

Pioneer days
"Inyo - Mono had pony express + stage service" ^{29th} July 1987 in paper

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Pioneer Days:

by Adele Reed

The riders of the "Saddle-bag Express," in 1859, experienced adventure and courage midst great danger and difficulty on their cross-country rides. No other mode of transportation can quite compare to the hard-riding messengers and their faithful animals. In the short period, eighteen months of their operation, the riders gained great renown.

One of the first settlements in the Owens River Valley was named Owensville, located on the east bank of the River near the present town of Laws. At that time the bustling mining camp of Aurora, NV. was the nearest supply center and communication most difficult.

Owensville, unknowingly, was to become quite famous for it was there that Daniel Wellington began, in 1864, the only Pony Mail Service in the area. He appointed W.J. Gill as the rider. The route was north by way of Fish Slough to Hot Springs and there it connected with a semi-weekly Pony Express rider to Aurora. Each letter had to bear the proper postage and there was an additional charge of 25 cents for the "mailman."

Several sod and stone cabins had been built in Owensville, the first one owned by a Mr. Van Fleet, in 1861. It was a short-lived town and after a few years the people moved away, usually to Bishop Creek. The foundation stones of the cabins were used to build large circular corral within the townsite. As Owensville was a Way Station, the corral was in use for stage relay stock and also as a hold-over for herds of sheep and cattle. The foundation of the historic corral though covered with grass and brush, can yet be traced.

After gold was discovered in 1849 in the Mother Lode area of California private stage lines began operating from Sacramento and San Francisco to the mining camps. It wasn't long until Wells Fargo came to the west coast areas. Two prominent expressmen in the east named Henry Wells and Wm. Fargo organized their Wells Fargo & Company California Express in 1852.

In the ensuing years Wells Fargo took over the private lines of the Mother Lode, one by one, as these were too small to combat the ever-increasing thievery and highwaymen. Their cross country operation continued as did the Butterfield Overland Mail Company.

The name, Wells Fargo, on signs...in gold letters against a green background...indicated protection for miners and others. Sustained throughout the life of staging as well as all later activities were the excellent rules and regulations followed by the Wells Fargo. In the early 1860's mining became important in the hills of Inyo-Mono east of the Sierra. Miners flocked to the Panamints, the Argus Mountains, the Coso's, the Inyo's, the Whites and north to Monoville and included much of western Nevada. The whole country soon became a maze of roads, typical early roads, rough, rocky, dusty.

Wherever business was good stage lines came. On almost every route the express services and agencies were operated by Wells Fargo. There was a great rivalry among the agencies as to who would be accorded the honor of carrying the famous iron-bound treasure box.

Stages were serviced by way stations spaced according to the needs and the terrain. Fresh horses, a meal or overnight stop was a valuable service. Many heavy freight wagons and mule or horse teams traveled the same roads at a much slower pace. In order to take care of these there were usually way stops at shorter distance than required by the through stages.

Yes, Wells Fargo rode the Coaches into Eastern California and Nevada. They made history with their rocking, swaying, charging conquest of high mountain passes, sandy lowland, creek or stream fording, whatever. The mail and bullion as well as passengers had to go through on schedule. Freightage was also on schedule to many outposts with supplies and merchandise.

History tells of one freight line that services Bodie and was named the Fast Freight. They traveled night and day, leaving Carson every other day. Usually each large wagon had one or two smaller wagons, a "back action" as it was called, needed to move greater loads. For

... The Saddle Bag Express

CARSON, PINE GROVE and AURORA

General Agent, H.D. Gellat, Carson City, Nevada. Local Agents, Geo. Tuflly, St. Charles Hotel, Carson City and J. Novacovich, Aurora. Stage leaves Carson City every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 6 a.m. Stage leaves Aurora every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 7 a.m.

TOWNS, 1869

Depart Carson City: 14 mi., Genoa; 39 mi., Double Springs; 55 mi., Wellington Station * Pine Grove; 80 mi., William Station; 90 mi., Elbow Ranch; 105 mi., arrive Aurora. 2 days time, fare \$20. Connections: At Aurora, stages connect for Hot Springs, Palmetto District, Columbus, Silver Peak and Fort Independence. Passengers for Aurora stop overnight at Wellington Station. * Pine Grove is situated 20 miles from Wellington Station off the main road. Fare from Carson City to Pine Grove \$15. Passengers go through same day.

RENO, WASHOE CITY and CARSON CITY

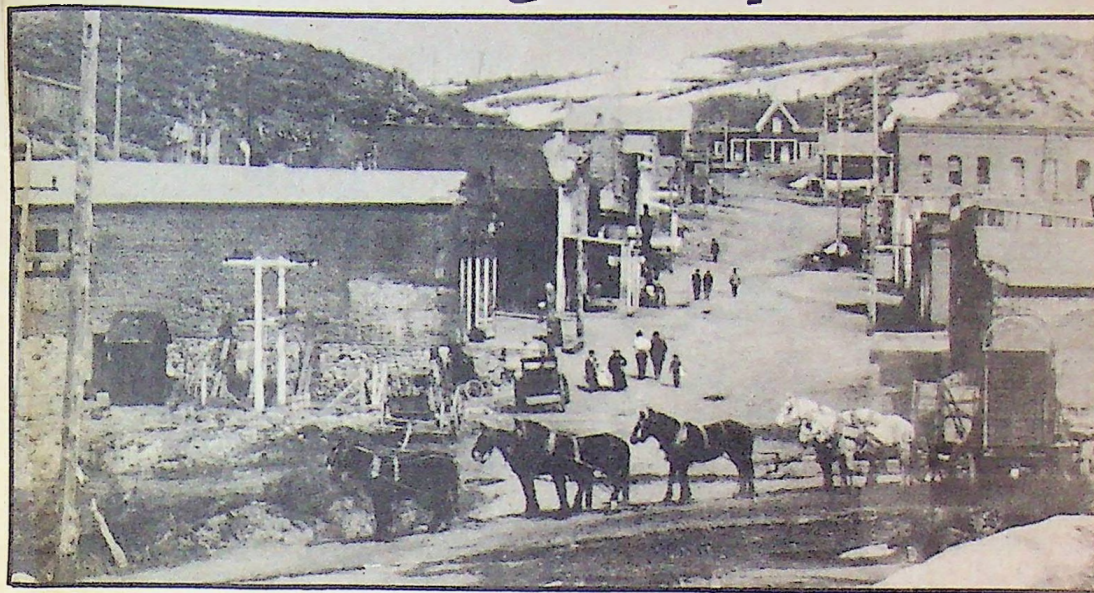
L. H. Dyer's Stage Line, gen'l agent, Reno, Nevada. Local agents, W.A. Van Reed, Washoe City. John Ullrich, Carson City. Stage leaves Reno daily at 1 a.m., on arrival of eastern train.

TOWNS, JAN. 12, 1871

Depart Reno: 6 mi., Huffakers; 11 mi., Steamboat Springs; 17 mi., Washoe City; 20 mi., Ophir City; 22 mi., Franktown; 25 mi., Mills Station; arrive Carson City, total 32 mi., time 5½ hours, fare \$4. Connections: At Reno connects with cars of the Central Pacific R.R. At Carson City connects with stages for Empire City, Genoa, Markleeville, Silver Mountain, Pine Grove, Aurora, Columbus District, Silver Peak, Kearsarge and Fort Independence.

AURORA, INDEPENDENCE and CERRO GORDO

Prop., T.W. Dexter, Aurora, Nevada. Local Agents: J.W. Dexter, Aurora; John Lintell, Independence. Stage leaves Aurora every Wednesday and Saturday at 6 a.m. Stage leaves Independence every Wednesday and Saturday at 5 a.m.

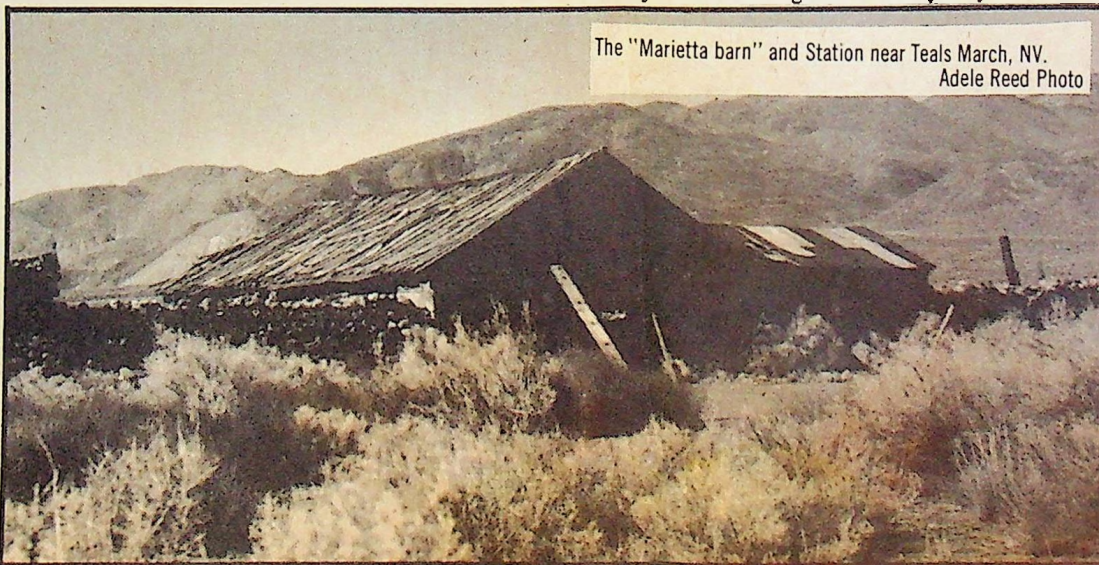


The Aurora, Nevada, mining town was once thought to be in Mono County, California. Seen on Main Street is the Sam Albright outfit that hauled to many mining camps from his ranch near Sweetwater. Anna (Dechambeau) McKenzie collection

Visalia with stage for Bakersfield and way places. Through tickets purchased at San Francisco from agent include railway fare. The fare being the same to Visalia, Havilah and Independence as from Gilroy.

A picture here and there and some history along the old stage lines increases the interest of the foregoing schedules.

Coming south from Gardnerville, NV., there was an important stage post named Mountain House or Holbrooks for the owners. It was on the right side of No. 395 north of the Y where a left turnoff carried the stages and teams to Bodie via Wellington. The dwelling and barn were near a row of tall shade trees, a rest stop nowadays. Both buildings were destroyed by fire in 1977.



The "Marietta barn" and Station near Teals March, NV.
Adele Reed Photo

TOWNS, APRIL 5, 1871

Depart Aurora: 17 mi., Dexters; 29 mi., Adobe Meadows; 49 mi., Benton* meals 50¢; 50 mi., Partzwick; 84 mi., Owensville; 89 mi., Bishop Creek * meals 50¢; or go through at option of passengers; 103 mi., Big Pine; 109 mi., Fish Springs; 132 mi., Independence; 150 mi., Lone Pine; 163 mi. Swansea; 172 mi. arrive Cerro Gordo

Holbrook's Station was an important Stage Post, seen on Hwy. 395 south of Gardnerville, NV., near the Y. The dwelling and barn of long ago were destroyed by fire in 1977.

Adele Reed Photo

for a cattle ranch. There once was a little settlement of buildings, store and post office and an elegant Victorian hotel. The two story Sweetwater Hostelry was known near and far and housed a fed stage passengers from distant areas. The dining room with a big fireplace was spacious. Upstairs was a long hall with the 28 rooms opening off of it, all done in fine Victorian decor. A large ballroom upstairs opened to a balcony. This building hosted the Old Time Dance Club of Bishop once each year. It was destroyed by fire some years back, leaving the large barn used for relay stock as the only reminder of a popular station.

Another station on the Bodie road was the Ninemile Ranch and further on was one named Fletchers. It was built long ago as the shade trees grow tall near the spring of clear sweet water. There are only rock remains of the buildings that once housed people and animals. Both the Bodie and the Aurora roads take off southerly from Fletchers and the main road continues over Lucky Boy Pass to Hawthorne, NV.

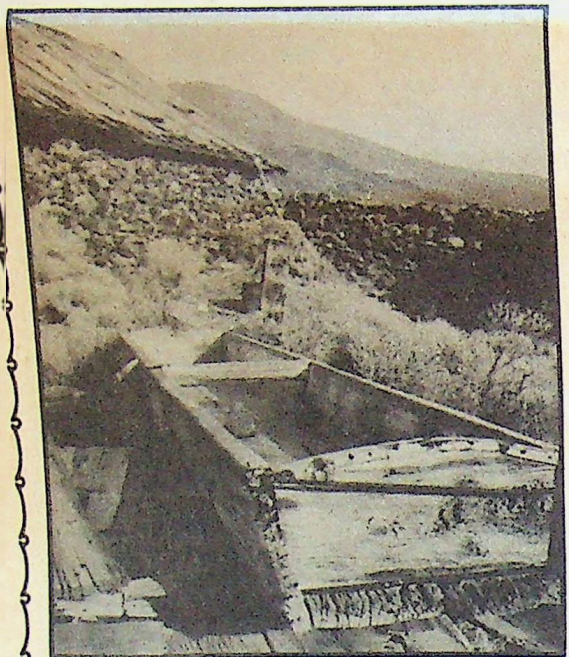
The mining camp of Marietta near Teel's Salt March in Nevada was booming in the 1870's. It is believed their daily stage to and from Candelaria connected with one from Hawthorne via upper Hontoon Valley. While visiting Marietta several years ago we noted the old barn used by the travel. An adobe hut was attached by a rock wall to the wooden stable making the complete Station. Both were enclosed by a spacious rock corral and in a corner is seen one of the old wooden watering troughs.

The nails in the barn roof stood like pins in a pin-cushion and a couple of props lend support to the near one hundred year old barn. It was noted there was room for 16 animals with four stalls on either side. Each had two tie-holes and two grain boxes. Old barns bring good memories, the warm animal scent, the sound of munching of grain and the sweet odor of hay.

The several roads leading into and out of Aurora and Bodie were busy thoroughfares. Many private stage lines

...to go through at option of passengers; 103 mi., Big Pine; 109 mi., Fish Springs; 132 mi., Independence; 150 mi., Lone Pine; 163 mi., Swansca; 172 mi., arrive Cerro Gordo. Fare \$28. Connections: At Benton with stage for Columbus, 40 mi., and Silver Peak, 75 mi., At aurora with Wilson's stage line for Carson. Direct connections each way with above lines.

History tells of one freight line that services Bodie and was named the Fast Freight. They traveled night and day, leaving Carson every other day. Usually each large wagon had one or two smaller wagons, a "back action" as it was called, needed to move greater loads. For



A watering trough was a must in desert areas as Marietta. Inside the rock wall of the "Station" we found a beautifully preserved wood trough that no doubt served stage and freight teams back in the 1870's.

Adele Reed Photo

night travel lanterns were attached to high wooden projections on the hames of every other pair of animals. What a superb sight it must have been to see twenty horses and mules with lamps alight pulling out in the dark of night.

Wells Fargo stages made all the important outposts in Inyo-Mono but one! The invitation to maintain a Wells Fargo agency in rich Panamint City was turned down as too risky. It was due to the fact her one road lead up a steep-walled canyon with great danger of hold-ups. Mine owners came up with a fool-proof method of moulding the rich silver bullion into huge balls that could be freighted in wagons with no risk.

We became interested in stage schedules and wrote to the Wells Fargo Bank Museum of San Francisco. They advised that their older records had been destroyed in the fire following the 1906 earthquake. However, the Museum obligingly sent copies of schedules from "Bancroft's Guide for Travelers by Railway, Stage and Steam in the Pacific States" dated 1869 to 1872.

We use the following stage schedules with permission from the Wells Fargo Bank History Room Collection, San Francisco. Note—the asterisk* denotes an overnight stop.

AURORA and KEARSARGE

Wellington's Stage Line; Gen'l agents, Wellington & Son, Aurora, Nevada; Local agents, C. Novacovich, Aurora; John Lintell, Kearsarge; Stage leaves Aurora every Wednesday at 6 a.m.; Stage leaves Kearsarge every Friday at 8 a.m.

TOWNS, 1869

Depart Aurora: 17 mi., Dexters; 29 mi., Adobe Meadows; 49 mi., Benton,* meals 50¢; 50 mi., Partzwick; 90 mi., Owensville; 95 mi., Bishop Creek * or go through at option of passengers; 115 mi., Big Pine; 140 mi., Fort Independence; 143 mi., arrive Kearsarge. 3 days time. cost \$25. Connections: At Kearsarge, connects with stage for Cerro Gordo, distance 50 mi., fare \$10. At Benton: with stage for Silver Peak, 70 mi., fare \$15; with Palmetto, 90 mi., fare \$20. Direct connections each way with above lines.

TOWNS, APRIL 5, 1871

Depart Aurora: 17 mi., Dexters; 29 mi., Adobe Meadows; 49 mi., Benton* meals 50¢; 50 mi., Partzwick; 84 mi., Owensville; 89 mi., Bishop Creek * meals 50¢; or go through at option of passengers; 103 mi., Big Pine; 109 mi., Fish Springs; 132 mi., Independence; 150 mi., Lone Pine; 163 mi., Swansca; 172 mi., arrive Cerro Gordo. Fare \$28. Connections: At Benton with stage for Columbus, 40 mi., and Silver Peak, 75 mi., At aurora with Wilson's stage line for Carson. Direct connections each way with above lines.

VIRGINIA CITY, GOLD HILL & CARSON

Virginia and Truckee Railroad, Nov. 21st, 1871. H.M. Yerington, Supt. Passenger trains leave Carson City daily at 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., and Virginia City at 7:45, 11:45 a.m., 3:45 p.m. Gold Hill at 8 a.m., 12 a.m., and 4 p.m. Fare, Virginia to Gold Hill, 25¢, Virginia to Carson, \$2.

GILROY, VISALIA, HAVILAH and INDEPENDENCE

Robert and George's Telegraph Stage Line. Gen'l agent, W.G. Robert off., 208 Montgomery St., San Francisco. Local agents, S.W. Thoms, Visalia; A. Bermudiz, Havilah; J. Knowlton, Jr., Gilroy. Stage leaves Gilroy for Visalia on the arrival of the 8:10 train from San Francisco, daily, Sunday excepted. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday for Kernville and Havilah and every Monday and Wednesday for Lone Pine and Independence.

TOWNS, MAY 18, 1871

Depart Gilroy: 20 mi., Bells Station (on top of Pacheco Pass) * meals 50¢; 37 mi., San Lucas Ranch (once had beautiful Spanish adobe buildings); 63 mi., Telegraph Station; 80 mi., Firebaugh's Ferry * meals 50¢; 92 mi., Watson's Ferry; 108 mi., Hawthorne; 125 mi., Elkhorn; 150 mi., Kingston; 156 mi., Cross Creek; 175 mi., Visalia * meals 50¢; 205 mi., Tule River; 225 mi., White River; 240 mi., Linn's Valley * meals 50¢; 270 mi., Kernville; 290 mi., Havilah * meals 50¢; 365 mi., Little Owens Lake; 390 mi., Big Owen's Lake; 420 mi., Lone Pine; 440 mi., arrive Independence. Time 75 hours. Fare \$50. Connections+At White River with stage for Bakersfield every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at 1 p.m. Returning from Bakersfield at 6 a.m. Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Fare to Bakersfield \$5. At Visalia with Bennet's stages for Snellings and way places. At

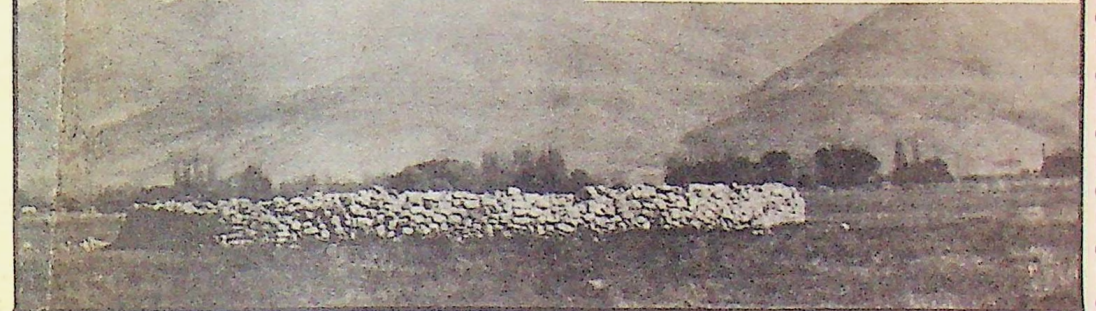
Holbrook's Station was an important Stage Post, seen on Hwy. 295 south of Gardnerville, NV., near the Y. The dwelling and barn of long ago were destroyed by fire in 1977.

Adele Reed Photo



The Owensville Corral, near Laws, was once in use as a Way Station for Stage, for freighting and for cattle herds.

U.S. Forest Service collection



Next we visit a green and picturesque valley in Nevada named Sweetwater. Vast meadows of grass, willow bordered streams, large barns with pole corrals indicate farming on a large scale. The acreage was developed by early sheepmen named Yparraguirre, then went into the ownership of a man named Williams who teamed to nearby mining camps. It is now headquarters

operated and numerous tales were told of famous stagers, (drivers). The familiar name, Wells Fargo Company was seen on much of the cargo that went out of both the booming camps. Hold-ups and scenes of gunfights over the valuable "box" were of daily interest.

The handsome "leftovers"...the red brick buildings minus roof, door or window...that we found at Aurora in the 1940's, suggested a regal authority. Some of the ornate furnishings and bric-a-brac were scattered midst tall sagebrush. We could see why the "city" of Aurora once contended with Virginia City as Queen of the Nevada mining camps. Aurora was the shopping center for the great new Inyo-Mono country in it's first years. No matter the long, slow miles by wagon and team, the pioneers found they could purchase most anything needed. We researched several items in old newssheets that name a few of Aurora's merchants still in business by 1890.

The following is courtesy of the Esmeralda County Courthouse in Goldfield, NV. From the "Esmeralda Herald, Aurora, NV."

"Esmeralda Brewery, Aurora, NV., finest brewed lager beer, delivered in Bodie, Aurora, Marietta, Belleville and Columbus." "Bank Exchange Saloon" Pine and Antelope Sts., Aurora, NV., C. Novacovich, prop." This man was local stage agent in 1869. "Feed yard and corral, Spring St., Aurora." H. Marden, prop. "Sazarac Saloon" Pine St., Auora, John Miller, prop. "Pioneer Stage Line, Sonora and Bodie" R. McAlpin, agent. From the "Walker Lake Bulletin" Hawthorne, NV. "Hoops and Curtis, Aurora Market and Gen'l Produce Store." Beef, veal, pork, mutton, hams, bacon, lard, etc. Fresh fish and poultry. Fresh vegetables and fruits direct from the growers. Prices reasonable and satisfaction guaranteed." Hoops & Curtis, props. Pine and Antelope Sts. "The Antelope House," N. Antelope St., Aurora. "Exchange Hotel," Mrs. Nellie Wade, prop., Aurora. "Pioneer Drug Store," G.R. Hatch & Co., Pine St., Aurora. Nov. 5, 1890. "The Aurora School". Roll of honor for month of Oct.; May Cobb, Alma Cobb, Dora Williams, Joe Wood, Mamie Williams, Clara Thompson, Sadie Reed, Eva Thompson, May Reed, Bert Wood."

Katie G. Blake, teacher.

The once glorious Aurora had faded away through the years and the land has returned to its native state.



A collage of Wells Fargo items. The wheel was on a freight loading cart. The Wells Fargo Company Smith and Wesson Schofield revolver is seen on a metal Wells Fargo box. The metal wax sealers in the holder were in use on parcels and letters to insure no tampering with.

3. Saddle Bag Express July 29-82

7 pictures ^{and} inside-large

Captions--Stage Service

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U. S. Forest Service collection

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Adele Reed Photo

Doug Southerland collection

3. The famous Wells Fargo "Box" has seen rough use.

Adele Reed Photo

4. Holbrook's Station was an important Stage Post, seen on #395 south of Gardnerville, Nevada, near the Y. The dwelling and Barn of long ago were destroyed by fire in 1977.

Adele Reed Photo

5. The "Sweetwater" barn is all that remains of a busy Stage and freighting Way Station on Nevada #22 en route to Aurora and Bodie.

Adele Reed Photo

6. The "Marietta barn" and Station near Teals Marsh, Nevada.

Adele Reed Photo

7. The Aurora, Nevada, mining town, was once thought to be in Mono County, California. Seen on main street is the Sam Albright outfit that hauled to many mining camps from his ranch near Sweetwater.

Anna (Dechambeau) McKenzie collection

Caption--Stage service

8. A watering trough was a must in desert areas as Marietta. Inside the rock wall of the "Station" we found a beautifully preserved ~~desert~~ wood trough that ^{no doubt} ~~must have~~ served stage and freight teams back in the 1870's.

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