

Nevada

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NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY

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Historical Society Quarterly

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SENATORS, SUBSIDIES, AND SILVER MISMANAGEMENT IN THE KENNEDY-JOHNSON YEARS

Gary E. Elliott

The Mint Act of 1873, better known as the Crime of '73, restricted the minting of silver coins for domestic circulation, but the Coinage Act of 1965 went one step further, removing silver entirely from most of the nation's coins (dimes, quarters, half dollars). This congressional measure wiped out nearly a century of legislation and lobbying by western mining interests, who had hoped to restore silver to a position of prominence in the nation's monetary system. And just as earlier western senators saw conspiracy in the original crime, their successors in the 1960s thought they detected similar forces at work to undermine the basis of the nation's money. But although the western legislators of the 1870s blamed their problems on shrewd easterners committed to a gold standard, the moderns saw more incompetence than treachery at work, and at the highest levels of government. And none was more vocal in denouncing the Treasury Department than Nevada's silver senator, Alan Bible. He was the latest in a long line of senators from Nevada who led the fight to restore the deteriorating western mining industry and at the same time preserve part of the West's vanishing heritage.¹

Born on November 20, 1909, in Lovelock, Nevada, Bible rose to political prominence in the Silver State through the political machine of his mentor, Senator Patrick A. McCarran. Bible learned that all politics is local, which meant that he would be judged by how effective he became in advancing the interests of his constituents. Thus, throughout his years in the United States Senate (1954-74), Bible supported the cause of mining in the West, seeking to obtain government subsidies through metal stockpiling, legislation banning imports, and protection from potentially disastrous environmental legislation.²

Moreover, Bible was solidly in the camp of Lyndon B. Johnson, whether as majority leader, vice president, or president. As a Senate insider, Bible wielded

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considerable power in the committees and backrooms of the Senate, where he could regularly count on Johnson's support. Thus, the states of the mining West, as a voting bloc, boasted an impressive line-up of powerful politicians dedicated to the protection of their oldest land-based extractive industry.³

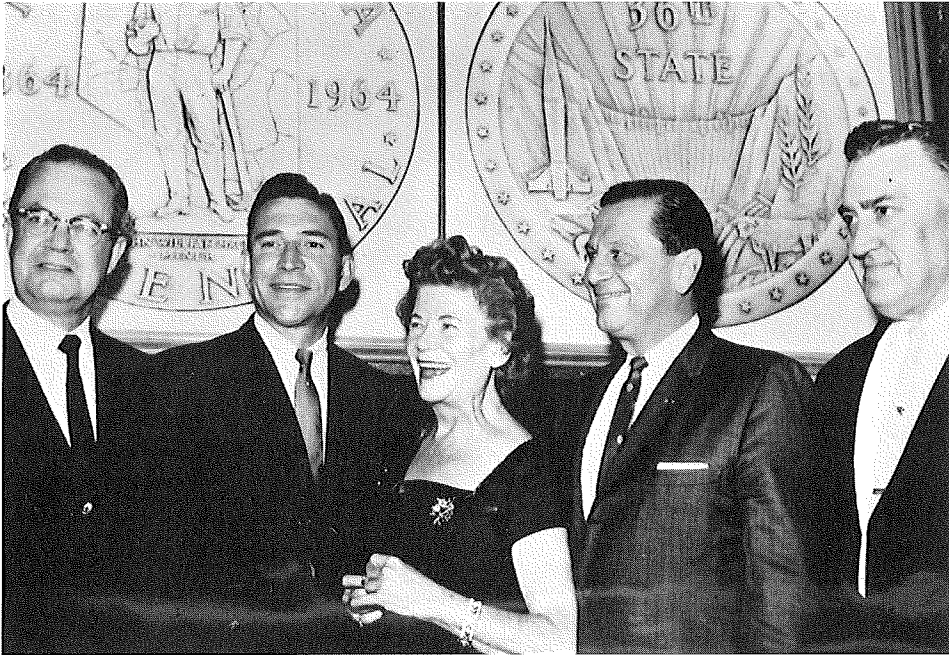
These western senators, whether Republican or Democrat, controlled the committees vital to the support of western mining, specifically the Interior and Insular Affairs and the Appropriations committees. More important, they were activists in expanding the role of the federal government in the economic development of the West. Democrats James Murray and Mike Mansfield of Montana, Clinton Anderson of New Mexico, Robert Kerr of Oklahoma, Henry "Scoop" Jackson and Warren Magnuson of Washington, Gale McGee of Wyoming, Carl Hayden of Arizona, and Ernest Gruening of Alaska voted more than 90 percent of the time to enlarge the federal role in western development.⁴ And part of their commitment was to stabilize and revitalize the western mining industry.

REPEAL OF THE PITTMAN SILVER PURCHASE ACT

The issue of silver coinage was raised early in John F. Kennedy's administration and continued well into Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society. The basic problem was the depletion of silver stockpiles. Although the exact amounts vary according to the sources used, it appears that from January through November 1961, silver inventories in the Treasury Department fell from 123 million ounces to 47 million ounces. The cause for the decline was clear: The Treasury had begun selling "free silver"—that is, the silver not needed to back the currency—to users and fabricators at the fixed price of 91.5 cents an ounce. Silver producers deplored this move because it would only increase imports from foreign sources. They urged that the sale of free silver be discontinued or, in the alternative, that the price be raised above the Treasury Department's ceiling of 91.5 cents in order to encourage domestic exploration.⁵

The government response failed to meet the hopes or expectations of silver producers. On November 18, 1961, the Kennedy administration did stop selling free silver for commercial use, but during the two-year period in which free silver had been sold to commercial users, 55 million ounces were extracted from the Treasury stocks. Worse yet, the Treasury Department's policy of selling at 91.5 cents an ounce kept the price artificially low, compared with world market prices that hovered around 93.5 cents an ounce during the same period. In short, American silver users received a considerable windfall, markets for foreign imports expanded, western silver producers received nothing, and Senator Bible was hopping mad about it.⁶

Nor did the Kennedy administration do anything to soothe the feelings of the silver senator. He hoped that the Treasury Department's belated action would not only stimulate silver exploration, but aid the copper, lead, and zinc industries, because silver is a by-product of their operations. Instead, the Kennedy admin-



Unveiling the Nevada Centennial medallion, made of silver, in the Congo Room at the Sahara Hotel in Law Vegas, April 4, 1964 (from the left): Senator Alan Bible, Governor Grant Sawyer, Director of the United States Mint Eva Adams, Senator Howard Cannon, Congressman Walter Baring. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

istration asked for repeal of the 1934 Pittman Silver Purchase Act and related laws, which mandated government purchases of western silver. Then, on January 31, 1962, Bible and Senator Frank Church (D-Idaho) went to the White House to plead their case. Both westerners opposed repeal of the Silver Purchase Act because the price of silver had failed to stabilize since the president's November pronouncement, which had driven the price as high as \$1.00 an ounce. More important, as senators from mining states, both feared the loss of a government subsidy that would translate into mine closures and layoffs. Bible and Church wanted a delay until silver prices could be determined with some degree of certainty; then and only then should the government consider a new policy direction.⁷

Another reason for Bible's stalling was his unfavorable opinion of Treasury Secretary Douglas Dillon and his department. Bible considered them not merely incompetent, but guilty of mismanaging the whole silver question and precipitating the crisis, and he was not alone. *Barron's*, a respected national business and financial weekly, charged that the acts of both Dillon and Federal Reserve Chairman William Martin had resulted in "mismanaged money." Dillon and Martin responded to the silver crisis by issuing federal reserve notes instead of silver

certificates for \$1.00 and \$2.00 bills. This prohibited redemption at the Treasury of silver certificates for bullion. Dillon went on to explain that as the price of silver approached 1.29 cents an ounce, it became profitable to redeem certificates for silver. Unless Congress acted quickly, the result could be a shortage of dollar bills in circulation, which would constrict the money supply and further drain silver stockpiles.⁸

The silver mess, and the related foot dragging by Treasury officials for two years, prompted further criticism. *Barron's* declared, "Mismanaged silver, to be sure, is an ancient and honorable U.S. tradition, which, some would argue, dates back to William Jennings Bryan. On this score, however, Messrs. Dillon and Co. probably have set some kind of low."⁹ Because of the Treasury Department's policy of selling free silver and its failure to stop the silver drain, prices rose to 1.28 cents an ounce in March 1963, driving Dillon and Martin to Congress for help before silver users started to demand silver bullion for certificates. There was even speculation that if silver hit \$1.38 an ounce, Americans would melt down their coins for the silver content and hoard the bullion.

However, Dillon and Martin's answer to the silver crisis only exacerbated the difficulty with shrinking gold supplies. The problem with their plan to exchange federal reserve notes for silver certificates was that the Federal Reserve was required by law to hold a gold reserve equal to at least 25 percent of the currency in circulation. But Dillon proposed to make the exchanges gradual as new dollar bills were needed, and no more than 35 million a year, which he claimed would have no impact on the gold reserves—a questionable assertion.¹⁰

To be sure, the matter of silver stocks, dwindling gold supplies, and money management was a complicated and controversial subject. Still, the administration's answer was only a half-hearted attempt to solve the problem. Moreover, the political and economic heritage of silver in the West had prophetic consequences as witnesses lined up for and against the administration. Eastern senators stood behind their silver user constituents, while westerners like Bible supported mine owners. Indeed, it was East against West in yet another silver dispute, but, unlike the uproar in the late nineteenth century, no silver parties were formed in the West. By the 1960s, the economy of western states no longer depended exclusively on mining. Because of the New Deal and World War II, the core economic interests of the West had changed from mining and livestock raising to manufacturing, irrigated agriculture, and tourism. Thus silver no longer represented the supreme economic importance that it had enjoyed in the 1870s.

The administration's proposal, H.R. 5398, contained four features. First, the Treasury Department was prohibited from selling silver for less than its monetary value. Second, \$1.00, \$2.00, \$5.00, and \$10.00 silver certificates would be retired from circulation to meet coinage needs and replaced by federal reserve notes. Third, the proposal repealed the government's mandatory silver purchases from producers at 90.5 cents an ounce. Finally, it eliminated the silver transfer tax to permit a free silver market unencumbered by mandatory government purchases

and taxes. The House Banking and Currency Committee held four days of hearings with only two hours allotted to opposition witnesses and two hours of additional time for floor debate. On April 10, 1963, H.R. 5398, known as the repeal of the Silver Purchase Act, passed the House and was promptly taken up by the Senate on April 29, 1963.¹¹

While administration witnesses like Secretary Dillion and Chairman Martin repeated their House testimony, western senators led by Bible lined up to assault H.R. 5398. Bible wasted little time in coming to the point of East versus West, producer versus consumers. He said, "Much testimony has been taken as to the hardship brought upon the silver users . . . in my opinion stopping sales of Treasury silver was action long overdue." Pausing only long enough to gather steam, Bible continued,

Silver users state that this has caused untold hardships upon their industry and forced silverware, jewelry, and other articles of artistic character to be faced with a very large increase in production costs to the detriment of the industry. Well, I, for one, cannot weep, especially when I can drive through my state and other silver producing states of the west and see silver mine after silver mine shut down.¹²

Afterward, Bible took dead aim at what he considered the central issue—the value of money. He argued the bullion theory—that is, it is necessary that currency be backed by metals with intrinsic value, a policy recognized in America since the early colonial period, or the value of paper in circulation would plummet, causing greater inflation. Moreover, the Treasury's plan to exchange silver certificates for federal reserve notes would only further drain gold reserves. In short, the result would be a devalued dollar that would cause an increase in inflation. And prices were already dangerously high because of the drain on gold caused by the imbalance of trade payments.¹³

Bible enjoyed ample assistance. Joining him in the fight on the Senate floor was Senator Lew B. Jordan of Idaho, while Senators Thomas J. Dodd of Connecticut and John O. Pastore of Rhode Island spoke for the silver users in their states. Naturally, vested interest groups like the American Mining Congress, the Western Conference of Senators, and silver consumer groups supported their positions before the committee. But a few senators and interested organizations, while potentially powerful, do not make a majority. The administration clearly had enough support on the Senate Banking and Currency Committee to assure that it would follow the lead of the House and report favorably on the bill. It did, and the Senate passed the measure on May 23, 1963. On June 4, 1963, President Kennedy signed into law the repeal of the 1934 Silver Purchase Act.¹⁴

SILVER SHORTAGE DISPUTES

During the debate over repeal of the Silver Purchase Act, Bible and his supporters heard little mention of the possibility of reducing or eliminating silver

from subsidiary coins like dimes, quarters, and half dollars. Indeed, Secretary Dillon gave every indication that after the repeal of the Pittman silver act, his department would have no trouble maintaining adequate silver supplies in the future. In an exchange with Senator Wallace F. Bennett of Utah, Dillon testified that he had 16,000 ounces of silver on hand, enough to last fifteen to twenty years.¹⁵ Once again Dillon and his experts were wrong, and within two years they were back to ask Congress to stop the drain of silver by removing it from the nation's coins.

Meanwhile, western senators were working to assure an increase in silver coins. Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, Democrat of Montana, Howard Cannon of Nevada, and Bible, to mention only a few, stepped up their campaign to persuade Congress and the president to mint silver dollars—known as cartwheels. Johnson, now president, proved sympathetic to his western friends in the Senate. In 1964, his administration requested \$635,000 for silver-dollar coinage, but the House Appropriations committee quickly rejected the idea. Bible and Cannon promptly launched a campaign to restore the cut. Afterward, Mike Manatos, the White House liaison to the Senate, attended a dinner commemorating Nevada's centennial and talked with Bible and Cannon about the silver dollar issue. He found them both deeply concerned and desirous of continuing the tradition of cartwheels in the West.

Amid the swirl of the Great Society, the silver fight quietly continued. Between June 3, 1963, and June 4, 1965, the silver crisis worsened, propelling Secretary Dillon and his cohort back to Congress with the ultimate remedy—the removal of silver from coins. For Bible, this was the Crime of '65, rivaled only by the legendary Crime of '73. That earlier crime had removed silver from the monetary equation, touching off a fire storm of protest in the West that culminated in William Jennings Bryan's "cross of gold" speech and his nomination for president at the Democratic National Convention in 1896.

The Silver Purchase Act of 1934, and subsequent amendments to it in 1946, had been the basic regulations governing purchase, sale, and use. During World War II, use of silver was controlled by the War Production Board. Treasury stocks were used for military and essential industrial purposes, while domestic silver was permitted in the making of silverware, jewelry, and church articles. Foreign imports were limited to preferential items such as electrical appliances and medical, dental, and photographic supplies. After the war, Congress made free silver available for domestic use under the 1946 amendment to the 1934 act. The price was set at 91.5 cents per ounce by the government, which in effect stabilized the silver market until President Kennedy ordered a halt to free silver sales in November 1961. Afterward, the price rose to nearly \$1.29 per ounce and remained constant through 1964.¹⁶

Repeal of the Silver Purchase Act in June 1963 brought further changes. For the first time since 1934, trading was again permitted in silver futures on the New York Commodity Exchange, and silver prices rose 38 cents an ounce over a



William Jennings Bryan. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

three-year period. Responding to the shortage of silver worldwide and seeking to locate new deposits, the government offered financial assistance to mine operators, up to 75 percent of the cost of exploration. But this incentive failed to stimulate exploration on a scale needed to keep pace with consumption.¹⁷

In Bible's view, the government's assistance program was too little, too late. In early 1965, the Bureau of Mines estimated that silver prices two to three times the level of \$1.29 would be needed to stimulate new exploration and production. However, at the current rate of coinage demands, the Treasury stockpile of \$1.25 billion would be exhausted by 1968. The rate of consumption had to be reduced, or the country would simply run out of silver. Paradoxically, if silver prices rose two or three times beyond \$1.29, to the level needed to stimulate exploration, the intrinsic value of all United States subsidiary coins would be greater than their face value, causing people to hoard or melt down their coins, and disrupting retail business and industrial production of goods requiring silver.¹⁸

Bible disputed not the facts, but the remedy. Ever since coming to the Senate in 1954, he had been clamoring for a domestic minerals and metal policy, all to no avail. He clashed with the Eisenhower administration over its lack of price supports for tungsten production, and later for copper, lead, and zinc, all of which had been devastated by foreign imports. Meanwhile, Bible continued to boil about a foreign policy that showed more concern for American business profits

from foreign mining than for the needs of western miners. Thus, on August 13, 1963, he told the Senate minerals subcommittee, "It is difficult for me to understand national policies while we will not permit at least an even break for our domestic mining industry."¹⁹

In the same statement Bible touched on the key to western mining problems—American investment overseas. In 1961, fifteen cents of every dollar of corporate profits came from overseas operations. This, in turn, affected the United States balance of payments, which curtailed investment at home. Unless the administration was prepared to institute trade restrictions such as quotas and tariffs, the domestic mining industry would be unable to compete with foreign sources that were better equipped and financed, principally by the outflow of American dollars that supported the production of cheap silver imports. Finally, Bible cited Nevada's lead and zinc industry as a prime example of domestic mining collapse resulting from an insensitive foreign policy. Nevada miners produced \$8 million in lead and zinc during the 1950s, but in 1963 only a token \$33,000 was mined. The number of mines had dropped from a high of 129 in 1948 to only 9 in 1962.²⁰

Bible believed that the silver crisis was inseparable from the over-all plight of mining in the West. He reasoned that since silver is largely a by-product of copper, lead, zinc, and gold mining, silver production was in direct proportion to the demand for these metals. Consequently, any reduction in output from these sources would naturally reduce silver production because roughly two-thirds of all silver mined in the United States came from these base metal ores. And since base metal mining had dipped to all-time lows, a boom in silver imports was created to keep pace with the demand. Bible bristled at the stragging amount of imports—15 million ounces from Mexico, and 36 million from Peru.²¹ Coupled with the 5.7 percent drop in American free-market silver production over fourteen years, these figures left Nevada's silver senator angry, frustrated, and perplexed as to the future of western silver mining.

Throughout 1964, the silver coin crisis continued to escalate. On May 31, 1963, the Treasury Department held \$69,688,192 in silver dollars. By February 1964, it was \$25,300,700, a decrease of \$44,387,492. By March 25, 1964, Treasury vaults contained only \$3,000,000. Moreover, nickels, dimes, quarters, and half dollars were in short supply, limiting trade exchanges of all kinds, and particularly vending-machine operations.²² By the beginning of 1965, little had changed. The \$3,000,000 in silver dollars held by the Treasury had reached a whopping value of \$93 million to coin dealers and private collectors. Meanwhile, western states, particularly Nevada, demanded the minting of additional silver dollars, but at a greatly reduced silver content, even though the coin shortage showed no signs of abating.²³

From Bible's perspective, the proposed cure could only kill the patient. In early 1965, the Bureau of Mines flatly stated that eliminating silver from subsidiary coins would release substantial amounts of the metal for industrial use by 1967. In addition, silver prices would stabilize with corresponding production levels. In

short, the solution was not an increase in domestic production stimulated by higher profits from government supports, but the elimination of silver altogether from the coinage system.²⁴ Naturally, silver users and collectors were elated, while western senators braced for yet another assault on their time-honored industry.

The political forces favoring change in the nation's subsidiary coinage system were business leaders, banks, the national Chamber of Commerce, vending-machine companies, and silver users. The vending-machine business was prepared to alter its magnetic grabs from 90 percent silver and 10 percent copper to whatever formula the Treasury Department decided upon for the new coins; this alternative was preferable to the continued coin shortage that had rocked the industry. Westerners, however, were unwilling to give up the fight completely. The 90-10 formula of silver and copper in coins meant that each silver dollar contained 0.77 ounces of silver. Therefore, when silver reached \$1.29 an ounce on the open market, a cartwheel contained exactly a dollar's worth of silver. This proved to be an effective ceiling, but it forced silver users to pay more for their raw materials.

As an alternative, Senator Lee Metcalf (ID-Montana) proposed to reduce the silver content rather than eliminate it altogether.²⁵ Agreeing with most western senators on the need for some reduction in silver content for subsidiary coins, Metcalf proposed a change in the ratio from 90 percent to 80 percent, which would make more silver available for coinage. But silver users contended that the Metcalf plan would only drive the world market price higher because cartwheels with an 80 percent silver content would contain 0.69 ounce of silver instead of 0.77, driving the price from \$1.29 to \$1.45 an ounce.²⁶ Meanwhile, on May 14, 1965, President Johnson ordered the United States Mint to produce 45 million silver dollars, no doubt in response to desperate pleas from his friends in the Senate, particularly Majority Leader Mike Mansfield. But the immediate response was mostly negative because the new dollars were bound to be hoarded. In short, it was simply a matter of putting 45 million new dollars into the hands of speculators.²⁷

THE BIBLE AND JOHNSON PLANS

Only ten days after President Johnson ordered the mint to produce silver dollars, the Treasury decided not to proceed. Congressional committees with jurisdiction over coinage matters wanted to wait. On May 25, 1965, the day following the mint's decision not to move forward with the production of silver dollars, Senator Bible introduced S. 2036, cosponsored by his Nevada colleague Howard Cannon and Senators Mansfield and Metcalf; it prohibited exportation, hoarding, and the use of silver coins as collateral for bank loans.

Afterward, Mansfield and Bible took to the Senate floor to present the case for silver producers.²⁸ Mansfield agreed that the mint should not increase silver



President Lyndon B. Johnson campaigning in Nevada, October 12, 1964. Senator Bible is on the President's left. Gary Cypher is reciting the Lord's Prayer in sign language. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

dollar production and that the silver content of subsidiary coins should be reduced. Although he supported this view, Bible was considerably less conciliatory toward the Treasury Department because of its lack of leadership during the silver shortage, which had left the Congress to wrestle with its own solutions. Clearly, Bible's bill was no solution because its provisions against hoarding and speculation were largely unenforceable and might only exacerbate the problem it was meant to solve.²⁹ But it was a beginning that attempted to clean up some of the mess created by the Treasury Department.

At long last, the Treasury Department submitted to the president its plan to deal with the silver crisis. Johnson swiftly submitted it to Congress. On June 3, 1965, the House and Senate received his message and corresponding legislation. The president noted that more than 10,000 tons of silver were used each year in the production of coins, far in excess of free-world production. The yearly deficit had to come from Treasury stocks, which had shrunk considerably since 1963, when the Silver Purchase Act was repealed and silver prices rose. The president proposed changing the metallic content of the dime and quarter to an alloy of copper and nickel. Also, the silver content of the half dollar would be reduced from 90 percent to 40 percent. The silver content of the cartwheel would remain

the same, but none would be minted. Finally, the president said that with these changes, a 90 percent savings in silver would be realized.³⁰

Johnson's supporters wasted no time. The day the message arrived, Representative Wright Patman (D-Texas) introduced the administration's bill in the House, H.R. 8746; and Senators Bennett and A. Willis Robertson (D-Virginia) introduced it in the Senate, S. 2080. The House began hearings the following day before the Banking and Currency Committee, where Chairman Patman set the tone by emphasizing that H.R. 8746 had something for everyone, including incentives for silver producers. But it was clearly silver users who would be the big winners, not western mining interests. Henry H. Fowler, who had replaced Douglas Dillon as treasury secretary, restated the president's message, which was based on a two-year Treasury Department study of worldwide trends in silver production and use.³¹

Patman led Fowler through a series of friendly questions. To counter the Bible bullion theory, the treasury secretary concluded that whether a nation's coinage was made from gold, silver, paper, or any other substance was immaterial. What was critical was its acceptance as legal tender and its being received in full faith and credit in commercial transactions. Moreover, Patman gave Fowler an opportunity to respond with a written statement as to the effect of H.R. 8746 on domestic silver production. Fowler expressed the belief that current production and employment levels would not suffer. While he was no doubt correct, the point was that the western silver mining industry was virtually incapable of further deterioration without going out of business altogether. In fact, silver production would remain static, given the high cost of production in comparison with foreign competitors.³²

In the Senate, the silverites reacted differently to the administration bill and the attitudes behind it. On June 9, 1965, the Senate Banking and Currency Committee took up consideration of the coinage act. Although generally supportive, Senators Mansfield and Metcalf wanted to amend S. 2080 to include portions of Bible's earlier bill to prohibit the hoarding of silver coins, which were being used as collateral for bank loans.

By contrast, Bible attacked the bill and the underlying Treasury Department study, with comprehensive testimony against the administration's proposal. Beginning with a review of the repeal of the Silver Purchase Act in 1963, Bible lashed out at the Treasury Department's rosy predictions over the past two years. "The Treasury Department said supplies of silver would last 15-20 years, which would maintain our coinage system . . . They are wrong again . . . They have now come up with another magic formula."³³ Bible maintained that the shortage of silver was artificial, the result of the Treasury Department's mismanagement and the hoarding of silver coins by speculators. His proposed remedy was to force silver coins back into circulation, not to debase currency practices employed since the days of Alexander Hamilton. Moreover, to issue new coins containing less silver

would only compound the problem by encouraging the hoarding of silver coins with a higher content. In short, circulating the two coins alongside each other was impossible, and the result could only be more hoarding of silver coins by speculators and a worried public.³⁴

Bible continued to emphasize that the remedy lay in his bill, S. 2036. While attacking the administration's approach, Bible disputed the argument that the United States was in short supply of silver. What had curtailed mining and exploration in the past was the unrealistically low silver price, partly a result of Treasury policy, which had proved to be a windfall for silver users while ignoring silver producers in the mining West. Bible cited examples of new silver discoveries in Ontario, Canada, that were capable of producing 200 million ounces of high-grade silver, and forecast a 50 percent increase in silver production in 1966. To bolster his argument, he also cited assumptions, recently shown to be invalid, that the United States lacked sufficient deposits of uranium and tungsten to meet defense needs. Again, he said, the forecasters were wrong: Once the price rose to a profitable level, massive amounts of uranium and tungsten were found. Bible predicted that the same would occur with silver.³⁵

THE TRIUMPH OF SILVER USERS

Predictions by a silver senator who was also the spokesman for the western mining crowd were not enough, however. Nor were the pleas from Senator Milward L. Simpson of Wyoming, who charged the Treasury with providing a cheap source of industrial silver. And he seemed to have hit the nail on the head because the senators who lined up to support the administration were also the eastern spokesmen for silver manufacturers. Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Massachusetts) said, "Industrial users of silver in my state have indicated to me that every effort should be made to free silver from coinage so that there can be a greater supply of this metal available for domestic production." Senator Pastore of Rhode Island echoed that theme: "My primary purpose . . . is the retention of American jobs. Silver is essential to industry not only in my state, where we have a large silverware industry and electronics industry, but in many parts of the country where silver is an essential manufacturing component."³⁶

But the most blatant expression of self-interest in the silver struggle came from Pastore's colleague, Claiborne Pell. Citing the census of manufacturers, Pell maintained that in Rhode Island 289 firms, employing 8,234 persons, or 7 percent of the work force, were directly tied to the manufacture of jewelry and silverware. Afterward, Pell said, "Silver means jobs, bread and butter . . . silver is an obsolete base for our currency . . . A saving of some 90 percent of the silver now used for coinage comes as good news to Rhode Island."³⁷

Bible had no illusions about the Coinage Act of 1965, which sailed through the House and then through the Senate. Clearly, the removal of silver from subsidiary coins had distinct advantages. First, the Treasury would save about \$300 million

a year by buying copper and nickel instead of the more expensive silver. Also, once free from coinage obligations, silver was available for use in missile parts, electronics, photographic plates, jewelry, silverware, and a host of other consumer items. More important, the coin shortage created by hoarding would be eliminated.³⁸ For the West, however, with so much history and folklore tied to silver, the 1965 Coinage Act was a blow to culture and tradition.

This once-proud metal, which shaped passions and moved political parties, and in Nevada helped create new ones, had been sacrificed not on a cross of gold, but on a silver place setting manufactured in Rhode Island. Silver, which once had intrinsic value, was relegated to electrical wiring components and film processing. In short, it had become just another commodity, like wheat, corn, or pork bellies, whose futures were traded like any other storehouse of goods. For Nevada—the Silver State whose tradition of silver senators began with William M. Stewart, John P. Jones, and Francis Newlands, and continued with Key Pittman's Silver Purchase Acts and Alan Bible—the 1965 Coinage Act seemed a death blow to an industry and a western tradition.³⁹

In an ironic blunder, the White House sent Senator Bible a freshly minted copper-and-nickel quarter as a gift from President Johnson. The accompanying letter bore the president's stamp, rather than the signature customary on letters to his long-time friend and supporter, and said, "I want you to have this shiny quarter as a memento. Perhaps it may become a treasured keepsake in your family."⁴⁰ Perhaps it did not, because Bible continued to carry the fight to the Johnson administration across a wide range of mining and money issues.

Despite the dire predictions of Bible and others, the western mining industry did not crumble after the passage of the 1965 Coinage Act. For example, in Nevada, the total number of mines, mills, and smelter operations rose sharply from 174 in 1967 to 472 in 1980. Also, in every western state, income from mining increased substantially during the same period.⁴¹ Still, silver production continued to decline relative to imports, but the cause had more to do with decisions by mine owners than with national legislation.

Although there is considerable evidence that the Treasury Department badly underestimated and mishandled the silver crisis, it is equally clear that the 1965 Coinage Act did not undermine western mining interests. Indeed, it proved that silver content was not necessary to maintain the value of the nation's coinage, and that the new practice did alleviate the chronic shortage of silver for industrial purposes. On balance, the Coinage Act of 1965 was not a crime against the interests of the mining West but rather a much needed correction in the way silver is used in an affluent and highly industrialized society.

NOTES

¹Portions of this article appeared in chapters 4 and 8 of *Senator Alan Bible and the Politics of the New West*, by Gary E. Elliott (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1994). Also see Gary E. Elliott, "A Legacy of Support: Senator Alan Bible and the Nevada Mining Industry," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 31: 3 (1988), 183–97.

²Elliott, "Legacy of Support."

³Gary E. Elliott, "A Work Horse, Not a Show Horse: Alan Bible and the Path to Power in the United States Senate, 1954 to 1974," *Halcyon: A Journal of the Humanities* (1993), 149–60.

⁴Elliott, *Senator Alan Bible*, 85.

⁵*The Humboldt Bulletin* (2 November 1961).

⁶Statement from the office of Senator Bible, 28 November 1961, Alan Bible Papers (hereafter cited as AB Papers), University of Nevada, Reno, Library, Special Collections Department, Boxes 42, 109.

⁷Statements from the office of Senator Bible, 31 January 1962, 15 March 1962, AB Papers, Boxes 42, 109.

⁸*Barron's* (18 March 1963); U.S., Congress, Senate, The Committee on Banking and Currency, Hearings on Repeal of the 1934 Silver Purchase Act, 29 April 1963, 88th Cong., 1st Sess., 11–26, 27–42.

⁹*Barron's* (18 March 1963).

¹⁰U.S., Congress, Senate, The Committee on Banking and Currency, Hearings on Repeal of the 1934 Silver Purchase Act, 29 April 1963, 88th Cong., 1st Sess., 11–26; statement of A. Willis Robertson, Chairman, Senate Committee on Banking and Currency, *Congressional Record* (23 April 1963), Senate, 6402–3.

¹¹U.S., Congress, House, A Bill to Repeal Certain Legislation Relating to the Purchase of Silver and Other Purposes, H.R. 5398, 88th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1963; U.S., House, A Bill to Repeal Certain Legislation Relating to the Purchase of Silver and Other Purposes, Report 183—3 April 1963.

¹²U.S., Congress, Senate, The Committee on Banking and Currency, Hearings on the Repeal of the 1934 Silver Purchase Act, 29 April 1963, 88th Cong., 1st Sess., 73.

¹³*Ibid.*, 73–76.

¹⁴U.S., Senate, A Bill to Repeal Certain Legislation Relating to the Purchase of Silver and Other Purpose, Report 175—13 May 1963; P.L. 88-36, 4 June 1963.

¹⁵U.S., Congress, Senate, The Committee on Banking and Currency, Hearings on the Repeal of the 1934 Silver Purchase Act, 29 April 1963, 88th Cong., 1st Sess., 23, 24.

¹⁶U.S., Department of Interior, Bureau of Mines, Bulletin 630, *Silver*, 1963, 8–9.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸U.S., Department of Interior, Bureau of Mines, Information Circular 8257, *Silver: Facts, Estimates, and Projections*, 1965, 9.

¹⁹Statement from the office of Senator Bible, 13 August 1963; statement before the minerals subcommittee of the Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, AB Papers, Box 252.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹U.S., Department of Interior, *Silver: Facts, Estimates, and Projections*, 11, 12.

²²*The American Legion* (October 1964), 14–18.

²³*Washington Daily News* (8 February 1965); *Las Vegas Sun*, (13 January, 20 March 1964); Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce, resolution recommending the unlimited coinage of silver dollars, AB Papers, Box 252.

²⁴U.S., Department of Interior, *Silver: Facts, Estimates, and Projections*, 12.

²⁵Arlen J. Large, "Coins' Silver Content Sparks a New Debate in Congress, Industry," *Wall Street Journal* (2 April 1964).

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷*Washington Evening Star* (19 May 1965); *Wall Street Journal* (17 May 1965); *Las Vegas Review Journal* (17 May, 21 May 1965).

²⁸U.S., Congress, Senate, A Bill to Prohibit Certain Practices Creating Artificial Shortages in the Supply of Coins in the United States, S. 2036, 89th Cong., 1st Sess., 1965.

²⁹*Congressional Record* (25 May 1965), Senate, 11052–55. Also, *American Metal Market* (26 May 1965).

³⁰Message of the President of the United States Relative to Silver Coinage, Document Number 199, House, 89th Cong., 1st Sess., 1965.

³¹U.S., Congress, House, The Committee on Banking and Currency, Hearings on the Coinage Act of 1965, 89th Cong., 1st Sess., 4, 7, 8 June 1965, 12 13–20; U.S., Congress, House, Coinage Act of 1965, H.R. 8746, Report 509–1965.

³²U.S., Congress, House, The Committee on Banking and Currency, Hearings on the Coinage Act of 1965, 89th Cong., 1st Sess., 4, 7, 8 June 1965, 130–31.

³³U.S., Congress, Senate, The Committee on Banking and Currency, Hearings on the Coinage Act of

1965, 89th Cong., 1st Sess., 9 June 1965, 27; U.S., Congress, Senate, Coinage Act of 1965, S. 2080, Report 317-1965.

³⁴U.S., Congress, Senate, The Committee on Banking and Currency, Hearings on the Coinage Act of 1965, 89th Cong., 1st Sess., 9 June 1965, 27.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 28-30.

³⁶*Ibid.* Statement of Senator Simpson can be found at page 32, Kennedy at page 36, Pastore at page 37.

³⁷U.S., Congress, Senate, The Committee on Banking and Currency, Hearings on the Coinage Act of 1965, 89th Cong., 1st Sess., 9 June 1965, 43.

³⁸*Washington Evening Star* (15 June 1965), A-24.

³⁹The Coinage Act of 1965 passed the Senate on 24 June 1965 with only nine votes recorded against the measure. *Congressional Record*, Senate D570-1. Senator Howard Cannon, who opposed S. 2080, voted with the administration in hopes of retaining the 40 percent content of silver in half dollars. For a concise statement on the role played by Bible in the struggle to defeat the coinage act, see *The Nevada Register* (2 July, 23 July 1965), editorial titled "Where Has All the Silver Gone: The Story of One Man's Fight in Washington."

⁴⁰Lyndon B. Johnson to Alan Bible, 3 November 1965, White House Central File, Name File, Box 248, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Houston, Texas.

⁴¹*Nevada Statistical Abstract* (1978), 149, 152.

THE MOULIN ROUGE MYSTIQUE

Blacks and Equal Rights in Las Vegas

Earnest N. Bracey

The historic Moulin Rouge hotel in Las Vegas, named after the original Moulin Rouge in Paris,¹ stands at 900 West Bonanza Road in a predominantly black neighborhood north of downtown, usually called the Westside.

John L. Smith, a columnist for the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, writes that "the Moulin Rouge sags like an old showgirl as it stretches out on Bonanza Road."² Indeed, the place appears overwhelmingly run-down, antiquated, and ragged—pitiful in comparison, perhaps, to its once glorious days. However, "by contemporary standards," writes Nevada historian Gary Elliott, "the resort was strikingly beautiful and comparable in elegance to any strip competitors."³ But like a once-vibrant person fighting off ravages of some cancer, neglect, or unknown illness, the Moulin Rouge struggles to survive. Its survival, and the story behind it, provide a paradigm for the history of Las Vegas, gaming, and how the black community has related to both, and how all of them share common threads that tie them to national trends.

When the Moulin Rouge opened its famous doors on May 24, 1955, it became an extremely popular night spot, a \$3.5 million showplace for black and white entertainers, as well as the Mecca and must-see tourist attraction for black Americans who wanted to have fun, dine, gamble, and visit in Las Vegas. It also reflected the evolving role of race in American society, as well as the tentative first steps for southern Nevada on its long and tortuous road to anything remotely resembling equal opportunity.

According to African-American historian Roosevelt Fitzgerald, "The opening of the Moulin Rouge Hotel in 1955 was a most important event. This was true not only for Las Vegas, but for the entire nation. It was the first major hotel in Las Vegas to be interracial and everyone was anxious to see if this 'experiment' would work."⁴

Eventually, the Moulin Rouge became "the site of interracial mingling of stars and customers in the 1950s,"⁵ even though the black community did not initially

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support the so-called experiment. Fitzgerald explains how blacks reacted unfavorably to the grand opening of the Moulin Rouge:

Most Black people around the country, who had the inclination and wherewithal, did not have the disposition for coming. Most refused to travel, even from Southern California, merely to participate in what they viewed as a "Jim Crow" operation. The felt that if they were not good enough for the likes of the Sands, Sahara, El Rancho, Flamingo, Nugget and others, they would not degrade themselves by consciously and actively participating in the venture of the Moulin Rouge.⁶

In the final analysis, however, prominent black stars, as well as other eminent black personages—such as Dr. Bob Bailey, the first chairman of the Nevada Equal Rights Commission—did attend the impressive gala opening of the Moulin Rouge, and it became the Rouge's finest hour. Nonetheless, Fitzgerald's perception is important, because the Moulin Rouge was not a black-owned business when it first opened, nor did it form the backbone of the Westside's economy in Las Vegas, as many local blacks had expected

In fact, the hotel-casino's ownership fit more appropriately into the general pattern of the Las Vegas resort community—if not physically, certainly racially and ethnically. The Moulin Rouge ownership was white and partially Jewish, as was that of most of "the major Strip hotels built between 1946 and 1967."⁷ And, as Elliott contends, the hotel "was constructed, opened, and operated to make a



The Moulin Rouge in 1955. (Nevada State Museum and Historical Society, Las Vegas)

profit,"⁸ not to serve a revolutionary social purpose. Indeed, the whole idea of building the Moulin Rouge was conceived by a white casino developer, Will Max Schwartz in 1954 "at an estimated cost of \$3,500,000, a considerable expense by the standards of the time."⁹

The only black American reported to have had original ownership in the Moulin Rouge was the former heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis; he served as an official host and held a 2 percent share in the luxury resort. For the most part, "the hotel's investment capital was 'lily white.'" ¹⁰ Schwartz held a 38 percent interest, while the other principal partners were Alexander Bismo, a Los Angeles investment broker, who maintained 31 percent of the venture, and Louis Ruben, a New York restaurateur, who held the remaining 29 percent.¹¹

So, contrary to myth and popular belief, the Moulin Rouge was not always a black-run hotel and casino, as it is today, though blacks later revered or viewed the site as their own.¹² Nor was it really "opened as an experiment in race relations,"¹³ as many historians persist in writing. It must be clearly understood, as one writer notes, that "the owners had no particularly altruistic intentions (such as improving race relations) when they opened the hotel and nightclub; they were in it for the money."¹⁴ In other words, the notion of racial integration was not important; making a profit was. In the final analysis, however, as another journalist astutely observes, the reality proved to be just the reverse. "Profits were small, but the Rouge loomed large when it came to promoting racial harmony."¹⁵

Futhermore, the Moulin Rouge was established thanks to the expansion of the Las Vegas Strip, the tourist response to that growth, and the righteous protest of blacks denied the luxury or privilege of full participation in the prosperity of Las Vegas. As Fitzgerald writes:

The first years of the 1930s brought about many changes for Las Vegas and the state of Nevada. In 1931 gambling was legalized and in 1933 prohibition was repealed. These two factors, along with the [Hoover] dam being hailed as the "Eighth Wonder of the World," attracted many visitors to Las Vegas, and a period of growth, which has not ended, began. Unfortunately, black Las Vegans did not share in this growth, in spite of their long presence in the city.¹⁶

With the construction of the Hoover Dam at the height of the Depression, the black emigrant population, attracted by the prospect of jobs, grew rapidly. Conditions for blacks, however, deteriorated considerably during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. In fact, as the black population of Las Vegas increased in earnest, forced segregation, racism, and overt discriminatory attitudes took firm hold, and prevailed in every aspect of life. This was not always so. Indeed, as Nevada historian Elizabeth Nelson Patrick explains, "In the teens and 1920s, there seems to have been more of an unsegregated life style [in Las Vegas], more of an easiness in race relations."¹⁷ James R. Brooks also tells us:



Joe Louis, one of the owners of the Moulin Rouge, pulls a slot. (*Nevada State Museum and Historical Society, Las Vegas*)

Overt discrimination did not begin until the late 1930s. Despite the growing importance to the community's infant resort industry, segregation barriers were rising. Across the nation Jim Crow laws were firmly ensconced, segregating schools, railways and public facilities. Visitors, as tourists were commonly referred to, brought with them the expectation and temperament of the nation. Discrimination was a forced issue in Las Vegas.¹⁸

Black Las Vegans, for example, could frequent only the Idle Hour Club, the first black-owned club in the West Las Vegas townsite, established in 1934 and considered the precursor to the Moulin Rouge. But the club was to cater *only* to a black clientele, and not to an integrated crowd, which was considered taboo. In

fact, city commissioners had no problem with granting a license to the Idle Hour Club as long as it was strictly in the black community, and "segregated for black businesses."¹⁹

So, as early as 1934, Las Vegas blacks were unofficially ensconced in the predominantly black part of town, later referred to as the Westside, which "was the onset of the 'colored annex.'"²⁰ This is important to understand, because even before the large influx of black workers at the Basic Magnesium Corporation during World War II, blacks had owned businesses in downtown Las Vegas, and did so until the 1940s. Which is to say, *de facto* segregation later became fully entrenched in Las Vegas. These unfair policies toward blacks extended to local businesses, hotels, restaurants, and casinos. In fact, as Fitzgerald explains, "black entrepreneurs were systematically squeezed out of the downtown area. Several who had operated small businesses there experienced great difficulty in getting business licenses renewed, and those who made application for new licenses were denied."²¹ Hence, as Elliott accurately reports:

Blacks were forced to live in one section of town, and city government, through its licensing powers, forced black businessmen to the "Westside" as well. Black soldiers were banned in white bars and the police commissioners even forced the closing of a "Westside" tavern for catering to an interracial clientele.²²

Although both black and white civil-rights activists vociferously urged integration of casinos, restaurants, and night clubs, black patronage was not enthusiastically accepted, and blacks continued to be denied access and services. In fact, as Michael Coray explains:

Not even the quest for profit was strong enough to include the acceptance of African-American customers in the burgeoning casino industry. Even though casinos accepted the utility of African-American entertainers in attracting white customers, African-Americans themselves, be they "talent" or customers, were barred by casinos until the 1960s.²³

Perhaps the blatant, widespread discrimination and segregationist attitudes, in both the gaming industry and Las Vegas in general, spread—at least to a small extent—from some of the southern whites who also migrated to the area in search of riches and a better life, bringing with them the racist tenets of the Old South, which excluded blacks entirely from genteel society. Indeed, if this was the case, it is no wonder that segregation became the order of the day, that Las Vegas "had quietly acquiesced in patterns of discrimination that effectively denied black citizens any places of opportunity or dignity in the trade unions or professions . . . and had denied them most places of public accommodation and entertainment."²⁴

To be sure, white segregationists created an almost impenetrable barrier to the

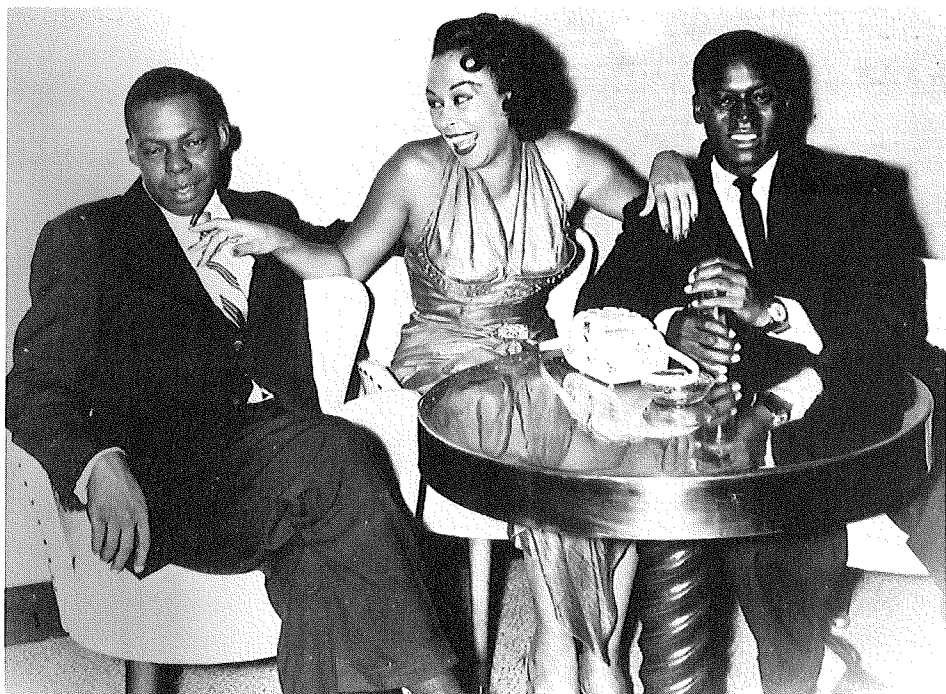
political, social, and economic development of Las Vegas blacks, who "suffered many losses in spite of their efforts to move forward. Not only had they been denied access to jobs on the dam project but they experienced similar difficulties with obtaining work on city, county and state projects."²⁵

Although restrictions in the Las Vegas job market later eased somewhat with the onset of the civil-rights movement, the discriminatory employment practices and limitations on opportunities for blacks on the Strip persisted. The glamorous Moulin Rouge, therefore, was considered a lifeline for "black waiters, cocktail waitresses, dealers, and croupiers [who] came from various parts of the country to work in the club."²⁶

The swanky Moulin Rouge also provided blacks with their place in the sun, a means of survival and a foothold in the entertainment industry in Las Vegas. And because of the equal access it provided, the Rouge "became a symbol of the times, a monument to blacks' expanding civil rights."²⁷ According to Elliott, "the opening of the Moulin Rouge was a transition phase in the civil rights movement between the war years and the 'Great Society' era."²⁸

But it must have rankled blacks deeply when they drove happily into that glittering, magnificent town, only to be unable to attend shows, to stay and gamble at the hotels and casinos of their choice—and finally, to face signs reading "No Colored Trade Solicited."²⁹ So if blacks could not be accommodated in the Strip's hotel-casino establishments, prominent citizens such as Tom Foley, who became the Moulin Rouge's attorney, argued that the eight thousand local black residents of Las Vegas needed a comparable place to go.³⁰ The Moulin Rouge filled the bill—much to the chagrin of the local white establishment—and proved an enormous hit with the jet set, famous white stars and celebrities, high rollers, and especially black entertainers resentful of the unfair treatment that they usually received when performing at white-owned resorts on the Strip, even if they had top billing. Of course, one must recognize that many of those casino owners were merely subscribing to the prevailing countrywide view that racial segregation was the only way to do business. But this adopted strategy or posture was no excuse for the cruelly harsh conditions under which most black people were forced to live in Las Vegas. Indeed, black entertainers were often denied accommodations at the hotels at which they performed, but this was not the case at the Moulin Rouge. "Here the performers could relax, gamble, and socialize. And after their own performance at a [Strip] hotel, they would often come to the [Rouge] and re-create their acts for black patrons."³¹ And other than the private homes on the Westside, the Moulin Rouge provided black entertainers with the city's only refuge, a place to congregate, to lodge, dine, mix, and intermingle with whites or blacks without fear of repercussion.

Moreover, the Moulin Rouge was not like a typical Strip or downtown casino operation, primarily because of its controversial location. The Rouge was not always considered part of the Westside, or the so-called black side of town. According to Fitzgerald,



Stump and Stumpy relaxing at the Moulin Rouge with Rosita Davis. (*Nevada State Museum and Historical Society, Las Vegas*)

The location of the Hotel was very important. It was on West Bonanza Road, which was a kind of line of demarcation between the two. Beyond Bonanza, to the north, there were no paved streets. The city had not seen fit to make those kinds of standard improvements in the Black community in spite of the fact that the residents were taxpayers.³²

Indeed, when the first significant interracial resort was quickly approved and granted a license to operate by the Nevada State Tax Commission,³³ longtime white residents and homeowners along Bonanza, close to the site, declared that the controversial project would lower property values and threaten local schools, as well as "set a dangerous precedent."³⁴ Nevertheless, despite the vehement outcry and protest from local whites, the Moulin Rouge opened as planned.

Even more important, many Strip hotels were later to relax their discriminatory accommodation practices with respect to certain black entertainers—luminaries such as the legendary Sammy Davis, Jr., Eartha Kitt, Pearl Bailey, Harry Belafonte, and Lena Horne—but these exceptions were "in rare cases."³⁵

Consequently, the Moulin Rouge Hotel and Casino quickly became—or was known as—the best late-night entertainment spot in Las Vegas. The fledgling resort also clearly proved that members of an integrated crowd could thoroughly enjoy themselves—face to face—in a social setting or public place without incident, hostilities, or creating a disturbance.³⁶ According to Tom Flagg, "it also

demonstrated to Las Vegas hotel/casino operators that black locals and tourists comprised an untapped market."³⁷

Jazz drummer and Nevada novelist Bill Moody's successful novel *Death of a Tenor Man* accurately describes what perhaps was the usual nightly scene at the Moulin Rouge during its period of greatest popularity. Most of the information about the Rouge came from Flagg's 1991 article, "The Joint Jumped All Night."

That place jumped around the clock, but especially late at night. Once the shows were over at other casinos, everybody came by the Moulin Rouge. People never knew what big names they were going to see at the Rouge. Black and white entertainers who had known each other for years and worked on the same stages found this was the only place they could socialize together. A lot of the hotels would be deserted after two o'clock because everyone was at the Rouge.³⁸

Because of the quality of the outstanding entertainment, such as performances by the Rat Pack in its heyday, the Moulin Rouge had to add a third show to accommodate the growing and demanding crowds. In fact, "the resort became



The can-can dancers at the Moulin Rouge. (*Nevada State Museum and Historical Society, Las Vegas*)

known for its legendary 'third show,' a 2:15 a.m. performance staged and frequented by Strip performers."³⁹ The Rouge was the place to go if you wanted to see such famous white stars as Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Peter Lawford, or Joey Bishop after their gigs and closing hours on the Strip.

To say the least, the initial success of the Moulin Rouge did not go entirely unnoticed by owners of the Strip's white casinos. Wary and jealous, some of them "ordered their employees not to patronize the Rouge."⁴⁰

The Moulin Rouge at that time seemed to flourish, and from all indications it was a complete and overwhelming success, because of or despite the racially mixed clientele. Nonetheless, the famous resort's casino folded unexpectedly, contrary to expectations, within seven months of its opening, forcing the place into calamity and bankruptcy.⁴¹ Why the Moulin Rouge closed has been the subject of much discussion.

For instance, it was reported that the budding resort was "undercapitalized," and that Strip hotel and casino owners "feared implications for their racially exclusive showrooms."⁴² Other reasons cited were casino "skimming" and the increasing pressure from Strip casino owners who were "fearful of its success"⁴³ and thought "the Moulin Rouge was siphoning off business."⁴⁴

Conversely, the initial owners insisted that the Rouge actually suffered from casino losses and "poor management." Finally, there was even talk by the local black population of a white conspiracy. Although it is hard to determine whether any or all of these factors contributed to the first closing of the Rouge, there is no evidence of a conspiracy. As Eugene Moehring explains in *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, "there was no conspiracy; mechanics' liens against the property testified to the fact that Schwartz had not secured enough financing originally to pay all the building contractors."⁴⁵

One thing is also certain: When the Moulin Rouge casino closed in November 1955, it was left in dire straits. The hotel complex, however, which the casino developers owned and leased separately and independently, kept its doors open.⁴⁶ Furthermore, negotiations continued with creditors until 1957, when development company owner Leo Fry bought and reopened the resort.⁴⁷ For some, the transformation and reopening of the Rouge seemed nothing short of miraculous. Sadly, according to Baker, there was no miracle; it was to open and close often.⁴⁸ Rumors also persisted, as early as 1957, that the Moulin Rouge "would be purchased by the Atomic Energy Commission and converted to an office building,"⁴⁹ and as late as 1968 the owner suggested that the Moulin Rouge become "a wing for the Southern Nevada Hospital" of Las Vegas.⁵⁰ The many suggested uses, however, never materialized.

In ensuing years, the Moulin Rouge had many reincarnations, going through painful shake-ups in management, and it continued to face insurmountable financial problems. For example, the City of Las Vegas filed an \$8,703 lawsuit against the Rouge in 1976 for back taxes.⁵¹ Even before this, the whole operation fell out of favor with the local black population, not only because it was a white-

owned establishment, but also because Leo Fry instituted a policy of charging white patrons less for their drinks than blacks.⁵²

Blacks felt, correctly, that overcharging them for drinks was just another blatant example of discrimination. Although the controversial Fry was merely following the lead of the other white owners, who had long condoned segregation and price discrimination,⁵³ it did not make his policies right.

The blacks were not only outraged; they were sufficiently incensed to take action. Making it abundantly clear that they would no longer tolerate such treatment, they prevailed upon the Las Vegas Chapter of the NAACP to defend them against the Rouge and prevent future shenanigans.⁵⁴ The negative perception generated in the community decreased the over-all patronage, which may also have contributed to the casino's financial woes. Blacks no longer frequented the Rouge, or felt an obligation to support it.

Despite his discriminatory pricing, the outspoken Fry held the black population in Las Vegas partly responsible for the decline of the hotel-casino, especially when Mayor Oran Gragson and the city commission voted to revoke Fry's liquor license in 1960, and again in 1961 and 1962, over the incident.⁵⁵ By that time the Rouge did not hold up well against the competition of other similar clubs or casinos, as the ending of racial discrimination in public accommodations, especially for black entertainers, had gradually begun to take place. And this change in racial policies, of course, adversely affected the over-all business at the Moulin Rouge.

However, by his own admission, the disgruntled Fry wanted the hotel-casino industry, and blacks in particular, to know that the Moulin Rouge was always in the business of making money and providing food and entertainment to tourists, "rather than a 'shrine' to racial integration."⁵⁶ But the Rouge became just that, a site venerated by blacks throughout the nation. In fact, the Moulin Rouge became synonymous with the civil-rights movement in Las Vegas, serving as the catalyst for racial integration in Nevada. Indeed, the civil-rights movement and the fight for equal justice for black Nevadans all started with the opening of the Moulin Rouge, as it was interracial and was eventually to spell the end of racial segregation in Las Vegas. Moreover, blacks throughout the country watched with keen interest what was taking place at the Moulin Rouge, as the slow process of integration began to take place in the nation.

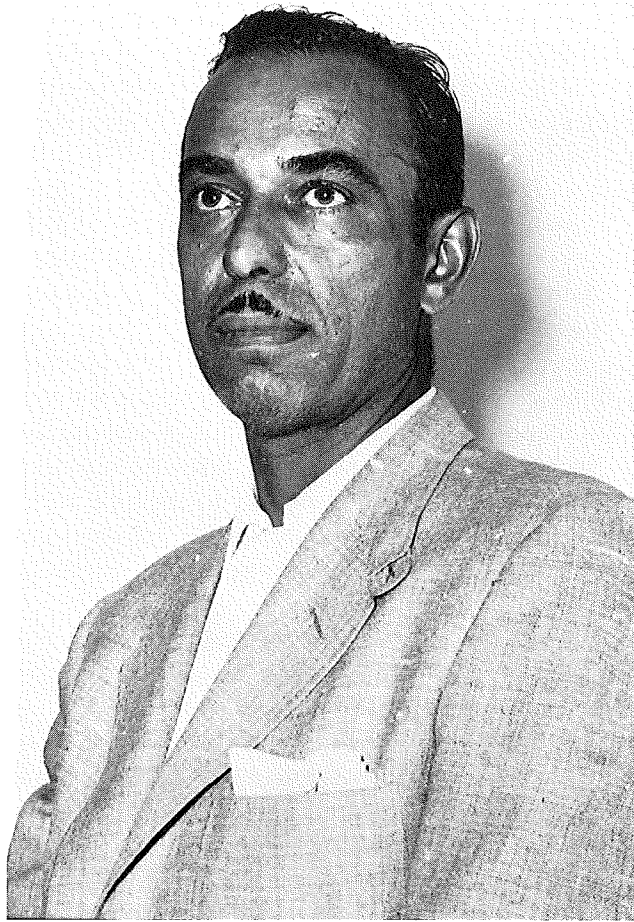
Although many Las Vegas casino owners were intolerant of whites who did mix freely with blacks, and thought of the Moulin Rouge as a competitive irritant, or later as an irrelevant institution that interfered with the real business on the Strip, the resort made history again by becoming, in March 1960, "the site of the signing of an agreement ending segregation in downtown and Strip hotels."⁵⁷ The significance of this major event at the Moulin Rouge should not be overlooked or understated, as the blacks might have demonstrated on the Strip had the agreement not been negotiated.

In fact, the threat of a protest march and demonstrations on the Strip was orchestrated by the NAACP, of which Dr. James B. McMillan, the first black

dentist in Las Vegas, was the branch president at the time; but the demonstrations planned were specifically and carefully organized to be nonviolent, although designed to demonstrate to the nation the discriminatory practices of Las Vegas casinos and restaurants.⁵⁸

The momentous signing of what has become known as the Moulin Rouge Agreement, was mediated by Hank Greenspun, the crusading publisher of the *Las Vegas Sun*, and attended by Governor Grant Sawyer. Also present were prominent members of the local NAACP such as the late Dr. Charles West, the city's first black physician; Dr. McMillan; and other important black activists and leaders in Las Vegas, including Lubertha Johnson, Woodrow Wilson, and David Hoggard, Sr., as well as many other civil-rights advocates.⁵⁹

According to published accounts, the racial atmosphere in Las Vegas at that time was vicious and volatile. The NAACP had indeed threatened to demonstrate against the invisible color line on the Strip and downtown.⁶⁰ However, at the



Dr. Charles West. (*Nevada State Museum and Historical Society, Las Vegas*)

conclusion of this epochal meeting, local black leaders decided not to stage the protest march, and the agreement was reached to end racial segregation officially in all Las Vegas hotels and casinos. This incredible feat, consummated at the Moulin Rouge, was hailed as an important achievement, a symbolic and tangible victory for black suffrage and the civil-rights movement, and one attributable to the brave and bold efforts of the black participants. They successfully fought the establishment on the Strip, where segregation had been "rapidly enforced in Las Vegas from 1947 to 1960,"⁶¹ and won.

Unfortunately, albeit inadvertently, the advent of desegregation devastated black-owned businesses on the Westside, and those who had patronized the Moulin Rouge were no longer limited as to where they could go. To say the least, it was not a good time for Westside businesses, whose entire livelihoods depended on black patrons and support, and the modest Moulin Rouge was no exception. Indeed, it suffered greatly and just as much as other area businesses. At that time, only the Rouge's bar operated with a modicum of success; the showroom, which seats 650 people, remained closed for more than twenty-two years.⁶² Perhaps the disheartened and battered Leo Fry was ready to sell the entire operation.

At that point, the formidable Sarann Knight-Preddey stepped in, together with her husband, Joe Preddey, and her son, James Walker, to rescue the Moulin Rouge from further disintegration and perhaps irreparable ruin. Wisely, they started slowly, leasing the place in 1985. It was at this time that Sarann Knight-Preddey became good friends with Leo Fry, and their relationship developed into mutual trust and respect. Later, with confidence and no small effort in coming up with the approximately \$2-million price tag, Mrs. Knight-Preddey and her family bought the celebrated place, in 1989.⁶³

In addition, as Mrs. Knight-Preddey has recently explained, Fry, the last white owner of the Rouge, admired her business acumen, and she believes that this may be why she was able to buy the struggling Moulin Rouge.⁶⁴ Mrs. Knight-Preddey is not, however, new to the casino business. She has "four decades of casino experience. She's been a card dealer in West Las Vegas and in Reno, a nightclub owner in Hawthorne, California and in Las Vegas."⁶⁵ She is also a fiercely proud and strong woman of varied talents and mixed ancestry, "including White, Spanish, Creek Indian and Black."⁶⁶ It should also be noted that she played an important role in the state civil-rights movement during the late 1950s and early 1960s, allowing leaders of the statewide coalition of NAACP branches to use her club in Hawthorne for strategy meetings because the El Capitan casino would not accept black customers.⁶⁷ Mrs. Knight-Preddey is also the first and only woman of color to receive a gaming license in Nevada, in 1950, and a gambling license for a hotel in Las Vegas.⁶⁸

Perhaps this ownership was always meant to be. The black owners, the first in the hotel's embattled history, are certainly responsible for many of the positive recent developments at the hotel-casino. For example, the Las Vegas City Council

has designated the Rouge as a historic landmark, and it is now on the National Register of Historic Places.⁶⁹ Furthermore, the Council voted unanimously in March 1996 to loan \$3 million of Department of Housing and Urban Development federal funds to the Moulin Rouge for an intended renovation project. Unfortunately, this promised loan does not take care of the accompanying requirement that Las Vegas banks give \$2 million more to the West Bonanza Road resort.⁷⁰ Indeed, somehow, the hotel must come up with another \$2 million for the renovation project, and the "matching funds that would make the Moulin Rouge eligible for federal aid."⁷¹

Furthermore, as late as April 1996, representatives of the Mashantucket Pequot Indian and Las Vegas Paiute tribes expressed an interest in investing in renovation of the historic casino.⁷² It remains to be seen whether this cautious overture will bear fruit, but it may be the final opportunity, as the Nevada Gaming Commission and Gaming Control Board contend, for the struggling Moulin Rouge and its current black operators to realize their dream of making the hotel-casino again renowned an internationally important Las Vegas resort. If the native American tribes eventually do invest in the Rouge, it will be a valiant effort, and may show how two ethnic minorities can come together to compete in Nevada's main industry—gaming.

The long overdue renovation of the 110-room hotel and its 8,000-square-foot casino "will mean approximately 40-65 new jobs, bring tourists to West Las Vegas and provide a glamorous focal point and asset to the community, all of which will be an economic catalyst to the area."⁷³ The remodeling project will also be an important turning point in the resort's history, a symbol of hope. It will not only result in physical improvements, but also present a positive image of a black-owned business in a town that unfortunately still locks blacks out of the mainstream of the casino industry.

For the most part, however, the Moulin Rouge is in a better position than it has ever been. Not only is it expected to generate business in the black community; it could mean that in the future, the distressed area may be revived and injected with new life. Both the downtown Fremont Street Experience and a domed stadium proposed to be built nearby could generate economic effects with a ripple through West Las Vegas.⁷⁴ Or perhaps the black community of the Westside will never really revive. Who can say?

Blacks in Las Vegas still feel some kind of affinity for the Moulin Rouge, and through it all, it will endure. The interior remains almost the same as it did more than forty years ago: The impressive crystal chandeliers, some old gaming tables, the poker pit, original fixtures, and ancient-looking slot machines, as well as the old casino murals depicting can-can dancers against a Parisian background, are all prominently visible.

The Moulin Rouge is a never-ending story, an enigmatic and—like a precious icon—beloved architectural relic that has survived the passage of time. Gary Dretzka, a staff writer for the *Chicago Tribune*, writes that the Moulin Rouge



The famous mural behind the bar at the Moulin Rouge. (*Nevada State Museum and Historical Society, Las Vegas*)

has managed to stay alive this long by becoming a social center for the community and a place where black celebrities felt comfortable hanging out, as well as an atmospheric location for such period Hollywood productions as the movie "Casino" and the TV series "Crime Story."⁷⁵

But the first interracial resort has meant much more. In a profound way, it represents a time and place in which segregation slowly gave way to integration, but not without confrontation. That it has been and can be a social center for the African American community of Las Vegas shows that its controversial past, and racial victories associated with it, can unite a city that often appears to observers and residents to lack a real history. Thus the Moulin Rouge remains in the public eye, because it is still a wonderful mystery that will always arouse fascination and curiosity. Las Vegas was once known as the "Mississippi of the West" because of "its slowness to act against private discrimination."⁷⁶ The story of the Moulin Rouge shows the road traveled, and many of the obstacles along the way. Even if the Moulin Rouge never regains its former splendor, it will live forever in the hearts and minds of those who revere it as a shining star in the darkness of Las Vegas's past.

NOTES

¹Frank Wright, "The Late, Late Show," *Nevada* (May-June 1993), p. 17.

²John L. Smith, "Hidden History of Las Vegas: A True Buried Treasure," *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (15 December 1995), p. 18.

³Gary E. Elliott, "The Moulin Rouge Hotel: A Critical Appraisal of a Las Vegas Legend," unpublished paper, 1.

⁴Roosevelt Fitzgerald, "The Night the Moulin Rouge Opened," *Las Vegas Sentinel* (May 1980), pp. 12–13. There were those of course who did not fancy the idea of breaking down the color barrier or an interracial club in Las Vegas. Katharine Best and Katharine Hillyer explain that "while [the] Moulin Rouge was building and plans being made for an opening that would attract a celebrity-studded crowd of both races, two fiery crosses burned one night out in the nearby valley of Moapa . . . Both crosses were set up near camps employing Negroes, and ignited, so local law enforcement officers stated, 'by three unidentified men.'" Katharine Best and Katharine Hillyer, *Las Vegas: Play Town U.S.A.* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1955), 139.

⁵David Moore, "Editor's Note: Historic Saves," *Nevada* (May–June 1993), 4.

⁶Fitzgerald, "Night the Moulin Rouge Opened," 6.

⁷Alan Balboni, "Southern Italians and Eastern European Jews: Cautious Cooperation in Las Vegas Casinos, 1940–1967," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 38:3 (Fall 1995), 153.

⁸G. E. Elliott, "Moulin Rouge Hotel," 6.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹Fitzgerald, "Night the Moulin Rouge Opened," 12.

¹²G. E. Elliott, "Moulin Rouge Hotel," 6.

¹³Tom Flagg, "The Joint Jumped All Night: The Moulin Rouge: Harbinger of Integration in Las Vegas," *Oasis*, 1:1 (Autumn 1991), 9.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵Chuck Baker, "Moulin Rouge: Are the Lights Brighter on the Other Side of the Street?" *Las Vegas Magazine* (Spring 1996), 26.

¹⁶Roosevelt Fitzgerald, "Evolution of a Black Community in Las Vegas: 1905–1940," *Nevada Public Affairs Review*, no. 2 (1987), 27.

¹⁷Elizabeth Nelson Patrick, "Black Experiences in Southern Nevada," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 22 (Fall 1979), 128; Eugene P. Moehring, in his *Resort City in the Sunbelt: Las Vegas, 1930–1970* (Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 1989), 184, estimates that "16,000 blacks lived in the Westside by 1955."

¹⁸James R. Brooks, "The Proud Sounds of the Past Ring into the Future," *Las Vegas Magazine* (Spring 1996), 26.

¹⁹Baker, "Moulin Rouge," 24.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹Roosevelt Fitzgerald, "The Demographic Impact of Basic Magnesium Corporation on Southern Nevada," *Nevada Public Affairs Review*, no. 2 (1987), 29.

²²G. E. Elliott, "Moulin Rouge Hotel," 3–4; "Vegas NAACP Chapter President Starts Peaceful Sit-ins in 1940's," *Las Vegas Sun* (18 February 1979).

²³Michael Coray, "African Americans in Nevada," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 35:4 (Winter 1992), 251–52.

²⁴James W. Hulse, *Forty Years in the Wilderness: Impressions of Nevada 1940–1980* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1986), 91. Best and Hillyer also write that "when the few Negroes in town were welcome in Las Vegas society, nobody [cared] about the color of the skin, only about personality and ability. When gambling became legal and white men from the south moved in to run the gambling halls, things changed. Many were lamsters one jump ahead of their local sheriffs, but by god they were white. Segregation set in." Best and Hillyer, *Las Vegas*, 137.

²⁵Roosevelt Fitzgerald, "Evolution of a Black Community," 27.

²⁶Mildred M. Wilson, "Entertain Them . . . But," *Nevada Towns and Tales, Volume II—South*, Stanley W. Paher, ed. (Las Vegas: Nevada Publications, 1982), 380.

²⁷Kristi Goodwin, "Putting a New Face on the Past," *Las Vegas Style* (November 1992), 6.

²⁸G. E. Elliott, "Moulin Rouge Hotel," 5.

²⁹Russell R. Elliott, *History of Nevada*, 2d revised edition, with the assistance of William D. Rowley (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 393.

³⁰Fitzgerald, "Night the Moulin Rouge Opened," 12.

³¹Wilson, "Entertain Them," 382.

³²Fitzgerald, "Night the Moulin Rouge Opened."

³³*Ibid.* It may be noted that the Gaming Commission wasn't created until 1959.

³⁴G. E. Elliott, "Moulin Rouge Hotel," 6; Moehring, *Resort City*, 183.

³⁵Flagg, "Joint Jumped," 10. Progressive former Nevada governor Grant Sawyer recalled shortly before his death that "In the early days, the Moulin Rouge was the only such place blacks could go. People like Sammy Davis, Jr., Lena Horne, and others went there to dine and gamble and so forth when they couldn't be seen except on stage anywhere else in town." Grant Sawyer, Gary E. Elliott, and R. T. King, *Hang Tough! Grant Sawyer: An Activist in the Governor's Mansion* (Reno: University of Nevada, Oral History Program, 1993), 99.

³⁶Flagg, "Joint Jumped," 10-11.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 11.

³⁸Bill Moody, *Death of a Tenor Man: An Evan Horne Mystery* (New York: Walker Publishing Company, Inc., 1995), 43.

³⁹Baker, "Moulin Rouge," 27.

⁴⁰"Black Pride: Rich Culture, History Legacy of Southern Nevada Black Community," *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (7 February 1983), 1B. Journalist Kristi Goodwin put it best when she wrote, "the lavish, relaxed, integrated atmosphere along with the stellar clientele drew increasingly larger crowds from the downtown and Strip properties. [And] other casinos definitely felt the competition." Goodwin, "Putting a New Face," 16.

⁴¹Moehring, *Resort City*, 184.

⁴²Baker, "Moulin Rouge," 27.

⁴³Wright, "Late, Late Show," 19.

⁴⁴"Black Pride," 5.

⁴⁵Moehring, *Resort City*, 184.

⁴⁶Baker, "Moulin Rouge," 27.

⁴⁷Moehring, *Resort City*, 184.

⁴⁸Baker, "Moulin Rouge," 27.

⁴⁹G. E. Elliott, "Moulin Rouge Hotel," 8, 13.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 12-13.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 9.

⁵³Moehring, *Resort City*, 184.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁶G. E. Elliott, "Moulin Rouge Hotel."

⁵⁷Marian Green, "Moulin Rouge Denied Grant," *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (16 November 1995), 1B, 2B.

⁵⁸Elmer R. Rusco, "The Civil Rights Movement in Nevada," *Nevada Public Affairs Review*, no. 2 (1987), 76.

⁵⁹Gary E. Elliott, draft introduction to oral history of Dr. James B. McMillan, unpublished, (1996), 4; Baker, "Moulin Rouge," 184.

⁶⁰Baker, "Moulin Rouge."

⁶¹Robin Jenkins, "Moulin Rouge to Reopen," *Indian Voices* (January 1993), 3.

⁶²G. E. Elliott, "Moulin Rouge Hotel"; "Moulin Rouge Hotel Awaits Reopening," *Las Vegas Sun* (8 March 1977).

⁶³Baker, "Moulin Rouge," 28.

⁶⁴Sarann Knight-Preddey, interview by Earnest N. Bracey, 21 March 1996.

⁶⁵Jenkins, "Moulin Rouge to Reopen."

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

⁶⁷According to Rusco, "El Capitan casino in Hawthorne conspicuously excluded black customers until the passage of the federal Civil Rights Act in 1964." Rusco, "Civil Rights Movement," 76.

⁶⁸Baker, "Moulin Rouge"; Nevada State Museum and Historical Society, Nevada Humanities Committee Grant Application Narrative" (no date).

⁶⁹Wright, "Late, Late Show," 17.

⁷⁰Steve Sebelius, "Moulin Rouge Will Get \$3 Million City Loan," *Las Vegas Sun* (7 March 1996), 3B.

⁷¹Caren Benjamin, "Moulin Rouge Celebration Awakens Hopes, Spirits," *Las Vegas Review-Journal and Las Vegas Sun* (17 August 1996), 1B. According to journalist Nichole Davis, talks continue "between the predominantly-black Indian tribe, owners of the Foxwoods High Stakes Bingo Hall and Casino in Ledyard, Connecticut," as the Pequot Indians still want to gain a foothold in the largest gaming state in the nation. Nichole Davis, "Negotiations Heat up at Moulin Rouge," *The Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice* (25 July 1996), 2, 5.

⁷²Marian Green, "Pequots Eye Las Vegas," *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (19 April 1996), 1A. As of August 17, 1996, Sarann Knight-Preddey believes that the Pequots "are focusing on grander and far more expensive plans" that would leave her in a backseat role in operating the Moulin Rouge, but this option has not yet materialized, nor has a permanent gaming license that would make the future preservation plans work. Benjamin, "Moulin Rouge Celebration," 14B.

⁷³Joan Shepard, "City Council Approves W.L.V. Economic Development Plans," *Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice*, 13:20 (10 September 1992), 1.

⁷⁴Baker, "Moulin Rouge," 107.

⁷⁵Gary Dretzka, "Gambling on Tradition," *Chicago Tribune* (6 February 1996), 3. According to Christel Wheeler, the old showroom of the Moulin Rouge is regrettably "barely recognizable as the place where stars of old entertained packed houses," or the place "which hosted some of the hottest parties in town," because the giant room "has become a storage area for cans of paint, old furniture and retired video poker machines." Christel Wheeler, "Don't Look Back: History, Which Never Was a Big Money-Maker Anyway, Faces the Wrecking Ball," *Las Vegas City Life* (29 August 1996), 13–14. It is hoped that the black community will rally behind the planned renovation of the Moulin Rouge—that is, if the financial negotiations with the Mashantucket Pequot Indians are not realized—and one day save the Rouge, perhaps from the wrecking ball.

⁷⁶Rusco, "Civil Rights Movement," 75.

GOVERNOR NYE'S SISTER KATE¹

George P. Nye

There is an old saying to the effect that if life serves you lemons, you ought to make lemonade. That's what Kate Nye did. She even picked some of the lemons herself.

Katherine Sophia Nye was blessed with some of the same abilities as her famous brother James, but her continual struggles met with little worldly success. Part of the reason was her female sex. In the early years of the nineteenth century, opportunities for women were strictly limited. If a woman did not marry, there was little she could do to earn a living except teach school. If she married the right man, she could share in his success. Kate married the wrong man. It was fortunate for her that when she was young she learned something about supporting herself. Her husband brought her many hardships and much disappointment.

Born in DeRuyter, New York, in November 1816, Kate was the eighth of nine children. In those days, in that newly-settled region, education was hard to obtain. Nevertheless, her father made sure that all of his children studied their lessons. Kate later recalled that during one year all but one of the Nye children were attending the local one-room school.

Like her brother James she learned easily, and at first she did not have to apply herself. She could rely on her keen observation and a prodigious memory. She loved to watch people, and she was able to entertain them with mimicry and ventriloquism. One day when the teacher had finished telling her where she had made grammatical mistakes, Kate saucily picked up at the moment he stopped speaking, and gave a good imitation of his harangue. Such daring, no matter how much it amused her friends, had a negative effect later on in her life. Acting on impulse was a liability that her brother James did not share with her, and it frequently damaged her plans.

Although impetuosity gave her problems, her skill with people made her an excellent teacher. She started teaching part-time for 75 cents per week when she was only sixteen. Her father soon declared she was more capable in that role than her brother. With her brother's encouragement, she moved on to the Hull school, where the pupils were so rowdy that they had driven the previous teacher out.

George P. Nye is a descendant of the Governor of Nevada Territory and has published frequently on his family's history. The Spring 1966 issue of the *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* contains an article by this author on James Warren Nye.

There she had to control a large number of "quite grown boys and girls." She did not boast that she controlled them all, but her efforts did earn the lasting gratitude of some of them. She doubtless could have become a renowned teacher if she had persevered in the classroom and improved her own training.

Instead, at age twenty-two, she abruptly married. Her first mention of John Starr, her husband-to-be, had been when the Hull school closed in the spring. She spent that summer keeping house for her invalid mother, planning to learn how to be a good housewife. Her description of her life's companion (written much later) is unpromising, to say the least: "a rich man's son who had been left fatherless at the age of fourteen with just enough money to spoil him. He was fitted for no occupation, as he could go wherever it was most agreeable to him."

The newlyweds optimistically decided to buy a farm. Kate's father had prospered by way of crops and livestock, and she retained warm memories of the comfortable farmhouse the family had shared. Her husband soon tired of farming, however, and after five years they had apparently had to sell all of their land in order to make ends meet. They then headed west and briefly attempted to manage a hotel. In February 1845, Starr went on to Chicago, while Kate returned home for her father's funeral. Her mother had died the year before.

When she returned to DeRuyter, Kate was deeply moved by memories of her happy childhood. Much was still unchanged. The family homestead was hardly desolate. Sister Eliza had kept the home fires burning, caring for their parents. Their schoolmates had scattered, it was true, but the old school was there. Her emotional homecoming inspired Kate to devote ten pages in her journal to recollections of school, old friends, and the first novels she read—*Charlotte Temple*, *Children of the Abbey* and others. She stayed on with Eliza for five years while Starr remained in the West, succeeding at nothing. In DeRuyter Kate belonged to a close-knit, supportive family.² Calling herself "self-supporting," Kate went back to teaching in order to have some income. She allowed an eight-year-old girl she had adopted to stay in the back of the classroom.³ Kate must not have liked this teaching position, for she quit after that one year. Her next move, which she says was motivated by a desire for independence, took her to another town. There she studied "the millinery trade." Once more she did not persevere.

Now Kate headed west. She met up with her husband at Erie, Pennsylvania, where she sought to establish a better understanding with him. His mother had agreed to supply money for their support if Kate would stay with him and make a home for him. In return she wanted him to settle down and become the breadwinner. She attempted this new beginning against the advice of her friends and relatives.

While her husband went East to visit his mother, Kate went to see relatives in Cleveland.⁴ There she was the center of much interest. She helped organize parties and dances and made some new and lasting friendships. At this point Kate started "railroading." With a few interruptions she continued to derive income from the railroad for the rest of her life. Through Starr's brother, she and her



Kate Nye Starr later in life, from the frontispiece of her memoir, *A Self-Sustaining Woman* (Chicago: Illinois Printing and Binding, 1888). (Nevada Historical Society)

husband became the managers of a station eight miles east of Suspension Bridge. She converted the baggage room there into a bedroom, and she felt a little pride in being "the first woman who ever sold tickets on the New York Central." She had broken one of the barriers to female employment.

Since her husband had no talent for keeping the records and accounts, she soon learned how to keep them. She even found errors in the inspectors' reports of how many tickets had been sold. Those errors remained unrecognized by the railroad authorities for two years. When Kate was able to pull her correct accounting out of the safe and hand it to the inspector, she not only demonstrated that a woman could keep the accounts correctly, she caused the railroad to start numbering tickets for the first time. While she was attending to the railroad's business, her husband was gone much of the time, riding, driving or trading horses.

Starr once told her that someone had said she "did not know the difference

between a man getting drunk on three-cent Irish whisky and one who drinks the Queen's brandy." To this she retorted that in drunkenness it made no difference what was drunk, and one advantage of Irish whisky was that it was cheaper.

Kate spoke her mind. In doing so she must have impressed some people and alienated others. To an Englishman who told her that one of her faults was that she was a Presbyterian, she recorded this reply:

I hear that every Sunday you attend St. Paul's church in Rochester, where it is an honor to be seated, with your gold-clasped Bible in your hand, and on Monday morning by eleven o'clock you have drank more brandy coming from Rochester to Niagara Falls than any other man. Now do you want me to tell you what I think of your religion? I think as my old uncle did when his daughter thought she had experienced religion and wished to make a choice of a church. "Father," she said, "I have decided to join the Episcopalians." "That is all right," he answered, "for it takes the least religion to belong to that church, and I don't think you have got any."

This verbal sally is suggestive of the rough-and-ready forensic style of her famous brother James.

An African-American minister of her own persuasion, Presbyterian, chided her with not being "a very great praying woman." She agreed that she was not, but pointed out that the Bible commands mankind to "watch and pray." She said he could do the praying and she would do the watching, and they "could both be employed for the same heaven." She did more than watch. She got people to donate money, provisions and a Sunday-school library for the minister's flock of escaped slaves who had fled to Canada.

She recorded another conversation with a Canadian called Old Happy John, who asked her why she was not going to the camp meeting and "'oller and 'allelujah." She told him she had to mind the railroad station; moreover, she did not care to attend revivals.

Realizing that it was vain to expect Starr to provide any security, Kate began to save for their "funeral expense," as she put it, without telling him. When she could buy something at the market for two cents less than the advertised price, she put the two cents into her savings, and she also stashed away the fifty dollars per year she earned at the Post Office, "the poorest paid and most disagreeable . . . of all positions."⁵ She also "bought Irishmen's time when they were discharged," and purchased a horse for twenty dollars and sold it for fifty. She finally amassed six hundred dollars, and used it later as payment on a 160-acre farm in Clinton, Illinois. A relative had written to her about the opportunity. She later exchanged that farm for a smaller one near the station. There she planted oats and had a barn erected.

In 1861 Kate was 45. That year her brother James was appointed governor of the Nevada territory. When John Starr heard the good news he was eager to go to Nevada too, where he might strike it rich or get an interesting job. He was tired of the railroad. She argued against his notion and "tried to show him how un-

desirable it was to exchange a certainty for an uncertainty . . . when we carried our own hindrances to success with us, that was, ourselves." She could not talk him out of going, however, and perhaps she wanted a little adventure herself, as well as a long-awaited chance to see her brothers. In the Nevada Territory James had been joined by their brother John, a '49-er, and John's son Thomas. She knew it would be an adventure to follow the Oregon Trail, and the cut-off to Salt Lake City. Kate must have heard that countless travelers had perished along that route, but in her narrative she did not dwell upon the dangers. During the preceding summer, for example, an emigrant named Love had been robbed.⁶ The trail, of course, had been gradually improved, even though some people said the ruts had merely become deeper. In her shrewd way, she raised money for the trip by mortgaging the farm and selling the furniture. At the same time she arranged with the railroad superintendent to have the job at the station saved for her.

On June 14, 1862, their horses and wagon were shipped as far as Brooklyn, Iowa (the terminus of the railroad at that time).⁷ This would have been too late in the year if they had been going to the coast. California-bound teams tried to get as far as Independence Rock by the Fourth of July, to avoid the chance of later being entrapped in the Sierra snows. Taking Tamar, an orphan girl recently adopted by Kate, the family traveled by boat to Chicago and by rail to Iowa. There Kate was introduced to Charles Rich, a Mormon apostle. He promised to try to assure their safety. He cautioned that because the Starrs' equipment was excellent, bandits might attack them and take their two wagons.

Starting the long trek, Kate sensed a new danger from Charlie, their driver. He really wanted to go to Idaho, and he meant to ride with the Starrs as far as the place beyond South Pass where the trails diverged.⁸ Kate learned later that Charlie intended to take their wagon and drive off to Fort Boise.

Even in this wilderness Kate found a man who had known DeRuyter and "Squire Nye," and who gave her milk, eggs and bacon. They rafted across the Platte River, and were joined by some returning Californians, one of whom joined their party.⁹ Kate then had the wearying task of cooking and cleaning for five. They were somewhat relieved not to be alone with Charlie, but they watched him night and day. Then they encountered an ox team which happened to be headed for the Idaho area, and Charlie quickly joined that party. Before leaving, he confronted her, wearing his pistol and brandishing a knife. He said he intended to settle some score with her husband, who quickly slipped away to avoid danger. Kate spoke in such a way as to mollify Charlie, assuring him that she was sorry that things had not gone better. Then she gave him some money and wished him well. She never saw him again.

At the Continental Divide, Kate's adopted daughter, who was half Indian, seemed to realize that they were at a high altitude. She asked whether her mother could look down from heaven and see her there. Kate agreed that her mother probably could. This made Tamar very happy. When the wagons reached Fort Bridger, the soldiers there were delighted to see the young girl.¹⁰ Later the party

had a narrow escape from an unexpected danger. Although they were tempted to stop for the night in a sheltered gully where the animals could graze, they decided to camp farther on. The next day they learned that a sudden nighttime shower had sent a raging torrent through that gully.

Soon they joined other teams, including many Mormons. Kate felt very sorry for a group of English women, recent arrivals in America. They had worn out their shoes, and they had to walk barefoot for about a thousand miles. Eventually Kate's party reached Salt Lake City. Pitching their tent on the green, they planned to stay long enough to let their animals rest and graze. They had to disappoint Mormons, who sought to buy sorely needed items from them. From one local woman Kate was delighted to receive cheese and butter.

Kate found a great deal about the Mormon way of life was repugnant to her. She shared a cup of tea with one woman who had not tasted any for five years. The woman said that her husband had been executed without her knowledge, and that after his body had been buried the sexton had dug it up and stolen the suit from it.¹¹

The Starrs were invited to stay with the Shirtliefs, "a family consisting of a husband, four wives and twenty-two children." Wife No. 1 having just died, Shirtlief was in search of Wife No. 5. Wife No. 2 told Kate that she could become Wife No. 5 if she would stay. Wife No. 3, an English girl named Lizzie, confided "There is enough to endure to break a heart of stone." On another occasion a Mormon husband and wife explained that the little girl who was with them was their daughter's child, fathered by their daughter's own father. Kate said she suddenly remembered she had packing to do and left the room. Mr. Starr seemed to be quite taken with the Mormons' marriage arrangements and, perhaps joking, said he might like to stay. Not to be hurt by that, Kate said she intended to go to Nevada to see her brothers, one of whom she had not seen in twenty-four years, but if he wanted to stay, she would help bake his wedding cake.

When it became known that Kate was Governor Nye's sister, Brigham Young visited her, accompanied by his wife, Emeline. He had an escort of six young horsemen, each dressed in gray. As the Starrs prepared to leave Salt Lake City, they were assured that if Nevada outlaws and Southern sympathizers made life too dangerous, the Latter Day Saints were ready to offer them protection and a refuge.

It took three weeks more to reach Carson City. The terrain was in places steep and frightening. When Kate's party was about six miles from their goal, they stopped at "Dutch Nick's" hotel, which had first opened for business the preceding August. There she met Tom, the eighteen-year-old son of her brother John. Tom had ridden out to meet her, and he escorted her party to the capital. In Carson City John greeted her warmly and got her a room in a hotel. Kate decided that he had not changed much, except for the fact that, because he had lived in California since 1849, he "had become very careless in dress." It had been over five months since Kate had started her overland trek.



Carson City in the early 1860s. The site is now the capitol plaza, looking south on Carson Street. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

In a few days, their brother, Governor James W. Nye, returned from speech-making in Sacramento. Kate helped him milk his cow, remarking that milk in Nevada was then a luxury. They enjoyed a Thanksgiving dinner and a partial family reunion. She soon found Carson City "quite gay," and she was invited to many parties. At a ball hosted by J. Neely Johnson, the former governor of California, and his wife, she met the Orion Clemenses and Mark Twain.¹² Her dancing won the approval of everyone, and she was able to give Tom some pointers. When Thomas Starr King came to Nevada to lecture, he stayed with the Nyes. She was deeply impressed with his religious doctrine. Mrs. Clute, who had been her friend on the California Trail, also spent some time at their home, and because Mrs. Clute was from the South, John Nye enjoyed her company very much.¹³

After an eleven-month visit in Carson City, Kate with Tamar set out for the Pacific Coast in September 1863. Her brother John joined them. John Starr remained in Nevada. The Governor, however, did not find Starr qualified for any permanent employment.

The trip to California was filled with new adventures. To alert any oncoming teams, the stagecoach drivers blew horns loudly as they approached blind curves in the road. Whichever team reached a suitable place first would pull off the narrow path. Near Lake Tahoe, where the roadway was covered with evergreen needles, their horses' hooves did not make a sound. Kate was awestruck by the mountain scenery. Each time their carriage met another one, John got out to make



Molly and Orion Clemens. (*Wales Photography, Kekuk, Iowa. Annie Martin Collection. Nevada Historical Society*)

sure that everything was managed carefully, he was so worried that the carriage might tip over. He promised one driver who liked to drink that he would give him a "fine treat" if he would refrain until the end of the trip. It was just sunrise when they reached the Sacramento Valley. Kate was amazed to see so many trees loaded with fruit. Tamar was delighted with the bountiful crop of ripe peaches.

Since the San Francisco newspapers had announced her coming, Kate received many callers. Her pleasant experiences in the city included staying with an old schoolmate there; seeing flowers blooming in December; visiting Chinatown, Cliff House and Seal Point; and spending a night in San Quentin, where prisoners of many nationalities were confined. The female prisoners made much of Tamar. Kate decided that, because the cemeteries were so large, the area must have been settled for a long time.

Leaving San Francisco with regret, she set sail for New York in early February 1864. She was seasick and said she had not suffered that much even while crossing the Plains. After sixteen days, as the vessel approached Panama, the officers had a wild party, celebrating the fact that the Confederate raider *Alabama* had not intercepted them. Kate strongly disapproved of their rowdy conduct. The passengers rode comfortably across the Isthmus and then sailed on to New York, giving Confederate shores a wide berth.

During the winter Kate's husband had come back from the West and sold their farm, without her consent. She had been given "gold enough to pay the mortgage

up'' by her brother James. She decided to challenge the sale of the property, for her signature had not been obtained. She told the judge in a frank manner that she had friends and a brother in high places who would help her pursue any lawsuit that might be necessary. After six weeks she had the farm back. She then sold it and moved with Tamar to Belvidere, Illinois, where she had friends. She mentioned Starr only one more time in her narrative—when they separated for good.

Tamar attended an excellent school in Belvidere, where they remained for eight years. On two occasions Kate went to see Sophronia, her first-adopted child. In 1872, the wife of Kate's oldest brother came from New York City for a visit.¹⁴ At this time a widower who had been a childhood friend of Kate's located her and proposed marriage. At first Kate consented, but when she realized that he saw no need for Tamar to have more schooling, she broke off with him.

Foremost in her mind was Tamar's employment—her Social Security. Kate also expected to find happiness in seeing her daughter succeed. The latter managed to



Elizabeth Cady Stanton. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

learn telegraphy in Syracuse, where Kate met her old friend, the division superintendent. Later on, Tamar was able to train a number of girls to work at telegraphy, some of whom were hired at the age of twelve or thirteen. The division superintendent bragged that he and Kate "could build all the railroads in the United States." However, since in the Midwest there were still few opportunities for female telegraphers, Tamar had to work as a schoolteacher for almost four years.

At one point, when Kate was mistaken for Elizabeth Cady Stanton, she was asked her views on women's suffrage. Kate declared that some classes of people—men and women—were not qualified to vote. Before any man is allowed to vote, she insisted, a committee should determine whether he understands what he is doing.

Near the end of her personal narrative she tells how she strove to find a good position for Tamar. In spite of failing health, Kate did not rest. The search involved moving from town to town and contacting railroad officials that she had known. In 1880, Tamar finally got a good telegrapher's job in Chicago, and Kate found a cottage close by. Kate's sister moved in with them. They continued to live there for eight years, until Kate's death in 1889. Their days were regulated by the whistle of a nearby railroad shop.

The final pages are full of bitter comment about the disproportionate burdens that housewives bear, compared to those of working husbands, who spend their days in a factory, and their evenings, perhaps, relaxing with their friends in the local tavern, like "lords of creation." She fondly remembered how her father used to stay at home with his family after each day's work. It was only natural to idealize him, considering the kind of man she married.

NOTES

¹This account is largely based on Kate Nye-Starr, *A Self-Sustaining Woman* (Chicago: Illinois Printing and Binding, 1888). Parenthetical page numbers refer to this rare book, a photocopy of which was presented to the author. Nye genealogies furnished names and helpful family data. The University of Nevada, Reno, Library has a microfilm copy of Kate's book.

²Almost everywhere she visited or resided she had relatives or friends. Her uncle Charles lived in Utica. Her sister Eliza stayed on for years at DeRuyter. Sister Mary Nye Sears lived in nearby Homer, as did her brother Joseph until his death in 1854. Joseph's son James lived in Chicago. Mary's daughters, Annie Sears Bailey and Mary Nye Sears, lived in Clinton, Iowa. Another of Mary's daughters, Celestia, lived in Janesville, Wisconsin, where Eliza went to live until her death in 1899. In Belvidere, Illinois, Kate found "a number of my acquaintances." In Ames, Iowa, a station agent recalled staying with Kate's "sister in Cortland." Even in San Francisco "an old schoolmate . . . would not think of my staying in a hotel." Relatives of Starr contributed to Kate's support network, also. Through them she and Starr got the railroad job. At Elgin, Illinois, was "a cousin of my husband's" (p. 114) and at Wayne, another cousin. (p. 115) When she returned from Nevada she undoubtedly visited her brother Tom in Brooklyn and with Governor Nye's wife and daughter Mary in New York. How greatly it would add to our story if we had some of the letters that must have passed back and forth!

³The girl was Sophronia, first of three adopted children. She impulsively left Kate to marry a horse thief who abused and slashed her. Later, Sophronia married a good husband. Kate finally found her in Iowa and they became reconciled.

⁴Did Kate not go along because she did not care for his mother? In any case it seems to have been preferable to visit relatives in Cleveland. Was the promised financial help contingent on Starr's going to his mother for a "reading of the riot act?"

⁵Postal service was part of her duties at the railroad station.

⁶*Daily Silver Age*, 15 September 1861, p. 2.

⁷Kate referred to the wagon, a closed conveyance smaller than a Conestoga rig, as an ambulance. In Iowa the party remained for eleven days, purchasing a second wagon, mules, an iron stove and other equipment. Kate's mathematical skill, of which her nephew boasted, was needed in order to figure out how much of every kind of food to buy. She was glad, later on, for a quantity of dried apples she had brought from home.

⁸Idaho was organized into a territory the following March, with Lewiston the capital.

⁹Kate's party had been following the Mormon Trail. By crossing the Platte they joined the Oregon Trail, which ran parallel. Many travelers lost horses, equipment, and even their lives trying to cross the Platte, which was said to be "a mile wide, a foot deep, and no bottom." For a graphic account of the Oregon trail, see Boyd Gibbons, "Life and Death on the Oregon Trail/The Itch to Move West," *National Geographic*, 170:2, (August 1986), 147.

¹⁰Tamar's mother, Mrs. Chew, had been trained for missionary work in Homer, New York, and had later married the Grand Sachem of the Tuscaroras, Tamar's father. When the Grand Sachem died, his widow was left with five children.

¹¹The sexton was later branded and banished for robbing the dead.

¹²Tamar was a welcome playmate for the Clemenses' daughter, who unfortunately died a few years later.

¹³The ex-Southerners preferred to discuss the war with John, rather than Kate. She may have been annoyed, for she remarked that John must not be homesick; he had not gone to see his family in Alabama for thirteen years. John Nye's ability to persuade people was depicted by Mark Twain (with exaggeration, of course). Once, John's party arrived at a station on the East Walker River only to be told there was no room for them and no feed for their horses. No welcoming smile greeted them inside, but before long Nye "found old acquaintances in three teamsters; discovered he used to go to school with the landlord's mother; recognized his wife as a lady whose life he had saved once in California by stopping her runaway horse . . . treated the entire party three times at the landlord's bar; produced a later paper than anybody had seen in a week, . . ." Needless to say, the landlord found accommodations.

¹⁴This was the former Jane Van Valkenburg. She was the widow of Thomas Crocker Nye, who had died in Brooklyn earlier that year. Kate loved her very much.

TIMOTHY FRANCIS MCCARTHY

An Irish Immigrant Life on the Comstock

Ronald M. James

On Nevada Day 1995, the National Register of Historic Places listed the McCarthy House of Virginia City for its historical and architectural significance.¹ Timothy Francis McCarthy, an Irish immigrant who lived in Virginia City for several decades, was part of a large industrial work force. Together with thousands of others, he helped forge the Comstock Lode into a legend of fabulous wealth and remarkable technology. At the same time, he built his house, reared a family, and hoped to find success six thousand miles from his native Ireland.

The National Register recognized the significance of his home as a remarkable survivor that helps us understand the average worker in one of the richest mining districts in the West. The house and documents preserved by the McCarthy family make it possible to piece together a picture of McCarthy and what was probably a typical life on the Comstock.

Timothy McCarthy was born on January 3, 1834, in the parish of Eyeries in Castletownbere township, County Cork, Ireland. This was the only place in Ireland in which there was extensive mining, and many who emigrated from that area traveled to the western United States, where the prospect of employment in hard-rock mining promised a better life than in the East.² In 1853, at the age of nineteen, McCarthy came to the United States in the wake of the potato famine.³ He apparently arrived in Connecticut, but soon relocated to Boston. In 1855, he arranged for his widowed mother to join him in Boston. Surviving documents indicate that Timothy McCarthy became a United States citizen on October 31, 1860. His mother died in 1866 and was buried in Boston.

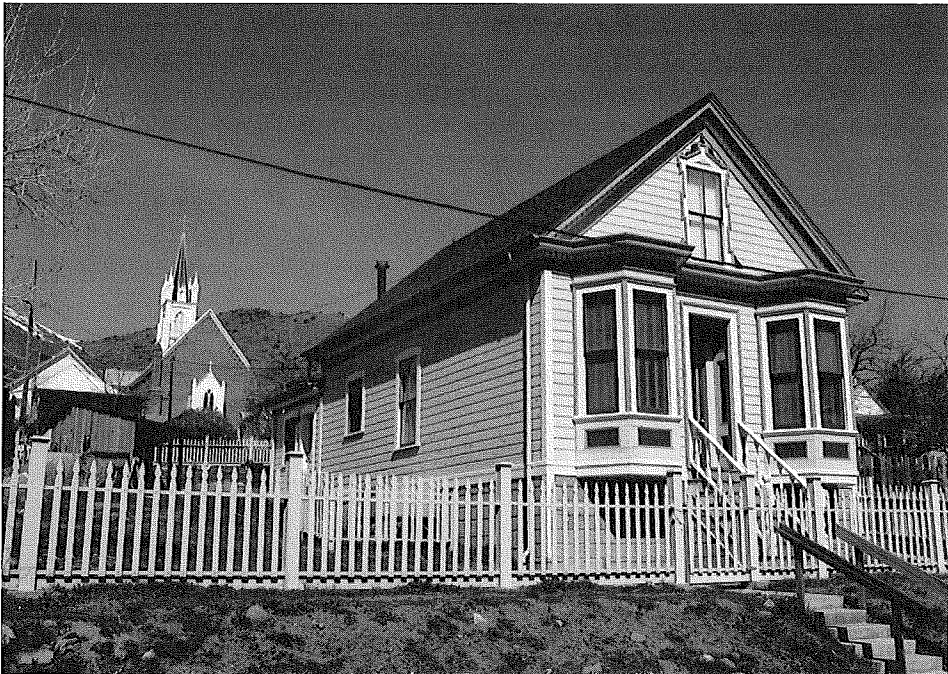
A year later, McCarthy married Mary Dooley, an Irish immigrant living in Boston, and the couple traveled west. Although McCarthy was not a miner, he may have been attracted to the mining West because of links with relatives and friends who had gone there to market their skills. It is significant that later in life McCarthy lived for a while with relatives in Butte, Montana, where a large enclave of immigrants from the same peninsula had settled after the failure of mining in Ireland.⁴ Eventually, the McCarthys moved to Vallejo, California,

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where he worked as a blacksmith for the shipyards. While living in California, they had two children, James, born about 1869, and Robert, born about two years later. In 1872, when it appeared that he could secure employment in Virginia City, McCarthy pursued the opportunity. He soon returned to California, where he worked briefly, but with the intent of moving his family to Nevada.⁵

Among the most significant documents preserved by the descendants of this Comstock family are several diaries that Timothy McCarthy used to record his daily affairs. Reproductions of these records are preserved by the Comstock Historic District Commission. Two of the diaries record the years 1868 and 1872. Although the third bears the date 1889, it appears that McCarthy used this diary to document events in subsequent decades, near the end of his life. Most entries record wages, expenses, and attendance at mass and confessional. These notations indicate a life of hard work, frugality, and piety, but a few comments, together with other documents, provide additional details concerning McCarthy's life on the Comstock.

The 1872 diary documents the arrival of the McCarthys in Virginia City, and it offers a comprehensive look at a year in the life of a Comstock laborer. Although McCarthy worked for various Comstock foundries throughout the year, he occasionally sought employment at a local mine. The entry for July 29, for example, records the unusual nature of an assignment underground: "I have been down in



The McCarthy house in Virginia City. (Courtesy Bernadette S. Francke, Comstock Historic District Commission)

the Savage Shaft this day to the 1000 foot level." Ordinarily working six days a week, he rarely earned more than four dollars a day. McCarthy notes several times that he was not able to attend mass on Sunday, and his diary suggests that he was needed at work. On days of illness, he earned nothing.⁶

McCarthy paid eight dollars per week for room and board at a Mr. Randolph's facility on South C Street while he established himself in Virginia City. His stay there, however, was brief, since he was soon able to retrieve his family from California. His wife was again pregnant. The family arrived in Virginia City in August 1872, McCarthy securing employment again at the Savage Mine. They moved into an establishment that cost twelve dollars per month for lodging. Given the low amount, this probably did not include board as well.

In September, McCarthy began to record the final days of his wife's pregnancy. On September 15, he noted that "no mass this day . . . Mary have been very sick this day . . . Doctor Berthier visit this night . . . 10 dollars paid." The following day, McCarthy noted that he worked only half a day, and that two other doctors came to see his wife, one visiting twice. A doctor visited each of the following four days, and then on September 21 assisted by yet another doctor, Mary gave birth to a daughter, who was probably stillborn. The baby was buried the next day. Over the following two weeks, several doctors visited Mary who clearly was not recovering from her labor. At times, doctors visited four times a day, and then on October 6, her struggle ended. McCarthy recorded that "My Dear & loving wife Departed this life at 10 minutes after 2 in the morning. May her soul rest in peace . . . amen." The following day, an undertaker took her body and placed it in storage for over a month. On November 1, All Saints' Day, McCarthy recorded that Mary's soul took flight to heaven at 1:30 p.m. Perhaps he had purchased a mass in her honor, or perhaps he may have believed that this had occurred simply because of a longstanding Irish belief that November 1 was a special day of grace. Presumably under the counsel of his priest, McCarthy recorded that Mary's soul would be in heaven "at 20 minutes to 2 o'clock p.m." It was a sincere declaration grounded in profound faith.

Two weeks later, McCarthy escorted the corpse of his wife on a seven-day trip to Boston for burial next to his mother. A family tradition maintains that Mary had asked that she not be buried on the Comstock, preferring instead the East Coast. He returned in December, resuming work at the Savage Mine and taking up board once again at Randolph's facility at South C Street. Without his wife, McCarthy had to resume paying for his meals. McCarthy entrusted his sons, one of whom was still an infant, to the care of a convent in Grass Valley, California.

Eventually, McCarthy decided to build a house. Perhaps he also wished to establish himself in a proper domestic setting with the hope that he could attract a new wife and reclaim his sons from the sisters' orphanage. He purchased a lot in February of 1875. It was some of the last open space near the core of Virginia City to be developed. The block on I Street had served Conlan's Milk Ranch, and before that it was known as Steel's Hay Yard. The property had probably been



Blacksmiths working at the C & C Shaft, Virginia City in the 1880s. Timothy McCarthy is on the left. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

home for one of several dairies and feed lots that provided the large Comstock community with fresh beef and dairy products. By 1875, at the peak of the district's population and prosperity, inflated property values apparently made the sale of real estate for more intensive development irresistible to the rancher.

McCarthy was one of several would-be homeowners who bought into the block hoping to build places to live. The block was next to neighborhoods that had long histories of Irish occupation. Significantly, most of the other owners of lots in the block had Irish last names.⁷ The 1880, Tenth United States Census shows that the block continued the easterly sprawl of the Irish neighborhood down the hill.

McCarthy sent for Robert Dwyer, a nephew who was a carpenter, to assist in the construction of his house. This request followed a pattern commonly found among immigrants, who often used employment opportunities as a means to help other family members relocate. A friend from Cork, Denis Crowl, apparently traveled with Dwyer and may have helped with the construction of the McCarthy House.⁸



Robert Dwyer (*John McCarthy Collection. Nevada Historical Society*)

Associated with Dwyer's immigration is one of the most remarkable documents in the McCarthy collection: a photograph of a young man taken in Boston which had long remained a family mystery. An inscription on the back was indecipherable and so unable to identify the individual depicted, the family merely assumed that he was a relative. The inscription is in Gaelic, using the characters of the now-seldom-used Irish alphabet. The text, transliterated, is as follows: "A dhearbhrathair dilis ma mhathar ionmhaina, Taidhg; is me mac do dhearfear—Riobard." The translation reads: "To Taidhg [Timothy], the dear brother of my beloved mother; I am the son of your sister—Riobard [Robert]."⁹

This photograph perhaps served as a letter of introduction from Timothy McCarthy's nephew as he arrived in Boston and looked for work. The image, now identified and properly understood, is unusual because it is a rare image of a nineteenth-century Nevada builder. In addition, it is the only known nineteenth-century example of the Irish language in Nevada. It is significant that Robert Dwyer, who came to the Comstock to work for his uncle, felt more comfortable writing in Irish than in English. One can imagine the two immigrants from

County Cork, uncle and nephew, conversing in the Irish language as they worked on the house. That they perhaps preferred the Gaelic forms of their names, Taidhg and Riobard, was, like their language, a clear statement of ethnicity. This of course rendered the inscription on the back of the photograph all the more unintelligible for subsequent generations who would know these ancestors only as Timothy and Robert. And here we can see the process of assimilation in the descendants, the other side of the ethnic coin.

The house that McCarthy and Dwyer built in 1875 is a vernacular one-and-a-half story, wood-framed structure with shiplap siding and a steeply pitched roof with a front-facing gable. The symmetrical, three-bay front façade has two slated bays with windows. The gable window has ornate surrounds. The house has a boxed cornice and frieze, eave returns on the rear, and a pedimented gable with dentils on the front façade. Straight exterior stairs lead to a paneled vestibule and a four-panel door with a transom.

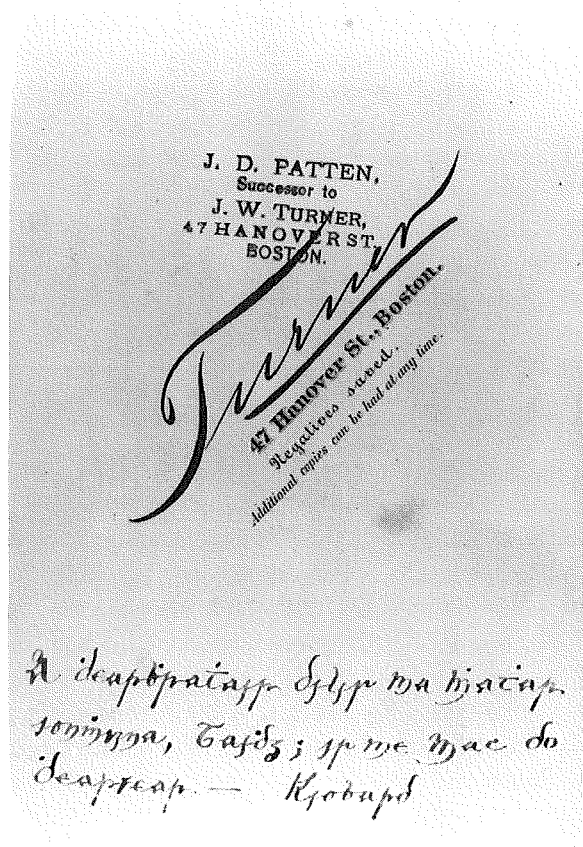
The interior includes a central hall with a stairway at the rear. There is a front parlor on the left and a bedroom on the right. An additional bedroom stands at the rear of the hallway on the left, with the kitchen to the rear on the right. Originally there was a small corner bedroom reached from underneath the stairway. This was subsequently converted to a bathroom in 1986, during rehabilitation carried out by John E. McCarthy, present owner and grandson of the builder. A small addition, designed in keeping with the character of the original structure, was added to the rear in 1987. Restoration of the second-story interior was not finished until that same year. The interior retains the original wainscoting throughout, with doors and trim in faux bird's-eye maple, achieved through graining.

The outbuildings include an original nineteenth-century outhouse and adjoining woodshed. John McCarthy moved this structure twelve feet to the west and twelve feet to the south to make way for the 1987 addition. The outhouse is now a tool shed.

Surviving documents detail the materials and costs associated with the original construction. Work apparently began in March of 1875 and was completed in August. It appears that McCarthy paid \$784.55 for lumber. An additional \$115.05 was needed for paint, wall papers, and other wall treatments, \$36 for doors, and \$18 for windows. To the Lonkey and Smith Mill and Mining Timbers Company McCarthy gave about twenty dollars in interest to carry his account, which he paid off within a year of beginning construction. Moving his furnishings cost \$10.¹⁰

Virginia City, noted for its mansions and its millionaires' row, was also home to thousands of wage-earning workers. The McCarthy House remains as one of the best preserved examples of what were once the hundreds of smaller, yet clearly distinguished domiciles that provided shelter and comfort for this enormous work force.

If Timothy McCarthy's intent was to attract a wife with his new house, his



Riobard Dwyer's Gaelic inscription on the back of his photograph. (John McCarthy Collection. Nevada Historical Society)

strategy worked. Before the end of the decade, he married another daughter of Ireland, Frances Dillon, roughly twenty-five years his junior. With a family re-established, McCarthy was able to retrieve his sons from the orphanage in California, providing them once again with a stable home life. A daughter, Mary, was born about 1879 and a son Timothy J., was born in 1881. By 1880, McCarthy was also providing a room for his older brother James, who was also a blacksmith.

In all, this was a modest house for Timothy McCarthy, his wife, and four children. John McCarthy relates stories that his father, Timothy J., who was better known as Joseph, told him of how the patriarch of the family had discouraged his son from playing in the neighborhood. The father of the household, nearly fifty years older than his youngest son, was concerned that his child might hurt himself if he were allowed to associate with the gangs of young men who roamed freely about the mining district.¹¹ Young Joseph subsequently chose the diversion

of spending many hours playing alone in the unfinished, dirt-floored crawl space under the house. There is clear evidence of a loving relationship between the son and his parents, however: Joseph at age seventeen wrote in his diary that he had come to love his mother "better every day and can now appreciate what she had done for me." And of his father, Joseph wrote that he was "a stern, just man."¹²

In 1902, Frances Dillon McCarthy died. Nine years later and at the age of seventy-eight Timothy McCarthy returned to Boston to visit the graves of his mother and first wife. In 1914, he moved to Jerome, Arizona, to live with his youngest son. He died four years later, and the house remained unoccupied but in family possession for the following seventy years. McCarthy's life had been one of quiet piety and hard work. His legacy survives in the records he kept and the house he built.

Robert Dwyer's story ended in Ireland in 1900. He had returned to Boston and then finally to Ireland where he died at age fifty-five. Denis Crowl, his traveling companion, became a priest. Standing by Dwyer's grave in Filedarrig Cemetery, County Cork, Father Crowl composed a poem called "Riobard," dedicated to his friend and the memory of their American adventure:

I envy thee they lot, Riobard,
In consecrated earth.
Thou sleepest 'neath the shamrock sward
In thine own land of birth.
And after years of exile spent
Far in the Golden West
Thy motherland doth fold thee fond
To her enraptured breast.
Those song-birds dearly loved in youth
Make vibrant all the air;
The flora of the sunny South
Is round thee everywhere;
And the river of the valley
We roamed when young and free—
The "Kista"—chants thy requiem ere
It murmurs to the sea.¹³

McCarthy's grandson, John McCarthy, moved into the property with his wife in 1986, installing electricity and plumbing. They removed a stucco finish that masked the original south wall of the structure, milling lumber to match deteriorated original siding where needed. For the most part, the McCarthys have kept the house intact, giving hope that this remarkable structure will survive to help future generations understand the everyday life of a Comstock worker.

NOTES

¹Some of the text presented here is from Ronald M. James and John E. McCarthy, "McCarthy House: Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places" (1995). My thanks to Mr. McCarthy for his

assistance with this article and for making documents available to the Comstock Historic District Commission, Virginia City.

²See David M. Emmons, *The Butte Irish: Class and Ethnicity in an American Mining Town, 1875–1925* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 14–15. Daphne du Maurier's, *Hungry Hill* (Philadelphia: Blakiston, 1944) is based on these Irish mines.

³See Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁴Emmons, *Butte Irish*, 15–16.

⁵*Brockton Enterprise* (Brockton, Massachusetts) 31 August 1911, clipping from the papers of the McCarthy family; copy on file at the Comstock Historic District Commission Office. Census data on the place of birth of McCarthy's children indicate he was in California in 1869; this is confirmed by his diary, which places him in San Francisco in early 1868.

⁶McCarthy's rate of pay contrasts with, for example, the six dollars a day that Mary McNair Mathews, another Comstock diarist, claimed her blacksmithing brother earned. Mary McNair Mathews, *Ten Years in Nevada* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1982), 35. Mathews also discusses mobility (p. 59), particularly on traveling between the Comstock and the Bay area.

⁷These include Doyle, Finlen, Desmond and two different Sullivans. The two exceptions are Marionni and Martinoni. See the record of sale for Block 130, Storey County Recorder's Office. On the Irish neighborhood, see Ronald M. James, Richard D. Adkins, and Rachel J. Hartigan, "Competition and Co-existence in the Laundry: A View of the Comstock," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 25:2 (Summer 1994), 164–184; Ronald M. James, "Defining the Group: Nineteenth-Century Cornish on the Mining Frontier," *Cornish Studies*, 2, Philip Payton, ed. (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1994).

⁸On Irish immigration, see Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*. And see Ronald M. James, "Erin's Daughters on the Comstock: Building Community," in *The Other Side of Bonanza: Women on the Comstock* (in press), Ronald M. James and C. Elizabeth Raymond, eds. (Reno: University of Nevada Press). For information on Denis Crowl and his association with Dwyer, see Riobard O'Dwyer, "The O'Dwyer/Dwyer-McCarthy Connection," (1996) a manuscript on file at the Nevada Historic Preservation Office.

⁹Special thanks to Dennis "Dinny" Healy for assistance with transcribing and translating the text.

¹⁰There was at least one additional door billed as lumber to Lonkey and Smith. Exact totals are problematic, but surviving paperwork provides considerable detail. See the files of the Comstock Historic District Commission.

¹¹See, for example, John Taylor Waldorf, *A Kid on the Comstock: Reminiscences of a Virginia City Childhood* (Palo Alto: American West, 1968; rpt. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991).

¹²Entry for 29 July 1898, Joseph McCarthy diary, copy available at the Comstock Historic District Commission Office.

¹³O'Dwyer, "The O'Dwyer/Dwyer-McCarthy Connection," 10–11.

BOOK REVIEWS

Earthtones: A Nevada Album. Essays by Ann Ronald. Photographs by Stephen Trimble. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1995, 120 pp. with 67 color photographs.)

"For many people, ongoing aridity connotes monotony. Yet I object to an easy label that tags the Great Basin inaccurately. While it is true that aridity counters conventional notions of what makes a place attractive, it is equally true that dryness generates beauty of its own." So writes Ann Ronald in *Earthtones: A Nevada Album*, essays about the Great Basin augmented by spectacular color photographs by Stephen Trimble. These three sentences penned by Ronald capture my personal reasons for adopting Nevada as my home. There is, in my opinion, no more striking, natural beauty than that of the Great Basin.

In the context of growing up, I had no real homeland, having been an Air Force brat. In that context, I called numerous places home: Fairfield and Napa, California; the Azores; Lubbock and San Angelo, Texas; Phoenix, Arizona. As an adult, I migrated from Seattle to Reno; to Tucson; on to San Francisco; then transferred to Montcoal, West Virginia; there back to Tucson; then to my first faculty appointment at the University of Missouri, Rolla; and finally, my lust for the Great Basin again fulfilled as I returned to Reno. I can say firsthand that the most unsightly of these homes was that of Montcoal, West Virginia, where lush, deciduous forest is horribly scarred by the remains of strip mines. Whole hills have their tops forever isolated as landlocked islands, surrounded by strip mines that followed horizontal coal seams completely around the topographic knolls. And Easterners call Nevada a wasteland? Obviously, they have never experienced the beauty of cactus flowers at the Nevada Test Site.

At one time, I considered Arizona the most beautiful place on [my limited notion of] Earth. Its White Mountains, Oak Creek Canyon, and Prescott are my favorites. Arizona, however, differs from Nevada in two important aspects. For one, its national parks and monuments are world-famous, well known by Hollywood and everyone else, and its landscapes are judged to be most beautiful by those who take the time to look. Second, Arizona's basin-and-range topography predates that of Nevada to the extent that Arizona's basins, because of erosion through thousands of millennia and extinct tectonism, have exterior drainage, their soils are therefore nonalkaline. Whereas Nevada appears stark, barren, and

consequently foreboding because of its alkaline soils, in contrast Arizona appears lush and inviting. Moreover, Arizona long ago abandoned its mining heritage, a political fallout from the burgeoning population of Phoenix with little sister, Tucson, not far behind. Prescott is little more than an afterthought, once having been the capital of the forty-eighth state. In one of her *Earthtones* essays, Ann Ronald refers to the publication, *Arizona Highways*. I cannot help but wonder if she, too, pondered these notions.

Ronald's essays much more vividly put into words the beauty that is Nevada than any issue of *Highways* does for Arizona. Moreover, in my opinion, there is more beauty to be found in Nevada than in the Grand Canyon State—one simply must work harder to get at it. Proving that this statement is true is one of the real accomplishments of *Earthtones*.

I had the pleasure of reviewing Ronald's text prior to publication, a process wherein I lacked access to Trimble's photographs. Ronald writes so vividly, though, that one can easily picture what she is describing, especially for readers with some familiarity with Nevada's natural history. When I finally encountered Trimble's pictures when reviewing the actual published text, I was quite filled with awe—that what I pictured in my mind's eye when reviewing Ronald's text appeared before me sixty-seven different times. Ronald and Trimble acknowledge in their foreword that their collaboration was loosely coordinated. I judge their final product to be quite remarkable in light of this statement, a perfect complement between text and photograph. As an aside, my interest in photographs of texture causes me to be most fascinated by two photographs, one of ponderosa pine bark on page 71, and the other of rusted cans on page 92.

In her essays, Ann Ronald so correctly observes the impact humans have had on the Great Basin. Pyramid and Walker lakes are dying. True, this is largely a natural phenomenon as the Great Basin is still recovering from the last ice age, a climatic event that ended a geologically mere 10,000 years ago. But, diversion of Truckee, Carson, and Walker river water for agricultural development further robs these lakes of what little water is naturally available. As noted by Ronald, Pyramid Lake was tens of meters higher when, in 1844, John Frémont first observed it. Introduction of sheep and cattle into Nevada's basins has likewise altered delicate grass and shrub ecosystems and polluted local streams. I get a sense from Ronald's essays that she laments the loss of Nevada's natural virginity to human intervention. Does she too recognize the lesson that is Arizona?

Titles of Ronald's essays comprise all possible Nevada keywords: colors, water, basins, ranges, ghosts, and treasures. Nevada is the most arid of the fifty states. Its topography is labeled basin-and-range by geologists and geographers; the tectonic processes responsible for this topography remain active. Nevada wrestled itself away from the Utah territory by virtue of its Comstock and other wealth, and these miners of yesterday are the ghosts that still share beers in saloons long since gone. Perhaps unfortunately, there are still treasures to be found by miners who still have not evolved technology to extract ore without

moving many tons of ground. No Nevada color is more vivid than that of the Red Rocks west of Las Vegas. These vivid sandstones have not gone unnoticed by Hollywood, casting them as the backdrop to many movies, including the opening five minutes to *Romancing the Stone*. Maybe the Red Rocks are ruined in an Arizona sense and should have been ignored in these essays. Ronald properly relegates Lake Tahoe to nothing more than a brief aside. *Earthtones* is much more valuable a collection of Nevada subtlety.

Stephen Trimble opens *Earthtones* apologetically with the following offer: "I am not a technically oriented photographer. I make mistakes. I bracket exposures for every photo and edit my slides fiercely. I believe in a line that appeared years ago in an interview with Steve Crouch: Asked what piece of equipment was most crucial to his work as a professional photographer, he replied, 'My wastebasket.' " May we all find a lesson in Trimble's humility.

Ann Ronald, whereas a professor of English, clearly finds geological notions compelling. As a geological engineer, I find her words about geology not only competent, but remarkably insightful; her ironic portraits of Pyramid and Walker lakes are notable examples. Also, Ronald's words about shivering through a Nevada episode of precipitation will be best appreciated by those readers having hypothermic memories.

Finally, it is again my opinion that Ronald and Trimble have collectively yielded a literary contribution that surpasses for Nevada what is accomplished for Arizona by *Highways*. But, this causes me considerable trepidation. As a boy, my mother, father, and brother helped me find fire agate near Saddle Mountain west of Phoenix, and Apache Tears and geodes near Wickenburg. This wasn't that long ago—1972. Maybe the geodes still lie exposed near Wickenburg, but Saddle Mountain now lies on the western perimeter of incorporated Phoenix; fire agates are covered forever beneath streets and homes. I have seen Arizona changed forever by, as Paul McCartney sang, "Too Many People." Each set of human footprints over natural terrain causes change. Imperceptible? One is reminded of Jules Henri Poincaré's remark made last century, paraphrased here: Small changes today produce very great changes in the future. Writing this, I now realize that *Earthtones* is truly a remarkable, valuable and historic tome.

James R. Carr
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A Wolf in the Garden: The Land Rights Movement and the New Environmental Debate.
Edited by Philip D. Brick and R. McGregor Cawley. (Lanham, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996, x + 323 pp., map, index.)

Any one concerned with the myriad of problems and debates surrounding the

public lands in the West will welcome this collection of twenty essays. They update the ideological struggles over the public domain that generally prevail between the new urban West and the old West. Nevadans in particular may note that their state is a focus of public land controversies dating back to early grazing questions, the late Sagebrush Rebellion, and now something called the Wise Use Movement. This should come as no surprise because of the rapid development of urban Nevada and the long shadow of change that it has cast over the traditional natural resource economies of mining and ranching in the state.

According to the editors, Phillip D. Brick and R. McGregor Cawley, the Wise Use Movement is the new wolf in the garden of the American West. But this new movement has taken on sheep's clothing in pursuing the means to its ends. The Wise Use Movement portrays itself in the utilitarian spirit of the original conservation movement at the beginning of the century, which the first Chief of the Forest Service, Gifford Pinchot, spearheaded. Pinchot knew that to win the West for conservation and the idea of permanent government forestry reservations (National Forests) Westerners must be assured of access to and use of resources in timber, water, grazing, and mining. His message: conservation was merely the wise and efficient use of resources rather than squandering them under systems of unregulated exploitation. Wise scientific management of resources was necessary on public lands and could serve as an example to private land holders. But herein is the rub. Today resource management agencies (i.e., the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management) try to carry out environmental protection policies and programs that Wise Users denounce as invasions of private property rights. They attack today's conservation agencies as betrayers of the original conservation movement and tools of an environmentalist ideology.

The Wise Use Movement gathered its followers in Reno at a "Multiple Use Strategy Conference" at John Ascauga's Nugget in 1988. The gathering as one observer declared had been "gestating more than a decade in the bosom of those who had been most wounded by environmental ideology." Represented were "a hodgepodge of property-rights groups, antiregulation legal foundations, trade groups of large industries, motorized-recreation-vehicle clubs, federal-land users, farmers, ranchers, fishermen, trappers, small forest holders, mineral prospectors, and others who live and work in the middle landscape." (p. 18) An opening essay by Sam Arnold of the Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise in Bellevue, Washington sees all of this as a grass roots reaction to the successes of the environmental movement, which he identifies as a "skulking wolf" in three forms: (1) establishment interventionists (2) eco-socialists and (3) deep ecologists. All pose a threat to private property rights and traditional American liberties. He sees the Wise Use Movement and another group, People for the West, as a long-overdue effort to defend the property rights of workers and businesses who depend upon the natural resources of the public lands to make their living. Both sides appropriate the image of the wolf to identify sinister forces at work in the western landscape.

These essays present the problem, debate it, and put forth some solutions. The editors ultimately call for cooperation among environmentalists, traditional commodity user groups, local government, and federal agencies. One visionary contributor, Karl Hess, Jr., calls for a complete rethinking of the public lands under federal administration. He urges the creation of self-governing small communities in the West to make resource-use decisions in well-defined geographical and ecosystem regions. This would place decision making at the local level in order to lend diversity to a process that must administer different natural environments in different ways. Nevadan Graham Chisholm cautions against too much optimism in the search for solutions to resource use problems. As Nevada Special Projects Director for the Nature Conservancy, Chisholm has devoted much energy to the distribution of scarce Truckee River water to various users including the Stillwater Wildlife Refuge marshes in northern Nevada. In spite of long hours and endless negotiations the successes might only be probable. He believes non-governmental organizations (NGO's) like the Nature Conservancy must become full community participants and citizens to be taken seriously by others in the local community. His essay is cautionary and far from visionary.

The editors of this work deserve recognition for the range of opinion and viewpoints brought together under this cover. In the end, however, they do tip their hand gingerly in favor of public land reform toward a free market approach to resources. In these chants we often hear about the rationality of the market compared to the bungling ineptitude of bureaucratic administration. The wonderful rationality of the market as a solution to both environmental concerns and commodity user designs is appealing, but the operation of natural laws of economics or any other natural law that operates according to a rational system of decision-making often falls into the disintegrating traps of human irrationality that no system can readily explain or predict. In short, the questions raised here are intriguing. All of this intellectualizing possibly presages some serious changes in the proprietorship of western public lands.

William D. Rowley
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A Conspiracy of Optimism: Management of the National Forests Since World War II. By Paul W. Hirt. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994, liv + 416 pp., illus., appendix, notes, references, index.)

While there is plenty of conspiracy, there is little optimism in Paul W. Hirt's *A Conspiracy of Optimism: Management of the National Forests Since World War II*. From an agency admired and respected by both scholars and the public only a few decades ago, the United States Forest Service is currently rife with internal dissent

and external suspicion. In this volume, Hirt attempts to explain how the Forest Service fell so far, so fast.

Prior to World War II, 95 percent of the United States' wood needs were satisfied by timber from privately-owned lands. With the increased demand for lumber arising out of the war, the Forest Service moved from its traditional custodial role to one of raw materials supplier for the lumber industry. The end of the war only increased demand for lumber. Joining the post-War optimism spawned by American science and industry, the Forest Service enthusiastically embraced the raw materials exploitation mission that arose in the euphoria at the end of World War II.

If the whole country was optimistic, few federal agencies were more so than the Forest Service. With most of the privately-held timber cut and the increasing need for lumber to build suburbia, the Forest Service accepted the challenge of the government's declared housing emergency and opened more and more acreage to timber sales. At the same time, a parallel increase in non-commodity use of the forest developed. No longer were the only occupants of the National Forests lumberjacks and ranchers. Instead, more and more people were using the forests for recreation. These vacationers were concerned with protecting the forests, rather than forest product production.

To meet post-war lumber needs, the Forest Service increased its dependence on science to achieve ever larger cuts. To do this the Forest Service and forestry schools developed systems of intensive management designed to yield ever more board feet within the constraints of the concept of sustainable yield, a management strategy that restricts the amount of timber cut to the amount that can be replaced. By combining sustainable yield with intensive management, the Forest Service thought it could produce ever greater amounts of lumber while not cutting trees faster than they could be replaced. This was done by putting "science" to work to produce more trees faster and more efficiently. As timber technology, road construction methods and market conditions changed, the Forest Service found itself able to continually increase the number of board feet obtained from its forests. Eventually, the drive to increase output resulted in what Hirt identifies as a deepening conspiracy within the Forest Service to choose only the most optimistic of alternatives when preparing plans for timber cutting. Congress endorsed and rewarded this optimism by increasing Forest Service timber-sale budgets. As Hirt notes, other budget areas, such as restoration, did not fare as well. Staff from the two organizations reinforced each others' flawed thinking until the environmental revolts of the 1970s challenged the conspiracy of optimism.

Hirt does a thorough job of outlining his argument and using to good effect the Forest Service's own documents, as well as a wide range of primary and secondary literature to bolster his case. But his argument remains somewhat circular. Hirt suggests that the overly optimistic use of science can be mitigated only by use of proper science, i.e., science that does not get caught up in the politics of the day; not a very reassuring conclusion as science never operates in a vacuum. That

a federal agency might get swept up in Congressional politics to its benefit, but the resource's detriment, is an ongoing problem only recently analyzed. But Hirt's interest is in explaining how the Forest Service, all the while believing it was following the proper scientific course, ended up in such disarray rather than elaborating a solution. Unfortunately, by focusing on the post-War period exclusively, Hirt neglects the creation and long history of the Forest Service as a commodity agency. The underlying concern of the Forest Service has always been commodity management rather than forest management. It has consistently been responsive to industry, perhaps excessively so. Prior to World War II, industry didn't want the Forest Service to sell its timber, thereby keeping prices high for privately-owned timber. That the country did not need timber from national forest lands until after World War II is an artifact of plenty, not an example of successful management.

The Forest Service's championing of foresters as the only people qualified to speak on forest issues was a design for failure. Such insularity may make an agency easy to manage, and industry happy, in the short-term; but it also insures the Forest Service's inability to respond to changes in society. Foresters found themselves ill-prepared to address recreational and wildlife issues. The Forest Service's troubles did not begin after World War II, they merely became large enough to be noticed outside the fraternity.

According to Hirt, this devotion to trees as an agricultural commodity falsely attributed to the post-war period, faith in technology, and a legislative structure that rewards cutting trees over all other activities has given us the current Forest Service mess. The illusion that the Forest Service and its scientific foresters know best how to ensure enough timber for present and future needs has unraveled. But the question of whether an agency that has devoted most of its life to natural resources as commodities can turn itself around remains open. What Hirt misses is that the culturally conditioned optimism of the post-war years is not an artifact of that singular period. Rather, the optimism of the country in that period suited existing structural patterns of the Forest Service and eventually produced a resource management disaster. From its founding days under Gifford Pinchot, the Forest Service has viewed forests as merely the place where trees are managed. It still does. The Forest Service has depended on academically trained foresters as possessors of special knowledge. That the agency would come to see itself as responsible for producing ever-more board feet was inevitable. All in all, *A Conspiracy of Optimism* provides a thorough coverage of the period but misses the underlying reasons why this optimism was so pronounced and destructive in the Forest Service. Although Hirt fails to place this period in context of the whole of Forest Service history, this is a detailed and useful study of an important time in the Forest Service.

Lucinda M. Long
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Beyond the Mafia: Italian Americans and the Development of Nevada. By Alan Balboni. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1996).

The cultural geography of Nevada offers a striking parallel with that of Italy. Those that know the history of the Italian peninsula are quite aware that there are two Italys: the North with deeply rooted cultural ties to Italian national identity and the South, where geography and history conspired to create a more peripheral identity with nationhood. Of course, those that know Nevada history recognize that there are two Nevadas as well: the north defined by Reno, well watered valleys and mining towns and the south, a significant player in the state's cultural identity only since the construction of Boulder Dam and the subsequent growth of Las Vegas.

The parallel with Italy was heightened when in the 1870s large numbers of northern Italians, attracted by wage labor opportunities in Nevada's mines, poured into Virginia City, Eureka and Ely. Northern Italians were especially in demand in the mining districts, for the mine operators valued their skill in the manufacturing of charcoal which was needed to operate the smelters. The Italian charcoal makers saved, prospered, purchased ranches and stores and by 1900 were solidly vested in the state's middle class. In the ethnic polyglot of Nevada, Italians were the largest single ethnic group and had the economic and political muscle to go with their position.

While the role of Italians in Nevada's north has enjoyed some scholarly attention, it was not until the publication of Alan Balboni's *Beyond the Mafia* that Italians in the southern part of the state have been placed in an academic perspective. Balboni neither cheers nor condemns, but thoughtfully weaves the experiences of Italians in Clark County into an ethnic tale. Prior to Balboni the most one could hope for when researching the cultural paths cut by Italians in southern Nevada was the time worn mobster scenario. Las Vegas was a synonym for sin and gangsters, and gangsters meant Italians—they deserved each other.

Aware of the distinction between northerner and southerner as applied to both Nevada and Italy, Balboni keeps his well trained sociological eye on Las Vegas. In his opening chapter, Balboni gives context to both Nevada and Italian history so that the reader is not left to wander through without context. Italians had long been a presence in the mining and rail towns of the Intermountain West. Las Vegas, with its roots as a coal and watering station for the Union Pacific, was no exception. The first Italians in Las Vegas were laborers and track workers, but like their countrymen in the northern part of the state they saved their dollars, and when able, opened restaurants and small hotels. When construction began on Boulder Dam, the restaurant and hotel business boomed. Along with the dollars came thousands of laborers, many who were Italian and would soon form the nucleus of an ethnic community.

Railroads and construction were critical to the initial growth of Las Vegas, but so was gambling. Balboni doesn't flinch from some of the darker elements of the

city's history and the questionable characters who were at times Italian. He knows the difference between a stereotype and a generalization and his writing is honest. He makes note of those who likely had mob connections and how he was occasionally stonewalled when requesting an interview. Still, he doesn't blame some for avoiding him, but explains that Italians have not often fared well in popular media accounts of Nevada's history. Although disappointed, he is understanding of their reluctance.

Balboni's primary thrust is toward the post-war period and the entertainment industry. The entertainment field was long an area that ethnic minorities could enter with little discrimination.

Gambling and alcohol, both of which Italians had no cultural predisposition against, went well with show business, and Italian celebrities soon found a comfortable milieu in Las Vegas. In the world of the American immigrant the legitimate and illegitimate often rubbed shoulders, but in the case of the southern Italians who were the bulk of the Las Vegas community, the assumption that all Italians were tied up in crime was fueled by the awareness that in some Italian families blood ties were stronger than national interests.

It was a rough stereotype to break, taking almost a generation. However, as Balboni points out as the popular press was producing "greenfelt jungles" and "Godfathers," the Italians who lived in Las Vegas gave a bit of a sigh and went on to produce a second-generation community not all that different from those in Chicago, Brooklyn or Boston. By the '50s and '60s organizations such as the Sons of Italy and the Italian-American Club began to make their presence known. Bocce tournaments, a San Genaro Festival (the patron saint of Naples and hence an admired southern Italian figure) and an increasing presence in all walks of the city's life made it obvious that Italians were not just lounge acts, but a group comfortable with its heritage while rapidly assimilating.

If there is weakness to this book it is less Balboni's fault than the nature of his subject. In a sense, until the 1930s southern Nevada was peripheral to the state's history. The state's story was in the north, where scholars were left a rich legacy of newspapers, diaries and letters. In the south, with its negligible population, little was left to researchers until the 1920s. As a result, Balboni has been forced to rely heavily on oral history with minimal documentary historical bedrock to anchor his story. In a way the myth of Las Vegas springing from the desert often shrouds the Italian population as well. Both may appear to have been plucked from nowhere only to be given center stage.

Balboni plays the hand he has been dealt well. His writing avoids bumbling academic jargon and enhances what he obviously believes to be an important story. Nevada and America's need to understand ethnic history takes a step forward with this book.

Albin J. Cofone

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Unfortunate Emigrants: Narratives of the Donner Party. Edited by Kristin Johnson. (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1996, 317 pp., maps, photos, annotations, bibliography, index.)

Scholars as well as casual readers of western history will welcome the publication of *Unfortunate Emigrants: Narratives of the Donner Party*, edited by Kristin Johnson. A librarian at the Markosian Library, Salt Lake Community College, Johnson has long been a researcher of the Donner Party. Published during the sesquicentennial year of the Donner tragedy, *Unfortunate Emigrants* taps the renewed interest in this enduring episode of the western migration.

Ms. Johnson's choice of sources poses the questions that have long intrigued those fascinated with the unspeakable experiences endured by these misbegotten emigrants. Who were the authentic heroes of the Donner Party? Who was responsible for the events that transpired? Can the "causes" of the tragedy be identified? How does one assess the reliability of the sources? With the hindsight of 150 years, what is the ultimate meaning of this singular event in emigration history? It is not the intent of the editor to provide answers; rather, she leaves such musings to the reader.

In spite of the inconsistencies and irreconcilability of many of the firsthand accounts, Kristin Johnson believes that further scholarly work on the Donner Party would be a fruitful enterprise. Her book includes a plea for a first class historical treatment of this subject, though she concedes the difficulties inherent in such an endeavor. She laments the shortcomings of Charles McGlashan's *History of the Donner Party*, George Stewart's enduring *Ordeal by Hunger*, and Joseph King's recent revisionist *Winter of Entrapment*. While acknowledging that each of these narratives has made important contributions to our knowledge of the Donner Party, Johnson takes note of the methodological shortcomings of these works, and wonders aloud why the historical community has not taken on the task.

In publishing this diverse collection of Donner memoirs and accounts the author exposes the crux of the difficulties of attempting a critical historical assessment of the "winter of entrapment." The obvious self-interest of the personal recollections, the crucial lapses of memory and pivotal oversights, and the tender age of many of the survivors during the ordeal, makes it virtually impossible to draw meaningful conclusions with any degree of confidence.

The format of *Unfortunate Emigrants* is very user-friendly. Johnson's introduction includes a concise but useful survey of the historical literature, as well as a brief description of her chosen sources. Her decision to begin with J. Quinn Thornton's early account is appropriate, since this work was the first detailed account to appear following the tragedy, and it shaped the public perception of the incident for years to come. Recollections of survivors, secondary accounts, and fanciful musings by literary notable J. Ross Browne complete the collection. The author includes biographical background for each source and introduces each

account with a commentary on the text. Occasional photographs add visual variety, and trail maps pinpoint particular geographical locations. Frequent proof-reading errors constitute only a minor annoyance.

It is in the estimable annotations to the sources that the editor really shines. Johnson's commentary identifies inconsistencies, provides crucial details often omitted by the sources, and places many of the significant events in a comprehensible context. Her thorough knowledge of the literature on the Donner Party is apparent throughout her commentary.

Unfortunate Emigrants is a great read and will no doubt attract a large audience. Scholars can glean much from the author's annotations, which reflect her comprehensive familiarity with the Donner sources. Johnson's annotations provide meaningful guidance on the context and reliability of the sources included in the book. Readers with a deep interest in the subject of the Donner Party will undoubtedly find many sources of which they were previously unaware.

However, those looking for a general introduction to the Donner Party must look elsewhere. Johnson's decision to exclude sources that are readily available in print results in a somewhat uneven treatment of the subject. Notably absent are the extant letters of Tamsen Donner, the memoir of John Breen, and the indispensable diary of Patrick Breen, the only surviving account written at the lake encampment. A reader new to the subject should begin with one of the aforementioned narrative treatments, all of which are still in print and available in paperback. Acquiring such a background before proceeding to *Unfortunate Emigrants* would enhance the value of Johnson's admirable work.

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