

Walter Chalfant

By George W. Savage



EW pioneers have either the opportunity or the ability to write of the scenes of their childhood and incidents such as comprise this book-truly from the pen of one of their own kind.

W. A. ("Bill") Chalfant is the dean of California editors, a pioneer eastern-California newspaperman who has chronicled the history of this last frontier through the years beginning even when he was a hand typesetter on Inyo County's first newspaper, the *Inyo Independent* of Independence.

He was born to Mr. and Mrs. P. A. Chalfant, then residents of that storied city of the Comstock Lode, Virginia City, Nevada. Two years later his parents forsook the gold and silver diggings of the Comstock and moved to the new community of Independence, county seat of Inyo County in California. That same year Bill's father, P. A. Chalfant, and a partner started the *Inyo Independent*, now in its seventy-second year. In this shop, as a small boy, Bill first learned the fascination of the printing trade. The smell of printer's ink entered his nostrils and it continues to run too strongly within his veins for him to leave his chosen profession.

In 1881, P. A. Chalfant sold the *Inyo Independent* to his partner, but Bill continued to work there for a time, until he failed to receive compensation due him and went on to Bishop, where his parents had moved in the meantime.

His father could not long remain away from his own field and in 1885, on April 4, the firm of P. A. Chalfant and Son initiated publication of the *Inyo Register* of Bishop. In 1887 Bill took over the active editorship and, as this book comes off the press, he has completed a remarkable record of serving as editor of this newspaper continuously at the same editorial desk for fifty-five years. By January 1, 1889, he was not only its editor but also its sole owner and publisher. Although he sold the *Inyo Register* on January 2, 1942, to the publishing firm of George W. Savage and Roy L. French, Mr. Chalfant continues as its revered and respected editor.

His love for Inyo is marked by his own appreciation of the towering peaks of the High Sierra and the grotesque beauty of Death Valley and the desert.

His life has been full of action, of editorial battles fought and won, of civic leadership that is typical of a man who knows well whereof he speaks-and writes. He figured prominently in the development of Bishop and the entire Inyo-Mono region of California. He fought tirelessly for the rights of the people of Inyo in their fight with the City of Los Angeles over the Valley water supply. Yet, when hotheads began dynamiting the Los Angeles aqueduct, he opposed this action as bad judgment on their part and was threatened with being run out of town.

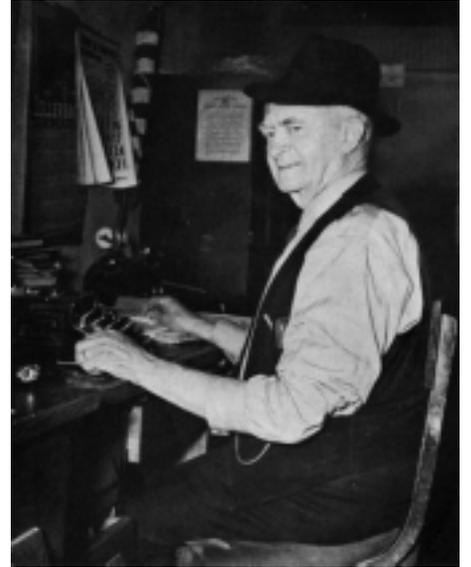
More recently he has served with others on the Inyo Associates Committee on relations with the City of Los Angeles. In part, through his wise counsel and sense of justice, new consideration for the hopes of the Owens

Valley people has been extended and he has lived to see town properties being resold by the great city to local residents and many acres of rich Owens Valley land placed back in production.

For many years he has been gathering the material which is included in this book. Much of it has appeared as a regular column, "Tales of the Pioneers," in the Inyo Register. He also is the author of *The Story of Inyo*, *Outposts of Civilization*, and *Death Valley, the Facts*.

He is chairman of the Advisory Board of the Bank of America in his own home town. His counsel is respected as a member of the Advisory Board of the Automobile Club of Southern California; yet he has never driven a car in his life, and the only automobile he ever owned was one he gave away in a subscription contest years ago when automobiles were a curiosity.

A charter member of the Inyo Associates, he is also a charter member of the Knights of Pythias Lodge, has been secretary of Winnedumah Lodge, F. and A.M., Bishop, for forty-one years, and is a thirty-year member of Islam Shrine, San Francisco. Likewise, he is a charter member of Bishop Rotary Club, with a 100 per cent attendance record. Some time ago when he was indisposed at home, Rotary members met in his bedroom to assure his attendance record. Recently, he and his helpmate, Flora Mallory Chalfant, were honored by the Rotary Club and other citizens of Inyo-Mono on the occasion of their fiftieth wedding anniversary.



Honors mean little to him, as long as he can continue to serve his people as a country editor should. He enjoys a rich humor that is best known by that group of friends to whom he has taught the rudiments of pinochle. He continues to lead a rich and active life, recounting the day's happenings, interpreting them in the foundations of the past, but ever looking forward to the opportunities of the future. Such is Bill Chalfant, country editor in our America.

LONE PINE, CALIFORNIA
October 5, 1942

Excerpt taken from *Tales of the Pioneers*
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