

Pioneer Days. A new way of transport (Saws)  
By Adèle Reed.

July 2-'81

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Captions--A new way of transport

1. Heavy equipment was hauled from Laws up Bishop Creek by teams and wagons in 1904 by Spray Kinney. The Power Company was building plant four. Drivers were Spray, jerk line; Fred Brooks and Will Calloway and swampers. This picture was taken near the present day postoffice on West Line. Ernie Kinney collection
2. Spray Kinney, logger, mule skinner, packer and all around helper. Ernie Kinney collection
3. A 1915 or '16 Dodge auto somewhere on the first road built up Bishop Creek. U. S. Forest Service collection
4. In the early 1880's the C. and C. Railroad crossed the state line into Inyo county. Ray Mcmurry collection
5. Hand operated turntable at Laws Depot, one of the last of it's kind in the west. Adele Reed collection
6. Florence Smith, pioneer and postmistress for many years. Don Calkins photo

7. Post Office - Laws, Florence and Joe



No 8 New Transport July 2-81

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PIONEER DAYS

A NEW WAY OF TRANSPORT. By Adele Reed E

The little, rural town of Laws, California...midst early stock farms, alfalfa ranches, orchards...became, in the 1880's an important railroad center. The "Iron Horse" had arrived in a remote valley served only by wagon and team or stage over long, rough roads.

The Carson and Colorado Railroad ran from Mound House near Carson City in Nevada and entered the Owens River Valley over Montgomery Pass as a narrow gauge. It was given the name Slim Princess and its route was east of the Owens River ending at Keeler near Owens Lake in southern Inyo.

~~Many~~ Stations serviced each town or settlement which meant that stages and wagons were busy the few miles between. The big wooden water tanks that serviced the C. and C. were seen near stations or wherever needed

At Laws a Depot building, a station master's home, a water storage tank and a turntable were built. Transport to the booming mining towns or camps in Nevada promised a good market for livestock, produce and hay as well as passenger travel became important. In 1908 the Southern Pacific built a standard gauge line from Mojave to Owenyo near Lone Pine connecting with the narrow gauge, thus promoting through travel.

We visited with <sup>the late</sup> Florence Smith a few years back and her recollections of her growing up years at Laws belong to this writing.

"My mother was born in Indiana in 1859 and Father in Tennessee in 1849, They married in Missouri in 1874 and decided to travel west, they had a dream of a fine new land. On April 10, 1874 they joined a wagon train made up of relatives and friends. After many difficulties in traveling my parents and a few other families decided to locate in the splendid, virgin Owens River Valley. They arrived at the Love Bridge...later

MORE



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named Five Bridges...on Oct. 26, 1874. (17 pages)

My folks went into ranching, a dairy, chickens and beef stock at a location about three miles up the river above the present Laws Bridge. It was known as the River Ranch. Father butchered chickens and beef and Mother made butter for him to haul to the flourishing mining camps of Bodie and Aurora. He also hauled lumber and other supplies.

My father was a partner of Tom Williams at Mammoth Lakes where they owned an oxen team for hauling logs to the Wildasinn Sawmill on the meadow. I was born at the River Ranch June 28, 1893, the eighth Hucky child. I was the fourth daughter, there being six boys and four girls born to this couple. When I was two years old my family moved to Laws.

There had been no town of Laws when my folks came to the area. A town named Owensville was located near the Laws Bridge at about the junction of Highway 6 and the road into Laws. The old fort used to stand in back of the present residence near the junction. I have played in the fort many, many times when a child.

I remember Laws as a bustling, busy railroad town. A. A. Schively was the Station Agent. He had a family of two boys, Allie and Arthur and a daughter, Lottie.

The town was named after the general superintendent of the Southern Pacific Company. A special train would bring Mr. Laws and wife on official visits to Laws and Keeler. How eagerly we children from the town and ranches would watch for their arrival. We gathered at the depot and watched for them to arrive, and we watched the section hand clean the coach.

The Chinaman who did the cooking for Mr. and Mrs. Laws was a great attraction also. He wore a white jacket and black pantaloons and his queue of black hair hung down the back of his neck. The tidbits that were handed out to the children were enjoyed and were anticipated long

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Laws was a friendly town of three boarding and rooming houses, a post-office, two pool halls, three stores and two movies. We did have a robbery. A man named Henry Gerkin ran one of the stores. One night while the train was switching and everyone was busy, two men entered the store, bound and gagged Mr. Gerkin, then put blankets over the windows. A neighbor noticed and sent a rider to get the deputy in Bishop. The deputy was concerned for Mr. Gerkin's safety and so the robbers outsmarted him and rode out. Len Summers and another man tracked them to Tonopah but never caught them.

The store changed hands several times and eventually was sold to Carl Nellen and Mr. Ray. Above Laws, about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles to the north, was a settlement called Dutch Flat. Most of the people were German and were named Ehlen. When their sons and daughters married, each inherited some of the acreage. This community had their own school, but the people did enter into all the activities at Laws.

Farther north of Laws was another settlement called Chalfant Flat. A Mr. McCrosty came into the area and saw an opportunity for people to homestead. He brought in friends and some nice chicken ranches were <sup>seen</sup> there. SEEN

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17 pages

As I grew older I went with my folks to Mammoth Lakes in the summer time. There was great activity at Laws in the spring as stock...mules and horses...were brought up out of the pastures to be shod and readied for the summer's work. Father and brother Frank used twelve horse teams to haul logs to the Wildasinn Mill. The wheelers were very big horses and Frank drove the team with a jerk-line, fastened to the lead horse or mule. He would give a jerk on the line and the animal would obey the command of "Gee" to the right or "Haw" to the left.

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How we loved it at Mammoth! I can still see...in memory...the place where we lived and the beautiful woods where they logged. I used to like to play around the sawmill at the flume, ~~where~~ where the sawdust came out and the water carried it away. I spent many an hour at this pasttime. It wasn't all play; children had chores. We would have hay in the mangers and grain in the boxes in the big barn on the meadow when the teams came in. Many nights the men came in late and tired, on account of getting the wagons stalled in deep sand. We would be on hand to help unhitch and feed, and we loved the work.

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When we were ready to return home, my Father, sister Ethel and I came by team through Silver Peak, Fish Lake Valley and down through Silver Canyon. On top of the White Mountains we could look down into Laws and the Owens Valley and it made us all cry, it looked so good to be coming home. A neighbor, Mrs Welch, and her three daughters, had lunch waiting and we were three happy people.

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Mother took care of the train crew and passengers as well as the teamsters. The dining room was near the big kitchen and meals were served family style. Cost was 35¢ a meal for all you could eat, or three meals for \$1. Mother was a fine cook and always had fruit pie for desert. Upstairs, the rooms were 50¢ a bed. We had an Indian woman who did the wash and ironing for \$1.50 a day. She came early and had breakfast with us and lunch at noon, as was the custom.

Father had a very large corral and I have seen as many as 150 head of



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horses and mules kept there for the freighting. It was usual to hitch up to 14 head of horses or mules to two wagons, having one driver, to handle the jerk line and a swamper to work the brakes. Drivers I can remember were; Spray Kinney, Bill and Lester Calloway, H. M. Gibson, Walter Young, John and Charles Collins, the Schober brothers and more. My first teacher in the old schoolhouse...that stood near where the Shell Oil Company tanks are now...was James Dehy. Then John Dehy, Mrs Will Trickey...a cousin of Maude Truscott...Miss Susseta, Clay Hampton and A. A. Brierly.

The school entertainments, Christmas programs and social gatherings included all of the neighbors and were enjoyable times. We all went to church<sup>c</sup> most of the people were Baptist.

My Mother was known as "Ma Huck". She had a big heart and was called upon many times to help with sick people. Many babies came into this world with "Ma Huck" in attendance. She knew many sorrows of her own. Father died in 1913, brother Ray at 21 years, brother Will at 22 years and a little later, my sister Ethel.

I married Joe Smith in 1909 after he had emigrated from Ohio. We continued to live in Laws, Joe teaming and ranching. We had one son, Tom. Our home still stands and is now used by the Bishop Museum. The little post office that was built next to our home has been moved over near the Depot. Postmasters I remember are; Mrs. Teddy, Mr Gerkin, Carrie Welsh, Julia Welsh, Julia Rogers...later of Mammoth Lakes...Allie Schively, John Compton and Elsie Calhoun. I became postmaster in 1931 and retired when the postoffice was closed in 1963 after 76 years continuous service.

I am happy to have lived the early years in and around Laws when there was the interest and enthusiasm of a "happy and growing time."



7. The surrounding people and neighbors at Laws knew Florence Smith as their smiling postmistress for long years. She was very proud of the number of people she served with general service and Florence also rented 32 rent-boxes to her customers.

The Laws of today...it's orchards gone, much of the land as the settlers found it and population very low...has taken on a new look in recent years. The railroad that "prospered" the town, ended its service in 1960 and has now become the focal point in the Laws Railroad Museum Complex, an attraction that draws many visitors.

Several buildings have been added to the original ones, the little Postoffice was moved on the grounds and engine No. Nine with several cars stand on track near the Depot.

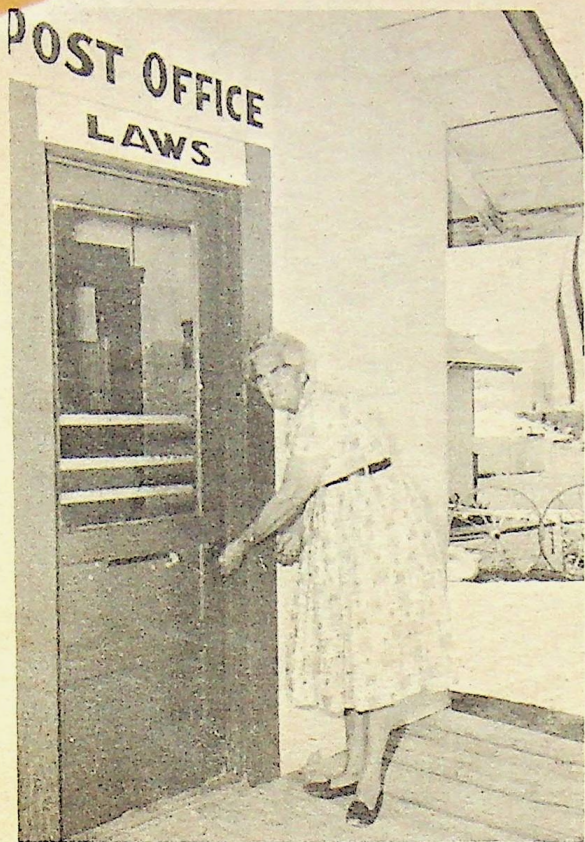
The sight of these bring stirring memories of the little narrow gauge train traveling up the Owens River Valley, full steam ahead. A big plume of black smoke, turning white, trailed along overhead, marking the passage of the proud desert-going "Slim Princess" we always liked to watch.

#### Addenda

From the "Mineral Empire" booklet we find: "The poineers of Esmeralda county in Nevada desperately needed light and power. They sought it to the west, crossing one mountain range, then another, until the sight of a tumbling mountain stream called "Bishop Creek" was found in Inyo county, California. It was 140 difficult miles from Goldfield but persistence and hard labor prevailed and in 1904, at great cost, electric power and lights were supplied to Goldfield and Tonopah. Eventually this line served Rhyolite, Pioneer, Bullfrog, Silver Peak, Manhattan, Round Mountain, Millers and other points in Nevada and to Bishop, California. The last sentence; "and now let it be said that the part the N.C.P.CO (Nev., Cal., Power Co) has taken in the developement of mining in southern Nevada can never be estimated."

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POSTMISTRESS — Florence M. Smith, postmistress at the Laws Post Office for 17 years, died the day before Christmas at the County Sanatorium at Big Pine. She was 85. She was appointed to the position in 1946 by Postmaster General Robert Hannagin and served until the post office was closed in 1963. She is pictured here during the last days of operation. The post office was in existence for 76 years. Funeral was held Wednesday (Don Calkins photo)

*Dec 1978*



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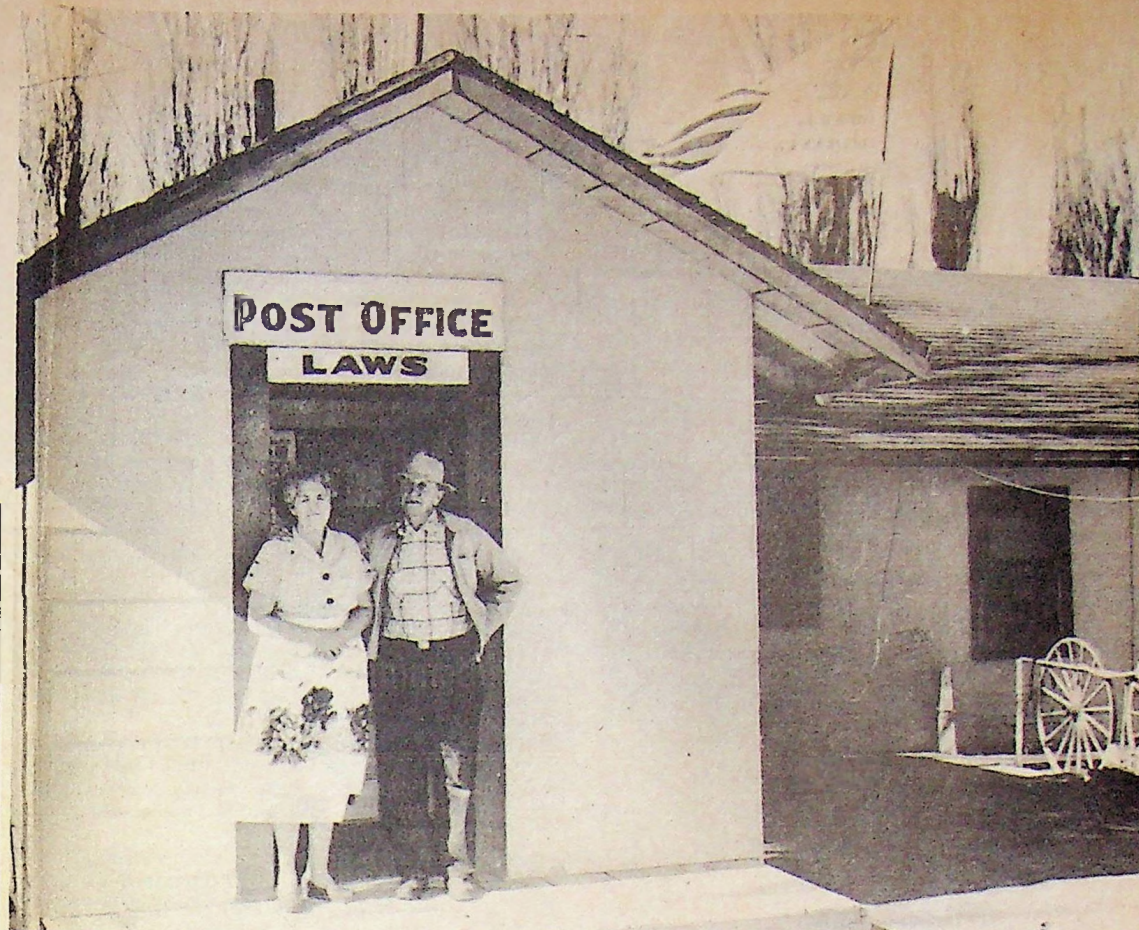
Brooks and Will Calloway and swamper. This picture was taken near the present day postoffice on West Line.

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Florence and Joe Smith stand at the front door of the old Laws Post Office which served the community for some 76 years. Florence was postmistress at Laws for 17 years and died at the age

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