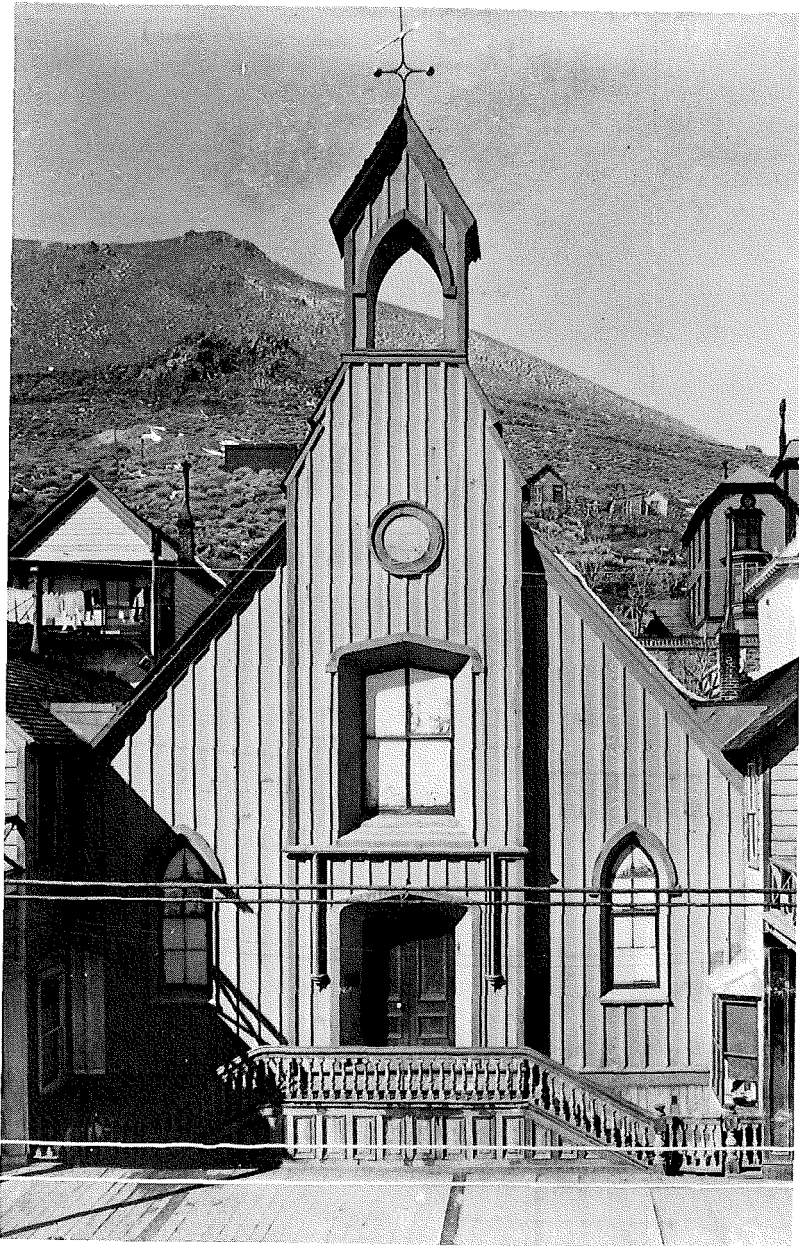


Nevada

Historical Society Quarterly



SPRING 1993

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Historical Society Quarterly

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COMSTOCK MISERIES

Medicine and Mining in the 1860s

Duane A. Smith

Mark Twain, like thousands of others, “was smitten with the silver fever.” He contracted his case soon after he arrived in Nevada in 1861. Like many of his contemporaries, he “only proposed to stay in Nevada three months—I had no thought of staying longer than that.” Those plans changed as he realized that “discovering and taking possession of rich silver-bearing lodes and ledges of quartz . . . plainly this was the road to fortune.”

All this occurred months before “I went up to Virginia and entered upon my new vocation. I was a rusty looking city editor.”¹ A mining fortune having eluded his best efforts, Twain took up an earlier occupation, the newspaper business, turning his talents to booming Virginia City and its Comstock bonanza. Fortunately for Twain and literature, his silver fever proved mental not physical; many others staked claims only to debilitation or death.

It all seemed so promising, the chance of a lifetime. Race to California in 1849, or to the Comstock or Pike’s Peak in 1859—stake a claim and watch the gold or silver tumble into one’s lap. Work? Never! Mining represented the ultimate of that great American dream of getting rich without working.

Reality panned out at far less than that. The vast majority of the would-be miners found they had “never worked so hard in their lives, to get rich without working.” Far too late, however, they also discovered that the excitement, trials, environment, and work involved in prospecting and mining was more likely to undermine their constitutions than to produce wealth. Riches and retirement awaited only the fortunate few.

Had the Comstock’s miners taken time to consider and evaluate, the lesson was all there in California: Disease and death came overland and by sea with the forty-niners. No one will ever know how many Argonauts died trying to reach the Mother Lode country, or how many died working in the river bottoms and canyons of the Sierra Nevada or perished while trying to return home. The knowledgeable 1849 era physician, Dr. Jacob Stillman, estimated that one out of

Duane A. Smith teaches at Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado. He has published numerous books on Colorado mining history and is now completing with Ronald Brown a history of medicine in the mining West to be published by the University of Nevada Press.

five miners died within six months of arrival in the gold fields. That estimate may be conservative. Far more found their health undermined, some for the rest of their lives. Louise Clapp, the observant, literary wife of a California doctor, summarized the situation succinctly as she looked around Rich Bar: "How oddly life and death jostle each other in this strange world of ours. How nearly allied are smiles and tears!"²

Louise continued in sentimental contemplation: "My eyes were yet moist from the egotistical *pitié de moi-même* in which I had been indulging, at the thought of sleeping forever amid these lonely hills, which in a few years must return to their primeval solitude." She avoided that fate, but many of her contemporaries lie forgotten, in unmarked graves along routes to the gold fields and among the mines they once called home.

No question about it, more white people died in the California gold rush than ever were killed in gunfights, Indian conflict, range wars, or other episodes of legendary western violence that captivate the public imagination. Add to this the rushes to Montana, Arizona, Alaska, and places in between, not to mention coal-mining disasters, and the mining industry represents by far the deadliest of any of the western frontier enterprises. Although the recurring fever metaphor in contemporary descriptions of gold and silver rushes depicted the excitement that seized peoples' minds, it also proved medically accurate as a generic for the sicknesses that captured their bodies.

The California experience was the worst, despite Mark Twain's observation that the climate was so healthy that you had to leave the state to die. Whether or not that observation held true, the old forty-niners did leave, looking for their El Dorado. Did those who rushed to the Comstock in 1859 or later stop to consider their potentially melancholy fate? Probably not. Silver and gold beckoned, and they hastened to the new bonanzas.

Doctors came west too because mining produced an urban frontier. For example, Virginia City's population in 1860 was 2,244 before the real impact of the initial boom; census takers counted 7,048 inhabitants a decade later. As prospectors and miners dashed about staking claims, digging, and blasting, others arrived to provide them with the services they seemingly could pay for once their mines started producing. Even if that would take a while, credit kept the mining West alive and well.

The medical problems the miners encountered resulted from many factors, ranging from the infamous Washoe zephyrs to the basic dangerous nature of underground mining. The altitude of the Comstock was the highest mining elevation yet encountered. The site, higher than 6,000 feet, left the unacclimated Californians breathless. They made up the vast majority of the early arrivals.

That other famous Comstock reporter, William Wright, better known as Dan De Quille, explained what happened in the initial season.

That first winter after the discovery of silver, 1859–60, was one of the severest the country

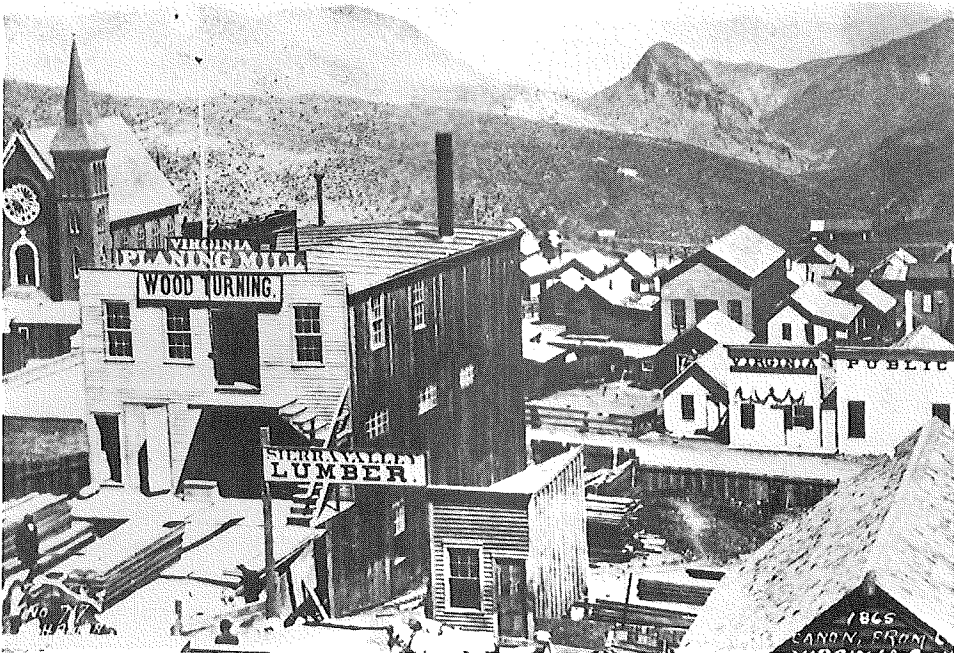
has known. As I have already stated, there were very few buildings in Virginia City that were worthy of the name. The majority of the inhabitants lived in mere shanties and in underground caves and dens—a tribe of troglodytes.

Food for man was about as dear as that for beast. Flour sold for seventy-five dollars per hundred pounds in Virginia City.

The early settlers at Virginia made the acquaintance of the "Washoe zephyr," during the first winter of their sojourn in the town. This "zephyr," as it is sarcastically termed, is a furious westerly gale which is a frequent visitant during the fall and spring months. . . . It made wild work that first winter with the frail tenements of the first settlers. Canvas houses, tents, and brush shanties were scattered right and left.³

The wind (the chill factor must have been harrowing some days), makeshift housing, high-priced food (a monotonous, greasy fare), and the weather all helped undermine the health of these pioneers.

The elevation and layout of Virginia City proved taxing to newcomers and residents alike. Mark Twain observed that "the mountain side was so steep that the entire town had a slant to it like a roof." Squatting at the foot of Mount Davidson, Virginia City challenged the vigorous and the sedate. Twain fit more into the latter category, complaining that "it was a laborious climb, in that thin atmosphere, to ascend from D to A street, and you were panting and out of breath when you got there."⁴



Virginia City in 1865, with Six Mile Canyon in the background. (Nevada Historical Society)

The general site might not be conducive to one's health either. Early visitor and mining reporter J. Ross Browne described it for readers of the January 1861 *Harper's Monthly Magazine*: "A more barren-looking and forbidding spot could scarcely be found elsewhere on the face of the earth." The residents, he described as "rough, muddy, unkempt and unwashed." Neither cleanliness nor godliness was dear to many miners' hearts, but they ignored personal hygiene at their own peril. Browne concluded that "under such circumstances, when a poor fellow fell sick, his recovery could only be regarded as a matter of luck."

Browne personally agonized through one of Virginia City's major health problems, the water—"certainly the worst ever used by man." He went on to say, "Filtered through the Comstock Lead, it carried with it much of the plumbago, arsenic, copperas, and other poisonous minerals alleged to exist in that vein." Virginians would mix a "spoonful of water in half a tumbler of whisky, and then drink it." This, according to Browne, neutralized the water's bad effects. He thought the one to be as poisonous as the other and chose to take his water straight. But he paid the price, suffering "violent pains in the stomach and a very severe diarrhea."⁵

Browne recovered, but for the next decade the water question bedeviled the community. Meanwhile, it was dangerous just walking around Virginia City and neighboring Gold Hill. The district became honeycombed with shafts and abandoned prospect holes. In his *Big Bonanza* De Quille devoted the better part of a chapter to describing the misadventures of people, animals, and even an eight-yoke team of oxen that disappeared into these "dangerous traps."⁶

Just living in an urban mining situation endangered one's health. Communicable diseases such as smallpox, measles, various fevers, cholera, and diphtheria quickly spread through the communities. In the drafty buildings a cold might swiftly evolve into pneumonia, the "most destructive of all diseases." Alcoholism was a chronic problem and the Comstock definitely was no place to be if one suffered from that sickness. Being struck by a runaway team, thrown from a vehicle or horse, or sustaining a host of similar injuries awaited the unwary or unlucky. Longtime Virginia City resident Alfred Doten, who had a decided interest in medicine, recorded in his 1860s journals a legion of injuries he helped treat—accidental shotgun wounds, stonings, hands and legs smashed in industrial accidents, stab wounds from fights, and several "social" diseases—syphilis, for example.⁷

The *Territorial Enterprise* also reported on the dangers of urban living. Mrs. I. E. James one dark night fell into a sidewalk hole; Foster, "the well known ice man" broke his leg when his horse fell; and in the excitement of racing to a fire a miner fell and severely injured himself. The pressures of urban living could also lead to child abuse, as Mrs. Farry's nine-year-old son found out when she threw him out of the house.

The most common diseases treated at the Storey County Hospital during the second half of the 1860s were fevers, miscellaneous injuries, rheumatism, ve-

neral diseases, and chest and throat diseases. After three years of no reported cases of smallpox, outbreaks in 1868 and 1869 pushed the yearly number to near the head of the list. Similarly, an outbreak of dysentery and diarrhea in 1866 propelled that year's total far higher than the average. Alcoholism was a steady if not spectacular contributor to bringing in patients; Mrs. Farry was one victim.⁸

Children found Comstock life fascinating, while their parents worried. Playing in the streets with the continual hustle and bustle of everyday business was dangerous; so, too, were the attractions of the mills, mines, and machinery. Empty buildings and animals of all shapes and descriptions offered accidents waiting to happen. Finally, the red-light district prospered, and the tolerant moral atmosphere of the boom community enticed the gullible and the curious. A young man or woman could easily and quickly be led astray.

The city underground, as Twain described it, proved even more dangerous. Comstock miners might have been "lords of labor and gloried in it," but their reign was in constant danger. In those dark drifts and levels a multitude of possibilities lurked to threaten the Comstock miner. Cave-ins and falling rocks from the "rotten rock" that undergirded the lode were an everyday worry. Because of the huge amount of timbering required for the miners to work at all, fire became a major danger. Water could flood a drift at any moment, and the temperature went steadily up as the shafts went down. By 1880 miners were encountering water of 170 degrees, with working at the lower levels tantamount to being in a steam bath. The high humidity and temperature undermined the miners' health, causing both physical and dietary problems.

Drilling accidents, falls down a shaft or in an uncontrolled cage or skip, runaway ore cars, general carelessness, blasting-cap explosions, misdirected hammer swings—Comstock miners found no safety underground. De Quille summarized their plight: "Accidents are of constant occurrence in mines in every part of the world. . . . Accidents of every imaginable kind have occurred since the opening of the first mine on the Comstock."⁹

Four medical champions challenged this epidemic of illness, disease, and accident—physicians, home remedies, hot springs, and patent medicines. Mining's urban nature, while providing fertile ground for illness, served also to lure physicians much more quickly and in greater numbers than other frontiers. A Virginia City correspondent to the San Francisco *Evening Bulletin* noted in 1860 that the new community had six physicians, one dentist, and three drug stores. J. Wells Kelly's 1862 Nevada business directory listed four physicians for Gold Hill and eight physicians and surgeons and one midwife in neighboring Virginia City. The fact that the Storey County Hospital opened in 1865 testifies to the urban attraction, as well as to the need and the profitable financial situation even when the Comstock temporarily had sunk into borrasca.¹⁰

It must not be assumed that all doctors were professionally trained physicians; anyone in that day and place could hang out a shingle and attempt to attract patients. With no licensing laws or medical regulations, the field remained wide



Miners at the 1800 foot level of the Consolidated Virginia and California Mine shaft. (Nevada Historical Society)

open. Doctors could be educated in a medical school, a year or two at most, or trained by another physician; they could also be persons intrigued by the potential profits or who just heard the call. The public did not have a particularly high opinion of the profession. After his Comstock days Mark Twain would write, "He has been a doctor a year now, and has had two patients—no, three, I think; yes, it *was* three. I attended their funerals."¹¹ J. Ross Browne complained back in 1861 that despite "the number of physicians who had already hoisted their shingles" much sickness existed in Virginia City. Browne did not completely blame them. The problem, he concluded, was "owing chiefly to exposure and dissipation, but in some measure to the deleterious quality of the water."

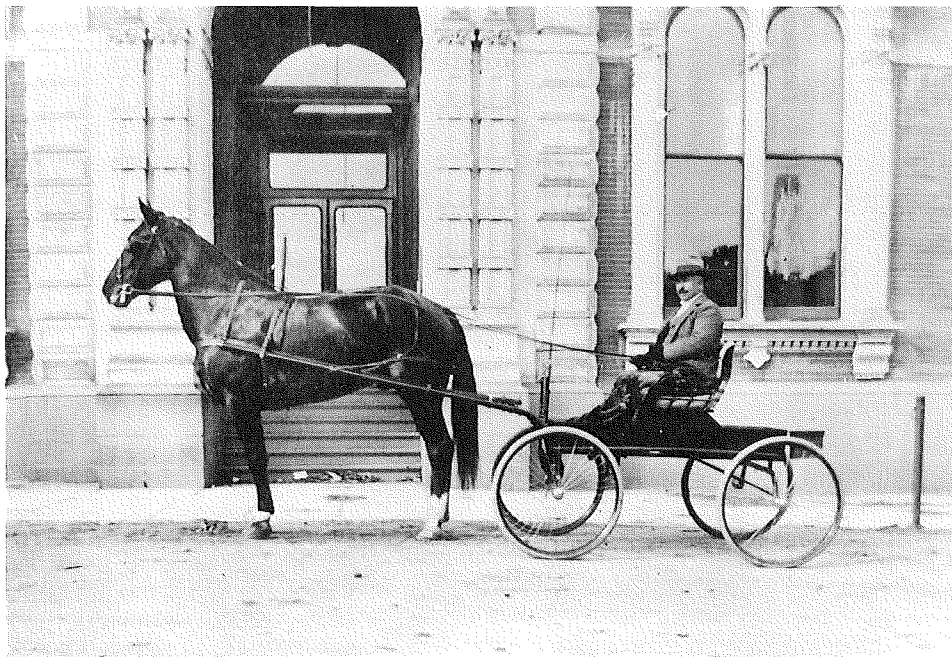
In answering a question from a young doctor thinking of opening a practice in Virginia City, Browne advised, "Doctors are already a drug in Washoe. Brandy, Whisky and Gin are the only medicines taken." He would do well, Brown believed, if he would bring over a "lot of good liquors" and then prescribe "them at two bits a dose."¹²

Comstock physicians did their best. They treated their patients with remedies older than the California gold rush and as new as the civil war that raged back in the eastern states. They commonly countered intestinal disorders—diarrhea or dysentery—with laxatives, Dover's powders, or opium, perhaps in combination with epsom salts or castor oil. They fought malarial fevers with quinine, the *sine qua non* for that illness, and quieted the sufferer with opium. Opium, the "queen of medicines," was popularly prescribed, as were morphine and belladonna, with casual indifference to their addictive properties. It was only several decades later that their potential for addiction became generally recognized.

Purgatives and emetics remained the most widely used drugs, with calomel

the most popular. Doctors relieved abdominal pain with hot fomentations, blisters, and cupping (in which a glass cup was used to draw blood toward or through the skin); fevers called for cold applications to the head and frequent spraying of the body with water; and patients swallowed small doses of turpentine to cure intestinal ulcers. Mercury was prescribed for venereal diseases, the old Victorian maxim explaining, "Thirty seconds with Venus, a lifetime with Mercury." Some still relied on bloodletting, and only then were anesthetics coming into popular use; nitrous oxide, ether, and chloroform had been discovered. Used predominantly as an antiseptic, whiskey at times also served as a crude anesthetic, and was not uncommonly employed to settle the nerves of the doctor.¹³

Most operations were performed in the patient's home or boarding house; one room was set aside for the operation, another for the recovery. This could produce problems for the surgeon, who usually found an attentive audience of neighbors, friends, and family ready to watch. The hesitancy to go to a hospital resulted from the public opinion that the institution was a place of last resort, a place to die. Considering the quality of many of them and the haphazard standard of nursing available, that was not a bad assumption. The Storey County Hospital represented one of the best, but it took a long time to overcome the prevailing opinion. One medical breakthrough from the war provided a decided



Doctor Pritchard making his rounds on the streets of Virginia City. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

improvement in nursing, as women proved they could handle the strain and stress of the profession. It was a few years, however, before this advance reached the West or Nevada.

Part of the medical problems of the day resulted from the primitive state of the art. The causes of infection were unknown, anesthetics new and untested at higher elevations, diagnosis unsystematic and superficial, and there were almost as many schools of thought on the theory of disease as Comstock mines. Heredity, skin color, emotion, manner of breathing, and general surmise attracted great attention in the treatment of illness. Modern medicine was still a long way in the future.

For women, those problems were only the beginning. In this man's world, few women found physicians of their own sex. A "Doctress Hoffman, Female Physician" advertised in the *Territorial Enterprise* of April 12, 1865. She claimed to have graduated from "the highest school in Germany" and had twenty-four years of experience. "She will cure all kinds of Female Complaints and Diseases of Children." Doctress Hoffman did not stay long in Virginia City (at least her ads disappeared), and women had to turn to the few men who specialized in "female diseases, irregularities, and complaints." Otherwise, they went to a general practitioner or a midwife, or talked with one of their friends or neighbors. Women of the mining West were more fortunate than their rural contemporaries in that they had female companionship. That, however, only eased and did not solve their medical problems.

Physicians also had concerns. Despite repeated complaints about high fees, many doctors found they needed a second occupation. Owning and operating a drug store was a popular choice. Patients might not pay their bills, but they never hesitated in complaining about the treatment they received or the fees. Both sides had justification, and, despite the image of the kindly nineteenth-century doctor, many people believed that a visit to a physician was a last resort. It ranked barely ahead of going to the hospital.

One reason for the persistence of this attitude was the appeal of patent medicines and quack doctors, both promising cures that legitimate doctors could not provide. They not only promised to cure, but would do so with ease, at a low cost, and painlessly. The medical profession suffered in comparison.

From newspaper page to store window, patent medicines everywhere reached out to tempt the Virginian. J. Ross Browne observed, "Quack pills, sirups, tonics and rectifier stare you in the face from every mud-back, rock, post and corners, . . . in cadaverous pictures of sick men, and astounding pictures of well men."¹⁴ Medicine shows caught the attention of Dan De Quille. In the evening a "perfect Babel of cries and harangues" greeted those out for a stroll. The speakers held forth from torch-lighted lots or tents and buildings. All manner of quack nostrums, apparatus, and machines tempted the gullible, the desperate, and those who suddenly came down with symptoms while listening to the discussion. Hear the man with the "electrical machine":

Who is the next gentleman who wishes to try the battery? It makes the old man feel young, and the young man feel strong . . . one of nature's own remedies. A quarter of a dollar places you in a position to have your nervous system electrified. . . . Try the battery and improve your health while you have the opportunity. . . Purifies the blood, strengthens the nervous system; cures headaches, toothaches, neuralgia, and all the diseases of the nervous system. Remember that electricity is life. It is what you, each and every one of you, require, and it is utterly impossible for you to live without it.¹⁵

No doctor could compete with such claims.

The many newspaper advertisements for patent medicines also promised all types of miracles and cures. A sampling of those that appeared in the *Territorial Enterprise* during the 1860s illustrates what ailments troubled Virginia City folk and other Americans.

Constitution Water: only remedy for diseases of the bladder, kidneys, impotency, genital debility, etc. etc."

Rosenbaum's Bitters: cure for fever and ague, diarrhea, dyspepsia

Newell's Pulmonary Syrup: cure for coughs, colds, sore throat, whooping cough

Mrs. A. Ragsdale's Vegetable Preparation: "guaranteed to effect a cure for diphtheria"

As Mrs. Ragsdale warned, illness could come among children "like a thief in the night"; the same could be said for adults. Everybody should therefore be prepared with their favorite patent medicines at the ready, or so the advertisements urged.¹⁶

It is probable, however, that the most popular cures remained home remedies, some of which had been handed down through families for generations. People would try these until it was almost, or actually, too late, and then blame the physician for failure to produce a miracle. The popular *Dr. Chase's Recipes* (an addition came out in 1864) recommended the following:

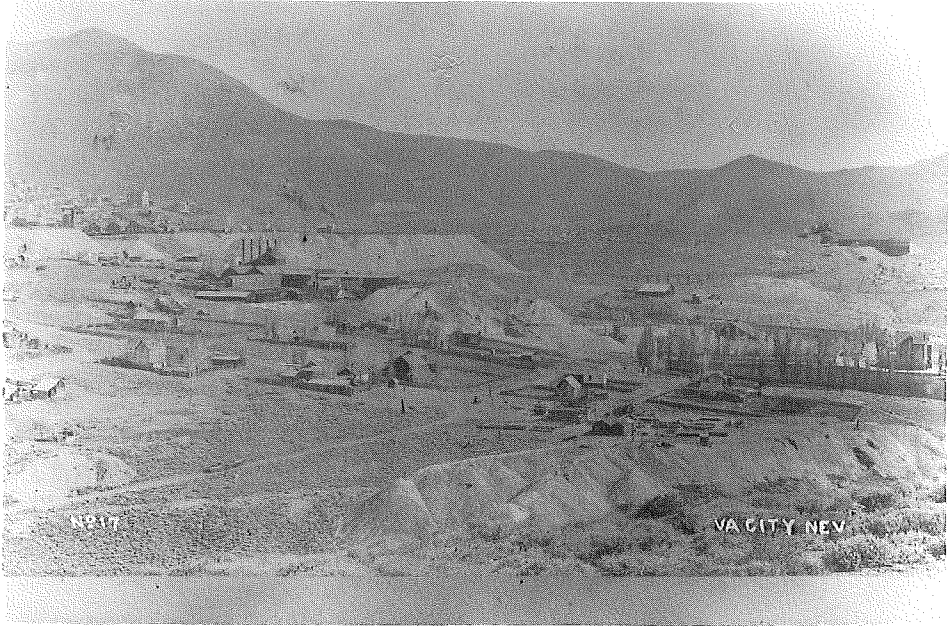
Headache: soak feet in hot water for about twenty minutes, same time drink some herb teas

Sore Throat: liniment of oil of turpentine, opium, or gum camphor

Drunkenness: a cup of dyspeptic tea—bayberry, hemlock, ginger root, cayenne pepper—immediately upon rising in the morning

Alvin Wood Chase also had cures for cancers, female irregularities, and ingrown toe nails, and included a method of painless tooth extraction. If, by chance, the volume missed an illness, the sufferer could, by describing the symptoms to Dr. Chase in a letter, acquire healing by mail.

Other home remedies proved as fascinating. Wood ashes or cobwebs would stop bleeding; a bag of asafetida worn around the neck could remedy a cold; and a salve of kerosene and beef tallow softened chapped hands. A mixture of



The outskirts of Virginia City. The hospital is at the far right of the picture, at the end of the row of trees. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

brandy and red pepper was believed to cure cholera, and an onion carried in the pocket prevented smallpox. Black-pepper pills and hot teas or soups answered a variety of complaints. Boiled pumpkin seeds cured stomach worms and saffras tea appeared to be an elixir of life. Some of these and their contemporaries were little better than the proverbial rabbit's foot, but these plasters, pills, teas, salves, and medications were often all that stood between life and death for the patient.¹⁷

One other hope existed for sufferers, that nineteenth-century wonder, the hot spring. In this day before miracle drugs, when even aspirin was still two decades away, the hot mineralized waters offered something beyond medical prescriptions. Advertisements for hot springs promised to cure almost every ailment known to humanity. The hot water did bring some relief for aches and pains, and some mineral waters eased "sour stomachs." For Virginia City, nearby Genoa Hot Springs promised to cure "rheumatic, cutaneous and scrofulous affections" when patrons bathed in its hot, cold, mud, shower, and vapor baths of medicinal waters. A resident "experienced physician" would prescribe the proper medicines "necessary for invalids." Other Nevada hot springs promised equal success, although they were at greater distances from the Comstock.

If all failed or the patient lost patience with European and American doctors, fortunate Comstockers found several Chinese physicians available. More than a thousand years old, Chinese medical practices intrigued many Americans and

Europeans. Acupuncture, massage, moxibustion (in which cone-shaped lumps of wormwood were burned on the spot to be treated), traction, strange herbs, and even magic (in the form of talismans) were some treatments not available from more traditional sources. Typical Oriental treatment for Comstockers involved the use of plants such as goldthread, watermelon, tarragon, and ginseng. The last constituted virtually a medical wonder all by itself, recommended for a variety of ailments, including asthma, depression, heart failure, menstrual disorder, impotence, and rheumatism. Diagnosis based on pulse-reading the condition of the tongue or on the moods or color of the patient was a novel procedure for the non-Chinese patient.

Desperate patients seeking a cure for venereal diseases looked to the Chinese physicians. Both doctors Gin Hin and Hop Lock promised to cure "private diseases" at reasonable charges. Hop Lock published testimonies from his American patients. J. Thompson let the whole world know that Dr. Lock's skills had brought a "speedy cure" to his venereal diseases, and "cheerfully" recommended him. Lock also pledged "successful" treatment of consumption, bronchitis, kidney affection, fevers, and sore eyes. Perhaps these doctors achieved real success with other diseases, but at the time only the outward symptoms of venereal disease were susceptible to treatment of any kind.¹⁸

Whether visiting Chinese and American physicians, hot springs, or trusting to patent medicines and home remedies, the Comstocker of the 1860s lived in a world described as the "medical late middle ages." During the next 130 years medical knowledge accumulated at an accelerating pace. But it was not until World War II and the decades following that truly modern medicine emerged. For the miners and urban residents of the Comstock, the medical world looked much like that of the California gold rush and the generation that preceded it. Their concerns and worries were universal, their treatment the best that could be obtained in the West of their day.

It remained a constant battle to maintain good health. Danger lurked around every corner and with every cold and minor injury. Mark Twain could be humorous and serious simultaneously: "Be careful about reading health books. You may die of a misprint."¹⁹ This once-excited miner knew full well whereof he spoke—he had been a Comstocker.

NOTES

¹Mark Twain [Samuel L. Clemens], *Roughing It* (Hartford: American Publishing Company, 1872), 20, 193, 295.

²Stillman estimate from George Groh, *Gold Fever* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1966), 5, 193. Louise Clapp, *The Shirley Letters* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 39. Research by Rodman Paul found that the original spelling was Clapp, not the generally published Clappe. See *Notable American Women* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

³Dan De Quille [William Wright], *The Big Bonanza* (rpt. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1947), 64, 65, 66. See also Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own"* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 190–91.

⁴Twain, *Roughing It*, 304–5.

⁵J. Ross Browne, "A Peep at Washoe," *Harper's Monthly Magazine* (January 1861), 153–54, 160.

⁶De Quille, *Big Bonanza*, ch. 19.

⁷Walter Van Tilburg Clark, ed., *The Journals of Alfred Doten* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1973), vol. 2, 896, 899, 913–14, 927.

⁸*Territorial Enterprise*, 12 May 1866. 12 January and 9, 25 May 1867; Eliot Lord, *Comstock Mining and Miners* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), 437.

⁹De Quille, *Big Bonanza*, 145–54; Grant H. Smith, *The History of the Comstock Lode* (1943; rpt. Reno: University of Nevada, 1980), 241–50.

¹⁰The *Evening Bulletin* (17 October 1860) is quoted in Lord, *Comstock Mining*, 94; J. Wells Kelly, *First Directory of Nevada Territory* (rpt. Los Gatos, Calif.: Talisman Press, 1962), 117–23, 154, 165, 168, 180–84.

¹¹Mark Twain [Samuel L. Clemens], *The Gilded Age* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1915), 102.

¹²Browne, "Peep," (January 1861), 159–60; (February 1861), 295.

¹³George Adams, *Doctors in Blue* (New York: H. Wolff, 1951), 227–29; *Territorial Enterprise*, 17 November 1865; William G. Rothstein, *American Medical Schools and the Practice of Medicine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 39–41, 73–75; Robert F. Karolevitz, *Doctors of the Old West* (Seattle: Superior Publishing Co., 1967), 139.

¹⁴J. Ross Browne, *A Peep at Washoe* (Balboa Island: Paisano Press, 1959 reprint), 188 & 190.

¹⁵De Quille, *The Big Bonanza*, 393.

¹⁶*Territorial Enterprise*, 9 April 1865, 18 April & 27 May 1866, and 4 Jan. & 14 March 1868.

¹⁷Alvin Wood Chase, *Dr. Chase's Recipes* (Ann Arbor: author, 1864), table of contents, 104–10, 96, 140–41, 183, 188–89; Clarence Meyer, *American Folk Medicine* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1973), 10–15; Karolevitz, *Doctors of the Old West*, 169–70; Billy Jones, *Health-Seekers in the Southwest, 1871–1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 36–37.

¹⁸John J. Powell, *Nevada: The Land of Silver* (San Francisco: Bacon and Co., 1876), 212–15; *Territorial Enterprise*, 12 April 1865, 4 January 1872, 8 September 1874; De Quille, *Big Bonanza*, 383; Heinrich Wallnofer and Anna von Rottauscher, *Chinese Folk Medicine* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1965), 37, 50–61, 100, 112–14, 140–55.

¹⁹Alex Ayres, ed., *The Wit and Wisdom of Mark Twain* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 97.

“HOW THE DEVIL TEMPTS US TO GO ASIDE FROM CHRIST”¹

First Presbyterian Church of Virginia City, 1862–1867

Charles Jeffrey Garrison

One of the oldest public buildings standing in Virginia City is the First Presbyterian Church on South C Street. The church was built in 1866 and has survived many fires, including an 1871 arson attempt² and the great fire of 1875 that destroyed most of the city. Based largely upon previously unavailable primary resources, this essay traces the early history of the congregation which built that whitewashed wooden church. These resources include the journal of the Reverend David Henry Palmer,³ an 1866 history of the congregation placed in the cornerstone of the building, an 1876 history of the congregation found in the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia, and early minutes of the church's session. Additional primary resources include letters from the first three pastors to the Presbyterian Home Missions, which were reprinted in denominational journals of the era and uncovered at the library of the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Available primary material and existing studies of religion in the western mining camps and of nineteenth-century evangelicalism add insight into the social and religious life on the Comstock Lode.

NINETEENTH-CENTURY PROTESTANTISM AND THE COMSTOCK LODGE

Social and religious life on the Comstock Lode in the 1860s stood in sharp contrast to the nineteenth-century American ideal. Even though there was no state religion and the non-Protestant population was growing rapidly, most Americans during this period saw the country as a Christian nation, and Chris-

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tianity was seen only as evangelical Protestantism. As church historian George Mardsen notes, "a protestant version of the medieval ideal of Christendom prevailed."⁴ But the American West was different. It lacked the Protestant ethos that was characteristic of the rest of the country.⁵ Historian Edward Wicher points out that Presbyterian evangelism in California and Nevada was carried out against a backdrop of "Spanish Missions, Mexican settlements, American adventurers, and tumultuous gold seekers."⁶

In a "State of Religion Report" given in 1877, the Presbytery of Sacramento, which at the time included northern Nevada, summarized the work and the challenges of the church in the West:

There are many difficulties peculiar to the Pacific Coast with which we have to contend, but none which the Gospel is not able to overcome. The irreligious influence of the early immigration to this Coast still makes itself felt. Many are yet drawn hither by the greed of gold, instead of an honest desire for homes. And the love of money proves itself to be a root of all evil. The world had the start in the settlement of this Coast, but the church is surely overtaking it; for which all praise be to God.⁷

Residents were drawn to Virginia City out of an interest in gold and silver or the hope of a good-paying job in the mines. Most had little concern for religion, being primarily occupied with business and pleasure. Yet, in spite of the difficulties presented by this secular city, the Presbyterian Church and the Roman Catholic, Methodist, Episcopal, and Baptist churches all established congregations in Virginia City during the first three years of its existence.⁸ For the Protestant denominations, establishing a church was one way to carry on the traditions and values of the Eastern seaboard and thereby "Americanize" the West.⁹

THE BEGINNING OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN VIRGINIA CITY

The beginning of the Presbyterian Church in Nevada can be attributed to the work of the Reverend William Wallace Brier. Brier grew up in Ohio and Indiana,¹⁰ attended Wabash College and Lane Theological Seminary, and was ordained by Logansport Presbytery in 1848.¹¹ Arriving in California in 1850 as a missionary, he organized his first church in Marysville.¹² During the 1850s, Brier established numerous churches throughout the state.¹³ In 1861, as an exploring missionary for the Synod of Alta, California (New School),¹⁴ Brier organized a congregation in Carson City, Nevada Territory. On September 14, 1862, he met with those interested in forming a Presbyterian church on the Comstock and constituted, with sixteen members, The First Presbyterian Church of Virginia City on September 21, 1862.¹⁵

A few weeks after the new church was formed, Brier departed for his home in California. Care of the small congregation in Virginia City was entrusted to the Reverend A. F. White of Carson City, the only Presbyterian pastor in the Nevada Territory. White was in the process of building the church in Carson City

and was unable to devote much time to the work in Virginia City. The congregation remained stagnant until late summer 1863.¹⁶

Nevada was booming in the early 1860s as miners and businessmen poured into the territory. Sensing a great opportunity, the Reverend White wrote to the Presbyterian Home Mission Board requesting help:

A failure in this effort would be to yield the whole Territory almost to unrestrained vice. Will you sustain us in planting the standard of the Cross here amid these mountains? This infant church [Carson City]—the first born in the great basin between the Sierras and the Rocky Mountains, stretches forth her hands to you for help.¹⁷

While the attention of the nation was focused on the Civil War, the Reverend Dr. Henry Kendall, secretary of the Presbyterian Committee of Home Missions (New School), was actively making plans to increase the number of pastors in the West. Kendall was a “venturesome kind of executive who looks after needs first and then gets the money afterwards.”¹⁸ He sensed that the end of the Civil War and the completion of a transcontinental railroad would spur an increase in the population of the western territories and present a challenge for the church. In the spring of 1863, Kendall recruited David Henry Palmer and William Wirt Macomber, two students at Auburn Theological Seminary in western New York, to become missionaries in Nevada.¹⁹ The Reverend White’s plea was answered in the summer of 1863 when these two young ministers arrived in Nevada. A fourth Presbyterian minister, the Reverend S. P. Webber also moved to Nevada in 1863. Webber went to work in the Reese River District and organized a church in Austin. Macomber organized the Calvary Presbyterian Church in Gold Hill, and Palmer was chosen as the first pastor for the First Presbyterian Church of Virginia City.²⁰

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN’S FIRST PASTOR: DAVID HENRY PALMER

David Henry Palmer was young and inexperienced when he began his work in Virginia City. He fits the description of the pastor in Mark Twain’s *Roughing It*, “a fragile, gentle, spiritual new fledgling from an Eastern theological seminary.”²¹ During the sixteen months that Palmer and his wife lived in Virginia City, he maintained a journal that provides insight into the difficulties he encountered. From his account, it can be seen that he was overwhelmed by the pace and demands of Virginia City.

Palmer was initially impressed with the wealth of Nevada—so much so that shortly after he arrived in Virginia City he informed the Presbyterian Home Mission Board that he would no longer need any financial support and that the congregation planned to construct a \$25,000 church edifice in the spring.²² As can be seen in his journals, Palmer’s initial optimism quickly waned. In April 1864, he encouraged his congregation to pray for an edifice, but he admitted that



Reverend David Henry Palmer and his wife Jennie Gilmore Palmer in 1863, before their departure for Nevada. (Courtesy of Elisabeth Ruddy)

no one believed it was possible.²³ Again, in June he noted the need of a building and how "all thinks its [sic] utterly impossible."²⁴ Even though his congregation consisted of many leading citizens,²⁵ they were few in number and the church had limited resources. During these early years the congregation met mostly in the district courtroom, which was described as "dismal and dirty."²⁶

Throughout his stay in Virginia City, Palmer complained of being sick. His ill health began during his final months of seminary. On one occasion, Palmer's illness caused him to question his call to the mission fields.²⁷ While in Virginia City, he had a sore throat which affected his sermon delivery²⁸ and a bout of "mountain fever."²⁹ In July 1864, he was sick and in bed for more than two weeks and had to cancel services on two successive Sundays.³⁰ During his last month in Nevada, Palmer complained about his "fickleness and inefficiency," which he partly blamed on his physical condition.³¹ A history of the church, written in 1866, cited discouragement and "impaired health" as the reasons for Palmer's departure from Virginia City.³² In addition to his health problems, Palmer seemed to be more interested in studying than in making pastoral visits.³³ Encouraged by church leaders to visit more,³⁴ he tried to force himself to spend two hours a day visiting.³⁵ Palmer blamed his seclusion as one reason for his difficulties in Virginia City.³⁶

Even though Palmer was self-critical of his pastoral abilities, he was possibly more effective than he believed. His journals show his concern for the well-being of his parishioners and his simultaneous criticism of himself.

There is a girl in my cong. now for a long time sick with whom I have desired to speak as to her soul's welfare. At last I did so today. What was my surprise when I found her indulging a hope! To this hope she professes to have obtained during her sickness. I have long since observed her attentive & even affected under preaching. O how ashamed & guilty am I that I have not been more faithful with Mary G——! I trust the Lord is with her.³⁷

Another example of Palmer's pastoral leadership ability can be seen in the effort that he and the church session made to visit every inactive church member. One of the people visited, A. B. Elliott, asked to be taken off the roll since he was no longer fit to eat at the Lord's table. Elliott said that he had sworn during a "fit of rage" and if given the same circumstances would swear again. Under Palmer's leadership, the session decided not to remove his name, giving him time to reconsider his decision.³⁸ Elliott later returned to church and served as a faithful elder for many years.

Housing and financial concerns were additional worries for Palmer. Upon moving to Virginia City, the Palmers took Nelson Winton's offer to stay in his house. They lived there from September 1863 until early January 1864.³⁹ During their sixteen-month stay in Virginia City, the Palmers moved five times.⁴⁰ The difficulty with housing was compounded by difficulties with finances. Virginia City was an expensive place to live, and, although Palmer had been promised a

large salary, \$250 a month, the church often didn't have the money to pay him.⁴¹ A letter to his parents illustrates his financial problems. Palmer told of having to cancel a Sunday evening service so he could travel to Steamboat Springs and perform a wedding.

Not exactly satisfied with that method of spending the Sabbath. Fee \$50.00. My pressing need of the money just now perhaps quells my conscience, but it soon disappeared this morning, paying weekly bills & getting some necessaries. Isn't it shameful that with a people as rich as this city, a promise of \$250.00 per month, I have to use my wedding fees to live on, & cannot give them to [his wife Jenniel] or to you as I would like.⁴²

Henry Kendall stopped in Virginia City on his tour of the West in 1864. During his visit, he baptized the Palmer's first child, named Nelson Winton Palmer.⁴³ Palmer must have discussed his dissatisfaction with his performance with Kendall. Shortly after Kendall's visit, Palmer wrote,

Here I have labored a year! What has been accomplished? What soul has been saved? Wherein the great end of a preached gospel & the pastor work attained still we have no [church]. Still are we often deprived of the prayer meeting & many other week services for the way of a place. Still is the [church] cold & worldly even more so apparently than one year ago. Still is our financial condition as a society very deplorable.

In the same entry, Palmer focused on his work, blaming his failure on his lack of faithfulness and effort.

My ambition is again aroused. We are passing on. Time is short. Eternity is near. Souls are perishing. When shall we work if not while the day last? I am sent here, sent by the church. Placed here by God. Bidden to do God's work. Was I sent here in vain? When will the purpose of my work be realized? When will its edifice & all its services & its annual, its monthly increase of such as shall be saved? Oh when! Is it not but asking when shall I be faithful, active, systematic, devoted to my work, longing for souls, persuading men never idle, never fretting & disconcerted, never faithless as to God's promise of care & protection & assistance? Surely it is for in all my weakness I might be strong did I but trust.⁴⁴

In the fall of 1864, Palmer wrote to Henry Kendall, requesting that he be reassigned and another pastor sent to Virginia City. In November, Kendall, then in California, arranged for Palmer to trade positions with the Reverend William M. Martin of Columbia, California.

After leaving Virginia City, Palmer honestly admitted his failure in a journal entry.

The exchange has been made. I am here. Bro. Martin is there. It is all my work & a work of [which] I am ashamed. Yet God may overrule it. Bro. Martin writes Mrs. M—— that the people in Va. liked me. That I might have remained had I not shrunk from them. But I know I did not mean to shrink. I wished to go all the while & at the first intimation that I might go, my heart sank within me. And the [nearer] the time of departure approached

the more I hoped yet to remain. But I had rashly set the stone in motion & did not dare to stop it. It is all for the best for Va. I doubt not. I cannot be sorry that I leave the work there in so good hands. Yet I feel that it was my sin that I did not or could not do the Lord's work in Va. I am heartily ashamed of my course, my life, & my work there. I would be glad to forget it all. I am only disheartened & chagrined by it. What did I there accomplish for [Christ]?⁴⁵

THE BUILDING OF A CHURCH: WILLIAM MULFORD MARTIN

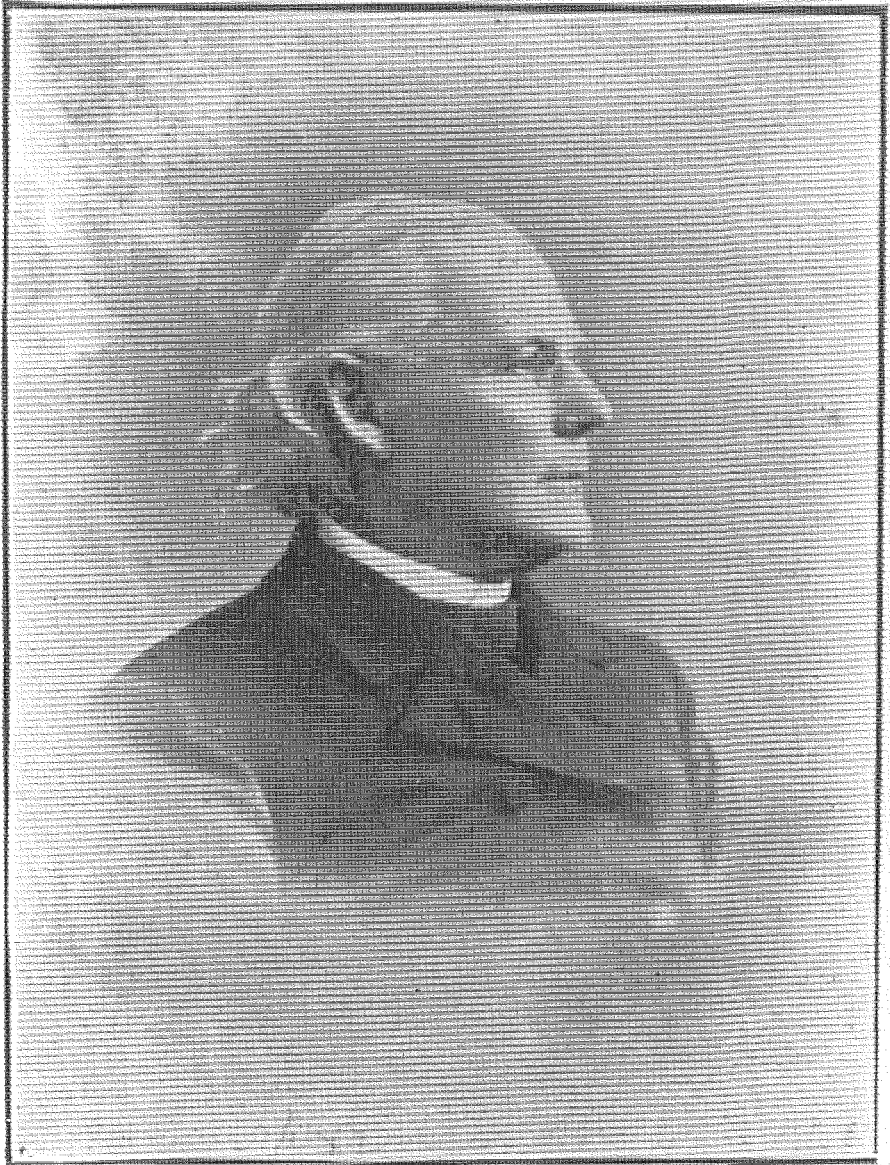
The Reverend William Mulford Martin was an experienced and well-seasoned pastor. Having grown up in New Jersey, he attended the College of New Jersey, New York University, and Union Theological Seminary in New York City. He finished seminary in 1842 and for ten years was a high school principal in Brooklyn. In 1852 he was ordained and for the next decade served as pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Woodbridge, New Jersey.⁴⁶ In 1863, Martin and his son, the Reverend W. Wisner Martin, moved to California. In October, William M. Martin began his pastorate at the Presbyterian church in Columbia,⁴⁷ while his son served as pastor in Sonora.

Kendall visited the Martins on his tour of the West and was impressed by an on-going revival at each of their churches. In a letter he reported:

I spent the Sabbath at Sonora and Columbia, two mountain towns of California where Rev. Messrs. Martin, father and son, are now laboring. . . . In Columbia a pleasant revival of religion has been enjoyed within a few months past. A former church edifice having proved inadequate to the wants of the congregation, they have just built a new one, more attractive and commodious than its predecessor, an honor to the people, and an ornament to the town, which will be ready for dedication in a few weeks.⁴⁸

At the age of fifty-one, with experience in church building, the elder Martin was an ideal choice for Virginia City. He immediately set out to encourage the congregation to build a house of worship, but, according to the 1876 history of the church, his plans were hindered by the financial crisis of 1864 and several fires in the business district.⁴⁹ A personal crisis in 1865 also affected Martin's work. His son, who was then serving Howard Street Presbyterian Church in San Francisco, became ill. When visiting his son, who died on October 16, 1865,⁵⁰ Martin had to cancel the Sunday worship services in Virginia City.⁵¹

Pastoral visitation was a priority for Martin, and he reportedly averaged a hundred pastoral calls a month.⁵² Martin supported the temperance movement⁵³ and a campaign to encourage Sabbath observance in Virginia City.⁵⁴ He also officiated at the funeral services for several popular Virginia City residents who had no church affiliations. In February 1866, Martin participated in the funeral sermon for Tom Peasley.⁵⁵ Peasley, who owned the Sazarac Saloon and who had served as chief of Virginia City Fire Company Number 1, was shot in a fight at the Corner Bar in the Ormsby House in Carson City. He was well loved



REV. WILLIAM M MARTIN.

First Presbyterian Church's second pastor, Reverend William Mulford Martin. The image is taken from the 225th anniversary program of 1900 of the First Presbyterian Church of Woodbridge, New Jersey. (*Presbyterian Church [USA] Department of History*)

in Virginia City, especially for his support of the Union during the Civil War. His funeral became a grand display of patriotism.⁵⁶ A month later, Martin gave the funeral sermon for Ben Ballou, another popular volunteer fire fighter, who was shot in Pat Malcahy's saloon.⁵⁷ Martin's message was said to have been "very appropriate and much to the point, although entirely too protracted."⁵⁸ During the spring of 1867, Martin preached the funeral sermon for Julia Bullette, a well-known prostitute who had been murdered. Alfred Doten, editor of the *Gold Hill News*, wrote in his journal that Martin's words were the "best and most appropriate for the occasion."⁵⁹

The Reverend Martin's efforts in Virginia City helped to form a strong congregation despite the necessity of worshipping in the courthouse or the Odd Fellows' hall. During his first two years as pastor, ninety-five people joined the First Presbyterian Church. It is even more remarkable that fifty-four of them joined by profession of faith, which indicated that they did not belong to a church prior to moving to Virginia City. Unfortunately for the church, many of these new members, along with most other residents of the Comstock, were quite mobile and did not stay long in Virginia City.⁶⁰ At the laying of the cornerstone for the new sanctuary, the church had fifty-two resident and nineteen nonresident members.⁶¹ Many who had joined had already moved away. The transient nature of the population was discussed at several session meetings. On May 31, 1866, the clerk of session recorded:

Numbers, it was found, had left for Meadow Lake, and other parts. The drain upon the Church and Cong. and the community at large had been very great. Still more trying, the Cong. had been deprived of its place of worship in the first floor of the courthouse (the place being fitted for sheriff and jail) and was compelled to hold service in the third story of that building. Notwithstanding these calamities the attendance on public service had steadily increased.⁶²

This entry reveals the difficulty presented by a transient population, a problem experienced by many western churches.⁶³ It also shows how the congregation needed a church building. Later, at the same meeting, Martin "insisted that a suitable Church edifice or place of worship ought to be secured and proposed to raise by his personal efforts part of the sum needed, if the leading members of the church and cong. would raise a reasonable amount."

The First Presbyterian Church of Virginia City was finally in a position to build in the fall of 1866. The cornerstone was laid on October 24, almost two years after Martin became pastor, and he can be credited for doing much of the needed work himself. Having some knowledge of architecture, he drew the plans and specifications for the sanctuary.⁶⁴ He also raised a large portion of the building fund—supposedly some \$6,000 in gold coin from businessmen in San Francisco. Contributors included D. O. Mills and W. C. Ralston,⁶⁵ the two principal operators of the Bank of California. Martin appealed to businessmen on the "principle that churches, ministers, and the preaching of the gospel, were making

their servants and customers honest."⁶⁶ He reported to the Presbyterian Home Mission Board that he had received money for the church building from Jews, papists, and other unlikely contributors.⁶⁷

The building, which reportedly cost \$12,000,⁶⁸ was dedicated on January 1, 1867. At the dedication, the congregation took up an offering of \$500, and raised an additional \$500 in "subscriptions," which liquidated the debt on the building. In addition, as was the custom of the era, the pews in the church were rented to individual worshippers, which helped provide the church with operating funds.⁶⁹

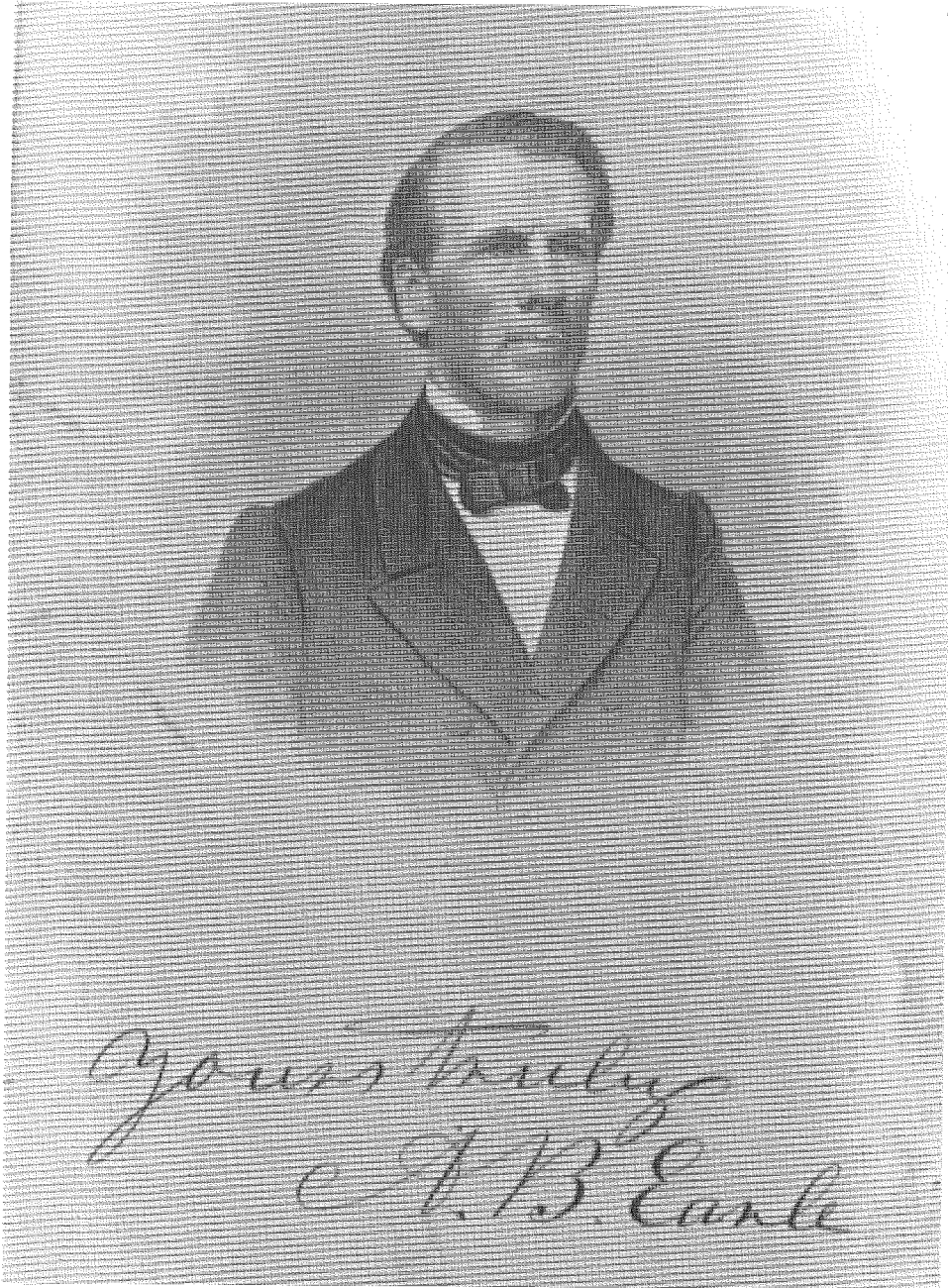
The influence of the Presbyterian Church in Virginia City probably peaked during the spring of 1867. In January the congregation acted as host for Virginia City's Great Week of Prayer, part of a world-wide effort of evangelical churches.⁷⁰ Prayer meetings continued at the Presbyterian church throughout the winter. The session minutes reflect how Martin sensed a spiritual stirring in the community and prepared church leaders for an upcoming revival.

A very free, frank, and heartfelt expression of the importance of a more entire conversation of the inner life and outer walk of the members was had. After confession and prayer, the members pledged themselves to each other, to their pastor and to Christ, that, with reliance upon the grace of God, and in view of his goodness and the vast work to be done in Virginia, where almost universal Sabbath desecration, and but few Christians, called mightily for a special pentecostal power of the Holy Spirit to quicken the church, and rescue the perishing.

At the same meeting, Martin informed the session of his correspondence with the Reverend A. B. Earle, the evangelist who had been leading revivals in California and Oregon and who had accepted Martin's invitation to come to Virginia City.⁷¹ Having gained the commitment of the church's session, Martin gathered the clergy from the other Protestant churches on the Comstock and planned a united effort.⁷²

The Revivals of Absalom B. Earle

Background. For much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, revivals were at the center of evangelical Protestantism. The first and second Great Awakenings are often considered examples of rural frontier religion. This is a misconception, especially with regard to the second Great Awakening. Charles Grandison Finney, the celebrated evangelist who began his preaching in the middle of the second Great Awakening, took the excitement of the rural camp meetings into the cities of the East.⁷³ The emphasis of the revivals changed as Finney began to evangelize areas where churches were already in existence. Instead of bringing religion to settlers who had moved away from the organized church, Finney brought religion to individuals living in the shadow of church steeples.



Reverend A. B. Earle, the famous evangelist. (From *A. B. Earle, Bringing in Sheaves* [Boston, James H. Earle, 1872], frontispiece)

On the eve of the Civil War, much of the Northeast experienced another awakening. Unlike the second Great Awakening, which began on the frontier and moved to the eastern cities, the awakening of 1858–59 had its foundation in noon prayer meetings led by businessmen and bankers.⁷⁴ During this awakening, emphasis was placed upon the possibility of the convert attaining perfection. Perfectionism, a Methodist-Arminianism view of sanctification, insists that, with the help of the Holy Spirit, the believer can obtain a sinless state in his life. It was during one of the urban revivals that the Reverend Absalom B. Earle was converted to perfectionism. He described his sanctification as taking place during a revival in Albany, New York, in 1859.⁷⁵

Earle was born in Charlestown, New York. After joining a Baptist church, he decided to pursue the ministry and served two churches in New York before devoting himself to evangelism. During the Civil War, Earle led many successful city-wide meetings. His style was to lead “union revivals” that involved all evangelical denominations. Earle believed this method was “better for the Redeemer’s cause in the world, and for the salvation of lost men.”⁷⁶ During the 1860s and 1870s (after the period of Finney’s popularity and before D. L. Moody’s), Earle and William E. Broadman were said to be the two most famous revivalists in the United States.⁷⁷

The Ministerial Union of San Francisco invited the Reverend Earle to come West the year after the Civil War ended. From the fall of 1866 to the summer of 1867, Earle led revivals in California, Oregon, and Nevada. It was said that his ministry created a “religious furore [*sic*] on the Pacific Coast.”⁷⁸ By Earle’s own account, his efforts on the coast brought more than five thousand individuals to Christ.⁷⁹

Earle’s Revival in Virginia City. When the revival began at the Sunday morning service on May 5, 1867, First Presbyterian’s new sanctuary on C Street was crowded with people eager to hear the famed Absalom B. Earle. Alf Doten, a reporter who attended the service, noted his observations of the evangelist in his journal:

About 60, tall, good appearance—hair mostly grey—earnest and impressive manner—common & not flowery, but truthful language—familiar & common style of similes—Appeals to home feelings & proclivities of hearers—none of your ranting sensational revivalist—Calculated to lead all who are in darkness to truth and light.⁸⁰

The revival continued for a week at the Presbyterian church, after which it was moved to the Methodist Episcopal church on Taylor Street for a week, and then back to the Presbyterian church for its final week. Often during the three-week revival, Earle preached three times a day. He delivered his final sermon on Wednesday evening, May 23, and left the Comstock for Carson City, where he was a guest of Governor Henry G. Blasdel.⁸¹

Earle’s preaching style is revealed in his famous sermon, “The Unpardonable

Sin," delivered at the Methodist Episcopal church during his second week in Virginia City. He had used this sermon in San Francisco at a previous revival and more than five hundred responded to his altar call.⁸² As Earle drew the sermon to a close, he told this story from the Civil War:⁸³



The Methodist Episcopal Church in Virginia City. The building was later moved to Sparks. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

After a severe battle, a soldier had his limb amputated near his body. He seemed to be doing well, but when a nurse was changing the dressing of the wound, the blood began to flow freely. The nurse quickly placed his thumb on the artery and called for a physician.

After a careful examination of the whole matter, it was decided that the artery could not be taken up without removing the thumb of the nurse; and if his thumb was removed, the soldier must die immediately.

"I think I feel very much as this nurse did," declared the revivalist. "Fearing, as I do, that many in this congregation the crisis has come when you are to decide where you will spend eternity."

People in the congregation began to squirm. The pressure was being applied to those who had not answered Christ's call. Earle continued:

As the nurse felt that he could not lift his thumb, and yet must, so with me now—How can I close this sermon, and end this entreaty, without knowing that you will not grieve the Spirit away this time?

Let me ask the Recording Angel to hold his pen, while each one of you in this hall decides the quest—whether you will cherish what little desire you have to become Christ's!⁸⁴

Alf Doten, who had earlier been favorable toward Earle, was critical of "The Unpardonable Sin."

This he makes out to be people not coming forward & becoming converts to his, Earle's, teaching & "accepting Christ"—All who "reject Christ" he says cannot be pardoned by God & will consequently go to hell—In view of the fact he has thus far made not two hundred converts in this City out of a population of 10,000, it would seem that an extremely small proportion have any chance of getting into heaven—His views on the subject are decidedly limited.

A letter of Doten's describes Earle's reception in Virginia City:

The Rev. A. B. Earle's revival conquest of the West somewhat checked by the common sense of Virginia City, which finds it hard to believe that only Christians can enter Heaven and still harder to believe that the only way to Christ is through Earle.⁸⁵

While Doten was critical, the Reverend Martin, in contrast, was joyous. According to Martin, Earle's efforts doubled the membership and quadrupled the spiritual power of the participating churches. He commented, "The blessings of his labors are Pentecostal," and "the Pacific is blossoming like the rose."⁸⁶ On the day of Earle's departure, the newspaper reported large crowds saying farewell. He was credited with bringing harmony to the Comstock churches,⁸⁷ and, four years later, a newspaper article cited Brother Earle's labor as a major religious reforming event in the history of the city.⁸⁸

Perhaps the best measure of Absalom Earle's reception on the Comstock was an engraved thirty-pound block of silver given to him as a going away gift.⁸⁹ A

week previously Alf Doten had noted that Earle's revival profits were "\$6,000 from Marysville, \$6,500 from Placerville, a probable \$3,000 from Virginia City and proportionate amounts in other towns and cities."⁹⁰ Not only had Earle's western revivals been successful in numbers converted, his revivals were also financially rewarding.

CONCLUSIONS

Difficulties in Building a Church

The greatest problem facing the congregation during the early years was the lack of a church building. It took the congregation more than four years to build, for which several reasons can be cited. One hindrance was competition from other churches. The Catholic Church, in 1860, was the first to build on the Comstock. In 1861, the Methodist Episcopal Church became the first Protestant church to build in Virginia City. The Protestant Episcopal Church, which also started its ministry in the courthouse, built a church in August 1861. As Alice Frances Trout notes, these three denominations had strong centralized governments that made them more adaptable to a frontier area.⁹¹ Their episcopal structures of government allowed them rapidly and effectively to deploy and replace ministers, while the Presbyterian Church, along with the Congregational and Baptist churches, had more difficulty placing ministers because of its decentralized form of government. The early difficulties of the Presbyterian Church and the relative success of the Catholic, Episcopal, and Methodist churches in Virginia City support Trout's thesis. In addition to the competition, weak leadership hindered the Presbyterian quest for building funds. For the first year, the congregation did not have the full-time devotion of a pastor, and, when one finally came, he was young and inexperienced.

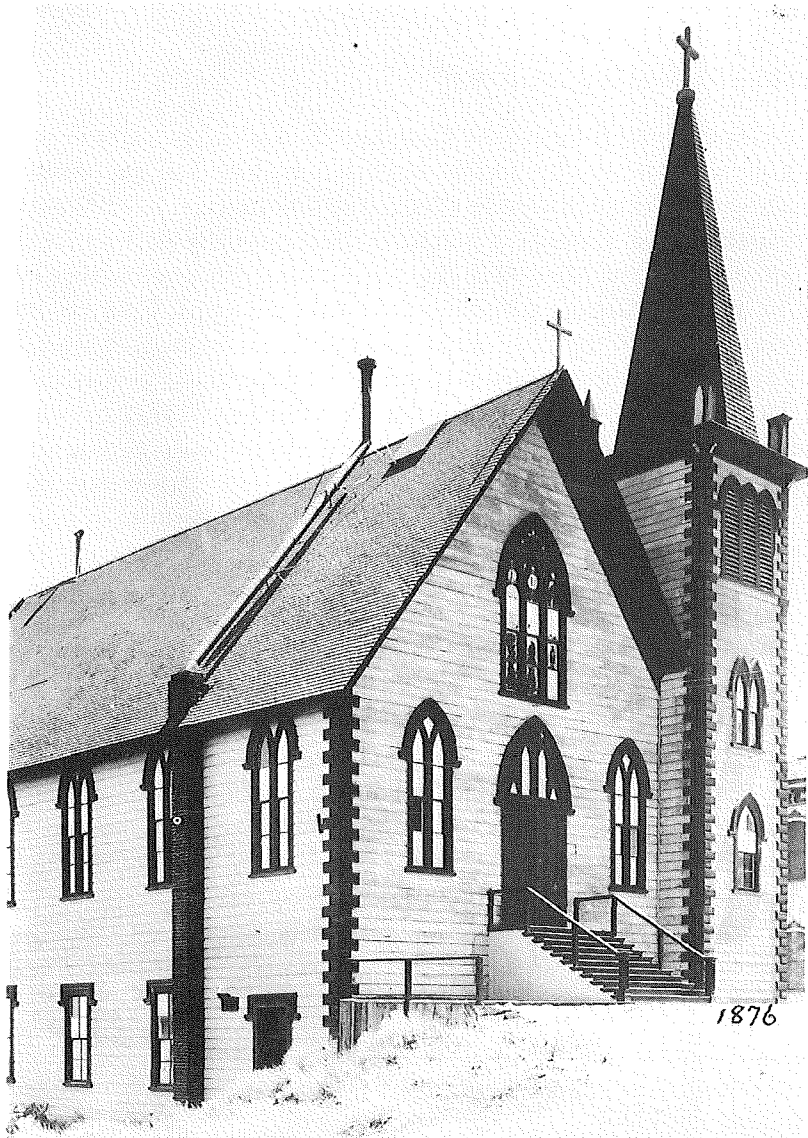
The third factor impeding the congregation as it searched for funds was the downturn of the Comstock economy in 1864. This depression was brought on by the end of profitable mining in Aurora and the collapse of the San Francisco stock market. Most investors in Virginia City became nervous and questioned how long the Comstock Lode would remain profitable.⁹²

Another problem facing all churches on the Comstock Lode was the lack of women in church and in the city. The 1876 history of First Presbyterian highlights this difficulty:

In those days, as is the case now, the prayer meetings are mainly supported by men, few women attending. Comparatively speaking there are few women here, and fewer still here are what they ought to be. In other countries the majority of church goers and church workers are women, but here the fact is the other way.⁹³

The fledgling congregation could not depend on a large group of women to support its work and mission. It has been estimated that the ratio of adult men to women in Virginia City in 1875 was 3 to 1.⁹⁴ The disparity was even greater

in the early years. As the passage quoted above suggests, many of the women in Virginia City worked in saloons or as prostitutes and therefore were not inclined to be involved in church affairs. Building a church without a strong group of women proved difficult.



EPISCOPAL CHURCH, Virginia City, Nevada

The Protestant Episcopal Church in Virginia City in 1876. (Nevada Historical Society)

One common myth has been that the Presbyterians raised the money for their building by using inside information to invest in mining stock. An 1881 history of Nevada supports this theory.

The Trustees had received from some friends on the inside what is known as a point, on the stock market. With a little money in the treasury they purchased a few shares of stock, which rose in a few weeks several hundred dollars in value. They sold out before the crash.⁹⁵

This story has continued to be told by the congregation and has been included in more recent studies of Virginia City.⁹⁶ In this author's review of the 1866 and 1876 official histories of the church, the session and presbytery minutes, and several letters from the Reverend Martin to the Presbyterian Home Mission Board that discussed the church building, no support for the story was found. On the other hand, there is support for Martin's claim that he raised funds from non-Presbyterians, including Jews. Both his letters and the church's histories indicate that he received donations from many unlikely supporters. Ferenc Morton Szasz, in a study of Protestant clergy in the West, cited several examples of Jewish businessmen who supported both Protestant and Catholic churches out of a belief that churches made for more honest customers.⁹⁷

Impact of the Church in Virginia City

Most of the early supporters of the First Presbyterian Church were business leaders. Many of these men supported the church not only for spiritual reasons but also on economic grounds. They assumed that the presence of strong churches would stabilize society and create a better business climate. As John Gillig, owner of a hardware store and not a church member, was quoted in 1876: "We men of business and wealth could not live on this Pacific Coast. We would be murdered for our money, but for the influence of which churches and ministers exert upon the people."⁹⁸ The Reverend Martin made his appeal for monies for the church edifice on the basis that churches "made people more honest."⁹⁹ In effect, what churches tried to do in the West was to mold society into an accepted eastern standard. The clergy became "important bearers of morality," as demonstrated in Alice Cowan Cochan's study of Colorado mining camps. In their attempts to settle the West, they formed churches based on established patterns of society in the East.¹⁰⁰

In the East, revivals were the standard way to call society back to its religious roots. In New England, most people who were not involved in religion expected that at some point in a revival the Holy Spirit would sweep them into the Church.¹⁰¹ Having lived through the second Great Awakening and the awakening of 1858–59, the early ministers in Virginia City hoped that a revival would transform their city. It is hard to assess the long-term impact of Earle's revival in

Virginia City upon those converted since many would not have stayed in the city long enough to take an active leadership role in the church and community. Because of the transient nature of mining-camp society, the revival probably had little lasting effect on the congregation.

A summary of how the leaders of the First Presbyterian Church felt about their community can be seen in an 1877 state-of-religion report to the Presbytery of Sacramento.

Almost everything here is so arranged as to interfere with and neutralizing Christian work. The almost entire absence of a Christian Sabbath, the prevalence of a large number of Saloons where soul and body destroying poisons are dealt out, day and night, on the Sabbath as on other days, and the large number of gambling hells where men are robbed of their money and morals, and the consequent lack of Gospel influence lead to an unusual State of indifference, immorality and infidelity. Even the faithful Christians are more or less chilled by their surroundings in this city. For members, we are almost wholly dependent on receiving them from other parts of the Christian world, and many received in this way very soon yield to the numerous, powerful, and demoralizing influences of this city, or leave for other parts of the country. All we expect to do here with our present surroundings is to lift up a standard for the comparatively few people, who come to hear the Word and thus in a small way keep Satan in check.¹⁰²

This narrative, written ten years after Earle's revivals, indicates that the church continued to face most of the same problems as before. In addition, the congregation also watched as some who had been active in church before moving to the Comstock were quickly tempted away. Such was the case with Dr. D. M. Geiger, a businessman for whom the road to Reno, the Geiger Grade, is named. Geiger was an early supporter of the First Presbyterian Church, but after a few years his commitment faded and he quit attending. Others, like James G. Fair, who had grown up within Protestant families, had lost interest in religion before coming to the Comstock. Fair, one of the wealthiest businessmen on the Comstock, was from an Irish Presbyterian family, but had become a "low-grade atheist," according to a church member.¹⁰³ In addition to the many individuals indifferent to religion, the Virginia City population included a large number of immigrants, most of whom were Roman Catholics or, like the Chinese, non-Christian.¹⁰⁴

The transient nature of the population—most of which had moved to the Comstock in the hope of becoming rich—continued to create a challenge for Virginia City's churches. Population shifts followed a fluctuating economy geared to the value of ore and the price of silver. As the Presbyterian pastors labored to build a congregation in these circumstances, they frequently joined other Protestant churches for revivals and to promote temperance and Sabbath observance. Lacking the widespread community support typical in the East, churches did often have the support of business leaders, who longed for a stable business climate. Even though the mining camps presented unfamiliar difficulties for the Presbyterians, they responded to the secular worldliness by relying

on techniques developed and tested earlier in the century.¹⁰⁵ Worship, prayer meetings, and Sunday school, along with revival and ecumenical promotion of the virtuous and religious life were the primary weapons with which the church countered this extraordinarily secular society.

NOTES

¹This phrase was the title for a sermon of the Reverend David Henry Palmer. See David Palmer, *Journal*, 9 January 1864, Manuscript Collections, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia (hereafter cited as Palmer).

²*Territorial Enterprise*, 16 November 1871.

³The journals of David Henry Palmer span the period 1863–69. They begin during Palmer’s last year at Auburn Theological Seminary in Auburn, N.Y. They cover his ministry in Virginia City and part of his ministry in Columbia, Calif., and in Prattsburg, N.Y. The journals were in the possession of Elisabeth Ruddy of Encinitas, Calif., a granddaughter of David Henry Palmer. They have been donated to the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia; and a transcript by Charles Jeffrey Garrison is also available in the manuscript collection of the society.

⁴George M. Mardsen, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 10.

⁵Cf. Douglas Firth Anderson, “We Have Here a Different Civilization: Protestant Identity in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1906–1909,” *Western Historical Quarterly* (May 1992), 205.

⁶Edward Arthur Wicher, *The Presbyterian Church in California: 1849–1927* (New York: Frederick H. Hitchcock, 1927), 33. Wicher’s book contains a chapter on the Presbyterian Church in Nevada.

⁷Presbytery of Sacramento, *Minutes of Presbytery*, 28 April 1877, Manuscript Collections, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia.

⁸For a broader history of all the churches of Virginia City, see Francis P. Weisenburger, “God and Man in a Secular City: The Church in Virginia City, Nevada,” *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 14:2, (Summer 1971).

⁹The need to “Americanize and Christianize” the population was included in a list of reasons why churches should be built in the West. See *Presbyterian Monthly* (November 1867), 257.

¹⁰Charles T. Brier, “Biographical Sketch of the Brier Family,” Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

¹¹Presbyterian Theological Seminary of Chicago, *General Catalogue* (Chicago: Melton Printing Company, 1939), 61.

¹²See Earl Ramey, “The Beginning of Marysville, Part III,” *California Historical Society Quarterly*, 15:1 (1936), 43.

¹³Wicher, *Presbyterian Church*, 58–59.

¹⁴In 1837, over theological issues, the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America split into an Old School and a New School. Both groups claimed to be the true Presbyterian Church. The New School was strongest in New York State, and the Old School strength was centered in Pennsylvania. The two groups merged back together in 1870. See George Mardsen, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

¹⁵First Presbyterian Church of Virginia City, *Minutes of Session*, 14, 21 September 1862, Manuscript Collections, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia (hereafter cited as *Minutes of Session*).

¹⁶*History of the First Presbyterian Church, Virginia City, Nevada* (21 December 1876), Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia (hereafter cited as *History* [1876]).

¹⁷A. F. White, “A Pioneer Church,” *The Evangelist* (New York), 32:12 (20 March 1862).

¹⁸Thomas Stratton Goslin II, *An Essential Portion of “Henry Kendall and the Evangelization of a Continent,”* 11, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia. The essential portion was taken from Goslin’s Ph.D. dissertation (University of Pennsylvania, 1948).

¹⁹Palmer, 2, 5, 12 May and 10 July 1863.

²⁰“Home Missions in Nevada,” *The Evangelist* (New York) (10 December 1863); cf. Palmer, 19, 22 September 1863.

²¹Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (New York: Rinehart and Co., Inc., 1953), 242. Though Palmer fits

Twain's description of his pastor (young, fresh from seminary, often ill, etcetera), the Reverend Franklin S. Rising, an Episcopal priest in Virginia City, has often been suggested as Twain's model. See Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain: A Biography* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1912), 214; Cf. Andrew Forest Muir, "Note on Twain and Rising," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, 34:4 (December 1955).

²²David Henry Palmer, "Letter," *The Evangelist* (New York) (10 December 1863).

²³Palmer, 14 April 1863.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 24 June 1864.

²⁵The original sixteen members included Nelson W. Winton, county clerk and first president of Virginia City's Board of Trustees; A. B. Ellicott, an attorney and an assemblyman in the first state legislature. For more information on Winton and Ellicott, see Myron Angel, ed. *History of the State of Nevada* (Oakland: Thompson and West, 1881). Other prominent Virginia City citizens who were active in the early years of the church include A. J. Ralston, agent for the Bank of California and brother of W. C. Ralston (*Virginia Evening Bulletin*, 24 August 1863); Charles A. Knox, a county commissioner and treasurer of the Board of Education (*ibid.*; *Gold Hill News*, 1 January 1863, 10 February 1865); and Dr. D. M. Geiger, proprietor of the Geiger Grade and involved with the school system (*Virginia Evening Bulletin*, 24 August 1863, *Gold Hill News*, 12 December 1865, Palmer, 6 January 1864). For additional information on church members, see Charles Jeffrey Garrison, "Members and Adherents of the 1st Presbyterian Church of Virginia City," Manuscript Collections, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia.

²⁶Palmer, 30 October 1863.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 18 May 1863.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 6 October 1863.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 15 October 1863.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 27 July 1864.

³¹*Ibid.*, 2 November 1864.

³²Nelson W. Winton, handwritten history of the First Presbyterian Church of Virginia City, placed in the church cornerstone in 1866. The document is in the possession of the First Presbyterian Church of Virginia City, hereafter cited as "History" (1866).

³³An example of Palmer's interest in studying can be seen by his goal to translate the Old and New Testaments from the original languages into English. See Palmer, 28 October 1863.

³⁴Palmer, 15 February 1864.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 9 January 1864.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 28 November 1864.

³⁷*Ibid.*, February 1864 (no day indicated).

³⁸*Minutes of Session*, 2 June 1864.

³⁹Palmer, 15 September 1863, 3 January 1864.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 7 November 1864.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 12 November 1864.

⁴²David Henry Palmer, letter to parents, 9 May 1864. A photocopy of this letter was made available to the author by Elisabeth Ruddy.

⁴³*Minutes of Session*, 3 August 1864.

⁴⁴Palmer, 25 September 1864.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 28 November 1864.

⁴⁶Charles Ripley Gillet, *Alumni Catalog of Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York: 1836-1926* (New York: Union Theological Seminary, 1926).

⁴⁷First Presbyterian Church of Columbia, California, *Minutes of Session*, 22 October 1863, Manuscript Collections, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia.

⁴⁸Henry Kendall, clipping of a printed letter found in Sheldon Jackson's Scrapbook (35a), 12, Manuscript Collections, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia. For additional information on the Martins in Sonora and Columbia see pages 8, 10 of the scrapbook. For information on the church building in Columbia, see *Tuolumne Courier* (Columbia), 20 February and 5 March 1864.

⁴⁹*History* (1876).

⁵⁰*Sonora Herald* (Sonora, Calif.), 28 October 1864.

⁵¹*Gold Hill News*, 10 June 1865.

⁵²Weisenburger, “God and Man,” 10.

⁵³*Gold Hill News*, 17 January 1865.

⁵⁴*Territorial Enterprise*, 2 May 1867.

⁵⁵Walter Van Tilburg Clark, ed., *The Journals of Alfred Doten, 1849–1903* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1973), 877 (hereafter cited as *Doten*).

⁵⁶Steven R. Frady, *Red Shirts and Leather Helmets: Volunteer Fire Fighting on the Comstock Lode* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1984), 87–91.

⁵⁷See *Gold Hill News*, 5 March, 1866; *Doten*, 879.

⁵⁸*Gold Hill News*, 5 March 1866.

⁵⁹*Doten*, 912.

⁶⁰An example of population instability can be seen in Marion S. Goldman’s study, *Gold Diggers and Silver Miners: Prostitution and Social Life on the Comstock Lode* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981), 15–16. She drew the names of 140 men listed in the city’s 1870 census. Five years later, in the 1875 census, only 43 of the men appeared, and only 27 of them were listed in the 1880 census.

⁶¹“History” (1866).

⁶²*Minutes of Session*, 31 May 1866.

⁶³Ferenc Morton Szasz, *The Protestant Clergy in the Great Plains and Mountain West, 1865–1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 28.

⁶⁴*History* (1876).

⁶⁵*Ibid.* W. C. Ralston was ruling elder at Calvary Presbyterian Church (Old School) in San Francisco. See Carol Green Wilson, *Many Years, One Message: Calvary Presbyterian Church, 1854–1979* (San Francisco: Calvary Presbyterian Church, 1979), 6. W. C. Ralston’s brother, A. J. Ralston, served on the committee to raise money for the church. See “History” (1866).

⁶⁶“History” (1866).

⁶⁷*Presbyterian Monthly* (January 1867).

⁶⁸*History* (1876). A different cost is given by Col. Henry G. Shaw, “The Churches of Nevada,” in Angel, *History*, 215. There, the cost of the Presbyterian edifice in Virginia City is \$4,700.

⁶⁹*Territorial Enterprise*, 1 January 1867.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 6 January 1867.

⁷¹*Minutes of Session*, 22 April 1864. Weisenburger, “God and Man,” 7–8, credits the Methodist Episcopal Church for acting as host for Earle’s revivals. However, *Doten*’s journals, session minutes, and Martin’s letters all indicate that the revival began and concluded at the First Presbyterian Church and that it was Martin who organized the event.

⁷²*Territorial Enterprise*, 28 April 1867.

⁷³For information on Finney’s contribution to the second Great Awakening, see Keith J. Hardman, *Charles Grandison Finney: Revivalist and Reformer* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987).

⁷⁴George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford, 1980), 11.

⁷⁵The Reverend P. C. Headley, *Evangelist in the Church* (Boston: Henry Hoyt, 1875), 348.

⁷⁶Rev. A. B. Earle, *Bringing In Sheaves* (Boston: James H. Earle, 1872), 239.

⁷⁷Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Abingdon, 1957), 141.

⁷⁸*Doten*, 925.

⁷⁹Earle, 351.

⁸⁰*Doten*, 925. The *Doten* journals provide the best overview of the various meetings Earle held in Virginia City.

⁸¹Earle, 336.

⁸²Earle, 144.

⁸³For the setting of the sermon, see *Doten*, 926.

⁸⁴The text for this sermon can be found in Earle’s autobiography, *Bringing in Sheaves*, 128–44. It was preached at the Union Hall in San Francisco on 14 October 1866. More than five thousand people were influenced to “embrace Christ” by this sermon, according to Earle (p. 144). Use of this sermon in Virginia City is confirmed in Alf Doten’s journals (see note 80).

⁸⁵See *Doten*, 925–29.

⁸⁶Wm M. Martin to *Presbyterian Monthly*, (October, 1867), Library, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

⁸⁷*Territorial Enterprise*, 23 May 1867.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 18 April 1871.

⁸⁹Earle, *Sheaves*, 335.

⁹⁰*Doten*, 927.

⁹¹Alice Frances Trout, "Religious Development in Nevada," *Nevada Historical Society Papers*, Vol. 1, 1913–1917 (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1917), 149.

⁹²Grant H. Smith, *The History of the Comstock Lode* (Reno: Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology, 1943), 48.

⁹³*History* (1876).

⁹⁴Goldman, *Gold Diggers*, 16.

⁹⁵Shaw, "Churches of Nevada," 215.

⁹⁶See Weisenburger, "God and Man," 10.

⁹⁷Szasz, *Protestant Clergy*, 24.

⁹⁸*History* (1876).

⁹⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰Alice Cowan Cochran, *Miners, Merchants, and Missionaries: The Role of Missionaries and Pioneer Churches in the Colorado Gold Rush and Its Aftermath, 1858–1870* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1980), 23.

¹⁰¹Witney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), 8.

¹⁰²*Minutes of Session*, 19 April 1877.

¹⁰³For information on the problem of keeping church members faithful and on the religious involvement of Geiger and Fair, see *History* (1876).

¹⁰⁴There seem to have been some Chinese Christians in Virginia City. A Chinese congregation was organized and a church built. See *Gold Hill News*, 8 June 1864, and *Territorial Enterprise*, 15 August 1875.

¹⁰⁵Cf. Cochran, *Miners, Merchants, and Missionaries*, vii–x.

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

VISTAS FROM MOUNT JEFFERSON

Steven W. Pellegrini

Tonight we'll camp in limber pine at ten thousand feet, where the nights are frosty enough to bleed the green from aspen leaves. Our backpacks are heavy, and the two-gallon coffee pot tied to mine catches on pinyon arms and clatters like a burro's load. I stop, lean on my walking stick, and wait for Aaron. Sharing this experience with my son is something I had anticipated for a long time— anxious to pass along traditions I believed he would eagerly embrace. But now I'm not sure—have I waited too long?

The trail up the east slope is steep; eye level is fifteen feet dead ahead. At this elevation aspen leaves still tremble like polished flat puppets in the high desert air, and an occasional water-birch oasis provides relief from the sun. I survey the horizon and check our progress; we have four miles to go, and we must reach a suitable campsite before dark. Pine crows challenge us in wavering voices—we are the rare species here. The trail parallels Pine Creek, which we must cross seventeen times. Our goal: Mount Jefferson's twelve-thousand-foot summit, tomorrow!

Mount Jefferson is the highest peak in the Toquima Range of central Nevada. Perched between the Smoky and Monitor valleys, it is midway between Tonopah and Austin. It looms against the sky east of the town of Round Mountain in Nye County. Between its middle and north peaks is Alta Toquima. There during the distant past, and despite an inhospitable alpine environment, an ancient people lived on occasion. All that remains of their dwellings are rock ring foundations on a bald knob above a small grove of limber pine. In silence, they now slumber under the dust of millennia. They are seldom visited. Deer and an occasional bighorn stop across the canyon for a drink from a snow-fed spring, and pikas, small furry rodents, dodge graceful darting falcons called kestrels on talus slopes nearby. The wind is the voice that speaks of changes the land has seen. A large playa shines like a salt spill on the flat bottom of Smoky Valley. Those brown-eyed people of mysterious origin viewed a much different

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scene from the village, for in their day a glacial lake lapped waves at sagebrush shores where now dust devils churn their alkali tails in ghostly flight across the valley bottom. Crazy twisted winds!

A fourth generation Nevadan, I have inherited an abiding love for the Silver State. Mountains and sage valleys hold me to her bosom. When evening falls I see blue distances where the coyotes' chortling rides mystically on the breeze and penetrates darkening canyons with shamanistic voices. The Trickster's cry is especially foreboding on winter nights when popcorn snow sparkles its blue diamonds across an expansive Nevada valley, and frozen stars hover but an arm's length away.

Aaron, born fifteen summers ago as I was beginning my teaching career, finds the world not always willing to accept his somewhat eccentric ways. As do I, he often watches the world from the fringes. Activities that bring joy to others do not inspire his participation. I was fortunate at an early age to find a tranquillity in the desert that gave me a new perspective—that led me to introspective satisfaction. Even though he has followed me over miles of mountain trails, he has not found that gift—and so far I have been unable to impart it to my son. We are here for another try before he becomes isolated in a world where we might become strangers forever—where other, frightening options avail themselves. I want him to grow to appreciate the subtleties of the natural world that he might



Mount Jefferson from Meadow Canyon on the west side of Monitor Valley.
(*Photograph by Steven W. Pellegrini*)

come to appreciate also the quiet majesty that dwells within himself. We often enjoy weekend visits to the hills around our home in Yerington, but this trip augments them. Here at Mount Jefferson, we celebrate, at the "center of our universe," our heritage as Nevadans. Ours is a pilgrimage meant to spark a mutual kinship with this land—the cold desert of Nevada—the domain of the coyote and his tiny blue brother the pine crow.

We lean into our loads and gain another hundred yards before stopping to rest. The trail is mostly uphill but provides some welcome jaunts downhill as it leads us, once again, to another creek crossing. The gravity-maddened water is achingly cold and bites through our canvas shoes; slippery rocks hide in its ripples and conspire to give us a dunking.

Careful, don't fall, you'll soak your sleeping bag! A coat? Yes, even in the middle of June we'll need a coat after the sun goes down.

Aaron lags too far behind, and I struggle to control my irritation. We rested only a few minutes ago, and I'm anxious to go on, but pushing too hard now, I'm afraid, will sour the experience for him. So I stop and wait and fidget. Is he purposely lagging behind, hoping to cause me to abort the trip?

We pause where an avalanche several years ago mowed down a swath of aspen across the trail. Here a spring crosses our path, and it pools in the trail before joining the creek in the canyon bottom below. The muddy spot would be an annoyance at this difficult stretch except for its flowers, for the shooting star and columbine that grace its perimeter and revive our sense of wonder. The aspen leaves are smaller now, not open as far as they were below. We're climbing to where winter sits boldly in the shadows of large rocks in contrast to heat waves that boil over the shad scale flats below.

"I have to sit down," Aaron says, and allows his backpack to pull him against the hillside.

"It'll be hard to get up." I glance apprehensively at the sun. It's gone—over the crest of the mountain. It's getting late, must be three-thirty and still two miles to go. We've come three, but the next two to camp are the toughest. I consider transferring gear from his pack to mine but change my mind. He will have to do his share; I will not always be here to lighten his load. So I tell him, none too gently perhaps, to get up; we must go on. He grumbles something unintelligible.

Creek crossing number seventeen, and we're home! We struggle up the last steep pitch and enter the dense grove where we will camp. Loose boulders attempt to send us rolling and nearly succeed, but we top the rise fifty feet above the creek and enter a grassy pocket amid aspen that whisper their welcome. We shed our packs and suddenly believe we could fly. A glance down four thousand feet into the lavender pool of Monitor Valley excites vertigo—perhaps we are flying. It's hard to imagine, but that is where we parked the pickup and began our hike just a few hours ago.

I unstrap the blackened old coffee pot and free it from its garbage bag gown.

My heavy legs protest, but it's to the creek for a pot of water for soup and another for coffee. There's much to do before dark; we've been a long time on the trail. On, first with our flannel shirts, and then our jackets, for the evening wind from up the canyon is chilly. We position a blue-tarp ground cover and



The view toward Monitor Valley from the slope of Mount Jefferson's south peak, with some limber pines in the foreground (*Photograph by Steven W. Pellegrini*)

then spread our sleeping bags—open ends toward the south—not toward the top of the canyon—to keep the morning wind from crawling into bed with us. Water boils quickly at this elevation, and the coffee pot rumbles and rocks mirthfully.

Supper time! We sharpen two aspen saplings, severed below their knees, and impale hot dogs that swell and split over the flames and smell better than flat-land steaks. After these we enjoy our soup and a cup of steaming coffee. Sift the grounds between your teeth. Our muscles relax; the hike just finished is a small price to have paid. A light, probably a car, winks somewhere in the valley haze off toward Belmont; it seems to be more distant than the stars that are gathering overhead.

Evening lingers in deep canyons on the east slope. Coffee cup in hand, I inspect the camp. Poignant memories in the gray twilight—I've been here before. For five summers I guided an eighth-grade environmental education class, thirty students at a time, to this camp and then to the summit, just as we two are now doing. Those were noisy camps with raucous laughter and horseplay. At least I thought so at the time. Did they really embrace the place—with that special respect that spawns communion? Some told me they did in journal entries that swelled with enthusiasm, but I was always left wondering.

Now I try with my own boy, and in our quiet camp we can't help but hear the wind welcome nighttime into the canyons below us. Before it's too dark I inspect the names and initials my kids left on the aspen trunks some ten years ago. I was bothered each time they did it. I forbade it, but found there are some rituals that even mutual respect can't restrain. They stand now as treasured reminders of all we shared. I hope that somewhere in their minds dwell reverent memories of this place so uniquely Nevada.

Night comes, and our world dims to a five-foot circle around the Halloween glow of our tiny fire. We sit and stare into the flames where the sugar energy of a time long past crackles and dances into the dark oblivion. Tiny sparks wink out before they go far. Be careful of those—we don't want to start a fire.

There are many thoughts, things we should talk about, but words skitter into the night where voices can't find them. So we each assume the other has nothing to say, and we listen to the quiet. Neither of us speaks. The fire burns low, and we crawl into our bags. At least the day's climb was quite an accomplishment; the night touches the soul.

The early sun blazes copper borders on the aspen leaves where they shiver above my bed. Aaron competently tends the fire, where he has breakfast coffee brewing. I've slept in. Sweet rolls, smoky links, and strong black coffee—and then a trip to the creek to wash our faces. The water is stinging, cold. We pack our day packs with apples and cheese and ignore aching muscles. The trail leads next to the top of the mountain. Now our packs are light, and we don't have to cross the stream; that's all below.



The glacial cirque from the top of Mount Jefferson. (*Photograph by Steven W. Pellegrini*)

He hikes slowly, this son of mine. He'd probably rather be home with his stereo—with Mozart. I listen to the music of the wind in the limber pines and wonder what he might be thinking? Does he see the sparkling clarity of morning that oozes warm pastels over these difficult slopes, or does he experience only the hard work? Is all of this that's so glorious to me just one more aspect of a world that defeats him?

Pine Creek is noticeably smaller each time we stop to rest until, at length, we see where it bubbles from the ground. It's a great place to get a drink. Now we see, in its entirety, the glacial cirque, the steep walled gouge in the mountain's face, that we are ascending. The trees have nearly stopped growing here—we approach timberline. These aspen have no leaves as yet; they are stunted, obviously struggling to survive. This is their limit, any higher and the growing season would be too short—not enough warm days in the year to allow them to photosynthesize next winter's rations. Like a growing boy without enough days in the sun to nourish his self-esteem. A few more steps and we're in the stark realm of the alpine world, with its brown scree, green lichen crusts, and unseasonable, biting wind. The top of the mountain is now at hand.

At the crest of the cirque where we climb the last few feet of the nearly perpendicular glacial slope, an icy wind pushes at us. With heads bent into the gale, we hike across the relatively flat top of the mountain to its middle peak,

and in the lee of a rock we eat an apple and share a block of cheese. Below us, almost at our feet, the salt marsh north of Mosquito Creek Ranch lies white and shiny in Monitor Valley—it marks the geographic center of the state. Off there to the east, in the blue haze of distance, is that pale line the Snake Range on our Utah border? I think so. To the west is the unmistakable ridge of the White Mountains, with Boundary Peak on its north end—California just beyond. Ridge after ridge, in every direction, rising like zircon skeletons from a blue misty lake—mile upon mile of mountains embraced by sage valleys. This is an expansive land where unrestrained winds that demand freedom find a kinship with something heretofore unrealized in my spirit. We stand and watch together, and I want to believe, close to our hearts, there is an unspoken and mutual vow to live in this land forever.

An hour later we eat our last apple at Alta Toquima; it is quieter with just one kid. I think Aaron shares my thoughts as I ponder this place and its ancient inhabitants. Why did they live here? Winter even in summer, with snow cornices hanging over the canyon below the remains of their village. One can't help but feel overwhelmed by the unfathomable time that has passed and respectful of the people, whoever they were, who placed these rings of rocks that were the foundations of their dwellings. The wind speaks to us but its message is unclear, faded by antiquity. Who were they who once listened to that wind and watched



The remains of a prehistoric dwelling at Alta Toquima, north of the middle peak of Mount Jefferson. (Photograph by Steven W. Pellegrini)

down this same canyon? How many of their fathers waited to be understood—how many of their sons had trouble comprehending what their elders sought to share? Do I hear voices in the distance? Is it the land itself that welcomes us, or does it invite us away? Easy to understand why the early inhabitants of the Great Basin were mystified by these peaks. I look at my son, and he smiles.

"It's beautiful," he whispers, his voice all but carried away on the wind. "Do you think we can come back again next summer? I'd like to spend a whole week next time."

"That's a long time to sleep on the ground, and you'll have to carry more supplies. Think you can do it?"

"Yeah, I'll be a year older, and I know, now, it's worth all of the hard work."

The hike back to camp goes quickly. We stop again to drink from the spring and to marvel, occasionally, at the wild flowers. Once we arrive I build a pot of coffee while Aaron fishes Pine Creek. An aspen sapling, five feet of leader, a hook, and a few worms brought up from below fetch two brook trout to our supper fire. No planters these.

Another night of wind-lulled sleep and seventeen early-morning trips across the creek later, and we are back at the pickup, where we change into dry shoes. Wow, look where we were yesterday! An eyebrow of corniced snow lines the ridge high above us, up against an apprentice thunderhead.

It's going to be sixty miles back to Tonopah and one-hundred-sixty more to Yerington—to home and a soft bed and supper, not cooked on a stick. We look forward to a shower, but we remember the adventure. The sage valleys have new meaning, and we have just seen those ridges from a different vista—from up where the wind is born, from the aerie of the eagle.

South of Tonopah we see them from yet another view, in the haze off to our right—Mount Jefferson and the Toquima Range. We feel a pride of ownership, a renewed pride to be Nevadans. Somehow it calls to us and we know we'll return. In some mystical way it owns us, too.

The trip home goes quickly. Back in Yerington we clean our gear and shower. Let's go out for dinner—celebrate the end of three special days.

In the restaurant two men (are they miners?) sit at the table next to us. Three women sit beyond them. The ladies pay their bill and leave. One of the men mentions to his friends, "They're goin' to Tonopah."

"Boy, I don't envy them," one partner answers.

After a sip of coffee the third man offers, "Ain't nothin' between here and there but sagebrush."

Aaron leans closer, and from behind his hand so no one will hear, whispers, "Some people just never learn to see the desert's beauty."

"Maybe they travel it too fast," I suggest, "in their air-conditioned steel microhabitats with wall-to-wall stereo."

Our eyes meet. My son's grin assures me he agrees.

BOOK REVIEWS

George Wingfield: Owner and Operator of Nevada. By C. Elizabeth Raymond. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1992, 350 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.)

Elizabeth Raymond of the Department of History at the University of Nevada, Reno, has written a fine biography of George Wingfield, one of the most important Nevadans of this century. Her sources were the Wingfield papers which she had organized and processed at the Nevada Historical Society, additional papers and photographs in the possession of members of the Wingfield family, the papers of other important Nevadans, extensive oral histories of prominent Nevadans (by the Oral History Program at the University of Nevada or Raymond), an unpublished biography, and numerous newspaper and magazine articles. It is not likely that she missed any significant retrievable sources about her subject.

A worthy addition to the relatively small number of high-quality biographies of significant leaders of Nevada,¹ *George Wingfield: Owner and Operator of Nevada* is more definitive than several of these, in the sense that it covers all aspects of the subject's life. Most of the book consists of a judicious and thorough account of Wingfield's personal and economic life, from his childhood on his parents' ranch in southeastern Oregon through a period of his youth when he made money playing poker in north-central Nevada, while sometimes also working as a cowboy. Finally comes the build-up of a mining fortune, its investment in Nevada agriculture and banking, and the collapse of the Wingfield economic empire during the early days of the Depression. Although the Depression also destroyed his political influence in the state, he tenaciously rode the tide of economic recovery in the last two decades of his life.

Wingfield's spectacular economic rise is well described, although precisely why he was so successful when others with similar characteristics were not still defies complete understanding. In accounting for his achievement, Raymond speaks of "an incredible combination of ability, luck, and gambling prowess" (p. 1). Certainly he did not inherit wealth or acquire it as the consequence of advantage gained through family or birth into a ruling class, if there is one in this country. Wingfield was definitely a self-made man (p. 268).

He had only a grammar school education and was evidently not accepted

socially for many years because of his gambling, drinking, and association with disreputable women. May Baric claimed for years that Wingfield had been her common-law husband; eventually, he made some kind of economic settlement with her (pp. 21, 49–51, 82, 84, 91–92). As one indication of his crude manner, at least twice he physically assaulted opponents (pp. 62, 116).

It does not at first seem likely that a cowboy, rough and not well educated, could become both one of the richest and one of the most powerful men in Nevada. How many cowboys have followed a similar path? But he must have had highly favorable personal qualities that were apparent to the people who met and worked with him because one of the explanations for his economic success is his remarkable network of friendships with powerful people, which began in Tonopah and Goldfield. Not just Senator George S. Nixon but also Tasker L. Oddie (later governor and United States senator), Bernard Baruch, William H. Crocker of San Francisco's Crocker Bank, Noble G. Getchell, Herbert Hoover, and a number of other rich and/or powerful men became his lifelong friends and supporters in the early years of the century. Later, in the mid 1930s, Baruch, Getchell, and Crocker came to his rescue, enabling him to recover economically after bankruptcy. Precisely why all these people thought so highly of him is not apparent from available documentation.

Whatever the explanation, Wingfield's economic career was astonishing. His first businesses (in Golconda) failed when that mining area declined, but shortly afterward (1901) he turned up in Tonopah and Goldfield; in both places, he made sizable fortunes. Moreover, he retained his wealth after the inevitable decline of these mining camps.

Moving his headquarters to Reno in 1908, Wingfield settled into the famous office known as the cave in the National Bank Building in 1916 (p. 114). He engaged in a bewildering array of economic ventures, almost all of them profitable. These included (among others) mines, banks (by 1932 he owned twelve in the state), the Golden and Riverside hotels in Reno, a dairy and a sugar beet company in the Lahontan Valley (neither successful), a California company that sold irrigation water to farmers, the Pyramid Land and Stock Company, ranches (on some of which he raised race horses), the *Nevada State Journal* after 1929, and many other enterprises. By 1927, Raymond tells us, thirty-five different companies, "not including any of the banks," operated out of his office (p. 134).

While an early Wingfield boast that "I have took over everything" (p. 93) exaggerated his situation, he was without doubt the richest Nevadan for nearly a quarter of a century. For this reason alone, he was often considered the most powerful individual in the state. Twice Raymond speaks of him as "the virtual owner and operator" of Nevada (pp. ix, 7). In economic terms, this assessment is hard to dispute, although she does not attempt an inventory of other economic concentrations operating or based in the state. It would be useful to know how the size of his fortune compared to other contemporaneous aggregations of wealth. Additional information about his relationships with other concentra-

tions of economic power, such as the railroads, public utilities, and other mining companies and large ranches, would also be helpful.

While Wingfield's economic power in the state is without doubt, what is more interesting is that for a quarter of a century he was also widely perceived as the state's most powerful political force. Wingfield was variously called the king of Nevada, King George, and a sagebrush caesar (pp. 6, 196, 232), but, as Raymond points out, the extent of this domination and the reasons for it remain subject to differing opinions.

The rules for conducting economic activity in a capitalist society are supposedly very different from those determining decisions of the government. Ownership of wealth, both legally and in fact, carries with it control over the use of that wealth, with few restrictions. Since wealth is held very unequally, the economic aspect of society is marked by inequality of power. While classical economics argues that transactions in the marketplace produce the best possible outcome for all parties, no one pretends that this result means equal distribution of either wealth or income (and in fact such inequality is usually seen as a necessity for the economy as a whole).

In the political/governmental realm, on the other hand, the basic rules of a democracy are radically egalitarian; each voter legally has one and only one vote, and (especially since the 1960s) representative bodies are designed to allow majorities of voters to choose elected officials. Moreover, it is commonly assumed that the goal of the political process is to produce governments that protect the interests of majorities (or, if possible, the society as a whole) rather than those of special interests.

It cannot be taken for granted, as Marxism does, that the rulers of the economic system will automatically dominate the political/governmental system, but clearly in highly democratic political structures there is conflict between government and private wealth. The study of episodes when a single controlling economic force also dominated the government can shed light on the ability of democratic governments to remain democratic.

A central difficulty in understanding this aspect of George Wingfield's life is that, to the extent that his influence extended beyond the economic realm to the control of government, he was, by definition, corrupting the system. Precisely because of this fact, it is not surprising that adequate documentation of the precise extent of his governmental control is not now available, and probably never will be. Many aspects of Wingfield's political activity are covered well in this book, but there are further questions that one wishes Raymond had asked, although she might have been unable to answer them.

In his study of the California Progressives, George E. Mowry discusses the Southern Pacific machine's long domination of that state's politics. He advances the hypothesis that California was so easily controlled by a single economic interest for so many years because the number of organized interests was small; in comparison with other concentrations of wealth, the Southern Pacific (earlier

Central Pacific) Company loomed very large. "As in many western states of the time," he says, "the railroad so far overshadowed any possible competitors in point of number of men employed, invested capital, and value to a community, that it stood alone in terms of crude social power."²

Raymond's study supports the same hypothesis. Wingfield's power was possible because he was a rich man who chose to stay in Nevada at a time when there were few competing economic concentrations. Raymond notes this first in evaluating his economic role:

Once the early-twentieth-century mining booms at Tonopah and Goldfield subsided, Nevada resumed its customary status as a small and impoverished state. . . . In such a small state, the economic impact of a man willing to invest a substantial part of a \$5 million fortune was considerable (pp. 147-48).

While it was impossible that other economic interests could have matched his wealth individually, economic resources can be pooled. Apparently, however, this did not occur to any significant extent in Wingfield's Nevada, but we do not have much direct evidence on this point.

Later Raymond indicates that the same set of circumstances underlay Wingfield's leading political/governmental role:

The very fact that he was located in a place like Nevada made the phenomenon of George Wingfield possible in the first place. A similar fortune and political program could never have had such an extraordinary effect in a more populous state like California. Nevada's isolation intensified Wingfield's potency due to the absence of any significant counterbalancing individuals or institutions (p. 272).

The similarity to the Southern Pacific machine went deeper than resemblance. This organization operated in Nevada during parts of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, no doubt with even less effective resistance than in California (although no adequate treatment of its role in the politics of the state exists).³ It was from George S. Nixon, "the state agent for the powerful Southern Pacific Company" and later a United States senator (p. 18) that George Wingfield learned how to "play the [political] game." Nixon also unquestionably helped Wingfield acquire his fortune, perhaps through aiding him financially after Wingfield lost money on his first business efforts in Golconda, and certainly by becoming his partner in mining activities in Tonopah and Goldfield from 1902 to 1909 (pp. 18, 20, 30, 92-93).

What other bases of political power were there besides wealth and income? Were there efforts to organize on these bases? Workers' organizations, for example, can gain strength by using the democratic rules to organize for both economic and political purposes. Miners' unions were powerful on the Comstock and for a time also in the southern Nevada mining camps of the early twentieth century. But, through actions in which Wingfield was substantially

involved, the power of the miners' union at Goldfield was broken, and miners' unions as powerful as those on the Comstock were absent for several decades in twentieth-century Nevada. Because they were weak economically, unions were presumably weak politically as well, although we know little about this. Other organizational bases for aggregating individual votes were, apparently, nonexistent or weak during Wingfield's time. Although advocates of women's suffrage organized effectively prior to World War I, it is not clear that there were comparable groups in any other area.

Understanding Wingfield's motivations and how he defined himself and the political and economic worlds of Nevada is another central issue, one that involves moral judgments about him and his activities. As the author is aware, her work, in spite of its thoroughness and judicious treatment of its subject, will not end the controversy over George Wingfield and his role in the state's history. Part of the reason for this is that people properly find it necessary to make moral judgments about important figures, in spite of the difficulty in understanding other people either as they understand themselves or in objective moral terms.

Some may feel that this study concedes too much to Wingfield on these grounds, perhaps partly because Raymond's object is to reconstruct, "to the extent possible, his own view of the events in which he participated" (p. ix). People seldom see themselves morally in unfavorable terms, even when others have no difficulty in making such assessments. An example of the author's tendency to accept Wingfield too readily as the persona he wished to project is her assertion that Wingfield agreed in the 1920s that prohibition should be enforced; she reports as evidence both a statement by him and the fact that he evicted a tenant who violated the law (p. 140). Surely these actions are simply hypocrisy in a man who himself drank and who tried for four years to get rid of a United States attorney because he was enforcing the prohibition laws. Wingfield was also indirectly involved in the Bank Club, which was the largest illegal saloon in Reno, and was a personal friend of the notorious bootlegger who ran it.

Wingfield's willingness to use his wealth to help others does reflect favorably on his character, but there are some interesting questions about the extent of his concern for the welfare of Reno and Nevada and about the reasons for such charity as he practiced. Raymond says that his "acts of charity were numerous," although he was no "public philanthropist" (p. 91), and that he "supported virtually every local charity effort" in Reno (p. 136).

She notes, however, that most of this charity consisted of gifts (or loans for which there was little chance of repayment) to numerous individuals, some of whom were members of his family. Most of his public gifts—with the exception of possibly the most important, the donation of Wingfield Park to the City of Reno in 1920—were made in 1928 and 1938, when he was running for a position on the Board of Regents of the University of Nevada (pp. 137, 249). At his death he made no public bequests, although he was by then once again wealthy.

Perhaps his orientation toward personal relationships, an aspect of which was his strong loyalty to family and friends, helps explain this pattern.

Raymond is clearly correct in asserting that Wingfield did not manipulate the value of the stocks of his mining companies for speculative purposes (a practice far from uncommon at the time he was making his fortune in mining), acting instead to provide as much price stability as possible (pp. 64–65). The facts that Wingfield's tax returns were often challenged by the Bureau of Internal Revenue, however, and that only in 1937 did he finally pay his back taxes for 1929 and 1930 (pp. 123, 244–45) are subject to several interpretations.

As she notes, Wingfield was also subject to much criticism over the Cole/Malley affair, in which a cashier of one of his banks conspired with two corrupt state officials to loot the public treasury. Wingfield used his political power to hold the bank's obligation to restore the money to 30 percent of the loss (pp. 175–81). Thus a less favorable view of Wingfield's morality than that presented in this study is certainly possible, although Raymond is not clearly wrong; accurate evaluation in these areas is extremely difficult.

Raymond believes that Wingfield's conception of the proper role of government, while coinciding in part with his personal economic interests, nevertheless grew out of his identification with the state of Nevada and its economic development. For example, she says that Wingfield "publicly identified . . . with the destiny of the entire state" (p. 87), and that, to him, this meant that "politics was a means to an end, a way to insure an advantageous business climate and [to] move Nevada toward constructive diversification" (p. 3). At another point she asserts that his "political program during the 1920s was . . . an amalgam of blatant self-interest and a more statesmanlike Republican promotion of limited government and economic diversification" (p. 149).

Later, after his move to Reno, he added "social toleration"—governmental noninterference with respect to gambling, drinking, and prostitution, combined with the protection of easy divorce in Nevada—to this set of attitudes toward government (p. 175). As Raymond suggests, this might have had something to do with the fact that many of his Reno investments depended on trade arising from the activities he sought to protect from governmental control, restriction, or prohibition.

Wingfield was an active Republican for most of his life, although in his early days in Tonopah he was elected a member of the Nye County Democratic County Convention (p. 29). He served as Republican national committeeman from 1920 to 1936 (p. 124), and the author asserts that he was always an "absolute and unwavering" Republican (p. 159), although there is some doubt about how far partisanship drove the so-called bipartisan machine.

Wingfield's ideology—the pattern of his political beliefs—may best be understood when considered in terms of his narrow conception of what constitutes the public interest. His political views, shared by most Republicans at the time,

amounted in practice to a belief that government should aid business but not other interests in society. In other words, what is good for business is good for Nevada and the nation.

Advocacy of protective tariffs, which Wingfield supported, was a principal policy position of the Republicans before the 1930s, but they opposed legislation to provide income support for unemployed workers. Although the Republicans often used the rhetoric of the free market to head off attempts to secure government protection of various public interests (for example, in the national struggle to outlaw child labor), in fact, they usually supported interference with market forces when it benefitted business.

The fact that many of these same leaders were, like Wingfield, also businessmen is not accidental, although the connections between self-interest and policy positions are subtle and perhaps not as easily seen by people like Wingfield as by others. As he once put it, "There is a legitimate relationship between material success and meritorious legislation." Raymond notes that "significantly, the question of which was cause and which effect was left unanswered" (p. 158). Perhaps more important is the fact that it is difficult to separate personal from public goals when one's ideology defines actions beneficial to oneself and others like one as being in the public interest.

The pattern of favoring government support, for business only, is clear in the life of George Wingfield. In order to break the strike against his (and other) mining companies in Goldfield, he prevailed upon Nevada's governor, John Sparks, to get President Theodore Roosevelt to call in the National Guard, although there had been no violence requiring such action. When the president withdrew the troops because they were not necessary, Wingfield persuaded the governor and legislature to create a state police. In other words, he used the authority of the nation and the state to suppress a labor movement that was demanding more than he was willing to give.

After these events, wages of miners in Goldfield dropped from \$5 to \$4 a day. More important, labor unions there did not recover their ability to influence corporate decisions during the remainder of the mines' period of productivity.⁴ Initially, Wingfield maintained control with the help of the "card system," which required employees to sign a card stating that they would not join a union. This practice was against Nevada law at the time, although a judge later invalidated the legislation. Wingfield's attitude toward government was one that used government to ensure success for some economic players and to defeat others. He did not hesitate to seek Reconstruction Finance Corporation loans to save his banks during the early 1930s (pp. 206–7), but the banks failed anyway.

In these cases Wingfield was obviously acting in his self-interest, although Raymond is probably correct that he saw the issue in broader terms. For instance, she argues that his support for both the Boulder Dam project and the Spanish Springs reclamation project was based on selfless devotion to the wel-

fare of the state (p. 207). Perhaps so, but at least it should be noted that these actions involved favoritism toward certain interests, not evenhandedness, and that these interests were the ones with which he identified.

Many business leaders try to exert some control over government, based on interlocking elements of self-interest and ideology. But Wingfield's control, even if its extent can never be determined precisely, went beyond domination of a few decisions of interest to himself to the selection of certain government leaders, whose decisions were of much wider significance.

The explanation for Wingfield's political successes involves several factors, although an adequate overall theory to explain his triumphs is still not possible. First and foremost, of course, is the fact that his economic strength was very great in proportion to competing centers of wealth. In addition, he chose to remain in Nevada, with his wealth, and to go beyond seeking favors from government to attempting the control of government itself. His objectives were thus broader than those of most businessmen.

That he was very hard-working and able undoubtedly also contributed to his rise to power. Through a long life and in spite of several illnesses at different times, he devoted himself steadily and with great diligence to his work. Wingfield also possessed various kinds of skill related to making money. He demonstrated substantial ability to estimate the value of mineral claims, although he was not a geologist, and must have been good at understanding other people. And he showed great skill in choosing gifted lieutenants to help him after his affairs became so complicated that he could not do everything himself (p. 8).

Still another factor is that Wingfield lived relatively modestly; he did not spend much of his fortune on high living for himself, although he liked and secured good food and wine and maintained a ranch for entertaining guests. Most of the luxuries he acquired—elaborate homes in Burlingame, California, and on Pacific Heights in San Francisco—were purchased for his first wife, Maude Murdoch (p. 134).

Raymond suggests yet another component: By "limiting his ambitions" Wingfield was able to concentrate on behind-the-scenes activities, his strong point, while minimizing the necessity to operate in the glare of publicity. The most spectacular example of this self-limitation was his rejection in 1912 of appointment to the United States Senate, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Senator Nixon (pp. 104–5, 148).

One of the most interesting things about Wingfield is that his political organization, like the Southern Pacific machine before it, extended far beyond the lobbying efforts of most businessmen; he created what became known as the bipartisan machine, using his wealth and talent to assume, at least in part, some of the functions normally exercised by political parties.

It is clear that Wingfield devoted substantial amounts of his time and fortune to electing public officials friendly to his interests and viewpoints (pp. 151–52),

although the precise extent of this activity is not known. While there were of course no Wingfield primaries, he and his employees actively recruited candidates for governmental office and supported their election campaigns in various ways. Apparently his political staff was not large, but he did have employees (notably John V. Mueller from 1926 on) who devoted full time to political activities (p. 152).

It is also clear that, after elections, Wingfield both personally and/or through Mueller or other employees lobbied elected officials to secure the desired results (p. 152). It would be fascinating to see a full list of the candidates and officeholders he backed and of the issues he supported or opposed, but it is not surprising that such tallies have not turned up, if they ever existed on paper. It is extremely unlikely that Wingfield ever attempted to control all legislative or other governmental decisions, although the range of his concerns was probably broad.

An interesting parallel with machine politics in other manifestations is Wingfield's unusual emphasis on loyalty to friends and colleagues, a trait that emerged early in his life (and was reciprocated later). Such loyalty (found also in organized crime) presumably reflects the highly personal means by which this kind of politics is conducted, but probably also indicates the need to achieve cohesion in a situation in which the structures for cohesion are weak.

The extent to which Wingfield's machine was actually bipartisan is difficult to determine. Raymond notes that the sample ballots that the organization distributed at election time endorsed mostly Republicans (p. 151). The allegation that the machine was bipartisan rests partly on the fact that some of Wingfield's key lieutenants were Democrats. Mueller, for example, was a Democrat who had worked for Democratic Governor James G. Scrugham. Most important, however, is the fact that Wingfield's two principal attorneys, George B. Thatcher and William Woodburn, were both Democrats. Thatcher was briefly Democratic national committeeman from Nevada and Woodburn was Democratic state chairman for a time (pp. 159–60). The fact that for several years the same telephone number was used to reach both the Republican and Democratic committeemen for the state as well as Wingfield's office certainly supports the notion that the machine covered both major bases.

It would be helpful in understanding this issue to have a detailed and accurate study of the nature of party organizations in the state at this time, but no such study exists. Whether the Wingfield organization worked through bodies such as county and state conventions or central committees, or by-passed them, is not apparent from the available evidence. Presumably, the parties were too weak to prevent the machine from exerting its will in either or both ways, but the actual situation is not known.

Although evidence is scarce, it is likely that rival machines, whether based on business or organized around particular individuals, did not exist until the col-

lapse of the Wingfield organization. Patrick A. McCarran, who was first elected to the United States Senate in 1932, built a personal organization about which legends also abound; whether it was in place by 1932 is not clear, but probably it was not, since presumably it was built chiefly by McCarran's use of his patronage powers.⁵ It seems pretty clear that the McCarran organization, while sometimes overlapping formal Democratic Party structures, was fundamentally a separate order whose cement was loyalty to an individual.

As Raymond points out, the dispute over the nature of Wingfield's political organization will no doubt continue. She argues that Thatcher and Woodburn were not actively involved with Wingfield politically. Her principal argument for this conclusion is the negative one that Wingfield's correspondence contains little that connects them with these activities. However, in any political system many important communications that might reveal the motives and acts of the principals never get put down on paper. This is particularly the case where the activities are those that could be attacked as improper or worse were they to become known. The author does not discuss at all the possibility that Wingfield's generosity extended to payments to public officials in return for specific governmental actions, but since this would have been illegal one would not expect to find documentation even if such payments existed.

Another reason for some skepticism about Raymond's claim that Thatcher and Woodburn were heavily involved in Wingfield's economic activities but not in his political efforts is that this presupposes an easy separation of these two areas of Wingfield's life. Since he often sought governmental favors for business reasons, such radical separation seems unlikely.

Raymond seems to be on sound ground in rejecting the theory that the Wingfield organization deliberately attempted to maintain one Democrat and one Republican in the United States Senate. Wingfield did aid Democratic Senator Key Pittman (one of his friends from the southern Nevada mining days) when he won re-election in 1922, but she presents substantial evidence that he opposed Pittman strongly when he was re-elected in 1928 (pp. 163, 181-82, 186). Unfortunately, as she points out in discussing the case of the primary contest between Reno Mayor E. E. Roberts and Senator Tasker Oddie in 1926, Wingfield was quite capable of publicly endorsing one candidate while privately using his money to work for someone else (pp. 157-58).

Raymond's evaluation of the success of Wingfield's political efforts is balanced and judicious, although it is unlikely that this study will end the disagreement on this question. Clearly, he attempted to control a meaningful number of governmental decisions and with some success. As many have suspected, he worked actively to reduce the residence requirement for divorce to six weeks and to legalize casino gambling during the 1931 legislative session, afterward taking credit for these enactments (pp. 193-96). On the other hand, in 1927 a Wingfield-backed bill to legalize gambling, which the author says was "similar

to the one that was eventually enacted in 1931," failed by one vote (p. 138). Assuming he was serious in 1927, apparently it took him four years, while at the height of his power, to secure enough votes to push these measures through, and the onset of the Depression undoubtedly encouraged their retention.

Another example of Wingfield's failure to exert total control of government is his inability to prevent the appointment of reformist United States Attorney George Springmeyer. Thereafter he tried for four years without success to get Springmeyer removed once it became clear that the attorney was making a good-faith effort to enforce prohibition laws (pp. 168–71).⁶

Raymond also deals in detail with Wingfield's role in Reno's decisive shift during the 1920s toward an economy based on offering forms of entertainment that were illegal and largely suppressed elsewhere. He supported E. E. Roberts in the decisive Reno election of 1923. Faced with a clear-cut choice between an incumbent mayor who wanted to enforce prohibition and close houses of prostitution and a challenger (Roberts) who opposed those policies, the voters decisively chose Roberts and kept him in office until his death in 1933 (pp. 164–65).⁷ More than this, Wingfield's ownership of the two largest hotels in Reno, one of which housed the Bank Club (owned by gangsters and bootleggers Bill Graham and Jim McKay), made Wingfield an active, if indirect, participant in illegal gambling and liquor sales. The fact that McKay was a personal friend of Wingfield also demonstrates that Wingfield could not have been very interested in enforcing the prohibition or gambling laws, notwithstanding occasional pious assertions of desire to be law-abiding (pp. 140, 184, 195).

All of this reinforces Raymond's contention that Wingfield led the way toward creating the contemporary gambling-based economy of the state (and possibly of other states as gambling spreads throughout the nation). Wingfield's notion of development in a small and poor state resulted in policies whose full impact did not occur until years after his death in 1959, for good or ill.

In a departure from custom, a number of excellent photographs are scattered through the book, placed close to the discussions of the subjects they depict.

This review has been long because of the importance of the subject matter of this biography; Wingfield's leading position in the state for a quarter of a century makes understanding him and his impact essential for all those interested in Nevada's history. Moreover, as noted above, the Wingfield phenomenon has significance for understanding the relationship between economic and political systems; more than one state has had similar machines dominated by economic concentrations and Nevada has other machines of this sort.

In spite of the substantial virtues of this study, there are several points at which one or another scholar may offer other interpretations or ask different questions. The great complexity and importance of Wingfield's life and activities in this state make this inevitable. Nevertheless, *George Wingfield: Owner and Operator of Nevada* is one of the best and most important books about a major

Nevada political figure. It should be read by everyone with a serious interest in the history of the state.

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NOTES

¹These include Fred L. Israel, *Nevada's Key Pittman* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963); Merlin Stonehouse, *John Wesley North and the Reform Frontier* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965); Sally Springmeyer Zanjani, *The Unspiked Rail: Memoir of a Nevada Rebel* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1981); Jerome E. Edwards, *Pat McCarran: Political Boss of Nevada* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1982); Russell R. Elliott, *Servant of Power: A Political Biography of Senator William M. Stewart* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1983); Anne Bail Howard, *The Long Campaign: A Biography of Anne Martin* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1985); and Betty Glad, *Key Pittman: The Tragedy of a Senate Insider* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

²George E. Mowry, *The California Progressives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 12.

³The best study to date is Mary Ellen Glass, *Silver and Politics in Nevada: 1892–1902* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1969).

⁴The basic account of labor conflict in Goldfield is still Russell R. Elliott, *Nevada's Twentieth-Century Mining Boom: Tonopah, Goldfield, Ely* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1966), esp. 103–52. A view sympathetic to labor is Sally Zanjani and Guy Louis Rocha, *The Ignoble Conspiracy: Radicalism on Trial in Nevada* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1986).

⁵See Edwards, *Pat McCarran*.

⁶See Zanjani, *The Unspiked Rail*.

⁷William D. Rowley, *Reno: Hub of the Washoe Country* (Woodland Hills, California: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1984), 51–52; and *idem*, "Reno and the Desert of Buried Hopes," in Wilbur S. Shepperson, ed., *East of Eden, West of Zion: Essays on Nevada* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1989), 119–33.

The Free Life of a Ranger: Archie Murchie in the U.S. Forest Service, 1929–1965. Oral History, edited by Robert Thomas King. (Reno: University of Nevada Oral History Program, 1992, 409 pp., glossary, index.)

Oral history has finally become a recognized scholarly pursuit with publications by university presses and reviews in professional journals. *The Free Life of a Ranger* is the latest work to come from the University of Nevada Oral History Program under the editorship of Robert Thomas King. As the series editor, King has moved the program from a neglected field of study to one of the leading ongoing research projects of its kind in the nation, and this work gives an idea of how and why.

The Free Life of a Ranger is the story of Archie Murchie's thirty-six-year career as a ranger for the United States Forest Service. The book is divided into sixteen chapters of free-flowing narrative that is interesting, entertaining, and informative. From the beginning, Murchie comes across as a likable person and a dedicated public servant who enjoyed his career and enjoys telling about it; between Murchie and his interviewer, King, it is told well. Also clear is that the life of a

forest ranger is demanding, requiring considerable skills combined with a high degree of self-reliance.

Murchie's career in Nevada began in 1947, when he was transferred from the Challis National Forest in Idaho to the Ely District in eastern Nevada. He recalls, "The worst problem on the Ely District was that there was a conflict between the Forest Service and the livestock people, and the livestock people were very bitter" (p. 208). Although the relationship improved over the twelve years that Murchie was in the district, the basic cause of the conflict remained and is still with us today. Murchie says, "A distinction needs to be made between grazing rights and grazing privileges, and that distinction has not always been clear in the minds of the cattle and sheep owners" (p. 331). That is the underlying cause of the conflict.

In Nevada, the tension between livestock interests and government regulators has been longstanding and at times shrill. For example, in the 1930s, Senator Patrick McCarran used his position to emasculate the Grazing Service (now the Bureau of Land Management). Also, the Cattleman's and Wool Growers' associations have used their political and economic clout to influence the decision-making process within the Forest Service. And they have been effective. Today "the federal government is subsidizing permittees with unrealistically low grazing fees." Murchie questions this policy: "What the public desires, and what many people go to the forest to see, the timber people and the ranching people are actually destroying" (p. 330). Murchie's long experience has led him to conclude, "On many areas of our forests where grazing is permitted there is evidence in the form of gullies, sheet erosion from slopes, and sand and silt in stream bottoms that significant erosion has occurred. Yet we continue to graze livestock on these ranges, and I wonder how much longer the public will allow the Forest Service to follow this policy" (p. 331).

Perhaps equally important has been the Forest Service's alteration of the natural environment to improve the range by the introduction of nonindigenous species of grass and the elimination of predators to enhance the value of forage for permittees. Today, Murchie questions the wisdom of these early predator-control practices. Nonetheless, they demonstrate the thinking prior to the environmental decade of the 1970s, when Aldo Leopold's land ethic and ecology itself became dominant land-use ideals. When Murchie ended his career in 1965 as a staff officer on the Toiyabe National Forest, the basic problems remained the same—permittees and erosion. Regrettably, little has changed in Nevada since his retirement.

This is an important book for a number of reasons. Archie Murchie is clearly an interesting person with an important story to tell. Moreover, the life of a forest ranger is a harsh, dangerous, and often times humorous adventure, of which most people are unaware but will be appreciative. But it is more than the personal experiences of one ranger. It is an indispensable historical record for those concerned with environmental and public policy issues affecting the

American West. It is also a welcome addition to the expanding body of knowledge on Nevada and a valuable supplement to William D. Rowley's *U.S. Forest Service Grazing and Rangelands: A History* (1985), Phillip O. Foss's *Politics and Grass* (1960, but still useful), and Roderick Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1982, third edition).

Gary E. Elliott
Community College of Southern Nevada

Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture after 1940. By John M. Findlay. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992, 408 pp., notes, bibliography, index.)

John Findlay's *Magic Lands* focuses upon one of the most significant and intriguing aspects of modern western America—the fact that it is the most urbanized of all regions. After a half century of frenetic urban growth, 85 percent of the population of the sixteen western states now lives within a metropolitan area. Not surprisingly, the western metropolis has engendered considerable scrutiny—and severe criticism—from urban planners and social critics for its failure to conform to the traditional pattern of European and eastern American cities. Far less dependent upon the central business district and given to extreme low-density suburban sprawl, this apparently formless and confusing new urban form first became pronounced in the American West following World War II.

Central to this postwar era was a phenomenon Findlay calls the urban village. These down-sized, manageable, and largely self-sufficient communities, situated within the much larger and menacing metropolis, provided residents with both physical and psychological havens from the dangers and fears they held about life in the big city. The urban villages, heavily dependent upon the automobile, established their essential independence from the central city, but were connected to the larger metropolis by a network of freeways and electronic communications. Consequently, the traditional pattern of a strong central city tightly linked to a few suburbs no longer made much sense to the predominantly white, relatively affluent Americans who now lived, worked, and played within the safe harbor of the urban village.

During the first two decades after the war, several distinct prototypes emerged that advertised the potential of this new urban form. What Findlay calls magic lands provided new alternatives to the chaos and dangers associated with life in a traditional city. They reassured residents by providing a sense of order, security, and coherence during a time of rapid and uncertain growth. In response to traditional urban phenomena of crime, racial conflict, pollution, grid-

locked traffic, and poverty, the magic lands symbolized the potential for order, stability, and security.

Findlay provides detailed and fascinating analyses of four such magic lands. All were fully functional by the mid-1960s thereby providing archetypes for emulation across the region—and ultimately the nation. Findlay's thesis is most believable when applied to the most sensational and popular of all magic lands: Disneyland. It is also quite plausible in explaining the significance of the retirement community of Sun City, Arizona, and the Stanford Industrial Park in Palo Alto. Disneyland provided a rational alternative model to the disintegration of the burgeoning Los Angeles metropolitan region by inspiring new approaches to the design of the urban village. Disneyland demonstrated the potential inherent in scaling down the urban environment to make it acceptable to the new generation of western urbanites. Sun City indicated that planning could provide a much-desired sense of independence and security for the growing number of retirees through a humane segregation of the senior population; it also provided the Del Webb Corporation with bountiful rewards, inspiring many imitators across the nation's sunbelt. Stanford's need to increase its income from little-used farmland produced a park-like environment that lured many new high-technology manufacturing and research and development companies to the South Bay Area, ultimately setting the standard for the architecture and planning of Silicon Valley. Imitators of this concept are now found throughout the world.

Findlay's probing analysis of these three magic lands adds much to our understanding of the process of modern urbanization, but his discussion of the 1962 Seattle World's Fair, although quite intriguing and informative, makes a much less convincing case for the fair as a magic land. It did not meet the major objective of its planners—the slowing of Seattle's suburban growth—and only by happenstance did it become an important harbinger of America's fervent embrace of science and high technology as the solution to an uncertain future. Its lasting impact upon urban cityscapes seems marginal at best.

Magic Lands is a provocative book, firmly grounded in the secondary literature and richly documented by Findlay's extensive forays into heretofore untapped primary sources. The University of Washington historian brings to his subject an admirable sense of historical perspective, interpretative insight, and balance. He leaves no doubt that the designers of these pioneering enterprises were often motivated by such dubious impulses as racism, elitism, and an excessive interest in profit. But he also firmly establishes the fact that the developers of these magic lands received strong support from an enthusiastic public. This important book will be of special interest to urban scholars from many disciplines; it also is a book that should receive the attention of anyone interested in the American West and the condition of its urban civilization.

Richard O. Davies
University of Nevada, Reno

The Business of Newspapers on the Western Frontier. By Barbara Cloud. (Reno, Las Vegas, London: University of Nevada Press, 1992, 255 pp., tables, index.)

The frontier newspaper was a ubiquitous, essential element in the settlement of the Far West. Its role and importance have long been recognized by local and regional historians who have struggled to reconstruct this or that mining town, railroad enterprise, social problem, women's issue—or any part of the gamut of western Americana. We have hundreds of fragments of newspaper history in the tailings of western historical writings.

In *The Business of Newspapers on the Western Frontier* we have a substantial contribution toward a broad description and analysis of the newspapers in the Far West during the crucial formative period, 1850–90, written by Barbara Cloud of the Greenspun School of Communications of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Cloud's book is richer in its anecdotal and analytical material than any work of its kind previously published, and it will be the standard for work in this field for some time to come. She focuses her attention on the eleven western states during this forty-year period, and produces a panorama of data that demands admiration.

In this book, we are invited to contemplate that period when the itinerant newspaperman moved often, with his "shirt-tail-full-of-type," from one locale to another frontier. Cloud's work is impressive both for its range and detail.

Specialists in Nevada history can be especially gratified not only that one of their colleagues has produced this work and that the University of Nevada Press has done its standard excellent job of publication, but also that Nevada's newspaper history is well represented in these pages. Cloud has combed the basic sources for Nevada newspaper history—such as Richard Lingenfelter and Karen Gash, Alf Doten, Lucius Beebe, Mark Twain and his biographers, Sam Davis, etcetera—and she has undertaken comparable work for other states and suggests connections and relationships as no one has previously done.

Nevada history is well served in these pages, but one must extract it from the anecdotes and tables that make comparisons, rather than absorb data condensed into discreet regional summaries. The comparative information is especially rewarding.

As the title indicates, this book is largely about the *business* of publishing newspapers. Thus, we are guided through the travails of myriad publishers in starting their newspapers, in building circulation, in job printing, in gathering news at great distances, in obtaining crucial supplies of newsprint, and in paying the bills. Here we are in the pre-Mergenthaler era, when most chores, including typesetting, had to be done by hand.

There may not be many of us left who have worked in a newspaper printing shop of the kind that Cloud describes, where it was the duty of the printer or his "devil" to set type, compose headlines, do job work, retrieve "pied type,"

handle circulation and distribution, and balance the various political and financial pressures. This book warmly revives the memories and discusses the bottom lines of the frontier newspaper on a regional rather than a local basis.

James W. Hulse
University of Nevada, Reno

Letters from the Nevada Frontier: Correspondence of Tasker L. Oddie, 1898–1902. Edited by William A. Douglass and Robert A. Nylen. (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992, 392 pp., introduction, maps, notes, index.)

This engrossing and hefty volume presents in readily accessible form the letters of Tasker L. Oddie written from central Nevada to his mother in New Jersey during the critical period 1898–1902. Oddie arrived in Austin as secretary of the Nevada Company (owned by the Stokes interests), remained to pursue various mining ventures, and happened to be standing “in fortune’s path,” as the editors phrase it in their introduction, when Nevada’s twentieth-century mining boom began. Because the letters were made accessible to scholars only in 1980, the collection does not figure in published accounts of the life of the man who was to occupy two of Nevada’s highest offices, governor and United States senator, or in studies done prior to that date on the mining excitement that commenced at Tonopah and profoundly affected the future of a depressed and depopulated state. These letters—candid, detailed, observant, and entirely absorbing—illuminate important aspects of the man and his times. As Oddie observed at the outset, “This whole life will be a most excellent education for me.” So it was, and so it is for the reader.

While the private Tasker Oddie revealed in *Letters from the Nevada Frontier* does not differ in essentials from the portrait historians have drawn, his personality emerges more sharply. The most amusing portions recount the education of a greenhorn who had not yet metamorphosed into a politician too self-important to laugh at himself. The sight of Oddie leaping frantically away from a wounded porcupine as it rolled down a hillside made the rancher who observed it laugh so hard that he nearly fell off his horse. Oddie’s emergence from a storm looking “like a drowned rat and more forlorn than one” evoked similar amusement from the men congregated in the lone general store. It is to be hoped that the miners who became ill from his early experiments with cooking found the “gilded, frivolous dude” equally entertaining. Less amusing for today’s readers are Oddie’s frequently voiced racial prejudices, which seem unusually virulent even when viewed in the context of the period. Chinese were “worse than animals.”

Indians were "lazy, stupid, treacherous, and ungrateful," and if an Indian buckaroo was killed breaking a horse, it was "nothing lost."

In fact, though Oddie occasionally admired the skills of a miner or a horsebreaker, he clearly believed himself superior to those around him and saw central Nevada as "only partly civilized." At the same time, he harbored a romantic ideal of tough frontier manhood that drove him to measure himself by the standards of miners and cowboys and produced an ongoing stream of preening and posturing over "the rough hard life I have led." The letters include so many accounts of Oddie's horsemanship that the editors considered it too repetitious to present all of them. No doubt these tales impressed his mother no less than his assurances that he had gained great expertise at mining and would soon revive the fortunes of a family sinking into a state of decayed gentility. Yet the truth was that Oddie's mining ventures failed to show a profit until he happened to be standing in the right place at the right time.

When Oddie casually mentions encountering an "ignoramous" [*sic*] named Jim Butler, the reader hears the rumble of distant thunder, knowing that momentous events are at hand. The ignoramus will make the first locations at Tonopah, and Oddie will have the assays done by his associate Walter Gayhart in return for an interest in the claims. That interest will transform Oddie into the wealthy and important man he aspired to be. In one of the many informative and thoroughly researched notes that follow the text, the editors indicate that certain aspects of the accepted version of Tonopah's discovery phase will need to be revised. The letters contain much useful information on early Tonopah, especially on such matters as leasing and ore shipments that Oddie supervised as general manager of the Tonopah Mining Company. Henceforth investments preoccupied the former novice miner and horsebreaker. "It is the greatest chance in a lifetime to make money fast," he observed to his mother.

Early Tonopah as it appeared in Oddie's eyes gains added resonance through contrast with the sparsely settled rural world he had experienced during the years immediately preceding the fateful discovery. Indeed, for this reader the vivid recreation of pioneer life that emerges from these pages is the most fascinating aspect of the book. Oddie's descriptions of a mustang roundup, a trial at Ione where the justice "had a hard time trying to keep the court from spitting tobacco on the floor," and a frontier dance with the "toughest looking old skates" he ever saw make compelling reading. Like one of the finest epistolary collections in the literature of the old West, the Shirley letters written during the California gold rush, the Oddie letters are unusually revealing for the reason that they were written by an outsider who was attempting to explain a remote corner of America to another outsider entirely unfamiliar with it. A local resident, native to the region and conditioned from childhood to see its realities as normal, might have found far less to report than did this New Jerseyite, eager to make his fortune and prove his manhood in the wild West of his imagination.

The result is the most valuable and entertaining private narrative on the Nevada frontier yet published.

Sally Zanjani
University of Nevada, Reno

Rough Water Man. Elwyn Blake's Colorado River Expeditions. By Richard E. Westwood, foreword by Bruce Babbitt. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1992.)

In 1869, the intrepid John Wesley Powell and a crew of nine set out from Green River, Wyoming Territory, in four wooden boats to run the Green and Colorado rivers. Ninety-nine days later, Powell and six bedraggled and very hungry men, in two boats, emerged from the downstream end of the Grand Canyon (three men had left the party a few days before the trip ended). They had survived rapids great and small and endured many hardships while traversing some of the most spectacular scenery on earth. In his famed and visionary 1878 *Arid Lands Report*, Powell advocated a sweeping program of reclamation, including making productive use of the rivers of the West. Powell's plans for rational western land use were stoutly resisted and earned him many enemies, including Nevada's Senator William Stewart. But, in the year of his death, 1902, Powell learned that a federal reclamation service would be created. The service, later the Bureau of Reclamation, did, indeed reclaim the West, although not necessarily in the manner Powell envisioned. By 1920, grand schemes to throw huge dams across the rivers of the West were developing. The Colorado River and its tributaries, the San Juan and Green, were prime targets.

To build dams, it is necessary to run a continuous survey line the length of the river beds and to do detailed geological studies of specific potential dam sites. It is also necessary for those parties with interests in using the water to come to some agreement as to its allocation. For the Colorado, the survey process began in 1921; the Colorado River Compact, allocating waters among the signatory states, was signed the following year.

Rough Water Man is at once a chronicle of the survey of the Colorado River and a discussion of the historical and political contexts within which damming the Colorado moved from a dream (or, to some, a nightmare) to reality. Henry Elwyn Blake, Jr., Richard Westwood's uncle, was a twenty-four-year-old World War I veteran and newspaper printer in Monticello, Utah, in 1921 when he signed on to work for the United States Geological Survey to help in the survey of the San Juan River, part of the over-all survey of the Colorado system. The

Geological Survey had hired the well-known prospector and river runner, Bert Loper, age fifty-two, as lead boatman. Loper knew Blake and arranged for him to be hired. Using wooden boats, Loper, Blake, and the survey team fought the rapids, the sand waves, the quicksand, and mosquitoes, and completed their work in good order from above Mexican Hat to the confluence of the San Juan with the Colorado. Blake, strong, hard working and keen witted, was asked to return in 1922 for a survey of much of the Green River, and again in 1923 for the survey of the Grand Canyon, from Lee's Ferry to the Grand Wash Cliffs, the official end of the Grand Canyon. Blake kept a detailed diary on his three trips. The author has used the diary as a basis for the book.

The book is a signal and welcome addition to the literature of Colorado River running. Those of us who have up-close and personal adrenalin-pumping acquaintance with the wondrous rapids of Ladore, Cataract, Marble, and Grand canyons recognize them as old friends in the Blake/Westwood descriptions. Those who have gazed in awe at the scenery of the canyons, while dawdling along in the calm stretches between rapids, feel right at home with Blake, Loper, and the survey teams. Those who know and admire men and women ("boatmen" both) who today read the rapids, set their oars, and go for it, through Hell's Half Mile, or into Lava, Upset, or Hance rapids, just missing the "holes" wherein lurks certain disaster, will recognize their ancestors in Blake and Loper. Colorado River running is heady stuff, despite the dams that have drowned so many of the rapids and so much of the scenery. Blake knew it all in pre-dam days and got it into his diary. Westwood, who retraced as many of Blake's trips as he could, uses Blake's knowledge and his own to allow the reader to appreciate the canyons and the sweat, danger, exhilaration, and satisfaction of running them.

Modern river runners use rubber rafts and pontoon boats to carry appreciative, albeit panicky, tourists through the rapids. The purpose is recreation. Blake was part of a team that used wooden boats, much more difficult to handle. And they had a job: to run a line-of-sight survey through the canyons, using plane table, alidade, and stadia rod. Making accurate measurements with those instruments is difficult on flat ground on a cool day with few heat waves to obscure the numbers on the rod. Making accurate measurements while the plane table is balanced on a rock, with the rod and its holder perched precariously on a talus slope or cliff above a roiling rapid in heat of 100 degrees plus is another matter entirely. The fact that, over a distance of hundreds of river miles, the survey teams were off by only a very few feet is a testament to their skill, daring, and tenacity.

The surveys were completed in 1923, and Blake returned to other life tasks. He continued to run the river when he could, as all who have muddy river water in their veins do. The great dams were eventually built: Boulder Dam (Hoover Dam) and Glen Canyon Dam on the Colorado, Flaming Gorge Dam on the Green, and Navajo Dam on the San Juan, and smaller ones besides. Plans to

build additional dams within the Grand Canyon and in Ladore Canyon were stopped by political pressure from conservationists and many others.

Powell's legacy did not come out quite as he envisioned it. But he began the dual process of running the rivers and studying them the while. Blake, Loper, and the United States Geological Survey teams continued what Powell had begun. Powell and his men left diaries that recorded their sense of awe at the country and rather matter-of-fact descriptions of the hardships and danger. Later river runners, such as the Kolb brothers, did so as well. Now, in *Rough Water Man* we have a splendid addition to Colorado River lore, and to the complex history of the fights to control, and fights for the control of, the river. Conservationists, river runners, and historians alike are indebted to Richard Westwood for an outstanding work.

Don D. Fowler
University of Nevada, Reno

NEW RESOURCE MATERIALS

Nevada Historical Society

FREDERICK NORTON PAPERS

Frederick Otto Norton (1868–1931) was one of those fortunate few, among the multitude of Nevada mining entrepreneurs, who chanced upon a major ore deposit and was able to reap a fortune from it. His name is prominently associated with the discovery of silver and gold at Fairview and the camp's boom in 1906, a boom that enabled him to sell his claims there at a great profit and live the rest of his life in comfort, first in Reno and then in Hayward, California.

The Society has received a group of letters written by Norton between 1893 and 1902, when he was prospecting and was involved with the development of mines in California and Nevada. By 1902 he was superintendent of the Gold-Copper Exploration Company's mines near Pyramid Lake. His letters, all to his mother, Lucy Norton Trask, who was also actively involved in mining, provide information on his activities and go into considerable detail about his mining work and the properties involved. Accompanying the letters are photographs of Norton and his wife Lena, their home in Reno, and Lucy Trask.

We thank Helen Olsen of Wilder, Idaho, for her donation of the Norton materials, which include Olsen's extensively researched short biography, "A Boy from Silver: The Story of Frederick O. Norton." The donated items do much to illuminate the career of a significant figure in Nevada's twentieth-century mining history.

TONOPAH AND GOLDFIELD RAILROAD RECORDS

As the result of a recent donation, the Society has added substantially to its collection of Tonopah and Goldfield Railroad records. This railroad was the first built into the Tonopah-Goldfield area, the most profitable, and the longest lived.

Four cashbooks, covering the period May 1915 to August 1918, have been given to the Society by Dewey and Janet Lambert of Reno. These volumes help document the railroad's fortunes during World War I, when it continued to make money—and to pay its shareholders dividends—largely because of shrewd management.

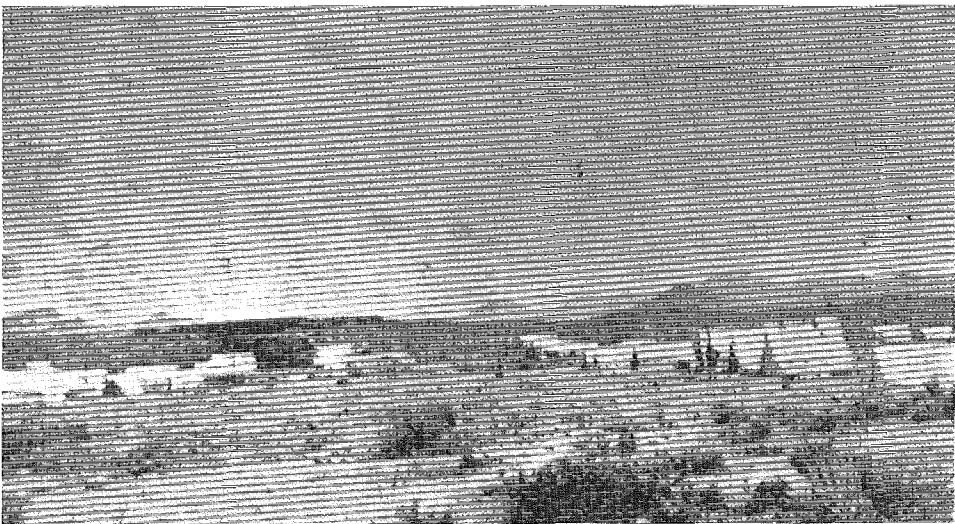
JAMESTOWN NEWS

More than eight hundred newspapers have been published in Nevada since the mid-1850s. Some have had long lives, others lasted only a few issues—and some vanished completely before history even took note of them. One of these last, the *Jamestown News*, has just re-emerged after nearly a century of oblivion.

Jamestown was a mining camp that boomed briefly in Esmeralda County, near the site of Gold Crater, in 1908. It attracted several hundred miners and other fortune seekers, then faded in a matter of months. For a short time, however, it was a bustling community—mostly of tents—boasting stores, saloons, real-estate offices, restaurants, bakeries, assayers, building contractors, a stockbroker, a stageline, and even a fledgling water company. It also had a weekly newspaper, the *Jamestown News*, edited and published by J. Mastella Le Grand, which described in minute detail the life of the town.

No issues of the Jamestown newspaper had been known to survive, or the journal even to exist, until a copy of its first issue, for May 29, 1908, was brought to the Society by Edward C. Schultz of Sparks. Schultz's uncle, Fred E. Schultz, was one of the original developers of Jamestown, and the copy of the newspaper had been in the family's possession for decades. Edward Schultz believes there may have been one or two more issues of the *News*, but so far none has been located.

We wish to thank Mr. Schultz for making the newspaper available, and for donating a number of family photographs taken in Goldfield and Jamestown in the 1920s and 1930s (Fred Schultz was the last mine operator in Jamestown in the



A view of Jamestown from the *Jamestown News* of May 29, 1908. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

thirties). The newspaper, which has been microfilmed, and the photographs provide researchers with much new information about one of Goldfield's more interesting satellite camps.

Eric N. Moody
Manuscript Curator

University of Nevada, Reno
Special Collections Department

The Special Collections Department has completed a major revision of "A Subject Guide to Manuscript Collections." This fifty-page guide provides basic information about the department's manuscript collections in nineteen broad subject categories: agriculture and ranching, architecture, clubs and organizations, Comstock mines, diaries and reminiscences, ethnicity and race, family papers and histories, Great Basin Indians, Lake Tahoe area, land use, landscape, literary manuscripts, mining, miscellaneous, music, politics, railroads, water, and women. Paper copies of the guide are available for purchase; the department is also producing microfiche copies for distribution to libraries and museums throughout Nevada.

Susan Searcy
Manuscript Curator

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Founded in 1904, the Nevada Historical Society seeks to advance the study of the heritage of Nevada. The Society publishes scholarly studies, indexes, guidebooks, bibliographies, and the *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*; it collects manuscripts, rare books, artifacts, historical photographs and maps, and makes its collections available for research; it maintains a museum at its Reno facility; and it is engaged in the development and publication of educational materials for use in the public schools.