to seven feet thick) through which saturated brine circulated. The voids, or open spaces in the crystal body, constituting 30 to 35 percent of the volume, contain the saturated salts. Water make-up to the lake now occurs only through precipitation and underground springs of which Dirty Sock is one. The present bed of the lake has an area of about seventy-five to one hundred square miles. Before the diversion of the Owens River, the lake at one time boasted two ore-carrying steamers, the Bessie Brady and The Molly Stevens.

In 1917, a well was drilled at Dirty Sock in an attempt to find fresh water for use in the recovery of soda which was needed for World War I. At 12,000 feet, warm water gushed through the casing, the war ended and the project was abandoned. All buildings erected for this purpose (kitchen and bunk houses) were moved to Keeler some twenty miles northeast. The well was left to bubble up naturally.

The great distances between watering holes in this arid country caused the Spring to be sought by wayfarers and Dirty Sock became a part of many early maps. Almost all of them marked it as: "Springs," "Hot Springs," or simply, "Artesian Spring." Dirty Sock, as a name, arose early in the 1900s and the place was known and used as a camping spot for over one hundred years.

In 1927 a cement swimming pool and some other structures were constructed in the hope that Dirty Sock would be a part of a health spa. By 1945, all buildings were destroyed.

Still travelers used Dirty Sock as a camping spot. The beauty of the scenery, its remoteness and location (halfway between wherever they had been and wherever they were going) endured in the itineraries of the journeyer.

Following the twenty-year cycle which seemed to be the fate of Dirty Sock's renewal, there was a movement again in the early 1960s to have Inyo County take over the springs so that it could be maintained properly. Many letters were written to the Inyo County Board of Supervisors asking that the place be recognized by the County.

The County investigated the possibilities. They surveyed and mapped the area, searched the title, had the land appraised, took estimates on improving the facility, and even secured a geological survey. This report showed the springs to be an artesian well flowing a little over two hundred gallons per minute into a circular swimming pool seventy-eight feet in diameter at a 94 degree temperature. As expected, the minerals found were mostly sodium and chlorine salts with traces of silica, calcium, magnesium and sulfates.

On the 15th day of March, 1965, the Board of Supervisors of Inyo County entered into an agreement with Oliver Thorson, Jean Thorson, Boyd Taylor and Neil Clark to lease 45.5 acres commonly referred to as Dirty Sock Springs. The lease was to run from March 1, 1965 for fifty years unless sooner terminated. In this agreement, the County assumed responsibility for public safety, and were to furnish public utilities, clear the spring, grade the property for easier access, place directional signs, install comfort stations and dressing rooms, plant trees, and keep the property clean and neat.

These responsibilities turned out to be a much bigger job than expected . . . not so much the construction of the facilities, but the maintenance of the spring, the directional signs, and the planting of trees. The pool filled with algae. Due to the scarcity of firewood, visitors used the directional signs for campfires. Trees refused to grow in the saline soil.

The restrooms and dressing rooms were completed, the road was graded, the pool cleaned. It was, indeed, a delightful spot with magnificent vistas. Post cards, picturing happy bathers playing in the sunshine with a backdrop of the towering Sierra Nevada mountains were sent to those back home who hadn't made the trip.

These halcyon days were not to last. From the *Inyo Independent,* June 23, 1967 (John Wintersteen, columnist):

"In our usual spirit of helpfulness, we pass along to County Recreation Director, Earl Greeno, a citizen's suggestion that he clean the algae, or whatever that green stuff is, from the pool at Dirty Sock.

". . . lying in the warm water has therapeutic benefits for people with spinal and other difficulties. Lately, however, the water is said to take on a deep green coloration at certain times. Upsetting to the nerves to take a bath, whether for fun or health, in green water.

"I'm sure that Earl will clear up the problem, and the water, in short order even if he has to stand in the pool with a tea strainer to remove the pigmentation."

The reply was given by Earl Greeno in the Inyo Independent, July 7, 1967, as follows:

"I read with a great deal of interest your column in the last issue of the Independent about Dirty Sock.

"I wanted you to know that the County did not build the pool, although we did patch it up, and mend the iron works and the artesian well part, and also put on a twist-around pipe at quite an expense to keep the water circulating around and round, which by the natural pressure coming at this angle would have kept the 'green stuff' out (which I believe is called algae). However, three times the pipe was taken off by people using the pool and the only excuse they gave was that they wanted the Dirty Sock water to come out to hit their faces and hair for their therapeutic treatment. As you know, I must bow to the masses or majority of the people.

"What I did do there was to build the pond that the pool drains into and also built the road that goes up and around the pool, and which we expect to have blacktopped in the near future.

"This algae is really quite a problem, being the heaviest chemical I have ever known, with 6500 solids. I also have tried to start a tree program there, but with this type of soil and water conditions, I have not as yet found anything that will grow, although we have tried at least 30 types of trees.

"Maybe in the long run your suggestion that I stay down there with a tea strainer might be the best solution to the problem."

Apparently some of the problem facing the County in regard to Dirty Sock was cleared as the next mention of the spring in the Independent came that same year in October (Lillian Hilderman, columnist):

"Saturday at 11 a.m., 17 cars and campers containing Fireball Caravanners from San Fernando . . . [had] an early Halloween celebration at the [Dirty Sock] camp where 32 trailers were parked. The pool and grounds were festive with Fireball flags and lights reflected in the pool, campfire ready for roasting wieners, buffets carried buns, various salads, pickles, marshmallows, and candy kisses.

"Earl Greeno and myself were Lord Chamberlains to judge and choose King and Queen of Dirty Sock. Two tin pie plates cut into points, covered with glitter and pieces of mirror were clever . . . the Queen carried a bouquet of yellow flowered rabbit brush, not tied with silk or satin ribbon, but a good grade of cotton string from Galloway's Store in Olancha. Amid many flashbulb lighted Kodaks, Mrs. Barry presented the King and Queen with a shellacked wooden plaque on which a single sock had been mounted, cured with a secret formula. Mr. Greeno spoke at length and with interesting data as to how the pool was acquired, costs, etc. Next came the Haunted House of Horrors, witches held gruesome things which felt horrible, with a bucket of blood. (Hours of work of many persons, but hours of fun for

Fireball members, the guests invited from Olancha, and myself.)"

In the same issue of the Independent Max Whitmore, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Fireball Caravanners, Inc., wrote a thank-you "for the warm hospitality of the merchants of Olancha, Mr. and Mrs. Coman of Cerro Gordo, and Earl Greeno, the county recreation director."

It wasn't long, however, before complaints again came into County offices. Most concerned vandalism. As fast as directional signs were put up, they were taken down by those who had forgotten firewood. Signs were replaced repeatedly, but each time were uprooted and burned. When the County could no longer keep up with the signs, fences and bath houses began to disappear.

Another pernicious complaint was that of dogs being in the pool. One such, ". . . there are as many dogs as people in the pool." An ordinance was passed and signs were placed around the pool warning visitors to keep dogs leashed and out of the water. You guessed it . . . they were burned also. In one case of sheer vandalism, the 'dog sign' was uprooted and planted in a pipe in the middle of the pool.

It was probably with a sigh of relief when the rumors circulated to the Supervisors that Dirty Sock was about to be sold. Between April and October of 1977, there were several businesses (from oil to mining) which showed interest in Dirty Sock. One of the companies was considering the placement of a commercial campground at the site. Nothing happened, and on July 18, 1978, the Inyo County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to terminate the lease effective October 17, 1978.

Perhaps Dirty Sock will revive again following its twenty-year cycle, but ten years later all that remains is a black, algae-filled pool surrounded by broken railings. Still the warm (no longer hot) water bubbles up from a volcanic source and the air retains a vestige of the acrid scent which gave the place its name. Bullet-ridden trash cans tell of casual visitors who drink beer while wondering at the lonely vista of a lake gone dry. Large red ants search the remains of a sardine can on the concrete foundation of what was once a bath house. Feathers of a large bird, perhaps a hawk, litter the blackened rocks where a hundred fires glowed.

Where once tales of gold strikes and gun shots were spun in the long evenings, there is only the ghostly death rattle of wind through sand.

ODDS & ENDS

Jim Butler, who discovered the riches at Tonopah, was not an avid prospector, as some folks believe. He wanted to get rich, of course, but usually went exploring when there was nothing better to do.

Legend says he was half-heartedly poking through an area, when his mule kicked in a pile of rocks and found the lode. That seems about right, because in his home town of Big Pine, he was known as Lazy Jim.

He was even too lazy to name the place. His wife Belle, who had gone on the prospecting expedition with him, named it Tonopah. She believed that Indian word meant "no water." Although she was happy about the find, she wanted to get back home to more comfortable surroundings.

Jim stayed around Tonopah for a short while, doing a little bit of work but mostly waiting for his money. He was anxious to return home to his wife. When he was paid, he went back to Big Pine and opened a restaurant and hotel, and never went prospecting again.

Shortly after the discovery, a reporter came to see Jim, and called him Mr. Butler. At first, Lazy Jim was surprised at being accorded such respect. But within a week or two, he liked it so well, he had convinced everyone, even his best friends, to call him Mr. Butler.

The name Lazy Jim was never heard in Big Pine again.

From Marie Taylor

Inyo Independent.

INDEPENDENCE, CAL.:

Saturday, July 10,.....1875.

LOCAL AFFAIRS.

Bullion Shipments.

From the bullion-loaded stages which have been for some weeks leaving the towns of Benton, Belleville and Columbus; we should judge that a most gratifying era of productiveness has come about in that region. From all three points there is a tri-weekly average of fifteen hundred pounds of silver bullion passing through the office of Wells, Fargo & Co. at Aurora. We will shortly give regular reports, as showing something of the enormous commercial importance of this growing section of the country

In Independence

You're an Old-Timer if you remember when

. . . The only paved highway in Inyo County was a ten foot wide strip, starting about ten miles north of Independence at Division Creek and ending approximately ten miles on north of Division Creek.

. . . A large flock of turkeys, owned by Bill and Amy Gibson, roamed about town in the 1920s, never bothered by the playing children, and fed by the local residents.

. . . Billy the Kid wandered all over town and was the playmate of one of the local children. Billy was a large goat owned by Frank Krater.

. . . A film crew spent several weeks in town in the early 1920s filming the movie, "Pollyanna," starring Mary Pickford. Many of the local residents, and Gibson's band of turkeys, were in the original movie. Most of the original film was destroyed by fire and only a few of the scenes taken in Independence remained when the picture was released.

. . . Dancing (the waltz, fox trot, and one-step), baseball, basketball, and card games preceeded radio and television as the most popular activities in town.

. . . The card game called "Solo" was the popular game played in the two local hotel barrooms. It was one of the best card games played, taking lots of thought to play properly.

. . . The only public transportation was the narrow gauge railroad. The train station, Kearsarge, was five miles east of town. Stages, one from the Independence Hotel and one from the Norman House, met the train every day.

. . . There were only a couple of houses west of Washington Street. Located just over two blocks west of the highway (Edwards Street) was the field Mary Austin called "my neighbor's field" in her book, "The Land of Little Rain." We called it the slaughter house field.

. . . There was not a high school in Independence and only a one-room grammar school, attended by all eight grades, supervised by one teacher. One of the early grammar school teachers, circa 1900, was the late, popular Arlie Brierly.

. . . There was an alley bordering the east side of town called "China Town." Several Chinese had lived there in the early days and in the early 1900s Chinese cooks, employed by the local hotels, lived in "China Town."

. . . Independence was only two blocks wide (east and west) and five or six blocks long (north and south).

. . . Until the late 1920s there were only one or two homes east of Jackson Street. The same was true west of Washington Street.

. . . The 4th of July was celebrated by the ever-popular dancing in the Pavilion, and with children's games — sack races, three-legged races, etc., right on Edwards Street. There was no need to block traffic. There was none.

. . . Aberdeen was a settlement of half a dozen or so large ranches. The settlement also had a post office and small store. There was an Aberdeen Grammar school with about fifteen students in one room.

. . . One of the first radios in the county was in the Aberdeen schoolhouse. People came from miles around to listen to the new form of entertainment.

. . . The present Inyo County Courthouse was built without a bond issue, something that may never happen again.

. . . Dances, basketball games, movies and traveling road shows were held in the Pavilion. After the Pavilion burned, an outdoor dance platform was built where the Agnes Loundagin home now stands.

. . . Owens Valley High School students in 1922 and 1923 attended school in three buildings: the Masonic Hall, destroyed by fire in 1922, the Pioneer Memorial Church, and the new high school building built in 1923.

. . . There was never a backpacker in the High Sierra. Everything was packed in by mule, donkey, or horse.

. . . Young children played in the streets or empty lots instead of inside the house watching television.

. . . Jim's Place, now the site of the video rental store, was a combination restaurant and ice cream parlor, and the gathering place for teenagers.

. . . Levy's Independence Hotel pool room was where all the local young men learned to play pool.

. . . All of the elected Inyo County office holders, and almost all of their deputies, lived in Independence, the Inyo County seat.

By Omie I. Mairs

Independence Courthouse, early 1900s. Mendenhall Collection.

Independence Main Street, early 1900s. Mendenhall Collection.

An Odd Connection

The Jeffrey Pine and Gasoline

By Barbara Moore

Who has heard of heptane? Probably very few, but all of us come into contact with heptane in our daily lives, for it is a hydro-carbon used as a yardstick for grading fuels under the octane rating system. Without it the development of the modern internal combustion engines used in our automobiles probably would not have occurred.

But what has heptane to do with the High Sierra? Surrounding the Mammoth area, and found in sunny places, most commonly between 6000' and 9000' in elevation, is the largest Jeffrey pine forest in the world. From the Jeffrey, a member of the Western yellow pine family, natural heptane is obtained.

This stout and stately tree has a close cousin, the ponderosa, which by a freak accident back in 1867 provided a clue that these trees that seemed so similar were actually quite different. A turpentine distiller in Butte County charged his still with pitch from the Jeffrey pine rather than from the usual ponderosa, and to his amazement the whole thing blew up! It was later found that a chemical called abietin was found to exist in Jeffrey pine pitch, but not in the ponderosa, and abietin contains 96 percent natural heptane, a hydro-carbon also found in petroleum. Until this discovery heptane had been chemically produced, a far more expensive process and less pure than that of the natural form found in Jeffrey pine pitch.

By contrast, the ponderosa pitch contains oleo-resins called terpenes, the main ingredient in turpentine. Terpenes are found in most pines, but oddly the Jeffrey contains hydro-carbons of the methane series. Heptane is also used as a solvent and in medicines as an antiseptic.

Besides these chemical differences, a close look at the two trees reveals other disimilarities. The beehive like cones are larger on the Jeffrey than the ponderosa and have prickles at the end of each scale that turn downward. The prickles of the ponderosa stick out so we say "gentle Jeffrey and prickly ponderosa." Also the Jeffrey has longer needles that are less feathery looking than those found on the ponderosa.

Besides containing an ingredient important to our modern lives, the Jeffrey is a valuable lumber tree. Growing in almost pure stands, the sweet-smelling Jeffrey can obtain heights of up to 150'.

The ponderosa is seldom found on the east side of the Sierra although the Jeffrey does grow on the west side, and occasionally the two trees will form a hybrid that is difficult to identify.

Long before the discovery of heptane, the Paiute Indians of the Mono area found the Jeffrey important to their livelihood. Not only did the long needles provide raw material for basket making but they were host to a thumb-sized caterpillar called Piuga (pronounced pee-a-gee) which the Indians collected in special open-twined carrying baskets. Roasted and pounded into a flour, the Piuga provided the Indians with an important protein food source.

Driving through the magnificent Jeffrey forest, covering over 200 square miles between Mammoth and June Lake, it is interesting to know how thoroughly this tree touches our daily lives and has provided food, shelter, or transportation through the centuries. Sadly, photo-chemical smog, a by-product of those same internal combustion engines to which heptane is so useful, is killing off these magnificent specimens, both the Jeffrey and the ponderosa.

The Incredible Willow

By Barbara Moore

The willow is an ancient plant, dating back to the Cretaceous period, and its usefulness throughout the ages is legendary.

In modern times the soft, light wood of the willow is used for artificial limbs, boxes, crates, barrels, all types of furniture including wicker, paper pulp, and even charcoal which yields a black powder, a constituent of black gunpowder. Its usefulness even extends to livestock and other mammals who browse the tasty and nutritious foliage, and to birds that feast on the seeds.

But no peoples or mammals found more uses for the willow than the native Indians. It was absolutely essential to their survival and encampments were often located along the stream banks or springs where tangled thickets of willows grew, giving them an unending and convenient source of raw material.

From shelter to tools, from baskets to medicine, the uses the Indians found for the willow seem endless. Stout willow branches were thrust into the ground in a circular pattern to provide framing material for their shelters. These were then made impervious to weather by weaving thinner willow strings through grasses and cattails to cover the framework. The roofs were thatched with willow leaves.

Since the Paiutes in this area were nomadic, following the seasons for hunting and harvesting, the light weight of the willow provided convenient burden baskets for transporting their possessions and food. They were easily replaced when worn by use. The baskets, depending upon purpose, ranged from finely woven water jugs and cooking utensils to the coarser weaves found in burden baskets and fish seines. In between were winnowing trays used for separating seeds and nuts from their husks, and harvesting trays.

The many uses for this plentiful shrub, completely changed or adapted by the Indian people, included a woven basket to hold water, sealed by smearing hot pitch over the outside of finely woven jugs. Baskets were used as cooking utensils. Rocks heated in the campfires were removed with willow tongs and placed into the food container, then stirred with sticks made from a green willow branch and formed into loops with handles.

Harpoons to catch fish were also made from sturdy willow branches, the bone tip fastened with hot pitch and grass hemp.

Besides these many uses, willow branches were also used for beating poles when gathering pine nuts, and threshing beaters were made to separate seeds from grasses.

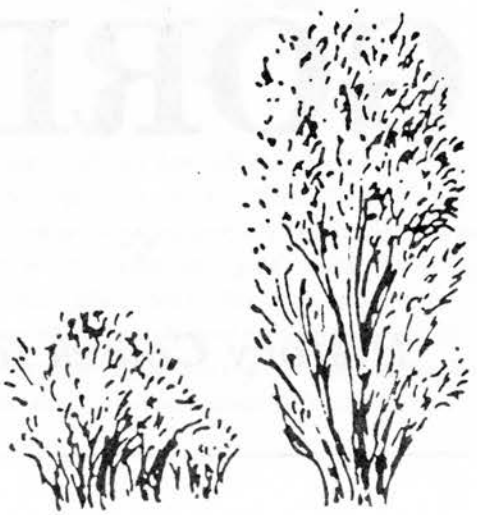
One of the most interesting and important uses of a green willow branch was in fire making. Fire, necessary for heat and food preparation wasn't always easy to come by in the days before matches, thus it was the duty of one of the grandmothers to keep those fires going, even while on the trail. To do this she thrust a green willow branch into the fire until it glowed, and throughout the day blew on it to keep it hot until it was time to use it to light the evening fire.

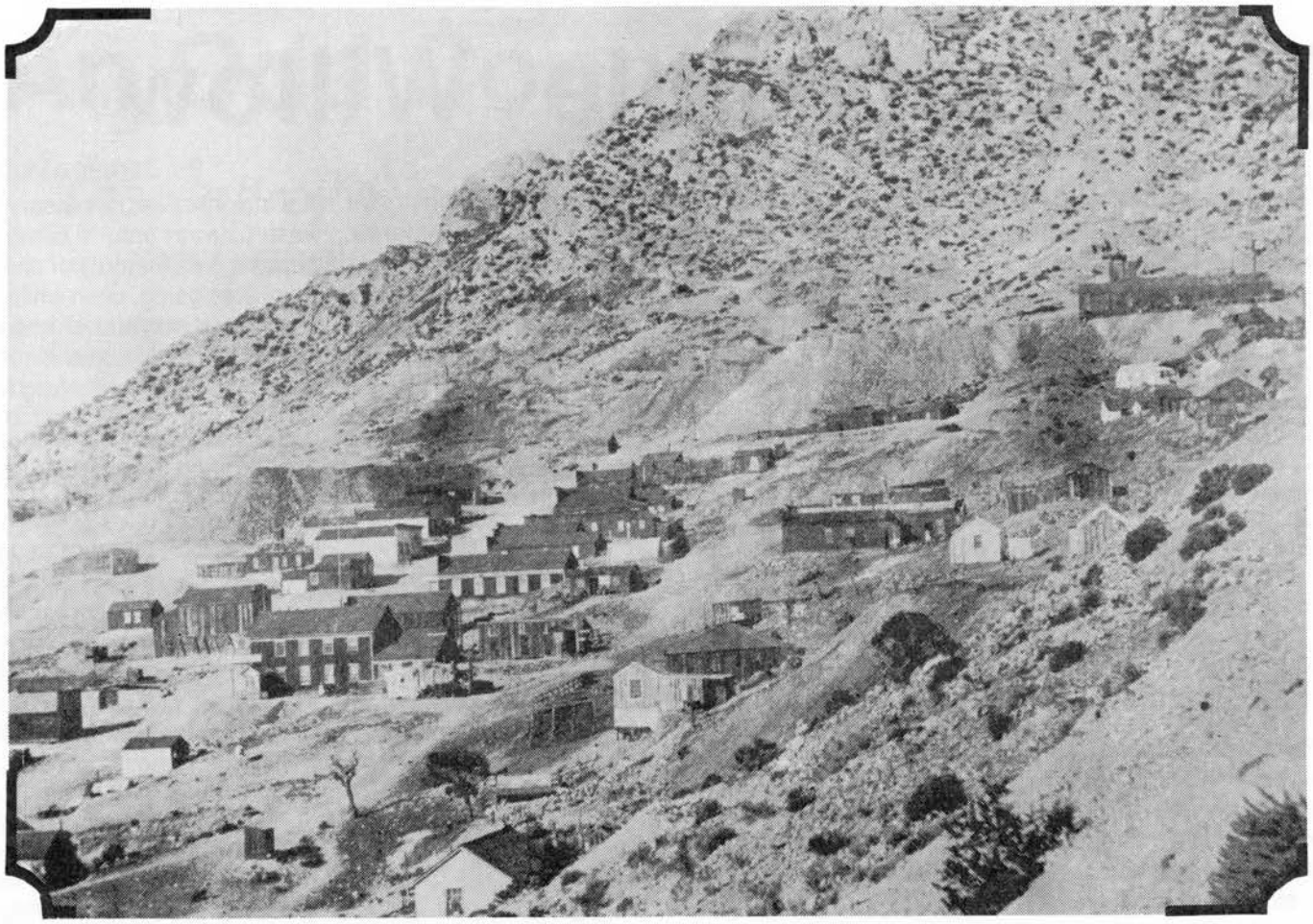
Babies were carried in cradleboards also made of fine willow branches. Each cradleboard had a hood decorated with patterns that designated boy or girl.

To make the baskets and tools, willows were usually gathered in winter or spring, before or after the leaves appeared. Sizes were sorted, with the coarser branches used for the warp of the baskets and the smallest split and peeled for the weft. The Indian women split these small branches with their teeth, removed the pith and then used sharp obsidian tools to scrape away any roughness. These willow wands were then wound into coils to dry.

Possibly in the course of splitting the branches with their teeth, the Indians discovered another use for the willow — medicinal. The plant contains tannin, but more important, the salicin found in the bark and leaves is natural salicylic acid, the main ingredient found in aspirin. Long before those little white tablets found a place in our medicine cabinets, the Indians were using willow and aspen, both bark and leaves, brewed into a tea for a spring tonic, to cure the pain of lumbago, as a cough medicine, and as a cold remedy.

The next time your fishing line gets tangled in a maze of willows, or the thick wickets prevent you from getting close to a stream or spring, instead of swearing at this prolific shrub, stand back and admire and praise this bountiful plant — a phenomenal natural provider, and if that pleasant day along the stream or lake is marred by a nagging headache, just chew on a piece of willow or aspen bark and let nature handle the cure.





This historic photo was taken prior to the 1870's, as evidenced by the building on the upper right which burned then. The American Hotel is the large building, lower left.

CERRO GORDO

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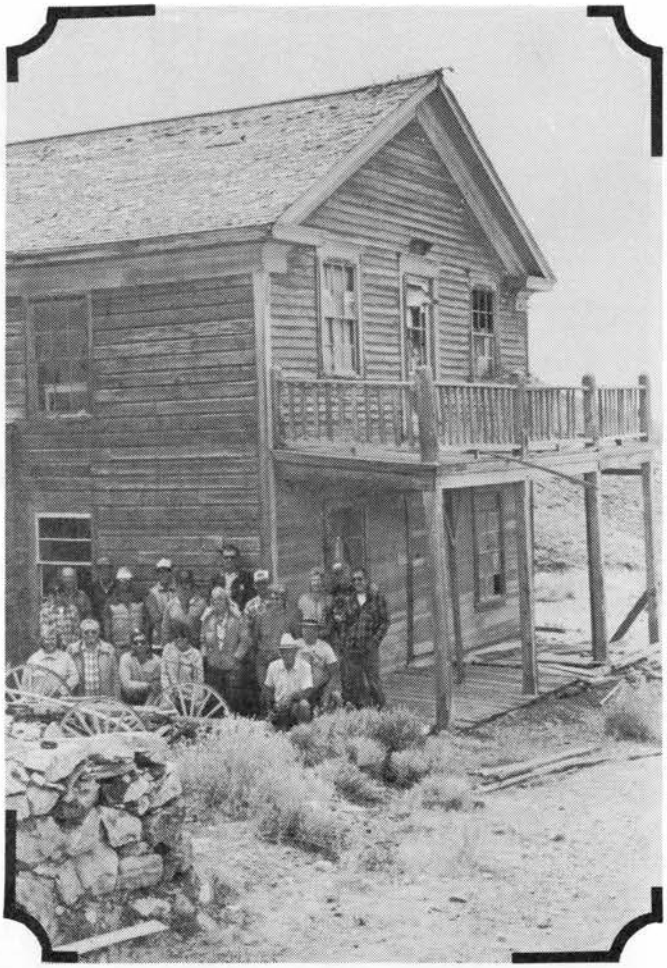
History Comes to Life

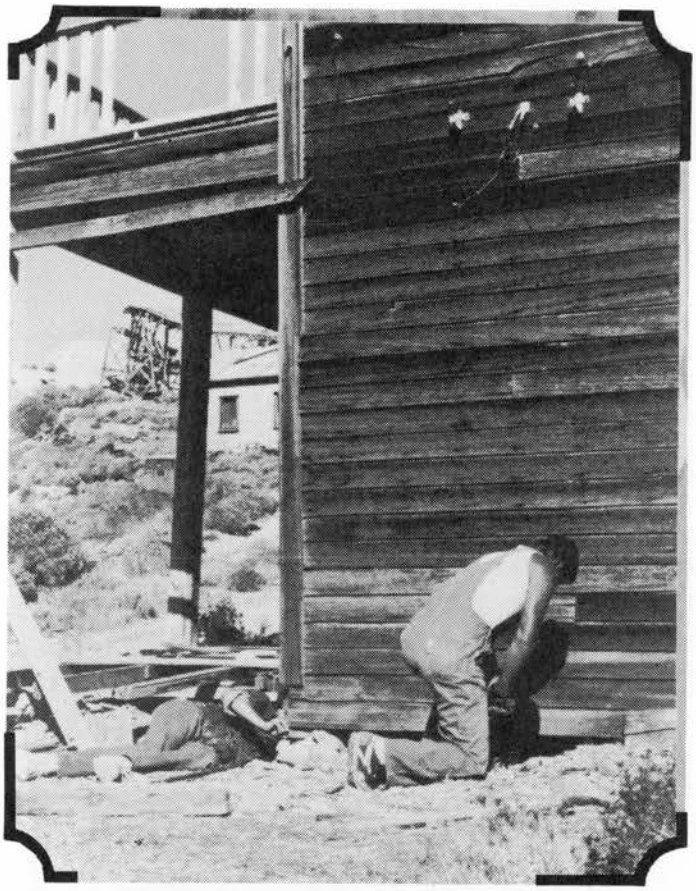
Cerro Gordo (Fat Mill) was also known as Bullion Hill. This "Comstock" to Los Angeles was discovered by Pablo Flores and a group of Mexican prospectors around 1865. By 1871 Mortimer Belshaw smelter had the highest output of any in the nation. Remi Nadeau's mule teams hauling bullion and supplies numbered somewhere around 1300 animals. The steamers, Bessie Brady and Molly Stevens plied the then navigable waters of the Owens Lake, their hulls filled with bullion, charcoal, equipment and settlers.

Cerro Gordo's population hovered around 2,000 during the boom years; its peak may have reached 4,800 souls in a multinational blend. At one time the mining district had more votes than Bishop. Soldiers from old Camp Independence were often called to keep the peace as well as celebrate the town's good fortune. The Hoist House, in the upper right hand corner of the photo, accesses the largest silver mine workings in California, which of unraveled would nearly reach from Lone Pine to Big Pine, roughly 37 miles.

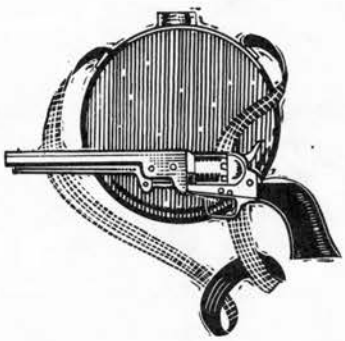
Now in 1987, after 122 years, two major and several minor boom periods, Cerro Gordo has been ravaged by time and weather. A large part of the damage has been done by those seeking ghost town relics and cheap building materials. By far the most senseless have been those who burn old buildings in their campfires.



Many visitors wonder what became of the Hotel Register? . . . Whose boots wore out the floor? . . . Who owned the business? . . . What famous or infamous characters checked in and participated in the Boom Town excitement. The friendly folks shown here are members of the Back Road Explorers Sanction Committee, L.A. Chapter of the Sierra Club. They have generously offered their time to assist in the restoration effort.

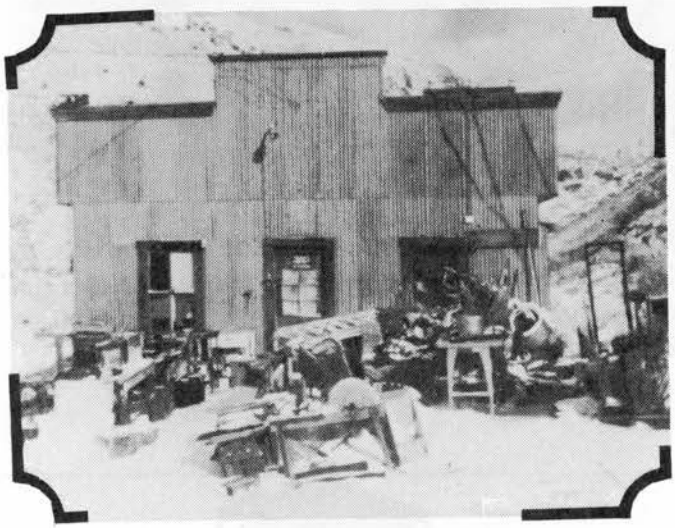


The American Hotel was built in 1871 and remodeled in 1923. Its foundation was undermined during the 1984 flash flooding that nearly buried Keeler. Now, in 1987, Jigger Nelson and his son Rick, of Big Pine, assist in propping up one corner.

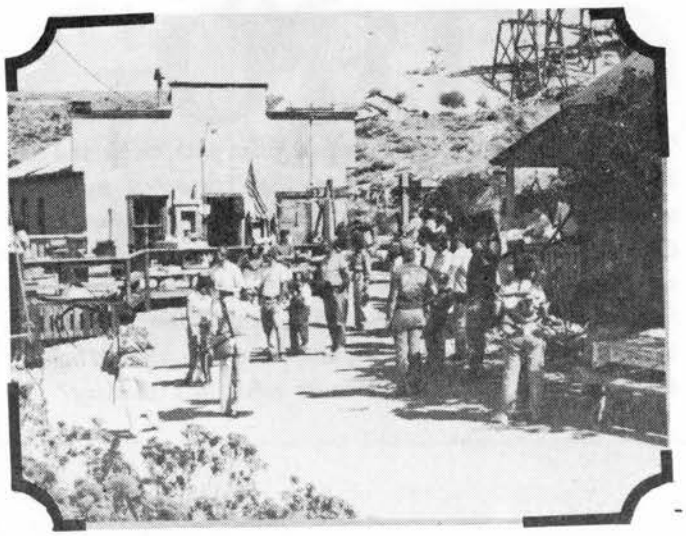


The old Livery Stable, as shown here filled with rubble and rubbish, illustrates the magnitude of the "Histo-Reclamy" being undertaken. The irrepressable Geargrinders Four-wheel Drive Club of Ridgecrest deserves silver and gold medals for having tackled the short straw jobs of the project. One volunteer shown here in contemplation while the club spent a sub-freezing and blustery Valentines weekend sorting artifacts from trash and hauling truck loads to the dump. Wonder what he's thinking?

Louis D. Gordon built this house for his wife Cornelia and their infant son Douglas in about 1908. Gordon controlled Cerro Gordo during its second boom; the zinc period. This picture (as well as the old town and man hanging from tram pictures) was unearthed by Gordon's grandson Douglas of Montrose, California.

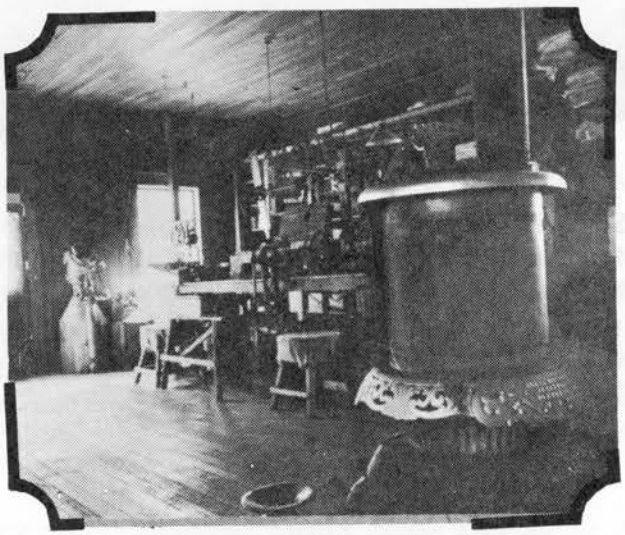


Possibly Victor Beaudry's General Store in the late 1800s, it served in the 1920s as a pool hall, later a shop building and then storage for all kinds of . . . well . . . "one man's trash is another's treasure." Victor's brother Prudent was the first mayor of Los Angeles in 1881.



For an extended time windowless and home to only mice and memories, the Gordon House has again become headquarters; this time for the restoration effort.

The Gordon House shown here, shortly after a stain and paint job by Humbolt State Geology professors and students – its facelift is nearing completion.



After months of cleaning mouse nests and removing 50 year's accumulated dust, the Cerro Gordo General Store displays artifacts from the old mining district. The tide is turning. Treasures which had been lost or were hauled away are finding their way home. Many thanks are due to those who express their desire to help preserve on-site evidence of this rapidly disappearing period.

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Some ardent supporters from the Maturango Museum visited Cerro Gordo this fall. This was their second annual visit to the ghost camp. Enthusiastic about the progress restoration work is showing, their third visit is planned for the coming spring.

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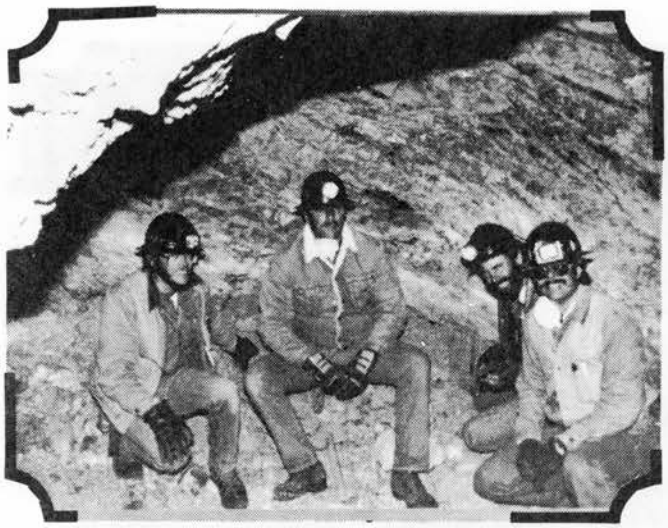


Intensive exploration for new mineralization has led Asamera Minerals to re-open old mine workings as well as chart new potentials in the famous mining district. Inyo County pioneer Pat Ready Esq. had partial interest in the tunnel shown.

Courteney Peddle, San Francisco Examiner Editor, and his friend Pam Magnuson assist in the retrieval of old ore buckets from Cerro Gordo's "Montgomery Tram."

Sensitive to the historical environment, the mining company cheerfully cooperates in the restoration. Their expertise in identification of old mining equipment and techniques so familiar to early Cerro Gordo residents is invaluable.

Each year thousands of people from all over the world visit Cerro Gordo. They've read about it in a book, had a relative who worked there or simply turned up a dirt road to escape the city.

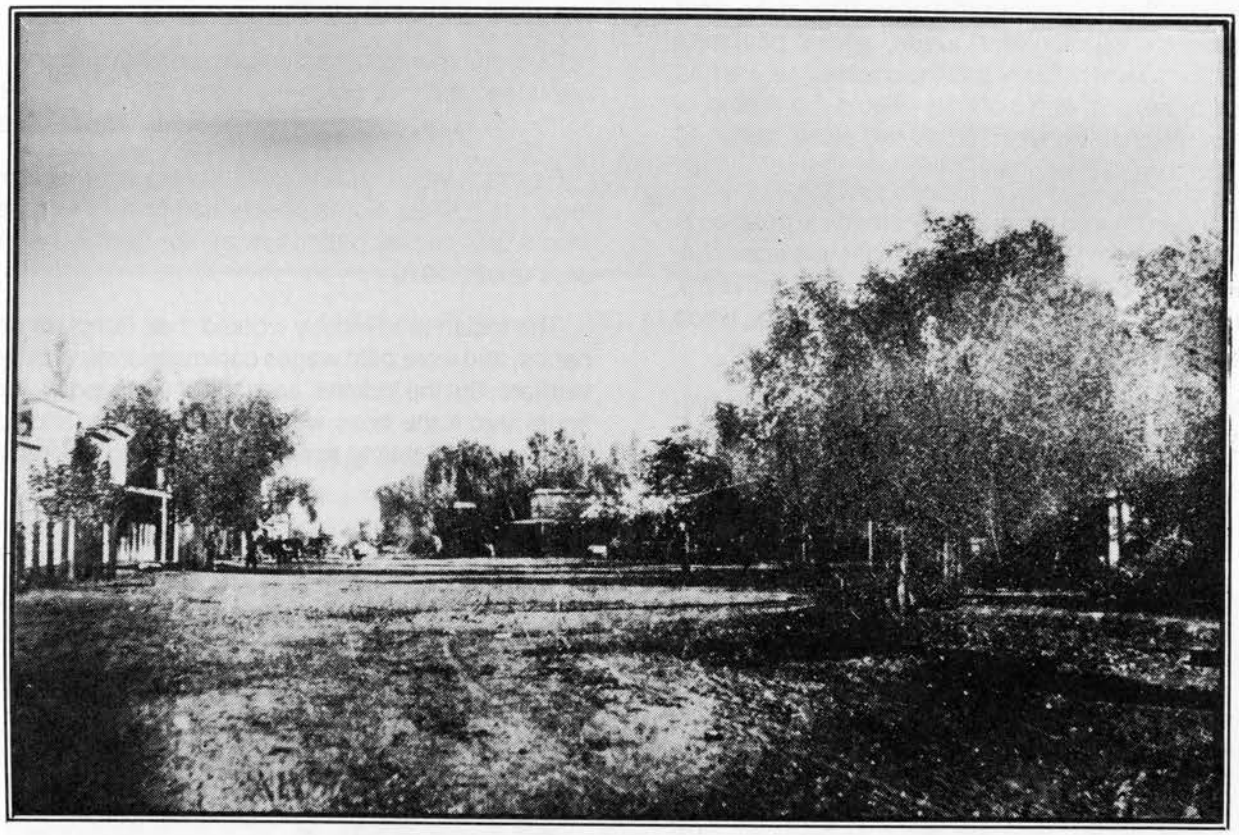
Once the Belshaw-Yellow Grade Road was a toll road. Now it is a county road. The climb is 5,000 feet in 7.5 miles.

As a mining district, Cerro Gordo's future is predictable. As in the past, changing national economies and technological advances affect its reawakening.

As a privately owned Ghost Town, its future is in the adroit hands of owner Jody Stewart. As an Inyo County pioneer daughter, she seems driven to save this remote camp as an instructive tool and grand example of our living history. Visitors are welcomed, but should bring water; a 4-wheel drive vehicle is needed to reach the mine. For further information, call (619) 876-4154 or (619) 876-5871.

RECALL

As Told to Marie Taylor



The oldest photograph of Main Street Bishop in existence, circa 1880. Curt Phillips Collection, courtesy Laws Railroad Museum.

In the year 1900, Bishop was a small agricultural community. Everyday life fell a bit short of the Wild West stereotype, although there were a few rogues who provided excitement and plenty of local gossip.

The city was incorporated in 1903, mostly to provide residents with a water and sewage system. Bishop had been supplied with water through a pipeline on Bishop Creek and individual wells. Now larger capacity and higher pressure was needed, as well as facilities for the new indoor plumbing.

The completion of the railroad to Laws helped increase the population to about 1,000 permanent residents. Phone service became available, and the power company began construction, with materials easily shipped from the north.

The streets, sometimes muddy, but usually incredibly dusty, favored horses. There were three blacksmith shops, two livery stables, and long hitching posts along Main Street, where teams and saddle horses could be tied. Bulpitt's General Store, where Josephs Market now stands, boasted the city's only wooden sidewalk.

Teams of six to eight horses were used to haul equipment from the depot at Laws to the Bishop Creek area and

to the mines. A common sight and sound in the streets were the teams, usually two a day, oftentimes more. They traveled slowly with their heavy supplies, and because it wasn't easy to stop, they wore warning bells fastened to their harnesses.

The miracle of the automobile was slow to arrive in Bishop. By 1907, there were three cars, the largest claimed to belong to Willie Chalfant. Unfortunately, his vehicle was noisy, prone to backfire, and never failed to spook the horses. After a short time, Willie relegated his car to a stable. His reason: "It's too dusty, it's too noisy, and besides, there's no place to go."

The roads out of Bishop at that time definitely were best traveled by horseback or team and wagon. One of the most frequent travelers was Dr. MacQueen, a local physician whose practice spanned Bishop to Independence. He had a fine team of horses, and claimed to hold the record of covering the distance between those two cities, about 45 miles, in 5 hours, 20 minutes.

Dr. MacQueen shared the majority of medical practice in the Owens Valley with Dr. Nellie MacKnight and later, Nellie's husband, Dr. Doyle. At the outbreak of World War I, the Doyle family moved to the San Francisco area, when Dr. Doyle enlisted.

The Doyles were the only people known to employ live-in help, a young Indian woman with a small daughter. Most other white families hired help on a day-to-day basis for housecleaning and home laundry.

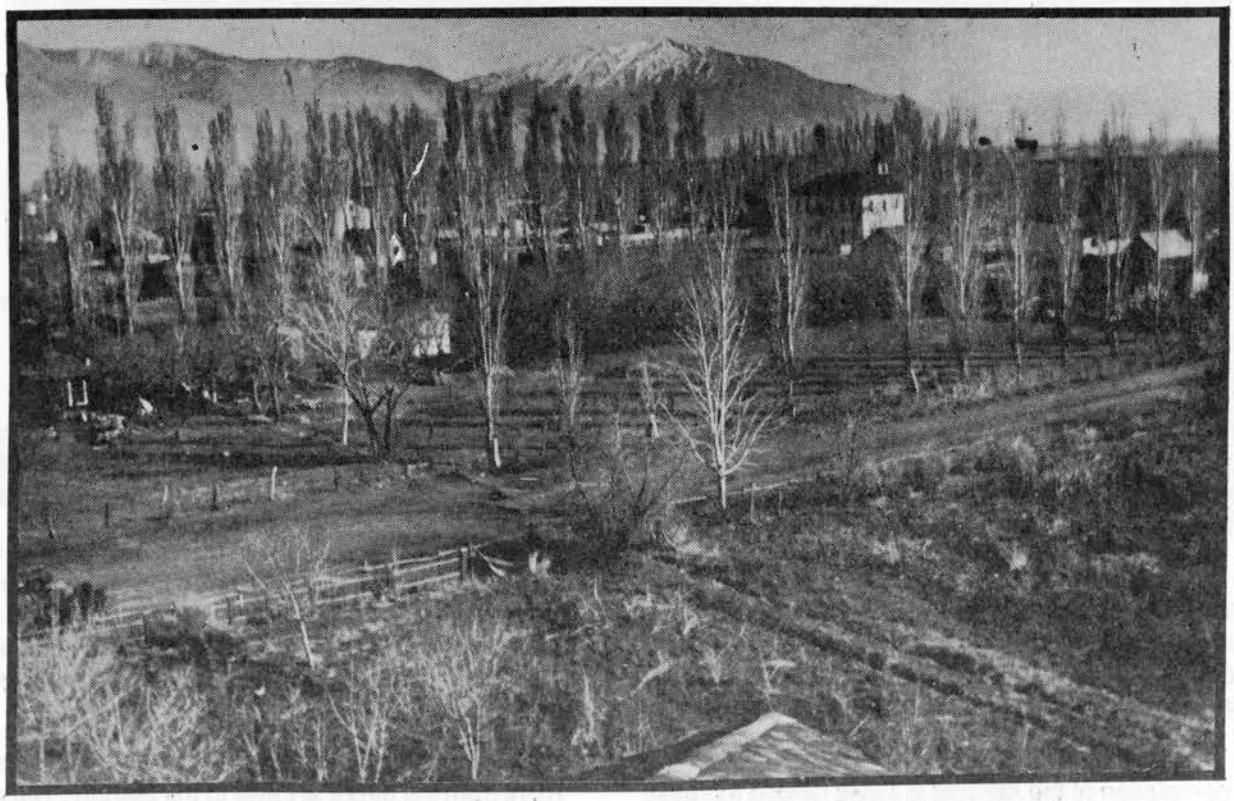
Laundry was a major chore during those coal and wood-burning times. Washing was done by Indian women in a cast-iron cauldron, similar in shape and size to a giant washtub. It was set up near the closest water source, and supported about waist-high by a sheet iron jacket which had a door for wood, and two to three lengths of stovepipe for a chimney.

The Indian women were given a noontime meal, and if they brought their children along, the children were fed also. First came dusting and sweeping, then washing. When the clothes were on the line, work was done for the day. Pay was one dollar.

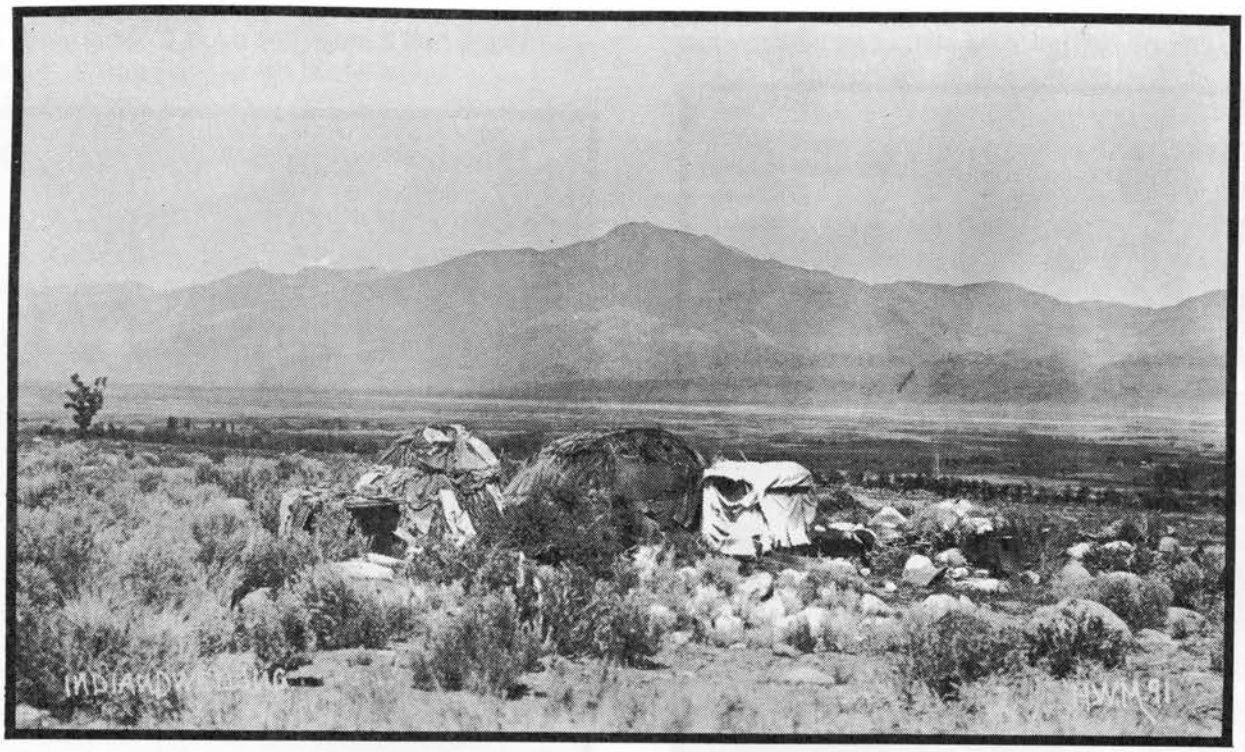
One dollar wasn't bad wages, considering that skilled workmen, such as carpenters and plumbers, earned 50 cents an hour, and their work often wasn't steady.

Payment was made in gold, silver, or nickels, all legal tender in Bishop. Some people had checks for use in the stores, but neither paper money nor pennies were seen until about 1910.

The Indian men mostly worked their farms, or as ranch hands, and were paid wages commensurate with the white workers. But the Indians, as many of us do today, tended to figure that if the boss wasn't working, why should they? This was particularly exasperating during haying season.



Early Bishop Grammar School. Curt Phillips Collection, courtesy Laws Railroad Museum.



Indian dwelling, early 1900's. Mendenhall Collection.

Frank Shaw had a ranch near what is now the Bishop airport. On one occasion, he had to travel out of the area for the day, which concerned him greatly. He knew his help would laze around unless supervised.

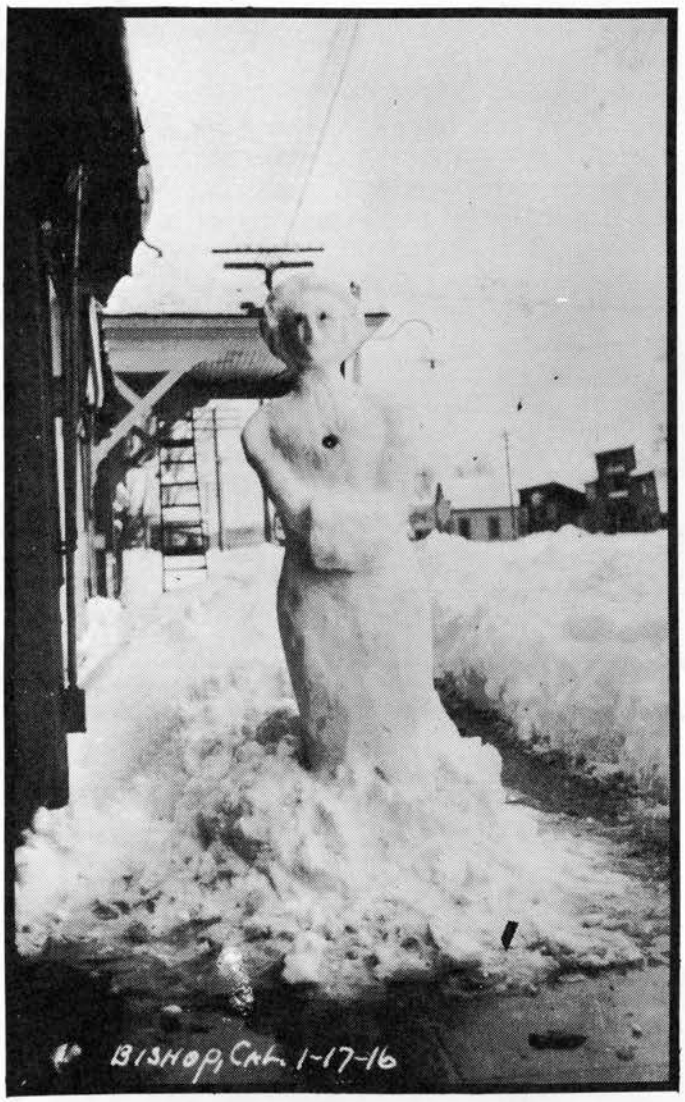
Frank had been wounded years before, and had a glass eye. It was barely noticeable, so he figured he would try an experiment on his workers.

He carefully removed his glass eye, and placing it securely on a fencepost, he told the Indians, "I'll be watching you, so keep on working." When he returned later that hot August day, he found everyone asleep in whatever shade spot was available. And on the fencepost, someone had placed a tomato can over his eye.

Despite the failure of his experiment, Shaw continued the Bishop tradition of feeding the men a noon meal. Usually, there was one table, and Indians and whites sat together. On the occasions when two tables were necessary due to the number of workers, the Indians sat by themselves, by their own choice.

Most of the Indians lived in shacks on the ranch property where they were employed, or in cabins nearby. They preferred to stay at home when not working, and were seldom seen in restaurants or soda fountains, although they were never barred from them.

Inyo Hotel at Laws, courtesy Laws Railroad Museum.



Main Street, Bishop, 1916. Curt Phillips Collection, courtesy Laws Railroad Museum.

Another group appearing in Bishop at the turn of the century was the Chinese. They introduced a new enterprise called the "Chinese laundry," which became the talk of the town. The laundries were run mostly by Chinese women, while their men sought work in the mines, on the railroad, or in such endeavors as the building of the Mount Whitney Trail.

Almost everyone in Bishop in 1910 had in his pocket a small ticket with "chicken scratches" on it, the means of retrieving his cleaned clothes. The prices were fair, so nobody complained about his inability to read these tickets.

Each one always got his own laundry back, without error, which amazed the local residents, and it was unusual to talk with someone without the topic of "chicken scratches" coming up, along with a theory on how the Chinese people could read them.

Clark Hotel, Warren Street, Bishop. Curt Phillips Collection, courtesy Laws Railroad Museum.

Another topic of conversation in quiet corners centered around the "working ladies." Generally, if a person worked, he was accepted in Bishop, regardless of race, creed, or whatever. But these ladies caused a brief flourish of negative public opinion. Ephemisms such as "ladies of the night" were not applicable, because they were open mostly during daylight hours.

On Bishop's South Main Street, the current location of Inyo-Mono Lumber, there was a tule swamp. In 1900, it was part of the China Slough which extended from west of the post office, southeast towards the Owens River, and the Chinese were raising ducks there.

In about 1910, on higher ground directly west, a building was constructed. The madam, known only as Slats, had two "girls." By 1920, several other houses had opened.

An effort was made to run these ladies out of town, but they decided to leave on their own, much to the relief of the law. It was noted that the city had received affidavits signed by the ladies, saying they were paying law enforcement officials for protection. And it was also noted that one law officer, name unknown, made frequent trips to these houses during his duty hours "for no apparent reason."

That was about as scandalous as the community became, with the major exception of illegal gambling. Most

people knew about it, but didn't figure it hurt anything. A favorite game was Pan, which is still available in some areas of the Owens Valley.

Shi Gin, a Chinese gentleman, gave up his gambling business about 1930. He had provided gaming in the local saloons and poolrooms for many years, and was purported to be quite rich. When asked why he had decided to retire from such a lucrative profession, he replied, "Eyes no good anymore."

It was apparent to almost everyone in the area that he could no longer see the marks he put on the cards.

The law worked hard to maintain peace in the Valley. But since there wasn't a jail in Bishop, most offenders were arrested, then sent home.

J.C. was a prominent man in Bishop, but occasionally drank too much. One night, the law deemed him thoroughly intoxicated, but he refused to be taken home. They handcuffed him to a small poplar tree, since it was a nice summer night, and there was no one within yelling distance.

J.C. was not pleased with this arrangement, and managed to climb the tree, but before he could reach the top, he fell back to the ground. Unhurt but angry, he vowed to make a change. He donated his land at Main and Lagoon Streets in Bishop to the County for a proper jail.

A wooden jail was built, and local lore has it that J.C. was the first customer. The jail didn't last long, however. Within a short time, J.C. was again arrested, and this time, again disliking the accommodations, was alleged to have burned the place to the ground.

No charges were brought, since it was his jail after all, and nobody was around to prove he did it.

Getting arrested was one thing; getting arrested and then being brought to trial was quite a different matter. People in town believed you had probably done something pretty bad, if you were hauled into court. This feeling, coupled with the right of the accused to a jury of his peers, often strained the boundaries of justice.

One gentleman in town was brought to trial on charges of arson. He was a blacksmith by trade, but also an avid reader, and preferred good books to the company of the more rambunctious bachelors in town.

After some debate, a jury was finally seated. The story was told: the accused had been going home one night to his cabin, near where the State Highway complex is now, and noticed lights in his cabin. As he got closer, he heard loud voices and observed several men in the cabin, drinking and playing cards.

The defendant didn't want to name names, but said some were currently in the courtroom. He claimed he was outraged by these men breaking into his cabin, so he set fire to his woodpile, and the cabin was burned to the ground. He had made sure that all the men escaped unharmed.

The judge inquired, "You are charged with arson. How do you plead, guilty or not guilty?"

He replied, "Guilty, your honor, but the Good Book says, 'He who burneth his den of iniquity shall not be punished.'"

After a bit of mumbling, the jurors and the judge felt it wasn't worth the court's time to continue the trial, and perhaps reveal who the men were. It was decided the defense was sufficient, and the trial ended.

Stealing horses, cattle, and water were major offenses at that time. Most horse and cattle thieves were dealt with out of court, usually through reclamation of the property, but one local resident was arrested, at the request of local ranchers, for stealing water. It had been a particularly dry year, and tempers were hot.

The chief witness for the prosecution was a lady well known in town for her inability to stop talking once she started. On the stand, she testified she had seen the water-stealing, for a vegetable garden, but then continued "I see in the jury box W.M., and he steals water, and next to him is J.S., and everybody knows he sold his water rights to the city of Bishop, but he still irrigates his ranch...."

Her testimony was halted before she had the chance to name everyone in the courtroom, and the case was dismissed. Afterward, almost everyone in the courtroom joked about how they all stole water, everyone knew it, and there was no reason to pick on one man who wanted to raise a few vegetables.

Bishop in the early 1900s was not as sophisticated as Eastern cities, not as raucous as San Francisco; it was a peaceful place to make an adequate living and raise a family. Few people would have believed that within a quarter of a century, the complexion of the Owens Valley would be dramatically altered by events to come.

Lady Bandit

By Debbie Gardner

With ruthless bandits such as Tiburgio Vasquez roaming the southern end of the Owens Valley, it may have been nothing more than irritating, or even enlightening, to have a few "green" outlaws arrive. And there were many who sought the profession of outlawry, an occupation often romanticized by young men, and in some cases, young women.

It was in the spring of 1875 that the cunning Vasquez was caught and hung, after countless stage robberies and other crimes that occurred throughout California. In the months that followed Vasquez's hanging, a group of prospective bandits wandered into the Owens Valley from the direction of Tulare. Four of the renegades were charged with several petty crimes, but the one that led to their capture is told as follows.

In the early months of 1875 to Inyo County came a man by the name of T. J. Graves. He, his wife, and their six-year-old son established a squatter's home west of Independence, near Oak Creek. Months passed turning spring blossoms into the shade of July. One evening at dusk came two strangers to the door of the Graves' cabin.

The strangers wondered if Graves would sell them some potatoes from his garden. Upon their request Graves ventured out, with the two young men at his heels, where he dug a sufficient bunch of potatoes. After the three returned to the cabin, one of the young men produced a navy revolver from its place of concealment. At that moment two more strangers entered the cabin, joining their partners. The Graves' were lashed to chairs or posts.

It was about this time that the Graves' noticed one of the looters was a young girl of about 18, dressed in man's attire.

One of the four robbers wandered outdoors toward the barn where he found the Graves' cow waiting to be milked, and this he did readily, as the others prepared some sort of dish found in the cupboards of the Graves' kitchen. After the meal was consumed by the bandits, they began to gather everything in the way of supplies. Even the boots from Graves' feet were taken, as were his son's socks.

Two horses in a nearby corral were caught, and on them the plunder was loaded.

A party broke out, as if in celebration of the looting. The leader quieted the bunch with his revolver, and at about 11 p.m. the bunch headed up the canyon on the road past the Kearsarge Mill.

The next morning Graves, who was released the night before, made his way into Independence without his boots. He found the Sheriff (a Dad Moore according to the tale) and told his story. A posse was organized thereafter. The posse caught the trail of the bandits, a scrap of paper with Mrs. Graves' name on it confirmed they were headed in the right direction, but the trail was lost at Horse Corral Meadows where a band of sheep had crossed. The next day a Big Pine merchant by the name of Tom Hill scouted out the bandits' trail once again. He came upon the bunch as they were eating breakfast. Hill silently returned to his party and informed them of his discovery.

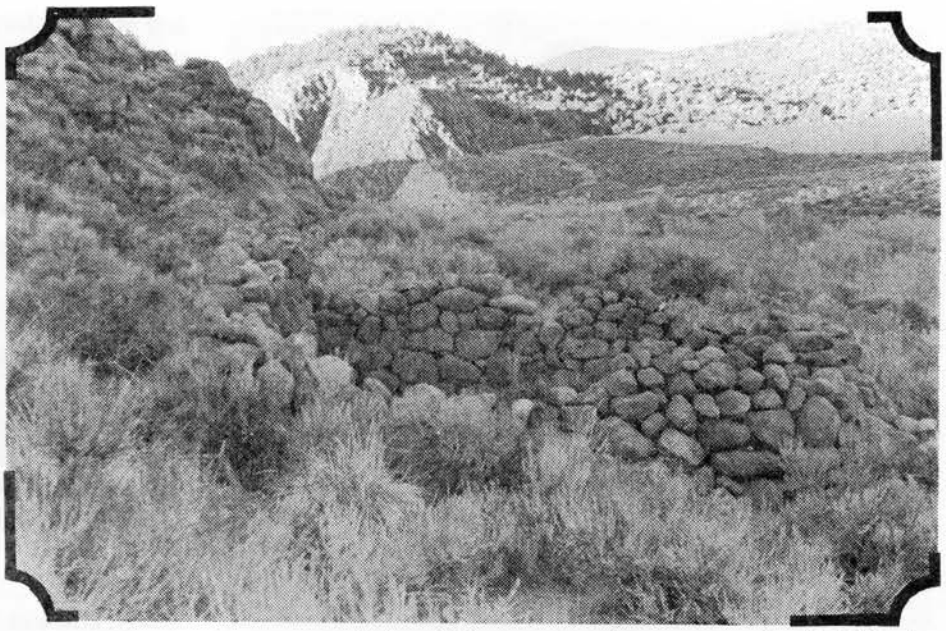
The posse formed and surrounded the unsuspecting bandits. After the posse circled the bunch, they let their presence be known and at this time the bandits surrendered without a fight.

A crowd gathered long before the posse rode into town with their prisoners. It is believed that the names of the bandits were Lewis, 25; Spees, 18; Bennett, 18; and Lizzie, 18. Lizzie was thought to be the wife of Lewis.

Sympathy was felt by all toward the young Lizzie, "who had seen but eighteen summers."

District Attorney Snelling found Lizzie innocent; she wasn't to be punished in any way, due to her "feminine nature." It was believed by all that she only joined in with the group under the direct orders of her husband, "real or alleged." The three young men weren't so lucky however; a five-year sentence to San Quentin was given to each.

A Dog Town



Ruins of Dogtown hovels. Joe Pollini Photo

By Marguerite Sowaal

About seven miles south of Bridgeport on U.S. Highway 395 just above the Bodie Road turn-off, the first placer mining camp in Mono County was established. Exactly when Dogtown, as the camp was called, earned recognition as a gold rush settlement is unclear, but in 1853, the *Sonora Herald* gave directions as to the best way to cross the Sierra Nevada mountains to reach it.

Prospectors, being transient by nature, worked their claims, drank their whiskey, survived a rugged existence in Dogtown and moved on, succumbing to the call of a new strike.

The term "dog town" was used by the miners to indicate a camp with extremely primitive living quarters, and since Dogtown was the epitome of the term, the name stuck. Due to a lack of lumber, most lived in a cave or make-do shelter of available materials. It did boast, however, an abundant store and saloon made of cottonwood logs chinked with mud. It is assumed that the operator of the store, a Mr. Warren Loose, showed profits exceeding that of most of his patrons.

Perhaps Mr. Loose saw the advantages of announcing an Independence Day party on July 4, 1859 at his saloon, but the culmination of events that day resulted in the near destruction of Dogtown. Whiskey flowed freely. Cord Norst, the young German immigrant credited with the first discovery of gold in Dogtown, gave an account of what happened on that fateful day. He recalled the event in later years, and perhaps colored it, but the story remains unchanged to date.

In the late afternoon on the day of the celebration, a young man named Chris wandered away from the party to clear his head. Laying down on a small hill several miles from the Loose saloon, Chris awoke holding a handful of dirt. He could hardly believe his luck when he discovered the dirt to contain flecks of pure gold in large quantities. He filled both pockets with dirt and hightailed it back to the saloon to show his find. The reception was not what he expected. He was accused of trickery and "trying to break up a good party." The other miners proclaimed him a liar, said he had salted the sample, and declared he must be hung for lying on Independence Day. The rope and stool stood ready for the deed when one of the more sober citizens remembered that he had always been honest and that maybe further investigation might be in order.

En masse the miners marched Chris back over the hills to the place of his discovery where they did, indeed, find gold. The site immediately became the new placer camp and was dubbed Monoville. Dogtown was deserted overnight except for Cord Norst and his Indian wife who remained in Dogtown placering gold in the sluice boxes of Dog Creek. No one seems to know what happened to Chris as he was never seen again.

By the early 1870s outcast Chinese had taken over most of Dogtown, and for ten or more years gleaned what gold they could find. The Chinese had been excluded from most other settlements, but were allowed to work the abandoned Dogtown placers. Industriously they planted gardens and built stone huts where they lived a meager, but peaceful, existence until the next Dogtown boom occurred as a result of the Bodie strikes. Once more the town teemed with rough and ready gold seekers. New sluices were built and several thousand claims were patented, few of which produced a large enough yield to make the effort profitable. After this brief flurry, Dogtown was deserted again.

In the 1940s dredging operations by a large mining company left a series of gravel mounds alongside the old stone cabins, and with the company's retreat Dogtown was put to its final rest - a dog town again.

Sybil

By Louise Kelsey

Sybil McGee . . . could a name be more Irish? And Sybil lived up to her name. Her ready smile, her fun-loving spirit and her spontaneous exaggerations keep her memory alive. A bit surprising because she was one of the first non-Indians to play in the meadows of Long Valley.

Sybil's father came to Long Valley driving a small herd of cattle. Alney McGee planned to sell the beef to meat-hungry miners in Bodie, Aurora and Mammoth City. However, the young cattleman did not know the suddenness of Eastern Sierra storms.

The summer was gentle; the grass in Long Valley grew high. Autumn turned with a golden charm. Its spell lulled the young man like the sigh of the Paoha, the tiny spirits that hid in the vapors of the valley hot springs. Then, without warning, a winter storm closed the passes and Alney spent the winter with only his cows and a pinch of salt. He moved out the next Spring but the charm of Long Valley had captured him. He returned to build a home, marry his bride and raise children in this loveliest of lands.

Sybil loved trout. The ranchhouse was not far from Convict Lake. When she saw her father put a mouse or two in a bag as he headed out to work cattle in the north end of Long Valley, she was pretty sure there would be fresh, firm trout for dinner.

Long Valley summer range - Before Lake Crowley, Long Valley was the graze of early cattlemen.

Mornings and evenings were always crisp in the high country. A rider usually wore two pair of levis and as the day warmed the outer pair would be rolled up and stuffed in a saddlebag. As Alney rode up to the lake he took a mouse from the bag, set his hook in it, floated it on a scrap of bark to the depths of Convict. The mouse was pulled off the wood and became bait to catch fish so large that a single trout would fill the leg of his extra levis. Two trout later a strange apparition, like a four-legged rider, would return to the ranch with food enough for a feast.

Sybil and her Dad spent as much time together as a hard-working cattleman and a lively youngster could. The story of the Lost Cement Mine was familiar to them. Always, when they were fishing, their eyes were searching about for "cement," the formation in which the fabled gold was to be found. One creek, above all others, held their attention.

"Sybil," Alney told his daughter, "whenever you are on foot or a-horseback on this creek bank, keep your eyes open, for the vein is surely here." To the end of her days Sybil loved to fish and hunt for the lost mine.

I was a pre-teenager when I first came under Sybil's spell. Syb was now Sybil McGee Summers, wife of Lloyd, and Mammoth's first postmistress. She became a statuesque lady with prematurely silver hair, a Country Woman with an inborn sense of style in both dress and bearing. Even when she wore levis, which was most of the time, she had a touch of pizzaz that set her apart from the crowd.

My family would bring me up to spend a part of the summer in their home and what a wonderous change for a little city girl. The Summers family lived in the log cabin at the turn of the Old Mammoth Road. The pelton wheel, cabin and clapboard laundry shed were all that was left after a fire destroyed the Mammoth Hotel. John Lutz built a lean-to on the west side of the market to house Mammoth's pack

camp. Syb's work-world was compact. The log cabin, the lean-to post office and the pack station were all in hollering distance of each other. This was the town of Mammoth in my early memory.

One balmy day we went to a ranch south of Lee Vining on a basket-buying hunt. Sybil spoke Paiute very well. Even though I had no idea what was being said, the round, warm sound of the women talking made me feel comforted and secure . . . a far cry from the "cowboys and Indians" I had seen on the screen.

From the ranch we worked our way through sage and rabbit brush to some summer camps near the edge of Mono Lake. The dome-shaped shelters, similar to igloos, were made of loosely woven willow. They gave filtered shade from the summer sun and the cooling lake breezes flowed through the boughs.

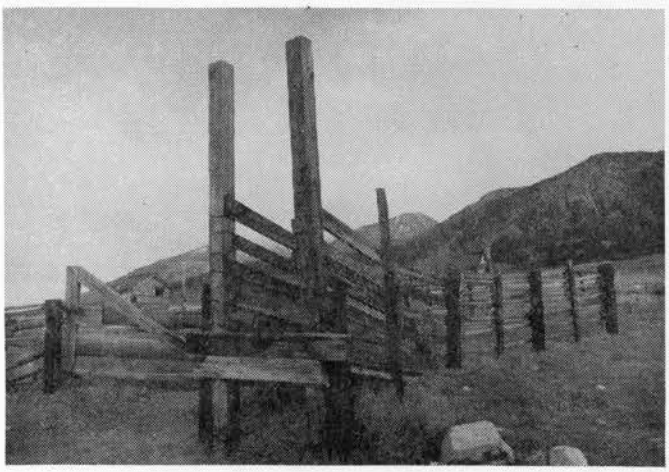
The basket-makers were harvesting brine flies from the lake edge. One friend offered Sybil a handful of something, but Syb shook her head and both women had a good laugh. On the way home I was told that the Indian wondered if the little white one would like some ku-za-vi (brine fly larva) . . . it would put fat on her bones.

Sybil had an Irish way of telling tales, and she exaggerated so naturally that the listener never doubted what she was saying until it was too late. No matter how tall the tale, there was always an element of truth in it.

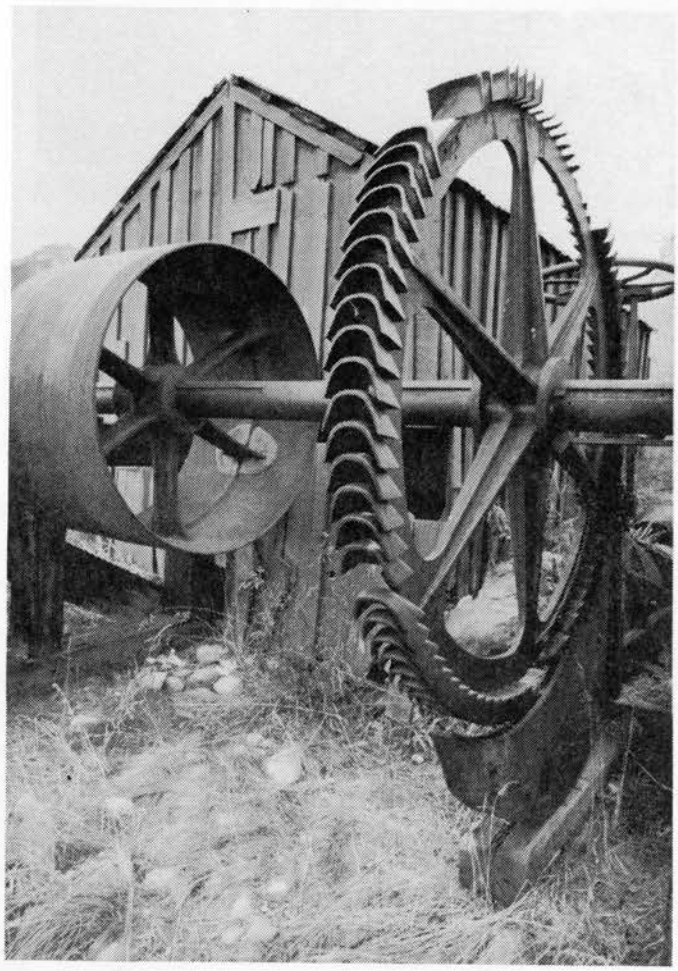
Sometimes I wondered how her sons grew up as I listened with fascinated horror to the stories of their youth. Sybil had a wonderful car. It was a shiny black Model T with running boards and skinny wheels with wooden spokes. Sybil was almost always in a hurry. One morning she jumped into the car to go to the post office. The driveway was simply a bent-grass path across the meadow in front of the house. There was no landscaping. And why should there be? With willows and aspen, lush meadowgrass and wild flowers which asked for no maintenance and no watering, why change it? Sybil's sons were playing near the front of the house. As Syb dropped the Model T into reverse and backed out of the yard her young son yelled,

"Mom, Mom, you just ran over Lee!"

Convict Lake - Record size trout still laze in the depths of this glacial lake.

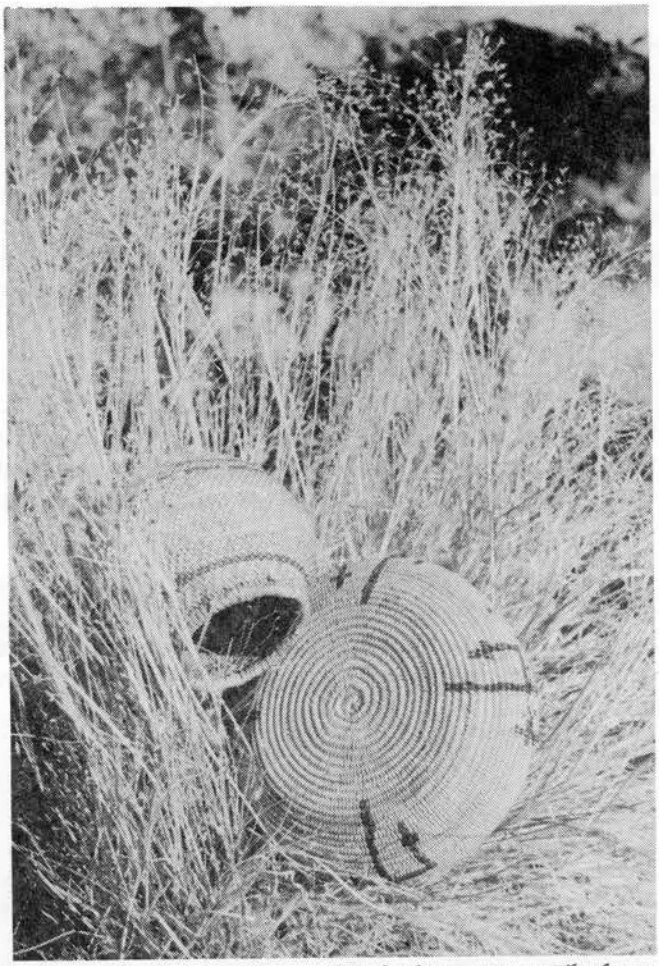


Mammoth Pack Camp Corrals - Geared up in the Spring, and battened down in the Fall, the pack outfit spent a busy Summer taking guests to the backcountry.

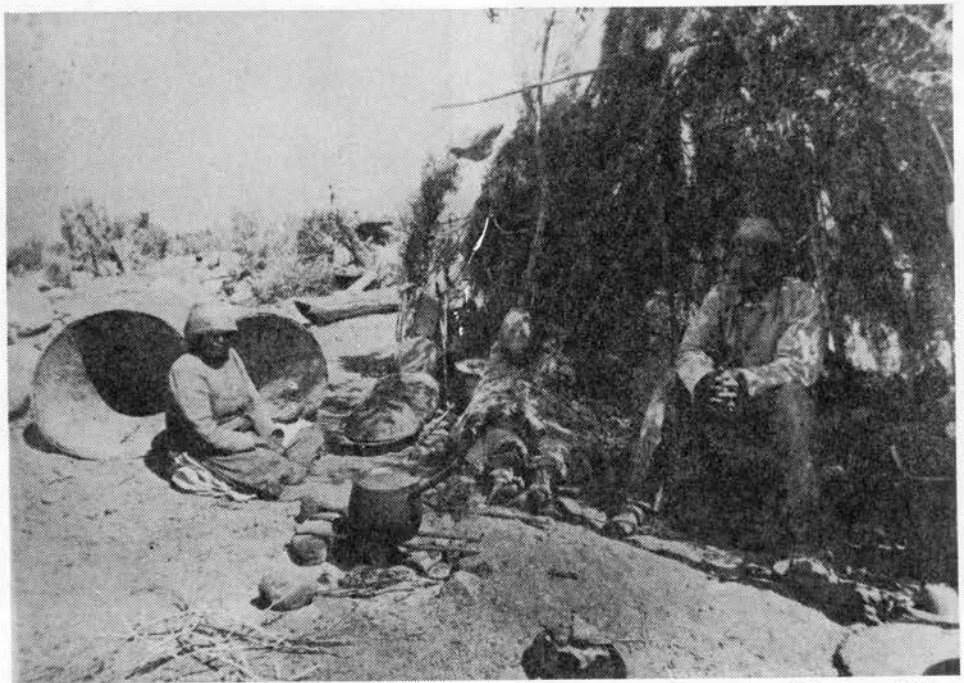


Pelton Wheel - The source of electricity for Mammoth Hotel, the pelton wheel is still a part of Mammoth's living past.

The Laundry Shed - Gentled by aspen, willow and grasses, this old building still stands at the edge of the creek, a reminder of busier days.



Baskets - The Paiutes were utility basket weavers. The beauty of the baskets speaks of their sense of lovliness.



Summer Shelters - using materials at hand, the Paiute made energy effective shelters with minimum impact on the land.

Horrified, Sybil jammed the "T" into low and powered back over the boy. Well, that's hysteria for you. But since the car was light and the whole thing happened on the cushiony meadowgrass, no real harm was done.

The same son was target-for-today when they all headed for Bishop the first time the road was passable after a snow storm had covered the Sierra. The boys had their skis and well up on old Sherwin Grade, Lee begged to be let out to try the shimmery, untracked snow. Sybil was always good for an adventure so she stopped the car and stood at the edge of the road while her eldest son made a few traverses down the mountain.

"Watch this," she said to Verne, picking up a rock and heaving it over the side of the mountain. Sybil, who could not hit the proverbial side of a barn, knocked Lee silly and no one was more surprised than she.

Sybil hated porcupines. She hated what they did to pine trees. In the case of porcupines, Sybil was a vengeful woman. I found this out one summer when we were sleeping on the screened porch of her Laurel Creek cabin. When we woke in the morning, we would tell each other what we had dreamed. If you've tried this with a trusted friend, you know that the more you talk about dreams, the wilder they become, to the point where you can hardly wait to get to sleep to see what will happen. But one night I realized I wasn't dreaming.

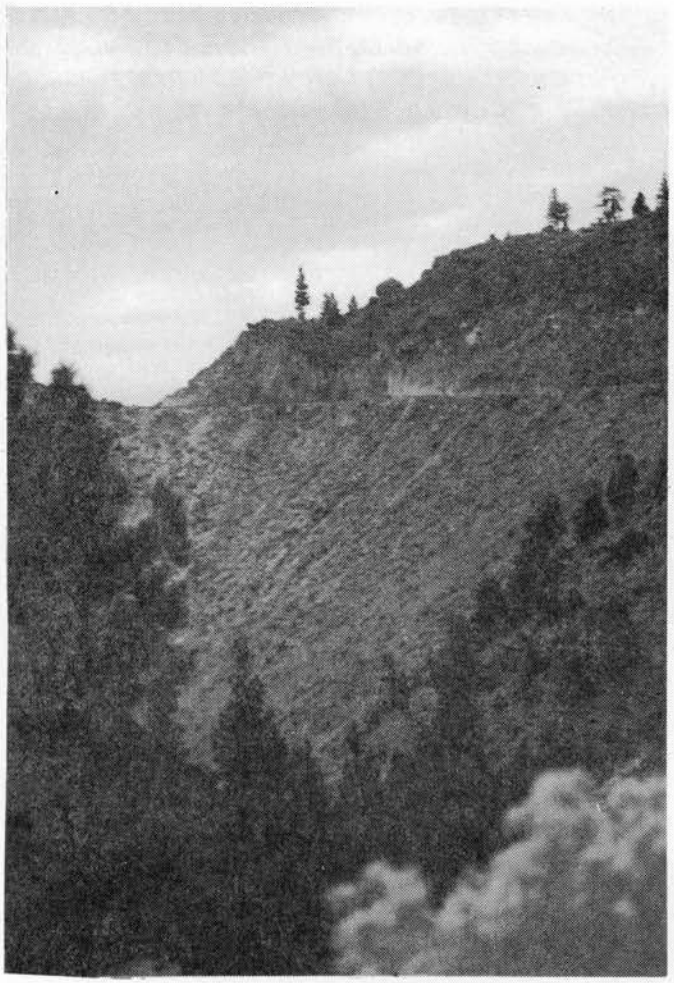
"Sybil . . . Sybil, wake up. What in the name of Heaven is that noise! Is it a bear? Good grief, Sybil . . . WAKE UP!"

"Sh, sh. Get the flashlight and I'll get the gun. It's porcupines and they are mating in that tree right outside." I knew what Sybil had in mind and I wasn't ready for this at three in the morning. I also knew I had no choice. I put on my shoes, grabbed the flashlight, and joined Sybil under the pine tree.

"Shine the light right up there. They're on the third branch. See, see!!"

I stood under the tree, flashlight immodestly beaming upward and WHAM, she blasted those lovers out of the tree and all over us. Well, Syb never said life in the woods was tidy.

Then there was the time she lost her good sense on the old Red's Meadow road. It was during WW II and just about everything was rationed. The hardest things to get were tires. By now Syb had a big blue Buick and tires for that car were not only hard to get, they were expensive.



Old Sherwin Grade - Before the freeway, the Sherwin Grade brought access from the North Country to Bishop and the Owens Valley.

Near the Old Sherwin Grade are the scars of freight wagon trains. The wagons set the brake on the rear wheels and headed down. When the scars on the tuff got axel deep, they just moved their trail over a few feet.

The road to Red's was unpaved, steep and narrow, about one car wide. Syb started down in the late afternoon. The light on the Minarets was splendid. The air was soft and the evening held every promise of loveliness. About half-way down all changed. A porcupine made the mistake of venturing out early. He was slowly crossing the road, unmindful of oncoming death; in a twinkling Sybil became the Champion of all Pine Trees. Of course she ran over the porcupine. Of course she backed over it. Of course she ran over it again. She killed the porcupine quite dead. She also punctured three tires. Not only punctured, but totaled. There was no auto club to come to her rescue so she drove out of Red's Meadow on the rags of those expensive tires.

Like Red's Meadow Road, the road to Hot Creek has changed some. On a long summer's evening, after a day of work at the post office or at the pack outfit we would head for Hot Creek. By now I was old enough to work part time at the post office. It was wonderful; the summer residents all had boxes, there was no local newspaper, and everyone knew when the mail arrived. That's when social hour began.

I felt like the luckiest person in the world to work at the post office for Sybil. The pay wasn't much but the fringe benefits were outstanding. Hot Creek was one of them. We would gather up some flour, a little bacon, a frying pan, our fishing tackle and head for the Creek. There was a road along the top shoulder of Hot Creek's little gorge. We would park wherever it looked good to us, then slither and slide down the steep pumice bank to the water's edge where there were no bubbling mud pots or steaming vents. The stream had hot and cold spots and swimming was a real game. We swam or fished as the mood moved us, but when the sun dropped close to the Sierra we built a small cooking fire, fried the trout, and Syb would make her fine frying-pan bread. Never mind nutrition, never mind calories. Good eating was what counted.

One day, after a shopping trip to Bishop, Sybil came dashing into the house, breathless and her arms filled with paper bags. She couldn't wait to tell us the amazing news.

"Do you know that they were blasting rock on the grade and it took 28 tons of dynamite!"

"Oh come on, Syb . . . 28 TONS?"

"Well, maybe it was 28 boxes."

"Sybil, think now."

"Well, maybe it was 28 sticks. It was 28 something. What difference, it made a wonderful bang. I WISH you could have seen it."

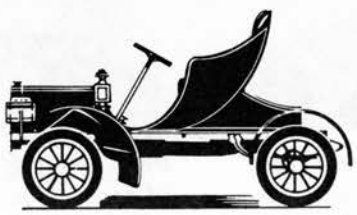
That was Sybil. She made us work, she made us laugh , but most of all, with her wonderful zest for living, she made us love her.

Author's note: These recollections have been a joy to pull out of the back corners of my mind. The real challenge was trying to photograph Long Valley and Mammoth as they may have been when Sybil was a child.

The Road to Red's Meadow - The Road from the Minaret Summit down into Red's Meadow has always been spectacular. In the early days it was always scary.

Hot Creek - Earth powers are at their most dramatic between the geothermal waters of Hot Creek and the glacial vallies and upthrust mountains of the Sierra. Could a setting for swimming be more beautiful?

Louise and Bill Kelsey Photos



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