

The Roads to the West

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Big Pine #4

Pioneer Days:

by Adele Reed

The trails and roads north of Lone Pine were continually busy with pack trains and horse or mule drawn vehicles of many kinds in the 1860s.

People were looking for places to settle and to farm and prospectors roamed the hills. A community named George Creek, a place of natural beauty, was primarily important for livestock. Later, the plentiful fruit orchards made necessary a packing house named Manzanar. Produce was shipped to Los Angeles by truck and trailer. The location became the site of a Japanese relocation center during World War II.

There were steam and water quartz mills, the Ida Mill was one in 1862 across the Owens River from Manzanar. A flouring mill was established by A.N. Bell on Oak Creek in 1866-67. Kearsarge mining camp was established. "A trail went from Kearsarge up Mazourka Canyon in the Inyo's to Waucoba, then down steep trails into Marble Canyon" as recalled by Henry Olivas, "and gold mining has continued there for years."

FIRST SETTLEMENTS DISAPPEAR

Hay, grain, ores and Saline Valley salt were hauled north or south and the return loads were supplies and merchandise for either Lone Pine or Independence. By the time Independence (Little Pine) came into being in 1865 some of the first little settlements as Bend City and Chrysopolis had vanished. A military post sprang up on Oak Creek in 1862 and Independence became important as the Inyo county seat.

As noted in the first news sheet, the Inyo Independent, July 9, 1870; "Abraham Parker, the blacksmith of Owens Valley. The undersigned respectfully informs the citizens of Independence and Inyo county generally, that he is always at hand at his old stand, to do all kinds of work in his line, in the best style, at the lowest rates—for cash. Horse shoeing, ox shoeing, tire setting, iron work, etc., of every description. Wagon work done in the best style at reasonable rates. Agricultural implements made and repaired. Uncle Abe returns thanks for the liberal amount of patronage from the people of Inyo and hopes they will continue to favor him with the same." A. Parker.

FISH SPRINGS WAY-STOP

Northerly was a community named Fish Springs. It was a way-stop for the teams and stages and travel that used the old road by Aberdeen, Taboose and the Tinemaha Apple Ranch, one of the largest fruit ranches. At Fish Springs a school, postoffice, store and nearby ranches were in evidence in early years.

A large acreage north of the little town was called the Fish Springs Ranch and was operated by Walter L. (Bullfrog) Smith, originally from the Bullfrog Mining District. He ranged sheep in the nearby meadows, operated a dairy, raised hogs and feed crops. The ranch in later years was operated by the Ahren family who

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HOTEL BUTLER, Big Pine, Calif. Dec. 17, 1914.
Collection H. Mendenhall

STEWART LANE BRIDGE

Another bridge that was in use until condemned a year or so ago was named the Stewart Lane Bridge for an early family near Big Pine. It was one of the bridges that saw much use by farmers east of the river. We had not thought about the "Slim Princess" needing crossing bridges over slough or creek until we came across a railroad bridge east of the highway. It is seen crossing the Fish Springs slough and also relates to early travel, by railroad.

Big Pine was once called the "Hub City" of the towns in the Owens River Valley, becoming an important center. Besides the extensive stock and alfalfa ranches there were poultry, hogs, horses and mules and a profitable production of honey, which was sent to far markets. The ranch buildings were sheltered by shade trees and land was watered from the nearby snowfields below the vast Palisade Glacier.

One of the early settlers in the picturesque little town was Jonathon McMurry. We quote from the family record; "Jonathon W. was well established with a 160 acre homestead north of town in the 1860s. He owned the Deep Spring Valley and the Deep Spring Lake, he worked in mines at Fish Springs and later owned a store and the first hotel at Big Pine. His sons drove the teams of his freight line. Jonathon wrote his brother in Illinois about the promises of the rich fields around Big Pine. It sounded good to Samuel Jackson McMurry, a farmer. In 1873 Samuel, wife Jane and six children traveled by stage coach to Carson City where Jonathon met them

ranch home was always entertaining, it was known from Olancha to Round Valley. Anyone traveling would stop and eat at Aunt Jane's and Uncle Sam's. It all adds up to the words of one informant, "Great people. Don't make them any better." (this applies today).

FATHER OF TONOPAH

The McMurry Hotel changed hands many times through the years. Jim Butler, famous as the father of Tonopah, Nev., moved to Big Pine with his family in about 1905. He acquired a ranch easterly and the McMurry Hotel on Main Street. Old-timers had a wide smile for Butler, saying, "Jim was such a character! We never knew when he'd be in the hotel kitchen of an early morning cooking his own breakfast in a big iron skillet. Bacon, eggs and spuds, then he'd take it to a table and eat out of it."

Jim was a big man and wore a gold chain across his front with three big settings, a diamond, a ruby and a sapphire. He sometimes sat on the hotel veranda with cronies and his fun was in throwing out handfuls of nickels for the kids to scramble for. Butler never did learn to drive autos. He had a team of mules he'd hitch to a spring wagon. He did own one of those big French cars and with his driver would make trips often to Tonopah, Sacramento and San Francisco.

The Hotel Butler was a handsome landmark of Big Pine in 1914. It was a sizable two story building with



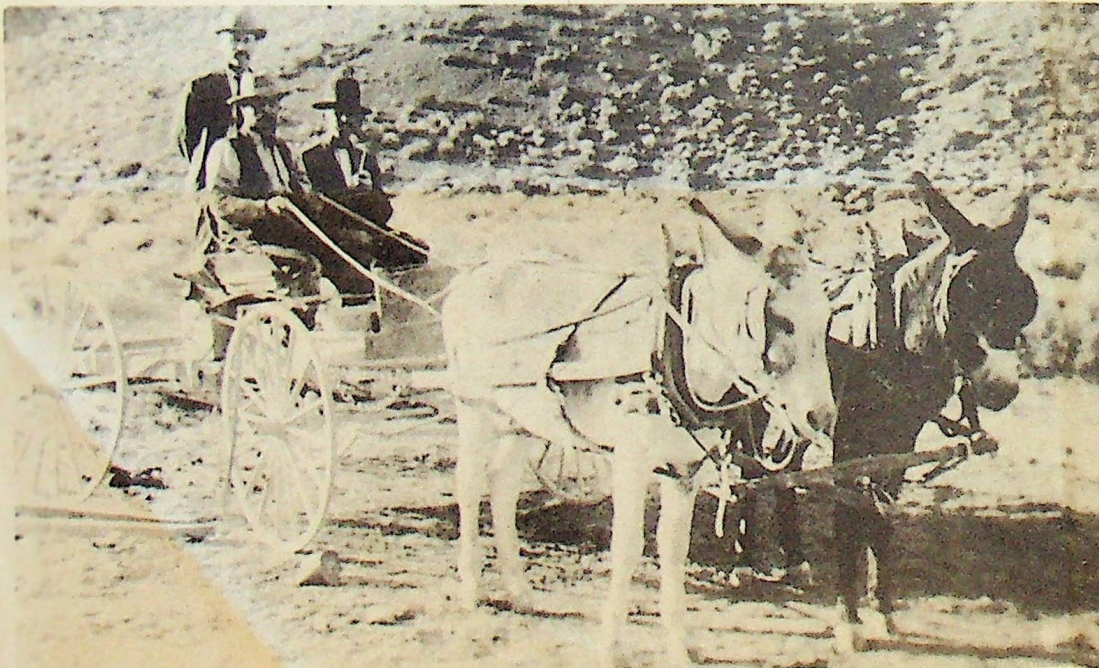


built two tall white silos that are seen across the field west of U.S. 395. It is now DWP owned.

After the main road was changed easterly from the town a small cabin camp, store and gas pump were operated by Bert Griffith. He had a background in baseball and became manager of the Big Pine ball team. Frederick Eaton of the Eaton Land and Cattle Company of Long Valley in Mono county began a huge enterprise in 1912 south of Big Pine. It was named the Owens River Poultry Company and was planned to become the leader in its line. Four hundred and forty acres were fenced by steel posts set in concrete. A large array of buildings made up the new industry in Inyo.

CHARLIE HUBER'S EGG WAGON

With quarters for over 7000 laying hens and a mill for grinding feed it became a producing endeavor. A steel car track was installed to carry in feed and to clean out. An egg wagon that had large drawer-like compartments was drawn by a mule in charge of Charlie Huber. The property was later known as the Howdy



Jim Butler drove a "spanking good" team of mules.
Collection H. Mendenhall

THE ABERDEEN BRIDGE was in use between the Stage Station and the C. and C. Railroad Station, both named Aberdeen. This bridge is in use after some work by the county.
Adele Red photo

Smith ranch important for sheep raising.

The first ranchers east of Big Pine and the Owens River had to use a ford in order to get to town. It was called "The Big Pine Crossing" and was also used by travel over Westgard Pass. In the 1870s Inyo county began building wooden bridges across the river from one at Lone Pine and wherever needed along the way to the Love Bridge (Five Bridges) north of Bishop. The bridges had trusses on both sides relating to early construction and there is only one left that has not been replaced. Still in use is one bridge that knew the sound of rumbling wagons, stages, buggies. It is the Aberdeen Bridge that carried the travel from the little settlement of Aberdeen across to the Aberdeen Station on the Carson & Colorado R.R. of the 1880s.

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and brought them to Big Pine by coach."

McMURRY HOMESTEAD

Samuel homesteaded one mile south of town. His five sons worked with their father clearing the land and a new house was built. The lumber for it was milled at the Stewart Sawmill on Big Pine Creek. Soon there were crops and horses, cows, hogs and sheep. They had plenty of water and were self-sufficient. The only food they bought was sugar and coffee, the butter and eggs paid for that. Wheat was milled for flour at the Bell Mill on Oak Creek at Fort Independence. Sam got their salt at Saline Valley.

Garden vegetables such as cabbage was covered with earth and left in the garden until needed. The pantry was full of hams, bacon, pickled pigs feet and sauerkraut. For lights they used candles made of tallow. Game was everywhere. There were more quail on the ranch than later years in the whole valley. Fishing was plentiful, they only caught what fish they wanted for a meal.

They drove cattle and horses to Mojave to be shipped by train to Los Angeles for top prices. Sam was one father who was careful to provide land for his sons when they married. All the sons had ranches adjoining their father's. The motto of the ranch was "never take anything from the ranch that can't walk!" The McMurry

THE McMURRY FAMILY of Big Pine. A gathering of the clan from great grandparents down the line.

Frank (Mac) McMurry collection

an addition that could be reached by a walkway between the upper floors. Beside the dining room there was a saloon as well as a bakery where homemade bread was sold.

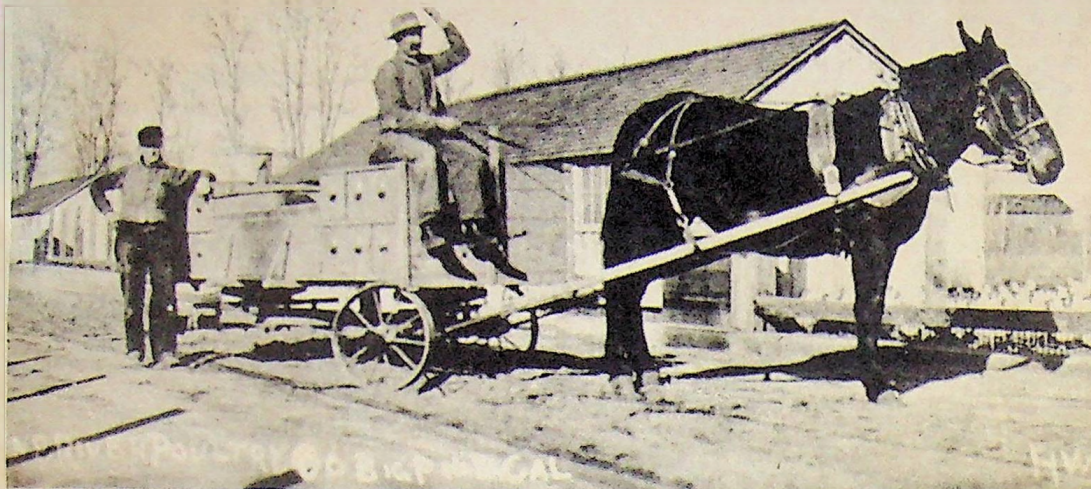
Two tokens from the hostelry were found in the area in later years. One is a brass, heart shape, embossed; "Hotel Butler, Big Pine, Cal./good for one loaf of bread." The other, a round aluminum, has "Hotel Butler Bar/good for 12½ cents in trade." These become more interesting as we learn about the Jim Butler who was said to have been a friend to all, his word as good as gold, or silver?

Reference: Chalfant—Inyo Anno Domini, 1912—Jim Crocker—Sophie (Staudinger) Black, memories.

ROUTE OVER WHITE MOUNTAINS

The Deep Springs Toll-Road was the beginning of a needed route over the White Mountains and later it was named Westgard. We find that an application was made Dec. 1870 by J.S. Broder, W.A. Greenly and T.J. Hubbard who had formed the Deep Springs Valley Company. A capital stock of \$10,000 was divided into shares of \$100

Toll roads and bridges



THE OWENS RIVER POULTRY Company, Big Pine. The egg wagon was driven by Charlie Huber. Mules served in many ways.
—Collection H. Mendenhall

each. It stated they intended to build a road known as the Deep Springs Valley Road, to commence on the east side of the Owens River at a point known as "Big Pine Crossing," (before bridges). Running thence in an easterly direction about 32 miles and terminating at a point known as Wyman's Creek in Deep Spring Valley, Inyo county.

The three men as named were to constitute a board of trustees. Filing was done, as stated and a petition June, 24, 1871. Road work began, then in 1873, a man named Scott Broder came from Aurora, Nevada and completed the road. This man began operating it as a toll-road after 1878 although it is thought the road was in use several years earlier. The original toll sign was taken to the Eastern California Museum in 1955 and read thus; wagons and two animals \$1.00 each; each additional pair 50¢; horse and rider 25¢; each pack animal 12½¢; loose stock, each 10¢; sheep, goats and hogs, each 5¢; rates adopted as of August 8, 1878. The Inyo county supervisors, after study by G.P. Doyle, Fred M. Hess and John H. Kispert, purchased the old road in later years.

TOLL-ROAD OPENS INYO

The route was one of the pioneer "ways" that helped to open up the land in Inyo. Previous to operation of it the only access was by road north or south. The northern route was often closed by snow in winter, when the toll-road was usually open. Thus the route saw much use by settlers coming west and by miners to the east, mining was opening up in Nevada. In 1915 the road was named Westgard in honor of Mr. A.L. Westgaard (note spelling) who crossed that way searching for an automobile transcontinental route.

This pass is a most picturesque drive, especially coming toward Big Pine. As one leaves the desert area of Deep Springs Valley and follows through rocky canyons up and across a high plateau, there are delightful glimpses of the white tips of the distant Sierra. It is a place where the fragrant pinon and juniper abound as well as shrubs and very colorful flowers.

ROAD TO BRISTLECONE

It is also the beginning of a road that takes one to the spectacular Bristlecone Pine Forest. These trees are the world's oldest known living things. The toll-road continues down hill from the high country and soon enters the "narrows" which reminds one of the fabulous Titus Canyon near Death Valley. The way was blasted of solid rock walls, narrow, with a patch of blue sky overhead. As the walls widen a most unusual scene shows the dry fields, the green oasis of Big Pine and hills and mountains of the scenic Sierra that shelter the huge ice pack named Palisade Glacier. The view is tremendous!

A few more turns of the road and the Toll Station is noted by a marker, shade trees and water! A clear, sweet spring bubbles from a barren hillside and is now

pipled to a tank. A historical little cabin was seen near the spring until its destruction some years back. It was said no barricade was needed to collect the toll as it was the only water for livestock on the "dry run." Chukar and quail are sometimes heard nearby. In another era there would have been the rumble of wagons, the sounds of pack trains, all kinds of loose stock, a lone rider or perhaps a prospector and his burro, each welcoming the good water.

Bibliography—Eastern California Museum.

HOOSIERS JOURNEY TO PACIFIC COAST

We recently read several Xeroxed copies of articles in "The Horseless Age," "Motor Age," and "The Automobile," July, 1913. These were courtesy of the Smithsonian Institute and relate to travel, some in Inyo-Mono. A group of 20 vehicles, carrying tourists, left Indianapolis on July 1, 1913. The object was to scout and chart possible routes for a transcontinental way to the west coast. The Indiana "Hoosiers" encountered heavy winds, rain storms, primitive lodgings in some areas, desert terrain and big herds of wild horses, (unknown to them). They received a great welcome wherever they stopped over. They drove some 3800 miles over all types of roads across eight states and arrived at Los Angeles on Aug. 3, 1913, this time included several breakdowns.

Fifty miles out of Goldfield, Nevada, the caravan crossed the Nevada line into California. Right in the bare desert was planted an immense flag pole with two flags, the national and the state. From there a delegation from the Good Roads Club of Bishop, California, escorted them up and over a high mountain pass. Then down rocky gorges over "eyelash roads" said to have been a route for the Pony Express from the east.

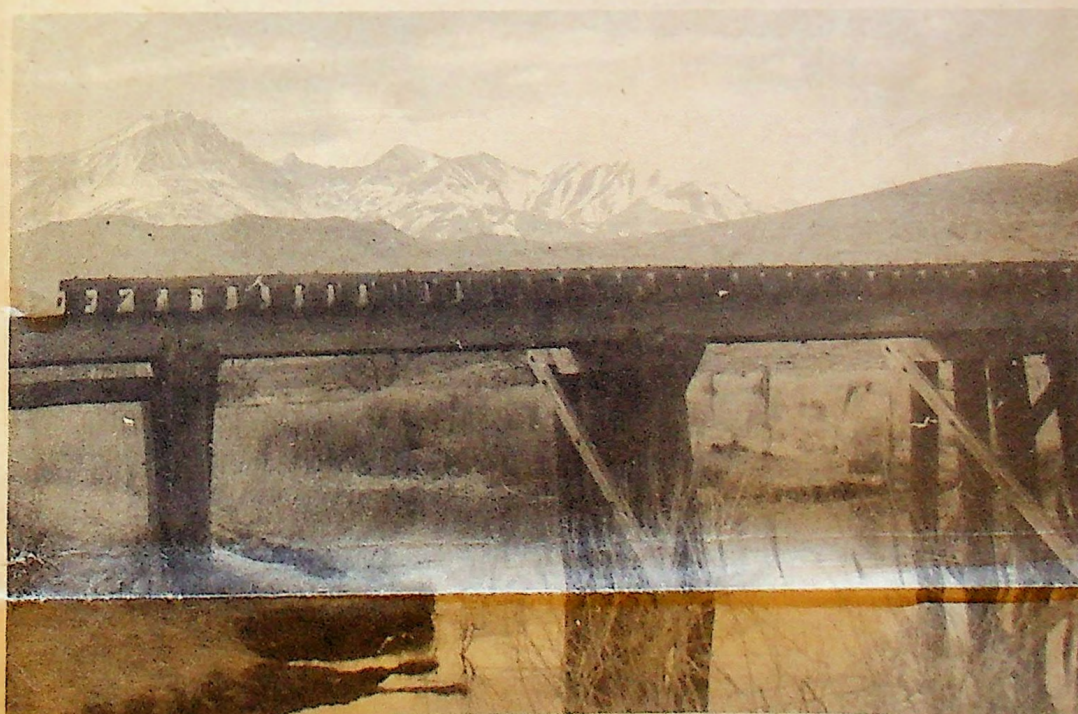
At Big Pine in the Owens Valley the tourists enjoyed a chicken dinner and a trout supper. The route from there was through Bishop to a camp "on Crooked Creek in one of the deepest canyons of the Sierra Nevada, the Owens River." They enjoyed fishing and mention is made of the beauty of the country as they went on. The canyon roads, valleys peopled with Indians, sheep and horses, and the boiling hot geyser, "The Devil's Castle."

INDIANA SUMMIT

The Indians crossed a summit that they then and there named Indiana in honor of the "Hoosiers." (the Indiana Summit is up canyon from the Alpers Ranch in upper Long Valley). The tour continued north over the mountains to Sacramento, San Francisco and Los Angeles, it was the beginning that brought travel from the east. The White Mountain Pass was given the name Westgard for a man working with the "Hoosiers."



STAGE TRAVEL from Bishop to Tonopah via the Deep Springs Toll-Road.
Ray McMurry collection



THE BRIDGE that carried the "Slim Princess" across the Fish Springs Slough.
Adele Reed photo