

Bridgeport Valley Dec 23 - 82ms etc '64 Sand cordoba

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Captions, Bridgeport

1. Bridgeport, county seat of Mono, when #395 was to the northeast and not through main street.

Anna (Dechambeau) McKenzie collec.

2. Early snow frosts the yard fence at the Bill Elliot home in Bridgeport Valley.

Adele Reed photo

3. An ore wagon that had seen heavy work.

Adele Reed photo

4. Logging in the old days near Boulder Lodge, June Lake.

U. S. Forest Service collection

5. The Bridgeport Courthouse, a very beautiful antique that is in daily use.

Adele Reed Photo

No 24 Bridgeport Palley Dec 23-'82

1 small pit in

1 large

Big Meadows

PIONEER DAYS

Bridgeport Valley Steeped in History

by Adele Reed

Big Meadows, as first named, was so appropriate for the green valley with its superb background of tall, majestic peaks of the Sierra Nevada range.

Great patches of snow lingered through summer time, water in the valley was plentiful and meadow grass grew tall. Three sparkling streams, the East Walker, Robinson Creek and Buckeye Creek found their way through the area. The water went on down the East Walker Canyon and into Nevada. It joined the West Walker River, eventually becoming the lifeline to the high desert lake named Walker. The river and the lake were thus named in honor of expedition leader Joseph Walker whose tracks lead through the Big Meadows on an early westward crossing of the mighty Sierra.

One of the first pioneers to discover the well-favored valley was a man named Napoleon Bonapart Hunnewill. He soon brought his family by oxen team and settled on acreage. To this day a huge part of the meadowland is known as the Hunnewill Guest or Dude Ranch and large herds of cattle are seen.

Several sawmills were important in the surrounding hills. Lumber was hauled by oxen for building in Bridgeport and later in the fast growing mining camp of Bodie. Transportation by wagon and long teams and all other way of horse travel soon kept the roads busy. The need of supplies from the western part of California brought about big business in freighting, as well as staging.

We quote the following notes from "Geographic and Economic history of the Carson, Walker and Mono Basins in Nevada and California" with permission from the Regional Forester, California Region and Wynne L. Maule, son of the late author, Wm. M. Maule.

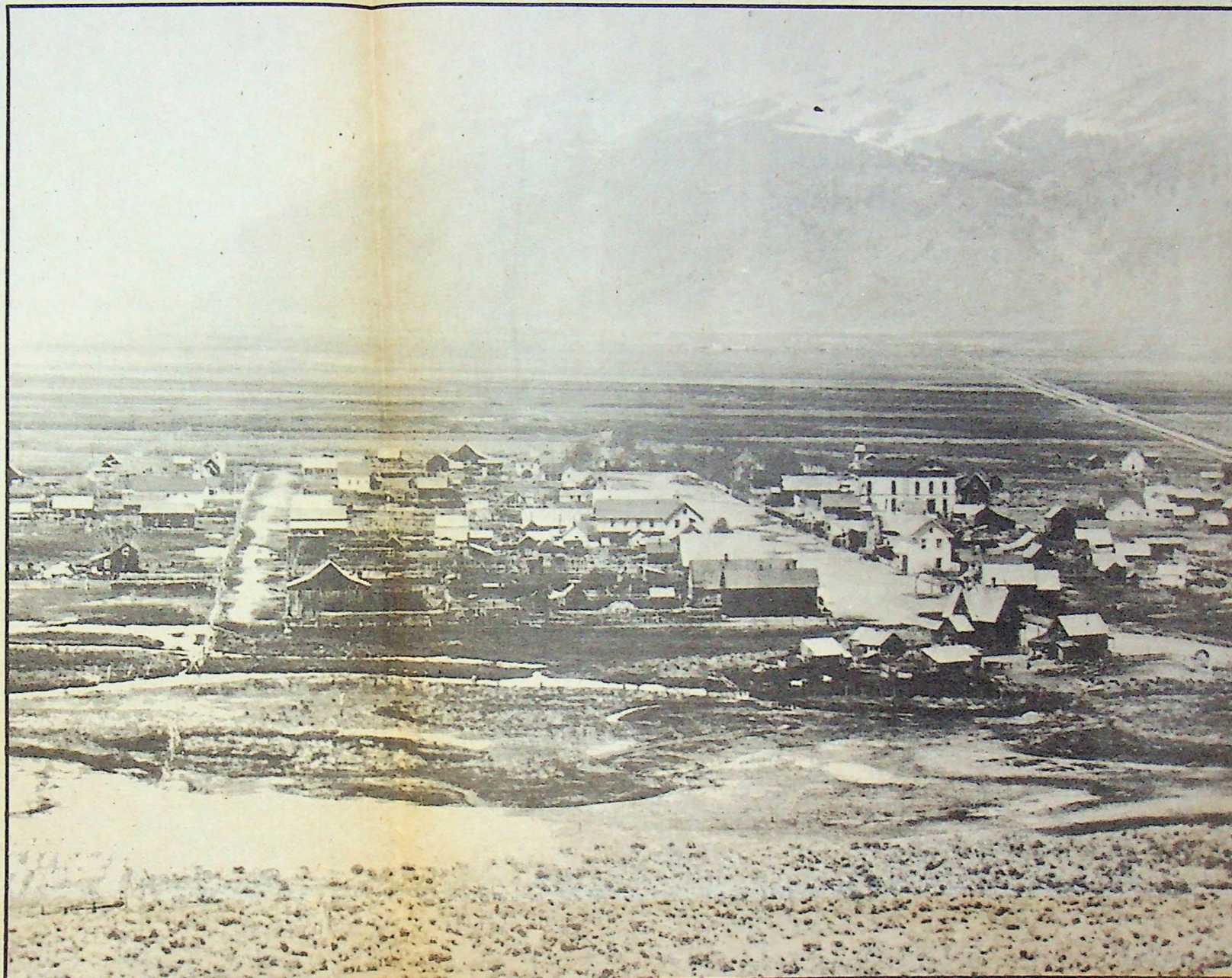
"Roads reach back into the late 1840's in line with the gold rush to California. Certain of the old road franchises granted by Nevada Territory were made effective in portions of Alpine and Mono counties. It was customary for the person or company securing a franchise, merely to construct and maintain the road. Various stage lines then arranged to use the road under contract. Numerous freighting teams in a like manner arranged for their needs. In addition there was a heavy use by saddle and pack stock as well as domestic stock driven from place to place. The franchise always stipulated the rates to be charged for the particular use of the road.

An important subsidiary to the use was the toll-house and gate and a nearby hostelry with hotel and bar, named under 'Stations.' Contract for a road from Sonora to Mono in 1863 was granted to W.G. Heslep, Judge Radcliff, D.O. McCarthy, et al. It was begun as a free road but due to extreme cost was made a toll road.

"When Bodie, so-called 'Shooters Town,' was booming in 1877 a stage line was established between Sonora and Bodie and used for four years. The Bodie stage had six standing horses at the 'stations,' Sonora, Sugar Pine, Cow Creek, Bakers Station, Leavitt, Fales Hot Springs, Bridgeport, Morman Ranch and Bodie, a total of 54 animals and eight drivers.

"Cooper and McCarthy ran a mule pack train and saddle ponies. In addition large freight teams operated over the road requiring two weeks to make the trip. A road was built from the Goat Ranch 'station' to connect with the stage road at Morman Ranch.

"The Lundy-Tioga Pack Trail was built in 1881 when Archie Leonard, a Yosemite guide, employed a 10 horse saddle train between Lundy and Yosemite. The day a half trip cost \$8 each way. This trail-way led from Tioga into Lake Canyon and down Mill Creek to Lundy. This way was also used to transport heavy machinery from Lundy to the Tioga Mine by pack train.



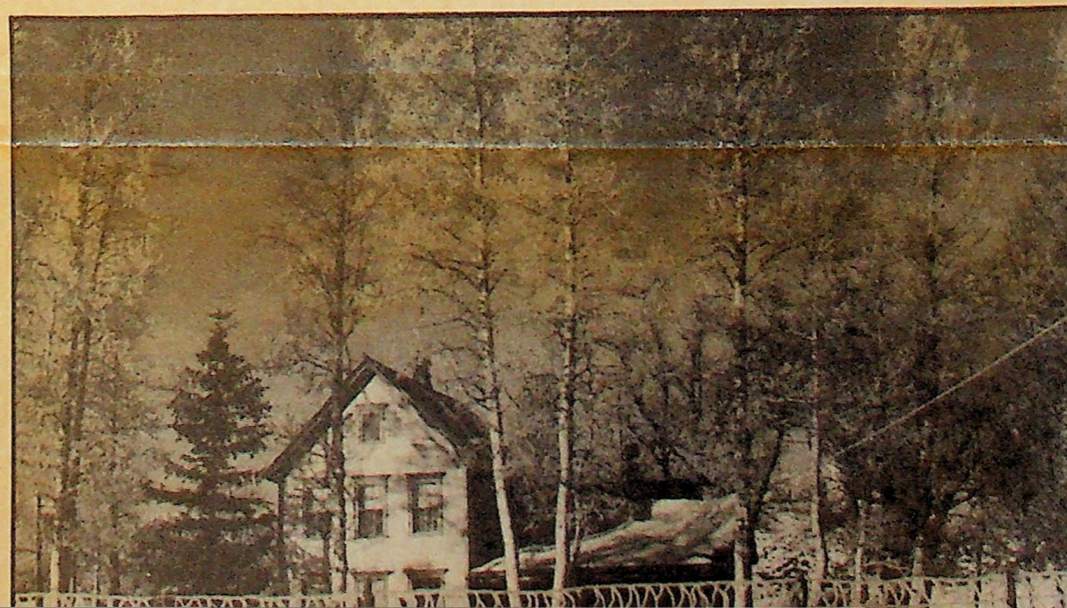
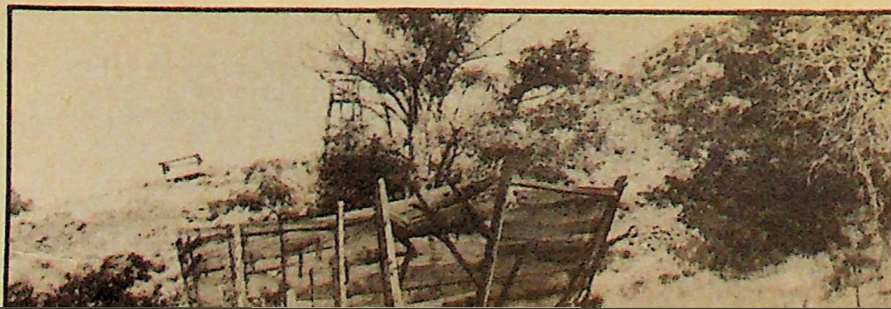
1882. Notice of location of "Wagon Road."

"A wagon road was to be built to run from the Bridgeport Toll Road on the East Walker River about 10 or 12 miles distant in a northerly course from Bridgeport and about three or four miles in a southerly direction from Dutch Fred's Ranch on the river. Then running across the hills lying between the river and Frying Pan Creek to Dorson's Ranch on Frying Pan Creek. Thence across the foothills and the mouth of Ferris Canyon to the new town of Williamstown near the base of the foothills of the Sweetwater Range. Surveyed and marked by stakes or monuments of stone."

Inquiring about the Bridgeport Toll Road we were advised to see an old-timer named M.A. "Slick" Bryant. It turned out he was a native son and very helpful and interesting. We quote from his recollections:

BRIDGEPORT, county seat of Mono, when No. 395 was to the northeast and not through Main Street.

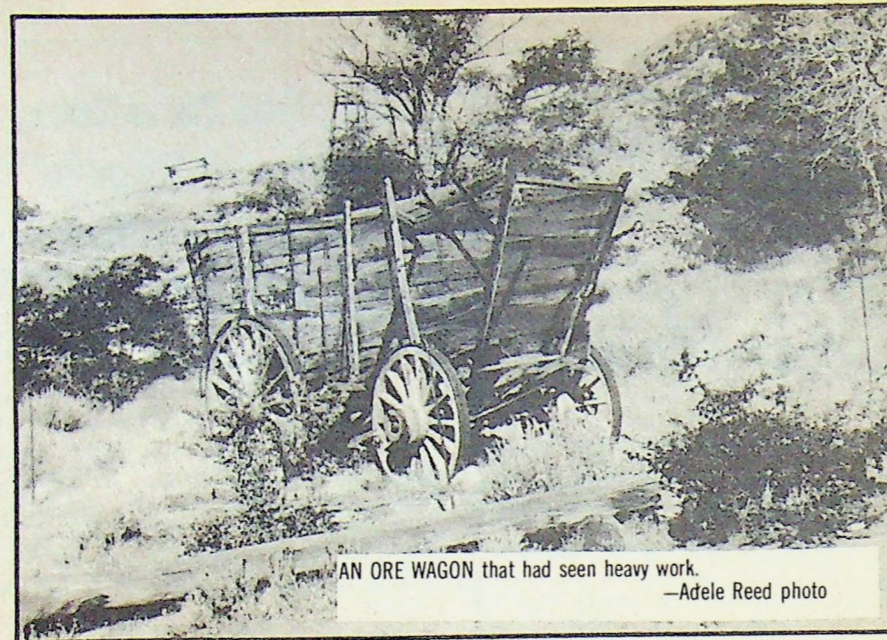
—Anna (Dechambeau) McKenzie collec.



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AN ORE WAGON that had seen heavy work.
—Adele Reed photo

"Hawthorne to Bodie—A wagon road was built from near the north end of Whiskey Flat, near the south end of Walker Lake, to Aurora and Bodie, 35 or 40 miles in length, starting at Hawthorne. In the June 10, 1881 issue of the Bodie Free Press, the U.S. Stage Company advertised three routes. One, Bodie to Hawthorne; two, Bodie to Carson; three, Bodie to Bridgeport. Clugage & Co., owners, J.S. Penfield, agent.

"Carson to Aurora—Daily stage through Genoa, 13 mi.; Spragues (Double Springs) 22 mi.; Walker River, 17 mi.; Wellington (Hoyes) 5 mi.; Pine Grove 25 mi.; Rockland 5 mi.; Elbow 20 mi.; Aurora, 17 mi.

"Toll-road, Mono Lake to Bodie. Andrew Thomson was the first to take up property at the site of Tioga Lake on the west end of Mono Lake. Andrew owned and operated a toll-house there which was discontinued in the early '70's when Jack Hammond bought the property. The original building burned down in January 1937. Thomson Creek leading to the lodge was named for Andrew Thomson.

"A road was built in the late '70's by Henry S. Williams and stages operated by Clugage. The 'stations' were: Nigger Dan's, Powell Place (east slope Powell Mtn.); Wichmans Place; Whiskey Springs; Summit Spring; Marietta and Teel's Marsh.

"The toll charges on the early road from Aurora to Owensville on the Owens River in Inyo were, in 1864: Wagon and span, \$1; empty team, 50 cents; buggy and two horses, \$1; man on horse, 25 cents; pack horse, 15 cents.

"Sweetwater was established by Henry S. Williams late in 1870. He was a prominent rancher and stockman and had a large freighting business to Aurora, Bodie and Belleville. A fine large spring at the ranch gave it the well known name.

A unique way of carrying mail over the Sierra in winter from Sonora to Bridgeport before roads was by men on snowshoes. It was relayed from man to man living along the Sonora Trail at different points. The six men were known as the "Snowshoe Mail Men" and theirs was an important service until the road was built.

A colorful road name of old led us to the historical Bridgeport courthouse and its interesting pre-emption files. We found the location of the "Frying Pan Wagon Road" in a pre-emption notice by W.H. Virden, Mar.,

Bridgeport Toll Road on the East Walker River about 10 or 12 miles distant in a northerly course from Bridgeport and about three or four miles in a southerly direction from Dutch Fred's Ranch on the river. Then running across the hills lying between the river and Frying Pan Creek to Dorson's Ranch on Frying Pan Creek. Thence across the foothills and the mouth of Ferris Canyon to the new town of Williamstown near the base of the foothills of the Sweetwater Range. Surveyed and marked by stakes or monuments of stone."

Inquiring about the Bridgeport Toll Road we were advised to see an old-timer named M.A. "Slick" Bryant. It turned out he was a native son and very helpful and interesting. We quote from his recollections:

"In 1868 my grandfather, A.F. Bryant, who settled here in 1863, and two friends, Dave Hays and J.J. Welch, also pioneers, decided they needed an outlet road from Bridgeport to the Nevada state line and to the stage road from Bodie and Aurora north.

"They floated bonds and built the East Walker River Road that was used as a Toll-road. The 'station' was about 60 feet north of the present bridge on East Walker. The manager was Dave Hays who collected charges as follows: team or auto, 75 cents; saddle horse, 25 cents. The charges were discontinued in early 1900 and it became a county road that was taken over by the state in 1933.

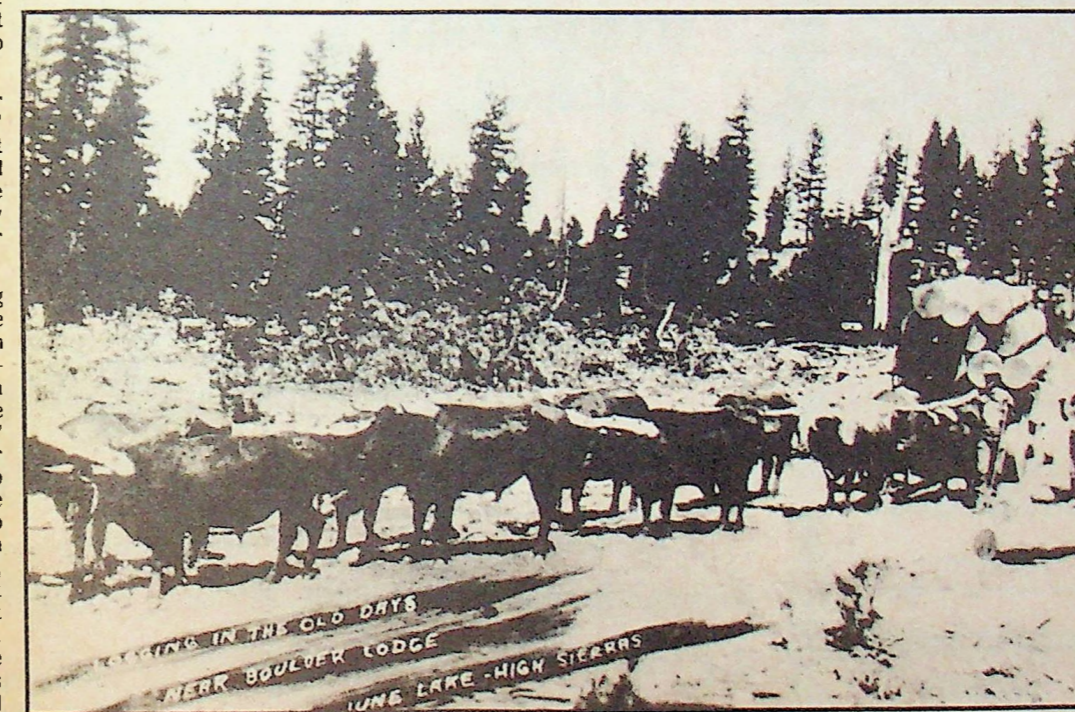
Of the many ranchers who had homesteaded in Big Meadows there were eight or nine who sold their fine property to the Walker River Irrigation Company in 1923. A dam was built and the homes and all appurtenances were removed and soon the fertile alfalfa fields were covered by the Bridgeport Reservoir. The water was taken to irrigate Nevada land. 'Slick's' grandfather was one who sold, although retaining other property in and near town. The valley was great sheep and cattle country in summer. Due to the extreme winters the stock were trailed, and later trucked, to lower and warmer climes. Bryant was of help with interest and names: "Cattle were trailed to Carson, Smith and Mason Valleys by both West and East Walker Roads. South of town, Miller & Lux owned about 12,000 acres of meadowland and had big cattle herds. It was purchased by the Rickey Land and Cattle Company and then Strosnider became the owner. It was called the Point Ranch where the big curve in the road is seen. Others in the valley were Bill Elliot, Pete Borsini, the Simpson property north of Buckeye Creek and the Chichester Field north of the Hunnewill place.

"There were large flocks of sheep brought in each spring and some of the early ones were: John and Joe Giraud, C.E. Wedertz, Fred Fulstone, Frank and Jim Compton and G.B. Day. The Domingo Saldubehere family trailed vast herds the 'Long Trail' from Bakersfield many years. A son now trucks a flock in that area seen grazing along the meadows and foothills

—Anna (Dechambeau) McKenzie collec.



EARLY SNOW frosts the yard fence at the Bill Elliot home in Bridgeport Valley.
—Adele Reed photo



LOGGING in the old days near Boulder Lodge, June Lake.
—U.S. Forest Service collection

north of Conway Summit in a scenic area. The Masonic and Bodie hills and all the meadows surrounding Bridgeport Valley were sheeped in summer. I used to know at least 13 sheepmen with flocks of two to three thousand head, now about three outfits come through.

"You asked about Antelope Valley in northern Mono. It was a pretty valley with sheep and cattle

ranches running to Topaz Lake and the Nevada border. Some of the sheepmen I remember were: Virgil Cornell, Ruby and Guy Terry, Harry Powell, Jim McKay, Albert Roberts and at Wellington, Ira Fallon. Also the Antelope Land and Cattle Company had big holdings."