

MILLSPAUGH - THE BEGINNING AND THE END

In "The Gay Nineties," called so with fond memories of those who are no longer with us. Almon Nathaniel Millspaugh, born in Plainwell, Michigan, January 2nd, 1860, owned an asphalt mine east of Santa Maria, California, which he worked for several years, some of the product being used on the first paving of south Main Street in Los Angeles, with the steam roller and equipment which he owned.

When Randsburg, Calif. boomed in 1895, he established a freight line from Mojave to there, using 10 and 12 horse and mule teams and supervising the work and over night camps on the 55 mile trip, on these he drove a fast buggy team. In 1897 he sold out and went over to the little "town" of Onyx on the South Fork of the Kern River - known by all as the "So. Fork", taking along an old friend Lou Smith, they camped at Onyx - the whole "town" consisting of store, barn and corral and a few homes. Taking in tow Frank Pettipool and his wife Jessie, they prospected and spent the summer in the high country camping. In the fall of 1898 the three men took off with pack outfit for Mt. Spring Canyon, across Indian Wells Valley, also known then as Salt Wells Valley, nothing there to excite them, except to meet a fine old time Mexican Juan Andrado, who had a cabin, plenty of water and a garden and worked silver and gold mine.

"The Bonanza." He was our friend until his death in 1904. We camped many times with him during those years when traveling to and from Camp to Mojave.

So they went up Mt. Spring Canyon and around and down to Junction Flat and across to the east side of the Argus Range to the head of Shepherd's Canyon, where George Davis "Old Man Davis" was camping and prospecting, had a nice camp by a spring - which later disappeared as springs do at times. He was a plasterer by trade, now devoting himself to prospecting and keeping himself

in "beans and bacon" making an occasional trip on foot to Ballarat, 20 miles down the canyon and across Panamint Valley to re-stock the grub-box and a bottle or so of "Old Crow" or "Old Taylor," the favorite and most common brand of "fire water." He invited the "boys" to pitch camp, the rare pleasure of companionship pleased him greatly. He was a good man. So they did linger and indulge in prospecting the country. Davis had a little sheet-iron cook stove and in it he dumped his samples of ore, gathered here and there and with the dry wood of the Yucca tree that he used for fuel, he would add a piece or chunk of the "petrified" Yucca, of which a great deal could be found then, was very hard, and scattered around on the hills. (This is the Shepherd's Canyon in which John Shepherd of George's Creek, Owens Valley - built the toll road to Panamint Valley in the 1870's when Panamint City was booming.) He had many beautiful and queer shaped Yuccas, "late comers" who know no better, persist in calling them "Joshuas," but to we old timers they were and are "Yuccas." These same "late comers" miss-call Grease-wood - "Creosote." The old names should be left alone and tourists taught the proper ones. Grease-wood was named so because of the brisk fire and drops of "grease" that dripped into the fire with a spluttering sound as one cooked over the open camp-fire. This "petrified" Yucca made a slow even fire and any gold or metal in the samples of ore melted and mixed with the ashes, maybe days later he would rake out the ashes and sift through them gathering the "nuggets" if any and depositing them in empty whiskey bottles, and then would "cashe" them in some hidden place, so he was never quite sure just where he had found the metal or gold bearing rock samples. One time a young man came through the country, having gotten word on the "Grape-Vine" of "Old Man Davis'" bottles of gold nuggets. Glad of company, he was invited to stay over and "just happened to have a bottle" with him, and which they emptied during the evening and Davis talked," but when he woke up next morning with a thirst, the young man and Davis' "cashed" bottle were gone, amounting to a hundred dollars or so, as he

hadn't been to town lately. But these three visitors were not of that brand.

He showed them claims he had located and recorded in Independence, California, and they took samples. Later on they moved their camp East, over to what was known as "Devil's Canyon," a deep inaccessible box canyon on the east side of Argus Range looking down into Panamint Valley, but high "falls" preventing entrance from that side, so there is only one way in. The Indians some times kept a few heard of horses, as I also did, to winter there and with a tree limb laid across the trail they would not get out, a fine spring in the canyon. They camped there until spring, prospecting and experiencing a spring snow storm of a foot or more. So they packed out to Shepherd's Canyon again and bought several claims from Davis. One they called "The Yellow Metal" high up the hill above what later became Millspaugh ("camp") and another just over the "saddle" at the top of a small canyon running east of camp and from this "saddle" a fine view of Panamint Valley and range and far to the south to where Trona is now, and across the valley to where a green spot called Ballarat, 20 miles away glimmered in the sun at the foot of a rough mesa, extending out from the mouth of Pleasant Canyon. The mines around there were working and prospectors in the hills, it was a busy place, 2 saloons and a store and hotel. Judge Decker presiding over court when necessary, which was quite often, the jail usually occupied. Ballarat was the end of the stage-line from Johannesburg, 75 miles south, 6 horse stage coaches in 3 times a week and out 3 times. The high light of the day was when the stage rolled in with the mail and maybe some one was aboard with money to invest in mining property or just to spend it in the saloon & a brisk game of "solo" and these games often ran several days and nights, without a break, til the lucky one had all the money.

To get back to the claim overlooking the valley, it was called the "K.P.C." for an uncle. Later a shaft was sunk 90 feet, but prospects did not materialize and no further work was ever done on it. The main mine remained "The Yellow Metal" which was sunk to a depth of 125' later.

Arrangements made, the men returned to the So. Fork, acquired teams and wagons and materials for setting up camp was hauled over. Millspaugh made a trip east to Omaha, Nebraska, to arrange with Oliver J. Bailey, his brother-in-law, to come in with us. It was never a stock company, but a family business, consisting of Bailey, Millspaugh, Jessie N. Fowzer and her daughter, the writer of this! Mrs. Fowzer (FOWZER) was bookkeeper and assayer and later Post Master when the Post Office, Millspaugh was established in 1901 and a stage line from Darwin to Ballarat contracted by Charles Anthony, came through six times a week - to Ballarat, Monday, Wednesday and Fridays, returning on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturdays by team, arriving at camp at noon time. Charlie Anthony owned the Darwin Store, hotel and barns, all destroyed by fire in 1917, and in 1918 the former buildings in 2 blocks burned to the ground, leaving the entire main part of town in these two fires a total loss. In 1904 Anthony sold out all his business to Domingo Etcharren - (who owned the Junction and had made a good strike in Death Valley with his partner Jack Keane, which they named the Keane Wonder. It is just off the Beatty road going up to Day Light Pass) and to Silas H. Reynolds, then supervisor of our district, the 5th. Silas brought his cows to the Junction, 16 miles south of Darwin and they also were partners in the cow business. In 1905 when Skidoo was booming, Silas as supervisor had the Skidoo Road built down Darwin Wash and over the mountains, and down old Lower end of Darwin Wash, to Panamint Valley - the grade was quite an engineering feat, built by hand - Fresno scrapers, black powder and a large crew of men - It was later called "Zink Hill" but should always be known as "Skidoo Road" that it was named in the beginning. Old place names should never be changed! The fire in August 17, 1917 also destroyed The Black Metal Saloon, 2 houses and Jack Gunn's old saloon building of 1876 days and the beautiful mahogany billard table with its marble top that came around The Horn and hauled from San Pedro by freight teams of Remi Nadeau. The July 7th, 1918 fire destroyed the Etcharren home store, Domingo's Hotel and Mrs. Loughrey's hotel and rooms and the Frank Carthery home. One of the

houses in the 1917 fire was the one in which our son, Richard Mechan was born October 9, 1916.

But I digress ! So back to Millspaugh, early in 1900 a crew of men were hired, spots graded and leveled, all with pick and shovel. Tents were put up, with floors and walled up sides, lumber from Oregon for buildings and mill arrived in Keeler on the narrow gauge railroad and at the same time a cloud burst hit the town, carrying the track-cars, lumber and all out into Owens Lake, at that time it had water in it! Work was held up until the lumber was brought ashore and cleaned after a fashion, loaded on freight wagons with 12 horse teams and hauled the 44 miles to camp, a 3 day trip. That was my first summer at camp - a tiny girl, busy climbing the hills or riding my big black mule "Jumbo", my feet sticking out from his broad back, at times I "gave a hand" at cleaning the soda dirt out of the tongue and groove in the flooring and siding with a screw driver, and the soda making my hands sore, but I was "earning nickles." It was hardened like cement, the railroad was supposed to have washed and cleaned all the lumber, but had done a poor job, so we all helped. We had a cook, Miss Brice, and her brother, Frank, was teamster, hauling wood and was a "man of all work," they were from the south and amused us greatly with their soft drawl and odd expressions as "there is a right smart heap of lath over yonder." There was also "Grandpa" Millspaugh, who came out from Plainwell, Mich. to spend the summer and do the mason work, at which he was an expert, the stone walls and boiler walls that he and Uncle Al built, still stand.

We have been called "Perfectionists" and I suppose we were, things done must be done the right way and maybe a little better than others do. (My sons and I still have that "fault") Many deride perfection, but our camp was perfect in lay-out, buildings and cleanliness, a truly beautiful setting. The buildings were lath and plaster, tongue and groove flooring and siding and dark red corrugated iron roofs, the main building had a fireplace in the living room, bathroom with tub and wash stand, the larger entrance room was shelved for groceries and large storage closet and behind a dividing wall

or fence was the office roll-top desk and the high bookkeeping desk, also used for the Post Office. The Assay Office was equipped with the finest of scales, furnace and grinders, etc., a dark room for developing pictures from glass plates. My mother was an expert assayer and did a great deal of work for other mines and the many prospectors in the hills. We planted slips from Locus trees brought from Lone Pine and tenderly cared for by my mother and they grew into large trees, we also had a fine garden which we watered from the lower well with a pitcher pump.

The first mill was built of wood with red corrugated iron roof. It had 2-1200 pound stamps, ore bin and crusher above, below the stamps was the "plates" and concentrating table. The plates were 3 large copper ones over which the pulverized ore ran in water and any gold adhered later to be gathered with quicksilver at the "clean-up." A Fairbanks Morse steam engine and steam water pumps, a deep well was dug just outside the mill and later a 50 ft. tunnel or drift was run from the 50' level, thus supplying plenty of water, a large tank was above the mill. 10' below the ground level was a steam pump on a platform in the wall that brought the water to the big boiler. Just to the north of the boiler room was a well equipped Black Smith Shop and cupboards for carpenter tools - forge with large bellows and anvil where the drills & picks were sharpened - also horses and mules shod. 50' in front of the mill was a very large wood pile of dead Yucca (trees) used for fuel in the boiler. (I was an expert at firing the boiler and keeping steam up and knew every part of the machinery and running of the mill.) We also had a stone root cellar built into a bank in hillside in which potatoes, carrots, etc. kept very well for a long time.

The miners had comfortable wall & floored tents with heating stoves & good cot beds and until the boarding house was completed a large wall & floored tent was used for kitchen and dining room. At the foot of camp, south, were the barns and corral - hay barn & buggy and saddle room. Those who helped get camp started with the first building were Frank Pettipool and his wife, Jessie,

from the "So. Fork." Grandpa Millspaugh spent several summers with us, Dominique Estabarne "Old Man Davis" who did all the plastering - Lou Smith, several who drifted into camp, the Brices, Uncle Al Millspaugh, my mother Jessie Fowzer and me and later Grandma Marshall came up to "lend" a hand. Al & Lou were the top carpenters, mother did the ordering of supplies, book-keeping and payrolls, I took care of the stock, the job I loved best. She and I were also handy with a saw and hammer. Freight teams of 12 & 14 head hauled everything from Mojave. After the fiasco in Keeler, we only went to Lone Pine for hay and in the fall for those fine apples raised in the Valley in those days. George Coffey did most of our hauling - some by John Callaway and in later years we did our own freighting from Johannesburg via Mt. Spring Canyon and through the Indian Wells Valley where Navy Ordnance Test Station "NOTS" is now located.

Indian Wells & Coyote Holes on the Mojave to Keeler road were well known stopping places, stage stops and freight teams, fine meals at Coyote Holes. Mr. & Mrs. Freeman Raymond ran it for many years and several times were victims of Tibursio Vasquez when he and his gang descended on the place, they used the huge pile of rocks to the southwest as a look-out "Vasquez Rock" from which they could see approaching stage or freight teams from Cerro Gordo to the north and Red Rock Canyon to the south also the road to Walker's Pass. Freeman Post Office was also there and 6 horsestages from Mojave to Keeler made it a change station and meals for passengers, of which there were a good many.

When the Southern Pacific railroad from Mojave reached Brown, Kern County, in 1908-09 we hauled from there. All the fine people who helped to make camp the wonderful place and home it was, are now gone, only I am left. The first mill-man was Jim Banks in 1901-02, who came from Los Angeles to get things rolling. Later John Carricart became mill-man. There was a "Jack of all Trades" he could do anything and worked for us, off and on when he could leave his own interests. He and Domingo Etcharren owned the Junction on Junction Flat, 5 miles west and north of us on the road to Darwin, they had some mining property and Domingo was pardner with Clair Tyler in the Ballarat

Saloon when John Shepherd built the road down Shepherd's Canyon. Panamint City was booming in the 70's and the main object of the road was to haul fresh produce from Owens Valley and on Junction Flat a station was built to accomadate the freighters and stages, water was piped down from a spring 2 miles, at the base of Little Matarango Peak in 1/4 inch iron pipe. Mr. & Mrs. Green of Lone Pine came out to run the station & planted the old locust trees that are still there and some apple trees. Remi Nadeau built a road up from Indian Wells Valley, a grade up the Malapai which is north of the mouth of Mt. Spring Canyon, this was known as the "Hamilton Road" after the man who engineered the building - this road came into Junction Flat at the southwest end, up the flat crossing the original road from (Owens Lake) via old Coso to Shepherd's Canyon and so was called the Junction, the road continued on in a straight line - as did most of Nadeau's roads (one could still see them for miles when I was growing up) and bore to the east along the foot of the Argus Mts. up a canyon and to Modoc, originally Look-Out - from where Nadeau was hauling ore to Mojave and returning with supplies. The old Hamilton road is now used by NOTS from China Lake to the Junction - that too is miss-called "Junction Ranch" it is just "The Junction". The trees are almost 90 years old, during the 20's and 30's they suffered from neglect and years of drought, and then in the early 1940's were brought back to their former glory by the loving care of John Carricart and his wife, Marie, he had returned to his old home where he had first arrived in 1891 as a lad from France. Then when all our old home country was taken over by the Navy for a bombing range and closed to outsiders, John became the caretaker and watchman, their fine garden and fruit trees were producing and the old Junction had come back to life. In the 1890's and early 1900's it was always a stopping place for anyone and used by many prospectors and folks from Ballaret who came up in the summer to escape the heat.

To get back again to camp. The mill made a few runs with ore from the Yellow Metal mine on the south side of the 7000 foot range. In the summer of 1900



three miners were working, John Carricart was doing the blacksmith work, tool sharpening and running the hoise with mule power. Bricis had returned to Alabama and "Grandpa" Tapman was cooking, hauling wood and supplies when necessary, on this day he was away with the team for hay and gain, Uncle Al was east on business, I was away in school and Mama was assaying, Davis was still camping at his old spot. To divert again, one evening when camp was being built, the men made a bet they could strike water at 25 ft. in a spot about the center of camp in the canyon floor. So after work in the evening and on their own time and with pick and shovel they sunk a 4' x 4' hole and at 24' the water came in, rising to 4' of the surface, the finest, purfst and coldest water any one could wish for, and it never lowered its level - we have watered 45 head of stock at one time, using a hand "Pitcher" pump, a half oaken barrel was the horse trough. The boys framed the well and platform over the top with a raised box on which the pump set, with a coffee can handy to prime the pump. Beside the well is a large round flat rock on which the Geological Survey, U.S. placed a bench mark in 1906, elevation 6157' above sea level.

John Carricart met a tragic death July 19, 1945, when returning home from his son's in Glendale, his pickup was hit at the fork of San Fernando Road and Supulvida Blvd. by a navy truck and he was instantly killed.

They stayed with us at camp while they were surveying and placing Bench Marks, one of which they placed at that time on the top of Matarango Peak 8850 We made trips in the spring to Lone Pine for hay and fresh vegetables with our four mule team, the white one "Beck" and "Jack" on the wheel and brown "Mike and "Pat" on the lead. Unless one has done so they cannot imagine the pleasure of sitting high on the seat, holding the reins "ribbons" properly and a good team in front! In the fall we went up for more hay and the fine apples that were raised in the Valley then, before the City of Los Angeles. "B.C.L.A."

Back to the spring of 1902 one more, as Mama worked with her assay she

looked out the window to see smoke coming out the mill door and from deep in the middle of the huge wood pile, running to investigate she found flames sweeping the interior of the mill and she could not get inside to the hose. She remembered the opened case of dynamite the men had gotten powder from that morning, she ran in the shop and carried the 50 pound box out and up the hill, by then everything was burning fiercely and up the hill came Davis panting "Mrs. Fowzer, I brought 2 buckets of water, what shall I do with them." By then it was 4 P.M. and John had come to the surface to get the powder for the round of shots at quitting time, saw the smoke, yelled down to the others to come up and he took off down the hill to camp. Of course none of our horses were up, so he walked over to the Junction, 5 miles, hoping to find ours or his but all he could find was old "Molly" one of the Indian's horses, catching her, he rode back to camp, ate and saddled up and started for Indian Wells, 50 miles away, arriving there at 8 A.M. Good time for any horse and "Old Molly" had "string halt" not painful, but causing a limp. The down stage, from Keeler to Mojave, arrived and John sent a wire by the driver to be telegraphed to Uncle Al, who was due in Los Angeles about that time and would be at The Hollenbeck Hotel. John started back that evening. Upon receipt of the wire Al caught the train to Mojave, our buggy team was stabled there while he was in the east, at Mrs. Catlins wagon yard. He left immediately for Coyote Holes 55 miles, 10 miles out of town, Jerry became ill and had to turn back, the only horse available was a fine black, "Nig", but a notorious runaway, this made an extra 20 miles for "Yaqui," however all went well to Coyote Holes and the next days 55 miles to camp. Upon reaching the winding grade down to Junction Flat, after leaving the head of Mt. Spring Canyon, "Nig" started to run, "Yaqui" would never let another horse pass him, so the race was on across the flat and up the short canyon to the summit where the old road drops down into Shepherd's Canyon, our grade to camp turned off to the left and was a quarter of a mile around to camp. Al had a box of apples on the seat beside him and it acted as a

balance when the buggy whipped around the short turns and the wheels did not touch bottom on the pitches (gullys) as they saw a few days later when returning to Mojave to get Jerry and leave "Nig" and his owner was welcome to him! They made a "Grand Stand Finish" when they arrived in camp! They unhooked the team in front of the store building and led them down to the corral, otherwise "Nig" would have kept running down the canyon.

Men were immediately set to work cleaning up the debris, the machinery was found to be undamaged, engines, pumps and etc. were taken apart, cleaned and oiled and re-assembled, the plates had to be replaced and the concentrating table had burned, the stamps and crusher were alright. Lumber and corrugated iron was hauled in and rebuilding began at once. This time the sides as well as the roof were of the dark red corrugated iron, a cyanide plant was installed in the new mill and a 50 ft. drift run in the well at the 50' level, thus assuring an abundant supply of water. Another large amount of dead yucca trees was hauled in for the boiler furnace and by late summer the first mill-run was made with John Carricart as mill-man. In 1904 and '05 a tunnel was run in 1500 ft. to connect with the "Yellow Metal" shaft which was used as an air shaft for the tunnel which extended 400 feet further, following the ore body where it "pinched out" at the 1900' face.

The Boarding House was built in 1904 on the site of Davis old camp, he having moved 3 miles down the canyon and built a shack by a fine spring and a carrol and tended the stage horses that were changed there, each day as the stage went down to Ballarat and on the return trip up and on to Darwin. Charlie Anthony ran the stage and had the mail contract and carried passengers. He also owned the Darwin Store, Hotel and barn and corrals. He was a fine man.

The following years camp had its ups and downs, as did all the mining and milling adventures around the country, the ore was just not there to pay a profit. Our last effort was made on a prospect up the canyon a mile from camp in 1908. A 50 ft. shaft sunk and several drifts run, but the ore body was not there. It was appropriately enough called "The Last Chance" and worked continued off and on until 1910 when that summer saw the end except for the

yearly assessment work until 1914 when all the buildings were sold to Summers and Butler who had recently bought the Junction and cows from Domingo Etcharren and brought their stock down from Long Valley and made the Junction head quarters with the line camps at Cole Springs 4 miles south of Old Coso.

The cowboys proceded to dismantle the buildings and hauling them out on hay wagons with the large flat racks. The boarding house they sawed in half and got it out O.K. and put back together at the Junction, also the blacksmith shop, the assay office they hauled to a spring west of Cole Springs 2 miles and dumped it off where it set for years tilting at an angle. Many years later it was moved over to Cole Springs. The lumber from the store building, our residence, they stacked in front of Junction and used for fire wood, easier than hauling pinon in for the purpose, of which there was and is a great deal. Piece by piece the mill was hauled away - some to Darwin in 1915 where my husband and Silas Reynolds went into the garage business, the first in town, gas .50 cents a gallon, later reduced to 35¢ (no tax!) Boarding House and Blacksmith shop still at the Junction.

And so ended the finest and most beautiful camp and home one could desire in a wonderful country. Before World War II the scrap-iron scavengers decended upon our desert country and hit the Jack-pot at camp, engine, pumps, smokestack, every piece of iron, even to old horse shoes was hauled away but none of them could get the boiler out of the mason work after repeated efforts and now that is all that is left of the beginning and the ending. Now the Navy has my beloved home in its Bombing Range. Cloud bursts have roared down the canyon, through camp, taking out Shepherd's Canyon road and it became impassable, but the stone walls still stand and the grade coming into camp. The memories flood over me of those happy years and of the ones who helped build and who lived there, all gone now except this writer and maybe it is later than she things!

Elizabeth L. Mecham

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