

THE ALBUM

Times & Tales of Inyo-Mono

Being a quarterly recounting of the nature and history of two California counties

Vol. I, No. 4



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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.

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



Los Angeles Department
of Water and Power



THE ALBUM, Times and Tales of Inyo-Mono

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*Cover photo: Lillian: "Now I am old and wise."
Photo by Louise Kelsey.*

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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*Miss Eleanor Margrave, Librarian, with Carl Lutzow and
the first Inyo County shipment of books to the schools.
1934*

The Library, Miss Eddy and the Train

By Marguerite Sowaal
Photos courtesy of Inyo County Free Library.

The "Saint" pulled out of Contra Costa County, Martinez station, headed for Los Angeles via Mojave. On board that July 6, 1913, was a determined young lady named Harriet G. Eddy. She watched the other passengers swaying to the click of the rails and heard them wearily complain about the heat and humidity. When those few social amenities were exhausted and conversation ceased, they silently sat, gazing at the landscape slowly creep through hazy glass, frame by frame. The Santa Fe bounced uneventfully through fields and plains and at last reached Bakersfield; a short stop and then the tortuously jolting climb over the Tehachapi mountains into Mojave.

Harriet sighed with relief when the train finally stopped. Although she knew she would have to board another within hours, it was nice to put her feet on the ground if only for a little while. She checked to make sure she had all her belongings and that the train to Inyo County was still running on time. Train schedules had just been changed and there was more than once when she had missed connections. All seemed to be in order, and she began the long wait for the northbound train from Los Angeles to pick up Mojave passengers. It seemed an eternity waiting in the hot, breathless sitting room over the station, but at last she boarded the dusty sleeper which began its journey up the eastern side of the Sierra, coughing and spitting as it went.

She found that she couldn't sleep. Whether it was the heat and closeness of the sleeping car or anticipation of what she must accomplish the following day, Harriet tossed and turned all night, arriving in Independence unrefreshed. She began her quest for a county library in Inyo, 9 a.m., July 7, 1913.

As the Inyo County Board of supervisors were to meet within the hour, she headed directly for the Courthouse. She felt she could rely on one of the Supervisors, Mr. Cooley from Bishop, but she was unsure of the others and more than a few butterflies occupied an otherwise empty stomach. Mr. Cooley had been in Sacramento the previous winter and both she and Mr. Gillis, the State Librarian, felt that he was in favor of establishing a library in Inyo County. Prior to going to Independence Mr. Gillis had sent Mr. Cooley a copy of the resolution of intention and asked him to help see that it was adopted. While she was waiting for the meeting to begin, Harriet met and talked with Chairman Thomas, Mr. Ford, Mr. Lubken and Mr. Reynolds. She breathed a sigh of relief and felt that the action would take only a few minutes to resolve in a unanimous vote in favor of the library.

It was more than a surprise when the vote failed because Mr. Cooley insisted that the resolution be placed on the agenda for the afternoon session. Apparently he had heard from a few of his

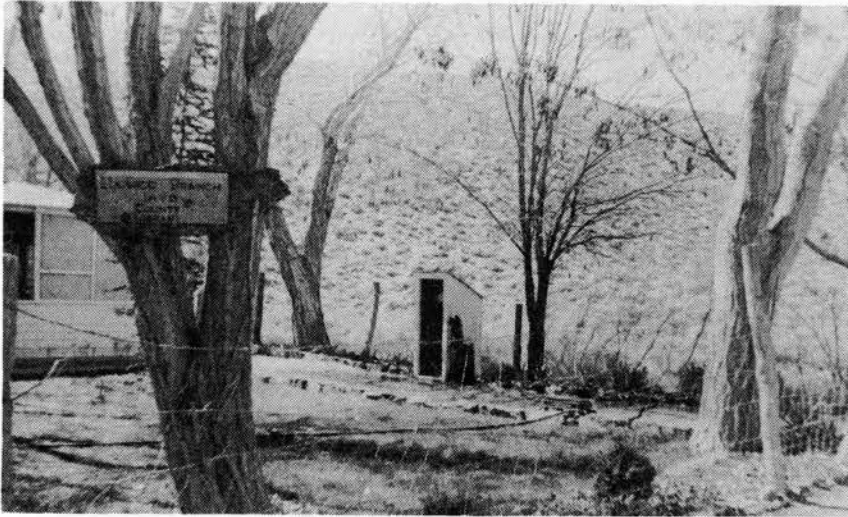
constituents who had opposed the establishment of a library. Through an animated lunch with Mr. Lubken, Harriet had elicited a favorable impression and was surprised for the second time that day when he voted "no" after the motion was brought up in the afternoon. Undaunted, Harriet waited until the close of the meeting to bluntly ask Mr. Lubken why he had changed his mind. "I'll promise to vote for the establishment, if you can get a few of the big taxpayers to favor it," was his reply.

Having come this far under less than ideal circumstances, the intrepid Miss Eddy got a list of the big taxpayers from the assessor and set out a plan to convince them of the need for a library in Inyo. Mr. Reynolds commented when he saw that the issue would not die easily, "Miss Eddy will find eight out of ten in favor all over the county and the other two will oppose simply because they aren't educated enough to know what a library can mean."

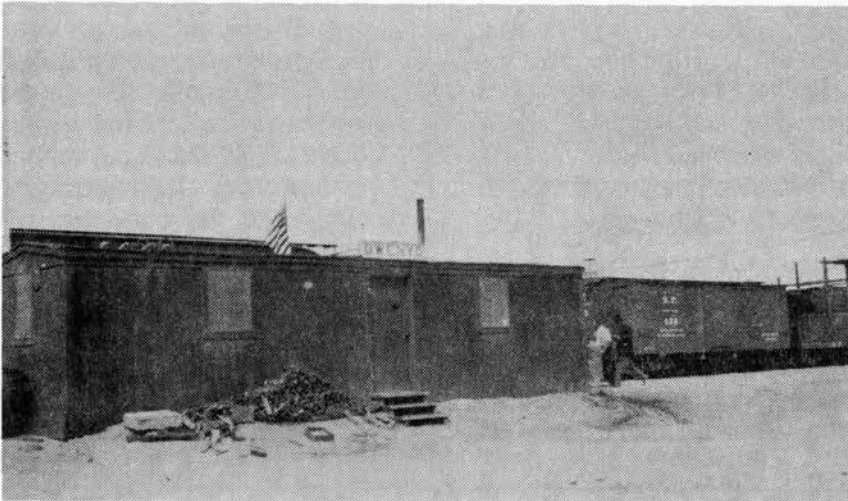
The same excruciating exercise in train travel was repeated and Harriet found herself in Inde-



Bishop Library, 1913, corner of Warren and Line Streets.



*Haiwee Branch
Library*



*Owenyo
School
Branch*



*Big Pine
Branch
Library*

pendence again on September 5, 1913. She was told that it was not a good time to ask the Supervisors for anything as the County was still smarting from the fight with Los Angeles over the water supply and did not wish to be bothered with anything or anyone from "the outside." The County was also mildly divided between north and south--the former being the more recent settlers while the south were the "old timers." Harriet decided to start in Big Pine where there was a unity of feeling. Her timing was excellent. A large crowd, gathered to meet the Highway Commission, offered her a ready-made audience and she was able to talk with some influential people, one of whom was Dr. McQueen. Dr. McQueen immediately approved of the concept of an Inyo County Library and said, "A fine idea. Anyone who opposes, I'll help hang."

As Supervisor Ford was standing next to him, Miss Eddy simply said, "No! Don't hang the supervisor, just convert him."

Dr. McQueen showed his amazement and took Supervisor Ford to task for his opposition, whereupon Mr. Ford answered facetiously, "If I hadn't voted 'no' you wouldn't have known I was there."

From then on Harriet took the County by storm and with complete confidence. Trips to Independence, Manzanar, Big Pine and Bishop produced an interest and petitions were circulated everywhere. The campaign was enthusiastically carried forward by Will Chalfant, editor of the REGISTER. An educated, intelligent man, Mr. Chalfant gave his readers a good understanding of the benefits of the library, and further offered advice to Miss Eddy regarding the handling of some of the hold-outs. Blanche Chalfant (who became County

Librarian 1916) was a big help in giving information to the people of Bishop.

The "north" was won, and the supervisors enthusiastic. They all said that it was the "south" that presented the problem. Harriet was given the name of the key man there, a well-to-do sheep ranger, and was told that nothing was passed without his approval. She sighed as she thought of another journey but felt that the end was in sight. After she found a room in Lone Pine, a makeshift 'hotel' above a store, she set out to find a Mr. John Stewart. When she arrived at his ranch, a lovely lady opened the door and welcomed Harriet most graciously. Upon inquiring if Mr. Stewart was at home, she was told by Mrs. Stewart, "My husband is not home, but you have come just in time, for he has been out in the hills for two weeks, and will be home today."

Harriet confided the purpose of her visit, and Mrs. Stewart offered the sage advice that the topic not be mentioned until Mr. Stewart had been given a chance to rest and the benefit of a good meal. "Wait until he has washed up and had his supper. Come back about seven o'clock."

Another delay, but at least, Harriet thought, she had left the proposition in good hands. When she returned that evening, Mr. Stewart met her at the door and was precisely as she imagined...a small, lean man with a sharp eye, grizzled hair and beard...an imposing sight. After she had told him her story she waited for his reply. Nothing. They chatted about everything else, including his son who had just graduated from the University of Nevada in Reno. He produced a picture of a fine looking young man and Harriet stared at the photo. Where had she seen it before? The visit extended into

the evening with Mr. Stewart telling of his life in the hills, herding sheep at the base of Mount Whitney, and skirting the library business entirely. Over cake and coffee Mrs. Stewart asked Harriet where she was born, and when she told them, "Michigan, near Detroit," Mr. Stewart said he had a sister named Deming who lived in Wayne.

"You don't mean that you are Aunt Kate and Uncle Johnny?!" "Of course we are, but who are you and how do you know us?"

In due course, the distant family ties were sorted out and everyone talked at once, trying to find out the how, where, why and when of those they had not seen in years. The evening lengthened into early morning but not a word about the library. Harriet felt that she could not ask and did not want to upset the nice reverie that had been established. She returned to her room not really knowing what would happen the following day.

The next morning when Harriet went down stairs, the storekeeper said, "What did you do to Uncle Johnny last night?"

"Why?" gasped Harriet

"He was on the street at seven o'clock this morning, circulating a petition for the library, with his name at the top of the list. And of course, everyone else in town has signed."

The next week, September 15, the petition was in the hands of the Supervisors and the resolution establishing the library was unanimously passed.

That would be the end of the story except for the train ride back to Sacramento. Harriet had learned to dread the ordeal of travel in Inyo County but this last train ride was by far the worst...and, in retrospect, the best.

The train north to Reno was a mixed freight and passenger train (the same one Harriet had ridden from Mojave). It was her first experience with this leg of the journey and added a humorous chapter to her adventures. Normally the trip would take eight hours from Independence to Reno where she would connect with an overland train to Sacramento. She planned for a three-hour layover in Reno - enough time for a nice dinner - but there was really no schedule for the rickety little engine and no promises were made. The engine was a wood burner and the tender couldn't hold enough wood needed for the trip. Things ran smoothly on the flat, but with the fireman stoking the engine constantly to keep up the steam pressure, the two passengers were concerned about ever reaching Reno. When the little train began to climb the grades, the engine would wheeze and puff and Harriet found herself leaning forward to mentally push the train, while keeping an eye on the supply of wood. The first time the engine stopped she became fearful that she would be forever in the valley and volunteered to get out and push. She was assured that this was a normal occurrence and that the train would be going again soon. This was when she noticed that the engine had halted directly before a large supply of old railway ties which the fireman and engineer began chopping, filling the woodbox as they went. Off went the train again, a full head of steam, only to get over the next hill and stop again by another supply of railroad ties.

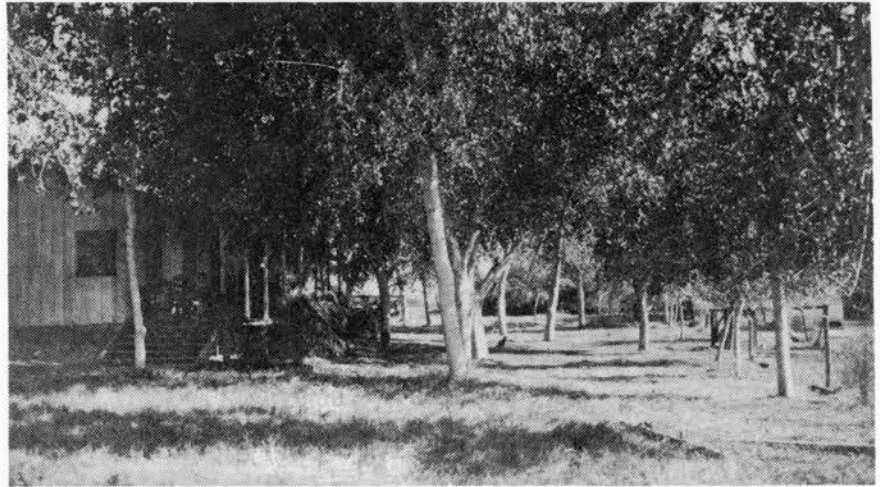
This stop-and-go, chop-and-fill process was repeated again and again. The train would labor up a hill, coast down the other side, and stop. On into the afternoon this process continued while the other passenger, a garrulous

miner, entertained Harriet with tales about Death Valley. As evening approached a hot meal was provided - where it came from was a mystery - and, at last, an oil burning engine came to their rescue.

At nine o'clock, just as the overland train from the East pulled into Reno, Harriet and the engine arrived as well. Within

minutes she was on the overland, asleep, the nightmare of the old woodburner over, and the dream of the library fulfilled.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The Inyo County Free Library celebrated the 75th Anniversary of its establishment in September, 1988. Elements of the above story were derived from the personal recollections of Harriet G. Eddy.



*Above: Former Tecopa Branch at Davis Ranch
Below: Lone Pine Branch Library*



R.J. Schober teaming out of Saline Valley; flocks of birds rise from the fields in front of the Inyo Range, barely discernible in background. Photo courtesy of Laws Railroad Museum.

TEAMSTER R.J. SCHOBER

and

**The Blacksnake with a
Copper Wire
Wrapped Around Its Butt**

BY JOHN SCHOBER
1985

THE TEAMSTER

We young'uns did not realize what took place before we were born or even old enough to get the drift of the careers of our parents. But we heard the old folks telling the history of their lives, and that is how we heard so many stories about what our parents did before our time of understanding. Of course, most of our mothers were just plain good housewives that loved to have and take care of a flock of kids, while our fathers tried to make the living

My father, known as R. J. Schober, spent most of his life working as a teamster hauling produce from Owens Valley to Los Angeles, and then hauling back to Owens Valley furniture, groceries and so on for the stores that had ordered such. He also had a number of other hauling jobs. He told us O. W. Larson, a resident and farmer here, was his bookkeeper.

After the Slim Princess came to Laws my father continued to freight, but he decided it was more profitable to haul silver-lead bullions out of Panamint Valley; this he did. This all took place before I was born in the year of 1903. By the time I was born, my father had a contract with the Southern Sierra Power Company to do some hauling. This was a rush job and I heard him say that he was compelled to hire more teams and wagons. During this contract the hired teamsters gave father trouble which he counteracted by buying a big Daniel Best steam engine weighing over 44,000 pounds, not including a thousand gallons of water. This ended the trouble with the hired men and the contract was finished.

It was probably toward the finish of this contract that I was old enough to notice what was going on. One summer day my oldest brother Walt was to meet our father west of Laws' hill with one of our old hay wagons pulled by a span of old, trusty horses; naturally I went along for the long four mile ride. Finally we saw the dust from our father's outfit, so Walt, who was about three years older than I, pulled the old hay wagon off to the side of the road. With the intention of getting a ride back to the hay wagon, we let the old horses stand untied while the two of us walked way down the road to meet him. This was the first time I watched my father in real action, and I really didn't expect to see anything like this. Imagine a string of powerful horses over a hundred feet long going by me. To me it seemed as though each one of those horses was not going to be outdone by its partner alongside. These horses were of all colors, and let me tell you, they knew what they were doing.

By now Pa (as we called him) started to show up riding on his "wheeler," the largest work horse I ever saw and no doubt weighed over a ton. He called this big fellow George. Pa was riding on a peculiar old junky-looking saddle: no horn and iron stirrups. I took time to watch those huge yellow wheels on the wagon make a round or two before Pa stopped the team to tell Walt and me to stay off of the wagons because they were already loaded too heavy.

We were used to seeing Pa dressed in common work clothes around home, but he wasn't dressed that way this time. He had on the nicest pair of high topped leather boots. They had four inches square of pretty blue leather inlay at the top, were very durable looking, and very spectacular. Draped around his neck was the old blacksnake, the butt of which had been repaired with copper wire. As I took a good look at Pa he didn't look quite natural to me. He was all business and wouldn't put up with any monkey business; the blacksnake was ready.

All of a sudden Pa said "Time is wasting, stay away from the wagons and don't hang on anything behind. I would rather haul you than drag you."

Next I heard him call (seeming in an unnatural voice) the name of one of his lead horses. Instantly the lead span seemed to tighten up on the main chain, which got larger as it came back toward the wagon. Next, all the other spans tightened up on the chains; but the wagons didn't budge until I saw that blacksnake flash in mid-air, the thing seeming to make a double report or pop, then continue back around his neck.

There was nothing to driving a team, I thought to myself as those big horses and great yellow wheels started moving. Walt and I walked up the sandy road alongside of Pa, who to me had the best of the deal sitting up there riding that big gentle horse. We reached the hay wagon before a word was spoken. No time was lost; all we did was get some junk off his wagons to take home. He seemed to be in a hurry but said, "By the time you get home it will be time to milk your cows." He got back on big George and I heard him speak to his leaders; next came the blast of that blacksnake as the wheels started turning again. The day's

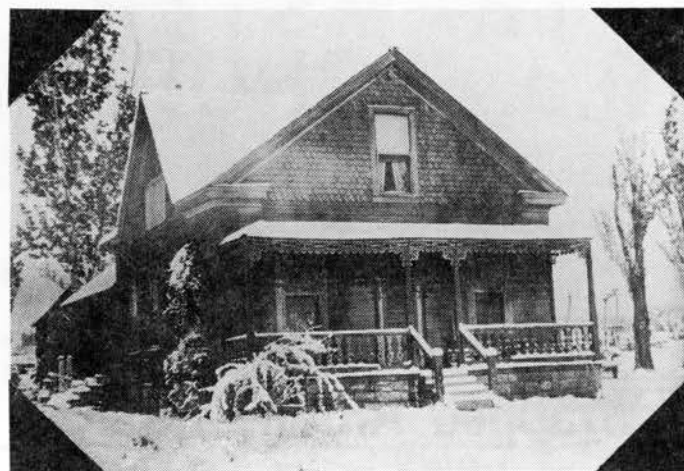
work for his horses would terminate just below Plant Four on Bishop Creek where Pa had corrals and feed. We kids didn't see Pa around home often, as he was on these hauling jobs most of the time.

Walt and I wanted to get home as bad as the horses pulling our hay wagon, as we sure had plenty to tell Mom about our trip. Everything at home kept going on as usual: we would get up early in the morning, milk our cows, and do the rest of the chores before going to school where I just plainly wasted my time. But I made up for my wasted time when I got home from school because all those chores had to be done before bedtime, and I mean every day, year after year.

Pa finished hauling for the Southern Sierra Power Company, but within a few days had taken another big contract with the Saline Valley Salt Company to haul heavy timbers and all necessities to make the Saline Valley Tramway. This job was a big undertaking and took several years, so we didn't see him home often. Sometimes we would see him coming up the sandy road toward our Sunland school. The teacher always had us raise the window shades then, and stand at the windows while we listened to him whistle as the big team went by.

It wasn't long until the Laws railroad bought a big White truck with hard rubber tires to take the place of an eight horse team used to haul freight from Laws to Bishop. By this time I was old enough to see that most all the teaming was about over.

Pa came home from Saline Valley telling us that he was about through with his hauling job. By now I was out of school and had plenty of experience at home with farm horses, sometimes using up to four span, or a team of eight horses, on a plow. But when us younger fellows handled that many horses for a few days we usually got the big head thinking we were much better than we really were around horses. Even so, we got things done.



R.J. Schober home on Sunland Avenue, Bishop.

A TRIP TO SALINE VALLEY

One day Pa says to me: "I have to have a swamper with me because I am bringing a heavy load out of Saline Valley on the next trip. About all you need to be ready to go is a new pair of shoes or boots -- because there are lots of rattlesnakes on this trip."

After loading a lot of hay and stuff, Pa checked his old grub box to be sure he had plenty of potatoes, bacon and onions, and also flour and baking powder. He knew how much I could eat, and that was a lot. His team bed, as he called it, was a big bed roll covered with canvas, and it was big enough to accommodate the two of us.

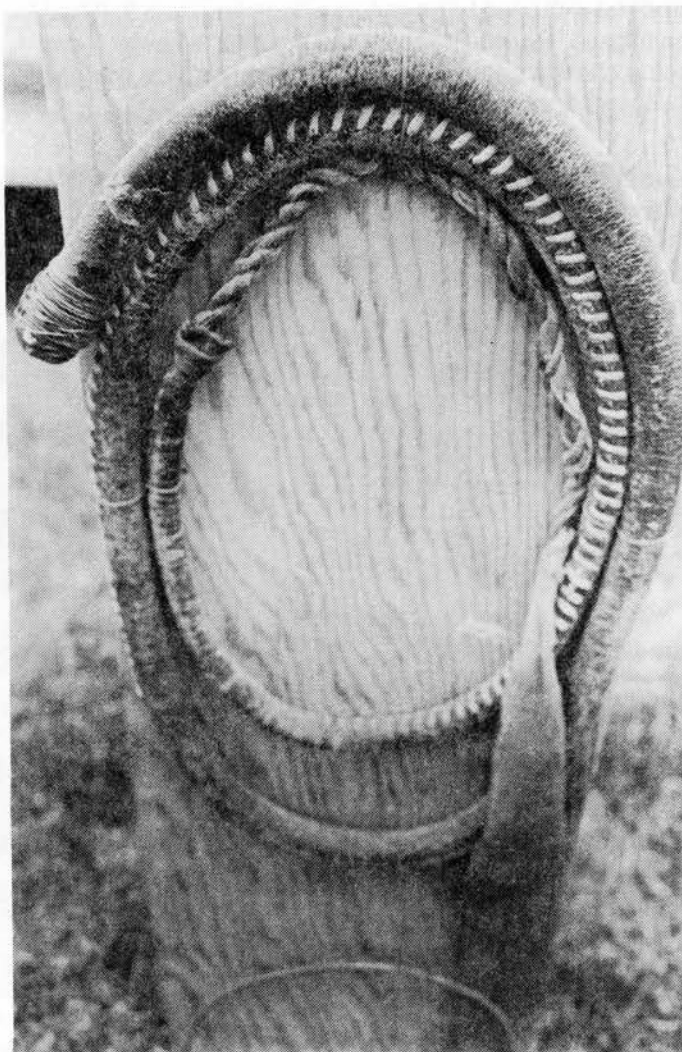
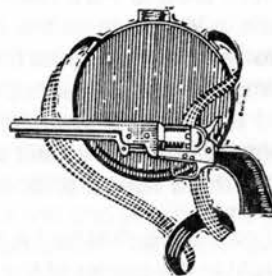
We started out with one large freight wagon loaded with hay and grain. His long, light-weight feed wagon was anchored on behind. There were only two lines, and they went to the lead span. The wheelers had lines but they were never used; they were tied to the wagon. Once in awhile that blacksnake would flash out with no effort at all, only to pop off a horsefly that was bothering one of the horses. It didn't seem possible that he could flick that blacksnake out there with such force and knock off a horsefly, and his horse didn't even flinch. This is the only thing the blacksnake was used for all the way to Saline Valley. There was one thing he never missed -- a fly.

Everything went fine all the way in, and our load kept getting lighter as we unloaded hay at different cache stations for the return trip. The trip in took four days. It was evening when we got to the corrals at Saline Valley. A slight breeze was blowing and it wasn't too hot. We had plenty of extra help there and it wasn't long until we ate supper in the main cook shack.

The next day before dinner the thermometer was reading 119 degrees in the shade. The wagons we were to take out were already loaded to capacity and ready to go, but Pa seemed to be in no hurry to get started; he had a little more visiting to do. I heard one of his old teamster friends say our Pa had a habit of talking all day, then working all night to catch up, but he always got his hauling done and his horses stayed fat and powerful. Before dinner Pa and I had all 22 head of horses fed and harnessed, but I will never forget how I was sweating. Then Jimmy, the cook, filled our bowls with steaming hot chuckwalla soup: it was good and seemed to cool me off some.

Right: The antique bullwhip used in the early 1900s by R.J. Schober. Mr. John Schober donated this bullwhip and the photograph on page 7 to the Law's Railroad Museum. Don Calkins photo.

After dinner we really got busy with the teams which were hitched to the wagons to suit Pa. Even though we were using all the horses in the corral plus the ones we brought in with us, Pa decided to borrow a span of mules belonging to Ned Smith. Pa seemed to think he was lacking enough power to make a certain pull on the road out. After that pull was made he intended to throw the mule harness on the wagon and let the mules go back to Saline Valley by themselves.



LONG HAUL OUT OF THE SALINE VALLEY

All was in order so we both got on the wagon. The old blacksnake with the copper wire wrapped on the butt was around his neck. The whole setup was a sight to see. I noticed but two lines from his wheel horses and they were tied to the wagon, but there was a small rope called a jerk line threaded through a row of rings on his side of the wagon all the way to the lead span. I watched him close as he jiggled that jerk line for a second or so, then he spoke sharply to his lead team. This time (more noticeable than usual) the chains started tightening up; single-trees on the stretchers started rising from the ground; seconds later the blacksnake came from around Pa's neck with effortless movement and made a loud pop in the air. The wagon didn't start moving for a little while, then finally the horses walked off with the wagon. I could see they weren't doing it easily. It was then I noticed this teamster didn't handle horses like us younger fellows; he wasn't continually yapping at his horses for more speed or power like we did.

All big freight wagons of his that had a seat also had a shallow box made right in the center of the big seats. This box was kept full of rocks about the size of hen eggs which were used on a lagging horse without warning or saying a word. Whenever he did throw a rock it hit the target -- there was no such thing as a foul ball. When the road would get crooked with blind turns or some large boulders that had to be missed, Pa would mount the big near wheeler. I could see a change come over him; he was ready to use all his skill and knowledge of teaming.

As well as all the spans of horses were doing, Pa knew they had to do better. The extra ten head of stock Pa had taken from the corral in Saline Valley weren't doing their best and he seemed to know this. Within a mile, he had to have the team ready to tackle the hardest pull on the board. He stopped the team, got off the old big horse, and told me to get the shovel and clean a little sand out from under the front wheels. Then he said: "Listen closely, my boy, to what I am saying. I always stop the team before they get tired enough to stop by themselves. Remember that! I never rest them longer than is necessary, so dig out from under the front wheels of that wagon and get away fast every time the wagon stops. And don't do anything I don't tell you to do until we get to the summit." I knew he meant business so I watched his actions closely.

This time he started the team while standing on the ground, and all seemed to be going well - but not good enough to suit him. He had already made it plain to me that I was to walk if the team was lugging a bit, so we both were walking. I was staying out of his way but close enough to see every move he made. I saw him walk by several of his own horses that seemed to be shirking on the job. To him, with years of experience, these small problems were common; and of course he had many remedies that would take care of such things. This time he preferred to make believe he was thrashing on the mules that were close ahead of the shirking horses, so they could see what was taking place. They watched Pa slowly pull the blacksnake from around his neck and pop it a foot above the rear end of the mules. This was repeated a couple of times over their backs. Next



*Mr. and Mrs. John Schober and sons Rudolph, Edward and Jacob, 1910.
(original print from collection of the Arthur E. Larsons)*

Pa walked to the side of the mules with the blacksnake popping under the mules' bellies for at least six or eight steps, then he slowly walked back. But on the way back there was one more pop that struck the leather blinds on one of our own horses. Pa figured the task was well done, but something must have amused him because he took time to laugh.

Those mules were pulling so hard that it was necessary to stop the team to give the mules a breather and a short rest. I came close to his side. I was so confused I couldn't talk right, but I will never forget his words: "I don't want to ever catch you trying to do what you just saw. Now get the shovel and get back on your job while I prepare the team for the next pull ahead. You know we are overloaded." He started the team very easily and the blacksnake became very noisy at times, popping in the air.

Soon after stopping the team for a few seconds the same thing was done again strictly to make them take notice. I could easily tell Pa was completely satisfied. He stopped the team, walked to the wagon to get atop the big wheel horse, and started things in motion. It wasn't long until I heard him whistling a tune, and once in awhile he would sing out something about Billy Boy and a cherry pie. Sure always sounded good to me.

By now we were within a few feet of the worst pull on the road. The team was stopped for a breather before he tackled that washed out steep, sandy gulch. The team was started as usual and it looked to me as though every horse in that string was doing its best except the big wheel horse Pa was riding and its side partner. They just walked along doing nothing. Pa spoke in a dragged out uncommon voice to one of the horses above him, then came the usual pop of the blacksnake. I was in a good place to watch everything as I walked behind him off to one side of the front wheel. Pa took the blacksnake off his neck easily, and did that whip make a couple of mighty vicious reports! He nudged the horse he was riding with his boot heel, then talked to those big wheel horses just as though he was talking to a person. I heard him say: "I'll need your help for a little while, Fanny."

Then and there those big fellows got busy and I could see they had endless power when every horse in that string was pulling its limits. It looked as though it was impossible to pull the hill. "We are stuck for sure," I thought to myself, but soon I found out how wrong I was. Anything the horses above couldn't pull, the big wheelers could.

Within about a hundred yards there was a level place in the road made just to give his teams a breather and short rest before he tackled the balance of the hill. His team seemed eager to get going, so Pa started up again to finish the pull to the top. I saw every horse, including the wheelers, pulling all they could. That big wheeler looked sideways right at me to be sure I was watching him, because he wanted to show off. I don't know what happened, but Pa was very quiet and the blacksnake was too -- but that big fellow really got busy. His burst of power threw his partner backwards just as if she was light as straw, and the stay

chains that went from his end of the double-tree back to the axle were so tight that I expected something to break. Oh what a demonstration that horse made! I felt kind of sorry for his partner who wanted to match him but couldn't, even though she tried hard.

The worst was over and even though the day was young we didn't go far. The team left the main road to end up at what Pa called one of his main stations for the trip out. This no doubt had something to do with the pulling power, for those horses who had made this trip many times before were wise enough to know that when they made that hard pull, they would get watered and fed.

The water at this station was in barrels and not too plentiful, so Pa said we had to be conservative with the water. He told me the water was in old pork barrels and didn't smell too good. He would show me how he wanted the watering done: "We water them while they stand as they are in their traces, but they are thirsty and I don't want them to drink all our water up. The first and second time you make the round with the water bucket don't let them have more than two or three swallows, otherwise any one of them would empty that big bucket and want more. After you make two or three rounds with two or three swallows each you can go back around again to let them have all the water they want, which won't amount to only a small amount. I will show you how to handle this smelly water because you will have to be quick to get their noses in it before they get a chance to smell, or they won't drink." I watched him awhile, then took over while he made a "teamster stew" as he called it.

This station showed signs of being used a lot. I could see how handy the arrangement was: there was a row of posts with a railing, a tank with grain for the horses, a manger, and plenty of good hay too. I had already been warned not to touch the lead span until all the rest of the horses were removed. The leaders came last. All the horses had halters already on, with ropes mounted to their manes. This sure saved lots of time. I had been on the job now long enough to know that I wasn't to feed fresh hay to them -- this time of day they were to clean up all the scraps of hay that were saved from morning or dinner feedings. All these leftovers were gathered up and hauled along to be fed in the evening up until bedtime; then the horses were all watered and fed plenty of fresh hay.

The first thing in the morning those horses got all the water they wanted plus a nosebag of grain and plenty of hay. The horses must then be well curried and harnessed before breakfast. After breakfast they were hooked up to the wagon exactly as they belonged. Then all the scrap hay was picked up and piled in the feed wagon to be fed the next evening when camp was made. Now the teamster was not supposed to do one thing other than drive the team, but being I was so green at this job I did get some help. I could see that Pa wasn't used to doing any of the swamper's job, and I said so, too. We had breakfast before the horses were hitched to the wagon, and it was Pa's job to start things in motion, which he did with ease and care. There was a great difference between coming in with a

small outfit and going out with a heavy load and a long team. I certainly had found this out.



USING THE BRAKES

We rode happily on the wagon for a long way. Then we started going down hill in places and the road was crooked, with even some blind turns where half of that long string of horses was out of our sight. Pa said "I will have to tend to my business for the next hour or two so when I tell you to pull that brake on, do so, but don't unless I tell you to."

I stayed on the wagon and Pa got on the big wheel horse. There were some short turns to be made but the horses had been well trained to do exactly what Pa wanted them to do. Pa knew he could make a certain crook in this down-hill road, providing I didn't foul him up with the brake. It seemed to me everything was going too fast to suit me, and about that time I heard his quivering voice drag out "Gee - George."

Immediately the big wheel horse George threw the front end of that wagon way off to the right side of the road. Some of the horses seemed to be crowded off the road and it looked to me as if they were going to get run over. The wagon with me on the front seat looked as though it could go off over the bank. I wanted to put that brake on long before, but I hadn't. All of a sudden I panicked, slamming on the brake until I could see the back wheels stop and slide, then come to a quick stop.

Pa got off his wheel horse not excited at all and said, "Jee-rusalem boy, we won't cry over spilt milk but that is why I told you not to pull on the brake until I told you to. If you had only waited a few seconds longer until I told you to set the brakes we would have saved ourselves a lot of hard work."

Without walking back to the big wagon that was in front of the feed wagon to see what had happened, he said "you will have to take Fanny off the wagon, she is the only one you can take off easily. Then get off of the road, lead her down in the gulch and come up the road behind the feed wagon. While you do that I will try to get a single-tree off the feed wagon. You will have to uncouple it and back the wagon up."

Pa tied the chain to the wagon and was all ready to hook onto it when I got there with Fanny. I hooked on to the single-tree and led Fanny up the hill a little way while Pa steered the front end of the feed wagon. There Fanny held the wagon until Pa blocked the wheels with a rock. Next I found a place to get Fanny back on the road and we both walked back down to the big heavy wagon loaded with about twelve tons or more. The front wagon was okay and in the road, but the back wheel of the second wagon had an almost completely imbedded hub and all in the left high bank of the road. There was plenty of slack between the two wagons so it wasn't hard to uncouple, but it wasn't an easy task to get the back wagon in the right position to get it out.

Pa wrapped a chain at the top of the right wheel. I led the horse up a foot or two but I knew she had no more reserve power. Pa blocked the wheel and then fixed back the chain high on top of the wheel for another pull. This continued until he thought he could get the wagon back in the road. He told me to put Fanny back in her place and we would get moving. As we moved out with the front wagon, Pa was on the ball. The road was very crooked but as I watched his team make some beautiful capers on some of the bad curves and turns, it was then and there that I could envision the years of experience back of him. Before I got home I sure knew our Pa was not an amateur!

We made our way to where we had piled hay on the way in. Some of the horses we left there, and took about six or eight back with us to get the other wagon. We also took chain and enough stretchers to rig one of the wagons. We had little room to work around the horses, but we got it hooked. All that was left to do was to hook on the long-bedded feed wagon -- which was no problem as it had a nice lever-type brake. Pa took the blocking out from under the wheels. I handled the brake while the wagon came down, and Pa hooked it to the big wagon. After freeing the brakes we were ready to roll again. We both sat on the big wagon. The team was shorter so with the help of his wheelers now and then, he took the wagons to the camp site. It took us about nine or ten hours to get the wagons to the camp.

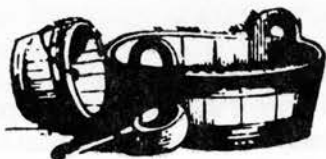
Our day's work was done. I took care of the stock while Pa prepared a big meal. Before he got his fire going he came out where I was working with the horses to make sure I was doing it right, but he let on he came out to warn me against picking things up: "There are plenty of rattlesnakes under that stuff out there so keep your eyes open." Even so, I didn't see many. I knew we had to get a real early start the next morning before sunup, and Pa made it clear to me that if I didn't foul up with that brake again we could easily make it to the summit where he knew of a nice spring where the horses could water. It sounded good to me.

After we got going the next morning we came up against new problems to me, but not to him. On a real steep place in the road Pa says "Pull the brake pretty quick. Now we have to stop and put a rough lock on the left wheel of the big wagon in back, otherwise the back of that wagon will go off

the road below," so it was time to set the brake. The team stopped, the front was blocked to make sure it didn't get away, and then we walked back to rough lock that wheel. What it amounted to was pulling one end of the old home-made chain from its resting place under the wagon bed, to in front and in line with the back wheel. One end was well anchored semi-permanently, the other end was wrapped around the wheel a number of times. When the wagon moved forward this wad of heavy-linked chain would be under the bottom of that wheel. It acted as a brake and caused the back wheels to hug the bank on that side. This doesn't have to be done often, but sometimes it's a must.

This hadn't taken long so we proceeded down, and with very little help needed from the other brakes. Everything went as intended. The team stopped. The rough lock chain had a big blacksmith-made toggle in it which made it easy to loosen. Of course the wagon had to be pulled ahead two or three feet and the chain unwrapped and put in its usual place for next time. But the next time was entirely different. There was a long way to go down hill but the common brakes on the front wagon would handle the situation nicely. The only thing was, the heat caused by the friction of those large, wooden brake shoes against the tires (on a hot, dry day) would cause tremendous heat, causing the tires to expand and maybe come off. So occasionally the team was stopped and a bucket of water was poured on the hot tires. There were other places on the road too steep to use brakes. In such cases what they called "shoes" were used.

The same bucket carrying the rough lock chains also carried the shoes; the rough lock chain was designed to handle either job. All that was necessary to put the shoe in use was first to take the rough lock chain off, then slide the heavy shoe off its bracket and place the shoe in front of that wheel. The front end, similar to a sled or the tips of a ski, had a large ring. When the wagon rolled ahead, the slack in the pull-chain let the heavy wheel ride dead center in that shoe. It couldn't get out of the shoe because the wheel ends up between heavy metal risers made for that purpose. Sometimes it was necessary to use a shoe on each back wheel; if so, they were ready. The heavily loaded wheels rode nicely on these shoes without damaging the wagon tires. The shoes took a terrible beating and when a bottom plate wore through the blacksmith would lay a new piece of heavy tire iron in its place. It seemed to be as common a job as to put on a sole in a shoemaker's shop today. The only difference was that a blacksmith would do the job for nothing if you furnished a shovel of coal.



MCMURRY SPRING AND HOME

After we had finished the hard going it would be about dinner time, but Pa decided we had done far better than he expected, and would be better off if we would continue and get in the main camp early. No doubt it was the best thing to do as water here was scarce. We got in camp before sundown. I knew there was plenty of hay but where was the water the horses needed so badly? As usual, Pa was to fix up a feed for ourselves. I could see this was another well planned stop and had been used plenty.

I took care of the horses the same as usual except there was no water at all! I came to the campfire and said "Pa there is no water for the horses here."

He acted like he didn't know, but with a good look on his face and eyes he said, "That fiery red leader, Maud, is a mighty good saddle horse. You can handle her easy with the halter rope. She already knows what is to be done. I am going to help you, so get on the horse and I will undo the tie ropes from the other horses and let them loose. They are dry so they will show you how to get to the water. Follow them there and follow them back to the wagon. As fast as they get back, I will help out there."

They started up the road toward home but soon took off the road up a wash for a little ways where there was a patch of willows and plenty of water. I heard Pa say this was McMurry Spring (east of Devil's Gate). After the horses got their fill of water they slowly, one by one, started back to the wagon to eat the scrap hay. By the time I followed the last horse back, Pa had most all the horses tied. There was nothing more to do until after supper, when I was to curry and feed the horses fresh hay before bedtime.

Next morning was a repeat of the night before -- watering the horses at McMurry Spring, then back to camp where fresh hay was ready for them. It was my job to put the harnesses on while Pa got ham and eggs and plenty of fried potatoes ready for breakfast. The two borrowed mules of Ned Smith's weren't to be harnessed -- they were to start home by themselves, back to Saline Valley.

After breakfast Pa says "I don't think those mules will want to stay with us, they don't really like me at all. So you lead them down the road until they are out of sight of the wagons, then take their halters off and start them back home."

Then he said, "Wait a minute," and he went out to the big wagon and brought back that blacksnake with the copper wire wrapped at the butt. I wondered what he wanted me to do with it because he had already said he didn't ever want to catch me using a blacksnake. This time he had a twinkle in his eye and said "Take this along and after you turn the mules loose try your best to give them a good thrashing. Even try to run them down, and if you can, blast them good!"

"So that's the way to do it," I thought to myself. "Otherwise they may not go back home." I really wanted to give them a good swap with the blacksnake.

When I was in a good place to turn them loose I dropped the blacksnake on the ground while I took off the halter; but before I even had the halter completely off, that mule was getting out of my reach. Then I took the halter off of the other mule and found out it was impossible to pick up the blacksnake and whack either one of those mules, because as soon as that halter came loose the second mule jumped forward as if he had already been blasted. By the time I picked up the whip those mules were forty feet away. Then I did as Pa had said (try and catch them). This didn't work either because they took off like crazy.

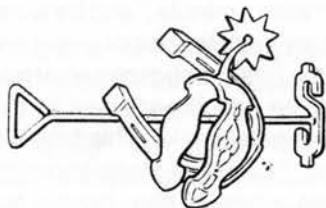
I gathered up the halters and went back. Pa was happy as a lark and said "I hope you didn't skin the mules up too bad with the blacksnake because Ned wouldn't like to see them come back all skinned up."

I told him how quick they had made their getaway before I could pick up the whip. He chuckled and said "Jee-rusalem boy, you say they got out of your way quickly?" Then he added, "I bet they did."

I had the idea later that this wasn't the first time Ned's mules had helped Pa to this place; he had them well trained to get going when the halters came off. No wonder I didn't get a chance to use the blacksnake!

It wasn't long until we were moving again. We were to stop for the night with his friend McMurry near Big Pine, and that we did. The next day we made it home. Walt had the gate open to the calf pasture and Pa drove the teams and wagons through, parking close to the blacksmith shop. With the extra help it didn't take long to lead the horses to the barn and unharness them. The barn was inside a corral where hay and water were always plentiful, so with the stock taken care of I knew it was time for me to head toward the kitchen to see what Mom was doing. I took notice of the big bean pot bubbling on the Old Home Comfort cook stove. There was also another big kettle full of chicken cooking in gravy. O Boy! I knew that somewhere she would have mashed potatoes too, and maybe a few pies. It didn't matter what kind of pies they were because I liked any pie she made.

A few days passed before Pa decided to head back to Saline Valley to finish his job completely. We didn't see him home for quite a long time, but when he did get back his teaming days were over.



THE END OF FREIGHTING

Most of the equipment was sold but he kept a few of his favorite horses that he wanted us kids to grow up with on the farm. Any wagon that was not salable or was too heavy to make a good hay wagon, we busted the wheels off of. These wheels made good oak wood for the cook stove. By now trucks were taking over the road jobs, and small tractors like the Fordson were doing some of the farm work, such as plowing. Horses were better for other work in the fields.

Not long after Pa quit his teaming, most of the farmers here sold their farms to the city of Los Angeles. Some of us younger fellows rented back some of the best farm land in the valley, and, still using work horses, we farmed a few years. Then Old Mother Nature cut off our rain and snow-fall. This in turn caused us to try and farm without water. After about three dry years we gave up, ending the use of the good old draft horses.

Our valley became more adapted to cattle raising and our mountains more useful for tourists and play. Now just a few good light saddle horses are needed by the cattlemen. The rest of the horses and mules in the state of California are used for play-work.

It ended up this way for the good old teamster: he spent the rest of his life doing nothing but fishing and hunting, using saddle horses and pack animals to help satisfy his pleasure. He and mother had sold the ranch and they had a nice home elsewhere. Pa liked to come up to the Owens Valley in the summer to play.

We boys kept busy trying to make a little money for ourselves. Finally the city of Los Angeles offered to sell most any home in the valley for the sum of twenty-five dollars; we were to tear the buildings down and clean up all the scraps we couldn't use. So we boys bought our own old home to tear it down for the lumber we could use. While we were tearing the house to pieces I acquired the name of "Grub Hoe John" because I used the grubhoe to do most of the tearing of the house to pieces.

Anyway, "Grub Hoe John" was knocking our kitchen cupboard apart, when all of a sudden I saw Pa's old black snake with the copper wire wrapped on the butt on top of the cupboard. I knew even then that those things were getting mighty scarce because if any of us kids got hold of even a new one we would take turns seeing who could pop it the loudest. If it wasn't completely wrecked when we got through blasting it, we would finish it off by cutting it open to watch the tapered lead slugs fall out.

I claimed the blacksnake for myself and hung it close to a picture of Pa and his big team. But the blacksnake caused too much attention and there was always someone wanting to try it out. I knew if someone tried to play with it, not knowing how to really use it, they would bust it up in no time; and that is just what happened. One fellow played with it and broke the popper off. This was bad, so I tried to find out if there were any old teamsters left here in the valley who

could put a new popper on the blacksnake. I had no luck. I had seen Pa do this a few times, so I figured I was next best to try and do the job, making the blacksnake look the same as it was. My job of fixing won't stay long if used. To keep it from being destroyed I will give it to the Laws Museum.

Although this particular teamster did possess a couple of spare blacksnakes around home during the early days, I remember they looked almost new. Finally they just disappeared without a history of their use. So to my way of thinking this particular blacksnake will look at home in our Laws Museum. We do not know how or what this blacksnake went through, say forty years before I was old enough to walk, and even then the blacksnake looked old as it does now. The first time I saw it used was about 1912 draped

around Pa's neck. I never saw this blacksnake used again until the year 1920 when I can truthfully say it was with Pa on our trip to Saline Valley, for about twelve days of real freight team work, that I saw this blacksnake used, once, on a span of horses.

All the horse management on our farms done by the new horse men of our time, used horses in a different way. Mostly they used them out in the fields with a willow for a whip, and common practice was spitting the horses with the lines, along with a lot of unnecessary yapping.

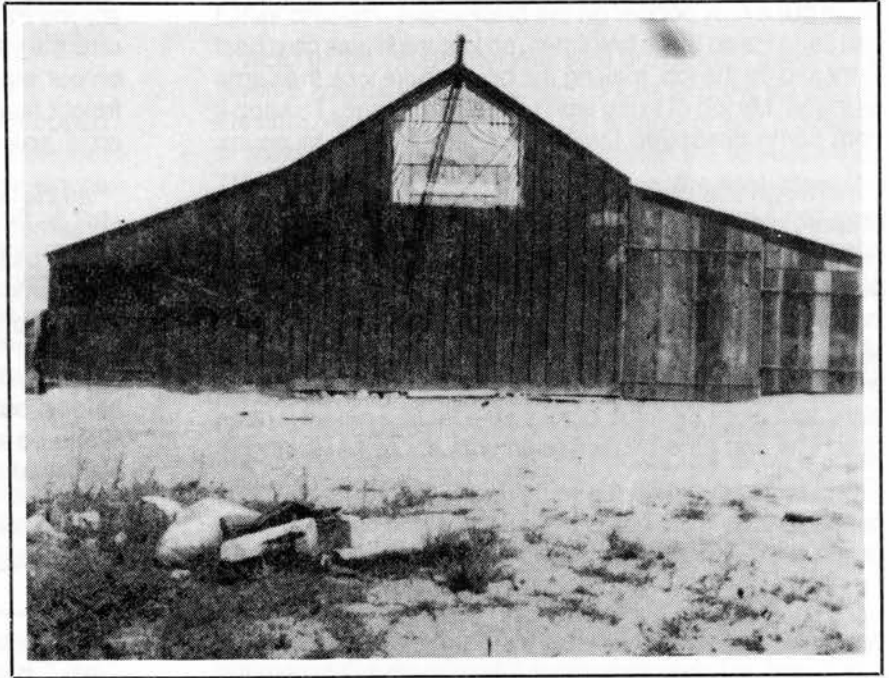
In my time we got a lot done on the farms with the horses, but I don't think there are any of us left who would like to be a teamster, or who would know how to use the blacksnake.



MYSTERY PHOTO: Where was it taken? When? Who are the people in the picture? Photo courtesy of Marguerite Carr.

CENTENNIAL HILL and LARSON LANE

by Enid Larson



As you drive southward from Nevada into California along Highway 395, you pass the town of Topaz and soon come to the small town of Coleville, California. South of Coleville's grocery store, on the west side of the highway near Meadowcliff Motel, is an historic marker¹ that commemorates the 4th of July Centennial Celebration in 1876. It was there that three men of the community, Wood Larson, John Connell and one of the Cole brothers,² carried a locust pole to the summit of the highest hill, which thereafter became known as "Centennial Hill." They anchored it firmly in a crevice of that granite rock and raised the American Flag amid loud cheers from the people in the valley below.

That flagpole withstood weathering for almost 90 years; then it was replaced with a metal pole by a Boy Scout troop from Coleville.

The community picnic that followed the flag raising in 1876 was described by a son of Wood Larson in the following letter to the family:

I shall try and copy a little poem that I have also written of the Celebration of that year as both Virgil and I recall the events on that occasion. Two miners with a box of dynamite were stationed near the base (of Centennial Hill) and were setting off constant blasts. There was constructed a long green willow shed with tables and benches around for protection from the sun and a speakers platform. I recall all this and Indians who had left their teepees to see what it was all about and were invited to eat after the whites were through. I conjectured of course what line of thought the speaker made in his address.

—V.H. Larson, dated December 9, 1951

In 1976 the Larson family held a second similar reunion to celebrate the bicentennial on July 4 in Coleville. At this celebration 33 direct descendents of Wood and Mary Jane Larson were in attendance. Their ages ranged from one year to 81 years and represented five generations.

This time a group of young folk climbed Centennial Peak, carrying another American Flag to the summit and as it floated forth in the early morning breeze, cheers again were loud from those watchers on the floor of the valley below. This year the flag was carried to the summit by a great-great-grandson of Wood Larson, Rob Larson III.

Nearby is Larson Lane. A sign along Highway 395 points to a paved road leading to the east. About half a mile north of this road was the original location of the two-story home of the Wood Larson family, built in the 1870s by Eggleston with lumber purchased from the Ash-Bordman lumber mill on Mill Creek, southwest of Coleville. This house stood for more than 90 years and was demolished by Lloyd Chichester, who now owns five acres of the original Larson ranch.

Still standing is a large barn built by Owen Larson, oldest son of Wood and Mary Jane. Its 12x12 supporting timbers, as well as all other joinings, were pegged; no nails were used. It was built in 1898 and is still in use. There are two sub-floors beneath the present floor. In the photo, there are two American flags painted on the facing gable to commemorate the Spanish-American War.

These photos were taken by Arthur E. Larson, youngest son of Wood Larson. When water rights to this ranch were

Opposite: Barn on Larson Ranch, built in 1898 and still standing, about 600 feet northeast of the house.

Right: Two story house for which Larson Lane was named, near Coleville, Mono County, about a mile east of Centennial Hill.



"frozen out" by Tom Ricky, Wood Larson came to Owens Valley and purchased the Joseph Shelly homestead south of Bishop. He never lived to get to Bishop, but died in Bodie in 1900 on his way down. The name of Wood Larson is perpetuated on a memorial window in the Methodist church on Fowler and Church streets in Bishop.

After living for eight years on the ranch south of Bishop, Larson's widow, Mary Jane, bought two lots on Grove Street and had a house built, where she lived until her death in 1931. The house still stands.

On July the fourth in Seventy Six
It was Centennial year
The people gathered around the bluff
To hail the flag and cheer

Old Glory waived high on the bluff
The people gathered under.
The frequent blasts of dynamite
Resounded loud as thunder.

The speaker spoke of Bunker Hill
With a patriot's devotion,
Of Washington at Valley Forge
'Midst cheers of great emotion.

Then he spoke of Yorktown
In Seventeen Eighty-One
Where Cornwallis did surrender
To General Washington.

At last the National Anthem,
The Star Spangle Banner,
Was sung in perfect unison
In a loud and fervent manner.

A long, wide willow shed
Built for making shade--
The young folks would gather there
To drink their lemonade.

A picnic dinner served to all
It satisfied all wishes.
A group of Indians gathered near
Ate all remaining dishes.

I well recall that year and day
While turning memories pages,
That pole which stands upon the bluff
Preserved throughout the ages,

That pole still stands where all may see
Just fifty miles from Carson,
Placed on that ancient granite bluff
By Connell, Coles and Larson.

—Vic Larson, 1951

1. In a letter dated December 9, 1951, Vic Larson wrote: "I made a trip to Nevada and also out to Antelope Valley in September and October. I went to Antelope for the special purpose to inspect a bronze plaque that my old friend Virgil Connell and I had had cast at a bronze smelter and engaged Tolge Hardy to mount on a monument near the base of Centennial Hill commemorating the 75th year of the placing of the pole and raising of the flag there on July the Fourth 1876 by John Connell, the Cole Boys and Wood Larson."

2. The Cole brothers were two large husky boys who helped Dad and John Connell carry the pole up Centennial Bluff. Their father was the one that Coleville derived its name from. The family soon left the valley for the Sandwich Islands, now the Hawaiian Islands.

HERE MY PEOPLE LIVED

The Source Spring

"I am fortunate that some of my friends are Paiute. Like many friends, we share stories and laughter and sometimes we give each other gifts." ...Louise

One day my friend and I were walking in the high country. We were still below the timberline as the path wound through pine and aspen, around great granite boulders. A curve in the trail brought us to the edge of a spring whose cool water was lively with bubbles that chuckled up from the clean, sandy bottom. The sweet water sustained animals and birds and gave life to the grasses that gentled its banks.

After we drank as much as we needed the companion at my side said,

'We are the Paiute, 'The Water-People.' The Old Ones told us that we rose from this pond. And you, little friend, came from dust and a rib?'



From Here Our People Came

Photo by Louise

Candelaria

One day I drove my friend to Candelaria. The mine was like so many in the Eastern California/Nevada gold country. Mountain ranges defined areas more clearly than state or county boundaries. Valleys and high passes became paths and then roads.

We drove through The Land of Lost Borders to the site of old Candelaria. The dust settled with the light desert breeze and we saw what was left of a roaring, successful mine operation.

Metal doors of the vault swung from rusty hinges but the thickness of the hand-hewn block walls stood as testimony to the treasure they once guarded.

Roads from the pits and old rail lines, bolstered by rockwork, left no doubt that oar carts and tiny mine trains hauled the miners' hard-worked rock to the mill.

A wooden door frame and a rusty pipe smoke stack marked an earth shelter where at night the workers still needed cool relief in an underground room.

Even the wooden cabins of the "red light district" were still standing in a row, windows dusty and occupants long gone.

We looked at what remained of the five-story mill, and the old woman beside me told of a time many, many years ago when she and her sisters were young.

One sister's husband had gone to work in the Candelaria Mine. The couple were expecting their first child so, as often as she could, my friend would saddle her mare and ride to the mines. It was a long and lonely ride. She passed isolated ranches and skirted sheep camps. An occasional trail tramped by a burro and a miner pointed to a gold hunter's hope.

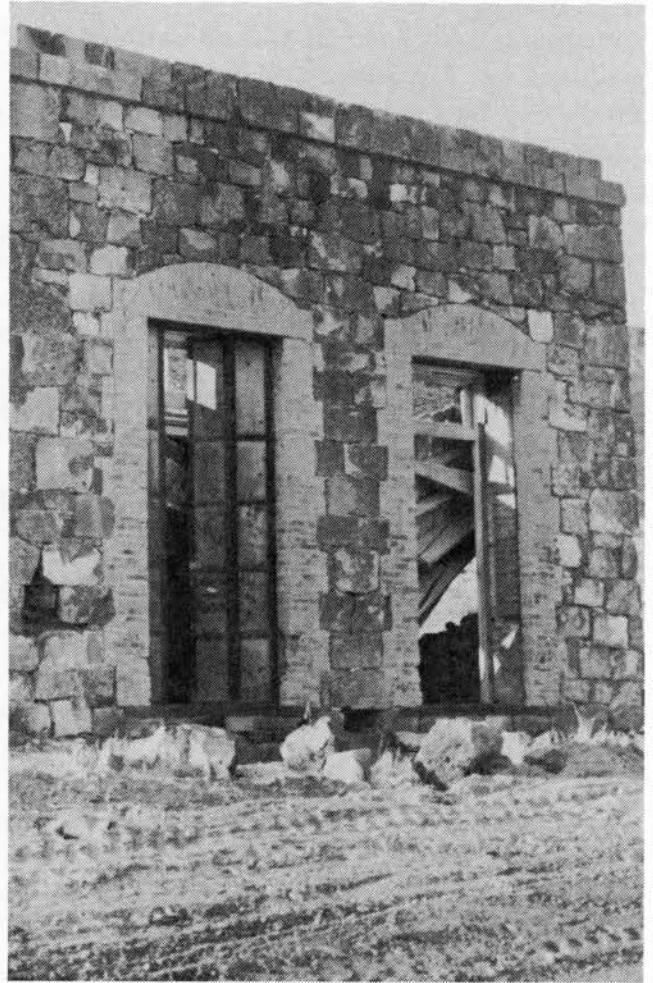
When my friend came back to her home in the Valley a friend once asked, "Why do you travel so far?"

"To help my sister. There are no doctors in Candelaria."

"But aren't you afraid? You are young and pretty and there are so few women there."

"No, I am not afraid. I have the fastest pony -- and a pistol."

We drove home in the long summer twilight. My friend dozed in the warm pickup seat. Once I heard her say softly, "Yes, once I was young and pretty. Now I am old and wise. I ride to Candelaria in a car with 160 horses under the hood."



Above: Candelaria Bank Building

Right: Dugout Abode--Candelaria Hotel

Photos by Louise

Petroglyphs

My friends and I have not talked about petroglyphs very much. We have looked at them together, and admired them, but I have never asked my friends about the meanings of the rock drawings. And they have never asked me why I write.

If you stand and wonder at the graphics in the rock it will be because you were guided to them or because you stumbled onto them, unplanned. There seems to be no path from one group to another. There seems to be no obvious reason for them being in one place and not another. But then, water sources were different then than now -- water and food sources.

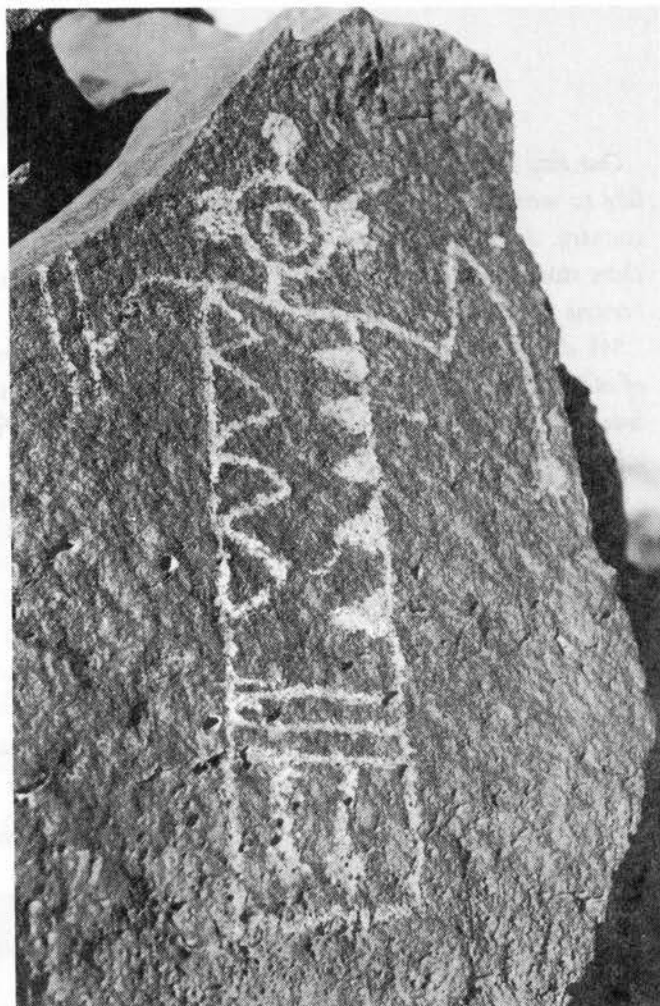
Many symbols among the petroglyphs are universal. They are seen in close modification in many parts of our earth -- in Africa, the Orient, South America, the Arctic and on and around. Some symbols are clear, such as big-horn sheep and rabbits and snakes. Other symbols are obscure and need an understanding mind to enjoy them.

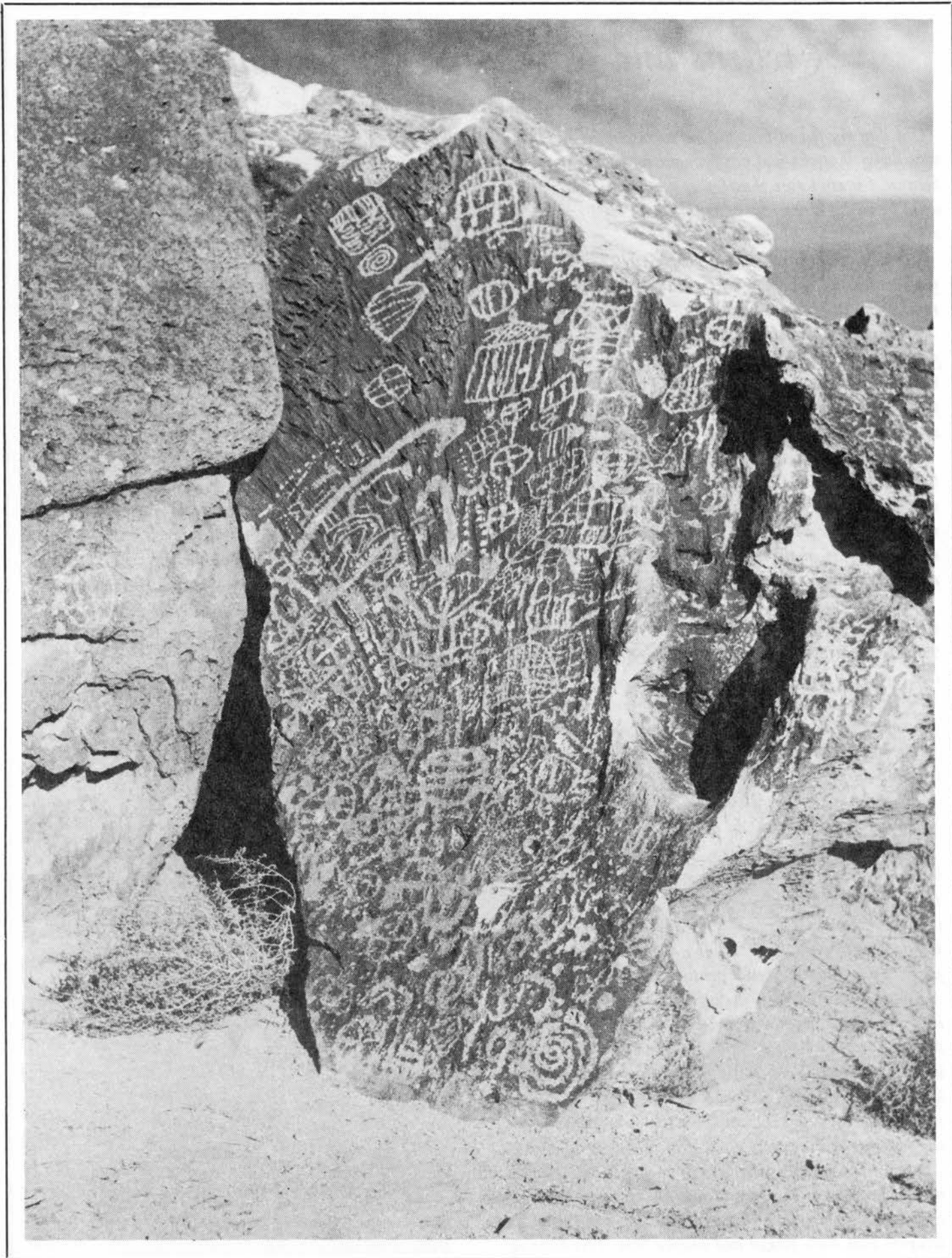
And what does it matter? If this work in rock is pleasing to look at and intriguing to puzzle over, then it has offered more than tonight's television. If you insist upon a meaning then you are doomed to disappointment for you may be given many meanings and explanations by many people but how will you know if you have been given the truth?

Does it change their value?

Above: Shaman--Hunter with Atlatl
Below: Wheel-A Highly Personal Universal Symbol
Opposite: Newspaper Rock-The Record Rock

Photos by Louise





Kitchens and Caves and Camps and Such

One day my friend brought me some pinyon nuts. It was lucky that she had not brought py-agi or ku-za-vi because I wasn't sure that I was ready for fried grubs or dried brine fly larvae, tasty as they may be. I felt a little more comfortable about pinyon nuts.

'Come, I will show you my people's kitchens. Bring your mano and your pine nuts and we will fix a fine meal. You DO have a hand-rock, don't you?'

The sun had just cleared White Mountain and was giving Mt. Tom its daily bath of sunshine. The pine nut harvest had been good and we both laughed at the many ways to use the nuts, but today I was to be given a lesson in grinding.

In the Valley, two flat grinding rocks, each with many holes, lay a talking distance apart. Perhaps this is why they were called the 'gossip rocks.' These broad ground-rocks held large deep holes for nuts, small deep holes for seeds, and flat, shallow surfaces which seemed right for rolling meal into cakes.

Win-nau-bu, to the west, towered over the women's workplace. They could send prayers and good thoughts to Prayer Mountain as they prepared food for their families.

After we had shelled the nuts and ground them into a reasonable meal my friend told me to taste the food.

'Oh, oh,' I said. 'I must have done something wrong. Mine is all gritty.'

'No, that is the way it is,' chuckled my big friend. 'Why do you think the old ones have such short teeth?'

Now we talked about caves. Most caves are in the higher country and can give protection from the Sierra wind or an early snow. My favorite cave is in the volcanic vomit from the Long Valley caldera. The rosy rock took the smoke from the cooking and warming fires with grace. The smudge etched a gentle pattern into the tuff.

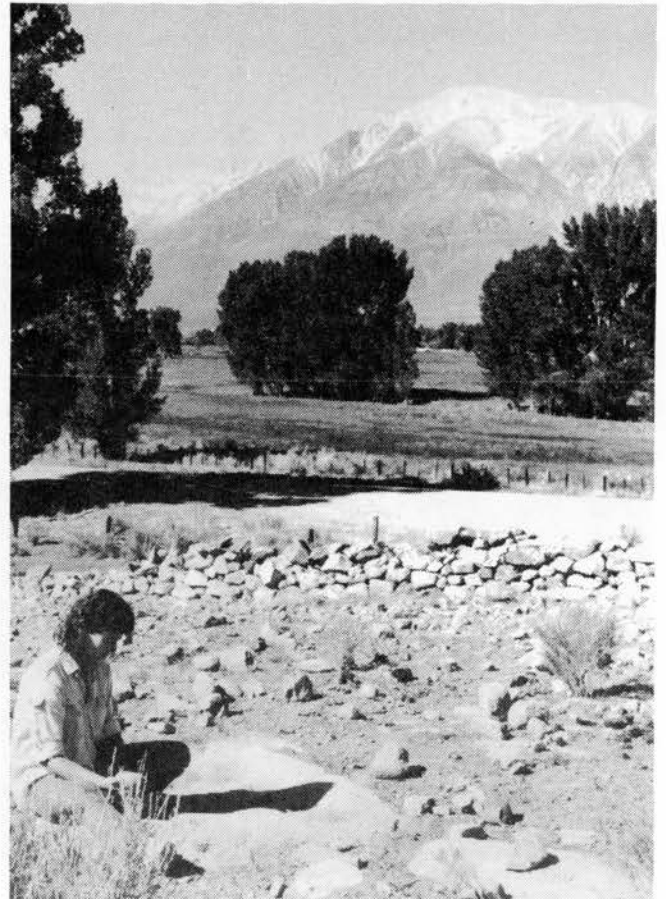
This cave was used in the autumn when families went into the mountains to gather pinyon nuts and hunt the deer that were starting down from their summer range in the rocky ridges of the Sierra, to spend the winter in kinder weather. 'My' cave had rock shelves for sitting or sleeping, a soft and sandy floor, a fine grinding rock at the entrance and a grand view of the country.

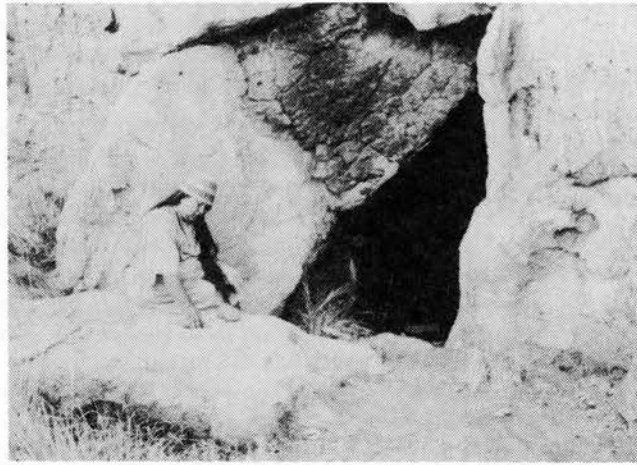
A bountiful pinyon pine is near and its many years of needles have made the ground soft and springy. Obsidian chips are a scatter-show from arrowheads and knives and scrapers that were flaked and shaped here. This hunting

- harvesting camp is in the pinyon and Jeffrey mix forest, so both plump nuts and fat, juicy py-agi were gathered. The rice grass is heavy with seed and the ever present sage fills the air with its gift. There is water and there are game trails so both birds and animals pass near the cave. It is a regular supermarket!

In the Valley, the warmth and protection of a cave is not needed. Here a round home is made of willow and reeds and brush. The wickiup and the toni is round, as is the Eskimo's igloo, the Navajo's hogan, and Buckminster Fuller's geodesic dome. The Paiute wickiup is a temporary or traveling home, and is quickly built of willow and brush. The toni is a more permanent home. It has lovely features, such as space for breezes to enter and cool, and slitty little openings to see without being seen, and places to hang a skin or a tarp to shade the sun as it moves across the sky.

And the wonderful fact of the kitchens and caves and camps and such is that the total cost is the time and effort to choose a fine spot and gather the free building materials!





Left: Hunting-Harvest Home

Photo by Louise

Opposite:
In The Shadow
of Prayer Mountain

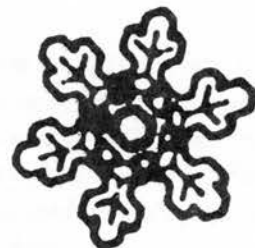
Photo by Louise

Below: Summer Camp

Photo from Winona Rpatch Collection



WHAT HAPPENED TO 1987-88?



by George Garrigues

It all began on November 12, 1861. On their arrival in Lone Pine, Alney and Bart McGee, driving a large herd of cattle through the Owens Valley to the mining camp of Aurora, found four inches of new snow. Since that day, the weather history of the Owens Valley has been maintained; sometimes only in sketchy notes, sometimes only by word of mouth or meager newspaper reports, sometimes intermittent with gaps that can't be filled, sometimes by local residents acting officially or unofficially with the U.S. Department of Commerce Weather Bureau, and sometimes by appointed weather officials.

1862

Although Bart McGee did not keep detailed information, his notes describe that first big winter. After the November storm, little happened until Christmas Eve when snow started again. During the balance of December, all of January and all of February there was not one day when rain or snow did not fall. Sometimes the snow depth reached two feet before subsequent rains melted it off. The ground was saturated, the hills and mountains covered by a deep white blanket.

Owens River was up to a mile wide in places, half water and half ice, rushing across the oxbows of the established channel. It carried trees, bushes and all sorts of debris on its way to Owens Lake. The lake itself rose twelve feet that winter. The cattlemen were reduced to eating beef without even salt because they had exhausted all provisions except what they brought on the hoof.

Since that time, every eighteen years on the average, plus or minus two, with the exception of 1897 which was four years late, the Owens Valley has received significant winter precipitation. Call it a cycle or not, the facts, sometimes incomplete, are there. Minor exceptions exist as I shall relate later, but the basic time period is dominating.

1878

Actual precipitation figures do not exist, but infrequent newspaper stories in the INYO INDEPENDENT provide limited infor-

mation. December 19, 1877 produced a very cold north wind, so cold it is reported that the flame of a candle froze instantly in Aurora. On January 13th, a three-day severe rain and snow storm hit the valley with over two inches of moisture and heavy snow in the mountains. Another storm on February 23rd delayed the northbound mail for two days. A March report indicated that the outlook was very good with saturated ground and more than enough snow in the mountains for summer irrigation.

1901

The next big winter was late. 1897, the expected year, had twenty-two inches of snow in February and 1.7 inches of rain in March, but little else. 1898, 1899 and 1900 followed a similar pattern.

The twentieth century began in proper form with a temperature of six degrees on New Years morning, 1901. Snow started falling later that day and continued into the next. Schools were closed for the week and most other meetings cancelled. Another storm on January 14 delayed the train this side of the summit for almost twenty-four hours. Temperature at Bridgeport hit a minus 32 degrees. Average temperature in Bishop was 36 degrees.

More snow fell on January 20, 21 and 31. Except for horseback riders, Darwin was cut off by the snow, very seldom seen in that area. The state lines were hung up and all mining ceased. Bill Chalfant, Editor-Publisher of the INYO REGISTER summed it up in a February 14 article:

"The amount of moisture, which has already fallen and the particularly bountiful supply in cold storage in the mountains gives assurance that the water question this year will be chiefly how to dispose of the surplus. Cold weather lingers with us and promises that this summer will yield a phenomenal fruit crop. 'Tis well."

1916

The old year went out in a windy bluster with a temperature of five degrees. Snow started at mid-afternoon on New Years Day and by evening of the second, sixteen inches had accumulated. The northbound train became stalled at Zurich (Big Pine) and didn't arrive in Laws until midnight, twelve hours late. It needed

help from a snowplow to get through the twenty-six inches of snow on the tracks. While waiting, the fourteen passengers were taken to Aberdeen where they were fed and kept warm. Many autos were stalled on Montgomery Pass by the storm which ended with rain on the third. Schools gave students an extra week of vacation.

Almost two inches of rain on January 8 added to the drenching of the previous storm, followed by three inches of snow on January 10 and temperatures of three degrees and five degrees on January 12 and 13. There was speculation that the worst of winter had passed.

"STORM EQUALS WORST IN VALLEY'S HISTORY" headlined the January 20 INYO REGISTER. Between evening on the sixteenth and forenoon on the eighteenth, thirty-three inches of new, wet snow fell on top of the six inches remaining from previous storms. All navigation was suspended. The temperature dropped to minus three degrees on the nineteenth. Many livestock were trapped inside fallen barns. Hall's Hall in Big Pine, valued at \$10,000, collapsed--a total loss, and various other buildings went down. Numerous electric power poles had broken and power was off. Snow shovelers were in demand at fancy wages. Schools were still suspended and rescheduled to open on January 24. South Lake rose at least twelve feet and three deaths were attributed to the storms. The temperature set a record low of

minus eleven degrees on January 21. Even the wildlife suffered as the January 20 INYO REGISTER reported:

"Wildlife, not adapted to such strenuous climatic conditions is undoubtedly making heavy sacrifices. Many kindly disposed persons are playing Good Samaritan to wild birds by feeding flocks or as many as come to accept the generosity."

1933

The INYO REGISTER of January 5 commented that hardly a cloud had been seen since the New Year. Prospects for water were as slim as anyone could recall. Precipitation was too far below normal to make comparisons. Then the January 19 issue headlined: "DEEPEST SNOW IN RECORD OF VALLEY. Not since the 1873 three foot snowfall has there been such a covering."

Another classic year. Perhaps my Grandmother Eva Yaney's record outlines that January's events best:

Monday, January 16: snowed eight inches

Tuesday, January 17: cold

Wednesday, January 18: snow started in the afternoon. Temperature was twenty-one degrees at four p.m.

Thursday, January 19: snowed all night with strong south wind. Thirty-six inches of new snow with drifts to seven feet. Still snow-



Main Street, Bishop, 1916

Garrigues Collection Photo

ing.

Friday, January 20: Began clearing. Total snowfall was fifty-six inches.

Saturday, January 21: clear, cold, temperature ten degrees below zero.

Wednesday, January 25: three inches more snow. Total for January now fifty-nine inches.

The INYO REGISTER of January 26 called it a historic snow storm, "the daddy of all storms." Shoveling for building protection created a great demand for local laborers. A few small buildings could not stand the load. Carrier's Top Shop, a shed at Bishop Ice, Crawford's Garage and the J. M. Wright residence among others, collapsed. There was no mail for five days beginning on the eighteenth. Many telephone poles were out south of town. Charlie Waters managed to keep the Western Union lines operating although he had to struggle through the snow on skis for over an hour to reach the office.

More small storms followed on January 24, 27 and 29. After an extra month of vacation, schools were scheduled to open February 6. Streets in the City of Bishop were clogged with snow for weeks. A D-6 Caterpillar pulling a sled was used to deliver coal for household heating. Milk was delivered door to door by a team and sleigh. Summer backpacks were removed from storage and used to carry essential groceries home from the grocery store. Most other businesses were at a standstill.

1952

An unusually heavy storm began December 28 and left 4.2 inches of rain in the valley by the time it ended on New Years Day. Skiers were marooned in Mammoth and June Lake. A Cal Electric snowcat crew patrolling power lines in the White Mountains broke down with battery trouble, but Bob Symons, Bishop Flying Service, dropped a new one by parachute and they were able to continue.

The heaviest snowfall since 1933 fell on January 14 and 15 causing many problems for highway and utility workers. The weather bureau was inoperative because of power and communication failure. Blizzard conditions followed on the sixteenth with three to four foot drifts. Electric power crews were rushed from Riverside and phone service in Bishop was intermittent.

Plans even were made to evacuate the Marine Cold Weather Station at Pickle Meadows.

Many snowslides closed Highway 395 and travel was at an absolute standstill. High winds and the blizzard effect continued for days, filling roadways as soon as the plows cleared them. Bob Symons was kept busy air dropping food, supplies and repair parts for people, livestock and broken down equipment.



Bishop Main Street, 1933

Garrigues Collection Photo

The highway north was finally opened on Jan. 28 with one-way traffic in many areas and trucks were not permitted. It took a box of dynamite to get through the tightly packed snowdrifts near Convict Creek. Crews managed to break through to Plant Two on Bishop Creek with fuel oil and food.

There was considerably more snow in the mountains during March on top of the well packed, frozen snow from the previous storms. Devastating avalanches followed. Two men working on the Gorge road three miles below the Crowley Dam were buried in a snow slide and killed. Several other workers managed to escape. Many Pine Creek homes were crushed and residents buried, but all, including a fifteen-month old baby were rescued. At the mill a 40-ton bulldozer was moved 80 yards by snow power. Avalanches at McGee Mountain and Tioga Lodge caused considerable property damage. Many cabins and trailers were demolished in Bishop Creek canyon. A snowslide dammed Bishop Creek and stopped power production for three hours. At Sabrina drifts were over twenty-five feet deep.

1969

The INYO REGISTER of January 30 reported that mid-week was spent digging out from the heaviest storm in recent years. Power, phones, state and county highways were disrupted by the snowfall. Snowcats were used to evacuate twenty-four people from Aspendell where ten feet of snow and ten below zero temperatures prevailed. Two hundred utility poles were down between Bishop and Big Pine at an estimated loss of \$160,000. Highway 395 was closed for a record 64 hours north and more than ten hours south. A snowslide closed the Union Carbide mine and mill.

The canopy at the Satellite Service Station collapsed crushing a car parked underneath. Other buildings and roofs could not take the stress.

The snow kept coming and on February 6 an avalanche badly damaged Glacier Lodge and many cabins in Big Pine canyon. On the thirteenth the avalanche danger in June Lake was called acute. By now it was the wettest year statewide on record. Heavy snow again on February 24 and 25 snapped power lines like falling dominoes. Avalanches closed 395 at eleven places in Mono County. Flooding south of Bishop, especially in Big Pine, closed the highway for twenty-four hours. Official records revealed 47.5 inches of snow for the season to date, setting an all time record.

Road damage to county roads in Inyo was estimated at \$500,000 and \$300,000 more in Death Valley. Precipitation was 240% of normal. Usually dry Owens Lake was six feet deep with the excess runoff. A snow marker near Mammoth, twenty-two feet tall, had only three inches showing above the snow and many others were completely covered. The March 13 INYO REGISTER contained a warning for hoards of mosquitoes the coming summer. Fish and Game employees were using airplanes, snowmobiles and trucks to feed an estimated 300 deer in Bishop Creek Canyon and 200 in Pine Creek. More than 100 deer were known dead from starvation and exposure in the immediate Bishop area.

Snow remained in shady spots on the north side of the buildings well into May. I personally measured 100 inches of new fallen snow at my home in Bishop that winter. When it was over I decided that I had shoveled enough snow to last me the rest of my life.



East Side of Bishop Main Street, 1951

Garrigues Collection Photo

OTHER YEARS

1868: according to precipitation records, the heaviest winter in the valley. With 12.19 inches in December including more than twelve inches of snow plus 5.46 inches more, mostly rain, in January. This winter is compared as equal with 1916, which totaled about 12.5 inches, leading to questions about the validity of the 1868 figures.

1873: A 1916 INYO REGISTER story mentions a December 1873 snowstorm lasting thirty hours with more than twenty-four inches of snow. Few people had sufficient firewood on hand and supplies were selling for \$16-\$18 per cord. Alney McGee lost 700 head of cattle in the sudden storm and many other cattlemen suffered losses. No other information is available, except totals for the year indicate that this was the only storm of the season.

1890: Not less than six nor more than seven inches of rain fell in a twenty-four hour period on January 24. Every property owner had a millrace on his premises and a stream twenty to thirty feet wide poured over the crossing at the Post Office. Again, this appears to have been the only storm of the season.

1891: An unusually severe May thunderstorm produced rainfall like the proverbial pitchforks. Lightning struck John Clarke's barn killing his most valued horse. Heavy snow in the mountains in December brought the Hillside Co. men down from Bishop Creek in a hurry. Work there was curtailed until spring.

1906: The heaviest storm to date for the season left over 1.5 inches of rain on January 13 and 14. There was little more until March when over 3.5 inches fell (a record for the month) during eight rainy days. The question was raised as to whether or not the recently refilled Salton Sea was to blame.

1909: There was heavy rain on January 20 in the valley with seven feet of snow at South Lake. Enough snow to whiten the ground fell on January 23. More than six inches of very wet snow on February 11 knocked down telephone and electric lines all over town. December storms totaled 6.58 inches including nine inches of snow and minus four degrees on the fourth and fifth, which distort the 1909 figure. This amount is actually part of the 1910 winter season.

1911: The heavens broke loose on the morning of January 9. This first storm of the season brought 1.56 inches of rain. Mt. Tom had a beautiful garland of white. The INYO REGISTER commented that other seasons had been drier up to this point and came out. To prove the point, a January 27-29 storm provided 2.94 inches of rain and snow, bringing the January total to 4.78 inches, almost a monthly record. Many overhead lines were down and the road from Chidago to Hammil was washed out for more than a mile.

Temperatures dropped to twelve degrees on February 16, the coldest of the year. Snow began on the eve of February 26 and continued until the twenty-eighth, leaving over fifteen inches on the ground. Avalanches killed eight men at Lundy and John Henderson's valuable four horse team was carried down the mountainside at Sabrina.

1914: A relatively heavy year for precipitation, but it was all rain in the valley. January 29 INYO REGISTER reported that the Sunland road was badly washed out. The rain gauge registered seven inches for the storm. No mail had been received in the prior five days. The southbound train was still two miles on the other side of Summit. Three northbound engines were stalled by the snow between Chalfant and Queens.

On February 5 the town of Lundy with its population of fifteen was abandoned after a snowslide swept away the powerplant. Railroad traffic was suspended south of Benton on February 26

due to many washouts. Fifteen feet of snow was reported at South Lake.

1938: Except for some December rain showers, the first storm came on January 30 with three inches of snow followed by rain. Snow was heavy in the mountains with the highway closed at McGee Creek. A snowslide on February 11 killed two people and destroyed seven cabins at June Lake. Torrential rains drenched the valley on March 3 with 2.45 inches in Bishop. Montgomery Pass was closed as were many Death Valley roads. Bishop Creek road above Plant Four was washed out.

1945: Heavy snow and rain hit Inyo-Mono on February 2 and 3. Phones were intermittent and buses behind schedule, but there was little damage. Bishop precipitation was 4.98 inches. Minor snow fell on February 17 and March 1. Thunder showers on October 12 brought more than three inches with many lightning fires and considerable flash flood damage.

1978: The first storm of the season brought 2.96 inches of rain in Bishop and 1.2 inches more on January 19. An avalanche closed the June Lake highway and cloud seeding activities were curtailed. More avalanches hit June Lake on February 16.

1982: A heavy storm left 1.58 inches of rain in Bishop on April 9-11. A snowslide blocked the highway at McGee Creek again, but damage was slight. A late storm on July 1 dropped four to six inches of snow at Mammoth and one inch of rain in Bishop.

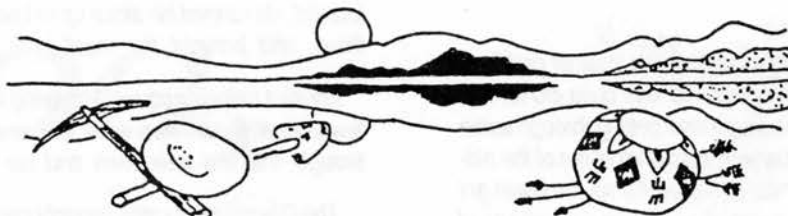
1987-88

Now, what happened to 1987-88? We know what didn't happen. The rain didn't come down in buckets. The snow wasn't piled two, three or four feet deep. The streams weren't up to their bank-tops during the summer runoff. The mountain lakes didn't spill. The snowbank I watch on Mt. Tom didn't last much past the 4th of July. If it remains until July 25, it means sufficient water for the year. Some years it stays all summer saving some of itself for the next season.

Bishop's "Old Weather Buff" Don Marcellin says the anomaly is there. Still, we have to draw our own conclusions. As one who has watched the weather in the Owens Valley for more than fifty years, I think I'll wait for the winter of 1989 and see.



Will we fish in the streets of Bishop in 1989? Phillips Collection Photo



AUGIE HESS, HIS OWN WORDS

Courtesy of Mono Basin Historical Society.

Mono Mills is where I was born, Oct 25, 1914. Mono Mills was quite a thriving community at that time. It was a stop over for people traveling from Benton to Mono Lake. All travel was done by horseback, wagon, or on foot; very few cars then.

Mono Mills was where they milled lumber and shipped it to Bodie. Bodie used a lot of timber in the mines and also a lot of lumber to build the town. Also used a lot of firewood which came from Mono Mills.

My dad (Gus Hess) came to America when he was 17 years old, experienced the great earthquake and fire of San Francisco, and from there went to seek his fortune in the gold fields of Aurora, Bodie and Rawhide. Rawhide is where he witnessed a shoot out and caught a bullet in his leg — wasn't too serious — and then traveled to Aurora and Bodie by horse and buggy.

He had used up all his money by now and while traveling from Rawhide to Aurora, he had nothing but beans to eat. Sometimes, he and his party would shoot a rabbit or sagehen for a meal. When they got close to Bodie, there was a toll charge for wagons and twenty-five cents a bucket for water for horses. I guess they had quite a time digging up the money so as to pass on to Bodie.

In 1910 he returned to Switzerland for a visit, decided to return permanently to America and began working as a blacksmith at Mono Mills. It was here he met my mother, Lulu Charley. She was Indian — "Paiute."

My mother was born Aug. 19, 1894 at Rush Creek, below the present Highway 395. Rush Creek was a beautiful valley then. It had quite a few ranches, beautiful Rush Creek roaring through the meadows and a lot of swamps, as I remember. Watercress grew all over the place and the Mallard ducks just loved that.

Her family had moved from their ranch at Rush Creek to Mono Mills to be employed at the lumber mills. While here, she met my dad and married in 1912. From this union, which lasted for 54 years, there were born three boys and two girls. My two brothers, Stan and Larry, have passed on, leaving Clara Fuller and Elma Blaver and myself.

For many years my mother and her sister, Daisy Mallory, cooked for the lumber crew, serving as many as thirty men at each meal. In 1910 my mother became the sole cook for a crew of nine men who were dis-

mantling the railroad from Bodie to Mono Mills. My dad was in charge of that deal.

In 1920 my dad and family moved to Tioga Lodge. Uncle Bill also moved with us. 1922 was the start of Lee Vining. A family named Burgans had the first building and used it as a store. It was located where the Inyo Store was (later). The Inyo Store was located where Nicely's Restaurant have their parking lot now. They sold groceries but had little stock on hand. They had six children. In 1922 my Uncle Bill and my dad, Gus, were operating a garage at Tioga Lodge.

Chris Mattly, who owned all the land here, wanted my dad to move to Lee Vining and help to start a townsite, which my dad did. We moved up here in 1922 from Tioga Lodge. Mrs. Cunningham didn't want my dad to leave; she was against him moving up here and also was against starting a town. I think she wanted everything down there at her place.

Chris got a surveyor and the townsite of Lee Vining was laid out. Chris donated land to the old elementary school and I believe he was a Trustee for the school for many years. I had personally witnessed some of his bookkeeping and he certainly had everything done neat and perfect. His handwriting was beautiful. He had that foreign touch that made his writing so nice. Chris, Uncle Bill, and my dad all came over from Switzerland.

Our garage was located where the firehouse is now, and the road going towards the dump was the main road at that time. The old road went towards the dump and cut across the ball field and high school and joined the old Tioga Road. You can still see the imprint of the old Tioga Road above the town.

My dad took in a partner by the name of Guy Carrington. They had six children and the Hess family had five. Chris married a widow from Benton who had six children and their names were Keller. Burgans had six. The Kellers, Carringtons and Burgans had attended the school at Mono Lake, but I think they came in a little later.

There were 17 children here, so a school had to be started. Lumber came from the old Mammoth lumber and sawmill, Chris donated some lumber from an old building he had torn down to get lumber to help build the school. I remember pulling old nails out of the lumber so the carpen-

ters could use it.

So a school house was built. To get a teacher was another problem, but finally they located one (a Miss Young) who was quite old for this type of living, but managed. She had a tough time getting through some of the hard winters we had. I remember with help from some of the older boys we would have to shovel her out of snowdrifts so she could get to school. She was a big woman. It seemed as though we had lots of snow those days.

Mrs. Van Allstyn came in after the first teacher left. She was real nice and knew her teaching very well. One time she asked me to go out and cut her a nice willow branch for spanking. This I did, and feeling good about it, knowing that I wasn't going to get spanked — I thought. She used the willow branch on me!

A post office was established and a name had to be made for this townsite. A man by the name of Lee Roy Vining was the first white man to cross over from the other side of the mountains. He and his gang came from Yosemite, and down the Lee Vining Canyon. They were supposed to have camped here and also later had a sawmill up the canyon. From this, the town of Lee Vining got its name. There was also a Dick Vining in the party, Lee Roy's brother. It could have been his name as well — Dick Vining, but they chose Lee for the name Lee Vining.

My dad helped put in a four-inch pipeline from the upper ditch, which supplied water for the town until 1940, when a new system was built. The upper ditch ran by Harry Blaver's house and above the elementary school, and back of the churches to Murphy's Trailer Court and then down to where we are going to put the old school house.

To get electricity, it seemed as though the people had to put up \$318 and help set poles, etc. With this came the telephone and more families moved in. The Gillis built the El Mono Hotel in 1927, then came the Curries, Bantas, La Braques, Honeas, Greens, Donnellys, Mitchells and many more.

Bill Banta delivered fresh fruit and vegetables from Bishop (from about 1918) and later acquired a store and motel. La Braque built his motel. Cecils built the hardware store and Katie Adair had the '76 Station. Murphys had a dairy, supplied milk, Calhoun had the first bakery and pool hall, and Mattly's had a dairy also.

Bob Currie sold meat at a little cement building where the store is

located. He ranged his stock up in Lee Vining Canyon, butchered it up there, and brought the meat here to sell.

My dad helped acquire and bring in the necessary utilities for the town. New water lines were laid and a new electricity system was brought into the new town and we were becoming quite modern.

The City of Los Angeles brought crews of men up to build the 11-mile Crater Tunnel which was completed in the late 1930s, and they were partly responsible for the prosperity of our town. Later a sewer system was built and public utility district formed. In 1947 our volunteer fire department was organized, which has been a great service to our community.

Other residences and more businesses sprang up over the years and we are what you see today, a community of which I believe Lee Roy Vining would be very proud.

When my dad first moved here, there were no roads to speak of going into June Lake, and no houses, but I understand the fishing was very good. When my dad was living at Mono Mills he and his buddies would ski to Grant Lake or June Lake and fish all day through the ice. They certainly did catch the fish. After fishing all day they would pick up and head for Mono Mills, sometimes at night. What dedication!

My dad served over twenty years as a school board member and I guess he and other board members had many problems to overcome. He also served on the utility board from when it started to the time he passed on. He played a French horn in the band back in Switzerland, and also played for dances at the old school house at Mono Lake. He taught us all to play some kind of instrument; my sister Clara played the saxophone, brother Stan clarinet, and I played the trumpet. We had quite a dance band in the '40s, '50s, and part of the '60s. We played from Lone Pine to Coleville, but mostly here at Lee Vining, for dad had a nice dance hall here, located where the Mono Lake Committee is.

My mother passed away in 1967, dad passed on in 1969. Today we have a nice high school as well as a nice grammar school, nice ball fields, tennis courts, and quite a few teachers to teach our kids. So this is the way I saw a town grow from hardly nothing to what it is now.

*Thank you all for listening,
Angie.*

I want to join the Mono Basin Historical Society

Individual \$5.00

Sustaining \$25.00

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Organization/Business \$25.00

Life* \$100.00

Patron* \$500.00

* Do not need to renew

I am enclosing a check for \$_____ made payable to the "MONO BASIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY"

Name: _____

Address: _____

Donations to the MONO BASIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY are tax-deductable.

Detach this section and mail with your check to:

Mono Basin Historical Society, P.O. Box 31, Lee Vining, CA 93541

For information call: 619-647-6543

Tava,

the Pinenut



by Jane Fisher

The mountain air is crisp, the sun warm through the autumn haze and the rabbitbrush blazes burnished gold. Pitch laden air steams up from the rocky slopes, mixed with the bitter lemon of juniper pine. Voices and laughter ring through the open, spicy scented forest, stirring catcalls from watchful pinyon jays and turning chipmunks into tiny statues.

"I think I've found some big buckskins here."

"Where's the mechanic's soap?"

"Bring the pole!"

"I've got pitch in my hair and I'm thirsty."

What we have here is pinenutting, the favorite harvest of Valley people, after a frost has opened the cones in the erratic years when the seeds develop into plump, sweet nuts.

For thousands of years the pinyon pine provided an essential food for the peoples of the Great Basin of Nevada and Eastern California. When the crop was abundant, it lasted through the winter and into summer and 30 to 40 bushels were gathered by an individual.

The Paiute Indians had a system of government based on the division of lands to provide enough food for each family. Each district owned pinenut territory, and the head man decided when it was pinenut time, organizing and leading the harvest. Permission to share the harvest was sometimes given, but trespass was resented and led to quarrels or rock throwing, the most frequent trouble between an otherwise peaceful people. Property rights were respected because of tradition and

One ounce of pinyon nuts:
150 calories
8.8 grams protein
13.4 grams fat
33 grams carbohydrate
0 cholesterol

fear of magic. White men were killed for felling pinyons, perhaps just punishment even today for the devastating commercialism that breaks down whole trees, rapes the forest with huge flatrack trucks piled with whole limbs of cones -- limbs that will never produce again -- and sells the irreplaceable harvest at premium prices.

When crops were good, the Owens Valley people moved into the mountains for the winter, using springs or snow for water. Cones were harvested by means of wooden hooks tied with buckskin to poles and then were stored in bins on the sunny hillside. Bins were lined with rocks and after being filled with cones, were covered with needles, boughs and more rocks. As they dried, the pits were opened as needed.

Sierra Stew:

- 1) Rinse one lb. pinto beans and soak overnight.
- 2) Simmer four hours in same water, keeping water level above beans.
- 3) After second hour, add 3 ham hocks, one 16 oz. can chopped tomatoes; 2 bay leaves, 2 garlic cloves, one-quarter tsp. each thyme, marjoram, oregano, sweet savory and white pepper.
- 4) After third hour, add 6 small, fresh carrots or scraped carrots cut in half-inch pieces; 4 celery stalks, cut in pieces; one green pepper and two large yellow onions chopped.
- 5) During last half hour, add 2 cups of shelled pine-nuts.

Nuts that fell as the cones were harvested were gathered in conical baskets by the women, from blankets and sacks spread on the ground under the trees, then kept in pits lined and covered with grass. These loose nuts were used first. After the bins were opened, the cones were threshed in pits and the nuts winnowed from the dirt in a basket. The nuts remaining when the people moved back to the valley floor in spring were carried along in baskets and buckskin bags.

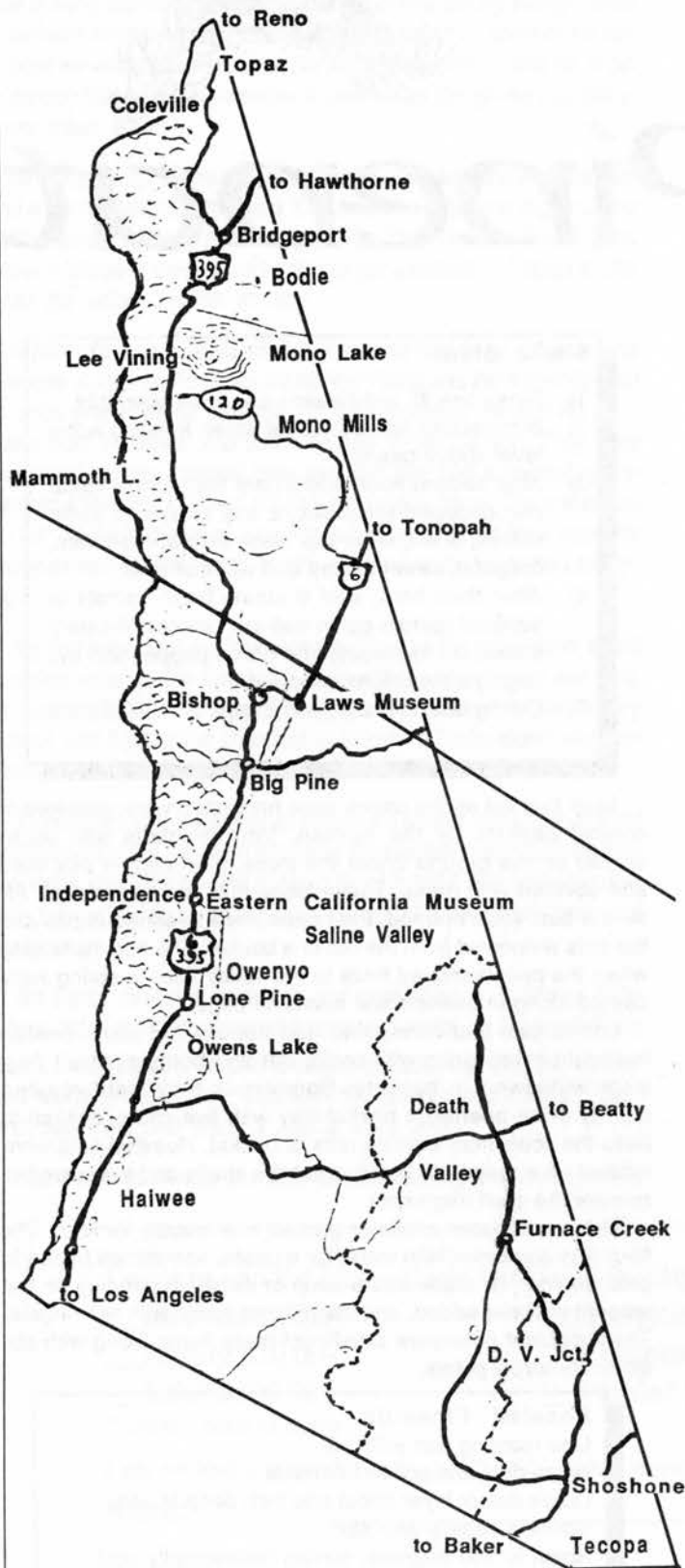
Loose nuts and cones that had not opened were roasted overnight by covering with coals, dirt and boughs. Again they were winnowed in baskets. Sometimes they were roasted quickly in an openwork basket-tray with live coals, shaken to keep the coals from burning nuts or basket. Roasted nuts were rubbed on a metate to break open the shells and winnowed to remove the shell fragments.

Nuts were eaten whole or ground in a metate for flour. The flour was combined with water for a paste, sometimes frozen in cold weather, or made into a soup or mush, depending on the amount of water added, and the mixture eaten with two fingers. The succulent nuts were significant trade items along with obsidian for arrow points.

Roasted Pinenuts:

Line roasting pan with foil.
Rinse dust and pollen from nuts.
Leave damp; layer about one inch deep in pan.
Sprinkle heavily with salt.
Roast at 300 degrees, stirring occasionally until water evaporates.
When heated through, nuts are moist and fruitlike; for crisp texture, roast longer, testing for desired result.

MONO COUNTY



INYO COUNTY

Letters to the Editor

Enid Larson re: Bristlecone Pine, Vol. I, No. 3; "There are no foxtail pines in the White Mountains, according to botanists; also the elevation of the gate to the White Mountain Research Laboratory is 11, 800 feet, not 14,246, according to Forestry maps."

Louise Kelsey, author: "The high altitude foxtail pine grows at 10,000' to 11,000', strong and erect among the sprawling many-stemmed trees of high altitude. However, this timberline tree grows in the Sierra, not among the bristlecone of the White Mountains."

ED. NOTE: Kelsey was referring to the elevation of the Research Laboratory, not the gate, but sentence structure left the matter open to interpretation.

A LITTLE STORY IN ITSELF:

I was delighted, and to some extent saved, by Chalfant Press' "Album." I had a naturally down-home, warm response to stories which enlarged upon ones I had been told since childhood by my father and grandfather who were born and raised in Bishop and whose family went back many generations in the area. As a history major who produced a piece of Bodie research under the precise Doctor Coke Wood at the University of the Pacific, I now spend each summer at our family cabin, enjoying Inyo-Mono; I applaud your accuracy as well as flavor.

(As you may know, Dr. Wood hailed from Bishop. He was one of my father's grade school teachers, and he later wrote books about the California Owens Valley water controversy and California text and history books. He was president of the California Historical Society.)

Well, now I am a high school teacher and the (step) mom of three brilliant young people who have adopted a love of their new heritage and of Inyo-Mono. They've taken like baby Rainbows to McGee Creek to all of this, but sometimes even my well of stories runs dry.

Then, the "Album" is a salvation. The fine piece on Sybil Summers, for example, reminded me of the stories my mom and grandmother told me about Sybil and the time she shot holes in the Summers' cabin floor to let out the water after a little water fight between the boys, about how she was the first woman over the mountain passes when the snow melted each year, about her only unreasoning terror — of lightning and thunder storms, about how despite her frontier toughness she could dress beautifully and grace any bridge table from Los Angeles to San Francisco. I recalled that the last time I saw Sybil, I think she was well into her seventies; she was flat on her back, waving a wrench and laughing larger than her slender self as she fixed an ancient wringer washing machine at the Summers' Mammoth cabin.

So the article got me going and I could tell bedtime stories through memories' connections for another week.

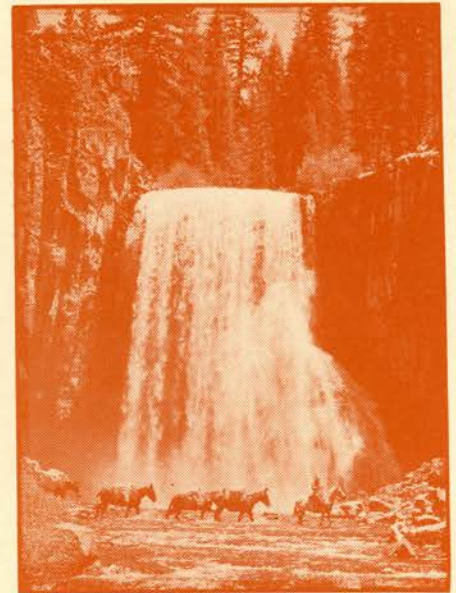
Please keep up the good work!...Jodi Newlan Wright

THANK YOU!

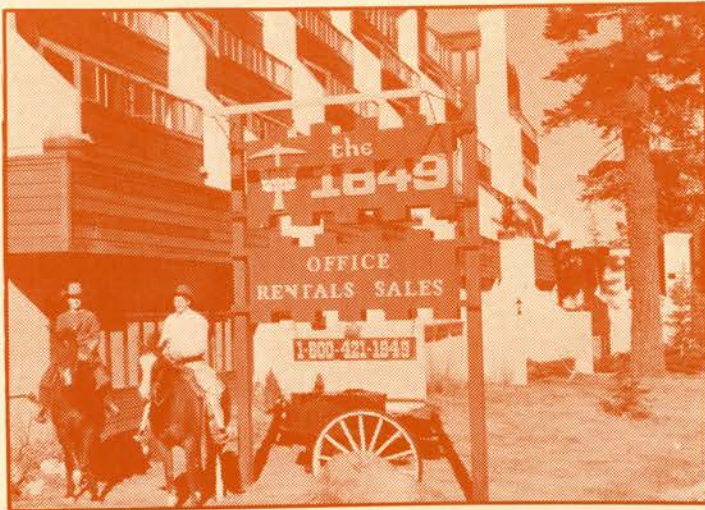
I was recently in Bishop with my husband and children on vacation. While there I was searching for a special gift for my father who had his 75th birthday in August...I was delighted to find "The Album"...What a wonderful idea! We have always enjoyed hearing the wonderful stories of the area...Susan I. Dossey



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