

## Sam Lewis

Sam Lewis is one of the finest men I have ever met. Quiet, soft spoken, and a man of few words, with a heart warming smile.

When I first started doing this book, in my interviews and letters, if a person could not come up with an answer to something they would say, "Ask Sam Lewis, he can tell you." Sam did prove to be the mental historian of his time.

I met Sam for the first time when my husband brought him home for lunch. Eddie, my husband, had been introduced to Sam by Ann the Postmaster, and they became friends meeting to collect mail each day. Eddie has greatly admired him ever since.

When I started to check on the past history of Little Lake Post Office, I asked Sam what he could remember on the subject. As Sam was answering these questions he would mention this or that person and I began to realize how much of a role these people played in not only the post office story, but in valley events. Without them there would be nothing to write about the post office or the valley.

The last day Sam was here in the valley, I gave him a list of questions I needed answered. He invited Eddie and I to his new home in La Verne, California. We did make the trip and had a lovely visit, finding it difficult to leave such grand people. Sam made available a collection of pictures from which I found it difficult to select some as there were so many. Each one told of some part of Sam's life, a place where he had been, or someone he knew. I must say for a man of few words Sam did himself proud. I appreciate all the time and pictures he loaned me.

Sam was born in Bailsburg, Illinois, on July 31, 1893 to Charles William and Estella Lewis. He has one brother, Charles William, Jr., and one sister, Isabelle. In 1895 when Sam was two years old his folks moved to Carlsbad, New Mexico (at that time called Eddy, New Mexico). Sam's uncle, Sam Ballard, was a construction engineer for the Santa Fe Railroad and his father came out to help with the laying of the rails from Pecos to Amarillo, Texas. After Sam grew to manhood he went to Arizona, then took the train to Los Angeles in 1912, where his aunt, Eva T Harris lived, seeking his fortune. When Sam was settled he took a job with the Harris Oil Company, pulling wells with a team of horses, and later he became a pipe fitter. His last job with the company was driving a truck oiling roads all over southern California. One outstanding job he worked on was oiling the race track at Ascot Speedway. The imported oil trucks were made in Switzerland, had hard solid rubber tires, and were known as a Saur.

In July of 1914 Sam, feeling the need for wide open spaces, left Los Angeles riding his horse and leading a pack horse loaded with his worldly possessions. He was not quite sure where he was going, but he had heard about the building of the Los Angeles Aqueduct along the east side of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. He obtained a map to see just where this was, noticed it did not seem too populated, and made his destination Little Lake. His last night on the trail was spent at Coyote Holes (Freeman Junction). To his great surprise he saw a car coming down the trail the next morning, of all places away out here, where the stage lines and horses were the mode of transportation. After the shock had worn off he asked the driver if they had come from Little Lake, and they said, "yes, does this trail take us to Los Angeles?" Sam said it did and that he had just come from there a several days ago. Still amazed at seeing a car, they parted company going on their respective ways.

On August 4, 1914 Sam arrived at Little Lake, hot, tired, and needing a job. He found employment with Riley Hart who was running the Little Lake spread which had horses and cattle. Sam remained until fall, breaking 30 head of horses before leaving. At Little Lake the only buildings were a hotel and saloon. The hotel was patronized by weary travelers, and the saloon quenched the thirst of cattlemen and aqueduct workers. It was here that Sam heard the news that war had been declared. (WW One).

Came the first of 1915 Sam moved further north into Rose Springs Valley, five miles north of Little Lake. He worked for Collin, Beal, and Skiel, drilling a water well and putting in a pump. The well is still there today. After the well was completed, Sam moved back south a few miles and tried his hand working for the Los Angeles Aqueduct. Sam said, "gas was so bad in the Soda Hill tunnel it made everyone sick one day. I had enough underground. High places suited me better, so I stayed with my horses and wide open spaces."

Following that one day in the tunnel, Sam went to Indian Wells Valley, to work for J D Callaway, who ran cattle and horses in the valley and Argus Mountains, breaking horses, rounding up cattle and branding. The Callaway Ranch was located on what is now the Naval Weapons Center, China Lake.

Sam also worked for John Lubkin for a time, then Bill Bramlette in 1915. While working for Bill, Sam homesteaded a place on Portuguese Bench in 1916, and built himself a tent home. He called his place the High Lonesome Ranch. Located eight miles north of Little Lake, and two miles west of Highway 395, along a lovely green flat up against the Sierra Mountains. It was called Portuguese Bench before Sam homesteaded because a group of Portuguese people would grass their cattle there and did not try to improve upon the land, and seemed to have no desire to really put roots down in any one spot.

Sam would stay at the Bramlette's place during the week while working. Then he would return to his own little abode taking a load of hay with him. Everyone teased him about needing a wife, so some of the ladies at the Bramlette's decided they would fix him up with a lady friend. Ma Toumey, Mrs. White and Mrs. Elvira Bramlette took a pair of Ma's drawers and stuffed them full of rags etc., for the body, added a head, then put some of Ma's clothing on the dummy

When Sam was ready to leave for his place on the week-end they gave him this "friend" and of course they all had a good laugh. Sam said, I guess Ma thought she was going to get her drawers and clothing back, but I fooled them, I took my lady friend home with me." This type of little joke and a few dances, along with the Fourth of July celebrations in Lone Pine, was the way people had fun and recreation to divert their minds from the hard work and perhaps sorrow from the loss of a loved one who may have perished from the freezing weather or exposure, some from heart failure due to the strenuous hard work.

The High Lonesome Ranch did not remain lonesome too long, Sam married Olive Truax from Inyokern, in 1918. Her folks had a homestead south of town. Sam finally found his fortune, not wealth in coins but a lovely wife, a good piece of land, and a start to the pack station he would one day have. Olive and Sam built a home on the bench and moved from their tent home into their first frame house, looking out across the entire valley, later enlarging it, adding the second story with a glassed in porch. Sitting on this porch looking out across the lower land you have the feeling of sitting on top of the world watching everything passing by. From his ranch Sam has seen many changes taking place, but he kept his ranch as nature had intended, quiet and peaceful.

After homesteading, Sam made several trips into Los Angeles bringing back horses to be used for a pack station he wanted to start. One of the most outstanding trips he made was returning with a wagon and twenty head of horses. This was quite a feat and a long trip in those days, it was never less than five days, and sometimes more. Sam said, "That trip taught me a lot, I had most of the horses broke before I arrived home. After they wrapped themselves around a few posts and almost broke their necks, they soon began to understand what they were supposed to do." He broke his horses to be driven, rather than lead as many guides do, he felt this served his purpose better.

Buying groceries was quite a feat also. They would order their food by mail from Ralph's Market in Los Angeles, then it was shipped Parcel Post to Little Lake. I guess you made sure you did not run out of the essentials, or hoped your order arrived before you did.

It was not until after World War One that Sam returned from serving his country in the U S Navy. He was able to start his pack station, along with his cattle business. Drought and national depression put him out of the cattle business in 1922. Hard work and strong determination kept him in the packing business, out of which came many friendships.

Sam packed many prominent people into the Sierras in the early 1920's. (Following this article on Sam I will give a list of some of those people) Sometimes there would be as many as fifty people scattered through different camps, from South Fork of the Kern River to Trout Creek, Fish Creek, Casa Vieja and Long Canyon to Hell Hole on the main Kern River, to name a few places.

He is very proud to have taken such people into the mountains on pack trips, but was a little hesitant to talk much about it feeling people would think he was bragging. He should be proud, Sam was selling his services, if he had not done a good job these people would not have returned each year, nor would their children in later years hire Sam as their guide into the wilderness camps. The trails were many for these trips, throughout Monache Plateau, from Mount Whitney to Domeland, from Summit to the main Kern River, some were fishing trips, others were for hunting. Sam built four forest camps for his packers, cutting his own logs, then hauling them to camp sites with a team of horses. He built cabins for his customers, but was very careful not to disturb anymore of the natural beauty than was necessary. Between trips Sam did fur trapping to supplement his income. I have seen several of the prize skins he cured for his own use, and they are beautiful. Olive accompanied him on many of his pack trips and was chief cook.

and bottle washer, and from what I have been told, a darn good one. She spent many hours working alongside Sam, helping build their packing business.

Sam and Olive raised six children, two sons and four daughters. In order they are; Lucille, Estella, Sam Jr., Helen, Richard and Barbara. They brought much joy and love to High Lonesome Ranch.

Following World War Two things began to change drastically for the packing business, and along with Sam's age, he was out of the business completely in 1959. The children grew and married, and his wife died in the early 1960's. The High Lonesome became lonesome once again.

Sam's daughter introduced him to her friend's mother, Ruth Thuaxton, a very lovely and sweet woman. A loving friendship developed and they were married December 15, 1968.

Ruth and Sam surprised everyone in the valley by announcing their marriage on their Christmas cards. Sam came by the post office one afternoon leaving a stack of cards with Postmaster Ann, wanting them mailed the next day and informed her he would be gone for a few days. Well, when we received our cards they were signed from Sam and his new boss Ruth. Everyone was so happy for them, now that the High Lonesome was no longer lonesome anymore.

They moved from the valley in June of 1971 to Ruth's home in La Verne, California. It was the valley's loss when they left, but Sam will always be here in our hearts.

### **Men Sam Took Packing**

This is only a small list of some of the people who went packing with Sam. Some of these went many years. The list is just as it was given to me.

The Swing family of San Bernardino, Senator Ralph Swing, Congressman Everet Swing, Congressman Phil Swing and Congressman Al Swing. They started to pack in 1923 and continued for several years.

Senator Miguel Estudillo of Riverside, 1931 and continuing for several years.

Attorney Walter T. Casey of Los Angeles, packed for 30 years starting in 1922.

Vince Yorba from the old Spanish land grant family, Anaheim in the 1920's.

George C. Friese, San Marino, many years starting in the 1920's.

Charles Strickfaden, packed many times starting in 1923, he was a member of the Paul Whiteman Orchestra.

Cole family of Whittier; Charlie, Roy and Clifford, packed for over 30 years.

Barker Brothers of the furniture company; Clarence, Lawrence and Earl, starting in 1925.

E. R. Maule and family, Santa Monica, starting in 1925.

Senator Jimmie Utt, Tustin, California.

Artist Kem Weber, from Santa Barbara, bringing many of his friends and family through the years.

Fletcher Bowran, once Mayor of Los Angeles, packed with Sam for over 30 years.

Race driver Earl Cooper and his wife. Earl was a driver during the times of Barney Oldfield's day, he started to pack in 1926.

Senator Fletcher and family of San Diego.

Attorney Harry G. Bodkin, Doctor Ernest G. Bashor, and so many others, from all walks of life, business man, farmers and mechanics, each coming to Sam for a guide into the beautiful Sierra Nevada Mountains.