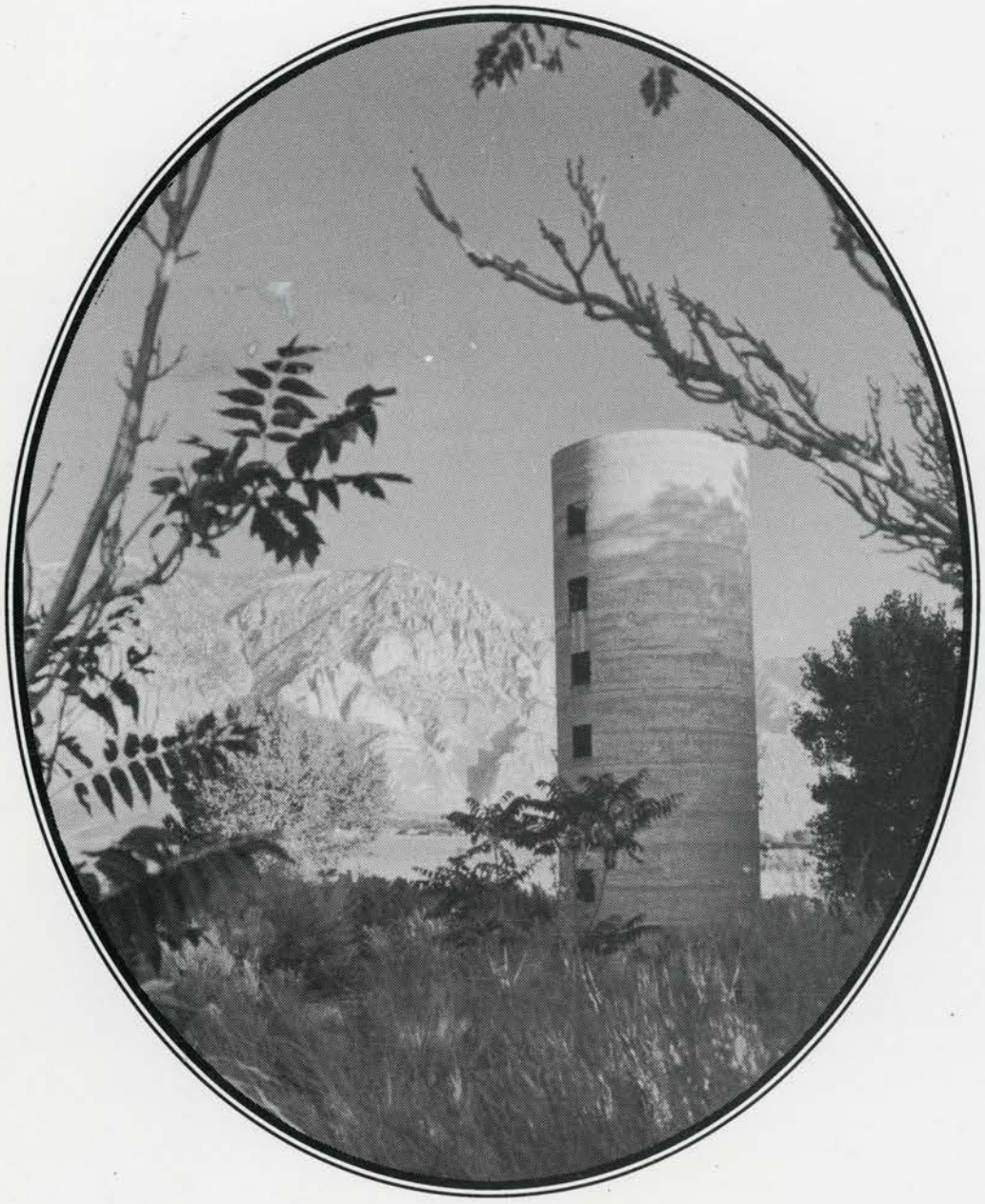
# The Best Of
# The Albvm



*Times & Tales of Inyo-Mono*

# BEST OF THE ALBUM

*Times and Tales of Inyo-Mono*

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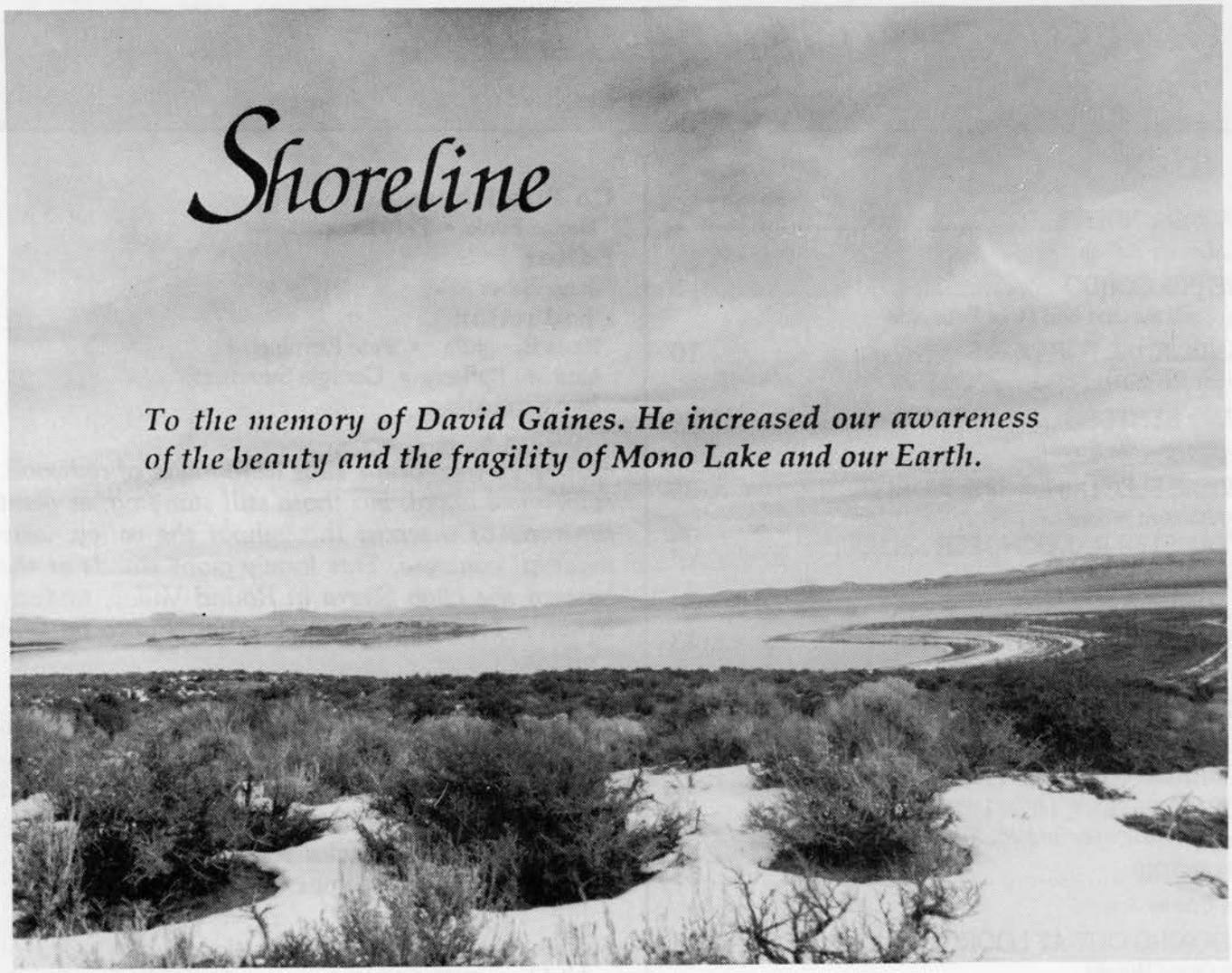
***Cover Photo**: Some silos were made of redwood, some were metal, but those still standing, as giant sentinels of the past throughout the valley, were made of concrete. This lonely giant stands at the base of the High Sierra in Round Valley, midway between Inyo and Mono counties. Photo by Don Calkins.*

*THE ALBUM* is a quarterly publication of tales told around the family table, the campfire, and from relative to relative, friend to friend, about the history and natural history of Inyo and Mono counties in Eastern California. It also includes some scholarly research, fish tales, and a few recipes.

Stories included in this celebration of five years of publishing *THE ALBUM* were selected by a committee and by popular vote of readers, not an easy task. Before the selection process was ended, every article in every issue had at least one vote, and at least one reader added, "plus most of the rest!" We avoided final choices that were family sagas, although they received many votes, because it was impossible to rate the importance of one family against another.

We always thought "don't say anything about anyone --- you'll be talking about his relative," was a platitude. But in researching families for *THE ALBUM*, the intricate network of relationships between pioneer families of Inyo and Mono, even though distant, has amazed us. The delight in this discovery expressed by far flung, generations later, distantly related family members has been a deeply heart warming experience. And I've discovered a great number of my own!

Jane Fisher, Editor




*To the memory of David Gaines. He increased our awareness of the beauty and the fragility of Mono Lake and our Earth.*

# Mono Under Ice

*by Louise Kelsey*

*One winter the surface of Mono Lake froze. In the memory of people born and raised in the Basin, this had never happened.*

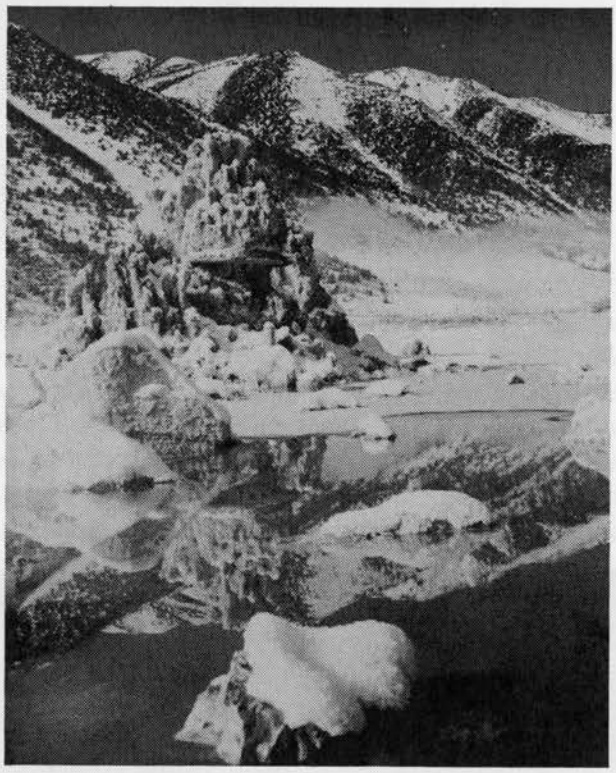
*Mono Lake waters are heavy with salts and minerals. In the early winter of this particular year a large quantity of fresh water was introduced into the lake. Before the waters could mix, an intense cold front moved in and froze the floating layer of fresh water. It was a bad time to break through the ice because beneath it Mono's normal briny water was colder than cold, but unfrozen.*

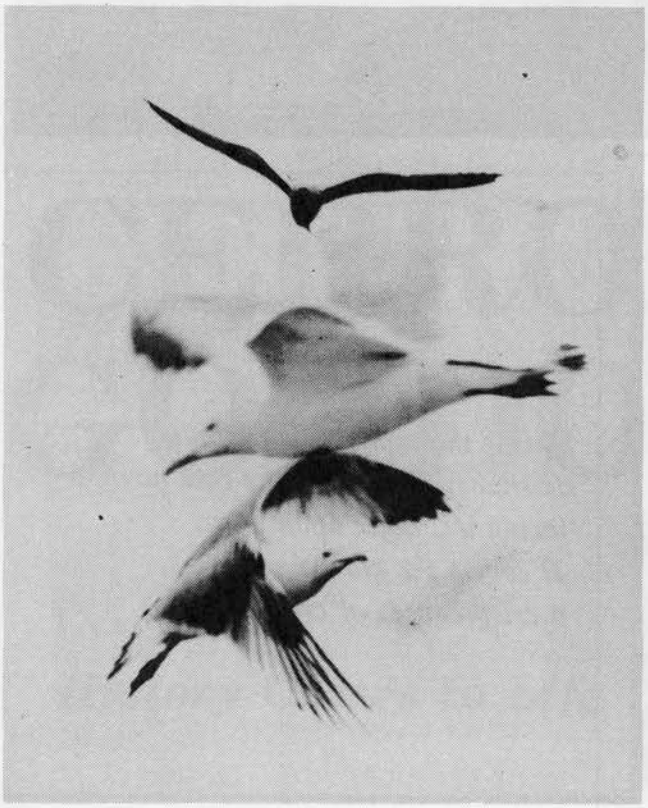
*Because the kutsavi were dormant they survived the freeze. The larvae of these brine fly were a high protein source of food for the Kuzedika Paiute. They harvested, roasted, and shelled the larvae. Some were stored as food and some were traded with the Valley Indians to the west.*

*As to the Paoha...I cannot tell you much about them except that they are tiny. They have long, flowing hair. And the gentle creatures laugh and dance in the vapor vents of the Island.*

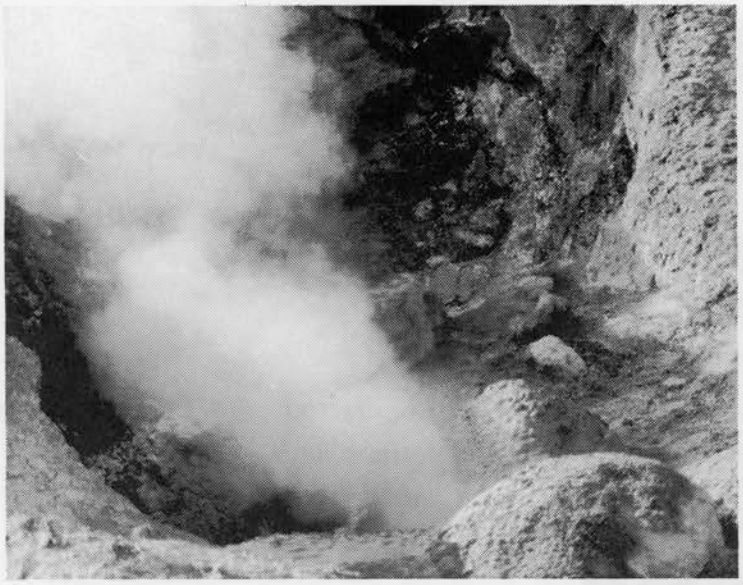
*A grey sky settles winter onto the land.*
*Sand towers wait,*
*with only a wisp of tumbleweed*
*as Autumn's last gesture.*

*Tufa towers wait,*
*their strong forms gentled*
*by a glistening ice-mirror.*



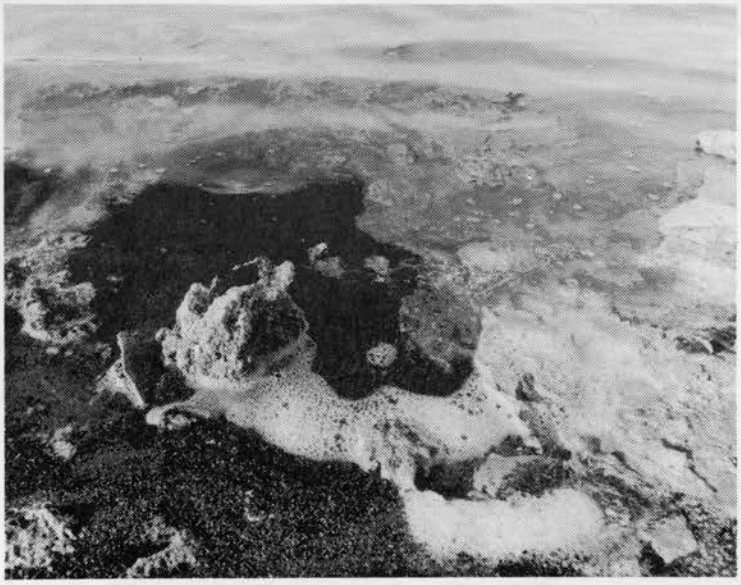


*Grebes and gulls have left for warmer air*
*and kinder water,*
*until the instinct guides them back*
*at nesting time.*

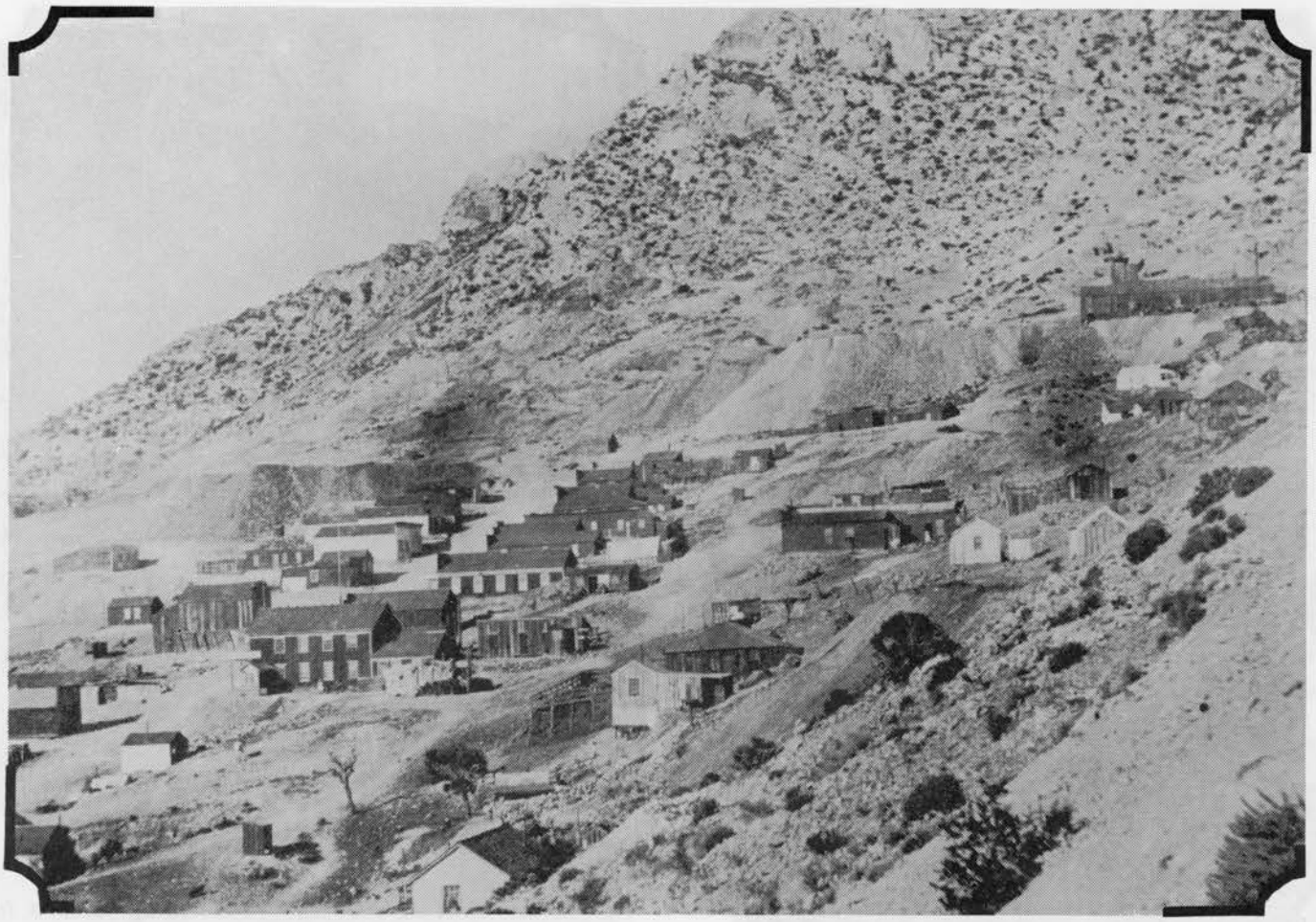


*Only the Paoha are left to play in the vapor.*
*Spirit creatures-*
*Strange as the land they live in-*
*Mono under ice.*

*Kuzedika Paiute have left,*
*taking their harvest of kutsavi*
*to nourish them until*
*brine flies hatch in the spring.*



*This is the time of the pogonip.*
*It shimmers through the cold air,*
*lacing ice, layer upon layer,*
*It covers the ground with*
*a crisp carpet of crystals.*



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

# CERRO GORDO

✣

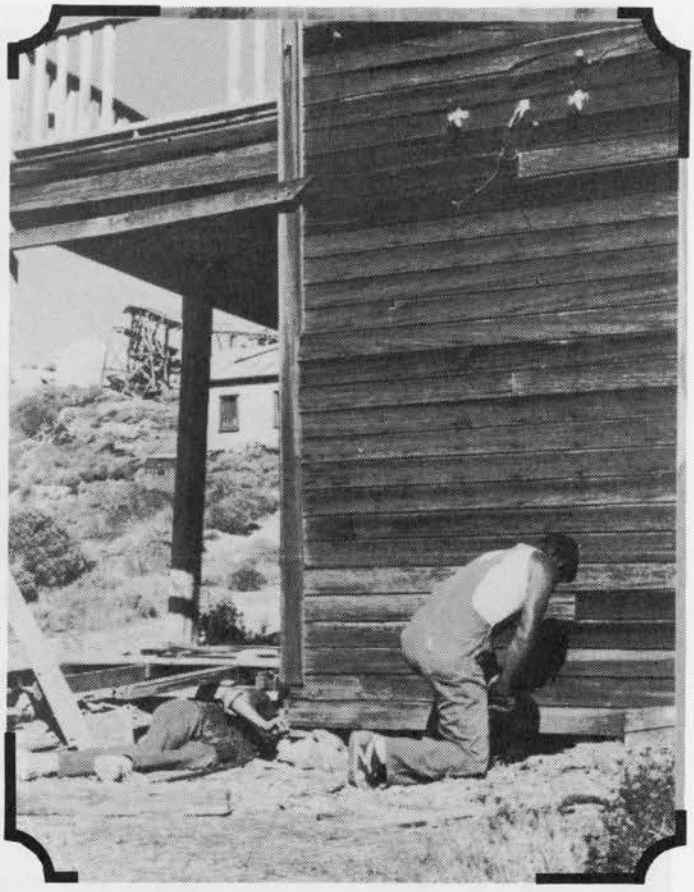
***History Comes to Life***

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

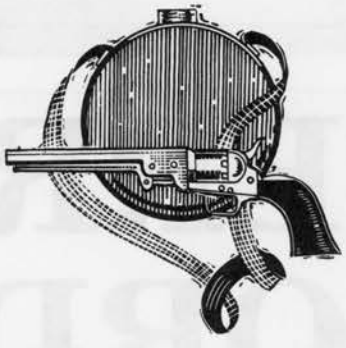
*Cerro Gordo's population hovered around 2,000 during the boom years; its peak may have reached 4,800 souls in a multinational blend. At one time the mining district had more votes than Bishop. Soldiers from old Camp Independence were often called to keep the peace as well as celebrate the town's good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

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

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

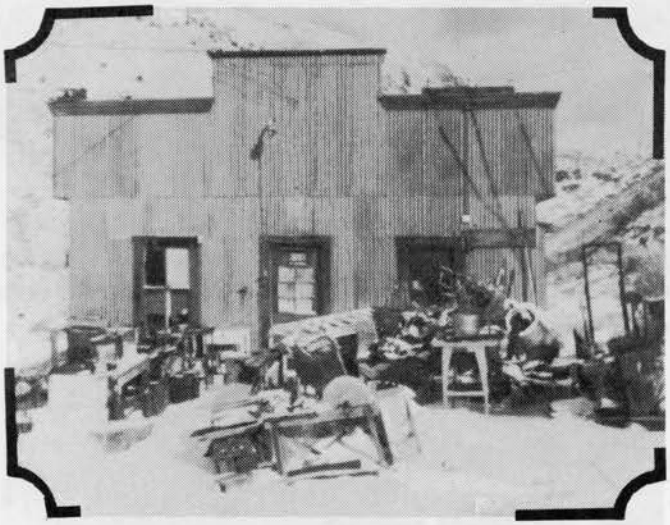


*The American Hotel was built in 1871 and remodeled in 1923. Its foundation was undermined during the 1984 flash flooding that nearly buried Keeler. Now, in 1987, Jigger Nelson and his son Rick, of Big Pine, assist in propping up one corner.*

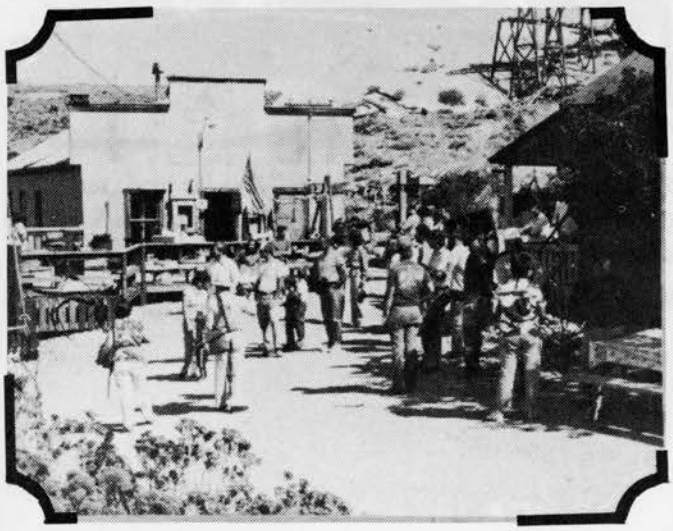


*The old Livery Stable, as shown here filled with rubble and rubbish, illustrates the magnitude of the "Histo-Reclamy" being undertaken. The irrepressable Geargrinders Four-wheel Drive Club of Ridgecrest deserves silver and gold medals for having tackled the short straw jobs of the project. One volunteer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

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

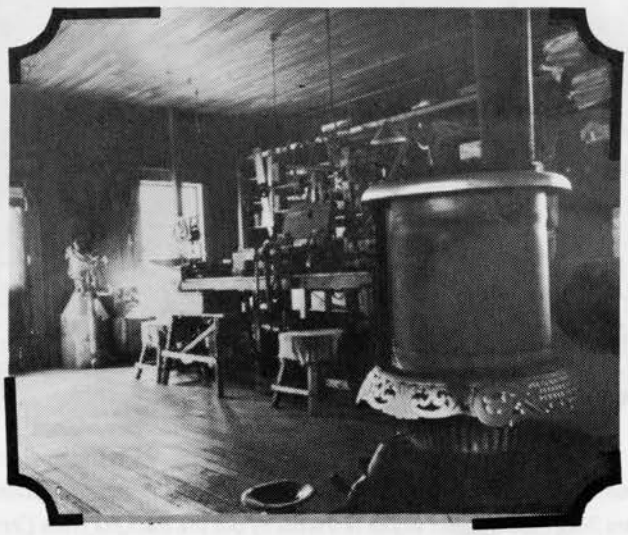


*Possibly Victor Beaudry's General Store in the late 1800s, it served in the 1920s as a pool hall, later a shop building and then storage for all kinds of . . . well . . . "one man's trash is another's treasure." Victor's brother Prudent was the first mayor of Los Angeles in 1881.*



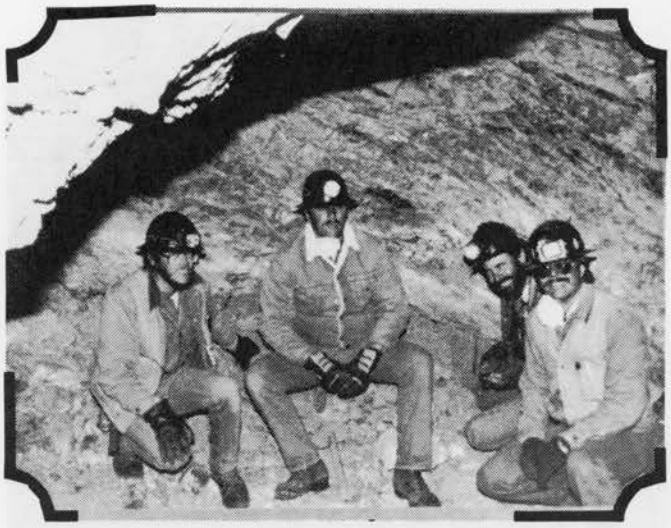
*For an extended time windowless and home to only mice and memories, the Gordon House has again become headquarters; this time for the restoration effort.*

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



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

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



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

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

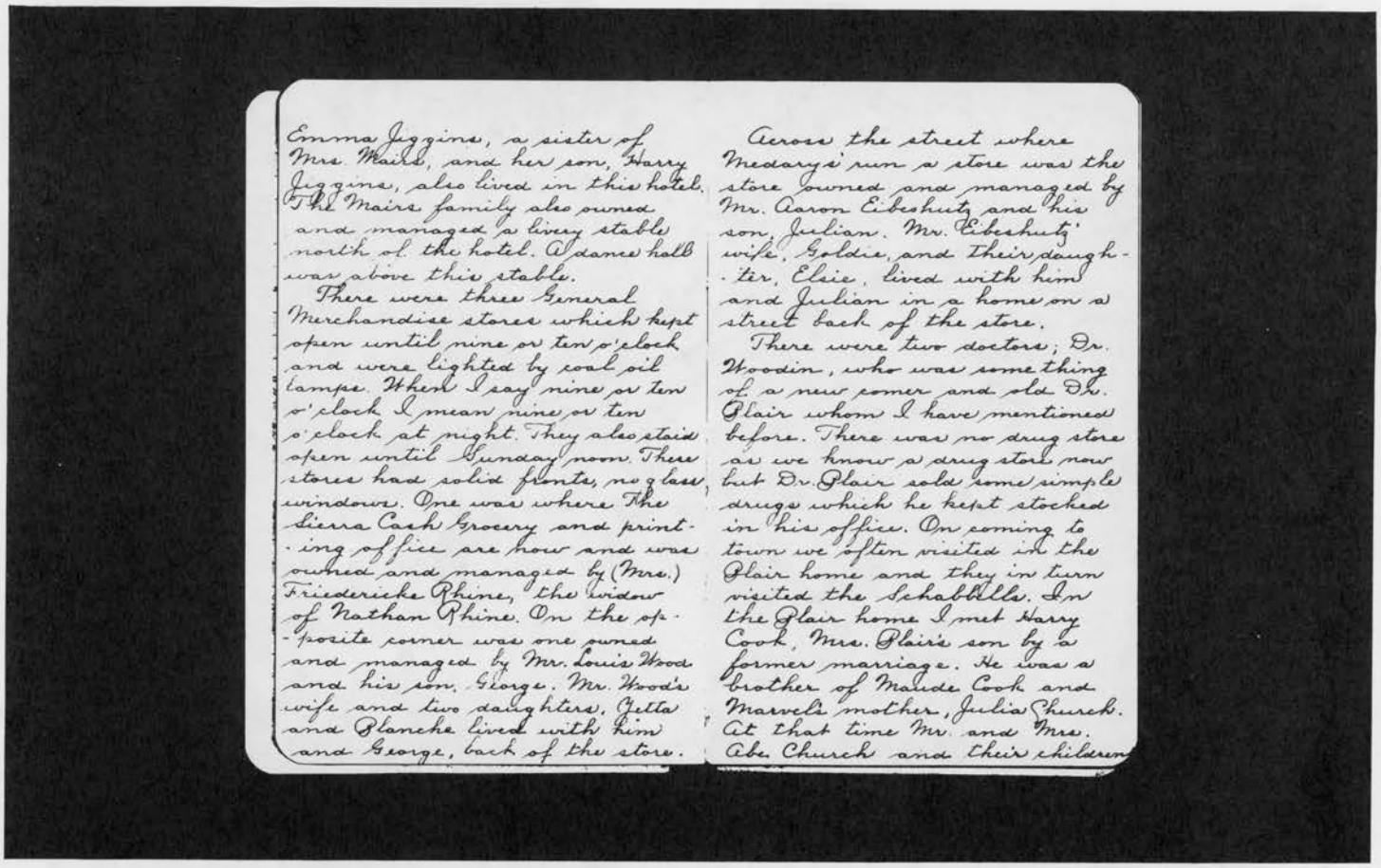
*Sensitive to the historical environment, the mining company cheerfully cooperates in the restoration. Their expertise in identification of old mining equipment and techniques so familiar to early Cerro Gordo residents is invaluable.*

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

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

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

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



Emma Jiggins, a sister of Mrs. Maird, and her son, Harry Jiggins, also lived in this hotel. The Maires family also owned and managed a livery stable north of the hotel. A dance hall was above this stable.

There were three General Merchandise stores which kept open until nine or ten o'clock and were lighted by coal oil lamps. When I say nine or ten o'clock I mean nine or ten o'clock at night. They also staid open until Sunday noon. These stores had solid fronts, no glass windows. One was where the Sierra Cash Grocery and printing office are now and was owned and managed by (Mrs.) Friedericke Rhine, the widow of Nathan Rhine. On the opposite corner was one owned and managed by Mr. Louis Wood and his son, George. Mr. Wood's wife and two daughters, Getta and Blanche lived with him and George, back of the store.

Across the street where Medary's run a store was the store owned and managed by Mr. Aaron Eibeshutz and his son, Julian. Mr. Eibeshutz' wife, Goldie, and their daughter, Elsie, lived with him and Julian in a home on a street back of the store.

There were two doctors; Dr. Woodin, who was some thing of a new comer and old Dr. Blair whom I have mentioned before. There was no drug store as we know a drug store now but Dr. Blair sold some simple drugs which he kept stocked in his office. On coming to town we often visited in the Blair home and they in turn visited the Schabbles. In the Blair home I met Harry Cook, Mrs. Blair's son by a former marriage. He was a brother of Maude Cook and Marvel's mother, Julia Church. At that time Mr. and Mrs. Abe Church and their children

Independence, California,
December 25, 1938.

Dear Doris:-

Complying with your request for the story of my first arrival in Inyo Co. I have written the following account which I hope will interest you and be a lasting pleasure to you.

Lovingly yours,
Auntie Grace.

# A Journal for Doris

*Realizing an ambition I had had since childhood I began to teach as soon as I was qualified to do so.*

*My first school was at Harmony in Riverside County, Calif. Before starting to teach that school I had taken the Civil Service examination for teacher at Los Angeles, California. While in Los Angeles at that time I was a guest of my friend, Mrs. G. O. Newman, a sister of Frank A. Miller of the Mission Inn at Riverside, California.*

*Before my term at Harmony was completed I was appointed to the Government school at Camp Independence, Inyo Co., California. As the salary offered was much larger than that paid in the Riverside County schools I accepted on condition that I need not take the new school until my term at Harmony had ended. This permission was granted and after my Harmony school closed May 9, 1902 I went home to Riverside for a few days' rest and to make preparations to go to Camp Independence. My father had learned that I would have to make part of the trip by stage.*

*On the afternoon of May 15, 1902, I left Riverside on the Southern Pacific for Mojave. And that evening I took the stage from Mojave to Keeler. As only fifty pounds of baggage was allowed on this horse drawn stage I took no trunk but a very large telescope suit case.*

*There were two other passengers on the stage, a Mr. Roach, an attorney, who was on his way to Independence, California on the Boland Water Case; and a miner from Cerro Gordo. This miner spoke with an accent and I judge that he was a German.*

*At midnight we stopped at Raymond's for a meal which consisted mostly of fried meat, fried potatoes and coffee which I did not drink. After eating, walking around for exercise, while the driver changed horses, we proceeded on our way, driving slowly over the winding, sandy roads of Mojave desert. We stopped at Olancha for another meal and another change of horses. My sister, Ivy, had put me up a lunch, to be eatten during the day time drive across the desert. After riding all day, in the evening of May 16, 1902 we arrived at the hotel at Keeler.*

*I was very tired, very warm and very dusty from head to foot.*

*This country hotel had no running water but in each bed room there was a wash stand with a bowl and a pitcher of water. I freshened up, as much as I could, and staid at this hotel over night, having dinner there that evening and breakfast the next morning.*

*Years later I learned that the driver who drove the stage across the desert, on this my first visit to the valley, was Henry Lenbeck, commonly known as "Stokes."*

*After breakfast I took the narrow gauge train from Keeler to Citrus, now known as Kearsarge. Also years later I learned that Max Fausel, Independence barber was a passenger on this same train.*

*Upon arriving at Citrus I was met by Mr. Henry Levy, who owned the Independence Hotel, and who drove the stage over from Independence to Citrus, a distance of five miles. He met me on the train, took my little hand grip, got my suit case and helped me on to his stage. At Independence we stopped in front of the hotel a little while, while he attended to some business. I did not get out of the stage. Mr. Levy then took me out to Camp Independence, for such was its designation on the map. The natives called it "The Fort." We drove along what was known as the "lower road" and eventually came to a nice looking place with a white picket fence around it. I admired this place and Mr. Levy said, "I am taking you to a nicer place than that," and we drove around to the Schabbell Ranch*

*which had a comfortable home, a very nice front yard with spacious lawns and flowers, enclosed by a white picket fence.*

*Here I was met by a German lady, Mrs. Fred Schabbell, and her chubby little twelve year old daughter, Dora, who was then often called "Baby" as she was the youngest of the family. Mrs. Schabbell took me through the front yard into the parlor where we visited for a while.*

*The parlor was a neat, home-like looking room with both a piano and an organ in it.*

The Fred Schabbell ranch house, February 18, 1938.

*My arrival on the Schabbell Ranch was on Saturday forenoon May 17, 1902.*

*After our visit in the parlor Mrs. Schabbell showed me through her house and told me which would be my room.*

*Miss Nellie Reynolds, whom I was succeeding, was in this room packing up her things preparatory to returning to her home at Georges Creek.*

*I then met another daughter, Carrie, and Mr. Fred Schabbell who was then 72 years old and crippled with rheumatism. He was a kindly gentleman, a German, who wore a long white beard. On account of his rheumatism he walked with one cane.*

*And about noon I met the youngest son of the family, Henry Schabbell. Miss Reynolds urged him to harness her horse to her cart as she was in a hurry to get home as she thought the wind was going to blow. She left before lunch. It was a warm summery day.*

*Visiting in the Schabbell household that day was Miss Minnie Levy, a daughter of Mr. Henry Levy. She staid until the next afternoon and the friendship begun with her then has continued through the years.*

*On the day of my arrival on the Schabbell Ranch Mrs. Schabbell asked me my name. And I told her "Grace Rehwold." From the day I entered High School in Riverside until I came here I was always called "Miss Rehwold" as I was the eldest in my family. But Mrs. Schabbell said, "We will call you Grace and you will be just like one of the family." She showed me my place at the table which was at the right of Mr. Schabbell, who sat at the head of the table. This place was always mine for the four years I boarded with the family. Mrs. Schabbell always sat at the other end of the table, Henry opposite me and the girls on either side of their mother.*

*Lunch was my first meal in this house hold. Among other things we had salmon and fried potatoes.*

*It turned very cold over night and the next afternoon, Sunday, we sat in the parlor with a fire going. Those present were Mr. and Mrs. Schabbell, Henry, Carrie, Dora, Minnie Levy and I.*

*Dora had a large doll with which she played on the lounge and from time to time she fell almost asleep. At this stage Henry would call, "Dora" and she would start up. The thing that impressed me most was the depth of his voice.*

*Shortly afterwards, upon my return from school one afternoon I met another son, next older than Henry named Fred. He was sitting on his heels by the stove in the sitting room, talking to his parents. I wondered at the high heels on his boots. Until I came here I had never seen men wear boots.*

*Fred was working on the Tom Rickey Ranch and had taken time off to come home and take his father to Coso Hot Springs for treatment for his rheumatism. Fred left his father there for a stay of about five weeks. A man by the name of Tom Furgerson cared for the father at Coso Hot Springs and at the end of Mr. Schabbell's stay there Fred went to Coso and brought him home.*

*My first stay in the valley was for six weeks. I liked it here and returned for four successive years.*

*During my six weeks' stay I met Louis Schabbell, the eldest in the family, and his young wife, nee Mary Connor. Louis and Mary came down for a few days' visit with his parents. He was a very large man with a very small wife ten years his junior.*

*In days following I met other members of the Levy family, Mrs. Henry Levy, Birdie Milt, Lena, Walter and little Edie. Also other friends of the Schabbells living in town; Dr. and Mrs. Blair, Mrs. Blair's daughter, Maude Cook, and her grand-daughter Marvel Church who was eight years old nearly nine.*

*Dr. Blair made regular trips to the County Hospital which was managed by (Mrs.) Margaret Lewis. And on some of these trips he would come over to visit the Schabbell family and bring Marvel with him.*

*Mrs. Lewis had two of her children still living with her; two sons, John and Albert. Albert was there all of the time and John only part of the time.*

*Mrs. Schabbell's brother, Wilhelm Arcularius, had died a few months previously and his widow and two children Louis and Sophie, were living with the widow's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Albers, at Georges Creek. This widow was Wilhelm Arcularius' second wife.*

*One week end Mrs. Schabbell said to me, "I want to go to Georges Creek to see my brother's widow and to see that a suitable stone is placed on my brother's grave and I would like to have you see Georges Creek."*

*So early one Saturday morning we started out by buggy, drawn by a team of horses, Sontag and Benton. About noon we came to the Reynolds Ranch on the river where we had lunch. Mrs. Reynolds, a refined English lady, lived there with her three daughters, Nellie, Clara and Irene. Upon coming to America she had left one daughter in England and she had two sons, Jim and Silas, not then living at home. We had come unexpectedly but Mrs. Reynolds got lunch for us which we ate in a kitchen lean-to. She sent her youngest daughter, Irene, to some place near by to get some home grown lettuce which was a luxury as there were no vegetable markets in this isolated valley. Irene went on horse back to the place where she got the lettuce. I also remember another item of our lunch, stewed tomatoes. In the front room of the Reynolds home was a screen upon which were fastened photographs of their friends. Among these was a photograph of Fred Schabbell and one of Henry Schabbell.*

*In the afternoon we drove on and toward evening came to the Kispert Ranch where we staid over night.*

*Mrs. Kispert, a German widow, lived there with one son, Charles, who was very bashful and would not come in to visit because a strange young lady was there. One thing Mrs. Kispert had for supper was cottage cheese with onions in it. Mrs. Schabbell told Mrs. Kispert that I did not like onions so I think I did not eat any of the cheese. Mrs. Kispert had recently lost a daughter and her own husband after a sad illness. Also a son. She was grief stricken and could talk of nothing but these three deaths.*

*On Sunday we left Mrs. Kispert's and drove to the Alber's Ranch, reaching there in the early afternoon. Mr. and Mrs. Albers were sitting on the front porch. We visited with them there and also with Mrs. Wilhelm Arcularius. I met others of the family but to-day I can not recall who they were. Later in the afternoon a very nice cocoanut layer cake and coffee were served in an out-of-door place in the back yard. This place had the ground swept very clean and was roofed over with branches of trees. After these refreshments we drove back home, arriving late Sunday evening.*

*When my first stay of six weeks came to a close I returned to my home in Riverside, California going back by stage to Mojave and thence by train to Riverside. On this trip the stage broke down and we finished the trip across the desert in an open farm wagon. And even in July the night was cold on the desert. The stage driver, one other than Henry Lenbeck, became intoxicated and the whole trip was so unpleasant that I never made it across the desert by horse stage again. But made the long trip around by train via San Francisco, Sacramento, Reno and Carson City and then down on the narrow gauge to Citrus. I had some very dear friends, Mr. and Mrs. Frank W. Richardson of Riverside, who in summer managed the luxurious Tahoe Tavern on Lake Tahoe. Mrs. Richardson, who died just a short time ago this year, was another sister of Frank A. Miller, Master of the Mission Inn at Riverside. Frank A. Miller died a few years ago. On my trips back and forth I would stop over at Lake Tahoe and visit Mr. and Mrs. Richardson for a few days. They had a son, Stanley, who was there when he was not East in college.*

*When I first came here in 1902 this valley was very much shut off from the rest of the world and had characteristics peculiar to itself. Very few new people came in and when any one did that person attracted every ones attention.*

*Out here at "The Fort" were a number of cultivated ranches with beautiful stands of alfalfa. Just east of the Schabbell Ranch was the Walters Ranch where an old couple, Mr. and Mrs. Walters lived. With them was (Mrs.) Lena Given and her little son, Paul. Mrs. Given was Mrs. Walter's daughter by a former marriage. In another house on the same ranch lived Carl J. Walters, son of the old couple, with his young wife, Frieda and their baby daughter, Marie.*

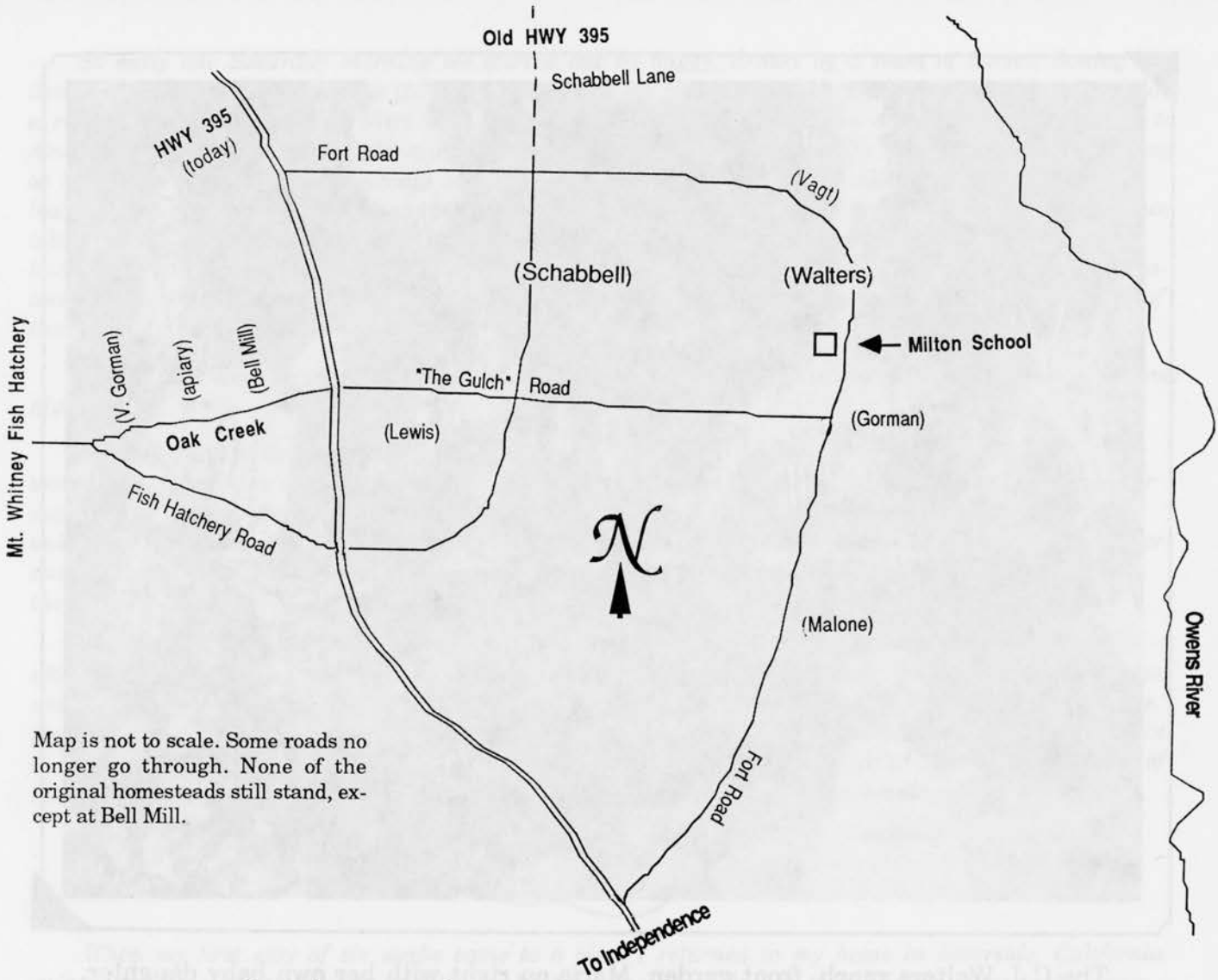
The C.J. Walters ranch, front garden, Marie on right with her own baby daughter, Marie Jeanette ("Jane" Hurlbut Fisher).

*On another ranch across from the Walters Ranch lived Mr. and Mrs. J. S. Gorman with their children, Maggie, a daughter of Mrs. Gorman by a former marriage, Val, Edith, John, Lester and little Vivian. Mrs. Gorman was a daughter of Mrs. Lewis. On the Vaght Ranch was a McSweeny family. Mr. and Mrs. Humphrey with their children, Fred, Ed, and Tula lived on the Fehrman place. Herb and Sid Seymore lived on this same ranch. Further north lived the Aguirre family and north of them the McGann family. Kate Walters lived with her mother on a ranch out at Black Rock. She often came in horseback to spend a few days with the Schabbell girls. A Carter family lived on the Densmore Ranch. South of the Gorman Ranch was the Malone Ranch with old lady Malone still living there. Further south was the Mairs Ranch and nearer to town a ranch owned by Mr. and Mrs. John Baxter. They had three children, Jennie, Clifford and Harold. I believe Jennie was already married to Crom Harper and Clifford may have been already married to Josephine Fearon.*

*Just south of the Schabbell Ranch, across the creek, was a lovely alfalfa ranch on which lived Billie Boyd and with him "Old Fairechilds."*

*Now going up Oak Creek was the flour mill owned by the Bell family and operated by them. Here lived Neel Bell, his sister, Mrs. Duncan and her little daughter, Alta, two brothers, John and Lee. Alva Bell was married and did not live there.*

*Going up the creek one came to an apiary owned and operated by Paul William Muth-Rasmussen. And nearer the mountains was a place owned by "Old man Lane."*



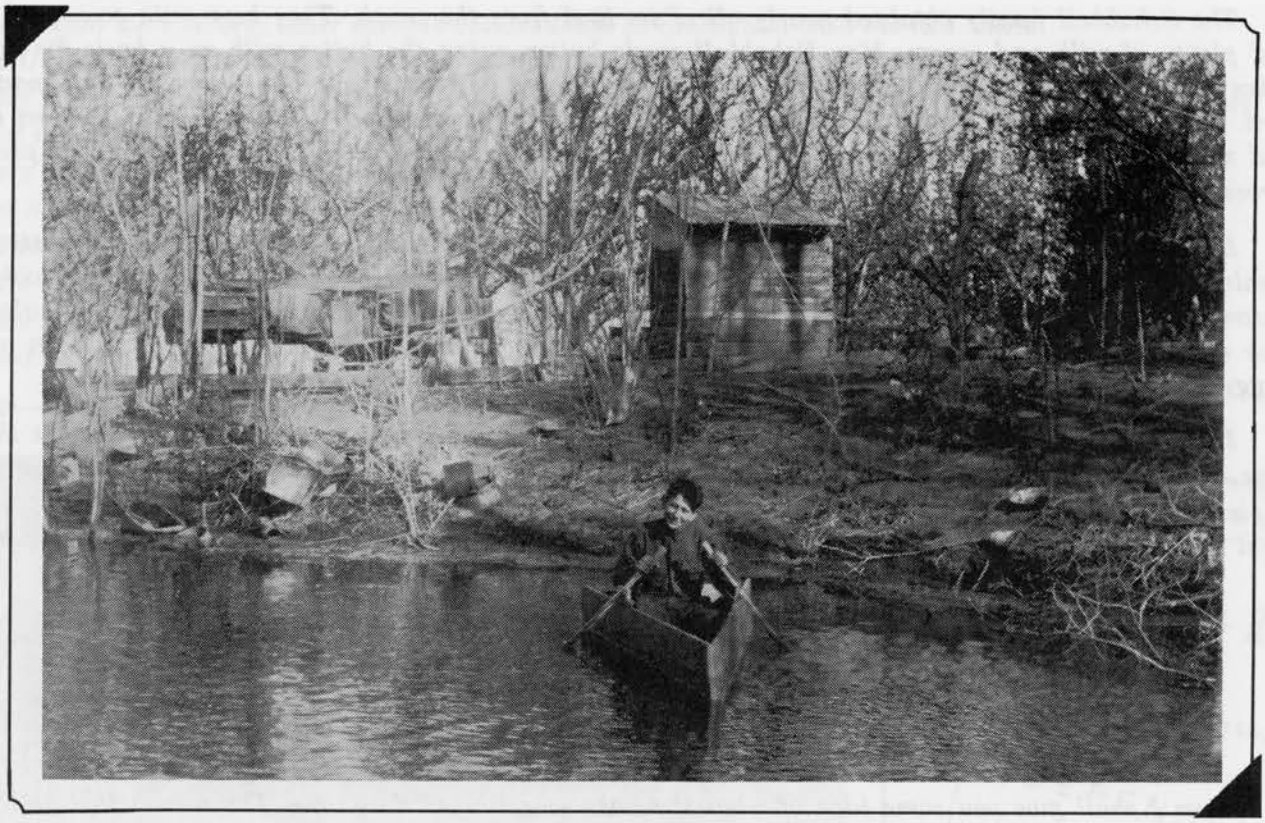

Locating some of the ranches at "The Fort" and Oak Creek.

*Now a little more in the way of description of the Schabbell Ranch as it was in 1902. I have already mentioned the lawns and flowers in the front yard. Along the edge of the south lawn was a row of locust trees, some of which are still standing. When Louis Schabbell was just learning to walk he carried the little trees to his father to plant. North of the lawns was a vegetable garden, north of that a number of rows of raspberry bushes that were in bearing and between them and the corral was a strawberry bed. Dora and I once picked a milk pan of strawberries from it. North of the corral and east of the house were orchards of all kinds and varieties of deciduous fruits and across the road was a vineyard. Where the house, which belongs to Henry and me now stands, was an alfalfa field. Then as now crops of alfalfa, wheat corn and potatoes were raised.*

*Like all ranch homes here at that time there was no water piped into the house but all water for domestic use was carried from the creek. There was no bathroom but in a sort of shed like room which leaned against the small back bedroom on its east-side was a tin bath tub. Water for its use was heated outside over an open fire near the creek. The house was lighted by candles and coal oil lamps. A neat and tidy mahalie, Sally Laird, did the washing and ironing. She used old fashioned flat irons which were heated on the kitchen range, wood and corn cobs being used for fuel.*

*The mail from the north came in every week-day night and from the south by stage across the desert three times a week. In the evenings Henry went in horseback to get the mail. The horse he rode was named, "Chub."*

*Though Edith Gorman was several years older than Dora they were very great friends and spent many happy days together at the home of one or the other.*



Behind the outbuildings of the J. Gorman Ranch was a reservior, a favored recreation spot, even in the chill of early spring. Carl Walters' son, Carl H. "Bud", rows a homemade boat with locust branch oars.

*Among the friends who visited at the Schabbell home was a Mr. Gus Stecker who lived in town. Mrs. Schabbell had raised his daughter, Alice, from three years old to eighteen years old. She then entered a hospital in Los Angeles where she studied to be a nurse. She followed this profession until the hardships of it caused her early death.*

*Mr. Henry Fehrman who in earlier years had owned a ranch at the Fort was then living in town. From time to time he came out to visit. And beginning several years later Mr. Ross, father of Mrs. C. J. Walters, made frequent visits to this home.*

*In the spring of 1903 Anna, the eldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Schabbell came home for a visit. She had married Leon N. Marx and was living in Globe, Arizona. She had come home by the stage route across the desert. Her trunk was delayed in getting here and upon her arrival she had changed from her traveling dress to one of her mother's clean wrappers. It was short on her but as for length would be in style today.*

*Two years after I came here Fred Schabbell gave up his work on the Rickey Ranch and came home to ranch with his brother, Henry. And from that day to this the two brothers have worked harmoniously together ranching and raising cattle.*

*The Schabbell family obtained nearly all of its food from the ranch. They kept milk cows and had plenty of milk and cream. Mrs. Schabbell made butter, using the butter milk as a basis for hot cakes the next morning. They raised hogs and smoked hams and bacon for their own use and made lard. She raised turkeys, ducks and chickens. She made sauer kraut and mince meat, dried sweet corn and string beans, canned tomatoes and all the different kinds of fruit they raised, made jellies, preserves, pickled peaches and pickles.*

*Life was simple. We spent our summer evenings on the front porch or on the lawn; our winter evenings in the sitting room where Dora and I embroidered, crocheted or did drawn work. We took lessons in these things from (Mrs.) Lena Given who had now become post-mistress in town. We also took music lessons from Mrs. Tom Webb. We took these lessons on Saturdays, driving to town in a buggy drawn by a team of horses named Flora and Charlie.*

*In the winter, when the days were short, Mrs. Schabbell always had an early dinner, about the time Dora and I came from school. And in the evening before going to bed we usually ate something; apples or apples and walnuts. For amusement there were dances and once in a while a show. If we went to town once a week it was an event.*

*Now I shall give you some idea of what the town was like at that time. There were two hotels, each having a saloon in connection with it. I have already mentioned the Independence Hotel, owned and operated by Mr. Henry Levy. The other one on the other side of the street was the Norman House, owned and managed by Mr. and Mrs. Omie Mairs. They had five children; Norm, Pete, Paul, Howard and Nellie. (Mrs.) Emma Jiggins, a sister of Mrs. Mairs, and her son, Harry Jiggins, also lived in this hotel. The Mairs family also owned and managed a livery stable north of the hotel. A dance hall was above this stable.*

*There were three General Merchandise stores which kept open until nine or ten o'clock and were lighted by coal oil lamps. When I say nine or ten o'clock I mean nine or ten o'clock at night. They also staid open until Sunday noon. These stores had solid fronts, no glass windows. One was where the Sierra Cash Grocery and printing office are now and was owned and managed by (Mrs.) Friedericke Rhine, the widow of Nathan Rhine. On the opposite corner was one owned and managed by Mrs. Louis Wood and his son, George. Mr. Wood's wife and two daughters, Jetta and Blanche lived with him and George, back of the store.*

*Across the street where Medary's run a store was the store owned and managed by Mr. Aaron Eibeshutz and his son, Julian. Mr. Eibeshutz' wife, Goldie, and their daughter, Elsie, lived with him and Julian in a home on a street back of the store.*

*There were two doctors; Dr. Woodin, who was something of a new comer and old Dr. Blair whom I have mentioned before. There was no drug store as we know a drug store now but Dr. Blair sold some simple drugs which he kept stocked in his office. On coming to town we often visited in the Blair home and they in turn visited the Schabbells. In the Blair home I met Harry Cook, Mrs. Blair's son by a former marriage. He was a brother of Maude Cook and Marvel's mother, Julia Church. At that time Mr. and Mrs. Abe Church and their children Rita and Jim did not live here. In time Rita came to visit her relatives and Dr. Blair brought her out to the ranch where I met her. In like manner I met Mrs. Church when she was visiting here and came out to the ranch.*

*Mr. Julius Roeper ran a meat market which he owned but about the only fresh meat he sold was beef. There was no store or market here from which one could buy any variety of meats, sausage, cheese, fresh fruits or vegetables. On holidays Mr. Roeper might get in a crate of celery. Julius Roeper and his wife, Mary, had four children, Nettie, Rose, Effie and LeRoy. Nettie was already married to the barber, Max Fausel, and they had one little girl, Norma.*

*In the town were several other saloons besides those in connection with the two hotels.*

*The United States Land Office was by the Norman House.*

*There were no street lights and to go through town afoot one walked on board walks or wooden porches in front of the hotels and business houses.*

*There was no place where one could buy books, papers or magazines.*

*Just north of the Blair home and very close to it was the two storied frame Masonic Hall.*

*The same Church is still standing but it has been improved inside and out.*

*There was a one room, one teacher Grammar School but no High School.*

*A two storied frame Court House stood where the Court House now stands. Many large trees surrounded it.*

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OAK CREEK
FLOURING MILLS,
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Crack Corn and Barley at
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A. N. BELL.

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PIONEER
LIVERY & FEED STABLES,
....AT....
Independence, - - Cal.

HAVING RETURNED AND RESUMED THE management of the above well known feed and livery stables, patrons can be assured of finding there the best of Buggy Teams, Saddle Horses, and

LIVERY ACCOMMODATIONS

in general. Also, Hay and Grain for sale by the pound or ton.

April 30, 1881

O. I. MAIRS, Prop'r.
n567tf

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ISAAC HARRIS. NATHA

HARRIS & RHIN

Merchants,

INDEPENDENCE

INYO CO., CAL.,

Wholesale and Retail

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eneral Merchandise.

OUR STOCK,

consisting of most every needfu
article, is well calculated to satisfy
the wants of everybody; and, as in
the past, it will be our aim in the
future to retain the extensive
patronage enjoyed heretofore.

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LARGEST, MOST COMPLETE AND FINEST Brewery on this side of the Sierras. Having thoroughly renovated the entire establishment, introduced new improvements and secured the services of one of the best practical Brewers on the Coast, the undersigned is prepared to supply the public with the PUREST AND BEST QUALITY OF BEER, by the

KEG, BOTTLE OR QUART.

Prompt attention given to all orders.

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FEED STABLE,
VY, Prop'r.

RATES FOR BOARDING or Teams by the feed, day, hay and grain for sale, whole- Corral-room for animals Cus saddle horses or teams will be

H. LEVY.


*In speaking of the Bell family at the Mill on Oak Creek I neglected to say that their uncle, Van Baker, lived with them.*

*Mr. Schabbell had had an interesting life and often told me many things in reard to it. Many times he expressed a desire to have me write the story of his life but it was put off from time to time until it was never done. And as you would like to know something about it I shall now give you an outline of his life as I remember it.*

*Frederick Schabbell was born in Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Germany November 1, 1829. In his 'teens he became a "roust-about," as he called it, for some lawyers. I think we would say that he was an office boy. These lawyers paid his passage to the United States. And he arrived when he was seventeen years old and weighed ninety pounds.*

*He found employment and went to night school to learn to read and write the English language. As soon as all the necessary requirements were fulfilled he became a naturalized citizen of the United State in Champaign County, Illinois.*

*He lived in and around Chicago and in his youth took a contract for building eighteen miles of Chicago railroad.*

*As he accumulated the money he sent back to Germany for other members of his family. I never heard him say that his father came over. Perhaps his father had died by then. But his mother and sisters came. His mother earned her living as a midwife. They all lived in Chicago.*

*By way of the Isthmus of Panama he came to the Pacific coast, taking fifty-six days to make the trip. On this coast he and the father of C.J. Walters were partners for seventeen years. They engaged in various enterprises, one of which was to run a boat up and down the coast around Monterey. This boat burned. He mined on the Fraser River and just escaped death. For very shortly after he left that part of the country the Indians killed all of the Whites. He came down to Oroville and later to Inyo County, California at the time the Eclipse mine was booming in the early 1860's, about the time the soldiers were first stationed at Camp Independence. He farmed on the Shed Ranch and he and a Mr. Broder ran a meat market in Independence in the 1870's. While in partnership with the father of C.J. Walters, they had another partner for a while; one by the name of Jacob Vaght.*

*December 18, 1872 at the home of the parents of C.J. Walters he was married to Miss Friedericke Arcularius, who had recently come from Germany.*

*A while later when he saw that his former partners, Walters and Vaght had taken up farms at Camp Independence he had to have one, too, and bought one from John W. Martin and Sarah E. Martin, man and wife. The deed to this 160 acre ranch was recorded February 17, 1874. He later homesteaded this ranch.*

*Mr. Schabbell always saved some money and when married was able to maintain a comfortable home.*

*The couple and their baby son, Louis, moved on to the ranch, into a three room adobe house which is still a part of the old home. Here their other children, Anna, Fred, Henry, Carrie and Dora were born. These children are all married and comfortably situated. As you know your family lives in the old home and your father still sleeps in the room in which he was born.*

*Mr. Schabbell had rheumatism when I first came here and his stay in Coso did not help him. He walked with a cane. And as his rheumatism grew worse he used two canes and later, crutches. Finally, for the last five years of his life he was confined to his bed. During all this time he was given loving care by all members of his family. And on December 21, 1910 at his home on the ranch he passed into eternal sleep.*

*Last summer you obtained the history of your Grandma Schabbell's family from her grand niece, Dorothee Rouse, so I shall just give you a few more items of interest in regard to her.*

*Friedericke Arcularius came from a fine German family which can trace its ancestry back for hundreds of years.*

*Her brother, Wilhelm Arcularius, had come to the United States in his young manhood and eventually to California. When he found himself well established he sent for his sisters, Anna and Friedericke. Anna backed out but Friedericke came. Wilhelm and his young wife, the former Lisetta Halberstadt, met her at New York. They came on to Inyo County, California, arriving here in July, 1872. Being a young lady of independent spirit and not wanting to be dependent upon her brother, who was now married, she went to cook for Mrs. Nathan Rhine who made her acquainted with Frederick Schabbell whom she married December 18, 1872.*

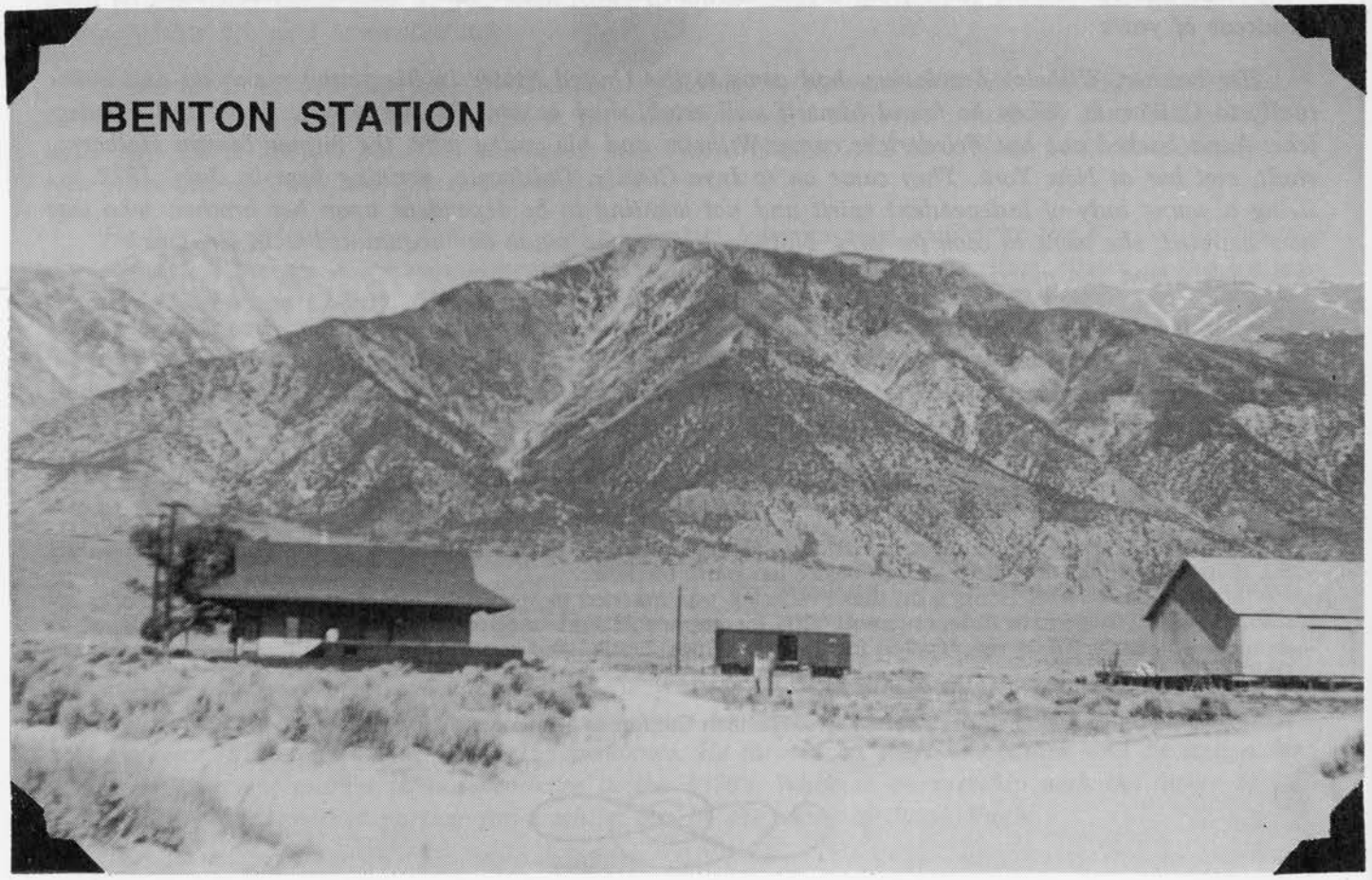
*After her husband's death in 1910 she went to live in Los Angeles, California, first with her daughter, Dora, who had just recently married Roman G. Schmit, and later in her own home where she passed on September 5, 1925 at the age of 74 years. On September 9, 1925 she was laid to rest beside her husband in the cemetary at Independence, California.*

**Editor's Note:** Grace Rehwold was married to Henry Schabbell on April 30, 1911. In the year 1924 on July 30, their only child Edith died, shortly before her ninth birthday.

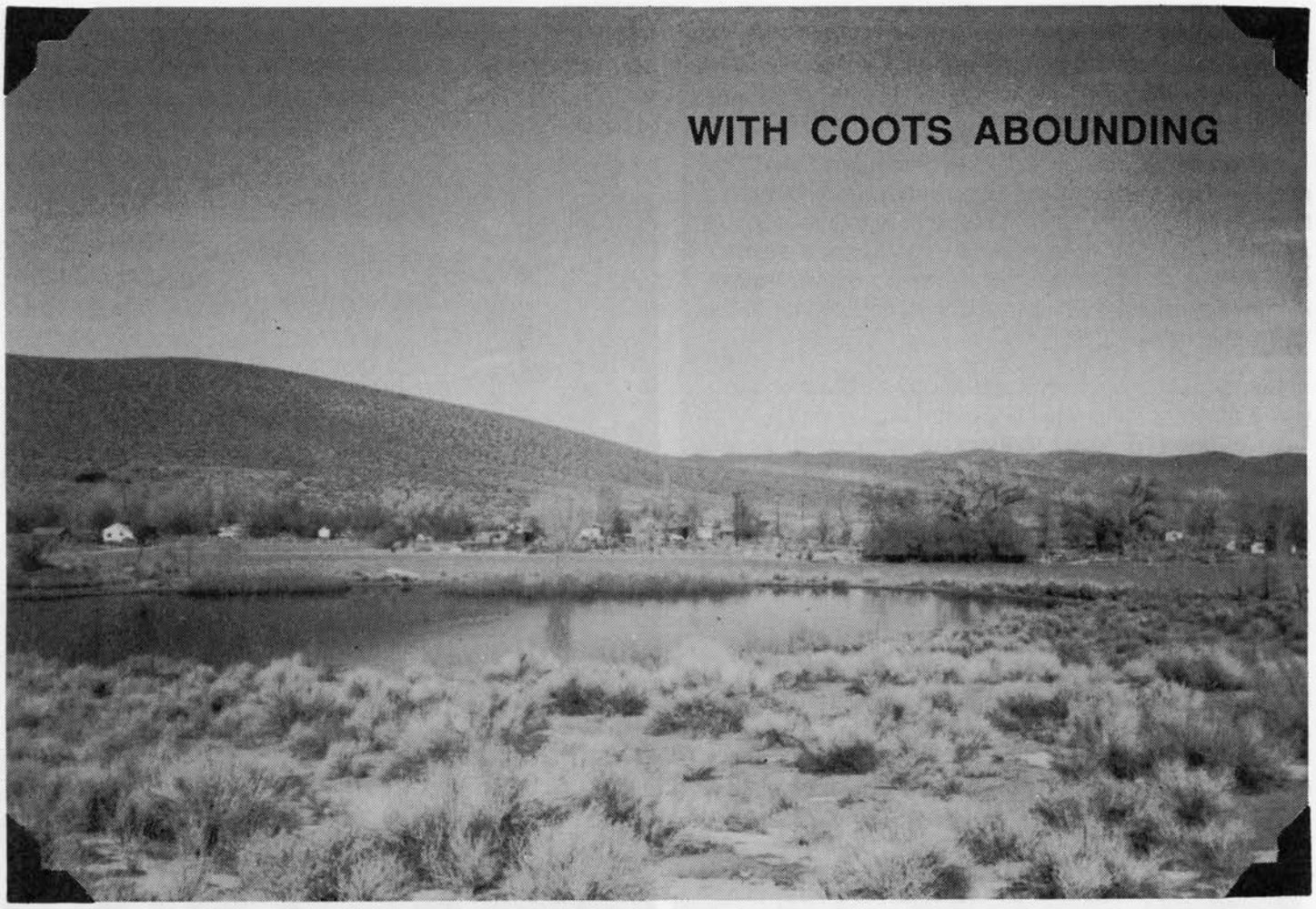
On May 17, 1916, Henry's brother Frederick was married to Marvel Maude Church at the home of her aunt, Maude Wheeler, in Independence. This incomparable first-hand account of family life near Independence in the early 1900s was written for their daughter, Doris, who is now Mrs. Wilfred Partridge of Bishop, California.

Photographs on pages 11 and 12 courtesy of Eastern California Museum.


**OLD BENTON**
**(Bramlette's Store)**



**BENTON STATION**




# A TALE OF TWO BENTONS

By Marguerite Sowaal

Aurora, Nevada, 1869. It was a Wednesday and the day dawned brisk and bright. At 6 a.m. the Wellington stage left on its weekly run with one woman passenger aboard. She glanced at the three men sitting opposite and wondered if they were going all the way to Kearsarge — a three-day trip — and was grateful she could leave the stage at Benton that evening. Her husband would be waiting for her. He had tried his luck mining gold, with little success, and now was mining silver on Blind Springs Hill near Benton. She was encouraged by his letter asking her to come. Maybe, now, they could settle down. A shiver went through her at the thought of the many gold camps she had seen, men drunk and brawling, disappointment the only reward for their labors.

The lady traveler would have stopped at the Dexters and Adobe Meadows way-stations before arriving at Benton where the stage made an overnight stop. She would have endured the rocking, swaying, charging climb up mountain passes; the dusty, thirsty lowlands; and the tricky fording of streams. Depending on the season, she would have suffered freezing cold or intolerable heat. She would not eat or drink unless she carried provisions with her.

Benton must have appeared a paradise to her upon her arrival there. Here was a town with conveniences — a grand meal for 50 cents, and hot water — a lot of hot water. It is still hot today, running at a temperature of 168 degrees from a stream producing 10,000 gallons a minute. Even today, many casual visitors exclaim, "Your plumbing is hooked up backwards!" after flushing a steaming toilet. Obviously there was a reason for one of the earlest names for Benton - "Hot Springs."

Prior to 1865, there were several other names for the community including "Spring Valley," and "Bentonville," but in 1865 the official name was declared "Benton" and a post office was established with that name in 1867.

It is a common belief that the town was named after Thomas Hart Benton, U.S. Senator from Missouri who was the father-in-law of John C. Fremont. It seems a reasonable assumption since Senator Benton was not only a proponent of Western expansion, but also an advocate of metallic currency. Benton being a silver-mining district in the West, the name is fitting.

Benton is located thirty miles north of Bishop on Highway 6 and four miles west of Benton Station on Highway 120. Today it slumbers peacefully amid cottonwoods. Cattle graze in valley meadows surrounded by low-ranging mountains. Coots dart here and there over a pond where an occasional black swan (locally called a "scout") glides languidly. There is a serenity not often found in our present civilization. It is hard to imagine that Benton was the largest town in Mono County in 1865.

In 1861, Aurora was not only the county seat of Mono, but boasted the largest population, 1,885 persons. But alas, a survey in 1863 found Aurora to be in Nevada and Benton took honors as being the largest community by default. The discovery of silver on Blind Spring Hill in 1862 brought in hundreds (some sources say thousands) of prospectors, increasing the population overnight.

Benton was the commercial center for the many mines which sprang up on Blind Springs Hill. It also served the communities of Montgomery City and Partzwick. Partzwick was a "rival" town about one-half mile from Benton. It boasted 10 buildings, a livery stable, liquor store, hotel, brewery, general store and 40 residents, but Benton was the major consumer supplier, including Wells Fargo and the Post Office.

That Benton was a successful shopping center is indicated by the advertising in the Mammoth City Herald of April 17, 1880. James Watterson proclaimed, "general merchandise of all kinds, the best assorted stock this side of the mountains...," and R.B. Alverson advertised wines, liquors, cigars, and a billiard table.

Advertising in the Benton papers was similar. In 1879 the "Mono Messenger" made its debut but only lasted a few months, followed by the more successful "Weekly Bentonian."

There was a succession of hotels, the most famous, the Waiwera. There was a school which, in 1881, had a Christmas program featuring 26 students, according to the Bentonian. There were mining camps, "Whiskey Flat," "Camp Enterprise," etc., as well as the mines themselves. Mines with colorful names such as "Cornucopia," and "Comanche," and names honoring ladies of one kind or another, "Elmira," "Diana," and "Laura." The more mines that were claimed, the more fights over territory, and the more new diggings. At one time the hillsides were dotted with so

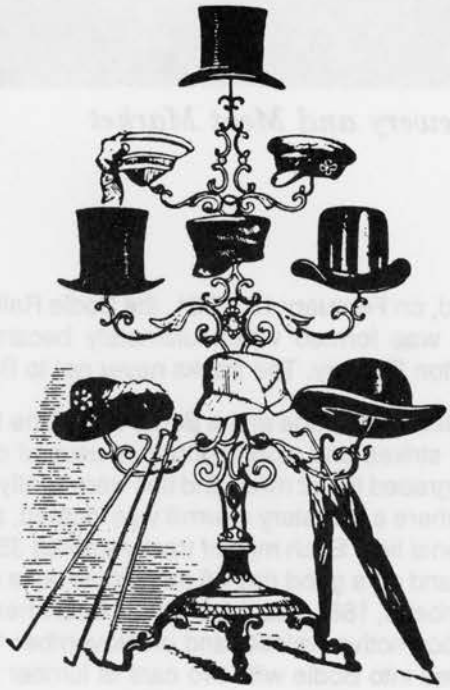
*If only wagons could talk...*

*There's no place like home...*

*Wells Fargo safe...*

many mounds of new earth, Blind Springs Hill looked as though a gigantic gopher had gone berserk.

Montgomery City, east of Benton Station, was typical of the mining camps in the 1880s. It sprang up quickly and disappeared almost as fast. Once it supported two newspapers but "shopped" at Benton. There is little left of Montgomery City — just rutted wagon tracks are visible today. A roaring flood followed the alluvial fan of the White Mountains taking what was left of the ruins.

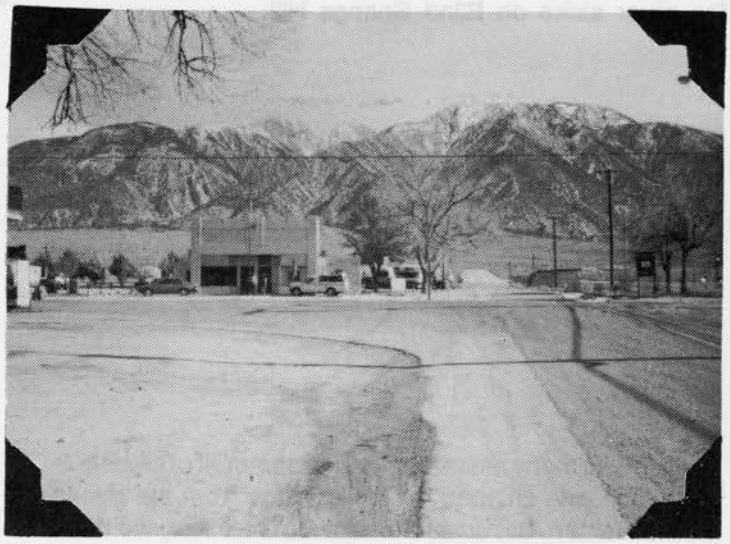


One of the old buildings in Benton which still stands as a monument to the silver mining days was built by John H. Milner. It has been in the Bramlette family for the past fifty years. Mr. W.W. Bramlette of Little Lake bought the property in 1929 and the present owners, MaBelle and Wales G. Bramlette bought it from his estate in the early 1940s. The actual building has changed very little since 1852 when it was built. The sod roof was replaced with lumber from Mono Mills and the "new" floor came from the Elsworth Taylor house in Bishop, both put in by Mr. Bramlette, Sr. There was a seven room hotel adjacent, with five more rooms available across the street. Home cooked meals were served and business boomed. At one time the building housed a general store, gas station and post office.

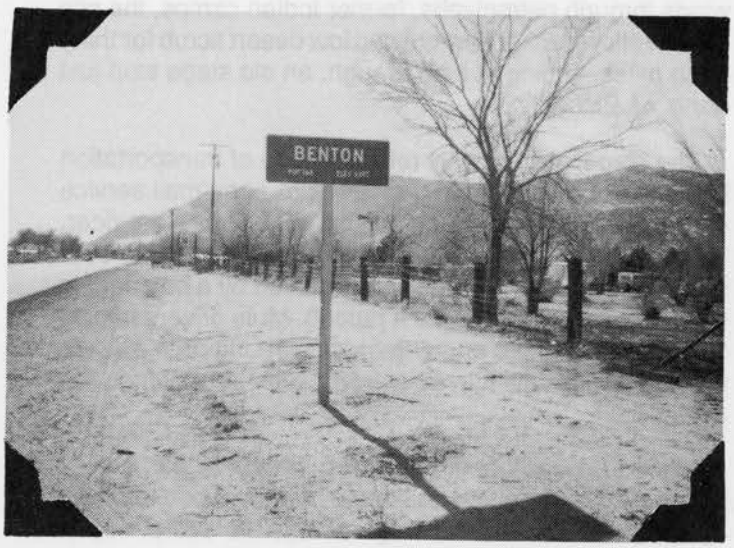
The post office moved to Benton Station when MaBelle refused to have it at Benton any longer. Since the Government classed it as a low-priority office, the name "Benton" went with it to Benton Station so that new stamps would not have to be made.

But Paramount Pictures figured their priorities a little differently and considered Benton (Hot Springs) an ideal place for filming. They sent scouts to find location sites, as well as their stars for rest and relaxation. Fred MacMurray and Andy Devine were frequent visitors in the '40s and '50s. Film stars were not the only clientele. Senators, judges and others came for the soothing effects, as well. When the hotel closed, visitors continued to search out Benton as a beautiful recreation area, coming with trailers and motorhomes. And still do.

Nor were these the only celebrities in Benton. Both George Washington (a Yosemite) and Abraham Lincoln (a white man) lived in Benton at the same time . . . few towns can claim two presidents . . . albeit in name only.



*Benton Station Post Office...*

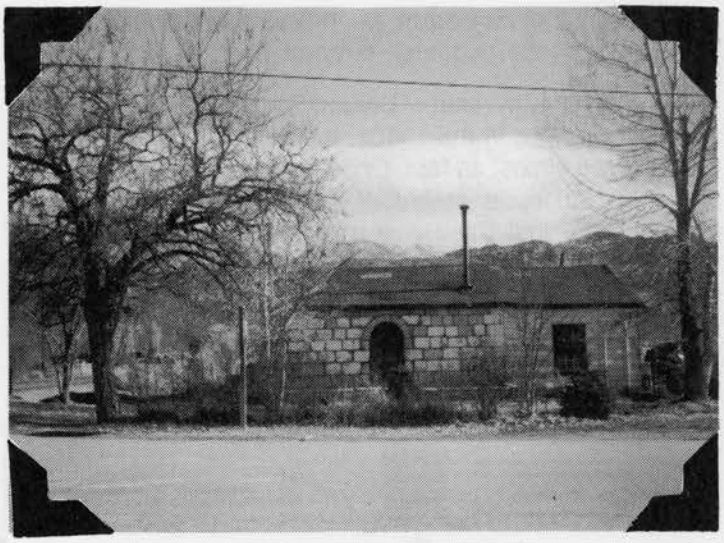



*Population 164, Elevation 5377*

Throughout the sojourn of the Bramlette family, MaBelle collected memorabilia and antiques. The one-time store became a marvelous place to see, with old books, figurines, signs, dishes, an ancient wood stove, and the Wells Fargo safe tucked away in a corner. Sorry, nothing is for sale at the present time.

Also the State Highway Department was at this Benton address for a while, but when the Bramlettes decided not to give the state a 90-year lease, it was moved to Benton Station, site of the old railroad station.

Another old house in Benton bears noting. The one on the corner of Highway 120 and Yellow Jacket Road was once a brewery, became a meat market, and ultimately a residence, housing a few other businesses in between. Many of the buildings (and ruins) remain from the days of the silver strike on Blind Springs Hill.



*Brewery and Meat Market*

There are many estimates as to the amount of silver bullion which was shipped by Wells Fargo from the mines around Benton, but since the records were lost, we have only estimates of between four and five million dollars shipped between 1862 and 1888. The coach route which carried the bullion from Benton south is still viable although at certain times it becomes a washboard-jarring ride. It winds through petroglyphs, former Indian camps, the site of the Yellow Jacket Station, and low desert scrub for thirty or so miles, ending at Fish Slough, an old stage stop just north of Bishop.

The stage was the only reliable mode of transportation into and out of Benton in the 1860s. A pony mail service connected Aurora and Benton with W.J. Gill as the rider. This service was semi-weekly and each letter had to bear the proper postage and be accompanied by a payment to the driver (usually 25 cents a parcel). Mule drivers hauled timber to the mines, and enterprising young men made a few cents each time they delivered a letter from Benton to a miner.

Miners and their families moved frequently and stages became so crowded that passage had to be booked days in advance. Nor was the stage always the safest way to travel. Destitute men, unable to find gold, turned to other means of quick income, and stages were stopped with regularity. It became increasingly clear that a railroad was needed to haul goods and passengers, and the community needed access to the world in general.

To that end, on February 18, 1881, the Bodie Railway & Lumber Co. was formed which ultimately became the Bodie & Benton Railway. The tracks never got to Benton.

Great strides were made at the Bodie end of the tracks, even though strikes and work stoppages caused delays. Ground was graded for 22 miles and ties were finally laid to Mono Mills where a two-story sawmill was located, a source for additional ties. Each mile of track required 352 rails 30 feet long and on a good day 46 men could lay a mile of track. November 8, 1881 was the first time Bodie heard the sound of a locomotive whistle, and on November 14, the first train rolled into Bodie with two cars of lumber for the Standard Mine.

Then winter came. It wasn't until May 12 the following year that grading began on the extension to Benton. Work progressed nicely, with grading completed to within 15 miles of Benton. Then, suddenly, work halted on July 10, 1882 and 125 men were laid off. There were many rumors. Some said that the Carson & Colorado Railroad, which was to have extended its line over Montgomery Pass to Benton had been held up because of the inability to obtain rails and there was no hurry to rush the trans-state system. Others blamed the C&CR for slowing progress because they did not want competition from the Mono Mills lumber business. C&CR was also in the lumber trade. Whatever the reasons, the work was never finished.

The Carson & Colorado finally got to Benton — four miles from Benton, anyway. Initial construction began at Mound House, Nevada in 1880, got to Hawthorne by April of the following year and to Candelaria by February of 1882. On January 20, 1883 trains (trough a tunnel and many switchbacks) began operation to Benton. Within a few months after this the rail arrived at Laws. Actually, the railroad didn't quite get to Benton. It's station was built four miles from Benton at what was called Benton Station.

*The treasures in the old Benton Hot Springs store*

From this turning point, the original Benton began a slow decline. With the railroad station at Benton Station, roads were built to that site, and the old coach road was used less and less. Miners on Blind Spring Hill heard of the new strike at Goldfield and moved on, and with access to the rest of the world via the train, Benton was no longer the shopping center for the area.

Old Benton was left to its rocking chair, content to ruminate the past and elaborate its history.

Tales abound. Selecting fact from fiction becomes difficult. The two tales which follow are considered fact as more than one source seems to agree on the cogent points.

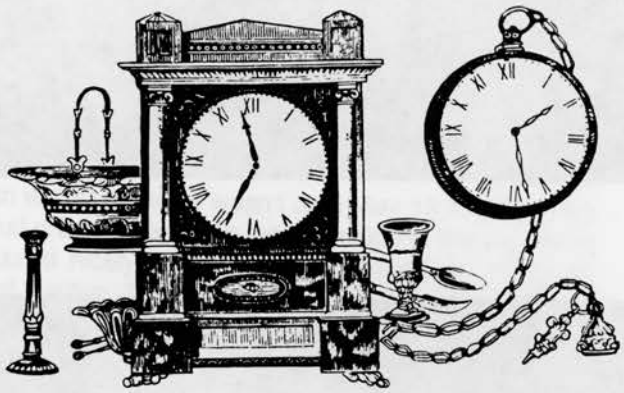
The story of E.S. ("Black") Taylor is a grisly one. He was a partner of Bill Bodey (after whom the city of Bodie was named). When Bodey froze to death, "Black" Taylor drifted on to "Hot Springs," as Benton was then called. He built himself a stone cabin about a mile northeast of Benton. The Indians in the area were angry at the Whites for disturbing their way of life and taking the land. A rebuff at Putnam's where they were denied entry, added fuel to the fire and they set out for Taylor's ranch. One of them, "Butcher Fred," told this story in his later years. He said the Indians surrounded the cabin and outnumbered Taylor. The seige lasted two days. Taylor's stone walls kept him from being hurt, although in that time he killed ten Indians. When they set fire to his sod roof, he was forced into the open and died the victim of many arrows.

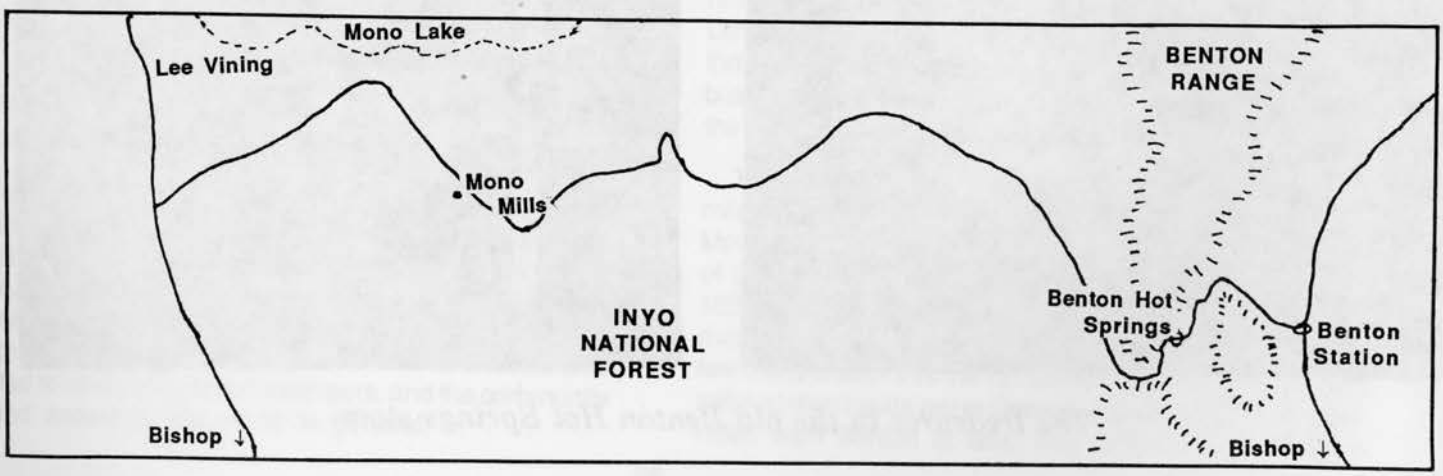
There is also the story of "Queen Dick," who lived about five miles south of Benton and built rock fences. He lived alone and some say he raised goats. His barn was shingled in flattened five-gallon cans. No one knows where he came from, but his ranch resembled a Quechua Indian village from Bolivia. As far as the eye could see there were stone walls. It was as though he lived in an imaginary village and perhaps entertained imaginary friends.

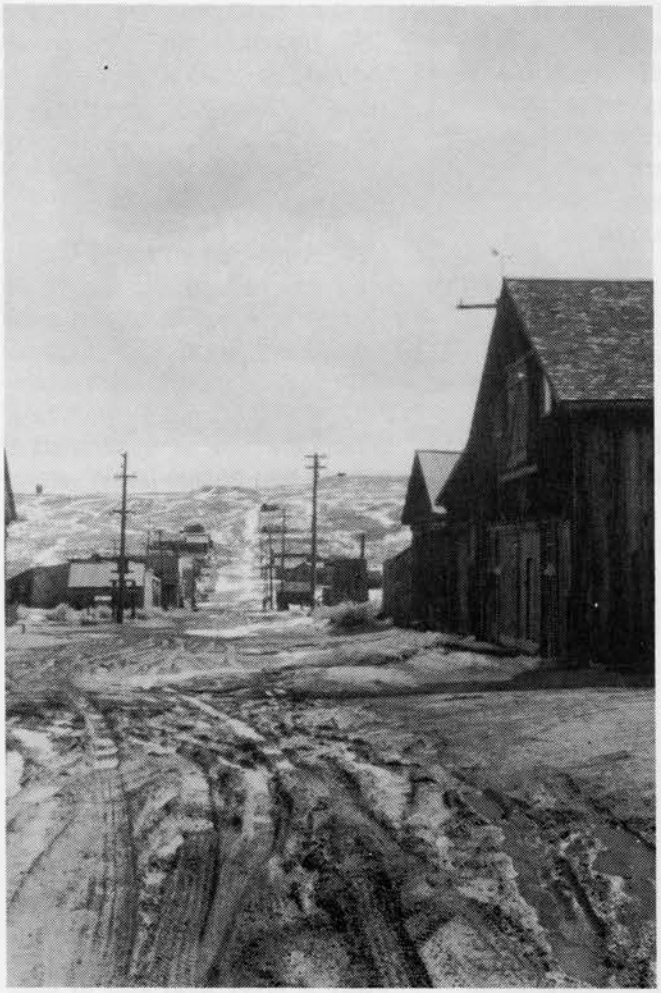
The second issue of the Album tells of another story, that of the resurrected Isador, and there are others which bring a chuckle or a gasp.

The years have not modernized Benton to any great extent. From the mule-driving days to the stages, the railroads to the air-conditioned passenger car; from the days when you could buy a meal for 50 cents to the times of prohibition when "Slim" Burke or "Fat" Campbell offered (for a price) to quench your thirst with some bootleg whiskey; through floods and earthquakes; it remains the same peaceful place where the Wellington Stage rolled in at 6 o'clock with passengers from Aurora expectant of home cooking, a hot bath and a good night's sleep.

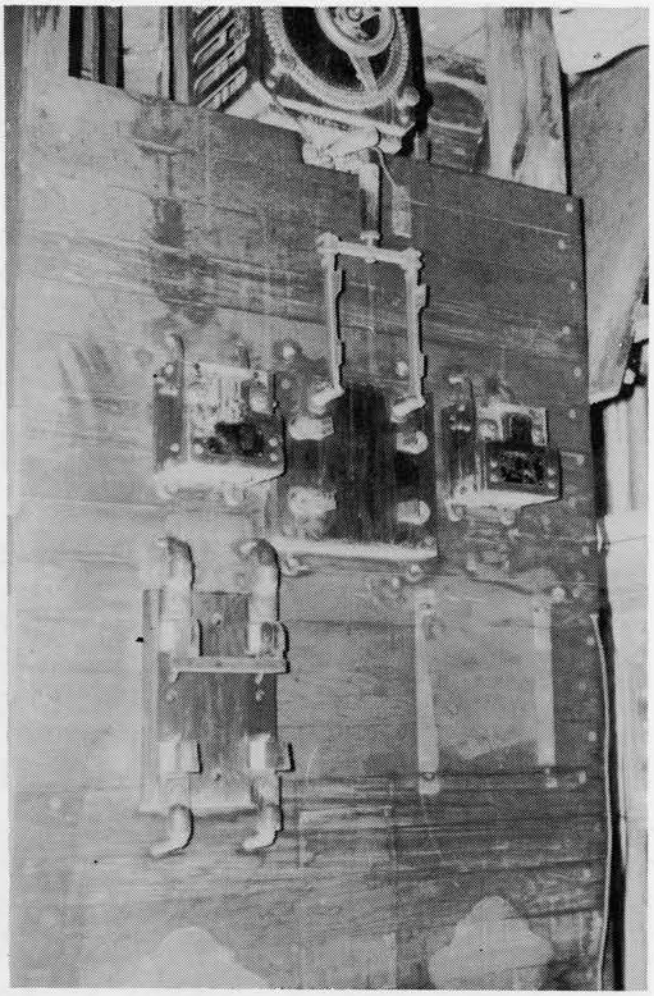
*AUTHOR'S NOTE: Thanks to Dorothy Mathieu & MaBelle Bramlette for their time and graciousness.*







*Green Street, Bodie, showing power poles and tree-less hills.*



*Original control panels inside Standard Mill. Shipped to Bodie in two pieces.*

# Bodie Electrifies the World

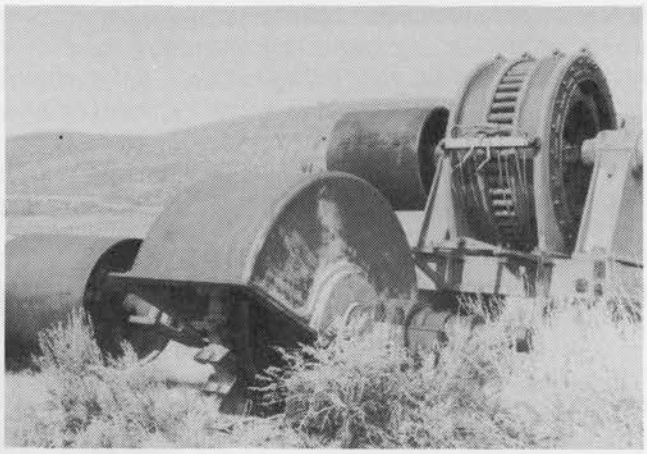
by Barbara Moore

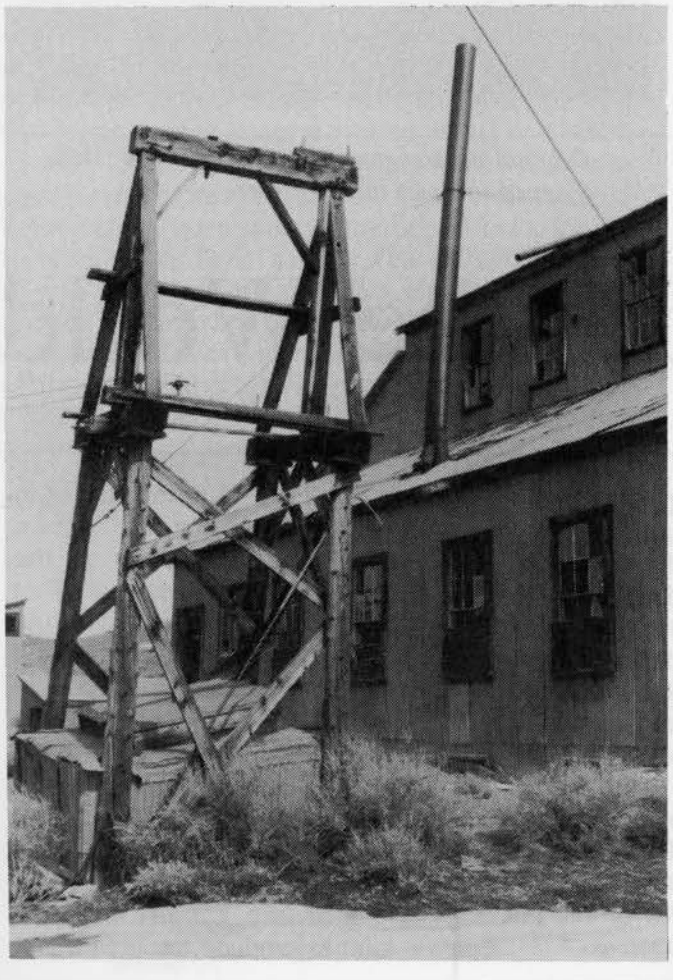
What visitor to the ghost town of Bodie doesn't peek into the houses and exclaim in wonder, "they had electricity!" That is, if the visitor is over fifty. Younger people take electric lights, refrigerators, heat, wall switches and electric plugs in stride. Few realize the use of electricity in homes is a relatively recent invention, and reaching for that convenient switch wasn't always the case.

The over-fifty group can remember the frantic efforts of government during the 1930s when, under the name of Rural Electrification Administration, poles were set and wires strung all across the country to electrify America. Although this was a rural movement to replace windmills and waterwheels as sources of energy, even tremendous numbers of homes in cities hadn't been wired up at the time. Today, in some turn-of-the-century relics, gas fixtures are still evident, giving us a mirror into the almost forgotten past.

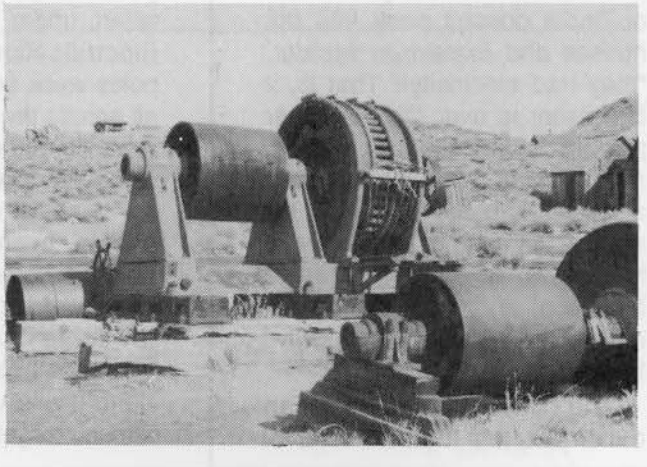
But Bodie? A town that died in the '30s had electricity? A town that was almost as far off the beaten path as you can get? That seems incredulous! But it is true. Bodie not only had electricity, it was the first place in the whole world to use power brought in over long-distance lines.

The reasons are two-fold. One, a far-sighted man. The other, Bodie's monumental need for wood, not only to build and heat houses, but just as important, to produce the steam that





*Upper left: Original generatar, thought to have been hauled from the Green Creek dynamo plant (in meadow display).*
*Lower left: Standard Mill building.*
*Above: Water powered generator in background. Pelton water wheel in foreground (in meadow display).*
*Below: Pelton water wheel with water powered generator used prior to electrification (in meadow display).*
*Opposite: Steam boilers used before electrification (in meadow display). Methodist Church background.*



powered the monstrous milling machinery. The Standard Mill alone used over 45 cords of wood a day at a cost of over $1500 per month.

Total wood consumption in Bodie was close to 5,000,000 board feet of lumber per year. Because the surrounding treeless hills provided nothing but scraggly sage brush, hauling the wood from distant Jeffrey pine and pinyon forests contributed substantially to the staggering costs. Wood cutting and hauling made many men wealthier than the stockholders of the mines and eventually led to the building of a railroad with the sole purpose of shipping wood to Bodie.

James Cain, a major stockholder of the Standard Mine at that time, was foresighted, innovative and persuasive, never afraid to experiment against odds and criticism. With its mines declining in production and the population doing likewise, going from a meteoric rise in one year from 3500 to 10,000 in 1880, and dropping to less than 1500 in 1887, Bodie needed some adrenalin to survive. James Cain provided it with two projects, both of which influenced the entire world and postponed Bodie's demise for several years.

One, in 1894, was the perfection of the cyanide process discovered a few years earlier in Australia. Cain, with associates, bought nearly all the tailings in and around Bodie and was able to prove there was money to be made by re-working the thousands of tons of ore in the waste dumps. The cyanide process revitalized Bodie for another ten years and is still an important part of the gold mining process.

However, two years earlier in 1892, the men in Bodie pioneered an event which would revolutionize the way the people of the world lived and worked, immortalizing Bodie in the annals of history.

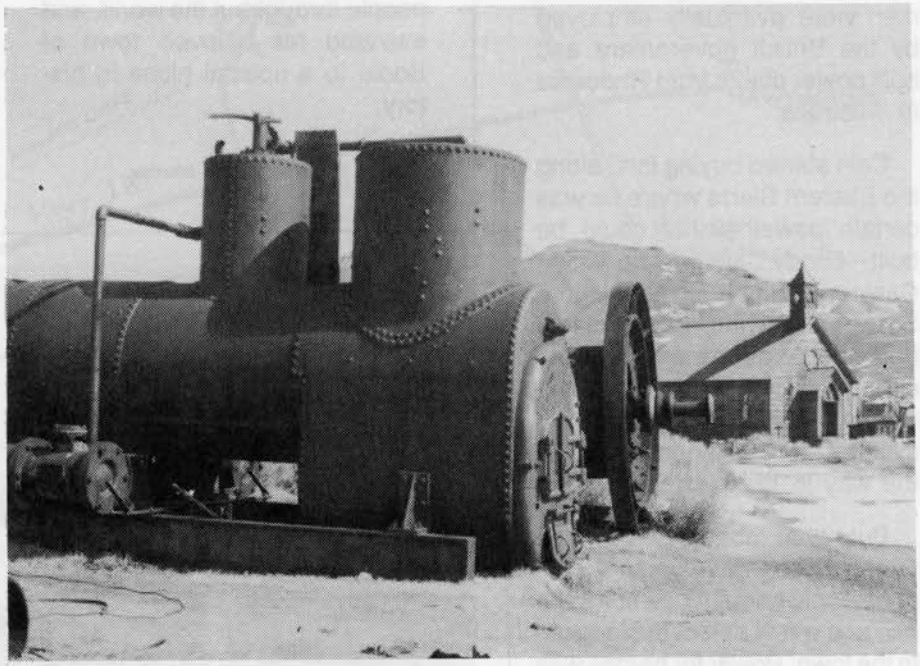
The superintendent of the Standard Consolidated Mining Company, Thomas H. Legett*, was quite certain that power could be transmitted over wires and used many miles from its source. Reluctant stockholders had to be convinced that this revolutionary idea was possible, but one early believer was none other than James Cain, the largest stockholder of the mining company.

Doubters dubbed the experiment as Legett's and Cain's folly, since the long-distance transmittal of power had never been tried before. Up to this time hydroelectric power was used only at its source. So little was known about transporting electricity that the engineers were instructed not to have any curves or angles in the line for fear the electricity would jump off and disappear into space if the line wasn't straight.

Construction began in the spring of 1892 at Green Creek, eight miles south of Bridgeport, and thirteen miles from Bodie. The creek was dammed to create a sufficient head of water. The water, dropping 350 vertical feet from Green Creek, went into four twenty-one inch Pelton waterwheels which produced a total of 250 horsepower. This was connected to a Westinghouse alternating dynamo that generated current at 3500 volts.

Later it was determined that the capacity of the original equipment was inadequate, and a new generating plant was built at Green Creek that produced 350 horsepower and 6600 volts of current in three phases. The three-wire alternating current replaced the old direct current two-wire line.

During the construction of the power plant mill operations ceased while it was equipped with agitators, motors, and generators to enable the changeover from steam to electric power. This brought howls of protest from stockholders who objected to the expense, not only of the machinery, but the need for the mill to be shut down.



After many delays caused by accidents and slow delivery of machinery, at 12 noon in October, 1893 the switches were thrown, and slowly the lights came on. The wheels of the small motors began to turn, then the larger ones hummed a steady tune. Power had arrived!

The laughter of ridicule turned to laughter of praise. The $30,000 cost of building the power plant was made up in less than two years as wood costs shrank to nothing. The men who engineered the project were hosted the world over. Legett and his men were eventually employed by the British government and built power plants from Rhodesia to Australia.

Cain started buying land along the Eastern Sierra where he was certain power plants could be built—Lundy Canyon, Lee Vining Canyon, and at Rush Creek near Silver Lake where power plants built shortly after the turn of the century are now part of the Southern California Edison grid system that furnishes power all the way to the Mexican border.

But what about Bodie. The Green Creek development produced only enough power for the mill and a few select businesses in the town. Power for homes was still a few years into the future.

In 1910 a second plant was built at Jordon, at the foot of Copper Mountain, using water from Mill Creek in Lundy Canyon with a 1500' fall to the power house below. Christmas in 1910 was a jolly day when the lights came on in Bodie. Sadly, they didn't stay on long. A massive avalanche thundered down Copper Mountain in March 1911, wiping out the Jordon plant, killing seven persons, and knocking out power in Bodie.

The Jordon plant was rebuilt in a more protected area and the other sites that Cain bought—Lee Vining and Rush Creek—were sold to the Pacific Electric Power Company, the predecessor of Southern California Edison Company.

The rush to produce this new marvel caused stock of the Pacific Electric Power Company to skyrocket from $4.00 per share to $125.00 in just a few years, making James Cain a very wealthy man.

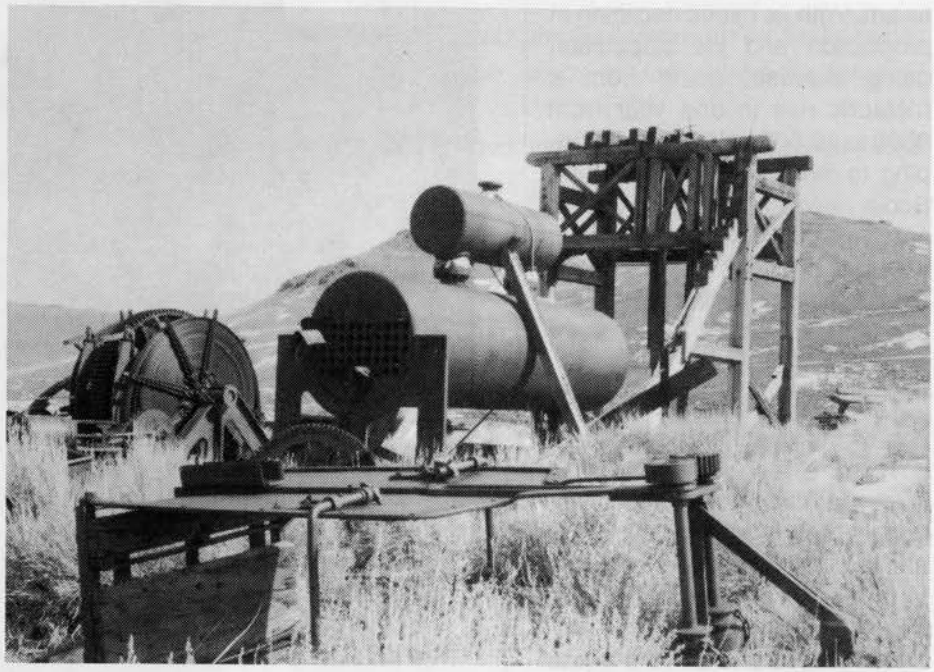
More important than the money he made with his uncanny foresight was the knowledge that his courage changed the lives of people throughout the world, and elevated his beloved town of Bodie to a special niche in history.

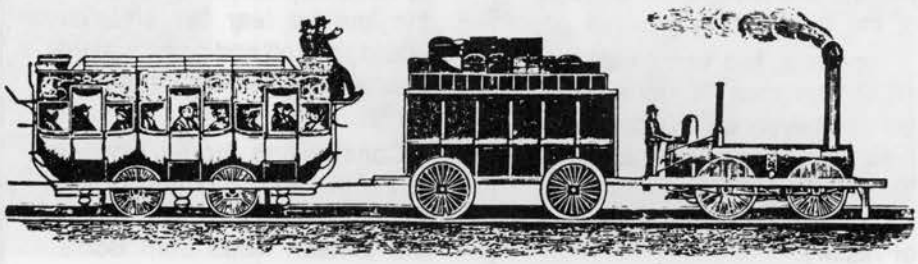
**Spelled Leggett in some sources.*

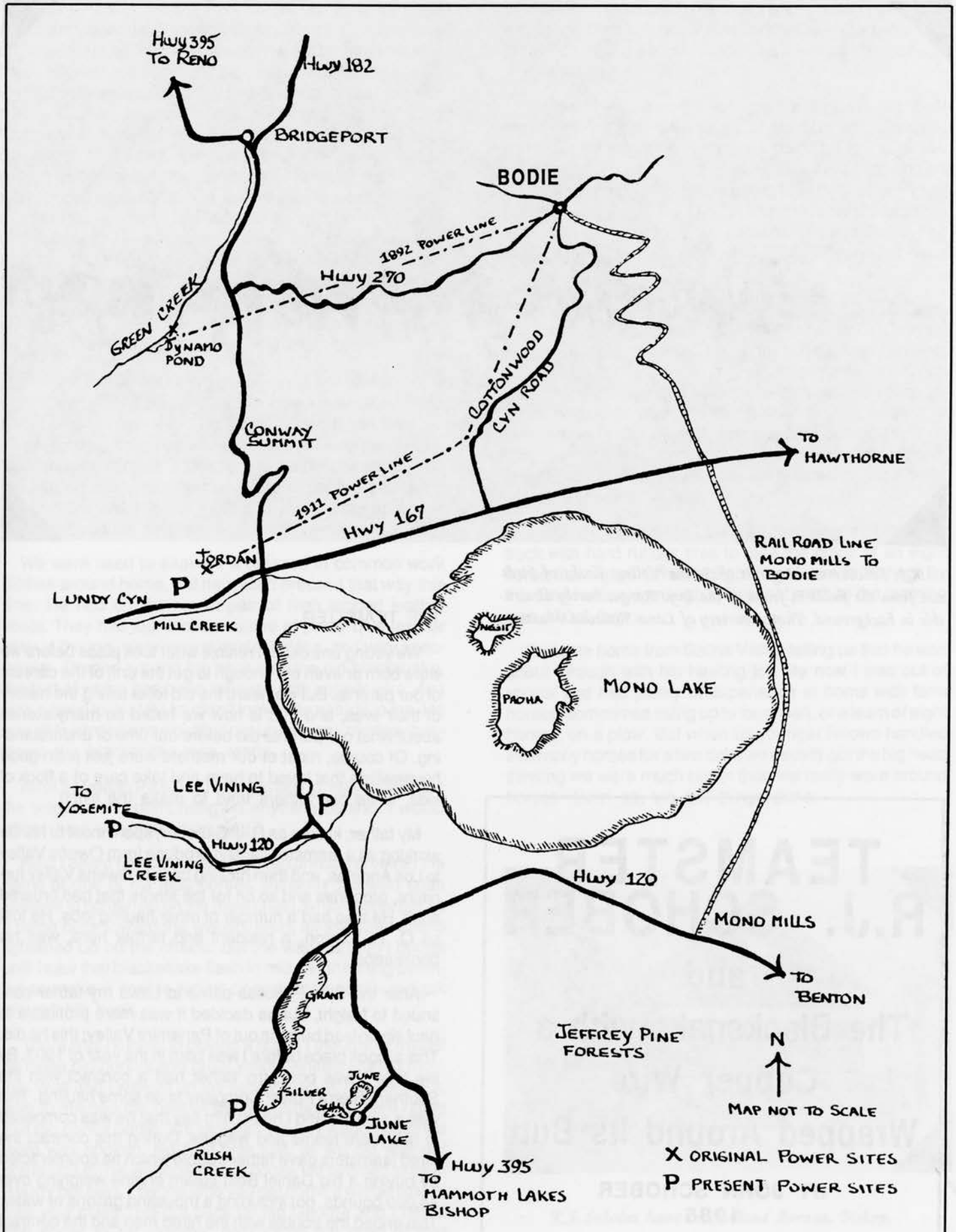
*Author's Note:*

*What is particularly interesting about this is that I am building a house 5 miles from Bodie and will have to generate my own power using solar cells, batteries, and generators. Except for the advanced technology I might as well be back in the days prior to 1892.*


The Ghost Town of Bodie, California State Park – Russ & Anne Johnson
Mining Camp Days – Billeb
The Story of Bodie – Ella M. Cain
Bodie 1859-1900 – Frank S. Werdetz
The Story of Early Mono County – Ella M. Cain
Brad Sturdivant, Bodie State Park Ranger




Hwy 395
To Reno
Hwy 182
BRIDGEPORT
BODIE
1892 Power Line
Hwy 270
Green Creek
Dynamo
Pond
Cotton Wood
Cyn Road
Conway
Summit
1911 Power Line
Hwy 167
To
Hawthorne
Rail Road Line
Mono Mills To
Bodie
Jordan
P
Lundy Cyn
Mill Creek
Negit
Paoha
Mono Lake
To
Yosemite
Lee Vining
P
P
Hwy 120
Lee Vining
Creek
Hwy 120
Mono Mills
To
Benton
Grant
Jeffrey Pine
Forests
N
June
Silver
Gull
P
June
Lake
Map not to Scale
Rush
Creek
Hwy 395
To
Mammoth Lakes
Bishop
X Original Power Sites
P Present Power Sites

*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."

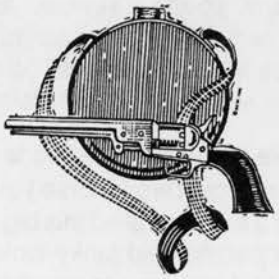
After loading a lot of hay and stuff, Pa checked his old grub box to be sure he had plenty of potatoes, bacon and onions, and also flour and baking powder. He knew how much I could eat, and that was a lot. His team bed, as he called it, was a big bed roll covered with canvas, and it was big enough to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

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.



*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 Laws Railroad Museum. Don Calkins photo.*

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 swampers 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 outselves 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.

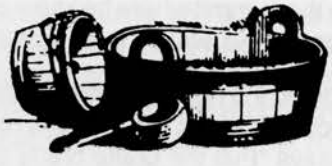
Our day's work was done. I took care of the stock while Pa prepared a big meal. Before he got his fire going he came out where I was working with the horses to make sure I was doing it right, but he let on he came out to warn me against picking things up: "There are plenty of rattlesnakes under that 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.

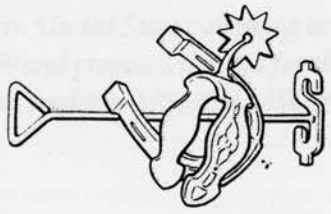
I gathered up the halters and went back. Pa was happy as a lark and said "I hope you didn't skin the mules up too bad with the blacksnake because Ned wouldn't like to see them come back all skinned up."

I told him how quick they had made their getaway before I could pick up the whip. He chuckled and said "Jeerusalem 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 snowfall. 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.

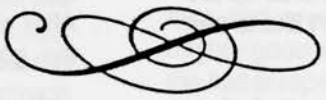
I claimed the blacksnake for myself and hung it close to a picture of Pa and his big team. But the blacksnake caused too much attention and there was always someone wanting to try it out. I knew if someone tried to play with it, not nowing how to really use it, they would bust it up in no time; and that 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

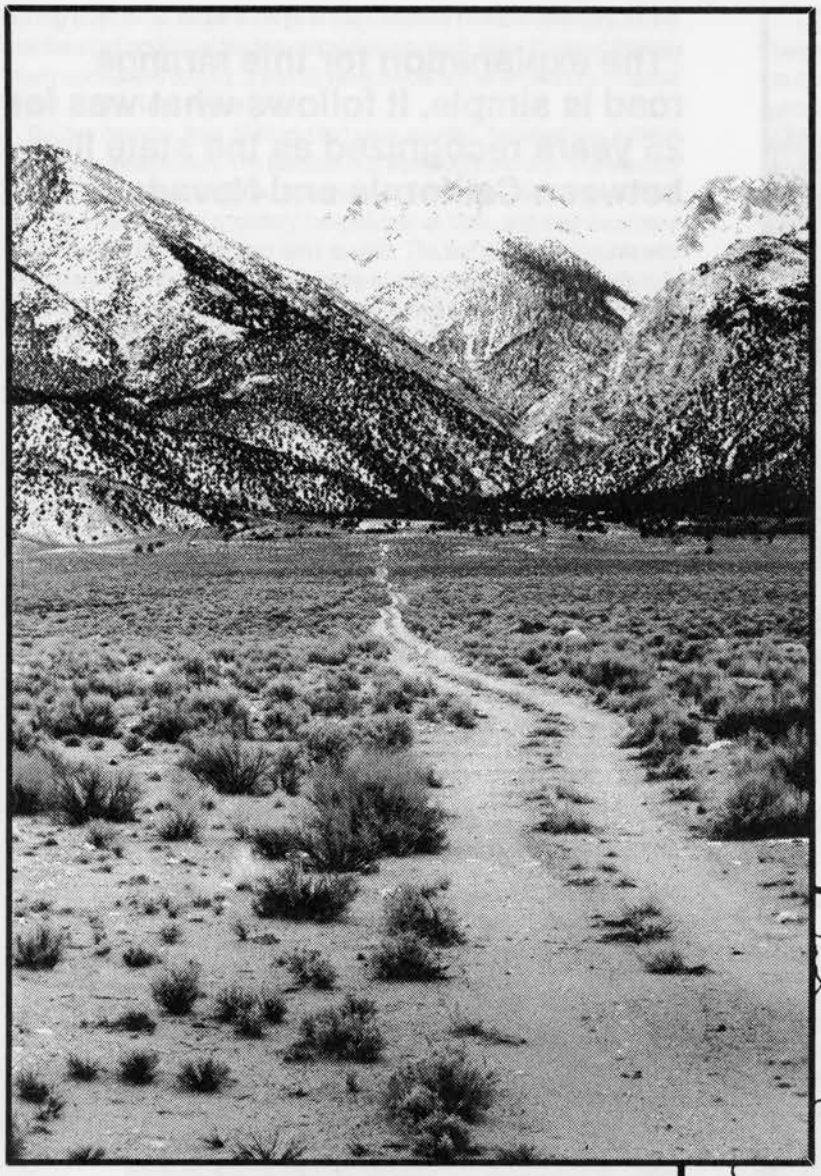
could put a new popper on the blacksnake. I had no luck. I had seen Pa do this a few times, so I figured I was next best to try and do the job, making the blacksnake look the same as it was. My job of fixing won't stay long if used. To keep it from being destroyed I will give it to the Laws Museum.

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 horsemen 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 spatting 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.

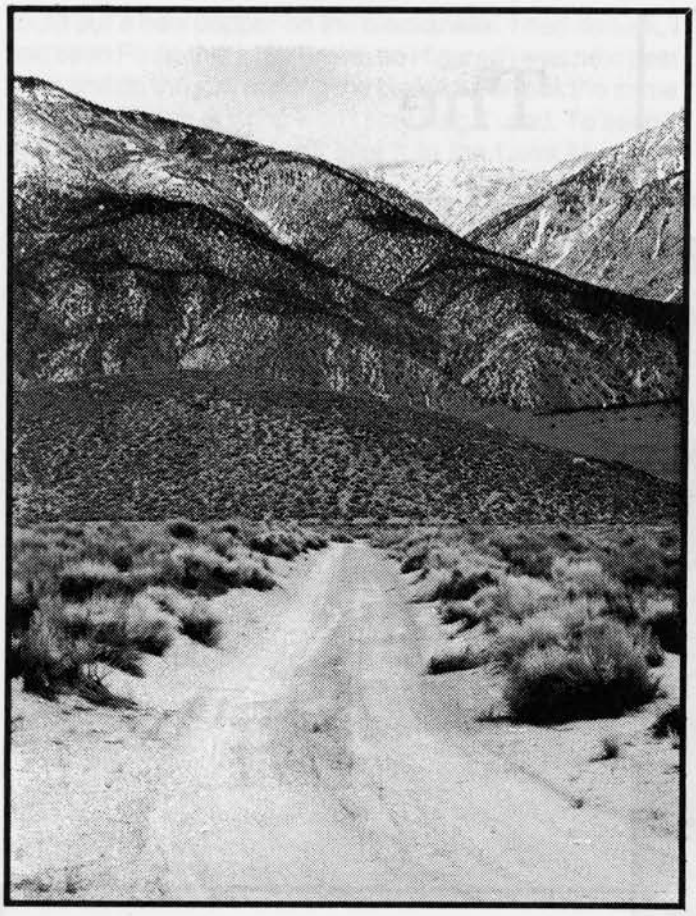




# The Elusive California Nevada Border

by Thomas M. Little, Ph.D.


*Western United States, showing actual boundaries of 1850 and proposed changes for the California Nevada border in 1853 and 1856.*



## "The explanation for this strange road is simple. It follows what was for 25 years recognized as the state line between California and Nevada"

Traveling up Highway 6 from Bishop to Montgomery Pass, you will pass a sign plainly indicating that you are crossing the state line between California and Nevada. If you continue another half mile you will see a dirt road on the right, running in a perfectly straight line for two miles to the base of the White Mountains. This may seem strange, since desert roads seldom follow a straight line for this distance. Instead they tend to follow an easy route, avoiding deep gulleys and other natural obstacles.

The explanation for this strange road is simple. It follows what was for 25 years recognized as the state line, known as the Von Schmidt line. Crossing two state lines is not at all unusual, as we shall see. As a matter of fact, on the north shore of Lake Tahoe there are six different lines that have been claimed as the correct California-Nevada border.

The story of this border is a fascinating account of political intrigue and even religious conflicts. Both the Mexican War and the Civil War enter into the story. Most of all, however, it is a story of some remarkable men, the surveyors who labored hard to locate the correct border. These men had to be both brilliant scholars and sturdy outdoorsmen. They had to be experts in geometry, plain and spherical trigonometry, astronomy and physics. They had to be adept at trail blazing and surviving in the wild. Besides possessing these qualities they had to contend with arrogant academics and bungling bureaucrats on one side and rugged mountains and barren deserts on the other. As remarkable as these men were, they were seldom given much recognition by historians. Sometimes one would be referred to simply as "a surveyor," as though he was just a lackey, performing a menial task.

To understand the events we need to go back into the history of this long border, the longest border between two states in the country, about 620 miles in length. While our main interest is in the portions of the border touching Inyo, Mono and Alpine counties, the events along the whole line were interwoven and had a bearing on our area.

**1714 British Government offered prize for anyone finding way to find longitude at sea.**

**1735 Prize awarded to John Harrison who invented chronometer.**

**1818 US-Mex treaty established 42nd parallel as Ore-Cal border.**

**1844 First telegraph line in U.S. NY to Washington.**

**Spring of 1846 Population of California — 10,000.**

**Feb. 2, 1848 Treaty with Mexico giving up all claim to New Mexico and Upper California.**

**End of 1848 Population of California — 26,000.**

**Mar. 18, 1849 Brigham Young announced the formation of State of Deseret which included Nevada.**

**Spring of 1849 General Riley became de facto governor of California.**

**June 1849 H.S. Beattie, one of traders sent out by B. Young built stockade and corral at base of Sierra, first called Mormon Station and later Genoa.**

**Aug. 1849 Population of California — 50,000.**

**Sept. 1, 1849 Constitutional Convention met in Monterey.**

**1850 Fifty telegraph lines in U.S. stretching from coast to coast.**

**Sept. 9, 1850 California admitted as state and territory of Utah formed.**

**1851 Surveyor of General of California requested to survey border in vicinity of Carson Valley.**

**1852 Surveyor General of California was making survey of northern end of line.**

**1852 It was determined that Carson Valley was in Nevada.**

**1852 Sketch made of Colo. River terminus by "government engineer" (see 1855).**

In 1819 a treaty was signed between the United States and Mexico making the 42nd parallel the dividing line between U.S. territory in the north and Spanish territory in the south. This is important because it was this line that was the

starting point for all future surveys of the California-Nevada boundary. At the time the exact position of the line seemed unimportant, since it passed through mostly uninhabited country. It was 35 years before any attempt to run an actual survey of the line was made.

The two decades from 1848 to 1868 were eventful, turbulent and exciting years in American history. The Mexican War was fought and won. The Mormon Rebellion took place. Gold was discovered in California. California became a state. Nevada became a territory independent of Utah, and later became a state. The Civil War lasted from 1861 to 1865. The first transatlantic cable was completed. All of these events and many of more local interest took place in these busy times and affected the establishment of the California-Nevada line.

The conclusion of the Mexican war resulted in Mexico ceding "Upper" California to the United States on February 2, 1848. Shortly after this, gold was discovered in California and a population explosion resulted. By the end of 1848 the population, which had been only 10,000 two years before, had increased to 26,000. In less than a year it increased to 50,000. Such fast moving events required fast moving political activity.

In the spring of 1849 General Riley assumed governorship of California and called a constitutional convention which convened in Monterey on September 1, 1849 with 28 delegates in attendance. Riley had arbitrarily divided the territory into districts, and allotted what he considered a fair number of delegates from each district.

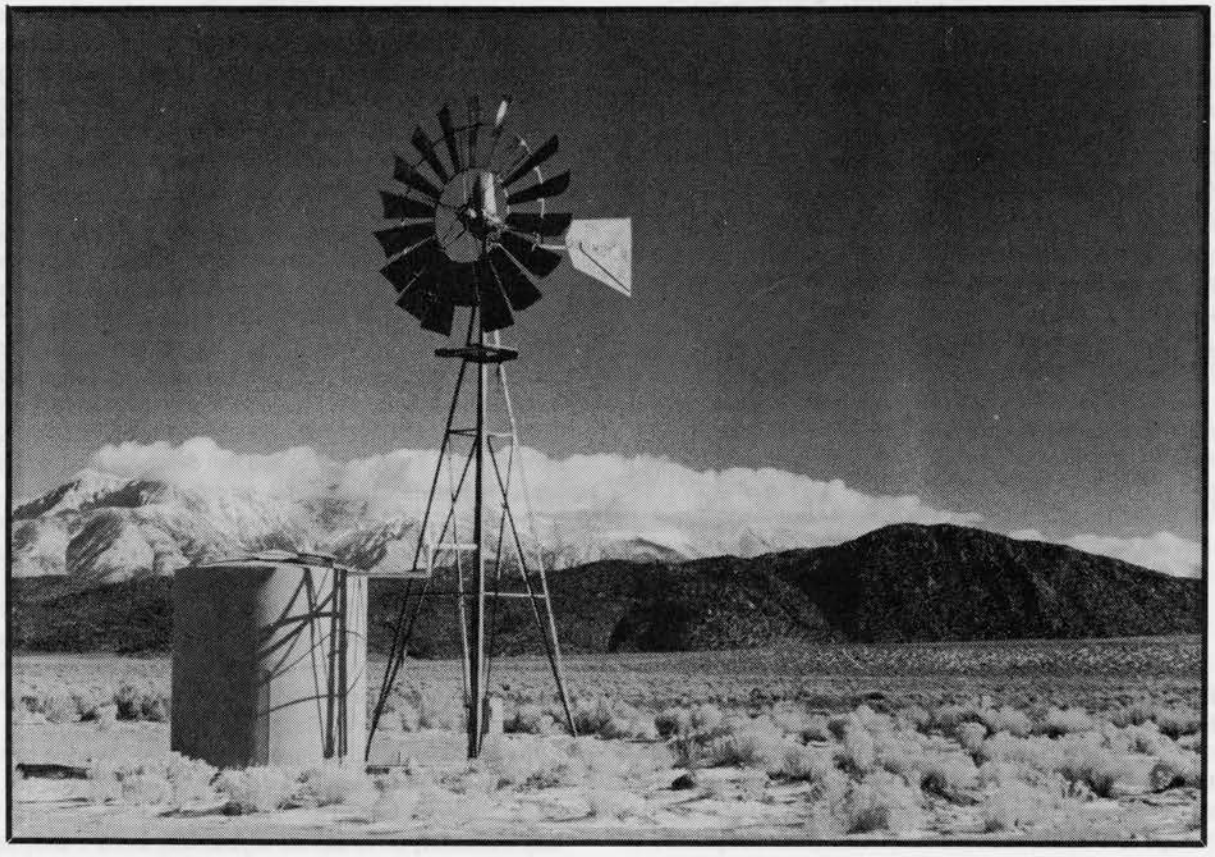
One can imagine some of the dissention that resulted. Riley was apparently an astute politician, for he not only realized the necessity for quick and decisive action, but he made provision for the dissidents to be heard. In his instructions to each district he indicated that if they were unhappy with their allotment, they could appeal to the other delegates. After considerable horse trading among districts, a delegation of 73 members was approved, but only 48 delegates finally attended.

The first order of business was to decide whether California should try to become a state or a territory. This question was quickly resolved by a vote of 28 to 8 for statehood. The problem that caused the most controversy in the convention was the location of the eastern boundary. Some favored the crest of the Sierras. Others wanted a much larger area to include all of the land ceded by Mexico. This would take in all of what is now Utah and Nevada. The opponents of this idea argued that such a state would be too large and unwieldy. Furthermore, they said, if at some further time the federal government would decide to divide the state into two or more smaller states, such division might not be to the liking of Californians.

A compromise was finally reached by taking the easy solution. They drew two straight lines on the map, one following the 120th meridian from the Oregon border to the 39th parallel, the other from this point to the intersection of the 35th parallel and the center of the Colorado River. This is the boundary today, but it did not solve all of the border problems. Instead it caused more problems than it solved, as is usually the case when politicians draw borders on a map with no knowledge of the geography of the region, nor regard for the desires of the citizens affected.

In the same year Brigham Young was trying to extend the influence of the Mormons to the west. On March 18, 1849 he announced the formation of the State of Deseret. In June he sent a trader, H.S. Beattie, to build a stockade and corral near the extreme western border of the territory. This was first known as Mormon Station and later as Genoa. The resulting influx of Mormons soon created tension among the settlers, with Mormons and "Gentiles" vying for control of the region.

On September 9, 1850 California was granted statehood by Congress. There began to be questions all along the line regarding the exact location of the boundary. An unknown "government engineer" drew a sketch of the Colorado River at the southern end of the border. The Surveyor General of California



*About five miles north of Benton, CA, looking eastward...toward the border?*

made a preliminary survey of the northern end of the line. The most critical area was Carson Valley because this was productive agricultural land, it was relatively more heavily settled than the rest of the line, and it was on important trade routes across the country. Late in 1851 the Surveyor General of California was requested to survey the line around Carson Valley. It was finally determined in 1852 that this whole valley was in Nevada.

In 1853 people in Carson Valley petitioned the California legislature for annexation and even proposed a new state line running straight from the northeast corner described in the California constitution to the terminus on the Colorado River. Acceptance of this line would have included Reno, Carson City,

**1853 People of Carson Valley petitioned California for annexation.**

**1853 Border straight from Oregon Corner to Colorado River advocated.**

**Jan. 1854 Carson Valley obtained permission from Utah Territorial Legislature to set up a county government.**

**1854 California legislature appropriated $3500 for survey of 42nd parallel.**

**1854 T.P. Robinson surveyed 41 miles of 42nd parallel line from pacific.**

**1855 "A surveyor" for California investigated border in Carson Valley.**

**1855 Sketch of 1852 used to determine longitude of southern terminus.**

**1856 A different line was proposed to include Carson Valley in California to follow the 117.30 meridian down to the diagonal line.**

**1857 Carson Valley lost its self government and was attached to Salt Lake City.**

**1857 Residents of Genoa and Carson Valley led by Isaac Roop of Susanville, met in Genoa and drew up constitution for "Territory of Nevada" and asked Congress to recognize their independence. Plea ignored.**

**Sept. 15, 1859 Roop elected governor of the unofficial Nevada Territory.**

**Dec. 15, 1859 Roop called rump legislature and continued as governor.**

**1860 Higley line at Lake Tahoe.**

**1860-61 US Government survey of 120th meridian established point on Lake Tahoe.**

Hawthorne and Tonopah in California. No action was taken on these proposals. However, in January 1854 Carson Valley received permission from the Utah Territorial Legislature to set up a county government.

Finally in 1854, thirty-five years after the 42nd parallel had been declared the border between California and Oregon, it was decided to run a survey of this critical line. The impetus for this decision was the question of who had jurisdiction over the Althouse and Sailor Mining Camp. The California Legislature appropriated $3,500 to conduct a survey of the line from the Pacific to Pilot Knob, a distance of 82 miles. Nine surveyors and engineers turned down the job because of the low price. Finally Mr. T.P. Robinson, county surveyor of Klamath County, accepted the job only after the clause " . . . or so much of it as the appropriation of $3,500 will allow" was inserted in the contract. How could he lose?

Robinson used an unusual method for running the line of the 42nd parallel. He laid out a great circle line from the initial point and then corrected back to the parallel. There were doubts about the accuracy of his survey because of suspected inaccuracies in the distances he measured. From his notes it would appear that he ran the line only about 41 miles instead of the 54 he reported. Thus he covered only about half the distance to the Northeast corner of California. At least the survey settled the question of who had jurisdiction over the "Althouse and Sailor Diggins" mining camp.

In 1855 there were piecemeal attempts to survey parts of the border. A surveyor for California investigated the border in Carson Valley, and an 1852 sketch was used to mark the Colorado River corner.

In 1856 another attempt was made to change the border so that Carson Valley would be included in California. Instead of following the 120th meridian it was proposed that the line be shifted eastward two and a half degrees. This would have included Reno, Carson City and Hawthorne but not Tonopah. This effort also failed.

By 1857 the Mormons felt that they were gaining control over all of Utah Territory, so they rescinded the right of self government they had granted to Carson Valley two years before. The residents of Genoa, Carson Valley and Susanville were indignant over this action, so Isaac Roop of Susanville called them together in Genoa where they drew up a constitution for the "Territory of Nevada." They asked Congress to recognize their independence, but the plea was ignored.

**This encouraged the Mormons to launch an uprising against the U.S. Army in September of 1857. After a few minor skirmishes, peace was made in May 1858 with some concessions on both sides.**

In the five year period from 1859 to 1863 there were two towns near the as yet unsurveyed line which underwent considerable turmoil due to the uncertainty of their position. The first of these was Susanville. We have already seen how Isaac Roop led an unsuccessful attempt to form a "Territory of Nevada" in the region including Susanville, Carson Valley and Genoa.

Roop, known for his persistance but not for his modesty, changed the name of Lake County to Roop County and claimed a portion of Plumas County as Nevada land. Susanville was made the County seat and a special term of the First District Court of Nevada was authorized for January 1863.

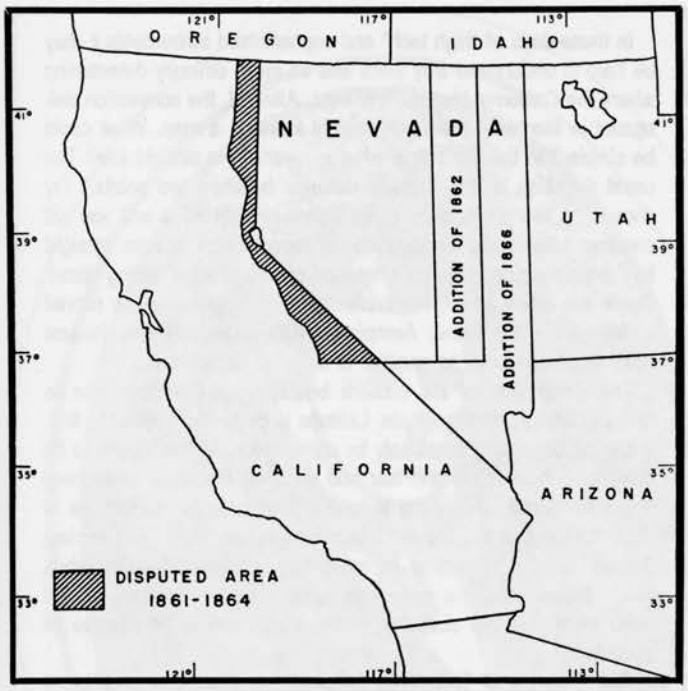
After the first session of this court the Roop County Probate Judge issued an injunction against the Plumas County Justice of Peace restraining him from holding court in the disputed portion of Roop County. The Justice ignored the order and was fined $100.00, imprisoned and then released on parole. A Plumas County judge then issued an injunction against both the Roop County judge and sheriff, and Roop County countered with an injunction against the Plumas County Sheriff. The Plumas County sheriff then arrested the Roop County sheriff and the latter escaped and gathered an armed band in Susanville. The Plumas County sheriff organized a posse. There was apparently no bloodshed and it was finally agreed that Susanville (and Roop's farm) were within the boundary of California as defined in the California constitution.

The portion of Roop County inside of California became part of Plumas County, the balance incorporated into Washoe County. Poor Isaac Roop! His one possibility of immortality was to have his name attached to a county such as Ormsby, Storey and Nye, but even that honor eluded him.

Actually the border conflict in the vicinity of Susanville may not be settled yet. Every few years the citizens in that area attempt by ballot or court action to be annexed into Nevada. So far they have been unsuccessful, but if they ever succeed perhaps the name "Roop" will be resurrected.

The other town which became involved in the state line controversy was Aurora. This situation was just the reverse of the Susanville one. In this case California claimed a region which was really east of the true line. On March 2, 1861 the Territory of Nevada was organized by an Act of Congress. California wasted no time in claiming Aurora, and on March 24 established Mono County with the county seat in that town.

One of President Lincoln's first acts after his inauguration on March 4 was to appoint James W. Nye, a New York politician, governor of the new territory.




*Historical diagram of Nevada. The 'Sierra Crest' boundary is shown approximately as it was interpreted by the DeGroot Map of Nevada Territory, 1861, in Bancroft Library, University of California.*

**March 2, 1861 Territory of Nevada organized by act of Congress.**

**March 1861 James W. Nye of New York appointed Governor of Nevada Territory.**

**March 24, 1861 California established Mono County with county seat at Aurora.**

**July, 1861 Gov. Nye visited Aurora, convinced it was in Nevada.**

**1861 New government of Nevada appointed a Surveyor General to survey parts of Carson valley and settled areas near border.**

**1861 California legislature petitioned to accept "Sierra Crest Boundary" — refused.**

**1861 Lieutenant Ives determined position of southern terminus at Colorado River.**

**March 21, 1862 Gov. Nye appeared before California Assembly to argue for "Sierra Crest Boundary."**

**Sept. 3, 1862 Mono County officials elected in Aurora.**

Nye travelled by sea to California, and soon after his arrival in Carson City he visited Aurora in June and was convinced that it was in Nevada. Being an astute politician, and aware of the bitterness surrounding the Susanville controversy, he decided to be patient and await the outcome of a survey to settle the argument.

In September of 1862 Mono County officials were elected in Aurora. In September 1863 another election was held, but this time, to be on the safe side, voters were given two ballots, one for Esmeralda County, Nevada and the other for Mono County, California. Just after the election a 102 mile section of the oblique line from Lake Tahoe was completed, and Aurora was definitely proven to be in Nevada. The county seat of Mono County was moved to Bridgeport.

The citizens of Aurora were doubtless pleased to find themselves in a different state from their neighbors to the west, the town of Bodie, which they considered a den of iniquity. The story is told about the editor of the Aurora paper who told of a little girl whose parents were planning to move to Bodie. She finished her prayers at night by saying, "Goodbye God, we're going to Bodie." The Bodie editor countered by maintaining that the punctuation of the girl's prayer had been incorrect. What she really said was, "Good, by God! We're going to Bodie!"

It was many years before the bothersome 120th meridian line was firmly established. Many people on the east side of the Sierras were unhappy about the artificial boundary and preferred a more natural one. In 1861 the California legislature was petitioned by Nevada to accept the "Sierra Crest" line. The petition was denied. On March 21, 1852 Governor Nye appeared before the California Assembly to argue the case. Nye was known as a logical, eloquent and persuasive orator. He presented his case with glowing phrases and intelligent arguments. The members of the assembly listened attentively, then informed him that nothing could be done since the boundary line was spelled out in the constitution.

Nye pointed out that the constitution could be ammended, but was told this would take too long. He finally threatened to take the case to the U.S. Supreme Court, but realized this course would stand no chance since Nevada was just a Territory and besides California had much more population and political power. Had the Sierra Crest line been accepted the Owens Valley would have been in Nevada and this would have had a profound effect on the water problem.

In the 1860s there were numerous attempts to establish portions of the line. In 1860 the first of six lines that have crossed the north shore of Lake Tahoe was referred to as the "Higley" line. It was the farthest west of all the lines. Another U.S. Government survey in 1860-1 established a different line. In 1861 Lieutenant J.C. Ives, who had explored the Colorado River by steamer, marked the southern terminus of the California-Nevada line. In 1862 a survey was started from the northern terminus, but the results were considered preliminary. The Houghton and Ives line of 1863 from Oregon to Lake Tahoe was recognized by statutes of both states and is described in the California Government code, yet it receives no actual use and only a handful of people know where it is.

On October 1, 1864 Nevada was admitted as a state. Nebraska, Colorado and Montana had all sought admission, but Nevada was the only territory admitted during the Civil War and this was mainly because of the huge silver revenues which helped finance the Union cause.

It was not until 1867 that a really serious effort was made to locate the northeast corner of California. On October 1 Daniel G. Major was awarded a contract to survey the 42nd parallel with particular attention to its intersection with the 120th meridian. He set up an observatory at Camp Bidwell, a military installation near the crucial northeast corner. From this observatory he made over 2000 astronomical observations through three lunations (complete lunar cycles).

When Major was satisfied that he had the exact latitude and longitude of the spot, he measured 9.7 miles north and 5 miles east and there he built a dressed sandstone monument to mark the "official" northeast corner. He did not explain why his corner was more than two miles west of the Houghton-Ives corner surveyed four years before. The authorities in Washington (who had probably never been to California) had complete confidence in Major's work. It is not known how Major arrived at his results, but it is probably that he did not use telegraphic signals. In view of the huge number of astronomic observations he made, he must have used the old "moons of Jupiter" method or some lunar phenomenon to determine longitude.[1]

The insistance of authorities in Washington to accept his results led to great frustration for the next surveyor. In 1872 the U.S. General Land Office entered into a contract with Alexe Von Schmidt to survey the entire line from Oregon to the Colorado River. The story of this remarkable man's accomplishments and subsequent shifts in this elusive boundary will be narrated in the next issue.

[1] Ed. Note: Without an accurate clock set to Greenwich time, the moons of Jupiter, which disappeared at a specific time, were used. Longitude was calculated with an ephemeris, or almanac, relating the disappearances to Greenwich time.

**1862 Survey started from northern terminus but results considered only preliminary.**

**Jan. 1863 Nevada claimed Susanville and established 1st district court there.**

**1863 Houghton-Ives corner.**

**1863 Houghton-Ives line at Lake Tahoe (Statutory Boundary).**

**Sept. 2, 1863 election for both Esmeralda & Mono counties held in Aurora.**

**1863 Oblique line run showing Aurora to be in Nevada just after election. Only 102 miles of line completed.**

**1864 Nevada admitted to Union as state.**

**1865 Oblique border extended 72 mi. beyond where 1863 survey ended.**

**Oct. 1, 1867 Daniel G. Major awarded contract to survey 42nd latitude line.**

**July 1868 Major began survey from Camp Bidwell near northeast corner.**

**1868 Major found surveys of 1860 and 1863 placed NE corner too far to the east.**

**1872 US General Land Office made contract with Von Schmidt.**

**1872 Von Schmidt line at Lake Tahoe (Marked boundary).**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In these days of "high tech" and sophisticated instruments it may be hard to understand why there was so much difficulty determining where the California-Nevada line went. After all, the convention delegates in Monterey drew two straight lines on a map. What could be simpler? In the first place, what is meant by a straight line? The usual definition is "the shortest distance between two points." Try connecting two points on a globe with a straight edge and you will see that a line fitting this definition is impossible. The term "straight line" on a map depends on what kind of map we are talking about. There are many kinds, each one trying to approximate a curved surface on a flat plane. Aeroplane pilots know that the shortest route from one point to another is a "great circle" route.

The description of the eastern boundary of California was in terms of latitude and longitude. Latitude is by far the easiest to find. It can be done fairly accurately by an amateur. All that needs to be done is to locate the north star and measure the angle in degrees above horizontal. This is the latitude except for minor corrections to allow for the fact that the north star isn't exactly north. The ancient Greeks used this method in navigating. (Incidentally, Columbus didn't discover that the earth was round. The Greeks knew it and even measured the diameter of the earth with a fair degree of accuracy.)

The question of finding the longitude of a point is a different matter. It is a problem that has plagued astronomers, navigators and surveyors for centuries. Columbus used changes in the variation of the compass for a very crude estimate. Galileo in 1616 devised a method based on repeated observations on the moons of Jupiter, but the method was not very precise and most difficult to use in practice. Nevertheless, he tried to collect the fabulous reward that had been offered by the king of Spain, but with no success. Portugal, Venice and Holland also offered very large rewards, and the king of France was cheated out of a very large sum of money by an unknown German inventor. In 1714 the British government offered a reward of 20,000 pounds for a practical solution to the problem.

It soon became apparent that the solution to the problem lie in a combination of accurate astronomical observations and precise measurement of Greenwich mean time. To do this an accurate timepiece had to be built that would not be affected by changes in temperature and buffeting by rough seas. John Harrison, a self educated Yorkshire carpenter, tackled the job. After 21 years he had made four "chronometers." It took 26 more years to arrange a test, and in November 1761 a ship sailed from Portsmouth to Jamaica, returning five months later. The test was eminently successful, meeting all of the stipulations of the reward. The Board of Longitude balked at paying the whole reward, insisting on more tests and detailed plans for the chronometers. After eleven more years, in 1772 Harrison was given the entire award at the insistence of George III.

The problem of finding longitude was not quite solved for land surveys, since chronometers could not be expected to keep perfect time when hauled over rough trails in stagecoaches. One other thing was needed: instant communication between Greenwich and locations in California. The first telegraph line was built from Washington to New York City in 1844, and within ten years telegraph lines stretched from coast to coast. On August 8, 1858 the first transatlantic cable was completed. Finally it was possible to pinpoint fairly accurately some points on a meridian.

# The Elusive California Nevada Border

## Part II: The Von Schmidt Line.

by Thomas M. Little, Ph.D.

*Col. Allexey W. Von Schmidt. Wells Fargo Bank History Room, San Francisco.*

On the third of August 1872, the *Inyo Register* carried the following brief item: "Col. A.W. Von Schmidt has received the contract for running the eastern boundary line of California and Nevada. He will commence work immediately."

It is doubtful whether the editor realized at the time what a momentous event in interstate history he was reporting. What a Pandora's Box of pettiness, jealously, frustration and hardship was opened! But to compensate for these unpleasant situations, there must have been the pleasure of a glorious adventure in wild unexplored country. One can imagine the survey crew sitting around an open campfire under the stars singing some of the latest songs such as "Little Brown Jug," "Shoo Fly, Don't Bother Me," "Sweet Genevieve," and above all, that latest hit by Henry Clay Work, "Crossing the Grand Sierras."

Little is known about the man, Col. Allexey W. Von Schmidt, except his surveying exploits. Dr. Vincent Gianella, former head of the Geology Department at the University of Nevada in Reno and a great Nevada history buff, described Von Schmidt as a "very remarkable man." One can only read between the lines of Von Schmidt's notes, and follow the route of his travels from Oregon to the Colorado River to guess what a truly remarkable man he was.

Right from the start of his survey he ran afoul of an obstinate bureaucracy. He had decided that the best place to begin his survey was at the point near Verdi where the 120th meridian had been determined with the help of telegraphic signals over the lines on what was then the Central Pacific Railroad.

This determination was made by Professor George Davidson of the U.S. Coast Survey in July and August 1872. It had been carried out at the request of J.D. Whitney, State Geologist, and Clarence King, U.S. Geologist, names familiar to everyone acquainted with the Sierra Nevadas. Von Schmidt was confident that the results of a survey with which such eminent scientists were associated should be acceptable. He therefore sent a telegram to Washington seeking permission to use Davidson's results as the starting point for his survey. He received the following reply, "Personal determination of longitude is required, so that your affidavit to returns of the survey may be properly made."

Von Schmidt was obviously irked, but dutifully proceeded to follow out the instructions. He spent a week making astronomical observations in conjunction with telegraphic time signals from George Davidson in San Francisco. Getting these time signals posed a problem, for there were frequent interruptions from other operators, but he finally collected enough data to satisfy him that his results agreed with those previously reported by Davidson. He has been criticized for "stretching the truth" when he certified that the work was executed "in his own proper person," since he had depended too much on Davidson's work. However, if anyone deserves criticism it would seem to be Willis Drummond, Commissioner of the U.S. General Land Office, for making an unreasonable request. After all, Von Schmidt had spent a hard week's work trying to comply with this request.

Von Schmidt wrote to Drummond asking for permission to start from the established point near Verdi and run a line north to the Oregon border instead of the other way around as had been originally proposed. Without waiting for a reply from Drummond, he proceeded to run a line northward

Psalm 101:6 I will look for trustworthy people [My eyes are on the **faithful** of the land] so I can live with them [ they may dwell with me]. Only those who live innocent lives [walk in the way of blamelessness] will be my servants [serve me]. EXB

The Hebrew word for faithful here is אמן (aman). It carries with it the connotation of: support (like the pillars of a door), confirmation (sureness), upholding (standing firm), and nourishing (like a foster-father or foster-mother). Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary defines faithfulness as:

1. Fidelity; loyalty; firm adherence to allegiance and duty; as the *faithfulness* of a subject.
2. Truth; veracity; as the *faithfulness* of God.
3. Strict adherence to injunctions, and to the duties of a station; as the *faithfulness* of servants or ministers.
4. Strict performance of promises, vows or covenants; constancy in affection; as the *faithfulness* of a husband or wife.

The Bible speaks of faithfulness as being reliable, steadfast and unwavering. It speaks of this type of faithfulness in four ways: as an attribute of God, as a positive characteristic of some people, as a characteristic that many people lack, and as a gift of the Holy Spirit. When a person walks consistently with God, in humble service to Him, he or she can be called "faithful." When Nehemiah had to leave Jerusalem to return to Persia, he put Hanani and Hananiah in charge. The reason for his choice of these men was that they were "more faithful and God-fearing . . . than many" (Nehemiah 7:2). Nehemiah needed men of character whom he could trust. Men who would not take bribes, who were committed to the welfare of the people, and who would uphold the integrity of the office. Notice that faithfulness is associated with fearing God. The better we truly know God, the more we will want to imitate Him (Ephesians 5:1). Other examples of faithfulness include Silas (1 Peter 5:8), Tychicus (Ephesians 6:21), Epaphras (Colossians 1:7), Onesimus (Colossians 4:9), and Moses (Hebrews 3:2). Faithfulness affects every relationship we have. The Bible says it is a gift from God. When we receive Christ as Lord, the Holy Spirit indwells us and brings the blessings of love, joy, peace and faithfulness (Galatians 5:22). The fullness of these blessings depends on walking with God and yielding to His Spirit. We should be faithful to read and abide by God's Word and to seek the Lord in prayer (Psalm 1:1-2; Ephesians 6:18). The Old Testament taught us that "the just will live by faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). That truth is amplified and illuminated three times in the New Testament. We obtain that faith, and our faithfulness, by the grace of God. He is faithful to His children, and by His grace you will one day hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:23).

toward the Oregon border. He had run this line about 100 miles when he received a reply from Drummond. The reply, a masterpiece of bureaucratic double talk, read in part as follows:

> ". . . in reply, I have to say that while the work of Professor Davidson may be correct, you are not to rely thereon, but will make your own observations and deductions so that you may be able to make the proper affidavits in regard to the correctness of the establishment of the line, which will, if deemed necessary, be tested by examination in the field.
>
> "No data of any other Astronomer or Surveyor except the establishment of the north east corner of the state by Major, which has been approved, can be adopted by you, as you are required to execute the work in your own proper person and in strict conformity to your contract and instructions.
>
> "There is no objection to your proposition to start from the railroad running thence to the intersection of the 120th West Longitude with the 40th North Latitude and correcting back, but the determination of the starting point on the railroad must be from your own observations and deductions. Major's corner must, however, be considered as the starting point of your survey and the line is to be marked with consecutive number of miles therefrom."
>
> Very Respectfully
> WILLIS DRUMMOND
> Comissioner

Thus Drummond had absolute faith in Major's work while ignoring or questioning the results of every other surveyor involved. Why did he apparently feel obligated to support Major? Was he indebted to Major for some reason, was he related to him, or were they fraternity brothers sworn to support each other forever? Perhaps we should be fair and grant that it was just a case of plain stubbornness. Whatever the reason, his blind faith in Major was hardly justified.

Nowhere in Major's notes was there mention of the methods used to determine latitude and longitude, nor any description of the instruments he used except for a transit. Nor does he explain the fact that his marker was over two miles west of the Houghton and Ives corner. In fact he makes no mention of that survey run three years earlier although it was well known to other surveyors, some of whom had utilized it in their work.

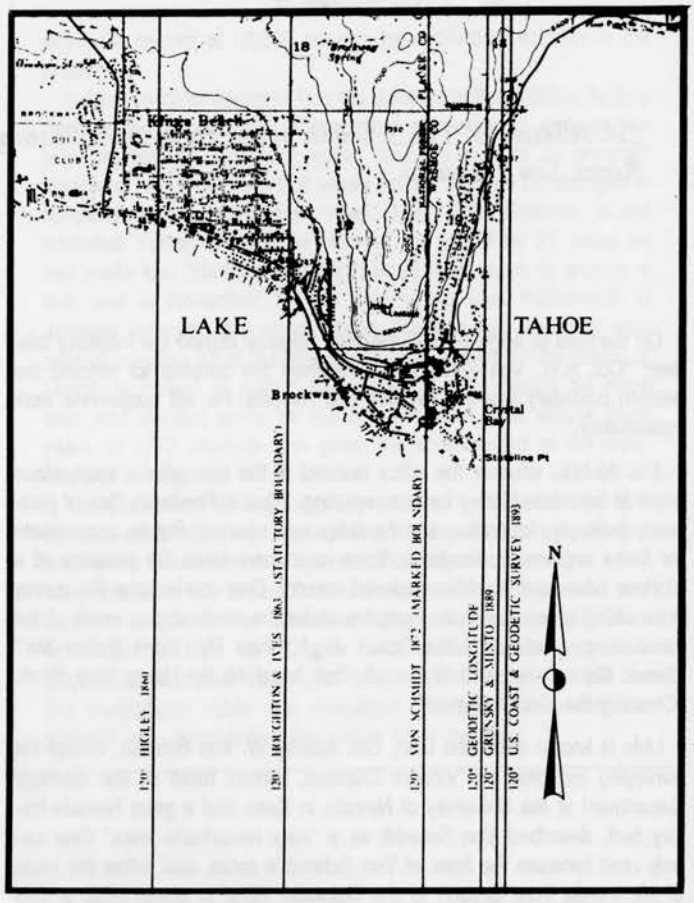
In spite of his reservations about the accuracy of Major's corner, Von Schmidt felt duty bound to follow instructions so he proceeded to run a line due south from the Major monument. He ran this line for a hundred miles, placing a marker every mile as instructed. When he reached Smoky Creek opposite from where he had discontinued his line from the south, he found that the two lines were three and one-half miles apart! This was the last straw. He had to decide whether his duty was to follow instructions and produce an incorrect line, or to run what he felt was a correct line, thereby disobeying the official instructions. He decided on the latter course.

He now retraced his steps to the Oregon border, removing all of the mile markers along the way. (This turned out to be an expensive mistake later on.) When he arrived at the border he destroyed the "hallowed" Major monument. He moved east about three and one-half miles and erected a new monument. From there he proceeded south, again placing markers every mile until he reached Smoky Creek, slightly to the east of his line from the south. After making minor adjustments he continued on to Lake Tahoe.

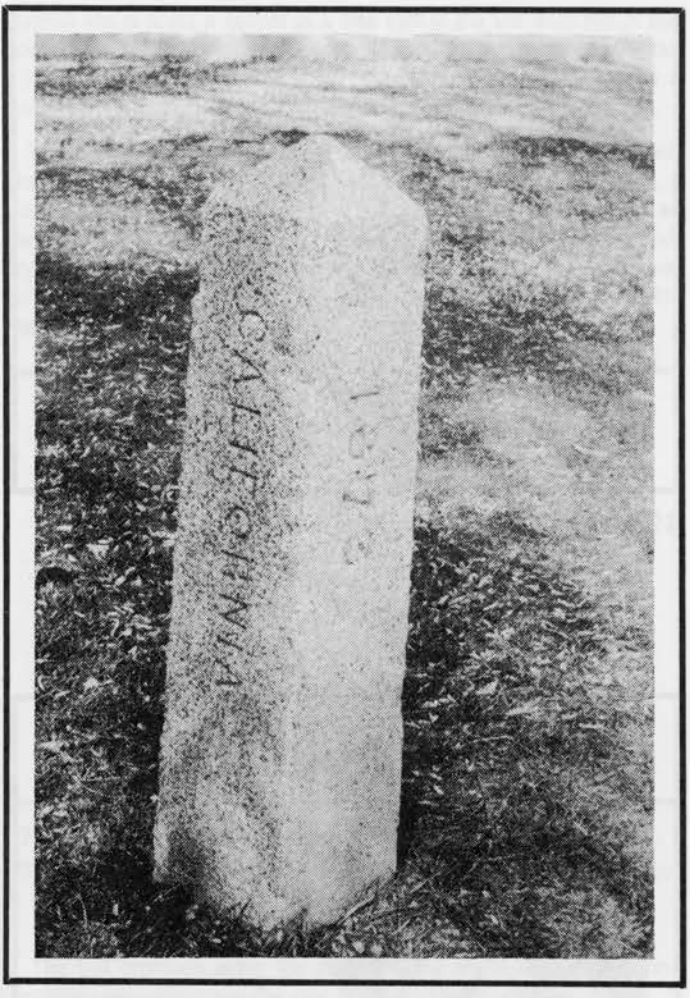
It is not known how Drummond reacted to this rank insubordination. The next we hear from the U.S. General Land Office is a communication from "Acting Commissioner" W.W. Curtis. (What happened to Drummond?) Curtis refused to honor Von Schmidt's claim for expenses involved in running the line 100 miles from the Oregon border twice. He stated that there was no evidence that Von Schmidt had really run the line south from Major's monument, since there were no markers to prove it. Poor Von Schmidt! When he had removed the out of line markers on the way back to Oregon, which was the correct thing to do, he had destroyed the evidence needed to support his claim.

It almost seems as though there was a conspiracy in the federal government to discredit Von Schmidt. In 1874, Charles A. Schott concluded that Von Schmidt's stone marker on the north shore of Lake Tahoe was three-quarters of a mile too far to the west. It turned out that the marker he had reference to was not Von Schmidt's but Col. Williamson's, and Von Schmidt had measured three-quarters of a mile east from this stone to establish his boundary.

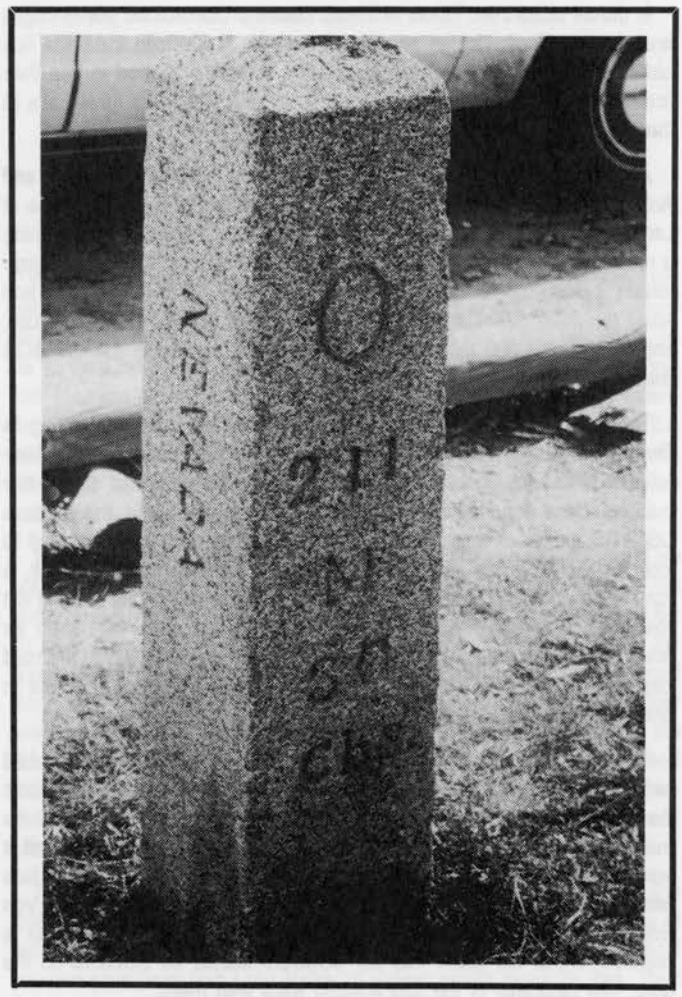
The situation at Lake Tahoe is impossible to simplify. There are six different lines passing through the north shore. The Houghton-Ives line is recognized in the statutes of both California and Nevada as the official line but this has long been ignored, and only a handful of people know where it is. The Von Schmidt line is the one that is marked on the North Shore. In 1977 California filed suit against the State of Nevada to settle disputes over the vertical boundary. The Special Master of the U.S. Supreme Court recommended that the present boundary known as the Von Schmidt line




*Six lines through north shore of Lake Tahoe.*



*Von Schmidt monument from Lake Tahoe in front of Genoa Museum, California side.*



*Same, Nevada side, Oregon 211 miles. T. Little photos.*

be approved as the permanent boundary between the two states. Thus, Von Schmidt's insubordination was finally vindicated.

Running the oblique line from Tahoe to the Colorado River was a difficult task, but the problems were different from those to the north. There were few political problems, but the topographic problems were much worse. To begin with, location of the corner posed problems, since it was in the middle of the lake. Von Schmidt set up fire signals at various points, and even obtained the use of the steamer "Truckee" to aid in his survey.

When he was satisfied that he had located the right corner, and had calculated the angle of the line to the Colorado River, he started to run his line. When he arrived at the Colorado River he was about a mile east of the terminal reported by Lt. Ives. Furthermore he found that the river had shifted its course so that the center of the river where it crossed the 35th parallel was about a half mile west of where it was shown on the Ives sketch of 1861. He was directed by Drummond to determine the corner in the center of where he found the channel. He was to correct his line back to Lake Tahoe, but actually did so only about a third of the way back, making a slight angle in his line.

Von Schmidt has been criticized by later writers for his failure to correct all of the way back. He was probably tired of the whole business at this time, had exhausted the available funds, and felt that a small error in a line through land of small value was not serious. The figures in later publications that show this angle are greatly exaggerated. Later calculations showed slight errors at both ends of the line, and a new line was run by the U.S. Coast & Geodetic Survey. Only the topographic maps show both the USC&GS line and the Von Schmidt line.

It is much more interesting to follow the line on these maps than to delve into the technical surveying details. Let us therefore follow the line and try to imagine what Von Schmidt and his crew encountered on the way.

On the southeast shore, he placed a granite monument showing the latitude, longitude and distance from the Oregon border. This monument has been removed and placed in front of the museum in Genoa. From the lake shore the line ascends abruptly to mountainous terrain reaching altitudes of 9,500 feet. (Any reference to "the line" hereafter will apply to either line unless otherwise specified, since they are fairly close together. At the beginning, the Von Schmidt line is about one-eighth of a mile southwest of the USC&GS line.)

In the 24 miles from Tahoe to Topaz Lake the line crosses seven ridges and seven ravines. Not an auspicious start for a 400 mile trek! The line bisects the lake, and fishermen from either state are allowed to use their licenses in this lake. Incidentally, Topaz Lake was known as Alkali Lake at the turn of the century.

After leaving Topaz Lake, the line crosses the West Walker River and Antelope Valley (not to be confused with the valley with the same name at Lancaster). After that it ascends into the Sweetwater Mountains, reaching a maximum altitude of 10,556 feet. Crossing about 15 miles of very rough terrain, it descends to the East Walker River just east of Devil's Gate and about ten miles northeast of Bridgeport. It is here that the two lines cross, and for the next 300 miles the Von Schmidt line is east of the USC&GS line.

The next hundred miles of the boundary are the most interesting to Owens Valley "explorers," since they cover familiar ground. About three miles from Devil's Gate on top of a high hill, the topo map shows two markers close together, one a Von Schmidt marker and the other a USC&GS marker. These looked interesting, so my wife and I decided to look for them. Driving along the east side of the Bridgeport reservoir, a road takes off to the right about a mile south of the dam. This winding dirt road follows a roughly northeast course toward the state line, eight air miles away but more like 12 road miles. Before reaching Masonic the road climbs "New York Hill," a 16 percent grade ascending over 400 feet in one-half mile. Four-wheel drive vehicles are strongly recommended.

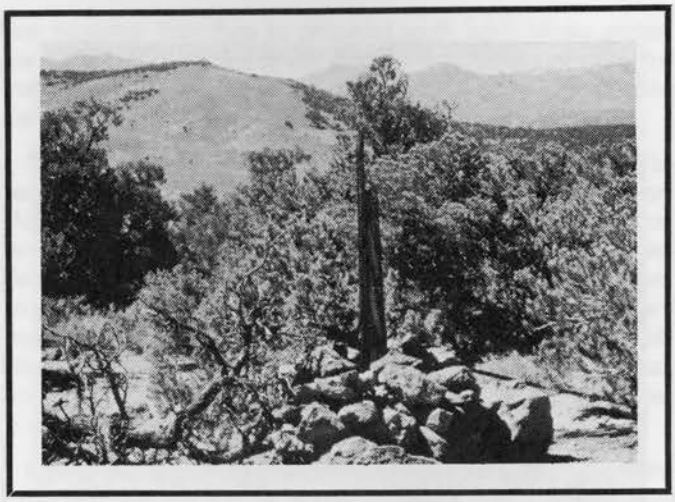
Masonic must have been a bustling mining town in its day. It even had two suburbs, Upper Town and Lower Town. Three miles north of Masonic the road curves around the shoulder of a prominent hill. We parked the truck where we thought we were closest to the markers. What a thrill it was, after a strenuous climb, to reach the summit and come face to face with the large stone cairn with a juniper post in the center just as Von Schmidt had described it more than a hundred years before. About a hundred feet to the south was the USC&GS marker as indicated on the map. The remnants of the flag scaffold were also there.

We decided to return by way of Devil's Gate, only two and one-half miles down the hill. The road, however, stretched nine miles, the first five of which were steep and winding. The state line was marked by painting on a large pine along this road. After reaching the bottom of the grade it was an easy trip back to Bridgeport.

The markers we found were not the highest in this range. The next hill down the line is Dome Hill, 8,000 feet, and 18 miles further on is Beauty Peak at 9,000 feet. From there the line descends abruptly to 7,500 where it crosses the Aurora road. One can imagine that after crossing more than 30 miles of high mountain country, the survey party was ready for a few days rest and relaxation at the night spots of either Aurora or Bodie. Von Schmidt never mentions such things in his notes.

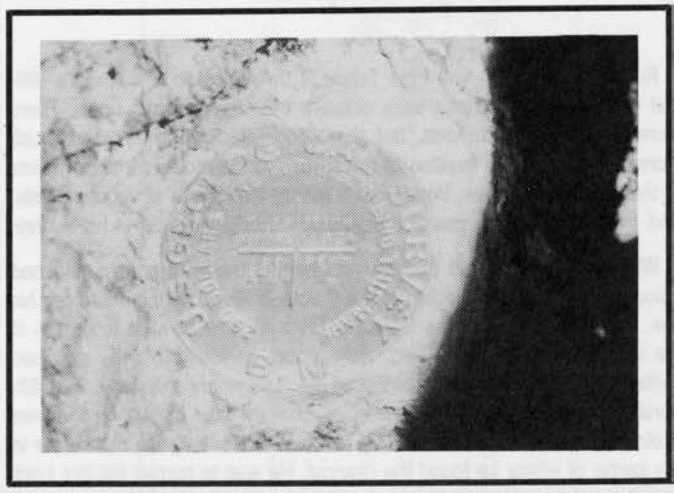
After climbing to 9,000 feet, the line descends in eight miles to 6,500 in Mono Valley, 10 miles northeast of Mono Lake. In the next two miles the line climbs to 7,500 feet and remains at about this level for the next 15 miles. It passes within a mile of Pizona on the west and the end of Truman Meadows on the east, an arrowhead hunter's paradise. The many collections of arrowheads by people in the Owens Valley contain hundreds of points from the Pizona-Truman Meadows region.

After crossing this plateau the line drops into Queen Valley between Benton and Montgomery Pass. Here it crosses the bed of the Carson and Colorado Railroad (later referred to as the Southern Pacific). The Von



*Von Schmidt cairn above Masonic.*

*Rock outcropping near Von Schmidt cairn where USC&GS marker is found.*



*Closeup of USC&GS marker.* *T. Little photos.*

Schmidt line is about a quarter of a mile east of the USC&GS line at this point. Von Schmidt placed an elaborate dressed stone monument here, but it has been torn down and only the foundation remains. Nearby was a crushed metal box of the kind used to store documents.

In two more miles it ascends an alluvial fan from 6,000 to 6,800 feet. The next four miles covers the steepest climb on the entire boundary. It crosses the saddle between Boundary Peak and Montgomery Peak at an elevation of 12,887 feet. Actually the Von Schmidt line was east of Boundary Peak, so that before 1896 this peak was not "the tallest peak in Nevada" as it is today. At that time Wheeler Peak in the eastern part of the state could claim that title.

*Foundation of monument along railroad bed below Montgomery and Boundary peaks. T. Little photos.*

The line proceeds along the eastern slope of the White Mountains, crossing many ridges and canyons but averaging about 8,000 feet for 10 miles. It then descends irregularly for another 10 miles to the base of the mountain at 5,200 feet. In the next six miles it goes over an alluvial fan to the floor of Fish Lake Valley at 4,800 feet.

The roughly 35 mile trek over the White Mountains from Queen Valley to Fish Lake Valley was not an easy one. The survey party had to go on foot, carrying equipment, food and bed rolls over incredibly rough terrain. The support party had to take the wagons and stock over Montgomery Pass and down through Fish Lake Valley where they could meet the survey party.

The difficulty of this trek cannot be appreciated from Von Schmidt's matter of fact notes, but C.H. Sinclair who supervised the USC&GS from 1893 to 1899 described the trip vividly:

> "The first station occupied by me for ranging out the line . . . was the most southeastern point located during the preceding season on the bold north front of the White Mountains, which stand across the line as a formidible barrier about 13,000 feet above sea level. It is an exceedingly difficult station to reach, owing to its altitude and precipitous sides. The footing is very insecure in many places on account of loose sand, and the difficulties were increased by the rarified atmosphere. . . . Next morning we moved upward, slowly, as far as the animals could be induced to go, then dividing the load between three of us, we reached the station after five hours arduous climbing, where it was necessary to shovel away the snow in order to get a forward sight. Patiently we waited for the heliotrope to flash from the forward party, and at last when it came they were on the wrong mountain, about three miles too close. It was too late for them to climb the mountain that day, so there was nothing left us but to descend to our camp and repeat the trip.
>
> "When the ascent was made the next day, the forward party was seen to be on the right mountain about 9.7 miles southeast in an air line, but as this station was 9,286 feet and the climb above the valley was about 4,000 feet, it was slow work for them. . . . When a point was lined in . . . two of us packed to the animals."

What happened to the third member of the party? Sinclair was very meticulous about minor details, but often careless about facts. For example, either he was way off in his statement about the 4,000 foot climb, or the forward party was utterly stupid to descend that far the day before. Post Meadow on Indian Creek at 7,600 feet was close by. Another example is his description of one point near the Aurora-Bodie road as being 2.8 miles "southeast" of Aurora, whereas it is really a little west of due south. The most ludicrous example is that of the East Carson River "running north and south" at one point!

The next twenty miles were fairly easy ones through the floor of Fish Lake valley and the alluvial fans on either side. The line then ascends the slope of the Sylvania Mountains, climbing to 8,000 feet in six miles. After 10 miles of rugged country, the line descends rapidly to 3,600 feet at the upper end of Death Valley, crossing only a small corner. Climbing rugged mountains to 5,700 feet, it crosses Grapevine Canyon at 4,000 feet, four miles east of the present location of Scotty's Castle. Going through the Grapevine Mountains, the line passes near Grapevine Peak (8,738 ft.) and Wahguyne Peak (8,628 ft.), both of which are between the two lines. Beyond this is the ghost town of Leadfield. This is the beginning of a one way road through Titus Canyon into Death Valley, a trip well worth taking.

The stretch of line from Fish Lake Valley to Leadfield caused the USC&GS party under Sinclair considerable concern due to the shortage of water and feed for the stock. An extra six-horse team was hired to haul hay and grain from Fish Lake Valley to various points along the line. Their own teams were used to distribute provender along the line and for hauling supplies from the railroad at Bishop.

After leaving Leadfield, the line skirts the eastern edge of the Grapevine and Funeral Mountains with the Amaragosa Desert on the east and the ghost town of Rhyolite with Beatty beyond. The topo map in this section mentions, for the first time, a new line called the "Baker Line" between the Von Schmidt line and the USC&GS line. This line extends only 20 miles on the Amaragosa Desert. What its purpose was or for whom it was named is not known by this author. It could be that it is named after the same person as the town of Baker on the Barstow-Las Vegas highway.

For 30 miles the line is mainly on the floor of the Amaragosa Desert, reaching a low point of 2,300 feet. It is at about the lower end of the desert that the "corrected" Von Schmidt line met the original line from the north and Von Schmidt finished his work. The two lines are one and one-quarter miles apart here, the widest discrepancy along the border.

At the end of the Amaragosa Desert the line goes over the Resting Springs range. At the foot of this range it crosses a very large sand dune and then enters Stewart Valley. After this it enters Pahrump Valley and crosses the Pahrump to Shoshone road due west of Las Vegas. The line lies mostly in Pahrump Valley for 30 miles, then crosses a low range of hills and enters Mesquite Valley. In the middle of this valley the two lines cross and from here on to the Colorado River the Von Schmidt line is west of the USC&GS line.

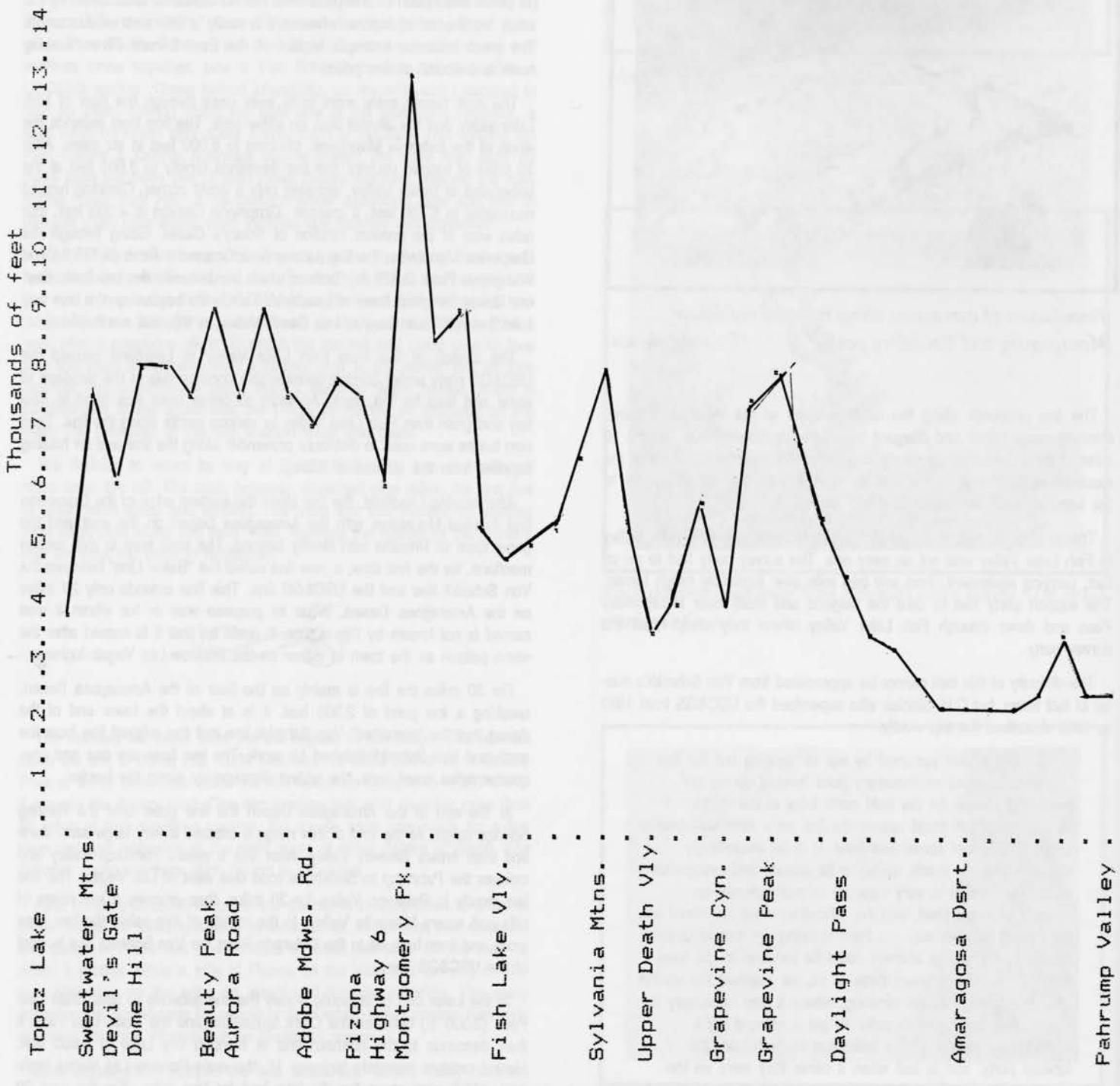
At the lower end of Mesquite Valley the line ascends to near State Line Pass (3,300 ft.) between the Clark Mountains and the State Line Hills. It then descends to the northern end of Ivanpah Dry Lake at 2,600 feet. Here it crosses interstate highway 15, the main Barstow-Las Vegas highway, which runs along the dry lake bed for four miles. For the next 20 miles the line is largely over large alluvial fans, rising gradually to 4,600

feet at the base of New York Mountains. The line ascends abruptly to about 5,200 feet, down a small valley and up through the Castle Mountains and the Piute Range. These mountains are not very high, but are very rough.

The next 30 miles over more mountains and alluvial plains brings the line to the terminal on the Colorado River. The 55 miles from Highway 15 to the Colorado is about the most uninhabited, if not the most desolate section of the line. Part of it is designated as the "East Mojave National Scenic Area," which may be appropriate for people with four-wheel drive campers, plenty of food, water, and gas, and a spirit of adventure. There is not a town within ten miles of the line unless one includes ghost towns and mining camp sites.

The end of the Von Schmidt line is about 15 miles south of Laughlin and 15 north of Needles. This is the lowest point on the line, being about 1,600 feet above sea level. To show graphically the ups and downs over mountains and valleys that Von Schmidt had to cover over part of his route, I have prepared a profile of the line from Topaz Lake to Highway 15.

Von Schmidt's survey by no means settled the problems of the California-Nevada line. When he arrived there he found that the river had changed its course since Lt. Ives had made his map in 1861. He therefore wrote to Willis Drummond (the same one who had insisted that Von Schmidt accept Major's corner as the starting point at the Oregon border), asking his advice. Drummond replied that since "Lt. Ives survey has never




PROFILE OF CALIFORNIA-NEVADA BORDER FROM TOPAZ LAKE TO PAHRUMP VALLEY

been returned to nor recognized by the department" it was Von Schmidt's duty to consider the middle of the river where he found it. This turned out to be bad advice, for many years later the USC&GS decided that the Ives corner should be adopted after all.

In 1889 the California Legislature voted to provide for the correction of some errors in the Von Schmidt line. The state Surveyor General, Theo. Reichert, appointed C.E. Grunsky and William Minto to survey the line from Tahoe to the Colorado, "provided the whole cost for the work shall not exceed 5000 dollars." About all they did was to check the two ends of the line, further muddying the waters.

The next and final survey was carried out by the USC&GS from 1893 to 1899 under the direction of Sinclair. The cost was $30,860.30 not including the salaries of the USC&GS staff. If these are included, a conservative estimate of the total cost would be about 80,000 dollars. Since this is primarily a story about Von Schmidt, I will not go into the details of these later surveys other than to compare their cost and value with his work.

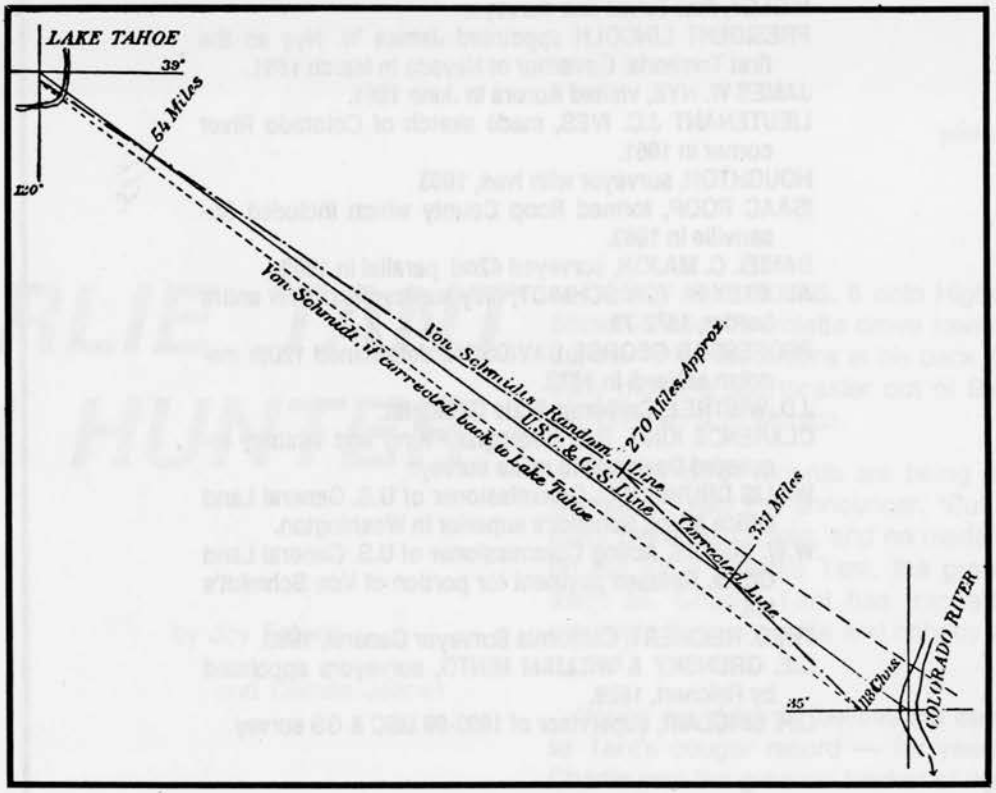
Comparing monetary costs is not legitimate, since the value of the dollar must have changed in 25 years. The cost in time and manpower can be compared, however, and the difference is striking. Von Schmidt completed his work on the Oregon to Tahoe line in one season in spite of all the bureaucratic interference. His work on this line has never been successfully challenged.

The Tahoe to Colorado section is a different matter. It took Von Schmidt one season to run this line. It took the USC&GS seven years to cover the same line. In spite of all the complaining that Sinclair did about the hardships encountered, he and his party had an easy time compared to Von Schmidt. After all, Von Schmidt broke new ground since he was the first one to cover the whole line. All the USC&GS party had to do was follow his line and make the correction they deemed necessary. Sinclair and other writers made much of the "angle" in his line. To see how little that angle deviates from a straight line, lay a 12 inch ruler on a flat surface with a paper clip under the middle. Press the two ends of the ruler until they touch the table and you will have a scale model of the bend in the line.

It is hard to understand why there was so much insistence on precisely following the line as described by the delegates at the Constitutional Convention in Monterey in 1949. Those men pored over what was at best a crude map by present day standards and drew two lines. The oblique line was especially unreasonable. One end was in the middle of a lake where the depth of the water was over a thousand feet, though they probably didn't know it at the time. The other end was in the middle of a river at a location where it was continually changing its course. One can hardly imagine two more difficult points to use as anchor points for a 400 mile line.

The discrepancies between the two lines were never more than a mile and a half. At the two ends the Von Schmidt line was claimed to be too far west of the "true" line. In the case of the Tahoe end there may be some question, since if his line was acceptable at the northern end of the lake, why wasn't it okay at the southeastern shore? At the Colorado River end, the difference was not his fault because he had been given faulty instructions by Drummond. In the middle of the line the Von Schmidt line is claimed to be too far east, and the difference is greatest (one and one-half miles) 100 miles from the lower end. This is where Von Schmidt called it quits on his way back from the river.

What damage would have been done if his line had been left stand? No communities would have been disrupted, no casinos would have had to close their doors, and no brothels would have lost their licenses. My vote goes to Von Schmidt for the man to be most admired for his energy, his patience and his tenacity in tackling the job of marking "the elusive border."




*Von Schmidt and USC&GS Survey lines.*

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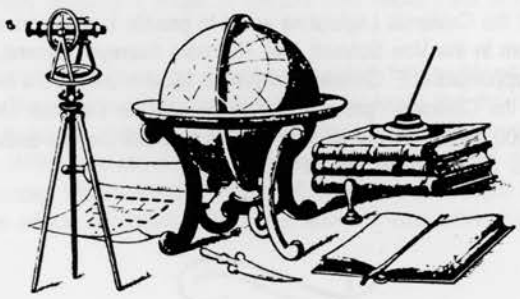


## CAST OF CHARACTERS
## THE ELUSIVE CALIFORNIA NEVADA BORDER
## PART I AND PART II

**GENERAL RILEY, self-appointed governor of California. Called first Constitutional Convention in 1849.**
**BRIGHAM YOUNG, formed state of Deseret 1849.**
**H.S. BEATIE, sent by Young to establish Genoa in 1849.**
**ALTHOUSE & SAILOR, persuaded California Legislature to call for survey of north border to see in which state their mining camp was located.**
**T.P. ROBINSON, appointed to survey line, 1854.**
**HIGLEY, first Tahoe line surveyor.**
**PRESIDENT LINCOLN appointed James W. Nye as the first Territorial Governor of Nevada in March 1861.**
**JAMES W. NYE, visited Aurora in June 1861.**
**LIEUTENANT J.C. IVES, made sketch of Colorado River corner in 1861.**
**HOUGHTON, surveyor with Ives, 1863**
**ISAAC ROOP, formed Roop County which included Susanville in 1863.**
**DANIEL C. MAJOR, surveyed 42nd parallel in 1863.**
**ALLEXEY W. VON SCHMIDT, only surveyor to cover entire border, 1872-73.**
**PROFESSOR GEORGE DAVIDSON, determined 120th meridian at Verdi in 1872.**
**J.D. WHITNEY, California State Geologist.**
**CLARENCE KING, U.S. Geologist - King and Whitney requested Davidson to make survey.**
**WILLIS DRUMMOND, Commissioner of U.S. General Land Office & Von Schmidt's superior in Washington.**
**W.W. CURTIS, Acting Commissioner of U.S. General Land Office. Refused payment for portion of Von Schmidt's bill.**
**THEO. REICHERT, California Surveyor General, 1889.**
**C.E. GRUNSKY & WILLIAM MINTO, surveyors appointed by Reichert, 1889.**
**C.H. SINCLAIR, supervisor of 1893-99 USC & GS survey.**

*photo by Harley Jenner*

# CHARLIE TANT LION HUNTER

by Joy Fatooh

and Demila Jenner

Turning west off U.S. 6 onto Highway 120 at Benton Station, Wales Bramlette drove toward the Sierra Nevada, the White Mountains at his back, listening idly as the early morning sportscaster out of Bishop chortled over the U.S. wins in Munich.

"Yes, a lot of records are being broken at the 1972 Olympics," said the announcer. "But there's one record that'll never be broken, and no medal's ever been handed out for it. Charlie Tant, the greatest lion hunter of them all. Charlie Tant has tracked and killed 1,303 mountain lions in his life and nobody's about to beat that record."

Wales could hardly believe his ears. Not about Charlie Tant's cougar record — for years he'd argued that Charlie was the greatest tracker of the big cats since the legendary Ben Lilly — but he didn't think anyone had been listening.

"I don't know where they got those figures," Wales said later. "Charlie always told me Ben Lilly was the greatest mountain man that ever lived, but I never knew how many lions he himself had caught. I do know, though, that Charlie can tell by how a cat puts down his foot how much he weighs, how hungry he is, how tired, how far he's traveled — almost what the lion is thinking. But then, hell, he's lived with the cats for more than fifty years."

It might be possible to verify those figures, if you searched through Fish and Game archives long enough. Charlie hunted lions in the days when there was a bounty on them, back when they were commonly thought of as vermin to be exterminated and only rarely seen as majestic creatures with a vital role in the balance of nature: They say Charlie didn't have a wife, rent payments, a Social Security number; the bounty was his income, and the mountains were his home.

Charlie hunted in Texas, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona and Nevada, in Ventura, Santa Barbara and Siskiyou counties in California; but from the 1950s on he roamed the rugged ridges of Mono County, east of the Sierra. The Benton Range, the very country Wales was winding through when he heard Charlie's name on the radio, was his favorite hunting ground.

To climb these mountains is to pull yourself up steep ridges of granite, water-worn in weird brown spheres and stacks, or sharp gray, cracked by ice; to edge along polished bluffs of black basalt inscribed with petroglyphs; to stand among wind-whispering pinyon pines and look down, down across sage-dotted valleys to snowcapped peaks a hundred miles away; to follow the track of deer or wild horses to a tiny spring in a hidden green meadow, muddy with hoofprints and frosted white with alkali dust.

Lions live here. You don't see them unless they want you to — or unless you and your dogs know how to find them.

Bill Bramlette, Wales' son, has a photo of himself as a child with Charlie and his dogs, standing in front of six lion pelts tacked to a wall of the old Bramlette ranch house. Charlie is tall, broad shouldered and square-jawed, his face browned by the sun, white hair showing

*Charlie (on left) with Wales Bramlette and his children, 1957. Bill Bramlette collection*

beneath his cap. The dogs are spotted Walker hounds, leggy and alert. "He usually had at least five or six adults," Bill recalls. "They had names like Sadie, Rocky, Buzzard Wing." Another picture shows five dogs, four puppies, and three lion carcasses — their mouths propped open — arrayed around his old blue Dodge truck with its homemade canvas cover. "He'd just live out of that old truck and camp. . . .

"Truth of the matter is, I don't think Charlie owned anything but what you see in that picture."

Charlie would make his home base wherever the mountains offered a bit of shelter: the little stone cabin at Pizona above River Springs, or an old lean-to at the Rabbit Ranch where Blind Springs Hill meets the volcanic tableland.

"The guy was pretty incredible in terms of being physically capable," Bill says. "He would place caches of food all over the country so that when he was hunting he'd take nothing but what he had on his back, and his dogs. He'd drive somewhere to pick up a scent; a good place was the top of Dutch Pete's Hill.

"And he'd take off walking. They'd go for days. You wouldn't even see the guy for a week."

"This whole range running northeast by southwest is Charlie's hunting ground," Wales used to say. "He'll start out at Black Rock, say, and next morning he'll be over at Pizona or Truman Meadows. Thirty, thirty-five miles.

"He'll set two dogs loose on the trail and tie two dogs to his belt. When the trail dogs get tired, he'll tie them to his belt and set the fresh ones loose. Sometimes the dogs circle around and lose the trail; Charlie'll find the track for them. At night when he can't see the tracks or even hear his dogs, the dogs tied to his belt will guide him until he gets in hearing distance of the trail dogs.

"Charlie really dedicates himself to a hunt. He only eats when the lion eats. But his dogs eat first."

When lion dogs find their lion they tree it, then stay there, barking, until the hunter arrives to make the kill. Charlie would shoot it cleanly with his old .30-.30 Winchester, skin the cat and pack the pelt back to his truck, and collect the bounty: $50 for a male lion, $60 for a female.

Bill Bramlette grew up in Old Benton, the ghost of a mining town his family owned; his grandparents kept a store and tended bar and sometimes tried to persuade Charlie to live for free in one of their houses. Charlie wouldn't live in town, Bill says, but he'd show up with bounty money and drink a case or two of beer with his friends.

"He'd come in, get drunk, and take off when he'd spent what he had," Bill says. On occasion when hunting was slow Charlie would trap bobcats and coyotes or work on a local ranch, but not for long: "You'd see him sitting here drinking beer one night and the next morning he'd be gone. Two or three weeks might go by with no one knowing where he was — he'd be out in the mountains somewhere.

"About once a year he'd come in here and start taking off the layers of old clothes he'd put on, soak it all off in the hot springs. He'd take newspapers and stuff them in between his jacket and shirt and his body; that's what he used in the winter for insulation." His bed was made

*"He'd just live out of that old truck and camp . . ." Bill Bramlette collection*

of rags and newspapers, and dogs: "The biggest joke was that it'd get cold out there at night and he'd just pull up another hound."

Bill's grandparents still run the store, with a photograph of Charlie, a dog and a dead lion displayed on one wall. MaBelle Barmlette remembers Charlie's dogs: "Lick Pot, Queen de High . . . Buzzard Wing? — awful names!" And she remembers his generosity, gifts of money to family and friends in need: "You know, that old man had a pretty good bank account at one time."

Once Charlie killed a mother lion in the rocks just above the Bramlette's spring, and his hounds found her cubs nearby. They killed two before he could reach them; the other two he brought to MaBelle. "They were a week, week and a half old according to Charlie, judging by when their eyes opened. I raised them on a regular baby bottle with Carnation milk. I kept them until they were five or six months old and then I sold them to Disney. They were getting to be too much in here, jumping on people. And they had a tendency to only want steak to eat. Fried steak."

MaBelle pulled out an old brown ledger in which she's written dates she wanted to remember. "Charlie was 66 years old on October 25, 1962. He'd been here ten or so years by then; he must have been here about 22 years altogether." That would put his birthdate in 1896.

On the back of the photo on the wall are the date — December 1965 — and the dog's name, which MaBelle pronounces "Ratifier" but renders "Radifirie." The lion is draped over the cab of a car; the dog is lolling on the trunk. Charlie in the foreground looks rather handsome and vigorous with his tousled white hair, smiling his pride.

"Old Charlie was about six food three and weighed around 190," MaBelle says. "He was a big man; he was rangy. Never wore any socks! — he said they made his feet sore."

Carolyn and Dick Dawson met Charlie when he used to drive cattle past their place. Dick reminisced over breakfast recently: "One time I was riding this nice stallion we had, north of our place here; and here's Charlie — he's leading this horse, Tumbleweed, and he was walking that horse into the ground. Charlie was taking such strides that I had to trot my horse to keep up with him while he was walking. And Tumbleweed was going, 'Wow! Do we ever slow down?' He had this immense stride. He could really fly."

"And he was not a young man then, that's for sure," Carolyn said. "There were some young men who came up and wanted to go lion hunting. These people came with their fancy dogs and their fancy clothes and vehicles and things, and he was going to be their guide. Well, first of all, they thought sure they'd be able to do most of it from their four-wheel-drives; but he said 'No, you'll have to get off and walk!' Well, he just flat walked away from them. They couldn't keep up with him."

"He was on the downhill side when we met him," Dick said.

Carolyn agreed. "But still, he could leave any of us behind!"

"He came to dinner at our house one night and was telling us about his saddle," Dick said: "1928 All-Around Cowboy at the L.A. County Fair, or something like that. He also told us that evening about his gun: he had this .30-.30 carbine, and the barrel was bent. He was rounding up cattle for the Harris ranch in one of the spring areas up there, and one cow would not come out of the aspens; so he said, 'Well, I'll go in and git it." So he charges in there with his horse, and the gun he had stuck underneath the cinch of the saddle — at a dead run, the gun went on one side of the tree and the horse went on the other side of the tree. And it bent the gun. It was a horrible wreck. He got up, finished gathering the cows and came back; and every time he would go to shoot anything, he would have to allow for the curvature of the barrel. He was still able to hit a mountain lion and kill it with that gun."

"We heard — he had this tumor on his eyelid," Dick said, "and his eyelid would grow together. Well, it was his shooting eye and he couldn't stand that, so he'd take his skinning knife and slit his eyelid so that he'd be able to see to shoot with it."

"He was tough," Carolyn said. "He was tough."

What would you give to sit by a campfire and listen to Charlie storying his life? Coauthor Demila Jenner did just that on a sunny, cold October morning 17 years ago, accompanied by Wales Bramlette, a bottle of red wine and a small tape recorder.

Charlie was recovering from surgery: they'd removed tumors from both eyes and installed tiny plastic drainage tubes at the corners. Were Charlie's hunting days over?

"Don't you belive it," Wales said as they drove out to the Rabbit Ranch. "The only reason Charlie agreed to the operation was so that he could see to go after that sheep-killer over in Nevada that made a fool of him and his dogs, on account of his eyes being so bad. He was down on his hands and knees trying to track it. Now he's just waiting to get his sight back — he wants that lion real bad.

"I'll tell you what he did last week, just after getting home from the hospital. Deer season opens, these guys come by to get Charlie to take them where they can find some deer. When Charlie picks up his gun they laugh; they know he can't hunt, them tubes in his eyes. Charlie don't argue, just takes that .30-.30 of his — he can put only one shell in it at a time because the receiver's all messed up. He uses that gun for a crowbar, a walkingstick . . .

"Charlie went and showed the guys where to kick out a deer, then walked down the slope a way and lay down under a tree while the hunters went up the draw. They flushed a big buck in no time. Charlie heard them shooting, heard the deer running — right toward him, like he figured it would. He sat up, rolled over, and let go with the one bullet in his gun. It was a clean shot, right through the neck, exactly what he aimed for."

Wales and Demila followed the dirt road past abandoned mines, up toward the Sierra, around great mounds of puma-colored pumice dotted with golden-blossomed rabbitbrush, greasewood and mountain mahogany, and plenty of bitterbrush for deer. "And where there's deer there's lions," Wales said. "That's why Charlie loves it so out here."

The road became two ruts through the brush, then disappeared in a grassy flat. Wales stopped the car in a primeval meadow where magnificent junipers, pale berries decorating their branches, grew near tall cottonwoods with yellow autumn leaves. Beneath clumps of willows running water murmured unseen. "The lions come right down that draw to drink," Wales said.

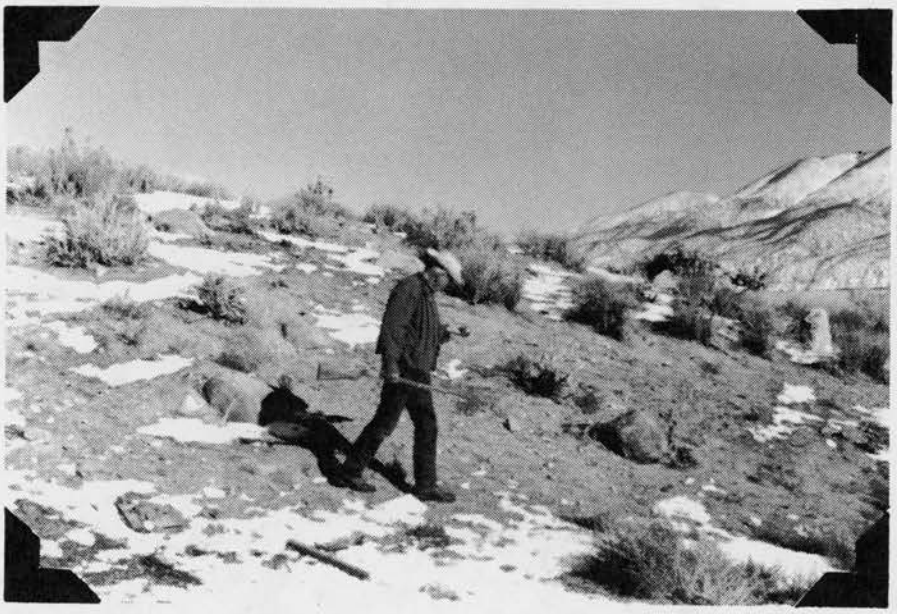
They walked single file along a path closed in by head-high rabbitbrush. Two hounds came out of the brush so silently that hummingbirds didn't bother to withdraw their beaks from the blossoms. A turn in the path revealed empty, falling rabbit warrens. Sheep ranchers had bought the old rabbit farm for summer grazing but no longer used it; they let Charlie live there in gratitude for his help with lamb-eating cougars. And there was Charlie, a time-stained light felt hat levelled across his head, tending a blackened coffeepot over a sagebrush fire.

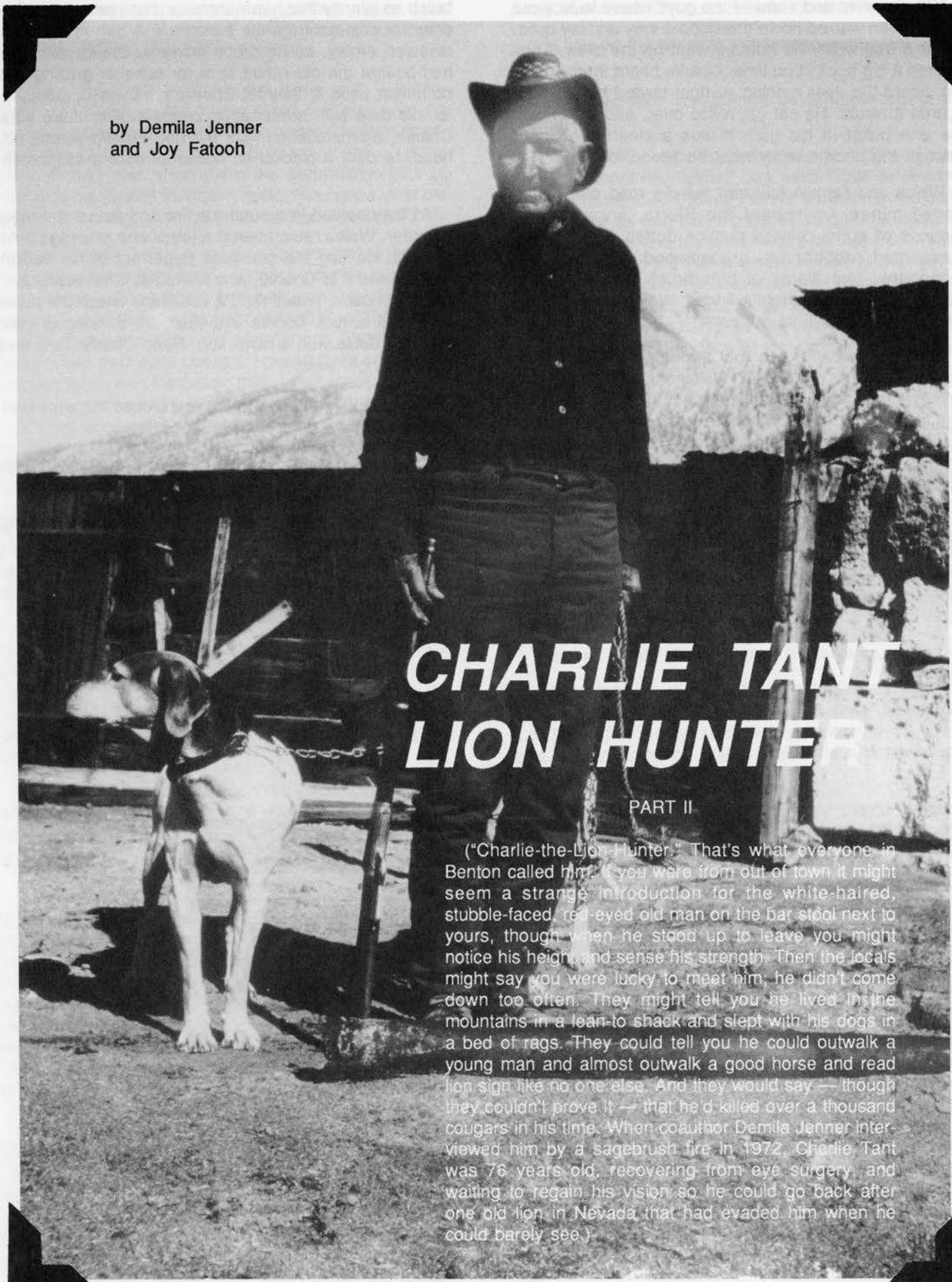
As they settled in around the fire and set up the tape recorder, Wales remembered a telephone message he'd brought. He dug the crumpled paper out of his pocket and handed it to Charlie, who looked at it helplessly and handed it back. Wales read a Louisiana telephone number: "Call collect. Lonnie and Stan are thinking of you. Having trouble with a black lion. Need Charlie Tant and his dogs right away."

Charlie squinted into the fire and blotted his eyes with a red bandanna before replying.

"I'm in no position to take care of it now. Someone else'll have to do it."

Under cover of the small sounds Wales made pouring wine, Demila turned on the tape recorder. ✤





by Demila Jenner
and Joy Fatooh

# CHARLIE TANT LION HUNTER

PART II

("Charlie-the-Lion-Hunter." That's what everyone in Benton called him. If you were from out of town it might seem a strange introduction for the white-haired, stubble-faced, red-eyed old man on the bar stool next to yours, though when he stood up to leave you might notice his height and sense his strength. Then the locals might say you were lucky to meet him, he didn't come down too often. They might tell you he lived in the mountains in a lean-to shack and slept with his dogs in a bed of rags. They could tell you he could outwalk a young man and almost outwalk a good horse and read lion sign like no one else. And they would say — though they couldn't prove it — that he'd killed over a thousand cougars in his time. When coauthor Demila Jenner interviewed him by a sagebrush fire in 1972, Charlie Tant was 76 years old, recovering from eye surgery, and waiting to regain his vision so he could go back after one old lion in Nevada that had evaded him when he could barely see.)

"I've never hunted them for sport," Charlie said, tossing black coffee out of his white enamelled cup and refilling it with red wine. "It's always been hard work for me. A living."

By then California had dropped the bounty and had begun regulating lion hunting, as Nevada does now; but it has always been legal for ranchers to rid themselves of a lion that threatens their stock. These lions — like the Nevada sheep killer — were Charlie's business.

"That lion's put one over on me too much," Charlie said. "He was killing ten or twelve sheep a night over there before they sent for me. Oh, it killed all last year, and my dogs took it off and one of them come in all chewed up. It was pretty rough, and I thought they got the lion too hot and it died. Sometimes if he's fat and running he gets too hot and he's helpless, you know. Sometimes they get the lion in the open and chew him up so bad behind, that lion would never make it.

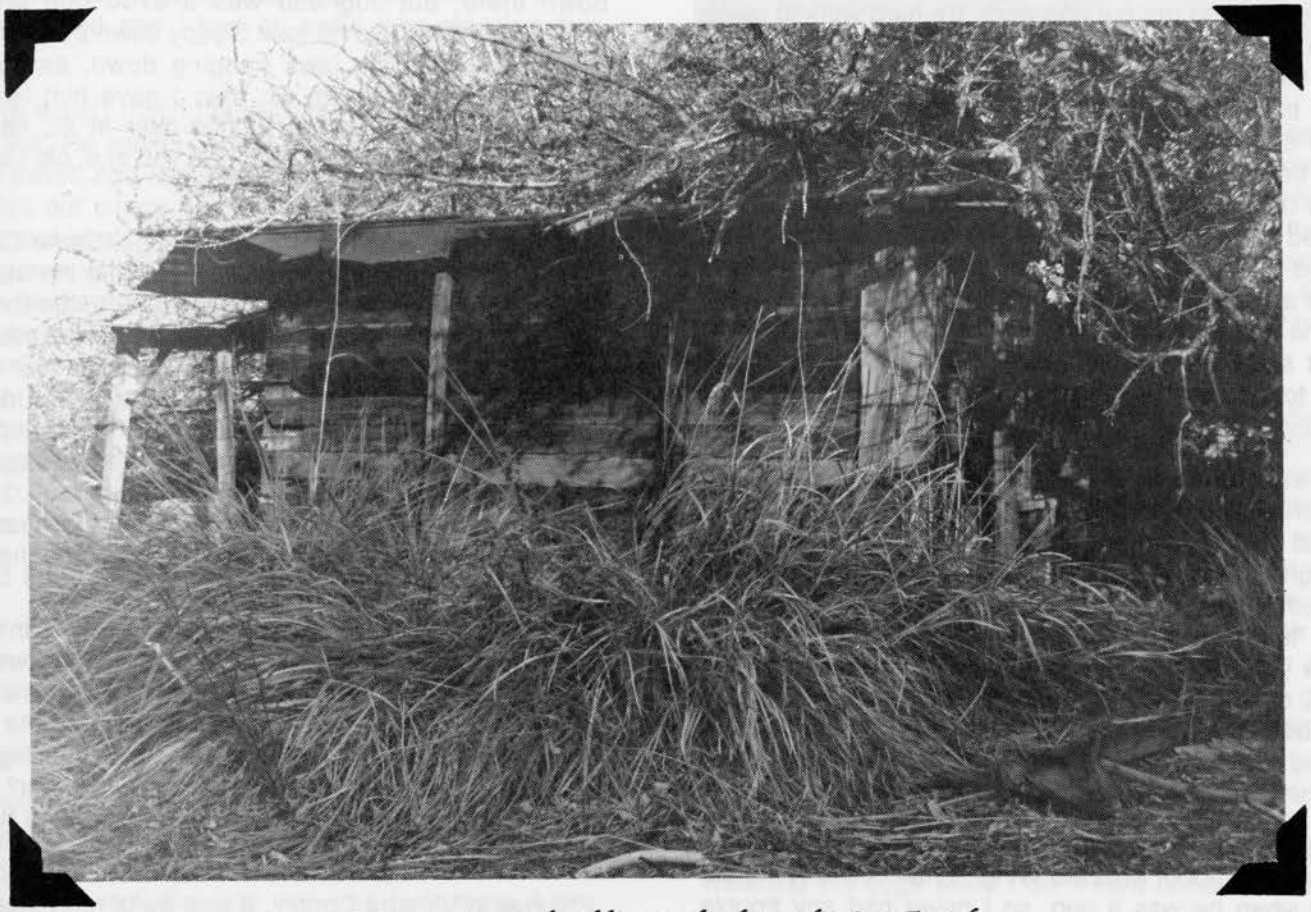
"So I thought that's what happened, because he just cut it off and didn't come back, didn't kill no more sheep. But this year he come back again, the same one. He travels the same way, and I know by the signs, you know. Size of tracks. Same lion. Just one time he come back. I was real late a-getting over there and the track was six days old, but my old dog took the track and carried it on up to where he'd killed the sheep.

"They'd had sheep all over the country and sheep tear a country all up, you know; sheep make so much scent a dog can't smell the lion track. I hunted two weeks out there, never did find the way the lion left, and so far I don't know if he's been back again. But he always did that: made a killing and took off through the open flats where there's no brush to hold the scent. If he comes back, I'll catch him . . . if he ever comes back."

That was an unusual lion, according to Charlie: most would follow the ridgetops. Charlie recounted tales of lion behavior, some of which contradicted commonly held ideas. Perhaps the strangest he ever observed was in Santa Barbara: "An old lion, I'd been tracking him for two days and hadn't caught up with him yet. I got close to one of my camps and I called off my dogs and went on it. Next morning I went back thinking I was a-gonna take up his track maybe ten or fifteen or twenty miles from there, but my dogs took his track right up the trail and I heard him jump and go to running for all it was out." Once the lion was treed Charlie discovered how it had spent the night.

"He'd killed a doe and then he'd just laid there; he'd taken a big feed. A coyote came along first; he killed that coyote and laid it on top of the doe. And then he laid there and two of them condors came along, and he killed them and laid them on top of the coyote. Maybe if one dog had gone up there not making too much noise he mighta killed it too."

Lions weren't always lone hunters, he said; he'd killed



*Lion country and rabbit ranch photos by Joy Fatooh*

two big old males, probably littermates, that always went after calves together, and he remembered three old females that always hunted together. More often it would be a female moving through the night with her two cubs flanking her, calling back and forth with bird-like whistles, flushing prey that she would kill. The blood-curdling scream people attribute to cougars was a myth, he said, "a story that got out about two thousand years ago and they made it stick."

He told how lions communicate by odor too, by making piles of pebbles, twigs or snow and leaving their scent. A good hunter could read those signs, as he had in Santa Barbara when he was accused of claiming to catch lions where there were none to be caught "They'd made a special study. So well, I come in there, and if I'd caught one lion it'd been all right, but I caught six in one month where they'd been in there a-writing it up."

Another time ranchers in Coleville sent for him after government hunters had supposedly left only two lions: "The lions was still just cleaning them out, eating the sheep over there. Some of the oldest, roughest-looking lions I ever caught." From mid-August until he was snowed out around Christmas, Charlie caught 23 lions there.

The hunters who failed had what Charlie called "short-run dogs." His own dogs had "en-durance" — as did he.

"Lion hunters is getting scarce, awfully scarce. They just don't like to get out and work. It's hard work to catch a lion. Lotta hunters, I just call them road hunters. They take the dogs and drive the roads and if they see a fresh track they put the dogs off after it; if they don't catch it after a while, they go back to the truck and look for a better track. If I put my dogs on a track they don't come back, they stay. I had a feller come up here, he wanted to tell me what to do: he said you drag a tree behind the car, and then go back the next morning and see if any fresh tracks were there. He said he'd guarantee me four or five fresh lion tracks a day. I told him you might show me one lion track, but my dogs won't be back to look for the others — they'll be going after that first lion."

It was rumored that Charlie's dogs were direct descendents of Ben Lilly's, but he said he'd been breeding his own line of hunting dogs since he was "a kid big enough to climb a tree" — years before he apprenticed himself to Lilly at 17. The best way to train them, he said, "is to take your pups when they jest big enough to follow you and git them in on a kill or two with the old dogs, and you'll never know you trained a dog. But if they been a-running foul stuff first, then you gonna have trouble with them." Foul stuff? "Anything that isn't lion. Anything they hit."

"I don't like to brag on my dogs," Charlie liked to say, but ask him about Buzzard Wing. "I had him with the old dogs when he was a pup, so I never had any trouble with him at all. He don't need any help in any way, finding the track, catching the lion. And you can tell by the way he barks whether he's hitting a fresh trail or an old one: if it's fresh he barks faster." And there was old Rounder, and Queen de High ("She was taller than the first Queen"), and Hotfoot — "But I got doublecrossed out of Hotfoot.

"Old Leo, he was a lionhunter from down Southern California. He done more spitting tobacco than hunting, though, biggest tobacco chewer I ever knowed. I sold him old Queen de High for $150. Another guy went to Utah and paid a thousand dollars for a hound and old Queen de High put that thousand-dollar dog in the shade, and all the rest of them dogs too. Run that lion for four hours and caught it all by herself.

"Leo stuck out his chest, took Queen de High up there in the canyon, gonna show the world. They always wanting to show up somebody else. But he'd got her so damn fat she couldn't follow him and she kept jumping off them ledges and pulled a ligament in her hind leg. Old Leo he come up here and said, 'I read an article in a magazine that said you were an honest guy. You sold me a broke-down dog and I think you ought to replace it with Jughead. If you don't I'll get you another kind of a write-up in a magazine.'

"Old Stuart offered him $750 on the spot for Queen de High; he knew what kind of dog she was; but Leo wouldn't take it, and he'd just given me $150 for her. I told him Sleepy, she'd be good enough for that country down there, but Jughead was a $750 dog and he couldn't have her. So he took Sleepy down there and he come back with his jaws hanging down, saying old Sleepy'd been run over. So then I gave him Hotfoot. Turned out Sleepy wasn't runned over at all; next I'd heard she'd had a litter of pups. So you see, old Leo got Hotfoot for free."

Lion hunting was hazardous for dogs. Some Charlie had to sew up; others were killed. He told the story of one dog that took off alone after a big old male lion and treed it while Charlie and his other dogs were pursuing a female. The lone dog kept his lion treed for four days, and when Charlie finally got there the lion suddenly came down and took off. When Charlie caught up with him again "he just turned around and bit that dog right through the head and dropped him off the bluff. I went back later and he'd eat that dog, just left the head and feet and tail. He come down and eat that dog that had him treed for four days."

Charlie himself had no fear of lions. They didn't normally bother people, he said, although they weren't afraid of us either: "They queerious. They'll come right up to your campfire if you don't have dogs, come back and forth around while you're sleeping." But hunting held other dangers for him. "The most dangerous hunt? Well, I broke my leg out in the brush, you know, and had to crawl in.

"It was in Ventura County. It was awful rainy weather, and I was a-taking grub back in the mountains. I'd been

going up and down that bluff all the time, but the granite soaked up rain and when I started to go off this time, a big rock came loose and rolled over my leg.

"Easier to crawl uphill than down, but I got down to my truck. I was laying in my truck a-cooking, a feller who was fishing come up — he'd told his wife he suspicioned he ought to go up. He drove my truck into where I got my leg fixed. It was my left leg, below the knee. But I kept going all the time. They made me feed a hay baler with a cast on my leg in Santa Barbara. They had me right where they wanted me: war time, you know, and they short of help. Gathering cattle, too, with a cast on my leg. I couldn't put my heel down for, oh, seven or eight years, walked on my toe." He went to Arizona to hunt but found they'd abandoned the bounty; "so I went out and laid in the sand and the sun and then my leg got well."

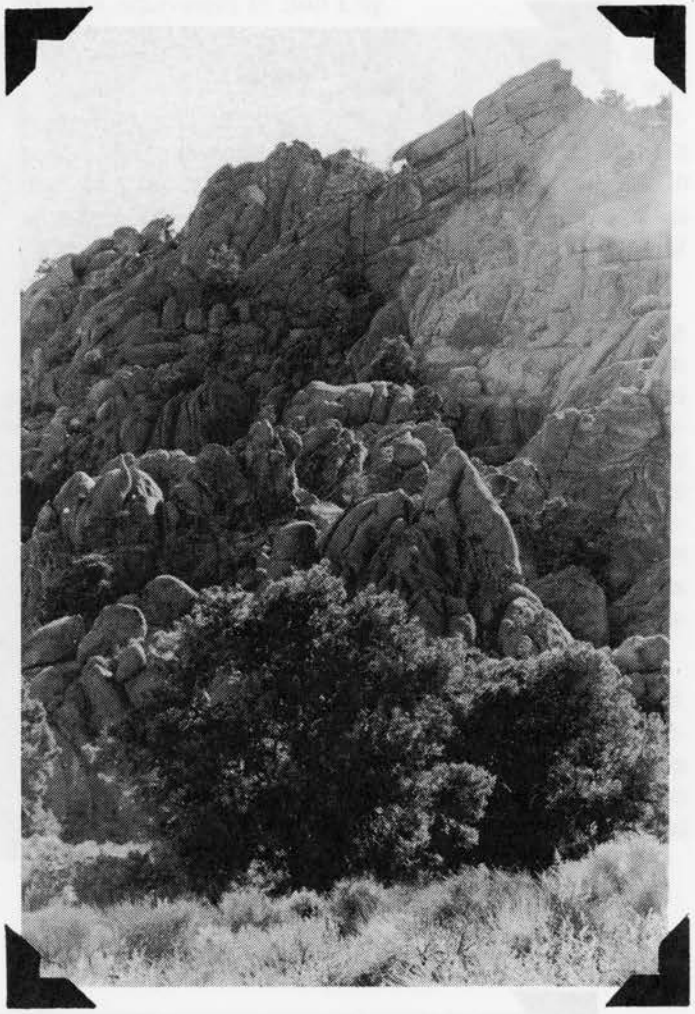
Another time, hunting in Santa Barbara, "I was going up the canyon a-pushing the brush back, staying in the draw, you know, and this here snake was on the side of the bank where the willows come out. They say they always rattle first, but he didn't; he bit me and then rattled. Oh, I tried to cut the bite out and bandage my hand; wrapped a string around my hand to cut the circulation off, and I guess I made a mistake doing that: my whole arm was just rotten there for a long time. I had three colts back in there and not a one of them really broke to ride, not a one I could saddle with one hand. I just stayed back in camp until it got well. I caught a lion with one hand and I had an awful time skinning that lion."

There wasn't much that would stop Charlie from getting a lion. He wasn't concerned about killing too many: "Lion'll travel. And lion increase. I've completely cleaned countries out where you couldn't find a lion track anywhere, and in eight years, seems like they'll be as thick as they ever was." One year, he said, he travelled every road in the Benton Range country with a Fish and Game man who was tracking migrating deer; they only found the tracks of two lions, and those were just passing through: "They come from the other side of White Mountain, them two lions. The Fish and Game boys and me, we caught one of them, the female; and the old male he just kep a-going straight on. He went clear to Yosemite Park.

"And the next year after that I caught thirteen."

That must have been back when the bounty was on. Friends of Charlie's used to claim he only killed the killer lions, the ones that took more sheep or deer than they could eat. It's doubtful that every lion between White Mountain and Yosemite was a bloodthirsty killer.

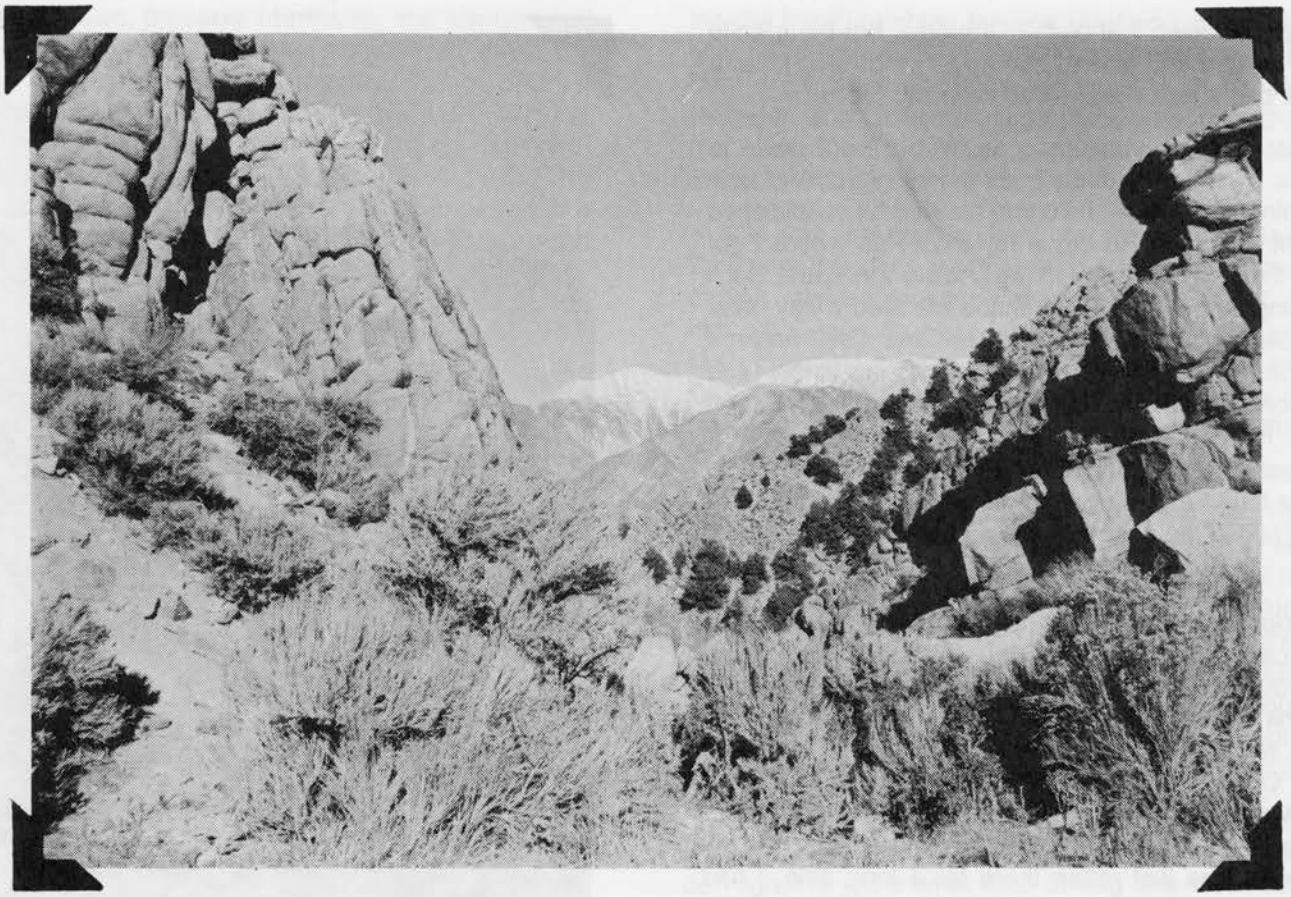
"I think Charlie had his own form of land ethic," Bill Bramlette says today. "The government had a bounty on lions; they were killing domestic sheep; and the values of the times were that you trap and hunt them. Lions were his bread and butter."

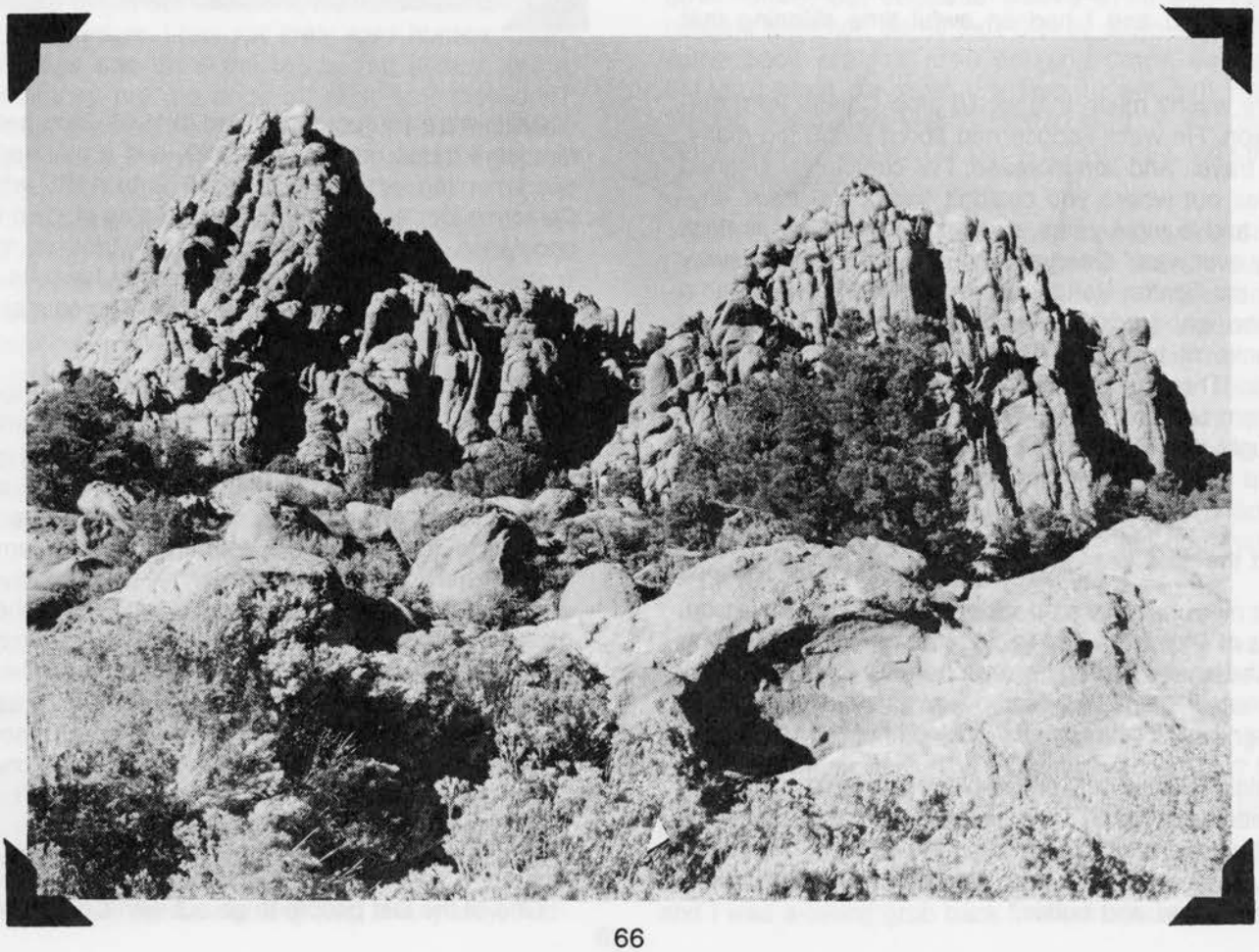


California's lion bounty ended in 1963, they became a regulated game mammal in 1969, and a moratorium on sport hunting extended from 1972 to 1986 while the California Department of Fish and Game studied the lion population. Since then the DFG has tried to reinstate sport hunting but has been blocked by lawsuits. Opponents say the studies are insufficient. The cougar has its defenders. Times have changed.

Lions did come back to the Benton Range, and meanwhile Charlie Tant died. Today Bill Bramlette is district ranger for the Forest Service region that includes Charlie's old hunting grounds; as head of the steering committee for a protected wild horse area, he reports that lions appear to be helping maintain unusually healthy herds. One researcher is studying the lions' effect on the horses' reproductive rates and their relationship with both horses and deer; his research assistants are lion hunters. Charlie Tant could have gotten along with some of them — like George Orisio, still hunting from muleback at 85. And he might not have objected to a hunt that ended with photographs, tests and measurements instead of death. As Orisio has said, "My biggest part of the enjoyment in a lion hunt is watching the dogs work. I don't care about killin' one."

One of the last people to go out with Charlie was Dick





Weaver, the DFG wildlife biologist in charge of lion studies from the time the moratorium went into effect until his retirement this year. "We were doing population studies and we decided to pick the brains of the old-timers," Weaver says. He spent two days with Charlie in 1972, looking for lion sign and learning where lions could be found.

"It was an interesting two days. He was an old man living in squalor by almost anyone's standards, and no longer able to keep up with his dogs — though he'd sometimes turn them loose just to hear them baying. He was well-known among other dog men as sort of a lion hunter's lion hunter. Everyone wanted to breed their dogs to his. Charlie had a thing with the dogs, almost like they could communicate. Few people have the kind of success that Charlie had.

"I don't think anyone could argue his knowledge of lions, lion behavior, lion sign. I've known a half a dozen people in my life with that ability to look at the ground and read it like a newspaper, to read sign no matter how faint. I'm a wildlife man, an outdoor person; I'd follow them and sooner or later I'd find a sign I could read; but they'd be traipsing along over a granite slab . . .

"When you go out you don't always find track, and then only one time in ten you put the dogs out and get a lion in hand. You can lose the scent on bare ground; there has to be a certain humidity; if it's too hot it volatizes. But Charlie had the ability to visually find a track and start his dogs all over again. He was probably California's equivalent to Ben Lilly."

There is no longer any call for a man who can kill a thousand lions. Charlie was master of his time and place, perfectly adapted to a vanished way of life, consumately skilled in a profession that — less than a decade after his death — the world scarcely needs. In Charlie's day a man struggled to adjust nature to fit his needs. Today we're trying to understand the balance of nature before it is altered beyond recognition.

There are those who argue that lions must be hunted to prevent their becoming a threat to livestock; and there are those who say even the small-scale hunt proposed by California's DFG will threaten the species. So far studies, like Charlie's observations, suggest that both may be barking up the wrong tree: if you kill a few lions more lions will take their place, as long as there are mountains and deer — and a healthy replacement population nearby. Ultimately it may come down to a personal choice against taking an animal's life for no good reason.

Charlie Tant was no sport hunter, as he said himself, and it was said of him that he would sometimes go hungry rather than kill the game around him. Nor were lions his enemy. They were his bread and butter, and maybe more: the worthy adversary against which he measured himself, the challenge that kept him coming back. ✦

*Angelo Rossi, center; from left, clockwise: Joe, Berna, Louis, Rafael, Tony; July 17, 1884*

*photographs from Rossi family albums*

*Only one highway runs through Inyo and Mono counties, and along its length lie little towns, some thriving communities, some slowly turning into new ghost towns, others hidden off the road among trees and lanes. Descendants of many of the first white settlers are still devoted to the life here along the vast spine of the Sierra, and as time passes the tapestry of relationships becomes complex.*

*One such family began its American saga when Angelo Rossi came from southern Italy and 105 years of Rossis began in the Owens Valley.*

*A family tree tracing relationships of Rossi, Serventi, Fletcher, White and Liston moves into Clarkson, Blake, Milovich, Fansler, Screen, Smith, Harwood, and on down into a sixth generation of well known Valley names woven into the fabric of an epic.*

*The Rossi stories typify the evolution of America, of the West, and of the Eastern Sierra. Angelo and Rosa's eight children and their descendants can tell of triumph and tragedy, love and music and poetry, adventure and hard work, of homesteading in Lone Pine, herding goats and sheep from Lone Pine to Mono Lake, of farming near Independence and ranching near Big Pine, of mining and stonemasonry, beekeeping, vineyards, orchards, cowboys, business ventures, and community volunteerism, of the good life the way it used to be and the way it is in the high country today.*

*This August will see the reunion regularly held on the first Saturday in August at the Rossi Reservation, site of the original home of Angelo's son Tony and wife Nancy (Blake) in Big Pine. One of those lovely oases unsuspected by passing motorists, the quiet streets of little Big Pine are bountiful with gardens, trees, neat fences and charming homes. A lush park on a back street, the Rossi homestead is now owned and maintained in its original beauty by Tony's grandson Mike Rossi and his son, Dean. Estelle and Virginia (Babe), Tony's daughters, also live nearby, as do 13 families altogether.*

*From 250 to 400 people from all over the West will gather under great trees shading the old home buildings, sloping lawns, pond and streams, with flowers, grapes, berries, and fruit trees planted generations ago. Games, swimming, skits and sing-alongs will be sustained by chickens, roasts and game birds planted in the ground in dutch ovens by the men around 4 a.m., accompanied by salads, desserts, polenta, spaghetti, relishes, breads and a Rossi staple, beans.*

*Here the stories will be told and re-told, keeping alive the roots of real America.*

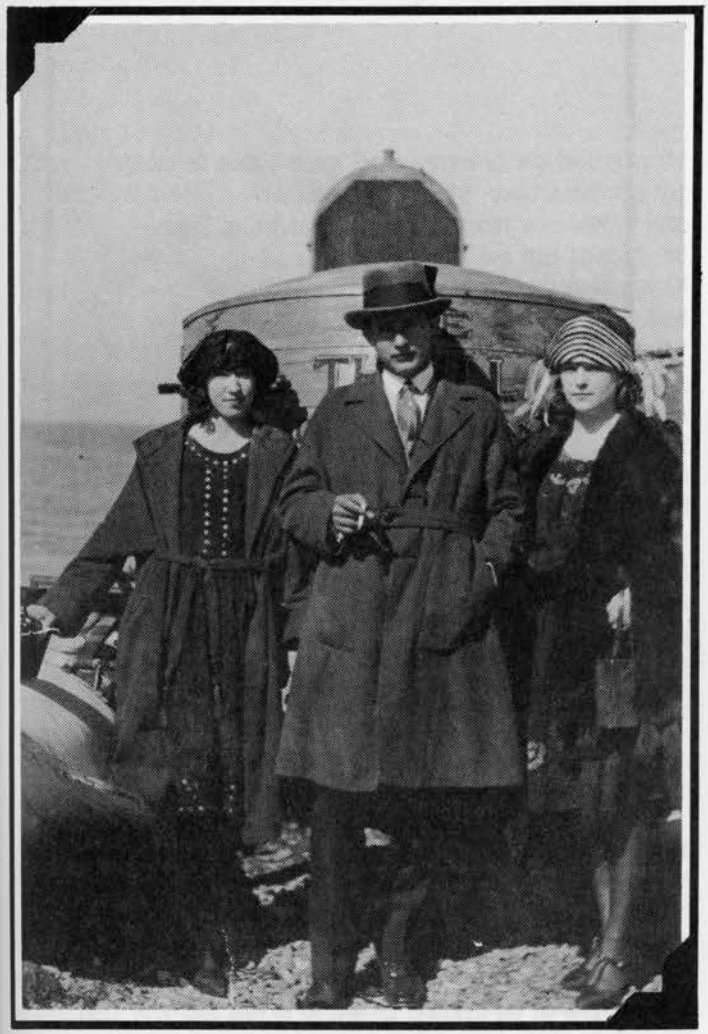
*Harriette Allison, Babe's daughter, says, "We are all Valley people. We have a love for the snows in winter, lilacs in spring, and the gathering of wood in the fall. Children of the families who have moved away come back to meet cousins and find their roots. No one is gone from us forever. They live on in our memories and come back with us at every reunion. We re-live the stories and remember how much fun we had. We're all there together and no one is alone with his memories."*

*We have chosen two of these stories, written by two of Angelo's granddaughters for their families, to share here. Estelle's story begins.*

# OUR TRIP

## Across the Mojave Desert

## by Covered Wagon



*Center: Harvey Rossi*

*Dedicated to My Children*
*and in Memory of*
*My Dear Mother, Father and Brother Harvey*

By Estelle Rossi Fansler Screen

*Jay and Estelle Fansler and family*

*"No one is gone from us forever. They live on in our memories and come back with us at every reunion."*

When I was a very young girl, my father decided to take his family on a trip to Los Angeles to see the bright lights of the city. It was the year 1911 in late November when we started on our journey. There were four of us kids and another on the way. My older brother, Harvey, was two years older than I and then there was a span of eight years between me and the younger ones.

Late in the summer months, my dad began making plans for a means of transportation. He took the old wood wagon and made it into a covered wagon which was as beautiful and glamorous to us then as the beautiful motor-driven house cars of today. The only difference — ours was horse power. We had no showers, sinks or running water. We carried our water in barrels fastened to the side of the wagon. We carried everything we needed, and it all had its place in the wagon.

When we stopped to camp overnight, Dad put up the tent and set up the little wood stove which we cooked our meals on and heated water to wash dishes and take baths. The tailgate of the wagon was our table, and the doors on the back were made to swing out and were used as cupboards. Dad made shelves on the inside of the doors to carry our dishes and cooking utensils. When the doors were opened out, we had our dining area before us. The tent was facing the back of the wagon so the stove was nearby and we could get in and out of the weather. Mother and the two little ones slept in the wagon which had a double bed made up. My Dad, older brother, and I slept in the tent. We were very snug and happy.

About once a week we would heat water and get out the old washtub and take baths and wash out our clothes and hang them on the bushes to dry. We carried enough supplies to last throughout the trip. Mother canned lots of vegetables and fruit. We had home-cured bacon and ham, dried beans, potatoes, and flour in large quantities. We were almost ready to go — everything had been taken care of. My Dad and Mother knew a family who would move into our home and take care of things until our return.

So, the first warm day in late November found us preparing for our journey. Grandma and Grandpa Blake thought it would be better if we stayed the night with them and get an early start the next morning. Grandma made beds for all of us and we retired early. We were up at the crack of dawn and could hardly wait to get started. Finally we were ready to climb aboard with everyone kissing, hugging, and crying all at the same time.

At last, we were on our way with excitement and adventure ahead of us. Dad had a team of big mares, a gray and a bay. We called them Maude and Grace. They were gentle and strong and we loved them. Maude had a colt, I guess she was about ten months or a year old, that my brother and I were breaking to ride. She was sweet and gentle with us. She would not lead, so Dad tied a rope around her belly and attached it to the lead rope some way so that when she pulled back, it pinched her and taught her to lead. Her name was Hazel. Dad took her along with the idea of selling her to help pay the expenses of our trip. Horses were much in demand at that time and sold for a good figure. When we arrived in Long Beach, a Chinaman offered us $150 for her but we had all become so attached to her that it was like giving up one of the family, so she made the trip home with us.

The first day we drove as far as Aberdeen and set up camp at what was then called the old Black Rock Ranch. The road used to go through the center of the ranch. Dad knew the people who lived there, so the grownups visited and played cards until late in the night. We kids were put to bed early so we would be ready for the next day's travel. Dad used to herd sheep up and down the valley in his younger days and became acquainted with all the ranchers along the way.

*"Grandma and Grandpa" Blake*

Early next morning we were on our way. We came to the Eight-Mile Ranch. It was a big sheep ranch north of Independence. In the early days it was a stage coach stop. Dad knew the folks who lived there so we stopped for awhile to rest and visit. Dad and the Mr. used to herd sheep together and had much to talk about while refreshing themselves over a glass of homemade Dago Red. The

women had many things to talk about, too. Visitors were few and far between in those days.

Finally Dad said that if we were going to make distance that day, we had better be moving on. So, off we go and went as far as Independence. We had some friends living there. We spent the night and part of the next day with them. Mama did the family wash and cooked a pot of beans and potatoes to carry us through for a day or two. We got a rather late start that day and only got as far as Manzanar. We pulled up in a little grove near the old school house and made camp.

This was during the time that the City of Los Angeles was building the aqueduct to carry the water from the Owens Valley across the desert to the city. There were supply camps about every fifteen miles through the desert and my dad tried to plan his trip to stop near one of these camps every other day. We could get water and hay for our horses which made it more convenient for us. This was the first one; it was a big camp set up in a locust grove alongside a stream of water. There was a big boardinghouse, many horses and corrals, there were no motor-driven vehicles. The work was all done by man and horse power — mostly mules in those days.

After we were all settled down for the evening, my brother and I decided to go calling. We went over to the cookhouse and the cook invited us in. He asked us to have supper with him. It was quite a thrill for us, so we stayed and, after we had finished, he made up a basket of goodies and walked us back to our camp. Of course, Mama and Dad were beginning to wonder what had become of us and were quite relieved when we walked in with our new-found friend. There were lots of goodies in the basket and, among them were some codfish balls that he had made. We nibbled at them and decided they were pretty good. Funny how things stick in your mind. I remember we used to go to Grandma Blake's and, about once a week in the pantry would be a kettle of codfish soaking in water to cook for the next day. It smelled horrible! She used to boil it and make a cream sauce with it; it was supposed to be good for us. They thought it was great but we kids could hardly swallow it, but we were made to eat it anyway. So, we were a little curious about the codfish balls. We didn't realize it could be cooked any other way and they tasted fairly good.

Up early and on our way the next morning. We drove as far as Cottonwood Creek. There was a little stream coming down out of the mountains, winding its way through the sand. A few cottonwood trees grew along the banks. The water emptied into Owens Lake which was a large body of water twenty-eight miles long. It reached from south of Lone Pine to Olancha. They used to haul cargo on a steamboat from Keeler to Olancha in the early years (before my time). My great uncle, Elias Blake, worked on the ship in his youth.

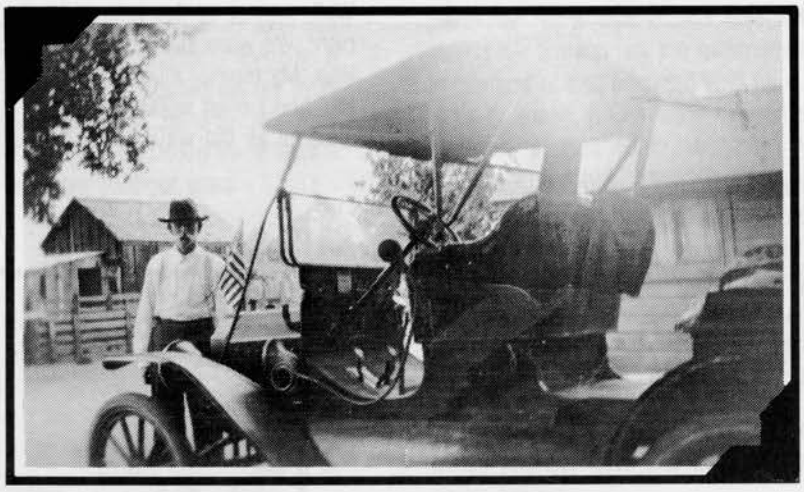
Well, we set up the tent under the trees and settled down for the night. We were always glad to get out of the wagon and stretch our legs. My mother must have been miserable throughout that whole trip, and I often wonder how she stood it and stayed so brave and cheerful all the way. I guess it was the pioneer blood in her.

*"Mom" Nancy Rossi*

The weather was beautiful and the sand was warm and soft on our bare feet. Dad set up the camp stove, my brother and I gathered twigs and buffalo chips for the fire. We all helped get supper. Mama made biscuits (I can still taste them). They had a smoked flavor from the brush and twigs we used in the fire. She made enough to last for a few days. We ate lunch as we traveled.

We spent a few days here enjoying the beauty and warmth of the desert.

We drove as far as Cartago the next day. We spent the night nearby the aqueduct supply camp. The next day we traveled as far as Haiwee Dam (at that time it was called the goat ranch). We stayed overnight here and then on to Little Lake. It was so warm and lovely here. Dad set up the tent on the south side of the rocks



*"Grandpa" Blake and his 1912 Model T*

in the canyon. It was so nice that we spent three or four days here. There was water from the spring and green grass for the horses. We spread our bedding on the bushes to air in the sun while Mama baked bread and cooked a pot of beans and boiled some potatoes for the next few days of travel, never knowing where the next stop might be. After a few days of rest and basking in the sun, we were ready to move on again. We drove as far as Indian Wells. We bathed in the pool from the mineral springs. It was there we met Grandpa Blake. He had been to Los Angeles to purchase a new Model T Ford and was on his way home. He stopped to rest and visit awhile before continuing on his way.

Dad knew the people who lived at Indian Wells. They were very nice to us. We only stayed one night. We had been on the road about ten days up to now and we were having the thrill of our lives.

My brother and I walked the biggest part of the way across the desert. The horses traveled so slow that it was easy to keep up with them. Once in awhile we would take our little sister and brother off the wagon and let them play along with us. Alma was four and Maynard was two. Mama was pregnant with our younger sister who was born after we returned home. I often think back and wonder if our mother really enjoyed that trip. I can't remember ever hearing a word of complaint from her; how uncomfortable she must have been climbing in and out of the wagon, sitting on a high, hard seat mile after mile dangling her legs and bringing her feet to rest on the dashboard below. The bed was fixed so she could crawl in the back and lie down when she got too tired to sit up, but there was always the little kids who required much care and attention.

Up to now, we had been taking our time and enjoying the scenery and beauty of the desert, but the horses were getting frisky and impatient so Dad thought he had better work it out of them. We traveled many miles that day passing through Red Rock Canyon in all its colorful beauty, and then on to Cinco. We stayed a couple of days here. There was a grocery store and a few old prospector shacks around. We made our camp near the railroad. The store was owned and operated by an old woman who had spent her entire life on the desert. In the evening she would sit on the porch in front of her store rocking back and forth, smoking a corncob pipe, and telling us stories about her life on the desert.

We traveled on to Mojave the next day and set up camp on the outskirts of the town. We made our beds and set up the little stove and cooked supper inside the tent. When we finished eating, we were all tired and went to bed early. Sometime during the night the wind came up and blew so hard it blew our tent down. We scrambled around in the dark and gathered up what we could find and crawled into the wagon until daylight. Then we finished gathering up our camp and were on the road again. By now we had been on the road two weeks. From then on we ran into more traffic and more people. We had to be a little more careful where we stopped to camp. The dirt road ran parallel to the railroad. When a train went by the horses would rear and snort and kick and make such a fuss it was hard to hold them. Sometimes it took both my brother and dad to keep them from bolting and running. It was fun for his kids but we didn't realize the danger it could have been.

Once in awhile we would meet a traveler who would be stuck in the middle of the road. The sand was so deep they couldn't get out of their tracks. We would unhitch our team and hook onto theirs in order to pull them out of the way so we could get by. The desert was beautiful but the roads were terrible!

We passed through little towns along the way like Rosamond, Lancaster, and Palmdale. We went through the tunnel at Newhall near Saugus. The horses really put on a show going through that long, dark tunnel. We were excited and frightened. It was a relief to all of us when we came to the end.

We drove around looking for a place to stop for a few days and found a big oak tree on the hillside. We had just gotten settled

when it started to rain. It rained for days, our tent leaked, the cover on our wagon leaked, and everything we possessed was soaked. Luckily it was a warm rain and we were on a slope which kept us from drowning.

Finally the rain stopped and the sun came out so warm and bright. We had bedding and clothes spread out on every bush and shrub around. When we finally got dried out and back to normal, we realized we were in the middle of an oil field. Most of them were pumping oil. It was quite an interesting experience for all of us.

We traveled on and camped here and there throughout the San Fernando Valley. The orange groves were a beautiful sight and the people were very hospitable and friendly to us.

We had some friends who lived in downtown Los Angeles. We had their address. We shared our home with them one winter when they were stranded and having a little hard luck. When they left, they told us if we ever came to the city to be sure and come to see them.

We were driving up one street and down another, the shoes on the horses' feet were making sparks on the pavement, the horses were snorting and rearing and shying from the trolley cars and automobiles. We were all hanging on for our lives. I guess our friends heard us coming because, when we finally found the place, they met us at the door and didn't seem very happy to see us so we didn't stay very long.

We drove around awhile and admired the beautiful homes and yards. The horses were getting restless and hard to manage. Dad was pulling on the reins and trying to hold the brake at the same time; he was worn out and quite relieved when we found ourselves in a little town called Hollywood.

There was a eucalyptus grove at the edge of town and that was where we made our camp for a few days. At that time it was a very small place. I remember a drug store, post office, and a general store. Orange and lemon groves were everywhere. My brother and I fed them to the horses and played anti-over the tent with oranges.

We got settled for the night and Dad decided to take a stroll. He came upon an old deserted-looking shed with a few old bales of hay in it, so he took a bale and carried it over to camp for the horses. He had just put the hay down and had come into the tent when a man came walking up and asked where our dad was, he would like to talk to him; so brother started calling for him. I don't know whether he saw the man coming and was trying to avoid him but, anyway, we were all ears and heard the man say to him, "You can return the hay now or answer to the judge in the morning." So, poor old Dad returned the hay and, as far as he was concerned, the case was closed! We thought it was funny and we were getting quite a bang out of it until Dad told us to forget it — or else!

After a few days, we traveled on and stayed in all the little towns like Fullerton, Anaheim, Little Rock, Venice, and several other places, finally settling in Long Beach. We had been on the road twenty-eight days.

Dad found a little unfurnished house for rent on Atlantic Boulevard where we stayed for a month, part of December and January. It had a big yard with a fence around it. There was an outhouse and barn on the back of the lot. Dad pulled in and we all pitched in and started unloading our belongings. Dad tied the horses in the barn and tied the colt to the water hydrant nearby so she could graze on the green grass for a few minutes. The first things she did was to break the hydrant and we had water spraying all over the place. Dad found a stick and whittled a plug, drove it into the pipe to stop the flow of water, and, as far as I know, it's still there. At any rate, it served the purpose for the time being.

*"The Old Cupboard"*

*Rose Seglie, Jean Peden, Estelle Rossi from postcard addressed from Estelle to "My dear cousin, Miss Louise Serventi"*

We finally got settled in the house. We didn't have any furniture so Dad went to a secondhand store and bought a used gas range and a table. We made do with the rest of what we had.

We spent Christmas here. Dad bought us a little tree and we popped corn and strung it, cut pictures from magazines and decorated the tree. We picked oranges from the tree in the yard. We filled the little kids' stockings and hung them on the tree. Mama prepared a lovely Christmas dinner. We didn't have a turkey but we had a home-cured ham and all the trimmings. It was a beautiful Christmas, one I shall remember always.

We were near enough to the ocean that we could walk to the beach. My brother and I would go fishing off the pier almost every afternoon. In the evening, after dark, we played games in the streets under the lights with the neighbor kids from blocks around. It was all a new world to us. We didn't have electricity or street lights where we came from.

We spent a glorious month here. Dad used to take us on the street car for a Sunday ride and Mama would fix a picnic basket. On week days we would go to the beach and play in the sand or fish off the pier.

*Virginia (Babe), Alma, and Maynard Rossi*

But finally it came time for us to make plans for the trip home. The horses had to be shod and the wagon had to be repaired, and everything put in shape for the long journey home. It was the end of January when we hit the road again, homeward bound. The weather was beautiful. We traveled pretty steady as we were all homesick and anxious to cover the miles in a hurry. When we came to the crossroad at Mojave, Dad wanted to flip a coin to see whether to go to Bakersfield or Big Pine. We were all so anxious to get home, we didn't even consider changing our course. We made very good time crossing the desert homeward.

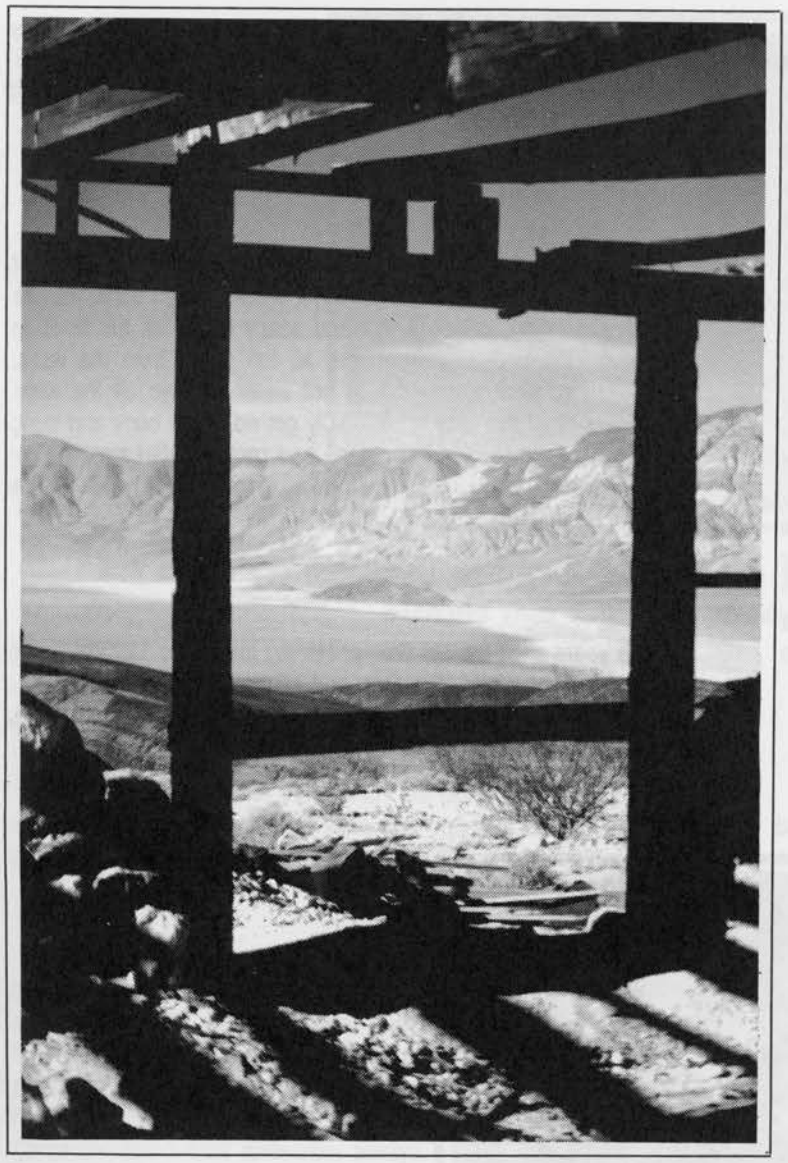
The weather was perfect until within a few miles south of Olancha. The north wind began to blow and we were miserable and almost froze. The horses were hard to manage, the wind whipped the cover loose from the wagon, and blew us around. The kids got scared and started crying and Mama wasn't feeling well. We finally made it into Olancha and met some people who had a cabin nearby. They invited us in to stay until the storm was over. It lasted a couple of days. When we were ready to leave, they decided to follow us home and they spent the winter with us.

We arrived home the middle of February and the snow came down. It was a long, cold winter. We were all happy to be home. My brother and I went back to school to take up where we had left off.

The family that stayed in our house while we were gone brought in a batch of bedbugs. We spent days, weeks, and, I think, months washing, sunning, boiling in lye and soapy water, all the bedding and even the bedsteads. We tore all the paper from the walls, white-washed and scrubbed with hot water and lye all the walls and floors of all the rooms. We finally got rid of the bugs and hung new wallpaper throughout. The time had come to start making preparations for the new baby who was born April 21, 1912. We named her Virginia Rose Rossi.

The years sped by. My brother Harvey joined the Medical Corps in the Army of World War One and I married and moved away.

*Harvey Woodcock, Jay Fansler, Nancy Rossi, and Estelle on the occasion of the wedding of Jay and Estelle, 1917*



*Looking out at Lookout. View over northern Panamint Valley David A. Wright photo 1989.*

# LOOKING IN ON LOOKOUT

by David A. Wright

*It is summer in Panamint as I find myself heading relentlessly up the boulder-strewn canyon. My mule beneath me strains her heart out up this Godforsaken country as we push ahead in our search for wealth. Boulders endlessly pound at my mule and myself until, in agony, I curse everything I can think of. There is evidence that others have come this way before me, in huge wagons with wheels of iron rim and seats of pain. How could they put up with this constant pounding?*

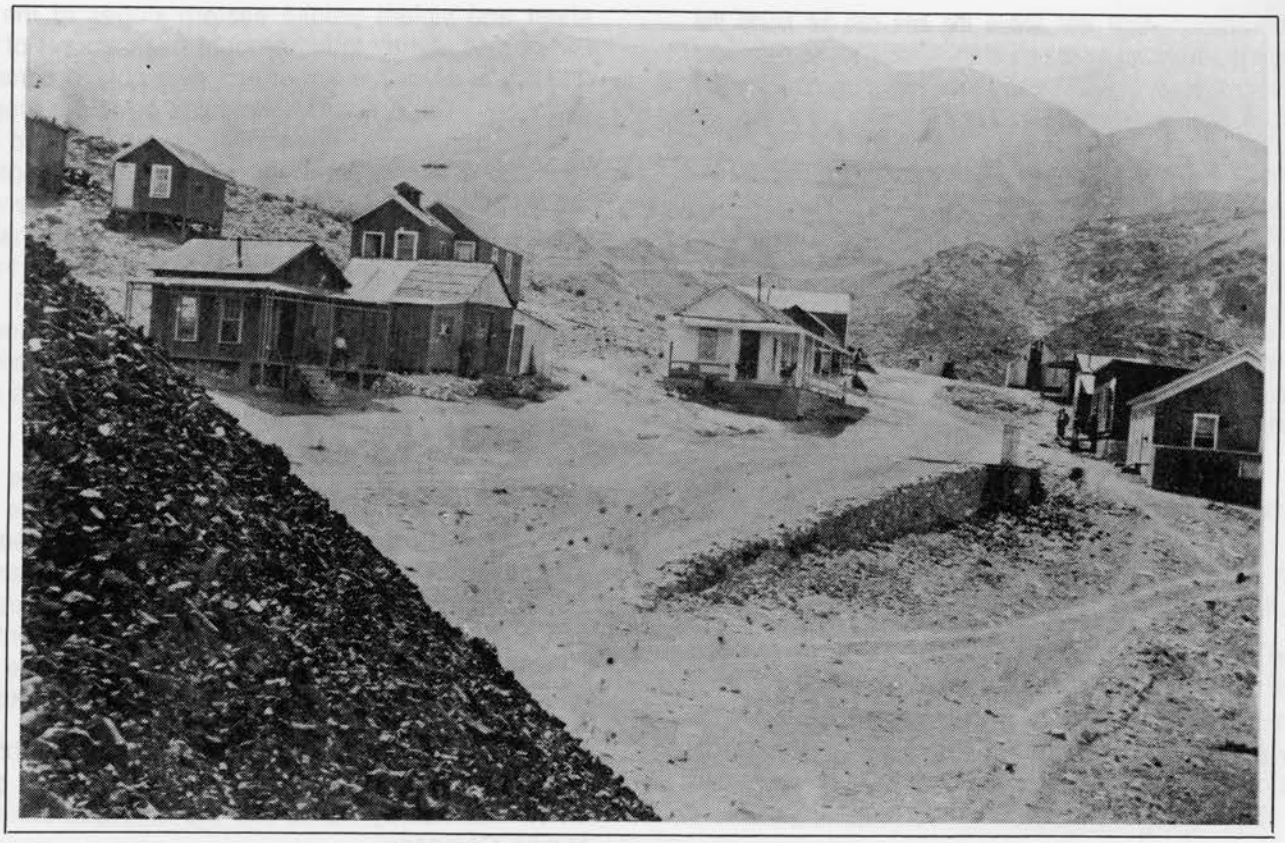
*This land in which I seek fortune changes the human landscape of emotion and mood, just as light and shadow change upon the landscape of earth and sky. One can run the gamut of feelings in each passing foot, mile, and segment of time.*

*At last! The backbone of the ridge where I seek my wealth is topped, and my mood changes to excitement! The rocks of the canyon floor cease, and the way becomes smoother. Before me spreads the exhilarating expanse of Panamint Valley, 3,000 feet below.*

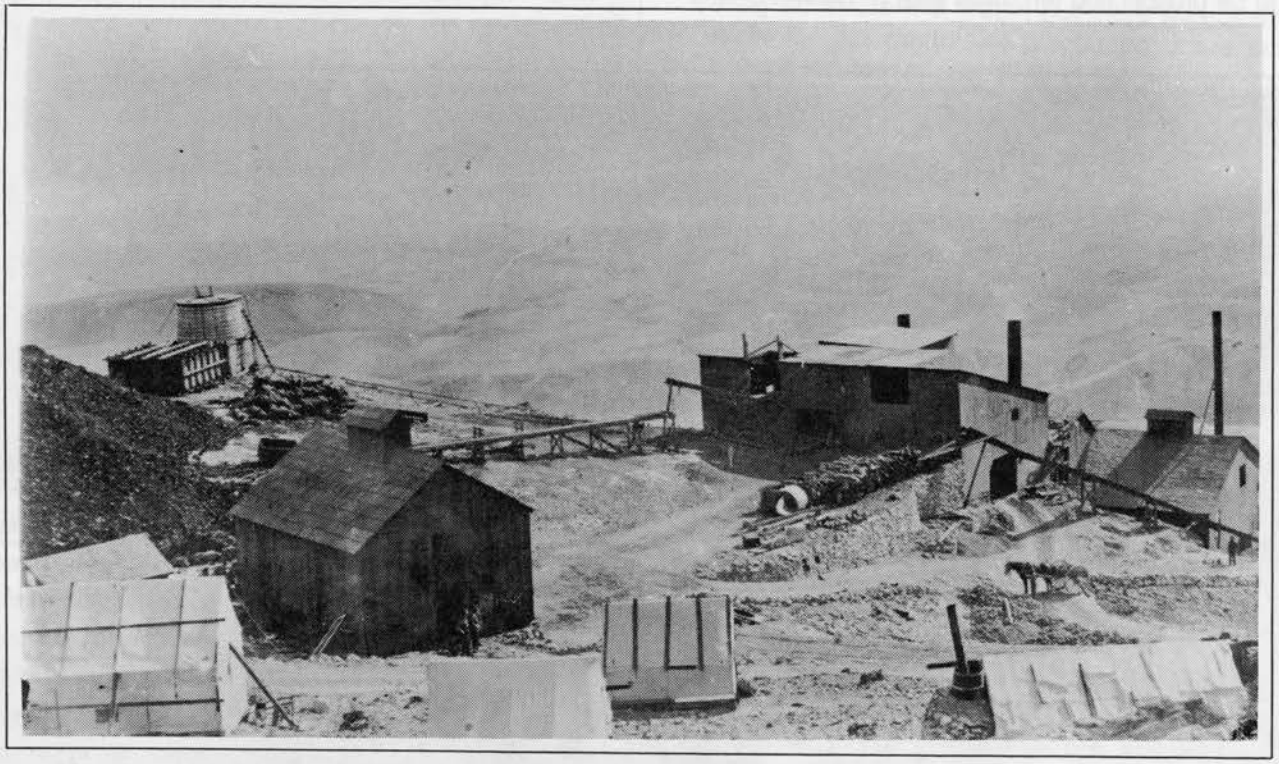
*Anticipation ensues. I know that my wealth will be found a little to the east on the knoll they call Lookout. As I reach my claim, a bit of disappointment sets in as I see I am not the only one to have found it; there have been others, but they are gone. My inquisitive nature takes over. Where did they go? They left behind so much.*

*Later, I find I am again on the roam. This time up into the cool pinyon forests of Wildrose Canyon, high in the Panamint Mountains. The route is much smoother up this high. In the dense forests I find curious objects. They have obviously been constructed by man in search of wealth, but seem to serve some other purpose. Legend has it that they once were a part of the quest across the valley where I had been searching for my own wealth, but what connection do these monstrosities of stone have to do with that place? Why have men toiled so hard on something that served so little purpose?*

*"One man's trash is another's treasure." I have found my treasure here on Lookout Mountain, and in Wildrose Canyon. On this*



*Main Street, Town of Lookout, and Argus Range. Historic photo courtesy Eastern California Museum.*



*Modock Furnaces, Panamint Valley and Panamint Mountains, looking north. Historic photo courtesy Eastern California Museum.*

*barren mountaintop 4000 feet above the sea can be found the reward of the adventurer in search of the ghosts of the past. And up in the cool pinyons 7,000 feet above the sea and 15 miles further east more treasure is to be found.*

*The wealth of Lookout that men of old searched for pinched out long ago in the Argus Range. When the silver, gold, and other precious metals stopped pouring out of the mines called Modoc, Minnietta, and Defense, the men stopped pouring out of the dying towns of Cerro Gordo, Virginia City, Aurora, and the towns of the Mother Lode. When men stopped searching for Lookout, Lookout's fires grew cold, as did the fires across the valley. Only a few short years before, men had scrambled into this land in search of what had been hailed as the outpost of hell standing in the way of California.*

*But I came up to Lookout to see the treasure these men left behind. It is a treasure because civilization has left so few of the bones of yesterday's cities that they are truly a rare and precious commodity.*

*Things have changed in the ten-score-and-one decades that have passed since Lookout died. My "mule" is an old, worn trail bike. The homes and hopes of men have collapsed. But the rocks, oh how little have they changed! You may wish to inspect the remains of Lookout; while you are enduring the rocks on the old road to the site, I will tell its story.*

## THE BEGINNING

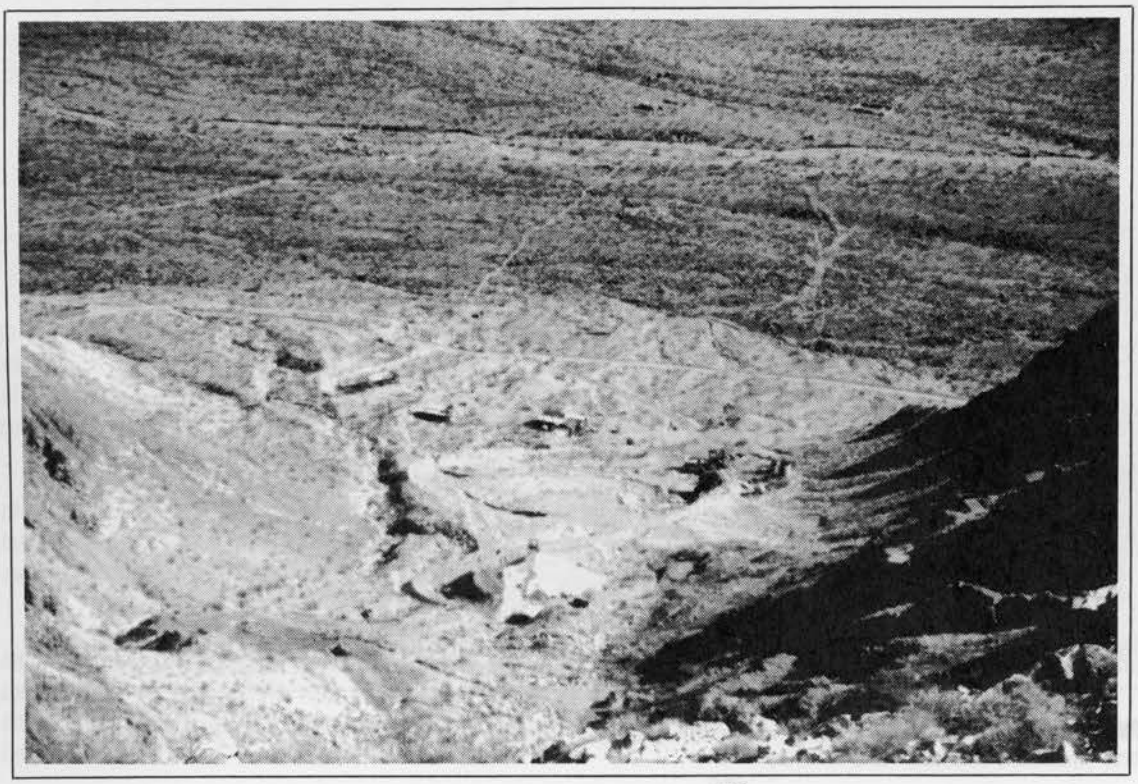
It was less than a diamond anniversary past the days of the '49ers when men began to trickle, then flood out of the camps east and west of the Sierra to scour the harsh land they cursed in crossing it back then. J.S. Childs, E. Burke, B.E. Ball, and J.E. Boardman happened to be prospecting ten miles east of Darwin on the sheer and violent granite eastern slopes of the Argus Range. What they found brought back assays of 101 to 293 oz. of silver per ton of ore, plus gold in commercial quantities. The ore was a complex of gold, silver, lead, copper, and zinc. Several mines were founded in that time, most notably the Modoc, Confidence, Eclipse, and the Kentuckian, later the Minnietta. These were scattered around and upon a 4,100-foot high knoll that jutted out from the Argus Range. The nearest mill to treat the ore was the R.C. Jacobs Surprise Canyon Mill in Panamint City, which required a rough trip down the mountain, across the desolate waste of Panamint Valley, then a grueling climb up the steep confines of Surprise Canyon.

Three months after the initial discovery, the claims around the Modoc were consolidated upon the mountaintop and organized into the Modock Consolidated Mining Company, with a board of directors in San Francisco, among whom was George Hearst. Hearst, who had made his fortune in the Black Hills of western South Dakota with his fabulously rich Homestake Mine (still in operation today), caught the siren song of Lookout ore.

Down below the Modoc group, near the bottom of Thompson Canyon, was the Minnietta. It was consolidated with nearby mines into the Minnietta Belle Silver Mining Company.

The mines were remote. The site was above a barren valley miles from any civilization, so it was decided to create a civilization on top of Lookout Mountain.

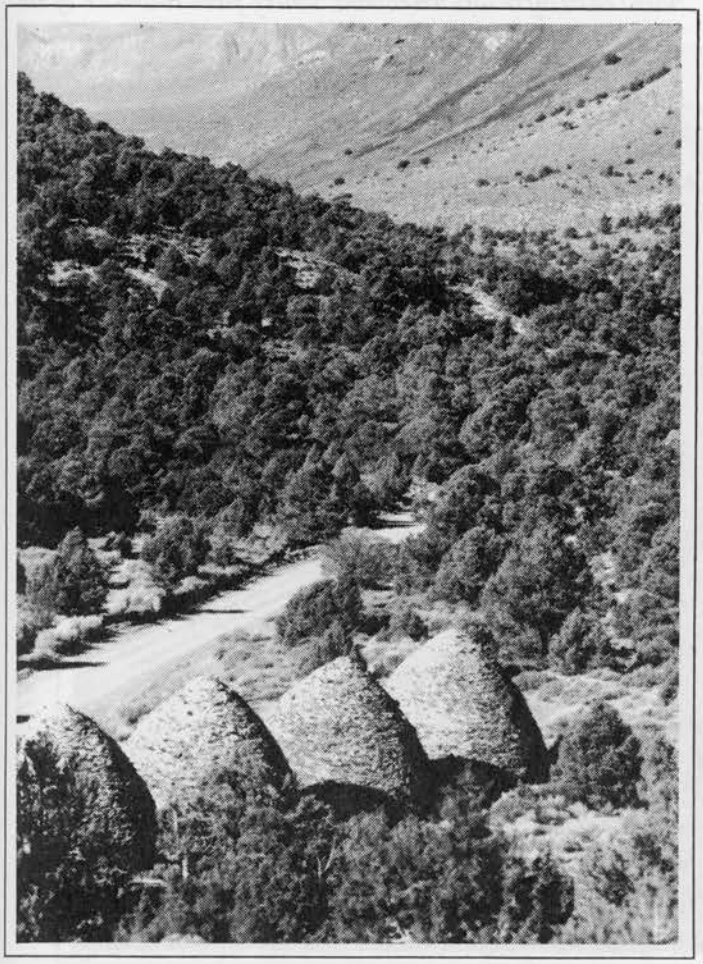
To release gold and silver from its mother rock, it is necessary to smelt the ore. The Modock Company sent engineers to the site to find a suitable location in which



*View from summit of Lookout Mountain of the Minnietta Mine. Note scattered rock ruins in the bottom of canyon to upper at upper edge of photo. David A. Wright photo 1989.*

*Charcoal kilns, 1929. Note forest around kilns is still sparse. This area was denuded 50 years before for the hungry smelters of Lookout. Historic photo courtesy Death Valley Museum, D.V. Nat'l. Monument.*

*Charcoal kilns, 1987, David A. Wright photo*



to build a furnace. Several areas were considered, most notably at the bottom of the mountain, where it would be easier to haul in supplies, ship out ore, and nature could bring down ore and water; but there was overhwelming favor for the mountaintop location, more suitable to human habitation, especially in the summer months.

Consider this: back in 1877, there was no such thing as air conditioning. The upper site, at about 3,700 feet would have climate similar to Lone Pine, whereas the lower site would be about 15-20 degrees warmer. The mountaintop location won out, to the dismay of the company engineer, and a company town was built up around it. Water was piped in from springs to the west in Stone Canyon. Snow's Canyon, six miles south, was selected for water supply for the Minnietta Belle Company. Their pipes are still to be found, twisted and broken.

## THE MATURING OF LOOKOUT

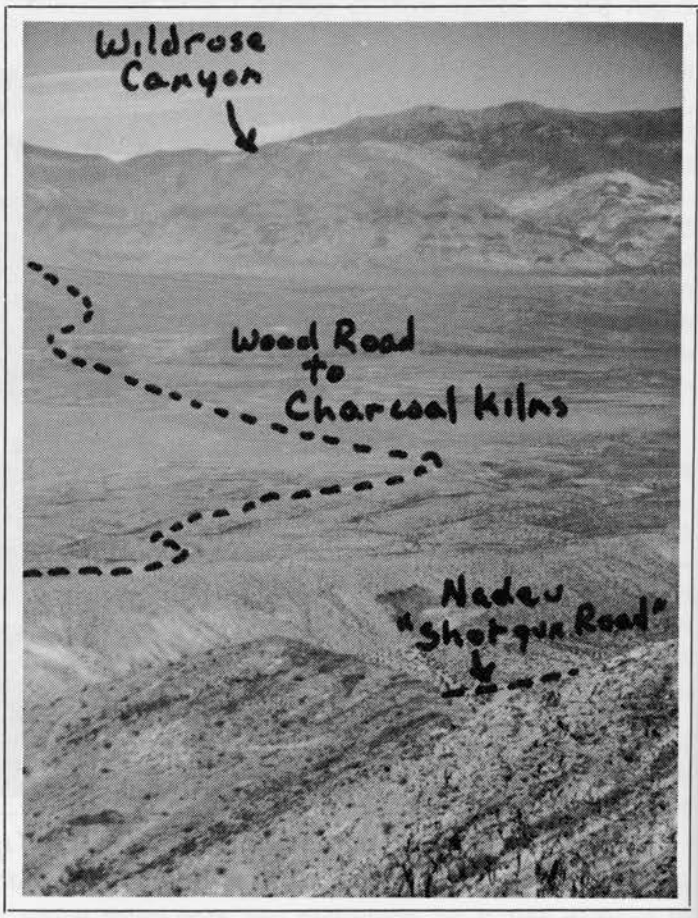
Soon Lookout began to be civilized, to grow to more than four score buildings of native rock and wood. A year after the discovery, the May 1876 *Kern County Courier* wrote ". . . that new and much talked of mining district in our backcountry . . . In Lookout District 10 miles east of Darwin, the Modock Company has found an immense body of first class ore, and will soon have a furnace or mill erected." By the time that the furnaces were nearing completion, the California Bureau of Mines could report in October of 1876 that ". . . the 60 ton fur-

naces are ready to start up. The Company has excellent boarding houses, blacksmith shops, etc. which are perfect in all their appointments."

With the great heat needed by furnaces came the hunger for great quantities of a source of that heat, namely wood or coal. Coal in the form needed to smelt is not found in the Panamint region naturally. Wood in its usual form is neither hot nor lasting enough to produce the heat necessary. But charcoal, similar to what we use in our barbecues, could supply that heat. To produce the charcoal needed consumed entire forests of the scant resources in the Argus Range, and the eyes of the Modock Company turned to the great range across the valley.

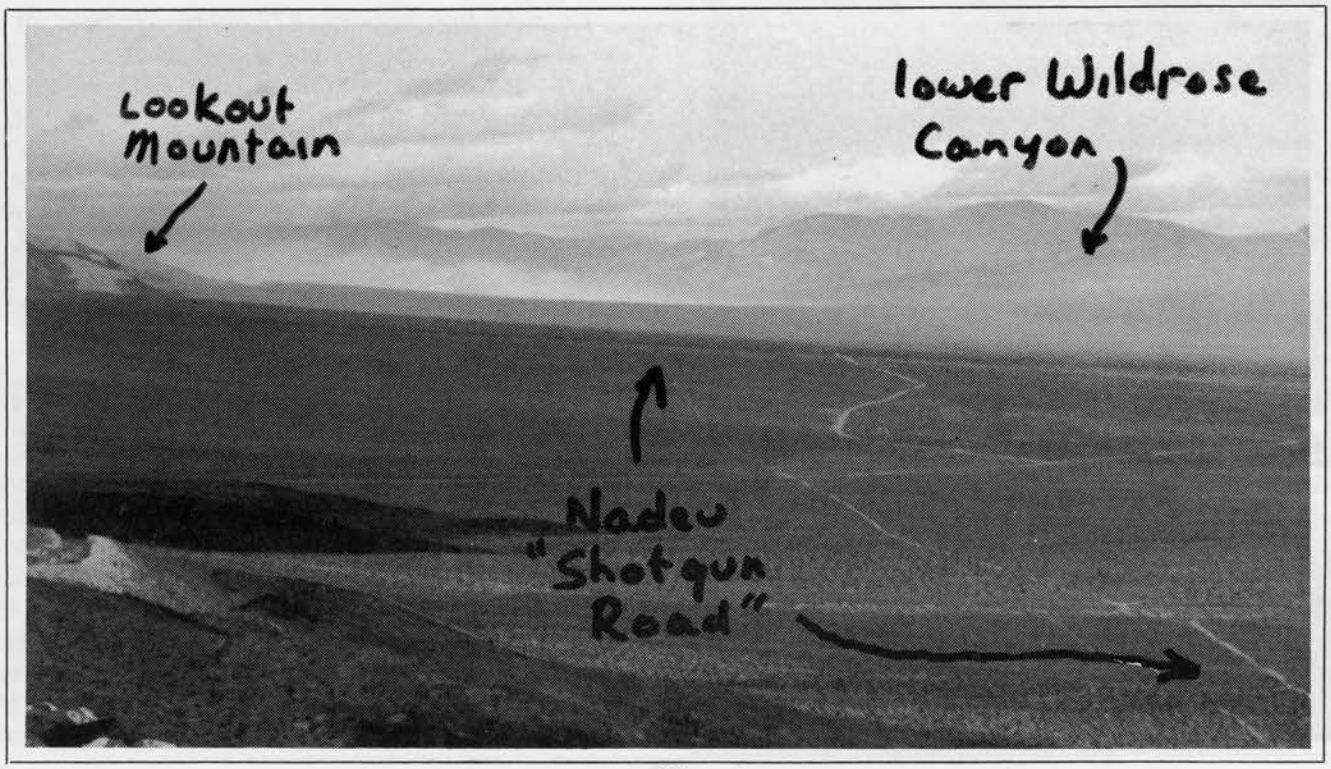
When the furnaces were first started in October 1876, production of ten tons of ore treated per day (which yielded about $500 per ton of silver) required 3,000 bushels of charcoal. The *Coso Mining News,* reported that the mines were inspected by engineers on hand to witness the first firing of the furnace and in the opinion of Superintendent Barber, "the furnace is working charmingly." By the end of the year, the Argus Range was denuded of its forest.

The community of Lookout prospered. Transportation needs were filled by a tri-weekly stage to Darwin. Hauling needs were filled by Remi Nadeau, founder of the famous Cerro Gordo Freighting Company. He proceeded to survey and build suitable roads in the vicinity; one south through Panamint Valley, and over the Slate Range. This was the first surveyed road in the Mojave Desert, nicknamed the "shotgun road." By the end of 1876, he had hauled more than 5,000 bars of silver




*View easterly across Panamint Valley from townsite of the Nadeau "shotgun road" and the wood road to kilns in Wildrose Canyon. David A. Wright photo.*

*View north from summit of Slate Range on Trona-Wildrose Road up Panamint Valley. David A. Wright photo.*



over his new road. These bars were created at a rate of four to five per hour; at 90 pounds each, they were worth $400 to $500 apiece.

By the time the postal service had noticed Lookout, there was another Lookout in California, so the post office was christened "Modock." About this time, there was to be found on the mountain a population consisting of 140 voters, with eight children taught by the Darwin school district. These helped to support Lookout's three saloons, two general stores, and community hall. Lookout never had a cemetery, though one known death did occur. Lookout was a peaceful town.

## CHARCOAL PRODUCTION AND THE WILDROSE KILNS

As previously mentioned, the Modock furnaces consumed the scarce timber of the Argus Range in a hurry. The *Inyo Independent,* Dec. 1876 gives us a glimpse of the activity that brought the demise: "Not less than 500 mules and quite an army of packers, teamsters, coal burners, wood choppers, etc., are constantly employed in furnishing coal and other local supplies . . . The furnaces are receiving no less than 3,000 bushels of coal per day. The average output of one furnace since October 9 when it was first started up, is close to 160 bars every 24 hours; a second furnace of the same capacity will soon be in constant operation, and then the daily yield will be over 300 bars, or about 13 tons of bullion . . ."

Finally, in the spring of 1877, the order to build charcoal kilns in Wildrose Canyon in the Panamint Range was given. They were supervised by S.B. Morrison. Ten were built, patterned after the kilns in Cotonwood Creek, south of Lone Pine, but built of stone. Each kiln was roughly the same size and shape, being on the average 31 feet wide, and 25 feet high. Each was about 25 inches thick at the bottom, narrowing to about 12 inches at the top, creating a parabola to burn evenly.

The May 19, 1877 issue of *Mining and Scientific Press* tells us: "Mr. Nadeau has a large force of men working on a new road from the Slate Range, up the valley, to the Minnietta and Modoc, connecting with the new road to the Wildrose wood and coal camp, where the Modock Company has a large force in the field. The new kilns, erected under the supervision of Mr. Morrison, are giving entire satisfaction and are already furnishing a large amount of clean, hard coal, very much superior to that made in the ordinary pits."

*Coso Mining News,* Jan. 27, 1877: "The wood and coal road to Wildrose Canyon, from whence those supplies will hereafter be obtained, is now completed and in excellent condition."

*Abandoned wagon of the type used to haul wood or charcoal; found and photographed in the vicinity of charcoal kilns in 1946. Courtesy Death Valley Museum, D.V. Nat'l. Monument.*

## THE END

The May 11, 1878 *Coso Mining News:* "Both furnaces are now running to perfection and turning out 200 bars of bullion every 24 hours, the bars weighing an average of 85 pounds each. Thirty eight tons of ore are running through each 24 hours. The fact that there were 50,000 bushels at the kilns in Wildrose Canyon and the further fact that Mr. Guptill has put a force of men at work to run the ten kilns, of 42 cords capacity each, and to burn also in pits, and is also purchasing coal from this side of the mountains as well, is pretty good evidence that the Modoc furnaces will run for a long time."

But it was not to be. Just prior to that glowing report, events began to take place in both Lookout and company headquarters in San Francisco to cool the fires in both Lookout and Wildrose. First, the breakneck pace that the furnaces had been run led to their total failure. The Modock Company had to reorganize to subsidize their total rebuild. Then soon after that came a crash in lead prices, which was an important by-product and valuable to the operation. Layoffs and wage reductions ensued, and remaining miners rebelled against the reduction in pay to less than $4.00 a day. Another reorganization followed.

As for the charcoal kilns, it is apparent through the sketchy company records and other related sources that their fires were cooled by 1879, never to be used again.

In 1883, the owners decided to lease the entire property, but soon the lessees were reported operating at a loss. Other mines opened or were reworked, but nothing materialized to cause the same excitement. Nothing was rich enough to add to the pile of broken champagne bottles or gouged out of the bowels of the earth enough to warrant warming the hearts of the long-cold kilns. Lookout had died, but it died rich. Production figures for the period of 1875-1890 show Lookout's total wealth at its death to be in the neighborhood of $1,000,000.

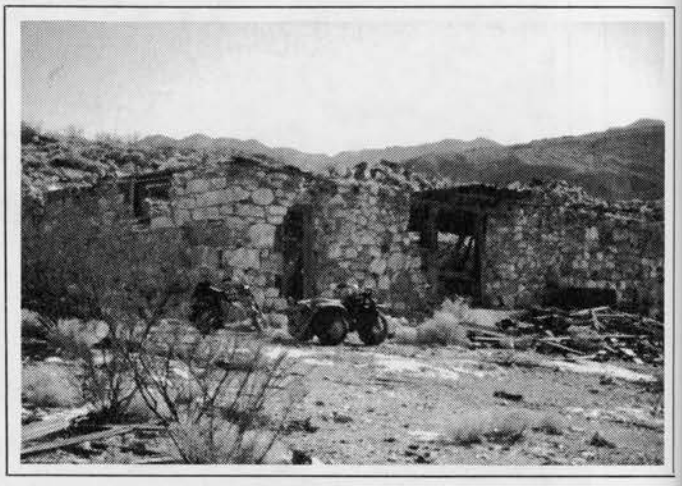
Lookout had only lived a few short years. Most towns that sprang up for the cause of precious metals of the earth sped through life in like fashion, many died even younger; but Lookout, in contrast to most fickle towns, returned much wealth to its owners.

But she also left behind much wealth. The ruins of Lookout and of Wildrose Canyon are true treasures in this time of so few places where solitude can be found in the ghostly ruins of the past.

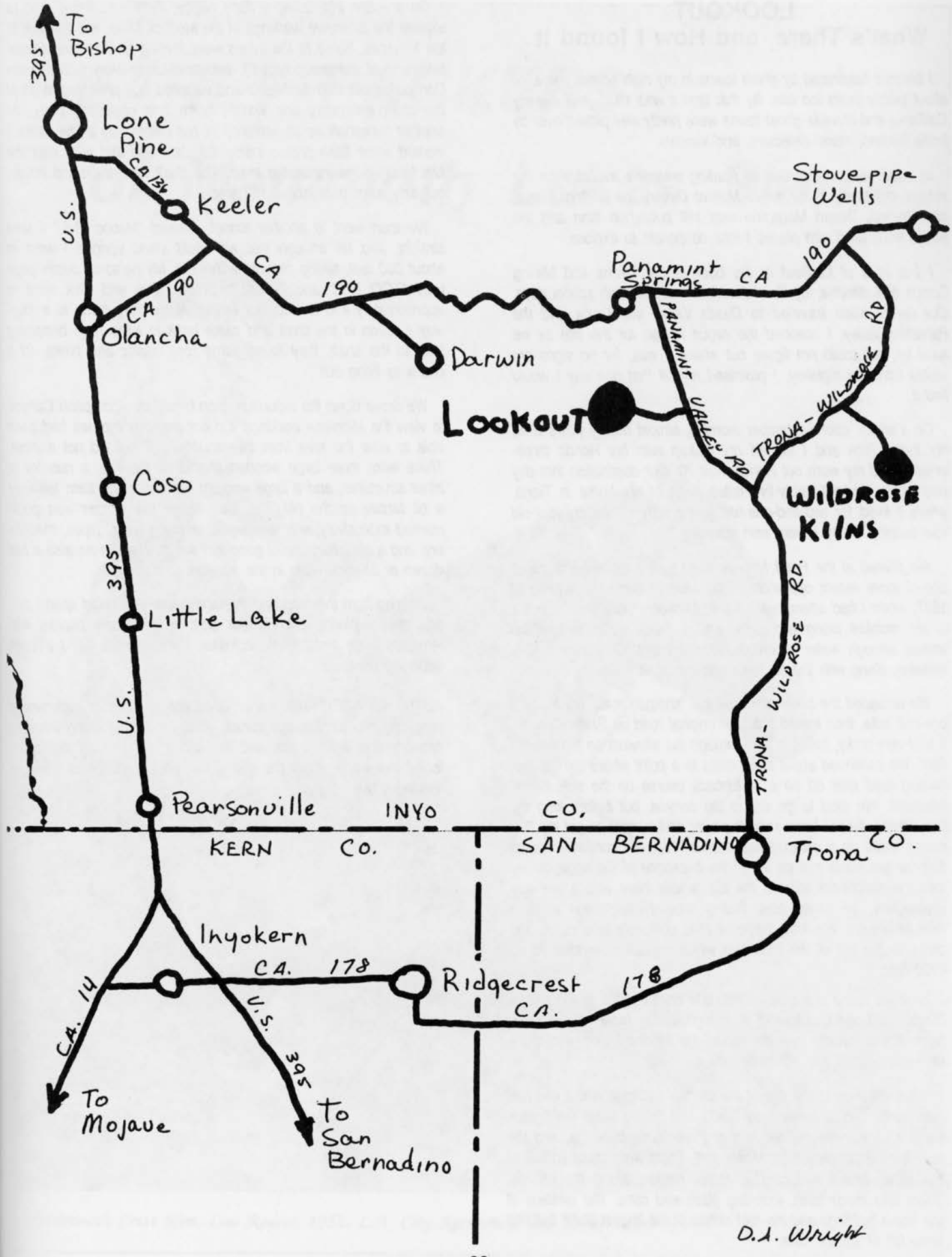
AUTHOR'S NOTE: The Cranston Bill creating roadless wilderness areas in the Mojave Desert will impact this area also. You may want to plan a trip soon while it is still accessible for those who have the equipment.

*Remains of wooden building. Lumber full of square cut nails. View of northern Panamint Valley, with Panamint Dunes lying against Hunter Mountain.*

*View from summit of Lookout Mountain onto the Modoc group of mines and main townsite. Large terrace at right is site of furnaces.*



*Ruins of largest building still standing in main part of townsite. Author's and friends' modern "mules" waiting patiently at the hitching post.*


To Bishop
395
Lone Pine
CA 136
Keeler
U.S.
CA 190
Olancha
CA 190
Darwin
Panamint Springs
CA 190
Stovepipe Wells
PANAMINT VALLEY RD
TRONA-WILDROSE RD
LOOKOUT
WILDROSE KILNS
Coso
395
Little Lake
U.S.
Pearsonville
INYO CO.
KERN CO.
SAN BERNADINO CO.
Trona
TRONA-WILDROSE RD.
Inyokern
CA. 178
Ridgecrest CA.
178
CA. 14
U.S. 395
To Mojave
To San Bernadino
D.A. Wright

# LOOKOUT
## What's There, and How I found it

*I became fascinated by ghost towns in my high school years, or about twenty years too late. By that time it was 1970, and already California and Nevada ghost towns were pretty well picked over by bottle hunters, metal detectors, and vandals.*

*In those years, I hoarded all reading materials available on the subject, especially in my native Mojave Desert, the Eastern Sierra, and Nevada.* Desert Magazine *was still published then and the pages were filled with places I was desperate to explore.*

*I first read of Lookout in the book* Ghost Towns and Mining Camps of California, *by Remi Nadeau, in those high school days. Our family often traveled to Death Valley via Trona and the Panamint Valley. I scanned the Argus Range for the site as we sped by, but could not figure out where it was, for no signs are visible from the highway. I promised myself that one day I would find it.*

*On a windy, cool September morning, almost twenty years later, my friend Rick and I loaded my pickup with his Honda three-wheeler and my worn out Honda Trail 70. Our destination that day was to be Lookout, thirty-five miles north of my home in Trona, where I lived for two-and-one-half years with my twenty-year-old vow burning in my bosom with intensity.*

*We parked at the Remi Nadeau road and a mobilehome camp site of more recent operation of the Modock Mine. In autumn of 1987, when I had attempted a trip to Lookout, there were about a dozen mobiles along two rows, and a metal water tank which leaked enough water to create a mini oasis. Only one mobile remains, along with the dry tank and no oasis.*

*We unloaded the bikes and took the "shotgun road" north about one-half mile, then turned onto the original road up Stone Canyon. It was very rocky, taking a path through the alluvium on the canyon floor. We continued about three miles to a point where the modern hauling road took off on a switchback course up the side of the mountain. We tried to go on up the canyon, but before long my little Honda did not have enough power and traction to get my 200 pound frame up a steep, loose section. Rick did continue, finding that the two roads met on top of the backbone of the ridge, so we took the switchback road to the top, where there was a four-way intersection. We turned east, finding another intersection about a mile further on. We took the right fork, obviously little used, and came to the top of the mountain which my altimeter showed as 4100 feet.*

*Here we found two rock cabins, one on the edge of the mountaintop, and one that looked as though it may have been a business. It was directly over the top of the Modoc mines, and there were many trails and roads below.*

*We went back to the site of the town of Lookout, about one-half mile north. The altimeter read 3,900 feet. There were many rock walls, rock foundations, remains of three frame buildings, and the terraced foundations of the Modoc mill. There were many portals of the mine, and rock-supported roads snaked along the hillside. There was much trash, including glass and cans. The remains of the frame buildings and the roof rafters of the largest stone building were full of square nails.*

*On a return trip, using a dune buggy, there was more time to explore the extensive workings of the Modock Mine, and the site of the furnaces. Some of the mines were inviting to the more adventuresome of our group (not I!), and so Rick and my father-in-law Don pulled out their flashlights and ventured in. I preferred to sit at the shaft entrances and watch, listen and chew my nails. At another mineshaft we all ventured in, but I went only a few yards. I wanted some flash photos inside the shaft and that wish was the fuel to drive me inside the mine. The shaft veered around inside, but only went back about 150 feet.*

*We then went to another tunnel, marked "Modoc M-8." It was straight, and tall enough that we could stand upright. I went in about 200 feet, taking pictures with flash. My personal depth gage read "TOO FAR" and I went back out. Don and Rick went in approximately 450 to 500 feet farther where they came to a four-way junction in the shaft and came back to keep from becoming lost. In the shaft, they found some rosy quartz and broke off a chunk to bring out.*

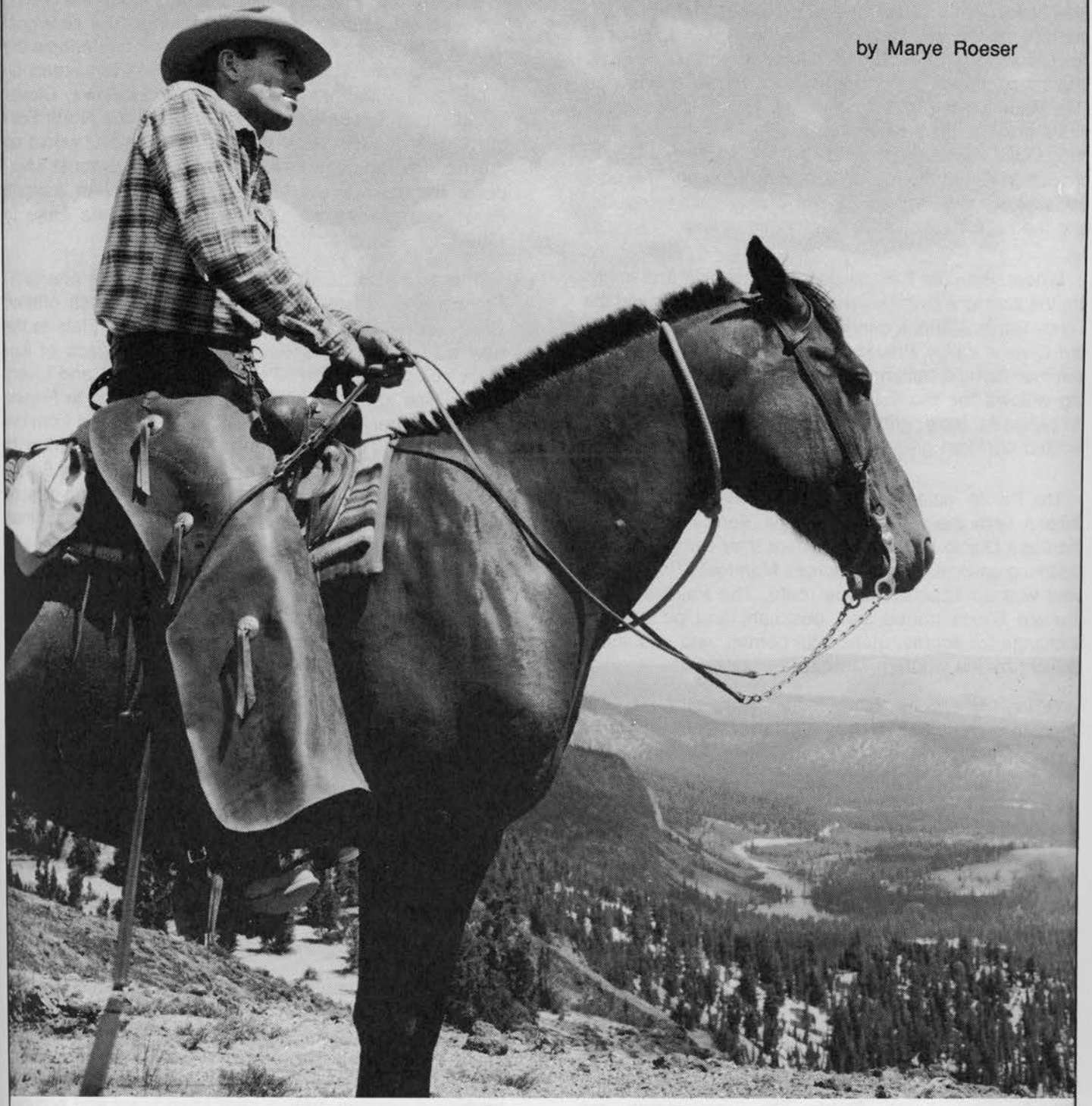
*We drove down the mountain, then turned up Thompson Canyon to view the Minnietta workings. On our previous trip, we had been able to view the area from the mountaintop, but did not explore. There were three large wooden shacks at the site, a number of other structures, and a large wooden ore chute and tram terminus a bit farther up the hill. The area above the houses was pock-marked extensively with rock walls, retaining walls, pipes, machinery, and a stationary diesel generator setup. There were also a half dozen or so rock walls in the alluvium to the south.*

*Judging from the map and the landscape, one could spend several days exploring the Lookout area. It is densely packed with remains, some small, some colossal. By no means am I through exploring Lookout!*

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: The author does not endorse or recommend venturing into tunnels and mines. Also, be careful along the road between the furnace site and the mines, for several shafts are found in the road; near the end of the road, a shaft has caved in, leaving a large crater.*

# EARLY PACKERS of Mammoth Lakes Sierra

by Marye Roeser



*Mammoth Crest Rim. Lou Roeser, 1952. L.A. City Recreation and Parks Dept. photo.*

Wooden pack saddles still creak in rhythm to the clink of steel horseshoes on rocky granite trails leading into the craggy Sierra Nevada Mountains of the Mammoth Lakes Sierra. Rugged packers carefully tend their sturdy animals carrying loads of supplies over narrow trails pioneered by Indian travelers countless centuries ago. The packing industry in the Eastern Sierra had its beginning in the early 1860s and the "mule packers" with their strings of saddle and pack animals look much the same today as they did in those days long past.

Packing in Mammoth Lakes area has a long and colorful history. When gold fever and the search for the lost cement mines reached the Eastern Sierra, miners flocked in from the west side, following gold's siren call. Interest centered on the mountain we presently know as Red Mountain but in 1877 it was called Gold Mountain, or Mineral Hill, by the ever-hopeful miners and prospectors. Claims were filed on the north and west sides of the rich lode and the mining excitement began. The richest claims were worked by the Mammoth Mining Co. and the region took its name from this mine.

Miners were not the first people occupying and enjoying the scenic region known as Mammoth Lakes and the Lakes Basin. Various bands of Indian people, the northern Owens Valley Paiutes, lived in the area during the summer months hunting, harvesting seeds, and gathering willows for the superb baskets they constructed. Arrowheads, tools, grinding rocks and broken pieces of worked obsidian give evidence of their presence.

The Paiute Indians traded extensively with the Miwok Indians from the west slope of the Sierras, meeting at the Casa Diablo Hot Springs where they camped by the steaming springs. The trail across Mammoth Pass to the west was an important trade route. The Paiutes of the Eastern Sierra traded salt, obsidian, and pinenuts in exchange for acorns, manzanita berries, and sea shells brought by the western Miwoks.

During the Owens Valley Indian Wars of the 1960s, Joaquin Jim, chief of the Northern Owens Valley Paiutes, headquartered in Long Valley. He reportedly was a renegade Fresno Indian escaping from the troubles on the west slope, using Mammoth Pass Trail to join the Paiutes in their fight against the white settlers.

When gold was discovered on Red Mountain, several little towns immediately sprang up. Mammoth City was located on the north side of Red Mountain, while Mill City and Mineral Park were located further down the mountain to the east. Pine City grew up along the little creek on the west side north of Summit Lake, as Lake Mary was originally named.

Log cabins quickly sprang up in Pine City, perhaps as many as twenty, along with hotels, saloons and the Pine City Feed and Livery Stable. The livery stable was located approximately on the present site of the Mammoth Lakes Pack Outfit. It advertised a corral with pasture attached, and hay and grain for sale, in the Mammoth Herald newspaper in 1879.

The Owens Valley was first settled in the early 1860s when Aurora became the booming mining town of the Eastern Sierra. Ranchers trailed their herds to Adobe Valley and Long Valley to supply the new mining towns with meat. Packers hauled produce, eggs, milk and butter from the Owens Valley farms and ranches by pack strings before the trails were improved for use by freight wagons.

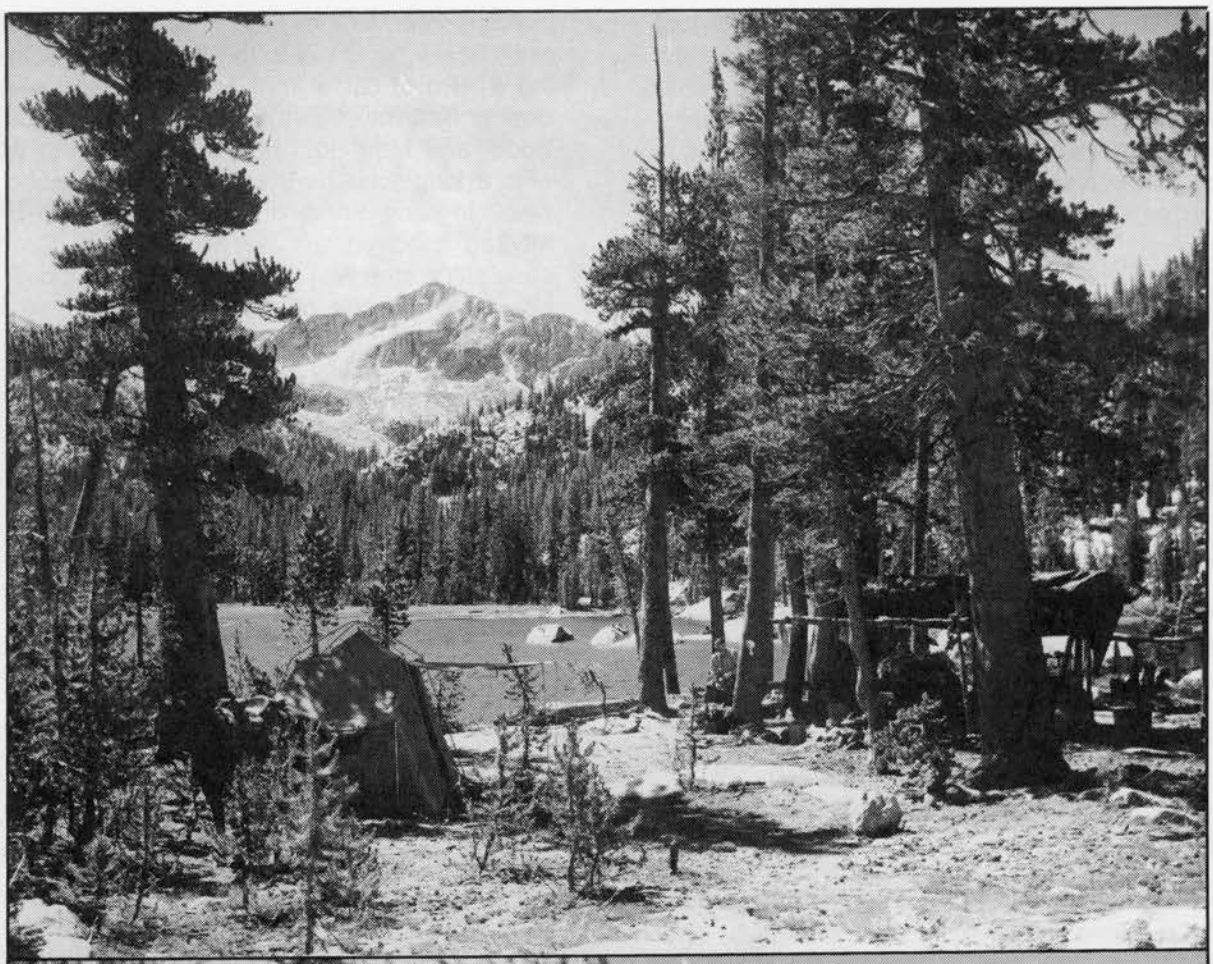
In 1878, J.S. French built a toll trail across the Sierra, following old established Indian routes to the new gold strikes. The Fresno Trail began at Fresno Flats (now the town of Oakhurst) 46 miles from Fresno, passed by such historic landmarks as Jackass Meadows, Clover Meadows, Soldier Meadow, and crossed the North Fork of the San Joaquin River. From there, the trail would up the Granite Stairway to King Creek and Summit Meadows and down to the Middle Fork of the San Joaquin River, over Mammoth Pass past Horseshoe Lake to Pine City, ending at Mammoth City.

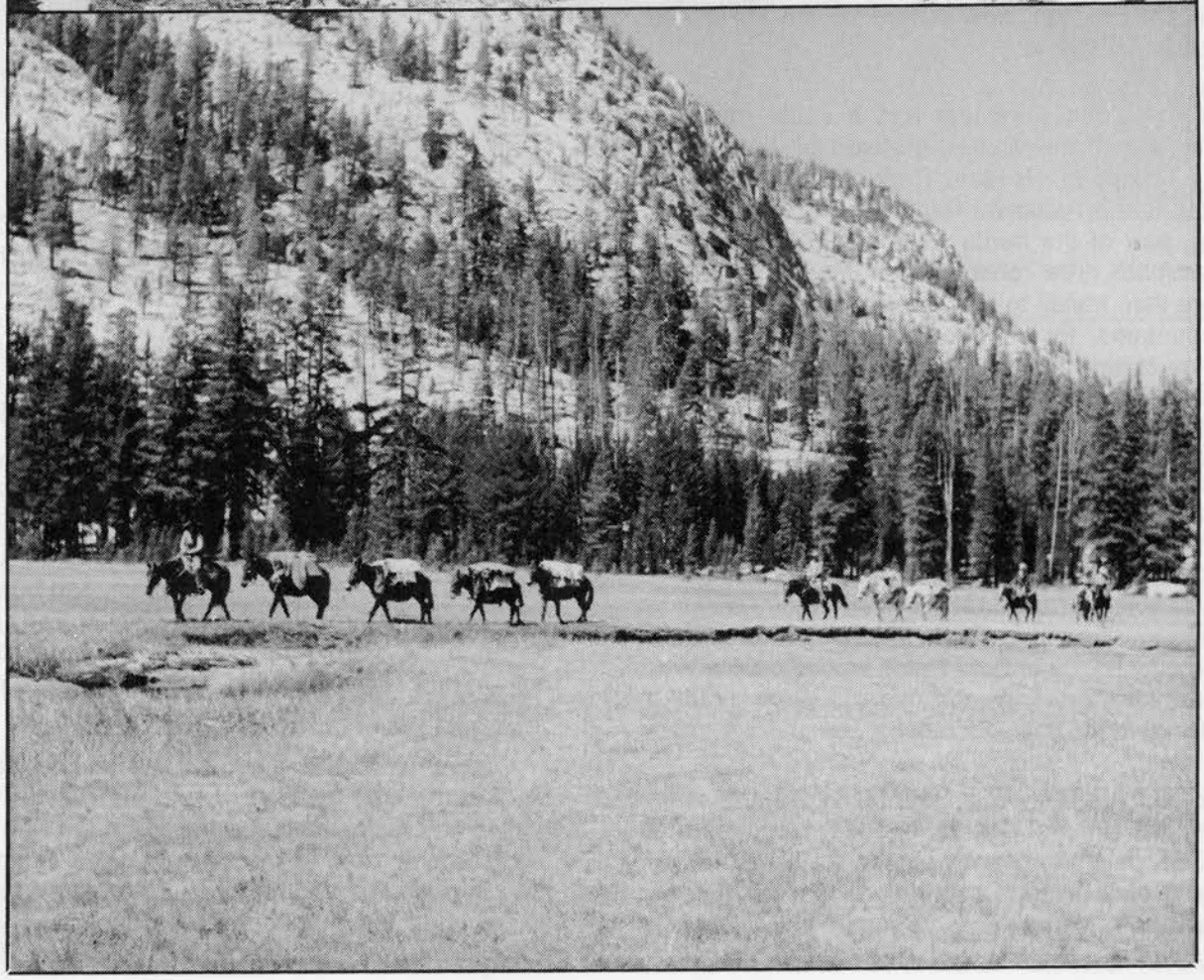
This trail was also called the French Trail after J.S. French who constructed the 1878 trail. French offered twice-weekly pack train service from Fresno Flats to the new gold mines for $15, and up to 20 pounds of luggage could be carried. The Pine City Feed and Livery Stable also advertised regular pack train trips to Fresno Flats. The Fresno Flats Saddle Trains departed from the Monumental Hotel on Central Mammoth Avenue in Mammoth City on Tuesday and Friday, leaving at 5 a.m. for the 54 mile journey. Travel and transportation of supplies and machinery for the new boom towns and mines depended on the sure-footed pack strings of mules and horses.

In April of 1879, a Fresno paper announced that the trail would be made into a wagon road, to cost $40,000. A Visalia newspaper reported that J.C. Sherwin of Bishop, California had filed a map in Fresno County of the route from Fresno Flats to Pine City. During the summer months, supplies would be packed into the new mining camps from the San Joaquin Valley.

Famous teamster, Remi Nadeau, kept 16 to 20 oxen in a big log corral out in Windy Flat near Hidden Lake. The ox team hauled freight and lumber to the mining camps. The old Sherwin Grade Wagon Road was constructed as a toll road by James Sherwin for hauling goods and equipment to the new mines.

As with other mining booms, the mines failed, and in 1881 the miners left, the towns declined and eventually became ghost towns. A few miners and prospectors continued to work the claims, living in the abandoned cabins. "Old" Charlie Albright lived in Pine City in 1889, working a wooden arrasta near Lake Mary and occupying a cabin at the edge of the meadow. There were perhaps twenty log cabins still in Pine City at that time,





located up and down the small creek. The forests had been heavily logged and thinned out during construction of the mines and towns, and the present thick forest is second growth timber. The meadows were more extensive then and "Old" Charlie cut hay for his two burros in the nearby meadows while flourishing wild strawberry plants provided him with strawberry shortcake.

The Fresno Flats Trail continued to be an important thoroughfare across the Sierra, used particularly by livestock men driving their herds of cattle and sheep into the high mountains for summer grazing. The California drought of 1876 and 1877 pushed central valley livestock into the mountains where the lush grass fed the hungry herds. In the early 1900s Indians from the west still journeyed across the mountains to Casa Diablo Hot Springs where they enjoyed the hot springs, building sweat houses and sagebrush lodges nearby.

In the 1870s Charlie and John Summers, from Sierra Valley near Downieville, moved into the Eastern Sierra. Charlie was a cowboy for Tom Rickey, later becoming foreman of Rickey's Long Valley and Owens Valley holdings. The two Summers brothers purchased ranches from Whitmore and C.B. Rawson, which included land from Benton Crossing to Casa Diablo, Laurel and Sherwin Creek. Charlie Summers' ranch headquarters were near Laurel and Sherwin Creeks and he built the cabin that is still standing in the aspen grove by Laurel Creek. John Summers built the cabin, near the Sheriff's substation, now owned by the Miller and Wood Ranch Company.

Charlie and John Summers had a cattle ranching partnership with Frank Butler, stepson of Jim Butler, founder of Tonopoah, Nevada. Their cattle ranged from Long Valley to the Panamint Range and China Lake. In the spring, part of the herds were driven to the Summers' Mammoth area ranches over the Rickey Trail. Cattle were then trailed to Fish Creek, deep in the heart of the mountains, for summer grazing. Packers and pack strings carried the gear and supplies for the cowboys' summer camps.

Charlie Summers was cattle foreman for Thomas B. Rickey, owner of Rickey Land and Cattle Co. Rickey was an early Inyo-Mono cattle baron owning and leasing land from Antelope Valley in northern Mono County to Big Pine, as well as Nevada. He owned 18,000 acres in Long Valley and huge herds of cattle. In 1905, he sold his Long Valley Ranch to Fred Eaton who was operating as an agent for the City of Los Angeles. Crowley Lake now covers parts of Rickey's ranch.

Charlie and his wife, Elizabeth, raised three sons, Lloyd, Len and "Young" Charlie. In 1911, Lloyd married Sybil McGee, daughter of early pioneer cattleman Alney McGee, and they built the cabin along Sherwin Creek, where their son, Verne, and his family still live each summer.

Alney Lee McGee, the father of Sybil Summers, had arrived with his family in the Eastern Sierra in 1861 driving a herd of cattle from Tulare County. Alney and his brother Bart trailed cattle to the mining camps of Aurora, Bodie and Mammoth in the early mining days. Alney was a long time rancher in Inyo and Mono owning a ranch in Long Valley that he later sold to Rickey. The McGee headquarters were on McGee Creek and an early stage stop was located there. The old Rincon Corrals were the site of many round-ups and brandings. Cattle and sheep were trailed into the mountains over McGee and Hopkins Pass to summer in the meadows of upper Fish Creek and Mono Creek. Many of the nearby geographical landmarks are named after Alney McGee.

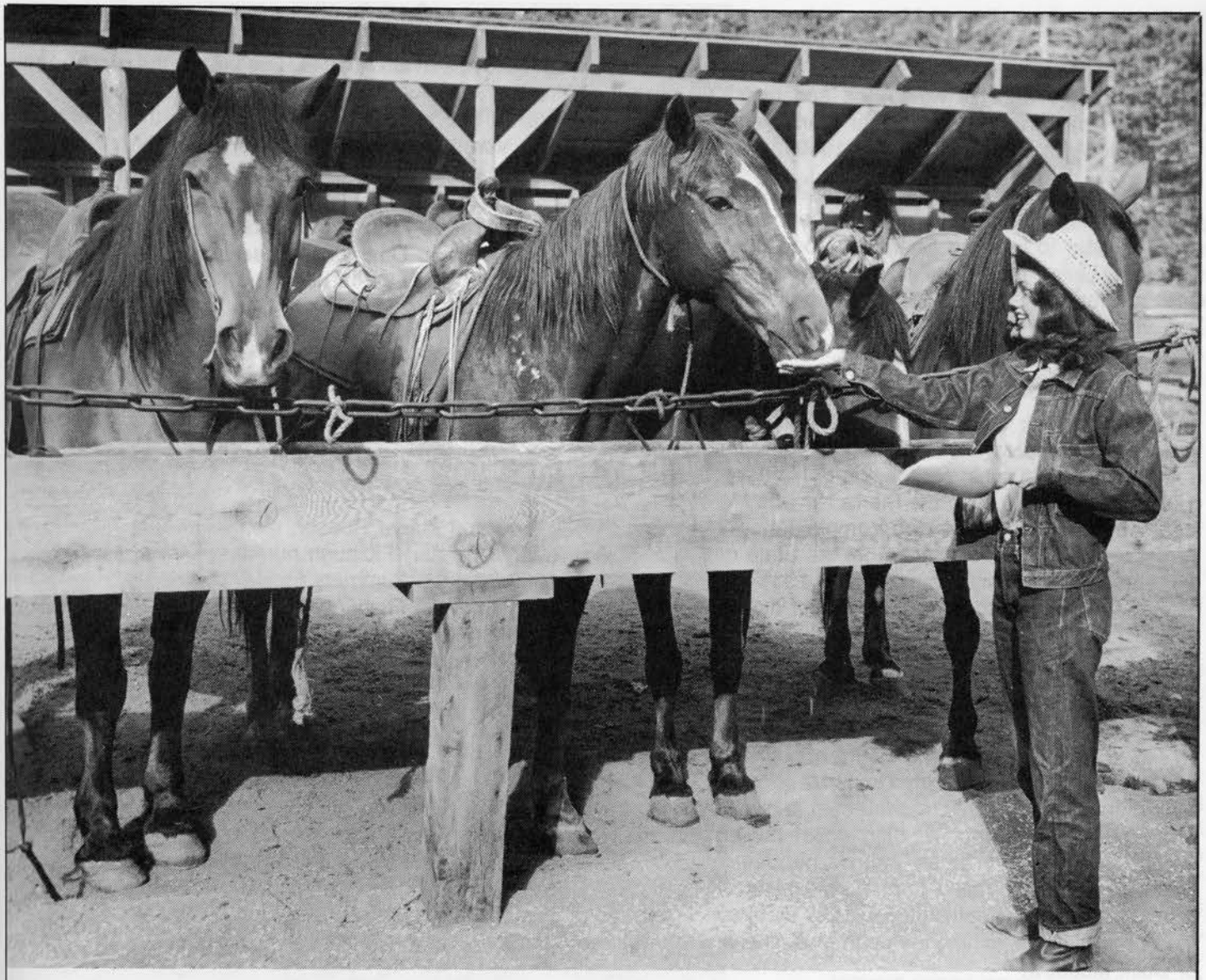
Charlie Wildasinn obtained a claim to 160 acres of meadowland in the Mammoth Meadows in 1891, plus some timber claims. He built a sawmill, hotel, and store along the creek. The hotel guest register lists Charlie and Lloyd Summers as guests there in 1908, and Sybil McGee (later Mrs. Lloyd Summers) as a hotel guest in 1910.

Tom Williams owned a ranch in Mammoth Meadows which at that time was called Big Windy Flat by the early settlers. Williams raised cattle and held a summer grazing permit for his cows in Deer Creek. He drove his cattle over Mammoth Pass on the Fresno Flats Trail each summer to graze in the grassy meadows along Deer Creek and in 1914 Put up a paddock to keep several horses. Occasionally he packed campers and fishermen into the back country, which included Red's Meadow and the San Joaquin River. He later sold his Windy Flat Ranch to Alvin Bodle who owned a dairy and supplied early visitors and residents with milk and dairy products.

Charlie and Lloyd Summers purchased 160 acres of meadowland and the Wildasinn Hotel from Charlie Wildasinn in 1917. In 1918, they built a large new hotel in the meadow. It was built of logs cut at Twin Lakes and slabbed on two sides at the sawmill along Mammoth Creek. Early movie companies discovered the charms of the High Sierra, began filming in the meadows, and stayed at the hotel. In the winter of 1927, the hotel burned down and was never rebuilt.

In 1915, the Summers family began packing in summer visitors to the magnificent backcountry lakes and streams. The lakes, even the highest, had been planted with fish carried in cans by pack strings. Early pack trips began at the barn and corrals across the road from the hotel. The Summers called their outfit Mammoth Camp Pack Outfit.

A corral was established on the south side of Lake Mary in the little meadow, which was fenced in so the horses and mules could be trailed up the day prior to a trip. The only road at that time was the original wagon road through Mammoth City to Pine City. When the old wagon road was improved, trips originated from Lake Mary. Trips traveled over Mammoth Pass via Fresno



*Corrals at Mammoth Lakes Pack Outfit. Mary Russell Roeser, 1950. Mammoth Lakes Pack Outfit photo.*

Flats Trail to Red's Meadow, the San Joaquin River, Ritter Range, Deer Creek, Sheep Camp and Fish Creek. Other trips used the old Duck Pass Trail into Fish Creek Basin. Lloyd Summers moved their pack station headquarters from Lake Mary to a site across the road from the present location of the pack station.

Charlie Roberts opened a pack station around 1927, called the Lake Mary Pack Station, on the site of the old Pine City Feed and Livery Stables and the present location of the Mammoth Lakes Pack Outfit. Don McGuffin and Ed Brown bought out Roberts and also had a corral at Pumice Flats along the San Joaquin River. McGuffin then bought out Brown and continued to operate the pack station until 1931.

In 1930, McGuffin moved the big saddle shed and the cook house up from Owens Valley. The two buildings were scheduled for demolition on a ranch that the City of Los Angeles had purchased. The City gave them to Don, who tore them down, hauled them up to the pack station, and rebuilt them in their present location. In 1931, McGuffin sold his pack station to the Summers who moved their Mammoth Pack Outfit headquarters across the road where it continues today. Don McGuffin married Alice Austin of Tamarack Lodge and together they hosted the lodge until the late 1950s.

For many years afterward, Don continued to guide horseback riders to the top of Mammoth Mountain, using a trail that begins in back of the Rim cabins, continues up past "Bottomless Pit" and "Dragon's Back" to the top. There is an old cairn on top where riders and hikers added their names to lists in a rusty soup can. McGuffin also guided riders to the top of Red Mountain on weekly rides, and the old trail, still dimly visible, switchbacks up to the top from the north side of the Mammoth Consolidated Mine.

Lloyd and Sybil Summers opened a new pack station in 1932 at Red's Meadow which they sold to Arch and Gladys Mahan in 1934. Mahan had been involved with

the Mammoth Consolidated Mine until it ceased operations in 1934. A pack station was operated at Agnew Meadows by "Young Charlie" Summers, Lloyd's younger brother. Charlie and his wife Altha and their children Jack and Emily, ran the station for many years before selling it to Arch Mahan in the late 1950s.

Cecil Thorington, a grandson of Alney McGee, was packer-foreman for the Summers for a number of years and was later to become Sheriff of Mono County. Lee and Cecil Lakes in upper Fish Creek were named for Cecil and for Lee Summers during a fish planting expedition in the early days. In 1939, Thorington began his own pack station at McGee Creek, using trails pioneered by the McGee family so many years before.

After John Muir died in 1914, the California legislature, in 1915, appropriated $10,000 for the construction of the John Muir Trail in recognition of his devotion and contributions in protecting the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Most of the construction was completed by the U.S. Forest Service with assistance from the State of California. The Trail was finally completed in 1931 from Yosemite to Mt. Whitney through the heart of the High Sierras.

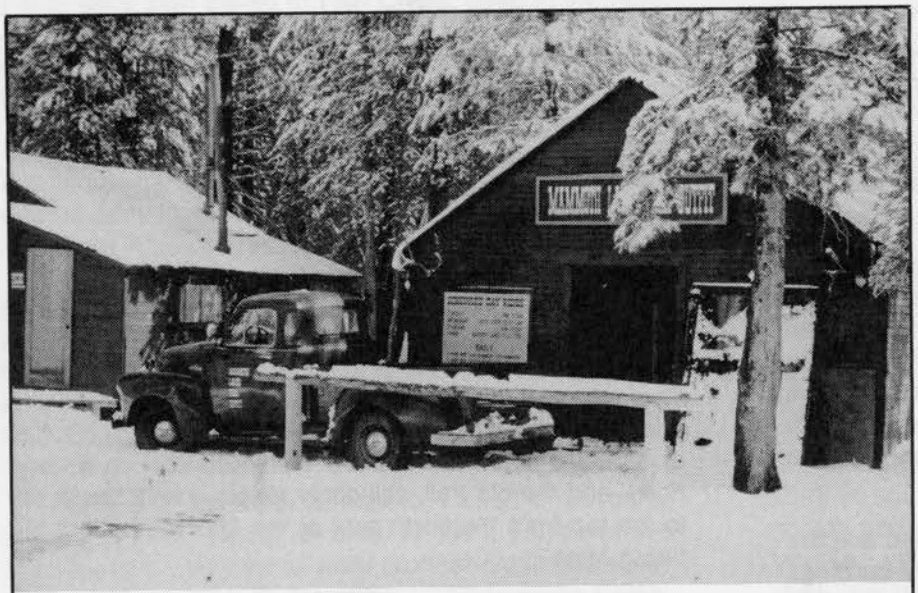
The original Duck (Duk) Pass Trail followed the present trail to Skelton Lake then went by the Woods Lakes over the top of the crest east of the present pass, stayed high along Duck Lake then dropped down to the outlet of Duck Lake. From Duck Meadow, the trail wound up a narrow canyon to the east and over the top south of Mt. Wintering, winding down the sidehill to Purple Lake. A very steep trail descended into Fish Creek in Cascade Valley from Purple Lake. The new Duck Pass Trail was completed in 1927 by the CCC and the Forest Service, joining the John Muir Trail just south of Duck Meadow.

Lloyd and Sybil Summers, with their three sons, Lee, Verne, and Dick, operated the Mammoth Pack Outfit until Lloyd's death in 1944. Lee was in the army in Alaska and Verne served in the South Pacific during World War II. Lee returned home to operate the pack station and Verne became District Attorney of Mono County and later Superior Court Judge in Inyo County. Lee married Dorothy Douglas in 1946 and they ran the pack station until 1960 when it was sold to Lou and Marye Roeser. Lee's son, Don, was a packer for some years and young Johnny, Lee and Dorothy's son, learned the trade at an early age.

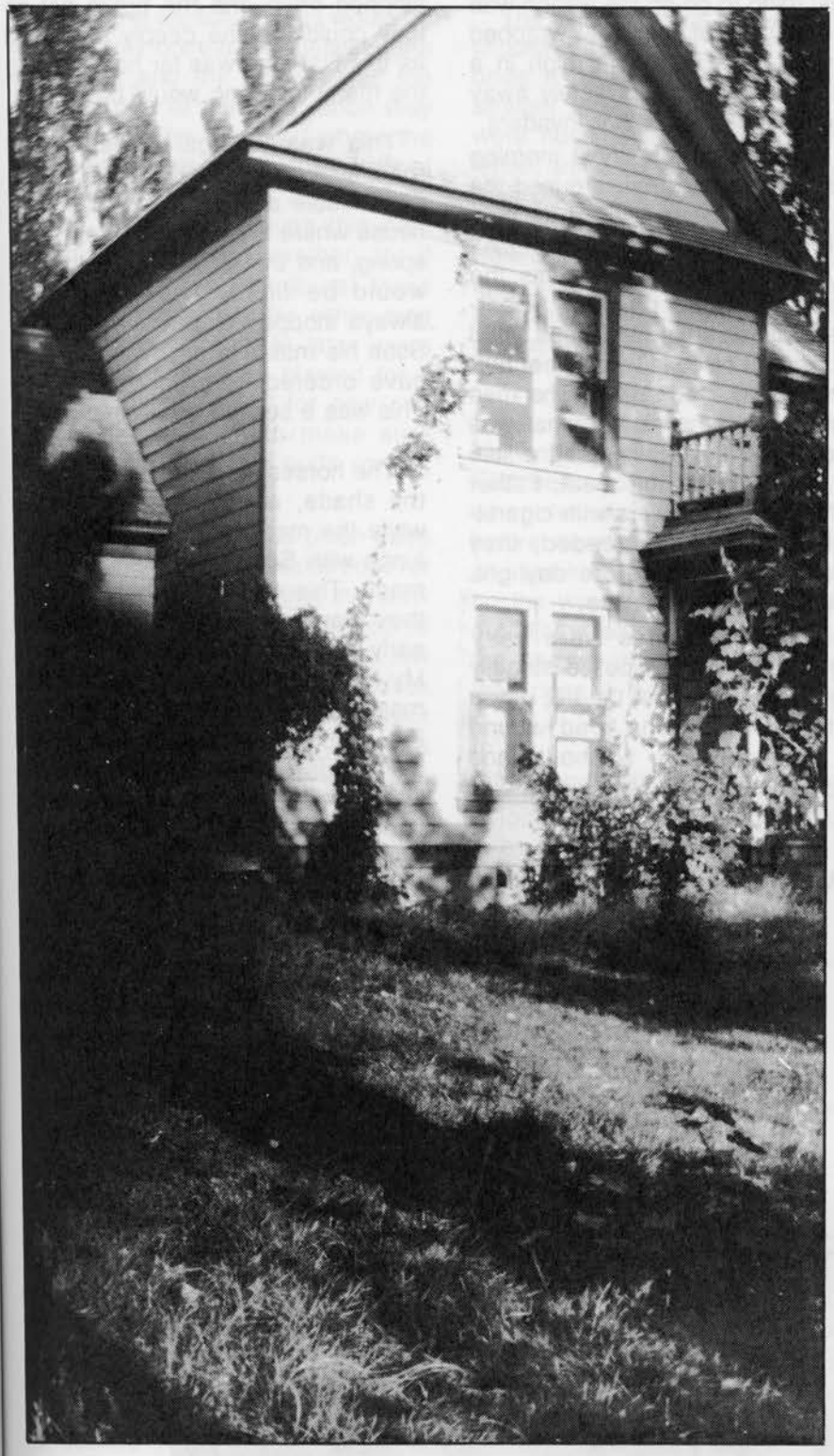
Lou Roeser joined the operation in 1952 as a packer loving the Sierra backcountry with its myriad wilderness lakes and streams. He married Marye Russell, then program director at Camp High Sierra, in 1953 and they spent the next years packing at McGee Creek Pack Station and Rainbow Pack Outfit.

Lou and Marye Roeser, along with Lou and Dorothy (Marye's sister) Fitzhugh purchased the pack station in 1960 from the Summers family. The Roeser family then bought out the Fitzhughs and have continued to operate the Mammoth Lakes Pack Outfit with their four children, Lee, Kerry, Maryl, and Leslie. Son Lee Roeser, named after Lee Summers, is now manager of the outfit, assisted by sister Kerry. Lee and his wife Jennifer Ketcham Roeser also operate the McGee Creek Pack Station.

The pack strings continue to wind their way up the mountains with echoes of the past around each curve of the trail. If one listens carefully, he might still hear ghostly packers calling to their mules, "Hey, Rocky, pay attention and step lightly! We'll soon be in camp, and green grass awaits you, with a cup of hot coffee for me." ✤



*October 1960. Time to move 'em out.*



*The Tate home in Big Pine*

# *Wood for the Home Fires*

by Clarice Tate Uhlmeyer

In 1901 my parents, Thomas and Esther Tate, moved their family to Big Pine from Smokey Valley, Nevada. A couple of years later they bought a 160 acre ranch about a mile north of town, but as there was no house on the property they bought one in town. Father did his farming by going back and forth on horseback or in his light one-horse buggy. He kept one hired man year 'round, to whom he gave board and thirty dollars a month. They came home to a hot meal every noon. At haying and thrashing times he took a whole crew back and forth to meals in a larger wagon.

The days were getting short and the nights cold before the last crop of hay was cut and stacked. Then and then only could farmers turn their attention to getting in wood for the long cold months ahead. Gathering enough pinon wood to keep at least two stoves going full blast the whole winter was no small chore. My father took on even more than that, selling wood to the townspeople who had no means of getting it themselves. Many farmers raised locust and cottonwood trees, both of which grew fast, for their own use.

It took days to get ready for the first trip into the pinon woods of the White Mountains east of Big Pine. Axes and saws had to be sharpened, wedges and sledge hammers assembled, horse shoes, shoeing equipment, and other tools collected and stored in boxes where they could be easily found to set up the wood camp which would be in use for many weeks.

The "big wagon," as we called it, was used and an extra horse led behind. Among things to be taken were several bales of hay, a sack of grain, a tent for stormy weather, two large barrels to be filled with water, a heavy harness and singletree for the extra horse, chains, and bedrolls wrapped in heavy tarps (sleeping

bags were unheard of in that day). A special place was kept open for the tin-lined "grub box" containing prepared food, butter, milk, several dozen well-wrapped eggs, and other perishables. Fresh vegetables from the garden were put into a wet barley sack and a lug of apples and pears stowed away somewhere.

Table utensils, tin plates and cups, and a large piece of bright new oilcloth to cover a makeshift table built on the spot, were also put in a wooden box. Cooking pots and pans blackened and dented by many years of use were tucked into a sack. All this cooking gear, together with a grate to go on top of rocks assembled for the cooking fire, had been carried down from the store room above the rock cellar days before, washed and polished up as best as could be done. Ten-pound lard cans were filled with flour and sugar and the lids securely fastened.

The days before the men were to leave, Mother baked bread, a couple of pies, and a jar of cookies which would all go into the grub box. About the last thing to go on the wagon was a quarter of beef, securely wrapped in canvas. This was hung high in a tree at the wood camp, safely away from chipmunks and other invaders.

By three o'clock the next morning Father was up, and had aroused the other two who were to go with him, usually my uncle and brother. All went out to feed and harness the horses while Mother prepared a hearty breakfast of steak and eggs, fried potatoes, hot biscuits with sweet butter and honey, and coffee. The men ate heartily as they knew what was ahead of them. They lingered a little over smokes after the meal, Father with his pipe, the others with cigarettes, but as Father intended, they were on their way before daylight. This was the usual routine.

The first few miles were easy going and the horses pulled steadily along. From the foot of the hill, it was a different story. The road wound back and forth over washouts and ruts deep and dusty, and riding was anything but luxurious. The higher they went the steeper the road became. The horses had to be stopped often and the brake set so they could breathe deeply and relax as this first load was far heavier than the many following would be.

This was Westgard Pass, a toll road, kept up by Scott Broder, a man past middle age. He lived at the toll house where there was a fresh water spring, and that is where the barrels would be filled. The wood crew always stopped to pay the toll, give Scott his mail and anything he might have ordered from Joseph's store. This was a service all his friends did.

The horses were unhitched, tied in the shade, and given a little grain while the men went in to share their lunch with Scott, with coffee he had made. This was the only long break they would have, and even though early in the day, it was convenient. My folks had gone over this road so many times during their trips from Big Pine to Smokey Valley that they were old friends of Scott, so mother usually included some special thing for his larder.

With barrels filled and horses

*Thomas Tate on his horse Billy, one of those he rode to and from his farm.*

watered and rehitched, they would be on their way once more. Between the toll house and the summit was the steepest part of the road. Soon they would reach the "narrows" where the road went between two solid walls of rock. There was always a little anxiety until they were through this part, especially in murky weather, for if caught here in a cloudburst there was no possible way for either man or animal to escape. In later years these walls had to be blasted for a two lane highway, but for now one man walked ahead to make sure there was not another outfit coming down.

Above the narrows the pinon trees became more thickly scattered over the hillsides. At the summit the crew took the first rough road that veered to the south and followed it for a few miles along the ridge into the thick woods. Then they started looking for a suitable campsite until they found a place sheltered by a large bluff from the northwinds. Their first chore was to tend to the horses, which they tied a short distance from camp. They decided where to put what before unloading so the heavy things would be handled only once. Rocks were arranged for the cooking fire, the grate put on and a pot of coffee put on to boil. Father drank only tea so his special pot was put on also. He drank it strong, either hot or cold. When camp was set up to their liking everyone sat down for a leisurely smoke. This over, it was time to start supper.

Steaks were cut for the evening meal, as well as a generous hunk for tomorrow's stew, before hoisting the quarter into its tree. They would cut up some onions and cucumbers in vinegar, heat the pot of beans Mother had cooked the day before, fry the steaks, get out the homemade bread, fresh butter and a fruit pie and have a meal fit for the gods. While two of them washed up and stowed away the rest of the food, a third raked out a few coals from the dying fire and tossed in some pitchy pinecones. Later they would rake the cones out and extract the delicious nuts to eat before going to bed. For exercise they usually scouted around checking on the timber near at hand.

The wood cutters never clear-cut, choosing trees here and there, dying ones if possible. They looked for straight logs. Plenty of pinon trees were not so large they couldn't be felled, trimmed and snaked by one man and a horse. They were satisfied that they had chosen the place well. Scarcely had the sun set before they were rolled up in their blankets and snoring. It had been an arduous day as many ahead would be.

They needed no alarm clock. Father had spent a large number of his working years driving stage, so had schooled himself on waking when he wanted. He was awake before dawn and had the coffee pot and tea kettle on, with breakfast well on the way before the others rolled out. They fed, watered, and grained the horses and when they returned there was a huge pile of hotcakes,

*Esther Tate*

bacon and eggs, and plenty of steaming coffee ready. They wasted no time eating and when through each washed his dishes in a pan of hot water, helped stow away the remaining food, and rolled his bed roll tightly to put into the tent put up the night before. They slept out-of-doors; the tent was used for sleeping only in stormy weather. They had done this so many times they had the whole process down to a science.

Each man harnessed a horse and they went into the timber to start the day's real work. The previous winter and spring winds had felled many a good tree so they were saved the trouble of cutting them, this first day at least. By early afternoon they had far more than enough for the first load. They loaded the wagon, had an early supper, and were in bed with the birds. The next day two men went down with the load while the third stayed to continue bringing in logs.

The two who went down laid over one day, sawing the logs into four-foot lengths, splitting them into desired sizes, and laying the four-by-four piles that would extend the length of the half acre lot. By the time they finished late in the fall there would be many such piles practically filling the whole lot. The third day they returned to the woods taking any needed supplies and an extra barrel for water. They would lay over one day up there, again helping to bring in logs to the growing stockpile, and come down again the third day. Thus with two trips a week the long rows grew quickly with the addition of several eight-foot lengths each week.

Often on the way down with a load, someone who lived along the way would come out and stop them, asking that they leave a log or so for their use. The men would unload the desired amount, estimating the price, and once more be on their way. Many a time Father stopped at some desolate place without being asked and left logs for people he knew did not have the means to pay.

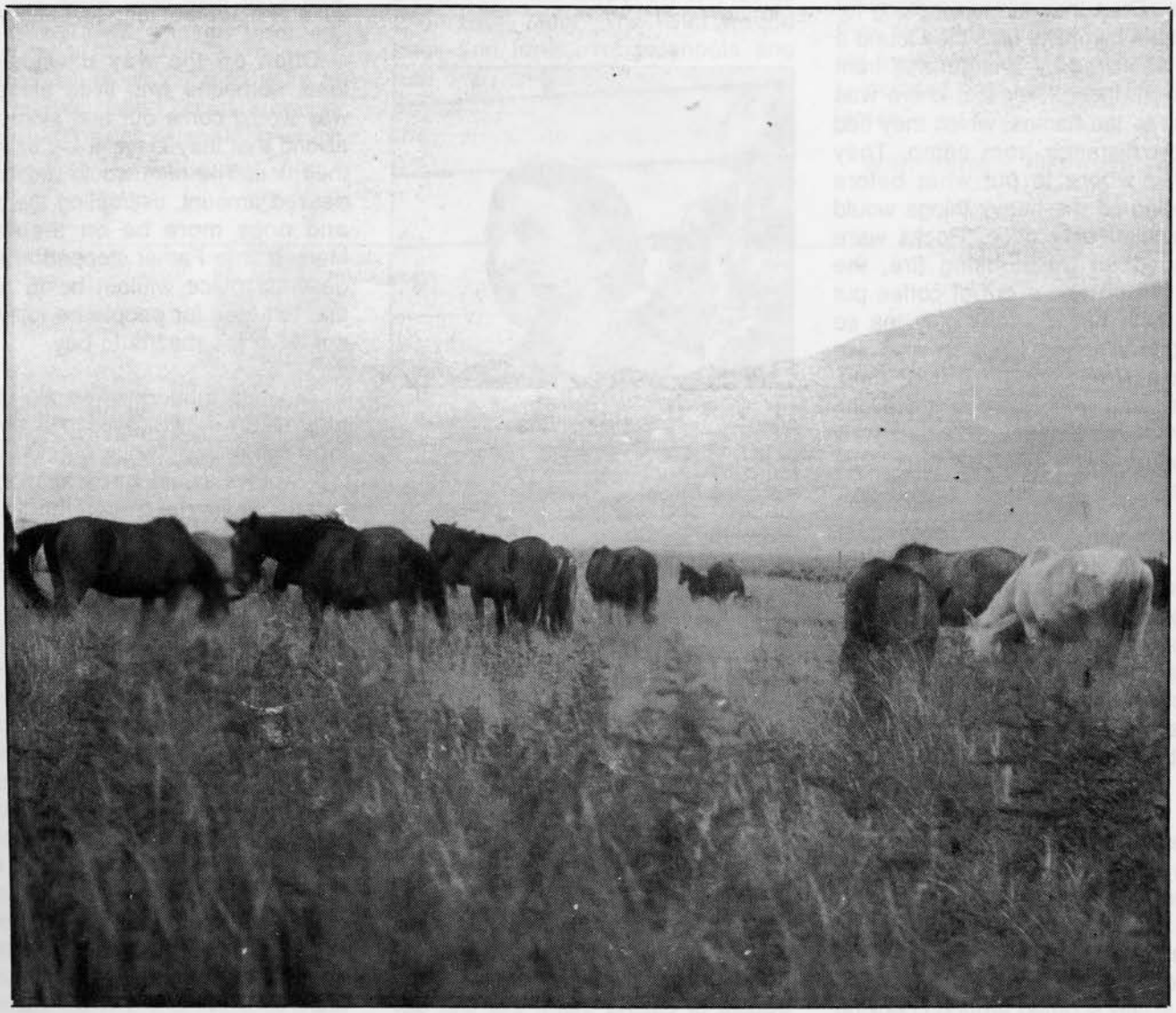
The two helpers often alternated trips to town, giving each a chance for a hot bath and hair cut. On every trip Mother would have fresh bread and some kind of sweets for them to take back, together with the late papers, which were always several days old when they came anyway.

The men had little time to read but always liked to scan the headlines to see what was going on in the outside world. Strange as it may seem the papers came from San Francisco, referred to as "Below" in those days. They came first to Reno, thence to Mina where the broadgauge took off to Tonopah. The narrow-gauge, nicknamed "Slim Princess," picked up the mail at Mina and brought it on down to the Owens Valley. Most outside travel went north, either by train or by team over Westgard or Montgomery. The roads south were poor.

Some years there was an early snow storm and the men were held up for a short time, but as a rule they could work into early November, when they had to break camp and go down for the winter. Occasionally they made a trip or so in the late spring. Toward the end of the fall season the stockpile would be large enough that an extra trip now and then was all that was needed to clean up before the storms came. Thus the last of the logs came down faster than they could be split and piled, so it was some time before the long neat rows were finished.

Neighborhood children had a habit of gathering at "Tate's corner" in the early evenings to play. There was little or no traffic. These long rows of wood afforded wonderful hiding places if the games happened to be Hide-and-Seek or Run-Sheep-Run.

After all the exhausting weeks for both men and horses, the highest price Father ever charged for a cord of wood was twelve dollars. The fact that all the equipment was his own, left over from freighting days in Nevada, that wages were low, and that much of the food, both crops and animals were grown on his own land, made the undertaking profitable and brought in quite a few dollars to add to the family coffers. ✤



*The east forty of the Tate property was wild pasture land. White Mountains are in the background.*

# With GAVEL And GUN

## *Law and Justice in the Mining Camps of Mono County*

by Joy Fatooh
and Demila Jenner

*"For some time, a lawless element had been rearing its ugly head around and in the outlying district of Aurora, as far as Carson City. In December, 1861, a decent, married man named Carder had been shot in a poker game by one of these toughs for no reason except that he had been lucky at cards. His wife had a marble headstone put over his grave. Inscribed thereon was:*

*William E. Carder*
*Native of Tennessee*
*Aged 33 years*
*Was assissinated in Aurora*
*on the night of December 10, 1861*
*"I will avenge," saith the Lord*
*Erected by his wife Annie*

*Several nights later, the ruffians went up to the Aurora Cemetery, blasted the stone full of holes, and broke it into pieces."* – Ella M. Cain, "The Story of Early Mono County."

Ed. Note: When Harley Jenner took this photo in the 1950s, the headstone was lying in pieces on the ground and he stood on his truck to take the picture without disturbing the stone. When he returned later, it had disappeared, apparently carried off, as were bricks and anything else loose in Aurora.

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January 2, 1871: A man's dismembered body is discovered scattered near the Inyo-Mono county line at Fish Slough, on the road between Bishop Creek and Hot Springs (Benton). The *Inyo Register* comments:

> As it is not known in which county the remains of the man were found, it is possible that no official investigation or coroner's inquest may be held . . .

Was it that easy to get away with murder in the Eastern Sierra's mining camp days?

California had been won from Mexico just a few months before gold was discovered in 1848. It was not yet a state or even a territory. Nor was there any precedent regarding mineral rights: California gold was the first precious metal found on American public lands. It was up to the miners to organize districts and to make — and enforce — their own laws.

As silver and gold strikes in eastern California and western Nevada began in the 1850s, seats of government established farther west were slow to extend their authority over the Sierra. In fact there was no clear distinction between California and Nevada at first. When Aurora, the county seat of Mono County, California, was found to be actually in Nevada, the county records were hastily moved — but meanwhile, in 1863, Aurora residents had the opportunity to vote in two different counties' elections on the same voting day.

Thompson and West's 1881 *History of Nevada* gave these statistics for 1859-1880: Homicides, 402. Murderers legally hanged, 8; suicided, 3; lynched, 13. Sent to penitentiary, 23. Acquitted or discharged, 39. Not arrested or called to any legal account whatsoever, 316! Bancroft gave even worse figures in his *History of California:* "From 1849 to 1854 inclusive, 4,200 murders were committed in California. In San Francisco there were 1,200, and only one conviction." In the mining camp of Aurora, perched on the swaying line between the two states, there were 17 documented killings during the boom years of the early 1860s; all but one were ruled justifiable homicide by a coroner's jury, and the one that went to court saw a verdict of not guilty.

The prevalence of violence is not surprising in such an unbalanced population of ambitious, unsettled young men. Traveler William H. Brewer described "Aurora of a Sunday night," 1863:

> One sees a hundred men to one woman and child. Saloons - saloons - saloons - liquor - everywhere. And here the men are — where else can they be? At home in their cheerless, lonesome hovels or huts? No, in the saloons, where the lights are bright, amid the hum of many voices and the excitement of gambling.

Aurora had 25 saloons; Bodie, nearly 50 on Main Street. Virtually all of the patrons were armed: a revolver was an item of apparel as essential as the belt it was tucked into. Roger G. McGrath, who analyzed all of Aurora's and Bodie's gunfights in his excellent book *Gunfighters, Highwaymen and Vigilantes,* notes that most were the result of arguments, personal feuds, or "challenges to the pecking order in a saloon."

Bodie native Ella M. Cain wrote, "The popular greeting as the miners met in the morning was, 'Have we had a man for breakfast this morning?' " The saying was a

*Inside Old Benton Store today; the last of the Benton "saloons." Photo by Joy Fatooh.*

common insult tossed by newspapers at rival towns, but some communities seem to have revelled in their reputations as the roughest camps in the highest murder rates. A "bad man from Bodie" was supposed to be worse than a bad man from anywhere else — though Mono County's other mining camps produced top conenders.

Why the low conviction rate? McGrath asserts that the new boom towns' "institutions of law and justice were highly structured and fairly sophisticated," but a closer look reveals the structure as something of a false front. Mono County was formed in 1861, complete with elected sheriff, district attorney and supervisors and an appointed judge. One skeptic commented that the citizens "think we have a pretty good set of officers — they can all drink plenty of whiskey — but whether they can steal or not remains to be seen . . ." In fact the new government was rife with voting fraud, and there were complaints about saloon electioneering in which the votes a candidate got were determined by the rounds of drinks he bought.

Foremost among regulations drawn up by a new mining district were those governing the making and keeping of mining claims. Where fortunes could be made or lost in a few square feet, claim-jumping was no small offense. You could protect your claim with the law or with a gun, the latter being handier and often more effective. When Sam Clemens first came west he and partners Cal Higbie and A.D. Allen staked out a fantastically rich strike at Aurora, but then each left town thinking the others were doing the work required within ten days to validate the claim. On the tenth day all three returned separately to find a crowd gathered to relocate the claim. Clemens and Higby conceded to the law, but Allen, cocked revolver in hand, demanded and got a share in the new company. On another occasion, a few days after a man was shot and killed defending a claim on Last Chance Hill, three claim jumpers entered a mine Clemens and his partners had been working and announced they were "in the hole, armed, and meant to die for it, if necessary." Clemens backed down and lived to become Mark Twain instead of an Aurora statistic or a silver tycoon.

Mining districts drew up their own laws concerning murder, assault and theft as well, and enforced them as best they could. These systems were gradually replaced by formal courts, but for years it was possible for just about anyone to set himself up as a judge.

G.W. Cross first made news in Benton in April 1874 by purchasing a "merchandising and likker trade." By August he was appearing in the papers as "Judge Cross":

> Two men went prospecting for a row in Benton and found it. One of them struck a man with his revolver while standing in Judge Cross's saloon. They then went outside and fired three or four shots just to let the justice and constable know they intended to give them some business . . .

Both men were fined $40 each and costs. From that point on references to Hizzoner's judicial duties alternate with notices concerning his "ambrosial cocktails" (patent applied for).

Pioneering editor W.A. Chalfant, in *The Story of Inyo,* wrote of a judge who, when a protesting attorney suggested that he refer to his books, gathered them up and threw them at the offender: "I don't know nothing about book law, but here's a law no lawyer can dispute!" Sometimes the strong-arm approach was necessitated by conditions in the courtroom, as in a story Chalfant tells concerning Judge Theron Y. Reed, circuit judge serving Inyo, Mono, Kern and Alpine counties — quite a distance to travel by horse and stage. On one occasion when unruly disputes persisted despite his admonitions, Judge Reed entered the courtroom the next morning "with a double barreled shotgun on his arm. He cocked both barrels of the gun and set it by his chair, announcing: 'Gentlemen, there will be order in the court today.' " And there was.

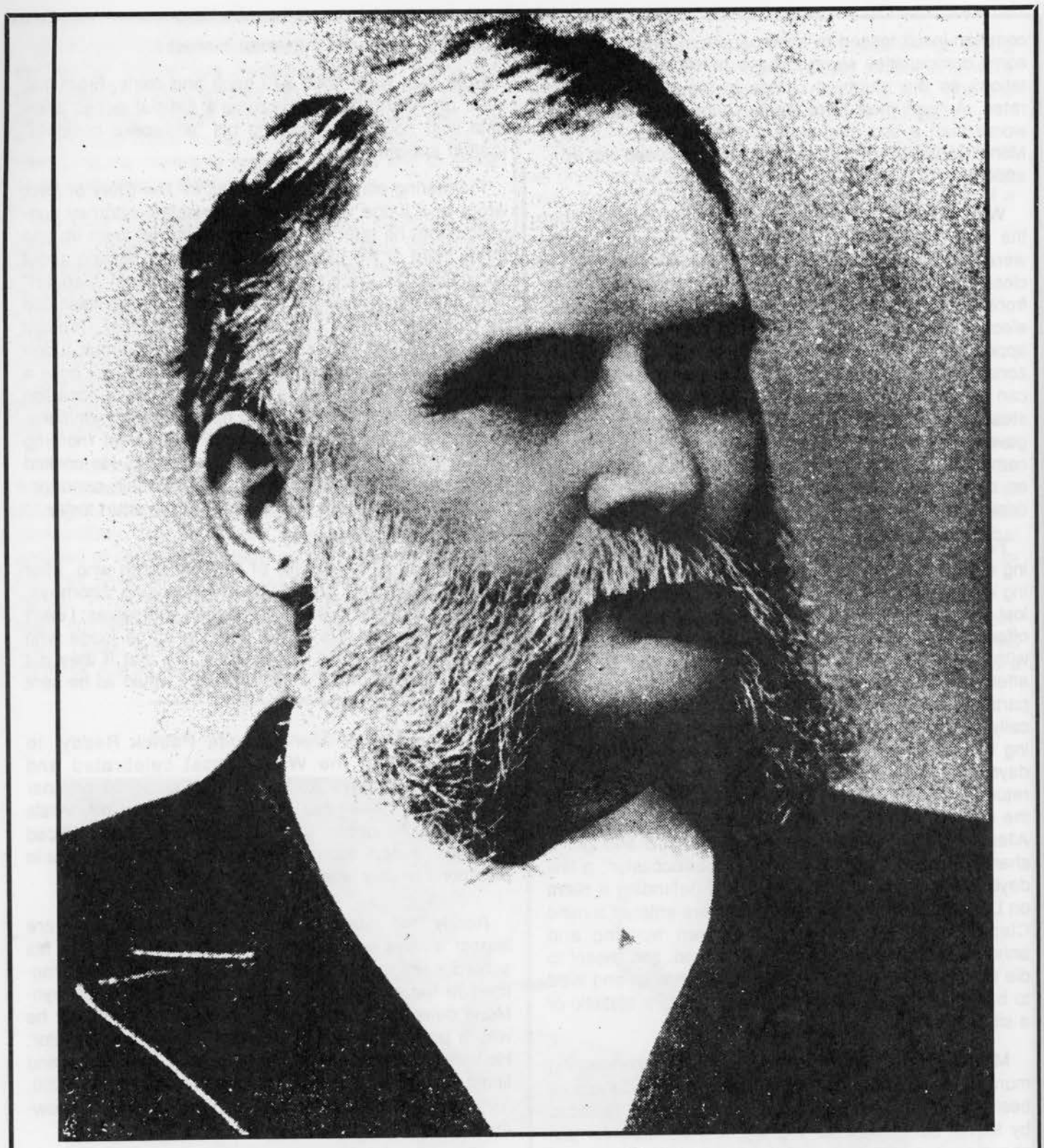
Elsewhere Chalfant tells of a Bodie judge who, after hearing prolonged arguments by opposing attorneys, ruled: "You'll have to settle it between yourselves; I can't make heads nor tails of it." And the same judge who threw the books once instructed a jury that if they did not find in favor of the defendant they would all be sent to jail for contempt.

Into this unruly arena strode Patrick Reddy, to become one of the West's most celebrated and respected attorneys at law. Reddy was just another Aurora tough when his right arm was shot off. While recovering he began to read law books, apprenticed himself to a local attorney and soon took his first case in Montgomery City, east of Benton.

Reddy had found his calling: judge and jury were almost always won over by the tall Irishman with his sonorous voice, fine diction and eloquent logic. He practiced in Independence, then in Bodie; served as Inyo-Mono delegate to the constitutional convention; later he was a prominent San Fransiscan and a state senator. He was known as a man of the highest intelligence and finest character. The Inyo Register eulogized in 1900, "His makeup included no fault of moral or physical cowardice, nor of littleness of any sort."

The dark side of Reddy's greatness was his willingness to defend the indefensible. Reddy is said to have been the means of freeing over a hundred men charged with murder in the Eastern Sierra. One was a drunken teamster who beat his wife to death, threw her body out of the wagon onto the Bodie-Lundy road and drove away. With Reddy as council he received a light sentence for manslaughter — pleading self-defense!

But Reddy was just as willing to face off against



*Pat Reddy. Photo courtesy Demila Jenner*

infamous bad men. Old-timer George Montrose recalled the tale of Perley Plane, leader of a gang of cutthroat horse and cattle thieves who — to divert blame from themselves — accused another man of leading a cattle-stealing ring. Plane was to be the chief witness for the prosecution, and he let it be known that Reddy would "die in his boots" if the accused went free or if anything was said about Plane's own criminal record. Reddy, during the morning session of court, sent a messenger to Bodie. By the time the afternoon session convened the Aurora courtroom was strategically occupied by both Plane's gunmen and Reddy's.

Reddy, "firm and steadfast," faced Plane in the witness stand and with his left (and only) hand hidden under the tail of his coat, intoned the forbidden questions. Plane was forced to admit to having served a prison term. He "crept from the witness chair and the courtroom, his power broken, his challenge met . . ." And Reddy's reputation for fearlessness was sealed.

Above all, Pat Reddy believed in everyone's right to a fair trial. He deplored "mob justice" and more than once defended clients who were targeted for lynching.

*Bottles from beer brewed in Bodie. Photo by Joy Fatooh*

In 1880 special officers were hired to keep opium addicts out of Bodie saloons. When addict George Watkins walked into the Comstock saloon, special officer Robert Whitaker clubbed him with his revolver. Watkins was carried unconscious to his room; when he revived he returned with a shotgun and killed Whitaker. The *Bodie Standard* called for a vigilance committee. The *Daily Free Press* rebutted:

> There is every form of official protection already in existence, the chief drawback consisting in lack of good or well-balanced juries . . . If good citizens will but half do their duty as witnesses, jurors, etc., there are good courts and officers enough to soon bring about a better state of affairs.

Watkins retained Pat Reddy, who had no chance to defend him: the next morning Watkins died, either of his head injuries or of a mysterious "medicine" given him in jail to relieve the pain.

The *Daily Free Press* had a point. "Lack of evidence" and "lack of witnesses" were findings as common as "self-defense." December 1876, with Benton's saloonkeeper judge:

> Business in Cross's court has been quite active for the past few weeks, taxing his patience to a considerable extent. Yesterday he was hearing a case where the charge was assault with a deadly weapon with intent to kill. Plaintiff could find no witnesses; two were examined for defendant. One of them swore he was so inebriated he didn't know where he was going, and the other swore he was drawing a picture on the bar and didn't think the row worthy of his attention. Prisoner was discharged.

Was justice blind in those days, or just nearsighted? Here is a murder mystery Mono County style, as reported in Aurora's *Esmeralda Weekly Union,* May 30, 1868:

> SAD AFFRAY. Just as we go to press, word comes that a fatal affray occurred in Hot Springs (Benton) May 28: W.R. Rison's wife wrote him a note and gave it to an Indian to deliver to Rison. The Indian by mistake delivered it to one J.J. Coddington. An altercation ensued between Rison and Coddington in which Coddington received a blow on the neck or head from a club and was carried home and put to bed by friends. Next morning he was found dead in bed. That is all we know at this time.

What do you suppose that note said? Who was it *really* for? It must have been ambiguously headed, "Darling," or some such. But it is not Mrs. Rison who stands to be tried. From the next edition of the *Weekly Union:*

> HOT SPRINGS. From our correspondence we learn that things in Benton are moving along lively as the people of that place have had a man for breakfast lately. We have received several accounts of the matter between Rison and Coddington, but nothing could be proved at Rison's examination — not even that he had struck the fatal blow . . . as no positive proof could be adduced other than the knowledge of a difficulty between them and that they were seen clenched on the floor, Rison was acquitted. The coroner's jury upon examination found that Coddington's skull had been badly fractured above the left ear.

Did some other party sneak up to Coddington's bed in the night and smash his skull? Or did Rison get away with murder?

Less than a month later and eight miles south, another mystery occurred. Charles Robinson was a genial Aurora stablekeeper; Frank Schoonmaker the proprietor of a saloon nearby. The two were known as the best of friends when they left Aurora to view some Owens Valley property in which they had a joint interest. All were astonished when an agitated Schoonmaker galloped into Benton to report that he had killed his friend at Yellowjacket Springs.

Schoonmaker hastily explained that they had argued about the property on the return trip and when they dismounted to drink from the spring, Robinson began firing and he returned the fire. He hurried on to turn himself in to the sheriff at Aurora, who brought him to Bridgeport for questioning. Public opinion seems to have leaned toward a finding of self-defense — despite the fact that a post-mortem showed that Robinson was shot in the back! A year later Schoonmaker married Robinson's widow, suggesting a motive; but by then he was long

gone from Mono County. One old-timer's account says that since Bridgeport had no jail Schoonmaker was released after questioning, caught the next stage out and never returned. According to a 1915 *Inyo Register* retelling Schoonmaker was tried in Aurora because there was "no government worthy of the name" at the new county seat. "There was so little evidence that perhaps a more settled community would have done as did the Aurora jury: 'Not Guilty.' It was the custom."

In Bodie, 1881, tolerance for the custom abruptly wore thin. Thomas Treloar, a small man who had lost much of his mental capacity after falling 225 feet down a mine, thought his wife was seeing too much of Joseph DeRoche. When he caught them dancing together the two men exchanged threats; later that night two witnesses saw DeRoche shoot Treloar in the back of the head.

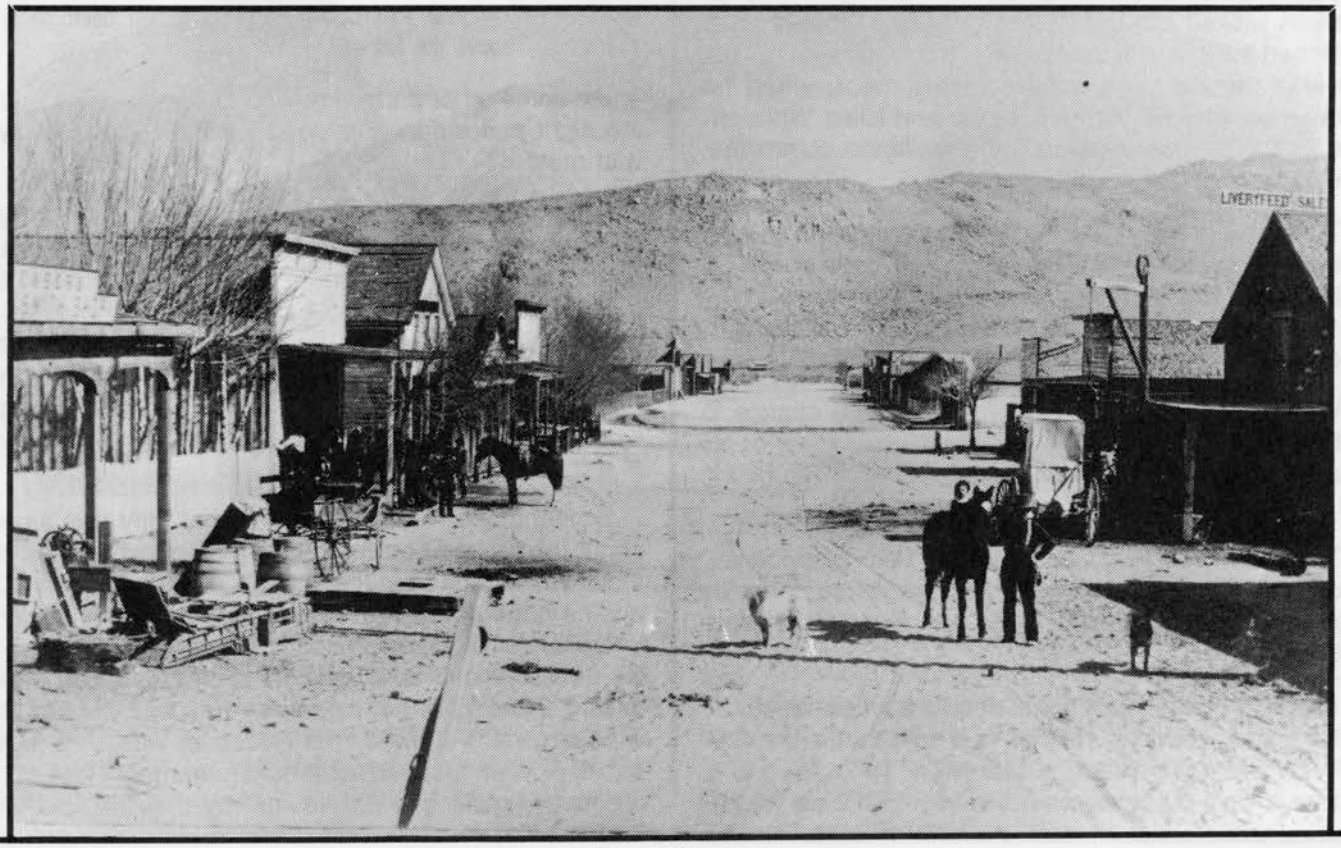
When one bad man killed another it was "good riddance," but this was different. Outrage at the blatant murder of a man thought to be harmless coalesced into a vigilance committee. A mob of hundreds was moving toward the jail when Pat Reddy stepped out into the street and dispelled the crowd with an impassioned speech. That afternoon DeRoche tried to secure Reddy for his defense, only to find that he was already engaged for the prosecution. The day's testimony revealed nothing to calm the vigilantes. They stormed the jail in the middle of the night and hanged DeRoche over the spot where Treloar died — "the fit representative of the Spirit of Murder," the *Daily Free Press* declared.

This was not the first time a mob prevailed in Mono, or the last. The notorious gunman John Daley and his gang had dominated Aurora at the height of its boom years, even succeeding in having a gang member elected as city marshal — who then appointed other gang members as policemen. Still, most of the havoc was among their own rough kind.

One day in 1863 a Daley gang member stole a horse from the hitching post at William Johnson's way station. Johnson sent out an employee who pursued and shot the thief. A year later the gang took revenge: they plied Johnson with liquor at an Aurora saloon, then four of them jumped him as he staggered toward his lodgings. Daley himself shot Johnson through the head and William Buckley cut his throat.

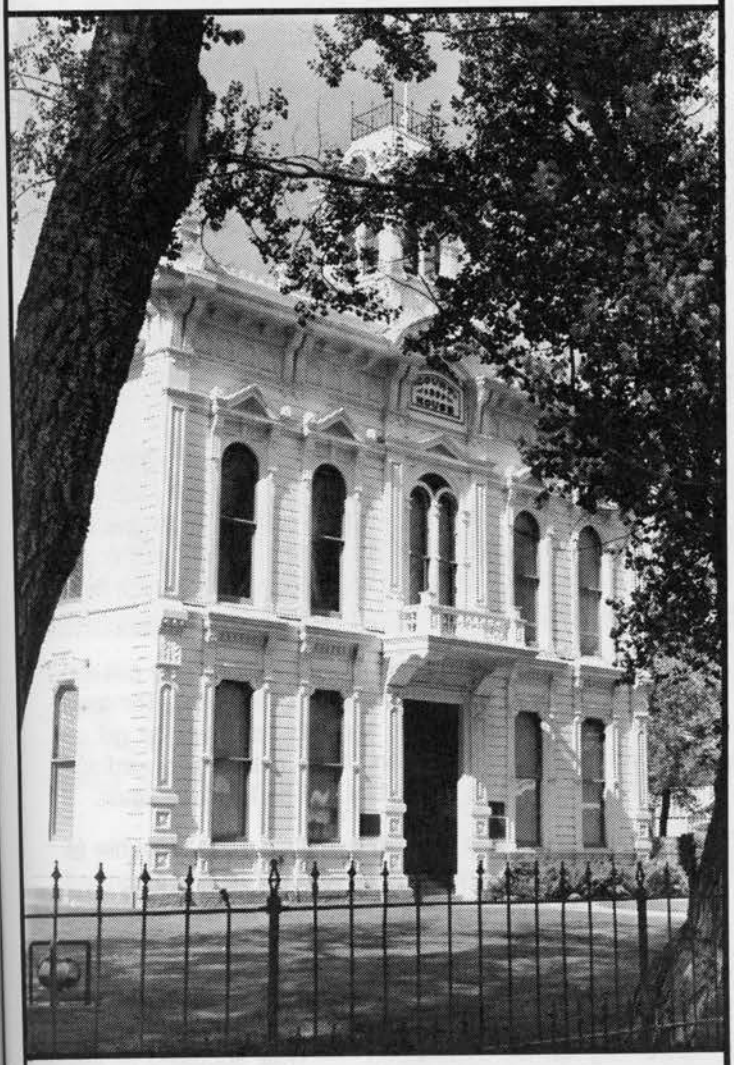
The next day some 400 Aurorans organized into the Citizens' Safety Committee and began rounding up gang members in Aurora and at Adobe Meadows. William Buckley evaded two posses in a four-day chase that ended at Lee Vining's cabin near Mono Lake. Meanwhile the Safety Committee, grown 600 strong, took control of Aurora and began plans for a four-man

*Benton's Main Street in the days of Gavel and Gun justice. Far left: John Creaser's blacksmithy. John Creaser, a Canadian, came to Benton in the early 1870s and in 1906 at age 68 was elected a Mono County supervisor. Photo courtesy Demila Jenner*



gallows.

Daley and Buckley, in speeches from the gallows, both maintained that they were guilty of Johnson's murder but that the other two men were innocent — to no avail. According to most sources Nevada's Governor Nye arrived too late to stop the hanging but on seeing the scaffold, ordered the "devilish machine" removed at once. But in what Chalfant calls "the Nevada version, from credible sources," the Governor said "I am sorry lumber is so high over here; it ought to have been longer to hold more."



*Bridgeport courthouse. Photo by Joy Fatooh*

The strangest case in Mono County of an accused murderer in the hands of an angry mob took place in Bridgeport, 1891. The defendant was Chinese, the mob Indian. Walker River and Bridgeport Paiutes had joined forces to look for Poker Tom, a tribe member last seen playing cards with Chinese merchant Ah Quong Tai. As some of Poker Tom's effects were found outside of town and in the river, the Indians became convinced that Ah Tai had murdered him. Only the protestations of Sheriff Cody, who had gained their trust, prevented them from taking immediate revenge.

Indians dragging the river soon found the upper half of a human torso. The chest cavity was empty, and medical examination showed that it had been pickled, as for corned beef. The Indians then recalled that some of them had been fed a strange pickled meat at Ah Tai's store which he told them was goat.

By now they had been joined by all Paiutes in the area and were several hundred strong, outnumbering Bridgeport whites. They threatened to burn the town and massacre the residents if Ah Tai were not turned over to them. The Indians had a logical basis for their demand: they had earlier surrendered to the whites an Indian who had killed a white rancher and another who murdered a Chinese man in Coleville. It was only right that the whites should give them a Chinese accused of killing an Indian.

Authorities searching Ah Tai's store and home found patches of new wallpaper covering stains that had been scrubbed. Several empty barrels smelled of brine. Two men later testified that Ah Tai confessed the murder privately to them. Publicly he pleaded innocence but sought and was given protective custody. The Indians surrounded the jail at night and lay down touching hand-to-hand, forming a human chain so that he could not be removed under cover of darkness. Ella Cain lived in Bridgeport then; Sheriff Cody was her father. In *The Story of Early Mono County* she wrote that an Indian woman who worked for her family confided that fires had been laid around 50 or 60 houses, ready to be lit.

On the day of the trial hundreds of Indians surrounded the Justice Court, posted themselves on Main Street, and waited on horseback at the edge of town. According to the *Chronicle Union,* June 13, 1891, there was no evidence that Poker Tom had been murdered nor any way of identifying the remains. "The defendant was ordered discharged for want of sufficient evidence."

When Ah Tai was informed by his counsel that he was free and could go, he grabbed the attorney's arm so hard that the marks he made remained for days. The Indians in the courtroom flung open the doors and the hordes in and pried Ah Tai loose. The judge and defense counsel begged them not to commit a crime in the courtroom, so they dragged Ah Tai outside and up the street.

Ah Quong Tai was beheaded and dismembered, parts thrown aloft and strewn about the sagebrush in a field at the edge of town. Dogs belonging to the man who owned the field brought home, months later, "a long black braided queue attached to a small shrivelled scalp lock."

It's hard to say what might have happened if Ah

Quong Tai had been white. Chinese and Indians seem (at least on the surface, and after the Indian wars) to have come under the same laws as whites in Mono County. Although racial hatred and xenophobia were strong, there seems to have been less of the discriminatory laws or racially-motivated mass violence common in nearby areas. From the *Inyo Register,* December 14, 1901:

> HORRIBLE ANTI-CHINESE VIOLENCE IN TONOPAH. A gang of 15 Union hoodlums and murderers invaded the Chinatown section of Tonopah in the middle of the night, beating, forcing the unclothed Chinese to flee for their lives out of town . . . All 15 were released, and Editor Chalfant comments that now the Chinese should be brought into court, all except the one who happened to die, and be prosecuted for taking up so much of the public's attention on so trivial a matter.

Was this a racist remark against the Chinese, or a satiric jibe at their tormentors? In an era when newspapermen strove to outdo one another with biting wit, the reader bent on learning the truth had to dig through layers of irony as well as prejudice.

And then — as now — there was more than one side to any story. From Benton, 1907, comes what the *Bridgeport Chronicle-Union* called "a case that has shown the most peculiar features of any that ever came before our courts."

The *Inyo Register,* May 3, reported it first: Benton's deputy sheriff W.F. Edwards was "foully murdered by one of three drunken Indians he was trying to arrest." Wildly differing versions emerged, but as B.W. Alden was the only white witness, one can piece together the basics of his story: Ada Bertrand, 17, was travelling home in her buggy when the Indians stopped her half a mile out of Benton. Edwards and Alden borrowed a rifle and rushed to the scene; the buggy had gone on, but the Indians wrested the gun away from Edwards and one stepped back and shot him.

The *Bridgeport Chronicle Union* editorialized:

> An officer in the execution of his duty has been shot down in cold blood by a drunken Indian. There is a weeping widow, there are fatherless children — sorrowing friends. The red-handed murderer hides in the rocks, fed and aided by his people. There is no pang of regret in his being, no sorrow nor fear of the loss of his soul. He has but one fear and that the justice of the white man. He knows that he, sooner or later, must fall into the hands of the officers, he knows that for him is death or the prison cell, yet he cares not for such is the way of the Indian.

The editor goes on to demand enforcement of the laws against selling liquor to Indians: ". . . today there sleeps beneath the sod one of the bravest men that ever wore a star as a martyr to the liquor traffic." And as for the killer himself,

> He must be captured and given a speedy trial. The welfare of our county demands that no criminals shall here find a haven . . . let the law take its course and every citizen join in running down the wrong-doer.

Just before going to press with the above, the *Chronicle Union* learned that two Indians had been "arrested without difficulty." Apparently, once news was typeset, it wasn't customary to remove it when proven false. The *Register* had first identified the killer as George Towie, but turn the page: "The statement on the front page of this issue that George Towie murdered poor Billy Edwards is untrue" — "Frank Towie" was to blame. Eventually the suspect was arraigned as "Tow Abe, an Indian."

When the *Chronicle Union* interviewed him in his Bridgeport jail cell the reporter called him "Ed. Tow . . . a bright young Indian about 20 who claims to have been raised on Bertrand's ranch." As Tow told it, his brother was drunk, so he had put him on a horse and was leading him home. On the way they met two girls; one was Ada Bertrand, who stopped the Indians and was talking with them when Edwards drove up and demanded, "What are you stopping white girls for?" Edwards ordered the brother off his horse, then hit him over the head with the rifle and knocked him down.

> He raised the gun to hit him again and I grabbed the rifle away from him. He told me to give him the rifle; I told him, "No, I'm afraid you'll shoot me." He said if I would give him the gun he would put it on the wagon. I gave him the gun and he hit me on the arm and on the side and over the head and face with it.
>
> He raised the gun to shoot me and I grabbed the gun and he pulled the trigger and it went over my head. The team ran away. I jerked the gun and Billy fell down; he got up again and came after me and I was running backward and Billy had a pistol so I shot him and he fell down again.
>
> The man who was with Billy asked me not to shoot him as he had not done anything. I asked him if he had a gun and he said no. Then I pumped the shells out of the rifle and gave it to him and ran home.

The other Indian under arrest — identified as Gray-Haired Johnnie, John Allen, Ollie John or McGee, but arraigned as "Allie John" — was accused of taking the empty gun from Alden and threatening him with it. The two were arraigned in mid-July; by July 11 the *Inyo Register* was complaining that of 100 prospective jurors, 93 had been dismissed — "a large percentage because they had opinions about the case which no amount of evidence could change." The *Chronicle Union* thought they were inventing excuses because jury duty "might discommode them to a slight extent," but the *Register* blamed "a feeling in the Indians' behalf in various parts of Mono County . . ." Apparently the Indians' story had gained credence over Alden's version and the opinions of the newspapermen.

*Above: Benton Deputy Sheriff Billy Edwards, left, with friend. Photo courtesy Demila Jenner*

*Below: Benton school children in early 1900s, among whom are the two (adopted) children of the murdered Billy Edwards. According to the INYO REGISTER of May 3, 1907, they were Gertrude and Lillian Allen, nieces of Billy's wife Jennie. Photo courtesy Demila Jenner.*

Long-time Benton resident Tom Buckley had no doubt in his mind when interviewed by Demila Jenner some 78 years later. "The Bertrand girls could talk Indian because the father of those brothers who killed Edwards irrigated the Bertrand ranch. They were talking Indian with the brothers, laughing, having a good time" when Edwards confronted them, left to borrow a gun and returned to beat them. "It was his own fault. He got no business doing that."

The trial was delayed for nearly a month as more jurors were called and rejected. The Bridgeport paper ran several editorials berating shirkers of jury duty and even hinted at vigilance: "Is it a fact that Mono has entered the class of counties where the law is a dead letter and each and every man must constitute himself judge and jury?"

On Monday, August 3 a jury was empanelled and the trial began. On Friday the jury returned its verdict: "We, the jury find the defendant guilty of manslaughter and recommend him to the mercy of the Court."

The *Chronicle Union,* incredulous, wrote:

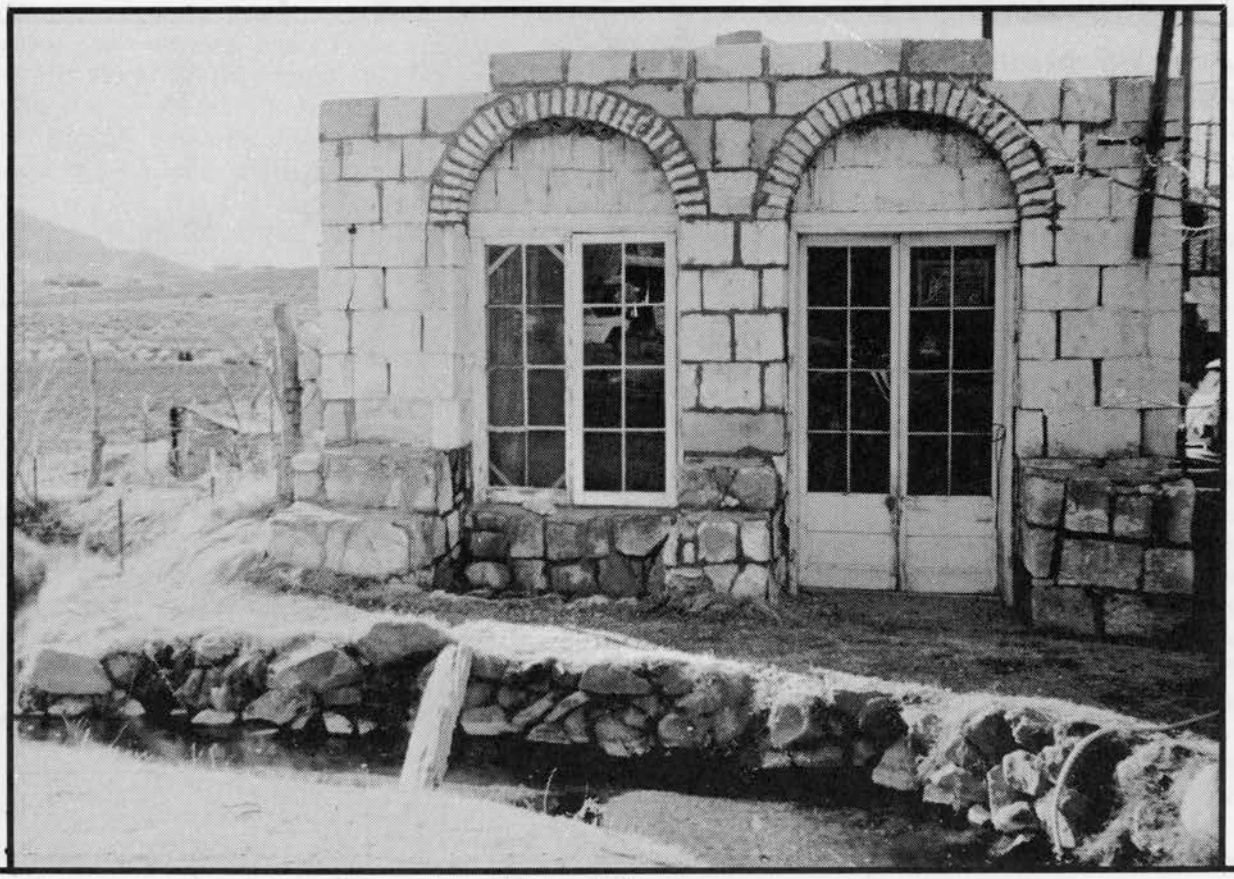
> A white man sleeping in the silent tomb forever and an Indian living on the best a prison can afford for a few short years and the tale is told . . . The dead has been damnified and the murderer lauded unto the heavens.

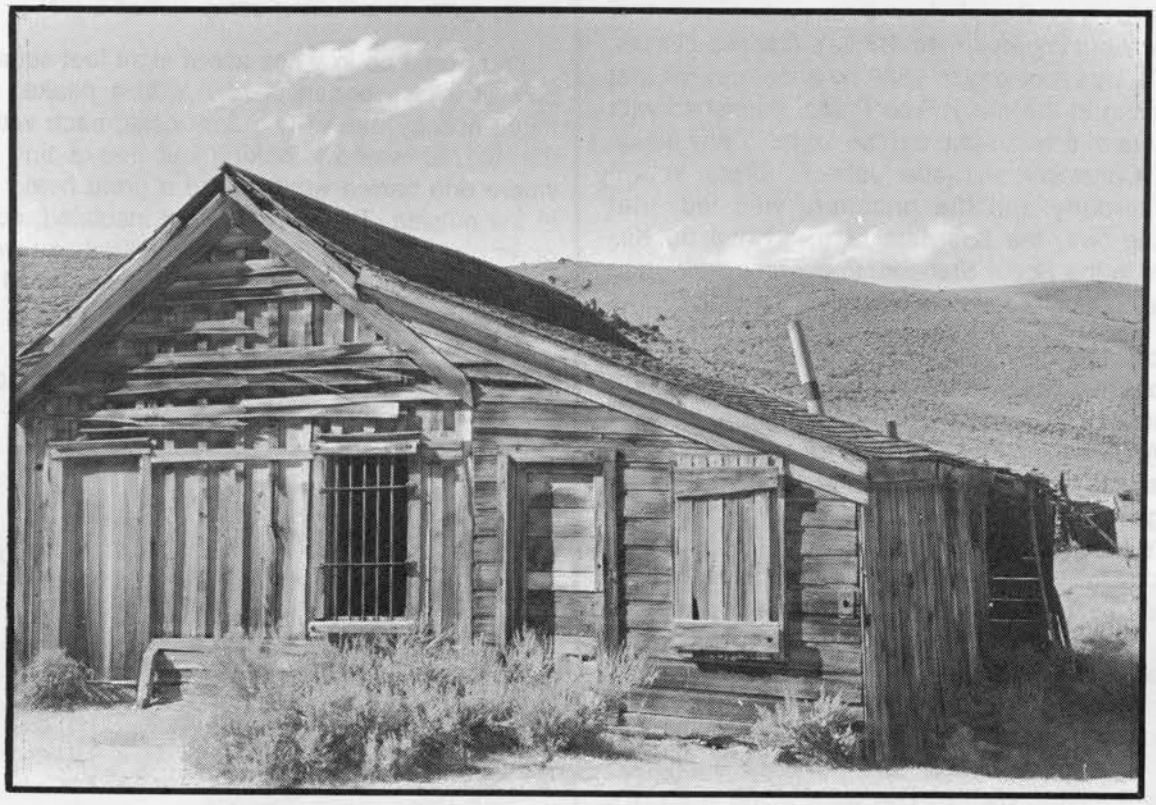
Allie John pled guilty to assault with a deadly weapon and was given eight months in San Quentin. In sentencing Tow Abe, the Bridgeport paper reported, the Court took into consideration a special petition for clemency made by the jury "and gave him the extremely light sentence of three years."

San Quentin had been the California State Prison since 1852. Early newspapers referred to a sentence there as a "vacation by the sea." In 1872 a horse thief was apprehended in Benton when he tried to enter the horse in the Fourth of July races; the *Inyo Independent* noted that "his prospect of spending a few summers at the seaside is exceedingly flattering."

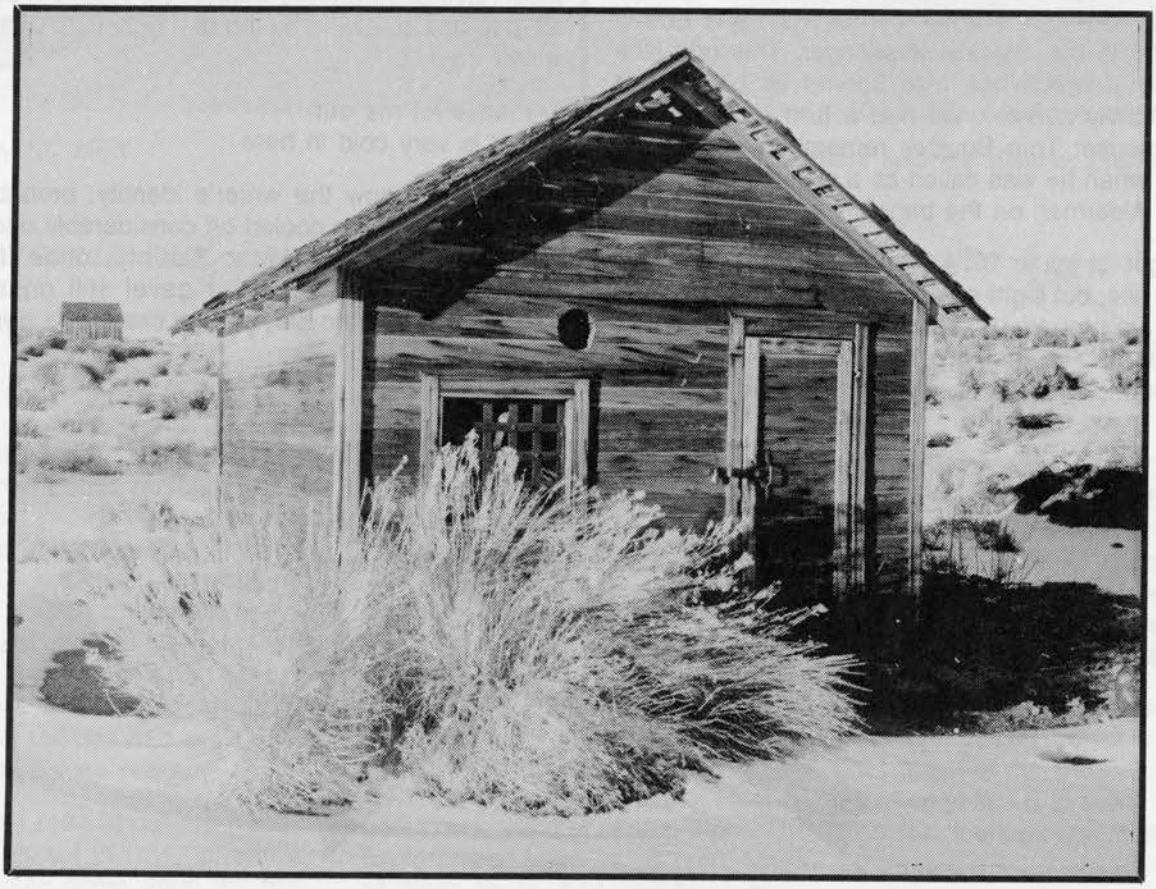
Serving time might indeed be pleasant compared to punishments meted out by some of California's earliest mining districts — flogging, branding, ear cropping — designed as deterrents in the absence of jail facilities. You couldn't simply lock a man up if there was no lockup. In Bishop prisoners were handcuffed to the wheels of freight wagons; one was handcuffed to a small tree and escaped by shinnying up until it bent over and he could drop to the ground. In Candelaria, 1881, Captain Charley was arrested for drunk-and-disorderly and locked in a cellar where glassware was stored. When he started breaking glass he was taken out and handcuffed to a flagpole. Charley slipped out of the cuffs and made a run for it. The constable fired one warning, then shot him fatally. The next year Candelaria got a jail.

*Old Benton meat market – bank – post office – courthouse – morgue! Photo by Joy Fatooh*





*Above: Bodie jail; below: Benton jail. Photos by Joy Fatooh*



The first Mono County jail, at Aurora, was declared totally unfit by the Grand Jury three years in a row (1862-64) without improvement. Bodie's first two-cell jail, built in 1879, was replaced in 1880 by a four-cell jail that was, according to the *Daily Free Press,* "furnished with all the articles of comfort that can be found in any jail on the coast." Constable and jailer John F. Kirgan kept it clean and orderly and the prisoners well fed; that Thanksgiving "we, the boarders of the 'Hotel de Kirgan' " wrote to the *Bodie Standard* to express their gratitude for the "bountiful feast of which we partook."

Bridgeport, the new county seat, was under public pressure to prove itself worthy of the honor. Benton editor O.E. Jones complained in the April 26, 1880 issue of *The Weekly Bentonian* that a petition for improved county buildings was being ignored, and suggested that the old buildings might be rented out as "possible corncribs." Bridgeport's elegant courthouse, built in 1881, still displays in its boardroom a portrait of its humble clapboard predecessor which may or may not have served later as a corncrib. Bridgeport's 1883 jail was not replaced until 1964. Today suspects being booked into Mono County's newest facility can still see that bare little dungeon with barred windows and slots through which food was passed to inmates. The chill of a hundred Bridgeport winters is still locked within those thick stone walls. It's said that in homicide cases the jail served to hold the deceased as well as the accused.

In Benton it was the butcher shop that doubled as a morgue: "Benton Meat Market, corner Main and Eddy," reads the ad in the *Weekly Messenger.* This odd little stone building, which has also served as bank, post office and family home, once had a turn as an improvised courthouse: Tom Buckley remembers "sometime after 1910" when he was called as a witness there, with Judge S.J. Alderman on the bench.

Benton got its jail in 1874. The cubicle still stands at the original site, but sight-seeing is not recommended as it is on private property and the owners take a dim view of trespassers. You just might get locked in until the deputy arrived and it is doubtful you would enjoy the inside view of a mining camp ruffian's life.

You would be in a box about eight feet square, solidly built of thick wooden planks, with a peaked roof. You might occupy one of two dark cells, each with a single iron-barred window looking out into a tiny anteroom where one barred window and a great heavy door lead to the outside. The walls are not insulated, nor the windows glazed. As the light slowly shifted you would make out bits of graffiti pencilled on the rough wood by former occupants.

A long, peculiar allegorical poem, mostly faded to illegibility, begins

In this Hive
We are all A-live

and goes on to draw some sort of analogy with the Honey-Bee. Several entries allude to the jail's nickname:

Here I am
locked in the Piss-house . . .

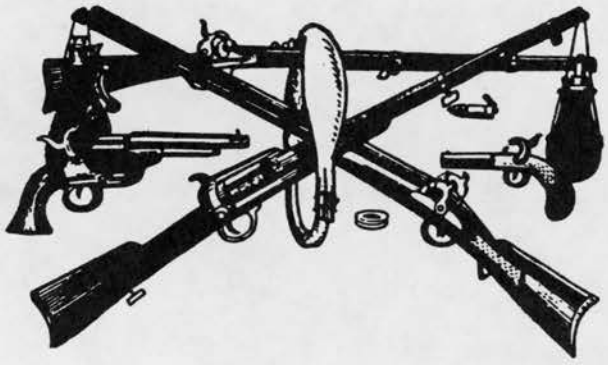
One amusing inscription reads,

I love my wife but
oh those dusty maidens

—possibly referring to Indian women, the popular term being "dusky maidens," but in those days all maidens must have been equally dusty. And the most poignant of all, perhaps scrawled by the dim gray light of a sub-zero winter day:

Please let me out
it is very cold in here

We don't know the writer's identity; probably a barroom braggart who cooled off considerably once he had the chance. So did Mono County, once it had the chance. The thwack of the gavel still rings through Bridgeport's courthouse, but the crack of a gun is rarely heard. ❊



# Railroading Dreams

*Keeler, Nov. 18, 1955* *Photo courtesy Eastern California Museum*

## *words and images dedicated to a railroad I never knew ...*

by David A. Wright

*Photos by David A. Wright, except as otherwise noted*

I was alive when the whistles of the last narrow gauge railroad east of the Rocky Mountains were still heard in the Owens Valley, but I never heard them. I was much too young to go see the source of the sounds in the sagebrush east of Owens River on my own. By the time I had learned of the Carson & Colorado, I was fifteen, and the railroad had been dead and gone for eleven years.

The more I read about the narrow gauge, the more I yearned to see it. That day would come upon my graduation from high school in 1974. I had a choice of spending the entire summer on a ranch, high in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado with some relatives I didn't know, or having the car for a week to go where I wanted. I chose the latter.

During my high school years, I had fueled the fires in my heart with the lore of eastern California and Nevada ghost towns and the skeletal limbs of ghost railroads that served them. The Explorer had been in his pupa stage all those years, had now been born, and needed to spread his wings.

My father and I spent a couple of days making sure the family car, a 1964 Rambler, was in shape to stand up to the rigors of sagebrush bashing, while my mother prepared and packed enough food and goodies to last out a week of teenage gluttony.

Three hours after leaving our Mojave desert home, I caught my first sight of the Carson & Colorado I had so yearned to see! Here I was in Keeler, fourteen years after the last train signaled the trainmaster and rails had been taken up! The station and depot were still there, the raised

bed still easily discernible, heading north out of town!

The next day, I drove northward along the southern end of the line, between Keeler and Manzanar. I walked over the remains of Owenyo that warm summer day of 1974. At that time, there was more left at the site to explore through. But then, as now, I was depressed by how swiftly the desert wind erased the once busy community. On that day, fourteen years after the trains left, I was left saddened. Fourteen years later, on a warm spring morning in 1988, I visited the site again, and again walked away dispirited. On a cold winter day in February 1990 I walked through the site and once again was left with the same feeling. Maybe it's the yearning to have been born a generation or two earlier, to have seen these sites while they were still in operation, or just to have seen them before the decades of the despoiler after the late '50s.

Driving northward along the line from Owenyo back on that day in 1974, gazing at the grade as I slowly moved along I spied what I thought was an old bottle. I stopped, got out of the car, and walked over to it. Just short of the bottle, I twisted my ankle on something sticking out of the ground: I had found the first of my collection of C&C spikes. The bottle was a contemporary Budweiser bottle.

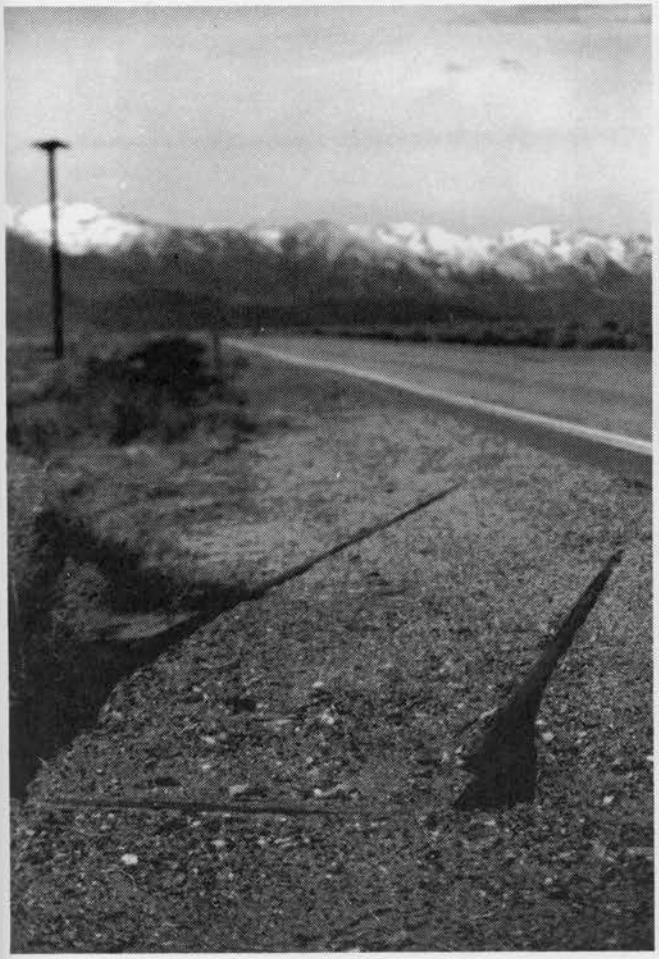
Since that time, I moved to the Eastern Sierra and began to search the remains of the Carson & Colorado Railway. From Mound House, Nevada to Keeler I have visited, driven along, walked, and searched the grade, station sites, sidings, spurs, ghost towns, and other sites along the right-of-way. I have walked through the only tunnel on the line at Montgomery Pass, pondered the immaculate rock work of the embankments wherever the grade traversed unstable and uneven ground, and pined to live back in the days when the railroad was young, to experience first hand the sights, sounds, and smell of sagebrush, the thundering steel belching out clouds of wood smoke as ore cars rolled along the

*Above: The Carson & Colorado Depot at KEELER was converted into a private home shortly after abandonment by Southern Pacific*

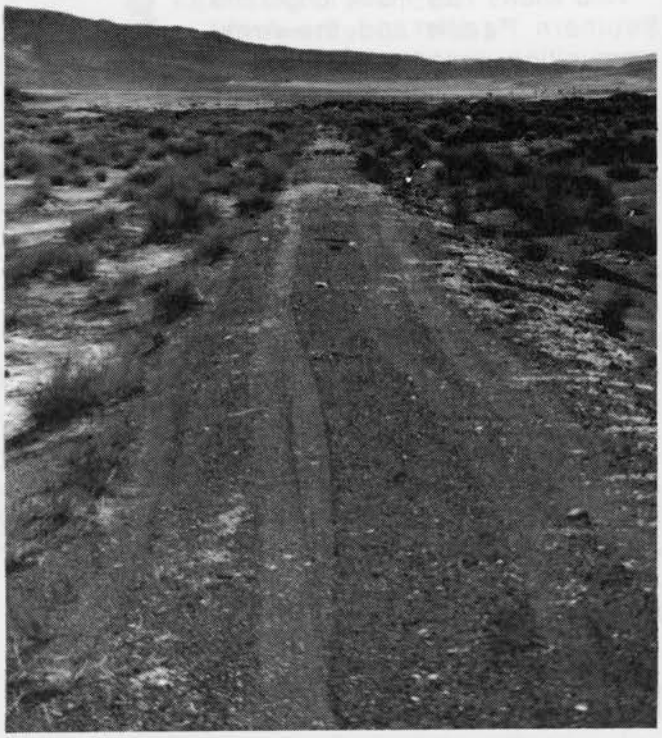
*Below: Site of Jiggervile (Boland), the true terminus of the C&C; also the site of Inyo Development Co. Keeler is in the background.*


*Right: Ties and spikes still lie on the ground on part of the MOCK SPUR, which branched off the main line a few yards north of the present junction of Hwy. 136 and Dolomite Loop Road. Glasses and a bit of refreshment provide scale. March 1988.*

*Below left: Rails still stick out from under HIGHWAY 136 at the junction of that road and the Dolomite Loop Road. This is one of three places that narrow gauge rails are still to be found on the ground. February 1990*



*The empty mainline toward Keeler, at the junction of Highway 136 and Dolomite Loop Road, February 1990*



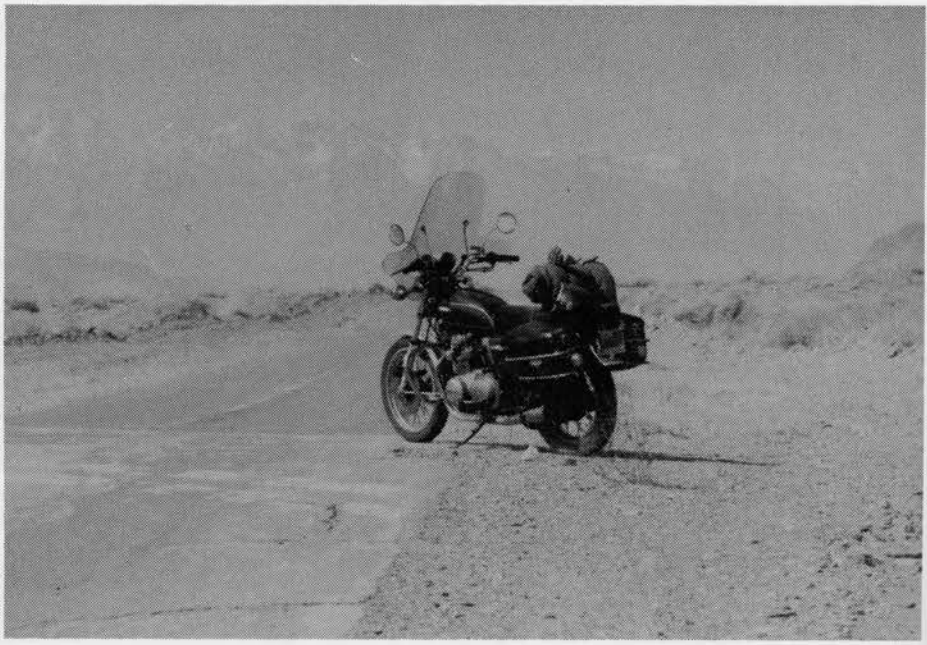
diminutive rails of narrow spacing, hauling precious cargo from Candelaria, Montgomery City, Benton, Blind Springs, Cerro Gordo, Aurora and the many mines in between.

The Southern Pacific started to abandon sections of the railroad in 1905, and continues to this day. 1905 marked the year that Hawthorne, Nevada, was bypassed and left off of the main line; in 1932 the rails on the Candelaria, Nevada branch were pulled up. In 1934, the northernmost section between Mound House and Churchill had its rails removed. The grade between Tonopah Junction and Benton, the most spectacular part of the entire route, up and over Montgomery Pass, was abandoned in 1938 and the rails were taken away in 1942. In 1943, the line was again shortened when the Laws to Benton segment was chopped off. Thirty years ago, in 1960, the rest of the narrow gauge was left to desert winds and memories.

Only one section of the original C&C remained for years afterward, that of the section between Churchill and Mina, Nevada (though in standard gauge form). When I drove through the area in May of 1990, the rails from Hawthorne to Mina were gone, fresh tracks of the equipment used to remove them left behind.

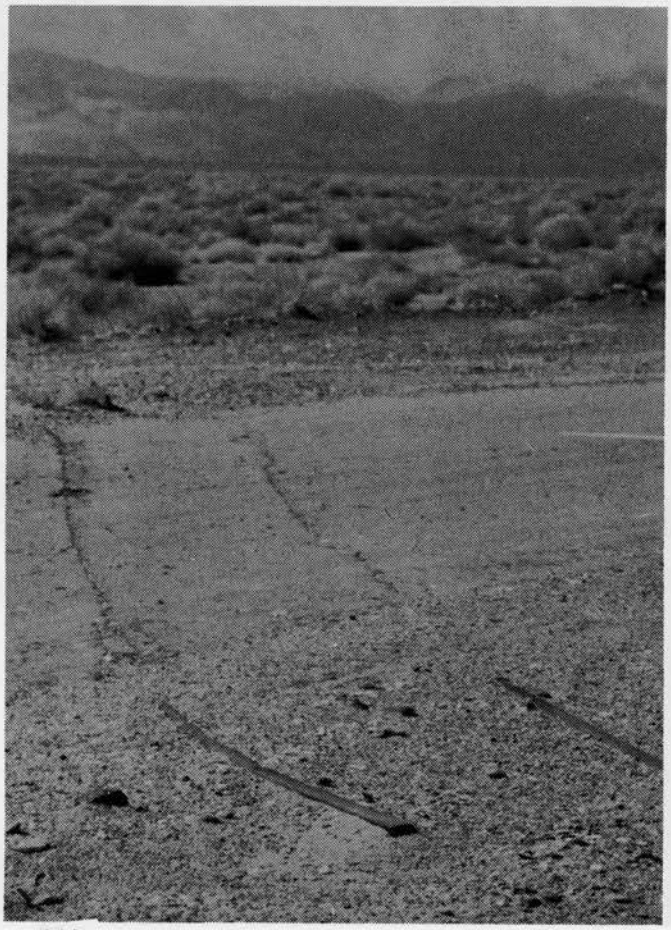
Who knows how much longer the Southern Pacific and the Army ammunition depot at Hawthorne, which uses its services, will keep alive the last remaining vestige of the railroad (Churchill to Thorne) that turned up the desert soil with horse-drawn Fresno scrapers back in the summer of 1880. But as far as the narrow gauge through Inyo, thirty years have gone by since the rails were doffed. Mono's share of steel rail has been gone for two score and seven years.

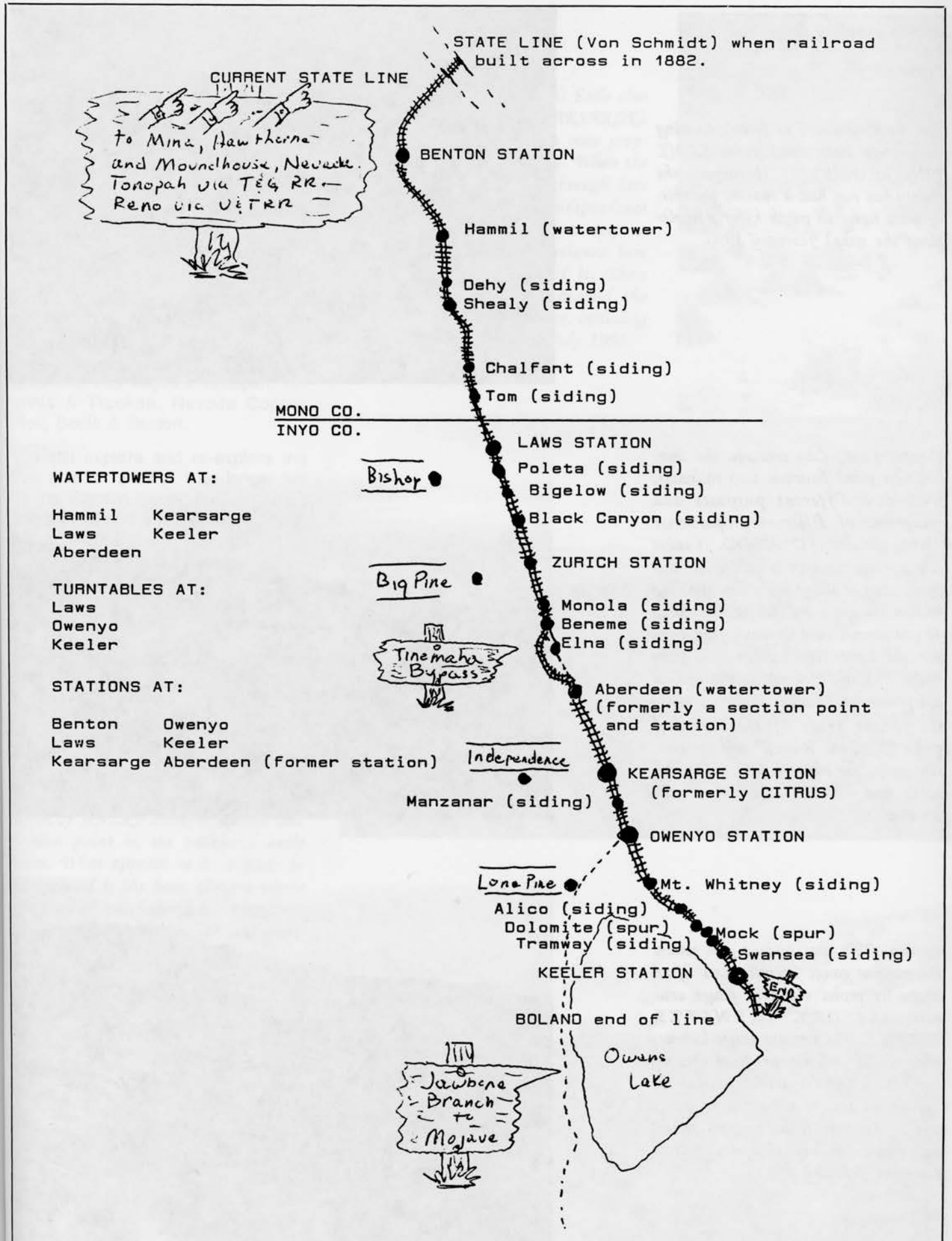
There is so little left, yet the experience of walking along a path of history is rewarding if one is willing to explore a little off the beaten path. Just three days before writing this, I was thrilled to find, during a refreshing afternoon thundershower, the foundation of a stone marker that noted the boundary of California and



*Above: My motorcycle sits on the former rail crossing of MOCK SPUR as it crosses the Dolomite Loop Road. Railroad crossing warning markings painted more than thirty years ago are still found on the pavement. Bike carries sleeping bag because I was just off graveyard shift and, hating to waste exploration time sleeping, I can nap later, somewhere in the sun. March 1988*

*Another place that rails are still on the ground can be found on the DOLOMITE SPUR. These rails and the crossing marks on the road are still found where the spur branched off to service Dolomite. March 1988*




STATE LINE (Von Schmidt) when railroad built across in 1882.
CURRENT STATE LINE
to Mina, Hawthorne and Mountainhouse, Nevada. Tonopah via T&G RR — Reno via V&T RR
BENTON STATION
Hammil (watertower)
Dehy (siding)
Shealy (siding)
Chalfant (siding)
Tom (siding)
MONO CO.
INYO CO.
LAWS STATION
Poleta (siding)
Bigelow (siding)
Black Canyon (siding)
ZURICH STATION
Monola (siding)
Beneme (siding)
Elna (siding)
Aberdeen (watertower) (formerly a section point and station)
KEARSARGE STATION (formerly CITRUS)
OWENYO STATION
Mt. Whitney (siding)
Alico (siding)
Dolomite (spur)
Tramway (siding)
Mock (spur)
Swansea (siding)
KEELER STATION
BOLAND end of line
Owens Lake
Bishop
Big Pine
Tinemaha Bypass
Independence
Manzanar (siding)
Lone Pine
Jawbone Branch to Mojave
END
WATERTOWERS AT:
Hammil Kearsarge
Laws Keeler
Aberdeen
TURNTABLES AT:
Laws
Owenyo
Keeler
STATIONS AT:
Benton Owenyo
Laws Keeler
Kearsarge Aberdeen (former station)

*Top: Looking south at former crossing with once busy road from LONE PINE to OWNEYO. (I suppose the county has not had a reason, for thirty years now, to patch killer potholes along the way.) February 1990*

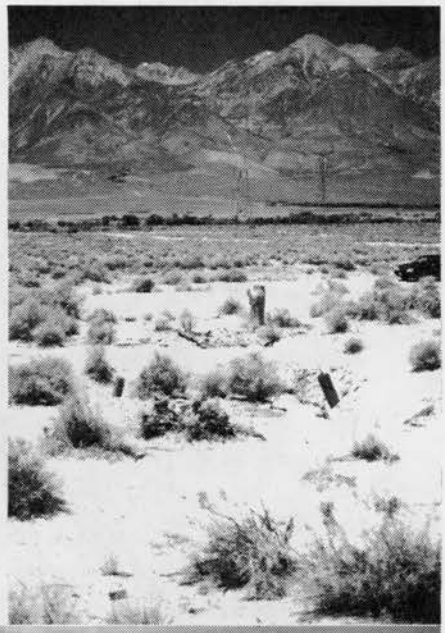
*Center: Look. Can you see the busy junction point between two railroads, with two different purposes and equipment of different proportions? This is the site of OWENYO. It takes a sharp eye to spot anything in this photo, and a sharp eye when walking within its space on the parched land. If you cannot find Owenyo, just drive out the Lone Pine Station road from Hwy. 395 and follow to the end of the pavement. The site stretched along the former grade of the standard gauge "Jawbone Branch" and the narrow gauge for about a half mile, both north and south of the end of the pavement.*

*Bottom: This was once a site where the narrow gauge literally was lifted above its proud standard gauge cousin; the ORE TRANSFER TRESTLE. The narrow gauge locomotives would pull a row of ore cars up the trestle, under which would be spotted ore cars of the standard gauge trains. The bottom dump doors would be opened, filling the cars below. Owenyo, February 1990*

Nevada. It is prominently displayed in the classic photo of the first train pulled by woodburner #6, the "Hawthorne," into California in 1882. Its location is a third of a mile inside Nevada now, but when the road was built through the area, it was the official von Schmidt division point for another decade. A few feet away, I found another spike to add to my collection.

My photo and spike collection has grown over the years. They are permanently displayed with their counterparts from such other railroads as the Eureka & Palisade, Nevada Central, Yellow Pine, Tonopah & Tidewater, Tonopah & Goldfield, Bullfrog & Goldfield, Las Vegas & Tonopah, Virginia & Truckee, Nevada Copper Belt, Bodie & Benton.

I still explore and re-explore the line and its remains. I no longer live in the Eastern Sierra, but can reach the tail end of the line from my home, an hour-and-change southeast of Keeler. The grandeur of the countryside, the quiet, and the unexpected to be found in Carson & Colorado country moves me, and suits my dogs who explore with me. You can find me out there walking the grade with my camera and dog; driving along it or on it with my pickup; or even gingerly piloting my new car along its dusty grade.



*To look at it now, there is little clue that CITRUS (later KEARSARGE), east of Independence, was once proposed as county seat of Inyo. When the railroad was constructed through here in 1883, the citizens of Independence were dismayed enough to attempt a petition to move the courthouse here and build a town around it. There was a small settlement around the railroad buildings for a time, including businesses and a saloon. July 1990*

*Center: The grade (in foreground) just north of ABERDEEN, a station and section point in the railroad's early years. What appears to be a grade in background is the berm along a water ditch which patchworks the area, once nourishing the grasses that still grow here. July 1990.*

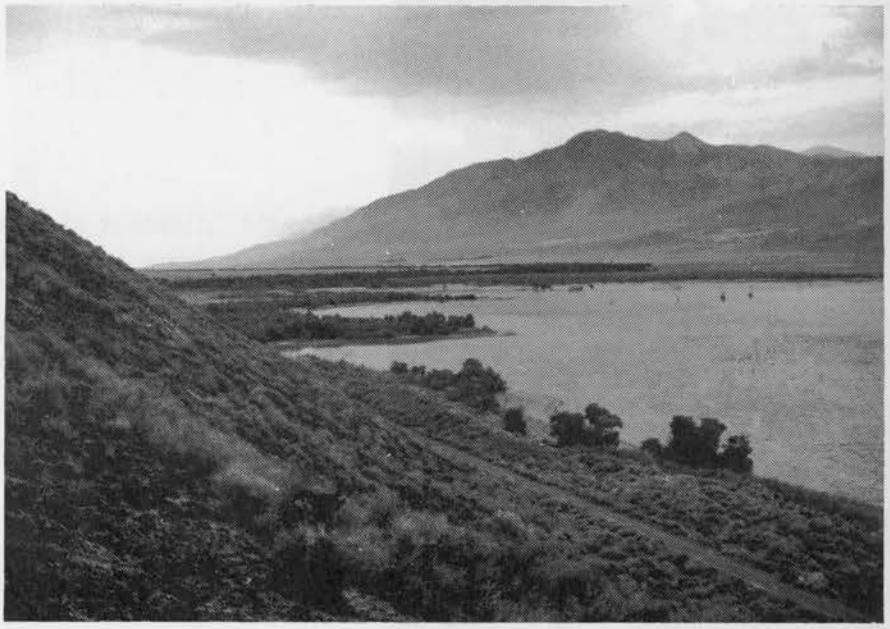
*Bottom: Foundations of the water tank at ABERDEEN, once important as the only water between Keeler and Laws. Faint traces of concrete are all that show a few buildings were once here.*

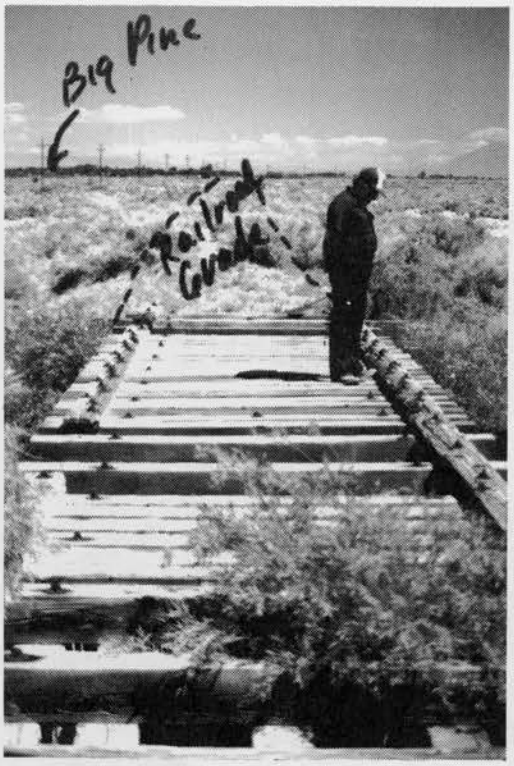
*Top: The bridge that carried the line over the OWENS RIVER to bypass TINEMAHA RESERVOIR. The railroad originally went north along the east side of the valley, but in the '20s, when Tinemaha was built, a detour was forced, merging back into the original line north of the lake's anticipated high water mark. My dog, Reno II, who had never walked a railroad bridge before, slipped between the ties and took a bath in the river. I, who was so busy laughing at Reno II, stepped back onto the rotten lumber walkway and joined him. Camera, zoom lens, and recorder managed to survive the baptism. July 1990.*

*Center: OWENS RIVER BRIDGE, looking south. The river had cut out the far bank and left the end of the bridge hanging over the water. The point where the TINEMAHA BYPASS broke away from the original line is a short distance past the river. So is the "Enthusiastic Explorer Express," the car I gingerly guided along the grade into a soft alkali hole. July 1990*

*Bottom: the grade of the TINEMAHA BYPASS as it gently curves around the Los Angeles Dept. of Water and Power housing at Tinemaha dam. July 1990*

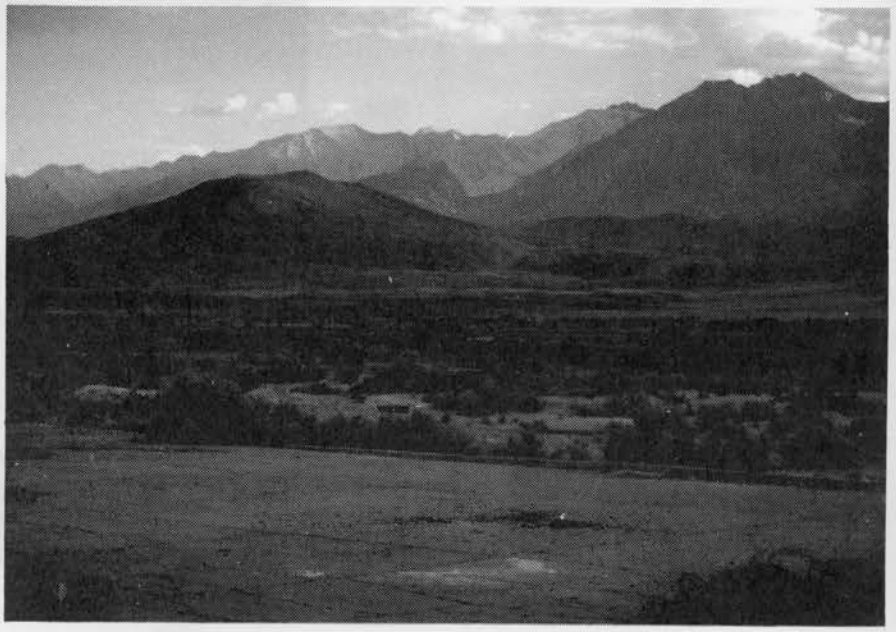
*Reno II urges me to come explore the grade as it squeezes between the end of POVERTY HILLS and TINEMAHA RESERVOIR (or is he thinking he wants to drink the reservoir dry?). July 1990*

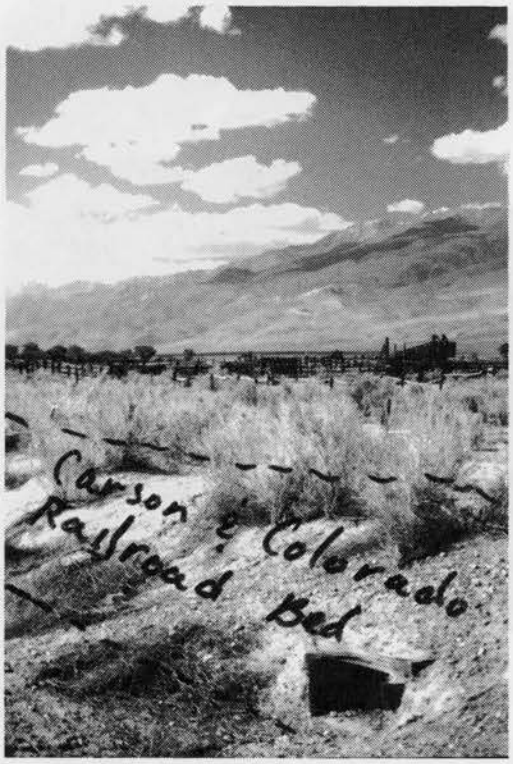





*Don Oliphant of Trona gazes at some nice trout lollygagging around in the water below the bridge crossing the canal south of BIG PINE. This remnant lies alongside Hwy. 395. Watch out for that train Don! June 1989*

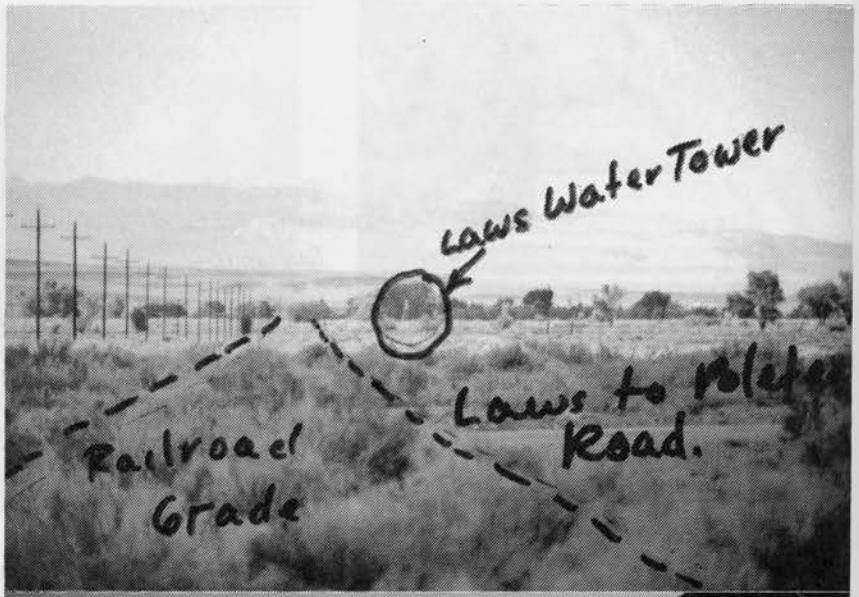
*ZURICH STATION east of Big Pine must have been a busy place, judging from the size of the concrete foundations here. The grade leaves the site north of the loop road on the east side of the foundation. View is eastward toward Big Pine and the Sierra beyond. July 1990*



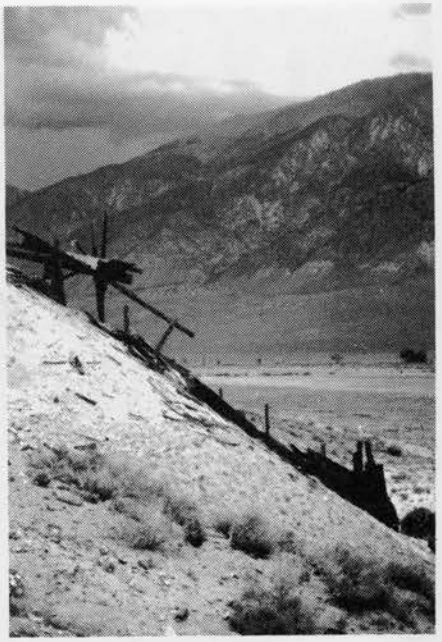



*Site of POLETA out on East Line Street, past the White Mountain Research Station. June 1989*

*Looking northward from POLETA to LAWS. June 1989*




*View from the loading platform of LAWS DEPOT to the Sierra, Buttermilk country, and Basin Mountain. June 1989*



*The roadbed runs below this old mining structure in HAMMIL VALLEY near the Zack Brothers Ranch. This part of the railroad, north of Laws to Tonopah Junction in Nevada, was abandoned in 1939, the rails torn up in 1942. July 1990*

*The route as it entered a short canyon below BLIND SPRINGS HILL, just south of BENTON. July 1990*

*Reno II explores the grade just north of BENTON (in background). July 1990*

*Top: The grade as it runs along US 6 north of BENTON. The State Agriculture Inspection Station is in the background. July 1990*

*Center: Looking northward from CALIFORNIA/NEVADA state line into Nevada. But there was once a bit of California left. When the railroad was built through here in 1882, the von Schmidt boundary was the official boundary recognized by the two states. At this point, California extended a third of a mile further. The current boundary was surveyed and became official in 1899. July 1990*

*Bottom: Compare this photo with that of Engine #6, the "Hawthorne," posed at the state line with passengers and crew around the engine and a STONE MONUMENT marking the border. +A beer can sits on the foundation of that marker in the lower left corner, indicating the von Schmidt state boundary, now one-half mile inside Nevada. July 1990* ❁


*Owenyo, looking north, 1947.* *Photo courtesy Eastern California Museum*

*First train crossing California/Nevada state line.* *Photo courtesy Eastern California Museum*

# The Narrow Gauge Railroad of Owens Valley

by Beverly Webster

*Photos by Bill Webster*

April 29, 1960 marked the end of a railroad saga spanning eighty years when the "Slim Princess," the last operating narrow gauge train west of the Rockies, made its final run between Keeler and Laws in the Owens Valley.

Then owned by Southern Pacific, this railroad had changed names several times, helped to build fortunes for a few farsighted, enterprising, some not-too-scrupulous, individuals, brought a transportation system and new industry to the Owens Valley, and become a significant part of the Valley's history. I cannot say whether you could set your watch by this little train, but it was a familiar sight puffing along the eastern side of Owens Valley at the foot of the White and Inyo mountains. From 1880 to 1960 it hauled freight, and until 1932 it also provided passenger service to the people of the Owens Valley who wanted to travel to San Francisco, Los Angeles, and more faraway places across the country.

It all started when the line was incorporated as the Carson and Colorado Railroad in 1880. The man considered by historians to be the brain behind the new railroad was William Sharon, whose character history books do not treat kindly. Most chroniclers of that period make it clear that Sharon's financial manipulations crossed the boundaries of propriety even for those years. He was president of the Virginia City branch of the Bank of California, California's oldest bank. Evidence is strong that Sharon, working with William Ralston of the bank's headquarters in San Francisco, had questionable dealings during the Comstock bonanza that resulted in losses to many San Francisco investors who had bought their worthless stock. After disclosure of the stock schemes, Ralston resigned his bank post.

Although it has never been determined that he committed suicide, it seems more than coincidence that Ralston, a known strong swimmer, drowned while bathing in one of his favorite haunts near the Golden Gate on the day of his resignation. Regardless of his unorthodox business deals, Sharon somehow escaped blame at that time and managed to inherit a substantial amount of Ralston's property, including the Palace Hotel in San Francisco.

Sharon had played a significant role in development of the highly lucrative Virginia and Truckee Railroad. As he saw his business ventures tied to the fortunes of the Comstock Lode fading, however, he turned to mining possibilities further south in Nevada and to another railroad. After Ralston's demise another major figure in post-goldrush San Francisco, D. Ogden Mills, took over his duties as president of the Bank of California. Sharon proposed to Mills the building of a narrow gauge railroad continuing south from the terminus of the Virginia and Truckee Railroad at Mound House, Nevada, to tap into the mines being developed in southwestern Nevada.

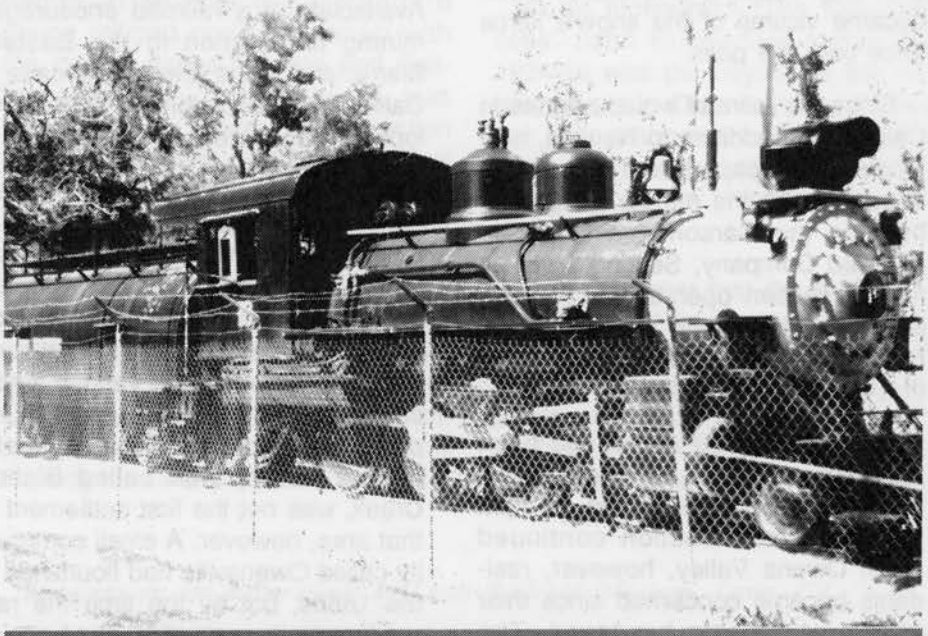
Sharon's most convincing arguments to Mills for the railroad were that it would be inexpensive to build and maintain and it would be a money maker. It would be narrow gauge and utilitarian, and, used largely to carry freight, the railroad would have no need for ornate rolling stock such as that on the Virginia and Truckee. Sharon also saw that using cheap Chinese labor to build it would be another way to save money. Convincing Mills that this small railroad would be a sure source of financial profit from the southern mines, Sharon succeeded in getting his approval to start construction.

At that time Mound House, ten miles east of Carson City, was an important railroad center on the Virginia and Truckee Railroad, the short line that served the silver mines in the Comstock Lode. The Carson and Colorado Railroad would continue south from Mound House on the Carson River and travel along Nevada's western border to Ft. Mojave on the Colorado River in Southern Nevada. The two rivers provided the railroad's name.

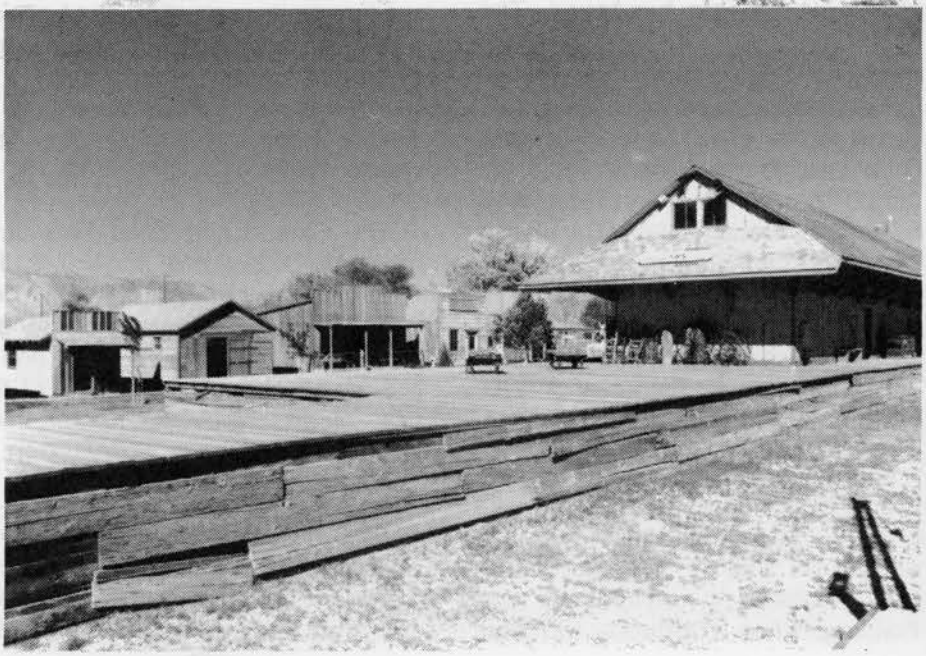
Ground breaking and laying of the first rails took place at Mound House on May 31, 1880. A year later tracks had been laid as far as Hawthorne, a distance of one hundred miles. During that summer of 1881, however, the proposed route to Nevada's western mines was changed when in addition to the Cerro Gordo Mine near Owens Lake more rich lodes were rumored to be locked in California's Eastern Sierra Nevada. The Carson and Colorado would go into Califonria and tap the business created by these mines.

The revised course introduced new challenges to the builders as they had to abandon original plans for level alignment and devise strategies to cross Mt. Montgomery Pass from

*Turntable, water tank, and pump house at Laws Railroad Museum, Laws, CA. Pump house and turntable are from original town of Laws.*



*Engine #18 is displayed in a small park in Independence, CA. Engine #18 is a Baldwin 10-wheel, 4-6-0 locomotive, built in 1911 originally for Nevada-California-Oregon Railroad.*



*Depot at Laws Railroad Museum, Laws, CA*

Nevada to California. The pass was over 7,000 feet, 2,700 feet higher than the original route. The eastern ascent with grades from 2.3% to 2.77% required building trestles and considerable cutting through rocky mountainsides to navigate the steep climbs. To help negotiate the western descent into California construction crews bored a 247-foot tunnel through the rocky mountainside just west of Mt. Montgomery station. Building the railroad over this mountainous stretch took a year, and the first train arrived at Benton in California in January, 1883. Travelling this section of the Carson and Colorado continued to pose problems throughout the railroad's life as extra engines had to be added to pull the loads over the summit, and trains often became victims of the snow's fierce force over the pass.

Since the railroad would operate in California in addition to Nevada, new incorporation papers had to be filed. Thus in 1882 the narrow gauge line became the Carson and Colorado Railroad Company, Second Division, for the section operating in Nevada and the Carson and Colorado Railroad Company, Third Division, for that operating in California.

By March, 1883 tracks had been laid as far as Laws, and regular train service in that town started on April 1. As rail construction continued down Owens Valley, however, residents became concerned since their towns were being bypassed. The population centers had grown on the west side of the Valley while the railroad travelled down the east side closer to the mines, and the townspeople had to travel considerable distances to use the train. Eventually, horse-drawn stages from the established communities met the trains, thus alleviating the problem to some extent. In 1911 and 1912 there were serious prospects that an electric railway would connect Bishop and Laws, but this project never materialized.

The narrow gauge reached Keeler, then called Hawley, on the north shore of Owens Lake in July, 1883, and at this time Mr. Mills decided to take a look at the railroad he was building. After a tortuous trip from San Francisco, most of it in the hot, lone, dusty, uncomfortable, utilitarian passenger car of the narrow gauge line, he arrived at Keeler and made his famous comment: "Either we have built the railroad three hundred miles too long or three hundred years too soon." The Carson and Colorado Railroad, Third Division, therefore, ended permanently at Keeler.

Despite Mr. Mills' feelings about the Carson and Colorado, the coming of the railroad did bring benefits to Owens Valley. It ended the isolation of the Valley residents and their dependence on slow, very limited horse-drawn vehicles. They had a north-south rail connection and most importantly a link through Nevada to the nation's main east-west line. Availability of a railroad encouraged mining exploration in the Eastern Sierra, and, as is always the case in California, speculators in land development prospered.

Many of the stations along the new railroad line soon became towns, of course some more important than others. As a result of the railroad, Laws became a thriving distribution center for the Valley, transporting mining supplies, ore of various kinds, cattle, farming equipment, agricultural products, and passengers, mostly miners. Laws, then called Bishop Creek, was not the first settlement in that area, however. A small community called Owensville had flourished in the 1860s, but by the time the railroad came through all trace of a town was gone. In about the same location before Owensville the first cabin in the Owens Valley had been built in 1861 — "at the big bend of the Owens River."

The Carson and Colorado's daily mixed train became known as the Slim Princess. The mixture included a mail and baggage car, a passenger car, a variety of freight cars, and a caboose. A trip from one end of the line, Mound House to Keeler, took two days, with an overnight stop at Candelaria, Nevada.

In 1890 one of the more famous shipments of the Carson and Colorado from the Owens Valley was two hundred cars of marble, from the Inyo Marble Works just north of Keeler, destined for San Francisco. The marble was to be used in construction of the ornate D.O. Mills Building that today remains a landmark in that city's Financial District and a survivor of the 1906 and 1989 earthquakes.

Business continued to be good on the narrow gauge until the early 1890s when mining traffic in Nevada declined and the nation's economy took a downturn. Expecting to improve the railroad's financial picture, the owners in 1892 again reorganized to incorporate the separate divisions into one company called the Carson and Colorado Railway Company.

Due to a recasting of players in this country's railroad-building epoch, the Carson and Colorado underwent a major change in the year 1900. Early that year Collis P. Huntington, head of Southern Pacific and last of the Big Four responsible for building the transcontinental railroad, purchased the Carson and Colorado for $2,750,000 from the Mills estate. Huntington, unfortunately, died later that year and was not to know what an opportune purchase he had made for his company.

The new leader of Southern Pacific, Edward Henry Harriman, was a railroad tycoon from New York and father of Averell Harriman, one of America's more famous statesmen of the twentieth century. When he took over Southern Pacific, E.H. Harriman already controlled Union Pacific Railroad and for a few years enjoyed the power that the joining of these two railroads brought.

Harriman saw the Carson and Colorado as instrumental in the expansion of his railroad empire throughout the West, mainly using it to connect Reno with Southern California. A silver boom in Tonopah, Nevada, and a gold rush in Goldfield, Nevada, however, pushed the newly acquired narrow gauge line into a prime position and diverted Harriman from his original plans. For a few years the Carson and Colorado had a monopoly on shipping mining equipment and supplies into the new Nevada mines along with materials and merchan-

dise for the towns that sprang up. And from the mines it brought out the silver and gold ore to be refined. These boom times for the railroad lasted about ten years.

To garner maximum profits from the new Nevada bonanzas, Mr. Harriman saw the need to streamline transporting freight from the narrow gauge Carson and Colorado to the main Southern Pacific line at Reno. The narrow gauge picked up the ore at Tonopah Junction, where it had been brought from the mines by mule trains, and carried it to Mound House. There it again had to be transferred, this time to the Virginia and Truckee standard gauge cars, one more slow, cumbersome, and expensive operation. Because of the transferring between narrow and standard gauge and reliance on the short-line Virginia and Truckee, traffic moved slowly and unloaded cars caused major congestion at transfer points. In 1904 the Carson and Colorado became standard gauge from Tonopah Junction to Mound House, which eased the situation somewhat, but Harriman still had to rely on the Virginia and Truckee as connector.

His solution was the Hazen Cut-Off, a 28-mile standard gauge line from Hazen, some forty miles east of Reno, connecting with the Carson and Colorado at Churchill. It would bypass Mound House and eliminate the Virginia and Truckee altogether.

In the meantime the narrow gauge Tonopah Railroad had been built from Tonopah to connect with the Carson and Colorado. This short line soon became standard gauge, and by 1905 shipment of ore from the mines to the main Southern Pacific line could be made all on standard gauge. Mina became an important railhead with the standard gauge cars continuing on the Tonopah Railroad to the Nevada mines and traffic going west into California transferring to the Carson and Colorado's narrow gauge cars. A third rail had been added to the nine-mile Mina to Tonopah Junction segment to accommodate the narrow gauge train.

The railroad that now included the Hazen Cut-Off became in 1905 the Nevada and California Railway, which it remained until 1912 when it took the Southern Pacific name.

One of Harriman's promises when he took over Southern Pacific had been to connect the narrow gauge Carson and Colorado with the main Southern Pacific line to Los Angeles. Not until the beginning of construction of the Los Angeles Aqueduct did work on this link finally start. This massive project that would ultimately bring water of the Sierra to parched Los Angeles needed a railroad to transport equipment and supplies to the Owens Valley, and the powers behind the undertaking pressured Southern Pacific to build a rail line.

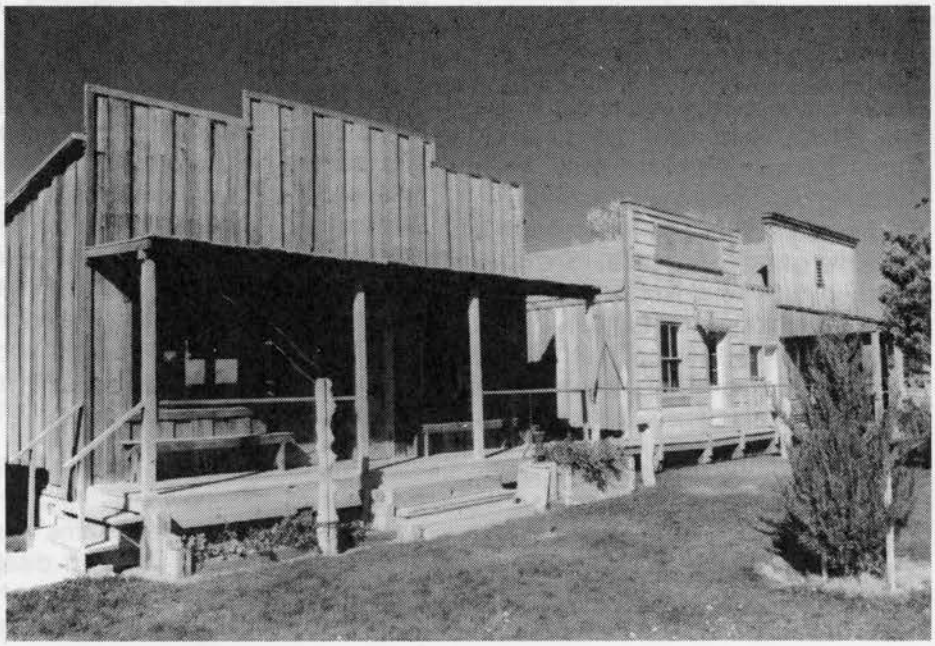
In May of 1908, then, work finally began at Mojave on a standard gauge railroad north to connect with the narrow gauge Nevada and California Railway. This route, too, was not without its share of construction problems. Cutting east to avoid Red Rock Canyon, the tracks had to cross El Paso Summit near the community of Searles. Here Southern Pacific constructed a 4,340-foot tunnel, a project that took the better part of a year. In October, 1910 the 143-mile Southern Pacific branch known as "The Jawbone" connected with the narrow gauge Nevada and California Railway at Owenyo, near Lone Pine, finally offering people of the Owens Valley rail transportation to Los Angeles.

As the link between the two lines, Owenyo became an important passenger terminal. It was a one-day trip from Los Angeles to Owenyo where through passengers stayed overnight to catch a train the next day. Then for several years during the 1920s an overnight sleeper ran from Los Angeles to Owenyo, thus avoiding the overnight stopover at Owenyo. There was service six days a week from Owenyo to Laws and three days a week from Laws to Mina, Nevada, where passengers transferred to the standard gauge train to continue to the main line at Hazen.

In his monograph "The Slim Princess" John Hungerford states that 1924-29 was the heydey of the narrow gauge in Owens Valley. "It was not uncommon for 1,000-1,800 carloads of sheep and 400-500 carloads of cattle to be shipped out in a season."

It would seem that the transportation system of the Eastern Sierra was complete with rail service both north and south and connections with the transcontinental lines. Nothing is static, however, and as California's highway system improved Owens Valley

*Buildings on the main street of Laws Railroad Museum, Laws, CA*



became part of that network, and automobiles and trucks had easy access to the Eastern Sierra. As had been the case with railroads in so many other parts of the country, this railroad slowly lost out to trucks and cars as its freight and passenger service gradually declined. Passengers became so scarce on the Mina to Laws run, historical accounts say that during summer the train often stopped at Walker Lake for the crew to swim when there were no riders to enforce schedules. Passenger service in the Owens Valley was finally discontinued in 1932.

1932 to 1938 saw the closing of sections of the railroad in Nevada, and in 1943 the line from Benton to Laws was shut down. By 1950 the only operating service of the narrow gauge railroad was the 71-mile segment between Laws and Keeler, with mining products continuing to be its main freight. Southern Pacific finally received approval to abandon this last section in 1960, and although the final run from Keeler to Laws was April 29, 1960 the Laws-Keeler branch of the Southern Pacific officially terminated on April 30.

During their lifetimes the Carson and Colorado Railroad, Carson and Colorado Railway Company, Nevada and California Railway, and ultimately Southern Pacific Railroad operated a variety of equipment as they converted from wood to coal and finally to diesel. To keep costs down, the Carson and Colorado usually used equipment inherited from other railroads, and Southern Pacific brought in more equipment from its other narrow gauge lines after it took over. Three Baldwin steam engines, however, did yeoman service for years — SP Numbers 8, 9, and 18. In 1954 a narrow gauge General Electric 450-horsepower diesel replaces the steam engines, but Number 9 was kept for backup. Number 8 is now on exhibit in Carson City, and Number 18 is in Independence.

After closing down the Laws-Keeler branch Southern Pacific donated to the City of Bishop and Inyo County Locomotive Number 9, some box cars, a caboose, the turntable, the water tank, and a piece of track, the nucleus for today's railroad museum. Building on what Southern Pacific had left and the remains of a set for a Steve McQueen movie made soon after the railroad's departure, members of the Bishop Museum and Historical Society determined to keep Laws a going operation. On April 1, 1966, exactly eighty-three years from the date the first train came through Laws, they dedicated the museum.

Buildings from other parts of Inyo and Mono counties have been brought in to complete the set, all done by volunteer labor. The buildings are filled with period furniture and artifacts of the turn of the century when Laws was a vital railroad town. The depot with its baggage room, passenger waiting room, and the station master's workroom gives a feeling that soon the train will be coming.

The town of Laws is named fittingly for one of the Carson and Colorado's old-timers. Robert Laws was superintendent of the construction crew when building of the railroad began at Mound House in 1880. A former Central Pacific roadmaster, he had a long career with the Carson and Colorado, and later when Southern Pacific took over he was kept on as Superintendent of the railroad.

Although the narrow gauge's roadbed sans rails can be seen most of the way down the Owens Valley, most of the towns that were created by the railroad have disappeared. At Owenyo and Kearsage weeds and sagebrush have taken over. The depot still stands in Keeler, although it has been converted to living quarters. Across the street from the Keeler depot is a plaque announcing that this was the "end of the line" for the Carson and Colorado Railroad. Except to the trained eye of an experienced railroad detective, signs that this was where the steam shop for the rail line was located with all the attendant activity are gone.

As the narrow gauge flourished for a time and has now vanished, the people of power whose dreams were tied to the railroad have also disappeared from the scene. The men who bought and sold legislators like shoes and whose voices caused people to tremble are silenced — Huntington, Harriman, Mills, Sharon, Ralston. Except for Huntington, they are known to few today, and evidence of their enterprise in western Nevada and Owens Valley is mostly gone.

At Laws, however, some of the memory of the Slim Princess has been preserved. Today over 20,000 people from various parts of the world visit the reconstructed railroad town. Here they can climb aboard the old steam engine, ring its bell, and become engineer on Engine Number 9. ❊

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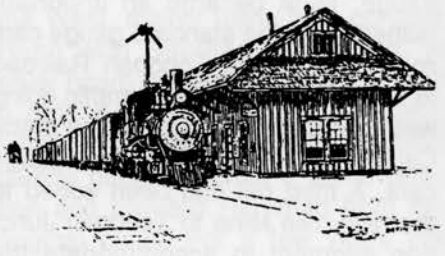


*"The Great Explorers. X--Jedidiah Smith," an illustration by Frederic Remington, made for Colliers Weekly and published in 1906. Remington was dissatisfied with the whole series and subsequently burned all but one of the paintings. Photo courtesy Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming.*

# TRAILS OF THE MOUNTAIN MEN

## through the Eastern Sierra

by Beverly Webster

***"I am exhausted going back and forth across the Sierra Nevada in deep snow, crossing the deserts looking for water, suffering hunger pangs, eating horse meat, and getting surprised by Indians. This was truly a towering breed of men who added to our Western expansion. Perhaps we would not want many of them home for Sunday dinner with our mothers present, but I would certainly like to have met some of them." – Beverly Webster***

The earliest explorers from the United States to venture into California's Eastern Sierra were mountain men, that special breed who during the first half of the nineteenth century roamed and mapped most of the Rocky Mountains and the far west. These burly adventurers, searching for beaver and accustomed to fighting weather, Indians, grizzlies, and hunger, paved the way for settlers who came later, carving out trails and gathering information about the country west of the Rockies. Two reknowned members of this daring fraternity, Jedediah Smith and Joseph Walker, figured prominently in the Eastern Sierra's history as they led early parties through Mono County and Owens Valley.

Each summer from 1825 to 1840 mountain men held a rendezvous, typically in the Green River Valley of Wyoming and occasionally in other scenic locations in Wyoming and Utah. Here they traded their furs for supplies with Eastern buyers and swapped stories and information about the past winter's successes and the West's geography. From the rendezvous they scattered in many directions, some alone, some in small groups, some in organized parties, to trap for furs that would be traded the following summer, always seeking new areas rich in beaver.

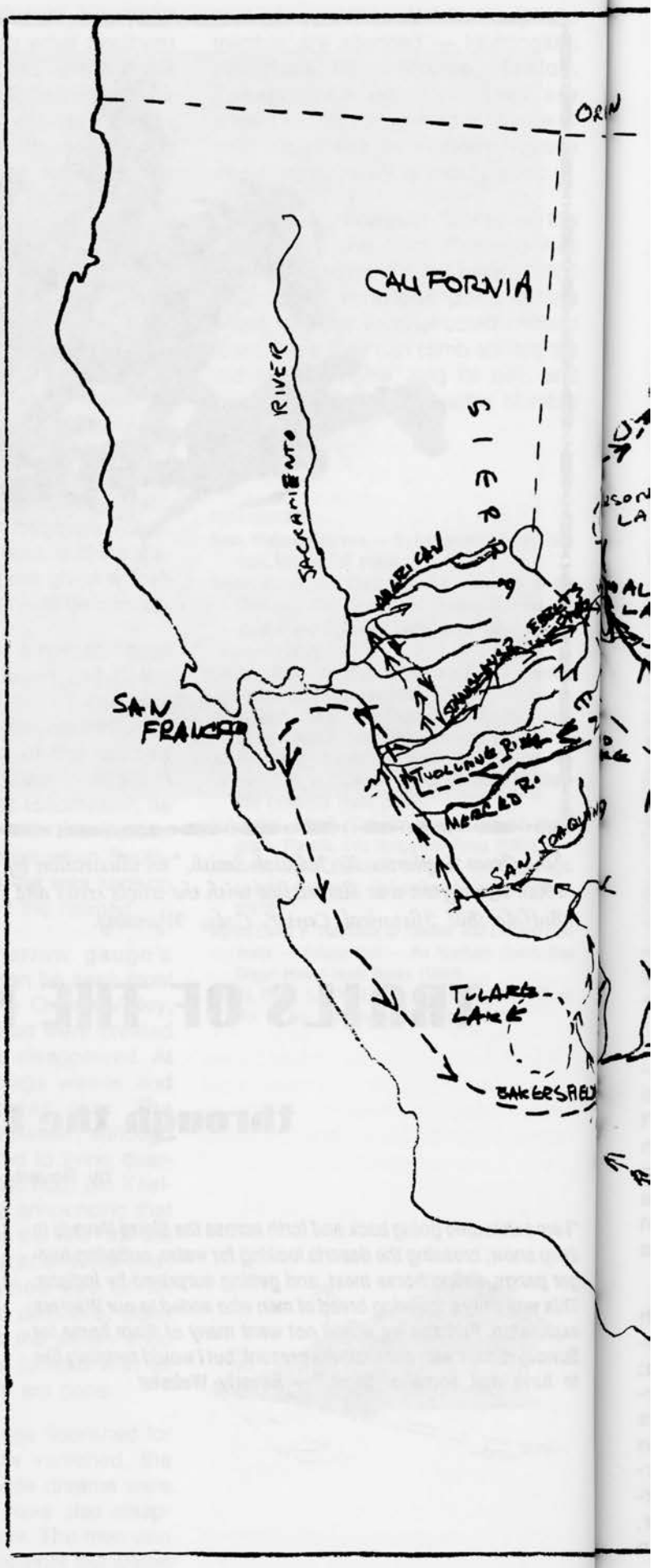
It was at the 1826 rendezvous held in Cache Valley, Utah, that Jedediah Strong Smith recruited men and left on his epic journey of discovery to California. On the return trip the following spring he and his two companions, Robert Evans and Silas Goble, became the first whites to cross the Sierra Nevada. The precise route which took this courageous trio across the Sierra and into Mono County has only recently been determined through discovery of Smith's personal journals of the trip.

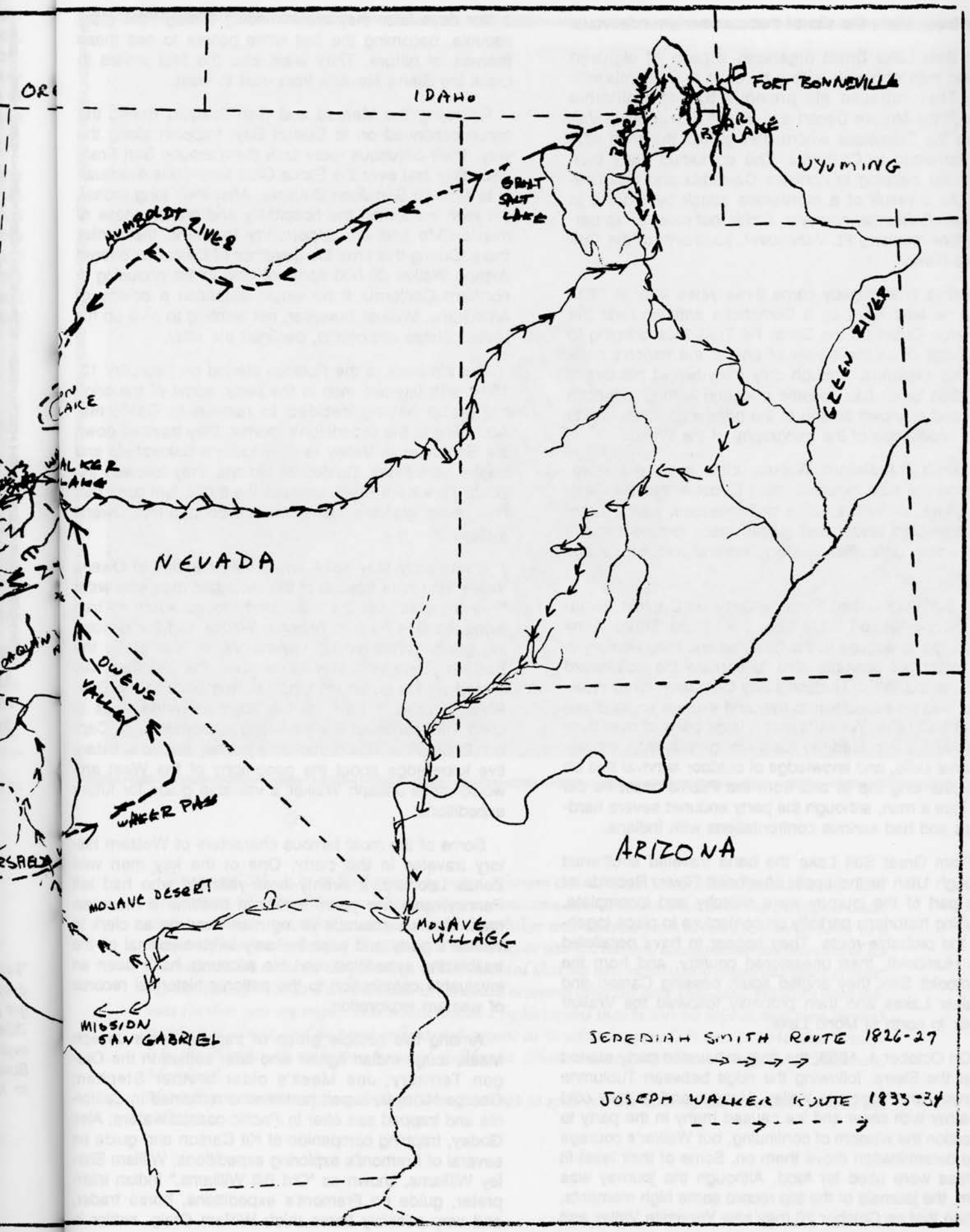
Born in 1799 in Jericho, New York, now Bainbridge, Smith began his career as a mountain man in 1822 in St. Louis, Missouri, when he joined the fur trapping company of William Ashley, originator of mountain rendezvous. His leadership qualities soon earned him command of trapping expeditions throughout the Rocky Mountains.

His route to California in 1826 was through largely unexplored and uncharted territory. Taking a southwesterly direction from Bear Lake, he crossed dry, barren Utah, enduring exhausting hardships where both men and horses suffered from the harsh environment, finally arriving at the Colorado River near today's Needles. Swinging west, the party traveled through the Mojave Desert and ultimately reached Mission San Gabriel, thus establishing what would be the final western section of the Old Spanish Trail.

After a winter of successful trapping in the rivers of San Joaquin Valley, Smith and his party of fifteen men started over the Sierra Nevada near present-day Highway 50 but were thwarted in their attempts by heavy snows. Returning to the valley, they continued south to near Oakdale and set up camp on the Stanislaus River. Feeling it urgent to get back to the summer rendezvous with information of his explorations, Smith decided to leave everyone but Evans and Goble on the Stanislaus, along with the furs, and once again attempt to cross the Sierra.

Leaving the encampment on May 20, 1827, with six horses and two pack mules, the three men succeeded in crossing Ebbett's Pass after eight days. Once across the Sierra the intrepid frontiersmen sliced through the northern tip of Mono County and followed the West Fork of the Walker River for a distance before cutting south over Wheeler Pass, passing between Walker Lake and present-day Hawthorne, Nevada. They continued from there in a northeasterly direction to their destination,




IDAHO
FORT BONNEVILLE
BEAR LAKE
WYOMING
GREAT SALT LAKE
HUMBOLDT RIVER
GREEN RIVER
WALKER LAKE
NEVADA
OWENS VALLEY
WALKER PASS
ARIZONA
MOJAVE DESERT
MOJAVE VILLAGE
MISSION SAN GABRIEL
SEREDIAH SMITH ROUTE 1826-27
JOSEPH WALKER ROUTE 1833-34

Bear Lake, Utah, the site of that summer's rendezvous.

At Bear Lake Smith organized a party of eighteen spirited men who were willing to return to California with him. They retraced his previous trail to California through the Mojave Desert and up the San Joaquin Valley to the Stanislaus where they joined the men who had remained in California. The combined party then continued trapping in northern California and into Oregon. As a result of a murderous attack by Indians in northern California, however, Smith lost most of his party before reaching Ft. Vancouver, just north of the Columbia River.

Smith's final tragedy came three years later in 1831 when he was killed by a Comanche ambush near the Cimarron Cutoff on the Santa Fe Trial, thus bringing to an abrupt close the career of one of the nation's most fearless explorers. Though only thirty-two at his death, Jedediah Smith has become a legend among mountain men and is known as one of the greatest contributors to early knowledge of the geography of the West.

Joseph Reddfeford Walker, after a six-year gap, became the next mountain man to come into the Eastern Sierra. Walker, a native to Tennessee, was a forceful, respected leader and guided many groups through dangerous, unfamiliar territory, several through Owens Valley.

At the 1833 Green River rendezvous Captain Benjamin Bonneville, on leave from the United States Army ostensibly to engage in the fur trade and map territory in the West but possibly also to contain the southward thrust of the British Hudson's Bay Company, hired Walker to lead an expedition to trap and explore south of the Great Salt Lake. Walker's was a large party of over sixty men, and it is a credit to his thorough planning, organizational skills, and knowledge of outdoor survival that on this year-long trip to and from the Pacific coast he did not lose a man, although the party endured severe hardships and had serious confrontations with Indians.

From Great Salt Lake the band traveled southwest through Utah to the upper Humboldt River. Records of this part of the journey were sketchy and incomplete, causing historians partially on conjecture to piece togehter the probable route. They appear to have paralleled the Humboldt, then unexplored country, and from the Humboldt Sink they angled south passing Carson and Walker Lakes and then probably followed the Walker River to north of Mono Lake.

On October 1, 1883, the now-exhausted party started over the Sierra, following the ridge between Tuolumne Canyon and Yosemite Valley. Hunger and brutally cold weather with snow and ice caused many in the party to question the wisdom of continuing, but Walker's courage and determination drove them on. Some of their least-fit horses were used for food. Although the journey was grim, the journals of the trip record some high moments, noting that on October 20 they saw Yosemite Valley and a few days later they were winding through the giant sequoia, becoming the first white people to see these marvels of nature. They were also the first whites to cross the Sierra Nevada from east to west.

Following the Merced and San Joaquin rivers, the group continued on to Suisun Bay, trapping along the way. Their circuitous route took them around San Francisco Bay and over the Santa Cruz Mountains eventually to Mission San Juan Bautista. After their long ordeal, the men welcomed the hospitality and pleasantness of mission life and the opportunity to spend the winter there. During this time the governor of California offered Joseph Walker 30,000 acres of land of his choosing in northern California if he would establish a colony of Americans. Walker, however, not wanting to give up his United States citizenship, declined the offer.

The trip back to the Rockies started on February 13, 1834, with fifty-two men in the party, some of the original group having decided to remain in California. According to the expedition's journal, they traveled down the San Joaquin Valley to near today's Bakersfield and up the Kern River. Guided by Indians, they followed the South Fork Kern River, crossed the 5,052-foot pass that now bears Walker's name, and descended into Owens Valley.

It was early May 1834, when they camped in Owens Valley, and here several of the mountain men who were "free trappers" left the main party to go south to trap along the Gila River in Arizona. Walker and the remaining group continued up Owens Valley and along the Eastern Sierra until they came upon the trail they had blazed on the outbound trip, traveling back to the Bear River in Utah in time for the summer rendezvous to bring information of the year-long explorations to Captain Bonneville. This remarkable journey added substantive knowledge about the geography of the West and would make Joseph Walker a valuable guide for future expeditions.

Some of the most famous characters of Western history traveled in this party. One of the key men was Zenas Leonard, a twenty-three-year-old who had left Pennsylvania two years earlier to become a mountain man. This adventurous young man hired on as clerk to Walker's party and kept the only written journal of the trailblazing expedition, and his accounts have been an invaluable contribution to the nation's historical records of western exploration.

Among this notable group of trappers were Joseph Meek, tough Indian fighter who later settled in the Oregon Territory; Joe Meek's older brother Stephen; George Nidever, expert hunter who remained in California and trapped sea otter in Pacific coastal waters; Alex Godey, trapping companion of Kit Carson and guide on several of Fremont's exploring expeditions; William Shirley Williams, known as "Old Bill Williams," Indian interpreter, guide on Fremont's expeditions, horse trader, and very possibly horse thief; William Craig, settler in

*" 'Bourgeois' W___r, & his Squaw" by noted Western artist Alfred Jacob Miller, painted at the 1837 rendezvous. The title "Bourgeois" was given to mountain men who had a dozen or more trappers under their command, and Walker earned this title. Walker was married from about 1836 until 1846 to a woman of the Snake band of the Shoshoni tribe who, as was the custom, accompanied him on many of his journeys. In his notes on the painting, Miller recorded that she was particularly pretty and quite artistic. No mention of Walker's wife is made in historical accounts after the year 1846, and Walker's whereabouts for that year are vague. It has been assumed by historians that he lost his wife at that time through accident or illness, and he never enlightened anyone as to what happened. It was in 1846 that Walker left the Rockies to make his home in California. Photo courtesy Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, Maryland.*

*Note: It was customary in paintings sometimes not to spell out the name of the mountain man in the title.*

the Oregon Territory and for whom several landmarks in the Northwest are names; and Levin Mitchell, trapping companion of Carson and Joe Meek and later horse thief, not an unusual occupation for these free-spirited rovers of the West.

Williams, Mitchell, and Craig had wild reputations that they continually lived up to, and it was a test of Walker's leadership and discipline throughout the expedition that he kept this band of mavericks together.

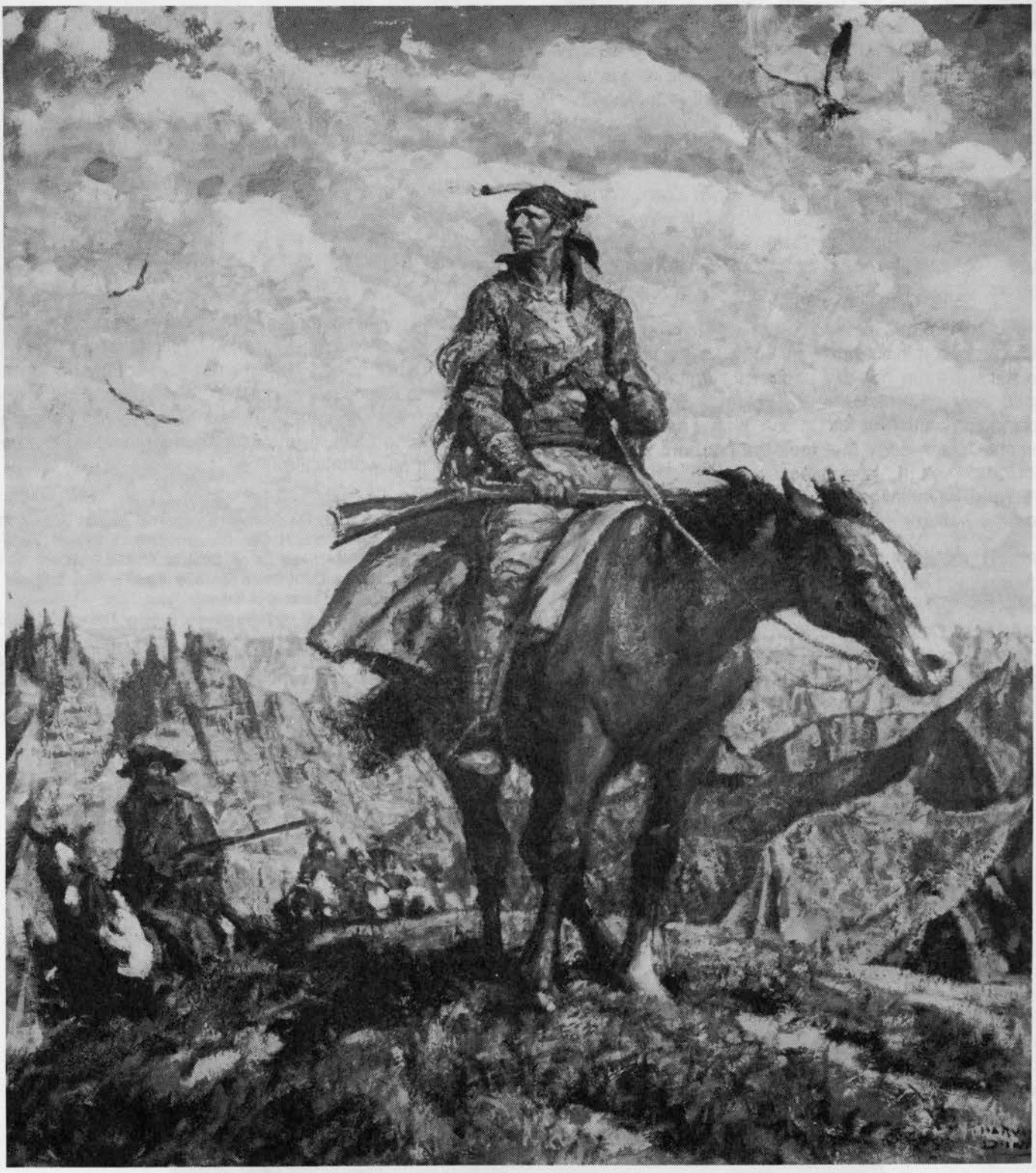
Walker returned to the Eastern Sierra nine years later in 1843 as guide to the Chiles Party, a wagon train of emigrants on their way to California. Under the leadership of Joe Chiles, the wagon train headed out from Missouri, composed of about fifty mostly inexperienced people including women and children. At Ft. Hall (in today's Idaho) the party split up when they were unable to get supplies from the British who controlled the fort. Chiles with thirteen of the party's strongest men left for Sutter's Fort by horseback intending to return to the wagon train with the needed supplies, while the main party under Walker was to continue west and then south. Due to Sierra snow, however, Chiles had to remain at Sutter's Fort, and Walker was left to oversee the wagon train.

Walker's group consisted of the women, children, and least experienced men. They traveled southwesterly along the Humboldt, Carson, and Walker rivers past Walker Lake, five hundred miles of this route later becoming part of the famed California Trail. Continuing south after leaving Walker Lake, they followed the Owens River down the valley to Owens Lake, becoming the first wagon train to cross California's eastern boundary. It was then near the end of November, and at Owens Lake the weary party abandoned the wagons, making packframes from some of the wood and burning the rest. With the wagon train becoming a pack train, Walker led the group over Walker Pass, reaching the summit on December third in six inches of snow. Once across the Sierra Nevada, he guided the grateful group to the coast where they parted to start their new lives.

Among the supplies jetisoned at Owens Lake was an entire set of heavy iron machinery destined to be used in the construction of a sawmill in California. For many years remains of the abandoned equipment could be seen at the south end of Owens Lake, but these traces of the Chiles Party's trials have long since disappeared.

Two years later (1845) Walker served as chief guide on John C. Fremont's Third Expedition, and one more

*National Registered Landmark Monument at Walker Pass, 5052 feet. Photo by Bill Webster.*



*"Jedediah Smith in the Badlands" by Harvey Dunn. Photo courtesy South Dakota Art Museum, Brookings, South Dakota.*

time he came to the Eastern Sierra. On this expedition of exploration was Kit Carson, famed scout, trapper, hunter, and soldier. Walker joined them in Utah and from Salt Lake guided the main section of the party down the Humboldt River and on to Walker Lake where he met Fremont, who had taken a small group another way. At the lake, which Fremont named for Walker, the party again split up with the Fremont/Carson contingent traveling over the Sierra via the Truckee River and Walker and his group proceeding down Owens Valley and over Walker Pass, a route Walker was coming to know well. After some confusion as to where in San Joaquin Valley the two groups would again meet, they finally rendezvoused near San Jose in February, 1846.

As a result of this expedition Owens River and Owens Lake received their names, although neither the person who named them nor the person for whom they were named ever saw either one. Richard Owens, often a trapping companion of Kit Carson, was a member of the Fremont/Carson party that took the northern route. Fremont, after hearing about the southern flowing Owens River and its alkaline lake, named them for Owens, whom he had come to respect on this expedition.

After 1848 Joseph Walker made his home in California, ranching near Gilroy for awhile and then at his Manzanita Ranch in Contra Costa County, often taking horses from California to the army forts in the Rockies. He continued to serve as guide to expeditions throughout the Southwest and organized a successful gold mining company near Prescott, Arizona, where he lived for several years. His final years he spent at Manzanita Ranch where he died in 1876 at the age of seventy-eight. He is buried in Martinez, California, where the words on his headstone include, "Camped at Yosemite — Nov. 13, 1833."

Although the mountain men considered themselves primarily trappers, they became true explorers as they traveled thousands of miles each year throughout the West, often through unknown country. When they came through Mono and Inyo counties there were no place names. Walker Pass was referred to as "the point of the mountain" — the southern end of the Sierra Nevada. Only through descriptions of geographic landmarks learned from others did they know where they were, and only through their own words were they able to pass on new information to others.

Each of those nineteenth-century explorers, the ultimate of individualists, had his own personal reasons to travel unfamiliar, dangerous territory and endure supreme deprivations, but certainly the elation of discovering something as magnificent as Yosemite Valley, eerie as Mono Lake, or majestic as the giant sequoia could make it all worthwhile. ❋

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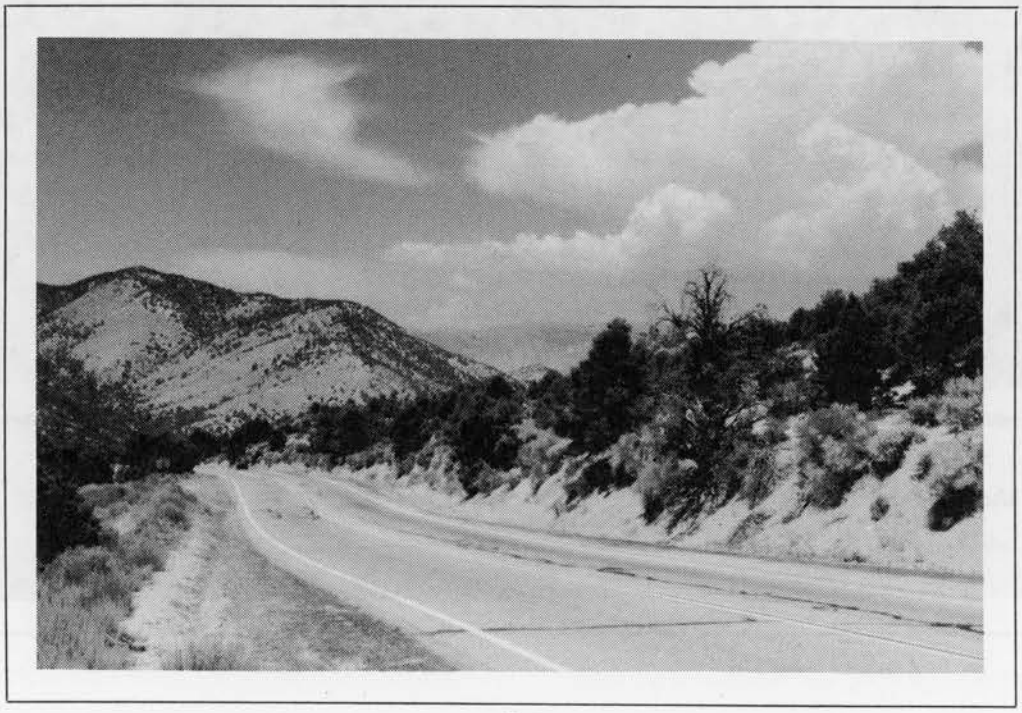
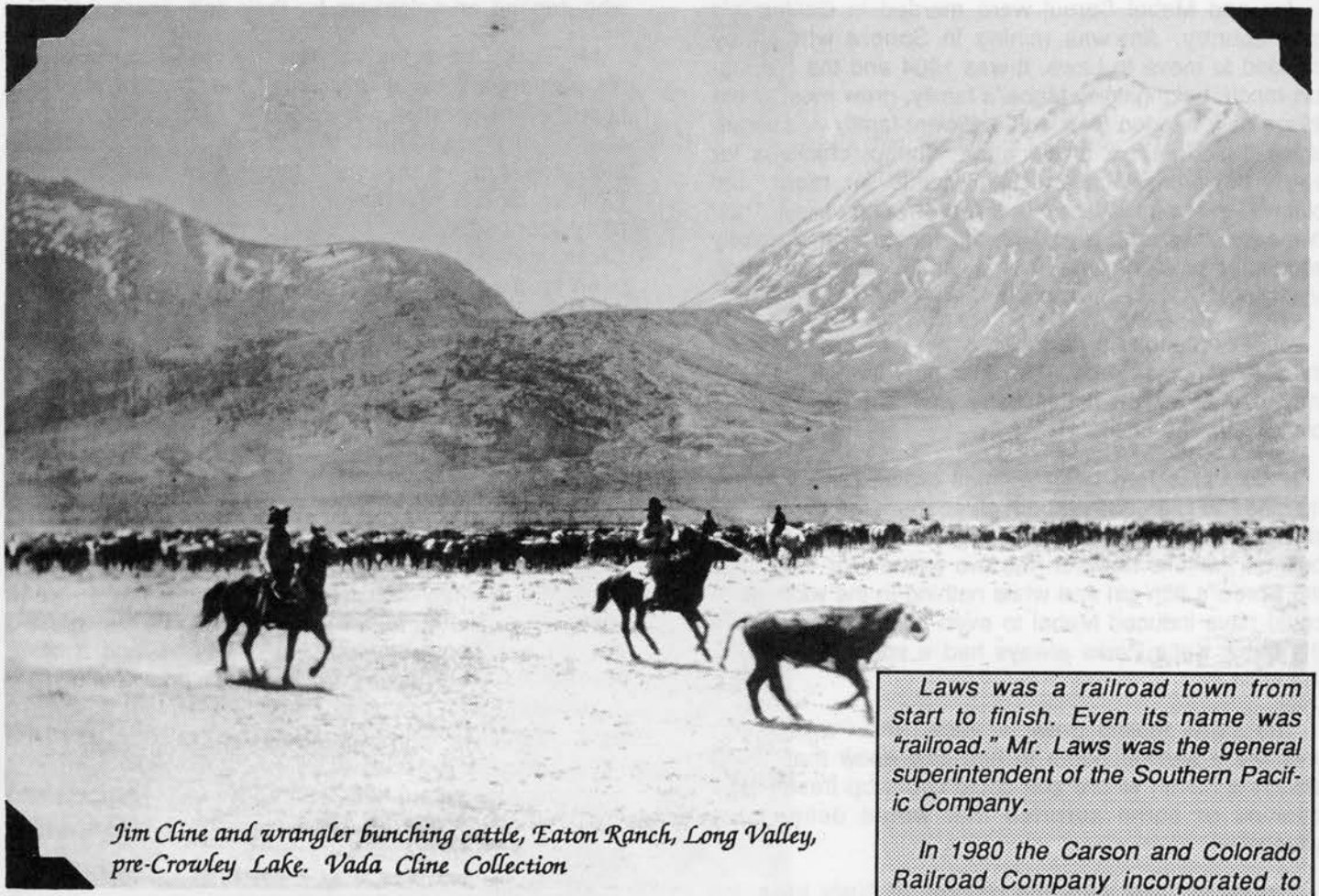
*California State Highway 178 looking west from summit of Walker Pass. Photo by Bill Webster.*





*Jim Cline and wrangler bunching cattle, Eaton Ranch, Long Valley, pre-Crowley Lake. Vada Cline Collection*

# "LAWS WAS THE SWEETEST LITTLE TOWN IN THE WHOLE WORLD"

*by Louise Kelsey,*
*based on the recollections of Vada Sproul Cline, along with the laughter and memories of her sisters, Ina, Wilma and Velma.*

Dr. Shute made one last check through his black bag before he walked out into the clear air of a July morning and climbed into his buggy. He wouldn't need a coat, even if his call lasted a day or more. Summers were hot in the high desert of the Eastern Sierra Nevada, and especially in Owens Valley. As the doctor drove his horse along the dusty road from Bishop to Laws he thought of Mabel Sproul, the expectant mother waiting for him in the small railroad town, six miles north.

*Laws was a railroad town from start to finish. Even its name was "railroad." Mr. Laws was the general superintendent of the Southern Pacific Company.*

*In 1980 the Carson and Colorado Railroad Company incorporated to build a narrow gauge railroad whose original plan was to run from Mound House, Nevada to the Colorado River. Building began in Mound House but was completed only 365 miles south . . . to Keeler.*

*The narrow gauge, less expensive to operate and whose track was easier than standard gauge to lay over rugged terrain, was surveyed to run east of the Owens River. The course of the roadbed was designed to serve the mines of Nevada and northeastern California. Cattlemen, sheepmen, ranchers and farmers saw the advantage of a rail line for both supplies and sales.*

*The station at Laws was an important one with its depot and loading platform, its turntable and switching yard, its gantry and stock corrals.*

*Train crews needed boarding houses and entertainment, ranchers needed supplies and children needed schools. So Laws grew on demand into a solid community with answers to the needs of both railroad and ranches.*

Jim and Mabel Sproul were married in California's gold country. Jim was mining in Sonora when they decided to move to Laws. It was 1904 and the Farrington ranch, belonging to Mabel's family, grew most of the things they needed for a self-sufficient family . . . vegetables, fruit trees, a grape arbor, sheep, chickens for eggs, cows for milk and beef cattle for meat. Jim planned to raise his family in this promising valley. Their home in Laws was filled with the laughter and sisterly squabbles of Mona, Ina, Wilma, and Velma, and later, Madeline.

Mabel's friend and neighbor, Katie Parks, waited with the again mother-to-be. With four girls Mabel, half joking, told Katie that if this baby was another girl, she could have the child.

Katie Parks had been a "mail order" bride but her marriage to Clarence had not given them the blessing of children. Some strange but strong bond seemed to have built on the joke between the two women for Vada was the Sproul's fifth girl and while nothing in the wide world could have induced Mabel to even think of parting with the baby, Katie Parks always had a special feeling for the child.

The same feeling grew in Vada. The Parks house was like a second home to her. She knew that it was always a haven where she could count on fresh-baked cookies or some surprise that would delight any youngster.

Streets in Laws were the children of dusty trails, left by the railroad survey crew who had laid out the town site for the Carson and Colorado Company.

When a new kid moved to town every youngster in Laws followed him down the street. That one walk told them where he lived, how many were in his family, what his dad did, and if they were lucky, whether or not his mom baked good cookies.

The Sprouls now had five daughters and were expecting their sixth child. This time Dr. O'Neill arrived at the Sproul's home just as Clarence and Katie Parks drove up in their touring car. They gathered up the girls and went for a drive around "the six-mile block."

They rolled along in a gentle cloud of dust and headed toward the Sierra on Highway 395 where Vada and her lifelong friend, companion and husband would live . . . in a home surrounded by flowers and with horses close by.

At Brockman Lane, Clarence maneuvered the corner and turned south. The Shipply ranch house, with its corrals and tack shop foretold a future time when horses and cattle would be Lester and Vada's lifestyle.

Next came the Nelligan and the Keyes homes, sitting across from each other on the Lane. Belle Nelligan Holland and Lizzy Keyes mid-wifed each other's babies and chatted and picked raspberries as two women will do who depend on neighbors for their daily touch with life.

Mr. Parks drove the car slowly, with its top down so his passengers could fully enjoy the days of summer. Locust trees hummed a low song as bees gathered their share of the food chain. Wild roses and asters decorated the edge of the road, and the sky was building cumulus clouds which promised a summer storm. The party stopped where Brockman crossed over Bishop Creek. It was shady, the water was cool and if it had not been for the excitement of a new member of the family on its way, they all would have taken a nap.

Brockman Lane ended at Line Street and Clarence steered the bulky touring car in a wide turn, heading east on the third leg of "the six-mile block." To pass a little time Katie had packed a picnic lunch. Clarence pulled to the side of the road, in the shade of a grand old cottonwood tree. They suddenly remembered that excitement had taken away the thought of food . . . until the girls spread a cloth on the ground and Katie unpacked crunchy homemade dill pickles, fresh bread with creamy butter, jam from the blackberry patch, hard cooked eggs from the morning gathering, and a cake. No cookies for an occasion like this. It was a chocolate cake, round as a drum and three layers high. It seemed as if the frosting between the layers was as thick as the layers themselves. Such a cake. It was the kind that only youngsters could eat all they wanted. Clarence and Katie enjoyed just a slender sliver. Lunch finished, they quickly gathered up what little was left, waved good-bye to the fields of wild iris and turned north on Bishop's Main Street. They were six long miles from Laws, and home, and . . . a boy or a girl?

Before the travelers could understand the words, they could see their friends and neighbors gathered in front of Tom Hughes' grocery store. As they got closer and closer they made out the chant, "Oh Joy! It's a Boy!" "Oh Joy! It's a Boy!" The sisters squealed and hugged each other. They finally had a brother. To complete the family, Madeline was the last child born to the Sprouls. The four older sisters helped raise Walter and "Maddy" in the caring, old-fashioned way.

*PLAQUE – on Hwy. 395 at the based of Sherwin Grade. Placed by E CLAMPUS VITUS:*

***PINE CREEK MINE***

*Gold was discovered in the Pine Creek drainage by Civil War Veterans in April 1916 by four men, O.E. VAUGHN, A.E. & C.C. BEAUREGARD and JAMES SPROUL on their claims Blizzard #1, #2, #3 and #4 high on the mountain. After years of development and production the mine was acquired by U.S. Vanadium, a division of Union Carbide Corporation on May 14, 1936. This mine became the world's largest tungsten mine, now known as "The Mine in the Sky."*

*Jim Sproul and Charles Gifford, good friends and close neighbors, 1907. The Gifford Ranch was just west of the Sproul Ranch. Vada Cline Collection*

Life in Laws was not all births. There were family outings and holidays and celebrations. One of the happiest of times was when Papa said, "Help Mama pack. We're going to Mammoth for a few days."

"But who will milk the cow while we're gone?" Vada questioned. "She's too big to get in the car and take with us."

It was no problem. Mr.Shaffer was the postmaster for Laws and a neighborly thing like milking a family cow was no big chore. He said he would gladly do it.

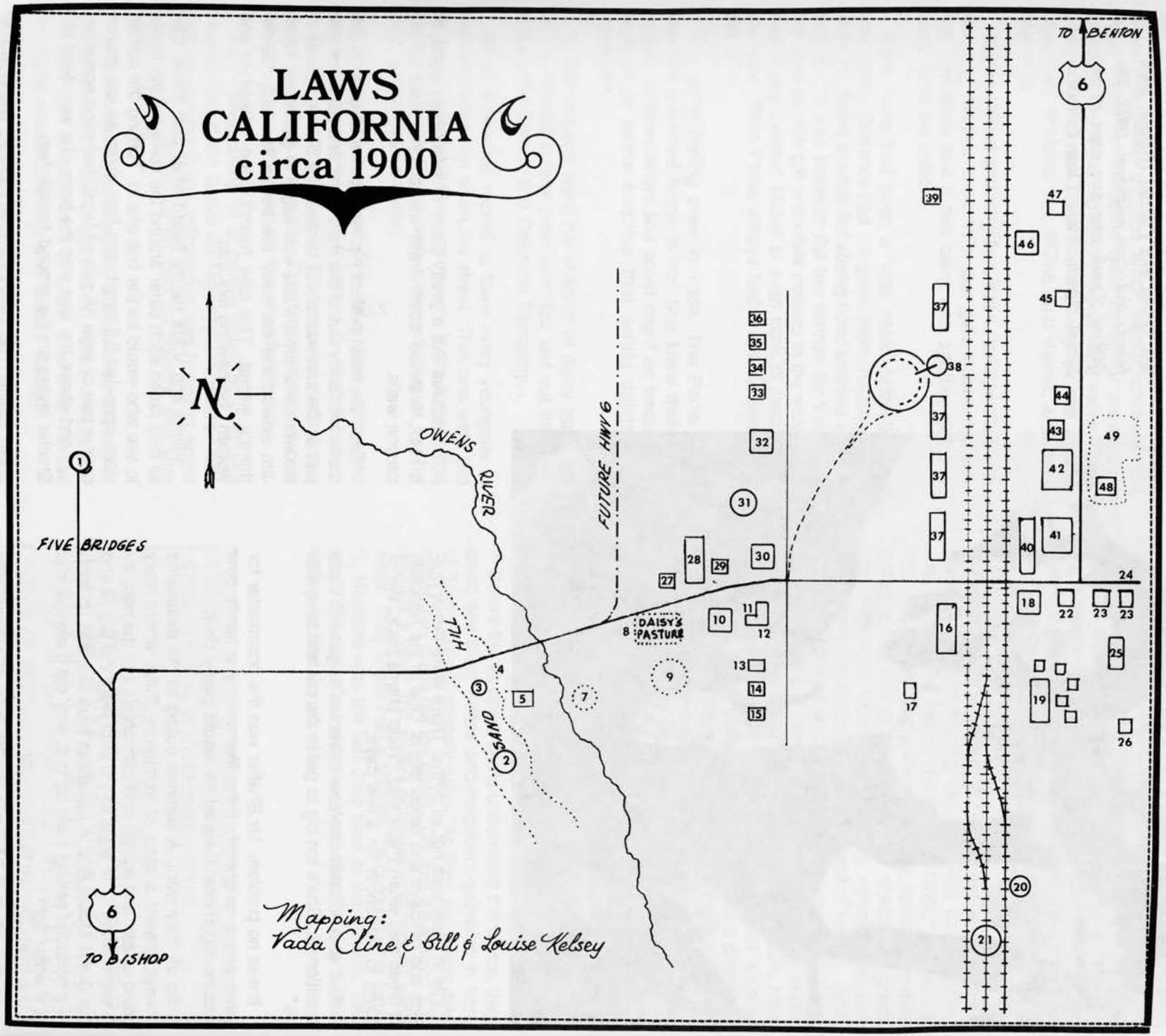
So off they went. A summer outing to the mountains always meant a stop at Whitmore Tubs where they could splash and squeal and cannonball into the naturally warm water. The walls of the pool were the Sierra and the Glass Mountains. A cloudless blue sky was its roof. In a beautiful setting such as this, why did it always end in a water fight?

Late in the afternoon Jim pitched their tent on Convict Creek. Mama wouldn't let the family anywhere near the deep, cold waters of Convict Lake. A warming campfire was welcome after wading and fishing and chasing around the meadow, looking for treasures to take home . . . treasures like a pretty piece of weathered wood, or a rock, washed down from the colorful face of the canyon walls.

Even the most perfect trip must come to an end. Jim drove his family out of the mountains and back to Laws just as the sun was about to meet the Sierra. In spite of the wonderful time, Vada was eager to get home. When Jim slowed the car near the house he said, "Something's wrong. The cow hasn't been milked or she wouldn't be bawling like that."

Wilma and Vada hardly heard what their father said as they raced each other around the corner of the house to see who would be the first one in. Turning the corner, Vada sprawled full length and face down as she tripped over a pair of legs. "A pair of legs!" her mind screamed . . . and above the legs was the body of a very dead Mr. Shaffer laying on the ground beside her.

Mr. Shaffer had died of a heart attack. The cow had not been milked. And Jim Sproul had to talk his two hysterical daughters into something close to calm. For days, when the sun started to set, the girls dreaded the quiet of the night and the grizzly memories it brought.


LAWS
CALIFORNIA
circa 1900
N
TO BENTON
6
OWENS RIVER
FUTURE HWY 6
FIVE BRIDGES
HILL
DAISY'S PASTURE
SAND
6
TO BISHOP
Mapping:
Vada Cline & Bill & Louise Kelsey

1. Five Bridges
2. Sand Hill
3. Will Farrington Ranch with cement silo
4. Water trough
5. MacIntoosh's slaughter house
6. Highway #6, Bishop to Benton (broken line - present #6)
7. Fort (before Vada's time)
8. Daisy's pasture
9. Indian Village
10. Lee Sheppey's deli/dance hall/theater
11. Barber Shop (Able's)
12. Stone Hotel, rooming house - Mr.& Mrs.Able
13. George Schleser home
14. West Amon home
15. Deyo home
16. Depot and loading platform
17. Agent's house
18. Recreation Hall, owned by James Henry "Jim" Sproul
19. Inyo Hotel and cottages, operated by "Ma" Huckaby
20. Water tower
21. Turntable
22. Clair Wells, Montague, Dinsome
23. Gish and Rogers (little houses)
24. Road up Silver Canyon
25. New schoolhouse
26. Francisco home
27. Moser' home
28. Lumber Yard
29. Uncle Carl and Aunt Hazel McAfee's home,
    later owned by A. Beaureguard
30. Hughe's Store
31. Court Yard
32. Fletcher's Hotel, later owned by Ray's
33. Shingle House
34. Ed and Ella Dehy's home
35. Billy and Winnie Vaughn's home
36. Clarence and Katie Park's home
37. Four storage and warehouse buildings
38. Gantry
39. First Sproul home. they later moved as family grew.
40. Stockyard and loading chute
41. Compton Store
42. First Post Office
43. McDonald's Blacksmith Shop
44. Joe and Florence Smith's home
45. Jim and Mabel Sproul's home
46. Old Laws Schoolhouse
47. Bedford's home (piano teacher)
48. Lem and Merle Gish's home
49. Gish farm

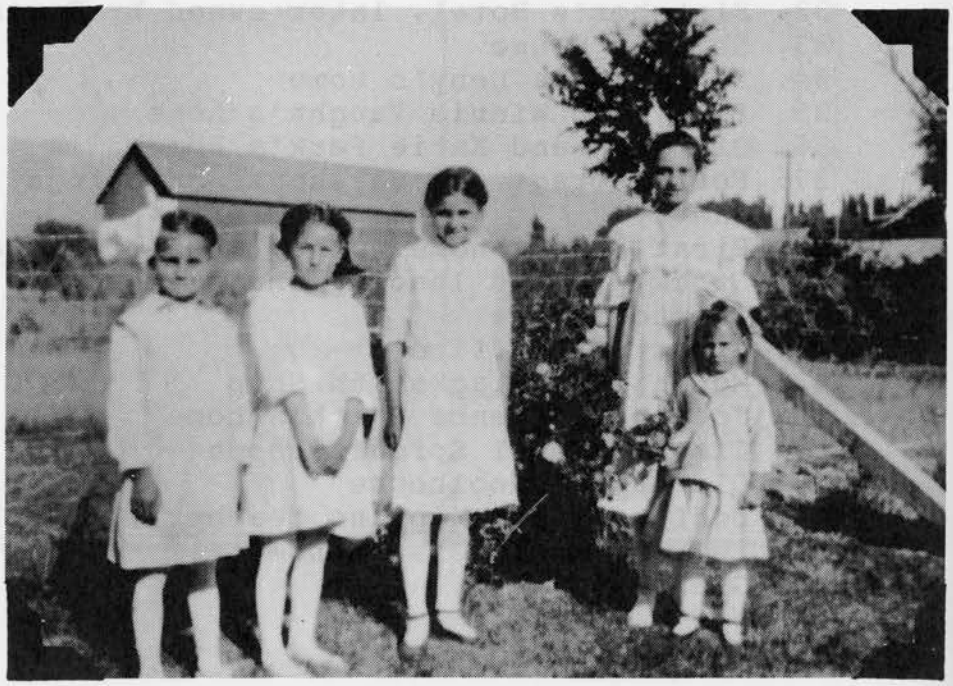
*A Sproul outing at Whitmore Tubs. Vada, Velma, Wilma, Ina holding Maddy, Papa holding brother Walter. Vada Cline Collection*

Jim ran the White Mountain Cafe, a two-story social/ recreation hall in Laws. Off-duty train crews would come in to play pool. There was a soda fountain out front, and at the top of the outside stairs on the side of the building . . . ahhh, there was heaven for the Sproul kids. There was a hardwood dance floor where the girls learned to roller skate; the piano offered a grand opportunity to young self-taught musicians; and public dances were held in that wonderful second floor.

Lee Sheppy's "Opera House" showed motion pictures making it the movie house in the little town. Lee would stand at one end of the hall, cranking the projector, and the audience would watch a pull-down screen. Lee had a delicatessen and ice cream stand but Mama wouldn't let the children buy anything there. "Too many flies around his food," she would say.

With a theater right in town, Vada's only complaint was when the movies were the least bit sad or violent, Papa and Mama wouldn't let her go; they would just take the older girls.

If the alluring scent of fresh-baked pies wafted through the air it was a sure sign that "Ma" Huck was in the kitchen getting ready for the hungry train crews or anyone else that might be staying at her boarding house or in one of the small houses clustered around the main building. The Huckabys had a large family of six boys and four girls. Mrs. Huckaby ran a clean place with



*The Sproul girls at Laws: Velma, Wilma, Ina, Mona, with Vada in front. Vada Cline Collection*

good, home-cooked food. It could be called the Eastern Sierra forerunner of the popular Bed and Breakfast . . . except that "Ma" Huck baked bread, cooked three big meals a day, raised chickens, grew a small garden for the table and still had time to love her children who, for all her work, came first. Florence (Huckaby) Smith was one of Mabel Sproul's dearest friends, and friends were a lifelong treasure in a small town. Florence grew up to be, among other things, a postmaster and the one who sorted the final mail drop for Laws in 1963.

At age five, Vada was too young for first grade, and there was no kindergarten. She tagged after Mona and Ina, Wilma and Velma when they left to walk to school. She could amuse herself in the play-yard and Mama didn't have to worry about her running to the tracks, or falling over the top rail into the stock holding pens, or any of the things an active five-year-old might do when turned loose in a railroad town. Ina was there to keep an eye on her. Ina had a natural mother instinct and seemed to have a sense of when brother or one of her sisters was on the verge of trouble.

Getting the girls ready for school each day was a ritual. Mama would have a basin of water and her comb ready, to the chorus of "Me first," "Me second," "Me third," "Me fourth," "Me fifth," "Me sixth, . . . oh darn! Why do I always have to be last!" Brother was the only one who didn't get into the morning hair-dressing line. Mama would slick back the hair, add a braid here, a roll there, and top each precious daughter's head with a ribbon or bow. She didn't have time to fluff the ribbons like some of the mothers, but made up for it with a hug and a kiss as she shooed them out the door. Of course, Wilma always tried to get in line first. She had beautiful, naturally curly hair that Vada "would have died for." Even before Vada was old enough to attend school she was always in the hair-line, usually in a perky dress. She never knew when the school pictures would be taken and, pupil or not, she was ready to be in the photograph.

Mona had an inborn sense of style. She always looked wonderful, and dressed in just the right thing for the occasion, whether it was Sunday school, parties or just plain school. Many a time she put Vada's choice right back in the closet and picked out one that always turned out to be better.

Velma was the one Mama could count on when time and energy ran low. Even as a small child Velma loved to be in the kitchen when Mama was cooking. She would wash vegetables, stir pots, and always happened to be near when there was a cake bowl to lick. Velma was a good housekeeper, too. She seemed actually to enjoy dusting and straightening. All the girls helped around the house, but Velma took pride in the results of these chores. All the girls took care of Brother and Maddy.

When Vada was five, Jim moved the family to the Farrington ranch nestled at the foot of the White Mountains in Chalfant Valley. Vada started her education in the Chalfant school which was across the line in Mono County, five miles north of Laws. Every morning all the neighboring ranch kids would saddle up a pony, hitch a wagon, or walk to school. No buses in those days.

Four years later Jim moved the family back to laws. Vada talked her father into getting her a milk cow. She also lived to regret it! She loved her "Daisy," but she had to drive her up from the pasture twice a day for milking.

*Laws School student body photo, about 1918. Vada Cline Collection*

***Teachers, Laws Elementary***

***Mrs. Mabel Amon***
***Mrs. Kumel***
***Mrs. C. Symons (substitute teacher)***
***The three above were sisters***
***Mrs. Marion Bulpitt***
***Mrs. Walter Clark (substitute teacher)***
***Miss Garstang***
***Mrs. Helen (Walter) Johnson***
***Mrs. McCutcheon***
***Miss McKee***
***Mrs. Grace Nellon***
***Miss Seabert***

*The Sproul children in front of Laws School: Mona holding Madeline, seated in front of Velma, Vada standing, Wilma holding Water, and Ina, 1923. Vada Cline Collection*

*Dotty the calf. Wilma is feeding Dotty, Mona holding Brother. Vada Cline Collection*

She hated the chore because Daisy had the worst breath in all of cow-kingdom. And another thing that bothered her were the mounds in the field. Right or wrong, she had been told by the town kids that they were Indian graves and as she walked by them all she could think of were those poor Indians under the earth.

It was said that soldiers had had a fort just southwest of Laws. It was a high walled circle of rock, a little like a rock corral but with no opening for sheep or cattle. Stories built up around the so-called fort, but no one seemed to know if they were true. The fights and battles between Indians and settlers were over and the reason for the fort seemed lost in time. Its final function was as holding pen for whatever the citizens of Laws wanted to keep from blowing into their fields and yards.

The Indians drove their wagons along the dirt roads which had been chewed to washboard by trucks and cars. The noise of wagons grinding over corrugated rock roads is a sound all its own.

The Indian women were a real problem to the kids. There was always a baseball game of "work-up" after school. Just as sure as the pitcher was ready to throw the ball . . . all bases loaded, of course . . . here would come the Indian ladies in their long, full skirts with goodness knows how many underskirts, a bright blouse, and perhaps some jewelry. Without so much as a "S'cuse us," and no effort to go around the players, the ladies laughed and chatted in Paiute and walked right through the game.

The Slim Princess, pride of the railroad town, ran from Mound House to Keeler on narrow gauge rail. These smaller trains, running on a narrower track than their bigger counterparts, the standard gauge, could haul freight at a lower cost and work their way over passes like Montgomery with greater ease.

It was mid-summer. The crew of the "Princess" knew there would be a dance in Laws that night and the

brakeman had a bad case of fish-fever as he thought of his favorite hole.

Coming down from Montgomery Pass north of Laws the crew pushed the engine to give all it had . . . which was just a little too much. The train picked up speed on the steep grade and jumped the track. The young fireman, Bert, was thrown out and both legs cut off by the train. A frantic call went to Laws and an emergency run was made to the accident. When the rescue engine returned to Laws all the townfolk were waiting to see if there was anything, anything at all, they could do. The trip to Los Angeles would take two days at best and it would have done no good. Bert died three days later. The handsome young man was a good friend of Ina. The shock of the 1923 accident is still burned into the memories of the people of Laws but as in any community, tragedy is part of life.

*Rails to Keeler. Louise Kelsey photo*

Any child of a railroad town can shut his eyes and see the whoosh of white steam from the engine, hear the clack of metal wheels rhythmically marking off the miles as they pass over the ties, smell the acrid smoke from the firebox and hear the long, lonely whistle of the train. But one of the most lingering memories of all was the noise of the gantry chains.

The huge gantry stood west of the track, ready to load or unload freight cars. The sound of the chains being cranked up or lowered could be heard in any part of town. A large turning circle was near the gantry on the far side from the track. There was just one problem. A loaded wagon had to get up a pretty good pace to make it up Sand Hill. Not every one made it on the first try. The story is told of Orville Merideth's failed effort. He urged the team to their fastest possible speed, then in turning the circle he fell off the wagon. Just a case of one too many "lemonades" on a hot day?

It was autumn. The locust trees had turned a lemony yellow and were starting to drop their leaves. Every small breeze would launch a flurry of tiny leaf-kites into the crisp September air.

In the mountains aspen were turning from green to gold and red; it was time for Jim Cline to start gathering cattle for the drive to the valley. Jim was foreman of the Eaton ranch, with summer headquarters in Long Valley. He worked through the early days of fall with bittersweet feelings. His son was only five, but he had worked as a hand with his father all through the high country summer. Lester was born in Benton but when the herds were taken to the mountains Jim raised his son at his side, teaching him the skills of a working rider and building a love for this startling and beautiful country in the boy.

As warmth of summer shortened to crisp days edged with a chill that forecast winter, Jim and his men gathered the cattle from the mountain ravines, bunching them in Long Valley for the drive to winter range in the fields between the White Mountains and the Sierra.

After market animals had been cut from the herd they would be headed for Laws and shipped to slaughter. Vada loved the stockyard with the cattle milling to the music of their own bawling and lowing. When sheep were penned in the stockyard they moved about the enclosure like a silent wave, almost as if the band was one woolly animal. The heavy smell of beasts and manure and sweaty cowhands was as comfortable to Vada's young nose as the wild flowers of spring, or summer's new-mown hay.

Papa lifted her onto the porch rail to watch the snake of dust that hung over the herd as it moved along the river, across the valley and on to Laws. Vada saw her future husband, for the first time, riding at his father's side, watching for bunch quitters that might try to break from the herd.

A wise man once said, "All good things must come to an end." Vada's "sweetest little town in the whole world" started its decline when trucks began hauling cattle and sheep, hay and produce to market. Many of the mines were played out. Irrigation ditches were dry, so fewer and fewer ranches could raise feed crops. Market fruit and vegetables were reduced to family gardens, and life changed.

The school closed. In 1963 Florence Huckaby Smith processed the last mail drop from the post office that had served the community continuously for 76 years.

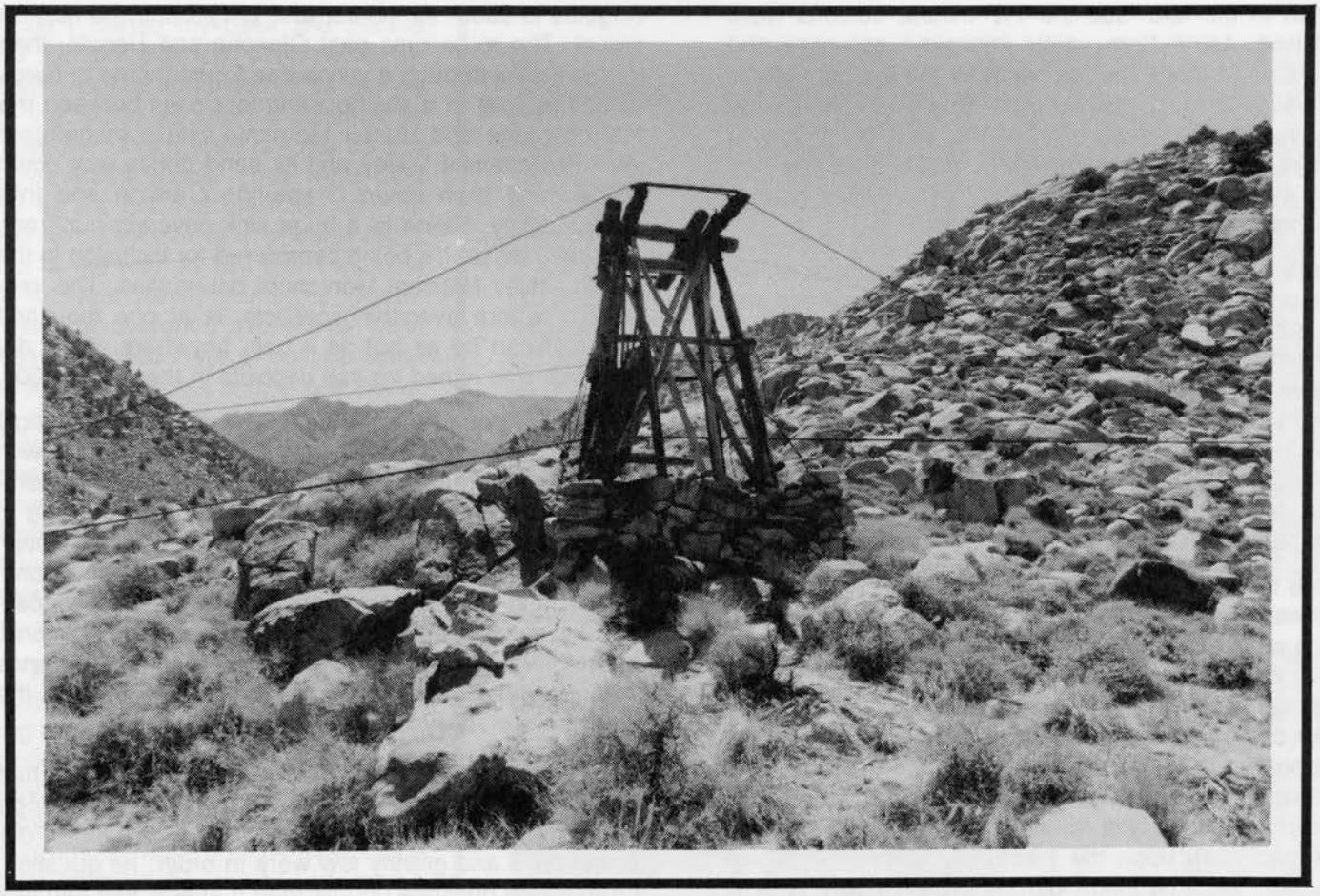
Vada missed her childhood friends as ranch families moved away. Finally, when she was 15, Jim told the family it was time to move to Bishop. Vada was glad to go.

*Florence Smith distributes the last day's mail to Laws post office, 1963. Chalfant Press photo*

### *Epilogue*

*Vada and Lester were married. Their life together was a long love affair of working cattle, rodeoing and living with the land. On one of their last rides together, beside the meadows and under the trees at the foot of the Sierra, Lester turned to his wife and said, "Vada, they can't take this away from us."* ✹

| Capacity of sidings | EASTWARD SECOND CLASS 702 Leave Daily Ex. Sunday | Mile Post Location | (Narrow Gage) Timetable No. 190 September 27, 1959 Keeler Branch STATIONS | | Station Number | Distance from Keeler | WESTWARD THIRD CLASS 703 Ar. Daily Ex. Sunday |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yard Limits WOTP | | 506.8 | | LAWS | 3200 | 70.4 | |
| 19 P | | 522.7 | 15.9 | ZURICH | 3216 | 54.5 | |
| 36 | | 525.5 | 2.8 | MONOLA | 3219 | 51.7 | |
| 17 P | | 536.9<br>536.2 | 11.4 | ABERDEEN | 3230 | 40.3 | |
| 11 WP | | 550.1 | 13.9 | KEARSARGE | 3244 | 26.4 | |
| | | 555.2 | 5.1 | MANZANAR | 3249 | 21.3 | |
| Yard Limits BKWOP | AM 7.01 | 559.8 | 4.6 TO-R | OWENYO | 3144 | 16.7 | AM 10.00 |
| Yard Limits YP | 8.00 AM | 576.5 | 16.7 R | KEELER | 3270 | 0.0 | 9.01 AM |
| | Ar. Daily Ex. Sunday | | (70.4) | | | | Lv. Daily Ex. Sunday |
| | 702 | | | | | | 703 |



*Tram tower above Beveridge. The tram started at the mine 800 feet above Beveridge and ended at the bottom of Beveridge Canyon. Most of the timbers in this tower are of native pinon from higher elevations.*

# BEVERIDGE

## A THREE-MYSTERY GHOST TOWN

by Thomas S. Budlong

Well over a hundred years ago the Inyos experienced a mining boom. At the south end of the range, opposite Owens Lake, the Cerro Gordo silver mine quickly grew to the largest operation in the area. North from Cerro Gordo were hundreds of smaller mines, prospects, and small mills dotting the canyons and ridges, but none could come close to Cerro Gordo's size. Written history for these independent operations is non-existent — rumor is that it went up in the 1906 San Francisco earthquake fire. With neither roads nor records most sites have been forgotten. But rumor also told that the next largest "town," if it could be called that, was Beveridge, named after John Beveridge, one of the early mining promoters. Several years ago I became aware of Beveridge, and determined to search it out.

For a long time the only topo maps for the Inyos were the small, difficult 15-minute variety. Once I tried to use the New York Butte quadrangle to get to New York Butte on a day hike. But it was too far for one day and I kept getting lost since I couldn't see that the map and the terrain were related. I didn't give those maps much respect. They were no help in finding Beveridge.

Then in the late '80s the 7½ -minute editions were published. Aside from vastly improved accuracy and detail one of them also showed, in the typical laconic fashion of a map, "Beveridge, Ruins" in Beveridge Canyon on the eastern side of the Inyo crest. It also showed a tramway from Beveridge half way up the side of the canyon. It was all quite far in, but with a road or trail shown part way.

I searched books and other maps for mentions of this place and found only one, a tantalizing aside at the end of a story on other activities in the Inyos. Of course undisturbed ghost towns simply don't exist anymore. They've all been discovered, looted for artifacts, washed away in flash floods, or rotted to oblivion. But here was hope and dream like winning the lottery. If it wasn't shown on maps until this recent topo, if it wasn't popular in the literature, if it had no trail or road to it, then it must be almost virgin.

One fall I visited Ballarat, the well known ghost town in Panamint Valley. About all that's left are a few old adobe walls scratched up from the hardscrabble around there, and one habitable building. Some fellow had taken up caretaker residence, kind of a self-appointed mayor of himself. When the mood fit he would sit on the front porch to see who went by. I stopped to talk about Ballarat, Panamint City, gold rushes, and other such interesting places and times. With the intrigue of the new map fresh upon me I naturally mentioned Beveridge. "Oh yes," he said, "old mining town way back in the Inyos. Some fellows from the Navy Center went in there a couple years ago in a helicopter and took out the piano."

It was a well-calculated remark. What, lost Beveridge was big enough to have — A PIANO? Of course that did it; I had to find Beveridge. I rearranged my schedule. My next stop on that trip was Cerro Gordo. Then, instead of returning to Los Angeles, I drove down the eastern side to Saline Valley, then north. Where Beveridge Canyon dumps into Saline I found a twisted 4WD road going into the mountains. I followed it until I got so scared I had to turn around. At least I had the place located. This was the beginning of winter so I knew I would have to wait until spring for any kind of comfort if I wanted to explore further. The Inyos can get terribly inhospitable at the extremes of the seasons.

Over the winter I looked at the topo map more closely. The road I had followed for a while was shown as a trail that stopped a mile short of and a thousand feet higher than Beveridge. I ordered the aerial photograph of the map. It wasn't detailed enough to show the "road." It revealed vegetation at the bottom of Beveridge Canyon and several springs a little up from the townsite apparently strong enough to create the growth. And all winter I couldn't get that off-hand remark about THE PIANO out of my mind.

Next May I arranged a trip, leaving Los Angeles on a Friday night to spend Saturday and Sunday searching out Beveridge. The drive to Saline Valley from Los Angeles is about six hours, four paved and the rest on gravel. The route runs past Olancha and Darwin, then on the gravel through a yucca tree forest (home to herds of wild burros) to a six-thousand-foot pass between the Nelson range and Hunter Mountain with a magnificent view of Panamint Valley and its sand dunes way down below, and then down Grapevine Canyon and into Saline Valley. Saline is a huge sink covering hundreds of square miles. It's being considered for inclusion in the Death Valley National Monument boundaries. The very bottom, where everything collects, is at one thousand feet and can be as hot as it gets anywhere. It's a dry lake that was mined for salt deposits in the early 1900s.

Springs around the dry lake, and at other seemingly random places in Saline Valley, provide oases thick with low trees and grasses adapted to the high salt concentration in the ground. The springs would be interesting to explore later. The BLM has fenced some as protection from the wild burros who live in the lower elevations. These, and their high-altitude cousins, are feral ancestors of abandoned prospectors' burros. You run onto them in odd places and hear them talking long-distance to each other with their crazy hee-haws. I spent the night on the valley floor listening to them.

Early the next morning I attacked the road that had stopped me six months before. It switches up a slope rising from the valley like a Manhattan skyscraper. Four wheel drive and granny low were in order, no question. From a little distance up this road it seems you can see the entire valley below. As it ascends the view gets even more astonishing. It compelled me to stop and gape at the emptiness, thinking it will surely be a long time before Los Angeles gets here.

After switching up the face of the foothills the road finally turns inward, grinding over ridges and through gullies and clinging to precarious slopes. My hat is off to the guy who made it, and to whoever thought it up in the first place. (I would have kicked him out for proposing such a track.)

The vehicle road ends at the silent Snowflake talc mine at about 3200 feet. A closer squint at the topo map revealed a small mark denoting the transition from 4WD road to foot trail. This was the start of the trail to Beveridge.

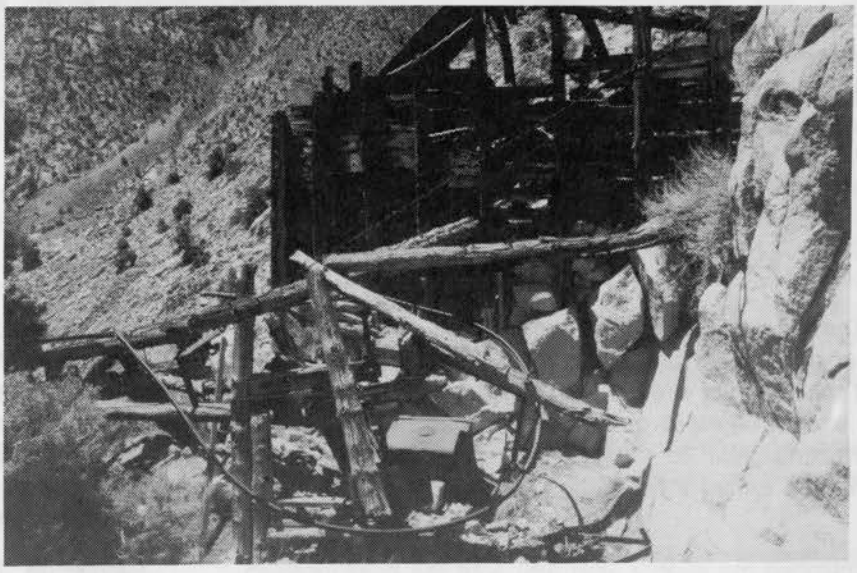
*p.35 top: Water came from a spring up-canyon, carried by a ten-inch wire-wrapped wooden pipe. Center: "Modern" house in bottom of canyon. Made partly of sawn lumber, with rotted canvas walls, it is probably only 70 years old. The perennial stream supports growth that has almost consumed it. Bottom: Ore loading facility and tram turn around at mine above Beveridge; loop in foreground is collapsed rail.*

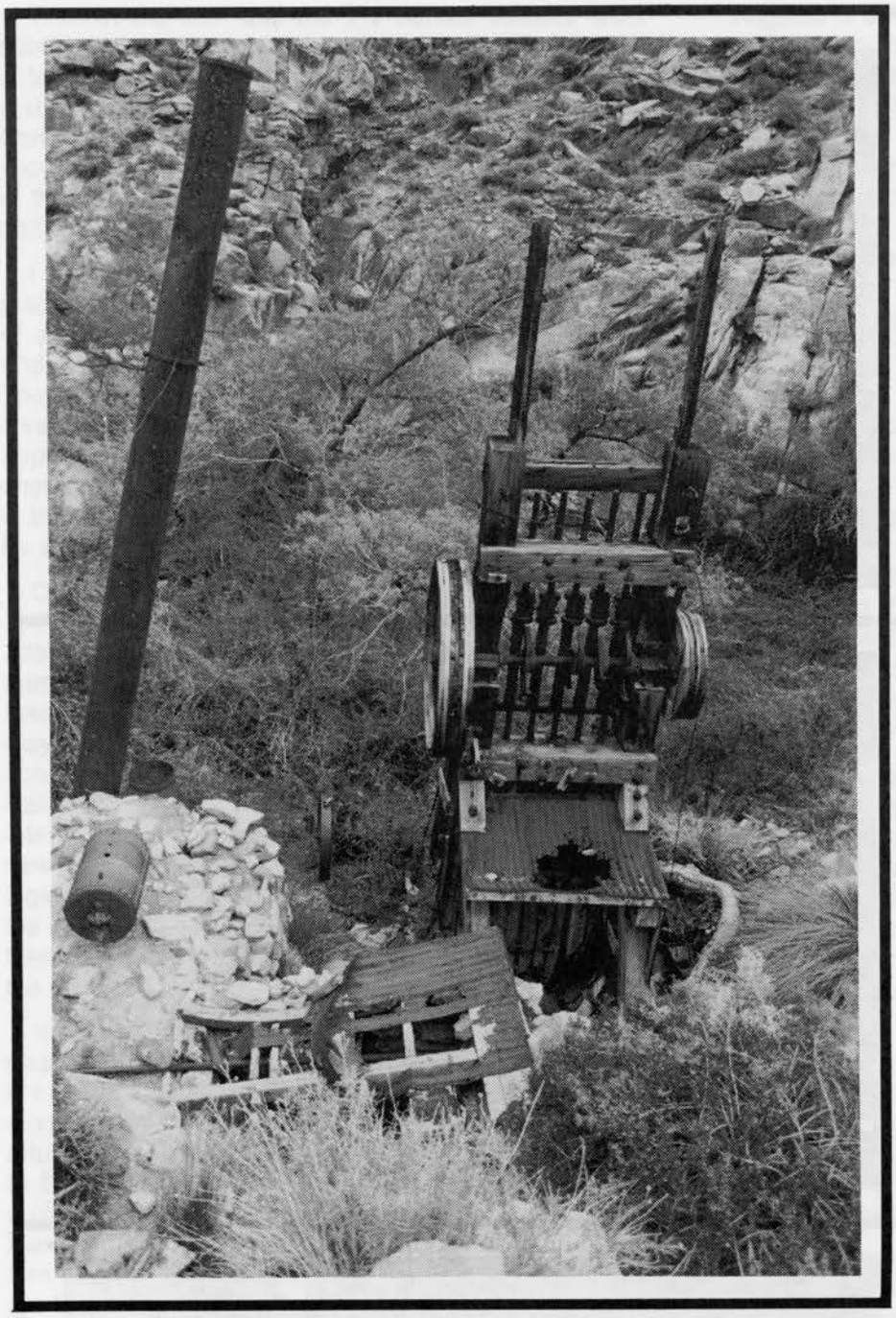
So I loaded my pack and started up the foot trail. It's a no-nonsense trail. It makes no apologies for getting to the top in as short a distance as possible. Mining trails are not built to government specs. They were paid for by the job, not the mile, and the job was to move only enough rocks out of the way so you didn't stumble a lot, and never mind the grade. There is evidence explosives were used here and there to bust up some of the larger rocks, and, in one place, to get through a persistent limestone ledge. But the trail is never built up to make a walkway. It was a minimal construction effort and probably hasn't seen maintenance in a hundred years. Credit its continued existence to the dry climate as much as the choice of grade location.

The foot trail roughly follows the north side of Beveridge Canyon, giving nice views of the wiggling canyon bottom. I was part way up when military fighter jets started playing on the floor of Saline Valley, making screaming, booming noises. Once they sounded closer and I realized a jet was flying inside Beveridge Canyon, nimbly banking left then right then left to follow the turns. I looked down on it a thousand feet below me for the several few seconds it was in view.

The trail marked on the map, as far as it goes, accurately matches the actual trail. On schedule I rounded a prominent corner at the 6600-foot level and only later found that the trail doesn't stop there, as the map advertises. A few old prospects marked the spot, about a thousand feet higher than the Beveridge townsite and over a mile east.

Believing the trail had played out I aimed at Beveridge, now visible, and started scrambling across and down over the rocks. I expected to make a sloping lateral traverse, but a huge, impassable, near-vertical debris gouge soon blocked my way. So it was straight down the sixty-degree boulder slope, aiming directly for the bottom of Beveridge Canyon. About half way down I saw below me a comparative freeway — a wide, flat, well-constructed path several hundred feet above the canyon bot-





*Five-stamp mill. The rock pile covers a boiler which fed a steam engine to power the mill.*

The evening in the cabin was idyllic — mountain solitude, perfect air temperature (mid-May at 5600 feet), just the slightest breeze, no bugs, gentle sounds from the stream below, a garden of trees and roses, and an interesting cabin to explore. I fixed a meal, read until dark, and turned in. But this was not Beveridge.

I climbed out shortly after first light the next morning. Back at the top where the trail "ended," I found my mistake. The real trail to Beveridge took a slight jog up; I had gone straight and had left the trail right where the map said it should end. The map makers couldn't talk to the long gone miners who knew the trail to learn that it continues. By relying on the map instead of common sense I had missed the jog and ended up doing the rock stumble down to what turned out to be the suburbs of Beveridge. It was too late on Sunday to do anything about it so I resolved to return.

tom, disappearing around a point of rock. At the visible end was a tailings slope. It turned out to be a mine, and the "freeway" was a rail bed to roll ore cars from the mine to a chute. An orphaned ore car in perfect working condition sat on the rails. The chute led to some processing machinery at the bottom of the canyon. This whole trailless 1200 foot descent, requiring careful scrambling, took a little over two hours.

At the bottom was a cozy little miner's cabin, framed with 2x4s and roofed and partly sided with corrugated tin. The front and back walls under the roof peak had apparently once been covered with tent material, long since rotted to shreds. It was well stocked, containing a lumpy bed, a chair, a bench, and assortment of debris. Next to a mining notice tacked on the wall was a greeting for visitors: "You're welcome to the cabin. Please leave it neat." I accepted the offer and the obligation.

The bottom of Beveridge canyon here has a flowing stream. I estimated the flow rate to be about 20 gpm — respectable for a lot of streams in wetter locations. But it's choked with growth, mostly California Rose bushes and willow trees, and a scattering of a few other species. The roses are a particularly vigorous variety, with long, stringy stems, dense with sharp thorns. The intense growth makes it almost impossible to walk up and down the bottom of the canyon. In fact it's even hard to find a place to fill a water jug; the water-loving plants hide the stream. Even when I did manage to fill up the water was full of tiny bits of organic debris, too small to filter out through my bandana. I concluded it was extra nourishment, and have suffered no ill effects.

Two weeks later I was back, this time spending a night at Snowflake mine. Driving up the 4WD road from the valley floor in the dark was as good as the scariest Hollywood movies. The bouncing headlights turned rocks and shadows into lurching monsters and when the road skirted precipices the only visible world was empty space. Snowflake mine was a welcome end and gave me a lonely but comfortable night's lodging. I started walking early Friday morning and, knowing the route this time, was into Beveridge in six and a half hours.

Now here's Beveridge's Mystery Number One: I haven't figured out why the trail is built the way it is; there must be a good reason, since the miners did not build trails for exercise. The problem is that it goes up to 6600 feet and then wanders into the hills, staying betwen 6600 and 7000 feet for a mile or so until it's directly above Beveridge. Finally it follows an endless series of switchbacks down a side canyon to get to the old town, which is at 5600 feet. Now why didn't the trail builder stop climbing at 5600 feet and do his lateral at that level? It would have saved quite a bit of trail construction and certainly a lot of effort for the traveler. The only thing I can think is that before Beveridge was there, the trail went to those diggings I saw at 6600 feet (there may be more I missed), and was simply extended to Beveridge when the time came. It stayed at the high elevation to avoid debris gouges like the one that stopped my lateral traverse. As to the traveler's extra effort involved getting to Beveridge? Well, I'll bet everyone was on a horse or a mule back then, so why worry; something else was doing all the work.

The tramway shown on the map is in the same side canyon as the final switchbacked descent to Beveridge. The cabling starts at a mine shaft some distance up the mountain, makes one long swoop down to a series of supports to get over a little ridge, and then makes a final, smaller span to its terminus in the bottom of the canyon. Four cables are still hanging, tight as the day they were strung, with another on the ground. Some are half-inch, some are full one-inch cable. The two termini and the support structures on the ridge are mostly of native timber — rough pinons dragged from higher elevations and carved to shape. Several ore cars still cling to the cable at the lower terminus. The mine shaft, still whole, penetrates the mountain for a distance. I explored until I found timbers supporting the ceiling. I realized these were hundred-year old timbers, maybe rotting, supporting a roof that wouldn't support itself, and decided that someone else could search out the end. What I did see followed the twists and turns of a quartz vein, with the rails for the ore cars still in place.

The tramway turnarounds are the same basic design still used on modern ski-lifts, except more primitive, of course. The turnaround at the mine end was built onto a supporting structure immediately below the level of the shaft. Ore was dumped from the end of the rails into a large wooden bin, and from there into the ore buckets traveling on the tramway. The weight of the loaded buckets going downhill must have provided the motive power for the whole thing. At the other end was a similar turnaround where the ore was presumably dumped out.

And here now is Beveridge Mystery Number Two. Where did all the tailings go? One would expect to see a huge pile at the lower terminus. But there is none. Did flash floods carry them away? No, there is a lot of mining machinery still in the canyon bottom that would have gone too. Was the ore so rich that there was very little debris? No, if it was so rich they would not have needed the tram. I don't have any answers.

The "town" of Beveridge itself now consists of several buildings strung along the canyon bottom. They are difficult to visit because of the same rose and willow thickets I found infesting the suburbs two weeks before. Exploration demands long pants. The living cabins (I found three), are rotting and falling apart, overgrown with trees and weeds. One now has water flowing under it! I think the miners had the undergrowth cleared out and built that cabin high and dry. In the hundred-plus years since they left, the growth and debris build-up has raised the creek to floor level. Remains of a few stone houses are some distance up from the thicket on the rocky sides of the canyon. They are now low, fallen-down walls, with no signs of their roofs.

Artifacts are all over the place. Among the interesting items:

- Big heavy iron machinery, with names like "American Hoist and Derrick Company, Racine Wisconsin," and "Acme Mining Equipment Company, Erie Penna." proudly cast into their sides in huge letters. I could sense the muscle of eastern industry pouring out smoke and noise to supply the west's booming mines and mills.

- Bed frames with springs, the old outer-spring mattress type that sag in the middle, set out on the only flat spot, rusting.

- The most precarious outhouse ever, propped over a thirty-foot deep crack. It was supported on one side by the steep canyon wall and on the other by a long pole. A springy plank suspended over nothing made a path to the door.

- In the weeds, sitting there all by itself, the bench to another outhouse. The hole was perfectly intact and the floor was in good shape. There were no walls, roof, or other structure. Did you ever stop to examine an outhouse hole? It's not round; it bulges a little in front. And the edges are not cut straight; they have a thoughtful bevel to them. Somewhere someone had enough demand for manufactured outhouse holes to put serious thought into the design and then build a machine to cut the hole exactly that shape. Hooray for free enterprise, demand and supply.

- In the bottom of the canyon, large wooden processing tanks with stirring paddles in them. All the tanks are deteriorating.

- A centrifugal pump, say two feet in diameter, being swallowed by a willow. A hundred years ago it was set

down at the foot of the tree. The willow's been growing around it since, and the pump is now half buried. Another hundred years and it will have disappeared entirely — the ultimate tree spike.

• Strung up and down the course of the canyon for a mile at least, a wooden pipe, about 10 inches in diameter. It's made of long, curved, precisely-milled strips, fitted together to make a cylinder and then wrapped with wire, about one wrap per inch. Some of the sections had fallen apart, but none had rotted. I guess it was redwood, which has a reputation for durability. The wood would swell when wet and compress the joints, making a water-tight seal. With the wire wrap for strength, the pipe would be leakproof and could withstand high pressure.

• A five-stamp mill, powered by a steam engine, complete with a boiler built into the nearby rock wall.

• And a great assortment of iron things. There were iron pipes, iron bars, iron valves, iron cable, iron screws, iron nuts, iron pumps, iron stove parts, iron springs, iron everything. The iron age climaxed in Beveridge.

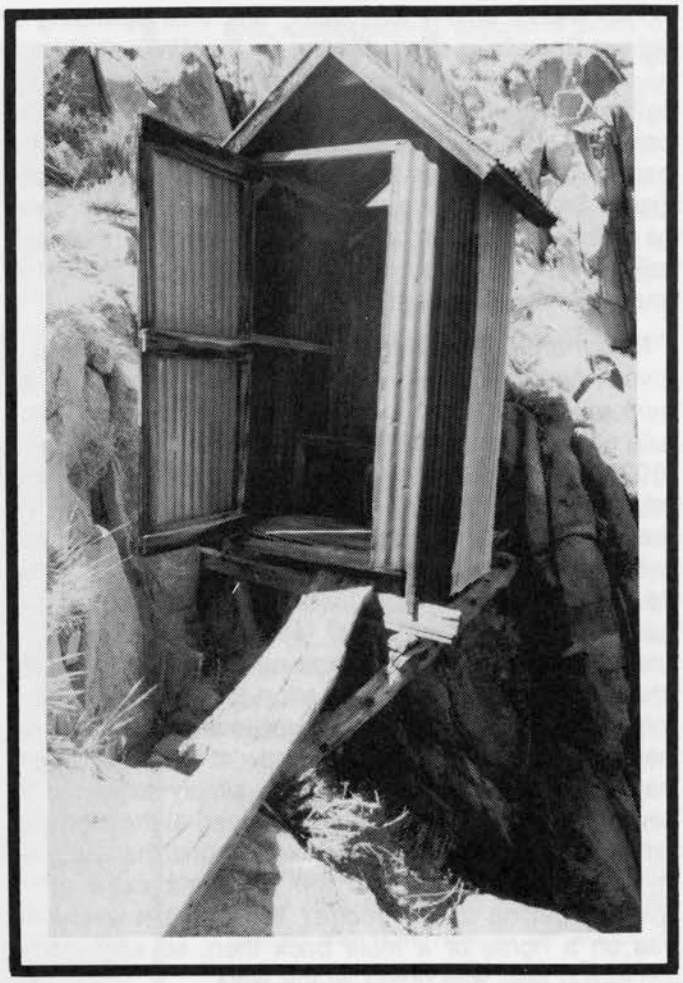
Now here's Beveridge Mystery Number Three. The five-stamp mill was *upstream* from the tramway terminus, with no tailings pile nearby. Did they haul the raw ore uphill to the mill, and then haul the processed rock off somewhere? That doesn't sound very likely. You figure that one out.

Upstream from the main part of town the canyon splits. In the left fork is a very nicely built and largely intact (except for the roof) stone house made from native granite rocks and boulders. A large fireplace with a massive one-piece granite mantle is built into one side. Perhaps this was the mine owner's residence.

The supply route for Beveridge was a trail west of town that went over the Inyo crest. It starts outside Lone Pine and crosses the crest at 9500-foot Forgotten Pass. It is longer and has more elevation gain and loss than the eastern route I took from Saline Valley. The remoteness of Saline Valley dictated this more difficult trail. Considering the driving time today, the trail from Lone Pine may still be the quickest.

Having explored Beveridge I scurried out early in the morning to have time to investigate the cold and hot springs in Saline Valley. One cold spring is an oasis of rushes and large willows, a magic spot in the midst of the heat with birds singing in the trees and frogs jumping in the grass. What wonders a little water will do since not 200 feet away is the driest, hottest, meanest, most inhospitable, foul-tasting desert imaginable. To add the final touch to this charmed place, the spring water tasted excellent.

Equally interesting are the hot springs. A rutted, dry, billow-dust track leads to three of them. The first has been turned into another oasis populated by nudists. Walking around sans everything seems like a perfectly reasonable thing to do in that little park surrounded by hostile desert. The next spring, located on a little hillock,



*The Beveridge outhouse is suspended by a pole over a break in the rocks. Entry is across a springy plank.*

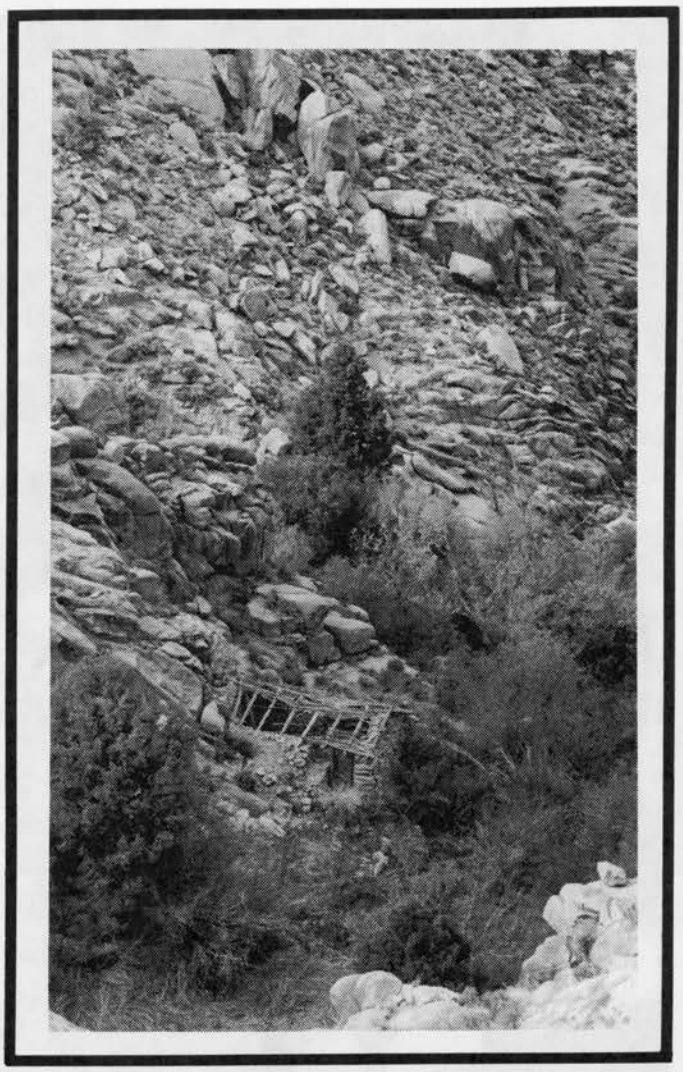
had been improved by The Wizard, according to an inscription in the concrete. The hot flow was piped into several nicely constructed concrete and rock tubs about twelve feet in diameter. The overflow watered a patch of grass and a palm tree. Someone had erected a tarp over one of the baths to provide shade from the intense sun, but there was no one around. After a few moments of contemplation I stripped down and started a soak in this magnificent exotic discovery. What pleasure it was — the hot desert, the deliciously relaxing warm water, the ready-made shade — all set up and waiting for me.

In about fifteen minutes the owners of the tarp showed up and joined me in the pool. They were a couple from Redondo Beach who had been coming to Saline Valley and these hot pools for twenty years and knew all about them. The pools belong to nobody in particular, improved and kept in shape by unorganized volunteer community effort and the good will of whoever happens to drop by. In the spirit of sharing that is abundant in that place the Redondo couple would have thought it strange if I had not taken advantage of their shade from the tarp. They knew quite a bit about the surrounding territory, where all the Indian relics were, old timers who had lived the area, the recent history of flash floods, 4WD roads from there into Death Valley

and to old mine ruins, and all sorts of other interesting things.

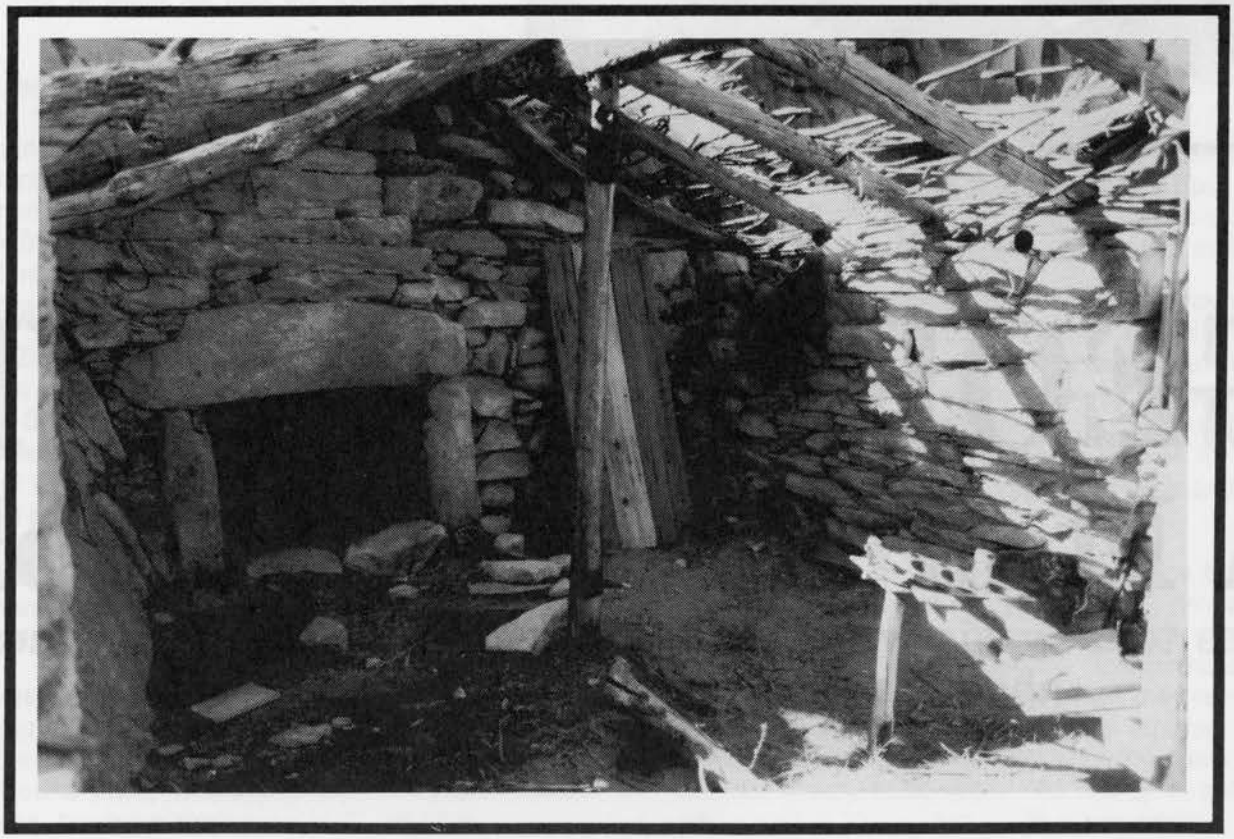
As I was about to leave I mentioned the intriguing Beveridge piano. The fellow from Redondo said he had heard the same story about pianos and helicopters. He'd heard it continually in fact, from the time he started coming there twenty years before. We concluded that it was one of those comfortable yarns that tells so easily and sounds so dramatic that it has a birth and eternal life all its own despite lack of first-hand, second-hand or any-hand evidence. Judging from the layout of Beveridge itself, and Mr. Redondo's experience, the piano story is just that. a story. But it was enough to get me into the place. ✲

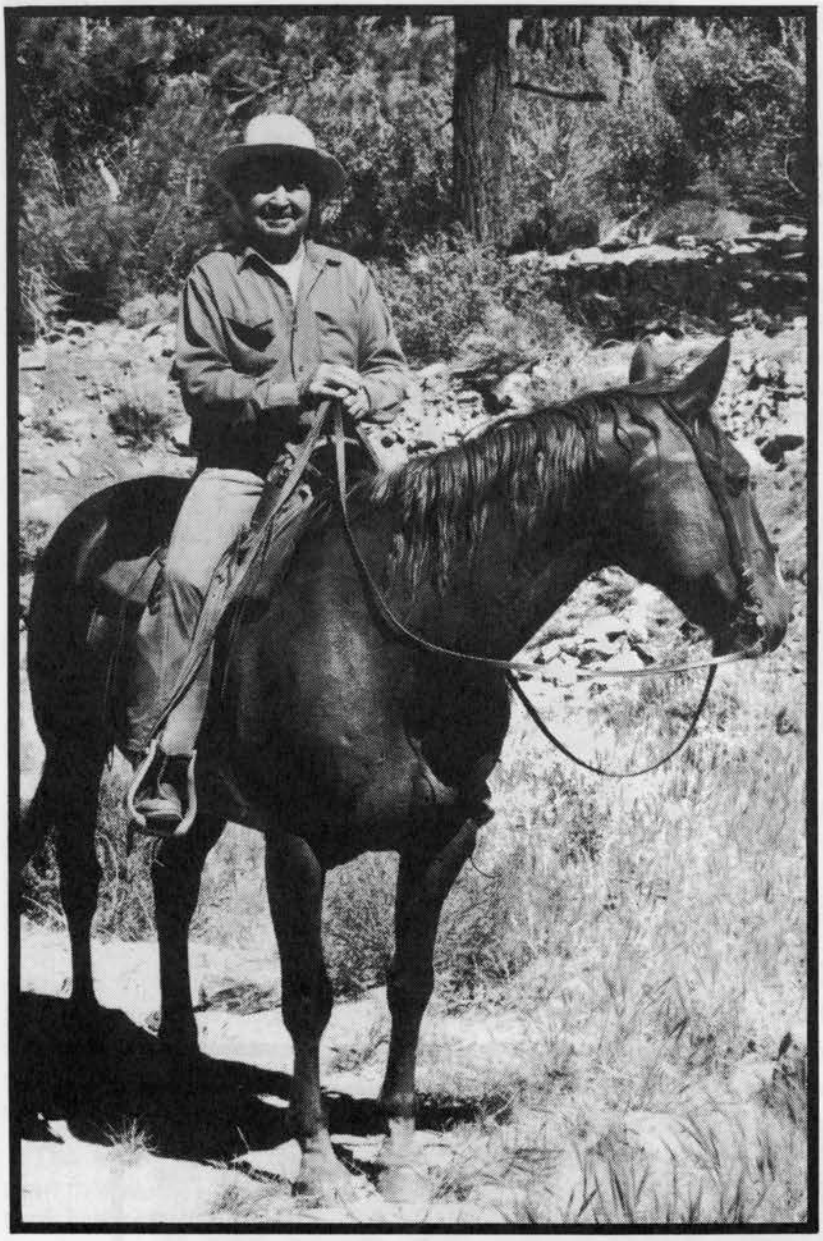
*Records of life around the lesser mines in the Inyos are scarce. Knowledge of the era is therefore left to personal exploration followed by speculation. Perhaps some readers do have photographs or written records of this fascinating part of Eastern Sierra history. If so, THE ALBUM would welcome hearing from you.*



*Right: Original rock house nestled in bottom of canyon. Most roof supports are in place.*

*Below: The rock house is well over a hundred years old. Built of all native materials, most roof beams and some latillas remain. The magnificent fireplace and excellent rock walls would be appreciated in a modern home.*





*George Brown on his horse, where he most preferred to be. The picture was taken in 1977 and a note on the back reads: "Jan. 27, 1978. Dear George, I've been meaning to send this to you for about two months, but I just have been too busy. The photographer (me) wasn't the best, but the guy in the photo is tops. Your friend, Steve Quesenberry."*

# GEORGE BROWN

## A Man For The People

as told by his wife Frances Brown to George Garrigues; photographs courtesy of Frances Brown.

August 15, 1898 was an important day at the Brown residence in Round Valley. That was the day that George, a Native American destined to leave his mark in the Owens Valley, was born.

George Brown attended the Carson Indian School at Carson City, Nevada. He was almost twenty years in 1918 when he went to work for Jim Birchim on the Birchim Ranch. After about a year, he left for a better job — breaking and riding wild or spoiled horses. In 1922, he began driving eight to ten horse teams for Bill Rowan. His job was to haul large loads, fourteen to eighteen tons of stone, from the quarry in Round Valley to the railroad station at Laws. This was slow, tendious work involving a two-day trip, much of it over loose, dry, sandy soil.

After Christmas 1923 George was hired for a forty-day cattle drive by Frank (Sage) Cornett. He helped push a thousand head of steers from Round Valley, through the Owens Valley, and over Walker Pass to Bakersfield. By the time he was twenty-six, he had become an experienced cowboy and mule skinner.

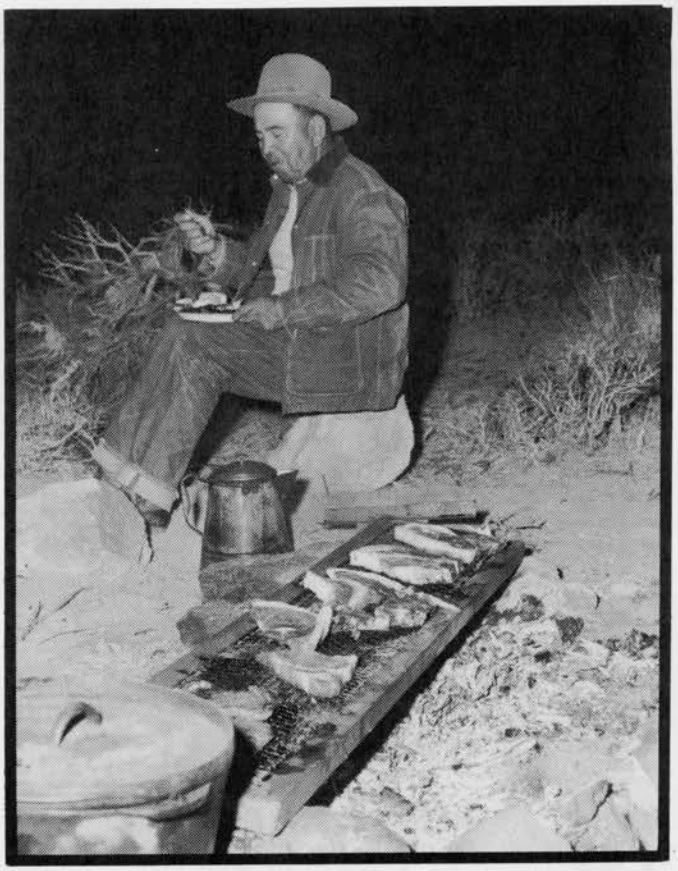
He went to work for Herb Francisco. The two men shipped two carloads of mules from Laws to Los Angeles for the Elington and Francisco Construction Company, to be used for leveling and grading the first subdivision in the Wilshire District. George's job was to see that the mules did their job.

While he was working in Los Angeles, the Indians in the area would gather at 16th and Main Streets once a month for a popular dance with music by a piano, sax, clarinet, and drum band. George attended these dances and at one of them he met his future wife, Frances Chrest.

Frances had been born in Quincy, California on February 1, 1907, and attended school at the Sherman Institute in Riverside. Frances says, "We got together at those dances. He was a cowboy and I liked that!" They were married in 1925 and George brought his bride back to Bishop on the Slim Princess. Over the years, five children were born to them: Kenneth L., Betty (Alexis), George D., Patricia (Elbers), and Polly (Cox).

In 1926, George started a dairy at Silver Lake. Frances's job was to milk the cows every morning and evening. She says, "It was a job that I didn't enjoy." After they bottled the milk, they placed the bottles in a large trough of ice cold water to cool. When it was cool, they skimmed off the cream and capped the bottles. George, in his Model T Ford, delivered it to the June Lake, Silver Lake, and Gull Lake areas and to Cunningham's Store near Mono Lake. The price was twenty-five cents a quart, delivered.

George also leased 160 acres in Round Valley from the Department of Water and Power. Every fall he drove the cattle down through Long Valley and over Sherwin Hill to Round Valley where they wintered over. Then in the spring, he drove them back to Silver Lake.



*Brown at chow time after a long day's work on a cattle drive. Curtis Phillips photo*

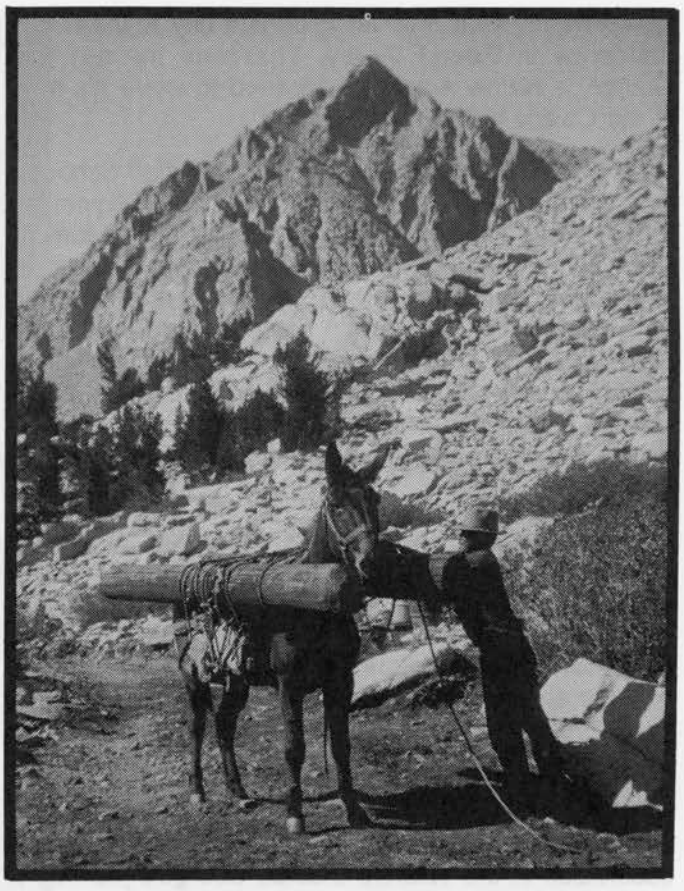
When the Inyo Bank failed in 1927, George lost all of his savings. He sold the dairy to Slim Tatum and returned to ranching, raising cattle and growing contract hay on his Round Valley lease.

When the lease expired, he sold his cattle to Cy Williams and moved into the Tom Jones house. It was leased by Frank Arcularius, and George contracted hay for all four Arcularius ranches and tended their cattle.

George was more at home on horseback than anywhere else, but one day he found himself not so "at home." He was tending herd for Frank Arcularius, riding through deep grass, when his horse spotted a snake. The startled horse started to buck and deposited George on the ground. The horse took off for unknown parts and George had a long walk back to the ranch house.

In the spring of 1934, the Jones house burned and again the Browns lost everything. Frank Arcularius was there to help, providing them with a house on the Pauly place. Eventually they leased the Roberts house on top of the little hill in Round Valley, where they remained for the next twelve years. The view was excellent and their children had fun racing up and down the steep road, but Frances mostly remembers their efforts to pump water with a gasoline powered pump to the house.

During this time, George started the Pine Creek Pack Outfit. He guided people and transported their equipment and supplies into the Pine Creek area and over Pine Pass into the French Canyon backcountry. He also packed many difficult loads of mining supplies and equipment to the Tungstar Mine in Pine Creek Canyon on the north side of Mt. Tom. All sorts of gear, lumber, and mine timbers, even a large cable, went to the mine on the backs of George's mules. The cable was a particular challenge. The Tungstar people didn't want to cut it, and asked George to bring it in in one piece. After considerable time and figuring, he found a way to fasten the whole cable on the mules.

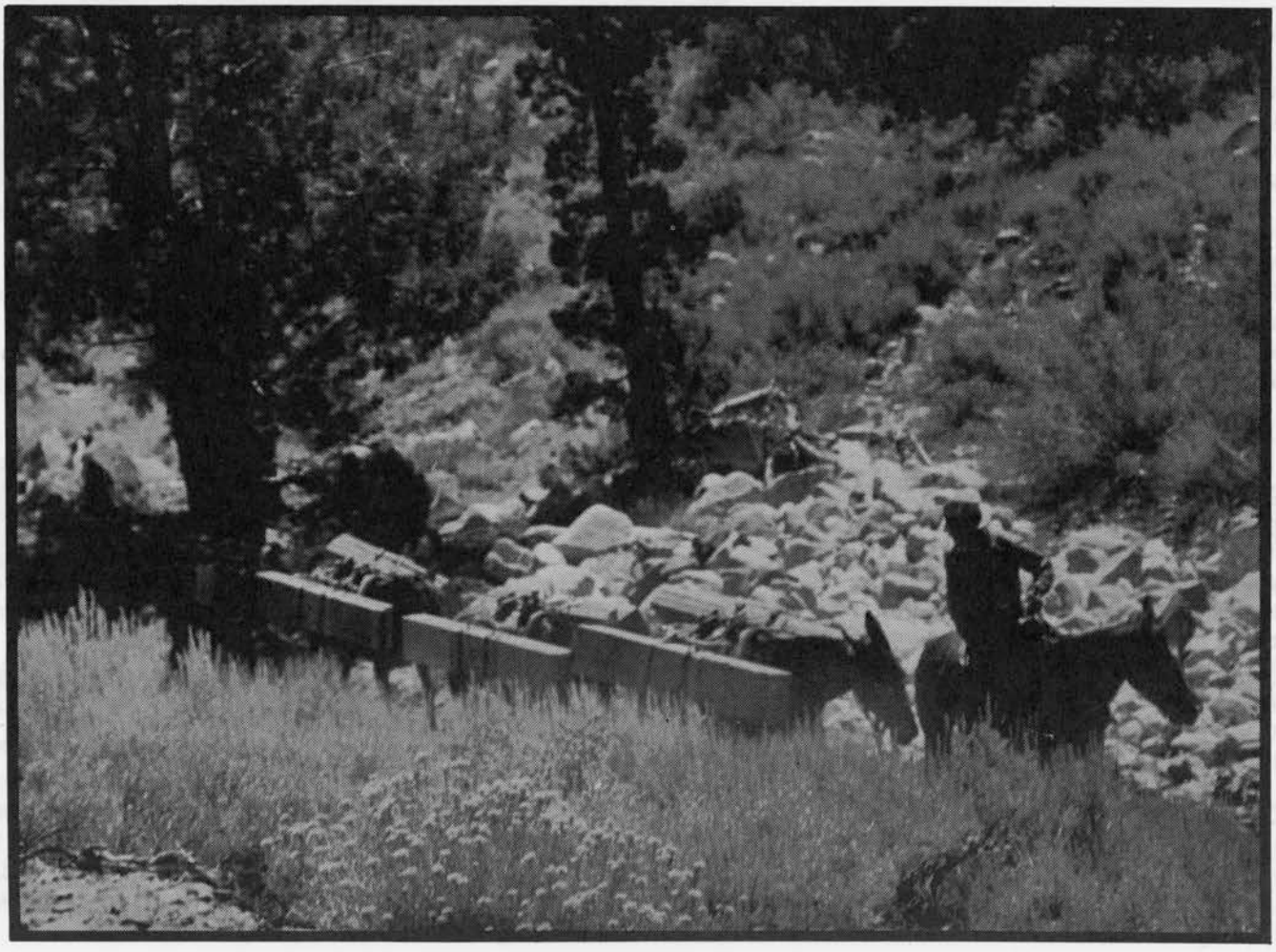


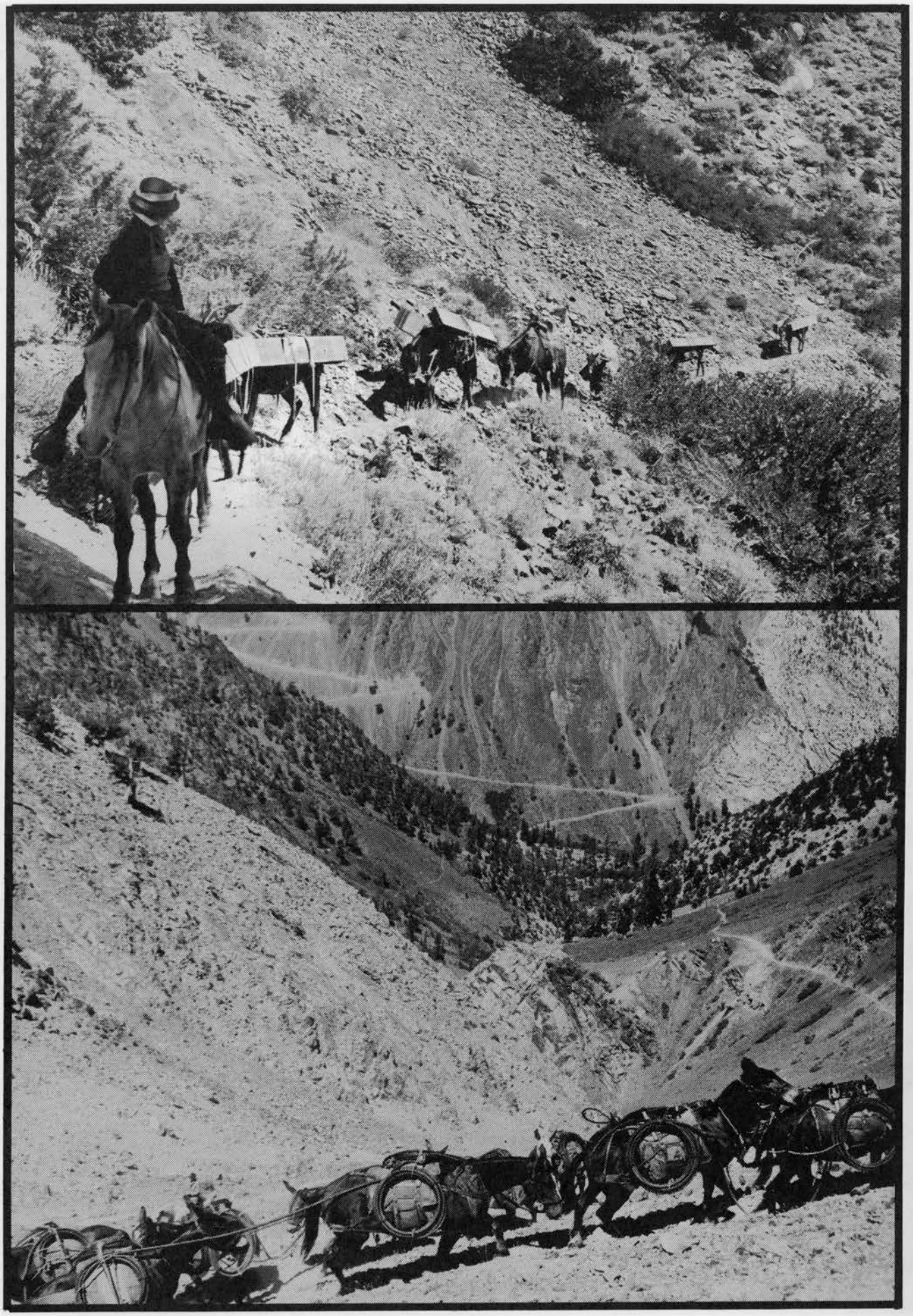
*Right: Brown packing a mule with mine timbers. Curtis Phillips photo*

*Below: Pack train with mine timbers, on the trail to Tungstar Mine. Curtis Phillips photo*

*Opposite, top: George Brown walking beside the fifth mule of the timber pack train*

*Opposite, bottom: Pack train in Pine Creek Canyon carrying cable and other supplies to Tungstar Mine*





California Interstate Telephone Company (now Contel) and California Electric Power Company (now Southern California Edison) relied on George to transport power poles and other equipment also in Pine Creek Canyon. He packed and delivered mail, even in the middle of winter when a horse or snowshoes had to be used. Then in 1943, he sold the pack station to Spray and Ernest Kinney and went to work for Jess Chance, herding cattle. This employment lasted until George received an urgent call to return to the back country.

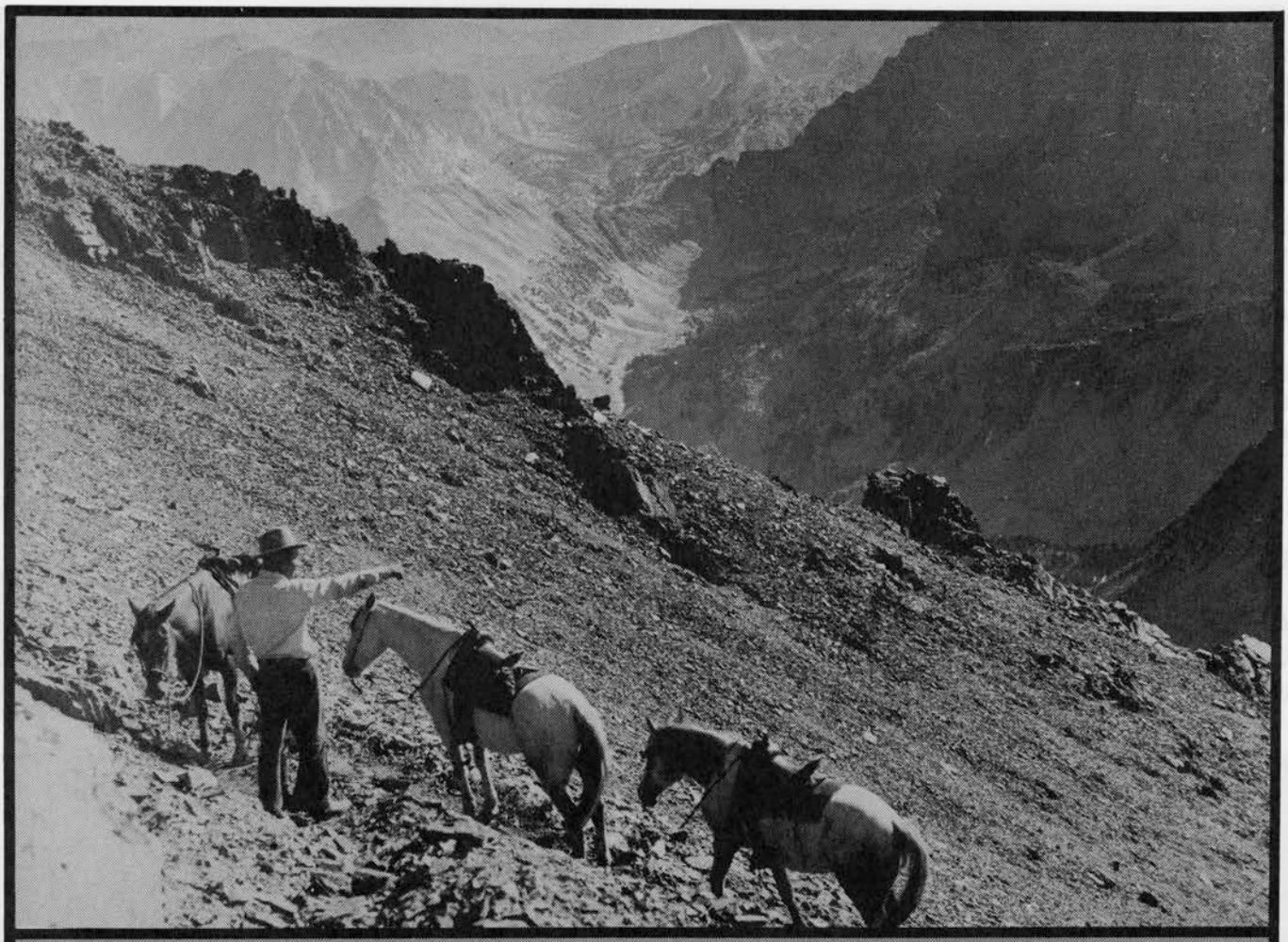
Generals George C. Marshall and Hap Arnold of World War II fame were on a vacation pack trip in the High Sierra. They had made arrangements to have mail airdropped to them on regular intervals at designated spots. Unable to locate one of the drops, they sent out an emergency call for assistance. George responded, leaving an unhappy Jess Chance, and returned to Pine Creek Canyon. He climbed up into the rocks, found the lost mail pouch, and continued on as guide for the generals' party, so impressing them that they wanted to take him to Washington D.C. when they returned. U.S. Forest Service authorities talked him out of going, for some unknown reason.

George went to work for the Deep Springs School as ranch manager in 1945, staying there for two years and then moving on to Fish Lake Valley to help Frank Alexis at the Oasis Ranch. After that, he worked for Alex Reeves, continuing for a year after Reeves' death in 1959. Alex once told George he was the only bald headed Indian he'd ever known. George replied "It's from eating too much white man's grub."

*Below: George Brown, Alex Reeves, and Lester Stewart*

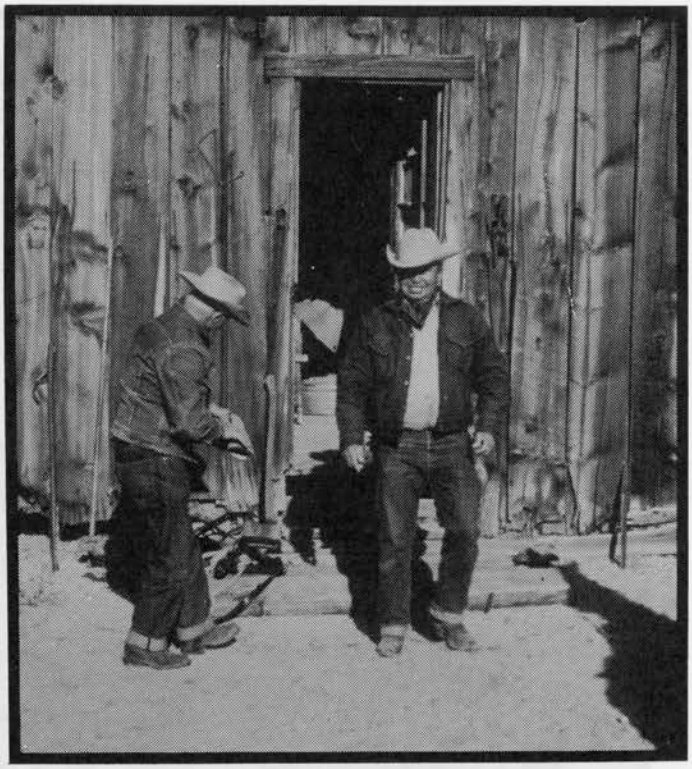
*Opposite, bottom: Brown and Les Stewart herding cattle*

*Opposite, top: Brown points out a hidden lake across Pine Canyon. Curtis Phillips photo*



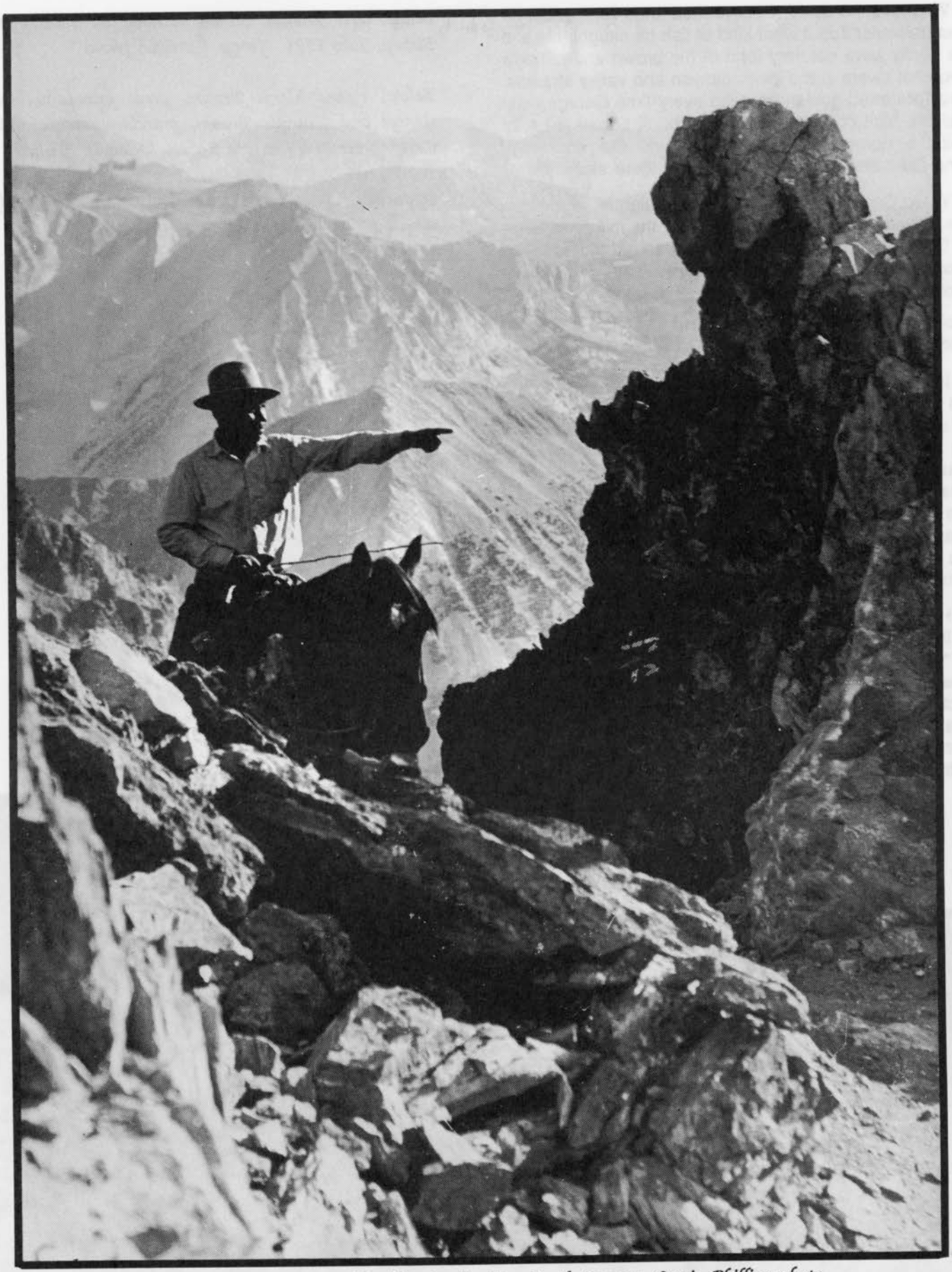
In 1960, George went to work for the Little Walker Cattleman's Association. and spent about half the year helping at their cow camp. The rest of the year was occupied driving cattle with Norman Brown in Smith Valley, at home in Bishop preparing his horses for parades, or talking in Indian language with Richie Conway.

One of the highlights of George's life was his selection as Grand Marshal for the 1969 Bishop Homecoming and Labor Day Celebration. It was an example of the esteem and high regard for George in the Owens Valley. He was at his best, riding at the head of the parade wearing his Indian costume and presiding over the various events at the Tri-County Fairgrounds and elsewhere.



*Right: Richie Conway and George Brown*

*Below: Inyo County Supervisor Wallace Partrige congratulates Brown on his selection as Grand Marshal for the 1969 Bishop Homecoming Parade.*



*Brown points out an old gold mine in Pine Creek Canyon. Curtis Phillips photo*

Whenever he could, George liked to go fishing, but he was particular about what kind of fish he caught. He and his family were not very fond of the brown and rainbow trout that swam in the lower canyon and valley streams. They preferred golden trout, so every time George went into the high country, he brought back a basket full of goldens. Some goldens had mixed with the brookies in Pine Lake and sometimes he fished there also.

When Caltrans was preparing to straighten and widen the highway over the sand hill and by the mill pond north of Bishop, there was a possibility of an old Indian burial ground in the vicinity of the new road. A team of archaeologists was called to investigate and they hired George as guide and adviser. He supervised the dig and, happily, nothing was found.

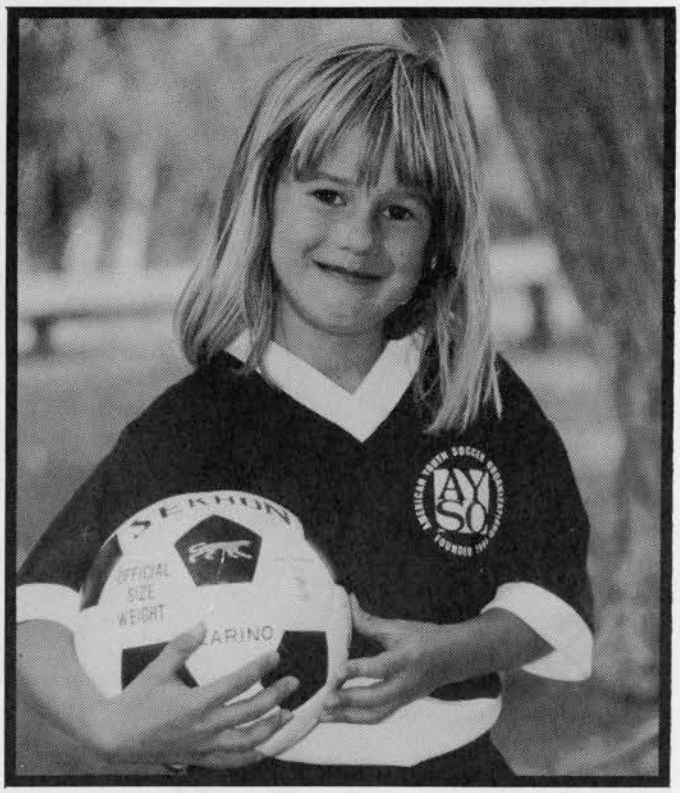
In August, 1984, at the age of eighty-six, George and his nephew Steve were enroute to Fallon for the funeral of one of George's brother's daughters. It was storming as they went over Montgomery Pass and the rain had washed out a portion of the road. There was a detour near a old mine. The truck skidded when it hit some of the tailings from the mine that had washed across the road, and George was killed. It was the end of a rich, full life for one of the most popular, well regarded Native Americans of the Bishop area.

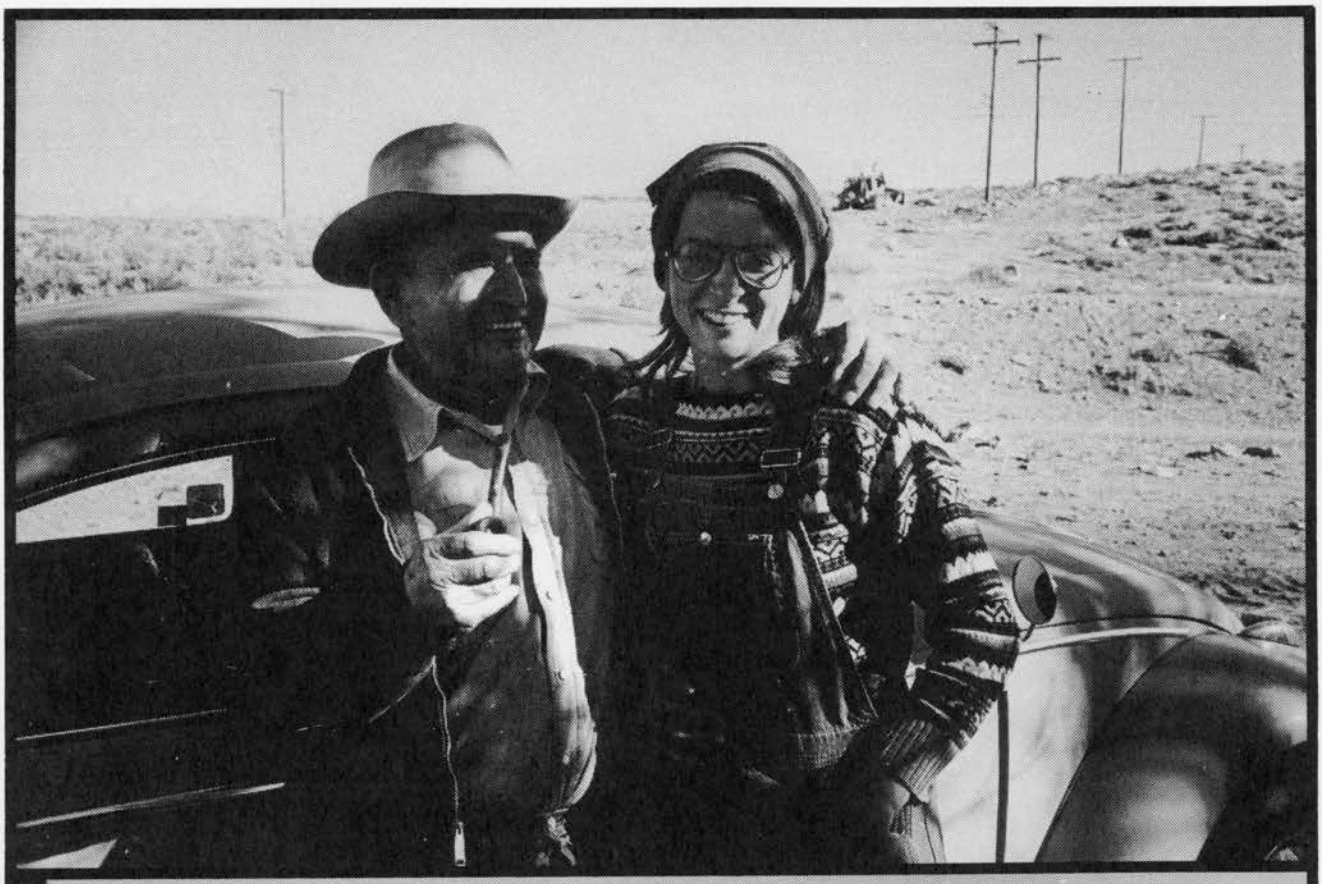
His wife, Frances, at the age of eighty-four continues to live on the Bishop reservation. She can't miss the daily "soaps" and enjoys being with her offspring. She is cheerful and alert in a house full of pleasant memories, pictures and mementos of George, their children and grandchildren. Her husband of fifty-nine years may be gone from this earth, but he can rest in peace, content with a happy, productive life. ✱

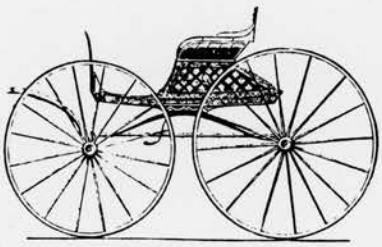
*Below, left: Frances Brown at home on Diaz Lane in Bishop, July 1991. George Garrigue photo*

*Below, right: Alexis Brown, great granddaughter of George and Frances Brown, granddaughter of Album Editor Jane and the late Robert "Himself" Fisher*

*Opposite, top: 1975: Brown and Mary Ann Bedford watching archaeologists dig during construction of a portion of Highway 395*







# THE ALBUM

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