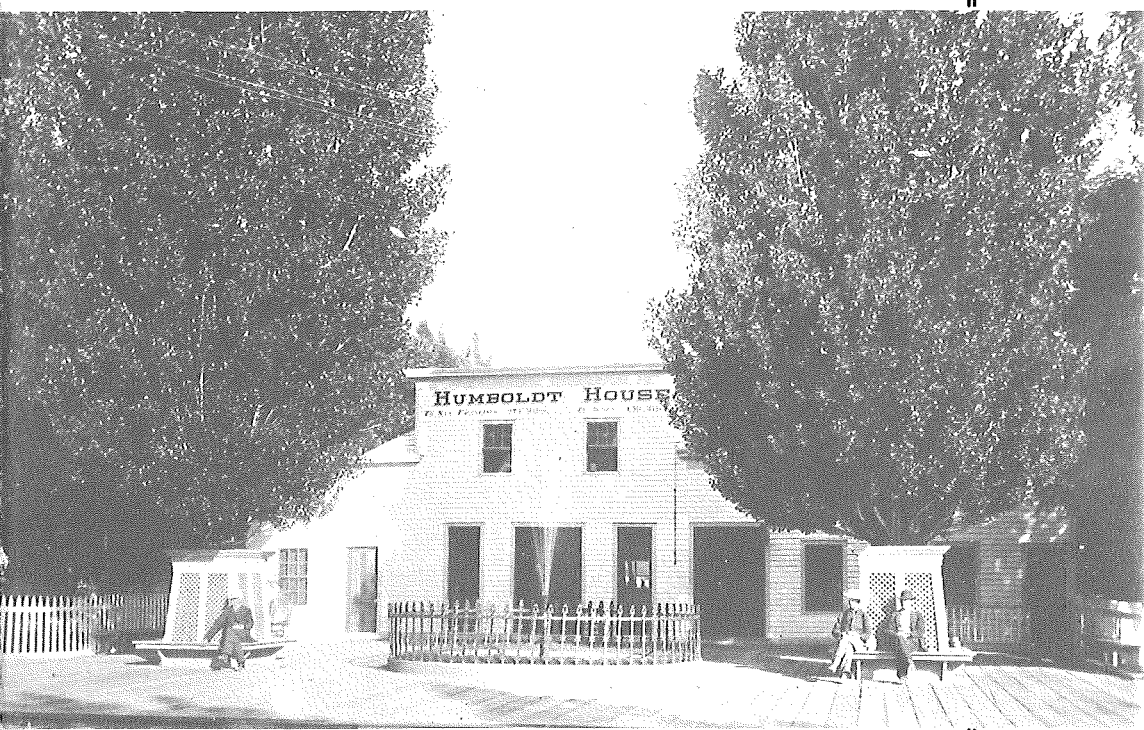
Nevada Historical Society Quarterly



VOLUME X
Number 3

FALL
1967

NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Founded in 1904 for the purpose of investigating topics pertaining to the early history of Nevada and of collecting relics for a museum, the **NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY** has dedicated itself to the continuing purpose of preserving the rich heritage of the peoples—past and present—who have inhabited the land of Nevada.

The Society believes that it can best serve the State by arousing in the people an historical consciousness which it hopes will be carried to succeeding generations. Thus, through its director, the Society sponsors an educational program which carries the history of Nevada to the schools and organizations throughout the State.

The Society maintains a library and museum where historical materials of many kinds are on display to the public and are available to students and scholars.

The Society publishes the **NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S QUARTERLY** which publishes articles of interest to readers in the social, cultural, economic, and political history of the Great Basin area: Nevada, eastern California, eastern and southern Oregon, Idaho, and Utah.

NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY

FALL 1967

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NUMBER 3

EDITOR

Mrs. Andy Welliver

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COVER

Humboldt House. Built in the 1860's and located about two miles from Humboldt City, it was operated in the 1870's by Idah Strobridge's father.

The NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY is published by the Nevada Historical Society, P.O. Box 1129, Reno, Nevada. Orders for membership, change of address, and undeliverable copies should be addressed to the Society.

Second class mailing privilege authorized at Reno, Nevada

SPO, Carson City, Nevada, 1967

Idah Meacham Strobridge

First Woman of Nevada Letters

ANTHONY AMARAL

Idah Meacham Strobridge

IDAH MEACHAM STROBRIDGE

First Woman of Nevada Letters

Literary interpretations of Nevada are as sparse as the land itself is abundant in sagebrush. By interpretations I mean a literature that conveys with deep feeling and perspective expression a sense of place, mood, and tempo of living.

Although definitions of regional literature abound, regional writing that lasts is characterized first by its feeling. The prose might read like poetry because of the writer's ability to translate an individual meaning to life and land and its history and legends. The perspective is not muddled with prosaic descriptions or a silly emphasis of a pantheistic land of clear skies and eternal blossoms. Neither does forthright regional literature confuse a region's local significance for unique values. Without perspective the writer will have no difficulty outliving his own writing.

But the writer might be overlooked, as is Idah Meacham Strobridge, now dead over thirty years. Her three books, *In Miner's Mirage Land (1904), Loom of the Desert (1907) and Land of Purple Shadows (1909),* all privately printed in limited editions, do not merely contain stories and reminiscences told within a regional setting. Idah Strobridge cast away flimsy observations and presented vivid and graphic impressions of the northern Nevada country.

Her writings, as her own life, reflect varying attitudes to the Nevada desert. She knew the desert when it was still sinister and vivid in the memories of people who remembered the toll it had taken of the emigrants and animals along the Overland Trail. The other world of the desert she saw or, more adequately, felt as a place of awe and reverence for mind and body.

Mrs. Strobridge wrote of one of the loneliest parts of Nevada—Humboldt County in the northern part of the state. Her first book, *In Miner's Mirage Land,* appeared one year after Mary Austin's classic, *Land of Little Rain,* and was somewhat similar. But Idah Strobridge may have been the first to write of desert landscapes in ecstatic moods as some parts of her book were reprinted from the *Los Angeles Times* and *San Francisco Chronicle.*

What she wrote about she had seen through long tenure of living in the desert during the late 1860's to the turn of the century. Even more, she deeply felt what she had seen; the desperation of emigrants facing the most miserable part of their trek to California in the barren face of Forty Mile Desert or Black Rock Desert; the fruitless wanderings of prospectors in the hills; and Chinese and Indians living as second-place people in the egocentricity of the white man's ways.

Her people are in conflicts, culturally or with the land. Out of the mixture she finds folk tales, and strange behaviors; the recluse and the gregarious. All affect the land in their struggles and in turn are affected by the land. These elements she sensed as the living sap which a land must be soaked with to make the essence of literature. Then, of course, this essence needed a literary sympathizer to give meaning and emotional expression.

When finally impelled to write, Idah Strobridge realized almost at the outset that true sympathy is a harmonious cycle and that her writings needed another dimension—a sympathetic reader. She writes *In Miner's Mirage Land:*

> "How can one convey meaning to another in a language which the other does not understand? I can only tell you the Charm of the Desert when you, too, have learned to love it. And then there will be no need for me to speak. . .
> ". . . To those who know the Desert's heart . . . speech is not needed . . . and the Desert speaks to them through her silence. . ."

She knew also that what she felt for the desert was not for all to feel in the same intensity. Moods, like the human face, are never exactly alike. And for some, the desert would always be "a gray waste of sand and sagebrush, lying in pitiful loneliness under a gray sky. . ."

The initiated, as she implies, needed no encouragement. They would explore the desert by the momentum of their own inquisitiveness. Those only somewhat enthralled and who preferred to stand at a town's edge and admire the desert, she encouraged to go out and to open themselves to the awe and silence that is the desert. She repeats this plea virtually as a fetish, since only her deep sensitivity to the desert and her fascination for its desolation could indicate to her the difficulty of transcribing the desert's wonders as she knew them. In *Land of Purple Shadows,* her last book, she finally arrives at an analogy which leaves little else for her to say:

> "At various times—in various places; in many moods, and in different mediums, are the studies and sketches made, which the painter brings back to the studio . . . Mere suggestions and rough outlines are they—first impressions . . . Not for the galleys did he make them, nor for the critics, nor for the careless. But the folio is open to those who will understand; those who in the incomplete sketch, the half-finished study, see the Truth. Even as the painter shows you such, so, too, are put before you these studies of the West—this land of golden sunlight and purple shadows . . ."

Not all of her writing about the desert follows a mystic vein. She wrote of lost mines, desert animals and about people. Her best accounts were about prospectors. But she was particular. She didn't care about those prospectors who came to the land, made their riches, and then

departed to find their particular happiness in San Francisco. She was intrigued by those desert wanderers who wore out their lives in search of what she calls the *rainbow gold;* a bonanza waiting somewhere for them, or a lost mine. Prospectors were her favorite people; and. . .

> "By campfire smoke, or in the dim light of sod cabins, I have sat in that silence the Desert teaches you, and have listened as they talked, and believed as I listened. Yes, even believed; as you, too, will believe if you hear from their own lips the fables that seem so true during the hour you are under the storyteller's charm. . ."

Still, their story-charm never lessened her perspective of the prospectors. While she could sit and be enthralled, she saw beyond their stories, and apparently, into the ticking of their souls:

> "The faith of the old prospector! There is no other such blind faith in the world . . . Even if the fairy stories of the fabulous lost mines are true, and they should, someday, find each his own treasure, I doubt if the end of the search would bring joy. To have money in the Desert, makes little change in one's way of living. And to go to the cities! They are alien to all the cities would give. So, the joy of life, for them, lies in the search for—not in the finding of gold."

Often the same theme is reiterated by Idah, but always in a fresh glimmering. In her story about the Lost Blue Bucket Mine, she repeats the idea of the prospector's wanderlust in search of gold:

> ". . . The years wax and wane; but time does not lessen their faith. Always and always will there be those who go up and down the length of the Desert land seeking the mines that are myths; serving the Sorceress of the sand wastes until the day shall come when they lie down to rest on the old Overland Trail, where the bones of those who broke the way were buried in the long ago. . ."

The final end of all desert rats (as she beautifully describes in a story called, *Old Man Berry)* is very much the same:

> "All the years of his life the old prospector gives to the Desert his best and his all—gives hope, and joy, and love, even as he gave youth. He gives his very soul; then, finally, he commits his body to the Desert's keeping—to sleep there in everlasting silence. Cruel? Nay, the Desert is kind; for in death the body rests where the heart found its joy in life. What lover could ask more?"

Idah's story people and their reactions to an environment strongly portray the Nevada desert region. But symbolically, her characters are beyond strict regionalism. They might have appeared anywhere in the American west where solitude was often the rule and a governing force in great expanses of a silent and a stubbornly unyielding land.

Contrary to some opinions which claim regional writing is best written by those who were born in the region they write about, Idah was a transplant from California, but tempered at an early age by the Nevada desert.

She fits perfectly the requirements for a regional writer given by Lawrence Clark Powell, bookman and former librarian at UCLA:

> "It does not require being a native son or long resident to write truly about a place. What is required is a writer's ability to root, to send down (and up) his sources of nourishment and strength. . ."

Idah's writings of Nevada carry the vitality Powell suggests. Her story, "The Quest of Old Man Berry," from *In Miner's Mirage Land,* is typical of her close-up description which does not lose sight of the panorama.

> "Take up your map of the Western States. There, where the great Oregon lava flow laps over the State line of Nevada, in the northwestern corner, lies the Black Rock country. Out there in that sweep of gray sand and sage-levels, and grim heights—the scaling of which—taxes the soul sorely, I found him—the typical prospector, "Old Man Berry," or "Uncle Berry," they called him. Over eighty years old he was, and for more than fifty years of his life led by the lure of a mirage.
>
> "All day I have been traveling over alkali flats and greasewood-covered mesas, to reach—in late afternoon—the upper tablelands. They were dotted with mountain mahogany, and slashed with cañons, and quite dark when we stopped at the ranch house doorway, through which the lamplight streamed—the friendliest sight a Desert wayfarer ever meets up with.
>
> "We had come upon one of those small ranches that are tucked away in the heights, where old prospectors are sure to drift to, when not in the mountains with poll-pick and hammer, as though they—like the ranchman's collie or the cat curled up on the bunk—were among the assets of the place.
>
> "He was tall and spare—gaunt, you would have called him; and you would have noticed at once how bowed he was. But not as other old men on whom age has rested a heavy hand. It was the head, not the back, that was bowed—as though he had walked long years, and far, with his eyes upon the ground. When he lifted them quickly—looking directly into your own—you found they were bright and piercing, with keenness that belonged to a man forty years his junior; and you felt that his sight reached away beyond—to things not of your reckoning. . ."

Although Idah Meacham Strobridge displayed a subtle touch for the pulse of Nevada, she was born in Moraga Valley, Contra Costa County, California, on June 9, 1855. Her father was George W. Meacham, born in New Jersey. He worked in the California gold fields in the 1850's, but after three years was only slightly ahead of a shifting balance of successes and failures. He returned to New Jersey and married a childhood friend, Phoebe Craiger. But she refused to go with him to California. After six months of marriage, he returned to California alone. Upon his arrival, Meacham learned that his partner had sold their mining interests and had disappeared. Shortly after informing his wife of the recent event, she decided to join him in California.

In Contra Costa County, Meacham went into ranching. Shortly after, Idah was born. When she was about eight years old, in 1863, the family moved to Humboldt County, Nevada, and Meacham became one of the pioneer stockmen. Nevada was still a territory, and the Promentory Point epic a few years in the future. The family lived close by the Overland Trail to California in Humboldt City.

In those impressionable years, Idah watched the emigrants passing through and liked to ride out into the desert to visit with them. Often, she rode just to be alone in the desert and seemingly to wonder about it all. Like Emerson, she was to believe, "Nature never wears a mean appearance." Yet she knew the desert to be harsh and a difficult challenge to those who settled on the land. Her writings do not deny this.

By the late 1860's the Central Pacific Railroad had established a station stop called Humboldt House, about two miles from Humboldt City. During the 1870's it was operated by Idah's father, along with a partner. By this time, Idah had attended Mills Seminary, Oakland, California, from 1871–1873. Facts are vague, but she may have returned to live with her parents for the next decade. By 1884, she had married Samuel Strobridge in San Francisco and later lived in Oakland. Three sons were born, all dying in infancy. This was the beginning of a series of tragedies. Four years after their marriage, her husband died. Shortly after this, her father's cattle herd was virtually wiped away by the severe winter of '88–'89. Her parents joined her shortly after in Oakland.

Again, facts are hazy. Idah did return to Humboldt County because by 1896, she was writing short stories and poetry for *Nevada Magazine,* some California newspapers and *Land of Sunshine,* edited by Charles Lummis. Later, she wrote for *Sports Afield* and *Munsey's.* Her very early writing carried the pseudonym of George Craiger, a combination of her parents' names.

Along with her writing she raised cattle and worked a gold mine called the Great West Gold Mine. An account in the *Lovelock Tribune* (c. 1901) of mining in that region reported some "very rich quartz having been taken from the mine and promises a fortune for its owner. . ."

An unusual hobby of hers was bookbinding which she conducted in the attic of the ranch house. Lummis, in an editorial comment in *Land of Sunshine,* wrote: "A commercial-bound book looks cheap beside her staunch and honest and tasteful bindings; and when I have a book that merits to endure longer than the commercial binds can make it, off it goes to Humboldt—and never in vain."

Spaced between her varied activities, Idah managed to take horseback rides into the desert and to visit with those who lived in cabins or in an outdoor camp. She came to know a number of prospectors, Indians, and cowboys and listened avidly to their stories. She also liked to ride along the old wagon trails where the emigrants had passed. On the Black Rock

Desert broken and sun-dried wagon wheels, animal bones, and household furniture abandoned by the emigrants to lighten their wagons had a profound effect upon her. Moody from her own tragedies, the mere indications of misfortunes were deeply felt by her:

> "So, if you will do as I have done—in the saddle—ride over mile after mile of the old emigrant road where it winds in and out among the gullies along the foothills, or where it dips farther down into the lowlands, or as it trails along the mesa, or stretches out straight across the hard, alkali flats; or where it follows the banks of the muddy Humboldt, crossing and recrossing the bends where the old fords are, you will surely chance upon some long neglected mounds which tell their silent stories of the sufferings and privations of those whose names must forever remain unknown. Sometimes a roughly-lettered board was placed at the head, but oftener it was 'a grave without tombstone or token.'
>
> "Forgotten and neglected graves of the Desert! For more than fifty years they have been part of that vast silence; visited only by the snows of winter or the rays of the burning summer sun. No one comes to mourn them. No one comes to lay flowers on their head. . ."

The great dangers of the desert, Idah indicates, were never to be doubted. It was an enemy to the emigrants who fought every desolate mile through Nevada and their final suffering before the rewards of California's pleasant valleys were claimed. In spite of the havoc the Nevada desert had wrought on the emigrants, the cause was not so much the desert as it was the lack of its understanding by the emigrants. Mirages—misty shapes that lured emigrants to unknowing destruction she well imagined:

> "Away back in the old days when the slow-moving ox team dragged its weary way, foot by foot, over the alkali flats and the long stretches of sun-baked soil, where the only growth was the gray sage and the greasewood—away back in those far days—the mirage, that Loreli of the Desert, was there to lure men on to their destruction.
>
> "Great lakes of shining water, where little waves ran up to lap the shore; wide fields of clover and bluegrass, that looked so green and cool under the burning sun; forests which reached miles away in a tangle of vine and tree—those were the visions that the Siren of the Dry Lakes showed to the water-starved emigrant of old, and—beckoning—led him on and on, in the pursuit of the unreal, until the picture grew fainter and fainter, and at last down the diminishing perspective of the vision—as he looked—he saw it fade away. The grassy fields where the oxen might have fed, the sparkling waters at which they might have drunk, the broad-leafed shade under which man and beast might have found refreshing rest, were gone! A tantalizing glimpse of Paradise in the great and awful desolation of those Desert days.
>
> "Many a poor traveler, led far astray by following the ever-calling, ever-retreating enchantress, has laid down at last to die

> alone in that vast waste, where his bones must bleach in the sun, and his dust must become the sport of the winds of the Desert."

Typically she bridges some of her topics from the purely subjective to the descriptive real. Thus, when she speaks again of mirages she says:

> "It is apt to make the shivers run up one's spine to see a harmless looking brush, of a sudden, metamorphose itself into a tall man, and see the man come striding toward you with a long, swinging step; and then—while you are still intently gazing, and wondering where he could have sprung from on that barren Desert bit—as suddenly discover that he is walking away from you—and backwards at that. . .
>
> "The mirage is, in very truth, a part of the Desert itself—just as the sagebrush, and the coyote, and the little horned toads, and the sandstorms are part. To those who know the Desert-land, the picture would be incomplete without them. . ."

About 1903, shortly after Idah was finding a wider acceptance of her work, she left Humboldt County and moved to Los Angeles. She built a house in an area which then was a center for artists and writers. Charles Lummis lived close-by, as did Mary Austin and Will Levington.

From here she issued her books and continued her bindery and the residence was known as the *Sign of the Sagebrush.* Her books were issued in limited editions of about 1,000 copies. Some were covered in wrappers, 8vo, and sold for $1.75. For $6.75, she covered the books in three-quarter morocco, and in full morocco for $10.00. In these full-leather copies the chapter heads of simple vignettes were hand colored. Each book was numbered and autographed in a bold, free-moving handwriting.

An unusual practice was her use of a binder's colophon, which she also autographed. Her bindings won her a silver medal, the highest award, at the California State Fair in 1908, and a gold medal at the Alaskan-Yukon Fair in 1909. Artists Maynard Dixon and Duncan Gleason exhibit their early efforts as illustrators in her books.

Presumably Idah never did return to Humboldt County after her move to Los Angeles. Often in her stories she pined to go back to the desert where she preferred . . . "alkali in my nostrils, and to smell the smoke from a greasewood campfire. . ." It may well be that Idah Strobridge needed the "alkali" and the "smoke," and to be close to the Nevada desert in order to write about it. For the years following her departure from Humboldt seem to drain her creative energies, and her later writings are, frankly, mediocre. Some of her attempts at fiction were even absurd.

After the publication of her third book, she apparently ceased writing. She became active in geneological studies and continued her bookbinding craft until her death in 1932.

Copies of Idah Strobridge's books are rarely listed in booksellers' catalogues. *In Miner's Mirage Land* and parts of her other two books *(Loom of the Desert* and *Land of Purple Shadows)* are deserving of new consideration by a publisher. While many readers will delight in her personal style, Nevadans in particular will find a dimension in her writing that matches the land that she felt should be set aside for "Silence, and Space and the Great Winds." Humboldt Country is still all this. Hawks and eagles soar on wind currents, cattle graze on unfenced ranges and men still poke into the brown hills for rainbow gold; and the careless desert traveler still becomes a victim. Idah Strobridge's books have as much of an essence of the present as they do of the past.

* * * * *

The Land of Purple Shadows

The Quail's Cañon

IDAH MEACHAM STROBRIDGE

THE QUAIL'S CAÑON.

BRISTLING with rocky cliffs and deep ravines—its face is furrowed and scarred where cloudbursts have warred their way; but all softly beautiful in its blending of violet-blues and shadowy purples as you view it from afar, is this rugged mountain where—in the long ago—miners and prospectors burrowed its sides full of holes, as the badgers burrow the plains away down below, making their tunnels and inclines and shafts in the quest for silver. For these things of which I tell you, happened in the days when silver, not gold, was the metal men went a-seeking.

Ledges were there in every cliff; and in a sunny cañon lying to the west they built their cabins, setting them in two long rows at the sides of the creek that came down in rowdy fashion (making much noise, and taking up much room) after it left the sky-line where it was born under the melting edges of the snow-banks.

The mining camp nestled happily between two uneven ridges; and there it grew lustily, and the miners called it a "city," and great things were expected of it. A busy, hopeful little community it was which had gathered there in those old days of honest endeavor and steadfast work; and all signs pointed (they would tell you) to the time

that it would become a great silver camp. But "all signs fail in dry weather"; and although it was indeed a dry land, and although there came seasons of unprecedented wet, and snow, and cold, as in other lands, one could not tell if it was in spite of the signs, or because of them, that none of the good things prophesied and hoped-for ever came true.

The mountain was a network of ledges, and in them silver was found in abundance. Willing hands were ready to do the work—the hands of men who were young and brave and strong as they must be who go to blaze the way through a new country. But a score of unforeseen difficulties leagued against them, and as they saw their chances for success diminish, their numbers decreased—they drifted away, one after another, going back to the old homes in the cities from whence they came.

First one cabin, then another, became tenantless—each owner taking with him all that was possible for him to carry. Down along the home road to the sea, they would find purchasers for all which they had no use for; so windows, and doors, and roofing were taken away, to be sold to other miners in other cañons farther toward the West. Lumber was priceless in a land which had neither railways nor water transportation.

Far away, across a continent, a civil war was rending our country, but the meager news which came to the miners in the isolated cañon seemed but as a story. Letters and newspapers must journey many a week ere ships, and ponies could bring them to their destination. "The world forgetting, and by the world forgot," the few who were left there numbered but two score when the Winter of the Great Snow descended on them.

Their supplies—cached in abandoned tunnels—had

The Quail's Cañon

been growing less and less, with no immediate means of being renewed. Each man was looking forward to the Spring when he, too, would return to the Coast. There would be enough to carry them through the Winter months, if the season were short, and nothing unforeseen occurred. They had ammunition in camp—not much, but what seemed to be enough for their needs; and rabbits were to be had for the shooting, while powder and shot lasted. Other fresh meat, there was none. They now saw, only too well, how great a mistake it had been for them to remain behind the others. It was too late in the season for them to start back on the long trail toward the sea. They must wait for Spring to open. Winter would be upon them soon.

Winter came—came cruelly, that year. What man among them ever forgot it while he lived!

The sun went out of the sky, and darker and darker grew the heavens. There was no wind. Nothing but a leaden stillness. Then the heavy skies began to sift soft flakes of snow earthward. At first, they came fine as the grains of alkali dust that had been whirled up by the Summer winds down on the dreary plains. Larger, and larger they grew as they hurried onward toward the little colony in the cañon. From big flakes, they grew into great snow-feathers; and these came so fast and so thick, that the sky which had been darkened was now white from the flakes, and shut out the leaden-colored roof of their little world.

Under the snow-drifts, where the wild rose-bushes and willows made a shelter for the stream, the creek shouted and laughed at their dismay and dread, and went babbling on down to the desert where the road was snowed under, and where no living thing moved across the shoreless, silent, ghostly sea.

There were nights when the storm roused itself to a fury that brought winds down from the heights roaring

like wild beasts roaming through the cañon. The storm in its frenzy would beat against the rocks as though to rend them from their very foundations; and then would go shrieking over the ridge, and away. Morning would come, and the storm-fury would have spent itself; but not the snow. Always, and always it snowed. Each day dawned upon down-drifting flakes which fell upon a world of unearthly silence.

There was no work done among the men. Who could climb the mountain-sides to the tunnels and inclines? For more than three weeks they had been without tea, or coffee, or flour, bacon, or beans, or any of the things they most needed to ward off starvation. For a man may starve, even with food to eat, if it be not the right sort. There were yet a few articles of food—though little else than sugar and dried "jerky." Not many of the men had ever been without wholesome food before—most of them were from the East, from the cities. The hard life began to tell on them. They grew thin; grew weak—very weak. Some among them sickened, and lay down too ill to care what the end might be.

Then the first one died. Not much more than a boy, and unused to hardships—unable to stand the rough fare, he died for the lack of nourishing food. It was two hundred and fifty miles to Virginia City, where there were both food and medicine to be had; but who could make the trip in the face of the relentless storm which daily piled higher and higher the white barriers between them and that distant help!

So Gilbert Bend died—died just as the storm, wearied of its weeks of warring, ceased. The flakes at last stopped floating earthward—stopped suddenly one day; and there was the sun! But oh! what a world it showed. A vast, trackless waste of dazzling white, unrelieved by even a solitary touch of any color or shading. Snowed in.

The Quail's Cañon

In the center of the town, among the deserted stores, was a saloon, also deserted. It was the one building there having a floor. This, they tore up; and making a rude box from the boards thus obtained, they laid in it the body of their dead comrade. Then, taking it on their shoulders, the six strongest men among them bore it down to the top of the mesa where others—ere the storm had fallen—had been buried before. Plowing their way through the soft drifts of blinding whiteness, under the warmth of the dazzling noon-day sun, they came at last to the rocky point amid the foothills. Two, who had broken a trail there before them, had the shallow grave ready; and there they laid him away—one of the unknown Trail-Makers of the West—while, together, they sang a hymn that most of them knew, and had sung in the old days "back home." Then one—his partner—tried to speak of the dead, but sobbing turned away; and so they slowly tramped back through the heavy drifts to their cabins.

When the first rider made his way into the cañon, after the suns of many days had made the roads passable, the men whom he found were very near to starvation; and some who had been among the number when the first flakes of the great snow had fallen, were no longer there. Again—and again had the old saloon-floor gone to the making of the rough boxes, which the few who were left had carried down to the lonely mesa where they left their dead comrades to sleep in an unkind land. So the trail grew wider, and the drifts were beaten down by the feet that passed on the way.

Years came and went; yet never again did the snow fall as it fell that year; the year that (far away) Lee had marched "horse and foot into Fredericktown." To the East, they counted time by the great battles; here—in the

West—events were dated from the "Winter of the Great Snow." Now, time dulls the sharp edges of history, and finally there were those (they were new-comers in the country) who said it was but a fanciful story—that no such heavy snows had ever fallen. But the old men of the old days, shook their gray heads, knowing better.

The Quail's Cañon

Colonists had come into the country since that time, and had made their homes. A railroad cut across the flat valley. Other cañons now held other camps; but this one still remained deserted. The last man had gone, long before. Not a roof was left; only the melting adobe walls showed where the houses had been, or the fallen stones marked the site of a miner's cabin.

The last to go was the first to build in the valley. Down there, in the midst of green fields and orchards which he planted, was the home of one of the pioneers. He plowed and planted; and he prospered. And he was content in the home he had made; and was happy. A grove grew up of trees that were his planting; and birds came to the trees, as birds come whenever and wherever trees are made to grow in desert-land. Birds in numbers came, and of many kinds. Yet what the man wanted to see were quail—the mountain and valley quail he had known long before, in his life among the poppies and pines of California. Try as he would, he could never quite forget those days when he had carried a gun across his shoulder along the Contra Costa foothills. He was lonely for quail!

Back in the old days they had been the oftenest-seen birds about him—those speckled black and steel fellows of the field, trig and trim; with cousins on the uplands, that flash a ruddy-brown wing past your sight as they take flight. There were larks, and robins, and doves here in the cañons; and on the heights were great flocks of sage-chickens; and water-fowl of many kinds were down on

The Quail's Cañon

the river, but he longed for the sound of the quail-call, and the sight of their whirring flight—the quail of the valleys and mountains of California!

Persistent were the recollections that haunted him of old hunting days; and he spent many hours thinking, and thinking. Finally he said to himself, that there was but one thing to be done—to fetch them over the Sierras, from the fields and foothills beyond, and then wait until their numbers multiplied.

So crate after crate of trapped birds came over in that first season when the trans-continental railroad was an established fact. Valley quail, and mountain quail, both. Crate after crate, and still more and more. And all were taken up to the cañons where there was plenty of water, and the wild grasses which yielded seeds; and there they were turned loose—scattering over the ridges or scurrying into the brush. There in the old deserted "city" they were freed; and among the tall, blossoming weeds, and the spicy junipers on the hillsides.

The little emigrants took very kindly to the change; and another year saw several flocks far from the range where they had been given their freedom.

Most Indians have as great a sense of honor as have some white men in respecting the rights of others when not protected by law, and the Paiutes—when they came to understand the purpose of bringing the stranger birds—were as zealous as the white man in their joint guardianship of the new bird-colony. No one seemed to have any thought of hunting them—they had become a sort of public charge. They multiplied amazingly. On the hills they were as numerous as were the jackrabbits down along the valley. Away off in other ranges—in cañons miles and miles away—across the valleys that lay between, and where on the mountain-sides green spots marked springs and shade, one could always find flocks coming in to water. They were everywhere!

At last they were plentiful enough that the sportsman might be allowed to hunt them; and for one short, sportfull season (when everyone went gunning) did the hunters have their will. Only one.

Then, with no foreshadowing of that which was to come, there fell upon the land a Winter more terrible in its bitter chill than that other one, more than five-and-twenty years before, when the little handful of early prospectors in the snowbound cañon waited through the long, white silence for the coming of the Spring. Earlier—much earlier than had ever been its wont, did the storms begin. Nor was it rain that came, as in the other years. Rains softened the brush, and swelled the seeds among the dried grasses and weeds on the mesas where the sheep and cattle grazed. Rain was good. Here, too, had the quail thrived, even as they had in their home on the other side of the high Sierras. But with deep snows overlying the land—! What were the little emigrants to do in their struggle to live if the wild elements waged battle against them? How were their small hearts to keep on beating throughout the chill Winter, and until the warmth of the Spring suns should set all the little creeks and rills running down the rugged old mountain's cañons and crevasses, to bring the grasses again? On mountain and plain were the wild things—helpless furred and feathered creatures, who would find death in the storms if they were many or long.

So the days went by; and on the plains the snow fell so deep that the chill layers of ghostly white hid the brush and sage as completely as though they had been sucked down and swallowed by these quicksands of the Winter.

Along the foothills where the valley quail had loved to

The Quail's Cañon

run, the drifts filled the shallow ravines; on the higher elevations—where among the rocks and stunted junipers the mountain quail had lived and found life good—now the sharp outlines were smoothed out under the rounded whiteness. Farther down, in the valley, the river ranches were blotted out. Snowflakes—like grains of icy sand—fell thickly, steadily, gently; with that soft insistence which is harder to do battle against than fire or flood. Then winds—cruelly cold, and dealing death where they touched animal life—would come and whirl the sharp grains (fine and dry as sand) into high drifts which—in turn—were buried under the stinging flakes that were ever falling—falling—falling, until it was once again a vast, unsounded level.

From the high lands where they grazed, the storm drove the stock into the valleys where it followed them, and where they died. Sheep dropped by the thousands at its icy touch; cattle weakened—staggered—fell. The birds and the four-footed wild things came down out of the mountains, no longer afraid, and too weak to flee. They, too, like the sheep and the cattle, died as though a pestilence had swept over the land. So they died everywhere, and each day the number grew.

There were times when a sickly sun tried to shine from out the sky, only to be beaten back by the storm. Colder and colder grew the days; lower and lower fell the mercury. Five below zero. Ten. Then eighteen—twenty—thirty—thirty-six! The stoves were kept (nine of them) choked with the hardwood crowded in; and all day the fires roared up the chimneys, and red-hot patches glowed on their iron sides. More than half the night the fires burned; but by and by they would die down, and in those early hours of the new day, one could hear the crack and creak of the timbers as the house grew colder.

Morning brought increased labors to keep alive the suffering animals that turned to man in their extremity. Life resolved itself into a monotonous repetition of those duties that were most necessary for the present hour. No one looked ahead; no one dared. It would be time enough for the cattle-owner to count the fearful cost when Spring should come, and he rode the range and reckoned up his losses. Now he must see that his men hauled feed to the cattle that were too weak to get on their feet; that the ice was cut in the river so that horses and cattle might drink; that snow enough was melted for household needs (for the waterpipes had long ago frozen and burst); that the woodboxes were heaped high with split logs; that the bread, and meat, and milk was thawed—freed from the flakes of ice that they gathered.

Up the valley where the railroad ran, the tracks were under the snow. Over them had no wheel passed for seventeen long days. Blockaded. The great, monstrous machinery of man's making, with its noise and its grime, was silenced—its strength and power crushed out by this soft, white, silent thing that never missed one day out of the twenty-seven in falling.

When the frost, and the cold, and the drifting snow were gone, and the sun came back, it shone on a crystal world. We looked out over a wide, trackless, shipless, chartless sea of eye-tiring snow-fields. But it stormed no more.

And the quail?

Poor little emigrants into an unkind country! For more than five years thereafter no one ever saw any quail. We looked for them whenever we rode through cañons, or over the mesas. It was always the same—never a one did we see. And we mourned for them, as we do for things that have eaten out of our hand; for had we not guarded

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them as something that was our very own? They had all perished, we said, the cold had been too severe for the strangers-to-snow.

Then, one day riding up through a wash all filled with tall rabbit-brush, and wild plum-bushes, I saw a touch or red-brown on a wing that flashed across my sight, and my heart gave a great bound. A quail! Then a long time went by before I saw another. Then others saw them, too. Sometimes a pair; then a small flock. Then another—a larger one; and another one—and another.

And now? The quail have come again! We say "come again" because we hate to think of those that met the chill of that awful Winter, and with the horses and cattle, and sheep on the ranges, died by the hundreds—thousands. Hunters, we, and we have no compunction in going forth with dog and gun, and filling the game-bag. But one would be less than human to think unmovedly of the slow death by starvation and cold that came to so many birds and beasts that Winter of 'eighty-eight and 'nine. So we would rather persuade ourselves that the quail which are now in the mountains, are the same bonny little feathered friends that took up their habitation there so long ago. Once again they are everywhere. Once again the flocks have increased sufficiently to permit one shooting them without fear of extermination. Once again they are on every mountain, and on the low-lying foothills. There are fewer of the valley quail, however, than there are of their little relatives.

Yes; they have "come back again." But the greatest numbers have gone to that cañon where the miners lived the Winter of the first great snow. It was the quail's first home; for there it was that they were loosed in the year they were brought from beyond the snow mountains.

The Quail's Cañon

Chinese placer miners working in the creek found gold —much gold; but the silver ledges still lie on the hillsides undisturbed, the tunnel entrances choked with thistles and briar bushes. No longer do men go a-search for silver. Only gold—in the ledges up above, or down on the bed-rock of the water course—lures them in their quests. The little yellow-skinned men of the Orient came, and went, and came again. They made their dug-outs in the banks back from the gray and crumbling walls which were built by miners of old. Up and down the creek bed they move so noiselessly, working with pick and pan, that one can very easily fancy them but gray ghosts haunting the quiet cañons, even as the shadowy wraiths of the dead years linger about the unroofed walls and weed-grown trails. Silently they go about their work, leaving the quail to go their ways.

If you go among the old adobes and fallen stone walls in the ruined town, you will see them scurrying by twos and threes out of the tumble-down, crumbling cabins, to find hiding places in the tall rabbit-wood or sage-brush; or—flushing by flocks—to sail straight away to the hill-sides. It is the quail's cañon. Once again they claim the solitude of the place as their own. Before they went away they were less shy than now; for they are beginning to know the fear of man. A while back, in the peace of the tumbling walls, there came no more disturbing sound to the cañon than the rumble of the train down on the desert, or the far-away shriek of its whistle. But they have learned a new sound, and with it has come fear.

The sunlight lies warm on the hillsides; and the soft West winds come to rattle the pods of dried weeds, shaking the seeds in showers to the ground. The quail run hither and thither, undisturbed by the seasons or the little yellow men working among the gravel and boulders in the

The Quail's Cañon

bottom of the creek; but away up on the slope where the brush and bunch-grass does not grow so thick, you hear the crack of a breech-loader where some hunter has gone hunting. It is the sound the quail have learned to fear.

How Las Vegas Pioneered a Rotary Club

Based on talks with the late C. P. 'Pop' Squires

JOHN M. BEVILLE

Fremont Street, Las Vegas circa 1920's

—Wengert Collection

HOW LAS VEGAS PIONEERED A ROTARY CLUB

Based on talks with the late C. P. "Pop" Squires

In the year 1923, on a glaring Las Vegas summer day, a young fellow named Les Saunders who had been hired by the Chamber of Commerce to sell Las Vegas to the outside world dropped down on the splintery wooden bench that rested beneath the shady elms surrounding Bill Ferron's drug store and took a survey of the town.

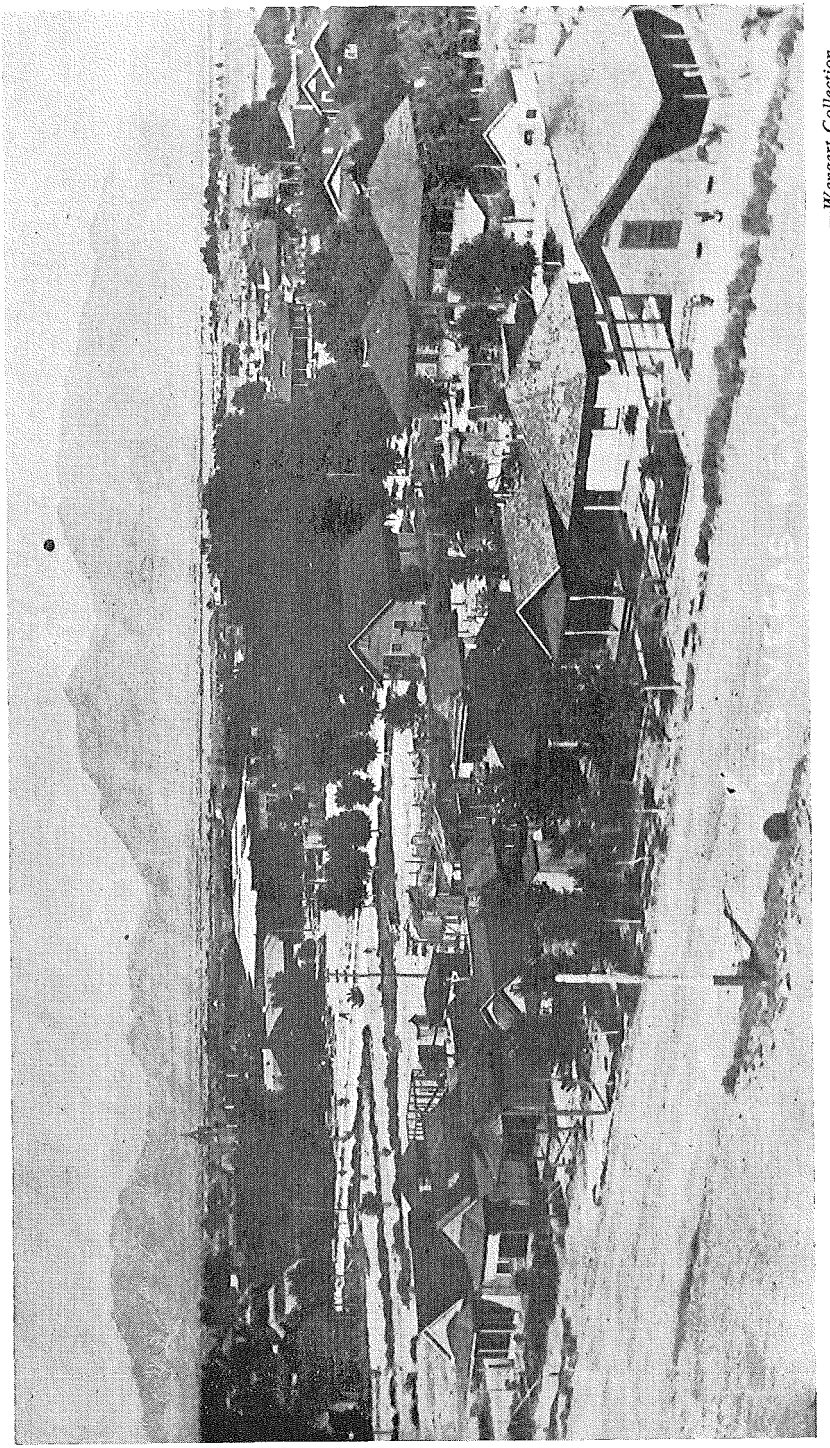
There wasn't much to see. A few blocks west of Saunder's position sat the Union Pacific depot where each night the townfolk enacted a social ritual of watching the evening train for Los Angeles take on water. An occasional passenger dropped off to stretch his legs the way they always do at whistle stops. Hardly anybody stayed. Farther east, down around Fifth and Fremont Streets, clustered the shaded homes of the early settlers, the Brackens, Ferrons, Squires and McNamees. The stretch between the depot and Fifth St. was intermittently occupied by small one story, false-front buildings with their western type porticos engaged in a losing battle with the sun.

East of Fifth St., Fremont became a tortuous dust road that wandered uncertainly past Sunrise Mountain. After crossing Vegas Wash, North of Whitney, it took a senseless notion to make a weary climb through Bootleg Pass eventually coming to a halt on the west bank of a sullen Colorado river.

Les considered his raw materials: spacious grandeur; sunshine; and plenty of confidence in the future. . . . the sort of stuff that starts poets singing and investors to tighten their purse strings.

Among Les's recollections of the moment was the dismay experienced when, full of enthusiasm, he rushed to the depot to meet some prospective eastern investors who had expressed a mild interest in the possible development of desert land. That day the wind chose to blow. The visitors stood on the train's platform while the wind swept eddies of dust into their eyes and they STAYED on that platform until the train pulled out. One of them laughingly asked Les Saunders, "where he could make up for Rotary". This remark, humorously intended, elicited in Les a desire to examine its serious aspects. He reasoned that anything that might intice a stray tourist to stay over a few extra hours would provide an opportunity to tell the Las Vegas story. He decided to do something about it.

The founders of Las Vegas and its Rotary Club were modern pioneers. Pioneering is not necessarily confined to the covered wagon variety. The pioneer of the Sixties or the Eighties possessed no monopoly on hardship



—*Wengert Collection*

and discomfort. There was as much heat and dust and as many flies in the early nineteen hundreds as in the Eighties.

An amazing fact about the Las Vegas pioneers was that they settled there by choice. They knew exactly where they were going and what to expect upon arrival. It wasn't credulity that caused them to suffer in mutual isolation. They knew of and came from the gentler environments of larger and more civilized communities. No, it was not credulity, unless you attribute the urge to "follow the dream" as being credulous. The impulse which prompted their coming . . . and staying . . . was simply the inexplicable stubborn cussedness of the pioneer—the urge to create something from nothing.

To the problems of good roads and the development of the Boulder Canyon Project, Les Saunders added a third—a Las Vegas Rotary Club! By comparison, the latter problem should have posed little challenge but first Les had to reckon with the powerfully urbane Rotary International.

The Rotary International had for years followed a hands off policy when membership of smaller communities was sought. In all of Les's initial correspondence with the club's international figures, he constantly referred to a vast mythical "trading area" that embraced the mining camps of Goodsprings and Searchlight in addition to the "lush agricultural communities of Moapa Valley". By some rather erie arithmetic and help from the cemeteries, he managed to conjure up a population of five thousand souls.

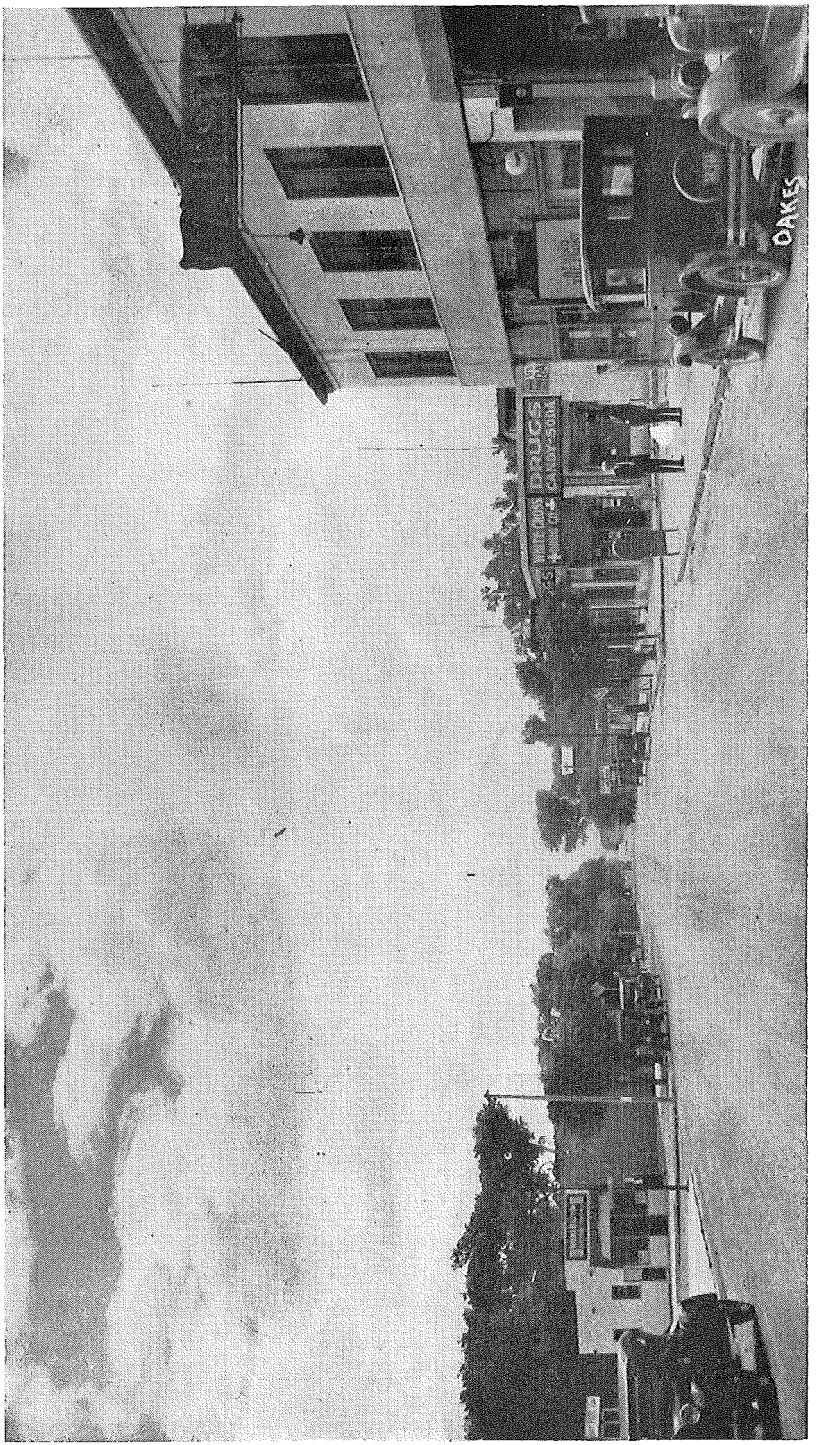
For help, Les Saunders turned to those men commonly associated with community leadership. Pre-charter meetings were held in the homes of Bill Ferron and Walter Bracken. Among the prospective charter members attending those first meeting were William S. Park and C. P. Squires.

The tenacity of these men eventually wore down the resistance of Rotary International who finally decided to use the Las Vegas club as an experimental guinea pig. They reasoned that if Rotary proved a success in Las Vegas it would open up a vast membership potential for this world-wide organization.

When you look back and consider the isolated position of the town the decision to use Las Vegas as a proving ground becomes increasingly equivocal leading you to wonder at the pursuasive talents of these early settlers.

Taking another look at Las Vegas in the early 1920's in relation to civilization reveals a whit of an island struggling in an infinite sea of land.

Consider this: In the year 1923, between Las Vegas and Salt Lake City, there stretched some four hundred miles of near primeval desert and forest. Traversing this abysmal area was the San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad and a sparsely marked trail or two worn dim by



—*Wengert Collection*

the feet of pioneers. Looking in a southerly direction, to reach Los Angeles by car required a jolting four hundred mile trip over unpaved roads through the mining camps of Nelson, Searchlight and Goffs, thence along the route presently known as route 66, on into Los Angeles. The speed record for this trip was 15 hours. To assure a degree of safety to the daring drivers of those days, the roads habitually snuggled along the railroad tracks and passing trains were authorized to make emergency stops for travelers aid.

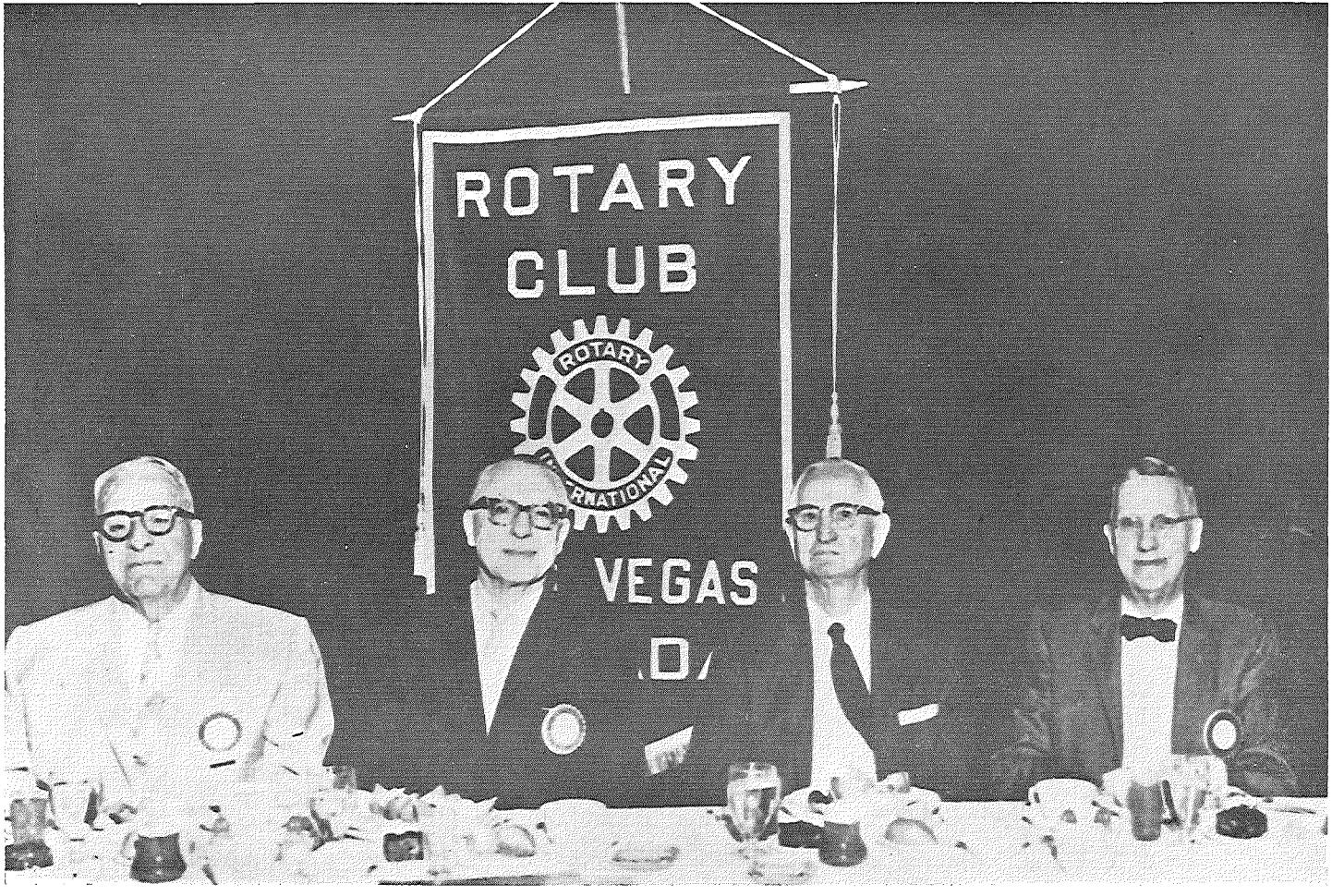
The town chosen for Rotary's great experiment could hardly have been more remotely situated.

Acting quickly, and before Rotary officials might have second thoughts, a list of fifteen names was hastily drawn. It is now a matter of ironic amusement that C. P. Squires, who had contributed so much to Southern Nevada as Governor Emmett Boyle's representative at the League of the Southwest for the promotion of the Colorado river, should be denied charter membership. You see, Rotary was squeamish about the taint of politics and "Pop" was the town's Postmaster! However, this deterrent was short lived and had its compensations. "Pop" was honored by being the very first "Baby Rotarian" introduced to the new club.

On March 15, 1923 the first meeting of the Las Vegas Rotary Club was held in the old Union Pacific dining room, affectionately called "The Beanery". Fifteen of Las Vegas's prominent business and professional men were seated as charter members: Leslie R. Saunders, Dr. William S. Park, A. A. Hinman, Walter R. Bracken, Ed. W. Clark, W. E. Ferron, Harry Blanding, Will Beckley, Dr. Roy W. Martin, O. K. Adcock, William Pike, James Cashman, C. E. Pembroke, C. S. Wengert and Sam Lawson.

At that first meeting Leslie R. Saunders became President, Dr. William S. Park Vice President and A. A. Hinman was named Secretary.

The gavel descended signalling the start of a new era of service in Southern Nevada's vigorous young community.



In 1962 the Las Vegas Club honored its four local surviving members—all of whom are now deceased. Left to Right Jim Cashman, Cyril Wengert, Will Beckley and 'Bill' Ferron.

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