

Pics, article, text, captions <sup>max 6</sup>  
"Mono Lake, a town" 1980

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Captions--Mono Lake

1. The Mono Mills general store and saloon. Spur Railroad tracks in front. Standing, L to R. Dan McMillan, Emil Billeb, Gus Hess, ?, E. Sais, Lulu Hess, ?, Gus Billeb and Minnie Turner. Seated, ?, ?, Nat Smith, ?, Walt Farrington, Bill Beaver, Al Belmont.

Collection of Lulu (Creasey) Bigelow

2. Two Mono Mills logging engines. Ray McMurry collection
3. Anna Dechambeau used to drive six miles to the Mono Lake postoffice for mail in 1915. Anna (Dechambeau) McKenzie collection

4. The Five Mile House or Gregory place between Bodie and Aurora.

Dorothy (Sherwin) Joseph collection

5. The Bodie to Aurora mail stage coming into Bodie in winter.

Anna (Dechambeau) McKenzie collection.

6. The Mono Mills spur track was interesting to follow.

Adele Reed photo

7. Once a busy, important Mill overlooked Mono Lake.

Adele Reed photo



15. Mono Lake, a town Mar 6 - 1980

7 pictures and 1 more inside - large



by Adele Reed

As the years go by, many early settlements—now of importance as a primary background—have faded from sight and memory. We are indebted to two ladies who lived some of the history of Mono Lake. Anna (Dechambeau) McKenzie of Bishop and the late Lulu (Creasey) Bigelow, a resident of Big Pine, had vivid memories of the little settlement they knew near the edge of a great inland lake of many moods.

Anna was born at Mono Lake and Lulu moved there with her family, both going to the Mono Lake school. The settlers' farms, about 30 in number in the 1880's, extended from Bodie Canyon on the north and as far south as the well-known Farrington ranch. The rocky, sage covered land, after hard labor, produced but two crops of alfalfa per season. It was a land of long, rugged, snowy winters. What gardens and fruit they raised were preserved and stored in cellars for winter. Any hay or produce not needed found a ready market at the booming mining camp of Bodie or nearby Lundy and the busy Mono Mills east of the Mono Craters.

Their ways of travel or carriage were in use on rough roads and trails winter and summer. Namely, showshoes, skis, horse and sleigh, or, buggy, wagon and cart. Horses at times needed snowshoes. Anna recalls, "We used to laugh at the sight of horses getting used to walking on the round, flat, strapped-on metal shoes. After trying a few steps they'd fall in the snow headfirst or hindend, then try again, it didn't take long to learn to spread their feet!"

The Mono Lake School District was organized in 1888, using someone's spare room. The next year a one-room school was built and it served as their church and also for dances and parties. In the same year a post office building north of Mono Inn suffered in a snow slide and was rebuilt below the inn near the lake. Anna remembers driving horse and buggy about six miles from the family ranch for mail.

There was a general store and a saloon named Hammonds, previously the Andrew Thomson Toll Station, to which site the post office was moved once more. The location became Tioga Lodge in later years. One more move for the post office was in 1928 af-



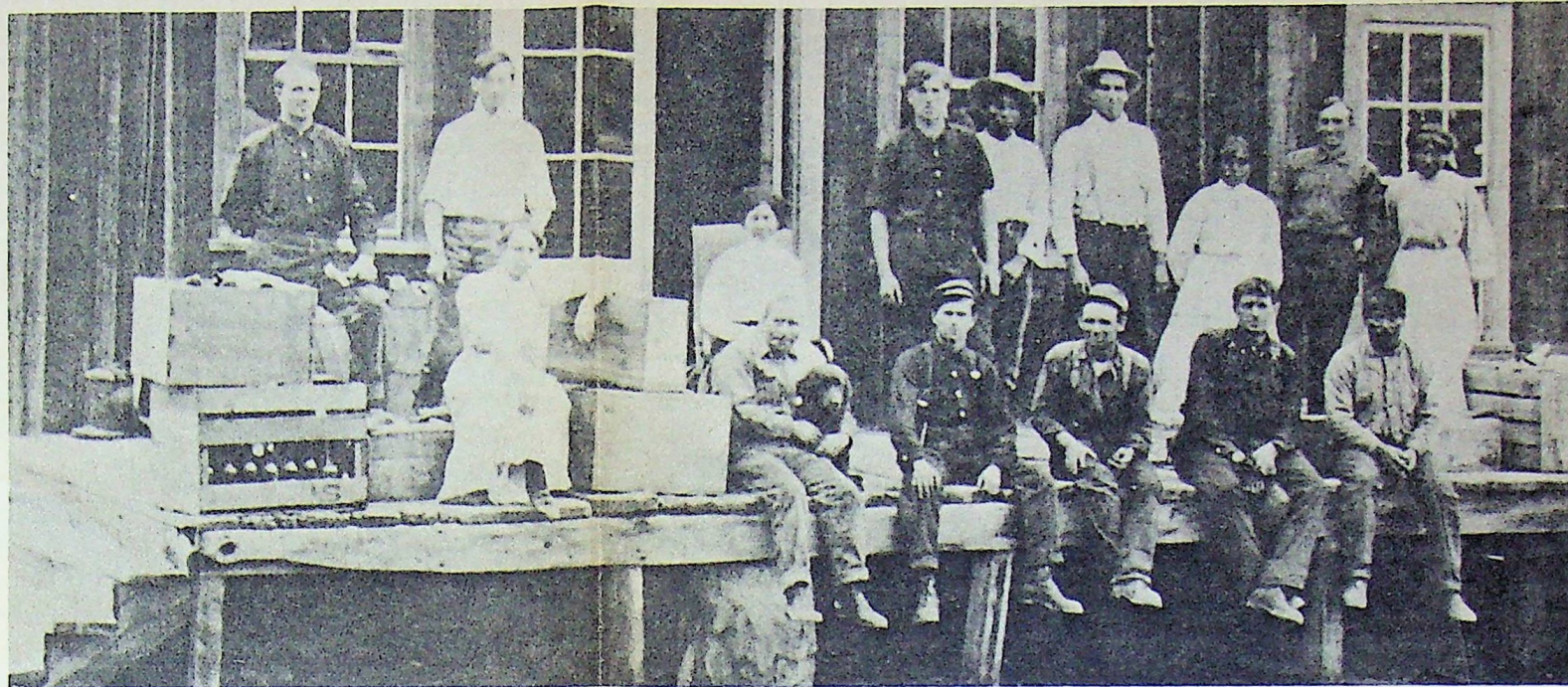
SPUR TRACK at Mono Mills was interesting to follow.

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ter the town of Lee Vining was established. The Mono Laker's graveyard, long combined with the newer town, is seen on a knoll northerly, overlooking the pretty blue water of Mono Lake. Many old-timers names are noted.

## Pioneer Days

Mono Lake was a town, also.



GENERAL STORE and saloon at Mono Mills. Spur Railroad tracks in front. Question marks indicate unidentified persons. Standing (L to R), Dan McMillan, Emil Billeb, Gus Hess, ?, R. Sais, Lulu Hess, ?, Gus Billeb and Minnie Turner. Seated, ?, Nat Smith, ?, Walt Farrington, Bill Weaver, Al Belmont.

Collection of Lulu (Creasey) Bigelow

THE FIVE MILE House (or Gregory place) between Bodie and Aurora.

Dorothy (Sherwin) Joseph collection

The trail was via the Sinnamon Cut back of the Conway ranch. Otherwise, they had to travel a long way around, by Bodie Canyon over Coyote Summit, across to the Mormon Station, down to Willow Spring and to Bridgeport.

Mono Mills, Lundy and Bodie provided work for the men folk of Mono Lake. Bodie was important as a shopping center and the only doctor for long miles. Bodie's travel and carriage were much the same and their mail was carried by sleigh and two horses in winter. The route was by the old stage road down Bodie Canyon easterly to the Del Monte Station near the shortcut road from Aurora, thence down to Fletcher's Station on the main stage route from Carson. Cecil Burkham provided the stage, sleigh in winter. Will Bell and Mervin McKenzie were drivers; the latter became Anna's husband.

The half-way house or Bodie Ranch, where stages and freighters found needed services, was located about halfway between Bodie and Aurora. Nathan Gregory and wife, Catherine (Wilson), bought the acreage in the seventies. Nathan was prominent in teaming, he was said to have hauled the first load of freight into Reno. He also was a Pony Express rider across the mountains by a trail that later became Sonora Pass.

The Gregorys built home, barn and corrals to accommodate stages and teamsters hauling freight into Bodie and hay and grain from Nevada ranches. Oxen teams were also in use hauling ore to Bodie. There were six Gregory children and one of the daughters, Idelle, was a great help to her father on the ranch. She taught school for a time at Sweetwater then went into the newspaper business in Bodie with sister, Christine. Idelle eventually married James Sherwin, well known in Bishop and in Round Valley. Two of their daughters were born at the Bodie ranch, Guin (Thompson) and Dorothy (Joseph), the latter is a long-time resident of Bishop. Dorothy remembers hearing that her grandfather was often plagued by horse thieves who would come over the hills at night. Horses were very valuable in those days as a way of travel and he kept many extras on hand.

Another road, named the Geiger Grade, was built via Aurora Canyon from Bridgeport, crossed the high mountains, "beautiful top of the world," and came down in to Bodie. It saw much freighting when the



A disastrous snow slide came down Copper Mountain, northwest of Mono Lake in 1911, during a heavy snow year. The Mill Creek Power House and several dwellings as well as people were buried. It was a time of fear for their lives and a time of great effort by the men of Mono Lake, Lundy and Bodie. One person, a woman, was rescued after about 60 long hours. Ida Sexton, a nurse, was brought from Lundy, with her two-year-old son, Perry, aboard a skier's back in a pack. A doctor was summoned from Bodie by a man on skis. The injured Mrs. Mason was carried to the Conway Ranch, tended by doctor and nurse and placed on a sled to take to Bodie.

Two teams of expert skiers hauled the sled, working four at a time, two pulling, two holding ropes at the sides to keep it on the narrow, icy road up the canyon. Ida Sexton



and son followed in a horse drawn bobsled. Mrs. Mason was sent to an Oakland hospital, and suffered the loss of one leg. The names of the vigorous rescuers were Perry Sexton, Sr., Charles Hadden, Andrew Sturgeon, Bob Creasey, Ed. Leveille, Herb Dechambeau, Louis Frazee and Jack Dechambeau.

A lumber mill east of the Mono Craters in pine and pumice country created a new way of transport and travel. Mono Mills began when Bodie was building and there was a great need for cordwood and lumber. A barge transport across Mono Lake to waiting wagons was soon replaced by the Bodie Railroad Lumber Company of 32-mile length. Sturdy little engines, the Inyo, Mono, Bodie and Tybo were in use on the "short line" until the mill was closed down in 1918. It knew a lively and important era of the Mono Basin.

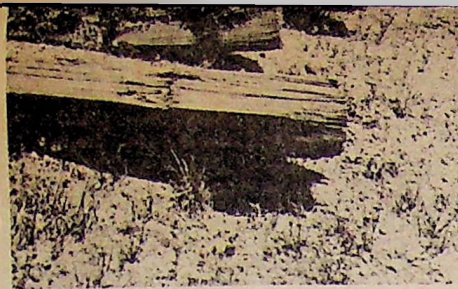
Historian Fred Brooks once worked at the mill and told of the little settlement in the pretty pumice and pine country. There was a general store and saloon, boarding house, some cabins, a bunkhouse, tent houses and an Indian camp nearby. Their water was piped from springs named Gas Pipe a few miles easterly. The mill works included the

grandparents of Ernest Kinney of Bishop. Ernest recalls, "My grandfather had a piano hauled from San Francisco to Bodie, then to their home for grandmother who was a fine pianist. She had many hours of enjoyment during their years there." The old piano was finally brought to the grandson's home.

George and Mary's son, Spray, father of Ernest, worked with his father teaming at the logging camp, then the teaming became a way of life for him. He was never happier than when either riding after cattle or aboard a wagon. In fact Spray once remarked he was never interested in learning to handle "those machines!"

The interlacing of travel by road and trail and rail, the closeness and friendship of the people of Mono Basin became very apparent in the memories. They had to depend on each other in times of disaster or trouble and the happy times were shared by all. In the 1930's it became the custom to celebrate Mark Twain Day. People came from long distance to join in the fun. They gathered on the grass under shade trees near Mono Lake just below the Mono Inn. It was a great picnic spot and all sorts of games, a beauty contest and a tug-of-war was enjoyed. The speed





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The Dechambeau family, Louis and Mary (Currie) and their seven children, lived on a ranch between Mill and Thompson Creeks. In the 1880's Louis ran a one-man mail route on skis, in winter, from Lundy to the Tioga Mine. A man named Newman, who had a ranch on Rush Creek, once hauled the daily mail by horse and cart to Lundy from the Mono Lake post office in summer. History tells of a population of 500 people living in the Lundy area. It was a place of heavy snow and cold and the mines were located high on the mountainside. There was a regular stage line from Bodie that serviced Lundy three times a week.

The Mono Lakers sometimes used a horse trail to reach Bridgeport, their county seat.

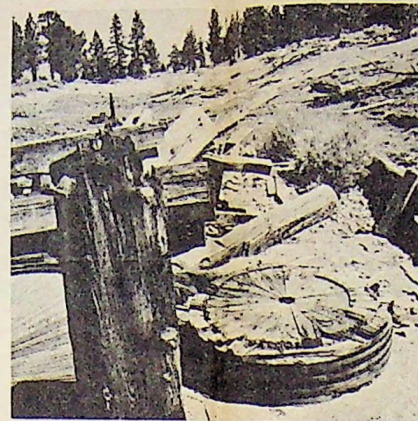
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Another road, named the Geiger Grade, was built via Aurora Canyon from Bridgeport, crossed the high mountains, "beautiful top of the world," and came down in to Bodie. It saw much freighting when the snowdrifts were gone, hauling of lumber to a mining camp named Masonic. The lumber came by rail from Mono Mills to Bodie.

Perry Sexton and wife Ida (Creasey) and children, Lulu, Bob and Harrison first lived near Mono Lake, then moved to Lundy where Perry worked at the mill. The late Perry Sexton, Jr., was born at Lundy and was a well known figure at Old Mammoth. Lulu Bigelow recalls a bit of fun at Lundy. "Anna's brother, Herb Dechambeau, used to ski up-canyon from the Mono Lake post office, carrying the Lundy mail in winter. We always knew when he was leaving as he'd ski out on the frozen lake, do a few fancy figure eights as he yodeled loud and clear, then be on his way!"

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The unique and aged Mono Lake lost its input of water in the 40's and began to shrink in size. The sale of farms for their water, to the DWP, meant dry ditches and farmers and settlers, moving away. No more rushing streams of water from the high canyons.

The water has since been transported by tunnel and aqueduct to Southern California. The big seagull rookery on Negit Island is now threatened. The pretty tourist town of Lee Vining was built in the 1920's on one of the old ranches overlooking the lake. It once went by the name "Mattley Place" as noted on a map which warns travelers of the 1911 dirt roads, "at Mattley's turn left to go over Tioga Pass, a rough road!"



ANNA DECHAMBEAU used to drive six miles to the Mono Lake post office for mail in 1915.

Anna (Dechambeau) McKenzie collection



THE BODIE-TO-AURORA mail stage coming into Bodie in winter.

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